

Preface

Are there great and famous prefaces to literary works, including translations? A clever way of answering this question and in the process turning it into a substantial anthology of famous prefaces and one of the Harvard Classics is by James Spedding, who in 1910 produced a volume entitled *Prefaces and Prologues to Famous Books*. Interestingly, only two of his seventeen titles—one from French, Victor Hugo’s preface (fifty pages!) to his play *Cromwell* (1827), and the other from German, Goethe’s preface to his journal *Propyläen* (1798)—were not drawn from English literature. Overall the prefaces fall into two groups: the shorter ones are advertisements and the longer ones are manifestos. Goethe’s preface merely advertises the contents of his journal, but Hugo’s preface is a true manifesto for French romanticism. Hugo points to the concept of the *grotesque* as the key to romantic literature.

Another famous manifesto is William Wordsworth’s *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* (1798). Part of its fame and importance lies simply in its date of publication in 1798, often referred to as the beginning of British romanticism. The poems by Wordsworth in the *Lyrical Ballads*, as well as the only one by his friend and collaborator Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” are a gold mine for comparatists and translators, because of the many influences of and allusions to the works of poets and thinkers of continental Europe. Wordsworth’s preface is also famous for reclaiming the importance of the language of common people. He puts it this way:

The majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure.

Wordsworth’s preface includes two resonant contradictions. One is the recommendation to avoid distinction between prose and poetry and to avoid “poetic diction”; but in his own practice a clear and distinct poetic diction is present. Secondly, he defines good poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” but at the same time “emotions recollected in tranquility;”

in other words, somehow poems are to be spontaneous as well as meditative products.

As translators and editors of *Delos*, we take prefaces of famous or not so famous literary works to be sources of inspiration. But in its actual, practical form, we take a more modest path in our prefaces, including this one, more advertisement of content than manifesto.

The present issue, as was last year the case for the Fall issue, has no official theme. Still, the contents are such that few readers will see only one work that interests them. For lovers of Russian poetry, we welcome back translators Dmitri Manin and Alex Cigale, but are also pleased with two new contributors, Nina Kossman and J. Kates.¹ Altogether we have poems by Baratynsky, Gumilev, Kedrin, Vaginov, and Pryakhin. Mr. Kates's contribution includes poems of Petrarch and Nerval on a related theme. For lovers of short stories, we have another one from the Dominican writer José Alcántara Almánzar and two by the Greek author Vassilis Alexakis, who writes these remarkable prose puzzles in French. From French also comes the "Boy's Eye View of May '68" by Claude Arnaud, a reflective narrative which might be interesting to read alongside Yoshida Mitsuru's vivid and immediate 1946 account of the sinking of the *Yamato*, of which Christopher Smith presents an excerpt.

The history of translation is commented on by Christopher Wickham in his presentation of a new translation of a short essay by Kleist, and indirectly by Stephen Rojcewicz as he looks intensely at an oft-translated passage of Homer and an oft-discussed sign in Shakespeare's *Othello*. One may also look to the reviews for discussions of translating works whose originals present special challenges.

Leading off the issue is a collaboration between the two poets Lola Haskins and Andrea Pham, both of Gainesville, *Delos*'s home town. Here we have Vietnamese poetry translated into English—and English poetry into Vietnamese. In next Fall's issue, we hope to present an analysis of Vietnamese metrics by Dr. Pham, based on this "conversation."

For the Spring 2020 issue of *Delos*, with a special theme of "Performance and Translation," Ralf Remshardt, professor of theatre at the University of Florida, will be our guest editor. He is the author of *Staging the Savage God: The Grotesque in Performance* (2004) and *Intermedial Performance and Politics in the Public Sphere* (2018). He has directed plays by Euripides,

¹ Mr. Kates in fact published in *Delos* in its late-90s and early 2000s series, edited at the University of Florida by Harold Hanson.

Shakespeare, Brecht, Beckett, Stoppard, Dürrenmatt, Bernard-Marie Koltès, and Roland Schimmelpfennig for university and professional theaters. Most recently he directed *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, a play by Simon Stephens, based on the novel by Mark Haddon, for a run at the Hipodrome in Gainesville, Florida in August–September 2019.

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