Abstract

“Stalk of Grain and Light” is an excerpt from O Resplandor (Toronto: Anansi, forthcoming 2010), a book of poetry that explodes notions of authorship and translation. In it, the heteronymic character Elisa Sampedrín translates from Nichita Stănescu, though she knows no Romanian, and the orthonymic character Erín Moure translates Paul Celan, using not Celan but English transcreations from the language of Celan by Oana Avasilichioaei which she appropriates and reorganizes to create the true translation of a poem by Paul Celan, which exists only in her mind. In this world where corporations copyright human cells, where academics and libraries appropriate works of writers, and where writing itself — moreso than visual art — is limited by expanded notions of plagiarism and ownership, of continuity of copyright for decades that prevents works from influencing art’s future, Moure refutes the idea that writing is inspired out of nowhere. Here it is rooted to human interaction, to love and loss, to the art of others, and is dedicated to creating a world where the free irruption of thought is possible, and lineages are acknowledged.

Keywords: poetics of translation, transcreation, authorship and heteronymy.
I: Elisa Sampedrín:

I stood before the screen of my own language. There was no remedy. Either I stood before the original work in its incredible beauty or I stood before the screen of my own language. Before this screen, I had no recourse. Something had to be altered in my body, to compensate for the screen of my language that stood between me and the poem. I unsocked myself. I unshoed myself.

I was a stalk of grain and light.

*

I was alone in Bucuresti. In its traffic. An absolute clamorous din. I had to change my face.

*

When I first started translating Stănescu, I didn’t know Romanian. “Albă” looked to me like “albumin,” so I translated it as albumin. Later I found out it was the feminine of “white.” Albumin then became even more accurate. Stănescu was urgently saying albumin. My mouth filled up utterly with this word. Something the same happened with all the others. Bucuresti. Why did I go there.
* (after Chus Pato)

— Do you know this is the ruin of translation if you go on like this?
— ...
— You only discover what is bad and foul about literature, don’t you?
— ...
— And not only that...
— ...

* 

I can’t explain why I was so suddenly drawn to translation. But surely it was the poems of Stănescu. In Bucuresti, in a bookstore, or in the street, the din. Or I was standing in a hallway, someone’s hall (whose?) and slid the book off a shelf. It had such a worn cover, pale yellow. I intended to put it back the instant that feet sounded in the corridor. But when I gently opened the book, I saw cattle. An eyeful of cattle. Their field was steaming. It was after a rain. A man was hammering on a stone. He wasn’t watching me at all, he was so intent. I heard feet then. The book slipped into my coat. One gesture. But my mouth hurt. I raised my eyes then and took the book out, and held it to the waiting woman. She turned to the shelf, then back to me without saying anything. I knew I had to translate it. I knew no Romanian. But I wanted to read the book, so I had to translate it.

There would be no surcease until I did so.

II: Erín Moure:

I’d been reading translations all day, O.A.’s unpublished ones of Paul Celan from Romanian to English, translations that occurred in the space between poems, and… true, the line was not there. But when I looked
up, I had said it out loud. The line had formed itself in my mouth and I heard it spoken. What had I translated? I opened the window. How could I have translated something into English that was already in my own tongue? The echo of vehicles on stone walls. It was Celan. Early Celan. *There is an essential anachrony in our being exposed to the other at the moment of translation, said Derrida (or not).* “Contagious fire and hours that break all clocks.”

*

Each time, time’s rupture must be admitted, for every translation destroys time. This is not “an impossible sentence with no meaning.” It is the time or tense of all translation, all writing. Like the future anterior of the phrase “I died,” all translation appears as a monster in time itself.

*

“I told myself the following, which I feel with singular acuteness and intensity: if this interiorization is not possible, if it cannot — and this is the unbearable paradox of fidelity — be completed, it would not be because of a limit, a border that cannot be crossed, a frontier that encloses a given space, organizing finitude into an inside and outside homogeneous with one another, symmetrical and commensurable. It would be, rather, because of another organization of space and of visibility, of the gazing and the gazed upon.” (Jacques Derrida, *Work on Mourning*, words underlined by E.S. in a book slipped into the library of E.M. by the window, beside bpNichol’s *Translating Translating Apollinaire.*
Part-Elegy

the roof between visceral and real

What comes from afar,
sent half-late and chilled
rosy as dawn to my singularity.
In cathedrals with pulse perceptible, half-late,
swirling and absorbing the intrusion of belief,
in an absurd circuit
right in the zone of absurdity,
raying with the sea drunk with moonlight,
in the gold of what exists.
The cinders of fury, nightly,
luminous eyes sleeping,
innumerous dints glow in the face taken up with sleep
sharing the tunic
seeding a plot of meteors
on the street of light called strada luminatâ
urging and corroborating together.
What comes from afar,
sent half-late to me
and
my own properties now are too naked
and much more intelligent
my own properties too are enraged
by a poet who exists and is leaving
too, enraged.
Astral,
grabbing the last step of the insomniac stair
in the evening of evening,
yearning
in the partial but unconjugated
strata of ice,
courting discards and
scuffling with insufficiency,

vale

of my care and my possibility of freedom

unnegotiable

with its possibility that all of this is a film, and over.

II

To be all bothered in myself with this rupture,

accepting

its rigours hugely, attuned to the procession

that seems will endure.

Endure and rupture in the gift of light,

the pattern it prints on my eyes, aches.

Endure and rupture in soaring

light,

the sound of loving bells, ache.

Endure ruptured in ache

in the mirrored sunlight,

and what touches my nostril, ache.

And you, oh you, remaking the entire inner world,

you, possibly my twin, helping me

imbricate the barbarity of the femur, yes,

oh, you, and you, and you

inhaling solemnly

the ruptured twinship

with flames of ash, detained by ash,

the prow of your voyage lit up with my fire

enraps me,

teaches me rigour, accepting,

professing, throwing me into the lifeboat,

teaching me rigour, over and over, to climb up again

rugged, unold.
“break simply with grief’s cane”

... a “force renewed” through the very renunciation of all restitution, all reconstitution, all postmortem retribution: the gift itself.

(J.D.)

the impossibility itself of the translation she was attempting. leaping into the map of Celan’s words with no instrument for scale, for not knowing the language she instead drank words. when she walked uphill the water followed her. because of O.A., Celan’s words had come to her in English, the language of no one. the language she herself could scarcely hold without it tremouring her. so she tried to make the instrument of equivalencies, of valence, of scale with the lines of the poems themselves:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{stained petal you extinguished} & = \text{rose wrenching the shoulder light} \\
\text{slowly unfasten grief’s doves} & = \text{with explorers of heightitude, the hands}
\end{align*}
\]

but she had mixed up gloves and doves.
KEY TO READING “Two Accurate Translations of One and the Same Poem by Paul Celan”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>German</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>impetuously beautiful</td>
<td>our single shipwreck, transparent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>literally: impetuous shipwreck</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sky’s flag</td>
<td>one floor below us silica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>literally: flag below us floor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stained petal you extinguished</td>
<td>rose wrenching the shoulder light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>literally: shoulder petal extinguish rose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
this poem is a monstrosity, but not a lie.

“The human soul applies this excess of forces to the formation of language.” Heymann Steinthal, 1851

“The deportations began the following day.” Paul Celan
Two Accurate Translations of One and the Same Poem by Paul Celan

Great Southern Cross

impetuously beautiful
sky’s flag
stained petal you extinguished
ash those nights
stain its silver in blood
blaze announce
there, unspeakably

(when boat reaches shore, the oars stop
(no way to become trees again
(rose wrenching the shoulder dark
(panther gashed dawn
Tropic

our single shipwreck, transparent
one floor below us silica
rose wrenching the shoulder light
ash those nights
kissed her incestuous
blaze announce
flood of light creasing the window

(I climbed one of the arms of light
(laid down oars to fathom
(boat-marks tugged into snow
(gaze vacant with walnuts save themselves
Wing

ash those nights
blaze renounce

“contagious fire and hours that break all clocks”

“slowly unfasten grief’s doves”

their wing-harrows
their salt tears

“she stepped over the threshold to face an eyelid”
so that i could get up and breathe at ease,
arrest the hour from time’s conflagration
a poem now to be assembled in any order, by anyone’s hand

4, “mourning drunk from a palm”
staggers not a bit of it
the palm opens clamour so leafed, rested

2, barefoot to be told
steps rambles
walk through the long brown grasses

1, “ash that night”
(snow alight)

3, “but how it floats amidst grasses with outstretched wings!”
Shoulder, face, wing:
I éclate you out of the waters.

encántame o recendo da menta nos teus dedos...
(we travellers of images blind

(next to you: transform colour

 my wing-harrow

 salt- wether

 loam, azul

 *

(with explorers of heightitude the hands
Living Proof (original)

this lexicon is Paul Celan’s and Oana Avasilichioaei’s, i arrested it.

Boat, face, wing:
night’s blanket sewn up around her shoulders.

Our convulsive foam
glove’s nocturnal kiss:
 oar in the high birches enflamed

The palm’s open clamour is
 leafed sky, rested
 barefoot to be told

steps brambles but what we know, blaze knows
 “walk through the long brown grasses”
 “ash that night”
 (endure)

Tomorrow’s laugh is autumn’s walnut, touch today the dew
 “how it floats amidst grasses with outstretched wings”

~ break harrow ~ simply ~ grief’s cane ~
A Real Letter

A Real Letter

17 xuño 2006, Calgarii, Alberta

Dragā O., I’m so interested in what arises in the present of the writing moment, in the blurring of the signatures. How this moment, loosened, immediately undoes or unties the signature. I feel, once I’ve written words and assigned them O., O.A., E.M. or have written across your words and signed them E.S., that I must give the texts over to you to enact your signature à travers, in whatever way your own present writing moment prompts you: as commentary, as new lines or liens in your own work. Writing is thus always already enacted, but moreso. There is continually a supplement and, like the halo, it is utterly unnecessary and utterly glowing there. Here. Every enactment or re-enactment of a signature is a staging, a “making-here” in space.

Yet we each are present as singularities in the text and the texts we create are at the same time our own, no matter how we sign them.

Translation, signature. The writing hand, long-fingered and supple, whose touch remakes an entire interior world.

Today, reading an online Scandinavian litmag of “experimental” work, I realized that I’m so uninterested in this construct continually dug up by other people in which “lyric” is split off and set up against “experiment.” I can’t even be bothered to protest it, for protest would just give it credence, in a way. I am interested in the signature and the mouth and throat. I am interested in how ear and throat receive language. Which gives me Bachmann and Beckett fully, which gives me your razā de lunā too. And Stănescu.

What’s strange to me I guess is how that false dichotomy only looks interesting (perhaps this is it, I am only guessing) from the interior of a monolingualism. Once other languages are part of the foment, the
dichotomy does not hold at all; there is but opening, opening. This opening is where we meet as poet-beings. And we get on with our work, which lets us both meet so richly, ever and repeatedly and anew. This “getting on with the work of language” is both lyric, and experiment. Deeply both. Yours, E.