



alchemy journal of translation

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Letter from the Editor

Each issue of *Alchemy* has its own particularities, its own sense of aesthetics and identity. As Editor in Chief for the year 2012-2013, I have had the opportunity to oversee submissions for Issues 3, 4 and 5, and it has been exciting to watch the journal grow during this period. The last issue was especially impressive in its chronological range, with work spanning several centuries. Issue 4 of *Alchemy* is the most geographically and linguistically diverse yet.

From the Middle East we have Nicole Fares' translation of contemporary Lebanese novelist Sahar Mandour's third novel, titled *32*, as well as Nilufar Karimi's innovative mash-up translations of old Rumi poems. Max Thompson presents us with a sample of Russian lyric poetry, elegantly managing the risky task of maintaining the rhyme scheme in his translations. And continuing with our exploration of the Raramuri language, Cathiana Sylne delights us with another adaptation of a legend from this Native American people, renowned for their long distance running ability.

And rounding up our collaborators for Issue 4 we have Wawan Eko Yulianto's translations from the award winning Indonesian poet Joko Pinurbo, whose work has been seldom translated into English. We also have EP Allan's translations from Yosa Buson, one of the major poets from the Edo Era in Japan, as well as EJ Koh's translations from Kim Myung Won, a poet and professor of Korean Literature at Daejun University in Seoul, South Korea.

I would like to extend personal thanks to Rae Armantrout, with whom I have had the opportunity to work closely on my ongoing translation of her Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Versed* into Spanish. I am honored to be able to share some of that work with our readers at *Alchemy*.

I would also like to take a brief moment to acknowledge all the hard work from *Alchemy*'s engine, our Editorial Staff: Bella, Monica, Adrianna, Aimly, Jacob, and especially Mika, our web-designer and all around problem solver. This

journal would not be possible without the commitment and perseverance of the Alchemy team.

Jose Antonio Villarán, Editor

excerpt from 32

Komodo had mentioned, as we talked about her brother, that her husband in Sri Lanka didn't live near her mother. She had married her current husband Prasanna, a month ago. Before him, she had been married to Mohammed, a Sri Lankan Muslim living in Lebanon. She herself is a Buddhist. And she hadn't told Prasanna that she had been Mohammed's wife here. She told me that women who marry in Lebanon gain a "no-good reputation." It also didn't help that she had married a Muslim. She told Prasanna that she had lost her virginity in a fling. I asked her: "so a fling is more socially acceptable in Sri Lanka than getting married in Lebanon?" "Of course," she answered me, "It's like nature itself gave that union its legitimacy."

She had her first date with Prasanna over the phone. They had one long talk and fell in love, especially after they exchanged pictures. She went to Sri Lanka and they got married. Then she left him there and came back to continue working here as a house cleaner. She still sends him new pictures every now and then. The first batch she sent was of their marriage day and of the day before, which she developed in Lebanon. I saw those pictures. In them, Koko was wearing magical dresses. Saris, colors, tight cloth wrapped around her belly, a stern look that rarely relaxed into a smile, and an expressive pose. One picture remained fixed in my mind:

Koko with her girlfriends the day before her wedding. She was sitting slightly higher than the rest of them, her legs rigidly fixed on the ground, and her friends were sitting on the floor around her, all looking at the camera, including her, with her arms draped around them as though she were their mother or guardian. And she was looking defiantly at the camera, like a protective Goddess. She doesn't smile in photographs. Photographs are formal.

In one of the non-formal photographs that Koko had taken of her in a photography studio in Lebanon, she was wearing green contact lenses. Her eyes

pierced through the photo, alien-like. I laugh every time I see it, and she laughs at my laugh and asks me what I think of her sex appeal, and I say: a queen! Then we laugh together.

When I asked her how far her husband lived from her family in Sri Lanka, she told me very far, which I found to be strange. I asked her: “aren’t you worried he might cheat on you?” She waved her hands around anxiously, and her vocals peeked as if jumping for freedom, then she threw words around until she finally put a useful sentence together: “Listen to me, a man will step out on his woman if she is there, and he will step out on her if she’s not... He wants to step out? Let him do it! Am I right?”

A result of economic independence, I suppose.

Her ability to provide and put a roof over the heads of the men and women in her family, young and old, made her independent. “If he wants to come live with me here, he’s welcome. If not, then I’m going to live my life.” I was a little hurt to find out that in Sri Lanka her first husband took a second wife, a Muslim, to please his family, and without telling her. She divorced him. She lived with him in the same house after the divorce for about a year, because the occupants of the building where he worked as a janitor were fond of her and refused to keep him if he was single. They wanted a family to guard their building. So she stayed with him platonically. She kept her divorce a secret until he brought his wife to Lebanon. And during that year, Koko didn’t fall for any of his attempts to wheedle her back. Nothing could change her mind, even though she loved him and knew he loved her. She made up her mind and stuck to it. “Enough.”

This independence, I think, is what drives the women of my generation away from marriage.

Add to that the many divorces we keep hearing about, and the “I’m satisfied with what I’ve got” types of marriages that are followed by constant nagging.

He smokes cigars, Dalal’s husband. And Dalal told him over and over that she couldn’t stand the smell of cigars. At first, in the first flush of their relationship, he used to put out his cigar whenever she got bothered by it, and

assured her that he would never hesitate to please her even if it meant his having to fly to the moon for her. Yup yup yup. A parade for putting out a cigar. Then the days passed, and they turned, and the wedding ended, and they were no longer stars to their families and friends. Their glow faded, and they became just another normal couple... naturally. And that's when he stopped putting out his cigar for her. That's the main reason she's so annoyed by him. He fills the air around her with cigar smoke early in the morning. She gets suffocated by the smell. And then the concept of the whole thing suffocates her even more. And her life becomes a cycle, circular like the body of a cigar. The cigar became the purpose for Saeed's (her husband's name is Saeed) existence. His life is meaningless without the thing he cherishes most: his cigar.

Then he'd go on about the thighs of the Cuban women who rolled his cigar especially for him. The Cuban women whose beauty Lebanese women only dream of. Oh my, those Cubans.

And Dalal would start making fun of him: "beautiful, yeah, but they rolled that cigar for you? Just for you? Some Cuban girl rolled that cigar especially for you? Believe me, one look at you and she'd quit her job. God, if she met you, she'd set herself on fire."

Dalal defends her feminism in the face of Saeed's attacks. And she is repulsed when Saeed struts around the house like a peacock. But, where would he strut if not in his own house?

And their shared life became a living hell.

I'm certain that the cigar is not the main reason for their marriage trouble, even though I myself go crazy every time I get stuck in a bar or café with someone smoking a cigar. I don't understand this invasion of personal space! It's the same with the sound of smacking gum. How can people invade other people's personal space like that? Unhesitatingly, carelessly, unaware that they're committing assault.

Despite that, I'm sure that the problem between Dalal and Saeed is not the cigar. The problem is their coexistence. Such a life is no longer comfortable or possible, and the thought of marriage is no longer seductive. They both began to hate each other, and their lives turned into constant daily revenge upon one

another. As if, now that she was his, he no longer needed to be mindful of her. And she felt as if she had lost her connection to her true self, and she could no longer tolerate his getting in the way.

I'm aware that there are more serious divorces, where the couples tear each other apart, but Saeed and Dalal's divorce became more of a retreat than a divorce. They wanted their old lives back and no longer wished to live their current reality.

And that's when old age comes up.

Every day at work, Dalal described to me an episode in her married life. And at that point, we usually started talking about old age. Her parents would tell her that Saeed would make a good partner for her when they grow old, so she should put up with him. She told me: what if I tolerate him and he dies of a heart attack ten years from now? Or what if I kill him before he reaches old age? How can I sacrifice the best years of my life, only to grow old and still have to face him, like a bad job? And what if he gets sick, coughing constantly, and ordering me around; me, who'd be old too, and would have to take care of him. And what if he divorces me then? What if he gets run over a year from now? What if I die young and never reach old age? Should I spend the best years of my life waiting for either death or old age? I can't stand him! Geez.

After four years of marriage, they got divorced.

His family dragged her reputation through the mud. Lazy, doesn't cook, doesn't take care of her house, doesn't want to get pregnant because it would ruin her figure, neglectful, dirty, reckless, goes out too much, works too little, spends too much, of her money and his,...

And her family dragged his reputation through the mud too. Grumpy, arrogant, a mama's boy, cheap, lazy, smokes cigars from the crack of dawn, neurotic, never likes to go anywhere, rarely ever showers, insults her, ...

I also know more dignified and less messy divorces. And I know of mature and conscious divorces, more like separations than anything. And there are divorces of couples with children, that are accompanied by whispering and references to the ex's positive traits. The woman would say: "he's my son's father." And the man would say: "she's my son's mother." And "as we entered

this marriage gracefully, we will exit it gracefully.” And as Abu Nuwas once said, “Don’t blame me, for blame is tempting.”

And I know of divorces in between: sneering put-downs would hang from the couples’ lips, but their mouths would refuse to utter it. The supportive listeners would ask for criticism, and the hero would offer some, but he would hold back from speaking the insult that was on the tip of his tongue, because he’s more moral than that. And the same goes for the woman too. Cursing each other becomes a matter where friends must blackmail, and wait, and anticipate, just like when the two were preparing for their wedding. And so, they both restore part of their glow. Restraining from calling each other names becomes an indication of their personal exceptional morals... more admiration follows, then a round of applause.

I also know of a disastrous divorce, where my friend Zumurrud advised the wife – a mother – to stop cursing the father in front of their four-year-old. The mother, Zena, told Zumurrud that it was hard for her to restrain herself, considering what she had to go through with her ex, but that she would try. The main problem was her parents who began to spread more gossip than usual about the ex.

The kid would sit and listen. Then he would jump up and start to play hyperactively, as if he wanted to run away from the voice destroying his father’s image. After having witnessed one of these moments of madness, and after having given up on trying to restrain her parents, her providers, who are free to talk about whatever they felt like – Zena resorted to asking her parents to use a nickname for the father (whose original name is Mahmoud) whenever they wanted to pluck his feathers like a chicken, so to speak. She explained to them that her request was purely for the purpose of protecting her son’s emotional health and not to preserve the ex’s social image. And, she added, Zumurrud was the one behind these instructions, in order to bolster her credibility.

Two weeks later, Zumurrud visited Zena at her parents’ house, where the family gathered in the living room, including the little boy, Abd al-Latif (named after his grandfather,) who kept spinning around himself. The grandmother initiated the conversation laughing (within earshot of the boy): In

order to please our psychoanalyst, Sitt Zumurrud, and to put our daughter's mind at ease, we will refer to that piece of lard as "Tarzan."

And they went on talking about Tarzan, and the conversation intensified and expanded, and Tarzan was sullied, and trampled on, and drowned in the mud, then in the toilet. Tarzan... Mahmoud, woops slipped out, I mean Tarzan... even his son, even his own son (gesturing towards 'Abd al-Latif)... Tarzan's son!

Ha ha ha.

By Sarah Mandour
translated, from the Arabic, by Nicole Fares

Nicole Fares is currently completing her MFA in translation and creative writing at the University of Arkansas. She has translations and articles published in *Jadaliyya*, *YouthLeader* magazine, *AUST Midwek*, etc, and is currently working on translating the novel *32* by the Lebanese-Egyptian writer Sahar Mandour.

Sahar Mandour is currently working in Assafir, and completing a fellowship at Oxford University, where she was selected for the Said-Asfari Fellowship within the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. She has published 4 novels.

Kuči nururía

A head scowling at us.
Move into the shadowed passes!
Gentle whispers, fading.

We learn.
We pass.
We are left
coated in dust.

Teach us.
We are strong enough.
Tell us everything there is to know.
We only know,
what we are told.

Distant, dark,
distant-dark,
figures...

We plow. We sow. The fields.

For the children
who will follow.

Raramuri myth

adapted, from Gabriela Caballero and Bertha Fuentes' transcription, by Cathiana Sylne.

Cathiana Sylne was born in Roche-A-Bateau, Haiti, to farmers and fishermen by the sea. Her voice as a writer draws from her cross-cultural experience as a Haitian woman living away from home. Family, love, political strife, and cultural identity are common topics woven throughout her work. She has a background in filmmaking, a deep love of banana trees, and enjoys listening to the sea.

The Raramuri, or Tarahumara, are an indigenous people of northwestern Mexico who are renowned for their long-distance running ability. The Tarahumara language belongs to the Uto-Aztecan family; today its usage is in decline due to pressures from the Spanish language, but it is still widely spoken.

Rubaiyat (from Divan-e Shams)

She clapped when she saw me this way.

“Repentance is shattered. You are drunk again.”

Repentance is like glass, I said,
hard to make, easy to break.

“Repentance is shattered. You are drunk again.”

My moon, where is your home?
Hard to make, easy to break

“In the piles of ruin inside your drunk heart.”

My moon, where is your home?

My eyes?

“In the piles of ruin inside your drunk heart
a river will run there.”

My eyes?

My heart?

“A river will run there.
And bleed until drowned in blood.”

My heart?

My body?

“Bleed until drowned in blood.
If you wait a while,

I will toss your body
through the door.

If you wait a while,
you have shame. I'll show the world."

Through the door,
enchanted moon addressed me with her light:
"You have shame. I'll show the world."
Go away, I said, not tonight.

The enchanted moon addressed me with her light:
"Moody one,
you have shame. I'll show the world
you shut the door on fortune."

Moody one,
on a wild white horse without bridle.
You shut the door on fortune
riding through a valley of terror.

On a wild white horse without bridle,
like a bird fluttering from a trap,
Riding through a valley of terror.
Where does this horse race to? What home, where?

Like a bird fluttering from a trap,
you curse. The moon smiles.
Where does this horse race to? What home, where?
Your curse is a ruby formed by fire.

You curse. The moon smiles.
Repentance is shattered. You are drunk again.
Your curse is a ruby formed by fire.

She clapped when she saw me this way.

By Rumi
adapted, after the Farsi, by Nilufar Karimi

Nilufar Karimi is a second-year Literature/Writing Major at UC San Diego.

Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi, also known in Iran as Molana, was a poet, theologian, and Sufi mystic. One of his most widely read collection of poems, *Divan-e Shams*, is known for its spirituality, and for its preservation of the Farsi language.

You Want Me White

You want me like dawn,
You want me made of sea-foam,
You want me made of nacre.
Lily-like, more chaste
Than any other girl.
Delicately perfumed,
My bud closed.

No pure ray of moon
would shine its light on me.
Not one daisy
would ever call me sister.
You want me white,
You want me snow-white,
You want me like dawn.

You, who grasped
at every goblet easily,
your lips stained purple
with the fruit and honey.
You who at the
Vine-draped banquet
Forfeited your flesh
To feast to Bacchus.
You who in black
Gardens of deception
Ran to ruin

Dressed in red.
You who keep your
bones so well-preserved
By what miracles
I still can't say,
You pretend I'm white
(God forgive you that)
You pretend I'm chaste
(God forgive you that)
You pretend I'm dawn!

Flee for the forests;
Go to the mountains;
Wash out your mouth;
Live in a shack;
Touch the wet earth
With your hands;
Feed your body
Bitter roots;
Drink from the rocks;
Sleep on the ice;
Renew your cells
With rocksalt and water.
Talk to birds
And wake at dawn.
And when your flesh
Comes back to you,
And when you've put
your soul back into it,
your soul so tangled up
In bedrooms,
Then, mister, only then

Pretend I'm white,
Pretend I'm white as snow,
Pretend I'm chaste.

By Alfonsina Storni
translated, from the Spanish, by Meghan Flaherty

Meghan Flaherty is an MFA candidate in Nonfiction and Literary Translation at Columbia. She is currently working on a book-length personal history of Argentine tango.

Alfonsina Storni is both the Dorothy Parker and the Virginia Woolf of Argentina. Her work is acid, stark, and melancholic, sometimes masked in singsong rhyme, and often brimming with a strident feminism decades beyond her time. In 1938, she walked into the sea, ending her life.

Grey Morning

Grey mouths open
on the round
plate of the sea.
Grey clouds swallow
silent mouths
of sea.

And at the bottom
there are fish,
asleep.

Lain in watery caves,
their bodies cold
and horizontal
sleeping, all the fishes
of the sea.

One holds beneath a fin
a little winter sun.

Its weak light
goes up, opening
a pale dawn
in each grey mouth of sea.

The ship passes
but the fishes
stay asleep.

And gulls traces signs of zero
over the immensity.

By Alfonsina Storni
translated, from the Spanish, by Meghan Flaherty

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Twilight

The unmoving sea
released from its own jawbones
exhales a new soul.

It has no bottom,
shipwrecks, souls,
embraced
in seaweed.

The newborn
pallid face
of God
is watching.

Vessels have not writ upon it.
Men have not deciphered it.
Fish have yet to tire of it.

The sun sinks
to search it,
plunging into flames
between the violet forests,
and touches its face
to open golden doors
spreading into—tunnels—
undiscovered spaces.

Slow steps descend
to the water

and arrive, already vanished,
at my feet.

By these I will ascend
until the day
that I commit myself
beyond horizon.

Walls of water
will have wooed me
in that resplendent
afternoon.

By Alfonsina Storni
translated, from the Spanish, by Meghan Flaherty

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Tears

Allow the thirsty rain
to swallow brimming tears
that simmer in your cup.

*By Joko Pinurbo
translated, from the Bahasa, by Wawan Eko Yulianto*

Tiny rain

Rain grows on my head,
rain that refreshes time.
It sprinkles tiny drops.
It trickles tiny ticks,
with tiny thunderbolts.
The rain from my childhood.

*By Joko Pinurbo
translated, from the Bahasa, by Wawan Eko Yulianto*

Generational

Before the dawn the old man leaves
his nightly sleep, and slips into
a giant stone in his front lawn.

Inside the stone he finds
a clear and bluish chunk:
the heart of rain, well-aged,
nurtured by time.

By Joko Pinurbo
translated, from the Bahasa, by Wawan Eko Yulianto

Sweat

Each single day, my dad collects
his beads of sweat in a bottle
and stashes it in the fridge.

When my temperature is so high,
My dad will pour his well-chilled sweat
into a glass, for me to drink.

Glug. Glug. Fever gone.

By Joko Pinurbo
translated, from the Bahasa, by Wawan Eko Yulianto

The Book of Hours

She weaves a basket
from threads of rain
then hangs it at the porch.

Inside the basket
he lays her baby, born
from the womb of dusk.

When nights thirst for light
the baby in the basket glows:
That basket at the porch
then swarms with loneliness.

By Joko Pinurbo
translated, from the Bahasa, by Wawan Eko Yulianto

Wawan Eko Yulianto is a graduate student in the Program in Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies, University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. His main interests include literary translation, American literature by Muslim authors and ethnic American literature.

Joko Pinurbo is an award-winning Indonesian poet who won the Best Poetry Collection Award from Jakarta Arts Council (2001), Khatulistiwa Literary Award (2005). Some of his best poems have been translated into English by the well-respected Australian professor and translator Dr. Harry Aveling.

“She sings – the purling lyrics melt”

She sings – the purling lyrics melt
Like violet kisses on the lips;
One glance – within her eyes are felt
The welkin’s distant, swirling mists.

And if she walks, her every move -
Or breathes a word, its every sense -
Is full of feeling, freshness, love,
Is full of wondrous innocence.

*By Mikhail Lermontov
translated, from the Russian, by Max Thompson*

Max Thompson is a translator of Russian prose and poetry, principally of the 20th century, and is currently working on Chingiz Aitmatov’s novella “The White Steamship.” He is a 2nd-year MFA student in creative writing and translation at the University of Arkansas.

Mikhail Lermontov was a nineteenth-century Romantic whose work was largely modeled after that of Lord Byron; he is best-known for his writings about the Caucasus mountains.

Love

The hour was still. The surf lay at our feet.
You smiled, saying as we parted ways:
“We’ll meet again... Until a different day...”
That was a lie. We knew we’d never meet

Again. We had forever said goodbye.
The firmament with crimson fire glowed.
A sailboat’s sails puffed up until they bowed.
Above the sea resounded seagulls’ cries.

I gazed afar, in aching woe awash.
The sailboat flickered as it sailed away
Amidst the emerald waves’ untroubled slosh,
A swan in sunset with its wingtips splayed,

And it was borne into infinity.
Against the heavens’ pallid, golden haze
A thick cloud rose up unexpectedly
And, like an amethyst, was set ablaze.

*By Mikhail Lermontov
translated, from the Russian, by Max Thompson*

Max Thompson is a translator of Russian prose and poetry, principally of the 20th century, and is currently working on Chingiz Aitmatov's novella "The White Steamship." He is a 2nd-year MFA student in creative writing and translation at the University of Arkansas.

Andrey Bely was a Symbolist poet, critic, and fiction writer of the early 20th century and is well-known for his novel *Petersburg*.

“I went to bliss; the footpath gleamed”

I went to bliss; the footpath gleamed
The ruby tint of evening dew;
And ebbing in my spirit streamed
The far-off voice of dawn anew.

The song of dawn, ensconcing me
Surged forth to fade; the heavens glowed;
And through the welkin's depthless seas
The flames of evening purple flowed.

My spirit blazed, around me streamed
Through evening, daybreak's song anew.
I went to bliss; the footpath gleamed
The ruby tint of evening dew.

By Aleksandr Blok

translated, from the Russian, by Max Thompson

Max Thompson is a translator of Russian prose and poetry, principally of the 20th century, and is currently working on Chingiz Aitmatov's novella "The White Steamship." He is a 2nd-year MFA student in creative writing and translation at the University of Arkansas.

Aleksandr Blok is the greatest Symbolist poet of the Russian "Silver Age" of poetry (in the early 20th century), and his work influenced a great many poets who were to follow him, including Anna Akhmatova.

“Nighttime, the street, a pharmacy”

Nighttime, the street, a pharmacy,
A lamp. Its senseless, dusky flame.
Live for another quarter century.
All will, a cycle, be the same.

You’ll die – again you’ll start anew.
And all will, as of old, repeat.
Night, water, icy ripples, dew.
A pharmacy, a lamp, the street.

By Aleksandr Blok

translated, from the Russian, by Max Thompson

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Dating 1

I am sorry

About the way I loved

Whether you wanted it or not, morning till night

I traced a line from your window to my living room window

I undressed you and dressed you. I was in love.

I lied, envied, and hated you. I was in pain.

Not once did I allow you to be yourself

Not once did I look at you the way you did

Took it upon myself to scissor-cut, glue, and patch you up

I am so sorry

By Kim Myung Won

translated, from the Korean, by EJ Koh

Dating 3

Who is this?
This beautiful man
Who started it all
Who did this?
This beautiful doom
You hold inside
Blistering, blisters boil
My toes and lips
You howl my name
Wipe the North Pole off the map
You are the North Pole now
You wipe me out
You who became me
Who are you?

*By Kim Myung Won
translated, from the Korean, by EJ Koh*

In the bathroom 2

time passes through us
as innocent as water
splashing

the bowl is a vessel for our truth

I'm sure of it
empty the warmth from one body
and all the world is wet

barren days, bare lands
then the waterflower blossoms
into wholeness

By Kim Myung Won
translated, from the Korean, by EJ Koh

EJ Koh is a poet and an author. Her work has been published in *TriQuarterly*, *Southeast Review*, *The Journal*, *Susquehanna Review*, *Gulf Stream*, and elsewhere. A finalist of the Ina Coolbrith Memorial Prize in Poetry. Masters of Fine Arts at Columbia University. She blogs at angelaekoh.com. Her first novel *Redis* due out this year.

Kim Myung Won is a poet and a professor of Korean literature at Daejun University in Seoul, Korea.

Dirigir

La manera en la que mi interés
en su beso
imaginario

esta secretamente dirigido
a ti.

*

Carentes de intención

dientes de hiedra
montan los postes
que sostienen la carretera.

Seria posible decir
que cada hoja

circunscribe esperanza

o que cada hoja,
fastidiosamente llegando
a un punto,

sugiere un temor
a lo desconocido.

*

Estas botas de tacón alto,
brillantes, amarradas

(cada hoja)

dirigida a ti

By Rae Armantrout

translated into Spanish, from the English, by Jose Antonio Villarán

Babel

“Descendamos y confundamos
su idioma

para que podamos distinguir
a nuestra gente
de nuestros pensamientos.”

Será verdad
que el bebé tiene miedo

su deseo
de tragarnos

ha sido ya
¿llevado a cabo?

*

Difícil de decir
debido a que hemos arrojado nuestra voz

hacia el futuro
y el pasado

*By Rae Armantrout
translated into Spanish, from the English, by Jose Antonio Villarán*

El cielo

1

Es un libro
lleno de niños fantasmas,

muertos y a salvo

y muertos significa
escondidos

o deseando
o no deseando

ser conocidos.

2.

El cielo es simétrico
con respecto a la rotación.

Es hermoso
cuando una cosa cambia

mientras otra
permanece igual.

3.

Redundancias que desvanecen

Intervalos plumosos.

Volutas alternativas.

Estriaciones surgidas

Imaginarias.

“Imaginarias” significa

“visto por humanos”.

By Rae Armantrout

translated into Spanish, from the English, by Jose Antonio Villarán

Jose Antonio Villarán received his BA in Writing from SFSU in 2005. He Published “la distancia es siempre la misma” in 2006, and “el cerrajero” in 2012. He is the Creator of the AMLT project. He’s currently an MFA candidate in Writing at UCSD.

Rae Armantrout is one of America’s most important contemporary poets, some of her recent publications include *Just Saying*, published by Wesleyan University Press in 2013; and *Versed* (Wesleyan, 2009), which received the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award. It was also a finalist for the National Book Award.

Farewell to Deceased Friends

Aging as I go
down Kosoumichi road —
alone in autumn

By Yosa Buson
translated, from the Japanese, by EP Allan

567

Extracting teeth
from out of an abdomen —
gourd seeds

By Yosa Buson
translated, from the Japanese, by EP Allan

Village fields on the banks of the Karogawa River

Moonflowers
tremble in the autumn wind —
a purifying river

By Yosa Buson
translated, from the Japanese, by EP Allan

430

Towards the moon
you threw the net –
splash

By Yosa Buson
translated, from the Japanese, by EP Allan

419

Summoning the ferry
from the grassy distance –
a fan

By Yosa Buson
translated, from the Japanese, by EP Allan

EP Allan has published many of his own poems and is working on “The Selected Poems of Yosa Buson” for his dissertation at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Yosa Buson is one of the major poets from the Edo Era in Japan and lived from 1716-December 25, 1784.

Gnedich—Translator in Translation: An Interview with Maria Rybakova

Maria Rybakova, who balances a dual career as writer and professor of Classics and Humanities at San Diego State University, graciously volunteered a few moments of her time to answer a few questions about translation and her latest published work, *Gnedich*, which is a novel-in-verse about the Russian translator of *The Iliad*, and the inadequacies he is forced to contend with as such. Rybakova won a Russian Prize in short fiction for *Gnedich*, and she was recently listed by the Spanish website El Poder de La Palabra as one of the most significant Russian writers.

Gnedich (Vremya, 2011).

Translation into English forthcoming, by Elena Dimov.

ALCHEMY: Writing as a multilingual author, do you find that this influences your process at all? Are there stylistic choices or ideas that you find are better expressed in one language or another? When, for example, you were writing *Gnedich*, did you work on and think about the novel only in Russian, or in some combination of languages?

Rybakova: Honestly, I am a very monolingual author. I can only write serious fiction in Russian. In English I can write as a joke, or write an essay for a magazine. But when it comes to expressing the nuances of meaning, I am out of my depth with English. I do think in English sometimes, but probably only because I am in San Diego at the moment, surrounded by the English language.

Some incredible people, like Nabokov, were proficient in writing in two languages, but I am not one of them, unfortunately.

You mentioned in your New Writing Series reading at UCSD a few months ago that you were reading from the English translation of *Gnedich*. Can you offer us some insight into how that translation came about? Did you and your translator have much communication with regard to its creation, or was it more of a private project on the translator's part?

Elena Dimov of the University of Virginia has written to me and expressed her desire to translate Gnedich. It made me very happy, of course, but I was afraid she would spend months doing this very difficult work without any hope of seeing her translation published – what publisher would be interested in a novel-in-verse, frankly? But she was undaunted, and heroically proceeded to translate. Now she has completed her translation. We discussed her work-in-progress every couple of weeks during the past year, going over my text and her translation word-by-word. I greatly miss our discussions. They taught me a lot about differences in the Russian and English vocabulary, about different stylistic layers of language, about English and Russian translations of the Iliad, and so many other things. For example: in a bout of humility, does Gnedich see himself as nonentity or as nothingness? The trouble with nonentity is that it is a Latinate word, and therefore sounds less emotional than the Russian ничтожество.

Since *Gnedich* features characters that speak from so many different vernaculars of the Russian language, I'm curious about how those registers were re-created in the English. In particular, you mention Helen, who speaks like a simple nineteenth century Russian woman. Can you speak more on how that reads in the English? Do you find the overall tone or feel of her words can be expressed in a nineteenth century English, or do the differing histories/linguistic histories lend

a slightly different flavor? (If so, do you find this an interesting difference, or altered “afterlife” of the text, so to speak?)

Well, of course, the flavor will be different due to a differing linguistic history, but one has to find some sort of analogue: a language of the 19th century lower classes in this case. Maybe cockney? Helen’s Russian vernacular is, of course, artificial: my idea how the early 19th century lower classes in Russia used to speak is evidently taken from the novels of that period. One could recreate an analogue using the 19th century English novels. I am not afraid that Helen wouldn’t sound Russian, but cockney or like an English peasant instead. The fact that she is Russian is not very important in the context of the novel; the fact that she is a servant is, on the contrary, very important.

Gnedich himself is a translator—the nineteenth century translator of *The Iliad*. Professor Amelia Glaser (UCSD) mentions that your novel concerns in part “the inadequacies that such a project naturally entails.” I wondered, speaking both for Gnedich and for translation studies in general, if you might elaborate on what you perceive as some of these challenges?

Well, it is also a novel about Platonism, you know? Any writer’s work is but a translation from the Eternity’s language into his country’s vernacular. The sufferings Nikolai Gnedich is undergoing by trying to find an adequate Russian translation for a Greek word equal the sufferings of a writer translating from the invisible language of divinity into his own words. Somewhere, in the Swedenborgian heaven, angels had written *Gnedich* in their heavenly hooks and loops – I was just trying to put it into Russian, rather clumsily.

In terms of pure stylistics, I’ve always been under the impression that verse would be the translator’s ultimate challenge, because in addition to meaning, lyricism, style, etc., one must also address the formal techniques, meters, etc. of the original verse. Are there

particulars of your own verse that you think would be a challenge to render into English, or another language?

[*Gnedich*] is free verse – therefore it varies a lot and there is no rhyme, although it's important to keep the metric structure. I think Elena Dimov accomplished it quite masterfully. Also, the lines in the novel-in-verse are short and the syntax is not very complicated. So, I guess, it might be even less confusing than prose.

What is it like to read your own work in translation? It must be interesting, to read words that are both your own and also entirely someone else's.

Strangely enough, when I am reading the translation in front of the audience, I kind of forget that I am reading a translation. I perceive it as my own text. I suppose the solution to this mystery lies in the fact (apart from the skillfulness of the translator) that a literary work rises into being out of images rather than words. And so, if the images are caught with enough precision, the foreignness of the language does not matter.

*Interview with Maria Rybakova
conducted by Mika Kennedy*

Mika Kennedy is a staff editor for *Alchemy*, and manages her own writing portfolio at In-Tongues.Net.

Maria Rybakova (1973-) is a Professor of Classics at San Diego State University. She has published works in the Russian language, all of which have been translated into a number of languages internationally. Her most recent work is a novel in verse titled *Gnedich* (2011).

Credits

Alchemy is committed to publishing quality, contemporary translations of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction creative writing. By dedicating our journal to the publication of high quality translations by students, we aim to encourage a new generation of translators. We publish creative translations and adaptations, including homophonic, homolinguistic, and other poetic forms. It is our belief that translation can teach us new things about writing and about language itself. We look forward to publishing work that is fresh, engaging and thought provoking. Alchemy is based in the University of California, San Diego's Literature and Linguistics departments, and is edited and published by UCSD students.

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