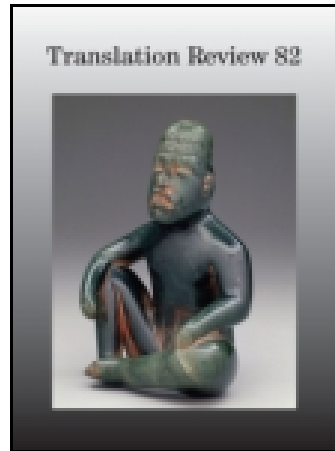


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Translation Review

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/utrv20>

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Samuel Hazo

Published online: 21 Aug 2012.

To cite this article: Samuel Hazo (1993) So True as to Be Invisible, Translation Review, 41:1, 3-10, DOI: [10.1080/07374836.1993.10523584](https://doi.org/10.1080/07374836.1993.10523584)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07374836.1993.10523584>

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SO TRUE AS TO BE INVISIBLE

BY SAMUEL HAZO

Delivered as the keynote speech at the 1992 ALTA Conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on October 29, 1992.

Translation occurs when something is changed or transformed into something else, when one thing becomes another. Defined and understood in this way, the very acts of speaking and writing in and of themselves can be regarded as acts of translation—the transformations of feelings or thoughts into sounds or markings that, by common agreement and necessity, stand for those feelings and thoughts—thus making the sharing of experience possible through what is then called communication or, in the hands of poets, communion. Perhaps life itself can be seen as an act of translation or a series of acts of translation from conception into fetus, fetus into infant, infant into child, child into adolescent, adolescent into adult—a sequence of changes or transformations beginning with the infinitesimal, which contains, in potency, everything that follows it, and continuing to the final stages of life. And for those who believe in the immortality of the soul, death itself can be regarded as an act of translation in which life, in the language of one of the major liturgies, is changed but not taken away—it is simply translated.

The art of literary translation is but one subdivision of translation considered in more cosmic terms. But it differs from most other translations in that it has about it the aura of absurdity. Why? Because it is predicated upon impossibility, and indeed, it comes into existence in the face of impossibility. How, some people ask, can the depth of feeling and the unique vision expressed in one language be rendered faithfully in another? Isn't the very attempt, these same people argue, a desecration of the original? The purists of this world would support such a position, and in one sense they are nothing but right. But their very absolutism, if carried to its logical conclusion, would do nothing but incarcerate us within the prison of our own language, leading us back to being citizens on the ground-floor of Babel (a convenient synonym for the face of the earth) where no one would understand or try to understand the literature of anyone outside of his own linguistic tribe.

On the other hand, those who give a spiritual and not simply a literal meaning to brotherhood and universality and internationality would not be so exclusionist. They would say that the translator—absurdity and impossibility notwithstanding—attempts to create understanding where none was or is thought possible. This is especially true where

poetry is concerned. If T.S. Eliot was correct when he said that poetry communicates before it is understood—and I for one think that he was and, I would add, that that remains true even when we are listening to poetry in a tongue that we ourselves do not comprehend—then the translator aids us immeasurably by helping us understand what we are feeling by giving us a bridge of words between the opposing shores of two languages.

Without translators attempting the impossible, what would be the consequences? I will not further elaborate on the metaphor of Babel, although the temptation is almost irresistible. I will simply say that we would of necessity be limited to our native literatures. Americans would know their Whitman, their Eliot, their Cummings, their Hart Crane, their Robert Frost, their Randall Jarrell, and their Richard Wilbur, but they would not know Dante Alighieri, Dostoevsky, Goethe, Cervantes, the troubadours, Sophocles, the great Hebrew poets of Spain, the pre-Islamic Arabic poets, the poets of China and Japan and, finally, the Bible. Yet all the aforementioned are ours for the reading because translators have dared them into English or Anglo-American, have attempted to approximate the originals so that even the translated work becomes an original in its own right, have tried to make their translations so true as to be invisible in order that the spirit of the poet, in whatever tongue, comes through. John Berger came close to saying the same thing when he wrote: "Every poem that works as a poem is an original. And *original* has two meanings; it means a return to the origin, the first which engendered everything that followed, and it means that which has never occurred before. In poetry, and in poetry alone, the two senses are muted in such a way that they are no longer contradictory."¹

Let me begin the body of my address by describing the ideal translator as one who is fluent—spiritually as well as linguistically—in the language from which he is translating and equally fluent—spiritually as well as linguistically—in the language into which he is transposing the original. This is a high qualification, and most translators do not and cannot meet it. Indeed even the possession of such spiritual and linguistic fluency in the ideal translator I have described is of dubious value if the translator is not of the same visionary orientation as the person he is translating. Translating a vision is more than translating words, just as

performing Mozart or Chopin is more than playing notes. It is somehow translating the untranslatable. How this is done remains a mystery even to the translator himself. A good translator, for example, may do justice to one author and fail utterly with another in much the same way in which a person may flourish by working in one geographical area and not grow at all if he moves to another, even though he may be doing the same work in both. The mystery of success in translation is just that—a mystery. It is a combination of talent, persistence, inspiration, insight, empathy, and not a little luck.

And there are pitfalls. Some translators, for instance, have been faulted because they used a poem by a poet they have translated as the occasion for creating their own poem—indebted, obliquely, to the original but essentially the translator's poem. Robert Lowell was charged with this indulgence in a book he frankly entitled *Imitations*. For my part I don't know exactly how this can be avoided. After all, the translator does recreate the poem he is translating from another language into his own through the prism of his own personality, and some of that personality is bound to find its way into the translation. In some cases it may be pure egotism. In other cases it may result in a poem that is poetically inferior to the original. Or the reverse. I have been told that Omar Khayyam is regarded as a third- or fourth-rate poet in Persian, but Edward Fitzgerald made Khayyam's "Rubaiyat" sing in his English quatrains. Would it have been better to have a fourth-rate translation of a fourth-rate piece of work or to have done, as Fitzgerald did, a first-rate work that the original spawned but was still indubitably Fitzgerald's "Rubaiyat"? Would anyone hearing these lines want them any different?

As much as Wine has play'd the Infidel,
And robb'd me of my Robe of Honour—well,
I often wonder what the Vintners buy
One half so precious as the Goods they sell.

Alas, that Spring should vanish with the Rose!
That Youth's sweet-scented Manuscript should
close!
The Nightingale that in the Branches sang,
Ah, whence, and whither flown again, who knows!

Ah, love! could thou and I with Fate conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would we not shatter it to bits—and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

A good translator has been called a kind of mid-wife, but I prefer a different analogy. Let us for the sake of amusement—if not for clarity—compare him to a cook. A cook takes things from their natural environment—vegetables from the ground, fruit from the tree, fish from the

water, meat from livestock on the hoof—and translates them into ingredients for cooking. As long as they remain in their uncooked condition, they remain ingredients—as literal translations remain literal translations before they are mysteriously transformed into good translations. Then, through his imagination and the mystery of fire and herbs and spices and sauces, a cook converts these ingredients into something we can eat and indeed want to eat—into food. A bad translation, to continue the analogy, is like a bad meal. We wish we had not eaten it. Here, for instance, is Clinton Bailey's translation of a poem by a bedouin named Anez abu Salim about Anwar Sadat's visit to Jerusalem—a poem commissioned by the head of Egypt's Socialist Union Party.

The will for peace which made Sadat embark on
such a mission
Brought those who ruled along with him to take up
his position.
Each speech they gave was followed by a din of
ululation;
Those who held the reins received the people's
adulation.
If someone were a traitor, he would act in ways
unknown,
And betray the Arabs' lands and borders while he
gained his own.
Families lose their homes in war, and many men
are slain;
The losers number many more than those that
maybe gain.
Anwar is choice, a leader, a healer and saint,
And for his pains we owe him our thanks without
restraint.

On the other hand, when the translation is as good as inspiration and human ability can make it, we quite literally can't get enough of it. I find this true time and time again when I read the translations of Edmund Keeley from Greek. Whether he is translating George Seferis, Yannis Ritsos or any contemporary Greek poet, I have rarely found a translation that did not work well—sometimes hauntingly well—in English. Perhaps this is because Mr. Keeley comes as close as anyone to fulfilling my definition of the ideal translator. He has lived in Greece, is fluent in Greek, and knew personally most if not all of the poets whose work he translated. Add to this that he is a genuine scholar of contemporary Greek literature, that he is a creative writer himself as well as a critic, and, finally, that he is fluent and literarily sensitive in English. The result is often a masterpiece of translation such as the following, "Mathios Pascalis Among the Roses" by George Seferis:²

I've been smoking steadily all morning
if I stop the roses will embrace me

they'll choke me with thorns and fallen petals
they grow crookedly, each with the same rose color
they gaze, expecting to see someone go by; no one
goes by.

Behind the smoke of my pipe I watch them
scentless on their weary stems.
In the other life a woman said to me: "You can
touch this hand,
and this rose is yours, it's yours, you can take it
now or later, whenever you like."

I go down the steps smoking still,
and the roses follow me down excited
and in their manner there's something of that voice
at the root of a cry, there where one starts shouting
"mother" or "help"
or the small white cries of love.

It's a small garden full of roses
a few square yards descending with me
as I go down the steps, without the sky;
and her aunt would say to her: "Antigone, you
forgot your
 exercises today,
at your age I never wore corsets, not in my time."
Her aunt was a pitiful creature: veins in relief,
wrinkles all around her ears, a nose ready to die;
but her words were always full of prudence.
One day I saw her touching Antigone's breast
like a small child stealing an apple.

Is it possible that I'll meet the old woman now as
I go down?
She said to me as I left: "Who knows when we'll
meet again?"
And then I read of her death in old newspapers
of Antigone's marriage and the marriage of
Antigone's daughter
without the steps coming to an end or my tobacco
which leaves on my lips the taste of a haunted ship
with a mermaid crucified to the wheel while she
was still
 beautiful.

A good translator is quite literally a gift to an author. He can be the difference between international attention and oblivion. Jerzy Kosinski, whose novels were translated into a multiplicity of languages, told me that he tried to meet each of his translators, so sensitive was he to the importance of the translator in the distribution of his work abroad. And the Russian poet Andre Voznesensky became well known in the United States primarily as a result of having his work translated by excellent poets who were determined to do right by him in English because they felt attuned to his

style—William Jay Smith, Stanley Kunitz, Richard Wilbur, to name but a few. Having mentioned Wilbur, I cannot refrain from adding that his translations have made the plays of Molière playable. The director and actress Zoe Caldwell emphasized this to me once. She said that she was hired to direct *Tartuffe* in which a translation other than Wilbur's was scheduled for use. She told me that both she and the actors found the translation virtually unactable. It was at this point that she insisted on the Wilbur translation as the only one she was content to use, and the play proceeded thereafter from rehearsal to production without a hitch. And all because Molière was the beneficiary of a brother-soul who chose to be his translator.

From this point I will become personal, speaking about my own attempts at translation from French and Arabic (plus one poem from Russian): how I proceeded, what I learned, what I am still learning. My first attempt was a translation from French of the lyrical essays on mythology by the distinguished Swiss author and federalist, Denis de Rougemont. I worked with a linguist since my own French was plodding at best. Indeed, one of the results was a coincidence between translation and history that remains for me to this day a miracle of language in language. Let me explain.

In one of the essays in this book, de Rougemont includes a line that describes the undertones that exist beneath what we call reality, beneath appearances—the archetypal or mythological truths that manifest themselves from time to time in the world—how heroism comes to light through the actions of specific heroes, how the ideal of feminine beauty is variously revealed through the beauty of specific women, and so forth; de Rougemont called this undertone (literally) "the flow of deeper waters."

I liked the literal translation, but I changed the rather flat word "flow" to "growl" in the published text. Simultaneously, I was trying to explain to de Rougemont that the book's title in French, *Doctrines Fabuleuse*, did not and could not convey in English (*Fabulous Doctrines*) the connotations of *fable* as he understood the word—that "fabulous" in English meant something so vacuous (as in "fabulous trip" or "fabulous job") that it meant almost nothing at all. He told me to feel free to come up with another title, and I began toying with the idea of calling the book *The Growl of Deeper Waters*. And, indeed, the book was published subsequently under that title.

In the late 1980s, Robert McGuire published under the imprint of the Princeton University Press a history of the Bollingen Series—a series, as you know, funded by Paul Mellon, which will always be one of the most distinguished ventures in the history of American publishing. McGuire noted that one of the earliest publications was a book by Denis de Rougemont called *The Devil's Share*. De Rougemont subsequently came to New York, working with various resistance groups against the Nazis. McGuire noted

further that de Rougemont had envisioned and committed himself to writing a book about mythology. The working title he chose at that time was *The Groul of Deeper Waters*. I was—to put it mildly—startled out of my wits. I telephoned McGuire and told him about this phenomenal coincidence—how a book that was simply a possibility in the mind of the author in the 1940s would eventually be published in French with the title *Doctrines Fabuleuse*, then be translated and entitled with the very title—to the very word—that was in the author’s mind thirty-plus years earlier. We were dumbfounded, and we remain so to this day.

The next venture I made as a translator was to turn a selection of poems by the Damascene poet Adonis (Ali Ahmed Said) into English. Again, I worked with a linguist but with trepidation since Arabic at its poetic best tends to be an imagistic and aphoristic language. I had tried my hand earlier by translating the work of two other poets from Arabic, and the results were ludicrous. What was picturesque and mellifluous in Arabic became sentimental and almost Swinburnian in English. I took some consolation from the fact that my failures were at least noble.

But with Adonis—and this was true before as well as after I met him—I felt I was with someone whose vision and way of thinking or feeling or felt-thinking (*sentipensante* in the language of Eduardo Galeano) were akin to my own. When I tried my hand at translating his poems, the spirit of the poetry seemed almost to glide into English, as in the following, entitled “The Days”:

My eyes are tired, tired of days,
tired regardless of days.
Still must I drill through wall
after wall of days to find another day?
Is there, is there another day?

The more I worked on Adonis’ poems, the more I discovered that the Arabic imagination does things to English that the Western imagination seems incapable of doing. Take, for example, these two words (literally translated) that describe the cramped and frenzied fluttering of a butterfly that is held captive within a cage of cupped fingers of two hands—“jailed astonishment.” How evocative, how daring, how simply different and, finally, how perfect.

In some of the longer poems I saw how the genuine elegiac tone and spirit of the original could be carried into English in such a way that the rich rhetorical power of the Arabic was not lost. Take, for example, “Remembering the First Century”:

A word without a moon
sounds over us.
Nightclouds

carry the snow of Christmas.
“Beware and keep away!
Magi and guests, avoid
us while you still have time.
We rule like princes over nothing.
Our history dissolves like foam.
I warn you. Go away.”
Mud engulfs us like a net.
We drown in it.

Slime
covers our eyelids.
It scarves
our necks like silk.
Somehow
it came without a cloud.
What happened to the thunder?
Who stilled the prophecies
of havoc?

“Come then.
Invade
us.
Invade our sacred
lives.

Our women wait
for you behind the bushes
of their dreams, in chambers,
on the grass.

Their loins and nipples
stiffen with the aches
of lust.

You are
their only lover.”
My country,
are you no more than air,
no dearer than a hill of salt?
Have you been stained too long
with the ashes of scribes?

My country,
you are an old soldier.
Like me, you give your very guts
to move ahead.

Like me,
you groan with every step.
I mourn with you.

I know
how a back breaks.
I share
your fate beneath this tree
of my despair, but the roots
of the plague are clear to me.
Blink by blink, I wait
a darker eagle.
Behind

my shoulder stands the shepherd
of no hope.

His flutes break
in my chest.

The road before me
bleeds with nothing but anemone
and weeds.

I hear a rasp
of thorns.

Despair, I call you
by your right name.

We were never
strangers, but I
refuse to walk with you.

My work with Adonis led to a few other translations that I did for Selma Jayussi in her Columbia University volume, *Modern Arabic Poetry*. The results, now that I look back on it, were mixed. It did result in one major discovery, but I'll return to that later.

The next major effort I made in translation was a sequence of poems by Nadia Tueni called *Lebanon: Twenty Poems for One Love*. There were poems written by Mrs. Tueni in French (but, as I was told recently by a close friend of hers, in French words that were linguistically close to their Arabic counterparts) as a kind of poetic geography or map of Lebanon, despite its gradual disintegration and destruction by feuding internal parties and the Israeli invasion. It was a testament not only of memory but of history itself. She lists twenty separate and uniquely Lebanese subjects or key-stones: individual cities, towns and villages, the famous cedars of Lebanon, the women and men of the mountains, and so forth.

After I worked over the versions that I made from the transliterations, I made arrangements to go over the poems (Mrs. Tueni died in 1983) with her husband, Ghassan Tueni, the prominent editor, publisher, author, and former ambassador from Lebanon to the United States. He is a man who is absolutely devoted to his wife's memory and her poetry, and his wish to have a good version of the Lebanon poems in English (they already had been translated into Arabic) was just as intense as my own.

I thought and still think the poems beautiful, but Ambassador Tueni's taste in poetry was more Tennysonian than mine, and we had a good many disagreements about how the poems would work best in English. Some of them were minor. Should it be "Byblos, my beloved" or "My beloved Byblos." Some involved a knowledge of background—there is a small village where, as a native Lebanese knew, the inhabitants kept basil plants in their flower boxes so that the whole village smelled of basil. This explained one of the images in one of the poems. The result of all this backing-and-forthing was uniquely satisfying to me, and all the

efforts in retrospect were well worth it. Here are a few examples from the sequence:

In The Lebanese Mountains

Remember—the noise of moonlight
when the summer night collides with a peak
and traps the wind
in the rocky caves of the mountains of Lebanon.

Remember—a town on a sheer cliff
set like a tear on the rim of an eyelid;
one discovers there a pomegranate tree
and rivers more sonorous
than a piano.

Remember—the grapevine under the fig tree,
the cracked oak that September waters,
fountains and muleteers,
the sun dissolving in the river currents.

Remember—the basil and apple tree,
mulberry syrup and almond groves.
Each girl was a swallow then
whose eyes moved like a gondola
swung from a hazel branch.

Remember—the hermit and goatherd,
paths that rise to the edge of a cloud,
the chant of Islam, crusaders' castles,
and wild bells ringing through July.

Remember—each one, everyone,
storyteller, prophet and baker,
the words of the feast and the words of the storm,
and sea shining like a medal in the landscape.

Remember—the child's recollection
of a secret kingdom just our age.
We did not know how to read the omens
in those dead birds in the bottoms of their cages,
in the mountains of Lebanon.

Women of My Country

Women of my country,
a common light hardens your bodies,
and a common darkness lets them rest
in a soft elegy of change.
A common suffering cracks your lips,
and your eyes have been set by the same unique
jeweler.

You reassure mountains,
convince ashes of their own fertility

and tell the land that it will never pass away.
Women of my country,
even in chaos you discover what endures.

Apart from these book-length ventures, I have done only individual translations of poetry from Arabic, Russian, French, and German, and my reason has always been the same—that I felt attracted to the theme of the poem as I understood it in transliteration and felt somehow in touch with that particular poet in that particular poem.

The Russian poem was an early poem of Yevtushenko called “The Third Memory.” There are no ideological considerations here, just an insight that the body has a memory of its own:

The Third Memory

After the Russian of Yevgeny Yevtushenko

To everyone comes that time
when anguish clings and clings.
Life then in all its nakedness
becomes pointless as death.

Fearful, weak, suddenly
cold, we shrink but perseveringly
call out, call out to memory
as we might summon a sister

of mercy. But still the desolation
in the night prevails. The memories
of reason and the heart are not
enough to save what wants

to live within the eyes,
what moves, what makes us speak.
Everything dies. Only
the body’s memory survives.

My legs remember being bare
against the coolest grasses.
My feet cannot forget the soft
sting of sand across a road.

My cheek recalls (it was after
a fight) how tenderly a dog
with that kind roughness of his tongue
consoled my rage away.

My brow remembers still
(and guiltily) how silently a kiss
revealed my mother’s tenderness
and how in darkness I was blessed.

My fingers keep their memories
of rye, pine needles, rain,
and, barely tangible, a sparrow’s
shiver or the nervous quiver

down the withers of a horse.
My lips remember lips
of ice and flame, of dawn
and dark, of some lost world

that tastes of oranges and snow.
Then I can whisper, “Life,
forgive my anger at your secrets.
Forgive the guilt that blinded

me until I doubted you.
If you must ask a bitter
price each time you offer
me some relish of the earth,

so be it. Uncertainties,
defeats, the pains of loss—
are these too much to pay
for all that’s beautiful in you?”

The French translation was of a song by Jacques Brel called “Seul,” and the German translation was of one section of Rilke’s *Das Marienleben* called “Pieta.” It is Rilke at his most sensitive. He has Mary speak after the body of the dead Christ has been taken down from the cross and placed in her arms. It was the first few lines and the last line that persuaded me to attempt a translation, even though poets like Spender and scholars like J. B. Leishman had already done it. I wanted to make the poem my own.

The Arabic poem to which I alluded earlier is one entitled “Out of the Depths I have Cried to Thee, O Lord” by Twefiq Sayegh. It uses its religious and psalm-like title as the basis for a love poem—an erotic love poem akin to the “Song of Songs.” The body of genuine erotic love poetry in English is not that full. I do not know if it is because of the language or our sensitivity to the subject or because the erotic and the pornographic are used interchangeably (nothing could be further from the truth, since the erotic is passion within personality and the pornographic is sexuality divorced from personality, a poetry of parts). Sayegh’s poem is to me a love poem to end all love poems in its ardor, its imagery, and, finally, its reverence. And it seems as good a place to end these speculations as any.

Out of the Depths I Cry Unto You, O Death!

Come near come nearer
my white young filly
Come nearer my strong delicious filly

Come nearer my strong delicious filly
Come nearer my filly in season
Your words are songs and hymns
I heard them before I was born
They lullabied me quietly to sleep
I heard them on wedding nights when the dancers
sang
I heard them in church above choirs of chanters
I heard them from the lips of my beloved
while we grappled in a tangle of bedsheets

Come nearer let me leap on you
Then kick the earth and scream in the face of
heaven
stir up the dust and fill the world with clatter
and gallop gallop and gallop and gallop
climb the mountain and ford the streams
race the wind and birds and light itself
and even the vows of lovers.
Let's gallop wherever we choose
Let's never stop even when the light turns red
Let's damn directions and gallop
I'll spur your flanks and gallop and gallop and
gallop.

Don't loiter in pastures soft with hay
sweeter than sugar in your mouth
Don't pause with me
in festivals of sickness
or in the still swamp of senility
where bodies are corpses
where childhood is not a dream of innocence
but just a prison for the simple-minded
where eccentricity is a disease,
exile—humiliation,
and madness, deviance.

Listen, I wouldn't have loved you
and chosen you to ride
had it been you and only you in the stables.
I wouldn't have loved you
if I'd been rotting in a swamp
and hated the universe without daring to spit
on everybody in it
or had waited with empty eyes
in an emptier existence
for an emptiness that you would bring me.
You wouldn't have been my mount
if I hadn't passed a thousand stables
packed with horse after horse—
sorrels, palaminos, chestnuts, black
thoroughbreds and halfbreeds
racehorses and ploughhorses
pampered or overloaded

well-groomed or not
if I hadn't rejected them all
and yearned for you
saying You are the one I love You and you alone.

So come nearer nearer
The sentence is clear
I'm nailed to the wall of my prison
Come nearer
I'd rather die than wait to die
Slow time bites like a whip

Come nearer You are the one I want Just you
You alone are my escape, my home, my Eden.
Come nearer
my help, my guide, my savior
my midwife
my mother
Come nearer please

I don't know your name
your parents or your country
(who cares about the kind of clay that is a statue
and who would send the beloved's bones to the
laboratory?)

It's quite enough that you are beautiful
that your body is my "open sesame"
to life itself.
Tonight I must make a journey
that will break my father's heart and gladden me
like a journey that broke my heart and gladdened
him.

Carry me now and gallop.

Don't pause with me
beside the spring where you always drink
where I promised to meet you.
Don't stop with me
in the fields of blood
where life is paid for
by a medal, a leader's speech, a headline.
Don't ride through fields
where hate's perfume is fouled
with the stink of heroism and braggadocio and duty
where hate is saved for enemies alone.
Fields of my blood
I don't patrol you I have no comrades here
Fields of my blood
Like guzzling mouths that are always thirsty
for the frozen blood of old men
the blood of young girls that blooms in their
cheeks
before the long monotony

the blood of warriors
the blood of healers
the rich blood of healers
the stained blood of syphilitics
the blood of friends and neighbors
the blood of my wife
 with a child in her arms
 and another she labors to bear.

Fields of my blood
Gardens fertilized with hatred
with utter, total hatred
for those there and those here
those I've seen and those I haven't
with hatred
for you, and you and you, and even for me

Gallop with me
Fly without wings beyond the horizon
Flick at space and the world with your mane
Flick the sun
Drive it off as if it were a tick
glued onto your flanks.

I won't ask
where your hooves strike
where the road goes where you spend the night.
I'm satisfied to ride you to be riding you
playing with your hair
hearing you
and see the world bow low and disappear
before you as you gallop.

Don't swerve with me
into some Bacchanalian garden
where the stars are like so many eyes
where songs are the hisses of snakes
where flowers are only paper and ribbon
their colors mingled—
red and white and yellow—

Don't take me
to a garden crowded
with circling dancers
whose arms and breasts mummified centuries ago
seem mounted on bodies
that move them like machines
They jabber prayers
in foreign tongues
to an unknown goddess.

They dance and cavort
 machine with machine
They carry out their secret rites.

Let's move in tandem
to the song we hear as one,
you beneath me,
I above.

Gallop with me.
The race is short,
and there is one goal for both of us.
Leap the last stream with me,
and when the last exhaustion topples you,
I'll fall beside you,
spent, transformed and still.

They mate until their climax sunders them
like a shedding of innocence
a baptism of sin and knowledge
a bond making the two one
and the one nothing...

But with you a sweet song
rises and rises when you are near me
You are the queen that ends all festivals and rites
Strongly beneath me
you gallop.

So gallop with me
my new Shahrazad...
You who swallow every night
a new Shahriyar
gallop with me
and I'll gallop with you
I breathe in what you breathe out.
I touch my feet to yours.
I'll pant with you
until we climb and search and then descend
the last horizon.

Gallop with me.
Falling, let's fall as lovers fall,
together.

NOTES

1. Berger, John. *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief As Photos*. New York: Vintage, 1991. 98.
2. Seferis, George. *Collected Poems*. Translated, edited, and introduced by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard. Princeton University Press. 1981. 