MANDORLA

NUEVA ESCRITURA DE LAS AMÉRICAS • NEW WRITING FROM THE AMERICAS

9

2006

$10.00 US $12.00 CAN

0 74470 04376 8

9

MANDORLA

NUEVA ESCRITURA DE LAS AMÉRICAS • NEW WRITING FROM THE AMERICAS

FOUNDING EDITOR • DIRECTOR FUNDADOR

ROBERTO TEJADA

ISSUE 9 EDITORS • DIRECTORES

ROBERTO TEJADA (SAN DIEGO, CA, USA)
KRISTIN DYKSTRA (NORMAL, IL, USA)
GABRIEL BERNAL GRANADOS (MÉXICO DF, MÉXICO)

HEADS OF PRODUCTION • DIRECTORES DE PRODUCCIÓN

SARAH HABERSTICH (ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PUBLICATIONS UNIT)
TARA REESER (DIRECTOR, PUBLICATIONS UNIT)

ARCHIVE • ARCHIVO

SUSANA TEJADA
TARA REESER

ASSISTANTS AND INTERNS

JANE CARMAN
AARON FURMANEK

WEBSITE • SITIO WEB

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY'S ENGLISH DEPARTMENT'S PUBLICATIONS UNIT

BOARD OF DIRECTORS • CONSEJO DIRECTIVO

ROBERTO TEJADA
GABRIEL GUDDING
JAMES J. PANCRAZIO

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS • AGRADECIMIENTOS

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT SAN DIEGO
ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
ILLINOIS ARTS COUNCIL

IMPRESO Y ENCUADERNADO EN EEUU • PRINTED AND BOUND IN THE UNITED STATES
ISSN: 1550-7432
MANDORLA IS INDEXED IN EBSCO AND PROQUEST DATABASES.

[clmp]

Illinois Arts Council
AN AGENCY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS

This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council

Mandorla's website is hosted by Litline at http://www.litline.org. La página web de *Mandorla* es parte de Litline en http://www.litline.org. Mailing address/Dirección de correo: Department of English, Campus Box 4240, Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-4240.
Current issue is #9. La presente edición corresponde al #9.

CONTENTS • ÍNDICE

11

NATHANIEL TARN

Ins and Outs of the Forest Rivers

23

YVONNE VENEGAS

Animal Artifice
(Working Notes)

29

JOHN ASHBERY

Mordred

(Traducción de Jorge Guitart)

31
Laura Mullen
Six Poems

45
Mauricio Montiel Figueiras
El mundo portátil

52
Mónica de la Torre
Two Poems from "One Hour Photo"

56
Omar Pérez
El intelectual y el poder en Cuba

61
Roberto Echavarren
Centralasia

69
Araki Yasusada
Fragmentos de *Doubled Flowering: From the Notebooks of Araki Yasusada*
(Traducción de Omar Pérez)

76

César Vallejo

Eleven Poems from *The Black Heralds*

(Translated by Clayton Eshleman)

89

Steve Tomasula

The Color of Flesh

103

Kamau Brathwaite

Ocho poemas

(Traducciones de Adriana González Mateos y Christopher Winks)

123

Mercedes Roffé

Wandering Canto

(Translated by Margaret Carson)

128

Lorenzo García Vega

El cristal que se desdobla

140

Carlos A. Aguilera

B, Ce-

(Translated by Gabriel Gudding)

147
Ana Rosa González Matute
17 de mayo de 1947

151
Horácio Costa
Tres poemas
(Traducción de Roberto Tejada)

167
Nancy Kuhl
Four Poems

174
Eduardo Lizalde
El gato

176
Dodie Bellamy
Lady Jane

190
Linh Dinh
Seis poemas
(Traducción de Gabriel Bernal Granados)

198
Clayton Eshleman
Joan Mitchell's Spinnerets

202
Jaime Luis Huenún
Six Poems
(Translated by Daniel Borzutzky)

208
Silvia Malagrino
Stills from *Burnt Oranges*

218
Kass Fleisher
s. e. edmonds

220
Régis Bonvicino
Acontecimiento
(Traducciones de Odile Cisneros)

230
Francisco Magaña
Corazón de pies cansados

236

Peter Ramos

Beyond the Deep Image:
James Wright's Vallejo and the Ethics of Translation

262

Marta López Luaces

Cuatro poemas

269

Tony Tost

Four Poems from *An Emperor's Nostalgia*
(A Dozen for Leigh)

274

Jussara Salazar

Os Jardins de Rivera
(*Alegorias mágicas*)

279

Mario Campaña

Poemas

288

Eugenio Rodríguez

Two Poems
(Translated by Jorge Guitart)

291
Luigi Amara
Seis poemas

299
Jorge Miralles
Wedding Photos
(Translated by Jacqueline Loss)

310
Ewa Chruściel
Two Poems

313
Notas biográficas / Biographical Notes

Cover:
by Yvonne Venegas, *Untitled*, Baja California, color photograph, 2005

Copyright © *Mandorla* 2006

NATHANIEL TARN

INS AND OUTS OF THE FOREST RIVERS

In memoriam S.A., activist.

"Les rivières sont des chemins qui marchent et qui portent où l'on veut aller."

—Pascal

"It is not certain that the speaker is the hero for it may be he who listens."
—"The Heroes at Kapit, 1815" ms.

Famished for the totality,
forever, still, again,
sampling yet another part,
moving out once more
toward the expected
but unknown flag
high on a mountain top
at this extremity of the tropic world.
Car to the airport late, friend
nervous and uncommunicative,
bookstore phone line down,
credit card therefore useless,

not a nickel left in cash, bank
a.t.m. machine swallows my card,
birdwatching book is not acquired.
A poor beginning.
The plane is at the gate
a thousand steps away in this
crazy aiport—the gun jumped
by this country once again
into a "higher" stage of "progress."
Weather is foggy, hazy, masks
an undertow begging to be revealed.
A seabed waits for you,
has waited since time began.
History enters the present
like a river into the sea.
This may well surprise you
but today is the day that you die

In the interests of solitude
that the void might conjure up a world,
nothing to be left at your back
from which any recall could proceed,
the river to run unimpeded into any sea
it might choose to drown in, the forest
to spring upward into its canopy,
the line between earth and sky
uninterrupted, with passage to and fro:
all the high birds in their sprung freedom
eating of fruit ripened by heaven

Entrance into the forest. In trance. At start
everything slithers, first of all two feet,
inadequately shod, on slimy roots and branches,
everything drips, face drips, the right
side neck gland drips, high in the nape,

the forehead into eyes, chin drips, nose, cheek,
hat itself drips—only gods know how—you stand
there watering the earth as if it were a garden.
Noise of the insects, a noise eternal
which never stops for birth or death
as bugs relay their sound through centuries.
Ditto the calls of birds—but "bird"
itself remains invisible high in the canopy,
will not come down for drowning man to glimpse.
A leaf will drop: no, it is not bird,
a movement here or there: it is a butterfly:
the butterflies in forest surrender to the eye
but the bird not: prefers to place a leaf
over its face and say "Cuckoo! Yes, *I* am
bird—but *you* will never read me!"
And finally the unexamined lives of all
these trees so much alive and yet so
silent, these also you can see with all their
parasites, exuding life with generosity
unparalleled in all the kingdoms. A single
giant especially, *dipterocarp*, couple of hundred
feet up into canopy, its crown a jewel
of that canopy in which, I'll swear to it,
all my birds are hiding. Trunk I cannot
embrace, diameter continuing so far
beyond my hands—and yet I wish I could,
more than a grandfather, so awe-inspiring
are reach and fretted bark. And then the silence
underneath the noise, refusing to allow
the planet a green death, the accidental scenes
of the two-legged animals slaving and slavering
to bite this treasure down with their steel teeth

Every time you move to the forest's edge
you meet it sooner. Forest encircles

you like a bride's corset (made up of silver
hoops among these tribes). Forest will choke
you if you move carelessly, without
extremes of circumspection. The animals look
haunted: they run into each other too often.
Birds find overmuch to feed on in the canopy.
They fly in circles, caged by the borders
imposed by bulldozers and other noise-makers.
It is the vastness of the forest over-shrunk.
Note, one pointed out, of all these surrounding
mountains only that small part up there,
about a tenth, is free of cutting—and now
they've got concessions for that tenth and
even villages will sink into their maelstrom,
because of having to give up their choicest trees,
the ground infertile and unhallowed,
their fields unable now to raise the rice

A plant moving slowly overhead—part of
the wall of trees moving—aha! a bird!
but it is not, merely some current of the air
invisible to you makes that leaf shiver.
Cut out the motor of your sleek canoe,
an able tide-devourer, you are in heaven,
or in a dream with things passing intangibly
as if by wisdom grasped. It is eternity
moving in unrecordable time you may
have witnessed once in a night cycle-ride
as ten young monks made the noise of thousands
back in Angkor, prepping their recitations
like centuries ago. And now. Never again

Sometimes it is my pleasure to become
obsessed with one of many subjects: this
time the predicate is "bird." I slither through

an unknown land with a methodical thirst
for a knowledge which will quench the desire
and cause it to desist. Leeches drain flush of
blood runs crimson down my legs and arms
while small thought-strokes from time to time
destroy what can't be bird in mind—which
is to say destroys all things that are not forest.
This purification will also satisfy the apes
astride the branches quietly in trees like
ripest fruit about to fall, their tails sometimes
hanging straight down, bell cords to pull—
unknown to them the trees themselves
they sit on will very soon be cut
for a few hours of heat or light as far away
as death is near to forest. "Up close and personal"
they call this thirst to know completion of the
catalogue before the very last of trees collapses
so that we are aware of what we've lost
we that have not achieved full-scale humanity

I do not know what sea this river ends in,
Sulu Sea it says, yes Sulu it says
on this new map—but I can see no evidence
of Sulu in this mist devouring all
phenomena. Sungai Kinabatangan,
a most melodious name you repeat day-long,
the name reverberating day-long in your head:
a narrow strip of virgin forest left untouched
on each bank of the rivers
(making the small ones look like gates to Eden)
in which they end by crowding animals
so tight they can be seen by tourists ignorant
of all the implications. (Besides, they look
only for monkeys, leave out all other wildlife
because that's what the guide books say to see).

While all around, thousands of miles, stretch
olive-palm plantations: most economical and
most remunerative but dry as dust and cash.
Upriver, silt and debris from the cuttings
menace the river from its head on down. It's
said you cannot bathe or drink in rivers anymore

Trapped in pervading stench of old ideas,
trapped in repetitive paralyzed projects,
trapped by the magistrates who never move
on cases dusty for decades, and by police
who police nothing but the new owners' shares
they took from those who owned the land
and are now homeless. The forest drips
a thousand years of water from every tip
of every branch mourning its lords, much
as the rocks in the high caves drip greater spans
of time to reach the rising stalagmites. If this
were blood, the whole land would run red.
Trapped in the monologues of ancient stories,
invisible birds and heroes sound their songs
but no one's there to hear them. My own ears
age—day by day I can hear less of birds
who sing the tribal sorrows for lack of poets.
All fades to elegy. Deadened by repetition,
I try to hear the words in birdsong, attempt,
by swallowing remnants of beauty, not to lose hope.
My guide ends up by whistling like a bird

Speed through the forest's arteries,
(the blood of talk, of work, of war),
through Malian, to Tutoh, into Baram,
five hours from here, Batang Baram,
mother of rivers. There are no words
for this: it is another world. It is

expressed in a foreign tongue, a host of
tongues—not in your terms, your codes,
you fancy folk in your homes comforted,
no, nothing can be parried to your query
"Have a good trip?" In fact you do not want
to know what you cannot know in those other
languages—so all is well. And the great rigs
barreling down from the raped mountains
continue breaking forest into road-locked
parcels, bring us the matter of "our" houses, the
comforts of "our" lives—so all is well.

The forest's heart explodes,
its green blood foams in the arteries
returning to the sea through a thousand
mountain walls of green untouched as yet.
Cascades of flowers several stories up,
beginning in the canopy and ending
in the river, the only signature of red.
Everything in heart's world explodes
as well, only the sapphire kingfisher
pierces the cataracts of emerald blood,
avoids a drenching, moves to farther fish.
In a boat that tips at the breath of a
dragonfly, keeping the body tense through
the endless hours, the corpse is taken
back to base and all blood ends in water. It is
the bird unseen takes a spent heart to ocean

At the farthest point in space-time,
at the greatest point of geographical distance
from which only return was possible
doubling back over our tracks,
there was no paint, no color,
the bare planks only for a habitation.

Here colorless death could have its way
and would hardly be noticed. Here even
green paled, as if polluted
by the bare planks. People were disappeared
shaking their heads at this disaster—
as bodiless as ghosts silently threading
brotherhood bracelets over my wrist

Think now as if the forest's parts were clouds
meshing with each other, some dark, some
light, or lighter. The green mass has the name
duration: one tree replacing another and never
falling but of its own accord and in obedience
to the common law. Nothing despoiled,
nothing torn down, nothing cut in its very life
leaving its blood over the jungle floor.
Clouds billowing but contained in the mass
although some, like balloons, could seem to
take off—if looked at long and hard enough.
Up there in the walls, on invisible paths,
leeches immeasurably patient below leaves,
bodies gyrating to warmth of mammal flesh

And, at the end, the forest closes in
on itself, and stops to admire itself, and
rests. Astounded at its own beauty
it gives assent to the planet
that it should continue, that it should
survive and its arks of creatures also.
This is where the birds
have become color
against a relentless green.
Across the mass of tints
white undulation headed with black,
Terpsiphone aparadisi,

deserves the appellation heaven.
In the middle of the scene
the vast river hushes too, rapt in its
rapids, its bridal veils of water,
creating a sound recognized as distance.
Far from the world of corporations
in murderous contention, the forest wonders
how men will last. Sun falls on leaves
a blessing lighting their myriad veins: it is
as if the air itself were sung with joy
in the temperate heat of earliest morning:
day is as light still as a young hero, not
yet weighing on river banks in suffocation

At the back of all buildings in the cities
mocking parameters of "progress"
forest walls rise in abundance and from
the walls hang the great war cloths
along whose strands the race depends.
All beings once woven into the cloths,
all beings compete there for air to breathe
and food with which to tamp their hunger.
The early patterns are the most complex
with the hooks on which all hangs,
all hangs together in a famous peace
between the warring tribes of the great rivers,
set many years before in the red-dye bath:
back when an emperor lost out at Waterloo.
This archaic image of the golden births
which the tribe looks back to as its hair
tears from the hooks which hold the heads
in place: enemy heads ferociously parted
from neighbor bodies together with
their own vivid catastrophes. But heads
are not taken anymore—only the honors won

by suffocating those who are too poor
to eat their forest any longer, die in the ghastly
cities, imbecile jobs. The stench of sewers open
for all to smell and drop into with both feet clawing
as they fall from the great cloths of their lives

Intrusion of other images into the vision,
other pages on other leaves, choking
the forest. Portions of brick, corners of
streets, the lineaments of a younger life.
Gradual process of departure. Too much
diversity can hide the forest's own behind
its mask of oneness. Though nearly strangled
by these roots and lianas, I am in thrall
to this initial darkness and find it hard again
to face up to the dryness of our pale polity

Half in the dream half out of the dream,
half in the forest half in the city,
which is the dream, which the forest,
which the city, which is the city
that I have always recognized
though never lived in, where
all my dreams have foundered?
How is abyssal failure to be read,
the seen in smaller quanta than unseen,
the known in smaller quanta than unknown,
I have been here before, not been before,
half in a dream of hell, half dream of
heaven—those contradictions, once
beautiful, still sometimes beautiful,
those deep addictions, hurrying down
as if the river spewed all disaster,
hurrying down out of the dream,
carrying all the reality of dream

far down the river and into the sea.
Which is night, which is morning,
what do I know, what not know, lord
to be so deserted, so alone!

Conjunction of forest and sea
dark crimson dragonfly linking the two
stitching together landscapes of the mind
where we have seen before, head above
clouds, landscapes remembered from another
life, landscapes remembered by each other.
I do not say "previous," would rather claim
some simultaneous lives running parallel,
with trigger hairs from time to time
between them. Steadfastly birds
refuse to manifest: they fly
the gardens far below this perch. I climbed this
mountain by mistake on a bitch trail.
No matter for my mind is so replete with birds,
so fabulous a kingdom of the upper sky
cannot be abdicated for a bunch of facts,
a bunch of species ticked off in a book.
The dragonfly has left for the far mountain
opposite, the beach's other shore. I shall
go down as well, my time goes down
the joyous sky and drinks drink up each
other. I am as thirsty at this water as if this
were my desert. The sun begets a second star

What if this butterfly
is the color of sky and night
and this one of the sea and night
and this one is the sun's blaze
at midnight on the alternate side
of world—night being the high color

of wing and day being the low?
I should have been a butterfly-watcher
for they are out in the open
with their delicate touches of color
in the midst of horror—whereas
the birds now, the birds alas…
The butterflies are more direct
with their shorter lives more patient,
read out to me in wavering lines
brief soul and its annihilation.
Whereas the birds move on and on,
pierce the sky like arrows, never seem to fall.
Their death is a quiet one in the deep forest
as the death of the forest is not quiet:
the towering trees fall over and over.
One dusk, as the light went down over the river,
the one bird I had dreamed of seeing and despaired
of ever seeing as the days went by, finally
Lord *Buceros* himself, prince of forest and sky,
bird of the river gods and gods of fallen heads,
dropped out of the sky and covered a tree
and seemed as large as the tree, covering it entirely.
It was still possible to glimpse the colors of the head
and know it for itself. Although this bright darkness
preceded the death, a death mourned by its fellows,
warrior-bird was known: for me, a death redeemed

Lem Baa Bario Asal, Pa Umor; Sungai Kinabatangan, Sabah; Miri, Mulu, Uma Bawang, Batang Baram; Long Lunyim, Sungai Pelutan; Sibu, Kapit, Kai Wong/Pala Wong, Batang Rajang; Kuching, Kubah, Bako, Sungai Santubong/Sungai Sarawak.

April–June, 2005.

YVONNE VENEGAS

ANIMAL ARTIFICE (WORKING NOTES)

I assume our need to relate to the animal kingdom as the need to communicate somehow with our deep-seated creature instincts and, following this line of thought, to project our various identities onto other living things; in this sense, then, we profit from animals not only as companions, but as mirrors.

The social hesitations around self-image have led practitioners to understand that the only way to photograph a human subject is when the sitter remains unsuspecting; with camera in hand, you have to focus on opportunities in those brief instances of distraction.

Animals, on the other hand, are free of such concern in that they simply reflect those qualities we cast upon them. When you catch sight of a horse with braided mane, you may well assume its owner arranged it in that manner—perhaps as a status symbol. In what way is that any different from a child dressed up for a photograph?

I'm interested in photographing animals insofar as they upset the conventions of appearance. To make pictures of them is to accept the challenge of capturing a flash of non-representation, and to wonder: Is there such a thing as an off-moment for animals?

I'm concerned with socialization, the bodily figure, and physical movement. I strive to give these images an undecided value, as apertures into our projected psyche and as representative of these animals as such.

In his book on the analytical language of John Wilkins (1960), Jorge Luis Borges lists a division of animals derived from a "certain Chinese encyclopedia" as follows:

a) belonging to the emperor
b) embalmed
c) trained
d) sucking pigs
e) mermaids
f) fabulous
g) loose dogs
h) included in this classification
i) that are agitated like crazy
j) innumerable
k) drawn with a very thin brush of camel hair
l) etcetera
m) that have just broken the jar
n) that from afar look like flies

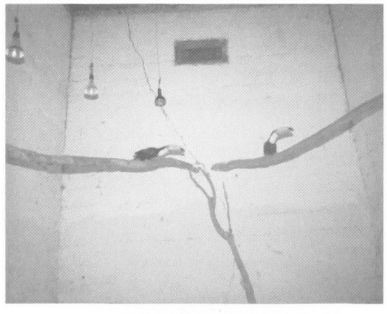
In light of this taxonomy, I understand my practice to be a slice of fiction that at some moment in time made so much sense as to be integrated into the pages of an informative guide.

We comment on our relationship with nature when we try to recreate it. We construct spaces that somehow recall a distant place, a location fantastic to us. A site that takes on such importance that we resolve to encase it, bringing the setting into architectural enclosure.

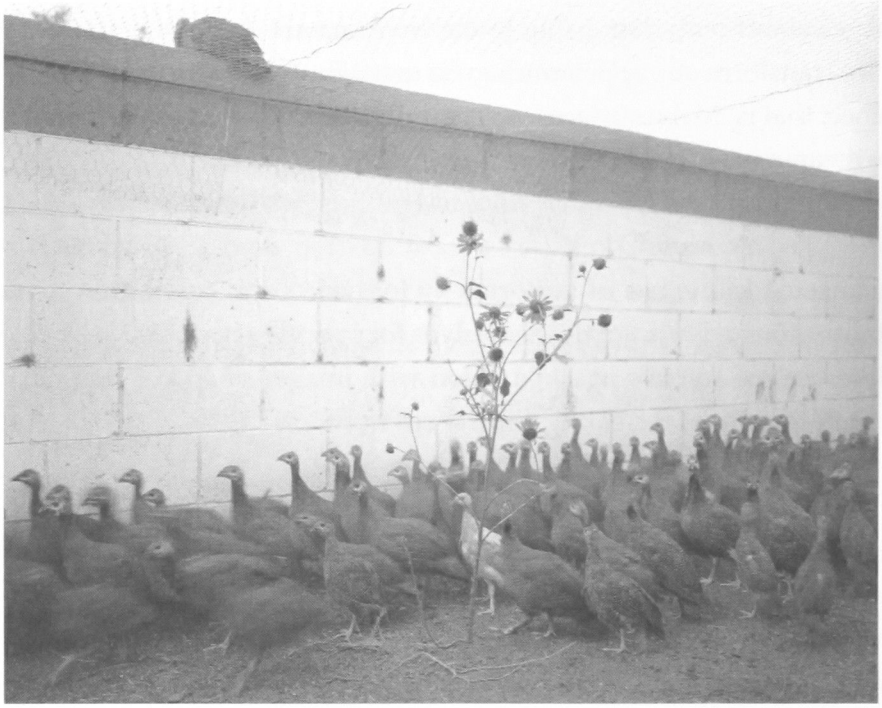
I'm fascinated to see what kind of values can be assessed in the juxtaposition of images about our relationship to the environment, how we represent it, and how we transform our appearance to be in touch with nature. I'm drawn to appearance: that is, to the surfaces we create to make of nature an artifice—that is, to the meanings we lend to nature's physicality.

I'm interested in the use of uniforms by individuals in connection to animals and those attached to animals themselves for specific activities. I seek the many possible uses of animals in conjunction with images of spaces that have been built with the aim of recreating natural environs.

In putting together these situations, I believe in a resulting fiction, one telling of creatures and uniforms, counterfeit spaces and movement; together they constitute a pageantry or literary invention as though torn from the pages of a certain Chinese encyclopedia, whether belonging to the emperor or drawn with a very thin brush of camel hair.

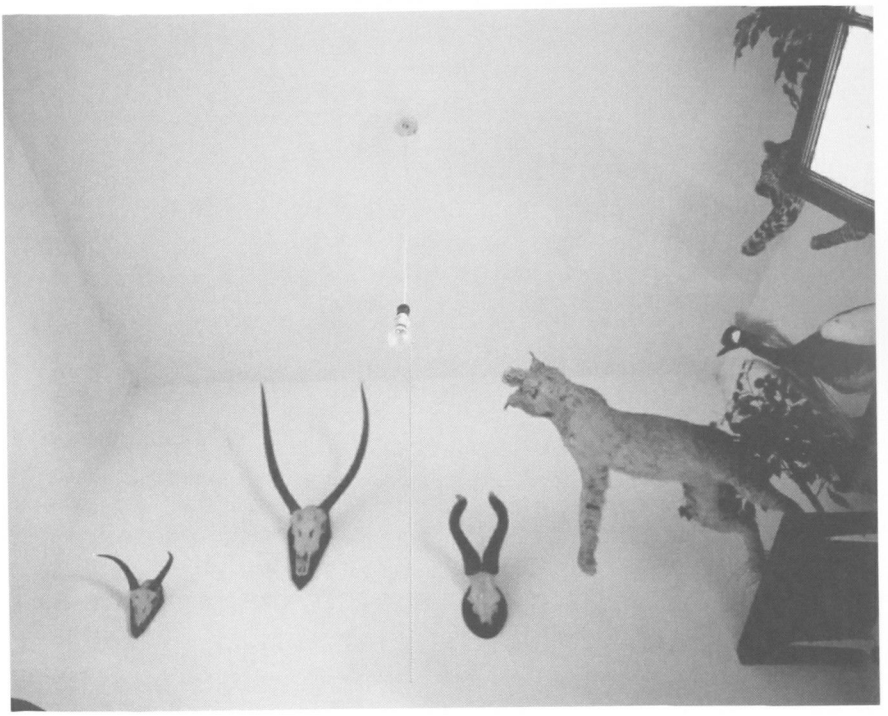


See *Mandorla* cover image:
Yvonne Venegas
Untitled
Baja California
Color Photograph, 2005



Yvonne Venegas
Untitled
Baja California
Color Photograph, 2005

Yvonne Venegas
Untitled
Baja California
Color Photograph, 2005



Yvonne Venegas
Untitled
Baja California
Color Photograph, 2005

JOHN ASHBERY

MORDRED

Ahora no tengo ni haz ni envés.
Soy como son ciertas personas
que nunca dicen cómo son
y sin embargo sabes que son como tú y lo son.

Yo era juicioso de un modo preternatural
pero era primavera, nadie se fijaba o le importaba.
Era primavera y funcionaban las regaderas.

Bahía, muesca, rocas viscosas
que son de alguien el placer. Placeres que no se van
pero no puede decirse que se queden,
que se queden del modo en que se suponía que lo hicieran.
Atrapé a un ser alado
lo miré firmemente en los ojos:
¿Qué es lo que supones? Ah, sólo me gusta seguir viviendo,
lo demás no me importa,
no me importa nada, si quieres.
Pero sí, dije. Bueno entonces es como un claro
en la oscuridad que no se puede ver. La oscuridad nos está destinada a todos.

Nos acostumbramos a ella. Entonces vuelve la luz del día.
Es lo que quiero decir cuando hablo de vivir,
podría estar ocurriendo, yendo a otro lugar,
pero no, es aquí, más o menos.
Tienes que ser su paladín, luego lucha por ti,
pero eso no hace falta, seguirá viviendo de todos modos.
Le digo ¿te importa? me está entrando cansancio.

Pero hay algo más que debo saber de ti.
¿Recuerdas una forja a medianoche
en torno de la cual se arrastraban los fantasmas de leprosos, que fueron herreros
en una época persistentemente inidentificable y entonces hiciste así?
Recuerdas cómo el martillo cayó lentamente
llevándote toda esa canción contigo.
Recuerdas la música de los caballos de tiro
que sólo podían tocar contra una pared.
Y bien, ¿qué poco te cuesta todo entonces?
Eras un niño de escuela, ahora has pasado de la edad madura
y la gran rifa no ha tenido lugar.

Veo que debo irme yendo.
Me gusta vivir y punto,
es lo único que me gusta.
En algún momento debes contarme de tus intenciones,
pero ahora debo quedarme aquí en este carril rápido
en caso de que pasen por aquí las provisiones
que no habré de necesitar, siendo una criatura viva que respira.
Pero yo te pregunté por tu sombrero.
Ah sí bueno es importante tener sombrero.

Traducción de Jorge Guitart

LAURA MULLEN

SIX POEMS

Space Program
(Trapped with the Body)

I let

The black feathers
Fall the bone dust in the water
Spiraling in on itself slipping
Away the 5 duties the 7 insults
From the forest of sorrows hack
A clearing of gratitude so goes
The wise book I use the "I"
Like an ax time is a wind
Is a winding among dendrites
Broken dead bits glinting
Whirl past I use the "I"
Like another moon a place
To see from to take a snap-
Shot of the earth dropping

Away and then in a blur
Coming back the atmosphere
Mutters the 9 implacable
Truths there are always 3
Of us moving ahead
Falling apart dissolving
Stream in the stream
Swirls uncoiling trails

I use

The I like a moonwalk I said no air no gravity I reposition myself I examine the vast distances and then tear them to shreds with my claws with my teeth my complaints I is hiding in the forest I belongs in the forest the heart a thin sheet of paper torn from a child's notebook I am so glad I write forming each letter with care to have made it back safe what else was it I didn't do I forgot it was all written down in a fine hand on a blue-lined sheet crumpled the dead I gulp those who never made it back would be proud of us of all of us the branch snaps

I

Use the I
I come back to the I
I return to it "like a dog…"
I won't talk
I use the I in a sentence
I don't mean it
I write it down
The wind the trees servile

Going back to the I

Tiny scraps of remember another white forest *just my perspective* using the I like a wind trying to be smart the naked why not even earlier unreadable wrong for this picture I is hiding green lines standards leaves this particular stumped you again I in the clear cut in the old growth loggers approaching the center a little childish scribble of black smoke torn in handfuls matter and I loving a dense "to do" list a riddle a really good joke having seen the signed confessions I'm using the I again when they come to that house it isn't clear whether the inhabitants fled just in time or were led at gunpoint out I am using "approach" not the word stomp troop and a bird's eye point of view wisely silent awhile and then *whatever* whatevermore I creaks croaks

I Uses the I

As an alias
A really good spy
Because no one can see how
I goes on admitting everything
Freely Now still
Looking mysterious
My client a voice
Your tax dollars
At work repeats
Doesn't have
To answer that
I've seen the signed
Will and frankly
  "I can't
Make any sense of it"
The trees were red
The trees were thick
And dark and the wind
Handfuls of black feathers

Ran errands complaining
I just wanted to be useful
I wanted to be loved
And now
I have no feeling
Of accomplishment

The Proofs Arrive
("starts" instead of stars)

Somewhere between a dark cobalt and a light manganese
A strip of her torn backpack by "the drag marks" at the edge
Of the trail

In a journal brought down from the attic the single line
She copied out "Why bother to send it at all"
And then her own poem in response
Who seemed to think the doubts were hers alone

(I cannot correct that impression)

Rewrote "stars" thinking it should have ended
"And been erased." No further explanations Should've ended
Earlier, before "Imagined"—these meaningless squiggles a word
Another word *What does it matter…* Stopped
Starting to imagine the nights as they were 8/1–8/13/05 in the "wilderness
Area" cold and clear. The glittering sky and her constellating

Her pattern-attentive, her meaning-seeking imagination

Sharp edges of stones under the trail map shifted
Letters, adding angles, Sometimes the pressure
Showing she tried to make sure. Words that seemed clear
Enough once were now hard to make out. Teetered
Into other meanings, destinations. *No*, I said, *here*….

Who would have seen the connection immediately

That much is clear. Over the rise came—8/26/05—
Those who would have it by heart. Stacked sandstone
Shards at the head of the black greasy stain on the scree

Of the trail. Proof a cloying foetor and her view of blue suddenly
Recalled laughter. Should have ended "Would have hovered

In the air"? Fearless and alone up there (we drove for hours)

Or the unfinished floor of the attic (which had to be emptied) treacherous
As love itself suggests itself a gesture *Why bother*

She should have died hereafter…
The empty canvas set down in a clearing (Dear

It would have been easy to fall, the detective explained, a single
Stone shifting could have led to the shattered ankle she bound
In strips of torn backpack (blue, scattered) a paintbrush as a splint

Of the dream she would say, "I can't believe how much you remember!"
The heavy box of "ashes" Maybe even earlier, on "dead leaves and shards."

Nearly two weeks of willed survival, hoping to be discovered.
Living on nothing. Suspended color

The Air

The trees are very small

So I is also small tangled in their stabs at comprehension their purplish branchings narrow insistences bad guesses caught in their inconclusive results nothing louder than the sound of the sharp blade biting into the living flesh remember the moonwalk I frantic "in the thick" of this disaster mouthing remember Foucault a fire still smoldering on the hearth the table set everything in that neat little cottage looking as if the inhabitants just stepped out but really almost infintesimal the whole complex a blip somewhere in the oily black in which each letter equals imagine tiny flakes of scattered ash

So far the I

Is not unuseful especially if you're in the market for cries of panic the hearty brother of one of the loggers croaks exactly what I said special synaptic buttons spray enkephalins into special receptors but frankly it's no use we could have followed the cries of pain even if we hadn't seen the smoke or the trail of pins in the pines where opiate receptors haven't failed us so far the I gives more than it takes I think though we're not all so patient following what appears to be a natural path under the unnatural light of abstract thought here you take a look at it it's true on each silver head someone has painted the dance steps different dances the man's starting position, the pointy, smaller footprints of his partner's numbered following moves one two one two one two

I go back

To the I to the fine mesh where everything reminds you of something else thicket of quotes family way of standing reaching out reading that passage or holding the mouth going back a wet cloth draped around the face the body vanishing into clouds of acrid smoke

One Two One Two

Back to I where it started among the feverishly multiplying cells the articulations the contingencies working their way like weed-killer back from the wilting leaves down to the tips of the roots moving slowly as if with deliberation nodding my TV head in time to invisible music copyright law is ferocious about nodding gravely the soul a sort of enfetterment my head a glass bubble above my white suit once upon a particular time it starts as if there were a clock in the room I go back in and in fact the scattered garments did smell like

Scratched

Into the silver heads of what had been used to keep the entire thing from sliding off the wall one word at a time each delicate green meaning that forest service of paper invisible record of how many days since invocation of ghost hope how many days until days measured in questions questioners buckets empty or full in and out

No

I but the shape blood welled up through
Leaf
They come back when they choose
Squeezed through the throat of a black bird
Hunched above a door you can't close
Imagined long ago ink on the page she
Of a notebook he
The treeline ends somehow

The air

Very slightly sparkles

The air (whatever

Else I once knew now distant from the repeated question) not a refusal

The Black Feathers

Swirls uncoiling trails
Off in the stream swirls
Falling away stream
Of us moving away
Drag use moving return
Returning this picture
And this shot and this
Shot of the earth dropping off
Not earth but a filmed distance
Like another distance space
Whirling past I use another "I"
Broken dead already past this is
Is a winding among dendrites
An impression the wind replaces
To find another "I" to replace
Then find another hurry back
From the clouds back down
Dust in the air in the water clouds
Fall his hands her hands dust

Should Have Ended

"And been erased." No further explanations. Never "gem-like," never "the silver
Screen" not even as a (mocking) gesture. Suddenly someone remembers—
That's how it begins—suddenly someone remembers. Should have ended
Earlier, before "Imagined"—that much is clear. Here is a complete list
At last, but it's over, the time for such a word. These are the proofs. Suddenly
Someone remembers that she can't work the gate, the daughter: she can't
Work the mechanism, so she'll be trapped there, if anything happens
To the mother. Should have ended "Would have hovered in the air"?

The unstable floor of the attic shifted: it would have been easy to fall, to pitch head first out the narrow entrance and—missing the ladder—land on the edge of the bathtub, the heavy box of journals upended, loose pages of unsent letters and long confessions of sorrow, jealousies, loneliness, dashed out. The paper was old and cheap and had yellowed. Sometimes she wrote with pencil. Words that seemed clear enough once were now hard to make out. Teeter. A loose board flipped up, emptied of its balancing load, and it seemed as if her furious spirit hovered, the tense essence of her frustration in the close air an almost anger. (Guilt, she'd said, is anger…whose anger.) (Dear

Why not even earlier? Here to recount the complete splinter of a larger
Dream who recalls that the daughter could be trapped and rushes to the house.
The mother has died, and the daughter—trapped with the body and unwilling
Or unable to recognize what has occurred—is still tending her. Should
Have. The mother naked, her livid body very clean, and the face
Carefully and delicately made up (all done by the daughter). Ended.
There would have been a time for such details in this world. Matter.
Maybe even earlier, on "dead leaves and shards."

She would say, "I can't believe how much you remember!"

In the dream the "I" was male, some admixture of self and other,
Belatedly rushing to rescue the daughter. She can't work the gate,
Can't see that her mother is no longer living. The speaker, the agent,

The rescuer attempts to convince the daughter she needs to leave:
You need to travel, to take a trip, to get out of here. The mother,
Lying on the bed, nods and smiles at this, Yes dear...—
At which point one white pearl-like maggot drops out of her nose.

Nearly two weeks of trying to stay alive, hoping to be discovered.
The proofs arrive, "starts" someone has typed in, instead of stars.
Just one—and the sudden knowledge that there are others.

Pieces from the broken
Roof of an abandoned passage

Splinter and blood credits
A twinkling gem-like
Up in the fading light tugs
Someone holding out one palm
As seen on the silver screen
And erased Imagined
Above some means of conveyance
Would have hovered in the air
Known for her vision
Of glass and courageous
The dead leaves and shards

With those who stooping remove
The audience identifies briefly
Impossible to convince her of that
It is the age of reason reason
Would be a trace and a force
An arbitrary squiggle miraculous
The train entering the station
How they can do that" even now
It is a golden age "I don't see
Never got over her fear
Arms stretched empty out

A word in this case rain in fact
These meaningless squiggles to
Coughing and translates
Is it now the audience bent over
Or a tangle of black lines What
A vase of Imagined

Spirals away each tower
Puffs of grey they are signaling
I didn't make it out for that much"
Dreary precipitation "I know
Image pocked by the endless

Completely without stars
A grid a gleaming support
It was it was Believed she'd marry
"It was a dark and stormy night"
So deep you begin to see boats
The streets fill with water
In the doorways the audience
An ongoing failure to reflect
Or so she claimed drunk
Over some silvery spill caught
And marry the metal framework

MAURICIO MONTIEL FIGUEIRAS

EL MUNDO PORTÁTIL

Dice o canta o escribe Fernando Pessoa:

¡Viajar! ¡Perder países!
¡Ser otro constantemente
en el alma no tener raíces
de vivir de ver únicamente!
¡No pertenecer ni a mí
marchar al frente, ir siguiendo
la ausencia de tener un fin,
y el ansia de conseguirlo!
Viajar así es viaje
pero lo hago sin tener de mí
más que el sueño del paisaje.
Lo demás es tierra y cielo.

Viajar, ganar países, parafraseo yo: no con la premura del turista que al disparar su cámara a mansalva reduce el mundo a añicos que exhibirá en forma de fotografías a su regreso, sino con la flema y la flama del peregrino que ignora si volverá a su lugar de origen y por ende guarda en la memoria *souvenirs* de cada sitio que visita para hacerlo manejable, móvil –un equipaje por el que no

pagará peso extra en ningún aeropuerto.

Ahora bien, todos los países caben en una ciudad sabiéndolos acomodar. En The Center of the World, Las Vegas se nos ofrece como la urbe omnívora por excelencia: un espacio con un apetito feroz que ha logrado asimilar, en un solo bolo alimenticio, los canales de Venecia y el puente de Brooklyn, las pirámides de Egipto y la Torre Eiffel. Los personajes del filme de Wayne Wang, un ermitaño adicto a las computadoras y una baterista adicta al dinero fácil del *table dance*, diseñan un raro escaparate erótico –ver pero no tocar: vivir de ver únicamente– en un cuarto de hotel vuelto ombligo en el ombligo kitsch del orbe. El equipo que necesitan para tal efecto no desborda los cuatro muros de la habitación: sus cuerpos, sus miradas. ("El mundo está más cerca de lo que pensamos", dice Wayne Wang. El mundo, hay que añadir, es más portátil de lo que creemos.) Lo demás, sí, es tierra y cielo: la desmesura del desierto de Nevada, en cuyo núcleo Benjamin Bugsy Siegel fantaseó con una ciudad invisible que mitigara con creces la sed de visibilidad característica de la cultura moderna.

∞

Italo Calvino también soñó, aunque no con una sino con varias ciudades invisibles: cincuenta y cinco, para ser exactos. Las agrupó de cinco en cinco en once categorías: las ciudades y los cambios, las ciudades y el cielo, las ciudades y el deseo, las ciudades y la memoria, las ciudades y los muertos, las ciudades y el nombre, las ciudades y los ojos, las ciudades y los signos, las ciudades continuas, las ciudades ocultas, las ciudades tenues. A cada una le asignó una identidad, mezcla de ingredientes reales y ficticios, y la bautizó como corresponde a toda Eva recién extraída de las costillas de la literatura: Adelma, Berenice, Eutropia, Isaura, Leonia, Melania, Trude, Valdrada, Zoe –una nómina de tintes mitológicos que recupera la esencia femenina de las urbes. El resultado es una guía ideal para el viajero que busca internarse en los territorios de la imaginación sin más equipaje que una mente abierta, un atlas que

> posee esta virtud: revela la forma de las ciudades que todavía no poseen forma ni nombre [...] El catálogo de las formas es inmenso: hasta que cada forma no haya encontrado su ciudad, nuevas ciudades seguirán naciendo.

Anne Carson, poeta y ensayista que suele sintetizar su biografía en una frase ("Vive en Canadá") para rehuir la pesadez del marketing y apelar a la levedad calviniana, ha tomado la estafeta del autor italiano y trazado su propio mapa de pueblos invisibles: treinta y seis, para ser exactos. En la introducción a "The Life of Towns", cuarto órgano de ese curioso anfibio llamado *Plainwater*, leemos:

> Los pueblos son la ilusión de que las cosas permanecen unidas de algún modo, mi pera, tu invierno [...] Hay pueblos regulares y pueblos irregulares, hay pueblos heridos y pueblos sensatos y pueblos evocados con fiereza, hay pueblos inútiles aunque indomables que continúan dando la batalla, hay pueblos donde la nieve cae del techo de las casas con tal vigor que las víctimas mueren, pero no hay pueblos vacíos (sólo eruditos vacíos) y no hay remordimiento. Ahora avanza.

Y claro que avanzamos, seducidos como Kublai Kan por un flamante Marco Polo que nos lleva de la mano a conocer el pueblo del apóstol y el pueblo donde otra vez es primavera, el pueblo de Emily y el pueblo de la vena del dragón, el pueblo de Hölderlin y el pueblo de la memoria, el pueblo de Greta Garbo y el pueblo donde se descubre el amor divino, el pueblo de Judas y el pueblo del sonido de una rama al romperse.

"Somos objetos en un vendaval que ya no sopla, ésa es mi opinión", leemos en "The Life of Towns". Pero somos igualmente los vagabundos que recorren el orbe que Anne Carson concentra en postales mínimas, de una misteriosa intensidad, para que la maleta no se abulte demasiado y sigamos desplazándonos a nuestras anchas.

ꝏ

"La maleta se vuelve el contenedor de los elementos vitales de la vida moderna, el recipiente de la construcción continuada de una entidad humana." Con estas palabras Yin Xiuzhen ilustra el espíritu que sustenta *Ciudades portátiles* (2002–2004), una bella serie presentada en la Bienal de Sydney y elegida por el Walker Art Center de Minneapolis para la muestra *How Latitudes Become Forms*. Con el afán de establecer desde un principio el carácter móvil, migratorio, de su proyecto, la artista china llegó a la capital australiana con seis maletas viejas que recogió

en el aeropuerto como parte de su equipaje. Cada maleta, etiquetada y sellada de acuerdo con las normas de la travesía internacional, albergaba una urbe, la maqueta de una urbe hecha con la ropa usada de sus habitantes: Guangzhou, Lisboa, París, San Francisco, Sydney y Wellington. A estas seis se han ido sumando otras: Berlín, Hong Kong, Minneapolis, Nueva York, Pekín y Shangai –una guía metropolitana en miniatura que, como ciertas instalaciones de Christian Boltanski, rescata objetos (prendas de vestir) de un vendaval que ya no sopla (el uso cotidiano) para reubicarlos en la vorágine contemporánea.

Dice Xiuzhen que la serie encarna las ideas, memorias y experiencias que los viajeros llevan metafóricamente a casa luego de visitar otro país. Habría que recordar los versos de Pessoa ("Viajar así es viaje/ pero lo hago sin tener de mí/ más que el sueño del paisaje") y agregar que el proyecto retoma la idea de Calvino: "Hasta que cada forma no haya encontrado su ciudad, nuevas ciudades seguirán naciendo". Ciudades evocadas o soñadas, ciudades invisibles. Ciudades que caben en una maleta como los pueblos fantasma de Anne Carson. Ciudades portátiles para un mundo portátil.

ꝏ

Para poder encontrarse y reencontrarse en un mundo cada vez más móvil, más centrífugo, los amantes deben apelar a una fuerza que los congregue aunque sea por unas horas –antes del amanecer, antes del anochecer– en algún punto del mapa. Dicho de otro modo: si quieren afianzar un vínculo centrípeto, los amantes de hoy tienen que renunciar al peso que lastraba a los amantes de antaño, lo que implica olvidarse hasta de maletas con cupo suficiente para las ciudades portátiles de Yin Xiuzhen, y deambular por el orbe con la mayor ligereza o levedad calviniana posible.

Esto lo saben Jesse (Ethan Hawke) y Celine (Julie Delpy), los amantes trasatlánticos –él estadunidense, ella francesa– creados por el director Richard Linklater. Su itinerario, azaroso como el espíritu de los tiempos que corren, abarca ya una década. En *Before Sunrise* (1995) se toparon a bordo de un tren que salía de Budapest, el cual abandonaron para pasar un día y una noche en Viena conociéndose y amándose y despidiéndose con la promesa de volver a verse en esa capital reconstruida casi milimétricamente al cabo de la segunda guerra mundial

que Xiuzhen aún no incluye en su catálogo de urbes ingrávidas. En *Waking Life* (2001) se reunieron durante unos minutos en una cama un tanto temblorosa por efecto de la animación para ratificar que el único equipaje que necesitan son ellos mismos: sus cuerpos, sus ideas enunciadas a lo largo de una conversación interrumpida que al parecer madura en los intervalos en que no están juntos. En *Before Sunset* (2004) han coincidido de nuevo, ignoran e ignoramos si de forma definitiva, para reanudar el diálogo en París, Ciudad Luz rebautizada como ciudad-espejo en un ensayo de Walter Benjamin:

> Vidrieras delante de todos los bistrós: aquí las mujeres se ven más que en otras partes. De estos espejos salió la belleza de la mujer parisina. Antes de que la vea el hombre, ya la juzgaron diez espejos. También al hombre lo envuelve un exceso de espejos, especialmente en el café.

¿Y de qué hablan, cuál es el bagaje verbal que acarrean los amantes de Linklater a través de París en una ruta vespertina que arranca en Shakespeare & Co., sitio emblemático donde Jesse concluye el tour europeo de promoción de su primera novela? Pues de la vida, o lo que es igual, del desencuentro en Viena –Celine nunca llegó a la segunda cita acordada nueve años atrás porque su abuela falleció– y los derroteros de la casualidad, el sexo y los descalabros sentimentales, la soledad y la muerte, los sueños y las grúas cotidianas que los derrumban, la memoria y el fulgor de los momentos irrepetibles. Es decir que hablan, vagando por el asfalto "liso como un espejo" o sentados en la banca de un parque o a bordo de un barco turístico que circula por el Sena, del tiempo: presencia conspicua que asoma la cabeza en el libro autobiográfico de Jesse (*This Time*) y en la canción ("Just in Time", Nina Simone) con la que Celine baila en la sala de su departamento luego de interpretar un vals liviano, inspirado en la noche vienesa que ambos atesoran bajo llave en el baúl de la añoranza. "Chiquito, vas a perder tu vuelo", dice Celine imitando a la Simone, o lo que es igual: Si regresas a la rutina neoyorquina de la que buscas desprenderte, optarás por la pesadez y no por la levedad del instante, dejarás pasar nuestra tercera y quizá última oportunidad. "Lo sé", dice Jesse, imaginando tal vez sus maletas en el auto con chofer que lo aguarda, esbozando una sonrisa que clausura el filme con broche de oro.

Afuera del orbe tenue diseñado por los amantes, la tarde se desploma sobre una de las urbes portátiles de Yin Xiuzhen. La voz de Nina Simone sigue fluyendo con la suavidad del Sena, "el gran espejo siempre despierto de París –escribe Benjamin. Día a día, la ciudad tira sus construcciones sólidas y sus sueños de nubes como imágenes a este río. Él acepta las ofrendas condescendientemente y en señal de benevolencia las quiebra en mil pedazos".

ꝏ

En 1997 el fotógrafo Richard Misrach se mudó con su familia y sus sueños de nubes a las colinas de Berkeley, en el norte de California, para habitar una casa desde cuyo porche delantero se dedicó a retratar el Golden Gate, la sonrisa roja bajo la que Alfred Hitchcock depositó a Kim Novak con la idea de captar el vértigo del *flâneur* fantasma. El experimento dio buenos frutos: obra plúmbea por excelencia, el puente vuelto símbolo de la bahía de San Francisco –otra de las ciudades transportables de Xiuzhen– gana merced al ojo aéreo de Misrach una ligereza que perdura lo mismo en amaneceres brumosos que en mediodías despejados y anocheceres de una intensidad cromática que se antoja de otro universo.

En el texto fechado en agosto de 1999 que prologa *The Sky Book* (2000), el anterior proyecto de Misrach –*Golden Gate* data de 2001–, Rebecca Solnit, historiadora y ensayista radicada justo en San Francisco, dice:

> Hace unos días, mientras bellas y extrañas nubes flotaban en el suave firmamento gris al cabo de un diluvio, empecé a pensar que el cielo es la conciencia del paisaje [...] Las nubes son evanescentes, cambiantes. Sirven como manchas de Rorschach, sugiriendo analogías que cada quien interpreta a su gusto.

Y cita en un epígrafe a Eliot Porter, citado a su vez por David Brower: "No muestres el cielo a menos que tenga algo que decir".

Honda inmersión en la conciencia del paisaje, *The Sky Book* se divide en tres apartados: "Cielo", "Cuerpos celestes" y "Nubes nocturnas". En cada uno hay un desfile insólito de lugares, nombres, fechas y horarios que denominan o más bien concretan las abstracciones cazadas durante una suerte de saqueo espacial:

Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, Nuevo México, Oregon, Utah. Bloody Run Peak, Death Valley, Jerusalem Mountain, Little Sahara, Massacre Dry Lake, Paradise Valley, Radium Springs, Sarcobatus Flats, Twenty-Nine Palms, Unnamed Playa.

Casiopea, el cometa Hale-Bopp, Júpiter, la Luna, Marte, Orión, la Osa Mayor, Polaris, Sirio, Venus.

Nimboestratos, cúmulos, estratos, estratocúmulos, cumulonimbos, altocúmulos, altoestratos, cirrocúmulos, cirroestratos, cirros.

9.27.92, 6.24.93, 10.26.94, 3.22.95, 11.6.96, 10.3.97, 1.25.98.

1:06 a.m., 2:52 a.m., 3:50 a.m., 4:15 a.m., 5:48 a.m., 6:07 a.m., 7:52 a.m., 8:45 a.m., 4:40 p.m., 5:16 p.m., 6:58 p.m., 7:05 p.m., 8:59 p.m., 9:28 p.m., 10:46 p.m.

La combinación de palabras y cifras da como resultado títulos que son en realidad las coordenadas de un cartógrafo ansioso por reordenar el mundo: Ak Chin 11.5.96 5:59 p.m.; Polaris over Lake Mead 3.14.97-3.15.97 11:56 p.m.-4:15 a.m.; Clouds (Cirrocumulus Undulatus), Fool's Pond 6.30.96 11:41-11:56 p.m.

Richard Misrach entiende que el cielo tiene mucho que decir, y lo ha tomado por asalto con ayuda de su cámara para mostrarnos lo portátil que puede ser: todo cabe en una fotografía, en un libro, en un momento, sabiéndolo acomodar. Todo, aun los nueve años que debieron pasar para que unos amantes se reencontraran en París a ritmo de Nina Simone.

MÓNICA DE LA TORRE

TWO POEMS FROM "ONE HOUR PHOTO"

Undated *Magritte moment in Dingmans Ferry, Pennsylvania.*

On Received Ideas and their Visual Counterpart

Who said all clichés were originally coined by literary masters?
Many would disagree (where many already is commonplace).

Six houses around a pond, of which two are seasonally hidden
by trees and the like. At eleven o'clock the fog has lifted and

the rain has stopped temporarily. Two of the houses and their
corresponding foliage are perfectly replicated in the water.

The sky is too bright for such a late hour. It behaves as if
it were not eleven at night but more five o'clock in the morning.

This must have been his surreal moment. A chance encounter between
trees backlit by a full moon and the reflection of lit houses in water.

A cricket walks on the window's surface, its underside and three
pairs of legs are presumably green. One half of the pond refrains

from duplicating; there, it is fucking The Home Depot landstrip
suburban mall time. Tonight the pond, in the spirit of authenticity,

will not reflect those two houses. The neighbors hardly leave
their carpeted country home, so they chose to place fluorescent

orange outdoor lights at the edge of their share of the pond.
Directly across from us there seem to be a man and a woman,

they get close to each other and then back off. I couldn't take a picture
without wrecking the effect of the light on this ambivalent landscape.

In the *Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues* Flaubert says of photography:
Will replace paintings. A clumsy bullfrog plunges into the water.

How beautiful is nature! Repeat every time you are in the country.

10/19/03 Gathering at an art collector's home with Hillary Clinton in appreciation of artists who donated work to fund her campaign. The topic for today: What do artists need?

Combines in the Living Room: A Comic Strip

No one failed to notice this peculiar pattern: the older the artists the more pressing the need for them to discuss what to do about the inevitable estate tax that their families would have to pay upon their deaths. Notebooks, letters, sketchbooks, and even photographs deemed of historical value could become fiscal burdens as well.

> The answer: give away! (At the right time, of course, don't sit on it until it's too late. Think before you die.)

The setting in which history was being made was like a movie set that's not flimsy but rather *is* what it appears to be. Apt for a Gregory Crewdson shot, except it was all too bright. Less eerie than pop.

> Join the right side of history!

The host says to Tom Otterness that he's got one of his sculptures with overflowing bags of money in his office. He wants more!

In an assemblage by Jim Dine, which Senator Clinton faces, hangs a hammer, a pair of scissors, some rope, a screwdriver, and yarn.

> Pass them along so we can make something out of this!

Elizabeth Murray says to her "I was very upset that you supported the war."

Who wants to be on the wrong side of history?

But what side are we on, asks Julia Jacquette? I know it's funny that I'm telling you this at a place like this, surrounded by some of the world's top artists, when I only recently got health care.

Funny: Should be used on all occasions: "How funny!"

Lots of optical illusions. At the living room, in back of Hillary, hangs a huge Lichtenstein canvas. It's the interior of one of his signature houses. It's a kitchen, to be precise. Hillary in the kitchen. In the dinning room a Bridget Riley makes everything swirl. Or is it the Fauchon chocolate cake the guests are ecstatically consuming?

On Bush: Giving someone authority is like giving someone a driver's license. Who knows whether the driver will turn out to be a psychopath. They might be venal but they're not stupid.

Leon Golub sat in the middle of the room, pensive. Chuck Close made such faces he seemed to be falling asleep at times. Andrés Serrano tried hard to look smart. Katia looked beautiful and somewhat distant. Superman-jawed Alexis Rockman came in late but made a successful effort to call even more attention to himself by apologizing profusely.

Never confuse the message with the messenger.

OMAR PÉREZ

EL INTELECTUAL Y EL PODER EN CUBA

1- Observad mi pasaporte; en los datos personales, donde se define "profesión", reza "escritor". Aunque no pretenda remedar a Maiakovski, no puedo olvidar el sabor, la euforia de aquel poema que aprendimos en la escuela: soy poeta, sirvo al poder del pueblo. En realidad, me limito a constatar un hecho: la República de Cuba reconoce mi condición de escritor. Esto tiene ademas dos efectos secundarios. Uno, que mi madre se sienta orgullosa; otro, que los policías en la aduana me pregunten: "Qué escribe?" "Poesía", respondo. En cierta ocasión, cierto policía fue más lejos que los demas; ocurrió en el aeropuerto J.F. Kennedy de New York, algunas semanas despues de September/11: "Qué tipo de poesía?", inquirió.

—Poesía filosófica.

—Qué es poesía filosófica ?, insistió, poniéndome en aprietos. No recuerdo qué respondí; no sé lo qué es poesía, mucho menos qué cosa es poesía filosófica, ni tampoco filosofía, *bios kubernitis*, gobernadora de la vida, al decir de los antiguos griegos. En ese punto, sin embargo de dificultad, debo haber respondido satisfactoriamente ante el poder constituido. No se me oculta que una buena parte de las verdades son dichas para salir del paso, luego olvidadas. Preguntarán ustedes qué relacion tiene el interrogatorio de un policía del aeropuerto de New York con el tema en cuestión. En primer lugar, el diálogo entre poesía y poder es siempre

el mismo, independientemente de latitud y circunstancia. En segundo lugar, la situación de un poeta ante el poder en Cuba no es indiferente a su situación ante el poder de los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica y esto, que quizas pueda parecerle a un intelectual europeo una artimaña teórica es, en nuestras tierras, una realidad constante desde hace más de un siglo. No se preocupen; por esta vez no citaré a José Martí. Prosigo, pues, con el interrogatorio: "Se llama usted Omar, es de origen arabe?". Persistió aquel uniformado.

—No que yo sepa.

—Es entonces musulman? Buena pregunta; en el sentido de "abandonados a Dios", sea Dios lo que sea, Tao, Buda, cosmos, somos todos **muslim**. Sin embargo, no queriendo agravar con consideraciones teológicas mi situación de poeta procedente de una nación que hoy en día se considera "terrorista", respondí que no.

—Por qué entonces se llama Omar?

—Mi madre, en homenaje a aquel gran poeta, no árabe, sino persa, Omar el Khayamm, me dio su nombre.

Persa o árabe, cubano, ateo o creyente: poeta, siempre sospechoso ante el poder constituido en uniforme. Sin embargo, hasta ahora, en una u otra parte, éste a la larga, tras algunos interrogatorios, me dejó seguir en paz mi camino.

2- Siempre que regreso a Cuba, vuelvo intensamente a la condición política fundamental: la vida diaria. Percibo el imperativo de ordenar el discurso político, y poético, no a partir de la crítica al poder constituido sino de la observación del modo de vida de las gentes, a comenzar por el mío. Entiendo que es esta observación lo que enaltece al humano en tanto ser y lo prepara para modificar la realidad. Su realidad. En este proceso no soy el objeto pasivo de poder alguno exterior a mí que me diga qué debo observar y cómo, qué debo o no modificar y en cuál manera. En tanto que poeta soy, aquí y allá, el señor de mi propia realidad. Iluso? Romántico? Ya lo dijo Pushkin, que no fue ni impune ni del todo inerme ante el poder: el poeta debe ser un poco estúpido. Pero no es esta estupidez básica, inmemorial de humano-poeta la que ofusca o denigra; en ella residen ideales, cual sedimento de nuestra vida eterna, y estos son eternamente realizables.

Ahora bien, qué es, etimológicamente hablando, la crítica sin la crisis? Bienvenida sea, pues, esta crisis de sistemas, de discursos, de poderes que es, en

fin, la crisis de una civilización toda y su modelo de conciencia. Sin ella no nos sería dada hoy, aún, poesía; hoy aún reflexión; hoy, aún, filosofía. Quién que esté por encima de ella lanzará la primera piedra? Obviamente, hoy, se ha llegado a considerar un acto normal lanzar piedras, invectivas, bombas. El que hoy critica debe también saber cómo sembrar flores. Y si es preciso, lanzarlas. Este sería el mayor acto de poder.

3- Me detengo un momento en este punto; tal vez se dirá que he intentado eludir retóricamente el asunto de la relación intelectual-poder en Cuba. Ni por asomo; conozco de primera mano la censura y otros recursos extremos de la terapia política. No pueden disuadir al poeta que ha entregado su energía a avizorar un estadio superior de la conciencia. No es culpa ni privilegio de sistema alguno en específico, el haber convertido al poeta en rehén de la realidad. Aun cuando todos los sistemas, por su propia naturaleza de sistemas, se hayan en algún momento atribuido el dudoso mérito de sojuzgar la naturaleza toda y, por ende, la naturaleza humana y la raíz de la poesía, ha sido en realidad el poeta quien, en su impulso más puro y en los cuatro puntos cardinales, ha decidido sojuzgarse a sí mismo para permanecer, cantando, entre los hombres; esta fuerza de su elección es lo que lo ha hecho subsistir hasta hoy entre los perseguidos y los silenciados, los que mañana vamos a ver salir el sol del otro lado de la montaña.

4- Salgo a caminar; sí, ya lo sé, es la ciudad devastada que todos ustedes han visto en las páginas de *Le Monde Diplomatique* y en *Buena Vista Social Club* de Wim Wenders. Dejo a mi hijo a la puerta de la escuela remozada, un antiguo almacén de bienes decomisados por el estado. Según éste, el futuro de mi hijo está garantizado; según mi instinto de padre y de poeta, su presente no es más ni menos incierto que el de todos los habitantes de este planeta en ebullición, el volcán nuestro de cada día. El precio del noni, la fruta prodigiosa que, según se dice, posee 101 propiedades curativas, es de 5 pesos por unidad en el mercado estatal y 7 pesos en la tienda del yerbero. Las muchachas con las que me tropiezo por el camino a Centro Habana, son tan hermosas y lozanas como de costumbre, "como perlas preciosas, adorno de ilusión..."; en el Malecón una típica estampa del *latin socialism*: un hombre, al mando de la excavadora,

trabajando, y 19 hombres observando. No son curiosos, son obreros y jefes de obra: estos gesticulan, aquellos permanecen absortos en la contemplación. Uno, inclusive, se ha echado sobre el muro, reclina la cabeza en el muslo de un colega y fuma un cigarrillo. Marx y Lafargue, padre y yerno, eternamente conciliados: el derecho al trabajo y el derecho a la pereza en unidad dialéctica.

Por otra parte, aquellos que desde los *think tanks* del occidente cristiano y materialista han determinado que Cuba, entre otras naciones no hegemónicas, sea un país pobre, profesan no sólo un materialismo extremo y fundamentalista sino además una visión limitada y, a su vez, pobre de la materia-espíritu en desarrollo y movimiento. Pues la materia-espíritu no es sólo objeto, su libertad no es sólo albedrío y su realización no es sólo gratificación.

5- Quién dijo que todo lo real era racional, un ideólogo al servicio del partido o un poeta al servicio de la publicidad? En la propaganda al uso de la sociedad del capital prima el llamado a un *carpe diem* individualista: *be yourself*. E incluso, según observo en el aeropuerto de Amsterdam, *be a tiger*. No dejes que otros consuman por ti, aquí y ahora, consume cualquier cosa, pero consúmela **tú**. *Get a life*. En la sociedad más austera que a los cubanos nos ha tocado vivir, la propaganda intenta activar otras regiones de la conciencia. Verbigracia: no se puede derrotar a las ideas, las ideas son inmortales, etc. *Platon dixit, Marx dixit*. Hay, además, una palabra en la cual coinciden la propaganda mercantil y la política: **revolution**. Y aún otra en la cual desembocan todos los mensajes y valores ideológicos, económicos, místicos y suntuarios: energía. Misterio supremo de nuestra irrealidad.

En tanto que individuo, en tanto que poeta y, en cierto modo, en tanto que *idiota*, según el sentido helénico de individuo independiente, encuentro ambos llamados simpáticos y estimulantes. Llenos de gracia, sí, vacíos de sentido. Gracia y sentido; se encuentra aquí uno de los puntos de giro en los cuales el intelectual puede actuar ante el poder y en el seno social. Propongo combinaciones, por ejemplo: *Be yourself*, las ideas son inmortales. Como es natural, se sabe que para dialogar de manera directa con el poder son necesarias mejores herramientas que el mero ingenio verbal y conceptual que subyace a toda poesía filosófica. Pero, a fin de cuentas, no nos falta trabajo ni materia prima: cómo volver a llenar de

sentido esas parejas, sino de contrarios, de mal llevados conceptos que hemos heredado de nuestra civilización descompuesta: mesianismo y productividad, ahorro y dignidad, futuro y muerte, honestidad y democracia, revolución y consumo. Revolución: hoy te nombran en los comerciales en las cuatro esquinas del mundo; allellujah!

Habana, 28 de septiembre del 2005

ROBERTO ECHAVARREN

CENTRALASIA

Se quitó la peluca, y entonces vi
el cráneo plano, rapado con una rabadilla
y redondo como el picaporte redondo
antropomórfico, el cuerpo
macerado con crema, y listo para ser usado
en un ritmo cálido de samba
cuando engarza dos
no sólo en el prólogo, en el baile de pareja,
sino bajo la luz roja fumescente
si el tachonado guante plástico
estrena una cavidad obstétrica por nefando modo
y ella, la cavidad, se sacude, se balancea, se menea
sin que sea necesario bordonear salvo
en apoyo y compañía, secundando
las iniciativas de su ritmo
en acompañamiento concertado.

Esta es la ventaja de que él
se siente encima de mí.
Dejo el control cogiendo

a su iniciativa sin encargarme,
no queriendo querer
gozando.

Parte para lavarse, parte para amasar
los panes ácimos del desayuno;
a las dos de la madrugada me despierta.
Lo dejo en fin, tardo en redormirme,
le doy medicina para relajarlo y que descanse.

He mandado un hombre temprano
donde hay un buen montero,
he mandado un farante avisando
que me mostrara la caza.
"Aquí ya no hay caza en años."
Se siguen dares y tomares.

Instalamos tienda al otro lado del río,
no allí en terrenos de mal acerque,
manteniéndonos ocultos mientras nos escurríamos
entretanto se nos corrió
y así se desvanecieron
como lo fue, sin respiro,
la historia de la segunda acometida tras napus.

"Hoy sombra mía aún no son."
Me pareció reconocerlo en una foto.
Una pifia significaba o perder un caballo
en la corriente o averiar la carga
        o las dos cosas.
Marea y desorienta.

Trataría de cruzar yo primero:
momentos de ansiedad en cada caballo de la reata.
Esas breves palabras significan:

"Aquí tuve ocasión".
Si siempre cabe decir que cada día tiene su afán,
¡cómo trabajamos allí!
Vimos un varal, sí, pero muy lejos y corriendo.

Volvimos al mal asubio.
Yo después de tanto afán pensaba qué triste
debe ser para los soldados volver derrotados.

Al día siguiente de nuestra noche triste
me había metido un poco
en el lío de encontrar un atajo:
en unos peñascales un poco adelante
darle caza por la carne:
"Ya tenéis carne con que hartar el vientre".
Avanzando por el empecatado valle de charcos y corruscos
en él se marcaba allí una senda de herradura.
A poco de entrar en el valle
numerosos arroyos en laderas y hondonadas practicables,
alfombras de césped apretado y blando,
se veía el matojillo gris de los buenos pastos,
había flores y pudimos observar
pájaros y roedores.
Donde se guarecía el ganado
estaba ocupado por ortigas extendidas a secar.

El cansancio, el frío, el viento, el aire claro
de la madrugada y el crepúsculo
con sus gemidos y malestar,
su mal hígado,
hubimos de pensar que habíamos de resignarnos.

Tres podía yo cobrar en mi viaje,
según las reglas.

Llegó la hora de levantar el campo:
fuera lo que suele ocurrir
descubrí al instante el punto.
Mandé la reata que parase
de derrota de nuestra actual retirada;
en un acerque recto le señalé unas rocas
del primer tiro sino en ángulo,
una deseable diferencia
para tomar los errores que el aire enrarecido
y otros azares pudieran causar.

Un arrastrón de éstos
y no sólo por la postura
ya había tenido ocasión de notar.
Para "conseguir trabajo crítico"
hay que parar la respiración por un momento;
y esto, que no ofrece dificultad,
donde el ritmo respiratorio
aún acelerado, no basta.

Al llegar tras el parapeto de rocas
desenrollé la bufanda para poder
apoyar la mano en blando.
Con los anteojos los podía ver confiados.
El primer paso es dominarse y escoger cabeza.
Podía como dije en todo el viaje derribar tres.
No es fácil juzgar.
Disparé al que parecía más alto.
Un tiro y el animal cayó sobre sus rodillas.
Con las piernas medio temblando
estaba como loco.

Yo ya no estoy malo, ni del hígado.
Suspendimos la marcha y paramos otra vez.
Por la noche los lobos nos molestaron.

He cumplido con mi palabra en decir lo que me costó a mí.
Y todo esto saben ya mis lectores iniciados
lo que representa.

El viajero puede soñar y desear,
se sale de lo rutinario
vallas de cultura y el engranaje de ruedas;
el destino nos tiene pegados al rincón donde nacimos.
Pero ese tal ha de saber más que soñar
pasando por los estorbos y trabas del camino
y así la alegría triunfante
—éramos nosotros los que le debíamos la visita—
le saluda a uno como quien saludara a hermanos
que no vimos en años, a los que hemos estado
acercándonos trabajosamente,
venciendo la indiferencia y las trabas materiales
después de subir por una árida planicie
como quien entra en algo diferente,
plazuela alargada con dos filas de álamos
a ambas manos de la calzada,
los lados que salen a recibirnos.

La rueda no ha entrado,
no hay miedo a vehículos,
un aspecto confiado y activo
y valientes peatones se alternan en los relevos.
"Ya se cruzó aquel paso."
Y el que había empezado en nueve meses de mal tiempo
se le ve hacer preparativos callados:
la misma voz y lo mismo
se enroscan y desenroscan,
se abren despidiendo amigable
o brindando el soñado alivio,
muy falsamente hosquedad absurda
el temple en la dura montería.

Y cada vez que tascamos el freno
miedos tan amenazantes que los consideramos peores.
Se defiende con mojones, banderas
y encantamientos inocentes
un caudal de nuestra excelencia
y un determinado quantum irrecobrable.

Y ese movimiento hacia abajo
él mira con cavilación inquisitiva.
Todo esto podría ser un poco inquietante
además de las fiestas corrientes
y el alargamiento del día sobre la noche
al compás de la flauta, la trompeta y el tambor
en la danza entre otras de la sangre,
la quema solemne del rollo en que escribieron
los males de que el cielo ha de librarnos
en el nuevo año.

El progreso viene de la antecesora
—de abuela a nieto—
un relieve incrustado en la pupila
flotante contra un fondo zafiro
que le preste palpitante ámbito
y avanza retrocediendo
—vuelto atrás— como si mirarla
fuera fuente de vida:
el agua del afecto en la hinchada rosa,
una vida por las fronteras,
y ella alentara la discriminación
que trasparenta el criterio:
tras puertas de cuerno
ventanas de cornalina.
Padece heladas,
la ceguedad de nieve y los puertos
y llega a término de su viaje.

Estaba condenada a muerte.

Un jovencito inteligente, puro e incontaminado
se dio a la meditación
porque venció una vez:
¿será su ansia de liberación un heraldo
y preparación no hedonista
de agua vivificadora?
Su carne bronceada,
ciñendo a la cintura, desnudo el torso,
un chal ligero, se sentaba
entre las plásticas raíces de la higuera
dejados caer los brazos en mudra de descanso
al margen de la religión.

Transmigran agobiantes penosos retrocesos
algo aberrantes por la serpiente,
el palomo y el cerdo, que forman
el cubo de la rueda del destino.
La quietud liberadora nos arranca de ese círculo
en la rueda de lamas poco fervientes,
elementos extraños a su pureza,
deidades subordinadas al gran ser,
al comienzo más bien como atributos suyos
o como virtudes personificadas o reencarnaciones,
aplacando primero los espíritus adversos,
una evolución del concepto de indiferencia
una manifiesta benevolencia,
un concepto tolerante,
las bellezas de abultados contornos de los monjes,
una indudable maestría contra el fondo incongruente
de sus cuevas basálticas
acogió de nuevo la ancha gama,
la misión de aplacar endriagos
con el poder de la yerba de las montañas.

Una vez al año volverán tal vez a descansar,
a asomarse de nuevo a la cámara recóndita
en donde representan y se aplacan venerando.

La acción, que todo lo mueve, es una.
Cualquier acto repercute en toda la masa de lo existente.
Todo acto es resultado de otro y origen de nuevos actos,
una complicación profunda, una responsabilidad.
Proviene del deseo, pues la ignorancia
que nos hace querer esto así o asá
es nuestra mejor guía.
El conocimiento nos daría el no desear,
entonces cesarían afinidades y repulsiones.
En el instante en que se parara el deseo
se pararía la rueda,
prerrogativas de bienestar, carencia de dolor,
grado avanzado y boca diminuta,
víctima de retortijones.
Las representaciones no quedan atrás
de las torturas imaginadas;
se representa entre otros el tormento del fuego
en país frigidísimo.
El mayor mal de este infierno es la mente.
La causa del sufrimiento es la ignorancia.
La acción cesa y ya no hay más renacer ni morir.
Un gallo o palomo representa la concupiscencia,
la atracción de las cosas,
del yo al otro no yo
nacen esas dudas y deseos
de la noción de dos.

FRAGMENTOS DE *DOUBLED FLOWERING: FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF ARAKI YASUSADA*

Hija Loca y Big-Bang

Diciembre 25, 1945

Caminando por el huerto
tarde en la noche, descubrí estupefacto
la cabeza cortada de mi
hija loca que yacía por tierra.

Sus ojos vueltos hacia arriba, me observaban, como en éxtasis...

A lo lejos parecía una piedra, con un halo de luz,
(cual arrojada allí por el Big-Bang.)

Qué es lo que estás haciendo, dije,
te ves ridícula.

Unos muchachos me enterraron aquí,
dijo de pronto.

Su pelo oscuro, estela de un cometa…

En cuclillas, saqué
el nabo por la raíz.

Telescopio con Urna
Febrero 14, 1960

La imagen de las galaxias se esparce como una nube de esperma.

Expandiéndose, dice el guía del observatorio, a tal y más cual velocidad.

Es como la idea de las flores, abriéndose dentro de la idea de las flores.

Me gusta pensar en ello, dijo el Monje, arreglándolas con sus dedos de papel.

Pequeñita eras tú, y te acuclillaste sobre un cuenco color cielo para hacer aguas.

Qué muchacha tan grande, gritamos, lanzándote en la dirección general de las estrellas.

Deliberadamente, entonces, en un sueño, plegué el gran telescopio sobre el Monte Horai.

En la forma de esta garza, es lo bastante pequeño para la urna.

Sueño y carbón
[*sin fecha*]

Y entonces ella dijo: he ido hacia la luz y me hice hermosa.

Y entonces ella dijo: cogí un par de alas y las pegué
a las retro-partes de mi cuerpo.

Y entonces ella dijo: todos los invitados están
volviendo adonde estaban y entonces hablan.

A lo cual ella dijo: sin mango para agarrarla, cómo
puedes reconocer mi desnudez?

A lo cual ella replicó: sin nada es cuando mueren todas las cosas.

Que es cuando ella sostuvo una loca batalla con las ramitas.

Que es cuando el carbón pasó de su cuerpo al mío.

Que es como ella ascendió hasta los cielos, cegando peatones.

Que es como nuestra unión fue traspuesta a un garabato oscuro.

Que devino la hija llamando, llamando mi nombre para despertarme.

[*Nota de Yasusada*] Tarea 20 ("Escribir en el estilo de otro")
Mayo 21, 1967

El Poeta Recibe una Tarjeta de Felicitación de Su Ex-Esposa Por la Publicación de Su Primer Libro.

Tus poemas son muy bellos, tan puros
y clásicos en voz y tono; las alusiones
mitologicales [*sic*] osadas en el contexto contemporáneo
sin embargo precisas. Asombrada, una amiga mía comparó
tu resonancia a la de Catulo. Estoy enamorada
de esos versos que abren la oda a Perséfone:

Esos cabellos rizados a hierro caliente,
empapados en mirra, Turnus es llevado
a toda velocidad por las Furias...

Quién pudo jamás darse cuenta que tras esa voz
están el alma y corazón de un comemierda?

Sr Rogers: Puedo explicar? Su tarea de escribir en la voz de otro está aquí cumplimentada, pero de una libertinaria [*sic*] manera. En realidad, lo que he hecho aquí es provocar una *triple* imitación. Aquí están las voces de 1) la esposa, 2) el poeta, y los ecos (así espero) de 3) Catulo, el gran poeta erótico del Imperio de Roma. Usted nos pidió amablemente escribir en la voz de otro. Creo, muy francamente, que toda escritura ha atravesado ya las voces y estilos de muchos otros. Esto, así lo creo en mi corazón, es la médula misma de la escritura.

Yasusada

[*Nota del profesor de Inglés a pie de página*]

Querido Sr Yasusada:

Estoy en total desacuerdo con sus observaciones acerca de la "escritura" (de

lo contrario, cómo podríamos explicarnos aquellos autores del pasado que desplegaron originalidad y grandeza incuestionables?) A fin de cuentas, es que Homero, Shakespeare o Sir Walter Scott, digamos, uno de los grandes poetas de mi patria*, "pasaron a través de las voces de otros"? Si así lo cree, yo estaría muy interesado en escuchar sus argumentos! No obstante, me complazco en darle un "Sobresaliente"por la inusual imaginación y creatividad. Y, debo decirlo, asimismo por su malévolo sentido del humor!

Sr Rogers

*[*Esta referencia revela que el Sr Rogers era escocés. Eds.*]

6*

Te calientas y te enfrías, y
Si atravieso con mi lengua tu boca que habla, sé que no hay
nada ahí. Pero si detengo mi lengua dentro de una oración
escrita,
Se quema, se me ampolla.
Esto es un acto de olvidar que los muertos están muertos y que así
es. Olvidar la vela sostenida tras la figura que habla
Tras la pantalla.
O es que la boca, caligráfico amigo, echa sus propias sombras?
"En Hiroshima," escribes, "las sombras de los vencedores estaban como
fotografiadas en los bloques de concreto."
O simplemente quedan prendidas por largo tiempo? O es que ambos compartimos
una lengua olvidada?
O nos pasan por el embudo
hasta el ideográfo apenas legible sobre la pantalla
de papel-
El espacio en derredor
Donde la sombra y la boca son una?

Traducción de Omar Pérez

**[Caligrafía a tinta en el silabario katakana sobre hoja suelta de papel hecho a mano. Este poema es una transformación del poema #6 en el volumen* Language *de Jack Spicer, 1965. La cita directa de los originales de Spicer contiene una variante: Yasusada, de una pincelada, cambió "vencedores" por "víctimas."]*

CÉSAR VALLEJO

ELEVEN POEMS FROM *THE BLACK HERALDS*

Our Bread

For Alejandro Gamboa

One drinks one's breakfast. The damp graveyard
earth smells of beloved blood.
City of winter... Mordant crusade
of a cart that seems to drag along
a feeling of fasting in chains!

One wants to knock on each door
and ask for who knows who; and then
see to the poor, and, crying softly,
give morsels of bread to everybody.
And to strip the rich of their vineyards
with the two saintly hands
that with a blast of light
flew off unnailed from the Cross!

Matinal eyelash, don't raise up!
Our daily bread—give it to us,
Lord...!

All my bones belong to others;
maybe I stole them!
I took for my own what was perhaps
meant for another;
and I think that, had I not been born,
another poor man would be drinking this coffee!
I'm a lousy thief... Where will I go?

And in this cold hour, when the earth
smells of human dust and is so sad,
I want to knock on every door
and beg who knows who, forgive me,
and bake him morsels of fresh bread
here, in the oven of my heart...!

Lines

Each ribbon of fire
that, in quest of Love,
I fling and vibrates in pitiful roses,
births me to the burial of a day before.
I do not know if the drum roll in which I seek it
will be the grasping of a rock
or the perennial birth of heart.

Extended toward the depth of beings
is an ultranervous axis, a deep plumb line.
Thread of destiny!
Love will divert such a law of life
toward the voice of Man;
and will give us a supreme liberty
in blue, virtuous transubstantiation,
against what is blind and what is fatal.

Let there palpitate in each cipher,
imprisoned in the frail dawns,
an even better Jesus from another great Yolk!

And afterward… The other line…
A Baptist who keeps watch, keeps watch, keeps watch…
And, rising on an intangible curve,
one foot bathed in purple.

The Miserable Supper

How long will we have to wait for what is
not owed to us… And in what corner will
we kick our poor sponge forever! How long before
the cross that inspires us does not rest its oars.

How long before Doubt toasts our nobility for
having suffered…
We have already sat so
long at this table, with the bitterness of a child
who at midnight, cries from hunger, wide awake…

And when will we join all the others, at the brink
of an eternal morning, everybody breakfasted.
For just how long this vale of tears, into which
I never asked to be led.
Resting on my elbows,
all bathed in tears, I repeat head bowed and
defeated: how much longer will this supper last.

There's someone who has drunk too much, and he mocks us,
and offers and withdraws from us—like a black spoonful
of bitter human essence—the tomb…
And this abstruse one knows
even less how much longer this supper will last!

The Eternal Nuptial Bed

Only when it ceases to be, is Love strong!
And the tomb will be a huge eyeball,
in whose depths the anguish of love
survives and weeps, as in a chalice
of sweet eternity and black dawn.

And lips curl up for the kiss,
as when something full overflows and dies;
and, in convulsed conjunction,
each mouth renounces for the other
a life of moribund life.

And when I think this way, sweet is the tomb
where everybody finally interpenetrates
in a single roar;
sweet is the shadow, where everybody unites
in a universal assignation of love.

Altarpiece

I tell myself: at last I have escaped the noise;
no one sees me on my way to the sacred nave.
Tall shades attend,
and Darío who passes with lyre in mourning.

With innumerable steps the gentle Muse emerges,
and my eyes go to her, like chicks to corn.
Ethereal tulles and sleeping titmice harass her,
while the blackbird of life dreams in her hand.

My God, you are merciful, for you have bestowed this nave
where these blue sorcerers perform their duties.
Darío of celestial Americas! They are so much
like you! And from your braids they make their hair shirts.

Like souls seeking burials of absurd gold,
these wayward archpriests of the heart,
probe deeper, and appear…and, addressing us from afar,
bewail the monotonous suicide of God!

Pagan Woman

To go along dying and singing. And to baptize shadow
with the Babylonian blood of a noble gladiator.
And to initial the gold carpet's cuneiforms
with a nightingale quill and the blue ink of sorrow.

Life? A protean female. To contemplate her alarmed
escaping in her veils, a heathen, deceitful Judith;
to see her from the wound, and to seize her with a look,
inlaying a ruby with a wax caprice.

The must of Babylon, a Holofernes without troops,
I hung my nest in the Christmas tree;
the redeeming vineyard denied love to my cups;
Judith, perfidious life, slanted her sacrificial body.

What a pagan feast. And to love her unto death,
while my veins sow the red pearls of wickedness;
in this way to return to dust, a luckless conquistador,
on the dagger leaving thousands of eyes of blood.

The Eternal Dice

For Manuel González Prada
this wild, choice emotion,
one for which the great master has
most enthusiastically applauded me.

My God, I am crying over the being I live;
it grieves me to have taken your bread;
but this poor thinking clay
is no scab fermented in your side:
you do not have Marys who leave you!

My God, had you been a man,
today you would know how to be God;
but you, who were always fine,
feel nothing for your own creation.
Indeed, man suffers you; God is he!

Today there are candles in my sorcerer eyes,
as in those of a condemned man—
my God, you will light all of your candles
and will play with the old die...
Perhaps, oh gambler, throwing for the fate of
the whole universe,
Death's dark circled eyes will come up.
like two funereal snake eyes of mud.

My god, and this deaf, gloomy night,
you will not be able to gamble, for the Earth
is a worn die now rounded from
rolling at random,
it cannot stop but in a hollow,
the hollow of an immense tomb.

SANCTOLOGY
(Paragraphs)

Old Osiris! I came as far as the wall
facing life.

And it seems to me that I have always had
this wall within reach.

I am the shadow, the reverse: everything passes
under the steps of my eternal column.

I have dragged in nothing by its hair; everything
came easily to me, like an inheritance.

Sardanapalus. So, my mouth was
the electric button of a dream machine.

Thus have I arrived at the wall facing me;
a wall always within reach.

Old Osiris! I forgive you! For nothing
ever needed anything from me, nothing, nothing…

Rain

In Lime… In Lima it is raining
the dirty water of pain
so deadly. It is raining
through the leak in your love.

Don't pretend to be sleeping,
remember your troubadour;
for I now understand…understand
the human equation of your love.

Tempestuous and meretricious gem,
the witchery of your "yes"
thunders on the mystical flageolet.

More, the downpour resounds
the coffin of my path,
where I ossify for you…

Muleteers

Muleteers, you walk fabulously glazed in sweat.
Menocucho hacienda
charges a thousand displeasures a day for life.
It is noon. We've arrived at the waist of day.
The sun that hurts so much.

Muleteers, with your beet-red ponchos you depart,
savoring the Peruvian romance of your coca.
And, from a hammock,
from a century of doubt,
I ponder your horizon and observe, deploring
the long-shanked mosquitoes and the charming, feeble
refrain of a "paca-paca."
In the end you will arrive where you should arrive,
muleteer, who, behind your sanctimonious burro,
trudge on. . . . . .
trudge on. . . . . .

Lucky you, in this heat in which all anxieties,
all motives rear up;
when the spirit that barely animates the body
goes without coca, and does not manage to halter
its beast toward the oxidental
Andes of Eternity.

JANUNEID

My father can, hardly,
in the birdborne morning, get
his seventy-eight years, his seventy-eight
winter branches, out into the sunlight.
The Santiago graveyard, anointed
with Happy New Year, is in view.
How many times his footsteps have cut over toward it,
then returned from some humble burial.

Today it's a long time since my father went out!
A hubbub of kids breaks up.

Other times he would talk to my mother
about city life, politics;
today, supported by his distinguished cane
(which sounded better during his years in office)
my father is unknown, frail,
my father is a vesper.
He carries, brings, absent-mindedly, relics, things,
memories, suggestions.
The placid morning accompanies him
with its white Sister of Charity wings.

This is an eternal day, an indigenous, childlike,
choral, prayerful day;
time is crowned with doves
and the future is filled with
caravans of immortal roses.
Father, yet everything is still awakening;
it is January that sings, it is your love
that keeps resonating in Eternity.
You will laugh with your little ones,
and there will be a triumphant racket in the Void.

It will still be New Year. There will be empanadas
and I will be hungry, when Mass is rung
in the pious bell tower by
the kind of melic blind man with whom
my fresh schoolboy syllables, my rotund
innocence, chatted.
And when the morning full of grace,
from its breast of time
which are two renunciations, two advances of love
which stretch out and plead for infinity, eternal life,
sings, and lets fly plural Words,
tatters of your being,
at the edge of its white
Sister of Charity wings, oh! my father!

Translated by Clayton Eshleman

STEVE TOMASULA

THE COLOR OF FLESH

Sunset. If it didn't happen we could paint it better.
—Bob Holman

On top of everything, she cut herself.

"Shit!" Yumi yelled, dropping both X-acto knife and the glossy gun catalog she'd been cutting in the kitchen.

"What's the matter?" Jerome called from his studio.

"Nothing," she yelled, ambulancing her finger from kitchen table to bathroom, telling one of those white lies we all tell when we're too busy, or too blue—when we're preoccupied, don't care or are unaware; too harried, polite or green, dulled by routine, too livid or 'don't want to deal with it'; too 'I don't have time for this'; too stuck in our rut—simplify, simplify—don't want to fight—just yet—or maybe too pissed to explain.

"His fault," she muttered, holding her finger under the bathroom faucet; her wound—as rends in flesh are called—stung—the stream of cold water turning rosé (red, Jerome would say) before swirling down the drain. After patting her finger dry she put on a Band-Aid, and here is where our story really begins.

Slowly she raised her finger into the bright white of the mirror above the sink, her attention arrested by how little the flesh-colored Band-Aid resembled the

color of her flesh. The sight of it, the sound of Jerome hammering in the bedroom he used as his studio, then his heavy grunting—with a sexual rhythm—made her want to cry. But she didn't cry. She looked at the wan face looking back at her from her bathroom mirror, at the quiver in her lip, and resolved to be stronger than that—she had always been stronger than that. Then she sat down on the toilet to think.

How had she not noticed this difference before, she wondered, running her hand over what she already knew to be the answer: her prosthetic leg—and how closely the Band-Aid matched the color of its smooth skin, that is, matched her. Or so it might have been natural for her to conclude, she thought, given the continuum between this moment, this Band-Aid, this leg, and the series of legs she had had, going back to her childhood, back to when her mother would take her to the store that sold such things and they'd pick one out: a happy shopping trip that included a new pair of shoes. It was like buying a new school uniform at the start of each year to replace one that no longer fit. Only a leg wasn't a uniform. Or a pair of shoes. It was more intimate than that. More intimate than even dentures. Almost a part of her even though it was apart from her. Or maybe it was more correct to say its apartness was a part of her. Which isn't to say that she ever confused the leg she wore—is that the right word?—with herself. There was her leg, then there was her other leg. Her not-leg. And her not-leg, like the Band-Aid, was always a pale shade of?—what?—not white, not the white of a ghost or a dead person, but not the color of flesh either, not if her other leg, her non-prosthetic leg, was the color of flesh. Whatever that meant.

On one of those outings she'd seen another girl being fitted for a charity leg: a black girl, as they were called then, even though everyone knew black skin wasn't black any more than white skin was white. Rather, the girl's skin was more coffee-colored while Yumi's own skin was, well, coffee-colored too. Or call it tea. Or bamboo, if that helps you imagine it more. But trying on the new, old donated leg with its straps and buckles, the girl looked black because the leg was white, that is, a vinyl, orangey color. Nevertheless, she was so happy about getting a new old leg that she seemed completely oblivious to the mismatch in color. Or maybe the new old leg was so not her that it didn't matter. Or was so much a part of her that it didn't matter. In any case, Yumi had been

so moved by the girl's enthusiasm, by her unflinching nature, that she resolved to be like her.

Despite the protests of her mother, when it came Yumi's turn to be fitted, she chose one of those new stainless steel legs, a leg that instead of skin evoked things modern: space ships, or chrome, abstract sculpture like Constantin Brancusi's *Bird in Space*, but most importantly, that black-not-black girl, that is, a girl who wasn't embarrassed for her other leg, her leg-not, and so avoided dances, roller-rinks, pogo sticks, hopscotch, sack races, any situation that would call attention to it.

Perhaps this is why, years later, she fell so hard for Jerome.

From his studio came a murderous scream. "I'll kill you, Bitch!"

Jerome was a performance artist of sorts and was rehearsing the script he was to stage in a few days. The scream was followed by crashes, then Jerome swearing at the top of his lungs, first in his own voice, then in his other own voice, the voice of the female lead, which he also played in the one-person dramas he created.

She loved him for his sense of humor. For his looks. But most of all, she realized, recalling how quickly she had moved in with him, she loved him because he loved her in spite of her leg/not-leg: the antithesis, she had thought, of that joke she met on-line, the grin he wore in his on-line photo collapsing in real time as he entered the restaurant they'd agreed to meet at and he caught sight of her leg. "I'm sorry," he coughed before running away. With Jerome, though, the transition from the prosthetics aisle of the medical supply store where they met, to lunch, then dinner, then bed, had been so smooth that she had to struggle to remember them as discrete events. It was only afterwards, after she was living in his apartment, that she began to notice things. Small things. Like the Band-Aids that had been as invisible as the air she moved through but now, now that Jerome polluted this same air with doubt, bothered her as much as—Well, as much as she'd been bothered by birds.

That is, after stumbling upon his collection of pornography—a whole drawerful—she'd begun to notice lots of things she never had before, the first being how radically different the thing a hummingbird had to do to stay in the air was from what a hawk did to stay in the air. Or a jet. Or hot-air balloon. And yet all four activities were called flying. The same with walking. After finding

more, and worse, porno mags in the closet—graphic, vulgar things—she couldn't help but remember how radically different what she did to go for a stroll was from what people with two natural legs did. If stairs were involved, what she did was closer to swimming. Yet both acts were called "walking."

Walking. With people gawking as though watching a parade go by....

Her thoughts began to trip over themselves for if things as obvious and fundamental as legs and walking could be so disjointed what of the unseen? What of ideas? Or feelings. How large could the gap be between what one person felt and what another called.... Love?

Enormous, she realized. And it was the freak-factor of his magazines that told her so: magazines with cheesecake shots of white women wearing corsets so tight that their waists could be squeezed into napkin rings. Some of the women in these magazines were missing a limb. Some both legs. All of them were missing clothes. Naked. All that skin, she'd thought, turning one flesh-colored page after another, sheer repetition bringing home the fact that everyone had skin. Men and women. Bears had skin. Snakes too. Tomatoes and potatoes and grapes. And yet....

When she heard Jerome coming home from the medical supply route he worked, she quickly hid the magazines back in his dresser, back where she had found them, and she kept her peace, trying to figure out what all those white women, and his owning them, could mean.

Judging from outward appearances, nothing had changed. Jerome kissed her as he often did when he came home to find her already there; their evenings were spent as they spent many evenings with her reading or drawing wide-eyed girls, rampaging robots, up-skirts and explosions, using her X-acto knife to cut from hardware or gun-lover magazines the pictures that she added to the girls to create cyborgs who fought injustice in the manga world she authored while Jerome worked at what he thought of as his real calling, his art, making life-sized puppets, building the sets, incorporating the crash-test dummies or CPR manikins he bought at employee discount for the avant-garde puppet burlesques he put on in whatever gallery or warehouse would have him.

The new one-man production he was working on was to open in a few days so he was very busy, retreating into his studio as soon as he got home. So

she bid her time, worked on her manga, and waited for a good moment to bring up his collection, not sure how to bring it up.

Inside, though, she was all turmoil. The thought of living with someone who was really in love with her leg-not, grew increasingly unsettling. Mortifying in the context of her own personal situation. Even sick. Her mood teeter-tottered as she sifted their six months together for clues to what he really felt about her. She had no memory of him even mentioning her leg unless she brought it up first but she couldn't decide what this might mean. After all, she'd never brought up his. Or the color of his flesh for that matter. Still, she couldn't shake the feeling that she had trusted him with no real reason (unless that's what trust was), and he had pulled the rug out from under her. From under them. From under whatever it was that they had had. Or what she had thought they had had or what she had thought he had thought they had had and that was the most dizzying thing of all—the idea that what they had actually had was a nothing. A void. An absence—at best a gap between what she thought and what he meant by "love," a disconnect because he hadn't lied to her, no, but because he was telling the truth when he said he loved her, meaning something like arousal, or desire, something like what he felt toward all those nude and limbless women in the magazines—or that he felt about her in some other way that shared only the most cartoon of outlines with what she meant when she said she loved him—or even that he felt something like she felt toward him only to a different degree.

There were degrees as well as kinds of love, weren't there?—a mother's love as well as puppy love. Pure love—as well as impure love. A 17% pure love but love nonetheless. The newly-minted love she and Jerome had shared. Nature's Second Sun. Not Darwin's selfish genes. Mutations. Zoos of love—and those were just the loves that had labels. Yes, she realized, as surely as there was no one color of skin, there must be loves that fell between labels, between words, rivers of loves—*the wine of love*—that went right through the finest mesh of letters: more loves that had no name than loves that did and each one being itself just as the crayon labeled "Flesh" could itself be neither true nor false. If there was a lie, it was on its wrapper, in its name, what was said about the crayon, and the same was true for all those things that were called love—*My love is a red, red rose*—the labels for loves no more unfailing than those for colors.

Still, philosophy didn't buy her much, she realized. Not if friendship could be a shade of love. Not if curiosity could be a color. Not if some perv's itch could be a love. Worst of all, there was pity.

Her instinct was to haul his magazines out into the light and demand to know his true feelings. But she was afraid to have her worst fears confirmed and the dream she'd been living popped like the bubble it was. Wouldn't you? Then, preoccupied over what to do, she'd cut herself. Now, sitting on the toilet in the bathroom, she knew she could not go on this way any longer.

She rose and took a hard look at herself in the mirror. Her body was still young even if tiny crinkles had begun to appear at the corners of her eyes; her chin was slacker than it appeared in the manga-style drawings of her face that she sometimes included in crowd scenes while the angular, samurai contours that made the heroine of her strip look semi-machine-like increasingly illustrated by contrast how quickly real bodies, like hers, lost their edge. The thought of another round of first dates sent a shudder through her. Equally repugnant was the idea of having it out with Jerome over this, the two of them slipping into some absurdist, *shoujo manga*—that is, girls' manga—about their true feelings or whether what they shared had been a lie, or if the fog she had entered was the true delusion, an illusion cast by an evil scorer who they could somehow defeat with a flower. Or a song. But what else could she do? Resigned, afraid, full of dread, angry that she—that no one—could escape their own human comedy—it's hard to describe the complex of emotions raging through her though mostly she was afraid that she was about to lose what she thought she had had by discovering that it had never been there to have—she took a deep breath, opened the bathroom door, and went out to face whatever twist life deemed to place in her plot.

She found him in his studio, back to her, adjusting the cape of the life-sized crash-test dummy that he had dressed for its role as Mr. Invincible. Arranged as a crowd of gawkers were his other cast members: naked store manikins, all bald and as genital-free as Barbie though with varying degrees of nipple realism; there were also CPR Dummies, their mouths open Os like the mouth of the Inflatable Suzie beside them but made for paramedics to practice clearing blocked air passages. He'd positioned the crowd so their painted faces appeared to be shocked by the rubber butt that was mooning them, that is, by his Prostrate Exam Simulator,

realistic penis and scrotum dangling, while three other Disease and Burn Victim Medical Training Manikins stood in the poses of See, Hear, and Speak No Evil.

She braced herself. "Jerome," she began, "why do we call our bedroom your studio?"

"Hmmm?" he asked absentmindedly, bending over the pride of his collection, a Geriatric Care Manikin that was more fully jointed than those pose-able manikins carved from blonde wood and sold in art supply stores. The vinyl this one was made of had been molded to give it an old person's wrinkles. It could be converted from a man to a woman and it came with fully functional cavities, if by functional you meant, like the manufacturer, that its nostrils could be suctioned, enemas and catheters applied.... Jerome was at the point in the play where Mr. Invincible is reincarnated as Old Mother so was switching the genitals of the manikin.

"I said why do we call our bedroom your studio?"

"We only have one bedroom," he said, gripping the plastic penis like the handle of a pump. Enough leverage and the whole genital area snapped out. "This is the only room we have with space for my work. You know that."

"But why do we call it that? You could still work here even if we called it our bedroom. It is the room where we keep our bed. And sleep. And make love. It's our boudoir. I mean, I make my strip in the kitchen but we still call it the kitchen."

He stood and faced her, dressed in plaid boxer shorts. Over his bare chest he wore a Breast Self-Examination Training Vest: a realistic, flesh-colored, silicon casting of the front of a woman with C-cup breasts. "Is something bothering you?" he asked. The breasts were white, alabaster in contrast to his own bronze skin.

"Jerome," she said, steadying her voice, "I found your magazines."

He stood there, the bathing beauty's symmetry of the breasts strapped to his chest pointing out everything she wasn't, a stunned stupid look on his face asking for an explanation, and to give him one she marched over to his stack of appliance manuals and pushed, sending them to the floor. The covers of a dozen of his porno mags fanned out like paint samples in a hardware store, a rainbow of pink tones.

"They're for my work," he said icily. "I use them as reference material."

She had expected a little humility. An apology. Not some chicken-shit dodge, not some bullshit attitude, so she strode to the dresser where she had first discovered a few magazines hidden among his underwear, growing more angry at him for lying to her than for having the magazines to begin with. "Oh yeah?" she yelled, jerking the drawer open to expose them; but she did so with such force that it came out of the dresser and fell to the floor. There, in the cavity beneath where the drawer had been, were more magazines—hardcore, cripple-fuck magazines she hadn't known about—and the sight of them flash-flooded her with the rage of having caught him in the act, in bed with some other—

How many more? "Liar!"

"I never lied!"

She threw open the closet and with a yank brought down a cascade of magazines. "Perv!" Years worth of subscriptions. Yes, subscriptions that he must have continued across moves, using the change of address cards. "You were hiding them! You don't hide all this other shit!" she yelled, indicating the stuff he brought home from the medical supply house he worked for: Mr. Budget Intubation Head; Baby Blood-Pressure Arm; the Bleeding-Wound Variety Pack and the rest of his freak show—his cabinet of curiosities that she—the jewel of his collection—had been living within, thinking all the while that it was their home! She fought to hold back the tears she could feel coming on, hold back her anger as well as stand against the loss, waiting to see what he would answer. Waiting to see if it was her not-leg that he was in love with, no not love, in lust with. He cleared his throat to speak. This better be good, she thought.

But it wasn't. Instead, he said the one thing he could to send her over the edge—"I was trying to protect you from—" Her fury roiled out as words: "Protect me? Protect me?" she yelled, feeling herself slip into a space she had never been before, a zone where she was beside herself watching herself swell into one of the gigantic robots of her strip, the size and weight of her anger taking on a momentum of its own, a life of its own that was also strangely liberating as she toppled first his tool chest, then his manikins; Hear, See and Speak No Evil fell like dominos.

"Stop!" he cried, his rubber breasts slapping about as he rushed to catch his props, the concern he had for his manikins—but not her!—fueling her robot's rampage. "Stop it!"

He begged her to stop trashing the months he'd spent creating his show while she screamed at him for the lie, for always it was a lie. "You mean protect yourself!" Oh, she'd had it with the hypocrisy of people—and now him!—pretending to protect her. Or to not see her, looking away, or looking right through her and her leg. "Protecting themselves!" She grabbed Mr. Invincible by his cape and flung him out the door of the bedroom. He crash-landed into one of the end tables in the living room. Her life had been a saga of everyone doing everything except just acting like she was normal. "A human being," she yelled, their argument and the limbs of his puppets spilling into the living room, the narrow rooms too small to hold her rage. Then, as quickly as her robot had blasted through his laboratory, it exhausted itself.

She flung herself onto the couch and let go a heavy sob. When she managed to choke it back, calm down, she buried her face in the cushions as she laid out for him wounds she had thought were forgotten: winning the Silver at an all-school art show because, as she later learned from the mother of Bronze, a judge felt sorry for her; Pegleg—punks on the subway sniggering behind her back.... She told him about being one of those girls who could walk into a dance and turn every man's head—away. "Their discomfort was palpable." She told him about girding herself for brave happiness, about guys from the on-line dating service, about the monumental scale of staircases in government buildings, their giant-sized flights designed to make mere citizens feel humble and people like her less than citizens.... After the longest time she opened an eye. Jerome was still there, still wearing his Breast Self-Exam Vest. But instead of the sorrow, or remorse, or even the speechless sympathy she expected, he was staring at her. At her legs. Both of them. And at her ass, yes, that was the only word that fit the way he was looking at it and the rest of her body, like a man who'd been too long in prison, or at sea, too long from women, no matter what he said, a bulge in his boxer shorts affirming that only the flesh didn't lie. Except for faces, she knew—a poker face to hide excitement—or eyes, shut to mask emotion; or hips, or hands, or legs too—the way they could be crossed to say 'no' while allowing a skirt to ride high up a come-hither thigh. Is that what he thought? She tugged her skirt down.

"Milk Duds," he said, his voice thick with passion. "In high school the white boys used to call me Milk Duds," he said, squeezing the rubber breasts

protruding from his vest. "The black kids called me Milkman. Or Jugs—because my breasts were bigger than these." He held the rubber, Caucasian-colored breasts out to her in supplication, their brown nipples growing like big, dilating eyes as he squeezed. Unlike real breasts, when he let go, these didn't show any marks. "They'd hang elephant-sized bras from my locker. Or gang up on me. For being queer. Or for fighting back like a man. Or because my mother was white. Or for crying like a girl because black-on-black crime hurt more than white-on-black crime, which I can assure you hurts as much as white-on-white or black-on-white.... No matter.

"One winter a group of them held me face down in the snow of the parking lot as they took turns pretending to ass fuck me. For fun. Or because they were the ones in the closet? Or for no reason at all? Do words matter? When I managed to turn my head to keep from suffocating, I could see two teachers watching—white men—from a window, high up in the school, like overseers looking down into the yard, seeing no evil being done, hearing no evil, and certainly not trying to stop it."

"What did you do?" she asked quietly, afraid she already knew the answer.

"Stop struggling. Lie there and take it because?... Because that was the most zen thing to do? Or because I was black?—I mean colored, a shu-nuf negro who'd been taught that struggling would only make it worse by a mother who found it more embarrassing to talk about my condition than to pretend it was invisible?" He gave off a bitter laugh. "How rich to think that no counselor, no minister, no.... Years later, when I discovered that the only genie I needed was a plastic surgeon...."

His bitterness turned toward her. "You must be blind to not have seen any of this in the plays I write," he sneered, sweeping his arm to indicate the stuff of his performance: the manikin arms and heads and wigs scattered about the living room, the penis he'd been removing from his Geriatric Care Manikin when she started throwing his props and puppets everywhere. But also, she saw, he meant to accuse her gun catalogs, drawings and cutouts of cyborgs, fighting for the right to be human, on the kitchen table beyond.

She stiffened at his attempt to turn this, to blame the victim, her. "Right," she said sarcastically, remembering what had started their fight, "you're trying

to tell me you don't get turned on by those naked—" She caught herself before she could complicate them beyond hope by saying 'white women.' For while she was white in comparison to him, she was much darker than them—

"I admit to being a man," he said defensively. "No," he added, straightening with dignity, "I admit to being human."

There was a knock on the door. "Who the fuck could that be?" she muttered, and they stood there in silence, both wiping back tears, waiting for whoever it was to go away. The knocking became a pounding. "Open up—" A gruff voice.

A few steps across the tiny living room and Jerome tore open the door.

Two cops stood there, a woman cop and her partner: white faces, blue uniforms and authority. Much later, Yumi would realize that the male cop was actually caramel-colored, his blue uniform, she'd figure, being the thing that turned him white as she got up from the couch and saw his and his partner's official eyes turn in unison to the rubber breasts Jerome still wore.

"Good evening...sir," the cop said, "a neighbor reported fighting in your apartment. Can we come in?"

"Oh for Christ's sake," Jerome said, "No." He tried to close the door but the cop stuck his baton inside, jamming it open.

Jerome opened it the rest of the way, trying to explain. "Look, I'm an actor. Someone must have heard me acting. There's nothing here to see."

...nothing to see, Yumi felt like parroting. How original. Instead, agitated, she bit her lip, knowing that just because Jerome said what was expected, just because the woman cop at her door had the expected P.E.-teacher's haircut, prison-matron expression, that is, just because the human comedy was a burlesque didn't mean it was any less real—or dangerous—and looking over Jerome's glistening bronze shoulders, seeing the cops' impassive expressions, she also saw him as she never had before: a black man explaining himself fast to two white cops. Then she noticed how much destruction she had done to the apartment, crying surely having left her own face puffy, her eyes red. Manikin limbs were scattered everywhere.

"...no can do," the cop was telling Jerome. Jarhead haircut; his jarhead body now filling the doorway like a squad car. "We go away and you or your wife or whatever ends up hurt, then our supervisors...."

"Oh let them in," Yumi said, seeing that the quickest way to get rid of them would be to go along. "What are you afraid of?"

The instant she said this she saw that the cops took it the wrong way—not as she had meant it, that Jerome had nothing to hide, but as a taunt, calling him yellow for wanting to quit their fight now that she had the Marines on her side. She also saw them take in her prosthetic leg—then look back to Jerome as they did the calculus for a fair fight, and in that instant she hated them for the assumptions they were making about him, about her, but was glad, in spite of herself, for the advantage. The cops were in the apartment now, and the woman cop had worked her way between Yumi and Jerome, saying something to her, trying to get her to go into the kitchen. Separate the combatants, Yumi knew from watching police on TV. "These your dolls?" her partner was asking Jerome.

Yumi didn't want to go into the kitchen. There wasn't any reason for her to go into the kitchen, and while she tried to explain this to the female cop she heard the male cop behind her saying, "A guy beating up on his crippled girlfriend isn't going to look good in court." The C-word flooded her with adrenaline just as Jerome began to raise his voice—"I'm *NOT* going to any jailhouse...." The woman cop had a hold of Yumi by the elbow and was trying to lead her by it toward the kitchen. Yumi stayed put. The grip tightened. The instant Yumi yanked her elbow free there was a crash behind her—like dishes busting. When she turned to the noise she found Jerome and the cop wrestling, rolling around in crushed flowers and pieces of broken vase on the floor.

Jerome's rubber breasts were in the cop's face but just as quick the cop rolled him over, and Jerome's own face was mashed into the carpet. With the finesse of a rodeo cowboy, the cop got into a sitting position on top of Jerome and put him in a hammerlock. Except the cop kept twisting Jerome's arm up, so high, and at such an unnaturally painful angle that his cries made it seem as if his arm was going to come off.

"Stop it!" Yumi yelled. "You're breaking his arm!"

Jerome had already stopped fighting and was just lying there in pain with his face ground into the white carpet. There was a smear of red at his nose and Yumi realized she was seeing him as those teachers must have that day he was beat up in the snow, the pang of sympathy that went through her so strong that

looking back at it long afterwards, she was certain that it could not but be at least something like love, as he just took it, the cop whipping out his handcuffs—no, it wasn't handcuffs at all that he retrieved from his belt, Yumi realized in the instant it took him to get out his stun gun: an evil-looking device like an electric shaver only with electrodes for jaws that the cop was about to dig into Jerome's back when Yumi yelled "Hey!" and kicked him. Not with her good leg, that is, her natural leg that was good for balance, but her other good leg, her artificial leg that was better than a billy club for blocking closing doors, cracking Brazil nuts, or kicking overly-white cops right in the balls.

"Agggggghhhh!" he screamed. Except no sound actually came out of his mouth. Though his mouth opened wider than Inflatable Suzie's, he was beyond screams, beyond words or speech of any kind as he crumpled into a fetal position on the floor. Just as she was about to give it to him again, Yumi was wrenched about by her prosthetic leg—as though in mid-kick the air froze solid around it—and before she could see why, she found herself on the floor beside the writhing cop, beside Jerome, the female cop standing over the three of them, holding the leg that had come off in her hands when she grabbed it to save her partner from the second blow.

Months later, Yumi stood before the bathroom sink, looking at herself in the mirror. On one finger was a fluorescent-green Band-Aid with smiley faces that looked nothing like skin; the cut on her other finger was completely healed, if by healed it was meant that she no longer had to think about it, tend to it, stanch its flow. As she marveled at the smoothness of the scar, Jerome came in beaming. The paperwork on her court decision had arrived and he had made a frame for it: a silver frame with a pattern of interlocking rings that reminded her of the Olympics. Or one of those frames that newly-weds sometimes use to frame their marriage certificates. She joined him as he hung it over their bed, the bed in their bedroom:

Yumi Song v. The State of Illinois.

An altercation with Officers Mike Garcia and Meg Leary led to the arrest of Yumi Song and Jerome Williams. Said officers seized Ms.

Song's prosthetic leg to hold as evidence and the State Prosecutor's Office detained said prosthetic leg for 8 months pending trial. At a hearing called for by Ms. Song's attorney, the Prosecutor's office claimed that Song's artificial leg should continue to be held as evidence because Song used it as a weapon in an attack against Officer Garcia. Song's attorney did not deny that his client used her leg in the assault. He maintained, however, that the leg should not be classified as a weapon and to hold it as evidence for such an extended period constituted a form of punishment before a verdict of guilty. Presiding Judge Rosemarie Grey concurred and ordered the release of the leg, finding that while Song's leg may not be an actual leg, as maintained by the Prosecution, she did in fact use it in ways wholly consistent with kicking.

KAMAU BRATHWAITE

OCHO POEMAS

Islas

Al mirar un mapa
de las islas, ves
rocas, históricos
fraudes, cas-
cos pútridos, ruedas
de cañón, tugurios
del sol: si nos
odias. Joyas,
si hay deleite
en tus ojos.
Luce
la luz en el agua,
astuto el
coral la mantiene
azul.

Al mirar un mapa
de las Antillas, ves cómo

atrapó el tiempo
aquí a sus criados. Des-
cendientes del esclavo no
reposan en el seno
de dioses
afortunados. Tanto reina
en la bodega el ratón
como el azúcar robado.
Pero si tus ojos
son gentiles, verás
mariposas
cómo suben más
y más antes que el esfuerzo
reseque su esperanza
y caigan entre las moscas.

Al mirar un mapa
de las islas, ves
la lección de la historia:
si se astilla
la esperanza, si trozos
de vidrio yacen
al sol,
si sola reina la lujuria
en la noche, si no
se barre el polvo
de las casas,
si son los hombres
más ruidosos que el mar,
la soga jamás
desatará
sus nudos, jamás
se extinguirá
el errante ardor del hierro
al marcarnos su lección

de dolor. Las joyas de las islas:
Saba, Barbuda, calci-
nada Antigua, serán perpetuas rocas,
puntos, en el marco azul cielo
del mapa.

Guijarros

Pero mi isla es un guijarro.

Si rompes un huevo,
miras la negra mueca dentada,
exuda un pegamento de vida
una muerte pegajosa.

No puedes romper un guijarro
excluye
la muerte. Las semillas no
arraigan en su fría super-

ficie. Resbala cual lomo
de pato. Un puñal no la
abre. Asesinará
gigantes

pero no dará hijos.

Blues

para Billie Holiday

Oscura es y su voz canta
al río oscuro . mansa lumbre
guardan sus ojos y sólo la conoce
la noche tibia . suave piel de almizcle

viaja hacia atrás . ex
plora ruinas . toca inmemoriales leyendas
sólo ella las recuerda . se
vuelve guerrera y reina y guardiana de la

tribu . no hay miedo
donde pisa . aunque anuncien los tambores
la muerte inminente de un tirano
aunque sea triste su canto . no hay dolor donde canta

anda en un mundo donde murmura el río certezas y sólo ella
sabe reconocerlas . se tocan
confiados los árboles discretos
anhela que la luz irrumpa al claro antes que acabe su canto…

Círculos

para Melba Liston

La música nunca volará de tu corneta verde en cuadros
ni de tu arpa ni de tu calimba

porque no va con plantaciones de algodón
no es producto manufacturado ni hecho de metal

nunca crecerá derecha al cielo
gateando notas por una escalera en el azul

se riza como tu pelo enraizado en alabama . ondas
como agua peces entre las estacas de tus hijos

Tiene ojos líquidos de león marino . claros ojos fogosos .
de halcón
cruza la piedra su mirada . se dinamita en canteras

de hondo hueso . nos trae nuestro ridmo
es la poza azul en tu trombón de varas

lo logra el eco no la roca
es el ridmo reggae reggae estalla la prisión incendia los
relojes

Fetiche

Los objetos de madera paja y piedra
reliquias marchitas. astillas. concha
son un viaje

la contemplación los retorna a nuestro tiempo
restaura un remo. hueso fósil
fetiche a nuestro culto

ahora tepalcate
grava
teja

arena
inútil canto del mar
injuria

aquí hubo una batalla
la adivina aún el puño erizado de la hierba
la cota de malla del cangrejo

nuestro primer conquistador
su espalda rota
huye sobre la hojalata

raíces desgarradas
rotas ca-
jas. ruinas:

viejo abrigo
cartagena
tenochtitlan

destrozos

pero de las ruinas
empuja aún
la hierba

de las grietas
repta
verde

del silencio
abriga
tiempo

La construcción del tambor

1
La piel.

Primero matar
al chivo y
restirar
la piel.

Bendito seas, cuadrúpedo, que comes reatas,
experto
sobre las rocas, cornudo por nuestros pecados;
restira tu piel, restíra-

la, cíñela a nuestra esperanza;
te matamos
para crear una sutil
voz que alcance

más allá de la esperanza
más allá del cielo, que llegue
profundo a nuestros dioses donde no se filtra
la luz fina, donde nuestros corazones

se restiran y no alcanzan. Corta la reata
en su garganta, experto
matador de chivos; su pecado,
derramado en grava limpia, llega
y corre a devorarnos. Así se mata
al chivo
y su piel
se restira.

2

La caja del tambor

Para esto elegimos madera
del árbol de *tweneduru*:
dura madera de duru
con la hueca sangre
que hace una matriz.

Aquí en este silencio
oímos las heridas
del bosque;
oímos los sonidos
de los ríos;
vocales lengüeta
de junco, guijarros
consonantes,
oscuro subsuelo
del continente.

Muda madera de adom
te curvarás,
te curvarás solemne, vientre
redondeado al fuego, heri-
do por útiles

para formarte.
Sangrarás,
oscuro cedro,
si te cortamos,
hablarás, si te tocamos.

3
Los dos bastones curvos del percusionista

Hay un palo
veloz crece en el bos-
que, dos floraciones al
año sin hojas;
desnudas ramas blancas
truenan como ra-
yos en el harm-
attan.

Pero no daña
a quienes viven cer-
ca. Este árbol, dicen
los viejos, jamás
muere.

De este árbol desnudo
agarra bastones raudos
para la fiesta. Su madera
endurecida al fuego como piedra,
es átona como los huesos.

4
Jícaras y maracas

Hojas
del árbol
de la calabaza

no chocan
dan una jícara
verde, queman

cobre a la
luz, se rajan
sus semillas
cascabelean.

Ciegos dientes de rata sie-
rran subterráneos sangran la
raíz húmeda, arrancan su arras-
trarse por el tiempo, su
ánimo, su sabor; tornan
agrias hojas maduras. Tañan
maracas, jícaras; no agoten
a los danzantes del tiempo como al árbol
que hace y burla nuestra música.

5
El Gong-Gong

Dios es mudo
hasta que el tambor
habla.

El tambor
es mudo
hasta que el gong-gong lo

guía. Hechos a mano,
los ojos del gong-gong
de hierro

de música
nos guían por los humildes
muertos hasta hallar

al mudo
ciego tambor
donde habla Odomankoma:

Atumpan

Kon kon kon kon
kun kun kun kun
Funtumi Akore
Tweneboa Akore
Tweneboa Kodia
Kodia Tweneduru

Odomankoma' Kyerema se
Odomnakoma' Kyerema se
oko babi a
oko babi a
wa ma ne-ho mene so oo
wa ma ne-ho mene so oo

akoko bon anopa
akoko tua bon
nhima hima hima
nhima hima hima…

Funtumi Akore
Tweneboa Akore
Espíritu del Cedro
Espíritu del Árbol de Cedro
Tweneboa Kodia

Dice Odomankoma' Kyerema
Dice Odomankoma' Kyerema
Dice el tambor de Odomankoma
Dice el tambor de Odomankoma

que despierta
que despierta
y se levanta
y se levanta
como *akoko* el gallo
como *akoko* el gallo que grazna
que canta en la mañana
que canta en la mañana

a tí te hablamos
ye re kyere wo

a tí te hablamos
ye re kyere wo

óyenos
danos el triunfo

óyenos
danos el triunfo

Máscaras

Dios del sen-
dero
Dios del
árbol
Dios de todo
adiós, te
saludamos.

Está rajado
tu árbol
por el hacha blanca
del rayo,
los sabios
divi-
didos, muertos
los ojos
de nuestros
mayores.

Y andamos,
la esperanza
burla el sen-
dero, entre
hojas muertas
de los viejos,
sus negros ojos
de extraños di-
vididos por dolor
y distancia;
sus sabios
huesos puestos
en sagrados
silenciosos,

tiemblan luces
por los tajos
donde estuvieron
las cuencas,
incisivos
de rata es-
cupieron fibra
ahuecaron
el árbol.

Y el dios,
máscara de quienes sueñan,
oye tartamudear
al rayo, los corazones
susurrar secretos,
la sangre temblar cual hoja
en la rama. ¿Aún nos
guiará
el árbol,
dios del sen-
dero? ¿Hablarán
tus labios de madera
para abrirnos los ojos?

Sunsum

Y por mi cercenado
corazón, por la memoria
de mis venas, me pongo

este ayer prestado: la
historia sangra de
mis cuencas vacías

sobre mi espalda mojada
se seca el sol de mañana
bienvenido hoy tu hermano

grita aún mi torcida len-
gua entrampada. Y regreso,
cojeo estas calles

calcinadas, cerebro
flojo de dolor, oculto
en esta madera, paja

y púa, busco la
tierra del recinto
donde enterró mi madre

el flaco gusano cria-
dor que maduró
entre mi corazón

y su pena. Bajo la
grava en algún lado ese
negro cordón natal

aferra aún tibio brillo
terrenal, presión de joya
hilados cantos de araña;

Kwaku Ananse destella
en lo oscuro y atrapa
nuestros subterráneos miedos.

Pero mi pala anhelante
quebranta la piedra
y el silencio mella

su eco.
Aquí acaba el principio
aquí en este ghetto.

Me desenmascaran firmes
dedos de sombra; aúlla
el hilo umbilical.

¿Me oyes,
puedes oírme,
tejido sangriento

curva cuestión
de mejilla, de hueso
envuelto en aliento, ojos

que tan bien recuerdo?
¿Qué cuarteó al oro nuestro,
sunsum del sol, guarda contra

termitas, ante el cañón del
saqueo blanco, cuña de dinero,
transa veloz de las balas?

¿Por qué el divino
escabel que nos diste,
Anokye,

no nos salvó del orgullo,
biblias de tribus extranjeras,
el hambre del dios cristiano

royó el bien de nuestro árbol;
carne de la carne de mi hermano,
rota para engordar barcos,

¿mar de lucro?
¿mucho orgullo?
¿mucho ruido

en nuestros blancos dientes
elogiosos?
¿excesivo?

¿muy externo?
¿muy fácil
el ceremonial antiguo?

Siguen callados
los años: nada aprende el polvo
al escuchar,

vuelven los pies a la piedra,
duele el sendero: el deste-
rrado tropieza en lo oscuro.

No más aquí la madera cru-
jiente, azul humo de cocina es-
polea mi rabia de rutas, ma-

torrales sudorosos. Mis hermanas
beben silencio. Los hermanos no
se fijan. Mi escabel, al sesgo, ol-

vida lento mi presencia lenta
cuya forma lo presiona:
negros dientes de termitas, al

cabo de trescientos años,
arruinaron pacientes mi poesía.

Traducciones de Adriana González Mateos y Christopher Winks

MERCEDES ROFFÉ

WANDERING CANTO

I don't know how many dreams ago this night began
at the shore of the sun at the shore of death
Like a veil sinking into memory
apprentice to banishment
oh mirror, moon of dark omens
From what heights will I ask the waters for the path
at the shore of the sun at the shore of death
Time is suspended
  and yet
verbs still happen
yesterday an elm tomorrow perhaps a willow
I cross the milk-white thickness of the day

A blind man
a monk
a puppet stretch their arms from the shore

I had prophesied the loss of the kingdom

I had seen the boats of madness go by
I had seen the lofty gestures of the idle priests

Innards of birds
you had revealed to me the destruction of the temple

But
who heard

Toledo and Alexandria had no room for
the dark tongue of the seer

I had prophesied the death of the gods

But
who heard

ꝏ

Bloody tears
toothless laughter
on a river of fire the ship sails

The altars were sacked
and the leaves stirred up by the wind

and the sibylline dogs tempted by the profane beast
and by food
and the nuptial bed
and silence

Someone hurled the Word from the top of the tower
The tower is burning

Someone dug up the corpses of my voice
                the bodies
        the names
the earth is burning

Someone hurled the light the canto
the ocean is burning

Father
    Father
A delirious child has come out of my body
and has given me
        a zither as my fate
and as scepter
        a jewel-encrusted serpent

(oh moon of dark omens)

ꝏ

You know
you won't know

you've fashioned a crown of perverse fruits
and placed it on my head

Prince
Loss
has chosen your age as a safe haven
and the hour of your thirst as a sanctuary

You've stolen the painted mantle of the bride
and draped me in golds and purples
(oh deceptive jewels
the words)

You know
You won't know

And you've threaded diamonds for my bare feet
and you've aged honey for my body

Instead of the battle a monotonous song
Instead of a song a sharp stubborn iron…
Useless to crouch down in the ancient valley
Useless to tempt the hot coals
Lamb
the golden domes of the Abyss will not shine on you
There is no shelter no flock

You won't know

And you've clamored
and you've performed the rite
and you've given it up for dead
    (Night
    Nothing can hide from you
                you deny nothing
    Old
        wish-giver)

And you've been pretending

But
you won't know
The path has been forgotten
                if there was any

Tiny Feet...

Translated by Margaret Carson

LORENZO GARCÍA VEGA

EL CRISTAL QUE SE DESDOBLA

Cristal muerte
—Huidobro

Estar solo con uno mismo, o con Dios, ¿no es como estar solo con una fiera? En cualquier momento puede atacarte.
—Wittgenstein

ENERO, 1998

Cuando lo que nos rodea se vuelve maligno. Cuando la humedad de la noche es maligna.

Párrafo automático.—Mefistófeles caramelo balón / tengo una torre llena de incienso/ en el cielo nos batimos peleándonos / desciendo en paracaídas / lloro como un niño que ha perdido su muñeco / todos mis abuelos están/ aviación para lisiados / Plaza de romaligures aplastadas las narices por la fuerza del viento / una escopeta esdrújula / los instintos como una baba / contar historia de instintos es contar historia de gatos que se agrandan / no hay más medida que un kaleidoscopio que arroja sus cristales / Dios no conoce a los hombres / descocer a un gato para luego volverlo a cocer / este procedimiento de narrar lo que pasó / así es tal como lo cuento.

Patología de estos días. Una patología específica de diciembre y enero, que siempre he padecido.

Miedo al miedo. Miedo terrible al miedo.

Miedo histérico a que el loco vaya a salir afuera (que vaya a salir de dentro de mí hacia fuera, como en una película). ¿Algo así como el temor a despedazarme, o como el temor a quedar despedazado? Y pensar, ¡ay!, que me he pasado la vida en esto.

Vuelvo a soñar con Venezuela. Siempre vuelvo a soñar con Venezuela.

Parece que cuando sueño con ese país es que estoy evocando todo lo que en mi vida fue una imposibilidad. Mi vida está llena de experiencias venezolanas; intentos por llevar a cabo un proyecto que me estaba absolutamente vedado.

Parece que Venezuela, para mí, significa el lugar donde no puedo estar, o la vida que no puedo vivir (¡cuántos trozos de vida no he podido vivirlos!).

Este sueño que estoy diciendo me inventa un sórdido y horrible personaje. Se trata de un comerciante español que emigra a Venezuela y logra establecerse allí. Hay una escena onírica con un espantoso juego de cuarto que tiene un enorme espejo, decorado con ángeles dorados. Según me dice el sueño, este juego de cuarto es el regalo que el comerciante le hace a su esposa.

También en el sueño hay, en la calle, una manifestación de protesta popular que bien parece un grabado llevado al cine.

Sueño persecutorio.

Perseguido. En un hotel, en el extranjero.

¿Cuándo estamos dormidos, en qué lugar se está? Me hago esta pregunta porque hoy, al despertar de la siesta—la siesta la comencé a las dos de la tarde, y la terminé a las cuatro—, creí que era por la noche y que todo estaba a oscuras. Creí que veía la oscuridad.

Por fin, pasados unos minutos, o unos segundos, o qué sé yo, me di cuenta de que todavía era de día. ¿Fue entonces cuando me desperté, o me desperté cuando creí estar bajo la noche? ¡Qué rara incertidumbre! Todavía la siento.

Me estoy preguntando por una zona nocturna, oscura, donde quizá se viva mientras soñamos. Me estoy preguntando si esa zona nunca la conocemos, ya que siempre, desde ella, saltamos hasta la claridad del despertar.

Pero ¿no podrá uno, estando ya despierto, conocer por un instante esa zona desde donde se sueña? ¿Pudiera ser?

¿Pude hoy, por un instante, haber estado despierto en el mundo del sueño? Todo puede ser posible.

Pero lo tremendo es que, si esa posibilidad existe y yo la conocí hoy, entonces ¡qué oscuro y sombrío es el lugar de los sueños! ¿Por qué esa noche?, ¿es la noche de la muerte?

No puedo menos que pensar en aquellas sombras en que, en el mundo homérico, se convertían los muertos. Sombras para ser alimentadas por la sangre.

¿Seremos esas sombras mientras dormimos?

Pienso también en la *cenestesia* que puedan experimentar esas sombras. ¿No será esa *cenestesia* idéntica al miedo que se padece mientras los estados de fobia neurótica?

Como lo negro, la humedad. Traducido eso en la mancha desleída de una pared.

Ahí donde está tirado un cartón. Trizado antes, encandilado ahora. Puede imaginarse como que fuera el azogue que corre bestialmente. Una memoria amarilla. Bien sujeta en cifras. Cuando digo lo que acabo de decir, el río lleno de recovecos inútiles. Recovecos ya exhaustos. Ahí, en esa tumba de hojas, apenas los recados dicen nada. Turbulencia que ya, como una mentira.

Ese histérico que golpea dentro de mí (¿golpea al reverso de mi piel?), como si lo hiciera con una pared. Pero si el histérico pudiera salir afuera, ¿qué es lo que iba poder hacer? Creo que nada, y creo que él, a pesar de pertenecer al reino del Inconsciente, lo sabe tan bien como yo.

Más o menos se vive en las nubes. Sobre todo cuando estoy con el carrito, en el supermercado. En las nubes, y hasta a veces pienso en la Teosofía.

Y en cualquier momento lo coge la muerte a uno. Si se mira bien, se vuelve a ver lo que ya se ha repetido hasta la saciedad: que la vida es bastante absurda.

A oscuras está el comedor, pero el televisor está en la sala, y mastico su sombra.

Es una sombra donde hay unos peces que caen en el agua.

A la pantalla también llega el ruido de la sirena del carro de los policías, y ese ruido se confunde con la caída de los peces en el agua. Pero ¿a qué orden

responde todo eso? Mientras resbala la sombra, y resbala el ruido, me siento como acurrucado, por el miedo a la muerte.

Durmiendo y soñando, durmiendo y soñando. También, cuando puedo, apuntando los sueños (sigo con mi libretica de apuntes en la mesa de noche).

A veces, sobre todo cuando estoy en mi trabajo del Publix, pienso que a lo mejor mi vida se está convirtiendo en una coagulación de sueños, de horas durmiendo, de apuntes en la libretica.

¿Si ahora me muriera, estaría preparado para pasar a través de las esferas?, ¿pudiera utilizar los sueños como contraseña? Por lo menos, mientras se espera la muerte, uno puede llegar a entretenerse con esas preguntas.

Pero no hacerme un coco con el asunto.

Amigo en la madurez me llama por teléfono. Me consulta sobre su proyecto de ir a Cuba para conjurar sus demonios. Con ese viaje, me dice, quizá logre domesticar a sus fantasmas. En Cuba está su padre, están sus hermanas, están algunos de sus amigos, y están sus recuerdos. Mi amigo todavía tiene un yo.

Pero uno… ¿es que me sonrío? Uno, cada día más, va perdiendo la memoria. Uno ya no tiene pasado en que caerse muerto. Si volviera a Cuba, por ejemplo, sería para evocar a mis padres, ya muertos, junto a ese espejo (el espejo, el primero donde me vi, estaba junto a la puerta que daba al patio, en la casa de mi infancia) que no existe, en escenario que deberá ser como de Ciencia-Ficción.

¿Qué le voy aconsejar a mi amigo, en su madurez? Recuerdo aquello que dijo Maeterlinck: "Se diría que el yo, a medida que debía de irse asegurando, tiende a empobrecerse, a desaparecer. Si se vivieran dos o tres siglos, en lugar de hacerse mayor y más seguro se convertiría en casi nada".

Así que uno, en la vejez, es budista quiéralo (yo lo quiero ser) o no.

ꝏ

¿El sirviente, con su carrito, espera hasta la hora del sueño para poder comprobar el verdadero peso del miedo a los demás, y de su agresividad —reprimida— hacia los demás?

Darme cuenta, cuando sueño, de lo que me abruma, y quizá reprimo, durante el día.

Anoche soñé con una clienta del Publix que me insultaba, pues ella creía que

no le quería llevar su carrito lleno de mandados. Fue a las cinco de la mañana, y al despertarme me quedé un poco turulato, pues me pregunté por lo que nunca me pregunto: ¿qué peso de agresividad y de ansiedad oculta debe de haber en mi trabajo con el carrito? O sea, me pregunté por lo que casi nunca sé formular, ni siquiera como pregunta.

Es como para sospecharse que me he sacado de dentro una nube que me oculta toda la agresividad que me pueda producir mi labor como criado, en un carrito. Uno nunca sabe.

ꝏ

Por la noche oír una campana, cuando estoy recogiendo los carritos en el parqueo del Publix. El sonido superponiendo un espacio al espacio de la noche que me rodea. Esto me impresiona. Es, también, como estar en un Laberinto y sentir que, a la vez, puedo estar en otro Laberinto.

Por cierto, esta noche he vuelto a la Atención.

¿Dónde suena esa campana?, ¿ella qué tiene que ver con el parqueo donde recojo los carritos? ¿Por qué se oye?

Oír los sonidos, los ruidos. "La espiral es la forma auditiva", decía Beuys. Oír, sentir su plasticidad sobre nosotros.

¿Un ruido lejano como una catedral arruinada?

ꝏ

Paseo sabatino, por la tarde. También la Atención.

Veo y oigo. ¡Qué bueno es ver y oír! Nada más que eso, aunque sólo sea dentro de un destartalo.

También pienso en los muertos, pero ahora eso no parece dolerme. Pues en lo que estoy pensando es si, aun en medio de un destartalo, pudiera haber una comunicación con otras esferas. Pero desgraciadamente yo no puedo saber de eso. ¡No soy teósofo!

Así que estoy pensando en las esferas —Dante, su cielo cristalino—, pero enseguida me río de mí mismo.

Estoy solo.

Nunca es bueno estar solo.

Y pensar que todo esto que estoy diciendo es como entrar en la muerte. Entrar en la muerte sin que uno se de cuenta, poquito a poco. Uno lo dice como ahora lo estoy diciendo, y parece que no es nada, pero…

ꝏ

Muchachas casaderas, *expuestas* (¿por qué *expuestas*?) a casarse con un viejo rico. Este sueño lo es en technicolor, y las muchachas son risueñas, gordonas y apetitosas. Despierto del sueño a las cinco y media de la mañana.

ꝏ

¡Cuánta dinamita dentro de uno! ¡Cuánta dinamita durante toda la vida! Siempre así, siempre sin cambiar. ¿Será la culpa, el sentimiento del pecado? ¿Pero por qué me pesa el pecado si yo no soy creyente? ¿Será mi enfermedad, mi neurosis? Pero ¿por qué he tenido que cargar como con una mancha? A veces, cuando pienso en una ruta teosófica después de la muerte, lo que más me atemoriza es seguir manchado y con miedo, por otros caminos.

ꝏ

En un sueño quieren que yo conduzca *el féretro de su hermano* (¿qué significa esto?). Pero yo impongo condiciones: sólo conduciré ese féretro si me permiten transportar… (¿ transportar qué?)

O sea, el sueño se ha disuelto y sólo quedan estos restos que apunto, a las cinco de la mañana, junto con esta frase: la casa del *Cementerio bullendo miel rosada*. Por cierto , estoy teniendo sueños a las 5 de la mañana. Antes los tenía a las 3.

ꝏ

Un yeso de tiza en cocimiento de tilo, y en acordeón embrionario esto, como para recibir a la visita.

Pues se ve al diablo en la ducha (uno está viejo), como el papel en blanco que ya no tiene mucha importancia.

Por lo que diletante el póster, visto desde la infancia, con esa cabeza de niño, paradójicamente desdentada por la abundancia de los años.

ꝏ

No queda más remedio, se está en plena noche bajo el puro miedo, bajo el terror total. Si se mira bien, esta situación casi podría calificarse de ridícula: con lo viejo que uno está y, sin embargo, no poder hacer más nada que achicharrarse bajo la soledad de la noche.

¿Fue todo debido a una irrupción de lo hipocondriaco? No sé lo que fue, pero sí sé que se trató de una situación verdaderamente absurda. La situación en la que, aunque uno sea un anciano y quisiera, por lo menos, tener un poco de dignidad interior (estoy pensando en aquellas espléndidas estatuas que dicen eran los estoicos), sin embargo tiene que debatirse como un feto untado con la grasa del miedo.

¡La libertad! ¿Por qué se habla de esa comedia de la libertad? ¿Quién es libre para no sentir el terror?

ꝏ

¡Ese reloj! Ese reloj que, aunque él no cree en la inmortalidad, aun después de muerto lo sigue oyendo.

ꝏ

Atención. Ejercicios con la vida-muerte. Paseos por la tarde en los días en que no voy al Publix. Hay un otoño de mentirita dentro de un invierno de mentirita. Sigo, con insistencia, registrando los ruidos.

ꝏ

Ahora, en esta noche —¿hay humo?—, pensando en aquellos años que pasé en New York. Entonces había otro humo, y un hombre, en el frío, caminaba por las calles de Queens. Me parece, si pudiera reconstruirlo, que en algunos momentos y con luz oscura, todo retrocedía a eso que por haber perdido la memoria no sé cómo decirlo, pero que pudiera ser como si mi tacto recuperase la posibilidad de recobrar una caja del 1936.

ꝏ

¿Me miro como un después que no comprendo? Cayendo en un pozo que se mueve en una memoria. Pero es sólo por un momento, ya que enseguida se disuelve.

ꝏ

Esa cara redonda que he visto demasiado tiene como el telón de fondo de una vieja película. Sus colores son apenas unas manchas. Manchas que como si no se hubiesen visto. Yo diría que la figura de un mandala quizá pudiera explicar la cosa. Pero hay un bastón ahí, colocado ahí, que acaba por desvirtuarlo todo. Así no se puede, o es que quizá se trate del retrato (¿color naranja?) de un televangelista.

ꝏ

Me sucede desde hace tiempo que me despierto, a las tres de la mañana, con calor y sudoración. ¿Se debe esto a un cambio de ritmo biológico? Puede ser, pero yo no sé nada de eso.

ꝏ

Sueño olvidado en que había como tres compartimentos superpuestos. En cada uno de esos compartimentos yo realizaría una actividad distinta. ¿Qué sería ese sueño?

Pienso en una determinada configuración de mi mente que tendiera a expresarse a través de estructuras superpuestas, donde pudiera primar el número 3. Pero ¿por qué pienso así? Quizá porque esta trilogía, así como esta estructura formal que le he sospechado a este sueño que acabo de tener y que acabo de olvidar, ya en otros sueños que he tenido también se me ha manifestado.

ꝏ

Soñé que alguien, yo mismo, o un actor ruso, estaba soñando con... Pero aquí vino el borrón, y el sueño se me olvidó. Sin embargo, pienso que aquí también había compartimentos.¿Un compartimento donde, dentro del sueño, soñaba?

ꝏ

Sueño—.Voy a atravesar una oficina pública. La oficina tiene cierta semejanza con una cárcel, y esto tiene relación con Alejo Carpentier. Lleno, todo, de gotas de humedad. / Hay una mujer. / Puede ser peligroso atravesar el lugar, lugar que, de tanta humedad, tiene como un parecido con un baño de vapor.

ꝏ

El Papa anda por Cuba. Hay un buen derroche de sentimentalismo, como lo que se derrite. ¿El Papa podrá estar relacionado con ese "simulacro" de que habla Baudrillard? Yo, sentado frente al televisor, veo todo ese melado sentimental que emana de la jira del Papa por lugares cubanos. Como ya soy un anciano, no puedo evitar que a veces, como si fuera una respuesta fisiológica, experimente cierto toquecito sentimental. Parece que la vejez es bastante pavloviana. Sin poderlo evitar, estamos sujetos a los reflejos sentimentales.

ꝏ

Culminando la noche de su cumpleaños, a la una y media de la mañana, fue multado por la policía al coger una izquierda prohibida. Ya antes, por la tarde, cuando por teléfono lo felicité por su cumpleaños, él me dijo: —No puedo liberarme de esa obsesión. Quisiera estar preso. Nada tendría que hacer en la cárcel, otros decidirían. Quizá es eso lo que yo quisiera.

—No he tenido ese sueño —le contesté—, pero lo que me dices no me resulta extraño. Cuando sin ninguna salida viví, en esta Playa Albina, los años de mi cincuentena, o sea, los años anteriores a mi vejez, muchas veces me sentí identificado con los presos. ¡Qué identificación!

Así le contesté al amigo que entra en su cumpleaños, queriendo estar preso. Le contesté pensando en aquellos horribles años, años sin salida, que no viví.

Pero ¿sentirme identificado con los presos? ¿Qué pudo significar? ¿Qué fue? Un pasado que nunca podré entender bien. Un pasado, unos cincuenta años que viví como en piel espectral, piel de fantasma, pero… ¿cómo comprender esto?

Cuando trato de acercarme, de comprender, siento como si fuera a oler esa locura dentro de la cual uno ha vivido siempre.

Es... Lo huelo. Como si un loco siempre hubiese vivido por uno.

ꝏ

Diríamos, el *day dream* absurdo de algo que sería como *techo de las vírgenes* (?). O, diríamos, como un alguien que soñase con entrar en un lugar para el cual está imposibilitado para entrar.

Conjeturo, también, sobre la posibilidad de que mi vida hubiese podido ser otra. ¿Hubiese podido ser otra? Ahora, a veces, por esta vejez por donde ando, me digo si no es que todo no estaba ya determinado.

ꝏ

Despierto, y con lo espléndido del día me acuerdo de Jorge Guillén. "Todo está bien. ¡Albricias!", diría Guillén.

Pero yo, que no tiendo a los júbilos guilleneanos, ¿por qué me identifico con eso? ¡No sé!, uno nunca acaba de saber quién es uno.

ꝏ

Ayer, mi paseo acostumbrado por lo mismo.

Lo mismo, lo mismo, el mismo paisaje-no-paisaje.

Volvía a ver lo mismo en lo afuera que caminaba, mientras que, dentro de mí, recorría un conocidísimo, pero demasiado sombrío territorio. La misma horrible angustia de siempre.

"...un empañado resplandor azul-amarillo reflejo del Mundo humano te herirá el corazón", decía el Bardo Thodol, por lo que, absurdamente, sentí que no me podría despegar del miedo, ni aun cuando me muriera. Sentí que el miedo (¿la culpabilidad?) era yo mismo.

Entonces, en el paseo, llegué hasta el lugar donde antes estaba tirada una colchoneta. Llegué, pues, hasta lo que ya se ha convertido en un paraje de mi imaginación. Pero el lugar ha sido transformado. Lo han convertido en sitio de postalita, con iglesia impoluta en el centro.

La iglesia, pues, recién construida y, cubriéndolo todo (cubriendo hasta el hueco pantanoso sobre el que estaba tirada la colchoneta vieja), una buena extensión de bien peinadito césped artificial.

Y es como para sospechar. Sospecharle a lo que está afuera, o sospecharle a lo que pueda estar en mi Inconsciente, una secreta espectral blancura: un escondido espacio donde un loco como robot, o un robot loco, dejara su ininteligible traza.

FEBRERO

Me vuelvo a repetir, entrando en este febrero, el cuento sombrío de mi pasado en la isla. Cuando era joven. Un cuento sombrío que para qué hablar.

Es el cuento de toda la vida y que ahora, en la vejez, de nuevo me lo vuelvo a contar. Cuento lleno de peleles. Los peleles eran como los nabos de aquel cuento de Cuenta-Nabos que oí en la infancia.

En aquel tiempo todavía se leía al Caballero Audaz.

Y puede parecer, todo esto que estoy escribiendo, como una apuntación surrealista, pero no es una apuntación surrealista. Es, desgraciadamente, el puro realismo. Es un viejo que mira para atrás, para su juventud en una isla, y sólo se encuentra con un campo de nabos donde no había ninguna posibilidad.

Era horrible. Aunque a veces se me olvida, y llego hasta a creer que las cosas hubiesen podido ser distintas. Pero nada, en aquel campo de peleles nabos que fue mi juventud, nada podía ser distinto. No había salida, y por eso las cosas fueron como fueron.

Pero ¿por qué tengo hoy, principio de febrero, la ingenuidad de apuntar lo que estoy apuntando? ¿Me estaré volviendo bobo?

Y hasta me río, porque ahora mismo estoy también, como para ponerle la tapa al pomo de lo que estoy diciendo, oyendo los cantos de la monja Hildegard von Bingen.

Y repito —siempre repito—, este es el cuento que me vuelve a hacer la vejez. En aquel país de la juventud uno tocaba puertas, trataba de abrirse paso, pero todo era una absoluta y sombría cerrazón. Los peleles como nabos a recoger. Un campo lleno de peleles, y el tiempo iba pasando.

ꝏ

¡Ay!, el opaco ruido-hierro de la sierra del carpintero. A lo lejos lo oigo. Se acerca. ¿Por qué tan opaco como es, tan sin nada, ese ruido se avalanza como para cubrirlo todo? Eso es una de las incomprensibles sorpresas que nunca dejará de producirme. ¿En qué punto de la imaginación se sitúa esa sierra? ¿Es un punto de lo que comienza?, ¿o es un punto en el recuerdo, de lo que terminó ya?

Y me araña, mientras apunto esta observación sobre el ruido de la sierra, el gris intenso del día de hoy.

ꝏ

La muchacha seria, nada sabrosona, pero camina como si llevara, entre las piernas, la hostia consagrada.

B, CE-

In my parent's house there was never a
gainsborough
o
r
state
per-missi
on,
or,
the
cyan-
otic
lan/guage
o
f
a
gainsborough
(de
formed,
twist-ed,
like

certain clinical cl-asses of Ce-,
or,
certain politic-al
not-es
of
chopin

-a ro
ugh
strategy
of
the
surplus value sub
/ject-):

The Dump
The Dump

banned
chop
in, or
, religious
chopin (that i
s to say: with the black c(ass)ock of those who cut
beef);

or: w
he
re
he breathes,

mechanical pro-
cess in
or
der

to esta-
bl-ish
a
m
ass-ive State
p-rod-uction,
"jobs and money"
(so
said Ce-),

"a tonsillo-economical
test
ic
le"
(Ce- had
written)

or: where
the tubercolosis gene
(the one, in fact, that is changed in the *infans* of a
novel)
ma-teriali-zing as
a longer
l-as-ting
form
and thus prolonged:
(gusanito – gusanito);

by h-
ow mu
ch do
es the price of
some teacher's rotten meat rise in
germany?
or by h

ow much do
es the price of some teacher's
thick poop
rise
in germany?;

the ideological scab
of *that*
knowledge
read or not in editorials,
ob-
served in
stain-ed glass wind-ows [cocaine is mental gravity]
the period(.)ovulation
a(.)jewess
(.)of(.)
the thing
(.)that(.) moves(.) it
self
(.),
or: metabolismus;

froteur
froteur
(lv, 6-7)

a/s(sssss)ick
ness
to an(n)ul
the process
(the-totalitarian-gear-of-the-process,
the gear wh/ich
makes
the pro cess
tot

ali
tarian),
or: the
mythical
percept-ion
of the reich
against
the
machine, sh
(it slices the cow: it distributes,
it slices the cow: "money-in-the-bank"):

carne/c
arne/arse-ne
car-
ne/
like someone disbursing the factual the-or-y of
us-
ed objects ;

"your
anechoic
excrement s-ulamita,
your
schizoid
brain m-
argarita,"
a gentle ditty of a certain
cere,bra,l
habitat;

or: twisssssssssssssting,
without
making per/ceptible the perm
anent ph

ysical mut
ation of water,
in
relation t
o
the
temperature
c(o)nd
itions
in the environment :
"pow
er zone
x"
(Ce- has said),
advancing
with the flabby haste of a monk toward the
market where
they re-sell
rice;

muscles:
two
three-t
wo: do
wn-wa
rd ;

muscles :
two
---
three
---
two :
dow
n war

d,
slowly ; c
iting phras()es of wittgenstein and pound),

muscles:
d-own-war-d,

(to-war-d
the
notes
and their politics
(and, the lack of conflicts)
of
a
chopin
in
bucovina
("the cough, the cough-cough:
careful with the cough") ha
ck ha
ck:

sputum.

Translated by Gabriel Gudding

ANA ROSA GONZÁLEZ MATUTE

17 DE MAYO DE 1947

"... el uso sutil de lo inútil"
—dicen en Japón

Nací el mismo día que la autora. Ignoro a qué hora fue.
¿Una tarde lluviosa de nubes ofuscadas que ensayaban al viento
y enaltecían las copas de los árboles?
Dos años antes: fin de la segunda guerra.
Dos años después: se declaraban la guerra algunos países...
y la India declara su independencia.

17 de mayo
Justamente el día en que nacieron X, R y Z,
una tarde de nubes austeras cuasi idéntica a aquella otra tarde en ese mismo día,
idéntico a aquella otra tarde y tantas otras tardes pero en 1847...
y en 1547 cuando nació Miguel de Cervantes...
Innumerables niños hoy muertos.
Hombres y mujeres que merodean el mundo igual que tú, que yo, que todos.

Justamente, también, un *17 de mayo*
Michel Leiris sueña que va a ser fusilado en medio de una especie de fiesta;

se despide de su esposa Zette,
de su amiga Le Castor (nombre que da Sartre a de Beauvoir).
Presa del más intenso pánico, luego de la rabia más intensa,
Leiris escapa a la ejecución dejándose caer
y cayendo va a sumergirse en otro sueño...
una segunda versión del primero, donde quienes serán ejecutados
reciben un rectángulo de papel blanco: ahí deberán anotar
sus últimas palabras.
Al momento de la ejecución, se les pegará este papel engomado a la boca.

Mi nombre es *Ava* porque a mi padre le fascinaba Ava Gardner. Mi madre
tiene cierto parecido con ella. Me hubiera gustado otro nombre, tal vez Rita,
Greta o
Gina. Entonces cabría la posibilidad de que mi vida hubiera sido distinta.
Hay quienes consideran que el nombre es importante.
Y si hubiera sido Ingrid, como Ingrid Bergman,
me habrían cantado en la película *Casablanca*:

You must remember this,
a kiss is just a kiss
A sigh is just a sigh
The fundamental things apply
As time goes by...

El *17 de mayo de 1947* le hicieron un homenaje a Louis Armstrong
y estrenaron algunas de sus canciones:
"Rockin'Chair", "Our Monday Date", "Pennies From Heaven".

Y ese mismo día de ese mismo año
nació el campeón noruego de sky Dagfinn Hagen.
Un deporte que jamás he probado y que se lleva a cabo donde
la nieve ha nevado...

Alrededor de una década después, otro *17 de mayo,*
Delmore Schwartz escribió:

Todo es fantasía
La familia, la oficina, los amigos, la calle
Todo es fantasía
Esté lejos o cerca
La mujer es fantasía:
Mas la verdad inmediata es
Que estás empujando/ tu cabeza
contra el muro
de una celda sin puerta y sin ventana.

Delmore también escribió *En sueños surgen las responsabilidades* y,
al igual que muchos antes que él, sus memorias.

Ciertamente en mayo de 1847, Héctor Berlioz anotó en sus *Memorias*
que viajó de San Petersburgo a Riga, donde fue al teatro a ver *Hamlet*,
y de Riga a Berlín, a interpretar su *Fausto*,
pero fue recibido y tratado con hostilidad. Mas luego del concierto,
la adversidad de los músicos y de parte del público
—que se acercó a felicitarlo—
se transformó en aplauso y reconocimiento.

En 1947 muere Vivien, esposa de T. S. Eliot,
y nacen los *Pisan Cantos* de Ezra Pound.
Dos décadas antes, un *mayo 17*, Pound había grabado su poesía.

En todas las épocas y desde que el hombre existe,
la mente humana ha sido errática, incontrolable. Salta
de idea en idea,
de recuerdo en recuerdo,
de absurdo en absurdo. Raya
en la más absoluta tontería. Va de un extremo
a otro
o se queda en blanco…

Hoy es *17 de mayo,* mi cumpleaños.
Jamás lo festejo, en cambio mi vecino que nació diez años antes
tiene una gran fiesta. Mandó hacer una enorme vela
que mide 3 metros de alto y 50 centímetros de ancho
y que sembró en su pequeño jardín para encenderla esta noche.
Dice que al derretirse cubrirá todo el pasto y así tendrá un jardín de cera.
Y ¿para qué un jardín de cera? Se sentirá abeja.

HORÁCIO COSTA

TRES POEMAS

RAVENALAS

"The Carmen Miranda's Museum
Is more important than the Louvre", disse-me
John Ashbery em Nova Iorque, e os olhos
Nadavam em gim. Olhando para o meu
Cocar kamaiurá, Octavio Paz exclamou
"Esto es mejor que un Picasso". Estávamos
Na casa de Coyoacán: era a primeira vez
Que ele entrava na sala dramática. As plumas
Cor de rosa-flamingo e de araras azuis
Enchiam o espaço, abriam-se sobre
O céu da parede numa "iminência
De gritos". Não sei se Octavio
De fato escreveu este verso, mas bem
Poderia. Na varanda de Pancho Vives,
Face ao Palácio Real, Gastón
Baquero, o habanero exilado, dizia:
"La Gran Vía es cubana. La Puerta del Sol
Es cubana. El Paseo de la Castellana

También es cubano." Haroldo ria-se
Às escâncaras: era verão e à onze da noite
Mantinha-se a temperatura em 38°.

Meninos eu vi, lembro a Revista Manchete
Assim como Borges contradizendo
Luisa Valenzuela, quem lhe perguntara
Se a quantidade de espadas em sua obra
Apontava a uma putativa simbologia fálica:
"Eso es impúdico, señorita" –nos olhos
Do vate cego, ainda o brilho da desonra
Vislumbro. Ou creio vislumbrar. O Manuel
Tinha ido de New Haven a Nova Iorque
Ver o portenho, e out of the blue me observou,
Como si nada: "estaremos juntos muchos años".
Nunca duvidei de sua intuição, não o contradisse
Mas quinze depois o abandonaria: já não podia mais,

Simplesmente já não pude mais.
Escrevo
Em Copacabana, lugar fabuloso entre todos,
E meca de memoriosos: ao longe, numa
Cobertura, descubro contra o azul
Umas improváveis ravenalas.

Também o banhista, qualquer cidadão poetisa
E sente irromper ouvidos adentro uma voz
Que não está, e que escuta como verso-fantasma:
Quantos vozes não escapam ao ar dessa forma
A cada manhã num preciso minuto
Como esse em que peso os meus: se senti-los
Fosse dar-lhes volume, uma debandada
De asas se abriria sobre o Rio de Janeiro,
Sob a forma de alguns versos de amor
Ou referentes à pátria ou aos antepassados

E outros, os mais, sem significado nenhum
Afora o afetivo, que concentra o tempo vivido:
O espaço da metrópole seria pequeno
Para tamanho hachurado lírico, para tanta
Chama sagrada, "Péri Hypsous", para dardos
Que tais de palavras que se materializassem
E se reduzissem no momento de ouvirem-se
E que se reduzissem –por que não?- a estas,
Sim, fotogênicas de fato, ravenalas. "Leques
Contra o azul entre sol e súdito" –este, escrevi-o
Eu, numa outra manhã, lá no México

E eis-me de novo surfando a memória,
Como esses jovens as ondas. As vozes
Não se desprendem, recocheteiam, somam-se
E ecoam como a brisa que atravessa
Esse palmar suspenso e que
Só eu pareço escutar e pelo qual,
exoticista e tambor, arquiteto
E sintaxista, deixo-me deslizar.

(P.S. Não há hierarquia na memória
E não se sabe ao certo o que a dispara:
tão importante o pergaminho quanto o plástico-bolha,
assim como o botton e o brasão, e o salmo
conversa com o conteúdo da filipeta e tudo,
na verdade, é um só monumento).

Rio de Janeiro, 7 VII 04

Ravenalas

"The Carmen Miranda's Museum
Is more important than the Louvre", me dijo
John Ashbery en Nueva York, y sus ojos
Nadaban en gin. Mirando a mi arte plumario
Kamaiurá, Octavio Paz exclamó
"Esto es mejor que un Picasso". Estábamos
En la casa de Coyoacán: era la primera vez
Que el entraba en la sala dramática. Las plumas
Color rosa-flamingo y de guacamayas azules
Llenaban el espacio, se abrían sobre
El cielo del muro en una "inminencia
De gritos". No sé si Octavio
Deveras escribió este verso, pero sí
Lo podría. En el balcón de Pancho Vives,
Frente al Palacio Real, Gastón
Baquero, el exiliado habanero, decía:
"La Gran Vía es cubana. La Puerta del Sol
Es cubana. El Paseo de la Castellana
También es cubano". Haroldo se reía
A sus anchas: era verano y a las once de la noche
Se mantenía la temperatura en 38°.

Niños lo he visto, me acuerdo de la Revista Manchete
Así como a Borges contradiciendo
A Luisa Valenzuela, quien le preguntara
Si la cantidad de espadas en su obra
Apuntaba a una putativa simbología fálica:
"Eso es impúdico, señorita" –en los ojos
Del vate ciego, todavía el brillo del deshonor
Vislumbro. O creo vislumbrar. Manuel
Había ido de New Haven a Nueva York
A ver el porteño, y out of the blue me observó,
Como si nada: "estaremos juntos muchos años".

Nunca dudé de su intuición, no lo contradije
Pero quinze después lo abandonaría: ya no podía más,

Sencillamente ya no pude más.
Escribo
En Copacabana, lugar fabuloso entre todos,
Y meca de memoriosos: a lo lejos, en un pent-
House, descubro contra el azul
Unas improbables ravenalas.

También el bañista, cualquier ciudadano poetisa
Y siente irrumpir en sus oídos una voz
Que no está, y que escucha como verso-fantasma:
Cuantas voces no se escapan al aire de esa forma
A cada mañana en un preciso minuto
Como este en que peso los míos: si sentirlos
Fuera darles volúmen, una desbandada
De alas se abriría sobre Río de Janeiro,
Bajo la forma de algunos versos de amor
O referentes a la patria o a los antepasados
Y otros, los más, sin significado ninguno
Sino el afectivo, que concentra el tiempo vivido:
El espacio de la metrópolis sería pequeño
Para tamaño sombreado lírico, para tanta
Llama sagrada, "Péri Hypsous", para dardos
Que tales de palabras que se materializasen
Y se reduciesen en el momento de oírlas
Y que se reduciesen -¿por que no?- a esas,
Sí, fotogénicas de hecho, ravenalas. "Abanicos
Contra el azul entre sol y súbdito" –este, lo escribí
Yo, en otra mañana, allá en México

Y héme de nuevo surfeando la memoria,
Como estes jóvenes las olas. Las voces
No se desprenden, rebotan, se suman

Y ecoan como la brisa que atraviesa
Ese palmar suspenso al que
Solo yo parezco escuchar y por el cual,
Exoticista y tambora, arquitecto
Y sintaxista, me dejo resbalar.

(P.S. no hay jerarquía en la memoria
y no se sabe a lo cierto qué la dispara:
tan importante es el pergamino como el papel de plástico
de burbuja, así como el botton y el blasón, y el salmo
conversa con lo que dice la hoja volante y todo,
en verdad, es un solo monumento).

A Traição De Rita, A Digna-De-Feno

A Reynaldo Jiménez

The Haystack, Le Chariot de Foin, o que mais posso associar
Ao título de um romance que li há trinta anos? Tergiverso o verso,
O que demora como uma coluna "serpentinata", "sierpe"
Gongorina, a ocupar um ondulante lugar no espaço: um verso.
Brueghel o Velho? Brueghel o Moço?
Uma visita a Praga? Ao Prado? Ao Metropolitan?
Aonde mais, caralho? Já se perdeu a leitura,
Aquele descobrir lento que na província
Havia interesse, que bastaria vê-la com novos olhos,
Novos olhos críticos. A vinheta
Não é minha mas alheia, mas já morreu,
Pobrezinho, o seu portador original, então
Não há como não repeti-la. Os homossexuais
Não temos filhos, temos "relacionamentos"
E nossa família às vezes desaparece num gole
A mais de água salgada que invada o pulmão,
Num acidente dito "de percurso", pára-quedas
Que se abra para pousar num cenário inimigo
Ou num crime quase nunca casual,
Cometido numa praça qualquer, às vezes sob o nariz
De polícias e circunstantes, e tantas,
Com a bênção de plantão de um Cardeal
Eminentíssimo. Pois, perceba-se que também já morreu
O argentino exilado na Espanha, e logo no México,
E logo no Rio de Janeiro: a quais périplos o século enviou
Os seus intérpretes, essa é uma história de dores
Levadas com a dignidade possível, com o que
Se pôde agarrar: um ramo de oliveira antes do
Dilúvio dos coturnos, um bico tatibitate que embarca
Na Arca não, mas num avião de carreira
De Ezeiza para nunca mais, porém que leva
O pampa na alma, os seus domingos, seus

"Asados de tira", essa maneira ritual de manter
Reticências na alma, e as burguesinhas do catolicismo
Devotas do cine e da Virgen de Luján. Puig
Dissecou-as com a disciplina de uma verdadeira
Bicha capaz de apaixonar-se por um carteiro,
Mas isso foi no Leblon e em função de sua profissão de fé no Brasil:
A vinheta que repito porque repito quem a contaria
Já se foi, deu-se antes, e o som de fundo –pasmem-
Era Gounod, a "Ave Maria" dos funerais de medio pelo,
Entre kitsch e joco-sério: na manhã mexicana,
Bordava um manto para um travesti amigo, e a cada agudo
Uma enfiada (de falsíssimas pérolas): assim processava Manuel
O seu exílio, na Colonia Condesa. O manto era, claro,
Azul-profundo, e os travestis chilangos, fascinados:
Os dons do escritor que jamais leriam
Revelavam-se como os seus -a cada manhã,
A invenção do dia, e a cada dia, um happening,
E nenhum editor houve que com a promessa
De uma mais perfeita canonização literária
Lhe fizesse substituir o matinal bordado do manto
Por um capítulo a mais que poderia esperar.

Assim reza o radical os seus dias, sem altares
E quase sempre sem a assistência que não a desses
Coniventes olhos amendoados de quem se chamava Sergio
E transformou-se em Amanda, e Rogelio em Fátima:
As identidades, que para o cidadão comum são quase sempre
Alucinações persistentes, tratam-nas, justamente, como
Invenções, e essa é a força que têm para arrostar
Polícias e pastores, e vizinhos, e banqueiros, e políticos.
Como escrever o século que passou? Em tratados hirsutos
Ou em vinhetas que tais? E quem os interpreta, e para quem
Retemos tais histórias? Eu, por acaso, resisti até agora
E não tenho a menor intenção de calar-me: ainda
Me bate no palato a língua e a palavra, muita vez, rã

Desbocada, proliferante e por certo incontornável,
Sonho com ela e desperto-me para quem a devora,
A serpentina e a serpe, o verso e o poema.
Entendei-me, não é por ver a minha voz impressa, é que
De fato tenho algo a dizer, escutai-me.

Rita Hayworth, and for that matter Gabrielle d'Estrées,
Nefertiti ou a Rainha de Sabá, Luz del Fuego e Mata
Hari, e quem mais não importa que relevado teve o seu perfil,
Em ourivesaria, baixo-relevo, óleo ou celulóide, de fato não importa,
Nas armas do presente: falsas musas, Clios de meia tigela,
Todas nos atraiçoaram a cada dia, a cada minuto,
E repetidamente, com a sua implícita promessa de ser
E ser livremente -corpo que nade na imensidão do mar,
Que se solte ao ar em seguro pára-quedas, e faça footing
Ao pé da matriz do pueblo: um a mais, um a mais
Num fim de tarde planturoso. Não.
A verdadeira cara da História, ao menos até agora,
Rebrilha a sós no fio da foice
Da Ceifeira.

SP 14 VII 04

La Traición De Rita, La Digna-De-Heno

A Reynaldo Juménez

The Haystack, Le Chariot de Foin, ¿qué más puedo asociar
Al título de una novela que leí hace treinta años? Tergiverso el verso,
Lo que demora como una columna "serpentinata", sierpe
Gongorina, que ocupa un ondulante lugar en el espacio: un verso.
¿Brueghel el Viejo? ¿Brueghel el Joven?
¿Una visita a Praga? ¿Al Prado? ¿Al Metropolitan?
¿A donde más, carajo? Ya se perdió la lectura,
Aquel descubrir lento que en la provincia
Había interés, que bastaría verla con nuevos ojos,
Nuevos ojos críticos. La viñeta
No es mía sino ajena, pero ya murió,
Pobrecito, su portador original, entonces
No hay como no repetirla. Los homosexuales
No tenemos hijos, tenemos "relacionamientos"
Y nuestra familia a veces desaparece en un sorbo
A más de agua salada que invade el pulmón,
En un accidente dicho "de ruta", paracaídas
Que se abriera para posar en un escenario enemigo
O en algún crimen casi nunca casual,
Cometido en una plaza cualquiera, a veces bajo la nariz
De policías y circunstantes, y tantas,
Con la benedición contumaz de un Cardenal
Eminentísimo. Pues, nótese que ya murió
El argentino exiliado en España, y luego en México,
Y luego en Río de Janeiro: a cuáles periplos el siglo ha enviado
Sus intérpretes, esa es una historia de dolores
Llevados con la dignidad posible, con lo que
Se pudo agarrar: un ramo de olivo antes del
Diluvio de los coturnos, un pico tartamudo que embarca
En el Arca no, sino en un avión de carrera
De Ezeiza para nunca jamás, pero que lleva
La pampa en el alma, sus domingos, sus

Asados de tira, esa forma ritual de mantener
Reticencias en el alma, y las burguesitas del catolicismo
Devotas del cine y de la Virgen de Luján. Puig
Las disecó con la disciplina de una verdadera
Loca, de esas capaces de apasionarse por un cartero,
Pero eso fue en Leblon y se relaciona a su profesión de fe en Brasil:
La viñeta que repito porque repito, quien la contaría
Ya se ha ido, ocurrió antes, y el sonido ambiente –pasmen-
Era Gounod, el "Ave María" de los funerales de medio pelo,
Entre kitsch y joco-serio: en la mañana mexicana,
Bordaba un manto para un travesti amigo, y a cada agudo
Una hilada (de falsísimas perlas): así procesaba Manuel
Su exilio, en la Colonia Condesa. El manto, claro,
Azul-profundo, y los travestis chilangos, fascinados:
Los dones del escritor que jamás leerían
Se revelaban como suyos –a cada mañana,
La invención de un día, y a cada día, un happening,
Y ningún editor hubo quien, con la promesa
De una más perfecta canonización literaria,
Le hiciese sustituir el bordado matinal del manto
Por un capítulo más que podría esperar.

Así reza el radical sus días, sin altares
Y casi siempre sin asistencia que no la de esos
Conniventes ojos almendrados de quien se llamaba Sergio
Y se transformó en Amanda, y Rogelio en Fátima:
Las identidades, que para el ciudadano común son casi siempre
Alucionaciones persistentes, las tratan, justamente, como
Invenciones, y esa es la fuerza que tienen para arrostrar
Policías y pastores, y vecinos, y banqueros, y políticos.
¿Como escribir el siglo que pasó? ¿En tratados hirsutos
O en viñetas que tales? ¿Y quien los interpreta, y para quien
Retenemos tales historias? Yo, por azar, he resistido hasta ahora
Y no tengo la menor intención de callarme: aún
Me bate en el palato la lengua y la palabra, muchas veces, rana

Desbocada, proliferante y por cierto incontornable,
Sueño con ella y despierto para quien la devora,
La serpentina y la sierpe, el verso y el poema.
Entendedme, no es por ver a mi voz impresa, es que
De hecho tengo algo que decir, escuchadme.

Rita Hayworth, and for that matter Gabrielle d'Estrées,
Nefertiti o la Reina de Saba, Luz del Fuego y Mata
Hari, y quienes más no importa que relevados tuvieron
Sus perfiles en orfebrería, bajorrelieves, oleo o celuloide,
De hecho no importa, en las armas del presente: falsas musas, Clíos
De media jícara, todas nos traicionaron a cada día, cada minuto,
Y repetidamente, con su implícita promesa de ser
Y ser libremente –cuerpo que nade en la inmensidad del mar,
Que se suelte al aire en un paracaídas seguro, y haga footing
Al pie de la iglesia del pueblo: uno más, tan solo uno más
En un final de tarde presuroso. No.
La verdadera cara de la Historia, al menos hasta ahora,
Rebrilla a solas en el hilo de la hoz
De la Segadora.

Morre, Caravaggio

A primeira versão é a que fica, a que luta pela incolumidade
Que não contravenha os fatos, mas com eles se lixa e quer terminante
A eles impor-se, como a filha do dono da tabacaria, "o tal do Esteves"
Que sempre supus fanfarrão: sardenta e com a mão na cintura.
Por anos acalentei a cena em minha interna retina, e começaria
O poema com a imagem de uma teia de aranha, deveras
Incólume a se o homem lá embaixo se morre e de quê
E com qual idade, e por qual razão. Aranhas não houve
Participativas, teias não construídas por um arquiteto, e jamais
A filosofia do encobrir um quadro de referência, um espelho dourado,
A múmia de um faraó, ocupou um inseto: tal seria o começo,
A versão fiel de uma cena dramática, "the death of an artist",
Egregius in urbe pictor, como queria Clemente VIII Aldobrandini.
Pela teia, depois a aranha, logo o macerado corpo afundado
Num sujíssimo colchão sobre um sujíssimo catre, e logo o delírio
Final, frases conexas e inconexas, uma sintaxe mortuória, própria de
Quem avalia quem foi e sabe que morre, e morre
Feito animal esvaziado, um cão terminal.
Tal a primeira versão que nunca escrevi, e a tinha tão clara
Em minha retina, terá sido por não contar com um temperamento
Dramático, isso nos passa: Cecília, a mansa Cecília
Travestiu-se para romancear a Inconfidência,
Jorge enlouquecia quando se aproximava a Orfeu, e Carlos
Resmungava as noites brancas de Minas e um mas:
Mal sentava-se à mesa com o fantasma do pai:
Em seu Elsinore ninguém que deambulasse pelas ameias.
Assim somos, não mantemos altura ou pouco, votamo-nos
Ao presente e nossa alma a ele pertence. Vejo que bom foi
E bom é: a vontade da Musa mister aceitêmo-la.
A segunda versão
Não se impõe como um todo, e só se escreve por partes
E sem insetos que metaforizem a indiferença e um mas: Ferozes atuns
Rasgam do cadáver a carne com alvíssimos dentes e ferozes tenazes

De caranguejos ferozes, no fundo do mar. Nessa que escrevo
A morte deu-se antes e foi perpetrada, o mandante continua
A gozar em seu castelo de fâmulos e confortos de mignons
E os assassinos, vulgares , musculosos marujos
Sequer sabem a quem matam e menos quem lhes contratara.
Tal a última e a verdadeira versão já que possível
De escrever-se -a Musa assiste ao lado e é de silicone, não importa
O seu look, não importa se baba, se aprova o que faço: escrevo
Por que devo fazê-lo, para augurar que morra Caravaggio
Neste teclado, que seja o agora do poema a sua tumba final. Morre,
Caravaggio, morre afinal. Foste bulir com as carnes brancas
De um protegido, comer o cuzinho do menino do Mestre:
Morre, estafermo, já tinhas trinta e nove e ainda podia mais
O teu pinto que o teu pincel, assim sucumbem os intemperantes,
No Tirreno e no poema e para um terrível gáudio crustráceo,
Na escuridão mais atroz e numa segunda e correta versão.

SP 15 VII 04

Muérete, Caravaggio

La primera versión es la que lucha por la incolumidad
Que no contravenga los hechos, pero con ellos se vale y quiere terminante
A ellos imponerse, como la hija del dueño de la tabaquería, "el tal de Esteves"
A quien siempre supuse fanfarrón: pecosa y con la mano en la cintura.
Por años animé la escena en mi interna retina, y comenzaría
El poema con la imagen de una telaraña, deveras
Incólume a si el hombre abajo se muere y de que
Y con cual edad, y por cual razón. Arañas no las hubo
Participativas, ni telarañas construídas por algún arquitecto, y jamás
La filosofía del encubrir un lienzo de referencia, un espejo dorado,
La momia de un faraón, ha ocupado a un insecto: tal sería el comienzo,
La versión fiel de una escena dramática, "the death of an artist",
Egregius in urbe pictor, como lo quería Clemente VIII Aldobrandini.
Por la telaraña, después por la susodicha, luego el macerado cuerpo hundido
En un sucísimo colchón sobre un sucísimo catre, y luego el delirio
Final, frases conexas e inconexas, una sintaxis mortuoria, propia de
Quien evalúa quien fue y sabe que se muere, y muere
Como un animal vaciado, un perro terminal.
Tal la primera versión que nunca escribí, y la tenía tan clara
En mi retina, habrá sido por no contar con un temperamento
Dramático, eso nos pasa: Cecilia, la mansa Cecilia
Se travistió para romancear a la Inconfidencia,
Jorge enloquecía cuando se aproximaba a Orfeo, y Carlos
Resmungaba las noches blancas de Minas y un pero:
Mal se sentaba a la mesa con el fantasma del padre:
En su Elsinore nadie que deambulara por las almenas.
Así somos, no mantenemos altura o poco, nos votamos
Al presente y nuestra alma a el pertenece. Veo que bueno fue
Y bueno es: la voluntad de la Musa es menester aceptarla.
La segunda versión
No se impone como un todo, y solo se escribe por partes
Y sin insectos que metaforizen la indiferencia y un pero: feroces atunes
Rasgan del cadáver la carne con alvísimos dientes y feroces tenaces

De cangrejos feroces, en el fondo del mar. En esa que escribo
La muerte se dio antes y fue perpetrada, el mandante sigue
A gozar en su castillo de fámulos y de consuelos de mignons
Y los asesinos, vulgares, musculosos marinos
Siquiera saben a quien matan y menos quien les contrató.
Tal la última y verdadera versión ya que es posible
De escribirse –la Musa asiste al lado y es de silicone, no importa
Su look, no importa si babea, si aprueba lo que hago: escribo
Por que lo debo hacer, para augurar que muera Caravaggio
En este teclado, que sea el ahora del poema su túmulo final. Muérete,
Caravaggio, muere por fin. Fuiste bullir con las carnes blancas
De un protegido, comer el culito del niño del Maestro:
Muérete, estafermo, ya tenías treinta y nueve y podía más
Tu pija que tu pincel, así sucumben los intemperantes,
En el Tirreno y en el poema y para un terrible gaudio crustráceo,
En la obscuridad más atroz y en una segunda y correcta versión.

Traducción de Roberto Tejada

NANCY KUHL

FOUR POEMS

PECCADILLOES

A slight fault in
the paper reveals
the forgery. This
is (is this?) what
they asked for,
night swimmers, faint
of breath and ghostly.
Or the tell is
in the composition
of paint. But blue rolls
into evening in any
case, little griefs,
little sins notwith-
standing. Then again
the forgettable heat
of a hand over eyes
is like that too. Already
about to dash off to.

Everything's there,
the edge of the brick
works, the edge
of town. The vague
craving, the barest
breeze. Keep even
that small betrayal
distant as a wild past.

Scenic Overlook

Relentless near dark, always
that time of day here that hour:

horizon gone gray
in summer's careless mouth.

Alone, a crushed shell road.
Or the tide, the opposite

of breakwater. Recollection
is cold suspense

on my tongue until it is
a narrative, the plot

predictable as a returning
comet, glowing, tulip-shaped,

terrible, ruby bright. Orbit
is conviction not imagination.

Throwaway Remarks

A sharp punch line is a hitch
in my step, the patio cracked

uneven. Taste cool liquid. Feel
smooth glass damp to fingers

and pretend to feel curious about
the close landscape, the drama

of design. Careful inflection
is a distraction. Like the hot

stormwind wheeling or
the arrival of fireflies,

disintegration begins slowly,
a kind of curious gift,

something you forgot you were
waiting for.

Cursing the Equator

it is a story you tell lying down
handprint on glass or in drying
mud red impression where fingers
closed on her upper arm the inexact
shape of memory
•
numbered crosslines on the map lines
announcing here and now but
Cathy does not consent there are so many
false maps so many liars
•
she is cursing the fish their
eyes blood-pink their singing
she has forgotten
whether the sea lies
beyond the door of this
rented room or another she
is cursing hot hours her lover gone
crazy with fever she is
watching him
breathe and cursing his mouth
•
invisible bite of a silvery
equatorial beetle or exotic
germ whatever draws streaks
across his face pulls cracks on
his moving still moving
lips is under her skin
too only cool this time
•
ignore lines across
palm ignore the girl in a bar
saying lifeline loveline touching

every outstretched hand
with the same gesture same
single finger sweeping

•

dogs lick her ankles her dress pink
as her earlobe slides higher
on her thigh and not by chance no
that wasn't this cliff city
there were no beetles no conjure girl
kids collected bottle caps
and dogs wandered loose in alleys
and seagulls somewhere
somewhere nearby but not here

•

the maps are wrong the streets
named twice or not at all the outlines
of water askew

•

the dream a transatlantic plane
above the imagined seam but first
Amelia Earhart stands on the runway
beside the shining exotic
equatorial beetle waving
like a beauty queen lips closed
against the gap in her front teeth

•

Cathy curses black-leafed trees
the sleepwalker the deaf boy signing
at the counter in the grocery curses
the line across the middle of everything

•

near circle of nipple near
circle of navel walk the edge
the straightest street in town
her lips sun swollen blister

back burns red until
sunlight on her shoulders
bends her into an arch

•

air moves
in response only to
her hand fanning his
face her face and
to the open/close/open
of the room's blue door

EDUARDO LIZALDE

EL GATO

Se sabe legendario y mágico.
Nos mira siempre como a sus inferiores
desde las grandiosas tinieblas milenarias
de Keops o de Karnak, donde era venerado
e inmune a toda terrenal ofensa.

Uno puede admirarlo sobre un mueble mullido
o una consola
sorteando sin romperlos frascos de cristal
y otros endebles ornamentos y espejos,
avanzando entre ellos como un soplo
de seda y fuego.
O bien, podemos verlo sobre el borde pétreo
de un muro en el jardín,
ejecutando largos y estremecedores
conciertos de inmovilidad
con estatuarias dotes sobrenaturales.

Se puede uno topar con él en un estante
—a riesgo de un zarpazo—

confundido entre los bibelotes
de armiño o lana,
o acurrucado en la vitrina de un museo
junto al tranquilo cuerpo disecado
de un felino congénere o cómplice remoto.

En la casa, cuando se halla esculpido
en uno de esos trances de asombrosa quietud,
suele fijar en nosotros, como un dardo,
su gélida mirada
por un tiempo sólo registrable
con uno de esos artefactos fílmicos
de acción continua
aptos para observar el crecimiento
de una planta o una flor.
Sus fosfóricas pupilas
—eso suele decirse—,
son un túnel de luz hacia el infierno.
Uno siente al verlas de reojo
que si intentara sostener la vista sobre ellas
durante dos minutos temerarios
podría llevarlo a enloquecer de pronto,
sufrir algún masivo infarto
o derrumbarse, sangrando por los ojos,
al pie de alguna de esas domésticas deidades.

Diciembre 2005.

DODIE BELLAMY

LADY JANE

for Lissa Wolsak

The committee has selected another candidate and they need to get rid of me quick. "Off with her head!" they declared. I am unsuitable for the position, I have seen better days, I'm in over my head, powerful forces have conspired against me, I am unlucky in luck. And so it is that I, whom fortune has abandoned, find myself kneeling before the block in this ridiculous white gown that cognoscenti consider plain, but which is plenty fancy for me. The straw laid down to soak up the blood makes my nose itch. The executioner stands to my left, his red tights thick as latex, the little cap on his head, squat and wrinkled, looks like a rolled up condom. His expression is stern, yet serene. His left hand loosely clasps the handle of a huge axe planted on the floor. He and the axe form double verticals, stripe of cock-red executioner, stripe of brown handle, metallic gleam on blade. It takes 15 seconds for the viewer's gaze to arc naturally from my blindfold to that blade.

These are the things that are wrong with me. My gown is white yet I have fucked so many times I'm like the anti-matter of virginal. My hair flows loose around my shoulders, when the proper decapitation coif is hair tied up to reveal a clean

neck-target. This confirms the committee's suspicion that I am tasteless, histrionic. Gossips say I'm lying about the private chamber, that an execution such as mine would only happen in the open air, witnessed by "enough staff to run a small town." They underestimate the committee. It always operates in secret behind closed doors, tossing about candidates' fates with the careless self-interest of Greek gods. The committee is cagy, flattering. Even when the axe is imminent it says *we'd be lucky to have you if only you weren't so qualified, we'd be lucky to have you if only we didn't have so many others just like you*. Behind me former and future candidates turn away in agony. Should they look directly at me they will be infected with wrongness, this wrongness, my wrongness. One former candidate claws the wall in silent rage, a future candidate has collapsed like a puddle on the floor, her eyes rolled backwards. Their Holbein-like dresses are anachronistic, pure nonsense. The committee's sandy-headed henchman tenderly wraps his arms around me and whispers, "The darkness surrounds us."

You are unlucky in luck. A student brought in a bag of fortune cookies and we did a spontaneous exercise: write a piece responding to your fortune without mentioning it. The cookies were delicious, fresh, crisp, vanilla-y. "Where did you get these?" I asked. "From the factory in Chinatown." The following weekend I entered an alley tucked away between Grant and Stockton. The alley was dark and strangely empty for a Saturday afternoon, the air cool, absolutely still. Most of the doors I passed were closed, unwelcoming, I imagined secret knocks, slits that slid open demanding passwords. Suddenly I was in front of the factory. It was tiny, packed floor to ceiling with fortune cookies and their paraphernalia. The workers pretty much ignored me so I stood in the entrance and watched the cookies bake on a huge horizontal wheel that slowly spun counterclockwise, it was made of dark, heavy metal, like the iron of a medieval torture device. The cookies were stuck to the wheel, pale flat disks, and an ancient Chinese woman sitting on a stool would peel off a circle, stick in the fortune and bend the cookie over a metal rod. She did it so quickly, it was hard to actually see the steps, as if time were moving forward in jolts, the woman takes a flat cookie from the wheel—blip—she drops a stuffed half-moon in a basket. The ease and seamlessness of her movements are hypnotic. I often fantasize about special ordering

cookies to commemorate key moments in my life, cookies stuffed with messages such as "Congratulations on your new position" or "Save Me."

I feel so alone behind my blindfold, it's my own private movie screen. A slurry of humiliations flickers across it. Humiliation #1: Bathroom stalls are challenging for me. My claustrophobia didn't begin until I was 30, but ever since then, it's been intense. I've just finished peeing in the ladies' room of a beautiful old theater in Chicago. I remember intricate patterns of beige and green or blue tile. It's a date night, the room is packed with women perfumed and hairsprayed. Midwestern women intimidate me, they're so tough and efficient. I pull up my pantyhose, then flush the toilet (I've done it in this order since that dreaded morning in grade school when the toilet overflowed with my panties still down around my ankles). I take a deep breath and turn the circular latch to the right, the latch turns easily but whatever it's supposed to catch onto doesn't catch, and the door won't open. Panic hits and I turn the latch over and over to no avail, it won't catch, won't unlock the door. I don't know what to do. Should I scream for help, but how long would help take? My heart is racing and I have to get out of the stall immediately. The bottom of the door is a foot or so above the floor, so I get down on my stomach, I have to bend my legs back at the knees in order to fit, the speckled linoleum is icy, I see a flock of high heels moving restlessly about. The space beneath the door is tight, I'm not sure if I can fit, but I stick my head under and wriggle and wriggle. As I emerge, still panting with adrenalin, the bathroom grows silent, all eyes staring at me, cruel, uncomprehending, heavily-mascaraed eyes.

Humiliation #43: When I applied for the fulltime position, the woman in personnel said, "Some people have a fulltime personality and some people have a freelance personality, and you, Jane, have a freelance personality."

Humiliation #15: We're in gym class, the boys mixed with the girls, in a circle holding hands, we're learning an ethnic dance, square dancing or the horah. Whenever I touch another student's hand it's sweaty, but my hands are dry, so I when I get a chance I turn my back to the group and covertly lick my palms,

so my hands will feel as sweaty as everyone else's. This proves that I'm a team player.

Humiliation #3: We're in gym class, the boys mixed with the girls, and my square dance partner is Randy, the teacher assigned the partners randomly, so at least I didn't have to endure the ordeal of being the leftover after all the choosing. Randy's an okay boy, we face one another, and the teacher tells us to take one another's hands. I look at Randy's hands and they're covered with warts, his hands move towards me in slow motion deep focus, like in a Hitchcock film, hideous black warts, how could I have never noticed them before, I look around, I can't run away, can't refuse, the warts are still moving towards me, so I grab the tippy-tips of his fingers, and we raise our arms above our heads and form an arch.

Humiliations #4 & 5: I'm in first grade, sitting on the toilet, girls are peeing silently in the stalls on either side of me, but my pee is noisy, rushing against the side of the toilet like urine storm, I clench so it stops and try to let the urine out in dribbles so my peeing will be quiet as the other girls' peeing. I'm in first grade spinning around in a white raincoat with black velvet trim. My umbrella is also white with black velvet trim. I feel so sophisticated, like Audrey Hepburn, except that I'm too young to have heard of her. I slip and fall face first into a puddle, and a group of boys laughs at me. I walk home crying, thinking, this is the worst day of my life. That year I fell down so many times my knees were permanently scabbed, oozing pus. My frustrated mother cleaning my wounds.

The committee never communicates with you directly, but gossip escapes from it like gas from a corpse, vile, dispiriting. You lack the usual equipment for success. Your spirit of adventure is considered deadly. You have a reputation for being deceitful and treacherous. Gossip is the only way I know what's wrong with me, and I'm not the only one who knows—people I've never met or even heard of know what's wrong with me—and I know what's wrong with other candidates all over the country. A colleague of A's sued for sexual harassment, B just doesn't have enough energy, C is the worst interviewee her committee's ever met, D got

pregnant by a grad student, E is a bigmouth who talks only about himself, F's fame threatens the chair of her committee, G once filed a discrimination suit, H is a Christian, the committee member who supports I doesn't have enough power, and everyone can smell that J will never behave herself.

Humiliations #14–18: I slip my head through the iron railing on our front porch and my head gets stuck. Over and over again.

Humiliation #4: My lover and I are sophomores in college, a couple of months into sharing a two-bedroom apartment with a pair of foreign exchange students from Liberia. By now everyone realizes this was a big mistake. Antagonism has been growing between me and Sarah, the roommate who's home tonight. I find her overbearing, judgmental, and I resent that I frequently find myself defending America to her. This is the early 70s, cool people are protesting Vietnam, not defending America. If she realizes Nance and I are lovers, she doesn't acknowledge it. She does, however, harp on the evils of drugs. Nance and I live for drugs, everybody we know (except for Sarah) lives for drugs, and for reasons incomprehensible to me now, we're hiding that from her. Perhaps we were so used to being closeted, that hiding was second nature to us. This evening we've dropped acid with our friend Dennis and we're sitting in our bedroom and one of us has to go to the toilet, and that's a big problem because, since we're on acid, the three of us cannot be separated, and Sarah would find it really weird if the three of us went together. Nance peeks out the bedroom door to see what Sarah's up to. She's right where we left her, lying on the couch watching TV. She's always lying on the couch, like she owns it. I tried protesting at first, but she wasn't going to budge. "She's on the couch," Nance whispers. I'm sniffing a bottle of Chanel Russian Leather, it smells so good I take a sip. It tastes poisonous. Whichever one of us that has to go to the bathroom, has to go really bad, and we're getting frantic with how to reconcile that with our total bondedness. I can't remember what happened, I hope it was a moment of self affirmation, that the three of us scurried past Sarah and squeezed into the tiny bathroom, but my memory blips and we're all sprawled on the living room floor with Sarah lying on the couch telling us how ludicrous the Peace Corps is, with their cheap tacky

Peace Corps outfits, everybody laughs at them, and Liberian teens wear Peace Corps shirts like American teens wear Army shirts. Peace Corps women sleep with wealthy Liberian men, they do it to survive because the Peace Corps are so stupidly poor. And then she switches to LSD. "Do you know what people do when they're on LSD?" We shake our heads no. "They think they're cats," Sarah proclaims, as she sits up with her thighs spread, she's wearing tan shorts and a shirt that looks dayglo white against her dark, dark skin. She cramps her hand into a claw, leans forward and makes screeching cat sounds and claws at us. I look over at Nance and Dennis, they aren't smiling so much as staring at her in awe. "Tell us some more Peace Corps stories, " I beg.

A rumor is about as hard to unspread as butter. Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday. Discover and consummate reverberant limits of maturity. The shortest distance between two people is a smile. Step aside from the milieu of linearity into a multiplicity of emergent properties. Because of your mediocre nature the moonlight never misses an appointment. Take off your data-gloves, revision your self-destructive copulation with time.

Participants were asked to look at me for roughly 20 seconds. Their focus of attention was then monitored and displayed. The central focal point was of course my blindfolded face. The participants' gazes then fell down the length of my arm to the executioner's block, traveled to the right to the axe itself and then onto the executioner's face. The figure of the henchman was hardly scanned across. Of the two weeping candidates, it is the past candidate with her back to the audience who attracts most attention, with most viewers studying the nape of her neck. Unsurprisingly, the executioner's well-defined genitalia, hidden by tights, also attracted a lot of attention.

Humiliations #50–79: I hated my father. He was tall and handsome, and his rage poisoned my childhood. "I'm going to beat the shit out of you," he'd shout at me, a little girl. Up until his death in the mid-90s I had nightmares about him; I'd bolt awake, heart racing, terrified my father was going to get me. Late in life—I don't know what it was—stroke, retirement, sagging testosterone levels—he

became caring. He'd be sitting there, in his armchair, this sweet man saying "I love you," and I couldn't recognize him, I couldn't absorb his affections, it was like there was this impenetrable shield between me and him. I still had the nightmares—then, the night of my father's funeral my dream father became loving as well—just like the spirits that John Edward talks to on TV, no matter how evil and cantankerous they were in the flesh, when they appear on *Crossing Over with John Edward*, they're compassionate Mother Teresa-types. Now when I dream of my father he's all glowy and unconditional. I wake up loving him with a compassion that burns.

Humiliation #11: My ex-lover gave up a tenure-track position to sell herbal tonics. I hadn't been in touch with her for a few years when, out of the blue she sent me a bottle of tonic. The xeroxed sheet that accompanied it said the tonic was anaerobic and therefore killed the AIDS virus. This was 1989, at the height of AIDS panic. I put down the reprehensible FAQs and took a drink of the green concoction. I liked its bittersweet bite, and it made me feel so peppy, like a double espresso, make that a triple espresso. Glug, glug, glug. I sent her money for another bottle. A few weeks later the big earthquake struck—I didn't have power for 4 days, my cat jumped out the window and went missing, a woman at work got smashed to death on the Bay Bridge—I came home to a phone message from the ex-lover. "I heard about the earthquake. Hope you're alright! And, by the way, you must be out of Herbal Voodoo by now, Herbal Voodoo's great for stress." I never spoke to her again. According to the internet she's doing really well—she's a district sales manager. Google leads me to an article she wrote for *Herbal Voodoo Journal. By the time I got to Herbal Voodoo™, I was at my wits' end! I'd come home from work exhausted and mostly ate dinner in bed or in front of the TV. I had 25–30 pounds to lose! I started with 3 ounces per day because I felt as though I needed extra help to ease the hunger throughout the day. I did that for about six weeks. Then I went down to 2 ounces per day, as directed. No more cravings. It's clear to me: less carbs, less cravings. Herbal Voodoo™ has also helped me reduce my portions. I eat less, I'm less vulnerable and I don't feel the least bit deprived.* At the top left of the page is a thumbnail of her on the cover. She's standing in front of a fireplace, with her right foot on top of a Herbal Voodoo display. Details

elude me in the one-inch j-peg. At 300%, the image blurs into jagged pixels, as if my ex-lover were in a clunky primitive computer game—the woman or the man in the ancient black and white animation I used to have of two people fucking—Lew Ellingham gave to me on a floppy—I loved its rough amateur zeal. It reminded me of a prison tattoo, only moving. When I upgraded system software, the program would no longer run and the jagged fornicators were lost to me. The red white and blue Herbal Voodoo display my ex-lover's foot is on top of is located in the lower center of the thumbnail, the same position as my chopping block. She's standing triumphant, smiling for the camera—I'm blindfolded, kneeling. She always thought I was a loser. She's wearing a short-sleeved black turtleneck, loose charcoal pants, and a wide, shiny black belt that's fastened tight like a corset. There's an insert of a larger woman on the top left corner of the cover, a woman with a short-sleeved black turtleneck and white pants. I assume it's my ex-lover's "before" picture. The white pants are a cheap shot, chosen to make her before look as unflattering as possible. When I knew her she was much thinner than either picture, her bones too big for her gaunt flesh. Her sharp hips left bruises when she ground them against me.

I feel as though the change is deep, at a metabolic level. Herbal Voodoo™ has changed the way I look at food. Cakes and cookies used to make me drool. Not anymore. There's this incredible sense of freedom that I never had before. Food is more satisfying than ever and it even tastes better! I carry myself differently, too. I'm down one full size and my clothes fall nicely. I no longer wear baggy clothes and I feel so good!

In a larger more detailed photo on the same site, my ex-lover stands in front of a white piano, the piano so shallow it looks fake, like wainscoting in the shape of a piano. It has a matching white bench. The carpet is the same dark gray as the cover thumbnail, so I assume both are taken in her home. The walls are stark white. Poking awkwardly into the lower left of the frame is a piece of upholstered furniture, white with a pattern of pastel and gray. On top of the piano sits the same red white and blue Herbal Voodoo display. My ex-lover, with her right hand caressing the Herbal Voodoo display, looks proud of all she's accomplished, her thinness, her managerial position in pyramid marketing, her suburban

chic home. Studying these pictures, my only glimpse into her life, I think the obvious—thank god things didn't work out between us.

When I started my Herbal Voodoo™ program, the most difficult thing was food preparation. Pot roast in the morning requires preparation. I started to use my crock pot a whole lot more. I put it in the oven the night before with my pot roast. I wake up to an amazing smell and I'm hungry for it. When you commit to losing weight, your taste buds change, everything changes. Look at Herbal Voodoo™, not as a diet, but as a personal experience. Give yourself three months and let nature take its course. Herbal Voodoo™ was life changing for me.

This is the person I lost my virginity to while still a child. We were together through grad school. Twenty years later, could I even recognize her? Do long-term lovers have some irrevocable genetic link, a mutual homing device that kicks in whenever they're within x-amount of feet of one another. If my ex-lover were standing beside me paying for pot roast in the Safeway checkout line, would I rush up and hug her in enthusiastic reunion—or would I barely register this conservative, kind of butch looking middle aged lady. On another site she poses as an enthusiastic customer who writes an unsolicited endorsement. "As far as I am concerned, I feel Herbal Voodoo Spray™ is a first aid kit in a bottle—I carry one with me in my purse, one sits on my desk and on my nightstand."

These are the things that are wrong with me. I'm a woman. I write about sex. I'm too old, I'm too weird. I'm white. I'm a white woman who's too old to write about sex. Whiteness is bad if the committee dislikes you. If the committee likes you, whiteness is neutral. According to the committee, if I were a gay man or went to a different school, or if I were Michael Chabon, I'd be less white. My whiteness is very bad. Whatever the desired experience or credentials are, I lack them. No one on the committee queries me about my ability to perform the advertised duties of the position. The advertised duties are just that—an advertisement. If I were the right candidate I'd understand the proper interview attire. No one on the committee would wear an anachronistic white satin gown. The committee is suspicious of my opinions, which they can surmise just from looking at me.

I'm low class, unfamous, unfit. The committee suspects I'd be bad at cocktail parties. They're right.

Humiliation #9: At work, perched over my drafting table, I have a panic attack. I slip away to the bathroom, lock the door, lay on the floor and give myself an acupressure treatment. The toilet right beside my head, I press my crown chakra until I feel a throbbing pulse.

Humiliation #10: Junior High, I'm in the Girls' room, excitedly telling anyone who will listen about chastity belts, which I've just heard of. Alana, who has the best outfits and hair—she started the trend, for instance, of wearing giant plastic rings—Alana catches my eye in the mirror and says, "You're disgusting."

Humiliations #8 & 13: I'm nine years old, standing outside my Catholic step-cousins' house, wearing my favorite sundress, it has a fabric rose pinned to its skirt. I'm excited when a horse comes walking down the street. I've only seen horses at ranches where you pay to ride them, never just walking down the street. The horse comes up to me, nudges the flower on my sundress, then clomps on my skirt with its giant horse mouth. I start screaming. My stepcousins won't last very long because my uncle has sex with the oldest daughter, who's eleven. I won't find this out for over 30 years. My brother will tell me at my father's funeral. I'm behind my house, walking towards the alley with my uncle, he puts his arm around me, pulls me close to his body—solid, warm—even though I'm only eleven, I'm feeling aroused.

Humiliation #14: Seeing a guy in a coffeehouse who I almost fucked twenty years ago and not knowing if he recognizes me. He was lying down and I was sitting on the edge of the bed and I could tell he wasn't really into it. I stood up, grabbed my shirt and said, "I just can't do this."

Humiliation #15: The guy with the bad limp who used to stalk me. He could limp really fast and he'd chase after me down the street. I talked to him once in a Mission bar, that's all.

Through dedicated web searching I'm pretty sure my first long-term (meaning one long tortuous on and off year) male lover, a photographer, now lives in Culver City. Things ended badly between us. He dumped me again, and again, like a nervous tic, and again and again, I'd come back begging for more. He was my first—thoughts of him still fill me with drama and awe, as if buried within my psyche is an unchanged hologram of my fucked-up hyper-romantic youth. For eleven days I drove past the strip malls, mini-malls, and mall-malls of Culver City, remembering the photographer. The concrete slithered by like an endless erotic snake, the streets, the air itself, felt haunted by him, who I also haven't seen in 20 years. That aging fart in the blue monster truck beside me, could it be him? I stood on a balcony of the Howard Hughes Center and scanned the crowd listening to free jazz in the courtyard below. He was never a mall-type guy, but I still tried to pick him out as if a random encounter were inevitable, were something I deserved, could recognize or will. The photographer, my female ex-lover—no matter how many times I tell myself they no longer exist, I carry their phantoms around, phantoms that won't die, will never die. This is what horror films are really about, a love that bleeds and bleeds and whispers let me out, I wouldn't have gotten trapped in here if you weren't somehow all wrong.

In Culver City Christine and I ate at a late-nite Mediterranean restaurant about a half a mile down the road from the Museum of Jurassic Technology. The restaurant was inside a giant clear plastic tent that had turned translucent with age. It was packed with hipsters and young Arab men smoking hookahs, the air thick with sweet burning herb. I was telling Christine how stupid I felt about the photographer when I noticed the banquet table behind her. Sitting in the midst of a large extended family, was an actor I've seen on TV. I took a sip of my minted yogurt drink and tried not to stare. He was on some kind of cop show, someone in a position of power who was corrupt and fell, a cop supervisor or politician, I remember him shouting and then humiliated. In real life the actor is remarkably handsome, but only so-so on TV. Months later, whenever I watch TV I'm still looking for him, waiting for him to pop up in a new roll, with a new personality, but with a face I will gradually recognize, and then I'll point at the TV and screech, "That's him!" The Abel Ferrara star I saw in a parking lot with

Chris Kraus, it took a year and a half for me to see him again, to figure out who the hell he was. Same with the character actor we spotted crossing the street in New York City—Alan, Peter, Kevin and I, we all recognized him, but couldn't place him. "I think I remember him with a gun to his head," I said.

Humiliation #6: Third grade, recess, a group of boys hold me on the ground, pull down my pants and pretend they're taking photographs.

Humiliation #7: I've just finished reading at Cambridge, I'm freaked out by my cold reception, and then I look at my stomach in horror—my black pants are unzipped revealing a vivid white stripe of panties.

Heighten your sensitivity to the liquidity of surface. When you are in it up to your ears, keep your mouth shut. Use proven methods, avoid shortcuts. Acquit yourself from the promulgation of incessant fear and aimless reactivity. The onion you are eating is someone else's waterlily. Walk away from the noose of hierocracy, voyeurism, and distanced complicity. You are filled with life's most precious treasure, hope. When you make your mark in the world, watch out for guys with erasers.

A student said he didn't like characters who have eating disorders, as if this were a standard category of character, and since I'm always yammering on about embracing disenfranchised female experience, I told him about Anne Carson's Simone Weil. I wish I were so weird I was mystical, that my weirdness were fetishized, famous. To spell "weird" correctly, I was told, remember that it contains the word "we." The morning I found out the committee was axing me, I stood at my bedroom window and watched a homeless woman on the sidewalk across the street. She had a shopping cart beside her and several layers of blankets laid out neatly on the sidewalk, pillows in pillowcases. It was all quite colorful and comfy looking. She was an attractive woman, 40ish, though perhaps younger, her hair hanging past her shoulders, dark with gray streaks. She was tanned, of course. She may have been Latina. Her clothes were J Jill casual, flowing gray knit pants that fit around her trim butt and stomach, long sleeved blue knit pullover. Barefooted. A man came up to her and she yelled for him to get away. "Don't do

your drugs here, go away!" He left and she was consulting with the guys from the autobody shop she was camped out in front of. They seemed indifferent to her situation. When she saw the man reapproaching she put on her shoes, slip-ons, she yelled again, get away from here, go do your drugs elsewhere, he came right up to her bed and she kicked him, he backed off a few yards and she grabbed a collapsible metal rod, which she snapped open, one length at a time, dramatically for the man's benefit, as she kept moving in circles and shouting "get away." There was no question she'd use the rod, had used it before, her bed on the concrete, totally exposed. Another man appeared and started coming at her as well, these creepy men just keep coming, never stop coming, their faces cruel as vampires, and she's out there, this lone warrior, fighting them off—even Buffy had backup—I rushed out to my balcony and started screaming, "Leave her alone, I'm going to call the cops if you don't leave her alone." The men left and the woman looked up at me, not in thanks, but in recognition, with a touch of disdain.

To my left, in the glass that separates the Starbucks from the Ramada I see the reflection of a blind man in a suit and tie and sunglasses, he's moving quickly, rocking back and forth, his lips going a mile a minute. He was doing that when I entered, when I could see the real him, not just his reflection. I couldn't hear what he was saying, don't know if he's emitting sounds or if his lips are just moving—or if his rocking has anything to do with the lively music that's playing. He seems very happy. On a weekday evening, I saw the woman again, standing on 11th, in jeans and a black pullover, a black baseball cap turned backwards. I almost didn't recognize her. She was looking expectantly towards Market Street—the same nervous pose I've seen repeatedly, of men waiting for dealers. The way it works is that the dealer arrives and the two men walk together towards Mission, as if they're just hanging out. Arms loose at their sides, their hands perform a quick unacknowledged exchange. The dealer turns and walks back towards Market. The other continues on to Minna Street, where I live, and smokes his crack. The woman stood in the noir glare of the streetlight, leaning against the B of A parking garage, her body tense, she glanced at me once, casually, then refocused her gaze on Market Street, refusing me any further details or evidence, refusing to

be an analogue for my own eager victimization. That final image lingers, she's still there, peering from the darkness, waiting.

Lady Jane, being nothing abashed prayed all the way till she came to said room. When she entered the room she said to the other candidates standing thereabout: "Good people, I am come hither to die, and by the committee I am condemned to the same. I am, indeed, unqualified for the position, and the consenting thereunto by me was unlawful: but touching the procurement and desire thereof by me or on my behalf, I do wash my hands thereof in innocency, before God, and the face of you, good Christian people, this day." And therewith she wrung her hands. And then, kneeling down, she turned to the executioner saying, "Shall I say this psalm?" And he said, "Yea." Then she said the psalm of Miserere mei Deus, in English, in most devout manner, to the end. Then she stood up and gave the future candidate her gloves. The executioner gave to her a fair handkercher to knit about her eyes. Then he kneeled down, and asked her forgiveness, whom she gave most willingly. Then he willed her to stand upon the straw: which doing, she saw the block. Then she said, "I pray you dispatch me quickly." Then she kneeled down, saying, "Will you take it off before I lay me down?" and the executioner answered her, "No, madame." She tied the kercher about her eyes; then feeling for the block said, "What shall I do? Where is it?" The former candidate guiding her thereto, she laid her head down upon the block, and stretched forth her body and said: "Lord, into thy hands I commend my spirit!" And so she ended.

LINH DINH

SEIS POEMAS

La palabra más bella

Creo que la palabra "verruga" es la más bella de la lengua inglesa. Dormía boca abajo, sin su camisa, su espalda humeaba. Yo mismo estaba sangrando. Había una cosecha de verrugas en su espalda. Su cuerpo lloraba. Guiño puede ser la más fea. No digas: "La bala guiñó dentro de su cuerpo". Di: "La bala danzó dentro de su cuerpo". Di: "La bala dio tumbos adelante y arriba". Luz oblicua. Todos los músculos inferiores de mi cara se crisparon. Le di la vuelta a mi hombre delicadamente, como un amante impaciente, cuidando de no fracturar su espina. Fichas de dominó dieron chasquidos bajo la piel crocante: ¡Clack! ¡Clack! Una cara colapsada miró con asombro. Había un rocío rosado en el aire, luego un breve arco iris. La mandíbula estaba cosida con hilos azules al alma. Extraje un diente de la lengua. Se había tragado el resto.

Ojos de pescado

Mi hijo no comerá otra cosa que ojos de pescado. En la pescadería, si mi esposa quiere comprar un esturión que ya no tiene ojos, también tendrá que preguntar por dos ojos extirpados a un bagre, o incluso a una anguila, de modo que mi hijo pueda cenar sus ojos de pescado esa noche. En casa, esos ojos se pondrán dentro de sus nuevas cuencas.

Si un muchacho que come piernas de pollo todo el tiempo se convertirá muy probablemente en borracho, y un muchacho que come alas de pollo se convertirá en poeta, ¿qué será de mi hijo, que nunca come otra cosa que ojos de pescado?

Comiendo pollo frito

Odio admitirlo, hermano, pero hay veces
Cuando estoy comiendo pollo frito
Cuando no pienso en otra cosa que en comer pollo frito,
Cuando me olvido por completo de mi familia, honor y país,
Las varias deudas de sangre que tienes conmigo,
Mis humillaciones pasadas y mis crímenes futuros—
No hay, en resumen, sino la piel crocante de mi pollo frito.

Pero no soy tan malo, también hay veces
En que me niego a lamer o tragar nada
Que no tenga relación con lo humano.

(Que es, si te fijas bien, algo completamente anodino.)

Y sin duda ésta es la razón de que las manzanas ocasionen pleitos,
Y la carne roja acarree humillación,
Y con cada bocanada de aire
Se llenen mis pulmones de pólvora y humo.

Cuerpo sin fronteras

Antes, era una persona miserable, enjuta, estirada,
Tiesa, completamente torcida, tartamuda, fanática,

Pero esa mañana, mi piel se sintió fresca y consciente como nunca.
Mi cuerpo tintineó. De pronto pude entender y hablar

Dos mil lenguas. Mi alma floreció, mis pechos retoñaron.
Volví a pelarme el prepucio para eliminar todos mis obsoletos

Y elaborados prejuicios. Mis dientes, los huecos entre
Mis dientes y mi aliento se sentían frescos y limpios como nunca.

Pude ver muy lejos. Pude simpatizar con cada
Hebra de pelo trenzada en la piel de cada persona.

Temblando, eyaculé por primera vez en mi vida, en la vida.
Me volví consciente del milagro de mi ano y vagina.

Finalmente, se me había permitido despatarrarme, mezclarme con
Todos los seres humanos, animales y cosas. Sólo quería volcarme

A besarlos a todos en ese momento. Sólo quería servir
Y mamarlos a todos en ese momento. También quería que todos

En esta tierra me mamaran. Estaba deseoso de perdonar
Y pedir disculpas a la juntura entre los dedos de cada persona.

Desnudo, caminé por la calle como el primer ser humano.

Vocab Lab

Esta palabra significa sí,
sin embargo, tal vez o no,
dependiendo de la situación.

Esta palabra significa deseo,
amor, amistad, violación o el deseo repentino
de involucrar a alguien en una conversación
filosófica.

Esta palabra es irrepetible;
su significado, hermético para todos los que vienen de fuera.

No puede pronunciarse
ni memorizarse.

Esta palabra también es proteica,
y puede usarse en lugar de cualquier otra,
sin merma en su significado.

Sólo puede sugerirse, implicarse,
y por lo tanto no aparece en ningún libro,
ni siquiera en un diccionario.

No puede decirse ni verse.
Puede escribirse con libertad, sin embargo,
pero sólo en completa oscuridad.

Esta palabra significa una cosa cuando la dice un hombre,
y otra, completamente distinta, cuando la dice una mujer.

Esta palabra significa ahora, pronto o nunca,
dependiendo de la edad del hablante.

Esta palabra significa aquí, allá o ninguna parte,
dependiendo de la nacionalidad del hablante.

Con frecuencia se ha dicho que los nativos
sólo enseñarán a los extranjeros un fraude, lenguaje degradado,
un sistema de signos simulado
que parodia el lenguaje real.

También se ha dicho que los nativos
desconocen su propio idioma
y deben imitar el lenguaje falsificado de los extranjeros,
para dar un sentido a sus vidas.

Productos de una marca nueva

La pistola de un vigilante que siempre da
En el blanco —incluso si el blanco eres tú—
Sin importar a quien estés apuntando.

Una computadora que escucha y te silba,
Como tú le silbas, tu tonada favorita.

Carne que te limpia los dientes
Mientras la masticas.

Un camión tan imponente, que sólo al presidente
De los Estados Unidos de América le está permitido
volcarse en él, a su propio antojo.

Un diccionario con adjetivos positivos solamente.
Un diccionario sin verbos húmedos.
Un diccionario con definiciones negociables.
Un diccionario que define palabras por sus antónimos.

Todos los grandes éxitos del último milenio
Interpretados en vivo, en el escenario, conforme
A tu concepción del arte, cráneo acústicamente agrandado.

Una serie completa de tus fotos
Desnudo, que tú tomaste y tú
Te revendiste —con descuento.

Una muñeca inflable con cara de espejo.
Una muñeca inflable con doctorado.
Una muñeca inflable con color de piel ajustable.

Una muñeca inflable sensible que sólo quiere
Tu amistad —una muñeca inflable platónica.

Agua de lluvia en una botella, luz solar en una caja
Y sonido ambiente de una parada de autobús
Al final de la calle, grabado en un CD.

Un video de 24 horas de lo que hiciste ayer.
Un video de 24 horas de lo que harás mañana.

Una foto hiperrealista de lo que está afuera
de tu ventana, pegada a tu ventana.

Un juego de beisbol que nunca termina,
para jugarse al mismo tiempo que
Un partido de futbol que nunca termina.

Bombas en racimo que esparcen ejemplares de *Hojas de hierba*
En un radio de mil millas, durante mil años.

Minas terrestres hechas de pasta,
Copeteadas con mozzarella y todo
Lo que tú quieras.

Un aeroplano que nunca aterriza.

Y, finalmente, tu cuento de hadas favorito
Pintado en tus nuevos miembros de plástico.

Traducción de Gabriel Bernal Granados

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

JOAN MITCHELL'S SPINNERETS

White flowers scissor-billowing the hemlock.

Where you begin is
a line tossed out, to catch on its own slant.
Your second move? Another line
punning across the first, as when one word
mounts another. Fishing the void, seeing if something
tugs back, and if not? The vexation of starting over
while keeping what was done.
Little Lulu's chair. A strip of chicken. What do
these shapes signify? A gesture, a gravid
reeling out. As if the lines were emerging from you,
spurting from many nipples.

How say this stroke works
but that does not? What is broken advances,
pillowed by what will not yield:
a thought drinking its shadow.

Loss looms. The loom hums.
An image is forming, a centripetal centrifuge
gusting erratic webs in the cream. Which peaks
and scrams,
almost, for nothing ever entirely leaves.
What seems to disappear has only camouflaged itself
as godfill.
Something has entered the composition that is alien to it.
I think of the Nephila
in her golden web unaware
hatched wasp larvae are feeding on her blood.
A blow-up of her midgut reveals
the septic aviary. Cross-outs galore
reassemble as
a burning lamb!
The painting as an enraged lamb!
In what neuron lode of your brain did rapture
misfire as rape?
To somehow get
the blood of the world in, the shed blood, the blood you cannot
see, or even know about, but know is shed.
Is this carmine or massacre red?
Is this chockablock knot
the scene of a crime, or quarried depth,
the two dimensional
clotting in psyche as a lioness crossing
the blood stream of your? of my? heart—and do I
want my heart to be played by
an auburn carnivore emotion,
or, by a caterpillar band? Oh so much of you is here,
just in swaying drip lines, nematocystic tentacles…

You leave before you arrive, you arrive
without having come. But is this not the spring of
self-invention? Of moving out an all,

unconfined by figure or representation, a presence
sea-urchin erect with menstruation, drunkenness
fucking, friendship! All of which are sensed and hived below
our meeting ground, internal aviation,
our dog fight in the clouds! zooming under you,
then you pepper me from behind, in flames I go down
through a blob of vermilion and a swath of no,
entangled in the ur-done, the undone, the never to be
is pulling something from me,
a memory tugged out of its carapace.

As you aged, the spider milk level lowered,
lifting into view a branchwork in staccato detour,
the casserole of a capillary thatch,
moulting
switchbacks, hemlock breakthrough become
your linden in slow explosion, as if the maw of the universe
had opened, pandoric, and Hope
had triumphed, consuming all her sister ills.

The periscope's mirror now a kaleidoscopic exit into
yellow tormentil stars, blue
dove-gray milkwort sprays,
lilac marsh violets, a field unfolding,
chopped turbulence, crocked,
eternally vernal, your friend Gisèle's
girlhood valley, explored only by those who knew
the location of the secret entrance, this
flushed paradise forth! Packed anagrammatic
closure, blue
loaded with black, affirmation
with hell in tow, azure ribbed with struts of
incorporated erasure. Vincent's crows,
wrung out black propellers lathing

corn trampled into ochre lightning.

Whose death mask is being molded with
these rampant arctotheric clouds?

How divine the state of the union in
the entrails of
Daisy Mae?

JAIME LUIS HUENÚN

SIX POEMS

I watch the clouds drift over port
a sad forecast for the future.
Weakly pushed by the winds of literature
the clouds return to sea,
I know they are not my destiny.
"Prophecies disgust me," I say
still, I see my life,
beneath the birds who carry in their wings
all the time in the world.

Says you can't stop going to the bars
along the morning shore,
that the bodies reach you
with that port violence always sold
to the lowest bidder.
In truth you cry in vain.
Your thirst is but the vanity of the trees
on the hill who have conquered the turbulent night sky.
Meanwhile, the silence will do what it can
to those poems sweetly burning
in the overflowing ashtrays of life.

A woman written in the sand,
the unhappy dreams of disappeared sailors.
The length of her hair reaches
the dark eyes of sleeping fish.
The moss of her shadow covers
the eroding walls of the dockyard.
"Happiness is a shadow," she says
as the imaginary storm floods in through
the port's broken windows.

"I lost my language on the ashen
coast of Trakl," the stowaway finally said.
Crouched between oil drums sputtering
the Yiddish of ports and bars.
"Give him scraps of food and clothes," the captain ordered.
"My ship's course will not be changed
by a madman dying in our hold."

"Cruelty is an infinite season,"
he inscribed on the dirty merchant binnacle.
Between toasts and curses
he recorded the dictums of his heart.
He then plucked out the fictions
and left them to die in the canals
that overflowed with trash
and rain.

"Now my homeland is silence," whispered the priest
as he entered the wide nave of the dilapidated church.
Sitting near the vitreau
I see the flock—dust, sandstone—
pounded mercilessly
by the port winds.

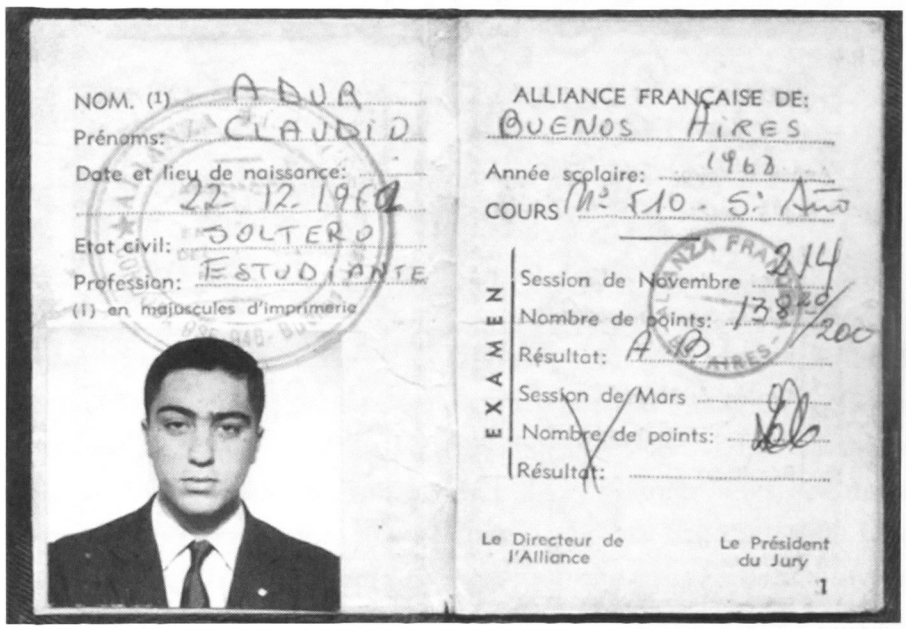
Translated by Daniel Borzutzky

SILVIA MALAGRINO

STILLS FROM *BURNT ORANGES*

The following photographs are stills and production shots from the film *Burnt Oranges* (2005), an experimental documentary about the long-term effects and repercussions, personal and social, of Argentina's 1970's state terrorism. Juxtaposing an intimate first person witness narration with interviews, documentary, and re-created footage, the film raises issues of memory, historical time, identity, love, loss and accountability. *Burnt Oranges* links the struggles of the Argentine people to recover social principles and communal ties with today's necessity to defend human rights, preserving human dignity and democratic values.

Claudio's Drawing: Sol Amante de Luz.



NOM. (1) ADUR
Prénoms: CLAUDIO
Date et lieu de naissance: 22 12 1960
Etat civil: SOLTERO
Profession: ESTUDIANTE
(1) en majuscules d'imprimerie

ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE DE:
BUENOS AIRES
Année scolaire: 1963
COURS Nº 510 - 5º Año

EXAMEN
Session de Novembre 2/14
Nombre de points: 138 20/200
Résultat: A 10
Session de Mars
Nombre de points:
Résultat:

Le Directeur de l'Alliance
Le Président du Jury

1

Claudio's ID. A disappeared friend.

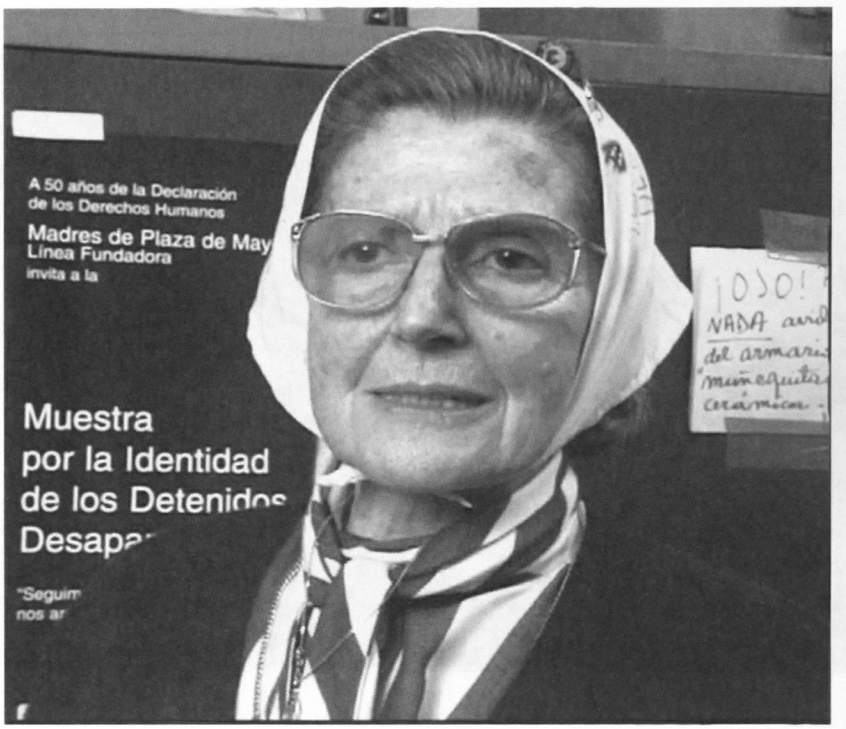
Cemetery Recoleta, Buenos Aires.

Demonstrator with Che.

Demonstrators' banner: out of Iraq.

Police at the 27th anniversary of the coup d'état of 1976.

Anniversary of the coup in Buenos Aires.



Laura Bonaparte. Madres Línea Fundadora.

Demonstrator with sign at 27th anniversary of the coup d'état of 1976.

KASS FLEISHER

S. E. EDMONDS

Guessing that a lone man might cross the border more easily than would a lone woman, Sarah Emma Edmonds (1841–1898) left Canada as Franklin Thompson, a Bible salesman in Flint, Michigan. When the Civil War broke out she enlisted in the Second Michigan Infantry. Although she repeatedly requested combat duty, she was assigned rearward on the grounds that she was too frail to fight. Colonel Orlando Poe sent her across the lines disguised as a black male slave, and she was so effective at gleaning information while building Confederate fortifications that Poe sent her across time and again, often "disguised" as a female peddler. Stricken with malaria and aware that treatment would reveal her sex, she deserted; following her convalescence she worked, undisguised, as a nurse in Union hospitals. Later in life she sued the United States for a veteran's pension, which was denied on the grounds that she was a deserter. In 1886 the Secretary of War finally recognized her as "a female soldier...rendering faithful service in the ranks."

i avow i aver she said she was a he that's how i heard it the poet was blind. ineffable thisness to meaning's raw stuff whether experience can become words and words become experience depends. so much upon. she said. i know. she said she was a she and because she did what shes do she stands stirring the raw. she said she was a reb and i wonder what did she do when she had her . her . beardless boy breastless girl breathless yank flag curls she said she was that is such is my in. formation. uniform. she with how is it they put it ear to the ground. she. did. picket. not a halfbad. shot. the poet was effable the crude was nipable the push was fryable they wanted to instill they had lain. with. her. in. tending on fight she was too as they say frangible. she said she was ill she said disease. is what. did. her in. unprivate privates. what she spied when she. knew. without mercy she was history. the green scent of marrow oozing out their bones no. an. aesthetic. she said she was a she then she said she was a vet they said desert. her. she said super. annuation. proof the fact she was. had. fabbed. entrenchment was her cause i could see from here the poet was that. there ineffaceable. there

i avow. i aver

oh say can

you see

here.

her.

one

us.

a

i

-

a

-

-

fist.

RÉGIS BONVICINO

ACONTECIMIENTO

1

Timbre áspero. Ángulo vivo del viento. Sol para magnolia. Lluvia para cactus. Crótalos para cobra y cola de cascabel. Rotación y traslación, desmedidas. "A" para cosa y estrella y para callar y para ex. Simple pasaje en sí, para seguir. Las cenizas de un mapa quemado. Estacas para mónadas. Atajo para alado. Detallado, el rostro precipitado anula el asa del dragón.

2

Lento para el sol. Lento que expone el azul. Susurro para el silencio. Silbido para callado. Fuerza para flujo, magnético, donde la estrella atrae la noche. Noche para estrella. Estrella para sol. Mutuo para azul y color, distantes. Ritmo para noche. Sol para luces y nube. Nulo para azul. Azul nulo para espacio. Cosa y sombra más adelante.

Cuarto poema
(Canalla densamente canina)

Las flores exhalan miedo
cólera de color,
las magnolias exhalan silencio
tulipán intimidado,

lenguaje de miedos
hojas caducas
de las caléndulas sin enero
culpa del cosmos

de haber visto el sol
la rosa y su
perfume, seco
sombra

despavorida de begonias
azul de hortensias
trampa distante,
tensa

crisantemo en pánico
pétalos rojos del rododendro
trémulas no
del viento

En Beco do Propósito

La estrella desaprovecha
el sol quema las lámparas de noche
el flamboyán
entrando en el techo de la casa en la esquina

hay habas negras, & semillas,
mañana azul
pétalos rojos del hibisco
en la pared,

el arbusto se yergue, de piedra,
como rostro enjuto
un perro, de paso, roe un hueso
los claveles huelen mucho

para Bruna
Paraty, 12/7/2000

Con Bruna
(ella a los 8 años)

Al atravesar el parque
hojas bajo los pies
pisando, en mí, el otoño

Canción (6)

Un golpe más imponía pliegues
al hueco de las ojeras
nadie para hacer guardia a mi puerta
como un perro

Cadáver de suicidio,
en aquella mañana suave de abril,
del vómito en torrente
borrando cualquier

vestigio de flor en mi cuerpo,
Calumnia acéfala,
hojas amarillas de la jacaranda,
cabezas rubias de las nípeas

la casa en declive de la luna, iluminada
por un sol de hemisferio
búgulas, de vacilantes llamas azules
¿verdad o música?

(jirón del tempo
y de tanto desprecio,
el tumbo violeta,
de la verdad en peso)

para Alva Flôr, in memoriam

Acontecimiento (3)

Hoy es domingo ayer fue sábado, el primero de enero será día festivo porque oigo música en la sala y la luna no estará en cuarto creciente, la semilla es roja y dura, la madera escarlata, la semilla es de madera: roja y negra, de una sola fruta; la semilla no cae del árbol, la semilla tiene alas, la semilla tiene vellos, la semilla es un pájaro de plumas escarlata, la semilla es madera, que despierta en las cuencas/recodos, en los huertos y, una vez, se despertó en la playa de Trindade; (hay algunos otros tipos de semilla de *tenteiro*, una de ellas, cáscara, de la vaina, marrón, grano, amarillo, vivo, y la semilla es roja, rutilante, la vaina, sinuosa, se va secando), la semilla sólo cae del árbol después de por lo menos dos años –la semilla es leña, la semilla es fuego, la semilla es roja, gris, en las tierras húmedas de Pará, es estrella, *mucunas*, *buiuçu*, aquí, en el sur, ojo de cabra, no importa, la semilla es un collar, de árbol, flores sólo en intervalos de varios años, (un florero, en una esquina de la sala, ahora en un silencio sibilino, siniestro), pétalos negro-violáceos, a veces más claros fugaces.

30/12/2001

Abstract (2)

Gaviotas cayendo en el agua
en el Niágara, verde.
Se agotan los dólares.
Un hombre dormía en un hueco

en una esquina de Lexington
en la acera
de la Collaborative High School –
School of the Future –

entre la puerta de vidrio
y las cercas de alambre
cajas de cartón,
una especie de refugio

(cigarros pisoteados),
"Visitors: no trespassing"
Él no obedeció al aviso

En Manhattan, sólo las ratas son democráticas

13/9/2002

Variación horaciana

El esqueleto del murciélago es un desecho
Inobvio
Delante del espejo
Avanza
Bajo la piel
De mi propio

Esqueleto de murciélago
Desecho inobvio
Delante del espejo
Avanzo
Bajo la piel
De mi propio

Antimuseo

Ocio, verano, exuberante, el charco, los dos canarios bebiendo agua en el charco, una piña, la fruta coronada, pudriéndose en el pasto, un manglar, cielo nublado, una garza en el mar, porque, dentro de poco, tendré las horas contadas, (los minutos contados), los días contados

•

ahora, de la ventana del cuarto, magnolias, la exuberancia del verano, que la lluvia aflora, lluvia de la tarde, los doce pétalos de la guzmania lingulata estrella, naranja y verde, el impulso de las plantas, gladiolos rutilantes, agapantos, vaganas, cebrinas, lo que cae con la lluvia, caballo, parado, horizonte, primaveras caen, por detrás de los muros, nube y lo que se mueve por esas líneas

•

entre la boca del río y el mar, en el manglar, hay árboles cerca del caballo, jauría de perros, ¿tierra firme?, el caballo pastando bajo la lluvia, angélicas, al ras del suelo, tritomas altivas para alivio de un rayo, amarilis, cúrcumas, lirios, la sal de la luna en las calles aún vacías, palmeras, el viento en las palabras, pío, disperso, pájaros, y ya no mana, por los tejados, el agua, lo que no pasa con la lluvia

Paraty, 22/1/2003

Casi

En un hueco
trueque más de mí a mí
mismo mientras tanto oscilé
y el silencio replicó

subí un escalón
reverso visible
como en un encanto
sapos en el estómago

ratas en las entrañas
pus en la médula
Duro como hierro
e inexpreso

cavé un espacio
en el mármol
un bálsamo no me alzó
emérito despedido

el sol del día
finalmente me persuadió
de tarde, en el Jardín Botánico
Poesía Pura,

Floribunda,
tallo con espinas –
roja, blanca
rosísima, como flor

Traducciones de Odile Cisneros

FRANCISCO MAGAÑA

CORAZÓN DE PIES CANSADOS

El huésped que me habita sigue viviendo oscuro el sueño de la promesa...

¿No hay amores para el tiempo ni olvido para la muerte?
La pregunta, con sus rasgos de ingenua curiosidad,
inventa un silencio a su alrededor
(sólo interrumpido por el grito fiebre de las parturientas, el nuevo llanto).

¿Quién responde?

La pregunta es la respuesta en el agudo filón del insomnio.

¿Cómo saber que el tiempo de saberte no se fuga en la insistencia del pordiosero?
¿Cómo saber si la fuga no es la verdad arropada en desconcierto?

Dolorosa, con su voz dolorosa,
una figura de negro se regodea
en los puntos cardinales del crepúsculo.
Destellos más que humanos:
los ojos de la recién parida son un adiós convulso
a los frescores del ayer desecho de sus días.

Su pálpito corazón ensombrece
los gestos, las oraciones al pie de la cama
—y así allá afuera,
tan lejos como el camino en el que nunca más sus pasos.

Debo dejar, entonces, que la mano que todo lo borra desvanezca tu voz, la semejanza a ti misma que en la promesa encuentra su sinrazón de ser.
Y que el instante sea sólo un conato de nostalgia, una simple reverberación en los labios del mundo.
Debo dejar que transcurra lo que tenga que suceder.
Pero con lluvia.

El silencio tiene el rostro
alumbramiento lumbre del incendio.
Deja el olvido en la mortaja:
nostalgia, música dolida
en las costillas de los pasos
devorados por el salitre.

¿Por qué mortaja es el cuerpo
si nuestros labios
gimen cuando la piel es apenas un leve
incendio, un temblor en los labios
creciendo de la noche?

¿Y dónde nuestros labios?

¿Pero dónde nuestros labios inflamados?

Volver los pasos.
Cantar a solas la canción que nunca me enseñaste,
mirarte en los cristales empañados
y saber que el movimiento de tus labios
anula la existencia en mis oídos.
Sólo así.

Sólo así podré creer el sueño que tu voz
inventó en mis venas, el asombro de saberte
entre nosotros y el tibio resplandor
de una espera que desfallece.
Sólo así
habré de regresar a la primera iglesia
donde vislumbré tu nombre.
Y a la ardua consigna de repetirlo a ciegas.

Gris el agua como la iglesia de Avignon en primavera; alegre como el hábito de Cister entre el crucifijo, la niebla y la montaña. Como el infierno verde del segundo canto en el principio de un camino largo. Como la mano de Lucía en los ojos del florentino que cantó a la angélica voz bajo la lluvia.

Y pedirle al agua como quien le pide a Dios,
para no dejar que el instante se pudra
en la mera revelación que lo convierte en nada.

Tiene la mortaja sensación de tierra virgen, de tierra no pisada por el profano que masculla su rabia en los altares.
Tiene en los ojos lluvia gris, que canta en la víspera de la fuga.

Cuando el espíritu adquiere posesión de los sentidos se trueca el mármol en arcilla resbaladiza, y al celebrar su aposento, tiene el sol un aura de festejo que no cabe en el amanecer.

Gracias a Kierkegaard sabemos de la condena. Destinados a nuestra propia suerte desde la primera vez que los órganos se revolcaron en el instante alucinado de la pasión, permanecemos a orillas del engaño, del tierno acontecer de la desmemoria. Y en el instante del advenimiento sabemos del olvido a medianoche.

Iremos a buscar el primer miércoles del mundo,
a llevar veladoras a los muertos
¿y hasta cuándo volveremos a cantar

si no hay tiempo
para invocar los murmullos de las complacencias?

Cuando el hombre se asoma a medianoche
al ruido ventanal de las quimeras
solo ve el hastío
o acaso el rescoldo de las últimas aguas.

También el humo de los altares es abismo.

La frase a medias
y el negro silencio de un minuto.
El agua de la luz
más carne y más desahucio:
tinta de luz
más viva muerte que la aurora,
letras que nada forman al formarse,
silogismos perdidos en el litium
y en la tarde larga del invierno.

Quizá la sangre de abril.
Quizá el ánimo del sepulturero
que mengua sus temores
en la turba tumba de los despertares
y luego canta con tierra entre las uñas,
con la impronta inequívoca del día:
porque sobre su piel los aires
y el festejo
en una gota azul cuando la gloria.

¿Y la cera derramada?
Luego el péndulo mar de la resaca
en el ojo adivino
de una tal vez habitación en ruinas.

Sobre todo
palabra en el infierno corazón y medianoche.

Sobre todo
luna y qué loco proceder ya sin remedio.

Sobre todo
mármol el miércoles del primer marzo.

Y además zozobra
en la palabra corazón y balbuceo.

¿Oscuro acaso el gesto?
¿Oscura acaso la sorpresa de la ceniza
volando hacia su fuego?

El presagio del nombre impronunciable
ha de venir
para que alumbre de nuevo en los ojos
el cansado hábito de la esperanza.

Mejor aquí en la callada soledad de sombras.
Con figuras escurridizas en el vaivén de los tormentos,
con la música temprana del dolor. Solo,
como un fantasma que le saca ventaja a las pastillas.

Mejor aquí, en el jardín de los ángeles sin ángeles,
con la palabra en el dominio de la furia,
con la exaltación del arrumbado sueño de los locos.
Con este manojo de quimeras
urdidas en la más ingenua de las tardes.
Con esta quimera de manojos
hundida en la perversa tarde de la nada.
Con la ruidosa compañía de todos

en este despertar con nadie. Tan solo
como el cuerpo en la tibieza de la sepultura.

Mejor aquí.

Mejor aquí el badajo como el alba rosácea de los vivos.

Mejor aquí, dolor,
aunque nadie cante mejor
que su propio mejor aquí,
en el amplio recorrer de los sentidos
sus culpas aferradas,
su rostro empantanado
como el rostro verdoso de los vivos.
Siendo la muerte fiesta de la vida,
mejor aquí. Aunque las líneas pasionales
nunca lleguen a juntarse, paralelas.

Mejor aquí,
cerca de las llagas como los clavos del primer herido.

Nada como el augurio del sueño.
Como la redención de una taza de café de madrugada,
cuando todo parece dispuesto a caminar hacia dónde.
Para recibir el alba,
nada como en mi cuerpo tu ausencia.

PETER RAMOS

BEYOND THE DEEP IMAGE: JAMES WRIGHT'S VALLEJO AND THE ETHICS OF TRANSLATION

Whatever we may think today of Robert Bly—or "Iron John"—U.S. American letters are indebted to him for helping to promote the idea that our national verse can only be enriched by the poetry of other countries and cultures, especially non-English speaking ones. It may be the great irony of our current abandonment of traditional "Western" poetic forms—and our sense that, theoretically at least, all cultures and languages are equally valid, equally legitimate, especially in the arts—that we can point to no current poetic movement that emphasizes the ethical[1] or even the aesthetic value of translation. If there is such thing as a national verse, the poetry of the so-called "American century" was built on what were then referred to as "Non-Western" poetic models. To "make it new,"—as in

1. "Ethics"—here and throughout the essay—I take to mean acting on one's personally chosen beliefs. Poetry, though not itself "ethical," nonetheless serves or assists this kind of ethics by expanding the realm of what there is to choose from. Translation in poetry carries this expansion even further. Allow me then at this juncture to express my indebtedness to Roberto Tejada and Stephen Ramos for their assistance on several matters in this paper, especially in suggested references concerning translation.

Pound's own translation of Tching's saying—was to look beyond the immediate "West." By 1965, a handful of U.S. poets had published their attempts to do so, in collections whose work could be unified aesthetically in what was known then and now as the "deep image" tendency.

Some more than others directly tied to this formation, the poets thereby associated began publishing almost consecutively, beginning in 1960 with Jerome Rothenberg's *White Sun, Black Sun*, Robert Kelly's 1961 collection, *Armed Descent*, and two titles from 1962: Diane Wakoski's *Coins & Coffins* and Robert Bly's *The Silence in the Snowy Fields*; the following years saw the publication of James Wright's *The Branch Will Not Break* (1963) and Galway Kinnell's *Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock* as well as Donald Hall's *A Roof of Tiger Lilies* (both in 1964). Other titles appearing throughout the decade and beyond include Louis Simpson's *At the End of the Open Road* (1963), W.S. Merwin's *The Lice*, and Charles Simic's *What the Grass Says* (both 1967), as well as the later books by many of these same poets—Merwin's *The Rain in the Trees* (1988) and Charles Simic's *The Book of Gods and Devils* (1990), to name only two—published throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Even into the early 1990s, many of these poets held considerable currency both inside and out of the poetry world—that is, one could read this work in the *New Yorker* even as it was becoming an object of inquiry in graduate studies and beyond the confines of the academy. And yet, we can safely say that few poets in the last decade have chosen to publicly affiliate themselves with the deep image tendency. It was as if, in the short span of a few years, this signifying practice had all but been bankrupt of its cultural authority.

What is the countermemory of this devaluation? Given the longevity of this practice or movement within the arena of modern American poetry, and considering the various forces that relegated the deep image to such sudden and apparently complete obsolescence, it is now necessary to examine the consequences of this aesthetic shift. The deep image was bound to be overthrown and for myriad reasons. But it will serve us to look briefly and in very broad strokes at two particular techniques of poetry that came into heightened popularity just as the deep image waned—keeping in mind, of course, that such methods did historically overlap each other, to some degree. The first modality—mostly

associated with what is known as Language poetry—is the product of post-structuralism, a poetics subscribing to deconstructionist theories, whereby, in an interchange of power and desire, subjects are produced as the representative signs of an open-ended system. The second representational style—first grudgingly and then happily accepted by the various institutions of poetic permission—we can call the poetics of Identity.[2] Both schools are relevant to our discussion of the end of deep image poetry, and in particular, of two poets, the first a major figure in the deep image practice, the second, though fundamental to the practice itself, only indirectly tied to it: James Wright, and the Peruvian modernist whose work he translated, César Vallejo. An essential aspect of deep image poetry is the fact that many of the school's poets translated (and were influenced by) writers from non-English speaking cultures. While there are still poets today translating writers into English (poet and critic Clayton Eshleman is especially noted for his comprehensive translations of Vallejo's work[3]), there no longer seems to be a poetics in this country whose aesthetic is defined by that process. That the current aesthetic trends in poetry do not seem to embrace translation to the extent that the Deep Imagists did implies a shift, not only in aesthetic values but in ethical ones as well.

Coined by poet Robert Kelly,[4] the phrase "deep image" remains a problematic one, especially resistant to being clearly defined. Finding it easier by

---

2. For the sake of this argument, I am not referring so much to racial identity as to national and/or ethnic identity—though the two often overlap. I have in mind especially cases where there exists an original cultural identity that is eroded or overwhelmed over time by the culture of the U.S.

3. Clayton Eshleman, whose translations of Vallejo have become the standard, also goes further than the Deep Imagists in his ability to clearly explain his translating choices. See especially "A Note on César Vallejo's 'Intensity and Height'" in http://www.fascicle.com/issue01/Poets/on-vallejo.htm.

4. Ian Hamilton, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). This fact, according to *The Oxford Companion*, is debatable. In the second issue of *Trobar* (1960), Kelley's article "Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image" makes reference to Jerome Rothenberg's "Poems from the Floating World," a poem in the second volume of the journal with the same title, published earlier in the same year (1960). The first lines of the last stanza of Rothenberg's poem read, "The deep image rises from the shoreless / gulf: here the poet reaches down among / the lost

far to list the members of the school than to rationally explain the deep image aesthetic credo or *ars poetica*, the critics, as well as the poets themselves, have offered mostly murky definitions since the practice's inception. In Galway Kinnell's famous explanation of achieving "depth" within the self, he seems to hint at a definition of the deep image practice by briefly alluding to poetry: "If you could keep going deeper and deeper [...] you'd finally not be a person...you'd be a blade of grass or ultimately perhaps a stone. And if a stone could read poetry would speak for it."[5] In an essay on poetry and the soul, Bly asserts, "We know that the latent intelligence, or the biological reservoir of experience, touches our instinctive life, and through that the life of all animals."[6] In another essay entitled "Looking for Dragon Smoke," Bly implicitly positions deep imagism within a larger, somewhat disparate poetic tradition:

> We often feel elation when reading Homer, Neruda, Dickinson, Vallejo, and Blake because the poet is following some arc of association that corresponds to the inner life of objects he or she speaks of, for example, the association between the lids of eyes and the bark of stones. The associative paths are not private to the poet, but are *somehow* inherent in the universe.[7] (my italics)

Critics come up against the same boundaries when trying defining the deep image, and as Nick Halpern admits, "What is certain is that, thirty or thirty-five

---

branches, till a moment of seeing[.]" But as early as 1958, Robert Bly, in his article "Five Decades Of Modern American Poetry," had already written the following: "An imagination, a content, a style exists that has a magnificence of suggestion and association. I think it is mistaken to think that if we work in this style our works will resemble Eliot's or Pound's. Two things make me think different. First, some profundity of association has entered the mind since then. Freud's ocean has *deep*ened, and Jung's work on *images* has been done. [...] We need poets now who can carry on a sustained raid into modern life, and in work after work, carry on the green and vigorous waters of this profound life." (my italics) William Duffy and Robert Bly, eds. *The Fifties* 1 (1958): 37, 39.

5. Hamilton, ed. *Oxford Companion*.

6. Robert Bly, "Voyages of the Body and Soul," in *American Poetry: Wildness and Domesticity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 40.

7. Ibid., 36.

years later, it is difficult to know what tone to take about deep-image poetry."[8] Yet Halpern defends what should be by now the obvious Jungian aspects of the deep image tendency, even as he apologizes for its lack of clarity. Pointing out the actively political aspects of the method's aesthetic, the critic insists that the deep image was also meant to heal the nation of the kind of inner violence associated with "Western" logic, the kind that invariably led, according to many of the followers of the practice, to the Vietnam war: "Again, it is difficult to explain how this [national healing] takes place, just as it is not easy to understand the therapeutic value in Jungian analysis of an archetypal image from the collective unconscious. We should expect difficulty, though, where mystery is involved."[9]

Bly, himself, often alludes to Jung's "collective unconscious" in his descriptions of poetry, and we know that it was under Bly's influences that James Wright performed the translations that led to his own version of deep image poetry—which brings us to the question of how we might critically asses Wright's relationship to and use of the deep image, especially as it relates to or stems from his translations of Vallejo. The established definition of the phrase, as even Halpern points out, is of little help to us in understanding this relationship. This is because "deep image," much like Jung's theories on the collective unconscious and universal archetypes, purports to define scientifically or logically that which cannot be measured or proven through logic: Jung's theories demand that we accept them as scientific measurements, never mind that there is no earthly

---

8. Nick Halpern. "'Coming Back Here How Many Years Now': August Kleinzahler and James Wright's 'Shall We Gather at the River'" in *American Poetry of the 1990s*, special issue, *Contemporary Literature* 42, no. 2, (Summer 2001): 433.

9. Ibid., 432. Nick Halpern explains, "The deep image carried with it a kind of promise of good fortune, especially in Bly's account. It had the power to heal. For some, the healing took place in the process of writing or reading the poem. Crucial to the process was what it excluded, the music of what did not happen in it. That is, what one was not doing was important: one was not using logic, one was not interrogating the image, not forcing it to tell all, not asking it to make sense. There was a politics as well, based on the hope that the healing could—why not?—take place on a national level. The kind of process by which they greeted and accommodated the deep image was, for some poets, conspicuously unlike the kind of strategic planning and cost-benefit analysis that was behind the waging of the Vietnam War."

(empirical) way to prove or even logically account for them. Likewise, the deep image comes to mean little but itself: how would we separate such a technique from Pound's use of "petals on a wet black bough"? At what point does such an image acquire adequate depth?

But perhaps the greatest obstacle comes in Halpern's explanation that a poem might heal the nation through the deep image, since such a technique elides the kind of "Western logic" that brought us to the Vietnam war.[10] Whatever artistic choices Wright made in translating Vallejo and in writing his own verse, Bly—in many ways his mentor—as well as the other deep imagists repeatedly implied that poets must escape "Western" logic in favor of the pre-rational mind, the mind of the collective unconscious. Admittedly, poetry need not be overtly political or ethical, but to the extent that deep imagism makes this gesture toward an accessible, pre-rational source, the theory behind the practice invariably obscures the subjective and highly personal—that is, ethical and political—choices Vallejo and Wright made in their art. Such a theory imposes, instead, the view that both poets merely listened to the primordial, hidden heartbeat of the collective. As an ideology and an aesthetic, deep imagism failed for many reasons, but perhaps its most vulnerable flaw was that it undermined the aesthetic—that is, ultimately, the ethical—choices that poets made in constructing their poems. In the larger sense, such Jungian views ignore the tensions, contradictions, particularities and differences of history, itself.[11] Implicit in Bly's allusions to Jung's collective unconscious, implicit even in the phrase "deep image," with its connotations

---

10. In this sense, the "Deep Image" philosophy anticipates its later use in the field of environmental conservation, "Deep Ecology." Both movements rest on the notion that one must somehow retreat to a space beyond or before reason. Carl Boggs explains: "Inspired by the counterculture of the sixties, Deep Ecology draws heavily upon many of the same impulses as the metaphysical revolt [...] Such impulses tell us that the modern crisis is rooted in forces much deeper than capitalism or bureaucracy or patriarchy: to understand the ecological predicament fully we must go back to the Enlightenment tradition and its glorification of rational knowledge, science, and technology, which produced an uneasy dualism between human beings and nature." Carl Boggs, "The Great Retreat: Decline of the Public Sphere in Late Twentieth Century America," in *Theory and Society* 26, no. 6 (December 1997): 769.

11. Alan Golding, review of *The Psycho-Political Muse: American Poetry Since the Fifties*, by Paul Breslin,

of primitive, primordial man and ahistorical, universal archetypes, is the idea that such a poetry requires the poet merely to "dig" deep enough in order to secure the poem, that, furthermore, such a poetry is universally available to all people, no matter their language or culture. Here too, as in the language-centered writing of poststructuralism, there is neither author nor subject. But language in this case is secondary, merely a tool, a way of marking "one's" cultural relationship to a collective, partially hidden "Truth." There is only ever collective unconscious, one that can more readily be gotten at by plotting points between cultures—though the differences between cultures vanish once the collective unconscious is "reached."

If, on the other hand, the poetry of Identity was meant to remedy the totalizing aspects of deep image poetry, if the former intended to mark or (re)insert ethnic, cultural difference where deep imagism posited only one singular, prerational, unconscious mind, the latter has ironically failed in a similar way. For, in so far as the poetry of Identity marks culture—or, rather, cultural displacement—without forcefully displacing or rupturing the (new) cultural language, it, likewise, makes language secondary. At best, a poetry of Identity approaches translation, but only when it brings in the language of the displaced culture. But even in these cases, such a poetry can do so only in the defensive mode, as a way of marking the erosion or absorption of one's original culture/language by or into the newer, "hegemonic" culture/language.

In either poetics, deep image or Identity, a poetry that neglects language or relegates it to the back seat can allow only so much room for difference. And despite the individual artistic achievements of its practitioners, the deep image tendency's philosophy—especially in its Jungian associations—inevitably links it to the popular shamanism of Joseph Campbell, undermines its rigor with promises of easy consumption and, ultimately, with an intellectual naiveté. Yet,

---

American Literature 61, no.1 (March 1989): 144. Alan Golding compares the politics behind the deep image school to that of confessional poetry, which, he argues, "is concerned with the sufferings of the socially over-determined self. The deep image poetry of Merwin and Wright, meanwhile, attempts to transcend or delve beneath such perceived determinisms into an unsullied, ahistorical unconscious, and in doing so carries the disentanglement of private and public too far."

again, if the language-centered poetry of poststructuralism, the cure for such a school, has failed to produce translations in equal abundance, it is, ironically, for reasons similar, yet in direct opposition, to those behind the failures of deep imagism and Identity poetry. For in the poetics of poststructuralism, there is equally no room for author or subject. Without these there can likewise be no countries, nor cultures. Languages (plural) disappear and Language itself—the monolithic babble that follows the destruction of the tower but precedes the formation of different tongues—language itself remains.[12] Such an elimination of the subject—and, more importantly, of different subjects—amounts to the ethical abandonment of subjectivity, itself, to the sense that there are no choices to make, since the subject is an illusion created by language, that, furthermore, semiotics is semiotics, no matter the language (prison) in which we are confined. The deep image—in its most Jungian sense—and language-centered poetry—in its most poststructuralist sense—in denying authority to the subject erode the very idea of subjectivity. In each case, a totalizing Truth remains—collective unconscious or material language—just as choices and, ultimately, difference, disappear. If translation serves ethics by extending possibility, as I maintain, choice and difference must remain inviolate.

Translation both requires and implies the very presence of different authors and subjects. And herein is the ethical element so lacking in the poetry of poststructuralism and in the poetry of Identity and even in the deep image theories. For without a subject or an author, choice—upon which ethics depends—vanishes. Ethics demands that one acts on one's chosen beliefs. I've noted before that poetry is not, itself, ethical, that it "merely" serves ethics by expanding the realm of what there is to choose from. But the poet herself is in the position to be ethical, in so far as she makes choices when writing and, especially, translating the poem. The illusion in language-centered poetry—that, somehow, language only ever chooses "us"—hides the fact that without a subject or a will, it makes no difference which words "one" chooses or is chosen by; choice disappears. But

12. Dennis Tedlock, professor of English and American Studies, echoed this sentiment when he said in January, 2000, at a conference at University at Buffalo on the Pan-American Exposition, that, regrettably, LANGUAGE poetry never evolved into LANGUAGES poetry.

when translating a poem from another language into one's own, one is forced to choose a new set of words that can neither perfectly mirror nor entirely ignore the presence of that other set—the original. As in Levinas's pre-ontological, ethical responsibility to the other, translation depends on its own "other"—the original text, which exceeds the translation's "version" of it, whose very existence beside the translation announces the infinite responsibility of honoring that which can neither be reproduced nor avoided, just as it renders the ethical abandonment of choice—or totalization—impossible.[13]

It's hard to know for sure what Wright, himself, thought about translation, though—again—we know that he came to authors such as Neruda and Vallejo through Bly. We might examine, therefore, an interview Bly conducted with Pablo Neruda in 1966. Here, Bly takes up the question of ethnic identity as it relates to the poetry of a particular region: "People often talk of the 'Indian element' which they see in much Latin American poetry and fiction. What is this 'Indian element' exactly?"[14]

Neruda responds, "In Vallejo [the Indian element] shows itself as a subtle way of thought, a way of expression that is not direct, but oblique. I don't have it. I am a Castilian poet. In Chile we defend the Indians and almost all South Americans have some Indian blood, I do too. But I don't think my work is in any way Indian."

---

13. In her essay "Language and Alterity in the Thought of Levinas," Edith Wyschogrod explains Levinas's concept of the other as it related to translation: "The other human being in the sanctity of her or his manifestation as a human face and the infinite as an ideatum whose excessiveness goes beyond any idea we can have of it can only be the object of an insatiable desire. Any translation (always already merely putative) demands a contraction of this content so that on the one hand it is communicated and on the other retains its ethical authority, the exteriority from which it derives. In order for there to be translation, there must be a pre-existent store of concepts, a speculative language without which translation could not come about, yet one that is disrupted by the more, the exorbitance, of an alterity that is beyond it." Edith Wyschogrod, "Language and Alterity in the Thought of Levinas," in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, eds. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 188.

14. The following interview appears in *Neruda and Vallejo: Selected Poems*. Robert Bly, ed. *Neruda and Vallejo: Selected Poems* (1993; repr., Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 160–162. Interview.

The exchange here sheds interesting light on Bly's (and, perhaps, through him Wright's) relationship to both Neruda and Vallejo. Bly's question attempts to unify Latin American poetry and then identify it as containing the "Indian element"—whatever that social and cultural shorthand might signify. Neruda's answer, which we'll explore in more detail shortly, seeks to distinguish between his poetry and that of his contemporary and friend. Earlier Bly had attempted to unify the two poets by comparing the trajectory of their poetic styles: "César Vallejo, after struggling through [...] a long period of surrealism, came out into a very human simplicity in *Poemas Humanas*. You also passed through a long period of surrealist poetry in *Residencia en La Tierra* and then came out into the simplicity of *Odas Elementales*. Isn't it strange you have both followed the same path?" Neruda responds, "I love Vallejo. I always admired him, we were brothers. Nevertheless, we were very different. Race especially. He was Peruvian. He was a very Peruvian man and to me Peruvian man is something interesting. We came from different worlds."

Shortly before this exchange, Bly, taking a strange tack in the interview, had announced, "I have a good question for you. Do you think you have ever lived before?" To which Neruda, clearly unsettled, responded, "I don't know...I don't think—I will try to inquire!"

What do these interchanges show us? Primarily that the two poets had a hard time understanding one another's position. If the deep image seems always obscured by a mystical murkiness, we might start with these exchanges to investigate why. First, as we've noted, there is in the U.S. at this time the already familiar (if naïve) linking of Western logic (including conventional poetic forms) with the U.S. foreign policies of both the 1950s (as in Eisenhower's relationship with Franco's regime in Spain) and the 1960s (as in the Vietnam conflict, when the interview is given). Bly, recognizing in Neruda, especially, an alliance between poetry and politics, turns to what he considers to be the "Indian element" inherent in certain Latin American poets for a new model. But Neruda's discomfort at Bly's mystical question about another life becomes ours when we realize how snarled the communication has become between the two. In response to Bly's unclear vision of Latin American poetry, Neruda seems to distance himself from what he thinks is Vallejo's "Indian element." Is it not conceivable that Neruda

could already sense in Bly a kind of colonizing co-option of Vallejo, the "Indian" Peruvian whose poetic models would serve to cure "our" traditional models of their inherently dangerous "Western" logic? Did Bly forget that Vallejo and Neruda were both strongly influenced by the French symbolists? Again, it's difficult to say what Wright thought about Vallejo and Neruda, but we know at least that it was through Bly that he came to these poets. The point of all this is not necessarily to illuminate Bly's problematic assumptions or Neruda's issue with Vallejo's race, nor is this to demonstrate yet another way in which the U.S. has colonized Latin America; it is merely to show that from the beginning, Bly and Wright probably could not conceive of Vallejo and Neruda as these Latin American poets saw themselves. In light of Walter Benjamin's ideas on translation, however, such a misunderstanding may also have led to the very fruitful nature of Wright's translations of Vallejo.[15] The problem Wright faced as a poet, as we'll see, was essentially the problem of language and form worn down to mere signification, what Benjamin means by the symbolizing form of language, that which is not in "linguistic flux" but is heavy, tied down by over-usage and

15. Benjamin notes, in his essay, "The Task of the Translator": "In all language and linguistic creations there remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated; depending on the context in which it appears, it is something that symbolizes or something symbolized. It is the former only in the finite products of language, the latter in the evolving of the languages themselves. And that which seeks to represent, to produce itself in the evolving of languages, is that very nucleus of pure language. Though concealed and fragmentary, it is an active force in life as the symbolizing thing itself, whereas it inhabits linguistic creations only in symbolized form. While that ultimate essence, pure language, in the various tongues is tied only to linguistic elements and their changes, in linguistic creations, it is weighted with a heavy, alien meaning. To relieve it of this, to turn the symbolizing into the symbolized, to regain pure language fully formed in the linguistic flux is the tremendous and only capacity of translation. In this pure language—which no longer means or expresses anything but is, as expressionless and creative Word, that which is meant in all languages—all information, all sense, and all intention finally encounter a stratum in which they are destined to be extinguished. This very stratum furnishes a new and higher justification for free translation. This justification does not derive from the sense of what is to be conveyed, for the emancipation from this sense is the task of fidelity. Rather, for the sake of pure language, a free translation bases the test on its own language. It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work. For the sake of pure language, he breaks through decayed barriers of his

convention. This kind of stasis is especially challenged when that which is included in the translation cannot be communicated—namely, the strangeness in all language that points both to the impure materiality of the word and to the very possibility of pure language, itself. Vallejo's poems force Wright to churn his own language into new shapes of hitherto unrealized possibility. And while many have noted the transition that occurs in Wright's poetry by the time he published *The Branch Will Not Break*—and have noted the influence Bly had on his work, as well as that of translating Trakl, Neruda, and Vallejo—few seem to have pointed out the specific ways such forces affected Wright's poetry.

In order to illuminate the aesthetic as well as ethical valve of translation in poetry, we need to re-look at the ways in which Wright's translating of Vallejo influenced his own work—despite the Jungian theories held by the Deep Imagists (including perhaps Wright himself) about such a relationship. We might go further and say that, in many ways, *The Branch Will Not Break* is, itself, a kind of translation—of the work of many other poets, including Vallejo.[16]

As those familiar with his biography know, James Wright had decided by 1958 to quit writing poetry altogether, believing he had been "denying the darker and wilder side" of himself "for the sake of subsisting on mere comfort—both academic and poetic."[17] According to his friend, the poet Donald Hall, Wright felt his verse had become formulaic in its careful, iambic, linear-narrative structure. In his introduction to Wright's *Above the River: The Complete Poems*, Hall recounts the reaction to the publication of *The Branch Will Not Break*, Wright's third collection, the one that marks a radical departure from his established poetic style. "The change startled his old readers, and many reviewers disparaged it, but it

---

own language." Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt, 1968), 79–80.

16. Robert Hass, in an essay on James Wright, notes: "The first of his books that I read was *The Branch Will Not Break*. It is supposed to have broken ground by translating the imagery of surrealist and expressionist poetics into American verse." Robert Hass, "James Wright," in *James Wright: The Heart of the Light*, eds. Peter Stitt and Frank Graziano (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 278.

17. Donald Hall, introduction to *Above the River: The Complete Poems*, by James Wright (New York:

gathered its own constituency, who preferred it to the earlier work. 'The cool master of iambic,' said the critical caricature, 'sheds his costume and walks naked.' It is difficult for people, even today, to love both sides of James Wright—Neruda and Robinson, Trakl and Hardy."[18]

In order to gauge the extent to which his translations affected his own verse, let's examine a poem written before this transition. "Saint Judas," the poem in the book of the same title published in 1959, comes at the very end of the collection. This is the last moment, so to speak, before Wright's transformation, before his translations and then before *The Branch Will Not Break*—in many ways the fruit of the transformation. It's not enough, however, to say that Wright's transition involves a mere departure from iambic, formal verse.

Saint Judas

When I went out to kill myself, I caught
A pack of hoodlums beating up a man.
Running to spare his suffering, I forgot
My name, my number, how my day began,
How soldiers milled around the garden stone
And sang amusing songs; how all that day
Their javelins measured the crowds; how I, alone
Bargained the proper coins, and slipped away.

Banished from heaven, I found the victim beaten,
Stripped, kneed, and left to cry. Dropping my rope
Aside, I ran, ignored the uniforms:
Then I remembered bread my flesh had eaten,
The kiss that ate my flesh. Flayed without hope,
I held the man for nothing in my arms.

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), xxix. The passage comes from a letter from Wright to his friend, poet Donald Hall, qtd. in Hall's introduction to Wright's *Above the River*.

18. Ibid.

We note Wright's remarkable use and utilization of the various forms here: the slight variation on the Petrarchan sonnet with ababcdcd efgefg end-rhyme-scheme, the directional twist of subject matter in the final sestet according to the formal devices of a sonnet, the seamless, unobtrusive quality of the lines, despite their strict iambic meter: [i] HELD the MAN for NOthing IN my ARMS.

No less impressive and worthy of mention is the way the poem moves: and it is particularly the movement of Wright's poems—before and after his translations—I want to focus on. Here the movement is chronological, a linear narrative in which a speaker recounts earlier events, one after the other, as they occurred. The one moment out of this order involves a flashback through memory—a device which complicates the events as they unfold, even as it shines new light on and thus re-contextualizes them. Judas, momentarily distracted from his despair at betraying Christ, runs to help a man being beaten. He then remembers what he has done earlier, and herein lies the twist in the narrative, the break in the chronology. This looking backward to the event that precedes the ones listed in the first octet of the sonnet illuminates the futility of his good deed. His kindness will go tragically unrewarded, but this in turn recasts the deed into something done for the sake of bare compassion alone. This becomes Judas's saintly virtue. Except for this final flashback, the poem adheres in its movement to the straightforward, chronological narrative structure.

Despite such mastery of form, and probably because of it, Wright seems to have become disillusioned by his work. At this very point, perhaps the height of his formalist abilities, Wright decided to quit writing poetry altogether. Yet we know he didn't, even briefly. A year before the publication of *The Branch Will Not Break*, Wright had already published his translations of Vallejo. As we've noted, Wright had also translated German poetry; however, the effects of this are beyond the scope of my intentions here: to adumbrate, if possible, the life and "after-life"[19] of the Vallejo poems Wright rendered into English. Robert Bly, who

19. "Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original—not so much from its life as from its afterlife. For a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stage of continued

along with Wright brought Vallejo and Pablo Neruda to U.S. awareness, reminds us of the difficulty of translating Vallejo. Many of his poems

> are like flashes of light in a room already light. The associative thinking in them takes place with incredible speed, and most are oblique, surrealist, interior, like willows, "almost air"[...]. Vallejo's art shows us what it's like not to go about recapturing ideas, but actually to think. We feel the flow of thought, its power like an underground river finding its way for the first time through some shifted ground—even when he doesn't know where it will come out.[20]

It will serve us to compare Bly's somewhat romanticized description of Vallejo's work to the iambic, linear-narrative verse Wright had mastered by the late 1950s. Below are Vallejo's "Rosa Blanca" (left) and Wright's translation of it (right) in their entireties:[21]

Rosa Blanca		**White Rose**
Me siento bien. Ahora	[a]	I feel all right. Now
brilla un estoico hielo	[b]	a stoical frost shines
en mí.	[c]	in me.
Me da risa esta soga	[a]	It makes me laugh, this ruby colored
Rubí	[c]	rope
Que rechina en mi cuerpo.	[b]	that creaks in my body.
Soga sin fin,	[d]	Endless rope,
como una	[a]	like a spiral
volute	[e]	descending
descendente	[e]	from

life [...]. Contrary, therefore, to the claims of bad translators, such translations do not so much serve the [original] work as owe their existence to it. The life of the originals attains in them to its ever-renewed latest and most abundant flowering." From Benjamin, "Translator," 71–72 (see n. 15).

20. Bly, ed., *Neruda and Vallejo*, 170–173 (see n. 14).

21. Ibid., 196–197 (see n. 14).

de mal...	[f]	evil...
soga sanguínea y zurda	[a]	rope, bloody and clumsy,
formada de	[e]	shaped by
mil dagas en puntal.	[f]	a thousand waiting daggers.
Que vaya así, trenzando	[b]	Because it goes in this way, braiding
sus rollos de crespón;	[g]	its rolls of funeral crepe,
y que ate el gato trèmulo	[b]	and because it ties the quivering cat
del Miedo al nido helado,	[b]	of Fear to the frozen nest,
al último fogón.	[g]	to the final fire.
Yo ahorha estoy sereno,	[b]	Now surrounded by light
con luz.	[h]	I am calm.
Y maya en mi Pacífico	[b]	And out on my Pacific
un náufrago ataúd.	[h]	a shipwrecked coffin mews.

Beginning with Wright's aesthetic choices as a translator, we note at least four spots where he takes what we'd call artistic license. "Voluta" is closer to the English "scroll," yet Wright chooses the larger, more abstract "spiral." "Zurda" is closer to "left-handed," and here, again, Wright opens the term up with the more general, abstract "clumsy." Wright's "a thousand waiting daggers" is not quite like Vallejo's "mil dagas en puntal"—in which a thousand daggers are "positioned with points out" or "drawn." And finally, most radically, Wright translates "maya" as "mews." The latter term (i.e. the English) we might associate with the cries of gulls, and this works contextually with the oceanic setting. The word also echoes "creaks" (for "rechina") in the first stanza. But "maya" does not seem to exist as a verb in Spanish. As a noun, it can mean "May Queen" or "English Daisy." Wright in this case echoes not the literal translation of the term but its un-transferable, uncanny quality. As in Benjamin's idea of "pure language," Wright brings out the pre- or meta-linguistic strangeness of language, itself. The result in Wright's poem is surrealistic, of course, but that is only to admit that it generates an unprecedented construction—"a mewing coffin"—we could not have foreseen. Sight and sound blur, disassociate, and we read such surrealistic tropes in Wright's own poems throughout *The Branch Will Not Break*: "Between

two walls, / A Fold of echoes, / A girl's voice walks naked" or "A splayed starling / Follows me down a long stairway / Of white sand" (both from "Snowstorm in the Midwest"). Here we might say, again, that the after-life or final translation of Vallejo's verse occurs not so much in Wright's "version" of "Rosa Blanca" but in the lines that recur throughout *The Branch Will Not Break*.

One can imagine "Saint Judas" translated into another language from a culture familiar with Christianity, with the story of Christ, and predict that the plot or narrative thread of the poem would, despite the translation, survive relatively intact. But this poem—Wright's translation of Vallejo's—doesn't move in the same way. It's not that the poem is opaque. We see images, concrete and figurative (the rope, the cat of Fear), and we know that imagism, or the use of images as a poetic device, is ingrained in English-speaking poetry at least since the turn of the century. The poem's movement, however, is neither chronological nor causal. We might acknowledge that much Latin American poetry of the early to mid twentieth century was "influenced" by the French symbolists,[22] and here we notice similarities, resemblances, but it's important to keep in mind that Wright is translating this poet, not Baudelaire. It would be false to say that Vallejo's poem resembles those of Baudelaire or Mallarmé, for that would imply a transferable representational quality to all three poets' work. What the translation makes clear is that very un-represent-able strangeness that is itself translated, but only as that quality beyond representation. Or we could say that in translation, Vallejo's poem is as uncanny as Baudelaire's. If, despite this alien quality, the poem coheres, it does so according to the movement of immediacy—not like the tracing curve of a profile but like a flash, in which the whole face is illuminated at once. How would we describe the feeling of the speaker—Peaceful? Grief-stricken? Carefree? Frightened? Each seems to play a part. What would Wright be conveying? The very difficulty of the poem forces Wright to wrestle not with the Spanish but with the English, demanding that he lift up the language to create the same strange, un-quantifiable quality we encounter in the original.

---

22. See Octavio Paz, *Children of the Mire: Modern Poetry from Romanticism to the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

But even without being able to speak Spanish—not to mention Vallejo's, with its Peruvian nuances—one still notices the absence of a major formal element in Wright's translation: rhyme. For, as the bracketed letters show, Vallejo's poem is constructed according to a pattern of end-rhymes, whereas Wright's version discards end-rhyme altogether. This may not strike us as significant—most serious translations since Pound privilege other poetic elements over the maintenance of the original's rhyme scheme. But Wright's decision here is worth mentioning given the artistic phase he was leaving at this time—one of strict formalism. There is little free verse in his published poems before *The Branch*, yet here is Wright willfully abandoning the end-rhyme so integral to the original poem in his translation—an aesthetic choice he repeats throughout *The Branch Will Not Break*, and one which makes the collection such a departure from his previous formalist style.

We may not come any closer to defining the "deep image," but what I wish to demonstrate, at the least, is the need to show more clearly the specific ways in which translating Vallejo affected Wright's own verse (and ours). We might thus grant poets like Neruda and Vallejo the respect of treating their work and subsequent translations not as a safe haven from the rigors and tyranny of "Western culture and poetics" but as a craft with its own specific techniques and forms. The most common of these—and perhaps the cloudiest here—is the ability to shift from image to image, point to point, without clearly defined logical connections. Speaking of the deep imagism in Rothenberg's poem, Robert Kelly notes, "The fundamental rhythm of the poem is the rhythm of the images."[23] As in the case above, we note in much of Wright's poetry, especially from *The Branch Will Not Break* on, this "lurching" from image to image with much less explicit logical, chronological connection. Quoting Wright, Walter Kalaidjian suggests that Wright gets this quality from Whitman and from translating Trakl, the former being "a poet who writes in parallelism, only he leaves out the intermediary, rationalistic explanations of the relation between one image and another."[24] While it would be futile to argue that the patterns Wright picks up from translating Vallejo

23. From Robert Kelly, "Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image," in *Trobar* 2 (1961): 15.

24. Walter Kalaidjian, "Many of Our Waters: The Poetry of James Wright," in *A Supplement on Contemporary Poetry*, special issue, *boundary 2* 9, no. 2 (Winter 1981): 105.

cannot be found in other poets, my aim is to examine the patterns, themselves, the particular techniques Wright seems to develop as he translates Vallejo, though he may generate similar patterns having translated others. To repeat, I'm not arguing that Vallejo influenced Wright in these particular ways. And this is an important distinction. As Benjamin reminds us, translation does not involve the mere transmission of particular information from one language into another.[25] It is Wright who, with the forms he finds adequate to the task, must echo the strangeness one encounters in reading Vallejo in the original.

Here is another one of Wright's translations of Vallejo's verse.[26]

Deshojacíon Sagrada	**Divine Falling of Leaves**
Luna! Coronada de un testa inmensa	Moon: royal crown of an enormous head
que te vas deshojando en sombras gualdas!	dropping leaves into yellow shadows as you go.
Roja coronada de un Jésus que piensa	Red crown of a Jesus who broods
trágicamente dulce de esmeraldas!	tragically, softly over emeralds!
Luna! Alocado corazón celeste	Moon: reckless heart in heaven,
por qué bogas así, dentro la copa	why do you row toward the west
llena de vino azul, hacia el oeste	in that cup filled with blue wine,
cual derrotada y dolorida popa?	whose hull is defeated and sad?
Luna! Y a fuerza de volar en vano,	Moon: it is no use flying away,

25. In "The Task of the Translator," Benjamin notes, "Yet any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information—hence, something inessential. This is the hallmark of bad translations." Benjamin, "Translator," 69 (see n. 15).

26. Bly, ed., *Neruda and Vallejo*, 186–187 (see n. 14).

te holocaustas en ópalos
disperses:
tú eres tal vez mi corazón
gitano
que vaga en el azul llorando
versos!...

so you go up in a flame of
scattered opals:
maybe you are my heart, who
is like a gypsy,
who loafs in the sky, shedding poems
like tears!...

Wright takes liberties here, as well, though I'll only point out that he changes the more open-ended "azul" (blue) for the more specific "sky." In terms of the way such a translation affects his own work, we note that here, too, Wright abandons Vallejo's rhyme scheme (much stricter here than in "Rosa Blanca")—each stanza's scheme is the same with regard to end-rhymes: abab. At the level of language, Wright simplifies another open-ended word: "gualdas." In Spanish, the term refers both to "yellow" and to the European herb that yields a dye of the same color. Wright settles for the former, but a similar, similarly mixed construction shows up in his own poem from *The Branch Will Not Break*, the famous "Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota": "Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly, / Asleep on the black trunk, / Blowing like a leaf in green shadow." The "black trunk," with its implicit reference to Pound's "wet black bough," reminds us that Wright's use of "green shadow" is not be confused with turn of the century Imagism. This strange combination of color and darkness seems to spring not from Vallejo, per se, but—as Benjamin would infer—from Wright's attempts to aim at the very strangeness of Vallejo's construction in order to produce an equally uncanny echo.[27]

In terms of other poetic forms, we immediately note the "lurching" from one image to the next. Following the movement of such "lurching," I want to point out that the successive metaphors here do not follow one another in any particular order, either chronologically or logically. Of course, the metaphors follow one another down the lines of the poem, one after the other, but there is no

27. From Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator": "Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one." Benjamin, "Translator," 76 (see n. 15).

sense of time in the poem and no visible transformation either. The moon does not metamorphose across time here. The metaphors work ubiquitously: the moon is a crown and a heart, always, at the same time, distinctly each one and both at once. This is what we mean by an illumination of a face all at once, as opposed to the tracing of a profile in a single stroke and in one direction (top to bottom). Each stanza begins with a direct address (a form I'll return to), but curiously the addressee is not a person but an object of beauty, the moon. Part of the success of the leaping in this poem, of its rhythm of imagistic transformations, is the way this form mimics the subject—heart and moon. The moon is fickle, they say, as is the heart, and while the movement here does not follow the clear, argumentative, narrative lines of "Saint Judas," there is nonetheless a duality to its direction, as "Saint Judas" moves toward both tragedy and redemption in the final lines. Here the moon, like the heart—like, finally, the speaker's own heart—cannot remain constant. The rhythmic images will not let the moon rest in a single, stable identity. There is a note of anguish to this idea in the poem, the speaker's lament at the drifting, aimless trek of his heart, metaphorically tied to this moon whose hull he calls "defeated and sad." Yet this wandering nature also summons the speaker's praise; the moon, like his "gypsy heart," points to the divine, to crowns of beauty and divinity. The title, itself, points in this direction.

Less than a year after publishing his translations of Vallejo and Trakl, Wright published *The Branch Will Not Break*. Keeping in mind his translations, his (re) creation of the rhythm of images and the strange forms of direct address, I turn to the first poem of that collection, presented here in its entirety.

Goodbye to the Poetry of Calcium

Dark cypresses—
The world is uneasily happy:
It will all be forgotten.
—Theodor Storm

Mother of roots, you have not seeded
The tall ashes of loneliness
For me. Therefore,
Now I go.
If I knew the name,

Your name, all trellises of vineyards and old fire
Would quicken to shake terribly my
Earth, mother of spiraling searches, terrible
Fable of calcium, girl. I crept this afternoon
In weeds once more,
Casual, daydreaming you might not strike
Me down. Mother of windowsills and journeys,
Hallower of scratching hands,
The sight of my blind man makes me want to weep.
Tiller of waves or whatever, woman or man,
Mother of roots or father of diamonds,
Look: I am nothing.
I do not even have ashes to rub into my eyes.

Here, too, the wandering image transforms rhythmically, not in chronological time but as flashing possibility / uncertainty. And the instability of the image here, as in the previous poem, reflects what we might call the substance or plot, though here, as in the previous poem, we can't think of plot as a linear, forward moving device, logically or chronologically. Here is the agony of the inscrutability of life itself—product of God, creator, fate—and how to comprehend, let alone worship, what one doesn't know, cannot see, cannot name. In the case of this poem, the use of direct address is conflated with the repetition of images: the image, itself, is directly addressed and the address changes— frantically in some lines—as the speaker attempts to call out the right name. As in "A Divine Falling of Leaves," though more implicitly, the referee of the images—god, etc.—stands metaphorically for another: the speaker. The unknown godhead paradoxically reveals the un-know-ability of the speaker's self to its-self. The frightening as well as tragic aspects of this quality are certainly evident. The speaker, moved to pity others (e.g., the "blind man"), can do nothing to help them, can hardly seem to help him-/her-self. Yet there is also another direction here, as in the previous poem. The title here points toward the other direction as does the other title. "Calcium," which we often associate with bone, appears in the poem in one of the addresses the speaker uses: "terrible / Fable of calcium." Might this and the title imply a discovery, that far from being solid, stable, and bone-hard, the godhead, existence, life itself, transforms and

will not remain stable? This possibility, certainly not a novel idea when Wright is writing the poem, nonetheless presents terrifying consequences to those who must suffer it, as the speaker demonstrates. Wright certainly inflects the dark, uncanny qualities of such a possibility, but we might also read in the poem possibilities of endurance, insight, survival, the seeds of redemption, without losing the other inflection. Although the "ashes of loneliness" have not been "seeded" in the opening lines of the poem, the speaker no longer possesses the ashes themselves by the poem's final lines. The final image as well—with its Biblical, imagistic echo of scales falling from one's eyes—points in this direction. It's also worth mentioning that Wright combines a concrete term with a rhetorical one here, as he does in "White Rose" ("quivering cat / of fear"), in his own "ashes of loneliness," despite the fact that such conjoinings had been verboten since Pound taught us not to make them in his Imagist manifestos.

As Benjamin argues, in translation we come face to face with the impurity of language—that different languages might point with different words to the same things, that, in other words, signified and signifier are split. Which is the right or true word? But this encounter also points toward the possibility of pure language, that place beyond particular significance and signification, where the encompassing truth exists beyond any one language: the opportunity shows us the materiality of language, that one must wrestle with it, work with it as a pliable material in order to form new possibilities within language. Ultimately, translation reiterates the idea of possibility, itself, implies difference—in terms of subjectivities and the ability to willfully make choices.

Here are two stanzas from one of Vallejo's poems, as well Wright's translation.[28]

Espergesia	**Have You Anything to Say in Your Defense?**
Hay un vacío	There is an empty place
en mi aire metafísico	in my metaphysical shape

28. Bly, ed., *Neruda and Vallejo*, 216–217 (see n. 14).

que nadia ha de palpar:	that no one can reach:
el claustro de un silencio	a cloister of silence
que habló a flor de fuego.	that spoke with the fire of it voice muffled.
Yo nací un día	Well, on the day I was born,
que Dios estuvo enfermo.	God was sick.

And here is Wright's own poem, in its entirety, from *The Branch Will Not Break.*

The Jewel

There is this cave
In the air behind my body
That nobody is going to touch:
A cloister, a silence
Closing around a blossom of fire.
When I stand upright in the wind,
My bones turn to emeralds.

Beginning with Vallejo's poem and Wright's "version" of it, I want to point out two areas where Wright takes radical liberties in his translation. The first concerns the poem's title. In Wright's defense, Vallejo's title does not exist as a word in Spanish; most likely this alien term is constructed from two different words, though one can only speculate as to which two particular words are joined here. The first part, "Esper-," might be an abbreviation for "esperar" (to hope, or to wait), "esperuar" (to clean the vine), or "esperma" (sperm)—any and all of which triangulate the poem in particular ways, lend unique nuances to it. The second part, "-gesia," closely resembles the end of "analgesia" (analgesic). Joining any combination of these gives us almost too much to choose from, though the sense of waiting, cleansing, as well as of yearning and stasis produce a strange duality of hope and fate, portentousness and possibility. In his own wild translation of the title, Wright seems to have sided with the portentous qualities. In each case, we might say that between these oppositional elements—fear and hope—lies the very defensive tone the stanzas take. In Vallejo's, however, this position hints at an apology.

Turning to Wright's "The Jewel," we notice that this defensive tone is heightened. The speaker sounds more like a highly literate mid-western tough, ready to knock out anyone who crowds his space—perhaps mirroring to some degree Wright's own brand of masculinity, a defensiveness stemming from his own working class, mid-western background, his open love of boxing—all qualities he shared with Theodore Roetheke, his mentor, friend and fellow poet. Aside from the obvious similarities between Wright's own poem here and his translation, I want to note his use of the word "blossom," especially as it relates to Wright's translation of Vallejo's line "que habló a flor de fuego." I've noted that *The Branch Will Not Break* may in fact be the collection where Wright's translations of Vallejo are finally secured. Benjamin's thoughts on translation as "after-life" seem particularly appropriate here: "The life of the original attains in [translation] to its ever-renewed latest and most abundant flowering."[29] In Vallejo's poem, the poet joins different elements of speech—in this case expressions—to create a wholly new kind of articulation. We can approach his line by pointing to the words "a flor de." These are difficult to translate literally. The expression of a similar phrase, "a flor de piel," means, roughly, "just under the skin," but the phrase also conveys a sensitivity or feeling "blossoming" at the surface. Though I cannot entirely explain Wright's decision to use "fire of its voice muffled," I want to emphasize the words he chooses for the translation versus those he reserves (or comes to) for his own poem. In his version of Vallejo's poem, we see the lines "a cloister of silence / that spoke with the fire of it voice muffled," and in "The Jewel," we see " A cloister, a silence / Closing around a blossom of fire." While "flor" in Vallejo's use of the term does not exactly refer to "flower" or "blossom," the word itself, disassociated, does mean these things. It's as if, again, Wright comes to the same blossoming, but only when he removes himself from trying to replicate the information of Vallejo's poem. Or we might say, with Benjamin, that Vallejo's poem finds itself blossoming again in Wright's "own" verse.

In translation is the possibility of bringing into one language the way one sees the world in another language, and this would be one way, as Benjamin says, "of coming to terms with the foreignness of [all] languages," a pointing

29. Benjamin, "Translator," 75 (see n. 19).

toward "pure language."[30] Not only would such a transfer make clear the fact that there is more than one version for the same term—beyond the level of rhetoric and into the sphere of the ontological—it would also expand and heighten the epistemologies into which the original language was translated. Translation in this way would therefore arrest and illuminate new areas of thought hitherto unexplored, would clear new paths in the woods. The deep image tendency, despite its problematic theories, its facile Jungian associations, embraced translation—especially of what were then considered "non-Western" cultures and/or languages—as a means toward creating a new "American" imagination through its poetics. In this way, the deep image poets not only enriched the verse and language of our nation, they expanded the limits of our imagination, our way of seeing the world.

Unless continually challenged and further complicated, corrective aspects of the poststructural critique and the gains of strategic essentialism are subject to run awry in the opposite direction, dissolving the author and subject into, respectively, an always/already monolithic language or displaced culture. Disregarding the theories of the deep image practice, we should nonetheless follow its practitioners by embracing poetic translation as an ethical means of re-admitting the existence and possibility of different authors and subjects. We would thereby insist on a pre- or meta-existence of a will, a subjectivity that is always in a position to dispose itself to its conditions—a subjectivity that can, finally, make choices, artistic and otherwise. If nothing else, such an approach toward poetic translations today would re-introduce that strangeness inherent in all language, including our own, and this would be yet another way to fight against the overdeterminacy that pervades not only the media outlets of our popular culture, but so many of the movements currently established in our national arts. We can start by focusing on the specific ways that Wright and others were able to use this strangeness to expand the realm of English speaking verse. We might thus remember not that Wright turned Latin American poetry into stateside English but that, to the contrary, he succeeded in rendering U.S. American poetry as though ethically impelled to situate it elsewhere in the hemisphere.

---

30. See n. 15.

MARTA LÓPEZ LUACES

CUATRO POEMAS

El secreto de los dioses

El secreto de los dioses
se encuentra en el idioma
de los hombres
—H. D.

La clave
no está en el misterio
sino en el reencuentro
del profeta
con su lengua.

Verás las palabras
y serás saciado.
Pedirás
y no faltará.

Nómada

En las largas mesas del tiempo beben
los cántaros de Dios.. Beben hasta el
fondo los ojos de los videntes y los
ojos de los ciegos, los corazones de
las sombras imperantes, la mejilla de
la tarde.

—Paul Celan

Vengo de un pueblo condenado
a errar por tierras extrañas.
Tres días caminaron
a la sombra de Babel.
Heredo de su tiempo
un mapa y un cielo.

De mi raza
el rasgo de la ausencia me delata
y una certeza:

antes de la tormenta,
de las sequías,
de tu mirada,
de mi orfandad,
de aquellos fuegos,
y antes de las sombras que les precedieron,
había un antes
que la memoria me pide, rescate

Pero he llegado tarde
las lluvias han pasado,
los ríos regresan a su cauce,
se alzan las ciudades en el horizonte,
y se me prohibe la entrada
Aquí, a sus puertas
espero

la resurrección del recuerdo
del yo que era

Entonces sus heraldos me piden que renuncie
a mis nombres,
mi sangre,
mi heredad

y que disfrace la voz
y jure
por la fe de su idioma
(mi raza sigue en busca de la lengua
perdida
\ antes de la infancia).

Los exilios de Olga Orozco

A Olga Orozco y Alejandra Pizarnik

Y otras veces me despierto en mi memoria
con el olor de los países donde nunca
estuve

—Olga Orozco

Olga,
el olfato te traiciona:
también a mí la sal de mar me llega
con un viento infectado.
¿Y sabes? Todos somos exiliados
de los países de la infancia.

En otoño
el amarillo reina
la impuraza del cielo
contamina la lluvia y su brisa

En la lejanía del conjuro

descansa

los residentes del desarraigo
te escuchamos

Más allá de tus piedras
no te entregues
ni a tus dudas ni a tu muerte

en vuestra nueva morada
de la memoria
quiero pensar
que con Alejandra a tu diestra
paseas

por los jardines infinitos
del recuerdo.

La visita

taking cabs in the middle of the night
driving as if to save your soul
where the road goes round and round the park
and the meter glares like a moral owl
—Elizabeth Bishop

¿Vienes?
Apúrate, llega
sube por el Hudson
cruza la ciudad por el Central Park
y llama.

¿Vienes?
En el East River
un barco nos llevará
alrededor de la isla,
una y otra vez,
para que veas
asomarse entre las torres gemelas
el vacío que nos engendra.

¿Vienes?
Brooklyn aún espera
ser descubierta
desea ser Manhattan y su puente cuelga
como una pérdida.
De envidia no quiere ver
la isla que la niega.

¿Vienes?
Aún te espero
y veo por la ventana
la neblina de otra ciudad
que me marca
Llega, apura, salgamos

protegidas por el anonimato
la noche nos fuerza
a enmascararnos.

¿Vienes?
El metro pasa por el Bronx
sus ojos sin pestañas
te persiguen desde la ventana.

¿Vienes?
¿O prefieres llegar por la mañana
cuando la ciudad muera
sin haber cumplido su promesa?

TONY TOST

FOUR POEMS FROM *AN EMPEROR'S NOSTALGIA* (A DOZEN FOR LEIGH)

If the depths are reached after arrives
a long blindness inside which a solitary manifestation
of a mind of some order is psyched : from inside this dream
must we choose? Depths or Heights. Me neither.
Process (here we come) hear us now.
I will put my hands here & there, place here birds
folded out of thicker papers :
out of
because as I've argued they are
in there always / already
in oscillation, between past &, perfection &.

That's where we head. Migration towards
a change in thought, fluttered, the sky
illumine : our illness preps us
for an other Above, one which flies thru, us, here.

I (suddenly I) will discuss you in religious tones :
& shall little birds be in grief for marvels (ours)?

Up on Breeze : for what is isolation
but Song in & not via Wind? We are still in the wind.
We are still in the wind. Same thing (we are in).
Breeze's hidden, moved : much the same. Who here
behind us (here, in the trees) needs no
counterlight refracted, is unaware from what depths
(from Whose)
each hour comes, to what fine degree each hour
arrives : to string, to bow? As though I mistake each
as my own to refract I carry one thought
(Indentities or Things are Neither Cause nor Effect)
towards (They are Eternal) another as a child would,
from spell to spell.
We are unlike gods so we tend to them →
with a stroke of the chisel.

Exalting. Paths more precious than gates.
How shall we fill our house?
With paths. Bringeth our wheel over the bones.
Afflicted, clothed? Our
wheel, like a flower forced : into our mouths?
our mothers? Like flowers :
who we face, & how. Stem of a great hour?
Face : you make my heart glad. There the fire?
Where no wood is?
My heart *is* glad.
Here is the rising.
The laws of kindness.
Consider this field.
These candles of our blessings.
Bind them to your heart.
My heart *has* obeyed.
These aren't dark sayings.
The poison I'm making
is this : love won't lose. You cannot lose to dying
if your case is love.
Flight from the earth.
If it helps I have nothing. I'll mention your features
in this book for luck. The arc
of migration & the shape thereafter will be described
by memory : as quick as fish.
The waters below.
This speech is the stem of the rose
(memory as stem of the act). If we vanquish a memory
let us thereafter wear its skin to ambush
another (I am so happily unaware
I was ever a child among the shadows).
Our acts may save us.

[Ripple]

totality is impulse
this is our boat, an instrument
defending the private life
our friends, as though words of great magic, sticks & stones
bound toothsomely
when these poems come to life I hope they love us
as though to see, the fire swam
every form imbibes a force
the lilies, the squash, the tomato plants
the news a blue light even in sleep
SUN/SHINE
civilization measured by the light along our walls
all to which we bow in our hours of strength
what wings to bend for a hand
the far swan, as though at sea
as constrained as we are on the limbs of our tree
very attached
a bird conceals its bones, an arrow's hollow sound
& opening all the doors
our bath tonight, a body's oar
these words await our bodies

My god in deep thicket we thought
how much more of us is there.

Not to render the adored but to
render adorable an unimportant world.

Tanglehearted at root we lead each other
to embody some words heft.

In here who answers as we be-
coming dawn draw down like concepts.

Into an inscrutable pouch : water, chatter
to weigh our souls on a feather.

Star riot a pouring down : sky's down
blue as a seed, its philosophy is a rainbow.

Have you seen it lately?

Night all we ask for is under your thumb.
Afternoons of consequence arise in your gyre.

A natural philosophy of skin to touch.
Not to build a house apart or above.

Double fantasia that we matter.
Strangers we are, of this road we are.

Nostalgia.
We become the storm-strum, a branch.

But who wrote our names on the chapel door?
Who built these nests in our necks?

JUSSARA SALAZAR

OS JARDINS DE RIVERA
(ALEGORIAS MÁGICAS)

Para Max e Igor Cavalera
(Roots Bloody Roots)

235

Deidades argilaamarelas
flutuam elevam se
multicolores sobre o manto bordado à seiscentista delicadeza—
assim o ondulante rubitopázio abre asas
imensas elas
feito folhas amazônicas coroam
a cabeça
dessas mulheres
tehuanas
yello w deidades fructirojas
as cabeças vasiformes extáticas
luz branca no sagrado mundo
de seus olhos

236

La ofrenda circular
mítico gotejo parafina
ao fogo
das mãos
anjos castanhos e suas asas urdidas
no tear vermelho
sobre a terra escura
(brotam laranjais ardentes desse solo)
e eles acariciam pequenos ídolos
enquanto duram suas almas
rezam bendizem o cântaro
a cinza leve dos mortos
sopro ao
rés-ao-chão entre serpentes
rodam as 13 saias do ancestral

239

deus é o engenho luminoso
oblíquo seria nave que sustenta pássaros alvos
cúpula formosa
sopro que eleva ao corpo sinuoso
montanha ou árvore que a musa
—dança circular entre portas
idênticas?— e a nação
resiste mínimo arbusto
terra que conceberá, pátina
tempo
em ouro solar.

240

Auati brotou do chão
fecundou corpo e alma daqueles obscuros
guerreiros adormecidos

mortalhas encarnadas ou pés nus

seu sangue alimentou os frutos amarelos
e via-se tudo através
do imenso olho escuro da noite

(*o sangue dos mártires da revolução fertilizando a terra*)

241

(Rivera encontra Caravaggio no arco oriental, pátio do fogo)

I.
"ALEGORIA CANTADA AO AMOR TRIUNFANTE"

Céu ainda que
luz — fugir? divino
ainda asas
inextricável musa feito peixe
ou pássaros float on rivu
luz (outra luz)
manhã que abarca
a noite curvo sabre trina
ao círculo
cinzel que dança anjo
tudo. Um sopro
alcança nuvens o topo
permite
a tênue orla entre tato e ouro
sutil labirinto
limite in fólios coroa
vitro
de madréporas
pedras que dobram se ao manto
tal vishnu.

POEMAS

III

Matusalén haz tu casa, con sorna decía mi abuela.
Ahora henos aquí impacientes, arrastrados sin notarlo,
Con la dudosa gracia de todos los venidos al fin,
No allá, donde queda el aire de los sobrevivos,
Sino a esta caja estrecha con forma de vagón que salta entre raíles,
Que viene desde lejos,
Tronando en su caída,
Con más virulencia en cada bache,
Bajo siniestra luz que brota de la risa
De una zorra que goza en su rincón.

Ahí, sagaz. Redoble de tambor y grito seco,
De hierro, agujereando: hoyos de corona en la cabeza
De la
Reina madre:
Inane muerte insensible se desliza
Sobre el árido cristal de la boca que arde
Y bravamente combate dividiendo el fuego

Nacido de sus sueños
Sobre el ojo carnoso, colgado ya, en anticipo.

En el vagón, boca animosa sin palabras,
El pájaro en la jaula y el pájaro en el cielo
Cantan del mismo modo: cantan los dos
Como en un domingo de aurora.

Hueco río estirándose perdido:
Nada refleja pero oculta en su ya oscuro sino.
Río perdido y árido también con su música fluyendo.
Único contrapunto para el corazón, duro como el tambor
De mi tortuga, tibia y triste en su ensimismado mutismo.

Impalpable agua de la muerte, desde el tren,
La sonrisa hiriente de la zorra en su rincón.
Avance del linaje de la nieve, fuego enternecido,

Y ver andar a otros sobre las dunas de esta tarde, estas horas terrosas,
Como un explorador que no puede entrar ya más,
Ni tocar, aun viéndola: estrafalaria la realidad,
Que suena a casa postergada, redobles de tambor, corona y lengua seca.

V

Para Amparo, Liber Seregni, in memoriam

Ninguna línea se insinúa hoy, blandiente y cándida,
Emergiendo entre esas viscosas miasmas rotas
Que cada noche preparan su victoria, en un fondo espeso,
Para librar a fronda abierta, fresca
El undívago combate
Y evitar que la muerte comparezca una vez más

(reina emancipada, masticando el grano añejo
y duro
cuyo silencio encierra el grito)

Evitar
Que escarnezca la pura circulación, la humilde irrigación
Por la sangre, de estas sabanas, así, pacíficamente
Quisiera llamar a estos selváticos lugares
Donde un meteorito es tan leve como un silbo
No menos radiante

Ninguna línea: en este incierto espacio acuoso
Hoy nadie transita, nada
Desconocido ahora su lento brotar:
Desprovista de señales, sin función
Sin florear
La sangre momentáneamente se marchita
Y permite que la muerte advenga.
En un día de asueto de la vida se instala ésta impura
Y sube a su enloquecido carro giratorio
Con su música salvífica
Ya melodía que todos tarareamos
en un parque de viejas diversiones
Con hinchado pecho adormecido,

Y hay una red de seda yaciendo en el camino
Que de pronto nos levanta enhiestos
Pero al revés: colgados; rotación baldía:
No como un actor sin cuerda que gira libre por el aire
Y en un instante salva su vida en un abrazo
Sino como el que ase al vuelo la gran aguja
Rota de un reloj, la arcillosa y lóbrega cornisa
De una vieja construcción
El aspa cortante de un abismo cierto

Y vemos que así
Será demasiado largo el tiempo
Como nadie pensara nunca, pues falta siempre
Y ahora sobra, ya para qué
La muerte en su altar se instala con su fúnebre oratorio
Mientras afuera alguien rompe los cristales
Alguien grita en media calle, su desgracia

Ingenua novia, la vida comparece en ese instante
Con su ramo de flores impolutas,
Sus promesas,

Y entonces evocamos
La última cosa a medias aprendida, animal
Que siempre cae parado, félido
La vida no es:
Resuenan en el aire sus candores
Rotos como un resorte viejo
Estirándose estridente, ya pura forma
Mecanismo inútil
Sin energía verdadera

Y así dan ganas de aplaudir
Cuando en la noche sobresale una bandera
Un grito, un cuerpo embravecido

Que se levanta ahuyentando al fin
A la intrusa usurpadora: en su último gesto
Un cadáver
Noble, noblemente retirándose
Acaso, dice, un nombre, en alto

VI

1.
Regular tres cuartos recortado, no más
Anda ahora el cuerpo, todavía
Solo y ajeno en su mutismo
Habiendo otra vez llegado
De repente
A la vuelta de tantas cosas visitadas
A este venerado lugar de antaño
De fantasmagórica armonía
De donde todos se han ido poco a poco
Las rodillas recogidas contra el pecho
Uterinamente hundidos en su pozo
Hospedaje seco para siempre abierto,

Cuerpo que no sabe, que huye, anhelando
Apenas, viviendo
En este lugar donde los hechos no son hechos
No ocurren ni se ven pero se expanden
Permanecen: carne sin ilusión, voz sin aire,
En campo
previamente hechizado
Que bastan para transformar
Lo sanguíneo en árido
El hervor del nervio en días desguarnecidos,
Sin que nadie pueda siquiera contarlo.

Viscosa mirada de murciélago
Que se orienta en las tinieblas: ve
Aquello que ocurre una vez y eternamente,

Jamás nunca reversible: todo, si una vez
Aconteció, condenado queda ya
A una eternidad no percibida:
Regular tres cuartos recortado.

Súbita nuestra escuálida medida
Jamás multiplicada, no más: aquí
Nosotros ya llegados para siempre
Hasta el último día este frío lugar desguarnecido
Para que todo vuelva a comenzar del mismo modo
Con su ruido oscuro atravesando largos surcos
Más luego la mano alzada, un punto de orden, sí:

Paz: polvo súbito, borrando rastros del camino
Sírvele un poco de pólvora al viejo tambaleante: adiós, amigo
Que te sean amables los caminos. El último ruego
"Los cordones bien atados", antes de morir.
Entrar en la muerte con zapatos fijos
Andar fijo, cuerpo fijo que camina
En un aire limpio:
Regular tres cuartos recortado.

2.
Secas las tempestades

Que traen a este lugar las palabras también atadas
Para el cándido paseo de un cuerpo lívido
Boca grave de metal roncando como bestia mortecina
En un sueño de ingenua exculpación
Equivocado como aquel conspirador que sueña
Cuando degüella corderos en poderosos reyes.

El fracaso eruptando ventosidades tétricas
A este lugar vuelto, ululante boca
Que acaricia o muerde según la hora.
Lejanísimo el tiempo en que detrás de la trompeta
Había un ángel advirtiendo del próximo estallido.
Ahora todos se han ido de este lugar y el cuerpo
Regular tres cuartos recortado.

Silencio de la calle, la casa, el corazón
Fuego que no quema la mano negra, pero reluce, oro
Etéreo, deletéreo; un estornino
diminuto al pie de un árbol
Sereno bajo el ríspido follaje
Demasiada sombra para un canto leve
Fiesta fugaz, teatrín improvisado

O jardín desconocido: fantasmagoría renovada
Fugaz también la evocación de cada aurora
Regular tres cuartos
Recortado, no más
(Ahora el cuerpo)

XXIV

Trataba yo a veces, en verano, de salir, a la intemperie de los campos, al aire. En mi día de fiesta, radiante, me lanzaba a la ventura de las calles, atravesando la ciudad. Pronto descubría gente que avanzaba ensimismada, acaso, me decía, tropa que marchaba rumbo a una batalla. Y enseguida oía disparos. Y, ágil, me lanzaba al suelo. Con la nariz rozando el piso, veía zapatos, botas: pasaban junto a mí, en escuadras; o en patrullas. Comboyes veloces zumbando atronadores. En el aire un reguero de humo. De repente, en un instante, zigzagueando, yo avanzaba. De ventanas y terrazas caían pequeñas bombas que hacían saltar las piedras, volar las sanguijuelas. ¡Ja! Miraba al cielo: difuso cielo. Cuerpos colgados de cornisas… Entonces, a ciegas, buscaba las trincheras. Solo. Y no hallaba. Nada hallaba. Sólo el humo y su marea. Ominosos, tardíos sueños del amanecer, me invadían: allí trataba yo a veces, en verano, de salir, a la intemperie de los campos, al aire. Allí corría, sediento, enloquecido; cayendo y levantándome.

A veces me detenía un instante, en el camino. Adoraba dioses, diosas de antaño súbitamente aparecidos. Cuerpos abandonados, desconocidos: carne estrujada, recién muerta, aún olorosa; o carne putrefacta corroída por el sol y la avidez de los gusanos: Andrajos de los días pasados.

Entonces, de pronto, se abría el cielo, un telón hueco, roto, como un tambor dañado. Y enseguida ardía en mi mente el pensamiento del regreso. Y a tientas trazaba una hábil ruta. Entre el polvo. Entre los muertos. Arrastrándome, volvía. Sangre en mis manos. Tarde en la noche. Y descansaba entre sollozos, hasta que al fin dulcemente me dormía, como un bendito.

EUGENIO RODRÍGUEZ

TWO POEMS

EXTRAVAGANZA

Even in its most wholesome and popular manifestations
the circus provokes confusion.
Consider for instance
the way in which people ogle the lady contortionist.
Anatomy will never go out of fashion.
Who would have suspected that arms and legs
could become so twisted and disjointed.
It is doubtful that the vigorous man
and the cowardly one will avoid looking at
the kaleidoscope of dislocations
offered by a specialist.
No one wants to miss the slightest variation.
Children wouldn't be able to explain
why any question on the subject
is regarded as indiscreet,
or wives why they applaud
with such little enthusiasm,

or gentlemen why they are on their feet
cheering together, whistling, and asking for more.

Hors d'oeuvre

Gentlemen can be classified
with regard to how they use a spoon.
Some hold it stylishly and elegantly
some clumsily with the worst manners.

The weak man licks the spoon that is fattening him.
Heads bow while hands from dish to mouth
and from mouth to dish
give all a portion of nausea.

The convict's attitude is astonishing then.
Prisoners know the ancient science
of finding redemption through personal objects.
The spoon sparkles in the hands of the inmate.
The handle is sharpened becoming an awl.
Used against an opponent
it could perforate the liver
or puncture an eye
and the bowl can be fashioned
into a blade that would inflict
cuts of variable depth and delight
aimed at the face or throat
depending whether the inmate's intention
is to injure or to kill
when the buffet yields to poetry.

Translated by Jorge Guitart

LUIGI AMARA

SEIS POEMAS

SEGUNDA MANO

Mangas de tela antigua ocultaban sus dedos.
El invierno era una superstición,
pero la cualidad campante
que le daba el abrigo
lo hacía agitar los brazos,
andar en un solo pie
como un perchero anarquista,
como un espantapájaros que preparara el vuelo.

El asfalto irradiaba una ficción de nieve.
Debía de tener un olor insinuante
(ese perfume a nuevo
que emana del hallazgo)
pues viciosamente olisqueaba
las axilas gastadas de su nuevo traje.

A mitad de la calle se detuvo.
Con aire metafísico,

como quien ahuyenta algo
indescriptible,
o como quien se descubre
culpable de algún crimen,
alisó las imperfecciones,
se arremangó absorto,
mirándose desconcertado, insomne.
Parecía entender que sus manos,
sus manos insolentes,
pálidas bajo la luz del sol,
eran las de otro hombre;
las manos que hace tiempo
emergían de aquel traje.

La ronda

Hay en el aire
el aire torvo de la cacería,
un frío feroz
que todo lo atraviesa como un mal presagio,
un aire o un aroma o tal vez un recuerdo
de otras noches desérticas en que la furia
reinó como una víbora,
como un impulso eléctrico
recorriendo las calles
injurioso y aciago.

Es un aire que arrastra y quema y se diría que no existe.
Un perfume futuro que intoxica,
la caricia —quizá— de un dios salvaje
vagando entre los perros,
cegado por lunas de neón
y falsas risas.

Es algo menos que el aire y que un augurio o un sueño.
Un deambular sediento más allá de la rabia,
un dejarse llevar, un continuado sí, el ansia
de quien sin saberlo repite
un ritual pendenciero,
la ronda incomprensible de esperar la mañana
aullándole a los hombres,
escupiendo.

Carrusel de ebriedad

Vuelve la necesidad de mareo.
Vuelven sin avisar los círculos sin centro.
Ese rumor de alisios frescos en el viento
—un viento en otro viento sugerido—,
vuelve como un llamado.
Y ya sobre el caballo sin riendas,
contra el aire,
una inflexión fatal que anuncia el suelo trepidante,
diosa de la velocidad que hemos montado a pelo
hasta alcanzar lo negro,
la estampida sin rumbo.

Vuelve el llamado del estruendo y la furia.
Diosa de la ceguera
y de la confusión y el asco,
el giro por tanto tiempo prometido
en dirección contraria al de la Tierra,
noche que hemos montado a contrapelo,
pisoteándolo todo,
hasta alcanzar la rabia del mareo,
la sonrisa babeante.

Acuario

En las paredes verdes
viscosas de la lama
la luz es un cuchillo.
Al fondo brilla el ojo
de un pez que desconfía de los cristales,
un punto inquieto
que mira con recelo y asco
—resignado animal
de un circo mínimo.

Suspendido entre las plantas de hule,
como un desperdicio más
de la coreografía flotante,
desciende milímetro a milímetro
hasta inventar en pocos litros de agua
un turbio abismo interminable.

Si aparto la mirada,
el lenguado se desliza a donde van mis ojos;
si cruza con pesantez de lado a lado,
me recorre cansinamente el vértigo
de mirar en su encierro
un espejo imprevisto.

Hipnótica y cautiva,
el agua se enmohece entre paredes
al igual que el cerebro
en su frasco obstinado.
Mientras la boca del pez
parece repetir que no
—mil y un veces que no, que no—
la tela de la superficie se interrumpe
por el balbuceo de las burbujas.

Reloj de arena

Escombros, costras, migajas,
sedimentos del cráneo,
jirones de un insulto no dicho
que la furia dejó
girando largamente
en un inútil, odioso remolino.

Cascajo, al fin basura,
restos de frases hechas
que he tragado hasta el cáliz,
polvo y escoria
cayendo en un reloj
que se angosta en la tráquea.

Juegos de sombras

La sombra es el oasis que la noche anticipa en los desiertos.

ꝏ

Al caer la tarde
la sombra de un árbol solitario
es más grande que el árbol.

ꝏ

Las sombras de los gatos se deslizan sobre la arena y las paredes
con una suavidad distinta de las sombras de los perros.

ꝏ

Las manchas movedizas, inquietas,
a los pies de las rocas
son sus pensamientos secretos.

ꝏ

Proyectadas en la sequedad de la tierra
las sombras de dos hombres
—de dos enemigos, por ejemplo—
no tardarán en fundirse.

ꝏ

A la sombra de un animal muerto crecen hongos eléctricos.

ꝏ

¿No han entendido, acaso, que las sombras
son los espejos más amables?

ꝏ

También bajo las patas de la chinche
avanza un charco de tinieblas diminuto.

JORGE MIRALLES

WEDDING PHOTOS

Yurislady's family is celebrating her wedding on the island. The girl's father, who is not the man in the photo, picked up the tab. Yurislady, her daughter, and the girl's father fight for their reunion.

Having made it through the interrogation at the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, once in Miami, they do not get to accomplish this meeting.

Time has elapsed, and making a living is as difficult, or more, than throwing together a wedding in Havana.

"But who's the man in the photo?" asked the girl.

Yurislady took out a white album that was already a bit yellowish on the edges, and thus the tale began.

1

From the beginning, I knew it would be difficult to find a bachelor who'd won *el bombo*, the annual visa lottery to come to the United States, and who would risk his life with a few-months-old girl on this adventure. But there was no other solution. In Miami, I didn't have any family; and the girl's father, whom I never married, was only here for a few months.

So that night—the 26th of July, a national holiday in Havana—I put my daughter in a cradle and I lowered the volume on the television. Silence slowly inundated the room, and the images were projected on the walls like Chinesco shadows. While I rocked in the chair, the rays and the shadows rose and lowered. The rocking created a creaking sound—a noise *so Cuban* that it seemed as if it were generated from the very jungle brush where men like Antonio Maceo Grajales fought for our freedom. "Independence," I said, and in front of me, the television went blank. I turned the volume all the way up and cried upon hearing the national anthem.

"Let's go, we must take the photo on the staircase," said my cousin, while he changed the lens on the camera. "Lola, let the wedding dress hang over the staircase for the photo and tell Alberto to come down... The rest of you get behind, as if you were in a queen's court..."

And suddenly, the lens was drowned in the flamboyán tree where my cousin was setting up his next shot.

Now they were smiling. "Ready, let's go, cheese." Click. The branch of the bush came down. We were all frightened. With my hands outstretched, I looked more like I was delivering myself to my bridegroom than helping my cousin. The rest were dying of laughter.

"Unforgettable. This one you've got to copy for me," said Alberto, taking away the rest of the leaves from above.

"And the camera?" My cousin asked.

Then he looked for the lens, in the flowers and the rice that fell on us from above, and we got into the car.

My bad memory would not have allowed me to remember, but photos are like a wildcard for oblivion. Although they are now tinted in red, whether because of time or because they were taken with East German *Orwo* film that they used to sell back then in Havana, the photos will always be to blame. We would all be erased by who knows what socialist alchemy; the same that was used to create these products. Thanks to the skilled blind man on the route 23 stop, at least the products could be conserved.

The photos were actually the only way of keeping a desire alive: the pose, the haircut, the dress, and even the corner of the house where we used to hang

the picture, were already in our imagination.

My cousin was courted by my female friends. The only thing they had in mind was that he would encounter the form, and not the content, that would change us. Part of this we learned in our Marxism classes in middle school: "The phenotype does not change the genotype." But the photos wouldn't respond to this dialectic on the Zenit camera.

We modeled each image on a pre-existing format taken from Spanish magazines. My cousin bought them from a merchant marine; and, although they were expensive, he got his money back by renting us an issue at 10 pesos a week. As soon as he got enough money from us by passing around the magazines, he would buy a few rolls of film.

He always had a knack for business; not only was he able to get our money, but he also made us dream of a life so close to the Prince of Wales's that at times we felt like princesses. That is, until one day when the director of the school surprised me with an issue of one of these magazines and accused me of "ideological diversionism."

From then on, something between dream and reality changed for me. In the beginning, I was embarrassed for my parents. After the embarrassment passed, it turned into indifference. "Erase the dream of your life? Are you crazy?" yelled my cousin that day in the middle of the classroom.

I can still feel what he shouted as if it were a pang in my chest. But when a desire grows beyond a person, not even time—which they say makes everything go away—is capable of placating it. I mean, until the bitter end, that throbbing will intensify the illusion for me.

"Kiss!" they shouted at the party. Laura took a bottle and stopped the uproar by shaking it in the air. "One moment, ladies and gentlemen. Before, we need to fill the cups and then interlock our arms, like they used to do in the olden days."

"If you want, we can also turn off the light," someone said, to make matters worse.

"No!" shouted my cousin, while he was running toward the center to achieve a better angle. "Here goes my whole reputation, and these images represent them for the bad guys from the North over there who depend on such photos to make decisions about visas."

"Don't make him nervous, ladies and gentleman. It's just one roll of color-film," I reiterated, and my glass just about fell down. He charged the flash again, not without first asking for the obligatory kiss. And click…

The news was already known in the neighborhood, and although my family prepared the wedding without previous warning, everyone in Marianao talked about it. What if this wasn't the girl's father? What if it was some kind of trick to keep a lid on who knows what? All this in the depths of the 1990s Special Period, as if morals, like the buildings of Centro Havana, had not suffered enough degradations to the point of losing their appearance entirely and only somehow encountering a "miraculous static state."

Nevertheless, that "special Cuban something" still kept this tradition going. Besides, it was indeed a neighborhood. Everyone knew each other, and they wouldn't have missed this over-the-top wedding for anything. My neighbors knew that my biggest thrill was these parties. There was no better advisor than me for my girlfriends. I had the details of weddings right at my fingertips, and weddings were my topic of conversation with them.

The upstairs neighbor and I spent many a night talking about the subject. She told me stories of weddings so dazzling that I would use any errand as a pretext to go up and visit her. My neighbor was a Russian who was over seventy years old. It wasn't known how or why she had taken refuge in Cuba after the Second World War. "The Russian," as we called her, had lost both of her legs, and although people attributed it to the war, she always told a different version of the tale. In so doing, she believed that she would get them back and be able to walk again.

We looked at all the neighbors' photo albums, and together we marveled at the elegance and respect that characterized such parties. Of course, at that time, those ugly neighbors were still young. They began marriage as if they were in a dream, but with the years, the value of the jewels, silver weddings, and gold weddings were the only things that lasted of this grand illusion.

The day they kissed each other at the altar was as if they kissed God and the Devil at the same time. Nowadays, we are more practical and we marry for other conventionalisms—pans, pressure cookers, lingerie, six packs, and we take a trip wherever, just to change our destiny.

"I don't know how I didn't stain my dress with this mess of crossing our glasses."

Alberto smiled and, without taking his eyes off me, added, "Look, *lady*, I never felt better. This kiss sealed a pact between us that was stronger than any written word. Not even in the movies did I believe such a feeling was possible."

I was invaded from head to toes with a sense of ridiculousness. I thought that three months was more than enough time to erase any public humiliation, old people's gossip, or unforeseen official something coming from one place or another. I knew very well that I ought to act as if reality were my favorite movie. If a kiss destroyed my role as actress, then the spell the Russian woman cast on me was not as strong as she told me it was. Alberto drowned his eyes on my sun hat, and understanding that I had entirely lost my composure, kissed me again, more violently than the last time.

"This is so you recover your strength," he said, and he let go.

Right then, my cousin came into the room, and lifting his hand above the camera, as if he were taking the photo with his plate, said, "Do you want to try the salad? Take some. It's good!" A *flash* thundered among us and, mechanically, I escaped from reality.

2

It was Wednesday, the last day before the wedding. Summer was about to begin. The sun had set and the light made the dust picked up by the Southern wind visible. The leaves of the *marpacífico* were swirling around the streets, and some old people were challenging the blizzard to finish its course from the house to the bodega. The sweat, like a thousand-year-old river, ran down between her wrinkles. She was taking it easy: the dust and the dry leaves obstructed her meanderings that, far from lessening the mud that appeared on the surface of her face, converted her skin into a bland hide falling off her cheekbones.

"The chicken, the chicken!" "the Russian" screamed from the vantage point her house had become. Her voice resonated, ricocheting from one wall to another. Her yell clenched the faces of those old people who were immobilized by the news.

"The Russian" was enjoying herself. She played morbidly, using her handicap against the mobility of those who convert their lives into a monotonous coming and going.

"You see it," she said when she'd already reached the last step. Yurislady, seeing those people reduced to ants, felt vertigo and nausea. "The Russian" noticed and asked her to sit down.

"It's the heat, right?"

"No, I'm just a bit nervous," she responded to her while consuming the glass of water.

"It's because tomorrow..."

"Ah! The wedding, I'd almost forgotten about it. I have one last tale to tell you, at least it will be the last for..." And the phrase remained inconclusive.

The blackout made her pause. It was Wednesday and, like every Wednesday, the blackout was planned for right after the soap opera, but suddenly, the weak flame from a candle made her face round again, centering those blue eyes on each one of their black and infinite points.

"Maybe this candle will refresh you from the heat," she said, and continued, as if her voice were already illuminating a long and painful trip. "Like today, it was a Wednesday, surely of some far-off year. The winter in my country brought snow. The trees were covered in cotton balls, and little by little they lost their luxuriance. Little drops of water glided down from the leaves and flickered with the passing of light.

"In the *dachas*, the ice, seen through the windows, carved out diminutive figures as if the very hand of God had painted them. The village was surrounded by mountains that seemed to situate it upright at the base of a pond—there—where perhaps the world, like nature's last folly, came to an end and guarded a great treasure. Sunk between mountains, day after day. The village's inhabitants cleared away a path from the snow that blew harder and was capable of burying some of the eight isbas that formed the village.

"The forest was the only opening among this circle of mountains. The trees represented the best of that area. Birches, pear trees, cherry trees, pine trees, hemlocks, maples, and common buckthorn, mounted the forest with their flowers and foliage like a treasure chest. The hops became entangled among black,

white, and pale pink trunks, until they created an immense spiderweb to hide their charms far from the vice and greed of men.

"As in every forest, where birds' chirping intensified at sunrise, morning had been announced by a bird that harvested with its beak an abandoned fruit. The civilized world had arrived at this border with Russia to announce the war.

"Mijail, observing on the patio of his house the evasion produced by the arrival of other birds, slowly turned the pages of the newspaper and, holding it lightly, as if it were the world he held between his hands, said: 'She will know how to wait.' And so, he simplified his life, with a twinkle of an eye, believing he could only see the hero that he could be.

"The war represented a trip far away from the castle that his village had become. It mattered little to him if she would accompany him to his death; any fear would be compensated by the adventure of demonstrating his valor. And he felt the cold sink into his hands upon remembering that place where, for the first time, he learned about how to build traps and barricades of snow from his father. 'A Russian peasant is the greatest proof of stubbornness against nature.' With this precept of an old muzhik he was raised. But his father also gave him his first weapons. Only war was a mortal game.

"'So many stories to tell after,' he said between his teeth, to the point of letting the first one escape from his teeth. 'I'd bet on anything.' The cold filled his pockets. He didn't have any money and said with utter desolation, crossing his arms, 'I can't even caress a kopeck in my hands.'"

Nevertheless, in his own reflection in the glass, he caught sight of a smile forming from the corner of his mouth. With the help of this conceit, he froze the gesture against the glass of the window. All the cold of the raw winter in Russia could not erase that image.

The voice of "the Russian" advanced rapidly like a ball of thread from children's stories, developing one plot in order to begin another.

"...the troika went away carrying with it Mijailovich. But before saying goodbye, he said to me, we shall celebrate our wedding as soon as I return from war. I will give you the best isba and the best sons that any family has in this village. These were his last words before parting on the path in the woods..."

Yurislady had the sensation that the voice of "the Russian" entered into her

in that thicket. The night seemed to contain the most intense heat of the summer, and she opened a window to get a bit of air. She saw some neighbors who opened theirs, and they even improvised cots or took out some sort of aluminum and placed them on the sidewalks. Nearby a woman cleaned the vestibule with a bucket of water from the freezer. Suddenly that frost inundated the neighborhood; first the houses, then it fell from the sky, and among thunder and electric charges, it started to snow.

Yuris had appeared at the windowsill, but she saw that with the brusque change of weather, the snow made it seem more like the tale, and she closed the window. She felt possessed, and without pronouncing even a word, she let herself be carried by the voice of "the Russian"...

"The war had ended and Mijail got ready to write his last letter from the campaign. The mail would go out mid-morning, stamped with its destination and arrival time. He announced with great satisfaction and pride that he ought to begin with the preparations for the wedding.

"The next morning, before leaving, Mijail received another order, to present himself immediately at the command post: he would have to deactivate the mined zones that protected the camp. He felt a ridiculous fear of dying, and he said, breathless: 'maybe it was the letter.'"

The flame flickered and "the Russian" wanted to get to the end.

"Some weeks later, the notice of the accident arrived: a mine caused the death of the sappers' official from the first regiment..."

"The Russian" looked urgently for something that, under the effects of the storm and the blackout, didn't appear in the boxes that were scrambled all around. She began to cry, and while her hands trembled uncontrollably, the fragile light of the candle drew another woman above the table.

Yurislady took a garter of blue satin full of orange blossoms that "the Russian" put between her hands. Then, "the Russian" said to her, as if now she were that bride from the Russian tale:

"Take this garter with you to your wedding. That way, I will be able to serve you and rest once and for all. Well then, I've come from very far away to complete my destiny." The candle flickered once more and went out, leaving its image for a few seconds, like an icon.

3

The wedding was on a Wednesday. Everyone in the village was impatiently waiting for Mijail. The night closes the heavens and only one of the eight isbas remained illuminated by the fragile light of a candle. The troika was announced by the neighs and the uneasy kicks of the horses. Some of his friends from infancy approached to welcome him, but surprised they saw, in the place of a young military official, just a mailman who carried on his lap a Zenit camera.

The young man asked for Mijail's isba, and without wasting any time, went in that direction…

A Coda

Yurislady opened the white album—already yellowish at the edges—and slowly went over each photo. Their colors, the places, those friends, all her memories, got mixed up with each other in a confusing manner. Barely any photo remained well-defined. She turned to the last page and found it white, as if it were missing something. "Maybe he's the one," she thought, "who doesn't allow me to…" And she remembered the blind guy from the bus stop from whom she bought the photo album. She slid her hand over the page, but the fear was beginning to invade her, when suddenly someone knocked at the door.

She found a letter that had been passed under her door, and she only saw the car that was driving away.

"At least it won't be one of those chain letters," and she closed the door immediately.

From the envelope, she knew it was from Cuba, because those envelopes are unmistakable. She scraped it with her teeth and wrapped herself up on an armchair in the living room. Her cousin, after a detailed introduction about material life on the island, found space for conveying some bad news: the death of "the Russian."

Yurislady was conscious of a feeling that she could not express. Nevertheless, she vacillated for an instant. She got up and went to call her cousin, but she thought that she would have to tell him some absurd Russian tale. He would say to her on the telephone that it was almost inexplicable — a tall tale, and then she stopped.

When she returned to her room, she found a torn-up photo on the floor. She looked at her daughter and wanted to scold her, but she understood that the carelessness had been her own upon letting that envelope fall. She sat down next to her and began to put the letter back together piece by piece, as if it were part of a jigsaw puzzle.

Yurislady did not remember having forgotten any photo, and this one did not appear to have the same color as the others, the ones that her cousin took with the roll of *Orwo*. Finally she joined two edges and made a corner from the photo. "A table with three legs is always wobbly," she said, positioning another side that was a little smaller, and so she reconstructed a new object.

She didn't know if she should reread the letter; maybe she had neglected some detail, a note, or something that could reveal what the object was.

She had left the letter in the room and the distance that separated her from the room was short. In spite of this, in that instant, she only recognized "distances," as "the Russian" used to say. She felt upset. Reality did not offer her certainty, and physical spaces were nothing more than simulacra that contained an emptiness, another distance.

She indefinitely sustained the echo from those words. "From the room to the letter; from the letter to Cuba; from Cuba to..." she almost tasted those three ellipses like grains of salt. The flavor seemed strange to her. She stuck another piece in place, and it matched.

In this way, she kept putting it together, one after another of the corners, until discovering that the objects were already familiar to her. She recognized the copper samovar that her mother had given her when she was a little girl, she palpated it and felt a certain tepidness in her hands. So perturbed was she that when she approached the mirror and rubbed the veil of snow, she needed to squeeze her eyes tightly to prove that it wasn't a dream.

...like her friends, she had listened to the neighs and the kicking of the horses. She had the certainty of an animal that sniffs from afar. She squeezed her eyes again, but the fear revealed itself in the desire to be another, a hidden premonition. Her destiny was crossed with that of another woman. "What destiny?" and she pronounced the question in the form of an echo, swirling around

each image in front of the mirror.

She felt vertigo or fear of dying and opened her eyes. She recognized the objects she could only replace with words and strangely familiar places. She couldn't name anything, not even her own name, because each point of the mirror deformed whatever she seemed to remember.

"Don't go and turn around, Yuris," he said, and click, the flash of the last photo that he took.

Translated by Jacqueline Loss

EWA CHRUŚCIEL

TWO POEMS*

DEATH MOST REVEALS ITSELF
BY SINGLE SHOES.

Scattered on the street. All the tracks covered. Only the sole still lurks. And there gaping pits. A shoelace still shivers. As a child I would sit in the room and crave for some accident. To be an onlooker. A voyeur. In the face of no ailment, my father would ask me to spit and catch. Here shoes are hung on electricity poles. My American students tell me it used to be a sign that somebody died. Or a secret sign for drug dealers. When we were little we would drive with our parents to the beach in Bulgaria. People would stop us and try to buy lipsticks, chewing-gums, medicines. There is no life without a reimbursement. Once when we were crossing the borders, my father woke me up—there was a dead body on the road. Big moment yellow. I am just on the other side of the mirror. Everything preserved under the glass wall. Every summer when I go to visit Poland the shoes are always there on the road. A veritable ontomania. Reproduction of being. Non-bodily here in relation to an already known there or set of theres. There is no there there. Things break in order to reveal. A shoe would like to burst forth. Find uncertain whole. When my grandma died, I refused to take a photograph with her. Only after the funeral, at the cemetery, my face resurrected. With a serenity. I saw her in a white wedding dress with my grandfather. What

a wedding feast! Next day she woke me up at four in the morning and I wrote my first poem.

Pentecost 1

You wrote: that explains a lot. This morning I woke up clapping! Luigi thought it was for him but after about half an hour of non-stop clapping even he thought it was a little weird. I thought that it meant I'd come down with Turret's syndrome or some other mental illness that results in uncontrollable behavior. Thank goodness it was merely the Holy Spirit descending on me in great waves of applause on Whitsuntide. Miss you, P. PS I've done some preliminary drawings of our villa in rural Poland. The garden is in the shape of a Chopin Nocturne, if you can imagine that. I'm thinking we won't actually need a house. We'll be like Lear and Tom the fool (I can be the fool, it's okay) walking around on the heath saying, "Blow wind and crack your cheeks." Doesn't that sound nice? I hope that being a deranged patriarch will work for you. Actually for some reason the left hand stopped clapping suddenly last night around 10:30, which is pretty damned awkward. The right hand continues but because the left hand isn't meeting it I think I've destroyed my right elbow. At any rate, the whole forearm and hand now dangles sort of uselessly from my damaged elbow and flaps back and forth still desperately trying to clap. I mean, this is some determined (and painful!) Holy Spirit. I wish it would back off for a day or so because this can't be good for my tennis game. You said: I take you so much to heart that your soul is causing large growths on my body where your abundance of spirit exceeds my capacity. It's as if I need to imagine that I'm in love with you in order to maintain a certain energy or feeling to keep me moving forward toward something that has nothing to do with you. You're more like a midwife than a mistress. I say: I am a landscape that you just managed to incarnate. Or a landscape where all orphaned chances take on unabated meaning. So it is perhaps more than just making me or you less lonely. I wade from *kairos* to *kairos*. We crave for seasons, for red-letter days. We wish they took off like cranes, beating electric letters in the air. *We would like only for once to get where we are already*. If we go down into ourselves we find that we possess exactly what we desire. It is not your face that I desire. It is not your body that I desire. Something inside it. Something where I cannot get.

**These paragraphs belong to a bigger project of thirty-three paragraphs entitled* A Life. *It started as a polemic with Lyn Hejinian's* My Life, *but then* A Life *took its own life and is still writing itself. It is a hybrid text incorporating letters, poems, as well as investigating the issues of identity, mediation, protest, the politics of the Eastern Bloc, and the sublime.*

NOTAS BIOGRÁFICAS / BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Nathaniel Tarn is a poet, translator, editor, critic and anthropologist. He has published some twenty-five books of poetry (the most recent is *Selected Poems 1950–2000* from Wesleyan); many volumes of translation, among them three collections of Pablo Neruda's work; and *Views from the Weaving Mountain*, a volume of thirty years' essays in literary and cultural criticism. Stanford is publishing an augmented edition. • **Yvonne Venegas** has shown her work in the U.S., France, Mexico, Spain, England and Canada, with recent solo shows at the Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego, Gallery 101 in Ottawa, and Diaz Contemporary in Toronto. In 2002 she was awarded top honors at the tenth annual Bienal de Fotografía organized by the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. Her work is held in the permanent collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art–San Diego and the Centro de la Imagen in Mexico City. Venegas has worked as a freelance photographer for the *New York Times*; in Mexico City her work has been published in several national magazines, including a weekly column in the weekend supplement of the newspaper *Universal*, and *Luna Cornea*, a photography journal published by the Centro de la Imagen. Her work appears in *Baja to Vancouver: The West Coast and Contemporary Art*, *Tijuana Sessions—ARCO, Madrid* and *Strange New World: Art and Design from Tijuana*. • **John Ashbery** es con seguridad el poeta estadounidense más original y prolífico de nuestros tiempos y goza de gran popularidad a pesar de lo intrincado de su obra, destacándose también como crítico de arte. Es autor de más de veinte libros,

y ha ganado numerosos premios literarios de gran prestigio, entre ellos el Pulitzer, el Bollingen y el National Book Award. • **Jorge Guitart**, poeta y traductor de origen cubano, es profesor de lingüística hispánica en SUNY Buffalo. Autor de los recientes poemarios *At the Zotel and Other Places* y *Del almacén de las emociones* (Buffalo: Electronic Poetics Center). Ha traducido al español poetas estadounidenses y al inglés poetas hispanoamericanos y españoles. • **Laura Mullen** teaches at Louisiana State University. She is the author of four books: *The Surface* (1991), *After I Was Dead* (1999), *The Tales of Horror* (1999) and *Subject*, just out from the University of California Press. Recent work has appeared in *Xantippe, Aufgabe, Iowa Review, New American Writing*, and *Civil Disobediences: Poetics & Politics in Action*. Her fifth book, *Murmur*, is forthcoming from futurepoem books in NYC. • **Mauricio Montiel Figueiras** (Guadalajara, 1968) es narrador, ensayista y traductor. Se ha desempeñado como editor y colaborador de revistas y suplementos culturales en México. Es miembro del Sistema Nacional de Creadores de Arte. Entre sus libros más recientes se encuentran *La penumbra inconveniente* (El Acantilado, 2001), *La piel insomne* (Norma, 2002) y *La errancia. Paseos por un fin de siglo* (Cal y Arena, 2005). • **Mónica de la Torre** is co-author of *Appendices, Illustrations & Notes* (Smart Art Press, 2000). She translated a volume of selected poems by Gerardo Deniz, published by Lost Roads in 1999. With Michael Wiegers she edited *Reversible Monuments: Contemporary Mexican Poetry* (Copper Canyon Press, 2002). Her reviews, poems, and translations have appeared in journals including *Art on Paper, ARTnews, BOMB, Boston Review, Cabinet, Circumference*, the *Poetry Project Newsletter, Fence, Chain, Pierogi Press*, and *Review: Latin American Literature and Arts. Acúfenos*, a collection of poems in Spanish is forthcoming from Editorial Ditoria in Mexico City, where she was born and raised. Since 1993 she has lived in New York, where she is the poetry editor of *The Brooklyn Rail* and a graduate student at Columbia University. • **Omar Pérez** (La Habana, 1964) es poeta, ensayista, y traductor. Es autor de los libros *Algo de lo Sagrado, Oíste hablar del gato de pelea?, La perseverancia de un hombre oscuro* (Premio Nacional de la Crítica 2000, ensayo), *Canciones y Letanías* y *Lingua Franca*. Sus textos se han publicado en *Revista Cacharro(s), Action Poétique, El Vuelo del Gorrión, Casa de las Américas, Unión, La Gaceta de Cuba, El Caimán Barbudo* y otras revistas. • **Roberto Echavarren** es un escritor oriental (de Uruguay). Sus últimos libros de poemas son: *Performance: género y transgénero* (2000) y *Casino Atlántico* (2004). Autor, junto con José Kozer, de la selección de poesía latinoamericana *Medusario*

(1996). De entre sus varios libros de ensayo destaca *Arte andrógino: estilo versus moda en un siglo corto (1998 y 2003).* • Las obras de **Araki Yasusada** han sido publicadas en dos libros, *Doubled Flowering: From the Notebooks of Araki Yasusada* (Roof Books, 1997) y *Also, with My Throat, I Shall Swallow Ten Thousand Swords: Araki Yasusada's Letters in English* (Combo Books, 2005). Una antología de ensayos y documentos sobre la controversia en torno a estos escritos heterónimos está en preparación. • Poems from **César Vallejo**'s first collection, *Los heraldos negros* (1918, Lima, Perú) will appear in Clayton Eshleman's translation of *The Complete Poetry of Cesar Vallejo*, with a prologue by Mario Vargas Llosa, an introduction by Efrain Kristal, and a new chronology by Stephen Hart, to be published in late 2006 by University of California Press. • **Clayton Eshleman**'s poem is from *Reciprocal Distillations*, with a foreward by Roberto Tejada, to be published by Hot Whiskey Press summer 2006. His most recent collection of poetry is *My Devotion* (Black Sparrow Books, 2004). In 2005, Soft Skull published a revised and expanded version of his translation anthology, *Conductors of the Pit*. University of California Press will publish his translation of Cesar Vallejo's *Complete Poetry*, with a foreword by Mario Vargas Llosa, in 2006. • **Steve Tomasula** is the author of the novels *VAS: An Opera in Flatland* (University of Chicago Press), *IN & OZ* (Ministry of Whimsy Press) and *The Book of Portraiture* (FC2). His short fiction has appeared most recently in *The Iowa Review*, *Fiction International*, and *McSweeney's*. • Internationally celebrated poet, performer, and cultural theorist **Kamau Brathwaite** has published numerous books, most recently the poetry collection *Born to Slow Horses* (Wesleyan UP). He shares his time between CowPastor, Barbados, and New York City, where he is professor of Comparative Literature at New York University. • The translations by **Adriana González Mateos** and **Christopher Winks** were supported by a grant from the U.S. Mexico Fund for Culture/Fideicomiso para la Cultura Mexico-E.U. González Mateos is a translator, fiction writer, and essayist. She earned her PhD in Comparative Literature at New York University and has received several awards. Winks teaches Comparative Literature at Queens College of the City of New York. His translations from French, German, and Spanish have appeared in numerous publications. • Argentine poet **Mercedes Roffé** has published *Poemas* (Madrid, 1978), *El tapiz de Ferdinand Oziel* (BsAs, 1983), *Cámara baja* (BsAs, 1987; Chile, 1996), *La noche y las palabras* (BsAs, 1996; Chile, 1998), *Definiciones Mayas* (New York, 1999), *Antología poética* (Caracas, 2000), *Canto errante* (BsAs, 2002), *Memorial de agravios* (Córdoba,

2002), *La ópera fantasma* (BsAs, 2005), and the anthology *Milenios caen de su vuelo* (Spain, 2005). Translated into English her work has appeared in *A*Bacus, The Literary Review, Chain,* the *Exact Change Yearbook,* and *boundary 2: An International Poetics Symposium.* Among other distinctions, she was awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship in Poetry (2001). • **Margaret Carson** has translated numerous works by Latin American authors, including *The Magic Lantern* by the nineteenth-century Mexican writer José Tomás de Cuéllar (Oxford University Press, 2000) and the drama *Electra Garrigó* by Cuban poet and playwright Virgilio Piñera, which will appear in the anthology *Stages of Conflict: A Reader of Latin American Theatre and Performance* (University of Michigan Press, 2007). • **Lorenzo García Vega** (Jagüey Grande, Cuba, 1926) integró la revista *Orígenes* y fue Premio Nacional de Literatura en 1952 con su novela *Espirales del cuje.* Salió de su país en 1968; desde hace años reside en Playa Albina. Entre sus libros más recientes están: *Cuerdas para Aleister, Papeles sin ángel, No mueras sin laberinto.* En México apareció su libro de memorias *El oficio de perder.* • **C.A. Aguilera** (Havana, Cuba, 1970), writer and codirector from 1997 to 2002 of the alternative magazine *Diáspora(s),* in Havana. His books, poetry, essays, and other texts have been published widely in Europe, Latin America, and the U.S. At present he is a recipient of a creative scholarship from the Sächsischer Kulturstiftung and the Dresdner Bank and currently lives in Dresden and Graz. • **Gabriel Gudding** is the author of two books, *A Defense of Poetry* (Pitt Poetry Series, 2002) and *Rhode Island Notebook* (Dalkey Archive Press, 2008). His work appears in such anthologies as *Great American Prose Poems: From Poe to the Present* (Scribner, 2003) and this translation will also appear in the anthology *The Whole Island: Six Decades of Cuban Poetry* (University of California Press). • **Ana Rosa González Matute** nació en la ciudad de México. Parte de su obra ha sido traducida al inglés por Lydia Davis. Ha publicado los libros de poemas *Hipoglomusa* (1986), *Estrías* (1994) y *Silogismo del alba* (1999); el libro de cuentos *Gneis* (2000) y la antología de cuento norteamericano contemporáneo *Un caracol en la Estigia* (1998). En 2002 obtuvo una beca del Hawthornden Retreat Admissions Commitee para residir en el Hawthornden International Retreat for Writers, Escocia, donde escribió el libro de poemas *Sil.* • Poet, translator and essayist **Horácio Costa** (São Paulo, 1954) is the author of *Satori* (1989), *O Livro dos Fracta* (1990), *The Very Short Stories* (1991), *O Menino e o Travesseiro* (1998), and *Quadragésimo* (1999). He has translated into Portuguese the works of César Vallejo, José Gorostiza, and Octavio

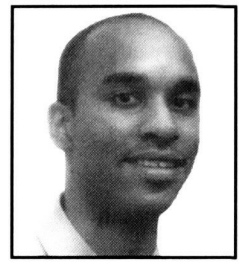
Paz, among others. The poems in this issue are from a new manuscript entitled *Ciclópico Olho*. • **Roberto Tejada**'s *Travels in the Image Environment: Camera Culture Out of Mexico, 1900 and After* is forthcoming from the University of Minnesota Press. He is the author of two collections of poetry, *Gift + Verdict* (San Francisco: Leroy Books, 1999) and *Amulet Anatomy* (New Haven, Connecticut: Phylum Press, 2001). • **Nancy Kuhl**'s chapbook, *In the Arbor*, was winner of the Wick Poetry Chapbook Prize and was published by Kent State University Press. She is coeditor of Phylum Press, an independent publisher of innovative poetry (http://www.phylumpress.com). She is the assistant curator of the Yale Collection of American Literature at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. • **Eduardo Lizalde** (ciudad de México, 1928) ha publicado, entre otros, *Cada cosa es Babel* (1966), *El tigre en la casa* (1970) y *La zorra enferma* (1974), libros de gran relevancia en la tradición de la poesía mexicana moderna. Su poesía reunida está publicada en el Fondo de Cultura Económica con el título *Nueva memoria del tigre*. • **Dodie Bellamy**'s latest collection, *Academonia*, is forthcoming from Krupskya. Other books include *Pink Steam* (Suspect Thoughts Press, 2004) and *The Letters of Mina Harker* (reprinted by the University of Wisconsin Press, 2004). Her book *Cunt-Ups* (Tender Buttons) won the 2002 Firecracker Alternative Book Award for poetry. • **Linh Dinh** nació en Saigón, Vietnam, en 1963. Vino a los Estados Unidos en 1975, y también ha vivido en Italia e Inglaterra. Es autor de dos libros de cuentos: *Fake House* (Seven Stories Press, 2000) y *Blood and Soap* (Seven Stories Press, 2004); y tres libros de poemas: *All Around What Empties Out* (Tinfish, 2003), *American Tatts* (Chax, 2005) y *Borderless Bodies* (Factory School, 2005). Su obra ha sido antologada en *Best American Poetry 2000*, *Best American Poetry 2004* y *Great Prose Poems from Poe to the Present*, entre otros lugares. El periódico *Village Voice* escogió su libro *Blood and Soap* como uno de los mejores de 2004. • **Gabriel Bernal Granados**, editor, traductor, poeta y prosista, nació en la ciudad de México en 1973. Su traducción de *Cuaderno de Balthus* de Guy Davenport fue publicada por el sello Libros del Umbral a fines de 2005. En el verano de 2006 saldrá su segundo libro de prosa, *Noticias de Como. Cuaderno de viaje*, en la misma casa editorial. • **Jaime Luis Huenún** lives in the town of Freire in Southern Chile. He won a 2005 Latin American Guggenheim Fellowship. His work has appeared in several books and anthologies published in Chile. In translation his work appears in *ÜL: Four Mapuche Poets*, edited by Cecilia Vicuña (Latin American Literary Review Press). • **Daniel Borzutzky** is a poet,

fiction writer and translator based out of Chicago. His book, *Arbitrary Tales*, was published by Triple Press in 2005. • **Silvia Malagrino** is a Chicago-based artist originally from Buenos Aires, Argentina. She has received numerous awards from sources including the National Endowment for the Arts and the Illinois Arts Council; *Burnt Oranges*, which she directed and produced, earned the CINE Golden Eagle Award. Malagrino is the founder and director of Libremedia-Studio Production Network, dedicated to the production of films and new media works. She is associate professor at the School of Art and Design of the University of Illinois-Chicago. • **Kass Fleisher** is the author of *Accidental Species: A Reproduction* (Chax, 2005), *The Bear River Massacre*, the *Making of History* (SUNY, 2004), and a forthcoming memoir on issues for women and working-class folk in higher education. • **Régis Bonvicino** nació en São Paulo en 1955. Ha publicado, entre otros, *Primeiro tempo* (1995), *Ossos de borboleta* (1996), *Remorso do cosmos* (2003), *Cadenciando-um-ning, um samba, para o outro* (con Michael Palmer, 2001). Es editor de la revista *Sibila*. • **Odile Cisneros** es mexicana. Ha traducido, además de Bonvicino, a Haroldo de Campos, Rodrigo Rey Rosa y Jaroslav Seifert. Edita la revista *Sibila*. • **Francisco Magaña** (Paraíso, Tabasco, 1961). Poeta y miembro fundador y editor de Ediciones Monte Carmelo. Ha publicado, entre otros, los títulos de poesía: *Cuerpo en ausencia* (1990), *Penitencia el mar* (1990), *Antorchas* (1999), *Ayer* (1999), *Maitines* (1999), *Fiebre la piel y adónde la manzana* (2002; segunda edición *Peau de fièvre où la pomme*, traducción de Françoise Roy. Ecrits des Forges/Mantis editores, 2002) y *Barra de panteones* (2003). • **Peter Ramos** has criticism and other scholarly publications featured in *Verse*, *The Oxford American*, *Lagniappe*, and *Rust Talks*. He is the author of two collections of poetry: *Watching Late-Night Hitchcock* (Handwritten Press, 2004) and *Short Waves* (White Eagle Coffee Store Press, 2003). He has poems forthcoming in *Verse*, *Fugue*, and *Indiana Review*. Ramos is assistant professor of English at Buffalo State College. • **Marta López Luaces** (España, 1964) ha publicado dos libros de poesía: *Las lenguas del viajero* (Madrid: Huerga & Fierro, 2005) y *Distancias y Destierros* (1998) y la plaqueta *Memorias de un vacío* (New York, 2000). Su poesía ha sido traducida al inglés y publicada en la serie Rebel Road (New York, 2004), y una selección en la revista *Literary Review* (2002). Edita la revista *Galerna: revista de literatura internacional*. • **Tony Tost** is the author of *World Jelly* (Effing Press, 2005) and *Invisible Bride* (LSU, 2004), as well as the editor of *Fascicle*. Recent poems are in *Talisman*, *Damn the Caesars*, and *Hambone*, and his long poem "Complex Sleep" will be

appearing as a chapbook in *Black Warrior Review*. • **Jussara Salazar** nació en Curitiba en 1959. Poeta y artista plástica, realiza exposiciones de sus esculturas y objetos, y produjo artesanalmente libros-objeto de pequeñas tiradas: *Plánctum, Solbelo Lunar da Noite, Vinte-Poemas de bolso*, entre otros. Editó la revista de arte y literatura *ET CETERA*. • **Mario Campaña** nació en Ecuador en 1959. Reside en Barcelona, donde dirige la revista *Guaraguao*. Sus libros de poemas son *Cuadernos de Godric* y *Aires de Ellicot City* (con carta-prólogo de Carlos Germán Belli) • Cuban poet **Eugenio Rodríguez**, winner of the 1996 Premio David of the Instituto Cubano del Libro and now living in the U.S., is the author of several books of poems, notably *En el nombre de alguien* and *La contorsión del plástico en el fuego*. He has just finished a novel about life in Havana during the Special Period. • **Luigi Amara** nació en la ciudad de México en 1971. Estudió filosofía. Ha publicado los libros de poemas *El decir y la mancha, Cazador de grietas* y *Pasmo*. Actualmente es jefe de redacción de la revista *Pauta*. • **Jorge Miralles** won UNEAC's Premio David for his collection of short stories, *Las voces del pantano* (2000), from which "Wedding Photos" is taken. Another story from that collection, "La ballena," appears in translation in *The New Review of Literature*. Miralles' own translations of Henri Michaux' *Poste Angulares* and Jean Baudrillard's *Fragments. Cool Memories III: 1991–1995* were published in Cuba in 2003 and 2004. • **Jacqueline Loss** is the author of *Cosmopolitanisms and Latin America: Against the Destiny of Place* (Palgrave, 2005), as well as several essays on Latin American literature and cultural studies. She has translated Cuban writing by Ernesto René Rodríguez and Víctor Fowler-Calzada, among others, and coedited a forthcoming volume of new Cuban fiction to be published by Northwestern University Press. She teaches Spanish and Comparative Literature at the University of Connecticut. In 2003 Studium published • **Ewa Chruściel**'s first book of poetry in Polish, entitled *Furkot*. Her poems and translations have been published in a variety of journals and anthologies in the United States, Poland, Hungary, and Italy, such as the *Chicago Review* and *Przekladaniec*. Other poems from *A Life* appear in *Pebble Lake Review* and *XCP: Streetnotes* (http://www.xcp.bfn.org/chrusciel.html) and are forthcoming in *American Letters and Commentary*.

Congratulations to Ricardo Cortez Cruz & Kent Johnson

winners of 2006 Literary Awards from the Illinois Arts Council.



from Ricardo Cortez Cruz'
"Sweet Honey on the Rocks":

She lived for fatal beauty: Bitch planned to walk around with a body bag, with homicide, until the police stopped her or she was dead. Girl leased her soul to the devil with the option to buy. She couldn't help it....

from Kent Johnson's
"When I First Read Ange Mlinko":

When I first read Ange Mlinko in *The Poker*, I started to bat my eyes seductively. Wow, I drank, this makes me want to both write more and drink less so I might live longer! ...

The Illinois Arts Council's companion awards for artistic quality recognize both the writers and *Mandorla* magazine. Cruz' and Johnson's work appears in #8, available for order through www.litline.org/mandorla.

Don't limit your vision...

Open an issue of

American Book Review

SUBSCRIBING TO IT IS AN ACT OF LITERARY RESPONSIBILITY.

—*The Wilson Library Bulletin*

ONE OF THE NATION'S LIVELIEST GENERAL-PURPOSE READER'S GUIDES TO EVERYTHING.

—Michael Bérubé

SUBSCRIBE

Please enter ❑ extend ❑ my subscription to *ABR*.

Name _____

Address _____

I enclose:

❑ $24 one year (6 issues)

❑ $40 two years (12 issues)

❑ $35 foreign (6 issues)

or go online:
http://www.litline.org/ABR

SEND TO **American Book Review**
Illinois State University
Campus Box 4241, Normal, IL 61790-4241

100 books: $5 each

Special Sale: Select any 100 Books from the Dalkey Archive catalog for $5 each

STEIN - MATHEWS - SHKLOVSKY - HIGGINS - CELA

DUCORNET - GASS - ELKIN - GREEN - LOEWINSOHN - WOOLF

CÉLINE - QUIN - MOSLEY - CREELEY - BARNES - O'BRIEN

BARTH - REED - ROUBAUD - YOUNG - COOVER - WHITE

SORRENTINO - HUXLEY - DAITCH - MOTTE - MARKSON

---

for more information and details about
free shipping or additional free books, visit:

www.dalkeyarchive.com

Dalkey Archive Press

NEW BOOKS FROM FACTORY SCHOOL

Heretical Texts

HT volume 1 (Winter 2005)

Dan Featherston
United States

Laura Elrick
Fantasies in Permeable Structures

Linh Dinh
Borderless Bodies

Sarah Menefee
Human Star

kari edwards
obedience

HT volume 2 (Spring 2006)

Diane Ward
Flim-Yoked Scrim

Steve Carll
Tracheal Centrifuge

Kristin Prevallet
Shadow Evidence Intelligence

Brian Kim Stefans
What is Said to the Poet Concerning Flowers

Carol Mirakove
Mediated

Southpaw Culture

Joseph J. Cohen and Alexis C. Ferm
The Modern School of Stelton: A Sketch

Correspondence Publishing Committee
Facing Reality

Elizabeth Ferm
Freedom in Education

Irwin Granich (aka Mike Gold)
Freshman at Harvard

Cara Hoffman
The Wedding and Other Stories

Fredy Perlman/Black & Red
The University is a Provocation

Fredy Perlman
The New Freedom: Corporate Capitalism

Public Intermedia

Fran Shor
Bush-League Spectacles: Empire, Politics and Culture in Bushwhacked America

PS 3577

Reina María Rodríguez
La detención del tiempo

Charles Bernstein
Blind Witness: Three American Operas

"The visceral, multimedia hit of poetry."
TimeOut, NY

RATTAPALLAX

DVD featuring films, poetry & writings from Sherman Alexie, Joyce Carol Oates, Ishle Park, Takeshi Kitano, Abbas Kiarostami, Martin Espada, Yusef Komunyakaa, Anne Waldman, Arnaldo Antunes and many others / $10.

Films were official selections at Cannes, Tribeca & Sundance Film Festivals.

rattapallax.com

Nathaniel Tarn
Yvonne Venegas
John Ashbery
Jorge Guitart
Laura Mullen
Mauricio Montiel Figueiras
Mónica de la Torre
Omar Pérez
Roberto Echavarren
Araki Yasusada
César Vallejo
Clayton Eshleman
Steve Tomasula
Kamau Brathwaite
Adriana González Mateos
Christopher Winks
Mercedes Roffé
Margaret Carson
Lorenzo García Vega
Carlos A. Aguilera
Gabriel Gudding
Ana Rosa González Matute
Horácio Costa
Roberto Tejada
Nancy Kuhl
Eduardo Lizalde
Dodie Bellamy
Linh Dinh
Gabriel Bernal Granados
Jaime Luis Huenún
Daniel Borzutzky
Silvia Malagrino
Kass Fleisher
Régis Bonvicino
Odile Cisneros
Francisco Magaña
Peter Ramos
Marta López Luaces
Tony Tost
Jussara Salazar
Mario Campaña
Eugenio Rodríguez
Luigi Amara
Jorge Miralles
Jacqueline Loss
Ewa Chruściel

$58.00 MXP