2016

Transference Vol. 4, Fall 2016

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/transference/vol4/iss1/1
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ISSN (print): 973-2325-5072
ISSN (online): 2325-5099
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Globe image © Don Hammond/Design Pics/Corbis

We gratefully acknowledge support from Emily Brooks Rowe and from the College of Arts and Sciences at Western Michigan University. We would also like to express our appreciation to Jenaba Duymovic Waggy and to Thomas Krol, Medieval Institute Publications production editor.

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Western Michigan University

This issue was printed by McNaughton and Gunn using Georgia, Segoe Script, MS Mincho, SimSun, and Gabriola fonts.
An Annual Publication of the
Department of World Languages and Literatures
at Western Michigan University

Volume IV

2016
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Foreword

Sometime in the 8th century B.C., Hesiod was shepherding his lambs on the slopes of Mount Helicon when he found the Muses. Or rather, they found him. The nine goddesses “breathed (enepneusan) into me a divine voice, so that I might sing of the future and the past, and they ordered me to hymn the race of the blessed immortals, but to sing always of themselves first and last” (*Theogony*, lines 31–34). The Greek verb *empneo*, like the Latin *inspiro*, literally means “to breath in,” so the Muses in this passage are literally the goddesses of Inspiration. While we are invited to read Hesiod’s encounter with the Muses as literal, the Muses’ lineage suggests a metaphorical reading as well. The Muses’ mother is Mnemosyne, which in Greek means “Memory.” In Greek mythology there is a distinction between real gods, who are worshipped and have temples dedicated to them, and personifications like “Sleep” and “Strife.” “Memory” is one such personification. What does it mean for the goddesses of Inspiration to be the daughters of Memory? Or for a more readily answerable question, what does it mean for our inspiration to be the product of our memory? “Memory” is a goddess and therefore external, but “memory” is internal, namely the mental faculty for recollection. The Muses are divine, but “inspiration” that is the product of our brain is actually our own human imagination.

Before the Muses “inspire” Hesiod, they say something quite odd: “We know how to speak many believable lies and we know how, when we wish, to utter the truth” (lines 27–28). At the literal level, the Muses order Hesiod to repeat whatever they tell him; he will not know when they are lying or telling the truth. If he tells multiple versions of stories about the gods, as indeed he does, he can blame the Muses for changing their story. At the metaphorical level, however, where inspiration is the spark to poetic creativity in his brain, he is giving free license to his own imagination.

Like the best poetry, the literal and metaphorical do not contradict each other, but provocatively coexist. Anyone who has stared at a blank piece of paper for an hour (or a day or a week) knows that when that “aha!” moment hits and the pencil almost starts to move on its own, the feeling can be an out-of-body experience. Hesiod, at the beginning of the Western literary tradition, perfectly sums up the creative process: a combination of the human imagination and magical inspiration that is beyond ourselves. This passage is profound for many reasons. It shows that the creative process and, in particular, the human conception of poetry, has not changed over the centuries—through distance and time, we are all connected. That we have the proof of Hesiod’s encounter with the Muses is in itself amazing, and due entirely to the art of translation. As we have discussed in the forewords to our other volumes, “translation” and “transference” come from the same Latin verb *transfero*. A translation is something that has gone through the action of being transferred from one medium to another. The *Theogony* was first
transferred from oral communication to the written text, and then translated from culture to culture, language to language, and century to century. The translations in this volume on a smaller scale perform the same miracle of communication across time and space. And just like the originals themselves, poetic translation depends on the Muses, the daughters of Memory.

Some 2600 years after Hesiod, Jacques Prévert, in his poem, “Pour faire le portrait d’un oiseau,” expressed the creative process with a similar mix of the literal and the metaphorical. The way to paint a picture of a bird, he says, is to paint an inviting background and a birdcage on a canvas, to lean the canvas on a tree, and then to wait for the bird to hop into the cage. He instructs to wait as long as it takes, years if necessary, for the bird to appear. If and when the bird comes, the artist must wait for the bird to enter the cage, close the door with a brush, and then erase the bars of the cage one by one (attendre que l’oiseau entre dans la cage / et quand il est entré / fermer doucement la porte avec le pinceau / puis / effacer un à un tous les barreaux1). Like Hesiod, Prévert implies that the artist does not dictate what is made, but that the potential creation (the inspiration necessary to make the piece) dictates how the artist is to form it. A work of art manifests itself if the artist is patient enough. It is not created, but coaxed into appearing. Prévert’s striking vision is particularly relevant to the art of translation. The poem really does exist before the translator begins. The setting is the only variable the translator controls. What is the right diction, meter, and tone for the original poem to arrive on the page in another language?

After Prévert has instructed the artist how to bring the bird into the cage and thus into the picture, he explains how to know if the picture will be a success: if the bird does not sing, it is a bad sign, but if it does sing, it is a good sign, a sign that all the painting needs is the artist’s signature, which he/she is to make with a feather from the bird (mais s’il chante c’est bon signe / signe que vous pouvez signer / Alors vous arrachez tout doucement / une des plumes de l’oiseau / et vous écrivez votre nom dans un coin du tableau2). When we and our referees pore over the submissions to Transference, this is what we look for: the bird to sing. The translations within these pages are poems in their own right because they let the originals sing with a new voice for a new audience.

I am writing this at the end of November 2016, and I am reminded of the greatest poetic tenet, stretching at least as far back as Hesiod’s other great poem, the Works and Days, and his telling of the Pandora myth: no matter what happens, hope remains. As always, Molly Lynde-Recchia, my co-editor, and I thank the translators, the referees, our editorial board, and the many others at Western Michigan University who every year help us champion this tenet. All of the translations in this volume erase the bars so the bird may sing.

David Kutzko, Co-Editor

1,2 Cited from Prévert’s collection Paroles (Gallimard, 1949), 155.
Ghada Mourad
Slow Jazz

The camel stopped at the old tavern’s door
And asked for water and sand
We gave him a bucket of water and a tequila shot
And we recommended that he follow the Silk Road
Where the sands do not end
And where the she-camels are pure gold

The camel is a jovial animal
In some sense
He walks as if he is dancing
He moves his nose as if he has just swallowed a whole garden of cocaine
The camel is a respectable animal
You can see a bit of villainy in his eyes
And a bit of pain
But at the end of the day he is an esteemed and elegant Animal
And a fitting theme for a poem written in an old tavern
Ghada Mourad  
Recklessness

-1-
I like tall women
I like streams
I like palm trees
I like cigars
I like trains
I like unending wine bottles
I like living for 1000 years
I do not like that those I love live for this long
Because I like short stories

-2-
The woman in her forties who visited me at midnight
Could not leave the bed
Her heart was tender
As a snail in early spring
My heart was dried up
Like a passing shoe

-3-
It was a few days
After Christmas
When I was thinking about what to do with the Christmas tree
And the Christmas things
Then this idea surprised me:
Why does Santa bring all this fun
But never comes back to collect his garbage?
Nightmares

Nightmare 1
Patriotic poets
Are eating a child
In my bedroom

Nightmare 2
The grass on the riverbanks
Ate the river’s frogs
Not a single frog is left
The grass is now a big frog
That will devour me because I resemble the prophet’s horse

Nightmare 3
There are five poems in my head
And on the highway there are
Five hundred cars
The five poems are now left on the edge of the road
Like squirrels with their stomachs ripped out

Nightmare 4
Jerusalem’s demons
Play Hamlet
On the doorsteps of my house in Canada
I am Hamlet

Nightmare 5
Because the street is narrower than a girl’s waist
I made love to the street
Nightmare 6
A date for dinner
At the Wailing Wall
With no salt
Or land

Nightmare 7
Blood on the grass
A crow on a tree
And prophets asleep in the virtuous city

Nightmare 8
My black coat
Turned into a cat
And my cat turned into a white lie

Nightmare 9
No wine today
Only a sermon

Nightmare 10
My neighbor’s scarf
My tablecloth
And my dinner is
A dead prophet
Who fell out of the newspaper
What did you do yesterday?
_Nothing._
What will you do tonight?
_Nothing._
Why did you leave the bottle full? It’s unlike you.
_The bottle is empty, my friend!_
The bottle is full!
_Why don’t I see anything in the bottle then?_
I don’t know.
_I will walk a little._
Where will you go?
_I will walk over there._
To your friends?
_No. I will just walk
Over there._
I see them, yes, your friends are waiting for you on the corner.
_I don’t see them!_
There, on the curb, your friends. Do you see them?
_No... I don’t see them!_
You don’t see them?
_The bottle is empty—I told you!_
Commentary

Ashraf Zaghal belongs to a generation of Palestinian poets that has decided to be a voice of everyday life with its ups and downs, away from the serious and combative tone of poetry of the previous generation. Zaghal’s collection, *A Desert in the Metro*, brings many motifs from traditional Arabic poetry written in or about the desert into a modern city setting—symbolized in the title by *metro*. Hence, this collection mingles the ancient with the modern without claiming to root itself in the tradition of desert poetry. Rather, the presence of the traditional motifs signals at the same time a distance from them, afforded by the sarcastic tone as well as the playful, seemingly lighthearted diction. Furthermore, as Zaghal’s poetry claims to—and in fact does—distance itself from the previous generation of politically committed poetry, Palestine seeps through the poems in the form of fragments or snippets that illustrate the irreducible presence of the experience of displacement and landlessness that cannot be ignored or repressed, as in “Nightmare 6,” which represents one of the nightmares continually experienced by any Palestinian.

Zaghal’s deceptively simple diction and his ironic tone constitute the main features of his poetry, and I tried to preserve the diction level as well as the irony. And of course the rhythm of the Arabic matches the tone and the themes. I did my best to maintain the rhythm in the poems.

For the most part, translating Ashraf Zaghal’s poems has been a pleasurable process, particularly when felicitous alliterations or unexpected rhymes occur in the English, as in “Slow Jazz” where “sand, road, end, gold” have a slant rhyme that provides a kind of cohesion to the stanza. The main challenge for the translator comes from the fact that Zaghal’s diction in Arabic can be easily distinguished from Darwish’s or Zaptan’s, but in English the distinction is much subtler, mainly because English does not allow as much space for this diversity as Arabic does. Hence, a translator needs to be aware of the necessity to bring to the Anglophone reader this peculiar aspect of Zaghal’s poems.
Hyacinthus Meredith
White Egret

An egret skims over autumn waters,
floating down singly, a flake of frost;
its mind untroubled, it need not race,
and stands alone by a sand-isle.
Commentary

Li Bai (or, in an older Romanisation, Li Po) 李白 (701–762) is considered by many (though not me) to be the greatest of all Chinese poets. Knowledge of several of his shorter poems is nearly universal among the literate Chinese population. Though “White Egret” is not among these most famous poems, it shares some of their characteristics: brevity, tonal and rhythmic regularity, vividness of image and adept use of figurative language. A great difficulty of translating traditional Chinese poetry in general, and the jueju (the form of this poem, four lines of five or seven syllables with the second and fourth lines rhymed) in particular, is that of conveying the compressed, often symbolic images while maintaining an easily flowing rhythm. I have been helped by the simplicity of “White Egret,” which is concerned principally with capturing a viewed moment in time and nature and is largely free of both abstruse allusions and meditations on contemporary or universal problems, though it may reflect the equanimity and eremitism that Li Bai sometimes achieved, or sometimes wanted to achieve, away from the ignoble strife of the imperial court. Nonetheless, my translation process was tortuous. I planned initially to render “White Egret” as a shape poem, emulating an egret floating down, but various attempts yielded no meaningful shape and detracted from the faithfulness and vividness of the translation. With inward relief, I returned to more familiar forms. That the poem has not (to my knowledge) been previously translated allowed me to forgo conscious innovation. The resulting translation was relatively spontaneous and conveys, I think, both the meaning and the sentiment of the original without being pedestrian. It is, however, not without craft. While I have not replicated the rhyme or the tonal and syllabic metre, I have tried with a natural English rhythm to convey something of the change from movement to tranquillity with more frequent stresses as the poem progresses. The long vowels at the end of the original, for example, are replicated in those of the last line of the translation, especially the spondee “sand-isle”; this and the words of the second line were arrived at after considerable editing.
Gazing out toward the country of France,
It happened one day, at Dover by the sea,
That I recalled the sweet pleasure
That used to be mine in that land,
And in my heart I started to sigh,
So great was the comfort I found,
To see the land that my heart truly loves.

I realized then it was not very wise
To keep such sighs stored in my heart,
When I see that the way is now clear
Toward good peace, which can benefit all.
That thought turned concern into comfort,
But still left my heart with a constant desire
To see the land that my heart truly loves.

Onto the ship of Hope I then loaded
All of my wishes, bidding them sail
Over the sea, with no stop or delay,
To give my good greetings to France.
God soon grant us good, lasting peace!
If it so comes to pass, I’ll then be able
To see the land that my heart truly loves.

Peace is a treasure beyond facile praise.
Warfare is hateful, and I value it not.
War right or wrong has left me unable
To see the land that my heart truly loves.
Samuel N. Rosenberg
Rondeau 44

The year has shed its old cloak
Of wind, of cold, and of rain,
And donned leaves bright as flame
For its sunlit, stylish new coat.

There’s no bird from whose throat
We don’t hear this proclaimed:
*The year has shed its old cloak!*

Every river and spring, every moat,
Is dressed in robes bright and gay,
Silver and gold on display.
Everyone’s clothed to evoke
*A year that’s shed its old cloak!*

Charles d’Orléans
Rondeau 44
Samuel N. Rosenberg
Chanson 53

Must we really lose our sight?
Do our eyes no longer dare
To gaze upon our object of desire?
Disdain is quite a hostile lord,
Insisting on enslavement of a lover.

Will you let yourself be crushed,
Love, and seek no remedy?
Can no one stand against Disdain?

Must we really lose our sight?
Do our eyes no longer dare
To gaze upon our object of desire?

Our eyes are truly meant to serve
And carry every pleasure back
To hearts that feel no end of woe.
Disdain attempts to close those eyes;
Is it right to tolerate such spite?

Must we really lose our sight?
Commentary

Charles d’Orléans (1394–1465) composed numerous lyrics in several genres and even some in the language of England, where he spent 25 years as a captive, following the French defeat at Agincourt. The first poem in this group of three is no doubt one of his best known: a ballad that expresses the prisoner’s longing for his native land. A typical ballade, its rhymes are the same in all three stanzas, with all final lines the same; the third stanza is followed by a shorter envoy. In its sense and line-to-line development, my translation is faithful to the original text, as it is to the rhythmic model; instead of rhyme, however, it is limited to irregularly placed phonic echoes.

The rondeau that follows is no doubt equally well known. Here, in addition to its other faithfully imitative features, I have introduced the same homophonic structure; perfect rhyme, however, is replaced by assonance.

To round out this generically varied selection, I have translated a chanson expressing the frustration of a man ignored or rejected by the beautiful lady whose lover he would like to be. Besides illustrating Charles’s adherence to his era’s well-defined poetic structures and patterns of recurrence, it exemplifies his penchant for the use of personified abstractions.

Here a few lexical choices that may be of interest. The obvious opening of the Rondeau would use “Time” for Le temps; I chose “The year” instead in order, as in the French, to establish an iambic meter with a monosyllable. I rejected “The season” as rhythmically disruptive and semantically too limited. As for failing to translate beste, there was simply no room in line 5 for both animals and a meaningful rhyme in -oa-; it seemed to me sufficient to let birds alone take on the task of emitting sounds.
As for the Chanson’s *Dangier*, it is surely one of the translator’s most challenging nouns, for it is clearly a cognate of “danger” and yet here, as is usual, it must be understood otherwise. Its etymon is *dominiarium*, from which stem multiple meanings clustered about the notion of power-dominance-superiority. In this instance, the allegorical personification “Disdain” struck me as a fitting choice. The penultimate line of the poem refers to the French noun with the simple pronoun *le*; this seemed to me to call for non-repetitive explication—a word rhyming, moreover, with “sight”; the context made “spite” look semantically acceptable.
Somewhere gold lives in the spoiling bank
and is intimate with thousands. But even
the blind one, the beggar, is to the copper penny
like a lost place, a dusty corner under the chest.

In the businesses nearby money feels at home
and garbs itself in silk, carnations, and furs.
He, the silent one, stands in the breath-pause
of all the breathing money, awake or asleep.

O how does it close at night, this always open hand?
Tomorrow it hauls fate again, and daily
holds it out: bright, suffering, ever destructible.

If only someone, a witness, finally grasped and praised
its long duration, astonished. Only speakable
by the singer. Only audible to the godlike.
Commentary

When translating a poet as well-known and frequently interpreted as Rainer Maria Rilke, one must have compelling reasons. Many gifted poets, in many languages, have tried with varying degrees of success to render Rilke’s complex syntax and multilayered meanings into something approaching accessibility in a totally new language. This is a Sisyphean task, to be sure, but a number of us are driven to it by love of these poems and poet.

In a case like that of Rilke, I am driven at the outset by frustration. Many available English translations, in my view, don’t get close enough to the original to satisfy. Of course, no English version can approach anywhere near the original for complexity of thought and density of language; some associations must be sacrificed. Nonetheless, I want to try to reach further in my own searching.

That reaching involves a number of small but important decisions that nevertheless add up to a substantial overall effect. The first line of Rilke’s Sonnet 19 (from Part II of Sonnets to Orpheus) I have rendered as “Somewhere gold lives in the spoiling bank.” Other translators have rendered the German word verwöhndenden as “indulgent” or “pampering.” While these are legitimate meanings of the German, they strike me as too mild, or even cute in the case of “pampering,” for a poem which communicates such a trenchant critique of wealth and power. “Spoiling” in English carries with it a negative connotation of rottenness, which I consider justified by the later assertions of the poem.

Word order is a crucial question when translating German. This language, with its four declensions, allows for freer word positioning than does English. This issue presents itself in the second and third lines of the first stanza. I have decided to hew close to the original word order with “But even / the blind one, the beggar, is to the copper penny / like a lost place. . . .” Moving the prepositional phrase would not help elucidate the dative German original in English.

In the final stanza, however, one needs to bring the verbs “grasped” and “praised” closer to the subject in English. Here the German word order cannot be effectively maintained:
“finally its long duration, astonished, grasped and praised.” Also in this line, I used the word “grasped,” with its double meanings of both understanding and reaching out to touch the “open hand” of stanza 3.

For some reason, none of the English translations I have read make a point of keeping Rilke’s emphatic “only” parallel in the last two lines. This strikes me as important, both musically and in terms of meaning. The word Göttlichen, “godly” or “god-like,” is rendered in one translation simply as “the god.” This is an unfortunate misreading. At the end of this sonnet of noteworthy social critique, Rilke leaves open the real possibility that the artist (poet or musician) or spiritually aware (“godlike”) person can witness and grasp the suffering, lost, forgotten beggar. This is an incisive assertion by a poet we often assume is concerned more with philosophical or aesthetic matters. I felt called to capture that assertion more forcefully in my English translation than I have seen elsewhere.
Houssem Ben Lazreg
A Woman Moving Within Me

Anybody who has read my coffee cup
realizes you are my love
Anybody who has read the lines of my palm
discerns the four letters of your name,
everything can be denied
but the scent of a woman we love,
everything can be concealed
but the footsteps of a woman moving within us,
everything can be debated
except your femininity.

Where shall I hide you, my love?
We are like two burning forests
and all the television cameras are on us
Where shall I hide you, my love
and all these journalists want to place you
on the cover page,
and make me a Greek hero,
a public scandal.

Where shall I take you?
Where shall you take me
when all the cafés have memorized our faces
and all the hotels registered our names
and all the sidewalks recollected the rhythms of our feet?
We are exposed to the world like a seaward balcony,
visible like two golden fish
in a crystal container.

Anybody who has read my poems about you
perceives the sources of my inspiration,
anybody who has travelled in my books

Nizar Qabbani
مرأة تمشي في داخلي
arrives safe to the harbor of your eyes, 
anybody who has got my home address 
heads for your lips, 
anybody who has opened my drawers 
finds you sleeping there like a butterfly, 
anybody who has dug up my papers, 
knows the history of your life.

Teach me how

to confine you in the Taa Marbuta 
and prevent you from coming out, 
teach me how to trace around your breasts 
a circle in purple crayon 
and prevent it from flying, 
teach me how to detain you like a full stop at the end of a sentence, 
teach me how to walk under the rain of your eyes without getting wet, 
to smell your body seasoned with Indian spices without fainting 
and to roll from the imposing heights of your breasts 
without crumbling.

Keep your hands off my small habits 
my tiny things 
the pen that I use to write 
the papers on which I scribble 
the key chain that I carry 
the coffee that I sip 
the ties that I buy, 
keep your hands off my writings 
as it is unreasonable that I write with your fingers 
and breathe with your lungs, 
it is unreasonable that I laugh with your lips 
and that you cry with my eyes. 
Sit with me for a while
to reconsider the map of love that you drew
with the harshness of a mogul conqueror
and the selfishness of a woman telling a man
“Be.. and he is”
Talk to me democratically,
for the tribesmen in my country
have mastered the game of political repression
I do not want you to play
the game of emotional repression with me.

Sit down so that we can see
where the borders of your eyes lie,
where the limits of my sorrows are,
where do the waters of your territory begin,
and where does my life end?
Sit down so that we can agree
on which part of my body
your conquests will end
and when at night
your conquests will begin?

Sit with me for a while
so that we can agree on a way to love
where you are not my servant girl
and I am not just a small colony
on your list of colonies
that is still seeking — since the seventeenth century —
emancipation from your breasts,
which do not respond
do not respond.
Commentary

Nizar Qabbani (1923–1998) was one of the most famous Arab poets of the 20th century. He was born in Damasacus in 1923 and spent a lifetime fighting for Arab women’s liberation and empowerment through his writings. The themes in his poems range from passionate and revolutionary verses about love, eroticism, and feminism to constant criticism of Arab leaders and the conservative traditions of the patriarchal Arab society. Over the course of half a century, Nizar Qabbani wrote 34 books of poetry including Childhood of a Breast (طﻁﻔﻮﻟﺔ ﻣﻌﻰ ﻟﻠﻠﻤﺎت 1948), Drawing with Words (ارسال ﺑﺎﻟﻜﻠﻤﺎت, 1966), No Victor Other Than Love (حبك ﻟـا ﻳﻗﻒ ﻋﻠﻰ ﺍﻻﺧـ, 1989), My Beloved (حبك ﻟـا ﻳﻘﻒ ﻋﻠﻰ ﺍﻻﺧـ, 1961), and Love Does Not Stop at Red Lights (حبك ﻟـا ﻳﻘﻒ ﻋﻠﻰ ﺍﻻﺧـ, 1985). He also composed many works of prose, such as My Story with Poetry (قصة ﺑـا ﻟـا ﺍﻻﺧـ, 1989), and On Poetry, Sex, and Revolution ... (عـن ﺍﻻـﺧـ، 1961), and Love Does Not Stop at Red Lights (حبك ﻟـا ﻳﻘﻒ ﻋﻠﻰ ﺍﻻﺧـ, 1985). He also composed many works of prose, such as My Story with Poetry (قصة ﺑـا ﻟـا ﺍﻻﺧـ, 1989), and On Poetry, Sex, and Revolution ... (عـن ﺍﻻـﺧـ, 1961).

In this poem titled “A Woman Moving Within Me” (اﺍﻟﺸﻌﺮ ﻟـا ﻳﻘﻒ ﻋﻠﻰ ﺍﻻﺧـ, 1989), the poet expresses his feelings of love and passion towards his beloved using highly creative poetic images. Some of these images are linked to the Arabic culture such as reading the fortune in a cup of coffee and reading the fate line on the palm of a hand. In this commentary, I bring to light a central poetic image that poses some challenges while translating it to English. In fact, the verse “Teach me a way to lock you up in the Taa Marbuta” (اﺍﻟﺸﻌﺮ ﻟـا ﻳﻘﻒ ﻋﻠﻰ ﺍﻻﺧـ, 1989) contains a reference to one character of the Arabic alphabet that acts as an indicator of the feminine gender. It is spelled this way ی. The uniqueness of the meaning of this metaphor lies in the fact that the poet wants to lock his beloved in this letter which is not only the indicator of the feminine gender in Arabic but also has the shape of a closed circle, from which escape is difficult. Since finding an equivalent metaphor in English seems challenging, I resorted to foreignization as a translation strategy and I kept the expression in Arabic.

In addition to that, on the stylistic level, the poet used a sensual language whereby he evoked repetitively the beauty of a woman though her body or at least some parts of it such
as the breasts and the lips. For instance, “roll from the imposing heights of your breasts,” “Teach me how to trace around your breasts,” or “seeking emancipation from your breasts.” For Nizar Qabbani, the female breasts became a space for revolution, emancipation and a weapon to challenge old conventional social norms. In other words, he tried to subvert the prevailing status quo of sexual politics in the Arab World which is tainted by “political and emotional repression.” To conclude, Qabbani’s poetry exhibits a great sense of enthusiasm for the construction of new gender relations based on freedom, equality, dignity, and beauty.
Elaine Wong
Five Rings

— Olympic wind: convivial, competitive, of five rings...of words and words
Elaine Wong
Five Rings, linear version

— Olympic wind: convivial, competitive, of five rings...of words and words

Olympic wind gusts from Mount Olympus, compressing the gods’ private words and private works in transparent, ultra-thin discs of light, spinning and sending them on to reach the five realms and four sides, and, when you are not noticing, gently wafting over Mount Parnassus, to be printed as poems by the Muses...

Of five rings, of five realms, of synergy: a self-breeding microcosmos. Swords and spears forge signposts. Hand basins adopt oaths without bloodshed. The five continents’ ancient arms are renewed by laurels of rushing waves in the round basins; five-color bubbles foam up, a fairy tale serial.

Convivial, jovial, digital/gaming, the past links through the present, the four seas are one family, a cell phone is a stadium, a laptop is a temple. Drinks reward brains wracking, victory parties honor efforts, rings of perspiration pay homage to the earth as entertainment tax, a selfless celebration.

Of words and words: in ink, cold spring, hot spring, fountain, sauna, all cleanse nerves and foot odor. Father and daughter-in-law bathe together, black and white bathe together, Hermaphroditus bathes: mixing fine and foul to purify and innovate, a stunning Venus rises from foam, from a sea of words.

Competitive, a gymnastic friendly for leaf, olive, cinnamon, parsley, pine twig... Light presents shadows as awards to the winners. At dusk, the gods withdraw to be the observers behind the night screen, sign their names with starlight. Across the Milky Way, a dazzling tug-of-war between brain/strength and beauty.
Chen Li (陳黎, 1954—) was born in Hualien, Taiwan, and is a prolific poet and translator working in the Chinese language. He has published fourteen poetry books and four essay collections so far. While his own poetry has been translated widely into English, French, Spanish, Dutch, German, Croatian, Japanese, and Korean, Chen Li has translated, in collaboration with his wife Zhang Fen-ling, the works of Yosana Akiko, Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes, Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz, Sylvia Plath, Wisława Szymborska, Tomas Tranströmer, and other poets into Chinese. His poetry and translations have been honored by prestigious awards in his country.

I came into contact with Chen Li through my research on Taiwan visual poetry, to which the poet has made significant contributions. I interviewed him in summer 2014 during a research trip sponsored by Taiwan’s National Central Library. Talking with Chen Li face to face, I felt strongly the brilliance inside the poet; the energy fueling a swift mind constantly shone through his eyes. At the same time, he told me about his hand injury in late 2011 that prevented him from writing and typing. More extensive physical pain followed and eventually led to bouts of depression. He had to decline an invitation to represent Taiwan at the Poetry Parnassus in London, an event coinciding with the London Olympics in 2012. Chen Li resumed writing when his condition improved. He wrote “Five Rings” (五環) in February 2013, revisiting the motif of an earlier poem, “Olympic Wind.” A visual version of “Five Rings” was published alongside the linear version in his 2013 collection, Dynasty/Saint (朝／聖).

In “Five Rings,” Chen Li creates an ideal “microcosmos,” to use his own word, that celebrates tradition, purity, hard work, originality, and fellowship. In the form of the Olympic symbol, “Five Rings” embodies not only the Olympic spirit but also the spirit of poetry. In the poem, words take part in a relay, as Chen Li describes in the earlier “Olympic Wind,” which he calls an ars poetica. There, “you can’t see them [the words] pass or receive the baton” (line 12, my translation), but the graphics in “Five Rings” bring their movement to view. Each intersection
in the rings offers a chance into a new direction, the potential of which is located in the potential of language.

A few months after our first meeting and with the poet’s encouragement, I began to translate some of his poems. I took on “Five Rings” because I was touched by the innocent voice sustained throughout the poem, no matter how wide the spectrum of images is in the poem and how provocative some of them might seem. I was also curious whether the visual poem would translate given the formal constraints. To find an answer, I relied on the English alphabet to guide my way.

My first question during the translation process was how to fit an English translation into the rings containing Chinese characters of more regular and shorter lengths. The double ring design came to mind as a solution that would not only provide more physical space but also resonate with the double nature of translation. With this decision, the contact points of the five rings would be letters appearing in the same position in the outer and inner parts of each ring. I set out to translate the linear version as compactly as I could, again due to concerns of space. Upon completing a first draft, I wrote the English stanzas on cut-out circles in the double ring design and looked for possible contact points. With as much apprehension as excitement, I arranged the circles into the Olympic symbol and turned them around to align all the intersections. After rounds of word adjustment, realignment, shortening or lengthening some phrases to fit the arcs marked off by the intersections, and fine-tuning for meaning, the translation found its way to the present arrangement. Although the translation is far from perfect, I hope it retains the spirit of the relay.

I would like to thank Maya Chen for creating the artwork of the visual poem.
Madeleine McDonald          Viviane Mellerio-Grasser
Puzzle                      Puzzle

A little piece of cardboard
With gentle curves and deep hollows
Yet its appealing colours
Are no more than fabricated conceits
Alone, buffeted by time
How to give our search meaning
If not by giving concrete shape to
This glimpse that makes no sense

Puzzle, puzzle indeed
To our wishes pay heed

In the wide whirlpool of ideas
In the name of peoples and freedoms
Let us stop for a moment
And make use of our differences
Face to face
Let’s open up
Using each other’s knowledge
To aim for a magical experience

Puzzle, puzzle indeed
To our wishes pay heed
Once our hollows and curves
Have fitted together, piece by piece
Hesitantly, accurately
The wedding time will come
Then, gently, little by little,
As the image is revealed
Our dazzled eyes would comprehend
...the Truth

_Puzzle, puzzle, be our guide_
_To fitting together side by side_

A little piece of cardboard which,
Having learned to forgive
With eyes wide open,
Compassionate yet without weakness,
Has fulfilled its side of the bargain
By breathing life into this substratum
Much love and much humanity
Make darkness lighten and retreat

_Puzzle, puzzle, you are nothing more_
Than a stage on the road to our destiny
Commentary

Viviane Mellerio-Grasser, who signs her poems Vyane, lives in France. Her poems are snapshots of love and life, and a reflection on life’s journeys. She has the ability to convey wonderment and awe, like a child discovering the world, enriched by the forbearance of a woman who has known bliss and sorrow, contentment and disappointment, privilege and adversity, and whose faith in human nature runs deep.

Her poem *Puzzle* was awarded the *Plume d’Or* (Gold Pen) prize in 2009 by the literary association *La Plume Colmarienne*, based in Colmar, the second city of Alsace, France. Like the judges, I enjoyed the clever, playful hook of the first line that draws readers in to a broad appeal for respect and tolerance.

Elsewhere, Mellerio-Grasser has spoken of the importance of her religious faith. She holds the view that each and every human being on this earth is interconnected, and part of an immense chain. In this poem, instead of links in a chain, she uses the image of jigsaw pieces slotting together. Only once all pieces fit together perfectly, and the puzzle is complete, would the image of Divine Truth become visible (her use of the conditional tense is deliberate).

The author sets herself the challenge of exploring this transcendent concept within a structured framework. Even the zigzag layout is a playful echo of the title. Playing with rhyme, Mellerio-Grasser nevertheless respects its rules, and her native French offers her an abundance of possibilities.

In my translation, I abandoned any idea of replicating the pattern and rhythm of her quatrains and couplets. Instead, with due humility, I attempted to capture the essence of this short poem.

Initially, I used the word “jigsaw” for the title and in the body of the text, inspired by the literal image of a piece of cardboard. However, the author preferred “puzzle,” referring both to a jigsaw puzzle and to the immense puzzle of a human being.

I translated *délicatement* as “hesitantly,” instead of “delicately,” imagining both the way one slots a jigsaw into place, and the way human beings get to know each other.
The reader is made to stop and think as the author jumps between the third person and the first person, between “its/his/her” and “our,” even addressing the puzzle as “you” in some lines. The author was insistent that she wanted sa/son translated as “his” in most lines because the jigsaw piece stands for a human being. Yet this created problems because of the distinction in English between “his,” “her,” and “its.” I therefore left “its” in the first and last verse, and amalgamated “his/her” and “our” into “our” throughout, to echo the poem’s spirit of inclusiveness.

The rhyming couplets, which enhance the rhythm of the poem, offered a particular challenge. In my attempts to find a rhyming structure that worked in English, I played with ever looser interpretations of meaning. For the repetition of verité/clé, the author herself suggested “Puzzle, puzzle in fact, To his wishes please act.” So the final version became “Puzzle, puzzle indeed, To our wishes pay heed.” For guider/ajuster, I flirted with “show us the way/day by day” before deciding on “guide/side by side.” Not for want of trying, I had to give up on finding an English rhyme to stand for rien and destin, although I contemplated pairing “yourself so tiny” and “destiny.”

I thank the author for her generous collaboration. Any shortcomings in the translation are mine.

Mellerio-Grasser’s collection, Tranches de Vie (Slices of Life) is published by Le Cercle du Rhin International.
Doug Slaymaker

Ferns

Let’s talk about ferns
Not like there’s anything else to talk about.

About hands
One supple hand placed atop another
Timidly, timidly, softly
Placed.

About
The tips of hands
Quivering slightly
All five
of the fingers.

About
Those five fingers
Quivering like the murmur of a stream
Ever so narrow, those fingertips.

Let’s talk about ferns
There is really nothing else to talk about.

On one shiver
another shiver layered;
From beneath a breath
another breath leaks.
From what deep past do they come,
From thick growth, growing thickly
Ferns, white-backed ferns, bracken ferns?

Delicate,
like those that breathe through gills,
come clammy
ferns’
exhalation.

A broken body, wrapped in bandages
A brittle,
like porcelain,
life-force.

Like youthfulness
that does not depart this world,
like a sadness
that only youthfulness knows.

The leaves that are spread open
the leaves that are clenched shut
we should wash,
with a toothbrush
one, by one.

In France
which is not content to leave a single word without a gender
you are Fougère.
It’s because you are, of course you are,
a woman.
The growth, spread as far as the eye can see
towards the women, inclines.
A foot extended into the growth
towards the women, buried.

With hands, grasped in other hands,
forming sloping valleys,
send up droplets of mist
tumbling into the marsh-edge.

Their bodies wrapped in robes
now stepping out of, trying to be the first
the young girls in this shower
with white skin, submerging into silence.

Astride the ferns
rocked gently by the ferns
buoyant, playful
moon!
This body of mine, however, much too heavy for this.

In this country too a man
of this country a woman he loved.

But that love was devoured
by those malevolent lolling imps.

In this country too the very rich
In this country too, the poor.

The poor had to dig up the potatoes while
the rich, they ate them as porridge.
The country is a damp oppressive country.
This country is a sad country.

With a long history, enough to make one seethe
searching through that dark secret passageway,

Ancient, with no exit,
the heart and soul of which
like a spider in a corner
sits, stares, waits.

In this country,
the walls, they say, have ears,
the ceilings, they have eyes.

The anger of young brides, the curses of mothers-in-law,
vengeful living spirits, the ghosts of the dead,
encircle the houses.

In this country, grief
turns into tuberculosis,

In this country, resignation
leads to arthritis.

And no question, to this country as well
civilization, it has come.

And civilization, with the stench of coal smoke,
wiped out the smell of miso and the old ways.

With the reading of Western books, the people,
posed as Westerners.
And then, in this country  
just when we thought that unhappiness  
had been wiped clean away,

came even more stubborn afflictions,  
we took on Western unhappiness,  
shouldered it.

And now  
like there’s a pebble in our shoes  
we find that days and days, when it is hard to walk, have come.

And now, more than ever  
with a clanking  
we have been saddled with Westernization.

With no space to offload that Westernization  
it piles up in layers on this country.

No point thinking about happiness in this country,  
having lost sight of one’s own unhappiness.

With everyone so worried about what others think  
we cannot criticize the people of this country.

Even were one to judge correctly,  
in this country, all gets washed away,

Having been chewed up by the new cogs in the machinery  
and spit out onto the world’s sandpile.

What is unchanged appears again following deaths  
with fits and starts: people continue to be born.
As long as there are men and women
this, too, will not end.

And after passing through the East, and through the West
men and women will, no doubt, remain.

Even if, perchance, men and women cease to exist
the landscape, arid and pungent, will remain.

Crushed flat by wind and rain, broken by earthquakes
crawling its way over the garbage heap
a slug.

Into this rich damp loam
the fern, the royal fern,
extends its roots,

Towering above such grand fruitless effort
the fern, the royal fern
flourishes.

The “Orient,” that we thought had retired already,
has just one final thing to do.
Following the end of the human race
its swan song is to lower the final curtain.

The ferns have aged too.
They have gone completely white-haired.

Old hermits turned to stone in their sleep:
do not strike them with a cane
and awaken them.
Everyone
needs a rest.

Even if the gods extend
no support,
even if life’s debts
cannot be brushed away,

With the grave comes the right to lie back and be at ease.
We can, there, unload the corpse, the baggage we have picked up,
and carried, this long way.

When the entire surface of the globe becomes a graveyard
and all is tranquil and calm,
the spirit of equality
mankind’s dream, now over,
will be actualized.

There above our faces,
weary of wind and rain,
the undersides of leaves, of the ferns.

Extending to the height of a man
dripping on us
the ferns;
spreading across the landscape
among their roots,

Clumps, and tangled groups, there,
innumerable, still increasing
the eggs of snakes
the eggs of lizards.
The ferns, with roots like the hard beaks of silky fowl, tap open the hard rocks to scoop up crystalline drops of water.

Centipedes curl around their roots: the jet black of those centipedes, said to be servants of the fierce guardian Bishamonten, there in the ever-flowing water of the conduit, turns it faintly purple.

Why even bother, boiling the roots down for glue? That must be why the impotent gods, waiting until human systems disappear, continue to cultivate the ferns. But then, what does that make the ferns? Not like I know. They seem to exist on a plane far from humans, shrouded in jade-green fog, at the outer edges of the monotonous, endless, and mind-numbing—I don’t know what exactly—I can only make sense of them as hypnotic, sleep-inducing and repetitive incantations. But in the palms of those hands is a palpable, other-worldly magic, pacifying the gods’ murderous intent. They even put the sun to sleep, make it look easy. The sun, speaking of the sun, now the faint red outline of a light bulb just extinguished, quivers among the ferns, barely there, more like jellyfish, like goldfish.

Listening to the ferns’ cool silk-like rustle, wandering in the sun’s lacy-murmuring stream spilling from the fern leaves, was when I first experienced it: the blood circulating through the bodies of the plants commingling with the sap flowing through my body comprising a sense of release that comes from the unified, the now single flow that yields an ecstasy that cannot be expressed without reference to its form of sadness; the first time that I experienced this was when I got lost and disoriented in the grove of giant ferns in the Buitenzorg botanical garden in Jakarta. At that time I was still lingering on the shores of youth, enthralled with a Jurassic period in which nature was a grand bathing pool, an expansive forests of ferns and rushes. But maybe that developed from the poverty of my youth. Body mass and physique were out of sync, living things were composed solely of lumps and tumors for that generation and its exoticized sense of beauty; I was looking for something to overturn our impoverished days. It is not unlikely, indeed it is possible, that in following our passion that was like sun worship, had we been paying any attention to what was going on around us, we would have entertained the
extravagant desire to be consumed by wild beasts. All I could see in the forest following each shake of the fern stalks covered in tortoise-shell colored scales, when the gold leaf of the sun flaked off, as the spores dispersed their dark red clouds over the area, were the horned beetles of all sizes resembling the weird outlines drawn on Sumatra shields, that came plopping out of the sky.

The teeth of those ferns no longer held their profound ancient power of fierce mastication.

And yet, those gods, they have not been fooled, they see the ferns’ murderous intent, and nurture their hopes for the near future when the ferns, whose entire bodies are comprised of rows of teeth, will grind the world’s body and its organizations into tiny pieces, and then grow and spread thick across the vast empty rubbish heap that remains. Such would seem to be their dream; but think how the leaves of the ferns will cover the faces of the gods in that time when death is the only option for them.
Commentary

Kaneko Mitsuharu (1895–1975)—poet, painter, memoirist—is well-known as an eccentric outsider in Japanese letters and culture. He is also one of the best poets of the twentieth century. His outsider status, and the middle, in-between spaces he occupied, literally and figuratively, enlivens his poetry and his Japan. And while it is unlikely that a reader would go to Kaneko for ecopoetic practice and sensibility, this particular poem is rich with an awareness of the physical human body existing with plant and animal life forms. This is the power, for example, of a transformative experience of the life-blood of the narrator commingling with the sap of the plants, itself echoed in the play of hands and teeth, seemingly shared by human, plant, and supernatural beings.

Non-human worlds occupy a central place in his writing. Among his most famous poems are those in the 1937 collection that includes the title poem 鯨 “Sharks” and which opens withおっとせい (“Seals”). These poems are strong with an anthropomorphic impulse to portray human society, and Japanese society in particular, as an animal society, but one that is vicious and rapacious, cruel, destructive, cannibalistic. The historical background is the imperialist warmongering and the extractive industries of mining and plantations being set up by Japanese companies in Southeast Asia, where these poems are set. His animals provide imagery of resistance and critique, of cruelty, and of the individual turning his back on the masses following blindly. They are deeply unsettling poems critical of a Japanese society that he sees as both somnambulant and voracious, as conformist while lumbering towards war and multi-layered destruction.

The poem translated here is the very rich and multi-layered poem called Shida (“Ferns”), published in a volume entitled simply IL. This poem is also based on his travel through Southeast Asia, particularly the Japanese expatriate communities of Indonesia. What he found in Malaysia and Indonesia unsettles a human-society-land equilibrium. It was written in the 1960s, drawing from his experience of the 1930s. Which is to say that Japan’s domestic environmental crises of the 1960s
layer this recollection of the environments encountered in the 1930s.

This experience of disorientation and subsumption by the forest changed Kaneko’s poetry and his relationship with the world. (He covered this material in a three volume autobiographical set of stories, also published in the 1970s.) The experience of nature as he found it in Indonesia is reflected in the move from the precious, self-absorbed, ornate style of his earlier poems to, in my mind at least, the richer, more satisfying, more corporeally physical work of the rest of his life. The thick vegetable growth of the jungle left him feeling lost and overwhelmed; these feelings provide a springboard for the anger and frustration at what he saw and experienced as a Japanese subject in the 1930s, but also provide the site for broader connections and spillovers between the body and something larger.

The richness of Kaneko’s vocabulary and the manner in which he exploits the associative capabilities of Japanese make translation a challenge. I was compelled to capture the richness of his poetry and, in this poem especially, to recreate his thick visceral representation of the natural world. I was also compelled by the piquant prose-like poetry with which he chose to conclude this work. Here, even more than in the poetic lines, Kaneko makes use of the potential in Japanese to have modifying words, phrases, even whole paragraphs and ideas modify multiple objects at once. Teasing these apart to make sensible English was one challenge; preserving at least some of that multiplicity was the another.

I would like to thank the cogent comments from the anonymous readers at Transference. I also want to acknowledge the close readings and support provided by Haraguchi Saburō and Akiko Takenaka.
Andrew Gudgel
Staying Again at Youqi Temple

The east face of South Mountain rises up alone.
I lean on my staff and, climbing, ponder the nature of all.
The temple is small among the surrounding peaks
And growing from the yellow plum is a branch worth admiring.
On the spring steps, the rain stops just at the hammock
In the summer courtyard, the gathered shadows bolt the doors.
The deep cave has not the slightest trace of comings or goings
Just marks of moss and trickling water on the many rocks.

Andrew Gudgel
The Peaks Along the River are Green

The autumn water is pure—as if it weren’t there—
And shadows of passing birds don’t appear in it.
The distant mountains are a gathering of dark marks
And the haze in the air makes them look like a sketch.
When the river is still, it’s as if the mountains are floating
And can’t be separated from the distant sky.
Shimmering waves shine
Their ripples only a couple of strokes.
And scattered among them
Places where the sky and water don’t unite.
Commentary

Zhang Dai (1597–after 1680) was one of the premier essayists of the late Ming/early Qing Dynasty. Though never an official himself, he was born into a family with a history of imperial service. Zhang lost his house, fortune, and possessions when the Ming Dynasty fell. He was fifty. He spent several decades hiding on a nearby mountain before finally returning to rent a portion of what had been his ancestral home. Zhang’s most well-known work is *The Dream Recollections of Tao An*, a collection of essays about his life before the fall of the Ming. It was Zhang’s belief that “many small [details] make up a large [picture]” and his writing—both poetry and prose—are composed using simple, straightforward words and images that have a cumulative effect greater than the sum of their parts. For example, in the fourth line of “The Peaks Along the River are Green,” Zhang compares the scenery to a sketch. This idea is built on by the mention of the mountains “floating.” Many Chinese landscape paintings leave blank space below distant mountains to help give the illusion of distance. The mention of the ripples on the waves looking like “a couple of strokes” adds to the comparison. From these simple elements, Zhang creates and maintains a rich metaphor throughout the poem.

Yao Nai (1731–1815) was born roughly fifty years after Zhang Dai’s death and was a high-level official during the Qing Dynasty. Though the writing is straightforward, Yao’s poems are often filled with allusions to earlier poets, seldom-used words, and double meanings. For example, in the line “Growing from the yellow plum is a branch worth admiring,” the phrase “yellow plum,” is an allusion to the spring rainy season of the lower Yangzi River valley, and which foreshadows the line below where spring and rain are both explicitly mentioned.

In translating these two poets, I attempted to mirror the styles of both poet and poem as best as possible. Zhang Dai uses a five-character-per-line style for his poem. As a result, I tried to keep the lines of my translation as short as possible. Yao Nai uses a longer, seven-character-per-line style, which allows for more fully realized images on each line. As a result, I tried to use more description, longer sentences and a somewhat more formal tone.
As would be expected, the challenges faced in translating these two entirely different poets were also dissimilar. With Zhang Dai, the problem was to show how the whole poem assembles itself from lines and thoughts that were almost independent. With Yao Nai, the difficulty was rather how to express his richness without losing the reader in the clever wordplay of the original poem.
If I were invited to dinner in one heaven
by Caesar’s summoner and another by Jupiter’s,
though the stars were nearer and the Palace
farther, I should give the gods above this reply:
“Keep seeking whoever might prefer
to be the guest of the Thunderer:
My Jove, you see, retains me here on earth.”
Commentary

Wherever power obtains, sycophancy is sure to follow. In this regard ancient Rome has arguably been unmatched, what with its succession of powerful emperors and the flock of courtiers who curried their favor. Among the latter was the poet Martial (40–104). Born Valerius Martialis on the Mediterranean coast of Spain, Martial, like many other ambitious young men from the provinces, went to Rome in his early twenties to make his name. In writing 1,500 epigrams, he achieved his goal. Beyond that, he sought preferment at the palace of several Caesars and flattered them with poems of such lavish praise that they justify using the word “sycophancy” to characterize them.

In Epigram 91, from the ninth of Martial’s fourteen collections, the poet claims that if he were invited to dinner at both the Palace of Domitian and Jupiter’s banquet hall, he would choose the earthly host’s table. Imagine a poet (laureate?) who published such a poem to President G.W. Bush or President Obama. What howls of derision would issue from the mouths of other poets, not to mention politicians, though whether they scorned the poet’s act of sycophancy or envied his preferment might be hard to tell.

Because Martial was scrupulous about form, I had to decide whether to use six lines, as he did, or break the extra-long line 5 into two and add a seventh line. In addition to avoiding an incompatibly long line, this allowed me to end with the rhythmically strong “r” sound of the final three lines, mimicking the regular punch-line tone of Martial’s epigrams.
The day before I visited the Chidorigafuchi
My daughter
You went and left home

Your room completely empty
Your old clothes left behind in that chest of drawers
The blue curtains sway
You are not here

You simply removed yourself from this house
Under the same Tokyo sky
You’ll be opening your window today too, as full of energy as always
Your departure fills me with such pain

Your footsteps no longer clatter down the stairs
Your easy laughter no longer echoes around
Such emptiness
Fills my eyes with tears

Without you
In your room I stand lost
That makes me wonder
How those mothers must have felt
The day that red draft slip arrived

How those mothers must have felt
Sending their sons off with a banzai
Sons, who will end as bones
There stood the large stone monument

Is this what is engraved here?

*Due to unjust national policy*
*They became pitiful bones they lie here*
*We must never again allow our nation to go to war*

It was just a poem by His Majesty Emperor Showa

*Whenever we ponder on those who dedicated their lives for the cause of our nation,*
*Our heart aches with deep emotion*

*These numberless lives*
*Sacrificed for none other than you*
*I become a shield for Your Majesty My Emperor*
*Although my blood splatters the clouds I have no regrets*

By Ushikubo Hiroichi Tokyo Medical University

*My friends depart for war*
*I too depart*
*Your Majesty My Emperor we will be your shields*
*We will not come back alive*

By Ono Masaaki Deceased aged nineteen

*At your word Your Majesty My Emperor*
*I will go, go to the very edge of world, even to my death*

By Oomori Shigenori Died somewhere near the Truk Islands

*Sacrificing themselves to you Your Majesty*
*Missing their mothers with heart wrenching sorrow*
*I think about those lives that can never live again*
*Your Majesty, have you thought about*
The tears that overflowed the hearts of these young men
each night before each death
   *Smiling for me my mother places her hand on my uniformed shoulder*
   *I return to base saying nothing*
You, who flew out from Chiran, Washio Katsumi
   *Looking at the many many letters sent to me by my mother*
   *I thinking lovingly of her eyes when we parted last year*
You, Mizui Toshio, who became a human torpedo five days before the surrender

For those men who can never again return home
At the very least instead of writing that fragment of poetry
You, Your Majesty, should have become a monk and prayed for the peace of their souls
You should have lived in isolation I wish you had
Carol Hayes and Rina Kikuchi
Girl 2

Ishikawa Itsuko
少女 2

15th August 1945
The day your motherland was liberated
You were so sick
No longer able to sit up

After abusing you so relentlessly
The Japanese soldiers
Ran off in their army trucks in mad haste
Yet you knew nothing of all this
Left with your six ‘elder sisters’
Lying there in that tiny freezing hut You
You, only seventeen years old
With no understanding of the hidden meaning of “Voluntary Labour Corps”
You, left your home town

Under guard on the train
Later jolted roughly in the last truck of the convoy
Taken to that cold place teeth chilled to the very root
Your untouched body still to ripen
Falls prey to a sabred officer

Each day twenty thirty men
Am I alive? Am I dead?
Shaking with cold so I must be still living
Even when I’m menstruating, soldiers arrive one after another
Am I no longer in the human world?
Beaten for any refusal
Swollen cheeks burning with pain so I must be still living
One day spots appeared
All over your body
Your lower body so inflamed so painful
You infected with venereal disease
  “When it gets really bad we’re sent off in a truck
  and dumped out on the empty plains”
You terrified by such whispered talk

Even then the soldiers continue to arrive
Your infection worse day by day
Your body burningly feverish
  “Will it be me? Will I fall prey to wolves?”
But on that one day the Japanese army discarded you
Let’s run away quickly
The others call to you
I can’t move, I’ll stay here with my sisters
Annyeonghi kashipshiyo (Farewell)
You let fall a single tear like a morning dewdrop

What happened after that nobody knows
Did you survive?
Did you die?
If alive where are you?
If dead where are you?

Seventeen years old
  “I thought I’d be nursing wounded soldiers.”
That’s what they say you said one day with such a face of girlish innocence
So like a pink peach blossom
15th August 1945

“Having been able to safeguard and maintain the structure of the Imperial State, We are always with ye, Our good and loyal subjects, relying upon your sincerity and integrity...”

Hearing His Majesty Emperor Showa’s radio announcement
No more blackout regulations No more air raids
Contradicting the beliefs of a patriotic daughter of the emperor
That twelve-year old me was so relieved
But in that abandoned “comfort women” station in Jilin
The six of you lying there unable to move and you so emaciated
What happened to you?
Only the wind bears witness
Commentary

Ishikawa Itsuko was born in Tokyo in 1933. She graduated from Ochanomizu University’s history department and her work continues to reflect her deep interest in history. Much of her poetry has focused on war victims, particularly the victimisation of women in war and the violence perpetrated by the Japanese Imperial Army across Asia and the Pacific. Ishikawa is the author of many books, including works for younger readers about the war, such as her 1993 work, *Jūgun ianfu ni sareta shōjotachi* (「従軍慰安婦」にされた少女たち: *The Girls Forced to Be Military Comfort Women*). Her first collection of poetry, *Hi ni Sando no Chikai* (日に三度の誓い: *Three Prayers a Day*) was published in 1956 when she was only 23 years old and since then her work has been celebrated by many awards.

“My Daughter’s Room” and “The Stone Monument” were first published in her 1985 *Chidorigafuchi e ikimashita ka* (千鳥ケ淵へ行きましたか: *Have You Been to Chidorigafuchi?*) collection and “Girl 2” was published in her 1994 collection, *Kudakareta hanatachi e no rekuiemu* (砕かれた花たちへのレクイエム: *Requiem to Trampled Flowers*).

In “My Daughter’s Room,” Ishikawa focuses on the “loss” of a child, drawing a thematic link between the mother in poem who feels a terrible sense of emptiness when her daughter moves out and mothers forced to farewell their sons to war. Ishikawa skilfully encourages her contemporary readers to imagine how those war time mothers must have felt by beginning the poem with a contemporary mother whose daughter had left home the day before she visited Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery for War Dead. Finding herself standing in her daughter’s now empty room, this mother imagines the pain felt by those wartime mothers when that fateful red slip arrived. The war draft notice was written on red paper and therefore known as *akagami* (赤紙) literally “red paper.” Ishikawa creates a further link between Tokyo now and then, by writing “Tokyo” in Katakana script (トウキョウ) rather than Chinese characters. This suggests that the Tokyo in the poem straddles a number of different time lines, including the contemporary Tokyo of today and the Tokyo during WWII.
On a more linguistic note, we have used the verb “will” in the final line of our translation of “My Daughter’s Room,” “Sons, who will end as bones” (骨になってしまうかもしれない) to express the verb kamoshirenai, more commonly translated as “may.” Although this expression can be used to convey uncertainty, in this case, there is a more superstitious implication. There is a strong Japanese belief in the power of words, referred to as kotodama (spirit of words). If words are spoken aloud, the power implicit in the word will cause what has been said to happen. No mother would dare to say her fears aloud in case that meant she had in fact helped cause her son’s death. So although she is all but certain that her son will never return home alive she uses the expression kamoshirenai to dilute the potential power of the kotodama.

Both “The Stone Monument” and “Girl 2” are powerful poems dealing with a difficult period in Japan’s modern history, focusing readers on various points of contestation. They present an uncompromising indictment of Emperor Showa, who Ishikawa feels should have taken far more responsibility for his acceptance of the sacrifices of so many young soldiers and an unsettling picture of the comfort women forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese Imperial Army in the occupied territories. Ishikawa ironically uses the term “Voluntary Labour Corps” or Kinrō teishin-tai (勤労挺身隊). Although this term translates literally as “voluntary,” during WWII the term was used as a euphemism for military comfort women.

Ishikawa presents herself both as a young girl during the war and as an older wiser poet, now looking back at the terrible acts perpetrated by the Japanese Imperial Army, embarrassed by her on complicit acceptance of the wartime patriotism. She uses the expression Kōkoku shōjo (皇国少女) or “patriotic daughter of the emperor” to emphasise how she and other young girls at the time, were encouraged to cheer on their army as the model of a “true” daughter of the Japanese empire.

Ishikawa embeds a series of tanka poems into “The Stone Monument,” beginning with a poem by herself in which she imagines what she thinks should have been engraved on the monument at Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery for War Dead. She then introduces the poem by Emperor Showa which is
actually engraved there. This contrast allows her to focus on the political underpinning of the poem, her challenge to Emperor Showa to accept his responsibility for the war. The poem then continues with a series of tanka composed by young Japanese soldiers written on the battlefield. By embedding these poems, she allows these soldiers to speak directly to her readers, showing just how deeply they believed in their emperor and how willingly they gave their lives as his shield. A contemporary reader cannot avoid feeling both a great sense of sadness and horror at their seemingly selfless sacrifice.

Our translation of “The Stone Monument” uses the official translation of Emperor Showa’s poem, as displayed on the Ministry of Environment’s official Chidorigafuchi website1 however, the translation of the soldiers’ poems are our own. We have used italics to emphasise the fact that these are quotations within the poem.

The two final poems were both written by young men who were soon to undertake suicide missions. The second last poem by Washio Katsumi was written at the Chiran base used by the kamikaze pilots. Some kamikaze pilots were allowed a short trip home to say farewell to their families before they flew off to their death. Others were allowed to spend a night with a family living near the Chiran base to symbolically farewell their families. The inclusion of Chiran in Ishikawa’s poem shows not only that Washio Katsumi was a kamikaze pilot but implies that he will soon fly to his death. The tragedy of this poem lies in the fact that the young pilot must “say nothing”; he cannot tell his mother, as she smiles in farewell, that this will be the last time he will ever see her. Although he uses the verb kaeru, often used to refer to returning home, the young pilot is referring to returning back to the Chiran base, thus implying his impending kamikaze flight. The final poem by Mizuo Toshio also focuses on the suicide missions of the Imperial army but this time providing an image of the human torpedos used by the navy, all the more poignant because his poem was written only five days before the surrender.

1 (http://www.env.go.jp/garden/chidorigafuchi/english/)
Ishikara skillfully avoids clarifying the subject in much of her poetry, often avoiding the use of pronouns altogether. This strategy allows Ishikawa to draw her readers into her work and to include them as the “you” or “we” of particular poems. “Girl 2” provides one such example in which Ishikawa sometimes includes pronouns and sometimes deliberately avoids them. The reader must consider whether the focus is actually the ailing 17-year-old “comfort woman,” the poet, or even the reader herself/himself. In our English translation, however, due to the importance of personal pronouns in English grammar, we have chosen to include the subject pronoun, even when omitted in the original. In another example, in our translation of “The Stone Monument,” we have sometimes chosen to include the title “Your Majesty” when the poet is using only the pronoun “you” (あなた) when we felt that it was important to clarify that she was referring to the emperor.

Another feature of Ishikawa’s Japanese original is her use of spaces rather than commas to incorporate pauses into her poetic phrasing. We have chosen to represent these inter-line pauses by adding longer spaces in the English, as a single space would fail to have the same effect.

Translators’ Notes: “My Daughter’s Room”

Red draft slip: The draft notice that families received when their sons were drafted to war was written on red paper and so was referred to as akagami (赤紙), literally “red paper.”

Banzai: During the war years, this expression was commonly used to bid farewell to soldiers as they left to fight for the emperor. It was very common to see a large group, made up of family, neighbours and the general public, gathering at the railway stations to cheer the soldiers on their way.

Translators’ Notes: “Stone Monument”

Chiran: During the war, Chiran, located in Kagoshima Prefecture, served as an airbase for kamikaze pilots.
Human torpedo: In the original Japanese, the term used is *kai-ten* (回天), which refers to the miniature submarine suicide torpedoes, manned by one sailor, that were used at the very end of WWII by the Japanese navy.

Translators’ Notes: “Girl 2”

Voluntary Labour Corps: The Japanese term *Kinrō teishin-tai* (勤労挺身隊) directly translates as “Voluntary Labour Corps”; however, during WWII this term was used to refer women and girls who were drafted for sexual and industrial labour. It came to be used as a euphemism for military comfort women.

*Annyeonghi kashipshiyo*: In the original poem, this Korean expression is written in Hangul with Japanese katakana furigana, as follows, 안녕히 가십시오. This is then followed by the Japanese translation *Sayonara* (さようなら) presented in brackets. In Korean this phrase is expressed in formal respectful language, which more literally means “Please look after yourselves and just go, leave me behind.”

“Having been able to safeguard and maintain the structure of the Imperial State, We are always with ye, Our good and loyal subjects, relying upon your sincerity and integrity...”: This is an extract from Emperor Showa’s surrender speech which was broadcast at noon on August 15, 1945. We have used the translation quoted in Robert J.C. Butow’s *Japan’s Decision to Surrender*, published in 1954 by Stanford University Press.

Patriotic daughter of the emperor: In the Japanese original, the term used is *Kōkoku shōjo* (皇国少女). This term was used to refer to the “patriotic young girl” that every “true” daughter of the Japanese empire should model herself on.

“Comfort women” station: In the Japanese original, the term used is *Ianjo* (慰安所). This refers to the military brothels which were set up to service the Japanese soldiers during WWII.
Siobhan Meï Abd Al Malik
Like a Dream

I don’t dream in Arabic or Lingala
not in Wolof or Bambara
I don’t dream in Spanish or English
but I speak, love and dream in French
and because they’re not in my head
and even less in my heart
they say this is still not my home

so I dream wide awake

that they may understand me.

Disintegrated

it hurts
not to see your face when you look in the mirror
it hurts to see yourself as other
unable to recognize yourself
the sickness of indifference hurts in the beginning
the virus of non-recognition is so aggressive
in the end you don’t give a damn
about the other guy’s face or your own
as anonymous as a résumé
‘cause they’ll laugh at you just the same
not just laugh, but straight up rip on you
‘cause you seriously don’t look like the guy for the job
I mean, your face doesn’t look so square so
you’re probably not square yourself
but they'll still put your face in a square
and from the beginning you're the only one out
of the loop

even though we give you what you need
to feed the bigmouthed fatty lie
a lie that's lookin' real fine
go ahead and try, nigger,
and we'll make excuses to your face
too bad we just rented it to someone else
oh I'm sorry you're just a little too qualified
when there's one it's ok but when there's
more than one you know how it is
it's true that you're pretty different from
the rest of your kind

and I could keep going on like that—
brother,
it's true, you were born here
but that doesn't change a thing
it's 'cause of your face
and what's more you won't shut your face
'cause you know, your parents said nothin'
not to you, not to anybody
they threw punches
and when they finally had somethin' to say
they said you should keep your mouth shut
'cause we were lucky to be here
and you said to yourself
but where do you want me to be?
and you said nothin' on the outside
you let your fists fly
and looked around with wide eyes
at all the guys who had the same face
and the same problems as you

you wanted to see somethin’ beyond—
to really see faces reflected back in the big mirror
in the middle of the living room
where the whole family sat
pretendin’ to recognize one another
and you finally saw in them
who you were supposed to be

or should become
you smiled at them
they said Beat it
you opened your arms
they said Go home
you said to yourself:
Even if it means bein’ alone

you let your fists fly
in their faces
it really hurts, doesn’t it
not to see your face when you look
in the mirror.
I was nothin’, or somethin’ close to nothin’
I was vain and, well, that’s what was linin’ my pockets
I was full of hate and ill at ease— a hate mixed with fear, ignorance
I cried in pain, from this imbalance in my own existence
I was dead and, hey, you brought me back to life
I said “I have” or “I don’t have” and you taught me to say “I am”
You told me “Black Arab White Jewish is to man what flowers are to water” ah

Oh, you, the one I love, and, hey, you, the one I love
I’ve crossed so many avenues, waitin’, waitin’ for you
That when I saw you, I didn’t know if it was you, if it was me, if it was you
Oh, you, the one I love, I create your name
In the desert of the cities I’ve known
‘Cause, I was sure of your existence, knew you’d hear me
Hey, you, the one I love, Oh, you, the one I love

I was nothin’, or somethin’ close to nothin’
I was vain and, well, that’s what was linin’ my pockets
I was full of hate and ill at ease— a hate mixed with fear, ignorance
I cried in pain, from this imbalance in my own existence
I was dead and, hey, you brought me back to life
I said “I have” or “I don’t have” and you taught me to say “I am”
You told me “Black Arab White Jewish is to man what flowers are to water” ah
Oh, you, the one I love, and, hey, you, the one I love
Neither street nor struggle blocked me from your view
Even at my lowest moment
When I told myself all was lost
I loved you as if I saw you
‘Cause even though I didn’t see you
I knew you were seein’ me.
Hey, you the one I love,
You are a lion and your heart is a sun
The ultimate savior of those lost in sleep
And, hey, you, the one I love, Oh, you, the one I love

I was nothin’, or somethin’ close to nothin’
I was vain and well, that’s what was linin’ my pockets
I was full of hate and ill at ease— a hate mixed with fear, ignorance
I cried in pain, from this imbalance in my own existence
You are, you are the alchemist of my heart
And, hey, you, the one I love, Oh you, the one I love
And, hey, you, the one I love… ¹

¹ Malik has performed The Alchemist on numerous television shows and at several music and spoken word festivals in France. My translation of L’Alchimiste locates itself at the crossroads of the textualized and performative versions of this piece.

The music video for this poem is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLCg__yXQcDE
Commentary

Abd Al Malik (born Régis Fayette-Mikano) is a French rapper, poet, novelist, filmmaker, and spoken word artist, whose writing and music address issues of religion, nationalism, and race. Born in 1975 in Paris, Malik’s family briefly returned to the Congo before settling in Strasbourg in the housing project of Neuhof, which serves as the backdrop for much of his earlier writing. In 1999 after founding the spoken word group, The New African Poets, Malik converted to Islam, a conversion that marked the beginning of a lifetime of advocacy for peace and unity among the diverse populations of France. His film *Qu’Allah bénisse la France* (based on his autobiography by the same title) was released in 2014.

It is the performative nature of Malik’s work that formally poses the greatest challenge to the translator. Much of Malik’s poetry rings with an oral quality native to rap and spoken word—hesitations, silences, murmurs come together textually without losing their original connection to the microphone. In so many of the poems and short pieces in this collection, the texture of Malik’s voice is present; the rhythm with which he speaks, performs, belongs to the streets in Strasbourg he grew up on, his words come together as quickly and softly as they do violently. Though he doesn’t completely ignore grammatical conventions he does bend them, as we often do when we speak, revealing to what extent language becomes but one tool among many for telling one’s story.

As a translator the oral quality of Malik’s poems proved difficult to capture. Not simply because I struggled to identify the relationship between utterance and text, but because of Malik’s awareness of the ideological implications of language. Though Malik does not hesitate to use the language and expressions of the immigrant and primarily black community he grew up in, he has made a name for himself in using this language to resist any kind of closed or permanent understanding of who he is. He doesn’t hesitate to quote Deleuze and Jay Z in the same sentence, to find poetry in the eyes of the dogs that roam his neighborhood. Malik’s work reveals that there are no rules in language nor in literature, but that disenfranchisement, racism, political corruption, and despair continue to diminish the voices of young, marginalized writers.
Alas, alas, my friend Posthumus,
The fleeing years slip quickly by.
No force or virtue can delay them—
We must grow wrinkled, age, and die.

Though you might sacrifice your oxen
Three hundred daily, cease not your fears.
You cannot sway relentless Pluto,
Huge Geryon’s keeper, unlearned in tears.

The dismal waters which confine
Tityos, all of us must sail,
Though we be kings or lowly peasants;
No earthly gifts will then avail.

In vain we flee from blood-drenched combat,
Avoid the sea’s engulfing tides.
In vain we shun the winds of autumn
For fear their chill might harm our hides.

Each in his turn must see Cocytos,
Flowing black in stagnant coils,
And meet the cursed spawn of Danaus
And Sisyphus, damned to age-long toils.

You’ll leave your lands, dear wife, and household,
And though you briefly were the lord
Of well-kept forests, none will follow
Except the cypress—pyre wood!
An heir shall gulp your choicest vintage
And splash upon your pebbled floors
Wine fit to stand on high priests’ tables—
The sweetest of your locked-up stores.
Quintus Horatius Flaccus, or “Horace” (65–8 BC) was the most popular lyric poet of the Augustan era. Though he wrote many longer and more serious poems, such as his epodes, satires, epistles, and Ars Poetica, he is most famous for his odes—short poems based on Greek models—which the contemporary rhetorician Quintillian thought the only lyrics in Latin worth reading. Horace’s odes are unique among Latin poems for their gentle lightheartedness. They sing the praises of everyday comforts, such as wine and good fellowship, and the follies of love. Their charm has endeared them to twenty centuries of readers, so that even in recent years, new translations into English free verse are still being published. As Spaeth put it: “no other [Latin] author has moved the pens of later poets so constantly to reproduction and imitation, none has sired so many parodies.”

It is particularly significant that Horace’s odes have often been translated into rhymed verse, such as Franklin P. Adams’ translations of odes 8 and 38 of Book 1. Rhyming and meter, perhaps because of their obvious artificiality, tend to confer a lightness that free verse is seldom able to achieve; hence the popularity of limericks. But this approach usually forces the translator to pay the price of deviation from fidelity; he must omit or poorly translate a word in order to fit the meter or find an appropriate rhyme. It might be argued that this particular ode should not be so treated. It is almost unique among its fellows in being of a somber, almost morose mood, so that the lightness of rhyming might be inappropriate. But the translator had no choice; the meter and rhymes came unbidden. In the initial attempt at an exact prose translation, the first stanza seemed determined to frame itself into tetrameters, with “by” and “die” in rhyming positions. This fortuitous arrangement provided the inspiration for continuing in the same format.

Although the ultimate aim was to achieve a verse translation that corresponded as closely as possible to the original Latin, the rhymed metric format forced several omissions and compromises. Since Latin is more compressed than English, it was necessary to omit one or two adjectives in each stanza. Some phrases, such as “whoever of us enjoys the gift of [life
on] earth” in the third stanza, could not be persuaded to fit the format and had to be replaced by other phrases of similar mood.

Repeated revisions left considerable debris, including alternative versions wherein fidelity to the original was relaxed for poetic considerations. For example, one might replace “friend” with “dear” in the first stanza, “age-long” with “endless” in the fifth, “briefly were” with “were awhile” in the sixth, and “locked-up” with “sealed up” in the seventh. The ultimate departure from fidelity was a loosely translated parody, in which the classical images were replaced by modern equivalents:

J. P. Posthumus, ageing comrade,
In not too long you’ll lose your hide;
And all the Mayo Brothers’ clinics
Can’t keep you from the Great Divide.

Don’t think that charity donations
Will help you when your time comes due.
The Reaper is immune to bribing;
He’s cut down bigger guys than you.

You’re booked to sail on Charon’s ferry
And can’t ignore the boarding call.
You won’t be in a first-class cabin;
It’s steerage deck for one and all.

Don’t try go get a draft deferment;
Or hug the shallows at the shore.
Don’t hope that trips to spas and salons
Will keep the Reaper from your door.

We all must cross the river Jordan
And walk the fiery floorless pit
We’ll see where Lizzie Borden’s burning,
Watch Adolph turning on a spit.

You’ll leave your townhouse, private golf course,
Your chorus girls in platinum fox,
And all the lumber shares you’ve cornered
Will merit you just one pine box.
Your kids will swill your bonded bourbon
And, dopes they are, dump down the sink
Your scotch, the match of any bishop’s—
The stuff you never lived to drink.

The classical allusions are in some instances obscure. Geryon was a giant, variously described as having either three heads or three bodies. Tityos was another giant, the son of the Earth goddess, who was punished in Tartarus (for attempting to rape Leto) by having two vultures peck eternally at his liver. Cocytos was one of the five rivers encircling the underworld. Danaus instructed his fifty daughters, forced to marry their cousins, to kill their husbands on their wedding night; forty-nine did so. Sisyphus, a greedy and cruel king, notorious for his trickery, was punished in Hades by being forced to roll uphill a huge bolder that always escaped him and rolled back down.

In short, Eheu fugaces is filled with allusions to unpleasant characters and places and is pervaded by the somber inevitability of death. Nonetheless, like Horace’s other delightful odes, it will continue to inspire translators and parodists for centuries to come.
Goro Takano
An Autumn Torso

Seen clearly inside
A poison hemlock
Is a ripe waist

A twisted womb which
Will remain sterile
For good

To whom in the world
Will a disjointed arm
Dedicate its momentary passion
Without any change in its figure

In the twilight where
Existence has overcome
A blood disease of humans
And has developed its plumpness
With a sense of nostalgia
The fire of this ruinous autumn
Moves from
Wax trees to
Sumac trees

Shiro Murano
秋のトルソ
Goro Takano
A Fish in Adolescence

Until you're pulled out of the water
With the bleeding from your gills
You are not a fish yet

When, as if they want to say something
Your eyes reflect the forest and the sky
And when your tail and fins
Start going into subtle spasm
Death finally makes you fishy enough

From an eternal distance
Someone calls you
In a small voice: “Thou fish”—
What is your depressed shape for

When your body is widely unfolded like a leaf
And your backbone is revealed at last
Neither memories nor language are left there
Except a drop of something rotten which
 Makes a bride’s hands fishy enough
Goro Takano

A Night Canal

Somewhere half-sleeping seagulls cry
Small fish, swallowing tar
Sometimes spring up painfully from the water
And sink deep back into the water

I’m talking not about the ocean
But about a nameless river flowing at the bottom of the night
Without its source and outlet
It’s a river of destiny
Where destiny remains stalled

In the midst of the lukewarm mist
Smelling of horses
I can see a bloodshot light all through the night
Staggering from behind the shade is
A man of the past
Out of his system, vomit and excrement spout profusely

I’m now talking about a dormant gentle river
Stagnating at the bottom of human consciousness
Due to the residue of no-exit sins
Goro Takano
A Small Civilization

Shiro Murano
小さな文明

A giant hand
Enters my mouth
And breaks with a snap
A tooth coated with blood
And tosses it on a glass plate
A young ghost says to me
“I’ll replace it with a new one
Within four or five days”
But I know the new one
Will be equally dead
Whose tooth was it before, anyway

From now on, at any rate
The echoes of my spirit will have to be
Crunched repeatedly with this gold-crowned stone-like substitute
And I must survive with it a hunger like Christ’s
An inlayed death
A replaced life
What kind of language will this mouth
Continue to speak until the end of time

I get up, finally
And spit the bitter blood into a piece of enamelware
Commentary

The four poems I chose for my translation are originally included in On Lost Sheep (The Japanese original title is Boyo-ki or 亡羊記) by Shiro Murano (村野四郎: 1901–75).

Murano is one of the most influential poets of the Showa-era Japan (1926–89). His early works were strongly influenced by surrealism, imagism and the German objectivism, while the poetry of his later years was marked by existentialism.

The most puzzling for me in translating the first poem, “An Autumn Torso,” was how to finalize the order of the following three keywords in its last stanza: “twilight,” “existence,” and “nostalgia.” In fact, the arrangement of those words in the original last stanza can be literally translated as “the twilight of the nostalgia of existence.” However, I didn’t like this undue vagueness, so I managed to contextualize those keywords as much as I could, without falling into a superfluous deviation from the original’s basic atmosphere.

When translating the second poem, “A Fish in Adolescence,” the very first obstacle for me was how to treat its title. The literal translation of the Japanese title might be “Youth’s Fish” or “A Fish of Adolescence.” But I chose the expression “in adolescence,” eventually, because it sounds the most natural to me. In addition, I first wondered about using the word “flat” (instead of the word “depressed”) for the Japanese adjective 偏平な (henpei-na) in the last line of my translation’s third stanza. I picked the word “depressed” after all, because it seemed to reproduce better the subtle color of miserableness hanging around the fish in the original poem. I also needed to ponder for a while as to how to translate the direct address in the third stanza; the original doesn’t include any pronoun in it (only the word “fish” is used there), but I intentionally inserted the word “thou” into my translation, because it seemed fit for the particular voice reaching from “an eternal distance.”

Intentionally again, I used the word “I” three times in my translation of the third poem, “A Night Canal,” though it doesn’t appear at all in the original. Other translators would choose not to feature this pronoun, but I thought the use of the first person necessary because (1) it would heighten the reader’s feeling of
being in the poem’s strange world (2) it would boost the translation’s overall readability. In addition, I could not help wondering how to interpret Murano’s use of the word “no-exit” in the last stanza of the original. No-exit “river”? No-exit “residue”? Or no-exit “sins”? After much thought, I picked the third choice.

I used the word “substitute” in the third line of the second stanza of the last poem, “A Small Civilization,” although it is not used in the original, where Murano merely says: “this gold-crowned stone.” My word choice should be justified, I believe, because it seems far better to show clearly in the translation that this “stone-like” thing is here a “substitute” of the wrenched-off tooth. In addition, the fourth line of the same stanza in the original contains another confusing issue: does it say “Christ’s own hunger” or “a hunger like Christ’s”? In the end, I selected the latter, which seemed more proper for the poet’s point of view.
Notes on Contributors

**Houssem Ben Lazreg** is currently a Ph.D. student and a teaching assistant for Arabic/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. Houssem has also taught Arabic, French, and English at different American institutions such as West Virginia University and Indiana University in Bloomington. In addition to teaching foreign languages, Houssem has been working as a freelance translator. His latest publication is the Arabic translation of a novel titled *Screwballs* by Catherine Mardon. His research interests include politics and translation, Middle Eastern graphic novels, and Islamist militant movements.

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

**Carol Hayes** is a senior lecturer in Japanese language and Japanese studies at the Australian National University, Australia. She has a Ph.D. in modern Japanese literature from the University of Sydney. Her research interests are broad, ranging from modern and contemporary Japanese literature and poetry to eLearning and Japanese teaching pedagogy. The poetry included here is part of the joint translation project of Japanese women’s poetry with Dr. Rina Kikuchi from Shiga University.

**George Held** has translated more than 100 of Martial’s epigrams and published many of these translations in such journals as *Circumference; Ezra; Natural Bridge; International Poetry Review;* and *Notre Dame Review,* as well as in *Martial Artist*
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**Rina Kikuchi** is an associate professor at Shiga University, Japan, where she has been teaching English language, literature and cultural studies since 2003. She has a Ph.D. in contemporary Irish poetry from Chiba University, which included a period of research at Trinity College, Dublin; and an M.A. in comparative literary theories from University of Warwick, UK. Her research interests include comparative literature and translation studies, with a current focus on the translation of Irish poetry written in English into Japanese, and research into the poetry of Sagawa Chika as a part of her second Ph.D. on Japanese *modanizumu* poetry at Australian National University. The poetry included here is part of the joint translation project of Japanese women’s poetry with Dr. Carol Hayes from the Australian National University.

At age 20, **Madeleine McDonald** fell into translation by accident. When she was a novice translator with no formal qualifications, her first boss insisted she read the King James Bible for ten minutes on arrival at work, to improve her English. This unorthodox training was successful and she later worked as a translator, editor and precis-writer for international organisations. She co-translated a legal textbook, *Sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly Islands*. Her own writing includes short stories, poetry and newspaper columns. Her third novel, *A Shackled Inheritance*, was published in 2016.

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historical complexity and cultural specificity of the relationship between language and racial prejudice.

Born in Shanghai, **Hyacinthus Meredith** currently lives in Sydney, Australia. His poetry has been published in *Cordite Poetry Review*, and his translations of poems from classical Chinese in *Ezra* and *Clarion*. He is currently working on articles on the poetry of A. E. Housman and the aesthetics of mathematical proof.

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**David Radavich** has published seven poetry collections, including *America Bound: An Epic for Our Time* (2007), *Canonicals: Love’s Hours* (2009), and *Middle-East Mezze* (2011). His plays have been performed across the U.S., six of them off-Off-Broadway, and in Europe. His latest books are *The Countries We Live In* (2014) and a co-edited anthology called *Magic Again: Selected Poems on Thomas Wolfe* (2016). He is currently president of the North Carolina Poetry Society.

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**Paul Shlichta** received a Ph.D. in chemistry from the California Institute of Technology. He has since been a research scientist, consultant, associate editor of a technical journal, and on-
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**Doug Slaymaker** is Professor of Japanese at the University of Kentucky. His translation, with Akiko Takenaka, of Furukawa Hideo’s *Horses, Horses, in the End the Light Remains Pure* appeared in Spring of 2016. He is currently translating two novels of Kimura Yūsuke while completing a manuscript of animals in post-311 Japanese fiction.

Born in the city of Hiroshima, **Goro Takano** (高野吾朗) is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Medicine at Saga University, Japan, where he teaches English and Japanese/Western literature. He obtained his M.A. in American Literature from the University of Tokyo and his Ph.D. in English Creative Writing from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. His novel *With One More Step Ahead* (2009), and his poetry collections *Responsibilities of the Obsessed* (2013) and *Silent Whistle-blowers* (2015) have all been published in the U.S. by BlazeVOX.

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We gratefully acknowledge support from Emily Brooks Rowe and from the College of Arts and Sciences at Western Michigan University. We would also like to express our appreciation to Jenaba Duymovic Waggy and to Thomas Krol, Medieval Institute Publications production editor.

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ISSN (print): 973-2325-5072
ISSN (online): 2325-5099
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