

[OOMPH! Press](#)

written by Entropy | February 24, 2021



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Interview with Alex Gregor and Daniel Beauregard, Founding & Managing Editors

How did OOMPH! Press start?

Alex Gregor: As a front porch East Atlanta dream-seed sprouted in a Buenos Aires patio bathtub with cutting planted in warm Mediterranean soil and telegraph wire connecting Argentinean stalk to Roman reed—this is how OOMPH! began and how we operate today. Dan came up with the name and idea in 2013; I brought my ideas to the table and by the time we had both moved to Buenos Aires in 2014, we were planning transcontinental multilingual readings and publishing journals of contemporary poetry in translation. It wasn't until I had moved to Italy in 2015 that we really started figuring out how we were going to make our little boat float—6 years later, I'm happy to report that we're doin' just fine.

Daniel Beauregard: Yeah. I think it was somewhat spontaneous too. We just both kind of realized how much we enjoyed and relied upon works in translation, so that once we had both moved to a foreign country to immerse ourselves in another language and culture, creating a press focused on contemporary work in translation seemed like the next logical step.

Tell us a bit about OOMPH! What are your influences, your aesthetic, your mission?

AG: OOMPH! is an international literary press publishing contemporary poetry and short prose in translation. Our mission is to find new literature written in countries around the world and facilitate its translation into English as part of a larger aim to encourage cross-cultural and -linguistic exchange. Our aesthetic is experimental, wild, unkempt; I personally like to publish work that is marching to the beat of its own drum—poetry as chant or ritual; poetry as dizzying dream-song. My influences for publishing come from presses, record labels, and reading series that start as homegrown, handspun projects, but later grow into something much larger—Ghost Box, Plan-It-X,

Saddle Creek, Stones Throw, Orange Twin and K Records all come to mind, along with Calamari Archive, City Lights, Action Books, and Microcosm.

While OOMPH! currently only publishes poetry in translation, I'm a firm believer in cross-pollination, as you can see in my influences—I think folks in the arts should maintain an active imagination and an open mind, engaging in an ongoing exchange with others and taking cues from other disciplines—in other words, without looking outside of our own bubbles for inspiration, we're risking doing the same thing that everyone else is currently doing or has done before.

DB: Like Alex said, our aesthetic leans more towards the experimental, the surreal and the uncanny, but I personally also like to pay attention to work that has flown under the radar in the English-speaking world for one reason or another. It could be because some big publishing house is holding the rights hostage for more than small presses can afford and larger publishing companies haven't yet taken an interest. Alex was way more into the DIY scene than I was but I think that's at the heart of where we're coming from, just trying to make new and exciting work accessible to an English-speaking audience; to try and give people an idea of the experimental poetry and prose that's being written at this exact moment, or giving a voice to authors around the world that, for one reason or another, have been sorely overlooked. Some of the presses I see doing this type of work include Action Books, Sublunary Editions, Cardboard House Press, Ugly Duckling Presse, The Song Cave, Archipelago Books; those are the ones that jump to mind off the top of my head, of course there are many more.

Can you give us a preview of what's current and/or forthcoming from your catalog, as well as what you're hoping to publish in the future?

AG: We just published our 10th title, a bilingual book of poetry from the Philippines called *Melismas*, originally written by Marlon Hacla and translated from the Filipino by Kristine Ong Muslim, with an introduction by Amado Anthony G. Mendoza III and stunning illustrations by Tilde Acuña. The book is beautiful, if I may say so myself, featuring a matte black & white cover with our favorite illustration by Acuña, framing nearly 150 pages of additional artwork and facing texts by Hacla and Muslim. Here's an excerpt from a blurb from Cristian Tablazon, artist and curator for Nomina Nuda:

“The cantos manifest an operative logic akin to afterimage and delirium, and we partake of the intricate wonders and terrors in this Boschian orgy, vacillating between the phantasmic and the embodied, the particular and the sublime, dreaming and waking, the world of the living and the world of the dead, the sensible realm and the noumenon, all ears to a persona singing at the brink of knowing and annihilation.”

And here's an excerpt from the book itself, which is also one of my favorite poems:

Everywhere, shaded areas are agitated,
stones are fluent in the language of stones.
From behind, the water is arching for a bite.
The sky is scattering bits and pieces of itself,
the birds are colliding tenderly,
the stars are assembling a mirror.
Through windows, children are watching
the night's pretension, no matter how weak
the grounds sustaining the source of this
continuity, nor will the flood
of luminaries in the country lead to progress
and strength of purpose in order to see
this radical shifting of the world.
For now, not far from here, these two are being honed:
the weight of the wind to enhance
its destructiveness and then a new song.

As for forthcoming titles, we're currently working on a bilingual book of poetry from Morocco called *Resurrection of Wildflowers*, originally written by Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine and translated from the French by Jake Syersak. Here's a little excerpt:

I offer the heavens a crown woven from scolopendra!
I offer the heavens my yellow liver and my burnt-out nights!
And to you, I offer my head on a platter.

Other recent titles include: *From Embracing the Sparrow-Wall, or I Schumann-Madness* by Friederike Mayröcker (Austria) translated from the German by Jonathan Larson; *Words* by Helena Österlund (Sweden), translated from the Swedish by Paul Cunningham; *Expendables* by Emma Villazón (Bolivia), translated from the Spanish by Thomas Rothe; *First Breaths* by Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine (Morocco), translated from the French by Jake Syersak. We've also published several journals & anthologies, showcasing a multitude of writing from many languages and cultures around the world.

Check out our [catalog](#) to learn more.

We used to ask, "What about small/independent press publishing is particularly exciting to you right now?" We're still interested in the answer to that, but we're even more interested to know what you think needs to change.

AG: The world is opening up in every direction—we've gone from town square to stadium seating to everywhere in between, and now we have the unique opportunity to listen in on mainstreet bandstands and massive performance halls alike. In the literary world, this means that bedroom bloggers and best-selling authors both have the ability to publish their work and reach an audience, and what makes this so exciting for small/independent press publishers is that we can contribute to this global creative exchange of

ideas and perspectives. Just as the restructuring of the music industry has allowed for greater participation for creatives and audience members alike, the same thing has happened in publishing—as small/independent press publishers continue to pop up all around the world, we each play a role in not only showcasing a variety of literary voices, but in facilitating an exchange between cultures as well—cultures that are not only divided by borders or geographical features, but separated by their languages, histories, and literary traditions. We're experiencing a moment right now where in the United States, for example, there is an industry-wide focus on publishing the work of historically underrepresented authors, especially in small/independent press publishing, but not only, and this is something to celebrate.

What needs to change? Well, in order for small/independent press publishers to continue moving forward, we need more support in building and growing our organizations. I think that what tends to happen is that a writer, grad student, or lit nerd starts a publication without really knowing how to sail the ship; while they may have the skills needed to produce publications (writing, editing, layout & design), they might not have the skills and resources needed to build or grow an organization (communication, finance, advertising), and this is a real problem if they want to stay in the game long-term. What we need, as small/independent press publishers, is funding and training—funding to not only float the boat, but sail it; training in the skills that we lack to make our projects self-sustaining and rewarding for everyone involved.

DB: Like Alex said, I think that small presses need support and training, but they also need to work together to achieve a common goal: to share as much unique work as possible with a wider audience. And I think that these days, there are a lot of presses out there, translation presses in particular, that have kind of shown their willingness to partner with each other and move toward that common goal. One thing I'd like to see more of is presses, authors, and translators exploring how to use the digital realm as a collaborative tool.

Of course, it's great to see when another press shares or retweets something you're doing, but I'd like to see more readings and book events and partnerships between small press translation publishers. These days, you have people all over the world running their own small press, like we're doing, that can bring their particular insight or experience, their cultural background as well, to curate a unique opportunity for everyone involved. It'd be cool to see more digital book fairs and translation seminars where small presses are involved too, like the [SMOL Fair](#) that we're participating in from March 3-7 of this year.

How do you cope? There's been a lot of conversation lately about charging reading fees, printing costs, rising book costs, who should pay for what, etc. Do you have any opinions on this, and would you be willing to share any insights about the numbers at OOMPH! Press?

AG: I believe a more pertinent question for us would be: How do you remain resilient?

I remain resilient by remembering my guiding principles, most notably my belief in the power of poetry. As poets, we have a responsibility to respond to the needs of our time—what better way to contribute than by helping to diversify voices and perspectives in the English-language world? As North Americans with the majority of our ancestors in Western Europe (I'm from Atlanta; Dan's from Toronto), we have such a limited, insular literary tradition, and I have found that we can expand, question, influence and even at times subvert that tradition by dedicating our resources to publishing work from other cultural and linguistic contexts. Remembering my belief in the power of poetry keeps me grounded in the good work, and thus keeps me resilient when times are tough.

As for the inner-workings of the press, I'll try to be as transparent as possible: OOMPH! is a press founded by two poets and currently funded out of those two poets' pockets. I'm not sure if you've ever seen a poet's pockets, but they're usually not too full. That being said, we have been extremely fortunate to receive support from our readers over the years as we've literally been building the ship as we've sailed it. Every year, we do a little better, and this helps ensure that we can stay in the game for the long run.

If you're interested in supporting us in our mission to find new literature written in countries around the world and facilitate its translation into English as part of a larger mission to encourage cross-cultural and -linguistic exchange, please consider purchasing [a book bundle](#) or making [a donation](#).

DB: My pockets are full of gold but it's a strange currency that's long fallen into disuse. But like Alex said, it's certainly a labor of love on our parts, which makes it easier for us to cope and remain resilient. I think these days we're much more careful to not bite off more than we can chew, in terms of the work involved in bringing a book to publication. Some years we might publish more titles than another, and that's OK too. A big part of sticking around in the long term, I think, is to create a working model and we've slowly done that, although it has perhaps taken us a bit longer than most. But I know I speak for us both when I say that we're certainly happy with the results.

Recent releases from OOMPH! Press:

