LARA MATTA AND THALIA PANDIRI

IN THIS ISSUE

We apologize for the delayed publication of the fall/winter 2022 issue, but we believe you will be as happy as we are to have the very varied and exciting work from many languages and cultures, from many parts of the world. The next general issue is not scheduled until 2024. As those of you who follow *Metamorphoses* know, 2023 will bring a special double issue dedicated to Catalan literature, guest-edited by Hillary Gardner and Guillem Molla. The current issue features two special sections. G. J. Racz, arguably the most impressive living translator of Spanish poetry into English, has given us a generous selection of poems from his forthcoming compendious *Anthology of Latin American Literature*. Andrés Bello (Venezuela, 1781-1865) is represented by the epic "Agriculture in the Torrid Zone," a loving tribute to his native land and a condemnation of those who dishonor and exploit it. His short parable, "The Man, the Horse and the Bull" is a succinct warning against accepting the aid of colonizing outsiders whose aim it is to turn a free people into beasts of burden. From Mariano Melgar (Peru, 1790-1815), "Ode to Solitude" is informed by Christian spirituality; "The Cats" is a political parable, similar to Bello's, about how internal, fratricidal division opens the door to annihilation by a common enemy; "Come Back, for I no Longer Can" is a plaintive love song. Another love song, this one ekphrastic and directed to a marble statue of Apollo, represents Juana Borrero (Cuba, 1877-1896). Eduardo Chirinos (Peru, 1960-2016), whose poems have appeared in previous issues of *Metamorphoses*, translated by various hands, is represented here by a sardonically playful and quirky poem: "Parallel Lives." With a nod to Vasari and Plutarch, Chirinos provides irreverent thumbnail biographies of Fra Lippo Lippi and Fra Angelico, two superficially different friar-artists but both "respected [...] a lot" by Cosimo de' Medici. In the prose poem "John's Lament on Patmos [+ John Lennon]" Chirinos revisits and reinterprets an iconic figure from the distant past to illuminate the present in an unexpected way. This relatively small selection of poems provides a glimpse into the richness and enormous variety of subject matter and genres, of language, meter, and style to be found in Latin American poetry over the past two and a quarter centuries.

Our—very different—second special section, on "Multilinguality and Translation in India," comes to us from Hyderabad. The introductory essay of that title by Professor Sowmya Dechamma CC, Head of the Centre for Comparative Literature, University of Hyderabad, lays out the issues, crucial in translation studies, that are complicated and ultimately illuminated by the very special multilinguality in India, a country in which 19,500 languages are spoken as mother tongues, according to a 2018 census. Under her supervision, teams of graduate and post-graduate students undertook the translation into eight Indian languages of a short story written in English by Hansda Shekhar Sowvendra, "November is the Month of Migration." The students, hailing from all over India, with a variety of mother tongues but also multilingual in Indian languages as well as proficient in English, worked together to translate, workshop, and refine translations into Hindi, Bangla, Kannada, Malayalam, Mizo, Nepali, Odia, and Telugu, languages belonging to an array of different language families. The student translators describe this ambitious collaborative translation project and their team's translation processes. They highlight the sometimes heated discussions about the nuances—cultural as well as linguistic—with which they had to grapple. The translators also needed to confront the multi-layered nature of the original: what does it mean that the story is written in English about the Santhali culture with its own particular values and ways of viewing the world, a culture predominantly oral until 1925 when an indigenous script was developed? The Santhali language has a distinctive phonology and morphology, with a very complicated and nuanced verb system. Sowvendra has authored works of fiction and non-fiction in English, and has translated poetry, fiction and non-fiction from Santhali, Hindi and Bengali into English. What are the implications of writing about Santhali culture in the language of the colonizer? Writing a Santhali story in English is perhaps the most radical act of translation, and the student translators were very aware of this added dimension of their translation projects.

The translators into Odia describe, in their note to that translation the particular challenges they faced, challenges that raise essential questions for translators. They needed to decide what version of the Odia language to use: the commonly practiced academic Odia (which is highly Sanskritized) would not reflect the register and tone of the source text, so they opted for the colloquial language in common, everyday use, although their choice of language would almost surely expose their translation to negative criticism from the academic and literary com-

munity. Another problem was how to deal with the "crude" and forceful way sexual violence is described in the source text: "[...] we narrowly escaped the allegations of being indecent and obscene for our choice of words. This raises the question of how differently the story would have read if conceived in Odia as the source language, and would the words implying the sexual actions find their mention at all." Their hope is that the use of colloquial language in literary translations would render a translation that is faithful to the register and tone of a source text, and might eventually make a breach in the language barrier between the elite and the marginalized.

I (Thalia) can relate to the Odia translators' challenges. Before the democratization of language (in law courts, official documents, contracts, school curricula, even road signs and shop names, etc.) in Greece after the fall of the Colonels' junta in 1974, the official language, *katharevousa* or purifying (also translated as purist) Greek, was used in all official documents. This archaizing language differs radically from the spoken language: vocabulary and grammar have to be learned, and the language was not taught in primary schools. At a time when those without some degree of privilege did not make it past primary school, the learning of *katharevousa* was reserved for those who went on to the Gymnasium, when suddenly all textbooks were in a form of *katharevousa*, and Ancient Greek was taught as one of the major courses 6 days a week. In a society where a draftee cannot understand his draft notice without a translator, the language barrier is de facto a class barrier. In Greece, championing and writing in the "demotic" (people's) language was viewed as a political ("communist") statement. *Katharevousa* was supported passionately, and sometimes violently, by conservatives, whether politicians, academics, or the Orthodox Church.

Serendipitously, we also have—quite independently from the Hyderabad project—a poem by Da Ra Bendre (the pen name of Dattatreya Ramachandra Bendre), "the greatest lyric poet of twentieth-century Kannada literature," to quote translator Madhav Ajjampur. Also serendipitously, we have an interview (by English professor and poet Mohammad Shafiqul Islam) with literary translator Sohana Manzoor, who has published many translations from Bangla into English. Author, editor and translator, she teaches literature and humanities at the University of Liberal Arts, Bangladesh. The interview focuses on issues of literary translation in general, and especially in Bangladesh, and is most interesting to read as one thinks about multilingualism and translation in India.

Returning westward, Mexican poet Xánath Caraza has very generously given us some of her latest work. Honoring her Nahuatl ancestry, she has focused in these poems on the Olmec, viewing the present through the lens of a colonial past that obliterated an advanced civilization. A prolific, versatile poet who has won too many awards to list, whose reputation is international, and whose work has been translated into several languages, including Greek, she has often supported this journal by sharing her work with us. Her poems are translated into English by Sandra Kingery.

From Spain, a poem by Juan Lamillar (translated by Don Bogen). Lamillar is one of the most prominent poets who came of age in the 1980s. "Horses in the Park" is a beautiful, deceptively simple yet deep and suggestive lyric poem.

A.Z. Foreman, polyglot and indefatigable translator, gives us two poems from Old Irish. One of the anonymous reviewers characterizes the translations as "taut and effective renderings of the Old Irish quatrains, replicating their trochaic rhythms in rhyming couplets with some degree of assonance (as in the original). They are tonally sensitive as well, the first being a poignant lover's lament, the second an amusing and whimsical comparison between a monk and his mouser."

A special treat, especially for opera lovers, is Erik Liddell's translation from the Italian of Neapolitan librettist Salvadore Cammarano's libretto for Giuseppe Verdi's *Alzira* (1845). This is the first English translation of the complete libretto of the opera based on Voltaire's play *Alzire ou les Américains* (1736), the oldest French play to represent Amerindians on stage.

A series of French poems follows. Poet, playwright, and musician Adélaïde-Gillette Dufrénoy (1765–1825) reached the height of her popularity during the First Empire, publishing several volumes of poetry and enjoying imperial patronage. After the fall of the Empire, Dufrénoy supported her family by writing children's books and translating novels from English. Laura Nagle offers us four of her poems exalting woman's choices in matters of love and lovers, while maintaining the elegance and playfulness of Dufrénoy's original verse.

Another testament to love albeit in an aesthetic sense is found in Théophile Gautier's two poems translated by Robert McLean. Whether in the ruins of a temple or in an artist studio, McLean captures the beauty of form.

From French as well, we have six poems from the 17th volume

of Nicolas Pesquès's ongoing serial poem *La Face nord de Juliau*. Pesquès's meditation on the nature of language is translated from the French by Lee Posna.

Abdellatif Laâbi, the well-known Moroccan francophone poet, novelist, playwright, translator, and political activist, was a political prisoner for over eight years. Mindful of the impact of these years of incarceration, Allan Johnston and Guillemette Johnston bring us a selection of Laabi's poetry.

We conclude our selection from French with an essay by David Ball: "Translating Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir*" and his review of the latest English translation by Raymond N. MacKenzie. An award-winning translator himself, Ball provides valuable insights into translation choices rooted in their historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts.

From Portugal and from the former German Democratic Republic we have two unusual short stories, each of which confronts the translator with serious challenges. Paul Melo e Castro (whose masterful translations from different iterations of Portuguese we have published in previous issues) gives us "Message to Garcia" (1963) by José Cardoso Pires. Paul Melo e Castro is, as usual, impressive in his ability to carry the register, tone and style of the original into English. It's impossible to improve on what the translator has to say about the challenges he had to overcome:

> With admirable economy, "Message to Garcia" depicts post-WWII Salazarist Portugal as a space of headlong stasis and general incarceration, paradoxical tropes to which Cardoso Pires would return obsessively in his later, most widely celebrated novels. Rendering his work in English poses the problem of colloquial language—how to handle the terse, highly idiomatic dialogue between uneducated soldiers of peasant origin that dominate the story. Recently English critic Jonathan Meades has contrasted jargon with slang: both formulaic, the former allows power to obfuscate while the latter enables the powerless to express their inner turmoil, an observation which underlines how important it is in the present context to strike the right notes. My aim as a translator was to capture the carefully styled harshness and despair of the original, but with-

> out losing the flashes of grim humour or moments of bleak poetry. Ultimately, I hope to have preserved the demotic charge of the language used without reducing the characters to the lifeless indignity of caricature.

Christoph Hein's "The Newer (Happier) Kohlhaas Report about a Lawsuit from the Years 1972-1973" features Hubert K., a bookkeeper in a state-owned chair factory in his (unnamed) city in Thuringia. He is a model minor bureaucrat, but he comes to be distinguished by his obsessive, indeed pigheaded fight with the many layers of bureaucracy, arbitration, and judicial appeals over a small deduction from his annual bonus that he perceives as a grave injustice. Conveying in English the particular flavor of the bureaucratic German of the GDR is a serious challenge. Hein and his translator enable us to see vividly the middle-class life of his protagonist, making us view Hubert K. with condescending amusement, with growing exasperation, and in the end a kind of recognition: his absurd persistence that gains him what we might see as a Pyrrhic victory epitomizes the absurdity and cumbersomeness of the hierarchically organized state. The translator, H.W. Pickford, succeeds beautifully in doing justice to Christoph Hein's work—something one would not imagine possible when reading the German.

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