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MARGARET CARSON – RENÉ CHAR – SERGIO CHEJFEC – JAMES CLIFFORD – CHRIS DANIELS
JOSEPH DONAHUE – GYÐDIR ELÍASSON – CLAYTON ESHLEMAN – ANI GJIKA – COLE HEINOWITZ
NAZIM HIKMET – HIROMI ITŌ – FERNANDO ITURBURU – ADRIANA X. JACOBS – STUART KENDALL
PHILIP LAMANTIA – HEZY LESKLY – ALEXIS LEVITIN – LULJETA LLESNÄHAKU
SALGADO MARANHÃO – JORGE MARTILLO – MEG MATICH – JESUS MAYA – SANDRA MOUSSEPÈS
MURAT NEMET-NEJAT – GERARD DE NERVAL – BRONKA NOWICKA – DANZANGIIN NYAMSÜREN
PRZEMYSŁAW OWČZAREK – JEANNINE MARIE PITAS – ROBERTO PIVA – ALEJANDRA PIZARNIK
MARK POLIZZOTTI – VALGERDUR PÓRODDSDÓTTIR – IRAKLİ QOLBAİ – PAM REHM
ELENA RIVERA – JEROME ROTHENBERG – DALE SMITH – HADLEY SORBYS-JONES
GORO TAKANO – MARK TARDI – MATT TURNER – GENYA TUROVSKAYA – PETER VALENTE
SIMON WICKHAMSMITH – KATARZYNA SZUSTER – CARMEN VASCONES – ROBERT WOOD
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ALEJANDRA PIZARNIK
FROM THE BLOODY COUNTESS
NOTES FOR A COLUMN
SOME KEYS TO ALEJANDRA PIZARNIK

TRANSLATED BY COLE HEINOWITZ
THE BLOODY COUNTESS

“The criminal does not make beauty; he is himself the authentic beauty.”
—J.P. Sartre

Valentine Penrose has collected documents and accounts relating to a real and unusual figure: Countess Báthory, the murderer of 650 girls.¹

An excellent poet (her first book opens with a fervent preface by Paul Éluard), Penrose unites her poetic talent with meticulous scholarship. Without altering the real, hard-won facts, she recasts them as a sort of vast, lovely prose poem.

Countess Báthory’s sexual perversion and madness are so obvious that Penrose ignores them in order to focus solely on the figure’s convulsive beauty.

It isn’t easy to reveal this kind of beauty. Valentine Penrose has achieved it, however, through her dexterous engagement with the aesthetic values of this dark history. The underground reign of Erzébet Báthory is inscribed in the torture chamber of her medieval castle: there, the sinister beauty of nocturnal creatures is embodied in a silent woman of legendary pallor, with lunatic eyes and sumptuous, raven-colored hair.

A well-known philosopher includes screams in the category of silence: Screams, gasps, curses form a “silent substance.” The substance of this underground is evil. Seated on her throne, the Countess watches the torture and listens to the screams. Her hideous old servant women are silent figures bringing fire, knives, needles, pokers; they torture the girls, then bury them. Like the poker or the knife, these old women are instruments of a possession. This dark ceremony has only one silent spectator.

THE IRON MAIDEN

“…among the red laughter of glistening lips and the monstrous movements of mechanical women.”
—R. Daumal

In Nuremberg, there was a famous automaton known as “the Iron Maiden.” Countess

Báthory purchased a replica for her torture chamber in Csejthe Castle. This metallic lady had the color and proportions of a human creature. Naked, painted, and bejeweled, with long blonde hair that reached the floor, it had a mechanism that allowed the lips to open in a smile and the eyes to move.

The Countess, sitting on her throne, observes.

To make the “Maiden” spring into action, one must touch several of the precious stones in its necklace. It responds instantly with horrible grinding sounds and very slowly lifts its white arms so they close in a perfect embrace over whatever is nearby—in this case, a girl. Once the automaton embraces her, no one can separate the living from the iron body, both equal in beauty. Suddenly, the iron lady’s painted breasts open up to reveal five daggers that pierce its living companion, her loose hair as long as its own.

Once the sacrifice is accomplished, another stone in the necklace is touched: the arms fall, the lips and eyes shut, and the assassin becomes again the “Maiden,” motionless in its casket.

THE POWER OF A NAME

“And madness and cold
roved aimlessly through the house.”
—Milosz

The name of Báthory—in whose power Erzébet believed as in a magic charm—was an illustrious name dating back to the beginnings of the Hungarian Empire. It is no coincidence that the family crest flaunted the teeth of a wolf, as the Báthorys were cruel, fearless, and lustful. The many marriages between close relations contributed, perhaps, to the appearance of hereditary illnesses and inclinations: epilepsy, gout, lechery. It is likely that Erzébet was epileptic given that she was stricken by episodes of possession as unforeseen as her terrible eye pains and migraines (which she exorcised by placing a wounded, barely living dove on her forehead).

The Countess’ relatives were no discredit to the ancestral fame. Her uncle Istvan, for example, was so mad that he couldn’t tell summer from winter and would have himself drawn on a sleigh over burning sands that were, for him, snowy roads; or her cousin Gábor, whose incestuous passion was shared by his sister. But the most delightful was her celebrated aunt Klara. She had four husbands (she murdered the first two) and died her own melodramatic death: a pasha caught her with her current lover and the unfortunate man was roasted on a spit. As for aunt Klara, she was raped—if this term can be used with
regard to her—by the entire Turkish garrison. She didn't die from this, however; rather, her captors—perhaps tired of raping her—finally stabbed her to death. She used to pick her lovers up in the streets of Hungary and didn’t mind sprawling out with them on some bed in which she had (truth be told) just killed one of her chambermaids.

By the time the Countess reached her fortieth year, the Báthorys had been dwindling and wasting away, thanks either to madness or their many consecutive deaths. Those who remained had become almost sensible, thereby forfeiting any interest they had inspired in Erzébet. It should be noted that, when fortune turned against her, the Báthorys, if they did not help her, at least reproached her with nothing.

THE MIRROR OF MELANCHOLY

“Everything is a mirror!”
—Octavio Paz

...she lived before her large dark looking glass, the famous looking glass whose pattern she designed herself... It was so comfortable it even had supports to rest her arms on so she could remain in front of it for hours without getting tired. We may imagine that if she could venture to design a mirror, Erzébet also drew up the plans for her dwelling. And we can understand why only the ravishingly sad music of her gypsy orchestra or the dangerous games of chase or the violent perfume of the magical herbs in the sorceress’ cottage or—above all—the basement swimming in human blood, could ignite in the eyes of her perfect face some semblance of a living human gaze. Because no one has as deep a thirst for earth, blood, and brute sexuality as those creatures that inhabit cold mirrors. And apropos of mirrors: they were never able to clear up the rumors around the Countess’ homosexuality, whether it was a matter of unconscious inclination or if, rather, she naturally accepted it as simply one more of her prerogatives. For the most part, she lived in an entirely female environment. Only women were ever present at her nights of crime. Then there are certain more obviously revealing details. For example, in the torture chamber, in her moments of maximum tension, the Countess herself would insert a burning candle into the sex of her victim. There are also testimonies that speak of less solitary forms of lechery. At some point, one maidservant affirmed that a mysterious aristocratic lady dressed as a boy had been visiting the Countess. On one occasion she discovered them together, torturing a girl, but she could not say if they shared more than the sadistic pleasures.

To continue with the subject of the mirror: Even if one doesn’t attempt to explain this sinister figure, it is essential to dwell on the fact that she was entirely free from the
sixteenth century’s *mal du siècle*, melancholy.

An unvarying tone presides over the melancholic. Their interior is a space the color of mourning; nothing happens there and no one enters. It is a bare stage on which the inert self is attended by the self who grieves for that inertia. The latter wants to liberate the prisoner, but any attempts fail like Theseus would have failed if, in addition to being himself he was also the Minotaur; to kill it, in other words, would have required he kill himself. But there are temporary fixes: sexual pleasure, for example, can for a brief time efface the silent gallery of mirrors and echoes that forms the melancholy soul. And what is more, it can illuminate that house of mourning and transform it into a kind of music box with bright and happy colors that sing and dance deliciously. Then, when the cord runs out, everything returns to immobility and silence. The music box is not a gratuitous comparison. I believe that melancholy, in sum, is a musical problem: a dissonance, an irregular rhythm. While on the outside everything unfolds at the dizzying pace of a waterfall, on the inside there is only the exhausted slowness of a drop of water falling now and again, with the result that the outside, when seen from the melancholic inside, seems absurd and unreal, and constitutes “the farce we all must act.” But for an instant—whether due to the sound of savage music or a drug or the sex act at its maximum violence—the melancholic’s torpid rhythm not only comes into alignment with the outside world, it overtakes it by an indescribably delicious excess, and the self vibrates with intoxicated force.

To the melancholic, time appears as a suspension of events—in actuality, things are occurring, but their slowness suggests the growth of a cadaver’s fingernails—that precedes and follows moments of fatally ephemeral violence. Between two silences or two deaths, the prodigious and fleeting speed, dressed in a variety of forms that range from innocent drunkenness to sexual perversions, and even to murder. And I think of the nights of Erzébet Báthory, keeping time with the screams of adolescent girls. The book these notes refer to contains a portrait of the Countess: the somber, beautiful lady looks like the allegory of melancholy as portrayed in old engravings. I would also like to point out that in her era, melancholics were believed to be possessed by this devil.

**DRASTIC MEASURES**

“…the law, cold and impersonal, is a stranger to the passions that could justify the cruel act of murder.”

—Sade

For six years, the Countess murdered with impunity. Over the course of those years, the
most dismal rumors never ceased to circulate about her. But the name of Báthory, not merely illustrious but also assiduously protected by the Hapsburgs, terrified any potential accusers.

By 1610, the King had received the most sinister reports—accompanied by evidence—concerning the Countess. After much hesitation, he decided to take serious measures. He charged the powerful Count Palatine Thurzó to investigate the tragic events at Csejthe and to punish the guilty.

Accompanied by a band of armed men, Thurzó arrived unannounced at the castle. In the basement, still in disarray from the bloody ceremony of the previous night, he found a beautiful, mutilated corpse and two girls in their death throes. But that wasn’t all. He breathed the stench of death; he saw the blood-splattered walls; he saw the “Iron Maiden,” the cage, the instruments of torture, the basins of dried blood, the cells, and in one of them he discovered a group of girls waiting their turn to die who told him that after many days without food they had been served a plate of grilled meat cut from the lovely bodies of their dead companions.

The Countess, without denying Thurzó’s accusations, declared that this was all her right as a high-ranking noblewoman. To which the Count Palatine answered: …I condemn you to imprisonment for life in your castle.

In his heart, Thurzó knew he should behead the Countess, yet such an exemplary form of punishment might have elicited reproach, not only from the Báthorys but from the entire nobility. Meanwhile, in the Countess’s apartments they found a journal in her handwriting, filled with the names and distinguishing marks of her victims, which now amounted to 610… As for Erzébet’s lackeys, when brought before the court, they confessed to unimaginable deeds and died at the stake.

The prison rose up around her. They bricked up the doors and windows of her apartments. A tiny opening was left in the wall through which to pass her food. And when everything was done they erected four gallows, one at each corner of the castle, to signal that it housed a prisoner condemned to death.

Thus she lived for over three years, almost dying from cold and hunger. She never showed remorse. She never understood why they had punished her. On August 21, 1614, a chronicler of the day wrote: She died at nightfall, abandoned by everyone.

She was never afraid; she never trembled. She deserves neither compassion nor respect—only a certain astonishment at the enormity of the horror, a certain fascination for a white dress turning red, for the idea of absolute rupture, for the evocation of a silence in which every scream is the image of intolerable beauty.
Like Sade in his writings and Gilles de Raise in his crimes, the Countess Báthory reached the unfathomable depths of debauchery. She is one more proof that absolute human freedom is horrifying.

c) What is the importance of poetry in the world today?

No. 1
We need a place where the impossible becomes possible. It is in the poem, particularly, where the limit of the possible contravenes law and order and risks itself.

*

No. 2
The poet brings news from the other side. He is the envoy or repository of the forbidden because he incites certain confrontations with the wonders of the world, but also with madness and death.

Outside the miniscule secret society of poetry lovers, everyone is afraid to recognize that an encounter with the poem could have freed them. Freed them from what? But this too everyone knows.

*

December 12
A writing that is dense and filled with danger due to its excessive transparency; utterly concrete; disproportionately material in the extent to which it reveals images originating in the most distant, unknown, and unexpected internal shadows.

A writing that is intolerably dense, to the point of suffocation, but made of nothing more than the “subtle links” that could allow for an innocent coexistence, on the same plane, of the subject and the object, as well as erasing the usual borders separating I, you, he, we, us, them. Alliances, metamorphosis.

My torment is transferring the images made on the other side by “the voice’s daughter” into lightning presences. A transfer I want to make with a tense precision that would allow me to master chance and would compensate me for my absolute submission to “the voice’s daughter.”

An intense need for poetic truth. She demands that visionary force be simultaneously liberated and maintained, an extraordinary poise in directing this force [and in structuring
these images].
I don’t notice whether I’m talking about poetic perfection, freedom, or about love and death.

* 

Thursday, December 14, 1964

No. 3
A writing that is dense and filled with danger due to its excessive transparency. Utterly concrete, as well as material in the extent to which it reveals images originating in distant, unknown, and unexpected internal shadows.
A writing that is intolerably dense, to the point of suffocation, but made of nothing more than subtle links that allow for an innocent coexistence, on the same plane, of the subject and the object, as well as erasing the usual borders separating I, you, he, we, us, them.
My torment results from the outpouring of images “the voice’s daughter” makes on the other side. Add to this an intense need for poetic truth. A simultaneous double movement: liberating the visionary force and maintaining an extraordinary poise in directing it. I want to effect this transfer into lightning presence by a tense precision that allows me to master chance and compensates me for my absolute submission to “my voice’s daughter,” either inspiration or unconscious.
**SOME KEYS TO ALEJANDRA PIZARNIK: AN INTERVIEW**

**MARTHA ISABEL MOIA:** In your poems, there are terms I consider *emblematic* and that contribute to the formation of your poems as solitary, illicit domains like the passions of childhood, like the poem, like love, like death. Would you agree with me that terms like *garden, forest, word, silence, wandering, wind, heartbreak,* and *night* are at once signs and emblems?

**AP:** I think that in my poems there are words I repeat incessantly, relentlessly, and mercilessly: the words of childhood, of fears, of death, of the night of bodies. Or, more precisely, the terms you indicate in your question would be signs and emblems.

**MIM:** Let’s start, then, by entering the most pleasant spaces: the garden and the forest.

**AP:** One of the sentences I’m most haunted by is spoken by the little girl Alice in Wonderland: “I only came to see the garden.” For Alice and for myself, the garden is the space of encounter or, as Mircea Eliade put it, *the center of the world.* Which suggests this sentence to me: The garden is green in the brain. A sentence of my own that brings me to another one by Gaston Bachelard, which I hope I remember correctly: *The garden of dream-memory, lost in an afterlife of the true past.*

**MIM:** In terms of your forest, it appears as a synonym for silence. But I sense other meanings. For example, your forest could be an allusion to the forbidden, to the occult.

**AP:** Why not? But it could also suggest childhood, the body, night.

**MIM:** Did you ever enter the garden?

**AP:** Proust, analyzing desire, says that desire doesn’t want to be analyzed but satisfied. In other words, I don’t want to talk about the garden, I want to see it. Of course what I’m saying is still puerile, but in this life we never do what we want to. Which is another reason to want to see the garden, even if it’s impossible, especially if it’s impossible.
MIM: While you were answering my question, your voice in my memory told me this from one of your poems: *My business is to invoke and exorcize.*

AP: Among other things, I write so that what I’m afraid of doesn’t happen; so that what wounds me doesn’t exist; to ward off Evil (*cf. Kafka*). It has been said that the poet is the great therapist. In this sense, the poetic task entails exorcism, invocation, and, beyond that, *healing*. To write a poem is to heal the fundamental wound, the rupture. Because all of us are wounded.

MIM: Among the various metaphors by which you construct this fundamental wound, I remember, because of how deeply it struck me, the one that in an early poem makes you ask about *the stunned beast dragging itself through my blood* (*). And I’m almost certain that the wind is one of the principle authors of the wound, since at times it appears in your writings as *the great tormentor*.

AP: I love the wind even if, exactly, my imagination tends to give it ferocious shapes and colors. Battered by the wind, I go through the forest, I wander in search of the garden.

MIM: In the night?

AP: I know little about the night but I unite myself it. I said it in a poem: *All night I make the night. All night I write. Word by word I write the night* (*).”

MIM: In an early poem, you also unite yourself with silence.

AP: Silence: the only temptation and the greatest promise. But I feel that the “inexhaustible whisper” is always welling up (*How well I know where flows the fountain of wandering language*). Which is why I would dare to say I don’t know if silence exists.

MIM: In a sort of counterpoint with your “I” that joins itself to the night, I see “the stranger;” “the silent one in the desert;” “the little traveler;” “my emigrant from herself;” the one who “wanted to enter the keyboard to get inside the music in order to have a homeland.” These,

1 All further references to poems by AP are marked (*).
your other voices, the ones that speak of your vocation of wandering, which for me is your true vocation, as you would say.

**AP:** I think of a line by Trakl: *Man is a stranger on earth.* I believe that, of everyone, the poet is the most foreign. I believe that the only possible refuge for the poet is the word.

**MIM:** There is a fear of yours that puts this refuge in danger: *not knowing how to name what doesn’t exist (*)*. That’s when you hide from language.

**AP:** With an ambiguity I’d like to clarify: I hide *from* language *inside* language. When something—including nothingness—has a name, it seems less hostile. *Nevertheless, I suspect that the essential is unspeakable.*

**MIM:** Is that why you look for *figures that appear alive by means of an active language that alludes to them (*)*?

**AP:** I feel that signs, words, insinuate, allude. This complicated way of feeling language leads me to believe that language cannot express reality, that we can only speak of the obvious. This is the root of my desire to make poems that are terribly exact in spite of my innate surrealism and the fact that I work with the elements of internal shadows. It is this that has characterized my poems.

**MIM:** Nevertheless, you don’t look for that exactitude anymore.

**AP:** True; I look for the poem to write itself however it wants to. But I prefer not to speak of now because it’s scarcely been written.

**MIM:** In spite of how much you write!

**AP:** …

**MIM:** *Not knowing how to name (*)* is related to the concern with finding *some phrase that is entirely yours (*)*. Your book *Works and Nights* is a telling response, since there your voices are the ones that speak.
**AP:** I worked hard on those poems and I should say that in configuring them I configured myself, and I changed. Inside me I had an ideal image of the poem and I managed to achieve it. I know I’m not like anybody (this is a misfortune). That book gave me the happiness of finding freedom in writing. I was free, I had the power to make myself a form as I wished to.

**MIM:** These fears coexist with the fear of *words that return* (*). Which ones are those?

**AP:** It’s memory. What happens is I watch the procession of rushing words, and I feel like a passive and defenseless spectator.

**MIM:** I find that the mirror, the other side, the forbidden zone and its oblivion, enable the fear of *being two* (*), in your work, which escapes the limits of the *doppelgänger* in order to include everyone you were.

**AP:** You’re right, it’s the fear of all of those that are contending in me. There is a poem by Michaux that says: *I am; I speak of who-I-was and who-I-was speaks to me. (…) One isn’t alone in one’s skin.*

**MIM:** Does this happen at any particular moment?

**AP:** When “the daughter of my voice” betrays me.

**MIM:** According to one of your poems, your most beautiful love was the love of mirrors. Who do you see in them?

**AP:** I see the other I am. (In truth, I have a certain fear of mirrors.) In some instances we come together. This almost always happens when I’m writing.

**MIM:** One night at the circus you recovered *a lost language at the moment when riders carrying torches galloped in a ferocious ring on black stallions* (*). What is that *something similar for my heart to the hot sounds of hooves against stand* (*)?

**AP:** It is the unfound language that I’m trying to find.

**MIM:** Perhaps you’ve found it in painting?
**AP:** I like to paint because in painting I find the opportunity to silently allude to the images of my interior shadows. In addition, I’m attracted by the lack of mythomania in the language of painting. Working with words or, more specifically, looking for my words, involves a tension that doesn’t exist in painting.

**MIM:** What is it that so attracts you to Rousseau’s “The Sleeping Gypsy”?

**AP:** It’s the equivalent of the language of circus horses. I’d like to be able to write something similar to the Customs Agent’s 2 “Gypsy” because there is silence and, at the same time, allusion to grave and luminous things. I’m also exceptionally moved by the work of Bosch, Klee, and Ernst.

**MIM:** Lastly, I’m curious whether you ever asked yourself the question Octavio Paz poses in the prologue to *The Bow and the Lyre: Wouldn’t it be better to turn life into poetry than to make poetry out of life?*

**AP:** I’ll respond with one of my most recent poems: *I wish I could live solely in ecstasy, making the body of the poem with my own body, rescuing every sentence with my days and weeks, infusing the poem with my breath insofar as every letter of every word has been sacrificed in ceremonies of living (*)*. 

[Published in *El deseo de la palabra*, Ocnos, Barcelona, 1972.]

2 The “customs agent” refers to the French painter Henri Julien Félix Rousseau (1844-1910), so-called for his work at the Paris customs office.
WHAT PRESENT SHOULD I GIVE TO YOU
THE FIELD OF THE MOON
THIS FALL IS LIKE FALL LAST YEAR
ONE YEAR
NIGHT SYMPHONY
THE RIVER IS FLOWING AGAIN
ON THE DAYS WHEN THE WOMEN
What present should I give to you
for this festival?
I’ll buy a bouquet of flowers from a kiosk,
but it will not be perfumed with honey or the wind.
In Baljingarav, in Jamyangmyadag, in Tsagaan-Uul,
there are many types of flowers,
but I’ll not deceive you, like the parrot
who copies everything, with painted flowers.
What if we two find pleasure
in our serene and uncomplicated life?
Or how about if we walk, gravely and quickly,
along the roads of the lower slopes, touched by the sun?
And so, my friend,
I will pick and give to you
one of last year’s blue psammachloa.
Weave this fine and delicate grass
in autumn into your hair,
like a golden pendant…

1984
THE FIELD OF THE MOON

for M.Tüvshinbulag

Is the sweet saiga lying here, pursued and felled? The blue moon casts its disc, like dark rays striking the snow. The frosted grasses hang over her desperate breathing. Through the harsh days of winter, the saiga comes running, falls inside the moon. An indistinct light touches her from the sultry remoteness of Heaven. And where I stand beneath the field of the moon, the snow tumbles like basketballs. The downy wrap of this dear woman, blindly fallen to her knees, is like snow. Burdened deep within her heart, lightly crumpled, as though fallen. But I, the poet, cannot find for you the precious diamond which shines like the sun, and even though I go to Singapore, from where might I bring it, like a heart glowing?! Like a dark vehicle rushing northwards in a mysterious and misty dream, like a tall man in a mackintosh, cursing me and swearing... the rays all shoot upwards into a grey, remote, and sultry Heaven. Like the ball, falling down through the net, the speckled moon makes a ring in snow. The white snow eclipses the moon, splits away the sadness beyond the moon. In the suffering silence, the moon cracks like porcelain.

29 November 1990
This fall is like fall last year, 
wet frogs splashing green water about, 
and damp yellow leaves fluttering 
and knocking against the dozy building.

A melancholy haze of birds 
whistles in onward flight, 
and tattered clouds creep 
across our drunken village.

A bird tumbles from above, 
like these sad leaves, 
and this clear morning a mist of feathers 
covers the speckled window.

An unknown woman passes the door, 
and the scent of a dead bird rustles 
from the pure bright red 
of her flowery cotton skirt.

My misted wisdom revives, 
and something forgotten returns, 
The river appears more lovely, though, 
beyond the hazy mists,

21 August 2001, third day of the new month. Day of the red dragon. 
Ereentsav
ONE YEAR

Fall’s fresh days have come,
more unseen than my companions.
A great door resounds, a
a head sticks through a hole.
My bench feels cold, the lamp
oil has seeped into the pottery.
Existence interrupted, outside…
a wolf goes by, carried on a stallion.
Fall’s signs are going,
flies break out on yellow leaves.
My tired brush slips in among the psammochloa,
I watch the butterfly sitting on a flower.

22 November 2001
First month of winter
NIGHT SYMPHONY

At midnight, the wind whistling outside,
I am eagerly listening, as though to a symphony.
Though I expect the fiend, I wish for
the melody of this sleepy silver trumpet.

Above the roof, flowing in on the first whistling,
the frosted feathergrass whips the ground near my pillow.
There were puppies barking, and in the silence now
cats are mewing in the building of sheet metal.

Now and again, the courtyard door slams shut,
and there is something in the darkness of darkness.
Like a owl, hooting in the sleeping village,
the wind blows harder, more poetry among the telephone lines.

And right now, tired from fiddling with
my poetry, I go and get firewood from outside.
As the red moon tilts from the west, the bad will flourish
and, in Ulaanbaatar, the Bolor Tsom goes by without me.

These nights of wind continue throughout Ereentsav,
like a woman, I think, in a silken summer gown, walking along the river.
This December, when the caravans are moving,
the bright sadness of my years awaits the pleasuring wine.

At midnight, the wind whistling outside,
my thoughts become clear.
The sky tomorrow will be perfect as poetry,
like an emerald, polished and cleaned.

24 December 1997, day of the mouse
The river is flowing again, 
pushing at the ice, 
and the birds are returning. 
You are combing my hair 
and everything, my love, 
is young again. 
And again, 
a gentle wind, 
a southeasterly, is blowing, 
and the larks are fluttering 
where it has blown through. 
On a winter’s day, 
even one word 
is swept away 
and the branches bloom, 
and I go out into the wind 
with my son in his cradle.
On the days when the women
take the warm waters,
in the branches of the almond tree
the birds are singing.

The warm and comforting snow
falls, or doesn’t fall,
but the moon wanders
like a dog, around the sky.

In a village out in the country,
the children enter
a little blue building,
and swing the wooden door to.

Outside the door,
the horseflies drone,
thrusting their noses
into the pale wormwood.

On the days when the women
take the warm waters,
in the branches of the almond tree
the birds are singing.

And just as the sunlight rubs and
polishes the dull stones,
my thoughts are become then
a myriad, a myriad of stars.
PAM REHM

A PIERCED HEART
DIVIDED ATTENTION
THE DESOLATION OF THE SPIRIT
A PIERCED HEART

Your resolution of loss
is days going forward

through the mystery

Life after life

The body of a body
Osiris

This vain solemnity
of loving

forged in language

Whatever hasn’t crumbled
in the rush of systems,
of given limits

Coalesces
in the alchemy of living

Strange intimations
of definitions

Irrevocable alterations
from which

coherence is regained
DIVIDED ATTENTION

Stuck on first pages

Fixed on months passing
No standards

A perverse impulse to pretend

Flush of the wind
Skepticism

Caught out in the multitudes

Penning “God help us”
after the lost plane and mudslides

No one wants to be missing

Just missed
Squeezed between

the beginning and ending

of the day’s melodies
The body, the five faculties

and impulse

Desire, a channel
that is always on

A text you can close
like curtains
to all else

Well-worn sarcasm
Well-worn questioning

I have the heart of a believer
The mind of a self-imposed rule
THE DESOLATION OF THE SPIRIT

We are all a consequence
of feral clarity

and the elements
of experience
more imagined than bestowed

In the immensity of the hour
by hour day
nothing is promised

Even falling in love
against doubt, is just
an angle of vision

The starting point
is always the same
morning search

My dreaming heart
a synthesis
as I think down
a dark world

Letting go of rescue
to be awakened
to duration

It is a fearful thing
to contemplate
Unfelt sorrow

The heart still beats, but
is it worthy?
Beside this pulsing Earth

You are trying to understand
crisis

The difference between
a shadow

and a body
without love in its veins

Damnation is relative
and so your name is not

emblematic of your being

At the edge of the void
the spirit is everything
NAZIM HIKMET

AN ORDINARY DAY

TRANSLATED BY MURAT NEMET-NEJAT
an odd sensation

wild plums

    have bloomed

first apricots bloom

    then wild plums...

my love

on the grass

let's just kneel down

face-to-face.

the air is delicious and lit—

but not yet quite warm—

the almonds' shell

    green green and fuzzy

    and still soft

we're happy

   (that we can live)

i'spose we should have been killed by now

if you're in london

and i in tobruk or on an english freighter,

my love

put your hands on your knees—

your wrists thick and white—

show your left palm

sunlight's inside your palm

    like an apricot...

of those who died in yesterday's air raid

    hundred are under five

twenty-four are sucklings...


my love

i'm a goner for pomegranate seed's color

    —pomegranate seed, light's seed—

in melon i love its smell

in wild plum its tang
... a rainy day
i'm away from fruits and you
—not a single tree has yet bloomed—
there's even a chance it will snow...
inside my cell in bursa
captured by the tide of an odd feeling
and a consuming agonizing anger
i'm writing these lines in despite,
for myself and my beloved human beings.

“an odd sensation” was written during World War II while Hikmet was imprisoned for his Communist views. It is from a series of poems that he wrote to his wife.
JEROME ROTHENBERG

FROM “FURTHER AUTOVARIATIONS”
REMINDERS OF A VANISHED EARTH
THE POEM AS LANDSCAPE

the definition
of a place
is more than
what was seen
or what was
felt before
when dreaming
of the dead
the way
a conflagration
wrapped itself
around his world
leaving in his mind
a trace of dunes
the fallout from
a ring of mountains
reminders
of a vanished earth
the landscape
marked with rising tufts
the hardness of
clay tiles
that press against
our feet like bricks
the soil concealed
beneath its coverings
through which a weave
of twisted wires
crisscross the empty
field as markers
to commemorate
the hapless dead
the ones who fly
around like ghosts
bereft of either
home or tomb
in what would once
have been their world
the count fades out
beyond 10,000
leaves them to be swept
down endless ages
fused together
or else set apart
lost nomads
on the road
to desolation
a field on mars
they wait to share
with others
dead at last

2/
NEVER DONE COUNTING

Enclosed by matter
all my thoughts
scream for prophecy.
When I wake up on Mondays
the night sky is hanging
above me galaxies
shedding their images
fading unknown
in the half light
a light that confounds me.
Nothing we know is unreal
& nothing is real.
There is only the face
of a woman
blind in the sun
& a voice that cries out
in a language like French.
When she raises her arms
they look distant & lame,
something there
that won’t work but falls flat
against me. I will follow her
up to the moon, will watch her
paint herself red
with no sense
of the distances
still to be traveled,
no plot to adjust to
but numbers
that show me
the little I know,
the way one
vanishing universe
shrinks till it swallows
another.
There are worlds here
hidden from sight
whose ends are like
their beginnings,
the world in daylight
turns dark
the blaze of noon
captured in their mirrors,
as the sun slips
through our fingers
never done counting
where the globe
has dropped
out of sight.
A DEEP ROMANTIC CHASM

Head facing downward

I descend the chasm
little caring
about space or time
my face caught halfway
between dark & light
a mix of random chance
& kindred circumstances,
before I reach the bottom
& a narrow street
alongside which I spot
a darkly churning stream
& follow it
until I reach its source.

Here is a world
outside of time & season
only broken by the sound
of ghostly birds
that blast us till we find
that we’ve arrived
nearby a field behind
a battered wooden fence,
the specters in that world
stare out at us,
move back & forth
until they cover the horizon, come
forward, forward
rising in their legions.

All they have to offer
is a turn, a word,
a sound that we can hear
& answer in return,
what has long been known
but left unspoken,
words from inner space
the tongue turns off,
the dead will learn
to speak again, the universe
is theirs & covers them
until they flee at morning,
leave us in a dream still,
*faces awash with dew.*

This will be the final book
the poet dreams or writes,
whose home is in his mind
or maybe elsewhere,
follows it around the world
to where it leads him,
a space forever dark
*an air so heavy*
*that he cannot push through it*
*or recognize the faces*
waiting for him as before
too distant to pursue,
the world once full of smiles
now dark with tears.

I am not he,
the wanderer, the captive,
the one who lives his life
as in a dream,
the messages that reach him
from a dying galaxy
fall on deaf ears,
echoes of an empty sky
the final world bereft
of sounds & images,
returned to what it was,
adrift & mindless,
the grim memento
of its absent god.

4/
To Take Death as a Tribute
for Will Alexander

Let us step out
among the suns,
so bright the eye
sees dragons
in a panoply
of gold,
like letters
from Sumeria,
overwrought
with crazy omens
signs of our
impending death
for which they serve
as tribute
blind & held back
till they plunge
down cliffs
into the burning water
barely kept
from drowning.

In the ancient dream
a wife
is ravaged
by a lesser god
who takes the form
of a dark scorpion
the lower part
of a chimera
& tracks her
as his prey
the target of his
mad maneuverings
frenetic
with a lover’s zeal
that knows
nor start nor end
no more than what
we always knew
the end as lost
as the beginning.

Always there were
footprints
on the dune
the traces
of a monster
like a god
a hidden universe
or cosmos
shining back at us
from some dark
mirror
hidden place
that might have been
a bishop’s
or a king’s
a trap devised
to strike & freeze
your innards
while their voices
babble

in each other’s
dreams.
In the 1990s I composed a series of thirty-three “Lorca Variations,” drawing vocabulary, principally nouns, from my previously published translation of Federico García Lorca’s early gathering of poems, The Suites. I later made use of this method of composition for homages to Jackson Mac Low, Octavio Paz, Arshile Gorky, & others as a step beyond translation but with an idea of translation—or what Haroldo de Campos called “transcreation” & I called “othering”—as one of the defining characteristics of poetry as a whole. The obvious difference in the auto- variations presented here is that I apply the same procedure to earlier works of my own, in this instance poems largely but not exclusively drawn from A Book of Witness (2002). As with other variations—other translations for that matter—the procedure, if it works, doesn’t so much annihilate the original version as bring it into a new dimension, where both versions can lead an independent if interlinked existence. The gap in time between them adds its own strangeness to the mix.

NOTE
ABORIGINAL SONG POEMS

GATHERED BY ROBERT WOOD
In an era where cultural appropriation and identity politics approximates an earlier discourse about mimicry and empire, I often think of the complicated politics of being non-Indigenous working with Indigenous material. What would Lionel Shriver or Claudia Rankine say? Although I can only speak about Australia and song poetry in particular, I think this question of authority, artifice and ownership resonates anywhere in the world, particularly in settler societies such as America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

I came to Australian Aboriginal song poetry through my brother-in-law, who is an initiated Ngarluma man from Roebourne. The first time I visited his traditional country was in 2003 and since that time I have conducted research and cultural heritage work in the region with Indigenous owned and run organisations. I myself am not Indigenous but I am also not white. In Australia, the national conversation revolves around Indigenous and white relations, with poets of colour being marginalised to a large extent. This might have similarities to the black-white debate in the United States, which dominates and might even provide a template for how raced paradigms of thought operate in a great many places.

Through my brother-in-law and his family, I maintain an interest in a specific Aboriginal language group – Ngarluma – which itself resists a paradigm invented by colonisation – namely, the Aboriginal, the Indigenous, the native. Yet, I undertake archival work in song poetry right across Australia precisely because it is can be a form of engagement that is an olive branch in the ongoing and traumatic war of colonisation that exists here. In other words, being conscious of privilege means one has a responsibility not only to critique that privilege, but to also create a new vision of the world. Australian Aboriginal song poetry is that for me, precisely because it uses beauty and truth to reorient and reclaim the colonial relations of power, which are historically negative though complicated in and of themselves. This is to not to deny the possibilities of my appropriation and the missteps I take, but to speak of the virtues of recontextualisation, which is to say the utopia enabled by a critical historical poetics.

That many of the [non-Aboriginal] anthropologists who go into the Aboriginal field become valued members of those communities and that this continues to happen, means that we should think less of the raced abstract when it comes to these songs and more of the lived reality. Articulating that lived reality with nuance and insight means thinking through
individual subjects in individual situations, and learning to see the complications of any endeavour. In that way, our critique might begin to reflect the complexity of the world and not confine ‘the Aboriginal’ to anything other than what an individual has the power to choose.

That the text is what is ultimately left behind is what matters though. And these song poems have much to do with the expectation of ‘Poetry’ at the time they are translated and published. Just as Yeats translated the Upanishads and Pound worked with Chinese, there is a cross-cultural engagement that should be read as being connected to these poetries. That there is an ongoing language genocide in Australia is a loss to all humanity precisely because with it we lose a corpus of aesthetic thinking and political possibility. What should we do without tarruru to describe the last evening glow above the horizon, that peace of mind and that dying down all at once? This definition is as important and indefinable as duende and matters for everyone. That we are yet to see this means we fail to see the rich complexity and enmeshment of words that are defined as environmental, emotional and embodied. And that, surely is a loss for thinking poetically for anyone, anywhere in the world.

An interest in Australian Aboriginal song poetry can raise consciousness, can let people know that this is a rich cultural heritage that is still ongoing and has a history and with that a future. History is not, in of itself a good thing, but it can contain lessons and beauty, richness and power, for those who choose to see it that way. This is part of a history of weltliteratur that stops along the way with Goethe and Lorca. It is salutary to learn from the past though, and in that way, perhaps the case of Ted Strehlow, who I have drawn on before is important.

Although his first language was Aranda and despite the fact that he grew up and lived on Aranda country for most of his life, Strehlow can be seen as a sort of paradigm of engagement coded as ‘white’. As John Morton writes in his article ‘The Strehlow Collection of Sacred Objects’ [http://www.clc.org.au/articles/info/strehlow/]:

Strehlow was part of an advanced guard of people who came to positively appreciate Aboriginal culture. In that sense, he was progressive, perhaps even genuinely heroic in his endeavour to magnify Aboriginal life. However, if we stop our assessment there, we neglect a whole portion of his history.

Indeed, Strehlow was part of that community and so was enmeshed with those politics, politics that cut across race and right into families, language groups and other social identities. What we might learn is that the assumed privilege of being a white man is no
longer tenable. What we might learn for the future is that collaborations and solidarity can happen across intersectionalities not only based on assumed collectives but on ideas of ourselves as a group that is yet to come. In that way, an idea of ourselves can be to refuse the non-utopian dreams of nations and embrace the continental brilliance that exists on a land mass mislabeled Australia. That is a poetic task that matters politically. In that way, I hope these poems are read in the spirit of generosity, collaboration, repatriation and hope that they are intended.

Yet it is imperative that we are critical of history, that we maintain the rage, not because we are righteous enough to assume we do it better, but so that we are clear eyed about our very possibilities. And so, the selections I have made for this sequence focus on race with whiteness being made particularly visible. In some sections, writers, presumably white, appear to translate work that would have the gaze turn back on them, containing critiques of whiteness itself, but they can also be seen performances that make whites the centre of the story. This case of ventriloquism comes out in many nineteenth century texts with their dying race theory. The self-loathing guilt of settlement seems to appear in a piece from the *Bendigo Advertiser*, Friday 11 April 1856. This is only one of the poems selected here, but what I intend to demonstrate is the complicated legacy of song poetry collaboration, particularly in its raced dynamic.

There is, of course, a history of collaboration that comes after Strehlow that I would like to think has a better relationship between informant and anthologiser, one that demonstrated the way in which Indigenous people themselves speak stronger than before and shows that we are on the right path. This is also there in Stuart Cooke and George Dyungayun, Brian Geytenbeek, Ronald and Catherine Berndt, Alice Moyle, Sally Treloyn. I include one final poem in this regard – Pompey Clumppoint’s ‘Baby Cockatoos’ from Bob Dixon and Martin Duwell *The honey-ant men’s love song* – to demonstrate when a poet is named rather than invisible and what might be possible if we have a relationship of solidarity across race rather than holding onto stereotypes or conservative notions of what one is or should be. It is that final note of hope that I want to end on, to show how Australian Aboriginal poetry contains universal possibilities of self-consciousness, history and collaboration for a future that is better for all.

* Re-publication does not necessarily imply endorsement.

** Effort has been made to contact the relevant communities from which these songs come. I understand the delicate cultural practices around songpoetry and it is not my intention to disrupt this. If I have done so I apologize unreservedly and would also like to make it apparent that the presentation of these works is wholly for educational rather than commercial reasons.
SONG ONE

The Wannon blacks, however, have a carobra song which sets this matter at rest —
In darksome grave the blackman sleeping lies
Until he hears anew the voice of spring,
Then from the stinking ground he upward hikes,
Like summer insect with its dewy wings,
Who quits its winter tomb to chirp and sing;
Or like the torpid bird or golden snake,
Which yearly lives and loves, and droops and dies;
Or like the bud which blooms within the brake,
Or Bunyip which doth till death despise.
All those and many more avouch that he must rise. —

Unnamed, Geelong Advertiser, Wednesday 26 September 1855, p 4
SONG TWO

The white man came with iron hand
And from the black one took his land;
Sent bullocks in his woods to roam
And drove him from his father’s home,
Eats his fish, his turkeys carves,
While their poor wandering owner starves;
Then claps a placard on his door
To warn away the homeless poor.
The time will come by fate decreed
When he himself shall want a feed;
Without a friend, without a bier,
Without a sigh, without a tear;
In the grave shall furnish then
To worms what he refused to men.

Unnamed, Bendigo Advertiser, Friday 11 April 1856, p 3
SONG THREE

Weare! Weare!
Sweet summer draws near,
With balmy breath from the northern sphere.
Fish will be plentiful--game will abound,
And the sweet little yam spread its leaves on the ground.
Weare! Weare!
In thy reeds so sere--
The swans canoe and her egg will appear;
The insect will sport on its dewy wing,
And the Corock hail the demise of spring.

Weare! Weare!
The ensuing year
Will furnish work for the Coolie’s spear,
And the cranky white fellow bushed on the stream:
O how the lubras will laugh at him!!

Weare! Weare!
Though the sun shine clear--
The white-fellow shuns thy banks so drear;
For Oona’s leangle or Cup’s boomerang--
Will carry as far as his bang, bang, bang.
Weare! Weare!

We will quambie here

And Corobra still from year to year.

The white-men will jump up bullocks; but we

Will ever remain as the eagle free.
Yaam Song from Lower Murray

I am with the white people,
But all mu tribe in the camp at home,
And I am living with the white people
And I am amongst other Blacks,
And can not understand their speaking.

Wheregara was my country,
But I am covering myself with the blanket now,
And I am not covered with the opossum rug,
And I can not make it:
Can not get the opossum to make the rug,

I am with the white people now –
And I can not go to my home yet!

I am married to my color,
Being now with white people,
And if I want to marry my colour,

I must go home –
And if I marry to my color
And if I go to another country,
With the white people,
And leave behind my lubra,
Perhaps white people take her
And give her to another Black –
And this I do not like!

_Ludwig Becker Letters_ (1860)
ABORIGINALS are very fond of singing, though their songs might not be considered very musical from white people’s point of view. They are very original in composing their corroboree songs, which generally are founded on incidents that have happened during their simple lives. Aboriginal children at the mission stations, delight in singing, and are quite clever in translating “white men’s songs” into their own language. Mr. R. H. Croll, in an article In Stead’s Review gives several songs of children in the Arunta language, spoken by tribes in the northern part of South Australia. Here Is one of them:

Jinga arbalama
Larbarinja nuka
I mankilna kuta
Jinga ilbaukama
Ara ntjara indora
Inka kat mugala
Lata bula ta itja
Ninteula juntama.

This means:
“I do not know the name of my sadness—I always think of the olden days when plenty kangaroos sat on the hills. Today I can not find a single one.”

*The Queenslander*, Thursday 22 May 1930, p 56
SONG SIX

A Warrego Lament

Meen guttee meen ga li na
Ya rin jay a reen yer mo
Dtharrdinga buthee
Marber go thun bin a yun ga
Ween jin ah!
Ween jin ah!
Been a guttee bookiyaka!

Happy hunting ours before
Happy hunts we know no more
Stick and sad are we
Broken hearts, wasting till we die.
Curse the whites!
Curse the whites!
Why must it be?
Why must it be?

From H O Lethbridge *Australian Aboriginal Songs: Melodies, Rhythm and Words truly and authentically*, Allan: Melbourne, 1937, p. 12
SONG SEVEN

Furious with rage, he is rushing along with high lifted knees.

The bat men are advancing abreast in a long line;
Over the endless sandhills they are advancing abreast in a long line.

The white bat men are rushing along with high lifted knees
To surround the camp they are rushing along with high lifted knees.

“Let us jointly hit them with out clubs;
Let us jointly hit them upon their foreheads!”

“With ringing weapons let us thrust our spears through them;
Let us jointly thrust our spears through them!”

Hiding himself, he bends the branches apart;
Behind a mallee tree he bends the branches apart.

Craning his neck, he is watching [them].

Their slain are in heaps –
The slain are covering the ground.
The warriors decked for battle –

The warrior decked for battle are stripping off their patterns, are stripping off their patterns.

SONG EIGHT

Baby Cockatoos

Waiting hopefully in the end of a hollow log
They swallow noisily, their voices beg

Waiting hopefully in the end of a hollow log
They swallow noisily, their voices beg
For the food their mother brings

Waiting hopefully in the end of a hollow log
They swallow noisily, their voices beg
For the food their mother brings

BRONKA NOWICKA

A COMB
A NEEDLE CUSHION
POCKETS
TO FEED THE STONE

TRANSLATED BY KATARZYNA SZUSTER
— Find a louse, and you’ll get a penny — says grandpa. He puts a 20-dollar bill and a fine-toothed comb on the oilcloth.

A fleshy scalp: I look down at it, standing on a stool. The comb ploughs the skin — leaving white lines that soon turn pink. The head is down. Grandpa’s dozed off.

A few days later his hands are made of wax.

— Go on, don’t be afraid, kiss him — they give me a little shove.

— Kiss him on his hand.

I get close and kiss him. His skin feels like it’s not there: unwarm, unsoft. Nobody lives underneath. A candy wrapper I’m allowed to keep. I’d take it out and smell it, and the candy would come back, one after another, as if they were real. The grandpa wrapper needs to be buried. But you can keep something as a memento.

— Take what you want. I want a sweater.

— It’s all sweaty, are you sure you want that rag?

Washed off grandpa, the sweater hangs on a line. Still wet, the sweater is ironed off the grandpa. I don’t want that sweater, not any more.

Not asking for permission, I take the comb. Not asking, so I’m stealing but I’m not ashamed. It still has grandpa. I take you, comb, to be my memento.
A child is worried because it can’t feed a stone. Not because it doesn’t know where its mouth is. It knows — it’s all mouth. It doesn’t know what to give it so it would eat.

It goes to the kitchen to ask for a chipped saucer from which a cat drank. It pulls at the apron once, twice, that’s how it knocks at the mother’s attention. It’s open — for a moment sliced out of minced meat. The child points to the saucer, its entire body is asking.
— Take it.

Mother goes back to beating the knife into the cutting board. The beat is in two.
— Don’t cut yourself.

It does so before it gets to the doorway. It presses its thumb too tightly to the glass dent. It collected some blood in the feline saucer.

Now it carries the stone. Aside from a chick, it never carried anything so gingerly. It squats and puts it on the edge of the saucer. It gives it a little nudge, as if it were a blind animal, to direct it to the blood. It rolls and stiffens. It won’t touch it.

The child asks for a cushion. The one that belonged to the needles but now it’s nobody’s, old and prickled. At night, when there’s darkness, it puts the stone on top of it. It gives it crust. It lays itself next to it. And waits.

The white by the crust — the bread’s flesh — is the only thing that gives light. The child knows, somehow it knows, that the night is heavy and makes every object a little heavier: the coal in the bucket, a button, thread and eyelid. The night has makeweights. The crust keeps on shining, untouched.

The child can’t sleep. It’s afraid that it won’t know when the stone has died. That it will carry a dead stone, talk to a dead stone and lie in the bed with the dead. It’s afraid that it will die because it won’t eat.
— Mom.

You can’t wake up mother when the night is putting weights on her.
POCKETS

One day, father found hands. His own. They were put away in a coat’s pockets. The right hand just a little tighter than the left.

First, he took out the right one. He did it by pulling the skin with his teeth. He dropped the hand to the floor, it hurt. He turned it on its back with his foot, and unfolded the fist into fingers. Before the first use, it should be wiped. He did it with a knee dressed in a flannel pant leg. He plucked the right hand out of the pocket together with a piece of lining it held on to. He spread it forcefully, put it on and cleaned it up.

After several days of being in place, the hands ate, drank and snapped their fingers. After a while, they felt like beating. That’s when father showed them to me.
Sorrow teaches me that I’m used for living.
– When you’re eating – it says – your job is to remember to chew and swallow, that’s all. You see, your hair grows without your help, breathing and sleeping happens on its own, your eyes know how to close. Basically, you almost don’t need yourself for anything. And so when walking, I only shuffle my feet, and sitting, I press the stool which squeaks. When I’m sitting like this, the view’s using me hours on end for looking.
LULJETA LLESHANAKU

FOUR WORDS
COMMIT TO MEMORY
A PERFECT DAY

TRANSLATED BY ANI GJIKA
The Eskimos have at least four different words for “snow”: the freshly fallen, the stepped on, the aged, and the piled up in heaps. As if nearsighted, they’re able to distinguish different shades of white: the nothingness, the emptiness, the present of an eternity, and the eternity of the present.

Where I come from, we have four different words for “evening.” Funny, but the one that fits best is borrowed from a foreign language and rhymes with “lilacs,” the one brought by invaders not by spice merchants.

Where I come from, there’s only one word for “grief” and for “water” and both take the form of the containers that hold them: each to their own fate, each to their own grief.

The Greeks have four different words for “love,” like the four stakes of a tent that assure you a spot in this world if not today, maybe tomorrow.

According to historians, until a century ago, my people had no word for “love,” only a clever, naive doubt: “Some very powerful emotion must exist, right?” A doubt performed with the rhetorical gesture of a King who asks questions and expects answers to arrive only in his dreams.
These words are carved on the gravestone of a Roman woman from 135 B.C:
“Her parents named her Claudia.
She loved her husband dearly.
She bore two sons.
Was charming in conversation, and patient.
Kept a good house. Spun wool.”

The women I’ve known can be described just as plainly with a single line:
M. who shined her copper pots and pans with sand.
L. who dreamed so much about her sons she was punished with a short life.
S. who made the best pickles.
H. who wouldn’t shut up about her brother’s mysterious death.
K. who used to peel fuzz off of faces with an egg-and-sugar mask.
F. the first to discover that a white dress goes best with yellow roses.
D. who ironed a perfect line on her husband’s sleeves, even when she knew he was going out with another woman.
P. who got along well with her mother-in-law.
S. who had an abortion every six months.
T. with a sweet laugh and always a run on her stockings.
N. who roasted good coffee when she had any.
R. who secretly used to sell her own blood.
Z. who picked up her son’s guts with her own hands the day he was hit by a freight train.

With a brief single line like an old telegram, twenty cents a word, and full of typing errors made by the post office staff.
As if that were the only way to remember them.
With a single, uninterrupted line
like Don Quixote in Picasso’s hands.

You think it’s that easy?
This probably happens somewhere in Provence, doesn’t it?
You wake up late, not in a hurry,
you open your window, and the heavy smell of earth
sprinkled with red poppy seeds floods in.
It could be May, and the cherries are in bloom.
The phone rings. It’s your father,
letting you know that he’s well and misses you.
(What’s wrong? You’ve never heard those words from his mouth?
Weren’t they so much like fruit without a pit?)
Then a warm bath to admire your body
as if in a Renaissance oil painting by François Clouet.
You go back to work in the studio—write nothing
or simply jot down some words. A single word would be ideal.
A single word, a need,
that puts your whole body into action, hands and feet,
like an old Singer sewing machine.
Buzz, buzz. A bumblebee’s nest in the garden. Nothing to worry about.
For lunch coq au vin accompanied by a glass of Minervois,
just before the uproar of children released from school.
In the evening, the love of your life takes you out to a terrace cafe
to show you how the sun sets,
its delicate exit, never turning its back,
like a baritone at the end of the show.
You happily talk to each other.
You wonder how much of the present is still unexploited:
“How many years do you think that old couple has been together?”
Then you get a little carried away with the wine...
You’ve got only twenty four hours; no reason to feel guilty.
Then what? What happens next? I don’t even know
and God damn it, the days are so long in May.
Perfect, yes.
But something makes you uneasy,
embarrassed, predictable,
like a winner’s speech in your pocket:
what everyone knows you have
even though you may never use it.
RENÉ CHAR
OLDER IMPRESSIONS

TRANSLATED BY STUART KENDALL
The few older impressions that I will offer have often appeared at the intersection of an enduring reading, in the words of Jean Beaufret, of Martin Heidegger's great texts and of the daily exercise of a human life that many of us have attempted to equal, without describing, in depths and heights. They are an homage in respect, recognition, and affection for Martin Heidegger.

... In the moment in which we are living – I am thinking of those who are seized with a certain hypnosis that spreads through the climate of an epoch – hope, this uncertain reassurance, is truly the only active language, and the only foil susceptible to being transformed through a positive movement. We are bound to attest that this hope is not naïve. Poetry is the solitude without distance amid the surrounding bustle, which is to say, a solitude that has the means to entrust itself. At dawn, one is the enemy of no one, except of the executioners. For Hegel, philosophy, from a commonsensical point of view, is the world in reverse. For some, from the point of view of equity, poetry is the world at its best. Even if it is prey to a pessimistic nature, he who accepts, wittingly or unwittingly, the perspectives of the future, should convince himself that overreliance on this pessimism is hope without rupture, the hope that something unforeseeable, wherein we will distinguish a favor, or, on the other hand, an hermetic spell will rise up, and oppression will be momentarily overturned. Doesn’t thinking the worst show respect for others? It seems that poetry, through the pathways it follows, through the proofs that it has made concrete, constitutes the relay that permits the wounded being to recover new forces and fresh thoughts. Poetry only rarely gleans indulgences, instigator of little offences, fantasies. Its originality doesn’t wander into a house of straw.

... The word passes across the individual, defines a state, illuminates a sequence within the material world; it also proposes another state. The poet does not force the real, but liberates a notion that it should only leave in its authoritative nudity.

... In 1945, we thought that the totalitarian spirit had lost, with Nazism, its terror, its subterranean poisons, and the ovens that defined it. But its excrements were buried in the
fertile unconscious of men. A species of colossal indifference in regard to the recognition of others and of their living expression, parallel to ours, informs us that there are no longer any general principles or hereditary morality. A flawed movement brought this to us. One will live by improvising on the level of one’s neighbor. Hunger becomes thirst, thirst won’t make us swim. An insane intolerance surrounds us. Its Trojan horse is the word *happiness*. And I believe it to be mortal. I speak as a man without original sin on a present earth. I do not have a thousand years in front of me. I do not express myself for the men of the future who will be – undoubtedly – as unhappy as we are. I respect what comes. We have a habit, a temptation, of extending the clear shadow of a grand ideal in front of what we call, for convenience, our path. But this winding line does not even have the choice between the flood, the foolish field, and the fire! Significantly, the promised golden age only deserves its name at *present*, hardly any more. The perspective of a joyful paradise destroys man. The entire human adventure contradicts this, but to stimulate rather than to overwhelm us.

… How can poetry be liberated from its oppressors? When poetry, which is enigmatic clarity and hurried rush, discovers its oppressors, it cancels them out.

… We need to learn to live without a shroud, to replace the heights, to broaden the sidewalks, to fascinate temptation, to push the new word to the first rank to consolidate evidence in it. It is not an assault that we continue on, it’s something more: a patient imagination in arms introduces us to this state of incredible refusal. For the preservation of an availability and for the continuation of the mercilessness of the not I.

… We are of a line that feels constricted by strictly intellectual summations. Heresy rescued vain orthodoxy early.

… The poet is traversed by passing wills; this old nutrient, so similar to the cuckoo, the veiled realist, absolute idler!
... The poet has no mission; all told, he has a task. I have never proposed anything that, once the euphoria has passed, threatened falling from on high.

... Succumbing is the risk, but for a luminous publication that can contain me without making me suffer for finding myself there.

... Why does the word “poet” come across me so often? So that there should be more space at the height and less error over a poorly reveled identity. Out of the necessity of conserving the essential shadows.

... To create is to exclude. What creator does not die in despair? But can one despair if one is torn apart? Perhaps not.

1950, 1952, 1964

DALE SMITH

THE WHOLE THING HAS RUN AWAY SO FAST...
A GHOST THE HEART
FOR MORGAN, SOUTH FRONTEC, ONTARIO
SUTPEN’S HUNDRED
Carolinian forest lengthens southeastern woodland north to Lake Ontario; waves are charged by the sun, the city obscured in haze. Petrol flames gas the asphalt, dynamited granite one barrel of oil equals 25,000 hours human labor (12.5 years at 40 hours per week). William Jarvis kept slaves after Simcoe banned forced labor in Upper Canada, 1793; many were maintained throughout the region. The first sold in New France, 1629, though the Quebecois preferred aboriginals; in Ontario, Africans were imported for crops. What things a people take, they blend toward, shape the true size of desire. Words, as configured in my running need, connect force, a pressed valence of continuity, what might be called image, dissolved. It’s closer to what Emerson saw as spiritual practice, with none of the dour minister’s habit. Rain and sunlight, the maple warmth greening May. Relief comes with each new turning. Plantation goes all the way to the plant, Susquehanna Nuclear, another apposition to the scheme of Pantisocracy, 1794, that Civitas Solis, sun fueled, brown water warming under poplar and silver maple and Siberian elm. Electric Steam, Luzerne County, and planted further north near me the morning sinks in perplexity, a ghostly commune, dreaming a warm sense of union: the labor of hands in moist dirt, red sumac, dogwood, sassafras.... All things absorb sunlight, converting it slowly to energy.
East of Toronto, on Lake Ontario, Darlington
and pawpaw and black maple and all theories of
spiritual carriage pivot by way of energetic crises:
sun, earth, and tidal moon—tiny, coherent petals.
“Lamps, and day, nothing not new equally forever....”
A GHOST THE HEART

Each life acts as passage, coming forward, damp air on sandy banks. Ferried from Havre de Grace and by train to Wilmington, Philadelphia, New York; identity stamped into papers advanced inky freedom. I have attempted to gain through story a semblance of voice, of where, or how, I stand by relation to geographic pathways. If English youth had chosen such a place, to be purchased by bargain in quiet backwater dreams of Platonic lunacy, the intersection of passages reaches through time, and sense, or any monetized reality one might face in electricity from Susquehanna to Darlington, a great green distance, diving down. To plant or be planted, to reach into the ground. I am speaking of a ghost the heart is glad to have return, of a room I have often been lonely in. To uproot and take word through the confines of cold chambers, to see unevenly and remain. Measure the distances from Garland to Austin and Sana’a and Portland. San Francisco and Toronto. And with no certainty, refuse easy gestures of racial charm. For just a moment, take in the warmth and sunlight. Feel your lungs swell with the air you breathe.
FOR MORGAN, SOUTH FRONTENAC, ONTARIO

Sunlight flashes; crows
racket in maples and poplars as deer
flies buzz in cool granite trails.
Aboriginals cooked leaves
of marsh myrtle, a soothing tonic.
Narrow, pinioned edges release a fragrant
juniper-like scent, very lightly, into your hand.
There were loggers and fish camps, narrow
openings through forests where the city
thrived in memory, Civitas Solis,
rare, heavenly, sanctuary. Or, perhaps, la cité
bears wilderness, the internal wild, mutated
faces of a sun-soaked imaginary. Morality derived
from perception, a response by word to the many things
a day loosens from crusty manifolds.
A day reckoned in blackberries and beaver pelt;
hawk feathers and lake pulsing in noon light
very like bringing words to time, or what one might
imagine: a narrow path to water, the honey
locust’s green illuminated as if from within,
as if perceived by the genius of Louis Agassiz
brooding over the ova of mud turtles;
finding in a leaf rare intelligence, solar
egg and lunar sperm: Give “deepest gratitude” for
“the monotonous, unvarying action of
physical forces, binding all things to their inevitable
destiny....” Cicadas hum into the heat.
See the lake, compounded to phrase
an illusion shared by convenience
of the settled mind. A flung, hurt dependence
of valued properties; bartering
of vistas, and ourselves left
to upkeep or divide social indignities
of the animal spasm.
The lovely Carolinian lakeside
calm is disturbed by casual dumb
jet skis. An imposition of
moody perplexity unsettles
the view. Persist in making
special attributes where none exist.
There are lethal certainties
in minivan excursions over
the fray in language. Original artifice
of the modern real
cuts an open field
to be a poem. And all around
the ragged edges to contend.
**SUTPEN’S HUNDRED**

Mark territory dream
spark ascendant
pine lick sour curd stationary startle
ahead, Ahab, Sutpen. Terror and rattle
hull or hole shadow thin fire
eat by now night’s black dome
moon crescent silver they are eyes.

*

Over wild earth traversed to gain.Grabbed up with intensest severity in the anti-social swamp. Cleared brush and stumps. Burned or cut or sawed. Into the woods a rabid god disclosed disciplined creed: submit to no one sky hawk stone feather. The antinomian began not as heretical word, but first in violent refusal. Silence and acts accountable by a great tallying dog of sky heaven. What I come to find is genetic infiltration. Soul memory delayed by flashes of fleshy being woken and flying out.
Sing pensive Logos wagon  
wild pig ballad.    Fall leaves  
angles orange convert team.

Do I wake my race?  
Missionary   shakes a gourd—  
ground hollow, shout

hallowed terms   undid  
conveniences.    Gum  
words stick chewy

fragrances unguent damp  
fall cold. Snake gains  
fallow undergrowth.

*  

Begin a word to whip stripped skin. What has Sutpen’s Hundred to do with words? A god,  
perhaps, in apostrophe. And muscly sinew. Spine. The interstices of sperm and egg. Signs  
of the corpse of Man prior to a human humming.
Poetry is life, i.e., the greater life of man. By poetry I mean the transmutation of human desire into a higher form of existence than its so-called “natural” state, manifested visibly in the poetic imagination and in the transformative poetic act. The imagination, it must be understood, is an autonomous & mysterious elemental power within all of us, the “maker of images” elementally, but whose extensive liberation is a power of the nth degree, determining a possible transmutation of psycho-biologic life! Under the auspices of a certain interior voice, the voice—as André Breton so beautifully said “that ceases not above the raging of the storms and goes on even to beyond death”—this power of image-manifestation can be rendered as a superior instrument of self-creation and a way of life superior to the derivative & watered-down “mystiques” & “yogas,” et al., sources all the more suspect as they negate the unity of natural and unknown powers within us in preference for some “quiescent void,” the opposite of vitality and of liberating power. The universe (s) is ultimately unknown, its source and aim incomprehensible to reason and no “void” can shed led light on its nature; the “void” understood and discernible in natural phenomena can be represented by the knot on a tree which has gnarled & ceased to bear fruit or branch; we can expect neither enlightenment from this “stage” analogous to our psychic voids and the famous “emptiness” of mystics is no more than a stage, preliminary, perhaps, to “new life” coming forth at some other level of the trunk of the tree! There is a kind of absolute knowledge which refuses cerebral & rational forms of comprehension but which living poetry—poetry lived—may reveal; by imaginative transmutation, a poem or image—painted, sculpted or written—gives testament and is a sign of direct knowledge-in-being. Glimpsed even so at times, beneath the layers of our so-called rational & cerebral consciousness, is a beam of unflinching light from which images issue and it’s from here the poet is born to manifest by meditation their inter-play; it is essential that the poet allow the inter-play of images from these depths of being, hence fulfilling the inborn power of imagination to combine these dimly seen images; for there is a voice there too, in this place, within us all, which seems to speak their absolute manifestation always “original” and analogic, uniting the most opposite of images in new synthesis & unity—the materia prima of language, it is—and all wisdom is to listen and mediate the transmission purely of this original and originating and inexhaustible realm of being from which all we have and know has come!

(1/8/68)
HIROMI ITŌ

THE THORN-PULLER: NEW TALES OF THE JIZŌ STATUE AT SUGAMO

TRANSLATED BY JEFFREY ANGLES
Hiromi Itō is one of Japan’s most prominent women writers—a fiercely independent poet and novelist who has consistently explored issues of motherhood, childbirth, the female body, sexuality, and mythology in dramatic and powerfully vivid language. Following a divorce, she left Japan and settled permanently in southern California in 1997, beginning a life shuttling back and forth across the Pacific. Since then, she has written a great deal about migration, national identity, and the pressure placed upon women to take care of their families.

In 2007, Itō published what is perhaps her most ambitious book, the strikingly original *Toge-nuki Jizō: Shin Sugamo Jizō engi (The Thorn-Puller: New Tales of the Jizō Statue at Sugamo)*. The following excerpt is one chapter of the book, which she sometimes refers to as a “novel in verse.” The book takes its name from the famous statue of the Buddhist bodhisattva Jizō—a figure believed, especially among elderly adherents, to alleviate suffering. Weaving together autobiography with elements drawn from folklore and classical Japanese literature, this surreal and wildly imaginative book represents Itō’s attempt to use a new mode of storytelling to explore some of the most important concerns facing contemporary Japan. In this regard, Itō’s work has much in common with authors like Haruki Murakami and Yōko Tawada, who have also employed a mythological, surreal style to explore aspects of modern society.

This novel focuses on Itō’s experiences rushing back and forth between her home in southern California and Kumamoto (the southern Japanese city where
she still maintains a second home even today) in order to take care of her ill and aging parents. In language that is often self-deprecating and funny, she describes difficulty of maintaining two households on opposite sides of the Pacific. The novel is set against the backdrop of a demographic crisis; in Japan, the nation with the world’s longest life expectancy, the numbers of senior citizens are swelling to enormous proportions, leaving their already aging children to become caregivers, even despite the fact they have their own families and problems. As readers learn, these difficulties prompt the narrator to start considering her own position and personal legacy in the world.

The novel can be enjoyed on many levels—for the amusing plot, which sometimes veers into the surreal and imbues scenes of everyday life with mythological grandeur; for its clever use of literary devices, including its deployments of archetypes and literary references; as well as for its innovative language, which weaves together both profane and elevated registers of speech. In several places in each chapter, Itō borrows famous turns of phrase from prominent writers, poets, lyricists, manga authors, popular singers and even punk-rock performers in narrating her own story. At the end of each chapter, she cites the names of the people whose language she has borrowed, but an astute, pop-culture savvy Japanese reader would likely recognize a number of the references through the text alone. Her re-deployments of these turns of phrase reveal how Itō, a creative and well-read author in her own right, is constantly drawing upon literature, society, and pop culture as she digests the language of others and turns it into her own. It was because these strikingly original features that the novel received the rare distinction of winning two of Japan’s highest literary prizes—both the 2007 Hagiwara Sakutarō Prize and the 2008 Izumi Shikibu Prize.
CHAPTER 4
ITÔ THOWS A PEACH THAT ROTHS,
AND SHE BECOMES A BEAST ONCE AGAIN

On February 24, I went back to Japan. I was alone this time. Just before I left, I bit my husband. Yes, you read that right. I bit him. A big bite too. I was so flustered I didn’t know what I was doing, I’d lost the ability to act like a normal human being. He was freaked out when I came to Japan, and now I wasn’t sure if I’d ever see him again.

I’d left Aiko, my youngest daughter, behind. If worse came to worse, I could go the bank and move money between accounts, my older daughter could send me the books I needed, and I could leave the rest behind—yes, I could leave everything behind, bringing only the flash drive for my computer. I could kidnap Aiko in front of her school, put her on a plane, and take her back. I repeated this over and over in my mind as I considered how to get her back.

When my husband and I weren’t face to face but were talking on the phone, we’d sometimes settle down, but it wouldn’t be long before we’d start arguing about what had caused our troubles. I hated, absolutely hated the way he’d fire off his arguments, one after another. It was like he was he trying to win some debate, and I couldn’t stand it. When I asked him why he was speaking to me so aggressively, he repeated the word *aggressive*. Even though I couldn’t see him on the other end of the line, I could tell he was rolling his eyes and letting out an impatient sigh. *You’re* the aggressive one, if you don’t think that what you did to me the other day was aggressive, then I don’t know what is, I’m still having
trouble walking.

He said, my thigh’s black and blue, it’s so swollen it’s like it’s got a peach stuck in it, and the peach has started to rot.

That’s too bad, I said. I didn’t have any ulterior motive when I said that. To be honest, that was the only way I knew to express what I was thinking in English, but I must have sounded nonchalant, even non-repentant. When I suggested he go to the doctor, he responded in a very, very low voice—so low it was hard to hear.

Just what am I going to tell him? That my wife did this? Just try telling that to the authorities in this country. You ought to thank your lucky stars I’m keeping my mouth shut.

If you’d ask why we were fighting, I wouldn’t have known how to answer. I’d already forgotten. That’s how it is when couples fight. That’s how it begins, and when they split up, there’s never any resolution. That’s how it was when I split up with my first husband, that’s how it was when I split up with my second husband, and that’s how it was with my third and fourth too. Fights always start over something stupid, but they still end relationships. When a Japanese couple reaches some sort of compromise, even if it is only a lukewarm one—like a teakettle that has been left for too long after it boils—the couple will clam up and stick it out. But my current husband was entirely different. He was British, he was Jewish, and he had been raised in an intellectual environment, so for him, debates were the stuff of everyday life. He’d made his way through the world, passing through the unsheathed blades of language for at least twice as long as I’ve been alive. My English, by contrast, is faltering at best. When we fought, he’d pick me apart word
by word. It was like he was picking up each word with chopsticks and dropping them into a sizzling hot vat of tempura oil.

He’d deep fry and sizzle me.

I’d curl up like a shrimp.

In reality, our footing probably wasn’t that uneven. I’d made up my mind to master his style of aggressiveness, and even though my English reading and writing abilities are still practically nonexistent, I’d made such progress in my ability to fight in English over the last ten years that even I was impressed with myself. Still, I come from a culture in which one either slashes at the opponent without saying anything or just commits hara-kiri. Slash at the opponent, or commit hara-kiri, how jolly. That’s probably what my husband would say if he’d heard me say that. Jolly. The word usually means “pleasant,” but it had taken on a new meaning in my husband’s vocabulary. He used it sarcastically to mean “shameless” or “incorrigible.” When he said it, I felt like he was looking down on everyone. I couldn’t hold my own with him through words alone.

Deep fried and sizzling. Scooped up by my feet. Knocked down hard. Driven into a corner. Caught in a hail of bullets, I take my last breath.

I say this all metaphorically, of course. The peach is a metaphor, my husband and mother and father are metaphors, the summer heat and winter cold are metaphors, everything is a metaphor, the only thing that isn’t a metaphor is me living as myself, and that’s all I have to hold onto.

So I fired back.

He’s a big man, twice as tall as me and probably three times heavier, but fortunately for me, he was getting old and his movements slow. I’m also lucky he’s
not the kind of guy who’d inflict bodily harm. Actually, I’m the one that lashed out at him. My ability to catch rats barehanded served me well. He didn’t think to grab my hand and stop me, or even try to hurt me. I took advantage of that and started throwing hard, unripe peaches without even taking the time to aim, but I had trouble hitting him even though he was right in front of me. (All of this is a metaphor, of course.) The peaches rolled about on the floor, running into each other as if they had electric motors. Most missed, but one hit squarely and lodged in his leg.

I was being unfair. I should have gotten back at him without restoring to projectiles.

But did I regret it? Not really. I did want to hurt him. People shouldn’t hit other people, that’s only common sense. So I bit him instead. It didn’t matter how, but I couldn’t resist the urge to attack and hurt him. When the marks my teeth had left began to welt, I knew I’d made my ill will felt. At the same time, I recognized I’d left myself in a terrible position.

American culture abhors bodily violence above all else. You can’t even lay a finger on a person—actually, that’s a huge lie. In America, you can take a gun and kill as many people as you want. People think it’s okay to shoot, but you mustn’t inflict violence—never, ever. It’s all or nothing here. You should never kill, but if you do, then do it completely.

No one dared to remove the peach lodged in his flesh, so it remained there as a visible reminder of his injury.

_I supported you, I supported your children, I supported your work, I supported you_
while you took care of your parents, but what am I to you? Just a monster you want to leave, or someone who supported you, cared for you and loved you?

My husband sent that to me in an e-mail. (Trying to talk on the phone was so unproductive we had given up on it altogether.)

I supported you, I supported your children, I supported your work, I supported you while you took care of your parents, but you still don’t believe in me, do you? That’s what he wrote. Thinking it over calmly, I realized he was right. I didn’t believe in him. These ten years, I hadn’t believed in anything.

You’re right, I replied. Like you said, I don’t believe in you, in a certain sense, I haven’t believed in you this whole time.

I was trying to answer honestly, but when he opened the e-mail, I could hear him groan all the way through the internet, and the rotting peach sank even further into his flesh.

Our family’s happiness had shattered to smithereens.

My wife is ferocious, faithless, shameless, unfeeling, she doesn’t believe in me—her own husband. She doesn’t love me, she’s a beast.

He was beating on the keyboard. He beat on it and beat on it. And as he did, he spelled out his abuse.

When he’s mad, he uses words as lofty as Jane Austen and speaks with that special form of circuitous sarcasm unique to Britain. Sometimes, those things slip out even when he’s speaking normally. People often get ticked off at him, and he turns away sighing that Americans just don’t get British humor. Honestly, we Japanese don’t either. Everything he writes just comes at me as a great big, aggressive jumble of words—after all, I live in an English-speaking country but
am practically illiterate. It took me hours just to digest his e-mail.

He wrote, *I supported you, I supported your children, I supported your work, I supported you while you took care of your parents, let me repeat, I supported you, I supported your children, I supported your work, I supported you while you took care of your parents—my freedom came second, and it’s caused me all sorts of emotional stress and loneliness. The peach is still buried in my thigh, and it still hurts.*

I wrote back, I understand. But you’re so aggressive, so negative, you make everything impossible, you’re always 100% right, I’m 100% wrong. There’s a Japanese proverb: the cornered mouse bites the cat. That’s what happened. And let me tell you something, you shouldn’t bring up money in a domestic dispute.

He responded, *Read this, and read this carefully, I’m NOT talking about money.*

I could tell. The injury in my husband’s leg was as sore as when I first inflicted it.

*I supported you, I supported your children, I supported your work, I supported you while you took care of your parents, let me say it again! I supported you, I…* He kept beating angrily on the keyboard.

*You talk about compromises, but a compromise involves both parties giving something up. What’re you giving up? Do you intend to give anything up?*  
*You say I’m being negative. Negative? In my work, I’ve accomplished things no one has ever done before, do you think that’s negative? How can you say that?*  
*You feel small and insignificant when you leave the house.*  
*You feel small and insignificant when it comes to your work.*  
*You feel small and insignificant when you leave me for so long.*  

EVERYTHING MAKES YOU FEEL SMALL AND INSIGNIFICANT, YOU
FEEL SMALL AND INSIGNIFICENT ABOUT SO MANY GODDAMN THINGS.

The last part was all in capital letters. He was screaming at me through the Internet.

He’d blown his lid, but I did think about what he’d said.

His view of me was way off the mark. How did he see me? Do I seem small and insignificant when I leave the house? Do I seem small and insignificant when it comes to my work? Heavens no. Not me.

That’s when I remembered why we’d started fighting. The reason behind it all.

We were having o-nabe for dinner. For those of you who aren’t familiar with Japanese cooking, o-nabe is a pot full of vegetables and meat cooked in broth. Usually people make it over a portable burner on the table so everyone can sit around, cook, and eat together. I’d recently bought a brand-new electrical burner, and we were having o-nabe every night. That meant that we were eating hakusai every night, since it is one of the most common ingredients. Now, hakusai is for sale everywhere—they call it “nappa cabbage” or “nappa” and there are piles in every grocery store. I realize nappa isn’t a proper name like you’d see on a wine label or something, but whenever I bought it, that name just didn’t feel right to me. One evening as I was putting some in the o-nabe, I used the word hakusai instead of the English word. My husband didn’t understand, so I had to explain. That evening, I’d already said “enoki mushroom” instead of just enoki, “shitake mushroom” instead of just shiitake, and “bean noodle” instead of harusame. I had to use the absurdly general word “sauce” to mean something specific like citrus-
flavored ponzu. I always had to rephrase myself for him. So by the time we got to the hakusai, I was already full of despair. We’d been living together for ten years, but for what? In a decade, he couldn’t learn a simple Japanese word like hakusai? He was always saying, “I love Japanese food” and “I love o-nabe,” but did it show? To make matters worse, he was trying out the Atkins diet. That meant he was eating lots of high-fat, high-protein, low-carb food so he wouldn’t touch rice with a ten-foot pole. How could he possibly claim to understand his wife’s culture if he didn’t eat rice?

I shouted at him, and he shouted back.

I wondered what would happen if somewhere down the line Aiko asked us why we got divorced. Because of nappa cabbage. How could I possibly say that with a straight face?

Several days later, I saw our parakeets kiss.

Originally, we had a cockatiel. Once day, I tossed some of its old food into the yard, and that attracted a green parakeet. I caught it, and the two birds started to live together. When the cockatiel was perched on my hand and the parakeet was near, it got excited. When the cockatiel was free in the house, it spent the whole day flying back and forth over the parakeet’s cage, showing off. It talked non-stop. “You’re a bird. Look! I’m a bird too! You’re a bird. Look! I’m a bird too! You’re a bird. Look! I’m a bird too! You’re a bird. Look! I’m a bird too!” The cockatiel stopped roosting on our shoulders or coming to the dinner table. It was just a plain, old bird whose only interaction with us was to sit on our hands. My older daughter decided to move it to her apartment, but that made the parakeet lonely. Far away in Japan, my father was home alone with my mother in the hospital. I
hated to think about bringing more tedium and loneliness into this world so I went to buy another bird. Aiko went with me. She pointed at a white bird and said, let’s get that one. It was a pure white parakeet, with none of the usual yellow, blue, or green on its back. We tried putting it in the same cage as the other parakeet, but the cage was too small, so we bought a new one—a cage for newlyweds. We also bought a birdhouse so they could raise babies. As the bird flapped around wildly, trying to get away, their feathers puffed out and dancing, I managed to catch the wriggling green parakeet and held it in my hand. (It bit me hard.) The white one was no problem. I let them go in their new home. The white parakeet was still and sat on a branch while the green one approached it as if to say, “How handsome you are!” After that, they couldn’t stop kissing. It turns out they had chemistry. Their kisses got deeper, and although I knew they were birds, I imagined them tonguing one another, their sweaty palms clenched tightly as they stared at each other, wondering what was next. They kissed shamelessly in front of my husband and me.

When my husband saw this, he snarled, those birds are the only ones in the damn house on good terms. (I could tell from his tone and expression just how foul his mood was.)

And it was true. We weren’t close anymore. If I’d had just shown him that sort of affection, there was a one-in-three chance it would lead to sex, and a two-in-three chance it wouldn’t, but we’d agree that was fine and everything would be okay. But his heart had grown old, leaving him feeling small, insignificant, and unable to compromise. I wanted to avoid him. I didn’t just want it, I probably said it outright.
Oh, damn it. You’ve done it now.

I shouldn’t have brought projectiles, but now I’d gone and used them.

We began to argue, and that was when I threw the peaches at my husband. One buried itself in his skin, grew inflamed and started to swell. It looked exactly like a bitemark.

I’m getting old.

I don’t have time.

My body won’t move.

His insecurities had mounted, but now he had the perfect opportunity—his own wife had bitten him. He exploded with rage. I was the one in the wrong, it didn’t matter how much I tried to explain. I’d hurt someone. Moreover, my own spouse. In a violent manner. He couldn’t put up with that. He was on the side of justice. His rage exploded.

I’m getting old. I don’t have time.

My work isn’t getting the attention it deserves. But I don’t have time. I don’t have time to wait. Shadows are falling over my health. My body won’t move like I want it to. Surgery isn’t helping. I don’t have time to wait. I’m getting old. I’m a sexual failure. I’ve failed over and over. Over and over. I don’t have time for this. I’m getting old, I’ve never been in this situation before, and I don’t know how to handle it. I don’t have time to wait. I don’t have time to come up with new ideas. I’m not satisfied. Things aren’t getting better. I don’t have time.

His anger was unrelenting. He didn’t have time. He directed his anger at me. At himself. At me. But more of it at himself. At his penis. At his eyes. At his ears. At his heart. At his knees. At his shoulders. At his lower back. At his elderly
body that wasn’t good for much anymore. At his old, decrepit self. Yes, himself.

As the days went by, the weather cooled down and warmed up again.

I was on the way to mother’s hospital, when I noticed a grassy spot in the sun. There were clumps of a particular plant in it. I was thinking how lavish it looked when I realized it must be what we call hotokenoza—literally “Buddha’s seat” in Japanese, or in English, henbit. Little reddish-purple flowers shaped like tongues were sticking out from it, and right before my eyes, I watched them fluff out as the individual stalks began to grow. As they grew, I noticed another flower, something like a white shepherd’s purse, scattered among them. It seemed too low for shepherd’s purse, however, so I was thinking that it had to something related, when it too began to grow. As it grew, it made a quiet rustling sound. There was mugwort too—impudent clumps of it had died completely and were being reborn as a new generation of plants—and vetch, which had produced vines that reminded me of a baby sticking out its hand. I saw something twinkling in the grass. The more I looked, the more of it I saw. They were speedwell flowers twinkling, warmed by the spring sun. They twinkled so brightly I thought they’d hurt my eyes. Next to them, some soft stitchwort plants were quietly blooming, revealing their neatly arranged white petals. Scattered around this were clumps of withered up weeds. They laid there dead and dry, without budging an inch.

Mother was lying in bed.
She couldn’t move, but she was conscious.
Could she answer questions? No, she couldn’t. Was she out of her mind?
No, she wasn’t. As the waves of her dementia came and retreated, the numbness in her body had spread. Her right hand was gnarled. It couldn’t move—or rather, it had died. It was a hand that was not a hand. A hand that had neither the shape nor the color of a hand. It was like the chicken feet that you get in dim sum. Like it had been cooked. She had lost the movement in her legs too. She couldn’t move her legs, so they had grown thin and frail. They wouldn’t have supported her even if she could stand. She couldn’t urinate so the hospital catheterized her. Before when they’d given her a catheter, she’d raised a fuss, but this had time, she didn’t say a word. She was still taking a diuretic for patients with high-blood pressure, but she didn’t seem to be having any more problems with that. Still, she was so weak that it was all she could do just to press the call button for the nurse with the pinky on her left hand. She couldn’t turn the pages of a book or use a TV remote. She had already spent long, long periods of time like this, unable to do anything, even move—a replay of the same tedium and loneliness my father and the parakeet gone through.

When I sat by her bedside, she asked me, will you scratch me a little? I’m so itchy I can’t stand it.

I rolled up my sleeves, pushed her hospital gown aside, and scratched her all over—on her back, her arms, her thighs, her belly.

Higher, harder, use your nails.

Her arms were slack and wrinkled. The skin on her belly was dry and worn. There was nothing left of her on the backs of her thighs. She was as thin as a bat. As a dried-up fish.

She moaned, oh, right there, right there, more, more. Don’t be namby-
pamby, do it harder, use your nails, more.

As I was scratching her, I felt a teeny tiny bump. Just a tiny bump. A rough, dry spot. Rather than hurt her by trying to scratch it off, I used the tip of my fingernail to press into it. Mother moaned, right there, right there, there, there.

I know how terrible it is to feel itchy. Her suffering was contagious—as I scratched her, I felt myself grow itchy all over. Moving the ring finger and pinky of her left hand, she kept trying in vain to scratch herself, but all she ended up doing was stroking her skin. I’m itchy but I can’t scratch myself, but I’m itchy… She was not tormented with anxiety and depression, but she lived through one day at a time, never really fully present.

A long time ago, I saw a TV program in which a lion on the savanna ate a gazelle. The lion grasped it at the base of the neck, and the gazelle shook and twitched, but then it went limp, and its eyes opened wide. I thought it was dead, but no, it was still alive. The lion sat down and began to eat. Was it dead yet? No, still alive. It was being eaten, and its eyes were open wide in a catatonic state. The voice-over explained that a chemical substance was being secreted inside the gazelle’s brain. The gazelle didn’t feel any suffering or fear, even though it was being consumed. I wondered if my mother’s brain was secreting some chemical substance like the gazelle. Was that why she laid there all day in a distracted state? Was that why she wasn’t afraid of death or worried anymore about not being able to move?

Across the room, there was a female Alzheimer’s patient about my mother’s age. She did all sorts of things—she shouted in a loud voice, walked out of the room, came back in, and on and on. In the bed next to mother was another woman
who also close to mother’s age, but she slept quietly without moving. She didn’t eat. Once when I was moving a metal chair, I accidentally knocked it hard against her bed, letting out a loud clang and shaking her bed. She opened her eyes wide, but even so, she didn’t move a muscle.

Mother said, when people get like that, it’s probably easier on them. (She didn’t look at the TV, she didn’t read, she just stared at a single spot before continuing.) The lady on my left sometimes talks to me, but I don’t have a clue what she’s saying. It’s a lot less trouble for me to get to sleep if I’m alone.

As night fell, Mother and the other old folks changed personalities and began to remember things, the wanderers began to wander, the emotional patients laid their emotions bare, and some of the patients started to rant and weep. A visitor coming in from outside would pass the receptionist of the dark hospital and go up to the patient rooms on the fourth floor, where they would find a world without night. The nightlights would be shining as bright as day, and at the nurses’ station, the nurses would be jotting things down as if nothing were the matter. On their desks stood artificial anemones and artificial lilies.

A world without night.

A world without night.

I heard a wild groan. A deep, male voice. Ohhhh, ohhh, ohhhh. The man’s voice reverberated, filling the entire floor.

The lights groaned out their light.

As sleek as a clump of growing grass, the nurse jotted down her notes. It was as if nothing was the matter.

Ohhhh, ohhh, ohhh, ohhhh, ohhhh.
Ohhhh, ohhhh, ohhhh, ohhhh, ohhhh.

Someone was angry.

At old age. At their aging self. At the world. At night. At their aging wife.

I was walking home from the hospital at night when I smelled it—a violently fragrant aroma that seemed to clutch my head and spin me around. That scent—that memory of desire—penetrated my brain, but for a second I couldn’t remember its name. I hadn’t smelled it for the longest time, but I thought, I know you, I definitely know you, I’ve missed you, I’ve missed you, I’ve been wanting, wanting, wanting to see you again—and that’s when I remembered. Ahhh.

It was a daphne.

It was hiding in the shade beneath a wall about two meters away.

A gecko darted right in front of me, and with lightning speed, I reached out and grabbed it. Catching a gecko in the early springtime isn’t anything compared to catching a rat. I put the gecko in my pocket and held it for a while. The way it squirmed inside my palm struck me as incredibly cute, and I wished I could keep it. I wanted to live with it, to be its family, but I realized that was absurd. A gecko is a gecko. I let it scamper away into the darkness of night.

Even at times like this, you’re daydreaming about making a family? As this thought crossed my mind, I couldn’t help but let out a hollow chuckle.
Author’s note: Throughout this chapter, I have borrowed voices from several pieces of literature and made them my own. I borrowed passages from Franz Kafka’s The Metamorphosis, Kenji Miyazawa’s short story “The Acorn and the Mountain Cat,” and Osamu Dazai’s stories “Osan” and “The Happiness of the Family.” [The English translation borrows passages from David Wyllie’s translation of Kafka.]
GORO TAKANO

DEATH AND THE WIFE
THE HOUSE OF AN ANGLER FISH
DEATH AND THE WIFE

Sunday morning Britain’s departure from EU still captivates the public
When hurrying into the sickroom and facing an almost inaudible voice –
"Take a deep breath, first of all"
Nodding and trying to be calmer, hearing the next order –
"Lift up both my knees slowly"
Getting the cold swollen ones to bend gently
Hearing a beastlike groan rumbling out of the bedridden tender throat
And its echo adding — “No more talk about cancer, please”
Answering “Of course not” and patting the cheeks
When the next order solicits feebly – “Now I want an éclair”
For the discolored teeth the sweet is one of the things long forbidden to chew
Coming back to the sickroom with the shopping and
Watching it devoured like carrion consumed by a hungry animal in the jungle
But only two morsels of the sweet end up gone
Being asked to eat the rest abandoned at the bedside
Cramming it into the already full belly

Finding the pocketbook version of Jonathan Livingstone Seagull at the bedside
Whispering – “I didn’t know you were reading this”
A broken answer after a short interval – “Even this size is too heavy for me to lift”
“Then I will read it for you” – no reply comes back
Except a series of vomit-like dry coughs
Apparently for discharging the water from the lungs for dear life
Then the next order – “Don’t go, stay with me”
The lonesome voice is reminiscent of a sky-blue dress selected
The previous night with a good weep as the one worn for the coffin
Answering “Of course” and getting close to the supine face
Receiving a couple of light slaps on one of the cheeks
Along with a jest-like word – “You look hopelessly pathetic today”
An instinctive reply — “I will not marry anyone else”
A frowned response – “That's not my business anymore”
Far beyond this town
Dinosaurs still infest
And this country is still
Ruled by samurais
No nuclear weapons are dropped yet
There is still a long way to go
Until the eradication of cancer

The soundless-thunder-like airwave fills the sickroom
Evening sunlight comes through the window and is subtly reflected
Over the pink pajama sprawling listlessly on the bed
The sunlight severely compels a mix of things around the bed –
A teacup, a straw, an old pair of chopsticks, a small spoon, a disposable toothbrush
A pack of nursing care diapers and a pile of towels –
To make a final decision whether it is time for them
To transfer from the ordinary into the extraordinary
A soliloquy – “Everything is tangled up with its history”
A slow response – “I have no more interest in the past”
An instant reply – “You don't want to meet anyone else?”
A careless response – “No – lucky you”
The faint smile is accompanied by another series of heavy coughs
“How does your selected one look today?”
“You remind me of the main character of Kenzaburo Oe’s A Personal Matter”
“What kind of story is it?”
“No more time to explain it”

The gaunt face asks – “How do I look today?”
“You hold me in awe, nothing but awe”
Hiding its tears, the skinny face begs – “I want you to kill me”
Rooted to the spot – staring at the gradual change of the wistful look
The sunken face mumbles – “I cannot wait to see what's waiting for me
After my passing – what a thrill”
A broad smile appears – almost impossible to keep back tears
Casting a quick glance over the outside landscape slowly turning red
To find a playful seagull disregarding its flock
And repeating again and again upspins and nose-dives alone
Calling the bird “Jon” wordlessly – a reply comes slowly
From the bed – “Did you call me?”

The wall directly opposite the pillow is feebly pointed to
Pinned there is a photo of evergreens whose young leaves
Start to change their color deciduously due to the sunset
Their heavenliness invokes the sandman

Far beyond this town
All dinosaurs have already perished
And the samurai nation
Has already collapsed
Countless nuclear weapons
And weapons of mass destruction
Have already been used
The extinction of cancer
Must be close at hand

The next order – “Raise the room temperature slightly – the remote is behind you”
Aroused from the sudden sleepiness by this thin voice
A look of reproach is in front – “Cannot you do me such a small favor?
Forgot why I asked you to stay here? — pull yourself together”
A silly joke – “Will you kindly live a little longer if I raise the temperature now?”
An almost inaudible reply – “You’re fortunately invited here
Not to miss my last moment – so pull yourself together”
A soliloquy with a half astonished look – “I could not imagine at all
We could become a husband and wife like this”
A deliberate reply – “I’m much obliged to this disease for its kindness”
Saying to the closed eyes in an undertone on a whim –
“Hey Jon” – the sickroom phone rings
Wondering what is spreading in the opposite world of the receiver
Wondering whether it is light or darkness or the nation fluctuating
Between hope and despair concerning the word “DEPARTURE”
Hearing a nurse’s voice while neglecting the ringing –
“Here is your wife’s dinner” – the tightly shut eyelids on the bed
Open slowly like the eyes of a maverick bird fading into the void
The mouth smiles and says – “I will not go as you want me to yet”
The eroticism of a woman in extreme fright is floating on the lips

Again from beyond this town
The roars of dinosaurs pierce the darkness
Echoing with them are the loud laughs of samurais
Killing one another in ecstasy
In a remote no-nuclear battlefield
Both ears are tightly covered with both hands
While a washed-up sky-blue dress is flitting around
In the sky without any wearer in it
Note: A water harp cave ("sui-kin-kutsu" in Japanese) is a traditional Japanese-garden accessory featuring a metal pot buried upside-down somewhere in a garden: whenever water drips through a hole at the top of the buried pot onto a small pool of water inside of the entire device, bell (or lyre)-like splashing sounds are created – you can enjoy the echoes of those sounds by, for instance, using a bamboo tube in the similar way a doctor hears your heartbeat with a stethoscope.

A time-honored garden gone dry

A water harp cave covered entirely with fallen leaves

A white-haired man stepping quietly alone out of his seemingly unmanned residence toward the buried lyre with a dipper full of water in his hand

Numerous wall clocks solemnly ticking everywhere in the venerable house

Every dial showing a different hour than the others

Water falling slowly from the dipper into the bottom of the metallic pot

The tip of a bamboo tube put gently on the upside of the hidden harp

The old man’s ear put gently on the other end of the tube

The illusion of an angler fish wriggling abruptly on the seabed

High-tone drops of water whispering to the tube: “A great number of creatures died because of you – even we almost died – yet, thanks to it, grace was miraculously brought later to our moribund lives”

The gradual disappearance of the high-tone drops while they confess in prayer: “Your old vice now looks like the creator of peace”
Low-tone drops of water whispering to the tube: “We don’t want to hear such rhetorical trickery – even we almost died – we can hardly sublime our wrath enough to affirm this status quo”

The gradual disappearance of the low-tone drops while they announce: “Your old evil now seems like the root of all sophistries”

Momentary tranquility

The white-haired man struggling to recover his former hearing

A female drop of water enticing him into going for a voyage with her to rediscover all the discarded songs of borderlands

Every singer-losing melody blending with one another and clinging to the tip of the bamboo tube

A male drop of water declaring against such a foolhardy itinerary

A voice echoing around the tip of the tube: “First, fear your own fading”

The retreat of the old man into his residence after throwing down the tube in the middle of the garden

A melody played by one of the wall clocks

Another one following it

Another one following them

The mating of angler fishes where a small male clings desperately to a giant female and eventually assimilates into her body

A small light turned on in the recesses of the quiet residence after the old man is sucked into it
The unexpected start of a night shower

The restart of the clamor of drops of water

No one to hear their reverberation in the pitch-dark cave
GENYA TUROVSKAYA

FROM LISTENING MACHINE
WHAT TIME IS IT THERE
NIGHT
We stood together, wine-warmed, in the rectory gardens.

Peacocks screamed. Dusk slurried into night

in a transitional season. We didn't hold time
to its particulars. Matches scraped, flared

their modest incandescence. I know it is coming, you said, waving
toward the sky with the dancing point of your cigarette's ember.

I am—I feel I am—walking into a storming rain of meteors, and the souls
of those other poets are falling, falling—they plummet

as long-tailed comets through black space.

When will a meteor fall on me? No one is spared. No solace.

Look, there it is, whipping its tail with the maniacal intent of a spermatozoa!
O Last of the Species, says
The Listening Machine, how it lusts
for its own kind,
listless with grief, the shape of it,
skeletal, wet
with the saline of its sweat and tears—
these hobbled curves, these knots and knobs
of its singular spine—O
Shipwrecked Alien! O
Last in Line!
WHAT TIME IS IT THERE

What time is it there, in the afterlife?
What are the customs of that country? How do they take their tea?
What are the mechanisms of delight and melancholy?
    Are there beloved animals always at hand?
Is there a nature to overcome or fight against?
What is the quality of form? Of formlessness? What forces
    push the light from ultraviolet and infrared?
Are there burdens
    of thought and speech to carry over
thresholds? And are there harbors
    to welcome ships of new arrivals? Or do they fly
    or float
    or sink like parachutists
from some great vague height?
Awake at night, I misread a wild lioness
*nursing a baby for a wild loneliness*

*An Unfolding* Nursing a Baby Captured For the First Time

Was that the white dove of annunciation?
Or the serpent — fanged, forked, uncoiled

in its stealth, its own wild loneliness?
VALGERÐUR ÞÓRODDSDÓTTIR

FROM WHAT ONCE WAS FOREST

TRANSLATED BY K.T. BILLEY
the boys squint against the window pane
but see only the moon, reflected
cold
and bright
and white

it is the fear
that gets closer

and the hands

the unease
makes them the same

virgins
white as whales, as virgins

raw
as film
they develop
under the night sky
slowly

on the glass we see only fingerprints

the secrets hidden by the light
and our hands sticky
from the sugar
in everything
she came at night
heavy in the dark

at the window
she looked
divine

and answered:
“'I'm whispering”

holy
whispers

antidote against ghosts

hungry for memories
pressed against the pane

this is what it is about

your body in some room
and you no longer there

we rush forward
beyond the end is another end

not yet

we are almost there
I wake to you
and that
which I couldn’t say in the dream

between my body
and your body
is a distance
that separates the now from the canal
where you wait
with ink-stained fingers
and watermarked mouth

the gap between train and platform
is like that
between this moment
and the apartment where she waits for you

it’s not the distance
from here to there
but between that which is
and that which was

a moment we live across years
touching the margins
excited for something
beyond the real

what the body experiences
is a secret
we carry within

the light of morning draws lines
that hint at the shapes of things outside

like in the dream
where your mother is not your mother

everything renews

endless anticipation grows

desire burrows itself out
of the shadows

clean and cruel
as the mirror
it’s always a second longer than you think
not long, but remarkably long

almost like breathlessness
are the seconds that follow

when you continue to walk
even though the heart has stopped beating

the mind blind to what only the body
can admit

I try to remember what you said
these last gasps:

April, something about April
even faster than the touch
the scent wakes that part of me
that answers the parts of you
that cling
to this cloth

I bring the fabric to my skin
my nose
my mouth

slip myself finally into the arms
of the garment
button all the buttons
and try to breath into it
life

the memory is long
since fused
with the breath
seeping out through the seams

what remains of us
does not remain

only the skin
CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

INTERVIEW WITH IRAKLI QOLBAIA
IRAKLI QOLBAIA: Your poem, *Short Story*, begins with “Begin with this: the world has no origin”, and yet, there seems to be, in your poetry, a constant quest for origin - personal origins, origins of imagination / of poetry. There is even a Blakean “character”, Origin, in your early poem of the same title (referring to Cid Corman and his ‘origin’?). Could you talk about that sense of origin in your poetry, and more specifically, about your origins as a poet?

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN: My relationship to origins has been multifaceted. I think my first engagement was hearing at 16 years old on a 45 RPM record the bebop pianist Bud Powell play his improvisation on the standard tune “Tea for Two.” I listened to Powell’s version again and again trying to grasp the difference between the standard and what Powell was doing to and with it. Somehow an idea vaguely made its way through: you don’t have to play someone else’s melody–you can improvise (how?), make up your own melody line! WOW--really? You mean I don’t have to repeat my parents? I don’t have to “play their melody” for the rest of my life? Later I realized that Powell had taken a trivial song and transformed it into an imaginative structure. While reading the Sunday newspaper comics on the living-room floor was probably my first encounter, as a boy, with imagination, Powell was my first experience, as an adolescent, with the force of artistic presence and certainly the key figure involved in my becoming a poet when I was 23 years old.

Soon after starting to try to write poetry at Indiana University in 1958 I found Cid Corman’s poetry journal called *Origin* in the library. I began a correspondence with Cid and when I was living in Kyoto, Japan, in 1962, I went to the coffee shop where Cid, also living in Kyoto at the time, could be found every evening. For a couple of years I watched him edit Origin and learned a lot about translating poetry from him. Corman was the first American translator of the great German poet Paul Celan and, while in Kyoto, as my poetic apprenticeship project, I decided to translate Cesar Vallejo’s *Poemas humanos* into English.

During this period I worked on Vallejo most afternoons downtown in another Kyoto coffee shop called Yorunomado (the word means “night window” in English). In the only poem I completed to any real satisfaction while living in Japan, I envisioned myself as a kind of angel-less Jacob wrestling with a figure who possessed a language the meaning of which I was attempting to wrest away. I lose the struggle and find myself on a seppuku (or suicide) platform in medieval Japan, being commanded by Vallejo (now playing the role of an overlord).
to disembowel myself. I do so, imaginatively-speaking, cutting the ties to my “given” life and releasing a daemon I named Yorunomado who until that point (my vision told me) had been chained to an altar in my solar plexus. Thus at this point the fruits of my struggle with Vallejo were not a successful literary translation but an imaginative advance in which a third figure emerged from my intercourse with the text. Thus death and regeneration = seppuku and the birth of Yorunomado, or a breakthrough into what might be called sacramental existence.

While Bud Powell and Yorunomado (via Vallejo) provided brief, if essential, adventures with origin, the crucial event after leaving Japan in 1964 was my 1974 discovery of Upper Paleolithic, or Cro-Magnon, cave art in southwestern France. My wife Caryl and I had, at the suggestion of a friend, rented an apartment in a farm house in the Dordogne countryside and after visiting some of these Ice Age caves I was completely caught up in the deep past. This grand transpersonal realm (without a remaining history or language) was about as far away from my background as could be, and I revisited and researched the painted caves throughout the late 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, becoming the first poet anywhere to do what the poet Charles Olson called “a saturation job” on the origins of art as we know it today. To follow poetry back to Cro-Magnon metaphors not only hits read bedrock--a genuine back wall--but gains a connection to the continuum during which imagination first flourished. My growing awareness of the caves led to the recognition that, as an artist, I belong to a pretradition that includes the earliest nights and days of soul-making. Wesleyan University Press published my book, a study composed of both poetry and prose, Juniper Fuse: Upper Paleolithic Imagination & the Construction of the Underworld, in 2003.

**IQ:** Clayton, there are many possible questions contained in your response and I would like to come back to several of them at later points; but at this point I wished to ask about the American poetry scene at the time of your decision to become a poet. You mention the year 1958, as a sort of starting point for you – in two years Donald Allen’s New American Poetry was to come out. Can you talk about that moment, as well as that informal, but interconnected (it seems to me) movement that was afoot at the time you started? You mention Olson and Corman; could you talk about other poets who were important to you, older or your generation? You talk about Vallejo, as a master poet; who were some initial American masters? Is it possible to talk about what that wave of New American Poetry (generally / personally for you) represented?

**CE:** In 1957 I took a course in 20th century American poetry at Indiana University
in Bloomington, Indiana with Professor Robert G. Kelly. I was an undergraduate senior majoring in Philosophy at the time. We studied mainly early 20th century poets and I recall writing a term paper on Robinson Jeffers’ long poem “Roan Stallion.”

The following year I met the graduate student and poet Jack Hirschman and his wife Ruth. The Hirschmans had come to Indiana University from New York City where they knew the young poets Robert Kelly and Jerome Rothenberg. The Hirschmans were also aware of a number of major 20th century European poets (Lorca, Breton, Rilke, for example) and they introduced me to many of the poets I am still reading today. Jack and Ruth ran a poetry recital club called Babel, and I gave my first poetry program there by reading translations of St.-John Perse. It was at this time that I also discovered the poetry journal Origin in the university library, and became aware of poets like Allen Ginsberg (whose poem Howl published in 1956 was notoriously popular at this time), and Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and Paul Blackburn whose writings also began to be published in the 1950s. At this time I also found the poetry of Pablo Neruda and Cesar Vallejo in a Latin American poetry anthology and began to inspect the translations with bilingual dictionaries (I was shocked to find how inaccurately a lot of the poetry had been translated and I think that awareness was crucial in my later becoming a translator of Neruda, Vallejo, Aimé Césaire and Antonin Artaud). This was the epoch when thousands of young Americans were “on the road” and in the summer of 1958 I hitchhiked to Mexico, a journey that inspired my subsequent years spent in Japan and France. While in Kyoto from 1962 to 1964, I read all of William Blake's poetry and struggled through the jungle of his long prophetic poems like The Four Zoas, Milton: A Poem, and Jerusalem. Without the inspiration from tackling Blake’s writing (I once passed out in Kyoto while reading The Book of Urizen) I do not think I would have had the courage to birth Yorunomado.

All of the poets mentioned above, along with Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, William Carlos Williams, Hart Crane, Gary Snyder, Adrienne Rich, have informed my sense of what poetry is and what it can be. Of all of these poets I think Hart Crane has meant the most to me over the decades. Poems like «Lachrymae Christi” and “The Wine Menagerie” stopped me in my tracks in the way that some of Blake did. I was being asked to stretch to accommodate an uncommon sense of things that I was intuitively convinced was not nonsense or pointlessly obscure. Crane’s metaphoric shifts recall Powell’s pell-mell bebop riffs or Soutine’s earthquake rumba landscapes.
Here are a few comments on other poets I have mentioned, all of whom have been very important to me.

Since the 1950s, when he read his poems about the Native American trickster Coyote in San Francisco when Allen Ginsberg read Part One of Howl, Gary Snyder has been developing a sensual landscape-attuned poetry of change and becoming that in the light of our current awareness of planetary potential and doom has become a clearing in American consciousness. It presents itself as ruggedly and thoroughly as monumental Chinese sung Dynasty landscape painting in a context of interconnectedness involving lore, research, meditation, and a range of living and mythical companions. Mountains And Rivers Without End (1996) was Snyder’s 16th book, 138 pages of text, 39 poems in 4 sections or movements. This work was struck off a Sung Dynasty scroll painting as, scene by scene, it unfurls, redirecting Whitman’s “adhesive love” from solely human comradeship to a comradely display that includes Artemisia and white mountain sheep. Snyder adheres to the Buddhistic principle of emptiness: there is no self, everything we see and are is empty. Thus the absence of the sensitive or tormented psychological subject in his poetry. To overturn 2000 years of Christian dominion over “unchristian” nature, the scale of values had to be massively rebalanced. Mountains And Rivers Without End was the first major Western poem to sweepingly foreground the natural world from a Buddhistic perspective and, without cynicism, to present civilization on a sharply diminished scale.

Robert Kelly is probably the most prolific American poet of the 20th and (so far) 21st century, being the author of over seventy collections of poetry, several novels, four works of short fiction, and two theoretical/critical books. Kelly is inventive in the way that Picasso was: he can improvise intelligently and imaginative on anything that strikes his ear, heart, or gaze. Kelly thinks of the poet as a scientist of holistic understanding. Guy Davenport has written: “No American poet except perhaps Wallace Stevens has his sense of balance in a line. What Eliot and Pound slaved over Kelly seems to have an innate gift for balancing out. He has the Chinese sense of bringing diverse things together into a stark symbol, and is happiest when he himself can’t quite see the meaning of the sign he’s made. I should think he would be interesting to the philosophers (had we any), for he seems to me to be a man determined to think deeply and carefully about Being itself (perhaps the one subject that pervades his poetry).”

Jerome Rothenberg’s Khurbn (1989) is the great middle-length (40 pages) poem of our times; it takes place with a handful of other poems of similar length and scope, such as Aimé Césaire’s Notebook of a Return to the Native Land or Vladimir Holan’s A Night with
Hamlet. The Jewish agony in the Nazi killing centers has been researched, testified to, and documented: Khurbn is the first American poem I know of to engage this agony emotionally, intellectually, and imaginatively. It pulls Adorno’s “After Auschwitz, there can be no poetry” inside out, to read: “After Auschwitz, there is only poetry.” Such a revisioning charges all poets everywhere to consider to what extent poetry itself is the language of the one hundred fifty million “violently departed” of the 20th century. Khurbn is precisely personal, horrifying, tender and structurally astute. Hearing Rothenberg read it several decades ago, I felt the eels of the brutalized, invisible for so many years, begin to move under my skin.

From 1996 until her death in 2012, Adrienne Rich and I wrote to each other regularly and exchanged poems in progress. In the summer of 1999, she wrote to me: «I am trying to imagine a poetics of absolute resistance which has critical resistance as its stable field yet can invoke many kinds of bending of language, but which does not depend for its testimony of resistance, simply on bending the language. A poetics that would be, both in spirit and method, resistant to the calculated destabilizations of content and context of our time--language proceeding from an indignant, outraged, undomesticated consciousness that is torqued and fired so that it indents that consciousness indelibly into the page.” Rich has also written: “Self-trivialization, contempt for women, misplaced compassion, addiction; if we could purge ourselves of this quadruple poison, we would have minds and bodies more poised for the act of survival and rebuilding” and “Art means nothing if it simply decorates the dinner table of power which holds it hostage.”

IQ: Every careful reader of your work, I trust, will recognize the points you share with the poets you have so carefully considered above. But about Gary Snyder you write: “the absence of the sensitive or tormented psychological subject in his poetry”. I have a belief that one of the major (often devastating) forces of your poetry has been exactly the refusal to empty the poem completely of the sensitive and tormented self. Even in your poems directly concerned with the Upper Paleolithic, the self is present. In this I think your writing might be closer to the poets you have translated – Vallejo, Artaud, Césaire, Holan – that personal, “darkness in the heart” should be ever present, no matter what transpersonal depths the poem might reach. Do you think this an accurate view of a certain aspect of your work? If so, could you comment on that necessity, for the poet, to be “the other”, but only at the cost of drilling through oneself?

CE: I disagree that, to quote you, “personal darkness in the heart should be ever present,
no matter what transpersonal depths the poem might reach.” I want the blackness in the heart of man to be engaged as part of my primary stabilizations and concentrations, but I do not want it to rule. The imaginative world that I have attempted to create includes my twenty-five year research via the Ice Age painted caves of southwestern France on the origin of image-making, a number of poems on such artists as Caravaggio, Soutine, Leon Golub, Unica Zurn and Hieronymus Bosch, and book-length translation projects including Cesar Vallejo, Aimé Césaire, Antonin Artaud, Michel Deguy, Bei Dao, Vladimir Holan, and Jose Antonio Mazzotti. While I seek to build an atmosphere of political awareness into much of what I write, I realize that being beholden to an agenda can be as undermining to imagination as self-censorship. I primarily agree with Wyndham Lewis’s view that the basis of art is that of clearing new ground in consciousness. Unless poets stave off and admit at the same time, keeping open to the beauty and the horror of the world while remaining available to what their perceptivity and subconscious provide them with, one is pretty much left with an unending “official verse culture.”

Gary Snyder became in his twenties a life-long Zen Buddhist and he believes that religion is a central part of his psychological/spiritual being. In an interview in the Winter 1996 Paris Review, he said: “I don’t think art makes a religion. I don’t think it helps you teach your children how to say thank you to the food, how to view questions of truth and falsehood, or how not to cause pain or harm to others. Art can certainly help you explore your own consciousness and your own mind and your own motives, but it does not have a program to do that... I think that art is very close to Buddhism and can be part of Buddhist practice, but there are territories that Buddhist psychology and Buddhist philosophy must explore, and that art would be foolish to try to do.”

I was raised in Indianapolis in a Presbyterian household. My father was a deacon in the nearby Fairview Presbyterian Church, and my mother sang in the choir there. I never had any interest in religion and when I discovered poetry I realized that this would be my life commitment and that I did not require any additional philosophy or religion to help me realize what I wanted to accomplish. I have a negative view of religion, not only for humankind in general but specifically for artists. I think religion acts as a governor on the imaginative auto and that poets who become religious in their 40s or 50s do so at the risk of compromising their imaginative focus and energies. From time to time I have speculated that Gary Snyder is potentially a wilder man than he has allowed himself to be. At the same time I recognize that his background and sensibility are so different from my own and that his accomplishments as a poet and naturalist are extraordinary. Unlike writers who
become religious as part of some sort of midlife crisis, Gary Snyder’s Buddhism appears to have taken root during his early 20s when he was a timber scaler and fire lookout and his masterpiece that I mentioned earlier is part of a long and daily meditative practice out of which that poem was generated and designed.

**IQ:** I quote, once more, Gary Snyder from your response, in relation to art / religion “there are territories […] that art would be foolish to try to [explore].” Do you think there are territories that art would be foolish to explore? Should the poem not be open to everything?

**CE:** I don’t know what Gary has in mind by that claim, which to this day appears questionable, even naïve to me. I wish that Eliot Weinberger, the interviewer, has challenged that assertion. If the poet and Buddhist Gary Snyder knows of such “territories” that Buddhist psychology and philosophy “must explore” it would appear that Snyder himself should explore them. “Foolish” is the troubling word here.

**IQ:** Can we dwell on some of this for a little longer?

I wanted to clear up my ideas about the “darkness” I referred to. I think there is a presence of radical image and thought in your poetry and this makes me think of your description of a certain kind of poet as the “the conductor of the pit”, not of the orchestra. This I understood as your command that poet (and poem) be concerned with the unconscious, unknown, uncharted. In the book of the same name, besides the poets you already mentioned (Vallejo, Artaud, Césaire, Holan) there was also Rimbaud. I also thought another poet who could qualify as a conductor of the pit is Lautréamont. In your essay (from *Companion Spider*), you quoted Bachelard: “there is “a need to animalize that is at the origins of imagination. The first function of imagination is to create animal forms.””

Could you comment on your interest in that “pit”, as well as the motive of animalizing (oneself? imagination?) as an important one in your body of work? I also thought that your relation to the radical, the hybrid, the “pit”, darkness, or the “animal”, have taken a new, deeper function since you started exploring the caves and the Upper Paleolithic Imagination.

**CE:** My primary belief concerning poetry is that it is about the extending of human consciousness, creating a symbolic consciousness that in its finest moments overcomes the
dualities in which the human world is cruelly and eternally, it seems, enmeshed. Here I think of Paul Tillich’s words: “A life process is the more powerful, the more non-being it can include in its self-affirmation, without being destroyed by it.” Affirmation is only viable when it survives repeated immersions in negation. The problem of focusing at large on brutality and filth is that in doing so symbolic consciousness is flattened out by agit-prop and poetically-disguised journalism. I see the blackness in the heart of mankind as an important aspect, no more, of the imaginative world I am attempting to create.

I have come to believe that the “I,” that selva of the self, along with its chauffeur, the ego, should be opened up and explored in what might be identified as the antiphonal flow, in Northrop Frye’s words, “of a bicameral mind in which something else supplants consciousness.”

When I proposed to forget the orchestra and conduct the pit, I had in mind not only the subconscious but the Ice Age realm of the decorated caves. I wrote the poem “Deeds Done and Suffered by Light” in northern Italy in 1979 when I was about five years into my twenty-five year “saturation job” on the Upper Paleolithic underworld. You mention “animalizing oneself.” My thinking concerning the origin and elaboration of cave image making began with an intuition while visiting the Combarelles cave just outside of Les Eyzies-de-Tayac in the French Dordogne: that it was motivated by a crisis in which Cro-Magnon people began to separate the animal out of their about-to-be human heads and to project it onto cave walls as well as onto a variety of portable tools and weapons often made out of the animals themselves. In other words, that the liberation of what might be called the autonomous imagination came from within as a projective response on the part of those struggling to differentiate themselves from, while being deeply bonded to, the animal. This would be more like a deanimalization than an animalization.

The separating out of the animal as a formative function of Cro-Magnon imagination indicated, on a daily, practical level, the increasing separation between human and animal domains. I conjecture that this separation was brought about in part by action-at-a-distance weapons (the spear, the spear-thrower, the harpoon, and probably the bow and arrow). Shamanism, or what might be more accurately termed proto-shamanism, may have come into being as a reactionary swerve from this separation continuum, to rebind human being to the fantasy of that paradise that did not exist until the separation was sensed.

In the poem in which I urge conduction of the pit I also write: “Hanged Ariadne giving
birth in Hades is the rich black music in mother’s tit.” To integrate Hades (the first version of which was surely those ancient decorated caves) would be to assimilate subconscious information and patterns, via dreams, fantasies, slips of the tongue, and the recognition of impulsive behavior. Were every American man to get up in the morning and state out loud: “I am a potential killer and am responsible for everything that I do and that happens to me today”—and mean it, America might become less lethal. I attempted to deal with the potential killer in me near the end of my poem “Coils” (in the book, Coils, 1973). I let my darkest specter speak. When I read that poem in poetry readings in the mid-70s, I put a paper bag over my head with eye slits (a kind of cartoon of a Ku Klux Klan hood) when I read that section. Audiences must have thought I was crazy. Which in that speech I was.

IQ: I thought the quotation from Northrop Frye is very important for understanding some of the directions you (as well as some others, close to you) seem to have taken in your poetic practice.

You have reinforced my belief that the darkness and the pit are to be related with unconscious as well as (and in your case, probably more importantly) with the cave, the cave-art, the Upper Paleolithic. This means that no matter what negativity may need to enter the poem, that darkness is mainly a positive, an affirmative force related to the imagination and the extension of consciousness. Could you explain a little more how you “entered the cave”; how your ‘saturation job’ began and how did this actual, physical practice of cave exploration become the principal fire-source of your poetry?

CE: The most complete response to this question is in my essay, “The Back Wall of Imagination: Notes on the Juniper Fuse project,” to be found in my book Archaic Design (Black Widow Press, 2007). In the spring of 1974 we rented a furnished apartment in a farmhouse outside of Les Eyzies-de-Tayac in the French Dordogne, and soon after moving in we met the archeologist H.L. Movius Jr who had been doing research on sites near Les Eyzies for decades. Movius arranged for us to visit the original Lascaux cave (which had been closed to the public since 1963; in 1974, groups of up to five people were allowed in the cave for forty-five minutes four days a week). The guide, Jacques Marsal (one of the original discoverers of Lascaux in 1940), made us all wait in total darkness at the entrance to the Rotunda (having passed through three steel doors and having cleansed our shoe soles in a formalin solution tray). He walked away and after a minute or so turned on the muted lights. Four immense aurochs, at once moving swiftly yet static, appeared, occupying nearly sixty feet
of a curving, crystal-white wall space. Across and below them, as if sprinkled there, moving in different directions, were small horses and deer. All of us were spellbound. I think that “moment of moments” sounded something in me that I could only respond to and realize through the writing of a book.

To begin to write into what I had experienced in such caves as Lascaux, Combarelles, and Font-de-Gaume entailed mounting a research project from scratch, and undertaking a poetic investigation that ended up spanning twenty-five years. While I had other projects during this period—poems not associated with prehistory, a translation of Cesar Vallejo’s book, *Trilce*, the essays collected in *Antiphonal Swing*, and editing *Sulfur* magazine for 19 years—the caves were the over-arching preoccupation project. Ideally, every poet should undertake at least one big investigative project that brings into poetry materials that have previously not been a part of it. This is one way that we keep our art fresh and not diluted with variations played on tried and true themes. The investigative project also makes one responsible for a huge range of materials, the assimilation of which goes way beyond the concerns of the personal lyric.

Caryl and I initially went to France at the point when I had worked through my apprenticeship to poetry—in *Indiana* (1969), *Altars* (1971), and *Coils* (1973)—years of self-confrontation involving an excavation, at times ruthless, of my Indiana background, in effect, my given life, including its racist, Christian, and sexist values. In 1973, I was hungry for an alternative to myself. Going to the Dordogne the following spring was utter serendipity. I was suddenly faced with an ancient transpersonal world, one that is still, decade after decade (starting for the most part at the turn of the 20th century), revealing the shards, as it were, of its once magnificent vessel.

**IQ:** As the affirmative aspect has been brought up, I thought it fair and important to ask you about another major affirmation throughout your work, namely, love and your manifold relation to your wife, Caryl, that many poems (say, from earlier “Eternity” to later “Combined Object”) directly address. I believe your poems addressing love are an extremely powerful and original extension of “love poetry”.

And beyond that, desire to integrate the woman, unhinged by the moulds of male imagination (while addressing the history-long male oppression), seems yet another principal aspect in your work. Am I somewhat correct in thinking so?
Caryl and I rented a Volkswagen one Sunday in the spring of 1970, drove to Harriman State Park (New York) and ate LSD in the woods. Filled with that poison I began to shout for Hollie, my “new” Marie, another person I had chosen to desire as self-torture. We came back to the car at dusk, the parking-lot filled with picnicking Puerto Ricans. Caryl had her camera and we started taking pictures of each other over the back of the car. Once, looking through the lens I saw her—Caryl—not La Muerte, femme fatal, or mousewife but an exasperated, sweating woman who was original! Not the image of Woman, not superficial: fresh. This was the crucial moment in the early phase of our relationship. There is a more detailed account of this event in the last two pages of the poem “Coils” in my book Coils.

In the fall of 1973 in Paris, I began to regularly show Caryl poems I was working on and to ask her opinions about whether they made imaginative sense or not. For some forty years she has defined the meaning of “reader” and “editor” for me. As a sounding board, she has been invaluable. Her responses, mingling confirmation and resistance, have helped me see through superficial clarities as well as groundless obscurities. More specifically, she has rewritten passages (while in draft) or changed the direction of certain poems with a deft phrase and has taught me to allow another person to enter my creative space with rapport and love.

In the beginning, I was unsure as to whether I should share this activity with anyone. Being unsure meant that to share it with Caryl was a constant assault on my ego, putting my convictions on this or that to a test that often came down to whether what I had written made any kind of uncommon or even common sense. I think that this activity has been, and continues to me, one of the best things that has happened to me as a poet. I am confident that my body of work as it stands today would not have been realized without her key presence in my life.

Here is the dedication to my book *Juniper Fuse, Upper Paleolithic Imagination & the Construction of the Underworld*: “Lespinasse, 1974: we carried our dinner outside to the stone table on the landing by the door to our second floor Bouyssou apartment. The farm was on a rise which slopped down through an apple orchard. When we sat down to eat, well before sunset, we had for entertainment an extraordinary sky. Clouds would come floating over the woods, spreading out over us. Puff collisions Mickey House ears, shredding gargoyles, turrets, vales, mammoth apparitions densifying and disintegrating as they appeared. Many reminded us of the images we were trying to make out on the cave walls. To sit at that stone table—what an experience—to be in love there, at one of the most vital times in our many years together.
Much of what happened—the ‘event aspects’—during our first spring and summer in the Dordogne is now as dispersed as the clouds we used to watch—yet it billows in us, an inclusive cloud whose heart is ours.”

From my first summer in Mexico, 1958, to the present, women have continually been one of the main focuses in my writing. I wrote about my mother in the poem “Hand,” my complicated 1968 girlfriend Marie Benoit in “Diagonal,” Adrienne Winograd for whom I left my first wife Barbara for in 1966 in “The Golden String,” Caryl Eshleman’s childhood in “Sugar,” and in the book What She Means (1978) there are many poems in which she appears. In 1981 I wrote a poem on the life of the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, and in 1986 addressed my mythological heroine Ariadne in “Ariadne’s Reunion.” Some of my most ambitious poems have been on women painters like Nora Jaffe, Unica Zurn, Nancy Spero, Joan Mitchell, Laura Solorzano, and Dorothea Tanning. And in my poems concerning the Upper Paleolithic caves I address a vulvaform I call “Our Lady of the Three-Pronged Devil,” “the mothers of Lascaux,” a three-inch tall female statuette carved from mammoth tusk, “The Venus of Lespugue” in “Matrix, Blower,” and the great Black Goddess in the cave of Le Combel that appears to be one of the first visions of The World Tree.

IQ: There is a notion you bring up, here as well as elsewhere, that I thought might interest those yet unfamiliar with your work and practice in general: that of apprenticeship. ‘Apprenticeship’ might sound bizarre to many people interested in poetry today and I think it is something utterly unique that you have (re-)introduced in the poetic practice. Could you shortly explain what poetic apprenticeship means to you?

CE: The most complete response to this question is to be found in “A Translation Memoir” at the end of my translation of The Complete Poetry of Cesar Vallejo (University of California Press, 2007). One afternoon in Kyoto in 1962 a friend, the American lithographer Will Petersen, mentioned that he had just visited a bonsai gardener who had completed his apprenticeship and was doing very interesting work. I had never thought of apprenticeship before, and I asked Will how old this man was. “He’s in his early sixties,” Will responded. Other than being moved that an artist would have such a long apprenticeship before doing his own work, I began to think that my difficulties in writing meaningful poems might be involved with my never having put myself through an apprenticeship. So I decided that instead of just trying to read the eighty-nine poems in Cesar Vallejo’s Poemas humanos which I had brought to Japan, maybe I should try to translate them as my apprenticeship to poetry.
To do that meant an awesome commitment of psyche as well as time, especially since my Spanish was poor and self-taught, and Vallejo’s poetry was very dense and complex. And in committing myself to such a project, was I simply evading the hard work of trying to find my way in poetry of my own? Or could I think of working on Vallejo as a way of working on myself?

In the afternoon I would ride my motorcycle downtown and work on translations in the Yorunomado coffee shop. Now, both in translating and working on poems of my own, I felt a weird resistance as if every attempt I made to advance was met by a force that pushed me back. I was as if through Vallejo I had made contact with a negative impaction in my being, a nebulous depth charge that I had been carrying around with me for many years. I also began to have violent and morbid fantasies that seemed provoked by the combination of translating and writing. I realized that I was struggling with a man as well as a text, and that this struggle was a matter of my becoming or failing to become a poet, and that this man I was struggling with was the old Clayton who was resisting change. The old Clayton wanted to continue living in his white Presbyterian world of “light”—where man is associated with day/clarity/good and woman with night/opaqueness/bad. The darkness that was beginning to spread through my sensibility could be viewed as the breaking up of the belief in male supremacy that had generated much of that “light.”

In an earlier response to one of your questions I mentioned a poem about struggling with a figure in this coffee shop. That poem is “The Book of Yorunomado.”

The above should give you and your readers some idea of my apprenticeship, which also involved my conversations with Cid Corman, and once back in America in 1964, discovering the text of the Vallejo Poemas humanos that I was trying to translate had many errors and that the original manuscript was in the hands of Vallejo’s French widow in Lima, Peru. In the spring of 1965, with my first wife Barbara pregnant, we left for Lima with a few hundred dollars. Once in Lima, I met Georgette Vallejo who refused to give me access to the worksheets upon which the various editions of Poemas humanos were based. It was not until 1974, when I was living in Los Angeles with Caryl, that I was given access to the Moncloa edition of the book which for the first time reproduced Vallejo’s worksheets.

IQ: We have touched upon the early stage (the apprenticeship/coming in terms with Indiana past) of your work, as well as what could be viewed as your maturity or gaining the fully formed singular voice as a poet (saturation job/involvement with the sacramental existence)
that has culminated in Juniper Fuse (around two decades in making), which I would consider a work in many ways central not only in your body of work but, more generally, in the poetry of our time. There is yet another stage that you have been pursuing since and that you have elsewhere called “summational.” As a reader, I first sensed it intensely in a poem called “The Tjurunga”, where the lifelong work and involvement of the poet comes together as a constellation. From the few poems that have been available, your new book, Penetralia, struck me as central to this summational stage. Could you talk about this? Further, sensing that the word “penetralia”, as related to your work, could be important in many ways, could you explain what it means for you/in the context of the book?

CE: I often open my 1955 Webster’s New International Dictionary and read a few pages at random. Doing so, one day a few years ago, I came across the word “penetralia” which was defined as: “The innermost or most private parts of thing or place, especially of a temple or palace.” A second definition followed: “Hidden things of secrets; privacy; sanctuary; as the sacred penetralia of the home.” Since I like words and phrases for book titles that to my knowledge have not been used by others as titles for poetry collections, I decided, then in my late 70s, that “penetralia” would be an appropriate and unique title for what might be my last collection of poetry, one that often ruminated on end matters, or summational engagements. There are, of course, a number of poems in this collection that do not directly do this, but the tone of the writing, along with the end shadowings, justify such a title.

You mention a poem, “The Tjurunga,” published in Anticline (Black Widow Press, 2010) that I mentioned was one of the two “soulend” supports, along with the 1964 “Book of Yorunomado,” holding the rest of my poetry in place. In this later poem I propose a kind of complex mobile (invoking the poet Robert Duncan’s re-reading of the mysterious Aranda ritual object) made up of the authors, mythological figures and acts, whose shifting combinations undermined and reoriented my life during my poetic apprenticeship in Kyoto, Japan, in the early 1960s. At a remove of some forty-five years I saw these forces as a kind of GPS (global positioning system) constantly “recalculating” as they closed and opened door after door. Thinking back to Vallejo pointing at my gut (in “The Book of Yorunomado”) and indicating that I was to commit seppuku I was struck by the following quotation from James Hillman’s Animal Presences: “The theological message of the Siva-Ganesha, father-son pattern can be summarized in this way: submit that you may be saved, be destroyed that you may be made whole. The sacrificial violence is not the tragic conclusion but the necessary beginning of a passage into a new order… the God who breaks you makes you; destruction and creativity ultimately spring from the same source.”
HEZY LESKLY

FROM ZOMBIE MEMORIES

TRANSLATED BY ADRIANA X. JACOBS
In the beginning was a lovely cliché
that asked for nothing more but
to declare itself.
And the cliché was made flesh
and flesh was made a ghastly bracelet
around the wrist of the divine pretender
and the hand dug a tunnel through the very world it wanted to escape.

And we made the tunnel a house.

In the middle of the house we placed a chair
In the middle of the chair we put an apple
What do you do with a chair
and an apple?
We asked
ourselves
And that’s how the question
mark was made.

We kissed the chair and nibbled the apple.
We nibbled the apple and said *Amen*.
Blessed are the lips in the tunnel whistling
a tune we dared negate!
Blessed are the lips wrapped around the apple,
tightly wrapped around the apple of our budding imagination
that gets scared like an apple!

*
When all the hands are dry
and all the ink dries up
and all the amniotic fluid
evaporates
and all the clouds dissipate, then
the word will split
from the expendable egg.
A redundant word doesn’t remember its broken home.
It dances on the vocal chords of a corpse quartet
humming a refrain,
always the same awesome refrain.
I find myself in prison of echoes
sitting on the echo of a couch
eating the echo of sliced bread
with
echo
of
sliced ham.
It’s getting dark. Praise the dark
that cleaves in the name of echoes:
the echo of ham
the echo of grace
the echo of the outer darkness

*
I knew that the poem would be
a useless thing
just what I wanted it to be:
a thing that can never be used:
the dirty knob
on a car door
that disintegrates.
The poem will be just like that.
The poem will be a corpse
in a field of thorns
piercing the flesh of the poem.
That’s just how I wanted this
tongueless nightingale song.
JAMES CLIFFORD
VISITING (GUSTAF SOBIN)
The Vaucluse is a lot closer to Paris than it used to be. Last time, I made a day trip of it—a blurred TGV ride at either end. In the mid seventies when my visits began, the train wended its way south, accompanying the Rhone, and one could watch the country change, leaving lush Burgundy for a stonier, light-drenched universe. Van Gogh wrote to Gauguin about his arrival in the Midi, leaning out the train window approaching Orange, to see if he was “in Japan yet.” For me the moment of arrival would be announced by the loudspeaker at Avignon station: “Avignon-ga, Avignon-ga.” And as often as not… Gustaf standing on the platform.

I was doing doctoral research in Paris, and my friend from graduate school, Michael Ignatieff, took several of us on a visit to his family house in the Vaucluse. He introduced me to an expatriate poet who was one of his neighbors, guessing we’d have something to say to each other. My interest in the Black Mountain tradition of poetry and in tribal cosmologies turned out to be a good enough starting point. We talked about Williams and Olson, about the work of Lucien Sebag and Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff on Amerindian mythologies, and Geneviève Calame-Griaule on “la parole chez les Dogon.” Gustaf adopted me. I was a young poète manqué—wondering if it was possible to bring something like Walter Benjamin’s miraculous “poetic prose” into scholarship. He read my academic work with an intensity that was flattering and intimidating—a vote of confidence for which I’ll always be grateful.

I became one of the readers, the interlocutors, Gustaf so needed at that moment. Having written for more than a decade in what he sometimes described as total isolation, he was finding his audience now, one by one. This was before his poetry began to appear in Eliot Weinberger’s Montemora, and later with the New Directions imprimatur. In 1973 Gustaf had just finished the astonishing Wind Chrysalid’s Rattle. He knew this was his best work…but he needed reassurance. The poetic voice he had been fashioning was a unique fusion of cosmopolitan English in the wake of Pound, French in the line of Mallarmé and Char, echoes of Heidegger, Hölderlin, or Celan, articulated, breathed, strained, through a very specific sensorium and place: the light, winds, and stones of Provence. How much of this
embodied, rarified world would be comprehensible to distant American readers?

We corresponded (the stakes were always high!) and whenever I could visit we talked and walked. He showed me his country. Others who have experienced Gustaf’s skills as a consummate poetic tour-guide will recall how those gentle performances worked. He would propose a trip by car to a site of interest, or a ramble through the nearby fields and rocky garrigues. It might be an excursion to the ruined Fort de Bioux (with its mysterious altar, linked perhaps to ancient sun-worship); or a drive to the Roman Pont Flavien near Arles (an aesthetic gem in a bleak industrial zone); or a steep ascent to the spectacular village of Suzette, high on the flanks of Mont Ventoux. Closer to home, a narrowing canyon might be revealed as a place where paleolithic hunters trapped and slaughtered game. A walk after rainfall between rows of wired-up grape vines might yield flint chips and, if you were blessed, a broken knife blade or arrowhead. (Gustaf seemed to see these tiny edges in the dirt, without looking.)

In a café in L’Isle sur la Sorgue, stories of René Char: the resistance activities of “Capitaine Alexandre” in the hills above Nôtre Dame des Lumières, or the famous postwar rencontres with Heidegger. And the rigors of discipleship: Char would not accept his young follower’s marriage to the painter Susanna Bott, and especially the birth of their daughter, Esther. The true poet could be wedded to his art alone! Then, after many years of silence, a reconciliation; and after Char’s death, his companion Tina Jolas and Gustaf looked after the grave.

Later, when I brought my wife Judith and son Ben with me, Gustaf guided us along the Roman aqueduct of Nimes (Luminous Debris pp. 203-222). We followed its fragmentary, often hidden, course through, over, and under a changing terrain--with a breathtaking arrival at the massive Pont du Garde, discovered from above, through the brush. Another destination was equally calculated to seduce our twelve-year-old: “Bronze Mountain” (pp 187-193), a wind-swept first-century pilgrimage site where one could, equipped with
tweezers and a film canister, collect a treasure trove of nearly-invisible bronze rings and lozenges, votive offerings long ago slipped into the walls of a now-vanished sanctuary.

These excursions were acts of hospitality. And they were also performances of Gustaf’s own poetics of place and time. It was never a question of simply walking in a lovely landscape. There was always a revelation--some poignant detail, resonant story, history, or allegory. *Luminous Debris* brings together some of the knowledge gained through all the years of attentive walking, the talk with locals and scholars, the hours spent in regional archives and libraries. Ladder of Shadows brings us through the Romanesque. And a third unfinished volume extends to the Second World War. (In the Pyrenees Gustaf looked for traces of Walter Benjamin’s last, fatal walk.)
My most recent visit was an intense, one-day dash down and back from Paris. From Avignon we drove to the familiar little house near Lacoste: a tall rectangle beside a rounded dry-stone borie. (René Char had named this profile: “Petrarch et Laura.”) Skirting a field of grape-vines, we passed the cabanon where, looking across the valley toward the Mont Ventoux, Gustaf has written, virtually every day, for the past forty years.

Coffee on a small, shaded patio, joined by Susanna: the talk was of the Iraq war and of a country, the United States, apparently gone mad with power and fear. What were people saying, doing back home? For all his European sympathies and deep roots in the Vaucluse, Gustaf still saw himself, with endlessly renewed ambivalence, revulsion and hope, as an American writer.
A short excursion was proposed for the afternoon, a drive across the valley to a vineyard near Roussillon, Cave Bonnelly. It wasn’t far, on foot, around the edge of a field to an oak, somewhat taller than the rest. This is the very tree, some believe, that inspired the tortured form, center-stage, in *Waiting for Godot*.

It’s well known that Samuel Beckett and his companion Suzanne fled Paris when their names turned up on a Gestapo list of *résistants*. In Roussillon, they waited out the war, employed as field-laborers and often walking several kilometers cross-country to the Bonnelly farm. Fuel had become scarce during the Occupation, and much of the landscape was denuded. According to local lore, a single tree survived on the Beckett’s path, offering shade in the blistering sun. Opinions vary about which one it was, and if, in fact, the tree is still living.
But the oak near Cave Bonnelly is a leading candidate, so Gustaf and I communed with it for a few minutes. A conscientious literary tourist, I took a picture.

Back at the vineyard’s tasting room, the elder Bonnelly, surrounded by wine bottles and a picture of his farm’s most famous worker, entertained us with stories of “Monsieur Beckett,” whom he remembered very well. Yes, bien sûr, the Becketts continued their resistance work in Roussillon (a point of some controversy). And there were plans to convert their house, now empty, into a museum of some sort.

The Beckett house, in sight of Roussillon’s famous ochre cliffs, was our next stop. Shuttered and overgrown, with stained stucco walls, the place exuded emptiness. It was hard to imagine it, as a tourist destination, telling some kind of heroic story.
There was time for a beer at Café de la Poste in Goult, the town through which Gustaf’s mail is delivered (his “lifeline,” he called it). Then a simple meal with Susanna on the patio, looking out over vines and hills in the falling light, and I was careening north on a train crammed with returning vacationers.

How to remember this last hasty visit? One more in a series: conversations over the years punctuated by misunderstandings, silences and renewals, all amounting somehow to a precious friendship. Another performance by the expatriate of his world: an intimate landscape of experience searching for interlocutors. Or my own nostalgic, luminous image of the poet’s life, without its winters, the bitter days, a mistral rattling at the windows.
And what to make of our half-comic search for a literary tree?

Hugh Kenner and Marjorie Perloff have proposed, paradoxically, that *Waiting for Godot* is a work of “realism.” The play’s wasted world, its menacing strangers and grim humor, its time of immobility, of frustrated hope, of waiting, waiting for a release forever deferred—all this rendered quite precisely the experience of wartime occupation. Of course the play was stripped of historical references, thus intensifying, allegorizing, the blocked reality that was daily life for the Becketts in Roussillon. Only a few specifics survived. In the play’s original French version, Vladimir reminds Estragon: “And yet we were together in the Vaucluse. Yes, we were picking grapes for a man named Bonnelly, Roussillon” (In Beckett’s later English text, the two tramps can’t manage to remember the name, or where it was they once picked grapes.)
Of course, the tree at the center of *Waiting for Godot* survives, luxuriantly proliferating meanings. (How many have attached themselves to its twisted shape over the years?) And it also grows in a particular place, on a path near a field of grapes.

Gustaf’s writing lives in a similar space of dissemination and rootedness, of structural purity and sensuous perception, of myth and materiality. His metaphors (“Wind, whose iris we are. Whose stutter.”) have all been seen, touched, heard. The land, light, sound and history of Provence are stripped, breathed, held an instant in language, and released.

That moment together in the real shade of a fictional tree.
GÉRARD DE NERVAL
FROM THE VISIONARIES (LES ILLUMINÉS)

TRANSLATED BY PETER VALENTE
REVOLUTIONARY MYSTICISM

When Catholicism decisively triumphed over paganism throughout Europe, and constructed from then on the feudal edifice that survived since the fifteenth century, that is to say, for the space of a thousand years, it could not suppress and destroy everywhere the spirit of ancient customs, or those philosophical ideas that had transformed the pagan principle at the time of Emperor Julian’s response to polytheism.¹

It was not enough to have overthrown the last refuge of Greek philosophy and those earlier beliefs, by destroying the Alexandrian Serapeum², and dispersing and persecuting the Neoplatonists³, who had replaced the external worship of the gods with a spiritualist doctrine derived from the mysteries of Eleusis and the Egyptian initiations, the Church still had to maintain its victory in all localities impregnated with ancient superstitions and persecution was not so powerful as time and oblivion for this difficult result.

But if we concern ourselves with France alone, we recognize that the pagan worship has long survived the official conversions effected by the change of religion of the Merovingian kings⁴. The respect of the people for certain consecrated places, for the ruins of the temples and the debris of old statues, forced the Christian priests to build most of the churches on the site of ancient pagan shrines.

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¹ Julian organized elaborate rituals and attempted to promote Neoplatonism as a rival to Christianity. In general, under Julian’s rule, Paganism was relatively tolerated.
² A serapeum is a temple or other religious institution dedicated to the syncretic Hellenistic-Egyptian god Serapis, which combined aspects of Osiris and Apis in a humanized form that was accepted by the Ptolemaic Greeks of Alexandria.
³ Neoplatonism is a modern term (first coined in 1827) used to designate a tradition of philosophy that arose in the 3rd century AD and continued until shortly after Justinian I closed the Platonic Academy in Athens in AD 529. According to Plotinus, with whose work Nerval would be have been familiar, the three hypostases are The One, The Nous (intelligible world), and the Anima, or Psyche or Soul.
⁴ Clovis was the first king of the Franks to unify all of the Frankish tribes under a single ruler, having changed the form of leadership from a group of royal chieftains to rule by a single king and in so doing, he ensured that the kingship was passed down to his heirs. He is considered the founder of the Merovingian dynasty, which ruled the Franks for the next two centuries.
Wherever this precaution was neglected, particularly in solitary places, the old worship still continued, as at the abbey of Mount Saint Bernard, where, in the last century, we still honored the god Jou at the site of the ancient temple of Jupiter. Although the ancient goddess of the Parisians, Isis, had been replaced by St. Geneviève, as protector and patroness, there was still, in the eleventh century, an image of Isis, inadvertently preserved under the porch of Saint-Germain des Prés, devoutly honored by the wives of sailors, which forced the Archbishop of Paris to reduce it to dust, and cast it into the Seine. A statue of the same deity was still seen at Quenpilly, in Brittany, a few years ago, and received the tributes of the population. In an area of Alsace and of Franche-Comté, we have preserved the cult of the Mother goddess, whose figures on bas-reliefs and on several monuments are none other than the great goddesses Cybele, Ceres, and Vesta.

It would take too long to respond to the various superstitions that have assumed a thousand forms, depending on the time period. There were in the eighteenth century, clerics, such as the abbé de Villars, Father Bougeant, Dom Pernetty, and others who argued that the

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5 Jou is a shortened form of the name Jupiter.
6 The celebrated abbé de Villars (abbé N. de Mountfaucon de Villars) was a French clergyman born in 1635 in Alet, which is near Toulouse, in the south of France. He came to Paris in 1667, where he wrote a number of books, most of which have been forgotten or lost. He was assassinated in 1673 or (by some accounts) 1675 while on the road from Lyons to his native Languedoc. His book the Count of Gabalis (Comte de Gabalis) concerns an occultist who explains the mysteries of the world to the author. The Comte De Gabalis is considered a Sacred Text for Rosicrucians and spiritual adepts.
7 Guillaume-Hyacinthe Bougeant, known as le Père Bougeant (November 4, 1690, Quimper, Brittany—January 17, 1743, Paris) was a French Jesuit and historian. Bougeant entered the Society of Jesus in 1706, taught classics in the College of Caen and Nevers and lived for a number of years in Paris until his death. His Philosophical Amusements on the Language of the Animals (Amusement philosophique sur le language des bêtes), published in 1737, attracted the censure of his superiors, leading to his brief exile from Paris. He is also the author of a theological treatise on the form of consecration of the Eucharist, and of a Catechism divided into three parts: historical, dogmatic, and practical.
8 Antoine-Joseph Pernety, known as Dom Pernety (February 23, 1716, Roanne – October, 16, 1796, Avignon) was a French writer. At various times he was a Benedictine, and a librarian of Frederic the Great of Prussia. Together with the Polish Count Tadeusz Grabianka, also influenced by the Christian mysticism of Swedenborg, he founded in 1760 the secret society of the ‘Rite hermétique’ or Illuminati of Avignon.
gods of antiquity were not demons, such as had been the claim of severe casuists\(^9\), and in fact were not even damned. They relegated them to the class of elemental spirits, who, not having taken part in the great struggle which had originally taken place between angels and demons, ought not to have been cursed or destroyed by Divine Justice, and had been able to enjoy a certain power over the elements and over men until the arrival of Christ. The abbé de Villars gave evidence for miracles that even the Bible itself acknowledges as having been produced by the god of the Ammonites\(^{10}\), the Philistines\(^{11}\), or others, for the benefit of their people, and that often fulfilled the prophecies of the spirits of Typhon\(^{12}\). Among these, he placed the oracles of the Sibyls, which were favorable to Christ, and the last oracles of the Apollo at Delphi, which were cited by the Church Fathers as proof of the mission of the Son of man.

According to this system, the entire ancient hierarchy of pagan gods would have found its place in the thousand attributions that Catholicism assigned to the inferior functions, to be carried out in matter and space, and would have become what has been called the spirits or genii, which are divided into four classes, according to the number of elements: Sylphs for air, Salamanders for fire, Ondines for water and the Gnomes for Earth.

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9  Casuistry is a method that uses reasoning to solve moral problems by extracting or extending theoretical rules from particular instances and applying these rules to new situations. Casuistry dates from Aristotle (384–322 BC), yet the high point of casuistry was from 1550 to 1650, when the Society of Jesus used this case-based reasoning, particularly in administering the Sacrament of Penance (or “confession”). The term casuistry quickly became pejorative after Blaise Pascal’s attack on the misuse of casuistry. In *The Provincial Letters (Les Provinciales)* (1656–7) he scolded the Jesuits for using casuistic reasoning during confession to appease wealthy Church donors, while punishing poor penitents.

10 There are numerous Canaanite gods usually associated with Moloch, the god associated with child sacrifice. One of these, Malkam, which signifies “great king,” is the god of the Ammonites and Phoenicians.

11 In the Hebrew Bible, Dagon, is referred to as the national god of the Philistines. They attributed their victories in war to him and offered sacrifices. This suggests that he played a part in doctrines about death and the afterlife. Usually portrayed as half fish and half human, Dagon is also seen as a god of agriculture.

12 Typhon was traditionally identified with the Egyptian Set, who was also known to the Greeks as Typhon. In the Orphic tradition, just as Set is responsible for the murder of Osiris, Typhon leads the Titans when they attack and kill Dionysus, who also became identified with the earlier Osiris.
With regard to the question of this one detail, there arose between the abbé de Villars and Father Bougeant, a Jesuit, a split that has long occupied the greatest minds of the last century. The latter was strongly opposed to the transformation of the ancient gods into elemental genii, and claimed, furthermore, that they could not be destroyed, since they had the quality of pure spirits, and since they were intended to provide animals with souls, which were renewed in passing from one body to the other, according to their affinities. In this system, the gods animated useful and beneficial beasts and the demons ferocious and impure beasts. Thereupon, the good Father Bougeant cited the opinion of the Egyptians concerning the gods and that of the Gospel concerning the demons. These arguments could be exposed in full during the eighteenth century without there being accusations of heresy.

It is quite clear that these were only inferior deities, such as fauns, Zephyrs, Nereids, Oreadss, Satyrs, Cyclops, etc. As for the gods and demigods, they were supposed to have departed from the earth, it being too dangerous, after the establishment of the absolute reign of Christ, and to have been relegated to the stars, just as in the Middle Ages, when we relegated a rebellious prince, after his submission, either to the city or to a place of exile. This view prevailed, particularly during the Middle Ages, among the most celebrated cabalists, and especially among astrologers, alchemists and physicians. This explains most of the conspiracies concerning astral invocations, horoscopes, talismans, medications or consecrated substances, operations related to certain gestures, or the conjunction of planets. It is enough to open a book on the occult sciences for clear evidence of this.

13 In Greek mythology, an Oread or Orestiad was a type of nymph that lived in mountains, valleys, and ravines. They were associated with Artemis, since the goddess, when she went out hunting, preferred mountains and rocky precipices.
If one were to give a full explanation of the doctrines that are outlined above, then one would understand the reasons why, alongside the teachings of the Orthodox Church, these ideas have grown continuously into a school, half religious and half philosophical, no doubt fertile in heresies, yet often accepted or tolerated by the Catholic clergy, and why it maintained a certain air of mysticism and supernaturalism, which is necessary for dreamy and delicate imaginations, like those populations more disposed than others to spiritualist ideas.

The converted Jews were the first who attempted, around the eleventh century, to infuse Catholicism with some of the assumptions that were based on a certain interpretation of the Bible, going as far back as the doctrines of the Essenes and the Gnostics.

It is from this time that the word cabal often comes up in theological discussions. There it mixes naturally with such things as the Platonic forms of the Alexandrian school, the ideas of which were already reproduced in the doctrines of the Church Fathers.

Christianity’s prolonged contact with the East, during the Crusades, brought over another large number of similar ideas which, moreover, found themselves easily supported by the local traditions and superstitions of the European nations.

The Templars were among those Crusaders who endeavored to achieve the broadest possible alliance between these Eastern ideas and those of Roman Christianity.

In the desire to establish a link between their order and the Syrian people they were responsible for governing, they laid the foundations for a new kind of doctrine that was engaged with all the religions practiced by the Levantines, without abandoning in essence the Catholic synthesis, but by often making it bend to the requirements of their position.

These were the foundations of Freemasonry, which were connected to similar institutions established by various sects of Muslims and which still survive persecution, especially in the Hauran, in Lebanon and in Kurdistan.

The strangest and most exaggerated phenomenon of these Eastern associations was the
famous Order of the Assassins. The nation of the Druze\textsuperscript{14} and that of the Ansari\textsuperscript{15} are the ones today who have guarded the last remnants of it.

The Knights Templar were soon accused of having established one of the most formidable heresies that Christianity had ever witnessed. Persecuted and finally destroyed in all the European countries, through the combined efforts of the papacy and the monarchies, they had on their side the intelligent classes and the many distinguished minds who were against the abuses of the feudal lords; they were what we would call today the Opposition.

From their ashes scattered to the wind there was born a mystical and philosophical institution which greatly influenced that first moral and religious revolution, that for the people of the North was called the Reformation, and for those in the South of France La Philosophie.\textsuperscript{16}

These reforms were still, moreover, concerned with the salvation of Christianity as a religion; Occultism, however, gradually became its enemy, and, aiming especially at people who remained Catholic, soon established clear divisions, gulfs between unbelievers and believers.

However, there are many who are not satisfied with pure materialism, but who, without rejecting the religious tradition, prefer maintaining towards it a certain freedom of discussion and interpretation. It was they who founded the first Masonic societies, which soon gave shape to the popular corporations and what are still today called trade guilds.

The Masonic order established its highest institutions in Scotland, and it was as a result of the relations of France with this country, from the time of Marie Stuart to Louis XIV, that

\textsuperscript{14} The Druze are an esoteric and ethno-religious faith that incorporates aspects of Ismailism, Judaism, Christianity, Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, Pythagoreanism, Hinduism, and other philosophies and beliefs. From this they created a secretive theology. They are known to give esoteric interpretations of religious scriptures.

\textsuperscript{15} The Ansari are a people residing in the mountainous regions near Antioch, and in other places in Northern Syria. Like the Druze, their religious rites are based on the occult mysteries of initiation. The incredible and semi-fabulous story of their origin is beyond the scope of a simple footnote.

\textsuperscript{16} “La Philosophie” refers to the Knights Templar and their system of Occultism. It also refers to the philosopher’s stone of alchemy. I have kept the original French in this case since the full implications of Nerval’s use of the word here are beyond the scope of a simple footnote.
we witnessed the establishment of strong footholds in our own mystical institutions which prepared us for the Rosicrucians.

Meanwhile, Italy had seen the establishment, beginning in the sixteenth century, of a long series of fearless thinkers, among whom were Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, Meursius\(^{17}\), Nicolas of Cusa, Jordano Bruno and other great minds favored by the tolerance of the Medici, and who are sometimes called the Neoplatonists of Florence.

The capture of Constantinople, exiling many illustrious scholars who were then welcomed in Italy, also exercised a great influence on that philosophical movement which brought back the ideas of the Alexandrians, and led to the renewal of the study of Plotinus, Proclus, Porphyry, and Ptolemy, those first opponents of nascent Catholicism.

It should be noted here that the most learned physicians and naturalists of the Middle Ages, such as Paracelsus, Albert the Great, Jerome Cardan\(^{18}\), Roger Bacon and others, were more or less attached to these doctrines, which gave a new formula to what one called the occult, that is to say, astrology, cabala, palmistry, alchemy, physiognomy, etc.

It was from these various elements and partly from the Hebrew science, that spread more freely from the time of the Renaissance, that was formed the various mystical schools we saw develop in the late seventeenth century.

First the Rosicrucians, whose indiscreet disciple was the abbé de Villars, who later, it is alleged, was a victim.

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17 Johannes Meursius (van Meurs) (February 9, 1579, Loosduinen, near the Hague – September 20, 1639, Soro), was a Dutch classical scholar and antiquarian.

18 Gerolamo (or Girolamo, or Geronimo) Cardano (September, 24, 1501 – 21 September 21, 1576) was an Italian Renaissance mathematician, physician, astrologer, philosopher and gambler. He wrote more than 200 works on medicine, mathematics, physics, philosophy, religion, and music. His gambling led him to formulate elementary rules in probability, making him one of the founders of the field. In France, he was called Jerome.
Then Convulsionaries\textsuperscript{19} and certain sects of Jansenism; by 1770, the Martinists\textsuperscript{20}, Swedenborgians, and finally the Order of the Illuminati, whose doctrine, first established in Germany by Weisshaupt, soon spread to France, where it merged with the Masonic institution.

\textsuperscript{19} The Convulsionaries (Convulsionnaires) were a group of 18th-century French religious pilgrims who exhibited convulsions and later constituted a religious sect and a political movement.

\textsuperscript{20} Martinism is a form of Christian mysticism and esoteric Christianity concerned with the fall of the first man, his state of extreme despair and distance from his divine source, and the process of his return, called “Reintegration” or “Illumination.”
JOSEPH DONAHUE
THE MASTER OF DISASTER
for Ted Horne  (1954-2014)

I

A church so
close to the

water it might as
well be a boathouse

*

An inlet so ashamed to take
back his soul

it sends this
bright, icy mist

*

A death apparently needed
because he was so good
at fixing things
The misaligned

elements
-- now

so close to
devastating

the planet --
have

called him
to help them

*

Not a climate scientist
Not an activist

Just an admirer of wind and water
attentive to conditions

as one would be
who had lived

at the shore
had worked

on board boats
on long voyages
A man with a knack
for solutions

tinkerer,

an improviser,

who could figure out
most things mechanical,

electronic, automotive,

anything involving

pipes, wires, shingles, insulation,
concrete, having worked in the trades

and in restaurants,
in the kitchen

a visionary behind a bar
a gifted artist

and listener, a man
with a deep background

in love and grief
and joy

*
The one all around
wanted around

when things
went wrong

*

Hard as it was at times to trust
he knew what he knew
given the percent of
know-how arising
from not a few close calls
not a few shenanigans,
schemes, gambits of
all sorts resulting
in at times only the most
tenuous of triumphs
and not a few flat-out catastrophes
hard as it was to trust the
truths to be deduced
from his outlandish

narratives
by any
not caught up
in howls and gasps

*

Over the years, among
some who loved him

an honorific
emerged:

the Master of
Disaster
Throughout a nominally Christian funeral service many prayed and did so devoutly others practiced mindfulness or took stoic note or wept openly in dismay or, disregarding the protocols of piety, offered to the snow-welling sky a silent cry: “Let all die, die fast, die now,
die as he
died,
on short
notice
in complete
disbelief
and at
the
turn of
a new year”
III

oracle

“Grieve only where
the waters flowing over
the wall of
a canal
solidify,
turn white,
where graffiti brightens the
massive
stone piling of a
bridge
grieve where a ladder has been
left above the frozen
floe of the last
earthly river
the Merrimack,
grieve deeply in this
arctic vortex,
in the grey air, a touch of blue
in the muted
gloom,
in the freezing twilit
industrial
ruin
of this, his
ancestral land.
Pile a few stones
at the foot of the
ladder
that ends
mid-air”
In the evening my mind sparkles. I am both tired and not. The pill I take is so strong parts of my body go to sleep. The pill does all the work.
So much so
if

I didn’t take it I’d be
dead by
tomorrow
night

But
I do and

feel great all
day

And
at twilight

wonderful thoughts
start to

fill my
head
V

dream

Shooting through the traffic
a tall, silver-haired man

late for lunch, on
a skateboard

tails flapping behind him

Incredibly, no top hat
Stopping short he

flips the skateboard
foot to hand, drops it

in a midtown
Manhattan trashcan

his wild arrival belied
by a solemnity

(A bit winded:) “There’s a part of me
a small area, right about here”

he point just below a rib
“that’s all black and rotten.

I saw it on a screen.
It has already died.
Why would part of me
go ahead and die?

I don’t get it, at all.
It hurts so, so much.

Brother I can’t tell you
how much it hurts.”

(Pause) “But listen: right past
that beat-up blue awning is

a terrific lunch place.
The bartender’s a friend.

The chef is great. They
all know me there.

I am so sorry I won’t
be able to join you,

but that’s where you
should go. Order

the special; whatever it is, you

won’t be
let down.”
Kept carefully provisioned the indispensible vessel
every emergency
anticipated
and a GPS to guide him
anywhere an ad
video, TV show
or a movie
was shooting
closely cared for
everything in place
for a week on the road
and the camera parts
and contracts and the
countless small gifts
for those he met
on his route,
seldom forgetting
any off-hand sigh
about something missed
or needed or wanted
by grips, sales reps,
cameramen, gaffers
best boys, foley artists,
electricians, directors
he brought each
a trinket from you
stored in the depths of
the conveyance you
lent him in his
last years on earth
through your
intermediate, his
employer, World Wide
Camera,
the white van
he called Vanna White
in your honor though
without quite
knowing it
Fortuna, by your grace
all felt his warmth,
knew his loyalty, were
amused at his outrageous tales
his high spirits and candor
his shrewd garrulity,

his immense
compassion,

his ease playing
the fool

He cherished the living
you allowed him

as stressful and demanding
as that so often was

he praised you not as you
were known in ancient times,

but as you appeared
in his historical moment:

a goddess on a game show
derived from hangman

light hearted, blonde,
as Vanna White

a beauty who
spelled out the

fate of each who
spun the carnival wheel

gasped as it slowed,
clicked to stillness --
your Wheel of Fortune

Even when dying he thanked you for

saving him from the failure

he so feared and Goddess,

he loved those long sales trips when

he dreamed of the movie

his life had been

and, he thought, still might be . . .
VII

_The ghost of Lucretius_

So, Venus, our
mother, isn’t waiting
to receive us, and
no heaven flares beyond
our own
materiality

Were our
mother anywhere

she would only be in spills of light,
in the cloud, in the glow
inside the
cloud
where the last
of the sun hides

Possibly
in the robin
gripping a deck chair
or a phone pole
thrown
over the

seawall by winter
in the hole where new rocks will

soon
be heaped

On this coast
where so

much
happened
VIII

_The ghost of Lucretius_

On tables, now, just above
the water-line, atoms

arranged
in his honor: wine,

whiskey, beer, a feast, the full moon
lights the pressing tide,

crests in the
flowing black

that slap and spume
the solemn frivolity of

commemorative
voices

*

As complete night arrives
in the shelter of

seawall boulders
twenty
packets of his
ashes are taped to the tips of
twenty
fireworks
-- his last request
Handing his
grit to the discreetly
grieving
rocketeer
his
daughter,
says:

“I always
thought all ashes
are black, but I
guess not.”

*

Full night now, tide out,
kelp-smell and wet

pebble rattle
in the rising
moonlight
the fireworks

fizzle, vault, and burst
over the breakers

in long
glittering arcs
PRZEMYSŁAW OW CZAREK

THREAD
ROULETTE
EAST ON THE BIEBRZA
FROM ARGUMENT
NEW YEAR’S EVE IN PRZEC HODY

TRANSLATED BY MARK TARDI
when I have a choice? – I choose the rain
and I see the wanderer. the coming monsoon
in his earthy eyes. premonitions writhe like trilobites.
laughter falls from the nostrils and haunts

the desert. the sea abandoned us. we’re its film
woven from the threads that Cervantes spun for
Harry Mathews. an unknown bottom. I saw – a ball became

a woman. whispers of her nine profiles.
on the hills of Helicon, dogs were seduced. in her mouth, the name
of the father clotted. (how’d you call it, Monsieur Lacan?)

eternal betrayal and beautiful sin. if you ask – I’ll choose
the headroom.
the eye in the weave.
color in a certain context can change
hue. a copper night. two dreams ago you bought
a revolver. the snake shed its skin and turned into
a chicken. at least so it seemed.

you shook the quills. slipped into the pit.
like a deranged miner you counted breaths. on
three: extract the light from the shell, reveal
the seeds of words, and go out into the meadow. you’ll wake up.

the sky will brace your steps. the land will abrade
your head. insert only one round and spin out the sun.
EAST ON THE BIEBRZA

a raven-headed man passed by.
his eyes scattered like buttons.
scampered like sparrows. a woman with

bluish skin casually removed her dress.
crumbling, her hair made of hoarfrost,
suspended. and I dreamt about when your

feet sought warmth under the covers of Pooh
bear. dawn just crept along the wall. the lips
were swollen from hunger. the hand on the breast

looking for affinity found it in the wide-open
body. two ravens by the river argued
with the air. and drops on the glass defiantly

walked towards the sun.
III.
if something’s born and something dies, there’s something
“neither.” neither drizzle, nor glint on the glass.
as if an old song was flying from inside.
NEW YEAR’S EVE IN PRZECHODY

I.
five hours of sleepy driving to Białystok. Mrs.
Jagoda was waiting for us on the dirt road.
then her Nissan ran across the bridge over the river
to the house in the clearing, where a long table's overgrown
with ham, herring, a green bottle of moonshine
labeled “Elk’s Kick” and a line
which I don’t remember. but the fire passed
through the body as if it were an altar for the new
year. we didn’t wait. the Russian front snagged ice
in the swamp, and Biebrza was sprinkled with the tracks of bulls
and elk. the game were captured in snapshots.
we played dice drinking Bordeaux. somebody mentioned
shopping at Lidl, guarantees for success.

II.
the unbelievably arduous encrustations
of frost. writing about nature? – an antiquated style.
especially on the morning’s reconnaissance with the barrel of
the Canon ready to shoot. who will believe

in a hunter’s adrenaline, which needs
to seep through calculated syllables, penetrate
the snare of references. don’t flirt with
the lighting. before cooling down the river in you
find a solar flare, glaze, the rotted specters
which stain the path. you’ll end up back at
the table. in protestant myths, the banker’s dream
in a poem, which you don’t reveal to friends.

or the cold laughter knocks them off the bridge? let them pass.

III.
the day was pure as moonshine. foxes dance around
a flock of wild geese. the watchful flight of the hawk.
and pupils remember small killings.
CARMEN VASCONES

"I SPRANG FROM THE SEA"
FOR EVERY STAR YOU PLUCK
"THE Lighthouse BEAM LINGERS"
"MY TEARS ARE FILTERS FOR MY MEMORY"

TRANSLATED BY ALEXIS LEVITIN
I sprang from the sea
not from the mouth of men
who spawned on me my children
with their brutal ways.

They buried deep my presence
not knowing who I am
I return to the tenderness of the waves.
FOR EVERY STAR YOU PLUCK

For every star you pluck
whether from the sand or from the sky
a man dies upon the earth
The lighthouse beam lingers
between the ocean’s thighs
complete surrender
between silence and motion
pitch black
the gaze returns to nowhere
its light complicit
the spell remains till dawn.

And the sea beyond all reach.
My tears are filters for my memory
may they never end
so birds may flourish
so the rainbow may curve towards the earth
so the sea may not be quenched
so fire bombs won’t set
the bodies of children aflame
so the sky may rest
so the forest may touch the wind
so you may feel the flow of water
on the skin you cover with my own
so I may love you in my own way
MOMENTARY RESURRENCE OF VISUAL SENSATIONS

... when I ask myself the question I think to think speaks for itself I think with my lips I smile but without thinking reflect on the fact that thought speaks for itself speaks the sound of my lips doesn’t exist if it isn’t in the sonic fiction I would like to speak to you I would like to tell all but to tell all results in a reality that is no longer my way of telling and of being and if a film obscures my field of vision then I think it’s a remake

... I also think of subtitles of languages read heard learned I think as thought they say to open their lips their eyes blink my mouth is open now I preselect a thought I think for you I divide myself into thoughts in my dreams thought is inscribed all along the faces the colors have their own thoughts that fill each projection into full screen mode

... one sees the lips of actors one sees that they don’t think the actors don’t think since their life is a momentary constraint a photograph of a two-way mirror, the actors act on the screen whereas off camera the actor thinks of the role and is therefore outside the role I sometimes point myself out as an actress of my spoken thoughts, think a thought in the moment then describe it more or less, I point myself out while those who think they’ve received my confidences haven’t heard a thing haven’t seen me, they have ideas but not their own proper thoughts, the reason that the crease at the corners of the mouth leads to an affirmative answer

... I like voices she could say I like not synthesizing not telling not retracing instead of shutting up, I ask myself and my answer is a question that becomes a remake of my supposed previous life, track the sound that delayed leaves my mouth track that which spills out in thought, do you think then that one can become a person that will come back that one can come back in thought in the thought of those who question you?

(tr. Eléna Rivera)
SUPERNATURAL JEWELLS

Let's take a sound dedicated to princesses
When the skin becomes slightly darker
And across the kingdom in a mauve bikini
Then get down on their knees on the motorway

Toward a perspective on deep harmony
The cult of the surface generates a form of obstinacy
From old scaffolding, you reach a blinding light
Or any other target is crushed in the anthology of senses

"She is really young"
Did not become a metaphor but a suspicion to divulge
From this statement, frozen landscape are born
With a purple dress at the middle (I can go even further on)

Often the house was closed
Because of link without extension
The billboard "ON SALE" was a part of a dynasty
But could not explain neither the light dizziness nor the melody heard in the distance

While watching "Spring breakers" from Harmony Korine

(tr. Sandra Mous sempès)
FRAME— NIGHT — RED ABODE

The heat of studios, we can extract this heat.
“Your body holds up a night-light, you are languorous.”
—title of the first dialogue—

The hero says he's captivated.

When you are in this Santa Monica hotel you have a view of the ocean, you are in the interior of a décor purchased by more than 900 T.V. channels.

You like the blue that makes positive thinking easy, the whiteness of the walls looks like Greece but in L.A. it’s never too hot or too cold “I like the quality of life, our kids go to a private school” or any other dialogue in sale will be fine.

She walks on the beach, that ocean is not actually a place for swimming, we find sharks there and
the opinion californian have on them.

— We have to drive, I see, you don’t like driving you’ll have to get used to it, that and the gym.

The red light intensifies, the faces frown, 1979 or maybe 1982, no mass movements, the Cocteau Twins are big with young Californians at the time, in L.A. there were some fake punks who lived in luxurious villas, they organized parties on the patios of their plastic surgeon parents.

[I met a brunette there who looked like Mia]

But also some arty directors and rising actors; sometimes the servers became stars, shortly after, but no one really knew how to lose themselves like here.
Dialogues numbered 1 through 13
— I want to re-read some books, books stimulate me and make me stronger, at the cinema (the image makes everything) there’s this condensation on the camera that prevents seeing in, depth, it is very tempting to be guided by an atmosphere.

— It’s possible to be lured by silence and to wish for the sound to guide us.

In L.A. two women kissed each others, I remember this moment; was it just a spot for a vintage porno in faded colors (a popular aesthetic in the field of design) ?

— I watched these two blonde women, naked, who had maintained long pearl necklaces, in a wicker chair, the light was blue, their blondeness was blue, and this blue became tangled in many layers, with their legs and their ankles becoming mauve on the photo once enlarged.

Red desk-blotter, first window 
Rectangle, transparency, dark edges—
The heroine became a second role in the background categorized emerging pin-up, in this independent film, she slaved away (the quality of the image makes everything).

—We’ll call her Mia, blond, father German, mother Irish, physique Hitchcockian but without the ambivalence, voluptuous curves, Mia wears a brown wig that brings out her blue eyes and the paleness of her complexion.
(In this boarding school, no one knows who is who, no one knows who is I)
—But, yet it’s the same woman, I’m sure I recognize her.
—Yes actually, but the image doesn’t make everything.

So, various hypotheses
—I did not go to the cinema for years but I included myself in my list of unfindable films

Questioning, question marks
Repetition of the final sentence
Motives, suppressed adjectives

— The final scene didn't make me feel anything
but deep inside, she is devastated
in a sculpted house

3 o'clock, in front of the housing development barely out of the ground, the residents come
to get the keys, they open the door of their apartment

A form of submission
They fool around with each other

I had repetitive dreams: I am almost superstitious when I keep quiet
No sentence seemed really positive despite the blue
"Coldly received"

Fade to black
Thesis of survivors who are fed up with
Aliases & memento to forget them
Something welcome: the replacement of the rumor with a strident note

“You enter a new cycle you'll see nothing will be the same, or maybe you'll see nothing
because
everything will have changed”

Nothing needs to be explicable if the explanation is the only thing that stays

Something shorter
— This bitch ripped you off

Features other than direct access to the sea: the waste collection is becoming decent
We could say boiler if everything hadn't been taken away

With me as an extension of you
I bet you are
Smiling I feel that you wish me well

(tr. Sandra Moussempès and Hadley Sorsby-Jones)
GYRÐIR ELÍASSON

FROM NO LEMONWOOD GROWS HERE

TRANSLATED BY MEG MATICH
UNCONVENTIONAL TRAVEL POEM II

Startled sometimes
that one
species (the one I
belong to) has overtaken the Earth.
But there’s nothing to be done
except
sink into a trainseat
inconspicuously
and close your eyes
to whatever’s outside
the window
In his final years,  
William Morris was depressed.  
His friends called him
*Million Worries*, among themselves.  
That was after he  
had visited  
Iceland twice,  
and once is depressing enough,  
imagine two times.  
He sat at the window  
and counted the pigeons pecking  
at seeds outside and  
cooing in pure  
pleasure. I once saw  
him hoist himself out  
the window and stretch  
a scribbled note  
toward the pigeons,  
entreating them to  
carry it with them,  
I didn’t hear  
where to (maybe  
it was Iceland).  
They pretended  
not to see him
BLACKOUT IN THE EAST

It’s evening by the time I arrive at the house. Autumn, low branches sway outside the window. A Citroen parked in the yard, and through the kitchen window I see you with a light on your forehead — a pitchblack kitchen, and you, with light on your forehead. And when I pass by the window, gravel crunching underfoot, a ray of light falls on me and then on near-luminescent rhyolite
The house was at the foot of an escarpment. The overnighters, afraid of the boulders on the slope, could hardly sleep those first few nights. But soon they settled in. Hardly a week had passed when it started to pour, the clouds hovering low to the ground, letting loose a deluge of gray and sometimes even black rainwater.

One night, after the rain had begun, they lay asleep when a boulder came loose from the summit and launched into the air barreling toward them, breaking straight through the rusted roof before landing in their bed, knocking them into a sleep so very deep, so very lasting.
SALGADO MARANHÃO

REFRAIN
DEVORACIOUS
BEYOND LIMITS 8
BEYOND LIMITS 10

TRANSLATED BY ALEXIS LEVITIN
REFRAIN

for Silviano Santiago

someone will flow
my
    playful
symphony
    and its
letters of linen.
someone of blood
    and wings
herald of the blue
will overflow
    my rhapsody
to sailors,
a cry from the veins
    and univertebrae
that sways my medulla
to the vibrations of a viper.

and God ploughs
his harem
    of lights
tillage of gold
that breezes breathe to everything.
and rivers sing in my pores
silent spheres
    of time.
DEVORACIOUS

singing of love that aches
lashes the word in its labor.

a singing that doesn’t gush forth,
that has to be versed in reverse.

squeezed in its decanting
like a sword screeching through glass.

sucking sweetness from astringency,
extracting wings from an ill-wind.

oh sea! lovely indigo sea! sea of my love!
devoracious tree of words
flowering of lights beneath the bog.
my saintly santa clara
spaceship of saintly clarity
give us clarity for charity
call me clarity
clarion clarity

to the sound of time—give clarity
to the fiber where the wind trickles
give clarity to always
where water waters
where stone stones

oh queen of the clan of the moon
ravish my thoughts
(tributary to silence
almost a lament)

give clarity to feeling
give clarity to faith
give clarity to saints in their madness
give clarity to madmen in their sanctity
give clarity to villains
killers with their serpentining destinies, set ablaze
their refineries
their rituals of lifeless life.

Oh ballerina of the break of day
oh muse of my clan, my clamor,
give clarity to our fragile
earth
sap of our very being.
(taxi blues)

I’m the one they killed
who didn’t die,
the one who dances on cactuses
and naked stone
      --in combat, alone.
the one delivered unto buzzards
and the blues
      and
the blues
sundaying my wednesday afternoons.
      --I am the light
beneath the filth.

(night that enters night and seals up
centuries,
tatters of my ethnicities,
arteries drowned in archetypes)

I am iron. I am irony.

and millennial fire of this cauldron
I raise an ebony pole, immense
obelisk, to the stars.

eh time beyond all limits and within!
eh time of latex and omnipotence!

riverbed of blackened earth
beneath white waters,
I am the spear
the ark of destiny above divining shells.

and from bluesy jazz to buzzard blues
I hear the grinding sugar mill
of the new slave owners
with their golden feces
and their hearts of phlegm.

eh time beyond all limits and within!
eh time of latex and omnipotence!

I am the light with its ritual of shadows
--radiance untouchable.
JEANNINE M. PITAS

JUNE 4, 1989

AMARANTA

THANK YOU FOR DREAMING

THE SYSTEM
I wake up
the sun is shining
lilacs bloom on the branches
peonies teem with ants
beetles build a new world
under rocks

today is my birthday
my mother is making potato salad
my father is pulling out card tables and the grill
tonight there will be a party

at six years old
I feel I’ve lived forever
all this spring
I have checked the robins’ blue eggs
in the nest they made outside our door
at Easter I held my Babcia’s hand
wore the orchid corsage she gave me
a few weeks ago we visited Disney
I hugged Micky Mouse, kissed Minnie,
visited replicas of Egypt and Mexico
believing all of it as real
as Mrs. Bova, my kindergarten teacher
as the crossing guard outside my school

today I help my mother dust the French doors
comb the fringe of Persian rugs
arrange a bouquet of silky roses
barely hearing the television’s watery chatter
my world is garden walks with my father
Babcia’s blue-pleated dresses, Mama’s pancakes
still spring afternoons waiting for swallowtails
to land on the crease of my blouse

I do not know
that on another side of the earth
streets teem with people
shouting for joy
this day will be remembered
red and white, colors of the flag
as the moment when, after fifty years,
freedom returned to Poland

I do not know
that on still another side
Beijing’s streets teem with people
screaming, fleeing
red and white, colors of blood and pale faces
filled with the worst kind of death -
a death preceded by fear
decades later, it will be mentioned in hushed tones -
the “June Fourth Incident”
that burns the backs of wordless throats

today is my birthday
I am turning six years old
relatives and friends gather to eat burgers
my mother is making potato salad
I open presents – Barbie dolls,
clothes, my first bicycle

I blow out the candles
on my Mickey Mouse cake
and wonder
what I should wish for
A woman made with the taste of almonds,
you fell from a tree believed wrongly to be sweet.

You imagined your thoughts could make pools of poison, appear in your niece Remedios`s
coffee, your red envy casting a gray haze over the village your parents founded.

Your queendom, the porch, where you sewed and sewed in a house without men. You raised
the children of others, a spider turned from in horror, your web the home in which others
could live.

When your nephew Aureliano touched you, your yearning was wider than war, harsher
than the banana company. It threatened to raze the whole village, give birth to a child with
the tail of a pig.

Yearning to rise up and fly as only priests and idiots can, you raised a wall between self and
desire, shut your bedroom door forever, collected letters to bear to the dead.

Virgin sacrifice, widow of no one, you closed your nostrils to the smell of lavender, your
ears to the strains of the pianola, sent suitors away from the porch where you ruled,

For years you sat, weaving your own shroud, Penelope with no Odysseus to wait for. You
sought the God your father lost faith in, strove to take a photograph of love and hold it.

I see you in so many adulterers, aging teachers, executives sitting alone on a million dollars.
I see you and wish to seek you, sit on the porch beside you, walk in the sun and hold out
your thread.

I´d ask your almond-shell to surround us like an autumn day, let us drink the dark chocolate
that grants eternal life, let others fly or stay behind walls or go to war or pick the imperialists´
bananas.

as we sit on this porch and spin stories, weave of them a flimsy web, making and unmaking
our Macondos before the dustclouds will at last call us home.
THANK YOU FOR DREAMING

you tell me of your dream
in which Mohammad appeared

surrounded by radiant imams
he prayed in your family’s garage

you speak of the time
when God broke his own law

showed his enormous face
and drank tea with your mother

oh, dreamer
you have enchanted me

with songs
of your beloved Babylon

laughter at Charlie Chaplin
your best resistance to war

memories of licorice,
yucca, Jericho roses in bloom

now, after escaping
the tortures and amputations

you have made it to safety
with your hands intact

you will use them
to play the oud
you have made it to freedom
with your tongue intact

you will use it
to tell your stories

you have made it to this adopted country
with your heart intact

you will use it to find people
like you, once broken

today, touched and held
by your dreams
THE SYSTEM

The system shines with uninterrupted light.
– Lisa Robertson

There is grass and clouds and blenders stirring morning mango smoothies.

There is the Brooklyn Bridge and Union Square with Hare Krishnas singing to their drums, buskers reciting Shakespeare. Children rushing to break enormous bubbles blown by a machine.

There are subways and rats and robotic voices apologizing for delays; there are chocolate shops with crystal chandeliers and shiny glass surfaces; there are would-be witches gathering herbs in Prospect Park while drones deliver parcels over their heads.

There are protesters occupying building sites and drivers rolling their eyes at them and more protesters offering roses to riot police.

There are women disappearing from the streets of Vancouver, evicted men roaming San Francisco while Googletati ride by in private buses.

There are gold coins in vaults and gold crosses hanging around the necks of Fox News commentators and miners digging into Incan soil while Goldcorps goes up a few more points on the Toronto Stock Exchange, while Xiomara looks out the window and cries no, I beg you, please..

There are late Renoirs and replicas of ancient Egyptian temples and Scotiabank-sponsored surtitles at the Canadian Opera Company’s Rigoletto.

There are trays and trays of plastic water bottles at every academic conference in every windowless hotel banquet hall; there are bus maps and Gothic revival churches dwarfed by skyscrapers; there are gods and there is God and how are any of us supposed to know the difference.

There are steel mills and “men working” signs and stone-faced men and women in the waiting rooms of HIV testing centres; there are garbage continents in the Pacific and
Ghanian valleys filled with broken cell phones; there are businessmen sipping cocktails in Grand Central before catching the train back to Scarsdale; there are turquoise beads hanging from garlands in the shops; there are big box stores and weeping statues, heaven and hell squeezed down to the size of a single tree; there are vans painted in William Blake drawings and underwater grids containing all the parts of ourselves we’d rather not have to see.

There is toxic forgiveness floating like smog around those who haven’t asked for it; there is the Bloor Viaduct hand-built by the old dispossessed, now guarded by high fences to keep the new dispossessed from jumping off.

Is there any border, any ring, any outside to this system that holds us, this net that economists deem beautiful? An edge to the web that contains us like flies, a wormhole we might crawl through to another planet locked inside ours, waiting to burst into leaf? Is there a way to find the sea in the reflection of a building, to look up and see the sun?

I see disasters and tears and gated communities patrolled by labradoodles; I see hatred in the shape of beauty, an onion of crystal ice.

I see apartments and buzzers and kitchens and floors, groups of people scribbling post-it notes with the names of the famous and pasting them to their foreheads, an endless party game where we sip our wine and eat our brie and ask each other who we are.
A minuscule white town, Jajó lies hidden in the heights. At that moment it looked empty, so much so that it wouldn’t have disconcerted me to know, for example, that for some mysterious reason it had just been evacuated. One had scarcely a hint of anyone’s presence in the houses, and along its narrow and steep cobbled streets one saw no recent signs of human activity, either. I’m a bit embarrassed because someone may think I do it on purpose, but I must say that once again I found myself confronting a habitual, all too frequent, situation: wandering like an essentially aimless stray through silent, unpeopled towns, whose meaning is as hidden as the sense of my perseverance. At the town’s highest summit I found the Plaza Bolívar, obligatory, and the Cathedral; both empty. (In Venezuela the main plazas always bear Bolívar’s name, with the exception of a minuscule spot lost in the depths of the country. Every village, town or city has its Plaza Bolívar, and the attributes of the Liberator’s statue are also foreseeable, depending on the status of the place.) I took a seat at one end of the plaza, on a slate-colored bench near some formal gardens crossed by paths of the same color. A short time went by, from the depths surrounding the town came murmurings of wind, or perhaps they were merely, as they say, the songs of the siren of the heights. Until at a certain point I was about to end up stunned by the immovable quiet of the place. I felt that my thoughts were being wiped out and a mild drowsiness was transporting me to another place. Then I stood up and confronted the local walk.

In Jajó, as in other Andean towns, you feel immediately moved by the balance of the proportions. I guess there must be some rule of the minimum when faced with the material limit on expanding and making improvements in nearly inaccessible places. Thus, the height of the houses and the width of the streets, for example, combined with the exclusive white coloring of the walls, alongside the surrounding physical monumentality, present the picture of a human scale adapted to the natural setting, with no desire to impose itself. Unlike other places, nothing here gave me an impression of imbalance or of neglect; on the contrary, even the most incidental details seemed to respond to a simple logic and to a day-to-day organization that is, let’s say, straightforward. Owing to the altitude, things in general took on a special clarity, which, considering the predominant emptiness and the bright colors of windows, doors and roofs contrasting with the white façades, gave the whole of the town
a touch of measured elegance, or at least of composure, in no way dissonant with the great backdrop of peaks and high plains, with their even colors and uniform desolation. And as tends to happen, the moment arrived when so much harmony brought on an inescapable feeling of discomfiture, also of distrust.

I toured a radius of two or three blocks in the vicinity of the plaza; after the second corner the uniformity dissolved: in certain parts you could see neglect, or some façades were not in agreement with the general norm. But what struck me more was learning Jajó’s limited boundaries, because when I went two or three streets farther along, I could see a plowed field, not too large, barely more than a vegetable patch, from which all the immensity of the region prevailed. There not only did the town end in the sense of houses clustered and organized, but the plateau ended as well, for on the field’s far edge began the quite steep drop of one side of the mountain. You then began to descend and you found cultivated terraces, but you couldn’t take that into account when it came to considering the town. Permanence and fleetingness; it seemed to me that both ideas were combined in this place alternating their habitual roles; there was no apparent contrast or conflict, what was constructed bowed to the physical command of the territory.

I returned to the Plaza Bolívar by means of a roundabout of streets. And at various corners it occurred to me to observe practically the same thing, that the actual space, the visual amplitude and the almost zenithlike, shall we say, perspective, practically began a few meters from there, without the presence of transitions or mediations as are habitual on the outskirts, underscoring the straightforwardness or the candor of what was constructed. I emerged into the plaza at a different point from that one I’d entered by. The world remained as silent as before. It turns out not to be easy for me to describe the strange amalgam of silence that inhabits this town; Baroni herself when talking about Jajó stresses the silence that reigned when she happened to live there, and which obviously persists. So I emerged into the plaza, and from this angle my curiosity was aroused by a bakery situated on the sidewalk opposite, to the right of the Cathedral, with its exterior walls white and painted in quite large blue letters, the name: Virgen de Talquito. I didn’t know that it referred to the local Virgin. I was moved by the diminutive -ito, of a straightforwardness I considered
surprising, otherwise similar to that of the town, accentuated in some way by a material, talc, that I imagined implausible in a Virgin. (It seemed to me that a Virgin of talc would be overly threatened, even more so if it were a matter of a little talc.)

I’ve kept a photo of the bakery, taken from a few meters off, where the name that takes up almost the entire width of the façade is readable. The door is open, but as a result of the brightness of the day and the dimness of the premises, the interior is darkened and it’s impossible to make out anything. All the same, I have a memory that effectively compensates for the darkness; when I paused to look, a man leaned over the counter and craned his head toward the street, trying to see me. I distinguish his face peering out and just recognizable as if he were in the photo every time I see it, but in reality he doesn’t appear. It’s also as if the photo were speaking, because whenever I see it I remember clearly when the man said, surely responding to a question somebody asked him, “He’s looking,” doubtless referring to me. His face displayed some very partial reflections of the outside light, especially in his eyes, just enough to notice, like those subdued ensembles of Japanese interiors, organized around progressively indirect and ever weaker aftereffects of light.

Later on, when I was back home and the interval in Jajó was another digressive point on my journey through the region, associated with the other places under different categories of things (photos, as I said, some paper with notes, an object or a simple souvenir), I learned that the Virgin of Talquito became the patroness of that town in 1936, when around Christmastime she appeared in some fine sheets of talc to a young girl who was working over them while making a Nativity. Very rarely have religious motifs interested me; therefore I don’t know whether this apparition represented a common episode within the panorama of the other apparitions of Virgins. I do imagine that she did it in a time and in a way compatible enough with the condition of the place; that it was an obliging apparition and resulted in an evident but discreet presence, without sensationalism; as they say, she hit upon the right means for the town. I imagine the townspeople, all of them half related and gathered around the crèche, celebrating an apparition so chancy it could have failed at any moment, just with a higher than normal wind. The talc-sheet girl was at that moment wearing a yellow-flowered apron, she was a guest, she had arrived from another
town, but surely she also had some kinship with the hosts, who I presume were involved in commerce or the transport of goods. When the apparition of the Virgin took place, Baroni was just a little over a year old and it would probably be just a few years until she lived in Jajó, where she remained until she was married, at age eighteen.

After my walk, while I was sitting in the plaza nobody went into or out of the bakery. Nor did I see people in the adjoining streets. And yet saying the whole place was deserted wouldn’t be exactly right, because you sensed life carrying on according to its own normality. It was getting to be time to leave, my sleepiness came on once again, so that I was just about to resume my journey. Right at that moment, as I was getting up, I heard the noise of a motor that seemed to be slowly approaching, downshifting because of the climb. Outside of its script lacking in action, finally Jajó was offering me something new. Life on the periphery thrives on sporadic journeys; that was probably the only one of the day or the afternoon. A school bus promptly made its appearance and slowly came to a stop by the edge of the plaza. I was already feeling very knowledgeable about the place, but not until the noise stopped did I notice the cloud of silence that surrounded the town; only at times broken, at that point in the afternoon, by the wind that, depending on its force and direction, was bringing the murmuring of a ravine, as it seemed to me. The driver got off the bus, took a few steps and when he saw me was first surprised and then raised a hand to greet me. I returned his greeting, as was only to be expected; and as I did so I noticed that he had no passengers. The man would have been about fifty meters from where I was watching, he had on a white shirt that shone too brightly in the sun. For a brief moment he seemed bewildered, it occurred to me because of my presence, but in the end he raised his eyes to the sky, performed a few stretching contortions and afterward went back to the bus to sit in the stepwell, where there was shade. A richly deserved rest, I thought. I believed I barely caught some music, as if he were listening to the radio, but this turned out to be something I never could verify. And even if at the time it wasn’t an interesting enigma, I occasionally surprise myself remembering that line of music, as now, and would like to know if it came of a mistaken impression or if he in fact he had the radio on.

It was curious that I felt like the sole inhabitant and virtual owner of that place,
being a stranger who within the next half hour would leave Jajó, probably forever after having been there a brief span, equivalent to a blink, or less than that, considering a normal lifetime. I’m not saying I felt like an actual owner, but something resembling a mental boss, abstract. I was looking all around and everything came forward as a landscape that was available and ready to be occupied at will. I was thinking, this lofty and hidden town, so adamant at the summit, by now physically integrated into the mountains, is nonetheless as yielding and malleable as the most insecure particle of reality.
MATT TURNER

HOUSING
HOUSING

“I think there’s optimism about cities again but most of what’s still being built is pretty depressing: inhumane towers facing each other, shadow and light indiscriminately being blocked.” —Moshe Safdie, 2017

Enthusiasm is one of the few pleasures that architecture affords. When I lived in Beijing I found myself constantly interrupting simple foot-errands to pause and marvel at all the architectural details from the past. In Old Beijing I’d stop and notice a gable, a stairwell, or another insignificant detail, and wonder to myself about the period of construction. There was little purpose in it, aside from enthusiasm. If I had wanted more than that, then I would have needed the wherewithal to rent an inexpensive, run-down “apartment” in the center of the city — a unit in a re-purposed siheyuan courtyard subdivided into a warren of tiny living spaces without private plumbing. Or, if I could have afforded to buy, then I’d have payed out the nose to rewire a siheyuan with modern conveniences.

Owning is the province of rich businesspeople. They dream of a Beijing lifestyle as realistic as a Washington Square lifestyle is to most New Yorkers — as if life consists of drawing room appearances amongst droll witticisms. In both cases, the lifestyle and architecture of privilege would be the concrete expression of what’s perceived as the literature of privilege. In the case of the so-called Beijing lifestyle, it’s usually a sanitized version of the laobeiijing stories of Lao She (featuring salt-of-the-earth poor people), Lin Yutang (featuring cultured rich people), and, most ridiculously, The Dream of the Red Chamber (featuring nearly everything under the sun as well as beyond it).

People hate concrete structures. Their famous exemplar, Brutalism, is shorthand for austerity measures and an immoveable bureaucracy. Never mind that that’s not the case: the Boston Government Center represents the progressive Boston city government, and Montreal’s Habitat 67 represents upwardly mobile lifestyle consumers. The belief that Brutalist structures represent failed social welfare projects stings. But, as commonly noted, many housing projects are at least inspired by Brutalist structures’ low-cost materials. The most famous example is St Louis’ Pruitt-Egoe housing project, built by popular World Trade Center architect Minoru Yamasaki. Both projects were certainly inspired by architectural modernism’s managerial rejection of the occupant.
Concrete is the fullest representation of architecture. On a trip to Wuhan, I passed some concrete structures in a tourbus. I noticed how the sunlight illuminated the walls. The effect made the buildings appear nearly white — except for where the mildew or shade had crept in (Wuhan is a humid city). Wherever there was mildew or shade that clashed with the bright white, a small drama or competition for space unfolded. But those were small residential and commercial structures on the street. When I later saw the same effects play across massive Brutalist structures, the light-and-shade drama looked like a manichean god.

Buildings don’t deliver ethics. They don’t deliver the poor from servitude through heroic gestures of design. Rather, they are about the play of light and dark. Buildings are as ephemeral as light and dark, where all housing is as ephemeral as refugee housing, where pretending otherwise is to play make believe.

* 

Refugee and disaster shelter is an important project for architects, and the Toyo Ito-led Home for All in Rikuzentakata, Japan, comes to mind as one of its more interesting expressions. Built as a community center for survivors of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, the structure utilizes refuse wood, and opens itself up to the elements. It submerges itself in its landscape with open scaffolding, and exposed beams project its multiple tiers beyond the landscape. The structure isn’t a political project — the usual frame for disaster shelter. The conversation between inside and outside, and useable and unusable materials, is sensual. Because of its refusal to acknowledge difference as anything other than temporal (the time of its construction a response to direct human needs), one even suspects a phenomenological strain running through it, where “structure” is no longer the appropriate word.

Jeremy Corbyn has demanded temporary “requisition” of vacant homes owned by the rich, as housing for victims of the recent Grenfell Tower fire. If a requisition happens, it’s easy to imagine the owner of a write-off home reluctantly saying “welcome, but don’t touch.” Tenants will be viewed as occupiers, and given few supplies. Furniture, electricity and plumbing will need to be purchased by tenants with obviously little financial means. The home, advocated by architect Kazuo Shinohara as “a work of art,” is precisely what Grenfell Tower’s residents did not have and will not have. Diminished economic and architectural means (in other words, diminished material realities) lead to minimal sensual experiences.
The demands of requisitioning are the demands of refugee and disaster shelter. The prerequisite economic accessibility to structures demands either an economic re-structuring of the world, or a re-evaluation of what accessibility and structure mean (and these are nearly the same thing). This applies to everyone, if indirectly. Questions of cost and value walk together with questions of experience (deprivation and delight) and creation, for lack of a better term. Creation meaning the objecthood achieved through experience, i.e.: “you’ve made your home into a work of art.”

Commentary

Unlike solutions from architects who can assume the support of a functional welfare system in their own countries, many build refugee housing at an international level. Like Shigeru Ban, whose Paper Emergency Shelters for UNHRC, following the Rwandan civil war, or his Hualin Temporary Elementary School, in China, provided temporary functional shelters. Not supplying an alternate metaphysics of architecture, they nevertheless recognize the contingent status of housing and learning. They do not propose any distance from the immediate needs of their users.
JORGE MARTILLO

UNTITLED

ARS AMATORIA III

TRANSLATED BY ALEXIS LEVITIN AND FERNANDO ITURBURU
UNTITLED

I don’t think, don’t exist, don’t anything at all
I drink religiously every night
As if the blessed father were offering me the blood of Christ
I don’t consider mine a bohemian stance
Rather an alcoholic militancy

Far from God, Marx and Lenin
Now others are my comrades
Neither the Bible, nor Das Kapital, nor What is to Be Done
Are my spiritual and ideological guides

I go on without guides or brakes
In fact the other night I went to sleep at the bottom of the bayou
Black serpents bound me to their bed
But I floated up and since then I feel as if I’d died
They say no man ever steps in the same river twice
do you remember those beers in the darkness of the melba bar
those tongues curling like serpents in the barrio las peñas
clothes hanging from windows eaten away by time
the murmur of boats crossing the river amid a green mantle of water hyacinths
that pair of drunkards embraced and on the verge of tears
perhaps you still can hear my words as the sun was setting like a sucked-out orange

do you remember what time the clock showed on the street of bitterness
my libidinous index finger pointing the way through dust to lust
the meowing of felines in heat reaching the fortified city of love
perhaps the grotesque figure your clothes made on the floor
my hands stroking the porcelain of your swollen breasts
my armadillo entering the fissure of your peach
your legs clinging to mine like kite string tangled in electric wires

do you remember my tongue on your moist fur like a pool in which one drowns
JESUS MAYA

THE FALL
TORONTO
PANCHO
RIGHT, MAMA?

TRANSLATED BY JEANNINE M. PITAS
THE FALL

As a kid I fell from the roof
in a vain attempt to escape a beating.
I was trying to reach the roof of the neighbour’s house
as always, tempting fate
without weighing the consequences.

Mamá, forgive me.

There are times when it seems too late.
You learn you’re free to make
whatever choices you want.
But you don’t choose the consequences.
Those hit you whether you like them or not.

Papá, forgive me.

I was trying to hang onto something
in the air beyond my reach.
But when you have nowhere to start from
there’s nothing you can do.
The ground stopped my fall.

Brothers, forgive me.

Someone came to rescue me
and when I regained consciousness
I knelt down to plead forgiveness
(Forgiveness for what?)
At the same time I was struggling to breathe and a thousand images
were passing through my mind.
God, forgive me.

The day that Aurorita’s son drowned
she came to our house with the news
wailing and begging God to not let it be true, her son couldn’t
have been swallowed by the sea.

Later I spoke with his brother
a witness to the drama.

He told me that he was just two metres away
and in a split second he saw him rise above the water,
then dip down again. They were walking,
their feet touching the ground.
He sank suddenly, unavoidably.

Dearest love, forgive me.

Who doesn’t shake his hands, struggling in vain
to grab onto something out of reach,
some nonexistent lifeline?

Dearest friends, forgive me.

The last time I saw a childhood friend
he’d just come out of prison
and he had some vague religious feelings.
He was trying to cling to them and save his life.

Teachers, forgive me.

To save oneself from a downward spiral.
He’d already lost his family, his job
his health and dignity...He said,
“If only my wife would come back, I’d change my ways.”
I felt bad for him,
she’d been fucking around for quite some time
he was clinging to an illusion.

Boss, forgive me.

One time on TV I saw
people jumping out the window,
escaping the fire
gesticulating wildly as their fall
accelerated more and more
until they crashed into the pavement.

This is how I saw myself all that time
clinging to your memory...
held up by the thousand images of the past
that doesn’t exist anymore.
But I can’t sustain myself on them,
not while I keep falling faster.

But I’ve already buried all this – I did it yesterday.
Forgive me...But you can all go to hell.
Last night I dreamed
that we were painting
with ocean blue
acrylics

I dreamed that we were painting
cutting the borders
rolling the walls.

With Windex we cleaned
a few drops
that had fallen
to the rubber floor.

The aroma
reminded me of you,
the exhaustion of my job...

I dreamed we were no longer in Mexico
and that we were not among
the 72 murdered men and women
in Tamaulipas.

That we pinched our own flesh, relieved
that we were not among those 72
or those 400 that fall every year
nor those thousands who are now just specks on the sea.
Arizona is one mere segment of the news.

I dreamed that you and I might actually fit in here,
that we weren't just plopped down here in Toronto.
Blood, tears, 
and many fears 
run through us. 
And we feel so much pain, 
the kind that doesn’t go away ever.
To paint the kitchen Mexican pink
the living room bright blue, bringing joy to each homecoming
the other bedroom bottle-green
and ours, the colour of earth

To paint a house, to have a home
and to dream of other things
some joyous reunion
some forgiveness
an embrace

The Guernica painting, masks,
pictures, a jacket, hats
To have work, vacations
To see the dentist often
Get your usual check-up

To feel certain
That there won’t be a raid
(In Canada the “migra” doesn’t exist).

To walk through the streets
To ask a police officer anything,
absolutely anything…
or to go and tell them how you got paid
with a bad check.

Maybe it all comes down to having a home
I won’t say that I need to own it
I just want a place to feel at home.
To dream of the moments
that build up our lives -
these moments that make us stand firm
always.
Mamá…
Now you don’t have to be afraid of gangs
You don’t have to worry.
When night falls, I’m at home
waiting for you to come back from work.

Mamá, the cycle has been broken!
Your son won’t have to experience
the pain your past generations endured.

Mamá, I won’t have to be a farmer.
Mamá, I won’t be a stumbling drunk.
Mamá, I won’t be another ghetto Indian!

Mamá, I’ll be able to go to university.
Mamá, we’ll eat red meat.
Mamá, over here no one gets high on glue!

Mamá, here you won’t have to worry
about finding me in a pool of blood.

Mamá, isn’t it true
that no one will be bothered that I’m Latino?
They don’t have the “migra” here, right?
Aren’t the police are colourblind?
No one’s going to rat on us, right?

Isn’t it true that your coworkers don’t ask you about your status?
And your roommate is trustworthy?
And everything is going to work out just fine?
Isn’t it true that here people only approach you in good faith?
Aren’t most people here good?
Mamá,
We’ve just been hearing made-up rumours, right?
Aren’t we just imagining things?
When you leave your job, you’ll be able to go back, right?
Immigration officials don’t come into coffee shops, right?

Doesn’t the Prime Minister understand what it means to start from nothing?
Mamá, don’t they pay fair wages here?
Don’t employment agencies care about our safety?
Aren’t people aware that we immigrants fill the factories?
Don’t they know who built their houses?
Aren’t we immigrants more complex forms of life?
We’re not the ambassadors of dirty, corrupt, hungry, dangerous countries!

If you marry for love, everything will fall into place, right?
You hear plenty of good news, right?
Because there’s a lot of good news! Isn’t there?
God sees everything that happens, right?
...And if we place our lives in his care, how can anything go wrong?

Aren’t people lying when they say corruption is legal here?
Isn’t it true that if you’re no longer with me, the world won’t come to an end?
It can’t be the case that turning people in is encouraged and rewarded.
Aren’t our people united, helping one another?

So, Mamá, is nothing really true?
Is everything just a lie?
You’re not going to cry, right?
We’re going to miss each other?
This is all just a dream, right?
A bad dream?

We’re just living in a bad dream, right?
Aren’t we more than a couple of silly dreamers?
V.

> kin < kind¹

¹ This line is a reference to the very first words uttered by Hamlet in *Hamlet*, “a little more than kin and less than kind,” that he utters as an aside while his step-father Claudius is giving a speech.
Dick-in-son

in jail
Dying In A Turkish Bath

did you ever attend a public bath?
I did.
the candle near me blew out,
and I became blind.
the blue of the dome disappeared.

you relit a candle on the navel stone.
the marble was wiped clean.
I saw some of my face in it.
it was bad, something awful,
and I became blind.
I didn’t expect quite this from my face.

did you ever sob
while covered in soap?
.................... flowing
peaceful along the sandy banks, whose water
halted her flight, and she implored her sisters
to change her form, and so, when Pan had caught her
and thought he held a nymph, it was only reeds
that yielded in her arms, and while he

sighed

the soft air stirring in the reeds made also
the echo of a sign!
Rainbow

Rainbow is the first gauntlet of boast by God in the Bible. Serial criminals, hearing voices, emblazon their message in red on the mirror, rouge, blood, after having butchered their victim on the bed. The killer, drained, in its murderous ecstasy, does it say, remorseful, for that very moment, “I’m sorry. Pardon me. I’ll never do this again?” Then, write the message in the surrounding space.
Hermes in Action, as an Agent for Zeus, Rescuing Io: the Play Within the Play

Hermes bored Argus with stories until all his eyes fell asleep

the story of Pan and Syrinx

was not boring but opiate and hermaphrodite

warm and full of spume and dream warm and scum and herpes

a) Syrinx was a woodland nymph with many suitors
b) Pan (of the REED) chased her
c) Syrinx PLEADED with her sisters to change her into reeds
d) soft air moving through reed
e) as bleating through hoofs
f) sounding like a sigh
   Aye O scything in the wind
e) Pan liked the sound
and bound them together with wax and called them Syrinx
f) Hermes cut off his head
g) Hera put Argus’ eyes on peacock feathers

---

2 The story of Pan and Syrinx in which Zeus through Hermes rescues Io echoes the main action of the myth where Zeus pursues and attacks Io.
Joy

For a period of fifteen years a recurring dream being inside a bath with a large pool, smooth green wall tiles—a replica of a place I had visited with my family as a kid in the ancient Ottoman city of Bursa—was! the only dream of unadulterated joy I ever had. The color of the joy was green and its shape circular. I only remember entering that bath & waking up with that feeling of joy. Nothing in between.
pour
n    unicorn

u-
cop-
ia

climbing a well
i saw stars
A cross.
An x.
A no.
A body.
A white.
A screen.
A perpetual.
Virginal

To bathe in your water
between your face and your hair
a hand must be.

Waters were alive, madly to love, links and links
I couldn’t tell was it rose, was it house

I couldn’t make it heard, your loving kiss
    -es were like a mask, glued to my face,

to pull them out in memories,

    h a i r of torture
Hermes Bored Argus With a Story and Argus of the Hundred Eyes Listened

Subversion of what is Seen in the visible

h airy

like Spanish moss on Louisiana oak

against the sky

like S- ask!- ia com- d - o - n - t e - v - e - r !

bing her hair sideways

spinning a thread of d- ove erotic words

in hOt bath tub d a - m a s k

Varnish evanescing pink

full of swe at be ad s d a h m - a s k

sweet bear ds d u m b !

swan and swarm birds Muriel's burial -

horse and hazy lazy ho urs seen

wall

(in cerulean blue tile s oh seductive hot bath house)

soul

am c l o u d o f m i s t i n n !

(solemn!) as but not solo Jack !

suc(cuba) cross(ing) in-
cubus

(ck)
cumb

c- cul-
ent

mist
Hairless in Cuba! Hairless layers slay the layers in Cuba!

Succulent mist

Sea
Blind
De
Li...
La(c
H)
Ah!
Pass-
I've
Shear
Seed
Seahman!

Oh, comb!
Occam's razor!

Hairing charm
Shearing the cloud    the cloud now is clear.
my blood spills on the ground, the cloud is modest,

blushes
and disappears.

your face shadows
in my palm
I see’er and squeeze it,

drinking stars
from the urinal.

His face is almost gone
My desolation is pure,
The water is flat
My pain is on.

The bird crawling on your back and belly
and finally becoming a squirrel

Toes,
Toes,
Toes,
Toes,  
Toe nails,

Oh, my darling!
The sea visible, moon
us—a new kind of distance,
water exhilaration

substantial—as fields,
approaching me in the
black wings of

night, lay down, my pillow
split—my guitar
dew dropped.

My heart streaked
with moonlight blood—indeed! oh, in deed!
in dread

wings, let’s
Swans
“Spinning within the span of a swan”

Swan milk in the bosom of the lake
withdrawn into the depth of the sky
flowing on earth
its history is upended
like Narcissus,

swan short of hands and legs
sensitive to water
its crimson eyes water’s song
the lake doesn’t fill, fast, let’s cry, let’s cry
swan
swan

the souls weeping in purple smoke
and being severed with silver wires maybe
are swan’s blood
that spill out through willow’s reeds

In the reflection of the peacock to
the ersatz stone reality abundantly defined
and stupidly too colorful, swan
is the weight

Out of the world of images it looks with vacant eyes
like a coaxed hand but with gloves
unaware like stars, drip by drip it rises to the sky

swan is water’s joke
with gods
god’s
with the living
swanesses
in a row
cover themselves in foam to shelter better in solitude in other warmths
from the reflective power of ruptures woven by your voice,

swan flying off
to the mouth of a stove where bread loaves are flying
kissing warmth sweats
swans stain the stars
as blindness descends over night

on the engraved graveyard branches of separation swan accumulates,
moves forward its talon
its eyes ceases dreaming
its lips withdrawn
stretches along each dimension of a square into our daydreaming,
if we keep quiet,
swan’s blanketed its sleep with snow.

its eyes gather like wagons
then stretches the eye-lashes towards darkness
the interior world of
a glass-like waving cone sheared at the tip
the needles of a splash cutting their hands

swan singing comprehensible incomprehensible
in water’s partitioned mouth kept ajar
swan is a severed neck amidst cries
there’re herds of swans following behind in the wake of a corpse

even if the swan dies the lake can’t pull back its lunar eyes
its children don’t want, don’t drink
its breast can’t be milked
if a swan’s born, the sky’s received by the lake
swans deck stars round their necks
make make love, smelling smelling white grass
if you haven’t seen a swan, just, just do so
their necks seem as if squeezed with light
where there should be departure, they meet

arriving just under my window
waking humanity from sleep
falling back, as if, it’ll change everything.

Spinning within the span of a swan.\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{3} “Swans” is a variation on the Turkish poet Sami Baydar’s poem “Kuğular.”
ROBERTO PIVA

OPEN YOUR EYES AND SAY AH!

TRANSLATED BY CHRIS DANIELS
“Moi, j’ai toujours éprouvé une caprice infâme pour la pâle jeunesse des collèges, et les enfants étiolés des manufacures”
Lautréamont
ANTHROPOLOGICAL VISION OF THE CORNER OF THE WINDOW IN HEARTJELLY
PRISM’D IN THE WINE OF MARCH (the most terrible month)
  new predatory animals
MY BOYFRIEND’S EYES MY BOYFRIEND’S EYES
  internal galaxies EYES FREEDOM
  internal galaxies
  in chocolate’s pink depths I breathe you in
  in the guts only with the dead and their pillows made of
  flowers
  in extravagant guts my love through
shop windows
  only with the dead the universe is a sneeze
in an apple’s womb
  everything begins to
    nighten
    full of energy
I am the jet set of love maudit
INSIDE THE NIGHT AND ITS ILLUMINATED COLICS
dead’s parrots with Aristotle on thunder’s prow
DISPOSITION TO TUMBLE ADRIFT WITH THE DICE OF LOVE
spinach for the morning & macaroni with sauce mornay
sportive souls flowers in their teeth
my orange opening like a door
YOUR VOICE IS ETERNAL I see the gray hand rip up
the wall of the world
WE ARE IN LIFE DEFINITIVELY
(POLITICS OF THE BODY ON FIRE OF THE BODY IN FLAMES OF THE BODY ON FIRE)
PUTTING OUT THE LIGHT darkness

visible devours

your body in flames your open mouth your suicide
for pleasure on the grass your hands plucking my face
of bruised leaves in darkness your moan in the
shadow of drawers in flower
your hair solidly black
THE PISSOIRE ANGEL LOVING THE PARIS COMMUNE
ALLOWS A PHOTOGRAPH OF HIM EATING A CHERMOYA
I’m getting ready for unfettered cities
the desert & its trembling tongues
marches of vigilant samurais across the wetlands
gone far without leaving the place
(I LOVE YOUR MOUTH DEVASTATED BY DIABOLICAL SMOKE)
a rose right in front of your eye
a rose in your vagrant mouth
my eyes fixed on heaven’s font
on the savannah love-mad elephants trumpet

AN EAGLE FALLS IN MY EYES & SIGHS
  SLEEP & DREAM SWOLLEN PALM OF THE HAND
i want your heart right now for to cast off
  petals choke your dreams
  announce a storm and tumble into night
THE HALFMON’S SEX EMITS HER METALLIC NOTE & HER
    WILD CATS) where we dance with tantric gorillas
    electronic brains wetting the scarlet bed
MARVELOUS CRIES IN THE WINDOW politics of systematic
    forgetting WE’RE IN THE GENTEEL SHIT
beetface & sexes in ruins
    bilingual mirror my spurs my smiling eyes
SIMULTANEOUSLY ALL WEEP IN TYRANNY’S BRONZE
    & SCREW THEIR GIRLS the wind of life dangling
    arms maxillaries exploded at sunrise
CAPITALIST TOTEM CAPITALIST TOTEM CAPITALIST TOTEM CAPITALIST TOTEM
(THE WORLD CHANGES THE COLOR OF THE JABUTICABA CHANGES YOUR
ASSHOLE CHANGES THE NEIGHBOR’S HAT CHANGES YOUR SEX CHANGES THE INDI-
AN CHANGES HÖLDERLIN CHANGED HEGEL CHANGED TECHNOPOLIS CHANGES &
WE CHANGE EVERY DAY WE MOVE CLOSER TO THE CELLAR OF LIFE LIKE RIMBAUD
ARTAUD MACUNÁIMA DINO CAMPANA)

the dragon
speeds by on the caraíba corvette feverish thighs I’m neither plant nor
phantom the true poison MODEST CREATURE CITIZEN

IN FLAMES I make this admonishment: THE PERFECT MUSIC
IS IN STEEL

leafy flowerbeds full of silence
cosmic space the samba song of nothingness
MAURÍCIO MAU-MAU LITTLE BIRD CHEWING PIRÃO
& ITS JELLY OGIVES where’s your sandal-poetry slapping
against the evening’s cheeks? tupiniquim angel running
along the bend of the square wet with the blood of comets
PELICANS EXPLODING IN YOUR EYES & THE MORNING WHEN YOU
WILL READ ISAAC DEUTSCHER & SCRATCH YOUR THUMB
your miniscule gestures
your tamale devoured in the middle of the woods
your amianthus eyes are shouts to the pirate ship
(with a kerchief on its head and a dagger in its teeth your soul
WAXES
DELERIOUS)
(MY LOVE SLEEPS & SCRATCHES IN DREAMS BICKERS & MOANS BICKERS & MOANS BICKERS & MOANS)

before lunch we sat on a fender
and talked about EMPEDOCLES so do
birds bear their magnificent truths in the center of the world where
we listen to voices of HUMAN MOTORS
I HEARD THEIR WORDS THEY BROKE INTO THE

UNIVERSE before
carnivore rain
before cannibal transistor
(LOVE’S EPIC BEGINS IN THE BED WITH RUMPLED SHEETS BECOME A BATTLEGROUNDD)
it’s there I begin to be born into madrugada & her vertigoes where you my love curl in my green velvet paranoiac heart & the delights of orange continents sleep in your face all muddled pearls oh drums of love never stopping on the way to PLANETARY storms & their sad cataracts heavy as tears
I love loving and the soul’s TV dawns drunk and tries to say something
INTERMINABLE-EXTERMINABLE

listening to Barney Kessel

red-booted angels
  (ten leopard apparations in the
   apartment window)

Mickey Mouse must be a
  CIA agent

cop-cancer of the world and its old
  Totems

sleep sleep like be pissed rocamboles
  Giorgio di Chirico & his
   shadow landscapes

sad boy the orgy awaits you
  with velvet cacti

before the night is squashed

I want to see your
  thighs on the
   burst television

lunar intestines under neon light
  carress your curly
   jabuticaba hair
GANYMEDE 76

Your smile
little eyes like black pearls
my love cruises the evening
peach daiquiris reflected in his little rusty eyes
hair abristle like a little god in a roccoco salon
strength of a body fragile as anchors
I loved you too
tomorrow at 7 then
tomorrow at 7
everything begins now in a slow ritual & fenced lotsful of cloth gardenias
your mad gaze crosses through the clocks the fountains the São Paulo evening like a spectacular
desire so doped with courage
ivory of your smile nascosto fra orizzonte perduti
here’s how I want you: fiery angel in the Landscape’s embrace
PROFOUNDLY AFFECTING THE EMOTIONAL

Antinous, ragazzo di marbro

pornographic kid
  before Moon shows up
  this feijoada will be a battle

Atilla wins all over the world
  ADRIANUS CAESAR imperator
  strolls in the Roman morning with his twelve lovers
I'd like you to read Jacob Boehme
  your thighs tighten
  & you cry a little

come, lick my hand &
  get ready for a million
  mad mad comas
before Moon shows up
  bite my heart on the corner
  & don’t forget me
ANTINOUS

movement of trees

crazy

tuesday I’d rather you were you really

my word & nothing you believe in
could happen: oysters bloodshot eyes Hegel
sleeps with his violet from the outskirts
the city coughs like
an indian with a fever

São Paulo wakes in your thighs

sweetly

hot bath spiralling
steam flakes of
erotic samambaia
so while you hang out I will be

bleeding
WHEN SEVERE ANXIETIES PREDOMINATE
BUT DEPRESSION IS NOWHERE NEAR

(Batman Baudelaire)
(our movements, or dreams analyzed etc.)
where seek
the blood
STRETCHED through
soil
sssssssplendisynergy
lacivious cannons
moan
of a
wounded
boy
wooden totems
avoiding angles
&
effects
LET US NOW LOVE
EIGHTH FLOOR EQUINOX CARBONIZED

for the poet Claudio Willer, my friend

mad images their event
  raven in the clouds
  cowboys in plaza 14 Bis
  bus clogged with literati and Cornithians
  (before the basalt and perilous bends
     where went Pithecanthropus
      erectus?)
this we dream this the
  world devolves to us a
  stravaganza with unsoaped skin
here we go by ghost train in the
  park of love’s bitterness
  our souls unelectrified
  on Lake Kropotkin
you petition for the right to asylum
you dive right into the front.
OPEN YOUR EYES AND SAY AH!

carnations

und

several boring

months

&

their images

SE PAR AT ED

carnaval

where I AM

the ultimate ALL

eaten

croaking mask

in legends

(my love on his BLIND march)
days and night extinguished

in

silence

&

its

arbitrary pieces
TRANSFORMING THE HORIZON

the space
   in
   your arm
opens the pace
   cuts the trace
in the corner of the mouth
   I look and hear
   your enchanted
   sob
wet-haired
   i wait
   for you
   in the square
   in the drizzle
Je suis comme vous
un enfant.
Picabia

Io vidi li occhi, dove Amor se mise
quando mi fece de sè pauroso.
Guido Cavalcanti
ANDRÉ BRETON

TWO INTERVIEWS WITH ANDRÉ PARINAUD

TRANSLATED BY MARK POLIZZOTTI
ON SOME MISPLACED HOPES. IN PARIS, SURREALISM MUST OVERCOME VARIOUS OBSTACLES. PROOF OF ITS VITALITY.

ANDRÉ PARINAUD: Before starting in on the main part of this interview—Surrealism’s positions since the Liberation—I’d like you to tell me what symbolic and personal reasons induced you to choose the title of the book that bridged two periods: Arcane 17.

ANDRÉ BRETON: The title Arcane 17 is a direct reference to the traditional meaning of the tarot card called "the Star," symbol of hope and resurrection. As I was saying at the end of our last interview, the new dawn promised by the liberation of Paris, as it seemed from the extremely excited news I had of it, would alone have inclined me to place my book under this sign. But it is certain that, in my mind, it was overdetermined by the presence of an infinitely dear person by my side, whom I knew had lost all reason for living shortly before we met-and whom I therefore wanted more than anything to “bring back to life.” It was to this exceptional conjunction of such distinct emotions that I appealed for an elucidation of the other meaning of that Arcanum 17, which, for occultists, is none other than sensitivity as the seed of intellectual life. As to the intellectual life that was soon to be reborn-free of constraints, or so we hoped—we had to know what renewed sensitivity was liable to carry it forward, once its original powers were restored. At the end of summer in 1944, when my eyes opened on the coast of the Gaspé peninsula—with its island, so invitingly named Bonaventure, in the distance circumstances favored my exploring the outermost bounds of those lands of desire that had been devastated for so long, but that were suddenly allowed to flower again, and that had never stopped calling to me, even when they seemed most out of reach: poetry, love, freedom.

AP: What were your hopes and emotions on the eve of your return to France? Did you still feel the enthusiasm and the will to struggle that had driven you twenty-five years earlier?

AB: At the end of the last war, which in many ways had been the most demoralizing of all,

1 This was Elisa Bindhoff, who became Breton’s third wife in 1945.
I believed (and I’m sure I wasn’t alone) that the world could now make a jump that would put it back in its orbit—an orbit from which centuries of so-called "civilization" seemed to have removed it more and more. In any case, it seemed impossible that certain all-too-costly illusions, which had managed to sustain themselves right up to the outbreak of the war, would not be refuted. The devil take me if we could reasonably have expected, even knowing how short human memories are, that the old political parties, all of them more or less bankrupt through either their acceptance of the Nazi-Soviet Pact or their deference to the Vichy government, if not through out-and-out collaboration with the occupier—would be called upon at war’s end to rebuild themselves, bringing to power the same men who had already proven so unequal to their task.

**AP:** More specifically, what did you hope to see from human government, for example?

**AB:** One could at least hope for the systems to be recast, and for men of character—which at the time only the so-called Resistance movement seemed to include—to be elected. My recent disputes with him notwithstanding, I’d like to say how right the articles that Albert Camus was then publishing in *Combat* sounded from afar, and how they went to the heart of the matter. In one stroke, the air seemed to have become breathable again. We told ourselves that the time was perhaps not far off when we would begin hearing proposals as audacious as they were generous. We know all too well what became of such hopes.

**AP:** Were you interested in a particular form of government?

**AB:** Of government? No, but let’s say in a less unreasonable management of human interests. It seemed to me that one could, at least for a large part of the world, have called for the constitution of a new kind of States-General, in which the three old orders would have made way for three new ones, such as (pending a deeper study of the problem): technicians and scientists, educators and artists, and urban and agricultural workers. I have in fact become convinced, notably by reading Saint-Yves d’Alveydre, that the States-General, even in their original way of functioning, had the enormous advantage of promoting the social over the political; that, by their own means-keeping a daily “record of grievances,” and, in certain cases, addressing "remonstrances" to the constituent powers—they were the only ones able to surmount the mortal dualism of governors and governed. I also favored returning to the source of aspirations toward a balanced and harmonious world; and I favored people taking
the time to study, without prejudice, Fourier’s *Théorie des attractions* and Father Enfantin’s theses on the emancipation of women.

**AP:** In any case, it was at this time that you composed your *Ode to Charles Fourier*. What were the circumstances?

**AB:** I wrote the *Ode to Charles Fourier* during a trip to the western United States, which allowed me to visit Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico. I spent a long time contemplating such ghost towns as Silver City and Virginia City, vestiges of the “gold rush,” with their abandoned houses and banging doors, their theaters still showing posters from the last century. Most of all, I was able to satisfy one of my greatest and oldest desires, which was to meet the Indians—particularly the Pueblo Indians (Hopi and Zuni), whose mythology and art held a special attraction for me. I haven’t abandoned the idea of relating the very vivid impressions I experienced in their villages (Shungopavi, Wolpi, Zuni, Acoma), where I became utterly convinced of their inalienable dignity and genius, which contrasted so sharply and movingly with their miserable living conditions. I don’t understand how the streak of justice and reparation that sometimes carries the white man toward the black and the yellow, more and more often neglects the Indian, who has given so many proofs of his creative power and has been, by far, the most despoiled.

**AP:** Before returning to France, you spent several months on a lecture tour in Haiti and Martinique. What were the notable events of this trip?

**AB:** Thanks to my friend Pierre Mabille, who at the time was the cultural attache in Port-au-Prince and who had good contacts there, I was able to witness a number of voodoo ceremonies and observe up close the phenomenon of “possession,” which has always constituted one of Surrealism’s poles of interest. It’s worth noting that this phenomenon is considered, by Haitian specialists in the matter, to be the syncretistic product of certain Dahomean and Guinean traditions on the one hand, and on the other of mesmeric practices that were imported to Port-au-Prince by Martinez de Pasqually in the eighteenth century.

**AP:** What were your prognostics at the time for the state of intellectual life following the Liberation?
AB: When I left America in the spring of 1946, I didn’t have a very clear idea of the intellectual situation in Paris. For a long time, in fact, I’d believed that everything that had been upheld between the two wars would be gone over with a fine-toothed comb, and that even Surrealism would not be spared. Whence the tone, which some consider reticent, of my 1942 speech to the students of Yale;² whence also a title—from the same period such as “Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism or Not.” Of course, since the Liberation, the letters I’ve received and various works I’ve been sent make me clearly understand that, intellectually speaking, the winds hadn’t changed all that much. In New York, I also had long conversations with Camus, then with Sartre, who gave me a glimpse of the state of mind here. I remember that Sartre particularly stressed the “terror” that the Stalinists waged over the literary world. As he told it, it was extremely unwise to openly dispute the poetic merits of the Aragon who had written Le Crève-cœur [Heartbreak]: you ran the risk of not waking up the next morning …

AP: What emerged from the events you then witnessed?

AB: In Paris, I soon realized that if Sartre had employed somewhat romantic terms, what he was describing was nonetheless real. The Stalinists, the only group that had been powerfully organized during the clandestine period, had managed to occupy almost every key post in publishing, the press, radio, the art galleries, etc. They were quite determined to stay there, using methods they had adopted long before, but which they had just had an opportunity to perfect experimentally. Even though I had long been aware of these methods, I admit that their application constantly surpassed my expectations. One heard the staunchest antimilitarists upholding the most chauvinistic viewpoints, brandishing "black lists," howling for sanctions, while secretly agreeing to overlook certain things in exchange for solid guarantees: the technique called “clearing someone’s name.” Naturally it was of the utmost importance for them to neutralize, stifle those intellectuals who might denounce such an operation and penetrate its true motives. Via countless infiltrations into every organization liable to influence public opinion, the Stalinist apparatus managed, at least to a large extent, to muffle the voices of such men, even as it tried to discredit them in its own press by repeated slander.

² An English version was published in Yale French Studies, Fall/Winter 1948, as “The Situation of Surrealism Between the Two Wars.”
**AP:** Did this sort of threat affect Surrealism?

**AB:** Surrealism, of course, was one of the troublesome obstacles. First of all, we knew too much about some of the intellectuals that the Stalinist party had promoted to stardom. Secondly, they had at all costs to keep Surrealism from appearing as an ongoing movement, faithful to its original precepts, which would have ruined the spurious argument that events had passed it by. This was all the more difficult in that part of the younger generation continued to support us, and that we were constantly gaining new members. Were it not for a subtle network of influence, which deprives them of their means of expression (notably a regular, collective periodical), figures such as Jean-Louis Bédouin, Adrien Dax, Jean-Pierre Duprey, Jindrich Heisler, Gérard Le grand, Gherasim Luca, Nora Mitrani, Jean Schuster, Dolfi Trost, and Michel Zimbacca (but I won’t list all my friends) would long ago have become prominent. Luckily, the signs are that this situation is nearing an end.

**AP:** How did Surrealism continue to develop?

**AB:** Because of hidden obstructions placed in its path, Surrealism these last six years has affirmed the continuity of its message only in individual works. It’s quite obvious, moreover, that after some thirty years of existence, and precisely because of the influence it has exerted in fairly distinct waves, Surrealism cannot be limited to those who willingly fill its current ranks. Today any number of works, without being strictly Surrealist, share more or less deeply in its spirit. To my mind, there is no intrinsic difference between what might inspire the lyricism of Jean-Pierre Duprey and that of Malcolm de Chazal. In the theatre, two recent works of very high caliber, Julien Gracq’s *Le Roi pêcheur* [The Fisher King] and *Monsieur Bob’le* by Georges Schehade, must by the same token be considered fully Surrealist.

**AP:** Couldn’t you just as well include some recent films?

**AB:** I could indeed: in this domain, even if Luis Buñuel’s *Los Olvidados* demonstrates a formal break with *Un Chien andalou* and *L’Age d’Or*, such a film, when compared with the earlier two, nonetheless shows the continuity of Buñuel’s spirit—which, like it or not, is a constituent part of Surrealism. Furthermore, what we’re saying about theater or film could be applied to other forms of expression. The poems of Georges Schehade and Octavio Paz,
Jean Ferry’s *Le mécanicien* [The Mechanic], and Maurice Fourré’s *La Nuit du Rose-Hôtel* [A Night in Rose-Hotel] are Surrealist in the same way, and destined to take the elevated place reserved for them in the history of the movement. A choice will no doubt be made, moreover, among many other works in which the Surrealist spirit comes through in diffuse form.

**AP:** And in the sphere of visual arts, how would you characterize the situation?

**AB:** It’s obviously more complicated. During the same period, all kinds of plots were hatched against Surrealism’s expansion in the visual domain. Some people, on Moscow’s orders, tried to kill imaginative art once and for all, and to substitute a kind of painting and sculpture called “Socialist realism,” which simply means putting a few academic rudiments in the service of state propaganda and agitation. Others—and this mainly concerns American interests—tried to depreciate Surrealist visual art to the benefit of so-called “nonfigurative” art, whose authenticity, through its successive demonstrations, has proven to be more dubious with each passing day.

As to that, money was apparently no object, since a large Parisian gallery offered to stage an international Surrealist exhibit, featuring a “rain room” and a “maze” designed by Marcel Duchamp; a “superstitions room” entrusted to architect Frederick Kiesler, whom they had purposely brought over from New York; as well as twelve “altars,” each of which was to be devoted to “a creature, a category of creatures, or an object liable to be endowed with mythic life.” But the organizers’ good will ended there. What am I saying! As if it had been planned in advance, the gallery’s owner seemed to want to join the ranks of his worst detractors, since he allowed tracts, signed by his main partner at the time and attacking the exhibit, to be handed out at the entrance. With him, we were as far as we could be from the constant affability with which Georges Wildenstein had put his “Beaux Arts” gallery at our disposal for an exhibit of the same type, in 1938.

**AP:** Two important Surrealist works—whose tone was not unlike the manifestoes of the early years—stirred some comment shortly afterward: I’m speaking of *A la niche les glapisseurs de dieu* [Back to Your Kennels, You Curs of god] and *Flagrant délit* [Caught Red-Handed]. Could you explain what was so interesting about them?
AB: In point of fact, during the same period Surrealism also had to defend itself against a bold attempt at monopolization and confiscation by religion’s henchmen: their goal was no less than to show that Surrealism’s aspirations were, if not shared by, at least compatible with certain Christian views. The same operation had already been led against Baudelaire and Rimbaud, and would be continued against Sade and Lautréamont. With the collective pamphlet entitled *A la niche les glapisseurs de dieu*, my friends and I think we’ve thwarted that siege tactic for some time to come.

A final assault, which I was forced to confront, was launched surreptitiously (I suppose in the name of hackneyed rationalism) by the author of a certain *History of Surrealism*, which was not devoid of merit but was often based on unreliable information, and which furthermore contained a certain number of inaccuracies and some rather alarming gaps. Where the fundamentally malevolent spirit of...this makeshift historian shows through is at the end of the book, where, after having tried—he wouldn’t be the last-to set my oldest and dearest comrade-in-arms, Benjamin Péret, against me, he decrees on his own authority that “all that remains is to draw up the death certificate of the Surrealist movement.”³ You’ve never seen such a rushed biographer. As I was still in New York when the book came out, he’d taken the liberty of following this declaration with a venomous postscript about me, founded on the basest hearsay. Nonetheless, I was perfectly willing to believe that he’d simply been misled, and didn’t hold it against him on my return. I was finally moved to react only after he seized upon the pretext of Antonin Artaud’s death to incriminate me for still being alive, which according to him conclusively proved my lack of authenticity. The profound ties that had bound me to Artaud, the unforgettable signs of attachment that he himself had shown me (as the publication of his correspondence will attest), and the effect his shattering and gruesome end had on his friends made such an expedient particularly grotesque. The man who had resorted to it, moreover, was soon laughing out of the other side of his mouth. Shortly after that I was given the best possible opportunity for rebuttal when he endorsed a text attributed to Rimbaud, the falseness and poverty of which were glaring. I related the ins and outs of that episode in *Flagrant délit*, which gives some idea of the rout he suffered. In earlier times, such a rebuke would have kept a critic from ever taking up his pen again.

³ This sentence, which figured in the 1945 edition of Histoire du surrealisme by Maurice Nadeau, was deleted from subsequent versions; it does not appear in the English translation of the work.
**AP:** So all things considered, you feel that Surrealism has not exhausted its historical necessity or lost any of its spirit?

**AB:** None at all. That’s why I insisted, for this last session, not only on underscoring the new strengths that Surrealism has acquired, but also on showing who it has run up against. If it were truly dead, as those who take their desires for realities have repeated every year since its foundation, I’d have trouble understanding why the offensives launched against it have only intensified in recent years. Far from saddening us, these constantly reiterated offensives are our surest sign of Surrealism’s deep penetration into the ground on which we walk, and of its hardy nature.
SOME FINAL BACKWARD GLANCES. HAPPINESS? THE MAIN THING IS NOT TO HAVE "GIVEN IN." THE FLOWER OF THE MOORS.

**AP:** Having reached the end of these broadcasts, Mr. Breton, I’d like you to answer one question: do you feel that what you’ve told us has really let us gain some specific knowledge of Andre Breton as a human being?

**AB:** I’d say I’m the last person who could judge that … From the first questions you asked me, I naturally understood that the subject of these interviews was Surrealism and not myself. Given that I was invited to describe the chronological development of a spiritual adventure that was and remains collective by nature, I was forced to erase myself somewhat. Above all, I had to be as objective as possible. By definition, I was not free to skate over any of the facts that profoundly concerned the history of the movement, and I was also bound by the need to show how events were linked together. In this regard at least, I had to strive to be impartial and, up to a certain point, leave the stage. But I don’t believe I completely avoided making judgments and comments that would allow someone to pinpoint my distinctive features, if he so desired. I’ve often regretted that people generally expect me to make the sort of statement that pushes me into the shadows rather than into the light—which frankly, especially in the long run, goes against my personal desire and inclination. But what can I say? This must be the price of any life that has largely been absorbed by the affirmation of a certain ideal.

**AP:** Allow me to push further ahead with my question. By deliberately refusing to adopt a formula for these interviews that would have consisted in asking you about your attitudes toward life (such as my colleague Robert Mallet, for example, so brilliantly did with Paul Leautaud), and by preferring to approach you via the history of Surrealism, to which every day of your life adds a page, I believed that objectively we would gain a deeper, more complete sense of you. But haven’t I left out equally essential, albeit less apparent, aspects of yourself? Do you feel that these interviews missed their target, which was above all to show who you are?
AB: Not at all. The way the interviews with Paul Léautaud were conducted, while quite appropriate to the person he is, would hardly have been suitable for me. For one thing, Léautaud is a wit, which I’m not. Also, his adventure has been purely individual, and he can therefore indulge every whim, take any detour, and say whatever comes into his head. I can’t claim to have the detachment that his age and natural skepticism grant him. I can admire the outward freedom conferred by this skepticism, without sharing it in the slightest degree. As far as your interviews with me are concerned, the alternative was the following: either they would be about me alone, or they would be about Surrealism via my life. You opted for the second possibility, and it would have been presumptuous of me to find fault with that.

AP: Your answer lets me limit my next questions to two other essential points. First of all, what is your opinion of yourself, considering the intransigence that you’ve always brought to the defense of Surrealism?

AB: To…the defense of Surrealism? You see how we come back to Surrealism in spite of ourselves. Oh, I’m well aware that intransigence is no longer in style! Our vocabulary has been so undermined and sabotaged in the last few years that you say “intransigence,” and people think of absolutism and dictatorship. What does that mean: the intransigence I’ve brought to the defense of Surrealism? I went with what I believed was right, what I believed was liable to make the human condition less unacceptable. To the extent that others—a fair number of others, as we know—had expressed the same concerns, I believed that in the case of a breach of contract on their part, even an implicit one, they should be called to account for their change of heart. As you can imagine, I’m rather pleased to have maintained Surrealism’s initial postulates, against all odds!

It’s not hard for several people to fundamentally agree on a given body of ideas in their youth, but we mustn’t ignore the fact that life is quite adept at breaking up forces that were once united. You see what happened to Saint-Simonianism, for example. And besides, material demands become more pressing as time goes on. And then there are women…. In short, everything happens as it does in Victor Hugo’s lovely poem, “La Chanson des aventuriers de la mer.” If fate wishes one to take the helm after, as he said,

*In Malta, Olfani became a monk
And Gobbo a harlequin...*
it's clear that one must guide this helm with a firm hand.

**AP:** Of course. But what is your feeling about yourself, considering the battle you've waged, the long series of hardships and rifts-and sacrifices, too?

**AB:** Well, I feel that I've lived up to my youthful aspirations, and to my mind that's already quite a lot. My life has been devoted to what I thought was beautiful and right. All things considered, I've so far lived as I had dreamed of living. In the battle I've waged, I've never lacked for companions just as determined as I; thanks to them, I've never been deprived of human warmth. It's true that I had to part from some individuals who were dear to me, and that others have left me. There are those whose memory long haunted me, whose memory still assails me at certain times of the day, and I won't deny that it's like a wound being reopened every time. But I believe this was necessary in order to preserve the initial stakes, and that this was the price if any thing was to be won. And to a large extent, the battle has indeed been won. I don't wish to sound conceited, but it's fairly commonly admitted today that Surrealism contributed much toward shaping our modern sensibility. Furthermore, it managed, if not entirely to impose its scale of values, at least to make these values be taken very seriously. If we refer back to the title of a magazine like *La Révolution surréaliste*, which at the time seemed hyperbolic, it's no exaggeration to say that such a revolution did take place in men's minds. Just think, for example, of all the figures from the past that Surrealism brought out from the shadows, and who today are recognized as *lantern bearers*; and of all the false lantern bearers that it pushed back into the shadows. On this score, we couldn't have hoped for any thing more.

It was in another domain that enormous obstacles blocked our path. Which domain? The one in which we felt bound to participate actively, yes, to contribute, from our specific position and with our specific resources, to the social transformation of the world. History will tell if those who've claimed a monopoly on that transformation are really working toward man's liberation, or whether they're condemning him to an even worse form of slavery. The fact remains that Surrealism, as a defined and organized movement, in trying to respond to the greatest possible will toward emancipation, could find no point of entry into their system. Even if this must be counted as an indisputable failure and in some ways represents a lot of lost time, perhaps it wasn't pointless. First of all, it was important that we attempt the experiment, and report our findings as they happened, from 1925 to 1950. And besides...Surrealism, that little particle of free thought, when compared to many forms
of subjugated thought (and without prejudice to the outcome of the struggle), is rather like David and Goliath, you know....

**AP:** We can obviously trust in the judgment of history, but do you believe that Surrealism’s current audience reflects its true importance?

**AB:** I have no complaints on that score. Eminent men have died, having every reason to believe that obscurity would forever be their fate; for others it took eighty years of posthumous neglect before the ears able to hear them even existed. Without putting myself on their level, I believe I can consider myself more favored than they: perhaps I had a luckier star, who knows! But twenty years ago, I was already asking how certain people could believe they were participating in the Surrealist spirit while still being concerned about their status in the world. Surrealism’s current status? I don’t know if it’s been given its due, but I have no objections; and if its status were less prominent, I still wouldn’t mind. In the word “status,” there’s always an aspect of official consecration that bothers me. I’ve already had occasion to say that, by temper ament as much as or more than by reasoning, I fell in with the opposition; I was ready, come what may, to join an indefinitely renewable minority (so long as it aimed toward greater liberation, of course). This is scarcely compatible with the imperialistic designs that apply to the many academic theses I’ve forbidden.

For my taste, it’s already too much that they’ve begun teaching Surrealism in schools—no doubt in order to diminish it. When I was young, what helped me understand Baudelaire or Rimbaud as they should be understood was the fact that they weren’t on the syllabus....

**AP:** Allow me a gratuitous question: if Surrealism had been discovered in 1951, would you have thrown yourself into the fray with the same enthusiasm?

**AB:** There’s always something pointless about that kind of speculation. To answer with some measure of pertinence, I’d have to take into account both the changes that some thirty years have produced in myself, and the changes in the world during the same time. On top of which, it’s clear that my own changes depended on the changes in the world, and on a certain number of other factors. At twenty or twenty-five, one’s will to struggle is inspired by the most offensive and intolerable things one sees around oneself. In this regard, the sickness that the world exhibits today differs from the one it exhibited in the 1920s.
In France, for example, the mind was threatened back then with coagulation, whereas today it’s threatened with dissolution. All kinds of major fissures, which affect the structure of the globe as well as human consciousness, had not yet appeared (I’m thinking of the implacable antagonism between the two “blocs,” of totalitarian methods, of the atomic bomb). It’s perfectly obvious that such a situation calls for different reactions from today’s youth than the ones provoked in us, in our youth, by another situation. At the same time, I believe that this in no way invalidates Surrealism’s principle theses on poetry, freedom, or love. What has to be rethought on the basis of new data is the social problem. In this regard, and if only to indicate what I considered right, I’d like to stress that I didn’t hesitate to look behind Marx, and, in my *Ode to Charles Fourier*, to call for a reevaluation of those parts of his work that are still valid. Moreover, I was one of the first to join the "Citizens of the World" movement, whose goals seem to me the only ones with sufficient breadth to meet the circumstances. Whatever difficulties such an action inevitably encounters, I still have complete faith in Robert Sarrazac and those around him, who inspired and organized it.

**AP:** But how do you feel about your former comrades-in-arms, some of whom abandoned you—even betrayed you?

**AB:** I’ve already gained enough distance to be able to make this judgment as dispassionately as possible. I was deeply impressed by the opinion that my friend Ferdinand Alquié expressed on this subject in his study on “Surrealist and Existentialist humanism.” Pondering the division that has occurred in Surrealism, as earlier it occurred in Romanticism, between those who have opted for “social action without dreams” and those who prefer “an attitude that least repudiates their initial ideals, but also implies the least commitment,” he believes he can state that both sides were equally sincere and faithful, and that, in short, it’s neither side’s fault if “the moral dimension and the historical dimension” cannot be reconciled. Insofar as I’ve always been an active participant in this debate, it would obviously be too much to ask me to subscribe to this opinion; but objectively, it seems very wise. I admit that Surrealism’s inclination was twofold, that there were and—as recent splits have shown once again—that there still are reasons for tearing away from it. Above and beyond anything that might have separated us, and the passions that got in the way (some of which have never died down), my desire would be to attain that point of serenity from which one contemplates the jointly followed path without remorse; from which one gives unreserved thanks to what fervently united a certain number of individuals around the same cause, even if the individuals themselves changed from time to time....
**AP:** I don’t believe any Surrealist inquiry ever took happiness as its subject. Could you tell us what role it has played in your life?

**AB:** We’d first have to be clear on what we mean by “happiness.” A certain degree of satisfaction, stemming from various ideas and the reactions these ideas might have elicited, cannot be equated with lasting well-being. But I believe that some people, myself among them, aspire more than anything to that kind of satisfaction, even if the cost is high. I’ve already said that the worst drawback of an activity such as the one I’ve engaged in resides in the fact that the emotional ties it creates between those involved can’t withstand significant ideological divergences. So this happiness is of the most checkered sort. But I think there’s something truly happy in being able to say that the landscape of one’s youth has not silted up in middle age, that the same inalienable expanses are still uncovered every time the wind brings the accents of poets and a few others, who were once the great sources of exaltation.

Speaking of happiness, I can still hear Gide reading us a text he’d written—I was with Aragon and Soupault—which began with the words: “All of nature surely teaches that man was made for happiness….” That’s rather debatable, I said to myself. It isn’t happiness I sought in love, either: it was love.

**AP:** Even though you might refuse to answer this question, I’d like you to clarify what promise Surrealism holds today for various techniques: film, radio, etc.

**AB:** As early as the first Manifesto, I purposely stated that future Surrealist techniques didn’t interest me. This is all the more the case, it goes without saying, for applications of Surrealism to a given technical means of expression. And moreover, in what category would you put certain of Duchamp’s works? Do some canvases by Max Ernst, Magritte, or Brauner concern poetry any less than they do painting? Can cinematographic criteria exhaust the content of a film such as L’Age d’Or? This kind of discrimination would be petty. No more petty than to wonder, about those of our friends who developed a taste for solo navigation, such as Miró or Prévert, to what extent they are or aren’t Surrealists. We need only transpose the problem to Romanticism, or even to Impressionism or Symbolism, to see how inane it is …
**AP:** This series of interviews, which has highlighted your activity and that of the Surrealist movement for more than thirty years, naturally leads us to ask toward what horizons you’re now steering your spirit and your action?

**AB:** If it’s true, as I’ve admitted, that Surrealism, which for so long was a tumultuous river rushing under an open sky, has more recently followed a rather prolonged underground channel, I repeat that this is an entirely external impression, which is due only to the present lack of a group periodical. With all due respect to those who, as you know, have dug Surrealism’s grave two or three times yearly for the past quarter century, I maintain that the principle of its energy remains intact. I can think of no better proof than this recent declaration from May 1951, which is all the more precious to me in that I owe it to seven of my youngest friends: “Up to now, only Surrealism seems to have defied the processes of petrification that spare neither systems nor men. To tirelessly alert that which has not yet been struck by aphasia, to constantly demolish the economic and moral dogmas that mire men in secular oppression…, and to seek the untried remedies required by the extent and virulence of the disease: these are the imperatives that ensue from the principles that have always been Surrealism’s own…. You have constantly defined the trajectory between the conscious and unconscious aspects of mental life, between revolutionary action and the exaltation of desire, between materialism and idealism. Starting at the point at which you have intersected it, we can only travel this trajectory, which is the very trajectory of Surrealism, from the outset, and make it ours in its totality.” One can imagine that for me, at the end of an account encompassing the-already exceptionally long-existence of a movement with which no one can deny that my life has formed one body, nothing can equal such a testimony.

**AP:** If you wouldn’t mind, let’s end our conversation with this question: what sustains your faith in the remarkable human adventure on which you’ve embarked?

**AB:** Speaking in America in 1942 to the students of Yale University, I underscored the fact that “Surrealism was born of a limitless affirmation of faith in the genius of youth.” For my part, I have never renounced this faith for an instant. Chateaubriand says superbly: “As a son of Brittany, I like the moors. Their flower of indigence is the only one that has not wilted on my lapel.” I, too, come from those moors; they have often torn me apart, but I love that light of will-o’-the-wisp that they keep burning in my heart. To the extent that this
light has reached me, I’ve done everything in my power to pass it on: all my pride comes from the fact that it hasn’t yet gone out. At stake, as I saw it, were my chances of not failing the human adventure.
NOTES & REVIEWS
SOME BOOKS NEED PICTURES:
TEJU COLE’S BLIND SPOT
REVIEWED BY MATT TURNER

Blind Spot, Teju Cole.

It’s hard for me not to like Teju Cole. In his novels and essays he personally comes across as a genuinely interesting, even nice guy. He writes about cities, art, poetry, travel — all things I myself am interested in — and looks with one eye at at their aesthetic composition while with the other for their politics. His new book, Blind Spot, is a collection of photos accompanied by prose poems. (And, hey, that’s something else I’m interested in!) The fact that he’s followed his popular fiction and essays with the unpopular genre of the prose poem is just another reason to think that the guy’s alright. The photos in Blind Spot are mostly snapshot-variety, but his eye for unusual composition gives nearly every photo unusual force. He states that he has tried to capture everyday scenes, and in a way he has — the reflection of a building on glass, a pile of gravel on a hill, things like that. The photos hit home-runs. And then we get to the poetry. Each prose poem is paired with a photo, titled after a place that Cole has traveled, and responds in some manner to the photo. Sometimes that means simple description of the photo, and sometimes it means social commentary on the place in question. Many of the poems slip between the two, only to drift away from the original impulse — the sort of dérive that his novels are known for. The following example illustrates the dominant style of the book.

SÃO PAULO

Something with bars, like a cage. Something like a fox, something like a wolf, but scientifically neither, a chimera. It was all attention, at least it was honest that it was in an in-between state, unlike we foolish ones who take ourselves for finished things or, worse, for final states. I took other photos that day, for example of the giraffe in its enclosure with an informational sign of a picture of a giraffe in the foreground. But it didn’t really work as a photograph, nor did my image of flamingos behind a sign with a photo of flamingos. But this large canid (scientific name:
Chrysocyon brachyurus) had tension, mystery, the unhappiness of looming extinction. Alert, with slightly too long legs.

It was a Tuesday. Only school groups were at the zoo, school groups and one strange solitary visitor with a camera. Bright sun to begin with, but then it rained. I was in São Paulo on a mission to find an old photograph, but the new ones kept coming, like tropical rain through a roof gutter’s spout, including this “maned wolf,” a sign for itself.

The poem gives us a sideways description. But imagine no photo and no title, and the text as a whole isn’t necessarily tied to a particular image or location. On the surface, what Cole is writing sounds to me like a cross between diary and abstraction. Isolate the different aspects of the poem (title, image, text) and you can more clearly see the poles that energize it: place, objects, and personal description all pulling in different directions.

So I can’t help but wonder how the poems would come across if they lacked titles and photos. The closest comparison might be something like haiku — brief suggestive descriptions that riff off the physical world yet don’t hew too close. The power of haiku lies in its suggestiveness as well as in its propulsive language, which has been mangled or enabled by translators who either want to suggest a clichéd “haiku moment” or a language whose ties
to the world are quickly fraying. Do the poems in *Blind Spot* achieve either of these states?

In another of Cole’s poems he loosely riffs off of a photo in order to do what so many ancient poets did: call to the gods.

**CHICAGO**

*I pray to Tarkovsky, Marker, and Hitchcock. I acknowledge the dumb skull, the verso of the face, the local globe from which all thinking originates. I pray to Ojeikere and Richter, in whose works someone is always turning away. In certain pictures, we can verify a character’s presence, but, without the clues of the confessional face, not what the character thinks. What has turned away contains itself. A stone contemplates a stone. *Stalker*, *The Mirror*, *Sans Soleil*, *Vertigo*. *Multa pinxit, hic Brugelius, quae pingi non possunt*, wrote Ortelius. *He painted many things, this Bruegel, which cannot be painted. What cannot be painted?*

Alfred Hitchcock and Chris Marker are examples of nearly opposite aesthetic tendencies. Hitchcock’s famous psychological dramas often depend on the unseen or suggested presence or link, requiring a leap of faith from the viewer in order to make fuller sense of his films. Marker, on the other hand, is a filmmaker of commentary, contrast and comparison, where little goes unsaid and the commentary often delivers what sound like profundities. These two directors point to what can and can’t be understood in the world. *Blind Spot* writes through Marker’s sensibility, and — like so many clunky haiku — will probably only excite people who are interested in something other than writing.

Some of the questions *Bind Spot* asks — namely how does text depend upon its title, and what does the combination of text and photograph produce exactly — are interesting questions. But much of the poems’ actual language is pedestrian, and plodding. Although Cole is often compared to Italo Calvino, and sometimes to John Berger, nowhere does he attack his topics with either the incisiveness of a Berger or the pizzaz of a Calvino. So if the book asks questions about the prose poem and its relationship to the visual arts, it also begs the question of the relationship of an author who takes personal risks to a work that doesn’t.
THE OTHER EDITOR

MATT TURNER

*Pei Pei the Monkey King*, by Wawa.
Translated by Henry Wei Leung.
Tinfish Press, 2016. 84 pages.

*Zero Distance: New Poetry from China*.
Edited and translated by Jiang Yujing.

Translations are approximations.

They cannot express an author's ideas.

Translations are compromises.

You need to read work in the original language.

You should talk to the author about it.

These statements are, in an incomplete way, true.

The reason these commonplaces are incomplete is because they take the author and the
text to be beyond question — as if the author were in complete control, aware of every
implication, and the text simple description. And these assumptions about the inadequacy
of translation can be used to describe realist work as well as work that foregrounds the
materiality and historicity of language.

For example, the belief that language is owned by a particular place or culture. For an
outsider to transform that language into something else can be seen as an aggressive act,
akin to uprooting a people from their particular material context or appropriating their
means of expression. Translation by an outsider is seen as recklessly political and possibly
racist, as in this statement:
When I taught Pound’s “The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter” to my Asian American Poetry class, my students summed it up pretty quickly: “that’s fucked up.” When I asked why it was fucked up, we talked about the privilege of persona, of orientalism, of yellowface, of white supremacy.¹

Of course, authors and languages are steeped in cultures and histories. And that’s why translation often appears like a purposeful statement about cultural preferences. Which makes it especially difficult for translators coming from and working within different languages and contexts — how to translate without turning one’s translation into an editorial position.

_Pei Pei the Monkey King_, by the Hong Kong poet Wawa, is translated by Henry Wei Leung. _Zero Distance: New Poetry from China_, an anthology of new online poetry from Mainland China, is edited and translated by Jiang Yujing. Both translators can be considered insiders to the cultures and languages they translate, so one might assume their translations sidestep or even solve commonplaces.

In the Wawa collection, a single translator (who is married to the author) offers a selection representative of the author’s works. In _Zero Distance_, a single translator translates works by 29 poets, not all of whom have the same aesthetic vision or even proficiency in Chinese. Both are a good test for any translator, but the books reveal more about the translators’ political positions and aesthetic tendencies than they do their translation skill. Both also engage in editorializing.

The “Translator’s Introduction” to _Pei Pei_ explains what Leung believes to be Wawa’s project. Like Sun Wukong, the mythical monkey king who rebelled against the Jade Emperor, Wawa is rebelling against Beijing’s hegemony over Hong Kong. Wawa writes in the Cantonese topolect, which can be contrasted with a more general Chinese, “not a language but an imperial project.” Leung calls her poems “very Hong Kong,” which is “a very Cantonese city-state … and consciousness,” and quotes from an essay of hers: “We Hongkongers are becoming forced-Chinese.”

Leung also says that “the poems in Pei Pei are not political poems in the strict sense.” But given the evidence of her positions it would be difficult to think of them otherwise. It was very difficult for me to read the poems as anything else, as I bracketed out incongruous passages and focused on possible political selections. Will more imaginative readers have better luck?

KINGDOM OF THE ROOFTOP

He likes a mountaintop siesta
He likes a cartop siesta
He likes a booktop siesta
He likes a housetop siesta
He likes siestas on everybody’s heads

I’m on the city’s highest, dirtiest rooftop
Tracing a few fingernail clippings
Until at last I find him napping in a broken garden
“Hey! I have returned!”
“Wake up!”
A kick to the face

I ask him how’s Confucius been
He says he saw a sky of white clouds
I ask him is Mencius still in good shape
He says the mountain roads are not quite right
I ask him does the city still have people
He says even the wind has strayed
But he also says
My city is arriving soon
My kingdom is arising soon

This is one of the more literal translations in the book. But literal translation — translation that sticks as close as possible to dictionary meanings in favor of an almost mechanical reading of the text — is both an aesthetic decision and a political decision. By first framing the poems as political, and then stripping the translation down to bare bones, Leung ironically attempts to communicate a meaning beyond language. It’s something akin to expressing a
“consciousness” that communicates through implication, and not linguistic specifics.

Yet because Leung frames Wawa’s poetry and Cantonese as resistance to Mandarin bullying, which he calls, quoting scholar Rey Chow, “white man’s Chinese,” he opens his translation methods up to criticism. From the perspective of presumably hostile Mainland forces, translating Cantonese into English (instead of into Mandarin) is capitulating to a history of colonization. No amount of implication can rescind the legacy of colonialism.

But *Zero Distance* is less politically difficult, though it may be the odder book. The oldest poet is in his 60s, and the youngest is around 11. And Jiang had the difficult task of rendering into English different sensibilities that nevertheless represent what he sees as a contemporary trend in Mainland China towards personal self-expression. If only because no one’s looking, “poetry has become the freest form of literature in China. As no one cares, the poets can write about anything they want under a pseudonym.”

This new sense of free expression comes with the awareness that it’s conditional, hence the use of pseudonyms. But the pseudonyms are easily unmasked. At their most effective, they are personas which express what Jiang seems to believe is poetry’s dominant tone, personal voice. Only a few poets in the collection dare be oblique — nearly all are very straightforward about their lives, emotions, and observations.

Jiang privileges this style of writing, and seems to be unaware of what else is out there. Chun Sue’s poem “Labia,” about her labia, is cited by Jiang in his introduction as a work that pushes boundaries. And in a Mainland context it does — well, a little. More difficult work, that pushes against ideas of the self, is absent from the anthology. The implication is that either because it pushes against “free expression,” or because “no one cares,” poets would rather not write that way.

But I don’t mean to harp on about this. Many of the poems are enjoyable (including Chun Sue’s poems). The real problem is that Jiang’s translations often sound similar, demonstrating the editor’s preference for a very particular personal voice. The title poem, by veteran poet Ouyang Yu, is more meditative than many of the others — but compare it with Ai Hao’s tongue-in-cheek “Toilet Love.”
ZERO DISTANCE

Human relationship
Never reaches zero distance.

Up close,
It’s the standard thickness of a condom.

At their closest, there are two
Beings separated by a skin.

TOILET LOVE

Several times I saw
a man outside the toilet
discuss something
in all seriousness
with his girlfriend in it.
Later I learned
as there was no lamp in the toilet
his girlfriend felt scared.
I kind of found there was a sweetness
in their stinky love.

Why Ai Hao’s poem is enjambed when Ouyang Yu’s is end-stopped was a decision of the translator, and not the author. Yet the different tones each method suggests are strangely similar-sounding — why? It’s no insult to say that the Chinese is more interesting, and more varied than the English, and Jiang even says as much in his introduction. He prefers literal translations because the words “will lose their vividness if I translate them into a native English word.” Well, it’s a strategy.

The problem is that literal translation is never too literal. It uses a frame to superimpose or foreground another reading over a linguistically limited translation. Jiang privileges a literal reading because, like Leung, he has framed his translation in a certain way. The irony is that he emphasizes the personal voices of the poets he’s translating — voices that end up
speaking for the position he himself advocates.

So I want to re-emphasize the role editing plays in his translation, as well as in the translation of *Pei Pei*. When words are selected, they’re selected to reflect whatever their translator — their editor — thinks should be foregrounded: image, sound, usually meaning. In the case of *Zero Distance*, the editor wants to emphasize a writing style he believes dominant. In the case of *Pei Pei the Monkey King*, the editor wants to push a political vision. Whether that comes through or not of course depends on any number of factors, not least of which is the aesthetic and political disposition of the reader.

But lest anyone think otherwise, I should say that I enjoyed both of these books. I’m immensely pleased they are being published, especially in bilingual editions. What I question are editors who claim their own readings to be primary readings, and who treat particular styles of poetry as exemplary. This isn’t a translator-author issue so much as it’s an editing issue. Editing poetry, just like editing a newspaper, reinforces the editor’s language.
CONTRIBUTORS
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ANDRÉ BRETON (1896-1966) was for over forty years the leader, and primary theorist, of the Paris Surrealists, and whose work served as a touchstone for Surrealist groups around the world. His later life was also marked by a commitment to Anarchist and Antifascist activities, as well as opposition to French colonialism—he was one of the signatories of the Déclaration sur le droit à l’insoumission dans la guerre d’Algérie. He died in 1966.

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**RENÉ CHAR** (1907-1988) was born in L’Isle sur la Sorgue. His poems began appearing in publication in the early 1920’s, and his first book appeared in 1928. Soon thereafter, he met Paul Éluard, André Breton, Louis Aragon, and René Crevel and became active in Surrealist activities. During the Second World War, he was a commander in the French Resistance, and remained engaged in political activism for the remainder of his life.

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**JAMES CLIFFORD** taught for many years in the History of Consciousness Department, University of California, Santa Cruz. His most recent book is *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty First Century*.

**CHRIS DANIELS** (Manhattan Island, 1956) is a self-taught proletarian (*feral*) poet and translator of global Lusophone poetry whose work has been published all over the place.

**JOSEPH DONAHUE**’s most recent books of poetry are *Red Flash on a Black Field*, (Black Square, 2015), and the third volume of *Terra Lucida* (an ongoing poetic sequence), *Dark Church* (Verge, 2015). He lived for many years in New York City, and now lives in Durham, North Carolina, where he teaches at Duke University. His book length poem, *Wind Map*, will be published by Talisman in 2018.

**GYRÐIR ELÍASSON** is an Icelandic poet and translator, brought up in Sauðárkrókur, a small village in the north of Iceland. Married, he has three daughters. His first book, a volume of poems, was published in 1983. Since then he has published many books of
poetry, along with several novellas and collections of short stories and essays. He has translated some twenty books into Icelandic, primarily from English.

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN was born in Indianapolis, Indiana in 1935. Since 1986 he has lived in Ypsilanti, Michigan with his wife Caryl who over the past forty years has been the primary reader and editor of his poetry and prose. Eshleman has published sixteen collections of translations, including *The Complete Poetry of César Vallejo* with a Foreword by Mario Vargas Llosa (University of California Press, 2007), and a 900 page bilingual edition of *The Complete Poetry of Aimé Césaire*, co-translated with A. James Arnold (Wesleyan University Press, 2017). In 2014 Black Widow Press published *Clayton Eshleman / The Whole Art*, an anthology of essays on Eshleman’s work over the decades, edited by Stuart Kendall, and in 2015 also brought out *Clayton Eshleman / The Essential Poetry 1960-2015*. In 2017 Black Widow Press published his newest collection of poems, *Penetralia*.

ANI GJIKA is an Albanian-born poet, literary translator, and author of *Bread on Running Waters* (Fenway Press, 2013). Gjika has been a recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Robert Pinsky Global Fellowship, Framingham State University’s Myriam Levine Reader Award, and the Robert Fitzgerald Translation Prize among others. Gjika’s poems and translations have appeared in *Seneca Review, Salamander, Plume, From the Fishouse, World Literature Today, Ploughshares, AGNI Online*, and elsewhere. Her translation of Luljeta Lleshanaku’s book, *Negative Space*, is forthcoming from New Directions in 2018.

COLE HEINOWITZ is a poet, translator, and scholar. Her books of poetry include *The Rubicon* (The Rest Press, 2008), *Stunning in Muscle Hospital* (Detour Press, 2002), and *Daily Chimera* (Incommunicado Press, 1995). Cole’s poems have appeared in the collections *Letters to Olson* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2016) and *In/Filtration* (Station Hill, 2016), as well as in *Aufgabe, 6X6, The Brooklyn Rail, Fence, The Poker, HOW2, Mirage 4 Period(ical)*, and *Across the Margin*. She is the translator of Mario Santiago Papasquiaro’s *Advice from 1 disciple of Marx to 1 Heidegger fanatic* (Wave, 2013), *Beauty Is Our Spiritual Guernica* (Commune Editions, 2015), and *Collected Works* (in progress), *The Selected Late Letters of Antonin Artaud, 1945-1947* (Portable Press @ Yo-Yo Labs, 2014), and *A Tradition of Rupture: Selected Prose of Alejandra Pizarnik* (forthcoming). She is the author of the critical study, *Spanish America and British Romanticism, 1777-1826: Rewriting Conquest* (Edinburgh
University Press, 2010) and numerous essays on British, U.S., and Latin American poetry from the 19th century to the present. Cole lives on the banks of the Esopus in the Catskills and teaches literature at Bard College.

**NAZIM HIKMET** (1902-1963) was one of the major voices in Turkish literature in the 20th century. After the First World War, he attended school in Moscow, where he would later return after persecution in Turkey for his involvement in the leftist press. In 1940 he was imprisoned for his Communist beliefs, and after his release from prison in 1950 (the same year in which he won the International Peace Prize, along with Wanda Jakubowska, Pablo Neruda, Pablo Picasso, and Paul Robeson), he left Turkey for the final time and continued to live the rest of his life in Russia and Eastern Europe.

**HIROMI ITŌ** emerged in the 1980s as the leading voice of Japanese women’s poetry with a series of sensational works that depicted women’s psychology, sexuality, and motherhood in dramatic new ways. In the late 1990s, she relocated to southern California, and since then, she has written a number of important, award-winning books about migrancy, relocation, identity, linguistic alienation, aging, and death. A selection of her early work appears in *Killing Kanoko: Selected Poems of Hiromi Itō*, translated by Jeffrey Angles (Action Books, 2009). Angles has also translated her wildly imaginative, book-length narrative poem *Wild Grass on the Riverbank* (Action Books, 2015), which won the 2006 Takami Jun Prize, which is awarded each year to an outstanding, innovative book of poetry.

**ADRIANA X. JACOBS** is a writer, translator, and educator whose translations have appeared in a number of literary journals, including *MQR, Poetry International, The Ilanot Review, Anomaly, Gulf Coast*, and in the collection *Women's Hebrew Poetry on American Shores* (Wayne State, 2016). Her book *Strange Cocktail: Translation and the Making of Modern Hebrew Poetry* is forthcoming from the University of Michigan Press. She is currently associate professor of modern Hebrew literature at the University of Oxford.

**STUART KENDALL** is a writer, editor, and translator working at the intersections of philosophy, poetics, visual culture, and design. His books include *The Ends of Art and Design, Gilgamesh, Georges Bataille*, and many edited or translated volumes, most frequently related to post-Surrealist trends in poetry, philosophy, and visual culture. He currently lives in Oakland, California, where he teaches at the California College of the Arts.
PHILIP LAMANTIA (1927-2005) was, and remains, the most important surrealist poet born in the United States. His *Collected Poems* appeared from University of California Press in 2013. In 1943, at age 15, he was welcomed into the surrealist movement by André Breton. The previously unpublished “Testament of the Inter-Voice” appears in the forthcoming volume from Wave Books *Preserving Fire: Selected Prose of Philip Lamantia*, edited with an introduction by Garrett Caples.

HEZY LESKLY (1952-1944) was born in Rehovot, Israel to Czech parents. After dropping out of high school, he devoted himself to an extensive study of dance and choreography. He lived for several years in the Netherlands where he studied multi-media arts and lived openly as a gay man for the first time in his life. Upon his return to Israel, he began a brief but productive career as a dance critic, playwright and choreographer. His first collection of poems, *The Finger*, appeared in 1986, and by the time of his death of AIDS-related complications, he was regarded as one of the major literary voices of his generation. His last book, *Dear Perverts*, was published posthumously in 1994.


LULJETA LLESHANAKU is internationally known as Albania’s most important and inventive poet of her generation. A winner of International Kristal Vilenica Prize in 2009, she is the author of seven books of poetry in Albanian and six poetry collections in other languages. Her American collection *Child of Nature* (New Directions, 2010) was one of 2011 Best Translated Book Award poetry finalists and her British collection *Haywire: New & Selected Poems* was nominated for the 2013 Popescu Prize by Poetry Society, UK. A new selection, *Negative Space*, is due in 2018 from Bloodaxe in the UK and New Directions in the US, drawing on two recent collections published in Albania, *Almost Yesterday* (2012) and *Homo Antarccticus* (2015).
**SALGADO MARANHÃO** won the prestigious Prêmio Jabuti in 1999 with *Mural of Winds*. In 2011, *The Color of the Word* won the Brazilian Academy of Letters highest poetry award. In 2014, the Brazilian PEN Club chose his recent collection, *Mapping the Tribe*, as best book of poetry for the year. In 2015 the Brazilian Writers Union gave him first prize, again for *The Color of the Word*. Within the last year, he was awarded the Jabuti for the second time, an extreme rare honor. In addition to twelve books of poetry, he has written song lyrics and made recordings with some of Brazil’s leading jazz and pop musicians. His work has appeared in numerous magazines in the USA, including *Bitter Oleander, BOMB, Cream City Review, Dirty Goat, Florida Review, Massachusetts Review,* and *Spoon River Poetry Review*. Here in the USA, he is represented by two bilingual collections of poetry: *Blood of the Sun* (Milkweed Editions, 2012) and *Tiger Fur* (White Pine Press, 2015).

**JORGE MARTILLO** was born in Guayaquil in 1957, and in the late seventies joined the literary circle Sicoseo. He is a journalist with a regular column in *El Universo*. His books of poetry include: *Fragmentarium, Confesionarium, Warning to Sailors, A Posthumous Life, Travels Through Coastal Towns,* and *Last Verses of a Decadent Poet*. He has also published two collections of prose cronicas: *Guayaquil of My Delerium* and *Bohemian in Guayaquil*. He has had some of his poems in translation appear in the USA in the following literary magazines: *Harvard Review, Per Contra,* and *Lake Effect.*

**MEG MATICH** is a Reykjavik-based poet and translator. Her translations have appeared in or are forthcoming from PEN America, *Exchanges, Words Without Borders, Asymptote, Gulf Coast,* and others. In 2015, she received the PEN Heim Translation Fund grant for her translation of Magnús Sigurðsson’s *Cold Moons* (Phoneme Media, 2017). She has received grants and fellowships from the Fulbright Comission, the DAAD, the Banff Centre, the Icelandic Literature Center, and Columbia University. She is currently the Madame/Director of Reykjavík’s Rauða Skáldahúsið.

**JESUS MAYA** is a Mexican-Canadian poet living in Toronto, Canada. Much of his poetry deals with the experience of growing up in San Agustín, a neighborhood of Mexico City, as well as the experience of living in Canada as an immigrant. His first book, *La Tolvanera,* was published by the Latin American Researchers of Ontario in 2012. He regularly organizes literary and cultural events in Toronto and currently curates a monthly Spanish-language reading series, *Poesía en Color* series.
SANDRA MOUSSEMPÈS is a poet and a singer. Former resident of the Villa Médicis of the Academy of France in Rome, she has contributed to various reviews and anthologies in France and abroad. She is the author of ten volumes of poetry, most recently: Colloque des télépathes & album CD Post-Gradiwa (editions de l’Attente, 2017) Photogénie des ombres peintes, (Poésie/Flammarion, 2009), Acrobaties dessinées & CD Beauty Sitcom, (l’Attente, 2012) and Sunny girls (Poésie/Flammarion, 2015). A bilingual chapbook, “From : Sunny girls” was published by Aboveground Press in Canada. In the 1990s she sang in several Paris and London based bands (including being featured on The Wolfgang Press’s final album, released by the British label 4AD). She is also a vocal and sound artist who has released 3 CDs with l’Attente publishing, and has performed in various art museums including MAMCO in Geneva, Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris, Actoral festival Marseille, and the Centre Pompidou.

MURAT NEMET-NEJAT is a poet, translator from Turkish and essayist. His recent work includes the poems Animals of Dawn (Talisman, 2016), and The Spiritual Life of Replicants. Recent translations are Seyhan Erözçelik’s Rosestrikes and Coffee Grinds (Talisman, 2010), and the republication by Green Integer Press of Ece Ayhan’s A Blind Cat Black and Orthodoxies (2015). He is the editor of Eda: An Anthology of Contemporary Turkish Poetry (Talisman House, 2004).

GÉRARD DE NERVAL (1808-1855), pen name of Gérard Labrunie, was a major figure in French Romanticism. A poet, novelist, essayist, and translator, he was instrumental in introducing French readers to the German Romantics. Among his major works are the poetry collection Les Chimères, the multi-genre collection Les Filles du feu, and the posthumous collection Aurélia ou le rêve et la vie.

BRONKA (BRONISLAWA) NOWICKA is a Polish theatre and TV director, screenwriter and poet. She is a graduate of the Leon Schiller School of Film in Lodz, and the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts. Her direction of the film etude Tristis received awards at international film school festivals, and her literary debut, Nakarmic kamien [To Feed the Stone] was awarded the 2016 Nike Literary Award. She is linked to three cities: Warsaw, Cracow and Czestochowa.
DANZANGIIN NYAMSÜREN (1947-2002) was born in Sühbaatar province, in the southeast of Mongolia. As a young man, he became a grade school teacher, and at the same time began to write poetry. Later he moved to Ereentsav, on Mongolia’s border with Russia, where he lived until his death. He published three books of poetry during his life, with another collection appearing following his death.

PRZEMYSŁAW OW CZAREK was born in 1975 and is a cultural anthropologist by profession. He is a graduate from Jagiellonian University in Kraków with an M.A. in Art and Literature Studies. He is currently the director of Dom Literatury in Łódź and has contributed to scientific, artistic, and literary publications, including Tygiel Kultury [Culture Pot], Literatura Ludowa [People’s Literature], Magazyn Sztuki [Magazine of Art], Studium, Format, Gazeta Wyborcza, Journal of Urban Ethnology, and numerous other periodicals. He has received numerous poetry awards throughout Poland and has published seven full-length books, most recently Jarzmo [Yoke] and Stojąc na jednej nodze [Standing on one leg]. He is the general editor of the quarterly journal, Arterie, dedicated to literature and art, and the coordinator of a poetry series in tandem with the magazine. He is interested in contemporary art.

JEANNE M. PITAS is a writer, teacher and Spanish-English translator living in Iowa, where she teaches at the University of Dubuque. Her most recent publication is a translation of four books by Uruguayan poet Marosa di Giorgio, recently published by Ugly Duckling Presse under the title I Remember Nightfall.

ROBERTO PIVA (1937-2010) was a Brazilian poet. durationpress.com has released, in Chris Daniels’ translation, his books Paranoia and Cyclones.

ALEJANDRA PIZARNIK (1936-1972) is increasingly becoming recognized as one of the major Spanish-language poets of the second-half of the 20th century. In addition to poetry, she wrote plays, fiction, criticism, and translated into Spanish works by Henri Michaux, Arthur Rimbaud, and Antonin Artaud.

MARK POLIZZOTTI has translated more than fifty books from the French, including works by Gustave Flaubert, Patrick Modiano, Marguerite Duras, André Breton, and Raymond
Roussel. A Chevalier of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres and the recipient of a 2016 American Academy of Arts & Letters Award for Literature, he is the author of eleven books, including Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1995; revised ed., 2009), which was a finalist for the PEN/Martha Albrand Award for Best Nonfiction; Luis Buñuel’s Los Olvidados (British Film Institute, 2006); Bob Dylan: Highway 61 Revisited (Bloomsbury, 2006); and Sympathy for the Traitor: A Translation Manifesto (MIT Press, 2018). His essays and reviews have appeared in The New Republic, The Wall Street Journal, ARTnews, The Nation, Parnassus, Partisan Review, Bookforum, and elsewhere. He directs the publications program at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

IRAKLI QOLBAIA was born in Tbilisi, Georgia, in 1995, where he still mostly lives. After several years in France and elsewhere in Europe, he returned to Georgia. Since then, besides writing poetry of his own, he has been translating poetries of Francophone, American and South American poets, among others. To this date, he has tried to follow out a dictum he found early in a film, Jules et Jim: “Travel, write, translate, learn how to live everywhere. Start right away: the future belongs to the curious by profession”.

PAM REHM lives in New York City.

ELÉNA RIVERA is a poet and translator who was born in Mexico City and spent her formative years in Paris. She won the 2010 Robert Fagles prize for her translation of Bernard Noël’s The Rest of the Voyage (Graywolf Press, 2011) and is a recipient of a 2010 National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship in Translation. She has also translated three of Isabelle Baladine Howald’s books, most recently Parting Movement, Constantly Prevented (Oystercatcher Press, 2014). She is currently translating a book by Isabelle Garron and is finishing a translation of Bernard Noël’s Ink’s Path to be published by cadastre8zero in France in 2018.

JEROME ROTHENBERG is an internationally celebrated poet, translator, anthologist, and performer with over ninety books of poetry and twelve assemblages of traditional and avant-garde poetry such as Technicians of the Sacred, Shaking the Pumpkin (traditional American Indian poetry), Exiled in the Word (a.k.a. A Big Jewish Book), and, with Pierre Joris and Jeffrey Robinson, Poems for the Millennium, volumes 1-3. He was a founding

**DALE SMITH** lives in Toronto, Ontario, and is the editor, with Robert J. Bertholf, of *An Open Map: The Correspondence of Robert Duncan and Charles Olson* and *Imagining Persons: Robert Duncan’s Lectures on Charles Olson* (both University of New Mexico Press, 2017). His most recent book of poetry is *Slow Poetry in America* (Cuneiform, 2014).

**HADLEY SORBYS-JONES** graduated from Brown University in 2017, where she studied poetry, translation, and Francophone literature. She is currently working on a complete English translation of Sandra Moussempès's *Sunny girls* while teaching English at the Collège Pithou in Troyes, France. Excerpts of her *Sunny girls* translations have also been published in *Asymptote Journal*.

**KATARZYNA SZUSTER** earned her MA in English studies from the University of Lodz, Poland and was a lecturer at the Department of Foreign Languages, University of Nizwa in Oman. She has translated various Polish poets into English, such as Miron Białoszewski, Justyna Bargielska, and Monika Mosiewicz. Her translations have been published in *Aufgabe, Free Over Blood, Moria, Biweekly, Words without Borders, diode*, and with Toad Press. She is interested in New Sincerity and handicraft.

**GORO TAKANO** (髙野吾朗), born in the city of Hiroshima, is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Medicine at Saga University, Japan, where he teaches English and Japanese/Western literature. His first novel *With One More Step Ahead* was published in US by BlazeVOX in 2009. His first poetry collection *Responsibilities of the Obsessed* (2013) and his second poetry collection *Silent Whistle-blowers* (2015) were also published in US by BlazeVOX. *On Lost Sheep*, his translation of the Japanese modernist poet Shiro Murano’s 1959 award-winning poetry collection, was published in US by Tinfish in 2017.
MARK TARDI is originally from Chicago and he earned his MFA from Brown University. His publications include the books The Circus of Trust, Airport music, and Euclid Shudders. He guest-edited an issue of the literary journal Aufgabe devoted to contemporary Polish poetry and poetics and has translated poetry from the Polish by Kacper Bartczak, Miron Białoszewski, Monika Mosiewicz, and Przemysław Owczarek. A former Fulbright scholar, he lives with his wife and two dogs in a village in central Poland and is on faculty at the University of Łódź.

VALGERDUR PÓRODDSDÓTTIR is an Iceland-born poet, publisher, editor, translator, and literary curator. She is the founder and editorial director of Partus, an independent publisher of poetry and prose based in Reykjavík, Iceland and Manchester, UK. Her poetry has been published in anthologies and magazines including The White Review online, Poetry Wales, Gutter, and Magma, and is forthcoming in New Poetries VII (Carcanet, 2018). She has published one chapbook in Icelandic, það sem áður var skógur (2015), and her nonfiction articles have been published online on Dazed and in print in Cereal, Iceland Review, and The Reykjavík Grapevine, among others.

MATT TURNER is a writer and translator who lives in New York City and Beijing. Writings of his can be found in Hyperallergic Weekend, Spolia and Cha, and are forthcoming in Bookforum and the Los Angeles Review of Books. His translation of Lu Xun’s 1927 book of prose poetry, Weeds, is forthcoming from Shanghai’s Seaweed Salad Editions.

GENYA TUROVSKAYA is a poet, translator, and psychotherapist. She was born in Kiev, Ukraine, and grew up in New York City. She is the author of the chapbooks Calendar (Ugly Duckling Presse), The Tides (Octopus Books), New Year’s Day (Octopus Books), and Dear Jenny (Supermachine). Her original poetry and translations of contemporary Russian poets have appeared in Chicago Review, Conjunctions, A Public Space, Octopus, jubilat, Gulf Coast, Asymptote, PEN Poetry, Fence, Sangam House Poetry, and other publications. She is the translator of Aleksandr Skidan’s Red Shifting (Ugly Duckling Press). She is the co-translator (with Stephanie Sandler) of Elena Fanailova’s The Russian Version (Ugly Duckling Press), which won the University of Rochester’s Three Percent 2010 award for Best Translated Book of Poetry. She is also a co-translator of Arkadii Dragomoshchenko’s Endarkenment: Selected Poems (Wesleyan).
**PETER VALENTE** is the author of *A Boy Asleep Under the Sun: Versions of Sandro Penna* (Punctum Books, 2014), which was nominated for a Lambda award, *The Artaud Variations* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2014), *Let the Games Begin: Five Roman Writers* (Talisman House, 2015), two books of photography, *Blue* (Spuyten Duyvil) and *Street Level* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2016), two translations from the Italian, *Blackout* by Nanni Balestrini (Commune Editions, 2017) and *Whatever the Name* by Pierre Lepori (Spuyten Duyvil, 2017), *Two Novellas: Parthenogenesis &amp; Plague in the Imperial City* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2017), a collaboration with Kevin Killian, *Ekstasis* (blazeVOX, 2017) and the chapbook, *Forge of Words a Forest* (Jensen Daniels, 1998). He is the co-translator of the chapbook, *Selected Late Letters of Antonin Artaud, 1945-1947* (Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs, 2014), and has translated the work of Gérard de Nerval, Cesare Viviani, and Pier Paolo Pasolini, as well as numerous Ancient Greek and Latin authors. Forthcoming is his translation of the poems of Catullus. He is also presently at work on a book for Semiotext(e). In 2010, he turned to filmmaking and has completed 60 shorts to date, 24 of which were screened at Anthology Film Archives.


**SIMON WICKHAMSMITH** is a scholar and translator of modern Mongolian literature. He is currently writing a book on politics and literature in Mongolia during the 1920s and 1930s. He teaches at Rutgers University, New Jersey.