

OREAD



**AN INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE
OF LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION**

Autumn 2021

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**A MAGAZINE OF LITERATURE
IN TRANSLATION**

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Pasquale Verdicchio

from Only You

The Self in Others and the Other as Self

Feet up
thirty-seven thousand feet
up in the air of winter
barely leading a Canadian front
on Ash Wednesday with only return
the real thought inescapable
to where thousands of feet up
again weather waits
and the weight of flight continues
to make insomnia a thing of the past
merely jet-lagged is slightly tired
language changes in transition
from state to state to state
the obvious but I mean that language
even changes on the way
from mind to mouth slowed down
and slurred feet up
to get the blood flowing again
down to my head and full circulation
no longer a way out
walking against direction
in fuselage again leaving to return
and return as leaving.

The topic of translation is always fascinating and full of possibilities. Yet, it is a topic that I tend to shy away from because, while for me it is wide open in terms of possibilities, for many others it is guided by rules of engagement, fidelity and reproduction. Quite possibly, translation may the ac-

tivity that best represents much of the work we do day to day, and here I mean in life in general and not only as academics or writers. In any case, it most definitely represents all of my so-called activities in writing, art, criticism and the negotiations of everyday life.

If I were to attempt to give a first instance of an awareness of translation in a more immediate sense, I would have to say that it would most likely have to be when I began to translate myself to and into another culture when we emigrated to Canada. At that point the imagination had to begin to construct a self that could negotiate a new language, new social spaces, and a new cultural grammar, projecting an existence onto a place that had been, up until that point, completely unknown. Not only, but in living in such a reality one also becomes aware of a residual self that remains in the place left behind. In other words, to keep with the translation metaphor, a language and culture from which one is transported, and one that with time begins to transpose itself into other parallel realms. It becomes a practice that slowly but surely fading as a practice and living on as a memory of sorts.

Rilke thought of mirrors as “intervals in time,” an apt description for the process of translation. The translator takes a step into a linguistic interval between languages in which we exist in suspension, neither in one nor the other; a mirror of expression and interpretation that defies fixity in its very ability to remain between sense, construction, syntax, and meaning.

Translatio

Translatio: carrying something from one place to another. Had I not been carried from one place to another as a result of emigration, I most likely would not have begun to engage translation as an activity. First, as a mode of survival by which languages and cultures were/are brought side by side, translated, coordinated, compromised and made to work with each other, and then through my activity in translating Italian literary works into English. This second instance of translation is merely an extension of the first, and represents a way in which to engage language and a feeble attempt at possessing it. One’s mother tongue begins to become distant the moment the linguistic environment changes. The weaning process is a painful one, resembling amnesia in the way that words become less and less available, or manifest them-selves in altered forms brought on by the effect of linguistic interaction and cross-influence. The process of familiarization within a foster language is just as problematic.

My recollection of the process of language acquisition, and what remains of it in my translation practice, manifest as “intervals in time.” As one mirrors one’s self in another language, attempting to discover within it a semblance of one’s cultural physiognomy, there is an “interval” in which choices of expression can be made. Occasionally, it happens that within the “intervals” the mirroring is deceptively invisible, and I find myself translating Italian into Italian, rather than in English. Could the insistence to speak one’s language, regardless of what is being spoken by everyone else, be considered to be a traumatic manifestation of the “interval”?

Movement

Even if insinuating a sense of stillness, translation is, in essence, movement. The movement required by translation is one that necessitates the intervention and knowledge accumulated through personal culture. So, in order to bring to the interpretation of the text the best possible referents, the process also requires that one transcend one’s biography. Translation is not about language, translation is about language. As such, there must also be a consciousness of the text’s translation as an occasion of present history. The job of the translator becomes one of “moving texts between” and “to move between texts,” an existing one and an eventual one, and an attempt to achieve a coincidence that might bring together textual expressions that are part and parcel of experience.

Transportation / Migration

Narrative is the attempt to establish some sort of rapport between the person who tells something and the person who receives the telling. Translation steps into that gap by offering another possibility, or at least it was for me a different approach to establishing a narrative, but a narrative without an apparent interlocutor. I found myself working not from English into Italian, which would have made more sense given that I was coming to English as a second language, but rather from Italian into English.

I am convinced now that the idea was to counter the effect of emigration by denying the first phase of cultural identification that we suppose language to represent. By going from Italian into English I was/am writing as someone entering into a knowledge relationship with the languages that proposes English as a mother tongue and Italian as an adopted or learned language. Such a reversal could be regarded as an attempt to translate myself into Italian, thereby re-suturing the gap opened up by emigration. The

transportation, or migration, of my language in this odd and peculiarly twisted manner back toward my language, was a way to move through migration and toward inhabitation.

Aside from translation, my own writing expresses a similar relationship. Having mostly done away with conventional narrative, and often even with the effects of conventional grammar and word use, the writing is an extension of my translating or translated body. By avoiding English in such a way, my attempt was to re-create for myself and an eventual reader the effects of entering a foreign language environment. The discomfort, ambiguity, and inadequacy that one might feel in participating in a new language are what I sought to make happen on the page.

My aim is to make English language readers uncomfortable in reading their mother tongue, mirroring my own experience in learning English, and attempt to re-make the language as mine. In other words, dissolve and re-define the distinction between foreign and native. It's no wonder, and I should say that to some extent it in fact pleases me, that almost all reviews of my writing comment on it in terms of "foreignness" and "translation."

Writing in a language whose literature does not control one's imagination makes prolems [...]. Verdicchio's poems would work in any language, even esperanto. But his English presents problems to those of us whose minds are full of the noises of English literature. (Indeed, I am inclined to wonder if Verdicchio does not compose in Italian, and then translates his own verse.) Just as the French admire the poetry of Poe because they cannot hear or speak the thump of English stress, the Italian Verdicchio, too, seems unable to hear the thump. (M. Travis Lane)

Of course my "ear" is different! But, if we cannot allow language to emerge out of its "prison house" and allow for a greater spectrum of expression and experience, then we are not allowing for the possibility of linguistic convention to be unveiled as just that, and as such is a limitation to the very freedom that poetry requires. In today's world, the reluctance to imagine languages as living cultural entities, the evolution of which includes and depends upon the influx and influence of different noises beyond the "thump."

The intention driving my work as a translator and as a writer is not to be opaque, impenetrable and unreadable. I am in fact attempting quite the opposite. Italo Calvino, in the short story "Le avventure di un lettore" (A

Reader's Adventures), digs deeply into human frailty and habits to illustrate how, even when involved in the most stimulating forms of entertainment, we look elsewhere for something better than what is engaging us at that moment. The *lettore* in the story is at the beach, deeply engaged in a novel, when he notices a woman sunbathing on the rocks nearby. The reader becomes curious and thinks that he might look for an excuse to start a conversation with the woman. As he ponders his approach, the reader begins to question whether the conversation might not possibly turn out to be less interesting than the novel he is reading. The story continues with the creation of an imagined narrative by which the urge to communicate with the woman and that to finish the book create an enormous internal struggle for the man.

What is important in the story is not the story of the reader or his imagined liaison but, rather, the terms of the distractions that weave yet another story. Desire, indecision, the search for happiness and the pain of suffering, all of which spring forth from an inability to deal with, recognize or value present history. I am not comparing myself to Calvino, however, what I hope to achieve with my writing is to create a net of continual distractions. And, as the distractions do their work, allow for another narrative to slither quietly underneath, in all the apparent chaos. I have the stories and the language, but they are not meant to meet a reader's expectations.

Places

“When you find your place where you are, practice occurs.”
(Dogen)

Emigration is the result of the failure to create community. The product is dis-placement, the admission of the incapability to establish a place as a functioning community, to fulfill the promise of nation. Emigration replaces that trauma with another that is called immigration. Ethnic writing, the writing of difference, the assertion of something “other” than the national and nationally endorsed, responds to both the points of departure and arrival. Ethnic writing is the expression of trauma. What we have yet to do, however, is to establish, or at least begin to uncover, an ethics of ethnicity. Such an ethics would go a long way toward proposing terms of equanimity that might tend toward a global community much different from the corporate globalism we see cannibalizing the world bit by bit. An ethnic ethics would divest itself of nationalisms, uphold cultural diversity and hetero-

geneity, and possibly begin to form what Gramsci might have called an international popular culture.

And so, for 20 years the Association of Italian Canadian Writers has presented our experience in place. Wonderfully, we all embody different dimensions of place which are also temporal: 1st generation, 2nd generation, 3rd generation, and so on. And we have grappled with the terms by which to define them. Assimilation and acculturation are words that tell of the struggle with defining the terms of our culture. As far as a vocabulary through which to describe what we might feel as displacement (and I would suggest that if we did not somehow feel this, the Association would not exist and we would not be here today) all we have is the vocabulary of departure and arrival: emigration and immigration, both of which are collapsed into a term indicative of a lack of place: Italian-Canadian. Hyphenate it, slash it, do what you wish; it still signifies a sense of lack of what we might call home. As such, the AICW could be said to represent a first step toward replacement, and the writing of Italian Canadians to be a form of literature as replacement.

C

How can we go home, and which home is it
that we want to reach; a home
of distance, a home of division, or a home away
from home where all will seem

like home but will differ greatly. A home adorned
with scents and images of the home imagined and
constructed at home
warm between the sheets, asleep, dreaming
of home.

(Verdicchio 30)

In the end, after more than two decades of work, all we can do is close with more questions: What drives our continued activities? Is it a matter of re-discovery of some forgotten or misplaced link with a culture? Are we narrating identity or producing it? The AICW is the result of a sort of what Stuart Hall might call “an imaginary coherence.” (220-236) While much writing continues to address the past of that coherence, what we have become and who we are is still struggling to be addressed. Of course, identities

have histories. We came from somewhere but, like everything else, those histories too have undergone transformations. Identities are not fixed within some idealized past but are at the mercy of historical, cultural and power relations. Identity is a reflection of how we position ourselves within, and in relation to, the narratives of the past. This sets us in a precarious situation in which while we are Italian and Canadian we are also not Italian and not Canadian. As the Italian writer Gianni Celati reminds us in his story “Studenti in mezzo alle acque”: “Tutto ciò che ti attraversa non sei tu, eppure tu sei solo questo.” (We are not what passes through us, and yet that is all we are.)

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Robert Lalonde

Translation by Jean-Paul Murray

from Rebuilding Paradise

The previous day, on Christmas, in front of a window lashed by blowing snow, I'd scribbled on the back of an unpaid bill words from Scott Fitzgerald—attributed to his dear Gatsby: “I saw the skins of tigers flaming in the night.”

Those words, precisely.

Our house was destroyed by fire at night, on December 26, 2018.

Both of us are somewhere. Sheltered. Far from home. Somewhere. Elsewhere. In front of a big lake that is blue as the sky this morning.

Somewhere, nowhere, elsewhere. A July like none other. *Aggiornamento*, as the Italians say. In transition. *Transition, sanctuary, displaced*: obscure words that mean everything and nothing. I still see “the skins of tigers flaming in the night.”

Whitman accompanies me. Everything’s fine. Everything will be fine.

A man is a summons
and a challenge.
It is good to fall.
Battles are lost in the same
spirit in which they are won.

And there are two of us, what luck. Two who desire the same metamorphosis. Endless conversations at night, in the blue bedroom of the transitional house, beside the big lake.

Our old Eden has turned into a savannah where she went to get day lilies, carnations, bellflowers, lilacs, bleeding hearts, peonies and delphiniums for our future garden... She works so hard. Me? I've been seeing an abyss in every scratch for the last six months. So I write. That's my way of breathing.

Before you breathe, you don't know you're suffocating.

It was time for me to breathe.

Thinking of her, I hear Whitman: "I understand the large heart of heroes."

I walk through burnt debris. Our kitchen, our bedroom, the living room, the library: caverns filled with dark tales. Ghostly foliage waltzes on the walls of an unknown bedroom.

I listen to the loon wailing its passionate song. A call, an exhortation. It casually greets the brand new day. I go to the window and grab the binoculars. There, at the end of the dock: three of them; the mother and her baby, which the waves hide, reveal and cover again, and the father swimming a little farther offshore, decked out in nuptial plumage. He dives. I count thirty-six seconds before he resurfaces.

This new time is out of synch. It moves forward and backward at once, so unlike what it was before. The hour, the day, the week, the month: same fleeting duration that dilates and contracts.

I am around, tenacious, acquisitive, tireless
and cannot be shaken away.

The sweet smell of coffee rises from the kitchen. Humming a syncopated air, she invents a necessary poem filled with good cheer. What happened to us, happened to us, that's how it is and that's that. The day is new, the only one of its kind, go downstairs! I mumble Whitman to my unshaved self: "There are millions of suns left..."

She doesn't hear me. I yell: "I think I'm going to translate Whitman! All *Leaves of Grass*! That'll keep me busy!"

She answers: "Why not?"

I start with one verse in my head: "Loose the stop from your throat."

"*Crache le mors qui entrave ta voix.*"

Not bad...

I head downstairs.

Our house burned down exactly six months ago.

Marie-Claire Blais, Virginia Woolf, Jean Giono, Faulkner, Hemingway, Gabrielle Roy, Albert Camus, Colette, Maupassant, Flannery O'Connor and so many close friends were burned, necessary companions, absolutely essential comrades. Firefighters really tried to get them out of the burning house in single file—let's see, four thousand books frozen in thick blocks heavy as slate stones. I shouted to them: "Never mind; it doesn't matter anymore!"

I believed it, didn't believe it, I no longer knew.

Today, I know I'm not deluding myself when I say, "alas!" and "good riddance."

Yet am I immunized against pirating other works?

That's when I hear Jean, my dear friend and publisher, proclaim: "At least you won't quote so much now!"

If I quote so much, it's because I don't want to be the only one to have been born with a mixed bag of paradoxes around my neck. And I'm convinced courage can come from imitation.

"Forever alive, forever forward!"

What is fatigue, if not a loss of confidence, an unjust betrayal of desire?

I would sleep endlessly, annihilate myself and abdicate any future without remorse.

Wrong! You would feel remorse, and you know it. Life and the future don't wait.

A nap will set you straight. With the hissing of rain. Go on, dive into the brief death that annihilates and restores.

I dig through the ruins, looking for one of my books. I remember writing it, heart in my throat and fire in my pencil. Lifting debris, burnt planks, broken bottles and stinking rags; I cough like a doomed man, but all I find are old papers with dreadfully washed-out letters. And then, under a cooking pot black as a witch's cauldron, I find the book of accounts we kept deep inside the dining-room sideboard. I grab it and decipher the word *incunable* on its cover. I open it. Its blank pages are stuck together by what looks like blood and smears my fingers. A thunderclap and all the lights go out.

I stare at the ceiling of the unknown bedroom where the pine's giant shadow is dancing. It's a new friend, a protector, standing guard in front of the house. What house? Where am I? What day is dawning? What unwritten masterpiece did I dream about? And who's singing in the distance?

Suddenly, I know. The transitional house, the great book that has always been expected of me, my loon is complaining, modulating for me the sadness of being an exile. I keep telling myself: "Surviving is possible, perhaps even easy, after death passes by and leaves you behind."

I do not want the constellations
any nearer. I whimper no more,
postpone no more, need nothing...

Yesterday, we introduced our daughter, her man and our grandchildren to our future house, baptized Louisiana, due to its New Orleans style. They congratulated us and seemed happy for us. But was their heart really in it? The old house was their one and only paradise.

No matter how, no matter what, shall come forth something to make a greater struggle necessary.

Another transitional home. We navigate from one cottage to the other while waiting for the new house to welcome us.

I'm lost, growing detached from these constant disturbances, which abolish the old joys and sorrows that had brought us out of ourselves only yesterday. Suddenly, nothing is near or close by, everything is against us.

Most of my books went up in smoke. Of course, I'll still be able to replace some of them. But my desolation is deeper and lies elsewhere. It touches on the edge of the past, makes me look blissfully at years braided with books parading by, at desires tied to plots imagined in their company, all that unfolded inside me to decipher the works of leading writers.

Since the very beginning, I've measured myself against infinite greatness, to the point of gaining the bitter certainty that faith and courage aren't enough, that I'd have needed and still need that gift from the gods, which the great ones were lucky to inherit.

This orbit of mine cannot be
swept by a carpenter's compass.

My book—*Fais ta guerre, fais ta joie*—will be published soon. The firefighters, by all accounts heroic, pulled my half-melted computer out of the flames, and expert technicians managed to pull the manuscript out of it, the Devil knows how. Faithful to my risky habit, I hadn't kept a spare copy in a safe place and, of course, the handwritten notebook had burned. A small miracle that followed the almost improbable one of our survival—we barely escaped the flames, both of us naked as the day we were born.

Hoping the small book would be worthwhile, I put all my heart into it, all the love I had and a great deal of care. As an epigraph, these words from Whitman:

Did you wait for one with a flowing mouth
and indicative hand?

It's about my father, the amateur painter—that's what he called himself. He's in the book from beginning to end, freely relating his hilarious aphorisms.

Under a pile of faded clothes, in the darkness of our old barn, where we're trying to sort out what's to be kept and discarded, I discover some thirty notebooks from the diary I've kept for over fifty years. Their covers and edges are smeared with soot, but their pages are all intact. I thought they'd been destroyed, and here are more than three thousand pages... Our friend Francis found them the day after the fire, under the table in the ashes of my office. In the miserable confusion of that day, I didn't have the heart to ask myself what to do with them.

This morning, they remind me of... what, exactly? A treasure that's been spared? An existence that's lasted too long? The constancy of a past that refuses to let go of me?

I've often wanted to burn these notebooks (!), where I confess my desires, shortcomings, idolatries, revulsions, fears and the unexpected returns of my courage to carry on. As well, and above all, the beauty of the world, its violence, sweetness and indispensable connivance.

Decidedly, something or someone doesn't want me to forget my past, that endless novel about an "extravagant in a hurry"—as my father described me—who never for a day thought himself wiser or crazier than the next guy.

Confront night, storms, hunger, ridicule,
accidents, rebuffs as the trees and
the animals do.

A cappuccino on the terrace of the lovely village café where I was exceptionally happy and wonderfully sad, fifty years ago today, mad with desire and wildly spellbound by the beauty of the countryside. Who would've

said that one day...?

But I no longer marvel at anything now, except our incredible luck,
pulled along by the cavalcade of disaster.

Larry Tremblay

Translation by Donald Winkler

from The Choreographer Tree / L'Arbre Chorégraphe

L'inconsolable Soif

La poésie meurt souvent. C'est qu'on l'assassine facilement. Personne ne s'en plaint. Quelques personnes peut-être, oui, de rares et fugaces silhouettes se couchent sur son cadavre frais et tiquent. Ou montrent une moue. Puis vaquent à leurs affaires. La poésie est un poisson d'or qui, une fois sur un milliard, lance un éclair. Sa fulgurance écorche le banc compact où il se confondait. Banc de quoi...? Au choix : truites, sardines, enflures, slogans, pubs, convenances, mots paresseux, souffreteux, dévitaminés, phrases cardiaques, paragraphes neurasthéniques, long déroulement de rouleau de papier hygiénique dans l'air piétiné par des matins monotones.

The Inconsolable Thirst

Poetry dies over and over.
It is simple to kill.
No one protests.
A few people perhaps,
yes, there are some rare,
evanescent silhouettes that stretch themselves out
on its fresh corpse and grimace.
Or pout.
Then go about their business.
Poetry is a fish of gold that,
one in a billion,
lets loose a flash of lightning.
Its brilliance sears the teeming school
in which it's been merged.
What school?
You may choose:
trout, sardines, swellings,
slogans, ads, conveniences,
idle words, sickly, vitamin deprived,
cardiac sentences, neurasthenic paragraphs,
a long unreeling of paper
in air weighed down by monotone mornings.

C'est un secret éventé : peu lit de la poésie. Trop en écrit qui n'en est pas, qui pourrait en être mais, pour des raisons de rigueur et de densité de la pensée, n'en sera, au bout de la phrase, que l'effort non soutenu. Paresse ? Illusion que fracturer un cœur et laisser s'échapper sans contrôle ce qui en sort deviendra texte et, forcément, poétique ? Cependant, la poésie n'est pas qu'affaire de mots. C'est une expérience. Ça se vit. Au mieux, ça s'existe. Demandez au poète encore vierge, enraciné dans le vert de son désir et dans les bleus de son angoisse : des braises reviennent au feu comme un évanoui à la conscience.

It's a time-worn open secret:
few people read poetry.
Too many write what it is not,
what might have been poetry
but for a shortfall in rigor and substance,
yielding at the end of a sentence only a labour unfulfilled.
Is it laziness?
Or the illusion that in opening up a heart
and letting everything within spill out unconstrained,
one will produce a text that is bound to be poetic?
Yet poetry is not just a question of words.
It is an experience.
It has a life.
At its best, it endures.
Ask the still virgin poet,
grounded in the greenery of his desire
and the blueness of his pain:
embers come back to life the way someone
who has fainted will regain consciousness.

Poisson or. Jaillissement. Pétrole pensée. Flèche œil. Cible joie. Échappée.
Lièvre feu . Zigzag glace. Verbe fusée.

(On soulève un mot comme un tapis. On regarde ce que le temps a caché
sous sa surface. Qui fait le ménage devant le bric-à-brac du lexique ?)

Qui n'a pas fabriqué, au sein de ses organes, une panoplie de cadenas, de
retraits, de caillots de verre ? S'abandonner : se défaire de cette collection
coûteuse ?

Il n'y a pas que soi dans le sac du monde. Pas que soi au fond du miroir.
Déchirez le sac, cassez le miroir, vous y découvrirez la multitude.

Fish gold.
Spurting.
Petrol thought.
Arrow eye.
Target joy.
Escape.
Hare fire.
Zigzag ice.
Word rocket.

(We lift up a word as we do a carpet's edge.
We see what time has hidden beneath its surface.
Who puts order into the lexicon's odds and ends?)
Who has not assembled,
deep inside,
a panoply of padlocks, discards, shards of glass?
And if one were to let oneself go?
To dispose of this costly collection?
You are not alone in the world's sack.
Not alone in the mirror's depths.
Tear open the sack, shatter the mirror,
there you will find multitudes.

Quand me suis-je abandonné ? Eh bien, voilà : j'y réponds car il y a un lien à faire avec l'expérience poétique.

C'est un pays, pas une œuvre, pas une personne, mais un pays - comment dire cela ? - qui m'a sorti de mon armure : l'Inde.

Je ne crois pas à la magie à l'exception de celle qu'on appelle le réel. Il suffit de penser son cerveau, d'accuser réception du poids que sa matière fait dans le crâne. Son gris est la condensation de l'infini. On peut passer toute une vie en promenant sa tête comme un bocal, serrant les côtes de peur de la renverser. Ou à la remplir sans jamais penser la vider. Tête : début du corps ? Tête : fin de l'âme ? Engrenage qui enclenche ciel et sol ?

When did I yield myself up?

Well, let's see:

I'm answering the question because there is an association
to be made with the poetic experience.

It was a land, not a creation, not a person,
but a land – how to say it? –
that freed me from my armor:

India.

I do not believe in magic,
other than that one regards as real.

It is enough imagine one's brain,
to acknowledge the weight of its matter inside the skull.

What's grey is a condensation of the infinite.

We may spend our lives lugging our head around in a jar,
clutching its sides for fear of its spilling out.

Or filling it up with no thought of emptying it.

The head: the body's beginning?

The head: the soul's end?

Gears to engage air and ground?

Je me suis égaré.

L'Inde. J'y reviens. Oui. Un matin - c'était plus qu'un matin, c'était l'aube fragile, mouillée, le souffle de la terre flottant à sa surface comme un tulle de pensée, matin qui n'en finissait plus de se dématérialiser et de se confondre avec la porosité des marcheurs levés avant lui - je rencontrai un homme sous la branche d'un banyan. Assis dans le nœud de son corps. Il fumait une *beedi*. Je m'approchai de lui. Je fumai avec lui. Il me dit :

Qui a un sourire
sur le point de naître
traverse le soleil

tu prends un hôtel
c'est une fenêtre

I digress.

India.

Let me go on.

One morning – it was more than a morning,
it was a fragile dawn, damp,
the earth's breath adrift on its surface like a net of thought,
a morning that never stopped melting away
and suffusing the porosity of those walkers earlier risen–
I met a man beneath the branch of a banyan tree.

He was seated in the knot of his own body.

He was smoking a *beedi*.

I went up to him.

I smoked along with him.

He told me:

Whoever has a smile
about to be born
crosses the sun

you take a hotel
it's a window

elle ralentit ce que tu regardes
tu dors les yeux ouverts
mais tu marches dans la neige d'un souvenir

combien de temps
à croire que rien n'avance ?

que tu n'es pas là
où tu penses ?

à l'aube tu bois un thé

tu rinces tes yeux

voyageur
vois-tu derrière le réel
ce qui pense dans l'atome ?

plante une aiguille dans ta pupille
laisse couler
l'eau de mots salée
où s'use l'énigme de ta conscience

it slows what you gaze upon
you sleep eyes open
but you walk through your memory's drifting snow

how long
to accept that nothing moves on ahead?

that you are not
where you think?

you drink tea at dawn
you bathe your eyes

traveller
can you see behind the real
what is pondered in the atom?

plant a needle in your pupil
let flow
a water of salted words
where the enigma of your sentience wears away

chien de phrases maigres
un vautour laboure l'infini
l'œil gonflé de blanc

des dieux se réduisent à leur cuir
matière odorante où craque le temps

des cloches énervent le vent
pâle oxygène échappé du fleuve gris

la lumière ne se lave plus
trop de bûchers où explosent les os

glisse voyageur une photo
entre ta peur et ta mémoire future

le repos ne s'assoit plus
il s'étend dans l'étonnement

le bec des corbeaux
dans l'intime
dans l'ultime

dog of gaunt words
a vulture ploughs the infinite
its eye swollen white

there are gods ground down to their leather
odorous matter where time fractures

bells trouble the wind
pale oxygen exits a grey river

light cleanses itself no longer
too many pyres where bones explode

traveller slip a photograph
between your fear and your pending remembrances

repose may no longer sit itself down
it lies down bedazzled

the crow's beak
in the intimate
in the ultimate

résidu du rien

où

l'or

ne

vaut

pas

le

noir

bu

par

l'œil

la vie dans un dé

le doute est un désert

une barque s'empare de ton torse

te voilà respirable comme la palme

été bref couteau de vert dans l'orage

trop de chemins dans ta main

l'Orient jette des coussins d'air

residue of nothing
where
gold
is
not
worth
the dark
imbibed
through
the eye

life in a dice
doubt is a desert

a boat takes hold of your torso
there you are breathable as a palm
short summer green knife in the storm

too many pathways through your hand
the Orient lobs cushions of air

tu observes le diamant des cadavres
jetés dans la boue de la pensée

la chaleur fait éclore le vrai
essentiel soleil de sel

les animaux ressemblent à leurs âmes
forêt de besoins de musiques claires

après la douche c'est le temps debout
celui de l'herbe montant au ciel

tu accompagnes la foule dans sa rêverie
tu t'inclines devant le présent

rien ne se perd dans l'œil
de chaque côté
il y a ou ici ou là
la chute infinie l'inconsolable soif

sur l'eau assassinée par ses vagues
s'allongent les regards

you eye the cadavers' diamond
tossed into the mire of thought

the heat brings truth into bloom
the solar essence of salt

animals mirror their souls
a woodland of wants of bright musics

after the shower it's time on its feet
that of grass reaching up for the sky

you partner the crowd in its dreaming
you yield before the present

nothing is lost in the eye
on each side
there is either here or there
the unending descent the inconsolable thirst

over the water put to death by its waves
there extends the gaze

les nuages songent au repas du ciel
à ces âmes de pluie
lotus fuis par les mots

l'infini se trouve partout
console-toi disparais dans cette pensée
dépose ta peur

voyageur que transportes-tu
sinon une fenêtre assombrie par hier
où as-tu mal en te levant du lit inconnu ?

voyageur y a-t-il plusieurs façons
d'ouvrir une porte en feu
de traverser l'air que tu portes
sur ton visage de vieil enfant ?

à quoi penses-tu quand tu crois être là
où tes pas déjà t'ont quitté ?

ne tente pas de te retrouver
le voyage t'efface

the clouds muse on the sky's repast
on those souls of rain
the lotus deserted by words

the infinite is everywhere
be heartened melt into this thought
lay down your fear

traveller what are you carrying
if not a window dimmed by yesterday?
where does it hurt when you rise from an unknown bed?

traveller are there many ways
to open a door on fire
to pass through the air you wear
upon your primal child's face?

what are your thoughts when you believe you are there
where your steps have already fled you?

do not seek yourself out
it is the journey deletes you

H.C. ten Berge

Translation by Pleuke Boyce

from Speaking in Tongues

An Initiation

The White Shaman (I)

1

Flying in over the Sont,
over dark bowls of Finnish lakes.

Boarding the kayak
of the departed.

Drifting on the waters
between taiga and tundra.

Purging eye and ear
in emptiness and expanse.

Feeding on berries, on cap
and scent of the divine mushroom.

Dreaming the dream
of the eternal present.

As an arctic bear
retiring into snowblind drunkenness again.

2

Melting seven snow flakes on the tongue
in waning afternoon light.

Crawling into his tent
when the sleepy sun sinks behind the woodlands.

Lying on a bed of leaves
fanning the smouldering fire of birch bark.

Spying on the white-blue Pole Star
through the smoke hole.

Watching in pure joy the heavenly nail
and shining navel of the universe.

Leaving the tent on all fours
for the distant swoosh of a wingbeat.

To stand eye to eye with the white wolves
of a brief dawn.

3 *Initiation*

The Great Mother flies
between Ural and Altai.

To grow rigid between her feathers and sleep
the death sleep of the shaman.

Her throat is a drum,
her throat becomes his vulnerable voice.

From the drum: raw cackling of reindeer-koryaks,
the hoofbeat, the rolling call of Yakuts on horseback.

Snow is on his lips,
foam covers the ground.

From her breast the birch tree grows
and the sleeper shelters in its upper branches.

A beak pecks at his groin,
an eagle feather trembles in the wind.

4

To wound oneself to be reborn
unharméd and clear.

Roughly toppled out of the egg
by the waving mother who flies away.

The first snow has fallen; a fresh game trail
leads from the forest's edge to here.

Oh children of Nanook
he returns with his song.

Nails of ice stand in the cortex of knowing.
The lips are cold but the tongue is purified.

Who brings light? Who healing?
He has been carried around the world seven times.

His hair, like a hat,
is pierced with a flight feather.

5 *First song of the shaman*

'Slender she is, small like a baby bear,
she shakes her black braids like wings,

her calico smock
is hanging from a branch.

In the breathing house of skin and wood
my cosmic axle churns deep inside her womb.

Nipples taut, skin in bloom,
snow rubbed into a blush on her thighs.

Oh, look like a mouse
through the eye of the tent!

How Nanook's daughter as snow goddess still rocks,
softly humming under my fur.

Tempting scent of eternal present, now that
seven days have proven to be seven years already.'

6

Mirage of cities, fleeting props
in the empty chaos of the steppe.

Living with few signs
embodying his total lostness:

Pole Star, Pleiades, the hunt
of the hounds, swift as arrows.

Weakened by resin, hash and millions
of mosquitoes, he slides down the tree.

He imagines
disappearing into the other tree,

concludes
that both have vanished.

Next to the shaman the scrawny hunter; behind them
the woman who, on her haunches in the grass, drops a thirsty cub.

7

Oh brothers and sisters, the blossoming of the imagination
is taking a long time.

It's not easy to speak
the snow language of the Samoyeds

nor is it easy to attach an image
of restrained emotion

to secret or domestic violence,
the rasping bombast of a civilization.

The white shaman becomes a crippled leper
who traverses colonies with his shrill rattle.

The game trail disturbed,
the fruit bud poisoned.

Who has dismantled
which innate power –

The Other Sleep

The White Shaman (II)

1

Grey light, late swans in a straight flight
along the thin outlines of retreating mountains.

Having come on the celestial horse from Fergana
and now on the edge of frozen marshes.

To the south the road that branches off on the autumnal tableland:
image of vapour around mounted nomads,

the flash of a train, red and dusty, breaking from the mountain flanks –
and low, in the western basin, the yellow yolk of the sun.

Brought by guides, ill-practiced but well
equipped, I sit on moss among skinny birches.

I poke in the ash of an ancient fireplace;
wet nostrils, eyebrows bristly with frost.

Too late an early snow hare gets wind
of the preying fox.

2

Here regarded as a fool
there excluded as a grimface

I claim to know of nothing else
than what is or was created by my hand;

having remained ignorant through thinking,
in everything a novice who unlearns

and then attempts again
to start a fire of damp wood.

Creaking, moaning, nevertheless
digging into dreams for ancestral forms:

Roasted the hare after all! but then with spit
as angle bar carried tentward

by curious hunters (who had heard a rumour
that the tsar was murdered long ago).

3

That's going to be something when the revolution
of the estranged breaks out in the city!

Although recovered, the body falters
in immense emptiness

and obscene silence fells the spirit
like a birch;

oh cool womb-like earth,
even the pliable spear of the slow

and distant sun chafes your skin here like a pebble
skipping over water.

The cold of ages keeps the earth's crust
in summer and winter sedated –

only death gets through to her;
the rustling of rats swells in the shrubs.

4

Troubled, in his tent on the mount
 lies the stubborn sucker from the west

who only sleeps to find
 the essence of sleep,

who, thinking of sunken lives
 slowly sinks down into the dark tidal forest below.

The sopping wet plains solidify,
 the growing frost opens up the marshes;

fur hunters shoot him awake: dragged along
 into which present? did they hit upon an ancient

catch in the bog? (Dead mammoths still bear living
 germs of anthrax under their skin;

bat-grey and musty like sheep the meat
 will strike the eager eaters with eternal sleep.)

5

Remember images of people
tough and supple like a spine:

the Windeby Girl – she with the blindfold
strangled in the bog and tanned

like a cow's hide between oak bark;
the red Venus of Yde, corpse full of grease;

the Grauballe Man – caught
in fear, with damaged throat,

stripped of life
as a text of its meaning,

but still pinned down with forked sticks
at the very bottom of the bog

and then covered with willow branches,
tough and supple like a spine.

6 < IN THE MOSSY BASIN AT THE TREE LINE >

A grave; the slow digging starts,
layer after layer is steadily cut away:

a soapstone bowl and traces of fire,
we hit upon signs –

halted language
scratched into an oracle tooth.

Then, from fault lines in petrified mud
the shrouded double image of black eyes breaks through

– as from dead lovers, surprised in the act
of coition and not found again by friends;

brought down by time and chance
but now a prey to frozen ecstasy –

still expecting birth
and already into death.

7

Is the raven coming yet?
is the bear not yet loose?

Here, under the wide-brimmed hat
of cattle drivers and ministers,

firm in the saddle – the horse fly
crushed to death on the forehead,

along the road that branches off,
between retreating pine forest and approaching tableland –

where the wood thins like poet's hair,
on the border of hoofbeat and heaven's lightning

we say goodbye
while the sparks are extinguished

and slumber is roused to feed consciousness
with signs of emptiness and life.

Contributors

Pleuke Boyce was born and grew up in the Netherlands and now lives on Vancouver Island. She received the James S. Holmes Award from the Translation Center at Columbia University for her translations of work by Dutch poet Gerrit Achterberg: *But this Land has no End - Selected Poems*. Her translations into Dutch include seven books by Alice Munro.

A star of film, stage and television, as well as a playwright and translator, **Robert Lalonde** is one of Quebec's leading novelists. Born in Oka, Quebec, in 1947, he studied at the Séminaire Sainte-Thérèse and Montreal's Conservatoire national d'art dramatique. The author of over 20 books, his first novel, *La belle épouvante*, won the 1981 Robert Cliche Prize, while his *Le Petit aigle à tête blanche* won the 1994 Governor General's Award for French Fiction, as well as the 1995 Prix France-Québec. His translation of Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces* was a finalist for the 1999 John Glassco Prize.

A writer, certified translator, researcher and communications specialist, **Jean-Paul Murray** has translated nineteen books. From 1995 to 1998, he was managing editor of *Cité libre*, a magazine founded by Pierre Elliott Trudeau. He was the magazine's English translating coordinator from 1998 to 2000. Among his *Cité libre* translations are works by Allan Cairns, Jacques Hébert, Mordecai Richler, F.R. Scott and Pierre Elliott Trudeau. In 2015, he was French-language translator for the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada. An experience from which he is still recovering.

H.C. ten Berge was born in 1938 in Alkmaar, the Netherlands. One of Holland's most important poets, he is the author of a large body of work that includes not only poetry but also novels, novellas, essays and translations. Apart from translating from modern languages, he collected and translated poetry and myths of the Aztecs, Inuit, Eastern Siberian Peoples and First Nations of the Pacific Northwest. He has received many awards for his work, including the most important and prestigious oeuvre prize in the Netherlands, the P.C. Hooft Award.

Larry Tremblay has published more than 30 books as a playwright, novelist, poet and essayist. His acclaimed theatrical works have been produced around the world. In 2006, he was awarded the Canada Council Victor-Martyn-Lynch-Staunton Prize for his contribution to theatre. The prestigious

press Gallimard Paris published *Piercing*, a collection of three of his short stories. *L'impureté* (*The Impurity*), his last novel, came out in 2016. Until 2009 Larry Tremblay taught acting and dramatic writing at l'École supérieure de théâtre de l'Université du Québec à Montréal.

Pasquale Verdicchio is an Italian Canadian poet, critic and translator teaching in the US at UCSD. Born in Naples, Italy, he moved to Vancouver BC in the late 60s. As a poet, translator, and essayist, he has published translations of Pasolini, Merini, Caproni, Porta, and Gramsci. He is the author of *Devils in Paradise: Writings on Post-Emigrant Cultures* and the poetry collection *The House Is Past, Passenger: Selected Poems* (Porta, Antonio and Pasquale Verdicchio, 2000) and *The Wall of the Earth* (Caproni, Giorgio and Pasquale Verdicchio, 1992).

Donald Winkler is a Montreal-based literary translator and documentary filmmaker. In the realm of poetry, he has made films on Irving Layton, P.K. Page, F.R. Scott, among others. And, among others, he has translated Roland Giguère and Pierre Nepveu. He is a three-time winner of the Governor General's Award for French to English translation.

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