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Translator's Preface

Marc James Müller

José F.A. Oliver was born in Hausach (Black Forest), Germany in 1961. He is the child of Andalusian working migrants, studied Romance languages, Germanic Studies and Philosophy at Freiburg University, and began writing both poetry and short prose texts in German, as well as Spanish at a very early age. He was awarded several grants. In 1997, he was awarded the *Adalbert-von-Chamisso-Preis* for all of his literary work to date. In 2001, Oliver was *Stadtschreiber* (poeta laureatus) for the city of Dresden, and in 2004, he was the *Stadtschreiber* for Cairo, participating in the *midad-project* which was organized by the *Goethe-Institute*. In 2002, he was guest professor and writer-in-residence at the MIT in Cambridge, USA. Selected publications include: *Weil ich dieses Land liebe*, poems, 1991; *Austernfischer Marinero Vogelfrau*, 1997; *Fernlautmetz*, poems, 2000; *nachtrandspuren*, poems, 2002; *finnischer wintervorrat*, poems, 2005.

"Salto Mortale" is in fact an atypical example of José F. A. Oliver's work. The German-Spanish poet marks his poetry predominantly with a large variety of neologisms and wordplays disclosed in language in an apparently effortless fashion. Thus, Oliver wants to identify language's immanent contradictions and disruptions. For the translator, the challenge of this poem rather lies in its augmenting meditative tone. Short lines and a repetitive style create a certain dynamic of the text culminating in a "Salto Mortale" ("backwards eye forwards") at the end. With the translation "still the stilted fingers" ("noch die gespreizten finger") it was possible to capture some of this dynamic. Moreover, with the alliteration ("still the stilted") and its homophonic character the translation adds some pace to the movement towards the "salto". Additionally, the emphasis on the sound quality of language in Oliver's work is stressed by this.

Another part of the poem was more difficult to translate. The verb "haften" can be used in German without or with preposition ("an"). Without preposition it conveys a more direct and active part of the agent similar to "to adhere." In order to remain true to the original and its dynamically sounding voice, I decided to translate "haften" solely as "to cling to," and simply to go without preposition where the original did so.

SALTO MORTALE

haftet die zunge am wort
 das wort an der zunge
 die stadt haftet die stadt
 am aug dirigiert das ohr
 schnecken.symphonisch
 die hand die hand noch die
 gespreizten finger zunge
 rückwärts aug vorwärts
 das wort haftet das wort

SALTO MORTALE by José F.A. Oliver

Translated by Marc James Müller

the tongue clings on the word
 the word on the tongue
 the city clings the city
 on the eye the ear conducts
 snail.symphonic
 the hand the hand still the
 stilted fingers tongue
 backwards eye forwards
 the word clings the word