EMPEDOCLES'S SANDAL

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TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY PIERRE JORIS

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Das Land, wo sonst die Purpurtraube gern
Dem bessern Volke wuchs und goldene Frucht
Im dunkeln Hain, und edles Korn, und fragen
Wird einst der Fremde, wenn er auf den Schutt
Von euern Tempeln tritt, ob da die Stadt
Gestanden?...

Hölderlin, Der Tod des Empedokles

Traces/ Renown/ Shades/ Urns/ Life(s)/ Epoch/ Zenith Lucid/ Strangely/ Suspended

Stop

a pause of short duration the closed space compelled remembrances tears they are not necessary the dictionary tempers the banality of the stereotype a nostalgia emerges in the description of the place

like a circumscribed exile like the eye dimming after the junction

handicap of the code unusual names at night fall despite the invocation's depth the usages intermingle on the asphalt the trace vainly sought there effaced it is visible

o heart you weaver the times don't change that fast their duration nor the embrace that follows where a soul decyphers itself a proliferation of signs but the loud voice the one that unties the tongues and curbs the discourse alas

so many lethal traps on the way the angels refuse to accompany us the lights blink ostentatiously the harangues lead us far from the encampment

This is the moment

to enter surreptitously I go in my purpose my utterance to open the door to say under the dictation of a continuous effusion to align a text without history for a moment to enjoy the stopping to reveal the splendor and brilliance of the vestiges without giving in to the letter's subterfuges

Paris november rue Saint-Antoine Constantine cité du 20 août Paris again examine each of these addresses

a small light rift whips the clouds

Itinerary
of precise annotations the return therein
envisaged I know
the tracings the dwellings and the hunger
the hesitation to take to the road is real

renown by auction victims interrogate who kills and reason

pomp makes sense only if sustained a hollow word illusions charisma is not a copyright trademark danger metamorphoses the limbs there is nothing to brag about today

the days have become flat right after the exchange the rivers advance in error in the moonlight I hesitated a long time before coming what is man without the praise that precedes him

you held me for a long time tightly in your arms without a word

eyes closed I believed

passion an outburst of eloquence ah how to get rid of that one there image to put fire to the house what an adventure country or metaphor causes prejudice the brothels have five stars

the city rejects you as you step off the bus it fears the look devoured by exile the limitless pretention of the accomplished witness he knows how bitter all food is the quick incendiary glance at the sidewalk cafés

elsewhere there are bars where the name imposes itself the throat forges renown customers attentive to the mordant killer wit beauties whose black stockings day envies neither the bus nor the townhall square have doubts the lover's glory when the glasses clink nor the play of mirrors where friendship melts

trajectory fixed meeting inevitable

there is no sales point nor waiting room where you didn't exercise your gifts in pure loss fascinated by the tenebrous beauty of forgetting that grabs the sonorous cohorts in the city a short-circuit

Lemurs
night escapades
to watch your secretive ways of appearing hiding
from the
bird
in the tumult the thirst
my head will roll at the edge of the river

the bits of green become visibly rarer the raised walls

jostle

the talk of lovers the hands unlock at the call of the setting sun

black blood revives chthonic speech it upholds the enterprise of chimerical periplos that quest loudly proclaimed in public companions perished

far from the atavistic

pains of the libations

that punctuate mourning from memory to question these dear beings

I accosted my father in the thick of so many dead unable — did I dare — to deliver my message I had fortified myself with lion's blood as the bar flies call red wine

I lost my way along the boundaries of the two worlds

in my pocket the right to enter your coins barely buy one round the soul of things can you put a price on it how much the assessment

moribund rituals

reference points

dissolving formulas

windows giving on roofs open on an ancient canvas that challenges you access to the sky's colors jealously closed off

to conform to the roads' tracings giving to the prescribed charities

here lies choice in the programmed debris lush spectacle smiles and congratulations facade

the complaints of those who are not dead reach you you know burning hate a secret remedy

...

the long sliding night introduces to the telling of adventures the magnanimous outlaw hero

the poem carries along since the art of weaving the assembly settles there as if around a fire each one dreams of his kin left with no worries the rhythms are favorable for enjoyable meetings but sometimes the poet strains to blur the narration's weft through an excess of figures

the bird that takes its flight at midnight is blind

Interpreter,
the lexicon at work
far in the abyss the wandering gait
no care taken
with the staging neither obscure rhetoric
nor this imperious vanity of surging forth

the instant contains its light — cursive resonance it dazzles the cantankerous audience you undecided your gear slung across your back chains the house is narrow you declaim what you know onto a canvas a sorting out occurs invisible scattered traces to describe the table the luminous circle it is possible to forget oneself in the description of objects while carefully watching the precision of the study time that one's not sparing with embellishments you enhance the declamation at the risk of perturbing the reception to catch depends on the baited trap the chant doesn't harmonize with the voice something you no longer doubt

sun

urns preserved the spirits of the ancestors dogs for the circumstance the occurance demands vagueness to the detriment of urgency the celebration in fireworks one by one

all

tutelary deities
praise consecrates them at the vault's summit
once the tower has been abolished

obsession
from quarrel to break
the argument contracts then loses itself
in the blackness of the invoked night
system of control
ineffectual despite the forces deployed
the warning shots
the blade
I was walking
up Boulevard Mohamed V. Kalachnikovs firing. The city safe
no longer for night wanderings.
The moon exposes the flaneur to danger.

life hangs on a thread but the needle and the hand and the freezing lover at the gate of the labyrinth fear of the worst hastens the cadence a breath missing to calm the grief from the annoucements to the road crossings

the blue-gray mysteries of the travelling show

Letters

bricolage of symbols gathered in neighboring

countries

the golden thread imprints on the memory the one I question answers to no

demand

rigid it invents for itself a republic in which reading commands summary hierarchy

in the scenery

a hidden laser

modern he said to tread territories made to measure where the places knot into a tight rope to live truly to be god

to claim it loudly

reckless pride

you the Impeder-of-wind with bronze sandals you the Obscure who loves to disguise yourself and I all alone tracking you lives a concise inventory the detail adorns the gathering the fragments are classified to observe a usage just as white milk curdles

was it in Heidelberg on a road in Sicily in Evry or in Mostaganem by the seaside ill-used infinite few words carry when the tension increases alternation of the forms does not resolve much nor do the *rivets of love* assemble I remain an orphan

neither wine of Anderin flowing freely nor bravado at the moment when the clan wobbles neither catalysing places a sequence of cast names nor beauties offering themselves along the way nor the poetic lineage you claim nor this hard to decipher manuscript nor any allegiance excluded rupture

Always this array of set-backs you register

stifled passion

far the epic gesture

the solemn declamations at the tribune

dwellings of Maya Asma Awf or Khawla recall of pure form

era of imprecation the loved one veils herself

usury eye and soul and the heart's expression and these memorable debris under the ashes

pangs at rising

at dusk a life comes to a close

a novel

torsion

the star blinks

a town in tatters

screams

you envisage death

daily reception to disappear swallowed by a mechanism

radically no longer to exist never scholastic divagation the views of the mind deteriorate the momentum of the word the South is wild

there I am confronted by the formulas ceaselessly stating identity to pass unnoticed to sound a fortuitous jubilation

at the outcome of a quest disposed to welcome a meaning that escapes me enigma resolved as soon as stated to love, an art wherein to take one's distances inside of the unhoped for

they will call your surrender wisdom quintessence the sterility of the soil and age adds to the bitterness

Obviously at its zenith the law has to concede suicide to the poet assure the inheritance

grandly there is a truth here difficult to grasp the tomb is sealed

the beautiful to resay it the road already traced by a mortal's audacity

rustling of the myth

discoveries of listening smoke

elasticity of the rays

passion consumes you

love roots itself in your eyes

you have handy cliches

a large library

advice that succeeds with illustrated examples and you tremble when the loved one appears is it a life

a belated madness a mystery that isn't one

sun or rain

prayer

your impatience unbalances nature where are you at the hour of regrets

the people get drunk on the drunkenness of the masters each judges according to his manner an illusory feast takes over custom blood transforms itself into a philter

waiting for day

acting

above the head death the road is straight it is not vengeance of a wounded chest it is not surrender to decline audacity shatters at the descent of the verse the clamors feed on themselves to exalt oneself by your name the torment has ripened

the accent isn't new

to recognize

the grace of a flash when the soul shatters

happy in her kernel a poem builds

to perish

the elements fuse

by hate or by love

invention

that which retains the guest in the house that which terrorizes the virgins of Tamim that which persuades the number

the titration is deceptive

Igneous
the soul in its crystal
the way constellated waves deploy themselves
harnassing
ONE engenders destroys yet alternates
he keeps me captive
corruptible

the sweet water in the sea on which the fish feed is not an irrefutable argument against the establishment of paradise on earth other elements of a subtle nature enter into the composition of the air man breathes which inserts the human species into a specific animal category man is like a weathervane at the heart of the whirlwind the sky attracts him

Aristotle's disciples debated physics meteorology natural science

then one did not consider armed struggle in the cities in order to impose a thesis a phenomenon that keeps spreading as does repression the system has seized up or to examine the conditions of the ground can to analyze sea water in no way unscramble the mechanism does that mean that in with the logic of the ancients this process it is necessary to sink the trace of the poem in fragments initiates formal audacities a rythm pursues you this is no longer the time to evade the words order themselves meaning

the year ends white

wishes crackle on all sides from the orient to the occident is it but a reflection light effluvia when the moon scatters

hail-stones

what remains accessible in the face to face this country where the violet grape once loved to grow for a better people, and the golden fruit in the dark thicket, and noble wheat, and some day the stranger will ask, treading through the rubble of your temples, if that's where the city rose...

this sovereign generosity this evil which hardens in the apple of the eye these plaints without notification a salute to the dead friends

Ochre maturity, it ends with the day the questions left hanging

you observe the flight of a flock of starlings bad news is spreading from the palms of Bahrain to the villages of Iraq

a tenacious worry the long crossing from deserts to cities these buried peoples with strange languages

there are only scattered signs truth surprises you at a metro gate

this visible and invisible world is decomposing science assures the poet of his wording

the risks hidden in the hands' palms let's leave tears and blood

our friends are everywhere

the voyage completes itself

by day as by night

all things astounded

Parcelled out they glitter under the moon motionless

the white armed virgin flies over the offerings

Paris-Constatine, November 1992 - January 1993 Évry, February 8, 1993

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in 1947 in Mostaganem, Eastern Algeria, raised on the Arab and Berber voices of marketplace storytellers, Habib Tengour has lived between Algeria and Paris ever since. Trained as an anthropologist and sociologist, he has taught at universities in both countries, while emerging over the years as one of the Maghreb's most forceful and visionary francophone poetic voices of the post-colonial era. The work has the desire and intelligence to be epic, or at least to invent narrative possibilities beyond the strictures of the Western / French lyric tradition, in which his colonial childhood had schooled him. Core to it is thus the ongoing invention of a Maghrebian space for and of writing, the ongoing quest for the identification of such a space and self. For, as another Maghrebian, Jacques Derrida put it: "Autobiographical anamnesis presupposes identification. And precisely not identity. No, an identity is never given, received or attained; only the interminable and indefinitely phantasmatic process of identification endures." Or, Tengour in a kind of manifesto piece, "Maghrebian Surrealism," that situates the tradition of French Surrealism as a late local variation of a much older and wider practice:

Who is this Maghrebian? How to define him?

"The woods are white or black "despite the hidden presence of nuances.

Today definition fascinates because of its implications. A domain that misleads. Political jealousy far from the exploded sense of the real.

Indeed there exists a divided space called the Maghreb but the Maghrebian is always elsewhere. And that's where he makes himself come true.

Jugurtha lacked money to buy Rome.

Tariq gave his name to a Spanish mountain.

Ibn Khaldûn found himself obliged to give his steed to Tamerlaine.

Abd El Krim corresponded with the Third International....

The core achievement of the poetics thus the successful relay between modernist Euro-American experiments and local traditions of sociopolitical and spiritual narrative explorations: "It is, finally, in Maghrebian Sufism that surrealist subversion inserts itself: 'pure psychic automatism,' 'amour fou,' revolt, unexpected encounters, etc.... There always resides a spark of un(?) conscious Sufism in those Maghrebian writers who are not simply smart operators – go reread Kateb or Khair-Eddine." Or read, now here in the US for the first time in book form, Habib Tengour.

Besides a range of lyrical works – works that always stretch the imagination of what the lyrical can be – such as *Schistes de Tahmad* 2 (1983), Tengour's main books are the narratives *Le Vieux de la Montagne* (called a "Relation," 1983), the retelling of the story of that most famous Arab triumvirate of Omar Khayyam, Hassan as-Sabbah and Nizam al-Mulk, Sultan Galiev, (1985) and two prose narratives, *L'Epreuve d l'arc* (1990) and *Gens de Mosta* (1997). His work has been translated into German and Italian.

Pierre Joris