

**OF THEIR ORNATE EYES  
OF CRYSTALLINE SAND**

**CORAL BRACHO**

**TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH  
BY FORREST GANDER**

**DP**

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**OF THEIR ORNATE EYES OF CRYSTALLINE SAND**

## YOUR LIFE REFRACTS ME LIKE AN ENIGMA

Like a translucent mirror  
among shadows, the deep backwater lies open; the inverse  
to this thirst which  
I drink, which I touch like a sphere, inextricable,  
beneath the liquid flash. Voice

—From between the dance and the vesperal ardour  
The most delicate song Between the green of stupor, of pleasure— What it is  
that incinerates in the high amplitudes  
vividly combines. What makes it quiver  
The wind

and the superlative fleece in the strings of the Aeolian harp.  
The crystalline eucalyptus. Sap  
in which the calm  
and the disposition of water is  
enciphered

What I drink in, what I apprehend like a reflection of that  
impregnable contact; the clarity  
of its rootedness in the night, of its vault.

Full, profound consonance above the forests like a roar.  
In the fluid hollow of the snail; against the leaded crystal  
—They make music

the ebony flagstone  
before the fire that reflects the dragging the inflamed ululate  
in the circular  
niches of song, the peril— The talisman sensed under those thermal springs,

within that light—

Like a flame within

birch forests, gentle multitudes. The atemporal

between their lit bodies. The sound

they plant (—The children trace its liquid howl

in the burning like a vegetal spectre)

Between the temporal vessels The spring:

What quivers there.

—The blaze drains the night, in their submerged roots— Its fluid

roundness,

its presence— In what I drink, what I touch

## OF THEIR ORNATE EYES OF CRYSTALLINE SAND

From the expirations of these marble fish,  
from the sleek silk  
of their songs,  
from their ornate eyes  
of crystalline sand,  
the calm of temples and gardens

(in their acanthus shadows, in the shale  
they touch and tenderize)

They have opened their beds  
have dredged their channels  
under the fledgling leaves of the almond trees.

They speak of their tactile  
sparkling,  
of tranquil games taken to the limit,  
to the languid edge of sunsets.  
Of their frigid lips.

Jewelled eyes.

Of the spume they blow, the fragrance they give off

(In the atriums: candles, amaranths)  
over the least altar in the arena.

(From the temple:  
the perfumed bales,  
the scales,

the deer. They speak of their sheer reflections.)

At night  
the delicate marble of their silence,  
the prized tattoos, the pristine outlines

(they have drowned the light  
at the shore; on the sand)

above the limpid image,  
above the standing gift  
of meadowland.

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Your voice (in your body rivers stir  
a calm foliage; grave and cadenced waters).

—From this door, the pleasures, their thresholds;  
from this ring, they are transfigured—

In your forests of liquid sand,  
of dense, pale jade (deep water cleaved;  
this door carved on the barks of dawn). I enclose  
your fountain— Water  
which holds to the light (in your body the rivers fuse, solidify  
in the nitrous ceiba trees. Flame— door of igneous glimmer—  
you circle and sweat me out: all about this glass, under those spongy valleys,  
between this blanket, this flesh



## ON CONTACT OPENS ITS INDIGO PIT

From your mouth, from the well of your eyes I drink, from your belly, at your flanks;  
between my hands they burn, moisten  
(the fervor emulsifies at the margins,  
texture gathers the tense pulsing of this skin, closes its smooth sphincter,  
burning,  
until the sum voids,  
the pain). This stroked song, licked to the limit.  
The barest coolness of your tongue.  
I contract (from your lips, in my hips, they expand— slivered ice—  
pointed, sharp) into the pang.  
Tipped toward intensity, contour, tightness howling at touch, my sex:  
flame polished in its concavity, anointed; a succinct hollow, intensive,  
interstitial;  
turned to its concentrated cadence, to its devoted desert;

From your mouth, from your overflowing shadows, I drink, from your crotches,  
your palms.

The burning between my thighs condenses— a twitching, slow fever—  
your magnetism; between my lips. Quiet ivy, resin, lit  
liquid, silica, my moistness, melts and conjugates: plexus,  
briney warmth, sensitive pulp, pressing, this penetrable tympan,  
this knot, this vulval excess. I'm seeking

the sure volume that unsettles me. The tensivity, the unquenched heat,  
stuffed in, overwhelming me, freeing me with its friction.

I would integrate your sex (retreating lava, coast, to envelope it,  
a lake going dense to the capillary  
rhythm of its thirst), its slow, apprehensible abundance, its solidity,  
at my limits; vineyard  
pressed to the pulse, swallowed by the vortex; seething peak, fulgent  
fulcrum,

desire

(I lick your candescent thickness; I pour out) on contact, opens its indigo pit, wets.

The veins, the private illuminations, the strains

(your thighs sink into my thighs;

your kiss tears away)

of a new caress; the juice;

## DISTANT CITIES

Their incandescent reliefs, their passages, they are  
a mournful, single-chorded psalm;  
the children run squalling  
like tiny slips in an endless, hushed  
and distracted sepia. There are also cities  
that sweeten the sunlight:  
In their mirrors of golden gloaming, waters unfold and ignite  
pockets of aroma and ritual caresses; in their baths:  
laughter, the greening walls;  
—Their temples sip from the ocean.

Lovely deserted boundaries (The caravans, foehns, the bulging unmanned  
nights, heavy afternoons,  
it is loose sand that holds them apart) mirages, blurring echoes  
bind them together;  
a liquid taste for salt in the furtive corners;  
And this dawning resonance.

## YOUR MARGINS: CLEFTS THAT REVEAL ME

You have teased,  
you have eased my flesh  
in your transparence, my senses (man of liminal  
contours, of sweet lucid eyes);  
in the vast overflowing nakedness,  
that rends and gives in;

(Like a slim window on the sea; like the delicate, insistent friction of your  
voice).

The waters: ways reflecting you (submerged skylight), your flowing to, your  
margins:  
clefts that reveal me.

—Because a smattering, a dense word, the living and the dead, a fungal  
acridity, of lines,  
of slime, of fruit carrion, a milky emission washes over us, gathers us,  
someone?  
was someone speaking here?

I'm reborn, like an albino, to the morning:  
pain's long climb toward the unaligned who watches me, whom I see.

Come here; look at his hands, this mire's recent drops; come surround me.  
(Evening taste, the shine of overbearing lands, of silken channels,  
arborescent,

half-obscured;  
the sea:

on this beach, among scattered, vitreous rumors). You have outshined,  
tenderized

On whom does this light explode?

—You have forged, stationed my body to your emanations,  
to their clear chords. You are overwhelmed

with roots, with spaces;  
you have deepened, skinned, been vulnerable (because your fingertips tense  
and relax,  
because your light extracts— sweetest track— with its tongue, its friction,  
my membranes— in your waters; luminous ceiba of endless tumescence,  
of fluctuating places, exceeded; your dew) my limbs.

Listen, feel in that gloomy verdict, in that combined intent, deliquescent.  
Who is anointed, who refracted, who revealed? in its miasma

my eyes, a pure pallor, I watch the waxen clangor,  
stranger to me.

(In my body your skin arouses a ductile forest, fecund at the borders;  
a question, an explored vineyard, that embraces the traced aisles.  
From the weft of their texture, from their heights: the irresistible richness.  
A piercing crystal, resinous, glowing, in the wide ochre pupils  
of desire, transparentizes them; a meticulous language.)  
You have impregnated me, you are woven through my skin;  
and who here is displaced?  
who slips through their fingers?

Beneath that night; who murmurs among the tombs, the trenches?  
Its flame, multiplied constantly, constantly swollen and concealed,  
your margins;

You have plunged, spilled, come undone, you have opened me for  
exhumation;  
And who,  
who dresses it for burial here? who embraces it, who kisses it?  
Who inhabits it?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in 1951 in Mexico City, Coral Bracho has published a number of poetry books, including *Peces de Piel Fugaz* (1977); *El Ser Que Va a Morir* (1982); *Bajo el Destello Liquido* (1988), which gathers her first two collections; *Tierra de Entraña Ardiente* (1992), a collaboration with the artist Irma Palacios; and the volume of her collected poetry *Huellas de Luz* (1994). She was awarded the Aguascalientes Poetry Prize in 1981 and, more recently, a grant from the Sistema Nacional de Creadores in Mexico. Her newest book, *La Voluntad del Ámbar*, was published by Editorial Era in 1998.

Her poems read, in Spanish, as though they were poured onto the page. They are fluid, lapping long-lined toward the gutters. Her images evoke an oneiric, sensual realm of dispelled logics. Her diction spills out along ceaselessly shifting beds of sound. Listen to this in Spanish:

Dicen del tacto  
de sus destellos  
de los juegos tranquilos que delizan al borde,  
a la orilla lenta de los ocasos.  
De sus labios de hielo.

Bracho's poems make sense first as music, and music propels them. Sad birds in the luminous ceiba. Ouseau Triste, Ravel. Then it is as though the very syntax has begun to run, has been heated to a magma by the sensual fingers holding the pen, by the pulsing resistance, the friction of accumulating words, of echoes bandied back and forth between lines like flames between mirrors. Bracho's syntax slips and recombines and flows lubriciously around its conventionally obstruant limitations.

When I was living in Dolores Hidalgo, in Mexico, I found *El ser que va a morir*, which had won the Premio Nacional de Poesía in 1981, in the local bookstand. It was Bracho's second book, and the poems made me think of Mei-mei Berssenbrugge's work: the stretching lines, the meditative tone, the radical syntactical strategies. Though Berssenbrugge's poetics lean toward the philosophical and Bracho's toward the sensual, both poets allow for an unusually high degree of abstraction, repudiating the dominant dictum of modernism—"Go in fear of abstractions." Asked for a statement about her aesthetics for an anthology I was editing (*Mouth to Mouth: Poems by 12 Contemporary Mexican Women*; Milkweed Editions, 1993),

Bracho responded, “My feeling is that any such statement would implicitly be an evaluation that I think is not up to me to make. Besides that, I think it would also interfere between the reader and the texts and set a limited pattern of approach.”

For me, the pleasures of her poems derive from their open-endedness, from their music, their delicious vocabulary, and from the tensions between an insistently telic rhythm and a dehiscent narrative. As readers, we sense that our arrival is imminent, but the destination keeps transforming.

--Forrest Gander