Ann Richardson

TEO SAVORY AND UNICORN PRESS

Teo Savory

Distinguished as a novelist, poet and translator, Teo Savory has established herself as one of the most important editors of contemporary literature works in translation. On November 15, 1966, together with Alan Brilliant, she founded *Unicorn Press*, then in Santa Barbara, California, and now in Greensboro, N. C. The number of translations published by Unicorn Press is impressive, especially the wide range of authors from various languages including French, Spanish, German, Vietnamese and others. All writers were selected because of their high poetic intensity and their works were edited with great care and much love. Often, even the design of a book reflects the particular atmosphere of a poet's sensibility. It takes knowledge, constant work, long years of experience and an incredible commitment on an editor's part to maintain the quality that *Unicorn Press* has demonstrated in its publications during the last twelve years. Without Teo Savory it would have not been possible. Her thought intensity, her artistic sensibility and her achievements as a writer and translator come to life in the following interview.

What do you consider the role of translations to be? How do you perceive the future of translations and the place of the translator in our literary milieu?

Would it be correct to say that there are now three kinds of translators, the professional, the academic, the amateur? And that, until fairly recently, there were two, the scholarly professional, the educated amateur? (Arbitrary boundaries of this sort are never absolute, just as with Cyril Connolly's "mandarin" and "vernacular": each category tends to overlap in one way or another.) The translators of prose, that is of fiction, of the works

of Thomas Mann, Proust, Turgeniev, Márquez, Borges, of *Monkey* and *Tales of the Genji*, of Jung and the *I Ching* (here we overlap a little into non-fiction), were or are extremely gifted non-academics, in the main, and often very fine writers themselves–e.g., Edwin Muir. Among translators of poetry, Ezra Pound is the first to occur to me. The most pertinent example, perhaps, is Pasternak, translator of *Hamlet*...

In short, one might argue that the finest translators of the recent past (and overlapping a bit into the present) have been amateurs, knowledgeable, disciplined, often well-versed in their other language, nevertheless amateurs in the true sense of the word.

Fashions change, as we know, but aren't these changes really swings of a pendulum–swung away from Pound or Waley, criticised at present for "inaccuracies", their great gifts to the West overlooked, the debt almost any mature Occidental poet owes to some of these translations? (Imagine for a moment that Picasso had never seen any African art!) Perhaps in another decade or two we will see a fine blending of the accurate with the poetic. That is the great hope of some of us for the future of translation.

You have been quite productive as a writer and translator. Could you make a few comments on your own background–the influences that have shaped your career as author, editor, and translator. What kind of balance do you maintain among your various literary endeavors? And what languages do you translate from?

I was born into another language, Chinese, Cantonese variety, which I heard as much as, in fact more than, English for my first seven years, though speaking it was a rather parrot-like accomplishment, quickly forgotten–but perhaps responsible eventually for my life-long awareness of and interest in other tongues. I say "tongues" purposely, as it is the sound that fascinates me; whatever adequate translations I may have made must be due to this. (The failures, too!) I did not start writing until well over thirty, as I was first trained as a musician and, while living in England, was a concert singer. That required long training in various European languages–French, German, Italian, of course, also bits of Russian, Portuguese, and so on. It is evident that I came to translation by a side, if no–back, door. But this unusual training (much of it in the countries in which each language was spoken) also served to attain my ear. My first published translation appeared in my first published novel,

The Landscape of Dreams. In it, in order to describe a piece of piano music–Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit*–that the protagonist is studying, I simply translated one of the poems from the poetry sequence of the same name by Aloysius Bertrand. After that, I began translating a few French poets simply as interesting "pick-up" work between novels.

After Unicorn Press was founded I became intensely serious about translations and their publication. For a year I read. And read. Mainly French, then German. At that time, the press was in Santa Barbara and there was a splendid bookstore in Los Angeles where all the books I needed were, unlike now in Greensboro, available. I was extraordinarily fortunate in having New Directions as model and, from time to time, James Laughlin as mentor. A model, one should add, that we can never live up to. Then, fortunate again in meeting Anne Hyde Greet in Santa Barbara, a lovely poet and fine translator who did some outstanding work for us and, in turn, helped me with the translations I was doing. Robert Bly acquainted me with Guillevic, whose first, and for a time official, translator I was. (As well as having translated the two books by him that we published, and the long sequences, for *Mundus Artium* and for David Cloutier's anthology, *Nine French Poets*, I was asked by Penguin to translate their *Guillevic*, issued as a volume in their Modern European Poetry Series.) Soon after, *Dimension* started appearing, an invaluable source of the finest and most exciting contemporary German writing. Then, fortunate still again, when Leslie Willson introduced Unicorn to Richard Exner. Exner brought us his Piontek translations–and some poetry of his own–and many important suggestions.

And so our first two foreign language series were begun: Unicorn French Series, Unicorn German Series. Simultaneously, we were honoured by Thich Nhat Hanh and Vo-Dinh in being offered their *Cry of Vietnam* for publication. This was the first translation of a Vietnamese book, so far as we know, to be published in the United States. And, unexpectedly, our best seller!–35,000 copies, including an edition for distribution in High Schools.

You ask about balance in my work. I am first a novelist, second a poet, third a translator. But I must earn my living as an *editor*. I like the work, and seem to be good at what I consider a most important function, being convinced that every author needs an

editor, though many North American writers no longer agree. But the editorial work *devours* time and strength. A few other editors–notably Daniel Halpern and Rainer Schulte–seem able to overcome this difficulty, but for me there *is* no balance! The only novel I could complete in this past thirteen years (STONECROP: *The Country I Remember*; Unicorn, 1977) was written when I had a unique three-months leave of absence. Now, thanks to the National Endowment for the Arts, I have another leave, perhaps longer, and coming at just the right time to save me from becoming a crusty editor, resentful of the demands of the work! But I have found much renewal and refreshment, during these years, in working on translations, not only my own, but those of others with whom I work closely, and by whom, in some cases, I have myself been helped.

My own published translations have been made from French, German, Spanish and Vietnamese. I have also worked on such various material as Haitian and Plattdeutsch! I used some stanzas translated from Middle English in a novel Gollancz and Lippincott published, and I attempt, from time to time, to work William Dunbar's poetry into modern English–not for publication, really, but because he may have been an ancestor!

Speaking about translations, would you talk a little about your working methods, the kind of techniques that you use to translate a text?

The techniques needed are, surely, a good grounding in the language, a fine ear (especially for poetry), and the kind of pertinacity which causes one to search for the right meaning of just one word perhaps for a week, even longer... These make for good translations, I think. For an *inspired* translation, one must somehow *become* the other poet, live in *his* skin, acquire *his* ear, until one knows just how that poet would express this phrase and that rhythm were he English-speaking. But... this does not happen very often.

As a translator, which of your works do you consider to have been a very great challenge?

The two greatest challenges were distinctly different. Queneau's poetry, which many more knowledgeable than myself have always considered untranslatable, was fantastically difficult (if you can imagine trying to translate Joyce's linguistic experiments into French...?) but it was also great fun. I took some liberties, just as I had with Prevert–translating *him*

earlier on, was good practice for Paraphysical Queneau; some results didn't come off, had to be abandoned, others really did. Perhaps the best way I can answer this question, and your preceding one, more fully, is to quote from the preface to our SELECTED POETRY: QUENEAU in the Unicorn French Series: 'Americans have been deprived of the delightful and unsetting rewards of Queneau's poetry. The Unicorn French Series attempts to remedy this lack in its eleventh bilingual publication. Included are excerpts from his sequence, *Pour un art poétique*, in which he is anti-poet, and displays his total dislike of all shibboleths and pomposity. In translating Queneau's poetry, there are many difficulties. Before even attempting to translate him, his poems must first be read aloud. Take the "untranslatable" poem, *Les Ziaux*. Even the title defies us, for he has combined the words "waters" (here translated as "seas") and "eyes" into a single word, adding to our difficulties by giving the result a phonetic spelling. A great deal of his desired effect he obtains by rhyming. Queneau cannot be translated unless one understands why he rhymes; it is not because he is "old-fashioned" or wants to use old forms, but because it is one of the ways he uses to play about with language. And, note well, he rhymes for sound rather than sense. (But to the ear, all that he expresses is sense.) Thus the translator must cope with and supply these end-rhymes; otherwise, forget this important and fascinating poet and turn to something easy, such as Ponge or prose (not Queneau's prose, though). However, end-rhymes are the least of our difficulties: many of Queneau's poems contain a complexity of interior rhyme and assonance, of plays on *made-up* words and phonetic innovations. Take for instance, again in *Les Ziaux*, "nuitent le jour, jurent la nuit," in which we have a made-up word "jurent," used only for its playful proximity to "jour..." Then, after the rather successful translation of this phrase, the translator sacrifices "chants de dimanche à samedi," with its unusual rhyming of "samedi" with "nuit," in order to produce an end-rhyme for "night" and lets us down with "singing from dusk to daylight"–being faced with the greater problem of giving at least an approximation of the sound of the several matching end-rhymes the author has used more or less throughout the poem.

As Queneau is not literal-minded himself, and as literal translations of his poems utterly destroy their essence, the translator must try, as far as possible, to enter into the

poet's own spirit and render the poem in *his* way. Of course, as one is not this unique spirit, "q-u-e-n-e-a-/u-r-a-i-grec mond" (*Vieillir*), the translation will always fall short and be only an "almost-nearest poem."

THE SEYES

brown seas, black seas, seas of marvel
seas of springs, seas of salt, seas of sparkle
they night the day and daze the night
singing from dusk to daylight

green eyes, blue eyes, eyes of marble
eyes of passing women throughout life
dark eyes, eyes of periwinkle
they silence words and muffle strife

seas of eyes poring over every mirror
secret droplets edging every vigil
every mirror, every vigil in green-blue seas-eyes
sighs of brown, sighs of black, sighs of marvel.

LES ZIAUX

les eaux bruns, les eaux noirs, les eaux de merveille
les eaux de mer, l'océan, les eaux d'étincelles
nuitent le jour, jurent la nuit
chants de dimanche à samedi

les yeux vertes, les yeux bleues, les yeux de succelle
les yeux de passante au cours de la vie
les yeux noires, yeux d'estanchelle
silencent les mots, ouatent le bruit

eau de ces yeux penché sur tout miroir
gouttes secrets au bord des veilles
tout miroir, toute veille en ces ziaux bleues ou vertes
les ziaux bruns, les ziaux noirs, les ziaux de merveille

TOWARD A POETIC ART

VII

When poets are bored then they o-
Ften decide to pick up a pen and write a po-
Em You understand that these conditions so-
Metimes tickle up a little poetry po-
Etry

POUR UN ART POÉTIQUE

VII

Quand les poètes s'ennuient alors il leur ar-
Rive de prendre une plume et d'écrire un po-
Ème on comprend dans ces conditions que ça bar-
Be un peu quelque fois la poésie la po-
Ésie

The other great challenge was Nhat Hanh's *Zen Poems*. Thich Nhat Hanh has long been considered by many to be Vietnam's greatest contemporary poet. But he was known in this country only for his prose writings on Buddhism (a series of lectures at Columbia, a recent Doubleday book, *Zen Keys*, most recently, his dialogues with Daniel Berrigan, *The Raft Is Not The Shore* (Beacon Press), and for his prose work on the war, *Lotus In A Sea Of Fire* (Hill and Wang, 1967) and his "war" poetry, *The Cry Of Vietnam* (Unicorn, 1967), excerpts from this last copiously reprinted–from *Fellowship* to a full page in *Look!*–and anthologized. *Cry* was the combined work of Nhat Hanh and his compatriot and fellow-Buddhist, the distinguished artist, Vo-Dinh. It was Vo-Dinh who urged us to bring out Nhat Hanh's "real" poetry, he who made the drawings and Vietnamese calligraphy for *Zen Poems*, and was my co-translator. The challenge for a Westerner was immense (despite the help

received): one has to turn one's mind inside out, or rather around another way, to see another view... It took the spare time–such as there is–of nearly a year to complete these eleven translations, but the different view was an inspiration for my own work.

Inasmuch as you were involved in the founding of Unicorn Press, would you discuss its development? What are its major functions, editorial viewpoint, and role in today's literary scene?

From the founding of Unicorn Press I was the acquisitions editor for foreign works, and the editor of *Unicorn Journal* which always contained more translations than anything else, in addition to art work from Vietnam, Papua, Haiti, as well as North America and Europe. As the press grew and I became editor-in-chief, I had to give up the Journal, but we have started the Unicorn Keepsake Series, contemporary prose and poetry in translation. As the Small Press movement grew, so did sources for the publication of U. S. poets. And so we all came to feel that our main function should be to show our readers, including our own poets, the finest works of poetry and of fiction (when financially possible) in other languages. Robert Bly was already doing this, and gave us wise advice. My own knowledge from reading, and from studying and living in Europe and Asia, proved invaluable as an editorial background. Of course we still publish English-language poetry as well as some prose, though we'd like to publish more translations than we do at present. But the work involved is formidable: the publication of any work in translation takes *at least* twice as long as that of any English-language book–permissions, two sets of copyrights, bilingual proofreading, and so on, and from four to ten times as much work as, with a few exceptions, I work closely–as mentioned–with the translator; in addition, each book requires very special promotion. Equally formidable is the poor financial outlook for books of translation, which I hope we can speak about later.

Our role in today's literary scene? I can only speak of our attempts, not our attainments: the larger answer must come, perhaps later, from others. But our *goal* does not lie in what we publish, in what categories, but in a search for a kind of unity that has been almost lost for many years. With us, no decision is unilateral. The designer works on manuscripts and the editor on design. To keep in touch with our readership we do our own

distribution. In this era of mass production we try, as best we can, to regard each book as individual.

What criteria do you use for the books you select for publication? Do you publish only twentieth century authors? Of the translations you have published, which do you consider the strongest from a literary standpoint? Do you rework the translations with the translator?

Criteria? Perhaps this is answered, in part, already. In the end, standards for choosing a book usually turn out to be those of personal taste and preference, wouldn't you agree? However, in our case, the taste is not based on how or what one writes oneself. It has been said that choice, that is, taste, at Unicorn is quite catholic. Guillevic's work, for instance, is so far from my own "best" that I anticipated difficulties in making a connection, but the only ones involved, after all, were those of language, not empathy. The meticulousness required was a difficulty, and time-consuming, but the work was not only enjoyable but also was spurred on by my concern for Guillevic's recognition, in England and North America, as one of the major living poets. I am happy to see that Guillevic is now being more widely translated and published in many periodicals.

We publish twentieth century authors–mainly, though not exclusively, because the university presses have the funds and resources for publishing classics, and do this better than we could. All our translators, of course, are contemporary, as well as being themselves poets. Exceptions to contemporaneity are some "forerunners" in the French Series: Corbière and Jammes, with Bertrand and Nerval, perhaps, yet to come; in the German Series–so far all contemporary–a book of ballads from the Peasant Wars which have never been printed is being worked on. Then, our interest in folk poetry: *WORDS OF PARADISE: Poetry of Papua New Guinea*, edited by Ulli Beier, translated mainly by Papuans–the only collection of its kind from this part of the world.

Well, you can see we are always searching. And often finding! But some of the things we find we cannot bring out as there is not yet the readership for them. I should certainly like to expand some of our serial publications, particularly the French Series, to include lesser-known contemporaries. This is another hope, that you asked about in your first

question, for the future of published translations.

I can't make judgments about the foreign language books we've published. We made mistakes at first–I made some awful boners in the first books I translated, and once or twice we brought out something better left to others or, conversely, that could not bear the weight of a whole book but should have appeared, more briefly, in *Unicorn Journal*–but we have complete faith in all our authors as well as all our translators.

Yes, as I said, I often work closely with the translators and, on occasion, with the poets.

Translations of poetry and fiction normally do not sell well. It seems, however, that Unicorn Press has seen a gradual expansion. Could you comment on your circulation–some of the problems involved. Who are the people who buy and read your books? And from where do you receive your financial support?

The "other half" of Unicorn Press, Alan Brilliant, director and designer, should give these answers, as he also does the distribution, although I look over most of the orders with him and read the letters we get from individuals and libraries–but I'll try to answer in a general way. Indeed, translations do *not* sell well, as we have found to our cost. Sometimes a book will sell because the translator is well-known, but even this is not always the case. Our Keepsake Series book by Pablo Antonio Cuadra, *The Jaguar and the Moon*, the first book by this fine Nicaraguan poet to be issued here, is an example. Even though translated and introduced by Thomas Merton and produced in a beautiful way–the book, physically, is now a collector's item–we could not sell out our first printing. Another volume in the Keepsake Series, *The Songs of Mririda*–she was a courtesan living in the High Atlas Mountains (Morocco) before World War II, who sang in the Takelhait dialect–was heard by a French officer who translated her poems into French: Daniel Halpern discovered this obscure, long out-of-print book while in Tangier, and he and Paula Paley translated this fascinating woman's songs into English... This book seemed to have everything in its favour, but, like *WORDS OF PARADISE: Poetry of Papua New Guinea*, the lack of interest in the schools and by the general public was quite remarkable.

Our financial support comes from diverse sources. Our books are bought by libraries,

collectors, individuals (from our constantly culled but ever-expanding mailing lists). Bookstores generally shun translations, which turned out to be a great disappointment for the sales, for instance, of *The Cell*, Horst Bienek's first novel, which had superb reviews in about fifty periodicals and newspapers, including (for once!) *The New York Times*. Bienek's third novel, *The First Polka*, is a best seller and prestigious prize-winner in Germany and a success in England, and will undoubtedly be so in the U. S. when it is brought out by a New York publisher–that is, not by a Small Press. We sold *The Cell* to Gollancz in England and to McClelland and Stewart in Canada, but could not sell it to a New York paperback house, nor could we sell our own textbook edition or, in fact, much of our second printing. It seems to us this is a sad, even shameful, commentary on "middlemen," not only booksellers but also the teachers in control of college courses. By the way, one source of our income can stem from these foreign sales: to England, Australia, Canada. We have also received support from the cultural bureaus of various governments, or from foreign foundations–as with our publication in the German Series of Günter Eich's poetry, for which we received a small grant from the Bavarian Academy (Bayerische Akademie der Schönen Künste) and a purchase order for books from the German Consulate. Without these, we could not have afforded the publication of the first and only extant translation into English of Eich's poetry. We did NOT receive any support for this or, more amazing, for any of our Vietnamese publications from any Establishment publications in this country, nor purchase orders from academics for Eich, Guillevic, Segalen (whose important book that we published, bilingually, was even out of print in France just at that time), and so on. The National Edowment for the Arts has been more than generous to Unicorn, but their grants could not be used to support publication of translations. Sometimes we have taken the slim profit from an English-language publication to help with our translation losses! Often the poets who translate for us turn some of their royalties back as donations to Unicorn Foundation, to help out. On the other hand, we have received a great deal of support from private foundations in this country: a special donation to typeset *The Cell*, for instance. Also many donations for some of our Asian publications. I especially recall that when we had sold out the first printing (10,000 copies) of *The Cry of Vietnam*, still at that time much in demand, we sent

out an appeal to our list of "peace people" and received the total amount needed–most movingly, from well-worn dollar and five-dollar bills to hundred-dollar anonymous money orders... In short, there are thousands of individuals of all kinds in this country who will support a press like ours and who want to read translations–if they can find them.

Have any major magazines, newspapers, or journals really helped you by reviewing the books published by Unicorn Press?

Yes, we have broken a lot of barriers, broken down a lot of prejudices, in the larger periodicals and trade papers, against both Small Presses *and* translations. Of benefit now, I am glad to say, to other Small Presses as well. This has meant a vast amount of promotion and paperwork–and expense. But now columns in *Choice, Library Journal, Publishers Weekly, Booklist, Bookviews, Best Sellers, The National Catholic Reporter*, several others, and some newspapers such as the *Independent Press Telegram* (Long Beach), the St. Louis *Post Dispatch* and so on (but *not* the *New York Times Book Review* which determinedly goes on ignoring Unicorn books) are generously open to us, as well as some programs on radio, including two national ones. Quite an impressive list, when you consider how little space book editors on newspapers and magazines are allowed, and how few of their readers are really interested in translations.

SPR is always open; *Dimension*, though not reviewing books, is meticulous about mentioning our German publications, and *Books Abroad* (as it was then) published a fine spread of Guillevic once. *Paintbrush, Western Review, Mundus Artium, Hudson, Webster Review*, many more we've not the time to list, have been interested and helpful. Sometimes, though, the literary journals review books months or even years after we have printed a catalogue of current books or sent out advertizers to our mailing lists. But, yes, our reputations and our sales have been inestimably helped by review and comments.

What percentage of your publications are translations?

Not enough, in our opinion! It's difficult, though, to give a numerical count that is fair. For several reasons. Should we give an accurate accounting of the time expended by the editor and the money spent in production, we'd have to say over fifty percent. Of the 165 items published by Unicorn from 1966 to 1978, perhaps only thirty of forty are translations:

this is misleading, as one cannot equate the two printings of a novel (*The Cell,* 6500 copies) with the publication of a small poetry pamphlet (e. g., Michael Hogan's 25-page *Letters for My Son*) or a broadside of 500 copies. Or the madly expensive *Poetry of Papua New Guinea* (2500 copies, 104 pages) with a set of postcards. Again, we have only, in our thirteen years, been able to afford the publication of three novels: one–the first–was a translation from the German. Excerpts from two novels filled a good portion of *Unicorn Journal III*; both were translations, one from the Vietnamese. So let's put it this way: relative to the work and expense involved, the length of the books and the sheer bulk of their printings, while also not forgetting that of the three on-going serial publications *all* are translations, well, then the percentage takes up over fifty percent of our production.

I have noticed that you publish certain books in bilingual form in an en face presentation, others where the English text is followed by the original, and still others where there is no original text. Do you have a preference?

We prefer the English text to be separate from, followed by, the original, in most cases. If a translation is truly a trans-lation, then the English version should be read as a poem in its own right. I know that the *en face* layout is the conventional one, and we have had so many complaints that we have changed over from time to time. Eich printed our way, Piontek *en face*, for example. But the placing of the original opposite the English is often too tempting to the reader with some knowledge of the original language: glancing back and forth from one page to the other, the impact of the poem, in either language, is quite lost.

Of course, nit-picking is a translator's favorite pastime, as well as that of the average critic; it's as good as any crossword puzzle in *The Nation* or *The New Statesman* (which one aspect of translation rather resembles) and one can learn a lot about one's own work–sometimes with a very red face!–when it is employed by critics. But for the student, still more for the general reader, instant gratification of this pastime, provided by printing en face, can only detract from the poem. To say the least. Our reason for having all our foreign books translated by poets would be nullified.

However, we print en face at times, when the design of the book warrants it. For instance, *Tree of Song*, our Lorca book in the Keepsake Series: this was originally hand set,

and the two different type faces opposite each other added to the aesthetic enjoyment of the book. The same with Merton's translation of Pablo Antonio Cuadra, also hand set, which was a challenge to the designer, in that each poem is accompanied with one of the poet's woodblocks; the design demanded facing texts. Nhat Hanh's *Zen Poems* presented a challenge of even more complexity. Vo-Dinh made eleven panels of brush and ink drawings to enhance the eleven poems; in his calligraphy, he placed the poems in Vietnamese within each drawing. To have the English, printed in type which faced the calligraphy, was an artistic achievement to match that of the poems and artworks themselves. It can be inferred, returning to your previous question, that many of our sales of these handmade books are to collectors and bibliophiles.

In other cases, of books printed in larger quantities and not handmade (although often hand bound), such as my *adaptations* of Prévert, we did not include the French at all, feeling it would have been superfluous, and in cases of poems filled with linguistic *innovations*, as with Queneau and, to a lesser extent, with Günter Bruno Fuchs, the *en face* layout would have been inappropriate. But all too often there is another reason for omitting the original language: because of the expense. We regret that Guillevic's book-length poem, *Euclidians* (just now reissued in both cloth and paper), could be published in English only; we simply could not afford the additional fifty pages. Would it not be a good thing if some of the foreign publishers would combine with U. S. presses, supply the American publisher with saleable copies of the original, as in the case of *Euclidians?*

What do you think of the quality of translations reviewed in journals and newspapers? Would you agree that few critics possess the requisite skills to effectively evaluate a translation?

I haven't read all the translations reviewed in the very few journals and newspapers which pay any attention to them, so I cannot comment on their quality. As for the critics, I must agree that, though many have the requisite skills, they are often the wrong people for the work. Too often the approach seems to be one of puffing up the critic's own knowledge of the original language, rather than any knowledge of *poetry*. Perhaps translations of poetry should only be reviewed by poets? Read over some of Robert Bly's critical essays, and I'm

sure you'll agree!

Some specific examples of this attitude: a publication devoted entirely to criticism included, in an issue so large and thick it could have contained our entire German Series, a review of Heinz Piontek's *Alive or Dead* (Unicorn, 1976), which briefly dismissed this important contemporary author's poetry as "it's not poetry"! This would be amusing if it did not exemplify the supercilious attitude of non-poets and/or academics who have more or less taken over the field of literary criticism. It is this attitude that keeps books of translations such as ours *out* of the college classroom and *in* the publisher's warehouse. A crasser example was a review in a very important journal about one of our Vietnamese books, in which, as I recall, the critic spent his brief paragraphs nit-picking, quite forgetting to mention the importance of the book or the paucity of translations from that language. Of course, every critic has the right to his own opinion and its free expression, but the result of this attitude is that Unicorn has on hand at least ten fine and important translations from diverse languages to every one book that we can afford to publish.

As there are notable exceptions to the foregoing, you will realize that I am not including the really creative critics who have much to teach us all.

Do you think that it is an encouraging sign that there is increased recognition of literary translators by foundations and federal funding agencies such as the National Endowment for the Humanities? Despite the increased interest in translation, an official for the NEH recently stated that "The United States is behind many other countries in the number and quality of its translation." In your opinion, is this a valid generalization?

This is an encouraging sign in some ways; that is, so long as it is poets or novelists who will be learning and then translating other languages. Naturally, my reservation does not apply to translators of scholarly works. May I quote from a book by Walter Allen on the English novel to show my total agreement with the National Endowment official? "It was during this period that the English began to acquire the habit of reading... *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* lists 150 prose tales written in English... and... *almost as many translations from the French, Italian, and Spanish*..." (my italics). The period was between, roughly, 1580 and 1660. If we allow for the increase in both population and

literacy between that age and our own, might we find that there are not many more translations now, despite our seeming interest in them, than in an earlier era? There has been so much written about the superior numbers of translations published, and bought, in England as compared with here, that I will not repeat. But a question comes to mind: who, now, is more insular, the English or the Americans? It is therefore incumbent on a publisher, it seems to us at Unicorn, to give readers of all sorts the opportunity to read works from other languages.

Do you believe there can be such a thing as a definitive translation? Can we speak of a final, "authorized" translation and attribute the same stability and creative harmony to it that we ascribe to an original creative entity?

How can there be such things? Translations vary from the old Penguin foreign language books, in which the English is given in literal prose, to Robert Lowell's imitations. How many translations, speaking of the classics, have there been of the *Iliad*, and isn't it absorbing to read them all? Of one particular ode by Horace ("*Eheu, fugaces...*")? Certainly some translations strike one reader as "perfect"–for me, Merton's *Chuang Tzu*, Rukeyser's *Sunstone*, Pound's *Seafarer*, the perfect "matings" of Kline-Brodsky, of Milosz/Herbert, Anne Hyde Greet's Reverdy and Eluard, for instance–but must one choose between Snyder's and Watson's Han Shan, or may one be thankful for both? There is always room for a new version, a new poetic vision.

Oh, a word or two à propos this question as well as the one concerning financial support: a helpful part of our income stems from selling our *English*-language books to foreign publishers for translation. *Ishi Means Man*, Thomas Merton's "Essays on Native Americans," has just been bought by Editorial Pomaire, Barcelona, and is being negotiated for by a Small Press in Italy. The fee from Pomaire is slightly in excess of the total profits on, for instance, all the Unicorn German Series! As Pomaire distributes widely in Latin America, the interest in essays on "American Indians" is not overly surprising, but... in Italy?

Would you make a few statements on the books that you plan to publish through Unicorn Press in the next year or two?

We shall continue to publish as many translations as we can afford and to accept the

best ones we can find. By the way, we do NOT publish unsolicited manuscripts nor, alas, have we the time or person-power to read them. I know some fine things are lost to us because of this, but there are many other Small Presses now, I'm thankful to say, that are becoming more and more interested in translations.

For the immediate future, we are just bringing out a powerful and also enchanting book by Günter Bruno Fuchs, the Berlin poet and artist, the poems translated by Richard Exner, the numerous graphics already "met" in the pages of *Dimension*. This bok will be bilingual, as will be Anne Hyde Greet's translations of Eluard's *Poems for Painters*, not collected previously, I believe, in book form. A new volume of Prévert's poetry, the adaptations previously printed as volumes I and IV in our French Series (long out-of-print), with several new ones and some photographs added. The next book in the Keepsake Series, *TheGood Message of Handsome Lake*, translated by Joseph Bruchac as already mentioned. At the same time, of course, we shall be publishing some English-language prose and poetry, and struggling to keep all our books in print.

Later plans include anthologies of Central American poetry, of Israeli poetry, perhaps of French Canadian poetry; translations by Ewald Osers from the Czech, and some very exciting prose.

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