

## METAMORPHOSES

LUCIA CHERCIU

### A FEAST OF TRANSLATION

*The Vanishing Point that Whistles: An Anthology of Contemporary Romanian Poetry.* Edited by Paul Doru Mugur with Adam J. Sorkin and Claudia Serea. Talisman House: Greenfield, 2011. 366. \$26.95. ISBN 10: 1-58498-088-5

*The Vanishing Point that Whistles* showcases translation as an art of collaboration, dialogism, and interconnectedness. While many have proclaimed a crisis of translation in America, which seems to be worsened by the crisis experienced by presses, bookstores, and universities, all dealing with budget cuts, this book indicates that more attention needs to be paid nationally to the art of translation and more recognition given to the labor and research good translation requires. Indeed, the depth of selection in this anthology proves that translation needs to be acknowledged in the difficult process of tenure and promotion in universities, and books of translation need to be brought back to the forefront of publishers' lists.

*The Vanishing Point* contains mainly poetry published after the revolution in 1989 and recognizes the richness of contemporary Romanian poetry in its diversity and complexity. It includes gifted poets such as Cristian Popescu, Adina Dabija, Ruxandra Novac, George Vasilevici, and many others. The translation team is impressive. Adam J. Sorkin has delighted American readers with a lifetime of translations that have received well-deserved recognitions and awards. Claudia Serea boasts, in addition to a rich experience with translation, several books of poetry in English and a wide experience as a superb poet in her own right. In fact, most of the translations in the volume are done through a complex process of collaboration, which reaffirms the dialogic structure of the book and the thorough research and labor behind it. Many other sophisticated translators contributed to the success of the book, such as Ioana Ieronim, Oana Sânziana Marian, Bogdan Ștefănescu, and Livia Vianu, to mention only a few of them.

*The Vanishing Point* displays the rich context of Romanian poetry and the complexity of the Eastern-European aesthetic background. The poets included offer a wide range of styles, experiences, and aesthetics. For instance, Ruxandra Cesereanu's poetry is distinguished through passion, voluptuous details, a tight verse and shocking accumulation of

layers, as in her poem "Lust": "the bite between the thighs comes from lust / that a knife often cannot cut loose / that chops you into pieces softens you / that slyly unbends you sets you back on earth / that tosses you into briars turns you black / the heavens may eat you with their earning and squalor / that may remove your marrow with greedy suck / pigs may gobble it chew it" (88). Cesereanu's selection from the anthology offers a good sample of the intensity of her verse and her incredible linguistic resourcefulness.

Teodor Dună's poetry impresses through its visceral representation of the body and a concentrated line, as in "The Fifth Day": "at night we see nothing of the mirrors that sliced through our bodies / because between neck and hip our skin has turned into a thin mirror / sticking out along the spine dividing our heart in two / and to say we're alive we tug our skin open we look in the mirror" (157).

George Vasilievici is included in the anthology with a powerful selection. In "trendy nights," a section from "Everything Always," Vasilievici creates an intense world of darkness and the macabre: "even the nights follow the latest fashion. / they've become plain old days / with liver sickness, simple days, / day-to-day days, when the light / turns only more and more sallow. / now we can sleep in peace. / it's well known that we rid ourselves of hepatitis / much more easily / than of darkness" (180). His poems from the anthology are shocking, dark, and impossible to resist. The selection demonstrates the good work that the editors and translators have done, as in "the onion": "We meet inside the onion / where right away our tears gush out / and we fuck while they stream down / until the love we obscenely / cooed about all this time / purifies the onion of our withered / memories and cuts it in thin slices / together with our flesh..." (182).

Similarly, Simona Popescu's poems invite us to sample the subtle, layered, and meticulous details of her work, as in "Night": "The night creatures come out from their lairs / the nocturiae the phalaenae the nictalopians / the hunters the predators with / fur with jaws with talons / a myriad of hungry mouths / bloom in the ocean as well / the dark slowly gets populated" (70).

The editors have taken great care in the process of selection, and this is what makes *The Vanishing Point* a superb collection that includes both emerging and well-established voices in Romanian poetry. Indeed, as Paul Dory Mugur points out in his preface, the "obsession for the real and for authenticity, the rejection of any form of compromise and the contamination of esthetic by ethic are the main characteristics of con-

## METAMORPHOSES

temporary Romanian poetry.” This “neo-realistic trend” (3) is represented in many of the poems included in the anthology, often calling to mind the gritty, cynical, and acerbic flavor of the brilliant new wave of Romanian cinema.