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Within the all-too-brief space of time that was his remarkable life, the young Portuguese poet Luis Miguel Nava arrived at a fundamental truth of translation as he wrote, “I am like a table set to the very bones / I lend the page my bones and when I write / it’s as if my hand were inside a mirror.” Nava’s brilliant insight, here and elsewhere in the selections below, stands as a witness to the essential task of the translator; i.e., to *perform* the original text and the translation of it, *down to the bone*. To place our “hand” as we write, *inside* the poem, so as to reflect its voice in a new language, inviting readers to *know* both the poet and the truth of the original text.

Indeed, the young Nava understood the sublime nature of the translation process as he carried the mirror metaphor through its spiritual dimension : “For that is exactly the infinite—the inside of a mirror in front of which an Other has been placed. Always when two mirrors lovingly confront each other, one of them, incorporating the Other, passes through it, and, carrying it along, crosses over to the other side, standing alert, straight and tall.” One, and Other; Poet and Translator; Writer and Reader; Text and Reader. If, as Jake Sheff notes in his review below, “poetry can serve a divine purpose”, then translation’s virtue is no less

manifest. Particularly in the current troubling climate where xenophobia, homophobia, and the practice of ‘othering’ are on the rise, it is imperative that poets, writers, and translators take a deep dive into the “mirror”. We must work to engage and welcome a wider audience of readers. Only in so doing can we hold on to our “hope in the restorative power of translation and the empathetic stamp literature puts on reading minds.” (*see : Review in this issue by Clara Burghilea*)

But achieving the transformational potential in literary translation is no cakewalk. It requires work and sweat and unflinching devotion and time. So will repairing our world. Luis Nava knew this. His words still call us to the task with the clarity and strength of sunlight : *“The sun is underground, the one I want to / stretch myself beneath lies within my spirit, one must / dig deep to make it rise.”*

In this issue, we at *Ezra* are pleased to present not one, but two featured writers, Alexis Levitin and Ricardo Vasconcelos, whose collaborative translation work has yielded a collection in English of Luis Miguel Nava’s exquisite, intense, meaty poetry. In addition, we offer readers Levitin’s translation of another contemporary Portuguese poet, Rosa Alice Branco. We are confident readers will also delight in the translated works below

of Paul Éluard, Victor Cabrera, Erri De Luca and the incomparable Jean Giono.

FEATURED WRITERS: Alexis Levitin and Ricardo Vasconcelos

Alexis Levitin has published fifty books of translations, including Clarice Lispector's *Soulstorm* and Eugenio de Andrade's *Forbidden Words*, both from New Directions. In the last fifteen years, his translations of poetry include five volumes by the leading Afro-Brazilian poet Salgado Maranhão: *Blood of the Sun*, *Tiger Fur*, *Palavora*, *Mapping the Tribe*, and *Consecration of the Wolves*. During the same period, he has completed three collections by the Amazonian environmentalist poet Astrid Cabral: *Cage*, *Gazing Through Water*, and *Spotlight on the Word*. Most recently, he has translated *Consecration of the Aleph Bet*, a twenty-two poem sonnet sequence honoring the invention of Hebrew, by the poet/linguist Leonor Scliar-Cabral. At the same time, he has translated three collections of Ecuadorian poetry: Ana Minga's *Tobacco Dogs*, Santiago Vizcaino's *Destruction in the Afternoon*, and Carmen Vascones' *Outrage*. From Portugal, he translated fourteen collections of poetry by Eugénio de Andrade, and individual volumes by Carlos de Oliveira, Egito Gonçalves, and Rosa Alice Branco. The poems in this feature of *Ezra* are drawn from his

recent co-translation with Ricardo Vasconcelos of Luis Miguel Nava's selected poems, *Through Nakedness*.

Ricardo Vasconcelos was a 2020-2021 Fulbright U.S. Scholar and director of the minor in the Program of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies at San Diego State University. His scholarly work on modern and contemporary Portuguese literature, focusing on Mário de Sá-Carneiro, Fernando Pessoa, Eça de Queirós, among others, has been published in several countries. In 2017, he edited Mário de Sá-Carneiro's *Poesia Completa* and also published a bibliographic and critical study comparing Herman Melville and Eça de Queirós, *José Matias/Bartleby*. He is also the author of *Campo de Relâmpagos — Leituras do Excesso na Poesia de Luís Miguel Nava* (*Lightning Field — Readings of Excess in the Poetry of Luís Miguel Nava*). In 2020, he brought forth a long-awaited critical edition of Luís Miguel Nava's *Poesia*. Working from that volume, he and Alexis Levitin have produced the American co-translation of *Through Nakedness*, from which this feature in *Ezra* has been drawn.

Excerpted from ***Dog Love***, April 2022.

translated by Alexis Levitin

*Naturally this had the contrary effect
and the two animals threw themselves at each
other's throats (one upon the other) over the body of the child*

To wait can be exasperating, when love is like a
a row of high-tension cables planted
at an incompatible distance. Through the wires flow
words they don't even know exist and when
a spark leads to apoplexy they find a way to marry
and be happy. They know this from the hope they place beneath
their eiderdown and in the stars, hope followed by the reality
of the unpredictable humors of a baby, sleepless nights,
but ask them if it matters. They kiss the rings around their eyes,
everything is reciprocal, and the dog guards the cradle with love
and conviction. The horizon is growing calm, I would say,
but one can see her belly already showing itself convex. Other
news is the baby dog,
demanding all the attention of the trinity, a fawning creature
so submissive that even our guts feel disgust.
An uproar awakened the small house, the dogs tangled together
and the child lying on the floor in the midst of frantic paws.
They sent the oldest dog to be put down and order returned
to the universe of the house where a sweet baby had been born,

a princess, the delight of her parents, slaving from their very pores.

Her brother threw her out of the cradle after wetting his pants again and again to draw their attention. The head of the little girl grew dented, but they didn't send off the eldest to be put down. They punished him, gave him a new world order, an impotence to be used by a future analyst. And the parents remained free to perpetrate little crimes with cruel consequences and their doubts concerning happiness have been rapidly swept under the rug. It's a house full of dust.

35.

*Only beings who do not know that their prey are
fellow creatures can kill without remorse*

Desires create a world of pleasures and just as many frustrations. At times it is incomprehensible glimpsing the dice we do not play but someone else plays for us because the swing of the hand, the disputes between chance and the face of the cube toward the sky open clearings along the way. Incomprehensible that the dog does not kill for hate nor the cat or the others. It is the tacit understanding of the law of cohabitation that stipulates prey and predator. The neighborhood guarantees truces that leave the doe and her fawns untouched by the wolf,

and the falcon does not tear apart the ring dove at its side.
Enough to see how the nests of the one and the other seem
neighbor's
houses separated by a garden. In fact, they ignore each other
beyond the hedge, but they don't foment wars or stir up
gossip. If you want to know, an urban building is a bit
the opposite of all of this, I'm speaking of daily pettiness,
of the neighbor who knocks on the door invoking reasons to
speak ill
of the blond on the first floor and I oblique like a seed
seeking water. I want to go to the woman I love two
blocks from here even if I have to go to the moon for love
generates
propelling forces and one cannot reduce everything to a weapon
pointed at someone's head. It isn't a question of a momentary
passion.
This love is self-evident, precise and deaf to the houses paired
in failed encounters. Right now, I'm in a rush, but at the proper
time
this love can stretch from this building to the horizon
and no one would run over the lives of others, but I know you're
thinking that my hormones are playing utopian pranks on me.

The effect of the distance for flight, that is the critical distance, helps to explain the behavior of a dog behind an open or a closed garden gate

I never know if I'll open the gate at the barking of
a bunch of dogs. And if dumb and still, doesn't the dog have
sharp teeth
behind dissimulation? I could be extrapolating from people
I know or read about in the papers, fences of hedges
and of pages hide a blinking yellow light
and we never know if it will turn to green or violence.
Sometimes it's only an imitation. A Proust made in China, chop
suey
of *young girls in flower*, the son who kills his parents
and wasn't even an addict. If a dog threatens the fencing with
his teeth I enter calm and relaxed and he backs off
flabbergasted. If I go towards him he moves away and gives a low
bark
so as not lose face over nothing.
But if I open the gate of a silent dog I may be silenced
for good. To invade the dwelling place and leave the dog
cornered,
the woman with hands at her throat,
the teenager humiliated in front of his friends,
is the same as knocking to the ground a physical barrier:
freedom embalmed by the glittering of the frame.

ROSA ALICE BRANCO (from Portuguese)

Selections from *Through Nakedness*

translated by Alexis Levitin and Ricardo Vasconcelos

Introduction

I've tied myself a ligature to the world.

Following a different strategy, there are those who screw it down, kneeling on the earth, or open an eye in it, a pupil.

Above them, the sky is elastic.

Elastic, adhesive, those are two of the attributes that, as I complete the book for which this text could serve, among others, as an introduction, fascinate me the most.

The soul itself is elastic: we could, placing a finger on its surface and pressing down, lead it to touch on the most unexpected things.

Reality is a window painted beneath a glaring sun; things latch on to my spirit. With the sea, to give just one example, I made a flawless mask.

Reality

Lifted and spun by waves

of reality, I am like a table set to the very bones,
I lend the page my bones and when I write
it's as if my hand were inside a mirror.

The Infinite

I would like to pass through the experience of one of those mirrors in front of which an Other is standing—to feel my image multiplied within me unto infinity. For that is exactly the infinite—the inside of a mirror in front of which an Other has been placed. Always when two mirrors lovingly confront each other, one of them, incorporating the Other, passes through it, and, carrying it along, crosses over to the other side, standing alert, straight and tall.

Landscape

Sometimes, leaving one another, from the crest

of our hearts we would feel
the sea splintering all around us, and everywhere,
scattered tracings, like those of broken glass.

Chess

At times I entertain myself by feeling every word of mine transformed into as many people as are listening. Words multiply, spread, linger in their spirits like those birds that, having flown into our houses, beat against the windows endlessly. It is often then that I want to open up my chest, exposing all my viscera, the organs upon which the light of the heart reflects and that, if by chance the sun rises in my consciousness, I feel my fingers returning slowly to my hands. They bring with them a deep desire to play, to open up again the viscera, reveal again the insides of my body, that magnificent game in which the workings of my organs are like the sequence of the moves in chess.

Underground Sun

The sun is underground, the one I want to
stretch myself beneath lies within my spirit, one must

dig deep to make it rise.

Scars

The flesh that time carried in its the entrails
shakes free
with greater difficulty now from a darkness, comparable
only to that of someone who,
trying at all costs to lift the stone screen

where cinema is undone, might dare
to make his flesh the score
played by his bones
in the midst of metaphors tied
within the very body that they name.

The flesh was a key, surely the world
would find others, but for now,
a key to doors that, having been torn
from their houses and hurled to the sea,
were locked forever

not a single one remains behind which
we might hide our scars.

The sea comes crashing

once again in memory, there where my bones
seem moored.

Raising my hands, I hold endless stars up high.
Of the blood with which distance itself is mixed
in houses through whose cracks
with difficulty we manage
to allow the sky to penetrate, displaying all silence,

there are marks in the destiny attached to which we find
the flesh that, woven in the entrails,
comes to crown us,
and, covering the body, it resembles what inside
each thing is that very thing in abstract terms.

LUIS MIGUEL NAVA (from Portuguese)

Traduttori/traduttrici:

Patrick Williamson	(Erri de Luca)
Ross Belot and Sara Burant	(Paul Éluard)
James Richie	(Victor Cabrera)
Chris Monier	(Jean Giono)

The Unnumbered

translated by Patrick Williamson

The unnumbered, doubling each square on the chessboard
we pave your sea with skeletons to be able to walk on it.

You cannot count us, if counted we multiply,
children of the horizon, spilling by the sacksful.

We have come on bare feet, instead of soles,
insensible to thorns, stones, scorpions' tails.

No police bullying can harm us
we have already been mistreated or worse.

We'll make ourselves servants, the children you do not have,
our lives will be your adventure books.

We'll bring Homer and Dante, the blind man, the pilgrim,
the smells you lost, the equality you subdued.

ERRI DE LUCA (from Italian)

Beautiful and Lifelike

translated by Ross Belot and Sara Burant

A face at the end of the day
A cradle in the day's dead leaves
A bouquet of naked rain
All sunlight hidden away
All springs from the springs in water's depths
All mirrors from broken mirrors
A face in the balances of silence
A pebble among other pebbles
For the fronds of the day's final light
A face like every forgotten face.

Season of Loves

translated by Ross Belot and Sara Burant

By the coastal path
In the three-sided shadow of agitated sleep
I come to you the double the multiple
To you akin to the era of the deltas.

Your head more petite than mine
The neighboring sea reigns with spring
Over the summers of your delicate form
And it's here we burn the ermine bundles.

In the restless openness
Of your public face
These floating animals are wonderful
I envy their naivete their inexperience
Your inexperience a bed of straw on water
Finds the path of love without sinking
By the coastal path
And without the talisman revealing
Your laughter to the crowd of women
And your tears to one who doesn't want them.

Hardly Disfigured

translated by Ross Belot and Sara Burant

Goodbye sadness

Hello sadness

You are inscribed in the lines of the ceiling

You are inscribed in the eyes I love

You are not entirely miserable

Since the poorest lips denounce you

With a smile

Hello sadness

Love of lovely bodies

Love's potency

Whose kindness arises

Like a monster without a body

Disappointed head

Sadness beautiful face.

Bad Memory

translated by Ross Belot and Sara Burant

The scattered peaks the evening birds

The feminine echoes of love-making

At the bedside of the street

And in the shelters of desire

The great dazzling darkness of rebels kissing.

The rain with full hands
Under leaves under street-lamps
In the wheelbarrows
The rubble of hours fully silent
Time is not the master
It slumps
Like a studied laugh
That withers in ennui.
The water the night the careless unaware woman will be lost
Loneliness makes every presence untrue
A kiss one more kiss just one
To leave the desert behind.

PAUL ÉLUARD (from French)

Offering

translated by James Richie

John 12:24

1 Corinthians 13:1-2

I planted my last wing splinter

in a parched garden and offered
my fossilized heart's remains.

Nothing came to pass from that humble gift
no forgiveness budded,
no evidence sprouted.

And then I understood
he who plants without faith
will harvest without hope
and nothing shoots up even in fertile soil
from a seed of resentment.

And I understood that pain is joy's
most forsaken farm:

And look how we treated joy.

And look how I am
able to create from pain.

VICTOR CABRERA (from Spanish)

The Still Traveler

translated by Chris Monier

I saw the old grocery again, shuttered, all out-of-place in that bend in the alley. Now, carnival sounds are coming in from the distance, from the square with the war memorial, and in other streets, the tide of life flows on against the keel of shiny new stores. New housewives go for the machines that can chop ham precisely, for the scales read with logarithmic tables, for vials of curry, cans of spicy anchovies. Lots of things that little shop had never dared (and after all, it was a grocery-haberdashery!). So now it has taken its flags in, and it is fading out alone, there in the forgotten part of the alley.

This shop was where I took off on my first trips to the *lands behind the air*. Every Thursday evening, they took me to my

aunt's house. It was there on that same little street, an old, stocky house overflowing its frame, its belly braided through with iron balconies. The corridor inside grabbed your shoulders with hands of ice, making your legs unsure of themselves before ushering you finally past the cellar door. I had never known anyone more upset, more bitter, than this cellar portal. It trembled with a constant flow of air that seemed to come up from the depths of the earth. It creaked, "Oh yes, these ones again; go on by." Then finally, stretching out your arms, you finished by touching the head of the banister.

Up above was a room like a parade ground with a small hearth in the back, though the fire was toy-like, a child's fire, fledgling and unserious, hidden and whistling below green logs still damp with the wetness of the hills. My aunt stirred in her chair, with the sound of rumpled skirts and the crackling of dry wood. When she saw us, she let out a muffled growl, like a big cat

who has spied the butcher's paper, and her great, manly voice would suddenly cover my mother with the storm of questions and responses that had been welling up inside her during the week alone.

In two steps and three movements I was thrown into the shadows, shoulders hurting and cheeks on fire as if pecked by a hen—the aunt had dry hands and rough cheeks.

I went back down the stairs on supple legs, onto the street, around the corner. There was Mlle Alloison's spice shop. Ah, Mlle Alloison! Like a tall column with a hinge in the middle. She bent down, rubbed her hands, and said: "ah Janot, so you've come back to see your aunt?" She had a cord pulled tight around her waist like a monk; a large seamstress' scissors hung near her calf. She was full of sighs and exclamations. One night they were saying, without sensing me, that she had been pretty when she

was young. She kept the parish bulletin. She knew by heart what I was here for and went back into her kitchen and left me alone in the spice shop.

Here there was nothing but the kerosene glow suspended in the copper lantern. Perhaps this was like being in the chest of a bird: the ceiling made a sharp vault in the darkness. The chest of a bird? No, the hold of a ship. Sacks of rice, packs of sugar, the mustard pot, three-legged kettles, the jar of olives, baskets of white cheeses, the barrel of herring. Dried codfish hanging from a joist threw great shadows on the cardboard cases where the little haberdashery was, and, getting on my tiptoes, I could see the beautiful *fil au Chinois* label. I advanced softly, softly; the soft slat floor rocked under my foot. The sea was already carrying the ship. I lifted the lid of the pepper box. The smell. Ah! this beach with palm trees and the Chinese man and his mustaches. I sneezed. “Don't catch a cold, Janot. –No, Mademoiselle.” I opened

the coffee drawer. The smell. Under the floor the soft water rippled: you could sense its depth, moved along by magnificent winds. We no longer hear the cries of the port.

Outside, the wind was pulling a long cable of dry leaves over the cobblestones. I went for the hiding spot of the brown sugar, taking a morsel of it. While it melted on my tongue, I crouched down in the little compartment between the bag of chickpeas and the basket of onions; the shadow took me: I was gone.

JEAN GIONO (from French)

Reviews:

SWEET HUNTER: THE COMPLETE POEMS OF SAINT TERESA OF AVILA; A New Translation with Commentary (Bilingual Edition), by Dana Delibovi. Rhinebeck, New York: Monkfish Book Publishing Company, 2024. 188 pages.

“Your head is held high like Mount Carmel; your hair is so lovely it holds a king prisoner.”

- Song of Songs 7:5

Poetry can serve a divine purpose. It comes as no surprise, then, to read that of a saint and to find devotional verse. What did surprise me, as someone new to the work of St. Teresa, was the breadth of her literary output. To better understand her poetry, I felt compelled to read a selection of her prose – namely, *Interior Castle*, and her autobiography, henceforth, *Life* (both translated by E. Allison Peers) – and to learn more about the cultural and historical context in which it was written. Three months prior to reading St. Teresa, I happened upon a discounted copy of *The Complete Poems of San Juan de la Cruz* (trans. María Baranda and Paul Hoover; 2021). St. John of the Cross (almost 30 years St. Teresa’s junior) was her partner in reform, and the two of them founded the Discalced Carmelites. Carmelite refers to the mendicant order whose members base their way of life on that of the prophet Elijah. In the *First Book of Kings*, his major acts occur on Mt. Carmel. *Kerem-el* (כַּרְמֶל), from which we get the name ‘Carmel,’ means in Hebrew “vineyard of God.” ‘Discalced’ means “without shoes.” The Discalced Carmelites wear sandals instead. This voluntary poverty

symbolizes their emphasis on humility and detachment from worldly (or concrete) possessions. (Note to readers: Wherever italics appear in a quotation, the emphasis is mine unless stated otherwise.)

Both poetry and religion make concrete what's otherwise not so. That is, they make things that correlate with spiritual phenomena, e.g., aspects of the human soul and what exists beyond time and space. And, as Camille Paglia tells us in *Sexual Personae*, "Art and religion come from the same part of the mind." She also says that the artist, the mystic, and the saint all possess "intuition or extrasensory perception... [which are both] a feminine hearkening to the secret voices in and beyond things." Consider Gian Lorenzo Bernini's famous sculpture, *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* ("The supreme Baroque work," per Paglia). 'Ecstasy' is derived from the Ancient Greek word *ekstasis* (ἐκστασις), which means "to be or stand outside oneself." One could say that the final idiomatic box we can think outside of is the self, but "final box" might also bring the coffin to mind. (The reader, I hope, will pardon my making concrete what isn't in saying this about the

self.) Surely, such a state removes all corporeal and egotistical impediments and, in so doing, is a way to access those secret voices, whose messages, Paglia continues, “[tell] us what nature is up to.”

And what is nature up to? Change and repetition. Poetry is nature’s mirror-image. Nature and poetry are amoral; they repeat and change things indiscriminately. (This is why Paglia, speaking as a moral agent, can say, “Art...is full of crimes.”) Religion and political ideology both have a moral agenda. As such, they are selective in what they repeat and change, with a preference for good and an aversion to bad. They are alchemy redirected. (These are not the principles of natural selection.) Here, I’m reminded of a quote from St. Teresa’s *Life*: “So this miserable concern for my honour prevented me from being able to do what I really regarded as an honour, for everyone interprets the word ‘honour’ to mean what he chooses.” As with ‘honour,’ so with ‘good’ and ‘bad.’ Religion and political ideology, then, are conservative endeavors, aiming to establish and maintain a desired order by harnessing change and repetition.

“Oh, God help me! What a miserable life is this! There is no happiness that is secure and nothing that does not change,” the saint laments in *Life*. And later: “I do not see how...we can be so very careful to please those who are living in the world, in matters which are so often changing. If these things could be learned once and for all, it might be tolerable... I am not yet fifty, and even in my own short life I have seen so many changes that I have no idea how to live.” “The life to come,” she informs us, is “where there are no changes.” In *Sexual Personae*, Paglia says, “The most effective weapon against the flux of nature is art. Religion, ritual, and art began as one...” This recalls the title of a poem by St. Teresa, “A Call to Arms at the Profession of Vows.” Religion, per St. Teresa, tells us that we cannot stop change on earth; abandon *some* hope, ye who enter it. Political ideology, unlike religion, cannot see “the life to come,” because it cannot see beyond this world. Unless it enlists the help of art. But art is “the dark mirror” to nature. Consider Plato, who, Karl Popper tells us in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, is the original totalitarian. In *The Republic*, he says, “[M]usical innovation is full of danger to the

whole State, and ought to be prohibited...[for,] when modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the State always change with them.” Repetition is a friend to many, but it breeds familiarity, which is what the artist selects for change. So, we find both religion and political ideology will inevitably end up at cross purposes with art, even if it can occasionally act, for a finite period, in league with one or the other.

One cannot run one’s fingers through the same lover’s hair twice. The lovely hair which fascinates a king – and in so doing, imprisons him – must, according to Plato, be shorn. For his philosopher-king is the warden of a panopticon, permanently locking everything into position and place to ensure that nothing changes. The world is kept by him the way it ought to be (according to him) until it ends. “Is not the best always least liable to change or alteration by an external cause?...Every god is as perfect and as good as possible, and remains in his own form without variation for ever,” we read in *The Republic*. The artist qua artist, to arrest the rest, must first arrest him or herself; he or she

does this by exiting the self through an internal portal, i.e., a jailbreak.

In *Life*, Teresa recounts how she and her brother “liked to repeat again and again, “For ever—ever—ever!”” She continues: “Through our frequent repetition of these words, it pleased the Lord that in my earliest years I should receive a lasting impression of the way of truth.” (In that book’s “Translator’s Preface,” Peers tells us that, for a translator of St. Teresa, a “stumbling block is repetition, a practice to which she was greatly addicted.”) In his lecture to the Browne and Nichols School (1915), Robert Frost says, “I went to church, once...[and] the only thing I [can] remember [about it] is the long line of “Nows” that I counted. The repetition grew tiresome. I knew just when to expect a “Now.””

This brings us to the poems. How do they do as such? Prior to reading, I had my doubts. In the book’s introduction, Delibovi says, “Teresa had a clear impetus for creating poetry...Her first motive was to release “the mystical fire she could no longer contain in her heart.” Teresa wanted to express pain, pleasure,

and desire she felt during her mystical experiences. Her second motive was to create a practical, “didactical and devotional” tool to aid in the education of the monastic nuns of her Carmelite order, part of the saint’s larger objective of evangelization and service for the Roman Catholic Church.” Here, she identifies a potential pitfall inherent to devotional verse: predictability. Consider Ralph Waldo Emerson (in “Self-Reliance”): “If I know your sect, I anticipate your argument.” Poetry is “news that stays news.” Poetry in the service of religious reformation will, by the definition of ‘reform,’ contain news while in the act of reforming. But once the reforms are established, the poetry becomes old news. Old news travels to the underworld if it travels anywhere at all, and there it awaits rebirth.

Having said all that, I do find much that is strong. Delibovi opts to not use rhyme, despite Teresa’s use of it and her “addiction” to repetition. But the poet often writes in a form called the *villancico*, which includes a refrain. So, the translations sound modern and the sense is never sacrificed for rhyme, yet they retain a musical quality. (Although, might the perfect mirror

to nature be rhyme, which marries change and repetition? It does not hurt that, if you say ‘rhyme’ backwards, it sounds like ‘mirror.’)

I am quite moved by “Let Nothing Disturb You,” a nine-line lyric (with a dedication to God at the end) which includes the following: “Let nothing disturb you; / nothing frighten you. / Everything passes— / but God doesn’t change.” It reminds me of “The Silken Tent” by Robert Frost. This little poem could be someone’s “supporting central cedar pole, / That is its pinnacle to heavenward / And signifies the sureness of the soul...” In *Interior Castle*, Teresa says that when her soul is disturbed – like a silken tent “in the capriciousness of summer air” (‘arbitrary’ and ‘capricious’ being terms that describe well nature’s decision-making) – if it is then sufficiently reassured by something as simple as an inner “Be not troubled,” then she knows that the locution came from God. (NB: “Interior castle” and “silken tent” are both box-like concrete representations of a person’s inner essence.)

“God’s Beauty” directly references the ultramundane: “O beauty far beyond / all beauties of the world.” And it recalls Gerard Manley Hopkins’ poem, “God’s Grandeur.” For, when she says, “Never ending, you end, / never needing to love, you love, / and from nothing, you create,” it echoes his, “nature is never spent; / There lives the dearest freshness deep down things; / And though the last lights off the black West went / Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs – / Because the Holy Ghost over the bent / World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.”

“Soul, Seek Yourself in Me” brings to my mind “Song of Myself, 52.” Teresa: “And if you haven’t known / before where to find me, well, / don’t walk from here to there. / If you want to find me, look inside, look for me in you.” And Walt Whitman: “If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles. // You will hardly know who I am or what I mean... // Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged, / Missing me one place search another, / I stop somewhere waiting for you.” (Paglia might say that, in these

poems, St. Teresa represents the sky-cult, and Walt, the earth-cult.)

“Big Gala” seems the most representative of her work to me: “Our Husband wants / to put us in prison, / at the big gala / of religion. // O what a lavish wedding / Jesus planned! / He wants us all, / and he gives us light; / let’s follow the cross / flawlessly / at the big gala / of religion.” “Homeward” is perhaps a more fleshed out version of its ideas, while “Embrace and Protect” reiterates it. The former begins with “Let’s walk to heaven, / nuns of Carmel,” while the latter commences with “Let’s walk toward heaven, / nuns of Carmel.” In the original Spanish, both poems open with “Caminemos para el cielo, / Monjas del Carmelo,” so Delibovi, like Peers before her, swerves to avoid the saint’s tendency towards repetition. (Which might be, in some respects, how one walks to heaven. Recall Paglia: “The moral man has one persona, firmly fixed in the great chain of being.” This might be where two roads – the poet’s and the saint’s – diverge.)

I find these four lines, from “Shepherds’ Watch,” illustrate the human soul quite well: “Gil: His sorrow barely hurts you—O /

how true of humankind that is! / When profit comes our way, / the pain of others hides from view.” It recalls Thomas Hobbes and the conclusion of his *Leviathan*: “For such Truth, as opposeth no man's profit, nor pleasure, is to all men welcome”

In “Cries in Exile,” she expresses her poetic impulse: “My soul hunts for you, / Lord, without success. / Invisible always, you / won’t relieve the longing, / Ay! You set fire to my soul / until it explodes.” It anticipates William Wordsworth, who says that poetry is “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.” And Frost: “A poem begins with a lump in the throat; a homesickness or a love sickness. It is a reaching-out toward expression; an effort to find fulfillment.”

Delibovi divides the poems thematically into four sections. A single poem makes up the fifth and final one (more on that below). In her commentaries that introduce each section, the translator emphasizes how “concrete” Teresa’s poetry is. She does this by repeating variations of the word ‘concrete’ while

describing the work, and she credits C. Brian Morris as pointing out that Teresa always chooses “concrete over abstract.” Expanding on this in her “Acknowledgements,” she adds: “[Morris] showed me that in her descriptions, metaphors, and word choice, Teresa always cleaves to the concrete, the tangible, the experiential. Morris reminded me to avoid the temptation to render some of the saint’s very concrete language in an abstract way.” I did not see much evidence of St. Teresa’s preference for concreteness, which is the first reason why it is an odd choice to me. The second is that ‘concrete’ is synonymous with ‘body.’ Paglia says, “No transcendental religion can compete with the spectacular pagan nearness and *concreteness* of the carnal-red media...Our *bodies* are pagan temples, heathen holdouts against Judeo-Christian soul or mind.” And later: “Judaism’s campaign to make divinity invisible has never fully succeeded...Idolatry is fascism of the eye...Greco-Roman personality is itself a visual image, shapely and *concrete*.”

And I agree. If this was truly the case, that St. Teresa embraces concreteness, such an embrace would seem at cross

purposes with her Catholicism and Judeo-Christian values. “The object of all health education is to change the conduct of individual men, women and children by teaching them to care for their *bodies* well,” according to Dr. Charles H. Mayo. The first female Doctor of the Church would say the same of religious education, but with “souls” in place of “bodies.” Simply put, I do not see the amount of sympathy with the concrete in these poems that would justify this degree of emphasis by Delibovi.

These poems call to mind uncountable canonized literary works, and this surely is a sign of their success as poetry. The collection’s final poem, “Joyful is the Heart in Love,” is rendered in rhyme and set apart from the rest, in a section named for a musical term: “Coda.” In it, Teresa writes, “Self-neglecting this heart must be, / since all of its desires crave God’s form, / and living in this way, *ecstatically*, / it skims the sea-waves of the storm.” The poem suggests that something of the mystic, the poet, and the saint – that ability to be outside oneself – is necessary for the heart to not get shipwrecked in the storm that represents nature’s (and society’s) constant, violent flux. (NB: The

storm is flux made concrete; the boat, the heart (itself the concretized inner atmosphere.) There is something catholic (with a lowercase c) about the poetry of St. Teresa of Ávila. And that's a necessary quality for work that one can classify as world literature. For poems, it's a good thing to have, since not one is accepted in its own country.

Popper would warn Plato that nothing is immutable save his heavenly (non-concrete) forms. Shakespeare might be considered the perfect mirror of nature. He is "proteanism personified," per Paglia. "Nothing [in his work] stays the same for long." But Plato is attributed with a warning to the artist who aims to embody amoral change and repetition: "There is no harm in repeating a good thing." (This always marks the birth of ritual.)

I ask myself why a person would write in a multiplicity of literary genres instead of focusing on just one. I think St. Teresa answers that question in *Interior Castle*, when she says, "I am beginning to see, as I go, that all I say falls short of the truth, which is indescribable."

~~*Jake Sheff*

BIRD SHADOWS: SELECTED POEMS AND POETIC PROSE

1967-2020, Veroniki Dalakoura. Translated and Introduced by John Taylor. Diálogos Books, 2024. pp 275.

Veroniki Dalakoura is a Greek surrealist poet, one of the leading poets of her generation. She is also a literary critic, a researcher, and a translator. *Bird Shadows Selected Poems and Poetic Prose 1967-2020* compiles a selection of her poetry and prose, and translations of the most important pieces of work in her seven published collections. The material thematically ranges body, childhood, love, nature, gods, humankind, the mundane and the art of poem-making.

Dalakoura is an experimental poet and writer, bending form to meet the needs of her content; she has a particular use of indentation and justification, exploring the margins of her prose poems to convey her unique style and voice. In her prose poem “Aversion,” Dalakoura confesses her desire to have her writing spill the edges of the container that is form: “And yet I have

committed myself to building and destroying enormous ossuaries. (They belong and will belong to the environs)” (153). This moment of brimming over the confinement of the form is preceded by a buildup of emotions, passion, anticipation and even violence: “You are liquid, but to die in your arms would be too much. I crave all your evil deeds because in your presence, evil being, you strip my joy bare” (11).

In a mixture of Greek mythology and Orthodox religious references, Dalakoura surprises with every piece of writing, braiding opposing concepts and conflicting images. Her keen eye captures intriguing figures of speech: “Rain, incessant rain, and the fear of humankind/ Penetrates the realm of light” (131). Personification is one of her favorite poetic devices, used to enhance descriptions and strike unexpected associations: “Mountain ranges cross paths with panic in the garden where pitiful repetition takes place./ I watched my deeds dancing on a shore” (161). She gives the reader access into the privacy of her mind where serpentine associations and striking imagery cumulate to seduce the reader’s perceptions. Her gaze zooms in

on objects, words, snippets of human life and spiderlike, she begins weaving a metaphor-laden web around them, distilling their inner beauty:

The road is closed; the dust shatters a moon that I've been shooting at for years.

On one side the cypresses and, on the other, the woman with her braided hair and cane.

Mother, with your clipped hair, sitting in your chair, you are looking at the future, a hollow tooth that chews your bread.

How to escape by breaking through the door—if there is one?

As a reputable translator from French, Italian, and Modern Greek, John Taylor is also an author of short prose and poetry, most recently *What Comes from the Night* (Coyote Arts, 2024). In his introduction to Dalakoura's translation, he generously accounts how poet and translator are bound by a friendship that has kept them in contact for thirty-three years via correspondence. This has also proved to be essential to the translation process since the two had a chance to be in dialogue about problematic decisions such as “punctuation and page

layouts: the lines that end with periods and the ones that do not, the capital letters at the beginning of some (but not all) lines, the broken-off images or sentences” (XIII). It is important for a translator to be fortunate enough to create a long-term, creative relationship with the poet they are translating since this positively reflects on the work.

In the introduction to this bilingual collection, the translator offers further details on the challenges the original poems raised and how his commitment to preserving her formal choices made the process stimulating: “I respected her punctuation and page layouts: the lines that end with periods and the ones that do not, the capital letters at the beginning of some (but not all) lines, the broken-off images or sentences, not to forget the ways (if I may paraphrase Nerval) by which she lets her prose “fall” into poetry, or vice versa.” (XIII). This attention paid to the intrinsic qualities of her writing shows in the English translation that captures Dalakoura’s unique poetic language: “Let the afternoon flee. Light is a cruel confessor” (207). This collaborative process

deepens as usual the hope in the restorative power of translation
and the empathetic stamp literature puts on reading minds.

--Clara Burghilea