




3-4-2016

Foreword

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Recommended Citation

(2016) "Foreword," *Transference*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 2.
Available at: <http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/transference/vol3/iss1/2>

Foreword

The woods of Arcady are dead,
And over is their antique joy;
Of old the world on dreaming fed;
Grey Truth is now her painted toy;
Yet still she turns her restless head:
But O, sick children of the world,
Of all the many changing things
In dreary dancing past us whirled,
To the cracked tune that Chronos sings,
Words alone are certain good.

(W.B. Yeats, from “The Song of the Happy Shepherd”)

Words? Foolishness, I know,
against the darkness coming on,
but then, what really works? So talk,
if only some private thought of elves
or if you think that way, talk facts.
Speak of amperes or chromosomes
or the molecules of hydrogen.
Soon, if your talk is right, it turns
into a kind of charm. Therefore
changing into abracadabra
against the brute descent of the sun.
Maybe this time the dark will brighten
almost as if it noticed us.

(R.M. Ryan, “What to Say”)

Communication is everything. It is the bridge between individuals, comprised of words. Words, of course, are not purely “good,” as the happy shepherd of Yeat’s poem sings. In the very next poem of *Crossways*, words are changed to an “inarticulate moan” as a man tries in vain to convey his isolation and sorrow (“The Sad Shepherd”). But words can create magic, “a kind of charm,” where optimism keeps despair at bay. This is the world of poetry. Even poems that are pessimistic in tone are in fact an “abracadabra / against the brute descent of the sun” because in the act of using words, we attempt to make the world better. Communication, “if your talk is right,” leads to empathy. Translating poetry—transferring words and ideas from one culture to another—creates, we continue to hope, a bridge around the world.

On our website (scholarworks.wmich.edu/transference), ScholarWorks provides a map tracking in live time the downloads for our journal. We often sit entranced, watching the map light up all over the world, documenting the potential of global communication and empathy. We are grateful for the referees,

translators, and general readers who make *Transference* a reality. We are also excited to present our largest and most diverse collection yet.

This year's issue of *Transference* opens with images of rain and a flooding river, tied to the gathering of friends who "will recall tonight, when scattered across the land" (Gudgel, 9).

Although it is a risky venture to read the translations published here as a single, long poem with many disparate parts and voices, their assemblage does invite a kind of impressionistic reading in which the reader sees unifying elements amidst the wide-ranging diversity. In our personal reading of this collection, we became keenly aware of the sometimes intertwined motifs of water, separation, and memory that recur in a number of poems.

The image of water appears as a separating force in Narni's "white sulfurous river" (Held, 15) and is evoked as "the language of the sea" (Gordon, 20). It appears again with the figure who "drank from a water deprived of light" and "dreamed of the open sea" (Tachtiris, 38). Some of these instances represent suffering, but not all. We see "dew's gleam" and a spirit "surging with the floods of spring" (Ruleman, 53). The spring snow in Bundy's translation of Princess Shikishi is joyful (57). The thirstless skeletons in Takano's translation of Murano have found a measure of "nostalgia-provoking" peace (89).

Separation occurs between lovers, between the living and the dead (Rosenberg, 55), in communities (Ben Lazreg, 77–80), and in the fragmented self.

The power of memory to sustain and move us is portrayed in a multitude of tonalities. We read of "A lonely park full of children ... [that] rubs the rust of ... memory with something similar to flight" and a figure "shredding her grief into tiny pieces at the threshold of wishing" (Morin, Snounu, and Tabbaa, 45; 46). In "Excerpt from A Pilgrimage to Sumiyoshi," the poem's narrator philosophically states: "I yielded to my brush and recorded my impressions of these various places, thinking that perhaps it will be of interest to people of another time," with a calm recognition of personal mortality. Horesh opens with a reference to Jerusalem's "old wall" which is emblematic of wholeness, separation, and memory in complex ways (31).

The recurrence of these elements invites a meditation on the eternal present—here perceived as an instant of stillness in the ever-flowing waters of life and time—and our constant need to look back in an attempt to find wholeness.

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