

***VIOLENCE OF THE WHITE PAGE:
Contemporary French Poetry***



Edited by Stacy Doris, Phillip Foss, Emmanuel Hocquard

Editor:

Phillip Foss

Contributing Editors:

Charles Bernstein

Mei-mei Berssenbrugge

Mary Caponegro

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TYUONYI



TYUONYI is a Keresan work meaning "the meeting place" and is the name of a major prehistoric ruin in northern New Mexico.

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Subscriptions, submissions, and other correspondence should be addressed to: Phillip Foss, *Tyuonyi*, PO Box 23266, Santa Fe, NM 87502-3266. Make checks or money orders payable to *Tyuonyi*.

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In memory of Edmond Jabès

Dedicated to Rosmarie Waldrop

PREFACE

American readers have often admired particular aspects of recent French poetry while viewing it overall as too sparse, lacking in substance; ultimately questionable with regard to form and content. To realize the extent of the French language's circumscription within French national culture, it seems useful to distort the categories, and consider French poetry in terms of its *forum* and *context*. Certainly most languages are tied to communities, but a social and political identity would bear more strictly on the language in France, whose development as a country is linked with governmental cultivation and regulation of means of expression, than in the US, where tradition entails a relatively composite, less determinate language being adopted by disparate populations. While French can be clearly traced back to an institutional stabilization of preponderantly Latin roots, a morphological reduction of the English language creates nothing narrower than a historical and evolving field of political and cultural interactions. For poetry, the French forms were finalized by the Academy in the seventeenth century, and served until they were effectively eulogized in the late nineteenth century. Poetry in English, in contrast, offers few indigenous forms and a range of prosodic dilemmas to choose from. Linguistic similarities as well as centuries of exchanging literary influences foster manifold points of comparison between French and American poetry. However, it is hoped that the following consideration of the *differences* between French and American poetry, from prosodic, conceptual, and national standpoints, will help the translations in this volume to be considered in their own light.

I. Forum

The advent of free verse in France more or less meant, as Mallarmé proclaimed, that writing assumed the liberty to express and modulate thought directly. Once the syllabic alexandrine was broken, it was viable for French writers to explore the properties of fluidity and duration in words. Time was no longer imposed in a sequence of numbered syllables; writing could now chart time in a Bergsonian sense, as sonorous, resonant duration. In part to open a

field for exploring this new mapping, formal poetic closure was increasingly deferred, so that a sense of the book came to outweigh the page as an underlying criterion of unity. But the transposition of free verse into American poetry, undertaken by Pound and others, did not allow for a similarly absolute freeing of form. Unlike the syllabic French, verse in English is traditionally accentual-syllabic: each word and phrase contains inherent rhythmic as well as syllabic value. Once the measure was broken, therefore, the metric problem was aggravated. Pound's resultant quest, "to break iamb," proved inexhaustable. There may be an infinite number of ways to break the iamb; an endless series of variations in terms of which it reforms. But this field of possibilities which must be navigated between thought and expression precludes the seamless gesture which French writing develops.

While French free verse worked to displace the constructed rhythmic emphases of the line on to a more organic, less clear-cut tension of the book or overall poetic entity, the natural stresses of the English language, in contrast, held within the words, forcing metric issues to be examined on a per-line basis. The break with prosodic conventions thus led American writers to focus all the more closely on the internal structuring of poems. American free verse in this way encouraged a heightened poetic commitment to building or operating within a corporeal presence on the page, even when the corpus is constructed from fragments or chance inclusions. Since the forms of poetry in English have never been strictly "native," poets have sometimes felt both less need to reject them and more interest in subverting them through internal experimentation. Free verse, while inaugurating French poetry's prosodic independence, generally brought American writers an individualized sense of formal responsibility.

In the decades following World War II, both artistically and politically, the traditional forms must have seemed reactionary to French poets. René Char wrote, "The genius of man, who thinks he has discovered the formal truths, reconciles the truths that kill with truths that *authorize* killing." A feeling of social exigency as well as literary imperatives produced the poems which emanate on the page as thought or strict perception, lexically sparse, spatially expressive of the durations of breath and sound. Such work, often tenaciously phenomenological as in the writing of Michel Couturier, distrusts volubility. Its form unfolds a measure for the truthfulness and accuracy of words by subjecting them to the pressures of description and isolation.

In the 1960s, the collectives which came together around new journals helped sway French writing to a more expansive formality. The *Tel Quel* collective advocated writing in which discursively theoretical, fictive, poetic, scientific, and conversational textualities are simultaneously employed, while

the *Change* group both promoted an awareness of American and international trends, and probed issues of prosody. Interaction between French and American writers has also led French writers to entertain new possibilities for a more solid formality. As with any kind of mutual recognition, the correspondence between French and American writing may make the two more formally intelligible to each other.

Much recent writing, both French and American, has been constructed with an awareness of silence. In America, silence has been felt more in the interstices of texts, as a menace threatening the continuity of language; the "other" of writing. For the writing of consciousness, silence means the end of consciousness, and some poets have experimented with delaying or betraying this end. In French writing, and in some American writing as well, silence has been addressed more as an internal than external pressure. Since French writing more often takes the word over the sentence as a minimal increment of meaning and the book over the poem as a unit for closure, it can explore silence within the sentence with impunity, deploying phrases as suspended movement over the page. Ideally, the words assume duration when they are projected as contingent but no longer dependent on sequence. French writers have been influenced by American experiments with duration. But since the French language recognizes no metric strictures within words, it affords an examination of duration which is unencumbered and can acutely serve as a basis for measure.

The use of white space, which might be taken to indicate poetic disembodiment, actually functions in French poetry as the trace of physicality, intended at times as breath. The spaces break syntax, not form, often to dramatize the possibilities of recombination. The sense of absent presence articulated by white space may work to emphasize continuity rather than fragmentation, because it introduces a heightened anticipation. This element of suspense can reside in the play of articulation against breath, disjunction against continuity. Suspense inserts a strong formal pivot in the poem, since the vertigo it produces requires a corporeal awareness to apprehend it. Recent interest in the unwritten components behind texts, including literary and psychological underpinnings of language, also dramatizes the absence of such factors from the surface level of writing.

At present, fewer writers are fundamentally rejecting the notion of form. Joseph Guglielmi, for one, works with traditional French forms in order to test their limits experimentally. For most French writing, this new ambivalence does not approach the general American sense of commitment to form; it takes shape more as curiosity about further possibilities. The poems of Pierre Alferi, for example, exhibit a formal interest which is central yet shifting and tenuous.

II. Context

In our present American context, the effects of war on every aspect of culture are easy to disregard and hard to overemphasize. It is worth considering, then, that the most determining factors in recent French and American writing stem from World War II and its aftermath. The writers included in this issue were either young or not yet born when the events of the War molded the relations which inform their work. For France, the War means early defeat, invasion, underground resistance, sometimes perfidious cooperation, subjugation, physical reduction and depletion. For America, the same War was more a *story* of struggle abroad, triumph, liquidation of the enemy, and the magnanimous role of the liberator. To Americans even now, the War seems somehow incredible, nearly fantastic. Books proliferate over the possibilities of how Auschwitz could have occurred, and how the US emerged as a world power. For France, the War remains something primarily unspeakable. Rather than hypothesizing and retracing, the national response has been a guarded silence. Although the majority of the French population and its leaders sought to disregard the scars of war and the collaboration under German occupation, such a silence in the literary work often articulates not a belief in forgetting but rather a profound mistrust in words and their power to explain or ameliorate.

These two reactions, the American expansive and inquisitive and the French hermetic, almost lapidary, introspective, bear directly on writing since World War II. For French writing, this becomes clear in a comparison of Surrealist and post-war attitudes. Breton and other were passionate about Hegel and Marx, and *engagés* to the extent that they at times sacrificed the autonomy they held paramount in order to work within the Communist Party. But while the Dadaists and Surrealists advocated automatic, collective approaches to literary production and thought, they still envisioned a resultant freedom that was personalized. In other words, the Surrealist critique of the self aimed to expand the limits of individual selfhood. But the fact of war rendered anterior dreams of social change useless. Post-war intellectuals and artists rejected the Surrealists as dangerously uncommitted because the cultural alternatives they proposed seemed to have failed with the advent of war. The post-war generation criticized the pre-war value placed on personal freedom. After the war the only remaining possibility seemed to be a collective social freedom won

through cooperative efforts. This ideal called into question the individualized pursuit of freedom.

After the war in France, it seemed clear that fascism is fueled by the glorification of some particular, symbolic, self, as in the Nazi veneration of Hitler. In addition to their reaction to the political self and their active support of socialist movements, the post-war writers expressed a mistrust of the fundamental self of automatism and pure imagination. The rejection of Surrealism by the generation of writers which came through World War II replaced the vision of a fully autonomous self with a contingent self that functions in terms of relation. From this standpoint isolated consciousness is nothingness; the self can only be formulated in terms of otherness. The post-war poetry of René Char's followers, including André du Bouchet and Jacques Dupin, consists of fragmentation, reduction, and an insistent focus on the constitution of language. Such work expresses consciousness as a series of inscrutable sparks rather than a continuum. The writing seems pulled toward speechlessness, and builds by refusing a palpable urge to silence.

When the injustices of Stalinism became apparent, disillusioned French thinkers and writers began to turn away from strict political allegiance to develop a critique of systems. The Structuralists joined Saussurian linguistic methodology with a reevaluation of Marx and Freud in terms of their uncovering of underlying structures. Structuralism in part replaced a trust in the ideal of social unity with an exploration of methodological congruency. Structuralist poetry, best represented by the bulk of Jacques Roubaud's work, explores contextualization in the generating of elaborate writing structures which often function as schematic games to be played out. Parameters and game rules rather than an individual largely determine form, which in turn determines content. Structuralist experiments provided new formal possibilities for American as well as French poetry.

In a way, for Structuralist literary thinkers, the text thoroughly supplants self. Distrust of the resultant text-in-self or text-as-self is partly what led Tel Quel and other groups in the sixties to try breaking down the text and categories of textuality to the point where poets such as Jacqueline Risset, Denis Roche, and Marcelin Pleyenet declared the end of the poem as a separate genre. These writers sought to dissolve the limits of the poem by making it of a piece with theoretical, narrative, and other material; inextricably literary and political at once. This project coincided with Jabès' *Livre des Questions*. Written in light of the Holocaust, Jabès' undertaking emphasizes the inseparability of writing and human life. It regards the adherence to genres within the book framework

as threatening to the growth of expressibility and therefore a prelude to literary, and consequently social, genocide.

Once the general concept of the book was expanded, material formerly considered personal — the sexual, the psychological — reemerged as complexly pertinent. This propels the work of Agnès Rouzier and Anne-Marie Albiach. The writing of Claude Royet-Journoud is deconstructive in that its presence is contingent on textual self-destruction. The work is what remains from the annihilation of a sizeable body of prose which the writer churns out and then cuts down to locate "minimal units of meaning".

When absence becomes so articulately present in a text, the writer is thrown into reflection on the ludicrousness, the near-impossibility of writing as an activity. The sense of satire and humor which has functioned in the writing of Olivier Cadiot, Alain Lance, Pascale Monnier, Leslie Kaplan, and many others responds to this absurdity uncovered in writing. But irony, ironically, cannot be expressed without the positing of self-consciousness. The self that begins to surface in this writing, then, is the dramatic self, the self best-suited to irony.

Throughout its tradition, the self insinuated to varying degrees in French poetry tends to be theatrical where the self of American poetry can tend to be more confessional. This relates to the general distinction wherein a project of French writing is often the charting of thought (inherently from the self) while American writing more often charts consciousness (implicitly of the self). The separation collapses in the light of much experimental writing, but is to an extent perpetuated by the national stances which followed World War II: the US's aggressive policies versus the French gamut inclusive of uncertainty and dissembling. While Baudelaire's and Mallarmé's explorations of 'theatre' influence recent French writing, Aragon brings up a central issue in his relating theatre and collage. In Aragon's explanation of collage, "the painter borrows a personage from an old illustration, just as the playwright uses a flesh and blood actor . . . But the drama lies in that *conflict* of disparate elements when they are reunited in a real form where their own reality is displaced." From this point, the parallel between theatre and metaphor becomes clear: they both represent the conflict resulting from a juxtaposition of disparate elements. Drama is thus meta-metaphorical, and the suspension of a body of words on the page constitutes a poetics by exposing the contradictions of its own composition. In a poetics of conflict, the poem emerges as a struggle for its internal survival. This can generate a formal groping in which stripped-down elements attempt to hook into the field of the page. Words become sparse because the white page has substance, a sort of flesh with which words variously interact. This is radically

different from what is considered the traditional English and American approach in which the poem is a substance or body to be transposed on the empty page.

With its theatrical orientation, recent French writing has often taken English and American writing, from Shakespeare to Michael Palmer, as an interlocutor or audience. We have not been passive as spectators, and some interesting interchanges result. Stevens' lovely, once provocative assertion that "French and English constitute a single language" has become an adage. This collection of translations offers, in effect, an extensive group of interpretations, on the part of vital French, American, and English poets, concerning operative possibilities and levels of interaction between our languages.

— Stacy Doris

VIOLENCE OF THE WHITE PAGE:
Contemporary French Poetry

ANNE-MARIE ALBIACH

A SMALL BOAT IS BURNING ON THE BANKS OF THE PORT

Her being unaware that she would never know that again

—Translated by Joseph Simas

PIERRE ALFÉRI

from LES ALLURES NATURELLES

1.

when nothing entices nothing
stirs beyond inertia
becomes agitation impulse aiming at
nothing but a nothing in the
way and the slightest contact
reverses the directional flow (ignorant
of being observed through two windows, a stranger
dresses, undresses, sits, gets up, lifts up, sets down
the receiver): first the incoherence
of suspended particles
then the period. An ordinary movement
filmed in video
a gesture replayed, its space
run through in every direction like
a break-dance whose surface is only
the other side of the reverse, is already
something else: a form
impassive crystalline.

2.

unlike the kaleidoscope
where tinted glass
slivers shake, the tomascope
paves a field of hexagons
by cutting triangles
it reverses
over each side.
An unfolded detail
whose edges become axes
of symmetry.

3.

just this side of a certain pace
the equilibrium is broken. The sound of the piece
on its edge reaching the end turning tales
or heads, spinning on the tangent
sound that hesitates to sound
that concentrates and that renounces
is recognizable anywhere
like the gasp of the needle when the arm
rushes to the center and the record
holds still. Then
it's not a matter of starting up
the speed again but of placing the arm
the head on the fulcrum to see
contagion spread
to drop everything that moves: unbreakable bodies
in silent films (wobbling
images, indolent
sound track).

4.

unconstrained movement
is a state (quasisolid —
the back and forth the same
to the same place polish it
burnish it) and what remains
a pavement.

— Translated by Chet Wiener

GÉRARD ARSEGUEL

from PORTRAIT OF A HEART UNDER CLOUDS

Not really

What lovely
paths with woods
radiant with branches more
or less

What red heat dancing
under cover of flat desert
 in time for coffee
on earth

that runs more or less well
in its wool cover
rather less

and the delicate shells
of oysters
on earth
pails of a beautiful yellow
under the sky

soft colors
which jump
at the foot of

in words
to the soothing shade
prisoners
but by the handful

and even the first milling
stones not so much
gray as parted

or that which makes form
of this disorder called in
words: needles leaves
not always

or papers that then
 with these leaves
were made
 (not just
 twine
that's enough)

firmly wiped out
 by a quick hand
thrown out (for the beasts
 riddles
in the field)

also flat sidewalks
 like quais
of reeds rotted
 or chewed
fostering winter
 (I guess)

limbs no doubt but limbs

as seen from a train
 but very far
a blue paper
 at the end of a
field
 not an image

some *algeco* poppies
not really
red
but more yellow
cranes
hence the foot
slips
for no one

— Translated by Connell McGrath

ANDRÉ DU BOUCHET

from THE EXCESS

and it
's by the going down
that

it had
to be.

in
its block

the sky
a
stone as

rejoined the stone of the first block
here

and without detaching itself here then
sky.

as to the stones
by a laying bare
of the mountain

rather if you're there
than
facing yourself

soon as the void

and
to the stone

compact

and to stones.

worn down

eyes

til

in the corner

the corner

attraction of the eyes

as

the earth you'll not see here

begins.

to knock against
the

room

compact

yourself air

such as outside the mountain

air

always

and

outside coming from the north.

as if

to be

by the insipid again

oriented.

to measure
the blue unravelling.

to have

and for
a word solely

mined
from the sheerest

water.

— Translated by Geoffrey Young

OLIVIER CADIOT

*AN EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE
WHO IS AN ADVENTURE EXTRAORDINAIRE*

Toute le monde talks weather.

& Pierre who is not there!

The blue, this is what goes best for you

you're no gentleman, you'll have not my girl

TOUTE LE MONDE (*stupefied*): *Oh!*

*Why won't I have your
girl?*

Cause you're no gentleman

Ah? I didn't know

[...] TOUTE (*astonished*): *Oh!*

I have no other desire than to serve you

(for ever, ever ever . . .)

Ah! That's so beautiful!

*falling, staying, averting, delaying
hoping, hurtling*

*It is impossible to part. This is
impossible*

I know that you are there. I love when you come

It rains. It's beautiful.

a) The sea / and the tempests

When is it that he's to come? [. . .]

Who? Me? This's absurd? —

Completely. You coming? —No

He knows not if he has no reason to part.

He comes also. He comes no more.

I wish, I desire to part . . .

*I think in the park — I think there. I think in
parks — I think there*

Who here comes here

Ha! you there!

You're not going to come? Sure!

remember the / remembering

My men friends, my other friends

love / am loved

entire, entirety, light, slight

you part, eh? — part!
we sleeping — sleep

You love him, me not; me not; not me

I have a bit, a bit too much
pain

Part, parting

I see Pierre — I see him there

Your blue dress. This, your blue dress. Your dress, blue

They faced their growing love growing difficult

admirably beautiful

quite too few, quite few, too few, quite too

ah! oh!

brrr!

Then come next to me

Dream, \ dream, \ Song \ \ to this night so \ cruel

(say, recount, think, believe . . .)

It gets

today hardly beautiful
(mediocre nice)

Come so's we'll talk

Also, is he coming

A chance, that there's rain

I saw it all from the balcony (from the balcony)

in winter, in summer, in autumn

It's for him that I cry It's now that I weep

(excepting, while, prior, during, follows)

He has acted badly toward you

The love of a child; this child is loved

What's doing and who's doing it? Me, part?

He has agreed foolishly

here (close place) and there (far place)

Here! near me There! a far place

*If I were you, or of you, or
which of you*

Smash me, I will not speak

*Like me / to look
for / some ham?*

I'll go, you'll go, we'll go

Astonishing to see these guys, or how to see these guys

(She) sleeps, (we) sleep

It's getting warm, it's humid, it's getting hot, it's clear

It's night, it's day, it gets windy

*I do this which pleases me
I do this which it pleases me
No, but who is this who was taken to her*

much less, much more, much too little

You look at me, look close, look away

*it gets somber, it gets good
He looks at me and speaks to me. Doesn't look at me; doesn't
speak to me. Look at me! speak to me!*

It's night / it's a night marveilleusement

Where go you? To Paris. How go you? Rapidly.

He walks extremely quick, admirably rapid.

A nice guy. This dress is very nice.

You come? —Uh huh. You not come? —Sure

I come from down there, he leaves from here

or stay there, comes there, goes by there

*That he has not written! Those
[he did write!*

*That he has not written? Why
[didn't he write?*

(Has he ever read?), after "without" (without ever stopping)

*That it may rain
Needlessly*

Needlessly
Needlessly
Weeping, wet

(to want, to wish, to tolerate)

The tempest ravages

drunk, drunkesse; nervous, nerveuse; foolish, foolish (e)

<i>Who go and come:</i>	present period
<i>Who went and came:</i>	past period
<i>He doesn't go by:</i>	future period

We'll go no more into d'woods.

— Translated by Charles Bernstein & Nick Piombino

DANIELLE COLLOBERT

SURVIVAL

I leaving voice without response to articulate sometimes the words
that silence response to other ear never
if to muteness the world not a noise
sinks into the cosmos blue
no longer question that vertical trip
I leaving slide to the horizon
all equal all mortal from the I on
at full speed fleeing the horizon
at last to hear only music in the cries
enough enough
exit
to enter born on garbage hardly recognized the ground
emerged from salty slime the fetus come out of the drain
solar plexus eaten away anguish diffusing lungs breath gasping

squeezed the neck by the cord waking
trembling waking
burnt consumed *bonze*
body break
out of touch caresses
far from lips drank
memory of the body
letting go present the instant survival
without knowing on what to open the energy to the imaginary answered
stutterings hardly at the rips
the cries from the edges of wounds not enough
dove black into the bloodbath
to be worked the veins for words
I speech to open mouth open to say I see to whom
swung to chaos weaponless
will survive or not resistance to blows the long lasting life
I gone exploration of the void
groping against day
already manacles on the hands brands on the wrists

at the feet irons chains
the distance of a step the unity of measure
I scraping my earth with that
drag the noise in the space
first of all on the tape promethean sound
the vulture in the throat
at blows to blood beaten back endlessly towards silence
in the middle of the forehead the flat future desert
behind hidden perhaps the body to be accumulated

little living cell with searching head
going wanting desperately to stick its juice somewhere
the goodness to the mucosa the waiting at the orifices
the silent first celebration of life
swallowed up by lava flow sticking speech wall between which
nothing to do to get the sounds out barely beyond death
stretching nerves to tune up the sound the lips higher
the bone skull resounded
strangulation overtone to hold barely beyond death
or not to smile with smile to empty in reflections to darkness face extinguished
scarcely light from distant sight
gone on the seven day circular hell
creation torments and rests included
sleep of full earth and dreams included

whose sun sometimes music on wide sky of open
on flat back the one apart
the sheltered one likely freely drawing on the thrust of the bearable
from that side from deep enough the writing on body
I etching in grit the erased moment
pushing the fever to lips resonating the gong
or buzzing rhomb fleeing the head
or drums of survival
or dry desert of dust bombs
and always the flames licking the body with fear
I of living insect nailed to the wall
seeking living to suffer more
self dreaming it even nightly
in view of the definitive

I time of what
spreading
wave rolled to gaze
untiringly from the I liquid measured red
fragments imperceptible to little eye of time vision none
onto space never more than a big field
the rest open to the rower the celestial visions
sucking from sentences toothless sustenance
or beaten by the tidal wave footing lost in basement syntax
days of passion
light from veins which comes
in the surface of articulation
I said blazing energy the cry or how burning never said

— Translated by Norma Cole

MICHEL COUTURIER

PROLOGUE

the hand tempts the hand

at the intersection

of a fruit which bursts
so reunites in an indivisible knot
which reunites me
in my dividing

the bottom of the air is cold

in this immobility
thought through but
in movements of its hip
interred

the most vivid
and most secret

the shadow crouches
in its volumes' substance
by turns enlarging
and shrinking the lawn
allowing for its
jointed and disjointed shadows

the bounds of certain gestures
the number of their gestures is near
and penetrates and mortal
between the image of time
and the image of time
unbroken separating us
from a quotient of zero orientation
throughout slow matters montage
rapid
which appear at the brink
of crossing out
only while bound by a transparent
numeral furnishes
the porosity equidistant from the air
in the hand the hand closed
by unpeeling the shadow
from the shadow
the furnishings slowly approach us
at the level

of an invisible sharing-out
 in which a distance concurs
 with a distance it divides
 the edge widens
 at their appearance
 as in courtyards
 intervals of space
 and layers shot through with liquid
 the *wearing down* appears
 along the tables' inclination
 placing on their surfaces
 fully laden surfaces
 that which is *dissipation*
 mobile outlines
 as seen from a disclosed game measures
 and shares out
 and disfiguring figures in sumptuous oats
 solitary bars
 meticulous

suspension of stones and feathers
in the the feather and stone of meticulousness
the similarity of one point to another
in its course defines the exactitude
of the movement

I was so joyous

I continue to read to you
the sea will define itself in these pages
from one end of the stalk to the other
an obviousness of the whole curve
which loses itself and amusing
in the cloth's existence
on its stem

in the folds
which lengthen the arms of flesh
when the elbow defends and
lifts itself

park closed in the park
of the substitution of the hand

for the blind hand which glares at such
and which skirts around the eye
intrication blind to the future
in times

gaining but a thumb
at the base of windows

gaining nothing

which abstracts itself from the light
it's limpidity
which is bypassed
in the intangible weight

in the day

je souhaite qu'il y
ait la mer au fond du jardin
at the root the furthest
from the air

— Translated by Robert Kocik

EDITH DAHAN

GIUDECCA

20th Century: literature

great axes that bind the whole north-Asiatic continent, from European Russia to the Japan Sea, literature, the great edifices, stations, domes, glass structures, vaulted arches, power stations, railroads. I ascend the boulevard Sebastopol as far as the *Gare de l'est*, archives and museums, frescos of ground pigment, entry to the major lines: Munich Berlin Schedule.

Rereadings, mountain meadows, I see mountain masses unrolling, rivers, forests. Collages and ancient works, Sigismund, years of maturity followed by years of an intense suffering in London. At the corner of the boulevard Sebastopol I pick up again, streets, passages, processions of Haussmann facades going towards the river.

*

The war had arisen abruptly once the major lines of the European network had connected with the Asian border.

I am writing the words, the last words of the day, at times this gentle shift of light, in the gap of the window opening onto the Venetian platform, in the breadth of the window opening onto the Armory, quays, warehouses, factories, corridors, palaces, the taut awning over the Atlantic wall of the San Michele cemetery.

*

The first main period begins the day before the war. In *The Black Circle* of beings and of things, a painter sees the world as a succession of tonalities and internal resonances, an incandescence of sounds and of sense. It snowed in me and I awoke, breast afire before wheat fields, and the world again present,

in clouds that pass, illness-birth, illness-birth, rereading all of Tolstoy, illness-birth, rereading all the Russians, cycles of the years 1905-1919, and I awoke, the window open, before the great unfurling of clouds, the world which was passing, undertow, East wind, Firebird in the river's prosody.

*

Since this morning, above the ocean the rhythm of books, the beat of sentences, breath of each word, full ocean color, aerial blue above the sea, opening of the field, transparency of light when the season's motion decenters full in sky, vision of the open city, motion of sentences, the year revolves around Mars. Gentle shift of light, other rhythms appear, diffuse seasons of fabrics, morning burst of crossing to retrieve the words and the voice in the bright night ocean, each one of the words. Closest to their internal power, retrieving that particular tonality of the word blue, coolness of morning on the Brenta.

*

Slow spaces of water, studios, hangars, level approach of the filmed city, holds, basins, wide angle, industrial smoke, foundries, basins, watery blue filmstock in the opening of the field, wharves, domes, processions of holds and warehouses, discolored areas of the river, towards the most isolated regions on the coast, chimneys, mist, pylons of reinforced concrete, indistinct ground mixing with currents of sand, boats filled with water, going upstream towards Giudecca, long shot on the rare walkers, travellers, Titian, Philip of Comynnes, greys, stockades, fortifications controlling the great axes of navigation to the East, the commercial routes of the North, forests of the Alps, Balkans, thousands of trees, entire forests, boles of oak and elm under the cobbles of the city giving onto the sea.

*

Nakedness of the sky, skin's coldness to the touch, at the crossroads of the lines of the past, archives and museums, mountain meadows.

Young woman withdrawing, the novel's central episode. The first sketches dating to 1909. She was reading, an ancient interior sea left traces of fire.

*

On the right the mountains and further off the sea.

This morning I awoke in the middle of you, in the middle of parks, in the middle of woods, long steps, corridors and quays, the Salute's pavement. Motion of waves, great tide cycles. Snow covered the city and several times the word torment. That year, 1909. Schoenberg wrote the *Three Pieces for Piano*. They were completed in Berlin in 1911, Cezanne's last canvases. How to write to you these last few months, this work on the motif, extension and regrouping of themes around Prague Vienna Budapest. The city is silent and I am at my table listening to the ebb and flow of the waves, the pressure on the words opening the way — first piece of Opus II, completed in 1909.

*

I am listening to a child which burns all existence.

Through the foliage and nocturnal dynasties, sexually the woman swimmer enveloped by the waves follows after this circular door opening onto the waves and the oceans. Moved along by the currents, a woman swimmer who ascends myths and forests, beyond sleep, enormous vessels and distant rivers, sailings, childhoods, golds and meadows of Ravenna, a nativity, lying in the flow of the river, glimmers of legends, lyric time, second suite of time, motions of vessels, foliage and gods at the water's surface.

*

In the river's slowness, in the slowness of the sentences, run-off of overcast walls and grounds, palaces and orchards, multicolored facades, in the slowness of divinities and of rivers, vines and meadows settled by sleep, words' bewildered power, sentences all in curves, sexually the woman swimmer, ellipses and rhythms at shoulder level, in circles' arcs, all in sunlight, ascends the current of strange fears, of dark noises at the water's surface, in turn such stretch of words, of sentences abandoned to time.

*

Seated beside the light, the Tyrrhenian woman, that a shadow carried by the wind system, in the night and the fury, the sea crossed the trees and the lands, glimmers of the legends. Black arc of the Appenines, islands, Mediterranean forests. I am the child who sees through the blinding wellspring of sleep, temple against the garden's iron balustrade, phosphorus blues bordering the forest. I hear the black murmurs of the vessels, the current of sentences in the distance in the page. We are measure of god, offerings, rhythms and riverbanks of time. Adrien goes down under the snow, slow motion, the sky unrolls around the word red.

*

Today I am not writing, I am seeing to the house of writing, and you are there in the garden light.

—Translated by Norma Cole

JEAN DAIVE

from LE JEU DES SÉRIES SCÉNIQUES

Me, lunar: to cry out. To cry out? I no longer cry. But I cried once, didn't I. I was crying out. I cried: the Supplements. I am no longer crying out. No. I was dying, fatal, relating the uneven world to the demonic world, obscure and luminous at last. Then she began to disappear, obscure and luminous. She was disappearing. The moon was growing, black, abrupt. The moon was vibrating, dejected. Mysteriously, the moon, pulling nearer to earth the grounds which would not coincide, was raising an immense field of clarity, almost similar to the motionless body, far off, dejected. Moon. She : lunar. And her temple, her wrist, her abbreviated knee were being erased in space and could articulate but this white verticality, unresolved, weakened, still full of that ancient resonance of a step, a cry, a gesture. From me. I am crying out. She is no longer walking, not crying. Transparent to her hallucinatory series. Thus nights were coming in time with all grounds which would not coincide. The nights. A cry. Transparency. A vertiginous never. "Vertigo. One. Never." There was a strip of greenish sky far off, slipping between two forms. "The garden is at rest." The gaping house of mortal apparitions, gray-red illuminations. The bed of unattainable floors. The laundry closet, of shameful wool. The impossible, the unceasing threw a shadow in my way. To speak. To pass through. Who's speaking? Who's passing through? To close. To open. To pass through. A mechanism rendering silence dynamic. Mirrors, steps, surfaces. To die: if I speak, on the inside, if I eat. On the stairs. In the room. In the alley. To speak. To pass through. In the closet of the therapeutic community. I pass through and my shadow throws out a beginning, a solitude of the object. She lets herself begin through the air of the grounds, under nights together. She lets herself reach through an understanding which improvises, less one useful lip than a mouth in my mouth. Motionless, sitting. To rot: if I were speaking, on the inside, if I move. The gestures buried in the body. The head in the head, in the dress. No forehead. On a knee. Far off. The warrior beam. Black hair, drenched in lunar clarity, perhaps still the Supplements of man. Bare feet, sitting on the edge of a half-step, eyes fixed on the garden rising toward her, the

Child holds in its hand an object wrapped in rags. She was looking between her fingers at the variable series of worlds fleeing before her or passing through her. I can see the universal rift among the gardens. The room plunged in obscurity: black waters where the half-step appeared like the overturned vault of Hell, spreading over the body's forces an irreconcilable time of the breaths which gave rise to it. To remodel Hell in time with the imagination. No. She crossed through Hell in time with imagination. She surged forth without terror. She watched herself, she could see herself on the inside of a mechanical displacement at the very moment she relearned to breathe and lead these words through: Invention on verisimilitude. All this was taking place under the sign of a desolation with enormous antlers, like the emergence of the word for all memory. The word of the worlds in their ensemble. In the interval between my words and my deaths, I lived darkly the time of the stone and the time of the Child: a similitude (is it madness, is it silence or the despondency of madness?) was making me wait, under the eaves, on a half-step, my body at obstinence of something decayed, or of my tongue. My body: perhaps an imprint through which a preparatory eternity runs in waiting for the formulas of the body. A mind resembles me, but the head distinguishes me from the fall that we feign. I was obscure, monstrous, supernatural. An ensemble nevertheless, at the bottom of myself, like the cipher which is necessary, and the cipher feigned. An ensemble, the time of the stone, the time of the Child — some similitude. Engulfing nothing, from the decaying pile, from insignificance, haunted by the abandoned grounds, nearly unreal, throughout my resemblance with the "higher" waiting. What surrounds me: the stone and the Child, the nights and the laws of the main idea. What surrounds me, as real as I, as real as the fear or the odor of what is missing, what surrounds me, can I sit it down in time with the invisible manoeuvres by the word of all manipulations (or in time with all memories of the word of the universe)? Her being seated. Alone: Yes. Sitting together: excrements and me toward the leaving of a sovereign proximity. "I know who I was." "I know who I was: is that possible?" Subjected, with the dreadful abyss and tree, standing in their foliage, to the laws of the main idea, we managed, excrements and I, to discern our common reality: a condition wavering between exhaustion and relief. From the thing exhausted of possibility. From the "abstract" thing: We. The anus was there, amidst skies and nights, calm and dreadful, at the extremities of pale skin and referring above, to the orifice of the mouth. Between the two, no body, no member, no gaze. Nothing took place: beyond us, a garden. I said, "Standing under their foliage." I say, "Standing under the threat that no longer recognized the power of some foliage over us." Abyss-sentence, battle-sentence with the

incomparable, inexplicable need-sentence, movement-sentence toward degradation, transparency-sentence, sentence, impure mass-sentence. "But what is impurity?" Sentence, sentence again, sentence, she was sentence, out of breath, beside herself. Degradation. Lower than degradation. Because she could formulate a secret, lunging from the mouth, into that which she had never ceased repressing. "Speak. Speak then. But speak." She found herself left to nothing, that an infinite succession of awakenings referred to an infinite pathway of enigmas. She was seeking, in the secret, its most literal part. No. She was seeking something else. The mystery of the secret. The subject of the secret. The lunar shore. The infiltration of the absolute argument. An anatomy. The forgetting-dying of the secret. The insistence of the secret inscribed in: "Below walks man, beats the world." Its fearful sense. In the storage closet, in the basin is the secret. Relating signified the necessity of introducing he-whom she had to name. Upon her, sitting, the secret falls, the Preparator falls, whom I introduce.

— Translated by Joseph Simas

MICHEL DEGUY

"SIBYLLARIES," from RECUMBENT FIGURES

I am looking for you. *Anecdotes*, proposes the etymon as one of your names, our names. *Aventurine*, another, like an adventure of filings thrown aimlessly upon a lukewarm fever. You were saying what are you waiting for. I am waiting for what comes crosslife, sibylline effusion, and why despite these crumbings of state, of earth (It is 6:30, 8:30, 5:30, zero hour), this global destruction that saps rescue parties, computers, why a secret marriage in the upstairs room that closes the planet's shutters, immunizes against the leukemia of information and gathers the smithereens of the stolen painting, coiled in its error prefers itself as a place

But negligent, we legendary restive ones, unconcerned with me, even, we threaten each other with a like insecurity, merry neighborhood of sharing where one invents worth-to-be

I write you not knowing where begins

Where do you begin

russet swaths like chimneys your vessels posed like cows and shrubs on November placed on your body at the borders like factories used to pose

Where the premises end

How to get out of torpor without hurting you, you, you? We negligent ones guilty of guilty negligence and unconcerned with self, even, fettered

versus everything like an obese man going upwind
capture seized in the street line stencil
you tack galley-slave backward against and against
disfiguration that blurs the glimpse
or the inadequate parable of words
which land without a pass between us
against the beggar women's troubled petition and the whole
thick obstacle the blocking of directions
the syzygy of books governs the skull's ebb tide

on a break hesitating where to put the pause, the mark,
busy with tablature as in the delicatessen,
or stacking verbs helter-skelter at the other end
pompous on the songfest committee,
celebrated and cracked in the face under spittle
in the tidal wave of origin and apocalypse
cited slandered getting others to do our crimes
no longer knowing how to commit the old iterations

Do not deprive me of you I would like to copy my poems for the new
Dedication like Hokusai his lion each morning ink-bathed and offered to the sun
You told me about it

To which proportions to devote oneself I turned round anemic gone
down like a deaf-mute into the muted language, the soundless poem of words
without music, mindful of the contradictory Orpheus who now freezes with his
turning and now stirs the stereotypes, losing illiterate music in the aphonic
phrase, having entered agnosis in order to know it I am looking for you thus
deprived of timbre with timbres and without pitch at the pitch, without a bass in
the voice, unbounded in the interior scree, atonal with tones, devoid of accents
or durations to entrust to accents and to say them, noiseless in the thesis-free
percussion of language, what music convicted of silence, we say interior, we
say within, in the hush of the mouth without a tune down to the sexual slice of
the larynx, to the spasm of the glottus swallowing Mallarmé, and aidless
testifier to its rhythm, without music, the soundless, to hear it, with all that is
heard, like phoneticians to say *voicing* slice your sibylline cords and say its
neume with their teeth, the palate, Hertz . . .

I offer the braille of readable words to the deafness of the poem reader
who takes in the amusicality of language and translates it with music, as I take
in my love for you, take in your pain and the movement of keeping these things
in the heart since the Virgin, or as painting discolors chromes, transcribing
alphabetical visibility to take in the seen — and by dint of not speaking to you
and not knowing how to speak to you, sporting this beast on my lip, in hatred
of ptosis and the movement that disjoins lips — so as to steal to return to redo
it in what it is not, its intimate enemy homologue made of its material's strict
negation: like a blue from here might be for not being that blue over there,
worked on how long for what is called recreating with what was not created?

Where your sibylline body begins I shall not reach
If your body had the perfection of your body
You would not die or like Goethe at the end
Under Eckerman's sheets with more light

I write you the sharing. There is of course what I do with you, make of you, what I carry off and carry, these wages snatched by so-called poetic rapacity, for me, I will give you some for examples (you had come to be that gift of yourself raised to the sixth heaven where one goes on to the you, Danaë visited, tomorrow your dream continued at intersections with naked men in daylight like a film)

and then what I perceive in you, which has to do with your finishing, no one else, the enticed singular knowledge that ends with you; that discovers your lucidity, your penetrating abruptness, your accuracy that times your vespers, your absence of illusion about me, you with me, us (that you have a poor opinion of me, one me would say, does not bother me only for myself but because over there in you, the altered one that is not one me alone, something would not rejoice in something, withdraws, accuses, frowns, would contract). There is this sharing; I call *me* that which you cannot enjoy

The departure machine makes a vacuum We drove ourselves back to Houston, to Belgrade And also the children's change of absence inclines scarf and palms to pose on the being met by chance; and the violent instinct, said Jouve, to seek intimacy with the last comer, she who bleeds and guides

Swaths like reddened chimneys your vessels posed like cows and shrubs on November at the borders placed on your body where the outcomes begin

Danaë raised up to the sixth apartment-house heaven where one goes on to the you, or visited by Correggio's cloud, but she it is the Dorothea who tips Pygmalion over into a painter desiring to turn the nude into poems, his hard nudification having been delight; and what else besides a cloud if I sweep myths along these lines into torment.

— Translated by Jacques Servin
and Wilson Baldrige, in collaboration
with the author

JACQUES DUPIN

from SONGS OF RESCUE

I can truly say that I did not begin to
live until I saw myself as a deadman.
— Jean-Jacques Rousseau

1. From a thread of space, endless and unbroken. Without unravelling the fabric of the open night. Without interrupting the concert of *their* cries.
2. Dream of an afternoon: a slow exodus of clouds in the eaves. And the instinct for hanging on, my fingers clenched around a rope.
3. Staggering, out in the open . . . As if he no longer needed a name to be lost. He listens to the light patiently go into him again. Patiently, the light absolves him.
4. You, motionless on the iron bridge. Watching another story. Watching with my eyes. *Motionless*. Watching the motionless weather.
5. I walked by a blindman laughing in the street. The clouds, the cliffs, the sea: *pressing down* against *his* chest. Music begins to play in the windows . . .
9. Your followers . . . Their dresses stained with blood. All of them, going farther . . . Farther than the arrow of emptiness inside us. You are stunned by their mistake . . .

10.

Nothing to hold onto in the water. The interrupted story. Wild flowers, like a kingdom.

11.

To say nothing, to allow everything to be said. To write that. To fall. Like a shooting star. To be the only one who forgets how the night is torn apart . . .

14.

To write as if I had never been born. Every word until this moment: pulverized, laid bare, breathed back into nothingness. To write *without any words*, as if I were being born.

15.

I creep into your prison. To make the belladonna dance. Squeezing every drop of poison from my open eyes. To distract you, to go down to your depths . . .

16.

The noise of the water, down below, bearing off the bright debris . . .

17.

Two vultures, motionless in the middle of the sky. I am asleep. I am alive. Ready to pounce. From the middle of the sky, or from the edge. Cloudless, no churning in the gut.

18.

Northern slope. An echo from the rift. Shadow tumbling to our knees. The dove returns . . .

19.

Busy with your sewing: a needle pointing north, a needle pointing south, a needle pointing to the heart . . . A sharper needle penetrating the needle: pain shot through, naked light.

20.

At my feet, the dried-up bed of a river. In the wrinkles of my face, a harmonica. I sleep, hiccuping like a drunkard, an infinity of windows around me.

21.

Signet rings of light, spread fingers, repainted walls: before death comes. Before reaching the knot in the wood of an impossible death. An egg in the sand, or else a meteorite in the sand, in the voice . . .

22.

A book torn to pieces, open hide. A spring quickened in the blood. And in the sand, where the water of your tongue is lost, the long labor, the sun's interminable day . . .

23.

The scudding clouds have dislodged the lightning from the barn. It had been lost. I am its strength, the sign of its return.

27.

I don't use a megaphone when I speak anymore. There is no ravine in my chest. There are no splints in my heart. I speak in the same way that I breathe. I breathe like a stone.

29.

On the edge. Without the nuances and lacerations of the edge. In the light that streams from the edge. The wounded expanse stretching before us.

32.

Through the rhombus of a night sky cut from the ceiling. I dream like a feather. The long deception of a knife marks the ground.

33.

Cracked earth, pus, somersaults, plucked-out eyes, tainted blood, terror — and the rare and sudden flash of warmth . . .

34.

A skirret over the emptiness. Zig-zag script beyond the frozen heart . . .
The earth flays my voice.

41.

A miniscule weight on each letter of your body. The breathing of the
plants at night. The horizon which is no longer a fluctuating line, but the rim of
a crater.

42.

Lightning sets the table. Lays out the savagery of the tongue. Drags the
credulous and frozen body.

43.

The air is not religious, but in the twisted lung the air's fever is like a
wick, dripping with darkness. The air is holy like a foot, like laughter . . . Like
the cloven foot of the blind wanderer, like the laughter of the drug-addict.
Finding a way . . .

44.

What could no longer *be dug*. Under a night like this one. Held captive
by the white ground. By the influx of dew. What already could be written no
more . . . The wet color on the edge.

45.

In this forgetfulness, — hatching death like a stone, heedful of this
shuddering in the grass — like a stone, — in range of the water's smell, — of
signs glistening in the abundant ashes . . .

46.

Suddenly sinking: in a kind of low-life saintliness. The vacant
windows, obstructed. The dead sky.

Writing gorges itself on the smells that decompose it. The light opens
like a ripened fig, like a black wound . . .

47.

So that no one will hear us come. I walk with another voice. Blue, scored with blue. Brushed by the migrating flocks. By the weakening of its grip . . . Voice of the screech owl, of the blindman, of the blind earth.

48.

The north fluctuates. The devastated step fluctuates. Inverse labor of the eyes and the arm. Under the fabric of lines, of *return*. Bright night by the needle . . .

49.

She sleeps. Standing up. On the iron bridge. As the trains thunder past. Legs high, like the sea . . .

50.

Even dead, to go on listening. To remain inhuman. Outside the voice. Like the shell of a chestnut. The poppy's flame . . .

51.

Scars from the plow and the stern, wheelmarks in the flesh . . . I have no idea what comes before and after this dancing ascent of mud . . . My dark eyes stare into the brightness of yours.

54.

A profile, and the absence of a story. I am not on the point of death. I have stopped drawing. I break down the line while listening for a face. The sharpening of the moon in its first quarter.

56.

Of you, of anyone, I know nothing about the edge and the heart. Like a man dying on his feet . . .

57.

The tenderness of empty space while scanning the stones in the dry wall. The heavy figs under the leaves, the light. And in front of the light, my broken fingers, my dead drunk fingers . . .

58.

Monkey teeth-marks on your wandering body. Green marks, ambiguous pain. I plow like a glacier into the sun . . .

59.

Death exists only in uncertainty. In the breath. From which follows, *a few steps away*, the opening of distances, the wave's shadow in the ongoing roll of the sea . . .

60.

An obstinate bramble come back to life. Nakedness at the bottom of the ravine. A few words set loose in the heat. Oscillating night. Summer night. You would be its torn-out heart, its absent one, its guardian . . .

64.

The mountain path. The simple one, the bare one . . . Impregnated with the sky's color. The lost path. Erased . . . Writing itself through the flames. Arousing the sublime terror of horses . . .

69.

Several traces of home in the deepest layers of air. The impossible and the ineffacable: the real. My fear inscribes itself on the flowering rock.

70.

This blade of deep sleep that slides through each awakened sentence. Humus-thick on the sun's face.

71.

Suffering. Already almost suffering no more . . . I write the more, the almost, the already, — of disappointed death. I write in the infinite past, the *childish* past, of a beam broken off from the open light . . .

76.

To grant that each word is erased the moment it appears. That it springs forth and evaporates. In the expansion of its aroma and its trace, the derangement of its harmony.

77.

To be born. To be nothing but flint. To shimmer along the letter's blade.
Splinter of being. On the wet surface of a plowed field.

80.

Defect of the word, knot of negative articulation . . . The current, the
river rapids trembling in its loss, trembling in the flow of its silt . . .

82.

Color sliding into the spectre of nothingness. Of writing, passing
through the sieve of death. Cuts, in the thickness of my foot. I am listening to
you, and I am walking . . .

83.

I was the only one. The eye at work. She was the many. Sleeping. The
many, and the monster. *Sleeping*. She is the mark, the thirst, the wild grass.
She is the widow and the lightning flash of a future storm . . .

84.

As the blade is sharpened, the listening begins, the dictation . . . A few
drops of blood, and this stretching of the void at dusk . . .

The stars have trouble following me. My body rejoices in refracting
their light.

85.

Sequence of water that squeezes you, that divides you — that deifies
you. That holds me in the grip of its liquid knot. And drowns the breath, the
voice. Below its shimmering, its divination. Its course . . .

86.

To write without breaking the silence. To write, in violation of a place
that disappears: squaring of the page, disencircled face, case dismissed . . . The
rapacious void, the calm — startles its prey . . .

87.

Earth and sky. And fear, the horizon line. Their complicity and their
agony. Fertilizing the depth of the eye. And their war, the arrears of night.

88.

They have plucked out my eyes. It is daytime. I expose my infirmity when I write these words: *it is daytime*. Untouchable, at loose ends. Like so many beasts, heads, suns. Roughed out badly by the denial of DAY.

90.

The breathing of the moors at night. All things dark. Holding my breath. One night. One instant. For as long as it goes on, I am master of the darkness of things . . .

— Translated by Paul Auster

CLAUDE ESTEBAN

from ELEGY ON VIOLENT DEATH

Your body has no place. It changes, it lives in the air, and it is there, in the morning, I breathe you in. It is the earth, at noon, between moss and the soil's warmth. I go down with you, pursue you in your caverns. Six o'clock in the evening. I know which road leads to the sea. The one that belongs to you. And it is over there, quite far from the house, that you, cool as can be, carry me away on the foam. No longer does your body have a place. Your body embraces all places. You cannot die.

*

They waken me. They tell me it is daytime and I believe it since I have a fever. A woman takes my hand and says I must eat now and I believe her since I am no longer hungry. A friend gives me a book and tells me I must read it and that it will cure me, and I am willing to believe him since there are so many words written on the pages. A man I do not know asks me the name of a street and I no longer remember in what city. I walk, I come to a place where they say they have had no news from me. I listen to them, one after another, and believe them. Later on, it is daytime again, I awaken.

*

Night returns. It is an easy sea for those in love. For myself, all the unknown. I know you are the one who dies, but no way to stop. One must go on, climb atop a wall, have the strength to look at this beach. I know it is an empty dream. Let it be repeated in the ear's echo. Tomorrow, here already, I can take a distance from it, break it down into sufficient reasons. In vain. It wins, every evening. I find it again and lose it when you fall. Your blood is odorless. It flows, it creeps toward the sea. It says: gather me up. Then the wave washes it away.

*

It was me they were coming to see and I was never, ever there. I had been living, since September, in a vacant house. Not yet sold, but deserted, with lamps that pierced the night and this horror of walking in the large rooms alone. So who knocked, occasionally, at the shutter? I no longer had a name, nor lips to answer. I was living in a dead house, and those who knew about it, the living, did not stop by.

*

These phrases from another September, when she was here. Fear already was approaching, indecipherable between the trees and the exact room. I spoke only of myself. I had my tricks, my secret paths to catch myself unawares. So many lost suns. Work was coming along, nonetheless, line by line. At times shade intermingled with writing's second sight. I made it worse. And the book got done, down to the last page's farewells. It is I who went away. It is I who crossed the sea, not knowing misfortune remained on the shore and death was growing, still tiny, in a body.

*

It is a dream. I am young. I am walking in the middle of the yard. I take my little girl in my arms. I lift her up as high as the tree branches. She laughs, she picks a pink plum, then another. She is five years old. Her dress, too, is pink. Suddenly I notice blood running down her lip, but it is not her own, I know it. It is old blood, full of gravel, as found on roads. I say to her: spit. But she keeps eating and the blood falls to the ground and forms a sort of crust in the grass. I am afraid to set the child down. I would not want her to soil her white shoes. No one to help me. Besides, there is no longer a yard. A nurse passes by in the hallway. She is naked under her blouse, she is a dark brunette. Your daughter looks so much like you, she whispers into my ear. Do not worry, it is nothing. She pushes me aside, takes the little one and carries her off. I remain alone. It is a dream, but it continues. In the distance I hear the helicopter coming.

*

September that will not end. Useless September on the clocks. September paralyzed like an arm. September like a sun that burns. September in flasks of formaldehyde. September on the pupil of stones. September with curdled blood. September in the bees' sting. September deep in stained beds. September in a bicycle's wheels. September in the police report. September in a throat screaming. September in the streets of Nantes. September that ceases no more.

*

The same heart beating is no longer the same. It thinks it suffers, but it is nothing. A mere edginess of the fibers, a mechanical twitching of weary flesh. The same heart died, one summer day. And what lasts is time deserted, space written in monotonous memory. The same heart works, it is so old. No other hope for it than this strange stir of a forge. A breath, yet another breath. And then tomorrow, the head that accepts no more, the short gash.

*

"What wounds you shall cure you. What enslaves you shall set you free. That which dies is life for you." I hear the words and I do not understand the meaning of this language. Who is speaking, who hides while speaking? I would like to see, lean on an able arm in order to believe. Nothing but the voice, from afar, which insists. "Thirst is what quenches. It is night that shall enlighten you."

*

In the room, a mirror. In the mirror, the reduplicated space of things. Who can live when nothing moves any longer? Self and the reverse side of self. A way to imagine a gesture and to destroy it. This rush, then the dread of feeling the surrounding air, solid, inert. The mirrors are ageless, but we who look at them, what do we read if not the already concluded story that sweeps us aside? The mirrors have no soul, but they live on our blood, they steal what is ours alone, a face come to light, a missing body.

*

They walked. They crossed streets. They said the sun was useless. They knew desire. They forgot about desire. They pretended to believe it. They lost their house. They wept against a tree. They chased away all of their friends. They pronounced unintelligible sentences. They wrecked their bodies. They found fear delectable. They read books that knew everything. They lied. They gave their word to unbelievers. They wanted to disappear. They lived. They walked till daybreak.

*

I saw them, the dead, lucid, inalterable. Released from their being and pure. As regards their retiring manner, everything appealed to me. They slept there, like exact winter in the shells. No flesh, no tears. Perfect profiles. And then I saw. The terrible reduction of powers, the pupil that stares and does not respond, the empty mouth. I loved them, the dead. In the words which did not hurt, images.

*

The road that used to lead to you, blocked. The tree with its round fruit, broken branches. So this time, they want to forbid me everything, tear my history away from its living places. I shall fight. I will make myself small in order to survive. I will be this lizard between the twigs, this bark when the rain comes. I will endure. I will rot, perhaps, in immobility. They wanted to rub out everything about you. I continue.

*

What is time? A pale blue door closing again. What is memory? Three children who play without looking at me. What is fear? A boat at anchor in the empty harbor. What is fatigue? This barely eaten piece of bread. What is death? A table where I write these indifferent phrases. What is love? The table where I write that you are no longer here.

*

Save me. Deliver me from my wound. Wanderer, open your sojourn up to me. Fragile one, have me share this force that defeated you, these stones that shattered your head. Let me rest. Let my body take root in this yard. Let me be a branch, the oldest one, in the big tree. Let me bear my fruit, you who died childless.

*

No, you did not die. You did not fall on the road one Tuesday. You did not scream. You did not say to the doctor: do something fast. You did not vomit in the helicopter. You did not arrive at Challans unconscious. You were not delirious in a waiting room. You did not roll among the cadavers on a cart. You did not stay, all one morning, in the emergency room. You did not see me crying in the hallway. You did not feel the gimlet drill into your skull. You did not breathe through tubes for a week. You did not know I telephoned Nantes six times a day. You never had that inert hand in my hand. You did not sleep like an Egyptian statue. You did not die a violent death one Friday. You were not aware of being laid out in the morgue. You did not go into your parents' putrescence. You did not hear me read a poem at the grave. You were not where I was looking for you.

*

I separated you from night. I stole you from the ancient earth that
smothers you. I brought you back up to the sea. Now both of us are here,
secretly united in a thicket of heather. The heavens pass by at a great distance. A
bit of sand has piled up against my mouth. We will sleep here, if you wish. We
will wait, you and I, until no one remembers.

— Translated by Wilson Baldridge

CLAUDE FAÏN

FROM VINCENT TO THEO

As many surprising gestures to write
injustice distorted by time

Body which escapes reason,

Soon as the act draws from death

a force opposes,

encrypts,

— Is it from the one the original the
overrun of the other

Time renews disorder,

As the forgotten is the safeguard, the
circle a minimal response

just before overflowing,

without power to gather into works
or the speech or the orator,

When strengths empty,

"Blue" shaping and crossing as far
as Jerusalem

This affirmation against the thing
and the curse,

from an uncontrol the object released without return

Countryside extends, while the drawing measures

Back from where
in a tailspin of negations
reaches ultimate the impact

plunged where no place exists

An incessant conflict assures

Burns at the invading,

That it be from an interpreter, point by point
or play of similarities,
body in the body,

The approach has a common root in THE DREAM OF
ICARUS
Its memory a destructive invention,

terrible wording which distance serves to
weaken

Too much for intimacy

or adhesion
by fear neither of erasure

nor of death,

(from one envelope another envelope)

cut-off places set adrift watertight
against all movement

the constant presence its shifts carry
along and in each detail which the eye
traces the mark, the color,

This letter

from the other demanding to exist,
the dividing up of cities

of meetings the garden as if suspended
midway in the abyss,

Such void and sense of the indefinite
until out of one's skull creates the search
for refuge never found

These gestures from a remote truth which
incites the fear,

Mingled with words from a world already
suspect in another,

Where resonance answers resonance

O what guilt or what pardon
facing dead eyes

refusal moves away from shore
the insufferable marked off in desert
each day of a line,

In the brute denuding

Where angles' austerity divested of jest
and of complaint,
the instant of hiding places streams out,

And arms which strike send back below
language words without echo

TO WANDER is space,cage the wandering

to keep intact the dark world with
color

from where the attention was born which obstructing itself
awakens crossing the street, Let this loose, infringes from an
old sky and from branch by the rhythm of the sea.

— Translated by Robert Kocik

DOMINIQUE FOURCADE

from XBO

Osoie

I have to not escape from any of your contaminations

I am your poet and I must perish

There are lyric and inventive words like cracked glass

I pass by train

Bodies produce words while they come for example Barbara

said bastard the words come because they are bodies

Words trains pass and climax by being bodies trains of words

People

There are silences between the trains (not the word shut-up
the word silence) of words on their rails

I (the poem? the author of the poem? the reader of the poem?)

I is one these three) pass on the rail I com

E (I believe) because of the fact that

Words are here stuffed with grain such as silo

Pools as well

Recurring along the way of any poem
Possibilities of splashes

Fields of words luminous grey rye of words deliciously close-
cropped

Songs

— Where am I —

Squalling

Follow upon (of sunflowers multitude)

There are pools all along
Trembling long after

Again some cracked panes my favorite words
My most-inspired words
Among all landscape words

A bit of prose now: the consequences of polls differ depending
upon whether or not the rails pass through and send up showers.

Occasionally a lone sunflower in the middle of acres of rye
 alters the sound of light
One darts along the words abandon pylon
Barn violent charm the head spins
Blind new factory
Airtight
Smell of hay — buffer
Martin-fisher
Crises
The word regroup

I is also the two others (is one)

Some words such as sour or carcass create a fervent industry
The poem is bedazzled by fatal signs uncertain off-limits even
 at the moment of decision
Seduction
Still there is the word hedge of which the rarefaction alone
 gives account of my anguish

And those which do not run along the track but navigate according
 to compensated time
Laconic body like the word trampoline
(Which could become a sail, this laced trampoline,

When the catamaran keels over)
Or words with extreme floats

Or autonomous such as the word breast in the plural
Yours
Conceived for a bra in *dos-nageur* style

And tepid bodies (like the word pinewood)
Or humid (the body of the word tepid for example) and some
moments (some places?) in the language where the vapor
inverts
Or containing a reality more vast than themselves (syringe) and
very specific

I am on the train I have my camera I write I sign my death
sentence I navigate according to compensated time

Odiah Sidibe athlete

I pass in front of myself (this me which reads the notices
Do not cross a train can hide a word that could knock you
down
I file past (or the text) I go word by word (who's that) in
the induced text
I feel that I am the text and my weakness only increases

The poem is a tunnel emptier stronger harder
Neater
I obey all induction I weaken supremely
The poem is a contract of obedience, and of weakening
The black also is a question of obedience

To either side
From all sides but not in front
The text once again
At the very moment I least expected it
Wished for it the least

To the front I do not see the poem but shining tracks nothing
but its tracks
The words 'is there no way' cross my mind
'To do otherwise'

All my life I conform to the writing of the notices
I don't throw bottles out the window
I obey I do not lean over
Nor spit

— Translated by Robert Kocik

JEAN FRÉMON

CEREMONY

He calculates the movement of the stars
He corrects the days' denominations
He consults the turtle and the yarrow

reform the calendar
is his first task

spell out the work and the errors
fix the scale of penalties
the second and the third

XXX

In the shells rubbed with ink
older than our fathers

in the thousand blades of grass
out of which balms are made
(after having wounded him in combat
the king bandages a king)

he reads the yes and the no

what will be is
written in what was

XXX

The works are
those that seasons dictate
unique principle

the punishments totalling five were executed
to the sound of eight types of instruments.

The punishments are: the black mark, amputation
of the nose, confinement, burial,
the fifth was not mentioned.

Furthermore, the edict said:

That crimes committed audaciously were to be punished twice.
That the severity of justice shall be tempered by compassion.

XXX

The eight sounds were:

the sound of metal
the sound of stone
the sound of stretched animal gut
the sound of wood crossed by breath
the sound of clay turned
the sound of skin tight and tanned
the sound of wood being struck

The voices stopped.

XXX

The stones had been carved into tablettes, pierced with a hole
and suspended from a gallows or a transom so that the sound would
escape from all sides.

They were arranged according to thickness.

They were struck with a metal hammer.

The purest sound came from jade
one revered their muted clap.

Brilliant in the sunlight, the metal instruments were
the first to be played and then the stone instruments.

At the sound of brushed strings the pantomimes began.

XXX

There are two sorts of pantomimes. One with shields
and axes, the other with flutes and feathered fans.

One began with flute and fan pantomimes
(the fan to hide the face.) They mimed
errors committed in daily life, liable for the first
or second punishments.

Faults committed against the public order
were mimed with shields and axes.

XXX

To the sound of clay. To the sound of drums.
To the sound of wood being struck the last
three punishments were executed.

When a man dies
his rational soul rises to heaven
his sensitive soul descends into the earth.

Thus the Ancients, speaking about the dying,
said they rose or they descended.

— Translated by Serge Gavronsky

LILIANE GIRAUDON

WHAT DAY IS IT

*Fazer o que seja é inútil
Não fazer nada é inútil
Mas eze fazer e ã fazer
Mais vale o inúfil do fazer*

João Cabal de Melo Neto

to do anything else
is useless
flowers
and they are tulips

at the end of the corridor
you wait
to be carried away
that day
will be night

savage and limp
they have never seemed
so beautiful

their shadow is soft
in the mirror

I look at them
and the coffee beside me

steams gently
 near my cigarette
 gone out
in the general muddle
 imprecision of statement

what day is it

it is time for a new attack
 on the inarticulate
 Hello Eliot!
 and you Cabral
de Melo Nero imprecision of statement
 as at the first corner
of the second floor
 the man yellow
with sanded sawdust
 swirls
 in the evening air

 you have cut
the tulips
 very short evening
 will soon fall
what else falls
 as steadily
as the evening

 Here
is partial testimony
 of the sort of activity

that takes up
most of my time
and my life
like yours
falling
steadily

you cut
the tulips
too short
they are cramped
in the pretty glass jar

to do nothing
is useless
but between doing and not doing
far better
the uselessness of doing

as the sky
changing behind your head
is the exact colour
we are speaking about
of course life
is no longer the same
that is what I told myself
this morning
in the dark barely awake crossing
quickly past the murmuring
rubbish tip
if

the image itself
and it alone
should still be
the sole possibility
of holding suffering
well
what use continuing
to write the
Berlingots don't taste
the same any more even

those from Carpentras
today
is another matter

the gallery brightens
as sunlight comes
brusquely
neither outside nor in
then red
yellow and pink
lonely sour almost
an effect of seclusion
when nothing
any longer stays the same
but

we already made
a similar comment
about another
case of this type
on page 48 of the second notebook
right beside
the polaroid portrait
cigarette papers
RIZ LA +.

it concerned
something there is nothing more to say about
and after so much time
it seemed that finally
we were getting near
to doing it
because that is more difficult
than not doing it
easier than

for anyone
 which is why you continue
 to do it
 not knowing if
 one day
 you have truly begun
 and for whom
 this thing
 continues
 nor sometimes
 how it is all possible

like soaking
your lips
in dark
liquid
it is cold outside

the light
fades
almost completely
it is time
to turn on the lamp
to prepare for night

sticky face-cream

after a bath
don't forget

the dead skin
and then eat
the 2 small cucumbers
a few strawberries

All these life-size details.

The poem is not a depository, but a dump and a temporary altar, for suffering. Writing in the ordinary surroundings of night but as if in profile. What day is it? What is the weather like? Not the qualification of the moment; rather that of detail. Which makes writing resemble a Ring Road. What day is it? What is the weather like? When no bright ideas come (to be inside a dark fist).

"The litre receives and envelops the water."

The woman goes to bed. You should notice how strange her son's voice seems. Writing to reach such a speed that I will no longer realize I am writing. Note: the right hand ages faster than the left. Because of the wave passing through it, little volleys, powder magazine, slight jerks. Something empties itself out that way. When sky and sun glare that is the hand you raise to shade your eyes. It lifts up food to your lips. And all liquids. And the tiny flame that darkens your lungs.

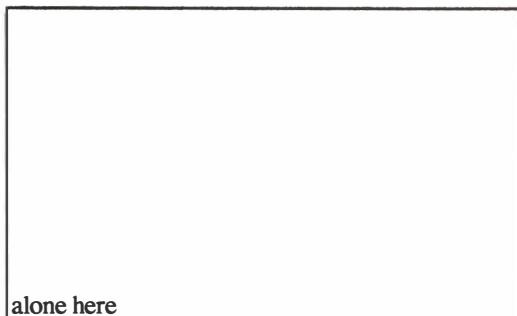
I dream of another reader of these poems.

A reader too crushed to even be able to open a book, to turn the pages like lettuce-leaves. Green enters your mouth, is ground up, shrinks, then vanishes from your face. Write no more for the keepers. The disciple is also the betrayer. Remember that. Don't forget to remember. What is done for no-one will therefore be of use to all those whom Benjamin called 'the crushed' . . . precisely those with whom, historically one does not go into details.

—Translated by Tom Raworth

ROGER GIROUX

THEATER

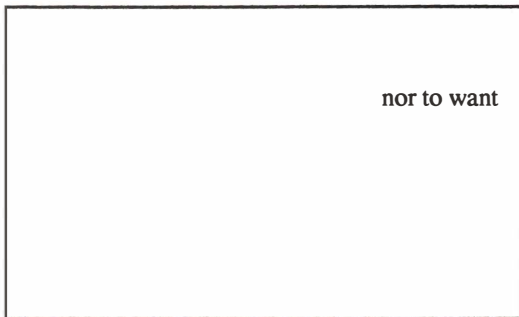


alone here

and
per-
haps

aflame

neither to lure



nor to want

SOMEONE

moves across the

chest

Traces

Which the night stops

all around

like an irrefutable proof of

the fine wall of the eye

here

it would be NIGHT, NUDE NIGHT

no

NIGHT

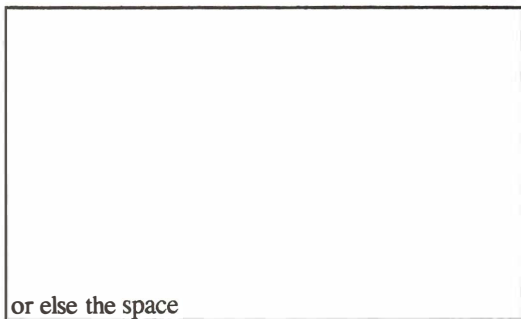
pistil

then

fell

from his ear

space



or else the space

or else

LAKES

—Translated by Ann Lauterbach

JOSEPH GUGLIELMI

from *LE MOUVEMENT DE LA MORT*

*Subversion is writing's actual working:
that of death.*

Edmond Jabès

When man has used up his life
let his remains tell us
Cruel wound of this
wind shatters where I watch
time's ghost the arm the
Memory of full force
of Hölderlin *zum Reste zeigt*.
The signs that we leave.
Images of the river and naked
age at once dark and blue.
Body and soul superimposed
and let
Death overflow with rain.
Teeth bared like a sea,
a flower on the ground of
stone dissolves in silence.
A scornful sun shows
up among the carnations.

Time, space, life
nor death the answer.
Shame on the symbols!
Pity the metaphors!
But there is the page of moon,
miniature labyrinth
toes in a fan.

Bello sguardo page twenty-seven
this look of blue or grey
where his arm in the hollow sky
remembers another life,
another colorless blue
d'Italia finestre alte
Via Palazuolo or other.
Italy's high windows,
a bridge a young woman,
the melancholy of eyes,
bello sguardo of her body,
grassy split of her life
there could moisten bite . . .
Hours make think corpse,
body in the water works
body and he would like to be able
to say *Kaddish* blue place,
long letter on the earth
that he is writing like a poem.
Close it! Eat my words!
Eat my mouth my mind,
buy a prayer book,
get yourself off with my pleasure!
It is day we are dead,
full of breezes and charms.

And if a person cries and shakes
a nice day nothing but sunshine
And Castel d'Appio in sky
in the breath of distant blues,
the olive tree's grimace,
the hollow of your dampness.
The story is about a siren
untitled at the secret junction
Hostage of the sky in fresco.
Romantic air ass ass
an insult to the mind or

the brain, I feel your holes of
intelligence bottomed out . . .
A gleam occludes in your mouth
Come poet taste my words,
Silence! I enter the casket
like a fuck.
The serpent around the tree,
no shelter in me brain
My *bite*, my nose, my heart
myriad exits towards
the same new universe.
Poor bones sucked white
cinder-grey, grey *over* prose
The petard of its mind,
delirium mastered on
sidewalk would be eating the moon
for simple reason of aging

fragrant as dreams
in the future morning torpor.
Delights of an animal
Saying love causes hate,
Return of the ritual cypresses,
of the tunnels *caduta massi*
purified by the snow,
the dew, the rain, the sage
the oak and the juniper.
And the beauty of the mind
in the dawn a mountain lake,
drawing from the last Cantos,
the nine Parques are over,
Citadel of desires
Memories of the blocks of childhood,
peaks that verbalize,
Poetry logos of the logos,
or brandy's firmament,
Supernatural medallion,

grandiose nor imprecise,
Pythian heritage
A deception even so!
Whistling the octopus of pleasure
A hole
 seated
 in its voice
in the voice fill me!
I am dark, hot, open
a gap in my verses too Caesuras
 of sail time.
Alas! the eternal rock
the music of silence

Here deep into this hollow
on a pillow of stone
against meaning withdraws.
Notes' dust
turns pleasure's key,
the concept and the name-less
That other half of life
Blind flash in the meaning,
in the song, the *chan* of tongues,
bursting, fresh, swallowed
at the sun's every step.
Higher, far in scent,
you open to me like a flower,
a flower of asia or china
Its mysterious dew,
nature's rest

— Translated by Norma Cole

JEAN-LUC HERISSON

from THE LITTLE LAND

"The Industrial Zone of J . . . H . . . "

Teeth laugh at the body.

Lose the chart and lose land; under
the charts it is black.

The little lot whistled well, but is
no musician for that. There where they
hang, they are dry.

Each street lit for itself. A speaking
pain is an islet.

Two little vapors meet, who will get
the best of it?

The sky scrapes its handle.

Love has no color.

Those on land guard the boats.

She hasn't taken a turn on me.
Behind booty is not body.

Speech in mouth had a charge.

The wharf is nothing,
it's uncanning who's the master.

The weeded land was full of respect.
The cut land holds its fence.

Send off the voice, but eat its
biscuits.

The grand taste of love is not gas.

The coast had to be undressed to see
its goodness.

— Translated by Stacy Doris

EMMANUEL HOCQUARD

from THEORY OF TABLES

She says, You are the negative—
Behind you an horizon in red
and the horizon a question
[. . .]
You are professor of watery tablets

Michael Palmer
Baudelaire Series

Brown, green & black

Don't say the fragments of glass are the words
or are *like* the words of the poem

Dear B., forget the words
don't count the years

Don't think you're holding in your hand
the pieces of the poem, time

Don't write that color contains history

These pebbles don't say Aegean Sea
on envelopes

These shards aren't syllables
these envelopes don't contain letters

Don't dream that you suffocate each night

The name of an island is: *invisible*

Clean the lens
wash the pebbles in the sea
an idea of the poem

Hello Olivier, where are you headed?
at five I photographed this palm tree for you

The pebbles don't become part of any field
work from the point of the absence of field

Consult the bits of glass
the remains of the tower

The glass can be endlessly recycled

Expose the negative to the light
wash the proof

Envelopes are tables

Your name is: *invisible*

How to say I and not say I
how to say you to you

You don't recognize your voice when you speak
your language is not yours

Clarify that in translation

Dear V., take what you have at hand
sort what there is on the table

Toss the pebbles in a bowl
color appears in the water

Don't sort out I and you
don't sort out blue and Aegean Sea

Schist and marble — two colors
white and grey — for the houses

Reeds for the bedding and floors

Seaweed, reeds, earth
and goat hides for the verandahs

Wildwood and glass for the apertures

Whitewash for the outside stairs

Hello Alain, don't discuss emotion
except in terms of tremors

The expansion of the house begins
with the house itself

You say the wind has shifted
this ship is seeking new anchorage

You say have you noticed that people
naked are fatter than those in clothes?

You say Kasparov is a copy of Fischer
but Fischer was stronger at the same age

I'll go back and bathe when I've finished this chapter

You spend your nights at the Barbarossa
watching Carlos drink coffee

You say he needs from a day to a month
to complete a fine miniature

You always drink huge amounts of water and coffee

You say it's utterly inexplicable
There was no reason for Bobby Fischer to quit chess

— Translated by Michael Palmer

EDMOND JABÈS

*THE INEFFACEABLE THE UNPERCEIVED
(THE BOOK OF RESEMBLANCES III)*

Before the Threshold

"We can never break our ties altogether," Reb Bethel had written. "Those we cannot undo — seemingly the lightest — are chains made of the very breaking." And elsewhere: "O invisible ropes of emptiness that eternity knots and unknots around our docile necks." "There will never be enough air for the book to breathe." Reb Kabr.
"Half mortal, half eternal."

"O Yukel, when you take me in your arms it seems even our shadows embrace lovingly."
"This is why I trust death," Sarah had written.

"So many chains whose links are words."
"We do not write. We shore up ties to death," said Reb Touna.
"Solitude is perhaps but a constant facing of our chains," he also said.

*

"Could it be that the book is just an amplified conflict of solitudes — the word's, man's — which writing takes charge of?"

"Whatever you do, wherever you go, the book is your future, and its paired pages are your left lung and your right lung," wrote Reb Yarbı.

PERMITTING THE BOOK

1

To belong to what by its essence impugns all belonging — the universal—: this is the true Jewish vocation: its unfettered becoming.

"What does it mean to be Jewish? I for one am tempted to reply it means being the person this question addresses, and who quietly keeps asking it of himself," wrote Yukel.

2

"Are we still writing when we keep harping on the impossibility of writing?"

"Are we not, rather, bristling against this impossibility, making sure that writing is always possible even where its very impossibility has been confirmed?" he had noted.

And received this reply: "The point is not to entrench ourselves behind the impossibility of writing and write only of this impossibility, but, on the contrary, to push to the point of impossibility the illusion that writing is possible; for nothing is written that has not been rewritten many times before."

3

To permit the book — as we resign ourselves to silence or refute it.

The book reflects us, a double mirror: reflects the mirror.

"To go to the sources means to enter the future," he said, "means, in the desert future, to make a lavish well spring up for every one run dry."

4

"White — color of absence of color — is so aggressive that in order to be read words have to attack it head on, syllable by syllable, letter by letter, never collectively, but each on its own.

"Strategy of writing," he said.

Violence of the white page, all the harder to subdue for being silent.
The resistance of the book is shaken every time.

Every birth breaks an original silence which it will fight to the death.
Hence eternity is perhaps this mute, infinite time down the stream of
time.

*

It was said that silence was the inner sky of man and words, and that it was this intimate space that made them grow.

Hence we can only read them within themselves.

There was an all too abortive attempt to base the world on the debris of its echoes.

Here, the brutal deadline rises up on the unmasked horizon.

To die to writing means perhaps having guessed that the last book, which all our writing has been listening to, is no longer behind us.

The Threshold

"Is there a threshold to the book?" asked Reb Souni.
"Silly question," replied Reb Dabbous. "We might as well install one to the infinite . . ."

And Reb Bahoum said:

"Could the Void have a threshold?"

And Reb Assadia said:

"Is not every word a threshold word?"

And Reb Souf said:

"Is the threshold not our well?"

"Saliva against sun. Source against sand.

"Death without merit. Miserable."

Reb Daffa

"What solitude could compare with that of the stone?"
asked Reb Daoum.

"I am this stone," Reb Fouda replied. "I am the solitude of this impoverished stone."

"Grain by grain. Dune by dune."

Reb Foula

*

"Insomniac void."

Reb Nim

"God is the miracle of death."

Reb Akla

THE PRE-EXISTENCE OF THE LAST BOOK

The last book is the book of God, a book which would have been man's first had he been able to write it.

Then there would be books and books all claiming to be the last.

We shall never know the last book; perhaps because we have always, dimly, known it?
Likewise God.

You do not write what you know, but what you are unaware you know and then discover, without surprise, you have always known.

As one knows that death is the end or that in a few hours it will be day.

As if you were, in short, exploring a past diverted from the course of your memory, but originally yours.

Munificent memory! Oblivion, too, is a pledge of the future.

*

Impassive permanence of the past; unexplored lining of days to come.

"A poet finds; a scholar rediscovers.

"All discovery is but patient conquest of oblivion," said Reb Rafat.

Oblivion is the nearest landmark. Thus the future sets imits for the creator in order to renew and perpetuate creation.

Discoveries still to be made give way under the weight of all that may never come to be known.

"If eternity lies behind us it is because the future is but a dreaded or expected past revealed by the moment.

"Then any achievement would only be self-recognition," he had written.

Intuition is a thin veil that gradually yields to the force of desire.

Ah, to keep our eyes closed jealously. All of knowledge lies behind our pupils.

"To see means to connect the thing seen with a knowledge that enriches ours," Reb Zalal had noted.

And Reb Hayat: "No discovery but has issued from the arbitrary idea we had of it.

"This idea was the right approach, the beginning of discovery."

"Resemblance of what is already created and what is soon to be.

"The book comes before. God comes before. The universe comes before. The creature comes before. Every morning teaches us so," wrote Reb Lamza.

God's wager is a wager of likeness.

To push likeness to the point of unlikeness that would define our likenesses.

"Whom do I resemble?" is perhaps the basic question man asks of both God and his prosaic brothers.

"In each of us there is an enemy of God's whose rash ambition gravely troubles our mind," Reb Maad had written.

"It is through the mind God holds us in bondage," said Reb Ezri.

And Reb Asson: "The thought of God pulls our thinking to such heights that it has no strength left for thinking."

"To escape God would mean to clip the wings of thought and make it hang on to our coat tails."

"Could it be that God's thinking is but an impudence of Thought, a haughty disdain of barriers that, like an imperious un-thought, challenges our thinking which is caught in its own threads like a spider in its net?"

"More than our heart God rules our mind," Reb Bahour will write in turn.

And was it not Reb Ragay who wrote: "Our sky is our soil. We think, eyes turned toward the ground?"

And Reb Galab: "Thought — luminous silkworm — is the larva of a butterfly. Master of the Universe it is locked into. The cruel duty of the thinker is to choke it in the chrysalis before it breaks out, trusting to its suicidal flight."

"It is the worm produces riches, never the butterfly," Reb Labod liked to repeat.

"Limits create limits," Reb Baadi had noted. "In the abyss, all of creation fails."

God succumbs to His own arrows. Target's revenge!

— Translated by Rosmarie Waldrop

LESLIE KAPLAN

from L'EXCESS - L'USINE

The factory, the huge universal factory, the one that breathes for you.
There is no other air than what it sucks in, throws out.
You are inside.

Every inch is occupied: Everything is useless. The skin, the
teeth, the glance.

You wander among walls without form. You encounter people,
sandwiches, coke bottles, instruments, paper,
boxes, screws. You move vaguely, outside of time. Neither
beginning, nor end. Things exist together, simultaneously.

Inside the factory, it never stops.

You're inside in the huge universal factory, the one that breathes
for you.

The factory, let's go. Everything's there. Let's go.
The excess-the factory.

A wall to the sun. Extreme tension. Wall, wall, the small seed,
brick upon brick, or concrete or often white, white
invalid or the fissure, a little bit of earth, the grey. The massive wall.
Meanwhile, this sun. Life is, hatred and light. The furnace
of life, before the beginning, complete.

You're taken, you're turned, you're inside.

The wall, the sun. You forget everything.

Most women have wonderful toothless smiles.

You have a coffee at the coffee machine.

The courtyard, to walk across it.

To be seated on a crate.

Tension, obliterated.

It's Spring. The factory is grimy and cold.

You look around, outside.

You get there by the fields, by going across the fields.
You pedal in the closed air, transparent.

The countryside is yellow and green.

You pass between anonymous trees. The trail fragments, fragile.
You roll in the jagged pieces, dry stones, gravel.

Around the very small animals flying across the flat sky.

You see her from a distance. She is perched on the grass, light. The sheet
metal is thin, corrugated.

The windows are open, banging. The air circles, identical.

You put the bicycle down. The courtyard is paved with stones, rounded.

At the back, the stage. The stones form a specific surface,
calm.

You cross the air. Between the stones, the weeds spring up.

Nothing disappears, ever. The air swells, each second with
odors.

You continue down the round courtyard. Above the sky, naive. You're
afraid, without stopping.

The women arrive in their supple corsets. You've got eyes, you
see their breasts.

Space is divided, it's terrible.
You're not protected.

You come, you go. Spring cruel and wet.
Factory, the factory, first memory.

Sometimes you walk to the cemetery.
It's far, beyond roads.

You enter by the main, round gate. The gate is huge,
immobile. You slide underneath.
On the other side are all the trees.

You walk down the drifting rows. The air is sweet, fluid.
Damp slope, bushes and everywhere trees, spare. The
leaves hang poised from the branches like lies.

Off to the side there are marble plaques and small awkward
houses. The inscriptions are faded. You read them. Names,
dates, history. Nothing is well marked. The sky moves, full
of water.

The animals play. It's free.

Something is there in the frayed air, transparent.
You don't know, you remember.

You pass between the leaves. The grass could glide, so green. The
words make no sense. Where, but where, are the dead?

from THE BOOK OF SKIES

I'm going farther, in a big city in the center, among
hills. The sky, beautiful, modern. The refineries are there.

Around the refineries, the sky is violent.
There are no women, there are no roads.

The highway, huge, grim, and the sky brilliant.
I go around and around in a car with friends. It's ignorance.

The small house, the room. I go inside.
Everyone is there. Walls and chairs, curtains.
It's compact, massive.

I eat. The nouns and verbs can circulate.
Everyone is there, face to face.

The food is really good, very heavy.
Bodies of animals swallowed, with vegetables.
Also cream, milk.
Everyone eats.

The walls are far far away. The radio is silent.
You're nonetheless engulfed. I feel the wallpaper.

The invisible strings working the scenery, there aren't any.
There are the eyes, and the hate, without object, tolerant.

—Translated by Cole Swenson

ALAIN LANCE

POEMS

Pretending to ignore the growing discomfort her insistence caused him, she didn't stop asking the hangman in her cage indiscreet questions about his private life.

What's surprising is that the other, whose reserve is well-known, didn't completely evade these interrogations, contenting himself with steadily turning the conversation toward a thin volume of verse by an unknown writer, entitled *The Fall of Hercules*, emphasizing the sober dust jacket and elegance of the title in blue typeface on a background of snow.

*

On the last floor before the roof of a large department store crowded with clergymen in uniform, she uses an umbrella to club to death the president-actor who just retired. Already wrinkled, the joker shrivels up into a quivering greenish wad: ah! it's breathing, you didn't kill it, he tells her, even as he glimpses — by the empty counter — the only witness, that detested writer who must be silenced, for security reasons.

*

With steel bars the others broke the high cage of glass where her golden fish were sleeping. Havoc. Deluge. The city and all the judges are already covered with mud. Carried off by the flood, he passes under the green eyes of a woman who once set fire to his senses.

*

At the far end of the depot a man swore the towers were going to fall. She was coming out of a long film with him just as night was turning pale blue. They were filled up to the stars with confidence, alive and talking to each other.

DEBATING ROSTRUM

Humidity Isn't Fatal

The shop-post examined recent atmospheric phenomena contradicting the calendar of central heating.

The shop-post expresses its surprise, its reproach before the commencement of the drizzle, rain, and hail, a commencement which announces itself in flagrant violation of meteorological principles set out in our almanac.

The shop-post considers it a duty to call each of the ill-timed inclemencies to a new reflection.

Following its set course, the shop-post invites the universe to create – as soon as possible – favorable conditions for the general drought.

Coarse Tobacco

What to do
With the crumbs

At the end of the glued days
Here's that shortness of breath
Hindering
My breathing and yours
Comrades

The clouds' mirror of tricks
Calls down flocks of birds

Paper talks to paper
In no time we'll have
Superb pigs

We saved
The mummy of disaster

As for us
Let's pace the narrow sidewalk
Dressed with meats

In a nook of the woods
Turned into paper
The blood of history
Buries itself

Once the separation ended
There was silence there was babble
Philosophy was served
In blood pudding and fists
Stuck to gummed tables

Breath: a stew of rancors
Neighbor's eye: pincushion of beams

And so the young smart alecks change
Hairstyles once again

Round Table

- A. considers the odds
- B. drinks them under a different fire
- C. laughs at the crisis of the changing brooms
- D. brings up the issue of the Great Mogul
- A. points out the thickness of the bed
- B. cuts the speech short and eats it
- C. is willing to take the hare's place
- D. refuses to throw out the Great Mogul

Spring

Spring and all, the tulips
Hold up a red goblet: drink a little
Sunshine flush with the wall to the east.
After all, why not spring
Which makes you feverish and whose song goes past
Dripping with music and muzak.
Spring's an objective fact
Abject fête fictitious object, etc.
Why do spring the other would have said
To have a body and fear's absence
I didn't say anything about it: to breathe
Without lying isn't on the agenda.

Spring's on sale! Glory to white onions!
Tarragon chives and watercress!
Let's get cooking, my friends, because life
Etc.

Raw spring includes the absent ones.

Caught Short

1. The boredom of the uniform

There's no excuse
The law isn't ignorant of
The nerves' state of war
Nothing's impossible
Everything can be stopped
A tiny bayonet
Indicates the time.

2. Figawo

O admiwable wolking crass O eternaw Powand
On your feet pwoles To solidawity
Twoops waise the cwoss high
Ewevybody behind the hory sacwament the Great Fwee World
And Wonald Weagan its pwesident

3. Permanent correspondent

And the streets have regained
Their usual appearance
And around here the patrols
Are much light now
And even the snow, etc.

– Translated by Jeanie Puleston Fleming
& Christopher Merrill

PASCALLE MONNIER

In the spacious and flower-decked salons
there was
 a refreshment table laid out as in the past
 with orangeade, cakes
 and sweet cordials

the lindens had grown
and shaded
 those sitting on the little bench

while in the laurel grove
 the sparrows continued
 to hide

in the fishing boat
was placed
 a small old-fashioned armchair
 and sail-cloth cushions

and in the carriage
 a precious footstool
but in the orchard
 the ground was covered with fruit
 that no one had gathered up

near the kitchen garden
 a statue of a woman

under a chestnut tree
and near other lindens
 a bench
 where strollers could rest

the third day when Phylostrato reigned
they lay down in the ideal valley
and bathed in the coolest and purest water
the servants had brought tables
amid the songs, laughter and dancing

under the elms, the aspens, the poplars
the sun burns sometimes
and a smell of rot drifts
here and there on the river
pike, trout, and perch still live there

in the blue bedroom among the armchairs
the carpets, the tapestries, the objects
another smell drifts but different
from that of perfume mingled with ashes

and windward of the parents' bedroom
and from the smell
of the corridor with the flowered wallpaper

Luck is now sent to you
you will receive this luck within four days
you will receive it by mail
do not send money
good luck has no price

do not keep this letter
it must leave your hands
within the next 96 hours

an officer in the R.A.F.
received 7000 pounds

Mr. Million received 40,000 pounds
and returned them because he had
thrown away the letter

while in the Philippines
Gene Walch
lost his wife
7 days after receiving it

however
before his death
he received 7,755,000 pounds

Kiss someone
you love
when you receive this letter
and that becomes magical

this paper has been sent to you
to
bring you luck

it has been around the world
9 times

please
send 20 copies
and see what happens
during 4 days
the letter comes from Venezuela
and was written
by Bual Anthony de Groof
a South American missionary

after a few days
you will receive a surprise
even if you aren't superstitious
take note of the following fact

Constantine Dias
received the letter in 1953
a few days later
he won 2 million \$
in the lottery

Arla Addit
an office worker
received the letter then forgot it
he lost his job
later
he mailed 20 copies
a few days afterward
he obtained
a better job

Allan Fairchild
received the letter
and didn't believe in it
and threw the letter away
9 days later
he died

kiss the one you love
send 20 copies
please
see what happens
don't keep this letter
it must leave your hands

THE MURPHY BED

It was hot, so hot that Alvin had stopped taking showers during the day. The reaction of his body to the cool water was violent, uncontrollable and hot. His circulation increased, his limbs shivered, his skin was covered with tiny drops; for a long moment Alvin's brain became inflamed. After finishing work he wrapped himself in damp cloths and stretched out on the tile floor. His apartment was situated on the 82nd floor of the Empire State Building. He was an oral surgeon. He lived and worked in the same place. His clientele was made up primarily of children.

On days when school was closed children were taken to the Guinness Museum, then to admire the view from the top of the building, and finally to the office of Alvin T. Fensterheim the dentist. The waiting room, which doubled as the living room after office hours, was permanently littered with children's magazines and comic strips. He had read and reread them hundreds of times, since he usually waited for patients rather than the reverse.

Lying on the tile floor, wrapped in damp cloths, Alvin's body rested agreeably. The metallic parts of the dental equipment, heated by the sun all day long, were untouchable. He slept in his dentist's chair, completely naked, in the light of the setting sun. Then the room was bathed in moonlight without his having wakened. Cars circulated noiselessly a hundred yards below him; airplanes flew around him in silence. His sleep was peaceful. On the same floor, on the same landing, in the next apartment, another man slept peacefully on a small leather couch placed in the antechamber of his office.

78 floors below, on a small stool, leaning back against the wall of lobby B, the guard dozed. He was snoring and sometimes his body thrashed about in search of a less uncomfortable position. He slept a lighter and more troubled sleep than that of the two other men.

On the 62nd floor, Martin Hoover was studying an important dossier for an insurance company. He was very sleepy. A few minutes later he fell asleep at his work table, his head cradled in his folded arms.

On Central Park West at the corner of 52nd, a man carrying a suitcase got into a red Mercury driven by a chauffeur.

— Translated by John Ashbery

MARCELIN PLEYNET

THE METHOD

The correct method of teaching poetry,
Art is limited to the propositions
of acknowledged sciences, with all clarity
and possible exactitude, leaving the poetic
enunciations to the student and proving to him,
every time there is a chance, that they are
without meaning.

Distressing reduction of the vocabulary
of modern poetry
syntactic retention
galloping schizoid
exploitation
dissimulation
mental misery.

Misery of poetry.
Poetry of misery.

Mallarmé:

"The vulgarity of Men of Letters . . . is perfect,
I'm still furious,
even though I'm so little one among them."

At best
contemporary poets
make literature (men of letters).
When one knows that literature in France
means the XIXth century!

The XIXth century once and for all . . . ?
What a bore!

Mallarmé

today required detour via Villon (Céline)

Mallarmé

too intelligent for the poets
he immediately convinced them

"What comes out of teaching must go back to it."

Break the Mallarmean lock:
esoteric pulp.
Pick up Villon — classical rhetoric —
experience:

Racine-Baudelaire.
Exoteric Rimbaud
("Gelding? Not an inch.")

Living language. Spoken language
(Written language is a bureaucratic language)

Quality of language: Quality of a body
Experience quantity
Experience the quantity of a body

Living tradition: Logic of experience.

The qualities of the French language
Are indissociable from the science of language:
rhetoric, the new science,
The cornerstone of our own practice.
Guillame de Saint Amour
The first to have used this new science.
Guillaume de Machaut
"the great rhetorician of this new form."
La Fontaine.
Bossuet: oratory art

Baudelaire:
"If you haven't studied rhetoric
With Satan, that clever master,
Junk it! You haven't learned a thing."

Lautréamont:
The phenomenon passes, I look for laws.

Necessity of maintaining everything.
Precipitation of actions.
Precipitation of informations:

diversity
practical truth
volume of languages
as quality
and as quantity
(everything in state in *Stanza*)

"Materialism is in itself grandiose poetry"
Against that miserable idealism of contemporary poetry
Stupid idealism . . . how sad!

Mallarmé: "You'll note that one cannot write
luminously in a dark field . . .
man pursues black on white."

Black on white: "If I do not lose the seed I sow
In your field when the fruit is fine
God commands me to smoke and borrow
That being the reason you are mine."
Villon.

"and the preacher became corrupted
since he could not explain
the corruption of nature."
Sade.

A man corrupted by nature is
a man who refuses to know
the corrupt nature of man,
a sort of vegetable

cf. a vegetable or a mineral poetry.

Lucette Destouche on Céline:

"He can be compared to those Hindus who
cannot come. They can stop on their way
to an orgasm. He was the same.
It was his matter, *his instrument*."

Rime, Venetian love, The Women and he
(lighter). Experience is never
quantity but variation:
clavier . . . volume.

"Joyously that's what lovers sign
Love writes it in his volume
That being the reason you're mine."
Villon.

Clavier: the body of thought.
If in fact as Diderot writes:
"My thoughts are my whores."

Daily exercises.
Quite agreeable to say the least:

erotization of vocabulary
quantity
enraptured by quantity
quality without waiting
 the practice
 exercizing the sexual body
 (isn't that so?)
 active thought on the clavier
 energy
 action
 swiftness of decision
 fusion of reasoning
 breath
 rhythm
 time
 eternity
 vital force.

You cannot go breathless!

When the Queen of Sheba met Solomon

"No *rûah* was left in her"
(she then lost her breath
she was transported
her animation and her vitality were as if suspended
by an extraordinary spectacle:
loss of *rûah* (breath)
diminution of vitality
entered the sphere of death)

II Kings 2

Elijah wishes to have a double share
of Elisha's *Rûah*

"I pray you, let me inherit a double share of your spirit."
Truly a question of Elisha's vitality removed and transmitted
at the end of his life. Elijah will first make use
of it to cross the Jourdan (miracle)
then to render fertile (gift of progeniture)
the earth watered by the source or Elisha's Fountain.

Needless to say it's how you want it.

Poetry, however, must say everything.

— Translated by Serge Gavronsky

ANNE PORTUGAL

from DE QUOI FAIRE UN MUR & LE PLUS SIMPLE APPARIEL

You who know painting thoroughly
the true distance
stepping back
tomcat's eye in the manufacture of marbles
flower pot to flowers
it's strong
the red of red beans
you need an American uncle
even beat
even creepy
rodeo's hereditary symmetry
mad longing
to set your bowling pins dancing
whistling silently away
think of the Cliff boy
who both relaxes
and hands you a scrap
You who know painting thoroughly

the landscapes of day are looked at piecemeal
differently
from the neighboring
and if he chooses to cut out
the other hedge
he's pleased
the other hedge
he's attracted by compassion
for the other hedge

the hour glass

me I'm enchanted by this landscape here seen from the sea
so brief that an hourly pedal boat rental is
a senseless waste not to mention a room
by the half-day

in this case cat who laps in turn sticks
a butterfly back of the windpipe
which gesture sends it into a rage in reverse
ah would I ravish a bombardier

since I see two hemispheres I think
I am passing the poles
I push a plane on to Melbourne I feel in a state
of post-sentimentality

on the slanted garden

a slant a garden
public
which makes the two gardeners of the city of Paris
seem to be
mural
allegories
nearly on the slant
they hold like mountain
cows
though it's vertical and almost
giving in
to their mutuality

so that the height of the boots on each leg
is proportionate
to the boy's bent
to pick a flower
in season
which shakes his root
to high firmness
of houses

if these boys shake up armfuls
of flowers
it's that they have to rip them
from threshers
on orders
from city hall
the two boys

I found they were trellised the white arm
and at the same time everything moved a little

that distinguishing two three separate
the window left an elbow at the fastener
whose impression is canvas and the following
returns the little profile or little else

the limits site the rest and arrange
you whom I adore who go beyond the countenance the clan
the women's set have you said all your things
works the dismantling by default

the quality of a stooping hairdresser multiple
that I would watch

this idea of cube
the cross it was delight
to cross the empty court
as far as the wall
and then to turn
sighting the heart the diagonals
crossing the voices
indigenous inclines
and women on the balcony spelled b
they facing you thought of me as from a p
lashing of hesitant ship
to the hold

— Translated by Norma Cole

PASCAL QUIGNARD

*IN AIR
AMONG THE BRANCHES OF BEECH*

Subject to fear. (I speak in tears.
Enraged. "The outside! The wordless!")

Farther than field's end
 (In forest. No silence.
 No uproar.)

(Subject to fear.) He turned back to see.
A blinding chaos: foliage unchecked en-
dangering the harvest. A wilderness
(they've taken a steep path which rises in
utter silence. Sheer. Nothing seen.
Fog a knife could slice) - to say

 makes a terrifying noise

No uproar but nothing at peace. The
silence of rage is identical with the
silence of utmost terror.

- while we were talking

Fled while we were talking

Take

(They took the path
mentioned above . . .)

in the territories beyond. (Amid deep
silence?)

(Still, when we try to achieve silence,
clenching our teeth to hold our breath,
as we gather it at the edge of our lips,
with what eloquence sounds:

"st")

But, "Sag!" it's "The Howling!"

Silence peculiar to night:
Her! She is being dragged
backwards.

(But, "Sag!" it's "The Howling!"
It's the word for the sound the waves make
as they resonate.
Let me put it this way, it's as if you
heard a sigh from the high seas.)

(He dies while writing

"from the high seas . . . "

but in what is foreign to
language! At field's end!) Winter
beginning at the mouth's opening

without community. Without enigma

more fluid than the wind

starting from these cliffs

(I say)

in the air

among the branches of beech:

end of the field and

fear. (What - me!)

Throughout the night the air is "freer
from turbulence because

nights are quieter.

(Without uproar, with nothing peaceful.)

Thomist but (What? Certainly not a
a creature of the woods
alone
among the beeches,
no matter what foolishness
to cry out
being accustomed to

— Translated by Michael Palmer
(After the French translation by
Emmanuel Hocquard and Pascal
Quignard, with a glance at Quignard's Latin)

JACQUELINE RISSET

EQUIVALENT TO: LOVE

PAGES

: Book, we should be able to undo it
what's the role of stone in
his books — Crowd, church, gravel pit

this ridge ideas get
on some days
sacrifice

 of the child
so that the earth / mother
a lot all this
which equals

your life, painful in
 / broken
us

Earthquake
earth wind
deep purple flash, sleep,

crossing the river,
thunder bolt,
rested eyes

D'S VOICE H'S VOICE

*D's Voice:**

they, like shepherds,
and I, like a goat,
have fallen asleep on the bank

and as a bow
bursts with arrows
I burst into sobs and sighs

when she spoke
far side of the river
the old flame

rekindled inside me
with its old color of blood
"for you I went through water and fire"

*H's Voice:***

it wasn't for heaven
it wasn't for anything higher than you but for you
hurt so that you should know

hurt tossing from side to side
in the narrow bed of the song
excited ready for

even virtue even order even school
believing nothing but your warmth
and that your name your sign

I say we I say sisters
but it's me crumbled for love of you
crumbled to bits

into river runs to surround you
wherever

**Dante, **Heloise*

FOREST

she started saying my name
with her voice her mouth
with the colors I knew
right after that she reproached me
and I cried
Toward Easter I dreamed
that I dreamed her dream
when I woke up
I didn't know where we were me and her
outside or inside this dream

from time to time
when she touches the point where her love lies
sleeping

her tongue wakes and comes back
to say
"I am here I see you do you see me?"
"I sing"

to say:
"my body, dear
I fear
I see you disappear"

— Translated by Rosmarie Waldrop

DENIS ROCHE

from PROSE AHEAD OF A WOMAN

I had reached the middle of the park when something changed in the oblong arena of the landscape I was watching. It was rather far ahead in front of me, slightly to the right, along the path which comes up from the tennis courts, in the direction of the local road. And while a horse appeared with a lady rider, I couldn't help but, I was only able to compare my field of vision — and I still feel it as I think about it — to a vast attic window with softly rounded angles, greyish and moth-eaten by the interior penumbra of the mind, the one which represses by degrees the brilliance of the world we see and which at times extinguishes it, a bit as one must surely see flickering and then go out in an invisible flight of smoke the portrait of a loved one enclosed in the pocket of a wallet or the firefly which dies because it had emerged too early on before nightfall.

I later learned that the rider's name was Blanche Castle, a character in this story who had found it appropriate, according to the initial outline, to give me a number of details concerning this young woman, knowing that I would need them later on as a narrative commodity, but also because of the desire for this type of need and all the information which was going to complete her character; in the same way that, in reality, the future lover knows he'll have to accumulate as many details as possible, pieces of information, paid for on a prorata basis of an enterprise becoming more imminent from day to day, all that "necessary material" around seduction, having for its solitary goal the dilation of time, to make of it a vertiginous moment half-way between the first meeting and the first caresses, between the glance and the touch. I must admit that, standing in the midst of this large grassy square, I had already begun to think about it, I envisaged a mix-up over the clothing, not because they were going to be removed, but because they were belted and double-breasted or buttoned up, that is to say, at a stage where all ideas of precariousness had been excluded; I joined to these parcels of images, cohorts of details, fluctuations in narrative verisimilitude, among those which sinuously rise in the slow and so suave overexcitement of the imagination.

Conscious of this obligation whose initial effects were only then beginning to be felt, I looked out firmly, one might say, forced into this profit, this person who slowly began to be called Blanche Castle, who was slowly coming towards me in the slow pace of her horse, brought here both by the weather and the dramatic action, both offering to me, on a pebbled tray, here and there pierced by some incongruous grass whose only destiny in this world was or was not to be crushed under the hooves of this fictitious horse.

I remained motionless, but that was all.

Despite the whirl of the moment and the absolute light of the sun on this scene, I was aware of the repetitive absence of sound, or should I rather say, of a continuous absence of all sounds. But can one say about the absence of sound that it detonates? No horse's clippity-clop, whose hooves nevertheless I saw strike the ground, no crackling of the silex on the path, though these noises certainly had occurred, borne under this chestnut beast and propagating all around the shape of invisible orbs, as true as the ocellates of peacocks, stretching to the point of crushing themselves against the fences, closing in, enribboned around tree trunks, coiling as so many tender reptiles or languid whips at the angle of the abbey's main building, or else finishing up by fainting for lack of strength, having forgotten their conviction in the air or the light.

When both horse and woman were no more than a few yards away from me, it was for me no longer possible to take in the inventory: the horse, the robe on the horse; the woman, the robe on the woman; the color of it all, the colors of the flesh and the clothes; the gait of the one and the carriage of the other.

— Translated by Serge Gavronsky

JACQUES ROUBAUD

from QUELQUE CHOSE NOIRE

NOLIFE

Neck squeezed by the rope of waking
Body all heaped together to the forehead
Stretch of flat desert with bad soundtrack
Wanting desperately to make its words stick somewhere
And smiling emptily in front of your black face
Licking your skin sandy sometimes with music
Caught in a circular hell of seeing and seeing
Ceaseless your face quenched the breath remote
As at that deepest moment where I understood

NOLIFE, II

Null vision at the bottom of thick brown glass
Caught from the surface of veins but never told
Never told on the wavering field of your dwindling voice
Groping for your throat endlessly backlit
Maybe hidden behind the topsoil even
Wide open sky of endurable brilliance
At the center of your flesh and draining a sound of flies
That frown on the horizon where it turns blue
One more vertical hour but just your lungs

NOLIFE, III

Renounce me eye out front and looking
At the uncurling wave of genuine surcease
Answer neither me trembling to tell and opening to say what
Say to whom now opening wide inside your mouth
Without knowing it breathless since you were born
Skin grey sudden drunkenness of oxygen
Pure phrase of liquid with no teeth
Far from me footing lost in the unbreathable
Blood and threw the sheet over your hair

NOLIFE, IV

Say it am I going to die say it
Die so that I won't know anymore say it
Tide wave of imperceptible space
Comes scraping the instant of your afterlife
Say it the wave of time and of what
Of lights of clouds of everything that makes everything
Squeezing my hand shoving night back a little
The door pushed back of light
I recognized your death I saw it

— Translated by Robert Kelly

AGNÉS ROUZIER

from NON, RIEN

As if each step, each word dissolved you—and you collapse— or at the same time you overflow, with such laughter, such affectation, such pauses, — you move forward to the undulating edge of a frontier where you are the only one who knows the handles, the coves, the passages; you feel happy swallowing this incomparable grey dust, while the swiftness orients you, pushes you by the shoulders, more than alone now, while around you drift solid and shapeless masses, skimmed through and dispersed by a finger, you skirt windowpanes that reflect you, dressed mannequins, undressed, bald or with wigs, on a street that would never have any architecture, no walls, no house, and that nothing, beyond you (but you?) traverses (but that speaks and breathes), at the edge of this page that is neither page, nor paper, nor whiteness, nor reflection, nor madness, nor wisdom, nor sense, nor book, not your hand, not your head, but a beginning splitting through an experience, a kind of present that doubles without end, without ever petitioning to an up-coming future, cassation, lack of grace — already you fall.

But give me a body. Or answer, chosen from among so many others: silence is a word that is not a word.

Here we will arrange what remains of men for us before the sea. And we will stare at her, on the beach, debased, supreme, simply mediocre, outside our gaze that adorns her in a myth. Body, called superb, and that I call, on my knees, with my tongue, adored. Here we arrange, facing the sea, what remains of men for us, in a sex-line, red, called obscene, drawn up, bust nude, immortal, fusillade that immediately assassinates them and starts up again, while a spring releases at their feet. Puts them back in place. You. Nude. Or us.

Here what you see. What is. What speaks.

Forward, facing premonition, facing impossible accomplishment — here what you see, erase, speak — forward, behind this powerful blue, this sun, these baths, words from breakfast, morning, water, sleep, sea, fisherman, river, meadow, forest, verdure, dessert, fish, dessert, forward, outside, at the most transient and sublime, until rain, the country, the city (up to this particular snickering) up to these round stones, rough, palpable (but not phantoms) until this . . . but nothing more (what you see, what is, what speaks). Shutters clatter. A moment you fall. As if wanting you and disappearing.

The hottest month is not yet behind us. Convention that makes death dreadful, then, immediately, tames it again.

So light, impossible, sounds reverberate inside of . . . Him, you, me, us: kind of conch of repetition. (At the heart of this work, of this apprehension, which will not leave them, not before not after). But you face if I invented you, if you move, and you deeper, more muffled, you, blood under open lips, path that goes, goes beyond, deranges, and behind . . .

Can we call this silence empty? (sea of ice) — and hot enough to burn flesh.

It appears from the very start. Nothing appears, but the onset is there, in these palms, in these turned-up hands, held up and undone, under these nails.

Let it come. Let the thread spread, and the ink, inchoate, appear. I, you, quiver. Let yourself, one thousand, die, run. Symbol of millepertuis. I don't know.

This is rest. Peace. Or unbounded, terror.

Inland, not even a tree, object, to give it measure or immoderation. Silence is a word that is not a word, and breath an object that is not an object.

Playing sounds, until like points their appearance limbers, disarticulates.

We learned to be blond. To have green eyes. Curls. Painted fingers. (By fantasy of resurgence.)

Silence is a word that is not a word and breath an object that is not an object.

By fancy into resurgence.

That beast who, all night, like a mole . . . Thus desire marries itself to expectation. Bang. I love, we love, the crusty scent of earth at your fingertips, under the nails. Painful image. Her laughing, radiant image. Sun. How distant you (they) are. How I . . .

The Vespers of the Virgin (Beata Virgine) enwrapping everything. As you, as I, we, radiant image, we are . . .

Hotel room, traditionally gloomy, narrow, hot. Sink, bidet, soiled objects. We look around. Asmodeus or the demon of . . . Worship. Narrow. We look.

Pleasant, the village square, where some children wait. Then they get up. Absence. As you, as I, we are . . . Sun.

This angel is not ugly.

((And so ceremoniously they bowed and told sweet stories of bygone days,
violins in hand (and that color rose, contemptuous of the green of leaves,
pre-spring)

angels on their knees
rigid, strikingly distant, proud, angels that face us. Does it matter anyway what
I saw that you I saw, and cried.))

New laughter.

(Density promised until damnation and that you offer, now, redemptress. Little
box, opaque, between your hands, that you caress, open. Nothing breaks
loose, but erases you, unsteady, further off, "almost to suicide.")

Bubbles, bulls from a tumultuous current: morass. The Bleeding Nun or King
Lear.

Then the walls no longer resemble walls. He takes a taxi. Streets traditionally
gloomy, narrow, burning, versus the country, vast, open.

I recount the severity of a dream that is not dreamt, of a labyrinth without
enigma. I recount the flaky density, absorbent cotton's hole.

Here the itinerary of whatever joy is traced, of whatever fear, laughter,
suffering, secret denunciation, absence. Let it come. Let it.

A freestone house. Polyester husks. Habitation. Cockpit. *Amica mea*. Open
lips. Misery of those through whom the scandal-silence-suicide arrives).

Infinitely reassuring, these characters in cornets. But the story doesn't end here:
spating, the other feels the words trace a path with him that carries him away
(stammering, frothing, flows down.)

Having completely lost any notion of the limits that make up definite being,
gradually sinks.

Tumultuous current, morass: the Nun or the King.

— Translated by Chet Wiener

Citations:

But give me a body. Kierkegaard

Silence is a word that is not a word. Georges Bataille.

Silence is a word that is not a word, and breath an object that is not an object.

Georges Bataille.

Almost to suicide. Mallarmé

Amica mea. (The Vespers of the Virgin) Monteverdi.

CLAUDE ROYET-JOURNOUD

THE NARRATIVE OF LARS FREDRIKSON

draft one

she crosses over

from one border to another

repetition

in that named space
of the neutral

on the pressing spread
where interrogation and rest
figure in

o

... near the muscle
an infinitive pain

draft two

relay:

the dejected sense
that a sheaf beats
and spreads
over the interval, the sum

relay:

... OF A FIGURE DISPERSING VERTICALITY

relay:

simulacrum of a body
the perishing of a scene

relay:

"my words in your mouth"
that a resemblance disseminates

— Translated by Joseph Simas

ESTHER TELLERMAN

from "1st and 2nd Door," a section of THREE INHUMAN MAPS

She came
gravel color
head overturned on the columns
only to delay the threat
the temple's development.

*

What was the conflict's nature?
Position.
Hammered to the edges of the mark.

*

East wall:
the whole landscape figured.
Palms and other essences.
Canals.

He's still asleep
You see every feature
around falsification.
The wheel moved air.

*

Refraction.
Through the effect of two mirrors
his laid out son.

In hell
several red points
broke the bodies.

*

3rd and 4th hours of the night.
Dark flesh.
Rite of the opening of the mouth.
And we were the cards
in rarified air.

*

Negative confession:
do not reproduce.
Overturn the face.
Air's absence.

Sudden the green
upstream
the day's variations.

*

A prince mixed in the ships of infancy.

1st and 2nd door.
Fix the mirror.
Transparency
must be taken.

*

Among fragments
the end of lands.
How many live
directly?

*

And under their over-white skin
brusque movement of departure.
Certain men.
The one the other.
Redhead
but was rejected.

Parted the man's thighs
with a black tip.

*

He begs them:
take the same way back.

Retraced glaze.
Double of the dead's face.
the other bank
revealed him.

*

The image had to be multiplied
along the yellow stream.
We were looking for an edge

water bathed the blue herbs
that morning already.

*

5 meters
aperture at 4
with the day's outpour.
Morning's salt rubs out the traces.

*

The bend of low waters.
Essences.
Torpor.
These points
opposing their own strength.

*

Hold back
deviate the route.

It was a very old departure.

"And if by chance
freed of the abyss

that night's fire."
A song passes over the water.

*

And so they lived
once again
as long ago their children.

*

When she reached the shore
the signs no longer had
the usual rhythm.

*

— Translated by Stacy Doris

JEAN TORTEL

THE BODY TO RELOCATE

Certain green certain leaves
Certain reflection of green on leaves
immeasurable but
Measures of awakening and this
Unforgotten which sleeps
Still and whose nights I have crossed
Fortunately often

According to some green certain
Reflective leaves
are not measurable but.

The day is livid winter.
Day means twenty-four hours.
A completed revolution.
Without stopping to begin.
Is again what it was.
The same circumference.
Divided into two segments.
Unequal each morning.
That the troubled eye rebuilds.
By sleep it's day.
That is to say a facade.
Appeared the eye does not follow.
Neither why nor if it's true.
That lividness could be.
Different within itself.

That which rises from the water half black.
Disintegrated but who could be.
Picture the day the body.
Real an object.
Naked breathing.

That which seeks
A road somewhere
One toward what I'm saying

It's toward what I'm saying
Or rather it's green
What I'm saying what I've

Chosen between signals
That say nothing.

(A verse is the possibility of saying anything in a predetermined number of syllables. It is necessary therefore, to know the definition of "verse", to know first what a syllable is. As here explained their number is predetermined by the mute will, perhaps unknown to itself, of the writer. But also by the very nature of an isolated line, black on the white of the paper. For it's through this line that I've dreamed of finding the definiton.)

More or less in place.
To its glow and all that.
Has only the meaning you want.
To match what comes.
Accidently but surely.

However she was beautiful
Stubbornly and the sleeper
Saw something she was.
The real night incites
Flames and the curves of faces
Reinvented sometimes recognized
Accepted lifted from below
 she was
Strange sometimes blue the night
Shudders in the writing
of its disjointed appearance but she
Was her own impenetrable night
Walled in by herself and protected
By the figures coming out of her theater
Such as the dancers.

Random body that knows nothing.
Of either the duration or the depth.
Neither of the two possible meanings.
Steering the curves toward nothing.
Form and its power don't know.
To name those things visible to the eye.
Open closed it's the same thing.
The same agreed upon the same.
Revival and torque.

— Translated by Cole Swenson

ALAIN VEINSTEIN

BETWEEN BODY AND SOIL

Here, with all my strength,
from a great distance.

So painful
to hold on.

Position of a man
who lays hands on death.

Master of his pen, of the fright that forms a plot of land, since that *other* and *only* time, he is no longer alone. But *nobody* as long as he drags along this land of prey.

I should have let them carry on:
words lead to body.

He comes back from his labors
hand buried in soil.

The land is not large enough
for this kind of hand!

To ground myself, to construct a story under my ribs and in my throat, I push far the study of this hand that folds me into death.

Deep in the whitish soil, a few steps from mere dust, my hand feeds the fire . . .

As far as the eye can reach

As far as the eye can reach, upset in his labor, not joining gesture to word . . .

The first fields have made him turn to a story that never takes place, where he never arrives.

From here on,
in my depression,
in spite of accidents,
I hold on to all that's misshapen in the land
so as not to lose my body.

A day laborer making the rounds.
Libertine.

At liberty to come and go
I burn, a good page,
at the heart of things.

I approach the fire that has already
consumed all the characters.

Incapable of moving faster, half my body as if bathed in dust, I try to rise to ground level, toward the other part of death.

*As in his infancy
plays havoc with his land;
then fights against death
with swollen lips.*

*And his land
but holes dug with bare hands
death's looking glass*

If I continued with this line, in my image, without trying for the least advance, I would dry out, far from my body, in the unwavering flame.

All movement of the pen.
(Light among ashen bodies.)
All movement that leads away
from the light.

And the fugitive whom no hand holds back, who is space lost . . .

I am not only here.
But there is no other hand.

So buried in writing . . .
Without a breath of air. Without issue
or menace.

In this clutter where there is no story
but death's progress.

The light

Nothing is lost. Nothing has budged.
I entrench myself in my hand,
choked with light.

Like a gesture answering a gesture:
the light.

From the first line to the last,
I borrow the name of the light.

Light

Light: this lack of strength.

But he, unable even to reach
a 'window.'

Tied to this word — between limb and land —
where words find no place.

— Translated by Rosmarie Waldrop

JEAN-JACQUES VITON

FRACTURED WHOLE

the pigeon's gait is spasmodic
it should not be called slow
if it is observed calmly
it can be comfortably studied
on a balcony railing
the ease of the method
is guaranteed to bemuse

at each contact of the foot
another measurement
time has no significance
steps often being taken
with a touch of distractedness
to run faster it's enough
simply to lengthen stride

changing place is a focused domain
resulting from the positions of the head
which the gaze must never leave
you've noted that frequently I move
my left hand at the touch of voices
a different situation I belong
to the second generation of robots

the respiratory rate is maintained
under constant tension
the duration of contact hardly varies
they attempt to verify this
sight cannot choose
the moment of touching the ground
walking is compromise

before the ordeal they followed
the rodent's lively climbing
the monkey's inspired leap
the hare's bounding escape
on a short color film
in which skeletons are articulated
like transparent sentences

crabs move in all directions
to normalize progression
at each step mistakes are compounded
even-numbered legs are seen
to swerve ascend descend
sheathed in aquatic crust
sprouting from limber sockets

a salto is more than a creature
just count the rebounds
a forward salto is expansive
a backward salto more compact
while eyes blur
the head is never stable
take a good look at the diners'

clearing a hurdle
is managed in short strides
something perfectly regular
the tempo tightens
in acrobatic postures
variations in rhythm
are negligible
above each target

never divert the sightless
momentum toward the narrow boards
regulating movements is tricky
all data are exploited
at five o'clock on Sunday morning
in the silvery wheels of bikers
the wind sets obstacles aquiver

a passive stretch of the foot
is expressed in terms of influence
simple reflex of engagement
a strong clench blocks
the complete unfolding of limbs
streets have become impassable
a pointless ordeal by exhaustion

we know that for an average stride
the prescribed speed has been stored
the mental image tends to disappear
but it's under other conditions
for instance a less persistent sun
I ask you to look in my direction
the response may alter the season

a woman is running on the cinder track
breasts compressed by her T-shirt
her blond hair can be seen for a long time
her great yearning for speed
like at the confines of this lake
the horsewoman's arrival at a gallop
it's a fractured whole

the instructions are to stay upright
feet set on a platform
the child stands there naturally
a series of leaps to be made
a hundred steps to quartering
ordinary stride method
the term *model* is equivocal

the obstacle zone is necessary
for the ankle's angulation
a certain forward motion of the body
without intermediary or hesitation
the arm's abrupt acceleration
like a perfectly commonplace gesture
but the trunk remains slightly unreal

the mechanical beat of the finale
suddenly intensifies its blast
time to admire the taped athlete
wrists glued to knees
he slowly flies on his back
like a little white projectile
into the stadium's gaping morgue

Aix-en-Provence, February 1987

— Translated by Harry Mathews

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS:

Anne-Marie Albiach. Born 1937.

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Pierre Alféri. Born 1963.

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Gérard Arseguel. Born 1938.

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André du Bouchet. Born 1924.

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Claude Faïn. Born 1926.

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Esther Tellermand.



Violence of the White Page:
Contemporary French Poetry

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