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Foreword

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“You will be guardian and vestal virgin
of the speck of light
dispensed to your species”

—“The Shoulders and the Burden”

by Abdellatif Laâbi, translated by
Allan Johnston and Guillemette Johnston

Once again it is our privilege to offer you a unique assemblage of experiences and perspectives distilled first into one language and then carried over into English. The time span of the poems appearing here ranges from that of ancient Rome (Martial, translated by George Held) to the contemporary (Ramy Al-Asheq, translated by Levi Thompson).

In all cases, they present intriguing illustrations of translation challenges and techniques. In Nina Youkhanna’s translation of Mohamed Fouad’s “An Axe Falling on a Blind Statue,” for example, she opts to privilege the lexical values of the original text, by which process she was freed from “forcing the translation into a distinctly English mold.” Sharon Fish Mooney uses form and meter in her rendering of Jules Breton’s “Autumn.” Louise Stoehr tackles the reproduction of alliteration in her translations of Uwe Kolbe, and Elizabeth Dodd transposes syntactic repetition into sound repetition for Dieurat Clervoyant’s “The Blood of One Heart.”

It goes without saying that poetic translation is intrinsically problematic—some would say impossible—yet the English poems featured here all succeed as poems in their own right, and all demonstrate creativity, boldness, a flair for what works, and respect for the original text. We invite you to discover the grandmother with an extinguished eye (Ben Driss/Fethi); the cold cicadas of autumn (Andrew Gudel/Yao Nai), the surreal high security ward (Kathryn Kimball/Linda Maria Baros), the crow with “filthy feet” “preening like a dandy” (Erik R. Lofgren/Umezaki Haruo) and the storyteller’s vivid picture show depicting “a woman just like sake—Bursting free” (Leanne Ogasawara/Takamura Kōtarō), just to name a few of the literary excursions in these pages.

The contents here also provide a rich *mise en scène* of widely distinctive poet persona figures. Whether adolescent or aged, courtly performer or dissident, lover of Mozart or simply a lover, they share their truths with us across the boundaries of space and time. We hope you enjoy this eye-opening collection that illustrates the confluence and divergence of language intersections, the art of imagistic and sonorous representations, and the layering of meaning upon meaning.

Molly Lynde-Recchia, Editor-in-Chief