

THALIA PANDIRI

IN THIS ISSUE

Once again, we are happy to present a wide variety of poetry and prose from many languages, countries and time periods. We are particularly excited to offer selections from Dr. Asselin Charles' long-awaited, masterful translation from the Haitian Kreyòl of Frankétienne's pioneering, indeed unique, novel *Dézafi* (1975). We are grateful to Dr. Charles and to the University of Virginia Press, publisher of the 2018 English translation, for permission to include in this issue of *Metamorphoses* not only some excerpts from the novel but almost the entirety of Dr. Charles' reflections on the challenges of translating Frankétienne's rich, idiomatic, polyphonic Kreyòl into English, and the choices he made. Frankétienne (1936-) is arguably the most original Haitian poet, novelist, and playwright. Known as the "dean" or the "father" of Haitian letters, he has written over fifty novels, plays and poetry collections, in French as well as in Kreyòl. Recognition outside Haiti came late, and then almost exclusively in France. In 2009 he was a candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature; in the following year, he was made Commander of the *Ordre des Arts et Lettres*, and named Unesco Artist for Peace. More recently, he was awarded the title of "national treasure." Asselin Charles' masterful translation, in a handsome edition that includes his magisterial introduction to the work in its context, as well as a glossary, introduces Frankétienne, and the richness of Haitian history, language and culture to English readers. It is our hope that the small taste we can offer of this major, groundbreaking work will inspire our readers to search out and enjoy *Dézafi*!

"Mémorial of Géolibertinage," ("Mémoires du géolibertinage") from the collection *Alléluia pour une femme-jardin* (1981), by the venerable Haitian author René Depestre, is also translated by Asselin Charles, from the French. It's a pleasure to present an important work that, surprisingly, was not translated into English decades ago, when it was first published.

Special also to this issue are Ruth Murphy's translations from the Yiddish of all seven short stories published in Yiddish newspapers at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century by Salomea Perl. Her short stories, some of which might be described as sketches, paint a vivid picture of daily life in Jewish communities in Poland. Vivid and often poignant details bring to life her characters and their environment.

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Her style is direct, economical, but at times imbued with a lyrical simplicity that reveals the dignity with which the hardworking poor face the daily struggle to survive. All of the characters in Perl's stories are real, and three-dimensional. Perhaps particularly sensitive are Perl's portrayals of women: the timid and sheltered bride who comes to embrace her husband's love of theatre; the childless wife of a wealthy husband whom she has come to love although she had not wanted to marry him; another childless wife abused by a cruelly unfeeling, rigid and self-righteous husband, terrified of being cast out of her marriage by divorce, as a barren and thus useless wife. It's a great pleasure to offer these stories as a collection, for the first time. Perl's fiction in Yiddish is placed in a larger context of Yiddish literature by women, in an introductory essay by Justin Cammy.

Also translated from the Yiddish by Ruth Murphy (and edited by Catherine Madsen), two stories by Hersch Smoliar (1905-1993). Born in Poland, he became active in the Communist Party as a young man and studied in Moscow. In 1928 he was sent to Poland as a Comintern agent, was arrested and spent four years in prison, escaped to Soviet-occupied Bialystok in 1939, and was interned in the Minsk ghetto after the Germans occupied Bialystok in 1941. He escaped from the ghetto and joined the local partisans. The two powerful stories in this issue are vignettes from the years of partisan resistance. Though different in tone, both are characterized by a deceptively direct, even simple narrative style, and imbued with what seems to me a faith in human decency and hope, despite the evil, violence, and death that threaten to prevail. Smoliar is another prolific writer, important and well-known elsewhere but little-known in the United States. From 1946 until 1971 when he emigrated to Israel, Smoliar was active in Poland as a writer and as editor of a Yiddish newspaper. Once in Israel, he continued to write and published a number of important books on Jewish political and cultural activities in the Soviet Union and Poland. As Yiddish Studies become more popular in the United States, one can hope that his major works will be translated into English in the near future.

Other short fiction includes "The Custom" by Manoranjan Byapari, translated from Bengali by V. Ramaswamy. Byapari came to India as a Dalit child refugee, and first learned to read and write when he was imprisoned. In this gripping story, a village tyrant gets his comeuppance in a surprising way. Xuao Tie's "The Well," translated from the Chinese by Kimberly Wright, is eerie and enigmatic. From Arabic, Gassim Dohal translates a story by Saudi writer Khalil Al-Fuzai about a teacher in a

rural school, exiled by economic necessity from the family his salary supports. “The Dolphin,” by Maria Mercè Roca, translated from the Catalan by Sonia Alland, is a deeply moving piece about how a 4th-century BC poem set to music brings a young girl to understand her mother’s heartbreak, to understand love, loss, aging, to grow beyond adolescent solipsism and reach out to her mother. A hybrid memoir-essay, “Bridging the Gender Gap With Love,” by teacher, author and feminist activist S. Vijayalakshmi, is translated from the Tamil by Thila Varghese. This translation into English makes available to an Anglophone readership an important figure in the realm of contemporary Tamil literature and social activism. I for one had no familiarity with her work, and I suspect I am not alone among readers of this journal.

Bridging poetry and prose, poet Bayir Dugarov’s “Manhattan,” a meditation on the poet’s experiencing Manhattan as a visitor while channeling Whitman, translated from the Russian by J. Kates, makes us see both Manhattan and Whitman’s poetry through fresh eyes. Bayir Dugarov was born in the Oka region, Buryat-Mongolian ASSR. A poet, doctor of philological sciences, a leading fellow of the Institute of Mongolian, Buddhist and Tibetan Studies of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, he has written fifteen books of poetry, and is a laureate of the state awards of the Republic of Buryatia for literature and art.

Some works seem to demand retranslation, and *Beowulf* is one of them. Donald Mace Williams offers a new, fresh version of verses 64-125 of the poem, vivid, swift-moving, as close to the rhythm and meter of the Old English as feasible—a delight to read. Philip Peek has a new translation of an epigrammatic love poem by 1st century BC Greek-Syrian poet Meleagros (Meleager) of Gadara. Another new translation of an ancient poet comes to us from (self-described) obsessive polyglot translator A.Z. Foreman: verses 1-82 of the first book and verses 617-646 of the seventh book of Lucan’s historical epic (*Bellum Civile* or *Pharsalia*), a monumental and influential legacy of a poet who was forced to commit suicide by the emperor Nero at the age of twenty-six, in 65 AD.

From German, poems by Georg Heym, one of the most famous of the German Expressionist poets, whose poetic legacy is particularly amazing since he met his death through accidental drowning when he was only twenty-four years old. He is translated by William Ruleman. Also translated from German (by Becca Menon) is a neoromantic poem by Isolde Kurz (1853-1944). Isolde Kurz was a prolific writer, once popular and admired. Already a well-known and respected figure when

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National Socialism came to power, she was dazzled by the new regime, which she envisioned as the new Holy Roman Empire. And she was celebrated by Nazi Germany. To her credit, she also lent her name to a French manifesto against antisemitism and militaristic excesses. Her work is now very little known.

“Lisboa” (“Lisbon”), a 19th-century poem by Antonio Gomes Leal (1848-1921) is translated here by poet-translator Ranald Barnicot. Also translated from Portuguese, a series of poems by Maria Teresa Horta, from the 2017 collection *Poesis*, translated by Edite Cinhã and M.B. McLatchey. This collection, the translators say, is “remarkable for the poetic that it embraces, namely, that these poems will celebrate a new western epic and a new epic hero: a woman and a poet—in particular, a *Portuguese* woman and *Portuguese* poet—who has known political, social, and personal oppression and who consciously resists oppression in poetic expression just as she resists it in her political life.” Furthermore, “in shedding punctuation and adopting the declarative voice, Horta’s verses *enact*, rather than simply *impart*, a view of poetry as epiphany.”

We are truly honored to have more work from internationally acclaimed poet Xanath Caraza, who has been a frequent contributor to *Metamorphoses*. From her 2018 volume *Hudson* are several poems translated from the Spanish by Sandra Kingery. The poem “Niña sin nombre” is translated from the Spanish by Sandra Kingery (“Girl With No Name”) and into Greek by Natasa Lambrou (Κορίτσι δίχως όνομα).

Two poets new to *Metamorphoses* complete our poetry offerings: Two song-poems by Karim El-Iraqi (Kareem Al-Iraqi), Iraqi poet and songwriter, translated from the Arabic by Housseem Ben Lazreg, and a poem by the contemporary poet Muhemmetjan Rashidin, translated from the Uyghur by Chuen-Fung Wong. Rashidin’s “To The Unborn” was written in Ghulja in 1993. Rashidin has written more than two thousand poems and published short stories as well as poetry. This is the first time we have published literature written in Uyghur, and we are excited to have a contribution in the language of this tragically oppressed minority population.

We are grateful to our contributors, to the rights holders who have given us permission to publish the work in this issue, to our anonymous expert reviewers, who so generously give us the gift of their time and wisdom, to our subscribers and other readers. We also thank Five Colleges, Inc., the members of the consortium (Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College, the University of Massachusetts Amherst), and the Translation Center of the University

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