Proceedings of the second ‘Science meets Poetry’ event held in Torino under the auspices of ESOF2010

Assembled and Edited by Chaunes

Euroscience 2010
The first ‘Science meets Poetry’ gathering was held in Barcelona at ESOF2008. It was itself a follow-up of an earlier event, more limited in scope, held in Munich at ESOF2006, in honour of king Ludwig II of Bavaria, who contributed much to European science and to poetry. Proceedings of these two earlier events have both been published by Euroscience, and the present volume is therefore the third in a unique sequence, the theme of which deserves a brief introduction.

Science and Poetry, although today they may seem poles apart to the casual observer, are in fact intimately linked, both in spirit and in practice. Both are quests for different forms of fundamental truth through the proper combination of language and experience, be it the vernacular or higher forms of language, including for example mathematics. The poet and the scientist can meet on equal terms once they have come to appreciate the connections between their apparently different approaches. In this respect, the work of the poet is fundamentally different from that of prose writers, and indeed is much closer to that of natural philosophers and other scientists than, say, to that of essayists and novelists.

Scientists and poets therefore meet easily and converse most fruitfully with each other when the opportunity arises. It is in fact the chance to meet which is lacking most of the time. At the Euroscience Open Forum held in 2006 in Munich, such an opportunity occurred, and since then, Poets and Scientists from all over Europe and indeed much further afield have rediscovered the importance of getting together to discuss their common future and purpose.

It is our belief that we are, in fact, merely returning to an ancient tradition which had simply fallen into disuse, possibly because of the rapid development of technology, which left scientists less time for reflection. Science and Poetry both have much to gain from rebuilding trust in each other. Many scientist-poets are participating in what we hope may turn into a new intellectual movement. The lively exchanges between them and other established poets and scientists give us confidence that the path we are following leads to fertile ground.

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(Chaunes)
Books on Science and Poetry
Previously published by Euroscience

Ludwig II
Ein Visionär auf dem bayerische Thron
The Visionary King of Bavaria
Edited and presented by Jean-Patrick Connerade and Wolfgang M. Heckl
Euroscience Open Forum ESOF2006 Munich

Science meets Poetry
Edited and presented by Jean-Patrick Connerade
Euroscience Open Forum ESOF2008 Barcelona

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Introduction

"Oppenheimer, they tell me you are writing poetry. I do not see how a man can work on the frontiers of physics and write poetry at the same time. They are in opposition. In science you want to say something that nobody knew before, in words which everyone can understand. In poetry you are bound to say something that everybody knows already in words that nobody can understand."

Paul Dirac

Is the Researcher entitled to be a poet?

In raising this question, I refer to a well-known anecdote, popular amongst Theoretical Physicists, concerning Paul Dirac and his attitude towards poetry.

One morning, Paul Dirac discovers one of his colleagues in what he considers to be a compromising position. Apparently, Robert Oppenheimer was writing poetry. He then expresses his utter condemnation to him. For Dirac, poetry and research are contradictory. And he utters the famous sentence: In science you want to say something that nobody knew before, in words which everyone can understand. In poetry you are bound to say something that everybody knows already in words that nobody can understand.

For short, I will refer to this condemnation of the attempts by researchers (and perhaps even, beyond researchers, of modern man) to write poetry as Dirac’s Objection.

Oppenheimer is remembered as a much tormented physicist who was in charge of the Manhattan Project. However, the identity of Dirac’s friend is rather unimportant. Indeed, his reply is not even quoted. He appears in the story merely as the fall man, to give Dirac the punch line. In fact, Dirac’s objection relates not merely to what his
colleague is up to, but to poetry in general. He expresses his concern that there is an essential incompatibility between poetry and what he regards as the search for Truth. So, Dirac’s objection is quite fundamental. It is similar in spirit to the objection of Plato, who would cast poets out of his Republic.

Dirac’s objection had a powerful if hidden influence in the era of the technological revolution, which owes so much to physicists in general and to quantum mechanics in particular – a theory which was regarded as quite fundamental to our understanding of the world and as a font of philosophical truth. The question today is to determine whether it should continue to play the same role in our postmodern world. One can consider this question as made up of two parts (i) will a future society open its gates to the poets and (ii) would such a society, having opened itself to poetry, be still able to participate fruitfully in research and development.

It may be worth noting in passing that some concepts such as ‘chaos’ had more or less disappeared from physics with the advent of quantum mechanics but, today, have returned as a postmodern touch, at the frontier between classical and quantum physics. One could almost speak of a post-modern science, raising questions which seemed forgotten on principles which had been thought well-established. This new intellectual climate is perhaps favourable to a return of Poetry amongst the admissible activities of a researcher.

In the anecdote referred to, Oppenheimer appears rather surprisingly as a happy soul, with a lighthearted love of old times now passed, those of the dilettante – or gentleman-researcher, who could do whatever he liked alongside his research – even write poetry. His attitude seems totally irresponsible to Dirac, because such a second fiddle could endanger his reputation as a serious researcher and ultimately become a millstone around his neck in the world of science. For Dirac, we are no longer living in the carefree world of yore, but in a new and serious era, dedicated to scientific truth and modernism. The dilettantes of the past lived outside the permanent obligation of pursuing serious research, and could afford in their barbaric ignorance of real science, to play as they pleased. They could open with one hand the great book of truth, and with the other compose poems in which the same words were used for quite a different purpose.

Before Oppenheimer rises Dirac, representing the new order of quantum mechanics, in which words are subject to verification of their content by experiment. This new form of strictly positivist logic excludes other interpretations. Writing poetry places the poet implicitly in touch with a higher world, where angels tread, whereas experiment shows quite clearly that angels are unobservable, and therefore do not exist. What irritates Dirac is Oppenheimer’s frivolous attitude. These are aspects he should clearly have understood. In the end, Oppenheimer, who at first seemed to
share the same faith as his, is really some kind of unbeliever, a heretic, a man serving two masters, able to solve Schrödinger's equation one minute and then to celebrate a vague and forbidden cult to the famous hidden variables forbidden by the very principles of Quantum Theory. Such hidden variables are, of course, no better than angels, which is why a special theorem was invented to exclude them.

There is no doubt that, for Dirac, such a course was not worthy of a great mind. Any proponent of the Quantum Theory must obviously understand exactly the frontier separating what exists from what is mere illusion. What does not exist should not even appear, because appearing could be taken as a form of existence, and would create confusion. The Researcher should not even tinker with anything lying outside this clear frontier. The gentle illusion of intuition is forbidden: Dirac dreams of a perfect form of scientific logic, based entirely on observation. To follow this path, the researcher must close his mind to the temptations of his own imagination. Dirac is not hostile to poets as such who after all exist, just like such people as fortune-tellers, but he is against the very concept of poetry. The world of true thinkers must be cleansed of such false pursuits, starting from the top, namely from, people who seek in words a form of higher truth which would rival scientific truth. It must be said that, largely because of such an extreme position, Dirac found himself rather isolated, even amongst his peers, but at least he was consistent.

For him, the Researcher is simply not entitled to be a Poet.

But what of the famous Copenhagen school, founded by the great Niels Bohr, who would have defined the new form of truth appropriate to the microscopic world? Already at that time, Louis de Broglie, who was struck by a certain chiaroscuro in this new philosophy, described Bohr as the Rembrandt of Modern Physics. Albert Einstein also had doubts, and these have come to the fore again through the work of David Bohm, who showed that there are legitimate questions to raise, despite the unquestioned success of Quantum Mechanics.

Apart from which, Dirac's legendary curtness, and his habit of taking all that was said quite literally, and seeking a definition for each and every word, did not protect him completely from semantic vagueness. He hides behind a mathematical formalism to redefine some quite simple and ordinary words which anybody can understand, in quite unexpected and surprising ways, which only few people can understand. In short, he does exactly what he objects to in poetry. The most significant of these words is 'observation', from which the word 'observable' (a much used term in physics) is derived. Indeed, for Dirac, the whole novelty and truth of quantum mechanics rests on the clear distinction between what is observable (i.e. exists) and what is not observable (and, by implication, does not really exist).
The only problem is that the action of observing is not quite as clearly defined as one would hope in Dirac’s theory. Dirac’s ‘observable’, first and foremost, is a quantity possessing theoretical properties which are defined by a mathematical formalism of which he is an undisputed master. The situation is worsened by the fact that the philosophical meaning of the word ‘observation’ has not disappeared completely from the theoretical argument, and sometimes reappears substituting itself for the mathematical sense as an extension of a concept which the strict definition is too restrictive. This is the kind of ambiguity which probably irritated Louis de Broglie.

In the otherwise exact sciences, such ambiguities are not rare. For example, the ‘chaos’ referred to by physicists has little to do with the primeval disorder which preceded the creation of the world. It is simply a mathematical property of certain systems, whose dynamics cease to be entirely predictable, the most notable example being the three-body problem studied by Henri Poincaré. But the word ‘chaos’ is so much more attractive…

Thus, the famous issue of observability so important to Dirac can often be reduced to a measurement which is in principle possible, or may even be merely conceptual. It must anyway be preceded by a mathematical preamble, which ensures that certain observables are excluded and recognised as ‘unobservable’. The beautiful mathematical structure created by Dirac is indeed itself not dissimilar from a poetic form imposed on reality, and so it is very interesting that Dirac himself often invoked the criterion of beauty, to be considered before all else: if an equation is sufficiently beautiful, it will surely be true.

In the name of quantum mechanics, the theorist Hawking amused himself by applying the Schrödinger equation to the whole universe. When the objection was made to him that the equation was not designed for this purpose, and that one should first explain the reason for doing this, he replied: “solving this equation might provide the probability of existing in this world rather than in any other”; That is how a theory based solely on experiment and observation can ultimately lead to a form of lyricism much akin to poetry. In fact, we encounter a kind of metaphor, based on analogy: having proclaimed that a theory is universal, one must pursue it to its limits of application to uncover new discoveries. This approach is not very different from the bold researches of the poet. Despite Dirac’s warnings, scientists strive to extend their theories by the exercise of imagination confined within a clear conceptual framework – an approach quite consistent with that of the poet. Discovery and imagination were never opposed.
Whatever one may say about a firm foothold, the researcher is also travelling towards the unknown. In contrast with the practical flair of the engineer, the researcher cannot remain always prudent. He must occasionally take a gamble. The researcher who never speaks unless he is absolutely certain of not making a mistake soon ceases to exist and has little future. Science without the magnificent danger of error could not progress.

The dilemmas of the scientist are very similar to those of poets. What is the use of answering fundamental questions? Is the quest for truth really a profession? Is it a real job? Would it not be enough for society to train engineers and encourage inventors? Does a republic need thinkers? How can one justify an activity which may seem basically useless, perhaps even costly?

In conclusion, the researcher and the poet are in the same boat, facing the same materialistic and disappointing realities which are the outcome of a mercantile society. Science, having been for a long time opposed to poetry as long as scientists thought they would always be supported by the economic system, has now entered its post-modern phase. It can no longer live in isolation. Soon, it will discover the enormous power of an alliance it cannot do without.
(French version)

Introduction

"Oppenheimer, they tell me you are writing poetry. I do not see how a man can work on the frontiers of physics and write poetry at the same time. They are in opposition. In science you want to say something that nobody knew before, in words which everyone can understand. In poetry you are bound to say something that everybody knows already in words that nobody can understand."

Paul Dirac

Le chercheur a-t-il le droit d’être poète?

En proposant cette question, je me réfère à une anecdote, devenue légendaire, au sujet de Paul Dirac, qui fait partie de la tradition orale des physiciens.

Un beau matin, Paul Dirac surprit un de ses amis chercheurs dans ce qu’il considéra comme une situation compromettante. Robert Oppenheimer, à ce qu’il paraît, écrivait de la poésie. « Je ne comprends pas, lui dit-il, que vous vous laissiez aller à une telle activité. Poésie et recherche sont contradictoires. Le but d’un chercheur doit être d’exprimer, avec des mots simples et accessibles à tous, une vérité que personne ne connaissait auparavant. Or, la poésie ressasse fatalement ce que tout le monde sait dans une langue que personne ne parvient à comprendre. »


On se souvient d’Oppenheimer comme d’un homme très tourmenté qui dirigea le projet Manhattan mais son identité ne change rien à l’affaire. L’anecdote ne dit même pas ce qu’il répondit. Il apparaît dans cette histoire simplement comme un prétexte. L’objection de Dirac ne vise d’ailleurs pas son collègue, mais la poésie en soi. Elle exprime ce qu’il ressent comme une incompatibilité essentielle entre poésie et recherche de vérité. Elle ressemble, d’une certaine façon, à l’objection de Platon, qui chasse carrément les poètes de sa République.
L’objection de Dirac a pesé d’un grand poids à l’heure de la révolution technologique, où l’œuvre des physiciens, et en particulier la mécanique quantique, fut considérée comme fondamentale, et source de vérité philosophique. La question est de déterminer si elle doit continuer à nous interpeller de la même façon dans le monde post-moderne. Cette question est en deux parties, à savoir (i) si notre société ouvrira de nouveau ses portes aux poètes et (ii) si une société ouverte à la poésie peut l’être aussi au développement et à la recherche.

Je constate en passant que le chaos avait plus ou moins disparu de la physique avec l’avènement de la mécanique quantique. Aujourd’hui, il revient en force comme une touche post-moderniste, justement à la frontière entre la mécanique quantique et la mécanique classique. Il y a (oserait-on dire) une science postmoderne, qui s’interroge encore sur le bien fondé de principes qui semblaient acquis et ce nouveau climat intellectuel est peut-être favorable au grand retour de la poésie parmi les activités avouables.

Dans cette anecdote, Oppenheimer apparaît un peu bizarrement comme un homme heureux, léger et insouciant, attaché à un ordre ancien, celui du chercheur-dilettante, qui pouvait se permettre de faire n’importe quoi à côté – même d’écrire de la poésie. Son attitude est, pour Dirac, irresponsible, car son violon d’Ingres risque de compromettre sa réputation de chercheur sérieux et pourrait devenir (s’il s’y obstine) une casserole dans le monde des chercheurs. Nous n’habitons plus le monde ancien, peuplé d’êtres inconscients de la modernité, qui ne soupçonnaient même pas l’importance quasi-divine de la vérité scientifique. Eux, ignoraient l’enfer de cette obligation permanente de chercher et tiraient de leur magnifique barbarie une quiétude morale impardonnable. Ils pouvaient feuilleter sans angoisse le grand livre de l’inconnu en composant des poèmes qui, somme toute, ne rendaient compte de rien.

Devant lui, se dresse Dirac, représentant de l’ordre nouveau de la mécanique quantique où l’on ne peut jamais être sûr que des limites imposées par l’observation. Ce tour de pensée se veut strictement logique et positiviste malgré tous les paradoxes de sa démarche. Ecrire de la poésie, c’est se placer sous la dictée des anges, alors que l’expérience montre bien qu’on ne peut observer un ange et que, par voie de conséquence, les anges n’existent pas. Ce qui énerve Dirac, c’est tant de désinvolture chez Oppenheimer, pourtant bien placé pour comprendre une chose aussi élémentaire. Ce chercheur nommé Oppenheimer, qu’il prenait pour un ami, n’est finalement pas un coreligionnaire. Il n’est qu’un hérétique, un incroyant, une sorte de païen, qui se permettrait de servir deux maîtres, de résoudre l’équation de Schrödinger et, presque en même temps, de célébrer un culte vague aux choses interdites, un culte qui ferait apparaître au grand jour ce qu’on appelle, en
vocabulaire quantique, les variables cachées. Sans aucun doute, les variables cachées ressemblent aux anges, et risqueraient fort de corrompre la physique tout entière. C’est pourquoi elles en furent bannies à l’aide d’un théorème.

Pour Dirac, nul doute que la démarche poétique soit indigne. Tout serviteur de la mécanique quantique doit connaître parfaitement la frontière entre ce qui existe et ce qui n’existe pas. Or, ce qui n’existe pas ne doit pas apparaître, car le simple fait de paraître est une preuve d’existence qui sèmerait la confusion. Le chercheur n’a pas le droit de poser le pied au-delà d’une frontière précise. La douce folie de l’intuition lui est interdite. Dirac rêve d’une logique absolutiste, fondée uniquement sur l’observation. Pour la respecter, le chercheur devrait à tout moment, se prémunir contre les tentations démoniaques de l’imagination. Dirac est hostile, non au poète, dont l’existence est inévitable comme celle des diseuses de bonne aventure, mais à la poésie en soi. Il faut purger le monde de la pensée de tous les faux-semblants, en commençant par le haut, c’est à dire par ceux qui cherchent dans les mots une vérité du même ordre et du même poids que ceux de la vérité pure. Il est vrai que, pour de tels propos, Dirac fut isolé même parmi ses pairs, mais il avait le mérite d’aller jusqu’au bout de sa pensée.

Pour Dirac, le chercheur n’a tout simplement pas le droit d’être poète.

Qu’en est-il d’ailleurs de la fameuse école de Copenhague, fondée par le grand physicien Niels Bohr, qui prétendait rendre un compte exact des contours de la nouvelle vérité (celle du monde microscopique) ? Louis de Broglie, frappé par le chatoyant clair-obscur de cette nouvelle vérité, traitait déjà Bohr de Rembrandt de la physique moderne. Albert Einstein, lui aussi, avait des doutes et il est encore légitime de se poser certaines questions, comme David Bohm l’a souligné, malgré tous les succès de la mécanique quantique.

Au reste, le mutisme légendaire de Dirac, prenant toute parole au pied de la lettre et cherchant à accompagner chaque mot d’une définition, n’a pas suffi pas pour le mettre à l’abri des dérives sémantiques. Il s’est caché derrière un formalisme mathématique pour attribuer à certains mots simples et ordinaires, que tout le monde peut comprendre, un sens singulier, surprenant, voire inattendu, que seuls certains sont à même de percevoir. En somme, il a fait exactement ce qu’il reproche aux poètes. Le plus important de ces termes techniques est le mot ‘observation’ dont on peut aussi tirer le mot ‘observable’ très à la mode parmi les physiciens. Pour Dirac, toute la nouvelle vérité de la mécanique quantique repose sur la distinction entre ce qui est observable (ce qui existe) et ce qui n’est pas observable (et par implication n’existe pas vraiment.)
Seulement, l’acte d’observation est loin d’être aussi clair qu’on pourrait le croire. L’observable de Dirac est d’abord une quantité possédant des propriétés théoriques bien définies par un formalisme dans lequel il est passé maître, ce qui est fort éloigné du sens premier de ce mot. La situation s’aggrave du fait que le sens philosophique du terme ‘observation’ accompagne en sourdine le développement de la théorie, se substituant parfois au sens mathématique comme une sorte de prolongement d’un concept que la définition avait trop appauvri. Voilà peut-être une des ambiguïtés qui pouvait choquer Louis de Broglie.

Dans les sciences par ailleurs exactes, de telles confusions ne sont pas rares. Par exemple, le ‘chaos’ des physiciens n’a rien à voir avec le désordre et le fourmillement qui précéda la naissance du monde. Il s’agit simplement d’une propriété mathématique de certains systèmes dont la dynamique cesse d’être entièrement prévisible, l’exemple le plus notoire étant le système à trois corps, étudié par Henri Poincaré. Mais le terme ‘chaos’ est si attrayant ...

C’est ainsi que cette fameuse observabilité qui préoccupait tant Dirac se réduit en définitive non à une mesure réelle, mais à une mesure possible, imaginaire ou conceptuelle. Elle est d’ailleurs précédée par une vérification mathématique, qui nous oblige à exclure certains opérateurs, interdits d’observabilité. Ce bel édifice mathématique n’est pas très éloigné lui-même d’une sorte de poésie imposée au réel, et il est très intéressant que Dirac lui-même ait souvent invoqué, pour juger du bien fondé d’une équation, le critère de beauté, à faire passer avant tout autre : si une équation est suffisamment belle, elle sera forcément vraie.

Au nom de la mécanique quantique, le théoricien Hawking s’est amusé à appliquer l’équation de Schrödinger à l’univers tout entier. Lorsqu’on lui objectait que l’équation n’est pas faite pour ça, en lui demandant de préciser à quoi cela pouvait bien servir, il répondait : « On peut en déduire la probabilité d’exister dans notre univers plutôt que dans un autre. » Voilà comment une théorie fondée uniquement sur l’expérience et l’observation peut mener à une envolée lyrique très voisine de celles du poètes. Nous entrons dans le procédé de la métaphore, appuyée sur l’analogie : ayant proclamé l’universalité d’une théorie, on est dans l’obligation pousser jusqu’à l’extrême pour parvenir à de nouvelles découvertes. C’est une démarche que ne renierait pas le poète. Malgré les avertissements de Dirac, les chercheurs vont de l’avant par l’exercice de l’imagination circonscrite dans un cadre précis – démarche nullement incompatible avec la poésie. Découverte et imagination ne furent jamais opposées.

Bon gré mal gré, le chercheur s’embarque lui aussi vers un ailleurs. Au contraire du génie pratique des ingénieurs, science n’est pas prudence, loin de là. Le chercheur
muét, celui qui ne parle que dans l’absolue certitude de ne pas se tromper, non seulement il n’existe pas, mais il n’a aucun avenir. La science sans un magnifique danger d’erreur ne progresserait pas.

Et le savant est donc confronté aux mêmes dilemmes que le poète. A quoi servent les réponses aux questions fondamentales ? La recherche de la vérité est-elle une profession ? Est-ce un vrai travail, un métier ? Ne suffit-il pas à notre société de former des ingénieurs ? Pourquoi ne pas nous contenter d’inventeurs ? La république a-t-elle encore besoin de savants ? Comment justifier une activité essentiellement inutile, voire onéreuse ?

En somme, chercheur et poète se retrouvent dans le même bateau, confrontés à la même réalité matérielle et décevante qui est l’aboutissement de la société mercantile. La science, après s’être longtemps opposée à la poésie tant qu’elle se crut soutenue par le système économique, entre à son tour dans l’ère postmoderne. Elle ne vivra plus en solitaire. Elle va brusquement redécouvrir l’immense pouvoir d’une alliance dont elle ne peut pas se passer.

Chaunes

(Jean-Patrick Connerade, Emeritus Professor and Distinguished Research Fellow Imperial College London Honorary President of Euroscience, President of the European Academy of Sciences Arts and Literature)
I much appreciate Jean-Patrick Connerade's invitation to give this talk. It led me to look more attentively than hitherto at the opening pages of the first issue of the journal Nature, and also to learn a little about Goethe - my artistic enthusiasms are primarily for music and the visual arts, so it was good to broaden my appreciation of the relevant epochs.

The first issue of Nature begins with a set of 29 aphorisms about Nature - I capitalize the noun for reasons that should become clear later on - written nearly a century earlier by Goethe. I'll come to these soon, but it is interesting to anyone interested in language to look at aphorisms for their own sake.

Aphorisms may be characterized as pithy or laconic pearls of wisdom - and sometimes they are witty too. One well known example is "All power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Darwin, whose Origin of Species appeared in 1859, 10 years ahead of Nature, wrote the scientifically profound aphorism: "It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change."

The earliest aphorisms may be those of Hippocrates, from about 400 BC, which deliver sometimes unpalatable advice about, for example, purging the body. Still in a medical vein but altogether wittier is Voltaire's "The art of medicine consists in amusing the patient while Nature cures the disease."

So now to Goethe on Nature. Here are the first five of his aphorisms.

"Nature! We are surrounded and embraced by her: powerless to separate ourselves from her, and powerless to penetrate beyond her."
"Without asking, or warning, she snatches us up into her circling dance, and whirls us on until we are tired, and drop from her arms.

"She is ever shaping new forms: what is, has never yet been; what has been, comes not again. Everything is new, and yet nought but the old.

"We live in her midst and know her not. She is incessantly speaking to us, but betrays not her secret. We constantly act upon her, and yet have no power over her.

"The one thing she seems to aim at is Individuality; yet she cares nothing for individuals. She is always building up and destroying; but her workshop is inaccessible."

Goethe wrote these words in the 1780s, when he was in his 30s. By then he had settled in Weimar, working at the court of the Duke of Saxe Weimar, Carl August. He had made his literary name with his epistolary novel The sorrows of young Werther, whose notable characteristic was a passionate emotional outpouring. This was a defining contribution to the Stürm und Drang (storm and stress) literary movement. It might have been a harbinger of Romanticism, but Goethe and, later, Schiller instead led the charge of a contrasting movement known as Weimar Classicism, which sought to reclaim ancient classical ideas, integrating them with ideas from the Romantic and Enlightenment movements. The interest in classical ideas was stimulated by Goethe's travels in Italy, upon which he embarked soon after he had penned his aphorisms.

What about the science of Goethe's day? In the 1780s, scientists such as Lavoisier were identifying the gases that comprise air, while Herschel discovered the planet Uranus. Goethe himself, a polymath if ever there was one, was exploring comparative anatomy, and had independently discovered the human intermaxillary bone - a component of the upper jaw. Later in life he worked on plant anatomy and on the nature of colour. This latter research he thought to be his most important work - though history decided otherwise.

Back to those aphorisms. Why did they appear in the first issue of Nature?

Nature was launched on Thursday 4 November 1869 by Alexander Macmillan, one of two brothers who jointly founded the Macmillan publishing company. He appointed as the journal's first editor Norman Lockyer, a distinguished solar astronomer who had first identified the element helium using solar spectroscopy.
To put the new journal in its scientific context: Darwin's ideas were still causing much discussion. Spectroscopy of the elements had been discovered by Robert Bunsen in 1859 and promptly followed up in the discovery of sodium in the solar atmosphere by Gustav Kirchhoff. James Clark Maxwell had formulated his equations integrating electricity and magnetism in 1865, Mendel had identified his principles of what was subsequently to be called genetics in 1866, and the year of Nature's launch was also that in which Mendeleev derived the periodic table of the chemical elements. Exciting times indeed.

Macmillan and Lockyer need scientific backing for their new creation. A powerful force was that of the 'X Club' - a group of enlightened gentlemen dominated by one of the most intellectually and rhetorically powerful scientists of the day, the zoologist Thomas Huxley. They were sufficiently interested in the public discussion of ideas to have launched their own magazine, The Reader - which had promptly failed. It took Macmillan's publishing acumen and determination and Lockyer's sturdy editorial flair to ensure the survival of Nature despite its chronic initial financial losses.

Lockyer invited Huxley to open the new journal with a contribution. Huxley chose to begin his article with Goethe's aphorisms. He then wrote:

"When my friend, the Editor of Nature, asked me to write an opening article for his first number, there came into my mind this wonderful rhapsody on "Nature," which has been a delight to me from my youth up. It seemed to me that no more fitting preface could be put before a Journal, which aims to mirror the progress of that fashioning by Nature of a picture of herself, in the mind of man, which we call the progress of science."

Huxley offered more thoughts about Goethe but before coming to those, let's consider and enjoy four more of Goethe's aphorisms:

"She tosses her creatures out of nothingness, and tells them not whence they came, nor whither they go. It is their business to run, she knows the road.

"Her mechanism has few springs -- but they never wear out, are always active and manifold.

"The spectacle of Nature is always new, for she is always renewing the spectators. Life is her most exquisite invention; and death is her expert contrivance to get plenty of life."
"She wraps man in darkness, and makes him for ever long for light. She creates him dependent upon the earth, dull and heavy; and yet is always shaking him until he attempts to soar above it."

There are two themes that I want to highlight from the aphorisms I have quoted. One is a sense of the power and glory of Nature. As Huxley pointed out, this, as expressed in these aphorisms, amounts to pantheism. Pantheists eschew the idea of an anthropomorphic and divine creator, but exhibit instead a sense of reverence for Nature and the Universe.

According to Huxley, Goethe himself, on rediscovering his aphorisms many years after he had written them, acknowledged this expressed philosophy, albeit with a sense of retrospective ambivalence. Huxley, in contrast, explicitly rejected the whole idea. He was an agnostic - indeed, he was a defining public example of the species. He was an agnostic not only in the sense of believing only in the evidence of his senses: he was a true agnostic in believing that metaphysical concepts such as divinity and Gods are essentially unknowable.

The other theme, in contrast, is the powerlessness of humankind. Of course our curiosity is boundless, and the fundamental belief of scientists is that deeper understanding will always be found if you ask the right question. It was that sense of curiosity and invention that led us to that strangest of concepts, and subsequently the strangest of revealed realities, the black hole. These objects mystify us as a 'singularity' in Einstein's equations of General Relativity, describing the shape of the universe as influenced by the distribution of matter and energy. They fascinate us as the endpoint of the lives of certain types of stars. And they inspire awe in us in their physical conditions in which gravity is so strong that not even light can escape. These objects can capture the imagination not only of astronomers but also of writers who have the scientific understanding to appreciate them.

One such was the chemist and writer Primo Levi (who spent much his life in or near Turin, where this talk was given). He was all too aware of the powerlessness of men and women, in the context of Nature but also that of human tyranny, as he himself experienced at Auschwitz. His writings are infused with blackness, and although I myself tend to live in a happier frame of mind than he evidently did, I find this poem, The Black Stars, in which he uses black holes as an emblem for thoughts about the powerless human condition, not only scientifically apt but moving too:

Let no one sing again of love or war

The order from which the cosmos took its name has been dissolved;
The heavenly legions are a tangle of monsters,
The universe - blind, violent and strange - assails us.
The sky is strewn with horrible dead suns, dense sediments of mangled atoms.
Only desperate heaviness emanates from them,
Not energy, not messages, not particles, not light.
Light itself falls back down, broken by its own weight,
And all of us human seed, we live and die for nothing,
The skies perpetually revolve in vain.

(Translated by Ruth Feldman and Brian Swann, collected in A Quark for Mister Mark, 101 poems about science, ed Maurice Riordan and Jon Turney, Faber and Faber 2000)

There is something beyond powerlessness expressed here. There is pointlessness too. The tenor of Goethe's aphorisms and Huxley's celebration itself is altogether more purposeful, it seems to me. Even though we may all be destined for oblivion, life for these two individuals (and for me, if I might say so) has plenty of point. And the journal Nature has always been an expression of one of the most purposeful and pointed of humankind's activities: the exploration of Nature's workings and principles, even if we never discover, in Goethe's phrase, her workshop.

Goethe's aphorisms over his career were not just about Nature. For amusement (or at least sober reflection) I quote:

"Love is an ideal thing, marriage a real thing; a confusion of the real with the ideal never goes unpunished."

Another was:

"When ideas fail, words come in very handy."

But now I have run out of words, too.
The Poets…

The very European theme of diversity of languages and cultures runs as a constant thread through all the ESOF meetings. Our poets come from many countries. They speak and write in many languages. We give their biographies in English and, wherever available, we provide translations of their contributions. So, we hope our reader can at least follow much of the material we have assembled.
Jean-Pierre Béchu, historian and poet, was born on the 29th of September at Lavans in the Tarn (France). He studied law, then History in the University of Paris, before turning to the Science of Religions, and spent a year in Poona (India) becoming familiar with the philosophy of Shri Aurobindo. He then returned to the University of Paris, obtaining a teaching degree in French in 1996. He has worked as a correspondent of the CNRS Bulletin on Asian religions, teaches French and History in a French Lycée Professionnel and is the Delegate for the Seine-et-Marne Region of the Société des Poètes Français. He has written and published historical studies (La Belle Époque et son envers Sauret 1980 ; Fenêtres ouvertes sur le Christianisme Durante 1998) poetry (Feux de Pierre Librairie-Galerie Racine 2000 ; Añjali ibid. 2005) and teaching manuals (Organibac Histoire Première Magnard 1987 ; Organibac Histoire-Géographie Terminales Magnard 1988). Currently, he is working on a volume of novellas.

Poems by Jean-Pierre Béchu

L’île est creusée de puits
Aucun village, aucune maison au pied de sa montagne d’écume verte, mais des milliers de puits.
Cette bosse poreuse, qu’écrase le plomb brûlant du ciel, est peuplée d’hommes enchaînés à ses puits.
Un homme par puits, agenouillé devant un grand tas de cailloux que ses mains palpent. A tâtons, il trie, soupèse, interroge les pierres, qu’il dispose par terre entre le monticule et son puits.
Ces prisonniers sont aveugles. Du moins le deviennent-ils dès que l’aube éteint la nuit. Pour ne point s’égarer dans les ténèbres du jour, ils s’attachent à leurs puits.
Ils ignorent l’ocre ou le rubis des fleurs, les sueurs incendiaires de l’aurore. De la montagne, ils savent seulement les effluves suaves qui ruissellent vers le chant des vagues. Lorsque l’île sombre dans la nuit, leurs yeux voient les pétales d’argent que la lune abandonne au fond des puits.
Chacun défait alors sa chaîne et commence sa descente pour creuser, gratter, afin d’emplir sa besace de toutes les pierres endormies dans le ventre du puits.
Peu avant les lueurs aveuglantes de l’aube, tous remontent puis, dans le noir du jour, ils assemblent les cailloux dans toutes les combinaisons possibles, car l’une d’elles est la clé de la lumière.
Jamais ils ne la trouvent. Alors, sous l’éclat de chaque nuit, chacun recommence l’exploration de son puits où repose le secret de sa lumière.(extrait de « Feux de Pierre »)
Darshan

C'est le fleuve qui m'a enseigné à
Ecouter, il te l'enseignera aussi. Il
Sait tout, le fleuve, et il peut tout
t'en enseigner

Hermann Hesse

Le bruisement des eaux,
dans sa chair,
touche des cordes graves et lointaines.

Voix de l'herbe, des pierres, du souffle rouge
Qui, lentement, éveille le fleuve.
Buées rosâtres,
Battements d'ailes sur une giclée de joncs

L'écho cristallin du monde
Dans son corps
S'enfonce.

Brasier de ciel enchassé dans l'argile…
de la vase montent des sphères d'argent,
one vapeur d'or perce les feuillages.
Transparence,
vie,
en deçà des apparences,
offerte,
dans le rayonnement de Brahma.

L'ivresse
l'écartèle

Laque étincelante
où glisse
le chant soyeux d'une boule de plumes,
mandala aux fugitives brillances

Errance
vers une écume oubliée,
vers le vent
l'astre
l'arbre
les racines de la chair
qui coulent
dans le roseau

(extrait de Añjali)
Dans chaque atome... chaque cellule de la matière, toute l’omniscience de l’éternel et toute l’omnipotence de l’infini vivent cachées et œuvrent inconnues.

Sa flûte sur la mousse, au pied d’un arbre étoilé de ciel.
Ivresse du vent.
L’or des nénuphars, dans le silence ébloui d’azur, la berge verte, où saignent les saris des porteuses d’eau.
Le chant du fleuve sous cette lumière ou une autre, le même chant toujours, au fil des regards et des lunes.
Lentement, Shyame s’enfonce au creux de sa prière...
Dans la sève, une clameur océane,
 l’astre d’un éclat de rosée,
 cette seconde, gorgée d’éternité.

(extrait de Añjali)

Marie-Noëlle Célérier

Marie-Noëlle Célérier is a scientific poet or a poetic scientist depending on the weather and on her mood. She has written poetry from her earliest childhood but never bothered to have her poetry published until an obliging colleague proposed her to attend the second ‘Science meets Poetry’ event in the framework of the ESOF meeting held in Barcelona in July 2008 and have three poems of hers published in the booklet relating the event.

Her enthusiasm is widespread over a number of activities from fundamental physics (she collaborates in the development of the theory of scale relativity) to cosmology, from riding horses to skiing, from banging on a piano to daubing a canvas with colours, and fainting while listening to opera singers or admiring paintings hanging on walls spread all over our planet. She loves experiencing new aventures and meeting new people. But she is also aware that we will never know the truth hidden behind the deceptive cast of life. This knowledge appears as a leitmotiv in most of her poetic production.
Théorie d'une naissance

en hommage à Paul Dirac

Paul vit un jour un électron
Hésitant sur son amplitude
De probabilité, poltron
Dont il supputa l'habitude
De vivre en couple et d'ignorer
Du chat d'Erwin l'indifférence
Superbe à pouvoir prospérer
Dans une demi-inconscience
De ses états propres à lasser
D'un compagnon la patience.
Il lui fallut donc en passer
Par l'astuce et la connivence.

Paul, qui avait le pied marin,
N'hésita pas, à l'évidence,
A embarquer son pélerin
En croisière de plaisance
Sur une mer helvète à trous
Dont il espérait l'assistance.

Paul eut raison car les glouglous
De son océan d'inconstance
L'aidèrent fort à réussir
De son électron la conquête.
Il eut en effet le plaisir
De voir, à la fin de sa quête,
Le petit frère positif
Hors du bi-spineur apparaître.
A ses amis admiratifs
Il dévoila de ces deux êtres
Le roman d'amour-passion
Qui, en les perdant dans le vide,
Les fait surgir par absorption
De quanta d'énergie candides.

Le monde apprit, ce fut un scoop:
    Que le vide n'était pas vide.
    Que de bêtes yeux dans la soupe
Font une théorie splendide.

Ully Saint Georges, le 8 novembre 2009

Je remercie Sydney Leach qui a suggéré de remplacer le titre initialement donné par moi (Le rêve de Dirac) par celui-ci, beaucoup mieux approprié.
Amazone

Jeanne allait au galop, toute de noir vêtue,
Penchant gracieusement son col vers son cheval,
Foulant dans la tiédeur d’un doux soir automnal
Le tapis ocre et or recueillant ses battues.

La voûte illuminée par les rayons obliques
De l’astre prolongeant sa chute vers l’oubli
Renvoyait les photons qui pleuvaient sur les plis
De sa jupe éblouie par leurs éclats lyriques.

Chaque feuille bruissait d’une voix chamarrée.
Le serein accrochait les perles de la nuit
Aux branches suspendues se balançant sans bruit.

La frêle et triste enfant, dans son deuil emmurée,
Passait blanche, pensive, et son œil embué
Lui voilait la splendeur des chemins remués.

Uly Saint Georges, le 22 mars 2009

Ardeur matinale

Ô toi ma feuille blanche, Ô toi ma seule amie,
A qui j’ai confié tous les secrets de mon cœur,
Ne me regarde pas comme une âme ennemie,
Ni comme une étrangère au sourd dédain moqueur.

Cesse de retenir sous ton visage pâle
Les mots qui autrefois noircissaient tes ardeurs.
Accorde ton humeur aux échos de mon râle
Et ne sois pas muette aux accents de mes peurs.

Vibre encore une fois ta morne platitude
En la laissant soumettre aux charmes de mes nuits
Ses hymnes fatigués par mes angoisses rudes,
Rassasiés jusqu’au sang de l’ombre qui s’enfuit.
Vomis sous mes doigts gourds tes anciennes folies.
Ne sois pas insensible à l'effroi triste et lourd.
Psalmodie doucement chaque mélancolie
Que viendra recueillir l'enfer du point du jour.

Ô page blanche offerte mais qui se dérobe,
Laisse là ta fureur et tes envoûtements.
Ne m'abandonne pas au vieux sorcier qui gobe
Chaque vers oublié par tes anciens amants.

Feuille blanche assoupie sur la plage déserte
Que décoraient jadis mes chemins familiers
Ne te dérobe pas aux vagues d'encre verte
Qui violaient ta candeur en de lents sabliers.

Si tu veux bien enfin ouvrir tes lèvres vierges
Au burin de ma plume affermie en couteau,
Au soc de ma charrue, au désir de ma verge,
Au cri de désespoir qui grince du marteau,
Alors je viendrai pour une dernière étreinte
Emprisonner ton âme avec mes vermisseaux,
Etouffer sur ton cœur les accords de ma plainte
Et planter en ton corps la croix de mes tombeaux.

Ully Saint Georges, le 22 mars 2009

Jacques Charpentreau

Jacques Charpentreau was born on December 25th 1928 at the Sables d'Olonne (Vendée, France).

By profession, he is a French teacher.

As a poet and writer, he has published some thirty books of poetry, roughly ten volumes of tales and short stories, three dictionaries, two books of translations of poetry, three pamphlets and some fifteen essays. In addition, he has put together about fifty books of selected verse.
Jacques Charpentreau’s poetry has developed outside any particular literary doctrine, his main concern being to bring pleasure to his readers through rhythm and harmony without ever boxing himself up in any predetermined system. He has received a number of awards for his work (Grand Prix de la Société des Poètes Français, Prix de la Société des Gens de Lettres, de la Maison de Poésie, Prix Alfred de Vigny, Grand Prix des Poètes de la SACEM, etc.). In addition, and specifically for his writings aimed at a young audience, he was awarded the Prix Jeunes Années and the Prix de la Fondation de France. His Dictionnaire de la Poésie française received the Prix Georges Dumézil de l’Académie française.

Many of his poems have been set to music, and many are now ‘classic’ in the literal sense: they are to be found in a number of school manuals, both in France and in other countries.

His poetry is translated into many languages, as far afield as Russia, China and Japan. A university thesis on his work has just been defended in the University of Smolensk.

He is on the list of contemporary poets whose study is recommended by the French Ministry of l’Éducation Nationale as « classical works ».

He is President of the Maison de Poésie-Fondation Émile Blémont in Paris and the Editor of its highly respected journal of poetry ‘Le Coin de Table’.

A school in Saint-Hilaire-des-Loges (Vendée, France) has adopted the name de « Groupe scolaire Jacques Charpentreau » since October 1996.

His most recent work is a book of poems: Ombres légères, élégies. Paris, La Maison de Poésie, 2009.
Some poems by Jacques Charpentreau

La même vie

Un geste, une caresse, un regard dans la glace
Changent l'ordre du temps.
Je ne saurai jamais quel univers déplace
Cette main que je tend.

Quel insecte, quel astre en leurs métamorphoses
Éclosent au moment
Où je cueille pour toi cette dernière rose,
Belle-au-Jardin-dormant.

Espace et temps mêlés, quel secret en sa gangue
Tisse l'endroit, l'envers ?
L'étoffe se déchire, Einstein tire la langue
Au fragile univers.

Sagesse du vieux clown ! Chaque coup de cymbale
De l'orchestre d'Ariel
Salue un jeune Dieu qui jongle avec ses balles
Sur le vieil arc-en-ciel.

Ariane, ma sœur, au fil noir de ma plume,
Tous les mots que j'écris
Ne sont que les reflets des mondes où s'allument
Des rires et des cris.

Un geste, une caresse – à ce moment peut-être,
Quelque part, une main
Amicale se tend vers moi sans me connaître
Et me guide en chemin.

Une feuille pour moi quitte à jamais sa branche
Et tournoie vers le sol;
Sur un astre ignoré, pour moi, un oiseau tranche
L'air épais de son vol.

Comment vous remercier, humains, choses et bêtes,
Vous qui veillez sur moi ?
Nous avons même vie, même amitié secrète,
Je le sais, je le vois.

Et la flèche du temps, vers sa lointaine cible,
Errante jour et nuit,
Traverse le cosmos visible et invisible
Et toute vie la suit.
L’explorateur

Nous avons quitté Bételgeuse,
Cette poussière voyageuse,
Pour viser plus loin Altaïr,
Et nos cent tuyères rageuses
Nous ont poussés sans défaillir.

Un grand saut dans l’hyper-pace !
Autour de nous s’égrène et passe
Un collier d’or éparpillé.
L’univers trop connu s’efface,
D’autres étoiles vont briller.

Si belle était une planète
Apparaissant dans nos lunettes
Que nous avons alors osé
Dans une traînée de comètes
Descendre nous y reposer.

Je t’écrits au bord d’une sente.
L’herbe est presque aussi caressante
Que la douceur de tes cheveux.
Le vent, de ses bouches pressantes,
Dans mon cou me fait mille aveux.

Des arbres rouges qui se dressent
Tant de voix charmantes m’adressent
Comme un invisible concert.
Les odeurs et les sons se tressent
Tout autour de moi dans les airs.

Nous avons rencontré des êtres
Que nous commençons à connaître,
Nous séjournons au milieu d’eux.
Ils jouissent d’une âme peut-être ;
Comme nous, ils vivent à deux.

Mais ils n’ont pas nos grandes ailes,
Ce crépuscule d’étincelles
Autour de nous, en camaïeu
De pourpre qui te rend si belle !
Et pour voir, ils n’ont que deux yeux.
Ils n'ont pas ce duvet de plumes
Moussant comme une rouge écume,
Ma bien-aimée, autour de toi,
Ni cette senteur qui parfume
Ton corps dès que tu m'aperçois.

Deux de ces êtres se promènent
Comme nous dans notre domaine,
Passants heureux sur le chemin.
Je les regarde l'âme en peine.
Ils s'en vont se donnant la main.

Ô ma si lointaine, je rêve
À toi sur cette mince grève,
Un naufragé sur un flot
Où tant de mondes se soulèvent
Et viennent battre comme un flot.

Chaque astre à sa façon dévie
La lumière qui se confie
À l'espace infini qui peut
Faire vivre partout la vie,
Étincelles d’un même feu.

Il me fallait ce long voyage
Pour comprendre sur ce rivage
Que cet univers au long cours
Renaît sans cesse d'âge en âge
Et qu'il vit partout de l'amour.


L'expérimentateur

Sais-tu que par-delà cet infini billard
Où roulent dans l'espace ouvert les galaxies,
Vit un petit vieillard empli d'ataraxie,
Que les étoiles font tousser dans leur brouillard ?
Parmi les soleils d’or et les astres fuyards,
Il suit son protocole en stricte orthodoxie :
Il répare, il recrée les planètes occies,
Les mondes sont pour lui grains de riz ou caviar.

Sur la planète Terre, il observe des êtres
Qui s’agitent, qui vont, qui grouillent par milliards.
Il s’intéresse à eux, il veut les mieux connaître.

Il équipe chacun d’un petit émetteur,
Et pour les amoureux, il règle, ce vieillard,
Sur la même longueur les ondes de leurs cœurs.


La cuisinière

Sais-tu bien que là-bas, où la lumière brille,
Une petite vieille assise au coin du feu,
Sur sa table penchée, dodelinant un peu,
Reste très attentive : elle trie des lentilles.

Sous ses bésicles d’or, ses yeux bleus s’écarquillent,
Elle scrute son tas d’un regard minutieux.
Elle prend dans ses doigts un petit grain douteux,
Et jette la lentille au grand feu qui grésille.

Ne sois pas étonné : cette vieille, c’est Dieu
Qui jette en son grand feu les univers trop vieux,
Les planètes ratées, les astres qui déclinent.

Elle hésite parfois: notre terre n’est rien
Qu’une infime lentille entre deux doigts, que tient
Cette petite vieille au fond de sa cuisine.

La plage

Non ! Dieu n'est qu'un enfant qui joue sur une plage
Et qui laisse glisser de ses doigts entrouverts
La poussière dorée d'infinis univers ;
Un souffle les emporte en de lointains voyages.

Toute la mer enclose au fond d'un coquillage !
Le flot borde le jour d'une écume de vair.
Son sablier du temps ignore les hivers :
Dieu n'est que cet enfant sur la grève des âges.

Il danse au grand soleil. L'empreinte de ses pas
Sur le sable pourtant ne se déchiffrre pas :
Le flux et le reflux sans cesse les effacent.

À jamais l'Enfant-Dieu sur la plage dansant
Jette en mon cœur l'écho de son rire innocent
Parmi les grains de sable au gré du vent qui passe.


Le chant de la création

L'explosion de la lumière,
La gerbe immense des photons :
Joie de la création première,
Allégresse du premier ton !

La sourde plainte des ténèbres,
Comme une pédale à jamais,
En un accord sombre et funèbre
À l'éclat du jour se soumet.

Le souffle qui parcourt la terre
Rythme les vagues de la mer :
Rien ne pourra plus faire taire
Les flots des mers, les vents des airs !
Innombrables voix des feuillages,
Murmure incessant des forêts,
La source enlace son sillage
Au lent froissement des marais.

Éclats brûlants des astres, cuivres,
Étincelles du ciel de nuit !
L'univers s'embrase et va suivre
Le tempo du temps qui s'enfuit.

Fruste appel angoissé des bêtes
Des bois, des prés, des champs, des eaux.
Leur complainte demi-muette…
Pour elles, chantent les oiseaux.

La voix de la première femme,
Ève qui s'ouvre pour Adam ;
Leur harmonieux épithalame,
Le rire de l'amour ardent.

Les jours, les nuits, le chant du monde,
Les dissonances, les accords,
Partout la grande voix profonde
Malgré la plainte de la mort.

Un chœur fait vibrer le silence,
Il chante en nous depuis toujours ;
La nuit, vers l'étoile il s'élance.
Il s'exalte dans chaque amour.

S'enlacent les tons et les thèmes
Dans la petite herbe des champs,
Dans la musique du poème :
En moi, en nous, partout, le chant !

Dans le vent, dans l'eau, dans la flamme
Et dans les voix tues que j'aimais,
Dans l'espace, au fond de mon âme,
Le chant ne s'arrête jamais.

Chaunes, a poet sometimes known as Jean-Patrick Connerade existed as a scientist for some considerable length of what is called by physicists and by some others « time » (for want of a better word, despite the fact that nobody really knows what it is) and still appears from « time » T₁ to « time » T₂ when this elusive quasi-classical variable permits (despite having many other occupations like for example collecting together and editing material for this book) as a researcher. Those who know Chaunes claim he can be tracked down occasionally in London, where he enjoys emeritus status at Imperial College (emeritus being another undefined quantity used by academics to their advantage, although nobody understands what it means in the real world if indeed reality can be properly defined). Imperial College, by the way, IS a well-defined location, mostly in South Kensington. He is also to be found escaping from the so-called real world to a village in the South of France, or alternatively, if not there, perhaps to China, mostly in Wuhan for those who know where THAT is to be found. Eventually, he was discovered to be more frequently a poet by those observing him carefully, although some others still believe him to be a scientist. This is a well-known situation in quantum mechanics, where a wavefunction can be the superposition of two different states. It is then up to the observer to decide what (if anything) is « really » going on, although, again, it must be stressed that reality exists only in the eye of the observer and that any connection between the two is purely accidental. Some literary publications (mainly verse) : La Furie Française (with Sylvoisal – L'Age d'Homme 2004) Le Paradis des Filles (Age d'Homme 2006), Variations sur don Pedro d'Alfaroubeira (2007) and Aquarelles Postmodernes (2009 Editions des Poètes Français), Aux portes du Tartare (2009) and Contre la démission des poètes (with Sylvoisal 2009) and Galeries souterraines in 2010 (all with Les Editions l’Age d’Homme). A book of verse Dans le désert fleuri des Temps Modernes and a play L’étrange sœur de la Nouvelle Espagne are due. In connection with earlier ESOFs, Chaunes (with W. Heckl) edited Ludwig II the Visionary King (Euroscience 2006) ; Chaunes also edited Science meets Poetry from the forum in Barcelona (Euroscience 2008). Various literary prizes (Prix José-Maria de Heredia de l'Académie Française, prix Paul Verlaine de la Maison de Poésie de Paris, Grand Prix Victor Hugo de la Société des Poètes Français). Chaunes is President of the European Academy of Sciences Arts and Letters.
Le G.I.B.

En son royaume du Bhoutan
où les lamas s’en vont broutant
sur les hauteurs du paysage

le plus prudent des rois doutant
que son peuple fût assez sage
pour les indicateurs d’usage

prit conseil de son astrologue
de son bras droit futurologue
et des experts les plus en vogue
pour contrer l’œuvre des traideurs

Damnant le pion des démagogues
il créa l’outil des rêveurs
le Grand Indice du Bonheur
jamais biaisé jamais trompeur

***

Et les marchés dopés crevèrent
tous les plafonds même de verre
qui comprimaient l’activité

Les bouchons du FOREX sautèrent
Pour les grincheux quelle galère
sur la Mer des Morosités

On ne parla plus de misère
Au champagne on s’intoxiqua
Elle ne fut plus éphémère
la griserie qu’il provoqua

Les actionnaires dépensèrent
leur dividende avec fracas
Et les banquiers en oublièrent
dans le Bhoutan tous leurs tracas
Ce roi qui règne en se foutant
De la déprime et de son âge
est resté jeune en chouchoutant
les dames de son entourage

Celles qui font en s’arc-boutant
sur les principes du mariage
quittent très vite le Bhoutan
fort peu suivies dans ce sillage

En contemplant les trous béants
de l’économie sans vertige
à l’instar des rois fainéants

Ce prince ne fuit qu’en avant
vers l’El Dorado des savants
et les paradis qu’ils érigent

***

Il avance en faisant confiance
aux grands progrès de la science
et se plaît donc à répéter

que l’euphorie est mesurable
et la poésie quantifiable
dans les meilleures sociétés

Elles y vont en froufroutant
disant c’est un vieux dégoûtant
que ce roi qui fait étalage
du bonheur dans tous les ménages

Elles y vont en se doutant
que pour lui plaire davantage
les filles font tout un battage
autour de la cour du Bhoutan
Deux sonnets égyptiens

à Serge Feneuille, Turin

1. La pesée

Luxor vois-tu encore un destin qui témeuve
L’auteur qui composa le grand livre des morts
a-t-il sa place auprès de ces êtres qui peuvent
escalader le ciel pour échapper au sort
du commun des mortels On en cherche la preuve
dans les bras de la Nuit où une étoile neuve
a surgi C’est parmi les roseaux sur le bord
du fleuve de la vie qu’elle a pris son essor
Dans la chambre où se rend le cortège funèbre
la barque est prête à naviguer vers les ténèbres
et le peuple accompagne en priant son départ
On dit que sur les murs il faut graver des signes
protecteurs Les vivants ne s’estiment pas dignes
d’en déchiffrer le sens et baissent le regard

2. Le combat de Hatshepsout

Je suis le Pharaon et si cela vous vexe
que je gouverne seule en dépit de mon sexe
j’arbore la barbe et le fourreau subtil
qui la tient prisonnière avalant sans complexe
au fond de sa volute un symbole viril
du pouvoir en Egypte indispensable annexe

Je suis le Pharaon et mon esprit habile
traversera le Champ des Roseaux quand le jour
viendra du grand départ vers mon second séjour
d’où je verrai le Nil et sa vallée fertile

Je répondrai comme il convient pesant plus lourd
dans la balance au dam du monstre crocodile
que les maux de mon règne et j’irai à mon tour
lui rendre au cœur de la nuit sur ma planète hostile
Sur un tesson d'amphore dans la plaine d'Ilión
(Le point de vue des Troyens)

Elle a eu son berger - folie de souveraine
Elle a trahi son clan car elle était si vaine
qu'il fallut compléter son échiquier de cœurs
par un jeune étranger juteux venu d'ailleurs

Nous l'avons enlevée à Sparte Or notre honneur
est de ne jamais rendre une prise et la reine
mérite bien le bruit qu'en ont fait les Hellènes
en nous rendant célèbres sur tous les voleurs

Ménélas dans son lit valait moins que zéro
Il lui en fallait plus à la noble princesse
qui n'a jamais couché avec tous vos héros

Agamemnon l'indifférait Le beau Stentor
criait trop sur les toits sa force et sa prouesse
Achille aimait Patrocle et Patrocle la mort

Florence Digne

Florence Digne, born on the 16th of February 1978 in Nevers (in the Nièvre, France) is a secondary school teacher in Paris, and is in charge of the young poets' section of the Société des Poètes Français. She has published a volume of poetry entitled D'Âge en âme as well as a number of sonnets in literary magazines. For her book of poems, she was awarded the Grand Prix Annuel de l'Académie de poésie française in 2010. Currently, she is working in a team preparing a school manual on French literature for a French publisher : les éditions Magnard. She will be responsible in particular for the chapters dealing with lyric poetry and the romantic movement in the arts... She will be the guest of honour of the International Salon "Bondy-Arts" in October 2010, which brings together painters, photographers, engravers, sculptors and poets.
Some poems by Florence Digne

Fertile solitude

Une étrange saison vient soudain m’habiter :
Il pleut au bord de moi quand le ciel me caresse,
Un parfum me traverse au doux bruit de l’averse,
Je flotte dans ma chair, rejoins l’immensité.

Sur mon lac solitaire, avançant, tête rose,
Je pose mes questions à plat sur les galets
Pour suivre pas à pas le murmure étoilé
Que la vie, en son vol, secrètement dépose.

Quel bonheur d’être soi au milieu de son corps !
Sans personne alentour, quel bonheur d’être « Accord » !
Un astre de lumière, à la nuit, me découvre…

Je trace mon sillon entre deux grands déserts,
La plume au creux des dents et le cœur qui s’entrouvre,
Puisant mon premier souffle à la source des airs.

Brouillon de l’être

J’ai ce papier mâché qui me sert de mémoire
Et qui colle à l’esprit comme un pot de langueur.
Qu’on repeigne les murs recouverts de pâleur
Qui tapissent les jours sur un fil dérisoire !

J’ai cet accent du rêve à la tête du cœur
Et qui trône, indécis, circonflexe, illusoire.
Qu’on gomme ce crayon, voleur de mon histoire,
Qui m’empêche de voir l’authentique lueur !

J’ai ce mal pénétrant qui me sert de repère,
Ce signal indécent, clignotant, délétère,
Qu’on baisse le volume et qu’on taise un instant

Ce cri de l’intérieur, paraphe de l’errance,
Qui signe de mon sang le parchemin restant !
J’ai ce mal d’exister qui me sert d’existence…

octobre 2009
Paroles de dryades

La rumeur du feuillage affole mon esprit…
Je tiens tête au mystère, et je cherche à comprendre,
Sous le dais ombrageux revêtu de méandres,
La force qui nous pousse à poursuivre à tout prix.

Nous avons dit adieu, fuyant toute croyance ;
Nos cerveaux sont peuplés de tombeaux délaissés,
Les dieux et les héros dont le front s’est plissé
N’enchantent plus les cœurs sortis de leur enfance.

Nous avons étouffé la voix de nos ancêtres,
Arraché brusquement les racines de l’être,
Et si notre âme saigne, impossible à soigner,
C’est parce qu’il lui manque, en cette ère malade,
Un air de poésie, une eau pour se baigner ;
Nous avons asséché la source des naïades…

juillet 2010

Rien qu’une ferveur…

Comment peux-tu savoir que tout n’est pas fini,
Quand on ferme les yeux sur les voix tant aimées,
Quand la douce caresse, autrefois parfumée,
Se meurt dans un passé que la mort a terni ?

Comment acceptes-tu de sentir que s’éloigne,
Chaque jour un peu plus, chaque jour pour plus loin,
Ce que tu as vécu, que tu ne vivras point,
Et qui va s’évanouir sans la main qui l’empoigne ?

N’est-ce pas un refuge à la peur de l’oubli
Que de croire à ce point aux lueurs éternelles ?
Je sais des mots et des regards qui nous appellent,
Mais s’éteignent parfois comme un cierge pâli…
Donne-moi quelque signe, un indice en pâture,
Ce paraphe authentique au bas du grand feuillet
Que je puisse m’ouvrir comme un livre effeuillé
Pour glisser dans ces vers mon signet de lecture.

Jacques-François Dussottier

Jean-François Dussottier’s poetry is translated into eight languages. He is the founder of several regional clubs of poetry and of a number of journals of poetry, and has held office in the executive boards of several societies of poets. He is also the organiser of numerous poetry prizes both international and national (French). He is the President of the European Circle of French language poets Poèsiennas and of the European Society of Poetry Arts and Letters, which confers the Léopold Cédar Senghor Prize of Poetry Arts and Letters, and he is president of the European Movement of Sensualist Poets. He is a former President of the Société des Poètes Français, and works in collaboration with six European countries on French Language poetry. He is an abstract graphical artist and has participated in exhibitions of pictures.

Two poems by Jacques-François Dussottier

SUBLUSTRE

Dans la chair du ciel
des révoltes étoilées
naissent
quand la nuit renaît.

Au minuit des astres
chambres aux miroirs éteints
vers les espaces sans limites
s’installe le règne animal.
Noyé d’espace
dans l’opacité de la nuit

Enclos de vertiges
où
j’écoute bruire l’éternité

Éternelle provende
en des infinis épars

Des cris de lumière
naissent
dans les débris du vent.

Serge Feneuille

Serge Feneuille was born on
November 16th 1940. He was
educated as a scientist at the Ecole
Normale Supérieure of Saint-Cloud
(France) from 1960 to 1964,
qualifying as a physicist. His
professional career was equally
divided between university research
and managerial responsibilities in
industry.

From 1964 to 1981 he pursued an
academic career, holding a chair in
Atomic and Molecular Physics in the
University of Paris-Sud and
becoming Director of the Aimé
Cotton Laboratory. From 1986 to
1988, he was Director-General of the
Cnrs (the French national research
agency). From 1981 until 1986, and again from 1988 until 2000, he held a position
in the Lafarge Group, one of the world leaders in construction materials, holding
various responsibilities, most notably as Director-General of the group, then known
as Lafarge Coppée from 1989 to 1994. He also became, from 1998 to 2000,
Operational Vice-President of the Centre d’expérimentation du bâtiment et des
travaux publics (Cebtp) in France.
Since his retirement in 2000, Serge Feneuille has ceased remunerated employment to devote himself entirely to archaeological research in Egypt and in Soudan. Since 2002, he has participated in excavations and research:

- in the French archaeological mission of Saqqâra (Mafs) established by Professor Jean Leclant and currently led by Professor Philippe Collombert of the University of Geneva;

- in the French section of Antiquities of the Soudan (Sfdas) in Khartoum headed by Claude Rilly, who has just taken over from Vincent Rondot.

In 2008, he published with the Editions du Cnrs a book entitled « Paroles d’éternité » assembled from the texts of the Pyramid of Pépy Méryrê (6th dynasty). In 2009, he was the author of a chapter on Egyptian philosophy in the compendium entitled « Philosophies d’ailleurs » published by Hermann. Finally, he has published either as sole author or as co-author several research papers on meroitic mortars.

In addition to all of this, Serge Feneuille presided the Haut conseil de la science et de la technologie, an advisory body of the President of the French Republic from 2006 to 2008.

Serge Feneuille is a founding member of the Académie des technologies since 2000 and a member of the European Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters.

How to restore ancient poetry in our modern languages.

The question which serves as a title to this talk has an obvious answer: “impossible”. As traditional wisdom of Italy has it: “traduttore, tradittore” and the American poet Robert Frost has been still more peremptory by writing “Poetry is what gets lost in translation”. But, let me quote another great man, French this time, namely Napoleon the First who wrote on the fifth of May eighteen hundred nine, in a reply to a letter from Jean Leonard, Comte le Marois : “Ce n’est pas possible, m’écrivez vous : cela n’est pas français”.

More seriously, it is obvious that any translation is a reconstruction from dispersed materials: metaphors, rhythm and music of phrases, semantic environment of words, implicit or explicit quotations, versification rules, metrics etc. When we have to translate into its present counterpart a text initially written in the ancient form of a modern language, Old French or Old English for example, one can hope that a purely literal translation will preserve most of these elements, but as soon as the text to be translated is written in a completely different language, in particular when it
belongs to another linguistic family or still worse, to a dead language, it is obvious that most of the poetic content of the initial text is lost in a literal translation. Of course, this does not mean at all that a literal translation based on our best philological knowledge of the translated language is useless; on the contrary, it is a basic material without which one can do nothing. Marguerite Yourcenar said it very clearly: « quoi qu’on fasse, on reconstruit toujours le monument à sa manière. Mais c’est déjà beaucoup de n’employer que des pierres authentiques ».

However, « à sa manière » does not mean without any constraint. On the contrary, one of the best ways to restore ancient poetry in our modern language is to search for the cultural or social constraints that the initial writer had to face, consciously or not. However, some of these constraints, such as the poetic forms, cannot be taken into account just as they are. For example, in ancient Egyptian poetry, the metric structure is based on asymmetry, a verse consisting in two parts, the first one comprising four units, the second one, three units. Moreover, the unit is not, as in French poetry for example, a metric foot that is to say a single syllable but such as described by Bernard Mathieu: “toute partie du discours susceptible de fonctionner syntaxiquement comme sujet ou prédicat d’un énoncé quelconque”. Transposing this rule into any of our modern languages would be nonsense. The only way to overcome this difficulty is not to write in prose, but to choose the modern poetic form which corresponds best to the tone of the poem. For instance, John Dryden, the well-known English poet of the 17th century, used rhyming couplets in iambic pentameter in his famous translation of The Aeneid, and the young Marguerite Yourcenar used in 1924 the traditional French alexandrine, a twelve metrical foot verse, in writing “une cantilène de Pentaour” based on one of the lyrics of a famous Egyptian poem entitled “The dialogue of a man with his soul” and dating approximately from 1900 BC.

A complementary way of restoring ancient poetry implies a deep analysis of the relationship between text and context, as the latter is provided not only by archeology, architecture or iconography but also by personal feelings when faced with original manuscripts or places where they could have been conceived or recopied. This approach was extensively developed by Dr. R. B. Parkinson in his extraordinary and lyrical book, published in 2009, entitled: “Reading Ancient Egyptian Poetry among other histories”. Robert Graves had already carried the argument still farther when, in 1955 after he had published “The Greek Myths”, he replied to some criticisms, coming from classical scholars, by arguing that by definition they lacked the poetic capacity to examine mythology forensically.

My personal work enters into the general frame of this debate. I recently published two books trying to restore two aspects of ancient Egyptian poetry in modern French; the first one deals with The Pyramid Texts, so called because the last kings and queens of The Ancient Kingdom had them engraved on the walls of their
funeral apartments inside their pyramids, whereas the second one concerns a less serious matter, namely the love poetry that appeared at the end of the New Kingdom and that we know by a few documents only, papyri, chips of limestone or fragments of ceramic.

My contribution does not lie in a better philological accuracy of my translations and I am not claiming any scientific recognition from Egyptologists. My only ambition is to show that men living many centuries ago used poetry to express feelings, fears or joys very similar to ours and that, despite language barriers, their poems can still charm and move us, sometimes much more than some contemporary texts one cannot make head or tail of. If the present world is no longer able to inspire poets, revisiting past times may offer them large possibilities, provided that they accept to approach ancient texts with humility and respect of course, but also with boldness and enthusiasm.

To illustrate these various points, I give a short example of my work, taken from my latest book, entitled “Paroles d’amour” (CNRS Editions Paris) 2010:

Literal translations:

C’est la voix de la sarcelle qui s’égosille, saisie par son appât.
Ton amour* me retient et je ne puis m’en délier. Je vais reprendre mes filets mais que dire à ma mère, vers qui je vais autant qu’il y a de jours* chargé de volatiles ?
Je n’ai pas posé de piège aujourd’hui car ton amour m’a ravie
(Bernard Mathieu, 1996).

The voice of the wild goose shrills,
It is caught by its bait;
My love of you pervades me,
I cannot loosen it.
I shall retrieve my nets,
But what do I tell my mother,
To whom I go daily,
Laden with bird catch?
I have spread no snares today,
I am caught in my love of you!
(Miriam Lichtheim, 1976).
L’oie rieuse crie sa détresse,
Quand ayant mordu à l’appât,
Elle se trouve prise au piège.
Moi aussi, je suis prisonnière,
Car je ne puis me libérer
De ton amour et de sa fièvre.
Puisque je me suis laissé prendre,
Je ne veux plus poser de piège.
Mais à ma mère, que dirai-je
Si je ne lui rapporte rien ?
Moi qui d’habitude reviens
Les mains pleines d’oiseaux captifs.
Mais je ne pourrai aujourd’hui
Poser ne serait-ce qu’un piège
Car tu m’as faite prisonnière.
L’oie rieuse crie sa détresse

A poem by Serge Feneuille:

Renaissance

Non, vous n’êtes pas morts, Esprits de notre terre,
Vous êtes assoupis, ignorant le vacarme
De ces dieux étrangers, venus avec leurs armes
Pour conquérir le ciel, brandissant le tonnerre.

Yahvé, lorsqu’il fut seul, déchaîna ses colères,
Mais il ne put vous vaincre, sidéré par vos charmes.
Aux hommes, il envoya son fils, brisé de larmes,
Le cœur rempli d’amour, mais ils le crucifièrent.

Puis s’en vint la raison, avec ses raisonneurs,
Enfants de la Réforme qui assécha le monde
De toute poésie, en clamant à la ronde :

« Dieu est mort, l’homme seul peut dominer ses peurs ».
Vous réveillerez-vous devant cette arrogance
Avant que ne triomphe à nouveau la souffrance ?
Assumpció Forcada was born in Sudanell, in the province of Lleida. Since 1990, she has published a number of books of poetry (14), first in the Catalan language, and then in bilingual editions (Catalan alongside Castilian Spanish). The best known are Immunitat and Flora Sapiens (Columna 1990, 1993) Ecosistema and EVOLUTIO (Seuba ediciones 1998, 2000) Germinació and Cosmos (Pagès editors 2000, 2002) Fotosintesi, Prisma, Semillas, Rails/Railes, Univers/Universo (La Busca edicions, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008). Several of her books of verse are available in translation in French, German, Icelandic and Russian. She presents her own poems either solo or accompanied by Fina R. Palau on the guitar. She has given lectures and organised poetry recitals in Universities, on radio programmes and in concert halls. A special feature of her writing is that she integrates biology and the scientific language into her poems. In fact, her poetry achieves a synthesis of all the forms and events of life, including erosion, magnetism, acid rain, coastal pollution, viral infections, the genome, common household accessories... all turn into symbols of our modern lifestyle. Her most recent books of verse are Geodynàmica (Geodynamics), and H2O, presented last May.

VOLCANISM
(translated into English by Kathleen O'Donnell and John O'Donnell)

The internal seismograph
Detects shocks
In the world of feelings--
Deep fissures

You can’t avoid
The flow of magma
That boils
The lava that overflows
and spreads out
As if it were an
Incandescent river in the night
Once this lava cools
Passion petrified
You will cut with obsidian
The days of doubt
You will hope that
Your memories
Be as light as pumice stone

(Geodinamica)

THE SUN
(Translated into English by Janet DeCesaris)

SUN I (ORIGIN)

1
The particles of gas
entered into dialogue
four thousand five hundred million years ago.
The law of gravity
enabled their meeting to be
increasingly dense and intimate.

And hydrogen combined
in fusion reactions to yield helium
the magic of light opening the beacon-star
of our solar system
that gives us life.

2
Lost sounds
and the silence of times
found the ear’s receptors
nature gave the first sounds
hints of the first words.

Invisible letters in the vacuum
during millions of years
were hieroglyphics in the first times
and fusion with ideas
lit the torch of the muse,
gave us the first poem.
SUN II (MAIN SEQUENCE)

1
And you come out every day,
and you sleep every day;
with twilight’s sheets
you open the path to the stars.

And leaves await you every morn
and there are flowers that open
marking the hours as you pass.
Others turn to not miss
your image, and with the corolla
imitate your round shape.

Meanwhile, every once in a while,
with eclipses you
flirt with the moon.

2
And sometimes you come out,
and sometimes you come
with the murmur of the wind,
the dance of the leaves,
the sound of the rain,
the touch of muses.

And I await you every morn
opening the hours up to hope,
time stops if you arrive
with the pen on a blank age,
revolving around you, poetry,
trying to round off, to not lose you,
each poem.

Meanwhile, from time to time,
you have eclipses and you flirt
with the muse.
SUN III (RED GIANT)

1
There will come a moment
five thousand five hundred million years from now
of imbalance,
you will have no hydrogen left
and you will contract within yourself
until you burn the helium
you had made.

Meanwhile, an opposing force
will expand your exterior
invading orbits and planets,
turning you into a giant red.

2

And there comes a moment of imbalance
of contradiction between Art and Life,
and you would want to leave behind
the time spent,
concentrating
on the interior world,
more and more intimate.

Meanwhile, opposing forces
stretch you outwards, towards stress,
towards a world, seemingly brilliant,
colder and larger, that does not allow you to live.

SUN IV (WHITE DWARF)

1
And when finally, after
another million years
you have no helium,
when contraction becomes stronger
and you have little light,
denser
and smaller.
What will you do with no clothes, without your garments
fading into the clouds?
What will you do, little white dwarf
if not cool off slowly?

2
And when finally,
you have no more inspiration,
when forces leave you
and the fog becomes denser
and the light of life fails you.
What will you do with no clothes, no words,
lost in the clouds of nothing?
What will you do little white dwarf,
lost under the burden of silence,
if not cool off slowly,
becoming cosmic dust again.

NEBULA OF THE HELIX

There turns the helix, expanding
and cooling while in the center dies
your binary star
that still shines.

When there is no more hydrogen
and helium, there only remains
carbon in the core
and you will not even become a white dwarf,
not even a brown dwarf.

Rather, a black, black dwarf
like the life that is ending
with the darkness of oblivion,
of a heavy burden.

GALACTIC FUSIONS

There is a dance in the universe,
mysterious attractions,
forces of love activating
your desire for fusion.
Perhaps from that act of love
a single galaxy might grow
able to sow at night
all space with stars.

Christophe Goarant-Corrêa de Sá

Born in Paris in 1977, Christophe Goarant – Corrêa-de-Sá now lives in Chartres, where he is an English teacher. Though comparatively young, he has already published a number of books of verse, including Cette ombre qui te suit, éd. Nouvelle Pléiade, Paris, 1998, which received the prix de la Pléiade découverte ; Fenêtre originaire, éd. Les Poètes français, Paris 2000, and Enfants Sillages, éd Séguier, Paris 2007. He has also written theatrical works : Dans l’Ombre du Dom Juan was published in 2009 by the éditions Séguier with the support of the French Centre National du Livre. His first play Metternich ou le Masque de l’Aiglon was given a public reading at the Arnaga, musée Edmond Rostand in Cambo-les-Bains (France).

A contributor to many literary reviews, he has received a number of prizes and joined poetry academies (which include three consecutive years in the Académie des Jeux Floraux of Toulouse, the prix Rimbaud of the Ministère de la Jeunesse and the Maison de Poésie de Paris in 2002 for his third book of poetry : D’impressions textuelles…) Christophe Goarant – Corrêa-de-Sá is a frequent speaker in schools, colleges and French lycées. Some of the texts from his fourth book of verse, Fenêtre originaire, are included in a school manual for teachers (séquences pédagogiques) published by la Nouvelle Revue Pédagogique éd. Nathan.

Currently, he is composing a new book of verse about rural life, entitled, Paysâmes, and working on a novel.
Du fond des granges…

Du fond des granges-canicules,
S’enfle torpeur - après-midi :
L'ombre poussièrê et particule
Dans la lumière qui frémit.

Gonfle chaleur, va, déambule
De frôle étable en appentis,
Dans ces recoins que dissimule
L'onde fraîcheur qui s’arme-nuit.

C’est l’heure-sieste, bruisse transe,
Où l’univers trompe-silence
Semble se taire en bruits menus.

Meules de foin troublent, murmurent,
Souvenir d’un temps révolu
Où le vent froissait leur faîture.

(Paysâmes, recueil à paraître)

Vrille toupie aux mille éclats,
Traîne copeaux en son sillage,
Sème peinture puis s’en va,
Dénude bois et prend le large.

De pièce en pièce à travers sol,
Mon vieux joujou tourne sillonne,
Crisse fébrile fier et fol,
Raille parquet puis polyphone.

Tout semble naître à son sillon :
Amas, poussière, galaxie…
Le centre monde tourbillon,
C’est l’axe fou de ma toupie.

(Enfants Sillages, éd. Séguier, Paris, 2007)
Dom Juan

Ne devrais-je souffrir d’autres formes d’Enfer
Que cet ennui des corps, cet exil de la chair,
Venu, comme réduire en simple badinage
Ce tout que je plaçais en mon libertinage !
Faudra-t-il, lentement, qu’au feu de ma question
Je consume l’attente où tarde mon démon ?
Que vous me décevez, vous suprêmes instances,
A venger par l’ennui mes anciennes errances.
N’attendez de la sorte aucun regain de foi :
Je ne renie en rien mes actes d’autrefois.
Dussé-je, siècle à siècle, errer puis croître en mythe,
Mon âme, au repentir, Vous demeure interdite.

Dans l’Ombre du Dom Juan, Acte I, Scène 1éd Séguier, Paris, 2009

Kaléidoscope…

Alentour c’est la fête, et la foule se presse,
Où chaque figurant fait nombre dans le soir,
Une masse qui bouge aux faux airs d’allégresse,
Un tableau qui se forme et s’imprime de noir.

La séquence se fige en fin de balayage,
Au terme d’un chaos difforme et sans raison,
La valse du regard se fait tendre cadrage,
Et s’estompe le flou quand finit la chanson.

La scène en devient presque incongrue, irréelle,
En ce tout qu’on éclipse il n’est que des abstraits,
Du plan qui s’éternise, il ne reste plus qu’elle,
Et le monde se brouille aux contours de ses traits.

L’univers se reforme à chacun de ses gestes,
Et la terre s’incline aux moindres de ses pas,
Du réel imparfait il n’est plus que des restes,
Qui réfractent sans fin chacun de ses appas.

D’impressions Textuelles, La Maison de Poésie, 2002

53
Au ras du pot, traîne d’aiguilles
Surnagent glu puis tournent fond,
Forment couronne puis vacillent,
Portent stigmate, courbent front.

Le pin résine son martyr,
Et fait obole au bas du tronc
Des gouttes colle qu’il transpire,
Saigent suppurent ses sillons.

Veines où figent -comme marbre-
Ces teintes d’ocre et de marron,
Que sève suinte, écorche d’arbre,
Et coagule tout du long.

Christophe GOARANT – CORRÊA-de-SÂ
Paysâmes, à paraître
Vital Heurtebize

Vital Heurtebize was formerly a teacher at the CNPS in France, Director of Studies and Honorary Teaching Inspector.

Primarily, however, he is renowned as a poet.

He is President of the Société des poètes Français (the national society of poets in France), President and founder of a society known as ‘Poètes sans frontières’, which has provided aid and charitable support for many around the world and is the author of some 34 books. Four times, he has received prizes from the Académie Française and is also a laueate of the Maison de Poésie in Paris.

He is the Director and founder of a poetry journal L'Etrave which first appeared in 1960. He holds a number of official distinctions from French institutions: Officier des Palmes académiques, médaille d'honneur de la jeunesse et des sports, médaille d'or de la ville de Paris, etc.

The man of science and the poet

In oriental philosophy, poets and men of science are both regarded as following the same path to reach the hidden world and render it visible.

Both prepare themselves for this task by a long ascesis which sharpens their technical skills, namely language, imagination, intuition, their spirit of investigation and their understanding of Nature.

Both are then able to celebrate the world in a way nobody had been able to before.

Thus, one can say that Science and Poetry are, in different domains, a huge celebration, a chorus of thousands of different individual songs.
Amongst the men of Science, there is the celebration of those who are researchers and who have not yet discovered, of those who create new languages, of those who have the privilege of discovery and remain astonished by their findings during their whole lifetime, whatever may be the importance of what they have found : Einstein will remain famous as the one who illuminated physics from inside, Louis de Broglie, as the one who discovered the undulatory properties of matter, Bequerel as the man who first saw radioactivity, Anderson as the first to see the tracks of the positron.

Can one not say the same of poets ? There are those who seek the inspiration but will never write the absolute masterpiece, those who torture language and give it a new form, but will never take it much further, those who have the good fortune to compose a great poem, and who will remain forever marked by the experience, however great the rest of their work may be : « le lac » of Lamartine, « la mort du Loup » of Vigny, « l'Albatros » of Baudelaire, and so on, from « Mignonne, allons voir si la rose… » of Ronsard to « L'œil était dans la tombe… » of our great Hugo !

People say that the man of Science is not a poet and that his celebration is not really a poem simply because what he discovers is simply reality, which he makes accessible through the language of science. In that sense, he does not create. Yet is it not a poem which Anderson wrote when he explained the first antiparticle ever observed ?

One could say as much for the poet ! He merely discovers the unreal side of things the « poetic truth of things » according to Auguste Dorchain. He translates this reality and expresses it in a specific language. He does not create it !

If we followed this path, we would soon take such judgements to excess. The work of the man of Science and the work of the poet are both creative. Poet and man of Science, when their work is over, both experience an intense feeling of creativity. This is a feeling which tends too easily to make a poet speak of « HIS » work ( !) when all he has done is to translate an invisible yet existing reality into words. I will say nothing of this aspect of the work of men of Science, since I know nothing about it, although I have noticed that two researchers sometimes quarrel over the « origin » of a discovery made simultaneously and thousands of miles away from each other !

Lastly, it is also claimed that a poem is unique, whereas a scientific discovery is not : if Joliot had not recognized artificial radioactivity, somebody else, sooner or later, would have found it. Fair enough, but the personality of the researcher nevertheless shines through in the way he did it. In the same manner, a poem is unique through the personal intensity with which the « poetic truth » is attained.
Poets and men of science are both attentive to even the smallest perceptible signs, even accidental, they find on their way. They see them and recognize them even if they are unexpected. Through this recognition, through discovery, the inner thoughts (our own « self ») are revealed.

Thus, Science and Poetry could well be parts of the huge chorus of individual voices…

Is it the chorus of poets which joins on to the songs of science, or the celebrations of the scientist which complete the discoveries of poets ? Whichever way, poets and men of science are both creators who, in their several domains, sing in unison, some to the material and some to the spiritual well-being of man. And who knows which does which ?

(French original version)

L’Homme de Science et le Poète

Dans la philosophie orientale, le poète et l’homme de Science, sont, tous deux, considérés comme empruntant les mêmes voies pour accéder au monde non manifesté et le rendre visible.

Tous deux s’y préparent par une longue ascèse qui aiguise le sens technique, c’est à dire le langage et l’imagination, l’intuition et l’esprit de découverte, le sens de la Nature.

Tous deux peuvent alors chanter un chant que nul encore n’avait jamais chanté.

On peut ainsi dire que la Science et la Poésie, sont, chacune dans un domaine différent, un chant immense, un chœur, composé de milliers de chants individuels.

Chez les hommes de Science, il y a le chant de ceux qui cherchent et ne trouvent pas, de ceux qui inventent des langages renouvelés, de ceux qui ont le privilège de trouver une fois et qui en restent saisis durant toute leur existence, quelle que soit par la suite l’importance de leurs travaux : Einstein reste celui qui illumina la Physique de l’intérieur, Louis de Broglie celui qui découvrit la structure ondulatoire de la matière, Becquerel celui à qui l’on doit la découverte de la radioactivité, Anderson, celui qui observa la trace du premier électron positif.

Ne peut-on pas en dire autant des poètes ? il y a ceux qui courent après l’inspiration mais n’écriront jamais de chef-d’œuvre, ceux qui torturent le langage jusqu’à lui donner une forme nouvelle mais dont l’œuvre n’ira pas plus loin, ceux enfin qui ont la grâce de
composer le poème dont ils resteront marqués à jamais, quelle que soit par ailleurs l'ampleur de leur oeuvre : « le lac » de Lamartine, « La mort du Loup » de Vigny, « l'Albatros » de Baudelaire, ainsi depuis « Mignonne, allons voir si la rose … » de Ronsard jusqu'à « L'œil était dans la tombe … » du grand Hugo !

On dit que l'homme de Science n'est pas un poète et que son chant n'est pas vraiment un poème, au motif qu'il ne fait que découvrir une réalité et la traduire en un langage accessible. Il ne la crée pas. N'est-ce pas un poème qu'écrivit Anderson lorsqu'il expliqua la première antiparticule jamais observée.

On pourrait en dire tout autant du poète ! Il ne fait que découvrir le coté irréel des choses, la « vérité poétique des choses » selon Auguste Dorchain. Il traduit cette réalité et l'exprime en un langage spécifique, il ne la crée pas !

A suivre ce genre de propos, nous tomberions vite dans l'excessif. L'œuvre de l'homme de Science et celle du poète sont toutes les deux des œuvres de création. Poète et homme de Science, leur travail terminé, éprouvent l'un comme l'autre, un sentiment intense de création. Sentiment qui, d'ailleurs pousse trop facilement le poète à parler de « SON » œuvre ( ! ) quand il n’a fait que traduire une réalité certes invisible mais bien présente. Je ne dirai rien à ce sujet de l'homme de Science, car je n’en sais rien, encore qu’il soit arrivé de voir deux chercheurs se disputer la « propriété » d’une même découverte réalisée en même temps, à des milliers de kilomètres de distance !

On dit encore, et pour finir, qu’un poème est unique et qu’une découverte scientifique ne l’est pas. Si Joliot n’avait pas reconnu le premier la radioactivité artificielle, d’autres que lui l’auraient à coup sûr perçue dans les mois suivants. Soit ! mais ce n’est pas en cela que la découverte de Joliot est unique. Elle l’est dans la manière dont le « moi » de l’homme de Science s’est exprimé en la circonstance. De même, le poème est unique par l’intensité avec laquelle le « moi » du poète s’est projeté dans l’ expression d’une vérité poétique enfin perçue.

Poète et homme de Science sont tous les deux des êtres attentifs aux signes, même peu perceptibles, que des circonstances fortuites placent sous leurs yeux. Ils les voient, les reconnaissent alors qu’ils ne s’attendaient pas à les rencontrer. C’est dans cette rencontre, dans cette découverte, que notre pensée intérieure ( notre « moi ») trouve l’occasion de se manifester.

Science et Poésie seraient donc bien ce chant immense composé de milliers de chants individuels …
Est-ce le chant du poète qui s’unit à celui de l’homme de Science ou, à l’inverse, le chant de l’homme de Science qui s’unit à celui du poète ? Poète et Homme de Science sont tous deux des créateurs, qui, dans leur domaine respectif mais au même diapason, œuvrent, l’un au bien-être matériel de l’humanité, l’autre à son bien-être spirituel. Et si c’était … réciproque ?

La Poésie dans tous ses états

Lorsqu’on me demande où en est la Poésie dans notre pays, s’il faut répondre en peu de mots, je réponds volontiers, de façon lapidaire, que la situation de la poésie en France n’est pas brillante. Elle reste un genre littéraire confidentiel, pratiqué par des initiés, hors d’un monde profane qui s’en désintresse aussi bien du côté des éditeurs que de celui du grand public.

La formulation est sans doute claire mais elle mérite qu’on en fasse une analyse un peu plus poussée.

Voyons du côté des éditeurs : ce sont eux qui, les premiers, devraient s’intéresser à la diffusion des œuvres poétiques lesquelles ne manquent pas. Qu’ils fassent un choix, certes, ils ont pour ce faire un comité de lecture, et qu’ils assurent ensuite la promotion des poètes dont ils auront retenu l’œuvre.

Mais Gaston Gallimard, dit-on, n’aurait-il pas, lui-même, répondu à un poète débutant et forcément inconnu : « Mon jeune ami, faites-vous d’abord un nom et je vous publierai … »?

En réalité, la Poésie n’ayant aucune valeur marchande, elle n’intéresse pas les « grandes maisons » d’édition qui ne sont plus aujourd’hui que des entreprises contrainte de « faire du chiffre » pour satisfaire leurs actionnaires.

Sauf exception. Soyez bon romancier, auteur-maison, alors oui, au surplus, on vous publiera vos poèmes. C’est le cas Houellebecque par exemple, ou de cette merveilleuse poète de notre temps : André Chedid.

Dès lors, il ne reste plus au malheureux poète inconnu ou méconnu qu’à recourir aux services d’un éditeur à compte d’auteur et là, les pièges sont nombreux.

Du côté du Grand Public, les choses ne vont pas mieux. A notre époque de matérialisme effréné, la Poésie est bien le dernier des soucis de Monsieur tout le Monde. La poésie ne se vend pas, elle ne s’écoute pas non plus. Les médias, la télévision, me direz-vous ? Certes, ce serait là encore un bon moyen de faire connaître la Poésie. Mais on vous opposera
l’audimat, cet outil d’évaluation taux d’écoute d’une émission et ce ne sont pas cinq minutes de Poésie qui vont faire « monter l’audimat ». Le public des téléspectateurs préférant se jeter sur les séries américaines, on lui en sert à toute heure, on l’en gave, il en redemande… Sur les chaînes publiques où la publicité vient d’être supprimée après vingt heures, libérant ainsi de larges plages, nous aurions pu espérer qu’un temps minime de parole serait laissé aux poètes. Que nenni, personne n’a pensé à la Poésie. On préfère passer en boucle dans cet espace libre, l’annonce des prochaines émissions jusqu’à huit jours à l’avance. Conclusion : pas de Poésie à la télévision.

Il reste les poètes eux-mêmes. Ah, les poètes !

Le Landerneau poétique, qui compte les poètes par dizaines de milliers, continue à nous offrir l’affligeant spectacle du combat des soi-disant anciens contre les soi-disant modernes ! Il n’y a sans doute pas mieux à faire…

Ainsi, on trouve les partisans purs et durs du vers classique, et je préfère pour ma part parler de vers régulier, le vers classique étant celui qui a fit florés au XVIIème et au XVIIIème siècles mais qui n’est déjà plus celui de la poésie d’un Hugo, d’un Baudelaire, d’un Verlaine ou d’un Rimbaud. Les tenants de ce genre d’écriture, au nom d’une certaine tradition, affichent le plus souvent un souverain mépris pour tout ce qui ne respecte pas les règles édictées par Boileau.

A l’autre extrême du tableau, on trouve, tout aussi purs et durs, les partisans du vers libre. Au nom d’une certaine modernité, ils montrent pour le vers régulier une profonde aversion et considèrent ce genre d’écriture comme une survivance d’un passé révolu.

En fait, une récente enquête portant sur les publications de ces cinquante dernières années a montré qu’il y a encore 60 % de poètes qui écrivent en vers réguliers, et l’Académie de Poésie française, anciennement Académie de Poésie classique, vient de décerner son grand prix à une jeune poète de trente ans. Poésie classique pas morte !

Dieu merci on trouve entre ces deux camps, des poètes et ils sont nombreux, qui ne sont les inconditionnels d’aucune forme d’écriture et qui jugent cette querelle dépassée voire ridicule. Le vers libre n’est pas la manifestation d’une quelconque modernité : il a toujours existé. Quant au vers régulier, il n’est pas une survivance du passé, bien au contraire il perdure de nos jours avec force et vigueur plus que jamais.

Soyons plus ouverts :
Le poète choisit le mode d’écriture qui lui convient, celui par lequel il va le mieux savoir exprimer ses émotions, sa vérité poétique et la faire partager. Choisit-il le vers régulier ? qu’il se garde de tomber dans le « ronron à douze pattes » porteur de mièvreries qui ne sont qu’anti-poésie. On peut aujourd’hui encore, à l’ombre du panthéon que fut Victor Hugo, écrire en alexandrins tout en faisant preuve de renouveau et d’originalité. Choisit-il le vers libre ? qu’il se garde de tomber dans le « n’importe quoi n’importe comment » souvent porteur de formules absconses qui ne sont également qu’anti-poésie. Pour écrire en vers libres, ne faut-il pas connaître d’abord les règles et les avoir pratiquées afin de bien savoir s’en affranchir et de pouvoir s’en imposer d’autres : ses propres règles.

Voilà l’opinion qui est la nôtre à la Société des Poètes Français.

Le tableau que je viens de brosser de notre monde poétique, assez pessimiste j’en conviens, nous interdit-il tout espoir de rendre à la Poésie ses lettres de noblesse ? Je ne crois pas. Il faut au contraire espoir garder. Avec ses plusieurs centaines d’associations qui s’activent de leur mieux, avec ses plusieurs centaines de revues qui paraissent courageusement contre vents et marées, le monde de la Poésie témoigne d’une vitalité admirable et, dans un avenir qui n’est peut-être pas si lointain, le poète saura faire retrouver à l’homme cette part de rêve et, plus encore, de spiritualité, qui est en lui, sans laquelle la vie n’est pour lui que morne existence.

Some Poems by Vital Heurtebize

Toi, ma vie …

Tu me taquines l’âme et tu me fais aimer ce qui n’était hier que rancœur et que haine :
Je ne sais plus punir, je ne sais plus blâmer car je trouve à la vie une beauté soudaine …

car elle te ressemble !… elle a pris la couleur de tes yeux !… et l’air doux qu’au matin je respire a le parfum de ton haleine !… et la pâleur du ciel s’efface avec ta voix, avec ton rire ! …

Je sais que l’arbre qui s’incline sur les blés épouse ta lumière au contour de tes hanches …
Je sais que les ruisseaux en mon cœur rassemblés ont le goût de tes pleurs au bas des pages blanches …
Quand ta faille mouillée au ressac de mes flots
fais déferler en moi tes tempêtes de brume,
et perler une larme entre tes cils mi-clos,
j’aime la mer de tes mains d’algues et d’écume !…

Tu peux me taquiner !… à l’endroit !… à l’envers !…
qu’au bord de toi, mon cœur à ton cœur se retienne !
cette beauté qu’enfin je trouve à l’univers,
c’est la tienne !

L’Enfant de ton rêve.

Jusqu’à ton sanctuaire en ta forêt profonde,
j’irai !… Tu me diras : « J’accueille en moi l’enfant
qui, tant et tant de fois, yeux clairs et tête blonde,
me parlait dans la nuit ou pleurait dans le vent …

et qui me parle !…et sa voix douce comme une onde
d’amour, berce mon âme … et qui pleure souvent …
et ses larmes, d’un flot qui déferle et m’inonde,
mêlent à ses sanglots son langage innocent … »

Et moi, je te dirai : « Cet enfant de ton rêve,
accueille-le … Je suis cet enfant … Autrefois,
ma nacelle d’osier s’échoua sur ta grève

où tu me recueillis pour la première fois …
Et depuis, c’est par moi que ton âme s’élève :
mes larmes sont ta plainte et mon verbe ta voix ! »

L’au-revoir du poète

Quand je serai parti chanter dans les étoiles,
tu m’entendras, le soir … tu diras : « c’est le vent,
un bruit d’ailes d’oiseaux, un glissement de voiles … »
Ecoute bien : c’est moi qui chanterai souvent
pour toi ... Je chanterai les chansons que tu aimes, 
ton cœur, les écoutant, tremblera comme avant, 
mais aussi, j’écrirai mille nouveaux poèmes 
que j’aurais tant voulu t’offrir de mon vivant.

Tu vois ! il ne faut pas pleurer ... Je suis ma route ...
Il ne faut pas laisser monter en toi le doute :
je n’ai fait que partir un peu plus tôt que toi.

De mes textes épars, compose un dernier livre :
Là, quand tu seras seule et frissonnant d’émoi,
mon âme, grâce à toi, dans ton cœur va revivre

Roald Hoffmann
(Nobel Laureate)

Roald Hoffmann was born in 1937 
in Zloczów, Poland. Having 
survived the war, he came to the 
U. S. in 1949, where he now 
teaches and does research at 
Cornell University. In chemistry 
he has taught his colleagues how 
tothinkaboutelectrons 
influencingstructure and 
reactivity, and won most of the 
honors of his profession, including 
the 1981 Nobel Prize in Chemistry 
(with Kenichi Fukui). Hoffmann is 
also a writer – of poetry, essays, 
non-fiction, and plays –carving 
out his own land between poetry, 
philosophy, and science. He has 
published five books of poetry. He 
was a keynote speaker of the 
‘Science meets Poetry’ session in 
Barcelona and has sent us an 
unpublished poem for inclusion in 
this volume.
CONSTANTS OF MOTION

In mechanics, a constant of motion is a quantity that is conserved throughout the motion, imposing in effect a constraint on the motion... Common examples include energy, linear momentum, angular momentum and the Laplace-Runge-Lenz vector (for inverse-square force laws). In quantum mechanics, an observable quantity $Q$ will be a constant of motion if it commutes with the hamiltonian, $H$, and it does not itself depend explicitly on time.

(Wikipedia)

Classical
You've swung so far as to risk that top trill of your motion. There, poised, where beyond would kill, you're all potential. To move. Again, and when you do, down, it's all kinetic, and what drew you there compels you rush on. Don't stop, please.

Quantum
So the world plays tough -- torn menisci, nixed grant. And then you saunter by with simple gifts -- a touch, sweet love. I am. But now the test. Imagine it turned around: We fall in love, all settings "high," and then -- in just a trice things fall apart, shoes land, the world turns on its random wear and tear. Where are we, dear?

Equations
No outer force, the push/pull of a father's dream, career jig. It's natural. a caress given a hug returned Neither reward, nor dissipation

Time rate change Together, still. But the equations, heartless, say stasis is not an option. Just move on, kids, through war bad knees, oh a lost child. To the parts that cry and muse, love is the sole constant of the motion.
Larisa Kosta- Belobrzeckaja

Larisa Nikolaevna Belobrzeckaja-Kosta has lived in Santa Margherita Ligure, Portofino in the Province of Genoa since 2005. She is both a Professor of Industrial Chemistry and a Poet, and has written many pieces about the places she loves, and has published them in Italian, in Russian and in English in a variety of anthologies and literary reviews.

Санкт-Петербург

«Люблю тебя, Петра Творенья,
Люблю твой строгий, стройный вид...»
А.С. Пушкин

Бродя по улицам Любимого города, в моем сердце звучали слова:
«Люблю тебя, Петра Творенья,
В Тебе черпаю Вдохновенье!» октябрь 2002 года.
Так родились следующие строчки:

Есть наверное Друг -
Питербург!
Мой любимый Град -
Петроград!
Он товарищ и брат -
Ленинград!
Я Тобою живу,
Я Тобою дышу,
В Тебе черпаю вдохновенье,
Петра Великого Творенье!

(The same, in Italian:)

San Pietroburgo.

E’ probabile che
Pietroburgo sia un amico.
Dico: la mia città prediletta,
Pietrograd,
la città di Leningrado

65
che per me,
come il compagno e il fratello
è la città del barocco
dell’acciaio e del vetro.
Vivo per te, respiro per te,
cerco in te l’ispirazione,
ti amo, creatura del Grande Pietro.

(first published in 2007)

МИЛАНСКИЙ СОБОР*

Я не думаю о том:
“Мадоннина дел Дуом”**
Сердцем чувствуй Красоту,
Осуждая Пустоту;
Ожерелье из скульптур
Для готических структур.
В центре строго Милана
Нет и не было тумана;
Есть Божественное Чудо -
Яркий Свет, и
Это будет!
*В переводе с итальянского на русский язык – Миланский Собор;

**Собор Миланской Божьей Матери.

(the same, in Italian:)

Il Duomo di Milano
Il mio pensiero non va
Alla Madonnina del Duomo
Sento la bellezza con il cuore,
tutto il resto è vano.
Le sculture sono come gioielli,
 strutture gotiche.
Nel centro della seria Milano
Non c’è più la nebbia.
La Madonnina
Miracolo Divino,
è la luce splendente
sulla guglia che veglia.
C’è, e sarà così, come il pane e il vino della prima comunione.

(first published 2007 in Italian)

Barcelona

Io ci sono, sono qui a Fira.
ESOF2008 – Address.
Faccio i bagni
Nelle acque del Castelldefels.
La sabbia alzata dal vento
Negli occhi
Mi entra, Mi tocca, rimane in bocca.
Le onde, le energetiche sonde; sono due mondi, il mare e la terra di cui sono molto fiera insieme con tanta gente, che viaggia, pasticcia e piange, affolla la spiaggia; che ride, per le partite si divide; Vola, non mola, apre le braccia a Girone o a Taragona. Abbracciamo, Barcelona! E parliamo Catalano-spagnol, La costa del Sol! Io ci sono

In Biblioteca
All’Università Catalana
Dove coesistono
La curiosità, l’immaginazione e la mente sana; da un libro all’altro passo, dal quartiere giudaico al Museo di Picasso passo.
Al Palau di Musica Catalana “Ma pensee” incasso.
E’ svegliata la mente con la chitarra Dalle musiche di Aranjuez, Sors, Tarrega, come un bacio dolce e amaro presso il Teatro della magica bottega.
Un pensiero è tracciato Da Dali Salvatore, un maestro, un grande pittore.
E’ “Adagio” che non fa dormire stanotte.
Forse, ESOF2008 Direbbe molto A un cittadino colto, poco oppure niente a uno stolto. Grazie ad Euroscienze Ci siamo uniti A Barcelona.
E’ una buona permanenza, io ci sono. Grazie a DIO Che è la mia roccia, il mio rifugio dalla città caotica, Nei canti dei cori sacrali Alla Cattedrale, Barrio Gotica.
Sydney Leach

Born in London in 1924, Sydney Leach has lived in Paris since 1946, after two years of research work in the Materials/Chemistry Division of the Royal Aircraft Establishment, 1944-46. He is the author of two major unpublished works: a play, The Turing Text, on the subject of whether machines can think, inspired by an article published by Alan Turing in 1950; and In Spite of God, a picaresque novella on the theological implications of junk DNA. Before ESOF 2008, his only previously published poem was Reflections on Byzantine History, in a book by Frederick Samuels « Intense Experience: Social Psychology through Poetry », Oyster River Press, Durham, New Hampshire, U.S. (1990). Sydney Leach’s own intense poetic experience dates from his poem, The River, in 1942. Now, in 2010, with 133 Poems of Innocence and Escape, one third of which use science as metaphor or as direct subject, he is slowly catching up with the number of his publications in the realms of spectroscopy, molecular and chemical physics, astrophysics and exobiology, but has a long way to go. He regrets, and wonders why, he wrote no poems during the period 1978-2005. Perhaps Fred Samuels, Professor of Sociology, could explain but, alas, he died last year. Read his book.
Some poems by Sydney Leach

Take care!

A battering rain of comets
Brought Ganymede to life,
While neighbouring Callisto
Escaped the pregnant strife

Take care!

In Ganymede’s natal mixture
Of ice and rock, the heat
From radioactive elements
Its iron did unseat

Take care!

To form within a molten core
And drive a field, magnetic,
With influence from Jupiter
That turned it quite frenetic

Take care!

Short changed on impact energy
Callisto’s fate was raw,
It could not melt and so was left
A world without a core

Take care!

Bombardment, Late and Heavy,
For long has been a myth
But Ganymede and Callisto
Were fashioned by this smith

Take care!
The original Hephaestus
We would love to get to know
And see him discard comets
3.9 billion years ago

With utmost care!

(Paris, 10 February 2010)

Number Crunching

10 is totally indigestible
So fit to break the teeth,
And 9 remains a mouthful,
Sticks on the gum beneath,
But 8, sweet and comestible
Lingers soft and cool,
While 7, like bread in water,
Tastes of cotton wool.

Now 6's fragrance of lemon
Adds something to the palate
To cause 5's quick absorption
Within layers intercalate
So that 4, once so remote,
Slips daintily down the throat
And 3, as sly as a felon
Is swallowed like a musical note.

Sad 2, requires some gum
To be the sum of 1 + 1,
Stern 1, the singularity,
Astringent as green tea,
Is drunk in anticipation
Of the ending of the spree
When zero is sipped through a straw
And cardinals exist no more.

(Meudon, 4 September 2009)
Questions and some answers?

Does a bark exist inside a dog
Is a question philosophical,
For a withered tree to become a log
Needs an act that’s consequential,
When a thought erupts in bitter time
Do neurons cease to jitter,
Can a word be caught in silent mime
Resisting manmade glitter,
How does an egg become a man
Embodied in life’s fiction,
To end his cry with “Yes we can”
In obvious contradiction.

Perhaps some answers can be bought
With one penny for your thought.

(Sydney Leach, Sauze d’Oulx, 29 July 2009)

Enrico and Primo. A ballad*

Enrico and Primo were boys of sixteen
In an improvised lab which was not very clean,
To be a real chemist was each lad’s ambition,
They dared to experiment with brave intuition,
These two self-made chemists were nearly in bliss
On subjecting water to electrolysis.

From the cupboard they took a chemical beaker,
Put water inside, then with hands very eager
Added some salt to encourage conduction,
Took two empty jars, and with a little deduction,
They upturned and placed them down in the water
With a wire inside each as electrical porter.

Connecting the end of the wires to a battery,
One to the negative, to the other, its no flattery
To call it positive, and they straightaway saw
Little bubbles galore
With twice as much gas produced at the cathode
Than what they could judge was born at the anode.
The theory was very well known to young Primo,  
Who wrote down a chemical equation for Emilio,  
To whom he explained what they were seeing  
In vocal terms that were partially pleading  
Since to gain his best friend’s solid conviction  
Required something more than academical diction.

Then they went home, after buying some cake,  
With electrolysis continuing its course without break,  
Next morning they returned again to the scene  
To find if the final result had been  
As predicted by Primo’s great theory  
Of which friend Emilio was somewhat leery.

Primo then caused the truth to be bent,  
In saying that although he did not really invent  
Electrolysis of water, perchance in his home  
The law of proportions was his own poem.  
But Enrico would have none of this,  
He said that something was clearly amiss.

Who is to say whether oxygen’s there  
And hydrogen might be even more rare  
Since you added some salt some called marine  
One of the gases may be simply chlorine.  
Primo felt this remark to be very offending  
And thought of a test as a suitable ending.

The cathode jar he raised with palpable crispation  
And maintained with care its upright orientation  
Lit a match from afar  
Placed it under the jar  
And glass fragments in dangerous motion  
Were born in the rapid explosion.

Neither boy had been hurt,  
But their discussion was curt,  
Primo’s legs somewhat knobbly  
Became shaking and wobbly,  
For his retrospective fear  
Was somewhat hard to bear.  
But later he began to feel quite proud
To have confirmed a hypothesis out loud,
To have released one of the forces of Nature
Was a herald of his yet far-off future.
For it really was hydrogen in those jars
The very same that powers the Sun and the stars.

* [Based on the last five paragraphs of the chapter “Idrogeno” in Primo Levi’s “Il sistema periodico”]

(Gello, 15 June 2008)

Jean-Pierre Luminet

Jean-Pierre Luminet is an astrophysicist at the Paris-Meudon Observatory in France and a leading expert on blackholes, cosmology, and the new field of cosmic topology – the study of the overall shape of the universe. He has published numerous articles in the most prestigious journals and reviews in these areas. He was awarded many prizes for his work in pure science and in science communication. Indeed one of Luminet’s greatest efforts has been to make his research work understandable to the non-scientific community.
Luminet is also a prominent figure in art and literature. He has produced a dozen of popular science books, six historical novels, TV documentaries, multimedia productions, and six collections of poetry. He is also an artist, engraver and sculptor and has collaborated with celebrated musicians. Luminet’s literary work has been translated into a dozen languages.

THE COSMOS AS A POEM

As an astrophysicist and a writer, I am apparently well prepared to give a talk about cosmic poetry. However it is not so obvious. During many years I conducted these two activities quite independently – I mean scientific investigation of the nature of the universe through the study of relativity, black holes, cosmology, topology, and poetic writing. I even refuted any relationship between these two ways of apprehending the world.

I began to publish poetry 30 years ago, at the same epoch when I also published my first scientific works, however my poetic works had nothing to do with astronomy. For me, poetry had to express feelings, emotions, and subjects that cannot not be reached by rational investigation, such as love, death, beauty, loneliness, despair, and so on.

However, later on I was involved in a nice project about astronomy and poetry. My publisher asked me to collect various texts of cosmic poetry, from different epochs and different cultures. I discovered how the greatest poets like Lucretius, Dante, Omar Khayyam, Victor Hugo, Gérard de Nerval, Edgar Poe and many others, had written the deepest things about the cosmos. They proved how poetic intuition could rejoin, or even sometimes anticipate, the scientific discoveries about the nature of the universe.

The figuration of the sky is not limited to pure astronomical representation, so imposing it is. As soon as it is a question of thinking the universe, the various disciplines of the mind are intertwined in an unravelled bond, as twenty-five centuries of cosmological questioning through science, philosophy, religion, art and poetry can testify. The universe— what there is of vaster and more subtle, of more foreign and more intimate at the same time,— is the cornerstone of creative imagination, the prototype even of any mental construction.

The specific link between the scientific and artistic approaches of the universe is manifest in the explicit representations of the cosmos : celestial charts, the design of telescopes and measuring instruments, diagrams of world systems, all translate a deep aesthetic concern. From black limestone «
kudurrus » appearing in old Babylonian cosmogonies to recent photographs of gravitational lenses taken by the Hubble Space Telescope, from medieval illuminated manuscripts on the creation of the world to XVIIth century uranographic atlases set in the baroque style, from the circular perfection of Ptolemaic astronomy to the foam of baby-universes spouted out of the quantum vacuum, the will to translate some kind of celestial harmony is omnipresent among thinkers of the cosmos. Harmony directly visible in the gold nails of the firmament, but especially invisible harmony, hidden in the secret beauty of the curves and equations of cosmic mechanics. As Heraclitus said: « The most beautiful universe is a pouring out of sweepings at random. Nature likes to hide. The hidden harmony is better than the obvious. »

The term of cosmos is etymologically related to æsthetics - just as cosmetics. At the times of Homer and Hesiod, it was employed to describe the ornaments, physical or moral attraction, order, poetry, truth. Pythagoras and Plato adopted the word to indicate the whole universe. Consequently the cosmos, associated with the logos, became synonymous with a majestic and imposing universe, governed by beauty, harmony, order, and understandable to human's mind.

But which kind of mind? That of the astronomer, the geometer, the philosopher, or the poet? According to Plato, astronomy must be treated under the angle of mathematics and geometry, rather than under that of æsthetics or art. In Phaedrus, he even affirms: « But of the heaven which is above the heavens, what earthly poet ever did or ever will sing worthily? ».

This peremptory standpoint raises the question of literary æsthetics. Indeed, each one reminds some verses where star names resound, emphatic invocations to the moon, the sun or the Milky Way. Force is to recognize that this type of poetry uses astronomy only as an element of decoration, and makes only consolidate the judgement of Plato. I shared myself this opinion a long time. Exasperated by the amalgams of the kind: « You are an astronomer? Then you must be also a poet! », I hardly tasted this alleged « scientific poetry » presented in a didactic form, still less these lyrical flights plated on the scientist's jargon, using of grandiloquent words with capital letters, such as Energy, Field, Quasar or Big Bang, supposed to conceal all the poetic mystery of the world. Fifteen years ago, I nevertheless devoted myself to the exploration and study of an authentic « cosmic poetry » nourished by the man's interrogative glance on the universe.

Throughout its history, this kind of « universalist » poetry - that can be opposed to « egotistic » poetry which more exploits the register of emotion
and subjectivity - is divided into two currents: that which imitates and that which invents. The first, didactic, deals with the topics provided by science and praises the scientific discoveries. Then the poet doubles the word of the scientist, making use of the lyric language and metaphor to try to differently express an emotion which does not pass by the equations. Science proposes an « external wonder » that the didactic poet tries to transform into an « internal wonder ». Except some masterpieces due to Lucretius, du Bartas or more recently Jacques Réda, it does not really succeed. Didactic poetry however gives a right reflection of the integration of the scientific knowledge in the culture at a given time. For this reason, it provides an invaluable information source for the historians and the epistemologists.

The second current belongs to poets who, knowing how to see beyond the decoration, are able to reinvent the world. I call them « dreamers of the universe » - in homage to romantic German Jean-Paul Richter, the author of an absolute masterpiece of cosmic poetry entitled Dream of the Universe (1820). Such a poetry wants to be the widest and most intense representation of « this constantly alive and constantly changing reality, whose various parts are closely bound and mutually interpenetrate » (Henri Poincaré).

A striking illustration of my purpose are the verses of Gérard de Nerval in his Les Chimères (1854), where he closely follows a text of Jean-Paul Richter about the poet’s vision of a dead star. He offers a seizing description of the whirling spiral of matter, space and time which engulf forever at the bottom of Nothingness – namely what later on astronomers will call a « black hole ». Indeed the scientific concept of black hole devourer of light and matter appeared only in the second half of XXth century. In 1979, I carried out computer simulations of the optical appearance of a black hole surrounded by a luminous gaseous disc. A virtual « photograph » of the black hole was thus produced, and appears today in handbooks of astronomy. However, to describe the scientific calculation, no caption would fit better than the Nerval stanzas (than I did not know at the time):

En cherchant l’œil de Dieu, je n’ai vu qu’un orbite
Vaste, noir et sans fond, d’où la nuit qui l’habite
Rayonne sur le monde et s’épaissit toujours ;

Un arc-en-ciel étrange entoure ce puits sombre,
Seuil de l’ancien chaos dont le néant est l’ombre,
Spirale engloutissant les Mondes et les Jours !

Thus the dreamer of the universe, enriched by his asset in all fields of knowledge, also enriched by his gaps and his doubts, by his strangely
foreseeing intuition, recreates a balanced and synthetic comprehension of the world. He reconsiders the objective facts that sciences bring to him and he supplements them with intuition, he finds in them secret unitary resonances. The abysses of vastness and smallness revealed by telescope and microscope, the hidden harmony of natural laws, the various of constantly changing forms of life are worthy topics to try it. Formerly the cosmic poet dreamed on universal attraction, the primitive nebula or the cold death of the worlds; today quantum mechanics, the big bang, the black holes or the space conquest open new poetic fields.

The appearance of a distant black hole surrounded by an accretion disc (J.-P. Luminet, Astron. & Astrophys. 75, 228, 1979).

This is precisely what the poet Francis Ponge claimed in his « Text on Electricity » (1954), a true manifesto for the revival of scientific poetry:

Here, we are back at a time very similar to that of the Cyclopes, far beyond classical Greece, far beyond Thales and Euclid, and almost at the time of Chaos. The great goddesses are sitting, once again, undoubtedly conjured up by man, but he is terror stricken when he imagines them. They are Angstrom, Light-Year, Nucleus, Frequency, Wave, Energy, Psi-Function, Uncertainty. Like the Summerian divinities, they too stagnate in a fantastic inertia but approaching them makes one dizzy. And in their aprons, written in abstract script, formulas are inscribed in advanced math. No hymn, in everyday language, could ever reach them. It would not even reach their knees. And that is why we cannot hear any of them (that is a fact), nor be tempted to compose a fitting one.
Our forms of thought, our rhetorical figures, actually date from Euclid: ellipses, hyperboles, paraboles, are also figures of that geometry. What would you want us to do? Well, exactly what we are doing, we artists, we poets, when we work well. And I do not pretend, in my case, that this has just happened. Assuredly not. It happens when we too dig into our matter: into meaningful sounds. Heedless of ancient forms and melting them back into a mass, as it is done with old statues, in order to make cannons out of them, ammunition . . . and, when necessary, new columns according to the demands of the Times.

Thus, we may perhaps, one day, create new Figures that will allow us to put our trust in the Word, in order to traverse curved Space, non-Euclidean Space.

Let me now conclude with a more personal view on poetry. For me a major point to be underlined is the close relationship between mathematics, theoretical physics and poetry: in both cases the question of the most economic language is fundamental. I mean that mathematicians and physicists try to condense their thinking into short, concise, beautiful and striking equations. It is also what the poet tries to do. As a matter of fact I am not an astronomer but a theoretician of astrophysics. Thinking about my own practice in poetry, I realised only rather recently and après-coup how my investigations about the nature of space-time, non-Euclidean geometries, black holes, topology and cosmology had a secret influence on my poetic style (if I have any style!).

My first poems were purely linear, like time. Then, through my scientific work, I discovered how space is geometrically richer than time. Because time has only one dimension, there are only two topologies of time: linear and cyclic. Space topology is much richer. This can be transposed to poetry: the space of the poem can be considered as a topological space, which can be penetrated by different ways of reading, different gates. It was already the case with Mallarmé and Valéry. For instance Valéry considered that the poem had to provide a « feeling of the Universe ». I practice much the idea of polysemy, namely multiplicity of meanings depending on the way a poem can be spatially read. This is clearly related to what in geometry and
topology is called multiconnectedness, a property that I much exploited in my scientific researches to produce specific models for the shape of cosmic space, such as the « Poincaré dodecahedral space », which is presently a good fit to observational data. In that sense I unwillingly followed the Stéphane Mallarmé’s prescription, who wrote in 1866 « I had, with the help of a great sensitivity, understood the intimate correlation of Poetry with the Universe, and so that it is pure, I conceived the intention of leaving it from Dream and Chance and to juxtapose it with the design of the Universe. »


Some poems by Jean-Pierre Luminet

Ciel nocturne
peuple d’étincelles
ta nuit est une mer sans rivages dont les jours sont les îles.

Il y a des portions de firmament
vides d’étoiles et d’un noir absolu

 Certains y voient de simples déchirures
entre les amas stellaires

 D’autres navigateurs prétendent que ces masses d’ombre frappent d’aveuglement ceux qui les regardent

(extrait d’Itinéraire céleste, Le Cherche-midi éditeur, 2004)

(The same in Spanish :)

Cielo nocturno
poblado de fulgores
tu noche es un mar sin orillas cuyos días son islas.

Hay fragmentos de firmamentos
vacíos de estrellas y de un negro absoluto

Algunos ven simples desgarros
entre los montones estelares
Otros navegantes pretenden que esas masas de sombra golpean ciegamente a aquellos que las miran

(traduit par Vivian Lofiego)

Les rayons sont ses mains
ses yeux les étoiles
les corps détestent le vide et se réjouissent de leur contact mutuel

Insécurité d’un ciel où monte la flambée
D’astres éphémères.
la Nature-machine traque avec acharnement la vie dans tous ses refuges.

Les astres sont de grands animaux
les planètes naissent des soleils
cœur dégorgée
ce sont les amours du fer et de l’aimant

La goutte d’eau prélude au nuage
qui prélude au soleil
cuirassé d’une fine écorce de neige

(extrait d’Itinéraire céleste, Le Cherche-midi éditeur, 2004)

(The same in Spanish:)

Los rayos son sus manos
sus ojos las estrellas
los cuerpos aborrecen y se gozan de su contacto mutuo

Inseguridad de un cielo donde sube la fogata
de astros efímeros
la Naturaleza-máquina acosa encarnizada
la vida en todos sus refugios

Los astros son animales grandes
los planetas nacen de los soles
espuma derramada
son los amores del hierro y del imán
La gota de agua preludia a la nube
que preludia al sol
acorazada de una fina cáscara de nieve

(traduit par Vivian Lofiego)

La tête dans les mains des savants fatigués
sont à leurs tables nues
qui pensent ou rêvent
las d’avoir gravi
des escaliers sans but
vers des dedans bornés

Ces rêveurs à leur table n’ont plus de cahiers
Les escaliers sont de chaque côté

Chacun doit monter
comme s’il avait des ailes

Les travaillants dormeurs penchés réfléchissent le
monde
et leurs lunettes sur les lointains
sont des canons braqués
subtils

Toutes les autres machines compliquées sont inutiles

Et nous
planant au ciel d’une treizième étoile
apercevant les clives par où
dans onze dimensions
table et chercheur sont pris tels des mouches
en haut
un verre feuilleté réplique et refaçonne
infiniment les moires à mirages des murs

(extrait d’Itinéraire céleste, Le Cherche-midi éditeur, 2004)
La cabeza entre las manos de los sabios fatigados
estan en sus mesas desnudas
pensando o soñando
cansados de haber escalado
escaleras sin rumbo
hacia un adentro cernado

Esos soñadores no tienen mas cuadernos en sus
mesas

Las escaleras estan a cada lado

Cada uno debe subirlas
como si tuviera alas

Los trabajandos durmientes inclinados
reflejan el mundo
y sus anteojos sobre las lejanias
son sutiles cañones
enfocados

Las otras complicadas maquinas
son inútiles

Y nosotros
aplanadores del cielo de una décimo tercera estrella
percibimos las hendiduras por donde
en once dimensiones
mesa y trabajandos fueron tomados como moscas
en lo alto
un vidrio hojaldrado reproduce y labra
infinitamente los tornasolados espejismos de los muros

(traduit par Vivian Lofiego)
La douceur de la danse est passée

Danse silencieuse
Ivresse du mouvement circulaire, légèrement embarrassée par les irrégularités célestes.
Le moins chaud tourne autour du plus chaud, à juste distance.

L'apanage des êtres vivants est le mouvement volontaire et l'irruption est un bris de clôture.

L'espace est plein comme une petite chambre. Aussi loin qu'il porte, nous trouvons des soleils et toute sensation excitée, les membres de nos corps animaux se mouvant le long des filaments solides de nos nerfs...
Ces rapprochements sans heurts, ces nœuds dénoués, cette confusion aussitôt démêlée...
d'autres glissements se produisent et nos nuits rayonnent d'une splendeur inconnue.

Ce qui semble noir, muet, se comble de son et de clarté. La lumière forme avec tes mèches des rets infinis, qui lient toutes les parties de mon univers et les désirs en sont les nœuds.

Riche en corps noirs invisibles, feutrée de nébuleuses obscures qui absorbent l'excès de mes rayons ta ténèbre est féconde
Son eau noire, du sépulcre dissous vagues lourdes et suffocantes corps plus pâle que tous les ors imaginables.

Le vide est un creux psychologique
Unité indéfiniment rompue par une dispersion nouvelle.
Etait-ce un soleil de feu ? Non, un globe obscur, terraqué mais environné d'un éther raffiné.
Le corps est donc obscur.
Pour une raison logique les petits corps obscurs tournent autour des étoiles.
Voilà ce qui détermine les courbes et les formes

L'attraction n'est pas une loi d'amour :
c'est une chaîne.
Rotation, perpétuel recommencement

La lumière visible elle aussi est un trou
une faille
une diminution de quelque chose d'autre.

Et moi
si joyeusement accueilli par ces gemmes de lumière vivante
qui forment couronne autour de toi
demeure un étranger dans ton espace.

De la nature (extrait)

Le diamant qui étincelle dans l'ombre
devient par frottement le plus beau des phosphores
or fulminant aux explosions terribles
quartz absolu qui n'est autre que feu solide
vie figée
l'homme ne l'a jamais vu

L'aventure intérieure pèse plus lourd que l'expérience objective
je crois pourtant à la définitive aurore
tremper dans cette lumière liquide qui fait de nous des corps glorieux

L'Être est une farce éphémère
un fond de rien où l'espace et le temps explosent
œuvre tumultueuse du diable
divine mort rêve de pierre
Le jour du minéral est venu
contre son invasion nous barricadons les oasis

Les montagnes craquent
les mers fument contre le ciel

Douce tiédeur de la concoction
brûlure du désir
la vie organique est éternelle
comme des étincelles dans les roseaux
transmués en substance lumineuse
nous sommes une lente rêverie végétale
où s’étirent les rameaux du désir

inédit, 2010

De Natura (extracto)
(Spanish version)

El diamante que relumbra en la sombra se transforma
al friccionar en el más bello de los fósforos
estalla en terribles explosiones cuarzo absoluto fuego sólido
el hombre no lo vio jamás

La aventura interior pesa más que la experiencia objetiva
sin embargo creo en la firme aurora
empaparnos en esta luz líquida que nos transforma en cuerpos gloriosos

El ser es una farsa efímera, fondo de nada, donde el tiempo y el espacio
explotan
tumultuosa obra del diablo muerte divina sueño de piedra
El día del mineral llegó frente a su invasión levantamos barricadas de oasis
las montañas se hunden las mareas humean al cielo

Suavidad minuciosa quemadura del deseo vida orgánica eterna
como los fulgores de los ramos trasmutados en sustancias luminosas somos
un lento sueño vegetal donde se estiran los juncos del deseo

trad. Vivian Lofiego.

KIRCHERIANA

Je ne vois que courants d'éther
mers en ébullition
pétillantes sur la face placide des lunes
poix visqueuses d'or fondu dans les cratères
flux et reflux de cet or liquide

Rêveur de grottes
je suis le voyageur d'une barque
incombustible
Les globes ont un squelette perforé d'alvéoles
canaux à circulation active
destinés à produire les vertus cachées

Monde inconstant
aux éruptions et vapeurs passagères
dont les altérations ne font plus scandale
j'admire les variations perpétuelles
les macules sur ta face radieuse et frénétique

(extrait d’Itinéraire céleste, Le cherche-midi éditeur, 2004)
I see only currents of ether
boiling seas
sparkling on the placid face of the moons
viscous gold pitches melted in craters
the ebb and flow of this liquid gold

Dreamer of caves
I am the traveller of a fireproof
boat
The spheres have a skeleton
perforated of cells
channels with active circulation
intended to produce the hidden virtues

Inconstant world
with momentary eruptions and vapors
whose alterations do not make any more scandal
I admire the perpetual variations
maculae on your radiant and frantic face

(traduit par J.-P. Luminet)

L’autre et le même

J’ai tant de questions à lui poser
quel message a-t-elle pour moi
si seulement je m’en allais
tout ce temps j’ai cru que c’était un jeu
on pourrait avoir de la lumière ici
il y a un corps dans cette maison un corps chaud
attendre que quelque chose se passe
pour l’instant elle apparaît d’une pureté cristalline
dis-moi ce que tu sais
sur la cristallisation de l’espace
tu sais cette lueur dans les yeux
j’ai remarqué que ton corps est différent des autres
les morceaux sont froids
c'est magnifique le froid il ralentit l’écoulement quelqu’un là-dehors a vu quelque chose je dois comprendre pourquoi pour certains la mort donne tout son sens c’est cela l’énigme une façon d’empêcher les autres de s’approcher une question de survie

The Same and the Other
I’ve so many questions to ask her
what message has she got for me
if only I’d gone away
I always thought it was a game
there’s light to be had here
there’s a body in that house a warm body
waiting for something to happen
she appears at present a perfect crystalline purity
tell me what you know
of space’s crystallisation
you know that gleam in the eyes
I’ve noticed your body is different from others
the bits and pieces are cold
extraordinary thing the cold it slows down circulation
someone out there’s seen something
I should understand why for some
death yields all its meaning
that’s the enigma
a way of stopping others from coming close
a question of survival
(tr. Peter A. Boyle)

Alla Valeria Mikhalevich

Alla Mikhalevich is a scientist, a poet and translator.

At present – the leading officer of Zoological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences; Doctor of biological sciences; the author of more than 200 scientific publications (including 5 monographs). She is a member of a number of the All-Russian and international scientific societies participating over 60 all-Russian and International scientific (and literary) meetings; awarded by the Grzybowski Foundation Society and the Presidium of the Russian Academy of sciences; prize-winner of Saint-Petersburg competition “Woman of the year - 2009” (nomination in science). She is Member of the Unions of Writers of Saint-Petersburg and of the Unions of Writers of Russia, the author of the 6 books of poetry; was published in the Russian literary journals (“Zvezda”, “Neva”, “Arion” and others) and foreign editions. She teaches poetry in the two literary circles; is Prize-winner of the Zabolotskiy prize(2007). Poems translated into English, French, Italian and Kirghiz languages.

She also published 5 books of translations, translating Roald Hoffmann (USA), Seamus Heaney, Sacha Abercorn, poets of the “World of Mouth” collective (Ireland) and other recent poets of these countries. Translations awarded by the American Corner in S. Petersburg (Russia), Peter Meinke in S. Petersburg (USA). Alla Mikhalevich likes to cite one of her beloved poets Nikolay Zabolotskiy: ”It seems to me, that the art of the future would so tightly merge with the science, that even now it is time for us…”
POETRY IN SAINT PETERSBURG SINCE AKHMATOVA

For the Russian poetry of the second half of the 20-th century Anna Akhmatova had actually been the only representative of that high culture which is conventionally associated with the Silver age of the Russian poetry. The important fact was that she continued her creative activity. After the elder generation had gone, and the younger one turned out to be under the ban or in exile Akhmatova even being persecuted and unacknowledged by the official authorities, half forbidden, still remained the symbol of this high culture, as it was she was responsible for all the high Russian poetry.

Though Anna Akhmatova is a symbol of classical Russian poetry of the XX century, as a whole, her presence in Saint Petersburg is marked by a special significance.

Firstly, the circle of St. Petersburg intelligentsia which had the opportunity to be acquainted with her still exists and (until quite recently) was even wider. And it is even wider of those of us who knew her at one remove. Thus, for instance, my husband lived in the very centre of St. Petersburg in an old wing of the Petersburg house where Kharms, Oleynikov, Zabolotskiy had climbed so often the wooden stairs. And I too went up the same stairs and sat at the same table.

And secondly, Petersburg (at that time Leningrad), the disgraced capital of the abrogated imperia, traditionally preserved first of all the stylistics of classical poetry. And this was, and still is in a sense, its resistance to Moscow, not only as to the center of everything official, everything soviet but also to the stronghold of unstrained modernism the brightest expression of which were the futurists.

And in this sense even the Moscow “Underground” differs from the Underground Movement in Petersburg significantly. The former reproduced the stylistics first of all of the formal futurists achievements, the latter – either based itself on the Acmeist style, or, following in the direction of the modernist’s searches reproduced not only the external features but also the philosophy of Oberiuts whose school was by far deeper, more philosophically oriented and at times had more in common with surrealism than with Russian futurism. Indeed, the live presence of Kharms, Oleynikov, Zabolotskiy could be felt in Leningrad in the Fifties and Sixties and continues to be felt up to the present day. I can again give a personal example mentioned above.
After Akhmatova died the direct influence of late Akhamatova, of that Akhmatova, who was not so much the personification of the thingness and lightness of the Acmeism as the pathos of the whole of classical Russian poetry showed itself in the poets belonging to her nearest circle – Dmitriy Bobyshev, Anatoliy Naiman, and Brodsky as well. But it is characteristic of Brodsky that no less significant a predecessor for him was Marina Tsvetaeva – the perpetual female antipode of Akhmatova in Russian poetry. It is to Tsvetaeva that Brodsky owes his daring stylistic torsions, the intensity of his poetic speech. But the main thing that he got from Akhmatova as well as generally from the classic Russian poetry is the feature that his intensiveness never turned to excessiveness. To the point, in the first years of his poetic activity he already had a lot of imitators exploiting more or less successively his style, prosody and his intonation and there are such imitators up to the present days.

And quite another Akhmatova influenced the other first-rate poet of the second part of the XX-th century – Alexander Kushner. Beginning from the poetisation of seemingly minor details of life similar to Akhmatova’s “glove from the left hand” which made her famous in her own time, Kushner was uniquely capable of transforming into the poetry any manifestation of life. And it was precisely this happy capability that created the Kushner’s school (and he always was in the company of his pupils). He made this school the most fruitful and promising one in recent Petersburgian and to a considerable degree in all recent Russian poetry. At present time, some well-known Petersburgian poets could be considered as the leaders of this trend. However it is significant that all of them more or less having studied in one way or another the Kushner school nevertheless differ significantly from each other.

Alexey Purin is the most brilliant representative of the Petersburgian (as well as of Russian) poetry. His poems are saturated and sometimes even oversaturated with the realia of the world culture – of antiquity, Renaissance, of the silver and golden ages of the Russian poetry. The multiple cultural associations in Purin’s poetry go well with the accurate vision of the details of every-day life, with the love to the things. The harmony and proportion are characteristic of his poetic style, and also the balance between the high style and conversational language, but almost never does he lose himself either to archaic pathos or into vulgar language or obscene language.

The other remarkable representative of this trend is Alexey Mashevski, who had already time to create his own circle of followers. A special attention to the philosophy and to the world culture history is characteristic of him. His
poems are also nearly always oriented to classic Russian poetry, and perhaps most of all to Innokentiy Annenskiy. Alexander Tankov also is oriented to the classic tradition and to Silver Age poetry though he does this in somewhat different manner. His poems are marked by strong emotional force at times resembling those of early Pasternak and going together with the classic realia and with the nor less classical vocabulary though significantly diluted with the modern expressions. Nikolay Kononov also belongs to this school although his poetic manner does not remain unaffected by attempts at modernism. Today he is mostly known as a prose author.

The bright lyric poets of this course are also Alexander Frolov and Vasilii Rusakov. The poems of the former are also composed as a poems having story, they are shot through with humour, the language of his poems heroes is often full of vernacular. Rusakov trends to paying homage to the realia of the western culture and also creates images of common contemporary people with all their everyday problems and intensive feelings.

In the visible proximity (first of all personal nearness) but at the same time at a certain distance from this poetry stands David Raskin’s poetry. Initially he had tried to interweave Russian Acmeist traditions with the poetic style of the German expressionism. The poetic intensity of his poems is often formed as a result of the collision of present day literary language and terms borrowed from the science, technology, sometimes from computer terminology (he was the first to introduce it into the texts written in verse) and also as a result of combining of free verse with solemn intonation and exact classical rhyme, as well as on account of the high associativity comparable with that of Mandelstam. Alexander Kushner notes that there is something Kafkaesque in his poems and at the same time they are stamped as an engraved Latin.

To the Kushner’s circle belongs also such an original and, from my point of view, one of the most first-rate Russian poets as Ivan Duda. His Russian language as well as Gogol’s language at his time renders in his texts the harmony and intonation of the Ukranian language (the native language of Duda). Poetry of Ivan Duda is based on paradoxical ironic intonation, very thin stylistic torsions combined with the lyric force and shrill poetic revelations. In spite of seeming simplicity and even naivety, in spite of some outward awkwardness, this poetry is exquisite, extremely delicate resting on the whole spiritual wealth of Russian poetic style and tradition. In some mysterious kind he manages to express in his poems some collective unconscious state. It is impossible to render all the fascination of his poems retelling them and unfortunately they are very difficult to translate.
The ability to turn into the poetry all the manifestations of the everyday life was the main achievement of the Kushner’s school but this way neither stylistically nor semantically is neither inexhaustible nor the only way. The present-day consumer of poetry is more often a person concerned with the recent science and technology either directly or at least indirectly. That is why it seems to me to be extremely important to introduce into poetry not only the vocabulary, not only the elements of the conceptual apparatus but also the ideas of the recent science. For me, there is a good reason to believe that the philosophical attempts to make sense of the world and of the human being which always was one of the goals of the high poetry is impossible without knowing the progress of the recent science. What I call the scientific poetry is the widening of both of the poetic lexicon and the semantic filling of the poetry as well. In my creative way I try to follow this path. And I suppose all of us here participating in this seminar try to realize namely these principles.

Another noticeable trend of the Petersburgian poetry of the end of the 20-th – the beginning of the 21-th century could be considered the creative work of such a bright representatives of the Leningrad underground as Elena Shwartz, Sergey Stratanovsky, Viktor Krivulin and others. Fortunately, their poetry is translated and they are rather well known at the West. This circumstance delivers me from the necessity to characterize their poetry in detail. All of them have much in common developing others than Akhmatova’s traditions. For Elena Shwartz in her youth and possibly till her last days (she died this winter) Tsvetaeva was the main poet. She makes an effort to take from her the force of the poetic pressure, unstrained expression, and at the same time the mixed style sometimes turning to an infantile attitude to the poetic word. In this poet’s poems passion always prevail the harmony and the strength of the poetic word does not always relay its accuracy.

From his youth Victor Krivulin tried to resist the Acmeist traditions prevailing in the Leningrad poetry. In his poems one can notice the influence of Alexander Blok who was by the way one of the most Peterburgian among the symbolists. Apropos, Krivulin was not free from the influence of modernism including the European one.

Sergey Stratanovsky was and still is one of the most original Russian poets. The outward paradoxicality and sometimes even the parodistic character of his poetry manifestly calling up with Kharms and Zabolotskiy is going together with the profundity of his poetic thought. The social and epic trend in his poetry is also doubtless. Among the other poets of the Leningrad
underground poetry such names as Vladimir Ufljand, Lev Danovskiy, Olga Beshenkovskaya, Elena Ignatova, Edward Shneiderman could also be called.

For the late soviet Leningrad cultural life the presence of the informal half legal places was characteristic around which the activity of the poets, prose authors, painters and musicians was concentrated. The most well known place of these was the famous Saigon – unofficial name of the café “Moscow” situated in the very center of the city on the corner of the Nevsky and Vladimirsky prospects. Though it would be necessary to say that Saigon did not generate some unified poetic tradition. Indeed, it was not capable of generating one. The main thrust of the artistic circle consisted in the resistance to the official culture. But if the resistance of Brodsky, Shwartz, Krivulin, Stratanovsky and of some others resulted in undoubted poetic achievements, the poetic production of the majority of the typical Saigon visitors not being different in form from the official soviet literature did not exceed it in its quality too much. The most noticeable and typical “Saigon heroes” unfortunately didn’t mark in the Russian poetry.

More profound and more interesting was the poetic circle assembling on Malaya Sadovaya street, somewhat earlier than the Saigon became so popular. A serious passion for philosophy, an aspiration for the philosophical discussion of the world was characteristic of this group. They tried with the more or less success to combine this philosophizing with the achievements of the Russian modernism of the beginning of the 20-th century. The most characteristic poet of this circle was Leonid Aronzon who passed away early.

For a long time the leader of the modernist experimental trend in the Petersburgian poetry was Victor Sosnora who had brilliantly debuted in the early 1960-s with a poetry book inspired by the images of the ancient Russia. Though Sosnora significantly stood out against a background of the official literature but he nevertheless was published from time to time and he even had time to rear several followers.

The soviet poetry, beginning from the sharp breaking with the traditions in its flourishing period came to lean on some reductive classical tradition, on the realism; the epic genre and narrative poems were welcomed, ideologically approved lyric was also permitted As it always happens under the totalitarian regimes, poetry had a tendency towards monumentalism and using the achievements of the classic denied the modernism. Futurism as well as any other forms of search was prohibited. Canonical soviet poetry was the imitation of the classic but placed at the service of ideology. Though it is not customary to take into account the official soviet poetry nevertheless
in the frame of that poetry and occupying the marginal position in it were such significant Petersburgian poets as Vadim Shefner, Semen Botvinnik, Ilia Fonjakov, and the wrongly forgotten Gleb Semenov. In general, the border between the official and nonofficial poetry was rather relative. Among the poets recognized officially is the bright representative of the classical trend, Galina Gamper.

Though Alexander Kushner had pressure put on him, he nevertheless was published and Josef Brodsky was forced to emigrate. Nevertheless many dissidents did not differ from the members of the Union of Writers of that time either in their poetics or in the quality of their verses.

After the official soviet literature had lost its host and customers and Petersburg had restored its historic name Petersburgian poetry found itself in the situation of the full outer freedom and at the total indifference of the significant majority of the public. In the 1990-s as well as now this indifference was intensified by the financial misery of the literary journals and of the majority of the publishers and as well by the gradual washing out of that social layer (intelligentsia) from which the majority of the readers and admirers of poetry had appeared. It would be necessary to note that in previous times poets who attracted many thousand crowds in the stadiums and the concert halls were not characteristic of the Petersburg in contrast to Moscow. Petersburgian poetry had always more severe style and was always more unassuming. But there were always plenty of the true connoisseurs of poetry among the intellectual Petersburgian public. Now they are far less in number.

At the present time, at a first glance, Petersburgian poetry is divided into the two camps: into one of them enter many of the poets mentioned here above (as well as many not mentioned) related to all the trends enumerated above. They are united formally by belonging to the Union of Writers of S. Petersburg as well as by the fact that to a greater or lesser extent they share democratic and liberal values. The other one, significantly less in number and inferior to the previous one in the quality of its production (though here also there are the true poets, Gleb Gorbovsky, Gennady Ugreninov, Irina Moiseeva, for instance) unites the literary members bent for the Orthodox Church fundamentalism, nationalism, sometimes also to communism. In their style more often they tend towards the Esenin tradition and pseudo-popular vocabulary, and sometimes for the pseudo-classic pathos mixed up with the religious images.

But recently a third camp has risen and is growing stronger being indifferent to ideology, to politics but working towards forcing out the poetic space of both “liberals” and “patriots”. These are young poets beginning their careers
in Internet who successfully compensate for the deficiency in the poetic achievements by the self-advertisement, mass character of their production and eccentricity of their outward behavior. In the frame of that “poetics” the main thing is to stand out and to stand out at any price. Here obscene language, pornography, formal poetic technique characteristic for futurists for example, and known long ago but not less extravagant from this fact are put to use. The poetic career begins to be created according to show-business rules. At present the representatives of this trend are quite noticeable in the Petersburgian cultural field but this pop-poetry hardly is much distinguished from that one of Moscow and hardly could be characterized as a specific Petersburgian one. Nevertheless among the poetic youth appear also a number of those who bent for the true poetry developing the trend formed around Kushner and his school. And this circumstance consoles. I can name such a poets as Denis Dateshidze, Vasily Kovalev, Dmitriy Kolomenskiy.

In the many outward parameters (the reduced means, not crowded halls, inattention of the press) the Petersburgian poetry is living through times that are not the best. But there were never best times for the genuine poetry. The last two-three decades of the Petersburgian poetry will be judged better by the future historians of literature than it can be by contemporaries. But there can be no doubt that in the present-day Petersburg live and work some first-rate Russian poets whose work (with the rare exceptions) is not well-known beyond the bounds of Russia and even in Russia itself.

Some poems by Alla Mikhalevich

Василию Пригодичу

Здесь трудится любовь – и ей не неведом отдых
(нет, я не о любви двух любящих существ), -
всебогая любовь, разлитая, как воздух,
и в травах, и в камнях разлитая окрест.

В масштабе всех миров космической вселенной
увидишь, как мала зеленая Земля,
ранимая, под тонкой кожей биосферной,
и беззащитная, как маленькая тля.

Должно быть, потому и выросло живое,
она рождает нас, спасает от обид
и горестей. И мы должны вернуть ей вдвое
сыновний этот долг. Так наша честь вели.
Есть высший разум, есть – космическая воля, 
ее палющий жар и мягкое тепло, всегда живет добро в ее магнитном поле 
и что-то создает, и деструктивно – зло.

И в этих нравственных структурных единицах 
сама материя усилием ядра 
пульсирует и всё разыгрывает в лицах: 
пусть вечно электрон пробить ядро стремится, 
но в отдалении он вынужден крутиться - 
его удержит там энергия добра.

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To Vasiliy Prigodich

Love making here its work, is working everywhere 
(no, I don’t mean the two creatures in love), -
I mean the general love which is poured in the air, 
is poured among the stones, the grass and all around above.

On a scale of all the worlds of the cosmic Universe -
oh, how small it is – our green Earth,
how harmful it is under its biospheric pellicle, 
and how unprotected – just like a green plant-louse.

And probably that is why the living matter arose, 
the Earth gives birth to us, saves all of us from wrong, 
and in return we need to pay it hundredfold 
our filial debt. It is a matter of honor.

Yes, the highest reason exists, as well as the cosmic will, 
its glittering parching heat and all its soft warmth, 
and always lives the good in its magnetic field, 
and always creating something, but evil is destructive.

And in these moral building blocks the matter as it is 
by the effort of the nucleus pulsates and acts all this out: 
the electron for ever aims to draw down the nucleus –
but needs to spin at a distance 
kept there and prevented by the energy of good.
Татьяне Черниговской

При слове «карандаш» мы видим карандаш, мгновенно образ тот из мозга извлекая, при слове «экипаж» представим экипаж, представлен в слове «лес» растительность лесная.

Но как находит мозг к ним верную тропу, единственную ту среди нейронных клеток, как в трилионах звезд, прорезав их толпу? Не так ли ищет мать своих пропавших деток?

Понятно, помнит зверь тропу на водопой, минуя миллион песчинок и травинок - но запахи, но цвет, но камень под ногой помогут выбрать путь в сети других тропинок.

Отсутствуют в мозгу и запахи, и цвет, и всё же он хранит и цвет, и очертанья, и запах, и размер, и тысячи примет, и даже весь объем Земли и Мирозданья.

Как в зеркале – весь мир кодирует, хранит компьютерная сеть его живых кристаллов, но как находит он сквозь этот лабиринт единственную вещь, что наша мысль назвала?

То Taniana Chernigovskaya

When thinking of the word “pencil” we just can see a pencil extracting in a moment its image from the brain, pronouncing the word “daisy’ we can just see a daisy, and with the word “a train” we’ll imagine a train.

But how does the brain just find the right way, the only true path among the web of neurons like in the trillions of stars cutting through their crowd. Isn’t it like a mother seeking her missing child?

The beast remembers its way to the place of watering while passing by the billions of blades of grass and sand grains but different smells, but colors, but stones under its feet would help to choose its way among the net of pathways.
The colors and the smells are absent in the brain.
And all the same it holds the color and the outlines,
and different smells, and sizes, and sunny days and rain,
and even the whole range of our Earth and Universe.

And like a mirror it codes and holds the whole world
in its computer net of tiny living crystals
but how is it able to find, through this labyrinth,
the single, single thing that our thought had named?

Роальду Хофману

Кто умер – тот уже сгорел,
pока горит – живет.
Свеча и клетки наших тел
сжигают кислород.

Микроны из горячих вод
с поверхности земли,
те, лишь сжигая водород
существовать могли.

Сжигаем в топках углерод
и выделяем дым,
который век, который год
горим, горим, горим.

Протон погасит электрон
на атомных часах,
лынет к аниону катион –
обмен веществ со всех сторон,
и в нас горит и гаснет он,
как звезды в небесах.

To Roald Hoffmann

Who died – already burned out
while burning – is still alive then,
a candle and our body’s cells
are burning oxygen.

The ancient microbes of the Earth
in high-temperature springs
they were able to survive
only burning hydrogen.

And year by year and round and round
we burn, we burn, we burn
burning carbon in fire-boxes,
evolving a solid smoke.

Proton extinguishes electron
on the atomic clock,
cation clings to anion -
metabolism is going on,
and inside us it burns and dies
like stars do in the skies.

Nick Norwood

Originally from Texas, Nick Norwood is currently an Associate Professor of English at Columbus State University, in Georgia. His poems have appeared in The Paris Review, The Southwest Review, Western Humanities Review, The Wallace Stevens Journal, Pleiades, Ekphrasis, Borderlands, and in a number of other magazines, anthologies, and online sites. He has been awarded an International Merit Award in Poetry from Atlanta Review, a Tennessee Williams Scholarship in 1998 and a Walter E. Dakin Fellowship in 2004 to attend the Sewanee Writers' Conference, twice been a finalist for the Vassar Miller Prize, once a finalist for the Verse Prize and the “Discovery”/The Nation Prize, and a finalist in the Morton Marr Poetry Contest. On March 5, 2004, he was the featured poet on the popular online website Poetry Daily. His first book, The Soft Blare, selected by Andrew Hudgins, was issued by River City Publishing in 2003. His second, A Palace for the Heart: Laments for Ludwig II—one of the winners of the Mellen Press Poetry Contest for 2002 and published by that press in 2004—seeks to explore the famous king’s life and death through a series of dramatic monologues, each in the voice of one of Ludwig’s contemporaries. Some of the personages are famous historical figures, others are lesser known acquaintances or staff members of the king, and still others are completely fictional. Each of them takes as its starting point the unique historical moment of Ludwig’s death in June of 1886.
As he does in several of his novels—Pnin, for instance, and Ada, in which the title character is a lepidopterist—Nabokov makes explicit the connection between science and literature in a number of his poems, including his paean to the thrill of encountering a new butterfly species “A Discovery.” And it is perhaps in the poetry—the fact of his poetry, we might say—that we discover what is most important about Nabokov: his greatest interest is in that which most of the world finds little use for. “Poetry,” as W.H. Auden asserts in his famous elegy for W.B. Yeats, “makes nothing happen.” In his own essay in defense of his most famous novel, Lolita, Nabokov remarks that, for him “a work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords . . . what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm.” We see in Nabokov’s passion for poetry that what he most loves about verse is its capacity for providing joy; to try to find some utilitarian purpose is to miss the point. Likewise Nabokov’s lepidoptery, even given his plodding, painstaking taxonomic method, was in the end a pursuit of his own happiness, an engagement whose very practice involved the hunt for something airy and capricious and distinguished by a kind of beauty that, in Nabokov’s estimation, goes far beyond what is practical.

Nabokov himself warned critics against the temptation to read his literary work in the light of entomology. The problem, he recognized, is that the study of Lepidoptera is far more complex than casual critics are likely to master in the brief time they may allot to it. “Confusion is inevitable,” as Kurt Johnson and Steve Coates, authors of the book Nabokov’s Blues, point out. Despite that, quite a lot has already been said about Lepidoptera in the fiction. Johnson and Coates themselves devote a chapter of their book to what they call, as I do, “Literature and Lepidoptera.” But they make only one brief mention of the poetry, and in fact, compared to his fiction, relatively little has been said about Nabokov’s verse—with respect to Lepidoptera or otherwise—by anyone. Since I am not a scientist I will limit my remarks to matters dealing with Lepidoptera in a way that I hope will not belie my ignorance of the subject: direct and indirect reference to butterflies and moths I find in the poems.

Of course, Nabokov is best known as a novelist, but he actually began his literary career as a poet. Indeed his first childhood literary endeavors were in the genre of poetry as were his first appearances in print, in terms of both his publication in periodicals and in books authored by him. By his own admission he wrote poems “compulsively” throughout his life and regarded himself as a poet even in his prose. His embarking upon what became the monumental task of translating Pushkin, especially when
combined with the essay on versification he wrote as a result of the project, demonstrates his commitment to the poetic art. Still other facts, such as his novel Pale Fire being written largely in verse and, regarding the “problems” he wrote about and that so characterize his favorite board game, that he described them as “the poetry” of chess further reflect poetry’s importance to the various elements of his professional and private lives. Lepidoptera, famously, is one of the most prominent of those elements and like poetry is also a pursuit that dates back to his childhood—in a certain respect even before that since the study of moths and butterflies was a family passion. His father was an avid collector whose books on the subject fascinated Vladimir as a child. That child would one day serve as the curator of Lepidoptera at Harvard’s Museum of Comparative Zoology, discover a new species of butterfly, and publish scientific work which eventually did, after the passage of some fifty years, gain recognition as important and groundbreaking—especially his monograph “Notes on Neotropical Plebejinæ.”

Rather than standing in binary opposition, Nabokov’s literary and entomological pursuits worked in unison to form the dual core of his being. In fact, it would be difficult to say which was the greater influence—that of butterflies on his writing or his writerly view of the world on his passion for butterflies. What the two sides represented for him—“curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy”—he considered equally important to all humans. He even went so far as to credit the existence of humans in their present form to the very impulses that literature and Lepidoptera represent: “a lolling and loafing which allowed first of all the formation of Homo poeticus—without which sapiens could not have evolved.”

The poems themselves reflect this idea and present us with the poet as the model human, the life cycle and physiognomy of the butterfly as the objective correlatives perhaps most applicable to the human condition. Notice for instance that when, in the bitterness of exile, he wants to express in the poem “No Matter How” his defiance of the Soviet machine, “loathing the filth, brutality, and boredom / of silent servitude,” his ultimate assertion of the point is to define himself in terms of his vocation, avocation, and world view. “I am a poet,” he says, “count me out!” Notice also how Nabokov’s very conception of “The Poem,” which he records in his poem of that name, is as a conspiracy of words achieving the kind of mimesis we associate with Lepidoptera, “the leaflike insects” that “fuse and form a silent, intense / mimetic pattern of perfect sense.”

In discussing the mimetic function of pattern and coloring in Lepidoptera in his memoir Speak, Memory, Nabokov lays bare what is perhaps the most fundamental connection he discovered between his twin passions. Natural selection, he remarks,
“in the Darwinian sense, could not explain the miraculous coincidence of imitative aspect and imitative behavior, nor could one appeal to the theory of ‘The struggle for life’ when a protective device was carried to a point of mimetic subtlety, exuberance, and luxury far in excess of a predator’s power of appreciation. I discovered in nature the nonutilitarian delights that I sought in art. Both were a form of magic, both were a game of intricate enchantment and deception.”

For Nabokov, then, the serious “play” of human art has its counterpart in what we generally consider an evolutionary result of natural selection. The ramifications could not be more significant, for just as with the mimetic function in Lepidoptera, the initial impulse to art in humans was likely an act of survival. Think of the cave paintings of Lascaux, whose function might have been religious, might have been related to the hunting of food animals, or might have been a combination of both, but whose execution, in its power and beauty, far exceeds what was required. Art, as Nabokov perhaps best found exemplified in butterflies and moths, is an activity centrally important to being which, paradoxically, in its highest manifestation is an exercise in pointlessness.

He makes the idea explicit in his memoir and elsewhere in his prose, but his most artistic expression of such a notion may be found in the poems. “How I Love You,” for instance, is a poem that makes direct reference to Lepidoptera, and one in which he conflates the experiences of being human and being butterfly. “Let’s go and abandon this garden,” the speaker, in the first stanza, says to his companion—“my mad one,” the “you” of the poem whose identity as human or butterfly is never quite certain: “let’s go before it’s too late, / quick, under one cloak, come home, / while you still are unrecognized.” The poem’s second stanza, in its cryptic way, may offer some insight into Nabokov’s deepest feeling about art and lepidoptery, and again, may in fact represent his conflation of the two:

Self-control, silence. But with each year,
to the murmur of trees and the clamor of birds,
the separation may seem more offensive
and the offense more absurd.
And I fear ever more that rashly
I may blab and interrupt
the course of the quiet, difficult speech
long since penetrating my life.

The stanza also seems to express what Nabokov considered “the two most severe limitations on human consciousness . . . the prison of the present—our inability to have immediate access to the real past we have lived through—and the prison of the self—our inability to escape our own minds
or enter those of others." It is a situation Nabokov likewise characterized elsewhere as "absurd." Here the "separation" perhaps further entails the divide between lepidopterist and Lepidoptera in addition to the ostensible dichotomy between lover and beloved.

In the third stanza the speaker speculates about the existence of a "place" where those dichotomies could come together, "some dark nook / where the darkness might merge / with a wing's cryptic markings." In the two lines that follow, which constitute a single parenthetical, one literally enclosed in parentheses, Nabokov suggests that the function of a butterfly's mimesis is aligned with his own human and artistic impulse to connect with the "other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm": "A geometrid," the speaker explains "thus does not stir / spread flat on a lichen host." We are referred back by the lines to the poem's startling declaration in the first stanza—"Let's go! / Let's go and abandon this garden"—to the effect that entering those blissful states of being which Nabokov says is art's goal requires hiding ourselves from the world which is alien and hostile to those states. Ironically, the method of hiding is the implementation of disguises which simulate that very world.

In the poem's final two stanzas, Nabokov's expression of his deep feeling for those wished-for states is itself an act of mimesis, in this case, an aping of the trite, banal phrasing of a sincere if unimaginative paramour: "How I love you!" But the speaker goes on to explain how, "now and then, / the spirit finds loopholes, translucences / in the world's finest texture," and there is so much to unpack in these two lines with respect to the ideas I have been discussing it is hard to know where to start. Perhaps I should merely point out the veiled references to Lepidoptera contained in the word "translucences." At any rate, the poem concludes with the speaker admonishing his interlocutor "Do not speak. / Stand motionless under the flowering branch. . . . Close your eyes, and diminish, and stealthily / into the eternal pass through." The lines restate the poet's own testimony about his desire for what he would want art to accomplish, to allow its audience to "pass through" to the hoped-for states. One can't help but notice the lines' allusion to the world of Lepidoptera in phrases like "the flowering branch" and in the reference to the mimetic function of stealth.

I have spoken here of only one representative poem, but in fact both direct and metaphorical references to Lepidoptera appear throughout his verse. One sees by how readily he reaches for such references how central they were to his poetic enterprise: from the title figure's "butterfly eyelash" in "The Model" to "the Peacock moth on picnic table" in "Lines Written in Oregon," from the motel room that "had grown / a ghostly thorax, / with a heart" in "The Room" to the "small caterpillar on its thread" in "An Evening of Russian Poetry." In "Evening on a Vacant Lot," Nabokov describes poetic inspiration itself as something resembling an emergent
butterfly, “slightly filmed with moisture and so tremulous.” A few lines down, the speaker pleads, “Do come out, my precious being, / cling securely to a stem,” indicating, it seems clear, that Nabokov thinks of his poetic muse in the form of a butterfly.

Also of interest is Nabokov’s more subtle poetic allusions to Lepidoptera and especially to the famous life cycle of moths and butterflies. But perhaps allusion is not even the right word. Rather it is a case where having lived so long with the idea of that life cycle, of that life cycle as objective correlative, we see examples of it underlying many of the poems in ways so natural and unremarked upon we may wonder if the poet himself realized he was doing it. Take, for example, a poem like “We So Firmly Believed,” in which the speaker contemplates the change that has occurred in him since his childhood, specifically the degree to which the child that was “father to the man” would be unrecognizable to the adult himself. In the first stanza he confesses how he finds it “astonishing / to what a degree, you, my youth, / seem in tints not mine, in traits not real.” Like the pupa, so different from the butterfly it would later become, the speaker says to his earlier self “You have long ceased to be I.” Having made his point, Nabokov finds a way to end the poem, gracefully to exit the stage, that may remind us even more the lepidopteran life cycle and the environs with which we associate its disparate stages: “yet how long we believed / that there was no break in the way from the damp dell / to the alpine heath.” Clearly in the stages of his own life—from idyllic Russian boyhood, to struggling penniless émigré, to American academic, and finally to world famous author and international celebrity—Nabokov finds some resemblance to the life cycle of the creature he pursued throughout and that, along with literature and chess, represents one of the only constants in that life.

For Nabokov the seeming uselessness of literature and Lepidoptera is akin to the seeming uselessness of all those things we hold most dear: beauty, memories of childhood, intimate thoughts, moments of introspection completely freed from utilitarian purpose. In her essay “The Sovereignty of Good and Other Concepts,” Iris Murdoch explains the moral function of art in a way that also perhaps explains Nabokov’s relationship to literature and Lepidoptera. The arts, Murdoch observes, show us the absolute pointlessness of virtue while exhibiting its supreme importance; the enjoyment of art is a training in the love of virtue. The pointlessness of art is not the pointlessness of a game; it is the pointlessness of human life itself, and form in art is properly the simulation of the self-contained aimlessness of the universe. Good art reveals what we are usually too selfish and too timid to recognize, the minute and absolutely random detail of the world, and reveals it together with a sense of unity and form.
It is easy to imagine Nabokov expressing complete agreement with Murdoch on this point, and easy to imagine his extending it to the realm of lepidoptery: that the enjoyment of that pursuit “is a training in the love of virtue.” In Speak, Memory he describes the time when he hunts butterflies as “a momentary vacuum into which rushes all that I love,” and he expresses a “thrill of gratitude to whom it may concern—to the contrapuntal genius of human fate or to tender ghosts humoring a lucky mortal.”

Fittingly, in the choice of Blues as his lepidopterological specialty, Nabokov belied his bias toward the seemingly unimportant. As Johnson and Coates explain, “Historically, [Blues] have lacked prestige among both academics and amateur collectors . . . [and] do not enjoy the public following of the showy, exotic butterflies like Swallowtails.” In his lepidoptery Nabokov’s pursuit was of something beyond practicality, beyond fame and fortune. We might say that his pursuit was of something more purely and supremely important. For this reason and others, I think we would not be in error to consider him first and foremost a poet.

Some Poems by Nick Norwood

READING NABOKOV

My mind is in the air. It’s in the bush, in Texas Hill Country twice a year. Then the monarch quivers through. Waist-high, now close to ground: she flits, lighter than paper, words, will seem to fall, to feint, then flutter up.

Padding through carpetweed I stay alert. I check my gear in live oak groves: my eyes, a notebook, pen. I work without a net in the yaupon thickets, under pecans. I look for her among the milkweed blooms, in cotton trousers, canvas shoes, alone upon the brushy hillsides, in the sun. I stop to read beneath a sweet gum tree the opening leaves of Lepidoptera. I’m in the mood, pistil and petal, tend
alike upon stems and flowering grass.
I'm made of love, and make of love this science.
I'm a Latin lover when calling out
her name, whispering it, mouthing the words
as softly as the wing beats of the luna.

Through rugged canyons, into shaded vales,
I rest sometimes on stony pillows, where
soundlessly opening and closing a book,
I settle at last into a fold and fall
asleep. Then come the dreams. They issue forth

in gentle sorties, flighty hordes, to take
the field. They feature her: her orange wings,
antennae, spots. Come winter, I'll tend to plots,
memoirs, flickering verses. But I'm on
my nymphet now. I'm after her. Inspired.

MOONWALK

The Eagle, landed, squats on its lunar base.
I'm stationed at the RCA. My father,
this waning July Sunday, is up a ladder.

He's scraping paint. The snarl reverberates:
a sort of rhythmic growl like gravel and hawk,
gravel and hawk. Meanwhile, car ads, experts.

David Brinkley passes the time. And when
the moment comes, I run outside and back,
the old man strides in behind, dusting hands

on paint-flecked jeans. Tomorrow, VFR
in his oilfield Cessna, he'll fly pipeline
checking for leaks. His ground support: the course
of rivers, highways; spaceship water towers rising over one-story towns. The sun coming up over Texas hardpan will go
to work on its bristle of pumpjacks and derricks. Like skeletal robots they'll cast their shadows across mesquite, concrete, caliche, stubble.

For now, we focus on the blue-gray light, the crackling sound. They climb out and down, one, the other, dainty, unpracticed, like two
dull, hamfisted men in a knickknack store. They even seem to speak with a hop-step cadence. Or is it just the distance? I watch, transfixed.

The live feed howls. The window unit hums its blue-gray note. And after a while, Dad gets up, goes out, back to his gravel and hawk.

Maurice Riordan

Maurice Riordan was born in Ireland and lives in London. His most recent collection of poems, The Holy Land (Faber, 2007), received the Michael Hartnett Award. Previous collections, A Word from the Loki and Floods, were nominated for the T.S. Eliot Prize and the Whitbread Award. Other books include A Quark for Mister Mark: 101 Poems About Science and the ecological anthology Wild Reckoning (2004). With Jocelyn Bell Burnell -- who discovered pulsars -- he recently edited Dark Matter: Poems of Space. He is Professor of Poetry at Sheffield Hallam University.
‘Is It About a Bicycle?’
A Prelude to ESOF Dublin 2012

Professor Connerade has kindly asked me to talk about ‘Dublin: City of Poets’ in anticipation of ESOF 2012 in Dublin. I confess I am almost perfectly disqualified to do so, since not only do I live in London, but my own close connections are with Ireland’s ‘other’ city, Cork -- which has its own ideas about being a city of poets. It’s not unlike asking a Torinese to speak about Rome! I’ll have to endeavour to overcome my natural prejudices.

Dublin is undoubtedly the literary capital of Ireland, and indeed one of the great literary capitals. Just to name-check some of the writers associated with the city: Jonathan Swift, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, William Butler Yeats, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett. Among these, only Yeats is known mainly as a poet. The others are better known for fiction or drama than for poetry. Shaw alone did not write poems. But it is characteristic of the great Irish writers that their work often transcends genre: The novels of Joyce and the plays of Beckett (as indeed those of Synge and O’Casey) are readily considered as works of poesis.

Nowadays, the great literary heritage of Dublin is woven into its civic and social fabric. Historically, however, writers have been at odds with their native city, and with its cultural and social hinterland. They have tended to live and write at a safe distance from the place. The exception is Swift, who as Dean of St Patrick’s Cathedral was a reluctant inhabitant for much of his life. He famously endowed Dublin’s alternative St Patrick’s, the hospital for the insane -- an action he recorded with typical acerbity:

He gave the little wealth he had
To build a house for fools and mad,
And showed by one satiric touch
No nation wanted it as much.

James Joyce, the writer most closely associated with Dublin, is of course also its most famous exile. Joyce spent almost his entire writing life in European cities: Trieste, Paris, and Zurich. Even so, in Ulysses (1922), he wrote in effect the Book of Dublin. The events of the novel centre on Leopold Bloom’s wanderings about the city and take place on 16 June 1904. ‘Bloomsday’, as it has come to called, is now an annual day of Joycean festivities in Dublin.
The original ‘Bloomsday’ celebration in Dublin occurred in 1954, when a small party of writers set off from the Martello Tower in Sandycove, where the opening of Ulysses is set, to visit places associated with the book (see the picture above). The party included two writers famous in Dublin publore, the poet Patrick Kavanagh and Brian O’Nolan [also known as Flann O’Brien and Myles na Gopaleen]. As Flann O’Brien, he was the author of a couple of astonishingly inventive novels, At Swim-Two-Birds (1939) and The Third Policeman, which was not published until 1967. I shall say some more about The Third Policeman at the end. This first expedition wasn’t entirely a success; it had foundered by lunchtime, overwhelmed by inebriation and rancour.

Nowadays Dublin’s literary life is more genial. And the city has an equable relationship with its poets. Books are reviewed in the national press as well as the periodicals. Poems appear in the IrishTimes. Writers are interviewed on radio and on television and indeed can be treated as minor celebrities. Among the prominent poets are Thomas Kinsella, Brendan Kennelly, Eavan Boland, Eileán Ní Chuiilleanáin, Paul Durcan, the Irish-language poet Nuala Ní Dhomnaill. But there are many others. Pre-eminent is Seamus Heaney, who since he won the Nobel Prize in 1995, has the status of a national hero. This presents a picture quite different to that of, say, the 1950s, when poets were often regarded with suspicion or worse. It implies a city that has been enriched and perhaps changed for the better by its poets.

What about science? Ireland has had four Nobel laureates for Literature: Yeats, 1923; Shaw, 1925; Beckett, 1969; Heaney, 1995. Perhaps reflecting an imbalance in the culture, there is just one for science. The physicist Ernest Walton received it jointly with John Cockcroft in 1951 for splitting the atom. This work was done in 1932 at the Cavendish laboratory in Cambridge, under the leadership of Ernest Rutherford, but Walton’s subsequent career was at Trinity College Dublin.

Among other scientists of international repute is the nineteenth-century mathematician and physicist William Rowan Hamilton (1805-65). Hamilton was a brilliant mathematician who predicted ‘conical refraction’. This has not turned out to be an important phenomenon but it is an elegant one, which his poet-friend Audrey de Vere described memorably as ‘the radiant stranger’. Hamilton’s most enduring achievement was his solution to the problem of quaternions. The solution came to him while out walking with his wife by the Royal Canal. He recorded the moment by scratching the formula with his penknife onto the stonework of Broom Bridge. This act of cerebral graffiti no longer exists but is commemorated today by a plaque on the bridge, which reads:
Here as he walked by
on the 16th of October 1843
Sir William Rowan Hamilton
in a flash of genius discovered
the fundamental formula for
quaternion multiplication
\[ i^2 = j^2 = k^2 = i j k = -1 \]
& cut it on a stone of this bridge

Hamilton also wrote verse. He was convinced that there was an affinity between mathematics and poetry. He was a friend of Wordsworth, to whom he regularly sent his own compositions. Wordsworth’s response is a cautionary one for anyone wishing to practise poetry and science with equal distinction:

You send me showers of verses which I receive with much pleasure, as do we all; yet have we fears that this employment may seduce you from the path of Science which you seem destined to tread with so much honour to yourself and profit to others. Again and again I must repeat, that the composition of verse is infinitely more of an art than men are prepared to believe, and absolute success in it depends upon innumerable minutiae, which it grieves me you should stoop to acquire a knowledge of.

Another great scientist with a strong connection to Dublin is Erwin Shroedinger, who – at the personal invitation of Eamon De Valera – helped to establish the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies and worked there from 1940 until 1957. Schrodinger is best known, of course, for his achievements in theoretical quantum physics. But it was during his Dublin years that he wrote and delivered the lectures that constitute What Is Life (1944), an exercise of speculative imagination as much as it is a work of science.

What of the interaction between poetry and science? I’d like to offer a context for this question. Writers tend to absorb their materials almost indiscriminately, and the greatest of them hoover up the ideas of their time. Under the pressure of their own obsessions and imaginative requirements, they magnetize a chaotic range of disparate materials into orderly patterns. It follows that their use of ideas drawn from science tends to be predatory and opportunistic. Swift, for example, satirized the activities of Royal Society in Gulliver’s Travels. The satire is brilliant but it is disproportionate and hostile, energized by that saeva indignatio [savage indignation], which he inherited from Juvenal and which he lays claim to in his own Latin epitaph. That epitaph can be read in St Patrick’s Cathedral – and it is also beautifully translated by Yeats in his poem ‘Swift’s Epitaph’.
Yeats's own interest in science is an overlooked aspect of his poetry. As a boy, his pursuits were more scientific than literary. He left the Godolphin School in Hammersmith, according to his report, on a note of literary failure and scientific promise. Yeats’s continued interest in astronomy manifests itself in his early poems, where it is masked by late-Victorian lyricism and conventional diction.

But Yeats’s scientific bent is evident again in his great speculative book A Vision. It is a diagrammatic work, a book of spiritual and historical geometry. He rejected a materialist reality, or one that was solely materialist, because he sought a transcendental truth. But It is worth recalling that Yeats went to séances in the hope that they would ‘prove’ the existence of the soul. Had he been born a generation later, it seems likely he would have been excited by the scientific developments at the outset of the last century. These lines, from an early poem, chime well with our present understanding of physical reality:

The wandering Earth itself may be
Only a sudden flaming word,
In clanging space a moment heard,
Troubling the endless reverie.

Joyce was not as scientifically-minded as his elder – but he was consciously attuned to the emerging modern world. It is worth noting that as a young man he managed in 1909, briefly, Dublin’s first cinema, The Volta. And in Finnegans Wake, he weaves a wealth of scientific material into the textual fabric. One ‘argument’ of the book indeed is between Newton’s and Einstein’s physics. The ideas of relativity in particular are conducive to the polysemic nature of the work. In an unusual instance of a reverse influence, Murray Gell-Mann, when he postulated a new fundamental sub-atomic particle in 1964, named it the ‘quark’, thus borrowing from Finnegans Wake, book 2 episode 4, ‘Three quarks for Muster Mark!’

I will conclude, as I said, with a few more observations about The Third Policeman, if only because we are in the city of Italo Calvino, who would surely have appreciated it as one of the great masterpieces of speculative fiction. Flann O’Brien finished the book in 1940. However, it was initially rejected and the author claimed he had lost the manuscript, though in fact it was sitting on his sideboard. It is provocative that it was lying around unread during those years when Shrédinger was writing his lectures.

The book incorporates much quasi-scientific material, including an elusive substance called omnium, which is the fundamental energy of the universe. It also includes a comical ‘atomic theory’, whereby friction causes the exchange of
atoms, and thus of identity, between objects. Alarmingly, in the novel’s world, humans are turning into bicycles, and vice versa.

The hero-narrator, who is nameless, has murdered an old man for his cash box. Since he is unable to locate the box, he goes to a police barracks in order to enlist the policemen’s help. ‘Is it about a bicycle?’, the Sergeant asks the narrator when he arrives at the barracks. The hero, unknown to himself, is dead and has entered a circular hell, a place eerily resembling the Irish Midlands in the age of the bicycle, but which is dominated by physical laws that are a comical hybrid of Newtonian and quantum-age science. In the world of The Third Policeman, the Sergeant’s question – which he repeats as the last sentence of the novel -- has a semi-metaphysical resonance. The Third Policeman is one of those exemplary books that draws its scientific ideas into the vortex of the imagination, where in this case they refresh the age-old subject of crime and punishment, with much playfulness and black humour.

A poem by Maurice Riordan

The Schrödinger’s Cat

If, as quantum theory suggests, the world only exists because it is being observed, then it is also true that the world only changes because it is not being observed all the time.

John Gribbin

That damned cat was at it again in the night. I took one of these paperweights and let fly. It clipped the glazed roof, then skittered off into the moonlight. But I woke with the recollection of a thump, a yelp, some unearthly commotion. Then silence.
It got to me round mid-morning, and over I went. The place was a haven of peace, finches and sparrows in-and-out among the wisteria and laburnum, the little Polo in its bay, parked askew, while out on the forecourt, sunning itself, a red Merc.

I stood there eye-level with the spy hole, my thumb on the button, wondering should sleeping dogs lie. And was about to press when I saw, nestled in the alpines and all the world as though it had been chosen and placed there, my paperweight bright with the dew.

Uli Rothfuss

Professor Uli Rothfuss is Rector of the International Bund-University of Berlin. He describes himself both as a social and cultural Scientist and as a writer, and holds an extremely varied collection of academic degrees, ranging from Dr.Phil.h.c. (of the State University for Culture and Arts, Tbilisi in Georgia) through an M.Sc. in Social Sciences of Leicester University, UK the Dipl.-Verw.-Wirt (Criminalland Police Sciences) of FH Villingen-Schwenningen in Germany) and a Diploma in German Language and Literature from Zurich Switzerland.

He was born on October 20th, 1961, in Ebershardt (Germany), and his professional career is as diverse as the wide range of degrees suggests. Between 1978 and 1994, he served as an officer in the Police and Criminal Investigation Services, before becoming Cultural administrator of the town of Bad Liebenzell and Calw in Germany. He then became a scientific expert of the Council of Europe for the
democratization of public administrations in former Soviet Countries (mainly in the Caucasus).

He is a member of the international PEN and delegate of the Writers-for-Peace-Committee of the International PEN, with a focus on East-European and former Soviet Countries. He is Honorary Professor, holding the UNESCO Chair for Translation and Intercultural Studies, at the Azerbaijan State University for Languages in Baku. His long and varied career in Germany includes many academic posts (always with a strong international flavour), which he has combined with artistic and literary activities. He has been Director and Artistic Director of the Klosterspiele Hirsau, a yearly Theatre-Festival, Lecturer for Creative Writing and Cultural Sciences at the University of Karlsruhe, and is currently voluntarily Rector of the Euro-Caucasian University of Interdisciplinary Studies and President of the International Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Tbilisi in Georgia.

He is the current President of die KOGGE – a European Writers’ Union. In Germany, he is Full Professor for Cultural Sciences and Rector of the International-Bund-University Berlin – a University of Social Sciences and Communication Arts. He is also the Professor for Text Production and German Literature at Matej-Bel-University Banská Bystrica in the Slovakian Republic, guest Professor for Cultural Management at the Merkur-International University in Karlsruhe (Germany) and Consultant for academic and cultural co-operation of OSCE (the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe).

And just in case you thought that was all, he is a member of the Scientific Initiative for Culture and Foreign Policy (Wissenschaftlicher Initiativkreis für Kultur und Außenpolitik WIKA) at the Institute for Foreign Relations of Germany (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen), Stuttgart. Not surprisingly, he speaks many languages: German, English and French, with a basic knowledge of Georgian and Azeri Turkish which we can only envy. Furthermore, he has written literature about the results of sociological research – mainly prose, but also theatre plays.

World Novel – The Dream of the poetic urban Space

This international artistic-literary and scientific project at World_Drives association Zurich (Switzerland), affiliated Institute for Practice and Social Research at IB-University Berlin (Germany) undertakes the attempt to go the way from the social construction of a town as a planimetric to a poetic urban space.
The urban space is a planned space, which is being went through every day, - a space, in which we live. But that is not all: People develop unordinarities in their everyday life in town, nonrecurring things. People are not only the doers (in a poietic sense) but also the dreamers (poetic disposed). The project contributes its part how the urban space of the town can be developed, devised, experienced as a poetic space by literary, poetic means.

Integrated into this project are therefore planners as town engineers as well as – on the other side – artists, authors and laymen. In this project the peculiarities of a town, the big in the small, the distant in the near is discovered – and described. Infrastructure and everyday commodities are transformed in literary, poetic short texts. These are gathered to compose step by step a World Novel of the public space of town.

The big guide in these poetic descriptions of modern towns is the swiss-french poet and writer Blaise Cendrars (1887-1961), who described several modern mega-cities by his characteristic literary means, f.e. Sao Paulo: “Here is no league for noise/ Like in all new countries/ Joy of life and entrepreneurial spirit are shown/ By hooting and clanking of exhaust pipes …”, and he conducts us like this into a worth living space aside the only by data organizers planned town.

The gathering of poetic short texts from cities all over the world finally leads to the construction of a modern World Novel.

Project Direction:

Prof. Dr. phil. Hans-Peter Meier-Dallach
Prof. Dr. phil. h.c. Uli Rothfuss M.Sc.

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Some poems by Uli Rothfuss

Gedichte von Uli Rothfuss

tage länger hell schon, jetzt
in diesem langen winter
betrachten
nur mehr dich

wie du da aufrecht sitzt
die strähne haar im gesicht
im licht

die tage, länger hell schon, jetzt
wie du sitzt und liest
weit weg
und wach

und schnee wächst herein
in unser zimmer
in diesem langen winter

draußen das helle kreischen der vögel

manchmal
nur für augenblicke
siehst du auf

ein blick
hinein
in die fremde welt
erstes licht am morgen

schnee
und dein erstes lachen
hineinspiegeln
festhalten
dieses dein zittern
ein mal noch schmecken
das meer der nacht

im schnee
spuren mit dir schaufeln

die hitzebilder
gegen den tag
in die länge zwingen

und auf den weg binden
hin zu dir

sattrinken uns
am schmelzwasser
der späten nacht

schnee, ja
dein lachen
und erste bäume blühen

blau draußen

kein laut
die wolken
vogelleicht

gib mir diese minuten
einatmen und ausatmen
nur noch
ein aus
oui, en francais

es ist der süden, ja
luft flirrt
und diese augen
tief
wie das wasser
unter uns
damals

du am meer
jetzt
hitze hier

schwarze flamme

schwarze flamme
du
im frühling
jetzt

leichter wind
noch
am see

und weiß –
der kontrast
zu deinen händen
dort
über den fernen bergen

und dein lachen
jetzt
endlich
unsere
diese nacht

das alles, jetzt
und hier
die gedanken
wie lange wege im wald

knospende
blume

und dein lachen

wie ein sturm
in die hitze des spätsommers
vom tal herauf
ganz vom süden her

auch an die drei rosen
in bologna

ein sturm, der die eiche wanken
zittern lässt

diese augen

do so dein lachen
das sich selbst vergisst
das dem wartenden
die türe aufwirft

diese augen
voll von geschichten
wie ein meer
für mich

ja so
trifft es mich
der wunsch
sich
einen augenblick nur
ewig
darin zu verlieren

du
hinein geboren
in deine stille

ist es ein traum?
und auch deine augen
lachen still
ja, noch immer

wie ein grünes meer
das sonne spiegelt

und doch
Andrey Solov'yov was born in Leningrad. By living in this city, now called St. Petersburg, for more than 30 years, he inherited the great poetic traditions of the place. Already at school, he developed his interest in poetry. During his University studies, he realized that he was also able to express himself in poetry. But at that time, his heart and mind were already filled by theoretical physics. So, he used this very special tool of self-expression only occasionally following the famous hint by Boris Pasternak that "poems are not written, they happen".

He graduated from St. Petersburg State Polytechnical University, and obtained his Ph.D. in theoretical and mathematical physics at the A.F. Ioffe Physical-Technical Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, where he later built up a research group in atomic theory. He became Doctor of Physical and Mathematical Sciences (full professor degree) and Leading Research Fellow. He also obtained a professorship at St. Petersburg State Polytechnical University. He joined the Frankfurt Institute for Advanced Studies as a Fellow in 2004, and currently is leading research there in Meso-Bio-Nano science. He is an author or co-author of some 300 articles, 15 books and edited volumes on science. He was invited to speak in more than 100 international conferences and chairs number of important international meetings and symposia.

Andrey thinks that the world of people and their human perception of the World and the world of physics are not entirely disentangled, but rather have many very deep parallels, linking points, intersections and things in common, which are all worth exploring or at least thinking about. In what follows, he gives us examples of such poetic reflections of a scientist. The first poem was written more than quarter of the century ago and other two are relatively fresh.
Неправду прочь и черное долой,
Pусть Солнцем загорится над судьбою,
Гор недоступных купол золотой,
Своей высокою, манящий красотою.

И исчезнут пусть неверные тона,
Ненужные, заигранные ноты,
И напряженная, счастливая струна,
Звучаньем новым очарует своды.

И зазвучит серебряный мотив,
Пути иные в мире открывая,
Нетронутые дали разбудив,
Со дней иных вуаль срывая.

И в гор далеких вышине
Иной восход зашевелится,
И Солнце юное, как птица,
Откроет путь к иной весне.

09-10.04.84, Ленинград

(English version – by the author)
Get off untruth and down with the black,
Let the golden Dome of unreachable mountains
Burn up like the Sun over fate
Tempting by its great beauty.

Let untrue tones disappear,
And also unnecessary, overplayed notes,
And the strained, happy string
Charm the dome by their new sounds.

And the silver tune will begin to sound,
Opening new roads in the World,
Waking-up the virgin expanses,
Tearing away the veil of earlier days.

And inside the height of the faraway mountains
Another sunrise will begin to stir,
And the youthful Sun like a bird
Will open a path to a new Spring.

Translated at Casa Alegre, Algarve, Portugal, August 25, 2010
О сути движения

Мы движемся куда-то во Вселенной,
Не понимая - где и для чего,
И пользуемся азбукой отменной,
Туманить суть явления сего.

Мы мчимся на планете вокруг Солнца,
Считая обороты за года,
Хотя для жизненного танца
Не так уж важна эта чехарда.

Мы крутимся, как уж на сковородке,
Вокруг земной и собственной оси,
И самые возвышенные нотки,
Кружатся с нами в той выси.

А им бы ощутить всю невесомость,
Оторванность и неземной полет,
Всю бесконечность, всю бездонность,
Бездомность и душевный взлет.

И возбудить серебряные струны
Спасительной вселенской красоты,
Беспечность и восторженность фортуны,
И гениальность простоты.

Но продолжается вращенье,
И замкнут у орбиты путь.
В моей душе живет сомненье,
Что в том вращеньи скрыта суть.

А.В. Соловьёв, Schloßborn, 15.11.2006
(English version – translated by the author)
On the essence of motion

We are moving somewhere in the Universe
Without knowing where from and what for,
And we are using a perfect alphabet (the ABC)
To obscure the essence of this phenomenon.

We are rushing on a planet around the Sun,
Counting the circles as the years,
Although for the dance of life,
This leapfrog is not so important.

We are whirling like a grass snake on a pan
Around the Earth and around our own axis,
And the most spiritual notes
Spin with us at the same height.

But they would rather sense all the weightlessness,
The alienation of unearthly flight,
All the endlessness, all the bottomlessness,
Homelessness and the emotional take-off,

And excite the silver strings
Of the beauty pervading the whole Universe,
The unconcern and delight of fortune,
And the genius of simplicity.

But the spinning continues,
And the path of the orbit is closed.
My soul perceives an apprehension
That the real essence is hidden in that spinning.

Translated at
Casa Alegre, Algarve, Portugal, August 25, 2010
Как мало в жизни нам подвластно,
Как много в ней предрешено!
Ужель печаль и та напраствна,
Когда всё в мире суждено?
Ужель и душу можно ставить
В границы, рамки, тупики?
Ату её! И балом править
Без оной, ну и без тоски.
И плыть куда несёт течение
Проворной жизненной реки,
Без задней мысли, без сомненья,
Без боли в сердце, без тоски.
Ум – тоже кажется помеха,
Никчёмный и ненужный груз,
Забава, пошлая потеха,
Обуза всех безумных уз.
И в этом предрешенном мире-
Вопрос старинный на слуху:
Любить или «мочить в сортире»,
Жить или верить в чепуху?!

А.В. Соловьев, Schloßborn, 13-14.11.2008
It's so little in this life that is in our power,
It's so much that is pre-determined!
Is it indeed so that sorrow is of no-use
When everything in the world predestined?
Is it indeed so that the soul can be put
In borders, frames, deadlocks?
Tally-ho! And rule the spheres
Without it and of course with nostalgia.
And glide to where
The stream of the swift river of life carries
Without ulterior motives, without doubt,
Without pain in the heart, without melancholy.
The brain seems also to be a hindrance,
Purposeless and useless cargo,
Amusement, vulgar fun,
Burden of all the brainless ties.
And in this pre-determined world
The age-old question is on the agenda:
To love or to brutally beat down in the WC

(«мочить в сортире»: brutally beat down in the WC, the phrase (well known Russian slang) used some years ago by Putin in one of his speeches to explain his politics towards Chechens. It became a common noun after the speech and is used often in numerous discussions of Chechen conflict. )
To live or to believe in nonsense?!

Translated and annotated by A.V. Solov'yov
Casa Alegre, Algarve, Portugal, August 25, 2010
Anne Talvaz

Anne Talvaz was born in Brussels in 1963 of a French father and British mother, she studied French literature and languages and currently works as a commercial translator. She has lived in China for three years and now lives mainly in Brazil. She is the author of 2 poetry collections, Imagines (Farrago, 2002) and Panaches, lithophytes et coquilles de mer (Comp'Act, 2006). She has also translated many poets from Spanish and English into French and French into English. Recent works by Anne Talvaz include a book of poems Confessions d'une Joconde – Pourquoi le Minotaure est triste (Lactmem 2008) and one in prose Un départ annoncé – Trois années en Chine (Lactmem 2010).

A Brief History of Linguaggi Di-Versi

It all began in September 1998 at the Culture of Wine Festival in Bulgaria, a festival which combined wine tastings and poetry readings. On this occasion, three Italian poets – Michele Obit, Luciano Paronetto and Paolo Tomasella – and two Bulgarian translators – Stefka Hrusanova and Temenuga Zaharieva – decided to start a translation initiative which at this point did not yet have a name. The idea was to bring the cultures of Eastern and Western Europe closer to each other and stimulate reciprocal interest in the literature and arts of the various member states of Europe. The first workshop, organised by Stefka, took place in 2000 in Hungary, at the Hungarian Translators’ House in Balatonfüred, and the project was to translate the poems of four Hungarian poets, Gábor Gyukics, András Imre, István Kemény, and István Vörös. The translators were the original group of two Bulgarians and three Italians. A debate about translation and translation issues was also organised. The next year, Michele Obit organised a week in the village of Topoló, in Italy. This time, the poems of four Slovenian authors, Taja Kramberger, Primož Ćučnik, Peter Semolič and Aleš Šteger were translated not only by the original group, but by Hungarian poet Andras Imre, Austrian poet and publisher Ludwig Hartinger. It was then that the group acquired...
its current name of Linguaggi Di-Versi. A book of poems was published as a result.

Taja Kramberger was inspired by this event to organise a multilingual workshop in the Slovenian resort of Koper the following year, during which each poet contributed one poem, to be translated into the languages of all the other poets present. There were over 20 poets present. The event was also attended by painter Alenka Koderman, who produced beautiful watercolour portraits of the participants, and musicians Jasna Nadles and Milan Vrsajov, and ended with a round-table discussion about the theoretical and practical challenges of translation. The results of this event were presented at two public readings and collected into a volume, Različni jezikI (2004).

In 2003, Taja Kramberger organised another meeting in Budapest to present the fruits of the 2002 workshop. The Hungarian translations from the 2000 workshop were then presented to a Hungarian audience by Steflka Hrusanov together with the four authors.

In 2005, the group reunited in Austria at the beautiful manor-house of Waxenberg, near Linz in Austria. We translated a short prose passage by Austrian Romantic author Adalbert Stifter in honour of the 200th anniversary of his birth. Once more, the group comprised around 20 poets, and we also visited Stifter’s birthplace in Slovakka. The translations were presented at a twilight reading on a ferry, as we crossed the beautiful (brown) Danube.

In 2008, Steflka Hrusanov and I attended the Science Meets Poetry gathering during ESO2008 in Barcelona. Although that time we limited ourselves to giving a presentation of the work of Linguaggi Di-Versi – more detailed than this one – it gave us our very first opportunity to meet scientists who were also poets. Overall an enthralling experience and a humbling one, as we watched readings by people internationally recognised as both scientists and poets. I had a particularly interesting conversation with astrophysicist Marie-Noëlle Celérier, who I believe is present on this occasion also, and who told me she had no problem taking liberties with scientific facts in her poetry – something I, as a mere poet and scientific ignoramus, would never dare to do.

This time, I am here on my own to present our work on what we called “the Shelley Project”, and which involved translating the second half of the second stanza of Shelley’s “Letter to Maria Gisborne”, written in 1820, while he was staying at the home of his and Mary Shelley’s friend Maria Gisborne at Livorno, then known to English-speakers as Leghorn. It was published in his Posthumous Poems in 1824 and later included in Mary Shelley’s edition of his complete works.
Why Shelley?

The project type – translating a work by an established author rather than work by each other – appeared to be the simpler solution in view of the fact that we all live quite far apart, and that translating living poets whom you may or may not know personally is always a tricky business. Generally speaking, it is best if the poet is present and can give an opinion – as you know, in Shelley’s own words, poets are apt to be “sensitive plants” and prone to take offence when misunderstood. However, as poetry is not a lucrative occupation, we have a great deal of other business to attend to, so that organising a workshop was simply not practical this time.

Dead poets, on the other hand, have one major asset in the translator’s view – they are unable to complain. Of course, neither are they able to supply any kind of useful information, but then, most silver linings do come with a cloud.

The inspiration for this particular project came from a line in the “Letter to Maria Gisborne”, “The hill / Looks hoary through the white electric rain”. This would be an inspired metaphor even in a contemporary poem written at a time when people have been taking electricity for granted for generations. In 1820, it was so cutting-edge as to be almost outrageous. A closer look at Shelley’s work soon proved that is a far from unusual occurrence. The most striking example is perhaps to be found in Prometheus Unbound, the great lyrical drama he composed in 1819:

> A sphere, which is as many thousand spheres,  
> Solid as crystal, yet through all its mass  
> Flow, as through empty space, music and light:  
> Ten thousand orbs involving and involved, 
> Purple and azure, white, and green, and golden...  
> Upon a thousand sightless axes spinning...

Although by this time the exploration of atomic theory was well under way, it would take another 80 years for the existence of subatomic particles to be scientifically confirmed. A stunning example of the poet’s intuition, indeed.

Although Shelley was not a scientist in the strict sense, he developed a passionate interest in matters scientific from an early age, thanks to an encounter with Dr. James Lind, a physician who worked near Eton College, where Shelley was a pupil at the time, and which he hated. It so happened that Dr. Lind had been a close confident of James Watt; was a cousin of James Keir, a pioneer of the modern chemical industry; and himself had
considerable knowledge of astronomy and meteorology. At the time Shelley knew him, he was also a close friend of William Herschel. It is unsurprising that the gifted boy to whom Lind acted as mentor and adviser should have found all of this considerably more exciting than the classical teaching he was receiving at Eton – with the exception of lectures given there by Adam Walker, an itinerant science master. Like many a teenager before and after him, he became an enthusiastic experimenter, playing with gunpowder, electrifying door handles to shock his teachers, and even (unsuccessfully) trying to raise ghosts. After leaving Eton for Oxford in 1810, Shelley continued his experiments. In the words of D.G. King-Hele, “His rooms were littered with scientific instruments such as electrical machines and voltaic batteries, his hands and clothes were stained with acids, and his guests would sometimes find their teacups half full of concentrated acid.” It was also during this period that Shelley produced a treaty, The Necessity of Atheism, which led to his expulsion from Oxford in 1811, ironically at the instigation of a Professor of Poetry. It is interesting to note just how profoundly the scientific approach had already affected his thinking: It is to be considered what arguments we receive [...] which should convince us of the existence of a Deity.

1st, The evidence of the senses. If the Deity should appear to us, if he should convince our senses of his existence, this revelation would necessarily command belief. Those to whom the Deity has thus appeared have the strongest possible conviction of his existence. But the God of Theologians is incapable of local visibility.

2d, Reason. It is urged that man knows that whatever is must either have had a beginning, or have existed from all eternity, he also knows that whatever is not eternal must have had a cause. When this reasoning is applied to the universe, it is necessary to prove that it was created: until that is clearly demonstrated we may reasonably suppose that it has endured from all eternity. We must prove design before we can infer a designer.

I shall now skim over the years 1811 to 1820, although they, too, were rich in incident. It is enough to say that by 1820 Shelley was living in Italy with his wife Mary – author, as you certainly know, of one of the earliest science-fiction novels – amidst a wide circle of friends, of whom the best known are Byron and Leigh Hunt. Maria Gisborne was another of those

friends, and in the summer of 1820 she lent the Shelleys her villa in
Livorno, which is where the “Letter to Maria Gisborne” came to be written. On several occasions, Shelley memorialised his friendships in long, rambling poems, which are a distillation of companionship and conversation at their very best. The “Letter to Maria Gisborne” is one of these, and includes many fine examples of scientific imagery turned to poetic account. As I have said, although Shelley had had an excellent scientific grounding, and kept up an interest in science, he never − unlike Goethe, for instance, of whom we shall be hearing more later − took it up as a principal occupation and made no discoveries of his own. However, it is beyond question that science and its achievements fired his unparalledimagination, and made an undoubted contribution, not only to some of the literary masterworks of all time, but to future scientific discovery. The original idea was for us to translate the first three stanzas of this poem. However, a gentle reminder from Jean-Patrick that we might be biting off more than we could chew and that in any case we were also bound by the constraints of time led us to settle on this extract from the second stanza, which I shall now read in the original English, and then in my own French translation. Sadly, two years after producing this poem, Shelley died in a sailing accident at the age of 29.
Finally, I would like to thank Jean-Patrick Connerade and the organisers of this forum for enabling us to participate in a very stimulating event. I would also like to give particular thanks to Stefka Hrusanova and András Imreh, whose absence I very much regret, and who provided invaluable and unfailing support. And thank you all, ladies and gentlemen, for being here.

This quicksilver no gnome has drunk—within
The walnut bowl it lies, veined and thin,
In colour like the wake of light that stains
The Tuscan deep, when from the moist moon rains
The inmost shower of its white fire—the breeze
Is still—blue Heaven smiles over the pale seas.
And in this bowl of quicksilver—for I
Yield to the impulse of an infancy
Outlasting manhood—I have made to float
A rude idealism of a paper boat:—
A hollow screw with cogs—Henry will know
The thing I mean and laugh at me,—if so
He fears not I should do more mischief.—Next
Lie bills and calculations much perplexed,
With steam-boats, frigates, and machinery quaint
Traced over them in blue and yellow paint.
Then comes a range of mathematical
Instruments, for plans nautical and statical,
A heap of rosin, a queer broken glass
With ink in it;—a china cup that was
What it will never be again, I think,—
A thing from which sweet lips were wont to drink
The liquor doctors rail at—and which I
Will quaff in spite of them—and when we die
We'll toss up who died first of drinking tea,
And cry out,—'Heads or tails?' where'er we be.
Near that a dusty paint-box, some odd hooks,
A half-burnt match, an ivory block, three books,
Where conic sections, spherics, logarithms,
To great Laplace, from Saunderson and Sims,
Lie heaped in their harmonious disarray
Of figures,—disentangle them who may.
Baron de Tott's Memoirs beside them lie,
And some odd volumes of old chemistry.
Near those a most inexplicable thing,
With lead in the middle—I'm conjecturing
How to make Henry understand; but no—
I'll leave, as Spenser says, with many mo,
This secret in the pregnant womb of time,
Too vast a matter for so weak a rhyme.

French version (traduction par Anne Talvaz)

Ce vif-argent, nul gnome ne l’a bu – dans
Le bol de noyer il repose, clair et veiné,
Sa couleur celle du sillage de lumière qui tache
Les profondeurs toscanes, quand de la lune humide pleut
L’averse la plus essentielle de son feu blanc – la brise
Est immobile – bleu, le Ciel sourit par-dessus les mers pâles,
Et dans ce bol de vif-argent – car je
Cède à l’envie d’une enfance qui survit
A l’âge adulte – j’ai fait flotter
Un idéalisme, un maladroit esquif de papier :
Une vis creuse avec des engrenages – Henry saura
De quoi je parle et se mettra à rire, – et dans ce cas
Il ne craint pas que je n’aggrave encore les choses. – Ensuite,
Voici des notes et calculs, bien embrouillés,
Par-dessus lesquels on a tracé des vapeurs, des frégates,
En bleu et en jaune, et d’étranges machines.
Ensuite, une série d’instruments
Mathématiques, pour plans nautiques et statistiques,
Un amas de résine, un curieux verre cassé
Qui contient de l’encre ; – une coupe de porcelaine qui fut
Ce que, je pense, elle ne sera jamais plus, –
Un objet où bien volontiers venaient de tendres lèvres
Boire la liqueur qui met en furie les médecins – et que
Pour ma part, je boirai malgré eux – et au moment de mourir,
Nous parierons : qui est mort le premier, d’avoir trop bu
Près de cette boîte à peinture, quelques crochets,
Une allumette à demi consumée, un bloc d’ivoire, trois livres,
Où des sections coniques, des sphères, des logarithmes
Du grand Laplace, de Saunderson et Sims
S’entassent dans un désordre harmonieux
De figures – les démêle qui peut.
Près d’elles, les Mémoires du Baron Toth Ferenc,
Ainsi que quelques tomes de chimie ancienne.
Et un objet des plus inexplicables, avec
En son centre du plomb – je me demande
Comment faire comprendre à Henry ; mais non –
Je laisserai, comme dit Spenser, avec tant et tant,
Reposer le secret dans la matrice du temps,
Trop vaste matière pour si faible rime.

(Hungarian version)
PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY
LEVÉL MARIA GISBORNE-HOZ
(részlet)

Ebből a vékonypénzű, erezett
Higanyból manó nem hörpinthetett,
Színe, mint a toskán tájat verő,
Nyírkos holdból zuhogó fényeső:
Mély, fehér, míg szellő sem mocorog,
Kék tengerekre kék ég mosolyog.
Gyermeki gyengémnnek engedtem én
Felnőttén is: a hígany tetején
A diótában ide-oda futkos
A kis papírhajó-idealizmus,
Üreges csavar – Henry tudja majd,
Miről van szó, és nem féli a bajt,
Csak nevet egy jót. Mellette kusza
Számlák és számítások halmaza,
És rajtuk pingált ábrák, sárga-kékek,
Gőzhajók, fregattok meg furcsa gépek.
Egy kicsit odébb mindenféle eszköz
Statikai és hajózási tervhez,
Gyanta, egy cakkosra tört kalamáris,
Csésze – mintha szeméten volna máris –,
Édes ajkak itták belőle egykor
A nedűt, melyből időnként egy-egy korty
Nekem is lecsúszik a torkomon,
Hiába emlegetik korholón –,
S ha meghalunk, eldől, mi tette: a
Zaklatott élet vagy a sok tea?
Poros festékdobozon, gyufaroncson
Kívül horgok, egy darab elefantcsont,
Könyvek Saundersontól, Simstől, Laplace-tól:
A gömbhöz ítt egy kúp metszete passzol,
Iszonyú sok szám logaritmusá –
A zűrzavar termékeny ritmusa.
Arrébb öreg vegytankönyv és a párja:
Tóth Ferenc báró vaskos memoárja.
Egy egészen talányos tárgy is áll ott,
Ólomközpű – azon spekulálók,
Henrynek hogyan magyarázom ezt el;
De nem, hagyjuk már, ahogy mondja Spenser:
Az idő méhe legyen véle vemhes
Túl nagy kérdés ez ilyen léha vershez.

Imreh András fordítása

Bulgarian version

Пърси Биш Шели
Откъс от “Писмо до Мария Гизбърн” (1820)

Тоз живак – ненапит от никой гном – лежи самин
в съда от орехово дърво, като жила фин,
на цвет като зората, обагряща навремени
tоскански небосвод, кога от луната ромоли
dъжд съкровен от белия е огн – а бризът спи
– небе лазурно сияе над морски бледини.
И в този съд с живак – защото се предавам на порива на детството, надживяло мъжеството, – пуснах във забрава грубия идеализъм на лодка от хартия да заплыва: – празно зъбчато колело – Хенри ще ме разбере и с подигравки ще ме подбере, – щом толкоз го е страх, не ще правя повече бели. – Книжа и сметки лежат разбъркани встани, с фрегати, параходи, механизми причудливи, листа оцветили със сини и жълти дири. После следва ред пособия геометрични, за карти навигационни и статични; куп смола, катурната строшена стъкленица с мастило; – чаша от китайски порцелан, частица е била от туй, що нивга веч не ще бъде, не крия, – нещо, от което сладки устни обикновено пият лекарството, що докторите възмущава – но аз ще го изъпьтам вместо тях, – а щом умрем, тогаз ще хвърлим чоп кой пръв издъхнал е от пиене на чай, и ще извикаме – “Ези или тура?”, от който и да е край. По-нататък – направена кутия със бои и вехтории, полуизгорен кибрит, слонова кост, три книги, разрези на конуси и логаритми, сферична геометрия, от Сондерсън и Симс чак до Лаплас, без симетрия, натрупани във хармоничен безпорядък от фигури, – да ги подрежда който иска до припадък. Мемоарите на барон дьо Тот лежат до тия, тъй както стари томове класическа химия. Най-непонятният предмет стои край тях, с олово по средата – досещам се през смях как Хенри аз да убедя; все ми е едно – ще оставя, както казва Спенсър, с много “но”, в бременната утроба на времето таз тайна, за слабия ми стих вселена тъй безкраина.

Превела от английски език Стефка Хрусанова

(Translated from English into Bulgarian by Stefka Hrusanova)
Two poems by Anne Talvaz

LA MORT ET LE PSYCHANALYSTE
La mort en avait assez.
Assez de sentir autour d'elle
ces gens qui la fuyaient, ou la recherchaient,
et puis qui changeaient d'avis au dernier moment,
ces gens qui l'avaient frôlée de près et avaient cessé de la craindre.
Assez de sentir qu'elle était combattue sur tous les fronts.
Assez d'entendre promettre à certains une vie après la mort
(qu'est-ce qu'ils en savent ceux-là).
Assez de sentir qu'on lui en voulait à mort.

Le psychanalyste avait l'air bienveillant.
La mort trouva son expression agréable quoiqu'un peu trop professionnelle.
La mort trouvait un peu étonnant
qu'on pût faire des relations humaines un métier,
elle qui n'aimait pas beaucoup les relations humaines
ni les gens en général.
Le psychanalyste se rendait bien compte de la gravité de la situation.
Il fallait débarrasser la mort de cette peur
qu'elle portait en elle. L'amener à devenir elle-même.
Amener la mort à devenir elle-même, vous vous rendez compte ?

Le plus simple
aurait été d'envoyer la mort se faire pendre ailleurs.
Ni vu, ni connu. Mais ce n'est pas une conduite à tenir.
Le psychanalyste aurait également pu lui dire :
"Faites ce que vous voudrez".
Mais dire cela à un patient, et a fortiori à la mort
ce n'est pas une conduite à tenir, d'autant plus que dans le cas de
la mort
les conséquences eussent été assez prévisibles.

Le psychanalyste fit donc parler la mort. De tout,
de son passé (elle n'avait pas eu
une enfance particulièrement malheureuse), de son désarroi présent,
de ses projets d'avenir. La mort n'avait pas de projets d'avenir.
Cela faisait partie de son problème.
La mort se mit à attendre ses rendez-vous avec impatience. Elle préparait ce qu'elle allait dire et parfois se trouvait en train de dire tout autre chose. Parfois aussi elle faisait des confidences qu'elle avait pensé ne jamais pouvoir faire à personne. La mort, ensuite, tomba amoureuse du psychanalyste. Elle chercha son nom dans l'annuaire. Elle chercha et lut ses publications. Elle s'abstint tout de même d'aller faire les cent pas devant chez lui.

En d'autres termes, la mort avait cessé de s'emmerder. Elle se sent beaucoup plus heureuse. Quand elle marche dans la rue, elle se sent le cœur ensoleillé, à l'unisson de la lumière qui filtre à travers les feuilles des marronniers. Quand elle a quelque chose sur la patate, elle sait le dire. Il lui arrive de temps en temps d'écrire un poème.

La situation dans le monde n’a guère changé, il est vrai. Les gens continuent à mourir et à redouter la mort. Mais la mort s’en fiche. Elle est heureuse, c'est l'essentiel.

(English version by Anne Talvaz)
DEATH AND THE PSYCHOANALYST
Death had had enough. Enough of people who would keep running away, or seeking her out, and changing their minds at the last minute, or who’d had a brush with her and were no longer afraid. Enough of being beaten back on all fronts. Enough of hearing promises of life after death (what did they know). Really, it was enough to make you want to lie down and die.

The analyst seemed a nice enough bloke. Death rather liked the look on his face, even if it was a bit too professional. Death found it surprising that anyone should make a living out of human relationships
as she herself did not particularly like human relationships or people, for that matter. The analyst knew this was serious. Death needed to lose the fear she was experiencing constantly. Help her become herself. Help Death become herself – can you believe it?

The easiest thing would have been to tell Death to go and jump in a lake and that would have been that. But that’s just not done. The analyst could also have told her to do as she pleased. But to tell that to a patient, and especially Death, is just not done, especially as in the case of Death the consequences would have been all too predictable.

So the analyst got Death to talk. About everything, her childhood (it hadn’t been a particularly unhappy one), her current lack of direction, her plans for the future. Death hadn’t any plans for the future, which was a part of her problem.

Death just couldn’t wait for her sessions. She would prepare what she was going to say and might find herself saying something quite different. Occasionally she would confide something she had believed she never, ever could. Death fell in love with the analyst. She looked him up in the phone book. She looked up and read his writings. She did not, however, drive past his house.

In other words, Death wasn’t bored any longer. She’s a lot happier. As she walks down the street, there is sunlight in her heart to match the light filtering through the chestnut leaves. When something gets to her, she knows how to speak up. Now and again, she writes a poem.

True, the world situation hasn’t changed that much. People are still dying and afraid of death. But does death give a damn? She’s happy, and that’s it, really.
LA QUESTION
Faudrait-il croire que la planète se réchauffe
quand il fait froid comme dans une église pourquoi
ne peut-on prendre le premier venu
et lui dire tu seras libre heureux et riche pourquoi
la douleur la ramène-t-elle toujours
alors qu'elle doit avoir mieux à faire et nous aussi pourquoi
pour réduire son empreinte carbonique
ne pourrait-on pas simplement s'essuyer les pieds pourquoi
tendons-nous les bras aux autres
pour nous en laver les mains au dernier moment pourquoi
les poètes qui écrivent beaucoup sont-ils considérés
comme meilleurs que ceux qui écrivent peu pourquoi
faut-il traiter les gros comme des moins que rien
alors qu'un jour l'humanité brûlera tout entière
et que nous brûlerons mieux que les autres ?

(English version – by Anne Talvaz)
QUESTION TIME
Should we believe the planet is heating up
When the weather’s freezing as a church why
can’t you just grab someone off the street
and tell him you’ll be rich happy and free why
does pain keep on and on at you
although both it and you have better things to do why
to reduce your carbon footprint
can’t you just give your feet a good wipe why
do we hold out our arms
only to wash our hands of each other at the last minute why
do prolific poets have better reputations
than those who don’t write much why
should fatsoes be treated as if they were subhuman
although someday all of humanity will burn
and we’ll burn so much better?

Poems by Andras Imreh (Hungarian originals)

Still Life
CSEND, ÉLET
De ha mégis, igérd meg, hogy az ágy
örökre ott marad, ahol a macska
először fekszik le. Nézd, a fotelben,
az el nem pakolt pulóvereken
milyen puhán, milyen kényelmesen
gömbölyödik össze, mint anyaölben
az embrió, vagy mint csigák a parton.
Nézd, mennyire méltatlan a szobánk:
nincs virágos kárpit a kanapén,
sem diszpárra, és forró csokoládé
sem gőzölőg alacsony asztalon,
viszont a 60W-os lámpa fénye
ugyanúgy hull rá, sárgán, melegen,
imtha egy szál gyertyánál vacsoráznánk,
miközben ő a sötétség vízébe
csobbanó láng szélső hullámkörén túl
felügyelne néma töltekezésünk.
Nézd lecsukódó mandulaszemét,
nézd őt percig és aztán válaszolj:
ugye te sem tudod már a félhomályban,
hogy ő reszket-e, mielőtt az álom
lassú, sűrű folyóvízébe lépne,
vagy szemed hullámzó csarnokvízében,
a megrendült feszített víztükörben
vibrál egy mozdulatlan macskaárny?
Ugye, milyen szép? Ugye, igazából?
Ugye nem csak én látom gyönyörűnek,
ahogy lassan, tapintatosan
gömbölyded hasán át oldalra fordul?

András Imreh
STILL, LIFE (English version)

You nonetheless have to give me your word
the bed will never be moved from the place
where the cat lies down first. See how it curls…
up in a ball, comfortable and soft,
upon a pile of pullovers we failed
to put away, just like an embryo
lodged deep inside its mother, or like snails
scattered across the sand. Our room is so
unworthy of its role, the couch without
a flowery throwover, or decorated
cushions, no hot chocolate sends a thread
of steam up on the lowly table, all
the light that falls on it comes from a bulb
of 60 watts, warm, yellowish, as if
we ate our evening meal with just one candle.
The cat, meanwhile, submerged in darkness, far
beyond the wave circles of splashing flame,
looks as if it’s keeping watch upon
the silent rituals that satisfy
our hunger. Spend five minutes gazing on
its almond-shaped eyes, and then deny this:
you cannot tell whether, in the half dark,
the cat’s pulsating, preparing to step
into the slow, thick, running water of
its dreams, or whether, in the fluctuating
liquid that bathes your iris, in that tense
and trembling watery mirror, all that throbs
is the unmoving phantom of a cat!
It’s wonderful, unspeakably so, don’t
you see? Am I the only one who thrills
before its majesty as expertly,
unhurriedly, distending its rounded
belly it turns over on one side?

(translation by Christopher Whyte)

MUTA, LA VITA (Italian version)
Ma se succede qualcosa, prometti che il letto
rimarra li per sempre, dove la gatta
giace per la prima volta. Guardala, sulla poltrona,
sui maglioni disordinati,
che soffice, che comoda
si raggomitola, come un embrione
nel grembo materno o come una chiocciola sulla foglia.
Guarda che povera è la nostra camera:
non c’è damasco a fiori sul divano,
nè un cuscinetto per adornarlo, sul tavolino
non fuma la cioccolata calda
invece la luce della lampadina di sessanta Watt
cade così gialla, calda,
come se cenassimo a lume di candela
mentre lei osserva il nostro silenzioso mangiucchiare
attraverso i cerchi delle onde intorno all’affondante
nell’acqua del crepuscolo
fiamma.
Guarda i suoi occhi a mandorla chiudersi,
guardali per cinque minuti e poi rispondimi:
è vero che anche tu non puoi decidere nella penombra
se trema prima che entri
nelle lente, dense acque del sonno,
o nell’ondulata galleria acquatica dei tuoi occhi,
nell’agitato dalla tensione specchio d’acqua
sta vibrando un’immobile ombra felina?
E’ vero che è così bello? E’ vero?
E’ vero che non solo a miei occhi pare meraviglioso
come lentamente, attentamente,
si volta di fianco sul suo pancino arrotondato?

(Traduzione: Michele Obit, Luciano Paronetto)

KOMPOSZT (Original, in Hungarian)

Nem szalma lesz a fűből.
Nyúlósan, nyálasan zsugorodik,
mint műanyag a tűzben.

Azután szürke lesz és kérkes és tömör,
mint a pala vagy a müzliszelet. A kérgen
tojáshéj, elszáradt muskált és

kávézacc. Esőben
gőzőög, mint a vacogó kutyák.
Ha belegondolsz: kertünk szégyene.

Mégis, ha megszerkesztenéd
az ingatlan súlypontját, kiderülne:
ott van, igen, ott, a sarokban –
nem sejtett epicentrum, néptelen,  
betemetett fővárosunk,  
sugárzóan, diadalittasan.

COMPOST (English version)
Tr. Anne Talvaz

Grass won't turn into straw.  
It shrinks stickily, viscously,  
like plastic in fire.

Then it will be grey and crusty and dense,  
like slate or a muesli bar. On the crust  
there's eggshell, withered geranium and  
coffee grounds. When it rains  
it steams like shivering dogs.  
If you think about it it's the disgrace of the garden.

But if you drew the estate's centre  
of gravity, it would be  
there, yes, over there, in the corner –

unsuspected epicentre,  
our desert, buried capital,  
radiating victoriously.

COMPOSTO (Italian version)

Non diventerà fieno l'erba.  
Si affloscia velocemente senza fare fiemma,  
come plastica nei fuoco.

Dopo diventa griglia, incrostata e compatta,  
come lastra o barretta di müzli. Sulla scorza  
gusci d'uova, geranio secco e  
fondi di caffé. Nella pioggia  
emette vapore, come nei cani che battono i denti.  
E pensa: la vergogna del nostro giardino.
Comunque, se calcoli:
il centro di gravità della proprietà, succede così, che:
e là, davvero, là nel angolo –

insospettato epicentro, nostra
inabitata, interrata capitale,
splendida, trionfante.

(Traduzione: Michele Obit, Luciano Paronetto)

Charlotte Ueckert

Living in Italy for some time in a year, I want to show the influence of landscape to the inner view and to may poetry. Reading some poems of different periods of my life, there could be a significant continuity of experience in life and in words. Including the continuity of breaks.
WIE SPRACHE FUNKTIONIERT

Abends kommen die Bienenfresser
Mit spitzen Schreien
Segeln sie scharf unter Wolkengeball
Bis in die Gassen fast
In die Fenster und mir um die Ohren
So klein flattrig
In liebenswürdigem Schnitt
Spielende Kinder die ein Lächeln
wollen
Und mich aus dem Verstummen
In Worte zwingen

COME FUNZIONA LA PAROLA

(A Italian version)

A sera vengono i vespieri
Con strilli acuti
Veleggian bruschi sotto l’ammasso delle nubi
Sin quasi dentro ai vicoli
Dentro la finestra e i miei orecchi.
Un piccolo sfarfallio
D’incantevol foggia
Bimbi giocosi in cerca d’un sorriso
E fuori dalla mia mutezza
Forzano me in parola

HOW LANGUAGE IS FUNCTIONING

(English version)

At twilight the beeeaters are coming
With pointed screams
They sail sharply under the buildup of clouds
Into the narrow lanes almost
Into the windows and around my ears
So small fluttering
In a charming cut
Playing children who want a smile
And force me out of dieing away (muteness)
To words
DIE GEDICHTE DER LETZTEN TAGE

gelebt
dann erst fallen mir Buchstaben in die Ohren
sanfte Vogelstimmen
die den Regen in die hintere Reihe singen

Poesie des Erhabenen
über dunstgefülltem Tal

I POEMI DEGLI ULTIMI GIORNI

(Italian version)

Vissuti
E poi cadono le lettere dentro i miei orecchi
Dolci voci d’uccelli
Che cantano la pioggia ormai all’ultimo posto
Poesia del sublime
Sulla valle piena di foschia

THE POEMS OF THE LAST DAYS

(English version)

Were lived
After this letters run into my ears
Soft voices of birds
Which sing the rain behind
Poetry of loftiness (superiority)
Over a misty valley
DAS TAL BESTIMMT ALLES

dort aus der Tiefe kommt das Gemüse
und wilde Früchte auch Vögel
herauf die Dächer
Schafe weiden und saufen den Bach aus
am Grund und die Männer ziehen hinab
zur Jagd am Frühabend
seh ich Glühlämpchen von oben
sich in den Wald fressen und dann fängt
das Geschrei an Höj Höj das Gebell
für die Wildschweine und es kracht
und dann kommen die Männer und
wollen bewundert sein richtige Männer
die bestimmt nichts von Frauen verstehen

LA VALLE DECIDE TUTTO

(Italian version)

Là dal profondo vengono i legumi
E frutti silvestri e uccelli
Fin quassù sui tetti
Pecore pascolano e sbevazzano dal ruscello
Fino al fondo e gli uomini migrano giù
A prima sera per cacciare
Io vedo barlumi di luce dall’alto
Che divorano il bosco e poi comincia
Il gridio “Ehi Ehi” e il latrare
Per il cinghiale e lo sparare
E poi tornan gli uomini e
Voglion essere ammirati veri uomini
Che di sicuro nulla sanno delle donne
THE VALLEY DETERMINES ALL

(English version)

Out of the depth there come vegetable
And wild fruits also birds
Up to the roofs
Sheep are grazing and broozing the brook
To the bottom and men drop down
To hunt early in the evening
I'm looking how glooming lights from above are
Eating the wood and now starts
The shouting Höj Höj the barking
For the wild pigs and the crashes
And then the men are coming back and
Want to be admired all real men
Who know nothing for sure
About women
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This book, published by Euroscience, is the record of the session ‘Science meets Poetry’ held in the Piazza San Carlo in Turin on the occasion of ESOF2010, the Euroscience Open Forum of the year 2010

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Il Circolo dei Lettori (Torino), the European Academy of Sciences Arts and Letters, die Kogge, La Société des Poètes Français La Maison de Poésie, and the Columbus State University (USA)
SCIENCE MEETS POETRY

The Science meets Poetry sessions of ESOF are an established meeting place for Poets interested in Science, Scientists with a taste for Poetry and those lucky enough to wear two hats, being recognized both as scientists and as poets. The whole story began with the meeting at ESOF2006 of scientists and poets celebrating the life of Ludwig of Bavaria, and continued in Barcelona at ESOF2008 with a much more general and ambitious theme: Science meets Poetry I which proved a great success. Both events gave rise to Proceedings already published by Euroscience.

We now present Science meets Poetry II, held in the magnificent surroundings of the Piazza Carlo Alberto in Turin, right next to the Palazzo Carignano, on the occasion of ESOF2010. The event brought many poets to Turin, and they have all contributed to the present volume, which therefore represents a compendium of original works, lectures and commentary by contemporary writers from Europe and further afield on the rich interconnections between science and poetry. The event lasted several evenings and was open for access to all citizens and passers-by from the city. As usual, we publish not only the lectures which were delivered, but also poems by all the participants.

The tendency of poets to cluster into groups with common interests maps similar behaviour amongst many scientists and, as a result, they understand the environment of international scientific gatherings extremely well. Moreover, poets have a way of analysing thoughts and getting to the bottom of new ideas which scientists often find an inspiration. Bringing the two communities together is therefore much more than a simple exercise in communication. Indeed, these apparently very different sets of people have much in common intellectually; in particular, they share a common suspicion of approximations whenever they involve any form of muddled thinking. Poets pride themselves on being precise, and enjoy meeting others who do the same.

The main outcome of such meetings is a broadening of horizons on both sides of the supposed divide. The fact that the 'two cultures' are in fact but one was reinforced by several lectures, contributed by established poets who are also active scientists. As regards the contribution to a Forum such as ESOF, poets are not generally guilty of vulgarisation, and the way they bring new ideas to others is often less jarring to many scientists than the simplifications prevalent in much of what is termed 'communication'. By coming together with poets, scientists discover a different approach to writing, and the two communities invariably end up respecting each other far more after such encounters. Moreover, bringing together poets from so many different countries, writing in various languages, is not an obvious exercise. With science as a common theme, they are also able to find a common purpose, which has created something of an international school of poetry over the years.

Indeed, especially on ethical issues and questions of principle concerning the pursuit of research, the poets will readily challenge received wisdom, and the discussions between scientists and poets soon transcend the ordinary. For scientists, the encounter is valuable and has proved refreshing to many. This small volume of proceedings will, we hope, serve as a lasting record of a very productive time for all those who were involved. We believe the Science meets Poetry event captures an important aspect of the Euroscience Open Forum, namely that research is not only open to all citizens to discover, but also branches out towards other forms of creative culture, even those which might seem quite different at the outset.

Jean-Patrick Connerade