

## FALL

### Volume 19 #3

Ever cognisant of the perils of the current moment, *Ezra* offers this issue as a kind of road map to survival - a way not simply to get through, but to thrive, in a time where what used to feel solid and settled is now in a state of constant shift. What was once accepted as right and good (fundamental human rights, democracy, the rule of law, freedom of speech, freedom of the press) is under full assault in the West. Autocracy and Fascism, it seems, are in ascendancy as truth itself slips away like sand in an ocean of manipulation and corruption. This is no doomscroll, however. On the contrary, it is a call to courage and action.

What hope do we as writers and translators have to offer our world? More importantly, what, if any, responsibility do we bear in the moment? Walter Benjamin tells us “*The translator’s task consists in this: to find the intention toward the language into which the work is to be translated, on the basis of which an echo of the original can be awakened in it*”. But that echo is, more often than not, elusive. Likewise, *intention* lives in the world of subjective interpretation - a world of slippage, of inbetween-ness. Liminality thus becomes the coin of the realm, where translation is neither transposition, nor transference nor reproduction, but rather mediation of message between two separate but porous thresholds - the languages of the original and the translated text.

As writers who toil daily within liminal zones, translators are uniquely equipped to navigate uncertainty: we bathe in the infinite relationships among languages; we breathe the interplay between original and translated texts; we anguish over meaning and grapple with *le mot juste*. Here again, Walter Benjamin’s insights are instructive. In his unfinished work *The Arcades Project*, set within the glass-roofed arcades of 19th century Paris, Benjamin highlights the fluid nature of what was at the time a wholly new swirling space of culture and commerce. The glass enclosures blurred traditional notions of interior v. exterior, public v. private, and the encounters within obscured the once clear distinctions between cultural experience v. commercial exchange. Rainer Hanshe’s translation of Léon-Paul Fargue’s *High Solitude*, reviewed below by Peter Thompson, is precisely on point here. As Hanshe’s beautiful

translation reveals, it is the *flâneur* who navigates in and out of these fluid spaces as a witness, an intermediary, a direct participant, a cultural commentator, and even as a *translator* for readers for whom 19th century Paris is inaccessible in time, space, or language. The *flâneur* serves as a mediator who opens an entry point to “outsiders” (here, readers) whose access would otherwise remain closed. This is the task of the translator, and it is more essential now than ever before as we face down falsehood in the form of mis- or dis-information.

Getting it right is both challenging and fraught with risk. Readers, as you peruse the selections below, you will find texts filled with a clarion call to courage in the face of impermanence and slippage. In Palash Mahmud’s *Liminal Spaces*, the water challenges the poet to be unafraid to follow its paths, to learn to live in the water, bear the discomfort of getting wet, to hold it as it flows, and even to be “broken up by the rocks”. Likewise, this issue’s feature, Pablo Medina, in Rafael Alcides’ poem *In Front of the Building*, recounts the melancholy memories of an old building construction worker. The poem provides the perfect metaphor for the process of construction of meaning: images of the lacuna that was the construction site reveal an amalgam of materials defined more by empty spaces than solidity, marked more by ephemera and accidents than by walls of certitude. Translators must not only learn to live with their un-ease. They must, as Horace tells us below, “bear bravely in all uncertainty” and not “linger worrying over what is unanswerable”. **In short, we must be word warriors.**

Living in liminality is not a mere abstraction that makes for interesting reading and little else, however. Translators know that meaning is real; we know that meaning and the shifting spaces within it have consequences in our world. Sadly enough, there are others who, likewise, know very well the meaning of in-between-ness, of being unsettled, of existing in a constant state of flux : migrants. Below is a lovely translation by Padma Thornlyre of an untitled poem by Ukrainian poet Lyudmyla Diadchenko, who speaks of one who has no birthday but only a “holiday” of [your] birth, and who arrived “as an illegal immigrant” on the “heels of another bone-chilling escape”. The poem is an all-too-real portrait of so many human beings who live between the thresholds of danger and safety, who are constantly on the move, who must face the daily reality of perpetual uncertainty. Indeed, being ‘pinned

down' in today's world in terms of meaning - of one's identity, culture, place of origin or even first language - can have dangerous and devastating consequences that include detention in squalid camps or even rendition to foreign lands where survival itself is uncertain. Word warriors, *Ezra* invites you to enjoy the works we present below. But more than that, wherever you can, answer the call to *act*.

#### PUBLICATION NOTICES :

*The Desert At Dusk*, Tahar Bekri (Tunisian). Poems, translated by Peter Thompson (from French, *Le Désert au Crépuscule*). NY: Contra Mundum Press, 2025.

*Narrowly*, Arno Bohlmeijer, self-translated from his Dutch novel (*Schuilgaan*). Running Wild Press, 2025.

#### FEATURED WRITER : Pablo Medina

**Pablo Medina** was born in Havana, Cuba, and raised in New York City. He is the author of over twenty published books, including poetry, fiction and works in translation. His most recent work includes *Sea of Broken Mirrors: Poems* (Hanging Loose Press, April 2024). In January 2008, along with fellow poet Mark Statman, Medina published a new English version of García Lorca's *Poet in New York*, which John Ashbery called "the definitive version of Lorca's masterpiece." He has also translated Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World*, *The Weight of the Island: Selected Poems of Virgilio Piñera*, and other works. Below are Medina's translations of four poems by the Cuban poet Rafael Alcides (1933 - 2018).

#### The Wooden Leg

*For a boy who made fun of a hero,*



And I spoke about my father's mysterious death  
ten years before,  
my father, who had lost a leg in the war;  
we found him one morning  
in the back of an empty lot, splattered  
ten steps from the window of a café bathroom,  
next to a small mound of liver  
and minor chunks of his flesh  
the dogs hadn't yet eaten.

But we were drunk  
and we laughed a lot, this is true.

Because it was real sweet  
to remember my father,  
with his small hero's medal,  
flying through the air  
confused for a wheelbarrow  
at the other end of his wooden leg.

## **The Recount**

For Gustavo Eguren and Belkis Cuza Malé

You paint a moustache on your upper lip in order to appear twenty years old,  
but a million years pass and you are only fifteen,  
fifteen miserable years old!

Finally you get to be twenty  
(after a million more years).  
But you are very young still to be twenty.  
That age should be reserved only for older folk.  
Then you learn to drive a car  
to keep from being bored. Because being twenty  
for a twenty-year-old is the most boring age.  
And a number of years pass,  
for sure,  
making believe that you are already a man,  
and that life is not what they said.  
Finally one morning they give you a driver's license.  
The phone keeps ringing.  
You are Tarzan in the city.  
Living becomes an important matter.  
Being twenty-five is the greatest sum of money you could ever have.  
Then, after the first job,  
after the first love, almost  
with the foam of the first beer in your mouth  
there appear, suddenly, all the stupid, voracious  
years. (They look like cows being unloaded  
from a cattle train. The stampede begins  
when the comb begins to pull out  
the first tufts of hair.)

You pirouette,  
rely on schemes,  
believe God has tricked you,  
you think seriously about taking hormones.  
Finally you begin to speak about all the work  
and the hard life you suffered  
under capitalism,  
what the current generation owes you  
(because you sacrificed everything for this damned generation  
that is now inspecting their moustache  
on your shiny bald head).  
Nevertheless, you dare think that perhaps, who knows, maybe  
a vacation next summer. . .  
And you fall in love again.  
But it is not the same as with the previous girl.  
Nor could it be now with any girl.  
(And to think that outside the classroom we pushed aside the chicks to go  
after the teachers!)

Meanwhile the years keep coming  
now in huge airplanes  
sometimes faster than the minute hand.  
Science is trash.  
The story about hormones is a tall tale.  
Yesterday's girl is now a mother for the second time.  
It appears that this wrinkle is truly real.

Besides, the arthritis,  
the doctor's orders.  
How fast it's all been, my God!  
Might this be not be a mistake?  
Is it possible?  
Is one seeing things?  
Has time nothing else to worry about?  
Have you not been a good person?  
In truth,  
youth is an unfortunate train going two thousand  
miles an hour.

### **Treatise On Cannibalism**

I.

I never understood my century very well  
and today, seeing you enter the room suddenly, wearing that dress,  
I feel like a cannibal.

But I was always a cannibal, woman,  
a cordial cannibal.

In my stomach rest the best thighs of Bayamo.

Like a ghost coming out of a bottle at night,  
my unforgettable lust for Olga Fernández returns,  
she was my fourth grade teacher, whom I devoured  
in glorious afternoons by the river's edge,

under the foliage of a huge ceiba tree  
that our hurricanes shook like a tiny branch;  
ear fragments reappear, left behind by mistake  
or out of haste; the delicate ankle bones  
of Mabel Vallejo or Nancy Pascual:  
dear people all, who grow in my memory,  
sweet ladies, who nourished my childhood  
while they sewed or prepared my Sunday clothes  
or helped me review my lessons in their house;  
fragments of Ana Gloria, Brenda, Lina Salomé reappear,  
and Tongolele's complete body,  
eaten with implacable slowness during one single season,  
night after night,  
in the rooming houses of my first youth.

II.

But our century is blind.

People die of hunger only two steps from their salvation,  
they stumble and perish on the streets.

Or they don't die and instead live in the clouds  
searching for a heaven which can be found on earth.

And couples search for each other in bed and never find themselves.

The man wants to stuff the woman in his chest  
and the woman wants to stuff the man in her ovaries,  
and what they really want is to devour each other

but they don't dare. And they divorce out of frustration  
invoking so-called "incompatible differences."

III.

In effect, dear friends,  
people who die of sadness,  
sitting in front of the television, eating cows,  
pigs, unnameable filth,  
or not eating  
and dying of hunger without television,  
preparing themselves to eat petrol bread in the future, steaks  
from the bottom of the sea  
(the population grows,  
the earth is not ample enough for so many mouths),  
allowing instead young women to grow old  
and spoil, thereby wasting  
millions of tons of the best protein.

Right now there are about two billion women  
in prime condition. Think about it.

Approximately two hundred billion pounds  
of thighs, tits, large hips under narrow waists,  
butts of alarming size underutilized at home,  
relics of family memories  
that will eventually spoil.

All that in the name of what? Certainly not  
in the name of a civilization smelling of gasoline which will be unable to  
resolve  
the fundamental problems of the spirit.

Because  
tell me, love,  
woman  
who today rules the poet's dreams  
with that criminal dress that is much more devastating than all of Beethoven's  
music,  
tell me, love,  
lilac beast,  
mare of dusk,  
morsel of bread  
soaked in the butter of heaven,  
tell me where,  
where can I find the flower of thought (Beethoven's music included)  
that might spare me the sadness of not being a god  
and all other pleasures that my soul would feel by digesting your thighs?  
  
Ah, to have that gift.  
Eat you in small, slow  
bites, perfectly, unforgettably raw. . .

and that you'd still be there the following day.

## **In Front of The Building**

*For Abel Prieto*

Once upon another time  
there was a scaffold here and a winch that went up and down  
with wheelbarrows filled with concrete, sacks of cement, sand and bricks.  
Now there is a multi-story building,  
still new, with a long entrance  
covered by areca palms in the rear  
(it is a building with two wings).

In the place where the scaffold and the winch once stood  
I see a man of unknown age  
meditating with a dog.

On the staircase that leads to the patio with the palms,  
two young women returning from the university  
look at the sunset  
as if it were the most natural thing in the world,  
and from a balcony on the last floor  
a woman who is saying goodbye to her youth  
looks at me intently, searchingly,  
with the solitude of certain people  
who have finally come to own a *Lada*.

"Why is he looking in my direction?"

Has he come to steal my *Lada*?"

In another time, some thirty years ago,

I worked on that building.

The unknown man with the dog, who knows what he was doing then?

The girls on the staircase were not yet born,

the woman on the balcony was still a girl,

and I myself, with a crayon moustache, pushed a wheelbarrow

hoping to fool the master builder.

They couldn't possibly remember me.

The creaking scaffold with its winch and its noise,

that scaffold from which sometimes, reaching the top,

wheelbarrows fell filled with concrete,

sand, sacks of cement and bricks,

and on occasion killed someone,

that and all the rest,

are now

things that exist only in my memory.

But once I worked on that building,

and knowing that has been my joy,

Lady of the balcony.

*traduttori/traduttrici*

Edward Gunawan

( Hendri Yulius Wijaya )

Palash Mahmud ( self-translation )

Richard Hayes ( Horace, Propertius )

Padma Thornlyre ( Lyudmyla Diadchenko)

Natasha Remoundou (Eleni Yannatou )

## **Mommy and Sorry**

*Translated by:* Edward Gunawan

because sorry is much too shy  
in appearing modest  
often it prefers to hide  
under *Hallmark* cards piling on the front porch  
before Christmas.

before your son left home,  
you managed to cry alone in prayer:

*"there's nothing wrong with my son when he was born."*

at the breakfast table, you and your husband started that morning  
with the parable of the youngest son

who disappeared and then returned  
in the company of a pop-up greeting card  
sitting smartly now in front of you  
along with the snowflakes  
that melted in slo-mo by the dining chair legs  
from a boy who had lost his way home.

the roads outside are sodden  
even though it's summer  
as though also grieving for the failure of an encounter.

HENDRI YULIUS WIJAYA

### **Liminal Spaces**

Palash Mahmud (*translating his own work*)

in this mid-summer night  
living is an ephemera  
every ingénue bond pushing me  
to a ceaseless monotony  
pulling me to smash to smithereens  
the prosaic knots  
meandering around the liminal spaces -  
of mountains

of oceans  
of woods  
of planets  
of galaxies  
of minds into the minds

i am in search of  
a thing in the world  
that will hold me  
in me  
my shadow will point me

look up-  
there you are  
here you are

you are not lost  
never & ever

still, if I want to know

what is in me excluding me

what is out there including me

then-

a voice keeps me in vigil

neither at war nor at peace

don't leave yourself behind

neither in rage nor in romance

just hold yourself in you

whereas-

every closest one strays away to the limit

every farthest thing crosses over into vanishing point

every meaning of things equal to

every edge of a triangle

thereupon-

the antebellum water

just touches on my toe

and says-

don't be so sad my boy

listen to my words-

hold me for a while

never look away

don't look up  
just be with me

follow my pathways-

the playground of human race  
is made of euphrates' water  
the sundial of human trace  
is broken by tigris' waves

just keep in mind-  
that water washes away the bay  
that water builds up the edge too

just get in my water  
learn how to get wet  
learn how to get broken into pieces  
on slit rocks

learn to live bit by bit  
your nomadic life  
in the liminal spaces

PALASH MAHMUD

## **Don't Count Your Days as if Somewhere They Have Been Reckoned Out**

*Translated by:* Richard Hayes

*After Horace, Odes, 1.11*

Don't count your days as if somewhere they have been reckoned out.

Don't look for solace in the patterns of the wheeling stars.

Bear bravely all uncertainty. Don't linger worrying

Over what's unanswerable: will this winter be the last

You see the waves crashing on the black rocks or will you live

To feel a hundred snows? Time runs through our grasping fingers

Like the rushing waters of the cataract. Even these words

Dissolve in air as quickly as the taste of her warm lips.

Entertain no despair or hope when you kiss her again.

HORACE

## **A Wind-Haunted Spot**

*Translated by:* Richard Hayes

*After Propertius, 1.18*

A wind-haunted spot

Where even the ragged bushes

Seem ashamed.

Place your ear against

The wet rocks—they give nothing



Your supposed love.

I cannot hate you,  
Though hate is the recompense  
These sorrows deserve.  
Best not incline you  
To bitterness and weeping  
On your own behalf  
And justify this exile,  
Bitten nails, tears on your cheeks,  
Your bright eyes swollen.

Would that you notice  
How I have changed, weathering  
Storms that you create!  
The trees bear witness,  
Who were once lovers themselves—  
Hear the nymph keening  
From the pine tree for  
The life she once had. I carve  
Your name in the bark.

I like to suffer

Quietly, unburdening

Only to your door—

Your locked, silent door:

Oh, how much of my distress

That closed door has heard!

Its obduracy

And your pride are one. How feel,

When                    your                    door                    is                    closed!

Cold water over

Colder stones accompanies

My plaintive singing.

At one with the crow

Who tiredly looks on—bored—

From the tallest tree,

I am lonely.

Strange to be without feeling

And yet also grieve!

And I only hear

Suffering's name, Cynthia,

Echo from the rocks.

## PROPERTIUS

### Untitled\*

*Translated by:* Padma Thornlyre

\*(selected poems originally published in *Magnetic Storms*, No Reply Press, Portland Oregon, 2023. Reprinted here with permission.)

You return after a tedious journey  
To a house redecorated in predictable ways by spiders.  
The old lodgers took off — you need remind no one  
That every summer races by, just as every winter overstays  
Its welcome. Spring can't refrain from waving her hand,  
Saying to her own mind: Nightingales, rendezvous.  
Air out the corridor, sweep leaves from the floor,  
Peel the maple-leaf wallpaper and assert your arrival.  
With nothing to prove, you're a woman  
Of Balzac's age, flying around the cobwebs!  
And Nature, that one reliable concierge, calls out,  
"Fall is back? You've made it home. Congratulations!"

LYUDMYLA DIADCHENKO

### Untitled\*

*Translated by:* Padma Thornlyre

\*(selected poems originally published in *Magnetic Storms*, No Reply Press, Portland Oregon, 2023. Reprinted here with permission.)

Close your eyes and trust the vision.

Weighing the lyre, was it worth the isolation?

The Internet? The cold vastness of space?—you’ve lived

On such crutches—solitude expanding into solitude.

Before the holiday of your birth, you arrived as an illegal immigrant

On the heels of another bone-chilling escape.

Your family idyll is generally highlighted

In bold. Shoulders slump as if italicized.

You pass the night alone: to every bird its own cage.

You close your eyes and strike at the gilded lattice.

Barefoot in your apartment, I greedily gather your

Traces on my soul’s, and my body’s, loneliness in print.

LYUDMYLA DIADCHENKO

**Mr. Penelope**

*Translated by:* Natasha Remoundou

8

**The Maternity of the Book**

*You don't think about children, you don't even  
feel them or see them coming. When they appear,  
they're already there.  
Like typos, almost.*

*-Guillermo Cabrera Infante*

No, no, and no again. I say this three times because only the third 'no' of a Greek woman can be believable. Have you ever seen Kazan's film *America, America*? At some point during the movie someone says that we Greeks tend to always refuse twice. We only really mean it if we refuse a third time. You don't remember it. That's fine, it doesn't really matter. It's not that strange to me, but it may be to you. A book could be born from the head, from the ribs, the liver, the kidneys, the rectum, the womb, from an egg.

But I'm happy to comply. Who sent you? Honestly, why don't you just sit and write a nice little article about false pregnancy? It's the most common disorder afflicting young writers. It used to be dystocia, now it's false pregnancy. What does it mean to say, 'The time has come to break my silence?' I can't stand people who devise lids for silence. I prefer Harold Pinter's and John Cage's lessons on silence. The former never avoided talking about the other kind of silence, that of verbal diarrhoea, the disease of most theatre scholars, and the latter with his composition proved we can't even zip it for 4'33".

You insist. Fine. Let's go back and run the distance to dullness. Since I was a young girl I knew I'd share the same fate with books: I'd be left on the shelf. Not because I thought I was ugly but because, as my father used to say, beauty opens doors that intelligence shuts. Don't forget that the Greek word for intelligence (exypnada) contains the Spanish nada. From an early age I had a soft spot for words that contained nada (kaminada, lemonada, klotsopatinada). Even as an adult, I remain a fervent nadaist (filenada, meanada, monada), a disciple repeating her Hemingwayean prayer: "Our nada, who art in nada, hallowed be thy nada, thy kingdom nada, thy nada be done, on nada as it is in nada."

I was expecting you'd ask about my parents. Both of them stuttered. My father pronounced the word 'paternity' as 'papalnerability'. My mother always talked about 'mamatrifilial' love. I don't remember much. When I was a child I was too busy playing hide and seek. I always found the best hiding spots, but could never have guessed that when I grew up I'd want more than anything to be found.

I guess a few of the symptoms should have alarmed me. I mistook my nausea for a kind of nostalgia for one of my favourite literary heroes, Antoine Roquentin. Yet, I used to lead a normal life, the life of a public library reader who satisfied her appetites with renewed passion every time. I don't think my fondness for shared or used books hides anything immoral. Each time I bent over to smell their pages, it felt as if I'd buried my nose in the pollen of a lily. But what are the chances of conception if you suffer from allergies?

What can I say? Perhaps I should blame it all to my broken Latin. In class, instead of liber, liberi, I conjugated liber, libri and my professor blamed it on my woolgathering. If I'd turned into a sentimental type... The truth is I used way too many exclamation marks. It was Giorgos Ioannou, I reckon, who had said that punctuation marks are the erection of written language and, in my case, I don't know, perhaps my writings were always under the influence of Viagra.

You can't talk to my parents. My father's not alive. He abandoned us many years ago, and due to his hot-headedness, according to my mother, he lost his own life as soon as he felt the cold steel of a question mark in his throat. What is it you want to know about my mother? She is possibly **not** interested at all in this type of growth. All my mother wished for, sir, was to teach me how to make decisions. Logical decisions. Such a thing presupposed not only that I'd spend my whole life on the island of affirmation or on the island of negation, but also that I'd never visit Gombrowicz's Sonland. Over time, I realized that my obsession with nada stemmed from an ennui born of mingling with people who knew only how to ask 'yes' or 'no' questions. I decided to become a mother, me-tera, non-terra –there's that broken Latin again;- I decided to swim just to hear a rhetorical question.

I don't really want to talk about my relationship to the librarian. It doesn't matter if he's the father. The only thing I can tell you is that Captain

Nemo –let’s just call him that, as he wishes to keep his anonymity- taught me how to survive just like Arion; astraddle on a book’s back.

How come you’ve met him already? No, he’s not aggressive. What did he tell you? “He didn’t Borgesitate to send you to hell”? Ha, ha, ha! Excuse me. He has his reasons to tell you that, he’s not mad, not mad at all. He was reading the Book of Imaginary Beings and you interrupted him. You see? It all makes sense now. He’s right. I might even be a descendant of the Gillygaloo. Wasn’t it my namesake who was hatched from an egg? Can you, please, hand me the book? On the top shelf. Can you see? The fifth from the left. Thanks.

Gillygaloo, Gillygaloo, Gillygaloo! Eureka! Listen:

The Gillygaloo rested on the slopes of Paul Bunyan’s famed Pyramid Forty, laying square eggs to keep them from rolling down the steep incline and breaking. These eggs were coveted by lumberjacks, who hard-boiled them and used them as dice.

Why did we break up? We had a heated argument over whether “Woman Man” by Zoe Karelli was a genetic or a grammatical anomaly.

I called my son Stear. Not a very catchy name, I know. It’s from a poem by Andreas Embirikos:

The scale tilts towards our will  
set on our gauge  
each time we roll the dice.  
And look, we score once more  
when the dice falls on the belly of a woman  
who sleeps naked  
in the sand after her swim.  
This woman- legend has it-  
alone

braved the sea

her naked body covered in swimmers' goose fat

gliding the vast sea surge

filled with the angels' sweet sighs.

From a girl with a shell, a girl in the shadow, on a beach, in a wheelhouse, I became a woman who gave birth to a book. It's simple. I chose a Julius rather than the one of my puberty to cross the Rubicon. After all those years, the cervical os dilated in book centimetres. The die was cast. In the end, I learned how to murder with quick-fire pencil strokes – “Et tu, matre?”

You wonder why? I just like the name Stear. It encloses the Greek ear like the words frear and delear.' With a name like this you can live singled out like a passenger on the 'Great Eastern'. Unfortunately, you can't see my son. I 'gave birth to him', is synonymous with the phrase 'the stork brought him to me', 'the dice brought him to me' only for some lumberjack to hard-boil him in the end. I had to kick him so he becomes the twin black yolk of a question: 'Did the woman writer make the book or did the book make the woman writer?'

To answer your question why I wanted to become a writer, let me ask you instead: 'Have you ever heard anyone challenge the maternity of a book?'

ELENI YANNATOU

## REVIEWS:

**TO THE MOST BEAUTIFUL 117 POEMS** by Mette Moestrup.  
Translated by Katrine Ogaard Jensen. Normal, Illinois: co•im•press,  
2024, pp 187.

TO THE MOST BEAUTIFUL 117 POEMS is Danish poet Mette Moestrup's second collection to appear in English in Katrine Ogaard Jensen's translation. This is an offering of thirteen poems to each of the nine muses, taking the reader on a thirteen-night journey.

The title of the collection is inspired by the Greek story of the Apple of Discord on which goddess Eris wrote the fateful dedication on the occasion of the wedding of Peleus and Thetis. The original apple, echoing the Biblical forbidden fruit, morphs into various iterations of desire: honey hexagons, paradise apples, teardrops, orchards, blood apples.

Numbers have various functions in the collection: to create lists or to emphasize quantities, to describe shapes and specify moments in a poem. For instance, *The Honey Hexagons* is dedicated to Terpsichore, the muse of choral singing, and choral dancing. The rhythm of music and pattern of movement in dancing are symbolized by the hexagon used by the poet as a title for each of the thirteen poems.

This graphic choice is reminiscent of Lauren Russel's *A Window That Can Neither Open Nor Close*, a hybrid collection where visual media blends in with poetry. The hexagon is a recurring motif for identity layers and medical diagnosis and the struggle with neurodivergence. The use of this geometrical shape by Mette Moestrup acts as a visual metaphor, enhancing the layers of meaning in this suite: the hexagonal shape of beehives, space efficiency, strength of pattern, focus on organization. The entire collection is informed by the attention the poet pays to structure and formal moves, which have the reader reveling in the rich layers of each poem.

“Ritual for one person” is a fragment of the *Thalia - Comedy* entry; part instruction, part enumeration, the poem invites the reader to partake in this rolling of tongue and imagery:

but/ what/ is/ in/ your/ mouth.... poison/ red/ apple/ boats/ rose/ red/  
rose petals? (104)

At the center of this incursion into mythology lies the female body and the way it ignites both passion and conflict: “So many myths have misogyny at their core. So many stories glorify war” (113). Thalia, the Greek Muse of Comedy, is present here in the way Mette Moestrup plays with words, white space, and imagery, mixing storytelling with lyrical verses. Katrine Ogaard Jensen carries across the intensity of the original, echoing the poem’s last lines: “your/ words/ are/ you” (109).

Indeed, some of the poems in the collection address the weight of words and how they are a chance to connect or a missed chance to convey meaning. In “Before Noon,” the first line points to the process of translation and the poet/translator’s preoccupation with finding the right word: “Mother tongues grow in bloody soil. Blood and soil and blood soiled mothers”(71). The poem is also an opportunity to reference other poets and translators, wordsmiths caught in the trade of wording—Celan, Novalis, Trakl, Gotfried Benn or Nelly Sachs. The right word is subject to times and history and makes the poet once again question what beauty is and why. Throughout the poem, red stands out as not only the color of apples, flowers, and love but of blood, war, and fire. The blue flower of poetry and the savor of apples are contrasted with the way red is a bringer of death.

The rest of the poems in this section, “Blood Apples Solar Day” dedicated to Clio – Historical Poetry, bring together poems and history and how the former echo the latter’s horror. The lines of all thirteen poems travel across the section, acting like leitmotifs or repetitions that confer the poetic landscapes rhythm and beat. The poet/translator Mette Moestrup marks her presence inside the poems, perhaps in an attempt to account for how she sees

words as instruments to measure historical change and her role in using them: “Our languages depend on us, how we use the. / Our languages depend on us, how we use them” (82).

In the introduction to the collection, Katrine Ogaard Jensen accounts for the linguistic and cultural choices that the translation from Danish into English required, as well as the decisions that a translator has to make in terms of context and aesthetics. Once again, the collaboration between poet and translator is beneficial to the way Mette Moestrup’s explosive style and exploration of beauty are rendered into English, surprising the reader with the way language bends under Jensen’s touch.

Paul Celan called the work of the translator as *Fergendienst* or a ferryman’s labor.

Katrine Ogaard Jensen does a great job at capturing the unique voice and playfulness of Mette Moestrup’s poetry, conveying to the reader the immense pleasure the task entailed. Much as the poet’s language is innovative and challenging, their working together and Mette’s own work as a translator conferred this collection a smooth touch, underlying once again that translation is as important as writing.

~~Clara Burghelea

**HIGH SOLITUDE**, Léon-Paul Fargue, translated by Rainer J. Hanshe.  
Contra Mundum Press, 2024, 187 pp.

Léon-Paul Fargue is the night moth—an imposing apparition whose wing-flap privileges the shadows and the secret corners of Paris. His beckoning is intimate, seductively concrete yet ultimately ephemeral; he

leads us on with authority, on to the night's secret and to his last steps at sunrise, thus on to a path of our own anguished ontology. Gide, Pound, Eliot, Joyce and Rilke all thought him one of the major poets of the early century.

First among flâneurs, he greatly deepened that genre with *High Solitude* (*Haute Solitude*, 1941). There were flâneur vignettes in his first book of prose poems (*Poèmes*, 1905 and later variants)—for decades the only book translated into English (Thompson, 2002). These were urban scenes, but they were balanced with moments in nature and the odd dinosaur dilation (this last a feature of *High Solitude* as well). The later *Piéton de Paris* (1947) boosts his flâneur status, to be sure; it is more programmatic, though, as it catalogues (by chapter) Parisian sights and personalities. *High Solitude* is the indispensable Fargue. While *Epaisseurs* has similar imagery, it does not have the same vast scope. *Vulturne* has a similar degree of dark, interior penetration—but gives the train ride rêverie (a narrative technique as well for Michel Butor and the poet Saint-Pol-Roux) a violent, metaphysical twist. In *High Solitude* Fargue balances the spooky, the goofy, the quotidien and the oneiric to outline an inner life—and a long vocation toward that inner self.

It is said that every work of art is a translation. Certainly Fargue moved *between* states more than most writers: between the family ceramics business and his poetic output, between bright dinner parties and the side streets he favored—those that had escaped Baron Haussmann's scalpel. As this reviewer has said elsewhere, "Paris is the allegory of his movement between two worlds, and of the poetry he invents to light his way." A review of the present translation has to underline three things: Fargue's importance, the preeminence of *High Solitude*, and the difficulty of this particular translation. Rainer Hanshe has succeeded magnificently—no doubt with the same pains and revisions for which Fargue was famous. When Fargue's sentence is a

lilting example of early twentieth century syntax (and Gallic clarity), there is no special difficulty:

For the man who wants to take the trouble, as for the good poet with the right shoes, Paris is a curious city, which has its folds, its ruptures, its broken down areas, its thrust streets and its volcanism (34).

The problems arise with obscure words, words playfully distorted, biological and geological references, and outright neologisms:

...poissons-hirondelles, monstres élégants des mers de Chine en forme de peignes de corne, de croissants bizarres ou d'instruments de musique, vieilles en cotte de maille, rebecs à l'oeil hagard, réductions de harpes, tailleés dans la cymophane... (31, edition of 1966)

...swallow-fish, elegant monsters of the seas of China in the form of horn combs, bizarre croissants or musical instruments, chain-mail hurdy-gurdys, haggard-eyed rebecs, reductions of harps, carved in cymophane... (20)

It helps to know Fargue's other works, to be attuned to his intimate and nostalgic connotations, to know old Paris and to have a massive dictionary and a search engine at your elbow.

The magic here is that it has all come through. Hanshe, who runs a translation press, has taken on a huge task; he has produced a smooth, erudite and sensitive version of an important and utterly unique book. The book which most suggestively reveals

[Fargue's] destiny, it's the effort of every night toward myself. It's the return to the heart, with slow steps, along cities enslaved to the bureaucracy of mystery... (62)

Generally, in avoiding modern slang and distinct Americanisms, an English version lets Fargue's beloved Paris shine through. Hanshe has stepped wisely here. For it is a subtle light that is preserved: gaslights on the somewhat grimy streets of what is called "le temps des fiacres" (the era of horse-drawn cabs). And the strange quiddity of Fargue's Paris—his favorite nooks and disparate, radiant objects—has come through with his exact emphasis: sometimes as plain apparition, sometimes with inexplicable tenderness—even a sense of loss. The "high solitude" that results is the pluperfect intimacy, that is, Fargue's own. It is unlike certain others: the lyrical intimacy of the Romantics, the analytical intimacy of Proust, the "confessional" intimacy of Robert Lowell and the group that wore that label.

Still, because this intimacy is understated, and sometimes alloyed or even muddled with the strange vibrancy of Surrealism, we are invited into it. We are invited into his pool of lamplight and into a dim uncertainty. "I work at my solitude" – and we are shown how this is done. Fargue's nightly journey "toward himself" can be our own search for self and meaning.

*--Peter Thompson*

