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Foreword

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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