

THALIA PANDIRI

IN THIS ISSUE

I won't lie—at times editing the journal “from soup to nuts,” from receiving submissions through editing and production and finally shipping out issues can feel like a burden. Some humble but necessary tasks can even feel like drudgery. The intangible rewards, though, are great: getting to know translators, poets and fiction writers from all over the world, as well as the experts who generously contribute their time and knowledge for double-blind peer review, and who are unremunerated and unsung. Many of all these wonderful people have become epistolary friends; some have become friends with whom to share a meal, a concert, a trip. And there is always the excitement and pleasure of being introduced to the work of someone I had never even heard of. This issue holds a number of such happy surprises for me.

Louis Calaferte published what his translator calls “a fantastic profusion of novels, short stories, essays, plays, poems and erotica” and was awarded a number of prestigious prizes in France before his death in 1994. I had never heard of him, but that is not so surprising. To my astonishment, though, the French colleagues I spoke to did not know his work. I am grateful to J. Kates for his outstanding translations of the poems that appear in this issue, English poems that reproduce the playful, inventive, idiosyncratic language and imagery of the French originals.

Also new to me is the Polish-Jewish poet Zuzanna Ginczanka, who was murdered during the Holocaust in 1945. During the interwar period, her poetry was admired for its dazzling language, but under Communism her work disappeared from view, until it was “rediscovered” in the past twenty years. Our Polish reviewers were impressed by the imagery, the distinctive voice and register of her poems, the occasionally playful use of language (for instance in the poem “Instead of a Pink Letter”). Thanks to translator Eve Bigaj for bringing this amazing and long-neglected poet to us.

Russian-born artist and poet Gena Gruz, who holds a PhD in Molecular Biology, is also new to *Metamorphoses*, though Aaron Poochigian, her co-translator of the poems that appear here, is not. Also new to me, Portuguese writer José Pedro Leite, translated by Richard Simas, and the young Colombian poet Maria Del Castillo Sucerquia, translated by Douglas Cole.

On occasion we publish translations from English into another language, and in this issue we are fortunate to have three poems I have come to love by Jamaican writer Alecia McKenzie, beautifully translated into German by Marlies Glaser.

Rounding out the long list of new discoveries, for me, among the poetry selections in this issue, poems by Abu Nuwas (c. 756-c. 814), translated from the Arabic with introduction and commentary by the team

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of scholar Ferial Ghazoul and poet John Verlenden. It's the pleasure of learning, of having my eyes opened to something beautiful and unfamiliar, that keeps me going.

We also welcome some old friends: Rainer Maria Rilke, and two quite different translators of his work, Christiane Marks and Erik Bendix. Christiane Marks's metered translation of Rilke's "Sonnets to Orpheus" was published in 2019 (Open Letter Press) to wide critical acclaim and soon went into a second printing. She has completed her translations of Rilke's "Duino Elegies" and is currently focusing on two German-Jewish women poets of the WWII period. We are very happy to have here her translation of "The Seventh Duino Elegy." From Erik Bendix, a Part II of work previously published in *Metamorphoses*, retranslating Rilke's "Sonnets to Orpheus": a translator's introduction and translations of Sonnets 5 and 29.

Finally, a familiar poet, Vicente Aleixandre of the Generation of 1927 in Spain, with a new young translator, Angela Acosta.

In 1997, a special issue of *Metamorphoses* was dedicated to Catalan literature. Since then, we have occasionally published translations from Catalan, most recently poems by Narcís Comadira and prose by Maria Mercè Roca, both translated by Sonia Alland, who has a long and distinguished career as a translator from the French. It's high time for a new special issue devoted to Catalan, and I am hoping that will happen soon: plans are underway. In this issue we are very fortunate to have an in-depth interview with Catalan author Maria Mercè Roca and translator Sonia Alland, conducted by Susan Entsminger, an editor at Pinyon Press: "The Defense of Language and Culture." in 2020 Pinyon Press published *Portbou*, a translation of Maria Mercè Roca's memoir *La Casa Gran* with selected stories from Maria Mercè Roca's collection *Nosaltres, les dones* (We Women). I am enormously grateful to the writer, the translator, and Pinyon Press both for this interview and for permission to publish excerpts from *Portbou*, with the original Catalan text on facing pages. I am sure that you, dear readers, will be gripped and moved by this taste of the memoir and will want a copy of *Portbou*, which is readily available. I hope you will be able to savor the terse musicality of the Catalan language.

Other prose work is very diverse in tone and genre and comes from many languages and cultures. Jocelyn Dupré's "They're in a Good Place" (translated from the French by Paul Curtis Daw) reads like an understated yet moving memoir. Gertrud Leutenegger's "Death Enters the World" (translated from the German by Thomas Ahrens and Edward T. Larkin) is an impassioned—and to my mind wholly justified—Jeremiad against the destruction of the environment in the name of progress, a disastrous course fueled by short-sighted greed. From the Farsi, Emad Mirmotahari has translated Sadeqh Dayat's "The Stray Dog," which I read not so much as

sentimental realism (or realist sentimentality) but as an allegory. Toshiya Kamei returns to the journal with a piece of flash fiction by Japanese author Jūran Hisao, particularly disturbing because of the narrator's unfazed, matter-of-fact delivery. In contrast, Vietnamese author Kieu Bichau's story "My Husband's Secret" (translated from the Vietnamese by Quynh Huong) explores the female protagonist's changing perceptions and evolving mentality along with the reader. From India, translated from Bengali/Bangla by Anvesha Maity, Nihar Ranjan Gupta's "The Yellow Dog" or "Bloodfaced Dragon," one of the author's Detective Kiriti novels (somewhat abridged here), a genre that owes much to Arthur Conan Doyle.

I am extremely grateful to two more contributors to this issue. David Ball, a prolific and award-winning translator from the French, has given us another masterful review essay: "Balzac in English II: Lost Souls," a companion piece to the review essay he published in the Fall 2020 issue, "Balzac in English: Lost Illusions." He provides a master translator/literary scholar's illuminating critical reading of Balzac's language and style in these long novels, and of how translators have succeeded to a greater or lesser degree in conveying Balzac's style in British or American English. Both these essays are a must for anyone interested in translation, or in these great works of Balzac which few of us have actually read. David Ball will make you want to read them—in French if you can, or in Raymond MacKenzie's new translations.

Catherine Calloway, a scholar of contemporary Vietnamese literature, gives us an extensive review of a new anthology, *Other Moons: Vietnamese Short Stories of the American War and Its Aftermath* (translated and edited by Quan Manh Ha and Joseph Babcock). She provides a thoughtful and sensitive overview of the stories in this collection, and places them and their authors in the broader context of contemporary Vietnamese prose. Especially for those of us whose knowledge of Vietnamese literature is limited, or at best spotty, this is an extremely informative review that whets the appetite for more good translations into English.

As always, I am grateful to all contributors and subscribers for their support, and in the case of this particular delayed issue, for their patience. Thanks also are due all rights holders who have given us permission to publish work in *Metamorphoses*. We are grateful for the institutional support of Smith College, Mount Holyoke College, Amherst College, Hampshire College, The University of Massachusetts Amherst, Five Colleges, Inc., and the Translation Center at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. I particularly want to express my gratitude to the anonymous expert reviewers without whom the journal could not maintain the standards it strives to protect, and to Danielle Colburn, who has valiantly continued her work as production editor remotely, despite the pandemic and the new abnormal. This issue could not come into being without her.