

Preface

This issue is an issue of transitions, edited in a world of transitions. Hal. H. Rennert, who has been the editor-in-chief and preface-writer-in-chief of *Delos* for more than five years, is now a very active member of the Board, while Ben Hebblethwaite has moved from the Board to the editor position, beginning with the 2022 volume. You will find in this issue commentaries from both of them on the past and the immediate future of *Delos*. Meanwhile, I, the managing editor, have put together this volume to my taste, and I hope to yours, reader.

The world of transitions is upon us. There are fires and far too little ice. Starvation and destruction drive survivors across borders, weakening the imaginary unity of states. Gainesville, Florida, weathers the changes well for now—it rains almost every day, replenishing the aquifer and encouraging the eponymous flora. There is also a plague, which human ingenuity battles with masks, modified RNA, and, at the last, with ventilators and isolation. There are political struggles between those who seek a savior and those who preach a life pure of any encroachment on another individual.

All this presses against my window (closed to keep the air-conditioning in) as I read and re-read the contributions of so many translators and so many source authors to this volume.

With the exception of Louise Labé, all the source authors are of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The poets Claudia Lars, Jibanananda Das, Xu Zhimo, and Giuseppe Ungaretti were all born near the end of the nineteenth century, and their poems are beloved in their own countries, memorized as treasures of the energetic modernism of the first half of the twentieth century.

The writers Givi Margvelashvili, Luigi Malerba, and Epiácio Pais were all of an age to experience World War II, in various ways, and to look back on the changes in society brought about by the new outlines of nations. Margvelashvili was sent by the Soviet Union from Germany to Georgia; literature helped him endure his linguistic and social isolation. Malerba, on the

other hand, made the acquaintance of a rural society where illiteracy and ignorance limited the lives of peasants, but not the meaning of their lives. Pais gives us a postcolonial murder mystery, complete with a policeman who narrates the story in Portuguese, the colonial language of Goa, already slipping away from common use there.

Two very long stories dominate the last half of the issue: *An American Lover* by Philippe Sollers, published luxuriously in French under its own covers, and “The Tempest” by Bao Ninh, published in the last issue of a journal which the Vietnamese government promptly shut down. They are both love stories. The one is all clarity and light and pleasure, full of art and music and the changing enthusiasms of the second half of the twentieth century. What does it mean to be French in America, or vice-versa? The other story confuses, is confused, in the smoke and death of a Vietnamese village in 1971, so that the reader can hardly discern motivations or characters, plot points are mere rumors; the men are defined by social roles, and by their need to love and/or kill a particular singing woman.

Two contributions are marked in my mind as of this century. The Dane Thomas Boberg, travelling with a half-Ghanian companion, explores an African city without, I think, trying to find in it either an abased Other or a mirror. Buying bananas for hungry children becomes a morally conflicted act; finding repressive Danish Christianity in Addis Ababa requires a little repression of one’s own opinion of such religion. Maria Attanasio, a Sicilian poet who uses Sicilian dialect in her work, looks at African immigrants, with their hidden names and languages, with a shock and outrage beyond compassion. If indeed literature can alleviate isolation, her poems have a chance to do that.

. . . At which point I come back to the sonnets of Louise Labé, intensely personal love poetry in a rigorous form. I received two submissions of her sonnets, and asked the translators, Dorothy Trench Bonett and Jim Kates, to discuss the joys and challenges of translating French Renaissance poetry.

This is a moment for taking stock and expressing gratitude for the past six years, during which I have worked with Hal Rennert and with review editor Alex Burak, and also with all the contributors to the journal and readers of contributions. Hal’s editorship has been very personal, and he comes from a tradition in comparative literature which harmonized with my own background as a medievalist. Alex raised my awareness of the discipline of

translation (as did our colleague Dror Abend-David). I look forward to working with Ben, and with Rori Bloom and Roxana Walker-Canton, the incoming book and film review editors.

Judy Shoaf

