

translations, new ways of looking down the *otchłań* – the ‘abyssus’ – of the untranslatable.

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*Panic Cure: Poetry from Spain for the 21st Century*. Translated by Forrest Gander with an Introduction by Daniel Aguirre-Oteiza. Pp. 208. Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2013. Pb. £12.95.

Aníbal Núñez: *Selected Poems*. Translated by Luis Ingelmo and Michael Smith. Pp. ix+303. Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2013. Pb. £14.95.

These two collections are proof of the dynamism and vitality of contemporary Spanish poetry. The number and range of publications currently emerging – anthologies, textbooks supported by public money, magazines, online sources, Spanish scholarly monographs – and their enthusiastic readership certainly point to a significant moment for the swiftly changing Spanish poetry scene.

*Panic Cure* presents a selection of poems by ten contemporary Spanish poets writing in Spanish. Daniel Aguirre-Oteiza, in his Introduction, explains that Gander’s book is best understood as a ‘highly personal miscellany chosen by a non-Spanish poet’. Gander selects three established figures – Antonio Gamoneda, Olvido García Valdés, and Miguel Casado – whose exploratory and self-reflexive verse prompted a younger generation of poets to question a politically repressive conformity by claiming new authority and new areas of consciousness in their writing. Some of these younger figures might be unfamiliar even to aficionados of recent Spanish poetry: Marcos Canteli, Sandra Santana, Benito del Pliego, Julia Piera, Ana Gorriá, Pilar Fraile Amador, and Esther Ramón, with around ten poems in bilingual format per author. Curiously, although it is mentioned by neither Gander or Aguirre-Oteiza, every one of these lesser-known figures was born in the 1970s. The element that binds the selected poets together, if there is one, is what Aguirre-Oteiza describes as ‘a multiplicity of stylistic and procedural choices beyond constraints of national and generational identifications’; an energetically errant writing epitomized by ‘non-linear, de-centred linguistic acts’.

Aguirre-Oteiza’s opening gambit illustrates with emphatic assurance how parochial, sectarian, and self-isolating the recent Spanish

poetry industry can be. Miguel Casado argues that translation is ‘an experience of foreignness’, but, as Gander’s ‘highly personal miscellany’ indicates, it is also a gesture of cultural renovation which goes some way towards correcting the schematic and reductive literary history perpetuated by rival anthologies of recent Spanish verse. Aguirre-Oteiza does not name names, but he has in mind the traditionalist doyens of the Spanish literary establishment, with their watchwords of commonality, continuity, and taxonomic neatness. *Panic Cure* supplies a more adventurously eclectic snapshot of current Spanish verse, in which Gander seeks to redefine critical parameters by uncovering creative sites of arresting singularity, nervous self-appraisal, and bracing disturbance. Indeed, Antonio Gamoneda’s typically combative advocacy of unpoliced, seditious, and ‘abnormal’ poetic locutions, which are resistant to time-honoured rhyming and metrical patterns, is one of the first articles of Gander’s editorial creed.

It is fitting then that a range of Gamoneda’s refractory and multivocal texts opens *Panic Cure*. Refusing to pigeonhole authors according to particular schools of poetry, networking clusters, or ideological templates, Gander reminds anglophone readers not to be swayed by squabbles about officially approved *versus* transgressive verse-cultures. Aguirre-Oteiza proposes that a possible solution to current literary-critical tendencies – by which Spanish public intellectuals neglect an assortment of poetic bequests in favour of a single, monolithic story of linguistic affiliation and cultural unity – lies beyond what he calls ‘the margins of national poetry collections by Spanish readers’. *Panic Cure* should be praised for pointing the way.

The terse translator’s note included in this bilingual edition might leave readers wishing for something more extensive and searching. As Gander’s carefully pondered contribution to Esther Allen and Susan Bernofsky’s 2013 volume *In Translation: Translators on Their Work and What It Means* shows, he is eloquent about his own editorial procedures. *Panic Cure* contains succinct biographical and bibliographical references – accompanied by a photograph – for each poet. Some detailed reflections on the peculiar challenges of capturing the associational density of splintered reference found in many of the Spanish texts would have been welcome. Indeed, Marcos Canteli’s poems are especially daunting in their portrayal of the mind’s struggles to decipher the elliptical interactions between language and the world:

la casa la casa que esencialmente no tenemos  
los ojos claris su propio aislante me dicen  
muere el canto el ojo aquí de mañana  
aquel parche pájaros maderas crujientes aquí  
no era ni es vestigio porque viene  
largos de agua árboles escritos a su calor

the house the house that most essentially we don't own  
the brightness of the eyes their own insulation suggests  
the song dies the eye here starting tomorrow  
that patch creaky wooden birds here  
it wasn't nor is it a vestige since it derives  
at long watery last from heatwritten trees

If Gander had rendered 'vestigio' as 'relic', this might have supplied an alternative slant on a poet whose work often glimpses survivals of the numinous and the arcane amid the repressive rubble of Franco's Spain. Yet Gander's version is admirably responsive to startling line breaks and percussive prosody, and he retains Canteli's ominous repetitions, torqued syntax, and spasmodic shifts in diction. Translating 'crujientes' as the colloquial 'creaky' – with its uncanny associations of dry leaves, dusty floorboards, and unheeded domestic nooks – conveys the echoing emptiness and vanished hopes memorialized in the source text, which moves between a sharp sense of the world's palpable actuality and an equally striking grasp of its grim dereliction. 'Creaky' is a word that also implies Canteli's verbal masonry in a number of poems featured in *Panic Cure*: pleasingly rough or brittle linguistic units do not dovetail but reveal invigorating instabilities, gaps, twists, and jumps – in focus, or between stylistic registers – that defy glib coherence and harmony. Canteli, in his understanding of defeat and (dis)possession – the loss of authorship, verbal and visual authority, even civic identity – probes Seamus Heaney's belief that the most potent translations negotiate the feeling of being utterly 'lost, | Unhappy and at home'. Gander's enthusiasm for Canteli's poetics of discursive and spiritual estrangement is obvious in an anthology that addresses what the translator calls the 'panic of the blank page, the twenty-first century, a transformed and transforming world'. Yet Gander's selection also productively stages, and relishes, interpretive panic: Olvido García Valdés' poems reveal bitter conflict between a highly self-conscious

mind and the instincts of ‘an unknown body, | your own body, strange | road leading | straight into dread’.

The second volume under review presents a bilingual selection of work by the poet, essayist, and painter Aníbal Núñez (1944–1987). Núñez struggled to get his poems published, and never enjoyed wide critical recognition during his lifetime. The translators Luis Ingelmo and Michael Smith situate Núñez as a figure of maverick and renegade dynamism, which makes ‘the classification of his work so difficult especially to English or even Spanish readers’. Ingelmo and Smith form a long-standing partnership, and have collaborated to render into English numerous Spanish poets in the past (Pablo García Baena, José Carlos Llop, Ana Rossetti, Roberto Bolaño, Enrique Juncosa). Ingelmo and Smith stress that Núñez ‘had no wish to belong to any group or school of poetry’. This might well be true, though one cannot help but wish for more precise contextualization here. Closer attention could have been paid to how Núñez’s aesthetic of conspicuous semantic innovation, especially the more open forms he chooses to capture vagaries, indirections, and perplexities of mind, might be measured against the public impact of the *Novísimos* (or ‘the latest’), as well as the all-encompassing ‘poesía de la experiencia’: the lexically daring and culturally cosmopolitan poetry that documented the uses and abuses of government and industrial power as 1970s Spain transitioned to democracy. Some explication of the poetic terrain during this period of civic ferment – the creative economies, ideological disputes, and group formations – would have clarified for anglophone readers the dissident difference of Núñez’s oeuvre.

While the Introduction outlines how Núñez fails to fit neatly within established poetic canons of the period, almost nothing is said about the effect of the poet’s oeuvre on a younger generation of writers or on Spanish verse of the last two decades more generally. This omission is offset by the translators’ consideration of affinities between Núñez’s artistic vision and that of a diverse array of seminal North American authors such as John Ashbery, Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and William Carlos Williams. It is certainly instructive to draw some brief parallels between, say, Ashbery’s syntactically convoluted, acerbic early works which reach for remoter zones of consciousness, and Núñez’s multiple, mobile perceptions. Fortunately, Ingelmo and Smith do not push the comparisons so far as to aggressively ‘americanize’ his idiosyncratic image repertoire. Indeed, the translators are responsive to Núñez’s uniquely serpentine tonal oddities and opacities in poems such as ‘La palabra cansada’ (‘The Exhausted Word’) and ‘Cristal de Lorena’ (‘Lorraine Glass’). In any

case, there is scant evidence to suggest that Núñez read Williams or that the Spaniard's spiritual homeland was near the Black Mountain. There is, though, plenty in this volume to show how diligently he scrutinized a historically conscious French modernism. Núñez studied Rimbaud at the University of Salamanca, and would later go on to translate *Poems 1870–1871*, *The Stupra*, and *Illuminations*, as well as works by Nerval and Mallarmé.

This anthology faithfully reflects Núñez's acute knowledge of, and commitment to, an experimental poetics. But it is a continental modernist vanguard rather than a North American postwar aesthetic that provides the most useful lens through which to construe Núñez's surrealist asides, dynamic disruption of rhetorical smoothness, and fondness for tapping and mapping intuitive domains of associative impulse. A notable instance of his formal skill – and the translators' facility in capturing it for a non-Spanish audience – is 'Testimonio de piedra' ('Testimony of Stone'). It is worth quoting in full:

y sin embargo  
no queda ni el más mínimo vestigio de lo dicho  
un jinete  
– dicen que una amazona – una mañana  
cruzó las puertas rojas sorprendiendo  
a la guardia y a pájaros esquivos  
como una exhalación  
A nadie dijo  
dónde se dirigía  
Aún podremos  
ver su imagen veloz, la capa al viento,  
con un bastión al fondo y levantando  
polvo dorado y chispas con los cascos  
en la nube ideográfica que ilustra  
la viñeta central  
de una ficción de invierno en latitudes  
propensas a viajar imaginariamente  
a colores más cálidos.

and yet  
not even the faintest trace of what was said remains  
a rider –  
they say it was a horsewoman – one morning  
crossed the red gates shocking  
the guard and some elusive birds  
like a breath

She told no one  
 where she was heading  
 We will still be able  
 to see her swift image, her cloak to the wind,  
 with a bastion at the back and raising  
 a golden dust and sparks with her horse's hoofs  
 in the ideographic cloud that illustrates  
 the central vignette  
     of a winter fiction in latitudes  
 inclined to travel in imagination  
 to warmer colours.

Here the translation effectively retains Núñez's eye-catching tropes in a composition whose unpunctuated lines of variable lengths suggest a sequence of linked oracular utterances, each approximating to 'a breath'. The translation of 'una amazona' as 'a horsewoman' is fine, though it is tempting to wonder if the line might have read better as 'an Amazon, they say'. This adds a different resonance to a poem which charts imaginative quest not to the expected sunny and benign climes, but rather to a wintry setting: perhaps that place on the edge of the known world to which the legendary race of richly attired female warriors ('her cloak to the wind') were thought to belong.

The translators, in their Introduction, present Núñez's existential parables as a means of confronting deep insecurities about any verbal text's capacity to narrate knowledge accurately and in temporal arrangement. In the studied metrical discontinuities of 'Testimonio de piedra' as well as in the more compact meditative forms of *Selected Poems*, are we not invited to view a more positive process? Núñez is adept at devising poetic modes in which disjunctive acts of thinking can occur, acts which (for instance) weigh the unexamined norms and conventions behind the notion of a carefully crafted personal lyric.

These volumes are timely and appealing additions to the body of Spanish poetry translated into English – already important in Shearsman Books' portfolio. Perhaps the most notable facet of *Panic Cure* is Gander's editorial belief that translation creates the possibility of a better understanding of the innovatory brio and angry assertiveness that came from overlooked Spanish writers publishing for the first time in the 1980s and 1990s. Surveying *Aníbal Núñez* encourages us to revisit and adapt the words of the Belgrade-born author Charles Simić, who felt that 'in an age when American poets are read in Siberia and Spanish poets in Kansas, a poetic style is a concoction of many recipes from many different cuisines'. How pleasing Núñez's art might be to the palate of a potential readership

in Kansas is difficult to say. Yet it is worth affirming how the translators have resisted the temptation crudely to ‘anglicize’ the source texts. Their efforts would no doubt meet with the approval of the translator Pierre Joris, who unwittingly extends Simić’s culinary metaphor by upbraiding those polyglot editors of international anthologies who ‘pre-chew’ and render foreign texts ‘to fit the taste of current American literary paradigms, thus eliminating the indigestible cultural differences, the little bones that if left in may stick in our American throats’. Núñez’s verse demonstrates an obscurely gnomic quality that Ingelmo and Smith render, for the most part, with scrupulous tact; a tribute perhaps to the transformative and salutary shock of encountering indigestible foreign textual fibres.

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*A Rug of a Thousand Colours: Poems Inspired by the Five Pillars of Islam by Two Contemporary Scottish Writers, Each Translating the Other.* By Tessa Ransford and Iyad Hayatleh. Pp. 124. Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2012. Pb. £8.99.

*My Voice: A Decade of Poems from the Poetry Translation Centre.* Edited by Sarah Maguire. Pp. 384. Hexham: Bloodaxe, 2014. Pb. £12.

Both of these volumes exemplify distinct trends in contemporary translation practice. They join the ranks of anthologies such as *Tablet and Pen: Literary Landscapes from the Modern Middle East* (2012) and *Words without Borders: The Best of the First Ten Years* (2013) by embracing literary translation on a truly global scale, as the publishing industry and Translation Studies gradually open up to non-Western traditions. *A Rug of a Thousand Colours* is a collection of poems translated between English and Arabic by two poets. Scottish poet Tessa Ransford has a long-standing interest in literary translation and poetic inspiration from foreign traditions, as seen in her 2012 collection, *Don’t Mention This to Anyone*, a semi-autobiographical exploration of Indian and British cultural identities. Palestinian poet Iyad Hayatleh has lived in Scotland since 2000, and his work, like much of Ransford’s, is very much concerned with the idea of belonging to more than one place. He wrote his first collection, *Beyond All Measure* (2007), in English. *My Voice* contains English translations from a number of African, Asian, and South American languages, but the collection has been, as its editor