

the PARIS REVIEW



Staff Picks: Fat Ladies, Flowers, and Faraway Lands

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THIS WEEK'S READING



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KGB BAR.

This Wednesday, a dozen people gathered in the dimly lit KGB Bar on the Lower East Side. A floor above, a comedy show was taking place; a floor below, a stage rehearsal. The sounds filtered through the walls, but here on the second story, the evening unfolded with quiet, dedicated passion. In honor of National Translation Month, five translators read from their work. Katherine E. Young read work by Ukrainian poet Iya Kiva as-of-yet unpublished in English. I retained, imperfectly, the lines “Is there cold war in the tap? Is there hot war in the tap? We have been eight days without war.” The translators’ voices cut through the other sounds—the laughter from above, the students in the bars below—and transported us to Romania, to Russia, to Iran, to Portugal. I was struck—it was one of those almost embarrassingly profound realizations, deeply felt and yet never as good said aloud—with how grateful I am to be able to read in translation all the languages I will never speak, to be able to commune with a poet with whom I could not converse. I suppose this week what I’m picking is translation, all of it, in general, but also this poem by José Luis Peixoto from *A Child in Ruins*, translated by Hugo dos Santos. At KGB bar, dos Santos read it first in the original Portuguese, then in English:

when it was time to set the table, we were five:
my father, my mother, my sisters
and me. then, my older sister
married. then, my younger sister
married. then, my father died. today,
when it is time to set the table, we are five,
except my older sister who is
at her home, except my younger
sister who is at her home, except my
father, except my widowed mother. each one
is an empty place at this table where
i eat alone. but they will always be here.
at the time to set the table, we will always be five.
as long as one of us is alive, we will always
be five.

—Nadja Spiegelman