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Circumference is a journal of poetry in translation and international culture that is published two times a year. Information on how to purchase issues or submit materials can be found on our website, circumferencemag.com. For advertising, publicity, and all other inquiries, email editors@circumferencemag.com.

Support for Circumference has been generously provided by public funds from the New York Foundation for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo.

Влез бешенок в мокрой шерстке —
Ну, куда ему, куда? —
В подкопытные наперстки,
В торопливые следы;
По копейкам воздух версткий
Обирает с слободы.

Брызжет в зеркальца дорога —
Утомленные следы
Постоят еще немного
Без покрова, без слюды…
Колесо брюзжит отлого —
Улеглось — и полбеды!

Скучно мне: мое прямое
Дело тараторит вкось —
По нему прошлось другое,
Надсмеялось, сбило ось.

[8–12 января 1937]

Up the devil clammers, his wool coat soaked—
Where’s he going, where to now?
Into hoof-imprinted thimbles,
Into hasty, rushing tracks:
On his way to fleece the farmlands,
Cent by cent, of typeset air.

The road spatters out tiny mirrors.
Fatigued, the rutted tracks
Will hold out a little longer
Without cover, without mica…
Wheels grousing in the slope—
Stuck. Only half the trouble!

I’m bored: My straight-and-narrow
Work is chattering off course—
Another trampled over it,
Snickered, kicked the axle out.

[January 8–12, 1937]
Husbands of My Dear Country

Let me have a polite conversation with my country
Let me write a poem to benefit my country
even if I’m not able to write a poem for my country like the wise poets write
even if I’m not the legal husband of my country or a leader
let me still water the dry land with planted sweat
let me slip in by the fence as a lover

By the front by the top by the upper upper door
dead closed the gate open but the gate never fits
it never fitted you, probably it never properly
fit the bowl

either way either way…

I don’t want to ask you to marry… Instead let me write you a poem
Let me fit a poem… to benefit my country
My writing of poetry will never stop… my writing of poetry will never cease
collecting the hill of words

The poetry of the people… is the melody of the people
until I grow vines I will… fit you with my poetry
until I twist lines here I will… build a rhyming house here for you

Because the lid doesn’t fit and the leaders don’t fit
and they always leave the door open
and they always leave the lid of the pot open
so people can scoop things out and scoop things out and scoop things out…
The planner

Why do we even make plans?
Being human is like being the plan
of another planner/planet,
so that in some way you are always
a plant in some-one else’s plan

and so until the planner decides to
change the plan
or unless the planner decides to
dismiss the plan

you are beautifully sitting there,
plain plan man.

Like the flow of the river, determined
by the shape of the land in any situation. But
how to flow
is a very different question.

You can either carefully step on the rocks
or you can simply decide to flow under
the rocks and be forgotten forever.

Two rocks, still out there—
to shape your flow and course.
Mi abuelo Klaus Kinski

foto: sonrisas penden de un hilo
se corta en Klaus, gigante de cabeza inclinada
sin anteojos elige ver mal
borrado, una mancha oscura en el brazo izquierdo
como un insecto muerto o no sé
no se ve bien

no flota una mariposa entre los dedos de Klaus
marchan patas en punta, aguijones

ya de niño
ocultaba manzanas en armarios, escribía:
comer poco para no crecer

y crecía igual, como todos

es verano en la foto
una mano intenta tapar el brazo herido
la otra a punto de secar, suspensa
gota que brilla en la frente
como una lágrima corrida de lugar

My Grandfather Klaus Kinski

picture: smiles hang from a thread
that ends with Klaus, his huge head half-tilted
without glasses he has chosen to see poorly
erased, a dark stain on his left arm
like a dead bug or I’m not sure what
it’s hard to see

no butterfly floats between Klaus’s fingers
marching on tiptoe, stingers ready

even as a child
he hid apples in closets, wrote:
eating little so as not to grow

and grew anyway, as we all do

it’s summer in the picture
one hand tries to cover the hurt arm
the other about to blot a glittering
drop suspended from his forehead
like a tear that’s gone off script.
Tres lombrices en la pileta hacen en el fondo un cuadro abstracto

Esa vez que intenté romper el domingo en dos y en la mitad del peor temporal bajo la flecha que parte la noche, agita sus criaturas, quise pisar la tormenta, los pies desnudos en el pasto el cuerpo a la espera de agua ajena hasta recordar lo que sale a flote:

lombrices que tras el diluvio los pájaros bajan a devorar, levanté un pie volví a los saltitos hacia la zona de confort bajo las rejas

lluvia, lluvia en serio la lluvia no era fílmico anuncio de otra cosa.

Three Worms in the Bottom of the Pool Make an Abstract Painting

That time I tried to break Sunday in two and in the middle of the worst gale beneath the arrow that parts the night, its creatures trembling, I tried to walk over the storm, feet naked in grass body given to the wait for distant water until I remembered what invariably floats:

earthworms that, once the storm has passed, birds will descend to devour; lifting a foot I hopped back to safety beneath the tiles it rained, rained like it meant it not like the rain that falls in films to signify something else.
Notas para un fado

intervalo: un hombre viejo, viejo
aferrado a un papel
repasa su letra
la punta del zapato
se acerca y se aleja del piso
marca el ritmo, ya no marca
insinúa, en parte ha perdido
el control del cuerpo, lo que queda
entre el piso y su pie
¿es ese el espacio entre las cosas
que Cage pedía no olvidar?
el hombre viejo avanza
lento en su estar
un poco desprendido del entorno
se aferra al micrófono, sonríe
hasta que encuentra
el compás del canto
a veces se le va una frase o la voz,
nosotros con pies firmes sobre el suelo firme de la taberna
en cada silencio le soplamos la letra,
todavía creemos en la necesidad de completar.

Notes for a Fado

interval: an old, old man
gripping a paper
rereads the lyrics
the tip of his shoe
inching toward and away from the floor
he’s keeping time, or no longer marks
but suggests, he has partly lost
control of his body, what’s left
between the floor and his foot—
is that the space between things
that Cage wanted us to remember?
the old man comes forward
slow in his being
a little detached from the world around him
he takes the microphone, smiles
until he finds
the music’s compass
from time to time he misplaces a line or his voice,
we whose feet are firm on the tavern’s firm floor
whisper the words to him at each silence,
convinced that everything must be whole.
家務

喔喔的我從沒有聽懂你的語言
我提起一個掏空了腹腔的身體

那是愛嗎？我在黝暗的禾桿窩裏拾起一枚蛋
仍然溫暖，回頭便見你在柴木堆裏探出頭來
喔喔的，像要對我說一些怎也說不清楚的話

那是一個下著細雨的下午嗎？我做著好像永遠做不完的家課
抬頭便見你在圍裏翻耙泥土，蓬起的翅膀下是三五小雛
怯怯地探頭，忽然急步躥出，爭相啄食你嘴裏的甚麼
我看著你頻頻點頭，在微雨裏，凝望小小翅膀抖掉閃亮的水珠

那是愛嗎？我看著雛雞慢慢變掉了顏色
下雨和晴天之間，我學懂更多時態和語氣的變換

看見勞累的母親突然動氣，向我掄起砧板上的菜刀
看見桌上擺了一碗熱氣騰騰的餐蛋公仔麵
待我吃了去應付午後悶長的升中試

喔喔的你在尋找你的蛋嗎？我再找我的嗎？
空空的方格待要填上甚麼呢？我望向窗外
斜風細雨又見你翻耙濕潤的泥土，深深的
一個彷彿永無止境的窟窿，藏下你的希望
我的希望？我望見漫天降下熱騰騰的蛋
我的喉管哽著，筆下一個字也寫不出來

那是愛嗎？一個下著冷雨的冬天
我望見你提高了喉管，額下的羽毛還未飄落
便見你把鮮紅的血瘋狂注入奶白的瓷碗
來不及發出喔喔的聲音，你已躺在沸水盆邊
掏空了腹腔，瞪看自己一一鋪陳在地的內臟
然後在茫茫蒸氣中，你從一個白瓷盅裏升起
模糊了揭起蓋子的手，模糊了不斷增添的皺紋

Housework

Oh oh-ing, I have never understood your language
I picked up a body with an emptied belly

Was that love? From the dark depths of the nest I took an egg
Still warm. Turning around, I saw you stick your head out from firewood,
Oh oh-ing, as if you wanted to tell me something you could never explain

Was that an afternoon of fine rain? I was doing almost never-ending chores
When I saw you rake the soil, while a flock of chicks under your wings
Looked around nervously, leapt, fought over something in your mouth
I watched you nod in the rain, gaze at glistening beads shaken off by small wings

Was that love? I watched chicks slowly change their color
Between rainy and sunny days, I understood more about shifts in tense and tone

Saw a weary mother suddenly grow irritated, brandish the kitchen knife at me
Saw piping hot spam and egg noodles on the table for me to eat
So I could face the afternoon’s tedious high school entrance exams

Oh oh-ing, were you looking for your eggs? Was I looking for mine?
How to fill the empty grids? I looked out the window
At light wind and fine rain and saw you raking the wet mud, a deep
And almost never-ending cavity, hiding your hopes
And my hopes? I saw piping hot eggs descend from the sky
I felt a lump in my throat, and could not write a single word

Was that love? On a rainy winter’s day
I watched you raise your throat, the feathers under your chin not yet fallen
And saw you pour bright red blood into a milk-white porcelain bowl
With no time to cry oh-oh, you already lay by the hot water basin
Your stomach emptied, staring at your own scattered organs
Then in the vast steam, you rose from a porcelain pot
Blurring the hand that lifted the lid, blurring the ever-increasing wrinkles
而雨下了多時還在下我還在做我做不完的家務
下雨和晴天之間，我學懂更多簡單的方法解決複雜的問題
你有無話可說的時刻，我學懂在旁靜靜地看着
靜靜地洗瓶開奶，更換尿布，小小的搖鈴靜靜地搖
你有無端暴烈的時刻，我學懂吞言吐辭
收拾破碎，學懂在關鍵時刻緊緊的從後緊緊抱著你
彷彿一對沉默厚重的翅膀，在漫天毛羽紛飛中
無有流血，無有掙扎，無有誰失聲哭泣

那是愛嗎？我買了一個九吋寬燉盅
內外洗淨，然後到市場買一隻母雞
隔着竹籠，我一眼便看到那異樣的眼神
沒有淚滴，只有那熟悉的，微微的
喔喔的聲音。然後寂滅。我看見血水
從溝渠流出。我看見肚腹
全掏空了。深深的，像一個口
甚麼話也說不出來。我揮一揮手
斷然拒絕店主手上閃亮的內臟

雨還在下水氣還在蒸騰我提起掏空腹腔的身體
喔喔的，我好像聽到窗外傳來喔喔的聲音
孩子又打噴嚏了是誰忘了添衣？
母親話來簡潔我聽到話筒那邊老房子的寂寞

Is that love? I bought a nine-inch-wide steaming pot
Washed it inside out, then went to the store to buy a hen
Outside the bamboo cage, I saw with my eye that peculiar gaze
No tears, only that familiar, faint
Oh-oh. Then silence. I saw blood
Flow from a ditch. I saw a belly
Emptied out. Gaping, like a mouth
That cannot say anything. I waved my hand
And refused the shiny organs the shopkeeper held out

The rain keeps falling the steam keeps rising I pick up the body with the emptied belly
Oh-oh, I almost hear an oh-oh from outside the window
I learn the water’s volume the onion’s temperament the cooking flame’s size
The steam we bring onto the dining table spirals exactly between rain and shine
When the oily yellow surface reflects the condensation on my face
A kid sneezes again who forgot to layer up?
Mother’s words are concise I hear in the microphone that old house’s loneliness
Will you be back for the New Year for the Lantern Festival and what about Mid-Autumn?
The well water is clear the tea stove cracked and is the firewood still last year’s?
The days are shriveled thin perhaps it is time to celebrate slaughter
那是愛嗎？我看到你喙裏流著稀液如淚滴
那是流感麼我看見滿城的人拉長了面容
下雨和晴天之間，我學懂穿戴面罩和塑料保護衣
深深的翻耙泥土做那永遠做不完的工作
喔喔的我又聽到那聲音那聲音若斷若續
在一個一個飽滿的黑色塑料袋內密封了口
那是愛嗎為了孩子我們把你驅除出菜譜
那是愛嗎，為了我們我們把你的軀體一一堆疊
像擁擠的房子在清晨在黑夜在關緊了的城市
我聽到那聲音那聲音就在不遠就在腳下
還未聽懂那語言便像日子般沉埋下去

[2004年2月10日]

Is that love? I see a thin fluid flow from your beak like tears
Is that the flu I see a whole city of people with long faces
Between rainy and sunny days, I learn to wear masks and hazmat suits
Deeply raking the mud, doing that never-ending work
Oh-oh, I hear again that voice that voice stopping and going
Mouths sealed in every stuffed black plastic bag
Is that love, for the children we removed you from the cookbook
Is that love, for our own sake we piled up your bodies
Like houses crowded together in the morning at night in a shut-up city
I hear that voice that voice is nearby is at my feet
Without understanding it that language is buried like the days

[February 10, 2004]
Herder and the Possibility of Translation

Why would someone with significant doubts about translation take up translating? The often overlooked eighteenth-century German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder is noteworthy—and paradoxical—for the deep significance he attributed to the act of translation, and for his skepticism concerning the possibility of a translation that would be successful. Unlike most other philosophers of the German Enlightenment, Herder saw the literature of a culture as encapsulating a worldview, and thus held it to be worthy of serious philosophical consideration. Yet he often expressed doubt that a worldview could, in fact, be translated. He wrote of Homer and the ancient Greeks, “But could these poets have written their works in our language? In our time? With our ethics? Never!… I am hence in great despair about the translation of the oldest Greek poets.” Despair did not prevent him from putting together a collection of folksongs and poetry, *Völkslieder*, in which traditional German pieces were placed alongside his own translations of Spanish ballads and Shakespeare’s poems. Herder’s views on language were ahead of their time—his questions concerning translation are still worth considering.

Herder stood at the center of the German Enlightenment and German Romanticism, despite the contradictory natures of these intellectual movements. In 1762, he studied under the central philosopher of the German Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant, and remained deeply influenced by his work throughout his career. Yet in 1773 he also collaborated with Goethe in writing *Von Deutscher Art und Kunst*, which served as a manifesto for the Sturm und Drang Counter-Enlightenment movement, and provided a foundation for German Romanticism. This tension between Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment elements in Herder’s thought is the consequence of a unique philosophical account of the role of language in shaping thought.

To see what made Herder unique in his time, it’s helpful to contrast his conceptions of reason and language with those of Kant. Kant’s writing develops the archetypical Enlightenment picture of man: man is defined by the power to reason, as well as a sensible nature. Unlike the beasts, man has the power to make judgments, and the conceptual apparatus that allows us to make judgments is shared amongst all human beings. We each reason according to the same laws of logic—or, at least, our thought is to be evaluated according to these laws of logic, though we may sometimes err in following them. Language, on this typical Enlightenment picture, is a code by which we express our thoughts—which exist independently of language—to one another.

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1 Herder, “Fragments on Recent German Literature” 42.
What set Herder apart and pulled him away from Enlightenment doctrine was that he saw thought to be dependent on language. He thought that a child only learns how to think by learning how to speak—meaning that the particular language a child learns to speak shapes both the world that child inhabits, and their ways of conceptualizing and inhabiting that world. So, unlike Kant and other philosophers who took the form of thought to be a universal form of human nature, Herder came to believe that there were many radically different ways of seeing and thinking about this world, each appropriate for a given culture at a particular point in history, and that these ways of seeing the world are embodied by a language. According to Herder, by means of language, our culture shapes the way we reason. It is our histories and cultures that make us reason and think the way we do, not any eternal, innate faculty. Thus the study of man must involve the study of culture.

If it is true that our thoughts are entirely shaped by the language that we speak, what do we hope to achieve by translating literature from one language to another, and what do we hope to learn by reading literature in translation? If different languages really do represent radically different worldviews, or different forms of life, how is translation possible? In taking languages to embody radically different forms of thought, we seem to rule out the possibility that one could genuinely take a thought from one language and convert it into another. But if something like translation is possible, what might be the best method for translation? If all translation must, to some extent, fail, what approach should we take in order to minimize those failures?

One of Herder’s earliest essays, “On the Diligence in the Study of Several Learned Languages,” acutely articulates the challenges translators face. The essay argues for the importance of reading literature in its original language, on the basis of the idea that this language expresses a worldview that’s impossible to express in the new, target language. Part of the goal of reading literature in its original language is to come to an understanding of a different worldview, Herder proposes several “national characters” that are captured in the respective languages of those cultures: “I seek to join the thorough English temperament, the wit of the French, and the resplendence of Italy with German diligence. I encompass the spirit of each people in my soul!” The diligence Herder sees in the German people, for instance, may be reflected in the piecemeal construction of complex words from more basic words, or the precision of the language’s case structure. By learning to read German and reading German texts in the original, the reader may experience this “diligence” in a way that would be impossible to imitate by reading the text in translation. And if the traits of a people are infused into their language, since language is the framework in which they think, then learning to speak a foreign language involves taking on a new stance toward the world, seeing the world through a new lens.

However, the “national character” that Herder discusses as being expressed by a language actually goes deeper than the attitudes he finds embedded in language. Herder argues that languages have thoughts and even judgments built into them. “Whoever masters the entire scope of one language surveys a field full of thoughts, and whoever learns to express himself precisely in it thereby gathers for himself a treasure of clear concepts.” There are a few ways of approaching this thought. First, by means of an example, we might consider how English differentiates between such terms as “drizzle,” “rain,” “shower,” “rainstorm,” and “downpour.” The fact that we have different terms for each of these phenomena suggests that, at some point in history, English speakers thought that it was worthwhile to distinguish between a “drizzle” and a “downpour.” And being able to distinguish between these two phenomena by the choice of one word over another remains useful—we know, for instance, whether to wear a raincoat or to bring an umbrella, or whether to wait out the storm. A central part of Herder’s idea here is that the idea to distinguish between “drizzle” and “downpour” by creating distinct words for each represents an idea or a series of judgments which have become embedded into our language.

Furthermore, even simple judgments like “It’s raining out” license a number of inferences, and a failure to make those inferences upon hearing an utterance of “It’s raining out” can amount to more than just a disagreement about facts—it can become a disagreement about language itself. If someone were to say, “It’s raining out,” and you were to ask, in response, “Is the ground very wet?” and they were to respond, “No, the ground is perfectly dry,” you would have to wonder what they meant by saying that it was raining. It simply cannot be the case that your interlocutor means both that it is raining out and that the ground is perfectly dry—she must be confused about the meanings of these words. That “The ground is wet” follows directly from “It’s raining out” is a judgment built into the meanings of the words “rain” and “wet,” built into the English language, on the view that I am here attributing to Herder.

Herder ends “On the Diligence” with a poem that compares the speakers of a given language to bees,

who in scattered swarms whisper through the air, and fall upon clover and blossoming plants,

and then return to the hive burdened with sweet boory, and bring us the honey of wisdom!

A language, to Herder, represents not just a series of definitions, but also a body of knowledge, built up by all prior speakers of the language. It contains a shared cultural knowledge and a shared way of looking at the world. It is only, it would seem, by coming to learn a language and read a work of literature in this language, that we can fully appreciate the worldview this literature inhabits, fully understand the thoughts expressed within it.

In his early work, Herder thus often appears to be a skeptic concerning the possibility of successful translation. Just as Homer couldn’t have written in eighteenth-century German, eighteenth-century Germans are not really reading Homer unless they’re reading him in Greek. “I feel sorry for those who want to read Homer in a translation, even if it were as correct as possible,” Herder writes in his early essay “Fragments on Recent German Literature.” “You are no longer reading Homer, but something which approximately repeats what Homer said inimitably in his poetic language.”

Yet it was Herder’s appreciation for the radical differences in ways of thought expressed in difficult cultures by different languages that led him, in the Volkslieder and elsewhere, to take the task of translation so seriously. Insofar as a work of translation is successful, it can allow us to see the world in an entirely new way, allow us to think thoughts that were inconceivable to us before. And so, even in questioning the possibility of successful translation, in the “Fragments” Herder suggests a possible aim for translation.

In his later philosophical writings, Herder begins to explore how translation might, indeed, be possible. The central component of Herder’s approach to translation is his conception of interpretation, embodied by his notion of “Einfühlung,” or “feeling into,” developed in later works, including his famous essay, “This, Too, a Philosophy of History.” By means of “feeling into” a text, the interpreter takes up everything she knows about a culture—the climate under which it developed, its history, the practices of its inhabitants—and attempts to put herself into the circumstances of the author. Herder writes:

> The whole living painting of mode of life, habits, needs, peculiarities of land and climate, would have to be added or to have preceded; one would have first to sympathize with the nation, in order to feel a single one of its inclinations or actions all together, one would have to find a single word, to imagine everything in its fullness—or one reads—a word!

Interpretation thus relies on a combination of knowledge (of a culture, their circumstances, and their practices) and empathy; we must use what we know about a culture to feel as they felt, if such a thing is possible. The interpreter must ask herself, for instance, “If I had been an Ancient Greek, had I lived as they lived, had I done as they did, had I felt what they felt, if I had spoken as they spoke, what would I have meant when I used this phrase in these circumstances?” In a text on the Bible, The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, Herder further emphasizes the empathetic role of this “feeling into”:

> In order to judge of a nation, we must live in their time, in their own country, must adopt their modes of thinking and feeling, must see how they lived, how they were educated, what scenes they looked upon, what were the objects of their affection and passion, the character of their atmosphere, their skies, the structure of their organs, their dances and their music. All this too we must learn to think of not as strangers or enemies, but as their brothers and compatriots...7

Herder’s writings on aesthetics are critical of his peers for judging ancient forms of art according to contemporary standards of beauty and ethical values. For example, an understanding and appreciation of an Ancient Greek sculpture of Apollo can only come by means of an understanding of the practices surrounding Greek sculpture and its role in Greek culture, as well as an investigation into the representation of the divine in physical form in this particular culture at this particular point in history. It is not that we must discard our meanings, values, and standards in interpreting the work of another culture, only that we must consider how these meanings, values, and standards would shift if we were to be a member of another culture, if we were to live their histories. Thus a successful translation can only be the product of a successful act of interpretation. Ideally, it will be one that brings the reader to a successful act of “feeling her way into” the language and the culture from which the work was adapted. The possibility of translation relies on our ability to engage seriously with a culture, on both an emotional and an intellectual level, and to transform our own values and meanings into theirs.

It comes as no surprise that, as both a translator and as a theorist of interpretation, Herder values historical accuracy over readability. He takes great care to ensure that translations refrain from assimilating the meanings of words that have no correlates in the target language to any word in the target language. In the “Fragments,” Herder is critical of historians of Ancient Greece who translate the Ancient Greek term καλοὶ κἀγαθοὶ / “kaloi k’agathoi” (roughly meaning “well-brought-up”) as either meaning a broadly ethical training or referring to a

4 Herder, “On Diligence in the Study of Several Learned Languages,” 34.
5 Herder, “Fragments on Recent German Literature,” 41.
6 Herder, “This, Too, a Philosophy,” 292.
specific education in the arts and athletics. These translators fail, Herder argues, because they have assimilated a term from a different conceptual framework into their own. Whereas we see a firm division between morality and training in the arts, the Greek sense of virtue acknowledged no such distinction, and a translation must, to whatever degree possible, reproduce the conceptual structure of the original. To a certain extent, the point of reading literature and poetry in translation is to make us feel as though we are not quite “at home” in the text—or, perhaps more accurately, to make us feel “at home” in the home of another culture.

The intellectual historian Michael Forster notes that Herder’s method of translation often involves “bending” the use of a word in translation—consistently using a single term to translate a term from the original language, even in cases where in the target language this term no longer seems appropriate. In the eyes of the reader, the meaning of the word in the target language then shifts to something that resembles the meaning of the word in the language of origin. The idea, on the reading of Herder I have presented in this essay, is that the very unnaturalness of the use of the word forces the reader to divorce it from inferences she would otherwise make in her native language—for instance, moving from the statement that a child was well-brought up to the thought that that child acted in conformity to the moral standards of the Bible. Instead, she’ll begin to make inferences that a contemporary Greek reader of the text might have made—such as that the child is familiar with the work of Homer. If this is does indeed happen, the language of the translated text will stand somewhere between the language of the original and the target language, borrowing from the character of each culture to bring them closer together.

In the “Fragments,” Herder claims that the translator of Homer must be “a creative genius if he wants to do justice to his original and to his language,” in part because it will be impossible to make German into the kind of poetic language that Homer spoke. The argument I have developed on Herder’s behalf attributes great significance to the act of translation, but it also imposes severe, potentially unsatisfiable demands on the translator. Perhaps this conception of translation as an impossible yet necessary act of bridging two disparate worldviews, however contradictory, will strike the reader of this magazine as not altogether implausible.

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8 Forster, After Herder, 146.
9 Herder, “Fragments on Recent German Literature,” 42.
Contributors

GAROUS ABDOLMALEKIAN was born in 1980, days after the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq War, and lives in Tehran. He is the author of five poetry books and the recipient of the Karnameh Poetry Book of the Year Award and the Iranian Youth Poetry Book Prize. His poems have been translated into Arabic, French, German, Kurdish, and Spanish. Abdolmalekian is presently the editor of the poetry section at Chesmeh Publications in Tehran and the executive editor of publications at the Youth Poetry Office in Iran.

HENNI ALFTAN (b. 1979) is a Helsinki-born, Paris-based painter who creates pictures based on a complex process of observation and deduction. Working in figuration but rejecting a narrative dimension, Alftan’s compositions use the tight framing of close-range photography to explore the similarities between painting and image-making. “I paint pictures,” Alftan says, and “painting and picture often imitate each other.” Inviting viewers to consider the history, materiality, and objecthood of painting, Alftan’s vignettes represent a fragmented vision of the real and address pictorial issues such as color, surface, flatness, depth, pattern, texture, and framing devices. Alftan’s work is represented in the public collections of the Helsinki Art Museum; the Amos Anderson Art Museum, Helsinki; the Kunists Museum of Modern Art, Vaasa, and others. Recent exhibitions include Studiolo, Milan (2019); TM-Galleria, Helsinki (2018); and Z Gallery Arts, Vancouver (2017). This fall, Alftan will present her first solo exhibition in the United States at Karma, New York.

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ANA CRISTINA CESAR (1952–1983) was a poet, critic, and translator from Rio de Janeiro. She was also a prolific letter writer. Today her work has risen to cult status and she is considered one of Brazil’s most original literary voices. Her poetry, which switches between prose and verse, is known for its epistolary, diaristic style and feminist bent.

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JOHN HIGH is a poet and translator. The author of eleven books, he is the chief editor of Crossing Centuries: The New Russian Poetry (Talisman) and a former member of the Moscow Poetry Club. He has translated several contemporary Russian poets, including Nina Iskrenko, Ivan Zhdanov, and Alexei Parschikov. His most recent book of writings, vanishing acts (the last part of a tetralogy), was published by Talisman House, and a new book is forthcoming from Wet Cement Press in 2020. He has received four Fulbright and two NEA fellowships as well as grants from IREX and The Witter Bynner Foundation for Poetry. He is a Zen monk in the Soto tradition and is currently living with Andrea Libin in Cambodia. Along with Matvei Yankelevich he received an NEH Fellowship to complete a new translation of Osip Mandelstam’s Voronezh Notebooks.

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GHÉRASIM LUCA was born in Bucharest in 1913, where he co-founded the Romanian Surrealist group. Luca relocated to Paris (via Israel) in 1952, after which he wrote exclusively in French. He was also a prolific visual artist who pioneered a collage technique known as “cubomania.” Luca committed suicide in 1994. The poems in this issue come from Luca’s 1976 book, Paralipomènes. The translator would like to thank Bertrand Filladéau of Les Editions Corti and Micheline Catti for permission to publish these poems.

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Circumference (Issue 8) returns to print with poems from Amharic, Chinese, French, Greek, Icelandic, Latvian, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Slovenian, Spanish, and Ukrainian. Also in this issue: mermaids of central Mexico; Johann Gottfried von Herder in great despair.