

THE ONLINE PUBLICATION  
OF ATA'S LITERARY DIVISION

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WINTER 2012

## LYRICAL TRANSLATING



“ . . . so I left it in the subjunctive but then I thought, No! there’s a gerund there and a semicolon at the . . . oh, I’m sorry, am I boring you?”

# IN THIS ISSUE

FROM THE EDITORS.....	3
FROM THE LD ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR..... Clayton Causey	4
NEWS AND VIEWS.....	5
FOUR PRESENTATIONS AT THE 2011 ATA CONFERENCE ..... Rafa Lombardino	7
SING IT, TOSS IT OUT, AND BEGIN AGAIN ..... <i>A review of Mark Herman and Ronnie Apter's 2011 ATA Conference Presentation: "Translating Art Songs for Performance"</i> Allison Ahlgrim	14
BY THE WAY: TRANSLATOR ON THE ROOF..... Tony Beckwith	18
DAWN/ALBA/AUBE:..... <i>Exploring language, literature and other things through self-translation</i> Patrick Saari	21
SUBMISSION GUIDELINES.....	29

BTW Cartoons by Tony Beckwith

# FROM THE EDITORS



**Michele Aynesworth**  
Editor



**Tony Beckwith**  
Associate Editor



**Patrick Saari**  
Chief Copy Editor



**Traci Andrighetti**  
News Editor

**The Winter issue of Source** begins a series focusing on lyrical translations of poetry and song. We start with reviews by Rafa Lombardino and Allison Ahlgrim of Literary Division presentations at the 2011 ATA Conference. Rafa's reviews of presentations by Carsten Peters, Attila Piróth, and Jayme Costa Pinto conclude with an appreciation of "Que de lindo," the Brazilian version of Cole Porter's song "It's De-Lovely." Allison Ahlgrim reviews Mark Herman and Ronnie Apter's presentation "Translating Art Songs for Performance: Rachmaninoff's *Six Choral Songs*."

In an intriguing example of self-translation, Patrick Saari describes the transformation of his poem "Dawn" as he translated it into Spanish and then into French, exploring the advantages and insights offered by each language—the elliptical concision of English, the baroque riches of Spanish, the plangent resonance of French.

We also learn how evenings on a roof in San Miguel changed the life of Regular *By the Way* columnist Tony Beckwith forever.

This issue's letter from a Literary Division administrator comes from Clayton Causey, who writes of the translator's mission and of ways our Literary Division can become more lively and diverse with increased member participation.

Special thanks go to Associate Editor Tony Beckwith and Chief Copy Editor Patrick Saari, to Jamie Padula for proofreading, and to LD officers Emilia Balke and Clayton Causey for their support.

Our next issue will continue the focus on lyrical translating. (See page 29 for Submission Guidelines.)

# FROM THE LD ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR

Dear LD Members,

A literary translator is an advocate. A proselytizer. A traveling preacher of sorts. Many have lost faith in the good books of this world. We could consider it our duty – along with other advocates like publishers, writers, teachers and professors – to come in and stop the rot. Many of us seem to have gone so far as to take a vow of poverty... though we constantly seek the best opportunity to renounce it.

In order to further promote our cause, the Literary Division has welcomed a group of professionals into a round table steering committee dubbed the Leadership Council. It is my privilege to be part of this Council as the Assistant Administrator. I plan on us having lots of fun with this and hope you all will join us.

I hope we can take the Literary Division back to its roots. We first fell in love with literature because it engaged us. It let us peer into the soul of another and find ourselves there. It helped us give voice to our musings. It put our hearts on the page in black and white. Shouldn't everything the Literary Division does be imbued with the same spirit, the same child-like sense of wonder and playfulness, the same care in every word?



*Clayton D. Causey, CT, is a freelance translator and musician. He translates fiction, poetry and song lyrics from Spanish, Portuguese and French into English.*

I've always tried to live by this philosophy. Along with some other academic writers, in my academic writing I've tried to move away from the typical sterile style used in history and literature papers. My paper on the role of the Bandeirantes in early Brazilian history was especially daring. I attempted to use a formula borrowed from popular fiction while maintaining historical perspective. It was a fight to receive approval for reading the paper at the 2007 Carolina Regional Phi Alpha Theta Conference. The paper won 1st prize in the World History category.

In this spirit, we plan on livening up discussions on the ATA-LD\_Listserve, giving the website a makeover, bringing in new creative collaboration on *Source* (our newsletter),

presenting an intriguing cast of authors and translators featured in a new *Beacons* (our anthologies of fine literary works and translations), and establishing closer working relationships with other literary translators' organizations, in the US and abroad.

Quaker advocate for peace and itinerant minister John Woolman said in one of his journals that one of the keys to his success and continued good spirit was that he used to improve himself "in winter evenings, and other leisure times." Let's make time to work together to build the strength and spirit of our division this winter on into the rest of 2012. If you're interested in adding your name to the list of contributors on any of our projects, please contact me or Emilia Balke (see below).

May this winter issue lead you to renewed faith in the power of the word and in your own creative contribution to the world of literature.

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# NEWS AND VIEWS

## *Introducing Traci Andrighetti* *News and Views Editor*

Traci Andrighetti, PhD, is a linguist with a passion for Italian language and culture. After serving as lecturer of Italian at the University of Texas at Austin for 11 years, she left academia to work for Apple Inc., where she supports Italian developers of apps for the Mac, iPhone and iPad. Traci is also a prize-winning literary translator, a published author of articles about translation, foreign language education and linguistics, and an editor of academic and literary manuscripts. In 2011, Traci began her blog *italicissima* as a creative outlet for all of the weird and wonderful knowledge she has acquired about Italian language, linguistics and literature during her many personal and professional endeavors.



### *Notable Blogs*

#### **Three Percent**

<http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepercent/>

Blogger: **Chad Post**

**Three Percent** (a reference to the dismal fact that only about 3% of all books published in the U.S. each year are translations) is for those who want to learn more about modern and contemporary international literature.

*italicissima* <http://italicissima.com>

Blogger: **Traci Andrighetti**

The intended scope of *italicissima* is to introduce readers to the many interesting features of the Italian language as it is actually used in spoken and written form. Special emphasis is placed on the varieties and forms of Italian as these appear in literature.

#### **Spanish-English Word Connections**

<http://wordconnections.wordpress.com/>

Blogger: **Steve Schwartzman**

A continuing series of short articles about the many connections between words in Spanish and English.

**Intralingo** [www.intralingo.com](http://www.intralingo.com)

Blogger: **Lisa Carter**

A general blog about issues relating to literary translation and publishing.



## *New Publications*

**Louise Popkin**, who contributed several translations of Mario Benedetti's poetry to *Beacons X*, has a new Benedetti anthology coming out in April: *Witness: The Selected Poems of Mario Benedetti* (with an introduction by Margaret Randall, White Pine Press, 2012). This is the first collection in English translation to draw on all thirty books of poetry written by Benedetti between 1948 and 2009.

**Anne Milano Appel** has two books out already for 2012: Paola Calvetti's *P.O. Box Love* (January 2012, St. Martin's Press) and Maurizio de Giovanni's *I Will Have Vengeance: The Winter of Commissario Ricciardi* (February 2012, Hersilia Press).

**M. Charlotte Wolf's** introduction to and translations of thirteen German-speaking authors, *Great German Short Stories of the Twentieth Century*, is coming out in March (Dover Publications, Inc. Mineola, NY).

## *Call for Contributions to News and Views*

Would you like to contribute an overview of recent developments in literary translation or an interview with a distinguished translator, editor, or publisher? Have you come across a translation of a book you would like to review? Have you read a good interview or seen a new blog of interest to LD members? Have you published somewhere recently, received an award, or given a reading?

If so, please e-mail Traci Andrighetti at [itraci@hotmail.com](mailto:itraci@hotmail.com) (see p. 29 for submission guidelines).

# FOUR PRESENTATIONS AT ATA'S 52ND ANNUAL CONFERENCE DISCUSS THE STATE OF LITERARY TRANSLATIONS

BY RAFA LOMBARDINO



*Rafa Lombardino (rlombardino@wordawareness.com) is certified by the ATA (EN>PT) and UC San Diego Extension (EN/ES), where she currently teaches aspiring translators. Also the director of Word Awareness—a small network of professional translators in California, Rafa has recently started working on literary translations. Since early 2011, she has translated into Portuguese the following works by self-published authors: Tom Lichtenberg's **Zombie Nights**, Sharon Hays' **Mysteerie Manor**, Joe Perrone Jr's **As the Twig is Bent**, and Bryce Beattie's **Oasis**. You can read more about her work at <http://bit.ly/literarynews>*

At ATA's 52nd Annual Conference on October 26-29, 2011 in Boston, I attended four sessions focusing on literary translation. Subjects ranged from a comparison of the creative role of authors to that of translators and how translators can compete in the literary market to the importance of translation theory in the literary decision-making process. Here are the highlights of each presentation.

**"There's really no difference between authors and translators," Carsten Peters contends.**

"Translators and Authors in the New Publishing Industry" was the title of a presentation given by Carsten Peters, translator and owner of Ceditora, a fairly young publishing house based in Austria. He opened the session by claiming that the work of authors and translators is one and the same. "My wife is a writer and I asked her once if there was any difference between what she does and what literary translators do... She almost asked for a divorce!" he joked.

Peters is a native speaker of German who has a background in technical translations and decided to partner with his Brazilian wife Tânia Maria Rodrigues-Peters to move into the literary world.

The first thing he noticed when examining the differences between his line of work and the new niche they were going into was that technical translations usually need constant updates, as a result of improvements and additions to the product or system covered by the translated material. Extreme accuracy was another important part of technical work, because translated instructions and specifications must stick very closely to the original. Literary translations, however, are literally a different story.

"A literary translator translates the thoughts of an author, what the writer might be thinking in the first place," Peters explained. "As a publisher, I'm not worried about a translation being 100% accurate when compared to the original. I want my translators to have freedom and do what's best for the translation to be successful in the target market. I ask them to rewrite the book, rather than simply translate it."

**Communication is the key** — To make sure the production team is on the same page, Ceditora facilitates communication throughout the process and puts authors and translators directly in contact with each other. And, since they're on the same level, Peters believes translators should be paid on the basis of the same arrangement.

As the translator-turned-publisher explained, authors usually receive an advance and then earn royalties from sold copies. His translators are eligible to benefit from the same type of publishing agreement and receive a percentage over the volume that is sold. "In Germany, the law says that translators must get 0.08 € on net receipts from each hardcover copy sold and 0.04 € for each paperback once 5,000 copies of the book have been sold."

Additionally, his translators get further recognition with each title. "We also put their name on the front cover and we always dedicate two pages at the end of the book to their short biography and contact information." When asked about Ceditora's practice of giving recognition to literary translators, Peters said that discriminating against translated literature is a thing of the past. "It's a publisher's misconception that putting the name [of the translator] on the cover would be the 'kiss of death' because readers would rather read an original book than something that was translated."

**Paradigm shift** — According to Peters, copyright is yet another area undergoing major changes in the new environment for the publishing industry. Traditionally, publishers wanted to have control over all of the creative material, so authors oftentimes agreed to relinquish their rights just to see their work published. As a result, translators were caught in the middle, acting merely as independent contractors rather than as an integral part of the whole publishing process, "just work for hire," as Peters put it.

At his publishing house, however, authors keep the copyright to their original material, translators hold the copyright to their translation, and Ceditora is granted the right to publish and distribute the book. "That is what a publisher does," he said, "so why would I want to keep rights to both the original and the translation as a publisher?"

Peters also described the more diversified marketing channels that come with the new framework for the industry. "We have a lot of word-of-mouth advertising, social networks, book clubs and even the Tupperware model," he said, referring to the direct-marketing giant that has advocates in social groups.



Peter mentioned that there are also the so-called “bait books” and that he had once read a very good book that was being distributed completely free as a self-published effort on the Internet. Then he realized that only the first book was for free. The second one was on its way, and if readers liked what they saw the first time around, they would get “hooked” and most likely come back for more and gladly pay for it.

**Wanna be a literary translator? “Just be proactive!” Carsten Peters says.**

For his second ATA Conference presentation, entitled “Programs for the Promotion of Translation,” Carsten Peters encouraged translators to “be proactive” if they wanted to break into the world of literary translation. “According to the old model, translators were only a side figure, just someone who did the job,” he explained. “Publishers would ask you to wait until they got in touch if they needed you. But if you want to think outside the box, you have to learn how publishers work and present a concrete project to them.”

After providing further details about the ins and outs of literary translation, Peters explained why he believed literary agents are fading away. In the past, they used to work as “middlemen” and scout books that were selling well in their native market to then pitch the translation project to a publisher in the target language market.

“Literary agents don’t add value to the process,” he asserted; they may actually hinder the process as far as language is concerned. Peters deals mainly with Portuguese and German, but if the literary agent does not speak either one language or the other, only English for example, then Peters would prefer bypassing the agent and working directly with the translator, who is bilingual and naturally inclined to communicate freely and openly.

Peters said translators must also be proactive because publishers would actually rather work with native authors than invest in a translation project. “Should I contact a translator to bring an international title into the country or should I just contact a big household name?” he asked. Risks are higher for publishers who opt for the former, because they have to pay for both the translator’s work and the original author’s royalties, regardless of how well the book ends up by doing in the target market.

**Know Your Grants** — The speaker also suggested that translators examine the many grant programs funded by governments to promote their country’s literature internationally. Oftentimes the paperwork to apply for these grants can be done online. He explained that the money goes directly to the translator, although a publisher has to be found in both the source and target countries to get the project through.

“Get in touch with the right people. Don’t use emails. Pick up the phone and talk to someone. Approach authors first, because they have a direct contact with their publisher. Don’t pitch the project, just talk about how much you like his work and how interested you are in maybe working together. Then get in touch with a publisher in the target country and provide the information about the grant and the author,” he suggested.

From a publisher’s standpoint, Peters said “it’s a win-win situation” because the translator has a concrete project and half the legwork is already done. “The publisher then doesn’t have to do anything, just sign the papers.”

**“The work of translators is known primarily through translated books,” Attila Piróth points out.**

Attila Piróth, an ATA-certified English-into-Hungarian technical translator and Head of the Eastern European Chapter of the International Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters (IAPTI), was responsible for a session entitled “Translating for the Publishing Industry.” Piróth began his presentation by indicating that it is usually because of translated literature that the general public knows about the work of translators. Literary translators, however, do not get the recognition they deserve, nor do they receive fair compensation in the current publishing world.

“There is this translator of Gabriel García Márquez’s books who doesn’t pay taxes, because her income is so low,” he noted.

Quoting a study entitled “Comparative income of literary translators in Europe,” organized by the European Council of Literary Translators Associations (CEATL)—which showed widespread dissatisfaction of professionals with the current market—the presenter said that there was a lot of room for improvement in this particular segment of the translation industry.

“Book distributors have an excessive profit margin compared to most other industries,” Piróth remarked. He estimated that usually only 8% of list price revenues go to a book’s translator. “When it comes to technical translations, you need a manual translated in order to sell the product in a foreign market. As for literary translations, what you sell is the text itself,” he explained, in order to highlight the status of a translated book as the final product, not an accessory to the complete package.

**How to compete** — And, as if bad compensation weren’t enough, competition is highly unfair in the field. “University teachers and academic research fellows have a full-time paid position and publishing a book is considered part of their teaching job,” he stated. “They’re not under the same price pressures a freelance translator faces, so literary translation becomes a hobby to them. Additionally, lots of people are ready to work for cheap, and some say having their work published is already an honor.”

He invited attendees to think about who was ultimately responsible for improving the collective situation and shared some tips on how to negotiate with publishers. “Translation is an original work of authorship, so add royalties to the negotiation, similar to those paid to authors,” he suggested, saying it would be especially viable for the second printing if the first edition turned out to be successful.

To look and apply for grants awarded by governments or other institutions for translations from the national language into a foreign language to promote a country's literature worldwide was yet another strategy propounded by Piróth. And there is always the option of translating classics that are in the public domain, usually 70 years after the author's death.

**Taking charge of it** — Similarly, "copyleft" books could provide a wealth of material for literary translators. Copyleft, represented by the mirror image of ©, is a play on the word "copyright" and describes the use of copyright law to provide the right to distribute copies and modified versions of an original work, while requiring that the same rights be preserved in any such modified versions.

In other words, if an author offers his or her book for free on the Internet through copyleft or a Creative Commons license, translators have the right to translate and distribute their translation so long as their version is distributed for free and within the same parameters.

"Literary translation is a hot topic right now," Piróth says. "But there is a conflict of interest between publishers and translators and the latter don't get much recognition. We can make a change with a Fair Book Initiative."

**"Theory helps us convince our clients that our translations are sound," says Jayme Costa.**

On the last day of the ATA Conference, one of the last sessions on that Saturday afternoon was "Topics in Literary Translation" by Jayme Costa Pinto. The English-into-Portuguese translator and head of studies at the Department of Translation and Interpretation with Associação Alumni in São Paulo, Brazil, has translated books by American authors John Updike and Seth Morgan.

He opened his presentation by stating: "Many people say that translation theory is only good for getting a teaching job. However, theory is what helps us convince our clients that our translations are sound. It's what helps us create a strong sense of translation, one that can be taken seriously."

**Domestication and Foreignization** — During the session, he focused on two translation theories. The first one was Friedrich Schleiermacher's concepts of domestication and foreignization. The German theologian and philosopher wrote about non-transparent translation: a translator could either adapt foreign concepts so that readers could assimilate the general idea or keep the foreign concepts intact in the translation so that readers could learn about another culture, even if it meant that references were literally "lost in translation."

As an example, Costa provided an excerpt of a story in English in which one of the characters quotes a nursery rhyme. Then he presented two different translations in Portuguese as possible solutions: one was more literal (foreignization) and kept the original references—albeit unknown to Brazilian readers—whereas the other was an adaptation

(domestication) that provided references to Brazilian culture that the Portuguese-speaking reader would have been well acquainted with to transmit the same original idea.

According to the presenter, the same technique has been used on TV shows. A classic example is “I Love Lucy,” which was broadcast in Brazil by a TV station targeting a lower-middle class audience. Substantial changes were made to the show during translation to bring it closer to Brazilians, including where Lucy and Ricky Ricardo lived (São Paulo instead of New York) and Ricky’s favorite ball team (the city’s Corinthians soccer club instead of the New York Yankees).

**Being Literal or Being Natural?** — Eugene Nida’s dynamic-equivalence theory was the second approach to translation discussed by the speaker. The late American linguist, famous for promoting the translation of the Bible throughout the world, disagreed with the formal idea that meaning is self-contained within the source text and that translation efforts should therefore focus on achieving semantic equivalence.

Nida’s dynamic-equivalence theory emphasized what was natural and understood in the target language. He contended that, since no two languages are identical, “either in the meanings given to corresponding symbols or in the ways in which symbols are arranged in phrases and sentences,” translators can never achieve an “absolute correspondence” between the source and the target language. As a result, there is no such thing as an exact translation.

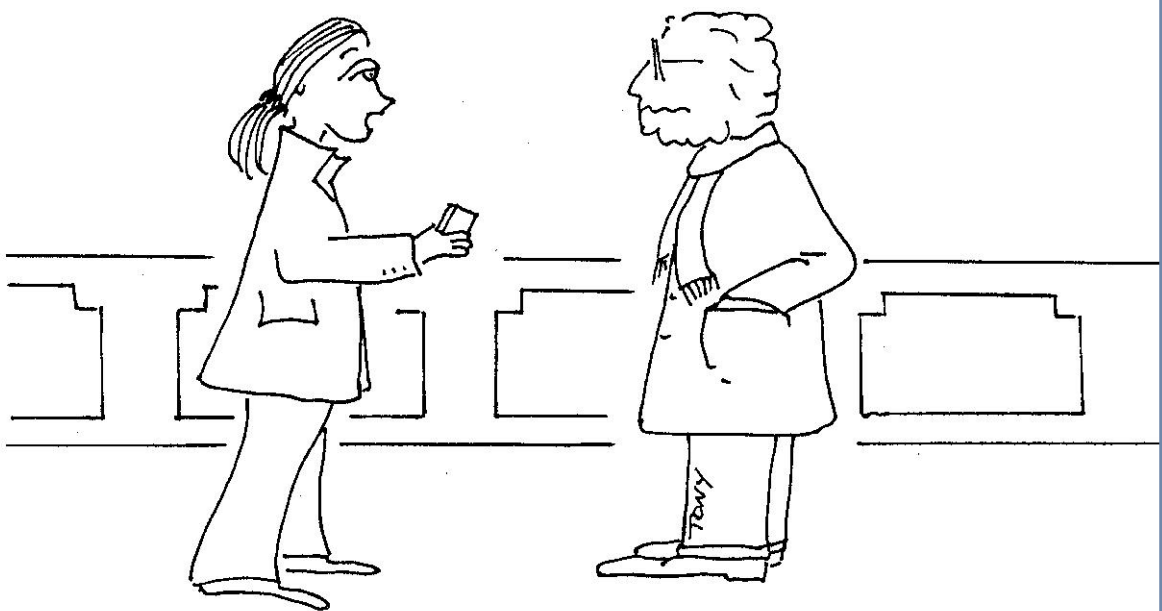
**Poetry and Music** — Most of the all-female audience left the presentation with goose bumps after Costa showed two more translation examples: a book of poems and lyrics to a song.

The first example was Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, written in 1845 and published five years later as a collection of poems inspired by the author’s courtship and marriage to Robert Browning. After a brief overview of Elizabeth’s life and how the British writer was inspired by 16th-century author Luís de Camões (hence the “Portuguese” in the title), Costa asked a native English speaker to read one of the poems in English and a native Portuguese speaker to read the same poem in translation. The Portuguese version by Leonardo Fróes, however, sounded as if it had been originally written in the target language.

For his final example of a literary translation, Costa gave us “Que de lindo,” the Brazilian version of Cole Porter’s song “It’s De-Lovely,” sung by Caetano Veloso as a bossa nova song with Rio de Janeiro as a backdrop, but still keeping the rhythm of the original while bringing archaic and sometimes made-up words to life. 🎵



BTW



“I downloaded Google Translate in case I get uploaded by aliens.”



# SING IT, TOSS IT OUT, AND BEGIN AGAIN

## A REVIEW OF MARK HERMAN AND RONNIE APTER'S 2011 ATA CONFERENCE PRESENTATION

BY ALLISON AHLGRIM



Allison Ahlgrim is a French>English translator and choral soprano. She lives online at [www.ahlgrimtranslations.com](http://www.ahlgrimtranslations.com).

**"A song is not just a poem set to music."** The translation of singable song lyrics, then, is not just a mere exercise in translating the meter, feet, rhyme scheme, imagery, and language of a poem, although it does encompass all of the above. Even the best of translators would balk at such a complex challenge, but Mark Herman and Ronnie Apter have tackled it with rousing success. They revealed their streamlined, elegant approach in their presentation "Translating Art Songs for Performance: Rachmaninoff's *Six Choral Songs*" at the 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual ATA Conference in Boston at the end of October. They gave an engaging, multimedia presentation that treated us to the sounds of Rachmaninoff's music in both Russian and their English translation.

After providing us with a brief history of the Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff, the early censorship of his *Six Choral Songs* in Russia, and the 2008 British commission that led to their English translation, Herman and Apter previewed the unique challenges that translators of singable song lyrics face. Fierce arguments rage over the use of some adjustments, such as changes to the rhyme scheme or musical alterations. But with all of these mountainous hurdles, they asked, how do you avoid bad translations, such as the French song "Maladie d'amour" (roughly, "lovesick") becoming "Melody of Love" in a popular English translation? Herman and Apter proved that, with the right amount of effort, good translations are well within the realm of possibility.

They first examined every aspect of the original Russian poems that Rachmaninoff set to music. Trochees abound in both Vladimir Nikoláyevich Ladyzhensky's "Night" and "Now the waves are drowsing," by Grand Duke Konstantín K. Románoff. End rhymes alternate between masculine and feminine rhymes, and both poems also have plenty of internal rhymes. "Night" has a dense, consistent abab cdcd efef rhyme scheme – which was promptly discarded when the translation in English began. Shocking? Not quite. They explained how cultural expectations of rhyme differ enough to justify this liberty. Although not everyone who works with Russian holds this opinion (as your humble French-and-English-speaking reviewer understands it), Herman and Apter believe that the Russian language overflows with rhyme in everyday conversation, while English is a much flatter language. A "normal" amount of rhyme for English speakers consists merely of an xaxa xbx b scheme, which is what Herman and Apter used for their translation of "Now the waves are drowsing."

Most translators, interpreters, and indeed, multilingual writers realize this to some degree. Some languages sound more musical to our ears because of their cadence or the extensive unintended rhyming in ordinary speech. As libretto translators, Herman and Apter simply include this information as one resource in their linguistic tool kit, providing them with more flexibility in a task that is even more difficult than poetry translation.

"Now the waves are drowsing" has yet another facet to take into consideration. Rachmaninoff completely changed the way the poem scanned to fit within his musical composition. One line is split between the sopranos and altos (high and low voices, respectively). One poetic line is extended into two musical lines. Lines 7 and 8 become 7a, 7b/8a, 8b, and 8c. The rhyme scheme becomes abab cddcdd, with the addition of several feminine rhymes. What is a translator to do? To achieve a true translation, would it be more faithful to first translate the original poem and then make similar adjustments, or to translate directly from Rachmaninoff's adjusted source? Herman and Apter answered that question at the beginning of this review by saying "A song is not just a poem set to music." The poem itself is not what matters in music. They made the singable translation based on Rachmaninoff's musical setting of the poem. Anything else, said Herman, would have been to "murder the music."

For singable translations, rhymes are just one piece of the puzzle. Pure sounds, the basic components of language, also have a huge impact. Herman and Apter described the different questions that they and other libretto translators must keep in mind, for example: What sounds are on the downbeats (usually the stress in a musical line)? And do they have the same stresses as in the spoken poem? Can the translation be consistent with the vowel sounds of the original, especially on the longer, held notes? Are certain vowel sounds even singable on certain pitches, very high or very low? Music gives birth to an even greater richness of sound, from vowels to whole phrases, which must be taken into account.

With all these concerns about sounds, how can a translator even consider syllables? What happens when syllables are altered, stretched or repeated? Then, there are tricks, "allowable in a translation if used sparingly." [See Table I.] The list of "allowable" changes is suspiciously similar to other music, outside of the realm of linguistic translation. Some songs, from church hymns to pop music, have slightly different meters or syllable counts for each verse. Their composers start with a melody, and then alter it just enough to fit the different lyrical patterns of each verse.

As Herman and Apter cautioned, however, a translator should not get bogged down in the minutiae of syllables and sounds at the expense of the bigger picture. In creative translations, and especially sung ones, the exact meaning is less important than mood. In "Now the waves are drowsing," for example, the interplay between the triplets in the left hand (lower notes) of the piano and the duples of the voices evokes rocking waves. The music must not be changed in any way that would alter that mood.

Many translators know that a text cannot be translated one word at a time; this yields an awkward or even unreadable paragraph in the target language. No matter how technical the writing, the translation must successfully transmute the original ideas into the translation.

Within the discussion of their precise decisions, sound by word by rhyme by phrase by song, Herman and Apter also touched on their collaborative process, highlighting their many years of experience working as a team. They start with a literal translation, with countless possibilities for each word or idea, and then create a working singable translation.

They take that to the piano, sing through it, toss it out, and start afresh. Apter notes that their kids know when they're working because they "sit down at the piano for three hours and scream at each other." Probably one of the healthier varieties of domestic dispute! Working as a team, they share all the frustrations of translation with each other, outside their own heads. The typical translator, a solitary creature, would do well to follow such an example from time to time. Not to yell out the window at a random passerby, of course, but to engage in healthy venting at a weekly coffee date or in online forums.

Throughout their rich presentation, Herman and Apter stressed that the key in their line of work is to retain the idea. Without the mood and meaning of the original work, their writing would become an adaptation instead of a translation. These two highly skilled writers have been honing their craft for years and, as a result, have been able to create a unique team. Their passion for their work is unmistakable. As music lovers, poets, and people interested in the sound and taste of language beyond the structure of grammar, the entire appreciative audience was able to find something of value to take back with them from this Conference session.

In the Q&A session at the end of the presentation, Herman and Apter were asked if they stressed over deadlines as much as other translators. Apter replied with a resounding yes. After all, they work in show business! Their project managers are directors or conductors who make requests (or demands), with varying degrees of logic behind them. What of the editor who insisted that their translation of Verdi's opera *Ernani* keep all mentions of a name on exactly the same notes as the original Italian? That's show biz. And that's our biz. 🎵

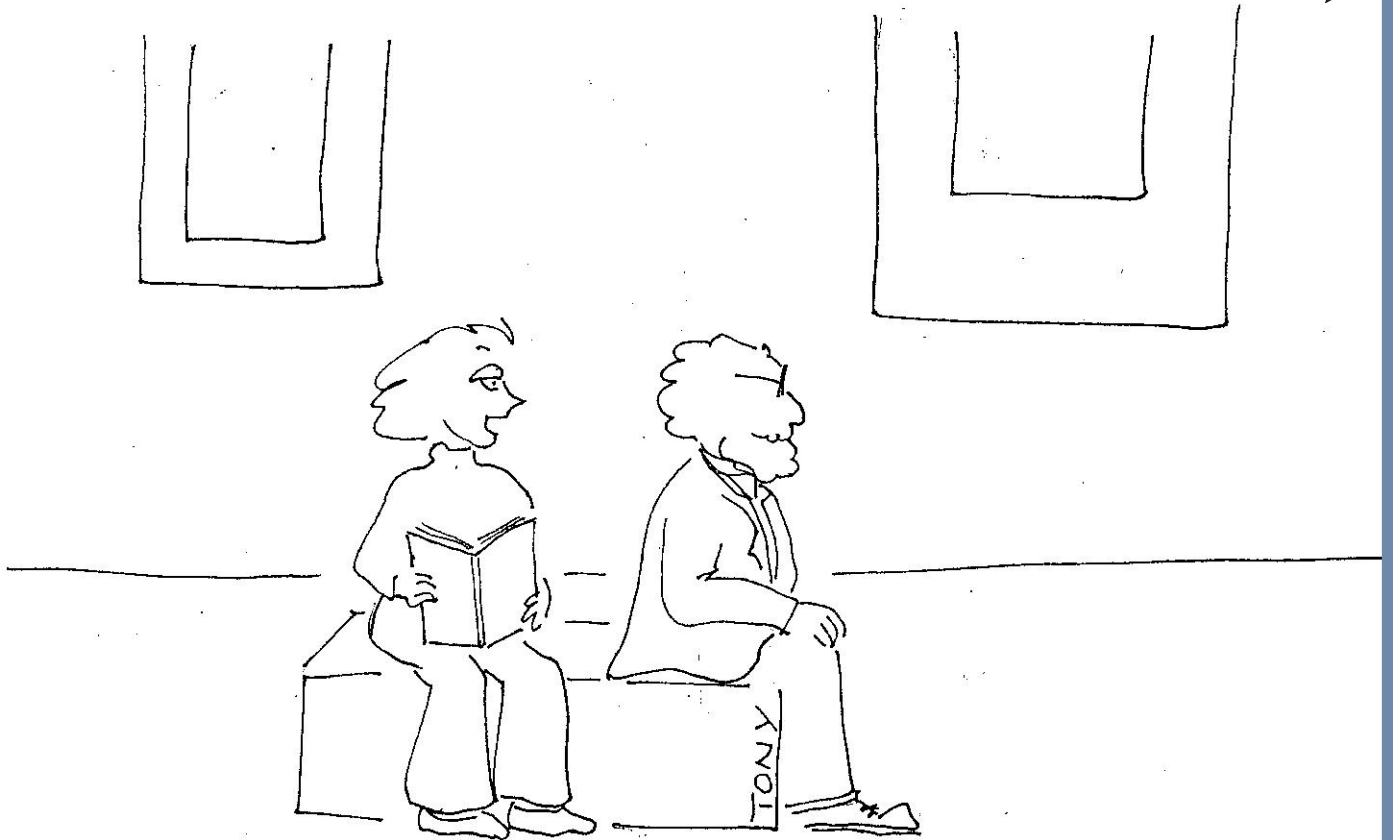
Table I

<b>Six musical changes usually allowable in a translation if used sparingly</b>	
<b>Splitting notes</b>  war	<i>becomes</i>  war-fare
<b>Combining notes</b>  war-fare	<i>becomes</i>  war
<b>Adding notes</b>  war-fare	<i>becomes</i>  of war-fare
<b>Deleting notes</b>  of war-fare	<i>becomes</i>  war-fare
<b>Spreading syllables</b>  war-fare	<i>becomes</i>  war...
<b>Inserting syllables</b>  war...	<i>becomes</i>  war-fare

For more information on this presentation, please see the handout and paper on the ATA Conference's Proceedings and Handouts CD or send an e-mail to [hermanapter@cmsinter.net](mailto:hermanapter@cmsinter.net).

This review was first published in the Winter 2012 issue of [SlavFile](#).

BTW



I still think Dada was the mother of all art movements.

BY THE WAY

# TRANSLATOR ON THE ROOF

BY TONY BECKWITH



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In San Miguel Allende, time stands still but people change. Nestled in the highlands of central Mexico, San Miguel was built by the Spaniards on the road they used to transport silver to the coast. Its narrow, cobblestone streets and quintessential colonial architecture give it a surreal quality which made me feel as though I had stepped into a different dimension, a different place and time—and in fact I had. I arrived on a bus from Mexico City and by sundown had rented a place to live and was signed up at the Instituto Allende art school to take classes in ceramics and writing.

It was the mid-1970s and I had taken a sabbatical—what is now referred to as a gap year—from a career in advertising that no longer inspired me as it once had. In the throes of a midlife crisis, I was trying to reinvent myself, looking for something else to do, and San Miguel seemed to be an ideal place to start.

In the aftermath of World War II the G.I. Bill spawned a new generation of art students in the United States, many of whom drifted south in search of new landscapes to paint in places where their dollars would stretch a little farther. San Miguel became popular with artists who found that the clear mountain air made colors brighter and sharper, while the remote location allowed them to enjoy a laidback lifestyle in idyllic, indulgent surroundings. The painters were soon followed by writers, and musicians, and their friends, and San Miguel



gradually turned into an art colony with a thriving, cosmopolitan social scene. It was just what I was looking for.

Blanche—who took a gap year from being a New York theater director and never went back—had lived in San Miguel for several years. She was friendly with some of the people in my writing class, and she invited me to join her translation circle. “We meet at my place on Tuesdays. I think you’ll enjoy the group.” She was right, I did. But what I really enjoyed was the translating. I grew up bilingual, speaking English and Spanish, and had always been a *de facto* translator and interpreter, as most bilinguals tend to be. My time in the advertising business had given me years of experience writing in both languages; I had always wanted to be a writer but somehow had never got around to it, mainly because I had no idea what I wanted to say. I now saw translating as a chance to take what someone else had written and then “write it” myself in another language. Not quite the same as creating my own original work, but it was a start. I also saw the translation process as a sort of road map for what I was trying to do, which was to re-express myself in another “language”—translation as a metaphor for transformation.

There were about ten of us in the group, all working from Spanish into English. Blanche lived in a studio apartment perched on the flat roof of a two-story building a couple of blocks from the center of town. We met on her terrace in the afternoons, surrounded by geraniums in rusted buckets and, occasionally, a line of laundry drying in the sunshine. We had a clear view of the spire of the church on the far side of the central plaza, silhouetted against a brilliantly blue sky. It was the 1970s, and we smoked cigarettes and drank black coffee and life was good.

A couple in the group had taken courses in translation studies at American colleges, and there were occasional discussions about translation theory and technique. But mostly we were newcomers to the field, feeling our way and learning from our own efforts as we struggled to do what proved infinitely harder than we had imagined. We worked on poems and prose passages by Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral, Jorge Luis Borges and, of course, Gabriel García Márquez. We all agreed that we also wanted to work on texts drawn from popular culture and daily life, believing that it was important to attune our ears to the vernacular of the street and hone our ability to capture the syntax of the common man. So we translated newspaper articles and posters,

hand bills and graffiti. We also produced English versions of some of the lyrics sung by Celia Cruz and Armando Manzanero.

Sometimes it was hard to pull away from the circle and we stayed on into the evening, switching from coffee to wine, and talking for hours on Blanche's terrace under the stars. On these occasions we set aside the works-in-progress that we produced and critiqued during the meetings, and the conversation took a more esoteric approach to translation. We discussed the endless subtleties of language, the myriad complexities of meaning, and the various ways in which the translator can be faithful to the author. It was a diverse bunch, and we speculated on the many ways in which our respective lives had prepared us for the linguistic and cultural challenges of literary translation. One by one we confessed to developing a more intimate, more critical relationship with our languages; we spoke of epiphanies when we suddenly understood things like the difference between "frowning" and "furling one's brow" and how these insights helped us bridge the gaps between an original text and a translation. We marveled at how exciting it was to take responsibility for a particular solution after grasping the nuances of a few words in ways that would have seemed impossible just a few weeks earlier. Literary translation, we realized, was a serious pursuit; yet we still enjoyed moments of hilarity as we played with code-switching to convey colloquial expressions, and *more bang for your buck* became *more beso for your peso*. As the summer slipped away we sensed that we were growing as translators, and felt a new respect for each other and, more importantly, for ourselves.

The group's free-roaming conversations inevitably led to ever-deeper reflections on the nature of language and the phenomenon of speech. How did language originate, and why? We theorized that humans have language because the senses that evolved for our survival provided experience that required expression. So, at what point was a grunt just not good enough, prompting one of our ancestors to articulate a sound that was inextricably linked to a specific meaning? Questions begat answers that begat more questions in the comfortable company of colleagues who had become friends and fellow-travelers on the road to new understanding.

Blanche—who said, "To begin anything with a certainty is to embark on a very short, uninteresting journey"—was never in a hurry for these soirees to end. Neither was anyone else. And that is the story of how my life changed forever in San Miguel and I became a translator. Δ

# DAWN/ALBA/AUBE: EXPLORING LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND OTHER THINGS THROUGH SELF-TRANSLATION

BY PATRICK SAARI

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**My poem, originally written in English as “Dawn,” was a hallucinatory vision of early morning in a big city,** specifically New York, with its anticipation of the subsequent unraveling of day till night and the next morning, a sort of compact “day in the life of everyman.” For Baudelaire and after him T.S. Eliot, cities were living nightmares peopled by ghosts wandering through landscapes of heartbreak and desolation. Little did they imagine that eventually there would be dense megalopolises throughout the world with dozens of millions of inhabitants, caught up in rhythms and cycles far removed from those that had cradled humankind for millions of years and whose cities are now easy to see from afar at night thanks to satellites hundreds of miles away in outer space.

For each city, there is a short time-frame when its dwellers massively make the transition from deep sleep to full wakefulness. Night is approached slowly, it is a gradual sinking into the id, libido and collective unconscious, the traditional realm of poets and dreamers (“Recueillement”, Baudelaire), but the break of dawn is that horrific moment that blends nightmares and the glaring light of day. People are neither governed by the wilderness of dreams nor as yet yoked to the stern dictates of survival. They must sort out the welter of dissonant sensations assailing them and jerk themselves into place to become the automatons that swoop down from their perches into streets, subways and cars.

On a clear day, the sun at a very precise moment, as it climbs into the sky, reaches the right angle to be briefly brightly reflected in the topmost windows of skyscrapers. Millions of sighs are exhaled almost in unison and extend like fingers/tree branches out onto the streets or like strands of hair spread out on a pillow, stretched out like cables on power lines. Pigeons that had been sleeping in the nooks and crannies of thousands of buildings, after desultorily moving about, suddenly take flight together like migratory birds from a far distant European wetland or African plain, impelled by no apparent reason other than the release of millions of dreams of those now waking, a sort of tsunami of the soul but in reverse.

And with this flight and release, the hard and heavy masks of social intercourse that had been thrown off are fitted again onto aching faces and dreams are tucked away. The earth's surface crust, with all its human accretions, is seen, in the light of day, like a pile of endless ruins as in the apocalyptic graphic novels of Jodorowsky and Moebius. Night is the steep cliff against which we must all collide, no matter how ambitious and bloodthirsty we may be. Sleep and death, though seemingly the very stuff of annihilation, paradoxically save us and the world from vanishing utterly and forever.

**When I first wrote the poem, I avoided any personal lyrical outpouring.** Restraint and suggestiveness were my self-imposed guidelines, probably an unconscious tribute to the academic obsession with "craft" governing the writing of literature, rather than authenticity, beauty, emotion or inspiration. The poem was to be a long and spare haiku of single words and brief phrases, where the reader had to bridge the many gaps between metaphor and actual photographic realism, between abstractness and concreteness, between the drama of hallucination and the inevitable prosaism of what is a daily occurrence for billions. American English also lent itself to that conciseness. Elliptical writing of this kind gives the reader the same freedom a moviegoer has when coping with the "interstices" of films such as those of Sergei Eisenstein or David Lynch, that is, the jumps and leaps from one image to another either for purposes of impact and narrative momentum or for imparting mystery and disquiet.

**But the translation into Spanish was able to revive the Baroque vision that was the driving force behind the poem,** the optical illusions that occur when inner visions get mixed up with outer perceptions, where inanimate things jump to life like crags attacking ships that become eagles foundering on their nests who had previously been sparrows personifying morning and clawing open a new day. In English it sounded almost retentive and remote, the product of an alienated sensibility. In Spanish, however, it suddenly became romantic, profuse, emotional. A few extra words gave it more density and body. The voice became "huskier." The enigmatic "pebbled stranded dawn" at the end became "otro amanecer encallado en las riberas arenosas del olvido", indicating explicitly that, every day, dawn has to be laboriously retrieved from the sandy banks of oblivion (imagine what would happen if millions or even billions decided not to get up just one morning, but to sleep and dream all day).

With the plethora of vowels that comes with Spanish, there were more opportunities for assonance and alliteration and the abuse of onomatopoeia, such as the use of "r" and "rr"s ("garras de gorrión" and "desparramados sobre los arrecifes" and "escombros alumbrados") throughout, to give a growling ominous tone to the whole poem, something easy to balance precisely because of the abundance of intercalated vowels.

**As for the French**, it benefited from the translation being done almost simultaneously with the Spanish and picked up on the longer syntactical structures, greater number of syllables, and obligatory use of all those articles that automatically come with working in Spanish in this case and Romance languages in general. Unexpectedly, however, the poem in French ended up with quite a few shrill “i” sounds and soft sibilants giving an anxious tonality to certain parts of the poem (“sourir retentissant”, “éparpillés sur les récifs”, “tisser patiemment ces instants pyramidaux”, “précipices de la nuit”) in contrast to the Spanish where the inevitable “i”s and pronounced plurals (“s”s) throughout are muted by the other vowels and the tide-like cadence of the language (majestic galleons and all).

**Although the laconic and free-form style of the English owes much to William Carlos Williams**, albeit without his other poetic beliefs, the French version had to resort, at least in terms of the flow of language, to Jacques Prévert and Paul Éluard. And where Gongorism (carefully eschewed by Borges) was the inevitable reference for the metaphoric obscurities in Spanish, Mallarmé, with his lapidary preciousness (“La nuit approbatrice allume les onyx”), and Gérard de Nerval, especially in his emblematic poem “El Desdichado,” were the patron saints of the complexities in French. In other words, well-established literary traditions in each language helped substantiate the choices taken when the translation was under way.

**The French version also drew from Proust** his affection for the accumulation of adjectives, nouns, verbs, prepositional phrases, etc., so that “blind bleeding eagles” became “aigles rapaces aveugles et saignants” (at the very end of *Le temps retrouvé* remembrance of the sound of the bell of the garden gate unleashing Proust’s final musings about time past is described using five adjectives, “ce tintement rebondissant, ferrugineux, intarissable, criard et frais,” emotionally very effective, albeit stylistically dubious, at least at the time). In French “aigle” is also a very sharp, on-the-ball type of person and “rapace” also means greedy, ambitious and lustful (and what would have been viewed as a “pléonasme”, or redundancy, because eagles are obviously predators, now makes stylistic sense). And this, in turn, provided feedback for the Spanish version, which also includes the word “rapaces”, not found in the English version, and renders more explicitly what was only intimated in English (“blind” ambition).

When it came to translating “recumbent night” a somewhat languorous image of repose, in French “nuit gisante” sprang to mind with its connotation of stillness and death (a “gisant” is a horizontal funerary sculpture over a tomb), whereas in Spanish the more dramatic “noche doblegada” came up, with its image of vanquished night, unable to rear its head crushed by the knee of a conquistador or

*“Each language has its hues  
and idiosyncrasies.”*



medieval dragon-slayer. Each language has its hues and idiosyncrasies. If I had put “noche yacente” or “recostada” or something like “nuit inclinée” or “couchée”, the pace of the poem would have suddenly dropped into blandness and the build-up so crucial to keeping readers on their toes would have been undercut.

As for “careless hair,” I knew I was thinking of not only morning dishevelment but also unconcern, which works out in English, albeit with a very light touch, but in Spanish the absence of worry or stress is underscored by the long, undulating word “despreocupada” giving emotional life to something quite inanimate (this time, with a Medusa touch) and highlighting the metonymic twist to the phrase, and using “cabellera” instead of simply “cabello” or “pelo” to emphasize abundance, the many strands of hair laid out, most likely that of a woman. The translation was faithful not to the words but to the very image that had loomed at a precise moment in the poem’s machinery. It also gave me the elements for the French, but without using more words than the English.

**It was Baudelaire’s vision of the city** (« fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves,/où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant ! »), however, that was the subliminal trigger for writing a hallucinatory version of dawn, far removed from the evangelical and popular notion of morning as rebirth, resurrection, fresh start, frontier hopefulness, and cheerful stiff-upper-lip positivism and belying the well-manicured, bustling and thriving image transmitted by chambers of commerce and tourism boards. The poem “Le crépuscule du matin” by its very title says it all. This vision has subsequently been more beautifully developed in science fiction novels, movies and fantasy comics than in poetry (*Dark City*, *Blade Runner*, *Matrix*, *Sin City*, Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*, Terry Gilliam’s *Brazil*, and Tim Burton’s *Batman* come to mind, movies that might well have been directed by highly successful blockbuster artists such as David, Géricault, Delacroix or Gustave Doré had they lived a century or two later).

Baudelaire took the language of his predecessors, whether Racine or Victor Hugo, and while remaining within the confines of literary convention, gave it such a twist and jolt (think of it as a literary “whiplash”) that, by comparison, all other French poets before him seemed pious and pompous and absolutely insincere. How he did it is the subject of countless books and translations, but his way of grabbing disparate images, overplaying or underplaying them, and putting them together offhandedly (Temps = injurieux vieillard / noir assassin; chevelure = port retentissant / houle / noir océan / roulis; ciel = couvercle; douce Nuit = long linceul; Mort = vieux capitaine) is a trick to inspire even the lowliest of versifiers.

**The other trigger was Homer’s “when the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn, appeared”** which is haunting, even somewhat scary (21st century vision of the advent of bloodless, man-eating aliens), especially when taken out of the context of the Odyssey and Greek mythology or a summer jaunt to the Aegean. And as morning is the child of dawn, so is day the child of morning, and evening, dusk

and deepest night the child of day, and night the mother of dawn, and so on and so forth in an endless chain of kinships. And “sea-dark travels” is a veiled allusion to the Odyssey’s “wine-dark sea” (or Joyce’s “and the sea the sea crimson” at the end of Molly’s soliloquy in *Ulysses*) that has to be sailed come what may.

Usually the translator reckons only with the flimsy scaffold of words to connect with a poem, in the best of cases second-guessing and, in the worst of cases, consulting Harrap’s, Webster’s or Roget’s and extrapolating. The advantage of being one’s own translator is that it is the experience, the memory, the intention, the images or the overall vision that are being reproduced in another language rather than the language being used as a crutch to gain access to the nonlinguistic substratum of the poem. For the writer-translator, it’s like being given a second chance, to fill in gaps and tinker with the poem, but impossible to abuse, because, at least in this case, it is poem with a specific rhythm and hemmed in by a winding pattern (the very image of a trail helping travelers wend their way across rough terrain), with sometimes just one word, at the most four, to a line, seemingly supple but not liable to much change. So whatever liberties it might take, the translation is constrained by that pace and layout (which in the past might have been iambic pentameter or dactylic hexameter, end-of-line rhymes, stanzas, sonnet, stepped triadic line, etc.).

And the above-mentioned literary references buttressing the translations are not the outcome of academic research but of heartfelt, genuine influences. If you’ve been hard hit by Baudelaire at an early age, before you start rationalizing everything, it will inevitably inflect how you write and it is all the easier to summon him up when you do a translation that already had Baudelaire as a backdrop.

**As a result of the translations, I was able to “explain” the poem to myself,** a poem I had written at dawn after a sleepless night (needless to say) and which I had dismissed as a feeble attempt at being surreal. I was able to reconnect with the wonderment I had felt when writing it, wonderment not at the poem, which is like the dregs of an experience, something left over, recalled in the pale light of memory, but at that specific moment when dawn, or at least one aspect of it, made itself understood. Ω



## Dawn

again  
a pebbled morning steps  
with sparrow's claws  
beats the flashing wings  
of windows  
with slivers of sun  
shatters  
the recumbent night  
while dreams  
in thunderous expiration  
like the fingers  
of phantom trees  
catch the steely wires  
the careless hair  
strung from pole to pole  
toss the hovering pigeons  
who wait  
then wake  
in a brusque  
compelling  
flight  
the dusty masks  
the fallen grimaces  
strewn on the deserted shoals  
of sleep  
unheeding  
the urgency  
of  
again  
a somersault  
an incandescent tumble  
among  
the lit debris  
of day  
to be woven  
in patience  
those pyramidal moments  
lifted in dunes  
and temples  
till crags of evening  
among their eddies  
wound  
the cruel vessels  
who stagger  
blind  
bleeding eagles  
to a feathered nest  
and  
implacable  
begin again  
sea-dark travels  
to a pebbled  
stranded  
dawn

## Alba

una vez más  
se abre paso una mañana pedregosa  
con garras de gorrión  
bate las alas resplandecientes  
de las ventanas  
con astillas de sol  
revienta  
la noche doblegada  
mientras que los sueños  
en un suspiro ensordecedor  
como los dedos  
de árboles fantasmas  
agarran los cables acerados  
la cabellera despreocupada  
tendida entre los postes  
sacuden a las palomas revoloteadas  
quienes esperan  
luego despiertan  
en un vuelo  
brusco  
e irresistible  
las máscaras polvorientas  
las muecas caídas  
desparramadas sobre los arrecifes abandonados  
del sueño  
sin darse cuenta de  
la urgencia  
de todavía  
otro  
salto mortal  
otro revuelco incandescente  
entre  
los escombros alumbrados  
del día  
para tejerse  
con paciencia  
esos momentos piramidales  
levantados como dunas  
y templos  
hasta que los acantilados de la noche  
entre sus remolinos  
embistan  
los navíos crueles  
quienes regresan tambaleándose  
águilas rapaces  
ciegas y sangrantes  
a su nido emplumado  
e  
implacables  
emprenden de nuevo  
viajes negros como el mar  
hacia otro amanecer  
encallado en las riberas  
arenosas del olvido

## Aube

une fois de plus  
un matin caillouteux enjambe le jour  
sur des griffes de moineau  
fait battre les ailes flamboyantes  
des vitres  
avec des échardes de soleil  
fait éclater  
la nuit gisante  
tandis que les rêves  
en un soupir retentissant  
comme les doigts  
d'arbres fantômes  
s'accrochent aux fils acérés  
à la chevelure insouciant  
suspendue aux poteaux  
secouent les pigeons tournoyants  
qui attendent  
et puis réveillent  
avec leur vol  
brusque  
et irrésistible  
les masques poussiéreux  
les grimaces déchues  
éparpillés sur les récifs abandonnés  
du sommeil  
sans se rendre compte de  
de l'urgence  
d'encore  
un autre  
saut périlleux  
une culbute incandescente  
parmi  
les décombres éclairés  
du jour  
pour tisser  
patiemment  
ces instants pyramidaux  
érigés en dunes  
et temples  
jusqu'à ce que les précipices de la nuit  
parmi ses remous  
ravagent  
les vaisseaux cruels  
qui rentrent s'écrouler  
aigles rapaces  
aveugles et saignants  
sur leur nid emplumé  
et  
implacables  
entreprennent de nouveau  
des voyages ténébreux comme la mer  
vers une autre aube  
échouée sur les plages  
sablonneuses de l'oubli



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