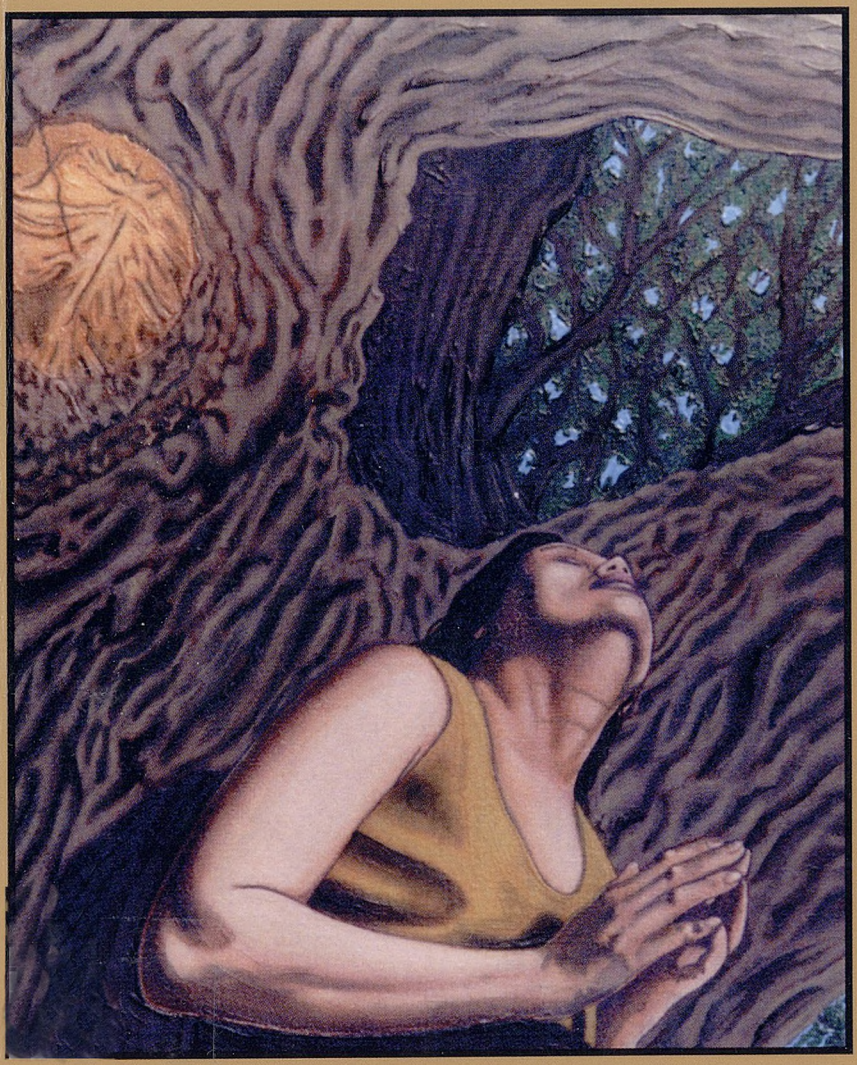
BURNING CARTOGRAPHY



POETRY BY NONI BENEGAS

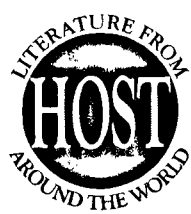
TRANSLATED BY NOËL VALIS

Burning Cartography

Burning Cartography

by Noni Benegas

Translated and with an introduction by
Noël Valis



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Introduction

Let us begin with a mapmaker, the mapmaker of the first poem in this collection:

There once was a mapmaker who delicately included the travelers themselves in the routes that she traced. Thus, the resinous vestiges of a trafficker in oils spilled across the charted surface; a much bosomed lady creaking in crinoline brought to mind an inebriate María Malibrán who would have spun on her heels had she stepped on something Czech. Alice in Wonderland was visiting other places, and of course, from this comparison arose the beautiful sounds of language: "ay" "uy" "so little," etc. In general the journeys were infinite, and in particular, they acquired a musky-sweet caramel taste of the Greek seas. She squeezed coffers into the angles, but these melancholy things never suspected there might be a solution hidden inside; hinges and dubious rings, teeth and still more skulls, can openers from the space age, caps and dolls especially, toothpicks, turpentine, hares, meadows, carpets and dates, and even Don José surprised by so much majestic stalking of the lovely dame nitwit.

This prose poem comes from Noni Benegas's first book of poetry, *Argonautica*, which was published in Barcelona in 1984. Noni, who is Argentinian, has lived in Spain since 1977 and is a citizen of both countries. She knows what it is to travel, to make the journey back and forth between cultures, between one's past and one's present, between the everyday world and dreams. Her books have names that also speak of journeys: *Argonautica*, *The Raft of the Medusa*, *Burning Cartography*. The first summons forth the Greek grammarian Apollonius of Rhodes' epic story of Jason and the Argonauts' quest for the Golden Fleece; the second, the disastrous shipwreck vividly recreated in Géricault's painting from 1819. Another of her books is called *Fragments from an Unknown Diary*, a record of another kind of journey.

She is familiar with the map of the world. But it is a different map we read in the poem cited above. José María Valverde in the prologue to *Argonautica* calls her poetry visionary; yet he also detects an unusual note of humor in it, a quality that in her later poetry especially could be called a form of cosmic irony. In "Mapmaker" different universes collide but there is no apocalypse. The cosmos continues. We simply do not understand it. It is filled with enigmatic objects from the everyday world: with hinges and rings, teeth and skulls, can openers and dolls. Quotidian, they are nonetheless beautiful, particularly as juxtaposed here. They cause surprise; they have unexpected qualities and provide hidden solutions, but like the coffers in the poem, we never suspect what might be revealed in what surrounds us. Which is also ourselves.

In this map everything is included, even the travelers. The poem begins deceptively, with a fairy-tale narrative opening: "There once was a mapmaker." Noni plays off readers' immediate recognition of this kind of beginning; we are primed for the special, insular world of storytelling, of welcome fantasy. But then she fractures the fairy tale, with odd juxtapositions and inclusions. The first deliberately jarring note is the travelers themselves: a trafficker in oils, a much bosomed lady, Alice in Wonderland, and Don José.

Many of these references are cultural and literary. The oils are also paintings. The much bosomed lady recalls the celebrated nineteenth-century Spanish mezzo-soprano, María Malibrán. And alongside Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, the seventeenth-century Spanish playwright Lope de Vega's dame nitwit, or *dama boba*. Such allusions reinforce the notion that not only are maps artificial constructions, but so too are the ideas that inform them. If an ordinary map contains self-proclaimed countries and cities, Noni Benegas's poem suggests that people make their own maps, charted surfaces that are both general and particular, that at once contain the collective history of the world and the private stories of individual lives. Thus she says: "In general the journeys were infinite, and in particular, they acquired a musky-sweet caramel

taste of the Greek seas." The spacing that brackets the phrase "and in particular" underlines how maps and journeys can be conceived as something expected and unexpected, the same yet different. The presence of the travelers themselves in the routes being traced changes the appearance of maps, provokes the unexpected, for no map can remain static and fixed with travelers swarming all over it.

This wonderful poem opens Noni's first book *Argonautica*, but it also struck me as a beautifully appropriate preface to this anthology, as an invitation to join the travelers of her map and chart the rivers, oceans, mountains, cities, and people of her poetry. Everything in these poems points to a geography of writing. "Mapmaker" itself suggests not only that writing is a kind of map but that language, whether on the page or in the air, in coffers or on the Greek seas, makes maps of our lives. Thus she writes that "Alice in Wonderland was visiting other places, and of course, from this comparison arose the beautiful sounds of language: 'ay' 'uy' 'so little,' etc." The phrasing turns on the elegance of irony, since we are not certain ultimately what comparison she refers to, but we remember that Alice's adventures alarmingly change in size and occupy spaces of different shapes and dimensions.

The world is both small and immense in this poetry. It may be a bureaucrat who knows nothing but his feet clattering methodically on stairs and disappears in producing a right angle with a corner (*The Ministry*). It may be nothing but a door: "And when one who is the door of the other / opens, / the precious contents crumble" (*Door*). Or then again, the universe: "The camellia sliver in the wake / of the boat at night / when the petal draws back / a trembling universe / like the line of flotation" (*A Flower*). In all these examples, the map of the world shivers and eludes our grasp; it disappears into a corner, crumbles upon opening, or trembles like the ever-changing line of flotation.

There is no fixed point in the poetry of Noni Benegas. One may enter at any point, only to discover, as Gertrude Stein

famously said, "there is no there there." The there Stein could not find was her childhood home in Oakland, California. The journey back to childhood and out of it haunts much of Noni's poetry, reminding us that "destiny is only the dense residue of childhood," as Rilke said. In *Fragments from an Unknown Diary*, writing "wants to fly, free from the anguish of families, inexplicable, inextricable" ("She wants to flee toward the calm"). This same motif appears in one of her most intense poems, "The Raft of the Medusa," which fuses childhood with the horrifying image of violent death and destruction reflected in a series of allusions, beginning with the Medusa's calamitous shipwreck in 1816 and ending with "eight heavy kilos to bury Rimbaud /knee deep in childhood." The poem begins and ends with a mercantile metaphor, in which childhood must be negotiated and freedom from that childhood purchased.

In a later poem, "Inutile," she builds on a series of word associations, in which a stream of language plays on similar sounds and disparate meanings, old words and invented words, and underlines the intimate, necessary linkage between language, memory and childhood. "Inutile / insolent / insociable / insecure filthy," she begins, as though exorcising herself from the very thoughts driving this poem. Then there is papa: "papa loved / papa pretty / papa talk / papa love / papa always," followed a few lines later with a long series of mama-associations, which begin: "mama suppressed / mama scolded / mama twisted / mama out" and end with: "mama recuperate / mama leftover / mama rags / mama mummy / mama whine / mama fate / mama loving / mama late." These remarkable pairings are at once Freudian and infantile, mimicking free association and baby talk, but surpassing both.

As this and all her poems show, this is writerly poetry, with an insistence on both the primacy and ultimate inadequacy of language as a form of communication. As she herself observes about the work of women poets in Spain during the last two decades, "it seems that language is stammering, but in reality what it is doing is losing its former, seamless eloquence, in favor of a caesura, or break, dictated by questioning and doubting that words

mean what a writer says." In the same vein, she says that many women poets "prefer minimal, quotidian images rather than totalizing metaphors, the description of the futile or provisional rather than the 'memorable' line." Like the writing of Olvido García Valdés, Chantal Maillard, Graciela Baquero, and others who appear in Noni's anthology of women poets, her own poetry struggles with the defining structures of grammar, while fusing colloquial with traditionally poetic language, technical terms with an older, pre-modern mindset.[1]

Thus, a number of her poems focus on writing itself. For example:

She does not know how to write. And thinks that to write presupposes a freedom previous to writing which causes it to float and fly like a soul suspended in air. Free. She sees life all around her and understands it: she spells the letters of life she sees, but does not record it. It is paper like paste, white magma before becoming paper. It is that paste. Where she spells letters, like someone who chews without teeth and doesn't swallow or eat, doesn't digest or enjoy. Gums and paste.

But it isn't like that, it is much less real.

Suddenly an image crosses her mind which isn't actually that, barely a plaster cast of something intuited, and then she sees. She sees the reasons, the causes, the motivations, but not even that. All at once she understands a situation. She seems to understand, and everything fits then. Maybe she ought to write it down, record what she saw in a flash. What is behind the acts, unattainable. And the world would possess an order.

Here, Noni reflects on the terror of a blank piece of paper, the terror all writers face, but she does so with that cosmic irony that first considers the alternative of writing without actually writing. But if this is writing, it is also life. As she observes elsewhere, the poet "tries to connect the inner, blind voices that have not yet seen

the light, with the words that aim to thread them together and put them down on paper; so there is no separation therefore between art and life: writing is conceived as a form of life" (Introd., *Ellas tienen la palabra*, pp. 74-75).

In the above prose poem found in *Fragments from an Unknown Diary*, life is spelled out letter by letter as though it were writing. Yet it is not recorded (while being recorded), because whatever life, or writing, is, it is "paper like paste, white magma before becoming paper." It is "gums and paste," masticated material. The literal stuff of life that, though it may be said, does not appear real. The text takes us into the dual process of conceiving a poem while derealizing life. Both, however, end up as scaffolding, or "barely a plaster cast of something intuited." Poetry records the impossibility of fleshing out life with words. And of fleshing out words with life. There is always something else, something behind the words, behind life, that is unattainable. Hence the irony of the last sentence that cannot express what is desired: a cosmic order that the world has never possessed.

Her flash of understanding recalls something Gertrude Stein once wrote:

> We live in time and identity but as we are we do not know time and identity everybody knows that quite simply. It is so simple that anybody does know that. But to know what one knows is frightening to live what one lives is soothing and though everybody likes to be frightened what they really have to have is soothing...[2]

The poem that begins "She does not know how to write" could also have started: "She does not know how to live." For had she known, it would have been soothing, as Stein observes, for there is nothing so soothing as to live without actually knowing and to live without understanding. Noni's flash of understanding illuminates that predicament, even as it calls to mind the visionary role of the poet.

But she is also knee deep in suspicion. Or as she has noted elsewhere, "the moment you are conscious that words are going to

filter what you want to say...suspicion grows in you, or perhaps better said, you decide to integrate that doubt into the poem" ("Poetas españolas en el fin de siglo," p. 14). Doubt, or suspicion, creeps in through the fragment, the leaps and bounds of unreason, through ruptures, she goes on to say. Is this why she writes in "The Golden Threads of the Collective Imagination"?:

> Suspicion (it was the last thing
> we could generate)
> pushed us to baptize every thing
> with two names.

Perhaps. This poem, however, points to a larger, collective context beyond the poet's own circumstances, in which suspicion rules the world, whether we are speaking of politics or the deceptive surface of named reality. Ironically, the title glows with presumed harmonious cohesiveness, while the poem itself implies that we generate the world through disquieting ruptures, disharmony, and ragged duplication.

The threads of this text lead me to another one, in which words are, among other things, a thread to guide you ("Words"). As "bomb words," however, they "make ruin / memory." In the last poem of this anthology, the "one who sustains me" is "like the thread of cup-and-ball," though the text is actually about uncoupling ("There we walked the rain"). A text in which two persons "walked the rain, / the fog, night, and mist" ends with:

> I do not fall you do not float
> so we go, space
> in another space comes and goes.

This thread, now severed, at once recalls the mythic image of human destiny and the Freudian game of fort-da, in which the child throws a spool attached to a piece of string out of sight saying fort (gone), then reels it in saying da (here). The game symbolically lessened the child's anxiety over his mother's absence. In this poem,

Noni recreates the virtual reality of an absent lover, but in other texts, like "Inutile," it is the missing mother who arises out of the poetic return to childhood and back out of it.

Implicit to the poem, "There we walked the rain," is the notion of a journey in which the travelers, or lovers, are now walking in a reversed world where the sky is the ground and they move as "space / in another space [that] comes and goes". This space within space, along with the thread image, resembles in some ways the mythic labyrinth from which Theseus manages to escape guided by Ariadne's thread.

Whether there is escape in Noni Benegas's poetry remains an unanswered question. In translating these poems, I found myself shunting back and forth between languages, much as the poet herself does between cultures. The cup-and-ball image noted above also struck me as fitting in describing the task of the translator, wherein the thread of one language must disappear and then return in the guise of another one while still attached to the original language. The cup of Spanish holds the ball of English with the same thread that is the conduit in both Spanish and English. Language is both gone and here.

Everything is ready for the journey.

1 This discussion of current writing by Spanish women poets is taken from Noni Benegas's anthology, *Ellas tienen la palabra* (Madrid: Hiperión, 1998), pp.81-83. See also her comments in the interviews, "Poetas españolas en el fin de siglo," *Insula* no. 630 (June 1999), p. 14; José María Parreño, "Noni Benegas: Sobre poesía escrita por mujeres," *Revista de Occidente* no. 208 (Sept. 1998): 77-91; and Rebeca Serrano and Asún López, "Noni Benegas: 'Mi lugar está donde está mi palabra,'" *El Eco Hernandiano* no. 12 (May 2005) (electronic publication).

2 See Stein,"What are Master-pieces and Why are There so Few of Them," in her *What are Masterpieces* (Los Angeles: The Conference Press, 1940), p. 92. I am grateful to Noni Benegas for telling me about this wonderful text.

Works by Noni Benegas

Poetry

Argonáutica
Prologue José María Valverde. Barcelona: Laertes, 1984. (Platero Prize)

La balsa de la Medusa
Prologue José Muñoz Garrigos
Alicante: Caja de Ahorros Provincial de Alicante, 1987
(Miguel Hernández National Prize for Poetry)

Cartografía ardiente
Madrid: Verbum, 1995.

Las entretelas sedosas
Montilla: Aula Poética Casa del Inca, 2002.

Fragmentos de un diario desconocido
Ferrol: Esquío, 2004. (Esquío de Poesía Prize)

De ese roce vivo
Unpublished manuscript, 2005.

Criticism

Ellas tienen la palabra: Dos décadas de poesía española
(with Jesús Munárriz). Introduction by Noni Benegas. Madrid: Hiperión, 1997.
2nd ed., 1998.

Translations of Her Poetry

"The Waiting" ("La espera"); "The Rope" ("La cuerda"); and "Passion's Map" ("Cartografía ardiente"). Translated by Herman Asarnow.
The Marlboro Review 9 (winter/spring 2000): 38-40.

de

Argonáutica

from

Argonautica

Una cartógrafa

Se oía una gran sonoridad que no se oía. José Lezama Lima

Había una vez una cartógrafa que delicadamente incluía a los viajeros en las rutas que trazaba. Así, los vestigios resinosos de un traficante de óleos quedaban dispersos a lo largo del plano; una dama antigua de miriñaque y sostén de afuera remembraba a María Malibrán que ebria hubiera girado sobre sí siendo checo lo que pisaba. Alicia en el país de las maravillas visitaba otros lugares, y claro, de su comparación surgían las bellas voces del idioma: "ay" "huy" "qué poco," etcétera. En general los viajes eran infinitos, y en particular, cobraban un gusto almizclado y dulce de caramelo de los mares griegos. Encajonaba cofres en los ángulos, pero esos melancólicos jamás sospechaban que dentro de ellos hubiera alguna solución; goznes y sortijas dudosas, dientes y más calaveras, abrelatas de la era espacial, y en especial bonetes y muñecas, palillos, aguarrás, liebres, prados, alfombras y dátiles, y hasta Don José sorprendido por tanto acecho majestuoso de la hermosa dama boba.

Mapmaker

A deep, silent resonance was heard. José Lezama Lima

There once was a mapmaker who delicately included the travelers themselves in the routes that she traced. Thus, the resinous vestiges of a trafficker in oils spilled across the charted surface; a much bosomed lady creaking in crinoline brought to mind an inebriate María Malibrán who would have spun on her heels had she stepped on something Czech. Alice in Wonderland was visiting other places, and of course, from this comparison arose the beautiful sounds of language: "ay" "uy" "so little," etc. In general the journeys were infinite, and in particular, they acquired a musky-sweet caramel taste of the Greek seas. She squeezed coffers into the angles, but these melancholy things never suspected there might be a solution hidden inside; hinges and dubious rings, teeth and still more skulls, can openers from the space age, caps and dolls especially, toothpicks, turpentine, hares, meadows, carpets and dates, and even Don José surprised by so much majestic stalking of the lovely dame nitwit.

El Ministerio

a José Ángel Valente

Sin ganas ya de criticar, dio por terminado el día. Subrepticiamente, aunque nadie lo observaba, se quitó los guantes y salió del Ministerio. Su cuerpo iba envuelto en sombras, casi invisible por la rapidez que le imprimía.

Sólo los pies, con método, repiqueteaban sobre la escalinata. "Bajaría escalones toda la vida" se dijo a sí mismo buscando asentimiento. Como seguía satisfecho, agregó "escalinatas de edificios oficiales, ex-palacios, ahora burocráticos, con largos escalones de mármol que se explayan entre una fila de columnas y las lajas de la acera, no la estrechez de la escalera del metro de absorbente aliento."

Una vez terminado el descenso al no disponer de la posición oblicua que tanto le interesaba, voló hacia la esquina, donde formó un bello ángulo recto, desapareciendo.

The Ministry

to José Ángel Valente

Tired of criticizing, he called it a day. Furtively (although no one was observing him), he removed his gloves and left the Ministry. His body was wrapped in shadows and rendered almost invisible by the speed with which he moved.

Only his feet methodically clattered on the staircase. "He would be going down stairs his whole life," he said to himself, seeking self-affirmation. Still satisfied, he added "staircases of official buildings, former palaces, now bureaucracies, with long marble steps that stretch out between a row of columns and slabs of sidewalk, not the narrow steps of the underground that suck you in."

His descent finished, without having at his disposal the oblique position that so interested him, he sped toward the corner, where he formed a beautiful right angle, and disappeared.

Los ahogados

Cuando el orden se roe las uñas el miedo queda codificado. ¿Aprueba Ud. mi actitud? Sobre un cuadrado un triángulo, sobre todo ello este intenso barniz transparente. ¿Qué piensa? No pido su aquiescencia, esa es suya y deberá descubrirla Ud. mismo, yo puedo nombrarle algunos de mis recursos e incluirlo entre dos pares de signos de interrogación. Ud. puede ser un búfalo, alguien detrás de un ropero donde no hay nadie, puro artificio, vamos. Cada vez que la tormenta se estrella contra el aluminio, o mejor dicho el plástico disfrazado, me doy cuenta de que la obra de Dios está destinada a desaparecer. Nosotros también hemos sido los oyentes de un fantasma que nos ha tenido atados a su escucha gran parte de nuestra vida.

¡Al agua! ¡Al agua! aunque los ahogados se hayan retirado a conversar amablemente en la terraza del café.

The Drowned

When order gnaws its own fingernails fear is codified. Do you approve of my attitude? Upon a square a triangle, over all of it this intense, transparent glaze. What do you think? I am not asking for your consent, that is yours and you ought to discover it for yourself, I can name some of my resources and include you between two pairs of question marks. You can be a buffalo, someone behind a wardrobe where there is nobody, pure artifice, say. Every time the storm smashes against the aluminum siding, or should I say disguised plastic, I realize God's work is destined to disappear. And we have been listening to a ghost who has had us hanging on his words most of our lives.

Into the water! Into the water! even though the drowned have gone off to chat like old friends in the terrace café.

de

La balsa de la Medusa

from

The Raft of the Medusa

Sin hacer nada

Tanto sin hacer nada como Gertrude Stein
menos que Henry James
cronista subterráneo de una época
tanto en vilo como Rimbaud
entre dos fronteras
Alcanzar la ceguera perfecta de Borges
la de ignorar la descomposición visible de cuanto
el sentimiento compone
Una memoria de hierro para atravesar las rejas
Pero el corazón
sin elemento inflamable...

Dolce far niente

So much *dolce far niente* like Gertrude Stein
less than Henry James
subterranean chronicler of an age
left suspended like Rimbaud
between two borders
To achieve Borges' perfect, oblivious blindness
toward the visible decomposition of everything
that feeling encompasses
A memory of iron passes through bars
But the heart's
inflammable element missing...

Otra luz

a Paul Virilio

A tientas por la casa con pasos
de tiza
con la luz de los sueños
tan pronto opaca o radiante
¿Quién alumbra esa pantalla
en el cerebro a oscuras?
Como la piel se aja desde dentro
el misterio de ese fulgor persiste

Another Light

for Paul Virilio

Groping through the house, blind steps
of chalk
with the light of dreams
suddenly opaque or radiant
Who shimmers that screen
in the darkened brain?
Like skin withering on the inside
the mystery of that glow persists

La balsa de la Medusa

Sobre un tema de Géricault

Para comprar y vender
para salir de una infancia
aliviarla
de su carga de adultos de balsa de la Medusa
destinados al infierno de un mar en tinieblas:
la muerte sin huellas
sin Géricault sin Velázquez sin Chirico o Borges
sin palabras para decir el horror de la muerte tan sabida
del rostro de boca contra la baldosa
del hilo de sangre de novela policíaca o mal
film de guerra o 41 que se quedó para siempre de espaldas
en Siberia o pájaros inevitables de la carroña del hígado
y Prometeo desmayado en el intento
La roca viva deslizante como una calzada de lava
el pasaje subterráneo de las flores secas entre las páginas
de los libros olvidados
el cinturón de oro de ocho graves kilos que hunde a Rimbaud
hasta la rodilla en su infancia
Para negociar una infancia y comprar la vida
la libertad

The Raft of the Medusa

On a Theme by Géricault

To buy and sell
escape childhood
lightening
its cargo of adults from the raft of the Medusa
destined for hell's sea of darkness:
death without a trace
no Géricault no Velázquez no Chirico or Borges
no words to say the horror of death so well known
face down on the pavement
the blood trickle of a detective novel or a bad
war film or number 41 who fell forever on his back
in Siberia or the inevitable bilious birds of carrion
and Prometheus passed out under stress
The living rock sliding like a river of lava
the secret passage of dry flowers pressed among the pages
of forgotten books
the golden girdle eight heavy kilos to bury Rimbaud
knee deep in childhood
To negotiate childhood and purchase life
Freedom

Una flor

a Ana Basualdo

La tenue camelia en la estela
del barco nocturno
cuando el pétalo descorre
un universo trémulo
como la línea de flotación

A Flower

for Ana Basualdo

The camellia sliver in the wake
of the boat at night
when the petal draws back
a trembling universe
like the line of flotation

Viajar

Los viajeros que llegan a la Medina de Raj-Kasar
se sorprenden al divisar su imagen repetida
– pongamos por caso – en el anillo de topacio
del guía o en la acequia que rodea el foso
o aun en la fuente que acoge el patio interior
Los viajeros que arriban a la Medina de Raj-Kasar
luego de atravesar entre dos lunas
el desierto de Al-Ahmir
suspiran ante las finas torres y sueñan
con el salón filigranado y el narguile conciliador
¿Llegan los viajeros a la Medina
alguien arriba en un momento preciso a Raj-Kasar
polvoriento curioso indolente?
La Medina de Raj-Kasar viajando hacia los viajeros
del Atlas
se sorprende gratamente ante el rubicundo pasajero
que se alza impávido en medio
del iridiscente oasis

Traveling

Travelers who reach Medina de Raj-Kasar
are surprised to see its image repeated
– for instance – in the guide's
topaz ring or in the pool-encircled moat
or even in the festive fountain's inner courtyard
Travelers who reach Medina de Raj-Kasar
after crossing between two moons
the desert of Al-Ahmir
sigh before the delicate towers and dream
of filigreed chambers and soothful hookahs
Do travelers reach Medina
or someone reach Raj-Kasar at a precise moment
dusty curious indolent?
Medina de Raj-Kasar traveling toward the Atlas
of travelers
is pleasantly surprised before the fresh-faced passenger
standing intrepid in the middle
of the glittering oasis

Frida Kahlo

a Jan Lumas

¿Era una obra de arte o su deseo ? una columna
de símil de acero segada más una alta carena
de colmillos de jade
Latía con la prisa impávida
de los templos futuros: el viento entornado
entre los dientes las cejas de dosel de búfalo
la impronta de esfinge sobre el asfalto
¿Era una obra de arte o su deseo ? una columna
de tiza húmeda posada día tras día bajo la
ágil pupila en floración perenne

Frida Kahlo

for Jan Lumas

Was it a work of art or her desire? a column
like harvested steel then fangs like jade
careening steeply
It beat with the bold haste
of temples foretold: the wind adrift
in teeth the eyebrows a buffalo bower
the stamp of the sphinx on asphalt
Was it a work of art or her desire? a column
of damp chalk posed day after day beneath the
agile pupil forever flowering

de

Cartografía ardiente

from

Burning Cartography

Jardines

Este dolor
¿a quién duele?

¿Quién, si emerge al fin,
muere de aire;
del mucho disponible
que oxida las estatuas?

Jardines de llanto
donde tocar magnolias densas
y transitar en andas
del perfume de esta lluvia
de párpados adentro.

Gardens

This pain
who does it damage?

Who, at last emerging,
dies of air,
great heaps of it
rusting statues?

Gardens of tears
the touch of dense magnolias
and the passage of
this perfumed rain
inside eyelids.

Interrupciones

¿Hasta qué punto su rostro guarda las impresiones
de la vigilia,
el paisaje visto a través de la ventanilla
descifrado por momentos;
hasta qué punto su rostro tiene interrupciones?

Sentada frente a mí
era un Buey Apis que era
una vieja actriz de Hollywood
pues anunciaba la vejez en sus rasgos,
no definitivamente añeja,
pero ya próxima.

De tránsito improbable
esos rasgos;
cerrado un aeródromo en desuso
con hierbas en la pista y viento
de techo del mundo.

Mas hay un canal
que las barcas remontan de cristal
fluido, remos y ruidos y casas
vivas en las orillas,

hay un hormigueo en su rostro
hecho de malicia y remolinos.
¿Sólo habrá visto lo que vio?
Si algo quedara en suspenso
entre dos canales
en el remanso de la mejilla...

¿Hasta qué punto su rostro tiene interrupciones,
si la interrupción no fuera paisaje o sonido
sino simplemente yo?

Interruptions

Is it true her face keeps the impressions
of wakefulness,
the landscape seen through the train window
fleetingly deciphered;
is it true her face is interrupted?

Seated across from me
was the sacred icon
of an old Hollywood actress
old age stamped in her features,
not definitively decayed,
but very close.

In improbable transit
those features;
an abandoned aerodrome
with grass on the runway and wind
from the ends of the world.

But there is a canal
that boats go up, of liquid
crystal, oars and noises and houses
alive on its banks,

her face swarms
swirling with malice.
Could she only have seen what she saw?
As if something were suspended
between two canals
in the stagnant waters of her cheek...

Is it true her face is interrupted,
what if the interruption isn't a landscape or a sound
but simply me?

Permanencia

Hay un pánico de antorcha
y ser el fuego,
no Palas de Rembrandt
ardiente en su calma de obra;

pánico de no ser el caballo de la estampa inglesa,
ágil de viento y nube,
o la presa a salvo por el pincel feliz.

De no ser el oro del penacho, ni el bronce Brahms
o la belleza amarga
sentada para siempre en su agonía.

De no ser objeto del silencio;
apenas un color ácido en movimiento,
en extinción.

Museo Gulbenkian, Lisboa 1989

Permanence

There is panic in the torch
and being fire,
not Rembrandt's Pallas Athena
art burning in its serenity;

panic in not being the horse in the English engraving,
fleet of wind and cloud,
or the prey saved by the happy brush.

In not being the gold plume, or the bronze Brahms
or the embittered beauty
forever sitting in her agony.

In not being an object of silence;
barely an acid color moving,
extinct.

Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon 1989

Los hilos dorados de la imaginación colectiva

La sospecha (era lo último
que podíamos generar)
nos empujaba a bautizar cada cosa
con dos nombres.

The Golden Threads of the Collective Imagination

Suspicion (it was the last thing
we could generate)
pushed us to baptize every thing
with two names.

Fuente robada

I
No hay nadie,
no
sólo la brisa.

Escalera de Lugano
un día más rosa
mediterráneo.

Orilla norte
del lago,
pura fruición emboscada
con villa clásica
enfrente.

Luego Lisboa,
tranvías
electrizando la noche.

II
La costa,
todo remite
a Costa
do Castelo

No entres
pasado.

III
Lo que amaste
debes
paso a paso
desandarlo.

Chorros de campos de nieve,
fuente robada.

Stolen Fountain

I
There is no one,
no
only the wind.

A flight of Lugano steps
the deep Mediterranean
blush of day.

North shore
of the lake,
pure wooded delight
with a classic villa
in front.

Then Lisbon,
tram cars
electrifying the night.

II
The coast,
everything goes back
to Costa
do Castelo

Don't come in,
past.

III
What you loved
must
step by step
be unwalked.

Torrents of fields with snow,
stolen fountain.

Puerta

a Angiola Bonanni

Y cuando uno que es puerta del otro
abre,
desmorona el contener precioso.

Door

to Angiola Bonanni

And when one who is the door of the other
opens,
the precious contents crumble.

Una lengua

a Martha I. Moia

Una lengua de pulpa de arrobo y canciones tibias
al amanecer;
de leguas de dendritas y confirmación de vuelo
half past seven, Concorde, porte trois.
Una lengua de palo para batear la lengua
de diamante
del tamaño de un grelón de hielo
o la bruma de mil gramáticas subidas
con cantos de silex y sintaxis fría.
Una lengua de pirita para los jaspes de la escuela
de Berlín
cuando cuatro por cuatro más un tamil
irisiden los jades del XXI,
con lapislázuli spaninglish
y gliptodontes gráciles turquois
y lusas amatistas de Bahía
libando libres el son
Moon, gate dos.

A Tongue

to Martha I. Moia

A tongue of pulpy ecstasy and warmed songs
at dawn;
dendrites by the league and flight confirmation
half past seven, Concorde, porte trois.
A stick-tongue to beat the diamond-
tongue
the size of a hail stone
or the rising fog of a thousand grammars
with stone-songs of silex and frozen syntax.
A pyrite-tongue for the jaspered school
of Berlin
when four times four plus a dravidian
make twenty-first century jade irises,
with lapis lazuli spanglish
graceful turquoise glyptodons
and amethyst *brasileiras* from Bahía
freely sipping the sound
Moon, gate dos.

El mar de hielo

El mar de hielo surge a 4.000 metros
de altura.
Entre dos cumbres ondea el valle
de senos de estatua.
Mientras el día se desenvuelve mecánico
como un piano de cinta,
el mar,
oblícuo de tubos de un níveo órgano
a la deriva,
contiene muchedumbres.
Quien lo mira recorre su vida
en un instante,
furioso
ordena trescientos azotes:
el mar astillado, ríe.

The Frozen Sea

The frozen sea rises to 4,000 meters
in height.
Between two summits flow the valley's
sculpted breasts.
As the day mechanically unrolls itself
like a player piano,
the sea
aslant, the tubes of a snow-white organ
drifting,
contains multitudes.
Viewing it your life passes before you
in an instant,
furious
three-hundred blows are ordered:
the sea in splinters, laughs.

Cartografía ardiente

¿Podría el otoño
ser maleza,
un hilo entre las rocas
serpenteante,
cañamazo indeciso
por la red de tu mirada?

¿Podría, pulsión aguda,
sentir tus bordes
desplegarte
como un mapa nuevo
– cartografía ardiente –,
comprometer mis caminos
desandarte?

Si hubiera otoño
así sería.

Burning Cartography

Could autumn
be wild brush,
a thread snaking its way
among the rocks,
a haze of hemp
in the net of your eyes?

Could its sharp pulse
feel your borders
unfold you
like a new map
– burning cartography –
cross my tracks
retrace you?

If autumn existed
it would be like this.

de

Las entretelas sedosas

from

Silken Linings

Las entretelas sedosas

Había muchas cosas verdaderas que sólo existían
para probar su verdad,
lámparas, balcones, árboles
cuerpos en general.
Con la repetición la gente se convencía,
y no faltaba quien ilustrara tanta verdad:
lámparas halógenas o de la sabiduría,
balcones de Lima o Santillana,
hojas perennes o alveoladas.
Pero había otras cosas que no eran ni propias
ni necesarias;
eran ciertas, sin duda, mas se eximían de la prueba;
tampoco porque sí, como aquellas
cuya sombra inquieta;
evaporaban en el recodo de los ríos;
alguien podía asomarse a la corriente
y verlas allí un instante,
o en las entretelas...

Había ropas de auxilio – eran nuestro pan cotidiano –
¡pero las entretelas sedosas! ignorábamos
su eficacia, ninguno subía
a probar la caída, otros lo harían.

Después
era bello flotar con ellas
maravillosas,
sin sombra.

Silken Linings

There were many true things that only existed
in order to prove their truth,
lamps, balconies, trees
bodies in general.
With repetition people were convinced,
and there was always somebody to illustrate so much truth:
halogen lamps, lamps of wisdom,
balconies of Lima or Santillana,
perennial, alveolar leaves.
But there were other things that were neither proper
nor necessary;
they were certain, no doubt, but they were exempt from proof;
and not just because,
the way some shadows disturb,
evaporating at the bend of rivers;
you could lean into the current
and for an instant see them there,
or in the linings...

There was clothing to help out – this was our daily bread –
but the silken linings! their virtue
was unknown, no one went up
and tried falling, let others do it.

Afterward
it was lovely to float with them
marvelous,
shadowless.

Una intemperie

Una intemperie fastuosa
de tormenta eléctrica
bajo el único ombú
o conversación definitiva en la terraza
arrojados del paraíso

Rough Weather

Splendid rough weather
in an electric storm
beneath the only ombu
or cloudless conversation on the terrace
thrown out of paradise

Cómo no perder

Cómo no perder el modo de cerrar la puerta
de caminar,
dar excusas, justificarse;

cómo no olvidar una cierta disposición espacial:
salón, dormitorio, cocinas, letrinas,
calabozos, tumbas, acequias de agua podrida
y ahorcado en la rama...
y seguir la esterilla con el dedo
la pana con la yema
leer bajo la luz de pergamino
vestir con la elegancia de la abuela;

cómo no desistir
vacilante el cuerpo en la roldana,
pendiente aún.

How not to Lose

How not to lose that way of shutting the door
of walking,
of giving excuses, of justifying oneself;

how not to forget a certain sense of space:
salon, bedroom, kitchens, latrines,
cells, graves, pools of stagnant water
and someone hanging from the branch...
fingertips tracing the straw mat
fingertips touching the corduroy
reading beneath the parchment light
dressing with grandmother's elegance;

how not to desist
the body trembling on the taut wheel,
still dangling.

de

Fragmentos de un diario desconocido

from

Fragments from an Unknown Diary

* * *

Quiere huir hacia una calma, "un fondo férreo para mí," se dice.
Una playa de basalto. Semejante a ese lugar que ve cuando quiere dormir y la acompaña como su única pertenencia. Extensión lisa y opaca donde quizás descanse. La escritura tiene que ver con ese fondo.
Se estanca.
No quiere romper, quiere irse. Quiere volar, perder esa congoja de las familias, inexplicable, inextricable.

* * *

She wants to flee toward the calm, "dig me a deep pit,"
as they say.
A beach of basalt. Like that place she sees when
she wants to sleep and it sticks to her as her only possession.
Smooth, opaque space where, maybe, she can rest. Writing has
to do with that deep pit.
It stagnates.
Doesn't want to break, but go away. It wants to fly, free from the
anguish
of families, inexplicable, inextricable.

* * *

Cuando amanece
cuando la luz viene a revelarme
y me quita mi condición de sombra
y el silencio se nutre de trinos, motores
y voces escribo
como una invención de la sombra que parte

No puedo alzarme
quiero armarme
para la soledad fecunda
no me busquen
no me dañen
ni me pidan
dejadme en mi terreno herido

No estoy
ni sé por qué hago falta
déjame borrar mi impronta
déjame quedar
en el revés del cielo matutino
antes del sol
no me traigas
al impuro mediodía blanco

Acuéstate de pie
cierra los ojos aunque abiertos
calla
y obra en lo oscuro
desvanece y revive entre las tapas de un libro
entre sus hojas calla
como sobre un lecho de hojas
en el corazón del bosque

hazte otoño
cruje, crepita, mira

* * *

When dawn awakes
when light comes to reveal me
stripping my shadow state
and silence is sustained on songs, motors
and voices I write
as if to invent the shadow departing

I cannot rise
I must be ready
for flowering solitude
don't look for me
don't hurt me
or beg me
leave me in my wounded earth

I am not here
nor do I know why I'm needed
let me erase my signature
let me be
the opposite of morning sky
before sunrise
don't take me
to the impure white of midday

Sleep while standing
close your eyes while open
be silent
and work in the dark
fade away and revive between the covers of a book
between pages be silent
as on a bed of leaves
in the heart of the woods

make yourself autumn
rustle, crackle, observe

pero no digas
y aún no es la muerte
torpe certeza del dolor
que considera adelantar su fin
y aún no es la muerte

es entre dos sombras un filo de luna
blanco y nítido
es la revelación
de un estado de guerra
mayor

El sol calcina
el desierto está oscuro
los días beben
las mañanas cantan el canto de los ahogados
en el metro – el banco – la oficina
juntos y mudos
se agolpan en las puertas
contantes y sonantes
de bolsas ajenas

Te levantas para perderte
hablas para escurrirte
caminas para hundirte
corres, gritas, celebras sacrificios foráneos

También Valéry hurgaba
en las horas que preceden al alba
los bolsillos vacíos de su persona
también llegaba
a extraer objetos y reparar sus trazas
también supo que la geometría
es un continente desnudo
un equilibrio innecesario

con Alejandra Pizarnik

and don't say
but it is not death yet
the clumsy certainty of pain
as it considers jump starting the end
but it is not death yet

Between two shadows is a slice of moon
white and clear
as the revelation
of a total state
of war

The sun burns
the desert is dark
the days drink
mornings sing the song of the drowned
in the metro – the bank – the office
together, mute
at the doors beats
ready money
from foreign exchanges

You stand up and go astray
you speak and slip away
you walk and disappear
you run, scream, celebrate foreign sacrifices

Valéry, also, rummaged
in the hours before dawn
the empty pockets of his self
also ended up
extracting objects and mending his appearance
he also knew that geometry
is a naked continent
an extra equilibrium

with Alejandra Pizarnik

* * *

¿Cómo va a estar en estado de escritura todo el día? Está sentada, con una pierna recogida sobre la otra. Eso no sirve para soñar o ver. Ver como revelación, sólo ve en la vigilia, con los ojos cerrados, horizontal. A esa hora indefinida de la madrugada, entre la noche y el día. Todo está dispuesto, entonces, para el recorrido. Y aparecen, una estación tras otra, las diversas situaciones de las que fue testigo. O de las que es ahora, entendiendo lo que vio. De pie, fracasa.

* * *

How can she be in a writing state all day long? She is seated, one leg draped over the other. Which is no good for dreaming or seeing. To see as in a revelation, she only sees in wakefulness, with her eyes shut, horizontal. At that vaguely defined hour of early morning, between night and day. Everything is ready for the journey. Then they appear, one station after another, the various situations for which she was a witness. Or for which she is now, to the extent she understands what she saw.
Standing, she is a failure.

* * *

Las palabras
(dicen)
que componen, reparan
sueldan los engarces
entre hueso y hueso
los suspiros
sístole diástole
encarrilan los pasos
remontan las huellas
llenan las sombras

Las palabras
(dices)
son un hilo
te conducen
Las palabras
frías
piden, exigen, invitan
a darte calor
por ellas
un batido, un aleteo, un revuelo
roces, sedas, ovación súbita
o latido
ronco, huero, hondo
hasta la formación de sentido
subido, oído, transido
su función:
mantenerte vivo

* * *

Words
(they say)
that compose, mend
solder the linkages
bone to bone
sighs
systaltic diastolic
steer steps
mount traces
fill shadows

Words
(you say)
are a thread
they guide you
Cold
words
beg, demand, invite
to give you warmth
through them
a flapping, fluttering, soaring
a brushing against, silk, sudden applause
or heartbeat
hoarse, hollow, deep
until sense forms
is risen, heard, pierced
its function:
to keep you alive

Las palabras
al sol
ropa tendida
escamas
torpedos veloces del agua-espacio
proyectil de algas, flecos de sentido
desmoronamiento
polvareda
palabras-bomba
hacen la ruina
la memoria

Words
in the sun
clothes spread out
scales
sudden torpedos of water-space
projectiles of algae, fringes of meaning
collapse
dust cloud
bomb words
make ruin
memory

* * *

No sabe escribir. Cree que escribir supone una libertad anterior a la escritura que hace que esta flote y vuele como un alma en vilo. Libre. Ve a su alrededor la vida y la entiende: deletrea la vida que ve, pero no la consigna.
Es un papel en estado de pasta, de magma blanco antes de convertirse en papel. Es esa pasta. Allí deletrea, como quien mastica sin dientes y no traga ni come, ni digiere o aprovecha. Encía y pasta.
Pero no es así, es mucho menos real.
De repente cruza una imagen que no llega a ser tal, apenas un vaciado de algo que intuye, y entonces ve. Ve las razones, las causas, las motivaciones, pero ni tan siquiera. Entiende, de golpe, una situación. Le parece comprender, y todo encaja, entonces. Piensa que debería escribirlo, consignar eso que vio en un relámpago. Lo que hay detrás de los actos, inasible. Y el mundo se ordenaría.

* * *

She does not know how to write. And thinks that to write presupposes a freedom previous to writing which causes it to float and fly like a soul suspended in air. Free. She sees life all around her and understands it: she spells the letters of life she sees, but does not record it.
It is paper like paste, white magma before becoming paper. It is that paste. Where she spells letters, like someone who chews without teeth and doesn't swallow or eat, doesn't digest or enjoy. Gums and paste.
But it isn't like that, it is much less real.
Suddenly an image crosses her mind which isn't actually that, barely a plaster cast of something intuited, and then she sees. She sees the reasons, the causes, the motivations, but not even that. All at once she understands a situation. She seems to understand, and everything fits then. Maybe she ought to write it down, record what she saw in a flash. What is behind the acts, unattainable. And the world would possess an order.

* * *

Esquejes de piedra
circunloquio que fija el órgano
entre vísceras dispersas

esculturas de un interior
expuestas
como parque nacional de mi persona

en Timanfaya, Lanzarote

* * *

Convulsed stone
a circumlocution skewers the organ
in spewed viscera

sculptures of an interior
exposed
like the national park of myself

in Timanfaya, Lanzarote

* * *

Caían primero
fluían luego
diríamos que evaporaban
las cosas de ella

nunca sabremos si sostenía
con los brazos o con la cabeza
si los hombros
erguidos
se disolvían en el punto de embriaguez
de un horizonte de alta montaña
o una insoportable
aventura del alma
la empujaba a perder la mirada
en los meandros terrestres
o si adivinaba a la distancia
y al acercarse a su rostro
un párpado de estatua paralizaba al voyeur
y temíamos, entonces, que ese mundo
nos fuera ajeno para siempre

* * *

They fell first
then they flowed
we might say her things
evaporated

we will never know if she kept going
with her arms or with her head
if her proud
shoulders
dissolved at the point of rapture
of a mountain's high horizon
or an unbearable
speculation of the soul
pushed her to lose her bearings
in earthly meanderings
or if she divined in the distance
approaching her face
a stony eyelid that paralyzed the voyeur
and we feared then that world
would be closed to us forever

* * *

Piensa que cuando tenga todo el material o así, le echará un vistazo y dejará lo esencial para que el relato corra. ¿Qué es lo esencial? Más bien poner "lo justo" ¿Y para qué? ¿Para que el relato corra, se acabe, y no sepamos nunca de qué va?

* * *

She's decided once she has all the material, she will take a look at it and leave only the essential so that the story flows. What is the essential? Better said, what is needed. And for what? So that the story flows, ends, and we never know what it's about?

* * *

Hemos llegado, decía, hasta aquí
burlando el tiempo
Analicemos: "llegar – imposible de conjugar –
aquí"
¿Qué lugar?
este no-lugar abarca
lo que sitiado está

El tiempo: "si no estoy llegando a ningún lugar
pero consisto en llovecer, lluviar,
precipitarme suave y finamente
en un sitio que no está, habré vencido al tiempo"

Si me hablas se rebobina, sucede:
el lenguaje es una cadena
Si haces el silencio con tu ausencia
no sólo es perfecto por involuntario
sino total

Yo no me hablo como un sucederme;
si intento dormir, y no puedo
y bebo, apenas, y entre embriaguez, sueño y vigilia
me quedo acunándome entre mis brazos
anulo el tiempo

Las conclusiones no concluyen
– hace mucho la explicación es una flor en el ojal, marchita –
no ganan, no pierden
no aluden, por tanto, al tiempo

Si hago el no-tiempo, dentro del tiempo, por sustracción del lugar
nada avanzará ni retrocederá
yo estaré en un instante indoloro
tenso con suavidad
extenso por tersura
cobijada, final

* * *

We have come, I was saying, this far
mocking time
So let's analyze: "to come – impossible to conjugate –
here"
What place?
this non-place that surrounds
the besieged

Time: "if I do not arrive anywhere
but am made of drizzle and deluge,
softly fine precipitation
in a nowhere place, I will have triumphed over time"

If you speak to me it rewinds in succession:
language is a chain
If you make silence with your absence
it is not only perfect for being involuntary
but total

I do not speak to myself as if it were happening;
if I try to sleep, and I cannot
or barely drink, and between rapture, sleep and wakefulness
I rock myself to sleep
annuling time

Conclusions are not conclusions
– for some time now the explanation has been a flower in the
lapel, withered –
they're no win-no lose
they do not refer therefore to time

If I make non-time, within time, by removing the place
nothing will go forward or turn back
I will be in a pain-free instant
tense with softness
vast and smooth
secure, final

* * *

Había dos mujeres, quizás tres, pero ahora una frente a la otra desde un puesto de poder. Ella, distante, se maravillaba de su exclusión de la cadena, y simple, como cuando la mañana sobre el mar, caminaba por la franja libre entre espuma y resaca. (Tan estrecho es el pasaje y tan exacta la pisada como sobre el hilo del funámbulo, o por la frontera amenazada).
Caprichosa, la línea es un centro en movimiento. Tras su paso, la arena cierra las huellas. En sus flancos se alzan hieráticos esos poderes.
Ella es el punto incesante que acechan para embeberse la una a la otra.

* * *

There were two women, maybe three, but now one is facing the other one from a position of power. Distant, she marveled at her exclusion from the chain, and simply, like morning above the sea, she walked through the open strip between the surf and undertow. (So narrow is the passage and so precise her step as though balancing like a tightrope walker, or slipping past an endangered border.)
Capricious, the line is a center in movement. Behind her steps, the sand closes its traces. On both sides the two powers rise up hieratic.
She is the incessant point they are stalking for enrapturing one another.

* * *

Inútil
insolente
insociable
insegura sucia
cuprífera carbona rehogada
lente lámina
levadiza
villana
vultífera fregada
insomne
maníaca
criminante desolante decisiva
incisiva
puerro ropa vieja
soplona
salivada babeante borrosa
bruta
abrutada brutal

malabuena
malhabida
saborida
brisada
brumosa
lunar rápida
mal ida
malvenida
ensillada sin silla
resalida
ahilada
recontada
recuperada
curtida

* * *

Inutile
insolent
insociable
insecure filthy
cupriferous carbona soaked
lens lamina
leavened
villain
vultiferous jerk
insomniac
maniac
criminoid désolée decisive
incisive
leeks mangled beef
snitch
salivating drooling dissolving
brute
brutally brute

malapertous
malapropous
beflavorous
borealeous
brumeous
lunar rapide
unmissed
unwelcome
seated seatless
second sally
aligned
related
recuperated
cured

cociente
crujiente
cosida
elegida
papá amada
papá linda
papá diálogo
papá amor
papá siempre

rota estrujada revertida
exonerada
extraída
lanzada
mamá elidida
mamá reñida
mamá torcida
mamá fuera
mamá lejos
mamá prisas
mamá hueco
mamá nunca
mamá vieja
mamá muerte
mamá espacio
mamá libertad
mamá voz
mamá riente
mamá doliente
mamá perdón
mamá porfavor
mamá ruego
mamá compra
mamá avizora
mamá idea

cooked
crunched
stitched
chosen
papa loved
papa pretty
papa talk
papa love
papa always

broken bashed bent
exonerated
extracted
launched
mama suppressed
mama scolded
mama twisted
mama out
mama far
mama hurry
mama hollow
mama never
mama old
mama death
mama space
mama freedom
mama voice
mama laughing
mama suffering
mama pardon
mama please
mama plea
mama purchase
mama vigilant
mama idea

mamá recupera
mamá sobras
mamá guiñapo
mamá momia
mamá queja
mamá sino
mamá amante
mamá tarde

jardín ido
recogido
jardín jarcias
jamases
jardín asido
hilo
jardín luna
riela
lúdica carpa
suena
charco estrella
jardín tramo
trance

mama recuperate
mama leftover
mama rags
mama mummy
mama whine
mama fate
mama loving
mama late

garden gone
gathered
garden rigged
never-ever
garden grasped
threads
garden moon
gleams
carp play
sounds
pool star
garden plot
peril

* * *

Se levanta empapada de otoño. Piensa en las últimas filas de árboles de la quinta de Cárcano. En los caquis, que no recuerda haber visto en la rama. ¿Tal vez le enseñara uno haciéndolo girar en la mano? Sospecha que como todo con ella – era pianista –, le entró por el oído la palabra caqui, tan de uniforme colonial en tonos beige, de excursiones con jeep en el desierto y sombrero cóncavo con héroe mirando por un largavista.

* * *

She arises soaked in autumn. And thinks about the last rows of trees at the villa of Cárcano. About the date plums called "caquis," that she does not recall having seen on the branch. Perhaps someone showed her one, making it turn in her hand? She suspects that as was usual with her – she was a pianist – the word "caqui" entered through her ear, in a colonial uniform, beige color, excursions by jeep in the desert and concave hat with the hero looking through a spy glass.

* * *

Ahora, al final de su vida, le ha pedido que la ayude a desprenderse de tantas cosas; a limpiar y vaciar para poder meter las manos nudosas – sin sensibilidad luego de la operación, ¡le dolían tanto! – entre las masas de tela, y poder así descolgar las perchas sin desesperar. La emociona pensar que la ha ayudado a respirar más hondo, a moverse con mayor soltura, a avanzar bajo el peso de esa jungla de huesos y músculos agotados, entreverados, que atenazan sus rodillas, sus codos, crispan sus muñecas, pugnan por cerrar su garganta y bajarle de una vez los párpados.

* * *

Now, at the end of her life, she has asked her to help let go of so many things; to clean and empty out so she can plunge her knotty hands – numb after the operation, they hurt so much! – into the sea of fabric, so she can then remove the coat hangers without despairing. It touches her to think she has helped her breathe more deeply, move with greater ease, go forward under the weight of that jungle of bones and exhausted cabbage patch of muscles, that squeeze her knees, her elbows, contract her wrists, struggle to close her windpipe and lower her eyelids once and for all.

de

De ese roce vivo

from

From That Tremble of Touch

* * *

Esta primavera que fue dolor cansino
y ahora es verano trasnochado;
este tiempo escarmentado entre corchetes
donde hubo tino y saber reconcentrado
despierto de su túmulo y arisco
experto en llama, y límpido tesoro
de días y más días consagrados
en aras de tu amor que me encontraba
allí donde siempre me tuviste;
este sino de ser tu paramento
cuando huías y sabía que te ibas
y pude atrincherarte entre mis brazos,
lavar tu solución, química o radio
concéntrico de esferas angustiadas;
este lívido color de estar contigo;
esta música especial de despedida,
y tus brazos y los míos y el conjunto
de severa carne austera,
juntas y así juntas, siempre tuya.

* * *

This spring was worn-out pain
and now is summer hung over;
this time bracketed in punishment
where once was insight and savored wisdom
awakened from the grave and wild
expert in flames, transparent treasure
with day after day anointed
on the altar of your love that found me
where you always held me;
this fate of being your adornment
when you fled and I knew you were leaving
and I could crush you in my arms,
I could wash your chemical solution, your concentric
radius of anguished spheres;
this livid color of being with you;
this special music of departure,
your arms and mine and the joining
of our pure, exacting flesh,
together and together, always yours.

* * *

Esta ilusión sin nombre de volver a verte,
de remar, de atravesar
el aqueronte de un océano,
una estigia laguna concentrada
entre ayes y dolores y quejidos
y sones y sinuosos ya sonidos
de suspiros y alientos recobrados
y caídas en mojones del camino,
y yo aquí entre mis brazos anidando
lo que hubo lo que fue lo que quedara,
y tú a medias demediada
entre tumbos, tranquila, atribulada,
sin saber ni intuir todo sabiendo,
tú sola decidiendo y yo aceptando,
recalcitrando el porqué,
el tránsito tan tuyo
y a pesar
conmigo

* * *

This nameless illusion of seeing you again,
of rowing, crossing
the ocean's Acheron,
a Stygian lake squeezed
between sorrow, pain, and complaint
and sweet sounds into sinuous sounds
of sighs and breaths resurrected
and crashing onto road markers,
and my arms cradling me here
what once was what was what might remain,
and you divided and redivided
between shudders, calm, afflicted,
not knowing or intuiting yet knowing everything,
you alone deciding and I accepting,
resisting why,
the passage all yours
and to my regret
with me

* * *

Ahora soy cuerpo
y tú eres alma
¿cómo aceptarlo?
Ahora camino, me visto, lloro,
uso tus cremas, zapatos, pelo
que he dejado crecer contigo
según tu imagen
(mi edad en la foto).
Y me carcomo y duelo
resoluciones tomo
como si tu fuerza
estando en mí
fuera
transfigurada.

* * *

Now I am body
and you are soul
how can I accept it?
Now I walk, get dressed, cry,
I use your face cream, shoes, hair
that I've let grow with you
in your image
(my age in the photo).
And I decay and ache
I make resolutions
as if your power
inside me
were
transfigured.

* * *

Pensamos juntas,
es un leve aleteo,
me decís cuidate
y siento la conseja
como un breve apretón,
aquel que hiciste
dibujando con el gesto
una eternidad de tu mano,
para siempre
en la mía.

De ese roce vivo.

* * *

We thought as one,
comes a slight flutter of wings,
you say take care
and I feel your advice
like a small squeeze,
the one you made
drawing with a sign
eternity from your hand,
forever
in mine.

From that tremble of touch.

* * *

Y volví a tu tierra, y serena.
¿Era tierra o etiqueta?
Puro nombre, pura estepa
llegar allí, esotra
orilla del planeta.

* * *

And I returned to your land, serene.
Was it land or a label?
Pure name, pure steppes
there, on that distant
shore of the planet.

* * *

Allí anduvimos la lluvia,
el fog, la noche, la bruma,
el día con su alcancía,
la tarde, revelación,
la voz de a dos, desparpajo,
desdoblada en puro eco
de otra que me sostiene
como un hilo del balero,
siempre inversa
la versión del cielo cuelga
y es el suelo nieve o nube,
siempre, siempre,
desparejo,
ni me caigo ni tú flotas
así vamos, vuelve, o viene
el espacio en otro espacio.

* * *

There we walked the rain,
the fog, night, and mist,
the day with its collection box,
the afternoon, revelation,
the voice a duo, self-confident,
doubled into pure echo
of the one who sustains me
like the thread of cup-and-ball,
always the reverse
version of the sky hangs
and the ground is snow or cloud,
always, always,
uncoupled,
I do not fall you do not float
so we go, space
in another space comes and goes.

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Cartografía ardiente

¿Podría el otoño
ser maleza,
un hilo entre las rocas
serpenteante,
cañamazo indeciso
por la red de tu mirada?

¿Podría, pulsión aguda,
sentir tus bordes
desplegarte
como un mapa nuevo
– cartografía ardiente –,
comprometer mis caminos
desandarte?

Si hubiera otoño
así sería.

Burning Cartography

Could autumn
be wild brush,
a thread snaking its way
among the rocks,
a haze of hemp
in the net of your eyes?

Could its sharp pulse
feel your borders
unfold you
like a new map
– burning cartography –
cross my tracks
retrace you?

If autumn existed
it would be like this.

Noël Valis teaches at Yale University. Her research centers on modern Spanish literature, history, with books on realist novelists, women writers, the Spanish Civil War, and bad taste in modern Spain. A Guggenheim and NEH Fellow, she is the author of nineteen books, including *of Cursilería: Bad Taste, Kitsch and Class in Modern Spain* (Duke University Press), which Katherine Singer Kovacs Prize, and *The Decadent Vision in Leopoldo Alas* (LSU Press). published translations of works by Pedro Salinas, Sara Pujol Russell and Julia Uceda, and a b *My House Remembers Me* (Esquío).

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