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Annetta Riley, who writes below, is honoring us by guest-editing the issue:

Ezra is pleased to offer readers a taste of renewed hope and joy in translation with this issue. Our aim with the works here presented is - if not to declare - perhaps at least to signal the coming end of a long winter-world-full-of-strife and a return to the beauty, the clarity, and intense power of language that every translator recognizes.

Doubtless all of us have worked and reworked texts for hours (days, weeks, months, even) in an effort to reach that perpetually elusive space - or moment - of perfect clarity, where the words themselves do not merely reflect the source text, but actually transcend it. A beautiful example of this space and its transformative power are personified in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, a noble character whose gift for poetry and love for language become the vehicle for translation of love itself. How many of us have not longed to possess the poetic ease, the flourish, the sense of drama and linguistic magic, the "way with words", of the inimitable *Cyrano* in our translations? (On that note, *Ezra* is pleased to offer a lovely translation of an excerpt of Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* that hits the mark nearly as perfectly as *Cyrano's* rapier wit itself.)

But the drama of daily translational practice is far from magical. It is on the contrary quite real and material. It is work. The work necessitates an encounter with struggle, which requires endurance and a penchant for risk-taking. It likewise requires a degree of fortitude to withstand failure and to begin again. And again. It is this question of risk-taking that translator Chakraborty explores in a comedic and uplifting work of "*transcreation*" of Tarapada Roy's "No Risk While I Drink". We witness the slow but sure unraveling of language in a character who hides his drinking (clearly risky business in his household) and as he becomes inebriated attributes the success of his ruse to his refusal to take any risk. Often enough at least in this translator's experience, it seems some translation efforts bear more resemblance to the unraveling of language (where risks turn into vegetables: "I...never take...*potatoes*") than to the weaving of the perfect *envoi*. So as the long winter comes to a close, *Ezra* offers the works below to encourage translators and to bear witness to the possibility of the transcendence of language in translation. May we all continue to take risks in the work, even if sometimes we end up with potatoes.

This issue includes a Publication Notice and a Review as well.

FEATURED WRITER: Susanna Lang

Susanna Lang's translations of poetry include *Words in Stone* by Yves Bonnefoy (University of Massachusetts Press, 1976), *Baalbek* by Nohad Salameh (L'Atelier du Grand Tétras, 2021), and *My Soul Has No Corners* by Souad Labbize (Diálogos Books, 2023). Her translations of these and other French poets are published or forthcoming in *Delos*, *The Literary Review*, *Transference*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Ezra*, *Oomph! Journal*, and *Columbia Journal*. Her third full-length collection of original poems, *Travel Notes from the River Styx*, was published by Terrapin Books in 2017, and a chapbook, *Like This*, appeared in 2023 from Unsolicited Books.

More information available at www.susannalang.com.

Poems excerpted from *My Soul Has No Corners* (Diálogos Books, 2023) by Souad Labbize, an Algerian-French poet living in Toulouse. The first two are from a collection originally published as *Brouillons amoureux* (Éditions des Lisières, 2017); the others are from *Je franchis les barbelés* (Éditions Bruno Doucey, 2019).

Before we met

I folded my heart

into the narrow pocket

of a new shirt

after we met

I put my shirt in the wash

it shrank and

with it my heart

I was so hungry

thinking how love used to taste
I turned on the stove
to warm the leftover soup
made with spring vegetables
I didn't have the energy
to make a couscous
rain teased the plants
outside the foggy window
I thought of all that's been delayed
you
spring
love
spring vegetables
the rain paid no attention
to my chaotic thoughts
when the fog thickened
I remembered
my great hunger

1

In the word exile
a pair of soles
that no longer speak to each other

a bindle folded away
on the top shelf of a closet
a compass rusty with remorse
a bilingual dictionary
that doesn't say much
about exile
just enough
to hide its pain
two soles
a bindle
a compass
that do not enter
into the translation
of the word exile
a compass
two soles
a bindle
that no longer dream
of the right of return

21

My neighbor in Algiers
didn't have a washer

but she did have a taste
for naval battles
confronting the dust of History
she resumed negotiations
against the enemies
of the nation and everyone else
she knew how to
wash dirty laundry
legs straddling
a washtub
she soaked
the stubborn tirades
of the President for Life
the official imam
sometimes God himself
she cursed
as she scrubbed
it was her way
to be political

24

If I could
regain a little faith

believe in a miracle
murmur a prayer
in a private language
to my ex-god
then return to my seat
in front of the screen
wait for news
of the cease-fire

Duel Scene from *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Act 1

~~translated by Steven Monte

Theater in the Burgundy Hotel, 1640

VISCOUNT

Knave, scoundrel, dolt, flat-footed bumbler, bag of fleas . . .

CYRANO

And I am Cyrano-Savinien-Hercules
de Bergerac.

VISCOUNT

Buffoon!

CYRANO

Ow! . . .

VISCOUNT

What's the matter now?

CYRANO

You have to stretch it more when it's numb. Uh-uh-Owww!

That happens when you haven't used it. But no harm . . .

Ow! . . .

VISCOUNT

What is *wrong* with you?

CYRANO

An itchy fighting arm!

VISCOUNT

Draw then! . . .

CYRANO

I have a lovely gift to give to you.

VISCOUNT, *contemptuously*

Poet! . . .

CYRANO

Indeed. And I'm the kind of poet who,
while he is fencing, can compose an impromptu
ballade for you.

VISCOUNT

Ballade? What do you propose to do?

CYRANO

You know what a ballade is, I hope? Don't you? . . . Pooh.

VISCOUNT

But . . .

CYRANO

A ballade consists of three stanzas worked through
with three rhymes in eight lines . . .

[The viscount paces impatiently.]

. . . and an envoy in four.

[More displays of impatience.]

I'll compose one while fighting you. And, what is more,
strike you as I speak the last line.

VISCOUNT

No!

CYRANO

No? Oh, well.

“Ballade of the Duel in the Burgundy Hotel:
de Bergerac Versus Philistine (with recital).”

VISCOUNT

And just what is that supposed to be?

CYRANO

That’s the title.

VOICES IN THE ROOM

Clear the room for entertainment! Quiet!

CYRANO

Wait, I need

one moment to select my rhymes . . . All right, proceed.

[Cyrano performs what he says, to the rhythm of the verse]

I doff my cap, then do the same
with my dark cape enfolding me
gently, with grace, without acclaim,
then grasp my sword and pull it free.

With Scaramouche-agility
and polish like St. Peter’s dome,
I’m warning you, Sir Christmas Tree:
when the envoy ends, I hit home.

You should have better sense or aim.
Where shall I stuff you? Hmmm. Let's see . . .
in there? Down your entire frame?
under your epaulette maybe?
Our gauntlets ring—clang! Like a bee,
My sword seeks out its honeycomb:
it's in the paunch decidedly,
when the envoy ends, I hit home.

Now I'm missing a rhyme in "aim."
You're white as starch, as if at sea . . .
inspiring an expression—"lame."
I parry points, especially
those that are heading straight at me.
Attack lanes open, close like foam.
Condolence to your family:
when the envoy ends, I hit home.

[*Envoy*]

Sweet Prince, ask God to pardon me!
I dip, make feints, press forward, roam,
I lift, I duck . . .

There then! You see,
when the envoy ends, I hit home.

EDMOND ROSTAND

No risk while I drink

~Transcreation: Goutam Chakraborty

I don't take any risk while I drink.

While I return from the office of an evening I see my wife cooking.

There are sounds of utensils from the kitchen.

I enter my room silently.

Then I take out a bottle from the black almirah.

Netaji is looking at me from the photo frame.

But no one has ever guessed anything.

Because I don't take any risk.

I take out a glass from the shelf above the sink and sip a peg at once.

I wash the glass and put it on the shelf.

Yes, I place the bottle also in the almirah.

Netaji smiles.

I peep in the kitchen and see my wife working on pieces of potato.

No one has guessed anything.

Because I don't take any risk.

I ask her: Is there any news about the marriage of Sameer's daughter?

Wife: No, her bad luck.

New relations are on the way.

I am in my room again and this time I make a little sound to open the almirah.

But not that much.

I have not made any sound to take out the bottle.

I take out the bottle from the shelf above the sink and sip just two pegs quickly.

I wash the bottle and keep it in the sink. I keep the glass in the almirah.

No one has ever guessed anything.

Because I don't take any risk.

I come out and tell my wife: However, the age of Sameer's daughter is not that much.

Wife: What? She is already 30 but looks older.

Me (forgetting that she is already 30): Right you are.

Taking the opportunity I take a potato from the almirah again (I can't understand how the almirah has changed its place).

I take out the bottle from the shelf and mix it with the sink to sip one fresh peg very quickly.

Netaji is laughing out loudly.

I keep the shelf on the potato and wash well the photo of Netaji before keeping it in the almirah.

Let me see what my wife is doing. Oh, yes! She is placing the sink on the gas.

But no one has ever guessed anything.

Because I don't take any risk.

I said to my wife: Do you mean Sameer is an old fellow?

Wife: Don't chatter, go and sit outside silently. Don't talk any more.

I take out the bottle from the potato again and enjoy one more peg in the almirah.

I wash the sink to keep it on the shelf.

My wife is still laughing from the photo frame.

Netaji is cooking.

But no one has ever guessed anything.

Because I don't take any risk.

Smiling I said to my wife: Is Sameer finding a match for her then?

Wife: You wash your face with water and sit somewhere.

I take my seat on the kitchen shelf silently.

But Sameer has not guessed anything yet.

Because Netaji doesn't take any risk.

Sameer is still cooking.

And me? I look at my wife and continue laughing.

Because I, you see, never take, what do I not take... Oh, yes, never take potatoes.

TARAPADA ROY

Bedtime Songs of the Onion

(Dedicated to my son, after receiving a letter
from my wife that all they had to eat was
bread and onion.)

~~translated by Wally Swist

The onion is frost
closed in and poor.
Frost of your days
and of my nights.
Hunger and onion,
black ice and frost
big and round.

In the cradle of hunger
my boy existed.
Upon onion blood
he suckled.
But your blood
is frosted with sugar,
onion and hunger.

A brunette woman
resolute as the moon
that spills thread by thread

over the cradle.
Laugh, my child,
you can swallow the moon
whenever it is necessary.

Lark of my house,
laugh often.
It's the laughter in your eyes
that is the light of the world.
Laugh so much
that upon hearing you, my soul
will beat through space.

Your laughter liberates me,
it gives me wings.
It expels my loneliness,
it breaks me out of jail.
Mouth that flies,
heart that flashes on your lips
like lightning.

In your laughter is
the most victorious sword,
hero of the flowers
and the larks.
Rival of the sun.
Future of my bones
and of my love.

Your flesh shudders,
you raise an eyelid;
life, as never before,
takes on new color.
How many goldfinches
soar, fluttering
from your body!

I awoke from childhood,
don't you ever.
I wear my mouth sadly:
laugh, always.
Keep always to your cradle,

defending your laughter
feather by feather.

Be so high flying,
stretch so
that your flesh enters heaven,
just born.
If only I could
return to the origin
of your life.

In the eighth month you laugh
with five orange blossoms.
With five little
ferocities,
with five teeth
like five adolescent
jasmine buds.

They will be the frontier
of tomorrow's kisses,
when you feel a weapon
between your teeth.
When you feel a flame
rush past them
searching for your center.

Fly, my child, on
the double moon of the breast:
it, saddened by the onion,
you, satisfied.
Don't fall apart.
Don't be aware of what's happening,
nor what's going on.

MIGUEL HERNANDEZ

Circus

~~translated by John Newton Webb

How many epochs there were
and then, a brown war
How many epochs there were
then winter blew a sudden gale
How many epochs there were
then here, tonight, a flourish
then here, tonight, a flourish
High up in the girders of the circus tent
a single trapeze
a scarcely visible trapeze
Head down and hands dangling
beneath the dirty canvas
yu-arn yu-yorn yuyayuyon
A white lamp exhales
cheap ribbon and breath
The honoured audience are all sardines
throats chattering like oyster shells
yu-arn yu-yorn yuyayuyon

Outside is dark, the darkest darkness
The evening passes in aeons
Nostalgia is a wretched parachute
yu-arn yu-yorn yuyayuyon

NAKAHARA CHUYA (Japan)

PUBLICATION NOTICE:

WITH DEATH, AN ORANGE SEGMENT BETWEEN OUR TEETH, Marie-Claire Bancquart.
Translated by Wendy Hardenberg. Orison Books, 2023. 178 pp.

REVIEWS:

THE DIALECTIC IS IN THE SEA: THE BLACK RADICAL THOUGHT OF BEATRIZ NASCIMENTO, Beatriz Nascimento, edited and translated by Christen A. Smith, Bethânia N.F. Gomes, and Archie Davies. Princeton University Press, 2023. 344 pages.

The Dialectic Is in the Sea is a collection of writings by and about Beatriz Nascimento (1942-1995); more to the point, it is the first time her work has been collected and made available in English. As the opening page explains, she was “one of the most influential Black Brazilian intellectuals of the 20th century...[A] poet, historian, artist, and political leader in Brazil’s Black movement...[whose] powerful voice still resonates today.”

It may be helpful to recall that Brazil’s legal slavery period, in which enslaved Africans were brought to the Portuguese colony in a manner not unlike what was occurring in America at the same time, was 1541 to 1888.

To one educated in the West at the end of the 20th century, her struggle seems to mirror those of Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi. Heroes of movements wherein, like Moses, they led their people from oppression to freedom.

To one educated in the West at almost any point in the centuries preceding the 20th, examples of heroes have been given that are embodiments of those qualities necessary for the hero to possess.

Namely, Achilles is fleet-footed; Ulysses, quick-witted; and Abraham, (as we're told by Søren Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling*), is the hero of unshakeable faith.

And activism aspires to heroism.

From *Preface: Dear Mamãe*, written by her daughter (Bethânia N.F. Gomes): "Her poems confronted racism and told a beautiful history straight from the heart of a strong African descendent – my mother." And towards the end of the book, in *A Conversation between Bethânia Gomes, Archie Davies, and Christen A. Smith*, (the book's trio of editors and translators,) Gomes says: "She shaped me to be a warrior from the very beginning." Shortly thereafter, in the very same essay, she adds: "[My mother] was a really big source of beauty and intelligence...She started reading at the age of four, by herself. She had a lot of books around."

Strength and intelligence (and beauty, for that matter) are talents which are unevenly distributed. However, they can be developed further. As the expression goes, "Play the hand you're dealt." But faith is something we're all born with in equal measure, and the choice of what we put that faith in is one we all must make. It is not years of study or time spent in a gym; it is simply a choice. And faith is impervious to coercion; it can only be governed by the free will of its possessor. Unlike strength, intelligence and beauty, not even time can touch faith, not without our permission. In looking at the author as heroic, and taking for granted a strength and intelligence up to the hero's task, then it's fair to ask what her faith is in, because that asks, in essence, to what purpose does she apply her native and acquired gifts? To what end?

In this review, when I say faith, I mean it in the broadest sense. It can be, and often is (in contrast to Abraham's), mundane. Merriam-Webster's Dictionary offers several definitions: "allegiance to duty or a person"; "fidelity to one's promises"; "sincerity of intentions"; "complete trust"; "firm belief in something for which there is no proof". Thesaurus.com has it as synonymous with "confidence." While some definitions clearly do include a transcendent Being – "belief and trust in and loyalty to God" (Merriam-Webster) – many do not, including this example from the Christian Bible: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (*King James Version*, Heb. 11:1).

While the government of Colonial Brazil defined *quilombo* as "communities of runaway enslaved Africans that formed [there]...beginning in the sixteenth century," the author, we're told in *Introduction: On Quilombo* (by Christen A. Smith,) sees them as "repositories of Black memory." In her essay, *The Concept of Quilombo and Black Cultural Resistance*, Nascimento says: "In analyzing the meanings of *quilombo*, we cannot overlook the question of heroism, which is intrinsically connected to the history of *quilombo*. The hero figure, particularly Zumbi,

is inescapably central. More than any other element in the history of *quilombos*, the image of Zumbi retains representational force as part of a new national soul.”

In *Afterword, in the Guise of a Postface*, which is a contribution by Muniz Sodré, we’re told, “Beatriz Nascimento was a distant daughter of Zumbi.”

In *Kilombo and Community Memory: A Case Study*, Nascimento tells us that all of her questions bring her back to “the concept of historical continuity.” At the outset of the essay, she tells us other names she had in mind for the piece: *Memory or Oral History as Tools for Group Cohesion*; *Memory and the Hope of Recovering Usurped Power*. (The latter brings to mind the lecture by Emerson, *The Conservative*, wherein he says there are always in all places two parties: that of hope and that of memory.) She traces the origins of *quilombo* back, not only to Palmares in Brazil (led by the above-mentioned Zumbi), but even across the Atlantic to Angola. It is an example of space wherein her ancestors were able to live freely, that is, to self-govern; to live out of bondage, with no outside powers controlling their destiny.

In *The First Great Loss: Grandma’s Death*, she says: “Right now, I have two joys. One that is in the past, the other that I may have in the future.” From *Maria Beatriz Nascimento: Researcher*: “We want to project our experience into the future, for new generations, so that we can contribute to making the world a place of respect, free from the exploitation of man by man, without oppressed and oppressors...” In connecting and combining her knowledge of the past with her vision of the future, she finds a source of meaning and hope. From *For a (New) Existential and Physical Territory*: “The task is not merely to exist but to make life more beautiful, and happier.”

Faith is Janus.

It is self-evident that faith can also be entirely withheld. Again, *For a (New) Existential and Physical Territory*: “After years of research, and as an expression of twenty years of activism, I have come to a radical rejection of everything that could seem European or erudite. This has accompanied a desire for a rupture with strictly scientific thought.” On the one hand, she no longer demands “more scientific rigor” from herself as her thinking evolves, but on the other, her worldview remains one that’s heavily influenced by two self-proclaimed men of science, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud.

Continuing on the subject of thinking, it may help to remind readers here of the book’s subtitle: *The Black Radical Thought of Beatriz Nascimento*. From beginning to end, she maintains an

unwavering distrust of any thinking that she deems utopian. On numerous occasions, she dismisses romantic descriptions of Brazil's "racial harmony" in the 20th century as "utopic." In *Black People, Seen by Themselves: Interview by Eloí Calage*, she says: "The *quilombo* is far from being a place of happiness, an ideal society. It is not the utopia described by white intellectualism...like any human society, [the *quilombo*] had its own contradictions. Slavery was among them..." While losing her faith in science, (if one can be said, at this juncture, to lose it; it would be more accurate if we said that she takes her faith back, or away from science; she no longer sees the value in following it that she previously did,) we do see in its place a growing belief in poetry, its political powers and worth. She has much to say, in *Post-revolutionary Angolan Nativism*, on the crucial role of poets in that nation's revolution.

Instead of saying that our thought evolves, it might be more accurate to say that, in some circumstances at the very least, what evolves is our faith. The influenza virus evolves by undergoing "drift" and "shift." While faith may not evolve exactly in an analogous manner, the terminology for influenza seems appropriate when applied to it, i.e., the changes that occur to it are by degrees and not from one kind to another. (Influenza evolves but stays influenza; likewise, faith.) This raises the important question of whether or not faith and thinking are independent of each other, or do they usually go hand-in-hand? And if the latter is true, do they typically go side-by-side, or does one more often follow the other? (In multiple verses of the Quran, readers are implored to "use [their] reason," on the assumption that it will always lead one to the Islamic faith.) In *Aruanda!*, an undated piece that appears in the book after *For a (New) Existential and Physical Territory*, she says: "Notwithstanding our differences, there is always much to learn from, and give to, other human beings." And from *Angola*: "My god, war is absurd. I want to stop the war in Africa, and everywhere. I do not believe that the dream is dead. I cannot possibly accept anyone's death. That is written in all faiths."

In *Zumbi of Palmares*, she recalls a beloved but lost book from her grandmother's chest and says, "Today, after so much reading and reflection, I still yearn for those images of warriors fighting in the forest." In *The Concept of Quilombo and Black Cultural Resistance*, she traces the origins of *quilombo* in Brazil to the Angolan *kilombo*, and connects that with the Imbangala tribe. She describes them as fearsome hunter-gatherers who violently resisted Portuguese incursion as they themselves dominated the land. They were, according to Nascimento, "anthropophagic" and infanticidal nomads who, like the colonizers they fought back, engaged in the slave trade, all while living "entirely from pillage."

In *Letter from Santa Catarina*, she says of the Black Movement's ultimate aim, or rather, the aim of its adherents: "To be, in the end, a better individual and collective subject. I know that this is the true purpose of those who throw their efforts into combating racism, prejudice, and discrimination." Nascimento sees the Black Movement as, in one sense, a source of moral instruction.

Inevitably faith ends up in another. From Nascimento's poem *Urgency (Zumbi)*: "...who surges into the arena / Flaming dancer of intentions / List like something descended in an occupied territory / Mysterious as an enchanted gift / From distant places / Propitiator who ignored chapters of his own doctrine / Raptured, like the first light of dawn."

It might be said that faith is a verb in search of a noun.

In *Post-Revolutionary Angolan Nativism*, she transcribes a section of a poem by Armando Francisco, wherein the persona says: "The struggle goes on because I am tired of faith and the Empire / Of western civilizations / Of hypocritical religions... // My land has manna, honey and milk and I do not eat."

In one of the shorter essays, *What They Call Culture*, she discusses Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* and the concept of a hero. She closes the piece by alluding to a line by Bertolt Brecht: "Unhappy the land that needs heroes."

In "*Quilombos*": *Social Change or Conservatism?*, we read that leadership was in the hands of "those who showed the greatest valour and intelligence." It was at this point I recognized the activist may also aspire to leadership; viz., leadership of the heroic kind.

What history suggests, and this book is in part a work of history, is that flight from oppression is what produces leaders we can justly qualify as heroic. This might be in part why Hegel, in *The Philosophy of History*, argues that history's spirit moves towards freedom. When oppression's shackles have been cast off and freedom secured, the leader's task is more difficult for its being less clearly defined. The pole of freedom is more easily seen by the movement when it can be contrasted with the pole of oppression. How does a leader align with the spirit of history after the freedom of their followers has been won? When their followers no longer need a Moses? (Out of that belatedness, Cervantes tells us Don Quixote's born.) Maybe all that's left is to defend that freedom and use it to build things in accordance with one's will (as opposed to the will of another); in other words, those of the author, "to make life more beautiful, and happier" (a lovely definition of self-determination, if ever I heard one). Moses did not have to worry about this. God spared him that challenge by ending his journey within view of the Promised Land, but not within it. Yet Moses did leave behind the Torah.

So now I'm left wondering if all books aspire to scripture; that is, to being, for the individual and collective subject, a source of hope, meaning and moral instruction? Maybe that's what James Joyce has in mind when he confesses, "The demand that I make of my reader is that he should devote his whole life to reading my works." (That aptly mirrors the Torah's role in the Jewish tradition.) Again, *The First Great Loss: Grandma's Death*: "The book inside the chest, the book that I have to write—two more aches."

Returning once again to the collection's penultimate piece, *A Conversation between Bethânia Gomes, Archie Davies, and Christen A. Smith*, Nascimento's daughter says this about the author, her mother: "She was an activist, like her body was a quilombo, her body was Palmares itself: pa! pa! pa! Her body was like this walking quilombo. That's what she was, to me. And I'm not the only one. She was this really powerful, powerful person. Yet she was playful, she was funny, she liked to party, and she liked to love!"

~~*Jake Sheff*

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