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Nocturne of Saint Ildefonso by Betina Escudero

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NOCTURNE OF SAINT ILDEFONSO

1

At my window the night invents

another night,

another space:

convulsive party

in a square meter of blackness.

Fleeting

coalitions of fire, nomad geometries, wandering numbers.

From yellow to green to red

the spiral unwinds.

Window!

magnetic sheet of calls and responses, high-voltage calligraphy deceiving sky/hell of industry over skin that changes with each instant.

Sign-seeds:

night fires them,

they rise,

explode high above

they precipitate,

burned out,

in a cone of shadows,

reappear,

rambling fires,

cluster of syllables,

spinning conflagration,

disperses,

once again small bits.

The city invents and annuls them.

I am at the tunnel's entrance. These phrases perforate time. Perhaps I am the one who waits at the tunnel's end. I speak with closed eyes.

On my eyelids,

someone has planted a forest of magnetic needles,

someone

guides the thread of these words.

The page

has become an anthill.

Emptiness

has settled in the pit of my stomach.

I fall

through this emptiness interminably.

I fall without falling.

My hands are cold,

my feet are cold

—but alphabets burn, burn.

Space

becomes and is destroyed.

Night insists,

instinctively night feels my forehead,

my thoughts.

What does it want?

2

Empty streets, crooked lights.

On a street corner

the specter of a dog.

Searches in the trash,

for a ghost of a bone.

Confused henhouse:

yard of a tenement and its commotion.

Mexico, toward 1931.

Loitering sparrows,

a flock of children

builds a nest

with newspapers they didn't sell.

The lanterns invent,

in desolation

make-believe puddles of yellowish light.

Apparitions,

time exposes:

lugubrious, lascivious, heel-clapping:

beneath a sky of soot

the flame of a skirt.

C'est la mort—ou la morte . . .

Indifferent breeze

tears lascerated ads from the walls.

At this hour

the red walls of Saint Ildefonso

are black and they breathe

sun become time,

time become stone

stone become body.

These streets were once channels.

In the sun

houses were silver:

city of lime and upright adobe

fallen moon on the lake.

The Creoles erected,

another city

—not white: gold and rose over the blind channels and buried idols

idea become space, tangible number.

They built it

at the eight-direction crossroad,

its doors

open to the invisible:

Heaven and hell.

Dormant ward.

We travel through galleries of echoes,

among broken images:

our history.

Quiet nation of stones.

Churches,

vegetation of domes,

their facades

petrified gardens of symbols.

Mired

in the vengeful proliferation of dwarfish houses humiliated palaces,

waterless fountains,

disgraced frontages.

Congeries

insubstantial madrepore:

they accumulated

on the vast massivity,

defeated

not by the weight of the years, but by the disgrace of the present.

Square of the Zocalo,

vast like a firmament:

lucid space,

court of echoes.

There we invent,

between Aliocha K. and Julian S.,

destinies of lightning

facing centuries and its coteries.

We are dragged

by the wind of thought,

the verbal wind,

wind that plays with mirrors,

master of reflections,

constructor of cities of air,

geometries

suspended from the thread of reason.

Gigantic worms:

yellow shut-down streetcars.

Esses and zees:

a crazy car, malicious-eyed insect.

Ideas,

fruit at arm's length.

Fruit: suns.

They burn.

Burn, tree of gunpowder,

adolescent dialogue,

sudden smitten framework.

12 times

the bronze fist of the towers pounds.

Night

explodes into shreds,

then gathers them and itself,

intact, it unites.

We disperse,

not there in the plaza with its burnt trains,

here,

on this page: petrified letters.

3

The lad who walks through this poem, between San Ildefonso and the Zocalo, is the man who writes:

this page

also is a nocturnal walk.

here specter

friends incarnate,

ideas dissipate.

Good, we wanted the good:

to straighten the world.

We didn't lack integrity:

we lacked humility.

We didn't want what we wanted with innocence.

Precepts and concepts,

theologians pride:

to strike with the cross,

to found with blood, erect the house with bricks of crime, decree obligatory communion.

Some were converted into secretaries of the secretaries of the Secretary General of Hell.

Rabies

became philosophy,

its drivel has covered the planet. Reason descended upon earth, took the form of the gibbet

-and millions adore it.

Circular madness:

we have all been, judge, jury, victim, witness in the Grand Theater of Filth,

we have all

brought false witness

against others

and against ourselves.

And the most vile: we were the audience that applauds or yawns in our seat. The guilt that doesn't know its own guilt,

innocence,

was the major guilt.

Each year a mount of bones.

Conversions, recantations, excommunications, reconciliations, apostasies, abjurations, zig-zag of androlotries and demonolotries, sorcery and deviations:
my history,

are these histories of error? History is the error.

Truth is that which.

further than dates,

closer than names,

history scorns:

the uniqueness of each day
—anonimous beat of everyone,

beat

unique in each one-

the unrepetitive

single day identical to all days.

Truth

is the bottom of time without history.

Weight

of the weightless instant

a few stones with sun,

vistas seen long ago which return today, stones of time that are of stone also beneath this sun of time, sun that comes from a dateless day,

sun

that illuminates these words,

sun of words

that is extinguished when spoken.

They burn and burn out

suns, words, stones:

the instant burns them

without scorching itself.

Hidden, immobile, untouchable,

the present—not its presence—is always.

Between the act of making and seeing,

action or contemplation,

I chose the act of words:

to make them, inhabit them,

to give language eyes.

Poetry is not truth:

it is the resurrection of presences,

history

transfigured into the truth of dateless time.

Poetry, like history, is made:

poetry,

like truth, is seen.

Poetry:

incarnation

of sun-over-stones in a name,

dissolution

of the name in an over-yonder from the stones.

Poetry,

hanging bridge between history and truth, not a path toward this or that:

to see

stillness in movement,

motion

in stillness.

History is the path:

does not lead anywhere,

all travel it,

truth is to walk through it.

We do not come or go:

we are in the hands of time.

Truth:

knowing we are,

from origin,

suspended.

Brotherhood over the void.

4

Ideas dissipate,

specters remain:

truth of what has been lived and suffered. An almost empty after-taste remains:

time

-shared fury-

time

-shared oblivion-

finally transfigured

into memory and its incarnations.

Time

become apportioned-body remains: language.

At the window

phantom warrior,

the commercial sky of neons

ignites and is quenched.

Behind,

barely visible,

the real constellations.

Among water tanks, antennas, roofs,

the moon:

liquid column, more mental than corporeal, cascade of silence,

appears.

Neither phantom nor idea:

once goddess and today roving clarity.

My woman sleeps.

Moon also,

clarity that elapses

-not among cloud reefs

among crags and anguishes of dreams:

a soul also:

It flows beneath her closed eyelids,

silent torment,

precipitates headlong from her forehead,

to her feet,

she ravages from within

and she buds from within,

her beats sculpt her,

she invents herself with self-surveyance,

copies herself while being invented,

between the islands of her breasts

she is an arm of the sea,

her belly is the pond

where shade and its flora

vanish,

she flows through her figure,

rises,

descends,

scatters within herself

ties herself

to her flow,

disperses in her figure:

also a body.

Truth

is the surge of waves of a breath and the visions closed eyes see: palpable mystery of a person.

Night is about to overflow.

It dawns.

The horizon has become aquatic.

To fling oneself

from the height of this hour:

will dying be

falling or rising,

sensation or cessation?

I close my eyes,

I hear my blood's footsteps,

inside my skull,

I hear

time pass through my temple.

I am still alive.

The room is moon-sanded.

Woman:

fountain at night.

I entrust myself to her peaceful flow.

translated by Betina Escudero