
2014

Foreword

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Recommended Citation

Kutzko, David and Lynde-Recchia, Molly (2014) "Foreword," *Transference*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 2.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/transference/vol2/iss1/2>

Foreword

Sooner or later
we must come to the end
of striving

to re-establish
the image the image of
the rose

(William Carlos Williams, from “The Rewaking”)

I came to explore the wreck.
The words are purposes.
The words are maps.
I came to see the damage that was done
and the treasures that prevail.

(Adrienne Rich, from “Diving into the Wreck”)

Lost, is it, buried? One more missing piece?

But nothing’s lost. Or else: all is translation
And every bit of us is lost in it

(James Merrill, from “Lost in Translation”)

The above quotations all focus on the attempt of recovery. Our desire to write and to read poetry can be explained in countless ways, but one of its purposes is certainly recovery—recovery of both individual and communal memories, feelings, and history. Williams, Rich, and Merrill imply that the success of this attempt is predicated upon communication between the artist and his/her audience. Because human communication is always imperfect, the act of recovery will also be imperfect. Merrill, in particular, calls it “Lost in Translation.” But Merrill refuses to say it is a failure, just as one gets the distinct impression with Williams that there never will be an end to the striving and that Rich’s wreck is as important for the prevailing treasures as for the damage. Recovery in literary translation is even more precarious than in original poetry. As we said in the foreword of our first issue, to even call this act “translation” is misleading, because “translation,” from the Latin verb *transfere*, “to carry across,” refers to something that has already been brought across passively, in a perfect state; “transference,”

on the other hand, from the same Latin verb, is the imperfect act of bringing someone or something across, always in a state of incompleteness.

Indeed, *Transference* continues to feature this imperfect yet essential human endeavor of recovery in our second issue: “Everything is on the way to being destroyed / Everything is striving toward completion” (“Nanmu Forest,” p.21). These two lines sum up the dynamic tension of loss and plenitude that characterizes many of the poems in this issue. From Brett Foster’s translation of Claudian’s ephemeral “Great Beauty,” which leads off the volume, to Andrew Gudge’s renderings of Tao Yuanming and Li Shangyin that evoke new spring wine and trees budding side by side with migrating geese and frosty moonlight, a pulling of opposites is woven through this collection. Goro Takano describes the “chilliness of / The new beginning” in his translation of Murano Shirō, and the stones in Michael Stone Tangeman’s rewriting of Murō Saisei “fell silent” but “yearned to scream and stand.”

Within this dialectic of yearning, the reader is trapped in the middle distance, compelled, like the “girl...who gravely counts her dreams” in Nicholas Swett’s translation of Khaled Abdallah, to enter a reverie, to take a side in a debate and then to switch sides, to contemplate “something like a castle / Soaring precariously / on the spot where everything else slips down” (“That Man,” p. 28). These manifold transcriptions of experience reframe the known in time and space. Rina Kikuchi and Carol Hayes’ “the rewinding of a watch” and Edward Morin, Dennis Ding, and Fang Dai’s image of the beard of the banyan tree “fluttering in the sky” take on a signal importance as they paraphrase the ineffable, telling and retelling the human story’s quotidian miracle. And at the same time, these poems, distillations of English words and sounds, carry the echoes of their first form, the language in which they sprang to life. To return to the quotations at the beginning of this foreword, by striving after the image, diving into the wreck, and getting lost in translation, we make it possible to find ourselves.

David Kutzko and Molly Lynde-Recchia, editors-in-chief