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Writing Sample

Luis Bravo

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Poems

THEY MOVE IN THEIR PLACES

“I didn’t do anything, but something was done,
what is shadow-bereft and echoless”
Marina Tsvetaeva

1.
And what will come out of this?
this is a different trade:
— I leave for work, says one
and this one says:
— And what about it? I come in,
we’ll see what comes out

who decides?
my slave sweats over his chisel
my master counts his profits

what yardstick shall I read by?
there are many sticks, break a twig off
the “talking to yourself” one,
... we’ll see what’s it about those greyhounds

a peculiar trade, I see:
to enter into what comes out of there
to accommodate what fits in.

2.
The scene is set:
their temperament I sniff
I follow them inside
closely feel my way
their resonant flesh I bring
on the table I set them down

if they say I say them or eat them up
book them in a letter: “my dear girl, my dear man”
:
saying is sheer risk by virtue of enthusiasm.

3.
... sleeping still, the unconscious muttered:
“this trade’s one of going in”
“not like ‘going out to work’"

it’s a trade of opening up for the one who took off
from that one, no one knows who he takes after, as they say of a child...

what if the one who’s taken off should hear
things no one has ever named?

ah, then he knows something’s beginning,
started to come out, as if saying...

4.
- give me the thing itself the thing
  not the idea abstracted into names

- give me a yellow canary
  not a dream where I don’t wake up
  except in muddles of symbols

- give me a trickle of saliva, alphabetic flesh
  two and three mustard seeds,
  give taste to the wine of the senses

- give me what has not been given:
  those dice who tell at random
  what only the last innocent sees and hears.

5.

to go out into the fields
and lie down in the day’s tactile light:

to have the fowl beforehand
and the keys in place:

to set feet on a flat flight
and watch the clouds in silence:

(but why should these infinitive
couplets do any such thing?)

6.

or go to crumbs
little birds pecking away in birdbaths
as the new imagination’s sumptuous find

then I wipe off the dust
from among oblivion’s things
and through my hand
surrender to that sparkle:
I pour shadow onto shadow
and dream of the tree and its fruits

7.
- it’s gift-wrapped,
a book for your father.

- it’s a piece of glass, Daddy,
from Rocío, he said to make me open it.

(a dew glass? what a fine image, I think)

- yes, like a window, it’s for opening:

: “MOUNTAIN POEM”
  “Poem of the end”
  “(New year letter)”

and the book, opened at random, says:
“you and I have to talk…”
.................................................
all said! but

what fruit will come in
once the poem’s skin has been peeled off?

and on which dish of the scales
can the Russian voice of autumn have fallen?

.................................................

—Please, please come in— says Marina

—What, is this a house?— a voice asks

—That of my soul. Words!

—True, if speaking to yourself,
you’re very much in the right!

—You think so? Maybe, but look, I’ve been imagining
that you were a ghost from the future coming into my house
like a poem, and once inside...

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1 Translator’s note: “Rocío”, a Spanish female name, means “dew” in the same language.
THE POLISHING OF THE STONE OF COUNTESS PIZARNIK

You were going to slay the Devil
and two white horns grew on you –
small, proud and fun;

after some good-looking corpses
in sufficient days after
the immortal nights
of the dancer in a trance

after the quiet hours’ annoyance
the circle started to go full

“the sense of the sun illuminated the sense of closing”
or the trap worked as an advance:

who writes in blood the word design in your little brown notebook?
whose is the beggar voice saying you should achieve it?

With the escape of desires
you dug
and
dug
and
a hole was made down to silence.

That 14th of January you dreamed of
the child prodigy of escapes
“par littérature / j’ai perdu ma vie”, he told you
and seeking the family’s support you wrote on your blackboard:
“O life / O language / O Isidore”.

There was nothing but smoke in the heads
in Paris
in Buenos Aires
and the bloody desire of you, O you, Countess!

that spare beauty of the soul
that transparent sound
your lyre hanging, firm and empty
by the babylon river, singing:

little trée of the birds of músic
O you, bough of light, guide through which I see

behold: the pentagram, the voice, the books like lilies, everyone knows
they’ve never been enough, the lines written or the voices given

for coming into the discovered harbor, as an equal you desired and asked

2 Translator’s note: In English in the original text.
with the golden whip under your arm
and it was thus granted to you.

Seeing yourself there, naked in the night mirror, you felt again,
“I’m finally curious” were your next-to-last words, they say

but now, only because I’ve again made contact with your poem,
from the distance, I wonder about you:

did you finally hit upon the exact hue of your lace stitch,
and blue or polychrome, like a polished shadow,
did they, the futile, twinkle under the timeless vault?

did you see another new sign, or just the sailor southern cross
leading your faun-like horns in the dance?

I just wonder next to the tree of silence
knowing you left your little body behind as a garment
next to the light, and started climbing again, and singing

there, audible and transparent, upon what is unseen and rising.

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Translated from the Spanish by Laura L. Chalar
THE IMÁN OF PEACE

the imán of peace is on fire
aims at the imán of war and disarms it

the imán of peace is a flame
it melts the shadow of hate begot by fear

the imán of peace is human force
luminous like high sky’s emanations

the imán of peace gets up and walks
sows seeds of the new in nonbelievers

the imán of peace traverses military lines
and shames the iron souls of soldiers

the imán of peace is not the summer fashion slogan
it is the last bastion against the coming winter

the imán of peace is not the traitor’s coin
but the pay of the just

the imán of peace may be a utopia
but it is the common good that sustains us

the imán of peace is not anonymous it does not offend or worry
it has your name and mine and is not called to silence

the imán of peace is a sign on the forehead of the times
times in which war would put an end to time

the imán of peace grows among forests, beds and tables
when women and men converse, dance and kiss

conjuring the thunder of drums
that haughty Death presides

the imán of peace opens the horizon, lets the sun in
and the moon out among its lines of white fire

the imán of peace is the spirit growing among those who love
it is the desert flower, the heart standing in the shadows

the imán of peace is the poem being written
words and deeds are the food of its song

the imán of peace is the chance we have
to give a chance to the peace we want
(give peace a chance/ again and again

the imán of peace is in flames

it is human light

aims at the shadow of war's hate

treads firmly among lines of soldiers

it is the last bastion of those who love

the imán of peace is not anonymous or called to silence

its word melts the thunder of drums

it is the pay of the just

the imán of peace is conspiring against the coming winter

it opens the horizon of nonbelievers

the imán of peace is the common good that sustains us

it has your name and mine

and is the voice of this burning chant.

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Translated from Spanish by Anna Deeney
NAMELESS PLACE
WITH WOMAN THE SAME WAY

She
woman again
looks out
standing in the middle of the garden.

From a light
through which I passed
in a dream automobile

she
looks at
me  her eyes create
a space
like a vault of rain.

She is someone that I’ve never seen
(but my heart recognizes her)

nor do I recognize this air
of glass
and transparent clouds

(I sense the magic of these always green pines).

Nor did that blinding white
wall where we kissed
exist afterwards

nor that garden where I breathe
her image, not her body.

from Lluvia (1988)

translated from Spanish by Ronald Haladyna
FISH / NETS

There are times when inexpressible silhouettes move about, fish, sea that no net retains upon the pier of the pillow

and we enter a silence made of heads like clouds

and we walk happily around the deserted rooms of the house where words go loosely about.

There are times when we enter a silence made of fish from the house where the words are silhouettes like clouds upon the pier, wave, pillow

sea that no net retains where the rooms of the words swim loose as if happy.

There are times when the fish of the night cross the morning the walls like parrots through the air of the house they go and they return.

translated from Spanish by Ronald Haladyna
FUGITIVE NATURE

for Arturo Carrera

There will be a day, probably at night, I won’t know about anyone not even about myself. When the hummingbird of oblivion revolves above the flowers and the last garden.

Like a melody gone astray from its instrument the air will forget to pass through the lungs.

like wilted bunches the alveoli will impregnate the earth with ink. The earth itself some day will be that night, the white aerial wet nurse on her vigil as an eye.

Everyone will have their end and their beginning and their violin, opening the secret.

Without getting a word in as if nothing, as if no one, existed all things named will depart without the intangible material of what was spoken.

That day slips away day after day it happens between one’s hands right next to the dripping sand of the clock, leaving nothing outside the rhythm of the circle of the fiery rose of the winds that will not return.

Now get out of here leave and look at the stinging sun the multicolored moon—the golden eyes—contemplate the sky above its swift passage grown dark, all that emits from the fiery disk to its cold reflection. So, just like that, are we.
A change of lights in the thickness of the stars
a ghostlike molecule in the coming millennia
because at the end, my love, beloved death,
there will be no memory, eternal seeing
only and just hardly
unfathomable genetic chip
frozen heart
troubled and tinted innards.

Hallelujah the hummingbird, the moon,
and this milky tinted mirror
in which we drink together just once;
hallelujah though the words are the same
others, always others, one night after another,
days of fugitive reading.

A long weave from the same naked tree
where men mature, season
after season, worried about provisions,
if you are to live, through the calls for your death
if you are to fall, because of doubts
if some certainty were to remain
standing, when love went away,
a hobbling foot of life.

Ready for war you probably came
to let them convince you that something is worth something:
the heroic battle plan you prepare to give
that day into the night, while the king, the cook, his dragon
and the devout saint with the dapple-gray horse all sleep,
with a golden helmet and a gesture of a haughty, popular demeanor.

You’ll become mute, barren with an empty hat
and something will fly over you, from you,
(that which you no longer are)
cloud of dust, nest of light.

Forget and continue, till the end, sipping
the sweet nectar, bitter, intransitive
of that unique leaf and of its deaths.

Go on while you forget, Chinese butterfly
fawn’s mouth, prodigious brain,
small imitation of the cosmos
exquisite miniature,
bonsai of one and several gods.

Here’s your limit:
your eye like a piece of glass.
So, celebrate, illuminate and let
your eyes kiss the smooth plain
of transparent things
that you now paint in your mind, fine reticulum
porous substance of what can happen;
enjoy yourself in the giant imaginary dome
undermine the splendor by the shovelful:

the depth of the night is yours
for an instant, like that star.

Germinate and be the flower
and the motorized bird
and the one who looks
and the one who sings and the one who flees
while time still blows favorably on you.

Please, then, take along
this handful of dead letters to the river.

Wait for the morning, the afternoon,
the frost, the next day;
name the names of those who have taken you
to the pit, to the peak;
play the deceitful game on them
the one of dreams and their gauze of conscience.

Finally, be generous and humble,
like the animal that you are, fugitive nature:

let silence spread its white mantle
on the musical shadow of the planets.

from Árbol veloz (1998)

Translated from Spanish by Ronald Haladyna

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“The blast /derivations”

the blast

The blast is a star coming through the nerve.
You don’t hear the blast
You foretell it like the lightening,
The fall of the ray, its drift
Like splinters lodged
Between heart and stomach.

The blast is an indelible mark
If the star falls at your feet
And you, with it:

"It shall take you ages to scale the crater
To return from the sacred humus among embers
And in each storm
Heaven shall cross your chest with its nacre stalactites"

The blast
Is that voice from within,
— It's a star coming through the nerve
That you shall obey,
Blindly:
An electrical behest ruled by faith.

THE BLAST (DERIVATIONS)

1. The blast is an omen from which you shall not free yourself
   Once it performs its propitiatory deed.

2. The blasts mirroring on the surface are multiple.
   Only depth can disown uncertainty.

3. What is it that he wants, him, who wants what he desires?
   Does he want the constant flow of that, that in being shall be stone?

4. The ardent flesh
   The ardent heart / the ardent heart's flesh
   The ardent heart made flesh
5.
And I want to stay
And not
At the same time
Like a string that
On ringing bursts

6.
The faint passage of time
Opposes: pleasure or agony

7.
During the blast present hides behind a thin film.
You must abandon yourself to the centripetal force of the whirlpool

— The millstone of paradox is at its heart —

You shall be drawn towards alien territory:
Black hole, change of skin, whim of the bodies’ chemistry

Translated by Laura Haiek.
THE HUNT

He returned every morning
He returned to the same place
That hollow in the rock
— Carving its image in shadows —
Quiet worship, same place.

He returned every morning
(That hollow in the rock)
A silhouetted dampness that comes
And fades
In the same same place;

Impossible deer when ink spreads
And on getting the torch close by
The furrowed wall
The skylight of movement.
To carve that image in stone.

Nourishment and speed.

There the body of the prey.
Here the winter cave.
The prey in flight.
Through the fleeing forest.
Where paths flee
At great speed.

He returned every morning
To the same same place.
That hollow in the rock
To see its face.
To carve its image in shadows.

The skylight of movement,
At great speed.

The deer doubling the leaves’ whisper.
Moving tree, out of the place.

He returned every morning,
That hollow in the rock
(An outlined dampness)

Hunting of the image, still worship,
Serf to the god of the place.

The place’ god as a serf.
**BLACK JUICE**

Black coat, black soul, black light  
(I'm invisible under the doors' gothic arch)  
Black coat, black soul, black light.  
Not your absence but mine from myself.

I'm on the brim of a black glass  
Dying to drown in your shadow

Someone who looks like me  
Drinks my black black blood  
As I let myself fall  
Into the juices of its universe

Black coat, black soul, black light.

I dreamt that water embraced my naked body  
On awakening someone had drunk the birds' song.

I'm as still as the liquid in a developing tray  
In negative, I'm backed by the light  
Of the scenario. Behind this face's looking glass  
I bite, the heart's black mane,  
Sunk behind the chest.

Black blood, black light.

Your trace, a crate from the tunnel  
Of the pocket of the black coat, hanging  
From the door knob, like a hung dwarf.

Here is my presence in radiant white  
- black coat, black light -  
Here is my presence under a black light spot  
There, this body's holography drawn  
By hairs of light.

Hight sings the soul  
In a stranger's body, it sings  
While drinking, drunk,  
A long translucent glass  
Of juice and black.

Translated by Cecilia Álvarez & Laura Haiek.
SKETCHES IN A CAR

The scene travels,
Passing the eucalyptus, airy latticework.
A bird crosses the windshield
(a bird crosses)
Loosing itself in the dust from the tires.
On the curve, a slight move with smile.

Behind us the city radiates slim white lines
Oil stains and that impersonal venom
It emanates, from which we run away.

The virtual knock of air on the crystal
Immobilizes the traveler.
Amphibious, the round of complaint is suspended.
Yellow bells on the field.

It's enjoyed to be the passenger.
To be the one whom does not choose,
Only the chosen way suits.
The back hollows, the elbow on the window
Among the foliage, the wind blows again.

Speed is therapeutic.

— Behind us the city emits slim white lines,
That impersonal venom we runaway from —

Speed is therapeutic,
Only the chosen way suits.
Yellow bells on the field.

(Regret and the seatbelt hold you tight
The Sunday, upon return).

Translated by Laura Haiek.

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FIRES FROM DAY

The light, once again, the music.
The music music this time
The same light always another.
The light, once again, the music
The same music this time.
Score of the day, the day gone.

Hour after hour I cave in the mine.
The gold of light was there.
“There” is nowhere.
You cannot touch happiness.

I got into the mine with that mina [1]
Mesmerized with the mina the gold was there.

I had something around here. In this pocket it was.
On the bloomed shirt. Around here.
I put it on, and I felt blossoming, I took it off
Colorful, with roses gleaming.
It was a flower that turned red from time to time.
It spat at my feet to see me grow, a tree from myself,
Ah my reddish chest, churrinche, [2]
On the chubby belly, like a Buddha, lying down
Where the camalote [3] floats
  cradle
  carricoche [4]
  mud pit.

A shade of death conceals the map
The map made of golden dust, noble feldespat [5].
The calculations, the ministrations of the oreal [6] dust,
To advance into the mine, through this poem,
With the mina, holding hand.

To the fathomless depths
To the bottom of the bottom's milk, fondue, mountain.
Where is heaven, the saddle of the orgone [7]
The breathing, where in this cave are
The crushing, the light, once again, from the gaze?
And the muse?
And the music from the mystic muse?
The one which is not fitting into the spill
Of thick white milk in and out and in
Of the mute marvel of the mine,
Ubi Sunt? [8].

Ah! they bloom, it's the spring of the leaves.
It's the oval leaf with strong yellow veins
Full of light, of liquid white lightning.
Like a fire from the root, the egg,
Grown prick swollen by movement,
Beautiful, sensitive orianna [9] golden mina in the cave
By the heart,
Where only now is now
Where reason is never ever enough.

Notes:
(1) Mina: this word has two meanings in Spanish. It stands for an excavation to extract minerals and is also used to name a woman in the tango argot of the Rio de la Plata.
(2) Churrinche: a little bird from the Rio de la Plata, which has red chest.
(3) Camalote: aquatic plant from South America.
(4) Carricoche: a quite old car in bad shape.
(5) Feldespat: from German, different types of minerals of bright white, yellow or red color.
(6) Oreal: neologism, it comes from ‘oro’ (gold) and from ‘oral’.
(7) Saddle of the orgone: in Wilhelm Reich’s theory the orgoneic energy is a vital, primary, immaterial element that draws the universe. In order to cure frigidity, impotence, and even cancer, Reich invented "the orgone-box" some kind of seat or saddle made out of wood and other materials to seat the patient on and allow him or her to recover the orgoneic energy.
(8) Ubi Sunt: Latin expression meaning “Where are them?”
(9) Oriana: female name of a literary character from de Middle Age, derived from ‘oro’ (gold).

Translated by Laura Haiek & Luis Bravo

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