

THALIA PANDIRI
IN THIS ISSUE

Thanksgiving, 2020. In the United States, the number of Covid-19 infections is surging—13,454,254 million as of today. The number of deaths from the virus is also rising; so far we have a total of 271,026. The official numbers are terrifying, but they represent only those cases that are diagnosed and recorded. The numbers of travelers crowding airports to fly to distant states, to gather in groups and crowd around a festive table, bear witness to the self-destructive stupidity of the human animal. The deplorably politicized Supreme Court majority has ruled against New York Governor Cuomo’s attempt to limit the spread of the coronavirus; the majority opinion is that there can be no limit on the size of crowds in houses of worship. The “alt-reality” show in D.C. has been cancelled by an unprecedented landslide in a legitimate election, yet the star and supporting cast are refusing to concede. The criminal push to wreak as much havoc as possible, to continue inflicting irreparable damage on all fronts, is unabated. And an incomprehensible number of Americans, even though they are in the minority, continue to suck up the Kool-Aid. And yet, we must cherish what we can be thankful for. There are still many good, caring people, here as elsewhere. In my town, the owner of a small local restaurant bought 800 pounds of turkeys, with all the customary sides, to donate to a community kitchen that provides meals for those in need. I am grateful for the medical personnel and postal workers, the grocery store clerks and, in short, the many underpaid, hard-working frontline workers who risk their health and safety every day to serve us all. And I am grateful for beauty: in nature, in all the arts. As Marcelino Freire says in “Zinho” (which appears in this issue), “The world’s in need. More each passing day. Of poets. Poets. Poets.”

As we ready this issue of *Metamorphoses* to go to press, I am particularly grateful to all the translators, whose work brings to us the literary works of poets and fiction writers, past and present. Translation is the bridge that connects continents, centuries, cultures. Translation never fails to open our minds to new perspectives and new adventures. One such new discovery for me is the work of the Mauritian poet Khal Tor-

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abully, masterfully rendered into English by poet and translator Nancy Naomi Carlson. We are honored to offer a selection of five translations drawn from *Cargo Hold of Stars: Coolitude (Cale d'étoiles: Coolitude)*, forthcoming from Seagull Books in January 2021. As Ms. Carlson concludes in her introduction,

Torabully's poems can be gut-wrenching, yet augur a brighter day to come, as expressed by his image of the indentured workers, lying on their backs in the cargo hold of ships, looking at the stars. In "Pages from a Ship's Missing Registry," Torabully expresses the hope that "[his] crew will be among those erasing borders to broaden Humanity's Homeland."

Another poet likely to be unfamiliar to most of our readers is Narcís Comadira. We are fortunate to have seven poems translated from the Catalan by Sonia Alland. Ms. Alland, who has enjoyed a long and successful career as a translator from the French, has more recently been drawn to the musicality and power of Catalan. In the Fall 2019 issue we published a short story by Maria Mercé Roca, "The Dolphin." Ms. Alland's translation of that author's *Casa Gran* and several stories first published in *Nosaltres les dones* was published by Pinyon Publishing (Montrose, CO) in July 2020, with the title *Portbou: A Catalan Memoir With Stories from We, Women*. In our spring 2021 issue we look forward to presenting excerpts from *Portbou* bilingually, along with an interview and wide-ranging conversation between author and translator, touching on the work, challenges of translation, and the nature of the Catalan language.

As always, we are pleased to welcome returning contributors. From internationally acclaimed poet Xánath Caraza, "Secreto" translated from the Spanish into five languages: English (Sandra Kingery), Greek (Natasa Lambrou), French (Justine Temeyissa), Italian (Anna Lombardo), Romanian (Tudor Șerbănescu). Alexis Levitin returns to this journal with more poems by Astrid Cabral, a leading poet and environmentalist from the Amazonian region of Brazil, and two striking short poems by Ecuadoran poet Carmen Váscones. Marguerite Itamar

Harrison offers translations of two Brazilian women poets, Natália Borges Polesso (“Girl”) and Jarid Arraes (“The Hand You’re Dealt”), and a prose poem, “Zinho” by Brazilian fiction writer Marcelino Freire. Dutch poet/translator Arno Bohlmeijer is another returning contributor, with a new translation of a well-known poem by Hans Andreus (“Voor een dag van morgen”), along with a short essay demonstrating why retranslation is warranted. New to this journal is Swedish poet and cinematographer Thomas Wahlberg, whose two terse and hard-hitting poems “See the Men” and “Request” are translated from the Swedish by Sarah Hollister. New to us also is the Welsh poet Hedd Wyn (the pseudonym of Ellis Humphrey Evans). A Christian pacifist, he volunteered to spare his younger brother from being conscripted, and died in 1917 on the first day of the Battle of Passchendaele. Hedd Wyn was the poet who became, for Wales, the symbol of a generation lost during the First World War. The poem translated here by Ruth Ceri Jones is in the same genre and tradition as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and other WWI poets writing in English.

Translations of Rainer Maria Rilke’s poetry are by no means new to *Metamorphoses*, and in recent issues Christiane Marks’s translations from *Sonnets to Orpheus* and translations from the *Duino Elegies* by Erik Bendix provide examples of outstanding versions in English. Rilke’s mastery of meter, rhythm, sound, idiom presents an enormous challenge to a translator, and we are happy to offer five poems in another exceptional translation by poet and translator Susan McLean, a new contributor to *Metamorphoses* whom we hope to welcome back in the future.

Much is new in our prose offerings as well. Kathrin Schmidt’s “Under Wraps” (“Falsch verbunden”), translated by poet, fiction writer and translator Sue Vickerman, is a surprising story which will resonate with many women in many countries—quite distinct from the fiction grounded in the former German Democratic Republic where she was born. Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, a historian of migration in the Middle East and the Caucasus in the 19th and 20th centuries, gives us “The Snake Charmer,” an excerpt from the final chapter of a memoir (“In the Wilds of Transcaucasia”) by Boris Nikolaevich Polozov, whose mem-

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oir recounts his life in the Russian military while stationed in the South Caucasus provinces of the Russian Empire between 1906 and 1913. The typewritten and unpublished original copy, in Russian, is preserved at the Bakhmeteff Archive of Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library. From the same time period comes "The City"—a nightmare fantasy by Shloyme Gilbert, published in Yiddish in Warsaw, 1907, and translated here by Abigail Weaver. Gilbert's horror of human cruelty is in stark contrast to the exoticizing complacency of Polozov's piece. Gilbert and his daughter were murdered in Treblinka in 1942, while Polozov served in several collaborationist forces within the Wehrmacht. Two stories by Hersh Smoliar, translated from the Yiddish by Ruth Murphy, whose translations of other stories by Smoliar appeared in the Spring 2020 issue, give us both unforgettable characters and vivid scenes from the Jewish Resistance in Poland in WWII. "Night of the White Devils," introduced by Ruth Murphy, focuses on children Partisans. "The President of our Capital" shows how the humanity, decency and forethought of a man who is unassuming and does not think of himself as a fighter can translate into courage, a sense of dignity, and decency in those for whose sake he has given his own life.

Turning to a much lighter, whimsical and approach to a potentially harrowing subject, we have "Chronicle of a *Feijoada Brasileira*," translated from the Italian of Christiana de Caldas Brito by Giovanna Bellesia-Contuzzi and her Special Studies student Lilian Rose McCarthy. Professor Bellesia-Contuzzi specializes in migrant literature by Italian-language women writers, and has translated several novels with her colleague Victoria Offredi Poletto. This story is narrated by a Brazilian bean that—after crossing the seas to reach Italy—is accidentally separated from his companions, cast aside and ignored, left to perish in obscurity despite his outstanding qualities and his unnoticed attempts to be heard and rescued. The allegory is amusing and charming, while the human suffering in the subtext is harrowing.

Rounding out our prose offerings, a story about racial and gender discrimination by Afro-Brazilian writer Cristiane Sobral, "The Flying Carpet," translated by Cecília Rodrigues, and an 8th century CE "medieval cover letter" by the English nun Leoba to St. Boniface, translated

by classicist Rob Hardy. *Leoba* includes a Latin poem in dactylic hexameter—the first known poem in Latin by an English woman.

We are also particularly fortunate to have two experts introducing us to newly translated novels. Alice R. Clemente, a scholar of Portuguese literature and former editor of *Gávea-Brown Publications* at Brown University, gives us an informative and sensitive review of *The Unknown Islands* by Raul Brandão, translated from the Portuguese by David Brookshaw. (Tagus Press, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, North Dartmouth, MA. 2020). Her presentation of this novel, now made accessible to Anglophone readers in an excellent translation, has made me look forward to reading *The Unknown Islands* when I have a break from Zoom classes and meetings. From award-winning translator David Ball we have an extremely interesting review article: “Balzac in English: Lost Illusions.” David Ball discusses the recently (2020) published translation by Raymond N. MacKenzie of Balzac’s *Illusions perdues*, the 1971 translation by Herbert J. Hunt and the 1951 translation by Kathleen Raine, comparing the choices each translator makes and weighing them against one another, with a close reading of relevant passages in the original French. This is a novel I had never read, and—perhaps because of its length—it is less well-known to the average reader than at least some of the author’s other novels. I found the review article riveting. When I have the time and peace of mind to settle down with *Illusions perdues*, I know I will enjoy the novel with greater understanding and sensitivity to Balzac’s language and style, and to the challenges that can ambush even the best of translators. What is striking to me, in this exemplary review article, is the writer’s respect for the translators, precisely because he is so aware of the difficult (and sometimes less felicitous) choices translators have to make.

In closing, I want to thank our contributors, our readers and subscribers, the rights holders who have given us permission to publish submissions, the institutions that support the journal (Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mt. Holyoke College, Smith College, The University of Massachusetts Amherst, Five Colleges, Inc., and the Translation Center at The University of Massachusetts Amherst). I am enormously grateful to our anonymous and unrewarded peer reviewers, without

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whose expertise and generosity we could not responsibly evaluate submissions in a multitude of languages. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude as well to Danielle Colburn, who has continued to work with me, remotely, as Production Editor during this pandemic shutdown and the frustrating dysfunctionality it brings. Without her dedication and hard work, this issue would not have been possible. And thanks, as always, to Chrissie Bell for her help in dealing with the “business” of *Metamorphoses*. She will be sorely missed, every day, as she heads off to early retirement and all the tranquillity, adventures and joys the future may bring.

Northampton, Massachusetts November 26, 2020