An interview with 2018 MacArthur Genius John Keene, a dispatch from Translation Now at Boston University, and a friendly invitation to join our Book Club!

Congratulations to the finalists of the inaugural National Book Award for Translated Literature, announced just two days ago. Not only did Olga Tokarczuk’s Flights appear first in our Winter 2016 issue, two other shortlisted titles (Hanne Ørstavik’s Love and Domenico Starnone’s Trick) were chosen by our expert editorial team as Asymptote Book Club titles in February and March 2018 respectively. Don’t want to miss out on the action? You too can discover future award-winners in your mailbox by joining the Asymptote Book Club for as little as USD15 a month: the deadline to give or start a subscription in October is this Sunday, October 14.

“A BRILLIANT IDEA AND A GREAT WAY TO GET INTO TRANSLATED FICTION”
Stay Sherez

“LIKE GOING TO A BLIND DATE WITH A BOOK”
Co-editor of our Writers on Writers Section **Victoria Livingstone** reports back from Translation Now, a two-day literary event at Boston University that served as a magnet for writers and translators the world over. Read on to discover the attempts being made by current industry professionals to stretch the conceptual boundaries of what we think of when we think of translation.

On September 28 and 29, Boston University held a conference titled “**Translation Now: Conversations on the Art of Literary Translation.**” Organized by Anna Zielinska-Elliott, translator of Haruki Murakami into Polish, and Keith Vincent, translator and professor of Japanese, the conference generated fruitful discussions on the global publishing market, the translation of poetry, translators as activists, and the need to advance conceptually beyond binaries in translation. A number of *Asymptote* contributors and editors were in attendance and participated in panel discussions.

The conference began with a keynote lecture titled “Translation as Strange Music” by poet and scholar **Rosanna Warren**, who guided the audience through thoughtful analyses of various English renderings of poetry by Arthur Rimbaud and Charles Baudelaire. For Warren, Baudelaire’s poem “Carrion” (“Une Charogne”), which depicts the decomposition of flesh alongside the composition of art, offers a rich model for translation. She also described translation as a form of “sacred cannibalism,” a “state of possession,” and “a shamanistic art... an art that understands itself as illusion.”
The discussion then shifted to the publishing market, translation's role in activism, and the rise of translation studies as an academic discipline. Translator and scholar Esther Allen began by giving an overview of the history of translation in the U.S. from the mid-twentieth century to today. Connecting political contexts and translation markets, Allen argued that readers tend to become more interested in foreign literature when they are disenchanted with their own governments. Allen lamented the lack of nonfiction translated into English and discussed ways in which translators can serve as activists in political resistance movements. Daniel Hahn, a prolific translator of Spanish, Portuguese and French, agreed that translators can be powerful activists, and pointed out that many translators advocate for their craft and for underrepresented groups by writing reviews, giving public lectures, and running workshops. Susan Bassnett, who has been influential in establishing translation studies as an academic discipline, described positive changes in the field, but argued that much work needs to be done before other scholars truly see the value of studying translation.

In a discussion of translating poetry later that day, Japanese translator Sawako Nakayasu listed some of the limiting pairings used to describe translation: author/translator, source/target, and domesticate/foreignize. She then emphasized the importance of thinking outside of these categories in translation. Nakayasu offered her dynamic “anti-translations” as examples of texts that challenge binaries. For instance, she presented a poem that she typed in English while using a Japanese keyboard in order to create a hybrid text. She also offered visual translations, digital projects, multilingual texts, and translations that incorporate drafts and reveal the messy processes therein.
The second day of the conference opened with an exploration of the ways in which multiple aspects of translators’ identities inform their craft. *Asymptote* contributing editor Ellen Elias-Bursać discussed the position of translators and interpreters who work in complex wartime contexts. Translators, she argued, need to be aware of how they position themselves in the world in order to “translate honestly.” Katrina Dodson, translator of Brazilian Portuguese, described the ways in which her identity as a woman and the child of a Vietnamese immigrant informs her choices as a translator. Ghirmai Negash, scholar and translator of African literatures, echoed Dodson and described translating as an “other”—first as an African refugee in Europe, and later as an immigrant researcher in the US. Negash went on to draw parallels between archeology and translation, and to describe translation as a form of discovery.

The conference also offered a space for debate and reflection on other important themes and trends in translation. David Boyd, scholar and translator of Japanese, reflected on the danger of claiming that any text is untranslatable, since untranslatability implies the impossibility of understanding other cultures. Writer Daniel Mendelsohn responded by saying that the untranslatable may spark interest in other cultures. Participants also discussed the need for new translations of classics, the pedagogy of translation, and the ways in which political and economic realities shape translation. The event concluded with an alumni panel honoring the fortieth anniversary of Boston University’s renowned translation seminar. Throughout the course of the two-day event, experts addressed a wide range of topics regarding the state of contemporary translation—ideas that translators and scholars will continue to explore, cannibalize and redefine as translation expands in scope and meaning.