

VOLUME 11 number 1

EZRA slumps back, exhausted from the format changes we've brought about—hoping you like. And reminds you that all past book reviews are listed, by issue, and have their own tab on our home page. Also that summer residencies are now open (competitive). From the dense thicket of contemporary French philosophers, roll these around on your tongue:

The ultimate stage of comfort should be seen thus: not simply surrounded, but contained, even detained, in a harmonious prison of the conventional terms, shared images and given concepts of an apparent objectivity in which every culture seals its subjects. What we refer to as intellectual comfort has two sides that are contemplated simultaneously: one creates real supports (theories, principles, religions and laws) that assure the stable vivacity of the mind, maintaining a working state between the safeguards that protect it from false ideas and empty words. The other places us under the dominion of unreliable ideologies or seductive words...

A Philosophy of Discomfort, Jacques Pezeu-Massabuau

Translation by Vivian Sky Rehberg

Do you believe that the gloomy declaration of this differing [différer] of writing dismays and depresses us? It interests us acutely and gives us new impetus. If there is a secret, it is this, its own: how does the impossible juxtaposition of intense singularities give way to the register and recording? How does the differing-displacement, beyond space-time, of the affective singularity give space and time to multiplicity, then to generality, then to universality, in the concept, in the frozen whole of the register, how does it give space-time to the differing-composition or co-placing? How does force [puissance] give rise to power [pouvoir]? How does searing affirmation become circumscribed around a zero which, inscribing it, annihilates it and assigns it meaning? This is our great interest (political interest amongst others, since this is the entire political question).

Libidinal Economy, Jean-François Lyotard

Translation by Iain Hamilton Grant

The first bit is from a treatise on discomfort, which occasionally (not as often as we'd like) veers into the deleterious comforts and heuristic discomforts of writing. The second is Lyotard on a post-metaphysical rampage, addressing not only meaning production but the functionality, operativity (what he calls efficiency) of texts. Does it not seem that these virulent stances are talking about translation? Translators have come a long way in the last ten years or so, and we talk (often in these pages) of our powers to re-make meaning, to generate meaning. Not to be too 19th century-bomb-throwing-anarchist about it, but these passages—not written by translators but seeming to buttress our work—urge us toward the harrowing open space, like Pound's vortex, where we might re-make meaning and make our translation. They offer the widest possible permission to shun the accepted speech patterns of the target language, the obvious sense of the source text. It's interesting to cast this, like Lyotard, as a political question—and not too far-fetched; Gayatri Spivak and others have already done this, though more narrowly. And interesting to plumb the discomfort Khatibi (our featured writer) felt with his own written language, with the source text of the piece below (from his first novel, 1971). The reader's discomfort, when we're talking about Khatibi in translation, always hovers near, and must be made part of the theater.

The issue ends with a bang: two startling riffs of prose, and a previous feature, Santiago Vizcaíno (whose long poem can be found, complete, as a stand-alone in the Archive).

FEATURE: Abdelkébir Khatibi — The great Moroccan novelist, playwright and critic (1938-2009); an experimenter and explorer of postcolonial identity who also wrote full-length studies of Arab calligraphy and the Maghrebi novel. (from *Tattooed Memory*, Editions de L'Harmattan, 2016):

Adolescence in Marrakesh

One severs childhood, with a considered judgment, at the intersection of an identity that devours itself and the weariness of fascination with the succeeding ages.. And how to disperse, just then, the profusion of reflections, and savage nostalgia? Very softly, at scene's end, there is a crescendo of memories. What mask to betray yourself with, when one drunkenness is like another and knowledge frays? A separation to be designed in a shifting whole, and so I move on, head bowed.

Leaving for Marrakesh at twelve years old! In the bus, a horrible nausea, that vegetal urge ever more aggressive which was beginning, thanks to the jolting bus, to scratch at my nostrils, and ended with the last stalactites of snot and tears. You launder your brain, trying to make sense of this passing upset, ration your breath, and that's when the crisis surges up, then sinks away. Through a gluey gaze, someone's grimace or smile, a sky and its white gesture—you fall asleep. During this sleep an absence beaded up, neither buzzing nor questioning, the very edge of a contradicting escape which hurled him, through the heart of his bewilderment—now fully himself—far from the tribe and far from the household dead, though his mother protected his travels with a talisman at his neck. A tumble through pure and ringing duration, and the weight of fragmentary somnolence. He was dazzled by sleep, body adrift and forehead nodding away. An adolescent's separation, ripped from his double exile, two towns and two mothers, but in the coolness of the past, behind everything else, that unforgettable bathing scene—the pool and the naked women scattering among the boughs. No madness was able to destroy that fleeting lewdness vanishing into a pointless metaphor. Childhood was about to die.

And the search for knowledge in a bus wallowing in the gravel, thus did the paternal plan push on through the dust of books. It seems I learned, by some kind of wink, by sleight-of-body, to read in a dead man and to write for the survivors of my uprooting (my generation), cleaved unto a double language. I deny nothing, however, nothing, and welcome any stirrings that challenge me!

I left, a glorious scholarship holder, shaped in my handwriting by a teacher from the Pernod and anisette school. He taught us with furor, with slaps, even on Sunday. Thus we had in our pockets a language that was heedless of the century, a French decreed on scraps from the middle of a wandering sentence, on degradable paper, for it was the Koran we respected; there where it lay, it sang of itself within and without. Parable, proverb and good news rounded out the tetralogy of our culture.

The semi-arid plain that separates Marrakesh and El Jadida is like a representation of stones, and by instinct I simplify the staggering of the fig trees, which rose up absent mindedly at the slightest flutter of my eyelids. Normally the fig trees let the wind have at them by bending over, sticking to the ground. At that time, while it was still hot, they shrank, unraveled and tender in their drowsiness. The nonchalant gesture of the sun showed me the dry brook, first and

retrospective taste of so many memories; from that point sparrows started up, seeking their rhythm, the ravaged memories of childhood, making of my body a transparent and voluble image. In one move the landscape tilted, red earth on all sides; sinking within a color, in the same motion, as if in a tumbling trick, an allusion to the beginnings of distress—and stopping there, never moving on.

At Marrakesh you distort the minaret of the Koutoubia with the weariness of your voyage; after the palm grove, on the threshold of an exiled sun, what I had to show at the city gates was—instead of a dagger—a suitcase crammed with underwear. When I got to the school the proctor announced: Number 108, here's your bed and your chair, the rest belongs to my iron fist. Jamaa Lfna Square pulled away as our barouche outwitted the streets. The school door was open. Our trip shut down, as we reached the dining hall; I cried, stretched out at night in the orphan dormitory. Weep, my brothers, weep, pilgrims to infused knowledge! In the school's kitchen there reigned two huge kettles. The cook, fondly blood-thirsty, hovered over them as the flame increasingly stirred them. According to daily chance and various strategies that he knew how to crack, he grabbed and served with open arms. Strange anecdotes made the rounds, about his terrible merriment. He moved whatever lay before him with just the tip of his thumb: a gong, his moustache, and the plate arrived on crusade in a land of exiles. Artisan till the end, he plunged a kitchen knife into the loveliest of the housekeepers. Hoo! And a look of joy. Yes, get the infidel locusts behind you—crush, step out in a direction all your own!

~~translated by Peter Thompson

Traduttori/traduttrici:

Eric Sellin (Baudelaire) Sarangadhar Baral (Baladeva Rath)
Will Carter (Roque Dalton) Ellen Cassedy and Yermiyahu Ahron Taub (Blume Lempel)
Patricia Hartland (Raphael Confiant)
Nguyen Trang Thanh (Zhang Lian) Kimrey Batts (Santiago Vizcaíno)

An Icarian Lament

~~translated by Eric Sellin

The paramours who always make love
To whores are satiated and content;
But my arms are broken, for I was intent
On embracing the towering clouds above.
It is thanks to the stars, rivaled by none,
Flaming in the sky's remote infinity,
That my wasted eyes now only can see
Imagined versions of the sun.

I tried in vain to reach the rings
Of space's edge or its middle sky;
Under I know not what fiery eye,
I can feel the melting of my wings;
And burnt by my lust for a beauty sublime,
I can't even imagine that one day a sea
Would bear my name as its honoree
And serve as my tomb for the rest of time.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

Memory and questions

~~translated by Will Carter

Here at the University
while I listen to the rector's speech
(at every door there are grey police
contributing in the name of culture),
disgusted by the paleness, I remember
the sad peace of my poor place of birth
the sweet slowness with which one dies in my town.
My father is waiting there.
I came here to study
the architecture of justice
the anatomy of reason
to find the cure
for helplessness and perpetual thirst.
Oh night of false lights,
adornments of darkness:
to where do I run
that I may escape this soul
the soul that wanted to return an emblem
that now, transformed, begs in rags
in this temple of merchants?

ROQUE DALTON (El Salvador, 1935-75)

(Odia text) “nayane nimiše nida na rakhi...”
(Krushna to Lalita// raag-barādi)

~~translated by Sarangadhar Baral,

Allowing no wink of sleep even for a while,
I have sat pressing the ear
Onto the tinkling of your anklet,

Keeping vigil constantly on your path.
Not letting my desire fulfill,
You became the cause of my sorrow.
O tender bodied, your unkindness got revealed.
You did not yet disclose
What was the response received from her
Whose body radiantly shames gold.
Did she admit to employ me as one
Among her menials, for every moment?
Or disappointing words
She, the fresh red jawā lip, ever imparted?
Speak, do speak, O tender heart, without fear.
I will get ready
Not to live this shameless life any longer,
If the maiden's favor is not likely.
At the private corner of the kadamba,
Being busy in dances and arty plays
I was spending times so happily!
With an arrow of the unblinking eye
She pierced me for no fault yet
And uprooted my plant of wisdom.
As the moment of my departing breath arrived,
Unmindful of the disgraceful act
She took away the life from me,
All a love goddess herself, a smiling crescent moon.
This maiden of new playful arts
Is all delight to the heart of Nanda's son.
People across the entire world said:
Her skill in making the naughty maestro dance
By the river and woods of joy,
This fame was not to her taste, she flung it away.
O soft bodied, she lotus eyed got disgraced.
By making me climb
The bejeweled mansion of Amarāvati
She cut down the ladder by the lower step.
The beautiful one looks in body
More delicate than butter;
She innocent looking has a cruel mind,
Coconut breasts borne playful.
The body is not to be so, O soft bodied Lalita,
She did not know a particle of pain.
Let her disown, but I seek shelter
At her beautiful foot.
Thus says the kavisurya rāyaguru.

KaviSurya BALADEVA RATH (1789- 1845 approx.)

If He's Not Around

~~translated by Nguyen Trang Thanh

If he's not around, who'll bring me out, enjoying the windy evening
If he's not around, who's waiting for me when mist fills the alley
If he's not around, who'll pick me up after those night class,
who's shadowing me, the riverside, noon afternoon,
whispering my name
If he's not around, who'll sit next to me in the same white night
If he's not around, who's weaving the poetry line, for my cheeks flush
If he's not around, this lip's smiling for whom,
this hair kept long-ing for whom, I'll tie my dream up
But I know, when peace hasn't come to mountains and rivers
He went. For life. For tomorrow. For freedom. Dare to sacrifice.
Some nights silently listening to news from the frontline
Missing him, my hero, facing death in each centimeter
Craving minutes, my two hands find each other
to wish for an end of hatred and sorrows, you will soon be Near,
you will soon be Here.

from "Nêu Vãng Anh" of Anh Bằng (Viet Nam)

A Patch of Falling Color

~~translated by Keming Liu

You must be aware
Over in Village 39 there is a patch of falling color
You were once
bent on entering the magnificent color
as determined to follow
along the highway through your village
Out, leaving the village behind
into the twilight.
In village 39
by a large alkaline lake
tufts and tufts of purple
forming a patch of twilight.

ZHANG LIAN

The Power of a Melody

~~translated from the Yiddish by Ellen Cassedy and Yermiyahu Ahron Taub

Far, far away, in the regions of the world encased in ice, there is no marking of time. No seasons, no renewal, no withering away – only a vast, enshrouded realm where frost and snow and primeval winds go unrecorded in any chronology. There, where all paths come to an end, the footsteps of eternity make no imprint in the void.

As a refugee from the green world, I brought my own seasons with me, smuggling them across the border with the songs that lived inside me, each one rooted in its own climate, its own hues and tones, its own purpose. There were songs that flowed with summer rains and apple blossoms, bringing to life the beauty of the Sabbath and the spirit of holidays past. There were songs that gladdened my heart and songs that drove me to the brink of despair. The song of all songs was the one that had brought me to him.

I never knew the date of his death. All I remember is that it was harvest time. Rows of haystacks stretched to the horizon like golden mountains. Hemp was soaking in the river. Carts loaded with the abundance of the field hurried along the back roads toward home. The stork pair roosting on our roof had just that morning flown off with their young, leaving behind an empty nest.

Sealed railroad cars had taken my parents away, and now I lingered in the doorway, the last to leave the house. Aside from a few flies, no one was about. I took a crust of bread from my pack and spread its crumbs on the table, then opened the window facing the river. Perhaps the flies would eat their fill, then step out for a stroll on God's free earth.

Dressed in peasant clothing, I went into the woods and started up the path toward the place where we had agreed to meet. I did not look back. On one shoulder I carried a wreath of garlic, on the other a head of cabbage. Hidden in my heart I carried the map that would lead us to the Promised Land.

The sun grew warmer. Silver threads of flax floated on the breeze. Certain that no evil could occur on such a blessed day, I felt no fear. I even hummed a melody to myself, a melody of resistance, heroism, and victory. On I walked, singing my song – until I spotted his gray jacket and his red forelock hanging from a tree.

I had nothing with which to dig his grave, and so I hid him under a pile of golden-red leaves. I covered him with branches and sharp, pungent pine needles. I did not stop singing; the melody continued of its own accord. Then I left the green earth behind. I wandered over the steppes, hitched rides in horse-drawn carts and crowded railway cars, travelling across the land known as the Russian bear, until I reached the very center of the frozen heartland.

There, in my cellar home, I adorned the damp walls with summer songs and filled the empty days and nights with remembrance. In the evening when I had devoured my portion of bread and slaked my thirst with hot water, the songs suppressed within me began to sing.

Singing, I lowered myself to the floor and peered out of the little barred window that stood level with the setting sun. I sang to the sun that was giving up its light and departing for other worlds. In those moments my cellar room glowed with the sun's grace. The crimson rays penetrated my barred window, spread out, and split open like the glittering blades of a pair of shears.

Seated in the open jaws of the shears as if in a boat, I swam to the edge of heaven, where the snow burned like the coals in our fireplace back home. Overcome with longing for that cozy warmth, I flung the thin branch of that tree of infamy into the fire and kindled the ebbing melody once more. The flames leapt up, wave after wave, incinerating the white snow and the black pine forest and burying my shears of light under a mountain of ash.

I rose from my seat, shook off the ash, and began pacing back and forth in the dark, searching for a rhythm to match my song. I looked into corners, felt along walls. The creak of an empty drawer reminded me of something. I paused for a moment, pondering, then broke out in a sweat. With trembling fingers I reached into the drawer and felt around in the emptiness. Palaces of cobwebs exploded under my touch and spiders ran over me like leeches hungry for my blood. Instinctively I raised my right leg for extra leverage as I tried to free my hand. But the cold sweat dripping

from my body swelled the planks of wood and drew my arm in deeper and deeper, dragging with it my throat, my neck, my head, my powers of concentration....

I would have screamed for help, but I knew no one would hear me. I'd begun to resign myself to my fate when my fingers closed around a candle, a tallow candle inside the empty drawer.

All fear left me. Effortlessly I pulled my arm out of the drawer. I lit the candle with the spark of my melody. At that moment I knew that today was the first anniversary of his death. I felt it in the rhythm of my blood. The song that arose within me resounded with the mighty tones of "Hatikvah," the Israeli national anthem. I placed the candle in the window to light the way to where the sun had set.

For a long time I stood over the candle I'd lit in his memory. It smelled like dough fried with honey, like the hair of my beloved when he would lay his head in my lap and sing our song, the song of promise, the blessed song of good fortune.... Above us, the sheltering branches of the plum tree seemed to us like those of a cedar. We paid no mind to the black ravens on the fence. Before our eyes fluttered a swarm of white butterflies, and with our singing we gave life to the song of life.

After the candle had burned out, I saw that the phoenix had arisen from the ashes and was pointing out the road I had lost, a footpath over fire and water. The wolves in the forest had ceased their howling. I took that as a sign that day had broken.

BLUME LEMPEL (1907-1999, b. Poland, wrote in the US)

Ravines of Early Morning

The Wake

~~translated by Patricia Hartland

Death among us, for we who live on, is an opportunity for nameless carnivality.

Annaise, preapress of cadavers, comes to clean Papa Loulou's body. This helps m'man Yise to forget her gloom. With the help of Leonise and the other neighbors, she arranges the tables on the veranda and in the courtyard. She then throws herself into the kitchen to prepare the feast. Hermann kills four roosters, some well-fattened rabbits, then transports a great many heavy cases of rum and Lorraine beer. Then, he sets a game of checkers and dice on each of the tables. The four well-to-do families of the Macedoine quarter come very early. They are—for the most part—mulattoes, dressed in sombre suits and ties. They have arrived to pay m'man Yise the homage she is due. These creatures, a full of scale of sharps and flats, approach the edge of the bed where Papa Loulou lies. Each dips a sprig of parsley into a jug of holy water placed on a chair. Each sprinkles the body three times. Later the lowblacks come then the coulies, descendants of the Indian migrant workers. Their hair, so dark and lustrous. Then Assad comes, the Syrian from Grand-Anse, whose tarpaulin-covered pick-up truck is, for us scampy kids, an absolute treasure.

They forbid us to see Papa Loulou. Aunt Emerante, priestly in her white robe, mounts an insurmountable guard at the Death Room entrance. When we try to sidle around the vigil keepers' legs, she catches us immediately and drags us all back by the ears. Myrtha, the youngest among us, cries, prostrate on a straw chair. Roland runs his fingers over his stash of agate stones, which have proven useless. You are still in a state of shock, having heard the death-cry of the Cohé-bird, when a heady odor—neither disagreeable nor pleasing—an odor, perhaps, of

magnolia flowers that had fallen into a pit of manure and had begun to decompose, seizes you at the throat.

The odor of death!

It is neither the mildly troubling fragrance of incense, nor the chrysanthemum excitement of the perfumes. Nor is it the disinfectant Leonise has employed to scour the room. Nor m'man Yise's cologne. It is truly and unmistakably Death Scent. You have never spoken of this to anyone, but it sometimes resurfaces, even today. As if at the end of a road or corridor, you feel it collide with your nostrils. In a single blow Death Scent interrupts your thoughts, forces you to hasten your footsteps.

Aren't the most enduring memories those forged by the sense of smell?

M'man Yise calls you to the kitchen to help her polish the crystal, used only when she expects a visit from the rich békés (whom we call Grands Blancs). DeValminier, the horse fool, is already there but he is more of a guava béké, the poorest of that lot. He is so truly destitute, the poor devil, that we hear through the grape-vine that his pockets are a godsend to currents of air. In all simplicity he sits at a table with one of the mulatto families. in a corner of the veranda. He is already bragging about his four-legged passion. His interlocutors—school teachers, store keepers, land surveyors, nurses—listen politely, mildly interested in his equestrian vaunt. DeValminier is, in effect, working as groom to the rich békés DeCassagnac, located in Moulin l'Etang. The latter makes a brief appearance, without even stepping onto the veranda, probably judging that the number of blackmen there is too great to venture any further.

The sugar-cane harvesters slap domino pieces onto the wood of the tables. With every slap, a joyous eruption follows. Leonise serves them an endless supply of tafia rum and an endless supply of lewd gestures, which she deals out to each audacious hand and puppy whimper. Milo, one of our buddies, sits astride a tanbou bèlè drum. Beating it softly, his eyes half-closed, he waits for the right rhythm to possess his fingers. Sonson, the leader of all us Macedoine rascals, organizes a game of hide-and-seek between the tables, and you're recruited straightaway. At about nine o'clock in the evening maitre Honorien rises to his full height. This motion spreads a blanket of silence over the funeral wake. He removes his straw bakoua hat and takes a bow of deference toward the Death room, where Papa Loulou is reposed. He declares:

"Ladies and gentlemen of the company, let us honor and respect the man Louis Augustin, who Death has crossed-out without asking his permission to do so."

"Yeeee-Krak!"

"Death is a country without bounds, ladies and gentlemen, and this country starts in the midst of ourselves. Krik!"

"Krak!" The funeral-goers ritually respond.

"Devinette?"

"Bois-sec!" They consent to the challenge.

"We left Paris to go to Marseille. We were two fathers and two sons. How many people does that make?"

"Three!" Gerard contributes. "One father, one son, and the son of the latter."

"Devinette?" The story-teller starts again, his eyes glassed-over by the drunkenness of his own speech.

"Bois-sec!"

"I work when I am big, I die when I am small?"

"A candle!" A banana hauler yells triumphantly.

Then maitre Honorien places himself between the veranda and the courtyard and asks:

“Sister Emerante, are you ready?”

“Yes, my dear.”

Gentlemen, I need three men minus one of them to help carry brother Loulou among us. Those of you who feel valiant raise your hand.”

Ten, twenty hands lift up at once but only Sonson’s father, the farrier and Hermann are selected.

They follow the story-teller into Death’s room, where an eruption flows out: Aunt Emerante, m’man Yise, and several sisters burst into sobbing. The men delicately raise the cadaver. They place balls of cotton into his ears and in his backside, set him on his rocking-chair, and carry him outside. They light bamboo torches that hang from the rafters of the shop. One-by-one, the vigil members grasp Grandpa’s hand, telling him their last good-byes.

“Old pig, you stole my virginity when I was hardly twelve,” an old bird from Fond-Massacre laughingly says. “Now, your little baton is going to rot in the ground, ha! Ha! Ha! Eh, Loulou? The sugar of your stick will be a dessert for the dirt!”

The mourners burst with laughter and obscene allusions to the lady’s virtue. One devil, so black that he seems painted with blue, stutters with monkey-like movements”

“Scuse me, m-m-mister Loulou, I owed you a c-c-couple hundred bucks and I was about to pay you back, boss... I swear on my godmother’s head, I was going to pay you b-b-back but what can ya’ do now, huh? Ha! Ha! Ha! Here, ten bucks, I’m putting them in your pocket. It’s a deposit, I’ll give ya’ the rest when the G-g-goodlord decides to reunite us underg-g-ground, OK?”

Everyone roars with laughter. You approach the body made stiff by death and an unbearable trembling seizes you. You are unable to tear your eyes from his arms, once so strong, now hanging pathetically from the rocking-chair’s sides. Master Honorien carefully opens Papa Loulou’s mouth and whispers an inaudible speech into its interior. Then he takes a bottle of tafia, and pours a few drops onto the ground, saying, “Ago le-mo!” (Respect for you, oh Death, oh Dead!). He opens the cadaver’s jaws even further and, before the eyes of those assembled, pours into him a great gulp of the amber liquid.

He solemn-tone whispers, “bwe, mon boug, anba late pa ni plezi, non!”. (Drink, old friend, for under the earth there is no pleasure!).

And while the farrier and Hermann return the body to its room, the story-teller begins his speech anew.

Around the veranda the night becomes darker. It carries a heavier weight on its shoulders. Night is menacing, the source of all evils, an unfathomable lair that hardly respects the gleam of bamboo torches. Until early morning Honorien embarks upon a parade of stories, parade of events. You exhaust yourself trying to follow him, but retain only the cadence of his words, the untamed lightning of his speech.

Later, you overhear an insignificant conversation between two of Papa Loulou’s old zigs, buddies. You learn that no other story-tellers dared to challenge master Honorien for fear of being ridiculed. They do not want the old mulatto to carry a displeasing image of their persons to the Great Beyond. As it is, that night our world’s Master Orator carried his art of weaving dreams and taming death to the utmost limits.

RAPHAEL CONFIANT

Song for My Son [entire version in Archive]
(poem at the brink of pathos)

~~translated by Kimrey Batts

I

I see you now and you are an echo in still water,
your unformed face is the perfect silhouette
of the river of memory that will come,
now that I am the one guilty of your sex
and I am bursting with the desire to touch you,
I also say to myself:
your life will not be the pain that left me adrift in filthy bars
while the night guzzled the sun like dregs from the cup of the vanquished.
You will not taste the early wretchedness of a chauvinistic father and his complexes,
you will not feel asphyxiation in the well of poverty,
you will not be struck by anyone or anything, save by amazement,
no one will oblige you to be the best, nor will you see your home weep,
because I penetrated your mother and I wished for the breath of your life.

II

One day I will see you asleep and your black eyelashes will brush my forehead.
Your mother's womb is for now an enormous, silent valley,
a bottomless nest.
Out here, just violence,
just millions of minds wracked with anguish.
What do I have to offer you besides the chance to live on the margin,
a kiss made flesh,
the clairvoyance of a world that is not quite animal.
This is what I should give to you:
the small virtue of loving that which cannot be seen
and which can just, barely, be named.

III

What is it that am I, little one?
The molten sheath of language, perchance?
The aspiration of the obituary?
The crime of the unspeakable?
If the ephemeral sets its paws upon the table
and we take our seats to eat dirty flies,
of what joy do we speak,
of what hypocritical smile do these words boast.
I only mean, ruminative little creature,
that the whole is merely an impression,
the blurred trail of a secret.
Ah, because secrets, my love,
carry them with you to your grave,
as the secret you will come to understand,
when you learn to read between lines.

IV

Your limbs grow, and your heart, and the cries of your mother.
And the offerings of flowers and the rain from your warm cerebrum.

Everything is pleasure and fear.
The street dogs also shiver with cold.
I hide under the wooden mantle like a rat.
This which I am, the uterus of tenderness,
ends silently in-between the scream of a nightmare
to which you are not invited.
And the night already goes about, runs up against the abyss.
The shadows have become accustomed to designating a body that is not his.

V

Your father is a flame: he whistles burning flowers.
Sometimes, at midday,
he falls into a deeply apathetic sleep to dream that he is an insect,
trapped in the enormous web of language.
He makes this place his habitat,
but his life hangs upon a thread.
Your father was born wizened,
fed on muddy ditch water,
filled, like a parasite, with the hunger of the night,
but he also understood that the day was squandered
between the canopies of the trees,
among vagabond riff-raff,
in the field of a concept that vanishes like a ring,
in the slumber of an unborn child.
Your father is not a flame, he is an insect.

VI

You are the tiny exhibit of our delirium.
Your mother knits the tomb of her past.
I unravel the past and create a mausoleum.
But you, you overcome,
you hear me beneath your blanket of water and I imagine you laughing,
because this is a another joke played by a mad god.
Don't call me father, my son.
Don't give me an authority created by my own ineptitude.
Don't say, I don't want to live in your world of black sands.
Don't speak of a tender embrace on a rainy night,
Don't name me as the heartbeat of sustenance.
Say to me: brother, I cry because I am cold.

VII

I am alone, my son.
Alone is not a word, it is a crust of bread.
When your cries sully the air,
I will no longer be alone.
Now there is a woman giving birth.
A woman I loved.
I am alone, my son.
Alone is a drop of water on burnt flesh,

alone is a crazed woman screaming in a eucalyptus forest,
alone is the ocean seen from a cliff,
alone is a countenance sowed in the sand,
alone is the delirium of this beggar who speaks.
He says: a woman I loved, a woman I loved...
And his word spills on the sofa like a river of saliva.

VIII

Home is a spiral of smoke,
home is an baby pouch where horror nests.
Come see me, my son, this is my home filled with ghosts.

SANTIAGO VIZCAINO