What is translation, and what constitutes “fidelity” to or “betrayal” of a source text? In a 1916 essay (“On Language as Such and on the Language of Man”) the German philosopher Walter Benjamin argues that all languages share an essential kinship, *qua* human; in his oft-cited “The Task of the Translator” he affirms that “a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language,” rather like small sherds belonging to a single Greek amphora. The most radical practitioner to put Benjamin’s theoretical assertion to the test is not Ezra Pound, but the American Objectivist poet Louis Zukofsky—arguably a genius, and certainly a daring experimenter who impressed Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and the influential critic Hugh Kenner. That Yiddish was his first and only language as a child on New York’s Lower East Side must have played a significant role in shaping his sense that no language can be converted into another without losing its melody and cultural depth, if one transfers what is ‘signified’ and ignores the ‘signifier’—the actual *letters* of the original artifact. In his laconic preface to his translation of the first-century BC Latin poet Catullus (all 116 poems and 5 fragments), he says: “This translation of Catullus follows the sound, rhythm and syntax of his Latin—tries, as is said, to breathe the ‘literal’ meaning with him.” The result is what some critics have called “homophonic” and others “rogue” translation: English words and phrases that sound like the Latin but mean something else, ‘false friends’ (“fiery” for *fieri*). Zukofsky’s English certainly does not translate the Latin in any conventional sense, and seems itself mystifyingly absurd and surrealist. Surprisingly, though,
if one reads Zukofsky’s versions aloud, with an open mind and without puzzling over each word, at his best Zukofsky captures the essential emotional impact, the underlying message of the original.

No translator in this issue is as radical as Zukofsky. But two unorthodox translations/transformations have vindicated Paul Mann’s views (in “Translating Zukofsky’s Catullus.” *Translation Review*, 1984): “[…] it seems obvious that translation practice in general could stand some unbuckling, arousal, play.” A rap version of Book One of Homer’s *Odyssey*, by the father and son team of John and Michael Lee, may seem transgressive at first glance. As a Hellenist, I was surprised and delighted to see—as were the classicist outside reviewers—that it is not just clever but, *mutatis mutandis*, accurate and close to the Greek text. And like the original Greek it is meant to be performed and heard. (Read it aloud, and pay attention to the rhythm!)

In his explanatory and discursive notes, Michael Lee tips his hat to Charles Kinbote, the obsessive annotator of *Pale Fire*, Nabokov’s 1962 novel (in the guise of a 999 line poem in heroic couplets, with notes that take on a life of their own). Kinbote is one of Nabokov’s fictional alter egos, a madder version of Nabokov himself as translator of Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*. His (virtually unreadable) literal, prose translation of *Eugene Onegin* appeared in 1964, in four volumes. The first volume contains a long introduction by Nabokov and the text of the translation. Of the remaining three volumes two (!) are comprised of Nabokov’s notes—detailed, discursive, autobiographical, polemical by turns, while the fourth contains a facsimile of the 1837 Russian edition. In contrast to his aggressive attacks on other translators (both those who preceded and those who followed his translation), his adamant defense of literal translation utterly devoid of rhyme or meter, and his counterattacks
on critics and detractors, Nabokov’s sly mockery of his obsessive involvement with *Eugene Onegin* and the lengthy autobiographical digressions in his translator’s notes form an elegant as well as entertaining challenge to the reader. As with his translation of Pushkin and the accompanying notes, we are forced to move between the poem and the notes which constitute a parallel, and increasingly autonomous story. *Pale Fire*, in short, demands that we think of the relationship of text to editor, translator, reader. By channeling Kinbote and Nabokov, Michael Lee offers readers a daring and complex journey along the forking, circular and intersecting paths of translation.

J.Z. Houlihan’s “transed” version of Fernando Pessoa’s “Chuva Obliqua” (“Oblique Rain”) is daring and experimental in a different way. There is no attempt at line by line correspondence. Houlihan’s poem is, rather, a distillation of meaning and effect. Charles Cutler—translator, poet, and an expert on Pessoa and on translations, transformations and imitations of his poems as well as a member of this journal’s editorial board—suggests that Pessoa himself might be amusedly approving. Pessoa wrote under dozens of names; his three most famous “heteronyms” are Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis, and Álvaro de Campos, alter egos whom Pessoa considered full-fledged individuals who wrote things he himself was unwilling or unable to write. So it isn’t that much of a stretch to argue that Houlihan has created a new persona for Pessoa, a voice in English that could well belong to a hitherto unnamed alias in Pessoa’s cohort of multiple identities.

Also in this issue is an abundance of other poetry, in more conventional translations. But every translator struggles with difficult decisions. What words precisely convey the meaning and register of the source text in the
target language? How can a pattern of sounds be reproduced, or if not exactly reproducible, what new sound pattern will produce a similar effect in the translated poem? Should rhyme or meter be attempted, and if so, will such ‘fidelity’ to a form that seems natural in the original seem archaic or contrived in the translation? What associations should the translator try to suggest through a ‘foreignizing’ strategy, or what should he or she let go and risk being accused of ‘domestication’?

Andrew Frisardi offers a new translation of five sonnets from Dante’s *Vita Nova*, a tour de force that reproduces the rhyme pattern and meter of the Italian, is uncannily close to the Italian on a literal level, and yet sounds natural in English. (His translation of the *Vita Nova* is forthcoming from Northwestern University Press in 2013.) Samuel N. Rosenberg and Patricia Terry also work with rhyme when possible and use meters and rhetorical devices appropriate to English ballads in their versions of five medieval ballads translated from Occitan and Spanish.

The Russian poems in this issue, by Arseny Tarkovsky (translated by Jason Bentsman), Osip Mandelshtam and Roald Mandelshtam (both translated by Ian Probstein), are all characterized by strict patterns of rhyme and meter; each of these poems cries out to be recited. To varying degrees, the translators make an attempt to reflect the use of rhythm and, to a lesser extent, of rhyme. Some of the challenge, at least, has to do with the different expectations of readers, and writers, of contemporary American poetry. And, certainly, an uninflected language like English makes it harder to come up with meaningful rhymes than a heavily inflected language like Russian. Of course, it isn’t impossible: one of the most skilled translators of Russian and German poetry into rhymed, metrically consistent English translations is Walter Arndt, who died very recently at an advanced but sharp old
Yet in recent years, critics have wondered if Arndt’s remarkable facility might not be a handicap, his translations too smooth, the effect too predictable, too sing-song. As a translator, you can’t please everyone.

Translation between similar languages—for instance Spanish and Italian—may make some of the difficult choices unnecessary. Similar sound patterns, grammar (e.g. noun and adjective declensions and verb conjugations), syntax, and vocabulary transfer well. So, in this issue, Diana Baldini Brown’s translations from Spanish into Italian of poems by the Argentinian Olga Bressano de Alonso retain a semantic and phonic correspondence impossible to achieve in her nevertheless “faithful” and poetically effective English translation of these same poems. Italian is, in some respects, a language of poetry—at least of melodic poetry. Hence it isn’t surprising that a gifted translator like Nancy Loglisci, two of whose translations into Italian of English poems by Donna Pucciani appear here, recreates a poem in Italian that seems perfectly at home in its new garb; in some cases—(other translations I have seen, which do not appear in this issue)—her Italian version is unquestionably a better poem than the original, a subtle orchestration of sounds and meanings lacking in the source text. Sometimes, then, as when Loglisci translates, the poetry is what gets found in translation, not—in Robert Frost’s notorious pronouncement—what gets lost.

Some of the poetry we present in this issue has been translated with, or by, the poet. Finnish writer and free-lance journalist Rita Dahl’s translation of a selection from one of her poems includes revisions by readers and editors, which she accepted graciously. Lynn Levin worked closely with Peruvian poet Odi Gonzales, who writes both in Quechua and Spanish, to translate selections from La escuela de Cusco (2005). Gonzales’ poems are descriptive, highly visual, bringing before our eyes the religious paintings indigenous
and mestizo artists were taught to produce for their Catholic colonizers. The subjects are those of Italian and Spanish religious art, but the scenes depicted nonetheless include indigenous religious beliefs and images as well as local nature. The poems are polyphonic: we hear the voices of the indigenous painters, of critics, and of the poet himself:

The prudishness of the monks in this monastery required that Eve's breasts be covered with three layers of plaster

or:

The signature of the artist lies hidden on the back of the canvas in a ribbon that hangs from the beak of a bird a wanchaco? a zorzal? a calandria?

or, from another poem,

Before painting *The Dormition of the Virgin* the parables of the series of angels armed with harquebuses, my hands were shelling corn in the sheds of the Chief Magistrate

The painters consistently appropriate the Christian scenes, translating them into their own familiar frame of reference. For instance, the Paradise which God shows to Adam and Eve, in a painting now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art
in New York, recalls a forest by an Inca palace, the rainforest, the orchards of an early fifteenth-century Inca ruler, a local hacienda, and is full of tropical birds, lush vegetation, passion fruit.

Award-winning Danish poet and short-story writer Niels Hav has generously given us a small taste of his work: six short, pithy poems masterfully translated by the poet himself or by Heather Spears or Martin Aitken working with Hav. Despite their economy and accessibility, Niels Hav’s poems display a range of registers and emotions. “Hypocrites” starts out with righteous-sounding criticism of anyone who claims to speak for Allah, God, Buddha; shifts in the poem’s middle with “is if possible an even worse hypocrite/than I” towards an ironic self-awareness that punctures the speaker’s own spiritual expectations; and ends with a striking deflation of register in the last line (“the price of diapers”). It seems to me that Hav delivers a philosophical treatise in nine short, and funny, lines. The opening lines of another poem (“Speech is silver –/ but silence is gruesome”) pull us into the poem and simultaneously send us far beyond it. And “The Hawthorn,” translated by Niels Hav alone, is a gem both in Danish and in English, utterly spare and straightforward, simple yet profound.

Mohammed (“Allama”) Iqbal, born in the Punjab in 1877, a leader in the movement for Pakistani independence and for the revival of Islamic civilization, and now officially recognized as the national poet of Pakistan, is represented here by one classically formal poem (“Love Meets Death”), translated from the Urdu into couplets by Hamida Banu Chopra, an internationally renowned reciter of Urdu poetry, and award-winning translator Zack Rogow.

From Israeli poet, painter, filmmaker, playwright and publisher David Avidan, there are several poems translated
by Tsipi Keller, who has won many prestigious awards for her translations of a wide range of Hebrew poets. Avidan is a powerful and versatile poet, a major force in contemporary Hebrew poetry, and Keller’s translations convey his voice despite the monumental challenge of translating from a language as terse and economical as Hebrew into English, which requires many more syllables and words to cover the same ground, or less. “A Sudden Evening” which begins “An old man—what is his life?” is a deeply moving meditation on the human condition and mortality. “Burying Uncle Solomon”—that stubborn old immigrant from Russia who in death “burrows in the sands of Holon bumming cigarettes/ from all the other interred who were as stubborn as he”—seems, in the end, to be less about death than about life with all its quotidian absurdities, and a paean to survival. “Peek Into An Open Dream” somehow, cleverly and with a light touch, imports the seven fat and seven skinny cows of the Old Testament into contemporary middle-class Tel Aviv society. Finally, there is “Desert Storm, An Infrared Dream,” a spate of a poem, a raging, rushing monologue—a soliloquy? Addressed to us? With Tsipi’s permission, we decided to print the piece as a prose poem, with no more punctuation than the original. It proceeds not in lines but in chunks, pausing only for a gulp of air so as to blast on to climax:

but what are small individual orgasms compared with the aerial orgasm in the skies of the Middle East so he who finishes inside finishes inside and he who finishes outside finishes outside and he who finishes Baghdad finishes Baghdad

Whatever the layout on a page, Avidan’s “Desert Storm, An Infrared Dream” is not ordinary prose. What
then, is poetry? It isn’t defined by rhyme, meter, nor is it—as is so often the case with what may pass for poetry today—a prosaic text arranged on a page in randomly separated lines. The poet Efraín Bartolomé describes his Ocosingo: diario de guerra y algunas voces (Ocosingo War Diary: Voices from Chiapas) as “snapshots” “transcribed” “in brushstrokes of stuttering prose.” We have chosen to print this piece bilingually, as we do poetry. The vibrantly immediate voice of Andrés Sánchez, whose idioms and rhythms come alive in Spanish and in Kevin Brown’s translation as well, bridges the fluid border between prose poem and prose narrative.

Good prose, in any language, pays attention to precision in the use of words, to sound, to the rhythms of thought and speech. To the best of their ability, translators as well as the authors whom they translate call into play the same sensitivity to language. In fact, translators must have a doubly sensitive ear, to hear the intricacies of both the source and the target languages. Kirk Anderson, who translates Franck Pavloff’s “Matin brun” (“Brown Hounding”) from the French has such an ear. This “parable of creeping totalitarianism” (to quote from Anderson’s preface to his translation) is particularly relevant to the USA today, and his translation for an American audience strikes me as particularly timely. Also translated from the French, a tragicomic vignette of peasant life by francophone Swiss writer Charles Ferdinand Ramuz (translated by Michelle Bailat-Jones). Keto von Waberer’s short story “Fasching” (“Mardi Gras,” translated from the German by Ingrid Lansford), leads the reader into the mind and psyche of a young girl. Most of von Waberer’s stories are journeys into the interior life of her characters, whose humdrum lives give no indication of the intensity of their longing or the fragility of their wild hopes. Also translated by Ingrid Lansford, this time from the Danish, two short stories. “The Boy in the Front Seat,” by Danish modernist
Peter Seeberg, is a third-person narrative told from the point of view of a young boy who stumbles into a future of betrayal and duplicity. Jan Sonnergaard, in pitch-perfect English translations by Ingrid Lansford, should be familiar to readers of *Metamorphoses*. In “Fruit Flies,” the voice and perspective are those of a young man, adrift but entitled, self-absorbed, indeed solipsistic and encapsulated. That Sonnergaard can craft such gripping and memorable fiction when his narrators are so hard to like or care about—at least for me—strikes me as remarkable every time I encounter a new story.

Investigative journalist by profession, translator of Polish fiction for love of Poland and its language and literature, Stephanie Kraft brings us a chapter from Wojciech Zukrowski’s 1966 novel, *Stone Tablets*, which was made into a film in 1983. We look forward to the publication of the entire novel in English. From the Balkans, and countries of the former USSR, we have several short stories. Yordan Yovkov’s “A Woman’s Heart” (translated by David M. Jones) is set in a nineteenth-century Bulgarian village; Yovkov’s tales of peasant life and military experiences are widely read and held in high esteem in Bulgaria. From the Ukraine, two more stories that evoke a vanished past, both translated by Michael M. Naydan: Maria Matios’ “Sweet Darusya” and Halyna Pahutiak’s “The Minion from Dobromyl.” From Georgia, excerpts from Archil Sulakauri’s “Salamura’s Adventures,” an allegorical political and social satire in the guise of a fairy tale for children, published with humorous drawings by the author and much loved by Georgian readers. It appears here in English for the first time, translated by the husband and wife team of Vaho and Veronica Muskheli. From the Americas we have only one work of fiction in this issue, Argentinean writer Reina Roffé’s “Sleepless Night,” translated from the Spanish by Anna Stein-Obreros. Set during Argentina’s brutal military dictatorship, the story
lets us see persecution, terror and helpless apathy from the perspective of an old woman; like her, we know what the child entrusted to the old neighbor (who has survived the persecution of Jews in France during WWII) cannot understand or imagine: what has happened to her parents, and what lies in store for her.

A scholarly essay and several reviews round out the offerings in this issue. Ahmed Gamal’s “Scheherezade’s Voice: Postcolonial Translation as Transformation in Ahdaf Soueif” provides an illuminating discussion of questions that have become prominent in postcolonial studies: What is English, and how many kinds of Englishes are there? More generally, how do the formerly colonized use the language of the former colonizers, and in appropriating it, how do they change and enrich it? What power dynamics are involved when we talk about language, and translation? These questions are not, fundamentally, wholly new. We need only think of the philosopher and translator Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), to single out only one influential early thinker who recognized how translation transforms and enriches the target language.

We didn’t plan it this way, but our review section is de facto dedicated in one way or another to G. J. Racz—an appropriate homage to an exceptional translator. In addition to Racz’s review of Poetry & Translation: The Art of the Impossible, by Peter Robinson, there are two reviews of Racz’s own recently published books of translation. In her detailed, erudite and very positive review, Alice Clemente says of his translation of Lope de Vega’s Fuentevejuna that it “does justice to Lope’s masterpiece. With an impressive command of both Spanish and English, the translator works comfortably with all of the dramatic elements and with the varied metrical forms […]” In their careful and closely
argued, laudatory review of Racz’s translation of selected poems by Eduardo Chirinos (Reasons for Writing Poetry), David Ball and Charles Cutler, poets and translators both, have this to say: “The translated anthology reads as if it were originally written in contemporary American English, but it does not resemble most contemporary American poetry at all. It is distinctively modern, but clearly from elsewhere. This is quite a feat for the translator, and, in our view, speaks well for the poet.” I can’t resist adding that we are proud to have published some of these Chirinos translations in an earlier issue of Metamorphoses.

As this issue goes to press, I would like to thank all the contributors for their work and for their cooperation during the editing and proofreading process. We are grateful to authors, translators, publishers and other copyright holders for granting us permission to publish both original texts and translations. Special thanks to the many anonymous outside reviewers who generously gave us their time and expert knowledge; without them, this journal could not exist. I would also like to thank the young women who have worked closely with me, Erica Zhang and Leah Jacobs; their hard work, quick minds and good judgment have made possible both producing the journal and keeping the website updated.

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