

New Brazilian Poems—Flávia Rocha
Translated by Idra Novey and the author

Like many international poets living in New York City, I rely entirely on translation to communicate as an artist in the community where I live. When you try to transpose your poems into another language, there's an unsettling feeling as well as excitement in the process. You find new sounds and new meanings entering your once locked poems, and that moving page talks back to you, with new demands. But you can hardly feel safe. Your knowledge of an acquired language is not as intuitive and malleable as the language you were born with. So you doubt. You reason, perhaps too much. But fortunately, in translation, you are never alone. There's always a counterpart in another language who can truly read you, someone who can step in your shoes and move along the lines, walking faster or slower, taking turns, finding new grounds. I'd like to thank my friend and co-translator Idra Novey for being that counterpart. For guiding me through the lines. For the generosity of reading with the eyes of one who writes.

—*Flávia Rocha*



HABITABLE ROOMS

On Mamma Andersson's paintings

I.

RESIDUE

The rumpled black coat
hung on the door, ox skull
in the bedroom—you wear

some other, less obvious color
and leave the accusing objects
at home, under the sink—when

you wash your face and the green
in your eyes absorbs the dark
radiance of a lamp,

you wake, missing the particular
—your hand still numb, a shell shape
over the pillow,

takes in a distant breeze,
leaving nothing toxic. Prints
on the small dark

wooden table—fixed outline
on the mirror, a lone reflex.
Ox skull at the door—

agile, decided, you look
for anyone still asleep.

II.

IN THE SPACE OF ANOTHER

Half of the room inverted,
chairs turned over identical
pictures, black on white—

you walk on streets drawn
on the floor, the exterior shadow

crushed by the soft blue

of objects—tables
with their histories, walls
with their defined tasks, residue—

you are not alone, hands crossed
behind your back
in a borderless disorder,

repeated, altered
in the spaces of the room, observed
by strangers—men and women.

In a parallel landscape,
two colored sketches, someone
in this place carrying

a blue stain on his shoulder,
waiting, every desire gone.

III.

IN THE WAITING ROOM

Light poured
in the room like a rock
and water landscape

in the sunfall of a day like this,
without alternatives. You foresee
what's about to happen, pale

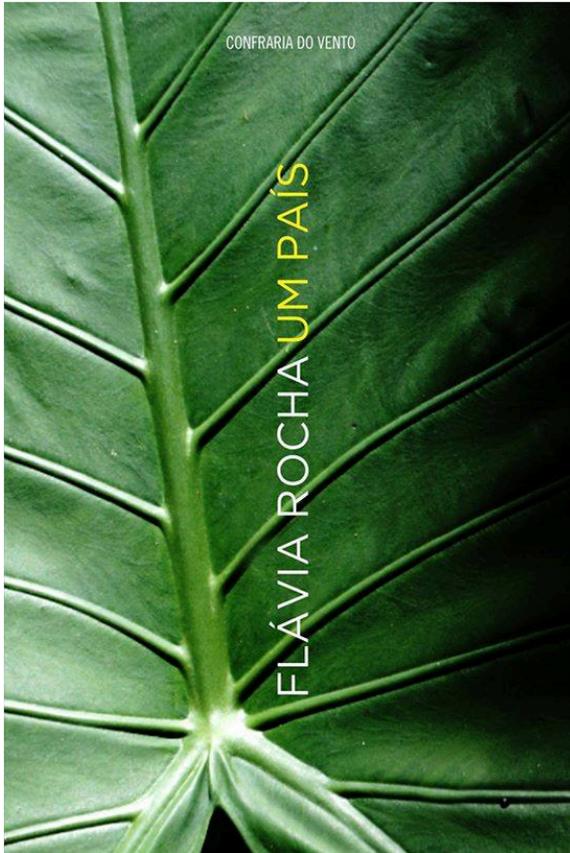
and diagonally. The objects
exposed on an improvised plane,
behind glass—bird bones,

small instruments, fractured
but useful—left there
provisionally, too near—

one of them gazing back
from the table, touching the vertex
of a yellow draft, only

half visible—the rest
left nocturne black, while the stream
of transparent light

leaks into the imminent gray:
the waiting room.



DEPARTURES

*The road as an earlier
refuge—*

your childhood by the river,
in the dirt, lacking words:

children, horses, expected deaths,

extinct trees, a canoe—

in the same direction, the pace
of time reprints

the unthinkable: I ride
a horse, step into the canoe.

*The road as a trace
in the sand—*

a photo taken before the waves,
understanding without superstition:

the outside heat lightens
the nature inside,

footprints on the walls,
recall of a language—

The place we name
home takes us back.

*The road as passage,
poorly lit—*

occasionally a scare,
I lose its track

around a fixed point:
stacks of paper

stuffing reality,
gravelly deposits along the bottom,

we have no measures
to prevent the floods.

*The road as a mirror,
a wall—*

your steps cast mine
missing a fit,

the strings of oblivion loosen
and we open our eyes

we eat under the same roof
to synchronize the day

reinstating the urgency
of meeting again.

*The road which is your horse,
my canoe.*

CITY WINDOWS

On the hill

The dry summer burns the fennel
growing higher outside the fence.

The tree with nine macaws
injects cries into a view
carved with towers.

Message

Bright green wings beat
against the grey buildings.

Hedgehopping between roofs
beneath the unfiltered sun—
something possible, even certain, insists.

Hyperbole

From this chair
 (the red fabric sun-stained)
 before waves of burned hills
 one can see the tamed
garden below:

a broken twig says the devastation.

Shortcut

The polished vase on the table.
(There is a passageway behind the viaduct.)

On the flat grass of the underground park,
it's easy to cut loose.

A thought

A view of the sea
from the rooftop of an abandoned building.
To bet on the waves, on the gravel

as if ready for flight—
to frame the seagull, leaving.

MOOSE

Static wind from a painting of pine forest,
a gas station stands desolate in the rain,
black ice camouflaged on the asphalt, the road
owes along a stupidly magnificent edge: forest, rain,
ice, canyon: my forest, my rain, my ice, my canyon.
A moose tall as a church crosses the road
near my bus in the fog, and everything goes on.

NATURE TALK

“AND THE GARDEN SUDDENLY ROCKED WITH A CRY OF
CICADAS”

Anna Akhmatova

In the garden, the click of cicadas:
this is our last existence:
as stream or weed
without the recollection of someone else's
dream –

voices cross the air without the gift
of being heard.

“A GATHERED LAKE OF AQUAMARINE BEGINS TO SMOKE”

Elizabeth Bishop

Steaming, the lake is not at home:
we're awake, but go on doubting.

Grey, blue, grey, blue. Listen –

insect wings flicker in the fog: the water
pours on to another place.

“SHARPER THAN EVER THE AIR REMAINING: YOU MUST
BREATHE”

Paul Celan

The air comes sharp: we have to breathe it.
Plants molding everywhere:
almost plants, mute, fresh,
sneaking—nearly a nest.

The ground raked
and nobody to find us.

“AND A BOUQUET IN DISARRAY BURNS THE WAVES’ CRESTS”

Paul Éluard

Everything spread, nothing left to be found:
long night, white route, extinction
of everything we’ve lived: flamed
flowers float on the waves.

The bird placed on the table
remains in its place, confused by the sea breeze
blowing in from the window.

“SUN DESTROYS THE INTEREST OF WHAT’S HAPPENING IN
THE SHADE”

Philip Larkin

The sun at noon, dogs
under the tree shade: heat evaporates
the scent of the leaves, which
seem to say something:

in the interval between dreams, without radiance,
the dogs age, and the leaves.

“THE SUN IS SET. THE TREES MEDITATE LIKE STATUES”
Federico García Lorca

Within tonight’s suspended tone
a thirst for aromas,
thirst for laughter shaking
the arrow-like grass—

hands mimicking roots
assume the idea of lasting.

“WHAT WE MUST FORGET IS THE DAY HEAVY WITH ACTS”
Cecília Meireles

A yellow flower takes flight—
its flight impossible

In this ex-human night
I too thought of a multicolor bridge
pinned across the air.

Brief presage of your return.

“INSIDE US, THEN, NO VOICE THAT LAUGHS”
Eugenio Montale

A tree abandoned in the suburbs,
without horror or excitement:

Trunk, branch, nest,
wind cracking leaves, and the silent
twilight, its divine indifference.

“TIME IS TERRIFIED OF CLOCKS”

César Vallejo

The cloud fills with seeds, Fall,
with coming back, hope on the table:
the unconscious tree craves for madness
and reason:

to remember, to insist, to go and forgive?
Fall stuffs itself with Fall:
why do we die so much?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Paragraphiti (Summer 2012): “City Windows” (5-poem series), “Moose”

Plume Poetry (Issue 23, May 2013): “In the Waiting Room” (from the 3-poem series “Habitable Rooms”).

Two Lines (Center for the Art of Translation, February 2013): "Residue" (from the 3-poem series “Habitable Rooms”), "Nature Talk" (9-poem series)

Blunderbuss (April 29, 2014): “Departures”

BIOGRAPHIES

AUTHOR AND CO-TRANSLATOR



Flávia Rocha is a Brazilian poet, editor and journalist. She is the author of two poetry books: *A Casa Azul ao Meio-dia* (2005) and *Quartos Habitáveis* (2011), both published in Brazil. Her third collection, *Um País*, is forthcoming in August 2015. She holds an M.F.A. in Writing/Poetry from Columbia University, and is the editor-in-chief of *Rattapallax*, a literary magazine based out of New York City featuring contemporary American and International poetry, fiction, nonfiction, music and film. She has edited anthologies of Brazilian poetry for magazines *Rattapallax* (U.S.A.), *Poetry Wales* (U.K.) and *Papertiger* (Australia), among others. In the area of film, she is a founder and Director of Communications of the Academia Internacional de Cinema, a Film School with locations in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, and the co-writer of the feature film *Birds of Neptune* (U.S., 2014). More at <http://www.flaviarocha.com>

TRANSLATOR



Idra Novey is the author most recently of the poetry collection *Clarice: The Visitor*. Her debut novel *Ways to Disappear* is forthcoming from Little, Brown in 2016. Earlier books of poetry include *Exit*, *Civilian*, selected by Patricia Smith for the 2011 National Poetry Series, and *The Next Country*, a finalist for the 2008 Foreword Book of the Year Award in poetry. Her work has been featured on NPR's *All Things Considered*, the Leonard Lopate Show, and in *Slate*, *Guernica*, and *Poetry*. She is the recipient of awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, *Poets & Writers Magazine*, the PEN Translation Fund, the Poetry Foundation, and the Poetry Society of America. Her most recent translation is Clarice Lispector's novel *The Passion According to G.H.* She teaches in the Creative Writing Program at Princeton University and has also taught at Columbia, NYU, Fordham, the Catholic University of Chile, and in the Bard Prison Initiative. More at <http://www.idranovey.com>.