But, in exchange for what he had taken, Baudelaire gave Poe's thought an infinite expanse. He offered it to future generations. That transcendence which changes the poet into himself...this was what Baudelaire's action, his translations, his prefaces, assured for the miserable shade of Edgar Allan Poe.

— Paul Valéry
**Calque** (kælk) [Fr., lit. 'copy', f. *calquer* 'to trace' (a design, etc.), ad. It. *calcare*, ad. L. *calcare* 'to tread'.] 1. *n.* A loan translation; a literal translation of a compound, derivative, or phrase from one language to another, e.g. 'thought experiment' calqued from the German *gedankenexperiment*, 'free verse' calqued from the French *vers libre*, 'blue-blood' calqued from the Spanish *sangre azul*; *vt.* to adopt a word or phrase from one language to another by semantic translation of its parts. 2. *n., vt.:* In translation practice, to consciously translate a word into the target language in a way that releases meaning not contained in the source language, e.g. to translate the contemporary Italian *soggiorno* into the archaic *sojourn.* 3. *n.* An original work written using the conceptual or aesthetic system of a source text; literary work that translates not the content of a source text, but the mode in which that text was written, e.g. *Ulysses*, where Joyce's hero traces a journey analogous to that of Odysseus while the novel itself stylistically and thematically genealogizes the English literary canon, beginning with Homer's *Odyssey*.

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Editor's Note

While *Calque* was in production the 198th anniversary of Edgar Allan Poe's death came and went. In Richmond, Virginia the local Poe museum held a memorial service, with hearse rides for the kids. You might have found the event advertised, if you looked carefully, in the "What's Happening This Weekend" section of the local paper, stuffed between ads for the Z Mullins Dance Co. and Punk Sinatra. The date got some attention in Philadelphia, the city where Poe began composing "The Raven." There, a local weekly published a cover story demanding delivery of his remains from Baltimore, where Poe died under mysterious circumstances—forcefully inebriated and dressed up in strange clothes so he could be used to stuff ballot boxes, according to one myth. Predictably, Baltimore journalists fired back with a cheeky insult in hopes that this strange business of exhuming Poe could be laughed off. But, in true Phillyfan style, the Philadelphia writers threatened to drive down I-95 and grave-rob the remains from the city they called "the syphilis capital of America."

So it goes for poor Edgar Poe's afterlife in popular culture. Even among people who supposedly know his work, the word *Poe* is bandied about carelessly like a shuttlecock at your auntie Olga's garden party. The press is so negligent with Poe's memory because he wrote what today they call "genre" fiction (they say *genre* in a nasal tone, turning their head slightly as if from an unpleasant odor). At a time when most literate people were reading "true" Indian-captivity accounts in which eight-foot-tall barbarian terrorists committed all sorts of unspeakables on hapless detainees, Poe had the crazy notion of writing stories that were psychologically horrifying, about common men seized by the terror of their own mind, where fantastic, almost unbelievable things occur.

Then as now, the American literary corps had drunk the Kool Aid proffered by the "cult of the real"—whatever is labeled Reality, or Not Fiction (meaning, true), a quart of water, a cup sugar, stir and serve—and Poe's work was widely reviewed with sneers, barely concealed by nods to his "intelligence." At the time his writing was called "morbid" and "strange." Today his work is marketed with the "weirdo" Goth iconography of crows and skulls, the covers to his story collections all ghoul-ed-out.

Among other things, popular critics ignore that Poe fashioned an aesthetic for the short story that practically became its definition. They ignore that he *invented*, rather than practised, half a dozen genres, including the mystery. His fantastically well-named Frenchman, C. Auguste Dupin, protagonist of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," was an analyst, an observer, and for Poe (who was obsessed with cryptography and all things French) a kind of super hero nerd. Poe's own inspiration for "The Murders..." came from accounts of the recently-formed Paris Police Prefecture, and from a French novel, Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*.

And lo! Our dear Edgar was a translation critic. In 1843 he reviewed the first American edition of *Les Mystères de Paris*, arguing that translators "should so render the original that the version should impress the people for whom it is intended, just as the original impresses the people for whom it (the original) is intended." This line should sound familiar. In 1926, German philosopher Walter Benjamin wrote that "the task of the translator consists in finding the intended effect [Intention] upon the language into which he is translating which produces the echo of the original." It is jarring to note the similarity between these words from possibly the most influential essay on translation, and those from a review by a guy no one has ever thought of as a translation critic.

It is not surprising, really, that Benjamin's words should so closely resemble Poe, whose introduction into the European literary canon came at the pen of Charles Baudelaire. In 1856 the spleen vendor published *Histoires Extraordinaires*, translations of Poe including "The Murders..." and other stories which had already appeared in the French small press. Baudelaire's translations made Poe one of the major influences on the Symbolist poets, precursors to the Modernist movement. Baudelaire would in turn be translated by Benjamin, who published a German version of *Tableaux Parisiens* in 1923. It's certainly possible that Benjamin never encountered Poe's critical work through Baudelaire, but considering the philosopher's temperament, highly unlikely.

In 1846, the same year Baudelaire read Poe for the first time, an exiled Venezuelan poet named Juan Antonio Pérez Bonalde was working in New York for the Lanman & Kemp Company selling Florida Water "and other fine products." The sudden death of his four-year-old daughter ensured that the exile, often spoken of in the same breath as Rubén Darío and José Martí, would never publish an original work.
again. Severely depressed, Peréz Bonalde began drinking heavily and using laudanum—the ill combination of choice for both Poe and Baudelaire. In the end, the only major project Peréz Bonalde would take on before his death in La Guaira (the Baltimore of Venezuela) was a translation of Poe’s “The Raven.” This translation is still regarded as one of the most perfect renderings of English poetry into Spanish.

Some years later, Jorge Luis Borges would make the name Poe a household word in Latin America with the publication, in 1943, of Los mejores cuentos policiales, an anthology of the detective story in two volumes, co-edited with fellow fabulist Adolfo Bioy Casares. For the first volume Borges and Bioy Casares translated “The Purloined Letter,” another Dupin mystery. In the prologue Borges tells the history of the detective genre, beginning with “The Murders in the Rue Morgue.”

Twelve years later another Argentine, Julio Cortázar, would publish his translation of Edgar Poe’s complete works. In his introduction to the first volume, Cuentos, Cortázar narrates Poe’s final minutes, delirious in a Baltimore hospital, possibly drugged, broken after forty years of unbearable living, the better part of which he spent battling the idiot swarm that tried to ruin his name at every turn. In a moment of lucidity Poe asked the doctor if there was any hope. When the doctor replied that his chances were slim, Poe replied, “That is not what I meant. I want to know if there is hope for a scoundrel like me.” What could the doctor have said to this? How could he have consoled the wretched Edgar? Poor Edgar Allan Poe! While he lived he never could have known that translation would grant him an afterlife to envy; he died never knowing that in translation he would be multiplied. Escort by his translators, Poe’s doppelgängers roam the Earth still.

Consider reading the following pages with Poe’s afterlife in mind. This journal juxtaposes writers from distinct, even disparate literatures. Most are appearing for the first time in English. Others are being rewritten by translators with a critical vision different from that of their predecessors. The only aesthetic connecting them is one of multiplicity—in our case, a literature that loves adaptation, refraction, transgression. In translation, literature is always becoming something new. Calque hopes to illustrate this process.

– Steve Dolph
Something compelled me, in the summer of 1997, to become a complete freak for Homer. I am still not sure what it was. Sudden literary obsessions are quite common in me. It may have simply been one of those. It may have been the fact that I always had the day laid out before me, with little do but drift from park to coffee shop, to read, to try to write, to wait for the night to lead me to whatever sofa I was offered. It may have been one particular sofa, owned by a woman I’d known for several years. Kathy was her name. She was Greek. In high school she had worn black and read Nietzsche. Now in college, she and a few friends shared an apartment that played host to a never-ending dinner party; in addition to the homeless me. It was heady stuff. I remember hearing people say things like, “He’s supposed to be some sort of Nabokov scholar or some shit,” and wondering who this Nabokov fellow was.

It was probably there, on one of those wine-dark nights, that I first heard the name Homer. By summer’s end I had read both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in the FitzGerald, Rouse, and Lattimore translations. I had my little problems with each of them, and the sense that by reading all three I might get a better idea of the Greek. Wasn’t I cute? When Kathy caught wind of what I’d been reading, and how, she laughed in my face and handed me Stanley Lombardo’s *Iliad*. In the ten years that have passed since then, I have re-read Homer many times, always in Lombardo’s translations.

Lombardo’s work stretches beyond Homer, covering Hesiod, Sappho and many other Greeks; Virgil; the *Tao Te Ching*; and now Dante. In each case, Lombardo begins with a beautiful, simple idea: why not translate all this old poetry into modern American poetry? This choice does two things. It allows him to bring his considerable skill as an American poet to bear. It allows his audience to hear the poem the way its original audience did. There is none of this hexameter approximation nonsense. The poem comes at you in strong lines, broken at the breath, with a strong natural rhythm, speaking your own language. There’s nothing you can do but bear. The results are a Homer, a Virgil, a Dante, that no American poet can afford not to read. In a perfect world we would all have the Greek, the Latin, the Italian at our disposal. In this imperfect world, Lombardo is the next best thing.

And he is apparently indefatigable. I mean, who translates Homer, Virgil, and Dante? Has anyone else even tried to do that, ever? Not that I know of. Somehow, Stanley finds time amidst all this translating to teach Classics at the University of Kansas. He patiently tolerated a shoddy phone connection when he spoke with me from his home in Lawrence.

*Calque:* Let’s begin with the unanswerable questions about the historical Homer. Do we have any facts about him?

*Lombardo:* No, we really don’t. There are ancient traditions but most scholars think that they are simply made up.

*Calque:* He was claimed as a native son by seven different cities, was he not?

*Lombardo:* Right. Everyone wanted to claim that Homer was from their hometown. There is a Hesiodic text, “The Contest between Homer and Hesiod,” that is in some sense authentic. Hesiod and Homer meet in a poetry contest and they do things like capping verses and they each recite their best passage and the judges decide. It’s kind of like a poetry slam, one on one.

*Calque:* Who wins?

*Lombardo:* Hesiod wins.

*Calque:* Of course.

*Lombardo:* Yeah, it’s cool. The judges decide that Hesiod’s poetry has more social utility. I do a lot of readings, and I used to do this contest of Homer and Hesiod, so I would have a straw hat and a staff for Hesiod, and there would be three rounds, pretty much like in a poetry slam. Hesiod would go and then I would switch over to the other chair and I would have a drum and a black silk jacket to be Homer. I’d go back and forth that way, and the audience would decide. And the audience would always award it to Hesiod just as the ancient judges did.
Calque: Regarding Homer's epics, what does the timeline of the history of those works look like?

Lombardo: Well, once again, we really don't know, (laughs) but the general scholarly consensus is that Homer is active in the 8th Century B.C., working in a tradition that's hundreds of years old, maybe six or seven hundred years old by then, going back to Mycenaean times. The subject of his poetry, the Trojan War and its aftermath, is roughly four hundred years in the past. So he's a poet working in a tradition, heavily influenced by that tradition and drawing on it constantly. But he has his own mind and his own poetic sensibility, a sense of narrative and drama that he apparently introduces into the tradition. But we really don't know; he was probably active during a fairly long lifetime some time in the 700's B.C., maybe slightly earlier. No one thinks it could have been much later than that.

Calque: What do we know about the shape and nature of the tradition in which Homer worked?

Lombardo: Well, we don't know much. We know it was an oral tradition simply because there's no evidence of any kind of writing and the poetic style has all the hallmarks of an oral tradition, formulaic phrases and so forth, although some of the phrases are attested in a very early form of writing from Mycenae called Linear B which pretty much passed out of use four or five hundred years before Homer. These are simply set phrases with epithets of goddesses and sacrificial animals and things like that that would have been recorded in palace inventories. They're not excerpts or quotes from poems, but poets picked up on these phrases. That's the very earliest evidence that we have, but we have absolutely no other evidence, not a scrap, of anything earlier than Homer, though some people think that Hesiod may be a little earlier. Hesiod is working in a parallel tradition, didactic rather than epic narrative.

Calque: At what point do the poems pass from that oral tradition into written texts?

Lombardo: That, too, is still debated. Most people think in the 6th Century B.C., so several generations after Homer was active, and probably in Athens. It was probably a political move as much as anything. These poems were circulating in oral performance and had enormous prestige. Athens decided it wanted to corner the market. Writing had been in common use for maybe fifty years at that point, so an edition was done, sort of downloaded from the rhapsodes' oral performances. And other cities had their own editions, after Athens. Finally, in the 3rd Century B.C., at the Great Library of Alexandria, the scholars there started to produce what they considered definitive editions, working with all these various city editions but also still consulting the rhapsodes who had kept the oral tradition going all of these hundreds of years.

Calque: What sort of relationship did the Greeks of the high periods of Greek culture have with these poems?

Lombardo: Oh they absolutely adored the poems. They were universally regarded as their greatest works of literature, they were very important culturally, they were normative for behavior, ideas of justice, beauty. They were widely regarded simply for their poetic excellence. The Greek tragedian Aeschylus says, "All our works are crumbs from the great banquet that is Homer." So he was like a god. He certainly had at least the status of Shakespeare, and even greater. Shakespeare and the Bible.

Calque: In the introduction to your version of the Iliad you write that the language of Homer is a specifically poetic dialect of Greek. What does that mean, exactly?

Lombardo: As a dialect it seems to be based in the Greek of the islands in the Aegean and the coast of Asia Minor, but its sort of a pan-Hellenic dialect, almost as if these rhapsodes in their travels throughout Greece had simply absorbed dialect and vocabulary from a wide range of geographical sources and worked it all together into what it became. It was shaped by the requirements of the verse form in which they were working. Certain phrases and words worked very well in that verse form, others might not work well at all and so they would drop out. So its shaped by travel, performance, and metrics.

Calque: Homer's work, along with a great deal of ancient literature, was lost in the West for many years. When they were re-introduced in Europe where did they come from and what kind of effect did that have?

Lombardo: They were not lost in the Eastern Roman Empire. Constantinople and the other great centers of scholarship in the East, which was largely Greek, kept all of this alive. It was re-introduced in the 15th Century, into Italy, after Constantinople fell to the Turks...
in 1453. A whole lot of scholars left, and northern Italy, with its commercial connections and prosperity, was a natural destination, a place where they could find patrons. So Homer comes back to the West at the beginning of the Renaissance. Editions followed closely after that, many of them, and Western scholars worked over the texts for about 300 years, consulting manuscripts, making editions, studying the style. Friedrich Wolf, the great German scholar, published his *Prolegomenon to Homer* in 1795 and this marked the beginning of modern Homeric scholarship. The editions that were produced in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries had a lot of scholarship behind them. There were around 300 Greek manuscripts of Homer that had survived and all of these were very carefully consulted, along with all of the scholia, which are the marginal notes that ancient scholars scribbled. The *Oxford Classical Text*, which is the culmination of that long line of scholarship, might actually be pretty close to what Homer was performing.

**Calque:** Given the length of Homer's epics, and the fact that, for hundreds of years, they didn't exist in written form, what are the chances that the versions of them that we have accurately reflect what would have come from the mouth of Homer himself in performance?

**Lombardo:** I think they're pretty high. Two things right off. One is the conservative nature of memory. Every parent has experienced this. You tell your kids a story and if you change one word when you tell it the next night they'll be all over you. That's how narratives work in oral tradition, the audiences are the conservators to a large extent in the oral tradition. It was not uncommon in antiquity to have all of Homer memorized. People used their memories in ways that we don't. We're perfectly capable of doing it, we just don't. If you memorize, say; even one book of the *Iliad*, you can begin to appreciate this. The more you memorize the easier it all gets. Furthermore, once you have it memorized the narrative takes a shape in your mind that's different than when its simply left on the page, no matter how many times you read it through. It's like its all there at once, within you, and you begin to appreciate the narrative architecture and the allusions, the cross references and so forth in way that you simply didn't before. And that leads me to the conclusion that when you work in an oral tradition you are capable of shaping narrative in very sophisticated ways. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are not just long, they are superbly constructed. The narratology is astounding. This has been studied extensively, and is pretty well understood. That's why some classicists came to the same conclusion, nobody could have composed stuff of this complexity and subtlety and high art without the aid of writing and revision and so forth, but I don't think that's true. In fact I think that the odds are a little better that you're going to come up with something like this working exclusively in the oral tradition.

**Calque:** Of the body of Greek poetry that existed in antiquity, what portion remains in existence today?

**Lombardo:** Less than ten percent, certainly.

**Calque:** And that stuff's just gone, basically?

**Lombardo:** Oh yes. Every now and then something will turn up, but it's just scraps and odds and ends. No one thinks there's any chance of recovering anything substantial.

**Calque:** As part of your process in translating Homer, you traveled around giving public readings and made those readings an important part of your translation work in the composition stage.

**Lombardo:** True.

**Calque:** Where on earth did you get an idea like that?

**Lombardo:** Well, from Homer (laughs), this is how he composed, after all. He composed for performance. It had to work with an audience. If it didn't work with an audience then it didn't work at all. So I wanted my translations to have that performative quality. I wanted to make sure that they worked in performance. So I was just being true to Homer's spirit.

**Calque:** How did it go over, initially; and were you surprised by the reaction?

**Lombardo:** It went very well from the beginning, I think partly because no one else was doing it, really. I mean you can find Greek drama performed any day of the week somewhere, but very very few performances of Homer, especially solo performances. Sometimes there are stage versions. The Aquila Theatre Company, in New York, has performed Book I of my *Iliad* and also Books XVI-XIX absolutely straight from the translation, but with six or so actors passing parts around and a lot of stagecraft. But just to have somebody sitting
there with a drum and doing it solo, which is much the way the ancient performers did it, hadn't entered people's experience. And solo performance can be pretty intense, emotionally. When I first began I was a little nervous about the women's parts and how I would do the women's voices, so I would look at the women in the audience to see what they thought, you know, to figure out their reaction. It did shape the translation, both in composition and revision. I composed for performance, for my voice, and I revised on the basis of performance.

Calque: How many performances did you do leading up to a final version?

Lombardo: Oh dozens.

Calque: You also write, in the introduction to your Iliad, regarding the English poetics of your translation, “I have tried to stay true to the dominant practice of American poets in a tradition that leads from Whitman, Pound, and Charles Olson to the present.” Why did you make that decision, which seems like an unusual one for a classicist?

Lombardo: Well, I was a poet and interested in poetry before I was a classicist, and in fact have always thought of myself as a poet with, I shouldn't say a classics day job, but maybe something like that, and I was determined to make it in Academia on that basis. Its not that I can't do the standard scholarship and so forth. I know Greek and Latin very well, and the things that a classicist is supposed to know. But I've always been interested in Greek and Latin poetry and interested in translating it and interested in somehow bringing it more within the tradition of American poetry because after all that's our voice. That's what's living right now, and when Homer was composing he was working in an art form that was living and vital for him. It seemed like a perfectly natural thing to do and I didn't think of it as revolutionary in any way. It is a little unusual, and there's this popular notion that classical poetry has to sound remote and dignified. That's simply not true. (laughs) When you read the stuff in Greek it grabs you as unbelievably immediate.

Calque: Did you have any problems from other classicists over the poetics of your versions of Homer, or some of the coarse language in your translations?

Lombardo: Oh no, not at all, in fact. Not from classicists. They understood what I was doing immediately. The only people who ever gave me any grief were non-classicists, especially from the conservative right, who sometimes lay claim to classical literature as supporting their ideology. I was on C-SPAN, for instance, Booktalk had a two hour program on my translation of the Odyssey, and this guy, Jody Bottom is his name, editor of the Weekly Standard, was on the show, and he actually led it off by saying, “Everybody should read Homer's Odyssey,” and he held up my book, “but not in this translation.” And he gave what he thought was an egregious example of coarse language, when Achilles is encountered in the underworld by Odysseus, Odysseus tries to make him feel better about his situation and Achilles says, “Don't try to sell me on death...” And Mr. Bottom just thought that this was terrible, that the great hero Achilles should use language such as this. So it's people like that who take issue. People with preconceived notions of tone. People who really don't understand literature very well at all, in my opinion.

Calque: When you came to translate Virgil, were the numerous historical resources that exist about him and his work, in contrast with Homer, an aid?

Lombardo: Yes, and I took that into account. For example we know that Virgil composed very slowly. He wrote the whole thing out in prose and would turn it slowly into verse. It was very considered. And we know two other things. We know that Virgil knew Homer by heart, just about, and he loved Homer the way every other young Greek and Roman author did. He was reflecting Homer constantly. And we also know that Virgil read his own works aloud. There's this account of a memorable reading to the Emperor Augustus and his sister Octavia. So we know that he composed very deliberately and also that he, too, composed for his voice, for performance, and that he could not help but be, in his own way, Homeric. I took all of these things as my cue. The verse, as I compose it in translating Virgil, I think is more considered, but it also reflects my translation of Homer. I think that's appropriate because Virgil was reflecting his knowledge of Homer's Greek. And it's really true that all classical literature was performative. The typical form of publication was a reading. Things were always read out loud. It may not have been a theatrical performance, but everything was read out loud. So once again I wanted to make sure that the Aeneid worked in performance.
Calque: You have also translated lyric poets, such as Sappho. How does your approach to translation differ when you work on lyrics rather than epics?

Lombardo: Sappho is very interesting in that she clearly has Homer in mind in a number of her poems, and is kind of showing Homer how it’s done. There are five or six famous passages like that. So its not that I had to completely forget about Homer. Sappho did not forget about Homer herself. But Sappho is not only lyric, it’s fragmentary lyric, and here the aesthetic of the fragment, that you find in poets like Pound, came into play. I really learned a lot from the *Cantos*, about shaping these fragments into poetry. I did some readings of Sappho, maybe I just couldn’t help it, but I wasn’t conscious of it as being from an oral tradition, maybe because it is so fragmentary. But allowing the little pieces of poetry that we have from Sappho to come to life on the page required a lot of attention. It was a wonderful process, and like Virgil this was something that I’d wanted to do since I was an undergraduate and could not, could not, simply could not hear a voice for Sappho until I had a class of poets at the university. We read Sappho, and some of them knew Greek and some didn’t and we just talked about it as poetry for a semester and that provided some insight that I needed, the voice that I needed to hear. For me that’s always the crucial step, to somehow be able to hear the voice of the author as one’s own voice and within one’s own poetic tradition. If I get to that point then I know I can do it. Sometimes it takes a while.

Calque: What are you working on now?

Lombardo: I’ve just finished a translation of Dante’s *Inferno*. It’ll be out next year.

Calque: How’d you handle the terza rima?

Lombardo: I kept a very strong tercet structure and paid a lot of attention to the strength of the line, especially the line endings. Then toward the end of each canto, sometimes twenty lines out, sometimes maybe just ten lines out, I segued into terza rima, as a form of closure for each canto. So there’d be the beginnings of rhyme, then it begins rhyming, maybe just ABA, and then it starts to interlock and then at least by the final tercet and the extra line it becomes strict terza rima. So it’s kind of like, you know when you start to hear the theme music when a radio program’s almost over.

Calque: Were there any translators of Dante that you read as some sort of guide?

Lombardo: No, not while I was working on it. Just the Italian text and of course scholarly commentary. Whatever I do, I use the best scholarly editions and commentaries, and the notes often solve translation problems for you. Its not like you lift the phrase straight from the notes, but a good commentary is invaluable. I had admired John Ciardi’s translation, that was the one I was most familiar with, and I also liked Binyon’s translation, as of course did Pound, or Pound at least came to like it. He carried on this long correspondence with Binyon and at first he was saying things like, “What are you doing?” but then he said, “Okay, this is really something.” But of course any full terza rima translation has to involve inversions and distortions that I just couldn’t live with. You can manage it in short stretches but English just doesn’t have the rhymes that Italian has.

Calque: Do you have anything planned after the *Inferno*?

Lombardo: *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*.
When, in the course of our interview, Stanley told me that he was soon to publish a translation of Dante's *Inferno*, I began to gibber excitedly. I may have gushed, and I seem to recall letting slip the fact that I have a very large tattoo of Dante on my left arm, accompanied by one of Beatrice on the right. Stanley laughed. I then began to beg for a canto to include in this issue. Stanley laughed again. Later, he obligingly sent along his version of Canto XXVI, one of the *Inferno's* most celebrated passages.

In Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt*, Fritz Lang quotes a passage from this canto, in German, which is instantly recognized by the French screenwriter and the Italian secretary who are present. The American producer, played by Jack Palance, ignores the poetry, throws some film canisters around, then declares, "Every time I hear the word 'Art' I take out my checkbook!" Good times.

The canto takes place in the eighth of Hell's nine circles, known as *Malebolge*, a term coined off of the Italian words *male*, meaning evil, and *bolgia*, meaning either ditch or pouch. What we have, then, is an evil ditch, or a ditch of evil if you prefer, which is itself divided into ten *bolgias*, each teeming with sinners suffering the sort of unspeakable torment of which Dante speaks so often, so eloquently.

It is in circles eight and nine that the worst types of sinners, the fraudulent and malicious, are punished. They have been, as all the *Inferno's* sinners are, sorted according to the severity of their sin. Those in *Malebolge's* first ditch are the least punished of these considerably chastised souls. Those being chewed eternally in the mouth of Satan himself in Hell's very bottom, the ninth circle, are subject to the most horrific punishment in Hell, and therefore in Dante's entire universe. *Canto XXVI* takes place in the eighth of the ten ditches of *Malebolge*. Here Dante and Virgil find the evil counselors, and among them the shade of Ulysses a.k.a. Odysseus, bound in a double column of flame with his co-conspirator Diomedes.

A fair portion of the critical ink spilled over Dante has been devoted to the question of what, precisely, was Ulysses' sin. It seems enough to note that Dante has Virgil himself as a guide through Hell to conclude that, for Dante, Virgil's statement in the *Aeneid* that the Trojan Horse was Ulysses' idea is sin enough. It is when Ulysses opens his mouth to tell his last story that ambiguity regarding Dante's conception of the character creeps in.

In the space of half a canto, Dante writes what amounts to a sequel to the *Odyssey*. It was this speech that Fritz Lang quoted in *Contempt*. In Lombardo's version it is yet another example of his ability to skilfully render the moments of a poem that really matter, the moments of complex, turbulent action and emotion.

— Brandon Holmquest
Canto XXVI

Rejoice, O Florence, for so great is your fame that you beat your wings over land and sea, and even through Hell has spread your name.

Among the thieves I found five who were your citizens, of which I am ashamed and which does not magnify your honor. But if dreams we have near morning are true you will feel, before too much time goes by, what Prato, and others, crave for you.

Were it done now, it would be none too soon, and would that it were, since it must be done and will weigh on me more as my life wears on.

We left that place, and my leader climbed the same stairs that the jutting stones had made for our descent. Then he hoisted me up, and we made our solitary way through the rocks and along the splintered ridge where the foot could not advance without the hand.

I grieved then, and I grieve again now when I turn my mind to what I saw there, and I rein in now my native genius to keep it from running where virtue does not guide, so that if my lucky stars or something better has endowed me, I will not vainly flaunt the gift.

In the season when he who lights the world lingers, hiding his face least from us, and in the twilight the fly yields to the mosquito—A shepherd resting on a hill will see swarms of fireflies twinkling along the valley where perhaps he plows and gathers grapes: with so many flames the entire Eighth Trench was aglow, as I realized when I reached the point where I could see all the way to the bottom.

And as the prophet who was avenged by bears saw Elijah's chariot when it took flight, the horses rising straight up to heaven faster than his eyes could ever follow so that all he could see was the shooting flame...
si come nuvoletta, in sù salire: 
tal si move ciascuna per la gola 
del fosso, ch'è nessuna mostra 'l furto, 
e ogne fiamma un peccatore invola. 
Io stava sovrà 'l ponte a veder surto, 
si che s'io non avessi un ronchion preso, 
caduto sarei più sanz'esser urto. 
E 'l duca che mi vide tanto atteso, 
disse: «Dentro dai fuochi son li spiriti; 
catun si fascia di quel ch'elli 
e inceso».

«Maestro mio», rispuos'io, 
«primo, assai ten priego 
che non mi facci de l'attendere niego 
fin che la fiamma cornuta qua vegna; 
vedi che del disio ver' lei mi piengo!».

And eli a me: «La tua preghiera 
e degna 
ma fa che la tua lingua si sostegno. 
Lascia parlare a me, ch'i' ho concetto 
ciò che tu vuoi; ch'ei sarebbero schivi, 
perch'è fuor greci, forse del tuo detto».

Poi che la fiamma fu venuta quivi 
dove parve al mio duca tempo e loco, 
in questa forma lui parlare audivi:
«O voi che sitet due dentro ad un foco, 
s'io meritai di voi mentre ch'io vissi, 
s'io meritai di voi assai o poco
quando nel mondo li alti versi scissi,
non vi movete; ma l'un di voi dica
dove, per lui, perduto a morir gissi.

Lo maggior corno de la fiamma antica
cominciò a crollarsi mormorando
pur come quella cui vento affatica;
indì la cima qua e là menando,
come fosse la lingua che parlassi,
gittò voce di fuori, e disse: «Quando
mi diparti' da Circe, che sotrasse
me più d'un anno là presso a Gaeta,
prima che si Enea la nomasse,
né dolcezza di figlio, né la pietà
del vecchio padre, né 'l debito amore
lo qual doveva Penelope far lieta,
vincer potero dentro a me l'ardore
ch'èbbi a divenir del mondo esperto,
de li vizi umani e del valore;
ma misi me per l'alto mare aperto
sol con un legno e con quella compagna
picciola da la qual non fui diserto.

l'un lito e l'altro vidi infin la Spagna,
fin nel Morroco, e l'isola d'I Sardi,
e l'altre che quel mare intorno bagna.

Io e 'i compagni eravam vecchi e tardi
quando venimmo a quella foce stretta
dov'Èrcule segnò li suoi riguardi,
acciò che l'uom più oltre non si metta:
da la man destra mi lascia Sibilia,
da l'altra già m'avea lasciata Setta.
O frati, dissi che per cento milia
perigli siete giunti a l'occidente,
a questa tanto picciola vigilia
d' nostri sensi ch'è del rimanente,
non vogliate negar l'esperienza,
di retro al sol, del mondo sanza gente.
Considerate la vostra semenza:
fatti non foste a viver come bruti,
ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza.

Li miei compagni fec'io si aguti,
con questa orazio piicciola, al cammino,
che a pena poscia li avrei ritenuti;
e volta nostra poppa nel mattino,

When in the world I wrote high poetry,
stop for a moment, and let one of you tell
where he roamed lost and met his death."
The greater horn of that ancient flame
began to quiver and murmur low
as if it were a candle vexed by the wind;
and then, plying its tip back and forth
as if it were a speaking tongue, the flame
flung out a voice and said, "When I left
Circe, who had held me back
a year or more on her isle near Gaeta,
before Aeneas gave it that name,
not the sweet thought of my son, nor reverence
for my old father, not the love I owed
Penelope, love that would have made her happy,
could overcome my burning desire
for experience of the wide world above
and of men's vices and their valor.
I put forth on the deep open sea
with one ship only, and a skeleton crew
of companions who had not deserted me.
I went up one coast and down another,
as far as Spain and Morocco, saw Sardinia
and the other islands lapped by the waves.

My crew and I were old and slow
when we pulled into the narrow straits
where Hercules had set up his pillars
to mark where men should not pass beyond.
I had left Seville on the starboard side
and off the port left Ceuta behind.

"Brothers," I said, "who through a hundred
thousand perils you have reached the West,
do not deny to the last glimmering shred
of consciousness that remains to us
experience of the unpeopled world
that lies beyond the setting sun.
Consider the seed from which you were born!
You were not made to live like brute animals
but to live in pursuit of virtue and knowledge!"
This little speech steeled my crew's hearts
and made them so eager for the voyage ahead
I could hardly have restrained them afterwards.
We swung the stern toward the morning light
de' remi facemmo ali al folle volo,
sempre acquistando dal lato mancino.
Tutte le stelle già de l'altro polo
vedea la notte e 'l nostro tanto basso,
che non surgea fuor del marin suolo.
Cinque volte racceso e tante cassa
lo lume era di sotto da la luna,
poi che 'ntrati eravam ne l'alto passo,
quando n'apparve una montagna, bruna
per la distanza, e parvemi alta tanto
quanto veduta non avea alcuna.
Noi ci allegrammo, e tosto tornò in pianto,
ché de la nova terra un turbo nacque,
e percosse del legno il primo canto.
Tre volte il fé girar con tutte l'acque;
a la quarta levar la poppa in suso
e la prora ire in giù, com'altrui piacque,
infin che 'l mar fu sovra noi richiuso».
Fredrik Nyberg

from A Different Practice and Clockwork of Flowers – Explanations and Poems

• Translated from the Swedish by Jennifer Hayashida •

I have earlier (quite a few times) tried to write about the absolute and sanctified in the relationship of memory to what we usually call knowledge. Let me then just one more time quickly state: I remember absolutely nothing of what took place (occurred happened?) before the 1976 Montreal Summer Olympics.

from “Crawfish – a Poem”

The year 2007 marks the tri-centennial of the birth of Carl von Linné (1707 – 1778), the Swedish botanist, biologist, and physician who established the conventions of scientific nomenclature and taxonomy in a seemingly infinite project of categorizing and cataloguing plant and animal life. Statues of Linné are ubiquitous in Sweden. His face smiles back at you from the 100-kronor bill. Since 1939 there have been 12 Swedish postage stamps with Linné-related motifs.

Growing up in Sweden, I was familiar with Linné from a young age. During so-called “Friluftsdagar” (“Open Air Days”), teachers would herd us into the woods that surrounded our dreary suburb. We would each be equipped with mugs of blueberry soup and a well-worn copy of Vår Flora i Färg, the pocket-sized illustrated catalogue of flowers and weeds with which we were to recognize, identify, and eventually be quizzed on the plants we would see that day. At that age, I saw the pages of the flora as a space where past and present collided, where the Latinate of “history” (Ranunculus acris) ceded to the pragmatism of the present (smörblomma, or, of course, buttercup). To a fourth-grader, the taxonomic schemes could seem overwhelming – how to distinguish between the seemingly identical types of pyrola? – yet the implication that there was an order behind each petal and blade of grass also inspired a perverse sense of determination. If the natural world was classified according to a system, that system could be memorized, and one could then ignore the inexplicable nature of the rest of one’s ten-year-old life.

The first time I picked up Fredrik Nyberg’s A Different Practice, I read the entire collection from cover to cover while standing in the bookstore. It was 1998, and I was home for the summer to see family and friends, a kind of visit I had made annually since moving to the U.S. in 1990. At the time, I had little knowledge of literary translation and had never considered my bilingualism to be anything but the artifact of a confusing intercontinental childhood. Born in the San Francisco Bay Area to a Japanese-American father and Swedish mother, raised in the suburbs of Stockholm, I felt like a perpetual outsider, skimming the surface of each culture as someone who was always of another place. If asked, “Where are you from?” I never felt that I had a satisfactory answer. It seemed impossible to parse what was “Swedish” and what “American” about my interests or opinions. This bafflement colors my continuous reluctance to claim any singular profession or practice. As a writer, poetry has become my structure for naming and mapping this sense of geographic and linguistic disorientation. When I first read A Different Practice, I felt an affinity with Nyberg’s negotiations around recollection and forgetting; his questions circling the possibility of ever truly capturing and holding onto experience, a pursuit I had been engaged in from a young age.

From this vantage point, I imagined that it was possible to see myself as part of a shared consciousness that I identified as particularly Swedish, where I, as a translator, could be an observer from within rather than without.

Organized in five sections, A Different Practice is bookended by two explicitly ordered sequences. The first is a suite of five poems titled “Rotorblades, Movements (1 – 5).” The other is “The Years,” a series of thirteen poems based on the months of the year. Three freestanding suites occupy the middle: “Pets – the Private,” “You...” and “Shall these hands.” Initially, it was this organization that held my attention. I recognized my own concerns in the attempt, through poetry, to organize memory and – to me, more importantly – gaps in memory, in an ongoing interrogation of the possibility of accurate recollection.
We see this also in the poems from between individual memories, landscape, and the body. Physical conditions of health or illness, thus outlining a relationship to mood, weather, speech, and experience extends like a never-ending map of time and place.

During the longer poems and suites, there is a continuous sense that the poet is, in fact, shrinking, as the linguistic landscape of the poem sense clarifies the speaker's relationship to the word and the world.

Girls make me disappear to become smaller in about the same way one becomes smaller in a certain type of (preferably grand) landscape.

During the longer poems and suites, there is a continuous sense that the poet is, in fact, shrinking, as the linguistic landscape of the poem extends like a never-ending map of time and place. This perpetual, three-dimensional unfolding is negotiated through a doggedly democratic attention to mood, weather, speech, and physical conditions of health or illness, thus outlining a relationship between individual memories, landscape, and the body.

We see this also in the poems from “You...,” where to imagine the beginnings of a face or a name or a body of water is pointless when faces names and bodies of water lack a beginning lack an end.

This ceaselessness is often seen when things go on länge, that is, for a long time. Länge occurs repeatedly throughout the text. Each instance has forced me to consider the translation of time. As a word, it mentions neither time nor space, and unlike the English long, it can be used only to measure time, not length or distance. To begin with, the clunkiness of “for a long time” counters the onomatopoeia of länge. More importantly, the English translation makes explicit the plane in which experience is unfolding – time. This often undermines the poet's attempts to collapse the here and then.

Nyberg's second collection, Clockwork of Flowers – Explanations and Poems, takes the desire to serialize or extend the poetic form and roots it in a far more expansive conceptual framework. Borrowing from Linne’s botanical conventions, the poems in Clockwork are organized around a series of Latinate plant names. These poems, arranged alphabetically, are occasionally interrupted by a free-standing poem that, through its intrusion, highlights the unavoidable slippage between systematic observation and what I can only refer to as just “being.” The work of cataloguing what is observed becomes an end in itself. Observation is experience, and the distance between seeing and self is collapsed through the space of the poem. As in A Different Practice, a sense of resignation permeates the desire to pin down experience as it retreats into the past and speeds into the future. The poems evoke a sense of melancholy triumph over an otherwise oppressive mess of mortality, tenderness, and self-doubt.

In spite – or perhaps because of – its conceptual underpinnings, the weight of the collection often appears to rest on the standalone pieces. I am particularly attached to two of the poems included here: “Prologue” and “And if You Die You Are a Lake.” The former, with its explicit homage to Ashbery, re-introduces us to the poet's ongoing investigations into the relationship between the profound (mortality) and the mundane (chips and chicken). The latter piece exemplifies some of Nyberg's most characteristic descriptions of experience.

I close my eyes in the dark. Ice from the edge of the flume frees itself and is crushed against the hand. At night you sound like thunder.

External darkness presages the darkness of closing one's eyes. Rather than avoiding experience, the speaker, in closing his eyes, is seeking to relive what already is, recognizing that what may initially seem external is in fact part of his internal landscape.
Looking at the two collections, I see that the rhythm and grammar of recollection is gradually being replaced by the momentum of the present. The practice in *Clockwork* is one of practicing experience. As such, “practice” has become an assemblage of certain meditative activities — writing, translation, research, observation — wherein memory is no longer the primary tool but “a method among others.”

I think of this vantage point — replacing the retrospective with the anticipatory — when I am back in Stockholm this summer. Swedish national identity, previously so intertwined with sentimentality and nostalgia (*Det var bäst för; The past was better*) is slowly, often reluctantly, recognizing irrevocable changes in the cultural landscape. I read *White Like Me* by the Black Swedish journalist Oivvio Polite, and I see people like me: mixed-race Swedes whose bilingual, bicultural backgrounds make us undeniable representatives of a global present. My sense of identification with a newfound Swedish hybridity offers an opportunity to redefine my understanding of that country, to make that understanding less contingent upon translation, upon mediation, to instead interrogate the limits of a national ideology of inclusion and egalitarianism.

I see this criticality in Polite’s essays on Black Swedish identity and its relationship to African American concepts of racialization and community. In the work of Jonas Hassen Khemiri, whose novels, plays, and essays take full advantage of the rapidly expanding vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of a Swedish inflected by its immigrant populations. In the novel I am currently reading, *Londonstani*, by Gautam Malkani, where just the glossary makes clear its protagonists’ frustrations with the limits of the nation-state, notions of community, and their own place along a continuum of belonging and alienation. How, then, to connect my nascent insights with these texts by Nyberg?

The nostalgic longing that led me to so embrace *A Different Practice* has been replaced by another instinct, one that appreciates the author's suspicions regarding totality, veracity, and nostalgia. What I previously identified as poetic slippage between past and present I now read as misgivings regarding that temporal binary. Here the import of bringing Nyberg’s work to an English-speaking audience becomes clear. As poems that explore suspicion, longing, and disappointment — in oblique relation to Swedish nostalgia and a cradle-to-grave social welfare ideology — both *A Different Practice* and *Clockwork of Flowers* ask readers to reconsider certainty as a phenomenological, ideological, and psychoanalytic construct. The practice for the reader becomes one of simultaneous dismantling and reconstruction, of parallel experience and observation. In either language, Nyberg gives his reader the chance to get to be in a story where one is constantly turning around.

I think about this “turning around” when I consider my shifting relationship to my bilingualism, my own place between cultures and identities. The analogy regarding Linné now seems instructive in its quaintness. My childhood desire to find explanation through a system of taxonomy has its corollary in the translation I’ve been engaged in since picking up *A Different Practice*. In many ways, Linné represents my initial attempt to locate the world in a text. I am struck by the fact that I, through Nyberg, once again find myself encountering a taxonomy that is at once personal and categorical. Translation has become my most intimate experience of reading, a continuous “turning around” where systems of vocabulary, grammar, and syntax constantly shift, subject to cultural forces that had no explanation in childhood.

Fredrik Nyberg is a Swedish poet born in 1968, currently living in Gothenburg, Sweden. His début collection, *En annorlunda praktik (A Different Practice)* was published by Norstedts Förlag in 1998, and a bilingual translation is forthcoming from Ugly Duckling Presse. Subsequent books, *Blomsterur - Förlarningar och Dikter (Clockwork of Flowers – Explanations and Poems)*, and *Åren (The Years)*, were published in 2000 and 2002, respectively. In 2003, Nyberg wrote the play *Tunnelsång (Tunnel Song)*. His latest collection, *Det blir inte rättvist bara för att båda blundar (It won’t be fair just because both shut their eyes)*, appeared from Norstedts in 2006, and his introduction to Erik Beckman’s *Collected Poems* was published in January of 2007. Nyberg works at the Partille bookstore and serves on the editorial board of the Swedish literary publication *OEI*. A new collection, *Nio, nine, neun, neuf*, is forthcoming from Norstedts. Translations of his poetry appear in *The Literary Review* (Summer 2002 & Fall 2007), *Circumference* (Spring 2009), and the online quarterly *Action, Yes* (Autumn 2006).

—Jennifer Hayashida
from *En annorlunda praktik*

**(Kräftor – en dikt)**

*Att säga*

att skriva utan att helt få det att likna den resa som föregicks av två eller tre mycket små somrar

Senare också ljung vågor vansinne

Ibland blir kärleken faktiskt fokuserad

Jag luktar på din mage för att länge minnas din mage

* 

Försöker säga poesi

långa dikter om en vardaglig och omedveten uppväxt

om fruaros och föräldrars förande frisyrer

Det är så dumt dammigt i lägenheterna

snön kommer säkert snart att falla genom oss

Större delen av dig rusar dock i en annan rymd

* 

from *A Different Practice*

**(Crawfish – a Poem)**

*To say*

to write without entirely making it resemble that journey preceded by two or three very small summers

Later also heather waves insanity

Sometimes love actually becomes focused

I smell your stomach to long remember your stomach

* 

Try to *say poetry*

long poems about an ordinary and oblivious childhood

about wives’ and parents’ flowing hairstyles

It is so dumb dusty in the apartments

the snow will surely fall through us soon

The better part of you though rushes in another space

*
Minnet som en metod bland andra

en kontinent av olika tillstånd sandstränder
sjukdomar som skall förklaras
och bli till faktiska konsekvenser för oss

>>Det går fint att flytta organ mellan tvillingar<<

* 

Hennes lungor dom små brösten

Det här är också den vänstra handens enda minne

Datumens grammatik sjukdomen som en särskild förskjutning
i kastanjerna du alltid bar med dig

Höstlöv snöfall

Iblad önskar jag att jag verklig var en helt annan
människa

* 

Jag skriver inte längre om min brors särskila adresser
om dom små husen som blir helt upplysta då man tänder i köket

Det verkligt obegripliga är fortfarande fruktträdlen

orden ur dom vardagligt döendes munnar

Under tio år inträffar det mesta ändå aldrig

>>Du måste lova mig att du tar det försiktigt när du kör hem ikväll<<

Memory as a method among others

a continent of different states beaches
illnesses to be explained
and transformed into actual consequences for us

>>Moving organs between twins is not a problem<<

* 

Her lungs the tiny breasts

This is also the left hand's only memory

The grammar of dates the illness as a particular displacement
in the chestnuts you always carried with you

Fall leaves snowfall

Sometimes I wish that I really was a completely different
person

* 

I no longer write about my brother’s special addresses
about the little houses that become illuminated when one turns on the kitchen light

The truly incomprehensible is still the fruit trees

the words from the mouths of the casually dying

During ten years most things still don’t happen

>>You must promise me that you will be careful when you drive home tonight<<
To take out clauses

These increasingly protracted record temperatures

How bad can an interpretation be and still remain an interpretation?

I can’t stand evenings when legs simply disappear

To exist in seasons (entire summers)

that are just seasons seasons which cannot be misunderstood

My sister and I consist of different sounds and membranes

She sees me while she slowly sleeps gives birth

she laughs

Girls make me disappear
to become smaller in about the same way one becomes smaller
in a certain type of (preferably grand) landscape

She who with a voice of November suddenly says:
>>We are like siblings (best friends) entire breeds of pets<<

We agreed to walk funny through rooms
to smile a little longer
I går kväll berättade Jonas om en (amerikansk?) konstnärinnan som ställer ut små metallskyftar med namnen på alla människor hon under sitt (sa han 50-åriga?) liv någon gång skulle ha träffat mött kanske tilltalat spottat på hänglat med eller bara kört hem i regnet sent en kväll i New York någon gång på 70-talet

Det betydelsefulla i att minnas (i att skriva) och att livet igenom uttala namnen på det man då minns

*I*

**Jag säger**

Jag skriver brev dagböcker långa inköpslistor
försöker översätta min egen kropps armar in i dessa intima genrer

Allt återkommer som sjukhuskorridorer
noggranna avstånd som förs längre in

Jag tänker ofta på ryggar och hårfrånen

*Döden är avståndet mellan syskon*

*I*

Avlövningen fiskelycka
ett prassel också av halsar

Jag vill verkligen skriva detta
och inte bara ändra på annat (av andra) redan skrivet

Dessa ständiga uruppföranden av dikt

Människor och boskap söker vatten i allt kortare sekvenser

Last night Jonas told us about an (American?) artist who exhibits little metal signs with the names of all the people she during her (did he say 50-year-old?) life sometime would have encountered met maybe addressed spit at made out with or simply driven home in the rain late one night in New York sometime during the 70s

The significance of remembering (of writing) and to throughout life pronounce the names of what one then remembers

*I say*

I write letters diaries long shopping lists
try to translate my own body's arms into these intimate genres

Everything returns like hospital corridors
careful distances that are brought further in

I often think about backs and hairlines

*Death is the distance between siblings*

*I*

Defoliation fishing luck
a rustling also of throats

I really want to write this
and not simply change what is (by others) already written

These constant first performances of poems

Humans and cattle seek water in shorter and shorter sequences
Jag skriver vardagar: (onsdagar)

(Det finns ställen där man alltid får stånd utan att ha någon anledning. Frågan är aldrig: varför?)

Verkligheten är det otroligaste av allt

Alla andra människors mammor

Att alltid pissa stående

Fragmenten försöken i min anteckningsbok blir allt oftare bara enstaka ord eller mycket korta satser

Jag skriver >>föreställningar<< >>din fot<< >>deras vind<< sedan skriver jag ingenting mer

Det tycks inte heller finnas något hopp om ett snart väderomslag

Kroppen är en exempellös framgång
Den minns sig själv via sina tidigare händelser

Jag dricker tre dessa koppar kaffe varje morgon

En text's intention dess >>ursprunglighet<< eller >>idé<< faller (delvis) lindrad genom det färdiga resultatet
Nyckelorden är också fortsättningsvis
Far Mor Minne Hand

Fåglar har jag alltid uppfattat som monotona

Jag föredrar sommaren framför vintern

Jag är 28 år fyra månader och 18 dagar gammal

Senare

Ett ras av viss gryning grönt gräs
också andra äldre objekt blir plötsligt synliga
blir enklare att hålla i sina två händer

Den lösa egendomen kommer ur lungorna

Vi blir samtliga lite illamående lutar oss ut över

Skrivandet är ett sätt att gå omkring

det är en precisare möjlighet att minnas och glömma

>>Viktoria ibland funderar jag på vem av oss som kommer att dö först
Var den kvarlevande då befinner sig
Hur länge det dröjer innan budet når ända fram<<

Keywords are also from now on
Father Mother Memory Hand

Birds I have always considered monotonous

I prefer the summer to the winter

I am 28 years four months and 18 days old

Later

A crash of certain dawn green grass
also other older objects suddenly become visible
become easier to hold in one's two hands

The loose property comes out of the lungs

All of us become a bit nauseous lean out over

The writing is a way to walk around

it is a more precise possibility to remember and forget

>>Viktoria sometimes I consider which one of us will die first
Where the survivor then will be
How long it takes before the news arrives<<
Jag har tidigare (åtskilliga gånger) försökt skriva om det absoluta och okränkbara i minnets förhållande till det som vi vanligen kallar kunskap.
Låt mig därför bara ännu en gång kort konstatera:
Jag minns absolut ingenting som inträffade (skedde hände?) före sommarolympiaden i Montreal 1976
Jag vet har alltså kunskapen om att jag aldrig föddes

"Det finns ingen död"

Ingen plats invid dig som bara växer utåt
Tingen föds framåt och oxidar sedan som steg (som andra ljud) i omfängsrika nyrenoverade trapphus
Denna enda långa koncipiering av låga ljud i sin egen lägenhet

Maria Magdalena håller hela tiden för öronen
Hon håller vänster hand för höger öra och höger hand för vänster öra så att armarna bildar ett kryss över hennes bröst
Karl-Axel har inga frågor att ställa henne
Han öppnar en dörr söker i skåp och lådor

I have earlier (quite a few times) tried to write about the absolute and sanctified in the relationship of memory to what we usually call knowledge.
Let me then just one more time quickly state:
I remember absolutely nothing of what took place (occurred happened?) before the 1976 Montreal Summer Olympics
I know so have knowledge of that I was never born

"There is no death"

No place next to you that simply grows outward
Things are born facing forward then oxidize like steps (like other sounds) in voluminous newly renovated stairwells
This one continuous conception of low sounds in one’s own apartment

Mary Magdalene always covers her ears
She holds left hand over her right ear and right hand over her left ear so that the arms create a cross over her chest
Karl-Axel has no questions to ask her
He opens a door searches in cupboards and drawers
Och att försöka säga

Dagsljuset är avigt som ansikten

Läsandet föregår alltid detta det skrivna

Du är den som befinner dig utanför seendets alldeles speciella skydd

Senare i ett brus av björkar (aspar?)

Allt är sjukdom långa värmeböljor för mycket insekter

Jag pussar dig

Jag pissar in i dungen

Skuggan är dåligt beskriven i trädgårdsliteraturen

Jag som skriver detta (som är så lätt att skriva) är död

Hav är hat

Kylan gör oss yngre
våra handflator och halsar sträcks som järn ibland sträcks

Vädret liknar minnets slumpmässiga princip

Jag blundar för att du inte skall se att jag tittar på dig

---

And to try to say

Daylight is awkward like faces

Reading always precedes this the written

You are the one who is outside the special protection of seeing

Later in a murmur of birches (aspen?)

Everything is illness long heat waves too many insects

I kiss you

I piss into the glade

Shade is poorly described in the gardening literature

I who write this (which is so easily written) am dead

Oceans are hatred

The cold makes us younger
our palms and throats are stretched as iron is sometimes stretched

The weather resembles memory's haphazard principles

I close my eyes so that you won't see that I am looking at you
Du...

(Sommarmånader)

Jo, jag känner till årstiderna
Jag känner till att människor dör
också under dom tre sommarmånaderna
Juni juli augusti i dessa små små rum
med Wimbledon tennis (på teven)

Döden är inget formuleringsproblem
när den kommer alldeles intill
Det är därför man kan stå i ett kök
och skölja sallad samtidigt som man säger:
>>Det gick bra men den var för stor<<

Du är död och därför
inte hos mig nu
Jag varken kan eller bör uttala
allt det som ändå alltid kommer att återkomma
och då återkomma i form av fragment
ur andra människors liv
eller i vissa bestämda platsers minne (m.m.)

Jag var aldrig nära denna död
Jag var nära den som denna död fick fortsätta igenom

You...

(Summer months)

Yes, I am familiar with the seasons
I know that people die
also during those three summer months
June July August in these small small rooms
with Wimbledon tennis (on the tube)

Death is not a problem of formulation
when it comes up close
That is why one can stand in a kitchen
and rinse lettuce while saying:
>>It went well but it was too big<<

You are dead and so
not with me now
I neither can nor should pronounce
all that which will still always return
and then return in the form of fragments
from other peoples' lives
or in the memory of certain determined places (and so on)

I was never close to this death
I was close to the one whom this death continued through
Bara för att jag inte låter dig vara den som du är
måste du sluta stå sådär stilla
som du gör på fotografierna
från Paris och Rom och London
och andra större eller mindre städer
byar skogar ängar hav sjöar floder
villor lägenheter rum
soffor fåtöljer stolar sängar
golv och annat
som du genom din placering på bilden
helt enkelt döljer
och som jag sedan länge har glömt

Just because I don't let you be the one you are
you have to stop standing still
like you do in the photographs
from Paris and Rome and London
and other larger or smaller cities
villages forests fields oceans lakes rivers
houses apartments rooms
sofas recliners chairs beds
floors and other things
you through your placement in the picture
simply conceal
and which I long since have forgotten
(Du i en andning)

Att göra människan
hennes omgivningar lägenheterna
(och annat också) till något
av det allra viktigaste

Att bara få tänka på någon annans sömn
Att få vara i en berättelse där man hela tiden vänder sig om
Jag ser dig i en andning som allt eftersom tycks utesluta min

Vi är parallella
Vi sover alltså samtidigt

Jag kan gissa
Du kan pissa

(You in a breath)

To make the human being
her surroundings the apartments
(and also other things) into something
of the most important

To only be allowed to think of someone else's sleep
To get to be in a story where one is constantly
turning around
I see you in a breath that gradually seems to exclude my own

We are parallel
So we sleep at the same time

I can guess
You can piss
Att som ett uttryck för en personlighet försöka föreställa sig början av ett ansikte eller ett namn eller ett vattendrag är lönlöst då ansikten namn och vattendrag saknar början saknar slut Dessa våldiga sjöar och floder uppkommer aldrig dom försvinner heller aldrig helt dom blir bara större eller mindre Victoria sjön (69 000 km² stor) avrinner exempelvis via Nilen (6700 km lång) ut i Medelhavet vidare mot Gibraltar New York Jag skulle kunna fortsätta länge - upprätta långa kataloger exempelsamlingar encyklopédier namn på barn som växer upp och blir större än sina föräldrar olika typer av nätverk generiska minnen om hur Det befriade Jerusalem återkallar Aeneiden som i sin tur återkallar Odysseén o.s.v - men detta är ingen argumentation det är bara ett försök att föra in dig i en ny betydelse liksom i ett ljusnande (eller mörknande) bortom löven denna vår

As an expression of a personality to try to imagine the beginnings of a face or a name or a body of water is pointless when faces names and bodies of water lack a beginning lack an end These enormous lakes and rivers never arise nor do they ever completely disappear they just get bigger or smaller By way of example Victoria Lake (69000 km²) runs off via the Nile (6700 km long) out into the Mediterranean on to Gibraltar New York I could continue for a long time - erect long catalogues samples encyclopedias names of children who grow up and become bigger than their parents different types of networks generic memories of how Jerusalem Delivered invokes The Aeneid which in turn invokes The Odyssey and so on - but this is not an argument it is just an attempt to bring you into a new meaning as in a dawning (or darkening) beyond the leaves this spring
Det är nu april
den allra lättaste vitaste snön som ändå faller

Ibland önskar jag att du den dør dagen verkligen dog

Och längre ner i rummet störtar händerna samtidigt samman
och din panna
och ännu lite längre ner ditt högra eller vänstra ögas iris

Så alldeles mot slutet
alldeles mot vinterväder väntar en plats
på vilken du inte är död

Det blå där är längtan
Det grå är där saknad
som blygd och det dumma dammet

(Irisar)

It is now April
the very lightest whitest snow that still falls

Sometimes I wish that you that day really died

And further down in the room hands rush together all at once
and your forehead
and still further down your right or left eye's iris

So right at the end
right against the winter weather a place awaits
in which you are not dead

There the blue is desire
There the grey is longing
like the private and the dumb dust

(Irises)
PROLOG

Jag blir bara äldre.
Ditt huvud är överdrivet ljus och stilla.
Om Europas historia är sann, vill jag lära mig den som man lär sig en sång. Idag när jag skulle gå ut för att köpa chips och kyckling luktade trapphuset halt av såpa. På Hotell Lautréamont rör sig utsagorna hela tiden uppåt genom stroferna. Du torkar pannan med en ros och rekommenderar dess törnen.

from *Blomsterur – Förklaringar och Dikter*

PROLOGUE

I only grow older
Your head is excessively pale and still.
If Europe's history is true, I want to learn it as one learns a song. Today when I was going out to buy chips and chicken the stairwell smelled slippery of soft soap. At Hotel Lautréamont the statements all the time move upwards through the stanzas. You mop your forehead with a rose, recommending its thorns.

from *Clockwork of Flowers – Explanations and Poems*
ADIANTUM (L. neutr.)

Det regnar inte.
Den vitare handen brinner biografiskt.
Den samlar och ger ifran sig sin fukt.
Vi står länge vid havet,
klipporna liknar beskrivningar av klippor.
Jag måste alltid vara den som tröstas.

Klockan är 21.54.
Jag antecknar någonting riktigt refererbart,
som detta att grannen tvärs över gatan plötsligt kommer
utspringande (sekvenserad) på balkongen och kastar
sin snus (i en parabel) över balkongräcket, ner mot den väntande
(ännu helt varma) asfalen.

Nyberg

ADIANTUM (L. neutr.)

It is not raining.
The whiter hand burns biographically.
It collects and releases its dampness.
We stand for a long time by the sea,
the cliffs resemble descriptions of cliffs.
I must always be the one who is consoled.

The time is 21.54.
I make a note of something truly referential,
like this that the neighbor across the street suddenly comes
running out (sequential) onto the balcony and throws
his snuff (in a parabola) over the railing, down towards the waiting
(still completely warm) asphalt.

Hayashida

64 Nyberg

65 Hayashida
ARMERIA (Willd. fem.)

Nypon, strandråg, trift.
Hela Danmark är en katalog. Om natten störtar insekter (stora nattflyn) mot gardiner och glödlampor.
För 20 år sedan försvann jag mycket försiktigt.
Varje förbränning är betydelselös i sig.

Havet luktar Halland.
Det går inte att sova då allting fortfarande växer.
Att saknar är en specifik upptäckt, en invokativ bildning till söka.
Jag tänker länge på de varma stenarnas mikroskopiska oväsen.
På den man som frågade efter en bok med titeln 100,000
vägrutstånd i Sverige.

ARMERIA (Willd. fem.)

Rose hips, lyme grass, thrift.
All of Denmark is a catalogue. At night insects crash (large noctuids) against curtains and light bulbs.
20 years ago I disappeared very carefully.
Each combustion is insignificant in and of itself.

The sea smells of Halland.
It is not possible to sleep when everything still grows.
To long is a specific discovery, an invocatory form of seeking.
I think for a long time of the warm stones' microscopic noise.
Of the man who asked for a book with the title 100,000
distances in Sweden.
Det är vår.
*Björken slummar för rågen.*
Jag går i slädspåren. Ingenting väntar som marken väntar.
Tänk att äntligen få försvinna in i varandras emancipatoriska gester.

Klockan är 04.47,
också skjortan klippar mot magen, bröstkorgen.
Jag ligger direkt mot parkettgolvet.
Jag sväljer och sväljer.

---

It is spring.
*The birch slums for the rye.*
I walk in the sleigh tracks. Nothing waits as the ground waits.
Imagine finally getting to disappear into each other's emancipatory gestures.

The time is 04.47,
also the shirt sticks to the stomach, the chest.
I lay directly against the parquet floor.
I swallow and swallow.
BRODERI

Varje gång vinter.
I skydd av mörkret reste vi ett trä. Värmen i munnen liksom löper.

Värmen i munnen liksom löper.
Jag vill inte dö som en slutning vid en sjö. Det blöder motsols ur dina öron.

Det blöder motsols ur dina öron.
Mina händer stelnar stelt runt könnet i pannan. Vid roSENS läge uppstår smärtan.

Vid roSENS läge uppstår smärtan.
Fettet runt hjärtslagen rym i kroppen. Löven på marken täcker delvis marken.

EMBROIDERY

Each time winter.
Protected by darkness we erected a tree. The heat in the mouth sort of runs.

The heat in the mouth sort of runs.
I do not want to die as a slope by a lake. It is bleeding counter-clockwise from your ears.

It is bleeding counter-clockwise from your ears.
My hands stiffen stiff around the sex on the forehead. By the position of the rose the pain arises.

By the position of the rose the pain arises.
The fat around the heartbeats fits in the body. The leaves on the ground partially cover the ground.
CALLUNA (Salisb. fem.)

Viken är en sekvens,
havet har en föränderlig färg,
ett minne som liknar ljungens bruna och röda nyanser.
Jag minns att det bläste, att vi letade efter något i det höga
vibrerande gräset.
Värje våg förlåter och sköljer.

Jag hostar och nyser.
Jag måste bli försiktigare då jag blundar.
Ögräset har en starkt semaförisk kvalité.

CALLUNA (Salisb. fem.)

The bay is a sequence,
the sea has a fickle color,
a memory that resembles the heather's brown and red shades.
I remember that it was windy, that we searched for something in the tall
vibrating grass.
Each wave forgives and rinses.

I cough and sneeze.
I must become more careful when I close my eyes.
The weeds have a strong semaphoric quality.
NEDERBÖRD

Förmiddag i sju år.
Ljuset i trapphuset väntar och växlar. Mina fingrar blänker portugisiskt feta.
Uppväknandet är en upprepning.
Jag vet t.ex. ingenting om vadret, om jag vet att det regnar eller icke regnar. Mycket av det man skriver liknar översättningar.
Vintern är en extremit kall årstid.

PRECIPITATION

Morning for seven years.
The light in the stairwell waits and shifts. My fingers shine fat, Portuguese.
The awakening is a repetition.
I know, for example, nothing of the weather, if I know that it rains or if it does not rain. Much of what one writes resembles translations.
Winter is an extremely cold season.
Jag sover.
Jag vaknar och hör att du vaknar av regnet.
Vi skall gräla om pengar. Alla människor som inte syns finns.
Vattnet i Mölndalsån – i höjd med Östra begravningsplatsen – fortsätter att stiga. Allt som inte syns finns.
Innanför ögonlocken är du nästan alltid hemma.

Jag minns redan 1999.
Är magsjukan bara ett tecken?
När det regnade gick vi runt sjön. Vi använde oss av långa parenteser.
Jag tror på Gud. Gud är god mot mig (men ond mot många andra). Mycket i naturen rör sig sävligt under vatten.
Också detta år måste få ett slut.

Jag blundar i mörkret.
Is från kanten av rännan lösgör sig och krossas mot handen.
Om natten låter du som åska.

Jag står inte ut. (Jag vill skriva “aska”.)
På vilket vis liknar en stjärna en annan avlägsen stjärna?
Men nu bläser det ständigt. Ingenting är vanligare än popplar.
Och om du dör är du en sjö som långsamt stiger inuti mig.

---

I sleep.
I wake up and hear that you wake from the rain.
We shall argue about money. All people who are not visible exist.
The water in the Mölndal creek – in line with the eastern cemetery – continues to rise. Everything that is not visible exists.
Behind the eyelids you are almost always home.

I already remember 1999.
Is the stomach flu only a sign?
When it rained we walked around the lake. We used long parentheses.
I believe in God. God is good to me (but bad to many others). Much in nature moves leisurely beneath water.
Also this year must have an end.

I close my eyes in the dark.
Ice from the edge of the flume frees itself and is crushed against the hand.
At night you sound like thunder.

I cannot stand it. (I want to write “ashes.”)
In what way does one star resemble another distant star?
But now the wind blows constantly. Nothing is more common than poplars.
And if you die you are a lake that slowly rises within me.
Christian Popescu

from The Popescu Art

* Translated from the Romanian by Adam J. Sorkin and Bogdan Ţefănescu *


Popescu was born June 1, 1959, in Bucharest, the cityscape of his poems. His work earned him a place as one of the groundbreaking poets of the first post-communist decade. His voice - even the offhandedness of his obsession with death - is quirky, strangely moving.

In his early work, Popescu created a fantastic family romance based on his own, utterly transformed, biography. Underpinning his work, the bittersweet myth of the Popescu family suggests an almost-sentimental, on-the-edge-of-cloying warmth in harsh contrast to the bleak, cold Bucharest of privation and despair. This is of course an impossible realm. An ironic idyll, stylized and conventional, like something from a folktale, but ultimately unconventional, a comic, reassuring Elsewhere unreachable during the worst and most repressive decade of the Ceauşescu regime. Or at any time, in any place.

Popescu saw his writing as the opposite of his literary generation's political parables and camouflaged between-the-lines "aesopism" (a term Romanian writers and critics frequently used for the aesthetic of sly indirection and hidden meaning under communist control). Rather than being strictly political or personal, Popescu's work displays a mixed lyrical sensibility, the "urban pastoral" - pastoral in the traditional sense: realizing complex attitudes disguised in an apparent simplicity, and pastoral in the modern critical sense: being directed most of all at sophisticated readers who expect polysemy as well as social and cultural criticism. Popescu's world is not so much political-allegorical as melancholic, satiric, wry and surprising. The mordancy, the sometimes madcap linguistic humor that can be seen in these slightly later "psalms" and other "poems" and 'essays," as Popescu called the works collected in The Popescu Art, enliven the book with a gently mocking spirit and an exuberant sense of the ridiculous.

Many of these prose poems are written in a poetic version of street dialect, making their translation a kind of puzzle requiring the piecing together of slang phrases and uneducated usages without sacrificing the poems' humorous freshness and delicacy. This was the major challenge I faced as a translator of Popescu. The central problem was in capturing the tonalities of vernacular speech without a crass, uncharacteristic vulgarity while trying to make the corresponding English version seem natural in the register of its diction.

Translating into the various forms of the demotic can be very hard. The translator doesn't want to limit the text to one or another recognizable, regional or class speech pattern that would falsify the place, time and verbal richness of the original. On top of that, in Popescu, there are repetitions, internal rhyme and a need to compensate for, if not directly to imitate, the poetic rhythms and often jaunty, clipped cadences in the original. Finally, there were a number of culturally specific things that needed to be glossed with a quick phrase that would sum up a Romanian reader's instant recognition from just a single word, such as the Miorita ballad, a cornerstone of Romanian culture, and the toaca, wooden sticks (sometimes brass) beaten in rhythmic patterns to call worshippers to Romanian Orthodox services. I hope that in these versions I've managed to evoke what I'm talking about (insofar as I have, I want to acknowledge my debt to my collaborator, Bogdan Ţefănescu).

Cristian Popescu spoke of The Popescu Art as comprised of "final variants" of poems penned earlier and sometimes previously put into print as deformed or suppressed texts. It was, he said in a brief note appended as an afterword, his "first book," in that his prior publications had to make literary compromises because of censorship. In The Popescu Art all of the choices were his own literary ones. Popescu openly wondered if the poems in the book were "drawer poetry" or if they made up a text of inward "spiritual resistance." It
is clear that by this latter term, he refers not just to the stubborn independence of the human spirit under straitened circumstances, but also to a religious element that can be seen, for instance, in his rather cajoling, buddy-buddy tone addressing God in his "psalms."

Cristi – as he called himself in his poems, as his friends still speak of him – suffered from schizophrenia. He died a few months shy of thirty-six on February 21, 1995 from a heart attack induced by a mixture of vodka and medications for schizophrenia and depression medications. *Memory Glyphs*, a book of three Romanian prose poets in my English versions, including Popescu, is forthcoming from Twisted Spoon Press, Prague.

– Adam J. Sorkin
That's it, precisely, we usually neglect to look at the icons, or those other pictures, our family photos, the dead! Don't put me on, Lord, You won't get me to believe You don't know about the kind of setting-up exercises they put us through!... Ooh la la!... Up till now I’ve hardly understood myself... Sure as hell, they breathe once a day. Early in the morning. They draw every bit of darkness into their breasts, and right there, deep inside...they thoroughly clean it, and then all of a sudden they let it out. And look at that: light, light, light again! The dawn, that is, the sunrise. And we, You know, we follow their orders like soldiers: Up! Down! Ten-hut! Crawl! Up! Down! Ten-hut! Crawl! We pant and drag our old bones after them as best we can... Woe is us!

And every so often, we sit up properly in our bunks, our backs ramrod straight against the wall. Gradually, after several years, the paint wears away and a stain appears. Nearly black. From the dirt. And there we are: ready-made artists, no less! We frame it and label it underneath: POPESCU: SELF-PORTRAIT. Here's fine art for You, Lord, no joke... Our own, near and dear to us! Lord have mercy on our mothers who made us: like tractor drivers, we're tanned, but only on our chests from three days and three nights of sitting in the candlelight! Instead of our sitting in the window like everyone else, in an icon, in the sun... Well, that's how it is, Lord!... What more can a soul do? You're the one, You tell me...
Antiportret
un psalm al lui Popescu


Mie să-mi dai exact chipul care lipsese de toate cartoanele alea pitorești, atractive, de-și bagă capul prin ele oamenii la bilițe. Să fie ei, nu eu. Și nici măcar atit. Nici mai, nici chiar, nici prea, nici foarte. Și nici măcar Popescu. Nu. Nici măcar atit. Să nu mai scriu... Să mi publice, așa, postum, doar buletinul—in cinzecinci de mii de exemplare, ediție de lux. Cu toate pozele de buletin din București, cu toate capetele lor amestecate între ele. Așa, ca și cum ar fi un lemn de icoană gata pregătit să se picteze icoane pe el.


Nici mai, nici chiar, nici prea, nici foarte. Și nici măcar Popescu. Nu, Doamne. Nici măcar atit.
Circul I
un psalm al lui Popescu

Acuma, Doamne, ce să-i mai facem?... Spune și Dumneata... La noi, aicea, circu' e baza. Circu'! Și nimic altceva. Ne chinuim și noi că animalele-alea cu Arta. Doar știi și Matale că ele sînt chiar bătute din cauza frumosului... Acuma, dacă ar fi după mine, eu î-aș vindeca pe toți de fandacșii astea, de orice fum de-al lor... Nu trece anul și—să te ții—iar o dresura cu zece-doispe nebuni... Dar nu oricum... Nebuni d-âia fioroși, numai unu' ș-unu', după gratii, în lanțuri, cu spume. Numai așa se face o dată înspre ci careva cu Arta și imediat sint cuminiți, politicoși și scriu versuri. Ge-ni-a-le, Doamne, gen-i-a-le! Pâi, daca se-mbolnăvește omu' de la frumosu' ăsta, poate s-o și vindeca cu el... Că dacă animalele aduc a om din cauza Artei, poate o să semene și Popescu cu omu' dacă scrie și el un vers-două, acolo, Dacă vrea și Matale...

Că noi numă' asta știm: circu'. Tigrîi! Leoaicile! Ursu'! Foca! Vorbește omenește! Dresură cu fandacșii astea, de orice fum de lor... Nu trece anul și-i să-i mai fac? Spune și Dumneata, Doamne, că le știi, așa, mai bine pe toate...

The Circus I
A Psalm by Popescu

Now, Lord, whaddya want us to do?... Hey, just say the word... For us down here the circus is the thing. No kidding, the circus! Ain't nothing else like it. We torment ourselves with Art just like those animals. You know, they're actually whipped and beaten in the cause of the beautiful... Now if it was up to me I'd cure everybody of their high-blown hang-ups—such folderol... Anyway, not a year passes without a new taming act, featuring maybe ten, twelve madmen... Not your ordinary madmen, but really ferocious, gotta be kept behind bars, in chains, they're frothing at the mouth. Take a guy threatening them with Art, whaddya know! They immediately behave, they turn polite, they begin writing poetry. Works of gen-i-us, Lord, gen-i-us! Well, if a guy can go wacko from all this beauty, no doubt he can get cured by it, too... Yeah, and if the animals start behaving like regular people on 'count of the Arts, maybe Popescu will also stand up and deliver like a man if he writes down a line or two of verse, that's it, if it's OK with You...

'Cause this is all we know: the circus. Tigers! Lionesses! A bear! A seal! The wolf! Sheep!!...Sheep—there's the thing, Lord, sheep!!! I learn to shrill a tune on my pipe like any shepherd since long ago and before I know it, I've got a circus act unique in Europe! Three lamb-herders! It walks in the herd, talks words to be heard. Like in that old ballad, Miorita. Tears shed in a flood, tears red as blood! It baas, tra-la-las. White sheep, black sheep. Sheer heaven, Lord, that's what!!! You whistle—it lies down at your feet. Speak to it—it follows you. Why, Lord, honestly, I've been walking it nightly for the last ten, fifteen years along the banks of the Dimbovița, on a leash like a bulldog. But it does no damn good. Every day I toss my fur cap on the ground and, whaddya know! Bats fly out of it... Doves, Lord? Nope, no doves. Only baby bats! Yeah, and what are these to You? Ha! Little angels, that's what. Little angels for rat babies... And look at me...night after night I go out along the bank of the Dimbovița to walk my sheep, to walk my bulldog—and I've got ten thousand little angels per cap on my artist's big head.

The circus—there's the thing. Now, what can I do? You tell me, Lord, say the word, 'cause You know best...

Zău, Doamne, crede-mă! Că poetu' și el: ca maimuța. Numa' că la circu' la care e el angajat, dresor e inger-îngerășu'. Și spectatori sint numa' inger-îngerăși de la copii din cartier. Că trebuie să se mai distreză și îngerășu', să-i mai treacă și lui, așa, din cind în cind, vremea.

Și-o dată se suie, Doamne, poetu', tocmai sus, sub cupolă. Și toaca începe să bată. Rar. Iar el, agățat de trapez doar c-o mină, își face cu cealaltă o cruce bântindu-se cu punnu' piet de rîd în stil toți spectatorilor. Și toaca bate din ce în ce mai repede. Și, dintr-o dată, sare poetu' de-acolo, de la peste treizeci de metri înalțime, drepți intr-o cristelniță obişnuită, umplută numa' pe jumătate cu așa de botez. Aoleu, Doamne! Tripul salt mortal! Că râmin inger-îngerășii înlenmiți. Și iese poetu' teafăr, zimbind și salutând în linistit publicul. Iar dresoru' și pune aureola pe cap. Drepți recompensă. Ștampilă aia de calitate a luminii. Ce mai: chioșe! Urale! Bucurie mare, Doamne! Exta! Se ridică cu toți fericii, în zbor, și-se aliniază deasupra orașului ca avioanele de bombardament în poziție de luptă. Și-neepe imediat o ninsoare de zici că n-o să se mai vadă nici coșurile caselor de-atîta năme! Păi, da, Doamne! Zi și Dumneata! Că fulgii așcia de zapadă ce sint? Gânați de inger—aina sint!

De ce să nu fim fericii? Las' că ai Matale griji. Și, dacă Ți-o plâceu, nu mai lua de la noi niciodată iarna. Și iartă-ne! Dacă asta e, asta e: acuma ce să-i mai facem? Circu'! În numele Matale. Amin.

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The Circus II
A Psalm by Popescu

Fine, Lord, now I'm a poet, yeah, a poet, but why shouldn't I be happy, too?! Look, if that's how it's gotta be, here's where I'm gonna go: the circus! Ha! What else will do?... The number one, the only model available to an artist anywhere in the world, no matter how high and mighty he thinks himself, is a circus monkey. Nothing comes near it, so don't give me any lip! The kind of monkey that when she grows up she's suddenly crushed by sorrow. Alas, she's outgrown her pretty outfits from when she was a girl at the beginning of her career. And just because of this, through her pain and through the laughter of the spectators, by the time she gets old, she almost turns into a human being! Fine, no? Whaddya think of that! That's what I call some taming act! Now fill your hat with earth, bury three, maybe four baby bats in it, and lol after three days and three nights of funeral hocus-pocus, out of the hat you pull doves. White as milk, soft as snow.

Honest to God, believe You me, Lord, the poet's like a monkey. Only, in the circus where he's employed, the tamer's a little angel. And the spectators are other angels assigned to the kids in the neighborhood. Sure, an angel's gotta have its kicks, too. Gotta while away the hours of eternity.

Then, here goes: without fanfare, Lord, the poet climbs the highest pole of the circus tent. A drumroll starts, like a toaca calling everyone to prayer. Slowly. Slowly. And catching the trapeze with one hand, dangling high over everything, the poet crosses himself with the other, beating his chest and making all the spectators laugh. The toaca's rhythm gets faster and faster. Suddenly he dives from over thirty meters above, aiming at an ordinary baptismal font, only half filled with holy water. Holy smokes, Lord! Oh God, oh God! A death-defying triple somersault! The angels are glued to their seats, petrified. And at long last, finally, the poet climbs out safe and sound, smiling, humbly saluting the public. The tamer proceeds to set a halo on his head. A just reward. The quality seal of light. There You have it: Shouts! Cheers! Immense joy, Lord! Ecstasy! In unison, the whole audience rises happily in flight, lining up over the city like bombers in attack formation. The next thing you know there's so much snow, it feels like it'll cover everything higher than the chimney-tops! Fine, Lord! Ha! Whaddya think of that?! Ya know what snowflakes are? Angel droppings—that's what!!

Why shouldn't we be happy? Any-which-way, You'll see to it. So, if it pleases You, never take winter from us. And forgive us, Father. For that's the way it's gotta be. What else can a guy do? The circus! In Your Lordship's name. Amen.
Takashi Hiraide
from For the Fighting Spirit of the Walnut

• Translated from the Japanese by Swakao Nakayasu •

In 1982, Takashi Hiraide published his second complete book of poetry, For the Fighting Spirit of the Walnut, to intense critical acclaim. In this book-length prose poem, consisting of one hundred and eleven well-orchestrated parts, Hiraide begins his lifelong investigation of prose poetry as a site of critical poetic engagement. The book seamlessly integrates his lyric sense of prose, with pseudo-scientific observation, fragmented narrative, poetics, autobiography, rhetorical experiments—all within a mathematical-musical structure and development. Although the parts vary in diction, creating a multi-textured work, the effect is similar to that which is produced from the instruments in an orchestral score. As with a musical composition, a few basic themes are laid out in the very beginning—themes which are later developed, reconfigured and expanded as the book progresses.

There is much in Hiraide’s poetry that is distinctly Japanese, of both serious and humorous persuasion. His playful subversions of idiomatic language lead to fantastical images and curious juxtapositions that take its root in a familiar language and world. Furthermore, one is led closer and closer into examining the text at character-level, for Hiraide’s usage of kanji, katakana, and hiragana characters is at once inventive and historical—some words using kanji are created out of neological combinations, while others are anachronistic, and still others are both. The text is also loaded with puns and double-entendres, made possible by grammatically fusing the phonetic hiragana with the meanings loaded in kanji. From the very beginning: the book is about a “walnut” (kurumi) and its “fighting spirit” (sen’i). But the phonetic word kurumi means not only “walnut” but “wrapping,” and sen’i can mean “fighting spirit” as well as “fiber”—and these elements go on to develop as sub-themes through the course of the book.

— Sawako Nakayasu

46.
色づく果樹園の果樹にまぎれ、憧れはいかにもわが構想の甘捔さにふさわしく、虫どもに喰いちぎられた葉となって目前に織られ、反対に彼の萎えきった敵意がこちらの身うちに、確実としかも無防備に閉じられていくようだった。

46.
Getting lost amidst the trees in the ripening orchard, longing—commensurate with the shoddiness of my scheming—bloomed in front of our eyes as the leaves that were chewed off by the bugs. On the other hand, his withered hostility seemed to be closing in upon my entire body, firmly yet unguardedly.
47.

Admitting to a beautiful shadow outside of itself, the creature is wounded, around the chest. The moss-grown hand still twitches in space, outstretched in an attempt to touch, fearful of losing. Nevertheless, it needs to announce, though lacking the voice with which to announce. That its breath has become a small storm. Staking the downfall of this creature upon that which is held dear.

50.

You who crawl past on the breath of an insect, along the unowned floor as it is suspended – I am your breath. Here and there, as the snow crumbles off the tree branches one after another, and when a ray of light pours vertically, it is my moment. Let’s set out in pursuit of that pristine crime of the bicycle grinding over the ice and leaving this place.
A bad habit of calling upon comets from the darkness of a taxicab. Yes, turn left at that dead light up ahead, crank the wheel all the way to the right, skimming the window of the clock store at the end of the street. Soon, dragging only the tail – downwards. To the radiant subway.
I come from that primary fiction created by words holding each others’ hands. I am the one who trims stories down into the smallest possible pieces, the one who walks along clipping off the fingers of entangled words with a single line of revenge. This walk, unbeknownst to people, has neither outlook, nor return, nor any kind of compassion.

Your arm has become a twisted rail, rusted and stretching out. On the slope of your side, a single seed of grass has been run over and squashed. Your heel is wounded, and overflowing with white smoke. I can’t save you. From the backs of your knees, a white smoke billows terribly upward.
61.

On the blackboard in my elementary school, a patched-up wing, pinned with nails. A half-cooked sunset printed out from the rotary press. Pushing apart the shiny yielding limbs of my classmates, heeding only the silent teachings of minerals, kicking through the window of the specimen room in the riverbed – I have graduated, O fragile night of the moon – all alone, holding a single hard eraser.

63.

When I read the yellowing civil notice regarding the traces of the strange small animal who splits walnuts cleanly in two, it was the same clear afternoon that I had received a very brief letter from the woman with long black hair who rode an old train passing through groves of walnut trees in full blossom to go back to her homeland to visit a dying person, but with its arrival, that yellow-green postcard split the dusk of my day's cabin right into two.
and disciplinary boundaries continue to exert their force. Sabato’s exploration of what he views as a world in crisis has shifted form over time, and includes his three great novels, his many articles on literary criticism, and his journalism, most famously his report Nunca Mas on Argentina’s desaparecidos. Throughout this diverse body of work, his concern for individual liberty and his commitment to human dignity have been constant themes. The courageous early essays of this first book show all the basic honesty, craft, and human concern of his later work, and shed valuable light on the themes and preoccupations that would continue to inform his writing as he grappled with some of the great problems of the 20th century.

— Carl Toews

Disclaimer (Advertencia)

The reflections that appear here in alphabetical order did not emerge from some vague contemplation of the world. They concern specific entities I have encountered on the road to myself. (One sets out for distant lands, or tries to understand man, or investigates nature, or searches for God; only later does one realize that all along one has been chasing the phantom of Oneself.) Off my particular route, there are doubtless other entities, other theories and hypotheses: the Universe that is the subject of this text is my particular Universe and thus incomplete, contradictory, and perfectible. Anyone respectable, or German, will object to the flimsiness of my Weltanschauung, but I forbid these gatekeepers of philosophical urbainity to read this book (nor do I see why they would want to.)

This book documents a passage, and is thus tinged with the impurity and contradiction that characterize movement. I can imagine how it will annoy fanatics of the system, those who pretend to be proprietors of Truth, in the face of a thousand other systems, as if by some sort of personal arrangement with the Spectacle’s Director. I, for my part, admit I lack such powerful connections.

Science was my traveling companion for a while, but now it has fallen behind. Whenever I look back, nostalgically, I can still make out some of the tall towers I saw in my youth, drawing me with a beauty totally removed from the carnal vices. Soon they too will disappear from my horizon and only a memory will remain. Many people will see this as a betrayal of friendship, while in fact it is fidelity to my human condition.

I assert, in any case, the merit of abandoning this clear city of towers, ruled by order and security, in search of a continent full of dangers, where conjecture reigns. Montaigne takes an ironic view of men because they are willing to die for conjectures. I don’t see what justifies irony: this willingness is precisely what gives these poor beings their greatness.
Borges (Borges)

The successive works of an author are like cities built on the ruins of their predecessors: though new, they prolong a certain immortality, formed by ancient legends, by men of the same race, by the same sunsets, by similar passions, by eyes and faces that return again and again.

When you excavate the work of Jorge Luis Borges, a mishmash of different fossils comes to the surface: manuscripts of old heresiarchs, magic playing cards, Quevedo and Stevenson, tango lyrics, mathematical proofs, Lewis Carroll, Eleatic aporias, Franz Kafka, Cretan labyrinths, urban slums, Stuart Mill, de Quinacy, and handsome men wearing wide brimmed hats with cocked brims. This diversity is misleading: the metaphysical concerns are always the same, just dressed up in different ways. A card game might be immortality, a library might be the eternal return, a buddy of Brother Bentos justifies Hume. Borges likes to confuse the reader: you imagine you are reading crime fiction and suddenly you find yourself with God or the false Basflides.

The efficient causes of the Borgesian canon are the same from the outset. In the stories that make up Fictions, the material seems to have achieved its perfect form, with the potential transformed to the actual. The influence that Borges continues to have over Borges seems insurmountable. Will he be destined to plagiarize himself from now on?

In the prologue to The Invention of Morel, Borges complains that in so-called psychological novels, freedom becomes something absolutely arbitrary—assassins kill for piety, lovers leave one another for love—and he argues that true rigor exists only in so-called adventure novels. I believe this is true, but it can't be taken as a criticism: it is at most a definition. Only in certain adventure novels—the best examples are in the crime genre, inaugurated by Poe—does this rigor exist in a form that can be accessed via a system of simple conventions, as in geometry or dynamics; but this rigor requires that truly human characters be suppressed. If human reality has a Plot or a Law, it would have to be infinitely complex to explain the world.

Necessity and rigor are attributes of logic and mathematics. But how can these attributes possibly be applied to psychology if they are not even suited to understanding physical reality? As Russell says, physics is mathematical not because we know too much about the external world, but rather because we know too little.

If you compare some of the labyrinths in Fictions to those in Kafka, you observe this difference: Borges' labyrinths are geometrical, chess-like. They produce an intellectual anguish comparable to the puzzles of Zeno, born from an absolutely lucid grasp of the elements at play. Kafka's labyrinths, in contrast, are endless corridors, obscure and inscrutable, and the anguish is nightmarish, born of an absolute ignorance of the elements at play. In the first, there are non-human elements, while in the second the elements are exclusively human. The detective Erik Lönrot is not a creature of flesh and blood; he is a puppet who obeys a Mathematical Law blindly (or lucidly, which amounts to the same thing.) He can't resist, just as the hypotenuse can't resist being used to prove the Pythagorean Theorem, and it is precisely because he can't resist that he is a beautiful character. In Kafka there is also an inexorable Law, but one that is infinitely unknown. His characters are anguish because they suspect the existence of something. They resist like you resist nightmares, they struggle with Destiny, and it is precisely because their resistance is futile that they are beautiful characters.

One could also say that Borges does algebra, not arithmetic (just like valeriy's Teste or Leonardo). The Memorious Monk from Fray Bentos could have been from Calcutta or Denmark. The necessity of giving people and places precise names—inexplicable, by literary convention—leads to error. One sees that Borges feels this limitation as a mistake. Not being able to call his characters alpha, one, or kappa, he strips them of as much local color as possible: he prefers remote Hungarians and, recently, abundant Scandinavians.

The Vienna school assures us that metaphysics is a branch of fantasy. The metaphysician find this claim irritating, but it delights Borges, whose books teem with metaphysical games. Strictly speaking, I believe Borges sees everything as a kind of metaphysics: he has worked out the ontology of the trick and the theology of rural crime; the hypostases of his Reality are usually a Library, a Labyrinth, a Lottery, a Dream, a Crime Novel; history and geography are mere spatial-temporal aberrations of some eternity ruled by a Grand Librarian.

In Three Versions of Judas, Borges tells us—and we believe him—that Nils Runeberg felt he had unlocked a central theological mystery with his interpretation of Judas. It was cause for pride, joy, and terror: it justified and totally wrecked his life. We can add: perhaps he would have gone to the stake for it.

For Borges, on the other hand, these theses are "useless light exercises in negligence or blasphemy." With the same happiness—or with the
same sadness, suggesting a complete absence of faith—Borges will articulate both Runeberg's thesis and its opposite. He will defend or refute either one, and for neither, naturally, will he accept death at the stake. Borges admires the man capable of all opinions, which is equivalent to a certain species of monism. Once he planned a story in which a theologian struggles his whole life against a heretic, refutes him and finally burns him at the stake: after he is dead, the theologian realizes that he and the heretic form one and the same person, just as in some way Judas reflects Jesus. But Borges would hardly let himself get burned for this monism, for he is also a dualist and a pluralist.

Borges' theology is the game of an unbeliever, and it is the leitmotif of a beautiful literature. How to explain, then, his admiration for Leon Bloy? Might he not, nostalgically, admire his faith and his strength? I have always been struck that he admires dandies and handsome men with knives in their belts.

I therefore pose the following questions:

Does Borges lack faith?
Might not disbelievers be condemned to some sort of Hell?
Might not Borges be this Hell?

You, Borges, heretic of the urban outskirts, latinist of Buenos Aires slang, chief among infinite hypostatic librarians, rare mixture of Asia Minor and Palermo, of Chesterton and Carriego, of Kafka and Martin Fierro; you, Borges, I see you more than anything as a Great Poet.

And therefore, thus: arbitrary, brilliant, tender, a tinkerer, weak, great, triumphant, daring, fearful, failed, magnificent, unhappy, limited, infantile and immortal.

Science (Ciencia)

For centuries the average man had more faith in witchcraft than in science: to earn a living, Kepler had to work as an astrologer. These days, however, astrologers place ads in the daily papers claiming that their methods are strictly scientific. The layman believes fervidly in science, adores Einstein and Madame Curie. But by some melancholy destiny, in this moment of popular splendor, many professionals are beginning to doubt its power. The English mathematician and philosopher A. N. Whitehead tells us that science should learn from poetry: when a poet sings the beauties of heaven and earth, he is not bearing witness to the fancies of his own naive view of the world, but rather to the concrete facts of experience “denatured by scientific analysis.”

The dissonance between the professional and the amateur is probably due to the fact that the development of science simultaneously implies a growing power and a growing abstraction. The average man sees only the first, always willing to receive the conquerors favorably. The theoretician sees both aspects, but on some basic level the second begins to bother him, to the point that it makes him doubt the aptitude of science for understanding reality. This double consequence of the scientific process seems contradictory, but in fact it is the double face of a single truth: science is not powerful in spite of its abstraction, but rather precisely because of it.

It is difficult to separate ordinary from scientific knowledge, but perhaps it could be said that the first refers to the particular and concrete, while the second refers the general and abstract. “The hot stove” is a concrete proposition, almost domestic and touching, reminiscent of Dickens' stories. But the scientist extracts something that has nothing to do with these associations: furnished with certain instruments, he will observe that the stove is hotter than the environment and that heat passes from one to the other. In the same way he will examine other, similar claims, such as “the iron burns”, or “latecomers drink their tea cold.” The result of these measurements and reflections will be a single dry conclusion: “Heat passes from warm bodies to cold bodies.”

This formulation is still quite accessible to the common mind. But for the man of science, the desideratum is to pronounce judgments so general as to be unintelligible, a task he accomplishes with the help of mathematics. The previous statement continues to rankle and he only rests content when he can finally say: “The entropy of an isolated system grows constantly.”

In the same way, questions about things like the apple falling on Newton's head, the existence of the Iguazu Falls, the formula for acceleration and Cyrano's accident all come together in the
The gentle noise is recorded by microphones and decomposed into a set of waves, each characterized by a number. And as far as erasing thoughts of gold and power, this doesn’t lend itself to mathematics, and thus remains outside the jurisdiction of the scientist. The world of science ignores values. A geometer who rejects the Pythagorean Theorem because he considers it perverse has a better chance of being interred in a mental hospital than being heard at a congress of mathematicians. Nor does a claim like “I have faith in the principle of conservation of energy” make sense: many men of science make claims of this sort, but only because they understand science not as scientists but simply as men. Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake for having sung phrases like “I believe exaltedly in the infinity of the universe”. That he should have been tortured for this phrase as a poet or a metaphysician is understandable; but it would be terrible if he had believed he was suffering as a man of science, for then he would have died for a fallacy.

Strictly speaking, value judgments have no place in science, even if in fact they influence its construction: the scientist is a man like any other, and it is natural that he should work with the usual collection of prejudices, with the aesthetic, mystic, and moral tendencies that form human nature. But these vices belong to the *modus operandi* of scientific understanding, and one should not make the mistake of attributing them to its essence.

The world has thus been transforming itself from a collection of rocks, birds, trees, Petrarchian sonnets, fox hunts and electoral struggles, into a conglomeration of sinusoids, logarithms, Greek letters, triangles and probability waves. And what is worse: *into nothing more than these things*. No scientist will give serious consideration to anything outside the simple structure of mathematics.

The theory of relativity has completed the transformation of the physical universe into a mathematical phantom. Prior to relativity, bodies were at least persistent pieces of material that moved in space. The unification of time and space has converted the universe into a set of “events”, and some people now view matter as the mere expression of cosmic curvature. Other relativists imagine that the universe has neither past nor present nor future; as in the realm of Platonic ideas, time is just one more of man’s illusions, and the things he believes he loves and the lives he believes he witnesses become at best imprecise phantoms of an Eternal and Immutable Universe.

Strict science—which is to say, mathematizable science—is alien to everything that is most valuable to a human being: his emotions, his sentiments of art or of justice, his fear of death. If the mathematizable world were the only true world, not only would dream palaces be illusory, with their ladies, jugglers, and grooms; so would moonlit landscapes or the beauty of a Bach fugue. Or at the very least, what would be illusory is that core element that touches us.

In contrast, if someone has full knowledge that the “entropy of an isolated system increases constantly”, not only will he seek a stove to heat himself—a very meager result for twenty years of study—but he will also be able to solve a whole host of other problems, from the working of a motor to the evolution of the universe.

It follows that as science becomes more abstract and thus further removed from the problems, concerns, and words of everyday life, its utility increases proportionally. The more applications a theory has, the more universal it is, and thus the more abstract it is, since the concrete loses itself in the particular.

Science acquires its power through a kind of pact with the devil: at the cost of a progressive evanescence of the daily world. It succeeds in becoming a monarch, but by the time it does, its kingdom is a kingdom of ghosts.

The unification of all those propositions is achieved through the elimination of the concrete attributes that allow one to distinguish between a cup of tea, a stove, and chronically tardy people. Very little survives this process of cleansing. The infinitely varied particulars of our surrounding universe begin to disappear. First we are left with the rather abstract concept of *body*, and if we advance further we are hard pressed to keep even *material*, which is even vaguer: a hanger or a manikin on which to hang any suit.

The universe that surrounds us is the universe of colors, sounds, and smells; but like some magnificent ghost, all this vanishes when faced with the apparatus of the scientist.

The Poet tells us:

- *The air sweeps the garden*
- *and offers the senses a thousand scents;*
- *the trees rustle*
- *with a gentle noise*
- *that erased thoughts of gold and power*.

But scientific analysis is depressing. Like men who enter a penitentiary, sensations become numbers. The green of those trees rustling in the wind occupies a spectral band of about 5000 Angstroms. The gentle noise is recorded by microphones and decomposed into a set of waves, each characterized by a number. And as far as erasing thoughts of gold and power, this doesn’t lend itself to mathematics, and thus remains outside the jurisdiction of the scientist. The world of science ignores values. A geometer who rejects the Pythagorean Theorem because he considers it perverse has a better chance of being interred in a mental hospital than being heard at a congress of mathematicians. Nor does a claim like “I have faith in the principle of conservation of energy” make sense: many men of science make claims of this sort, but only because they understand science not as scientists but simply as men. Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake for having sung phrases like “I believe exaltedly in the infinity of the universe”. That he should have been tortured for this phrase as a poet or a metaphysician is understandable; but it would be terrible if he had believed he was suffering as a man of science, for then he would have died for a fallacy.

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Velimir Khlebnikov

"KA"

• Translated from the Russian by Sandra Newman •

Velimir Khlebnikov is one of those writers acknowledged not to translate well. Linguists are always, of course, eager to give writers this appellation: it creates a freemasonry of those who read the source language, who alone hold the keys to Dostoevsky's, Celan's, Jelinek's, kingdom. It also exalts the work of the translator who has managed to convey some exiguous portion of the magic of the original. While translatability is among those unquantifiables whose reality should, I think, be acknowledged (learning Russian to read Tolstoy in the original is a waste of time; reading Pasternak's poetry in English is often an equal and opposite waste of time, and experience is adamant on this point against the best arguments of theory) it is often an unexpected writer whose works are most successful in translation. There is no particular reason to predict, to give one example, that the plays of Brecht should translate readily into works which enjoy as great a popularity abroad as the originals did in Germany, while his poetry has been the source of some of the most leaden and unloved English verse available in stores. In any case, translation of work like Khlebnikov's which immediately demands a creative vision on the part of its translator—and which already reads like a translation from a foreign, possibly alien, language—has been the source of some of the greatest literature in any language.

Khlebnikov does not translate easily: his meaning often depends on puns, neologisms, rhymes, alliterations. Naturally, in translation, the puns are distorted, the neologisms altered in meaning, the rhymes have to be excised or else explained in laborious footnotes...the linguistic mayhem that makes the translator's life two parts guilt to one part migraine. Russian literary taste is also more tolerant of certain quirks of Khlebnikov's writing: the unabashed sentimentality; the anthropomorphism; the structure which is an anti-structure. Finally, Russian speakers quite freely form neologisms in everyday speech, making Khlebnikov's coinages more digestible to a Russian audience.

But even for the Russian reader, Khlebnikov is, to put it mildly, difficult. His school of Futurists explicitly demanded the creation of a new language. Their most famous concept is that of zaum or trans-sense (the original connotes simultaneously "beyond sense" and "behind sense") language, which was intended to have a different relationship to meaning than the language in current use. Khlebnikov was also a believer in a poetry of conundrum which required deciphering to yield its full range of meaning. As a student of mathematics, ancient history, botany, and ornithology, et cetera, he also casually, and without explanation, refers to specialist scientific or philological knowledge.

He refers with equal carelessness to his personal theories, notably his life-long effort to establish "Tables of Fate" which would explain world history via numerology, and his conviction that phonemes have fixed and invariable meanings. So Khlebnikov is an uncomfortable combination of genius with crackpot; prankster with zealot. A hint of his unselfconscious eccentricity is in his name: born Victor Vladimirovich, this fearful, tearful, physically frail man named himself Velimir—roughly translated: "Rule-the-World".

He wrote his greatest works in conditions of extreme poverty, which in Russia at the time meant starvation and cold. This produced its usual effect of chronic and severe illness. The period of his greatest productivity also coincides with World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the Russian Civil War. He was in St. Petersburg during the Bolshevik uprising. Drafted into both the Red and the White Armies, he escaped seeing battle only through desperate efforts by his friends. He was also imprisoned once (by the Whites) as a suspected spy, and finally died a victim of the famine of 1921. (The cause of death is variously given as starvation and malaria, but Khlebnikov had been suffering from malnutrition for some time before his death, and hunger was certainly the ultimate if not the immediate cause.)

In the midst of these events, and even in periods when he was literally dying of hunger, the writer was immersed in working out his mathematical theories of history and devising an etymology of sounds. A typical project was the creation of a parallel Government of Time which would be consulted by the Governments of Space (i.e. real governments). He recruited a motley group of writers, theologians, and random foreigners to his proto-state, the Society of 317 (based on his belief that there were 317 natural Presidents of the Earth at any given time), and planned the construction of a "station" on one
of the islands of the Caspian Sea. For easily comprehensible reasons, construction of this station was never begun. He remained awkward, impractical, and utterly unworldly to the last. A typical story has him losing the money his collaborator Matyushin sent him to pay for travel to the city: “I went swimming and dropped my wallet in the pond,” Khlebnikov wrote to his friend. Many accounts have him weeping uncontrollably: because he spent all night writing poetry without a lamp (no money for oil) — and in the morning, couldn’t decipher a word of what he’d written; because, after a performance, his fellow Futurists demanded back the ring (borrowed from a friend) that in the show designated Khlebnikov “President of Planet Earth” — apparently the poet had taken the ceremony seriously, and felt he was now being stripped of his position. Shortly before his death, the penniless author took a trip to Iran, where he wandered about in rags, happily barefoot, and earned the nickname “Priest of Flowers.”

His otherworldly personality is evident in every word of his writing. His darting between bizarre humor, prophecy, and tenderness ends by eliding the distinctions between the three, creating a texture of tender prophecy, prophetic joking, ludicrous loves. He is at his most natural when speaking in the persona of a Martian or a citizen of the year 2222. In reading his most extreme trans-sense writings, which are nothing but sound: “Ebza chitoren! Epsei kai-kai! Mguum map!” — the reader is awkwardly aware that Khlebnikov believes these are the most significant of all possible words. The reader who perseveres finally comes to a posture of protective tenderness for this poet driven into a fabulous insanity not by his genius — though all of his contemporaries agree he possessed such genius — but by his stubborn infatuation with the world. We imagine him stooping to examine a wildflower in a vacant lot and falling into a reverie, trying to determine the value of its petals as repositories of time — while artillery fire is heard from the next street, and the stink of smoke and uninterred corpses drifts over the freshness of the grass.

A few notes on allusions might be helpful in reading the work that follows. The eponymous “Ka” of the narrative is the individual’s vital spirit in Egyptian mythology. At death one was said to have joined one’s Ka. The character Amenophis (better known as Akhenaton) was an Egyptian pharoah who abolished polytheism and instituted monotheistic worship of Aton, the sun. Ai and Shurura were high priests of Aton; Nefertiti was Amenophis’ wife. So when the narrator and Ka visit, and find these four together, the pharoah Amenophis is talking to a circle of intimates. As the subsequent mention of Akbar and Ashoka (a great Mughal and a great Maurya emperor of India, respectively) suggests, the piece, as Khlebnikov says of Ka, “intersects times”. Here pharoahs inhabit a common fictional space with the Sikorsky airplane.

In all the English translations I have read, a certain literariness has been introduced which is alien to the spirit of the original. To my mind, Khlebnikov is a sort of Magic Nerd, or Weltnerd, and his peculiar potency is attenuated by any trace of self-consciousness. The difficulty of the text also produces a certain plodding cadence in many translations; there is a distracting taste of worthiness; like a “healthy options” version of a snack food. In my translation, I attempted to retain the speed and careless wit of the original, and to avoid “fixing” phrases which are opaque, silly, or clumsy. The clumsiness, silliness, and opacity are intrinsic aesthetic features of the work of Rule-the-World Khlebnikov, Priest of Flowers.

— Sandra Newman
Я живу в городе, где пишут «бесплатные купальни», где городская управа зовет Граждан помогать войнам, а не воинам, где китрые дикарисмотрят осторожными глазам, где лазают по деревьям с помощью кролиководства. Там черноглазая, с серебряным огнем, дикаря проходит в умершей цапле, за которой уже охотится на том свете хитрый мертвый дикарь с копьем в мертвой руке; на улицах пусктся стада тонкорунных людей, и нигде так не мечается о Хриносковском заводе кровного человечества, как здесь. «Иначе человечество погибнет», — думается каждому. И я писал книгу о человечестве, а кругом бродили стада тонкорунных людей. Я имело свой небольшой зверинец друзей, мне дороги своей породистостью; я живу на третьей или четвертой земле, начиная от солнца, и к ней хотел бы относиться как к перватам, которые всегда можно брить стадам кроликов. Что еще сказать о мне? Я

KA

1

У меня был Ka; в дни Белого Кита Ева, с воздушного шара Андрэ сойдя в снег и сльша голос «иди!», оставив в эскимосских снегах следы босых ног, — надеяться! — улиялась бы, услышав это слово. Но народ Маср знал его тысячи лет назад. И он не был неправ, когда делил душу на Ka, Hu и Ba. Hu и Ba — слава, добрая или худая, о человеке. А Ka — это тень души, ее двойник, посланник при тех людях, что снятся храпящему господину. Ему нет застав во времена; Ka ходит из снов в сны, пересекает время и достигает бронзы (бронзы времен).

В столетиях располагается удобно, как в качалке. Не так ли и сознание соединяет времена Вместе, как кресло и стулья гостиной.

Ka был боец, миловиден, смугол, нежен; большие чахоточные глаза византийского бога и брови, точно сделанные из оцинк узких точек, были у него на лице египтянина. Решитель, мы или дикари рядом с Маср, или же он приставил к душе вещи нужные и удобные, но посторонние.

Теперь кто я.

I had Ka; in the days of White China, Eve, descending onto the snow from Andree’s air balloon and hearing a voice, “Go forth!”, then leaving barefoot prints in the Eskimo snows – have faith! – she would have been surprised to hear that word. But the people of Masr’ knew him thousands of years ago. And they were not wrong to divide the soul into Ka, Hu, and Ba. Hu and Ba = repute, good or ill, about a person. But Ka is the shadow of the soul, its twin, ambassador to those people who appear in dreams to the snoring lord. For Ka there are no obstacles in time; Ka walks from dreams to dreams, intersecting time he reaches bronzes (the bronze of ages).

In centuries he sits comfortably, as in a rocking chair. And doesn’t consciousness unite times just as it does the armchair and the sofa in a living room?

Ka was obstreperous, handsome, swarthy, tender; on his Egyptian face he had the big tubercular eyes of a Byzantine god, and brows that seemed made only of fine points. Decidedly, either we are savages next to Masr, or Masr supplemented the soul with things necessary, convenient, but extraneous.

Now – who I am.

I live in the city where people advertise “Free Bathes”, where cunning savages look with wary eyes, where people climb the trees with the aid of rabbit husbandry. There a savagess with silver-flamed black eyes walks by dressed in a dead heron, which in the other world a cunning dead savage already hunts with a spear in his dead hand; through the streets are herded flocks of fine-fleeced people, and nowhere is the Krapp stud farm of pureblood people so dreamed of, as here. “Otherwise people must die out,” is the thought of all. And I was writing a book on person husbandry, and flocks of fine-fleeced people wandered round. I have my modest zoo of friends, precious to me for their bloodlines; I live on the third or fourth earth, counting from the sun, which earth I would like to treat like gloves, which can always be tossed to the flocks of rabbits. What more is there to say.
Ка был мой друг; я полюбил его за птичий нрав, беззаботность, остроумие. Он был удобен, как непромокаемый плащ. Он учил, что есть слова, которыми можно видеть, слова-глаза и слова-руки, которыми можно делать. Вот некоторые его дела.

Раз мы познакомились с народом, застегивающим себя на пуговицы.
Действительно, внутренности открывались через полость кожи, а здесь кожа застегивалась на роговидные шарики, напоминавшие пуговицы. Во время обеда через эту полость топилась мяслящая пекарь. Это было так. Стоя на большом железнном мосту, я бросил в реку двухкопеечную деньгу, сказан: «Нужно заботиться о науке будущего».

Кто тот ученый рекокоп, кто найдет жертвую реке?
И Ка представил меня ученому 2222 года.
— А! — через год после первого, но младенческого крика сверхгосударства АСЦУ. АСЦУ! — произнес ученый, взглянув на год медичек.— Тогда еще верили в пространство и мало думали о времени.

Он дал мне поручение составить описание человека. Я заполнил все вопросы и подал ведомостичку. «Число глаз — два, — читал он, — число рук — две; число ног — две; число пальцев — 20». Он положил худой светодиодный черен на теневой палец. Мы обсуждали выгоды и невыгоды этого числа.


— Это предельные числа, — ответил я. — Дело в том, что иногда встречаются люди с одной рукой или ногой. Число таких людей заметно увеличивается через 317 лет.

— Но этого довольно, — ответил он, — чтобы составить уравнение смерти. Язык, — заметил ученый 2222 года, — вечный источник знания. Как относятся друг к другу тяготение и время? Нет сомнения, что время так же относится к весу, как бремя к весу. Но можно ли бесноваться под тяжелой ношей? Нет. Бремя поглощает силы веса. И там, где оно, это нет. Другими словами, время поглощает силы веса, и не исчезает ли вес там, где время? По духу вашего языка, время и вес — два разных поглощения одной и
той же силы. Он задумался. — Да, в языке заложены многие истины. На этом наше знакомство прервалось.

3

В другой раз Ка дернул меня за рукав и сказал: «Пойдем к Аменофису».

Я заметил Аи, Шурура и Нефертити. У Шурура была черная борода кольцами.


Ка познакомил его с ученым 2222 года.

Аменофис имел слабое сложение, широкие скулы и большие глаза с изысканным и детским изгибом.

В другой раз я был у Александра и у Асоки. На обратном пути мы очень устали.

Мы избегали поездов и слышали шум Сикорского. Мы прятались от того и другого и научились спать на ходу. Ноги сами шли куда-то, независимо от ведомства сна. Голова спала. Я встретил одного художника и спросил, пойдет ли он на войну? Он ответил: «Я тоже веду войну, только не за пространство, а за время. Я сижу в окопе и отмечаю у прошлого ключок времени. Мой долг одинаково тяжел, что и у войск за пространство». Он всегда писал людей с одним глазом. Я смотрел в его внешние глаза и бледные скулы. Ка шел рядом. Лицо дождь. Художник писал пир трупов, пир мести.

Мертвецы величаво и важно ели овощи, озеренные подобным лучу месяца бешенством скорби.

В другой раз, по совету Ка, я выбрал наголо свою голову, измазал себя красным соком клюквы, и рот взял пузырек с красными чернилами, чтобы при случае брызгать ими; кроме того, я обвязался поясом, залез в могучие мусульманские рубашки и надел чалму, приняв вид только что умершего. Между тем Ка делал шум битвы:

"Yes, language contains many truths." With this our acquaintance ended.

3

Another time Ka pulled my sleeve and said, "Let's go to Amenofis." There I recognized Ai, Shurura, and Nefertiti. Shurura had a black beard done in ringlets.

"Hello," Amenofis nodded in greeting and continued:

"Ate! Your son, Nefer-Khepru-Ra, has said: 'there are flying gods, and swimming gods, and crawling gods. Sukh, Mnevis, Bennu.'

Tell me, in the Nile Valley, is there a mouse that doesn't demand prayers to itself? They squabble amongst themselves and a poor man has no one to hear his prayers. And he's happy if someone only says 'It's me,' and demands the fatty mutton. Nine bows! After all, wasn't it you who trembled at the war cry of my ancestors?

"And if I'm here, while Shesh grasps my shade in her deft hand, is her hand not preserving me here from myself there? Nine bows! Is it not my Ka among the clouds that illumines the blue Nile now with pillars of fire? I command that they pray to me here! And you, foreigners, carry my words back to your time."

Ka introduced him to the scientist of the year 2222.

Amenofis had a weak physique, wide cheekbones and big eyes with a graceful and childish slant.

Another time we went to see Akbar and Ashoka. On the way home we got very tired.

We steered clear of the train and heard the noise of a Sikorsky plane. We hid from both, and learned to sleep on our feet. Our feet walked somewhere on their own, independent from the ministry of sleep. The head slept. I met an artist and asked if he was off to war? He answered "I too wage war, only not for space, but for time. I sit in a trench and capture a patch of time from the past. My task is just as hard as that of the troops who fight for space." He always painted people with one eye. I looked at his cherry eyes and pale cheeks. Ka walked alongside. Rain poured down. The artist was painting a feast of corpuses, a feast of vengeance. The dead ate vegetables majestically and solemnly, lit by moon-like rays from the ravings of grief.

Another time, on the advice of Ka, I shaved my head, smeared myself with scarlet cranberry juice, put in my mouth a vial of red ink, to spit out when the time came; in addition, I tied a belt around me, put on a baggy Muslim shirt and turban, striking the attitude of one recently dead. Meanwhile Ka made sounds of battle: he threw a stone at a mirror, pounded a metal tray, wildly roared and screamed a-a-
в зеркало бросал камень, грохотал подносом, дико ржал и кричал на «а-а-а». И что же? Очень скоро к нам прилетели две прекрасных удивленных гур с чудными черными глазами и удивленными бровями; я был принят за умершего, взят на руки, унесен куда-то далеко.

Принимая правоверных, они касались чела концами уст и так же лечили раны. Вероятно, они знали вкус крови, но из вежливости не замечали. Смешно испачкавшись в чернилах своими очаровательными ротиками, 3 гур скоро стерли искусственную рану и достигли исцеления минного больного. Иногда гур плясали, и черные волосы гнались за ними, как играющие вороньи или как сиракузские суда за Аликвиадом, как птицы, одна за другой. Это была пляска радости. Казалось, целый венок головок мчался в одном ручье. Позднее радость их немного углегась, но они-пожежную смотрели на меня восхищенными глазами, перешептываясь и сверкая ночной глазами.

Пришел М<агомет> и смотрел веселым настороженными глазами. Он сказал, что теперь многое не настояще. — Ничего! Ничего, молодой человек, продолжайте в том же духе!

Утром я проснулся немного усталый; гур смотрели немного удивленно, точно заметили что-то странное. Губы их были чисто-накрашенною вымыты. Красные чернила тоже сошли с их рук. Казалось, они не решались что-то сказать. Но в это время я заметил надпись; на ней моими же красными чернилами было написано: «Вход посторонним строго возвращается». Далее следовала замысловатая подпись. Я исчез, но запомнил запачканными красными чернилами волосы и рука Гауры и еще многое, и в тот же вечер вместе с воинами Виджаи плыл на Сахали, в 543 году до <Р. Хр.> Гур мне чудились по-прежнему, но в одеждах из крья стрекоз или в шубах из незабудок, тяжелых и суровых, составленных почвой и растениями, — кудрявые голубые дани.

Конечно, многие из вас дружат с игральной колодой, некоторые даже бредят во сне всеми этими семерками, червяками, девами, тузами. Но случалось ли вам играть не с предметным лицом, каким-нибудь Иваном Ивановичем, а с собирательным — хотя бы мировой волей? А я играл, и игра эта мне знакома. Я считаю ее более увлекательной, знаки того, что она — свечи, мелок, зеленое сукно, полночь. Я должен сказать, что в выборе ходов вы ничему не ограничены. Если бы игра требовала и это было в ваших силах, вы бы могли, пожалуй, стереть мокрый губкой черное небо все его созвездия, как с училищной доски задачу. Но каждый игрок должен своим ходом свести на нет положение противника.

Несмотря на свою мировую природу, ваш противник ощущается вами как равный, игра происходит на началах взаимного уважения, и не в этом ли ее прелесть? Вам кажется, что это

And what then? Lickety-split three lovely startled houris flew to us, with wondrous black eyes and startled eyebrows; I was taken for dead, grasped by the arms, and swept off somewhere far away.

Receiving the faithful, they touched my brow with their lips and, just like that, the wounds healed. Probably they knew the taste of blood, but out of politeness pretended not to notice. Laughingly smudging their charming mouths with ink, the 3 soon wiped away the phoney wounds and healed the malingering. Sometimes the houris danced, and their black hair chased after them like sportive crows, or like the Syracusan courts after Alcibiades, like birds, one after another. It was a dance of joy.

It seemed a garland of heads raced down a single creekbed. Later their joy calmed down somewhat, but as before they looked at me with ecstasy, whispering amongst themselves and flashing their night eyes. Mohammed came and looked at me with jolly sarcastic eyes. He said a lot of things were artificial these days. “Never mind, young man, carry on in the same spirit!”

In the morning I woke up a little tired; the houris looked at me rather surprised, as if noticing something odd. Their lips were washed clean, spic-and-span. The red ink had also come off their hands. It seemed they couldn't make up their minds to say something. But then I noticed a sign; in my own red ink was written: “Entry to unauthorised persons strictly prohibited”. There followed an intricate signature. I vanished, but committed to memory the stained red hair and hands of the Houris and more besides, and that very evening together with the warriors of Vijay I sailed to Sakhali, in the year 543 BC. The houris appeared to me as before, but in clothes of dragonfly wings or fur coats of forget-me-nots, heavy and severe, knit together by soil and plant life — curly, sky blue, does.

Of course, many of you make friends with the card deck, some even rave in dreams with all these sevens, Queens of Hearts, aces. But have you ever chanced to play not with a subject, some Ivan Ivanovich, but with a plurality — even if it's only the will of the cosmos? Well, I have, and the game is well-known to me. I consider it far more entertaining than the game whose marks of distinction are — candles, chalk, green baize, midnight. I should note that you're in no way limited in your choice of moves. If the game demanded it, and you had the points, you might take a wet sponge and wipe the black sky's constellations off, perhaps, like an assignment from a blackboard. But every player should by his move put his adversary's position to naught.

Despite his cosmic nature, you feel your opponent as an equal, the game takes place on a ground of mutual respect, and doesn't that have its charm? It seems to you that you know this man well, and
знакомый, и вы более увлечены игрой, чем если бы с вами играл гробовой призрак. Ка был наперекор в этой забаве.

Ка печально сидел на берегу моря, спустив ноги. Осторожнее, осторожнее! Студенческие морские существо, разбитые волнами, толпились у берегов, пригнанные сюда ветром, скитаясь мертвым стадом, и, тускло блестя, скользили из рук купальщика, то темно-зеленых, то темно-красных в плотно одеваешь их тканях. Некоторые неприятно хохотали, застигнутые волной. Ка был худощав, строен и смугл. Котёл был на его, совсем нагом, теле. Почерневшие от моря волосы вились по плечам. Тусклые волны, поблескивая верхушками, просвечивали сквозь него. Чайка, пролетая сзади серой теми, видна была через его плечи, но теряла в живости окраски и, пролетев, снова возвращала себе яркое, черно-белое перо. Его перерезала купальщица в зеленом, усыпанном серебряными пятнами, купальном. Он вздохнул и снова вернул себе прежнее очертания. Она смеяла улыбнулась и посмотрела на него. Ка сгорбился. Между тем, долго плававший в воде, выделял из моря на берег, покрытый ее струями, точно мехом, и был зверь, выходящий из воды. Он бросился на землю и замер; Ка заметил, что два или три наблюдательных дождевика написали на песке число шесть три раза подряд и значительно переглянулись. Татарин-музыканты, понявший черных буйволов, бросившихся к воде, разрывая постромки, и ушедших в море на такую глубину, что только темные глаза и ноздри чернели над водой, а все их покрытое коркой переплетенной с волосами грызя тело скрылось под водой, вокруг улыбнулся и сказал христианнику-рыбаку: «Масих-аль-Деджал». Тот его понял, лениво достал трубку и, закурил, лениво ответил: «А кто его знает. Мы не ученые. Сказывают люди», — добавил он. Военный, в подзорную трубку следивший за редким пловцом, повесил ее на ремень и холодно посмотрел на него, повернулся и пошел пешком заметной тропинкой.

Между тем вечерело, и стадо морских змей плыло по морю. Берег опустел, и лишь Ка по-прежнему сидел, обив руками колени. «Все суетно, все поздно», — думал он. «Эй, теневой храбрец, — казалось, крикнул ветер, — осторожнее!» Но Ка был недвижим. И волна смыкает его. Подпивает белуга и проглатывает его. В новой судьбе он становится круглой галькой и живет среди ракушек, одного спасательного пояса и пароходной цепи. Белуга питала слабость к старым вещам. Здесь же был Кожа с арабской надписью

you're carried away by the game much more than if you were playing a graveyard phantom. Ka was my confidant in this pastime.

Ka sat on the bank of the sea forlornly, letting his feet hang down. Watch out, watch out! Jelly sea creatures, buffeted by the waves, were crowding the shore, driven there by the wind, straying in dead herds, and they, dully shimmering, slipped from the hands of bathing girls, now dark green, now dark red, in the fabrics that tightly coated them. Some burst into artless laughter, slapped by a wave. Ka was lean, harmoniously built, and swarthy. He had a bowler on his otherwise naked frame. His hair, black from the sea, fell in ringlets to his shoulders. Dull waves, sparkling at the crowns, shone through him. A gull, flying past behind the grey shadow, was visible through his shoulders, losing however its vivid coloring, till, once past, it regained its vibrant black-white plumage. Ka was sliced clean through by a bather in a green suit speckled with silver dots. He shuddered and resumed his former lineaments. She smiled boldly and looked at him. He stooped. Then, having swum for a long time, he came out of the sea onto the shore, covered in ocean streams, like fur, and was a beast, coming out of the water. He threw himself to the ground and froze; Ka noticed that two or three vigilant rainworms wrote the number 6 in the sand three times in a row and exchanged significant glances. A Muslim Tartar, who was watering his black buffaloes — who had run into the surf, tearing their traces apart, and fled into the sea to such a depth that only their dark eyes and nostrils showed black over the water, and their whole bodies, covered in dirty crust interwoven with hair was hidden beneath the water — suddenly smiled and said to a Christian fisherman: "Masikh-al-Dajil." The other grasped the point, unhurriedly took out a pipe, and, lighting up, lazily replied: "And who knows. We're no scholars. People talk," he added. A soldier, who had been observing the occasional diver with a spyglass, hung it on its cord around his neck and coldly looked at the fisherman, turned and went away up a barely discernible path.

Meanwhile night was falling, and a flock of sea snakes swim through the sea. The shore emptied, and only Ka sat as before, arms wrapped around his knees. "It's all pointless, it's too late," he thought. "Ah, shadowy hero," the wind seemed to shout, "Watch out!" But Ka was immovable. And a wave washes him away. A white whale swims up and swallowed him. In his new circumstances, he becomes a round pebble and lives among sea-shells, a life preserver, and a steamship chain. The whale had a weakness for old things. Here was a belt with
Фатми Меннеда, от тех времен, когда среди копий, кончаров, весел и перначей стоял сам орел смерти, а она отражалась в воде, качнув синими сердцами, хохотунь с раскрытыми раз навсегда нечалиными глазами, и, ударив веслами, плыл уструг все дальше и дальше, отраженный в ночных водах, и точно усики ночной мотылька касались палубы ноги белого облака. Но вот могущественная белуга умирает в сетях рыбаков.

5

Ка вернул свободу.

Седые рыбаки с гольми икрами пели эды, печальную песнь морских берегов, и тянули невод мелкий, частый, мокрый, полный капель, в котором порой висели черные раки, схватив клешней за нитку, напрягая жилистые руки; иногда они выпрямлялись и смотрели на вечное море. Поодаль мирно щели, как большие дворовые собаки, орланы. Морская хохотунья села на камень, в котором был Ка, и отпечатала мокрые ноги. Сама рыба, мертвая, блестела жучками на берегу.

Но его нашла девушка и взяла с собой. Она пишет на нем танку: «Если бы смерть кудря и взоры имела твои, я умереть бы хотела», а на другой стороне камня — ветку прыгнувших зеленых листьев; пусть они оттениют своим узором нежную поверхность плоского беловатого камня. И их темно-зеленый обвили облысший камень сеткой. Он испытывал мукинья Монтезумы, когда все бывало безоблачным или когда Лейли подымала камень и дотрагивалась до него губами и тихо целовала его, не подозревая в нем живого существа, и говорила языком Гоголя: «тому, кто умеет усмехаться». Около был чугунный Толстой, нежно-красная морская ракушка, очень блестящая, покрытая точками, и морщинистые, с каменими лепестками, цветы. Тогда Ка соскучился и пришел к своему господину; тот пел: «Мы ели ее сао чачоочныи стрижей и будем есть их до, до ен сао друзей». Это значило, что он был зол.

— О! — сказал тот мрачно, — ну говори, где и что.

Рассказ про свои обиды журнал: «Она была полна того неземного, непонятного выражения...» и так далее. Собственно, это был жалобный донос на судьбу, на ее черную измену, на ее заплывок.

Ка было приказано вернуться и держать стражу.

Ka saluted, touched the peak of his cap, and vanished, gray and winged.

They gave Ka his freedom.

The grizzled fishermen with bare calves sang Eddas, the mournful saga of the seacoast, and hauled in their net, fine, dense, wet, full of drops, and in which at places hung black crabs, clutching the strings with their claws and tensing wiry arms; sometimes they straightened up and looked at the eternal sea. A ways off, like big yard dogs, sea eagles peaceably sat. A laughing gull perched on the rock which Ka was, making prints with her wet feet. The whale herself, dead on the shore, twinkled with beetles.

But a girl found Ka and took him away with her. She writes a tanka on his side: "If death had your curls and gazes, I would want to die", and drew on the stone's other side a branch of simple green leaves — may they set off the tender surface of the flat whitish stone with their design. And their dark green design wound the stone in its net. He felt the torments of Montezuma, when all was cloudless and when Laila lifted a stone, touched it to her lips, and quietly kissed it, never suspecting a living creature inside, and said in the words of Gogol, "to the man who knows how to grin". Nearby was cast-iron Tolstoy; a soft-red seashell, very shiny, covered in points; and wrinkly flowers with stone petals. Then Ka grew restless and came to his lord, who sang, "We ate Yan Sao the spittle of tubercular swifts, and shall eat them up to and including Yan Sao of their friends." This meant, he was irritable.

"Oh!" said he, gloomy, "Say what you have to say, then."

Ka grumbled the tale of his misfortunes: "She was full of that unearthly, inexplicable expression..." and so on. Basically, it was an official complaint at fate, at her black deception, at the back of her head.

Ka was ordered to return to sentry duty.

Ka saluted, touched the peak of his cap, and vanished, gray and winged.
На следующее утро он доносил: «Просыпается: я на часах около» (винтовка блеснула за его плечами). «Восклицательный знак; знак вопроса; многоточие. Оттуда, где дует ветер богов и где божья Изанага, оттуда на ней змея полусеребряная ткань, пепельно-серая. Чтобы понять ее, нужно знать, что пепельно-серебряные, почти черные, полоски чередуются с прозрачными, как окно или чернильница. Предел этой ткани постигается лишь тогда, когда она озаряется слабым огнем радостной молодой рукой. Тогда по ее волном серебристом шелке пробегает оттенок огня и вновь исчезает, как ковыль. На зданиях города так трепещет вечерний пожар. Большие очаровательные глаза. Называет себя обожаемой, очаровательной».

— Не то,— прервал я поток слов.
— Ты ошибаешься,— строго заметил я.
— Неужели?— деланно-печально возразил Кая.
— Вообрази,— еще веселее произнес он немного спустя, как будто принес мне радостную весть,— три ошибки: 1) в городе, 2) улице, 3) доме.
— Но где же?— Я не знаю,— ответил Кая, чистосердечное звучало в его голосе. Хотя я его очень любил, но мы поссорились. Он должен был удариться. Маляя крыла, одетый в серое, он исчез. Сумрак трепетал у его ног, точно он был прыгающий инок, мой горделивый и прекрасный бродяга. «А это он, безногий!— воскликнули несколько прохожих.— А где же Тамара, где Гудал?» — дав повод воткать в повесть эти художественное мелочи своим испугом горожан.

Между тем я ходил по набережной взад и вперед, и ветер рвал мой котелок и бросал косые капли на лицо и черное сукно. Посмотрел вслед золотившемуся облачку и хрустал руками.
— Я знал, что Кая был оскорблен.

Еще раз он мелькнул в отдалении, изредка мочь крылами. Мне же показалось, что я одинокий певец и что Арфа крови в моих руках. Я был пастух; у меня были стада душ. Теперь его нет. Между тем ко мне подошел кто-то сухой и смирный. Он осмотрелся, значительно взглянул и, сказал: «Будет! Скоро!», — кивнул головой и исчез. Я пошел за ним. Там была роща. Черные дрозды и славки с черной головой скакали в листве. Как охрипшие степные войны, ревели и мычали прекрасные серые цапли, высоко в небе зажигнув клов, на самой высокой ветке старого сухого дуба. Но вот промелькнул инок в сухой измятой высокой шапке, весь черный, среди дубов. Лицо его было жезлно и смиренно. Один
дуб имел дупло, в нем стояли образа и свечи. Коры не было, потому что она давно была съедена больными зубной болью. В роще был ветчный полусумрак. Жуки-олени бегали по ложу дуба и, вступив в единоборство, прокалывали друг другу крылья, и между черных рогов живого можно было найти сухую голову мертвого. Пьяные дубовыми соком, они попадались в плед мальчикам. Я заснул здесь, и лучшая повесть арамеевцев «Лейли и Меджид» навестила еще раз сон усталого смертного. Я возвращался к себе и проходил сквозь стада тонкорунных людей. В город прибыла выставка редкостей, и там я увидел чулоко обезьяны с пением на черных восковых губах; черный шов был ясно заметен на груди; в руках ее была восковая женщина. Я ушел.

Падение сов, странное и загадочное, удивило меня. Я вспомнил, что перед очень большой войной «путовица» имеет особый пугающий смысл, так как еще никому не известная война будет скрываться, как заговорщик, как рано прилетевший жаворонок, в этом слове, родственном корню «пугать». Но у меня среди этих зарослей ежевики, среди этих звуков, погребенных в голосах орков, где все было тихо и пасмурно, сурово и серо, где одинокий бражник метался в воздухе, а деревья были тихи и строги, какая-то пыльная трава, точно умоляя, опутала мои ноги и вилась по земле, как просыпая милосердия грешница. Я разорвал ее нити грубыми шагами, посмотрел на нее и сказал: «И станет грубый шаг силен порвать молчующий паслен».

Я шел к себе; там моего пришествия уже ждали и знали о нем; закрывая рукою глаза, мне навстречу выходили люди. На руке у меня висела, изящно согнувшись, маленькая ручная гадюка. Я любил ее.

— Я поступил, как ворон,— думал я,— сначала дал живой воды, потом мертвой. Что ж, второй раз не дам!

7

Думая о камне, с написанной на нем веткой простых серо-зеленых листьев и этими словами «Если бы смерть кудри и волос носила твои, я умереть бы хотела», Кая летел в синеве неба как золотистое облако; среди маленьких облаков гор, настолько меча крыльями, затерявший в стае красных журавлей, походившей в этот ранний час утра на красный пепел огнедышащей горы, красный, как и они, и соединенный с пламенеющей зарей красными нитями, вихрями и волокнами.

Путь был неблизок, и уж капли пота блестели на смуглом

furrowed. One oak had a cavity, in which icons and candles stood. It had no bark; that had been eaten off by toothache sufferers long ago. In the wood eternal twilight reigned. Stag beetles ran along the bark of oaks and, engaging in single combat, pierced each other's wings; between the black horns of the living could be found the desiccated head of the dead. Drunk on oak sap, the beetles fell captive to young boys. I fell asleep here, and the best story of the Aramaics, Laila and Majnun, paid a visit again to the dream of the weary mortal. I started for home, and passed through a herd of fine-fleeced people. There was an exhibit of curiosities in town, and there I saw a stuffed ape with froth on its black waxen lips; a black seam was clearly visible on its chest; in its arms was a waxen woman. I left.

This coincidence, odd and puzzling, shocked me. I believe that, before a very big war, the word "button" has a special frightening meaning\(^6\), so a war still unsuspected by any will hide, like a conspirator, like an ominous lark flown in too early, in this word related to the root of "frighten". But among these blackberry thickets, among these larks flown in too early, in this word related to the root of "frighten". Among these blackberry thickets, among these willows, coated in red-headed root hairs, where all was gloomy and silent, grim and grey, where a lone reveller tossed about in the air, and trees were still and stern, some dusty grass, as if imploring, tangled my legs and wound along the earth, like a fallen woman begging for charity. I ripped through its filaments with rude strides, looked upon it and said, "Thus the crude, strong tread uproots the weed that pled."

I went home; there my arrival had been awaited and expected; covering their faces with their hands, people came out to meet me. On my arm hung, gracefully coiling itself, a small tame viper. I loved it.

"I have behaved like the raven," I thought. "First I gave the water of life, then the water of death. Well, next time I won't give anything!"

7

Thinking of the stone, with the branch of simple grey-green leaves drawn on it, and the words "If death wore your curls and your hair, I would want to die", Ka flew into the azure of the sky like a gilded cloud; among magenta cloud mountains, persistently flapping his wings, lost in a herd of red cranes that resembled at that early morning hour red ash from a firebreathing mountain, he was red like they, and bound to the flaming dawn by red threads, swirls, and filaments.

The way was long, and already drops of sweat shone on Ka's swarthy face, they too were red from the rays of dawn. But here the
mighty crane horn of his war-like ancestors sounded somewhere above, beyond the crumbly-white masses.

Ka folded his wings and, sprinkled head to toe with morning dew, landed on the ground. On each of his feathers a pearl of dew stood out, black and coarse. No one noticed his landing somewhere by the source of the Blue Nile. Ka shook the water off himself, and, like a swan by moonlight, beat the air with his wings three times. There was no way back. Friends, fame, glorious deeds – all was ahead. Ka mounted a mean wild horse, never insulted by having a rider before, and, allowing it to bite his shadowy but still gorgeous knees, galloped over the plains. A pack of stripy bristly wolves gave chase with a nasal outcry. Their voice was like a round-up of young literary up-and-comers in the daily and monthly press. But the golden racehorse obstinately tucked its head down, gnawing Ka's shadowy elbow with undiminished rapacity. He rejoiced in the headlong gallop. Two or three Nyam-Nyams shot poisoned arrows at Ka and fell to the ground in superstitious dread. He greeted the earth, waving his hand. By a waterfall he stopped. Here he fell into a company of apes, who were sitting with urbane casualness on the roots and branches of trees. Some held infants in their pudgy arms and nursed; the youngsters laughed as they leapt from tree to tree.

The black coat; sturdy, low-browed skull; curved canines gave a fearful stamp to this society of shaggy people. Shrieks of boisterous sweetness issued from the murk from time to time. Ka entered their circle.

"Then," sighed a venerable ancient with a leathery face, "Everything was different. The bird Roc has departed long since. Where is she? And we don't battle Carthage, tearing out their swords and breaking them on our knees like rotten twigs, and covering ourselves with glory. Carthage has gone back across the sea. And the bird Roc? Now I can't wrap myself in a single voluminous feather and make my bed on another! And long ago she, swooping from snowy mountains, woke the elephants of a morning with her cry. And we said, 'There goes the bird Roc!' Then she carried off the elephant young beyond the clouds; and they looked down on the earth, their trunks hung from the clouds, so did their legs, and their eyes, grey foreheads and ears – were above the dark blue limit of the clouds. She's gone! Farewell, o Roc!"

"Farewell," said the apes, rising from their places.

By a campfire close by, the White One sat, wrapped in the tatters of a shawl. Clearly, she had lit the fire, and therefore enjoyed a certain status.

"White One!" the ancient addressed her, "When you were crossing the desert, we knew; we sent the youths – now you're among
могие в последний раз взглянули на звезды. Спой нам на языке
своей родины.

Молодая Белая встал.
— Посторонись, бабушка! — сказала злотоволосая девушка
сторой обезьяне, сидящей на дороге.

Золотые волосы одавали ее в один силошной золотой
сумрак. Славя журав, они лились вниз, как зажженные воды, мимо
плеча, покрасневшего и озябнувшего. Вместе с прекрасной спереди,
отразившшейся в ее движениие, она была поразительно хорошо и
чудо стройна. Ка заметил, что на ноге красивой правильной ноги
отразилась вся площадка леса, множество обезья, дямящийся
костер и ключок неба. Точку в небольшом зеркале, можно было
заметить старцев, воспользовье тела, зыбкотных младенцев и весь
табор лесного племени. Казалось, их лица ожидали конца мира и
чего-то прихода.

Они были искажены тоской и злобой; тихий вой временами
вырывался из уст. Ка поставил в воздухе слоновой бивень и на
верхней черте, точно винтики для струн, прикрепил года: 411, 709,
1237, 1453, 1871; а внизу на нижней доске года: 1491, 1193, 665, 449,
31. Струны, слабо звеневшие, соединяли верхние и нижние гоздики
слонового бивня.

— Ты будешь петь? — спросил он.
— Да! — ответила она. Она дотронулась до струн и
произнесла: «Судеб завистливых волей я среди вас; если бы судьбы
были промыми портинаками, я бы сказала: плохо и плохо владеете, им
отказала в закахах, села сама за работу. Мы заставим само железо
запеть «О, рассмейтесь!».

Она провела рукой по струнам: они издали рокочущий звук
лебедейной стан, сразу опустились на озеро.

Ка заметил, что каждая струна состояла из 6 частей по 317
лет в каждой, всего 1902 года. При этом в то время, как верхние
кольшки означали нашествие Востока на Запад, винтики нижних
концов струн значили движение с Запада на Восток. Вандалы, арабы,
татары, турки, немцы были вверху; внизу — египтяне Гатченсул,
греки Одиссея, скифы, греци Перикла, римляне. Ка прикрепил
еще одну струну: 78 год. — нашествие скифов Адия Саки и 1980
— Восток.

Ка изучал условия игры на 7 струнах.

Между тем Лейли горько плакала, уронив чудные золотые
волосы на землю.

— Худо свой труд исполните, горько иглою владеете,
— произнесла она, горько всхлипывая.

Ка сломил ветку и положил около плачущей.

us, though many have looked upon the stars for the last time. Sing to
us in the tongue of your homeland.”

The youthful White One got to her feet.

“Out of my way, grandma!” the blond-tressed girl told an old
ape, sitting in her way.

Her gold hair clothed her in a seamless golden twilight.

Feebly murmuring, her hair flowed like kindled waters, down past
her shoulder, reddened with cold. With her beautiful grief, expressed
in gestures, she was stunningly pretty and wondrously shapely. Ka
noticed that in the toenail of her beautiful right foot were reflected
the woodland scene, the many apes, the smoking fire and a patch of
sky. Just as in a pocket mirror, one could make out the elders, the
hairy bodies, the tiny infants and the whole encampment of the
sylvan tribe. Their faces seemed to anticipate the end of the world
and someone's advent.

They were disfigured by sorrow and fury; at times a low wail
escaped their lips. Ka erected an elephant's tusk in the air, and on the
upper end, like keys for strings, he fastened the years: 411, 709, 1237,
1453, 1871; and on the footboard below the years: 1491, 1193, 665, 449,
31. The strings, weakly resonating, joined the upper and lower pegs of
the elephant tusk.

“Will you sing?” he asked.

“Yes!” she replied. She drew her hand over the strings and
said: “By the destinies of envious wills I am among you; if fates were
common dressmakers, I would say: you work your needle poorly,
I would cancel their orders, I would sit to the work myself. We'll
compel the steel itself to sing 'O, laugh!'.

She drew her hand across the strings: they gave out the
rumbling sound of a flock of swans, suddenly settling on a lake.

Ka noticed that each string consisted of 6 sections of 317 years
each, 1902 years in all. At the same time, the upper pegs represented
invasions from the East to the West, the screws attaching the string
below meant movements from West to East. Vandals, Arabs, Tartars,
Turks, Goths were above; beneath – the Egyptians of Hatshepsut,
the Greeks of Odysseus, the Scythians, the Greeks of Pericles,
Romans. Ka attached one more string: the year 78 – the invasion of
the Scythians of Adia Saka and 1980 – the East.

Ka studied the conditions of play on 7 strings.

Meanwhile Laila bitterly wept, letting her wondrous gold
hair fall to the earth.

“You do your work poorly, you master your needle ill,” she
said, sobbing bitterly.

Ka broke off a branch and laid it beside the weeping girl.

Laila trembled and said, “Once in peaceful childhood I had a
Лейли вздрогнула и сказала: «Некогда в детстве безбурном камень имела я круглый и ветку такую на нем».

Ка отошел в сторону, в сумрак; затаенные рыдания души его; зелеными листьями он осушал свои слезы и вспомнил белую светелку, цветы, книги.

— Слушай,— сказал старик,— я расскажу о госте обезьяни. На Моа приехала она однажды к нам. Мертвая бабочка на игле дикобраза, вонзившей в черную прискучу, ей заменяла ветер и опахала. В руке был нынью пуг с серебряными точками, в руке у Венус обезьяна; ладонью черной она держалась за Моа; за крылья и за грудь. Лицо ее черно, как вонор, и черный мех курчавый мягко вился ночной руно по телу; узкой страстной миловидной, хорошеньком ягненком казалась она нам. И с хохотом промчалась сквозь страну. Богия черных грядей, богия ночных вздохов.

Лейли: «Если бы смерть кудри и волос носила твои, я умереть бы хотела» — уходит в сумрак, заломив над собой руки.

— А где Аменофис? — поспыкались вопросы.

Ка понял, что кто-то не хватало.

— Кто это? — спросил Ка.

— Это Аменофис, сын Тен, — с особым уважением ответил ему.— Мы верим, он бродит у водопада и повторяет имя Нефертити.

Ай, Туту, Азир и Шурурра, страж меча, кругом. Ведь наш повелитель до переселения души был повелителем на Ахпии мутном. И Анх сепа Атен идет сквозь Хуг Атен на Хапи за цветами. Не об этом ли мечтает он сейчас?

Но вот пришел Аменофис; народ обезвожен умолк. Все поднялись с своих мест.

— Садитесь, — произнес Аменофис, протягивая руку.

В глубокой задумчивости он опустился на землю. Все сели. Костер вспыхнул, и у него, собравшись вместе, беседовали про себя 4 Ка: Ка Эхнатэна, Ка Акбара, Ка Асоки и наш юноша. Слово «сверхгосударство» мелькало чаще, чем следует. Мы шутились. Но старший щум смутил нас; как звери, бросились белые. Выстрела. Огонь пробежал.

— Аменофис ранен, Аменофис умирает! — произнесло по рядам сражающихся.

Все было в бегстве. Многие храбро, но бесплодно умирали.

— Иди и дух мой передай достойнейшему! — сказал Эхнатэн, закрыв глаза своему Ка.— Дай ему мой поцелуй.

— Бежим! Бежим!

По черно-пепелному и грозовому небу долго бежали четыре духа; на руках их лежала в глубоком обмороке Белая, round stone and a branch thereupon like this."

Ка stepped to one side, into the darkness; suppressed weeping choked him; with green leaves he dried his tears and remembered a white attic, flowers, books.

"Listen," the ancient said, "I'll tell the tale of the ape's guest."

On a moa she came to us one day. A dead butterfly on a porcupine's quill, worked into a black coiffure, did service for her as a fan. In her hand was a willow switch with silver buds, in the hand of the simian Venus; with her black palm she held onto her moa; by its wings and by its breast. Her face was black as a crow, and black wavy fur softly wrapped her body in night fleece; with a passionate smile comely, she seemed a pretty lamb to us. And with laughter she raced through the land. A goddess of black breasts, a goddess of night sighs.

Laila: "If death wore your curls and hair, then I would want to die" — goes off into the darkness, hands clasped over her head.

"And where is Amenophis?" the question was asked.

Ka understood someone was missing.

"Who's that?" asked Ka.

"It's Amenophis, the son of Tiy," they told him with particular respect, "We believe he roams by the waterfall repeating the name of Nefertiti."

Ai, Tutu, Aziri and Shurura, keeper of the sword, were all round. Indeed our sovereign before the migration of the peoples was the sovereign of turbid Khapi. And Aikh-sep-Aten goes through the city of Aten to Khapi to gather flowers. Isn't that what he dreams of now?

But here came Amenophis; the ape tribe hushed. They rose from their places.

"Be seated," Amenophis said, stretching out his hand.

In deep thought he settled himself on the ground. All sat.

The fire threw sparks, and around him, gathering, 4 Kas conversed amongst themselves: the Ka of Akhnaten, the Ka of Akbar, the Ka of Ashoka, and our young friend. The word "superstate" flew round more freely than is right. We whispered, gossiping. But a dreadful noise unmanned us; like beasts, white men threw themselves upon us.

Gunshot. Shots flashed past.

"Amenophis is wounded, Amenophis dies!" passed through the ranks of the fighters.

All was headlong flight. Many bravely, but vainly died.

"Go and give my spirit to the deserving!" said Akhnaten, closing his Ka's eyes. "Give him my kiss."

"Flee! Run!"

Along the black-ashen and terrible sky for a long time ran four spirits; in their arms the White One lay unconscious, her golden
распустив золотые волосы; только раз мотылек поднял свой хобот и в болоте захрапел водяной конь...

Бегство было удачно: их никто не видел.

Но что же происходило в лесу? Как был убит Аменофис?

I — Аменофис, сын Тэй. II — он же, черная обезьяна
(полястовые волчата, попугай).

1) Я Эхнатэн.
2) И сын Амона.
3) Что говоришь, Аи, отец богов?
4) Не дашь ли ты Ушенепт?
5) Я бог богов, так величал меня ромету; и точно, как простых рабочих, уволил я Озириса, Гатор, Себека и всех вас. Разжаловал, как рабису. О солнце, Па Атен.
6) Давай, Аи, лепи слова, понятные для нахаря. Жречество, вы мошки, облепившие каменный тростник храмов! В начале было слово...
7) О Нефертити, помогай!
   Я пашни Хапи озаливил,
   Я к солнцу вас, ромету, вывел,
   Я начерту на камне стен,
   Что я кум Солнца Эхнатэн.
   От суеверий облаков
   Ра светлый лик очистил.
   И с шепотом тихим Ушенепт
   Повторят за мною: ты прав!
   О, Эхнатэн, кум Солнца слабогрудый!
8) Теперь же дайте черепахи щеп. И струны. Аи! Есть ли на Хапи мышь, которой не строили б храма? Они хрикают, мычат, ревут; они жуют сено, ловят жуков и едят невольников. Целые священные города у них. Богов больше, чем небогов. Это непорядок.

1) Хау-хау.
2) Жрабр чап-чап!
3) Угуум мхэ! Мхэ!
4) Бгав! Гхав ха! Ха! Ха!
5) Эбза читогорень! Эпей кай-кай! (Гуляет в сумрачной дубраве и срывает щепы). Мгум ман! Мал! Ман! Ман! (кушает птенчиков).
6) Мию бзэг; бзэг! Вий! Га ха! Мал! Бгхав! Гхав!
7) Егжизэу равира! Мал! Мал! Мал! Май, май. Хаою хао хищцу
8) P r r r a га-га. Га! Грав! Эньма мээну-уийай!

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hair hanging down; only once a moth raised up its trunk and in the swamp a bittern snorted.

They made their escape; no one saw them.

8

Бут what happened in the wood? How was Amenophis killed?

I. Amenophis is the son of Tiye. II. The very one who was the black ape (the striped wolf cubs, the parrot).

1) I am Akhnaten.
2) And the son of Amon.
3) What are you saying, Ai, father of the gods?
4) Won't you give an Ushepti?
5) I am the god of gods; so was I styled by the folk; and exactly like common workers, I freed Osiris, Hathor, Sobek, and you all. I demoted you, like a rabisu. O sun, Ra Aten.
6) Come, Ai, mold words, such that a ploughman will understand. Clergy, you are gnats, clustering on the stony reeds of the temples! In the beginning was the word...
7) O Neferetiti, help!
   I inundated Khapi's ploughed fields
   And to the sun, folk, I brought you,
   I will write on the walls of stone
   That I am Akhnaten, godfather of the sun
   From the superstition of clouds
   Ra washed clean a shining face
   And in a muted whisper Ushepti
   Will repeat after me: you're right!
   О, Akhnaton, narrow-chested sun Papa!
8) Now give me the tortoise's shell. And strings. Ai! Is there a mouse in Khapi, to whom a temple has not been built? They oink, low, roar; they chew straw, capture beetles and eat the slaves. They have entire holy cities. There are more gods than ungods. This is disorder.

1) Khau-khau.
2) Zhrabor chop-chop!
3) Ugoom mkheh-eh! mkheh-eh!
4) Bgav! Gkhav kha! Kha! Kha!
5) Ebza chintoren! Epsey kai kai! (Strolls in a gloomy oak grove picking flowers) Mgoom mop! Mop! Mop! Mop! (Eats bicks)
6) Mno bpeg; bpeg! Vyyg! Ga kha! Mal! Bgkhav! Gkhav!
8) R r r a ga-ga. Ga! Grav! Enjma mecui-uaiai!

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Аменофис в шкуре утана переживает свой вчерашний день. Ест древесный овоц, играет на лютне из черепа слоненка. Остальные слушают.

Ручной попутай из России: «Прозрачно небо. Звезды блещут. Слыкали ли вы? Встречали ли вы? Пенца своей любви, пенца своей печали?»

Трубные голоса слонов, возвращающихся с водопоя.

Русская хижина в лесу, около Нила. Приезж торговец зверями. На бревенчатых стенах ружья (Чехов), рога. Слоненок с железной цепью на ноге.

Купец. Перо, бинни; хорошо, душа моя. Заказ: обезьяна, большой самец. Понимаешь? Нельзя живьем, можно мертву на чучело; защити швы, восковая пена и обморох из воска в руки. По городам. Це, це! Я здесь ехал: маленькая резвая, бегает с кувшином по камням. Стук-стук-стук. Ножки. Недорого. Еще стакан вина, душа моя.

Старик. Слушай, почтенней господин мой, он рассердится и может испортить прищучку и воротнички почтенного господину.

Торговец. Прощайте! Не сердитесь. Хе-хе! Так охота на завтра? Приготовьте ружья, черных в засаду; с кувшином пойдет за водой, тот выйдет и будет убит. Цельность в люб и в черную грудь.

Женщина с кувшином. Мне жаль тебя: ты выглянежь из-за сосны, и в это время выстрел меткий тебе даест смерть. А я слыхала, что ты не просто обезьяна, но и Эхнатэн. Вот он, я ласково взгляну, чтобы, умирая, ты озари был осенью желания. Мой милый и мой страшный обожатель. Дым! Выстрел! О, страшный крик!

Эхнатэн — черная обезьяна. Мэ! а_и_ч_Манч! Манч! Манч! (Падает и сухой травой зажимает рану.)

Голоса. Убить! Убить! Плюшите! Пир вечером.

Женщина кладет ему руку на голову.

Аменофис. Манч! Манч! Манч! (Умирает.)

Души схватывают Лейли и уносят ее.

Древний Египет

Жрецы обсуждают способы мести.
— Он растоптал обычаи и равенством населял мир мертвых; он понажился нас. Смерть! Смерть!

Вскакивают, подымает руки жрецы.

Amenophis in an otang-skin re-lives his yesterday. He eats the forest vegetables, plays on an elephant-calf-skull lute. The others listen.

A domestic parrot from Russia: “The sky is see-through. Stars shine. Have you heard? Have you encountered? The singer of his own love, the singer of his own sorrow?

The trumpet voices of elephants, coming back from the waterfall.

A Russian hut in the woods by the Nile. The arrival of a trader in animals. On the log walls rifles, Chekhov, antlers. A baby elephant with a steel chain on its leg.

SALESMAN. Feather, tusk: good, my dahling. The order: an ape, a large male. You get me? Live, no way; maybe dead for stuffed; sew a seam, wax froth and a fainter in its arms. From town to town. He he! I travelled here; a little frisky she, run with a jug across the stones. Knock-knock-knock. Legs. Low price. And a glass of wine, my dahling.

OLD MAN. Listen, my honored friend, he's going to lose his temper and maybe muss the honored gentleman's hair and starched collar.

TRADER. Bye bye! Don't get mad. He he! So we hunt tomorrow? Get your rifles ready, the blacks in ambush; she goes with a jug for water, one comes out and – killed. Aim for brow and black breast.

WOMAN WITH JUG. I pity you: you peer out from a pine tree, and a keen shot gives you death. And I've heard you're not merely an ape, but Akhnaten too. There he is, I give a melting glance, so, dying, you'll be lit with the autumn of desire. My sweet and scary worshippers. Smoke! A shot! O, dreadful cry!

AKHNATEN — BLACK APE. Meu! Manch! Manch! Manch! (Falls and tries to staunch his wound with dry grass.)

VOICES. Killed! Killed! Dance! A feast tonight!

AMENOPHIS,. Manch! Manch! Manch! (Dies)

Spirits seize Laila and carry her off.

Ancient Egypt

The priest plot their vengeance.

“He trampled on the customs and people the land of the dead with equality; he unmoored our faith. Death! Death!”

The priests run about with arms raised.
Эхнатэн. О, вечер пять, причал трави!
Плыши «вельчье любви»
И веслами качай,
Как будто бы ресницей.
Гатор прекрасно и мягко
Рыдает о прекрасном Горае.
Коровий лоб... рога телицы...
Широкий стан.
Широкий выступ выше пояса.
И опрокинутую тень Гатор с коровыми рогами, что месяц серебрит в лучах Хапи, перерезал с пилой брони пронзенный ящер.
Другой с ним спорил из-за турупа невольника.
Визг головой, прекрасный, но мертвый, он плыл вниз по Хапи.
Жрецы (тихо). Отрвы. Эй! Пей, Эхнатэн! День жарок.
Выпил! (Скачут.) Умер!
Эхнатэн (падая). Шурура, где ты? Аи, где заклинания? О Нифертити, Нифертити! (Падает с пеною на устах. Умирает, хватаясь рукой за воздух.)
Вот что произошло у водопада.

9

Это было в те дни, когда люди впервые летали над столицей севера. Я жил высоко и думал о семи столах времени; <...> Египет — Рим, одной Россия — Англия, и плавал из пыли Копенгеха в пыль Менделеева под шум Сикорского. Меня занимала длина волны добра и зла, я мечтал о двоевыпуклых чечевицах добра и зла, так как я знал, что темные греющие лучи совпадают с учением о зле, а холодные и светлые — с учением о добре. Я думал о кусках времени, тающих в мировом, о смерти.

Г.Н.А.Т.Б.Е.В. И на путь меж звезд морозный
Пологу я не с молитвой,
Пологу я мертвый, грозный,
С окровавленной бритвой.

Есть скрипки трепетного, еще юношеского, горла и холодной бритвы, есть роскошные живопись своей черненькой кровью по бельм цветам. Один мой знакомый — вы его помните — умер так; он думал как лев, а умер, как Льва. Ко мне пришел один мой друг, с черными радостно-жестокими глазами, глазами и подругой.

AKHNATEN. O, fifth night, pay out your mooring rope
Sail “love’s majesty”
And bat your oars
Like eyelashes
Hathor beautifully mutinously
Weeps of beautiful Horus.
Bovine brow... calf horns...
Broad stance.
Broad-sprung above the waist.

And the toppled shade of Hathor with its cow horns, that the moon silvered in the depths of Khapi, was sawed through by the nimble pangolin. Another fought with it for the corpse of the slave.

Hanging his head, lovely, but dead, he swam downward through Khapi.

PRIESTS (quietly). Poisons. Eh! Drink this, Akhnaten! The day’s hot. He’s drunk it! (Dash forward) He’s dead!

AKHNATEN. (Falling). Shurura, where are you? Ai, where are the incantations? O, Nefertiti, Nefertiti! (Falls with froth on his lips.

Died, catching at something in the air)

So that’s what happened by the waterfall.

9

This happened back in the days when people flew over the capitals of the North for the first time. I lived high and thought of the seven feet of time; Egypt – Rome, only Russia – England, and I swam from the dust of Copernicus into the dust of Mendeleev beneath Sikorsky’s noise. I was concerned with the wavelengths of good and evil, I dreamed of a dual-convex lens of good and evil, since I knew that the dark roasting rays correspond to the knowledge of evil, and the cold and bright – to the knowledge of good. I thought about the pieces of time, melting in the cosmic, about death.

And on the frosty road between the stars
I’ll fly not with a prayer
I’ll fly dead and terrible
With a bloodied razor.

There are violins, and a palpitating, still young throat, and of a chilly razor, there are lush paintings of one’s blackening blood on white flowers. An acquaintance of mine – you remember him – died that way; he thought like a lion, but died like a Leo. A certain friend came to me with black joy-cruel eyes, eyes and a girlfriend. They
Они принесли много сена славы, венков и цветов. Я смотрел, как Енисей зимой. Как вороны, принесли пищи. Их любовная дерзость дошла до того, что они в моем присутствии целовались, не замечая спрятавшегося льва, мышата!
Они удались в Дидову Хату. На сухом измятном лепестке лотоса я написал голову Аменофиса; лотос из устья Волги, или Ры.
Вдруг стекло ночного окна на Каменноостровском разбилоюсь, посыпалось и через окно просунулась голова лежавшей спокойно, вдвинутой, как ящик с овощами, походившей на мерную, Лейли. В то же время четыре Ка вошли ко мне. «Эхнатэн умер, — сообщили они печальную весть.— Мы принесли его завещание». Он подал письмо, запечатанное черной смолью абракадабра. Вокруг моей руки обвязывался кольцами молодой уда; я положил его на место и почувствовал кругом шеи мягкие руки Лейли.
Удав перегибался и холодно и зло смотрел неподвижными глазами. Она радостно обвила мою шею руками (может быть, я был продолжение ена) и сказала только: «Медлум».
Растерянные Ка отошли в сторону и молча утирали слезы. На них были походные сапоги, лосинные штаны. Они плакали. Ка от имени своих друзей передал мне поседел Аменофиса и поцеловал запахом пороха. Мы сидели за серебряным самоваром, и в изгибах серебра (по-видимому, это было оно) отразились Я, Лейли и четыре Ка: мое, Виджана, Асоки, Аменофиса.

(Endnotes)
1 Ancient Hebrew word for Egypt.
2 We can discern within this a typical Khlebnikov riddle; the buttons = teeth; the cavity = mouth, and the thinking stove within is of course the brain.
3 317 was a significant number for Khlebnikov, which connected all phenomena. In 1916 he created a Society of 317 to realize his project of a universal state.
4 In the original, this is a complicated proof-by-rhyme: the words vryemya, vyes; bryemya, byes (meaning, respectively, time, weight; burden, demon) are used to demonstrate that since vryemya relates to vyes in the same way bryemya relates to byes, time and weight are the same quantity.
5 The Muslim Anti-Christ.
6 In Russian the word for button, “pugovitsa”, has a common sound with the word for frighten, “pugat”.
7 Images of the dead; articles of Egyptian grave furniture.
8 Two meanings; an Egyptian vassal or a Babylonian demon.
Stephen Kessler

“What Does It Take to Translate Poetry?”

In theory, only poets should translate poetry; in reality, poets are seldom good translators.” So writes Octavio Paz in his essay “Translation: Literature and Literality.” The master goes on to explain: “They are not [good translators] because they almost always use the foreign poem as a point of departure for writing their own poem.”

This ranks, along with Robert Frost’s much-quoted witticism that what gets lost in translation of a poem is the poetry, as one of the great red herrings—and most abused anecdotes—of translation folklore. Paz himself, in the same paragraph, hedges his bets by declaring with equal authority: “The good translator of poetry is a translator who is, in addition, a poet—like Arthur Waley; or a poet who is, in addition, a good translator—like Nerval when he translated Faust Part I.”

So which is it? Do poets make the best translators or not? As anyone with any sense can tell, it depends on the poet. Paz and Frost are setting up straw men and mowing them down with the force of their own rhetoric. For Paz, the typical poet is an egomaniac unable to put himself at the service of anyone else’s poem; for Frost, the translator is a feckless scribe who may understand the language but lacks the skill and grace to turn a poem into a poem.

Both these stereotypes, while true up to a point, are equally irrelevant to the practicing translator. As countless masterpieces of translation testify, the poet need not be in it only to advance his own agenda, and the translator need not be a tin-eared imitator hopelessly inferior to the original artist. Paz deepens his discussion by explaining the dialectical opposition he finds between the ways in which poets and translators work: “When writing, the poet doesn’t know how his poem will turn out; when translating, the translator knows his poem should reproduce the poem before his eyes.” Thus, he concludes, “translation is a parallel operation, though in reverse, to poetic creation.”

So: Must a translator of poetry be a poet? This sounds to me like a trick question, or maybe a Zen koan—akin to: Must a ballerina be a dancer? Must a pianist be a musician? Must an actor be a performer? Or perhaps most trickily, Must a bear shit in the woods?

Well, some bears shit in the zoo. Polar bears presumably shit in the snow of the tundra. But where else except in the woods do most bears shit? Surely the same logic applies to the vast majority of ballet dancers, pianists and actors. Who else is qualified to execute the demanding moves of those rigorous disciplines? So there must be something more to this question about translators and poets. Some subtext only an exegete might unlock. But what?

Translation is a kind of exegesis. In order for a translator to open a poem into a new language, he or she must understand the meaning of the text. An astute scholar or critic with sufficient knowledge of the original language may well be able to tease out the meanings of even the most obscure, ambiguous, esoteric or irrational poem. He (I use the masculine pronoun for convenience) may well be able to paraphrase the poem and to expound on its themes, its structure, its technique, its style, even its vision; he may even be able to transcribe accurately the words of the poem such that its meanings will be somewhat discernible.

But a poem, more than almost any other kind of text, means exactly what it says and what can’t be said in any other way, even as its language may shimmer with multiplicity. To bring the poem alive in another language means, yes, to lose the original poetry; but it can also mean to regain new qualities implicit in the original, resulting in an analogous experience for the reader. To make the new poem live on the page and make its sounds move musically in the air with something resembling its original spirit requires a very particular combination of skills; and those skills, and the sensibility to deploy them with the necessary nuance, belong primarily to a class of writers commonly known as poets.

Literal translation is writing. Translators at the top level of the art are specialists equipped with the tools and training to execute their task, and the most fundamental discipline they must master is that of writing. In the case of poetry translators, it goes without saying—but it needs to be said anyway—that the poet’s tools and the knowledge of how to use them are indispensable.

Even a nonpoet, when he’s translating, is necessarily a poet. When he’s laying those lines of ink down on the page, his dictionaries open on the desk, his full attention brought to bear on the text—its blatant significations and its mysteries—with any luck or grace he may feel possessed by the poem’s author, may feel as if he is channeling the voice in the poem and so, in this moment of re-composition or re-creation, in the zone or flow of inspired translation, even in the analytical rigor of a more rational procedure, this writer who may
seldom if ever compose original verse of his own is, by virtue of what he's doing now, a poet.

But like the musician who in the flow of performance may feel possessed or directed by the pre-existing composition, the series of notes laid down by the composer, or the actor completely absorbed in a written character, the poetry translator needs not only the sensibility but the technique and imagination to bring the work to fruition. Technique because, as should be obvious, the laws of prosody inevitably come into play in the re-composing of a poem—all the subtleties of sound and rhythm, measure and rhyme (in the largest sense of pattern and correspondence, not just the mechanical sound that lands at the end of a line like the bell on the carriage return of a manual typewriter)—and only a poet practiced in the intricacies of the art can reliably make a translation in anything resembling its original music.

Technique and imagination. Understanding the language of the original is helpful and often important, though not necessarily essential; there are numerous examples of poets who collaborate with linguists and scholars of idioms they don't know, or assemble from earlier versions, or versions in other languages, what might be called synthetic interpretations. Yet there are countless bilingual or multilingual individuals, even highly sensitive and literate ones, people exceedingly capable of understanding what they read in another language, who couldn't translate a poem to save their lives. And why is this? Well, for one thing, they don't "speak Poetry." And I would add, with all respect, they are not practiced in the poet's art, which entails, among other receptive and active traits, the art of listening.

A poet must be attuned to the sounds of lines taking form in the mind, and in finding the precise words and phrases to trace the faintest hint of a thought or feeling through its linguistic texture into a shape on the page and a sound in the air that somehow approaches the elusive music implied as the words emerge from their pre-conscious source. The poet learns this ineffable skill of careful listening not in a workshop or through instruction but by reading as deeply as possible as much great poetry as possible and appropriating, by keen attention and imitation, the habits of hearing patterns of sound and rhymes and ideas and images, the particular rhythms and thoughts-in-progress that somehow, inexplicably, amount to poetry.

This is not a field for the faint of heart, though anyone is free to try their hand and can learn a lot from the process. Many poets have used translation as a way to increase and extend the scope of their own poetic potential. And certainly there are examples of nonpoet translators who, through patient practice over years, develop the sensibility and skills to create very fine versions of the poets they translate—this elite group would include the likes of Clare Cavanagh, Edward Snow, Robert Fagles, John Felstiner, Alexis Levitin, and Elliot Weinberger, among others. But these are exceptions. The vast majority of successful translators—and by successful I don't mean in terms of fame but rather full realization in English of what they translate—are poets on their own time. Not necessarily well-known or "successful" poets in the conventional sense, but writers whose lives have been lived in the service of poetry. Many of the best translators have been less than major poets, poets whose original writings may be scarcely known beyond a small circle of readers (I think of Arthur Waley, Robert Fitzgerald, Mary Barnard, William Arrowsmith, David Ferry, Guy Davenport, Alastair Reid, Chana Bloch, and Roger Greenwald, to name a few), but poets nonetheless.

And then there are the poets known for their own original writings—poets like Ezra Pound and Kenneth Rexroth, W. S. Merwin and Robert Bly, Anne Carson and Clayton Eshleman—who have also made important contributions as translators. In the case of some, most notably Pound and Bly, the force of their own poetic personality or voice may overwhelm that of whatever poet they happen to be translating and, as Paz observed, the original poet becomes subsumed in the poet/translator's style. But the greatest translators subscribe to Keats's notion of the poet as "the most unpoetical thing in existence," as having no identity of his own, the better to adapt to the voice of whatever happens to be using him as a medium.

Merwin, for example, surely one of the master poets of our time, and one of the most ubiquitously published and garlanded with prizes, whose personal signature in his original writing is utterly distinctive, also has the uncanny ability as a translator to vanish within or behind the voice of whoever he happens to be translating. Perhaps his Buddhist practice has something to do with the egolessness of his nonpersona, his invisibility, as a translator, but he was a first-rate translator before he was a Buddhist, and I think this is a function of his mastery of prosody (which in turn may be largely due to his early and extensive training in translation).

Jack Hirschman, another prolific poet/translator, who works with astonishing speed and versatility from at least a half-dozen languages, because of the velocity and spontaneity of his practice can often be found to have made mistakes in his haste. But the poems consistently sound like poems in vital American English, and thanks to Hirschman's poetic genius the flavor if not the letter of the original is brought across for the listener or reader to experience.
Which brings us to the question of accuracy—of what it is, exactly, and how important to the larger issue of fidelity. Gregory Rabassa, arguably the greatest translator of Latin American fiction (yet not a fiction writer himself), has spoken of the critic he calls Professor Horrendo. Professor Horrendo, a scholar of languages, like many academics is fixated on correctness, and in the case of translation, being correct means being accurate. But what is accuracy? Is it getting right the dictionary definition of every word in the original? Every specific image? Must it serve as a functional paraphrase of the poem’s themes or ideas? Or is it something less measurable, something no dictionary, no scholar, no computer can define? (We can only begin to imagine the comic results of Google's Universal Library, where in some techno-utopian future, at the click of a button, works of literature will be instantly translated into any language desired.)

One thing I believe a poet is more likely to understand than other translators, human or robotic, is that in translation "accuracy" is really the least of one's problems. Fidelity is a far more important matter, and it is a matter of mood and tone and nuance, of atmosphere and rhythm and timing, of melody and feeling and all the elusive, ineffable elements that separate a work of art from one of craft or mechanics. When you look across the page from a great translation at the original and compare the literal meaning of the words with what the translator has written, your response is less likely to be "Wow, that's really accurate!” than “Wow, how did he ever think to come up with that?”

The difference between these two types of translation is imagination. The one of whom you ask how he came up with that is the one who has mobilized his imagination, not just his knowledge of languages but his gift for finding analogies, to re-create the poem in an English that approximates the feeling, the sense, the meaning—beyond the correctly conveyed words—of the original. Imagination is the poet's realm, and it is through imagination (or faithful re-imagination) that the greatest translations are created.

The art of translation, like the art of poetry, is open to anyone. No formal permit or license is required. You just, as Frank O'Hara put it, go on your nerve. In time, with practice, patience and perseverance, one may develop the moves, the intuition, the ear, the stylistic versatility and virtuosity, the range, the technique, the confidence, the humility, the daring, the presumption, the gifted accomplishment of skilled translation. It's possible, I suppose, to do this by reading and translating full-time and without ever publishing a line of original poetry. But in my experience the motivation to write and the motive to translate are intertwined, if not one and the same: the desire to bring something true and beautiful and unique and revelatory into the world. The practice of one is inextricably bound up with the other, and one feeds the other and enhances it in what Paz calls "a continual and mutual fertilization."

Must a translator of poetry be a poet? Maybe not. But if not, he has to be able to do a very persuasive impersonation of one.
Ly Doi and Bui Chat

Selected Poems

• Translated from the Vietnamese by Linh Dinh •

Officially known as Ho Chi Minh City, Saigon is a mess. Only 300 years old, it is way overpopulated, its congestion broken up only by sewer-like rivers and creeks. Hung-over from decades of wars and revolutions, it’s a cocktail of unpredictable sights, noises and smells, and has a raw, exasperating energy. There is nothing refined about Saigon. It’ll hug you tight, molesting you, and won’t let go until you either strangle or marry it.

Scooters, cyclos, careening vans, overloaded trucks, pushcarts and beggars on dollies swarm its streets from 5 in the morning until 2 at night. Its architecture is a moldy French/Vietnamese hybrid left over from Colonial times, mixed with no-nonsense box-like buildings from the 60’s and 70’s, American style, and slick new skyscrapers downtown. Soviet statuary mars its rare parks. Sly, crass, incoherent and frankly infatuated with all things foreign, Saigon mimics everyone and proclaims itself an original.

I met Ly Doi and Bui Chat in Saigon in July of 2001 at a party at poet Tran Tien Dung’s house. They had just graduated from the university and not yet published. I didn’t know them then. At the party, I recognized translator Cu An Hung and poets Nguyen Dat, Phan Ba Tho and Nguyen Quoc Chanh. All of us sat on straw mats on the floor, drank, ate and shot the shit for hours. Born in 1957, Chanh was (and is) the most respected underground poet in Saigon. Despised by the establishment, his poetry is described by one critic as “a cemetery of the spirit and the body.” Though absent from official journals and anthologies, Chanh is an inspiring presence to his peers, and provides a model for younger poets like Ly Doi and Bui Chat. More or less banned from publishing, Chanh has to content himself with appearing on webzines and samizdats.

I’d bet that Ly Doi and Bui Chat are also inspired by a poet from the previous generation, Bui Giang, the lost soul of Saigon. Not for his style, which was rather traditional, but for his raving, whoring madness, his lust for experience, his love of learning, his outcast status and his dedication to poetry. Bui Giang translated Camus, Gide, Heidegger and René Char, among others. He wrote about Sartre, Confucius, Lao Tzu and Gandhi. By his own admission, he started to become “brilliantly mad” in 1969. After 1975, he slept in a squalid shack next to a turbid pond.

Defiant and reckless, Bui Chat and Ly Doi revel in their outcast status. They drift from place to place, do odd jobs to make money, gather at sidewalk cafes to drink and talk with other poets. With Nguyen Quan and Khuc Dzuy they form a small group calling themselves Mo Mieng, or “Open Your Mouth.” Yes, sometimes they suck or say stupid things—who doesn’t—but when they’re on their game, they can also be brilliantly mad.

Some applaud them as a turning point in Vietnamese poetry. Others sneer that they’re all attitude and no substance. The Goethe Institute in Hanoi was intrigued enough to invite them to read in June of 2005, only to have to cancel the event at the last minute under pressure from Vietnamese authorities. The government had previously jailed Ly Doi and Bui Chat in 2003 for 2 days for passing out flyers at another cancelled reading.

Among the Vietnamese government’s rationalizations for this latest cancellation, as reported by the BBC: “[T]he poetry group Mo Mieng is not serious, with works that are downright obscene.” Read on and judge for yourself.

LYDOI was born in 1978 in Quang Nam and now lives in Ho Chi Minh City. A member of the Open Mouth group, he has been published widely on webzines and in group samizdats such as “Six-sided Circle” (2002) and “Open Mouth” (2002), and in his own samizdats, “Seven Spider Improvisations” and “Dogmeat Vegetarianism” (2005). A drifter, he makes his living performing odd jobs on the sidewalks.

BUI CHAT is the pen name of Bui Quang Vien. Born in 1979 in Bien Hoa, he lives in Ho Chi Minh City. A member of the Open Mouth group, Bui Chat has been published on webzines and in group samizdats such as “Six-Sided Circle” (2002) and “Open Mouth” (2002), and in his own samizdat, “Deesturbances Today” (2003).

— Linh Dinh
POEMS BY BUI CHAT

Hiện Chương

Không ji có thể đoạt tôi khỏi những bàn tay
cái nhìn không tương xứng làm ngôn
Jưa con mắt dài và chiều
không phải cái mũi thò nò xanh
thể jới lấy không thể bợp tôi
nững hình ảnh cũ thay đổi tôi như mơ
thái độ nên câu ngoi xóm để joi một vật jurj luiọc
không muốn hát xì với dâm dồng
tối nà cái thai chong bung người con gái tôi yêu

Kurrent State

nothin can seize me from da hands
a look doesn't korrespond to da fi fingers
between da rite and left eyes
not da blue runny nose
dis world kannot squeeze me
old images alter me same as new
attitude on toilet skuattin to drop one thing into water
don't want to sneeze with da crowd
I am da pregnancy inside da belly of da gurl I luv
Cây Chòng Ngựyv

Nước lao cùng chồng ngựyv
xoè
cây chơi
jài con mặt ngo ngưra
niếc
jura trường tôi muốn chân nà dâu
tôi hát
vể cuấn dâu nò xo ôm chën cường
lời nhỏ các đồ vật
& xư lân
cái bụng u ám là dã nà hối thơ tôi?
tôi fải niêm nhũng nơi nöm coanh dở vật
jồi chồng
ngựyv
nuơn nuơn thế'ng
bằng cách lao dể nàm mọi việc
tôi ngày xoè ja tôi tánh birc trường
nà nòi coát
dợi mới
chora bao jơ bước ja khuôn mặt cuấn dũ của tôi

Upside Down Pole

All ways upside down
spread
da broom
some eyes within
look sideways
leenin against wall I want feet to be head
I sing
about shorts coiled springs being sic in bed
da faulty sentiment of missin stuff
& apathy
dis bleek room has been ma breath?
I must lic da uneveness around stuff
den flip
upsidedown
all ways
how to do all things
spread nite and day I seduce da wall
hornily flap
da lips
never stepped ousse my shorts face
Dám Ja

tới lèm lướt bọt nến trùng
tớí yêu những người dân bà đang nả chuộtJuróí công
tớí thấy em mất cứu nót mưung ngàn bà cái mua ở vía hê
xách không nấm tớí tớí hơn mỗi khi chà nhạt
tớí nhìn tớí bay chênh chê
tớí hành hạ tớí ba bử
tớí dấm ja
tớí cêu dói chữ ghê
tớí tô chức chiến chánh
tớí làm mó vỉ chúa chê
tớí đánh làng vào buổi sáng
tớí dấm ja
tớí cái tao âm hô
tớí mở to jà y ni hòn

Đình

Stab Skin

I thro spit onto da wall
I luv women who are sewer rats
I see you wearing 33 cent panties bought on da sidewalk
books don't make me better each Sunday
I see myself flyin in da sky
I torture myself three meals a day
I stab skin
I shout for words
I organize wars
I chant namyó to God
I lash ma tomb teeth in da mornin
I stab skin
I reform da uterus
I a divorce paper
JÓ CHÁY MUỐN

H bác thấy thủ jâm Việt
Thơ không thể với và dời xông làm
Chiếc jương vật hâm hiu Từ bỏ
xúc tăng chương jắc mông Nhũng con bố chết
thời nao Dăng ngiti đên mảnh vươn ja thì Tời
một người ngửa mặt
Các hợi âm ông lúc từng bày*
Coanh tôi như jắc
Cô the băn chăn cái chòng đất xấu
với hai Vũ jông
Tời cếu một vung
Tắt cái mới thứ đêu xanh
Chong chút
Từ cái nhìn nang thêm cuyên jù bâu chòi
Tời định hướng đầu
Nhất thiết tôi im jù chỉ một tài
Bằng cách lẻm chờ nhung no âu
Khi tôi không ngưng nörn jay & đi
Bay Về lời mong tiếng động hô jój chay muốn

*Lời âm ngâm nước: Thơ Trần Tiến Dụng

Late Floing Wind

Ha master masterbaitin Writes
Poetry cannot be rushed life's philled
with dismal priks Give up
accruing dreams Fleas
durin time of turmoil Thinkin of da flesh plot I
a person wit an itchin eye
A gatherin herd of water logged responses*
Surrouns me like trash
Perhaps a feemal foot deep inside da earth
with two hollow breasts
I shout an expanse
Everythin's blu
Inside da words
From a wandrin look sedoozin da whorizon
I orient ma head
I must keep silent even if onlee in one ear
By throin back da whorries
As I don't cease growin & goin
Flyin towards somewhe known for a late flowin wind clock

*water logged responses: from the poetry of Tran Tien Dung
Văn “Inh”

tớ buồn khỏi như buồn nôn
ngơi phố
nắng thủy tỉnh
tớ gọi tên tớ cho đỏ nhớ
thanh tam Bên
[i quên, bụi chất chó!]
bụi chiều sâu vào chiều giăng đường
boong! boong!
tớ xin một chỗ qui thẩm kín
cho đứa em nhỏ lính hồn
sợ chỗ ò
con chỗ đối lâu nào
sửa
gâu! gâu!

tớ buồn chết như buồn ngủ
dù tớ đang đứng trên bờ sông
nước đền sau thoái thước
tớ thiết tên tớ cho người giận
bụi chết! bụi chết!
dêm ngả xuống khoảng thụ thấm tớ lơi
ev em bế cường khán độ ơi
này một con chó sói
thứ có sói lang thang
những rãt dưới... P $...ng hoàng

tớ thêm gieële tớ
loai sát nhơn muốn đời
tớ gọi tên tớ thẩm thiết
bụi chết! bụi chết! bù ủ `ơ ¡ ¡¡ i ché é e t t t !
búi cỏ tớ chết cực
dế tớ được phục sinh

vợ tớ hôm nay bất ngờ có kinh...

Ing Rhymes

I want to cry like I want to vomit
on the street
crystal sunlight
I call my own name to soothe my longing
thanh tam tuyền
[crap, meant bui chat!]
evening a star breaks against a church bell
boing! boing!
I need a secret place to kneel
for a little one whose soul
fears vicious dog
a starving brown dog
barks
gaw! gaw!

I want to die like I want to sleep
although I'm standing on a river bank
the deep dark water is restless
I scream my own name to slake my rage
bui chet! bui chet!
night falls onto a sinful whispering realm
child wearing a red kerchief
hey there wolf
a wandering sort of wolf
though very upright

I crave suicide
an eternal sort of murderer
I scream my own name in distress
bui chet! buoi chet! buu u o o i i che e e t t t!
strangle myself into collapsing
so I could be resurrected

today my wife suddenly menstruates...

[this poem is a parody of Thanh Tam Tuyen's very famous 1956 poem, “Resurrection.” Twenty of 31 lines are identical with the original.]
Cái Lớn Quê

là cái lọn có kinh, ngoại ra có thể hiểu như sau:
ngày xưa, cách đây rất nhiều nhiều năm, các loại đều chung sống, đôi
dai với nhau như bạn bè, riêng đàn bà & lọn là 2 loài ăn chéri đàn đì &
nhau/net bên họ hàng cả
ví mà nhớ một món tiễn khá lôm, lọn buông phải ở đây cho đàn bà, suốt
ngày quanh quẩn trên cơ thể, làm lung váy và: từ chính sắc sắc đẹp cho
dền về sinh các thứ...
một hôm, nhờ giằng họa không chịu nổi, lọn bỏ trốn vào ngay. chính thể
mà đàn bà biết, loài đàn ông yêu thương, đâm duỗi mình cùng chỉ vì lọn
dể giữ lọn lại bền mình, đàn bà tìm mọi cách giằng bảy, đánh đáp lọn tan
nhản đến quẻ cả hai chân... sau đó xừng luôn ở hàng
tử do, phân biệt thiên hạ đảm tiêu, phần vì di dộng không tiên. chẳng ai
biết lọn ở đâu
duy bổn trẻ lúc nào cùng nghĩ: đàn bà & lọn, nhất định là một
binh:
thế mới dài đót

The Crippled Cunt

is a cunt during menstruation, and can also be understood as:
in the distant past, many many years ago, all species coexisted, treated
each others as friends, except that woman & cunt loved to get drunk &
party worse than anybody else
in debt, owning a fair sum, cunt became servant to woman. all day hanging
around the body, doing hard work: from beauty care to hygienic
duties...
one day, longing for her bohemian past, cunt ran away for a few days.
that's why woman knows, man only loves her, is only infatuated with her
thanks to the cunt
to keep cunt next to her, woman set up all sorts of traps, and beat cunt
mercilessly until cunt became crippled in both legs... then she tied cunt
forever to her crotch
from then on, partly because of other people's ridicule, partly because of
her difficulties of movement, no one knows where cunt is
except that children always think: woman & cunt, they're one & the
same
discussion:
how foolish

[translator's note: "crippled cunt" is a translation of "lon que," a
Vietnamese idiom meaning a vagina during menstruation]
Cho tinh thần, cho cơ thể, cho cuộc sống hay là нам lý do để bạn chọn thơ Việt

quảng cáo giảm lý do về gian hàng thơ việt, tại hội chợ thơ toàn thế giới (đề định 2012)

sự tin cậy
là sản phẩm đã tồn tại cả ngàn năm qua

sự tin nhiệm
đã được khoa học chứng minh là thực ăn có nhiều lợi ích dinh dưỡng

chứng nhận
đã được cấp giấy chứng nhận ISO 9001: 2000, ISO 14001, GMP & HACCP

cam kết
không có cholesterol, không hóa chất bảo quản, không màu nhân tạo

cần thiết cho cuộc sống năng động
ví thơ việt là thực ăn bổ dưỡng:
• cung cấp năng lượng tức thời cho cơ thể
• giúp tăng cường sức đề kháng & sức mạnh tinh thần
• thải giọt thực dầy nhanh quá trình phục hồi sức khỏe
• cải thiện trí nhớ & năng lực trí tuệ
• giúp giảm căng thẳng thần kinh
• tăng quá trình tiết sữa non ở phụ nữ [có mâu thơ] nuôi con
• bổ máu nhuận khá năng tăng hấp thụ & sử dụng chất sắt

lưu ý: thực phẩm này không phải là thuốc, không có tác dụng thay thế thuốc chữa bệnh

For the Spirit. for the body. for living or five reasons why you should choose Vietnamese poetry

an advertisement to assist ly doi at the Vietnamese poetry booth, at the all-world poetry fair (planned for 2012)

trust
it's a product that has endured for a thousand years

reliance
it has been proven by science to be a food with many nutritional benefits

certified
it has been granted the certifications ISO 9001: 2000, ISO 14001, GMP & HACCP

guaranteed
no cholesterol, no chemical preservatives, no artificial colorings

a necessity for an active life
because Vietnamese poetry is a nutritious food:
• provides instant energy for the body
• increases the body's immunity & spiritual strength
• contributes to a speedy recovery of your health
• improves memory & mental power
• helps to alleviate psychic tension
• improves young mothers' abilities to breast feed
• is good for your blood thanks to its ability to absorb and use iron

note: this product is not a medicine, and should not be substituted for medicines
Poems by Ly Doi

Khoan Cắt Bè Tông

phải...
ta sẽ quyết sách tất cả [lũ] khoe các bờ tường
ta sẽ quyết sách loại người cùng như loại vật,
ta sẽ quyết sách chìm trôi lần cả biên
ta sẽ khiển cho kẻ gian ác phải lão dáo tế nhào
và sẽ tan diệt loại người [cùng lũ khoe cắt bè tông] khỏi mặt đất...

phải...
ta sẽ đáng tay đánh phạt lũ bộ phân [và chỉ điểm]
và toàn thể cư dân Bách Việt
ta sẽ tan diệt khỏi nơi này [kể cả hẻm 47] số còn sót lại của cư dân lân cận
và xóa tên các nhà xuất bản thơ chính thống
ta sẽ tan diệt những kẻ leo lên mái nhà mà cấu cấu chi viễn
ta sẽ tan diệt những kẻ chui xuống đất tìm mà dép [hay mồ yên cùng thế]...

hay lệnh thình trước ta: Doi Ly—kể khoe cắt bè tông...
và hay nho, ta sẽ câm đến lòng suc khắp Bách Việt
ta sẽ trừng phạt bọn đàn ông,
ta sẽ biết thì bọn đàn bà
và đàn áp bọn đồng tính
những kẻ cư đơn hiền như rụt trên lớp căn
bới chúng tự thú rằng: Doi Ly không ban phúc, nên cùng không giữ hòa ở...
chúng đã tâm, tài một xí số toàn trợ
tái sẩn của chúng sẽ bị cường phá,
nhà cửa sẽ bị tàn hoang,
chúng xây nhà, nhưng không được ở,
chúng trồng nho [lúa cùng thế], nhưng chẳng được uống rượu...

Drilling and Cutting Concrete

must...
I will wipe out all of you [those who drill and cut concrete—you all]是从 the bases of walls
I will wipe out mankind and animals
I will wipe out birds and fish
I will make the wicked wobble and fall
and exterminate mankind [as well as those who drill and cut concrete]_from the face of the earth...

must...
I will raise my arm and strike the traitors [and snitches]
and all the Viet settlers
I will exterminate from this place [including alley 47] all the adjacent settlers who are left behind
and obliterate the names of sanctioned publishers
I will exterminate those who climb to the roofs to beg for aids
I will exterminate those who crawl into the ground to search for a
a beautiful grave [or a quiet tomb, same difference]

keep silent in my presence: Doi Ly—one who drills and cuts concrete...

and remember, I will use a lamp to search all over the Viet realm
I will punish the men,
I will insult the women
and abuse the homosexuals
those who are nonchalant like wine above dregs
they reassure themselves: since Doi Ly doesn't dispense benefits, he
will not unleash harms...
they are mistaken, in a totalitarian country
their properties will be stolen or destroyed,
their houses wrecked,
they build homes, but cannot live in them,
they grow grapes [or rice, same difference], but cannot drink the wine...
dã gần rỗi, ngày của Doi Ly
ngày vọng lên những tiếng kêu thảm thiết
ngày thịnh nộ
ngày khốn quẩn
ngày gian tranh
ngày hụy diệt & tàn phá
ngày tối tăm & mịt mù
ngày âm u & âm đâm
ngày của thiếu ruì...

này hỏi dân dân vô liêm sỉ, hãy tập họp, tập họp lại để
trước khi các người bị phân tán
như vỡ trâu bị gió thổi bay trong một ngày
và nhìn lên những số phone rao vặt khoan cắt bê tông
tren các bức tường đang vài hãm các người
dù đông đất, dù ta [kể hụy diệt tất cả] cũng không phải bờ được...

Ghi chú: Tác phẩm này được viết khi xuyên Việt trở lại thời kỳ dòng
dạt-mũi lửa [8-2005], sau 3200 năm. Và một tuyển tập thơ Sài Gòn
[không có bài này] sắp chui ra đời.

it’s near, the day of Doi Ly
the day of heart-rending screams echoing
the day of wrath
the day of despair
the day of afflictions
the day of extermination & destruction
dark & blurry day
overcast & gloomy day
the day of devouring fire...

hey, all you shameless people, gather, gather together
before you will be scattered
like rice husks blown away by the winds in a day
and look at the phone numbers on advertisements for drilling and
cutting concrete
on the walls surrounding you all
that even earthquakes, or I (who can exterminate everything)
| cannot destroy...

Note: This piece was composed when the Viet realm was
experiencing earthquakes and volcanoes [8/2005], after 3,200 years.
And when a volume of poetry [without this poem] is about to come out.
doi ly nhênh làm phép lạ đi trên nước

rồi doi liên bất các môn đề chử nghĩa xuống ghe qua sông, trong lúc doi xin tiên và vốn sông từ đam dông, và lên núi câu nguyên một cái tự, tự và chủ đề không đến, doi ở đó một mình như kẻ tham lâm, ngu dân... và cái ghe chử nghĩa đã xa bờ nhiều sai tay, bị sông gió đánh nguye, suốt buổi chiều và phần còn lại của đêm, mái canh tur, doi mỗi đi trên bàng tối mất nước và định sang sông, nhưng các môn đề chử nghĩa nhìn thấy và tương dầy là kẻ nguy danh và hột hoảng, doi ra đầu bình tâm và gọi từng món đề cùng bờ ghe đề qua sông, một rồi hai, rồi ba, rồi vô kể cùng xuống nước... sự thế diễn ra chức lát và chẳng ai nhìn thấy, nhưng môn đề hoài nghi và kém tin bất đầu chìm, doi kéo từng đứa lên và việc đầu tương tương cho chúng, chúng nghi chuyển đến bờ, chuyển vào hăng ngử và chuyển được người ta nâng niu... rồi bờ đến, doi đúng nhìn những món đề thân can mà ưa nước mạt, bàng phép lạ, một đứa lên bờ và khiến đứa khác từ diem xuống đây, cả đứa không hoài nghi và tranh тре đục tin... những mon đề được lên bờ sống sọt, kinh hoàng, kiểu kỳ rồi vài lạy: doi nhìn đúng là kẻ nguy danh-nguy danh một bát thò.

from Seven Spider Improvisations

doí ly spider performs a miracle walking on water

then doi immediately made his disciples get on a boat to cross the river, while doi begged money and capital from the crowd, and ascended a mountain to pray for a poetic inspiration, poetic inspiration and topic did not come, doi stayed there alone—like a grasping idiot... and already the literary boat was several arm's-length from shore, beat back by the waves, all evening long and what's left of the night, until nearly cockcrow, doi finally stepped onto the dark surface of the water intending to cross the river, but the literary disciples saw and mistook him for an imposter and panicked, doi made a sign for them to calm down and called each disciple to abandon the boat to cross the river, one then two, then three, then countless others all entered the water... the situation occurred in an instant and no one saw it, but the disciples who were doubtful and without faith started to sink, doi pulled each one up and rubbed imaginary ointment on them, they thought of reaching the shore, of belonging to the group and having people pamper them... then the shore arrived, doi stood watching the familiar disciples with teary eyes, thanks to a miracle, for each one who made it to shore countless sank to the bottom, even those who did not doubt and were full of faith... all the surviving disciples were in shock, terrified, haughty then kowtowing: doi spider was truly an impostor—pretending to be a poem.
shortly after the crossing the river incident, doi summoned his remaining disciples and asked them: what defiles us, then [to set himself straight] answered: it's not what goes in but out of the mouth, the mouth is fouler than any other hole on your body and mine also! these things [phrases, strings of words...] are fouling me then you and I don't know what to do to make myself even more foul and continue... then the disciples approached and took turns answering: do you know, doi, those words can make the old-fashioned ungrammatical and lament to god; the wise guys of language grumble and scream about the absence of beauty, though the nosey and analytical fancy themselves useful... doi spider replied: among many disciples only a few can become trees and bear fruits, the rest are corpses at the river's bottom, the rest are blind and deceived, they lead each other and roll to wherever, it doesn't matter, how can I stop them... still uncomprehending, the disciples asked: so where can we roll to now... doi turned away from them: scram to wherever, I could care less, you idiotic and defiled, hanging out with you all, there's a risk that my mouth will freshen and my soul will become pure.

cái gì làm doi ô ước?

ú lâu sau vụ qua sông, doi nhận gọi các môn đệ còn lại và hỏi: cái gì làm chúng ta ô ước, rồi [một cách cười lồi] trả lời luôn: không phải cái vào mà là cái ra từ miệng, miệng ô ước hơn bất cứ lỗ nào trên thân thể các người và cả ta nữa! cái đó [những cụm từ, chuyện câu...] đang làm ta rồi các người ô ước và ta không biết phải làm gì để được ô ước hơn và tiếp tục... thế rồi các môn đệ đến gần và thay phiên nhau trả lời: doi biết không, những lời đó có thể làm mọi thằng cha có diễn vấp-phẩm và kêu trời; mọi ông cụ non từ ngứa ta thân và gào thét vì sự kém thẩm mỹ, những kẻ soi mồi phần tích thì trưởng mình có ích... doi nhận đáp: trong rất nhiều môn đệ thì một ít thành cây và ra quả, phần còn lại là xác đầy sông, phần còn lại là những kẻ mù và ngố nhăn, chúng tự diệt đất và lần đi đâu mà kể, ta làm sao cần được... vẫn không hiểu, các môn đệ lại hỏi: thế chúng tôi giải lăn đi đâu... doi quay đi: cuốn xéo đi đâu mà bọn bay, những kẻ ngụ dân và ô ước, luôn quàn với các người, miệng ta tham thô và linh hồn ta thành sạch mát.
Xã Hội 3

Chủ thích cho Bố Tất ở chùa Su Thái:

Hôm nay báo Công An thành phố [xá] đăng vụ phở bố trưng bố già dậy chuyện mua dâm [đức tính net] tre em bị tử hình [đảng], và đây là vấn đề cần quan tâm, diễn ra ở pháp trưởng [bàn]


Có đau thi thành chỉ thi bể-dề hay phọc, hay chớ Nuốt gì độ… dùng làm chỗ Việt Nam, suốt ngày ăn cự, bị ngưới ta đánh và còn có nguy cơ bị trông cơ thành cây chín món.

Cả câu chuyện thay này theo Bà Sâu là một kiểu phim tình cảm cả pó ba có pha chuyển dụ đều, có thể thều đề đăng tài cho Tấn Sơn [tình trưng] và có thể chịu không ngời nghi ở chua Su Thái [làn man].

Society 3

Footnote for the Bodhisattva at Su Thai Temple:

Today a story appeared in the City Police newspaper about some deputy minister who habitually bought sexual favors [and dispositions] from children and was condemned to death, and here we have a matter worthy of attention that happened on the execution ground:

Since the guy was a master in wheeling and dealing [even selling out the people] he bought off the director/psychological [issues] advisor to the firing squad, to make these guys feel remorseful [as in their conscience shred into pieces] when they take out their guns to perform their duty. He also bought off the entire firing squad... the result: the hail of bullets only hit a soft [but tasty] spot and even the coup de grace, an extremely rare occurrence, only glanced his skin—blood spilling all over... he pretended to faint, then fainted for real, then was revived by a waiting crew of doctors with their equipments...

But it seemed that the sky had blue eyes and a red beak... gloating over his complicated plots, he grinned constantly while lying in hospital to be treated for his [mediocre] light wound. Discharged, he officially laughed out loud in [abject] satisfaction, but because he was not paying attention he slipped on a banana peel, fell and hit his head on a pebble that a little girl he had bought sex from he was not paying attention he slipped on a banana peel, fell and over his complicated ploys, he grinned constantly while lying in hospital to be treated for his [mediocre] light wound. Discharged, he officially laughed out loud in [abject] satisfaction, but because he was not paying attention he slipped on a banana peel, fell and hit his head on a pebble that a little girl he had bought sex from. But it seemed that the sky had blue eyes and a red beak... gloating over his complicated ploys, he grinned constantly while lying in hospital to be treated for his [mediocre] light wound. Discharged, he officially laughed out loud in [abject] satisfaction, but because he was not paying attention he slipped on a banana peel, fell and hit his head on a pebble that a little girl he had bought sex from. But it seemed that the sky had blue eyes and a red beak... gloating over his complicated plots, he grinned constantly while lying in hospital to be treated for his [mediocre] light wound. Discharged, he officially laughed out loud in [abject] satisfaction, but because he was not paying attention he slipped on a banana peel, fell and hit his head on a pebble that a little girl he had bought sex from...
LOI ÍCH CỦA THƠ

Thơ và Vẻ Đẹp Cơ Thể

Thơ là một bài luyện tập thể dục rất tốt. Vì bạn làm thơ, tức là các cơ bắp được hoạt động, năng lượng được tiêu hao, cơ thể sẽ dễ dàng, thân hình sẽ thon gọn và săn chắc. Chỉ cần làm thơ tự hai đến ba lần một tuần, đấy sẽ là bài tập hay thể tốt nhất cho những bài thể dục thông thường ngày.

Lắm thơ cũng là bài tập luyện với đề “thu gọn” vòng hai, săn chắc vòng ba và phẳng nách [hiệu quả] vòng một. Các cơ bụng, cơ hông, cơ ngực sẽ được hoạt động rất nhiều khi bạn làm thơ. Theo một nghiên cứu của Tấu mới đây, một người làm thơ kết hợp với nhiều điều như nhảy nhảy như Waltz, Tango, Swing,... sẽ tiêu hao nhiều calo, tăng chiều cao và khoan khoái tâm trạng...

Một người luyện tập làm thơ thường xuyên cũng là người có dáng vẻ thanh lịch, tao nhã; và tất nhiên, không kém phần gây ấn tượng và hấp dẫn.

Thơ và Sức Khỏe

Thơ không chỉ đem lại một cơ thể khỏe mạnh, thân hình eo thon mà còn giúp bạn chữa và phòng chống rất nhiều bệnh. Sau những giờ làm việc căng thẳng, một miếng, được thơ minh theo những kết cấu biên áo, sống động của Rubai, Sonnet, Haiku, Đạo đức luật, Lục bất, Tứ do, Hậu hiền đại... thì mọi căng thẳng, stress sẽ được xua di nhanh chóng.

Theo những nghiên cứu, điều tra của Mỹ cho thấy, một người thường xuyên luyện tập làm thơ sẽ giảm tới 70% các bệnh như: mất ngủ, bệnh phụ, đau các khớp xương, bệnh trầm cảm, đau đầu và cả bệnh tiêu đường. Khi cơ thể được yêu thương theo những cấu trúc bài, nhịp chảy con chữ... thì máu được lưu thông, hệ thống thần kinh được thư giãn.

Khi đã trải thành một người làm thơ thành thạo, bạn sẽ học được rất nhiều kinh nghiệm để trở thành một người có sự rèn luyện về tinh thần, về khả năng giao tiếp, lập kế hoạch và là một người đặc biệt tự tin. Những thuận lợi này sẽ giúp bạn rất nhiều trong cuộc sống, công việc và nhân chất của bạn.

THE BENEFITS OF POETRY

Poetry and Physical Beauty

Poetry is a great form of exercise. When you write poetry, it means that your muscles are active, your energy spent, your body becomes flexible, your figure slim and firm. You only need to write poetry two to three times a week, this practice is the best replacement for all other forms of daily exercises.

Writing poetry is also an excellent way to “tighten” the second circle, harden the third and invigorate the first. The stomach, buttocks and chest muscles are very active when you write poetry. According to a recent Chinese study, writing poetry combined with dancing to gentle rhythms such as Waltz, Tango and Swing... will burn up a fair amount of calories, increase your height and juice up your sex drive...

A person who practices poetry regularly is also one with an elegant, classy appearance; and, of course, not without allure and attractiveness.

Poetry and Health

Poetry doesn't just bring a healthy body, a slim shape but can also help you to resist and prevent many illnesses. After many stressful working hours, exhausting, you can let yourself go with the lively, transforming constructions of a Rubai, a Sonnet, a Haiku, a Sung Dynasty styled poem, a 6/8, a free verse, a post-modernism... all your tensions and stresses will be shooed away quickly.

According to researches and investigations from America, someone who practices poetry can eliminate up to 70% of illnesses such as: insomnia, obesity, arthritis, depression, migraines and even diabetes. As your body is allowed to move rhythmically to the constructions and flows of words... your blood can circulate, your nervous system can unwind.

Once you've become an expert poet, you will have gained much experiences to be someone with the skills to socialize, make long-term plans and be especially confident. These benefits will help you greatly in life, work and play.
Poetry and Romance

Writing poetry with all your passion is definitely an activity to help you increase your human potential for being sensitive and romantic. As you succeed in feeling a poem, chasing after its inner movements, you become more sensitive. As with nearly everyone, we all want to become more attractive to a lover or a spouse. Nothing else will give you so many opportunities to trigger emotions, increase your attractiveness to a stranger of the opposite sex without saying a word, or do anything but spend a few minutes reading a poem together.

Poetry and Social Organization

Of course, unfortunately, writing poetry is also one of the causes of regrettable misunderstandings that can destroy your social contentment, and subvert society. The main cause is that poetry is still an oddity to many people, and on top of that there is a lack of positive knowledge of this mode of social communication among those in leadership positions all over the world.

In Vietnam, writing poetry is also spreading widely, relatively speaking. You can catch people writing poetry in many places, in the offices of the national assembly, parks, next to a lake and in locales where people gather to eat and use prostitutes. From early morning until dusk, late night and beyond. From preschool, youth, middle-age to even old age, everyone enjoys practicing poetry. A destination for those who want to participate, exchange, explore and research news about poetry in Vietnam: the various types of literature and art journals.

Poetry and Advice

Let's all practice poetry not only out of enjoyment but also because of the many advantages and attitudes that poetry can bring.
Gert Jonke

"Catalogue d'oiseaux"

Translated from the German by Vincent Kling

Few experimental artists can seriously hope to become household names, and few writers have followed experimental initiatives more thoroughly than Gert Jonke (born in 1946 in Klagenfurt, Austria). He seems to compose every work in language crafted to the structures demanded by the particular artistic situation. Making no concession to accessibility, Jonke remains relatively unknown, even after winning major prizes and awards, though his admirers judge him one of the great virtuos of the German language. They're also right to judge him one of the most complex, not surprising for one who began writing after his liberating discovery at age fifteen of Georg Trakl and of Giuseppe Ungaretti and the Italian Hermeticists.

Like many authors who emerged in Austria after 1945—Thomas Bernhard, Ernst Jandl, Elfriede Jelinek, Hans Lebert, Gerhard Rühm, to name a handful—Jonke is a trained musician with more than passing command. His mother was a pianist who, at her five-year-old's insistence, used to play him Ravel's Jeux d'eau every night; he reports that he would refuse to go to bed until she did. He had considerable conservatory training in piano himself and added university course work in musicology and music history, but he stopped preparing for a concert career upon “taking up residence in language and living in rooms of narration,” as he puts it.

That does not mean Jonke lost interest in music. If anything, his passion was intensified by transporting worlds of musical sound, of musical structure and form, of composers' lives and music history into his literary art. He's the one writer this translator would have expected to bump into—and did—at every event during performances of Anton Webern's complete works over a long weekend in Vienna in June, 2004. After all, one of Jonke's most adroit and profound narratives, the novella Geblendeter Augenblick (Blinding Moment), takes as its point of departure the bizarre shooting death of Webern and refracts the event through motivic fragmentation of the story line with strategic repetition, imitating Webern's buildup of structure through small cells of canonic motifs. Just as Webern orchestrated J. S. Bach's "Ricercare" from the Musical Offering to draw emphasis away from linear structure and toward separate pointillist tone colors, so Jonke moves his novella away from linear chronology toward isolating individual points along a set of coordinates, the x axis Webern's life up to the moment of the shooting and the y axis the killer's life from the shooting to his death ten years later. (Blinding Moment will appear in a book of four works by Jonke about musicians, forthcoming from Ariadne Press, which will also contain "Catalogue d'oiseaux"; The Head of George Frederick Handel, an interior monologue taking place during the composer's last hours; and the play Gentle Rage, or The Ear Machinist, in which Beethoven, in the intervals of composing his great Hammerklavier sonata, Op. 106, obsessively explores devices and gadgets to regain his hearing and has one of his famous explosive quarrels.)

One sign of Jonke's versatility is his adapting Blinding Moment and The Head of George Frederick Handel from scripts he had earlier written and directed for German television. Composing in every form, Jonke repeatedly turns to music and musicians as analogues for the process of shaping form from sound, of governing chaos through artistic structure. A recent play is called The Sunken Cathedral, after a legend around which Debussy built one of his piano preludes. One of his novels bears the title The Distant Chord, taken from an opera by Schreker; and another is called The School for Velocity, echoing the title of those ubiquitous piano exercises by Czerny. Another play is titled Opus III, whimsically alluding to the number of Beethoven's last piano sonata but referring here to a conservatory with a catastrophically dysfunctional administration in which one hundred eleven pianos, delivered as a gift, are decaying in a forgotten attic.

As the instance of Opus III shows, the zaniness of threatened anarchy or misrule is always pulling against the stringent order of musical organization in Jonke's work. So too in "Catalogue d'oiseaux," first published in 2002 in kolik, a Viennese journal of experimental writing, as an explicit homage to Olivier Messiaen and his three-hour piano work of the same title from 1938. The title in turn recalls the Homeric device of placing extensive catalogues at intervals in epic poems. And if the term "catalogue" suggests that only one of the humbler epic devices, a simple itemization by category, is being requisitioned, the range and scope Messiaen's and Jonke's works reveal them as full epics, containing whole physical and spiritual...
worlds in their closed systems. This attempt to evoke universality by cataloguing is what helps that device further an epic, in fact. After Homer has listed all the ships waiting in the harbor, there is probably nothing more to learn about seafaring, and it is seafaring that largely sustained his culture and that functions as a metaphor for any activity in it, on land or on water. Every aspect from taxonomy to mythology appears. Likewise, each of the thirteen parts of the Messiaen work exhaustively chronicles the calls, the habitat, and the ecosystem of a bird species, evoking a complete world over the entire work. Each part also focuses on a different region or province of France, so the purposely all-encompassing geography typical of the epic is in evidence as well.

Nothing about the imitative music seems at first to transcend physical depiction in Messiaen's elegant collection of bird pieces, grounded in the French tone-painting tradition of eighteenth-century keyboard works like those of Rameau and Couperin, but the odd, iconoclastic emphasis on the religious and mythic in Jonke's tribute owes its presence to Messiaen's ecstatic, visionary belief in bird songs as a manifestation of God's immanence. An ornithologist with scientific publications based on extensive field work, Messiaen was also a joyously mystical Catholic who consciously connected bird song with scientific publications based on extensive field work, Messiaen was also a joyously mystical Catholic who consciously connected bird song with Saint Francis of Assisi long before he composed his opera *Saint François d'Assise*, first performed in 1983, the sixth scene of which enacts Saint Francis's sermon to the birds.

The first part of Jonke's work is accordingly not just a listing of bird types, but it is also an invocation, a summoning by the nightingale of all the other birds. (The title of that part, “Song of the Nightingale,” is the same as that of an early work by Stravinsky, allowing Jonke to sneak in a subsidiary tribute.) The nightingale never says why he (she?) is summoning the other birds, but Jonke's oblique, persistent anthropomorphism (“wide-beak bespectacled shrikes and blue-headed organisms...church finches, great broad-billed cardinals”) anticipates the addresses to the human race delivered by a chorus of birds in parts two and four. Jonke is employing the reverse process of Messiaen in *Saint François d'Assise* by giving human attributes to birds, while the composer associates his main characters motivically with various bird calls. The other four parts reveal that the birds were in fact summoned, in the best iconographic presentations of Saint Francis by Giotto and others, to hear a sermon. Those four parts are a comprehensive “epic” of salvation history from the beginning of all things (“Humans! / We were here long before you”) through the eschatological ending, the restoration of the golden age through universal harmony.

Part one is a kind of prologue, a summoning by type and kind, a long litany speeded to a canter by its prevalent dactylic meter. The middle three parts portray respectively creation, redemption, and humanity's striving toward wholeness in comic modes that only Jonke could think up, giving in succession daft, madcap twists to Greek myth via religion, Christian salvation narrative, and Greek myth via philosophy.

Each of these middle parts occupies a mythic dimension, then, addressing modes of piety and faith with a humor that only reinforces Jonke's esteem for the mystical aspect of Messiaen's art. In the second part, “Chorus of Birds to the Human Race,” the birds assert their claim to become once more the rightful gods of humanity, because they emerged at the beginning of time, after Zeus killed Kronos, to mark time from its very inception by the beating of their wings. The third and central part, “The Sap-Sucking Woodpecker's Litany of Sacrifice,” is a loving parody of Messiaen's central belief, that of the salvific action of Jesus Christ. It is correspondingly sly, mildly coarse, reducing through proliferation the sacrifice of the Cross to an absurdity that swamps all seriousness while showing respect by inviting the kind of radical reconsideration that parody compels. Parody is not irreverence here; on the contrary, it is the necessary balance to reverence, just as doubt is the necessary accompaniment to faith. The fourth part, “Chorus of Birds to the Human Race II,” reworks the speculations (themselves calculatedly droll) from Plato's *Symposium* about how the two sexes were originally united, the birds again speaking, as in the second part, as if they had been eyewitnesses and are thus entitled to authority.

The fifth part, the eschatology, restores peace, nullifies the power of objects to do harm, and ushers in the new millenium where death can have no dominion. It depicts a state of transcendent glory that goes past the need for Saint Francis's stigmata, since all suffering is annihilated in a vision of the last things. This was a state of redemption at the end of time (and Messiaen has an early chamber work called “Quartet for the End of Time”) that Messiaen took for granted and that Jonke could only parody—but again with complete ability to identify and admire—through exuberance and energy of style with Messiaen's unmistakable elan.

—Vincent Kling
Catalogue d'oiseaux
(Für s. g. Herrn Olivier Messiaen)

1. Lied der Nachtigall

Wo bleibt ihr denn, ihr Putzigen, ihr fleißigen Kirschhackeramseln und anderen Fruchtverwerter und fleißigen Besucher der Obstspaliergeflechte, so kommt doch herbei, ihr Raben, die ihr hintern pflügenden Landmann die Würmer ihm aus seiner Furche pickt, wo bleibt ihr denn, ihr Saatgutvertilger, die ihr unterm Deckmantel der Abenddämmerung die Krüpfe euch vollstopfende Gerstendiebsbande, ihr ungeliebten Olivenhainbesichtiger, ihr in den Weingärten kundig die Jahrgänge Vorausverkoster, wo seid ihr Zwitscherer, Schreier, Heuler, Rufer, und auch die, die aus den Wäldern die Daten der nächsten Sterbenden ankündigen so genau und sorgfältig, daß während nächtlicher Schneetreiben auch schon kleine vorgedruckte Patenzettelchen aus dem Himmel flattern, wo bleibt ihr fleißigen Moskitovernichter, die ihr helft, den Rauhreif herbstlichen Malariafrostes in den unbetretbaren Sumpfen gefangenzuhalten, ihr Eisvögel mit dem sirrenden Singen durch die Luft pfeifend sich bohrender Eiszapfengesänge aus den Hagelwettern der arktischen Nordlichtgletscherfolklore, ihr Haselhühner, Goldfasane, aber auch ihr Greifer, ihr Kondorsegler, Fischadler, Weißkopfgeier, Hühnerhabichte, Mäusebussarde, Turmfalken, wann hör ich endlich euer plärrendes Gekeife, Drosseln, wo bleibt euer Spott, und einmal endlich deinen Ruf hören, weiße Schneeuale, du seltene, deinen Ruf habe ich nur von den Schneefüchsen gehört, die dich fürchten, und sie haben mir mit erschauerdem Lachgebell

Catalogue d'oiseaux
(For Olivier Messiaen)

1. Song of the Nightingale

Where can you be now, you winsome ones, hard-working chopcherry blackbirds and other consumers of produce, and hard-working haunters of fruit-entwined trellises; take wing now, you ravens, who follow the farmer while plowing to pick the worms out of his furrow, and where are you keeping yourselves, you gobbles of seed-grain, who, cloaked in the mantle of evening at twilight, gorge till your craws bulge, you gaggle of barley thieves, unbeloved watchers of olive groves, gibbers before others get there, gourmets of the vineyards and vintages; and where are you, chirpers and screechers, wailers and callers, and those who foretell, from out of the forests, the death dates of those who will pass next with such great precision and focus that during a snow storm by night there also come fluttering down from the sky tiny announcements already printed; where are you, hard-working mosquito destroyers, who help keep the hoar frost of autumn's malarial freezes confined to impassible swamplands; kingfishers, ice birds, who sing with a squawking sound, whistling high in the air your piercing icicle songs out of hailstorms from far northern folklore about faintly lit Arctic glaciers; you hazel grouse, gold pheasants — also you raptors, great sailing condors, bald eagles, ospreys and chicken hawks, buzzards and kestrels; when will I finally hear once more your chattery scolding, you thrushes — has mockery left you? — and finally hear your own call, brown-spotted snow owl, rare bird indeed, whose call I've heard only from snow-foxes, living in fear of you?
dein Rufen parodiert!
So nähert euch endlich doch, ihr Heuler, Gurgler, Zirper,
Girrer, Fipser, Tschielper,
o ihr Amaranten,
ihr Borstenschwänzler, Saftleckerspechte,
Breitmaulbrillenwürger, Blauscheitelorganisten,
Brutschmarotzstürzler, Dickichtschlüpfer, Erdhöhentöpfer,
Gelbperzeltlütenpicker, Gimpelhähner, Klippenkleiber,
Lappenschräppper, Luftröhrensprechkopfspecher, Moluskenschmätzer,
Pfefferfreßtrumpetenvürger,
Rotstichelstörper, Schluchtenrötelstutzhäuschenpürger,
ihr Schneballwürger,
Graubrückensprächter, Spitzschopftrüggelnfritter,
jaja, ihr Große Schnabelkardinale und Dompfaffdotterspecht,
ihr Rhinozeroshornputzer, Maiskolbenfagottstutterer,
reed-cryers, shawm-throated squealers and bladder of bagpipe wing-flutterers,
Warum läßt ihr euch heute so gnädig erst bitten?

2. Chor der Vögel an die Menschen

Menschen!
Wir waren lang schon vor euch da! Hört, ihr Menschen, hört auf
unsern Flügelschlag!
Wir sind ab heut wieder eure rechtmäßigen Götter, wie auch schon
früher einmal.
Aber das ist schon so lange her, daß ihr euch kaum mehr daran
erinnern werdet.
Unser Urvater, der Gott Eros, entschlüpfe einem schwarzen Windei,
das die einzig erste Urnacht aus Sehnsucht nach einer zweiten Nacht
gleget hatte, und zeuge mit der Göttin der Unendlichkeit
uns, die ersten Vögel: Feuervögel,
noch ehe die Zeit begonnen hatte, die Kronos, der Gott der Zeit, noch
in den riesigen Behältern seiner Lungen gefangenhielt, während er
ständig seine Frau kopulierte, die ihm ständig Säuglinge gebar, die Vater
Kronos wie Spanferkel briet und fraß.
Diese als Kinder eines Unsterblichen ihrerseits unsterblichen Kinder
wurden deshalb, nachdem sie gefressen und verdaut worden waren,
vom Vater Kronos immer wieder neuerlich in den Bauch seiner
Frau zurück hineinkopulierte, um immer wieder neuerlich vergeblich

2. Chorus of Birds to the Human Race

Humans!
We were here long before you!
Take heed, oh humans, heed the beating of our wings!
As of today we are once more your rightful gods, just as in times gone by.
But that was so long ago you will have hardly any remembrance of it.
Our ancestor, the god Eros, escaped from a barren black egg laid by
the first primeval night — there was to be but one — out of longing for a
second night, and with the goddess of infinity he begot
us, the first birds, firebirds,
even before there had come into existence time, which Kronos, the god
of time, held captured in the huge vessels of his lungs as he copulated
unceasingly with his wife, who unceasingly bore him infants that their
father Kronos would roast and eat like sucking pigs.
These children, as children of an immortal themselves immortal, would
then, after they had been eaten and digested, be recopulated anew by
Father Kronos, over and over, back into the belly of his wife, but for
ought, only to be born anew, over and over, but for nought, until one
of them, Zeus, upon being born anew yet once again after an unending
series of birthhoods, all for nought, secretly hid himself away and, with
geboren zu werden, bis einer von ihnen, Zeus, nach seiner schon unendlichmal vergeblichen Geborenheit schon wieder neuerlich Geburt sich heimlich versteckte und mit Hilfe der Mutter rasend schnell heranwuchs, bis er groß genug war, um den Vater hinterrücks zu erschlagen. Da aber Kronos als Unsterblicher gar nicht richtig erschlagen werden konnte, haucht er seit damals mit seinem immer noch andauernden und uns bis zum Beginn der Ewigkeit weiterhin weit überdauernden vermeintlichen Sterben nicht sein Leben aus, sondern unsere Zeit, die ihm aus den seit damals leckgeschlagenen Lungenbehältern entweicht.

Seit damals schlagen wir Vögel mit unseren Flügelschlägen jede Sekunde der ablaufenden Zeit und zeigen euch Menschen mit den Zeichen, Zeichnungen und in der Schrift unseres Fluges am Himmel die Jahreszeiten an.

Wir sind ab heute wieder eure rechtmäßigen Götter!
Offnet alle euch erreichbaren Käfige und laßt die Vögel daraus frei!
Nur der Gesang der Nachtigall versöhnt uns kurz nur.
Menschen!
Hört endlich zu!
Hört da herauf!
Ja, und hört endlich auf.
Dem Nachthimmel entkommen
Echogesänge
im Schmelzwasser glitzernd herabstäubenden Nordlichts:
Sternschnupperstaub eure letzte Hoffnung.

3. Opferlitanei des Saftlekerspechtes

Höre uns du, Gottvater des Erlösers unserer Welt, die dir unterlaufen ist, die niemand wollte, auch du nicht, Gottvater, aber hast uns geschickt immer wieder ein Wesen in diese ungewollte Welt, deinen Sohn, unseren Erlöser, den Heiland, der immer wieder kommen wird und muß und jedes Wesen, das in dieser Welt existiert hat und existiert, erleben muß, o Sohn Gottes, der du errettet hast die Amöben, weil Gottvater dich in die Welt geschickt hat als Amöbe, um die Amöben zu retten, alle Amöben dieser Welt und alle Schuld der Amöben auf sich zu nehmen als Amöbe und dafür von allen Amöben, den anderen verstoßen und geschändet und erniedrigt wurdest und schuld zu sein, daß der Frosch keine Haare hat selbst von den Amöben getötet, aber

3. The Sap-Sucking Woodpecker’s Litany of Sacrifice

Oh heed and hear us, God the Father of the Savior of our world, which happened to you by accident, which no one wanted, no, not you either, God our Father, though again and again you sent a being into this unwanted world for us, your Son, our Savior, the Redeemer, who will come again and again, who will have to come to redeem every being that exists and has existed in this world, oh Son of God, you who have redeemed the amoebas, because God the Father sent you into the world as an amoeba to save the amoebas, all the amoebas of this world, to take all the guilt of the amoebas onto himself, as an amoeba, doing so for all amoebas, despised and rejected and degraded as you were by all the other amoebas while bearing the sins of all and sundry, of any and every single amoeba that helped kill the frog, a creature with no
nach seiner Zellteilung wieder als Amöbe und Amöbenkind jener Eltern, die nicht mehr wissen, ob sie die Kinder sind, oder die Kinder ihrer Eltern, weil eine Amöbe ja nicht weiß, ob sie ein Amöbenkind oder ein Amöbenvater oder -mutter ist, denn wie soll eine sich teilende Zelle wissen, wer das Kind, wer die Eltern und aus den Gewässern aus dem Himmel zurückgekehrt zu dem Allmächtigen und alle Amöben für immer erlöst hat in dieser Welt aber noch lange nicht aus dieser Welt, weil alle Amöben seitdem gerettet sind und erlöst, weil sie wissen, daß der Amöbengott sie zu sich rufen wird in das Amöbenparadies, wo jeder zur Rechten des Amöbenerlösers sitzen wird und auch zur Linken wahr- scheinlich und dann trat das Leben aus dem Wasser auf das Land und in die Luft und viele Insekten übersäten das Festland auch Wanzen und auch Schaben und hast du auch die Wanzen erlöst und die Schaben, und hast die Ameisen erlöst, indem du Ameise geworden bist und bereit gewesen bist, die Schuld und Schulden aller Ameisen auf dich zu nehmen, indem du sie von ihren Sünden errettet hast, die du auf die Spindel deiner schlanken Ameisenentaille aufspultest, und die dir dafür auseinandererbissen worden ist von gemeinen Ameisenarbeiterinnen, die dich dann aufgefressen haben, dich, den Ameisenenerloß, Erretter aller Ameisen, aber du auferstanden bist als geflügelte Ameise und geflogen bist zu Gott, dem Herrn, zu Gottvater, dem Herrn aller kosmischen Ameisenkönige, die du daraufhin alle befruchtetest und sie weiter pausenlos bis in alle Ewigkeit kopulierst, auf daß sie Eier legten, damit die kosmischen Monsterameisen bald auch in unsere Welt kommen können und dürfen, um ihr bei ihrer eigenen Beendigung behilflich zu werden, Gott Vater denk auch immer wieder an den einen oder anderen Vogel von uns, du hast bis jetzt den Zaunkönig erlöst und du hast die Lerche erlöst und hast die Nachtigall erlöst auch die Blaumeise, den Buntspecht, den Schwarzspecht, aber nicht den Saftleckerspecht z. B., der noch immer auf seine Erlösung wartet durch dich, Sohn Gottes, daß du endlich auch einmal als Saftleckerspecht auf die Welt kämest und alle Saftleckerspechte erlöset und auch einmal bereit sein wirst, ein Saftleckerspecht zu sein und die Schuld aller Saftleckerspechte auf dich zu nehmen oder lasse dich herab um auch endlich einen dammen dieser Zeisigvögel zu erlösen, von denen du noch als kein einziger in die Welt gekommen bist, also sei doch endlich auch einmal bereit, ein dummer Zeisig zu sein und die Schuld aller Zeisige auf dich zu nehmen. Vergiß auch nicht auf Sperbergrasmücke, Sandgrasmücke, das sind keine Insekten, sondern Vögel. Vergiß auch nicht auf Maskenwürger, Saatkrahe, Buchfink, Zitronengirltz, hair, and that after its cell division is again an amoea plus an amoea child of parents who can no longer tell if they are the parents or the children of their parents, since an amoea doesn't know after all, if it's a papa amoea, a mama amoea, or a baby amoea, because how can a dividing cell tell the child and the parents apart, and out of the waters from the sky have returned to the Almighty who has forever and ever redeemed all the amoebas in this world, though not by any means from this world, for all amoebas have been saved ever since, redeemed because they know that the amoea God will call them to himself, into amoea paradise, where each one will sit at the right hand of the amoea Savior and probably at the left hand as well, and then life crept out of the waters onto dry land and into the air, and swarms of insects covered the land, along with all kinds of bugs and roaches, and you redeemed all the bugs and the roaches, too, and you redeemed the ants by becoming an ant and being willing to take on yourself all the iniquities and transgressions of all ants and in that way saving them from their sins, which you wound onto the spindle of your slender ant's waist, and for that you were bitten into little pieces by common female worker ants, who then ate you, you the savior of the ants, redeemer of all ants, but you rose from the dead as a winged ant and flew up to God, the Lord, to God the Father, the Lord of all the ant-kings of the cosmos, all of whom you thereupon fertilized, as you continue now unto all eternity to copulate them so that they might lay eggs, thereby enabling and permitting those cosmic monster ants to enter our world soon for the purpose of being helpful to it when its own end has come, and also, God, Father, think always and ever of this or that bird among us, for as of now you have redeemed the wren, and you have redeemed the lark and redeemed the nightingale and the blue titmouse, the spotted woodpecker and the black woodpecker but not, for example, the sap-sucking woodpecker, which still awaits redemption through you, oh Son of God, that you might finally come into the world as a sap-sucking woodpecker and redeem all sap-sucking woodpeckers, might one day finally be willing to be a sap-sucking woodpecker and take the guilt of all sap-sucking woodpeckers onto yourself, or might deign finally to redeem one of those drab, stupid little sparrows, as one of which you have never yet come into the world, so be willing, finally, to become a stupid sparrow and take the guilt of all sparrows onto yourself, also not forgetting the sparrow-hawk warbling gnat and the sand-dwelling warbling gnat, which are birds, not insects, and not forgetting, either, the masked shrike, the harvest raven, the chaffinch, the lemon-yellow canary, the red crossbill, nor the blind crossbill, and you should not by any means forget the almost forgotten carmine-red bullfinch, though we do not wonder at your
Fichtenkreuzschnabel, aber auch Blindenkreuzschnabel und
den beinahe vergessenen Karningimpel darfst du auf keinen Fall
vergessen, daß du den wunderbaren Ortolan noch nicht erlöst hast
wunderst uns nicht, sondern ist uns ein Trost, dafür, daß du in deiner
großen Gerechtigkeit das allererbamlichste und das allerschönste
und erhabenste in dieser Welt und würdigste völlig gleichberechtigt
behandelst, Gottvater und Gottsohn, siehst du, dort ist diese
traurige Schattenlochspaltenfälle, wo ein nie je stattgefunden
habendes Gewitter steckengeblieben und verschimmelt ist zu den
Verwitterungsresten seines eigenen Rohrkrepierers, das du, Herr,
acht daran gehindert hast, sich zu entladen, sondern immer nur die
Sünden dieser Welt! Du hast auch schon ein paar Pflanzen erlöst.
Du hast die Rose erlöst, die Nelke erlöst, den Petersil erlöst, die
Tamariske und den Pejotkaktus wie du auch einzelne Pilze schon
erlöst hast, den Fliegenpilz zum Beispiel, aber auch die rauschigen
Pilze der Mexikaner, die auch am Semmering wachsen und in den
Untergrundfinsternisgesellschaften der europäischen Hauptstädte
gekostet werden oder auch nur bei uns in Neunkirchen oder
Wiener Neustadt, ich weiß nicht weiter, so hast du auch schon die
Brennessel erlöst und den Klettenstrauch und wirst du auch die
Dinge weiter erlösen und oft noch als Ding in die Welt kommen
wollen als ein ganz bestimmtes. Du wirst die Kleiderschränke
erlösen, die ja auch in den Himmel kommen wollen und wirst
als Kleiderschrank in die Welt kommen und die Sünden aller
Kleiderschränke auf dich nehmen oder auch meinenwegen als
Küchenkredenz oder meinenwegen auch als Rucksack wirst du
den Sohn in die Welt schicken um alle Rucksäcke zu erlösen
und von ihren Sünden befreien und auch die Sünden der Sandalen
und bald solltest du bitte die Zuckerdosen erretten und zu einer
Zuckerdose werden, du Sohn Gottes, aber letztlich bist du als
Heuschneuhen in die Welt gekommen und hast als Heuschunpfen
alle Sünden aller Heuschunpfen auf dich genommen und bist als
Heuschunpfen von den anderen Heuschunpfen verraten worden,
überantwortet einem dahergelaufenen Hals-Nasen-Ohren-
Arzt, der dich bis heute nicht auferstehen ließ, sondern dich
bis jetzt nach wie vor in einer Nährlösungsfängniszelle seines
wissenschaftlichen Laboratoriumsinstituts gefangenhält, weil du bis
jetzt nach wie vor ein Heuschunpfen geblieben und noch immer
nicht auferstanden bist, weil du noch keinen Weg gefunden hast,
dich aus dem Laboratorium und aus der abartigen Nährlösung jenes
wissenschaftlichen Instituts hinauszuretten, zu fliehen, um endlich
wieder richtig auferstehen zu können, aber bald, wenn wir dir dort
heraushelfen, lieber Retter der Welt, und wir wissen ganz genau, wo
not yet having redeemed the wonderful ortolan, taking it instead as
a comfort that in your great justice you mete out equally fair
treatment to the most pathetic and the most beautiful and the most
sublime in this world as well as the most worthy, God the Father
and God the Son, for here, you see, is that shadowy fold-crevasse-
ditch-gap in which a gathering storm, never yet actually having
occurred, has grown stagnant and moldered away into the few
weather-beaten remains of its own pitiful washout, one that you,
Lord, did not prevent from discharging itself, but only, at any given
time, the sins of this world instead! You have redeemed a few plants
as well. You have redeemed the rose, redeemed the carnation,
redeemed parsley, the tamarisk, and the peyote cactus, just as you
also redeemed several mushrooms, the Venus fly trap, for example,
as well as the intoxicating mushrooms of the Mexicans, which also
grow in the Semmering mountain range and are given a taste in the
underground darkness of some social circles in the capital cities of
Europe or maybe just by people closer to home, say in places like
Wiener Neustadt or Neunkirchen, where all I don't know, and in
the same way you have already redeemed stinging nettles and
climbing shrubs, and you will go on redeeming things and will
continue to desire coming into the world as a thing, though of some
very definite kind. You will redeem wardrobes, which also want to
go to heaven, after all, so you will come into the world as a wardrobe
and take all the sins of the wardrobes onto yourself, or, for instance,
as a kitchen cupboard, or you will send your Son into the world as a
backpack, for instance, to redeem all backpacks and free them from
their sins, and the sins of sandals, too, and could you also please
redeem the sugar bowls, too, and soon become a sugar bowl, oh Son
of God, though the last time you came into the world it was as a
case of hay fever and, as hay fever, took all the sins of all cases of
hay fever onto yourself and, as one case of hay fever, were betrayed
by all the other cases of hay fever, delivered into the hands of some
ear, nose, and throat specialist, a doctor who just happened along
but who to this very day has not let you rise from the dead, still
holding you captive in the prison cell of a nutrient solution in his
scientific laboratory instead, for you have remained up to the
present time a case of hay fever and have still not risen from the
dead, because you have not yet found a way to escape from the
scientific laboratory and the abnormal nutrient solution in the
research institute in which you are being held, not found a way to
flee so that you might finally rise from the dead, all proper and
correct, once again, but soon, when we come to help get you out of
there, dear Savior of the world, after we find out exactly where you
are, of course, you must reward me by coming into the world next
time as a crab louse, to take all the sins of the crab lice onto
du bist, mußt du für mich zur Belohnung dafür das nächste Mal als Filzlause in die Welt kommen, und alle Sünden der Filzläuse auf dich nehmen und dich dafür und das mußt du mir versprechen, jener Geliebten, die mich verschmäht hat und weshalb ich für immer unglücklich sein werde, dich in der Tiefe einer Haarwurzel ihres Schnurrbarter rund um ihren zweiten Mund, der sich zwischen ihren Beinen befindet, einnistet, um nicht nur alle Filzläuse zu retten in dieser Welt, sondern auch meine Geliebte, deren zweiten Mund du zu mir führen sollst, du Retter der Welt, damit ich endlich glücklich werde. Dann werden wir dir dabei helfen, diese Welt, die dir unterlaufen ist und in der wir für dich alles ausbaden und die niemand wollte, dir bei ihrer Liquidierung zu helfen, so gut ein jedes Wesen kann, was immer möglich ist, beizutragen, bis du jedes Atom und Quark und Neutrino und alle Moleküle, jedes einzelne höchstpersönlich, das du auch noch erlösen mußt, ja erlösen lassen durch den Sohn. Aber da du noch immer der Heuschnupfen bist, dort drüben in deiner Nährösung, werden wir dir vielleicht möglichst bald den Heiligen Geist in Gestalt einer Taube zu Hilfe schicken, aber die muß erst geboren werden, und wann die in welchem verdreckten Dachboden geboren wird, weiß natürlich keiner. Denn bevor nicht auch die letzte der allerkleinsten Kleinigkeiten aller bislang noch unbekannt versteckt und immer noch verborgensten der unsichtbar allerkleinsten aller bislang unbekannten kleinlichsten aller Kleinigkeiten aufgedeckt, gefunden und auch erlost sein wird, wird auch dem gesamten restlichen Weltall, diesem ganzen idiotischen, sich erübrigenden Kosmos letztendlich hier öd und blöd herumzusitzen übriggeblieben sein, ohne je weiter erlöst werden zu dürfen.

4. Chor der Vögel an die Menschen II

Menschen! Ihr seid nur halbe Wesen! Von euch selber abgeschnittene Halbwesen. Eure Urahnen waren noch vierhändige vierbeinige Menschenkugeln, in deren Zwillingsswirterkörpem ein Mann und eine Frau einander verkugelt umschlangen und derart verzwickt untrennbar ineinandersteckten, daß sie einander unaufhörlich kopulierten, während sie über den holprigen Erdboden weiter vor sich hinverrollten, um nur manchmal kurz innehaltend ein paar kleine Säuglingskugeln hinter sich fallen zu lassen, die sich selbst überlassen über den Erdboden verrollten und in den Ebenen sich gleichmäßig zerstreuten ...

4. Chorus of Birds to the Human Race II

Humans! You are only half beings! Half beings cut off from your own selves. Your ancestors were four-handed, four-legged human spheres in whose twinned, hermaphroditic bodies a man and a woman were entwined in a ball and inseparably interlocked in such a complex fusion that they were unceasingly copulating each other, all the while rolling all over the bumpy ground, only stopping briefly sometimes to drop a few small baby spheres, which, left to themselves, would start rolling over the ground and scatter themselves evenly in the flatlands ...
Und euch gut so vermehrend hattet ihr euch eines Tages ausgerechnet am Fuß des Olymps versammelt, um dort mit dem Lärm eurer inzwischen vielfach vertausendfachten unerträglichen Kopuliergeschreibelästigung den unsterblichen Schlaf der damals höchsten Göttlichkeit zu stören. Bis es nicht mehr auszuhalten war, sodaß man euch von dort oben eine Mannschaft göttlich medizinischer Assistenten herabschickte, um euch Stück für Stück voneinander trennend auseinanderzuschneiden und eure von euch abgeschnittenen anderen Hälften versammelt in alle Winde verblasend in alle Himmelsrichtungen zu zerstreuen, um die damals euch noch unerreißbar unbekannten anderen Erdteile, die damals noch menschenleer gewesen waren, mit eurem durch euch abgetrennten anderen Hälften zu besiedeln. Seit damals sucht ihr Menschen bis heute, ohne es selbst zu bemerken, bis heute noch immer danach, was euch fehlt, ohne daß ihr euch je wieder finden werdet, denn selbst die direkten Nachkommen jener auf den inzwischen von euch längst entdeckten anderen Kontinenten wohnhaft lebenden Kindskinder der euch unzählbaren Grades verururtenkelt noch immer fehlenden anderen Hälften sind euch derart enträumt, daß ihr sie erbitterter bekämpft und vernichtet als eure erbittertsten Feinde!

5. Schlusschor

Aber jetzt wird alles gut.
Kein Nagel wird mehr fürchten, daß ihm der Hammer den Kopf einschlägt.
Die Köpfe der Nägel werden nicht rosten,
die Dornen der Rosen werden uns streicheln.
Keine Bosheit wird mehr angerichtet: so wird freundliches Lachen
die Zukunft der Feindschaft schüren.
Da man in Kriegen einander nicht mehr vernichtet,
wird man mit den Zuwendungen der Wohltätigkeit einander zerstören.
Künftige Verleumder werden uns nur mehr mit den Ehrerbietungen ihrer verschimmelten Hochachtung beleidigen können, und selbst die Gerüchte der miesesten Intriganten werden in den Ohren ihrer

And so, strongly increasing and multiplying, you were one day all assembled at the foot of Mount Olympus, of all places, where the unbearable noise of your shrieks during copulation, by that point multiplied many times by many thousands of times, disturbed the immortal sleep of what was then the highest deity. Until there was no standing it any longer, so that they sent down to you from on high a team of divine assistant medical practitioners to perform surgically an operation that would one by one separate your parts into their two different constituents and then, having gathered together all of the mutually cut off other halves, to scatter them in every direction under heaven by blowing them to the four winds, another purpose being to have settled by your mutually cut off other halves those continents unknown to and unreachable by you at that time and accordingly still empty of human beings. Ever since then, and lasting right up to the present day, you humans, without even noticing it yourselves, have been searching for what is missing in you, with no chance of your ever finding it again, for even the direct descendants of those living generations of the other halves you are still missing, having meantime come to dwell on those other continents, which you have long since discovered, and, though being related to you by uncountably many removes of great-great and great-great-great kinship, have become so estranged from you that you fight them with great bitterness and destroy them as your most bitter enemies.

5. Closing Chorus

But now all shall be well.
No nail shall be afraid that a hammer might smash in its head.
The heads of nails will not rust,
the thorns of roses will caress us.
Malice will no longer be dealt: friendly laughter will thus be what spurs on the future of enmity.
Since people will no longer exterminate one another in wars they will destroy one another through bestowals of charity.
Future slandermongers will be able to injure us only through the deferential posturings of a respect moldered by dry rot, and rumors put about by even the most lowdown schemers will cause to sprout in the ears of their hearers nothing more than a peace tinged with longing for concord.
Horcher lediglich den Sehnsuchtsfrieden der Eintracht zum Keimen bringen. Die schlagenden Ruten der Brennesseln werden die Befreiung aus den Gefängnissen der Gicht erzeugen, und die verdornten Früchte des Klettenbusches werden die Rostwunden der steckengebliebenen Reißverschlüsse heilen helfen. Nur der mehrfach beglaubigte Nachweis der tatsächlich richtigen Fakten wird den für die Zukunft nötigen Aufbau der neuen Irrtümer ermöglichen. Denn Bäume haben sich entwurzelt, sind luftaufwärts geschossen wie die Raketen, sind aus dem höchsten Himmel zurück lichtabwärts gezielt über die Sägewerke hergefallen, und haben sich gezielt in deren Kreissägen hineingestürzt, um sich eigenhandig auseinanderzersägend zu jenen Tischen und Bänken zusammenzuzimmern, an denen wir sitzen: Die Köpfe der Nägel können nicht rosten, und die Dornen der Rosen werden uns streicheln.
These four poems, together with 43 others, make up &Silk &Love &Flame: Selected Poems, the first translations of Birhan Keskin’s poems into English.

– George Messo

Birhan Keskin
Selected Poems

* Translated from the Turkish by George Messo *

These translations are from Birhan Keskin’s fourth book of poems, Yirmi Lak Tablet, first published in 1999 by Yapı Kredi Yayınları, Istanbul.

Birhan Keskin was born in 1963, in the Kırklareli district of Thrace, close to the Bulgarian border. She moved to Istanbul as a student in the early 80’s and began publishing her first poems shortly thereafter. She graduated from Istanbul University with a degree in Sociology and has worked at various literary publishing houses in Istanbul ever since. From 1995 to 1998 she jointly published and edited the small magazine Göçebə. Keskin published five poetry collections between 1991 and 2002: Deltlirikler (1991), Bakarsın Üzgün Dönürüm (1994), Cinayet Kışt + İki Mektup (1996), Yirmi Lak Tablet + Yolcunun Siyah Baskulu (1999), and Yeryüzü Halleri (2002).

In 2005 the Istanbul publishers Metis brought all of Keskin’s previous collections together under the title Kim Bağışlayacak Beni, in addition to releasing a new book, Ba (2005), which went on to win Turkey’s prestigious Golden Orange Prize in 2006. That year also saw the release of her seventh and most ambitious book to date, the long poem sequence Yol (2006).

Keskin is one of a growing number of women poets in Turkey, along with Lale Müldür, Betül Tanman, and Bejan Matur, who have risen to prominence since the late 1990’s for their bold, often experimental, powerfully imaginative poems. Keskin stakes her own unique claim and in large measure defines what we understand as contemporary poetry in Turkish: visually evocative, and yet semantically elusive; a voice inhabiting space between cognition and remembering, testimony and invention; a city-dweller whose unpredictable urban syntax brings the natural world of her verse into ever sharper and compelling focus.
Enstrümantal

Aksun, içimde bir nehir gibi
dolanan keder
unuttüğüm, unutmaya çalıştım ne varsa
bende durmasın
icimde öyle çok ki, her gidenden
birkırdığım melekler.

Zaman insafsızlık etmese
kederin oyduğun tarafını sana getirsem
kalem beni tutmasa, anlatsam sana
siyah, simsiyah bir engerektir zaman
ve kâş neler eder insana.

Reddettim bütün kesinlikleri, kalbim
bu hayale bir daha inansın diye
siyah... değişmiyor,
siyah, hâlâ, nehir içinde
ve kalbim, anlamıyorum
adalet yok, niye?

Yiktığım, atladığım, sönürdüğüm
bir yangın yerindeyim
icimde sadece, dediğim gibi,
her gidenden biriktirdiğim melekler,
kalemin üstünde bir daha hançer.

Instrumental

Let it flow, like a black river in me
the entangling grief
whatever I forgot, I try to forget
let it not stay in me
so many inside, the angels
I've gathered from each who left.

If only Time were not so cruel
and I could bring to you that part of me scoured out by sorrow
if the pen would not hold me back, if only I could tell
it's black, Time is a coal black snake
and winter, what won't it do to us.

I declined all sureties, so my heart
might once more trust this dream
black... unchanging
the river within still black
and my heart doesn't understand
why there is no justice?

I am at the fire's burnt out core
that I wrecked and trampled and put out,
inside me, just, as I said
the angels I've gathered from those who left,
a dagger in my heart
once more.
Penguen

Penguen
bana sirtını dönme,
biliyorum, sana benziyorum
ve içinde saklı tuttuğun yele.

Penguen
benim de içinde saklı tuttuğun
buzlu kaylar, çılgık hattıraları
ben de senin kadar kaçırmım ve yaralı.

Kim bağışlayacak beni, penguen
çizdim senin beyaz ve narın yerini.

Bir yumur bembeyaz ışık
kör ediyor, bir yumun zehir gece.
Parkta sauncağa binmeyi
beceremedim bugün ben de.
Penguen bana sirtını dönme.

Unutmadım aramızdaki beceriksiz dili.
Dünya yordu bizi. Benim de söleyemediklerim
var. Hic söyleyemeyeceğim onları belki de.
Uzun bir yol geliyoruz seninle, yolu,
geldikçe anlıyorum ki, biz,
bu dünya üzerinde yürüyemiyoruz bile.

Penguen,
kim bağışlayacak beni?
Çizdim senin beyaz ve narın yerini
elinde unuttuğum ince metalle.
Çiçeklerin eksilen suyuna su,
yazın yamna hatrayı ekledik,
çekirge sesleri ve
öğle güneşin altında narin
olgunlaşmasını bekledik.
Bekledik, başka başka odalarda
çektigimiz ağrı dinsin,
bir çocukluk düşü Gibi
ince bir sıziya dönün diye
yaza sedeften bir anlam ekledik
Biliyorsun,
bir başdonmesi gibi sürüyor hayat,
yazların yanında yazlar ekleniyor,
 zaman uzun bir sıcağa dönüyor burada,
ağrıguna duyguun, taşnamazlığa
ve yazlar hatırlaya...
Suğindığımız konuşmalar kesecek mi ağrıyı?
ağacın güzelliğindeki mânâ sömeyececek,
kökerinde süreç mi aşık?
ah benim hayal kardeşim,
bizim bu aşktan alacağımız var,
dinsin ayrı odalarda çektigimiz ağrı,
yaz geçip gitsin ve olgunlaşın nar.

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Pomegranate Dream

Water for the flower’s decreasing water,
we added memory to summer’s side,
beneath locust sounds
and the afternoon sun,
we awaited the pomegranate’s ripening.

We waited, in different rooms
that the pain we felt might cease,
that it might change into the tiniest ache
like a childhood dream,
we added a pearl-like meaning to summer.

You know,
life goes on like dizziness,
placing one summer next to another,
here time turns into a long heat
into the weight of feeling, into its immovability
and summers into memory...

Will the conversations we shelter in relieve the pain?
Will the sense of the tree’s beauty be extinguished,
will love go on in its roots?
My imaginary friend,
this love still owes us:
let the pain we feel in separate rooms cease,
let summer pass and the pomegranate ripen.
Yaprak

Yorgundum...
köklerimdeki uğultuyla ölümü beklemekten...
yaz bitmişti...
bir deprem sesi geliyordu...
yaprağımı savuran ağacın köklerinden.

Ben doğurdum seni...
icimdeki kaynaktan, acı sudan..
ben doğurdum seni, bir hayal için..
ödünç bir bahardan.

Leaf

I was tired...
waiting for death with my wuthering roots
summer over
an earth tremour sounding
from roots of the leaf-shedding tree.

I gave birth to you...
from my inner spring, my bitter flow
I gave birth to you, for a dream
from a season on loan.
Adrien Le Bihan

five excerpts from The Meninotaur, or How I Discovered the Desire of Velázquez as Caught by Picasso: A Caprice

• Translated from the French by Jeff Edmunds in collaboration with the author •

On the title page of the French edition, The Meninotaur is described as a "caprice," a term seldom used nowadays in reference to a literary genre but which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as "a work of irregular and sportive fancy." The term is apt. In his book, Adrien Le Bihan forsakes traditional approaches to writing about art by blending criticism, biography, history, lexicography, and autobiography to reveal the hidden sources of Pablo Picasso's obsession with Diego Velázquez's Las Meninas, a painting widely regarded as a masterpiece of seventeenth-century Western art.

In a text that opens with the author's father on his deathbed and ends with the painted image of Picasso's dachshund Lump, Le Bihan leads the reader on a captivating journey from the palace of Alcázar in Madrid, where Las Meninas was painted three and a half centuries ago, to the side streets and back alleys of Barcelona, Paris, and Marseilles (haunts common to Picasso and Le Bihan), and ultimately to the villa known as La Californie, in Cannes, where Picasso, between August and December 1957, painted a series of fifty-eight canvases based on the Spanish masterpiece.

A group portrait depicting several members of the family of Philip IV of Spain, courtiers and attendants, including the maids of honor to which the title refers, as well as Velázquez's self-portrait at his easel, Las Meninas has been the subject of endless commentary since its completion in 1656. Baroque painter and print-maker Luca Giordano described the work as a "theology of painting," and countless commentators have seen in the picture's multiple levels of pictorial reality—portraiture, self-portraiture of the artist at work, mirrored reflections, reproductions of paintings and of copies of paintings by other masters—a fertile ground for study and speculation.

Picasso's painterly response to this imposing canvas—Las Meninas is ten feet high and nine feet wide—is as multiform and whimsical as the original is inscrutably sedate. To the unique original, Picasso responds with a whole series of remakes. If Las Meninas captures in a single image "the theology of painting," Picasso's pictorial object lesson on the process of painting reveals the entire notion of "masterpiece" to be questionable in the context of modern art.

The differences between the original and the "copies" (a term of dubious usefulness in this context) reflect the artists' different temperaments, times, and approaches to art. Whereas Velázquez was a court painter in the service of the Spanish monarch and a man known for his reserve, Picasso, when he began painting his own Meninas at age seventy-seven, was an international celebrity known for his exuberant, often X-rated impishness.

A fervent admirer of Velázquez since his youth (and nicknamed by his family biznieto de Velázquez—Velázquez's great-grandson—because of his frequent visits to the Prado Museum to see the artist's works), Adrien Le Bihan shares Picasso's cultural background (Franco-Spanish) as well his penchant for Las Meninas. By combining erudition and analysis with sometimes bawdy whim, Le Bihan modulates his tone between the cool detachment befitting a scholar discussing an avowed masterpiece and the rakish levity Picasso's art both embodies and inspires.

The structure of The Meninotaur is achronological, moving backwards and forwards in time over a period of three centuries. The result is an engaging, semantically rich text that sheds new light on the nature of artistic and literary inspiration and on the complex, often insoluble conundrums of the relationships between art and life, between artists, and between the arts.

Translating The Meninotaur posed a number of challenges. Words and their etymologies play a prominent role in the text (French historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet has called Le Bihan "a man keenly concerned with the relationships that arise between words"), making finding English equivalents to French terms essential. Neologisms abound: witness the title. While the French méninotaure (a portmanteau that
blends the French *ménines*—from the Spanish *meninas*, maids of honor, the title most commonly attributed to Velázquez’s painting—with *Minotaure* is more mellifluous than its English counterpart, the centrality to the book of the terms *meninas* and *Minotaur* dictated that the neologism “Meninotaur” be adopted for the title to the English version.

Le Bihan’s French, while usually precise and cogent, is also poetic (and therefore polyvalent) and at times subverts a more commonplace French syntax. He fancies the caesura, and thus the comma, and these gentle pauses lend the text a vaguely faceted feel: we begin by looking at things from a certain angle, pause, then consider them from another, and then a third, just as a Cubist picture is built from a patchwork of points of view. Finally, Le Bihan’s magpie erudition challenges the translator to notice and identify allusions to texts, paintings, and films from at least three cultures (French, Spanish, Anglo-American). Translating such allusions sometimes involved rendering not only the words, but the cultural context, into another tongue.

In meeting these and other challenges, the translator benefited from the patient collaboration of the author, an immense boon. Le Bihan’s grasp of English and his experience as a translator made his help invaluable.

Born in Marseilles, France in 1938 of a French father and Spanish mother, Le Bihan is a writer with eclectic and far-ranging tastes: he has published books on subjects as diverse as Charles De Gaulle’s literary style, the inscriptions in the visitors’ book at Auschwitz, the rue André Gide in Paris, and the anti-Semitism of George Sand. He has translated works from English (by Barry Lopez and by Edward Abbey) and Spanish (by Cristóbal Serra), and collaborated with Czesław Milosz, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1980, in translating one of Milosz’s last poems, *Orphée et Eurydice*, from Polish into French.

—Jeff Edmunds

Excerpt I

The annotators of Francis Ponge have lent credence to the belief that don José handed off to Pablo with the hopes that “his son would succeed where he had been unable to penetrate.” A matter of penetration indeed! In *Space and the Flute: Variations on Twelve Drawings by Picasso*, Jean Tardieu translates his gestures into words:

... rolls unrolls
folds untwists flattens out
breaks scatters tears

gathers scallops twists
soils thrashes patches

... spruins up divides
stretches encircles unravels
points out thumbs—and walks off.

There being no dearth of horned bulls in this series, in which a lady, “adorned with breasts like a child,” dances on the tip of a flute, we need not fear adding stings, pierces, transpierces to the list. As for penetrating, Picasso went about it in thousands of ways. He was invited to do so by his maternal surname, which a fatherless son named Aragon displaced to greet “Pablo Picasso-Ruiz, the Malagüeño.” Francis Ponge, at the outset of the eulogy (Text on Picasso) that he dedicated to him in 1973, plants “like, at the end of a pike, a banner,” the upper-case initial he shares with him. And as an epigraph, Virgil, *Audere in proclia*: “Let us cast ourselves into the skirmish,” “amidst the weapons.”

The pike, which Picasso used frequently, offensive and defensive weapon of the picador, just as, according to him, painting is for the painter, is a close relative of the spears in *The Surrender of Breda*. Featuring prominently in the Secret Dictionary of Camilo José Cela, who nicknamed Picasso “the old picador,” we find in addition that *pica* is commonly used to mean prick, like its derivatives, fraternally synonymous, *picana* (goad, prod), *picarazada* (speck, spot), *picaporte* (the knocker on the artist’s door behind which the model is undressing at the top of the spiral staircase in *Balzac’s Unknown Masterpiece*). And like *pico* (beak) and *picota* (needle, church steeple or pillory).

Picasso leads us further along the path of the *picaro* he liked to think of himself as being, *picaro* or *pajaror carpintero* (woodpecker), *picazo* (sting, bite), *picazón* (tingling, tickling), and *picajoso* (ticklish).
In French toward Picasso, "a spot to be found on certain earthenware." The imprisoned Mirabeau drew on his libertine erudition to note that, in antiquity, the picatrix, "unweavers of vulvas," were "young girls charged only with the task of combing all the hair that nature had distributed upon the body, to prevent the tangles that impede insertion."

Rejecting the fable of a don José stepping aside to bequeath colors and paintbrushes to his son, John Richardson recalls that, far from withdrawing, "he went on wielding his feeble brush until well into the twentieth century, portraying the pigeon of the year for Barcelona's Colombofila Society, of which he was president," and that Picasso, after having released his dove of peace all over the world, "claimed to 'have repaid him in pigeons.'"

Having died in 1913, don José did not know the Demoiselles. He would not have approved of the picture, despite the familiar palomas from a bordello on Avingnon Street, up and down which he frequently strode, where his son purchased his papers and watercolor paints. Odds are that in Malaga, in similar establishments, he had displayed the "whimsical temperament" and committed certain "youthful sins" that annoyed his older brother, the theologian and canon on whose injunctions, we are told, he consented to make painting his profession.

We know that Pablo, still very young, frequented brothels, at least those in Barcelona. Given the neighborhood in which his family lived, in which he had his various studios, given the morals of that era, such apprenticeship was nothing out of the ordinary.

In 1925, when Montherlant, poorly recovered from being gored, irritated by the newspapers that questioned the quality of his bullfighting performances (one of them transformed him into Monttherlantova, Russian ballerina who danced The Dying Swan), allowed himself a few Spanish escapades, a certain Puig came to his aid. This small, potbellied, talkative man, "with a complete absence of spiritual needs on his cheerful face," is reputed to have told him in Catalan: "In Barcelona, all the women are whores! Here, you see boys of fourteen going off to get laid! The only city in Spain where, under the influence of European ideas, they're beginning to understand that solitary gratification is not all there is!"

Did Pablo's father encourage these visits? My own, in Marseilles, did not hesitate to recommend them when he happened upon me distracted from my studies by some schoolboy crush. He reasoned that, having returned to the street, the client is quits, since he has paid. His conscience clear, he rejoins his friends in some noisy establishment, where no one asks for an explanation. At the approach of my mother, a Spanishwoman from Majorca, whose virtue was certified by the aura lent her by being an émigré from the Civil War, Albert changed the subject.

Of course, he loathed Picasso, whom he knew only, like most people, from newspapers and whom he took to be a crafty devil adulated by snobs. I hardly eased his antipathy in arguing that the ocean liners on the posters of the Messageries Maritimes (steep triangular prows parting the waves of the Indian Ocean) bore the stamp of Cubism. Nor would I have been any more convincing had I then known, and had I repeated to him, that steamship whistles rang out at the performance of Parade.

My amazement was considerable when I unearthed, in a magazine, a photo of Picasso with Sara Murphy on a beach in Antibes, summer 1932. Pablo, in a black checked swimsuit, a dark fedora decorated with a ribbon at the fingertips of his left hand, resembled, in miniature, my father, who, on the Mediterranean coast, never parted from his headgear, only uncovering himself when the sun was setting. I was also very surprised when I noted that, on the title page of Genius Without a Pedestal, a collection of texts by Michel Leiris on Picasso, the name of the publishing house, Fourbis (from the title of the second volume of Leiris's Rules of the Game, translated into English as Scraps) is embellished by a vignette with a ship, unexpected in this context.

My father would have considered Picasso and his universal triumph less debatable had he known that he was a client of houses of ill repute. And don José would have had less to find fault with in these virile staircase climbs ("Screw you and your vices!" one cried in Marseilles, an obscure and involuntary allusion to Balzac's spiral) than in the Parisian output of Picasso, son of Ruiz. Spanish Catholicism was able to tolerate whores, pimps and celestinas—a felicitous term that allows one to infer that heaven and hell are complicit.

* *

It has been written that Picasso attacks Las Meninas, fights the painting hand-to-hand, paraphrases it, chops it to pieces, metamorphizes it, parodies it, translates it into his idiom, naturalizes it as a Picassian, dialogues with it, keeps an illustrated diary of their discussion. Sometimes we are taught that he deconstructs it to reconstruct it in his own way, which is inconceivable. A painting or book not being comprised of isolatable elements arranged into a whole, one can only reconstitute them such as they originally were. Pope Paul III did not destroy Michelangelo's nudes; he suppressed them. The man from
Nimes Pierre Ménard was not hoping to write a new Don Quixote, but to compose Don Quixote itself. He produced multiple drafts, made corrections, tore up thousands of manuscript pages that he allowed no one to examine and, before dying, saw to their destruction. Borges laments: "I strove in vain to reconstruct them."

A critic hazarded "iconoclastic re-creation," in which one senses, beneath the paradox, a palace revolution. Let's go in and have a look around the palace. In the Picasso Museum in Barcelona, a small reproduction of the model with captions invites one to compare, to ass the differences between the first Meninas and the new. For a long time those in the Prado Museum were confronted by their reflections in a mirror. Louis Réau (Archives, Libraries, Museums) expressed his pleasure in these terms: "Major works would have much to gain from being isolated in small sanctuaries where the visitor could collect his thoughts without his attention's being tempted away."

And if Pablo, the imp, had wanted to distort this mirror, to elicit from it a grimace or two? And if Picasso, the prodigy, had wished to reply to the unique, to the perfect picture, with the multiple?

At the time of the duel, taking Ponge as a witness, he explained: "We don't make masterpieces. We make fun of making masterpieces, we do studies, exercises, we work, we study, we practice." The author of The Fig or the Materialist Consolation continues: "Naturally the weak, the impotent reproach artists for taking an interest in games, in research, in exercises—in becoming technicians. But we pay them no mind."

Except Picasso, in contradistinction to Ponge, is also a rematador, a finisher, a conqueror obsessed by numbers. Let's shake his dice cup. We roll 56, 57, and 58. The explanation is simple. Velázquez painted Las Meninas in 1656, in a room of the Madrid palace Alcázar. Three centuries and one year later, as if to affirm, with this uneven number, that ceremony and closure were of no concern to him, Picasso, in his estate of La Californie, at Cannes, sets his own in opposition to them. He works without respite from the end of August (no researcher has been able to determine the date with greater precision) until December 30, 1957. On this terminus, everyone agrees. It is clear that Picasso did not want to spend time on Las Meninas in 1958. But during the four months of trance to which he treated himself with them, he lined up fifty-eight paintings, oil on canvas, or nearly one painting every two days, and one more than the number of the calendar year. This discrepancy of a single digit is not accidental. Picasso, an incessant producer, has, in Time, a formidable adversary. He seeks to confound it. "He never painted, in his fury," confirms Balthus, "anything other than this profound vertigo of time."

He has an "indefatigable and solar manner of destroying in order to attain, of burning in order to overcome, of provoking in order to recover." He also has a mania for dates. His last Luncheon on the Grass is from 1962, earlier by one year than the centenary of Manet's. This meeting had been foreseen long before. Thirty or so years earlier, he noted: "When I see the luncheon / on the grass of Manet / I tell myself of troubles for later." Emphasis by the iconolatrous iconoclast. Convinced that by accumulating paintings, engravings, sculptures, he is defying time, he drives himself to produce ever more. He is annoyed, in Velázquez, by a relationship with time that is foreign to him. Theirs is a dialog between a talkative man and a laconic one.

When, during my studies, I had discovered Las Meninas and Venus at Her Mirror, at the grand exhibition on the tercentenary of Velázquez's death (Madrid, December 1960), I acquired a small yellow collection, articles and lectures by Ortega y Gasset, from the publisher El Arquero (The Archer), thanks to which I began to glimpse why these paintings appeared to me as twins. The members of my Madrid family dubbed me "Velázquez's biznieto (great-grandson)," because I went to see him every day.

Simultaneously, Ortega exerted a comparable influence on Jonathan Brown. Just as the latter had come to know the Velázquezes in the Prado Museum, chance placed in his hands the text celebrating "one of the coolest men in existence," for whom living and painting meant "to keep distance." Brown, in the course of his subsequent work, adjusted this assessment, but, at the time, he was impressed by it: "These words made a staggering impression on me, a still-uncertain youth who was living at a time when emotional detachment—we called it being cool—was counted among the cardinal virtues. As for Velázquez, I was his favorite artist...."

As for me, I also recall that José Ortega y Gasset defined Velázquez as un multimilionario del tiempo. A very felicitous formula, although difficult to render into English or French. It was so satisfying to me that I immediately stopped reading. I only resumed it quite recently. With forty years of distance, I was not disappointed: Ortega's reluctance to complete his book is an indirect homage to the multimilionario del tiempo. As Velázquez had, by temperament, time enough to fill his pockets, or to spare, he was not subject to urgency and frenzy.

It does not follow that he should be considered cold. As little given to impulse as Titian, he certainly lived "at a different temperature." Let us admit that he displays no appetite, no passion. Kenneth Clark
dares to add: "[T]here are no sensuous images burning in the back of his mind." On the authority of what electroencephalogram? Would not a pinceau—the French for paintbrush, from the Latin penicillus, from penis, "tail"—be able to channel the flames? Perhaps it is to some unavowed blaze that we owe the infanta Margarita's pink cheeks, cold eyes, and small closed mouth, neither ingenuous nor seraphic.

Excerpt 2

And Picasso grows impatient. The masterpiece he interrogates exacerbates his need to accompany his painting with texts, reanimates his verse as a semi-automatic prose-writing poet.

Parallel with the variations and fugue in fifty-eight canvases of his series of Meninas, he writes a portion of The Burial of the Count of Orgaz, preceded by the short Portrait of Hélène Parmelin and by the poem To Don Díaz de Vivar de Silva and Velázquez. The picador had not produced as many pages in ten years.

Of the forty-four canvases that make direct allusion to Velázquez's, fourteen are devoted to the infanta and five to each of the meninas. To these Picasso adds several sequences with the pigeons he allowed to proliferate on the balcony of his loftily situated studio, as well as three landscapes, a portrait of his wife Jacqueline, and The Piano.

Number one in the series corresponds to a translation of the whole, like the dozen he produced in smaller dimensions, four of which without Velázquez. All the elements in the original (individuals, décor, openings) occupy more or less their usual positions, but deformed, reformed. Picasso has subjected them to the light of his X-rays.

The painter, at his immense easel, is a mustachioed giant. Bold indeed is he who would see in him Picasso's double. We are tempted to shout: "Beware, the self-portrait is going to explode!" His head presses against the ceiling. He appears all the more disproportioned in that the picture he inhabits is smaller than the original and wider than it is tall. The respective dimensions of the painter and the easel will subsequently be reversed, without the fellow's being rehabilitated for all that. Near a stretcher frame taller than he, Velázquez, in his Meninas, implied modesty, real or false. This painter is a grotesque Porthos. Around him everything is in motion, for, under the effect of the unequally distributed oblique rays of light, which scrub instead of permeating, the distortion of torsos, limbs, faces, hair, has liberated the colors. He seems armor-clad, as if to defend his works, to sell his canvas dearly. But circumstances escape him. No one would claim that this giant puppet, bewildered, has anything to do with the new Meninas. He sports a moustache like Philip IV. Behind his back, in the mirror wherein the queen is blurred, this moustache, under a nose one presumes is the king's, has upturned ends, caricaturing a gentleman playing the fool.

The female dwarf, the two figures standing in confabulation, are porcelain vases or mummies. They reveal nothing. But the slight differences between the two meninas, who in Velázquez could pass for sisters, are accentuated. Isabel de Velasco has become shriveled. Sarmiento offers a duenna's profile. The little infanta is so well surrounded by her protectors that she remains ignorant of what is being hatched in the studio.

On almost the entire surface, Picasso has spread the silvery gray of the dresses of the infanta and her two followers. All the shades verge on black, white, or a whitish gray, metallic. Stage left, he has opened the curtains or the shutters, which animates Nicolasito and the dog. The latter, grown thin, is elongated. From the big mastiff he was, he has changed into Lump, Picasso's dachshund, his master's ambassador in about fifteen of the canvases. Nicolasito, all in outline, recalls the Saint from the novels by Leslie Charteris. His face is reduced to a circle, which establishes an unexpected correspondence between him and the dark Nieto, a pure black silhouette, perfectly upright, in the very white doorway. It's like flipping through The Three Musketeers:

"In the embrasure of that door: a man wrapped in a cloak."

"Ah, this time," cried D'Artagnan, springing to his sword, "this time he will not escape me!"

Like the dog, from which he will remain inseparable, Nicolasito becomes stretched. Before revealing himself as a pianist, he seems to be waving, with his right hand, a pole. Is he aspiring to an orchestra conductor's baton?

The two ceiling hooks intended for hanging chandeliers, which Velázquez had placed in the darkness of an inaccessible plafond, are closer, sharper, have become akin to a butcher's hooks. In a piece of writing from August 14, 1957, Picasso suspends ham and chorizos from them.

The eyes lose their lids as the windows do their blinds. They are stretched into almonds or triangles, their pupils are black or incandescent dots, or little hoops in the concentric circles of the heads. Whether they remain organs of sight is uncertain. They compete with the gazes for preeminence.
The mirror becomes pointless. Picasso, progressively, gets rid of it. It is not that he doubts, like Claudel, that Velázquez had hung one up. He parts with anecdotal suppositions. Often, in his work, as in Matisse's, the mirrors reflect nothing, or not the object expected. They insinuate, at best, the idea of reflection, remind us that around us reflections circulate: they do not fix them. Pierre Reverdy's observation, in 1925, remains apt: no one, in Picasso's work, is characterized by "any posture, any gesture that is anything other than a plastic outcome of the method put into play." The mirror, from this perspective, is a bothersome witness. A superfluous expression of distance. Ponge confirms: "In the 20th century, mirrors have exploded into fragments." In the new Meninas, the total eclipse of the self-portrait has destroyed their ultimate raison d'être.

At the same time, Picasso removes the principal witness of his apprentice works: the king, the father of the infanta, Philip IV. Beginning with the second composition of the whole picture, nothing will allow the suspicion that the king and queen strolling by could be greeted, with deference, by the characters. The mirror will change into an attic window, then into a television set turned off or which only reveals (phantomatic dots of phosphorus) the white pupils of a person or an animal, or rather (a memory of the rewritings of Grünewald's Crucifixion) the crossed bones of a pirate flag.

As Velázquez's composition would suggest, mirror, door, window, ornamental or didactic painting, become interchangeable. On the walls, the copies after Rubens are only rectangles. With them, Arachne, Minerva, mythology vanish. Nothing should suggest that a mortal is rivaling a god, or Picasso Velázquez. Picasso's intent is not that we ask whether Arachne was punished by a Minerva jealous of her art or horrified that her tapestry reproduces the censurable acts of the divinities: Europe ravaged by a bull, Leda asleep beneath the wings of a swan, Jupiter entering the bed and body of Alcmenes in the guise of her husband, Saturn become a horse engendering a centaur. Poetic licence—and licentiousness—suit him.

Excerpt 3

I was about eight years old when my parents, eager to see a movie without me, left me alone, one evening, in the apartment. (When they sent me to the cinema, in the afternoon, it was to distance my alarmed ears from their favorite pastime.) In that era, our suburban apartment buildings were not equipped with intercoms. Nor even doorbells. The lock of ours was jammed. Anyone who wanted could enter, at any hour of the day or night. The tenants' names were inscribed on the mailboxes and on the doors.

We lived on the third floor. It must have been 11 p.m. The neighbors were all asleep, even the painter in the apartment across from ours, a man who, unwilling to dirty his indolent hands, sponged off his wife, a dockworker. I had had the privilege of seeing only one of his creations in person. Destined for a public school, it was awaiting a moving company in the lobby. As I later realized in the Longchamp Museum, it was a washed-out imitation of the pale frescoes of Puvis de Chavannes—a fine name which Lautrec, although unaware that the museum adjoins the zoological garden, transformed into pubis de cheval, horse's pubis.

There is a knock at the door. In my bed, I sit up, scared, silent. Another knock. Very loud. On tiptoe, my feet bare, I investigate through the judas-hole. The hole was not intended to facilitate treachery, but I sometimes peer through it to spy on the artist-painter-decorator (according to his business card, on the door opposite) with long, gray, dirty hair. Awaiting me is the gallows horse's pubis. Jupiter entering the bed and body of Alcmenes in the guise of her husband, Saturn become a horse engendering a centaur. Poetic licence—and licentiousness—suit him.
The wedding’s two witnesses, of whom one is Van Eyck in person, if one can express it thus, are reflected by a small circular mirror, fixed, like an eye, to the back of the room. Mrs. Arnolfini, in a green dress, lets her hand rest on an abdomen so round that she would be declared prematurely pregnant. In the foreground, between husband and wife, a little dog already usurps their privacy.

Nieto makes thirteen appearances in Picasso’s Meninas. He figures in all the overall compositions and in two of the close-ups, with the infanta and Isabel de Velasco. With one exception, in which his head is round, he is reduced to a long black silhouette. His size varies from the disproportionate (never huge) to the miniscule. No zoom lens sets him apart. His face remains unknown.

Specialists have seen in him, wrapped in his cape, a double of the medical student entering a brothel, in an old study by Picasso, from the era of Avignon Street. Why would Picasso disguise himself (or disguise his father) as a medical student? Because in the medical profession, no emotion is displayed. Picasso is unlike his great admirer Michel Leiris, who writes “What I find most moving even today when going to a brothel is the act of crossing the threshold, as if one were casting dice or crossing the Rubicon.”

Very slightly, Picasso shifts the infanta toward the windows and the dog in the opposite direction, so as to line up the two actors with the man in black in the doorway. A line extending from the very straight, very stiff leg of the latter would pass through the infanta’s body at the middle, grazing her sex, and end up on the muzzle of the dog, good Lump, both of whose eyes are on the same side of his body.

With one exception, the arrangement is repeated in all the copies of the entire composition. In only a single instance, when he and Isabel de Velasco alone are visible, Nieto does not have the infanta in his sights.

On the 15th of September, 1957, Margarita becomes transparent in the center of the canvas. Nieto is able to contemplate the dog through the infanta’s body.

Ten years earlier, in The Four Little Girls, Picasso had placed three of them on a bed around which prowl “enormous winged dogs.”

Excerpt 4

In Madrid in 1960, a Spanish dramatist staged Las Meninas. A talkative Velázquez (in this already implausible) rails against the injustices of the royalty. The characters of the painting in progress are all on stage. Supernumeraries complete the cast. Two informers report to Philip IV: “Velázquez mocks his mission as painter of the Chamber. The servants, the dwarves, and even the dog seem, on the canvas, no less important than the infanta. In a tumbledown studio, unworthy of the grandeur of your royal daughters, Velázquez has erected a large stretcher-frame. This is self-glorification by the painter. And your Highnesses visit the studio of this fop.”

Franco’s dictatorship, benevolent toward the Church, could not judge indecent a play in which the artist’s independence was predicated on matrimonial virtues. It is astounding to hear Velázquez declare to Juana: “You refused to pose as Venus. I sought other models, while continuing to love you. I remained faithful to you, in Italy as here.” And to the King: “Majesty, I love my wife. Women are still attractive to me, but the man who has taken his pleasure often leaves behind him a mother and child who shall suffer.”

This humanitarian Velázquez is an impostor. But plausible is his King, on the boards, when he responds “We are made of mud.” Of the same mud, perhaps, the same clay, from which búcaraS are fashioned, which devoted meninas, one knee on the ground, proffer to adorable infantas.

I have no difficulty believing that Philip IV, to the extent that a monarch could allow himself to be, was a friend, almost an accomplice, to the man he wanted as his exclusive painter, from the first test, encouraged by Olivares. In the year of Las Meninas, Velázquez had served him thirty-three years. Such an assiduous portraitist knows more about his model than a confessor.

In 1652, Philip IV had named Velázquez aposentado mayor against the advice of the council of majordomos. The key of this chief quartermaster-sergeant, whose volutes have been detected on his belt in Las Meninas, opened every door in the palace, including those of the royal apartments.

Of Velázquez’s five competitors, only Nieto had obtained fewer votes than he. If his promotion had depended only on the King, he would not have had to wait so long for the cross of the Order of Santiago. Less secretly exhibited, the Venus At Her Mirror risked being turned against him. He painted it certain of royal favor. Under Philip’s protection, he sought to be as unquestionable as Titian was for Charles V or (a paragon very in vogue at the time) Apelles of Cos for Alexander. If it is true that the latter gave the beautiful Campaspe to his painter as reward for having painted her, the King of Spain offered Velázquez better: the freedom to paint his Venus.

In addition to nudes, Philip IV appreciated pictorial illusions. In Las Meninas as contemplated at the museum, his blurred icon may
give the impression that he effaced himself in Velázquez's presence, conceding that if History attributes to him some merit, it will be that of having protected the latter. But the picture was destined for his summer study, very private in character. Fernando Marias's inventory of it includes, alongside a few bamboccia, Venetian women by Tintoretto or Veronese, a nymph by Rubens accompanied by two young women, three Cupids, one seen from behind, by Francesco Gessi, and one by Corregio, a Ganymede also by him and a bacchanalia by Van Dyck, and Poems, paintings for a love nest illustrating the Metamorphoses, which Philip II had commissioned from Titian to enjoy himself as he pleased, in private, with female nudes.

Bizarre companions for Las Meninas, at least apparently. One wonders what secret connection could link in her father's eyes the five-year-old infanta to a Venetian woman nonchalantly exposing an enticing bosom, if one disregards the power of enigmas. Those offered to Philip IV and his guests by the clandestine canvas hampered, fortunately, his penchant for the grissaille of binary oppositions (heaven-hell, grace-sin), played to his pleasure at being privy to a secret, and alerted his senses.

The verbal games of Pedro de Castro y Añaya, in The Dawns of Diana (a forename that Maria de Ágreda detested), may have helped Velázquez, who owned a copy from 1654, to foresee the time and the mirages he hoped for his paintings. The composition, in which prose and poetry alternate, collects in five cantos the tales told to Diana by her poet and musician friends to brighten her convalescence on the banks of the Po.

In a disconcerting mirror, a woman of the fifth dawn glimpses two bodies of a single soul. She cannot make out which is alive and which reflected. Each seems so perfect that it could be the soul of other bodies. Suddenly the mirror shatters in her hands. She laments at not being able any longer to be captured in a single reflection. From painters she obtains only thousands of copies in thousands of fragments. Then she begins to weep. The tears on the ground form a clearer mirror. Because each tear contains her image, the more she sheds, the more she will be consoled.

The Dawns of Diana is a novel of love, adventure, and, according to Lope de Vega, erudition and artifice (joyous partnership!). But any creation, whatever the subject matter, in which the author plays at sibylline games, elicits a sensual pleasure. In Praise of Folly, for example. If Erasmus constructs the panegyric, madness expresses itself through his pen. Are we being regaled with the allegory of the lady or with one of her fantasies? The writer's lampoon and the heroine's self-portrait are so well intertwined that the reader is loath to disentangle them. Forgetting whether the author is a woman or a man, we cannot tell to whom belongs the fraternal member that suddenly appears from its hiding place: "Is it the head, the face, the chest, the hand, the ear, or some other part of the body deemed to be seemly which possesses the power to reproduce the gods or men? No, if I'm not mistaken; but rather a certain other part, so mad, so farcical, that one cannot utter its name without laughing."

On this topic (the member or the paintbrush) it would be timely to clarify what mysterious correspondence has led a number of French writers, from Diderot to Paulhan who gave their opinions on painters, at times in the capacity of chroniclers, to produce or distribute extremely risqué pages of erotica on the sly.

In the summary by Apollinaire of a fictitious opera, I call attention to "Sancho's donkey thought that he would prove his hardiness by abducting the infanta."

Palomino ("little pigeon") hailed in Las Meninas "a new caprice." The term, imported from Italy, at that time had a meaning less narrow than today. Its caprine root implies (as Fernando Marias, on the trail of Carducho, stresses) that painters of caprices wandered off the beaten path, like goats, that they munched on new concepts. The pictorial experience was their sole aim. Las Meninas is one example. The painting reflects Velázquez's wish not to have been preceded by anyone on the terrain he has chosen. This desire need not be explicitly sensual for it to be evident. Some effort is necessary, on the other hand, on the part of anyone who wants to retain, at the heart of the royal drawing-room, the precious image of an out-of-the-way path (like the one down which I lost myself in the groves of the counterfeit van Rysselberghe).

In France, the Brantôme of Gallant Ladies is thought to have introduced the word "caprice" into literature. La Fontaine sensibly contrasts the caprice with politics. Besides the latter, the King who protected Velázquez was interested only in women and in painting. He would have been very intrigued by Verlaine's Caprices, the first of which is entitled "Woman and She-cat," the last "The Death of Philip II."

Philip IV, witness to their appearance, could not have been deceived by Las Meninas. He alone, with Velázquez, knew their hidden significance, whose great charm, like the charm of an infanta too young for the beauty we acknowledge she has, consists in forever eluding us.

Excerpt 5

A tale, one might say. Like a magnanimous barbarian from Cervantes's time, Picasso, the infanta captured, doesn't lay a hand
on her. Transposing the interrupted gesture, he preserves Velázquez's tac—tact—a providential term at the end of which the sense of touch is transformed into a mental operation. He refrains from dressing the infanta as an odalisque, as a demoiselle d'Avignon. He resists the temptation of enrolling her in the brothel of his youth. He allows her to retain a child's bust.

Contrary to Titian and Rubens, Velázquez was not in the habit of exposing nor of suggesting breasts. His queens, princesses and meninas are devoid of chests or too corseted for one to be inferred. From this point of view, the queen Mariana is an older sister, hardly more developed, of María Teresa and Margarita. The woman busy frying eggs has an unobtrusive torso. Of the lady with a fan, one is lucky to see the open neckline of her bodice. The mirror of the Venus foils our desire to ogle the small twin mounds from over her shoulder. The sole chests entirely exposed in Velázquez's work belong to the god and to a drinker in the Triumph of Bacbus as well as to Vulcan, sinewy and brawny in his forge.

What profusion of breasts, on the other hand, in Picasso's work, of every shape and consistency: excessively large, dried up, spherical, prismatic, targets for darts, drooping ovals, rubberized teats, concentric circles imitating the contour lines of a mountain peak on a map at 1/50,000 scale. Those in his Rape of the Sabine Women, originating in a Poussin corrected by David, erect their tumuli so abundantly that despite the commotion, the women's screams, the whinnying of the horses as in Guernica, the music of the spheres would be audible. To say nothing of moulines: sea-urchins, spiders, cogwheels, crimson mouths, millipedes, caterpillars, exclamation points.

But in his Meninas, no breasts, still less any crotches. No nudity at all. Not a hint of copulation. In the fifty-eight canvases of the series, there is no little girl playing the zambomba or taking out her cock to urinate in the broth. No infanta lifts her dress or reveals her enchanted fissure, just as Francis Ponge, two steps from a place known as The Three Pigeons, refrains (although a frequent explorer of dictionaries and a former student of the Mistral Lycée in Avignon) from exhausting the meaning of the word mouline, Picasso limits himself to disguise and to capture. To the semaphore of his acrobatic back-and-forth between Picasso and Velázquez imposed on him by his scruples as an art lover. Pleasant respite. Recreation. The birds coo in their furbelows (a word of Provençal origin). Their eyes gaze half-open at landscapes by Raoul Dufy.

Chronologically, all these rather mild-mannered pigeons fall between the infanta with green hair and the infanta with the red eye. To claim with Michel Leiris that Picasso intended only, through their agency, to open the windows of culture onto nature would lead us astray into conceptual alleys too barren to bother with. They confirm that Picasso likens Margarita to them, to their living garland maintained in memory of José Ruiz and of an apprentice forenamed Pablo. Abstaining from committing an act that would pass for sacrilege on the favorite of the painter of painters (were it only in appealing to his example), abstaining from tracing out the infanta's slit, her enchanted fissure, just as Francis Ponge, two steps from a place known as The Three Pigeons, refrains (although a frequent explorer of dictionaries and a former student of the Mistral Lycée in Avignon) from exhausting the meaning of the word mouline, Picasso limits himself to disguise and to capture. To the semaphore of his desire. To the joyous sign (beating of wings on the balcony) that he understood Velázquez's own sign. In the entire series, the risk of a kiss hovers only over two pigeons disposed to rubbing beaks.

One might object that Picasso leaves us in uncertainty, that having become immersed in Las Meninas, he rapes and does not rape the infanta, penetrates and does not penetrate the soon-to-be royal mouline, that the two possibilities persist, as is the case of Ugolin. Will he devour his children's flesh? "Dante did not want us to believe it, but he wanted us to suspect it," responds Borges, who also observes: to insinuate that Moby Dick is a symbolic book, "Melville declares emphatically that it is not." In Ada, it is enough for Van to dream that the heroine "has just been delivered of a girl-child whom he is about to know carnally on a hard garden bench" (it was no more comfortable underneath Freddie's washing-place) for speculation to arise in our minds that her brotherly cousin may have deflowered her not at twelve, but much earlier. Nabokov, two hundred fifty pages previously, clears the way for this hypothesis by evoking an eccentric
old man in a state of inebriation who managed (a very shrewd verb) “to impregnate—in his sleep” his great-granddaughter Maria, age five. In Lolita, the gap (tender membrane) turns out to be tenuous indeed between the five years of this Maria or the infanta and the twelve of the nymphet when the latter, in a poem, surfaces between her classmates Mary Rose and Rosaline like “a fairy princess between her two maids of honor.” Five and twelve! It is astonishing that the same figures come to light in Musil, who, after having compared, in his Diaries, the vulva of a girl of twelve to a blind eye, takes an interest in the sexual relations of a café waiter with a little girl of five.

But such objections become blurred before a painting in which nothing happens out of sight. In the series under examination, Picasso’s frolics with the infanta, as familiar as he elsewhere is with five and twelve, do not take place. His brush applies make-up over the audacity of his pen. A modesty not often seen prevents him from assaulting the doll. He wants nothing to do with the beast evoked by Musil, “a toad in heat clinging to a piece of wood.” The deflowering of Margarita will mould in the hothouse of our imagination, with the invisible characters in front of her in the studio. Those who appreciate how much our mininotaur, mouninotaur, excels in showing from every angle, with enjambments, reshufflings and spectacular intromissions the amorous activities of one, two, or several individuals, will have to settle for a sacrifice (Arachne surrendering, on reflection, to Minerva’s injunctions) which diverts the submissive artist out of the royal drawing room through Nicolasito’s corner, where he has spotted a removable wall.

The scene of the kidnapping was completed on October 10th, 1957. One week later, The Piano. This variation no. 40, the real end of the fable, would seem at first glance to be entirely unrelated to its predecessors if the dog Lump, close to the ground, were not sticking out his muzzle.

Verlaine comes to mind once more, the Verlaine of Romances without Words in which “the piano caressed by a frail hand” appears a few lines before “the dog of Jean de Nivelle.”

The original Meninas allowed metamorphosis. Only Velázquez, María Agustina Sarmiento, and the dwarf do not limit themselves to looking and whispering. The foot of the handsome boy on the mastiff’s back, the sole and discrete contact of one body with another, evokes the piano’s pedals.

The transformation took place in stages. We recall that Nicolasito, reinvented by Picasso, first appeared brandishing the flexible pole, slightly curved, which cohabits with the lance, the taper, the syringe, and the hot dog in the Secret Dictionary. But how long it was, this pole, for a boy so small and so young! Picasso changed his mind. Two vertical lines on the wall in the model, seeming to touch Nicolasito’s right hand and nape, inspired a cord to which Picasso attached him like a marionette. And he stuck the instrument to him, like an accordion.

Often a piano serves as furniture in his texts, appearing on one occasion between “winged blood sausages” and “fat tears of sperm.” And so it was in his Meninas.

Intuition whispered that Nicolasito’s hands were hovering over a keyboard. Tempted to make an equestrian pianist of the graceful dwarf—“the child playing piano suspended attached by the neck on horseback dressed as a cook with his (mourning) cap holds in his left hand a frying pan for shield – (the horse in a black and silver horse-cloth) this has nothing to do with Las Meninas”—he gave up. His transpositions accommodated pigeons, not horses.

Despite the standing position imposed on everyone in the infanta’s vicinity, he sits Nicolasito on a stool mounted on a screw in front of an upright piano. He inundates the oval to which his face has been reduced with white and extends it, in the back, with a strange tail, the long white braid of a woman or a Chinese, which gives his head the look of a tadpole. From top to bottom, he dresses him in red, a color whose role, in Velázquez’s Las Meninas, had not escaped him. Thus he concentrates on this slender figure the “red roar of laughter of his amorous freedom” which, according to René Char, he casts at Velázquez. He endows him with the powerful hands of the menina with the jug, those that threatened to close around the object transformed into an innocent she-pigeon. White like the dove of a two-part ornithology, these hands flutter across the keyboard, in conformance with Cela’s lexicon in which, at the entry for picha, a song sung by Spanish students awaits us, celebrating a hand substituted for a virile member to play on a female body represented by the keys of a piano. Two tapers illuminate the score. Shaped like blood sausages, they are in essence, in color and in name the sperm foretold, esperma in Catalan. But for a single consonant, hardly different, the word is akin (readers of Moby Dick—the white whale, sperm whale—will not be disconcerted) to the one we translate as candle: espelma. Above the notes, bright drops of wax will drip into the candlesticks. What good would there be in dwelling on the infanta any longer? The pianist without a face, bent over his keyboard, plays his pavane alone. The dachshund pricks up his ears, opens his eyes wide. Under his belly, for the first time, an appendage, stiff and hairy, echoes the master’s brush.
Jean-Marie Damais was born in July, 1939 in the French city of Sainte-Adresse, a northern sea resort near the commercial port of Le Havre that was popular among impressionist and fauvist painters before World War I. Born into an artistic family, Damais is the youngest son of Emile Damais (Paris, 1906-Paris, 2003), a violinist, composer and musicographer who taught music history for many years in the École Normale de Musique de Paris. Though both his parents were musicians—his mother was a pianist—Damais never mastered a musical instrument and ended his study of violin prematurely. Jean-Marie's paternal uncle, Louis-Charles Damais (Paris, 1911-Jakarta, 1966) was a researcher in Asian archeology for the École Française d'Extrême-Orient. In spite of his remote influence on his nephew, Louis-Charles Damais was to inspire him a certain interest for Asian art. Thanks to his godmother's influence and financial support, Damais received a Jesuit education at the very elitist Lycée Louis le Grand in Paris. In the early 1960s, he became a student in Classical Language studies at the University of La Sorbonne. In an interview, Damais confirmed he had never written before the age of fifty.

Along with his religious upbringing, his father's musical compositions, many of them inspired by the Roman liturgy, undoubtedly exert a great influence on the author. Though Jean-Marie Damais professes his atheism, the quest for a type of godless spirituality that he uncovers in this novel includes religious precepts, references to the Old Testament and to the fathers of Christianity. It is through the prism of art that he retraces episodes of his life as he rewrites it.


In *Un spasme de vacuité*, Damais reveals his atheistic mysticism through the study of two paintings, thus providing a direction to his spiritual quest. The first, *The vision of Saint Augustine* (1502) by Carpaccio, is the first of a series of seven paintings tracing the lives of three saints: Jerome, George, and Tripun. The second painting is *St. Jerome in his Study* (1514), by Albrecht Dürer. However diffuse it may seem in the novel's beginning, there is a correlation made between these pictorial works and the autobiographical *Confessions* by Saint Augustine (app. 400). Oriental art appears through the description of decorative objects and furniture, and through a reference to Baudelaire's poem, *Invitation to the voyage*.

Some interesting points in the translation of this novel are neologisms, lengthy sentences, and numerous indirect references to works of art. Jean-Marie Damais' taste for art films, classical authors and modern literature is a leitmotiv in his work. He obviously writes novels from having read books, watched films, listened to music and studied paintings. An adept, tireless craftsman of the neologism, he speaks of his first book, *Gentil-Tranquille*, as a "non-book", written as an attempt at "décritinisation." With this term Damais refers to a type of literature the purpose of which is to rid his life of the idiotic, the numbing, as though this novel contained the antidote. The novel's implications are clear: the protagonist's awakening from a quasi-pathological routine mingles with the burst of life the author feels at the start of a literary adventure. Damais' later novels confirm that "autofiction"—a term originating in French writer Serge Dubrowski's work—is the only genre in which Damais writes, a genre built on the intermingling of reality and fiction. Numerous biographical elements breathe inspiration into *Un spasme de vacuité* more than any of Damais' other novels.

— Fabienne Pizot-Haymore
Un jour, ulcéré par son manque de prévenance et de considération, ayant encore dans la bouche plusieurs semaines après ce coup un arrière-goût de latrines, tu lui as posé une question précise consécutive à un incident futile, une grotesque histoire de répondeur, de panne partielle et d'appel différe, la totale de l'incommunicabilité endémique, qui avait dégénéré en dispute mesquine assez éloignée des subtiles du marivaudage, dont l'érudit le plus vétilleux ne relèverait pas le moindre indice sur la carte du Tendre : « Vous (tu vouvoies Marie-Anne, si réelle et si familière, alors que tu tutoies l'inaccessible Milena, si peu incarnée, inconséquence digne d'un esprit assez tordu) avez trouvé naturel de n'avoir pas un seul mot ni un seul geste pour me retenir, alors que j'étais en plein désarroi, ce vendredi sinistre, au lendemain d'un anniversaire désormais inscrit dans ma chair au rouge d'une plaie perenne, comme l'autre il y a environ un an, quand vous m'aviez infligé, en toute légèreté de cœur et d'esprit, le premier camouflet de notre histoire. Je soulève aujourd'hui une hypothèse des plus fantastistes, vous en conviendrez : si un jour, parce que je trouverais trop pénible votre désinvolture s'ajoutant à l'absence permanente de tendresse, je proposais de ne pas poursuivre plus avant, ferez-vous un geste, quelque chose, je ne sais quoi de ludique et de poétique pour me retenir ? Je vous demande de répondre par oui ou par non, comme à l'université, première année, où l'évaluation des connaissances s'opère au crible de la complexité zéro, parce que toute autre formule, en particulier votre fameux « je ne sais pas », qui m'a maintes fois cloqué de doutes et d'inquiétudes, quand je cherchais naïvement, pathétiquement devrais-je écrire, à savoir si vous m'aimiez un peu, beaucoup ..., veut dire invariablement non ».

Marie-Anne répondit non et ne te revit pas. C'est clair, le bouleversement dans sa vie est de l'ordre du iota.

Vous aviez tout (ce tout, diplomatiquement emphatique, est un cliché cher au discours amoureux qui distille un parfum de mélancolie propre à raviver les larmes, quand tout est consommé) pour vous entendre, être bien ensemble, mêmes valeurs, mêmes espoirs, pour partager des moments de bonheur dans l'intimité des corps et des esprits.

One day, her lack of thoughtfulness and consideration rankling with you, as you still had a foul aftertaste in your mouth several weeks after this blow, you asked her a precise question consequently to a trivial incident, grotesque nonsense dealing with an answering machine, a partial failure, a delayed call, you name it: the height of the endemic incommunicability which had degenerated into a petty argument rather far from the subtleties of sophisticated banter and gallantries' and of which the most finical erudite would not be able to discover the faintest clue on the carte de Tendre: "Well, (you formally address Marie-Anne who is so real and so familiar, whereas you are on first-name terms for the inaccessible Milena who is so illusory, an inconsequence that is worthy of a rather warped mind), you found it natural not to utter a single word nor make the least attempt to keep me from leaving when I was in complete disarray that gloomy Friday, in the aftermath of an anniversary henceforth deeply engraved in red on my heart with a perennial wound, like the other one approximately a year ago, when you inflicted on me the first scolding in our story, in all thoughtlessness and carelessness. At the present moment I am making the following assumption, you will agree that it is going a little far: if some day because I found your casualness too painful when added with your permanent lack of tenderness for me, I suggested not to pursue our relationship, would you react in a way or another with something amusing and poetic to keep me? I am requesting from you that you answer with yes or no, like in the freshman year, when the evaluation of competences is assessed with a zero level of complexity, because any other phrase and in particular your famous "I do not know" which on numerous occasions left me stricken with doubt and worries, as I was trying to know naively or pathetically I should write, whether you loved me, loved me not, ..., invariably means no."

Marie-Anne chose no as an answer and never saw you again. It is clear; the disruption in her life is barely worth one iota.

You had everything (tactfully emphatic, this everything is a cliché dear to love discourse, which diffuses a perfume of melancholy fostering tears when everything is over) everything to get along, to feel good together, the same values, the same hopes, to share moments of happiness in the intimacy of the bodies and the minds.
Foutue époque tout de même ; la dernière image que tu as d'elle est un sourire convenu accompagné d'un petit geste amical de chiottes à travers un pare-brise.

Son empreinte est lourde encore, palpable, si réelle sur ta peau, cou, dos, bouche, ventre, épaules, verge ...

Un week-end sans vous,

était comme un fleur sans corolle,

un Pârt sans tintinnabul

une flèche sans le paradoxe de Zénon

Tu t'es vu quand t'as pas bu ? Tu es moche, bagal, souffreteux, tu sembles un bleu de chauffe délavé, une ruchée d'asticots grouille dans ta trachée, tu branles du chef, le noir est ton écran, tu souffres, quoi d'autre quand l'avenir est plombé, flapia la mécanique des épaules, tu nausées, un goût de lait caillé sur la langue, tes yeux fragiles sont des caldeiras éteintes, tu bats le pavé dans ta maison vide comme un lion sous séquestre, « c'est bizarre, on dirait que ta maison n'est pas habitée », te confia un jour sur un ton sucré-miel une visiteuse inopinée, après avoir parcouru sans curiosité apparente, alors qu'elle avait tenu à faire le tour du propriétaire, avec juste ce qu'il convient de réactions intermittentes pour montrer qu'on s'intéresse, les différentes pièces de ton logement. La remarque, dénuée d'animosité, se voulait objective ; elle s'appuyait sur l'ordre et la propreté du lieu d'où émanait une certaine froideur, mais tu savais qu'elle ressortissait à un regard qui dépassait le visible et le contingent, parce que la connaissance que ta vieille copine avait de toi, forcément incomplète et conjecturale, lui faisait plutôt augurer quelque laisser-aller dans le rangement ; elle te prenait en effet pour un cérébral détaché des réalités matérielles ou pour une sorte de poète un peu exalté, clichés plutôt sympathiques à ton endroit.

Tu avais tout montré, sauf le « sanctuaire » dont tu avais furtivement entrebâillé la porte, en le désignant du terme mystérieux de musée inachevé, comme pour susciter chez elle à la fois le désir de voir et la frustration de n'être pas admise, ta préoccupation première étant de préserver votre sanctuaire de toute intrusion impromptue, qui aurait conté au sacrilège ; n'empêche que tu avais souri sous cape en comprenant que par ce geste tu venais de te rendre coupable d'un procédé cher aux conservateurs de musée qui s'ingénient à

Bloody times we are living in; the last image that you have of her is a conventional smile accompanied with a damned little friendly sign through a windshield.

The lasting impression of her is still deep, palpable, and so tangible on your skin, your neck, your back, your mouth, your belly, your shoulders, your penis...

A weekend without you was like a flower without a corolla

a Pârt without tintinnabulations

an arrow without Zeno's paradox

Have you seen yourself when you are sober? You are ugly, lame, miserable, you look like faded overalls, a colony of maggots crawl in your throat, your head shakes, black is your backdrop, you are suffering, what else is there to do as your future is sealed, no more showing off, you are beat, you nauseate, a taste of curdled milk on your tongue, your fragile eyes are extinct calderas, you loaf about your empty house like a caged lion, "it is strange, it seems that your house is not lived in", an unexpected visitor confided to you with a sugary voice, after she had gone through it without any apparent curiosity, when she had insisted on having a guided tour, displaying what it takes of periodic reactions to show interest, in the different rooms of your dwelling. This remark, devoid of animosity, was meant to be objective; it was founded on the tidiness and the cleanliness of the place from which a certain coldness emanated but you knew that it pertained to a look going beyond what is visible and what is contingent, because the knowledge obviously incomplete and conjectural that your old woman-friend had of you somewhat led her to augur some signs of carelessness in the orderliness of the place; she took you for a highbrow detached from material realities or for some kind of an impassioned poet, which are rather pleasant clichés about you.

You had shown her everything except the 'sanctuary' whose door you had furtively left ajar, referring to it with such mysterious terms as the unfinished museum as if to arouse in her both the desire to have a look and the frustration of not being admitted, your main concern being to preserve your sanctuary from any inopportune intrusion which would have verged on sacrilege; nevertheless you had smiled under your breath knowing that by this gesture you had made yourself guilty of replicating a process dear to museum curators who strive to forbid the entrance to certain rooms, the ones of course

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Faut faire avec, radote la pseudo-sagesse populaire, pas moins sage que celle qui ne serait pas populaire, tout aussi factice, toi tu ne fais pas avec, tu te défaits, pour un rien tu pleures silencieusement, tu veux mourir, dehors tu rases les murs, la honte, qui est la plus précieuse compagne des misères. Désarçonné par sa pertinence, tu n'as pas relevé la remarque de ta copine ; l'intuition féminine avait encore frappé. Effectivement tout est propre dans la maison ; soyez attentifs à la préposition : il ne faudrait pas confondre cette phrase anodine avec le vers fameux de Léo Ferré stigmatisant l'hypocrisie et la voleuse des bourgeois des années 50, les « temps étaient difficiles », qui envoyaient leurs filles enceintes en Suisse, « pour que tout soit propre à la maison », subtil jeu de prépositions à la française. Le lisse, le briqué et le net aujourd'hui règnent en maîtres ici ; « on dirait que ta maison n'est pas habité », ce n'est pas une révélation pour toi, tu connais son occupant : sans consistance, il ne pèse pas sur les choses, ne les dérange pas ; quasi spectral il les effleure, comme absent, et tu sais sa misère.

One should make do with what one has, the would-be popular wisdom rambles on; it is not less wise though than the one which would not be vernacular as it is as artificial, anyway you do not make do, you make undo: for a trifle you weep in silence, you want to die, outside you hug the walls, shame, the most precious companion of the drop-outs, numbs you, you withdraw from the look of others, suffering is humiliating, you know that there is nothing more abject than the sight of misery wherever it is from, remember the horror of these living skeletons, the scrofulous bodies with wild looks abandoned to the silence of a quiet or violent death, you remember your son; your golo, as you liked to call him, was not hungry nor thirsty, he was never naked, would not have to endure the fury of tribal wars; nevertheless he attained the bottom of abandonment and exclusion, wallowing in a place where people are left to die, certified by the bastards from the social services, because he did not have his place in this civilized society of yours, he was severely mentally retarded; stuck in the bush by the thousands, for not belonging to the ruling ethnic group, there is nobody but Mother Dolorosa assisted by a few specialists of famine in their official capacity to approach them, feed them, cure them; the others, the cowardly accomplices of the violence inflicted on the
un gangster, qui impose à ses membres de sa bande, un mafieux, un expert en corruption, un fasciste

la race humaine ! Il faut l'avoir appris pour y croire. II est probable que tu ne chiales plus mais tu fredonnes la toccata de Martinu, tu dissemble plus de toi que le portrait que tu tires à jeun, tu es lion, non seulement tu ne chiales plus mais tu redresses la toccata de Martinu, tu réveques les vieux démons qui t'invitait au voyage sans retour, tu as envie de vivre, de parler aux gens, d'aimer une femme, tu redeviens lyrique, témoins ce court poème que tu avais glissé dans la première lettre à Marie-Anne que tu venais de rencontrer, composé sur le modèle des haïku,

Ciste magique

ou désirs et souvenirs se confondent,
je me grise de ta présence prochaine,
les jours s'étirent délicieusement, une vague de compassion pour tes semblables te submerge, même s'il te reste une dent contre les ordures régnerantes, tu n'es pas loin de les absoudre, ta rogne se dissout aux degrés d'alcool absorbé, tu ris, mais quand tu n'as pas bu, ton apparence humaine s'estompe au flou de ta perplexité chronique, le toutou-chrysalide rhabille ton être et pour peu que tu déambules parmi les vastes cirques marchands ou sur les trottoirs encombrés d'une grande ville, tu négatives à mort. Se peut-il qu'on croise des centaines de personnes sans rencontrer un seul visage ? Rien dans ce swarming of anonymous people with mechanized attitudes lets you know that they are your semblables, tes frères. Tous ces animaux-là appartiennent à la race humaine ! Il faut l'avoir appris pour y croire. Il est probable qu'un sentiment aussi prégnant habite Meursault, si calme d'ordinaire en son indifférence au monde, quand quelques heures avant son exécution il clame son désir de mourir au milieu des cris de haine de la foule ; « Meursault est le seul Christ que nous méritions », commente l'auteur. La hargne contre le genre humain te mange, pour un peu d'une dérive l'autre tu pactiserais avec l'intolérance célébrique, mais tu évites le massacre, car tu focalises ce qui te reste de force de haine sur les crapules incontestables, vêtues de meurtres et de rapines, qui gouvernent les peuples; tu as consulté le dictionnaire thématique paru au Terrain Vague : tu ne jouis pas d'une patience de bénédictin pour répertorier tous les noms, mais à la lettre B une entrée excite tout particulièrement ton ire, bush ...Le président des E-U est un gangster, qui impose aux membres de sa bande, un mafioso, un expert en corruption, un fasciste à tête de rat, un larbin et trois figurants, sa volonté de continuer à polluer impunément la planète,

third world countries escape shit-scared and keep holding forth.

What a contrast when you are not sober! Your bearing has changed; you are lively, you walk almost straight, you can suspend your step without quivering in a panic, you look at the others, you seem pleased, you are handsome, nothing differs more from you than the character sketch that you make of yourself when you have not drunk any alcohol, you are a lea, not only have you stopped blubering, you are humming Martinu's Toccata, you dismiss the old daemons who invited you to the trip of no return, you want to live, to speak to people, to love a woman, you become lyrical again, as shown by this short poem which you had slipped in your first letter to Marie-Anne whom you had just met, a poem composed on the model of the haïku,

Magical cist

where desires and memories mingle intimately

your forthcoming presence infatuates me
qu'elle que soit l'exorbitance du prix que la terre devra payer : il faut une puissante raison, pensent les gentils membres, pour s'obstiner à une telle inconséquence criminelle : garantir le niveau de vie de ses administrés. Tu hallucines ! Comment réагissent les seconds couteaux ? S’opposent-ils, se rebellent-ils, mettent-ils les américains en quarantaine, traitent-ils bush-d’égout pour ce qu’il est, une canaille ? Ils se couchent, entonnent l’hymne glorifiant le veau d’or, léchent les rangers du shérif suprême ; les laquais de presse ne pipent mot et vous, électeurs de tous pays, vous vous couchez pareil. A partir de quelle phase de l’agonie annoncée le crime contre l’humanité serait-il retenu ? Débat ardu, à cause du vide juridique : l’Internationale des juristes se réunira en conclave pour finaliser le mode opératoire d’évaluation et disputera un long temps, et quand la planète sera assassinée, défoliée, énouée, chaque branche s’une solitude ; vous, asphyxiés de la terre, recevrez une aide psychologique pour le travail de deuil.

Tu te souviens de ton ami chanteur. Un jour il sortit précipitamment du boui-boui, marcha quelque temps sous la pluie, renifla nerveusement en branlant du chef tous azimuts, comme pour débarrasser ses narines d’un corps étranger, lorgna le ciel d’aluminium et mouлина des bras, pareil à un vieil albatros rythmant l’inanité d’un dernier envoi. « Les glaciers fondent, l’ozone fout le camp, à vos masques ! » hurla une tête pas possible dressée vers le crépuscule zébré d’éclairs ultraviolets. « Au secours, j’ai soif ! » Un rire homérique désarticula l’effaré. Le rire sauvage du chanteur, étendu maintenant sous un chêne à la frondaison sale, fendit les langues de bois, rebondit sur les claviers décolorés, longue plainte ca hotante, secoua les feuilles criblées de pluie acide, s’arrêta d’un coup, bouche écartelée avalant gourmande le liquide empoisonné.

Un paradis minéral

« Ton amour est dans ma chair, comme le roseau dans les bras du vent ». Avec ce fragment d’un poème égyptien comme viaticum, le rat face, a flunkey and three stooges, his will to continue polluting the planet with impunity, whatever the extortionate price the planet will have to pay; it takes a powerful motive, the nicest members think, to pursue obstinately in such criminal inconsequence: and that is to guarantee the level of life of his citizens. You don't believe it! How did the minions react? Do they oppose to it, do they rebel against it, do they quarantine Americans, do they treat the bush-whacker as what he is: a crook? They fawn on him, they start singing the hymn glorifying the golden calf; lick the ranger boots of the supreme sheriff; the lackeys of the press do not say a word, and you, the voters of all countries, you fawn and cringe all the same. At which phase of this announced death agony will the charge of crime against humanity be upheld? It is an arduous debate because of the existing legal loopholes: the International of jurists will meet in a conclave in order to finalize the operational mode of evaluation and will argue for a long time, and when the planet is assassinated, defoliated, drained of its resources, each branch exudes its solitude; you, who are asphyxiated from the earth will receive psychological help to cope with the mourning arrangements.

You remember your friend the singer. One day he went out of the dingy café, walked for a while in the rain, sniffled nervously, his head shaking in all directions, as if he wanted to clear his nostrils of a foreign body, peered at the aluminum sky and waved his arms around like an old albatross giving rhythm to the inanity of a last soaring. "Glaciers are melting, the ozone layer is clearing off, get to your masks!" an improbable head yelled lifted toward the twilight striped with ultraviolet lightning. "Help, I’m thirsty!" A hearty laugh disturbed the man become wild. The wild laugh of the singer then resting under an oak tree whose foliage was dirty, rended the usual hackneyed phrases, bounced back on the discolored keyboards, a long lament with ups and downs, shook the leaves riddled by acid rain and stopped immediately, his mouth strained to swallow the poisoned liquid avidly.

A mineral paradise

"Your love is in my flesh, as the reed is in the arms of the wind" It is with this fragment of an Egyptian poem as a viaticum that the long
voyage commence par une longue route en 4X4 qui mène le groupe de douze personnes jusqu'à l'oasis de Farafra, d'où doit partir la randonnée de cinq jours avec assistance chameîlière dans le désert blanc. Deux véhicules militaires, à l'avant et à l'arrière du convoi, lui font escorte, c'est devenu la règle depuis le massacre de Luqsoor. Les huit soldats vêtus de noir, souriants et débonnaires, très jeunes, brandissent des kalashnikov obsolètes, on se croirait à l'opéra. Tu as entraîné Marie-Anne dans cette aventure malgré ses réticences relatives aux conditions de bivouac, non qu'elle soit chichiteuse, mais elle est très sourcilleuse en matière d'hygiène. Le guide local, profil d'aigle, keffiy intemporel, voix douce, port de prince, précise entre autres choses les modalités de distribution de l'eau : à chacun sa ration quotidienne pour boire et se laver. Le désert blanc est un enchantement permanent ; tu désirais ardemment t'y immerger, ne fût-ce que quelques jours, avant que tes yeux ne te trahissent. Escarpements de vestiges, sable troué de grandes nappes calcaires, châteaux et cathédrales sculptés par les vents, fragments de gravures rupestres représentant des animaux disparus depuis longtemps, éléphants, girafes, bouquetins... Le sable s'infiltre partout, appareils photographiques, duvets, bouches, recoins intimes. C'est ainsi que le troisième soir, où la quantité d'eau attribuée à chacun est réduite, Marie-Anne se croyant atteinte d'une vaginite des sables, se met à pester, que diable êtes-vous venus faire dans cette galerie ? Tu as beau lui offrir une partie de ton eau, elle ne décolère pas : elle te tance, te morigène, t'engeueu quoi ! Mais le prince du désert, alerté par ces éclats de voix malséants, s'approche, s'enquiert, rassure ; il lui apporte un bidon supplémentaire : elle se fait biche aux dunes, alerte par ces éclats de voix malséants, s'approche, s'enquiert, pas : des sables, se met à intimes. C'est ainsi que le troisième soir, s'infiltre par tout, appareils photographiques, duvets, bouches, recoins intimes, fragments de gravures rupestres représentant des animaux de gran des nappes calcaires, châteaux et cathédrales sculptés par les yeux non te trahissent. Escarpements de vestiges, sable d'ardement t'y immerger, ne boire et se laver. Impeccable, modalités de distribution de l'eau : tourcilleuse conditions de bivouac, non qu'elle soit chiciteuse, mais elle est Marie-Anne dans cette aventure malgré ses reticences relatives aux sables, se met à intimes. C'est ainsi que le troisième soir, s'infiltre par tout, appareils photographiques, duvets, bouches, recoins intimes, fragments de gravures rupestres représentant des animaux de grandes nappes calcaires, châteaux et cathédrales sculptés par les yeux non te trahissent. Escarpements de vestiges, sable d'ardement t'y immerger, ne boire et se laver. Impeccable, modalités de distribution de l'eau : tourcilleuse conditions de bivouac, non qu'elle soit chiciteuse, mais elle est Marie-Anne dans cette aventure malgré ses reticences relatives aux

trip starts with a long road in a four-wheel drive vehicle which brings the group of twelve people to the oasis of Farafra, where the five-day hike led by a camel driver is supposed to start in the white desert. Two military vehicles, one at the front and one at the back, escort the convoy; it has become a rule since Luqsoor's massacre. The eight soldiers dressed in black, very young, happy and good-natured wield their obsolete Kalashnikovs; one would think it is an opera scene. You have led Marie-Anne into this adventure in spite of her reluctance relating to the bivouac, she is not too fussy but rather finicky about hygiene. The local guide who has the profile of an eagle, an impeccable keffiyeh, a gentle voice, a regal bearing, lays down among other precisions the conditions of water distribution: each one of us will have a daily ration to drink and get washed. The white desert is a permanent delight; you yearned to be surrounded by it if only for a few days before your eyes would fail you. Dizzy escarpments, the sand with limestone patches, some castles and cathedrals sculpted by the winds, the fragments of rock drawing showing animals dead long ago, elephants, giraffes, ibexes... The sand seeps into everything, cameras, sleeping bags, mouths and private parts. So, on the third night, the quantity of water allotted to each of us having been reduced, Marie-Anne began raving at the situation thinking that she was struck down by a sand vaginitis: what the hell are we up to here? You attempted to relinquish a portion of your water to her, but she does not calm down, she berates you, lectures you, bawls you out! But the prince of the desert alerted by these unseemly shouts comes up to us, enquires about the situation, reassures her; he brings an additional can to her: she becomes a doe with gazelle-like eyes. Every day, you go across rows of ghostly rocks shaped like giant mushrooms resting on black plinths: they are the impassible protectors of vestiges still buried. Like a gift from the erstwhile gods, a tiny dot lost in the middle of dunes and cerberi petrified in white chalk, a stream coming up from the sand gives rise to a grove; the animal life remains discreet, leaving all freedom to the mineral paroxysm. At night, no humidity at all, the stones irradiate their whiteness, the Milky Way so dense, so close, metaphysical dreams; the white outshines the night. Dry coldness at dawn, an otherworldly silence, the statues of chalk acquire a fuchsia hue, a paradise according to Kubrick.
Tu connais parfois des pulsions d’ascétisme, tu diètes, une belle tomate, des pelures d’oignons, huile d’olive, vinaigre balsamique, sel et poivre, avec en prime, quand ça ne manque pas à la maison, quelques olives noires amères. Ça te convient, tu n’as pas faim. Coup d’œil que ton voisin italien t’apporte de somptueuses tomates charnuex et parfumées, car tu détestes toutes les autres, mûries à la paille humide, dures de cœur et de peau, pépineuses à vomir, de quelque événitaire qu’elles viennent ; sans ces pommes d’amour providentielles tu n’aurais rien mangé, c’eût été cocasse, ça t’aurait rappelé, mises à part les rasades de rosé frais nécessaires à la survie en été, ta grève de la faim d’une semaine pour défendre une cause juste, eau sucrée de rigueur. Comme dessert, il faut toujours un dessert chez les franchouillards, des pruneaux d’Agen, c’est un must incontournable de la gastronomie hexagonale. Pourquoi des pruneaux ? Parce que tu n’aimes pas les pêches et n’as plus envie de yaourts au goût bulgare, si grecs soient-ils ; des pruneaux donc, et puis, à ce qu’il paraît, il font chier, tu as appris cela sur le tard au cours d’une randonnée en Islande, tu avais un problème de transit, comme on susurre à la télé en souriant chafouin ; alors l’accompagnatrice, bonne fille, se mua en secouriste et lâcha sur un ton d’instit, « je vais te donner quelques pruneaux », et tu connus la délivrance parmi un chaos de mâchefer.

Marie-Anne

De nos jours, sophistication extrême, on assassine à coups de téléphone, la victime désignée n’a aucune chance, elle ne peut qu’encaisser. Marie-Anne t’apprend d’une voie enjouée qu’elle part le lendemain pour Amsterdam, destination qui figure pourtant dans vos projets de voyage, « il faut que chacun garde son indépendance et sa liberté », argument incontournable, « c’est comme ça » ; malgré le miel de sa voix la tienne s’enroue, s’étrangle, s’éteint, l’exquise courtoisie du ton ne parvient pas à masquer le coup de vache ; ta main libre esquisse un mouvement, comme pour dessiner une ébauche de protestation, mais elle toupine dans le vide, tu n’as personne en face, rien que ce machin noir collé à l’oreille. Cette révélation imprévisible t’assomme, la main orpheline est prise d’une tremblote qui ferait croire à un début de gâtisme, un rictus d’incompréhension douloureuse te cimente la

Sometimes, you have impulses of asceticism; you are on a low diet, a plump tomato, a few onion skins, some olive oil, balsamic vinegar, salt and pepper, with as a bonus, when there are some at home, a few bitter black olives. That suits you, you are not hungry. You are lucky that your Italian neighbor brings you luscious tomatoes, fleshy and full of flavor as you hate all of the others ripened on wet straw, with a hard core and a hard skin, disgustingly full of seeds, from whatever vegetable stand they might come. Without these providential love apples you would not have eaten anything, this would have been funny, and aside from the glassfuls of chilled rosé wine necessary to one’s survival in the summer, would have reminded you about your week long hunger strike in order to defend a noble cause, compulsory sugared water included. As a dessert, as one cannot do without it at the archetypal Frenchies’, prunes, the unavoidable must of French cuisine. Why prunes? Because you do not like peaches and do not feel like having creamy yogurt any more, as Greek as the ones you usually buy, might be. So be it and anyway it seems that they help one shit, which you learned quite late in life during a hike in Iceland, you had a problem of intestinal transit, as they whisper on television with a sly grin. So the tour guide, like a good girl, became a first-aid worker and let out in the typical tone of a primary-school teacher “I am going to give you a few prunes” and you experienced deliverance amidst a chaos of slag.

Marie-Anne

Nowadays, with an extreme sophistication, one commits murder on the phone; the designated victim does not have a chance and can do nothing else but stomach it. Marie-Anne tells you in a cheerful voice that she will be leaving for Amsterdam the following day, though this destination is listed among the trips both of you would like to take, “one should keep one’s independence and freedom”, an unavoidable argument, “that’s the way it is”; in spite of the mellifluousness of her voice, yours gets hoarse, chokes, dies, the exquisite courteousness of the tone does not quite conceal this rotten blow; your free hand makes a slight gesture as if to draw a sketch of protest but it circles in the air, there is no one in front of you, only this black thing stuck to your ear. This unexpected revelation stuns you; your left out hand is taken with the shakes mimicking the beginning of senility, a rictus of painful disbelief keeps your mouth tightly shut. One should react and
Soudain l’apocalypse ! Les centres névralgiques de la plus puissante nation du monde, réputée invincible, frappés en pleins cœurs, le temple de l’argent et le sanctuaire de la guerre. Stupeur universelle, effroi, en proportion de ce qui paraissait inconcevable ! Alors débondez, exhibez votre commiseration ! Mais pourquoi y aurait-il des morts plus importants que d’autres ? On déverse en cascades des mots écoulés, on vaticine à qui mieux mieux. Bien mal, dieu satan, mort vif, guerre sainte, croisade, justice sans limites..., même logorrhée débile, mêmes rodomontades d’un autre âge. L’ordre du monde est menacé ? Tu t’en tapes. Qu’est-ce que cet ordre foncé sur l’injustice ? A quelque chose malheur est bon ? Le bon serait la liquidation du régime des Talibans à condition que les populations afghanes, déjà au seuil du désastre humanitaire, après avoir été tyrannisées par l’obscurantisme le plus rétrograde soient épargnées, et de la part des américains un examen de conscience qui les rende moins cyniques et fight, the armchair strategists proclaim, but against whom? In the past, god the merciful was used as an ideal outlet; whether one hurled abuse at him or begged for mercy, one would strive to vent one’s feelings; it was possible that in front of such suffering a microspeck of compassion clouded god’s retina; today it has become obvious that god is deaf and unconcerned about the misery of mankind; in addition how could we establish a dialogue with a mute? Who would dare to maintain actually that the loads of nonsense which fill the so-called holy books, which assert everything and anything, are the divine word? Only the obscurantists all denominations included pretend to believe it in the sole purpose of holding sway over the imbeciles who persist in abiding by their rule. Her- refined, intelligent, curious of everything, desirable; you had barely united your respective solitudes and tuned them to a place for both of you. Were you about to lose her when the understanding and the complicity between the two of you were improving so tangibly, as your shared intimacy promised a harmonious relationship? You are soured by disappointment deep down. Oblivious of the man who is there in pain, spring is laughing all around, but it has excuses: remaining a stranger to the jerks of the human puppets, it creates, it reinvents life. Nature is cheery, blooming; your soul retracts and falls to pieces. In your garden linden trees coming into leaf, and roses are turning rosy, flurrying emotions turning into leaf mold, and love, love, is it leaving me?

Sudden apocalypse! The neuralgic centers of the most powerful nation in the world supposedly invincible are struck right in their cores, the temple of money and the sanctuary of war. Universal amazement, dreadfulness, proportionate reactions to what seemed inconceivable! Pour out, display your sympathy! But why should there be some dead people who are more important than others? Commonplace words cascade, for vaticinations it is all the worse. Good bad, god satan, dead alive, holy war, crusade, boundless justice ..., always the same stupid logorrhhea, the same rodomontade of another age. The world order is threatened? You could not care less. What is it about this order based on injustice? Is it an ill wind that blows anybody any good? The good thing would be the liquidation of the Taliban regime provided that given that they are already on the brink of humanitarian disaster, the Afghan populations after being tyrannized by the most retrograde form of obscurantism may be spared, and from the Americans: some soul-searching that would make them less cynical and more supportive toward the poorest nations.
plus solidaires des pays pauvres.

D'où vient que cet homme (cet homme c'est toi, pastiche oblige) qui ce matin était si accablé de tristesse pour la crainte que son aventure galante ne tourne court à peine écluse, n'y pense plus maintenant ? Ne vous en étonnez point ; il vient d'apprendre une excellente nouvelle : le grand rodomont s'attaque aux paradis fiscaux qui permettent aux extrémistes de financer leurs menées meurtrières. Il n'en faut pas davantage. Le voilà tout ragaillardi à l'idée que le nerf du terrorisme va être tranché. Il se met même à rêver à un dessein plus grandiose encore, un monde où les spéculateurs, les trafiquants, les mafieux, les affairistes, les terroristes et leurs clones masqués seraient mis hors d'état de prospérer et de nuire par le gel de leurs avoirs. Banquiers, vos papiers ! Un délit de faciès bien sympathique !

« Joie, pleurs de joie ! » Rebonjour tristesse : le divertissement manquait de pouvoir anesthésiant, te revoilà chagrin et malheureux, car tu sais que les « grands » ne transgresseront jamais le dogme de la libre circulation des capitaux, par quoi ils s'enrichissent ; touchez pas aux flux financiers, tabou ! Tu n'es pas dupe des gesticulations théatrales des présidents et assimilés, ce n'est que de poudre de perl pimpinpin destinée à mystifier les patrouilleurs trop prompts à les croire, vile piperie, pipeau, rectifierait un adepte du langage familier, même étymologie, même finalité, une arnaque de plus pour attraper les gogos ; vos dirigeants sont les as du palper-rouler en vogue chez les intoxiqués des crèmes amincissantes ; ils vous roulent d'abord et palpent ensuite, vous bavez même de reconnaissance à picorer les miettes qu'ils auront bien voulu vous accorder, car vous aurez maigri de quelques kilos. Tu hais les maîtres de la manipulation qui s'ingénient périodiquement à monter des pantalonnades solennelles à seule fin de vous abuser et maintenir en joug. Que fait d'autre, dans le registre mystico-farcèque, le saint-pitre exhibant une panoplie de pauvres et d'éclopés à chacun de ses shows ? Quand il est en forme, il leur lave les pieds « quel homme, quel homme ! » Sa phraséologie mystique et son marmottement sénile fascinent les foules, ça marche, les croyants croient que le vieux roublard a des accointances avec dieu, hoquètent d'attendrissement, se prosternent ; à l'âge de fer les hommes étaient autrement testiculeux.

How is it that this man (this man, it is you, in keeping with the very need for a societal pastiche) who this morning was so weighed down with sadness lest his love affair might end when it had barely started, no longer thinks about it? Do not be surprised; he has just heard some good news: the great swashbuckler makes an attack on tax havens which enable extremists to finance their deadly scheming. It does not take any more than that. He has renewed optimism at the idea that the sinews of terrorism are going to be severed. He even begins dreaming about even more of a grandiose design, a world in which speculators, traffickers, Mafiosi, wheeler-dealers, terrorists and their concealed clones would no longer be able to thrive and would be rendered harmless by the freeze of their assets. Bankers, produce your IDs! A good kind of racial profiling; « Joie, pleurs de joie! » joy and what sadness again! This misappropriation lacked anaesthetic power, here you are sad and miserable again for you know that the big guns will never transgress the dogma of the free circulation of capitals from which they grow richer; hands off the financial flux: no trespassing. I am not fooled by the theatrical gesticulations of presidents and people of that ilk, it is only quack magic aimed at taking in the patriotizing cowards who are too eager to believe them, a foul trap, claptrap, an adept of colloquial language would rectify, it is the same etymology, the same finality, another rip-off to fool suckers. Your leaders are the aces of the cash and dash game so in vogue amongst the addicts of slimming creams: they dash you first and then cash the money; you will even drool with gratefulness nibbling on the crumbs they will have had the kindness to grant you, for you will have slimmed down by a few pounds. You hate these masters of manipulation who make great efforts every so often to put together a solemn farce with the only purpose of deceiving you and keeping you under their yoke. For the holy-jester, in the register of mystico-farcèque speech, is he doing anything differently as he exhibits an array of paupers and cripples at each of his shows? When he is in good form he washes their feet “what a man, what a man!”? His pseudo-mystical phraseology and his senile muttering fascinate the crowd; it works, the believers think that the old dodger has contacts with god; they gasp with tenderness, prostrate themselves; in the Iron age men had got more balls.
1 Refers to the French “Marivaudage”, term coined from the name of French author Marivaux whose theatrical works are suffused with a particular manner of approaching interpersonal relationships known and commonly referred to with this term.

2 La carte du Tendre, common vulgarisation of la Carte de Tendre, an allegorical topography of the ways leading to love, designed by the Précieux Mlle de Scudéry (1607-1701) and Mme de Rambouillet (1588-1665). Very well-known among the Précieux, this geography of love was established by a character named Clélie in order to lead Herminius to the allegorical village of Tendre (Tender).

3 Albert Camus (1913-1960) about Meursault, the hero of his novel entitled l’Étranger (1942). Meursault from his jail, contemplating his death, is compelled to think about the meaning of his life. After being a stranger to his own existence, it is there that he feels revolted by injustice, by his near death, and reconciles with the world and with himself.

4 Poem by Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), The albatross

To amuse themselves, sailors often
Capture albatrosses, those giant sea birds
Who follow, indolent companions of the voyage,
The ship gliding over bitter depths.

As soon as they are set down on the deck,
Those kings of the sky, awkward and ashamed,
Let their great white wings, like anchors,
Drag pitiably alongside them.

This winged voyager, how clumsy and weak he is!
How comical and ugly, he who was so beautiful before!
One sailor jabs at his beak with a pipe,
Another limps, miming the cripple who once soared!

The Poet is like this prince of the clouds
Who flies with the tempest and laughs at the archer;
Exiled on land, in the midst of the jeering crowd,
His giant's wings prevent him from walking.

5 This acceptance of the French word « galère » (literally “galley”, referring to a horrible situation can be found in one of Molière's plays (Molière, 1622-1673), Les Fourberies de Scapin, Act II, scene 7 : « Mais qu'allait-il donc faire dans cette galère ! » (but what was he doing in this incredible mess !), a sentence which was obviously borrowed from le Pédant joué by Cyrano de Bergerac (1619-1655) in which Granger complains about the tricks played by his son Charlot : « S'en aller dans la galère d'un Turc ! Hé quoi faire, de par tous les Dieux, dans cette galère ? Ô ! Galère, Galère, tu mets bien ma bourse aux galères. » (Go away in a Turk's galley! What in the Devil's name is there to do in this mess? O galley, galley, you put my purse in a mess!)

6 From the second conversion of Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), a French mathematician, a physicist, a philosopher and a theologian, whom, having experienced a mystical episode after a coach accident had the mind to keep a trace of his state of exaltation. This manuscript was found after his death in the lining of his coat.

7 Pronounced by Sganarelle, horrified to learn that Dom Juan had not repented for his sins nor amended his attitude in Molière's play, Dom Juan ou le festin de Pierre, Act V scène II (Molière, 1622-1673)
Aline Desentis

"Dead Dog"

• Translated from the Spanish by Rebecca Crocker •

Aline Desentis Otálora has been publishing poetry and essays in Mexican magazines such as Opción and Identidades for the past 20 years. She is a social scientist by training, with interests ranging from ethnic identity to culinary traditions. In 2000, she published a groundbreaking culinary songbook, El que come y canta Cacntorlero gastronómico de México, exploring the connection between food and culture in Mexico, including the particular way in which food and kitchen duties have stereotyped and marginalized women. She is currently compiling a book of legends and popular myths.

"Perro Muerto," translated here as "Dead Dog," was published in Oaxaca in the 2005 volume Mano de Obra: Relatos Breves (Work of Art: Short Tales), an anthology of stories written by Oaxaca-based authors. The anthology resulted from a grassroots, statewide submission competition, followed by a judging workshop. This unique project generated a great sharing of ideas, talent, and critique. The project and its accompanying volume have met with such success in Mexico that Oaxaca's Institute of Culture and Communication has initiated a second round of the competition. The panel of judges from libraries, universities, and cultural organizations in Oaxaca, ranked Desentis's story fourth out of a total of forty-one submissions, the top fifteen of which comprised the published volume.

As translator, I was introduced to Desentis's tale on a trip to Oaxaca in March 2006, during which I worked directly with the volume's editor Héctor Huerga González. "Perro Muerto" immediately impressed me with its overwhelming appeal to the senses, drawing the reader into the scene through stench, sweat, blood, grief, and the sounds of traffic.

In his prologue to Mano de Obra: Relatos Breves, Huerga hails the story form for its unique ability to offer significant narrative development while still maintaining brevity (all stories for the volume were within a 3-8 page range), organic openings, "concise and chiseled language," cadence, rhythm, and parody. Huerga credits Desentis in particular for her ability to employ the ellipsis, thereby setting the surrealistic scene of the story's conclusion, Barrio Viejo as Virgil's boat, without the need to explicitly state the connection or fill in each gap in time before reaching the story's end.

"Perro Muerto" is set in a fictitious village in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca. This region, which has historically suffered from extreme poverty and isolation, is currently in the throes of severe social unrest. "Barrio Viejo" (Old Town), as the village is known, combines the expected elements of rural marginalization and hopelessness with a racing interstate highway that splits the village in half. As the highway traffic increases and population swells, life in the village becomes increasingly precarious. With biting gravity and skilled prose, Desentis uses these factors to create a story of abandonment and adaptation, in which we see a forsaken community decline into its own pathological existence.

Last year, Oaxaca became the locus of international controversy when an initially peaceful teacher's strike was quelled by local police, resulting in deaths, an intensification of protest, and ultimately the involvement of federal troops. "Perro Muerto" is a literary window into the social malaise found in impoverished, indigenous regions of Latin America, where a dearth in government services force citizens into physical upheaval or mental abyss. That this malaise has risen to the surface in the recent unrest in Oaxaca (as it did in Chiapas in the early 1990s) only adds to the importance of Desentis's tale.

- Rebecca Crocker
Perro Muerto

La primera vez que Ramoncito vio un perro muerto, se enfermó de susto. Su mamá lo llevaba al kinder y esperaban el urbano a la orilla de la carretera cuando lo descubrió en medio del carril de alta. Ahí estaba el pobre animal medio inflado, con el terror congelado en la mirada y el pescuezo aplastado por las llantas de los carros. El hedor invadía la parada de autobús, mientras nubes de moscas se perseguían y copulaban sobre el banquete.

El niño estuvo muy malo, le dio calentura y no quería comer, hasta que su tía Laura le hizo una limpieza. La siguiente vez que vio un perro atropellado, en lugar de espantarse, se quedó mirándolo. El otro día observó cuidadosamente los cambios: estaba más hinchado y más hedoroso. Cada mañana estudió el proceso de putrefacción, el paso de los autos hizo que el animal cambiara varias veces de posición hasta que uno lo apachurró. Quedó algún tiempo como una mancha de tripas, pelos y sangre. Cada vehículo que pasaba se llevaba adherido en los neumáticos algo de piel y carne hasta que, finalmente, sólo quedaron los huesos encrustados en el asfalto. Desde lo alto del puente peatonal, podían verse como un curioso epitafio en letras blancas.

Ahora, treinta años después, Barrio Viejo había crecido. Había más vecindades en las calles de tierra, más cuartos improvisados en cada vivienda y muchos más niños y perros. Al lado de la carretera llamaban más la atención las bardas, anunciando a todo color un baile, que el casi picante olor a muerto. Los cuerpos, en diferentes etapas de descomposición, formaban parte del paisaje y ya nadie los notaba; el aire fétido se mezclaba con los humos de los escapes y los efluvios de las cocinas. Sólo los viajeros que pasaban por ahí subían las ventanillas asqueados. Incluso llegaron a acuñar el mote de "Perro Muerto" para esa colonia dejada de la mano de Dios, a orillas de la carretera.

No solamente perros, también chivos, gallinas, gatos y uno que otro cristiano habían encontrado la muerte bajo las ruedas de un camión. Y es que daba flojera usar el puente peatonal para ir de Barrio Viejo Oriente a Barrio Viejo Poniente, o viceversa. Esa misma flojera le pesaba a Ramón, ya crecido, mientras subía las escaleras enlutado y desvelado, acompañando a su mamá a su última morada.

Dead Dog

Ramoncito was sick with fright the first time he laid eyes on a dead dog. His mom was taking him to kindergarten and they were waiting for the bus on the side of the road when he made out the dead dog's body in the middle of the fast lane. The poor bloated animal just laid there, its neck flattened by the tires of passing cars and a look of terror frozen in its eyes. The stench of death flooded the bus stop as clouds of flies chased each other and copulated above the feast.

The boy felt awful. He ran a fever and didn't want to eat anything until his aunt Laura performed a cleansing ritual on him. The next time he saw a dog run over in the street, rather than feeling frightened, he stayed to observe it. The next day, he carefully noted the changes: it was more swollen and fetid. Each morning he studied the on-going process of decay. The passing vehicles changed the animal's position several times until one finally squashed it. It remained there for some time as a patch of guts, hair, and blood. Every vehicle that went by carried off fragments of hair and flesh stuck to its tires, until finally all that remained were bones encrusted in the asphalt. From up high on the pedestrian bridge, they could be seen as a strange epitaph written in white letters.

Now, thirty years later, the town of Barrio Viejo had changed. More neighborhoods dotted its dirt roads, its houses had more makeshift rooms and everywhere there were many more children and dogs. The villagers paid greater attention to the colorful roadside signs announcing the next town dance than they did to the almost biting smell of death in the air. The bodies, all in different stages of decomposition, just formed part of the landscape now and no one noticed them. The fetid air mixed with exhaust fumes and warm aromas wafting from kitchen windows. Only travelers passing through town rolled up their windows in disgust, coining the nickname "Dead Dog" for that God forsaken place on the edge of the highway.

It wasn't just dogs that met their fate under the wheels of some truck, but also goats, hens, cats, and more than a few poor souls. People just didn't feel like using the pedestrian bridge to cross from East Barrio Viejo to West Barrio Viejo, or vice versa. Sleep-deprived and in mourning, the now grown-up Ramón was plagued by that same feeling of laziness as he climbed the stairs of the pedestrian bridge to accompany his mamá to her final resting place.
La primera en echar un perro muerto a propósito fue Sonia, la de la tienda. Se le murió de moquillo a media noche y, por miedo a la infección, mejor lo arrastró hasta la carretera y ahí lo dejó. Sabía que en menos de cinco días las llantas de los automóviles terminarían de desintegrarlo. Total, ojos que no ven.

Y así como Sonia, luego fueron otros. Lo mismo echaban cualquier desperdicio que sus animalitos muertos, y es que Barrio Viejo era un asentamiento tan hacinado como olvidado. El camino de la basura simplemente no pasaba y la última vez que alguien vio a un policía por ahí, iba saliendo del congol de Rosa, mientras unos vándalos le desvalijaban la patrulla. Sólo las unidades de transporte público prestaban algún servicio, pero porque estaba en su camino y no les quedaba de otra.

Una vez, en tiempo de elecciones, el gobierno contrató a algunos vecinos para lavar los pilares del puente y repasar las rayas de la carretera. Hubo dinero para eso y el pavimento se veía chulito. Hasta la plancha de algo muerto quedó atravesada por una franja blanca. Pero no pasó de ahí. En general, Barrio Viejo se las arreglaba como podía, haciendo valer la autonomía de la marginación.

El sol pegaba a plomo y el ataúd avanzaba lentamente sobre el puente. Detrás, amigos y familiares caminaban pesadamente. La banda tocaba el *Dios nunca muere* y Ramón llevaba el brazo a su tía Laura, agitada por el parkinson. Había quedado viuda hacía unos años y desde entonces vivía con ellos. Su marido falleció al querer pasar los carriles recién pintados. Hasta la plancha de algo muerto quedó atravesada por una franja blanca. Pero no pasó de ahí. En general, Barrio Viejo se las arreglaba como podía, haciendo valer la autonomía de la marginación.

También había cruces a ambos lados de la carretera, tantas que el *Día de Muertos* se hacía la fiesta justo ahí y los vecinos de Barrio Viejo, Oriente y Poniente, se daban cita en el puente para compartir unos tragos y cantar a gritos sones, boleros y chilenas.

La carretera se convirtió en la Barca de Virgilio para los habitantes de Barrio Viejo, a la que en menos de cinco días las llantas de los automóviles terminarían de desintegrarlo. Total, ojos que no ven.

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La procesión se detuvo a la mitad del puente. El calor era insoporable y los cuatro hombres que cargaban la caja la apoyaron contra el barandal, aprovechando para tomar un respiro y enjugarse el sudor. Don Genaro, que hacía las veces de sacerdote cuando se ofrecía, rocío agua bendita y pronunció unas palabras ininteligibles. Al terminar, Ramón se adelantó, abrió la tapa y besó a su madre en la frente. "Adiós, Jefecita, allá espéreme cuando me toque a mí" dijo con el rostro contraído por el llanto. Le puso un crisantemo blanco en el pecho y, a la cuenta de tres, empujó el féretro para dejar caer el cuerpo de la difunta al paso de un tráiler de doble remolque que venía de Puebla a ciento veinte kilómetros por hora.

The procession stopped in the middle of the bridge. The heat was unbearable and the four men carrying the coffin rested it on the railing, seizing the opportunity to breath deeply and wipe the sweat from their brows. Don Genaro, who acted as priest when necessary, sprinkled holy water and uttered a few unintelligible words. When he was done, Ramón came forward, opened the cover and kissed his mother's forehead. "Adiós mamacita, wait for me on the other side," he said, his face wincing in pain. He placed a white chrysanthemum on her chest and to the count of three heaved the coffin so that the dead woman's body fell in front of a tandem trailer coming through from Puebla at 75 miles an hour.
Severo Sarduy
Selected Poems

- Translated from the Spanish by Suzanne Jill Levine -

Severo Sarduy has been an inspiration from the very beginning of my adventures in translation. I started working on Severo's trans-genre neo-baroque narratives in 1969, tantalized by his wild crossings between pop and erudite cultures, his brilliant heteroglossia, his intelligent wit and stylistic rigor, not to mention his extravagant personality, and, last but certainly not least, his stoicism and dignity in the face of death by AIDS in the early 1990s. The last two prose works of his I translated, in collaboration with Carol Maier, Christ on the Rue Jacob (1987) and Beach Birds (1993), attest eloquently to his courage and almost religious devotion to art.

The first translation I did of a Sarduy poem, the concrete—or calligrammesque—"Mood Indigo" (1970), celebrating the history of jazz, was commissioned for an homage to Nelson Mandela. Over the years I have done versions of a few other poems, and include here three; the first, a sonnet from Un testigo fugaz y disfranzado (1985) translated years ago, displays that characteristic Cuban conjunction of humor and eroticism and music, alluding, as the author often does, to one or two of his favorite Spanish Baroque poets. From his last volume of verse—Un testigo perenne y delatado (1993)—I include "Portrait", a divertissement in which each verse ends in x, and "Reckoning" which offers perhaps a truthful mirror.1 I write to constitute an image he once wrote, and "Recuento" (literally "Recount") sketches an emotional landscape as lucidly as any of those autobiographical "epiphanies" Sarduy gathered in Christ on the Rue Jacob. At least two of these poems will be included in my own translator's journal or chapbook-in-progress, bringing together fleeting translations and masked originals scattered over decades from 1970 to the present.

- Suzanne Jill Levine

1 Gustavo Guerrero, Severo Sarduy Obras I: Poesía. (Mexico: FCE), 2007
Entrando en ti, cabeza con cabeza,
pelo con pelo, boca contra boca:
el aire que respiras –la fijeza
del recuerdo–, respiro, y en poca

luz de la tarde –rayo que no cesa
entre los huesos abrasados– toca
los bordes de tu cuerpo: luz que apresa
la forma. Ya su cénit la convoca

a otro vacío donde su blancura
borra, marca de arena, tu figura.
El día devorado de sonidos

quema, de trecho en trecho, su espesura
y vuelca de ceniza la textura
en la noche voraz de los sentidos.

Entering you, head against head,
hair by hair, mouth against mouth

I inhale the air you breathe–
memory a stillness in the dying
afternoon light–endless ray
piercing burning bones, touching
your body's edge: day's light
catching the shape

a wide void where
whiteness

erases marks in the sand, your face
as sounds devour the day

burning
slowly

your thick
texture turning to ashes

in the hungry night of the senses.
**Recuento**

Ya no soy el de ayer, el tiempo pasa.
Mi verso se ha tornado transparente.
Por la tardes me vienen de repente
bruscos deseos de volver a casa.

La pasión que ensimisma y la que abrasa
se alejaron de mí; ahora es la mente
quien disfruta, nocturna indiferente,
con los cuerpos que el día me rechaza.

No deploro el amor, que me fue ajeno;
sino el deseo, que redime, invierte
y modifica todo lo que toca.

Escrituras, pasiones y veneno
faltaron a mi vida y a mi muerte.
Y el roce de las manos, y una boca.

---

**Reckoning**

I'm no long the same as yesterday: time passes
My poems have become transparent
In the late afternoon I often feel
a sudden desire to return home.

Burning passion, passion that turns one inward
Has gone away; now it's the mind, indifferent,
ocurnal, that savors the bodies
The day rejects.

I don't miss love. It was always alien to me,
But rather desire, redeeming, inverting,
Modifying everything it touches.

Writings, passions and poison
All missing from my life and death
Also hands stroking me gently, and a mouth.
Retrato

A los veinte años del mayo del 68

El óleo abandonó por Liquitex,
Lacan y Lévi-Strauss por Asterix;
vendió el Max Ernst y compró un Otto Dix;
el amor renegó por “sea-sun-sex”.

Botó el “Heno de Pravia” y usó Ajax;
dejó la Leica por la Rollyflex.
No se arriesgaba sino con Durex
y en las ciudades remotas –Aix or Dax.

Su alimento era el whiskey. Y el Viandox.
Se burló de Pierre Daix y de Pierre Dux
y sobre el sexo se tatuó “DEL LUX”.

Hoy, su jurbizzia en Wall Street es vox populi. Y sus arreglos con el tax.
De aquellos tiempos conservó el Mandrax.

Portrait

20 years after May 68

He gave up oils for Liquitex,
Lacan and Levi-Strauss for Asterix;
He sold the Max Ernst and bought an Otto Dix,
Love he sold out for “sea-sun-sex”.

He dumped his Heno de Pravia and used Ajax;
He left his Leica for a Rollyflex.
He dared do it only with Durex
And in remote cities like Aix or Dax.

His food was whiskey. And Viandox.
He made fun of Pierre Daix and Pierre Dux
And tattooed on his sex “DE LUX”.

Today his mischief on Wall Street is vox populi. And his wily ways with the tax.
From the old days he has conserved Mandrax.
Severo Sarduy

Beach Birds

• Translated from the Spanish by Suzanne Jill Levine and Carol Maier •


$12.95 trade paperback

Reviewed by Philip Barnard

—¡Revienta!—es Socorro la que habla—. Sí, revienta, aguanta, muérete, quejate al estado, quejate a los dioses, drop dead, cáete abierta en dos como una naranja, ahógate en cerveza, en frankfurter chucrute, jódete. Conviértete en polvo, en ceniza. Eso querías.

Auxilio aparta las mechas. Se asoma, quevediana:

—Seré ceniza, mas tendré sentido.

Polvo seré, mas polvo enamorado.


Severo Sarduy, De donde son los cantantes (1967)

“Drop dead!”—Mercy speaking—“Yeah, drop dead, stick with it, kill yourself, go tell the president, go tell the gods, shove it, split in two like an orange, drown in beer, in franks and sauerkraut, fuck yourself. Turn to dust, to ashes. That’s what you wanted.”

Help pushes aside her locks. She peeps out, Baroque:

“I will be ashes, but meaningful ashes.

I will be dust, but dust in love.

MERCY: “Tu me casses les cothurnes! (en français dans le texte). Shut up. I can’t go on either. Wipe away that tear. A little modesty, please. And poise. Stick with it. Take your compact.”

From Cuba with a Song (1972)

Tr. Suzanne Jill Levine

Ave Severo, Hail and Farewell

Severo Sarduy (1937-1993) was a key Spanish-language writer of the late twentieth century who lived in Cuba until 1960, then in Paris until his death in 1993. Although his writing moves beyond the romantico-modernist paradigm of aesthetic literature linked to the nation-state, in cultural terms it is still accurate to say, along with François Wahl, that Sarduy always remained Cuban yet also became French.1 His singular position as a writer who was an important contributor to the Latin American boom, as well as a Parisian novelist who could successfully translate the intellectual revolution of high poststructuralism (aka 1968) and connect it with queer and postcolonial dynamics, makes him a rare bird indeed, a challenging and fascinating writer positioned between several cultures, and one whose reputation will likely grow as his work becomes better understood in the twenty-first century. There is already a substantial scholarly literature on Sarduy and hopefully translations like this one will make him better known to English-language readers.

Beach Birds (Pájaros de la playa) is Sarduy’s final novel. For those familiar with his work, its appearance in an English-language version by distinguished translators Suzanne Jill Levine and Carol Maier, published in the forward-looking Otis Books / Seismicity Editions Series, is a very welcome event. This is a typically Sarduyan performance, which is to say a startling, beautiful, allusive, courageous novel, even if read simply by and for itself, with no previous knowledge of Sarduy and his writing. It is also a summa of Sarduy’s entire novelistic corpus that takes on its fuller outlines only when the reader becomes aware of the many ways in which it connects with his earlier, always self-consciously interrelated writings. It reprises, revises, and gives new senses to a combinatory of thematic, conceptual, and stylistic elements that extend back

1 For a comprehensive and informed account of Sarduy’s career and unique cultural location, see François Wahl, “Severo de la rue Jacob,” an overview of the life and writings written for the Obra completa project: Sarduy, Obra completa, Gustavo Guerrero and François Wahl, eds. (Madrid, Galaxia Gutenberg, Círculo de Lectores: 1999), II: 1447-1547. See also the website of the non-profit “Severo Sarduy Cultural Foundation” organized by Wahl, Guerrero, Elizabeth Burgos, Roberto González Echevarría, and others: severo-sarduy-foundation.com.
through the entirety of his career. Since his writings are interwoven in this manner, and since all of the English translations have been by Suzanne Jill Levine and Carol Maier, reading Sarduy novels has always been a question of new encounters on several levels with old friends and fellow travelers. Finally, and certainly not least, *Beach Birds* is a bravura farewell performance written while the author was dying of AIDS at age 55 in 1992. He saw the first proofs but did not live to see the book appear in July 1993. The novel transforms this experience of mortality, and everything one associates with it—from the breakdown of the body and the indignities of medicalization to the task of preparing oneself for the inevitable—into an affirmation that is as improbable as it is instructive. Without morbidity or fear, but with his characteristic combination of stylistic panache, intellectual rigor, and knowing humor, Sarduy transformed his own experience of dying into a cultural artifact that is also—to wax poststructuralist—a lesson in the serene management of that familiar and frequently ridiculous web of desire and disappointment formerly known as the self.

The first definition of the word “translation” in the OED is “transference; removal or conveyance from one person, place, or condition to another,” as in “the removal of a bishop from one see to another” or “the removal of the body or relics of a saint to another place of interment.” Like Sarduy’s other novels, *Beach Birds* foregrounds and assumes the uncanny movement of translation in many more ways than the conventional sense of rendering one linguistic performance into another. Translation is not a secondary feature of Sarduy’s novels, or an external process applied to them from the outside. The difference, the familiar strangeness, the transferential motion of translation is intrinsic to them, part of their energy and logic from the start. Thinking of Proust’s formulation when he wrote of “that perpetual error which is nothing but ‘life’ itself,” we might regard *Beach Birds* as the concluding chapter in the perpetual translation that Sarduy seemed to perform and prefigure with everything he wrote. Whether one encounters them in Spanish or other languages, Sarduy’s novels always seem meticulously translated from some ludic Cuban–Parisian–Mediatic dialect whose lexicon will never be fully deciphered, but whose syntax lovingly replicates and mocks the chains of desire, the cultural relays, and the mirror-play of self and other that make up the deep architecture of his work. He would have laughed at the word *oeuvre* but, taken without its aestheticist trappings, it provides a concept of coherence and interrelatedness that is appropriate for describing his corpus of writings.

Another way of describing the incessant dynamic of translation in Sarduy is to think of it as a constitutive element of the verbal brilliance that is the most obvious feature of his writing. Proceeding from the basic poststructuralist critique of idealist foundationalism, Sarduy’s writing is not about things, but about relations between things and relations that construct things, about generative networks or systems of meaning and reference, of which translation is one key instance. He loved translation’s aleatory potential, linked it to the Cuban practice of *eboteo* (irreverent, vulgar joking and wise-cracks), and built it into his work beforehand, relishing the transformative energy and vitality it can imply. What the cut-up was to Burroughs, as a basic generative operator, translation is to Sarduy’s assertively trans-cultural writings. He regarded translators as collaborators and took great pleasure in the unexpected twists that translation brings to what he had written. I think this is part of what Roland Barthes was referring to, in *The Pleasure of the Text*, when he presented Sarduy’s writing as a sort of linguistic perpetual motion machine that made him think of an inspired or crazy Saint conversing with an unruly flock of dazzling tropical birds. Barthes described Sarduy’s writing, and specifically that writing’s investment in translation, as “a kind of Franciscanism that invites all words to perch, to flock, to fly off again; a marbled, iridescent webs of desire and disappointment formerly known as the self.

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**Translatio studii**

Building on their earlier Sarduy translations and notable careers as translators of many other writers, Suzanne Jill Levine and Carol Maier’s collaboration here is exemplary. Sarduy had nine paternal aunts, nine like the number of muses, and Levine and Maier’s success in translating his challenging texts makes one wonder whether they qualify as numbers ten and eleven. Beyond the technical excellence of their work on *Beach Birds*, one has to appreciate how their behind-the-scenes presence in the novel constitutes an echo and an extension, in uncanny and fitting ways, of the novel’s characteristic mechanics.
of twins, splitting, doubling and identity as construction and performance. Levine and Maier understand this mechanics and they raise it to a second degree because they have played this role in the performance right from the start, as translators and stage-managers for the previous novels and essays in English. With the exception of the one small volume of radio plays, For Voice, translated by myself in 1985, Levine and Maier are responsible for all of the Sarduy that is available in English. Levine, of course, along with Gregory Rabassa, is perhaps the best-known Anglophone translator of Latin American writing, a key English-language voice of the big boom from Infante, Donoso, and Puig to Cortázár and Fuentes. Her translations of Sarduy’s early trilogy of novels, From Cuba with a Song (Spanish 1967 / English 1972), Cobra (1972/1975), and Maîtreya (1978/1987) established her some time ago as Sarduy’s primary English interpreter. Carol Maier previously translated Sarduy’s first book of essays and part of the second as Written on a Body (1968/1989), and Levine and Maier together have previously collaborated on his late essay-collection Christ on the Rue Jacob (1987/1995). Yet to appear in English are the early Gestos (1963), and the later Colibris (1984) and Cocuyo (1990) which, along with Beach Birds, constitute a second trilogy. Sarduy is an important writer whose reputation is likely to grow with passing time, and whose books should all appear in English.

For those of us interested in translation as a cultural practice in its own right, Levine and Maier’s intersections with Sarduy are further developed in their own informative writings on translation. Levine’s The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Fiction (1991) includes two chapters and other reflections on Sarduy drawn from her work on his early novels. Maier’s “Translator’s Introduction” in Written on a Body, and “Interviewing Carol Maier: a woman in translation” (Quaderns: Revista de traducció 2, 1998, 155-162) likewise develop insights concerning Sarduy’s work and its peculiar connections with the translator’s task. Given the importance of sheer verbal surface and linguistic structure in Sarduy, these writings are an important part of the English language scholarship on his work. The “Translators’ Afterword” in Beach Birds clarifies many of the key lexical decisions the translators have made and provides essential commentary on the novel as it does so. Only such highly informed and accomplished translators, in the end, could meet the challenges posed by Sarduy’s style and produce English versions of his writing that convey its acrobatic brilliance.

Analogies are always risky, but reading Beach Birds in English suggests a final, very particularly Sarduyan trope for Levine and Maier’s accomplishment with this translation. Like learned versions of the iconic Help and Mercy, twinned characters whose role in Beach Birds reprises their crucial appearances in previous Sarduy novels, beginning with the opening passage of From Cuba with a Song which serves as the epigraph for this piece, Levine and Maier’s earlier collaborations with Sarduy and with each other are recycled and renewed in this performance. Auxilio and Socorro (re)appear in Beach Birds as metamorphic figures circling around Immortelle-Siempreviva, an indomitable diva-queen, but for the Anglophone reader of Sarduy, these two characters, like the translators who have supplied their voices, are in fact familiar companions and collaborators whose contribution takes on new significance in this final performance.

Ars Moriendi

Beach Birds’ fortunate fall into translation brings together a neo-baroque memento mori, a raucous farce, and an art of contemplation. The narrative setting is a nameless tropical volcanic island with a colonial legacy, and on that island a sanatorium-style building, never explicitly identified as a hospital, in which patients struggle with the nameless illness or plague, preparing themselves for death and contrasting its gravitational tug on life with the persistence of vitality in the world around them. A ridiculously vain diva, Immortelle, persists in a stubborn desire for youth and beauty, becoming the object of competing medical, herbal, and sexual attentions by an antagonistic pair of doctor-lovers, Horse and Cayman, and by the iconic companion nurses Help and Mercy. A wheelchair-bound Cosmologist contemplates his own dilapidated body and events around him, preparing for the last.

The “birds” (pájaros) and “beach” (playa) of the title are polyvalent markers. The birds are flying creatures who defy gravity’s relentless force, but also, in a central scene, diseased animals that crash and die against the pentagonal glass atrium ceiling of the sanatorium. They reference, among other topoi, Merce Cunningham’s choreography for Birds on the Beach, which Sarduy admired in 1991 while working on the novel; a short 1989 piece (“El texto devorado”) on Spanish novelist Juan Goytisolo’s Las virtudes del pájaros solitario (The Virtues of the Solitary Bird) in which Sarduy first developed the central motif of birds dying against a glass atrium roof; and Cuban slang “pájaros” or “patos”
As Wahl points out, the novel develops a three-fold organizational scheme conveyed in three groups of characters and three stylistic layers: The inhabitants of the sanatorium and the general surroundings of the island are rendered in a relatively dry, transparent, “blank” style; the diva Immortelle along with her attendants and physicians spark Sarduy's more playful, allusive, acrobatic and “neo-baroque” prose; and the reflections of the wheelchair-bound, Stephen Hawking-like “Cosmologist” detach into “The Cosmologist’s Diary” and the angular, spare, gnomic style epitomized in the poems that conclude the narrative. Fittingly, the novel’s last lines are the Cosmologist’s translation of a Marina Tsvetaeva poem on death, written while she was an émigré in Paris, on September 5-6, 1936, mid-way between Sarduy’s conception and birth (February 25, 1937). Sarduy’s Buddhist themes intersect with his passion for science and cosmology as the narrative brings the opposition of life and death full circle.

**Curriculum Cubense**

Concluding Sarduy’s corpus as elegantly and self-consciously as it does, what parting inflection does this novel give to the larger body of work? With the brief historical perspective afforded by fifteen years, the novel’s emphasis on meditative cultivation with Buddhist overtones and an ethics of the transmigrant’s’ care may remind some readers of related themes in the final stage of Foucault’s writing, as he succumbed to an AIDS-related illness in 1984, nine years before Sarduy. Both writers had lived and written at the height of poststructuralism and the culture of 1968, and both epitomize its transformative energies. Both likewise encountered AIDS as a plague of the 1980s-1990s, as part of a symptomatic fin-de-siècle decline in which the aftermath of 1968 gave way to the revanchist neoliberalism and neoimperialism of the Reagan-Thatcher-Bush era. Certainly the novel can and should be read in the context of the wave of cultural production driven by AIDS, from the 1980s to the present. But the deflationary forces of decay, loss, and death in Beach Birds are not restricted to this context. In fact, they arguably mark the latter (post-1980) phase of Sarduy’s career and the second loose trilogy of novels (Colibri, Cocuyo, and Beach Birds) in a provocative way, even before Sarduy’s knowledge of his illness. Making sense of this novel and this turn, in translation, thus brings us back to Sarduy’s unique position as a writer and engaged intellectual, and the related question of how that position translates for an Anglophone audience at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Understandably, Sarduy’s reception is significantly different according to the perspective one takes on his production: boom writer, poststructuralist writer, queer writer, Cuban, Parisian, Spanish writer or internationalist-émigré avant-garde writer, and so on. He can profitably be read from all these angles, although the core of his reputation is that of an erudite stylistic virtuoso who combines Latin American boom and poststructuralism. The basic elements of this cultural location are summed up in the references to the rue Jacob in Sarduy’s essays invoking that street, and in Wahl’s overview “Severo de la rue Jacob,” for this is the location of Editions du Seuil (Threshold Publishers), the well-known publishing house where Sarduy worked as an editor for many years and which published his first four novels in their French translations. Since Seuil was also a key publisher of the poststructuralist revolution and of the crucial journal Tel Quel, its street address localizes a certain intensely Parisian literary-intellectual milieu of the 1960-1980 period in which Sarduy developed both his complex relations with the boom as it became institutionalized and struggled over as a site of cultural capital, and his equally complex relations with the constantly-evolving Tel Quel group (i.e., Philippe Sollers, Marcelin Pleynet, Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Gerard Genette, Derrida during the early phase, etc.) in which he was a significant although never a central figure. It was at the conjunction of these two major generators of cultural energy and exchange that Sarduy grew into his role as a kind of institutional translator for other Spanish-language writers and émigrés, as an influential Spanish-language acquisitions editor for Seuil, and as a Spanish-language commentator and host on Radio France.

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3 See “Two Broken Uppers, a Stitch in my Lower Lip, or Christ on the Rue Jacob” in *Christ on the Rue Jacob*, tr. Suzanne Jill Levine and Carol Maier (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1995), 23-27.

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Situated as he is, for English-language readers, as a practitioner of the kind of resolutely “textualist” writing associated with Lezama Lima on the one hand and high poststructuralism (Barthes, Derrida, Lacan, etc.) on the other, it is important to remember that the dominant Anglophone reception of this milieu tends to reject or re-aestheticize the deeper intellectual and cultural transformation that these names represent. But the synthesis and transformation of cultural traditions that Sarduy produces (condensed, in his work, into the transformation of Spanish Golden-Age baroque into a postmodern “neo-baroque” of big bang cosmology) is certainly not the literary version of a depoliticized “linguistic turn,” nor is it a reinscription of new-and-improved artistic tropes or styles by a gifted novelist drawing on an impressive battery of modernist and avant-garde exempla. Sarduy was well aware that he inherited both the history of art and an avant-gardist attack on the elite-aesthetic construction of this history, and he embraced that rejection of latter-day aestheticism wholeheartedly. In this manner, Beach Birds and all of Sarduy’s work registers and contributes to an ongoing transformation of central categories concerning literary institutions, practices, and ideas.

In other words, since Sarduy was not an overtly political novelist in any doctrinaire sense, it bears emphasizing that he was also a writer of (cultural) revolution, a product of and a contributor to at least three key twentieth-century revolutionary contexts: the anti-neocolonial Cuban revolution of 1958, the anti-systemic revolt of 1968 that subtends poststructuralism, and the post-Stonewall sex-gender revolution that began in 1969 and still develops its implications today. Although it registers a certain melancholy in the wake of massive reactionary responses to all of these transformational forces, Beach Birds also reminds us that we too write in the wake of these events and that literature, whatever it may be today, no longer draws its productive forces from either the museum or the nation-state.

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Philip Barnard is Conger-Gabel Teaching Professor in English at the University of Kansas. He works primarily on the cultural politics of the revolutionary and Napoleonic periods and on cultural theory from historical materialism and poststructuralism to world-systems theory. His translations include Sarduy’s For Voice, Philippe Sollers’ Writing and the Experience of Limits, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy’s The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism (collaborating with Cheryl Lester), and “The Mulatto” by Victor Séjour, the earliest African American published fiction. He has also translated short pieces by Julia Kristeva, Alain Kirili, Louise Bourgeois, and others. Two translation projects currently underway are The Productive Body (1972) by François Guéry and Didier Deleule (philosophy), and The Count of Haag (1872) by Victor Séjour (a novel). In collaboration with Stephen Shapiro, Barnard is also publishing a series of critical editions of novels by Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810) and is textual editor of the Charles Brockden Brown Scholarly Edition (brockdenbrown.ucf.edu), a six-volume print and subsequent electronic edition of Brown’s non-novelistic writings.

Rebecca Crocker has been exploring Latin American and Latino culture and literature ever since moving to California in 1990. Over the past 17 years, she has taken on bus journeys through Mexico, hands-on work with street kids throughout the region, efforts to curb gang violence in East LA, sponsorship of Spanish-language bookclubs, working alongside and writing about migrant workers in California’s central valley, and studying the region in depth while pursuing her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Stanford University. In her present life, she is often a medical, legal, and community interpreter and translator, sometimes a Spanish teacher to elementary students, occasionally an activist, and always a mother to two young girls. She lives and works in Durham, North Carolina, a region currently experiencing unprecedented growth in its small Latin American (primarily Mexican) immigrant community.

Linh Dinh was born in Saigon, Vietnam in 1963, came to the US in 1975, and has also lived in Italy and England. He is the author of two collections of stories, Fake House (Seven Stories Press 2000) and Blood and Soap (Seven Stories Press 2004), four books of All Around What Empties Out (Tinfish 2003), American Tatts (Chax 2005), Borderless Bodies (Factory School 2006) and Jam Alerts (Chax 2007), with a novel, Love Like Hate, scheduled to be released in 2008 by Seven Stories Press. His work has been anthologized in Best American Poetry 2000, Best American Poetry 2004, Best American Poetry 2007 and Great American Prose Poems from Poe to the Present, among other places. Linh Dinh is also the editor of the anthologies Night, Again: Contemporary Fiction from Vietnam (Seven Stories Press 1996) and Three Vietnamese Poets (Tinfish 2001), and translator of Night, Fish and Charlie Parker, the poetry of Phan Nhien Hao (Tupelo 2006). Blood and Soap was chosen by the Village Voice as one of the best books of 2004. His poems and stories have been translated into Italian, Spanish, Dutch, German, Portuguese, Japanese, Arabic, Icelandic and Finnish, and he has been invited to read his works all over the US, London, Cambridge, Berlin and Reykjavik. He has also published widely in Vietnamese.

Jeff Edmunds is a painter who writes and translates in his spare time. His texts have appeared, among other places, in McSweeney’s, Formules (Paris, France), and, translated into Russian, in Inostrannia literatura. In 2003 his tale La feintise was published with Jean Lahougue’s La ressemblance (a rewriting of Vladimir Nabokov’s Despair) by Les Impressions Nouvelles. His Laffaire Laura, the story of a literary hoax, was published by remue.net, a site founded by French author François Bon, in 2006. Jeff Edmunds lives and works in central Pennsylvania.

Poet and translator Jennifer Hayashida was born in Oakland, CA, and grew up in the suburbs of Stockholm and San Francisco. She was recently awarded a 2007 PEN Translation Fund Grant for her translation of Nyberg’s Clockwork of Flowers - Explanations and Poems (Norstedts Förlag, 2000), and is the translator of Eva Sjödin’s book-length prose poem, Inner China (Litmus Press, 2003). In addition, she has been a Fellow at the MacDowell Colony and the recipient of a Witter Bynner Poetry Translator Residency at the Santa Fe Art Institute. Her poems and translations have appeared in Circumference, The Literary Review, Insurance, The Asian American Journal, and Action, Yes; text-based work has been included in group exhibitions at The Vera List Center for Art and Politics and Artists Space. She received her MFA in writing from Bard College in 2003. She currently lives in Brooklyn, and teaches Asian American Studies at Hunter College and the University of California, Davis. A Different Practice is forthcoming from Ugly Duckling Press.

Stephen Kessler’s most recent translations include Written in Water: The Prose Poems of Luis Cernuda (City Lights, 2004, Lambda Literary Award) and Eyeses, poems by Raymond Queneau (co-translated with Daniela Hurezanu, Black Widow Press, spring 2008). He is completing a version of Cernuda’s later poems, Desolation of the Chimera, a selection of which was featured in Calque 2. The essay here is from Moving Targets: On Poets, Poetry & Translation (due from EL León Literary Arts in 2008). His latest book of original poetry is Burning Daylight (Littoral Press, fall 2007). He is the editor of The Redwood Coast Review. For more about Stephen Kessler visit www.stephenkessler.com.

Vincent Kling teaches English, German, and comparative literature at La Salle University in Philadelphia. His main interests are in Southern U. S. literature and the literature of Austria, especially since around 1890. He has published scholarly articles on Heimito von Doderer, Gerr Monke, W. G. Sebald, and Ödön von Horváth, as well as translations of works by Doderer and Monke. Also, a book of concrete poems relating to the Holocaust, Heimrad Baecker’s nachschrift, is in preparation; translators and editors
Kling, Patrick Greaney, and Thomas Eder. His work has appeared in Chicago Review, Southern Humanities Review, Review of Contemporary Fiction, German Quarterly, Modern Austrian Literature, and Die Unterrichtspraxis. Ariadne Press has published his translations of The Writer's Place: Heimito von Doderer and the Altergrund District of Vienna, a study by Engelbert Pfeiffer, and A Person Made of Porcelain and Other Stories by Heimito von Doderer. Forthcoming is a book of the Doderer Divertimenti and Variations, to appear in the Spring of 2008 with Counterpath Press, and Ariadne will publish a series of short works about composers by Jonke, also in 2008; that volume will include “Catalogue d'oiseaux,” the Jonke work found in this issue.

Suzanne Jill Levine is professor of Latin American literature and Translation Studies at the University of California in Santa Barbara. Her many honors include PEN awards, National Endowment grants and a Guggenheim fellowship. Aside from her many translations of important Latin American writers, her books include The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Fiction, and the literary biography Manuel Puig and the Spider Woman: His Life and Fictions.

George Messo is a poet, translator, and editor. His books include From the Pine Observatory (2000), Aradaki Set (The In-between Voice, 2005), Entrances (2006) and Açıkta’un Kıcık Tanrıları (The Little Gods of Europe, 2007). His translation of İlhan Berk's selected poems, A Leaf About to Fall, was published by Salt in 2006. His translations of I'll be at the Birds' Birthday and The Book of Things by İlhan Berk are due in 2008 from Shearman Books and Salt Publishing respectively. He is the editor of Near East Review.

Sawako Nakayasu was born in Japan and has lived most of her life in the US. Her books include Nothing fictional but the accuracy or arrangement ube, (Quale Press), So we have been given time Or, (Verse Press), and Hurry Home Honey (Burning Deck, forthcoming). Her translations from Japanese include Four From Japan (Litmus Press), featuring four contemporary poets, and For the Fighting Spirit of the Walnut (New Directions, forthcoming 2008) by Takashi Hiraide. She is the recipient of a 2007 NEA Literary Translation Fellowship and a 2006 PEN Translation Fund Grant for translating the poetry of Chika Sagawa and Takashi Hiraide, respectively. Her own writing has been translated into Japanese, Swedish, Arabic, and Vietnamese.

Sandra Newman is the author of two novels, the critically acclaimed and award-nominated The Only Good Thing Anyone Has Ever Done, published by HarperCollins, and Cake, from Random House. A writing manual, How Not to Write a Novel, co-authored with Howard Mittelmark, is forthcoming in 2008; her memoir, Folk Tales of the Rich is forthcoming in 2009. She has taught writing at Temple University, the University of Colorado, Chapman University, the Gotham Writing Workshop and the 92nd Street Y, as well as to numerous private students. Her fiction, essays, talks, and reviews have appeared in Harper's, Granta, on BBC's Radio 4, and in various newspapers and literary journals.

Fabienne Pizot-Haymore specialized in English and American studies in the University of Montpellier, France. She has been living in the United States of America since 1998. Fabienne Pizot-Haymore has taught as a lecturer in French at several American universities. Her areas of interest are semiotics and cognitive linguistics as well as the theory of metaphor. She also composes lyrics, and performs as a jazz singer. She occasionally writes scripts and works in storyboard for historical documentaries. A Spasm of Vacuity is her first work in literary translation.


Madeleine Stratford has a B. A. in Modern Languages from Bishop's University and an M. A. in German Studies from McGill University. She is presently completing a Ph.D. in Translation Studies at Université Laval, specializing on the French, English and German translations of Argentine poet Alejandra Pizarnik. She translated into French Verena Stefan (Brèves littéraires n°69, 2005) and Antonio Carvajal (Si proche de Grenade, Éditions Seghers, 2005). In June 2005, Ms. Stratford was invited to the Banff Literary Translation Centre in Alberta, to work on her French translations of Austrian poet Ingeborg Bachmann. Since January 2006, she teaches "Introduction to literary translation" from English to French at Université Laval.

Carl Toews lives in Pittsburgh, where he divides his time between mathematics and translation. He can be reached at toews@duq.edu.
Alejandra Pizarnik: 3 Poems Translated by Madeleine Stratford

Signos / Signs

Todo hace el amor con el silencio.
Me habían prometido un silencio como un fuego, una casa de silencio.
De pronto el templo es un circo y la luz un tambor.

Everything makes love to the silence.
I was promised a silence like fire, a house of silence.
The temple is suddenly a circus and the light, a drum.

Fuga en lila / Fugue in lilac

Había que escribir sin para qué, sin para quién.
El cuerpo se acuerda de un amor como encender la lámpara.
Si silencio es tentación y promesa.

One had to write for no why, for no whom.
The body remembers a love like lighting a lamp.
If silence is promise and temptation.

Del otro lado / On the other side

Como un reloj de arena cae la música en la música.
Estoy triste en la noche de colmillos de lobo.
Cae la música en la música como mi voz en mis voces.

Like an hourglass music falls into music.
I am sad in the night of a wolf’s fangs.
Music falls into music like my voice in my voices.
TRANSLATIONS

Dante Alighieri • Stanley Lombardo
Jean-Marie Damais • Fabienne Pizot-Haymore
Aline Desentis • Rebecca Crocker
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Ernesto Sabato • Carl Toews
Severo Sarduy • Suzanne Jill Levine

INTERVIEW

with Stanley Lombardo

ESSAY

by Stephen Kessler

REVIEW

Severo Sarduy's Beach Birds

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