

word for word

parola per parola

palavra por palavra

wort für wort

palabra por palabra

mot pour mot

2021

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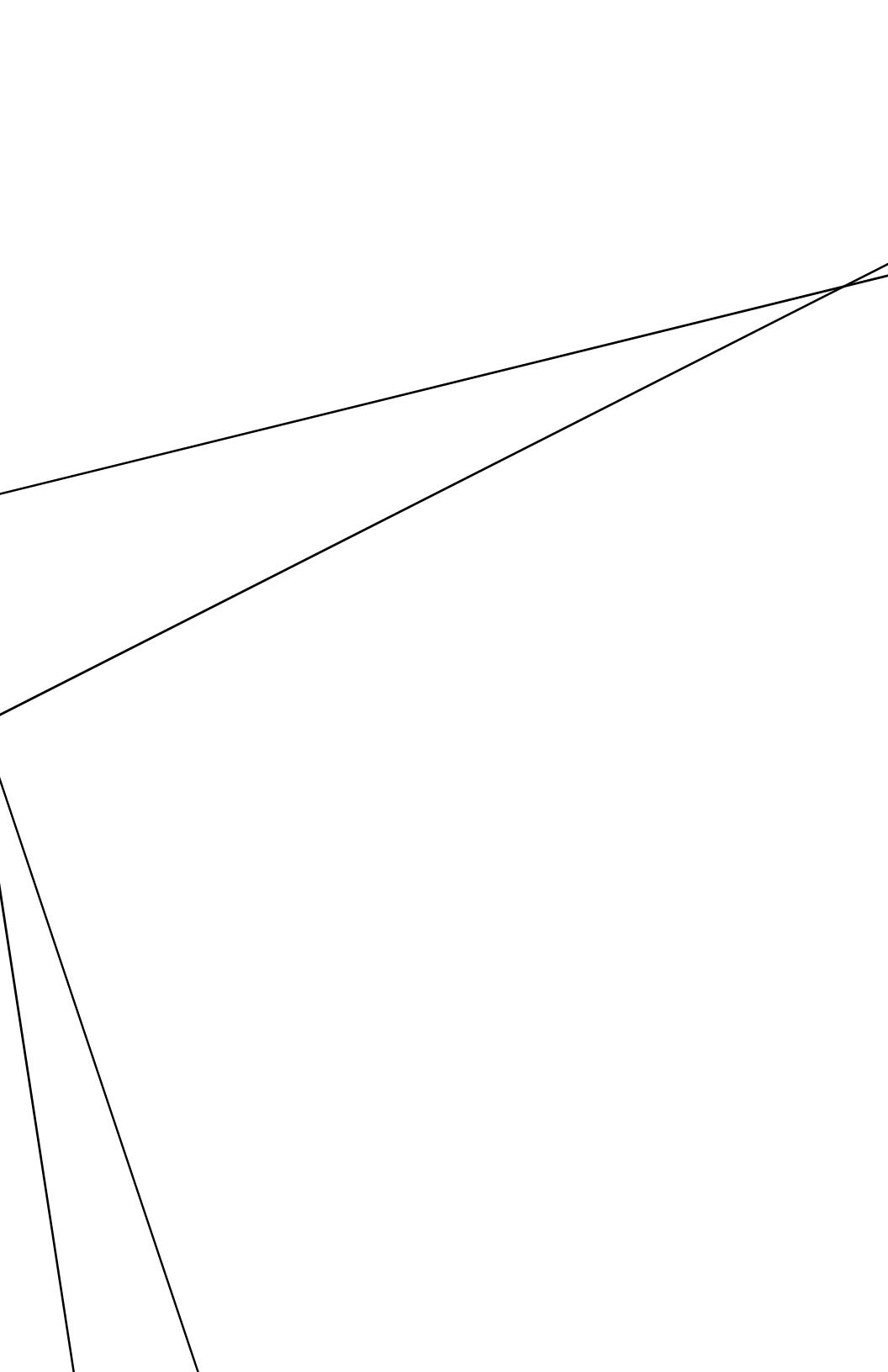


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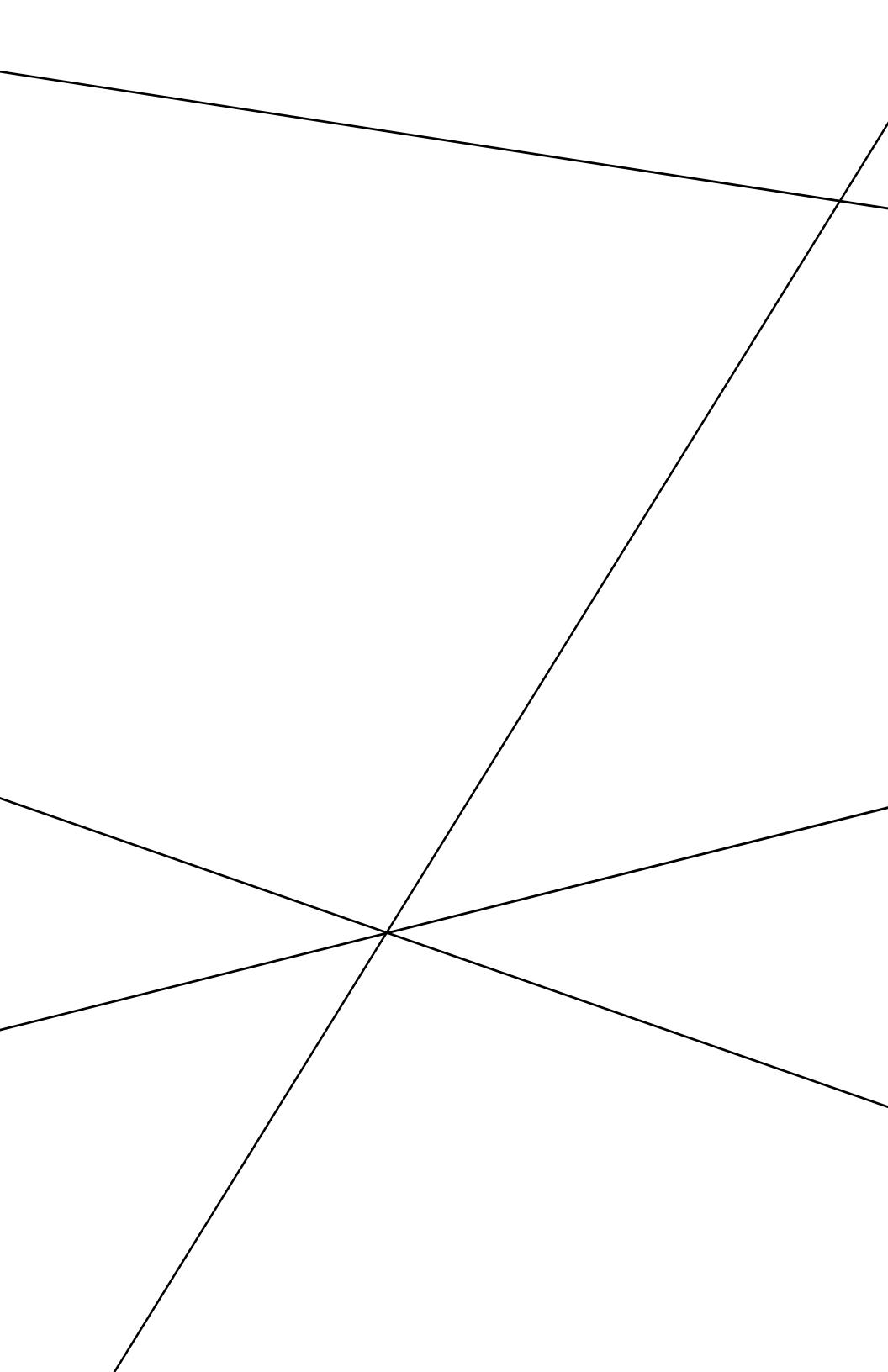
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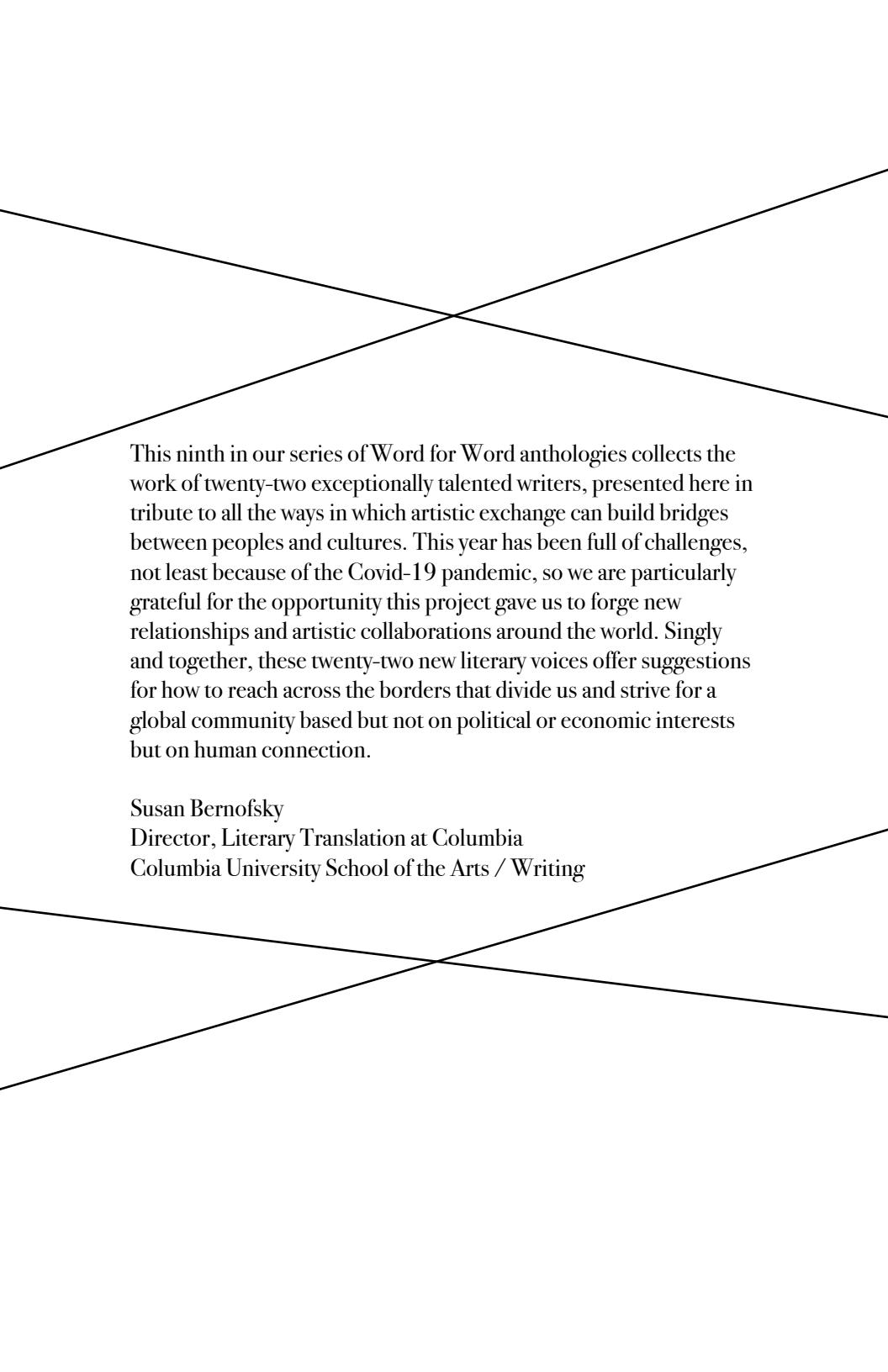
foreword

Word for Word is an exchange program that was conceived in 2011 by Professor Binnie Kirshenbaum, then Chair of the Writing Program in Columbia University’s School of the Arts. The exchange was created in the belief that when writers engage in the art of literary translation, collaborating on translations of each other’s work, the experience will broaden and enrich their linguistic imaginations.

Since 2011, the Writing Program has conducted travel-based exchanges in partnership with the Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig in Leipzig, Germany; Scuola Holden in Turin, Italy; the Institut Ramon Llull and Universitat Pompeu FabraIDEC in Barcelona, Catalonia (Spain); the Columbia Global Center | Middle East in Amman, Jordan; Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C.; and the University of the Arts Helsinki in Helsinki, Finland.

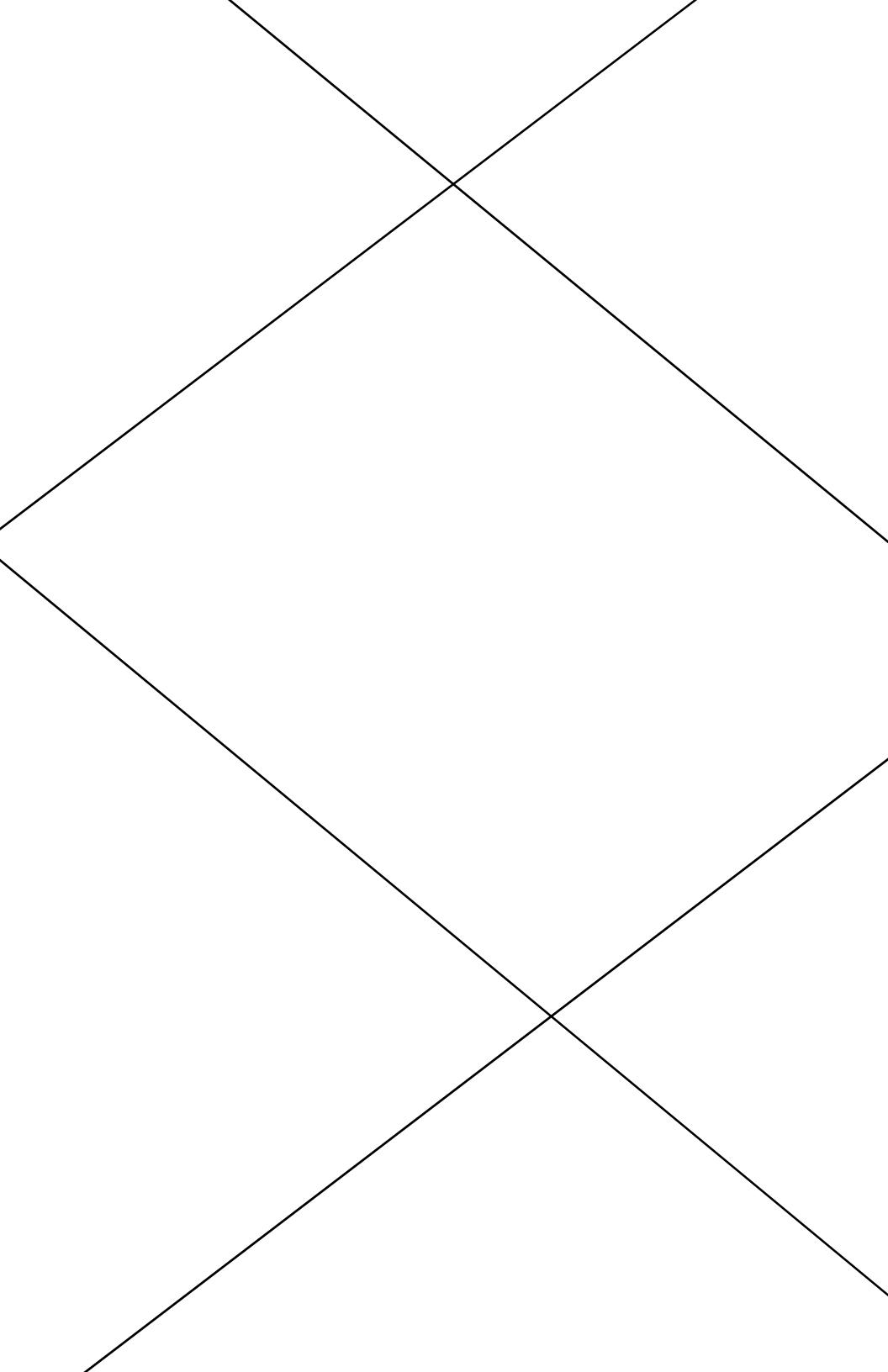
In 2016, the Word for Word program expanded to include a collaborative translation workshop that pairs Writing Program students with partners at two of these same institutions—the Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig and Scuola Holden—as well as new ones: Université Paris 8 in Paris, France; Universidad Diego Portales in Santiago, Chile; and the Instituto Vera Cruz in São Paulo, Brazil. These workshop-based partnerships offer participants the chance to expand their horizons even without travel via personal and literary exchange and collaboration, establishing a new model for cross-cultural engagement.

The present volume offers selections from the works (originals and translations) written by members of the Spring 2021 Word for Word Workshop in the Columbia School of the Arts and their French-, Italian, and Spanish-language partners in Paris, Turin, and Santiago.



This ninth in our series of Word for Word anthologies collects the work of twenty-two exceptionally talented writers, presented here in tribute to all the ways in which artistic exchange can build bridges between peoples and cultures. This year has been full of challenges, not least because of the Covid-19 pandemic, so we are particularly grateful for the opportunity this project gave us to forge new relationships and artistic collaborations around the world. Singly and together, these twenty-two new literary voices offer suggestions for how to reach across the borders that divide us and strive for a global community based but not on political or economic interests but on human connection.

Susan Bernofsky
Director, Literary Translation at Columbia
Columbia University School of the Arts / Writing



word for word / mot pour mot
Columbia University School of the Arts
Université Paris 8

Translator's Note

La poésie d'Heather Gluck est sensible au monde qui l'entoure d'une façon évanescante. Les choses sont évoquées par des images, comme pour les approcher d'une manière qui ne les heurteraient pas. Les images ainsi que les métaphores mobilisées dans la poésie d'Heather Gluck sont comme une vitre de protection entre l'auteure et le monde, vitre qui voudrait dire par exemple, ne me touchez pas. Par la même occasion ces vitres donnent à voir sous différentes teintes et personnages, allant du cow-boy à la femme victorienne, de rares aperçus de l'auteure. Des sujets reviennent à plusieurs reprises et témoignent d'un rapport au réel : l'état de la lumière, l'alternance entre l'immobilité et le mouvement, le monologue intérieur, le souci des choses qui s'effondrent (qu'est-ce qui s'effondre, et comment), thèmes qui rappellent parfois la poésie de Sylvia Plath et de Virginia Woolf.

La poésie d'Heather Gluck, à travers des formes d'écritures variées : persona, vignettes, calligrammes, réussit à parler par le vague, à cette capacité à décrire par le vague, par des allusions, ou des détails glanés.

Un souvenir fait d'un nom mentionné, un titre d'une œuvre précisé, sont autant de procédés qui font qu'on sait tout de suite de quoi il est question, et ce grâce au travail du pouvoir de l'évocation qui est à l'œuvre dans l'écriture.

Dans le même temps, on admirera le travail de l'intensité, la fougue que l'auteure fait sentir au moyen d'un cow-boy, la mort à ses trousses, criant de bonheur face à la liberté trouvée dans la fuite (Un homme mort).

Ce faisant, la poésie est à la fois vague et fine, c'est un

vague qui ne se cache pas, qui permet aux lecteurs d'Heather Gluck de recevoir toutes les évocations mobilisées dans l'écriture, et d'avoir accès aux images évanescentes désirées.

Parfois, un dépôt d'algues se met à flotter au-dessus, et le lecteur emmené par le texte, se met à flotter au-dessus des évocations, et commence, lui aussi, à observer l'état de la lumière et des choses qui s'effondrent.

HEATHER GLUCK

POEMS

Dead Man

johnny i'm only listening to american iii: solitary man.
it makes me think im out at black midnight:

no moon, no stars, but then how are my leather boots
shining white, and what is it passing through the drops
on this ice plain that makes them gleam like little
weapons.

they cup my ass and my denim soaks through to the
muscle,

but i'm wearing chaps and this is not gonna be how they
take me,

no matter how soft that noose
or how sweet that hangman's kiss.

i'd sooner ride my own brown horse down and force her
knees,

she's a-bucklin' and i holler out a scream because it's
good

to let the air taste your stomach and bite back the acid
and know

you're the alien, and you've got the goo.
now ooze on over the plain.
you're sure to rise again.

that was a madcap time johnny but it had no sex.

**traduit de l'anglais par
LÉANA DARMON**

POÈMES

Un homme mort

johnny je ne fais qu'écouter american iii : solitary man
j'ai l'impression que je sors dans la nuit noire :
pas de lune, pas d'étoiles, alors comment mes bottes en
cuir peuvent-elles
briller autant , et qu'est-ce qui traverse ces gouttes
sur la plaine glacée ça les fait luire comme des petites
armes.
elles moulent mes fesses et mon jean est trempé jusqu'au
muscle
j'ai mes chaps ce n'est pas comme ça qu'ils
m'attraperont,
peu importe à quel point le noeud coule
peu importe la douceur de l'étreinte du bourreau.
je serai déjà sur ma jument brune et je la ferai cravacher,
voilà qu'elle se rue moi je fais sortir un cri parce que ça
fait du bien
de laisser l'air sentir l'estomac et râvaler l'acidité
et savoir
que c'est toi l'extraterrestre, c'est toi qui est visqueux.
Maintenant écoule-toi dans la plaine.
Tu renaîtras forcément.

c'était un temps fou johnny mais il n'y avait pas de sexe.

nor no truth, it was just beers and breakfast beers
which are suckin' juice from moldy fruits.
my fingerpads never dug into dry dirt road
never gripped a picket line
never entered a woman in lowlight lovin.
i did comb her hair and o
what tenderness there
but i could not testify it.

johnny how could i tell you
my spurs kick up lost breeze and red morning dawns
they pour like cement under me.
i said i'm the thing from the sky that beams the cows
but i've never dunked in the warm slop, the blood of life.

i used to think the knotted hair at the nape of my neck
would roll me onward like a great green life
a kindling that chars up the grass
and burns up the air
i used to think it was the hot sun
that had the power to train my mind
toward a life like a spark plug.

when i brushed my hair with the boar bristles
it fell flat and braided like the wires of a cattle prod.

ni aucune vérité, c'était juste des bières puis encore des bières au réveil
elles sucent le jus des fruits moisissus.
mes doigts n'ont jamais creusé la terre sèche et sale de la route
n'ont jamais tenu de piquet de grève
ne sont jamais entrés dans une femme pendant une nuit d'amour tamisée
j'ai peigné ses cheveux et—
comme c'était tendre de le faire
mais je ne pouvais pas le prouver.

johnny comment pourrais-je te dire
mes éperons font voler une brise perdue et les matins rouges de l'aube
ils font couler une sorte de ciment sous moi.
j'ai dit je suis de cette chose dans le ciel qui téléporte les vaches
mais je n'ai jamais plongé dans la bouillie chaude, le sang de la vie.
moi je croyais que les cheveux emmêlés dans ma nuque m'emporteraient vers une vie plus vaste de vallées vertes un départ de feu qui fait brûler l'herbe et qui fait flamber l'air

moi je croyais que c'était la chaleur du soleil qui pouvait entraîner mes idées vers une vie comme une bougie d'allumage.

quand je me coiffais avec la brosse à poils de sanglier ça faisait plat et tressé comme la tige d'un aiguillon.

you could jolt me get me going
with that shrieking pain
freak my heart make me broil in the plains forever
but no man can find me and no man did ever take from
me
what i didn't leave scattered
and burning up behind me.

**tu pouvais me secouer me donner un coup de jus
avec ces hurlements de douleur
me faire flipper me faire griller dans les plaines pour
toujours
mais nul homme ne peut me trouver et nul homme n'a
pris
ce que je n'ai pas laissé traîner
pour le brûler derrière moi.**

Toy Vignettes

I

Koala plush in underwear,
flat gray thing with big hard eyes
and big soft ears,
I yanked on your little briefs
til the seams that tied them
to your middle broke.

Oh, to be sewn into your clothes!

Laying on a finished puzzle—Gustav Klimt's “The Kiss”—soft gray thing against gold lovers,
whose eyes are closed in glittering embrace. Yours

stay open, to see.

Vignettes: jouets

I

Un koala en peluche en sous-vêtement
une chose grise et plate avec des grands yeux durs
et des grandes oreilles douces
J'ai tiré sur ton slip jusqu'à ce que les coutures
qui retenaient le slip à toi se cassent

D'être cousue dans tes habits...!

Allongée sur un puzzle terminé : *Le baiser* de Gustav Klimt
La chose grise et plate posée sur les amoureux en or,
dont les yeux sont fermés dans une étreinte brillante.

Les tiens restent ouverts, pour voir.

II

Bad little man with hard, moving joints and luscious
rubber cape,
Mysterio, your dark helmet
is your head!
I can pull it off, and look
at the nub of your neck.

Your foot rescued by agile fingers
groping in the corners
of the puppy's mouth.

You're the first of your kind,
the set of five villains,
to fall from a hand into the kitchen
trash can.

Later fished out for autopsy,
to make sure he ate no more of you.

II

Un méchant petit homme
avec des articulations dures qui peuvent bouger
et une somptueuse cape en caoutchouc,
Mysterio, ton casque foncé c'est ta tête !

Je peux l'enlever, et regarder la bosse sur ton cou.

Ton pied rattrapé par des doigts adroits
tâtonnant dans les coins de la bouche du chien.

Tu es le premier de ton genre,
parmi les cinq autres méchants,
à tomber d'une main vers la poubelle de la cuisine.

Repêché plus tard pour une autopsie,
pour être sur qu'il n'a pas mangé d'autre parties de toi.

III

Maggie Doll, a duck
named after Maggie,
whose last name I don't know.

She had a blonde bob and silver stud in her nose.

You, fat yellow duck,
sit upright,
tuft of hair slightly stiff
from being vomited on.

The sheath of plastic glued to your
stomach holds a picture
of Maggie and me.

I sleep with you each night
and never know
if it bothers my mother how much
I love her.

III

La poupée Maggie, un canard,
nommé d'après Maggie,
dont je ne sais plus le nom de famille.
Elle avait un carré blond et un piercing argenté au nez.

Toi le gros canard jaune,
assis bien droit,
une touffe de cheveux un peu dure
à force qu'on ait vomi dessus

La poche en plastique attachée à ton
ventre tient une photo
de Maggie et moi.

Je dors avec toi chaque nuit
sans savoir
si ça dérange ma mère
l'amour que je lui porte.

IV

Barbie with a haircut,
my sister at fifteen
shaves the back of your head
to thin your hair.
She presents you to music.
You roll out of the bathroom in the convertible and
look the same.

Your best friend's detachable pregnancy belly
has a baby that curls inside.

The twelve of you live together,
sing silently, make love.

In the stillness of your smiling faces life
flares through.

IV

Barbie avec une nouvelle coupe,
ma sœur à quinze ans
rase l'arrière de ta tête
pour que tu aies moins de cheveux.
Elle t'introduis à la musique.
Tu sors de la salle de bain en cabriolet
tu as l'air pareil qu'avant.

Le ventre à grossesse amovible de ta meilleure amie
a un bébé qui se tortille en lui.

Vous vivez toutes les douze ensemble,
vous chantez en silence, vous faites l'amour.

Vos visages qui sourient, immobiles,
la vie passe au travers.

Algae

Strange things

pull and sway down here

Gather pulp
in wide teeth

Hold for pressure
drop

Listen, echo

Algae blooms and decays.

Glory.

It takes the oxygen,

kills the fish.

Look
it is so blue.

Open mouth,
drink,
let light fall through

Algues

Choses bizarres

tirent et se balancent par là

Ramasse la pulpe
avec des dents larges

Serre pour augmenter la pression
lâche

Écoute, l'écho

Les algues brillent et se décomposent.

Splendeur. Ça prend tout l'oxygène,
tue les poissons.

Regarde
c'est si bleu.

Bouche ouverte,
bois,
laisse passer la lumière

to the bottom.

Rise.

Fistful of sponge
ripped from the floor.

It eats,
sits decaying, alive
in a hand.

A soft, collapsing
Mountain range,

unsentimental.

fais la tomber jusqu'en bas.

S'élever.

une poignée d'éponges
déchirées du sol.

Ça mange,
s'assoit décomposition vivante
dans une main.

Une chaîne de montagne
douce, qui s'effondre
indifférente.

The World of the Well

Where is my sweet rat,
Who I had befriended?
The work of your upkeep was
Disintegrating.
Your long tooth pierced my skin—
Sharp pain
That dulled and diffused
After you unhooked
your pinky maw
The ridge of your fang was
Inside me.

Rabies rolled warm and
Seductive.
I flushed to feel a loving fever
Hold me under.
Lying abed for days, pearly
Porcelain weakness.
Fear of fluids, which
Purify spasms in the throat.
Hours painting gothic portraits
Of me holding you.

Now I'm forced to
Touch the soft and coarsened
Faces of the townsfolk.
I must hold a spoon
To a pair of withered lips, shakily parted.

Le monde du bien

Où est mon gentil rat avec qui j'étais devenue amie ?

S'occuper de toi me détruisait

De toutes parts

Ta longue dent a transpercé ma peau –

Douleur aiguë

qui diminua et se répandit

Quand tu as desserré

ta gueule rosée

La marque de tes crocs était

en moi.

Avoir la rage me sembla attrayant et

Réconfortant

J'ai rougi afin de sentir une fièvre d'amour

m'enserrer.

M'allonger des jours durant, nacrée

comme une faiblesse en porcelaine.

Peur des fluides qui

soignent les spasmes de la poitrine.

Des heures passées à peindre des portraits gothiques

où je te serre dans mes bras.

Maintenant je suis forcée de

toucher les visages doux et grossiers des gens de la ville.

Je dois porter une cuillère à la bouche de lèvres fanées,
entrouvertes et tremblantes.

Eyes might shine to me in kindness
And love, a spinning in my chest
Would hold me there, with them,
With a smile, forever.

I worry

That the people call to me in rageful need
And can be heard
If I lift my gramophone needle.

I do not think
(When it is not time for your bath)

Of the whole safety
Of your sadist eye
But the dull smoothness
Of an empty tub
And my unbroken flesh
Strong arm which clenches
Air, and paints itself
Raw. I listen at night for
Your scratching on the wood...

Only because I am petrified
Of the ethics beyond my clammy sickbed.
The honesty of your bite
Is nothing to the thrashing oceans
Of power
I would outrun,
The deserts of
Retribution
That would swallow me,

Des yeux pourraient m'adresser des signes de gentillesse,
Et l'amour, un tourbillon dans mon cœur me tiendrait là,
avec eux,

Souriante, pour toujours.

J'ai peur

Que l'on m'appelle furieusement à l'aide
et que je puisse l'entendre
si je soulève l'aiguille du gramophone.

Je ne pense pas
(quand ce n'est pas l'heure de ton bain)

À la sécurité totale
de ton œil sadique
Mais la surface lisse et terne
d'une baignoire vide
Et ma chair intacte
Des bras forts qui serrent
l'air et se peignent
À vif. Je guette la nuit
le bruit de tes griffes sur le bois...

Seulement car je suis terrifiée
par la morale qui se cache au-delà de mon lit moite de
malade.

L'honnêteté de ta morsure
n'est rien comparée au saccage des océans
De pouvoir
Je me tiendrais loin
Des déserts
Du châtiment
Qui m'avaleraien,

The soaking sands
Of ripened action
Sinking and sprouting onward,
The decisions of a world
Collapsing
Like days
At my knees.
And I cannot be made
To stir from your cage
And crawl
To the street.

Le sable mouillé
De l'action prête à être accomplie
qui se noie puis refait surface,
Les décisions d'un monde
qui s'effondre
Comme les jours
À mes pieds.
On ne peut pas
faire un seul geste en dehors de ta cage
et ramper
vers la rue.

Translator's Note

Léana Darmon's poetry is invested in the mundane—the simple repetitions of life and the wonder they hold. The difficulty of translating Léana's work is in trying to recreate its effortlessness. The poems move from depth to lightness, from the day-to-day to the defamiliarized, from tongue-in-cheek to sincere, as easily as shifting your weight from foot to foot. The subtlety of tone is what makes these lines stick in your mind. "Holding on by a thread, everything doesn't hold." The words hint at a greater understanding of the world, but turn away coyly before the big reveal.

The titles of Léana's pieces reflect the sites of their composition. This is not merely a stylistic choice, but an indication of the themes at play in her work. The poems take place in airports, train stations, and car rides, where our speaker seems to be perfectly still, as life, incomprehensible, rushes around her. Cars are whales, she "updates her face" to talk to strangers, jellyfish are as big as stop signs, but not as octagonal. Léana uses her own coded language of machine and nature to play with the feeling of existing in private and public space. The final poem of her series is a decided shift from the form: it is a homecoming. After all the wandering, and the nameless places—"Terminal 1," "Station 7"—the poet returns to her childhood town of Saint-Germain-lès-Corbeil, a city so small and meaningless that the speaker dubs it only "Saint-Germain-not-gonna-say-your-name." At the end of the wandering, the poet finally seems to reject sentiment, home, and even place, altogether.

Léana's focus on location and travel reminds us of the motions of life: the rhythmic onward, the stop and start, the way everything continues, and how we bear witness to it. Léana's poems are works of observation.

They ride in the passenger seat of life. They look out the window and around the car at the other travellers, and discover something to bring back to themselves. They remark, with a resigned surprise, “nothing to see there is / nothing to see / in contemplations.”

LÉANA DARMON

POÈMES

Aérogare 1

Il y a des grues et des avions mélangés le ciel est simple
les engins on ne sait jamais qui les pilote
les éoliennes touillent le ciel
on ne sait jamais qui les pivote

Je suis dérangée dans les gens qui attendent
pour me donner de la contenance je vais attendre aussi

Le sol est lisse c'est pratique ça glisserait bien
si l'on avait à y glisser
on se déplace comme on peut, on n'a pas à y glisser

Roissyville 15h30
ils ont appelé les villes ville et les avions avion c'est
pratique ça explique bien
Casablanca A320 embarquement porte F
des fois on se perd à s'y ronger les ongles

Je ne parviens pas à m'asseoir les chaises
c'est partout pareil installée dans un fauteuil à 120 degrés
c'est un angle trop obtu pour être confortable
c'est une inclinaison de fauteuil qui ne permet pas de

**translated from the french by
HEATHER GLUCK**

POEMS

Terminal 1

Cranes and planes muddled together the sky is simple
engines, you never know who works them
wind turbines stir the sky
you never know who turns them

I'm annoyed inside people who wait
for me to compose myself I'll wait too

The floor is slick that's useful, that
would be slippery
if we were to slip on it
we move how we can, we don't have to slip there

Roissyville 3:30pm
they called cities city and planes plane that's useful,
that
really explains Casablanca A320 boarding gate F
sometimes we lose ourselves biting our nails

I can't sit down the chairs
are the same everywhere set at 120 degrees
that's too obtuse an angle to be comfortable

s'asseoir

Assise dans un fauteuil à plafond
rien à voir il n'y a
rien à voir dans les contemplations

that's a position you can't sit in

Sitting face-up at the ceiling
nothing to see there is
nothing to see in contemplations

Aérogare 6

Regarde moi comme un avion (un avion qui va pour atterrir !)
viens me chercher à la porte d'embarquement s'il te plaît
tiens-toi à une rampe : Zone d'accès 2 à 4

Il y a des voitures sur le tarmac à rendre jaloux les cétacées
parce que ce sont de larges machines plates !

Je les regarde derrière la vitre qui est là
je fais toc-toc deux fois rien ne bouge

Les baleines sont des voitures aussi
elles ne se tiennent qu'à un fil : le parcours des valises
est-ce que tout va tenir en une seule fois ?

Le rattrape-valise permet de récupérer sa valise après un laps de temps invisible
allez savoir ce que les panneaux indiquent

Terminal 6

Think of me as a plane (a plane that's going to take off!) see me at the boarding gate please hold onto the handrail: Gates 2-4

There are cars on the tarmac that would make cetaceans jealous
because they're large flat machines!

I look at them behind the window that's there
I tap-tap twice nothing moves

Whales are cars too
they're holding on by a thread: the baggage journey will they all hold together?

The bag catch-all lets you collect your bags after an invisible period who knows what the signs say

Chez moi 2

Je vais leur dire bien-sûr
et que je me déplace
je vais où tout est impossible

Chez moi 3

Trouve des murs de substitution
trouve comment s'asseoir par terre

Je m'intéresse au lyophilisé dans l'absolu
ne tient qu'à un fil, effectivement, tout ne tient pas

Je ne sais pas pourquoi les valises se suivent mais au
moins je ne les suis pas

At Home 2

I'll tell them of course
and that I'm moving
I'm going where everything
is impossible

At Home 3

Find replacement walls
find a way to sit on the ground

I like freeze-drying in the absolute
holding on by a thread, in essence
everything doesn't hold

I don't know why suitcases follow one each other but at
least I don't follow them

Route 1

Je ne me suis pas arrêtée à la plage, j'ai eu peur de
doubler alors j'ai ralenti
présence fréquente de sable sur la chaussée, effectivement
il y en avait

J'ai eu envie de m'arrêter sur le bas côté, là où c'était
beau comme un désert
mais quand même avec des arbres

Je ne me suis pas arrêtée j'ai continué tout droit (c'était
fléché tout droit)
j'ai quand même imaginé que je m'arrêtai

Ride 1

I didn't stop at the beach, I was scared to pass anyone so
I slowed down attention drifting sand,
essentially there was some

I felt like stopping on the low side, where it's beautiful
like
a desert but with trees at least

I didn't stop I kept going straight (it was straight
as a sign post)
I imagined I was stopping anyway

Gare 3

Les gens sont mal élevés parce qu'ils se doublent dans la file du taxi
envisage : je met le visage à jour, je propose un sourire
es gestes sont mal élevés je ne sais pas lequel choisir

La politesse bavarde des inconnus m'échappe
on ferait bien mieux de ne rien se dire sauf peut-être

Gare 7

Il pleut je le sais, effectivement je rate le train
le train s'en va je n'ai rien à faire du train s'en va
on n'appelle pas un train un train sans y penser à l'avance
il paraît que l'herbe pousse et je la crois

Voie 4 éloignez-vous de la bordure du quai
ce train ne prend pas de voyageurs et je le crois
j'oublie mon numéro de voiture rapidement

Station 3

People have no manners they pass each other in
the taxi line imagine:
I update my face, I suggest a smile
gestures have no manners I don't know which
to choose

I can't catch the chatty politeness of strangers
it would be better to say nothing except maybe

Station 7

It's raining I know, essentially I'm missing the train
the train is leaving I don't care the train is leaving
you don't call a train a train without thinking
about it in advance it seems that grass grows
and I believe it

Rail 4 please keep away from the edge of the platform
this train does not hold passengers and I believe it
I'm quickly forgetting the number of my train car

Chez moi 4

L'ascenseur est en panne ce sont des choses qui arrivent
il me suffit de ne plus jamais prendre l'ascenseur
pour l'instant je peux, ne plus jamais prendre l'ascenseur

Je trouverai des endroits sans ascenseur
Finirai par tomber sur quelque chose

Port 1

Vitesse maximale autorisée dans le port 3 nœuds
l'eau est verte elle ne permet pas de regarder les méduses
j'ai fait semblant de la comprendre c'est-à-dire de voir les
méduses
il m'a expliqué que les méduses parfois faisaient la taille
du panneau Stop
sans être octogonales à proprement parler

At Home 4

The elevator is broken these are things that happen
I'm fine to never take it again
for the moment I can never take the elevator again

Find places free of elevators
I'll end up coming across something

Port 1

Maximum speed authorized in the port 3 knots
the water is green it keeps you from looking at the
jellyfish
I pretend to understand:
see the jellyfish
he explained to me that jellyfish are sometimes the size
of stop signs
without being octagonal, strictly speaking

Gare 10

C'est ridicule

Je savais que ça ne marcherait pas une deuxième fois je
ne suis pas un sachet de thé

j'ai voulu essayer quand même

j'ai voulu essayer quand même parce que je pensais à des
choses

j'ai fait exactement pareil, une deuxième fois

Quand un train passe sous la gare,

(quand il y a un bruit énorme)

tout le monde se regarde – je participe au qu'est-ce qu'il
se passe

Initiation de la recherche d'un abris –

effectivement il a plu – trouve une raison de rester là

je participe à l'étanchéité

J'ai réussi à rester une deuxième fois

Station 10

It's ridiculous

I knew this wouldn't work a second time I'm not a tea bag

I wanted to try anyway I wanted to try anyway because I was thinking about things I did exactly the same a second time

When a train passes under the station

(when there's a tremendous noise)

everyone looks at each other—I join in the what's going on

On to the search for a shelter

it rained basically I find a reason to stay here join in the waterproofing

I succeeded in staying a second time

Gare 11

Je suis partie comme je pars régulièrement,
en toute logique je me déplacerai encore plus tard
pour rentrer, pour quelqu'un
rien du tout, ce n'est rien du tout
je ferai en sorte de ne pas y penser de ne pas me souvenir
d'être complètement
sonore

Regarder de moins en moins
écouter de plus en plus
liste des choses qui me préoccupent – j'ai faim
elle est carrément venue acheter du pain à la gare
J'ai perdu tout mes mots

Station 11

I left like I usually leave
logically I'll move again later
to come home, to see someone
nothing at all, it's
nothing at all
I'll make sure to not think about it to not remember
being completely sound

Looking much less listening more
list of things I worry about—I'm hungry
she really came to buy bread at the station

I've lost all my words

Rue 7

Ils ont tracé un nouveau passage piétons 10 bandes jaunes
ils installent des cônes de signalisation qui expliquent où je dois circuler

Heureusement que j'ai des mains pour faire autre chose
j'essaye quand même de voir la route tourner

Effectivement tout ne tient pas
j'essaye quand même que tout tienne

Effectivement tout s'affaisse
imprévisions : tout tombe
j'essaye quand même de rattraper

Street 7

They drew a new crosswalk 10 yellow stripes
they're putting traffic cones to explain where I have to
move

Luckily I have hands to do other things
I try anyway to see the road turn

Essentially nothing keeps
I try all the same to make everything keep

Basically it all caves in
unforecast: all of it falls
I'm trying regardless to catch it

Saint-germain-je-ne-dirai-plus-ton-nom

Je voulais rentrer chez moi mais la ville-dortoir
m'embarrasse : je n'ai pas fait qu'y dormir

La carte n'indique presque rien :

des allées en scrogneugneu
paul valéry apollinaire il y a des rues aux noms
trop grands pour faire rue
les trottoirs sont trop étroits alors soit on est seul
soit on dérange
les voisins vigilants à chaque pâté ils ont des
caméras

Ce qui a changé :

ils ont déraciné le saule pleureur
plus de trou dans la haie
on ne se faufile plus à Saint-germain-je-ne-dirai-
plus-ton-nom
les rideaux de ma maison préférée ne sont plus
les même
il fait trop chaud

Ce qui est resté pareil :

l'air de jeu toute cassée
la poignée de porte du lion doré
les ronds point creux
pas de transport en commun
j'habite toujours au 12

Saint-Germain-not-gonna-say-your-name

I wanted to go home I did but that bedroom town
embarrasses me: I did more than
sleep there

The map tells you almost nothing:

 paul valéry, apollinaire streets with names too
grand to be streets
 the twisty alleyways
sidewalks that are too straight you're either alone or
you're disturbing
 the neighborhood watch
on each corner there's a camera

What's changed:

 they uprooted the weeping willow
 no more holes in the hedges
 you can't sneak into Saint-Germain-not-
gonna-say-your-name anymore
 the curtains in my favorite house are different
 it's too hot

What's still here:

 broken down playground
 gold lion door handle
 raised traffic circles you can see down through
their centers to the streets below
 no public transportation
I always live at #12

Je reconnaiss chaque coin de rue même si ça fait
longtemps : je ne sais pas d'où ça vient
je suis un sept millième de Saint-germain-je-ne-dirai-
plus-ton-nom

Pour me la péter je montre la galerie marchande
comme s'il y avait un centre-ville ou même une ville

Je ne suis pas allée voir :
l'usine de miroir
l'école de musique
le dojo de karaté
le centre aéré (je détestais)

Je vous laisse :
les tarterets
coquatrix
coquibus
ris orangis

Je ne vais plus aller à Saint-germain-je-ne-dirai-plus ton-
nom

I recognize each corner though it's been a while: I
don't know where that comes from

I'm one seven-thousandth of Saint-Germain-not-
gonna-say-your-name

To show off, I now present the sad mini mall
as if there was a downtown or even a town

I didn't go see:

mirror factory
music school
karate dojo
children's center (hated it)

I leave you, the places:

the tarterêts
coquatrix
coquibus
ris-orangis

Saint-Germain-not-gonna-say-your-name I'm never
coming back again

Translator's Note

Née à la fin du mois d'octobre, sous le signe du scorpion, on ne sera pas étonné de retrouver le venin et le piquant de cet animal infusant dans les poèmes de Rhoni Blankenhorn. Peut-être en a-t-elle croisé dans sa Californie natale dont on voit apparaître dans son œuvre des images puissantes, comme des flash : clichés d'une Amérique conservatrice, peuplée de cow-boy et écrasée du lourd sceau de la religion.

Les poèmes de Blankenhorn, à teneur autobiographique, évoquent la violence de l'enfance et ce que l'on en fait, une fois adulte. Dans « Octobre » ou « Avant le couteau du boucher », elle décortique un complexe rapport père-fille. Du côté de la mère, on devine un lien plus tendre dans lequel se mêle la religion jusqu'à un certain mysticisme – dans « Mission San Luis Obispo », mère et fille se rassemblent pour former à elles deux une superbe cathédrale.

Dans les poèmes de Blankenhorn volètent des papillons de nuit ou des insectes dérangeants. La nature est là, souvent en pot, parfois mourante, d'autre fois on est sauvé par une harmonie inattendue avec le cosmos, mais la mort n'est jamais très loin. Elle rode, menaçante, dégoûtante, et invite le lecteur à regarder ses propres cadavres en face. Ce qui permet de soutenir le regard, c'est toujours une forme d'humour noir et grinçant qui apporte la légèreté et le recul dont on a besoin.

Si la violence appartenant à l'enfance se localise facilement sur la côte ouest des États-Unis, on comprend qu'il y une libération sur la côte est, dans le « West

Broadway » de New York dans lequel Blankenhorn essaye d'écrire « quelque chose de drôle ». La langue de Blankenhorn est incisive : ses mots sont toujours justes et percutants. Par des effets de double sens, elle parvient avec brio à faire passer une grimace pour un sourire, des mites pour des papillons et peut-être ainsi réussit à changer la mort en vie, la haine en amour ?

RHONI BLANKENHORN

POEMS

Morning

Venus blazing in the burgeoning sky
mountains backlit

at the horizon break
like teeth busting. I hear one bird

then a flock
wings shimmering black.

I make myself sick. What good is a poem
when a light

goes out. A poem can't hold her
that hot moonless rock.

Again I look
but she has already faded

into the pale
and frightening blue.

**traduit de l'anglais par
MARIE DEBROUWÈRE**

POÈMES

Matin

Vénus de feu dans le ciel bourgeonnant
montagnes rétro-éclairées

à la rupture de l'horizon
comme des dents qui éclatent. J'entends un oiseau

puis toute une nuée
d'ailes mordorées.

Je me rends malade. À quoi sert un poème
quand la lumière

s'éteint. Un poème ne peut contenir
cette chaude roche sans lune.

À nouveau je regarde
mais elle a déjà disparu

dans le bleu
pâle et effrayant.

October

Near the shitter, spider mites again
stretch threads between veined leaves.
Again, we have entered the month
of our birth. Again, you are not anywhere,

leaving my skull addled with echo,
my mouth full of clorox and moths.
The window is open. The alocasia
pushes another leaf to sway

drunk on chill air. I am enthroned,
pants at my ankles. You ass.
I will never outgrow the soft green
of my love for you.

I hate that you enter my mind
when I'm so exposed. I suppose
you win in the end, leaving as you did.

Octobre

Près des chiottes, les araignées rouges encore une fois étirent des toiles entre les feuilles veinées.

Encore une fois, nous sommes entrés dans le mois de notre naissance. Encore une fois, tu n'es nulle part,

laissant mon crâne pourri d'échos,
ma bouche pleine de javel et de phalènes.

La fenêtre est ouverte. L'locasia
pousse une autre feuille à se déhancher

ivre d'air frais. Je trône,
pantalon aux chevilles. Connard.
Je n'irais jamais plus loin que le vert tendre
de mon amour pour toi.

Je déteste que tu entres dans ma tête
quand je suis si exposée. Je suppose que
c'est toi qui gagne à la fin, puisque c'est toi qui es parti.

Mission San Luis Obispo

I remember carrying the mission
down the long hall to the classroom.

That can't be right. Suddenly, it's my mother
wielding the structure with its secondary nave

and the belfry, all of cumbrous carborad, white
clay, popsicle sticks, the structure we formed

with our hands' flesh, mine pale, hers
perhaps a shade darker.

Mission San Luis Obispo

Je me souviens avoir porté la mission
dans le long couloir jusqu'à la salle de classe.

Ce n'est pas possible. Soudain, c'est ma mère
brandissant la structure avec sa nef transversale

et le beffroi, tout ce carton encombrant, l'argile
blanche, les bâtonnets de glace à l'eau, la structure que
nous formions

avec la chair de nos mains, la mienne pâle, la sienne
peut-être juste un peu plus sombre.

Devotion

I'm sorry for always sneaking
you into my palm
when mom wasn't looking.
I liked the weight of you.
I liked how the spikes of your halo
turned your head into a hand grenade.
There was always something dangerous
about all three inches of you.
On mom's glass altar, you were my favorite,
with your secret smile. You would fall
when the door slammed, or if mom
vacuumed too close. I interpreted this
as a small act of rebellion, a minor threat,
a reminder of your potential.
Your wobble-clatter on the glass
made me believe that the boldness
of your spirit could be condensed
into three naked, brass inches
with a well-patinated ass
and a terrifying amount of hair
for a baby. I took you, impossibility
of god's entirety, into my palm
as often, and for as long, as I could.

Dévotion

Pardon de t'avoir chipé
si souvent dans ma paume
quand maman ne regardait pas.
J'aimais ton poids.
J'aimais la façon dont les piquants de ton auréole
transformaient ta tête en grenade.
Tes huit petits centimètres
avaient quelque chose de dangereux.
Sur l'autel de verre de maman, tu étais mon préféré,
avec ton sourire secret. Tu tombais
quand la porte claquait, ou si maman
passait l'aspirateur trop près. J'interprétais cela
comme un petit acte de rébellion, une menace sourde,
un rappel de ta puissance.
Ton cliquetis sur la vitre
Me faisait croire que l'audace
de ton esprit pouvait être condensé
en huit nus et cuivrés centimètres
avec un cul bien patiné
et une quantité terrifiante de cheveux
pour un bébé. Je t'ai pris, impossible
totalité de Dieu, dans ma paume
aussi souvent et aussi longtemps que j'ai pu.

Before The Butcher Knife

In the photo, the house,
the spidery pine, five kids in line, falling
like the angle of the roof, the girls
gleaming in their dresses and mary janes,
little Patrick standing on someone's toes,
and you, my father, your hair shining from the teeth
of the comb that dragged through it,
your head tilted down, your bottom lip extended

(something I do)

saying *fuck you*, before the word fuck caught fire,
because you were sometimes good
at predicting the future,
you already held the feeling
of the word inside of you, puffing
your twelve-year-old chest
beneath your Christmas sweater,
while your arms stayed stiff
as baseball bats, your palms wet
against your jeans, as the man
behind the camera slurred *smile*,
ya little cocksucker before pressing
the lever that would catch the downturn
of your jaw, your furrowed brow

(something I do too, the furrowing)

for the photo, for grandma, who'd scrawl
1962 Xmas in big, blue ink across the edge,
and on the back, in red script, *my grandchildren*,

Avant Le couteau de boucher

Sur la photo, la maison,
le pin arachnéen, cinq enfants alignés, tombant
comme l'angle du toit, les filles
étincelantes dans leurs robes et souliers vernis,
le petit Patrick se tenant sur les orteils de quelqu'un,
et toi, mon père, tes cheveux brillants à cause des dents
du peigne qui ont creusé des sillons dedans
la tête penchée, la lèvre inférieure détendue
(je fais ça)
en disant *va te faire*, avant que le mot enculé ne prenne
feu,
parce que tu étais quelques fois doué
pour prédire l'avenir,
tu avais déjà le sentiment
de ce mot en toi, faisant haletter
ton torse-de-douze-ans
sous ton pull de Noël,
alors que tes bras restaient aussi raides
que des battes de base-ball, tes paumes moites
sur ton jean, pendant que l'homme
derrière la caméra bredouillait *souris*
petit suceur de bites avant de presser
le levier qui permettrait d'attraper la contraction
de ta mâchoire, de ton front plissé
(je fais ça aussi, le plissement)
pour la photo, pour grand-mère, qui gribouillerait
Noël 1962 en grand, encre bleue sur le coin en travers,
et au verso, en rouge, *mes petits-enfants*,

perhaps imagining years later, her progeny
would hold the photo and wonder
who the fuck these people are,
as I am doing now, though I am familiar
with what comes next—the man, and the song
of the big, sharp knife as it cartwheels toward you.

imaginant peut-être, des années plus tard, sa progéniture
tenant la photo et se demandant
qui sont ces putains de gens,
comme je le fais maintenant, bien que je sois familière
de ce qui va suivre – l'homme, et le son
du grand, tranchant couteau qui fait la roue jusqu'à toi.

Eddie Kills A Sheep

I have never seen a cowboy with such a taste
for honey, likes how it coats his tongue
in sweet gold, sticky-trapping ants.
Doesn't swallow, spits them out, quick

little bullets straight through the back
of that lamb's skull. Hollow shells
collect, whisper to each other—
the smallest bells. Blood slips

from the slit in the throat, brilliant
against glinting blade. He smiles,
one browned hand pulling skin
from meat, the other tendering

a filled glass. *If milk tasted like this, honey,*
I'd still be sucking on mama's teat.

Eddie tue un mouton

Je n'ai jamais vu de cowboy aimer à ce point
le miel, il aime comme ça enduit sa langue
d'or sucré, des fourmis collées-piégées.
Il n'avale pas, les recrache, vite

en petites balles tirées droit dans le dos
du crâne de cet agneau. Les coquilles creuses
se rassemblent, se susurrent l'une l'autre –
les plus petites clochettes. Le sang s'écoule

de la gorge fendue, brillant
contre la lame scintillante. Il sourit,
une main brunie tirant la peau
de la viande, l'autre offrant

un verre plein. *Si le lait avait ce goût, mon sucre d'orge,*
Je serais toujours en train de téter ma daronne.

Mabagal na gamot

Slow Medicine

pull marrow
out your mouth
into mothy thread

falls in clumps
your crown shines
you are empty
as the bones of birds

with yellow eyes
you cracked lip kiss
moon curved hook

slick as the spit
that weaves veins raw
caresses tendons
and the hardness

between left lung
and heart

you lose movement
before words, leaving
howl to echo
in hollow body

angling off your pelvis

Mabagal na gamot

Médecine douce

tire ta moelle
par la bouche
en fil de phalènes

tombe en touffe
ton crâne brille
tu es aussi vide
que des os d'oiseau

aux yeux jaunes
tu crevassais lèvre baiser
lune courbée en crochet

gras comme le crachat
qui tresse les veines à vif
caresse tendons
et la dureté

entre poumon gauche
et cœur

tu perds le mouvement
avant les mots, laissant
le hurlement à l'écho
en corps creux

ton pelvis anguleux

reverberating ribs

les côtes réverbérantes

Escaping Bataan

Romeo pretended to be one of them,
said things in the enemy's language
to steal the fisherman's bangka,
somehow maneuvered across the dark water
with its tiny glittering crests
and the thumbnail of a moon.

Because he also held his gun at the ready,
the bullet traversed the full length of his arm.
Hot lead entered above his wrist,
slid like a tiny shark beneath the skin
before emerging from the back of his shoulder.

This could be considered a beginning, middle, or end.
What is true is that Romeo continued
and which is sometimes a difficult thing to do.

Fuir le Bataan

Roméo prétendait être l'un des leurs,
il a dit des choses dans la langue de l'ennemi
pour voler le bangka du pêcheur,
il a manœuvré, on ne sait comment, sur l'eau sombre
avec ses toutes petites cimes scintillantes
et la rognure d'une lune.

Parce qu'il tenait aussi son arme à portée de main,
la balle a traversé son bras sur toute sa longueur.

Du plomb chaud a pénétré au-dessus de son poignet,
a glissé comme un tout petit requin sous la peau
avant d'émerger de l'arrière de son épaule.

On peut voir ça comme un début, un milieu ou une fin.
Mais ce qui est sûr, c'est que Roméo ne s'est pas arrêté
et ce n'est pas toujours chose aisée.

West Broadway

It's cold on this window ledge. I'm sweating
from sun. People can see me from their homes.
People can see into my home. Sometimes I walk naked
from the shower to the closet, tell myself
no one can see this far in, or, who cares. Part of me
likes the thrill. I feel kind of bad about it.
Like, what if some kid recently read *How To Do Nothing*,
took up birdwatching, found me instead? It's possible
the cathedral arcs of my chest enjoy expanding.
I want to write something funny,
instead get up to make a sandwich.
I've never known quite what to do with this body.

West Broadway

Il fait froid sur ce rebord de fenêtre. Je transpire
au soleil. Les gens peuvent me voir depuis chez eux.
Les gens peuvent voir chez moi. Parfois je marche nue
de la douche à la penderie, je me dis
on ne peut pas voir aussi loin ou, on s'en fout. Une part
de moi
aime ce frisson. Je m'en veux un peu.
Genre, imaginons qu'un enfant ait lu récemment
Comment faire
pour ne rien faire,
lève les yeux au ciel, et me voit en lieu et place d'un
oiseau ? C'est possible
la nef dans ma poitrine aime se déployer.
Je veux écrire quelque chose de drôle,
au lieu de ça je vais me faire un sandwich.
Je n'ai jamais bien su quoi faire de ce corps.

Threshold

It is October, and I wonder
if I'm as dead as the ladybug
desiccating on the window pane.
As dead as the *Peperomia caperata*
with potato chip leaves
that fall apart at my touch.
How many times can a word be said
before it is dead?
D wants her ashes spread
at the base of a Redwood tree;
D's daughter wants to compress her ash
into a jewel, wear her as a necklace.
Alex says, *make a reliquary*
of my finger, and I ask which one.
L and *B* both ask me to pray.
Sometimes I cross the threshold,
anoint myself with holy water,
breathe from the nave's arcing lung.
I don't know what to believe.
I hear bones rattling
like the amulets my mother wore
pinned to her nightdress.
Her small bells,
silver, ringing.

Seuil

C'est le mois d'octobre et je me demande
si je suis aussi morte que cette coccinelle
se desséchant sur le carreau.

Aussi morte que le *Peperomia caperata*
avec ses feuilles de chips
qui tombent quand je les touche.

Combien de fois peut-on dire un mot
avant qu'il ne meure ?

D veut que ses cendres soient dispersées
au pied d'un séquoia ;

La fille de *D* veut comprimer ses cendres
dans un bijou, la porter en collier.

Alex dit, *prenez mon doigt*
faites-en une relique, et je demande lequel.

L et *B* me demandent tous deux de prier.

Parfois, je franchis le seuil,
m'oins d'eau bénite,
respire par le poumon arqué de la nef.

Je ne sais que croire.

J'entends des os qui carillonnent
comme les amulettes que ma mère portait
épinglées à sa robe de chambre.

Ses petites cloches,
d'argent, qui sonnent.

Translator's Note

In this excerpt from *Portholes*, French author Marie Debrouwère submerges us into a shimmering, mercurial atmosphere in which our main character, Laurence, encounters an enigmatic woman at a public swimming pool. What quietly and profoundly develops is a meditation on aging, the female body, memory, perception, and the subconscious.

Debrouwère's prose functions like a prism; her understated language catches and refracts the intangible into innumerable strange and beautiful hues. Debrouwère is particularly skilled at transforming seemingly mundane observations with precise imagery, often relating to color, as well as with elaborate syntax that extends and expands our focus, rupturing our common understanding of time. For example, Debrouwère opens this excerpt with a layered description of the color of the Ludivine-Louiseau pool. Debrouwère closes the paragraph with a fragment that describes the pool's color as "swimming-pool blue." After the previous winding sentences, this phrase's brevity is shocking in its simplicity, and elevates the reader's discovery of a swimming pool the color of a swimming pool into a radical and delightful surprise.

In the translation, I primarily sought to maintain Debrouwère's ambient sense of liquidity that contributes to the piece's overarching surreal tone, as well as her complex sentence structure. Even in the original French, a language that lends itself to clauses, Debrouwère's sentences achieve a stunning level of intricacy—one of the many tools she employs to entangle us within this wavering reality. I also closely attended to Debrouwère's use of color. From the pervasive shades of blue to the hued bursts that bounce off the walls as Laurence speaks

with the woman with intergalactic goggles, Debrouw  re leverages color as an expression of Laurence's interior life; a lesson in how to illustrate our abstract, inner lives with veracity and exuberance.

At its core, *Portholes* asks: how can we expose the wonder hidden beneath the surface of the ordinary? I hope you enjoy your time with this piece as much as I've enjoyed translating it.

MARIE DEBROUWÈRE

LES HUBLOTS

Si la mer est grise au nord et turquoise au sud c'est, on dit, à cause de la couleur du ciel qui est soit chargé de nuages ternes et sablonneux soit couleur lavande. Au-dessus de la piscine Ludivine-Loizeau, il n'y a pas de ciel, mais des néons fluorescents, ce qui lui donne sa belle couleur bleu électrique – à moins que ce ne soient les milliers de petits carreaux polis qui constituent le fond du bassin. Un bleu piscine.

Laurence portait des lunettes. Elle était myope et lors de son dernier rendez-vous avec son ophtalmo, celle-ci lui avait diagnostiqué le début d'une légère presbytie. Avant de quitter les vestiaires, elle prenait la précaution d'enlever ses lunettes de vue car elle n'aurait pas su où les poser sans craindre de les perdre – alors elle ne voyait plus rien et cela lui rappelait toujours un voyage de classe en Angleterre, plus de trente ans auparavant, où sa correspondante avait fait un mouvement brusque dans une barque sur le lac Seymour ; ses lunettes étaient tombées à l'eau et elle avait passé le reste du voyage dans une confusion totale, ne comprenant rien ni à ce qu'elle entendait, ni à ce qu'elle voyait, l'anglais et ses yeux flous se conjuguant pour la plonger dans une vision approximative du monde. A chaque fois qu'elle allait à la piscine, elle retrouvait cette sensation d'égarement, comme en pays étranger. Avec l'âge, elle avait appris à apprécier ce retranchement forcé en elle-même, acceptant que le monde parle une autre langue que la sienne, et même trouvant agréable cet isolement qui soulignait plus encore le sentiment de solitude du nageur.

**translated from the french by
RHONI BLANKENHORN**

PORTHOLES

They say it's the sky—either thick with dull, grainy clouds, or as gentle as lavender—that gives the sea its color: grey in the north and turquoise in the south. But there is no sky above the Ludivine-Loiseau pool, only fluorescent neon lights that turn the water an exquisite, electric blue, or perhaps it's the thousands of small, polished tiles lining the basin's depths that are responsible for this phenomenon. This swimming-pool blue.

Laurence wore glasses for her nearsightedness, and during her last appointment, the ophthalmologist gave her an additional diagnosis: the onset of a mild presbyopia. She always took the precaution of removing her glasses before leaving the locker room because she worried about misplacing them and the blurry vision that ensued reminded her of a class trip to England more than thirty years ago: they were at Lake Seymour on a boat when her pen pal made an erratic movement—tumbling Laurence's glasses into the water. She had endured the rest of the trip in utter confusion, understanding nothing of what she was hearing or seeing, the unfamiliar language and her blurry eyes colluding to plunge her into an approximate experience of the world. Every time she went to swim at the pool, she reencountered this feeling of disorientation, as if she were lost in a foreign country. As she grew older, Laurence learned to appreciate such moments of unavoidable seclusion; she could accept that the world spoke a language other than her own, and even began to find pleasure in this isolation that further contributed to her swimmer's sense of loneliness.

Une fois ses lunettes à l'abri dans son casier, elle s'aventurait dans l'antre de la piscine même, les choses l'entourant échappant à toute traduction. Heureusement, au centre de l'horloge qui surplombait le grand bassin tournaient de grosses aiguilles, une vraiment très grande, verte, et une autre jaune, plus petite, et Laurence arrivait à deviner l'heure en fonction de leur position dans le rond blanc. Très vite, ne rien distinguer n'avait plus d'importance : elle enfilait ses lunettes de piscine, la cordelette en caoutchouc s'agrippait à son bonnet de bain, les hublots en plastiques bleu comme des ventouses étaient bien positionnés de sorte que l'eau ne s'infiltrait pas : dès lors, la piscine et le reste se teintaient par le filtre bleu des lunettes et l'eau apparaissait encore plus bleue qu'elle ne l'était déjà – si cela était possible. Comme ça, le monde lui paraissait moins dissonant, enfin en correspondance avec sa couleur intérieure. Un camaïeu de bleus-vague-à-l'âme. Mettre ses lunettes de piscine, c'était comme entrer dans un sous-marin et regarder un monde étrange à travers le hublot.

Elle s'asseyait sur le rebord du bassin, goûtait du bout des pieds la température de l'eau. Elle observait son corps, les plissures de son maillot rouge – devenu violet – au niveau de son ventre, l'entrelacs de veines qui se dessinait sur ses cuisses étalées, sa peau granulée par la chair de poule ou peut-être l'âge – tout, tout était bleu (ses ongles, ses pieds, ses genoux) et son corps coloré lui paraissait soudain nouveau et bizarre, comme venant d'une autre planète. Le voir bleu, c'était le voir autrement que vieux : depuis quelques années, il avait pris de l'ampleur comme on prend une décision, même si elle avait mis longtemps à se résoudre à vieillir.

Une fois dans son couloir, il n'y avait qu'à aller tout droit ou, dans le doute, suivre les jambes de la personne devant elle. À cette heure, le soleil transperçait la baie

With her glasses stowed safely in her locker, Laurence ventured into the natatorium, the hall that held the pool itself, while the world around her eluded any meaningful interpretation. Luckily, the big clock overlooking the pool commanded significant hands—one quite large and green, and another smaller and yellow—so Laurence was able to guess the time based on each hand's position within the white circle.

Before long, her inability to distinguish one thing from another didn't matter. When she put on her goggles, the rubber straps clung to her swimming cap, and she pressed the blue plastic lenses to her face like suction cups, positioning them so water couldn't seep in. The little blue windows tinted everything around her, including, of course, the pool; the water appeared bluer than it already was—if such a thing was possible—so the world became less dissonant and more in harmony with her interior color—undulating shades of blue. With her goggles on, she felt as though she were in a submarine, observing a strange world through its portholes.

She sat at the pool's edge, testing the water's temperature with her feet. She examined herself in her red—now purple—swimsuit, the folds of her stomach, the spidery veins etched upon her loose thighs, her skin textured with gooseflesh or perhaps age. All of her was tinged blue, her nails, her feet, even her knees, and her body suddenly seemed unfamiliar, even peculiar, as if it belonged to another world. To see herself blue was to see herself as something other than middle-aged. Acceptance had arrived slowly, but Lawrence could now appreciate the inevitable process of growing old.

Once in her lane, all she had to do was swim straight ahead between the floating guardrails, or if she became confused, she could follow the legs of the person in front of her. At this hour, the sun was shining through the

vitrée et la lumière venait se couler dans le chlore, éclaboussait au passage d'un rayon aveuglant et diffracté par le plastique des lunettes les yeux bleus de Laurence qui prolongeait alors son mouvement de brasse coulée en immergeant sa tête sous l'eau. Pendant qu'elle nageait, ses pensées flottaient, ici et là tout autour, et elles aussi changeaient de couleur au contact du liquide. Ses angoisses noires qui gisaient au fond de la piscine en forme de mannequin jaune, de ces mannequins qu'on laisse couler là pour les entraînements de sauvetage, devenaient bleues. La jalousie jaune, la colère rouge, le temps-qui-passe vert barbotaien et se dissolvaient doucement dans le bleu. Elle voyait aussi nager le livre à la couverture orange en cours de lecture sur l'expédition d'une aventurière dans le désert ; pourtant il n'y avait pas d'eau dans ce livre qu'elle avait laissé dans son casier fermé à clef avec ses vêtements, de toute façon, sans ses lunettes, il lui était difficile – quoique pas impossible – de déchiffrer les mots. Parfois, le matin, dans un demi-sommeil, elle prenait sur sa table de chevet le roman qu'elle avait posé là la veille et reprenait sa lecture, tenant la page tout près. Son esprit flou se superposait aux lettres barbouillées et irréelles mais, peu à peu, elle émergeait doucement, trouvait le chemin du réveil – qui n'était incontestable que lorsqu'elle chaussait finalement ses lunettes. Dans l'eau, donc, c'était comme si elle dormait.

Elle en était là de ses pensées quand tout à coup, ses jambes en plein mouvement cognèrent. Elle s'interrompit dans sa nage, se redressant en apesanteur. Surprise, elle replaça ses lunettes sur son front, comme pour mieux voir, et cela lui fit comme deux paires d'yeux bleus superposées. C'était une nageuse de dos crawlé qui l'informa qu'elle se trouvait dans le mauvais couloir – si elle voulait nager la brasse, il fallait qu'elle passe en dessous de la ligne de bouées rouges, à droite. Ici, on pratiquait plutôt le dos. Elle avait un petit sourire gêné en disant cela, comme si elle s'excusait des règles tacites

bay window and streaming into the chlorinated pool, projecting blinding columns of light that were further refracted by Laurence's plastic goggles before reaching her blue eyes. She submerged her head and lengthened her stroke as her thoughts drifted and changed color upon contact with the water; her deepest hued anxieties sank to the bottom of the pool and took on the shape of an abandoned rescue dummy, entirely blue. The yellow jealousy, red anger, and corroded green of her years gone by all sloshed together before quietly dissolving into blue. She could picture the orange cover of the book she was reading—an explorer's desert expedition—though this book existed outside of the water, shut away in her locker with her clothes, and in any case, it would have been difficult, though not impossible, for her to decipher the words without her glasses. Sometimes in the morning, still half asleep, she would reach across her bedside table for the book she had been reading the night before and resume reading, the pages nearly pressed to her face. Her mind would flutter over the blurred, illusory letters, until gradually, she emerged, finding her way to wakefulness—a state that only became incontestable when she finally put on her glasses. In the water, without her glasses, Laurence felt as though she were asleep.

Laurence was lost in thought when she felt something bump against her legs. She paused, then righted herself to peer above the surface, treading water. She pushed her goggles up her forehead—as if this action could make anything more clear—and blinked, one set of blue eyes above the other. A backstroke swimmer informed Laurence that she was in the wrong lane; if she wanted to swim breaststroke, she had to go to the other side of the red buoys on the right. The other swimmer gave an embarrassed smile as she said this, as if apologizing for the unspoken rules that governed the large pool.

qui régissaient le grand bassin. Mais Laurence n'écoutait pas vraiment. Son regard était comme magnétisé par les lunettes de son interlocutrice : elles étaient extraordinaires, avec des verres irisés dans lesquels Laurence aurait pu voir son reflet sans les remous de l'eau, ou le remue-ménage que faisaient leurs corps pour s'efforcer de flotter. Elle en restait médusée, plus par ces lunettes que par le fait de s'être trompée de couloir alors qu'elle savait pertinemment – bien qu'elle s'en excusait, vraiment, elle nageait pourtant toujours dans le couloir numéro trois, à quoi pensait-elle – elle était comme hypnotisée par ces yeux d'insecte stupéfiant. La lumière s'amalgamait aux couleurs en faisant un mélange compact qui donnait l'impression que les verres étaient faits d'une matière intergalactique. Le rose, le bleu se métamorphosait en orange ou en vert tandis que la nageuse inclinait la tête rencontrant telle onde de lumière ou tel éclat de soleil. Laurence s'excusa à nouveau, replaça ses propres lunettes et se laissa couler sous les bouées rouges pour rejoindre le couloir réservé à la brasse. Elle nagea encore un moment, comme ça, à compter les longueurs et les battements de son cœur.

Laurence était sortie de l'eau et se dirigeait grelotante vers les douches d'un pas prudent – non sans avoir jeté un dernier coup d'œil vers le bassin pour essayer d'apercevoir, dans le couloir numéro 4, la femme aux lunettes intergalactiques, bien qu'elle sache que c'était peine perdue à cause de sa mauvaise vue. Ses lunettes de piscine, de plastique et de caoutchouc, pendaient maintenant au bout de son bras. Comme ça, elle se sentait vraiment nue. Les couleurs, sans le filtre bleu, lui paraissaient bien plus ternes, le retour sur le rivage était toujours décevant – elle avait retrouvé sa peau de terrienne pâle, presque rousse, fatiguée par le chlore.

Laurence was hardly listening. She was too entranced by the woman's goggles, which were extraordinary, with iridescent lenses in which Laurence might have been able to see her own reflection, if it weren't for the swirling water's or the froth their bodies were churning up in their effort to stay afloat.

Laurence remained hypnotized, more by the goggles than what the woman was saying. Though she always swam breaststroke in lane three, Laurence apologized, still staring into the woman's beetle eyes; light melted with color to create an intangible mixture, an impression of intergalactic material. Pink and blue glinted into orange and green when the swimmer bowed her head in response to a wave or a ray of sunlight. Laurence apologized again, pulled down her own goggles, and descended beneath the red buoys. She swam for a while in the next lane, counting her laps, tracking her heart rate.

Laurence emerged from the water and walked, shivering towards the showers, but not without looking back towards the pool to try to glimpse, in lane three, the woman with intergalactic goggles, though she knew this was impossible because of her terrible eyesight. Laurence's goggles dangled from her arm, all plastic and limp rubber—she felt quite exposed without the blue filter, and the world seemed dull. The return to shore was always disappointing, as was the discovery of her pale, irritated skin, weary with chlorine.

Elle prenait une douche brûlante pour redonner à son corps la chaleur que l'eau venait de lui voler quand elle vit les lunettes. Elles avançaient sur le front de la nageuse de dos crawlé dont on pouvait à présent voir les yeux clairs. La femme lui sourit et la peau de son visage se plissa par endroit. Elle portait un maillot de bain noir avec des bandes fluorescentes sur les hanches. D'un côté de sa poitrine, le maillot était creux – il lui manquait un sein. Ses lunettes lançaient des éclairs colorés qui rebondissaient sur les murs et les flaques. Elle vint prendre sa douche près de Laurence qui lui bredouilla quelque chose comme j'ai trouvé le bon couloir finalement ou j'étais perdue tout à l'heure. Elles étaient mouillées toutes les deux et se distinguaient mal. Pour Laurence, tout n'était qu'un tas de couleurs sans trait ni dessin. Elles venaient souvent, l'une comme l'autre, nager sous le ciel de néon de la piscine Ludivine-Loiseau, mais ne s'étaient encore jamais croisées. L'une venant plutôt le mercredi, l'autre le jeudi, mais on était vendredi et tout était possible. Peut être qu'elles pourraient aller prendre un verre en sortant, lancèrent les lunettes intergalactiques. Laurence répondit que oui, c'était vrai, bizarrement, on se déshydrate en nageant et leurs rires éclatèrent en couleur sur les murs carrelés.

While taking a hot shower to restore the warmth the pool had drained from her body, Laurence again caught a flash of the remarkable goggles now protruding from the backstroke swimmer's forehead. The woman's clear gaze was now visible, and her skin wrinkled around her eyes and mouth when she smiled. She wore a black swimsuit with fluorescent stripes at the hips, the jersey hollow on one side of her chest—she was missing a breast. Her goggles threw colorful streaks of light that bounced off the walls and the puddles on the floor. She chose a shower near Laurence, who mumbled something like, I found the right lane eventually, or, sorry I was confused earlier. Slick with water, they were not easily distinguishable from one another. For Laurence, everything was a medley of color without distinction. Both women swam often beneath the neon sky of the Ludivine-Loiseau pool, but they had never crossed paths before. One came more on Wednesdays, the other on Thursdays. But today was Friday, and everything was possible. Maybe they could have a quick drink, the intergalactic goggles said. Laurence replied yes, isn't it strange how thirsty you get while swimming, and their laughter burst into color, echoing off the tile in every direction.

Translator's Foreword

Traduire c'est plonger dans le Tout-Monde si cher au poète Edouard Glissant.

S'immerger dans les poèmes de Mina c'est s'immiscer dans sa vie, dans son histoire dans cette mémoire relationnelle qui tisse des liens, de la Corée au Pakistan, des États-Unis à la France.

Mina Khan est née aux États-Unis d'une mère coréenne et d'un père pakistanais. Contrairement à son frère, elle ressemble à sa mère et cela veut dire que dans une Amérique post 11 septembre comme elle le raconte sans détour et crument dans *After september*, elle a moins à subir la violence froide et métallique d'une oppression désormais ancrée et qui innervé une nation désunie sous la bannière étoilée. La réalité vient frapper et nous déranger dans les poèmes de Mina Khan. Nous ne pouvons pas détourner le regard et quant à nos sens, ils sont tous en alerte (Tout le monde a vieilli désormais). Une écriture qui crie la douleur et l'absurdité d'un monde incapable de nous comprendre dans l'infine immensité de nos rhizomes car il aplani, universalise et rétrécit donc, en nous empêchant de « continue[r] à chercher continue[r] à chercher continue[r] à chercher... » comme nous invite le personnage de la mère dans *Ma mère* raconte que les tortues portent chance.

Les premières fois sont comme des brûlures dans la chair (Premier Amour) qui rappellent aussi comment les États-Unis furent bâtis sur les « amas de peau frottée noire et fripée ». Aucune mention à ce moment de l'Histoire et pourtant, je l'entends résonner cet esclavage qui asservit tout à travers les mots de Mina. Il y a tant de choses dont elle se souvient, cette mémoire relationnelle est incarnée dans ses textes. Ses histoires parlent d'instants

de vie suspendus et Mina s'y rattache du mieux qu'elle peut : par des bouts de visage dans Cette chose qui refuse de mourir ; par des recettes empruntées aux parlers asiatiques Sōsbi-kaimei, Jaan meri jaan ; par le bruit que fait la pluie à seize heures de l'après-midi (Crépitement) ; par la mousse printanière d'un arbre (Aujourd'hui).

J'ai découvert grâce à ce travail de traduction que je pouvais me libérer de la prose pure pour laisser les images prendre le dessus sur les mots. L'anglais est une langue très visuelle et donc je voyais avant de comprendre ce que Mina transpose dans ses textes. C'était une expérience enrichissante de comprendre la langue de l'Autre. Malgré la distance et grâce à la technologie Mina et moi avons pu échanger plusieurs fois, nous avons pu nous rencontrer par écrans interposés et frotter tous nos mondes différents à ceux de l'autre. Parfois, je voyais des choses que Mina n'aurait pas imaginé dans son texte et vice versa. Dans La dernière fois par exemple, j'imaginais une interprétation réaliste-magique alors que Mina m'a rappelé que ces souvenirs étaient avant tout enracinés dans le réel.

Dès le premier échange, je me sentie reliée à Mina par son rapport à la langue française d'une part et au fait qu'elle ait vécu à Toulouse, ma ville natale d'autre part. Mes origines aussi sont asiatiques : des arrière-grand-parents paternels originaires du Gujarat et une arrière-grand mère maternelle, de Mélanésie. Il a été simple et fluide de communiquer et de partager nos travaux sous ses liaisons communes.

Je remercie Mina pour sa patience, sa confiance et sa générosité.

MINA KHAN

POEMS

A thing that refuses to die

What is your father like?

Everyone is older now.

There is a lot I remember—

the concave mound of his mouth.
grey speckled irises. smile lines, deep as
my own.

There is more I do not—

he was bad to my mother. he liked longwalks.
he drove fast. rum—the brown kind. he met my
mother. first snow. he boarded my bedroom. he
smacked a branch. I did not sleep. he cracked a
tv. she shivered, damp. he was a shadow—
a loud one. I liked him very much.

**traduit de l'anglais par
LYNE HERVEY**

POÈMES

Cette chose qui refuse de mourir

À quoi ressemble ton père ?

Tout le monde a vieilli désormais.
Tant de choses dont je me souviens—

moue boudeuse de sa bouche.
iris tachetés de gris. ridules de sourire, profondes comme
les miennes.

Tant d'autres que je ne—

horrible avec ma mère il était. les longues marches il aimait. vite il conduisait. du rhum—du vieux. ma mère il rencontrait. premières neiges. ma chambre il calfeutrait. contre une branche il frappait. je ne dormais pas. une télé il cassait. moite, elle tremblait. il était une ombre—assourdissante. Je l'aimais beaucoup.

The good parts—

There's a lot I could remember.

Les bons côtés—

Tant de choses dont je me souviendrais.

Everyone is older now.

When I left, I was fourteen, and there's a lot I

His face,
static.

Still, I have aged. When we left, my mother,

The good parts—

A mouse, crunched is supposed to die.

A boot, crunch.

The red parts—

scrape
up the sink.

squeeze
out the shower.

A sound sounds soft in the distance

Tout le monde a vieilli désormais.

Quand je suis partie, j'avais quatorze ans, et il y a tant de choses dont je

Son visage,
figé.

Et pourtant, j'ai grandi. Quand nous sommes parties, ma mère,

Les bons côtés—

Une souris, écrasée est censée mourir.
Une pelle, les oreilles autant roses et pourtant
frétilantes.

Une botte, percuter.

Les côtés roses—

gratter
dans l'évier.

presser
sous la douche.

Un son résonne doucement au loin

jaan

meri jaan

His coos in my chest
without intention. A language I

Some things

I still remember.

Some things I wish

I couldn't.

Some things are dead.

And still living.

Some things

refuse

to die.

jaan
meri jaan

Ses roucoulements sur ma poitrine sans intention. Une
langue que je Tant de choses

Dont je me souviens.
D'autres que j'aimerais
Oublier.

Certaines sont mortes.
Et vivent encore.

Certaines
refusent
de mourir.

after september

each bodega.

each owned by a man.

each named Mohammed.

dark blue clothing. FBI badges. glint of steel
they knock and my father never opens the door.
the door opens. and

a shrew thrown overboard	its fur
sopping	
he squeaks. the plastic couch.	
sunken	I am not allowed in the living room
the coffee table scuffs	
its varnish peels	
poop floats up the fish tank.	

after 9/11

cold silver stretches
across a slate gray table
a room tucked in an airport terminal
one you have never heard of. I arrive
my brother's luggage already inside out. still,
they rummage.
i scrape. the skin. my thumb.
you look just like your mother
a red-bowed ribbon, zip-up sweater, Hello Kitty
toothbrush
my mother's 노리개,
elastic tethered to two puffs-

après septembre

chaque épicerie.
chacune appartenant à un homme.
chacun se prénommant Mohammed.
habits bleu foncé. Insignes du FBI. reflet d'acier
ils frappent et mon père jamais n'ouvre la porte.
la porte s'ouvre. et
un mulot jeté par-dessus bord sa fourrure imprégnée
il couine, le canapé en plastique.
enfoncé on m'interdit d'aller au salon rayures sur la table basse
son vernis s'écaillle
déjections à la surface de l'aquarium

après le 11 septembre

l'argent glacé
sur la table gris ardoise
une pièce dans un recoin d'un terminal d'aéroport
c'est qu'elle n'a jamais entendu parlé de. J'entre
le bagage de mon frère déjà sens dessus dessous.
pourtant,
ils fouillent.
je gratte. la peau. de mon pouce.
tu es le portrait de ta mère
Un ruban à nœud rouge, un pull à fermeture éclair, une
brosse à dents Hello Kitty Ma mère 노리개
élastique attaché avec deux froufrous-

they let me go

quick.

ils me laissent partir.

vite.

my mother tells me turtles are good luck

ma mère raconte que les tortues portent chance

we turn serpent because

No man wants to enter something so
slick that could slip so seamlessly
from under a body scented of
muck and sweat.

No man wants to enter a mouth
fanged, flaying back flesh

No man wants to enter a woman
skin like barracks
mounds of dead skin
rubbed black and pilling.

No man wants to enter a shape
so much
like
his own.

Nous devenons serpents car

Aucun homme ne souhaite pénétrer dans cette chose si
lisse si facilement
par dessous ce corps sentant la
crasse et la sueur.

Aucun homme ne souhaite pénétrer une bouche à crocs,
chair dorsale écorchée

Aucun homme ne souhaite pénétrer une femme la peau
comme rempart
amas de peau morte
frottée, noire et fripée.

Aucun homme ne souhaite pénétrer une forme autant
semblable
à
la sienne.

First Love

A room, a possum, its body in formaldehyde
My right leg trembles the first time
It's easy to trap a possum, just squeeze its tail, watch it
squirm and
Since then since then I am too slippery, skin all wet
between my
Stink. I hate that smell.
I know you do too because you told me
Stink. I came
I did so sobbing
My eyes could almost slip out their
Sockets are full of electricity, my wet a conveyer
Belts, I hate them, that click of silver. Hated it
Now and I hate my mouth and I wince
Before your hand,
Because what is worse than
Lips so pink and full of teeth
What is worse and so I
Stay. A possum in a bucket,
Fur floated to the top.
You said he was your best friend.
Its bones a string across your neck
White and glistening and
Dripping

Premier Amour

Une chambre, un opossum, son corps dans le formol

Ma jambe droite tremble pour la première fois

C'est facile de piéger un opossum, suffit de lui prendre la queue, regarde-le se tortiller et Depuis, je suis si fluide, la peau toute mouillée parmi ma

Puanteur. Je déteste cette odeur.

Je sais que toi aussi, parce que tu me l'as dit

Puanteur. J'ai joui

En sanglots

Mes yeux semblaient sortir de leurs

Orbites chargées d'électricité, moi mouillée, convoyeuse

Chaines, je les déteste, ce claquement d'acier. J'ai détesté ça

À présent et je déteste ma bouche et je me tords

Face à ta main,

Parce que ce qu'il y a de pire que

Des lèvres si roses et pleines de dents

Ce qui est pire et donc je

Reste. Un opossum dans un seau,

De la fourrure qui flotte.

Tu disais qu'il était ton meilleur ami.

Ses os une corde autour de ton cou

Blanche et luisante et

Dégoulinante

Sōshi-kai mei

Locate the hollow between your collarbones.
Pinpoint the center.
Then trace a dot three centimeters upwards.
Apply a light pressure.
In time, you will notice this spot collapse.
This is normal.
In time you will notice your skin contract.
And your thumb, it will prune.
Like an infant soaked overnight.
Like elastic stretched too far, then discarded.

Sōshi-kai mei

Repérer le creux entre tes clavicules.

Repérer le centre.

Dessiner ensuite un point trois centimètres plus haut.

Exercer une légère pression.

Avec le temps, remarquer ce point s'effondrer. C'est normal.

Avec le temps remarquer ta peau se contracter. Et ton pouce, s'émacier.

Comme un nourrisson trempé passée la nuit. Comme un élastique trop étiré, puis balancé.

The last time I saw you we took bites out a raw
pumpkin ‘cause no one was looking. I didn’t. I didn’t
know. but if I did you would have spit the chunk in my
palm and it’d be on the ledge right now right by the
candle labeled “storm” that does not smell like a storm,
because what is a storm but dirt and water, because what
is a “storm” but soy wax artificial lavender. I don’t know.
I don’t know. there’s a lot I don’t know.

La dernière fois que je t'ai vu nous avons croqué dans une citrouille crue parce que personne ne nous voyait. Je ne. Je ne savais pas. Mais si j'avais su tu aurais craché le morceau dans ma main et il serait sur le rebord désormais en ce moment même, juste à côté de la bougie « tempête » celle qui n'a pas l'odeur de la tempête, parce que qu'est-ce qu'une tempête sinon de la poussière et de l'eau, parce que qu'est-ce qu'une « tempête » sinon de la cire de soja à la lavande artificielle. je ne sais pas. je ne sais pas. il y a tant de choses que je ne sais pas.

pitterpatter

This afternoon, I listened
cows churning against steel.

4PM sounds:

a tin roof, slipping and
(cannonball)
into

The dirt. *It stinks of ground meat.*

crépitement

Cette après-midi, j'ai entendu
des vaches se cognant contre l'acier.
seize heures sonnent :

un toit de tôle glisse et
(coup de canon) dans

La poussière. Ça *pue la viande hachée.*

Today I passed the dirt tracks your car dug in the driveway by the tree. the one that looks like a lightbulb that bubbles purple with spring.

and kept walking.

Sometimes, I glimpse that car
 skin peeling silver
 Massachusetts license plate pale
 yellow and red text
 tinfoil crumpled into the dent of a tree
 somewhere in rural Connecticut
 a street named Beer Hill Rd.

It was an accident, it was an accident
but (I know)
(you know)
what it is to look at a road where a car would be,
glance at a tree,
and
(press forward)

Aujourd’hui j’ai longé les traces de terre laissée par ta voiture dans l’allée à côté de l’arbre, en forme d’ampoule follicule violet quand printanier.

et j’ai continué à marcher.

Parfois, j’aperçois cette voiture
sous la peau pelée peinture argentée Plaque du
Massachusetts jaune pâle
et caractères rouges
tôle froissée au creux de l’arbre
quelque part dans le Connecticut rural
une rue nommée « Route de la Colline de Bière ».

c’était un accident
mais (je le sais)
(tu le sais)
ce qu’est regarder une route où gît une voiture
coup d’œil à l’arbre,
et
fonce

Translator's Foreword

Lyne Hervey's *Me, Thomas Paine* explores blackness and immigration through the telling of a daughter visiting her mother's home country of Mauritius. She utilizes the revolutionary, Thomas Paine, as a lens through which to recognize cycles of injustice—historically and internationally. In this piece, she calls out France's imperialist history, discusses her Creole origins, and allows the reader to sit with anger. Her piece deals directly with race—a faux pas in French culture. Lyne described to me the French hesitation to acknowledge the violence of slavery, of contemporary racism—issues that the French label an 'American problem.' Hervey says the French go as far as to not name race, avoiding it in conversations. Her peers have described *Me, Thomas Paine* as too angry, too exaggerated; however, when translated directly into English, the text reads as not angry enough. For better or worse, English has a unique vocabulary in naming racism and describing, unflinchingly, its brutalities. This is the intent of Lyne's piece. As such, when working on her excerpt, I translated not only the language, but its cultural context; I utilized harsher language, clipped sentences, and more vivid violent imagery to describe the injustices of French colonialism. *Me, Thomas Paine* is a gorgeous, haunting, and honest piece. It is my honor to have translated this excerpt!

LYNE HERVEY

MOI, THOMAS PAINÉ

Le goudron anthracite s'étire et scintille faiblement ici ou là devant nous malgré le mauvais temps. Les lointains rayons du soleil ne font pas rutiler la route nouvelle. La B9 Coast road a été refaite. Nous prenons la direction du Morne, mon beau-père et ma mère à l'avant, moi assise en tailleur à l'arrière avec un livre de Thomas posé tout près. Je ne l'ai pas encore terminé, des pages en sont cornées, je le découvre petit à petit. Je le trimbale partout avec moi, même lors de cette sortie-pèlerinage. Mes parents discutent de tout et de rien. Mon beau-père propose de passer à Port Louis sur le chemin du retour, ma mère ne préfère pas et pense qu'il vaudrait mieux éviter l'engorgement de la capitale. Je reprendrai plus tard ma lecture car quand je te lis Thomas, je ne supporte plus les bruits parasites. Je regarde mon beau-père, blanc Métropolitain et ma mère, aux origines africaine-indienne-mélanésienne, dite Créolette mauricienne puis, mon regard se porte sur mes jambes repliées ; le triangle que forme le dégradé des couleurs de nos peaux me laisse songeuse. Au fur et à mesure que l'on s'approche du Sud, mes yeux et mon visage s'assombrissent. Le Morne Brabant haut de ses cinq cent cinquante-cinq mètres est une des plus hautes montagnes de l'île. Ça n'est pas difficile, Maurice est plate ; les vents, les éléments ont érodé, sédimenté cette terre australe naguère volcan actif. Morne menaçant. Il n'est pas très grand pourtant, mais il m'opresse rien qu'à le voir sous ce ciel couvert. J'imagine son sommet duquel on se jetait, je songe aux esclaves en fuite, les esclaves marrons. Ils courrent les tripes au bord de la glotte oui, ils cavalent à en vomir pour échapper aux chiens déjà à

**translated from the french by
MINA KHAN**

ME, THOMAS PAINÉ

The charcoal road stretches and sparkles despite the weather. The sunbeams are distant, the path dimly lit. We, my stepfather, my mother and I, are driving towards Morne, with me cross-legged in the back. Next to me is Thomas's book, its pages dog-eared. I haven't finished it yet; I savor each word, carrying him with me everywhere, discovering him slowly. In the car, my parents go on about everything and nothing. My stepfather suggests we stop by Port Louis on the way back, but my mother is concerned about traffic at the capital. I decide to return to my book later, because when I read you, Thomas, I'd prefer not to do so amid any parasitic clatter. I look at my stepdad, who is white and French. Then at my mother, African-Indian-Melanesian, who speaks Mauritian Creole. My gaze turns to my folded legs. A triangular shadow forms between my thighs—three points in the gradient of our skin. I think about this.

My face dims as we approach the south; Le Morne Brabant towers over us at 1820 feet. It's one of the tallest mountains on the island, which isn't a difficult feat. Mauritius is flat; it was once an active volcano, but the wind, the elements, eroded it to land. The sky is close, claustrophobic, and menacingly depressing. I imagine the summit, the slaves, the Black slaves preparing to tumble themselves off the cliff. Running with their organs crammed up their throats; yes, they run, nauseous, running from the dogs, the ferocious

leurs trousses, aux féroces canines des molosses de ces contremaîtres barbares, claquant à quelques mètres de leurs mollets coursés. Les esclaves arrivent au bout de leur désir d'évasion, un pas de plus et ils basculent. Je me représente leurs dernières visions : les mâchoires acérées des cerbères canidés accrochées à leur chair qui sera déchiquetée, arrachée puis le retour certain à la servitude, comme si la fuite après tout, finalement, n'aura servi à rien. Quelle devait être leur décision finale et précipitée au bord du précipice : sauter ou reculer ?

Tout là-haut tout est gris. Il fait chaud et humide, la lumière du soleil et le ciel bleu jouent à cache-cache. Décembre cette année aura été un mois ténébreux sous le tropique du Capricorne. L'air lourd m'assomme tandis que j'ai du mal à me défaire du rugissement des aboiements et de l'odeur de la peur. On crie d'abord on s'évanouit ensuite avant de se fracasser au sol car l'enfant ne peut pas supporter l'idée que le corps tombe sans filet et qu'à la fin de la chute, eh bien c'est la mort assurée. Encore faut-il se jeter d'assez haut, la tête la première pour être sûr de ne pas se rater. Je l'ai entendu ou vu, je ne sais plus. Était-ce après le 11 Septembre, quand des experts commentaient ces confettis filant tout droit vers le bas de l'écran, le long de la tour ? Ils soutenaient que ces personnes-confettis, bien avant d'aller s'écraser à la base des World Trade Center, perdaient connaissance. Très cliniquement, le cerveau humain se doit de disjoncter – ou est-ce le cœur qui explose dans la poitrine ? Je ne m'en souviens pas non plus. On perd connaissance et cela vaut mieux argumentèrent-ils parce qu'avoir conscience de sa propre mort imminente à deux doigts d'arriver, c'est insoutenable. Il me semble l'avoir entendu aussi en écoutant cette voix off de documentaire revenant sur les assassinats politiques perpétrés par les régimes militaires chilien ou argentin ou les deux. Quand on ravissait puis balançait d'avions en plein vol les opposants à ces régimes, au-dessus du Pacifique – ou était-ce l'Atlantique ? Pourquoi est-ce si confus dans ma

canines salivating at their heels, jaws snapping just a few feet from their calves. I imagine the slaves at the edge of the hill, at the edge of giving up, one step from falling. I can see their last memories: the sharp teeth of Cerberus latching onto their flesh, ready to pull it to pieces, to pull these people back to servitude—then it all would have been for nothing, wouldn't it? What would their final decision be here, at this edge: to jump, or to give up?

Up there, everything is gray. It is hot and humid. The sunlight, the blue skies, are off somewhere playing hide and seek. December is a dark month in this Capricorn tropic. The air is heavy and stale as I fight to unhear the roaring, unsmell the pungent odor of fear. When falling, a scream is the last thing you hear, mind vanishing before smashing the ground. The brain cannot conceptualize that a body falling without a net will, well, die. But of course, a body must fall from high enough—head first—to ensure death. This I know. I listened or watched, I don't know which, the 9/11 broadcast on the shooting stars, on the confetti people falling down the screen, down the tower. The broadcasters assured me that the confetti lost consciousness well before cracking the cement of the Twin Towers. They explained it clinically: first, their skin detached—or their hearts exploded in their chests? I don't remember which. During the fall, you lose consciousness and that's for the best, because to witness death just two fingers away—well, that's unbearable. I heard those screams on the broadcast, I heard those screams while watching a documentary on assassinations in either Chile or Argentina—or maybe both—planned by military regimes. When the protesters were loaded onto planes then thrown into the Pacific, they—or was it the Atlantic? What's going on with me?

tête ? Le Morne se rapproche et reprend place dans mes pensées. Il est classé au Patrimoine mondial de l'Unesco. Ce qui s'est passé là-haut, au bord de l'abîme et sur ce mont dans son ensemble appartiennent à l'histoire de l'Humanité. C'est notre pèlerinage ce devoir de mémoire chaque fois que nous revenons en vacances à l'Ile Maurice avec mes parents. Autant dire que ce ne sont pas des vacances plaisir. Pourtant, chaque fois, je me réjouis tant bien que mal de l'ultime droit de ces hommes et femmes, esclaves marrons, part ancestrale de mon histoire, héros et héroïnes arrivées au sommet, de choisir entre la mort ou la liberté.

Novembre, le mois des morts. Ça a son importance si l'on en juge par mes origines créoles, teintées de superstition. Ma mère dit qu'en novembre il faut éviter de sortir après certaines heures, qu'il vaut mieux rester à la maison souvent, ne pas passer le balai après minuit – tu pourrais dessiner un pentacle sans le vouloir ma fille – et éviter de se montrer devant un miroir la nuit tombée. Pour quelles raisons mon reflet deviendrait-il soudainement menaçant après minuit ? Allez savoir. Ma mère interdit même à mon petit frère d'aller à la pousse¹ sur le boulevard Lancastel là-bas à Saint-Denis de La Réunion. Et puis aussi, il faut rendre visite aux morts, les honorer, aller les saluer au cimetière.

— Mais comment ? Même des inconnus Maman ?

— Même des inconnus ma fille. Tu n'aimerais pas toi, qu'on vienne se souvenir de toi et qu'on nettoie ta tombe, qu'on la fleurisse ?

Depuis ma rencontre avec Thomas, j'essaie de cerner d'où, pourquoi et comment je ramène tout à lui. Où me vient ce désir irrésistible d'en savoir plus sur cet homme,

qui il était, ce qu'il a fait. Pourquoi est-ce que je bois

I'm bugging. The mountain is glaring and my thoughts snap back. It's a World Heritage Site, this mountain. What happened there, at the edge of the abyss, is part of human history. It's our shrine. It's our duty to remember this. Each time I visit Mauritius with my parents, we must remember our history. Despite how unpleasant, a part of me delights to remember the men and women, the Black slaves, my ancestry, my history, my heroes and heroines standing at this cliff, choosing, as their last will, between freedom and death.

November, month of the dead. Well, at least according to my Creole origins, which are colored by superstition. My mother says that in November you must avoid going out after certain hours—it's best to stay home. Don't use a broom after midnight, *you could accidentally draw a pentagram, ma fille*—and do not look in the mirror at night! Because after midnight, my reflection suddenly becomes evil? Why? Who knows. Mother prohibits my brother from going to *la pousse'* on Lancaster blvd over by Saint-Denis, Reunion. If he's there, then he, of course, must visit the dead, greet them, honor them at the cemetery.

“Really? Even strangers, Maman?”

“Even strangers, ma fille. Wouldn't you like it if someone visited you, tended your grave, gave you flowers?

Ever since I met Thomas, my thoughts always come back to him. I am trying to understand where, why, how this happens. I think it comes from an irresistible desire to know this man, who he was, what he did. Why is it that I drink his words, each page of his writing like an

¹These illegal car, scooter, and/or motorcycle races are tolerated by authorities, and take place in many cities in Reunion. Visitors take the opportunity to tune up and show off their cars.

chaque mot de ses livres comme un puits sans fond ?
Comment ai-je pu plonger sans filet dans sa vie et son
histoire et que pourrait bien révéler au bout du compte,
tout ce temps passé et dépensé pour lui ? Ma mère
l'appelle Mystère Thomas, elle veut savoir pourquoi ce
monsieur si éloigné de moi fait tourner la tête de sa fille.

Elle n'est pas la seule ; j'espère trouver des réponses
à cette question. J'ai attendu que ma mère soit en
vacances, de passage à Paris pour lui en dire un peu plus
sur mon lien étrange, c'est-à-dire tout ce que j'ignore.
C'était l'été. On avait prévu elle et moi de se retrouver
pour une sortie au musée. J'en profiterais donc pour
m'ouvrir à propos de ma relation impalpable.

Quand on émerge de la bouche de métro, en ce début
d'après-midi du mois d'août, ma mère s'exclame : « On
est à Nice ! » Avec cette allée de palmiers je dois bien
lui donner raison. Bras dessus bras dessous on prend la
pseudo promenade des Anglais vers le palais imposant de
la Porte Dorée. Il est massif ce bâtiment. On reste là à
le regarder un moment avant de se dire qu'on aurait tort
de se laisser intimider comme ça et qu'enfin, on devrait
peut-être y pénétrer. J'ai en tête des images de décors
soviétiques et je me dis qu'il faut un vaste pays pour
d'aussi vastes édifices. La France est-elle encore ce grand
pays ? Ma mère répond à ma pensée audible par ces mots
: « N'oublie pas qu'avec ses terres d'outre-mer, elle l'est
toujours. » Oui, bien sûr Maman, la France ça n'est pas
uniquement l'Hexagone.

endless well? What compels me to dive into that well, no safety net, into his life and story, eager to discover what all this time with him will eventually reveal? My mother is intrigued, too. She calls him *Mystère Thomas*. It's a mystery to her why a man so different from her daughter would turn her head.

And she is not alone; I also long to answer this question. I waited until my mother was taking her trip to Paris to discuss this bizarre connection—which is to say, to discuss everything I don't understand. It was summer. We planned to meet at the National Museum of the History of Immigration; here, I would open up about this impalpable relationship.

When we emerge from the lips of the metro, it is an early August afternoon. My mother, seeing the rows of palm trees, shouts, laughing, “This must be Nice!” We walk arm in arm down the tree-lined avenue, a pale imitation of the Promenade des Anglais, towards la Porte Dorée—the towering golden gate guarding its palace. It’s massive, this building. At first, we are awestruck, agape at the gates. Before remembering that it’s silly to be so intimidated by a museum and that we should, finally, enter it. My head fills with grand notions of Soviet decor and I think—there must be a vast country for these vast buildings. “Is France a big country?” I wonder aloud. My mother answers, “Do not forget that with our islands, it will always be huge.” Yes, that right, Maman. France is not just *l'Hexagone*.²

²The phrase refers to continental France, which excludes French territories such as Martinique, Guadeloupe, Réunion, Guyana, French Polynesia, Saint Pierre, and New Caledonia.

À l'intérieur, on découvre le titre de l'exposition temporaire. Elle nous enchanter : Les musiques révolutionnaires de Londres à Paris. Ma mère éclate de rire. Elle a toujours eu le rire facile et communicatif. Nous rions toutes les deux à présent, ravies de notre bon flair d'avoir choisi ce musée accueillant justement pour notre bon plaisir, l'indiscutable fusion musique-révolution. Notre rire s'écoule au moment où nous empruntons le grand escalier du hall qui nous sépare de l'exposition située à l'étage supérieur. Cet escalier, et les murs qui le surmontent, retracent l'histoire d'une nation, celle de la France et de son empire colonial. Je sens Thomas, en bon penseur révolté, flottant à mes côtés souriant de l'occasion d'être dans mes pensées pour faire la visite avec nous, à la dérobée. Sous nos yeux, sur ces murs, se déroule la frise chronologique des événements de la conquête impérialiste française ainsi que la politique d'immigration, du dix-neuvième siècle jusqu'à celle du Président François Hollande.

Le pas ralentit, nos muscles malgré nous se crispent, nos visages se ferment. Ma mère et moi nous arrêtons pour lire et découvrir un passé qui fragilise nos fondations citoyennes et questionne sur ce qu'est la grandeur de notre pays. Chaque marche montée devient une épreuve. Les impressions d'images puis de photographies incrustées sur ces murs sont sans équivoque : là, des gens parqués dans des embarcations sommaires, de fortune, on les appellera les boat people. Suivent d'autres clichés avec des rangs de personnes sur un quai, un trottoir, des files de travailleurs pauvres devant une usine ; ici, des queues d'immigrés à la soupe populaire ; là-bas un visage d'engagé chinois ou indien rongé par les rides, le travail et la désillusion. Plus jamais ces yeux-là ne reverront leur pays d'origine, ils seront enterrés loin désormais : à l'étranger c'est-à-dire en Métropole ou en outre-mer français. Plus jamais leur langue ne circulera, libre, en territoire conquis et il deviendra parfois insurmontable de se faire comprendre, entendre, aider. Les désirs d'un

When we enter the building, we see the title of the temporary exhibition. We're intrigued: Revolutionary Music from London to Paris. My mother erupts. She's always had an easy, infectious laugh. We roar together, delighted that we chose to visit this museum, just out of curiosity, to find a show on something as true as revolution and music. Our laughter is cut short the moment we step onto the grand staircase, the one that separates this exhibition from the upper floor's. These stairs, its walls, retrace the history of a nation—all of France, including its colonial empire. I feel Thomas hovering beside me. The revolutionary thinker he is, he beams at the chance to occupy my thoughts, to join me on this tour, without anyone noticing. The walls unwind a timeline of the French imperialist conquest, as well as immigration politics from the 19th century, all the way to President François Hollande.

Our pace slows. Our muscles tense. Our face shadows. My mother and I, we slowly uncover a past that questions our country's greatness and weakens the foundations of our citizenship. Paintings and photographs encrust these walls. Each step up the staircase is an indisputable moment of history. Over there—an image of people confined to small boats. Let's call them boat people. Shots of people lined up on docks, on sidewalks, queues of poor workers in front of a factory. Here—immigrants lined up at the soup kitchen. Down there—a Chinese or Indian face. Chewed by wrinkles, by labor, by dissolution. Never again will those eyes see their country, never again will they come home. They will be buried far away. Abroad in France, or on its islands. Never again will their language spread freely across a land—a land conquered until its words are impossible to recognize, to understand, to be saved. An empire craves without

empire ne connaissent pas les sacrifices de ces personnes qui ne serviront qu'à ça : édifier la gloire et la grandeur d'une puissance dont elles ne connaîtront jamais que la souffrance de l'avoir façonnée. Je vois les mâchoires de ma mère se serrer. Elle laisse échapper : « quand ils ont eu besoin de nous, ils nous ont pris, nous ont déplacés et quand ils en ont eu assez, ils nous ont abandonnés et chassés ». Elle parle de son propre départ et de son expérience en France. Les vexations dès qu'elle ouvrait la bouche, son accent stigmatisé, ses fautes d'accords et de français, sa maîtrise peu assurée de la langue à son arrivée, ses heures travaillées systématiquement les soirs, les samedis et dimanches parce qu'immigrée. Elle devait laisser la part du lion, les horaires aménagés en journée aux « vraies Françaises ». Ma mère ne se censure pas, les autres visiteurs non plus d'ailleurs. En passant, chacun réagit à sa manière devant ces murs marqués. Un père dit à son fils : « Regarde ce qu'un pays est capable de faire. Il faut que tu saches pourquoi et comment la France est devenue si riche. » À l'entendre, ce père, je repense à un passage du livre de Thomas : « L'Homme n'a pas fait la Terre et, bien qu'il ait un droit naturel de l'occuper, il n'a pas le droit d'en déterminer une partie à perpétuité comme sa propriété ». Un couple de retraités se lamentent devant la guerre d'Algérie. Ma mère souffle : « Heureusement que ces preuves sont là, qu'elles existent, heureusement que quelqu'un a pris ces photos, récolté et gardé tous ces témoignages ».

Devant ces bribes de récits bruts et bouts d'archives crues, posés sur les longs murs du Palais de la Porte dorée, je me dis que cette sortie au musée avec Maman va être longue. Ma mère et moi atteignons maintenant la marche qui nous place face à l'arrivée massive des immigrés italiens dans les années cinquante. On n'a pas encore atteint les années soixante-dix, décennie de son arrivée en France comme immigrée mauricienne, que déjà je sens peser le poids d'une histoire, d'une conquête et d'enjeux trop lourds à porter pour les femmes que

recognizing the sacrifices of its people. It builds itself glory, grandeur, and power, without acknowledging the suffering of its people. I notice my mother's jaw clench. "When they needed us, they took us, displaced us. And when they didn't need us anymore, they abandoned us, drove us out." I know she's referring to her own departure from her home country, her own experience in France; how the French acted when she opened her mouth, spoke in her accent and in her grammar. Of her poor command of language when she first arrived. Of her hours spent as a robot—at night, on Saturdays, Sundays, because she's an immigrant, because the normal working hours with weekdays and sunlight were allotted to the "real French." In the museum, my mother doesn't censor herself, and neither do the other visitors. I hear the strangers and their comments on the marked walls. A father to his son, "You must learn how a country becomes so rich. Look at what it's capable of." On hearing this, I am reminded of a passage in Thomas's book, "Man did not make the earth, although he has a natural right to occupy it. He does not have the right to determine a part of it perpetually as his property." A retired couple mourns the Algerian war. My mother breathes, "Luckily the evidence is there, it exists. Luckily someone took all these photos, collected and kept all these testimonies."

Standing before the snippets of raw stories and archives expanding the walls of the Palais de la Port dorée, I realize it'll a long way to the exit. My mother and I travel through a mass of Italian immigrants in the 1950s. We have not yet reached the 60s, the period of Mauritian immigration to France; yet I already feel the weight of history, of conquest and problems too heavy for us women to bear. While she lingers to read all the

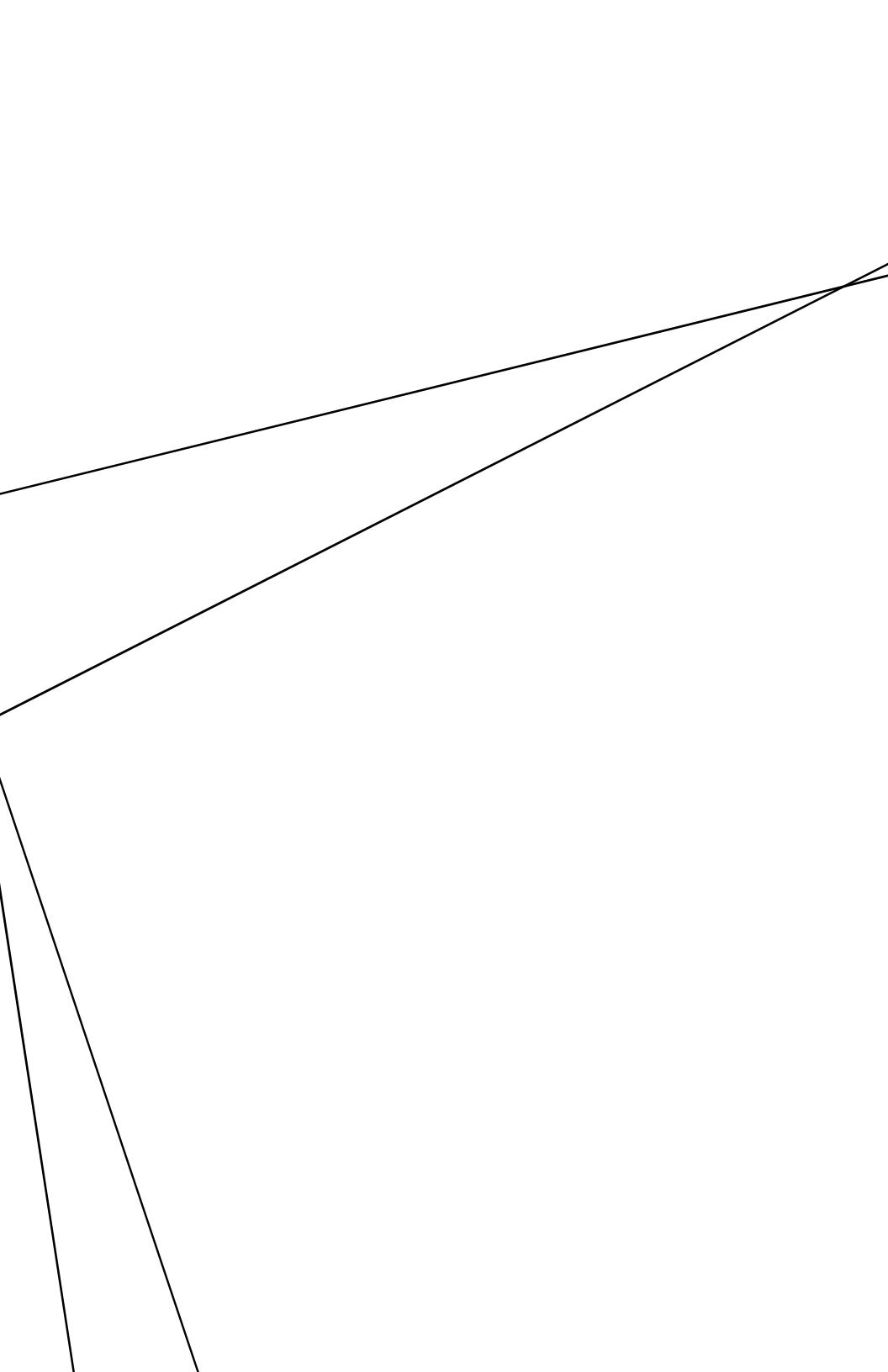
nous sommes. Alors qu'elle s'attarde à lire tous les textes liés à l'immigration italienne, je me demande ce qui lie ma mère à ces destins inconnus et passés, de personnes si lointaines et différentes d'elle ? La famille des déracinés, quels qu'en soient ses membres, éparpillés, déchirés ou disparus, ne formerait-elle qu'une seule et même souche, celle de la géante famille des immigrés ? Quelle que soit sa terre d'origine, il faut l'oublier ou l'idéaliser afin de tenir le coup vers cet exil forcé, accepter une compromission sur l'avenir, une non-promesse de continuité. Je me dis que je suis heureuse de n'avoir pas vécu ces vagues de départs. Quitter ma terre minuscule pour une autre imposante et nécessairement hostile, je n'aurais certainement pas eu la même force que ma mère quand elle a dû quitter son île Maurice natale. Certaines terres ont beau se parer du vêtement attrayant de l'accueil, l'hospitalité n'est qu'un accessoire qui jamais n'ira de soi. « Rital », ce mot remis dans son contexte d'alors et jeté sur la pierre du musée à la vue de tous et sans détour possible, me met mal à l'aise. Il me renvoie à un lexique que nous ne connaissons que trop bien, nous, les descendants des « Français pauvres et d'origine » .

Je ne vois pas sur ces parois, l'histoire de ces Mauriciennes et Mauriciens venus comme ma grand-mère et ses enfants en France en tant que main d'œuvre bon marché. C'est mon histoire maternelle mêlée à celle de la France, mon pays de naissance et pourtant, dans ce musée-mausolée je ne vois pas inscrit le devoir de mémoire concernant cette ancienne Île de France comme s'appelait jadis, l'île Maurice. Je ne retrouve pas, sur la roche de l'édifice historique, ma trajectoire familiale également partagée par des centaines de milliers d'autres comme moi, en France. Mes yeux se mettent, en vain, à la recherche d'Inès, mon arrière-grand-mère parmi tous ces visages compactés d'engagé.e.s asiatiques à bord de ces embarcations de fortune. Ça aurait pu être elle là, compressée comme une minuscule sardine (elle était petite) quelque part sur ce rafiot....

text on Italian immigration, I wonder: what connection does my mother feel to these unknown pasts and futures, to unknown peoples so different from herself? Do the uprooted, the scattered, torn, or disappeared, form a single group, one giant family of migrants? Wherein whatever your land of origin, you must forget—or fantasize—about it so as to endure a forced exile, so to accept a compromise of the future, a promise of non-continuity. I think I am glad to not have experienced these waves of departures. I certainly would not have had my mother's strength when she left her minuscule homeland for one so hostile, so imposing. It's easy for a country to dress itself in the garb of hospitality, but a garb will only ever be just that. "*Rital.*" This Italian slur was so easily used back then, and is thrown now onto the walls of this museum, to be seen by all without possible detour. This word refers to a lexicon with which we—the "*Français pauvres et d'origine*³"—are all too familiar.

On these walls, I don't see the story of Mauritians like my grandmother or her children, hired by France for cheap labor. My maternal line is mixed into French history; France is my country of birth, and yet, this museum-mausoleum holds no memory of the former *Isle de France*—my island of Mauritius. Inscribed into the brick of this historical building, I do not find my history, one shared by thousands of French citizens just like me. My eyes search in vain for Ines, my great grandmother, crowded among the photos of Asian faces on makeshift boats. She was there, her already small body squished like a tiny sardine, on a raft somewhere...

³A common phrase used to refer to impoverished French residents whose ancestry and/or place of birth are not France; these people have roots in Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Islands, etc.



word for word / wort für wort
Columbia University School of the Arts
Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig

Translator's Foreword

„Hunger“ ist ein Auszug aus einem Romanmanuskript von Anamarie Katayoon Pasdar. Ich hatte das Vergnügen, mich im Rahmen des Übersetzungsaustausches intensiv mit ihrem Text auseinanderzusetzen und die Ehre, das Kapitel „Hunger“ zur Übersetzung anvertraut zu bekommen. Die narrativen Fäden, die Anamarie in ihrem Text zusammenflicht, überspannen mehrere Generationen und Erdplatten, binden das Politische in das Private und das Historische in das Persönliche ein. Anamarie bringt Erinnerungen an die Deutsche Sprache mit der Kindheit zusammen, dekonstruiert gleichsam die Vorstellung von Erinnerung und Kindheit als etwas abgeschlossenes, indem beide als Geflecht offenbart werden, die sich in Eigenes und der in ihre Familiengeschichte Eingebettetes, Gehörtes, Zitiertes und Nacherzähltes aufgliedert. Die Sprache selbst dient ihr als Material und als Bindeglied; ein nostalgisches Kinderlied über das Backen verhallt im Text und findet sich im Namen einer historischen Figur wieder, deren politische Genealogie in kausalen Zusammenhang mit dem Überleben der eigenen Mutter steht, genauso wie mit dem Sterben vieler anderer. Die Ambivalenzen und Grenzen der Erzählung werden reflektiert und im Spektrum einer vielfach gebrochenen Sicht beleuchtet. Die Geschichte der Mutter hallt in der eigenen Geschichte wieder, transgenerationalles Trauma und translinguale Erinnerung gehen ineinander über. Anamaries Text bindet narrative Schleifen, er schafft diese Verbindungen, scheinbar ohne sich zu verausgaben, sie sind ihm eingeschrieben. Die Eleganz und Lässigkeit, mit der Anamarie dieses feine Gewebe aus Beobachtung, Brillanz und Stille schafft, haben mich beim ersten Lesen sehr beeindruckt. Aus einer historisch materialistischen Perspektive finde ich, dass ein Umgang mit Geschichte einen Blick auf Einzelheiten, Ambivalenzen und auf Ungesagtes erfordert; diese

Kriterien habe ich in „Hunger“ als virtuos erfüllt empfunden und habe mich deshalb sehr gefreut, den Text ins Deutsche übertragen zu dürfen. In dem Wissen, dass eine Übersetzung einen Text manchmal Windungen abverlangt, oder Knoten macht, wo vorher keine waren, aber auch neue Verknüpfungen zulässt, stand ich mit Anamarie im regelmäßigen Austausch, über den ich neue Texte, Bücher, Geschichten kennengelernt habe. Unser Austausch ging oft über die Detailarbeit an unseren Texten hinaus, und war für mich ein großartiges Erlebnis, für dass ich sehr dankbar bin.

ANAMARIE PASDAR

HUNGER

Hesper is home sick. I am upstairs working when I hear my mom singing to her

Backe backe Kuchen

Der Bäcker hat gerufen

Wer will guten Kuchen backen

Der muss haben sieben Sachen:

Eier und Salz

Sucher und Schmalz

Milch und Mehl,

Safran macht der Küche gelb

Someone sang that to my mom. Her Omi? Her mom?
Her aunts? Her brother? Her grandfather? Her father?
All of the above. Who sings it to my daughter? Only my
mom, who sang it to me. Culture needs more than one
person to reinforce its bonds.

I am reading about The Hunger Plan aka Der
Hungerplan oder Der backe-plan...in a sliver of a
moment my brain sometimes flashes into Deutsch: oder
instead of or. German was my first language; my mother

**aus dem englischen übersetzt von
LENA SCHMIDT**

HUNGER

Hesper ist zuhause. Sie ist krank. Ich sitze oben, und während ich arbeite, höre ich, wie meine Mutter für sie singt

Backe backe Kuchen
Der Bäcker hat gerufen

Wer will guten Kuchen backen
Der muss haben sieben Sachen:

Eier und Salz
Zucker und Schmalz
Milch und Mehl,
Safran macht die Küche gelb

Jemand hatte ihr das vorgesungen, als sie ein Kind war.
Ihre Omi? Ihre Mutter? Ihre Tanten? Ihr Bruder? Ihr Großvater? Ihr Vater? Sie alle wahrscheinlich. Wer singt es meiner Tochter vor? Nur meine Mutter, die es mir vorgesungen hatte, als ich ein Kind war. Kultur braucht mehr als eine Person, um ihre Bande aufrecht zu halten.

Ich lese etwas über den Hunger Plan, bekannt als Der Hunger Plan oder Der Backe-Plan...für den Bruchteil einer Sekunde springt mein Hirn manchmal ins Deutsche; oder statt „or“. Deutsch war meine erste

spoke to me in German and until I started school I spoke to her and my brother in German. There is a snap of primal contentment when I hear leute, die Deutsch sprechen, like stepping into a familiar and loved place. This feeling of comfort is swiftly knocked aside by a jarring awareness of my dislocation: I don't understand much, it's totally familiar and absolutely closed to me simultaneously. The disjointedness has a cloudy nightmarish quality to it. My brain wants to understand; it is supposed to understand; why does it not understand? Als ich ein Kind war, verstand ich | when I was a child, I understood.

Als das kind, kind war...my friend James had that quote tacked to the outside of his dorm room door, the quote from Eine Himmel Über Berlin | Wings of Desire. A German quote from an art house film pinned to the corkboard on a dorm room door: That!! Ladies and gentlemen, is a marker of a particular fellow, a person to befriend. That quote and the Radiohead leaking under the door and the dog-eared book of Larkin poems on the windowsill, James was a magnet for the pensively inclined.

Here's the poem:

Lied Vom Kindsein | Song of Childhood – Peter Handke

Sprache; meine Mutter sprach deutsch mit mir und bis ich in die Schule ging sprach ich mit ihr und meinem Bruder deutsch. Wenn ich Leute, die deutsch sprechen höre, ist da etwas wie ein Einrasten in ein ursprüngliches Behagen, so als würde ich an einem vertrauten und geliebten Ort ankommen. Dieses Gefühl der Geborgenheit wird durch ein jähes Bewusstsein meiner Entwurzelung, meines „Ausgekugeltseins“ erschüttert: Ich verstehe nicht viel, die Sprache ist mir gleichzeitig vollkommen vertraut und absolut verschlossen. Die Zusammenhangslosigkeit hat etwas Trübes, Albtraumhaftes. Mein Gehirn will verstehen; es müsste verstehen, warum versteht es nicht? Als ich ein Kind war, verstand ich | when I was a child, I understood.

Als das Kind Kind war ... Mein Freund James hatte dieses Zitat außen an die Tür seines Schlafsaals geheftet, das Zitat aus Der Himmel Über Berlin | Wings of Desire. Ein deutsches Zitat von einem Art House Film, an die Kork-Pinnwand einer Schlafsaaltür gepinnt: Das!! Meine Damen und Herren, ist das Merkmal eines besonderen Typen, einer Person, mit der es sich anzufreunden gilt. Dieses Zitat, der unten durch den Türspalt sickernde Klang von Radiohead, und der eselsohrige Gedichtband von Larkin auf dem Fensterbrett, verliehen James eine Anziehungskraft, die auf die Nachdenklichen unter uns wirkte wie ein Magnet.

Hier ist das Gedicht.

Lied vom Kindsein „Song of Childhood“ – Peter Handke

Als das Kind Kind war,
ging es mit hängenden Armen,
wollte der Bach sei ein Fluß,
der Fluß sei ein Strom,
und diese Pfütze das Meer.

Als das Kind Kind war,
wußte es nicht, daß es Kind war,
alles war ihm beseelt,
und alle Seelen waren eins

Als das Kind Kind war,
hatte es von nichts eine Meinung,
hatte keine Gewohnheit,
saß oft im Schneidersitz,
lief aus dem Stand,
hatte einen Wirbel im Haar
und machte kein Gesicht beim fotografieren.

Als das Kind Kind war,
war es die Zeit
der folgenden Fragen:
Warum bin ich ich
und warum nicht du?
Warum bin ich hier und
warum nicht dort?
Wann begann die Zeit
und wo endet der Raum?
Ist das Leben unter der Sonne
nicht bloß ein Traum?

*Als das Kind Kind war,
ging es mit hängenden Armen,
wollte der Bach sei ein Fluß,
der Fluß sei ein Strom,
und diese Pfütze das Meer.*

*Als das Kind Kind war,
wußte es nicht, daß es Kind war,
alles war ihm besetzt,
und alle Seelen waren eins*

*Als das Kind Kind war,
hatte es von nichts eine Meinung,
hatte keine Gewohnheit,
saß oft im Schneidersitz,
lief aus dem Stand,
hatte einen Wirbel im Haar
und machte kein Gesicht beim fotografieren.*

*Als das Kind Kind war,
war es die Zeit
der folgenden Fragen:
Warum bin ich ich
und warum nicht du?
Warum bin ich hier und
warum nicht dort?
Wann begann die Zeit
und wo endet der Raum?
Ist das Leben unter der Sonne
nicht bloß ein Traum?*

Ist was ich sehe und höre
und rieche nicht bloß der Schein
einer Welt vor der Welt?
Gibt es tatsächlich das Böse
und Leute, die wirklich
die Bösen sind?

When a child was a child
It goes about with hanging arms
Wants something to be a river
The river to be a storm maybe
And these feet a meercat?

That can't be right

Child/child was etc
It didn't know that it was a child
All was with him sealed (?) *Wrong*
And everything sealed was one *I know I am wrong*

Child/child yada yada
It didn't have an idea in its head
Had no living time (wtf)
Sat often in some seat *You get my understanding is*
Ran around the area *milky at best so here is the rest*
Had something in its hair *accurately translated*
Didn't make faces within a *You are no longer*
photograph *condemned to*
my confusion

*Ist was ich sehe und höre
und rieche nicht bloß der Schein
einer Welt vor der Welt?
Gibt es tatsächlich das Böse
und Leute, die wirklich
die Bösen sind?*

Als ein Kind ein Kind war
Läuft es mit hängenden Armen rum
Möchte dass irgendwas ein Fluss ist
Dass der Fluss ein Sturm ist, vielleicht
Und diese Füße ein Erdmännchen? *Das kann nicht
stimmen.*

Kind/war Kind etc
Wusste nicht, dass es ein Kind war
Und war mit ihm versiegelt (?) *Falsch. Ich weiß,*
Und alle die versiegelt waren, waren eins *ich liege
daneben*

Kind/Kind war usw usf
Hatte es nicht eine Idee in seinem Kopf *Wie ihr seht, ist
mein*
Hatte keine lebendige Zeit (wtf) *Verständnis im besten
Falle*
Saß oft in irgendeinem Sitz *schleierhaft.*
Rannte in der Gegend rum *Hier ist also der Rest*
Hatte etwas im Haar *Akkurat übersetzt*
Machte keine Gesichter innerhalb *Ihr seid meinen Wirren
nicht*
Einer Fotografie *länger ausgeliefert.*

When the child was a child,
It was the time for these questions:
Why am I me, and why not you?
Why am I here, and why not there?
When did time begin, and where does space end?
Is life under the sun not just a dream?
Is what I see and hear and smell
not just an illusion of a world before the world?
Given the facts of evil and people,
does evil really exist?

Als das Kind ein Kind war, war es die Zeit
für diese Fragen:
Warum bin ich ich
und warum nicht du?
Warum bin ich hier und
warum nicht dort?
Wann begann die Zeit
und wo endet der Raum?
Ist das Leben unter der Sonne
nicht bloß ein Traum?
Ist was ich sehe und höre und rieche
nicht bloß die Illusion einer
Welt vor der Welt?
Wenn das Böse und die
Menschen gegeben sind, gibt es
das Böse dann wirklich?

To ask if evil exists, we need to know what it is. The people who teach us to speak are the ones who tell us what words mean, who define the world for us, in the beginning.

I have a picture of my mom aged five or six. She is thin: not Auschwitz thin, but the bones of her kneecaps show under a thin dress; her eyes look sunken and are ringed with black circles. Even if she was a stranger to me, which really my mother as a child is a stranger to me, my heart would still seize a little looking at the hunger and need in this stranger child. The large bow in her hair seems incongruously decorative on a starving child. I assumed hunger had a sizable presence in her childhood, I mean, war, etc., plus witnessing the long-term effects of malnutrition on her current dental health—surgeries, implants, bridges, a lot of awkward pain—and it was, hunger was real, the pictures tell me her legs were bony and undernourished. But she had food when others did not, because a man named Herbert Becke.

Herbert Becke was born in Georgia, Tbilisi, to a Prussian dad and a Caucasus German mom. Herbert's mom's mom had been born in Georgia to parents who had been born in Georgia to parents who were born in Georgia to parents who emigrated from Germany, which meant Herbert, a fourth generation Georgian was not considered sufficiently loyal to Georgia and Russia because of his German ancestry, and was therefore interned at the start of World War I because he was a Prussian citizen. He emigrated to Germany in 1917 and after working as a laborer, he enrolled at the University

Um der Frage nachzugehen, ob das Böse existiert, müssen wir wissen, was es ist. Es sind dieselben Menschen, die uns das Sprechen beibringen, die uns erklären, was die Worte bedeuten, die unsere Welt an ihrem Anfang definieren.

Ich habe ein Foto von meiner Mutter, als sie fünf oder sechs ist. Sie ist dünn: nicht Auschwitz-dünn, aber ihrer knochigen Kniescheiben zeichnen sich unter ihrem leichten Kleid ab; ihr Augen sind tief eingesunken und von dunklen Ringen umkränzt. Selbst wenn ich sie nicht kennen würde, und tatsächlich kenne ich sie ja als Kind nicht, würde mein Herz beim Anblick dieses fremden, Hunger und Not leidenden Kindes kurz ins Stocken geraten. Die große Schleife, die ihr Haar schmückt, wirkt unpassend dekorativ auf diesem hungernden Kind. Ich nehme an, der Hunger nahm in ihrer Kindheit einen gewissen Raum ein; ich meine, es war Krieg, etc., plus: die Langzeitfolgen der Mangelernährung sehe ich an ihrer Zahngesundheit – Operationen, Implantate, Brücken, viel unangenehmer Schmerz – und so war es, der Hunger war real, die Bilder erzählen mir von ihren knochigen, unterernährten Beinen. Und doch hatte sie Essen, als andere keins hatten, wegen eines Mannes namens Herbert Backe.

Herbert Backe wurde als Sohn eines Preußischen Vaters und einer Kaukasiendeutschen Mutter in Tblisi, Georgien geboren. Die Mutter von Herberts Mutter war in Georgien geboren worden, ebenso wie ihre Eltern und die Eltern ihrer Eltern, deren Eltern wiederum aus Deutschland emigriert waren, was wiederum bedeutete, dass Herbert, George vierter Generation, aufgrund seiner deutschen Abstammung als nicht ausreichend loyal gegenüber Georgien und Russland betrachtet wurde und zu Beginn des ersten Weltkrieges interniert wurde, weil er Preußischer Staatsbürger war. 1917 emigrierte er nach Deutschland und nachdem er dort als Lohnarbeiter tätig war, immatrikulierte er 1920 an der Universität

of Göttingen in 1920 and studied agronomy. In 1926 his doctoral dissertation “The Russian Cereals Economy” as the Basis of Russian Agriculture and the Russian Economy was rejected; however after Germany invaded Russia in 1941, he took the opportunity to self-publish 10,000 copies of his paper. Curious move, particularly in wartime 1941.

Becke joined the Nazi party by 1925, worked as a farm administrator, got married, joined the SS, worked middle management jobs, rising in prominence and then in 1944, assumed the post of Minister of Agriculture.

The objective of the Hunger Plan was to inflict deliberate mass starvation on the Slavic civilian populations under German occupation by directing all food supplies to the German home population.

When does experience breed empathy? When vengeance?

Göttingen, um Agrarwissenschaft zu studieren. 1926 wurde seine Doktorarbeit *Die russische Getreidewirtschaft als Grundlage der Land- und Volkswirtschaft Russlands* abgelehnt; trotzdem ergriff er 1941, nach der Deutschen Invasion in Russland, die Gelegenheit 10.000 Exemplare seiner Arbeit im Selbstverlag zu veröffentlichen. Ein kurioser Schachzug, vor allem 1941 – inmitten des Krieges.

Backe schloss sich 1925 der Nationalsozialistischen Partei an, arbeitete als landwirtschaftlicher Verwalter, heiratete, schloss sich der SS an, arbeitete in mittleren Verwaltungspositionen, stieg gesellschaftlich immer weiter auf und errang dann, 1944, den Posten des Landwirtschaftsministers.

Ziel des Hungerplans war es, die Slawische Bevölkerung unter deutscher Besatzung absichtlich massenhaft verhungern zu lassen, indem sämtliche Lebensmittellieferketten an die deutsche „Heimatbevölkerung“ gelenkt wurden.

Wann bringt Erfahrung Empathie hervor? Wann Rache?

Translator's Foreword

It has been a secret shame of mine that I have never been one to spend time lingering over anything: not a painting, a moment, a book, not a blooming tree. I rarely read books twice or watch movies a second time. It's not disinterest, but hunger: *there is so much to do.* But with translation, I am captured, I am contained by my task. The thing I must do: transpose the meaning as carefully as I can from one language to the next, feels like separating the egg yolk from the white, only in the case of translation, I must transfer the slippery yolk into a new shell and make the egg appear unbroken. The confinement of the work, and the challenge of thinking through words, finding a way to carry the meaning is so engaging.

I am not fluent in German. That this translation makes any sense at all is due to the support of Susan Bernofsky, my classmates, and my patient friend Sabine Cockrill: most especially the trust of Lena Schmidt as I stumbled my way through the initial translations of her remarkably nimble work of prose.

Lena is a writer who is obsessed with Vermittlungsaporie | the perplexity of intercession.

Here she has written a river of words about the unüberbrückbare Lücke | unbridgeable gap between *what is meant and what is said.* Translating Lena's work felt like slowly decoding a message about the very process I was immersed in, like looking into a trippy magic mirror while navigating the gap between understanding and fluency.

She writes with looping echoes and precision; her voice is clear, her humor ever present as she deftly delineates

the hunt for *that rustling thing*, the elusive (...) you understand it, or you don't yet, but you will after reading this explosive prose from a writer who works so deftly with language to make the theoretical personal. Lena pushes the boundaries of what language can do, while writing about those very limitations. It was such a pleasure to spend time with her words and her mind.

LENA SCHMIDT

(...)

WORT / BILD oder SENSE / GESTE oder
REISSZAHN / GREIFARM oder RHIZOME /
IKONEN oder MESSER / NETZ oder GITTER /
GRAMMAR oder (...)

Es ist ärgerlich, ich weiß jetzt schon, es wird ein anstrengender Text. Ich will nämlich/deshalb versuchen mich zu fangen. *Mich* heißt, Welt die sich in mir ablagert und einprägt. Aber wie lauere ich ihr/mir am besten auf? Vielleicht sollte ich vor meiner Geburt beginnen. Damit meine ich, irgendwie die Stromrichtung nachzuzeichnen, die meinem fröhlichkindlichen Spracherwerb, dem Saugen an der Welt, richtungsweisend war. Oder vielleicht sind es die Mulden, in die ich mein Denken gelegt habe, die es so geformt haben, bestimmte Mulden aus Grammatik, in die ich dann das Gemisch aus Allgemeinem/Persönlichem, Vokabular/Welterfahrung hinein kippen konnte.

Atmung, Osmose, Geschrei. Vor meiner Geburt gab es meine Familie schon (große Teile davon jedenfalls). Meine Mutter wuchs in der Schweiz auf, als Kind einer Dänin und eines Schweden, die sich teilweise auf Englisch verständigten. Sie wuchs zwischen vier Sprachen auf, und organisierte ihr Denken deswegen, so glaube ich jedenfalls, rhizomatisch und ikonisch, oder; durch die Verkettung von Assoziationen und Bildern. „Heimat“ war für sie ein Negativ ihrer realen Umgebung. Heimat in Anführungszeichen, weil ich mich von dem Begriff distanzieren will. Als sie 18 war, starb ihre Mutter, meine „Mormor“ (Schwedisch: „*Muttersmutter*“). Ihre Familie rann über die Weltkarte wie Quecksilber. Meine Mutter, Tochter eines Piloten, wurde mit 18 nicht nur mutter-,

**translated from the german by
ANAMARIE PASDAR**

(...)

WORD/IMAGE or SENSE/ GESTURE or TOOTH/
TENTACLE or RHIZOME/ ICON or KNIFE/ NET or
GRID/GRAMMAR or (...)

It's annoying. I already know this is going to be an exhausting text. Exhausting because I am going to be attempting to capture myself. Myself, meaning, the world and its debris, swirling inside of me and leaving a trail of sediment. But how to ambush it/myself, what's the best approach? Maybe I should start before I was born. That way I think, I can kind of retrace the current that oriented my childhood acquisition of language, that suckling on the world. Or maybe the hollows in which I lay my thoughts shaped them that way, those particular hollows of grammar into which I tip my mixture of experience: universal, personal, verbal, world. Respiration, osmosis, outcry. My family existed before I was born (a big part of it anyways). My mother grew up in Switzerland, the child of a Dane and a Swede who communicated sometimes in English. She grew up between four languages, and I think that's why she organizes her thoughts rhizomatically and iconically, or: through the concatenation of associations and images. "*Heimat*" for them was a negative of their actual surroundings. Heimat in quotation marks, because I want to distance myself from the term. Her family ran across the world map like quicksilver. Her mother died when she was eighteen, my "*Mormor*" (Swedish: "mother's mother"). My mother, daughter of a pilot, became not only motherless at eighteen but also stateless;

sondern auch staatenlos und zog zuerst nach Dänemark, kurz in den Iran, reiste dann in Vorderasien, in Pakistan, in Indien, herum, lernte meinen Vater in Afghanistan kennen, und ging dann nach Amerika, wo sie ihren ersten Mann kennengelernt. Sie bekam dort meinen Halbbruder, während ihr Vater, Schwester und Bruder nach Schweden „zurück“ gingen. Zurück in Anführungszeichen, weil eigentlich nur mein Großvater zurück ging, seine Kinder hatten ja nie wirklich dort gelebt. (Irgendwo habe ich mal gehört, dass Menschen, die viel in Anführungszeichen stellen, näher am Wahnsinn sind, als Leute, die das nicht tun. Ich fand es daraufhin eine Zeitlang sehr witzig, alles in Anführungszeichen zu setzen. Noch lustiger; die Geste der Gänsefüßchen, eine Alberheit, die sich zwischen gekrümmten Zeige- und Mittelfingern aufspannt. Jetzt bin ich wieder abgeschweift – zurück zum „Eigentlichen“) Meine Tante bekam mit einem Franzosen ein Kind, der Bruder, mein Onkel, mit einer Schwedin, die Halbschwestern meiner Mutter wanderten nach England und Italien aus und gründeten dort Familien. Auf meinen Familientreffen mütterlicherseits wurde überdimensional viel gestikuliert, glaube ich. Wir Kinder sprachen miteinander ein Gemisch aus Sprachen und Gesten, ich kann mich nicht daran erinnern, irgendwann nichts verstanden zu haben. Oft imitierten wir Filmsequenzen, spielten oder malten. Mir fiel eigentlich nicht auf, dass wir nicht die gleichen Sprachen verstanden. Als ich meine ADHS Diagnose bekam, vor gar nicht so langer Zeit, stand im Befund der psychologischen Einschätzungsbesprechungen an erster Stelle: „Frau Schmidt gestikuliert sehr viel.“ Mir war das selber nie aufgefallen.

Die Familie meines Vaters ist geographisch und auch sonst weniger eklektisch. Aber auch hier erstreckt sich die Verwandtschaft nach Österreich, Italien, Israel, Syrien. Irgendwie scheint mir das Ringen um Sprache und der Komplex von Vermittlung und Übersetzung ein Knotenpunkt zu sein, der die Stränge/Strähnen/

she lost her Swedish passport after becoming an adult who had never lived in Sweden. First, she moved to Denmark, then briefly to Iran, then she travelled to the Near East, to Pakistan, around India, in Afghanistan she met my father, then went on to America where she met her first husband. She had my half-brother there, while her father, sister and brother went “back” to Sweden. Back in quotes, because actually my Grandfather was the only one going back, his children had never lived there. Somewhere I heard that people who put quotes around everything are closer to madness than those who don’t. For a while I found it very funny to use quotes all the time. Even funnier: “*Gänsefüßchen*”—air quotes are called goose-feet in German—the gesture is a silliness laced between crooked index and middle fingers. Now I’ve digressed again—back to “reality”. My aunt had a child with a Frenchman; her brother, my uncle, had children with a Swede; my mother’s half-sisters migrated to England and Italy and started families there. There was a lot of überdimensional hand-waving at my mother’s family reunions. We children communicated with a mix of languages and gestures; I can’t remember having trouble understanding anything at any point. Often, we played, painted or imitated film sequences. I never actually noticed that we didn’t understand the same languages. Not that long ago, when I was diagnosed with ADHD, the first thing the psychological assessment noted was “Ms. Schmidt gesticulates a lot.” I had never noticed.

My father’s side is less eclectic, geographically and in other ways. But here too, the family ties extend across Austria, Italy, Israel, Syria. My struggle to find the right language, to translate and mediate this complexity seems to me to be a “*knotenpunkt*”, literally knot-point or node at which all the strands of my existence are joined

Fäden/Fasern meines Daseins verbindet. Ich denke manchmal über die alttestamentarische Geschichte vom Turmbau nach, der sich in Babel zugetragen haben soll. Das Bild davon liegt irgendwo in mir herum und von dort aus leitet sich mein ganzer Bezug auf die Welt ab. Dort kommt auch mein Schreiben her, oder der Drang danach, das am selben Punkt aber auch oft, in irgendeiner Windung dieses Knotens, oder schwindelnd in irgendeiner Etage zum Erliegen kommt. Das Schreiben ist also Babylonisches Derivat, aber auch in vielen anderen Bildern aufgehoben, die auch irgendwo in mir herumliegen, oder festhängen. Zum Beispiel als Bild von einem Kampf. Ich würde spontan sagen, es ist ein Kampf zwischen einem Hai und einer Qualle. Man kann die Sprache als scharfkantiges Gebiss sehen oder als umschlingende Tentakel. Man kann sie auch als Schwert oder als Mantel sehen. Als Asymptote oder Netz. Präzision oder Metapher, Verstand oder Gefühl. (...)

Ich kürze ab; Satzzeichen helfen mir, beim Verweis auf eine schier endlose Kette von weiteren Antagonismen, die sich auf einen, den Himmel zu durchdringen drohenden Stapel türmen: Die zwei Klammern und drei Punkte zeigen auf etwas, ohne sich genötigt zu fühlen, ihm eine Form zu geben, sie vertrauen auf das Verständnis der Lesenden, was daneben fällt, fällt daneben. Die Klammern sind Panzer, Chitin oder Grenzschild, die Punkte sind, jeder für sich, eine letzte, kompromisslose Instanz. Und Stopp. KO-Schlag im Kampf. Vehementer Abschluss, Nachdruck. Punkt. Dann aber noch zwei weitere Punkte: Punkt. Punkt. Wiederholte Vehemenz – scheint mir wie ein Widerspruch. Oder wie eine Dehnübung. Die drei Punkte üben sich also in Gelassenheit, die die heißgelaufene, in Kreissägenbewegung Ölfetzen um sich spritzende, fortlaufend schneller rasende Sprachproduktionsmaschine nie aufbringen, eher gesagt; zu der sie sich nie herunterdrosseln könnte; Ich könnte hier endlos lange weiterschreiben, versuchen das

together. Often, I think about the tower in the Old Testament story, the one that is said to have been built in Babel. This metaphor is lying around somewhere inside of me and how I see the world is filtered through that image. This is the source of my writing, or my desire to write: but equally at the same time, following the twists of this spiral can make me spin out and come to a standstill. Writing is another legacy of Babylon, also preserved in so many other ideas that are suspended somewhere in me or are stuck. For example: to illustrate this struggle, I would spontaneously offer a fight between a shark and a jellyfish. One can see language as razor sharp teeth or grasping tentacles. One can see it as a sword or a cloak. As an asymptote or a net. Precision or metaphor, thinking or feeling.

I'll cut it short: when referencing a seemingly endless stack of further antagonisms, that pile one on top of another into a tower, threatening to pierce the sky—punctuation marks help me. The two brackets and three dots indicate something without feeling compelled to give it a form; they trust in the understanding of the reader: what gets lost, gets lost. The parentheses are armor, chitin or border signs, each individual period a last, uncompromising stance. And... Stop! The K.O. punch in the fight. A vehement ending. Punkt. Then two more dots. Period. Period. Repeated vehemence—seems to me a contradiction, the word *period* itself meaning both duration and endpoint. Or maybe a stretch. The three dots practice themselves in serenity, in a way that the overheated, buzzsaw screeching, oil spewing, constantly accelerating language creation machine could only dream of throttling itself down to; I could continue writing endlessly here, trying to peel off what I mean, trying to

Gemeinte zu schälen, versuchen auszudifferenzieren, was ich eigentlich sagen will, versuchen immer weiter zu teilen, zu präzisieren, asymptotisch und scharfkantig sich an den Sinn anzuschmiegen, in verzweifelten Verkettungen und ermüdenden Nuancen ins Stottern kommen und Versuche versuchen; Vers versucht. Sucht.

Oder ich versuche die Sprache als Netz auszuwerfen, ein Bild einzufangen, in lose miteinander verwobenen Fäden - also, zum Beispiel hab ich einen Traum der sich oft wiederholt. Von einem Zoo bzw. Terrarium, in dem ich allein im Dunkeln herumlaufe, Schatten und Schemen sehe, aber keine Tiere, nur leere Gehege und manchmal nicht einmal die. Alles erscheint wie in einem statischen Zustand verhaltener, versteckter Bewegung, wie wenn es nachts sehr dunkel ist und reglos, aber durch das Zirpen der Grillen hat man eine Art Stroboskopeffekt und durch das Geräusch wird die Szene schraffiert. Ungekämmte Gedanken, alles verhangen. Jedenfalls laufe ich durch den Zoo und schaue mich um und beobachte, finde aber doch keine Tiere. Gehege aus Grammatik, kam mir irgendwann mal in den Sinn und seitdem denke ich über den Traum anders nach. Das meine ich auch damit. Oft schüttle ich den Kopf, wenn ich meine Träume auslege, weil sie sich in ganz offensichtlichen Metaphern verkleiden und ich dann fast beleidigt bin – hatte ich mich wirklich, mit einem so billig angeklebten Schnurrbart sozusagen, vor meinem Bewusstsein sicher gewöhnt? Aber gleichzeitig schön, und interessant; sonst gleitet einem ja alles durch die Finger, wie wenn man sein Denken konturieren will, aber es ist schon längst weitergewischt, wie ein flauschiges Tier, dem man hinterherrennt und irgendwie noch nicht zu fassen kriegt, und dann rennt man mit einer Art Kneifzange hinterher und rationalisiert alles. Dann und wann fängt man doch was ein damit, es ist aber bei der ersten Berührung ganz hart geworden und lässt sich nur noch ausstopfen und ausstellen. Das ist dann natürlich auch toll, diese ganze Wand von ausgestopften Emotionen und ausgegossenen

differentiate what I actually want to say, trying to keep on sharing, specifying, asymptotically and sharp-edged, trying to brush closely against the meaning, stuttering in desperate concatenations and wearying nuances and assay essay, acid test case, crack.

Or I attempt to cast a net around language, to capture an image in loosely interwoven threads, like this recurring dream I have where I'm in a zoo, more like a terrarium, walking around in the dark by myself, I can see silhouettes and shadows but no animals, only empty enclosures, not a single animal in them. Everything appears in a static state of restrained, hidden movement, like when it's really dark and motionless at night, but the chirping of the crickets creates a strobe effect, their noise is the light crosshatching the dark scene. Uncombed thoughts, cloudy vision. Anyway I walk through the zoo, looking around and observing, but I can find no animals. The phrase *grammatical enclosures* came to mind at some point, and ever since I thought differently about this dream. That's what I mean. I often shake my head when I interpret my dreams, they dress themselves up in such obvious metaphors. I'm almost offended—did I really think I could hide my subconscious behind a cheap glued-on mustache like that? But the obviousness is simultaneously beautiful and arresting; without it everything slips through your fingers, like when you want to outline your thinking, but the thoughts are long gone, like some fluffy animal that you chase after and still can't catch, you run after it with a sort of pincer tool rationalizing everything. Every now and then you do catch something, but as soon as your tongs make contact, the fluff stiffens and you are left with nothing but a shell to stuff and display. Great: now you have a trophy wall of taxidermied emotions and spilled impressions. But

Eindrücken. Aber so hatte man sich das trotzdem nicht vorgestellt, als man den Stift in die Hand genommen hat und sich auf die Jagd nach dem rumsausenden Etwas gemacht hat. Und schon wieder merke ich, wie meine vor sich hintippenden Finger ein überladenes Analogie-Konglomerat hinter sich her schleppen. Wäre das hier nicht mein Versuch, dem Denken schreibend so nahe wie möglich zu kommen – mich mit kaum hörbar trippelnden Schritten, Buchstabe für Buchstabe, anzupirschen, und das wilde, schreckhafte, formlose Denken aus größtmöglicher Nähe zu erleben, bis ich fast die Hand danach ausstrecken kann, nur noch eine Leerzeile liegt dazwischen, nur noch ein Satz, mit etwas Anlauf vielleicht – dann läge dieser Text an dieser Stelle schon längst auf dem blutigen Schneidebrett der Bearbeitung, und große Teile des unnötigen Metaphern-Geschwürls, die überflüssigen Eingeweide wären mit wenigen, lieblosen Beilhieben weggeschnitten. Aber ich versuche jetzt, dieser komischen Gedankenbild-Text-Produktion aufzulauern.

Oder vielleicht ist es ein psychologisches Problem. Ich sehe oft den Zeigefinger vor mir, den an dieser Uni ein Professor mal trefflich und bohrend auf mich gerichtet hat und mir ein mangelndes Sprachvertrauen diagnostiziert hat. Das sei sehr gefährlich, betonte er dabei durchdringend. Ich habe es als wohlmeinend und anmaßend zugleich empfunden, vor allem aber als treffend. Ich bin besessen von der Vermittlungsaporie. Jene unüberbrückbare Lücke, die sich zwischen Gemeinten und Gesagten auftut, versuche ich mit Versatzstücken, Beispielen und Synonymketten aufzufüllen oder mit Metaphern und Assoziationen zu überbrücken. Allerdings war das auch zu diesem Zeitpunkt nichts, das mir nicht bewusst gewesen wäre. Deswegen schreibe ich auch immer noch keine Prosa. Ich weiß, das würde einen völlig ersticken. Stattdessen Verse suchen und mit rudernden Armen und nachdrücklich gekrümmten Augenbrauen gestikulieren.

that's not at all what you imagined when you picked up your pen and went on the hunt for the rustling thing. And even now I see my fingers, tapping away in front of me, are dragging an overloaded conglomerate of analogies behind them. With barely audible tripping steps, I stalk, letter for letter, until the wild, flighty, shapeless thoughts are almost at my fingertips, only one blank line lies between us, one sentence, with a little effort perhaps—if it wasn't the objective to get as close as possible to these untamed thoughts, the text would long since be splayed open on my editorial butcher block, a few loveless swings of the axe could cut away the tumor of unnecessary metaphor, the superfluous viscera. But I'm trying to ambush this weird Thought-Image-Text production line.

Maybe it's a psychological problem. Often, I see in front of me the index finger that a professor at my university once pointed at me—in an aptly piercing manner—he diagnosed me with a lack of confidence in language. It was very dangerous, he insisted. I found this to be both well-meaning and presumptuous, but mostly apt: I am obsessed with the perplexity of intercession. The unbridgeable gap that opens up between what is meant and what is said—I fill it with stock phrases, illustrations and chains of synonyms, or bridge it with metaphors and associations. However, this was nothing I wasn't already aware of. That's why I don't write prose. I know that it would completely crush the reader. Instead I search for verse, emphatically arching my eyebrows while paddling my arms in primitive gesticulations.

Zu dieser Zeit, etwa parallel zum Zeigefinger, gipfelten meine Schlafstörungen im nächtelangen Warten auf den Schlaf, der nicht kam. Ich durchwanderte entrückt Plateaus von drei Nächten mit kaum zwei Stunden Schlaf. Jede Nacht begann mit der Unterdrückung einer Panik, schon wieder nicht zu meinem Körper zu finden, der wie ein Stein auf dem Bett lag und über den meine Gedanken hinwegfegten wie eine Windböe. Oft habe ich dann krakelig Tagebuch geschrieben und versucht, sie so zu fangen, und zu beschweren. Aber es war ein hoffnungsloses Unterfangen, es war wie diese Geschichte, mit dem Typen der sich wünscht das alles, was er anfasst zu Gold wird (oder Glas?) und dann verhungert er. Nicht, dass ich mein Schreiben oder Denken mit Gold vergleichen will, aber mit einem Metall vielleicht, das man auf jeden Fall nicht essen kann. Und die Gewalt von Sprache ist uns ja wahrscheinlich allen bewusst und derer habe ich auch viel Gebrauch gemacht, mit einer Zunge wie eine gewetzte Klinge habe ich in der Pubertät meine Umgebung sauber zerlegt und seziert und es hat mich mit Stolz erfüllt, ohne irgendeine Gefühlsregung zu zeigen, meinem Gegenüber im Streit die qualvollsten Dinge anzutun. Aber dann ist man plötzlich mehr Schwert und Schild als Hand und Brust.

Sobald man auf etwas blickt, ist man ja nicht mehr Teil davon. Und sobald man etwas beschreibt, ist man Außen. Es ist eine Frage der Positionierung, ob man von sich oder über sich spricht: ob ich mich im Empfinden auflöse oder mich davon ablöse. Etwas im oder mit Schreiben lösen zu wollen, ist jedenfalls problematisch. Entweder¹ ist meine Artikulation ein kurz aufscheinende Klinge, die weiter und weiter spaltet, entfremdet, formt und konturiert bis ein Selbst geschaffen ist und über der überwältigten Masse von Reiz und Rezeption thronend, die Richtung des Schwungs weiter bestimmt. So stehe ich immer über mir, und bedaure das und versuche mit Sprache das unbestimmt Verlorene wieder einzufangen.

¹Ich lese doch einmal darüber, das „Oder“ habe ich vergessen.

Around this time, roughly parallel with the Finger Of Shame, my insomnia culminated in a nightlong wait for sleep that never came. For three nights, I wandered through plateaus with barely two hours of sleep. Each night began with the suppression of panic, the fear that again sleep would not find my body. I lay like a stone upon the bed as my thoughts swept over me like a gust of wind. I would try to catch them, scrawl in my diary to try to weigh them down, but it was hopeless. Like the story, with the guy who wishes everything he touches would turn to gold (or glass?) and then he starves to death. Not that I want to compare my writing or thinking to gold, but maybe to a metal that one definitely cannot eat. Presumably everyone is familiar with the violence of language; I made ample use of it as an adolescent. With a tongue like a sharpened blade, I neatly dismantled and dissected my surroundings and it filled me with so much pride to eviscerate an opponent in an argument without showing any emotion. But then suddenly one is more a sword and shield than a hand and chest.

As soon as you look at something, you are no longer part of it. And as soon as you describe something, you are on the outside. It is a question of positioning, whether one speaks of oneself or about oneself: whether I dissolve in my feelings or detach myself from them. Trying to solve something in or with writing is problematic anyway. Either my articulation is a briefly emerging blade that splits, alienates, molds and contours until a self is created and enthroned above the overwhelming mass of stimulus and reception, further determining the continued direction of the swing. So I always stand outside myself

Die Sprache aber ist ein quasi öffentlich subventionierter Raum des Allgemeinen. Die Sprache gehört mir nicht, ich habe sie mir ausgeliehen, als Gebrauchsgegenstand, und zwar, als ich mich zum ersten Mal mit einem Mangel konfrontiert sah. Die Wunschlosigkeit, die ich als Fötus erfahren hatte, war mit einem Mal, zu einer Utopienostalgie geworden, einer pränatalen Erlösungsphantasie, die vielleicht erklärt, weshalb ich der vorbeifließenden Zeit wehmütig hinterherschau, und die Zukunft nur von hinten vernehme, was wiederum erklärt, warum mich der Engel der Geschichte nicht losgelassen hat, seit ich davon zum ersten Mal las.

Ein Mutterbauch ist zwar kein Tonkrug, aber ich sehe in der Geburt schon einen Bruch. Wie man plötzlich einfach aus der Wärme entlassen wird, dem Paradies permanenter Zufriedenheit, der Hülle, in der man sicher lag, wie ein Aprikosenkern, der Mitte der 90er plötzlich auf das von Frost und Dreck belegte Kopfsteinpflaster Leipzigs gespuckt wird. Aber auch darüber könnte man ewig lamentieren, und ich versuche das abzukürzen, worauf ich nämlich eigentlich hinaus will, ist, dass die Sprache aus dem Autonomiebedürfnis stammt, das aus der Konfrontation mit dem Schock der plötzlichen Geburt erwachsen ist. Plötzlich gibt es Bedürfnisse und Abhängigkeiten, und allem zugrunde liegt die Angst. Um dieser möglichst zu entfliehen also lernt man Bedürfnisse zu artikulieren, zu kommunizieren. Es ist ein zutiefst funktionales Verhältnis, aus dem heraus man zur Sprache kommt. Man erlernt und benutzt sie, wortwörtlich, als Gebrauchsgegenstand, als Werkzeug. Sie schafft einem die Verbindung zu anderen Menschen. Daraus folgt der absurde Charakter der Sprache als logische Konsequenz. Ihr komisch schizophrenes Moment siedelt sich zwischen innen und außen an, im Grenzbereich zwischen spezifisch und allgemein, privat und publik. Es ist eine Frage von Besitz. Wie sehr gehört meine Erfahrung mir? Wie weit kann ich sie teilen? Ich wache auf, und habe ein ganz bestimmtes Gefühl. Das Bett ist warm und gemütlich und ich fühle mich, als wäre ich in das Laken gesickert

and regret it and try to recapture the indefinitely lost with language. But language is a quasi-publicly subsidized space of the universal. Language doesn't belong to me, I borrowed it as a utensil when I was first confronted with a shortcoming. Walter Benjamin's Angel of History has kept a hold of me since I first read about it, it explained at once why I look back with melancholy at the passing of time, and only ever sense the future approaching from behind, which in turn clarifies my nostalgia for the desirelessness I once experienced as a fetus, my prenatal redemption fantasy.

A womb is not an earthenware jug, but I can see a crack already at birth. How you're suddenly released from the warmth, from the paradise of permanent contentment, the shell in which you safely lay suddenly spat out like an apricot kernel on the frost and dirt covered cobblestones of Leipzig in the mid-90s. But one could carry on lamenting forever, and I'm trying to cut it short, to get to the point I am actually trying to make, that language stems from the need for autonomy that grew out of the confrontation with the shock of sudden birth. Suddenly, there are needs and dependencies, and everything is rooted in fear. In order to escape this as much as possible, one learns to articulate needs, to communicate. One comes to language through a deeply functional relationship. One learns it and uses it, literally word for word, as an object of daily use, as a tool. It creates a connection to other people. From this it follows that the absurd character of language is a logical consequence. The weird schizophrenic moment is located between inside and outside, in the border area between specific and general, private and public. It's a question of ownership. To what extent does my experience belong to me? To what extent can I share it? I wake up and

wie ein aufgeschlagenes Ei. Ich kratze mich aus dem Bett, laufe nachmittags durch die Straßen und finde das Licht so schön, das auf die Häuser fällt, es ist so golden und schwer und ich denke mir, es sieht aus, als wäre die Stadt in Cognac eingelegt. Ich sehe ein Neugeborenes, und seine winzigen, durchscheinenden Zehen sehen aus wie Mandarinenschnitze. Alles ist Synästhesie und Kitsch, weil das wirklich spezifische, das wirkliche Gefühl, im warmen Bett zu liegen, oder eine lichtdurchflutete Straßenschlucht zu durchqueren, oder einen gerade geborenen Menschen zu betrachten, sich natürlich nicht beschreiben lässt. Was übrig bleibt, sind dann mehr oder weniger generische, ausgestopfte Bilder, die sich andere anschauen können. Wenn der eigene Anspruch aber so mimetisch ist, warum dann nicht malen? Sprache ist ein viel grobkörnigeres Material als Farbe. Und das Bild das man mit Sprache malen kann, ist sehr viel vermittelter: es wird dabei das Allgemeine, das ein Spezifikum der Sprache ist, wiederum gebrochen, um vom Anderen gelesen werden zu können. Somit bleibt das Eigentliche allen Fremd, ein Quecksilber. Es ist ein vermessener Anspruch, die eigene Grenze auflösen zu wollen und die Sprache mit einer Erwartung zu überlasten, derer sie nicht gerecht werden kann. Ich treibe diesen Anspruch, er hetzt mich, ich erinnere mich.

Ich habe meinem ersten Freund und mir irgendwann verboten, in unseren „nicht-analogen“ Gesprächen, also Facebook-Chats und SMS, Smileys zu benutzen. Ich fand das faul:

:) „;:)“ „;:)“

have a totally specific feeling. The bed is warm and cozy; I feel as though I've seeped into the sheets like a cracked egg. I scrape myself out of bed, walk through the streets in the afternoon and find the light that falls on the houses so beautiful, so golden and heavy and I think to myself, it looks like the city is preserved in cognac. I see a newborn, and its teeny translucent toes look like tangerine wedges. Everything is synesthesia and kitsch, because the actually specific, real feeling of lying in a warm bed, or traversing a street bathed in light, or looking at a person that has just been born—these things are naturally indescribable. What remains are more or less generic icons to display to others. But when one's own aspirations are so mimetic, why not just paint? Language is much grittier than paint. And the picture that one can paint with language is much more mediated: the existence of the general, which is specific to language, is broken down in order to be read by others. Thus the original remains foreign to all, a quicksilver. It's a presumptuous claim to want to dissolve one's own boundaries and to overload language with an expectation it cannot live up to. I chase it/it attacks/ and I remember.

At some point I forbid my first boyfriend from using smileys in our “non-analog” chats like Facebook & texts. I thought it was lazy:

:) “:)” “-:)”

Mittlerweile denke ich, dass mich die Grenzen, die die Sprache um mich herum zieht, schützen. Ich lasse mich gerne begrenzen. Ich bin seit einiger Zeit in einer Beziehung, in der ich mich hinter meine Sprachgrenzen zurückziehen kann. Wir treffen uns auf neutralem Boden, verkleiden uns beide mit einer Fremdsprache. Neulich habe ich meinem Freund einen Brief geschrieben, den er nicht lesen konnte. Das war gar nicht meine Intention, ich habe den Brief auf Englisch geschrieben. Hatte nur vergessen, dass meine Handschrift, die ohnehin schon schwierig zu lesen ist, für jemanden, der ein anderes Alphabet benutzt, und mit dieser Schreibschrift nicht vertraut ist, vollkommen unlesbar ist. Also fange ich mich. Ich muss; nämlich den Anspruch der Vermittlung durch die notwendige verbale Eingrenzung fallen lassen. Das ist sehr erholsam. Ich filtere die Bilder. Alles Schreiben ist übersetzen, aber ich entwische meinem Anspruch nur, wenn ich „tatsächlich“ „übersetze“: Dann kann ich fokussieren und fangen.

:)

Now I think that the boundaries of language protect me. I like to be contained. For a while now, I've been in a relationship where I can withdraw beyond language barriers. Both of us dress up in a foreign language to meet on neutral ground. Recently I wrote my boyfriend a letter he couldn't read. That was not at all my intention: I wrote the letter in English.

My handwriting is already difficult to read, so for someone who uses a different alphabet and is unfamiliar with this style of handwriting—I forgot it would be totally illegible. So I get a hold of myself. I must. I have to let go of the claim, the aspiration that these limitations will somehow enable communication. That is so relaxing. I filter the images. All writing is translating, but I only escape my claim when I “literally” “translate”: then I can finally focus, stalk, and catch.

:)

Translator's Foreword

Nell Volkmanns Text ist eine Coming-of-Age-Geschichte mit allen erforderlichen Ingredienzien, mit Schwimmbad, Minigolf und Vanilleeis und mit Liebe und Eifersucht. Doch anstatt Kindheitskulissen bloß abzurufen, wagt er sich dahinter, verhandelt Schuld, oder genauer: das (vermeintliche) Verlieren der Unschuld. Den erzählerischen Rahmen bildet das Verhältnis einer Babysitterin zu dem zehn Jahre jüngeren Kind, das sie betreut, — und wie sich dieses Verhältnis ändert, als sie ein Jahrzehnt später dem Jungen, der nun zumindest körperlich *erwachsen* ist, wiederbegegnet.

Es geht um das Jungsein, das Junge-sein und das Nicht-Junge-sein, vor allem aber geht es um das Wahrnehmen des eigenen und des fremden Körpers in seiner raschen Veränderung. Nell Volkmanns Kurzgeschichte ist dabei auf eine so wunderbare Art ehrlich, dass man ihrer Protagonistin folgt, ohne zu wissen, ob man Verständnis für sie aufbringen will, oder nicht. In meiner Übersetzung versuche ich, diese Möglichkeit der Unentschiedenheit zu bewahren.

NELL VOLKMANN

BLACKLIST

The boy is sick, but his mother has to leave anyway. She doesn't say why. It does not seem important. The boy and I are familiar enough with each other for this arrangement to be acceptable. Don't give him more than two aspirin, she says. They're on the sink in the bathroom. He will ask for more because they taste like grape.

He is seven, and I am his babysitter, and for four or five hours I will be the only one in the world whose job it is to make him feel better. Maybe his mother can tell I'm thinking this. Don't worry about it, she says, he's already asleep.

Objects, anything usually flat and dead, sometimes feel animate at night. The walls and the floor in the boy's house sigh and talk to themselves. I walk around and turn on all the lamps to make them stop. Really, what I am hearing is not the house, but the boy. He appears perfectly at the bottom of the stairs, and in that moment I feel for him so much that it surprises me. The only other truly alive thing in the house, in the world, he looks down at me and for a moment I feel only the good, warm, honest parts of myself, all singing out from me, towards his feverish cheeks and sweaty hair.

I ask him if he wants me to carry him back to bed, and he is nearly the height of my shoulder but he says

**aus dem englischen übersetzt von
LEONARD MARX**

SCHWARZE LISTE

Der Junge ist krank, aber seine Mutter muss weg. Sie sagt nicht, warum. Es scheint nicht wichtig zu sein. Der Junge und ich kennen uns gut genug, um das zu akzeptieren.

Gib ihm nicht mehr als zwei Aspirin, sagt sie. Die sind auf dem Waschbecken im Bad. Er wird mehr wollen, sie schmecken nach Trauben.

Er ist sieben, ich bin seine Babysitterin und für vier, fünf Stunden auf dieser Welt die Einzige, die dafür sorgt, dass es ihm besser geht. Vielleicht merkt seine Mutter, dass ich das denke. Alles gut, sagt sie, er schläft schon.

In der Nacht fühlen sich Dinge — überhaupt alles, das normalerweise plan und tot ist — manchmal lebendig an. Die Wände und der Fußboden im Haus stöhnen, führen Selbstgespräche. Ich gehe herum und mache die Lichter an, damit sie aufhören. In Wirklichkeit höre ich nicht das Haus, sondern den Jungen. Er steht ganz unten an der Treppe und ich habe ein derartiges Mitgefühl mit ihm, dass es mich überrascht. Er, das einzig andere, wirklich Lebendige in diesem Haus, blickt zu mir herunter, und für einen Moment spüre ich nur die guten, warmen, ehrlichen Teile meiner selbst. Sie alle schwingen aus mir heraus zu ihm hinüber, auf seine fiebrigen Wangen und sein schwitziges Haar.

Ich frage ihn, ob ich ihn zurück ins Bett tragen soll, und obwohl er mir fast bis zur Schulter geht, sagt er

yes. I lift him and feel the rare intensity of recognizing my body as my own. I remember the strength and the softness in my muscles and my joints, and I choose, willingly, to share it with someone who is temporarily mine.

The boy is eighteen and I am twenty-eight. Neither of these ages is so awful, alone or together. They call out to each other across ten years of dimness, the listless, lonely heat of being twenty-anything. At the end of those years I have not gone anywhere. The boy has not gone anywhere either, but he will, because he has time, and he is a child, still to himself and always to me. That is the only way I know him.

Tall now, taller than me, taller than the girls bobbing next to him in the pool, who barely reach his shoulders. They seem to enjoy this, his size as compared to their own, because they tilt their whole faces up to look at him, though they could have just as easily raised only their eyes to meet his. I have never seen him here before, or never noticed him, in eleven years . I watch them all in the water, whose shade of blue as compared to the late June sun is absolutely right.

I would like to be one of those girls again. The fairer of the two looks like me, blond and indelicate. I would like to wear a red swimsuit and remember what it was like to be so aware of my body in its newness, before familiarity made me contemptuous of my visible self. I am her, and my friend wants to get on his shoulders, sure, she is

ja. Als ich ihn hochhebe, habe ich das seltene Gefühl, meinen Körper als meinen eigenen wahrzunehmen. Ich erinnere mich an die Stärke meiner Muskeln und die Beweglichkeit meiner Gelenke und entscheide bewusst, sie mit jemandem zu teilen, der vorübergehend mir gehört.

Der Junge ist achtzehn und ich achtundzwanzig. Weder das eine, noch das andere Alter ist schrecklich, auch beide zusammengenommen nicht. Die Jahreszahlen rufen einander zu, über zehn Jahre der Düsternis hinweg; die lustlose, einsame Hitze des Irgendwas-nach-zwanzig-seins. Am Ende dieser Jahre bin ich nirgendwo angekommen. Der Junge auch nicht, aber er wird ankommen, weil er Zeit hat, weil er ein Kind ist. Selbst in seiner eigenen Wahrnehmung ist er das noch, und in meiner wird er es immer bleiben. Nur so kenne ich ihn.

Er ist mittlerweile groß, größer als ich, größer auch als die Mädchen, die neben ihm im Pool hüpfen und ihm kaum bis zur Schulter reichen. Sie scheinen es zu genießen, seine Größe im Vergleich zu ihrer eigenen, denn sie neigen den ganzen Kopf, um zu ihm aufzuschauen, wo sie doch nur ihre Augen ein wenig nach oben bewegen müssten. Ich habe ihn hier noch nie gesehen, oder überhaupt bemerkt — nicht ein einziges Mal in elf Jahren. Ich beobachte sie alle im Wasser, dessen Blauton perfekt zur späten Junisonne passt.

Ich wäre gerne nochmal eines dieser Mädchen. Das Hübschere der beiden, blond und gedrungen, schaut mich an. Ich würde gerne einen roten Badeanzug tragen und mich daran erinnern, wie es war, meinen Körper als etwas Neues wahrzunehmen, bevor ich aus purer Vertrautheit heraus aufhörte, ihn wertzuschätzen. Ich bin sie, und meine Freundin will auf seine Schultern, natürlich, sie

smaller, I don't care. He can't see her up there. I slide out of the water and let down my hair, which I have been keeping dry on top of my head. Mom says pool water makes blonde hair green. That's never happened to me, things like that don't happen to me. I climb up on the diving board. I don't know how to dive but she does, red and blond and blue and muscle and sky whirl together and arc through the boy's line of sight. Perfect.

He looks as though he is meant to be strong, as though his body is now exactly as it was intended to be. I admire him as I might an Olympian. How good it is to be alive in the world to witness someone young and proud and beautiful, who has taken such great care to sculpt himself into something we all agree is worthy of being seen. That's all. I think he runs through the streets in the early morning with other boys, and their bare chests breathe and beat together as one. I think when he is in school his knees don't fit under the desk.

When the boy is little, he likes for me to read him fairytales. The book is big and old and I wonder how heavy it must feel in the arms of someone small. All the women in the stories just sit still. When it is appropriate, they sigh, or scream, or cry. To be in love is a woman's default state, say the stories. If she does not love you, there is always something you can do about it. It is a way of talking about women that doesn't feel allowed anymore, and it embarrasses me. Instead, I say once that the prince came in and saw Sleeping Beauty and felt that what he wanted most in the world was to hear her speak. He knew what was required to wake her, and so he got on

ist kleiner, es ist mir egal. Er kann sie dort oben nicht sehen. Ich gleite aus dem Wasser und lasse mein Haar herunter, das ich vorher festgebunden habe, um es trocken zu halten. Mama sagt, Chlorwasser lässt blondes Haar grün werden. Meines ist nie grün geworden und wird auch nie grün werden, so etwas passiert mir nicht. Ich steige aufs Sprungbrett. Ich kann nicht springen, aber sie kann es. Rot, Blond und Blau, Muskeln und Himmel verschwimmen und fliegen durch das Sichtfeld des Jungen. Perfekt.

Er sieht aus, als wäre er dazu gemacht, stark zu sein, als sei sein Körper jetzt genau so, wie er sein sollte. Ich bewundere ihn wie einen Olympiasieger. Wie gut es sich anfühlt, auf dieser Welt zu sein, um jemanden zu erleben, der jung und stolz und schön ist, der sich so große Mühe mit sich selbst gegeben, der sich zu etwas geformt hat, das wir alle für sehnswert halten. Das ist alles. Ich glaube, jeden Morgen rennt er mit ein paar anderen Jungs durch die Straßen und ihre Brüste beben im Takt, als wäre darunter eine einzige Lunge. Ich glaube, seine Knie passen nicht unter die Schulbank.

Als der Junge klein ist, möchte er, dass ich ihm Märchen vorlese. Das Buch ist dick und alt und ich frage mich, wie schwer es sich in den Armen eines Kleinen anfühlen muss. Die Frauen in den Geschichten sitzen nur still herum. Wenn es angebracht ist, stöhnen sie, oder schreien, oder weinen. Die Geschichten vermitteln, es sei der Normalzustand einer Frau, verliebt zu sein. Wenn sie Dich nicht liebt, gibt es immer etwas, das Du dagegen tun kannst. Es ist eine Art, über Frauen zu sprechen, die sich nicht mehr erlaubt anfühlt. Sie ist mir peinlich. Deshalb sage ich einmal, dass der Prinz hereinkam, Dornröschen sah und merkte, dass er nichts lieber wollte, als sie sprechen zu hören. Er wusste, was nötig war, um

one knee and kissed Sleeping Beauty's hand, which worked just as well as kissing her on the mouth, and was more polite.

That's wrong, the boy says.

Well, not really, it's just different. Aren't you bored of always hearing it the same way? You shouldn't kiss somebody if they don't know you're there.

Ew, the boy says, and makes a face.

See? I say.

No. I want the real story. Go back and read it right.

In the winter the pool is covered up, and everybody covers up too and finds somewhere else to go. It seems unimaginable that I or anyone else could have ever been so naked. I put on my swimsuit in front of the mirror and think, how did I let myself go out like that, I look ridiculous. Next summer I'll do it again, but for now, I give myself to the anesthetic qualities of December that say, sleep, drink, hide yourself.

The town is so small that we are all in sympathy with each other about the fact that there is nothing to do. The bars will let in anyone who does not look overtly underage. The boy does not look overtly underage. The light soaks yellow, wood colored, as though it is generated by the grained laminate panels on the wall. It equalizes us, this light, I like to think to myself sometimes after I've been drinking. But I am usually aware that this is

sie zu wecken, also kniete er sich vor Dornröschen und küsste ihre Hand, was genauso gut funktionierte, wie sie auf den Mund zu küssen, und was vor allem höflicher war.

Das ist falsch, sagt der Junge.

Nicht wirklich, es ist nur anders. Langweilt es Dich nicht, dieselbe Geschichte immer wieder gleich erzählt zu bekommen? Man sollte jemanden nicht küssen, wenn diejenige nicht weiß, dass man da ist.

Wäh, sagt der Junge, und verzieht das Gesicht.

Siehst Du?, sage ich.

Nein. Ich will die echte Geschichte. Lies sie nochmal richtig vor.

Im Winter ist der Pool verhüllt, genauso wie sich alle anderen verhüllen und verstecken — nur woanders. Es scheint unvorstellbar, dass ich oder überhaupt irgendjemand einmal so nackt war. Vor dem Spiegel ziehe ich meinen Badeanzug an und frage mich, wie ich mich so aus dem Haus getraut habe. Ich sehe lächerlich aus. Nächsten Sommer werde ich es wieder tun, aber erst gebe ich mich dem betäubenden Dezember hin, der sagt: Schlaf, trink, versteck dich.

Die Stadt ist so klein, dass wir uns alle gemeinsam darüber einig sind, dass es nichts zu tun gibt. Die Bars lassen jeden rein, der nicht übermäßig minderjährig aussieht. Der Junge sieht nicht übermäßig minderjährig aus. Das Licht ist gelb, holzig, als käme es aus dem gemaserten Wandlaminat. Manchmal, wenn ich getrunken habe, denke ich bei mir, es würde uns gleichmachen. Aber eigentlich weiß ich, dass das nicht

not true, even though it sounds as though it should be.

I am seventeen, and the boy sees me kissing another boy. This isn't my fault. I am not the sort of babysitter who invites boys over after the kids are asleep to forage beer from the basement cooler and kiss on the couch. We are out behind the miniature golf course, me and a boy with dark hair and veins in his neck and forearms that pull so tight they vibrate on the edge of breaking. It is night, but every surface is still washed in heat. Even the dew on the grass is the same temperature as my skin, and when it licks my ankles I feel nothing. We are kissing on top of a picnic table, and his mouth has the fermented, malted taste of vanilla ice cream, warmed and congealed. I imagine him at home at the dinner table. His mother, who I have never seen, and will never see, serves him a sundae in a tiny glass dish.

People look different in places where they're not supposed to be. It takes me longer than is right to realize that the boy is standing fifteen or twenty feet away, watching us. He holds a neon colored golf ball in his hand, and his baby skin glows in the dark. I push the other boy back from me, all the way across the top of the table, until I can no longer feel the warmth of his body. Not knowing what else to do, I say hello to the boy, as though he is an adult who would find me in contempt of convention if I did not. Beyond him, in the sometimes-lights from the road, I can see the boy's mother and with her, a man I don't know. She calls to the boy and the boy says nothing, turns, walks away.

Next time I see him, the boy wants to show me

stimmt, obwohl es sich so anhört, als müsse es stimmen.

Ich bin siebzehn und der Junge sieht, wie ich einen anderen Jungen küsse. Es ist nicht meine Schuld. Ich gehöre nicht zu der Sorte Babysitter, die Jungs zu sich einlädt, wenn die Kinder schlafen, Bier aus der Kellerkühlbox holt und auf der Couch rummacht. Wir sind draußen hinter dem Minigolfplatz, ich und ein Junge mit dunklem Haar, Adern im Nacken und mit Unterarmen, die vibrieren, wenn er mich an sich zieht, als wären sie kurz vorm Zerbersten. Es ist Nacht, aber jegliche Oberfläche noch in Hitze getränkt. Sogar der Tau auf dem Gras hat die gleiche Temperatur wie meine Haut, und wenn er an meinen Knöcheln leckt, spüre ich nichts. Wir küssen uns auf einem Picknicktisch und sein Mund hat den malzigen Geschmack von warmem, geronnenem und vergorenem Vanilleeis. Ich stelle ihn mir zuhause am Esstisch vor. Seine Mutter, die ich nie gesehen habe und nie sehen werde, serviert ihm einen Eisbecher in einer winzigen Glasschale.

Menschen sehen anders aus an Orten, an denen sie nicht sein sollten. Ich brauche länger als ich sollte, um zu bemerken, dass der Junge fünf, sechs Meter entfernt steht und uns beobachtet. Er hält einen neonfarbenen Golfball in der Hand, seine Babyhaut leuchtet im Dunkeln. Ich stoße den anderen Jungen weg von mir, über die ganze Tischplatte, bis ich die Wärme seines Körpers nicht mehr spüren kann. Weil mir nichts besseres einfällt, grüße ich ihn, als wäre er ein Erwachsener, der sich sonst missachtet fühlen würde. Hinter ihm, im wechselhaften Straßenlicht, kann ich die Mutter des Jungen mit einem Mann sehen, den ich nicht kenne. Sie ruft nach ihm, er sagt nichts, dreht sich um, geht weg.

Als ich ihn das nächste Mal sehe, will er mit etwas zeigen.

something. Sure, I say. I am putting him to bed, and the care I felt for him when he was sick is still alive inside me. I want to see anything he has to show me. I want to make it up to him. I want to see that nothing has changed. He pulls a notebook out from the crack between his bed and the wall and opens it up.

It's my list, he says. I can see my name, and his mother's, and a few other girl's names as well.

Your list of what? I say.

It means I don't have to listen to you. I saw you doing bad things. With that boy. I can tell that these are not his words, and that he might not even really understand what they mean, but that he also believes them.

But your mom is in there too, isn't she?

She does it too, the boy says. I hear the comforter crackle when he shrugs. In the dark his eyes blend into the rest of his face and disappear.

I can't think of what else to say, and my eyes begin to sting, not with tears, but as though I've been hit. The boy is wrong, of course, and I could try to tell him why, but at the same time it feels as though I've been shown to myself, made to look in a mirror clearer and cleaner than any that has yet existed, and the reflection I see is stupid and small. That reflection can't tell the boy anything. He doesn't have to listen to me. I don't want him to look at me anymore.

Your mom loves you, I say, and I tug the blanket out

Klar, sage ich. Ich bringe ihn ins Bett und fühle in mir noch immer die Sorgen, die ich um ihn hatte, als er krank war. Ich will alles sehen, was er mir zu zeigen hat. Ich will es wieder gutmachen. Ich will sehen, dass sich nichts geändert hat. Er zieht ein Notizbuch aus der Ritze zwischen Bett und Wand hervor und schlägt es auf.

Es ist meine Liste, sagt er. Ich kann meinen Namen, den seiner Mutter und die von ein paar anderen Mädchen sehen.

Liste wovon?, frage ich.

Sie bedeutet, dass ich nicht auf Dich hören muss. Ich habe gesehen, wie Du böse Sachen gemacht hast. Mit diesem Jungen.

Ich weiß, dass diese Worte nicht von ihm kommen, und dass er sie womöglich gar nicht versteht, aber ich weiß auch, dass er sie glaubt.

Aber Deine Mutter kommt doch auch darin vor, oder nicht?

Sie tut es ja auch, sagt der Junge.
Er zuckt mit den Schultern, ich höre die Bettdecke knistern. In der Dunkelheit verschwimmen seine Augen in seinem Gesicht und verschwinden. Ich weiß nicht, was ich noch sagen soll, und meine Augen beginnen zu brennen, nicht von Tränen, eher als wäre ich geschlagen worden. Natürlich hat er Unrecht und ich könnte versuchen, es ihm zu erklären, aber gleichzeitig fühlt es sich an, als würde mir ein Spiegel vorgehalten — ein Spiegel, der klarer und sauberer ist als je ein anderer, der mich klein zeigt, und dumm. Das Spiegelbild kann dem Jungen nichts sagen. Er muss nicht auf mich hören. Ich will nicht, dass er mich weiter anschaut.

Deine Mutter liebt Dich, sage ich und ziehe die Decke

from underneath the boy to tuck him in.

A little while after that, his mother gets rid of me. She calls me, says she's found my name on a list that has something to do with relations with boys. Why have you been telling him about that sort of thing? she says. He's a child, Jesus Christ, it's totally inappropriate. I really didn't think you were like that. She seems not to know I've seen the list too, her name in blocky letters spelled out above mine.

I know what happened isn't as bad whatever she's thinking, but I can't explain it to her without telling her what the boy had seen, and I can't bring myself to do that either. It doesn't matter anyway, because she has already seen that same false reflection of myself that I have, there in the boy's room, and to that reflection I can answer nothing. I see the boy and his mother sometimes, on the street or in the supermarket, and when the boy's face starts to change and morph with age, I recognize him at first only by his mother, and I never speak to either of them.

I know someone is looking at me. I try not to meet his eyes, I don't want to scare them away.

I am not very good at holding on to things. My cigarettes slip from my hand and the box claps onto the sticky floor. Somebody kicks it, a mistake, and it slides over the salt from everybody's boots and nudges the boy's shoe, animate, like it wants something. The boy picks it up and holds it out to me. His hand is dry and warm. I think

unter ihm hervor, um ihn zuzudecken.

Kurze Zeit später wird mich seine Mutter los. Sie ruft mich an und sagt, sie habe meinen Namen auf einer Liste gefunden, die etwas mit Beziehungen zu Jungs zu tun hat. Warum hast Du ihm von solchen Dingen erzählt?, fragt sie. Mein Gott, er ist ein Kind, das ist vollkommen unangebracht. Ich hätte wirklich nicht gedacht, dass Du so bist. Offenbar weiß sie nicht, dass ich die Liste auch gesehen habe, mit ihrem Namen darauf, in Blockbuchstaben, über meinem.

Ich weiß, dass das, was passiert ist, nicht so schlimm ist, wie sie denkt. Aber ich kann es ihr nicht erklären, ohne zu sagen, was der Junge gesehen hat — und das schaffe ich nicht.

Es ist ohnehin egal; sie hat schon dasselbe, falsche Spiegelbild von mir gesehen wie ich im Zimmer des Jungen. Diesem Spiegelbild kann ich nichts entgegnen.

Manchmal sehe ich den Jungen mit seiner Mutter, auf der Straße oder im Supermarkt. Mit dem Alter verändert sich sein Gesicht und ich erkenne ihn erst an seiner Mutter. Sprechen tue ich mit keinem von beiden.

Ich weiß, dass mich jemand ansieht. Ich versuche, seinen Augen nicht zu begegnen. Ich will sie nicht verscheuchen.

Ich bin nicht gut darin, Dinge festzuhalten. Meine Kippen rutschen mir aus der Hand und die Schachtel fällt auf den klebrigen Boden. Aus Versehen tritt sie jemand, sie schlittert wie lebendig über das Streusalz und stupst den Schuh des Jungen an, als wollte sie etwas von ihm. Er hebt sie auf und hält sie mir hin. Seine Hand ist trocken und warm. Jungs in seinem Alter, denke

to myself that boys of his age share a universal and inexhaustible heat, I remember them wearing shorts into wintertime and joyfully removing their shirts in March. Could I borrow one? The boy says when I take the box. This is the first time I have really heard him speak, and for a moment I don't say anything back. His voice is higher than I'd imagined it.

Here, he says, I'll trade you, and nods at the empty glass in my other hand. He is drunk, but not alarmingly so. I can tell that his self is further back behind his eyes than it usually is. This one's fresh, I promise, he says, and pours some of his beer from his glass to mine. We hold the two cups up against each other to measure, glass grinds against glass and I grit my teeth.

Outside, he lights my cigarette while it is in my mouth, which is something I cannot remember anyone ever having done for me. It feels old fashioned, and because I have lost the coordination between my hand and my lungs, for a moment I am not sure when to breathe in, as though I've never done this before. He holds the fire unsteady near my face.

I can make my body feel anything. Perhaps this makes what happened, what is happening, my fault. Perhaps I chose to feel this. When I lie in bed, I can call the motion of a train or the sea up from underneath me, up into my belly and my limbs. As I child, down on my back in the grass, I thought I could feel the earth spinning underneath me, and it made me sick. Maybe his hands and his mouth and his cold red face on mine were like those other phantom sensations, conjured from darkness. Maybe I conjured the feeling of wanting them there.

ich mir, teilen eine allseitige, unerschöpfliche Hitze,
und ich erinnere mich daran, wie sie bis in den Winter
kurze Hosen tragen und im März fröhlich die Hemden
ausziehen. Darf ich eine haben?, fragt der Junge, als
ich die Schachtel nehme. Es ist das erste Mal, dass ich
ihn wirklich sprechen höre. Einen Augenblick lang
antworte ich nicht. Seine Stimme ist höher, als ich mir sie
vorgestellt habe.

Hier, wir tauschen einfach, sagt er und nickt auf das
leere Glas in meiner anderen Hand. Er ist betrunken,
aber nicht auf eine besorgniserregende Weise. Ich merke,
dass sein Ich weiter hinter seine Augen getreten ist als
sonst. Das hier ist frisch, sagt er, versprochen, und gießt
Bier aus seinem Glas in meines. Messend halten wir die
Gläser zusammen, sie klirren aneinander und ich knirsche
mit den Zähnen.

Draußen zündet er mir meine Kippe im Mund an, was,
glaube ich, noch niemand für mich gemacht hat. Es fühlt
sich altmodisch an, und weil die Koordination zwischen
Hand und Lunge versagt, weiß ich nicht, wann ich
einatmen soll, als wäre es mein erstes Mal. Unsicher hält
er das Feuer neben mein Gesicht.

Ich kann meinen Körper alles fühlen lassen. Deshalb ist
das, was passiert ist, was gerade passiert, vielleicht meine
Schuld. Vielleicht entscheide ich, das zu fühlen. Wenn ich
im Bett liege, kann ich die Bewegung eines Zuges oder
die des Meeres beschwören, von unten in meinen Bauch
und meine Glieder hinauf. Wenn ich als Kind im Gras lag,
dachte ich, ich könnte spüren, wie sich die Erde unter
mir dreht, und mir wurde schlecht. Vielleicht waren
seine Hände, sein Mund, sein kaltes, rotes Gesicht auf
meinem nur das nächste aus dem Nichts herbeigerufene
Phantomgefühl. Vielleicht habe ich das Gefühl
beschworen, sie genau dort haben zu wollen.

Every time I kiss someone, I think it might feel new, and it doesn't. For a second, I think I've found something, that if I push harder, deeper, there will be something more underneath, and the possibility feels better and more joyful in my mouth than anything. Sometimes, I am right about this, but usually not.

My hips against his, my back pressed against the brick wall around the corner, and I wonder, Do you know who I am? Once the question arises, it has to be excised. I think I know what the answer will be, but I have no choice but to ask anyway, for the last ten seconds I've been able to think of nothing else but these words, tossing them back and forth between my head and the pit of my stomach. I don't know if I want him to say no, or to say yes.

You don't go to the high school, right?

No.

You're not like famous, or something?

No.

I'm sorry, I don't think so.

Now it is clear that I wanted him to say yes. Yes would have absolved me, but now I hold some piece of information that he does not, and standing so close to him feels like a trick. There in the sideways whiteness of the streetlight, the boy is waiting for me to tell him who I am. My hands are still inside his unzipped coat, where they'd begun to climb under the hem of his sweater. I take them back.

Jedes Mal, wenn ich jemanden küsse, denke ich, es könnte sich anders, neu anfühlen, aber das tut es nicht. Eine Sekunde lang denke ich, ich sei auf etwas gestoßen, aus dem, wenn ich weiter vordringe, mehr wird. Dann schmeckt nichts besser als die Möglichkeit, dass da mehr ist. Manchmal liege ich richtig damit, meistens aber nicht.

Die Hüfte gegen seine, den Rücken gegen die Backsteinwand frage ich mich: Weißt Du, wer ich bin? Sobald die Frage aufkommt, muss sie ausgemerzt werden. Ich glaube zwar, ich kenne die Antwort, aber ich muss trotzdem fragen. Die letzten zehn Sekunden konnte ich an nichts anderes als diese Wörter denken, habe sie in mir herumgeworfen, vom Kopf bis in die Magengrube und zurück. Ich weiß nicht, ob ich will, dass er nein sagt, oder ja.

Gehen wir auf dieselbe Schule?

Nein.

Du bist auch nicht berühmt oder so?

Nein.

Dann weiß ich es nicht, sorry.

Nun ist offensichtlich: Ich wollte, dass er ja sagt. Ein Ja hätte mich entlastet — jetzt weiß ich etwas, das er nicht weiß. Es fühlt sich an, als hätte ich irgendeinen Trick genutzt, um ihm so nahe zu sein. Im schiefen Weiß des Straßenlichts wartet der Junge darauf, dass ich ihm sage, wer ich bin. Noch immer befinden sich meine Hände in seinem offenen Mantel, wo sie unter dem Pullover hochgewandert sind. Jetzt nehme ich sie zurück.

I used to come to your house, I say. When you were little.

Like we played together?

I guess. I mean, I think I babysat you. I was pretty young. Only once or twice. Which wasn't true, it was more, and I wasn't that young. I say my name again.

Remember?

He squints at me. Under the streetlight, there is only complete light and complete darkness, no gradient, no inbetween. I am not sure in which I stand. You showed me a list you made once, with my name on it. I am drunk. Maybe shared indiscretion is endearing. Remember?

He does. He remembers that he is the boy and I am myself, and he has to go. Face young in confusion. Oh. I don't remember that, he says, which isn't true. I think I thought you were someone else. Should go back. Last call. I shut my eyes and hope that the imprint of his face registering the memory of who we both are will not be on the other side of my lids, and it isn't. There is only crimson.

Ich bin öfters zu Dir nach Hause gekommen, sage ich, als Du klein warst.

Wir haben zusammen gespielt?

Sozusagen. Also, ich glaube, ich war Deine Babysitterin. Ich war ziemlich jung. Nur ein oder zwei Mal, sage ich, was nicht stimmt; es war öfter, und ganz so jung war ich nicht. Ich wiederhole meinen Namen. Erinnerst Du dich? Er blinzelt mich an.

Nachts auf der Straße gibt es nur absolutes Licht oder absolute Dunkelheit, keine Abstufungen, nichts dazwischen. Ich bin mir nicht sicher, wo ich stehe, ob im Licht oder in der Dunkelheit. Du hast mir mal eine Liste von Dir gezeigt, da stand mein Name drauf.

Ich bin betrunken. Vielleicht wirkt geteilte Taktlosigkeit liebenswert.

Erinnerst Du Dich?

Er erinnert sich. Er erinnert sich daran, dass er der Junge ist und dass ich eben ich bin, und er muss los. Sein junges, verwirrtes Gesicht.

Oh. Daran kann ich mich nicht erinnern, sagt er. Das stimmt genausowenig.

Ich hab' Dich für jemand anders gehalten, glaube ich. Ich sollte zurück, letzte Runde und so. Ich schließe meine Augen und hoffe, dass das Nachbild seines Gesichts und mit ihm die Erinnerung an uns beide nicht an der Rückseite meiner Lider hängen bleibt — und das tut es nicht.

Nichts als Rot ist da.

On the night the boy is sick, I sit quietly outside the door to his room and listen for him. I hold still when his rustling and coughing becomes too active, or too quiet. I know nothing is going to happen to him, but I need to verify this constantly. This is my part of the deal. His is to sleep, and feel better in the morning.

He is eighteen, but he will always be seven, and I will always be myself, always be a person who has felt the mouth and tongue of someone who she once fed and read to and carried in her arms. I try to throw up into the snow, because I think it would be the right thing to do. For me, or for him, or someone that might be watching, I'm not sure, but it won't come. All my remorse amounts to is acrid spit.

Die Nacht, in der der Junge krank ist, verbringe ich still lauschend vor seiner Zimmertür. Wenn sein Husten zu laut oder zu leise wird, halte ich inne. Ich weiß, dass ihm nichts passieren wird, und trotzdem muss ich mich dessen permanent versichern. Das ist mein Teil der Abmachung. Seiner ist es, zu schlafen und sich am nächsten Morgen besser zu fühlen.

Er ist achtzehn, aber er wird immer sieben sein, und ich werde immer ich sein, immer die, die Mund und Zunge gefühlt hat von jemandem, den sie einmal gefüttert und dem sie vorgelesen hat, den sie einmal mit ihren eigenen Armen getragen hat. Ich versuche, in den Schnee zu kotzen. Ich glaube, das wäre jetzt angebracht. Ob angebracht für mich oder für ihn, oder für irgendjemanden, der gerade zuschaut, das weiß ich nicht. Es kommt nichts. Meine Reue reicht nur zu bitterer Galle.

Translator's Foreword

Leonard Marx's "Death-Helper" is an exploration of a young person's reckoning with the way society treats death and the dying. What is the meaningful difference between allowing someone to die, and being responsible for their death? What are the moral implications of compartmentalizing the dying, keeping them out of sight? What does it mean for a person whose life is just beginning to be so intimately connected to those whose lives are coming to an end?

"Death-Helper" is based on Marx's own experiences shadowing friends who worked in palliative care units, and conducting interviews with other doctors and nurses on these same wards. He also researched Germany's laws and standards of practice concerning end of life care, and this careful and specific knowledge is evident throughout the piece.

Marx's prose is sometimes analytical, sometimes quietly emotional, and very often both at once. He moves in different registers—from mathematics to the law, medical terminology to the animal kingdom to spirituality. Because death is life's counterpart and partner, the text's interest in the relationship between death and so many different aspects of life feels entirely natural, even necessary. Moreover, it speaks to the author's desire to link living and dying—to bring death out of the shadows and examine it with the dignity that the patients in his narrator's care so deserve.

One of the things I love most about translation is the way it feels like a particularly enjoyable and fulfilling sort of puzzle. In my experience, translating requires the engagement of a different, more analytical part of the brain than generating my own prose, particularly when

working with the German language. German is full of different language-pieces that can be recombined and reconstituted in order to convey words, structures and ideas that amount to more than the sum of their parts. As a writer and a translator, I am grateful to German for teaching me to ask more of my words, to ask them to do more and be more, and to not settle for expressions that aren't absolutely right.

My guiding principle in this translation has always been to convey the overall spirit, message and tone to the best of my ability, and I have made some small changes to that effect. For example, Marx quite often inserts small asides, modifiers or descriptors in parentheses. I made the choice to eliminate this punctuation, instead integrating these phrases into the larger context of the sentence. The parenthetical reads as more comical and lighthearted, or else melodramatic in English than it does in German, and preserving them in translation served to undercut the contemplative tonality of the piece. German is also a far more precise language than English, sometimes requiring only one word where English might call for two, three or even four. In some places, I have added a few words or reconstructed a phrase in order to sharpen the translation.

Like so many of the best pieces of writing, “Death-Helper” brings what we might otherwise wish to ignore into the light, and I am grateful to have been entrusted with it.

LEONARD MARX

STERBEHELFER

0.

Es gibt Texte, die handeln von anwesenden Abwesenden. Von denen, die da sind, ohne da zu sein. Die präsent sind in allem, was geschieht, was gedacht und gesprochen wird, ohne aber selbst zu geschehen, zu denken oder zu sprechen. Ihre Handlungsebene ist nicht die geschilderte Realität, sondern auf seltsame Weise darüber. Ein Stockwerk höher, in der Gedankenwelt schwirren sie, halten die Fäden aller Figuren in ihren Händen — nein, nicht in ihren Händen, ihre Hände gibt es nicht (mehr).

Jemand erzählte mir von dieser Idee (wer, weiß ich nicht mehr), und seitdem lege ich sie wie einen Filter über meine eigenen Texte, lese sie durch eine Brille, die nur jene anwesenden Abwesenden durchlässt, und erkenne: Dieser Text funktioniert (?) umgekehrt, muss umgekehrt funktionieren. Nicht die Abwesenden sind anwesend, sondern die Anwesenden abwesend. Keinesfalls gänzlich, sie treten auf, aber nicht als Individuen, sondern immer nur als anonymer Teil einer Gruppe. Sie müssen anonym und in der Gruppe bleiben, denn ich kann und will sie nicht fragen, ob sie explizit und als Individuen auftreten wollen. Deshalb sind sie nur (?) als *Patienten* da.

**translated from the german by
NELL VOLKMANN**

DEATH-HELPER

0.

There are texts that hold the presence of those now absent, those who are there without being there. They are present in all that occurs, each thought and every word, yet they do not themselves occur, they can no longer speak or think in their own right. They act from somewhere outside the reality depicted before us, and their ways, even if we knew them, would no doubt seem strange. Somewhere above our heads, they move through the world of thought, pulling at the puppet strings held in their hands. No, not in their hands—their hands do not exist anymore.

Someone once explained this to me, though I'm no longer sure who, and since then I've layered the idea like a filter over my own writings. I read my work as though with a pair of glasses, through which only the presence of these now absent ones may pass. And I realize: this text functions inversely, as a mirror image—indeed, it must function this way. Not that the absent are present, but that those present are absent. The figures in this text must remain roughly sketched, their identities kept private. They can only appear here as anonymous parts of a larger whole. I can no longer ask them if they would like to be named here, introduced as who they once were. And even if I could ask, I would not want to. So here, they are simply the Patients.

I.

Vor einigen Monaten habe ich angefangen, meinen Hund zu fotografieren. Er zeigt sich in anderen Tieren (oder: andere Tiere zeigen sich in ihm?): Die Ohren hochgeklappt zur Fledermaus, im Liegen eingerollt zur Schnecke. Ich streiche sein Kopfhaar gegen den Strich, stelle ihm ein Nackengefieder auf, den Kopf senkend wird er zum Wasservogel; zum Haubentaucher.

Seitdem ich nachts auf Station arbeite, steht er immergleich vor der Tür, wenn ich abends um neun Uhr das Haus verlassen will. Den Rumpf zum Halbkreis gebogen schiebt er mir seine Flanke entgegen, diese kleine Wölbung zwischen Bauch und Hinterlauf, an der sich die Haare kräuseln. Jedes Mal ist er pünktlich, eine tierische Tür-Uhr. Jedes Mal riecht er an mir, seine feuchte Nase durch die Jeans pinselt meine Knescheibe. Und jedes Mal frage ich mich, ob er die Gerüche der Patienten kontrolliert. Ob er mich riecht, um sie zu riechen, wenn ich morgens um sechs Uhr wiederkomme. Ob er ihre Gerüche abpaust, sie an meiner Hose zählt — weiß, wer von ihnen gestorben ist und wer noch lebt (und wer demnächst sterben wird?).

Die Wohnungstür ist unsere Spiegelachse, morgens komme ich von der anderen Seite und er steht andersherum da, er und seine Flankenschranke: Sein Pinseln ist Passkontrolle, ohne komme ich nicht vorbei.

II.

Am ersten Tag stehe ich eine halbe Stunde vor Schichtbeginn an der Garderobe. Meine Augen gehen mich im Spiegel ab. Die weißen Sportschuhe hoch die noch weißere Hose entlang, darüber der schwarze Gürtel, das rosa Poloshirt mit Krankenhaus-Logo (eingesteckt) — an meinem Hals, vor dem Kinn, mache ich Halt, biege

I.

A few months ago, I started taking photographs of my dog. From the images, I can recognize him in other animals—or maybe: recognize other animals in him? His ears point up, like a bat's. At rest, he is a snake, his body coiled in stillness. I stroke his head against the grain, fluff the fur on his neck to give him a plumage. When he lowers his head, he becomes a diving bird, with a great crest of feathers on his head.

Since I started working the night shift on the ward, I leave the house at nine o'clock each night. I stand in front of the door, always the same, and my dog comes and curves his body around my legs, nudging me with his flank, the little arch between belly and hind leg, where the fur ripples. He is always punctual, my sentient clock. He sniffs me, and I feel his wet nose through my jeans, brushing my kneecaps. I always wonder whether he is gauging the smell of the patients—whether he smells me in order to smell them, when I arrive back home at six each morning. Does he measure off the scents, count them on my pants? Can he tell who among the patients has died, who is still living—and perhaps who will die next.

That door is our reflection axis, it creates a kind of symmetry—in the mornings I come back and again my dog is there, set up like a furry little barrier: his snuffling nose is the checkpoint. I cannot pass without inspection.

II.

On my first day of work, half an hour before my shift begins, I stand in the hospital locker room looking myself up and down in the mirror. My eyes travel from the white sneakers up to the even whiter pants, over the grey belt, then the pink polo-shirt embroidered with the

links ab, den dünnen Oberarm, den kantigen Unterarm hinunter zu meinen Spinnenfingern. Ich sehe aus wie ein Trickbetrüger, Enkelschwindler, wie ein schlaksiger Golfspieler-Bonze.

Eine halbe Stunde nach Schichtbeginn merke ich: Die (allermeisten) Patienten sehen mich nicht so, weil sie mich nicht sehen können. Ich werde durch die Station geführt, begrüße die, die mich begrüßen können. Im Gang hängt eine leinwandgroße, gerahmte Collage aus Bildern, die Patienten in Kunsttherapie- Sitzungen gezeichnet haben. Darunter stehen in Druckschrift Name, Alter und Todesursache der Zeichnenden. Die Bilder sind geordnet und ordnen selbst, sind Collagen von Lebensinhalten.

Beim Vorbeilaufen fällt mein Blick immer wieder auf eines: Auf einer Wiese stapeln sich beschriftete Boxen: Eine graue, auf der Krebs steht, die Angrenzende, Rote beinhaltet die *Familie*, darüber *Hobbys, Beruf*. Darunter, wieder in Druckschrift: *Allem seinen Platz zuweisen*. Die Boxen sind Biotope im doppelten Sinn; Lebensräume mit eigenem Klima. Im *Krebs*-Raum regnen blaue Tropfen auf das Krankheitsgrau, darüber spannt sich ein Regenbogen. In der *Familie* scheint die Sonne.

Weil die Palliativstation ein besonders hygienischer Raum ist, gibt es eigens Räume für das Unhygienische. Im Raum *Unrein I* sind die schmutzigen Kleider der Patienten, in *Unrein II* werden die Fäkalien entsorgt.

hospital's logo. When I get to my neck, just below my chin, I stop, track left, down my thin upper arm and angular forearm, and over my spidery fingers. I look like a con-man, a swindler. Or some gawky big-shot off to play golf.

Half an hour after my shift begins, I notice: The patients, most of them anyway, don't see me as I see myself, because they cannot see me at all. As I'm shown through the ward, I greet the ones who can greet me in return. A framed collage hangs in the corridor. It stretches across the wall like one large canvas, made up of pictures drawn by the Patients during art therapy. Each artist's name, age and cause of death is printed in block letters below their picture. Carefully arranged beside one another, the pictures seem to come together—laying out all the different elements that make up a life.

Whenever I pass by, my gaze always falls on one of these pictures in particular: a meadow, piled high with labeled boxes. There is a grey one, on which "Cancer" is written, and next to it, a red box contains "family." "Hobbies" and "Work" are stacked on top. Along the bottom, again in block letters, is written "Everything in its place." These boxes constitute habitats in a double sense—they hold different elements of a life, but they also contain their own distinct climates. In the cancer box, blue raindrops drip down the sickness grey, while a rainbow stretches overhead. In the family box, a brilliant sun is shining.

Because the palliative ward is a sanitary environment, the unsanitary has its own specific room. "Medical Waste I" stores the patients' dirty clothes. "Medical Waste II" is for feces disposal.

III.

Die meisten Patienten sterben wenige Tage nach ihrer Verlegung.

Natürlich gibt es Abweichungen, natürlich gibt es wenige, die vor ihrem Tod noch nach Hause können, um dort zu sterben, und natürlich gibt es noch wenigere, die dorthin zurückverlegt werden, wo sie herkamen, wo ihre Krankheit noch therapiert wurde und in diesem Fall doch weiter therapiert wird.

Wenn eine Patientin stirbt, wird eine Kerze in einem eckigen Holzständer auf den Boden vor ihr Zimmer gestellt. Bevor die Totenstarre eintritt, legt die Schwester ihr eine Kinnstütze an, ein gelbes Plastik-Oval, das den Mund schließt. Ihre Hände werden gefaltet und zusammen mit einer Rose auf die Brust gelegt. Die Tote bleibt bis zum nächsten Tag in ihrem Zimmer, dann wird sie vom Bestattungsinstitut abgeholt, die Kerze verstaut und eine Blüte der Rose in eine Wasserschale zu den Blüten anderer Verstorbener gelegt.

Das Zimmer wird gereinigt, anschließend zieht der nächste Patient ein. Am Mittwoch meiner ersten Woche verpasste (?) ich den Tod einer Patientin um drei Minuten. Die Schwester stellt ihn fest. Unsichere Todeszeichen: keine Atmung, kein Puls. (Leichen-)Blässe und (Toten-)Kälte sind weitere Indikatoren, doch die meisten Patienten hier weisen sie schon vor ihrem Tod auf.

Sie flüstert mir zu, was sie gerade macht. Danach sagt sie zur Toten: — Haben Sie's geschafft, Frau .

Sie schiebt die Vorhänge zur Seite, lehnt sich zum Fenster und dreht sich zu mir um. Während der Griff in die Waagerechte knarzt, sagt sie:

III.

Most of the patients die a few days after they are transferred here.

Sometimes, there are exceptions, sometimes there are a few who can return home to die instead. And sometimes there are even a few who return to whichever ward they came from, wherever their disease was being treated, to continue treatment further after all.

When a patient dies, a candle in a rough wooden holder is placed on the floor in front of their door. Before the body stiffens, the nurse places a yellow plastic chin rest beneath the patient's jaw, closing their mouth. Then their hands are folded, and together with a rose, laid across their breast. The deceased Patient remains in their room until the next day, until the undertaker comes to collect them. Then the candle is put away again, and the rose blossom is placed in a bowl of water, to float among the flowers of the other recently deceased.

The room is sanitized, and the next patient moves in. On Wednesday of my first week, I miss a Patient's death by three minutes. The nurse records it. Signs of death: no breath, no pulse. Corpse-pallor and a deathly cold are further indications, though most of the Patients already exhibit these while they are still alive.

The nurse narrates each action to me in a whisper. Then she gently says to the body:

—There, you made it through.

She pushes the curtains to the side, leans toward the window and then looks over her shoulder at me. As the handle turns and the window creaks open, she says:

— Damit die Seele entweicht.

Sie öffnet das Fenster. Wir verlassen das Zimmer.

Später gehe ich aufs Klo und heule. Mir ist nicht schlecht, ich habe keine Schmerzen. Ich heule nur. Möglichst leise.

Als ich zurück ins Schwesternzimmer komme, sind meine Augen rot: — Meine Linse ist verrutscht.

— Komm, ich schau mal. Welche denn? Links oder rechts?

— Beide.

— (Lacht) Achso. Sind sie mir früher auch manchmal.

Am nächsten Vormittag, beim Schlafengehen, frage ich mich, wie schnell die Seele aus dem Körper entweicht. Und wo sie beim Schlafen ist.

Am nächsten Abend stehen zwei weitere Kerzen im Gang.

Wenn eine Patientin gestorben ist, sagt man zu ihr:

— Gute Reise, Frau .

Wenn eine Patientin gestorben ist, sagt man zur Schwester:

— Ich hab' sie gemocht, die Frau .

—So that the soul can escape.

She opens the window all the way. We leave the room.

Later, I go into the toilets to cry. Nothing is wrong with me, I am not in pain. Still, I cry. As quietly as I can.

When I return to the nurses' station, my eyes are red.

—My contact is bothering me.

—Here, let me look. Which one? Left or right?

—Both.

Smiling,—Ah. That used to happen to me, too.

The next morning, when I'm getting ready for bed, I ask myself how fast the soul escapes from the body. And where it goes when we sleep.

The next evening, two more candles stand in the corridor.

When a patient dies, we say to him:

—Safe travels, Mr.—.

When a patient dies, we say to the nurses:

—I liked her, that Mrs.—.

IV.

Seit ich auf Station arbeite, springen mir unzusammenhängend Bilder aus meinem Leben in den Kopf. Ich stelle mir vor, ich bilde mir ein, ich rede mir ein, sie wären Ausschnitte des Films, der einem beim Sterben abgespielt wird. Ich rücke meinem Film näher, weil ich dem Tod näher rücke — nur dass der Tod nicht meiner ist, sondern der Tod derer, die ich pflege.

Ich sehe Bilder, an die ich mich eigentlich nicht mehr erinnere, die ich meinem Gedächtnis nicht zugetraut hätte. Ich sitze im Schwesternzimmer, schaue auf die Uhr und muss unvermittelt an meinen Schulweg in Bonn denken (ich war seit zehn Jahren nicht mehr in Bonn und seit fünfzehn nicht mehr in der Grundschule). Ich kann sagen, was ich sehe, aber nicht, wie es sich darstellt. Ich kann sagen: Schulweg in Bonn, Straße, Brücke. Genauer wird es nicht. Es fühlt sich an, als zeige mir mein Gedächtnis diese Erinnerungen, um mir ihre Unbeschreiblichkeit, ihre Transzendenz zu demonstrieren.

Erst kamen sie nur auf der Station, einige Tage später auch zuhause und dann im Schlaf. Ich rieche sie mehr, als dass ich sie sehe, und schmecke sie mehr, als dass ich sie fühle.

V.

pal·li·at·iv Adjektiv [Medizin]: *Schmerzlindernd; die Beschwerden einer Krankheit lindernd,*

aber nicht [mehr] die Ursachen einer Krankheit bekämpfend.

Ich beobachte an mir, dass ich begonnen habe, mich

IV.

Ever since I started working on the ward, incoherent images from my life seem to jump suddenly into my mind. I consider, I imagine, I tell myself, that they could be clips from a film, the one that will play in my head as I'm dying. I let the film advance, because death advances too—only this death isn't mine, it's the death of one of them, of one of those people I tend to.

I see things that I don't even remember anymore, that I would not have believed could still be in my memory anyway. I sit at the nurses' station, look at the clock, and suddenly I am thinking of my walk to school in Bonn—though it's been ten years since I left Bonn, and fifteen since elementary school. I know what I can see, but not what it means. I can say: *The way to school in Bonn, the streets, the bridge*. But it becomes no clearer than this. It feels as though my mind is showing me these memories in order to demonstrate how indescribable, how transcendent they truly are.

At first these thoughts came to me only in the ward. A few days later, they follow me home, and then reach me in my sleep. I smell them more than I taste them, and taste them more than I feel them.

V.

Pal-li-a-tive Adjective [of a medicine or medical care]
relieving pain without dealing with the cause of the condition

I observe that I have begun to observe myself more—or

selbst mehr (oder: genauer?) zu beobachten.

Ich beobachte, dass ich zu rechnen versuche, was sich nicht rechnen lässt. Es ist da nämlich etwas, das ich noch nicht verstanden habe und aus irgendeinem (un-)logischen Instinkt mathematisch lösen will.

Ich stelle mir die Palliativmedizin als Diagramm vor: ein Balken für die Lebenszeit, ein zweiter für die Lebensqualität. Die Lebenszeit rot, die -qualität grün. Beide Werte sind unwillkürlich. Trotzdem lassen sie sich weder miteinander verrechnen, noch verlaufen sie kongruent zueinander.

Ich versteh nicht:

Ist dieser Ort aussichtslos, weil der Tod seine einzige Aussicht ist? — Nein, weil der Tod das beste ist, was den (meisten)

Patienten hier passieren kann.

— Ja, weil (oder: wenn?) die Patienten hier trotzdem Angst

vor dem Tod haben und nicht sterben wollen.

Ich versteh:

Wer ins Krankenhaus kommt, soll weiterleben.

Wer auf die Palliativstation dieses Krankenhauses kommt, soll leben, bis er*sie stirbt. Wer ins Krankenhaus kommt, ist Patient, *patiens*, leidend. Sein Leiden soll beendet werden. Auf der Palliativstation wird es minimiert, bis es von selbst, im Tod, endet.

at least, with more precision.

I observe that I am trying to calculate something that does not permit calculation. There is something that I have not yet understood, and out of some (il)logical instinct I want to solve it mathematically.

I imagine palliative care as a bar graph: The first bar, the red one, represents lifespan, and a second, green, tracks quality of life. Both values are arbitrary, beyond our control. Nevertheless, they cannot be offset by one another, nor are they congruent to each other.

I don't understand:

Is this a place without hope or promise, because death is promised instead?—No, because dying is really the best thing that can happen to most of the patients here.

—Yes, because: Sometimes the patients do not want to die, and they are afraid.

I understand:

We expect those who enter the hospital to live.

We expect that those who enter the palliative ward will live, until they don't anymore. Those who enter the hospital are patients, *patiens*, suffering. We expect that their suffering can be alleviated, cured. On the palliative ward, suffering will only be minimized until it ends on its own terms, in death.

Die Palliativmedizin ist die endgültigste Therapie und vielleicht die ehrlichste: Sie versucht nicht mehr, dem Unaushaltlichen auszuweichen, weil ihm nicht mehr ausgewichen werden kann. Sie ist die einzige logische Konsequenz der sich (per Medikament) verlängernden menschlichen Lebenszeit.

VI.

§ 216 Tötung auf Verlangen

(1) Ist jemand durch das ausdrückliche und ernstliche Verlangen des Getöteten zur Tötung bestimmt worden, so ist auf Freiheitsstrafe von sechs Monaten

bis zu fünf Jahren zu erkennen. (2) Der Versuch ist strafbar.

Abends stellen wir erst die Medikamente, dann drehen wir die Patienten. Schon in meiner ersten Woche habe ich Zimmer, die ich lieber betrete als andere — und solche, vor denen ich Angst habe: Auf der 3 werde ich regelmäßig aufgefordert zu töten. Bin ich, ist die Schwester, die Ärztin, sind wir nicht Sterbehilfe genug?

Wir versuchen, das Sterben zu erleichtern. Wir erleichtern dem Sterbenden das Sterben. Dem Sterben selbst, dem Tod, erleichtern wir nichts.

Ihm wird nicht entgegengekommen, es wird gewartet, bis er kommt. Wie alles werden auch die Begrifflichkeit geordnet, zu Paaren:

Passiv, nicht aktiv. Palliativ, nicht kurativ.

Die Patienten werden sterben gelassen, aber beim Sterben nicht alleingelassen.

Palliative medicine is the most finite treatment, and perhaps the most honest: It doesn't try to evade the inevitable — simply because it cannot be evaded any longer. Palliative care is the only logical response to medicine's drive toward extending the human life.

VI.

Assisted Dying

(1) Should one person be killed by another due to the explicit and sincere desire of the deceased, it shall be punishable by six months to five years in prison.

(2) The attempt of this act is also punishable.

In the evenings, we give out medications, then turn the patients in their beds. Though it is only my first week, I already have certain rooms that I prefer to enter more than others—and some that I am afraid to go into at all. In room three, again and again, I am asked to kill. Aren't I, the doctors and nurses, are we not already doing enough, helping this patient through his dying?

We try to make dying feel easier for the patient, but we don't make it easier for death to come. No one goes to meet death, they wait for it, until it comes for them. We are categorized in terms of pairs:

Passive vs. active. Palliative vs. curative.

The patients are left to die, but not left alone while they die.

Der Defibrillator steht im Nebenraum, darf aber nur für Pfleger, Ärzte oder Besucher benutzt werden.

Wenn ein Patient kurzfristig starke Schmerzen hat, etwa beim Umlagern, wird ihm ein *Bolus* gegeben; eine definierte Mehrgabe von Schmerzmitteln im Perfusor.

Wenn ein Patient langfristig starke Schmerzen hat, wenn ihm Atmen, Essen, Liegen, Umlagern, Schlafen nur noch Schmerzen bereiten, wird er sediert. Die palliative Sedierung ist umstritten, weil sie das Sterben des Patienten beschleunigen kann und so in die Nähe der aktiven Sterbehilfe rückt.

Aber: Die Sedierung macht es dem Patienten leichter zu sterben und den Pflegern leichter, ihn dabei zu betreuen.

Die Schwester sagt:

— Wen wir sedieren, den holen wir nimmer zurück.
Meistens.

Oft kann der Patient der Sedierung nicht einwilligen. Die Entscheidung darüber trifft seine Ärztin im Dialog mit den Angehörigen. Die Sedierung greift so stark in das Bewusstsein des Patienten ein, dass ich mich frage, ob von einem eigenen Bewusstsein überhaupt noch die Rede sein kann. Wie nah ist die Sedierung dem Tod? Wie nah ist der Sedierte dem Toten? Wenn der Schlaf der kleine Bruder des Todes ist, wird die Sedierung zu seinem großen?

Sediert man, weil man nicht töten darf?

Zwischen passiver und aktiver Sterbehilfe verläuft ein

There is a defibrillator in the next room, but only to be used on one of the doctors, nurses, or visitors, should they need it.

When a Patient experiences extreme short-term pain with movement, they are given what is called a Bolus; a quick increase in pain medication pushed through their IV line.

When a Patient experiences extreme prolonged pain—when breathing, eating, lying down, moving and sleeping only bring more pain, they are sedated. Palliative sedation is controversial, because it can accelerate a Patient's death, and so comes nearer to actively assisting death.

But: Sedation makes dying feel easier for the Patients, and makes it easier for the nurses to care for them.

The nurse says:

When we sedate them, they never come back. For the most part.

Often, the Patient is not able to consent to sedation. The Patient's relatives and the doctors make the decision. Sedation intervenes so strongly in a Patient's consciousness that I wonder whether it is possible to say they have consciousness at all. How close is sedation to death? How close are the sedated to the dead? If sleep is death's younger brother, does that make sedation the elder?

Do we sedate because we are not allowed to end a life outright?

There is a thin line between actively and passively

schmaler Grat, dessen Wanderung die Sedierung ist.
Denn die Patienten sind im weiteren Sinne schon sediert,
beruhigt. Verspüren sie Angst, wird ihnen Lorazepam
gegeben — das wirkt sedierend, beruhigend, macht
sie aber noch nicht zu Sedierten, sondern höchstens
somnolent; schlafbrig, benommen.

VII.

Die Schwester kommt vom Patientenzimmer in den
Aufenthaltsraum. Sie sagt: — Er rasselt schon.

Das Rasseln ist die expliziteste Todesbotschaft. Wer
beim Atmen rasselt, kann seinen Speichel nicht mehr
wegschlucken, -räuspern oder -husten.

Wer rasselt, der stirbt bald, und wer bald stirbt, der
rasselt.

Es ist mit der Rasselatmung ein derartiger
Determinismus verbunden, dass es mir Angst macht.
Mir kommt es vor, als würde der Tod aus dem Patienten
sprechen, durch seinen Hals, durch seine Stimmlippen
zu mir. Und ich höre ihn, verstehe ihn aber nicht. Ich
verstehe nur, dass er kommt. Denn die Rasselatmung
ist das Lautwerden und Lautmalerisch-werden
seines Kommens. Davor meldet er sich nur an. Seine
Anmeldung war Grund für die Verlegung des Patienten.
Jetzt wird dieser Grund explizit.

Der Patient ist noch ansprechbar. Ich schaffe es nicht,
mit ihm zu reden — obwohl ich weiß, dass es das letzte
Mal wäre. Nach der Schicht, zuhause im Bett, gehe
ich den Flur tausendfach gedanklich ab, denke ihn mir
mit Kerze und ohne, versuche (natürlich vergeblich),
den beiden Ereignissen ihre Wahrscheinlichkeitswerte
zuzuordnen:

assisting death, and sedation migrates between the two. Even before this, in another sense the Patients are already sedated, *pacified*. If they feel fear, they are given Lorazepam—which has a sedating effect, calming, though they are not yet truly sedated, rather only *somnolent*: sleepy, dazed.

VII.

The nurse comes from the Patient's room into the break room. She says:—He's already rattling.

Rattled breathing is imminent death's most explicit sign. It means a Patient can no longer swallow their own spit, cannot clear their own throat or cough it away.

Anyone with a death rattle will soon die, and anyone who will soon die—rattles.

There is such a determinism associated with the death rattle that it scares me. It feels as though death himself is speaking to me through the patient, through his neck and his vocal cords. I can hear him, but still I cannot understand. All I know is that he is imminent. The death rattles are his approaching footsteps made loud, the onomatopoeia of his coming. Before this onset, death simply registers his presence in the body. The announcement of his Presence was the reason for this patient's transfer here. Now that reason is made explicit.

The Patient is still responsive. I can't do it, I can't talk to him—even though I know there won't be another chance. After the shift, at home in my bed, I walk that hallway a thousand times over in my mind—imagining it with and without a candle placed there and trying, in vain of course, to assign a probability to each image.

$$p (+\text{Kerze}) = p (-\text{Kerze}) =$$

$$p (+\text{Kerze}) + p (-\text{Kerze}) = 100\%$$

Ich frage mich, ob es ein Ergebnis gibt. Mir fällt auf:
Die *Kerze* ist euphemistisch. Es müsste lauten: *p (\pm Tod Patient)*.

VIII.

Wer kürzlich verlegt wurde, klingelt am häufigsten. Ist er dement und steht nachts auf, ohne zu wissen, wohin, wird ihm ein Klingelteppich vors Bett gelegt, der im Schwesternzimmer Alarm schlägt, sobald er betreten wird.

Weil sich die Einschränkungen zum Lebensende nicht zuletzt räumlich äußern, stelle ich mir den (nicht-plötzlichen) Tod wie die Verengung eines Raumes vor. Wenn sich der Tod anmeldet, sterben die meisten Patienten in ihrem engsten Raum: zuhause im Bett oder eben auf der Palliativstation. Es ist ihr engster Raum, weil sie ihn nicht mehr verlassen werden, weil es ihr letzter ist.

Die Station wird zu einer Art kollektivem engsten Raum, denn sie ist für viele gleichzeitig ein engster Raum, dessen Verlassen (fast) ausgeschlossen ist.

Die Verlegung bedeutet Verengung. Sie verrät sich, wird manifest in Fluchtgedanken, die Patienten während ihrer ersten Stunden auf Station haben. Aber: Kaum ein Patient bereut seine Verlegung. Vielmehr akzeptiert er die Verengung, weil er erkennt, dass sie alternativlos ist.

$p (+\text{Candle}) = p (-\text{Candle}) =$

$p (+\text{Candle}) + p (-\text{Candle}) = 100\%$

I ask myself if there is a solution. I notice: the candle is a euphemism.

It should read: $p (\pm \text{Death of Patient})$.

VIII.

Patients who have been recently transferred here ring for the nurses the most. If a Patient has dementia and gets up at night with no idea where they're going, a carpet with built in alerts is laid by their bed. As soon as the Patient steps on it, alarms sound at the nurses' station.

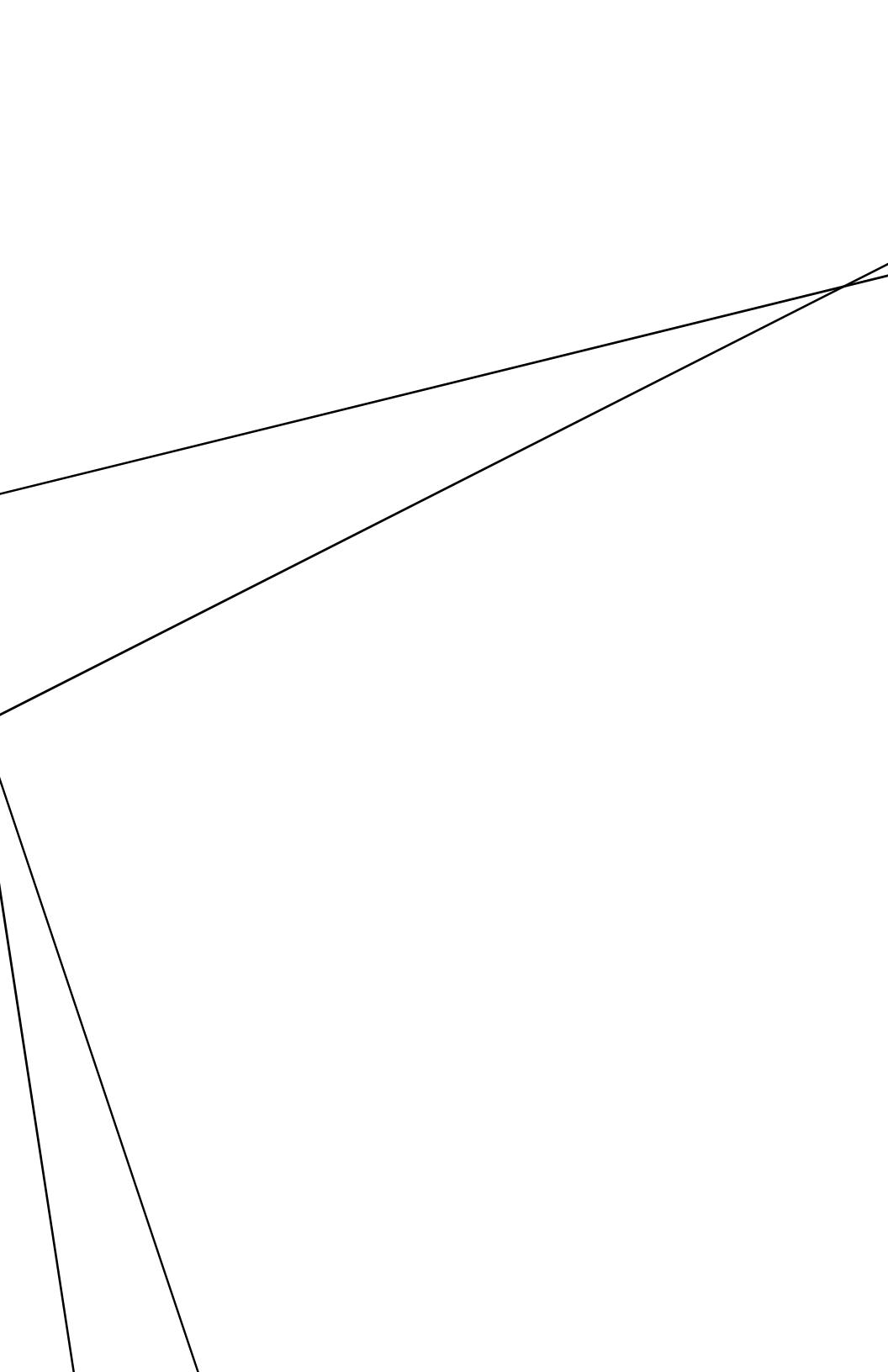
I imagine gradual death as the narrowing of a room—because the constraints that come with dwindling life express themselves in terms of space. When death announces himself, most Patients die in a state of confinement, the narrowest space they will experience: at home in bed, or on the palliative care ward. Dying is the narrowest space because the Patients can make no exit, and because the room in which they find themselves will be their last.

The ward becomes a kind of collective narrow room, because it is the final, shrinking space for so many, and because leaving is almost impossible.

A transfer here means tightening. The feeling reveals itself, manifests in the escape fantasies the Patients seem to harbor during their first few hours on the ward. But still: hardly any Patient regrets coming here. Instead, they accept the walls pressing in, because they know there is no other way. And they know too, that the

Und dass die Palliativstation, wenn nicht der beste, so doch ein guter engster Raum ist.

palliative care ward, if not the best, is a good narrow room in which to be.



word for word / parola per parola
Columbia University School of the Arts
Scuola Holden

Translator's Footnote

“Espirazione”, di Shir Kehila, è un saggio autobiografico sul debito. La vicenda comincia con una polizza assicurativa piuttosto sconveniente: durante una visita d’emergenza, Kehila incorre in un debito che la sua assicurazione non copre. Tempo dopo, a seguito di una lunga riflessione, ci racconta le conseguenze materiali e spirituali del fatto. Il saggio fa parte di una raccolta sull’oscurità medica, e cioè sull’isolamento e l’angoscia che possono nascere da un’assistenza inadeguata, così come dalla perdita di fiducia nella medicina. Per ragioni di spazio, è riportata qui soltanto la prima metà del racconto. Ai lettori basterà sapere che, se nella prima parte del testo Kehila incorre nel suo debito, nella seconda le toccherà faticosamente espiarlo.

Dopo le numerose revisioni e stesure che hanno prodotto questa traduzione, posso dire di aver incontrato principalmente due sfide nel rendere giustizia al testo di Kehila. La prima riguarda la resa di alcuni passaggi riflessivi che hanno faticato a trovare, in italiano, il vestito che li calzasse meglio. Nonostante il tema sia giustamente complesso, anche nei passaggi più densi la lingua di Kehila è sempre puntuale e diretta. Questa densità correva il rischio di diventare, in italiano, astrusità. La mia preoccupazione principale è stata quindi di rispettare la precisione quasi accademica dell’autrice conservando la freschezza del suo tono. Per questo, la punteggiatura è stata semplificata e alcune ripetizioni, fruibili in inglese ma meno in italiano, sono state eliminate.

La seconda sfida, più sostanziale, riguarda la semantica del debito. Il debito su cui ragiona Kehila non è solo economico: ha una radice più antica, e una natura quasi spirituale. Del resto, come suggerisce il titolo,

“Espiazione” è una riflessione sul debito, ma è anche un racconto di formazione. Tra le tante domande che pone l'autrice, ce n'è una particolarmente significativa all'inizio del testo: “ci capita mai di non dovere niente?”. Questa domanda ha guidato il processo di traduzione dall'inizio alla fine. Così, espressioni come “before my debt was forgiven” sono state intenzionalmente tradotte alla lettera: “prima che il mio debito fosse perdonato”. Kehila, che è Israeliana e di cultura ebraica, riflette su un tema particolarmente scottante nelle culture giudaico-cristiane: quello della colpa, e più precisamente del senso di colpa. I lettori italiani non faticheranno a capire quest'associazione: ce la ricorda la più famosa delle preghiere, dove al Padreterno si chiede proprio la remissione di un debito.

Se queste accortezze abbiano ottenuto il risultato sperato lo giudicheranno i lettori. Certamente, però, tenerle a mente è stato un bell'esercizio chi ha tradotto. E infatti, dopo le numerose revisioni e stesure che hanno prodotto questo testo, posso anche dire che la parte più interessante del lavoro stava proprio in queste sfide.

Ringrazio Piernicola D'Ortona per avermi seguito nella mia prima prova di traduzione letteraria, e soprattutto l'autrice, Shir Kehila, che fin dall'inizio mi ha dato piena fiducia.

SHIR ORNER

EXPIATION (an excerpt)

Two springs ago I was working, four days a week, at a museum of bird carving. It was a small building with one permanent exhibit: bird carvings by its namesake, a local master-carver who died shortly after the museum first opened.

I'd started working there the summer after graduating college, a couple of months before it would have been legal for me to do so—before the start date on my student visa extension—a year-long work permit for international college graduates, called Optional Practical Training.

I'd been at the museum for most of that year by that spring, when J started as its first Director of Development. In the weeks we overlapped, before I left to apply for a new student visa for graduate school, J and I shared a narrow office, opposite the workshop of the museum's artist in residence, a bird carver who'd worked there for close to thirty-five years. We chatted over coffee—Keurig capsules she'd brought from home, much better than those at the museum, she said—until sometime in the late morning, when we agreed to “start work.”

We must have talked about worries, one of those mornings, when J told me that worrying was like “paying interest on a debt you might not owe.” Her mother used to say this when J was still too young to understand, but she did come to believe it as an adult. It struck me, I think, because a lot of my worries at the

tradotto dall'inglese da
FLAVIA DI MAURO

ESPIAZIONE (an excerpt)

Due primavere fa lavoravo, quattro giorni a settimana, in un museo di uccelli di legno. Era un piccolo edificio con una sola esposizione permanente: uccelli scolpiti dall'uomo che dava il nome al museo, un maestro intagliatore del posto morto poco dopo l'inaugurazione.

Ci ero andata a lavorare l'estate dopo la fine del college, un paio di mesi prima che fosse legale, cioè prima che cominciasse l'estensione del mio visto studentesco, un permesso lavorativo di un anno per i laureati internazionali chiamato Optional Practical Training.

Ero lì da quasi un anno quella primavera, quando J diventò il primo Responsabile allo Sviluppo del museo. Nelle settimane in cui ci accavallavamo, prima che me ne andassi per richiedere un nuovo visto e proseguire gli studi, J e io dividevamo un ufficio angusto, di fronte al laboratorio dell'artista in sede del museo, un intagliatore d'uccelli che lavorava lì da quasi trentacinque anni. Fino a tarda mattinata chiacchieravamo bevendo al caffè - capsule Keurig che J portava da casa, di gran lunga migliori, diceva lei, di quelle del museo - e poi decidevamo di "metterci al lavoro".

Dovevamo parlare di preoccupazioni, una di quelle mattine, quando J mi disse che preoccuparsi è come "pagare un interesse su un debito che forse non avevi mai contratto." Quando lo diceva sua madre, J era ancora troppo piccola per capire, ma in età adulta si era convinta che era proprio così. Mi colpì, credo, perché allora un sacco delle mie preoccupazioni erano legate a un

time were linked to a debt I did owe. I wondered whether I'd been paying this "interest"—what couldn't count or be counted—because I hadn't yet paid what did.

Though my debt was only a few months old, it did not feel recent. Had there ever been a time when I had none? Do we ever not owe?

I find myself wanting to make debt less abstract. What would it look like? A dent on something not yet realized—preceding the object on which it will be inflicted? How does the shape of what isn't yet there subjected to that impact of debt? While not exactly predetermined, that shape is in some ways restricted: it cannot be absolutely anything, I think, but only anything which carries this particular dent, this specific diameter of absence.

When I left for graduate school in New York City, I hadn't considered that I may, in the not so distant future, find myself back on the island—that I will live a walking distance from the nearest medical facility, the island's only hospital, and be unable to use its services. I hadn't considered that it may be during a pandemic. I left thinking the next seven years, before my debt was forgiven, would pass as hurriedly as the last—that soon they will be over—that I'd spend them hundreds of miles away from this hospital, and then thousands, without ever confronting, just about two years in, the physical implications of this debt. But I did find myself here—keep finding that I am still here. And that I may soon need what I can't access.

A little over two years ago, during the ER visit where I incurred this debt, I was still under the impression that

debito che avevo davvero. Mi domandai se stessi pagando quell’“interesse” - una cosa che non aveva valore e non si poteva quantificare - perché non avevo pagato ancora quell’altra cosa che un valore ce l’aveva.

Benché risalisse solo a qualche mese prima, il mio debito non sembrava recente. C’era mai stato un tempo in cui non ne avessi avuti? Ci capita mai di non dovere niente?

Mi sorprendo a volerlo rendere meno astratto. Che aspetto avrebbe? Un’ammaccatura su un oggetto non ancora realizzato, che già c’è prima di essere inflitta? Com’è condizionata la forma di una cosa che ancora non esiste dall’urto con il debito? Pur non essendone predeterminata fino in fondo, ne è in qualche modo limitata: non può essere una forma qualunque, credo, ma solo una che rechi quella particolare ammaccatura, quello specifico diametro d’assenza.

Quando andai all’università a New York, non avevo considerato che, in un futuro non troppo lontano, avrei potuto tornare sull’isola, che avrei vissuto a due passi dalla struttura sanitaria più vicina, l’unico ospedale della zona, senza poter accedere ai suoi servizi. Non avevo considerato che poteva accadere durante una pandemia. Partii pensando che i sette anni a venire, prima che il mio debito fosse perdonato, sarebbero passati in fretta come l’ultimo - che presto sarebbero andati - che li avrei trascorsi a centinaia, e poi migliaia di chilometri da quell’ospedale, senza dover affrontare, solo due anni dopo, le implicazioni fisiche di quel debito. Ma mi ritrovo qui, continuo a ritrovarmi qui. E presto potrei aver bisogno di ciò a cui non posso accedere.

Poco più di due anni fa, quando andai al pronto soccorso per la visita d’emergenza che avrebbe causato il mio

I had viable healthcare. I was lucky to have a plan that meant I could go, I told myself.

There was something jarring, though, about this feeling: the way in which being unwell seemed an occasion to consider oneself lucky, a call to reckon with privilege. Where I grew up, access to medicine meant only that I was a person. Here, it meant I was lucky. It meant, not everyone is lucky.

I'd started searching for health insurance shortly before graduation. My college coverage was set to expire in mid-August, and I knew it was unlikely I'd find a job that offered one. It was also unlikely, in fact, that I'd find a job at all; the restrictions my Optional Practical Training meant I could only work within my "field of study," and so, of the few year-around positions on the island, there were fewer I could legally accept.

One May afternoon, while searching for insurance, I found a website that seemed legitimate. I filled out a form with my contact information and submitted. A minute later I got a call.

On the other side of the line was a friendly male voice. He had some great options for me, he said, if I could answer some of his questions. I assumed he worked for an insurance company and said yes. Then I answered some of his questions.

Since I was usually healthy, didn't smoke and drank only socially, the man was able to offer me "a really good plan:" a hundred and fifty dollar premium for an eighty

debito, ero ancora convinta di avere un'assicurazione sanitaria valida. Che fortuna avere un'assistenza che mi permettesse di andarci, mi ero detta.

C'era qualcosa di stridente, però, in quella sensazione: il fatto che non stare bene sembrasse un'occasione per ritenersi fortunati, un appello a fare i conti con il privilegio. Dov'ero cresciuta io, l'accesso alla sanità significava solo che ero una persona. Qui, significava che ero fortunata. Significava che non tutti lo sono, fortunati.

Avevo cominciato a cercare un'assicurazione poco prima di finire il college. La mia copertura studentesca sarebbe scaduta a metà agosto, e sapevo che era improbabile trovare un lavoro che me ne offrisse una. Del resto, era già improbabile trovare un lavoro; le regole dell'Optional Practical Training mi permettevano di lavorare solo nel mio "campo di studio", e quindi, se già sull'isola le offerte annuali erano poche, ancora meno erano quelle che potevo accettare ai termini di legge.

Un pomeriggio di maggio, alle prese con l'assicurazione, trovai un sito che sembrava valido. Riempii un modulo con i miei dati e lo inviai. Un minuto dopo ricevetti una chiamata.

All'altro capo rispose un'affabile voce maschile. Se potevo rispondere a qualche domanda, disse che aveva delle ottime opzioni per me. Diedi per scontato che lavorasse per una compagnia assicurativa e dissi di sì. Poi risposi alle sue domande.

Siccome generalmente ero in salute, non fumavo e bevevo solo in compagnia, l'uomo mi poté offrire "un ottimo piano": un premio di centocinquanta dollari per

to one hundred percent coverage of all emergency care and preventative checks. I thanked the man and told him I wanted to look at other options before I committed.

In early August I called the man again after I'd done no more research. The plan he offered didn't sound too bad, I thought, and I was running out of time. He was glad. He said I'd get the card in the mail.

A month later I went to the ER. The visit lasted two hours. There was nothing in particular to worry about, a nurse told me, my tests came out normal. I was relieved and went home.

I came across the hospital bill almost by chance, in January, in a pile of mail that one of my housemates—the only one of us who was home in December—brought in. For a moment, before I opened the envelope, I was glad to find it. I felt it could have, just as easily, slipped away.

The breakdown of the bill showed that my insurance had covered only a hundred and fifty dollars—the exact cost of my monthly premium, and which was just a little under five percent of the bill's total. It was as though I had been reimbursed, for some reason, one month's premium—as though it was just cancelled out—as though I, in fact, had no insurance.

The next day, during my lunch break at the bird carving museum, I called the Loomis Company. It was before J was around and I had the narrow office to myself. It may have also been the first time I registered the company's name to my mind. I hadn't looked them up before buying the plan.

A lady at the Loomis answered my call, and I told her what I'd been told my plan included.

una copertura dall'ottanta al cento per cento di tutte le emergenze e dei controlli preventivi. Lo ringraziai e gli dissi che avrei valutato altre opzioni prima di impegnarmi.

All'inizio di agosto, senza aver fatto altre ricerche, lo richiamai. Il piano che mi aveva offerto non sembrava così male, pensavo, e il tempo stava per scadere. Fu contento. Disse che avrei trovato la tessera nella posta.

Un mese dopo andai al pronto soccorso. La visita durò due ore. Non c'era niente in particolare di cui preoccuparsi, disse l'infermiera, le mie analisi erano nella norma. Ne fui sollevata e tornai a casa.

Trovai la fattura dell'ospedale quasi per caso, a gennaio, in un mucchio di lettere che una coinquilina - l'unica in casa a dicembre - aveva portato dentro. Per un momento, prima di aprire la busta, fui contenta di averla trovata. Sentivo che avrebbe potuto tranquillamente sfuggirmi.

Il prospetto mostrava che l'assicurazione aveva coperto solo centocinquanta dollari, ovvero il costo esatto del mio premio mensile, e poco meno del cinque per cento del totale. Era come se, per qualche ragione, mi avessero rimborsato una mensilità, come se l'avessero semplicemente detratta, come se, di fatto, non fossi assicurata.

Il giorno dopo, durante la mia pausa al museo, chiamai la Loomis Company. Era prima che arrivasse J, e l'ufficio angusto era tutto per me. Forse era anche la prima volta che la mia mente registrava il nome della compagnia. Non li avevo cercati prima di comprare il piano.

Una signora della Loomis rispose alla mia chiamata, e le spiegai le cose che, a quanto mi avevano detto, erano coperte dall'assistenza.

The lady listened and said she was sorry to hear that, but that what the man on the phone had told me was none of their responsibility.

What do you mean, I asked.

“It’s really too bad that agents promise you the moon and the stars,” she said, “when it’s really got nothing to do with the plan.”

What, I asked again.

“He doesn’t work for us,” she said. “Technically he could have told you anything.” I asked if it was legal.

“Yes,” she said.

I asked her to cancel my policy. She asked if I was sure, and I asked if she was kidding.

Cancelling wasn’t something I could do by phone. The lady put me on hold while I sent an email with a cancellation request. As the “reason for cancellation,” I wrote: “Extremely poor coverage - not what was promised! Cancel ASAP please.” I was trying, for some reason, to be polite.

“Is there anything else I can do for you today?” The lady was also trying to be polite.

Please no, I said. Please don’t do anything else.

The hospital regretted I fell victim to questionable practices and suggested I apply for the state’s healthcare assistance. Though I lived here, my immigration status meant I didn’t qualify. I was not considered a resident.

La signora ascoltò e disse che le dispiaceva, ma quello che mi aveva raccontato il tizio al telefono non era in alcun modo una responsabilità loro.

Che vuol dire, chiesi.

“È proprio una seccatura che gli agenti promettano mari e monti” disse, “cose che non c’entrano niente col piano”.

Come, chiesi di nuovo.

“Non lavora per noi, tecnicamente poteva dirle qualunque cosa”

Le domandai se fosse legale.

“Sì” disse.

Chiesi di disdire la mia polizza. Lei mi chiese se ero sicura, e io le chiesi se mi prendeva in giro.

Il recesso non lo potevo fare al telefono. La signora mi mise in attesa mentre mandavo una mail con la richiesta. Come “causa del recesso” scrissi “copertura pessima - non com’era stato promesso! Disdire al più presto, per favore.” Chissà perché, stavo cercando di essere educata.

“C’è qualcos’altro che posso fare per lei oggi?” Anche la signora cercava di essere educata.

No, grazie, dissi. Non faccia nient’altro, per favore.

All’ospedale si dissero dispiaciuti che fossi caduta vittima di pratiche discutibili, e mi suggerirono di fare domanda per l’assicurazione sanitaria statale. Benché vivessi qui, il mio permesso di soggiorno non soddisfaceva i requisiti. Non ero considerata residente.

That I was not a resident, I thought, did not change my income level. I pay taxes here, I thought. If not this, what are they for?

I didn't pay the bill. Also I didn't get a new plan. "You're better off without insurance," many of the Loomis Company's google reviews read. I thought maybe they were right, and spent the rest of my Optional Practical Training, about six months, without insurance. I didn't tell my mom. She still doesn't know.

Five days after I'd arrived back on the island this spring, at N's parents' place, I got a questionnaire from the Israeli Social Security Administration. It was meant to determine whether I was still a resident in Israel, and concluded that I was not.

The change seemed a formality, nothing that would matter much in and of itself. It made sense, too: I'd been living in the U.S. for six years, and spent days to weeks in Israel. What it did mean, though, was that along with the status of residency, I lost my healthcare—the universal coverage I had back home. This, too, made sense: I haven't worked or paid taxes back home in years. Technically, I understood, I no longer deserved it.

A few days after I'd submitted this first questionnaire, I filled a different questionnaire from Maccabi—one of the four Health Maintenance Organizations under the National Health Insurance Law in Israel, where I'd been insured my whole life—to see if I qualified for an alternative plan for "non-resident citizens." I was surprised to find that it asked, among more standard

Non essere residente non cambia il mio reddito, pensai.
Le tasse le pago qui, pensai. A cosa servono, se non a
questo?

Non pagai la fattura. Non stipulai nemmeno un altro piano. “Si sta meglio senza assicurazione”, si leggeva in molte delle recensioni di Google della Loomis Company. Pensai che forse avevano ragione, e passai il resto del mio Optional Practical Training, più o meno sei mesi, senza assicurazione. Non l’ho mai detto a mia madre. Ancora non lo sa.

Questa primavera, cinque giorni dopo il mio ritorno sull’isola a casa dei genitori di N, ho ricevuto un questionario dall’Istituto di Previdenza Sociale israeliano. Serviva a stabilire se ero ancora residente in Israele, e la conclusione è stata che non lo sono.

Il cambiamento sembrava una formalità, nulla di così importante. E aveva senso, anche: ormai vivevo negli Stati Uniti da sei anni, e in Israele ci avevo passato solo qualche giorno, tutt’al più settimane. Ciò che comportava, però, era che oltre alla residenza avrei perso anche l’assistenza sanitaria, la copertura universale che avevo lì. Anche questo aveva senso: non lavoravo e non pagavo le tasse giù a casa da anni. Tecnicamente, lo capivo, non la meritavo più.

Pochi giorni dopo aver spedito quel primo questionario, ne ho compilato un altro di Maccabi - una delle quattro organizzazioni di assistenza sanitaria istituite dalla legge sulla sanità israeliana, presso la quale ero stata assicurata per tutta la vita - per vedere se mi qualificavo per un piano alternativo rivolto ai “cittadini non residenti”. Mi ha sorpreso scoprire che, tra le altre domande di routine,

questions, for the circumference of my waist.

At the top of the signature page were a few declarative statements, which included lines like “I am aware that Maccabi may not confirm my joining and will not be required to justify its decision,” and “I am aware that Maccabi will be exempt from providing services related to pre-existing conditions, including hereditary conditions and those present since birth, whether they are treated or untreated, and/or any medical situation or phenomenon caused or worsened by a condition preceding the joining of this program.¹”

I signed and am now waiting to hear back. In a sense, I have time. I am not sure when I might next go home.

In her book *Having and Being Had*, Eula Biss writes, “When time is money, as it is now, free time is never free. It’s expensive.” I think about what it means to afford time—to keep our time in our own hands, hold onto it as its value is rising—as it becomes, like real estate, too expensive for some to maintain.

When money is time, I wonder, what is debt?

Whereas I used to be a “non-resident alien” in the U.S., this year I filled out my tax returns as a “resident-alien.” What this means was that I’d just passed the “substantial presence” standard: the portion of the time I’d spent in the U.S., over the past five years, was significant enough to grant me the status of a “resident for tax purposes.”

¹Originally in Hebrew, translation mine

ce n'era una sul mio girovita.

In cima alla pagina da firmare c'erano alcune dichiarazioni, che includevano passaggi come: “sono consapevole che Maccabi potrebbe rigettare la mia domanda e non sarà tenuta a giustificare la sua decisione” e “sono consapevole che Maccabi sarà esentata dall’offrire servizi relativi a disturbi preesistenti, incluse patologie ereditarie o presenti sin dalla nascita, che siano o non siano trattate, e/o tutti i problemi medici causati o aggravati da una condizione precedente all’adesione a questo programma.”¹

Ho firmato e ora sto aspettando risposta. In un certo senso, ho tempo. Non saprei dire quando tornerò di nuovo a casa.

Nel suo libro *Having and Being Had* Eula Biss scrive: “Quando il tempo è denaro, così com’è ora, il tempo libero non è mai gratuito. Ha un prezzo alto.” Penso a cosa significa potersi permettere il tempo, stringerlo tra le mani, tenercelo stretto quando il suo valore cresce, quando, come gli immobili, diventa per alcuni troppo costoso da mantenere.

Quando il denaro è tempo, mi domando, il debito cos’è?

Se fino a poco fa ero una “straniera non residente” negli Stati Uniti, quest’anno ho compilato la mia dichiarazione dei redditi come “straniera residente”. Il che significa che avevo da poco superato il criterio della “presenza sostanziale”: la quantità di tempo che ho passato negli Stati Uniti, negli ultimi cinque anni, è abbastanza significativa da garantirmi lo status di “residente a fini fiscali”.

¹Il passaggio è un estratto originale dal questionario di Maccabi

That I am not considered a resident for any other purpose, having just lost this same status back home, means that at this moment in time, there isn't a place where I am a resident. That legally, I live nowhere.

When a residency is assigned just one purpose, most of what it means to reside somewhere is, by default, negated. It seems as detached from reality—the reality of life in a place, that is, a residency—as to consider one's arm an “arm for cleaning purposes.” But we cook with it, too, and move things and type and rest our chins when we are sleepy. And the government knows that, you would think, or it should.

In a letter Hemingway wrote to Lillian Ross, he added, in pencil, “Time is the least thing we have of.” And what happens when not all we have is ours, I wonder, when time exists in forms that are not transferable, that can't be turned into money? That can't be used to pay for what isn't ours? What happens when time *isn't* money? And what does the having, as in *having* time, entail? If and when the “having” is temporal, where it does not, cannot, entail “keeping”?

In *Having and Being Had*, Biss writes that her family lives “in their money,” that their house is a “container” for their washing machine. What happens when we equate money to place, I wonder, rather than only to time? When we consider the ways in which we live *in* money, surrounded and confined by it, rather than just through the flow of money, or by means of money? What happens to dimension when money is both time *and* space?

And if money is space, what is debt?

Che non sia considerata residente per nessun altro fine, avendo appena perso questo status anche a casa, significa che, al momento, non esiste un posto in cui sia residente. Che, ai termini di legge, non vivo da nessuna parte.

Quando a una residenza si assegna un solo fine, gran parte di ciò che significa risiedere in un certo luogo è, automaticamente, negata. Diventa un concetto tanto slegato dalla realtà - la realtà della vita in un posto, e cioè la residenza - quanto un braccio che si consideri tale soltanto “a fini igienici”. Ma con quel braccio cuciniamo, anche, e muoviamo cose, e digitiamo, e ci appoggiamo il mento quando abbiamo sonno. E il governo lo sa, verrebbe da pensare, o dovrebbe saperlo.

In una lettera a Lillian Ross, Hemingway aggiunse, a matita: “il tempo è il minimo che abbiamo”. E che succede quando non tutto quello che abbiamo ci appartiene, mi domando, quando il tempo esiste in forme che non si possono trasferire, che non si possono convertire in denaro? Che non si possono usare per pagare ciò che non è nostro? Cosa succede quando il tempo non è denaro? E cosa implica l'avere, nel senso di avere tempo? Se e quando l’“avere” è contingente, quand’è che non implica, o non può implicare, il “mettere da parte”?

In *Having and Being Had*, Biss scrive che la sua famiglia vive “nel proprio denaro”, che casa loro è solo un “contenitore” per la lavatrice. Cosa succede quando equipariamo il denaro anche al luogo, mi domando, anziché solo al tempo? Quando riflettiamo sui modi in cui viviamo nel denaro, circondati e confinati dai soldi, anziché semplicemente attraverso il loro flusso e il loro scambio? Cosa succede alle dimensioni quando il denaro è sia tempo che spazio?

È se il denaro è spazio, il debito cos’è?

Author and ceramist Emily Maloney was still in debt when she wasile working at a hospital with fifty-four million dollars of its own debt. She was paying, in small increments, the debt she incurred while hospitalized, without insurance, following a suicide attempt years earlier. The essay where she writes about this, “Cost of Living,” calls into question not only the cost of being alive, in this country, but also that of *staying* alive—of not having died just yet.

TIn the summer before graduate school, I read *Momo* by Michael Ende, a book my mom had recommended, and which I’d put off for a couple of years, thinking I “didn’t have time” for a children’s novel. In large part, the book challenges exactly that—this notion of not having time, the concept of “saving” it for later, for something different. In the book, the characters of “the Men in Grey,” a species of parasites living off of the time of humans, convince humans to be more “economic” with their time, and “put it away” in a “Timesaving Bank,” with the promise that it will be returned with interest. But the “saved” time is stuffed into the grey men’s cigarettes, and consumed to allow their existence. The book problematizes in this way the notion that time can be retrievable at a later point, that it can act as currency. Saved time is not saved; it becomes smoke. And the more one “saves,” the less they have.

While reading this book I was searching for things to read to six-year-old twins, who I’d started babysitting, a few times a week, a couple of weeks earlier. Their parents were both Israeli, and the family spent summers in Israel and the rest of the year in New York. It was likely that

La scrittrice e ceramista Emily Maloney aveva ancora un debito quando lavorava in un ospedale, di per sé indebitato per cinquantaquattro milioni di dollari. Pagava a piccole rate il conto che le avevano presentato quando, anni prima, era stata ricoverata senza assicurazione dopo un tentato suicidio. Il saggio in cui lo racconta, *Cost of Living*, mette in discussione non solo il costo di essere vivi in questo paese, ma anche il costo di restarci vivi, di essere scampati alla morte.

L'estate prima di tornare all'università, lessi *Momo* di Michael Ende, un libro che mi aveva consigliato mia madre, e che rimandavo da un paio d'anni, pensando di “non avere tempo” per un romanzo per bambini. In larga parte, il libro contesta proprio questo: l’idea di non avere tempo, di doverlo “risparmiare” per il futuro, per qualcosa di diverso. Nella storia di Ende, i “Signori Grigi”, una specie di parassiti che vive a spese del tempo degli umani, convincono le persone a essere più “parsimoniose” con il loro tempo, e a “metterlo da parte” in una “Cassa di Risparmio del Tempo”, promettendo loro gli interessi. Ma il tempo “risparmiato” finisce a riempire le sigarette dei Signori Grigi, che lo consumano per poter esistere. Il libro problematizza così l’idea che il tempo possa essere recuperato in futuro, che possa funzionare come una valuta. Il tempo risparmiato non è risparmiato; va in fumo. E più uno lo “risparmia,” meno se ne ha.

Quando avevo tra le mani il romanzo di Ende, stavo cercando qualcosa da leggere ai gemellini di sei anni a cui badavo di tanto in tanto, da un paio di settimane. I genitori erano entrambi israeliani, e la famiglia passava l'estate in Israele e il resto dell'anno a New York. Era

I would work for them also in the fall, in some capacity, while at school.

I loved Momo and considered reading it to the twins, but feared it may feel too familiar—that they would be able to recognize their parents as victims of the Men in Grey, and the scam of the Timesaving Bank as the reason why I was there—why it would have been me reading for them in the first place.

probabile che avrei lavorato con loro anche in autunno,
compatibilmente con le lezioni.

Momo mi piacque molto e pensai di leggerlo ai gemelli,
ma temetti che potesse sembrare troppo familiare: che
sarebbero riusciti a riconoscere nei loro genitori delle
vittime dei Signori Grigi, e nella truffa della Cassa di
Risparmio del Tempo la ragione per cui ero lì, la ragione
per cui, tanto per cominciare, ero io a leggergli quella
storia.

Translator's Foreword

Flavia Di Mauro's "Three Portraits of a Paramour" is a triptych of brief historical fiction, based on three photographs from the 1800s. The first two photographs feature Michelina De Cesare—a real-life woman who inspired Di Mauro's protagonist, Maddalena Soriano. The third picture captures three young children who, in reality, are unrelated to Cesare, but in Di Mauro's fiction include the protagonist, Maddalena Soriano, as a young girl.

On first read, di Mauro's narrator may appear omniscient, providing thorough descriptions of the photos, the lives they capture, and the lives wherein they exist as objects. But the narrator often admits to not knowing, punctuating the prose with phrases like "As far as we know," "We don't quite know," and "It is not clear." These repeated indications of the narrator's limited knowledge turn the unknown into its own character in the story, creating the atmosphere of a fable: a distant occurrence that can't be retrieved in full. Di Mauro's narrator not only leaves room for the reader's imagination, but also heightens the life-like qualities of her fiction, in that it reflects the unknowns of being alive—the gaps and speculations—blurring, in this same reflection, the distinction between "life" and "fiction."

The story takes place during the unification of Italy (1848 - 1871), and relies on the average Italian reader's familiarity with this history. To provide context for the American reader, I utilized footnotes and tried to preserve the Italian syntax and punctuation, as well as the particular cadence of this narration. The Italian tense *presente storico*—adding immediacy to historical occurrences—is rendered here in the past, but with lighter, less scholarly language.

Native to neither Italian nor English, I'm aware of the limitations of my own perspective, and am certain I've missed things. But a translation would inevitably be "missing" so long as we assume the original misses nothing. If we consider, on the other hand, that what's "missing" is a part of the text—an important function in the story as well as in the telling—we may reach a different conclusion.

FLAVIA DI MAURO

SCRIVERE 2 A TRE RITRATTI DELLA DRUDA

Il suolo

Per quanto se ne sappia, non esistono che tre fotografie di Maddalena Soriano. Attraverso questi scatti è stato possibile risuscitare non solo le fattezze, ma anche pezzi di biografia — e forse frammenti di spirito — di quella che nelle cronache del tempo fu chiamata variamente “la cecchina di Lusciano”, “la druda di Battaglia”, e “la diavolessa tessitrice”. Le prime due, scattate con ogni probabilità tra il 1855 e il 1864, sono state rinvenute in tempi recenti, in maniera piuttosto casuale, e sono ora custodite in una teca museale a Rionero in Vulture. L’ultima, scattata certamente nel 1868 — e per la precisione la mattina del 6 settembre, presumibilmente tra le undici e mezzogiorno — ha conosciuto invece larghissima diffusione fin da pochi giorni dopo la data dello scatto.

Come era d’uso nella ritrattistica del tempo, l’immagine sembra emergere gradualmente dalla cornice bianca, in una forma d’uovo dai contorni sfocati. Si tratta di un mezzo busto dalla grana piuttosto grezza. La Soriano vi appare svestita, con le labbra turgide leggermente socchiuse e le palpebre calate, come addormentata. Si può comunque intuire il bel taglio degli occhi, due grosse mandorle ruotate verso l’alto, incoronate da un folto paio di sopracciglia nere. All’epoca dello scatto ha ventiquattro anni appena compiuti, ma ne dimostra non meno di trenta. I seni sodi, rotondi, dai capezzoli minuti, sono quelli di una donna nel fiore dell’età; la chioma è

**translated from the italian by
SHIR ORNER**

THREE PORTRAITS OF A PARAMOUR

Ground

As far as we know, there are only three photographs of Maddalena Soriano. These photos—depicting a woman whom the chronicles of the day called “Lusicano’s Sniper,” “The Paramour of Battaglia,” and “The She-Devil Weaver”—reveal not only her features but also snippets of her biography, perhaps even a sense of her spirit. The first two, most likely taken between 1855 and 1864, have recently been rediscovered, in a rather casual way, and are now kept in a museum display case in Rionero in Vulture. The last, we know, was taken in 1868—on the morning of September 6th, to be precise, presumably between eleven and noon—and widely circulated thereafter.

As was customary in the portraiture of the time, the image is shaped like an egg emerging gradually from the white frame, blurry around the edges. It’s a head and shoulders portrait, and rough grained. In it, Soriano appears naked, her lips swollen and slightly parted, her eyelids closed as if in slumber—their beautiful slant is still notable: two large almonds turned upward—crowned with a pair of dense black eyebrows. Soriano has just turned twenty-four, but seems no younger than thirty; her firm breasts, round and with delicate nipples, are those of a woman in her prime; her hair is still as

ancora nera come il fondo dei pozzi; la fronte, per quanto ci è consentito osservare, sembra ancora perfettamente tesa. Eppure dalla sua figura emana una sorta di stanchezza, un senso di fatica irrimediabile che sembra negare, in lei, la possibilità della gioventù. A produrre questa sensazione devono aver contribuito, oltre alla vita spericolata della Soriano, le circostanze particolari in cui fu scattata la foto.

Sappiamo da fonti certe che la notte precedente si strinse all'amante Domenico Battaglia nella cavità di una quercia secolare. Lì, sorpresi da un violento acquazzone, i due rimangono a ripararsi fino all'una del mattino. A quel punto sono intercettati da forze ostili. Queste forze stanno perlustrando la zona da diversi giorni senza ottenere risultati. Ma, quella notte, alla guida viene in mente di avvicinarsi al boschetto di querce, sapendole abbastanza incavate da poter ospitare tranquillamente una persona. Così, "fatti pochi passi, e splendendo in quel momento un vivo lampo, scorse accucciati presso una di quelle querce due briganti". È a questo punto che il verbale della prefettura si fa inaffidabile. Secondo i militari, Soriano e Battaglia si sarebbero dati immediatamente alla fuga. Poi, intercettati ciascuno da un proiettile (lei nel centro dello stomaco, lui dritto nel cuore), muoiono sul colpo. Il ritratto della Soriano, tuttavia, fa pensare a una morte più lenta.

La mandorla dell'occhio destro, che nella foto si vede di tre quarti, è gonfia e scura. La tumefazione produce un'impressione di asimmetria, tale che la palpebra destra sembra cadere più in basso della sinistra. Dalla guancia sinistra si solleva un grosso bozzo, anche questo scuro e tumefatto. Questo bozzo, che ha bene o male le dimensioni di un mandarino, si estende dal centro della guancia fino all'inizio dell'orecchio. Gli incisivi, affacciati dalle labbra socchiuse, sono spezzati a metà. Anche quello che possiamo vedere del corpo è ricoperto di segni. Pochi centimetri sotto il seno destro si apre

black as a mine shaft, and her forehead, as far as we can discern, appears perfectly unwrinkled. Her figure, however, emanates a kind of profound tiredness—a sense of fatigue so irredeemable it seems to deny the possibility of youth. Among the factors contributing to this effect, other than Soriano's reckless life, were the circumstances in which the photo was taken.

Reliable sources inform us that the previous night, Soriano wrapped herself around her lover, Domenico Battaglia, in the hollow of a centuries-old oak tree. There, surprised by a violent downpour, the two sheltered until one in the morning, when they were interrupted by hostile forces. They had been patrolling the area for days without obtaining results, but that night—knowing the oak's hollows could comfortably fit one person—it occurred to their commander to approach the oak thicket. And so, “after he had taken a few steps, in a moment of bright, flashing lightning, he caught a glimpse of two *briganti*¹ curled up in one of those hollows.” Starting here, the prefecture’s report becomes unreliable. According to the police, Soriano and Battaglia fled right away, were later shot (she in the stomach, he right in the heart,) and died on the spot. Soriano’s portrait, however, seems to suggest a slower death.

The almond of her right eye, partially seen in the photo, is dark and swollen. The swelling creates a semblance of asymmetry, such that the right eyelid seems to droop lower than the left. A large lump, also dark and swollen, more or less mandarine-sized, rises from the center of her left cheek and extends to the edge of the ear. Her front teeth, exposed by parted lips, are snapped in half. What we can see of the body is also covered in bruises. A few centimeters below the right breast appears what

¹I Briganti (literally “robbers”) were a group resisting the unification of Italy in the 1800s, regarded as criminals by some and heroes by others.

quella che sembra una ferita da taglio. Sull'attaccatura del collo e sugli avambracci sono impresse delle striature scure e disomogenee. In fila sul petto, simili una piccola costellazione, ci sono tre stelline sfocate, ma non è chiaro se si tratti di bruciature o di un difetto della foto. Tutti questi dettagli hanno portato a ipotizzare una violenta colluttazione precedente allo sparo, se non una morte sotto tortura.

Comunque sia, non ci sono dubbi sulla disposizione successiva del cadavere. “I militari solitamente così avari di immagini, rivelano un'improvvisa prodigalità fotografica durante la repressione del brigantaggio...”. Così, non sarà difficile riconoscere nella griglia nera che fa da sfondo al ritratto della Soriano il basolato di piazza Chiesa, nel centro di Lusciano. Qui, la mattina del 6, i militari trasportano i corpi denudati dei due briganti, li mettono entrambi sobriamente in posa, e scattano le foto giunte fino a noi. I ritratti furono distribuiti al popolo, affinché tutti sapessero com'erano finiti Battaglia e la sua *druda*.

La guerra

Il secondo ritratto è stato rinvenuto nella primavera del 1998, nel rudere di una masseria a Casaluce, a pochi chilometri da Lusciano. La masseria era stata acquistata alcuni mesi prima da un imprenditore locale, un certo Angelo Tafuri, che aveva avviato i lavori per convertirla in un B&B. Per un fortunato caso del destino, Tafuri era anche un uomo piuttosto curioso (nonché un fervente neoborbonico). Così, quando un piastrellista gli comunicò di aver trovato un vecchio cofanetto di legno — pieno, a suo dire, di “scartoffie inutili, ritagli di giornale e brutte foto” — fu subito preso dalla smania di saperne di più. Consegnò il cofanetto a uno storico locale, che pensò di riconoscere in una delle foto la brigantessa Maddalena Soriano. L'intuizione si rivelò corretta. Si scoprì che

could be a stab wound. Her neck's hairline and forearm are marked with scattered, dark scratches. On the chest, three blurry stars appear aligned like a constellation, though it is not clear if they are burns on the body or blemishes on the photo. Taken together, these details have led to speculations about a violent struggle preceding the gunshot wounds, if not death by torture.

In any case, there are no ambiguities regarding what followed: the positioning of the corpse. “The police, usually stingy with images, reveal an unexpected photographic enthusiasm during brigandage repression...”. Without difficulty, one can recognize the black grid forming the background of Soriano's portrait as the paving stone of Piazza Chiesa, in Lusciano's city center. It was there, on the morning of the 6th, that police transported the stripped corpses of the two *briganti*, arranged them in sober poses, and took the photos in question. At the time, the portraits were distributed publicly, so that everyone knew how Battaglia and his *paramour* ended up.

War

The second portrait was rediscovered in the spring of 1998, in the ruins of a farmhouse in Casaluce, a few kilometers from Lusciano. A few months earlier, the farmhouse had been bought by a local entrepreneur, one Angelo Tafuri, who began construction transforming it into a B&B. As chance would have it, Tafuri was also a rather peculiar man (as well as an ardent neo-Bourbon.) And so, when a mason told him he'd found an old wooden chest—full, according to him, of “useless paperwork, newspaper clippings and bad photos”—Tafuri was instantly seized by the urge to learn more. He gave the chest to a local historian who believed he recognized the *brigantessa* Maddalena Soriano in one of the photos. His intuition was right: it turns out the chest belonged to one

il cofanetto era appartenuto a un bracciante agricolo impiegato nella masseria, e che il bracciante era Ugo Vitale, figlio di primo letto della Soriano. Era già noto che la Soriano fosse rimasta vedova a diciannove anni. Emersero però alcune novità sull'inizio della sua relazione con Battaglia. Ora, bisognerà tener a mente che, appena dopo il parto, la Soriano si era subito attivata nella lotta all'invasore. In un primo momento questa lotta si era concretizzata nel supporto notturno ai briganti, che col favore delle tenebre si avventuravano al paese per approvvigionamenti di vario tipo. Oltre a rifornirli di vino e formaggio, la Soriano, che si manteneva come filatrice di lana, intesseva per loro sciarpe e passamontagna. Poi, nell'aprile 1864, quest'impegno divenne un impegno armato, ed è esattamente a questo periodo che risalgono l'inizio della relazione con Battaglia e la seconda fotografia.

In questo scatto, la brigantessa è ritratta a figura intera, seduta su quella che sembra una roccia vulcanica, con un moschetto ben stretto nella mano sinistra e una rivoltella nella destra. Volge lo sguardo fuori campo, verso un orizzonte misterioso, e gli occhi (che scopriamo nerissimi) sono concentrati e vigili. L'immagine è soffusa di una certa delicata tensione, tale per cui la Soriano sembra quasi sul punto di balzare in piedi e sparare un colpo all'osservatore. Dalla disinvoltura con cui se ne vezzeggia non lo si direbbe, ma era la prima volta nella vita che possedesse un'arma. Era andata in questo modo: durante la seconda settimana di aprile si era sparsa una voce nefasta tra i contadini di Lusciano: l'esercito progettava arrestarli e spedirli a formare terrapieni nel distretto di Sora. Non si sa bene come fosse nata questa diceria, né se l'esercito covasse realmente un piano simile. Fatto sta che i contadini si levarono in sommossa. Alla sommossa prende parte anche la Soriano, così come il brigante Domenico Battaglia. Si presume però che non sia stato quello il loro primo incontro. Nelle notti senza luna, sul limitare del paese, i due dovevano essersi

of the farm's day laborers, Ugo Vitale—Soriano's son from her first marriage. Soriano was known to have been widowed at nineteen, and the news of her relationship with Battaglia was beginning to emerge. We must also keep in mind that, soon after giving birth, Soriano became active in the battle against the invasion². Early on, she supported the *briganti* who ventured nightly into the village, under the cover of darkness, for supplies of various kinds. Other than restocking them with wine and cheese, Soriano—who made her living as a wool spinner—wove their scarves and balaclavas. Then, in April of 1864—when the struggle became an armed struggle, and when her relationship with Battaglia intensified—this second photo was taken.

In this full length portrait, the *brigantessa* is shown seated on what seems like volcanic rock, a musket gripped tightly in her left hand and a revolver in her right. She turns her gaze away from the camera, towards a mysterious horizon; her eyes (pitch-black, we realize) are focused and vigilant. The image is suffused with a certain delicate tension, making Soriano seem as though on the verge of leaping to her feet to fire a shot at an observer. Her poise would not reveal it, but this is her first time ever holding a weapon. Here is what transpired: during the second week of April, an inauspicious rumor spread through Lusciano. The army, local farmers heard, was planning to capture and ship them to the Sora district for embankment construction. We don't quite know where this rumor came from, nor whether the army did nurture a plan of this kind, but the fact remains that the farmers rose up in protest, and Soriano—just like the *brigante* Domenico Battaglia—joined in. It was not their first encounter. On moonless nights, on the outskirts of the village, the two were apparently spotted on multiple

²The invasion of southern Italy by the Kingdom of Sardinia and Savoy.

visti varie volte per la consegna dei rifornimenti. Ma il giorno della rivolta, quando infine giunge la Guardia Nazionale e i contadini si disperdonano nelle campagne, i due fuggono insieme per non separarsi più. Partono poi in direzione di Roma, dove Battaglia ha degli agganci tra i legittimisti Borbonici. Qui rimangono per alcune settimane. Da Roma, Soriano manda una lettera alla sorella, raccomandandole suo figlio Ugo. Prega entrambi di perdonarla e di capirla, perché ha deciso di “sposare la battaglia”. A parte queste poche righe apologetiche, la lettera tratta quasi esclusivamente di politica, e ha un che di febbrile, di ossessivo. Si parla molto di “indipendenza”, di “gloria” e delle “generazioni a venire”. La foto, scattata durante il soggiorno a Roma, doveva essere stata allegata alla lettera.

Si presume che l'autore dello scatto fosse un fotografo Borbonico. In effetti, il ritratto ha tutti i crismi della professionalità. La parete bianca alle spalle di Soriano suggerisce l'ambiente asettico di uno studio. Gli abiti da contadina, fin troppo puliti, fanno pensare a un costume. La roccia vulcanica, a ben vedere, sembrerebbe cartapesta. Come la precedente, anche questa foto è pensata per la distribuzione al popolo. In questo caso, però, lo scopo è di incoraggiare i contadini a imbracciare le armi. Non si sa bene cosa sia successo agli altri esemplari prodotti, se siano stati distrutti dai militari o se, più semplicemente, siano sprofondati nelle nebbie del tempo.

Quello che giunto fino a noi è in ottimo stato di conservazione. Sul retro sono vergate poche parole “a Ugo mio. Arre cuordate 'e mammà”.

occasions by supply trains. But on the day of the revolt, when the National Guard arrived at last and the farmers dispersed across the countryside, the two made their escape so as not to be separated again. They left, then, and headed towards Rome; Battaglia had contacts among the Bourbon Legitimists³, and the two stayed in the city for a few weeks. From Rome, Soriano sent a letter to her sister, entrusting her with Ugo, her own son. She asked that they both forgive and understand her, as she had decided to “marry the battle⁴. ” Apart from these few apologetic lines, the letter revolved almost exclusively around politics, tinged with feverish, obsessive tones. There was much about “independence,” about “glory,” and about the “generations to come.” The photo, taken during the couple’s stay in Rome, must have been attached to the letter.

It is presumed that the photo was taken by a Bourbon photographer; the portrait carries, in fact, all signs of professionalism. The white wall behind Soriano suggests the aesthetic ambiance of a studio. Her farmer’s clothes, far too clean, seem like a costume. On closer inspection, the volcanic rock looks like papier mache. This photo, like the first one, was meant for public distribution. But its aim, in this case, was to encourage farmers to take up arms. We don’t quite know what happened to other model products, whether they were destroyed by soldiers or, more simply, vanished in the mists of time.

The photo we have in our hands is in an excellent condition. On its back, a few Neapolitan words read: “To my Ugo. Remember your *mammà*.”

³Royalists supporting the right of dynastic succession to descendants of the Bourbon Dynasty (overthrown in 1830.)

⁴Also the name of her lover, “Battaglia.”

L'infanzia

Della terza fotografia non si può dire che sia stata ritrovata, perché non era mai stata propriamente perduta. È rimasta per decenni nell'archivio Alinari, ma mai nessuno si era accorto che il soggetto fosse la brigantessa Maddalena Soriano. La scoperta si deve a Giulio Bugno, uno studente di beni culturali dell'Università di Napoli Federico II. Nell'ottobre 2006, Bugno si laureava con una tesi in storia dell'arte contemporanea dal titolo *Attilio Di Pace: albori del ritratto fotografico nella "Terra di lavoro"*. In un lodevole sforzo di ricerca, Bugno aveva passato in ricognizione tutto l'immenso corpo di lavoro del fotografo luscanese. Si era imbattuto, quindi, nel terzo ritratto, cui lo stesso fotografo dedica alcune righe in uno dei suoi diari.

Nella foto sono immortalati tre bambini di età compresa tra i quattro e i sedici anni, sullo sfondo di quello che sembra un vicoletto di paese. Il più piccolo, un maschio, dorme in una cesta in basso a destra, il volto affondato nel cuscino. La maggiore, abbandonata su una sedia a sinistra, si copre il viso con un fuso di lana. Al centro, con gli uncinetti tra le mani e i riccioli neri tutti intorno alla fronte, è seduta una bambina di undici o dodici anni, che guarda dritto in camera e non sorride. Questa bambina è Maddalena Soriano.

Secondo la testimonianza del fotografo, la foto sarebbe stata scattata in circostanze piuttosto eccezionali. Quel giorno, Di Pace esce di casa per raggiungere il palazzo del marchese Pellegrino, che gli ha commissionato un ritratto. Visto il bel tempo, il fotografo decide di andare a piedi, e sta per raggiungere il palazzo del marchese quando s'imbatte in quelli che lui chiama “i figli dello scarparo Soriano”. Racconta quindi che, incuriosita

Childhood

We can't say the third photograph was found, because it had never quite been lost. For decades, it remained in the Alinari archive of images and photography, but no one realized it depicted the *brigantessa* Maddalena Soriano. The discovery was made by Giulio Bugno, a cultural heritage student at the University of Naples Federico II. Bugno graduated in October 2006, having written a thesis in contemporary art history, titled *Attilio Di Pace: the Dawn of Photographic Portraiture in “Terra di Lavoro.”*⁵ In an exceptional effort, Bugno researched the entirety of Di Pace's work, closely studying the immense oeuvre of the Luscan photographer. It was then that he stumbled upon the third portrait, to which Di Pace had dedicated a few lines in one of his personal diaries.

The photo immortalizes three children between the ages of four and sixteen, against a background of what appears to be a narrow village alley. The youngest, a boy, sleeps in a basket to the lower right, face deep in a pillow. The oldest, resting on a chair to the left, covers her face with a spindle of wood. In the center, crochet hook in her hands and black curls all over her forehead, sits a girl of eleven or twelve. She looks straight into the camera, unsmiling. This girl is Maddalena Soriano.

According to the photographer's testimony, the photograph was taken under rather exceptional circumstances. That day, Di Pace left home, heading to the palace of Pellegrino—a marquess who had commissioned a portrait. A briefcase on his shoulder, the photographer set off, and was about to reach the marquess' palace when he stumbled upon “the children of Soriano the shoemaker,” as he called them. The girl

⁵Terra di Lavoro was a historical region in southern Italy, stretching across in the area of modern southern Lazio, northern Campagna, and western Molise.

dalla grossa valigetta, la bambina con gli uncinetti lo trattiene per un lembo della giacca e gli domanda di cosa si tratti. Allora, colto da un'ispirazione improvvisa, il fotografo risponde che trasporta un dispositivo magico, capace di catturare istantaneamente le facce di chi vi guarda dentro. Subito, la maggiore si fa il segno della croce: ha sentito parlare di oggetti simili, che trattengono in terra un pezzetto di anima: chi osa guardarvi dentro arriva in paradiso tutto mutilato. Ma la bambina con l'uncinetto, la Soriano, se ne mostra entusiasta. "Aspetta e spera, tu e 'o paradiso" sbotta la Soriano "je 'a vita 'tierna me l'abusco ccà." Poi si getta in ginocchio ai piedi di Di Pace, gli promette una sciarpa di lana e lo prega di scattarle una foto. A questo punto il racconto termina, e Di Pace si lascia andare a tutta una serie di considerazioni più o meno originali sugli orizzonti rosei dell'arte fotografica, straordinariamente rapida e fedele, surrogato della memoria, se non forse (aggiunge Di Pace, ispirato probabilmente dalla Soriano) dell'Eternità.

Dell'infanzia della brigantessa non sappiamo molto altro, né esistono, che se ne sappia, testimonianze sulla sua vita che non afferiscano alla mera cronaca. In queste tre immagini c'è tutto quello che sappiamo di lei, tutto quello che rimane della sua vita burrascosa.

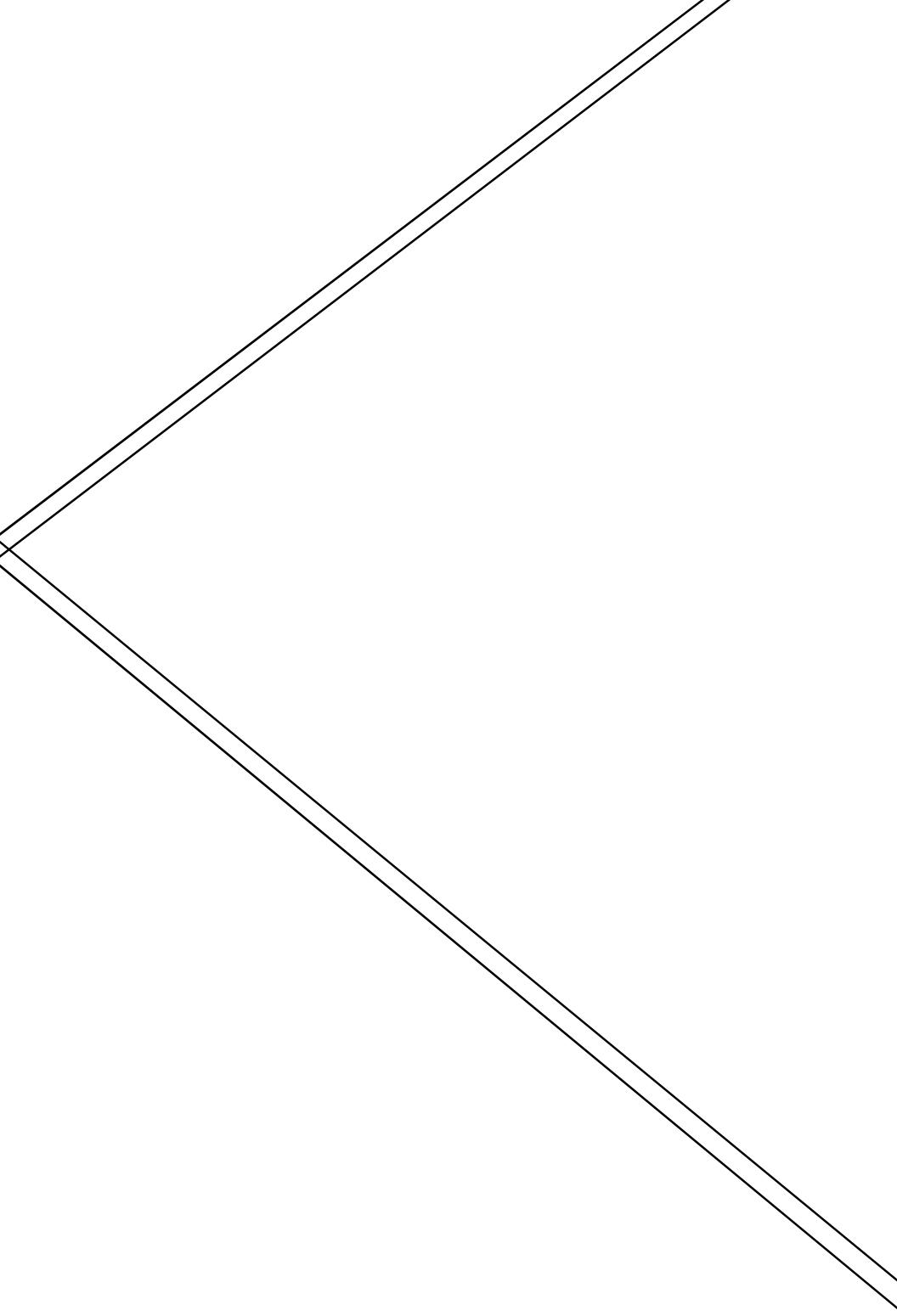
Si conserva in esse il ricordo eterno di Maddalena Soriano: per sempre bambina, per sempre guerriera, per sempre morta.

with the crochet hook, he went on to say, grabbed him by the edge of his jacket and, intrigued by the large suitcase, asked him what was inside. Gripped by sudden inspiration, the photographer said he was transporting a magical device, capable of instantly capturing the faces of those who looked inside it. Right away, the oldest child made the sign of the cross; she'd heard talk of similar objects, which trapped bits of the soul, keeping it on earth: anyone who dared peer inside would arrive in heaven completely mutilated. But the girl with the crochet hook, Soriano, seemed enthusiastic. "Wait and hope," she blurted out, "You and Paradise. My eternal life—I want it down here⁶." Then she fell to her knees at Di Pace's feet, promising him a wool scarf and begging him to let her peer inside the box. This was where the story ended, and Di Pace began indulging himself in more or less original musings on rosy horizons in photography—an extraordinarily swift and faithful art—a substitute for memory, if not (Di Pace added, most likely inspired by Soriano) for eternity.

We don't know much else about the *brigantessa*'s childhood, and neither do we have testimonials, beyond mere chronicles, about her life. These three photos carry everything we know about her, everything that remains of her tempestuous life.

In them, the eternal memory of Maddalena Soriano is conserved: forever a child, forever a warrior, forever dead.

⁶Originally in Neapolitan



word for word / palavra por palavra
Columbia University School of the Arts
Instituto Vera Cruz Formação de Escritores

Translator's Foreword

“Alyzia Contreras had no business playing mother to child” é a frase com a qual Deya Luna escolhe abrir o seu *The Sorter*. Muitas das questões do conto já se estabelecem nesta pedra fundamental: a maternidade como principal eixo narrativo; o contraste de mundos (sujeito mexicano, predicado em inglês); o comentário social (Alyzia é mãe solo aos 40); e ainda as noções de acaso e destino, que ganharão espaço conforme o conto avança.

Uma primeira frase capaz de dizer tanto revela uma autora consciente da potência da linguagem. E, logo entendi, não só consciente, mas também arrojada, já que, tantas vezes, irá manejá-la a produzir um certo esgarçar que resulta em estranhamento, beleza, e atinge diferentes camadas de sentido. Ler *The Sorter* é perguntar-se: o que mais há para ler?, e o esforço de traduzi-lo concentrou-se em fazer escolhas que não refreassem suas possibilidades, e que não tentassem aplacar o estranho — me parece que é através dessas operações que, qual o recém-nascido Marco, Deya Luna consegue “tatear o novo”.

O que apresentamos aqui é apenas a primeira metade do conto: Alyzia Contreras, imigrante mexicana de primeira geração, trabalha em uma fábrica de tomates em conserva, e engravidia, sem planejar, aos 40 anos. Seu pequeno Marco nasce com sindactilia bilateral. Enquanto aguarda um diagnóstico definitivo, temos acesso à “vida passada” de Alyzia, no México, um trecho envolto em uma fina névoa mítico-poética que evoca Juan Rulfo em *Pedro Páramo*. Ao mesmo tempo, a linguagem não quer se assentar — os registros poético e coloquial se contrastam e se fundem.

Beleza, estranheza, camadas de sentido, o novo e os ecos de uma tradição literária — que as leitoras e leitores de *A Seleccionadora* possam experimentar tudo.

DEYA LUNA

THE SORTER (an excerpt)

Alysia Contreras had no business playing mother to child. And yet what a peculiar fruit she bore that day, in dead winter, at San Joaquin Hospital! Marco, a little love so ripe with condition, born breech and plucked from her belly by masked men and women. The doctors saw Marco's hands first. A case of bilateral syndactyly. Peculiar, but benign, his fingers, fused together, grasped at the new.

"Don't worry... he's healthy...very healthy...nothing's wrong..." said a young nurse, Patricia, her nails shellacked and hair bunned-up in braids. She'd taken Marco to the NICU straight away for diagnosis and presented him to Alysia for the first time. He slept in a swaddle in a nearby bassinet and fluorescent light reflected in the gleam of the vernix still coating his skin. "Don't worry, he's healthy—it's actually very common... it's just syndactyly."

"Syndactyly," Alysia repeated, the new string of syllables sore in her mouth. In the swaddle, Alysia couldn't see Marco's hands. Just Marco. Just the contours of his pout, an inheritance from her family. The Contrerases were true smilers, eye crinklers, some real good kissers-on-the-cheek. She saw the wisps on his head. Would his hair really stay blond? "He looks... okay."

"It's just his hands... it's very common...don't worry..." For Patricia, it was just another day.

**traduzido do inglês por
NATALY CALLAI**

A SELEÇÃO (an excerpt)

Alysia Contreras não tinha nada que ser a mãe de uma criança. Ainda assim, que fruto peculiar ela pariu naquele dia, em pleno inverno, no Hospital San Joaquin! Marco, um amorzinho maduro e desafiador, nascido em posição pélvica e arrancado de seu ventre por homens e mulheres mascarados. Os médicos viram as mãos de Marco primeiro. Um caso de sindactilia bilateral. Peculiar, mas benigno; seus dedos, grudados, tateavam o novo.

„Não se preocupe... ele é saudável... muito saudável... não há problema algum», disse uma enfermeira jovem, Patricia – suas unhas envernizadas e o cabelo trançado preso em um coque. Ela havia levado Marco direto à UTI neonatal para o diagnóstico e o mostrou a Alysia pela primeira vez. Ele dormia enrolado em um cueiro, em um berço próximo, e a luz fluorescente refletia no brilho do vérnix que ainda revestia sua pele. «Não se preocupe, ele é saudável – na verdade, é bem comum... é só sindactilia.”

“Sindactilia”, Alysia repetia, a nova sequência de sílabas ferindo sua boca. Enrolado no cueiro, Alysia não conseguia ver as mãos de Marco. Só Marco. Só o contorno do seu beicinho, uma herança de família. Os Contreras eram uns bons beijadores de bochechas, uma gente que realmente sorria fácil, espremendo os olhos. Ela viu os tufinhos na cabeça dele. Será que seu cabelo continuaria loiro? «Ele parece... bem.“

„São só as mãos... é muito comum... não se preocupe..» Para Patricia, era um dia qualquer.

Alysia rubbed a thin eyebrow in worry and met the sweetness of Patricia's smile, a veneer for her eyes, scanning Alysia's face with peculiar curiosity. Alysia had gotten to know that look well, around town, during her pregnancy—the judgment of younger mothers! Alysia knew that she was rare, having pushed her first out at 40, but these busybodies didn't need to keep reminding her, all the time, with their smiles that fell just short of comfort and felt like lies. Well!....better to be mid-life and managing a twist than to be 19 or 20 and caught off guard, stuck at home in the prime of life! Nope, not Alysia. At least she had enjoyed her youth! You wouldn't catch her taking a single regret to her death bed. Alysia managed to sit up a bit on her hospital bed and couldn't help but roll her eyes as Patricia kept smiling.

But Patricia was an astute professional. "It'll be okay. There are things we can do..." She explained that it remained to be seen whether Marco's case could be fixed, but by the doctor's measure, he wasn't a guaranteed lost cause. Not like some others. Alysia perked up as Patricia pointed her to pamphlets filled with smiling families, stats about heredity and sugar-coated sentences about surgery and support groups.

On the second day of her hospital stay, Imelda and Consuelo visited. They were trusted friends from her summer shifts at the tomato cannery. The three were fellow travelers, entrepreneurial sisters with a direct sales side-gig. Alysia repped Home Interiors, Consuelo touted CutCo knives, and Imelda championed Herbalife shakes. Each Monday, their one day off, they cultivated downlines, traded secrets, and conspired to rule over the San Joaquin Basin. Someday soon, they'd top the

Alysia esfregou, preocupada, uma de suas finas sobrancelhas e deparou com a doçura do sorriso de Patricia – uma fachada para seus olhos, que examinavam o rosto de Alysia com uma curiosidade particular. Ela conheceu bem esse olhar, pelas ruas, durante a gravidez – o julgamento das mães mais jovens! Alysia sabia que ela estava dentre as raras que pariam o primeiro aos 40, mas essas intrometidas não precisavam ficar lembrando, o tempo todo, com seus sorrisinhos constrangidos e falsos. Bem... melhor estar na meia-idade e administrando uma reviravolta do que ter 19 ou 20 e ser pega de surpresa. Passar o auge da vida dentro de casa! Para Alysia, não, muito obrigada. Ao menos, ela tinha aproveitado a juventude! Quando morresse, não teria arrependimento algum. Alysia conseguiu se sentar um pouco na cama do hospital e não pôde não revirar os olhos enquanto Patricia continuava sorrindo.

Mas Patricia era uma profissional astuta. “Vai ficar tudo bem. Há coisas que podem ser feitas.” Ela explicou que ainda não se sabia se o caso de Marco teria solução, mas que, segundo a avaliação dos médicos, ele não era garantia de caso perdido. Não como alguns outros. Alysia criou ânimo enquanto Patricia alcançava panfletos repletos de famílias felizes, estatísticas sobre hereditariedade e frases açucaradas sobre cirurgia e grupos de apoio.

No seu segundo dia no hospital, Imelda e Consuelo a visitaram. Elas eram amigas leais dos turnos de verão na fábrica de tomates em conserva. As três eram companheiras de viagem, irmãs empreendedoras com um trabalho paralelo em vendas diretas. Alysia era representante da Home Interiors, Consuelo revendia facas CutCo e Imelda promovia os shakes da Herbalife. Todas as segundas, o único dia livre que tinham, elas cultivavam afiliados e as manhas do negócio, conspirando para dominarem San Joaquin Basin. Um dia, em breve, alcançariam o topo da pirâmide e deixariam para trás os

pyramid and leave their ill fitting shift work behind.

Imelda and Consuelo brought Alysia a bouquet of roses, some valerian root tea, and a Hallmark card. The outside of the card was blue, lined with stars, swirls, tiny handprints and footprints. Inside, taped to the left, was a Walmart gift card. The right side contained a message: *A miracle just came into your life—a miracle made of tiny baby boy smiles and hugs and lots of love.* All around that card were the signatures of cannery coworkers: fellow sorters, mechanics, and sanitation workers, and even quick scrawls from the nose-up, air-conditioned office girls. After the gifts, Imelda and Consuelo fussed about Marco's blond hair. When Alysia spoke of his hands, they adopted an understanding posture, wore treacle smiles, and skimmed the pamphlets. Imelda wrung her right hand over the rings on her left hand. Consuelo studied her own hands, the dry folds gathered at the knuckles and the beginnings of an age spot under her pinky.

Alysia hadn't let her eyes rest on Marco's hands for more than a few seconds since he was delivered from the NICU. But with Imelda and Consuelo by her side, she gathered the courage to look, really look. She approached the clear plastic bassinet next to her bed. Gingerly, she loosened his swaddle, so that his little hands were visible and rose and fell on his chest with each little breath. Despite herself, Alysia pursed her lips. Her heart pounded and her face contorted into some sugary smile. Slowly, she lowered her face to his and gave him a light peck on the cheek. Alysia felt Imelda and Consuelo's gaze. Could they see her hesitation? She tried to will herself a mother, right then and there. She focused on Marco's closed eyelids. Such long lashes! And his pout, his Contreras family pout! A future true smiler. A would-be real good kisser-on-the-cheek. This was her child, after all! But

inconvenientes turnos na fábrica.

Imelda e Consuelo trouxeram para Alysia um buquê de rosas, chá de valeriana e um cartão da Hallmark. O lado de fora do cartão era azul, alinhado com estrelas, espirais e pequenas marcas de mãozinhas e pezinhos. Dentro, à esquerda, havia um vale-presente do Walmart. O lado direito continha uma mensagem: um milagre acaba de chegar em sua vida – um milagre feito de sorrisinhos de bebê e abraços e muito amor. Ao redor do cartão estavam as assinaturas dos colegas da fábrica: selecionadoras como elas, mecânicos, equipe do saneamento e, ainda, os rabiscos desinteressados daquelas narizes empinados do escritório. Depois dos presentes, Imelda e Consuelo fizeram um alvoroço com o cabelo loiro de Marco.

Quando Alysia falou sobre suas mãos, elas adotaram uma postura compreensiva, deram sorrisos melados e folhearam os panfletos. Imelda retorceu uma das mãos sobre a outra, pressionando os anéis. Consuelo examinou as próprias mãos, os vincos nas juntas e o princípio de uma mancha de idade embaixo do mindinho.

Alysia ainda não tinha deixado seus olhos repousarem nas mãos de Marco por mais de alguns segundos, desde que o tinham trazido da UTI. Mas na presença de Imelda e Consuelo ela criou coragem para olhar, realmente olhar. Se aproximou do berço de plástico transparente ao lado da cama. Cuidadosamente, afrouxou o cueiro, para que as mãos de Marco pudessem ser vistas, subindo e descendo sobre o peito a cada respiração. Sem querer, Alysia franziu os lábios. Seu coração bateu mais forte e seu rosto se contorceu em um sorriso amarelo. Devagar, ela abaixou seu rosto em direção ao dele e lhe deu um beijo na bochecha. Alysia sentiu que Imelda e Consuelo a observavam. Será que percebiam a hesitação? Ela tentou parir uma mãe ali, naquele momento. Se concentrou nas pálpebras fechadas de Marco. Cílios tão longos! E o seu beicinho, o beicinho da família! Um futuro sorridente de olhos espremidos. Um bom beijador de bochechas. Ele

would he really stay blond?

“The pamphlet says it’s actually pretty common... Sometimes they can fix it...” Consuelo said.

Alysia just nodded, looking between the pamphlet in Consuelo’s hands and Marco in front of her, his hands so common. But if it was so damn common, if it was so damn okay—why the sinking feeling in her gut? She had imagined a child, her child, but not quite her Marco. Why her Marco of all children? And why Alysia of all people? And people sure loved to talk. She could kiss her yearly sales goal goodbye! To say nothing of the medical bills—thank goodness for Medi-Cal. And the guaranteed gossip at the cannery! And if it couldn’t be fixed? Her Marco’d be doomed to eat his PB&Js out in the kindergarten lawn all alone. And they had better leave him alone! All those kids...who could be such assholes!

Just like Alysia was, back then, in her single-digit days, playing tag in the streets of Tierra Mojada. She felt a pang in her chest, guilt from a past life lived over the border, in the arid mountains of the Zacatecan highlands.

In Alysia’s past life, she was nine years old in Tierra Mojada, part of a co-ed collection from the same block. The kids ran ragtag, in rebellion, shaking off the dullness and the duty of their adobe homes. Troublemakers of the first degree, they stole chiclets, tripped strangers, and threw firecrackers into crowds at the plaza. They were children, always forgetting and never regarding. Children, who gave no thought to the fragility of their skin or the continuity of their lives. The rest of their lives were like

era seu filho, afinal! Será que continuaria loiro?

„O panfleto diz que, na verdade, é bem comum... muitas vezes, eles conseguem resolver.”

Alysia assentiu, olhando entre o panfleto na mão de Consuelo e Marco, em frente a ela, com seus dedos grudados tão comuns. Mas se eram tão comuns assim, se estava tudo tão bem assim, por que, então, aquela sensação na garganta? Ela tinha imaginado um filho, seu filho, mas não exatamente esse filho. Por que justo Marco, de todas as crianças? E por que justo Alysia, de todas as pessoas? Todo mundo ia adorar ter do que falar. Ela podia dar adeus às suas metas de vendas anuais! Sem falar dos gastos com os médicos – abençoado Medi-Cal. O falatório na fábrica estava garantido. E se não tivesse solução? Esse filho, seu filho, estaria condenado a sentar sozinho no recreio do jardim de infância. E seria melhor mesmo que aqueles capetas o deixassem em paz. As crianças... elas podiam ser tão cruéis!

Como a criança que Alysia tinha sido, lá atrás, antes dos 10 anos de idade, quando brincava de pega-pega nas ruas de Tierra Mojada. Ela sentiu uma pontada no peito, era a culpa pela vida passada do outro lado da fronteira, nas montanhas áridas do planalto zacateca.

Em sua outra vida, aos 9 anos, em Tierra Mojada, Alysia tinha uma turma de amigos do bairro. Eles viviam correndo pelas ruas, maltrapilhos e rebeldes, fugindo do tédio e das obrigações de suas casas de adobe. Arruaceiros de primeira, roubavam chicletes, faziam estranhos tropeçarem e atiravam bombinhas entre as pessoas, na praça. Eram crianças, não pensavam antes e esqueciam logo depois. Crianças, alheias à fragilidade de suas peles ou à continuidade de suas vidas. O futuro era como um

a horizon ahead of them, justice and chance just far off things.

One day, as Alyzia and her friends tired of playing tag in the plaza, they spotted Fernanda Vasconsuelos. She slumped along with her cart, selling fried wheat wheels with lime juice and hot sauce, and sliced up mango tied up in bags on the side. Fernanda was in her mid-30s, an earlier greyer with almond eyes and heterochromia. Left eye green, right eye brown, and neither trained on her itinerant husband, she dared the town to see her as just one living thing. Next to her, walked Humberto, her five-year-old. He wore hand-me-down jeans and a souvenir t-shirt from the Pyramid of the Moon. Humberto had an atypical head on his shoulders, swollen and hydrocephalic, his eyes his mother's left-hand green. He carried a set of bells on his right hand, twisting his wrist every few seconds, making music and attracting sales. And with the town so flush with pity, Fernanda knew Humberto was good for business.

Flush with blood and simple play, Alyzia and her gang approached Fernanda. They decided to go in together on a bag of wheels. As Fernanda prepared the bag, the children were left with Humberto and the same, sad routine. Half of the children stared blankly at the boy. The other half looked down at the floor, suddenly finding their sight a shameful thing. After paying, Rodolfo, Alyzia's next door neighbor, broke the tension and took the stage. He had just discovered, only two weeks before, the exhilarating power of making sheep laugh.

“Whoa! Gross! Look—his head!” Rodolfo pointed at Humberto, who just smiled and rang his bells in response. “Like a little alien! Imagine my head like that!” Rodolfo then puffed up his cheeks and made his eyes bulge. He swayed his head left to right, right to

horizonte, muito além – destino e acaso apenas coisas distantes.

Um dia, Alyzia e os amigos, já cansados de correr pela praça, avistaram Fernanda Vasconsuelos. Ela ia se arrastando com seu carrinho, vendendo chips de trigo, molhos de limão e de pimenta, e uns saquinhos com manga fatiada. Fernanda estava nos seus 30 e poucos, era uma grisalha precoce, com olhos de amêndoa e heterocromia. Olho esquerdo verde, olho direito castanho, e nenhum dos dois voltado para o marido viajante. Ela desafiava a cidade avê-la avulsa, como apenas um ser vivo. Próximo a ela estava Humberto, seu filho de 5 anos. Ele vestia jeans de segunda mão e uma camiseta turística da Pirâmide da Lua. Humberto tinha uma cabeça incomum sobre os ombros, inchada e hidrocefálica, e seus olhos eram verdes, como o direito da mãe. Ele segurava um conjunto de sinos na mão direita e os fazia soar o tempo todo, atraindo os clientes. Com a cidade corada de pena, Fernanda sabia que Humberto era bom para o negócio.

Corados por causa da brincadeira, apenas, Alyzia e sua gangue abordaram Fernanda. Eles resolveram comprar juntos um pacote de chips. Enquanto Fernanda preparava o pacote, as crianças foram deixadas com Humberto, e o mesmo tipo de cena triste se repetiu. Metade das crianças olhou para o menino. A outra metade olhou para o chão, censurando o próprio interesse. Entregaram o dinheiro a Fernanda, e Rodolfo, vizinho de porta de Alyzia, quebrou a tensão e subiu ao palco. Ele havia descoberto, apenas duas semanas antes, o poder eletrizante de fazer o rebanho gargalhar.

“Olha a cabeça dele! Que escroto.” Rodolfo apontou para Humberto, que só sorria e tocava os sininhos. “Parece um E.T. Imaginem se eu tivesse a cabeça assim!” Rodolfo então inchou as bochechas, arregalou os olhos e balançou

left in caricature. Alyzia and the rest of the children laughed and laughed and performed disgust. They looked alternately between Rodolfo and Humberto, between their cartoon comfort and the real life thing.

Fernanda took Humberto by the arm and put him behind her and out of sight. She spoke to Rodolfo. “Y’know what? I know your mother! That weak bitch?—If you’d’ve come out like Humberto, she’d’ve thrown you down a well.”

Then, Fernanda grabbed a squeeze top bottle and squirted Rodolfo with lime juice, right in the eyes. He cried out and ran away. She brandished the bottle and the rest of the children scattered and screamed.

But Alyzia stayed put. Her mouth gaped open, her gaze fixed on Humberto. He poked his head out from behind his mother’s thigh. Humberto looked at Alyzia, but she missed his eyes for his head. His head! A human head, to be certain. Like all the others she’d come across in her life, yet remote and transmuted. A being like Humberto seemed improbable and ridiculous, yet here he was, right in front of her, some well-kept secret now un-secret. She felt a feeling rise up in her chest like a bile, some ancient mixture—morbid curiosity, pity, and disgust. The world around her broke and reconstituted, broke and reconstituted, all in the span of just a few seconds.

Fernanda snapped her fingers, crisp and commanding, waking Alyzia from the dumbness of her stare. She lowered herself to level with the girl.

Brown and green, both eyes spoke some technicolor curse.

“Just you wait...just you wait ‘til you’re a mother...”

a cabeça de um lado para outro. Alyzia e o resto das crianças riam e riam e faziam caretas de repugnância, olhando alternadamente para Rodolfo e para Humberto – a caricatura confortável e a vida real.

Fernanda pegou Humberto pela mão e o colocou atrás dela, fora da vista das crianças. Falou para Rodolfo: “Sabe o quê? Eu conheço a tua mãe! Aquela vagabunda não aguentaria o tranco. Se você tivesse nascido igual ao Humberto, ela já tinha te jogado dentro de um poço!“.

Fernanda pegou a garrafa de molho de limão e espirrou diretamente nos olhos de Rodolfo. Ele chorou e correu. Ela ameaçou fazer o mesmo com as outras crianças, elas gritaram e correram.

Mas Alyzia permaneceu ali, boquiaberta, os olhos fixos em Humberto. Ela cutucou a cabeça dele por trás das coxas de sua mãe. Humberto olhou nos olhos de Alyzia, enquanto ela tentava assimilar a cabeça inteira. A cabeça dele! Sim, uma cabeça humana. Como todas as outras que ela tinha visto na vida, mas remota e transformada. Um ser como Humberto parecia improvável e ridículo e, no entanto, ali estava ele, em frente a ela; uma espécie de segredo bem guardado, agora descoberto. Ela sentiu como se algo subisse pelo seu peito, algo como a bile, uma mistura antiga – curiosidade mórbida, pena e nojo. O mundo em torno dela se desfez e se refez, se desfez e se refez, como se ela estivesse fora do tempo.

Fernanda estalou os dedos, rispidamente, trazendo Alyzia de volta. Ela se abaixou na altura da menina.

Castanho e verde, seus olhos pareceram praguejar em tecnicolor. “Só espere... só espere até você ser mãe...“

Six months a mother and six hours in, Alysia climbed bar-grated stairs to get back to work, her work, always waiting, even after her water break. The Phosphorous Cannery Company was guarded by tall shrubs and backroads. The air inside sat thick and humid, a soup of bleach and tomato paste and sweat shorn off the brows of the hairnet and helmet women. Alysia was part of the rank and file, hands gloved, ears plugged, mouth closed, eyes goggled. The workforce was a coordinated dance of loops and sockets, churning to the beat of eight dollars an hour.

Climbing the stairs, Alysia couldn't help but think of Marco's hands and of Marco, of all his needs and tomorrow's trip to San Francisco. Now that Marco was a little older, the doctors would be able to give him a proper prognosis and Alysia her proper sentence.

All around her, she saw the world play out in punishments and past lives. Souls strip-mined from Tierra Mojada, now living up North. Not the dreamed up North, but the real life thing.

Underneath Alysia's boots, she saw Lucy and Cassandra, sisters working sanitation, a delicate pair of Sunday mass show-offs, known back home for cleaning up nicely. On a crane above her, she saw Guillermo, a rare man repairing broken valves, having wasted his youth on breaking women's hearts. Alysia, too, arrived in her place, #4 on the conveyor belt, with tomatoes and slow minutes, flowing her way always.

There, Alysia sorted—she sought and she culled all that fruit unfit for product. Her days played out like one of the Dr. Seuss picture books the Migrant Education

Mãe havia seis meses, e há seis horas na fábrica, Alysia subia as escadas de ferro de volta ao trabalho, o seu trabalho, à sua espera sempre – mesmo depois da bolsa estourada. A Phosphourus Conservas era resguardada por arbustos e estradas secundárias. O ar lá dentro era denso e úmido, uma sopa de água sanitária e molho de tomate e suor arrancado da testa das mulheres, de touca e capacete. Alysia era parte da tropa: mãos enluvadas, ouvidos tampados, olhos protegidos, boca fechada. A força de trabalho era uma dança coordenada de engrenagens indo e vindo no compasso de 8 dólares a hora.

Subindo as escadas, Alysia não conseguia não pensar nas mãos de Marco, e em Marco, em suas necessidades e na viagem para São Francisco no dia seguinte. Agora que ele já tinha crescido um pouco, poderia enfim receber um diagnóstico, e ela, uma sentença.

À sua volta, o mundo se manifestava em punições e vidas passadas. Almas extraídas de Tierra Mojada, agora vivendo no norte. Mas não o norte com que sonharam, o norte vida real.

Pelo vão dos degraus, ela viu Lucy e Cassandra, irmãs que trabalhavam na limpeza, e que em Tierra Mojada impressionavam as pessoas quando se arrumavam aos domingos. No alto de um guindaste, ela viu um dos únicos homens, Guillermo, que quando jovem quebrava o coração de mulheres e, ali, consertava válvulas estragadas. Alysia também chegou ao seu lugar, posição número quatro na esteira transportadora, diante dos tomates e do tempo, que chegavam sempre, lentamente, em sua direção.

E de lá, Alysia selecionava – identificava e excluía as frutas impróprias para a produção. Seus dias passavam como em um dos livros do Dr. Seuss que o Programa de

Program started delivering to her doorstep for Marco last month. Down the way came small tomatoes and wrinkled tomatoes, some half rat-bitten tomatoes, and bruised and brown and putrid tomatoes. And amid the tomatoes came other sundries taken up with the harvest—clods, rocks, branches, even the occasional critter carcass.

Alysia had another two hours left on the night shift. Her mind ran parallel to her body, an automated effort, two green rubber gloves, two brown goggled eyes. Thank goodness for that Migrant Program! They'd keep bringing books and books would help. If the doctors fixed Marco's hands, he'd be able to turn some pages and his whole life around. Marco, with his hands, had better read books, had better comport himself and do well in school. After all, everyone loved that Univision special. That rags to riches, freak to fab, grey to glory kind of story. That would ward off all the talk! All the talk about Alysia and Marco that made it around the break room these days. And those smiles and hugs, so ill imposed, during her precious half hour of Hot Pocket bliss. Those smiles and hugs that burned with their sweetness. But she'd show them. Marco'd be one of those fabled good ones. Nothing to pity. Everything to envy. He wouldn't be like Alysia or them, living some distant second life among gringos and tractors. Marco'd live just one life. His very own! Like that shrimpy Juan Pablo, who never made the cut to hang with her childhood crew. Little Juan Pablo, head in books, who left town at 17 and went south instead. And Grown Juan Pablo, that brick in the gentry, who'd write home to his mother, that proud lady Lourdes, about his German car and French Jazz and English lit in Mexico City. The town never heard the end of it. And that could still be Marco. That'd be Marco, too, one day. No longer a curse. And writing home! A

Educação do Imigrante tinha passado a entregar em sua casa, para Marco, no mês anterior. Pela esteira, chegavam tomates pequenos e tomates enrugados, alguns tomates com mordidas de ratos, tomates marrons e tomates machucados, e alguns até putrefatos. E, dentre os tomates, apareciam os excedentes da colheita – torrões, pedras, galhos e até as carcaças de eventuais criaturas.

Alysia ainda tinha mais duas horas no turno da noite. Sua cabeça funcionava paralela ao corpo, que operava em um esforço automatizado – duas luvas verdes de borracha, dois olhos castanhos protegidos. Ainda bem que existia o programa do Imigrante! Eles enviam livros, e livros seriam úteis. Se os médicos resolvessem as mãos de Marco, ele conseguiria virar as páginas e também sua vida. Marco, com suas mãos, era melhor que lesse muito, se comportasse bem e fosse bom aluno. Quem não amava aqueles especiais da Univision? Da dureza à riqueza, do lixo ao luxo, histórias assim. Pelo menos o falatório sobre ela e Marco, que circulava durante os intervalos, diminuiria. E ela também estaria livre daqueles sorrisos e daqueles abraços, dados por obrigação, durante a sua preciosa meia hora no paraíso comendo um Hot Pocket. Aqueles sorrisos e abraços, corrosivos de tão doces. Mas eles iriam ver! Marco seria um daqueles com final feliz. Não seria digno de pena. Seria digno de inveja. Diferente de Alysia e dos colegas de fábrica, que viviam uma segunda vida apartada, entre gringos e máquinas. Marco só teria uma vida. Sua própria vida! Como Juan Pablo, nanico, que os amigos de infância dela sempre deixavam de fora. Pequeno Juan Pablo, cabeça nos livros, deixou a cidade aos 17 e foi para o sul. E Juan Pablo adulto, um tijolo de adobe no muro da burguesia, escrevendo para sua mãe, a orgulhosa dona Lourdes, sobre o seu carro alemão e o jazz francês e a literatura inglesa na Cidade do México. A cidade não se cansava de ouvir sobre ele. Com Marco, ainda poderia ser assim. Seria assim com Marco, um dia. Não mais uma maldição. E escrevendo pra casa! Um pequeno Contreras,

Contreras child after all—her very own true smiler, a certifiable, real good kisser-on-the-cheek. With two whole hands and ten free fingers.

Alysia had another hour left on the conveyor belt. She saw a long vine, disconnected from fruit, making its way down the belt. It'd be just beyond reach. She stretched her arm and grasped for the vine, her stomach pressed against the metal frame of the conveyor belt. She felt the warmth of the frame on her belly, through sweat-drenched cotton and the plastic of her apron. She managed to grab the vine, hard and desiccated under her hand. She dropped it down into the waste trough, a long skinny maw that sat and waited, perpetually yawning between her boots and the conveyor belt. The maw was a disappearer, shepherding waste to some unseen elsewhere. In dropping the vine, she caught sight of her white apron stained red, inevitably red, adorning her belly, now six months flat.

These days, Alysia still caught herself confused with the flatness of her stomach. Since giving birth, she'd wake, at times, startled by her walls and still heavy with Marco. Was it just her or all mothers, waking distant and sluggish? She'd been happy when she conceived, after years of false starts, those miscarriages and leavers. She'd thought herself a lost cause when she met some *güero* from Morelia, on that Billiards night out with Consuelo and Imelda. With no single thought to condoms or conditions, she'd enjoyed herself in his room. Together, they brought forth the dawn through slatted blinds, a pale light that came in and mixed with the glow of his red LED lights. And now that morning was a part of every other morning—the flatness of her belly and Marco in her room, once so inconceivable.

afinal – um pequeno soridente feito por ela, um bom beijador de bochechas certificado. Com duas mãos inteiras e dez dedos livres.

Alysia ainda tinha uma hora a mais de trabalho quando viu uma vinha comprida, separada do fruto, vindo na esteira. Parecia fora do alcance. Ela esticou o braço e tentou segurar a vinha, pressionando o estômago contra a borda de metal da esteira. Sentiu o calor da borda na barriga, mesmo através do algodão encharcado de suor e do plástico do avental. Ela conseguiu segurar a vinha dura e seca em suas mãos, e então a jogou na lixeira – uma mandíbula comprida e delgada que ficava ali parada, esperando, bocejando perpetuamente entre suas botas e a esteira. Mandíbula adentro o lixo desaparecia, conduzido a algum lugar misterioso. Ao jogar fora a vinha, Alysia viu sua roupa branca com uma mancha vermelha, inevitavelmente vermelha, colorindo sua barriga, há seis meses esvaziada.

Nessa época, Alysia ainda se pegava confusa com a barriga voltando ao normal. Desde que tinha dado à luz, ela acordava, às vezes, assustada com as paredes, como se seu corpo ainda carregasse Marco. Era só ela ou todas as mães acordavam assim, lentas, distantes? Ela estava feliz por ter concebido, depois de tantos alarmes falsos, abortos espontâneos e abandonos. Se considerava um caso perdido quando conheceu um güero de Morélia, em uma noite de sinuca com Imelda e Consuelo. Sem pensar em camisinhas ou desafios, ela aproveitou a noite no quarto dele. Juntos, fizeram amanhecer através da persiana, uma luz pálida se misturando ao brilho das lâmpadas de LED vermelhas. E agora, aquela manhã persistiria em todas as outras – a sua barriga como antes e Marco em seu quarto, antes tão inconcebível.

Translator's Foreword

Through her short fiction, Nataly Callai positions herself as a gifted medium of the absurd. *The Heat* explores a day in the life of M., a supermarket worker, while *The Source* offers a pastoral portrait of a nameless woman, more archetype than character, a comically idealized mother and muse. Characterized by a sarcastic and voyeuristic collectivity, Callai's narration results in productive opacities. The more the narration scrutinizes Callai's protagonists, the more they are revealed to be inscrutable. Yes, Callai's narratives feature women living within multiple strictures—capitalist exploitation, sexual objectification, maternal duty—but her fiction resists pat didactics. M. and the nameless woman are neither victims nor victors. Instead, they embody mystifying simultaneities: bound, yet boundless, disposable, yet deified, existing both within and without a world recognizable to the reader.

Callai's fiction, then, seems committed to offering only ephemeral meaning, confronting the reader with an affective experience that, by turns, charms as much as it confounds. The narration curates imagistic overload, supplying one surreal and grotesque symbol after another. As a result, to re-create the effect of Callai's curation in English was to honor the primacy of these images (and the affective responses they were likeliest to elicit), rather than to attempt a stricter syntactic reproduction. This strategy of affective fidelity resulted in a translation that takes maximalist liberties not only with syntax, but also with diction and punctuation. These amplifications intend to render the peculiarity constitutive of the original as a literary eccentricity, where a stricter translation would have risked fashioning that same eccentricity as a mere artifact of translation, defamiliarizing for the ‘wrong’ reasons, rather than

for the ‘right’ ones. Once these amplifications were pursued to satisfaction, a secondary challenge came in finding opportunities to trim less justifiable and functional excess. It is the translator’s hope that these strategies appropriately introduce English readers to the magnetism of Nataly Callai’s riddles. After her tales, you’ll never see armadillos or mayonnaise, watermelon or swans in the same way again.

NATALY CALLAI

O ARDOR

Para dentro de sua casa M. devolve a si própria ao fim de mais um dia. Está firme sobre os dois pés, no caminho pôde desenrolar sua coluna de tatu-bola porque sabe que na segurança de sua kitnet não precisará passar o tempo todo de um lado para o outro, impulsionada pelos toques de jogadores experientes. Brincalhões! Terão que encontrar o que os distraia e a noite é longa.

Da aspereza do asfalto para os tremores de seu colchão d'água M. não faz escala. Precisa dormir e o fará, passando reto pela geladeira, sem chupar um pedaço de melancia. M. deveria limpar suas costas esfoladas com um pano úmido, mas agora já se deitou e precisa dormir e sonhar, amanhã estará recomposta, rolando pelos corredores sob as luzes brancas do supermercado, dando tudo de si para suprir imediatamente todas as faltas, sempre que houver um buraco, haverá M. disposta a tapá-lo com um pote de maionese. O trabalho é tão bem feito, como se o buraco não houvesse existido. O homem está empurrando o carrinho, e avista a maionese, e chama sua esposa, não é esta a maionese que você queria? É esta! Esta é a maionese! E o casal resplandece diante do cartaz amarelo com o preço em promoção como fazendeiros pobres comemorariam o nascimento de um bezerro, M. está próxima e deve, sim, se preocupar com a mácula na prateleira, mas antes pode se alegrar por ser ao mesmo tempo testemunha e vaca sagrada.

**translated from the portuguese by
DEYA LUNA**

THE ARDOR

On her way home, M. comes back to her body after yet another day. Returning, she unfurls her armadillo spine and walks firm on both feet, knowing that in the security of her kitchenette, she can be more than a ball, passed around and lobbed for practice, the plaything of those pro center-forwards. Chumps and fools! Well, the night is young and they'll just have to find some other toy.

M. bolts straight to her waterbed, escaping enemy asphalt, so rough and asperous. She needs to sleep, so that's exactly what she'll do. She walks straight past the fridge, without so much as a nibble of watermelon. M. should wash up, should grab a wet cloth and scrub that sore back, but too late—she's already in bed. She needs to doze and dream, so that tomorrow she'll be good as new. Back to the white lights of the supermarket, ambling through the aisles and giving all of herself, instantly providing for every need. Don't worry, whenever there's a hole, M. will be there, ready and willing to fill it with a jar of mayonnaise! And after her expert work, there'll be no trace of that hole, like it never existed: a man pushes his shopping cart, spots the mayonnaise and calls to his wife—hey, isn't this the mayonnaise you wanted? That is it! That is the mayonnaise I wanted! And facing a yellow poster announcing a sale, the couple embraces, beaming and glowing, like humble farmers celebrating the birth of a calf. M. eavesdrops just out of sight and should, yes, concern herself with the stain on that shelf, but before that, she can cheer up just a bit—she's fulfilled her duties: humble spectator, sacred cow, all at once.

Há noites em que, apesar de sua completa prontidão e disciplina, o sono não aparece para buscá-la e esta é uma delas, por quanto tempo este sofá ainda terá que esperar na calçada até que os homens da mudança apareçam e o carreguem para dentro do caminhão, o empurrando cada vez mais para os fundos, até que fechem as portas e ele esteja enfim entregue à mais profunda escuridão? Quando a equipe é minimamente eficiente M. adormece e sonha, mas esta é uma das noites em que seguirão viagem e só lembrarão muitos quilômetros depois, na primeira parada, ao arriarem as calças, ou abrirem uma lata de coca-cola, que o sofá foi deixado pra trás.

Se M. não pode dormir, pode então olhar pela janela e isso é o que fará. Ali está, em pé, completamente em pé, emoldurada pelo retângulo da janela, não é vista por ninguém, não há pessoas na rua, nem morcegos se pendurando no varal de roupas. Se a paisagem continuar cristalizada, pode ser que, quem diria, M. comece a ter ideias, mas a elas é sempre preferível um, dois, ou três pedaços de melancia, até que uma congestão passe a ardê-la, como um incêndio toma conta de um capinzal quando o mato ameaça, perigosamente, crescer demais. Não se pode dizer que uma pessoa não tem escolhas, M. faz o tempo todo muitas escolhas, chegou à cozinha, por vontade própria. E ali irá se lambuzar, esta é a sua vida, que se oferece de bandeja.

Cada fatia de melancia é um sorriso hediondo de uma boca repleta de dentes, M. não está intimidada, já viu sorrisos piores, ela confia no poder de sua própria mandíbula e sabe que nesse caso é mais forte, M. vai fazer o que quiser com a melancia, tudo está agora sob seu controle. Comeu três fatias, em uma velocidade impressionante. Está em segurança, fez a mesma escolha

Despite M.'s diligence and perfect preparedness, on some nights, sleep never comes, never finds her and, well, tonight's one of those nights. How much longer is M. going to have to lie there, like a second-hand couch left on the sidewalk, before those moving men appear and carry it off to their truck, and push it deeper and deeper inside and close the doors and surrender it, at last, to the worn out darkness? Most nights, the movers are competent, they collect the couch and M. dozes and dreams. But tonight, it's those bumbler! They'll just drive right by, remembering the abandoned couch only many kilometers later, only after they're already home, pants off, popping open a can of Coke.

If M. can't sleep, she can at least look out the window, so that's exactly what she'll do. There she goes, standing now, really standing, framed by the window, a perfect composition, but there's no one there to look at her, no men hanging in the street and no bats hanging from the clothesline. If the landscape remains still, it's possible that, who knows, M. might start to get ideas! But, watermelon might be preferable to those ideas, one, two, three slices of watermelon, until some reflux rises and burns her throat, as if it were a brushfire out to humble a shrub that's growing menacing and dangerous and much too tall. It can't be said that a person doesn't have choices—M. makes many choices, all the time—she came to the kitchen of her own volition! And here, she can help herself, this is her life after all, offering itself up on a silver platter.

On each watermelon rind, there's a row full of white teeth, a heinous smile. But M. has seen scarier grins, so she trusts her own jaw here, its superior strength and commanding chomp. Yes, M. has everything under control, she'll do whatever she wants with this watermelon. She eats three slices: quick—decisive—dazzling! And with her choices made, she's arrived at the

e chegou ao mesmo lugar, quem sabe agora possa dormir.

Antes que a melancia complete sua missão pelas veredas interiores de M. e seja enfim descartada, é hora de levantar. É hora de tomar um banho, amarrar os cabelos em um coque baixo, vestir o macacão marrom e pendurar no pescoço o crachá de tatu-bola. Está pronta, sua boca colorida por um batom rosa, relativamente agradável aos olhos de consumidores pouco exigentes. M. não tem para si um lugar privilegiado na gôndola, mas tem mobilidade, pode estar em qualquer canto, aumentando sua chance de ser escolhida.

Parados no estacionamento de carga e descarga estão, como sempre, os três bandeirantes. M. passará diante deles, atravessando dignamente a nuvem de imundície da fumaça de seus cigarros, ouvindo o que pronunciam em um código que não domina, mas que por hábito e por instinto pode saber: é sobre ela, a última pobre modelo a renascer do gelo seco.

Depois de rolar por três horas durante o turno da manhã, é chegada a hora da refeição. M. está ansiosa, à espera, não sabe como será servida: em pé, contra a parede de caixas de frutas, ou deitada no cubículo do subsolo, persianas fechadas, dando aos bandeirantes a segurança de que não serão perturbados enquanto comem, mais uma vez, o mesmo prato requentado. O bandeirante número 1 a pegou pela cintura, será ele, o primeiro desbravador, o mais faminto, já tem o guardanapo babador arranjado sobre a camiseta, não irá perder tempo. Desceram ao subsolo, o equipamento de que ele precisa está pronto para uso, calças no chão, macacão de

same place again, she's safe, and who knows, maybe now she can sleep.

Before the watermelon can complete its mission through M.'s insides and be expelled at last, it's time to get up. Time to take a shower, put that hair in a low bun, don that brown supermarket apron, and hang that ID around her neck, an armadillo once more. She's ready, but first: a finishing touch, a pink lip, so easy on the eyes of all of those consumers, her faithful shoppers so easily impressed. No, M. doesn't occupy a prime place on the shelf, but on the job, at least there's possibility, she can move from this corner to that corner, improving her odds, and most days, she's a popular selection.

Like always, the loading dock men are gathered by their trucks, three bandeirantes, a trio of raiders. M. walks right past them and holds her head high-and-mighty, traversing a cloud of cigarette smoke and swirling filth and cryptic sounds. No, she has no command of this language, yet sense arrives somehow, her body tunes in, a habit, an instinct: they're talking about her. Here she comes, M., that third-rate model, the last one to rise from the fog of the runway.

One, two, three hours of morning shift and now—lunchtime! M. waits, eager to see how she'll be served today: on her feet?—or, up against the wall of fruit boxes, rocking the inventory?—or, perhaps, lying in the basement office, blinds drawn and doors closed. There, in the office, the raiders can savor their food with no interruptions, their favorite dish enjoyed yet again, scooped cold on a plate, reborn and reheated. Today, it's Raider #1 that grabs M. by the waist, yes, it's him, the first explorer, the most famished of travelers, so eager to eat, he wastes zero time and fastens his bib. He and M. descend to the basement. His equipment is primed and ready to go, now his pants fall on the floor, and there goes

M. semiaberto, agora adentrará pela mata e percorrerá confiante um caminho que já conhece.

Não fosse a porta do cubículo subitamente escancarada. Os superiores estão desacreditados, isto está mesmo acontecendo? Está mesmo acontecendo? A mulher superior se avermelha em vergonha. M. e o bandeirante estão imediatamente demitidos. Recomponham-se e subam ao segundo andar.

O cubículo é pequeno demais para a frustração do bandeirante que não teve seu desejo saciado, pode ser que as quatro paredes de compensado venham a se romper, ele está cada vez maior e mais rígido, movimenta-se de um lado para o outro em descontrole, uma ameaça à integridade do edifício. Mas que exagero! Dentro do elevador, no percurso até o segundo andar, murcha completamente, e só diante dos superiores voltará a inflar com pedidos de desculpa, moderadamente, como uma comprida bexiga de festa que se dobra ao gosto da aniversariante. Dele pode se fazer um cão.

E você, não fala nada? Os três, então, direcionam seus olhares para M. que finalmente tem sua boca aberta, por onde dá passagem ao fluxo impetuoso de um suco doce e azedo de melancia, não uma só vez, mas três vezes, o suficiente para que cada um receba sua medida.

Esvaziada, M. vai embora sem falar uma palavra, sem assinar seu nome em documento algum. Pela última vez percorrerá um corredor do supermercado. Com a agilidade que desenvolveu, tão cedo quanto possível estará do lado de fora. São ainda duas horas. Durante a tarde a cidade acolhe os trabalhadores em seus corredores, balcões e linhas de produção e não oferece muitas possibilidades para as peças com defeito de sua

M.'s apron, coming half undone, and he knows this trail well, he's got this, no problem.

And suddenly!—the office door is yanked open, wide open. It's the two shift supervisors, incredulous, shaken, is this really happening? Is this *actually* happening? The female supervisor reddens in shame before stammering—fired, you're both fired, get yourselves together and meet me upstairs, the second floor, immediately.

The basement office is too small to hold the Raider's frustration and its walls too flimsy. Look: the plywood's already cracking under the blue weight of his balls as he thrashes about, stomping and stamping, clenching his fists and puffing his chest, he's lost all control, he'll demolish the building. Drama queen! But inside the elevator, he shrivels and wilts. Then, on the second floor, in front of the supervisors, he perks up just enough and tries to save face, so squishy, so pliant, like a little balloon animal to be folded and twisted at the birthday boy's will. Here you go, buddy—a nice little dog!

And you, you're awfully quiet, what do you have to say for yourself? The two supervisors and the Raider, they all stare right at M., who thinks and who swallows and then opens her mouth—and out pours the fire, the reflux, the watermelon, so sweet and so sour, such glorious juice! First one, and then two, and then three fine eruptions, enough to quench all their ardor and thirst.

Vacant and emptied, M. leaves without saying a word or signing her name away on any of those documents. She flits through the aisles one last time, and with her grace and agility, she soon meets the outside. Somehow, it's only 2pm. In the afternoon, the city is hospitable, it welcomes its workers, they fill its aisles and shelves and production lines. But it has no use for defective cogs: throwaway parts that grind it all to a halt, rusted and

engrenagem que teve que descartar.

M. está de volta em casa. Deita sobre o colchão e em pensamento pode subir de novo até o segundo andar do supermercado e rever os rostos e as roupas dos três, sujos do jorro de melancia que sua natureza expeliu. Adormece trinta minutos depois, com a mão dentro da calcinha.

busted, just scraps for the dump.

M.'s back home, lying on her bed, and her thoughts return to the supermarket. They go up, all the way up to the second floor until she sees it again: those faces, those uniforms, wet and filthy and sour with watermelon, a bastard baptism, a gift of her essence. She drifts off some thirty minutes later, dreaming and dozing, hand still in her panties.

A FONTE

Suavemente como num sopro de Deus, ela se aproxima da beira do rio. Irá lavar as roupas que remendou e que não ficaram como novas. São os mesmos trapos de antes, e ela a mesma mulher. Em nada disso há motivo para lamento: não há sentido na nostalgia, tampouco há na novidade. O que existe é o prazer de perfurar e amarrar e consertar. Como tem mãos boas para costura! Como é boa em tudo que faz!

Um coração elevado como este deve ser protegido, por isso o embalamos com uma grande folha de papel manteiga, são três ou quatro camadas de papel amarradas com barbante, por mais forte que este coração venha a bater estamos certos de que não violará o invólucro. Fizemos um bom trabalho, mas não podemos descansar, esta mulher é de nossa completa responsabilidade.

A correnteza do rio está tomando para si as impurezas das quais agora a mulher e sua família estão livres, calças, camisas, vestidos e roupas de baixo estão esticados sobre a grama, ela então olha para o céu e chega a pensar: prefiro esta família de tecido sem gente, à minha verdadeira família, com um homem e duas crianças feitos de carne e osso. Um homem bom, e duas crianças boas, três pratos rasos nos quais sirvo, todos os dias, minha bondade fervilhante. A mulher não teria ideias como essas, estes somos nós com nossos pensamentos torpes. Ela então olha para o céu e agradece a família que tem,

THE SOURCE

Gentle, billowing, like God's very breath, she brings herself to the bank of the river. She's there to wash clothes, her family's clothes, patched up by her hand and no longer brand new. They're the same old rags, and she, the same worn woman. And that's no reason to cry: there's no meaning in youth, still less in nostalgia, a senseless worship, a false idol. But what does exist is pleasure: her privilege, her duty to pierce and tie and mend. Such good hands for sewing! So amazing, everything she does!

A heart as virtuous as hers should be protected, yes, that's why we've wrapped it up in large sheets of butcher paper, at least three or four layers tied up with twine, and despite her heart's power, its thrumming and throbbing, our packaging has stayed intact, there's not a single rip in sight. And though we've done some good work, let's not get complacent, she's counting on us, her shepherds and stewards, so noble and wise.

The river's current absorbs all impurities, absolves the woman and her family, leaving them clean and setting them free. With all of their clothes stretched out on the grass: pants—shirts—dresses—underwear—the woman looks to the sky and reaches epiphany. I prefer this family of fabric, this cloth void of people, to my own flesh and blood family, that man and those kids and their bare bones and marrow. Her marvelous man and her marvelous children: three marvelous plates she has to serve every day, three round, flat plates, always eager for seconds. What's for dinner today? Whatever's left of her kindness! ...But our good woman wouldn't have ideas like that! These are just our own impure thoughts. She looks to the sky again, no doubt giving thanks, thanking God for her family, she renews her commitment: a vow to keep

renovando a promessa de amá-los e remendá-los enquanto durarem suas vidas.

A partir de uma única cena, boa mulher lava roupas com os pés na água, pintamos nossas telas e compomos nossas canções, ela mesma pode cantar e basta que nos concentremos para que possamos ouvi-la. Se conseguirmos, estaremos em paz. A ela devemos o exercício da nossa sensibilidade, a ela devemos a humanização. A mulher já lavou todas as peças, passa seus dedos úmidos pela grama, tão delicada nos modos, jamais levaria à boca um punhado de terra.

Quanto a nós, é melhor que apaguemos nossos cigarros e nos arranjemos em nossas poltronas, se não estivermos errados é chegada a hora em que a mulher se despirá e lavará a si própria. É nosso dever controlarmos nossos humores diante do corpo molhado desta boa mulher, que a natureza zelosamente nos oferece sob a luz roxa do crepúsculo. Ciscamos em todas as direções, mas voltamos sempre, famintos e medrosos, para o calor das asas de nossa mãe.

Deitou-se sobre uma pedra e fechou os olhos. Está pensando na família que formou, em suas duas crianças de bochechas fartas. Pacientemente bate às portas dos três ou quatro cômodos de sua consciência, e procura dentro deles, abaixando-se e esticando-se conforme

serving and loving and patching them up, so long as they all shall live.

From this humble scene, our good woman washes her clothes with her feet in the water, as we paint on bare canvasses and compose our grand songs, haven't you heard, she can sing, too! Yes, it's true, and sshh, if we're still, we might even be able to hear her, and her fine serenade will finally bring us peace. Yes, we owe this all to her, our moral faculties, our human niceties. The woman finishes washing her garments and runs her puckered fingers through the blades of grass, so delicate, so fine, such dignified manners, she'd never sully her lips with a handful of earth.

As for us? We'd better sit up in our armchairs and stub out our cigarettes, if we're not mistaken, the time has come for her to strip and get clean. At this moment, it's our duty to control ourselves and tame baser urges, so, let's all remain calm. There's her wet body, there's our very good woman that nature has offered us, here, so dutifully, under dusk's purple light. We go mad, we go wild, we peck in every direction, but we always return, coming back every time, so famished and fearful—to the warmth of her wings—to the safety of mother.

She stretches out on a rock and closes her eyes. She must be thinking of her family! The one that she birthed: those two good children and their fine, cherub cheeks. She delves into her consciousness and finds a hallway. She knocks on the doors of three or four rooms and waits patiently, before going inside and searching each carefully, kneeling and craning, scouring each nook and cranny, looking for a hell or highwater she wouldn't withstand for her fine, lovely children. And lo and behold, to no one's surprise, she finds absolutely none. It turns out she'd endure them all, each and every hell!—and every single highwater! Her love and its purity, it

necessário, por alguma razão pela qual não suportaria qualquer coisa por seus filhos. Não encontra. Suportaria tudo! Este amor nos honra, nos engrandece, mesmo que não seja a nós dirigido. Também deveriam celebrá-lo as duas crianças, que nunca terão suas bocas costuradas com linha e agulha ao berrarem demais.

Fechamos também nós os nossos olhos para adentrarmos nos pensamentos da boa mulher e agora a perdemos de vista. Como pudemos nos distrair a este ponto? Se ela deslizou pelas pedras levada pela correnteza e a tivermos perdido para sempre não nos perdoaremos. O que temos será suficiente para fazer florescer nosso espírito pantanoso?

Sequemos nossas mãos e testas suadas, o desespero foi em vão. Ali está ela, nua e limpa, montada em um cisne branco. Seus braços envolvem o pescoço do cisne e suas mãos tocam o bico do cisne, estamos extasiados e agradecidos, e contemplaremos este entrelace perfeito até que o percamos totalmente para a escuridão.

Agora sim nossa natureza escassa já estocou o suficiente, estaremos mantidos até a próxima vez. Nos afastaremos desta imagem e voltaremos às nossas vidas com nossos sacos bem forrados.

Mas não imediatamente! Por detrás da planície nasce uma lua cheia, parece que ficaremos um pouco mais. Nunca vimos lua tão grande e tão iluminada, cada vez maior, cada vez mais branca! A mulher, a ave, as águas cintilantes. É mais do que esperamos, talvez mais do que podemos suportar. Estamos um pouco tontos, nossos

makes our hearts swell, and no, it isn't ours, but we feed off the excess and make do with the scraps. Those two fine children should relish her love and give thanks to their mother that they're spared a sewn fate: no thread and no needle will seal their mouths shut, no matter their volume, their insistence, their shrieks.

Just for a moment, we close our own eyes to commune with the woman, but wait—now, we've lost sight of her. How could we?—how could we let this happen? She might've slid over the rocks or been taken by the current. Gee, if we've lost her for good, we'll never forgive ourselves. And did we even get enough? Enough of her light to banish the muck that's been lining our spirits?... to bring spring to our souls, a glorious bloom?

We dry our hands and wipe the sweat off our brows—it looks like our despair was a bit premature. There she is, majestic and glowing: naked!—clean!—mounted on a white swan! Her arms encircle the swan's neck and her hands pat its beak, and we're just here, so grateful, in ecstasy, our souls bearing witness to this perfect embrace, this glorious image imprinted forever, with us for good, until our return to the darkness.

With our minds trained to scarcity, we're still here, but wait, we've succeeded, our stash is replenished and we'll get through this dry spell. Let's retreat from this spectacle and return to our lives, let's head out with our sacks, swollen and blue and heavy with victuals.

But not yet! Behold: the full moon rises beyond the plateau. It looks like we'll stay here just a little bit longer. And God, what a moon!... glowing so bright, its blinding white light, growing larger and larger! The woman, the bird, and their luminous waters. This is more than we anticipated, maybe more than we can stand, yet we're still here, dumbstruck, in awe, with our sacks

sacos transbordantes.

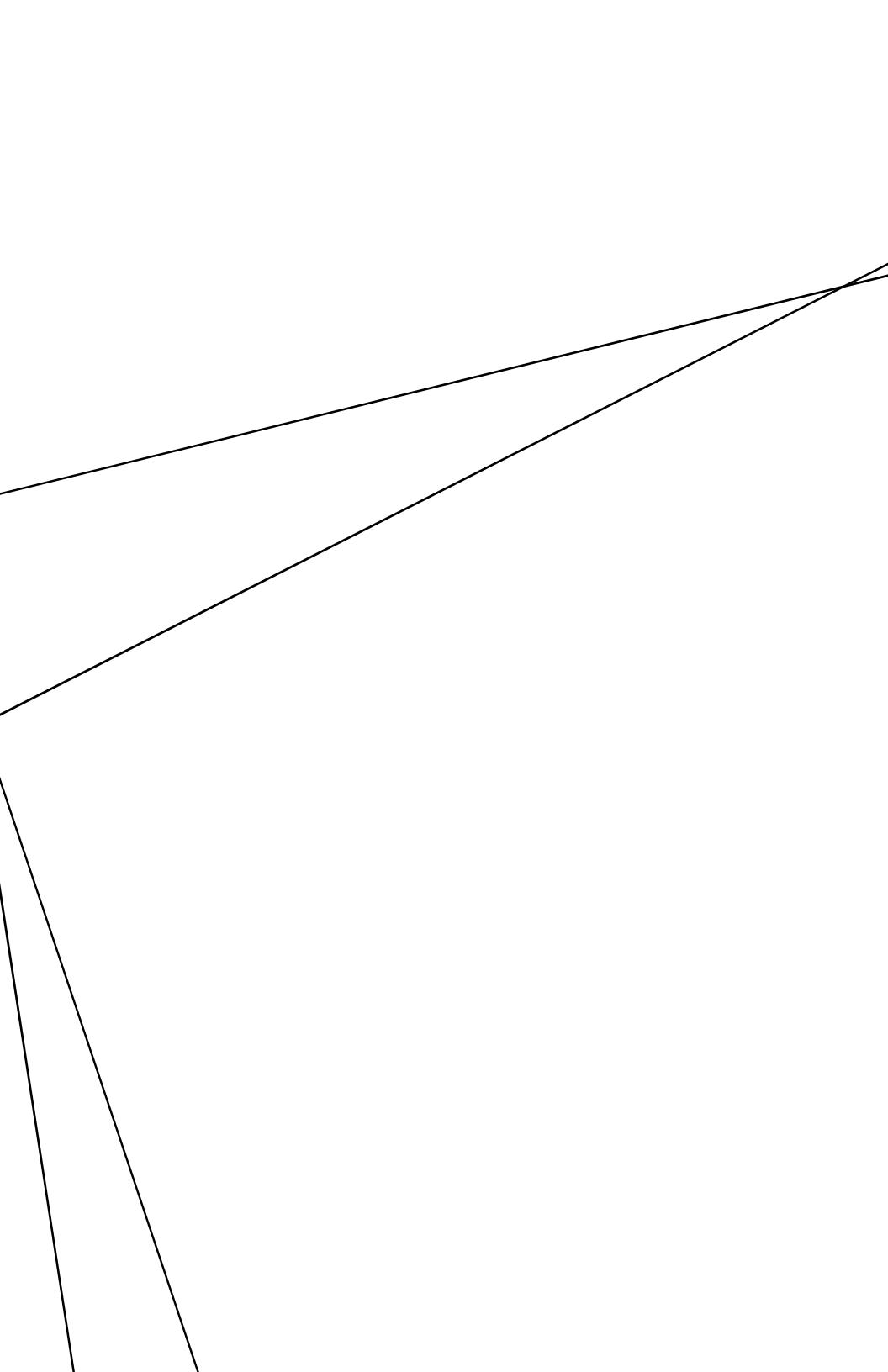
Na mais extraordinária manifestação do seu ânimo, a boa mulher reluzindo aperta o pescoço do cisne, nos olha e vem em nossa direção.

A baixo! Curvamos nossas colunas. O calor da terra, a acolhida das minhocas.

overflowing.

And the good woman, gleaming, performs an extraordinary act, a vision of courage: she braces herself, holds tight to the swan, and, looking straight at us, starts in our direction.

Down! We fall, prostrate, heat rising from the earth, and the earthworms welcoming.



word for word / palabra por palabra
Columbia University School of the Arts
Universidad Diego Portales

Translator's Foreword

La poesía de Tiffany Troy florece en las calles del Chinatown de Queens, en medio de conversaciones, lazos y vivencias. En cada poema se proyectan colores en combinaciones únicas que desembocan con sensibilidad en lo cotidiano, en lo biográfico. En cada verso se expresan problemáticas del día a día, pensamientos de amor, de dolor, exaltación, sin dejar de lado el humor en las pequeñas cápsulas que la mayor parte del poemario contiene. Tiffany pinta con la palabra el mundo en que habita, a veces en tonos fuertes como Yayoi Kusama, a veces en tonos apastelados como si la ciudad de repente oscilara en dirección a un bosque del imaginario Ghibli. Con una alusión directa a Sylvia Plath en Lady Lazarus y un poema titulado Hermione Granger, Tiffany nos muestra un trozo de vida, de amores, de enfermedades, de arte: Se refiere, sin miedo, a la experiencia humana, carnal, animal sin dejar de lado todo lo demás.

Desde un lugar remoto, gracias a Tiffany y su poemario, pude acercarme a temas contingentes de esa realidad que habita, a bibliotecas, sociedades y artistas plásticos por medio del verso. La visión crítica de esta realidad se vincula con la estética propia de la poeta, potenciándose. La sensibilidad en el detalle, en la textura de las cosas que se describen, hacen que esta serie de poemas se proyecten en quien esté leyendo, como una experiencia. A la hora de traducir, fue fascinante ir encontrando mensajes ocultos y lecturas diversas que se intentaron mantener convergiendo simultáneamente. En un idioma intermedio logramos aclarar dudas, conocernos, aprender de nuestra cultura y de nuestras distintas percepciones de la poesía.

TIFFANY TROY

POEMS

America in the Year of the Pig

*On the last day of the Seventh Month
of the Year of the Pig I clicked open the Adobe PDF,
typed my name,
drew my signature
on the loyalty oath denouncing
the country of my birth.*

I have not missed the irony
or forgotten the *Rabbit*
in the Moon shining
upon Chinatown with its men-spits
and street defecation—
my hands taking peach blossom
branches perfectly aligning
them one by one
to those in line
around *la Trampa*
Table #5 as one after one
signed their rights
away and our cries
unheeded only branding
us as *incompetent*

**traducido del inglés por
CATALINA VERGARA**

POEMAS

América en el Año del Cerdo

*En el último día del Séptimo Mes
del Año del Cerdo, clickié el Adobe PDF,
tipié mi nombre,
dibujé mi firma
en el juramento de lealtad denunciando
a mi país de nacimiento.*

No he perdido la ironía,
ni olvidado al *Conejo*
en la Luna brillando
sobre Chinatown con sus escupos
y la defecación de la calle—
en mis manos la estampilla con las flores de durazno
ramas perfectamente alineadas
una por una
en una fila
alrededor de La Trampa
mesa 5 una tras otra
firmaron sus derechos
y nuestros llantos
desatendidos sólo etiquetando—
nos como *incompetentes*

*or infertile like the two cows
with no milk
left as I pressed that frail
leaf and lit it on fire
to warm myself,
holding golden paws
in that Sakura Matsuri dance
before I learned
that I was *la mestiza*
no different from the *little animals*
who should be taught
a lesson before being sent
back to the crime-infested country
from which they came
or the *alien who got off*
scot free for fifteen
years before he was taken
away by ICE agents already waiting
there. Please come with me, they said,
what right does he have to be here?
they asked. But I remember
the warning: *First they came*
for . . . and then . . . I saw
I was the black pixelated
board no longer lit
as hives circle my body
and I carry his heavy
corpse as the pests sound
in the silence of the tree
songs as I dragged*

o *infértil*es como esas dos vacas
sin leche
me fui apretando esa frágil
hoja y le prendí fuego
para calentarme,
sostuve las patas del perro
en esa danza de Sakura Matsuri
antes de que aprendiera
que yo era *la mestiza*
no distinta de los *animales chicos*
que debieron haber aprendido
una lección antes de ser enviados
de vuelta al país criminal-infestado
de donde vinieron
o el *alien que salió libre*
por quince
años antes de que fuera llevado
lejos por agentes de Inmigraciones que lo esperaban
ahí. Por favor ven conmigo, dijeron,
qué derecho tiene de estar aquí?
preguntaron. Pero recuerdo
la advertencia: *Primero vinieron*
para... y después... vi
Yo era el tablero negro pixelado
sin luz
mientras la urticaria rodeaba mi cuerpo
y llevaba su pesado
cadáver al sonido de la peste
en el silencio del árbol:
canciones mientras arrastré

his body away long before
I looked up
and saw that rabbit
in the moon
covered in silver
raindrops.

su cuerpo lejos.
Miré hacia arriba
y vi a ese conejo
en la luna
cubierto en plateadas
gotas de lluvia

Hermione Granger

Say years ago,
You were Hermione
Granger beaming
with delight at the animation
of caged men
being led outside
of the cave
by the philosopher-king
but you were locked
outside, as the class began
without you,
and you wept.
But say you told yourself
not to give up, just yet,
as you peered into the split canvas
of paint, heart beating,
but when you raised your hand
to speak, high,
way up high,
you were not called on, and
eventually...
like a dog slapped
by his master
too many times
in doing what he was not
supposed to do
you were brought to the ground
where you belonged. Say

Hermione Granger

Digamos que años atrás,
Tú eras Hermione
Granger brillando
con el ánimo radiante
de hombres enjaulados
siendo soltada afuera
de la cueva
por el rey filósofo
pero encerrada
afuera, como si la clase empezara
sin ti,
y tú lloraras.

Pero digamos que te convenciste
en no rendirte, todavía,
como si miraras el lienzo dividido
de pintura, corazón latiendo,
pero cuando levantaste la mano
para hablar, alto
demasiado alto,
no fuiste llamada, y
eventualmente...
como un perro golpeado
por su maestro
demasiadas veces
por hacer lo que lo no se supone
que se debe hacer
fuiste enviada al piso
donde perteneces. Digamos

you no longer gleamed
and your hand waited
in your arms, hesitant, fearful
of the heart-slap
more than yearning
to cough out phlegm
trapped within you. Say
that is your school-life,
this sad noise,
that after a while you stopped
caring about the hand-me-downs
from your big brother
or you tell yourself so.
But say you went
through the Butler
stacks on the tenth floor,
as if you were on
an adventure, to search for
books to be earmarked
but unmarked when unburdened
at the end of the semester
in their colorful Borrow
Direct jacket, warmer
than your heart
is, as outside, the apple grows,
drops, and rots. Say
unlike Faust
who was so driven
that he was good
enough to trade souls

que no brillaste más
y tu mano esperó
en tus brazos, con duda, temerosa
del palpitar violento
más que el anhelo
de toser la flema
atrapada en ti. Digamos
que es tu vida escolar,
ese ruido triste,
que detuviste después de un rato
tomando en cuenta el baja-la-mano
de tu hermano mayor
o de ti diciéndotelo.

Pero digamos que diste
con los folios de la Biblioteca
en el décimo piso,
como si estuvieras en
una aventura, en búsqueda de
libros que deberían estar etiquetados
pero sin etiquetar
al final del semestre
en sus coloridas chaquetas
de Borrow Direct, más cálidas
que tu corazón
es, como por fuera, la manzana creciendo,
cayendo y pudriéndose. Digamos,
no como Fausto
quien fue tan motivado
que fue lo suficientemente bueno
para intercambiar almas con el diablo, tú

with the devil, you
were no longer driven
by books, or so you say,
out of your fear of not
belonging, though it's true
you no longer
even want to be
a philosopher-king. Say
still, even then, your smile
betrayed you as your world
expanded, as you flipped
open a little unknown
and you quietly stepped
out of the darkness
into the meadow
or swamp
that awaits you.

ya no estás motivada
por los libros, o eso dices,
en ese miedo a no
pertenercer, aunque es cierto
que tú ya ni siquiera
deseas ser
un rey filósofo. Digamos,
aun así, tu sonrisa
te traicionó mientras tu mundo
expandido se abría
un poco a lo desconocido
y saliste silenciosamente
a la oscuridad
a la pradera
o al pantano
que te espera.

A Familial Scene

In the flat hills of the village
Next to the tiny streams irrigating the wheat
The sweat hangs, clinging.
Like tears—cleaving skin—to that tight white blouse
Before dropping to the ground the hour before dark
As the hornpipe and the heart swell with yearning
Waiting for the hour to sit down as the blood-orange red
sun sits
Momentarily in the embrace of the hay
As the colors of the world drained away by the shoulder
aching
Until at last that salmon roe of a sun finally bursts
Letting out all that is glowing, glistening,
bulging, bleeding, burning
the riding hood in scarlet face facing against the sun, still
waiting for the prodigal son.

Her brother.

Returning but never
returning from his adventures with women.
Her scythe will one day take her father away, she
thought,
as the sun ravaged her baby white skin, toughed it,
burned it.
Like her pink soft lips.

A moment of translucent clarity—that boundary of
brown—
That all colors melt to
like the ground—dappled with her sweat.
Yet at the beginning of darkness, she sees, distinguishes
still:
The purple dome and the church she never saw, and had
no use for.
For that was the color that lured her brother away.
She had no use for that grandiosity.
She wondered if she still retains faith in Father,
When the sun sets and the moon comes by

Una Escena Familiar

En la llanura del pueblo
Al lado de los arroyos que riegan el trigo
La transpiración cuelga viscosa.
Como lágrimas –piel adhiriéndose– a esa blanca blusa
Antes de caer al suelo a la hora
antes de oscurecer
Como la gaita y el corazón lleno de anhelo
Esperando la hora de sentarse como
el sol rojo sangre naranja se sienta
Momentáneamente en el abrazo del heno
Como los colores del mundo desvanecidos por el dolor de
hombros
Hasta que al fin el huevo de salmón de sol estalle
Dejando salir todo lo que está brillando, resplandeciendo,
abultándose, sangrando, quemando
La caperucita con la cara roja
a todo el sol, está aún
esperando al hijo pródigo:
Su hermano
Volviendo pero nunca
volviendo de sus aventuras con mujeres.
Su guadaña un día alejará a su padre, pensó,
mientras el sol destrozaba su blanca cara de guagua,
tocándola, quemándola.
Tal como a sus suaves labios rosados.
Un momento de claridad traslúcida –ese
límite de marrón–
Que todos los colores se derriten
como el suelo moteado con su sudor.
Aún al comienzo del atardecer, ella ve, distingue todavía:
El domo púrpura y la iglesia que nunca
vio, y que no tenía ningún uso.
Fue el color que atraía a su hermano
Ella nunca le dio uso a esa grandiosidad.
Ella preguntó si aún tenía fe en El Padre,
Cuando el sol se pone y la luna pasa

And the silence of the night perturbs memory
Of Father who knew it all and talked
but was powerless
to stop the destruction of his son.

Y el silencio de la noche perturba la memoria
del Padre que lo supo todo y dijo todo
pero no tuvo el poder
para detener la destrucción de su hijo.

Lady Lazarus

The yellow muck flowing from the
tips of the lady's breasts oozing and bulging
smells of desire to unravel the silky cocoon
into flesh, till regret caked into scarlet:
a self-laceration darkened

Here, apples and milk are equally forbidden:
her skin is plagued, warped with sweat, wrapped in
leather
tears fall and she brushes them away:
she has no home:
she was not the Chosen Maiden.

This is her second coming:
her tattered body
unmoored, digs in to latch on
and ravish her face in her

Lázaro Mujer

El pus amarillo fluyendo
de la punta de los senos escurriendo del bulto
huele al deseo de desenredar el sedoso capullo
en la carne, hasta que el arrepentimiento se endurezca en
costra:
una oscurecida auto laceración

aquí, manzanas y leche son igualmente prohibidas:
su piel está hinchada de
sudor, cubierta en cuero
caen las lágrimas y se las seca:
ella no tiene hogar:
ella no era La Virgen Santa.

En su segunda llegada:
su cuerpo trizado
se aferra sin amparo
para rasgarse la cara.

Phi Beta Kappa

Papa could not understand why
I could not get over the Phi Beta Kappa,
which is a Greek society you need to buy

Your way into: a real pain
if you are stingy like me
and from your heart disdain

a gold-engraved certificate, which reminds
you too much of your brother
and his material-boy kind.

But I didn't care: I wanted to belong!
though I pronounced Phi "fee"
spelled Kappa wrong

I itched to join the club of nerds
who sang of the delight
of the cannibalized son's head, eaten, undeterred

by the enemy, unsuspecting
in Herodotus' *Histories* and Sophocles' *Medea*
how delightful it must have been, for those kings!

To be part of assholes united by the King's new coat
we associate with the confusion
in him or her when I talk about the *What*?

Phi Beta Kappa

Papá no podría entender por qué
No puedo superar el Phi Beta Kappa,
una sociedad griega que necesitas comprar

Es tu camino hacia: un real dolor
si eres tacaño como yo
y de corazón desdeñado

un certificado grabado en oro, que te recuerda
demasiado a tu hermano
y su condición de materialista.

Pero no me importaba: ¡Quería pertenecer!
aunque pronunciara Phi, “fi”
y escribiera mal “Kappa”.

Ansiaba unirme al club de nerds
que cantaran con deleite
sobre la cabeza del hijo canibalizado, comido, sin
inmutarse

por el enemigo, desprevenido
en *Historias* de Heródoto y *Medea* de Sófocles
¡qué encantador debió haber sido, para esos reyes!

Ser parte de imbéciles unidos por el abrigo nuevo del Rey
nos asociamos en la confusión
de él o ella cuando habla acerca de *¿Qué?*

But the real reason why my heart pound fast
was when I figured what this might mean for
that jerk who put me last

maybe then my love wouldn't be unrequited
and Daddy will not be looked down upon
as lawyer by his race indicted

so I rushed to pay with PayPal
before Columbia says oops,
administrative error, ----, poor gal!

Papa could not understand why
I told him I was in *the Phi Beta Kappa!*
For the tenth (!) time tonight

Or why I stayed up all night instead of sleeping,
to be listed with a bunch of my enemies
and he's right, technically speaking,

Because I really wanted to screw them,
those meanies, whose souls are dark as 90% dark
chocolate
covered with phlegm

Those jerks with 4.0 GPA's
who pretended to be my friend,
only to, at the end of the semester, part way.

Coward! I yell,

Pero la verdadera razón por la que mi corazón se aceleró
fue porque me pregunté qué significaba que
esos antipáticos que me dejaran al último

quizás mi amor sería correspondido
y papá no sería menospreciado
en su calidad de abogado acusado

así que me apuré en pagar con PayPal
antes de que Columbia dijera ups,
error administrativo, ----, lo sentimos.

Papá no podría entender por qué
le dije que estaba en *el Phi Beta Kappa!*
Por décima vez en la noche

O por qué me quedé despierta toda la noche en vez de
dormir
y lista para mis enemigos
y estaba en lo correcto, técnicamente hablando.

Porque realmente quería molestarlos,
esos malvados, esas almas eran oscuras como el chocolate
amargo al 90%
cubierto con flema

Esos arrogantes con nota 7
que pretendían ser mis amigos,
sólo para al final del semestre, irse.

¡Cobardes! Grité,

To those who take four classes per semester
Content in their shallow cell

But no one heard, for I yelled to no one but the night
and the moon, who smiled down
as my dream took flight.

In my dream I asked Papa:
Papa, are you listening?
I won the Phi Beta Kappa!

Papa just smiled:
his (infuriatingly) un-surprisable self,
hiding just how proud

he was, and how happy
that after 4 years of bowing my head down to everyone
----- was lifted from the abyss of suffering,

to be catapulted
(even for a second)
to fame.

a esos que toman cuatro clases por semestre
Contenidos en su profunda celda

Pero nadie escuchó, porque no le grité a nadie más que a
la noche
y la luna me sonrió mientras despegaba mi sueño.

En mi sueño le pregunté a Papá:
Papá, ¿estás escuchando?
¡Gané el Phi Beta Kappa!

Papá sólo sonrió:
su (exasperante) no sorprendido ser,
escondiendo cuan orgulloso
estaba, y cuan feliz

después de 4 años de inclinar la cabeza a todos
---- fue levantada por el abismo del sufrimiento,

para ser catapultada
(incluso por un segundo)
por la fama.

Flushing

Stalls are open; zippers are down:
Yellow splatters on toilet seat.
Feces cover mirror mural,
Avant-garde show of what we eat.

Butter, burger, fries are yellow;
Yellow's the crown of Burger King.
Dazzling cashier señoritas:
Yellow faces are nowhere seen.

Shi smokes and throws saliva darts,
WeChats between his bathroom trips.
I love him still, but aircon's off,
Burning, my sweat's his chips and tips.

They take your seat and cut the line,
They smell of their own don't-want-face.
“One dollar!” yells the greedy rogue;
“One more!” Narayama reiterates.

The hag cares not: tea clenched in teeth,
She knocks with kicks on bathroom door.
Her stalls open; her zippers down:
Kusama-grades the dampened floor.

At six per hour she stands to hand:
Stuyvesant! Green Card! Fun Tours! Free Food!
Bored men brush past, hungry to lay

Flushing

Puestos abiertos; cierres, abajo:
Gotas amarillas por los baños.
Heces cubriendo el espejo de la pared,
Show vanguardista que vamos a comer.

Mantequilla, Hamburguesa, papa fritas amarillas;
Amarilla es la corona de Burger King
Deslumbrantes señoritas cajeras;
Caras amarillas, no vi.

Shi fuma y lanza dardos de saliva,
WeChat entre sus viajes al baño-
Aún lo amo, pero el aire acondicionado está apagado.
Mis sudor quema sus fichas y propinas.

Tomaron tu asiento y cortaron la línea
Se huelen las cara, no quieren nada.
“¡Un dolar!” grita el astuto codicioso;
“¡Uno más!” reitera Narayama.

A la vieja no le importa el té entre sus dientes,
golpea con patadas la Puerta del baño.
Los puestos están abiertos; los cierres están abajo:
Kusama nivela el piso mojado.

A seis por hora, con sus manos extendidas:
¡Stuyvesant! ¡Tours Divertidos! ¡Comida Gratis!
Pasan aburridos hombres hambrientos con ganas

Lewd rose-hued women loitering nude.

While rosy dawn is fast asleep,
The purple local 7 trains
Are home to dreams: hammocks rocking
Men sporting Pollock's dripping stains.

The button-downs and frilly frocks
Instead will take the LIRR above;
When underground at eight o'clock
Tough love and luck's the Chinese shove.

de mujeres desnudas, acaloradas, dormidas.

Mientras el alba rosa se va durmiendo,
Los trenes púrpura del local 7
Son el hogar de los sueños: hamacas meciéndose
Hombres sudando manchas de Pollock en su ejercicio.

Botones abiertos, vestido con vuelos
En su lugar, tomaré el Ferrocarril de Long Island
Cuando el metro llega a las ocho en punto,
El amor duro y la suerte son el empujón Chino.

Three Trees

The winds swung open impenetrable,
wheat-colored walls, draining garish feathers.
Empty is locked silver,
as outside sprinkles melt upon grey
pigeon heads ecstatic in the sunset glow.
Empty is locked silver,
as outside snow-stained antlers burned
like candles on an iced birthday cake.

Oblivious to yellow, Memory,
wrapped in Byzantium slept soundly,
locked in the silver others left behind.

Dark red violet vines turn
green kites purple and maroon.
In this winter foliage, I see
Jimmy's head of curly vines, fierce
as we waded in and breathed in evergreens,
quipped bright red cynicism for laughter,
drowning out calls to run in our freedom.

Pink fireworks,
like Hisaishi's music,
are lighted antlers which wake Memory.

I once rejected Jimmy
so he came all black alone.
Two months later, he wanted me

Tres árboles

Los vientos se abren impenetrables,
paredes color trigo, drenando plumas estridentes.
El vacío es plata sellada,
como afuera salpicaduras sobre grises
cabezas de palomas estáticas en el brillo del atardecer.
El vacío es plata sellada,
como afuera las astas quemadas cubiertas de nieve
como velas en una torta helada de cumpleaños.

Ajena al amarillo, Memoria,
envuelta en Bizancio dormida profundamente,
sellada en la plata que otros dejaron.

Parras de uva roja vuelven
a los volantines verdes, en morados y escarlata.
En este follaje de invierno, veo
la cabeza de enredaderas rizadas de Jimmy, feroz
mientras nos metemos y respiramos árboles perennes,
colorado, bromea sarcástico y cínico
por encima de las ganas que teníamos de arrancar.

Fuegos artificiales rosados,
como la música de Hisaishi,
la Memoria despierta en las astas iluminadas.

Una vez rechacé a Jimmy
y vino entero de negro y solo.
Dos meses después, él me quiso

to keep his pink secret locked in silver
So I hid my dark red behind his pink,
smothering the small pebble in my hand.

Heart blossoms splendidly till wind blows out
hope and the mobile's light blue lullabies
tucks love to sleep in warm Byzantium.

contar su secreto rosado sellado en plata
Así que escondí mi rojo oscuro detrás de su rosa,
sofocando el guijarro en mi mano.

El corazón brotaba espléndido hasta que se esfumó
la esperanza y el móvil celeste con canciones de cuna
mandó a dormir al amor en la acogedora Bizancio.

Translator's Foreword

collaborating with catalina from universidad diego portales to translate catalina vergara's *diamonds and rust* from the spanish to the english this semester has been such a wonderful and eye-opening experience. the english translation took some liberties so the humor of the eponymous joan baez song and the cadences of the lyric in spanish are present in the english translation. catalina's lyric focuses upon the leitmotif of lost love in joan baez's song, drawn to and from blood, astrology, and outer space. in this space-scape, the masculine mars is juxtaposed with the feminine venus. queer love often at the core of the poems bursts forth as emanations, feverish in the bitter taste it leaves. the speaker, rooted in mars' blue introspection, peers into a whirl of gross coffee.

the speaker's offer to read astrology charts for free begs the question: "what is astrology?" just a way that humans use to divine what is on earth through what is celestial. if you look and listen closely enough, you will be able to make out the embroidering of bloody letters and hear what the esses are telling you. perhaps you'll also find echoes of joan baez's song alongside with the occult associated with the life in between the blood and sugar crystals, crystals born of what is left over of a lost love.

CATALINA VERGARA

DIAMONDS AND RUST

1.

marte es un planeta
inhabitável marte
es un desierto
de óxido

entre medio del metal
en el vacío
en el cielo de marte
hay un letrero escrito
en la quinta dimensión
que dice
como un fantasma

silencio
marte
desierto
de óxido

en marte se capta un maremoto subterráneo y un robot
ajeno
capta al diablo en marte
hay un abismo un monstruo

**translated from the spanish by
TIFFANY TROY**

DIAMONDS AND RUST

1.

mars is a crummy planet
mars is a
desert of
rust

between metal in
the void of
mars' sky
a sign written in the fifth
dimension, speaking like
a ghost

silence mars
desert of
rust

on mars, the photo captures an underwater tide an
alien
captures mars' devil
a fissure an enormous

enorme

y se miran las personas a través de un papel

en este marte azul Tierra

madre Venus

brillante

en esta sexta dimensión de marte

joan baez reescribe

el silencio.

monster

through paper, people look at
mars blue Earth
mother Venus
glimmering
while in the sixth dimension of mars, joan
baez re-writes
silence

2.

en esta noche en este mundo
clavas cien tornillos en mi garganta
me drena el calor de las estrellas
y esta ausencia (de ti)
bordo con sangre las letras de tu nombre y
las agujas recrean
el dictado de tus voces
pero no sé volver
ni escribir
despierto en corrientes de petróleo
en un lago de colores y
muerte y
a veces despierto silencio en tu casa
bajo cien soles calcinando mis sentidos
y la ausencia
la sombra
el susurro
la palabra
en sintetizadores
busco lo que dices
sobre mí.

2.

on this night, on this earth, you loosen
one hundred screws in my throat
draining out
the fever of the stars
and (your) absence
enclosed by the letters of your name,
embroidered in blood
the timbre of your voices
though i don't know
how to return
or write
i arise, amid
crude oil
waves in a lake of diamonds and
rust
sometimes mute in your home below
a hundred suns kindle my desires and the
absence
the shadow the
whisper the
word
in the sounds of the sewing machine, i listen for
what you're saying
 about me

3.

pregunto si eres
o no
si tu alma vino o no
de otro planeta
responden entidades d
esconocidas
se comunican
para decirme
que tienes el alma de serpiente.
en el astral lucifer mismx se hace pasar por ti
guarda silencio y me escribe en papelitos
que no debería decirte nada
me dijeron que a tu alma la habían parido
en las pléyades
y que de la emanación misma de la radiación
había migrado a Venus
aquí
de repente te percibo
en realidad
veo cíclopes ciegos de ojos verdes
espiándome
en diferentes pliegues de este tiempo
en el visillo de las cortinas
en el silencio de mi closet
en las letras de mi nombre
a veces pregunto al cielo
si en la otra vida
te mueres por mi culpa

3.

as i ask if you are
if your ghost came from
another planet, unknown
esses tell me
you have a serpent spirit.
in the light years, lucifer himself pretends to be you
guarding silence and writing me paper scraps
that should not tell you, well, anything
your ghosts were born, they tell me,
in the pleiades
and that the radiance's very burst
a sojourn on Venus
here
suddenly i
knew you
i see a clan of blind, green-eyed cyclops
spying on me through
the pull of drapes
the light of time
the silence of my closet
the letters of my name
sometimes i ask the sky
if in another
life you
stray because of me
if your

y tu voz
me abandona
y las nubes
dan vueltas
en esta estratosfera
sobre socavones
explosiones
atómicas
en la oscuridad del astral de noche
me dicen que sí

voice
abandons me
the white clouds spin
in the stratosphere
over swallow holes
atomic bursts
in the silence of the night's star
they stir again

4.

te regalo aros de plumas que no se ven por
la (carencia de) luz

me dice que le contó a ella que yo te quería
y yo

me tomo toda la cerveza de una
amargo ámbar silencio
la tormenta de relámpagos tu silueta; olas sobre nosotras
escondidas, evidentes
psicodelia tu voz que es
siempre
mi único recuerdo de esta vida
o la única (carencia de) luz

te sigue el criminal en cada amante y yo enmudezco
citas las palabras que te dijo por teléfono ese hombre
carencia (de luz)

y caminas sin mí en nuestra última lluvia

4.

i brought you some feather earrings that cannot be seen
in the (lack of) light

he tells me that he confessed i love you to her, and i,
i drink the absinthe whole from a wan, green silence—
rolling thunder your silhouette; waves shrouding us,
as diamonds pronounce your voice, bringing
my only memory always of dear life or (lack of) light

a vagabond, i silently follow the lover in your every lover

you repeat words that lack(luster) man
said to you, and embrace him
as I hang alone
in our last rain

5.

cada trece días se absorben
la carne celeste
y el aceite solar les atraviesa el cuerpola densidad
la energía hace que pierdan el rastro

cuando se hunden profundas en un beso de muerte estallan
en un aullido eléctrico que les emana
de los huesos

no se escucha si no hay aire y no hay aire en el espacio

encuentro las canciones de tu playlist y entre platos rotos
me quiebras
la percepción de este mundo
se te destiñen las puntas del pelo
te quedas mirando a la quinta dimensión cáncer en venus

leo cartas astrales y leo el tarot gratis
me veo limpiándote las lágrimas con la punta de mi
lengua en las cadenas de mis muñecas está la
mitad de ti
y en las tuyas está otra persona
se siguen inflamando las heridas de esta tierra transparente

5.

every thirteen days the flesh of celestial fruit
absorbs itself
and solar oil passes through shape, density,
energy, making them lose track

when they fall straight into death, its smooth, exploding
in an electrical howl emanating
from the bones

if there is no air, no air in space, there is no sound

i find songs from your playlist and between broken
dishes, you shatter
my perception of this world
the split ends of your hair blur
as you contemplate the fifth dimension: venus in cancer

i would read your tarot and astro-charts for free—
moisten my tongue-tip with your tears,
half of you wrapped by my wrists—another man
encircled by yours
singeing my gash
on this transparent earth

6.

una vez toqué sus cabellos y eran
seis millones de diamantes
en un vaso de plumavit revolvía
un café de mierda
y llanto

6.

once, I touched your tresses,
six million diamonds in a feather cup whirling
in black coffee,
and I cry

7.

gritas el nombre del amor de tu vida
(que no soy yo)
esta noche
cristales
de dulce
se te queman en las
uñas
se te chorrean
caramelo
corre
por tu
carne
y esparces polvo de ámbar te
bañas en ámbar
y en droga
tus piedras en la columna
tu sabor natre en sus labios
en esta noche que Marte
está tan cerca
parece de mentira parece un cristal
de sangre

7.

you call out to the name of the love
of your life (not me)
tonight,
sugar
crystals
charring your nails—
caramel runs through your skin
and you scatter amber powder
bathing in resin
and drugs, stones
along the spine, your
taste held in her lips tonight
when mars is so close
it is like a lie, or a blood
crystral

8.

el mar trae espuma a la arena y pulgas
se meten
en la humedad
siento
que ya escuché lo que me quieras decir
una vez estuve sola aquí
fue como haber estado muerta
una vez quise que el agua dejara de traer la espuma a la
arena
y que se volviera mudo el mar
y que el cielo se cayera
y que las estrellas fueran de arena
y la arena fuera de estrellas
te digo que la espuma del mar es rabia
y que en Europa
en la luna Europa
hay sólo vida marina
y que toda esa vida debe ser ciega
y que toda esa vida debe ser incolora
que recién se está originando la vida

8.

the sea brings foam to the sands
fleas cross—

into the mist
i feel

i already heard what you'd like to say once
i was alone here, as though

i were dead.

once, i wanted the sea to stop
bringing foam to the sands,
for it to return mute

for the sky to fall

the stars to be made of sand
the sand to be made of stars.

i tell you that sea-foam is rage—
in the continent europe,

on the moon “europe”
there's only marine life.

all this life blind and colorless
life is just beginning where a new

hay luna nueva
y cien estrellas fugaces
pasan
en realidad son trozos de piedra espacial
entre tu silencio y esto
tus ojos
me muestran grandes olas
de fuego
y después
silencio
y después
el cielo
y después
me veo yo deformada
como si fuera un
como si fuera un
animal ciego
o tú
si no hay vida allá entonces no hay memoria
entonces no hay guerra
no hay nada
me preguntas

moon is

a hundred shooting
stars,

meteorites
between your silence and this.

your eyes

show me enormous waves
of fire

and after
sound

and after
air

i see myself deformed
as if i were
as if i were a blind animal

or you.

if there is no life, then there is no memory,
or war

is there anything?
you ask.

me quedo callada
responde, me dices, responde
por telepatía
por la energía de los ojos
con la energía de los ojos
a la energía de los ojos
de ojos
a ojos
con los pies en el agua fría
con las piernas en el mar
con las manos atadas a los brazos propios
nos comunicamos
sin poder
sentir otra cosa
que lo que estamos sintiendo
una ola quiere subir al cielo estrellado
al abismo
al cosmos
quiere alcanzar el cielo
yo me quiero meter antes de que la espuma se reviente en
mí
antes de que las pulgas piensen que somos de arena
quiero gritar tu nombre mientras nos ahogamos

i remain silent.

respond, you tell me, respond
by telepathy, that twinkle of your eyes
with twinkle of eyes

to eyes

with feet in cool water with
legs in the sea

with hands we pantomime
power

less to feel a
thing:

we feel

a wave striving toward the diamond-studded sky
to the abyss

to reach the cosmos—

striving to fly.

i want to transcend before the foam bursts in me
before the fleas realize we are made of sand—

i want to call out your name

por un rato
y después gritarlo para siempre
pero me sale la primera letra no más
la primera letra
que es la primera letra
de mi nombre
que es la primera letra
que aprendí a leer
que en el algún momento
voy a dejar de estar diciendo
repetidamente
las estrellas se disipan
entre el celeste divino y las nubes de la mañana
y me quedo entre la arena el agua y el último lucero o el
primer lucero visible
restos de arena entremedio de tus uñas
de tanto andarte aferrando
y tú espuma
tú ola
tú cielo
tú arena

drowning for a while after
though I no longer even know the first
letter

that's the first letter of
my name,

that's the first letter
i learned to read,

that some time from now
i will stop rotely
pronouncing

the stars dissipate

between divine sky and morning clouds.

i stay behind, between the sand and water, between last
and first visible star
the sand's remnants filling your nails

from so much clinging to you and you
foam

you wave

you sky

you sand

tú sol que me pega
en la cara
que nos obliga a entrecerrar los ojos
tener que gritarnos

you sun caressing my
face

forcing us to squint
as to each other we cry out

9.

en este fin de luces diluidas
de violencia de cuerpos de violencia
me dices que sembramos alcachofas
y ruda con tierra oxigenada

se nos riegan
los suelos con agua de Ventanas
y se evapora la atmósfera

la ley de gravedad es una teoría

en el centro de otra Tierra reencarnemos
amantes juntas.
prometo reencarnar libre o reencarnar analfabeta

9.

under diluted lights
of violence—of bodies of violence—you
tell me we sow artichokes and rue
with oxygenated earth

we moisten the earth with
water from Las Ventanas
that vaporizes the atmosphere

the law of gravity, a theory

at the center of another Earth let us be reborn
as lesbians together.
i promise to burst free or—before letters

10.

de esa poesía apócrifa que sostienen tus dedos
drena música marina,
constelaciones de
sueño
al centro de este océano de sombras
en las islas de basura submarina
disecada
fósil
óxido
te espera
mi cuerpo

10.

that apocryphal poetry succoring your fingers—
barge music drained
sleepy constellations—
at the center of this ocean of shadows
in islands of submerged, dissected garbage
rusted fossil
my body
awaits

Translator's Foreword

Kai-Lilly Karpman tiene 22 años, estudia un máster en poesía en la Universidad de Columbia, Nueva York. Vive en Playa del Rey, California; y es la poeta con la que trabajé a lo largo del programa Word for Word 2021. Entre los aspectos más destacables de su poesía está la temática de la cotidianidad y la presencia de sentimientos “problemáticos”. La poesía a traducir parecía provenir de emociones como la tristeza, la rabia, la frustración, la soledad e incluso el miedo. Narra situaciones del día a día, problemas familiares, conflictos personales y acerca del amor, se cuestiona sobre la figura de la madre y del padre. Trabaja también temas de contingencia social, como en su poema *La gentrificación de Playa del Rey*, donde habla de cómo la edificación destruyó la naturaleza y las comunidades indígenas de la zona. Sus poemas están firmemente asentados en lo ordinario de los días y sus complicaciones, trabajado en un lenguaje coloquial. Estas temáticas fueron desafiantes al momento de traducir, de tal manera que no se perdieran en el español: la cotidianidad, las groserías, los dichos en inglés. Asimismo, fue desafiante escribir acerca de lugares que no conozco como Texas o Playa del Rey, pero al mismo, fue llamativo lo similares que eran los problemas entre estos lugares y Chile. Gran parte del semestre me encontré a medio camino entre el inglés y el español, sin saber bien cómo aterrizar los poemas en el “chileno”. Me percaté de lo *sonoras* que son las palabras en inglés, es decir, que traen consigo algún sonido como “clench” o “crack”, características que el español no tiene, y fue desafiante buscar algo que se le asemejara. Es una experiencia muy enriquecedora para la práctica del inglés, pues se debe desarrollar el idioma desde lo abstracto, fuera de las palabras y más acerca de las imágenes que el poema quiere proyectar. Sobre todo, las de esta poesía en particular, cuyas imágenes eran vívidas y profundas. Todo esto fue difícil, nuevo,

e incluso incómodo, pero a la vez muy emocionante. Kai logra plantear reflexiones y problemas de la vida cotidiana, tanto con su tristeza, dolor y monotonía, aunque también, con mucha belleza.

KAI-LILLY KARPMAN

POEMS

Removing My Father's Gallbladder

My father shows me to be unlike him
as the dog is house-broken.

*Rub her nose in her own piss
until she understands what she did.*

Before surgery, my father says he is afraid.
We never learned to touch. I looked away.

**traducido del inglés por
ANA MORA ESTRADA**

POEMAS

Extrayendo la vesícula de mi padre

Mi padre me entrena a no ser como él
como el perro que se mea en la casa.

*Frota su nariz en su propia orina
hasta que entienda lo que hizo.*

Antes de la operación, mi padre dice que tiene miedo.
Nunca aprendimos a tocarnos. Tuve que dejar mirar.

The Life Cycle of Cruelty

The other night, I dreamt I was maimed by him, again. This time, stabbed in the stomach. How hard it has been to not love him. He said: *Don't eat meat in front of me. I hate to see your teeth.*

Crack open my sternum. Witness the clenching and unclenching of my heart. Rabid and quick as a dog off the leash.

In high school, I was reprimanded for “my womanly wile” by a woman with short hair. I swear to God. I looked at her hands decorated with fake gold rings and fingers fragile as carrots.

I looked at my huge paws, the strong edge of my jaw, the smooth curve of my hips, and I knew I’d grow up to be a mean fucking bitch.

I always thought *Silence of the Lambs* was a love story. Had I been served a human kidney I would have said *thank you* and devoured it like a plum. If bothered by the screaming of the lambs, I would have sculpted a silence from their dead limbs. Piles of red and white pushed into the open, blue mouth of sky.

Meat on ice. Nights of oysters and talks of money and dick. Feeling too old to be wrong anymore. I recall the first man I fucked after my ex. I walked into his kitchen, naked, cold, dark blue, humming like a rising wave in a storm. I returned with a blizzard in my mouth and my filthy sock in my hand. *Eat it, eat it, eat it*, I said.

En el ciclo de vida de la crueldad

La otra noche soñé que él me atacaba, una vez más. Ahora una puñalada en el estómago. Cuán difícil ha sido no amar al único hombre lo suficientemente inteligente para intentar matarme. Él dijo: *No comes carne frente a mí, odio ver tus dientes.*

Abre una grieta en mi esternón. Sé testigo de cómo se empuña y desempuña mi corazón. Rabioso y frenético como un perro que cortó su correa.

En media, una señora de pelo corto me retó por “ser demasiado coqueta”. Lo juro por Dios. Miré sus manos adornadas con anillos de oro falso y dedos frágiles como zanahorias. Me reí de ella. Hice que todos los niños se rieran también. Miré mis gigantescas patas de animal, mi mandíbula marcada, la suave curva de mis caderas, y supe que cuando creciera sería una perra desalmada.

Siempre pensé que *El Silencio de los Inocentes* era una historia de amor. Si me sirvieran el riñón de un humano lo agradecería y devoraría como una ciruela. Pienso que la gente debería tener modales, y reglas. Si molestaran los gritos, los gritos, los gritos de los corderos, me hubiese controlado. Habría esculpido un silencio desde cada trozo muerto de los inocentes corderos, alzados en rojo y blanco dentro de la boca lapislázuli del cielo.

Carne sobre hielo. Noches de ostras y conversaciones de plata y pico. Recuerdo al primer hombre que me tiré después de mi ex. Entré a su cocina desnuda, fría, azul noche y murmurando como una ola que se alza en una tempestad. Regresé con mi boca llena de nieve y en mi mano, un calcetín inmundo. *Cómetelo, cómetelo, cómetelo,* dije.

As a child, I chased boys on the playground, shoving them down face first in front of me when I caught them with their backs turned. Then, I would flip them over to see their faces, my little oysters of tears and sand, making a pearl for me.

There has never been anything to outgrow. I do not think it could have been given to me, crumpled up and hidden in his fist. Violence is my bone, my hair, my father, the very shape of me.

The other night a man brought his gun to my apartment. Black metal sinking into my pink couch. Night blended the colors together and I could not tell the metal from the cushion until my back was pressed against the cold.

Cuando era chica perseguía a los niños en el patio y si los encontraba de espaldas, los empujaba para que se fueran de cara al suelo. Luego, los daba vuelta para ver sus rostros, mis pequeñas ostras de lágrimas y arena, preparando una perla para mí.

La otra noche un hombre trajo a mi departamento su pistola. En el sofá, el metal negro se hunde en mis rosados cojines. La noche funde nuestros colores hasta que ya no puedo distinguir el arma del cojín, hasta que mi espalda se aprieta contra al metal, contra el frío.

Born Blue

I bring my Mother poems like dead birds
from an alley cat's mouth. A gift of violence,
where my old mask of loathing protects me
from the hot blade of fear in my gut that
slices me up into something that looks alive.

My Mother always tells me I was born blue,
that I cried every day before I could talk.
Then, with my babbling baby dribble,
came the ramblings of Plath and Beauvoir.
When I was old enough to know about drugs,
I dreamt of fields of darting tongues,
I dreamt of my own airborne brain,
I dreamt of giving into my father's guns.

When I slipped out from my Mother,
I was already gutted.
I hope she understands when I
go on about the things that keep me
Half-alive-and-half-nothing- half letters-
I want to fill that place in my stomach
(and hers) that my birth left empty.

Nacer azul

Le llevo a mi Mamá poemas como pájaros muertos
de la boca de un gato callejero. Un regalo de violencia,
una vieja máscara de odio que me protege
de la espada que arde de miedo en mis tripas
que me corta en pedazos de algo que parece vivo.

Mi Mamá siempre me dice que nací azul,
que lloré todas las noches antes de hablar.
Luego, con mi baboso balbuceo de bebé,
vinieron las divagaciones de Plath y Beauvoir.
Cuando crecí y aprendí de drogas
soñé con campos de lenguas que se movían,
soñé con mi propio cerebro volando,
soñé con ceder a las pistolas de mi padre.

Cuando me deslicé fuera de mi Mamá,
ya me habían vaciado por dentro.
Espero que entienda cuando
sigo hablando de las cosas que me mantienen
entre la vida y la nada, entre cartas a medias,
quiero llenar ese lugar en mi vientre
(y en el suyo) que dejé vacío al nacer.

“I wanted to be a Poet not a Mother”

in my dreams i lie sideways on the flat sand of a cold
desert and the emptied spaces in me
turn into velvet desert stars. night slithers on its belly
from my silkened hands, and everything looks dark, dark,
dark, like the space between my knees.

my breasts become ravines that fill with water after rain,
and the jackals and rabbits all come to drink and keep
clean, but the jackals grow hungry and the rabbits are
maimed. thickened with blood, the water flows within me
all the same.

i almost wake up when I see a gaping baby mouth open,
wet and moving like the whole sea
or under. with breath like a jackal's she calls out
“Mother?”

“Quería ser Poeta, no Madre”

en mis sueños estoy recostada en la arena de un desierto helado y los espacios vacíos dentro de mí se transforman en estrellas de terciopelo. la noche se desliza desde su vientre a mis manos sedosas, y todo se ve oscuro, oscuro, oscuro, como el espacio entre mis rodillas.

mis pechos se convierten en quebradas que se llenan con agua de lluvia, y los chacales y conejos vienen a beber y a limpiar, pero los chacales están hambrientos y devoran a los conejos. engrosado por la sangre, el río fluye dentro de mí, siempre igual.

a punto de despertar veo la boca abierta de un bebé, húmeda, desgoznada y moviéndose como lo hace el océano o aquello que está debajo de él. respirando como un chacal, ella reclama “¿Mamá?”

The Gentrification of Playa Del Rey

Daytime: It seems that I am the luddite
of Culver Boulevard. I spit on signs
offering up mined crystals and egg whites.

I have seen houses thronging the
ocean's shoreline; eclectic colors of stucco
pushing, pushing, stumbling on the land.

The protruding phallus of real estate
extends beyond its place, throbbing
into the sticky wet of scirpus and salt water.

I am not even a part of the history.
The wetlands breastfeed from the mountains,
and those teats had fed another people,

now only remembered by a Teepee
set up by the state. I've seen smoke
spool from it, ignored smells of teenage ganja, hoped.

But listen: I have watched shifting crowds
of sacred seagulls fighting over a potato chip,
their cries growing delusional, mixed with wind's scream.

The ships have come and pillaged
the deepest sand of the sea, making a trench
for cruise ships' bellies, leaving a screeching ravine.

La gentrificación de Playa Del Rey

De día: parece que soy la retrógrada
del Culver Bulevar. Escupo a los anuncios
que ofrecen cristales y merengues.

He visto casas atiborrando
la orilla del mar; millones de colores y yeso
empujando, empujando, resbalando en la tierra.

El saliente falo de bienes raíces
crece más allá de su lugar, palpitando
en la humedad pegajosa de juncos y agua salada.

Y ni siquiera soy parte de esta historia.
Las montañas amamantaban a los humedales
y sus tetas alimentaron a otro pueblo,

ahora solo los recuerda un tipi
que instaló el Estado. He visto humo en remolinos,
he ignorado el olor de mota adolescente, tuve esperanza.

Pero escucha: he visto moverse a las santas multitudes
de gaviotas a pelear por una papa frita,
sus delirantes graznidos, mezclados con el grito del
viento.

Los barcos han venido y han saqueado
la arena de lo más profundo del mar, haciendo una zanja
para la panza de los cruceros, dejando un canal
chirriante.

The waves bash their own brains
in on the sand. They try to rise but only end up
like rabid old dogs—snarling, falling, then dead.

Oh God, the bleached sun howls through
the smog. She turns the whole scene into hot
grey and white. I follow her until she sinks into

night. The King's eponymous beach
backs its silent waves into wherever it goes, and
I stand to give a speech for the bit of sand I know.

Las olas destruyen sus propios cerebros
contra la arena. E intentan levantarse, pero solo
terminan
como viejos perros rabiosos—gruñendo, cayendo,
muriendo.

Oh Dios, el pálido sol aúlla a través
del smog. Convierte toda la escena en
caliente gris y blanco. Y yo lo sigo hasta que se hunde

en la noche. La playa homónima del rey
respalda sus olas silenciosas a dónde quiera que vayan,
y yo me levanto para dar un discurso por este poquito de
arena que conozco.

Texas Afternoon

The Western Half of Texas
comes over me like a fever dream.
Ten hours from Albuquerque,
and a lifetime from everything.
I only travel with a sleepy stray cat
who's taken a liking to me.

The land seems made of liquid.
The scape's a blur of khaki-colored grass
and the hazy, beige, drip of sky that expands
like a spreading drop of blood in the tub.

The cows live for years here.
But, the grass looks so dry
and barrenness feels so deep
it appears life could never grow.

Still, a large bull moves through the greyish,
hazy sky, dragging his hooves on the road nearby.
Bull, who are your great horns for?
Why do you appear grand and proud
without a witness to your bulk?

Would you rather me take your head
to hang as a trophy so others can see?
Or are these lame cows all you need
to hold up your weighted frame of muscle?
What about your special coat?

Tarde en Texas

La mitad oeste de Texas
viene hacia mí como un sueño afiebrado.
A diez horas de Albuquerque,
y a una vida entera lejos de todo.
Solo viajó con un gato extraviado
que ha empezado a aceptarme.

La tierra parece hecha de líquido.
El paisaje es un borrón de pasto color caqui
y el difuso beige, que gotea del cielo, se expande
como gota de sangre diluyéndose en una tina.

Las vacas viven por años aquí.
Pero el pasto se ve tan seco
y la aridez se siente profunda
parece que nunca pudiese brotar la vida.

Aun así, un toro enorme se mueve a través del cielo
gris y borroso, arrastra sus pezuñas en el camino.
Toro, ¿para qué son tus grandes cuernos?
¿Por qué pareces tan grande y orgulloso
sin nadie que atestigüe tus criadillas?

¿Preferirías que te quite la cabeza
y que la colgara como trofeo, para que otros la vean?
¿O son estas patéticas vacas todo lo que necesitas
para sostener tu cuerpo marcado de músculos?
¿Qué hay de tu abrigo de piel?

You are the first spot of glimmering dark brown
that a mudless landscape has ever seen.

He raised his heavy head
pulled by the wet pink
of his apple-shaped snout.
With his brown eyes,
he said, My God, my God,
you've no idea what life's about.

I turn to my car and get my shotgun out.
This is a moment to philosophize:
a bullet becomes known, for example,
only by what it leaves behind.
The bull becomes important to this story
through the wet hole I put in his head.
Like the bullet, I am important
because of what I leave behind.

I see the landscape of cows, of death,
of years where the sun was always out,
and wonder what the bull leaves behind.
I leave my handprint with his blood
on the road, like a signal to those who pass,
recalling a time, now absent and gone,
marking the route of my meaningless path.

Eres el primer atisbo de brillante café oscuro
que una tierra sin barro ha visto alguna vez.

El toro levantó su pesada cabeza
empujada por su rosado y húmedo
hocico con forma de manzana.

Y sus ojos cafés
dicen, Dios mío, Dios mío,
no tienes idea de cómo es la vida.

Vuelvo a mi auto y saco mi escopeta.
Este es el momento para filosofar:
una bala se hace conocida, por ejemplo,
solo por lo que deja detrás.

El toro se hace importante en este relato
por el agujero húmedo que abriré en su cabeza.
Como la bala, soy importante
por lo que dejo detrás.

Veo un paisaje de vacas, de muerte,
de años donde el sol siempre estuvo afuera,
y me pregunto qué deja el toro detrás.
Dejo mi huella con su sangre
en el camino, como una señal para esos que pasen,
recordando un tiempo, ahora ausente, ido,
marcando la ruta de mi camino sin sentido.

Translator's Foreword

Ana Mora's poetry follows a lineage of other Chilean writers (such as Claudio Bertoni or Delia Domínguez) who have inspired her. Like these writers, her poetry deals with nature, eroticism, and the body, often featuring images pertaining to the moon, the body, birth, the sea, foliage, and the fecund.

Though her language often reads straightforwardly, making confident declarations such as “soy como la luna” (I am like the moon), I find that her works often exists within a sort of dream-like space. She navigates her poetry with the senses, recalling the heat of a summer day, sailing with a lover, squawking seagulls, eating seeds, or gazing at the moon.

In these poems, I saw a story about a woman who understands her relationship with nature. She embraces her divine femininity, and though this speaker is someone who has a romantic partner, she never betrays herself or loses sight of her power.

In my translation, I tried to maintain a balance of mystery and clarity that I sensed in the original. I did not aim to make sense of lines that felt surreal or unclear. In fact, I think Ana's sensual, dreamy imagery can be seen as an act of feminist resistance. She does not need to be understood by everyone in order to express herself. These poems beg the reader to come into their world and don't fret if we don't follow.

While translating these poems, I noticed Ana's use of repetition. For example, in “Acuario” she uses the phrase “siento que puedo verte” (I feel I can see you) over and over again. To me, her use of repetition felt like a prayer or a spell. It made her poems ring true, it demanded to be

seen by the reader.

In my translations, I broke up the stanzas in a way that I felt allowed her repetition to shine. The exception to my stanza creation was in “Metamorphosis,” which I felt benefitted from its fast pace and connected lines. Furthermore, since I viewed these poems as a collection, the fact that Ana has a sestina encouraged me to think more deeply about formal moves she could make, and what formality did for her imagery and rhythm in the sestina.

Ultimately, I tried to capture Ana’s surrealism and sensual nature and honor the spaces between mystery and clarity. I also thought about the ways in which her poems may be viewed in stanzas, and how this related to her use of repetition and inkling for nostalgia. Lastly, to prepare to translate these poems, I read Chilean authors Ana recommended to me. I paid attention to their natural imagery and straightforward diction, particularly, and attempted to bring that into my translation. I am so honored to translate Ana’s work.

ANA MORA ESTRADA

POEMAS

Quimera

Nací lejos de casa,
de mis ojos y mis manos:
aquí las montañas tienen esqueletos
y nacieron ciegas y desnudas;
todos nacimos en el valle,
recostados entre las líneas,
aquí no existen los caminos,
solo la gran cordillera,
los colores son como nubes en el cielo:
todo es difuso,
a veces siento que me salgo de mí misma y me olvido de
quién soy,
me veo como a un espejo,
un cuadro atrapado entre instante e instante,
y te recuerdo como quien recuerda el calor del verano,
una palpitación salada,
los pies hundidos en la arena,
aquí dentro todo es océano y peces,
perfume azul brillante,
mejillas coloradas y playa,

**translated from the spanish by
KAI-LILLY KARPMAN**

POEMS

Chimera

I was born far from home,
made by my own eyes and hands:
in this place, the mountains have bones
and were born naked and blind;

we were all born in this valley,
sprawling between its lines,
in this place, there are no roads,
only the great mountain range,
and the colors are like clouds in the sky:

everything is blurred, sometimes
I feel I escape myself and forget who I am,
I see myself in a mirror, a picture
caught between moment and moment,

I remember you like someone remembering the heat of
summer,
a salty throb,
feet sunk in the sand,
everything here is ocean and fish,
bright blue perfume,
red cheeks and a beach,

me siento como las gaviotas en el muelle,
semillas de girasol en bolsitas de tela,
porque pienso en ti como quien piensa en sus ojos y sus
manos,
melodía oscura y llameante,
estando aquí siento que todo respira,
somos montañas en este valle de líneas,
cardúmenes de besos latiendo en cada rincón,
te siento como quien siente una coronada en sus
costillas,
llanto y grito,
euforia,
palabras más allá de nuestras bocas,
profundidad sorda y sonora,
y es así como te veo:
te veo como quien ve la gran cordillera que se alza tras la
ventana,
destino final,
infinito,
reloj de arena,
diente de león.

I feel like a seagull on the pier
hungry for sunflower seeds from cloth bags,
I think of you like I think with my eyes and hands,
I hear your dark and flaming melody,

being here, I feel that everything breathes,
we are mountains in this valley of lines,
schools of kisses pulse in every corner,
I know you like someone knows a curve in their rib,
I moan and scream,
euphoria,
words beyond our mouths,
deaf and sonorous depths,

this is how I see you:
like someone watching a great mountain range rise
behind their window,
this is the place you have waited for,
infinite,
hourglass of sand,
dandelion.

Tú eres y yo soy (sextina)

Siempre camino **descalza**
todos los días vuelvo a **nacer**
soy como la **luna**
nací de tu **boca**
ciega, sin saber **navegar**
desnuda, así cómo **soy**.

Yo soy
aquella que corre **descalza**
que tiene ansias por **navegar**
ansias por volver a **nacer**
por volver a encontrarse con tu **boca**
por volver a ser como la **luna**.

Tú mismo eres como la **luna**
tú mismo eres y yo misma **soy**
pienso que todo ha nacido de tu **boca**
que tu misma boca nació **descalza**
que todos queremos volver a **nacer**
que todos tenemos ansias por **navegar**.

Nacimos con ansias por **navegar**
por intentar alcanzar la **luna**
por no morir y solo **nacer**
por saber quiénes somos y quién **soy**
por andar por la vida **descalza**
y tener la fortuna de nacer de tu **boca**.

You are and I am

I always walk barefoot
each day, I am reborn
like the moon
I was birthed from your mouth
blind, not yet knowing how to sail
naked, and baring all that I am.

I am
the one who runs barefoot
who thirsts to sail
longing to come back and be reborn
to return and meet your mouth
to return and rise like the moon.

You too are like the moon
You are yourself and so am I
I think everything was born from your mouth
your mouth was born barefoot
like we all want to be reborn
like we all thirst to sail.

We were born thirsting to sail
trying to reach the moon
trying not to die, seeking only rebirth
knowing what we are and who I am
walking through life barefoot
with the grace of being born from your mouth.

Porque es tu **boca**
la que me invita a **navegar**
desnuda, descalza,
como se tiende sobre la noche la **luna**
de la luna eres y de la luna **soy**
y juntos volvemos a **nacer.**

Juntos volvemos a **nacer**
los dos nacemos de nuestras **bocas**
de mi boca eres y de tu boca **soy**
juntos salimos a **navegar**
a perdernos con el sol y la **luna**
a encontrarnos a la muerte **descalza.**

Y **descalzos** somos al **nacer**
ambos de la **luna** y de nuestras **bocas**
nacimos para **navegar**(nos): yo en lo que eres y tú en lo
que **soy.**

Because it is your mouth
that invites me to sail
naked, barefoot
like the moon lays upon the night,
you belong to the moon, and the moon I am
and together, we are reborn.

Together we are reborn
We were both born from our mouths
from my mouth you are and from your mouth I am
together we go sailing.
We lose ourselves in the sun and the moon
We meet death barefoot.

And we arrive barefoot at the rebirth
the two of us created by the moon, the mouth
we were born to sail in each other: I in who you are, and
you, in who I am.

Acuario

Puedo verte tras el vidrio,
tras mis párpados y la cortina,
la sombra de la sombra,
el recuerdo del recuerdo,
puedo verte sumergido en agua,
hundido en el viento,
tu rostro, tus ojos cerrados,
tu pecho que respira,
las hojas que se caen,
el paisaje que se mueve,
puedo verte,
el aire que te rodea,
la silueta de tu silueta,
el contorno de tus huesos,
las cicatrices,
lunares,
el color de tus latidos,
siento que puedo verte
que existe más que el aire,
el tiempo, el frío de la pared,
cierro los ojos y puedo sentirte
palma contra palma,
nudillo con nudillo,
recostados en el mismo mar,
hundidos bajo el mismo cielo,

Aquarium

I can see you behind the glass walls,
behind the curtain of my eyelid,
a shadow of a shadow,
memory of a memory

I can see you submerged in water,
Sunk beneath the wind,
your face exposed, eyes closed,
chest rising,
leaves tumbling down,
you are a landscape
that stirs,

I can see you,
the air that floods around you,
the silhouette of your silhouette,
the contour of your bones,
scars,
moles,
the shades of your heartbeat,

I feel I can see you
that more than air exists,
time passing, the cold of a wall,
palm against palm,
knuckle against knuckle,
we lie in the same sea,
submerged beneath the same sky,

alzados por los mismos pies,
siento que puedo verte
hago memoria para regresar,
puedo verte tras las capas,
las puertas, las calles, las sábanas,
los harapos, el vidrio,
puedo verte tras la ventana,
immerso en una nube,
el agua que se deshace en el cielo,
siento las gotas contra mi pecho,
mis párpados,
mi sien,
puedo verte sin mis ojos,
existiendo tras la negrura,
la memoria y las murallas,
puedo verte caminar.

raised by the same feet,

I feel I can see you,
I make a memory to return to,
I can see you behind the layers,
the doors, streets, bed sheets,
rags and glass,

I can see you behind the window,
submerged in a cloud,
water melting in the sky,
I feel the drops against my chest,
my eyelids,
my temples,

I can see you without my eyes,
still alive behind the darkness,
in this memory and through glass walls,
I can still see you walk.

Metamorfosis

Hoy he nacido de nuevo,
cuando tus dedos se hundieron en mi piel,
pues has incrustado semillas
dentro de mi columna vertebral,
y se han asentado raíces
en mis piernas y mi vientre
y ahora caminan por sí solas
avanzan por las calles
aparentemente sin rumbo,
pero cada vez que se detienen
mi corazón deja de latir,
porque siempre que me muevo,
cobro vida y siento una presión
en lo más profundo de mi cuerpo
y se alza el comienzo del tallo,
de una planta que carcomerá mi espina dorsal,
y fundirá mi hueso en madera
y me crecerán ramitas por los dedos,
se romperán mis uñas y saldrán hojas
que podré pintar mientras pasa el otoño,
y engañarlas para que no se vayan en invierno
y sigan creciendo, lentamente,
mientras se me cae el cabello y me lleno de flores,
y de nidos, y de pájaros,
y estos se asienten en mí en bandadas,
y canten por las noches y anuncien cuando no hay
estrellas,
y me llenen el corazón de pepitas,

Metamorphosis

Today I was reborn
when your fingers sunk into my skin
and you planted seeds
inside of my spine,
their roots have taken hold,
in my legs and stomach
and one day, they'll walk on their own,
hazing through the streets
with no apparent course
and every time they stop
my heart won't beat
and every time I move,
I'll come alive as I feel something stirring
in the deepest part of my body
and when the tip of the stem rises,
from the plant that will eat my spine
and cast my bones in its wood
twigs will erupt from my fingers,
breaking my nails as their leaves unfurl,
I'll paint my leaves as Autumn passes
and trick them into staying for the winter,
I'll keep growing, slowly,
and when my hair falls out I'll fill myself with flowers,
and nests and birds,
that will settle into me as flocks
who will sing all night and shout when there are no stars,
fill my heart with your seeds,

mis ojos, mi nariz, mi boca,
me alimenten de plumas,
de callos,
y mi sangre se inunde de alas,
mis pies se vuelvan cada vez más pesados,
mis ojos se conviertan en sol,
mis labios en fruta,
mi garganta en nudos y cuesco,
hasta que un día mi sangre se seque
y deje de llegar a mis pies
y se fundan por completo en la tierra
y mientras mi corazón siga luchando por bombar
alzaré mis brazos,
y dejaré mis manos a la luz,
cerraré los ojos y no escucharé a las aves,
y las sentiré marchar mientras por primera vez
se caen las hojas
y quedo desnuda,
desnuda y sola frente al asfalto.

my eyes, my nose, my mouth,
feed me feathers
and calluses, until
my blood becomes flooded with wings
and my feet become heavier and heavier
and my eyes become the sun
and my lips become fruit
and my throat becomes knots and pits
until the day my blood will dry
and stop reaching my feet
and melts across the earth,
and as long as my heart keeps struggling to pump I will
raise my arms,
I'll leave my hands to the light,
I'll close my eyes, and I won't listen to the birds
but I'll feel them marching while
for the first time
my leaves will fall,
and I'll be naked,
naked and alone upon the asphalt.

Translator's Foreword

La traducción literaria, especialmente la de poesía, puede ser también entendida como un juego. Esa fue mi experiencia con el trabajo de Stephanie. La discusión de las posibles variantes, el contexto cultural o las ideas de cada poema lograron que nuestra experiencia se enriqueciera y eventualmente mezclara. Ese juego de la traducción borra también fronteras entre versión y original y entre autor y traductor, más aún cuando ambas personas entran en contacto. Ese contacto es necesario, especialmente cuando se discuten las imágenes poéticas. La cultura de origen y la cultura que las recibe necesitan encontrar una sensibilidad común, una zona de intersección que permita el flujo de una lengua a otra. Esto es a mi juicio la claridad a la que puede aspirar una traducción.

Literary translation and particularly the translation of poetry can be conceived as a game. That was my experience with Stephanie. The weighing of different variants, the distance between cultural contexts, the ideas carried by each poem enriched our experience and eventually fused them. This game in translation erases borders between version and the original, between author and translator, especially when the two are in contact. This contact is necessary, particularly when discussing poetic images. The culture of origin and the target culture need to find a common sensibility, an overlapping area that will allow the flow of these images from one language to the other. In my opinion this is the clarity that a translation can aspire.

STEPHANIE DINSAE

MY BODY AS CRATERS

Underneath the surface of my cheeks my zygomaticus major, the muscle

Clinging to my skin

Splits into two and chisels itself into moon craters

This plunging of my cheeks is considered attractive

I am given commended adoration with praise

When there is less of me to applaud

I speak or smile

And my cheeks become an automatic, repetitive carving of themselves

My face self-sabotages, gnaws itself open, making

The skin where my dimples hide

vulnerable, weakened by all attempts at erosion

Unless I swallow my own insides first

The lesson I am learning over and over is:

Less of everything

Especially less color

Too much color is too bitter for the tongue to hold

My moon craters take up virtually no space on my body

But this complexion?

**traducido del inglés por
MATTHIAS MOLINA**

MI CUERPO COMO CRÁTERES

Debajo de la superficie de mis mejillas mi cigomático mayor, el músculo

Ceñido a mi piel

Se divide en dos y se talla a si mismo formando cráteres lunares

Esta hendidura en mis mejillas es considerada atractiva

Me elogian adoración mezclada de alabanzas

Cuando no hay tanto de mi que aplaudir

Hablo o sonrío

Y mis mejillas se convierten en una automática,
repetitiva escultura de si mismas

Mi cara se auto sabotea, se corroea a si misma, haciendo

De la piel donde se esconden mis hoyuelos

Vulnerable, debilitándose en todos sus intentos de erosión

A menos que trague primero mi propio interior

La lección que aprendo una y otra vez es:

De todo, menos

Especialmente color

Mucho color es amargo, demasiado para que la lengua
aguante

Mis cráteres lunares se recogen casi no ocupan lugar
en mi cuerpo

¿Pero mi tez?

Is too obsidian, too visible
My external organ has been tinted this way to protect me
from the sun
My skin is smooth and firm
And sensitive and most times
Abrasions on it swell up permanently to ward infection
away from me
The complexion of my external organ is fluorescent
And gleaming, having absorbed all the sun's rays
Enthusiastic bright colors clutch to my body for quick
rejuvenation
The skin is the only organ completely present on the
outside
And skin like mine is the only one with a hue

That is met with snickering, scorn, disgust
And made a punching bag for Blackness

Because of the space my shadow skin desires to occupy,
I exist as a hyper-visible silhouette
something for whiteness to lean upon
I gnaw at myself so I can make it easier
For whiteness to do
what it has always longed to do

With any flesh it can manage to hold
in its teeth
whiteness tries but always fails at figuring out how I
should be digested
best
Always reminds me that Blackness

Es demasiado obsidiana, demasiado visible
Mi órgano externo se ha pintado de esta manera para
protegerme del sol
Mi piel es suave y firme
Y sensible la mayoría del tiempo
Los roces la hinchan hasta formar una infección ajena a
mi
La tez de mi órgano externo es fluorescente
Y fulgurante, después de absorber todos los rayos de sol
Colores claros, entusiastas, se aprietan a mi cuerpo para
rejuvenecer rápido
La piel es el único órgano totalmente presente por fuera
Y piel como la mía es la única que tiene un tono

Se reconoce con burlas, desprecio, asco
Y hace del ser negra un saco de boxeo

Existo como una silueta extra visible
Por el espacio que mi piel oscura desea ocupar
Algo para que la albura se apoye
Me muerdo a mi misma para que sea más fácil
Para que la albura haga
Lo que siempre ha deseado hacer

Con cualquier carne se puede agarrar
Entre los dientes
La albura trata pero siempre falla al descifrar como debo
ser digerida
Incluso
Siempre me recuerda que ser negra

can never be anything
But a means for consumption
My shadow skin dictates that I must not eat for fear of expansion
Whiteness is not held to the same limits
It can infiltrate my body
And expand and eat at me until I am hollow
My entrails offered up for eager sacrifice

But they want to feast too
They want to nibble away at
the bad butterflies I get within when I am nervous or fearful
They want to devour any sickness or illnesses capable of harming me
My entrails want to inhale big gusts of my sadness away

My dimples wish they could eat away any painful comments
They endured while hiding away in my cheeks
They wish they could sip the tears that fell at their doorstep
to prevent me from sitting in my own heartache and misfortune
My dimples wish they could shoo away the lips of every lover

Gutless enough to pollute my name for their own survival
To leave me to rot, dispose of me

To dispose of me, leave me to rot

Nunca puede ser nada
Más que un objeto de consumo
Mi piel oscura demanda no comer por miedo a
expandirme
La albura no se determina por los mismos límites
Se puede infiltrar en mi cuerpo
Y expandir y comerme hasta que este hueca
Ofreciendo mis entrañas para el anhelado sacrificio

Pero también quieren darse un banquete
Desean poder dar mordiscos
A las mariposas maliciosas que entran cuando estoy
nerviosa o atemorizada
Quieren devorar cualquier enfermedad o dolencia capaz
de hacerme daño
Mis entrañas quieren inhalar grandes bocanadas para
deshacer mi tristeza

Mis hoyuelos desean poder tragarse cualquier comentario
hiriente
Aguantan mientras se esconden en mis mejillas
Desean poder chupar las lágrimas mientras caen en su
puerta
Para prevenir que recaiga en mis dolores y desgracia
Mis hoyuelos desean ahuyentar los labios de todos los
amantes

Tan cobardes que para su propia supervivencia
contaminan mi nombre
Para dejar que me pudra, me desechan

Para desecharme, dejan que me pudra

To dispose of my rot, leave

Leave me alone

Leave.
Leave

Leave.

Leave.

Leave.

My skin begins to bulge
To tremor at the words, at the memories

My moon craters swell /stretch into black hole
Scarf down all the whiteness
Scarf down all the lies and insults
Without caring to chew any of their bones first

Para desechar mi putrefacción. Ándate

Deja Me Sola

Deja Deja Deja Deja
Deja

Mi piel empieza a engrosar
A estremecerse con las palabras, los recuerdos

Mis cráteres lunares se hinchan/estiran hacia un agujero
negro

Se zampan toda lo blanco
Se zampan las mentiras e insultos todos
Sin importarles masticar alguno de sus huesos primero

Translator's Foreword

As someone with a decent grasp of romance languages, I primarily focus on the dead ones: Latin and Ancient Greek. While I know that Ancient Greek isn't really considered a romance language, I still call it one because Latin owes so much of itself to Ancient Greek. I focus on dead authors, mostly dead poets, and it's been such a refreshing shift to work on poetry translations in Spanish: a language still very much alive and breathing and one I am always looking to improve my grasp in. My favorite moments this semester were the moments that happened in the silence. The trying to figure out how to convey what my translation partner wanted to say, the pauses when asking about certain word choices. I especially learned about mistakes and how to own them, to remind myself that I am not an expert but rather an imperfect reader, as translator Paige Morris says. As a reader, you have more permission to falter, to get it wrong, to be someone who makes mistakes no matter what they try because it is all a part of the process of handling words. Precious cargo to hold as the messenger. One big game of Telephone in which you can hold your breath and hope to get as close as possible to the real substance and meaning.

Matthias Molina's poems that I have had the honor to work with over the past few months are full of life and bold, poetic choices. There is such a visceral physicality to Matthias' poems in Spanish. He is concerned with making his reader come along for the ride of whatever the poem's subject matter may be. You might feel like an outsider, but you will be always be able to find your entry into the poems. This is what I tried so hard to convey in the English, that the metaphors are grand and pointed, the sounds are deliberate, and that the writer in question is engaging with vulnerability and honesty in a

very strategic way. Matthias is preparing the reader to be pulled in, to engage with the page in a way that requires their bodies to take part in the experience of the poetry. The poems are often compact and heavy, generous with their images. Sometimes, they make reference to tidbits of Chilean culture. The poems are trying to figure out how to pay attention and tend to their wounds. The poems and the process of translating them remind me that even when it seems like you have all the answers, there is always more to learn and discover.

MATTHIAS MOLINA

POEMAS

Ataque de Pánico

A veces la paz bendita
paz se puede encontrar solamente
en manchas de tinta
sobre un fondo blanco
cuando las manos sudan y
la cabeza se aprieta
el estomago retuerce y
la muerte te toca el hombro
solo un hechizo funciona.

Les gens ils sachent pas quoi faire,
Les gens ils sachent pas comment faire.

Una sombra profunda de rencor
maldito menor la ira miedo
se consumen bajo el pulso
deforme de una pluma
débil a veces sólo falta
eso para tranquilizar el
alma. Dolor tendido
se convierte en un puzzle
sur un echeque
c'est un enjeu
la volonté d'être

**translated from the spanish by
STEPHANIE DINSAE**

POEMS

Panic Attack

Sometimes peace sweet

Peace can be found only

in stains of ink

left over on a white wall

When the hands sweat and

the head tenses up

The stomach twists and

death taps on your shoulder

Only a spell can work.

Les gens ils sachent pas quoi faire, (People don't know what to do)

Les gens ils sachent pas comment faire. (People don't know how to do it)

A deep shadow of the resentment,

Bitterness lack anger fear

all consumed in the warped

heartbeat of a weak

writer—sometimes this is all

that is needed to soothe the soul.

Prolonged pain

becomes a puzzle

sur un echec (over a puzzle)

c'est un enjeu (it's a challenge)

seguir un respiro
tras otro, por un tiempo
más ¿por qué no otro paso?
Gracias a la nada
poder jugar todavía
aunque el aire no sea pleno
abrir los ojos, con las pupilas
cerradas.

Solo manchar, solo ensuciar
un papel
y, con eso basta.

la volonté d'être (the will of being)

Take one breath

then another, and another,

why not another step?

Cheers to nothingness

still able to play

although the air may not be rich

open your eyes, with closed

pupils.

Stain, soil a single page,

And that's enough.

Sólo tú

La cocaína no ayuda
cuando los fragmentos se desplazan
al pudrirse los dientes
el pájaro vuela lejos de mi
los jales se te pegan en el tabique
trastornan el tiempo-espacio
y a ti mismo
los jales cansan
cuando se despierta la quimera
de un sueño roto

la cocaína no ayuda
a la mente que busca paz
cuando el ferrocarril descontrola
la gente muere adentro
una vez que se inhala
los ojos desorbita
y el placer envenenado se rebalsa
una pared pequeña pero insaltable
se posa frente a tu rostro
hasta que ya no existes

Only you

Cocaine doesn't help
when its pieces are destined
to rot the teeth
the bird flies far away from me
you inhale the pieces, caught deep in your nose
they disrupt time-space
and you especially
you inhale the pieces, they tire you
when the chimera wakes up
from a broken dream

Cocaine doesn't soothe
a mind searching for peace
the train goes off the rails
people inside die
once inhaled
the eyes daze
and poisoned pleasure overflows
a small but unclimbable wall
rises up in front of your face
until you no longer exist.

Gigante

Si pudiese por un segundo quebrar la brecha
que me subyuga de los ojos del gigante
el río se calmaría podría respirar
sin el manto negro que corta el caudal
que lo ahoga y acumula una empresa
de vanidad irreconocible

Que patético se ve ese monstruo
empapando todo con su sudor indolente
como si no existiéramos
como si no estuviésemos
caminando entre sus pies gigantes

¿existe razón para siempre tener que mirarlo hacia
arriba?

Giant

If I could, for a moment, close the rift
that subjugates me beneath the giant's eyes
the river would be calm, would breathe
without the black cloak cutting the flow
which drowns it and builds up a venture
of undetectable vanity

How pathetic that monster seems
soaking us all with its indifferent sweat
as if we didn't exist
as if we were never
walking between his gigantic feet

Are we compelled for some reason to gaze up at him
forever?

Poema 5

Un susurro defiende los arboles
del viento gélido, el sonido seco
en una mirada anónima
el pasto muerto pide auxilio
crecer no podrá no podría
hasta nuevo aviso

misericordiosas las estrellas que
reflejan luz indiscreta
llantos llenos de tiempo
infinito bandido
que calman que enloquecen
las montañas solitarias en días
de junio y olvidadas en enero
vuelven a estar solas una noche
no hablan no escuchan

El pacífico ríe en sus oleadas violentas
barcos desesperanzados se vuelcan
vomitán y sangran
en este planeta pequeño
trágicamente infinito
donde no hay momentos iguales
con museos olvidados
pasillos rotos de madera quebrada
desiertos color mugre
sangre color noche
días azules de olor a incienso quemado

Poem 5

A whisper defends the trees
from the ice-cold wind, the withered sound
in a nameless glance
the dead grass pleads for help
it won't it cannot grow
until further notice

the merciful stars which
reflect the indiscreet light
cries full of time
infinite bandit
which calm what they drive mad
the isolated mountains on days
of June and forgotten in January
return to being alone every night
they don't speak they don't listen

The Pacific laughs in its violent waves
disheartened ships capsize
they vomit and they bleed
on this small planet
tragically infinite
where there are no identical moments
museums forgotten
broken hallways of broken wood
deserts the color of grime
blood the color of night
blue days the scent of burned incense

humo grueso que atraviesa pulmones
y cuerpos débiles como tiza de colegio

thick smoke that pierces the lungs
and bodies weak like classroom chalk

Translator's Foreword

Tal como el título sugiere, traducir la poesía de E.R. Pulgar se sintió como ir abriendo lentamente una puerta tras otra, descubriendo en cada palabra una nueva interpretación de lo que significa pertenecer al mundo: dejar atrás monumentos destruidos que alguna vez evocaron recuerdos cálidos, dudar de la propia identidad latinx desde una tierra extranjera que es hogar, refugio y exilio al mismo tiempo; experimentar la sexualidad aferrándose a un otrx como si algún día este fuera a desaparecer, como si solo tuviésemos un par de versos para condensar la intensidad de un amor cuya mano se escapa con el sonido de un avión despegando.

E.R. le otorga una estética particular a cada poema con sumo cuidado, como si cada uno de ellos fuese un bebé recién nacido con una voz y musicalidad única que no podría ser oída de otra forma. Asimismo, cada *Puerta* permite entrever una parte de E.R. desde su propia piel, acompañándole en un camino experimental, sensible, caótico, sexual, romántico, mitológico y por sobre todo, honesto. Jamás dejé de creer en las imágenes de cada poema, porque las palabras han sido siempre escogidas con precisión: cada espacio guarda un silencio intencional, cada secreto esconde una voz que grita. Referencias a artistas como Carlos Cruz Diez, Ana Mendieta y John Keats se pueden hallar como parte de la experimentación mencionada, que se entremezcla con una gran capacidad de convertir un lienzo blanco en un maravilloso tributo a lo que representa, tomando por ejemplo a la obra de Cruz Diez en el Aeropuerto Internacional Simón Bolívar: tanto esta como la obra de E.R. hablan sobre despedirse del hogar y añorarlo desde lejos, llevándose un pedazo de lo que alguna vez fue un cuadro completo y creando, desde aquellas pequeñas piezas, una nueva vida que es exhalada como una

nueva tierra, como una promesa de reencontrarse en los fragmentos del resto.

E.R. Pulgar nació en Caracas y se crió en Miami, pero actualmente reside en Nueva York. Sus trabajos, — publicados en revistas de renombre tales como Rolling Stone, Playboy y Pank Magazine, entre varias otras—, incluyen escribir poesía y artículos periodísticos, editar, investigar y entrevistar a distintos artistas de la industria musical. *30 Gates* es parte de un proyecto más grande, que va mutando con el paso de los días y se alimenta del frágil caos que requiere la poesía más memorable y sincera. De esta manera, estas son solo algunas de las puertas que se deben abrir para desvelar los restos de aromas, caricias y despedidas que E.R. transmite como quien pinta un cuadro con delicadeza y pasión, reuniendo los tonos claros y oscuros en igual medida para formar la imagen de una noche de luna llena o de un último beso.

E.R. PULGAR

30 GATES

Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate.

Dante Alighieri

Siente que entre nosotros
No hay ventanas
Ni hay puertas
No hay muros
Ni hay nada.

Miguel James

**traducido del inglés por
VALERIA ARAYA**

30 PUERTA

Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate.

Dante Alighieri

Siente que entre nosotros
No hay ventanas
Ni hay puertas
No hay muros
Ni hay nada.

Miguel James

GATE 1

The ocean over the big houses. Your shirt makes a soft ripple in the water. Lands at my feet. The air it leaves behind is a lavender chemtrail. I could not love you more. I will try.

GATE 2

The senior citizen RV resort where I find myself living is framed by a lake. Until the hurricane, it dried up. Watching it swell with life again after the storm, I remember the day before. Standing at the dry vestige. The former lake. Playing my lyre. Praying for rain.

GATE 3

Heaven is marshland and desert and beach. Timely A train. Mansard rooftop sunrise (drunk). Sunset by the ocean (drunk, with you this time).

GATE 4

Driven to insanity by how much I needed. To fuck. Jumped turnstyles. Fooled guards. Made pacts with angels and demons. Snuck through too many gates for an orgasm. Sometimes a waste. More often, a story.

GATE 5

Underage and sneaking in through the back with the DJ or my fake. Picking up strangers by reading their palm. I'm better with cards, but there's something about locking eyes with someone. Grabbing hold. Starting the conversation. Whispering. *Your love line vibrates in a*

PUERTA 1

El océano sobre grandes casas. Tu camisa produce una suave onda en el agua. Aterriza a mis pies. El aire que deja atrás es una estela de lavanda. No podría amarte más. Intentaré.

PUERTA 2

El resort de casas rodantes para adultos mayores en el que me encuentro viviendo está rodeado por un lago. Hasta la llegada del huracán, estaba seco. Viéndolo hincharse de nuevo con vida después de la tormenta, me acuerdo del día anterior. De pie ante el árido vestigio. El que solía ser lago. Tocando mi lira. Rezando por lluvia.

PUERTA 3

El cielo es tierra pantanosa y desierto y playa. El oportuno tren de la Línea A. El amanecer desde la mansarda (ebrix). El atardecer en el mar (ebrix, esta vez contigo).

PUERTA 4

Enloquecí por lo mucho que necesitaba. Coger. Salté torniquetes. Engañé guardias. Hice pactos con ángeles y demonios. Salté demasiadas rejas por un orgasmo. Algunas veces un desperdicio. La mayoría de ellas, un cuento.

PUERTA 5

Menor de edad e infiltrándome por atrás con el DJ o con mi falsa identidad. eligiendo extrañxs para leerles la palma. Soy mejor con las cartas de tarot, pero hay algo sobre la mirada. Sobre aferrarse. Empezar la conversación. Susurrar. *Tu línea de amor está vibrando de*

particular way.

GATE 6

I played with becoming a psychiatrist. Listening to other people's problems. Prescribing a solution. I devolved. Psychology. Psychic practice. Journalism. I think what I like is talking to people.

GATE 7

Purity as gate. The way you suck. Me, waiting for my turn next to the metal tray. *Clang clang* the credit card. In the back the boys. Taking too long. I say *it destroyed my sister nation*. I gum it and lick it when nobody's watching. The boys call it "pure." The portal opens at the center of the dance floor. A vague haze. A cute boy. He likes to grab me. I like being held and turned. Metallic as a handle.

GATE 8

I would have an orgy with Orpheus, Dionysus, Apollo, and the "you" of the poem. In my dreams, I love "you" enough to go to hell and return without looking back. The "you" is a god, too. Just not one I'd kick out of bed.

GATE 9

Of course, what a stupid idea! To ponder New York City. As a space abandoned. There are those times. When you're walking back from the party. When everyone is forced inside. Walking the streets feels unsettling. I feel a minor god marching up Broadway in the night.

manera particular.

PUERTA 6

Jugué a convertirme en psiquiatra. Escuchar los problemas de otras personas. Prescribir una solución. Retrocedí. Psicología. Práctica psiquiátrica. Periodismo. Creo que lo que me gusta es hablar con la gente.

PUERTA 7

La pureza como portal. La manera en la que chupas. Yo, esperando mi turno junto a la bandeja de metal. *Clang clang* la tarjeta de crédito. Atrás los chicos. Demorando demasiado. Dije que *eso destruyó a mi nación hermana*. Me lo llevo a las encías y lo lamo cuando nadie está mirando. Los chicos lo llaman *puro*. El portal se abre al centro de la pista de baile. Una vaga neblina. Un chico lindo. Le gusta agarrarme. Me gusta que me sostengan y me den vueltas. Metálico como una manija.

PUERTA 8

Tendría una orgía con Orfeo, Dionisio, Apolo, y el *Tú* del poema. En mis sueños, amo a *Tú* lo suficiente como para ir y volver del infierno sin mirar atrás. *Tú* es un dios también. Solo que no es uno al cual echaría de mi cama.

PUERTA 9

¡Por supuesto, qué idea tan estúpida! Imaginar a Nueva York. Como un espacio abandonado. Existen esos momentos. Cuando regresas caminando de una fiesta. Cuando todos son forzados a entrar. Caminar por las calles se siente intranquilo. Me siento un dios menor marchando por Brooklyn durante la noche.

GATE 10

The 9/11 Memorial is sandwiched between The Oculus and Brookfield Place. An avant-garde building housing a mall. A mall. It took six years to visit. I was surprised to see how expansive it was. Names inscribed in metal. An eternal waterfall into the ground. Tears and blood and water shed here. Weigh down the air. In some of the names. White roses lie dewy with rain.

GATE 11

In an earlier draft, here lay a line about fathers. When I was crueler, I thought I'd make a point about an immigrant experience. Not mine. This is me holding myself accountable. This is me memorializing the death of a thought. This is me saying I'm sorry. This is me marking a grave. This is me laying a wreath at the gate of a grand mausoleum.

GATE 12

Abuelo Oscar was a fan of the Yankees. Mamí always wore his old baseball cap. Blue, disheveled by time. Too many field trips and visits to the beach. She understands the sentimentality of objects. The damage they carry. She is the first writer I have ever known.

GATE 13

We cling to broken objects because of a precarious balance between the practical and the divine.

PUERTA 10

El Monumento del 9/11 se encuentra intercalado entre El Oculus y Brookfield Place. Un edificio avant-garde que aloja un mall. Un mall. Tomó seis años visitarlo. Me sorprendió ver lo amplio que era. Nombres inscritos en metal. Una eterna cascada hacia la nada. Lágrimas y sangre y agua se derramaron aquí. Sobrecargan el aire. En algunos de los nombres. Rosas blancas rociadas con lluvia.

PUERTA 11

En un borrador previo, aquí yacía una línea sobre padres. Cuando era más cruel, pensé que mencionaría alguna experiencia como inmigrante. No una mía. Este soy yo asumiendo mi responsabilidad. Este soy yo conmemorando la muerte de un pensamiento. Este soy yo pidiendo perdón. Este soy yo marcando una tumba. Este soy yo dejando una corona de flores a la entrada de un mausoleo.

PUERTA 12

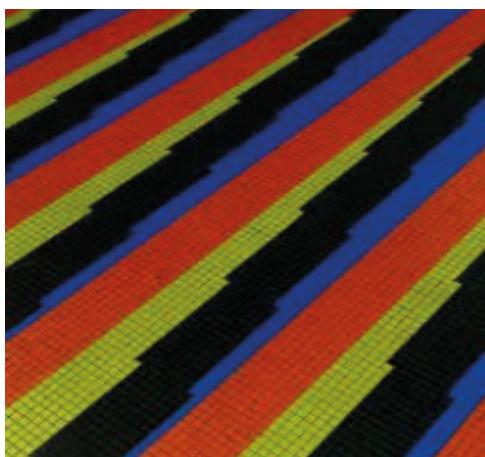
El abuelo Oscar era fan de los Yankees. Mami siempre usaba su vieja gorra de béisbol. Azul y desaliñada por el tiempo. Demasiadas excursiones y visitas a la playa. Ella entiende la sentimentalidad de los objetos. El daño que acarrean. Ella es la primera escritora que conocí en mi vida.

PUERTA 13

Nos aferramos a objetos rotos por el precario balance entre lo práctico y lo divino.

GATE 14

Americans watch their country burn. From inside a laptop. Pay close attention. To people who did not have the chance. To mourn. Their survival. Country burning from afar. To watch your country burn from outside. Headlines and Whatsapp messages. To watch it burn. Coldly. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha invokes Melpomene. Asks her *suffice*. The smoke is in my lungs. How much it hurts. The people I love. *Suffice, Melpomene*. Is it you? Is my antennae on straight? Is the fire in my veins next time? *Suffice*. Conjure. Dictate. Sob. Shrugged it off. Out of grief and flame. A picture.



Cromointerferencia de color aditivo, 1974-1978 (Detail)

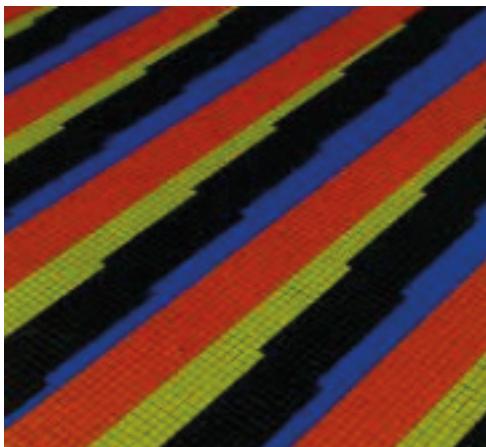
Carlos Cruz Diez. Aeropuerto Internacional Simón Bolívar (Maiquetía, Venezuela).

GATE 15

AMERICAN GOOGLE SEARCH: “CARACAS” |
12.09.20, 12:02 PM

PUERTA 14

Los estadounidenses ven a su país arder. Desde el interior de una laptop. Le ponen mucha atención. A personas que no tuvieron la oportunidad. De lamentar. Su propia supervivencia. País quemándose desde lejos. Ver a tu país quemándose desde afuera. Titulares y mensajes de Whatsapp. Verlo quemándose. Fríamente. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha invoca a Melpómene. Le dice *basta*. El humo está en mis pulmones. Cuánto lastima. A las personas que amo. *Basta, Melpómene.* ¿Eres tú? ¿Estará mi antena derecha? ¿Será el fuego en mis venas la próxima vez? *Basta.* Conjura. Dicta. Solloza. Se encogen mis hombros. De pena y lumbre. Una imagen.



Cromointerferencia de color aditivo, 1974-1978 (Detail)

Carlos Cruz Diez. Aeropuerto Internacional Simón Bolívar (Maiquetía, Venezuela).

PUERTA 15

**“CARACAS”, BÚSQUEDA DE GOOGLE EN
ESTADOS UNIDOS | 12.09.20, 12:02 PM**

After Carlos Cruz Diez

[REDACTED] CRUMBLING [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] HOME [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

ELECTION [REDACTED]
A CHARADE U.S. CONDEMNS
A 'CHARADE'

AS VENEZUELAN STARVE [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
ENTERTAINING [REDACTED]
PUBLIC [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

NEEDLESS DEATH ON MEAN STREETS [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

WHEN CARACAS WAS SAFE FROM TYRANNY

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

GET ME BACK [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Para Carlos Cruz Diez

[REDACTED] DESMORONADOS [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] HOGARES [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] ELECCIÓN [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] UNA BURLA [REDACTED] E.E.U.U.

CONDENA [REDACTED]

“BURLA” [REDACTED]

MIENTRAS VENEZOLANOS MUEREN DE

HAMBRE [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] ENTRETENIENDO [REDACTED]

AL PÚBLICO [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] UNA MUERTE INNECESARIA EN [REDACTED]

PELIGROSAS CALLES [REDACTED]

CUANDO CARACAS [REDACTED]

ESTABA A SALVO DE LA TIRANÍA [REDACTED]

LLÉVAME DE REGRESO [REDACTED]

TO

LOVED ONES

GATE 16

DESIRE

SILUETA

After Ana Mendieta and John Keats

gallery	tender	cumbia
bound	fire	salsa
museum	rough	light
rounds	high	protest
public	water	pre-marital
orgy	purple	guitar
dancefloor	red light	white fur
bathroom	election	paint
whipped	bodies	acrylic
wax	earth	sculpture
rooftop	stain	happy
picnic	soft	love
dive bar	hard	forever
graveyard	heaven	warm
airplane	hell	forever
couch	creek	enjoyed
cinema	river	forever
bed	disappeared	panting
stage	paint	young
more	happy, happy	love

A

SERES QUERIDOS

PUERTA 16

SILUETA

DEL

DESEO

Para Ana Mendieta y John Keats

galería	delicado	cumbia
destinado	fuego	salsa
museo	tosco	luz
rondas	drogado	protesta
público	agua	pre-marital
orgía	morado	guitarra
pista de baile	rojo	blanco
baño	elección	pintado
azotado	cuerpos	acrílic
cera	tierra	escultura
tejado	mancha	<i>dichoso</i>
picnic	suave	<i>amor</i>
bar local	duro	<i>por siempre</i>
cementerio	cielo	<i>ardiente</i>
avión	infierno	<i>jamás</i>
sofá	arroyo	<i>saciado</i>
cine	río	<i>por siempre</i>
cama	desaparecido	<i>anhelante</i>
escenario	pintado	<i>joven</i>
más	<i>dichoso, dichoso</i>	<i>amor</i>

GATE 17

I like how soft
Your hands are
The portals
You open
Within me
space-time
continues
Doesn't matter
Next to you
Rising like a giant
Over the mountains of the great cities
Caracas Bogotá Port of Spain
The great cities with mountains
My breath hissing as we slumber
Rising our breaths
Together the lungs
And the ventricles
The little intricacies of my body intact
Electric next to yours

GATE 18

It takes two years or two weeks to get your Venezuelan passport renewed. It's an expensive, lengthy process that puts you in another limbo. Too many hurdles for a piece of paper that affirms where you were born.

GATE 19

Because I have family members I met too long ago to remember and because they haven't eaten meat in

PUERTA 17

Me gusta la suavidad
De tus manos
Los portales que abres
Dentro de mí
El espacio, el tiempo
Continúa
Sin importar
Junto a ti
Alto como gigante
Sobre montañas de las grandes ciudades
Caracas, Bogotá, Puerto España
Las grandes ciudades montañosas
Mi respiración siseando al soñar
Elevándose
Juntos pulmones
Ventrículos
Las pequeñas complejidades de mi cuerpo intacto
Eléctrico junto al tuyo

PUERTA 18

Se necesitan dos años o dos semanas para renovar un pasaporte venezolano. Es un proceso caro y extenso que te pone en otro limbo. Demasiados obstáculos para un pedazo de papel que te afirma dónde naciste.

PUERTA 19

Porque tengo familiares que conozco desde que tengo memoria y porque ellos no han comido carne en meses y

months and because when I look up my country on the Internet I'm met with images of a lion starving to death instead of the Ávila or Salto Ángel and because it seems nobody except other Venezuelans care and because I was raised elsewhere and because that doesn't make me an expat and because it does make me an expat and because that word stops making sense in my mouth and because I cannot exist where I first drew breath or where I breathe and because in my breathlessness I exhaled a third land.

GATE 20

“Sabes que no te quiero, ni te amo, te adoro.” Abuelita Teresa’s signature phrase. The Stone Roses’, too. Adoration and its contexts. Saints and grandchildren. Lovers and punks. Long-distance phone calls. I wanna be your dog. I wanna hold your hand one more time. *I wanna, I wanna, I wanna, I wanna be adored.* I wanna grow a tomato plant. I wanna feel like I lost you all at once instead of slowly. I want to know you’re okay, wherever you’ve landed.

GATE 21

I was in Paris the day Notre Dame burned down. I got in a fight with my lover about colonialism. He said we were Latinxs and the church deserved to burn. For the destruction of our ancestors. I thought of my Cuban friend who lived here. When she got lost, she used the spiral for guidance. I watched it fall from the back of a taxi crossing the Pont Royal. A pillar for a plume of flame.

GATE 22

And maybe I wasn't super flamboyant, but before I left I did fall in love with a boy. I made out with another one who made me wonder whether all boys kissed like dogs.

porque cuando busco a mi país en internet me encuentro con imágenes de leones famélicos en lugar de El Ávila o el Salto Ángel y porque parece que a nadie excepto a otrxs venezolanxs le importa y porque me crié en otro lugar y porque eso no me hace expatriadx y porque eso sí me hace expatriadx y porque esa palabra deja de tener sentido en mi boca y porque no puedo existir ni donde tomé mi primer aliento ni donde respiro ahora y porque en mi falta de aliento exhalé otra tierra.

PUERTA 20

Sabes que no te quiero, ni te adoro, yo te amo. La frase típica de Abuelita Teresa. La de The Stone Roses' también. Adoración y sus contextos. Santos y nietos. Amantes y punks. Llamadas a larga distancia. Quiero ser tu perro. Quiero tomar tu mano una vez más. *I wanna, I wanna, I wanna be adored.* Quiero cultivar tomates. Quiero sentir que te perdí de una vez en lugar de lentamente. Quiero saber que estás bien, dondequieras que hayas aterrizado.

PUERTA 21

Estaba en París el día en que Notre Dame se incendió. Discutí con mi pareja sobre colonialismo. Él dijo que somos latinxs y que la iglesia merece arder por la destrucción de nuestros ancestrxs. Yo pensé en mi amiga cubana que vivía ahí. Cuando se perdió, usó el espiral de la catedral para guiarla. Lo vi caer desde adentro de un taxi, cruzando el Pont Royal. Una torre. Un vacío. Una torre de fuego.

PUERTA 22

Y quizás yo nunca fui súper extravagante, pero antes de irme sí me enamoré de un chico. Me besé con otro que me hizo cuestionar si todos los chicos besaban como perros.

GATE 23

You were awful to me. I had to pursue you. You had a long cock. I liked a challenge. You knew a lot about Russian futurism and finding PDFs on the dark web. My first experience with flexible gender. I flew to Chicago. I came back. Feelings didn't exist. In me. Three years since we've said happy birthday. I still think about sleeping on the deflated blow-up mattress. On my side.

GATE 24

GOD HATES FAGS

FAGS DOOM NATIONS

The Westboro Baptist Church hasn't changed their slogans. The font is recognizable as Congo Square or St. Louis Cathedral. Mardi Gras rages around us. I'm holding Erik's hand. He's uneasy. I'm drunk, courageous, angry. I catch beads from a balcony. I throw them so they land. I stand in front of the signs. I kiss Erik like you kiss when it feels final. I grab his hand steady. We push through the center.

GOD IS YOUR ENEMY

NO PEACE FOR THE WICKED

GATE 25

I loved kissing you because I didn't feel wrong when I did.

PUERTA 23

Fuiste horrible conmigo. Tuve que perseguirte. Tenías una verga grande. Me gustaba el desafío. Sabías mucho sobre el futurismo ruso y sobre encontrar PDFs en la dark web. Mi primera experiencia con el género flexible. Volé hasta Chicago. Regresé. Los sentimientos no existían. En mí. Tres años desde que nos dijimos feliz cumpleaños. Todavía pienso en dormir sobre el desinflado colchón de aire. De costado.

PUERTA 24

DIOS ODIA A LOS MARICONES

LOS MARICONES CONDENAN NACIONES

La Iglesia Bautista de Westboro no ha cambiado sus slogans. La letra se puede reconocer como Congo Square o la Catedral de St. Louis. Mardi Gras causa furor a nuestro alrededor. Estoy sujetando la mano de Erik. Él está inquieto. Yo, ebrix, valiente, enojadx. Atrapo collares con perlas falsas desde un balcón. Los lanzo para que caigan abajo. Me paro frente a los letreros. Le doy un beso a Erik como lo haces cuando sientes que será el último. Tomo su mano con firmeza. Empujamos hacia el centro.

DIOS ES TU ENEMIGO

NO HAY PAZ PARA LO PERVERSO

PUERTA 25

Amaba besarte porque hacerlo no se sentía mal.

GATE 26

I have thirty numbers blocked. Friends, lovers, debt collectors. Locked out. I still get calls from one “Scam Likely.” The reactionary hang-up has become a sort of ritual, a sighting of someone peeking over a line they can only hope to cross. I know you get these scam calls too, nightmare rectangle buzzing in your pocket as you read this, Scam Likely breaking the spell of the text.

GATE 27

Creepy men watch my best friend’s Instagram story. Accost her on the street. I get cat-called for wearing red short-shorts. My ass looks great. The girls and I have a laugh. Those compliments are not tinged with death.

GATE 28

We’re walking back. On Gates Avenue. Stoned under the waning gibbous. We hold each other like myths. People in love. You kiss my neck under the red light later. I feel like a fearsome god. In life, Eros. In bed, Hades Hades *Hades Hades*.

GATE 29

Naked in bed listening to Ella Fitzgerald. Sticky from failure and comeuppance. Linoleum, lavender, wood and satin feel different on my flesh. The wall vibrates with jazz. *She walks like Sinatra walks.* She’s in my wallet. She’s two trains away. I’m in the new painting with nothing on except some orange juice and wayward seeds. This is before we clean my beard. After we hold each other for an hour. I forgot what it was like. To be held at

PUERTA 26

Tengo treinta números bloqueados. Amigxs, amantes, cobranzas. Fuera de mi alcance. Aún recibo llamadas de una *Possible Estafa*. Colgar como reacción se ha convertido en una especie de ritual, una mirada de alguien espiando sobre una línea que solo puede soñar con cruzar. Sé que también te llegan estas estafas al rectángulo zumbando en tu bolsillo mientras lees esto, *Possible Estafa* rompiendo el hechizo del texto.

PUERTA 27

Hombres asquerosos ven el Instagram de mi mejor amiga. Se le acercan en la calle. A mí se me acercan por usar shorts cortos de color rojo. Mi culo se ve estupendo. Las chicas y yo nos reímos. Aquellos cumplidos no están teñidos de muerte.

PUERTA 28

Caminamos de regreso. Por la Avenida Gates. Drogadxs bajo la gibosa menguante. Nos aferramos al otro como mitos de personas enamoradas. Luego besas mi cuello bajo la luz roja. Me siento como un dios temible. En vida, Eros. En la cama, *Hades Hades Hades Hades*.

PUERTA 29

Desnudx en la cama escuchando a Ella Fitzgerald. Pegajosx de fracaso y castigo divino. Linóleo, lavanda, madera y satín se sienten distinto en mi carne. La pared vibra con jazz. *Ella camina como camina Sinatra*. Ella está en mi billetera. Ella está a dos trenes. Estoy en su nuevo cuadro. Solo tengo puesto jugo de naranja y semillas rebeldes. Esto es antes de que limpiemos sus jugos de mi barba. Después de que nos abracemos por una hora. Olvidé cómo era. Recostarme sobre el pecho

the chest of a person who means it. I forgot to write the beautiful thing that came to me at sunset. Maybe this is better.

GATE 30

In my dreams you do not disappear from me forever by getting on a plane.

de alguien que lo sintiera de verdad. Olvidé escribir algo hermoso que se me ocurrió al atardecer. Quizás esto sea mejor.

PUERTA 30

En mis sueños tú no desapareces de mí para siempre al subirte a un avión.

Translator's Foreword

The title of Valeria Araya's collection is self-explanatory. A poet of the magical quotidian, these poems exhibit a wit and humility that I can only hope I was able to properly translate. *Places Without Poetry* deals in big emotions and their small contexts. There's an angst that comes from her complete surrender to The Muse. Araya is self-admittedly not a student of any school of poetry; she's well-read in the South American avant-garde such as Jorge Teillier and Alejandra Pizarnik, as well as more established voices like Gabriela Mistral. She is a staunch anti-Neruda poet, largely because of the institution he has come to represent in South America, in Chile, and in poetry at large. This inherent irreverence to form or tradition, a defiance and blunt honesty that defines her poems and her, couldn't be more crucial to understanding her highly-imagist work. It transmits as the best kind of simplicity, as a friend telling it how it is.

Araya's work maintains an irreverence that feels aged but young, light and willing to poke fun at itself and its dualities. I see the "young" of Araya's work in the sense of wonder so searingly locked in these poems. The lovers seem fresh, the fear and anxiety of city life and fears about going on a journey or taking a step are present as in "Andén". Like the stone tripping someone up at the end of "Números irracionales", she's good at conveying hope and its costs, in language as accessible as the situations it portrays. One of her "younger" poems, "Al final, escribir es una excusa para embellecer casas de madera", hones in on a deeply important idea of finding beauty in the quotidian.

The "ancient" you can find in her subversions of Biblical and Neo-Classical themes. I think about the Narcissus reference in "Olvidar algo es recordar otra cosa" or the

entirety of “Génesis” a beautiful and surreal feminist take on the Biblical story of Adam & Eve where she is born gripping his rib only to dip it in ink and “birth a couple / Love poems”. Set in the origin of the world, this “place without poetry” is where the collection gets its title, and where we find the core of her oeuvre: finding poetry where there is none, birthing love poems from a rib.

Araya’s work trades in aphorisms injected with a bit of hope, tender as they are bitter. It’s not a bad way to write the crumbling world. In fact, it’s the only way to get through it.

VALERIA ARAYA

EN LUGARES NO POÉTICOS

Olvidar algo es recordar otra cosa

Como cortar la lluvia con un cuchillo
En secreto a veces nos despojamos del resto
Afuera, el viento golpea las ramas del árbol favorito de
alguien mientras pienso
No quiero desaparecer, quiero cambiar
Verter la esencia en un molde nuevo y beber
directamente del Lete
esperando sentada en la orilla
olvidar todo aquello que desprecié

(Todo aquello que desprecié es también aquello
que más amé)

Quizás todavía pueda expulsar el
veneno con una lágrima

Quedose el alma herida
en el reflejo del río

supe que Narciso nunca
alcanzaría mi semblante

Semejante horror el mío al descubrir
que los ojos propios

siempre contarán la
misma historia

**translated from the spanish by
E.R. Pulgar**

PLACES WITHOUT POETRY

To forget one thing is to remember another

Like cutting the rain with a knife

Secretly sometimes we strip ourselves of the rest

Outside wind slaps the branch of someone's favorite tree

And I think

I don't want to disappear I want to change

Pour myself into a new shape

Drink straight from the Lethe

Sitting crouched upon the shore

Forgetting all the things I hate

(Everything I've hated, everything I've loved)

Maybe I can still expel this poison with
one tear

Lost soul wounds falling in the reflection

I knew Narcissus did not caress his
face

I was horrified to discover my
eyes

Will always tell the
same story

El poema que nunca escribí

Hello, hello, goodbye

Todo lo he vivido para contártelo algún día
He protegido con valor ante el olvido
En el camión de basura un vaso de agua
Y un poco de arroz
El amor de tu vida a veces se detiene bajo la lluvia
Todas las puertas abren hacia afuera cuando miramos
desde el mismo lugar Cuando empuñamos la pluma
para escribir los mismos versos de siempre ¡Y es que me
gustaría que no me olvidaras!

Cualquier camino te llevaría hacia mi mano
Sendero de preciosas piedras expectantes
Cada día morirá una mejor versión de nosotros
Una carta para siempre guardada
En la punta de mi lengua
Te amo, dice el verso
Pero al final no escribo nada
¡Olvida lo dicho y toma tu rumbo!
Nuestro amor solo sirve para decir adiós

The Poem I Never Wrote

Hello, hello, goodbye
I have lived everything just to tell you about it
I have protected with valor
In the garbage truck
A glass of water
And a bit of rice
The love of your life sometimes stops beneath rain
All doors open outward when we look from the same place
When we push our pen to write the same old verses
How I'd love if you never forgot about me
Any path will guide you to my hand
An expectant road lined with precious stones
Every day a new version of us will die
A letter never sent
On the tip of my tongue
The verse should say I love you
But I refuse to write it down
Forget what I've said
Go your own way
Our love only works
When we say goodbye

Andén

Metrónomos que no coinciden con mi aliento condensado
Se despierta un niño enfermo deseando
oír una canción
La culpa siempre dice la verdad aunque deje perplejo a
sus oyentes
No se responde ni se calla ante confesión semejante Lo
cierto es que esta ciudad se está hundiendo
El bosquejo de un sol naciente en la ambigüedad del cielo
es una mentira cálida con aroma de hogar
Esperamos sentados a que nos caliente los pies
O nos abra los ojos
Mientras la lluvia abraza a la nostalgia de los que callan
Y se quedan en el andén por miedo a llegar a su destino

Subway Platform

Metronomes beats don't align
With my condensed breath
A sick child wakes up wishing
To hear a song
Guilt always tells the truth
Despite it leaving listeners perplexed
It does not answer or silence itself before a confession
I am sure the city is sinking
The sketch of a dawning sun in the ambiguous sky
Is a warm lie that smells like home
We wait beneath hoping to warm our feet
Or open our eyes wider
While rain embraces the silent nostalgia
Of those who wait silently on the platform
Afraid of reaching
Their destination

Con el pecho agitado

¿La creación de las horas te calma o asfixia?

Pequeño jardín acuarelado

Desbordándose en el pétalo que alguien más pisará

Recoger una piedra y hacerla amuleto

o tirarla al mar

Quizá un adulto sepa a dónde van esos días

solo la serpiente sabe explicar su siseo

perder el control de las letras y ahogar el aroma

de un poema

Una voz se rompe en direcciones inexactas:

Tomando el aire con las manos y guardándolo en su boca

salió a dar un paseo por la ciudad

Agitated chest

Does the creation of the hours choke or calm you
A modest watercolor garden
Spilling onto petals somebody else will step on
Picking up a stone and making it an amulet
Or tossing it into the sea
An adult might know
Where the days go
Only the snake can know its hiss
Lose control of the words
Drown the scent of a poem
A voice breaks in jagged directions
Takes air into its hands
Guards its mouth
Strolls the city

Al final escribir es una excusa para embellecer casas de madera

Yo no soy poeta ni escritora
Mis manos no convierten nada en oro
A veces recogen leña cuando hace frío
Cuando la calle está vacía y la radio suena más fuerte
Gestos incómodos de quien no sabe bien cómo existir
A veces escribo porque no puedo hacer otra cosa
Hundirme a gusto en mis lágrimas de trapo
O mentir sobre la casa más bonita que he visto
La casa más bonita que he visto estaba hecha de madera
Abandonada en la entrada del bosque más sombrío que he visto
Pero irradiaba una nostalgia de quien alguna vez perteneció
Un gato descansaba en el techo estropeado
Cerrando los ojos ante el sonido de las cigarras

**In the end, writing is an excuse to make wooden houses
beautiful**

I am not a poet or a writer
My hands can't make things golden
Sometimes I pick up wood when it's cold
When the street is empty and the radio blares strong
Uncomfortable gestures of people who don't know
How to exist well
I write because I can't do anything else
Besides drown in these ragged tears
Or lie about the most beautiful house I've seen
Made of wood
Abandoned on the outskirts of a dark forest
Radiating the nostalgia of its last owner
A cat resting on its rotting roof
Closing its eyes to the hum of the cicadas

Números irracionales

Una ballena fue encontrada en Canadá llorando por ver a su madre

El sol se oculta en la sombra de las flores y se refiere al mar como un viejo

amigo

Grita, corazón, velando por la estrella más sucia del cielo

Nadie pretende admirar a quien conoce bien

Hundo los pies en el mismo lugar

un lienzo blanco es un lienzo negro, pienso

El camino que no tomes siempre será el correcto

Verás jóvenes a quienes lloran al costado del lago

Encendiendo pequeños fuegos artificiales que alumbrarán tu rostro

tu sombra flameando entre vítores de esperanza

Pero incluso en un cuarto ruidoso oirías la caída de una aguja

Así que bien podrías haber escogido cualquier camino

La ignorancia nos ata los zapatos para salir a correr

y tropezar con una pequeña piedra camino a casa

Irrational Numbers

They found a whale in Canada crying for its mother
The sun sets in the shadow of the flowers and calls to the sea
Like an old friend
It pines for the sky's filthiest star
Nobody pretends to admire those they know well
I sink my feet in the same place
A white canvas is a black canvas
The unmarked road will always be the right one
You'll see young people who cry at the edge of the lake
Lighting small fireworks that illuminate your face your
Shadow flickers across cheers of hope

Even in a noisy room you'll hear a pin drop
So in the end you could have taken any path
Ignorance ties our laces together before we go running
And trips on a small rock on the way home

Génesis

Las marejadas devolvieron la arena despojando a la
herida de su cobijo
El sacrificio de la niña que anhelaba convertirse en el sol
Sagrado sermón de sonrisa tendida
abarca el tamaño de una mentira sin confesar
Desearía dejar de culpar a la distancia entre las olas
En lugares no poéticos nace la mujer de barro
empuñando la costilla del primer hombre agasajado
La entinta y empieza a parir un par de poemas
de amor mientras un extranjero
busca permiso para llorar con la boca cosida

Genesis

The swells devolve the sand as it strips
Off its injured shelter
The sacrifice of a girl who longed to become the sun
Sacred sermon of a stretched out smile
That encompasses the size of a lie unconfessed
I want to stop blaming the distance between the tides
In places without poetry the earth
Woman is born grasping the tender rib
Of the First Man
For entertainment she covers it in ink
And births a couple
Love poems while a stranger
Seeks permission to cry
With his mouth sewn up

Hijo pródigo

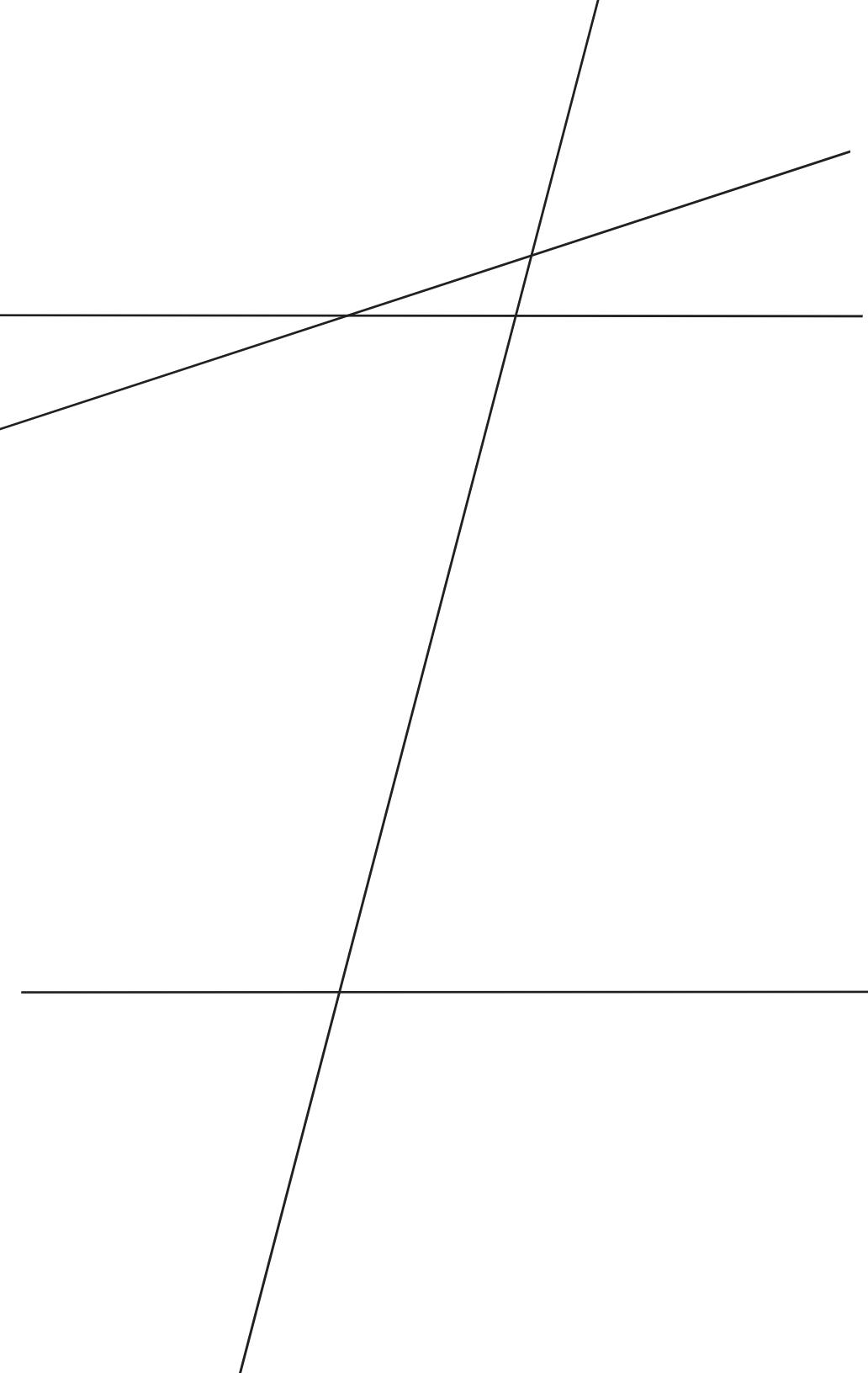
Fantasmas de peces que buscan su río en la infancia
Recogemos las piezas que forman la noche más larga del año
Los ojos de Dios se desorbitan
Las nubes se desvanecen en el rostro de quien espera aplausos
De mi palma no habrá suficiente de nada
A menos que tome la mano de alguien más
¿Una rosa sin espinas puede seguir siendo una rosa?
Como un dedo sin uña o poesía sin pretensión
Un verso es un verso es un verso
Y podemos afirmar que así es
Pero un verso es el fantasma de un pez que puede o no hallar su río
y el primogénito será siempre el culpable

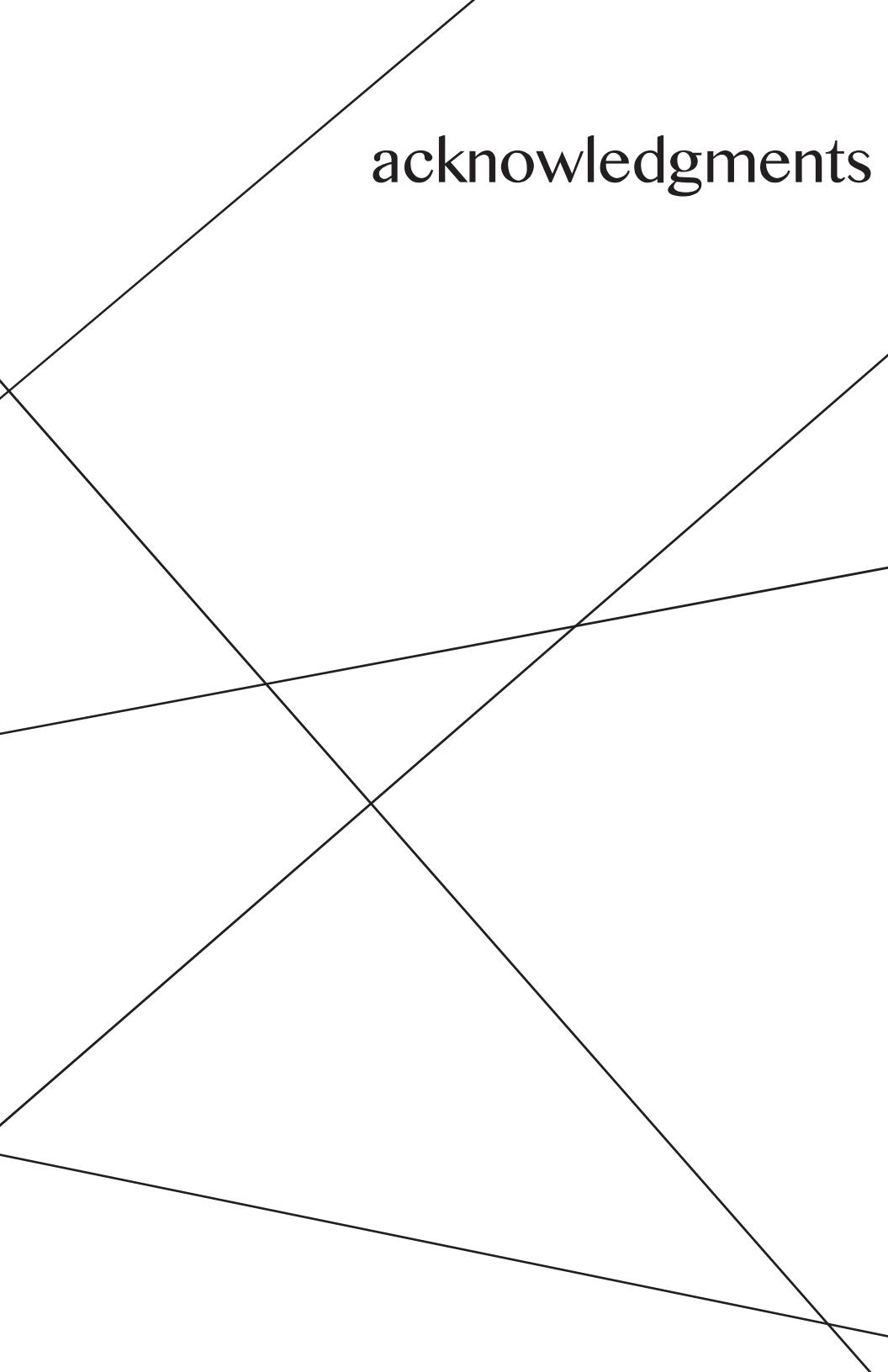
Nunca se debe confiar en quien no halle razón para cometer pecado

Prodigal Son

Fish phantoms who seek their river in boyhood
We pick up the pieces that form the longest night of the year
The eyes of God fall out of orbit
Clouds dissipate into the face of anyone seeking praise
From my palms which will never yield enough of anything
Unless I take another's hand
Can a rose with no thorns stay a rose
Like a finger without a nail or a poem without pretensions
A verse is a verse is a verse
And maybe that's true
But a verse is the fish phantom that can or cannot find its river
And his ancestors will always be the guilty ones

You should never trust someone who cannot find reason to sin





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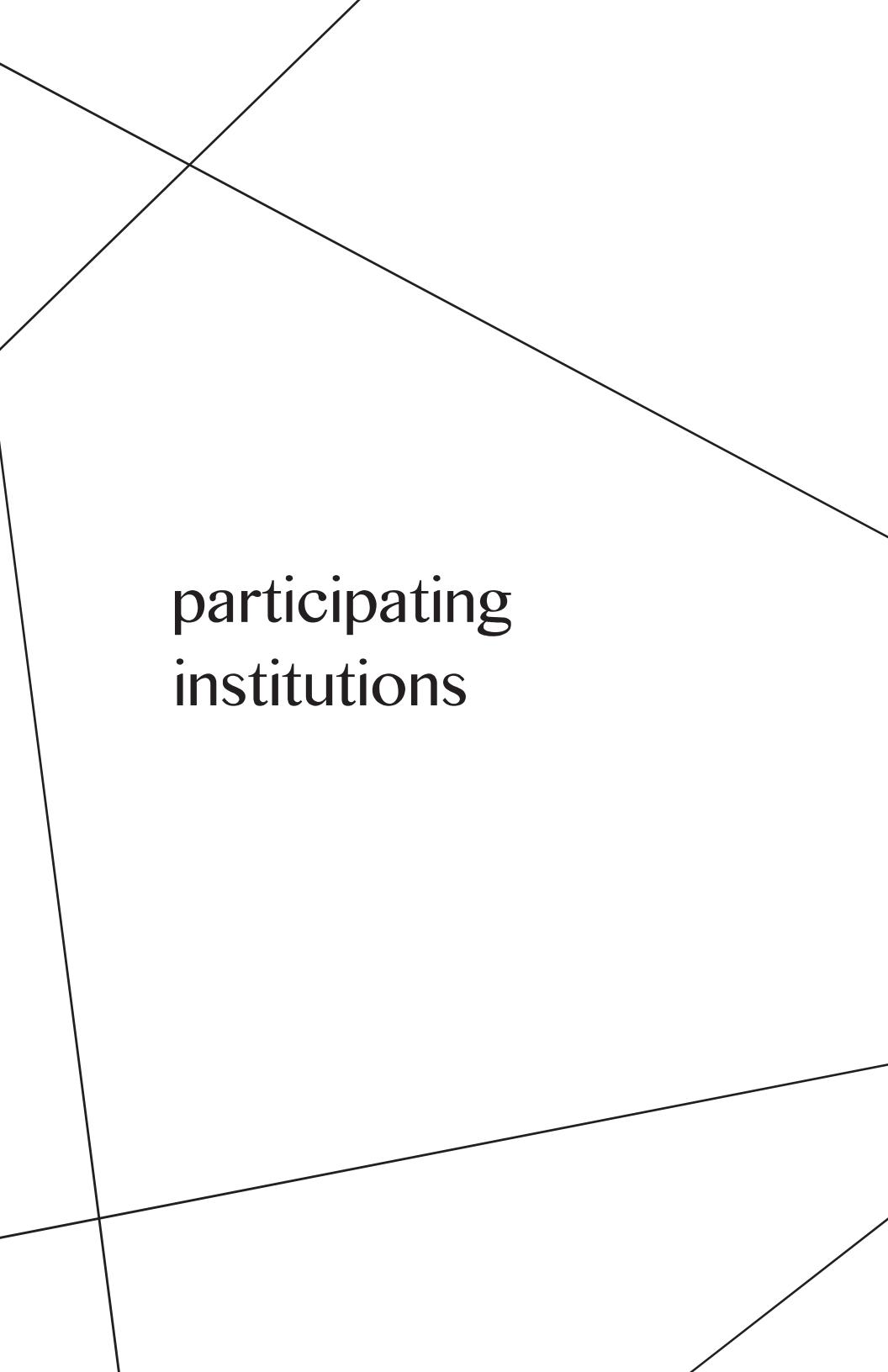
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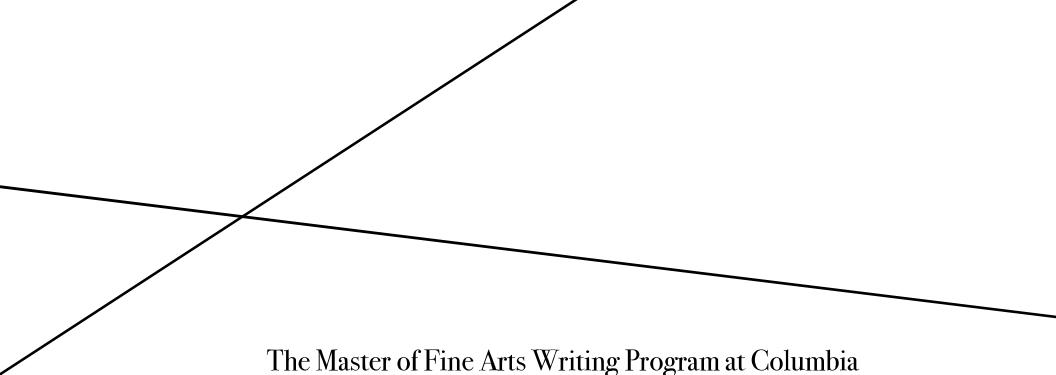
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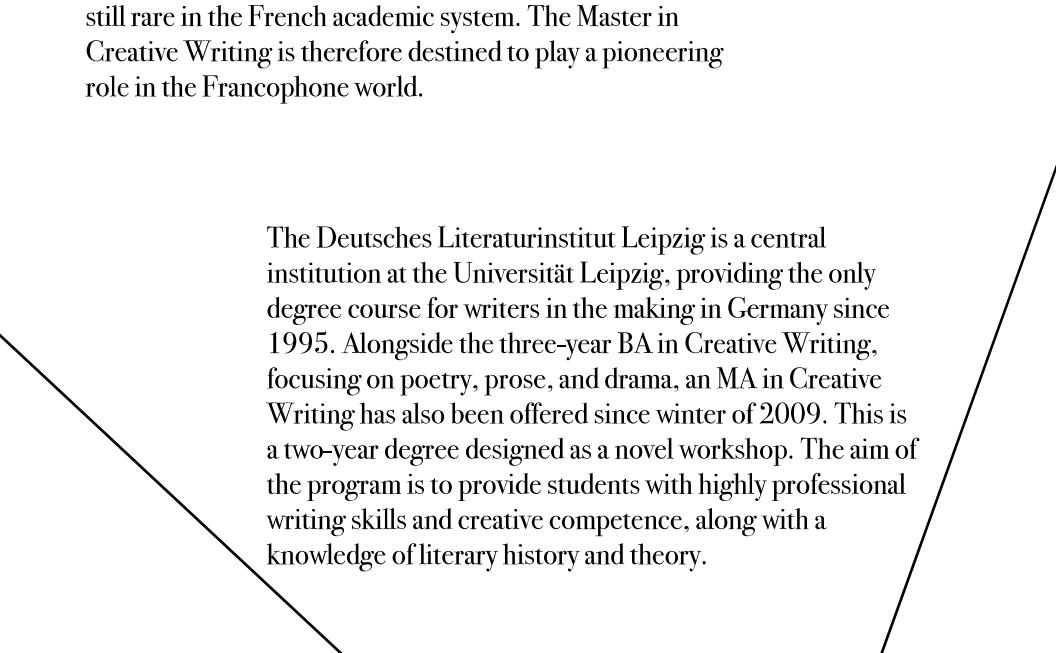
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participating
institutions

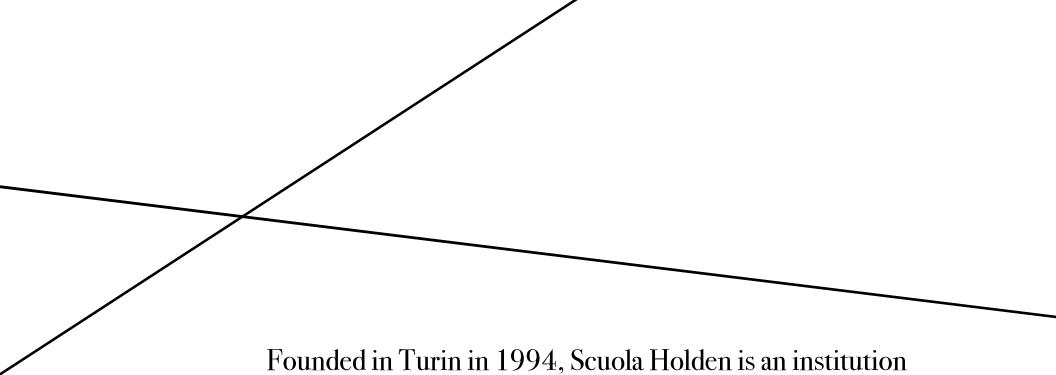


The Master of Fine Arts Writing Program at Columbia University School of the Arts was founded in 1967, and is one of the foremost creative writing programs in the United States. Students in the Program pursue degrees in fiction, poetry, or creative nonfiction, with the option to pursue a joint course of study in literary translation. The Program is distinguished by the intellectual rigor of its curriculum, the eminence of many of the writers on faculty, and the significant number of its alumni who have gone on to become eminent authors in their own right.



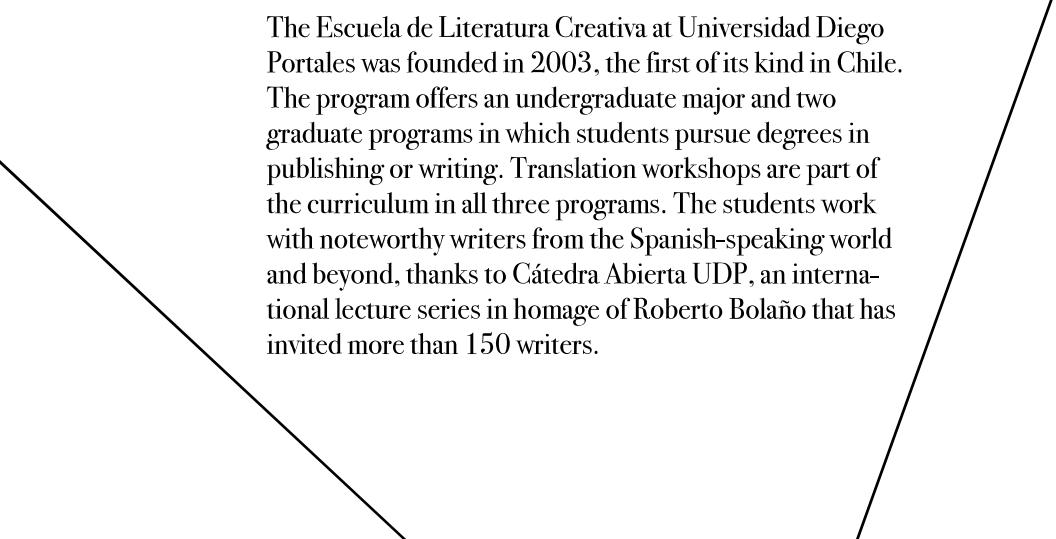
The Master in Creative Writing at Université Paris 8 was founded in September 2013, with the goal of allowing students the opportunity to start or continue a work of literary creation. While programs of this type are common, especially in the United States and Great Britain, they are still rare in the French academic system. The Master in Creative Writing is therefore destined to play a pioneering role in the Francophone world.

The Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig is a central institution at the Universität Leipzig, providing the only degree course for writers in the making in Germany since 1995. Alongside the three-year BA in Creative Writing, focusing on poetry, prose, and drama, an MA in Creative Writing has also been offered since winter of 2009. This is a two-year degree designed as a novel workshop. The aim of the program is to provide students with highly professional writing skills and creative competence, along with a knowledge of literary history and theory.



Founded in Turin in 1994, Scuola Holden is an institution devoted to training storytellers through courses spanning multiple disciplines of writing and performing arts. Scuola Holden also serves as a cultural production center in Italy by way of collaborations with schools, universities, book-shops, publishers, and festivals throughout Italy and Europe.

Established in 2011, the MFA in Creative Writing at Instituto Vera Cruz focuses in two areas: Fiction and Nonfiction, with secondary concentrations in Writing for Children and Young Adults and Creative Writing Methodology. Vera Cruz was founded in 1963 and started offering undergraduate and graduate courses in 2005. The MFA has 80 students now enrolled in an intensive two-year course, with a faculty of award-winning and recognized writers. It is among the most renowned in Brazil.



The Escuela de Literatura Creativa at Universidad Diego Portales was founded in 2003, the first of its kind in Chile. The program offers an undergraduate major and two graduate programs in which students pursue degrees in publishing or writing. Translation workshops are part of the curriculum in all three programs. The students work with noteworthy writers from the Spanish-speaking world and beyond, thanks to Cátedra Abierta UDP, an international lecture series in homage of Roberto Bolaño that has invited more than 150 writers.

