

2020

Foreword

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“The artist in each one of us potentially ‘awakens’ elusive thoughts and ideas beyond the pale of day-to-day awareness.”

—Paul Robbert

“[T]here’s nothing to see, except those who have come to watch the festival.”

—“The Zhongyuan Festival at West Lake”

by Zhang Dai, translated by Andrew Gudel

It seems appropriate to start out this special issue on vision/seeing with the quote from artist Paul Robbert and the first line from Gudel’s translation of Zhang Dai, with its insistence on the fact that it isn’t the festival itself but the show provided by those who come to watch it that creates the real spectacle. The idea of vision/seeing as a special theme for this year’s issue was inspired by the simple pun on the year 2020, as in 20/20 vision.

We invited a wider variety of contributions for this issue, including poems in English that take their point of departure from a work in the source language rather than directly translating it (such as James Fowler’s “At the Villa” and John Savoie’s “Persistence of Memory”). This issue also includes two lengthier essays, which, in a fortuitous coincidence, both discuss work by the poet Abdellatif Laâbi to different degrees: Mike Baynham’s essay on *agence*ment includes a discussion of the impact of Laâbi’s French translation of Abdallah Zrika on his own English Zrika translation, and Allan and Guillemette Johnston analyze the complex notion of the double in the essay accompanying their translation of part I of Laâbi’s “My Dear Double.” Another fortuitous coincidence is the presence of translations of three Baudelaire poems: two by Arnold Johnston (including “Invitation au voyage,” which Baynham mentions in his essay) and a third by Sharon Fish Mooney. (As an aside, and as we close this pandemic year, it is interesting to be reminded of Baudelaire’s revolutionary notion that one can make a beautiful poem about an object that is inherently repulsive.)

The thematic of vision/seeing is explicitly addressed in some of the poems and commentary included here. For exam-

ple, Susan McLean observes that “Rilke uses the outward details of the appearance of things to unlock their emotional resonances.” Marilya Veteto Reese’s opening translation of Safiye Can’s “Alas” begins, “In the far distance / beneath the starry skies / we both were free / in different countries and cities / the firmament / a bond for both.” In her discussion of Feng Zhi’s sonnets, Emily Goedde asks “How does a frame help us see?” and points out that “[t]ranslation ... shifts between frames.” Mooney presents ekphrasis as “a type of translation, transposing the ‘language’ of the visual arts into the written language of poetry” and sees her English translation as “another ekphrastic layer.” And Michael Zhai presents us with two visuals—the Chinese characters of Du Fu’s original poem and an image of the mountain they describe—inviting us to create our own vision and rendering of the source poem before offering his own.

It goes without saying that every act of translation can be implicitly understood as another way of seeing the original poem. In the wider sense, is not every physical act of seeing an act of translating the real into our consciousness? The creative self then “awakens’ elusive thoughts and ideas,” bringing into being what was previously unperceived. We hope you will enjoy this kaleidoscopic collection of poems and reflections, and that it will stimulate further creative excursions.

It will come as no surprise that due to the pandemic, putting this year’s issue together was a bit more complicated than in the past. One of the results of the pandemic, it seems to me, has been the frequent reminder to practice gratitude whenever possible. I will take that cue to offer my appreciation and thanks to all of the contributors, peer reviewers, colleagues and supporters who make *Transference* possible, with special thanks to Scholarworks librarian Maira Bundza, recently retired from Western Michigan University, and to our typographer Thomas Krol. I am deeply grateful for your creative contributions, your expertise, your patience, and your support for this shared poetic enterprise.

Molly Lynde-Recchia, Editor-in-Chief