



# HYPERION

On the Future of Aesthetics

VOL. 14, NO. 1 (2021)

MARY ANN CAWS &  
JARED DANIEL FAGEN

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JEAN-NICOLAS ILLOUZ on  
*Mallarmé en plus*  
ANTONIO MOSCA on  
*Carmelo Bene*  
ADRIAN MARTIN on  
*Bill Morrison*

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&  
MORE

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*On the Future of Æsthetics*



## MAST HEAD

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Location: New York, London, Melbourne

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*Hyperion* is published  
by Contra Mundum.

P.O. Box 1326, New York, NY 10276, U.S.A.

W: [contramundumpress.com](http://contramundumpress.com)

For advertising inquiries, e-mail: [info@contramundum.net](mailto:info@contramundum.net)

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## INTERVIEWS

Mary Ann Caws & Jared Daniel Fagen: Conversation 0–37

## TRANSLATIONS

Antonin Artaud, What I Came to Mexico to Do 38–42  
Antonin Artaud, Eternal Secrets of Culture 43–45  
Antonin Artaud, I Came to Mexico to Escape 46–51  
Stefano Benni, *Bar Sport* (excerpt) [AGRODOLCE SERIES] 52–57  
Claude Cahun, *Leaves detached from the Scrap book* 58–70  
Maria Wine, *The Wind Out of the Darkness* (excerpt) 71–82  
Henri Michaux, Appearance-Disappearance 83–101  
Miklós Szentkuthy, *Prae*, Vol. II (excerpt) 102–117

## ESSAYS

Jean-Nicolas Illouz, *Noli me legere*: Mallarmé, Marcel  
Broodthaers, Michalis Pichler, *Un coup de dés  
jamais n'abolira le hasard* 118–139  
Antonio Mosca, The Enunciative Machine and its Critique:  
There where language does what it can 140–159

## MANIFESTOS

Hans Arp, Samuel Beckett et al., Poetry is Vertical 160–161  
Kay Boyle, Hart Crane et al., Revolution of the Word 162

## POETRY

Maura Del Serra, Contagion Triptych 163–169  
Sara Whym, dreamscapes 170–186

## REVIEWS

Adrian Martin on Bill Morrison's *Dawson City:  
Frozen Time* 187–195

## CONTRIBUTOR'S BIOS

COVER ART: LAJOS VAJDA, *PANTHER AND LILIES* (1930–33).  
PHOTOCOLLAGE ON PAPER, 25.5" X 20"

Johnny Shaking on the ruins of time...

Army heads swimming...



the moon the moon...

# EXHIBIT Bertie MARSHALL

Released October 29  
Shaking Johnny single out now



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MARY ANN CAWS &  
JARED DANIEL FAGEN  
CONVERSATION



Leonora Carrington, date and location unknown

## ~ HYBRID DISCUSSIONS ~

JDF: Let's talk about the way you look at things and think about them, like you once did Breton's face rendered by Cornell in profile, curiously and obsessively regarding that which is *not* evidently seen, that which looking readily refuses. I'm talking, specifically, about your announcement in *The Surrealist Look* and how it might relate to your recent and current projects, the way your eyes have moved into the very face you so adored, the way your own looking has assumed the iconized center and, through it, has turned to the fringes, looking past and away, "[acting] toward other faces it admires" standing at a desiring distance. After gifting English readers the poetry of René Char, Tristan Tzara, Paul Éluard, Robert Desnos, Artaud, and so many other immensely important (male) writers, you've been working on giving us — since *Surrealism and Women* and re-envisioning or reframing the surrealist look — a bigger glimpse of the *overlooked*, the manhandled, or maybe what's been hidden within the huddle.

Currently, you've fixed your attention on a new translation project: a collection of poems by Alice Paalen Rahon called *Shapeshifter*. I absolutely love this title, which plays nicely with the surrealist tradition of perpetual transformation and the petition to the reader (or viewer) to participate in the process of reconstruction. At the same time, however, it appears uncooperative with the *other* part of that tradition: the predominantly male-surrealist gaze, and its dismembering and manipulating. But while reading some of the earlier poems, the title became for me not just simply an immediate pronouncement of evasion or ephemerality but, in another sense, a renunciation of female objectification that, perhaps as a consequence, engenders anonymity, isolation, loneliness, and despair — the latter itself a poem to Picasso. Yet there's also, especially in *À même la terre*, some violence and rage in these poems, which I suppose I wasn't expecting. This isn't the passive madness of, say, Nadja. Rather, there's this recognition of the "woman once lovely" who "one day / took off her face," "the looks [that] have changed their source," "the night [hanging] kisses of hanged men," and the "cries like madwomen at twilight." In the contradictory fashion of surrealism, this spectrum of emotion ranging from timid to temperamental, I think, both repudiates but also simultaneously resituates the female surrealist in the asylum with Léona Delcourt, Leonora Carrington, and others. And we're led to believe that's where they belong, right? They don't belong to any other province of surrealism — their place is Olympus or Mount Helicon, or they themselves, as malleable bodies, become sites of unmitigated sensual frenzy whose replies are either subdued or appropriated. Undoubtedly, surrealist women belong everywhere — but can't they also belong to madness, or can't madness belong to them, too?

Who was Alice Paalen Rahon, and what interests you about her? Do you see her and her work caught in this double-bind of madness and, if so, do they support or reject a feminist reading? Is there that other side of her too, the archetypal "tenderness" women are *supposed* to inhabit?

MAC: Ah, yes, the unexpectedness as well as shapeshifting. Alice Paalen Rahon really was herself too, of course. But I have to say I'd never heard of her, and it was the beloved and welcoming John Richardson who asked why I'd never written on her — since she was loved by Picasso and had to leave him because her then-husband Wolfgang Paalen (whose work I've rather learned to like, detesting their story first) had threatened suicide if she stayed with Picasso. So, writing "Despair," she returned to Wolfgang Paalen, who after their divorce married twice more, and then finally committed suicide anyway. Now that wasn't the dumbest of moves, leaving the noto-

rious Spaniard for the super-interesting Austrian, with whom in any case she lived in a threesome with Eva Sulzer, who financed the whole thing.

Everything about Alice was fascinating to me: her wounded knee and leg and her eternal limp which bound her to Frida Kahlo in her eternally wounded state, and her fibs, indeed lies: about her birth date, her birth place, born when she wasn't born, born there and not born there, nor at the same time, and on and on. From a French poet she became a Mexican painter, before marrying a film person. So everything was *not that*, and the "not that" was a kind of shifting. Her poems, which I translated for New York Review Books/Poets, with the help first of Edwin Frank, my editor, and also of several French experts at the publishers, are at once differing from each other, shifting their shape and their impact and all else, like herself, and our reaction to her, shifting our shape also, and our affections. Translating those poems was impossible because there were almost no French books of her poems around, so I had to get scans from various libraries that may have had or may not have had it.

So that everywhere and surrealist rareness interests me, as well as its too-muchness. And that's something we could talk about at some other point: secrecy and lying. I was thinking of doing a book about omissions and obsessions: what is left out and how to point to it without ellipses.

The tenderness seems to me to be maybe clearer in the poems to Frida Kahlo — I mean *that's* a beautiful poem we're putting in the book — and to Valentine Penrose and her other women lovers, since she was bisexual, in the feminine things and some snatches of writing to Jacqueline Johnson. That's, to me, where the tenderness comes in, maybe more than in her relationship with Picasso (though she sure did adore him).

And you know the manuscript of *À même la terre* was given to the New York Public Library dedicated to Dora Maar, of all people? I mean we're thinking Picasso and Dora Maar, oh my goodness. You reel around in this world of you don't know where anything is or what secrets are being held or what is it to display a secret, so I guess that I feel — though I haven't said it or thought it except a bit now: about the kind of display of secrecy she had: how do you display secrecy?

And about "madness": who's not mad? I've never been bored with madness and I have a friend with whom we might think of translating some of those *incredible* letters Nadja wrote to Breton, which are full of drawings and mad as you can be, and she was madly in love, and I hold dear *L'amour fou*, of course.

JDF: And Jacqueline Lamba had another face that I think you loved, for its radiance.

MAC: Oh yes. And her painting called “L’amour fou” responds exactly to that mood: not exactly bright. I want to think about that at some point.



Jacqueline Lamba, *L’amour fou*

JDF: I love that for Rahon, caught “at the crossroads of the wind,” despair “will never be reduced to begging even if you burn its arms.” If Magritte addresses only the suspended torso, who is the female surrealist’s apostrophe? Who does she direct her pain and violence and rage toward, if not the erection?

MAC: I’m thinking, when you ask me that, the violence is mostly toward herself. Not just masochism, which is a little bit boring, but if you think of someone like the contemporary surrealist writer Annie Le Brun, it’s very often about the self, because the other one is not quite as interesting. I mean Breton was interesting but not as interesting as a lot of other people, and he probably knew that.

You know, that’s terrible, I hadn’t thought of that before. Maybe that’s one of the sources of his particular self-pity. When he leaves surrealism and goes to mysticism, there’s that kind of non-voyage into the other that remains mystical and doesn’t remain surrealist in the impulsive-beginning sense. But the *violence* is, surely, always there, especially in the per-



ception and not just at nightfall. Remember when he and Jacqueline are walking along the beach when they first meet and he says it's not too late to turn back — wow. You're walking with the person you're in love with for the first time and you say maybe we should turn back. That's the kind of violence to the relationship that seems to me to be characteristic of a certain female surrealism.

And Breton was changing girlfriends all the time. You know his famous love poem, *L'union libre*, was written for one person and then offered to somebody else? I mean c'mon. Then he says: "the same person I've always loved I love," well, thank you. That really threw me off completely. It's kind of like if you believe in faithfulness then you probably don't believe in surrealism, but *my* fidelity to surrealism is unchanged. That doesn't mean that surrealists have to be sexually faithful to people. On the other hand, I think there's a whole issue about the secrecy and the fidelity that I haven't thought about at all, but should. I think that I think that. I haven't thought it through but I think.

JDF: Didn't Rahon have a child that passed away shortly after birth? Could the *À même la terre* poems or some of the others in the collection also be a deeply personal response to the supposed function or failure of prescribed "womanhood," one's ability or inability to raise or bear children? Perhaps this is a simple interpretation, but in her poem to Marie-Louise Vogeler Regler, *Mieké, la Fée*, Rahon writes about "mothers standing at the seven gates of life," cosmic-on-earth entrances to different modes of subjective and collective healing.

You and I have talked in the past about digging, about burying and what's at stake in the excavation. But here, I think, it could be about the female artist that comes to life after the earth has been razed, after the "angel" and "monster," as Gilbert and Gubar put it, have been put down, after she gives herself permission to her own eternity. And what grows from the earth often comes to life so delicately and tenderly on the surface, after the trials of pushing through the violence or struggle of being born (or born anew). What are your thoughts on this — the poetics of expectation, or the unexpected, and loss?

MAC: When, as I do often, forget the biographical details, the rest remains. About children and mothers, and her involvement with Valentine Penrose and the ashram, that lasted in India two months and then she was off again.

But about eternity, I have little to say or read. It seems to me to be so much about the present, although when you mention angels I keep remembering the angel in the house and Virginia Woolf and what any writer has to confront in the ac-

ceptance of the past and its customs as what *ongoes* of the ongoing. How does refusal work? Mine is probably that of all persons deliberately and by choice teaming up with someone we love, and refusing to be what is expected. However, I did broil wild cod tonight and make a sauce of cilantro and anchovy which will last for another night, so it makes sense to prepare one night for the next three. My husband makes great soups with the stock for which we use all our bones (well, not ours exactly, but from what we consumed *ce soir*). I am a *very* slow eater so I have time to read after he leaves the bar we use as a table.

For a while at the Graduate School of CUNY where we met, I continued to run the Comparative Literature PhD program, then the French PhD program. The blackmail about that went like this: the president of the GC, whom I liked and respected, said, "Oh alright, you don't have to run the French program after Henri Peyre retires, we just won't have a French PhD program, no problem." So I took it over, and we had only one student, who was failing anyway.

JDF: You've also been working on Mina Loy: the "fabled" futurist, surrealist, Dadaist, woman of many disguises, lampshade designer. Can you tell me about her and the book you just sent off to your publisher? I think I can see why she fascinates you, and in a different way than Rahon does, but I'm really only familiar with *Insel* — her only novel — and the "Love Songs" which — with the "Pig Cupid" and its subversions, demystifications, denials, and disjointedness — I loved teaching to non-English majors in my intro to literary studies course, when I was teaching it. And now that we're thinking about *The Madwoman in the Attic* and Woolf killing the angel in her house, Loy's idea that the failure of ideal roles for male and female lovers necessitates the failure of aesthetic ideals, seems to me less preliminary than it does revelatory and life-sustaining.

From the first *Manifesto* through the second, even when it became so politically charged (maybe to its detriment, which is the conundrum of Bataille's "Old Mole"), surrealism was articulated as a way of participating in the world as a free-living citizen, would you agree? But it was only through art and poetry, expressed unconsciously, convulsively, and irrationally, that this world and way of living in it could be pleurably realized or felt. And Loy lived unapologetically everywhere liberated, didn't she? Caught up in the intimate performance between art and life, which sometimes became indistinguishable, like Duchamp's *Rose Sélavy* and one of your favorites, the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven?

MAC: Yes indeed. My book on Mina Loy coming out in the spring of next year is subtitled *Apology of Genius*. I only wrote

with great anguish over confusing the sources, one is *The Last Lunar Baedeker* and the other is “the Lost Lunar Baedeker” heavens above.

But I’m fascinated by the futurists. Marinetti comes up in my Mina Loy book, and I guess everybody comes up in everything just about. She finally got bored with him, which I think is pretty interesting, because he keeps doing the same thing over and over — it’s true — like shouting all the time. Then there’s the other futurist, that weird guy Giovanni Papini, she loved two of them at the same time and of course simultaneously. Then I think she thought (you know, she was a lot smarter than most people), “Oh shit, I’ve done that,” and then went on to something else. That going to something else is something that they couldn’t deeply approve of, but her poems about futurism and all that are fantastic. *Really* interesting.



Mina Loy, *Stars* (1933)

To me the “Love Songs” to Joannes and “Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose” are less interesting than the way her poetry changes from time to time. When she left futurism and was always going back to Paris, getting her children or leaving her children, she finally came to America and lived in the Bowery with the Bowery Bums, wearing her nightgown to be with them. Her poem called “Hot Cross Bum” — *that* kind of thing is what interests me. How original is that? So this book of mine on Loy has nine chapters and she’s always doing different

things, like going to Aspen as a toothless white-haired person while still writing these fantastic poems. To me *that's* Mina Loy. She can do all this. Then she did everything else. Mina Loy didn't need to lie about everything, she just did everything. She was complicated enough without lying

As for *Insel*, I *hated* it. Can we talk about that? I had to devote a chapter to it. First of all it bores me immensely. Secondly, I think that the artist was not interestingly mad, just mad. It's terribly written. It's the worst thing she ever wrote. So how was I going to devote a chapter to it? You can't *not* do it if you're doing a book on Mina Loy. So the only thing that *really* interested me in all of that, Jared, was that at one point she looks across the room and on a shelf is a picture of Arthur Cravan. So of course *that* she can sort of get herself interested in, but I couldn't be interested in *Insel* or her prose writing that they have at the Beinecke that's all online. My book is about her poems, really.

JDF: Is Cravan going to make an appearance in your Mina Loy book?

MAC: Oh enormously. A whole chapter. There's a whole interlude with Arthur Cravan. Just today in the acknowledgements — I mean really just today I sent them off — I was writing "Mina Loy was in love with Arthur Cravan — me too." I fell in love with him first in Rome where I found a book of his — *Maintenant* — and he was so weird in every single possible way, I mean a genius, period. So I fell in love with this book that I had found in a bookstore. Of course it was in French, but then it was translated and then somebody else picked it up and it was plagiarized everywhere. So in my acknowledgements I say something like "and so I fell in love with him in Rome and Paris and New York, just like Mina Loy," and I think the last line of the acknowledgements (because you've heard my son's band) is something like, "I wouldn't be surprised if Matthew Caws, of Nada Surf, decided to write a song about Mina Loy, or Loyland," which is what Roger Conover — the person who loved Mina Loy most and who devoted his whole life to her — calls his place. And I'm just thinking "good lord, Arthur Cravan would have not gotten along with him at all." I mean he was at least twenty-five feet tall and he was a pugilist and all that.

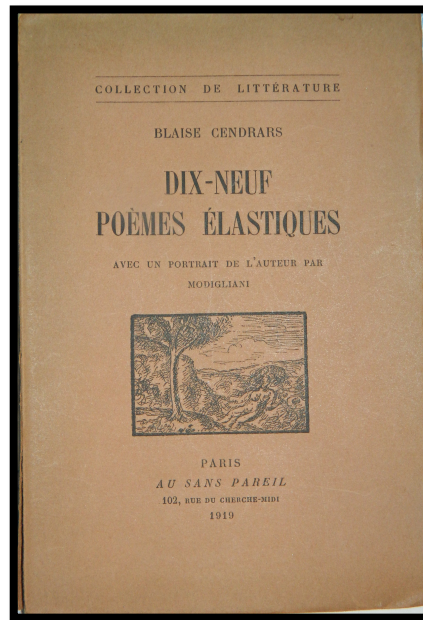
JDF: He was Mina Loy's second husband, right, also fleeing and sort of being everywhere at once? Did I read somewhere that he was also the nephew of Oscar Wilde?

MAC: He was, and then he got lost. Or murdered. Or we don't know.

JDF: On the topic of art and life, can we talk about Blaise Cendrars for a moment? In *Journal*, the first of his Nineteen Elastic Poems translated in the New Directions volume as “Diary” (to which I am referring), he writes:

Christ  
Life  
That’s what I’ve ransacked

In a free-verse poem where the poet and world bewilderingly coalesce, in the imaginative extension of the private self in a public landscape, the choice of “Diary” is interesting because, as you know, *journal* in French could mean “diary” or “newspaper.” The noun in itself, used as the crucifix of the poem, stands for the space of personal reflection and private emotion *and* the efficient consumption of public information, costing a nickel or however much in 1913. The poetic “freedom” of the diaristic form meets and violently harmonizes with the fragmented and detachable episodes (i.e. headlines) of the popular form of prose. But the “ransacking,” the culling of poetic material directly from modernity’s “Rockets,” “Efferescence,” “Everything” that is “bright orange” rather than the subjective well of the lyric, is what’s so spectacular — Cendrars taking from life what it had taken from him: a limb. And



then there’s Christ: the figure of redemption, the representative of “ideal” humanity, and an exclamation that expresses

disbelief, dismay, awe, disappointment, pain. Private confession and the exhibitionism of the “paintings [the poet has] done” that “hang on [his] walls” and “open strange vistas in [him]” find agreement in the shock, the abstraction of poetry and the poet in reality, both no longer recognizable (or all *too* recognizable), with Christ at the café unfolding the ridiculously large pages of a newspaper across his chest, securing the posture that anticipates his being nailed to the cross or the wings of an airplane he will ride first class to heaven.

Whether a “commentary” on the artist’s existence in a world on the brink of annihilation or on the “literary marketplace,” with the lyric “I” presented as produced discourse, maybe Cendrars is saying that poetry — like Dada — belongs to everyone just like a road should, or at least has transcendental utility, like the functional beauty of an American highway (and this, I think, is where he and Henry Miller disagree about technology). The engineer and poet are both masters of their materials, for the former numbers and the latter language, and both give shape to a complex image or idea first formed in the mind before made into matter. Is this futurist or surrealist or both, as embodied by Loy?

MAC: Yes, and perfectly put, both I suppose, but Cendrars is The Great Modernist in my view. My Breton friend Monique Chefdor is the world’s great knower and lover of Blaise, only. She ran into difficulties with the pretended daughter and so switched to the Breton poet (whose name I always forget) and she arranged for the French government to give her the rights to bury him under a stone on a Breton path: he was the *greatest* of writers, this Blaise I too loved, and we all wanted to take the train as in the Trans-Europe Express to Russia (sommestoin loin de Montmartre?) enough to weep over.

That is something we could at some point talk about: what we weep over.

JDF: I weep over the sound of a name I was given but never heard aloud. I weep over that part of myself too late to love. I weep over the lives I’ve ruined with my affections. I weep over the loss and heartache that leads to abandonment. I weep for the thought I just had now reduced to... I weep apologies. I weep over the sunflower that is not a dandelion. I weep over the lawns I mow. I weep over the eyes that glow in the distance. I weep over the drink too hastily drunk.

MAC: When do you write best? Do you drink something when writing or before or after or all or never? I ask because I have two lives: one regular and one at some other time like 3am

with rum, and I scribble but the next day usually can't read but think I am imagining better, alas, for losing it.

JDF: I'm closer to "all" or always (as I write you it's 6pm and I'm pouring my first drink of the day). I too like dark liquor, but prefer non-blended Scotch or bourbon.

I feel the same way about it as you do. The best imagining has to do with its own fragility and peril. The best writing, in my opinion, comes from a place of intoxication, getting access to inside yourself or outside the outside, and as a reader being able to locate (not necessarily in words) what's at risk in the attempted escape (or excavation).

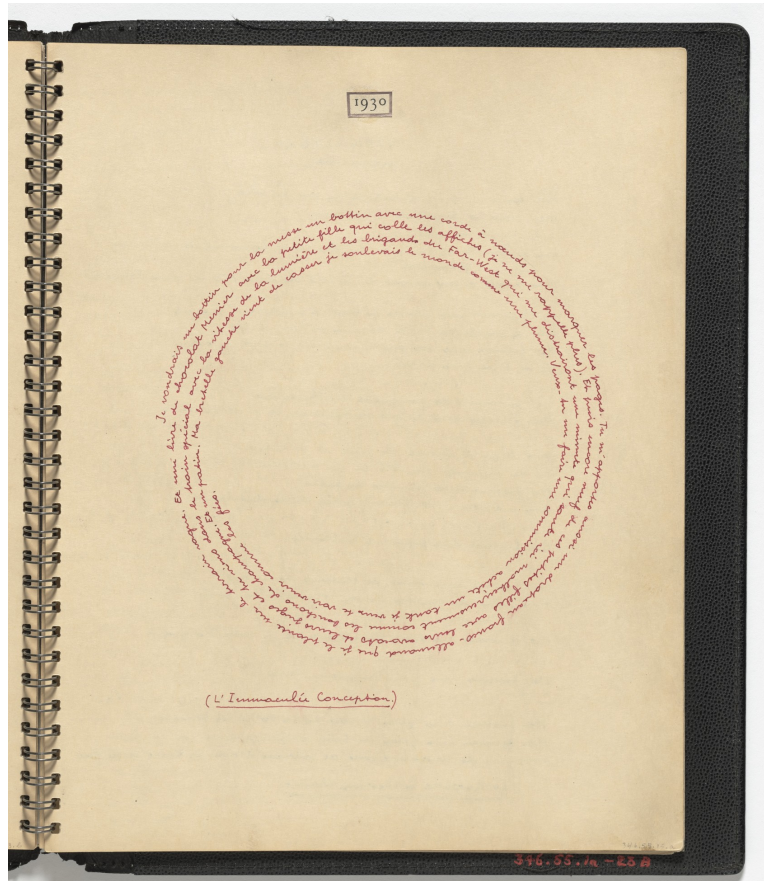
So when I'm writing I'm mostly drinking (those times of day when I can afford to be a little reckless) and when I'm drinking I'm mostly writing. What comes first, I don't know. But I want to say I write best when I'm not writing or neglecting it (impossible!) or when I have nothing I think is really worth saying or even when refusing it — when the writing finds me and not the other way around. When writing (and ultimately publishing, when we're able to and do publish) I think there's a relationship between wanting to find and be found, but sometimes we don't know what we're looking for (or at) anymore and by whose eyes or if any at that.

The relationship between drinking and writing is also with boredom. The pendulum of reverie and emptiness, the distress and vastness of instances. In a surrealist and not-surrealist way, it's maybe another conduit to dreams and desire (but maybe not so pleasurable in itself). I think of the last stanza in Baudelaire's "Au Lecteur," with the bored "dreams of scaffolds" accessed by the opium pipe. It's one of my favorite things in *Madam Bovary* (how *real* boredom is!) — when confronted with the boredom and banality of (bourgeois) convention, or the expectations of some real world, Emma seeks refuge in reading magazines and novels, "seeking in them imaginary satisfaction for her own desires" and, with "the hours [slipping] by," she forfeits to her imagination with her thoughts "blending with the fiction." And like Emma, the sickly immobile Des Esseintes is able — after carefully preparing and making all the travel arrangements — to simply place his finger on a map and travel to/drink in some English pub entirely in his mind.

...

JDF: In "The Task of the Translator," as you know, Benjamin talks about making a commitment to a text's "afterlife," which includes the participation of the translator to not only resuscitate but also to transform and reinscribe language into a different time or a different place. Immediately, of course, I think

of your work on Char, whose aphorisms are able to isolate time in your care, but more prominently (and famously) I'm thinking about your decision to translate *ma femme* to “my beloved” in Breton’s *L’union libre*.



Yves Tanguy, André Breton, .a: *Untitled* (1930), .b: *L’Union Libre* (1931)

That’s where changing *femme* to “beloved” is bold but also indispensable to the work and our reading it now. “Beloved,” in the sense of reinscription and afterlife, makes sense to me: there’s the beloved whom you admire from a distance but doesn’t requite your affections, there’s the beloved who’s passed away or is no longer there. And the beloved isn’t precisely male or female but could be — you’ve translated, here, the word’s *possibility*. Just this one word is so much more rich than “woman,” which does what many words do — limit.

So I’m interested in this conscious choice that you felt very strongly about — to not use a literal translation that reinforced male possession. How much do you believe in moral translation?



MAC: “Reinscribe” is so interesting because “inscribe” is interesting. I went to Bryn Mawr, and the person who was the first president was not only anti-Semitic and anti-everything else, but wanted to remove the inscription for the M. Carey Thomas Library. I mean is that not interesting and ironic in a terrible sense? You could keep the façade and reinscribe the plaque, but you have to have the first inscription to reinscribe.

The man with whom I first translated “Free Union” for the University of Texas Press had put “my woman” or “my wife” and I said, well, there’s a *little* problem with that (he was a man so of course he knew much better). *Ma femme* is not “my wife,” obviously if you’re going to change all the time, and “my woman,” I mean forget it, I’ll just go walk right off the stage. So with Pat Terry, with whom I loved translating, finally we put “my beloved,” which could be a man or a woman, and I realize that’s the sort of exciting problem now. But that was the issue with that poem, and so I took it out of the Norton Anthology because I said “you cannot put my name there with something saying ‘my woman.’” Then I said “but I could give you a re-translation,” but they said I couldn’t because of something about how they’ve sold so many copies. I think that was a big distress in my life because I wanted Breton to be in there, I wanted that poem to be in there, but I wanted it not to say “my woman,” please.

I had a wonderful discussion with my editor Edwin Frank at New York Review Books about a word in the Rahon book, *tordre*, meaning wind or wind or, you know, twist. And you say “twist” and you’re thinking “the twist.” There isn’t any translation that doesn’t sort of go slipping into some other word or something else. Recently I talked with Mark Polizzotti, who’s the big-deal translator and the big-deal writer of surrealism, about how you worry about translating various issues as well as words, because like cubism, it’s everything seen from different angles. In this way cubism and surrealism are not so different, and of course I have always stressed the closeness of baroque and surrealist looking. The grand book of his called *Sympathy for the Traitor* is a manifesto of translation, and that’s exactly what seems to me to be the problem. Well no, it’s not a problem, it’s why we stick to translation. Wouldn’t it be boring if you were just doing this and that, you know, like on Wikipedia, this means that? But this never means just that. Certainly in surrealism this no way ever means just that, like with the fish in the aquarium and all that. It’s not ever A to B.

I do believe in and love the term moral translation, and how much of what we do, you and I and many others, in deciding what to do with our lives and time and other persons, involves exactly that kind of decision: a judgment about whether

this or that. What to leave out: and that decision might differ if the object in consideration is about something to be read or heard, and over a long or brief period. That's about presentation.

JDF: What role does omission play when translating and writing about poets with whom you've also formed close relationships, and the promises you've made to them? Can we talk about *representation* in relationship to presentation?

MAC: The moral decision concerning "my beloved" is important because Breton was not gay, in fact he was a bit homophobic, and that was the problem with Crevel. But "my beloved" doesn't have to be a person.

As for representation, how very involved it gets with your/our own involvement with the author/artist we are standing in for or with: I used, in my younger days, to write on and on about translation and interpretation and judgment — you always wonder what lasts of what you do or say or write: must happen to all of us all of the time.

I was just thinking that what I was trying *not* to think about was also that I've been writing about Ian Hamilton Finlay, you know that Scottish poet and shepherd who then became sort of (to understate the case) right-wing? I don't know how to deal with that, but I loved his poetry and his shepherding and I'm Scottish way back, so how do you deal with what you can't deal with?

Have you read that wonderful play of Paul Claudel (whom I wrote my thesis on), about the woman that he was in love with, the *Partage de midi*? If you see a production he's sitting in this kind of chair that looks like he's sitting on a throne in heaven. Claudel was not only desperately religious, or pretending to be, but what a visionary! You know if you read his writing about art you see how incredibly luminosity was everywhere. It was all about light. One of my favorite poems of his is about that.

So the *Partage de midi*, the sharing of the wake of the ship at the wake of noon, is about the woman he was in love with, and then he adopted the child he had with this woman and made — or let, or forced, or persuaded — his wife adopt the child he had with his mistress. Give me a break. And Claudel was horrible to his sister Camille, and I think that dreadfulness to somebody in your family is not inexcusable but it's sure as hell bothersome, because Camille Claudel was not just Rodin's mistress but a great sculptor. To Paul Claudel, her being Rodin's mistress is *terrible*, and yet of course he had his own.

So what are we doing here about morality? I'm always trying to think about writing as a moral issue — what you choose

to write on, what I choose to write on — and I promised Yves Bonnefoy (and I remember promising) I will *never* write a biography of somebody I don't admire. And I think, I hope, that I'm true to that. It's a big-deal problem.

JDF: Maybe with his personal life — his questionable devoutness, his mistress, the way he might have committed his sister — writing for Claudel was less a moral act than an act of redemption.

MAC: Oh, well that's interesting. So *Partage de midi*, in a way, is kind of like, "I did it, so let me write about it," and then it was performed by Jean-Louis Barrault, if you can believe it, and Madeleine Renaud, his wife. It was like you're redeeming it by having it shown, but what am I doing?

JDF: Right, without exploiting it or romanticizing it or turning it into something else.

MAC: Yeah, like turning it into just an academic issue or subject. I think that's it. You don't want to make something you really cared a lot about into something it's not.

It was like Artaud and Jacqueline Lamba, who he was in love with (everybody was). In some of her letters he would write spells to protect her. And here she is telling me this and I'm thinking "I can't record it" because I had to rip up everything I recorded from her. So that's a moral issue for me. How do you deal with what you couldn't deal with because you promised not to deal with it, and then the person dies? It's like Max Brod and Kafka. What do you do when you made a promise to somebody who's gone?

JDF: That's tricky. How much of Kafka would we have had Brod *not* betrayed his wishes?

MAC: I only want to deal with people who fascinate me, not Paul Éluard who doesn't fascinate me. He's a fine poet, but Desnos is much more fascinating as a poet. I *get* Éluard's poems — I like the poems I don't get, and that's I've been spending time with the "side" people like Rahon and the wonderfully peculiar and madly dressed Erik Satie, on whom I have an essay that's hopefully coming out with Reaktion Books called "The Vexatious Gentleman," about his *Vexations* performance at the Guggenheim, his love for Susan Valadon, and his seven brown corduroy suits (even though he had no money) that were all the same.

As you know, I've written a lot, and we all cared desperately about, Artaud. I was going to do my thesis on *him* but then

realized that it wasn't going to work at the University of Kansas. But his madness was the first I loved: I was appealed to precisely that madness. His work is *so* much more interesting in a way than it would have been if we just had him before he lost his voice and he was this *beautiful* actor holding up his bible when Joan of Arc is dying at the stake, and Falconetti and



Carl Dreyer, *Jeanne d'Arc* (1928)

all that. I mean isn't that gorgeous? But later I worried about profiting from his madness for my publication — that was the kind of thing we in my epoch concerned ourselves with, I suppose — and realized it had already become an academic business, just like Virginia Woolf. Unless you're Hermione Lee or somebody as gifted in all ways as she is, I think you hesitate to overpopulate the field.

You won't have known the feminist writer of *Writing A Woman's Life*, Carolyn Heilbrun, but I have to give a talk on her this Monday and it has been obsessing me: how do you spend 26 years walking with someone every week at the same time and yet manage when she does away with herself to speak of that?

That is suddenly about haunting: all these enormous geniuses of people, like Char and Cravan who were over six-feet tall, and the kind of thing one gets involved in (must happen to you too), what it is you get involved in, that you get reinvolved in and then uninvolved in but you're not uninvolved, you're still haunted by. Just as I'm writing about Mina Loy and reviewing the proofs, I'm looking at Carl Van Vechten, who was very problematic and very peculiar and helped Mina Loy a lot.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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ALICE PAALEN RAHON (1904–1987) was a member of the surrealist group in Paris, a lover of Picasso, a poet and, a painter, alongside her husband, Wolfgang Paalen, joining the European surrealist exiles and natives in Mexico after visiting the caves of the American northwest, marrying the filmmaker Edward Fitzgerald, then living a solitary existence.

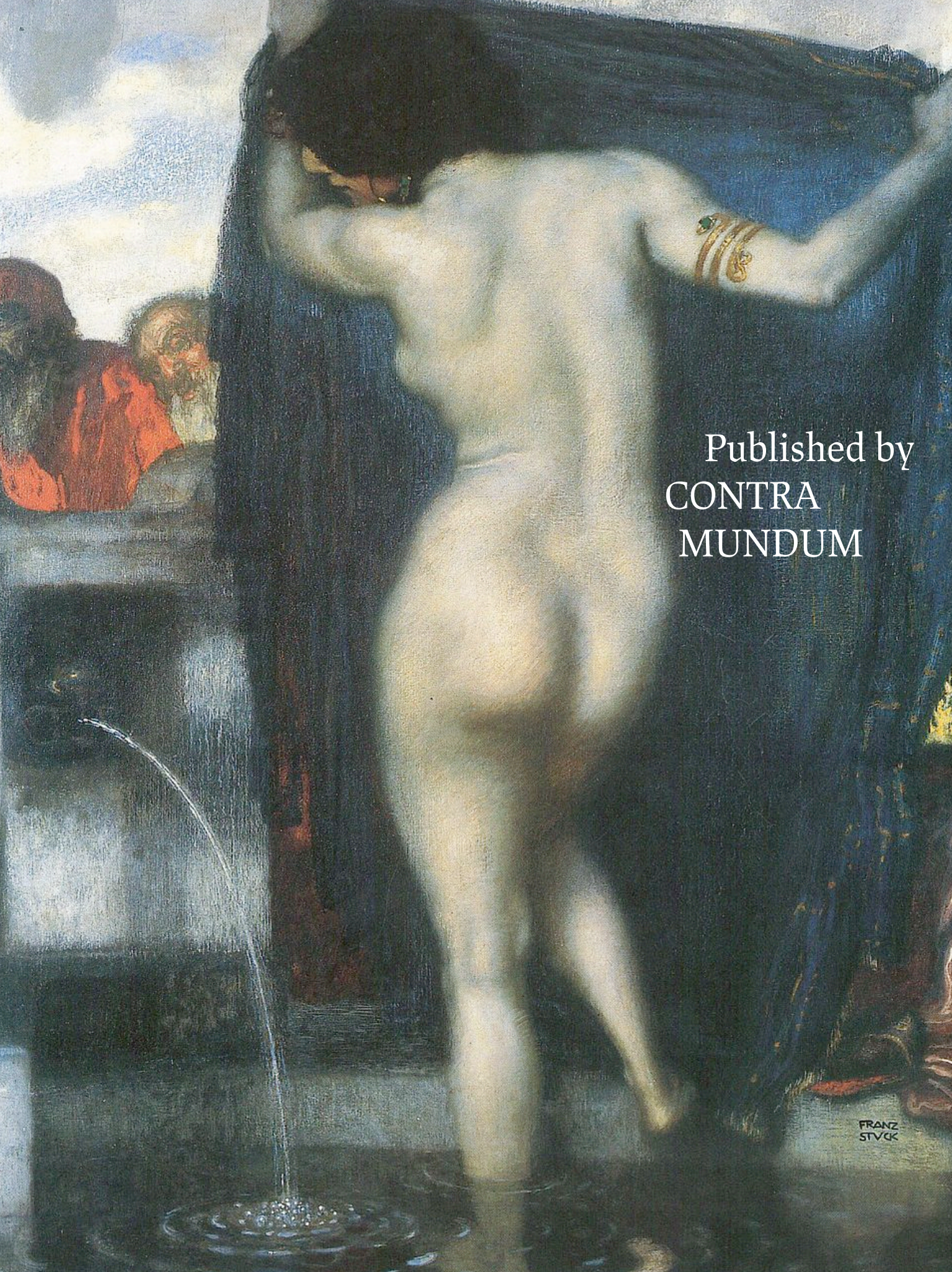
Literary critic, translator, and poet, GIANLUCA RIZZO teaches at Colby College (Waterville, ME). His research focuses on modern and contemporary macaronic writing, contemporary poetry, theater, and aesthetics. Among the volumes he edited are: Mariano Bàino, *Yellow Fax and Other Poems* (Agincourt Press, 2019); with Luigi Ballerini and Paul Vangelisti, *Nuova Poesia Americana. Chicago e le praterie* (Aragno, 2019). His latest monograph is titled *Poetry on Stage: The Theatre of the Italian Neo-Avant-Garde* (University of Toronto Press, 2020). His most recent book of verse is *Il lavoro meccanico. Un'apocalisse in quattro tempi* (Oèdipus, 2016).

MAURA DEL SERRA, poetessa, drammaturga, traduttrice e critica letteraria, già comparatista nell'Università di Firenze, è una delle voci più lucide e feconde del panorama europeo contemporaneo. I suoi testi sono nutriti da un *background* culturale che spazia dai classici della cultura occidentale ed orientale ad un ampio spettro di autori moderni e contemporanei, ad alcuni dei quali ha reso omaggio in diversi suoi testi teatrali e con le sue traduzioni dal latino, tedesco, inglese, francese e spagnolo. Ha riunito le sue poesie nei volumi *L'opera del vento e Tentativi di certezza*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2006 e 2010; *Scala dei giuramenti*, Roma, Newton Compton, 2016, *Bios. Poesie, haiku*, distici Firenze, Le Lettere, 2020 e *In voce. 55 poesie lette dall'autrice*, con allegato CD, Pistoia, Petite Plaisance, 2021. Per la sua attività ha ricevuto primari riconoscimenti poetici e teatrali, nazionali ed internazionali, e nell'anno 2000 le è stato assegnato il Premio della Cultura della Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri. È tradotta in numerose lingue.

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