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IN THIS (PANDEMIC) ISSUE

In these dark, frightening, uncertain times, we all find ourselves reaching out to friends and family with whom we cannot share a meal, whom we cannot touch, because we are in isolation in another city, state, country, continent. Emails arrive from old classmates, former students, former colleagues with whom we haven't been in touch for decades. We think about the past, many of us worry about the future, some dwell on mortality as they have never done before. Many of us know someone who has been ill with Covid-19, many of us know someone who has died. Some have lost loved ones. There are parts of the world where suffering, especially among the poor, is far greater than we can imagine. For those of us in the USA, we grapple daily with acute anxiety caused by a government that is at best dysfunctional, by the burgeoning of bigotry and violence, by the willfully ignorant, solipsistic, catastrophic actions of some segments of the population, enabled and encouraged by widespread misinformation and inconsistent, often contradictory, often misguided and misleading, official statements. The lack of a united approach to this crisis (between states, amongst politicians) only further exacerbates our sense of how precarious this new, surreal, once unimaginable, reality is. My wish to you, our contributors and readers, is: keep safe, stay well, nurture your sanity, your creativity, your hope that better days will come. In our lockdown/shutdown/quarantined isolation, we have had time to realize how very much art, music, dance, literature matter. And how much it matters to communicate, to cross boundaries and bridge distances virtually. What better way is there than literary translation to travel through time and space, among different cultures, to connect intensely and intimately with one another? We hope this issue will bring you pleasure, and hope.

All the work in this spring 2020 issue was selected and placed into layout well before the pandemic struck—or was taken seriously in the USA. Contributors were receiving galleys to proofread, and we anticipated going to press by early April. Then the shutdown came in mid-March, and Smith College went on lockdown. My gratitude to Danielle Colburn, who has just graduated, is boundless. She volunteered to continue working remotely as Production Editor, corresponding with contributors and graciously accommodating all the changes they wanted to make. When this issue goes to the printer, it will be thanks to Danielle's generous dedication, thoughtfulness, and patience.

We are excited to have new poems from the latest collection (*A*

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casca mitica/Shell of Myths) by acclaimed Brazilian poet Salgado Maranhão, whose work has appeared in previous issues of this journal. I knew his work, and his official biography (with all his publications and the many awards he has earned), but nothing about his early life. His translator, Alexis Levitin, shared with me “A Personal Accounting of Salgado’s Life” and I share it here with you:

Salgado Maranhão was born in the tiny village of Canabrava das Moças, in the municipality of Caxias in the interior of Maranhão. His mother was a “camponesa,” a sharecropper. His father was a wealthy landowner. His mother insisted on raising him alone, despite her rudimentary living conditions. Throughout childhood, he worked the fields, in a region with no hospital, no school, no church, no police, no judge, no cars, no electricity, no social mediation whatsoever. He was illiterate, like everyone else in his village. At fifteen, he moved to Teresina and learned to read and write, spending much time at the local library, where he discovered and devoured Camoes, Pessoa, Walt Whitman, Dostoevsky, Mayakovski, and the whole world of western literature.

At home with his mother, he had always loved hearing the *repentistas*, Brazilian traveling musicians and bards or modern troubadours, who came through on their northeastern peregrinations, singing or reciting their highly rhymed, highly rhythmic verse. After four years of schooling and voracious reading in Teresina, he was able to combine the rhythms of his infancy with the literary poetics he had learned at the library, and so he went off to Rio to be a poet. In addition to his fifteen books of poetry, he has written lyrics for over five hundred popular songs, of which at least fifty have been recorded, including “Caminhos do Sol,” which became the theme song for a famous telenovela. Salgado’s poetry has earned for him all the major poetry awards in his country. He is the only Brazilian poet to have toured five times throughout the United States, reading at well over one hundred institutions.

A new contributor to *Metamorphoses*, Dmitri Manin—who is a physicist and programmer as well as a poetry translator—brings us poems from Genrikh Sapgir’s *Sonnets on Shirts*, a 76-piece cycle well-known in Russia, where it achieved landmark status. Sapgir (1928-1999) was a leader of the Lianozovo Group, an association of ‘unofficial’ avant-garde artists and poets in the late-Soviet period. As Manin writes

in his Translator's Note,

The *Sonnets on Shirts* cycle explores a wide range of formal options and themes. There are rhymed, partially rhymed and unrhymed poems; some use strict accentual-syllabic meters, some are loosely metrical and some in free verse; there are also acutely lyrical poems, philosophical musings, landscapes, political satires, absurdist jokes, etc. They are shot through with Sapgir's unmistakable humor and playfulness. On some level, the collection can also be read as a lyrical diary of a non-conformist poet.

New to this journal is the Italian poet and astrophysicist Guido Cupani (translated from the Italian by Patrick Williamson). The two evocative poems we selected clearly demonstrate his sharp ear for everyday speech and his keen eye for the details of daily life. Poet and translator Arno Bohlmeijer has generously given us a "Dutch batch," poems by eight contemporary Dutch poets (including himself)—all were new to me, and I was struck by how different their voices are. In addition to Arno Bohlmeijer, the poets are Bert Schierbeek, Leonard Nolens, Simone Atangana Bekono, Martin Veltman, Jan Eijkelboom, Remco Campert, and Phebe Rasch.

Erik Bendix, whose fresh translations of Rilke's First and Fifth Duino Elegies are prefaced by an original and illuminating essay on "Translating Rilke's *Duino Elegies*," is another translator of poetry who has many unexpected facets. An aficionado and practitioner of movement arts and a widely published poet himself, Bendix draws a connection between his interest in movement as a form of expression and his interest in poetry. About his formation as a writer and translator, he writes, "My father's family had nearly been silenced by the Holocaust, so finding my own voice was difficult at first, but has gradually become a way to celebrate death and life as a whole."

Regular contributor Xánath Caraza, an internationally acclaimed, prolific bilingual poet, offers us "Música acuática," written in Spanish, translated by the poet into English, and into Turkish by Eyup Esen. From Samuel N. Rosenberg, also a frequent contributor, two poems by Victor Hugo, translated from the French. Also translated from the French, by Jacob Collum, poems by French neoclassicist André Chénier, who was beheaded at the age of 31 in 1794, during the Reign of Terror. From Ancient Greek, Philip S. Peek has translated two graceful short poems, one by the 6th-century BCE lyric poet Anacreon, and another by the 1st-century CE poet Meleagros. From farther east than Meleagros's native

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Gadara, the opening verses of Appaya Dikshita's (16th century) 50-stanza hymn in praise of Shiva, translated from the Sanskrit by Louis Hunt.

Finally, I should explain why we have republished a poem that appeared in the fall 2019 issue, along with the translator's note, although the emendations the translator made in the English were minor. Muhemmetjan Rashidin's poem "Tughulmighanlargha/ To The Unborn"—translated from the Uyghur by Chuen-Fung Wong—struck us as especially relevant and timely during this pandemic. The voice of this venerable poet, who speaks for his oppressed people, deserves to be heard. And, now more than ever, we need to be thinking about those who are suffering in parts of the world that may be far from us, and to be aware not only of their struggle, but of their culture and the language—and poetry—through which they keep that culture alive. Translation, in this context, represents one more way we can connect people and cultures and keep those cultures alive even as we remain isolated from one another.

The prose selections in this issue span many languages, time periods and genres. Paul Melo e Castro, currently a Lecturer in Portuguese and Comparative Literature at the University of Glasgow, has given us a short story by Brazilian author Rubem Fonseca, one of Brazil's best-known contemporary writers. Fonseca's violent themes, marginal characters, and urban settings have influenced Brazilian literature deeply. The story "A Força Humana" ("Raw Muscle") was first published in 1965 as part of Fonseca's second short-story collection *A Coleira do Cão* (The Dog's Collar). In 2003 he won the Camões Prize, the most important literary award in the Portuguese-speaking world. Paul Melo e Castro's translation, for which he earned a commendation in the 2017/2018 John Dryden Translation Competition, is a tour de force. He has chosen to recreate the voice of the first-person narrator, a marginal urban kid whose only chance for a dubious future is to become a successful bodybuilder, in the 1960s British idiolect of a young man like Fonseca's narrator. The voice we hear is surprisingly natural, so authentic and so vivid that we are drawn immediately into the speaker's world and his mind. Castro has an unerring ear for dialogue, and unfailing sensitivity to register—including the peculiar rhythms and vocabulary of the melodramatic telenovela to which the protagonist's landlady is addicted.

We are especially pleased that Paul Melo e Castro has offered this superb translation to us, and happy to welcome him back. Three varied and fascinating short stories he translated appeared in past issues of *Metamorphoses*, all by Portuguese-language Goan writers. Spring 2012 saw Vimala Devi's "Nâttak," Fall 2012 Epiácio Pais' "Munu" and in Fall 2015 Maria Elsa da Rocha's "O Manilheiro" ("The Bangle Seller"), which I particularly recommend to interested readers. Maria Elsa da Ro-

cha (1924-2005) was one of the last Portuguese-language Goan writers. A primary school teacher by profession, her short stories appeared in the local press—particularly the newspaper *A Vida*—in the years following the integration of Goa into India, and were often broadcast on the last radio program in Portuguese, All-India Radio’s somewhat ironically entitled “*Renascença*.” In 2006, a selection from the some 25 short stories she produced was published in Goa under the title *Vivências Partilhadas* [Shared Lives]. As Paul Melo e Castro writes:

The author’s lyric stories are characterized by their focus on intimacy and female experience. Her story “O Manilheiro” (“The Bangle Seller”) revolves around events preceding a traditional Goan marriage rite known as *chuddo* (transliterated in Rocha’s story as *churó* and referring to the bangles this event involves). Before the rite, a bangle seller, known locally as a *volar*, due to the distinctive cry mentioned in the story, or a *kakoncar* (from ‘kankon’, or bracelet), visits the bride and her female companions in order to supply them with new trinkets. The symbolism of the bride’s bangles (to which at one point the protagonist refers as “*algemas de virgindade*” [the handcuffs of virginity]) provides a symbolic mid-point in the story between a frank depiction of female sexual feeling and the forces restraining it in traditional Goan society, a symbol that is echoed and deepened by the bangle worn by the mother and which breaks as she attempts to fulfil her desires.

It’s hard to do justice to each of the very different prose pieces in this issue, but I confess that I found Koda Rohan’s “Tale of a Phantasm” (translated from the Japanese by Tsutomu Nagata) particularly beguiling. Our informant, a somewhat pedantic narrator, retells the story he claims to have heard from a samurai relegated to a backwater post who spent his time well, becoming an experienced angler. The tale is set in the 19th century, not long before the end of the Shogunate. The story meanders through fascinating digressions about different kinds of fishing, and depicts the natural setting as well as the material objects that form part of the characters’ lives with sure brushstrokes. We become intimately interested observers of how the samurai acts and feels, we are drawn into the relationship of the gentleman samurai and the boatman he hires. Rohan carries the reader along the stream of this story to the surprising and supernatural ending so skillfully that the conclusion feels not only plausible but perfect.

Nevena Pascaleva’s “You’re A Father, You’ll Understand” (trans-

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lated from the Bulgarian by the author and edited by Polina Dimova) is a modern folktale that also introduces the supernatural into a very human story. Some non-fiction in this issue also treats the supernatural: excerpts from Michael Ranfft's 1725 doctoral dissertation *On The Dead That Chew In Their Tombs (Dissertatio Prior Historico-Critica De Masticatione Mortuorum In Tumulis)*. The work was translated from the Latin (and occasional German) by Peter Schranz and Susan Gould. The succinct introduction by Craig Davis provides background and context to help readers approach this unusual text. Ranfft, a German Lutheran theologian, was born in 1700 and was twenty-five years old when he defended his dissertation in Leipzig. The subject he tackled was controversial among theologians and religious leaders. Sensational accounts of corpses chewing and gobbling in their graves fueled the popular imagination. How not to assume that the Devil was behind such alarming and unnatural phenomena? As a progressive young theologian, Ranfft had to strike a balance between respect for earlier scholarship and respect for the less enlightened beliefs of older theologians and perhaps of his examiners, while enlisting natural philosophy and scientific inquiry to account for these supposedly supernatural phenomena. He cannot deny the existence of the Devil, but disproves the agency of the Devil in the cases reported, since evidence—and its absence—preclude the supernatural. Like many of our selections, this pioneering work from the early years of the Enlightenment seems especially resonant today, when uncertainty and fear are fostering superstition, mutual suspicion, witch-hunts, religious fanaticism, a fascination with the supernatural (superheroes, monsters, aliens, flesh-eating zombies,) and with apocalyptic scenarios in fiction and film. I cannot help reflecting on how the current President of the USA exemplifies the phenomena I have just mentioned: the rejection of science; attacking scientists; discrediting expertise or any intellectual as well as scientific knowledge; showing complete disregard for truth, facts, evidence; purveying a fantastic, constantly shifting, alternate “reality” every day. What would Michael Ranfft have thought? I suspect he would have expected that 300 years later, we would not have regressed this far.

Of course, our world has never been a stranger to horrors. Hersh Smoliar's short stories (translated from the Yiddish by Ruth Murphy, edited by Catherine Madsen) offer a heart-wrenching and vivid glimpse of the horrors of pogroms and the Holocaust, of violence and suffering, of the brutality of the oppressor and sometimes the pettiness of the oppressed. But they also show how, in the bleakest of circumstances, human beings can show nobility of spirit, dignity, compassion, courage, and the will not only to survive but to hope. After introducing Smoliar to

our readers in the Fall 2019 issue, we are happy to have more stories by him in this issue: “A Good Morning,” “At the Edge,” “Enemies,” “Night in the Forest,” “The Verdict.” Unfortunately, war, suffering, violence, and persecution continue to be everywhere around us. Refugees in the millions are crowded into detention camps as they attempt to escape to safety from these very phenomena. Ibtissam Shakush gives us stories of Syrian refugees in *Among the Tents* (2016). Two of these stories are translated here from the Arabic by miriam cooke. Deceptively simple and unsensational, these two short pieces compel the reader to fill in the gaps, to imagine the hardship and suffering and the devastating loss that these vignettes adumbrate.

Finally, to end on a happier note, a fifteenth-century wagger tale by the Veronese epigrapher, writer, and early printing pioneer Felice Feliciano (known as Feliciano Antiquario), “Justa Victoria.” As in most folktales, the evil and duplicitous are unmasked, humiliated and punished, while the innocent and virtuous triumph, cleared of all false charges that besmirched their reputation, and restored to the high esteem they deserve. Justice prevails, thanks to the sharp mind of an intelligent, courageous and pure woman. What more can one ask for?

If you are looking for something that will transport you to a better place, after reading Susan Ayres’ review essay, “Amorgos Notebook: A Dream Journal,” you might well be moved to look for Luis Ingelmo and Tony Frazer’s fine translation of Elsa Cross’s *Cuaderno de Amorgós*.

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