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(www.johnrunning-johnson.com;
john.running-johnson@wmich.edu)

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Department of World Languages and Literatures
College of Arts and Sciences
Western Michigan University



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Foreword

“Because of all this,” writes Nina Youkhanna in her translation of Suzanne Alaywan, “the rain creates—in the space between one drop and the next—this colossal echo.”

To a certain extent, the notion of an echo in the space between one drop of rain and the next can be seen as a metaphorical representation of poetic translation in and of itself. An echo depends entirely on the original sound, but it also carries a certain distortion and mystery, both of which add to its arresting appeal when our own call bounces back towards us from a mountainside. It would be risky to push the metaphor too far, but it is certainly true that poetic translation occurs in a space between: a space between the original poem’s meaning and language on the one hand, and the translator’s reading of the poem paired with the linguistic toolbox afforded by the target language on the other. In this sense, a collection of translated poems can be said to resemble overlapping echoes created by multiple voices, each of which is calling out from a distinct point of perspective on the human experience.

The voices in this year’s issue speak of fragmentation, loss, yearning, truth, spirituality, injustice, love and desire—all serious subjects—but at the same time there are touches of lightness and even humor. Ronsard abandons the repeated long climbs up the palace stairs to see the object of his affections in Ann Lauinger’s translation of “I’d mind less, if you only took account”; in Gregory Divers’s translation of Yaak Karsunke’s “mystery and crime,” we contemplate the pragmatics of stealing a Ferris Wheel; and in Ranald Barnicot’s translation of Catullus’s “To Fabullus (Invitation),” his guest is invited to bring his own dinner.

This issue also includes some carefully distilled reflections on the passing and ceasing of life and time, and in the last stanza of William Ruleman’s translation of Georg Heym’s “Both day and evening began to seep...,” we see a dreamlike vision of the faraway:

And near and far now blended in one field,
One wall or scene of equal radiance.
The moon's path spanned the ice's wide expanse
With muted gleam, as on an ancient shield.

Interestingly, this image of a muted gleam on an ancient shield finds an echo in the observation that Ann Cefola makes in her commentary about the enigmatic poetry of Hélène Sanguinetti:

Heightened by multiple individual voices, it is studded with jewel-like imagery such as grains of sand or dust, a bird's beak, or snow falling on snow.

Each voice in this volume expresses its own particular truth about the human condition, and some make reverberations that harmonize in surprising ways with the others. We hope that you enjoy the rich variety of sound, topic, and texture that they offer.

Molly Lynde-Recchia, Editor-in-Chief

Nina Youkhanna
Excerpts from *The Clutter of Words*

Suzanne Alaywan
كرايب الكلام

1

Who has broken the moon's lantern?
What rain is this that
Extinguishes the stars with its shoe?
Where is my window, O walls?
Who has made the willow cry on the shore of my soul?
And you, my hand,
Wherefrom did you get all this fearlessness?

2

Because the morning has lost its yearning.
Because I have outrun my desire
and emptied speech of all its clutter.
Because I am without friends.
My heart, a shadow rose.
My body, an absence tree.
Because ink is not blood.
Because my photographs do not resemble me
and the moon that hangs in the closet is not suitable to clothe my soul.
Because I loved with a worthless sincerity
and only when I was broken
did I realize the magnitude of the tragedy.
Because this city reminds me
of a woman's voice whose defeat I cannot forget.
Because God is singular and death is innumerable
And because we no longer exchange letters.

Because of all this,
the rain creates—
in the space between one drop and the next—
this colossal echo.

Clowns with their powders, without features.
 Angels dead in the arcades.
 The cafe of the past.
 Cement squares and benches.
 Music that leans towards the cry of the window.
 A season of birds.
 Disease. Hospital. Recurrent scenes of suffering every time.
 Closed doors.
 Our bitter tears on the doorknobs.
 A school uniform suspended by its shredded wings.
 Prostitutes embracing their umbrellas
 In the frost of dawn
 on distant sidewalks.
 Overcoat wet like a handkerchief.
 The woman whose hair used to laugh with the willows
 and with the stars.
 Her unknown place is in a cemetery somewhere.
 Tattered posters on the remnants of walls.
 The desolate city.
 With its wrecked houses
 and its children charred in the refugee camps.
 Water and metal—that impossible equation.
 Rain: the hammer and the nails,
 our shattered mirrors.

Commentary

Suzanne Alaywan was born in Beirut in 1974 to a Lebanese father and an Iraqi mother. She graduated from the American University of Cairo in 1997 with a degree in journalism and media. During the Lebanese war, she spent the majority of her youth between Cairo, Paris and Spain. In addition to writing, she also paints and has previously published her artwork in, and as part of, her poetry collections. She currently resides in Beirut. She has a personal website where she publishes her poetry and her artwork, <http://www.suzanne-alaywan.com>.

The three translated poems appear in her 2006 collection titled *The Clutter of Words* (كراكيب الكلام), which, appearing as one long poem, consists of short segments. There are several reoccurring images in the long poem that link the shorter ones together, such as the heavy rain that provides the soundtrack to Alaywan's words. However, and as the title indicates, this collection is made up of words—scattered, incoherent, reverberating, pregnant. They appear together in (often peculiar yet organic) succession, and attempt to transmit profound emotions, unencumbered by syntax and grammatical regulations.

Perhaps it is this “clutter” that proved the most difficult to translate into English. The Arabic word Alaywan employs, *karakeeb* (كراكيب), refers to an array of old, worthless house items such as furniture—what is referred to in English as “junk.” However, I have opted for “clutter” instead because, in its implications of untidiness, it perfectly represents the chain of poetic images that permeate this collection. Alaywan emphasizes the simultaneous power and impotence of words, which, much like our feelings, can be conveyed in forceful ways, yet somehow remain ineffable.

I have attempted, to the best of my ability, to remain as true as possible to the text in my translation. Alaywan's use of free verse enables her to construct disarrayed verses outside the restrictions of rhyme and meter, and it was certainly a challenge to imitate that same structure in English because it often becomes strange and unintelligible. In these cases, I have privileged meaning over composition because, I believe, that is the essence of Alaywan's writing. For example, for the second poem I separated the last three lines and add a final “Because of

all this” in order to indicate to the reader that all the previous “Because’s” were intended to lead to the final image of the rain drops’ echo. Most of the punctuation was also added for the purpose of rendering, as closely as possible, the flow of the original Arabic.

My immeasurable love for Arabic poetry proved at times to be a frustrating obstacle in my search for the perfect rendition of Alaywan’s bewitching words. Nevertheless, the process was delightful in its own right because I had the support and guidance of my inspiring sister Nahrin, and my father Atalla whose love of poetry has nurtured my soul since birth.

Source text:

Alaywan, Suzanne. *The Clutter of Words*. Beirut, 2006, pp. 3, 8-9, 18-19.

Ann Lauinger
Four Sonnets from Ronsard

Pierre de Ronsard
Sonnets pour Hélène

Whoever reads me, fool for love or wise

ll. 1

Whoever reads me, fool for love or wise,
and sees my grizzled head ought not to wonder
I write of love. Old firewood that lies
half-burnt hides yet a spark in the gray cinder.
Green wood, blown on, is hardly coaxed to light;
with no coaxing, the dry will always burn.
The Moon was wooed and won with fleece of white;
her old Tithonus was not despised by Dawn.
Reader, I don't aspire to Plato's school
(to preach us virtue, but the practice shun)
nor to the lethal daring of the utter fool,
stubborn Icarus or clumsy Phaethon.
Yet without playing charioteer or high-flier,
I burn and drown myself in my own desire.

These long winter nights, when round its circuit ll. 42

These long winter nights, when round its circuit,
the idle moon so slowly turns her car,
when the cock heralds break of day so late,
and to care-filled minds a night feels like a year,
I'd die of grief, but for your doubtful form,
which lightens my love's burden through a cheat
and, settling wholly naked in my arms,
misleads me with a lying joy so sweet.
The real you is savage, proudly cruel.
In private, I enjoy the seeming you,
and, pleased by your counterfeit in full,
I drowse at peace beside your shade. It's true,
kind sleep's deceit abuses my lover's pain:
such loving self-abuse, I count as gain.

I do not wish my heart's jailer dead

l. 62

I do not wish my heart's jailer dead.
However, Love, if only to avenge
the six years of my weeping, do this: change
her, seed thickly with snowy hairs that head.
If you wish it, vengeance is near at hand;
you shorten years, you can linger them out.
Don't suffer her, in your own camp, to flout
your old brawler. Age her, heed my demand.
She glories in her curls, her youth's fresh green,
the thousand darts she harbors in her keen
eyes that, glancing, launch them in every breast.
Helen, why do you pride yourself on something,
beauty, which is no more than wind, a nothing?
Beauty's roses scarcely the day outlast.

I'd mind less, if you only took account

11.65

I'd mind less, if you only took account
of my pains, the stairs I count and re-count often,
the sum to the palace summit I must mount
to reach your rooms: Olympus was not so lofty!
At each visit, sweat courses down my face;
my pulse races; breathless, I puff and pant,
and all to hear your refusal, in a voice
full of disdain and cold pride—a torment.
Goddess-like, you're throned in the most high;
I can't ascend your heaven: I'm no god.
I'll send my devout heart up to your sky,
lamenting as usual, but from the yard.
To Jove in heaven, that's how we men pray,
keeping firmly on earth our feet of clay.

Commentary

In translating Ronsard's *Sonnets pour Hélène* I hoped not so much to reproduce the exact structure and rhyme-scheme as to capture the astonishing variety of tone Ronsard achieves even in a single sonnet. This variety is all the more remarkable, since Ronsard's style in these sonnets is limpid and straightforward, with lines that are syntactically simple and end-stopped more often than not.

Ronsard's sonnets are written in alexandrines and are Petrarchan in form: an octave rhyming *abba abba*, a sestet more freely organized around two or three new end-rhymes. My translation substitutes iambic pentameter and the familiar Shakespearean three quatrains and couplet—for English-language readers the prototype of the love sonnet—and employs occasional half-rhymes. Practically speaking, the stress patterns of English make hexameter lines feel much heavier in English than in French; and the relative poverty of rhymes in English, compared to the romance languages, makes the Petrarchan octave on only two rhymes more constraining in English. However, I hope the half-rhymes I've used are not just an evasion of constraint but help to recreate the nimble, even colloquial, voice of Ronsard.

Whoever reads me, fool for love or wise

The story of how Pan seduced the Moon by luring her into the woods with a white fleece (disguising himself as a ram?) is found in Vergil's Third *Georgic*:

Munere sic niveo lanae, si credere dignum est,
Pan deus Arcadiae captam te, Luna, fefellit,
In nemora alta vocans; nec tu aspernata vocantem. (391-3)

[Thus with a prize of snow-white wool, if the story is worth believing, Pan, the god of Arcadia, tricked and caught you, Luna, calling from the deep woods; nor did you spurn him when he called.]

These long winter nights, when round its circuit

This witty and self-mocking sonnet is directly indebted to one of the best-known of Ovid's *Amores*, "Aestus erat, mediamque dies exegerat horam" ["It was hot, and deep mid-afternoon"] (I. 5), in which the speaker's summer afternoon nap is deliciously interrupted by the unexpected appearance of Corinna, and all proceeds just as he could have wished it. Ronsard jokingly reverses Ovid's poem in several ways. Here, the setting is not summer but winter, not day but night, and the speaker is insomniac. Where Ovid's poem balances beautifully our uncertainty as to whether the experience was real, Ronsard clearly depicts an erotic dream. The speaker falls for the fake Hélène, and so the sonnet is self-mockery—or rather, mock self-mockery, since, as Ovid everywhere maintains, fake is good. Lie to me, Ovid begs (*Amores* I. 4 and III. 14), and he promises to collude in the lies his lover will tell to cover up her infidelities. In this sonnet too, Ronsard collaborates happily in his self-deceit and enjoys its fruits. The play on the word "abuse" in the final couplet of the translation renders the double-entendre of Ronsard's last two lines: "...*abuse* par le faux.../ *S'abuser* en amour..."). This translation doesn't fully capture the mimetic skill of Ronsard's first two lines, with their repetitions of sound and meaning creating the slow passage of the night ("Ces longues nuits d'hiver, où la Lune ocieuse / Tourne si lentement son char tout à l'entour").

I do not wish my heart's jailer dead

I have followed the envelope structure of Ronsard's octave but allowed myself four rhymes, not two.

"Your old brawler" (8) is an attempt to render the pejorative sense of *soudart*: a career soldier—thus, a ruffian or desperado, according to Renaissance popular opinion (an opinion not without empirical basis at the time). Ovid's *Amores* is the source of the military metaphor for Cupid and the lover.

The trope of the stand-offish beloved getting her or his comeuppance with age is familiar, most notably perhaps in Horace's *Odes* (see I. 25, IV. 10, IV. 13), and is often paired with the exhortation to seize the day, as in the most famous of the *Son-*

nets for Hélène, “Quand vous serez bien vieille” (II. 43). Here, however, *les roses* are the sonnet’s final words; left unplucked, they stand simply as an emblem of the brevity of mortal beauty and a rebuke to vanity.

I’d mind less, if you only took account

A jokey sonnet, whose ironic wit targets both the lady and the poet-lover. Hélène’s goddess-like elevation is actually a palace apartment up many flights of stairs, and the poet’s ascent to her hyperbolically Olympian abode is a catalog of his corporeal ills: a fine romance!

The first two lines of the original (“...si tu *contois* ma peine,/ De *conter* tes degrez *recontez* tant de fois”) pun multiply on the repeated verb, which can mean to enumerate, to take account of, and to recount or narrate; and at the root of which lurks a bawdy pun. I’ve tried in the first three lines of the translation to recreate Ronsard’s sound repetitions and suggestiveness by additional repetitions and the exploitation of a different pun, based on his *sommet* (summit) in line 3. The last two lines of this sonnet are densely linked in the French by diction and sound: “Ainsi les hommes font à Jupiter priere:/ Les hommes sont en terre, et Jupiter aux cieux.” My free translation eliminates the repeated phrases but adds “feet of clay” to convey the mocking self-deprecation of the original.

N.B. French quotations above follow the source text I’ve used, in which some words lack their modern accents: Ronsard, Pierre de. *Oeuvres Complètes*. Edited by Gustave Cohen, vol. 1, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade-Editions Gallimard, 1950, pp. 243, 259, 241, 268–69.

Stephen D. Miller and Patrick Donnelly
Four Love Poems from *One Hundred*
Poems of the Dharma Gate

Jakuzen
Hōmon hyakushu

Hearing the Name, longing to be reborn

65

when my dear lord may I come
where rumor says you are?

the pines of Iki—

though it's *you*
who exhausts your heart with waiting

THESE WORDS SIGNIFY that the power of Amida's will is such that anyone who hears the Name and longs to be reborn arrives in that land almost before realizing it, and achieves unshakeable faith.

How impatiently Amida must wait, sleeves of salvation moist, restless with longing! Anyone who understands Narihira's poem "I should never have left home" must vow to return there in haste. Because I've heard that Ikinomatsu is a long sea-road to the west, may I liken it to that land?

Never slept

68

inside this dream

grieving my bewildered heart—

how many nights

how many dawns

our eyes went without meeting

THE BODHISATTVAS WHO COULD SEE the white whorl of light emanating from between the Buddha's eyebrows didn't have hearts indifferent to seeking the Buddha-path, and this scripture says that they never slept.

But

for one on the path of love, lost in fleeting dreams, the fact that sleepless nights pile up is really of no benefit.

Thoughts of enlightenment alone, no other thoughts 69

where shall I rest my heart?
adrift on waves of thoughts—

then sunk, wondering—

is there something?
is there nothing?

THE *DAI* SPEAKS OF A PERSON practicing *śamatha-vipasyana* meditation, considering only the true nature of the phenomenal world, and not mixing in thoughts about other things. Doesn't meditating upon "am I or am I not?" still the mind in the truth of the middle way?

Heart of longing, revering the Buddha path

70

longed-for face
from which I've been parted

come, appear even in dreams —

lip-of-the-mountain
moon

HE WHO DIED LONG AGO, becoming “original dew,” when I think of our unendurable parting—the leaves of his words lodged in my heart, causing me to drop dew again and again upon my sleeves—doesn't the clear form of this friend arise before me, in actual truth, when I'm unable to sleep?

And rises before me all the more whenever I think about when Shakyamuni was alive, a time when no one ever had enough of gazing on his form with its thirty-two aspects, nor ever tired of hearing directly the Law of unimpeded wisdom and the eight virtuous sounds.

But with the cremation wood exhausted, karmic opportunity faded up and away like smoke from the śāla trees, where is the person who wouldn't have plunged into thoughts of longing and reverence?

Having now entered into the latter days of the Law, for us to be sprinkled with blessing on this wondrous path is far beyond our reach, even if we hang our hearts on this figure of compassion, even if we're unable to sleep for grieving.

In this dream of life and death, why can't we see the face of the full moon?

Therefore it is written, “With single-hearted longing to see the Buddha,/they give their lives./Then with the companions of truth/I appear on Vulture Peak”—a saying not pertaining only to some heaven beyond the clouds.

If ever a time comes that the Buddha responds to the appeal of sentient beings, he will appear in our hearts on the mountain of the middle way.

Commentary

Jakuzen was a 12th century priest of the Buddhist Tendai sect, living in Ōhara outside the capital of Kyoto. He left behind three manuscripts of *waka* poetry; that forty-seven of his poems were published in several imperial poetry anthologies of the late 12th century and later is a mark of how highly they were regarded. One of Jakuzen's most famous collections is the *Hōmon hyakushu* (One Hundred Poems of the Dharma Gate).

As the first one-hundred-poem private anthology of *shakkyō-ka* (Buddhist-themed poems), the *Hōmon hyakushu* sits at the juncture between the Japanese court's ongoing literary and religious projects, exemplifying the late-Heian (794–1185) formula *kadō soku butsudō*: “the way of poetry is none other than the Buddha-way.”

Each of the hundred parts of Jakuzen's sequence is comprised of a *dai* (poem topic, in this case a short quote from Buddhist scripture in Chinese), a *waka* (31-syllable poem in Japanese) and a lyric prose afterword in Japanese on the same topic. The hundred sections of the *Hōmon hyakushu* are grouped into ten “books” of ten poems each (modeled on the imperial poetry anthologies), and the four selections here are from book seven, the Love poems (*koi no uta*).

Translating Jakuzen

Jakuzen's original text is in classical Japanese (and Chinese, in the case of the *dai*). What makes lexical research for this translation project—translating all one hundred sections and related *honka* (poems that Jakuzen alludes to in his own poems and prose)—interesting and sometimes challenging is that the themes of Jakuzen's poems are inherently Buddhist, and often contain terms that can only be found in Buddhist dictionaries.

The project of a *shakkyō-ka* in general is to inflect familiar poetic tropes—about the four seasons, congratulations, separation, love, complaint, etc.—toward reflecting on the teachings of Buddhism. It is especially interesting to observe how Jakuzen adapted the “library” of references and vocabulary associated with poems of erotic and romantic love (a topic Buddhism might be thought to deprecate, because of its potential

for dangerous, deluding passions and attachments) to depict a Buddhist practitioner's longing for enlightenment, or for union with Amida Buddha in the Pure Land.

Thus in the Love section we find familiar references to waiting all night for the lover's arrival (often in vain), to rituals of betrothal, to the tortures of inconstancy, to painful separation from the beloved, to "sleeves wet with tears"—but all metamorphosed into the fervent spiritual relationship the practitioner forms, or neglects to form, with the Buddha and the teachings. Translating these poems has required familiarity with both the original secular tropes and models, then working to express how Jakuzen adapted these to a Buddhist worldview, in such a way that the original models can still be felt.

It is a poetic truism that great love songs can be redirected toward longing for the divine, and conversely great hymns can repurposed to praise a human beloved. In the case of Jakuzen's recycling of the love poem project in the context of an overall Buddhist poetry project, his deployment of erotic tropes is simultaneously ironic and sincere. He knows that inflecting erotic longing toward religious feeling creates a grinding of rhetorical gears, in a witty (if not comic) way. But the adaptation is also sincere in that Jakuzen enacts an emotional relationship with ultimate spiritual reality, rather than a mental, theoretical, or legalistic relationship. It's the *Song of Songs*, rather than *Leviticus*.

Any translator attempting to render a classical Japanese poem into English must first face a very fundamental difference between the two languages, which has exerted a strong influence on the poetics of each. In Japanese every syllable receives the same amount of stress, but English is characterized by the alternation of strong and weak stresses. It was natural—inevitable—therefore that syllable-counting became a primary characteristic of Japanese poetry. By contrast, English poetics developed a conscious attention to the arrangement of strong and weak stresses. Because syllable-counting represents a minor cul-de-sac of English poetics, rather than the main road—and because we wanted our translations to work well as English poems—we chose not to imitate the 31-syllable form of the original poems.

The translator must address a second fundamental difference between poetry in Japanese and English: Japanese poetry may be written in vertical or horizontal columns, where-

as English poetry is invariably written in horizontal lines. The syllables in *waka* are understood to be broken into groups of 5 - 7 - 5 - 7 - 7, and these groupings are sometimes rendered as five lines in English translations. But we chose to let the syntax in English take precedence over the original arrangement, drawing on a variety of line and stanza management strategies from English poetry, while still trying to achieve a small footprint for the translation.

We did wish to reflect in English some of the constraints that the *waka* form imposed on Japanese writers. For instance, we avoided capitalization except in the case of proper names, and limited punctuation to question marks, long dashes (m-dashes) and a few commas, quotation marks, colons, parentheses, exclamation points and italicized passages for syntactical clarity or emphasis. We broke these self-imposed constraints in a few instances, but only for good cause. Above all, we wished to honor the poems' breathtaking brevity and compression, which successfully hints at far more than is said outright.

When these poems were written, they were not antique; we strove not to make them sound so in our translations. It was our limited goal—difficult enough—to convey the emotional and spiritual arguments of these poems in idiomatic, musical, contemporary English, in versions that are also accurate enough to satisfy the scholar.

A few notes about the individual poems:

In the afterword to poem 65, Jakuzen quotes a poem by Ariwara no Narihira from the *Kokinshū* (KKS 969), part of which reads *sato oba karezu*, “I should never have left home.” In the *Hōmon hyakushu*, Jakuzen constantly alludes to other, older poetry; in this case he uses Narihira's poem to invoke the trope of a woman waiting in vain for her lover to appear. Narihira's poem is in the voice of a man who expresses regret for leaving his beloved waiting in that way; in Jakuzen's poem, the beloved who waits is Amida, the Buddha of the Western Paradise. In the poem, we translated Ikinomatsu, a place name, as “the pines of Iki,” to give a sense of how in Japanese the word *matsu* means both “pine (tree)” and “to wait (with longing),” a pun that works in both Japanese and English.

The afterword of poem 68 refers to “white whorl of light emanating from between the Buddha’s eyebrows” (Sanskrit, *ūrṇā*; Japanese, *byakugō*), which was one of 32 marks of an enlightened being, often described as a curl of hair that emits light.

The afterword of poem 69 refers to *śamatha-vipasyana* (“calming-insight”) meditation (Japanese, *shikan*). According to Yamamoto Akihiro’s *A Complete Annotation of the Hōmon hyakushu by Jakuzen* (*Jakuzen Hōmon hyakushu Zenshaku*, Kazama Shobō, 2010), Jakuzen recorded—in another of his poetry collections, *Yuishimbōshū*—that he studied this form of meditation at Raigō-in temple in Ōhara, under the instruction of Ennin Shōnin. Thus Raigō-in is one of the few places where we can definitively place Jakuzen during his lifetime.

In poem 70, as in many Buddhist poems, the moon symbolizes the Buddha himself, as well as his teachings; therefore the hidden moon is a metaphor for times of trial for the Buddhist practitioner. In the afterword, Jakuzen repurposes the love-poem trope of “sleeves wet with tears” (in this case, wet with dew, a metaphor for tears) to depict the grief of the practitioner after the Buddha’s physical form was hidden from view. The afterword also refers to the “latter days of the Law” (Japanese, *mappō*), a period of time prophesied in Buddhist scriptures, which was thought by many Asian cultures to have begun in 1052. According to this prophesy, during this age accessing and acting upon the teachings would become an extremely arduous task. The passage Jakuzen quotes near the end of the afterword is taken from the 16th chapter of the Lotus Sutra, “Life Span of the Thus Come One.”

Source text:

Jakuzen Hōmon hyakushu zenshaku, Yamamoto Akihiro. Kasama Shobō, 2010, pp. 124–25, 129–30, 130–32, 132–34.

Gregory Divers
Woe to those...

Jakob van Hoddis
Weh denen...

Woe to those who await the night
In the pale glow of twilight
 – Evenings they say
The goddess of life slinks smiling
Through the streets in a sheer silk
Moon-woven gown, red flowers
In her white hand and if she meets
You in dull dreary rooms where
No lamp's sacrificial brightness
Glow, she will sneer and go her way –
Woe to those who await the night
In pale twilight.

Gregory Divers
mystery and crime

Yaak Karsunke
mystery and crime

for Rainer Hachfeld

Samuel Dashiell Hammet “knew
a man who once
stole a Ferris wheel”
(more than that he didn’t divulge)

yet: such a contraption doesn’t
just walk off on its
own (even if it’d been dismantled
broken down to parts & pieces
& stored in crates)

the gondolas alone
added to that girders & struts
plus nuts & bolts
by the hundredweight

at the least one will need
a flatbed trailer with the length as well as
a tractor with the power to haul it all away
(& from where to take
if not to steal)

a lot of work – on the other hand:
who’s going to steal a Ferris wheel?
Hammett
still knew someone who did

Gregory Divers
elderly couple
(after Sebald Beham)

Yaak Karsunke
älteres paar

für Ingrid

there on a palm-of-the-hand-sized
copper engraving from 1543
you see them standing
a woman & a man
not exactly slender no longer young
the inventors of love

that rustling sound of fig tree leaves
rubbing against each other
kept Eve from her sleep
& as Adam took the apple he saw
her breasts with new
eyes above his slowly
opening lips

(shortly thereafter both were
deeply moved by knowledge)

the serpent slithers
out of paradise & glides
smoothly towards you & me –
let us go then into the garden
& adorn their altar
with pomegranates

Commentary

Jakob van Hoddis: *Weh denen... / Woe to those...*

Jakob van Hoddis was born in Berlin in 1887 as Hans Davidsohn; his pen name van Hoddis is an anagram of the family name. Although primarily known as an early-expressionist German poet ranking alongside Georg Heym, Georg Trakl and Ernst Stadler, van Hoddis is also considered a forerunner of surrealism.

Jakob van Hoddis was deported to Poland in 1942 and murdered by the Nazis, most likely in Sobibór. Unfortunately he published relatively little during his lifetime; “Weh denen...” is one of his many poems first published long after he was dead.

“Weh denen...” is somewhat unique among the works of Jakob van Hoddis. Unlike the majority of his poems “Weh denen...” has neither formal stanza structure nor rhyme scheme. The content, however, is representative of his verse. Like many of his generation, van Hoddis followed in the Romantic tradition of appropriating legends and mythological figures for his subject matter. Here we have an unnamed goddess of life. Whether this is the Egyptian, Greek or another deity is not specified; nevertheless, this goddess readily finds a home in the unique poetic world of Jakob van Hoddis. The setting is at twilight, a special time for van Hoddis for it marks the passage from day to night. His goddess of life is endowed with distinctive qualities both in her attire and mannerisms, particularly in how she “slinks” through the streets and sneers at those she encounters in “dull dreary rooms” during twilight time. Although this goddess of life appears as ephemeral as twilight itself, there is something overtly ominous in how the text is bracketed by the initial two and final two lines. The repetition of “Woe to those who await the night” coupled with the actions of this goddess of life suggests that the wait is in vain.

Yaak Karsunke: *mystery and crime*

Although Yaak Karsunke began as a political poet during the 1960s, his poetry includes a wide variety of subject matter. He

has long been fascinated by crime novels and is the author of *Toter Mann* (1989) for which he received the *Deutscher Krimi Preis* in 1990. His poem “mystery and crime” pays tribute to an American master of the crime novel and is dedicated to Karsunke’s friend Rainer Hachfeld, a jazz saxophonist. The poem is rendered in Karsunke’s distinctive style and orthography: only proper nouns are capitalized, the language is unadorned, the diction concise. The quote in stanza one is Note # 28 in Hammett’s “From the Memoirs of a Private Detective” (*The Smart Set*, March 1923). The key to translating Yaak Karsunke’s poetry is capturing the voice (especially with regard to how he uses flavoring particles such as *ja* and *eben*); and here that means somehow blending in the voice and diction of Dashiell Hammett lurking in the background. Furthermore, Karsunke’s deft use of the German language and occasional word play are not easily rendered in English. For example, in stanza four I chose the more lengthy but parallel construction of “a flatbed trailer with the length” paired with “a tractor with the power” to emphasize the crucial point expressed in the original. Finally, the vocabulary in this poem is somewhat dated. The best example of this is “by the hundredweight” in stanza three, a phrase typical of Dashiell Hammett’s 1920s.

Yaak Karsunke: *älteres paar* / *elderly couple*

Yaak Karsunke’s “älteres paar” is based on a copper engraving by the 16th century German artist Hans Sebald Beham. The poetic treatment of an artist and work of art has been a constant in the poetry of Yaak Karsunke ever since the 1960s. Once again, this poem is representative of his distinctive style and orthography with only proper nouns being capitalized and his preference for the ampersand. The language is succinct with no word wasted. The German in “älteres paar” was relatively easy to render in English; the challenge in translating this poem was not only to capture the voice but also to make sure that line breaks enhanced both content and diction. One advantage I have in translating Yaak Karsunke is that we have known each other for over twenty years and communicate freely regarding my translations. Both he and his wife Ingrid, to whom this poem is dedicated, have a good feel for the English language and that

greatly aids this partnership. Yaak Karsunke calls “älteres paar” one of his personal favorite poems (a vintage print of the copper engraving hangs on the wall above his desk) and is also a double portrait of him and his wife. As a closing note, those readers familiar with T. S. Eliot’s “Prufrock” will recognize the “let us go then” in the final stanza.

Source texts:

Hoddis, Jakob van. “Weh denen...,” *Dichtungen und Briefe*, edited by Regina Nörtemann, Arche, 1987, p. 147.

—. “Mystery and Crime.” Previously unpublished.

Karsunke, Yaak. “älteres paar.” *hand & fuß: Gedichte*, Lyrikedition 2000, 2004, p. 58.

Ann Cefola

Excerpts from *And here's the song*

Hélène Sanguinetti

Et voici la chanson

YOKE 1

it's snowing today¹ here → butterfly
comes down, maybe flower, not snow,
to kiss below where no one ever
(posed dry lips, so to speak)

so much before had been spoken of so much before,
today let's go let's stay

ppffuuuuuuffffff butterfly and
flower, No, snow,
on snow so steep that
no one falls, flies away

1: if this day exists

“What’s the point?” so much before was,
no harm to earth and grass, a pebble
smashes rolls down
Where? hey! hey! someone
lights up, frozen, he died and he lives, it is written:
many circulate still, nails, beards, hairs

Let’s be here let’s go, she’s a good girl she has her checkered
dress her favorite, Still kisses the little Red
well-ironed clutch ↓ Taken away

Gilbert smokes and spits in pnou
what woman, hips of a boy
Gigi cries (panther paces her eyes)
her husband fishing-captain had a small craft and
boat² (panther pnoue weeps in his eyes)

2: possibly a boat

Then dogs, their bowls shine
in the sun at entrance to their doghouse the sun
and one is called *Wham*, the girl pets it, she
has a name,
someone knows, not here

To be born to several, to love a dream, to be loved by it –
– terracotta kitchen tiles
Humble.

I live on a peak
It was
(Already the profile of a little dancer)
Was one I
It snows
Scattered

It is snowing on me
Who was a peak
Was a kind of musk ox, Moss
under horns, spit, wind

Loving the moon of the night with such wind more than anything
to pick up a body crushed for days

“was am will be all squirted and all gone”
She has slippers of glass or fur? question
He wants to marry her so slipper he fucks and fucks
again

Who receives the most?
In Hell the Cloven indignant
One can imagine
without recoiling

one day, Raised up.
Lights a candle for You, beautiful Belt,
one day, Saint Anthony, Saint Christine,
for the eternal living and
it smells good

So: fishing-captain was
Even had a name,
someone must know, not here³

Pezzi di pane, scraps of bread,
ucello che beve with small jabs of beak
spout from head, Bird drinks and swallows
Again

3: too little

Dust infinite difficulty infinitely deep on the square
there is a church with colonnades and also very fine rain

He died, it was for nothing, that the robin returned

Commentary

Hélène Sanguinetti and I have been working together for nearly two decades. In translating Hélène, I stay as faithful to her text as possible. Reading her work is a little like falling down a rabbit hole: unexpected punctuation, mixed verb tenses, awkward juxtapositions, varying fonts, and whimsical drawings drop the reader into a world that enchants and disturbs. To make this journey any less challenging would deprive readers of its newness, and would dilute Hélène's desire to create language that's "scraped." Hélène's goal is to use language in a way that disturbs and disorients the reader—with the result being the heightened alertness one might feel as one passes through a darkened room, feeling for furniture or a light switch on the wall.

This selection represents the first few pages from Hélène's fourth book, *Et voici la chanson* (Éditions de L'Amandier, 2012). While the title *And here's the song*, inspired by a CD of acoustic guitar I sent Hélène, might suggest frivolity, the text sets up opposing forces—*Yoke* and *Joke*—that act as night/day, life/death, moon/sun, water/thirst, good/evil, and so on. The two engage one another against a backdrop of tragedy and triumph, respectively the *Kap Arkona* sinking and five-game record of US Olympian Willye White.

Hélène's collage-like approach, cohesive as it is surprising, addresses the political on a collective human scale. Heightened by multiple individual voices, it is studded with jewel-like imagery such as grains of sand or dust, a bird's beak, or snow falling on snow. This audacious architecture—from broad philosophical and moral themes to intimate human moments and longing—is signature Sanguinetti.

Hager Ben Driss
Standing

Sghaier Ouled Ahmed
مقام الوقوف

Standing up
in
my shoes,
my shadow kissing the cheek of a distant girl.
Standing up,
nothing to say
except
that my lonely soul
is now alone.

Standing up
under
my head.
If our master wills,
I shall take it off the way I do with my shoes;
turn it around in the air,
and throw it in one of the many garbage cans.
And then ...
there must be a "then"
so that the conversation goes on and on.

Standing up
under
my shadow,
while my shadow politely answers
the greetings of unique seeds.

Standing up
for years
cooking my food on the idea of fire.
The Fire,
O Master,
is there: you have it
in the scabbards of the ready legions.

Standing up,
asking ants
and bees;
and yes
asking time,
about a tortoise
who went before us to new eras.

Standing up
in a vast expanse that Uqba or Hannibal will reach,
but won't distinguish the sea from Kairouan.
They would only find streets and avenues
named for them
by some guy
in a newspaper.

Standing with skies
beneath me
and above
skies
milked into a tough clay bowl of faith.

Standing up.
He who locked me out
forgot that I
am still standing
to bring the place to Him
and transmit to the sheikh
the voice of his disciples.

Standing up
and words,
like a coffin,
proceed
to
their
grave
in
the
poem.

(Tunis, winter 1989)

Hager Ben Driss
The Ninth Floor Again:
The Military Hospital

Sghaier Ouled Ahmed
الطابق التاسع مجدداً
المستشفى العسكري

I love a dead trinity:
my father,
death, and the great poetry.

I venerate a living trinity:
life, its daughter,
and the present tense of verbs when used correctly.

I look upon truth:
The mouth of a volcano
.....
which neither sand
nor water can fully satiate.

I board the ark with two versions of my land ...
and a tent ...
where I take a nap,
flying in the nebula like a butterfly.

I insist on commas and dots,
for I have no letters other than commas and dots.
Our sky is full of diacritical marks, too.
It's had no language for a long time.

I prepare food for the mourners around me:
truth tellers,
liars,
lovers,
and haters.

I don't forget the qāri', either,
who condenses the texts and al-Mughira's testimony as in:

Alif

Lam

Mim

I insist that you are
a replica of me,
and I of you:
only separated by our understanding of paradise.

I believe They are greedy for the afterlife,
therefore,
they make a hell of life.

Commentary:

Dubbed the “poet of the country” (شاعر البلاد), Sghaier Ouled Ahmed (1955–2016) celebrated his love of Tunisia throughout his poetic oeuvre. His work was censored under the regimes of both Habib Bourguiba (1956–1987) and Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali (1987–2011) and he was banned from media. In 1984, his poem “Song of the Six Days” (نشيد الأيام الستة), in which he chronicles the violent events of the Bread Uprising, was censored and the poet was incarcerated. His poetry became available after the 2011 revolution and he emerged as the most prominent poet of dissent. He bestowed upon himself the title of the “poetic leader of the Revolution” and pursued his poetic activism against all types of regimentation and control. He was a vehement opponent of religious fundamentalism and launched a fierce attack on religious strictures and all the custodians of Islam.

“Standing” (1989) and “The Ninth Floor Again: The Military Hospital” (2015) appeared in his volume of poetry *Muswaddat Watan (Draft of a Homeland, 2015)*¹, a collection of poetry that gathers old and new poems. Despite the lapse of several years, the two poems offer stylistic and thematic reverberations. Both raise issues of death and religion.

“Standing” offers a significant testimony. His claim in the first stanza that he has “nothing to say” unfolds in a flow of words that destabilizes the seeming immobility of his posture. Standing is an act of resistance as he witnesses and reports the maladies of his country. While the first stanza describes his loneliness in carrying the responsibility of testimony, the last one presents death as the ultimate destiny of his poetry. Death as related to his poetic production is a compulsive image in Ouled Ahmed’s early work. Because of censorship, his poetry was doomed to die as soon as it was produced.

“The Ninth Floor Again: The Military Hospital” was written a few months before he passed away. Death is interpolated in this poem in a different way: it is more a celebration than a

¹ *Muswaddat Watan*. Tunis: Al-dar al-Arabiyyah Lilkitab, 2015 (“Maqam al-Wuquf” [Standing], pp. 255–59; “Al-Tabiq al-tasi’ Mujaddadan” [The Ninth Floor Again], pp. 305–07).

mourning of his poetry. His relentless critique of the abuse of religion by those who appointed themselves “the ministers of God” brought upon him the wrath of religious zealots and he was pronounced an infidel. Even though expressing a sarcastic attitude towards fanatics, the end of the poem expresses Ouled Ahmed’s belief that fundamentalism is not inherent to religion, but rather to specific factions.

A seeming simplicity defines Ouled Ahmed’s poetry. The fluidity of his language and especially his rhyming lines are quite difficult to render in translation. In “The Ninth Floor Again,” I managed to create a rhyme scheme only in the first two stanzas. This musicality is essential in recreating the celebratory atmosphere of the whole poem, which is remarkable given that it was written on the poet’s deathbed.

What makes the two poems challenging in terms of translation is the density of cultural and historical allusions. In “The Ninth Floor Again,” for instance, the poet inserts towards the end of the poem “al-Mughira” without the least explanation, which obfuscates the meaning of the whole stanza. That is why I added the word “testimony” based on my knowledge of al-Mughira’s story. In fact, the poet refers to Walid Ben al-Mughira, renowned for his strong command of the Arabic language and his stubborn refusal to convert to Islam. Upon hearing the Koran recited by the Prophet, al-Mughira was impressed by its eloquence and the beauty of its economic style, which Ouled Ahmed exemplifies in his quote of the opening words of surat al-Baqara: the three letters *Alif, Lam, Mim*. I used foreignization as a strategy of translation both at the beginning and the end of this stanza. I kept the word *qāri* (Quran reciter, قارئ القرآن), for the palimpsestic nature of translation is sometimes challenged by some words that resist erasure.

Unless the reader is well versed in Islamic culture, several religious references and allusions are lost in translation. “Standing” offers pertinent examples of Ouled Ahmed’s subtle critique, often verging on irony, of religious dogmatism. His lines “If our master wills/I shall take it off the way I do with my shoes” refers to the practice of taking off shoes before entering a mosque. Religious zealots, however, seem to take off their “heads” as well. In other words, they obliterate all critical thinking. The poet’s subtle irony and deliberate obfuscation of

meaning are manifest at the threshold of his text: the title. The word *maqam*, in “Maqam al-Wuquf” (مقام الوقوف), offers several meanings: a shrine, a sanctuary, a high position. Stopping at the threshold of the poem to ponder upon meaning comes as an ironic nod to those who put off their shoes, as well as their heads, at the threshold of a mosque. I finally opted to translate the title into “standing” because this word encapsulates the meaning of upright position as well as high status. In the same poem, stanza 7 presents a particularly challenging venture. The original line at the end of the stanza is “tuhlabu fi taasatin min fakhar al-→aqidah” (تحلب في طاسة من فخار العقيدة). The originality of this line resides in the poet’s idiomatic use of the word *fakhar* (clay), reminiscent here of the Tunisian idiom *fakhar bikri* (ancient clay), which means something solid. A literal translation (“a bowl made out of the clay of faith”) would be rather meaningless. My use of “a tough clay bowl of faith” describes better the ossified religious ideas and beliefs.

Tunisian literature is rarely translated into English. This translation emanates from an urge to disseminate Tunisian literary production via Ouled Ahmed’s work. It speaks to the spirit of the poet who strived for long years to see his country free and democratic. The beauty, eloquence, and the dissident impulse in his poetry deserve more attention.

Andrew Gudel

Stopping the Boat Near Xiling Bridge

Tan Yuanchun

近西陵橋邊息舟

The lake and the sky merge seamlessly,
And the constellations are reflected above and below.
Nearby skiffs haven't noticed the dew,
Distant lanterns seem moved by unseen people.
Walking beside the dike among yellow leaves—
On shore it feels like autumn.
It's past when wild geese finish migrating,
A lonely patch of mist lasts until morning.

Reciting Alone

獨吟

I struggle to read the book beside the stand
While a white butterfly circles around the wattled fence.
I look up, as if someone has come—
A single leaf falls in front of the stairs.

Leaving Jiufeng Mountain by Night

夜別九峰

This bright moon calls me back.
But the sound of this spring draws me on.
Even the mountain knows I'm leaving—
But how light the Autumn makes my staff!

Commentary

Tan Yuanchun (1586–1637) was born towards the end of the Ming Dynasty in Jingling (now Tianmen) in China's Hubei Province. A scholar-official, he came in first in his Provincial examination in 1627 and was given a job in the Ministry of Rites. Tan was one of the co-founders of the Jingling School, which rejected using the more formal style, structure and diction of ancient writings as a model, and which emphasized instead creativity, emotion and expressing the writer's personality. He died at the age of 51 as he traveled to Beijing to sit for the national-level examination.

Translating these poems brought both collective and individual challenges. Taken as a group, all three are composed mainly of images, often contrasted in (sometimes rigidly) parallel phrases. For example, the lines “Nearby skiffs haven't noticed the dew/Distant lanterns seem moved by unseen people” both follow the exact same pattern: adjective/noun/modifier/verb/noun. The parallelism is intentional, making it difficult to keep a similar structure without twisting the English syntax into difficult-to-read phrases. For example, the second of those two lines literally reads “distant lanterns as-if have people” and I couldn't translate it without adding words to convey what I felt to be its meaning.

In addition, Chinese poetry is often written with an ambiguous point of view and/or narrator. In fact, with one exception (the word “I” in the line “Even the mountain knows I'm leaving”), a narrator is never actually stated in any of these poems. This meant that in “Reciting Alone,” I was forced to create an “I” to establish a point of view.

There were also translating challenges within each poem. For example, in “Stopping the Boat Near Xiling Bridge,” I was forced to ponder a way to deal with two consecutive words meaning “end/finish” (過盡) in the penultimate line; while the last line of “Leaving Jiufeng Mountain by Night” made sense only by taking a word normally recognized as the number “one” (一) and reading it in a rarely used adverbial form instead.

Source text:

Tan, Yuanchun 譚元春. Tan Yuanchun ji 譚元春集 [The Works of Tan Yuanchun]. Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1998, pp. 201, 275, 285.

Roger Greenwald
Poor Rutebeuf

Rutebeuf / Léo Ferré
Pauvre Rutebeuf

Friends, oh what's become of you,
The ones that I was so close to,
Our love supreme.
They've been too few and far between,
I think they're scattered by the wind:
All love is dead now.
These friends were ones the wind had brought me
And then a gust blew in and taught me
How light they were.

Amid the storm stripping the leaves
Till branches show not even one
That hasn't fallen,
As poverty grinds and assaults me
From every side and tries to maul me
When winter roars,
It's not the time for me to tell you
Exactly how my shame befell me,
That sorry story.

Friends, oh what's become of you,
The ones that I was so close to,
Our love supreme.
They've been too few and far between,
I think they're scattered by the wind:
All love is dead now.
Misfortunes never come alone,
The many stones that fate has thrown
Have all hit home.

Scanty sense and faulty mem'ry
I got from God, the high and mighty,
And paltry wages.
And at my ass the north wind rages,
It rips my rags, it snags my pages.
All love is dead now.
These friends were ones the wind had brought me
And then a gust blew in and taught me
How light they were.

Now I'm hoping for brighter days
And that's my pleasure.

Commentary

In 1955 the French singer-songwriter Léo Ferré released an LP that contained what would become one of the best-known songs in the Francophone world over the following decades. The lyrics consisted of excerpts from two poems by the 13th-century troubadour Rutebeuf that Ferré had combined and adapted into modern French,¹ and the music was of course Ferré's. Ferré called his song "Pauvre Rutebeuf" (Poor Rutebeuf). I met the song for the first time in Ferré's own voice—in a version recorded live in 1957 at a Paris club called Bobino.

Most of the singers who covered this song were French, but two with wide audiences outside France also did so: Joan Baez and Nana Mouskouri. They sang it in French, but their LPs did not supply the French text or an English translation. Some sixty years after the song's first release, I wondered whether it might be possible to translate the lyrics into English in a way that would convey in writing to people who had no French some of the appealing qualities of the lyrics—their tone, their rhythms, their patterns of rhyme and repetition. And it struck me that one way to take aim at that goal would be to try to write a translation that *might* be singable in English to Ferré's music.

Translating song lyrics so they can be sung in the target language to the music written for the source-language text poses all the challenges that translating poetry always entails, plus these special ones: how to match the pattern of syllables in the source text (both their number and their stress pattern); how to match the lengths of vowels; and how at least to avoid mismatches between the characteristic frequencies (i.e., the pitches) of the vowels in the translation and the pitches of the notes in the music. The issue of rhythm and stress is familiar, so I will give examples only of the second and third challenges. (But it is important to remember that in French, a word's final *e* that is silent in speech is most often sounded as an unstressed syllable in singing.)

A singer can of course choose to draw out almost any sound, but a good songwriter knows that some sounds lend

¹ "La Complainte Rutebeuf" and "De la griesche d'yver"

themselves better to such treatment than others. Ferré holds notes longest at the endings of *devenus* and *tenus* in his first two lines. In English, “quit” or “skipped” would be unhappy choices for the first line, since a short vowel cut off by a consonant would be difficult for a singer to extend.

One can hear that spoken vowels have characteristic pitches if one attends to the difference between the sounds of the vowels in, say, “oar” (a “dark” back-vowel) and “peep” (a “bright” front-vowel). (The nearby consonants have an effect on the vowels, but I don’t need to go into that here.) There is a risk of a serious mismatch or an outright clash if, for example, the original song sets a relatively low note to a word with an *aw*-sound and the translator uses a word with an *ee*-sound in that place. Ferré lowers the pitch when he gets to the stressed syllables of *emporte* and *emporta*. An English version translated and sung by Peter Hawkins has “indeed” and “away” in the corresponding positions, thus imposing higher-pitched English vowels on lower-pitched notes written for a dark French vowel.²

Readers with access to the French can judge for themselves the extent to which my version supplies equivalent effects without unduly compromising the tone or the literal sense. I was concerned to reproduce the rhyme pattern (including internal rhyme) as closely as I could without betraying the tone or the naturalness of the diction. I found myself forced to depart from the pattern of the French in the third stanza: the last line in English ends on a near-rhyme (“home”) with the preceding two lines (“alone,” “thrown”) rather than on a rhyme with the first two lines of the stanza (“you,” “to”).

After I’d completed my version, a Web search turned up a couple of literal translations of Ferré’s lyrics that made no attempt to convey the formal qualities of the French. Then I discovered Peter Hawkins’s translation and recording. Hawkins has

² *Love and Anarchy: The Songs of Leo Ferré*, 28 April 2016. Lyrics and audio of Hawkins’s version of “Poor Rutebeuf” are at <https://peterhawkins.bandcamp.com/track/poor-rutebeuf> (accessed 15 May 2017). Ferré recorded the song several times. Of the versions available on line, the one most relevant to this discussion can be heard at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=942qPwPdILI>.

moved some lines around, even shifting which stanzas some of them are in. He hasn't followed the rhyme scheme of the French text closely, but he has devised a rhyme scheme that on paper produces an effect similar to that of the French, and I think his wording has some fine touches (though "Now they are strangers" is rather mild for "L'amour est morte"). However, I find the rhythms problematical. Of the thirty-eight lines in the French, nineteen have feminine endings as sung (that is, they end with ordinarily silent syllables that are pronounced in the singing). I have reproduced that pattern exactly, though in some cases a scansion might mark a final syllable as half-stressed rather than as unstressed (but in singing, the stress would be slight on the last syllable in phrases such as "brought me," "taught me"). Hawkins has only two lines with feminine endings and one that ends with a half-stress ("feast-days").

Since English tends to be iambic, one could claim that stressed final syllables sound more natural to our ears, and I might agree with that in the case of a poem to be *read* (on the page or aloud). But Hawkins's purpose was to make the text singable to the music written for the French, and he misses out on the falling/trailing rhythms at the ends of lines. He also finds himself forced in places to semi-speak a few words quickly to fit them all in as the music goes by. So I find his version less than fully effective for singing, but it's not for me to say that mine would be any better if actually sung. Vocally talented readers are invited to try it out and report on the results!

William Ruleman
Gina

Georg Heym
Gina

All round you the scents of the spacious steppes still blow,
The air of Polish summers, the surge and shiver
Of the wheat fields, when, along the river,
Work gangs shoulder on, huge rafts in tow.

Deep as black autumnal wells that rise
Alone to pierce the early morning's grays,
Such are your eyes, which, with their distant gaze,
Shun narrow streets for starry winter skies.

And you were made to mount a steed wild and free,
Meant for a ride some night when dangers flare,
Your Tschapka shining with gilt finery

While underneath it flows your fine black hair
And bright as silver gleams our weaponry
When the white eagle sails the moonlit air.

William Ruleman
Steamers on the Havel

Georg Heym
Die Dampfer auf der Havel

Wannsee

White bodies of the steamers. Keels that rend
The lakes in widespread furrows red as blood.
A massive sunset. On its rays' bright flood
Quivers music borne here from the wind.

And now the ships' flanks feel the near shorelands
That nudge them on past dark and arching bowers.
The chestnuts shake down all their soft white flowers
Like silver rain on children's waiting hands.

And farther out again. Where twilight lays
Its black wreath round an island wood that lies
Near soft waves striking at a reed bed's maze.

In the west's abyss, as chill as moonlight rise
Smoke columns still, while in a weary daze
The dead process on through pale evening skies.

William Ruleman
I made my landing
on an island where . . .

Georg Heym
Auf einer insel
landete ich . . .

I made my landing on an island where
The summer held its frail and final stand
In autumn's rich domain. And, settling there,
My heart had won at last that magic land
That it had dreamed of on soft nights in spring.

There it found love. And the beech wood's autumn gold
Was the house of love for a host of lovely days.
Yet autumn all too soon would trace with bold,
Triumphant sway the last, secluded ways
Of vanquished summer's quiet lingering.

The summer fled. And conquering autumn came
And broke with coarse, crude hand and storms' rude power
The summer's final refuge. Its every flame
Consumed the forest and shattered the beeches' tower,
Erstwhile dwelling of love and majesty.

The love then died. Once more the boat that bore
Me in the storms and in the dark flood's flow
Comes near to bear me off. Our island's shore
Is soaked in sunset now. But soon its glow
Is gone, and I am lonely on life's sea.

William Ruleman
Both *day* and *evening*
now *began* to seep . . .

Georg Heym
Da sank *der abend*
und der tag . . .

Both day and evening now began to seep
Down through the island's thin and brittle brake.
The sound of ice now faded on the lake,
And all but the wind in the dry reeds slipped toward sleep.

Shades still passed across the crimson blaze,
Racing fast till they, too, disappeared.
The winter land lay mute, alone, and bleared
As twilight cloaked the whole expanse with grays.

You turned around. Before you stood the sight
Of forests already dark. And night quite soon
Came to the icy sky. From the wood, the moon
Now made its way. The cove all round grew bright.

And near and far now blended in one field,
One wall or scene of equal radiance.
The moon's path spanned the ice's wide expanse
With muted gleam, as on an ancient shield.

Commentary

The German Expressionist poet Georg Heym (1887–1912) is most famous for his surreal depictions of the modern city and nightmarish visions of a culture in collapse. While he did not live to see the First World War, scholars tend to agree that his strangest verse foreshadows its horrors.

Heym spent his childhood in Lower Silesia (now Southern Poland). Then, in his thirteenth year, his family moved to Berlin, the city with which he is linked most; and while his more sensational pieces are often inspired by that noisy metropolis, there are a host of others—many of them unfamiliar to English readers—that are set in a more or less peaceful countryside. The poems that I have presented here are of that kind, and they show Heym's more traditional romantic tendencies, as well as his keen and sensitive observations of nature.

To begin with, "Gina" indeed is romantic. Heym raises his subject to the stratum of a warrior's status, imagining her on a raging steed and clad in the type of Polish helmet known as a *Tschapka*. In fact, Heym so ennobles Gina that her presence seems to suffuse the landscape with which he associates her. In this way, she almost attains an otherworldly quality; and it seems fitting that, in my use of "shiver" and "river," I found myself echoing Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott," an earlier poem about a supernatural female.

"Steamers on the Havel," the river where Heym died by drowning in January of 1912, conveys no premonition of his early death, though it does end with an image of the dead processing into the night. Moreover, its air of acceptance, tranquility, and self-effacement—like that of the English Romantic Keats, say, at the end of "To Autumn"—confirms the view that Heym (even more so than that earlier poet) was "half in love with easeful Death."

With its transition from late summer to autumn, "I Made My Landing on an Island Where . . ." also hints of Keats's poem, though the suggestion of a love that has ended and left the speaker "lonely on life's sea"—hence solitary in a turbulent realm removed from the island's ephemeral haven—makes for an ending that is more disquieting. And, if the boat that comes

to bear him off reminds one of Charon's craft on the Styx in Hades (a river that figures in another poem by Heym), the implication is that life in the ordinary human world is hell—an idea supported by the fact of the young dreamer's disdain for any mundane career.

Finally, the last poem here also contains echoes. Reminded of Georg Trakl's "Dämmerung" ("Twilight"), I deliberately changed "shadows" to "shades" in line five. My use of "bleared" in line seven was less intentional; but on adopting it, I thought right away of a line in Thomas Hardy's "The Convergence of the Twain" (1912), which was based on the sinking of the *Titanic*. Then I recalled that Heym drowned roughly three months before the *Titanic* sank, and this last piece began to seem incredibly (and eerily) prophetic.

Source texts:

Heym, Georg. "Auf einer Insel landete ich ..." http://gedichte.xbib.de/Heym_gedicht_Auf+einer+Insel+landete+ich....htm.

—. "Da Sank der Abend und der Tag ..." http://gedichte.xbib.de/Heym_gedicht_Da+sank+der+Abend+und+der+Tag....htm.

—. "Die Dampfer auf der Havel." *Gesammelte Gedichte*, edited by Carl Seelig, Verlag der Arche, 1947, p. 168.

—. "Gina." *Gesammelte Gedichte*, edited by Carl Seelig, Verlag der Arche, 1947, p. 176.

Carol Hayes and Rina Kikuchi
Untitled Nonsense

Yoshihara Sachiko
無題

wind blowing
tree standing
ah on a night like this you're standing there aren't you tree

wind blowing tree standing a sound

late in the night alone in my bathroom
soap foam like a crab blowing bubbles bitter play
lukewarm bathwater

slug creeping
over the wet towel in the bathroom
ah on a night like this you're creeping aren't you slug
I'll cover you in salt
then you disappear but you're still here

is fear
existing
non-existing - I wonder

again spring arrives again the wind blows

I am the salted slug I don't exist
I exist nowhere

I seem buried in soap foam washed away

ah a night like this

Carol Hayes and Rina Kikuchi
She

Yoshihara Sachiko
あのひと

she	was living
she	was there
just yesterday	until just yesterday
she was there	she was laughing

she	was living
mackerel in miso	soy simmered pumpkin
yummy	yummy, she said
she was there	she was eating

just yesterday	eighty years ago
she	was a girl
the pencil	she sharpened
the swing	she swung

just yesterday	three years ago
she	was a girl
in an angelic	delicate voice
she sang	“chasing rabbits”

every time she saw	my dimples
cutie	cutie, she said
reaching out	her warm palm
squeezing tight	she held my hand

the flowers
the shoji screens
the juggling balls
the fallen leaves

she grew
she mended
she made
she burnt

the comb
the futon
the letters
the paths

she used
she slept in
she wrote
she walked

the sunsets
the sounds of the sea
the loves
she
she

she saw
she heard
she remembered
was living
was living

Carol Hayes and Rina Kikuchi
Contradictions

Yoshihara Sachiko
むじゅん

Snow-covered mountains dyed red in the distant sunset
Wild birds motionless on each rock of the luminous river bank
Two little children sing in pure soprano
I will soon go to my death
I suffer the world as beautiful as this

*

Weekend fireworks blossom in the distant night sky
A fragment of stone pierces the soft throat of a child
Black snow falls on black sea
I will soon go to my death
I suffer if the future is not beautiful!

Commentary

Yoshihara Sachiko 吉原幸子 (1932-2002) was born in Tokyo and studied French literature at Tokyo University, graduating in 1956. Very active in theatre while at university, she became a member of the famed *Gekidanshiki* (The Shiki Theatre Company) after graduation. She came to poetry later in life, publishing her first collection *Yōnen rentō* (幼年連禱: *Childhood Litany*) in 1964, which won the fourth Murō Saisei Poetry Award in 1974. Her third collection, *Ondine* (オンディーヌ), published in 1972, and the fourth, *Hirugao* (昼顔: *Calystegia Japonica*), published in 1974, are often considered as a pair, winning the forth Takami Jun Award. Her eighth poetry collection, *Hana no moto ni te, haru* (花のもとにて 春: *Under the Blossoms, Spring*), published in 1983, includes poems dedicated to her beloved mother, who passed away at the age of ninety in 1982.

She was a pioneer Japanese feminist poet, who founded *La Mer* magazine together with Shinkawa Kazue (新川和江, b. 1929) which ran for ten years from 1983 to 1993 and helped to launch the careers of many younger female poets. *La Mer* was discontinued due to Yoshihara's ill health. She was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 1994. Her last poetry collection, *Hakkō* (発光: *Bioluminescence*), published with the help of Shinkawa Kazue in 1995, won the third Hagiwara Sakutarō Poetry Award.

Of the poems included here, "Untitled Nonsense" was taken from *Childhood Litany*, "She" from *Under the Blossoms, Spring*, and finally, "Contradictions" from *Bioluminescence*.

In her Japanese writing style, Yoshihara chose very intentionally to use old-style hiragana kyū-kana dzukai (旧仮名遣い) rather than modern hiragana usage, shin-kana dzukai (新仮名遣い). When compared to modern hiragana usage, old-style hiragana usage sounds the same and the meaning does not change. Its main effect is visual, and thus, it is not reflected in our translations. Similarly, the visual impact of "Contradictions," written completely in hiragana, is again lost in the English translation.

Yoshihara drew on the linguistic possibilities available to her in Japanese to create layers of meaning in her work, by using both kanji and furigana superscript. One example is the

title of “Untitled Nonsense.” The original Japanese uses the kanji term *mu-dai* (無題) which translates directly as “no-title,” with the superscript furigana *nansensu* (ナンセンス) written above the kanji. Because *nansensu* is a foreign loan word coming from the English word “nonsense,” katakana script is used. We aimed to capture these two layers in our translated title.

Another interesting title translation issue is in the poem, “She.” In the original Japanese, the title of this poem is *ano hito* (あのひと) which translates directly as “that person.” However, this is a poem dedicated to her ailing mother, and the “that person” is the poet’s mother. In Japanese, the expression *ano hito* does not carry the same sense of distance as “that person” in English. Thus, we have chosen to use “she” as it conveys a more immediate and personal feeling which we feel the original evokes.

Yoshihara intentionally uses single or double spaces between her words and phrases in the original poems, although Japanese sentences do not usually include any such spaces. We have used ten English spaces for each single Japanese space to reflect this structure.

Finally, when we translate we often find ourselves discussing the smaller grammatical elements in the original Japanese and deciding whether or not to include them in the English, as they sometimes add too much emphasis to a particular word, over and beyond the original. For example, in “Contradictions,” Yoshihara uses *no ni* (のに) which is a conjunction that carries a number of meanings, such as “although,” “in spite of,” or “regardless.” In this poem, we argue that the meaning is “regardless” and not “although,” and that if we included it, the translation of Line 4 in both stanzas would become, “Regardless of the fact that I will soon go to my death.” This we feel is too explanatory and places too much emphasis on the interconnection between Lines 4 and 5. As a result we have chosen to leave it to the reader to make that connection.

Translators’ Notes: *She*

Chasing rabbits: This is the beginning of the well-known Japanese song, “Furusato” (ふるさ), which means “home country.”

Source texts:

Yoshihara, Sachiko. 無題 ("Untitled Nonsense"). *Yoshihara Sachiko Zenshi*, vol. 1, Shichosha, 1981, pp. 22–23.

—. あのひと ("She"). *Yoshihara Sachiko Zenshi*, vol. 3, Shichosha, 2012, pp. 94–96.

—. むじゅん ("Contradictions"). *Yoshihara Sachiko Zenshi*, vol. 3, Shichosha, 2012, pp. 350–51.

Housseem Ben Lazreg
In Jerusalem

Tamim Al-Barghouti
في القدس

We passed by the home of the beloved
but the enemy's laws and wall turned us away
I said to myself, "Maybe, that is a blessing"
What will you see in Jerusalem when you visit?
You will see all that you can't stand
when her houses become visible from all sides
When meeting her beloved, not every soul rejoices
Nor does every absence harm
If they are delighted when meeting before departure
such joy cannot remain kindled
For once your eyes have seen Jerusalem
You will only see her, wherever you look.

In Jerusalem, a greengrocer from Georgia,
annoyed with his wife,
thinks of going on vacation or painting his house
In Jerusalem, a middle-aged man from Upper Manhattan
holds a Torah and teaches Polish boys its commandments
In Jerusalem, an Ethiopian policeman
seals off a street in the marketplace,
A machine gun hangs from the shoulder of a teenage settler,
A person wearing a yarmulke¹
bows at the Wailing Wall,²
Blonde European tourists who don't see Jerusalem at all
but spend most of the time taking pictures of each other

¹ A skullcap worn in public by Orthodox Jewish men or during prayer by other Jewish men.

² A place of prayer and pilgrimage sacred to the Jewish people.

beside a Palestinian woman selling radishes in public squares all day long
In Jerusalem, there are walls of basil
In Jerusalem, there are barricades of concrete
In Jerusalem, the soldiers marched with heavy boots over the clouds
In Jerusalem, we were forced to pray on the asphalt
In Jerusalem, everyone is there but you.

And History turned to me and smiled:
“Have you really thought that you would overlook them
and see others?
Here they are in front of you;
They are the text while you are the footnote and margin
O son, have you thought that your visit would remove, from the city’s face,
the thick veil of her present, so that you may see what you desire?
In Jerusalem, everyone is there but you.

Jerusalem is the wandering deer
As fate sentenced it to departure
You still chase her since she bid you farewell
O son, calm down for a while, I see that you began to faint”
In Jerusalem, everyone is there but you.

O historian, wait,
The city has two timelines:
One foreign, serene, with steady steps as if it is walking asleep
The other wears a mask and walks secretly with caution
And Jerusalem knows herself,
Ask the people there, everyone will guide you
Everything in the city
has a tongue which, when you ask, will reply

In Jerusalem, the crescent becomes more curved like an embryo
Bending towards other crescents over the domes
And over the years, their relation developed to be like a father to a son

In Jerusalem, the stones of the buildings are quoted from the Bible and the
Quran

In Jerusalem, beauty is octagonal and blue
On top of it, lies a golden dome³
that looks like, I think, a convex mirror
Reflecting the face of the heavens
Playing with it, drawing it near
Distributing the sky, like aid in a siege for those in need
If people appeal to God after Friday sermon

In Jerusalem, the sky is shared by everyone,
We protect it and it protects us
And we carry it on our shoulders
If time oppresses its moons.

In Jerusalem, the marble columns are dark
as though their veins were smoke
Windows, high in mosques and churches,
took dawn by hand, showing him how to paint with colors
He says, “like this”
but the windows reply, “no, like this”
And after long debate, they compromise
as the dawn is free when outside the threshold
But if he wants to enter through God’s Windows
He has to abide by their rules

In Jerusalem there’s a school built by a Mameluke⁴ who came from beyond
the river,
was sold at a slave market in Isfahan

³ The most famous Islamic site in Jerusalem is the Dome of the Rock (*Qubbat as-Sakhrah*). A beautiful edifice, the Dome of the Rock can be seen from all over Jerusalem.

⁴ A member of a military class, originally composed of slaves, that seized control of the Egyptian sultanate in 1250, ruled until 1517, and remained powerful until crushed by Egyptian ruler Muhammad Ali in 1811.

to a merchant from Baghdad, who traveled to Aleppo,
and gave the Mameluke to Aleppo's Prince
Fearing the blueness in the Mameluke's left eye,
the Prince gave him to a caravan heading for Egypt
where soon, he became the vanquisher of the Moguls and the Sovereign Sultan

In Jerusalem, the scent of Babylon and India
are at an herbalist's shop in Khan El Zeit⁵
I swear, it is a scent with a language that you will understand if you listen;
It says to me
when tear gas canisters are being fired
"Don't worry"
And as the gas wanes, that scent fills the air again and says:
"You see?"

In Jerusalem, contradictions get along, and wonders cannot be denied
People check them out like pieces of old and new fabric
and miracles there are tangible.

In Jerusalem, if you shake hands with an old man or touch a building
you will find, engraved on your palm, my friend, a poem or two

In Jerusalem, despite successive calamities
a breeze of innocence and childhood fills the air
And you can see doves fly high
announcing, between two shots, the birth of an independent state

In Jerusalem, the rows of graves
are the lines of the city's history while the book is the soil
Everyone has passed through
For Jerusalem welcomes all visitors, whether disbelievers or believers

⁵ *Khan el Zeit* is the busiest, most colorful shopping street in the Old City of Jerusalem. It has a popular market where spices, dried fruit, herbs, coffee, and pastries are sold.

Walk through, and read the headstones in all languages
You will find the Africans, the Europeans, the Kipchaks, the Slavs, the Bosniaks,
the Tatars, the Turks, the believers, the disbelievers,
the poor and the rich, the hermits, and the miscreants
Here lie all sorts of people that ever walked the earth
They were the footnotes of the book, now they are the main text before us.

Is it just for us that the city has become too small?
Oh chronicler! What made you exclude us?
Re-write and think again, for I see that you made a grave mistake

The eyes close, then look again
The driver of the yellow car heads north, away from the city's gates.
And now Jerusalem is behind us
I could glance at her through the right wing-mirror
Her colors have changed before the sunset
Then, a smile sneaked onto my face
and said to me when I looked close and careful,
"Oh you who weep behind the wall, are you a fool?
Have you lost your mind?
Do not weep because you were excluded from the main text
O Arab, do not weep, and know for sure
that whomever is in Jerusalem
It is only you I see."

Commentary

Tamim Al-Barghouti is a famous Palestinian poet, columnist and political scientist. He is one of the most widely read poets in the Arab World. In 2011, Barghouti won the prize “Prince of Poets” in a TV competition. Tamim’s charisma, literary virtuosity, and political engagement captured the imagination of a wide Arab audience. He was a visiting professor of politics at Georgetown University in Washington DC from 2008 till 2011, and is currently a Consultant to the United Nations Economic and Social Committee for West Asia. He has published six poetry collections in both colloquial and classical Arabic, *Al-Manzar* (The Scene), 2000, *Maqam Iraq* (The Iraqi Ode), 2005, *Fil Quds* (In Jerusalem), 2008, and *Ya Masr Hanet* (Oh Egypt, It’s Close), 2012, and two academic books on Arab politics and history (*Benign Nationalism: Nation State Building Under Occupation, the Case of Egypt*; and *The Umma and the Dawla: The Nation State and the Arab Middle East*).

This poem is a diary of Tamim’s last visit to the occupied capital of his homeland. It is marked by a sad atmosphere through the allusions to the occupation soldiers, the illegal settlers, and the apartheid walls. It is a literary reportage from Jerusalem, broadcasted according to what the poet’s eyes witnessed. Nevertheless, the poem ends with a cheerful and optimistic tone. Thematically, the first part of the poem provides a realistic picture of Jerusalem, in which the poet highlights the different segments of the occupation forces such as the vegetable seller, the religious people, the Ethiopian policeman (Flasha Jews), and the armed settlers. However, in that same city, Muslims are prevented from praying in the Al-Aqsa Mosque, so they pray on the ground. The poem moves to another theme using wonderful rhetorical expressions and the poet converses with the history that was written with an impartial stance. This dialogue is characterized by a long description of Jerusalem, in which the poet describes the multiple identity of the city (Islamic, Christian and Jewish facets), and ends with an inclusive portrayal of all the nations and peoples that settled in Jerusalem.

This poem posits some challenges when translating it to English, notably on the stylistic and cultural level. On the stylistic level, the poet uses a hybrid poetic style that mixes Arabic classical prosody and free verse. In translating, I rendered the whole poem in free verse for two reasons: on the one hand, I would like to put the emphasis on the narrative aspect of the poem and the main theme (the visit to Jerusalem). On the other hand, I found it extremely challenging to preserve the rhymes of the source text as this poem is meant to be performed.

On the cultural level, there are many references that are culture-specific, such as the yarmulke, the Wailing Wall, the Golden Dome, *Mameluke*, and *Khan El Zeit*. I added footnotes that would help a non-Arab audience to grasp the meaning and connotation of these references. Some of them are religious and are linked to the Jewish tradition (the yarmulke and the Wailing Wall), others are Islamic such as the Golden Dome. *Mameluke*, as a historical reference, means literally slave soldier, a member of one of the armies of slaves that controlled politically and militarily several Muslim states during the middle Ages. Under the Ayyubid sultanate, Mameluke generals used their power to establish a dynasty that ruled Egypt and Syria from 1250 to 1517. They managed to win the Battle of Ain Jalut, thus preventing the Mongols from occupying more lands.

Overall, my translation is marked by both processes of domestication on the stylistic level, and foreignization on the cultural level.

The source text may be found at: <http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=76853>

Ranald Barnicot
To Fabullus (Invitation)

Gaius Valerius Catullus
XIII

Fabullus, you'll dine well within a
Week *chez moi*, gods willing,
But make sure you bring a dinner
Ample, tasty, filling.
Also you'll need to contribute
Laughs (the lot!), salt wit and wine,
A girl – mind! – radiantly cute.
Bring these, my charmer, and you'll dine
Well, I say, because yours truly
Has a purse that's cobweb-packed,
But you'll be requited duly:
Pure love's my part in this compact,
Or what's even more becoming:
For I'll present you with a perfume
Of a power suave and cunning,
My sweet girl's gift from love-gods, whom
(Venuses, Cupids, such as those)
You'll petition to metamorphose
You into nothing else but nose.

Commentary

According to St Jerome (mid fourth century to early fifth century CE) Gaius Valerius Catullus was born in Verona in 87 BCE and died at the age of 30 in 58–7 BCE. However, given internal evidence in the poems, this end-date cannot be right, so many scholars have brought the birth-year forward by three years and made it 84 BCE. At any rate, it is the tradition that Catullus died as a relatively young man. His father appears to have been on friendly terms with Julius Caesar, whom, however, Catullus was to lampoon in a number of poems, together with Pompey and their associates. Plutarch tells us that they were reconciled just before Catullus's death, and this is borne out by Catullus's reference to Caesar's conquests in Poem XI.

Catullus was a poet of great wit, power and range (both in theme and in meter). He wrote poems celebrating friendship, mourning his brother, attacking enemies quite viciously and scabrously, recounting Greek legends and expressing his love, at first tender, later bitter and tormented, for his faithless lover, Lesbia, who was probably—though this also is disputed—Clodia Metelli, the wife and later widow of the soldier and politician Metellus Celer.

Poem XIII is both an expression of warm, relaxed, light-hearted affection for a friend, and also, it seems, a love-poem to Lesbia, who is not mentioned by name. Another attractive feature is the poet's ability to laugh at himself (whether we should accept his protestations of penury at face value has been debated). The verse is also elegant and with its several slick elisions—the slurring of final syllables of words that end with a vowel or an *-m* before a following word that begins with a vowel—moves quickly and smoothly towards its conclusion. One has to be careful with this conclusion. Catullus's invitation to Fabullus to imagine himself as nothing but a huge nose may come across as comic and grotesque—see below for the possible sexual interpretation—but I also tried to convey the lyricism. (Also, here's a slight departure from the original. In this Fabullus will make his prayer to the gods in general; in my version he prays to the love-gods who had donated the perfume, although that was no doubt the implication Catullus intended.) Moreover, please note that

“Venuses and Cupids” are to be conceived as a plurality of spirits, emanations from those two deities. There are parallels in some of his other poems such as III and LXXXVIII.

Latin verse is based on quantity (length of syllable) rather than syllable-stress as in English. The verse form in the original is the hendecasyllable, which employs a combination of trochees (long – short), spondees (long – long), with the second foot being a dactyl (long – short – short). To use the same meter in English seemed unnatural and ineffective, so I decided to use short rhyming lines (four quatrains with a concluding tercet), stress-based, rather traditional in style but I hope not archaic. The meters I use are a combination of iambic and trochaic, with two or three dactyls (depending on how line 17 is analysed) thrown in. The number of feet per line varies between three and four. Some lines are catalectic, i.e. with an extra syllable tagged on to the end. This approach may strike some as technical inconsistency, even ineptitude, but I feel it lends my verse a certain unpredictability, which I find attractive. Anyway, in a world drowning in free verse, why should one worry about some slight metrical inconsistency, which at least offsets the rigidity of the rhyme scheme?

This is as follows: ABAB CDCD EFEF GHGH III. It should, hopefully, read like an extended Shakespearian sonnet, though with shorter lines. I like the concluding three rhymes, though some might find them clunky. It is all a matter of ear. Line 18 was inserted to make clear which gods were to be petitioned (see above). “Contribute,” ending line 5, may, according to the dictionary, receive its main stress either on the penultimate or ante-penultimate syllable. The latter, with a secondary stress on the final syllable, gives a smoother rhyme with “cute,” and that’s what I intended.

As to the structure and interpretation of Catullus XIII, Helm (1981) finds it an example of humour *para prosdokian* (Greek), or “contrary to expectation.” There are three jokes: Catullus invites Fabullus to dinner ... but Fabullus must provide the dinner; Catullus’s purse is full ... of cobwebs; the exquisite perfume that Lesbia will provide will, if Fabullus’s prayers are granted, turn him into ... a huge nose!

Is this invitation poem really a bona fide invitation or just a parody of a common classical sub-genre? Many scholars are confident in proposing the latter, e.g.:

“It can be seen that the poem is only nominally addressed to Fabullus; in reality its central purpose is to compliment Lesbia” (Vessey, 1971).

I am not so sure of this. The affectionate tone (and in many poems Catullus shows great affection to his friends) half-persuades me that Catullus is truly addressing him. The situation described is also not that far-fetched. As a modern analogy, I can imagine the modern equivalent of one friend inviting another round for a meal providing he/she stops off at a Chinese takeaway on the way. It happens!

Next, I want to deal with the “revisionist” (term employed by Witke, 1980) sexual interpretation of this poem. Is the nose in fact a penis? Martin (1992) suggests this:

“That transformation is explicitly an erotic one; part of the reason why the poem is so funny is that we recognize in the concentration of Fabullus’s sensuality into a single, enlarged organ, an erection of the nose.”

Going along with this interpretation, if we may, for the time being, what excites the erection? Here is Littman’s (1977) suggestion:

“I suggest that ‘unguentum’ refers to Lesbia’s vaginal secretions which sexual excitement causes to flow.”

And:

“The air of innocence now fades, and the poem becomes concrete, earthy and sensual, like many of Catullus’s other poems.”

And again:

“Whether or not the invitation to dinner is real, Catullus offers Fabullus Lesbia’s genitals to smell. This suggests that since Catullus offers her genitals, he offers the girl,”

I find it quite easy to accept the association of nose with penis; it occurs in many cultures. Did Catullus intend it? Certainly, it may account for the discomfort we may feel, and Fabullus may have felt, although to be turned into a nose would in itself be sufficiently grotesque! It is, I think, a *deniable* interpretation. If questioned, Catullus might have said in response: “Oh, I just meant a nose, nothing else!” Nevertheless, whether we are Freudian or not, sex is a place our minds often go, and Catullus was clearly a highly-sexed young man.

With regard to Littman's thesis, it seems much less plausible. Witke advances several arguments against it. The most cogent of them is psychological: given the extremely jealous and possessive attitude Catullus shows towards Lesbia in other poems, Catullus is unlikely to have "offered" her to any of his friends. Another is cultural: the Romans found bodily effusions and secretions disgusting. Nevertheless, his mind may have gone there, whether as writer or as reader of his own poems. My use of the adjective "cunning" to describe the perfume's power to insinuate itself insidiously into the brain may also have subconsciously reflected this association even before I had read of it. Think of the archaic obscenity "cunny" or the modern one that has replaced it.

However, I do not wish to foist this rather Freudian reading onto you without mentioning that there are other interpretations. For example, Vessey (1977) proposes that the *unguentum* is both a physical perfume-ointment, a conventional contribution to Roman dinner-parties, and the ointment of Aphrodite, which confers *kallos* (beauty). Quinn (1973) says something similar, quoting Propertius 2.29.15–18:

"a reference to the idea that a lovely woman, like a goddess, emitted a special characteristic fragrance, which was her *aura*;"

In all events, the reader must beware of claiming to know Catullus's mind. It is to some extent a mystery to us, as it may have been to him. It is quite possible that the poem is susceptible to different interpretations, equally valid if apparently contradictory. Catullus has loosed the perfume and the nose onto the world, and their significance is now beyond his control!

Finally, let me express my own attitude to poetic translation as applied to this poem. Of course, the translator needs to engage with the original and wrestle meaning from the source poet's words and phrases. But I think that there is a margin, narrow or broad, within which the translator can operate and express his or her creativity. This accounts for my deliberate mistranslation of *paucis ... diebus* (in a few days) as "within a / week," which maintains the alliterated w's and is not *too* far from the original. Also, the greater length of my translation, 19 lines as against 14. This is due partly to the looser structure of English compared to the highly compressed Latin, and partly to

a certain *joie de vivre*, if I may say so, which reflects Catullus's own.

The relationship between translator and source poet is like that between dog and owner, out for a walk together: at times, the dog will pad along at the owner's side; at other times, it will be off exploring on its own account until the owner calls it or pulls on the leash. This tension is in itself creative. The worst mistranslation is the one which may be faithful to the original but is bald, prosy and boring.

Source text:

Quinn, Kenneth. *Catullus: The Poems. Edited with Introduction, Revised Text and Commentary*. 2nd ed., Saint Martin's Press, Macmillan Education Ltd. 1973, text of Catullus XIII p. 9, commentary on XIII p. 135.

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Notes on Contributors

Ranald Barnicot lives in Watford, near London, England. He has a B.A. in Classics from Balliol College, Oxford University, and an M.A. in Applied Linguistics from Birkbeck College, London. He retired from a career as EFL/ESL teacher a year ago. He had worked in Spain, Portugal, Italy and the UK. He has published, or is due to publish in the near future, translations from Latin (Catullus, Horace), French (Verlaine, Mallarmé) and Portuguese (Soror Violante do Céu), together with original poems, in the following journals: *Priapus*, *Acumen*, *Brooklyn Rail In Translation*, *The Rotary Dial*, *Sentinel*, *Ezra*, *Metamorphoses*, *The French Literary Review*, *Poetry Salzburg* and *Stand*. Apart from the three languages mentioned above, he has also translated from the following: Ancient Greek, Spanish and Italian.

In addition to *Hence this cradle* (Seismicity Editions, 2007), **Ann Cefola**'s translations of Hélène Sanguinetti's work have appeared in journals such as *eleven eleven*, *Exchanges*, and *Inventory*. She has won a Witter Bynner Poetry Translation Residency and the Robert Penn Warren Award judged by John Ashbery. Her latest work is *Free Ferry* (Upper Hand Press, 2017). For more on Ann, visit www.anncefol.com.

Gregory Divers is Professor Emeritus of German at Saint Louis University.

Patrick Donnelly is the author of four books of poetry: *The Charge* (Ausable Press, 2003, since 2009 part of Copper Canyon Press), *Nocturnes of the Brothel of Ruin* (Four Way Books, 2012), a 2013 finalist for the Lambda Literary Award, *Jesus Said* (a chapbook from Orison Books, 2017), and *Little-Known Operas*, forthcoming from Four Way Books in 2019. He is director of the Poetry Seminar at The Frost Place, Robert Frost's old homestead in Franconia, NH, now a center for poetry and the arts. He is also a current associate editor of *Poetry International*, and teaches at Smith College. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in many journals, including *The Kenyon Review Online*, *American Poetry Review*, *Ploughshares*, *The*

Yale Review, and *The Virginia Quarterly Review*. His awards include a U.S./Japan Creative Artists Program Award, an Artist Fellowship from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Margaret Bridgman Fellowship in Poetry from the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, and a 2018 Amy Clampitt Residency Award.

Hager Ben Driss is Assistant Professor at the University of Tunis. She teaches Anglophone literature and her research addresses mainly gender and postcolonial studies. She is director of the research group Gender Studies (Laboratory of Philosophy, University of Tunis). She has published several articles on Tunisian and Arab literature as well as Anglophone literature. She is keen on working on the work of the late Tunisian poet Sghaier Ouled Ahmed and has published an article on his life and work in *The Literary Encyclopedia*. Ben Driss is the editor of *Knowledge: Trans/Formations* (Sahar, 2013) and *Women, Violence, and Resistance* (Arabesque, 2017).

Roger Greenwald attended The City College of New York and the Poetry Project workshop at St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, then completed graduate degrees at the University of Toronto. He has won two CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) Literary Awards (poetry and travel literature) and has published two books of poems: *Connecting Flight* and *Slow Mountain Train*. He has collaborated on translations from French and Italian, but most of his solo translations have been of Scandinavian poetry. *North in the World: Selected Poems of Rolf Jacobsen* won the Lewis Galantière Award (American Translators Association); *Through Naked Branches: Selected Poems of Tarjei Vesaas* was a finalist for the PEN Award for Poetry in Translation; and *Guarding the Air: Selected Poems of Gunnar Harding* won the Harold Morton Landon Translation Award (Academy of American Poets). He has also translated the novel *A Story about Mr. Silberstein*, by the well-known actor and writer Erland Josephson.

Andrew Gudgel received a B.A. in Chinese from The Ohio State University and an M.A. in Liberal Arts from St. John's College, Annapolis. He spent a decade-plus working for the U.S. government, mostly in U.S. embassies overseas, before becom-

ing a freelance writer and translator. He is currently a graduate student at Johns Hopkins University.

Carol Hayes is an ANU Distinguished Educator and an Associate Professor in Japanese language and Japanese studies and Associate Dean of Student Experience in the College of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University, Australia. She has a Ph.D. in modern Japanese literature from the University of Sydney. Her research focuses on modern and contemporary Japanese cultural studies, literature and film. Her current research focuses on Japanese women's poetry, poetry of pilgrimage and Japan/Australia cultural relations over the last 100 years.

Rina Kikuchi is an associate professor at Shiga University, Japan. She has a Ph.D. in contemporary Irish poetry from Chiba University, for which her study included a year of research at Trinity College, Dublin. At present, she is a visiting fellow at the Australian National University and University of Canberra, undertaking her research on modern and contemporary Japanese women's poetry. Her bilingual anthology, *Poet to Poet: Contemporary Women Poets from Japan* was published in September 2017 by Recent Work Press (co-edited with poet Jen Crawford). She hosted a bilingual poetry reading at Poetry on the Move Festival 2017 in Canberra with a focus on Japanese women poets.

Ann Lauinger's two books of poetry are *Against Butterflies* (Little Red Tree Publishing, 2013) and *Persuasions of Fall* (University of Utah Press, 2004), winner of the Agha Shahid Ali Prize in Poetry. Her poems have appeared in anthologies, in journals including *Angle*, *The Cumberland River Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *Parnassus*, and *The Southern Poetry Review*, and on Poetry Daily and Verse Daily. A member of the literature faculty at Sarah Lawrence College and of the Slapering Hol Press Advisory Committee, she lives in Ossining, NY.

Housseem Ben Lazreg is currently a Ph.D. candidate, a translator, and a teaching assistant of French in the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies at the University of Alberta in Canada. He was a Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant of Arabic at Michigan State University from

2010–2011. He holds a Master of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) from Nazareth College of Rochester. He has also taught Arabic and French at different American institutions such as West Virginia University and Indiana University in Bloomington. His latest publication is the English translation of two poems by the famous Tunisian poet Mohamed Sghaïer Ouled Ahmed. His research interests include politics and translation, Middle Eastern graphic novels, and Islamist militant movements.

Stephen D. Miller, associate professor of Japanese language and literature at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, is author of *The Wind from Vulture Peak: The Buddhification of Japanese Waka in the Heian Period* (Cornell East Asia Series, 2013), which includes co-translations of Japanese Buddhist poems with Patrick Donnelly. The *Vulture Peak* translations were awarded the 2015-2016 Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission Prize for the Translation of Japanese Literature, from the Donald Keene Center of Japanese Culture at Columbia University. Miller is translator of *A Pilgrim's Guide to Forty-Six Temples* (Weatherhill Inc., 1990), and editor of *Partings at Dawn: An Anthology of Japanese Gay Literature* (Gay Sunshine Press, 1996). Miller lived in Japan for nine years between 1980 and 1999, in part as the recipient of two Japan Foundation fellowships for research abroad.

William Ruleman is Professor of English at Tennessee Wesleyan University. His most recent books include his translations of Hermann Hesse's *Early Poems* (Cedar Springs Books, 2017) and of Stefan Zweig's unfinished novel *Clarissa* (Ariadne Press, 2017).

Nina Youkhanna is an independent scholar who recently acquired her M.A. from the Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto. She is a novice translator and a longtime lover of modern and post-modern Arabic poetry. Her academic interests are largely focused on Syrian theatre, particularly the satirical plays of Mohammad al-Maghut. She hopes to continue her academic career by pursuing a Ph.D. in the near future. This is her first published poetic translation.

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