

# ADAGIO MA NON TROPPO

RYOKO SEKIGUCHI

TRANS. LINDSAY TURNER

GLOBAL POETICS | DOSSIER

GPS-6

# INTRODUCTION

## DOSSIER SERIES

### TEASER

*ADAGIO MA NON TROPPO* MARKS the beginning of Les Fignes Press's new dossier series. The dossiers will include supplementary information about our books, their authors and translators, and the publication process for each text. The PDFs will be posted on our website and available for download at no cost. We hope the dossiers will provide a bridge for readers unfamiliar with the press, the writers we publish, and the contexts to which these writers respond.

Les Fignes has historically served populations around the globe. The dossiers are intended to be a conversation starter between these populations and invite our readers to consider the labor involved in the production of a book – a sort of behind-the-scenes gesture if you like.

In a time of worldwide political insolvency, when the value of the arts has been thrown into question, we encourage you to share the dossiers and invite others into that conversation as well. Les Fignes believes – yes, we are believers – in the power of global communities, in networks visible and invisible, in the gift of sharing, and in the act of providing context. The pages that follow are a sneak peak into the dossiers to come.

Watch out for an updated version when *adagio* goes live in September 2018.

Until then, adieu. ¶

Kim Calder and Evan Kleekamp, Co-Directors

Les Fignes Press

# 36 PARAGRAPHS

## LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

JUNE 03, 2018

IN PARAGRAPH 24 OF HER *36-paragraph adagio ma non troppo*, Ryoko Sekiguchi quotes a letter Fernando Pessoa wrote his lover Ophelia Queiroz: “If some day, by one of those slips which are always nice to make on purpose, we meet and by accident take the bus to Lumiar or to Poço do Bispo (35 minutes), it would give us more time to run into each other by accident.” While I write this, I’m listening to Kanye West’s 23-minute album *ye*, which came out two days ago. It’s 2:10 a.m. on Saturday, June 3, 2018. Kanye has me thinking about time, duration, irony, the rendezvous and its conspirator – the love letter. Kafka’s letters to his fiancée Felice Bauer, Karl Ove Knausgaard’s letters to his unborn daughter, and Claire-Louise Bennett’s *Pond* have all shared space in my bag over the last month. It’s not lost on me that Knausgaard names each book in his sequence after the seasons – *Autumn*, *Winter*, *Spring*, *Summer* – or that Bennett relishes the name, serial number, and origin of her cooker: “Salton,” “92711,” “South Africa.”

Letters issued with love carry promise.

But promises end if fulfilled.

Love, it has been said, cannot thrive without promise.

Likewise, climax defines most affairs.

“Oh Salton of South Africa, do you even exist? I fear you do not,” Bennett laments. Or does she? The first song on *ye*, “I Thought About Killing You,” reminds me irony depends on ambivalence. Or, at least feigning to be ambivalent. Perhaps because, when performed, ambivalence implies power. The supposedly ambivalent do not react because reaction communicates a shift in power whereas the actually ambivalent do not react because power does not matter to them. Even acknowledgement suggests a disparity between parties.

Do what you will you with that information.

The choice is up to you.

How fitting that it’s Gemini season. Gemini asks us to consider the dual meanings of the worlds within and around us, to think in pairs: good and evil, intimacy and alienation, me and you, you and you, etc. I recommend *adagio* as a salve for this mood. Pessoa loved contradiction and paradox – elements that Sekiguchi sustains throughout her detour. Pessoa, who studied the occult, was born on June 13, 1888, which places his sun sign in Gemini. Attribute whatever meaning you want to this. But remember the sun sign is but one component of a larger constellation. If *adagio* doesn’t exist without Pessoa, it also requires Queiroz, who similarly requires many interlocutors, friends, and attendants, including Sekiguchi, translator Lindsay Turner, and literary emcee Sawako Nakayasu, who wrote the introduction to this book.

Pusha T and Drake, get on with your love song.

I suppose I should also mention Pessoa did his early schooling in South Africa. But, because this is the beginning of a new line of inquiry, I'll have to return to the matter in a subsequent dispatch. In the meantime, let's ponder: Pessoa, where were you on the night of November 27, 1911? What know you of the beloved Saltons of South Africa who bestow marvelous stovetop devices to women, fictitious or not, in Irish cottages, which, because they reside on an island, are never far from the coast?

Cheers, Lindsay and Sawako, this letter is first and foremost for you. Shoutout to Stephen Motika and Nightboat Books who sent Asiya Wadud's *Crosslight for Youngbird* in the mail – it arrived today. *adagio* marks the first Les Figues title Kim and I oversaw as co-directors. It's no coincidence *adagio* belongs to the Global Poetics Series. We couldn't be happier to share it with the world.

More soon. ¶

<3

Evan Kleekamp, Co-Director  
Les Figues Press

# ADAGIO MA NON TROPPO

**RYOKO SEKIGUCHI**

TRANS. LINDSAY TURNER

RYOKO SEKIGUCHI TAKES THE LETTERS Fernando Pessoa wrote his would-be fiancée Ophelia Queiroz as her subject matter in *adagio ma non troppo*. *adagio*'s 36 prose blocks – appearing in Japanese, French, and English for the first time in the 2018 Les Figues Press trilingual edition (trans. Lindsay Turner) – echo the 36 letters Pessoa addressed to Queiroz dated from March 1, 1920 until January 11, 1930.

Sekiguchi reconceives the Lisbon Pessoa and Queiroz describe in their correspondence as a map over which rendezvous, affairs, and liaisons can be continued through writing. “Written words,” she asks, “do they erase themselves? [...] or instead do all words, once read, never disappear?” Sekiguchi superimposes objects over a landscape where names carry shapes, directions, and the places to which they refer. In her Lisbon, a chair slid into daylight or set before a window punctuates time like comma in a sentence. An old couple contemplating ducks indicates a line between two points like a parasol taken from its stand announces a departure. As love establishes boundaries and relationships between people, if our objects convey our love for one another, then Sekiguchi traces the paths and perimeters lovers leave behind.

Originally published in a bilingual edition containing Sekiguchi's self-translation into the French (Le bleu du ciel éditions, 2007), *adagio ma non troppo* belongs in the same category as the modernist works of Franz Kafka and Pessoa – as well as the recent epistolary work of Marguerite Duras, Roland Barthes, Karl Ove Knausgaard, Maggie Nelson, and Claire-Louise Bennett – writing as a philosophic and aesthetic act that reshapes our notions of time, space, translation, and love. ¶

*adagio ma non troppo*

Ryoko Sekiguchi (trans. Lindsay Turner)

Introduction by Sawako Nakayasu

Trilingual edition: Japanese, French, English

Literature | \$17.00

Global Poetics Series

ISBN 13: 978-1-934254-70-7

Binding: Softcover, Perfect

Forthcoming: September 1, 2018

Distributed by Small Press Distribution

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Born in Tokyo, **Ryoko Sekiguchi** has lived in Paris since 1997. Her books in French include *La Voix sombre* (2015), *Manger fantôme* (2012), *L'Astringent* (2012), *Ce n'est pas un hasard* (2011), *adagio ma non troppo* (2007), *Deux Marchés* (2005), and *Héliotropes* (2005). Three of her collections have previously been translated into English: *Heliotropes* (Sarah O'Brien, La Presse, 2008), *Two Markets, Once Again* (Sarah Riggs, Post-Apollo Press, 2008), and *Tracing* (Stacy Doris, Duration, 2003).

**Lindsay Turner's** first collection of poems, *Songs & Ballads*, was published by Prelude Books in 2018. Her translations from the French include *The Next Loves*, by Stéphane Bouquet (forthcoming, Nightboat Books, 2019) and a co-translated book of philosophy by Frédéric Neyrat, *Atopias* (Fordham University Press, 2017).

**Sawako Nakayasu** is a poet, translator, and performance artist who has lived in Japan, France, China, and the US. Her books include *The Ants* (Les Figues Press, 2014), *Texture Notes* (Letter Machine Editions, 2010), the translation of *The Collected Poems of Chika Sagawa* (Canarium Books, 2015), as well as unconventional translations such as *Costume en Face* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2015) and *Mouth: Eats Color – Sagawa Chika Translations, Anti-translations, & Originals* (Rogue Factorial, 2011).