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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

fruit at arm's length. Ideas,
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,
on this page: petrified letters. here,

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
—anonymous 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*