

## VOLUME 18 number 2

### Spring

*Ezra* reminds you to register, this summer, for the ALTA conference (<https://literarytranslators.org/conference-and-events/annual-conference-alta47/registration>). Slots for a bilingual reading can be requested now, and are going fast.

“*What does the word say?*”, muses the great 20th century Spanish poet Antonio Machado in his melodic observations on humankind, *Proverbios y cantares* (1912) (selected poems translated below by Gerald Friedman). Here is the eternal question that by turns plagues and inspires translation theory and practice. Indeed, *Ezra*'s featured writer in this issue, Wendeline A. Hardenberg, in her translation of selected poems by the inimitable Marie-Claire Bancquart, conveys the deep desire - the struggle - both to understand and be understood via the frightfully flawed, slippery, ever-changing tool that is human language: “words hidden / held back”. Our own utterances become “the book we will not write / our true one . . . our unknown last words / which will be misunderstood by us”.

Poets and translators have long recognized the power and the limitless possibilities of language interpretation, as well as the illusive nature of *meaning* or *truth* itself. It seems that in the current climate these lofty notions have even filtered down into the collective consciousness. So much so, that they sometimes devolve into an unsettling (and unwinnable) argument around the kitchen table about what is or is not “true,” or whether “truth” is even still accessible to us in an age of AI, of news media “bias,” of deep fakes, or of social media influence. That basic human drive for understanding and certitude are precisely what Houshang Golshiri plays with (and deliberately frustrates) in his short story “The Wolf,” translated here below by Lesley Evensen. The text floats perpetually between impressions, character traits, perceptions, interpretations and details of factual events recounted accurately or inaccurately. It likewise mixes time frames in verb tenses so the story’s threads are even less concrete, less easily grasped.

This ever present sense of indeterminacy might be enough for any translator to “*catch anxiety*” as does Alma Reibzdaite’s narrator in the poem “Our spring 2022,” translated here by David Seter. In this issue, *Ezra* is pleased to offer readers a selection of translated works that confront some of these “*questions without answers*” (Machado). If there is a message in the translations here below, it might be the importance of recognizing that “proclaiming the truth” at every turn has brought us to the current moment, where absolutism has polarized not just meaning, but people - and peoples - the world over. So this issue is offered not as a proclamation of any unassailable truth, but as one earnest effort among many to glimpse a “*measure*” (*a bit more here, somewhat less there*) of . . . what *the word* says.

NOTE to READERS : *Ezra* is honored to include in our Special Editions the extraordinary work *Beyond Sense* by Rainer Hanshe, Editor of the highly regarded Contra Mundum Press. We are grateful to Hanshe for his invaluable contribution to our permanent collection and look forward to future collaborations. Read, and Enjoy !

**FEATURED WRITER** : Wendeline A. Hardenberg

**Wendeline A. Hardenberg** (b. 1983) is a faculty librarian at Southern Connecticut State University who pursues literary translation as part of her creative activity. Her translation of Marie-Claire Bancquart's volume of poetry, *Avec la mort, quartier d'orange entre les dents* (*With Death, an Orange Segment Between Our Teeth*), came out with Orison Books in 2023. She discovered Bancquart during graduate school at Indiana University Bloomington, and *Ezra* was the very first journal to publish those initial translations back in 2009 (Vol. 3, No. 2). She has also previously published with AmazonCrossing, *Asymptote*, *Columbia Journal*, HarperCollins, *One Sentence Poems*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, Twirl Books, and others. She lives in New Haven, Connecticut.

Poems excerpted from *Avec la mort, quartier d'orange entre les dents* (Obsidiane 2005) by Marie-Claire Bancquart, French poet, novelist, essayist and critic (1932-2019). *With Death, An Orange Segment Between Our Teeth* (Orison Books, 2023), translated by Wendeline A. Hardenberg

### **Somebody, Brother for Life**

As he was busy clearing the snowdrifts in the sky  
to make room for the light  
he was caught in the avalanche.

He waits despite all the foggy mornings  
at the top of the Eiffel Tower

now and again  
he succeeds in making the mist glow a bit red.

### **Glidings**

The delicate sound of the snow  
diligently works its way into the house.

Under the boiler  
the cat narrows its eyes, perceiving the alliance  
veiled by the flakes  
with a wide face.

We, too, would be waiting for an unexpected arrival  
through this rustling

but the window shows only shadows  
that pass by, bundled up, unseeing.

When we were fish at the bottom of the ocean  
the shadows in circulation  
could not yet be those of men  
(swimmers, the drowned).

Among the high underwater arches  
we glided

agile birds of the damp  
we knew nothing of being  
a pre-world  
for other, more opaque lives.

## **Cries**

Within us the aponeuroses, the mastoids, the peritonea, shared with the ox, the chimpanzee. Further,  
reaching back to the caterpillar and coral.

Our speech, sumptuous and full of sweetness, like the scent of ground blackcurrants, or that balm once  
used to anoint corpses,

our speech, we've soaked it in the corruption of things, which we are very clever at.

But suddenly we cry out. We are hardening in life. In a time of misfortune, fervently, we cry out.

## **Memory**

In the shaken jar rattle  
buttons widowed by their garments

along with them an old belt buckle  
made of Rhodoid plastic, black with flowers.

You recall a narrow band  
around  
a crêpe dress, with decorative shoulders,  
sixty years ago

smell a bit sour, a bit sickly sweet,  
which is now second to none.

A memory of the body  
and even  
the face in times past, marked by bitterness,  
squeezes your throat like  
a nameless assassin

vanished after a battle, barely there at any rate,

*since your heart isn't in it.*

## **Cruel**

Dying friend, I cast you into the clouds

I speak to you very gently

I think about the hinges on your casket

I stroke your hand  
with postmortem gloves.

*Drunk with deception, outside the room I get someone to whisper to me that tomorrow you won't be there  
for anyone anymore*

for a second I feel  
the dubious joy of a survivor

I make a deal with the monsters.

*Afterward, I cry that we have been  
cut off from death,  
from the life in death, in the breathing of the universe.*

## **In Exchange**

The ripe fruit

its orangey color

in the jam

sweet-sour  
on a December tongue.

Of the tender thickness of a balm  
It delights our throat.

### **Words Hidden**

The book  
we will not write

our true one.

Words hidden, held back.

One would speak grandfather's dialect.  
The other would be a graffito: first name, fruit.

Near them, kept secret from our bodies,  
wait  
our *unknown last words*

which will be misunderstood by us

and  
heard  
by others—but forgotten.

### ***traduttori/traduttrici***

Gerald Friedman (Machado)

Lesley Evensen (Golshiri)

David Seter

(Riebždaitė)

## **Proverbios y Cantares**

*~~translated by Gerald Friedman*

### **I**

I never went after fame  
or leaving songs with my name  
in people's memory.

I love worlds with no trouble  
that like a soap bubble  
are subtle and gravity-free.

I like to see them fly,  
painted with scarlet lake  
and sun beneath blue sky,  
suddenly tremble, and break.

### **III**

If someone justifies mistrust, then we  
call him the thief of hope, an enemy.  
The moron never forgives if he sees the truth:  
the nut was empty that cracked wisdom's tooth.

### **IV**

Our hours are just minutes  
when to know we yearn,  
and centuries when we know  
the amount that one can learn.

### **V**

There's no worth in the fruit  
that's picked before its season...  
And praise from a dumb brute  
doesn't mean he has good reason.

## VII

I have seen polished hands with claws like hooks,  
I know poetic pigs, melodious rooks...  
The greatest villain's hand is on his heart,  
the fool is stuffed with reason, looking smart.

## VIII

No need to waste time asking  
if you already know why...  
And to questions without answers  
who can ever reply?

## IX

Man, goaded by a constant hunger for robbery,  
malicious from his birth, and cunning naturally,  
developed a mind, took over Earth and all its store.  
And he still proclaims the truth! The greatest ruse of war!

## XIII

The one who knows this is the best:  
Whatever life may bring,  
measure is everything—  
a bit more, somewhat less...

## XIV

Virtue is the only joy that soothes the worries down  
of even the most serious, and smooths out Cato's frown.  
The good man is the one who keeps, like an inn with a roadside sign,  
for the thirsty traveler, water, and for the drunkard, wine.

## XV

Come sing with me in chorus: There's nothing, nothing we know,  
from an arcane sea we came, to a mapless sea we'll go...  
And between the two enigmas is the serious mystery;

three arks are locked by an undiscovered key.  
By light nothing is lit, by the sage nothing is shown.  
What does the word say? Or water from the stone?

## **XVI**

Man's by nature the only beast that's paradoxical,  
an animal that, though absurd, needs to be logical.  
He created a world from nothing, and when the work was done,  
"I know the secret of all real things," he told himself, "There are none."

## **XVII**

Man's only rich in hypocrisy, relies  
on ten thousand kinds of lying disguise,  
and from the spare key to his house he labors  
to make a lockpick good for robbing his neighbor's.

## **XXV**

Extracting sweets, the bee recurs  
to flowers, and the tuneful birds  
derive from love their melody.  
Dante and I—your pardon, sirs—  
convert—O Lucy, pardon me—  
love into Theology.

## **XXIX**

Walker, the road you walk  
is the path that your own steps beat.  
Walker, there is no road;  
by walking the road comes to be.  
The road comes to be by walking,  
and when you look back, you see  
the path that will never again  
be trodden by any feet.  
Walker, there is no road  
but wakes of boats on the sea.

ANTONIO MACHADO



## The Wolf

*~~translated by Lesley Evensen*

Thursday afternoon we got word that the doctor was returning and now he was sick, too. It was nothing serious. Around the clinic it was said that he slept from the night before until then and when he woke up, he started sobbing. He usually went into town with his wife on Wednesday or Thursday afternoon. This time too, he went with her. But the driver, who brought the doctor with him in his truck, said that only the doctor was in the car. It seemed like he was numb with the cold. The driver stopped by the coffee house and left the doctor there. The driver and some others had found the doctor's car in a narrow pass. At first they thought they'd have to hitch the car to something and bring it in. They had gone to get the clinic's Jeep to do just that. But when they returned and the driver got behind the wheel, the car started when someone else pushed it from behind. "It was just cold from last night, the car is fine." Even the windshield wipers were fine; but then the doctor said "Akhtar, where's Akhtar?" No one had given a thought to the woman.

The doctor's wife was tiny, so short and thin, as pale as though transparent. They had two rooms in the clinic. The clinic was on the far side of the graveyard, that is, about quarter mile away from the village. The doctor's wife was no more than nineteen years old. Now and then she would appear at the door of the clinic or behind the window. Only when the weather was warm would she walk to the village past the graveyard. Most of the time she had a book in her hand or sometimes a packet of candy or chocolate in the pocket of her white blouse or in her handbag. The children liked her very much. That's why she often walked by the school. One day, I suggested to her that she could teach a lesson at the school if she wanted, but she said that she didn't have the patience to deal with children. The doctor had suggested that to her to keep her occupied. Sometimes she also went to the edge of the canal, along with other women.

After the first snowfall, she was nowhere to be found in the village. The women saw that she was sitting at home by the fireplace and reading something, or pouring tea for herself; when the doctor had to go to other villages, the driver's wife or the porter would stay with her. Sadiqa, the driver's wife, understood what was happening first. Sadiqa said about this woman: "I thought at first she was worried

about her husband, she'd go to the window and pull back the curtain to look out for him." She went to the window and stood gazing out at the shining, white desert. Sadiqa said: "When she heard the sound of the wolves howling, she would get up and go near the window."

Usually in winter, if snow is falling, wolves come closer to the edge of the village. Every year it's like that. Sometimes a dog, a sheep, or even a child will get lost, and only a collar, or a shoe or something will be found. But Sadiqa had seen two gleaming wolf eyes from the house, and saw that the doctor's wife stared into the eyes of the wolf. The wife was so entranced she didn't even hear Sadiqa's voice.

After the second and third snow fell, the doctor couldn't travel to any appointments in the local villages, and when he saw that he would have to stay home 4 or 5 days of the week he decided to join our gatherings. Our group was not for women, but if the doctor's wife was coming, she could go to the women's side. But his wife said "I'll just stay home". When it was the doctor's turn to host our gatherings, she sat near the fireplace and read a book, and from time to time went to the window to gaze out at the desert expanse, or went to the window on the side of the cemetery and I think she looked at the village lights.

I think the gathering was at our house – the doctor said "This evening I have to go earlier." He had seen a big wolf on the road. Mortazavi said maybe it was a dog. But I said to the doctor there were a lot of wolves around here. He ought to be careful. Never get out of the car. My wife then said "Doctor, what about your wife? Your house, it's out near the cemetery?" The doctor said "That's why I need to leave early." After that he said that his wife was not afraid. And he knew that one night, in the middle of the night, he awoke to find her sitting near the window in a chair. He heard his wife's voice, saying "I don't know why this wolf always comes to face this window". The doctor saw that the wolf was sitting there, by the side of the fence in the dark moonlight and howling at the moon from time to time.

Well, one could think that sitting and staring out the window at a big wolf, alone, was beginning to be a problem for the doctor, maybe even for all of us? But we thought probably his wife was sick, or at least maybe the doctor was, but tomorrow the wife herself was coming to the village school, and said that if they needed a drawing teacher for the children, she was ready to help. There were so few pupils the teacher was no longer needed. Now they were all packed into one class, Aga Mortezaavi alone could manage them. But well, I am not good at drawing, nor is Mortezaavi. On Wednesday morning we arrived. After I spoke of the wolf, I told her not to be afraid, that if they didn't leave the door open, or come outside, there would be no danger.

Later she said that at first she was afraid, that one night when she heard the sound of howling, that she felt the wolf must have come over the fence and now through the window, or door. By the light of the lamp she saw the black shape that jumped the fence, and two glowing eyes. She said “They were two burning coals.” Then she said “I don’t know why, when I saw him, his eyes, or that still shape...you know, it’s just like a German shepherd, with two upright front legs, and staring for hours at the room behind the window.”

I asked her “Then why do you do it!?”

She understood what I was saying but she said “I told you I don’t know. Believe me, when I see him, especially his eyes, I cannot tear myself away from the window.” We talked about wolves and I told her that wolves are very clever, when they are starving, they sit in a circle and stare at one another for hours; then, if one rolls over from exhaustion, the others pounce on him and eat him. I also talked about dogs that get lost and then only their collars are found. The doctor’s wife spoke, too. For example, she had read books by Jack London. ‘Now I know wolves very well.’”

Last week she came with leaves and flowers for the children to draw. I didn’t see, I heard that. It was on Saturday I heard that the villagers had set a trap by the graveyard. After the third bell, I went myself with one of the children to see. It was a big trap. The doctor had bought it in town and put a piece of meat in it. In the afternoon, my wife let me know that she’d gone to look for the doctor’s wife. She said “She’s not doing well.” She said she’s afraid she may not be able to have a child. My wife consoled her. It had been a year since they were married. After that my wife talked about the trap. “Usually they skin them here and bring their skins to town.” My wife said “Believe me, suddenly her eyes flew wide open, and she began to tremble and said ‘You hear? That’s the wolf’s voice.’” I said “Come on, madam, really, at this time of day?” Just like that the doctor’s wife ran to the window. Outside it was snowing. My wife said “She pushed aside the curtain and stood near the window. She even forgot that she had a guest.” That morning the driver and a few of the villagers went to look at the trap – it was untouched. Safir said to the doctor “He must not have come last night.” The doctor said “No, he came, I heard him myself.” The doctor told me “This woman is going crazy. Last night she didn’t sleep at all. Always sitting by the window and looking at the wilderness. At midnight I was awakened by the sound of the wolf, I saw my wife went to the door latch. I said “What are you doing, woman?” Then the doctor told me she had a flashlight, she turned it on, his own wife. The doctor’s face was pale, his hands shook. We went to look at the trap. It was set. The piece of meat was still in place. We saw his footprints by the side of the trap, he sat near the trap. From there the tracks of the wolf went near the fence around the clinic. I saw the woman’s face near the window. She was watching us. The doctor said “I don’t understand it – can you at least talk to her”.

The woman's eyes were wide. She was pale, paler than ever. Her black hair spilled across her breast. Only her eyes were bigger than ever. At least if she had put on lipstick she wouldn't have looked so pale. I said "I've never heard of a hungry wolf leaving so much meat." I also asked the doctor about the footprints. He said "He wasn't hungry. I don't know, he's probably very intelligent."

The next day they brought news that the trap had been pulled up. They followed the line of the trap. They found him. He was half alive. They killed him with two shovel blades. He wasn't that big after all. The doctor who saw said "Thank God." But his wife said to Sadiqa "I saw him myself early this morning sitting by the side of the fence. That was probably a dog or a wolverine or something." Perhaps she said the same thing to the doctor when he went to the gendarmes. After that one or two gendarmes stayed at the doctor's house. On the third night we heard the sound of a shot. The next day some villagers with the driver followed a trail of blood up behind a hill behind the building, they found the footprints of a wolf in the deep snow, a disturbed patch. But they couldn't find even a shred of white bone. The driver said "Infidels, they have even eaten the bones."

I couldn't believe it. I said that to Aga Safir. Safir said "When she heard it the lady just smiled." Even the doctor himself informed her. The lady was sitting near the fireplace, drawing something. She heard the door open. When she saw me, she turned the paper over. The lady's drawings were undefinable. Only a wolf was there. Two red eyes gleaming in a black background, an inky design of a wolf sitting, with the wolf howling at the moon. The shadow

of the wolf was greatly exaggerated, completely covering the clinic, the graveyard. One or two of them were of a wolf's muzzle, that resembled the muzzle of dog, especially the teeth.

On Wednesday evening, the doctor went to town. Sadiqa said that his wife wasn't well. The doctor himself said so. I didn't believe it. I saw her myself Wednesday morning. She came on the hour to teach the children drawing. One of the designs was drawn on the blackboard. She said so herself. But so then I asked "So, why a wolf?" She said "Whenever I wanted to draw something else it didn't turn out. When I put chalk to board, it almost drew itself." It was a pity that the children erased it at recess. In the afternoon when I saw one or two of their drawings, I thought they probably wouldn't be able to draw it. But the design of the children was just like a shepherd dog with its ears hanging down, and its tail around its rear. Thursday afternoon I heard the doctor returned, I think his wife spent the night in town and he returned to work. No one was sick, that is no one came from other villages. But, well, the doctor was an industrious sort. After that he took Akhtar and they went into the pass with the clinic Jeep. The gendarmes went too. Nothing was found.

The doctor wasn't talking. When he woke up, if he wasn't crying, he just stared at us with wide eyes, one by one, with the same expression as his wife's eyes. I had to get a couple glasses of arrak into him to get some words to come to his lips. Probably he didn't want to talk in front of others. I didn't think he and his wife had never had a dispute. But I don't know why he kept saying "Believe me, it wasn't my fault." I asked my wife and even Sadiqa and Safir if they could recall the woman and her husband ever raising their voices to one another. But I had told the doctor not to go. I said that the snow was thicker in the pass. Probably it was alright for the doctor, I don't know. Then he said "She's not well, I think that she can't stand it. Has she made any new drawings?" I looked. A few drawings of the wolf's paws. One or two of the ears, laid back, I told him.

The doctor could not really speak. But there was a lot of deep snow, like everything was covered in glass. Then the doctor realized the windshield wipers were broken. He was forced to stay. He said "Believe me, I saw him, I saw him with my two eyes, standing in the middle of the road." Akhtar said "Do something. We'll freeze here." The doctor said "What if we see him?" The doctor put his hand out from the window and wiped the windshield but the snow could not be cleared. He said "You know we can't turn around here." He was right about that. Then he shut the motor off. Akhtar shone the flashlight ahead and saw the wolf, sitting right near the road. She said "It's him. I believe he's completely harmless. Maybe it's not even the wolf, maybe it's a shepherd dog or some other dog. Go outside and see if you can tell."

The doctor said "Go outside? Didn't you see him? He said it, grinding his teeth. His color became white, just like the deathly white of Akhtar's face behind the window gazing at the shining desert or at the dog. Akhtar said "What about if I throw him my purse?" The doctor said "What will that do?" She said "It's good leather. The second he grabs the bag to eat, you can go out and do something." Before throwing the bag out, the doctor said "I wish I had my fur coat." The doctor told me "Didn't you say that one shouldn't go outside or open the door?" Akhtar threw the bag out, but the doctor didn't get out. He said "By God, I saw his big black form there, standing in the road – he didn't move and he didn't howl." Then Akhtar tried to find her bag with the flashlight and didn't see it. Akhtar said "I'll go myself." The doctor said "You'll do nothing of the kind." Or probably said "You cannot really do this." But he remembered that Akhtar got out before he said that. The doctor couldn't see since the snow blocked the windshield. He didn't hear the sound of her scream. Then he shut the door, out of fear of the snow - or Akhtar shut it. He didn't say.

Friday morning we spread out on the road to look. The doctor didn't come. He couldn't. Snow was still falling. No one expected to find anything. Everywhere was white. We shoveled where ever we thought

it made sense to do so. We only found the purse. On the road, when I asked Safir, he said “There’s nothing wrong with the windshield wipers.” I just don’t understand. And then when Sadiqa brought more drawings it was even more puzzling. A handwritten note was pinned to them, ‘an offering for our elementary school’. When the doctor was ready to go back, he wanted me to give the drawings to Sadiqa, in case he did not feel better, or on Wednesday if we couldn’t get more models, to let me use the drawings instead of models. I couldn’t tell the doctor, or Sadiqa either, but at the end of the day, what good is it for peasant children to draw dogs, ordinary dogs?

HOUSHANG GOLSHIRI (Iran)

### **Our spring 2022**

*~~translated by David Seter*

late evening, but in town life goes on,  
strange and real, I had gotten used to seeing her  
silent, extinguished by a pandemic,  
I look down my avenues, they aren’t what they were,  
beautified now,  
the center slightly dressed up,  
leaning against the collapsing fence of Oginskiai Park—  
spring! In the town center  
a little girl laughing, playing with her ball,  
“little sun you rise again to wake the world,”  
lady with puppy, young people, couple,  
me, I catch anxiety,  
how the north wind carries it,  
I take photographs with an aching heart,  
I drink the air greedily,  
still I guess it’s something to think about, our dear world, when I hear people  
speaking in our small town  
a language not heard until now

## Vagus nerve

they don't understand when and how this happened,  
I go somewhere else for a while,  
to Antarctica  
in my own room,  
I daydream  
or race my mirage in the desert,  
fly an airplane  
around the Earth,  
training to live on Mars,  
the moon landing really happened  
or was it a dream,  
I do that all the time,  
go to a place inside myself,  
drink coffee,  
miracles happen every day,  
I signed the documents,  
listened to my music  
or pet the cat,  
I thought about you,  
wrote a poem  
about nuclear threat,  
I can't say exactly where I was at the time  
and what I did, what I ate,  
I was talking to myself  
or someone else,  
lying on the sofa or  
making blyni,  
when my vagrant nerve returned, parasympathetic,  
strangely it returned during the war,  
everything else in my house still the same,  
but I know my wandering nerve dangles from the ceiling in the attic,  
it slides under the bed,  
settles gently among the dust  
over the corner window behind draperies,  
swinging upon the spider webs,  
flying into lamp-lit canyons,  
climbing like vines that act like bindweed,  
we found one another,  
everything in my house back to the way it always was,  
it is becoming more of an obsession,  
the vagus nerve taking root,  
do you understand

## **It's difficult to talk about**

they got engaged,  
then got married,  
they had a child  
she laughed a lot  
and didn't sleep,  
he was a good humorist,  
published two books of poetry,  
they built a house in the country,  
she learned to sew and took up  
management responsibilities,  
they took out a loan  
and expanded their business,  
they became very powerful,  
he ran the town,  
their daughter became an artful knitter,  
somebody was crying under a cross  
in the dark,  
returned from exile, become unimportant,  
a person people were reluctant to see,  
walking ragged  
and speaking about affairs of state,  
nobody wanted to hear,  
Justinas Mikutis  
sometimes crying to himself

how naïve I was,  
the people were gourmets,  
wanting art that tasted like saffron

ALMA RIEBŽDAITĖ

REVIEWS:



THE BUTTERFLY CEMETERY, Selected Prose (2008-2021) by Franca Mancinelli. Translated by John Taylor. Bitter Oleander Press, 2022. pp 182.

In *The Translator's Invisibility*, Lawrence Venuti urges the translator to have a strong link to the foreign author, not merely to admire her/him, but he says that “there should also be an identity between them,” thus binding the translator to the author to confer the utmost degree of faithfulness on the translation (237). Venuti uses the Italian word ‘*simpatico*’ to illustrate the idea that the translator should be as one with the author, that s/he should utterly understand the author. Translator John Taylor and poet Franca Mancinelli share a long collaboration on different projects and *The Butterfly Cemetery* is proof of mutual literary identity.

Franca Mancinelli’s *The Butterfly Cemetery Selected Prose (2008-2021)* is a collection of autobiographical stories, personal essays, and fragments about poetics and landscape. It explores a variety of themes such as childhood, healing, landscape, or the relationship between reading and writing, while also capturing the author’s firm voice infused with sensibility and warmth. The bilingual collection is aimed at an English audience, yet pairing each piece with the original allows the curious reader to get a taste of Mancinelli’s vivid language.

The first section contains short stories with nameless, yet vividly penned characters. In “The Little Girl Who Learnt How To Fly,” the little girl and the little bird become one and the same and the former’s turning into a feathered creature is deftly depicted: “Within a few hours her plumage had grown so much that she could start practicing her first test flights: running and then, having reached the maximum speed, leaping. Her leaps brought her off the lawn, carried her to the lowest branches of the trees” (33). Such dainty descriptions become gently shocking in other pieces: “He says *the bathtub, let’s go to the bathtub*. This is how children are killed. Mothers don’t even notice. The water that flowed out of them in a start ended up filling a basin, a washbasin, a lake. Quiet surfaces that contain nothing, wait for something. They ask you about it, stretching your face into a monstrous reflection. By cutting off your arms in the breeze”

(39). In a mixture of romantic, personal, and disturbing imagery and narrative, Mancinelli's versatile writing captures invisible instances of both the mundane and the elsewhere.

In the "Postface" of the collection, translator John Taylor explains how thirteen years of writing have been braided together in *The Butterfly Cemetery Selected Prose* to account for Mancinelli's search for "the place of 'the other' and the possibilities of an 'open identity' that goes "beyond human contours" (160). The idea of an open identity is a recurrent theme for Mancinelli whose poems also gravitate around the self as place or the self as ebb and flow. The glue that binds these fragments is language itself and the rich explorations she embarks on. In "Piazza XX Settembre-Fano: Following the Ammonites" she describes herself as being "made of the almost never clear water of this mild, half-enclosed sea, which becomes furious every so often in winter with the shores that have constricted it" (65). Geography not only traces her legacy but lives in her blood, the same one that runs her pen. John Taylor, a poet himself, skillfully depicts the lyric intensity of her prose and for a reader familiar with Mancinelli's poetry, he draws a beautiful arc into her fluid, versatile verse.

The second section of the collection is a departure from childhood and first love and investigates the self in relation to place. The eye moves from the parameters of a room to the vast possibilities of the street to the contained strokes of a pool, a metaphor for writing itself: "In writing, there is also a time beyond which the most thoughtful kinds of perseverance and dedication are worthless: from that text, no poem will be born. A careful, experienced reader can help us to recognize which text might still have hopes" (111). Writing is further tackled with in her piece "Poetry, Mother Tongue" where she addresses the importance, elegance, and necessity of poetry. Caught "between the unknown and the nothingness" we resort to poetry to translate what has already been imprinted on us, our bodies, mere vessels for the embedded creativity.

This idea of the invisible that seeps into our mundane, imbuing it with potential is echoed in Mancinelli's closing piece, "The Invisible as The Facing Page" where she speaks to the limitations of both poetry and

language. Despite these constraints, she ends in an optimistic manner: “Every time we hold a pen, we must remember this ancient branch with which we wrote as children, when we were translating from the invisible (our own body, our presence, was a recent translation from the invisible)” (159).

John Taylor has done more than render Mancinelli’s unique voice into English; he has managed to capture this elusive invisible process that translation is, bringing her work to a wider audience while also depicting the transient nature of the butterfly, a beautiful metaphor for so many things: creation, beauty, life itself.

~~Clara Burghelea

PRAYING TO LANDED-IMMIGRANT GOD: *Rugându-mă la un Dumnezeu emigrant* by Diana Manole. Translated by Diana Manole and Adam J. Sorkin. Grey Borders Books, 2023. pp 176.

*Praying to Landed-Immigrant God. Rugându-mă la un Dumnezeu emigrant* by Diana Manole, co-translated by Diana Manole and Adam J. Sorkin, is a bilingual Romanian-English poetry collection. Its seven sections explore themes such as identity, exile, language, geography, displacement while making room on the page for the way in which Romanian, English, Finnish, Russian, French, Spanish, German, Dutch equally coexist or clash into one another. It is a personal account of an immigrant’s journey, though it also speaks to the way migration is a multifaceted phenomenon.

Diana Manole is a Romanian-born scholar, writer, and literary translator who moved to Canada in 2000. Her literary journey reflects a constant preoccupation with immigrant anxiety and how poetry is the one medium to channel this. The current collection closely looks at her migration process, documenting the anxiety and displacement she experienced while settling in the new country.

The book lacks an introductory reflection on the translation process, though Diana Manole briefly addresses in the Acknowledgments section, her transition from Romania to Canada, from one language into another, and the multiple roles she fulfilled as a citizen, professional, and individual. The poems in the collection beautifully render the intricacies of the process and ask the reader to reflect not only on the immigration experience but also on the way translation is a metaphor for this encounter with a new country, a new language, a new culture. How does one translate an old self into a new place? What are the residues of this uprooting?

The collection is built chronologically, accounting for Diana Manole's personal journey as an immigrant to Canada. The first section follows the speaker's settling in to the unfamiliar environment, with the bilingual poems acting as sliding doors, allowing the speaker to move back and forth from memory-land to the page where the pen mercilessly keeps track of the painful transition. The city is ruthless in its choking of lives suspended: "angels with sugar wings melt/ in bakery and pastry shop windows/ I've no one to say goodbye to/ when I'm leaving" (29).

The initial anxiety slowly turns into acceptance: "I have become Romanian, fleeing" (125). This awareness that the self has undergone a process of dissection is becoming more and acute: "I keep paring away my self-image/ as if slicing an apple thinner and thinner/ until the fruit becomes/ perfume" (67). Nevertheless, the collection is not bleak but rather pulsating with aliveness, desire, yearning. The speaker refuses to give in to sorrow or despair. Instead, she is ready to embrace love "among skyscrapers that trumpet arrogantly/ the triumph of the West lording over the rest" (69).

Inevitably, the collection urges the reader to also consider the translation process and the essential relation between a poet and translator/s. On one hand, Manole wrote "Praying to an Immigrant God," "Fleeing,"

“Becoming” and “Postscript” in Romanian and had translator Adam Sorkin assist her in translating the poems into English. On the other hand, the collection includes a multilingual closing section, called “Deflowering. Other People’s Languages,” which brings together immigrants with Finnish, Russian and Persian roots into this translation journey. The same poem, “Deflowering,” also gets translated into French, Spanish, German, and Dutch.

This is an intriguing project that addresses the fluidity of translation and how it is not a one-way avenue, a singular interaction between the source and the target language. The poems of this collection are here both authored and co-translated and this allows Manole to wear many hats from poet to translator to editor. Somewhere in between, there is the richness of connecting to other poets and translators in a process that articulates the practice of translation which, alongside poetry writing, is a remedy against immigrant anxiety.

Once again, this is a fortunate project where poet and translator share not only a language but also a symbiotic understanding of the source culture. The two of them collaborated on other projects, among which the co-translation of Nora Iuga’s poetry collection, *The Hunchback’s Bus* (Bitter Oleander). Adam Sorkin is known for his command of the Romanian language and his generous partnerships with authors and other Romanian translators. This also shows in the way *Praying to Landed-Immigrant God. Rugându-mă la un Dumnezeu emigrant* is a space of meaningful exchange, once again testifying to the capacity of poetry to transcend time and space and allow for cross-cultural explorations.

~~Clara Burghelea

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