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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 po-
ems appearing here ranges from that of ancient Rome (Mar-
tial, translated by George Held) to the contemporary (Ramy Al-
Asheq, translated by Levi Thompson).

In all cases, they present intriguing illustrations of trans-
lation challenges and techniques. In Nina Youkhanna’s transla-
tion of Mohamed Fouad’s “An Axe Falling on a Blind Statue,”
for example, she opts to privilege the lexical values of the origi-
nal text, by which process she was freed from “forcing the trans-
lation 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 syn-
tactic repetition into sound repetition for Dieurat Clervoyant’s
“The Blood of One Heart.”

It goes without saying that poetic translation is intrinsi-
cally 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 Gudgel/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 de-
picting “a woman just like sake—Bursting free” (Leanne Oga-
sawara/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