

**Resonant Response Beyond the Limits of Translation**

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Études Françaises

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts in Translation Studies at  
Concordia University  
Montréal, Québec, Canada

December 2006

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395 Wellington Street  
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*Your file* *Votre référence*  
*ISBN: 978-0-494-28874-0*  
*Our file* *Notre référence*  
*ISBN: 978-0-494-28874-0*

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## ABSTRACT

### Resonant Response Beyond the Limits of Translation

Jessica Moore

Translation is always an act of furthering and response. It takes a written work beyond its boundaries, both structurally and linguistically, and offers, in ‘answer,’ a new text. But there are instances when a translation goes one full step further, becoming more than a translation, becoming something that requires a new name to indicate its transgression: for example, a “closelaboration,” a “nontranslation,” or a “transelation” (Suzanne Jill Levine, *The Subversive Scribe*; Jacques Brault, *Poèmes des quatre côtés*; Erin Mouré, *Sheep’s Vigil for a Fervent Person*). Further still are works, like my own, where translation becomes the door to creative writing. These are practices and texts that have entered a new arena beyond conventional limits of translation – a creative, resonant space.

Moments of creative composition through translation, which are often playful, reveal a deep sympathy between the translated work and the translator: a resonance. My project explores the idea and the act of *response*, through – and beyond – translation. I begin as the translator (who is more deeply engaged – creatively, already – with the text than a casual reader will ever be) and end as the writer, composing pieces in response to the translated text. Prefaced by a discussion of creative response and the limits of translation, my project is a translation accompanied by a work of resonant response.

## RÉSUMÉ

### Réaction-résonance, au-delà des limites de la traduction

Jessica Moore

La traduction est forcément un acte de prolongement, de réponse, c'est-à-dire qu'elle repousse les limites structurelles et linguistiques d'une œuvre écrite en offrant, en « réponse », un texte nouveau. Or l'éventualité d'une traduction transcendante qui ne revêt plus le sens usuel de « traduction », d'où la nécessité de nouveaux termes, à savoir *closelaboration*, *nontraduction*, ou encore *transelation* (Jacques Brault, *Poèmes des quatre côtés*; Suzanne Jill Levine, *The Subversive Scribe*; Erin Mouré, *Sheep's Vigil for a Fervent Person*). En résultent alors des textes et des démarches qui s'éloignent des normes préétablies de la traduction, vers un espace de création et de résonance.

La traduction comporte des moments de création discursive, souvent ludiques, qui révèlent une affinité profonde entre l'œuvre traduite et le traducteur. Bref, une résonance ayant pour nature la reconnaissance d'un lien entre le soi et le texte qui, par conséquent, mettra en rapport le soi et l'autre. Ce rapport incitera-t-il parfois une réaction, tel le traducteur devenu créateur, ou encore le lecteur devenu écrivain? J'examinerai donc le concept de réaction en tant qu'idée et acte, et ce, sous l'optique de la traduction - et au-delà. Je me place tout d'abord en position de traductrice, plus absorbée dans le texte, du moins sur le plan créatif, qu'un lecteur ordinaire ne le serait. Viennent ensuite mes réactions, soit celles d'une écrivaine, au texte traduit. En préface, une discussion sur les limites de la traduction et la réaction créative, et ensuite mon mémoire, qui consiste en une traduction accompagnée d'une œuvre de réaction-résonance.

## Acknowledgements

For help with the translation, I would like to thank Sherry Simon and H elo ise Duhaime for careful, creative reading. I would also like to extend heartfelt thanks to Jean-Fran ois Beauchemin for giving me a privileged glance into the writing of *Turkana Boy* and the meaning behind the phrases.

Thanks to Shannon Collins and Eden Herzog for honouring this work with their reading.

For invaluable help with the writing, I would like to thank Patrick Leroux, and my mother, Angela Moore. Thank you for the respect and insight with which you read this work, so close to my heart.

in memory of Galen Kuellmer

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## INTRODUCTION

Translation is always an act of furthering and response. It takes a written work beyond its boundaries, both structurally and linguistically, and offers, in ‘answer,’ a new text. But there are instances when a translation goes one step further, becoming more than a translation, becoming something that requires a new name to indicate its transgression: for example, a “closelaboration,” a “nontranslation,” or a “transelation” (Suzanne Jill Levine, *The Subversive Scribe*; Jacques Brault, *Poèmes des quatres côtés*; Erin Mouré, *Sheep’s Vigil for a Fervent Person*). Further still are the works, like mine, where translation becomes the door to creation, and where intimacy with the source work becomes the catalyst for the translator’s own writing. These are practices and texts that have entered a new arena beyond conventional limits<sup>1</sup> of translation – a creative, resonant space.

Moments of creative composition through translation, which are often playful, reveal a deep sympathy between the translated work and the translator: a resonance. To resonate with the work of another is to recognize a connection between oneself and the text that ‘strikes a chord,’ between self and other. Sometimes this sympathy moves us to reply. These are the instances when a translator is pulled to create, as when a reader is inspired to write. My project explores the idea and the act of *response*, through – and beyond – translation. I begin as the translator (who is more deeply engaged – creatively, already – with the text than a casual reader will ever be) and end as the writer, composing

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this essay, I will use the term ‘conventional limits’ to indicate a narrow definition of translation as transfer between languages.



pieces in response to the translated text. Prefaced by a discussion of creative response and the limits of translation, my project is a translation accompanied by a work of resonant response.

## BEYOND THE LIMITS OF TRANSLATION

But what are the limits of translation? Douglas Robinson indicates that recent western translation theory holds a wider view of the limits of translation, whereas at various earlier points in history (though a range of translation practices has always existed) the translator was bound to extremes of literalism, or word-for-word translation (20, 16). Modern and postcolonial thought has underscored subjectivity in Translation Studies, as in other fields of study. Universal definitions become impossible: everything is dependent upon a variety of specific influences that are constantly in flux (Robinson 19). Increasingly, Robinson writes, translation is seen as “limitless” – no longer bound by binary sets of terms<sup>2</sup> (20, 19). Susan Bassnett suggests that perhaps readers need to approach translation with more awareness of their “collusion” with a fixed (and rather stringent) definition of translation and its limits (26-27). We accept the idea that a translation is one specific kind of text – i.e. one that has passed from one language to another – but through her examination of several problematic kinds of ‘translation,’ Bassnett shows that this acceptance is often uninformed, and that the texts we acknowledge as translations are not always such (27). Both Robinson and Bassnett indicate that we are moving beyond the limitations of binary thought (i.e. translation

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<sup>2</sup> “The gradations between artificial poles like ‘sense for sense’ and ‘word for word’, or ‘domesticating’ and ‘foreignizing’, or even ‘translation’ and ‘non-translation’, are not only potentially but actually infinite (20).

versus original) in the field of translation studies – which means expanding the limits of translation to include more diverse practices (Bassnett 39; Robinson 19). In her essay on Anne Carson entitled “A Single Brushstroke,” Sherry Simon draws attention to our limited vocabulary for practices of translation that have great degrees of variance (3-5). “We are at a loss to account for looser forms of translation, where process takes over from equivalence. Where the translative impulse (the awareness of moving between two codes, two realities) becomes the motor for creative writing” (Simon 4-5). Simon points to translation as a keynote in Carson’s creation: her style is “translational” – straddling opposites, keeping us awake and alert through juxtapositions – and translation is often used as a stepping stone for her work (2).

#### CHOOSING THE BOOK: JUSTIFICATION OF SUBJECT

The choice to translate a particular book of literature almost always has a personal impulse at its root. Translators, like authors, are drawn to certain styles, subjects, and stories. I came across Jean-François Beauchemin’s *Turkana Boy* by felicitous chance and was drawn to the poetry of the phrases, the quiet sadness of the story, and the wonder that underlies the magnificent questions Beauchemin asks through the character of Monsieur Bartolomé: “L’âme était-il un ciel enchevêtré à l’homme?”; “Aurai-je été un bon habitant de la Terre? De qui fus-je l’élève?”; “Les matins étaient-ils amarrés aux éperviers?” (14, 18, 39). I found this book when I, like the central character, was searching for ways through grief. I felt a *resonance* with the work and this is what compelled me to translate it. There is a deep satisfaction to be had in conveying words, already admired in my

second language, into my mother tongue – the language in which I have the most sensibility, the language that sits closest to my heart. It is even more fulfilling to have my translation of a work that I respect be the point of departure for a series of responses – writing of my own.

#### PRIMARY TEXT: *TURKANA BOY*

*Turkana Boy* is the story of a single character, Monsieur Bartolomé, and it explores his grief after he loses his child. His bewilderment and wonder are constant as he searches landscapes and life for “quelque chose de plus grand que lui-même” (Jean-François Beauchemin, *Turkana Boy* cover). Poetic prose fragments are woven through with rich, often startling language and questions that are the crux of both the search and the poetry.

#### THE AUTHOR: JEAN-FRANÇOIS BEAUCHEMIN

On the inside cover of his latest book, *La fabrication de l'aube*, are these words: “Jean-François Beauchemin a 45 ans. Ce n’est ni jeune ni vieux, mais assez sérieux pour lui permettre de saisir, avec un étonnement ému, tout le mystère des beautés de ce monde. Voilà pourquoi, peut-être, il se consacre désormais à l’écriture.” He has published seven novels (all of them with Québec-Amérique except *Le jour des corneilles*, published with Les Allusifs): *Comme enfant je suis cuit* (1998), *Garage Molinari* (1999), *Mon père est une chaise* (2001), *Les choses terrestres* (2001), *Le petit pont de la louve* (2002), *Turkana*

*Boy* (2004), and *Le jour des corneilles* (2004). Critics write that *Turkana Boy* is “sans doute le plus grave et le plus inspirant d’une oeuvre qui flirte avec divers styles, de l’écriture enfantine (*Comme enfant je suis cuit*) au langage archaïque (*Le jour des corneilles*)” (Julie Sergent). Another critic writes, “On sent dans l’écriture de Jean-François Beauchemin une intensité incroyable” (Florence Meney). The following quotation speaks to the theme of resonance and connection: “Il sait transmettre à travers son témoignage particulier quelque chose d’universel, qui nous rejoint tous” (Renée Bolduc). His latest book, *La fabrication de l’aube*, appeared in January 2006, and is, as Beauchemin himself writes, the first autobiographical work he has published. After coming close to death two years ago, Beauchemin writes a moving account of his experience, with deep insight into our relationship to death and our engagement with life. Significantly, at the end of this book he includes his email address and invites readers to respond to this book. I say ‘significantly’ because I came across this invitation at a point when I was just beginning to form my thoughts for my thesis project, knowing that I wanted to go beyond the limits of the translation I was working on and further than analysis of method; that moment – of receiving his invitation for response – was a clear signal for the direction I would take.

#### METHOD: RESONANT RESPONSE

The creative parts of the project are explorations of selected questions or segments from my translation of *Turkana Boy*, written fragments that are inspired by lines from my translation (at times the pieces are textually bound by translated lines, in a

manner that recalls the glosa in poetry – for instance, structuring paragraphs of a piece around consecutive lines from the translation). I have responded to fragments with fragments that are tied thematically to the book – threads of grief, memory, and wonder weave through both Beauchemin’s and my texts. Like Alison Pick, whose book *Question and Answer Poems* I will later refer to, my pieces use another writer’s questions as their departure point and are an experiment in resonant response.

#### THEORIES OF CREATIVE RESPONSE: MEMORY, GRIEF, MOVEMENT AND RESONANCE

This is a work of gathering, in which memory holds a central place. There is a strong link between memory and translation. The doubling, or two-mindedness experienced by the one remembering is like the double consciousness of the translator – and, on another level, of the writer-translator. For the translator, it means reading words in one language and seeing other words in another language; for me as the writer-translator, it means reading about the character of Monsieur Bartolomé and seeing myself or people in my own life; it means being in the present and seeing the past; it means, essentially, becoming two selves<sup>3</sup>.

Walter Benjamin touches upon ideas of (linguistic) fragmentation and wholeness in his essay “The Task of the Translator,” and in particular, of memory in relation to translation. The “iterability” of a work is its potential to be remembered, or given continued life (“afterlife”), through being translated, quoted, or criticized, all of which are forms of response (71). Although works of art are clearly inanimate objects, and do not

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<sup>3</sup> I have written about this doubling explicitly in two pieces, on pages 68 and 76.

have “souls” or experience “sensations,” Benjamin posits that they possess both a life and an afterlife because they have their own history: “The idea of life and afterlife in works of art should be regarded with an entirely unmetaphorical objectivity” (70, 71). Translation, quotation and criticism quite literally refer to, or remember, an original (work of art) and transpose part of it into a new context, giving it a further incarnation beyond its original. Through this reference a text or work of art is kept ‘alive,’ carried forward through the act of ‘remembering’ into the present moment and on into the future.

A translation, just like a response, takes on a new life, becoming – or leading to – a distinct creation, and this is the direction my project moves in – *moving* being the operative word. Movement is integral to the work of translation, which, as I have stated, is always an act of furthering, beginning from a source text and moving to a new place – but more than this, the process of translating parts of *Turkana Boy* has moved me to create. Works that are *moving* are the most powerful ones – because they incite reciprocal movement.

For the grieving character of Monsieur Bartolomé in *Turkana Boy*, movement is absolutely, crucially central. If, in grief, we stop moving, we stop being of the world – we become frozen – and there is no chance for us to heal. For Monsieur Bartolomé (the one who is left behind) movement is essential because he still belongs to life, and life is an existence that changes continuously. The translation (and the response to translation) is akin to the one who survives, who will always hold something of his “original,” his self-from-before, but moves onward, indelibly transformed. This is how grief translates us.

The notion of responding has several formal outlets in literature, most prominently in poetry. Glosas, rengas, and ‘question and answer’ poems all indicate the same underlying spirit of resonance with an existing work or author.

## THE GLOSA

“The glosa is an early Renaissance form, first developed by the poets of the Spanish court” (P.K. Page, *Hologram* cover). In the glosa, the author takes four lines from an existing poem by someone else and uses these as the skeleton for her new poem. Each of these four lines closes one of four 10-line stanzas; lines 6, 9 and 10 of each stanza are rhymed. In my experience of writing glosas, there is at once a comfort and a challenge in the constraints of the form: it is reassuring to know what I am writing towards and simultaneously demanding as a writer to be working within the boundaries of someone else’s words. In the introduction to her book of glosas, P.K. Page writes that she “liked being controlled by those three reigning rhymes – or do I mean reigning?” (9). She compares the challenge to that of a crossword. The fourteen glosas in *Hologram* take their structuring lines from poets with whom Page has felt a certain resonance, and she considers her glosas a form of “homage” (9). The poems vary greatly in tone, reflecting the styles of the authors from whom she borrows her structuring lines: her glosa in response to D. H. Lawrence is ornate and replete with flowery adjectives, whereas the poem responding to Dylan Thomas is authoritative, probing, and stark. In the first stanza of “Planet Earth” in response to Neruda – whose poems are so often grounded in simple,

humble images drawn from the lives of common people, she writes:

It has to be loved the way a laundress loves her linens,  
the way she moves her hands caressing the fine muslins  
knowing their warp and woof,  
like a lover coaxing, or a mother praising.  
It has to be loved as if it were embroidered  
with flowers and birds and two joined hearts upon it.  
It has to be stretched and stroked.  
O this great beloved world and all the creatures in it.  
*It has to be spread out, the skin of this planet.*<sup>4</sup> (42)

She resists the word “influence,” preferring to say that she feels an “affinity with” another author<sup>5</sup> (12). This idea of affinity is synonymous with resonance as I am using the term in this project.

## QUESTION AND ANSWER POEMS

Alison Pick has also used poetry as a kind of homage to writers whom she “admires” in her book *Question and Answer Poems* (cover). “...Rilke says, / love the questions / as though they are poems in some / other language” (11). Her poems borrow questions from writers such as Sylvia Plath, Patrick Lane, and Erin Mouré; using these authors’ questions as her departure point, Pick writes poems that are her own explorations of the question’s themes. I use the word ‘explorations’ rather than ‘answers’ because Pick’s responses, while they do sometimes grammatically ‘answer’ the question, are not closed doors; probably, too, because the tone of her poems is one of meditation, similar to the voice in *Turkana Boy*, which is one of searching and wondering without ever finding

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<sup>4</sup> Alastair Reid is the translator of Neruda’s poem “In Praise of Ironing” from which Page’s four rei(g)ning lines are drawn.

<sup>5</sup> “‘affinity with’ seems closer to the truth than ‘influenced by’” (12).



a final answer. In part of a poem responding to Mary Oliver's question, "Tell me, what is it you plan to do / with your one wild and precious life?", Pick writes:

[...] This and each morning  
we try not to speak. Soon I will put my sweater back on, move  
to the desk. This space, this silence, someone who loves me:  
over the field the clouds shift their shadows. When the last  
change is made I will sit by the blank paper, listening. (33)

The ending of the poem is one that does not close – but rather prolongs, furthers, the space of response, of which "listening" is an integral part.

## THE RENGA AND RECIPROCAL TRANSLATION

Response is the basis for Jacques Brault and E. D. Blodgett's book *Transfiguration*. Working in close collaboration via mail across the physical distance between Alberta and Quebec, Brault and Blodgett exchanged, responded to, and translated each other's poetry (in Simon, *Translating Montreal* 138). The form they used is the renga (with the additional step of translation). Like the surrealists' exquisite corpse, the renga is a form that is written collectively – the response is immediate and emerges from multiple writers working together on one project. The renga is a traditional Japanese form of poetry dating back to the early 13th century, in which two or more poets write a sequence of poems, each piece in response to the preceding poem (*Dictionary of World Literary Terms* 169). Rengas are an exercise in non-individuality: the emerging work takes unchallenged precedence over the individual identities of the poets involved (Octavio Paz 23). Similarly, experiments such as the exquisite corpse have been attempts to move past individuality to a space of collective creation; in the case of the exquisite

corpse, the aim has also been to leave conscious direction behind in the hope of allowing something uncensored to emerge from the subconscious mind.

TRANSLATIONS THAT GO BEYOND: SUZANNE JILL LEVINE, JACQUES BRAULT, AND ERIN MOURÉ

SUZANNE JILL LEVINE

Resonance is at the heart of Suzanne Jill Levine's process as a translator and 'closelaborator,' and it is this that allows her to step beyond conventional limits of translation. Her book, *The Subversive Scribe*, is a collection of elaborated translator's notes and a testimony to the close relationships behind her literary translations. Her process of "closelaboration"<sup>6</sup> with authors Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Manuel Puig and Severo Sarduy is revealed to be dynamic and creative. The wordplay that occurs in the collaborative space brings her translations beyond conventional limits.

There are practical, target-oriented reasons behind closelaboration – to compensate for the loss of a central element of the original, and to make the translated work resonant for an anglophone American audience. Closelaboration has a dual movement of turning inward – in intimacy with the original (and with the original author), demonstrating a certain loyalty to this (him) – while simultaneously turning outward towards the receiving audience, conscientiously, shaping phrases such that the new work will strike complementary chords when read in English. Levine says clearly that her intention in elaborating upon jokes and puns in *Three Trapped Tigers* – her translation of Cabrera Infante's *Tres Tristes Tigres*, a translation thirty pages longer than

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<sup>6</sup> " 'closelaborations,' a neologism coined by Guillermo Cabrera Infante," referring to their collaborative early translation experiences (xiii).

the original – was to compensate for the loss, in English, of the spoken dialect of Havana, which was a principal source of the book’s humor in Spanish. This shows how elaboration is an essential part of Levine’s work of closelaboration.

The *closeness* in closelaboration, though, comes through most strongly in a singular element, and that is the element of play. Levine writes, “[w]hat drew me to these writers was the playful, creative possibility of self-betrayal, of re-creating (in) language” (182). Behind this possibility is an irreverence for the original, a refusal to see it as superior or untouchable. Levine’s work, then, of closelaboration, approaches Jacques Brault’s work of “non-translation”<sup>7</sup>: both subvert the notion that an original is always best – that translations are always poorer ‘copies.’ In Levine’s case, playfulness and expansion of the original were possible because she was working intimately with authors who delighted in the deviance of language, and who saw “their originals already as translations of texts and traditions as well as of realities” (8). She describes the connection she felt with Cabrera Infante at their first meeting, already “bandying words,” recognizing with delight their mutual love of manipulating language: “(S)wordplay was our communal, if not sacred, ground” (x, 22). If resonance means to feel connected to a person, work, or idea through recognizing a similar current in oneself, then the resonance between Levine and Cabrera Infante was present from this first meeting. The correspondence that ensued is a further testament to the closeness, and the playfulness, between them<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Jacques Brault, *Poèmes des quatre côtés*.

<sup>8</sup> With Jean-François Beauchemin, the resonance I felt in reading his works of fiction was strengthened and took on a new shape when I began to correspond with him. I encountered in him an openness and a warmth which encouraged me to search even more deeply into the passages I was translating. His receptiveness to this correspondence placed me, as a reader, in a position of great privilege, able to ask anything I wanted about the meaning of phrases or his choices of words and names; as a translator our exchange has been an

Closelaboration depends upon versatility of the original, creativity of the translator (and the author), mutual willingness to engage in the process, and to a certain degree it depends upon non-attachment to the original: the translation is a new form of a work that exists in a universe where change is constant. The process of translation through closelaboration is an echo or a furthering of the act of writing, as Levine expresses here: “The translation process mirrored the process of writing the original, Cabrera Infante adding a parody here, a pun there up to the very last minute” (24). Literary translation becomes a creative act that is “synonymous” with writing itself, including comparable deliberations over word choices and a similarly broad span for creation (90).

#### JACQUES BRAULT

Jacques Brault’s book *Poèmes des quatre côtés* is a collection of his “non-translations” (“nontraductions”). The book is divided into four sections of poetry corresponding to the four directions, alternating with passages of reflection, or commentary, on the process of nontraduction. There are several ways in which Brault challenges the limits of translation, and shows his process to be a creative, responsive one.

His appellation of the process “non-translation” is the first signal that his work will challenge the limits of translation. Brault will engage with texts of the four poets he has chosen and *not* translate them: “Traduire, mais sans traduire” (32). By beginning with this negation, he paves the way for the slew of binary opposites that inform the first

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invaluable resource when I am searching to understand the poetry of his work. I wonder what effect this correspondence will have upon me as a writer – I think it must, in keeping with the spirit of the letters, help me to be open, and to lean my mind towards the poetry of questions.

section of commentary (on page 14: “ouverte et fermée,” “angoisse heureuse,” “menace et [] rassurance,” “l’autre et le même”). These pairs of terms describe the conflict which precedes creation. The creative act in this case is non-translation. The name suggests a rejection of the conventions – which could also be called the limits – of translation. Non-translation separates itself from tradition through its inherent negation.

Brault rejects the idea that an original is categorically superior to its (non)translation. The ‘originals’ informing this series of poems are not cited until the end of the book. Like the name “non-translation,” this reversal – physically placing the ‘translation’ before the ‘original,’ and rejecting these designations – puts a spin on our expectations, pushes us past previous limits. He revolts against the original, and against all “pré-jugés” of philosophy (such as Plato’s pre-existent, unchanging forms); a work is not literary, he writes, if it is immutable – it must have a flexibility that the concept of ‘original’ does not allow for (33). Creativity is essential to the process of non-translation. To imitate or reproduce a work of literature through conventional translation proves perilous for both that work and the translated piece (32). If a translated text imitates the text it is inspired by, “il perd le meilleur de lui-même – l’autre qui de jour et de nuit se fait son hôte, l’accueille et le révèle à son inconnissance” (32). While Brault is certainly not ‘sourcier’ in his thinking, his practice is carried out with respect for the poems that inform his non-translations. In the contrenote his tone even leads us to think that his ideology has reflections of Henri Meschonnic’s concept of the “poétique” of a work of literature. The poétique of a text is its particular logic or poetics (in both poetry and prose) as well as the logic and poetics of the language it is written in, and encompasses several elements, notably recurrent themes and words, and rhythm (Meschonnic 214).

Respecting these in translation can mean, at times, privileging the poétique above the meaning. Brault gives the example of a particularly sonorous passage of poetry that is degraded through a literal rendition (in the same language) and respected yet altered in a Hungarian (non)translated version that maintains the rhythm and repetition of sounds (92). It is possible, even without understanding Hungarian, to see how the poétique has been respected – the rhyme and repetition of sound that visibly hold the original piece together are clearly recreated.

The passages of commentary, which read like stream-of-consciousness musings, always hold an element of poetry. Brault writes with the presence of a Zen Buddhist<sup>9</sup>, the political and linguistic alertness of a francophone in Québec, and with the questioning, image-bound language of a poet. That he is a poet is evident from his other works, but it is palpable here in his commentary as well. In the same way that a poem might circle a central point with carefully selected words and images, Brault spirals around the idea of non-translation, narrowing in until, through suggestions, negations, and meditations, we too have an idea of what it is to non-translate. He writes: “Nontraduire; se decentrer. Le coeur sur la main et la main au coeur,” and we have a sense of both displacement of self and reciprocal motion (also, perhaps, of something deeply felt – or heartfelt) (16). The second section is particularly rich in images. In this chapter we get a glimpse of the agony of the non-translator, caught now in the antagonism of the dualistic elements listed in the first section, the conflict that precedes creation. “La pluie bafouille à la fenêtre. Novembre aux doigts, au coeur un gris-froid [] Lequel des deux résiste à l’autre, le texte

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<sup>9</sup> I am referring in particular to his discussion of silence on page 52 – a true silence that we have not yet learned, that is more than the absence of sounds. Within this space of true silence there would be no need for translation. He implies interconnectedness, or oneness (here and elsewhere in the book) which is a central premise of Zen Buddhism.

ou moi? Je me lève. J'ouvre la fenêtre. On me crache à la figure" (32). It is a poetic device to use images to illustrate an idea or an emotion, as Brault does here, setting a stormy backdrop to his struggle. He poeticizes the act of non-translation, and this injection of poetry into the process marks it as creative; also, it places non-translation a step beyond conventional limits. And, of course, it is poetry that he chooses to non-translate.

Though there are distinct differences between his sensibility and that of each of the four poets whose work he draws upon, it is the points of overlap, or resonance, that pull him to non-translate them. Writing of John Haines in the contrenote, Brault states that he knows hardly anything about the Alaskan landscape that informs Haines' poetry - "mais l'hiver, le silence et la solitude, je les connais, comme plusieurs, et encore mieux l'effroi subtil qui perce à coups d'aiguilles froides la plus solide espérance au premier vrai matin d'avril" (89). Brault's resonance with Haines' work stems from the familiar that he recognizes within the foreign, and it is from this place of sympathetic vibration that he is pulled to respond. He writes of being opened by the poetry of e. e. cummings ("cette poésie très rhétoricienne m'a ouvert comme une blessure et me rouvre sans cesse au bonheur du plus pur lyrisme" [89-90]). The action inherent in being opened can be compared to the motion of feeling 'moved' by poetry. This is the place from which the impulse to respond comes. The place of response, which is inspired by resonance, has its roots beyond the limits of translation.

## ERIN MOURÉ

Erin Mouré extends the network of referents in Fernando Pessoa's poems to include elements of her own life, through the intimate process of "transelation." The little red 'e' on the cover of *Sheep's Vigil by a Fervent Person* is a little wink telling the reader that this translation goes beyond the usual limits, a nudge that testifies to the spirit of the work: a *transelation*, written with exuberance, "exorbitance," "as if translation were the performance of an exorbitant body" ("Hi! Fidelity" 1). The red 'e' also creates a *gap* – a concept I will return to – within the body of the word "translation."

*Sheep's Vigil by a Fervent Person* is Mouré's inventive translation of Fernando Pessoa's (a.k.a. Alberto Caeiro) collection of poems entitled *O Guardador de Rebanhos*. In Mouré's introduction to the book, she writes of her own tremendous enthusiasm, moments of "excessive" movement when she worked (as Pessoa) quickly and prolifically, "in a sort of ecstasy," translating his lines and adding her own ("Hi! Fidelity" 3; *Sheep's Vigil* viii). "I did not 'intend' to translate *O Guardador*. I intended to read it. I started 'translating' without goal and without aim, making words in English to incarnate, alongside the text, my own surprise and pleasure, and my own readerly sitedness in time and culture" ("Hi, Fidelity!" 2). Mouré's engagement with the text was personal, her responses coming from a place of enjoyment – and of resonance – as she drew close to Pessoa's words.

The translator has a privileged relationship to the text, one that goes beyond the relationship of a reader, and it is a deeply intimate one. "The translator reads in the desire to join with what she reads, placing the life of the poem thoroughly within her own, discovering how each entering word modifies that life" (Jane Hirshfield 60). As Mouré



states, “[a] practice of reading is always embodied” (“Hi! Fidelity” 1). A practice of translation is even more so. In Mouré’s case, the poems of Pessoa have entered her life – have become embodied – to such an extent that, in translation, they become poems about the place where she is and the thoughts that she has there (“What I’d give to be the creek under the road at No Frills / So that people could sense water on the way to the laundromat”), and the characters in her own life – like the neighbour on Winnett Avenue who “throws lasagna to the crows” (55; 79). Mouré’s translation transposes the work – geographically, from Portugal to Toronto; linguistically, from Portuguese to English; and subjectively, from Pessoa to Mouré. More precisely: from Alberto Caeiro – one of Pessoa’s several heteronyms – to Eirin Mouré, Mouré’s alter(ed) ego engaged with this book. One can see in these transpositions a movement in which, through the writing of the text-in-response, the two (texts, places, languages, personalities) approach, touch and superpose each other, like transparencies, such that the original is visible through the translation but is unmistakably transformed. We can see Mouré and Pessoa “suffusing and being suffused by” each other: Mouré’s casual wit shines through in exclamations like “hey, I’m born,” “[w]hat the heck” and “[m]y head’s wet” – in a kind of grounding she brings to lofty or esoteric thoughts, while Pessoa’s contemplation of things as things and ironic yet sincere meditations on the universe still pulse in the heart of the poems when they are placed against the backdrop of Toronto’s modern streets (Hirshfield 67; Mouré, *Sheep’s Vigil* 7, 3).

But what happens in those moments of blending identities, of transfer from one place to another – in the space between original and translation – and what is the nature

of the interval? This space – or gap<sup>10</sup> – is the wordless site where the poem goes between languages (the “inter-texte,” or “interlangue,” in Jacques Brault’s words), shedding one skin to step into another (*Poèmes des quatres côtés* 69, 70). In relation to Brault, I argue that the gap is the space where engagement occurs, and that this engagement is the precursor to *response*. Responding is also the nature of Mouré’s work in translation. The gap has a mysteriousness about it – it is neither one thing nor the other but the *inbetween*, not made of words but wordless. It is not a space of logic: rather, of intuition. Sherry Simon picks up on this when she says, of Mouré, that her translations occur “presque par hasard, dans un moment d’illumination,” and Hirshfield touches upon it when she writes that translation is “a process of choice-making as mysterious and intuitive as writing itself” (“Interférences créatrices” 8; Hirshfield 62). Hirshfield’s suggestion that there is a space beyond words where poets go to find the poem – before it becomes embodied in words – indicates the gap as being the site of poetry itself. Translators have a task that is synonymous with that of poets – to reach into the gap between languages and texts, between known and unknown, to find the new written work.

The gap is the wellspring for creation. Simon writes,

Reading Mouré’s translations, moving from left to right and back, invites us to adopt her doubling habit of mind, and everywhere see the gap between one thing and another, between what we see and what we do not see – just as Erin Mouré sees Portuguese and imagines English, sees the ugly parking lot and imagines the river flowing below. And this turn of mind, this habit of doubling, comes to define a special kind of poetic impulse – the impulse that uses what is given as a springboard to what does not yet exist. This impulse we might call translative, because it introduces a permanent double consciousness” (*Translating Montreal* 154).

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, some would say this mysterious gap is accessed through a practice of having *no* gap between self and world – “[t]he Sung dynasty poet Yang Wan-Li” indicates “the Heart Sutra, the central text of Zen: ‘no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind, no consciousness’” as a way of illustrating his point about the poet’s direct engagement with the world (in Hirshfield, 57). This is an engagement that is unmediated by even the senses – “abrupt, direct, total” (Mouré, *Sheep’s Vigil*, viii).

Translation becomes a vehicle for creation, a stepping-off point for one's own poetry. Mouré's uses Pessoa's poems to further her own – "elle fait de la traduction un outil" ("Interférences créatrices" 7). It is brave work, following through on the creative impulse, from the shared intimacy with the original author's work, through the gap of engagement, to the place of response where the writer-translator gives something of herself back to the world.

## CONCLUSION

As I have shown, resonance is at the heart of practices of creative response. P. K. Page and Alison Pick use the glosa and question and answer poems, respectively, to pay homage to writers whose work has moved them. In *Transfiguration*, Jacques Brault and E. D. Blodgett embrace the spirit of the renga (which seeks to repress individuality) and use reciprocal translation to advance their collective creation. My aim with this project is not so much to pay homage or repress my individuality as it is to acknowledge the connection between people, and to bring forth the writing that can be fuelled with resonance as the conduit.

Resonance in my own work takes the form of response, rather than collaboration, which is one way of distinguishing it from Suzanne Jill Levine's work of "closelaboration." The creative parts of my project are an extension of the act of literary translation: written pieces in response to the translated words of Jean-François Beauchemin. In this sense they are elaborations, but (and this is the crucial point of distinction between my work and Levine's) my elaborations do not occur in the realm of

translation – the pieces have moved into the space of writing, linked to but not synonymous with the space of translation. When Levine writes that a translation is “a continuation of the original’s distant yet interpretive relationship to an unspoken network of referents,” I think of how the responses in my work will be a continuation of a network of thematic referents in *Turkana Boy* (memory, grief, simple miracles), extending Beauchemin’s work, taking it, in this sense, beyond the limits of translation, giving it continued life through a new glass – of loss, and of wonder (16).

It is in the space beyond translation that most of the work of response takes place. This points to the element of Jacques Brault’s process that comes closest to my ideas of resonance and response: his privileging of the “passage” – between ‘original’ and “non-translation” (94). This is a third space, an “inter-texte” and an “inter-langue” (69; 70). This third element, or space, is the very site of engagement – where engagement means to be in close dialogue with the text being (non)translated, and implies an affinity with this text. Engagement (or resonance – both are states of sympathetic vibration) is an integral part of non-translation, as it is an essential part of creative response.

My process of response begins, like Erin Mouré’s, during the course of reading, when Beauchemin’s words trigger my own memory and poetic mind, develops when I begin to translate, and culminates in my written response. In my project, one can point to the gap in the moments when the emotions that are evoked in my reading of *Turkana Boy* – “les grands chagrins” and “les grandes joies” – become embodied through the process of translation, coming inside where they “remue[nt] l’intérieur” and as his words touch on similar sensations and synapses in me, they awaken personal stories in response (Beauchemin, *Turkana Boy* cover). The mind is called to respond because the heart has been stirred.

note:

For this section of translation and creation, two separate works – one of translation, one of resonant response, accompany each other, with the translation appearing on the left hand pages, the creative work on the right. Though intimately linked, they do not always match each other step for step; and through the process of writing the responses, it became clear that the creative work was much more than ‘commentary’ on the translation – it was beginning to move towards becoming a distinct work. For this reason, each element (translation and creation) has its own title and distinct font.

**TURKANA BOY**

**I – THE ESCAPED ISLAND**

**BY JEAN-FRANÇOIS BEAUCHEMIN, TRANSLATED BY JESSICA MOORE**

# Everything, Now

by Jessica Moore

To mark the place

No stone, no -  
nothing

but the concrete and steel ties  
of the railway bridge above

that terrible blind  
corner

red tulips lain down  
by the roadside

cracked glass jar for the candle that keeps  
being put out by the rush of trucks



1.

HE TOOK NOTES. ALL HIS LIFE, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ HAD DONE NOTHING BUT TAKE NOTES. HE GAVE TITLES TO DOWNPOURS, PRODUCED CHAPTERS IN WHICH ORDINARY THINGS HAPPENED; IN HIS STORIES HE ALWAYS WROTE BIRDS ONTO THE FIRST PAGE. SOMETIMES HE MADE BOOKS OF THESE STORIES, IN WHICH PEOPLE SAID THEY RECOGNIZED THE GLIMMERINGS OF CHILDHOOD. BUT THIS WAS TOO EASY TO SAY – HE WASN'T INTERESTED IN CHILDHOOD – IT HAD TAKEN YEARS FOR HIS OWN TO HUSH A LITTLE AND HE PREFERRED THE BITTER BEAUTY OF THINGS. IN HIS BOOKS THERE WAS ALWAYS THIS MISUNDERSTANDING: THE CHILDREN HE DESCRIBED WERE NOT CHILDREN, BUT ADULTS, WHO STILL HAD A QUALITY ABOUT THEM THAT COULD MAKE YOU THINK OF CHILDHOOD BUT WAS IN FACT SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT, SOMETHING THAT HAD TAKEN MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ A LONG TIME TO NAME.

ONE DAY, READING OVER A FEW PASSAGES HERE AND THERE, HE REALIZED THAT ALL THE PEOPLE IN HIS STORIES HAD THIS IN COMMON: THEY WERE MEN AND WOMEN WHO WERE WAITING FOR SOME ADVENT, SOLITARY SOULS WHO COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT OTHERS, DREAMERS SHATTERED BY REALITY, LOVERS WHO DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH THEIR INTELLIGENCE, FREE BEINGS IMPRISONED INSIDE THEMSELVES. THEN HE UNDERSTOOD WHY PEOPLE SAW SO MUCH OF CHILDHOOD IN HIS WRITING: WITHOUT REALIZING IT, HE HAD CREATED A LITTLE SOCIETY OF MALADJUSTED PEOPLE WHO DIDN'T YET UNDERSTAND THE WORLD IN WHICH THEY LIVED. HE HAD DEPICTED BEINGS WHO, IN THEIR OWN FASHION, TOOK NOTES FOR LATER, GAVE TITLES TO THE RAINS SO THAT THEY MIGHT RECOGNIZE THEM IF THEY EVER CAME BACK. BUT EACH RAIN WAS DIFFERENT AND NONE FELL ON THE WORLD MORE THAN ONCE – THIS WAS DOUBTLESSLY WHY MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ WAS SO FASCINATED BY THEM. THIS WAS ALSO WHY HE PREFERRED BIRDS. BECAUSE BIRDS DID COME BACK, AND ALWAYS FROM AFAR, AS THOUGH PRECEDING HUMANS IN THEIR CEASELESS MARCH TOWARDS THE FUTURE.

HE ALWAYS WROTE BIRDS ONTO THE FIRST PAGE.

Memory is a strange bird  
allowing the world only in fragments:

shards of life, our stories –  
the very stuff we are made of.

I am the keeper, now, Galen,  
I hold them all.

Tonight as I write I will become the conjuror  
and when I open my hands:

a thousand doves.

2.

HE HAD A YOUNG SON. HE WAS A CALM CHILD, FULL OF SILENCES, WHO PLAYED HIS GAMES IN THE SHADOW OF AN IMMENSE ELM PLANTED IN THE YARD, MIRACULOUS ESCAPEE OF THE BIG CITY'S TENTACLES. THE YEARS, IN THOSE TIMES, PASSED LIKE THE SHADOW OF THE ELM OVER THE YOUNG BOY'S BACK: LIGHT, LONG, COOL, HARBORING THE PROJECTS OF BIRDS.

THE CHILD HAD ALWAYS SAID, "THIS TREE IS MY BROTHER." THEN, ONE DAY, THE ELM HAD TO BE TAKEN DOWN – DISEASE HAD INVADED THE LEAVES, THE BARK, AND EVERY OTHER PART OF IT. WORKERS CAME WITH CHAIN SAWS. WITH HIS NOSE CRUSHED AGAINST THE WINDOW, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ'S SON WATCHED THE BRANCHES GIVE WAY ONE BY ONE IN THE YARD. THEN THE WORKERS LEFT. THE CHILD DRAGGED HIS FEET IN THE DEBRIS FOR AN HOUR. FOR HIM, CHILDHOOD ENDED THERE. MAYBE THAT WAS HIS FIRST SADNESS, WHO KNOWS? BUT SOMETHING ELSE HAD FALLEN WITH THE BRANCHES AND LAY NOW BENEATH HIS FEET, IN THE DUST OF THE TREE THAT WAS NOW, AND WOULD ALWAYS BE, INCONCEIVABLY SMALLER THAN HIM. THE YARD WAS INUNDATED WITH LIGHT. IT WAS THE ONLY TIME THAT HE SHOUTED INSULTS AT THE SUN.

3.

MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ WAS HARDLY AN EXPERT ON THINGS OF THE SKY. HUMAN PRAYER, THE LEAFY TOPS OF TALL TREES, CERTAIN KINDS OF MUSIC AS WELL: EVERYTHING THAT HAD ITS PLACE UP THERE REMAINED FOREIGN TO HIM, FARAWAY. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ'S UNIVERSE WAS MADE UP OF STREETS, HOUSES, CARS, CHAIRS, NOTEBOOKS, AND LOOSE CHANGE. HE HAD BEEN THROWN IN CHAINS IN A HOLD CALLED EARTH. SO HOW TO SPEAK OF THIS CALL FOR AERIAL THINGS THAT RESOUNDED IN HIM, OF THIS SPACE THAT UNFURLED ITSELF, VAST AS A FIRMAMENT? BECAUSE NOTHING, TRULY, IS MORE ANCHORED, MORE TERRESTRIAL THAN THE BODY. HOW TO NAME THIS LIGHT THING TIED TO THE BALLAST OF THE LIMBS, THE ORGANS, THE BONES, AND THE BLOOD? THE SOUL? WAS THE SOUL, THEN, A SKY TANGLED IN EVERY PERSON?

SO HOW TO SPEAK OF THIS CALL FOR AERIAL THINGS THAT RESOUNDED IN HIM, OF THIS SPACE THAT UNFURLED ITSELF, VAST AS A FIRMAMENT?

I phoned Jim to ask: what was the story of Galen and the ladder?

When he was two, or maybe three, Galen was with his dad in the old barn at his grandfather's farm. There was a ladder that went up, *oh, maybe forty feet*, and Galen wanted to climb. Jim let him go - he wanted to see how far Galen's little legs would take him. *Well, he went straight up - all the way to the top*. Even then, even so young, he was pulled skyward.

In Mexico Galen and I climbed to the top of hills, churches, pyramids; on our last day I sat in a blue tiled restaurant with echoing ceilings, writing, while Galen climbed to the forty-fourth floor of the Torre Latinoamericana for one last, long, wide look at this wild city that stirred him to excitement, filling him with energy to create.

Was that the call of what resonated in him, vast and deep as a sky over Mexico city?

WAS THE SOUL, THEN, A SKY TANGLED IN EVERY PERSON?

Ghosts move through this house

with all the windows and all the doors open  
they move in swathes

ribbons  
thin cloth

Spaces we move in contain so much –  
or, rather than containing, *allow* –  
wind and motion,  
silk sheaves blowing,  
our own long-drawn souls.

This body is not a closed thing,  
not the shell, but the room with windows,  
simple vines gathering at the sill.

Come, come to the doorway,  
I will show you my yellow room,  
unbroken.

We need to give a wider berth to thoughts like love, or the soul.  
Call them skies, then.

Galen writes: *I have fallen, but it feels as though I am falling up into the wide open blue sky.*

Come, sit, and I will tell you the story of the souls.  
Imagine yourself moving in swathes  
and when you reach the end of the path  
carved out by leaving  
someone is there waiting.

Imagine that you gather ghosts, like smooth stones,  
or flowers – that you press your ear to the hull of ghostly evenings  
and carry a basket for what you can collect there –  
every time you turn to the window with the light pressure of a question in you –  
another one.

Imagine that all those ghosts will be waiting, there, at the end.  
Imagine that it will be beautiful.

You can close the windows in the yellow room now,  
and the door behind you.  
We need to give a wider berth to thoughts like the soul, or love.

Galen writes: *I feel as though we are connected on other planes that I know little of.*

Galen asks in a moment hard as a stick: *Do you think we would lose each other if we weren't together? That's not much faith.*

I have moved into a new apartment in Montreal,  
painted my room pale yellow.

On days when there is a little wind, I open  
all the windows and all the doors,  
allow this motion.

4.

AND BESIDES, THE SKY DIDN'T USUALLY MIX WITH THE EARTH. BUT IT HAPPENED SOMETIMES THAT – THE DAWN'S COLOURS STRETCHING OUT FURTHER THAN USUAL – THE WORLD RUSHED TOWARDS THE SKY AND BLENDED WITH IT. THIS MIXTURE PAINTED THE IMAGE OF THE HOURS TO COME, ANNOUNCING A RARE CONCORDANCE OF THINGS TERRESTRIAL AND CELESTIAL. AT THOSE TIMES, THE HIGHWAYS OVERTOOK THE SUN. A PLANE PASSED, DREAMING OF ROADS. HOUSES BECAME ANIMATED, BAPTIZED BY A RAIN. THEN IT WAS TWILIGHT: IN THE ANGLED ROOFTOPS OF THE BELL TOWERS, THE WINDOWPANES FELL ASLEEP. LEANING AGAINST HIS WINDOW, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ BATHED HIS FACE IN THE LAST LIGHT. THE PARK WAS WATCHED OVER BY STARS, THOSE ISLANDS.



AND BESIDES, THE SKY DIDN'T USUALLY MIX WITH THE EARTH. BUT IT HAPPENED  
SOMETIMES THAT – THE DAWN'S COLOURS STRETCHING OUT FURTHER THAN USUAL –  
THE WORLD RUSHED TOWARDS THE SKY AND BLENDED WITH IT.

In San Cristobal every shade was intensified. We walked in that thinner air, close to the  
sky. You took photos of me and of the light.

We chose to spend a day apart – then were exasperated and happy to chance upon each  
other at a church on a high hill.

Evening turned,  
sudden as pigeons.

Prayer flags white on the sky  
like flickering wings,

light paused ~

the church dome bathed  
orange, raving, exultant,

that last outpouring of deep sun  
violet clouds roiling forward.

5.

HIS HANDS WERE LIKE SOLDIERS COMING HOME FROM CONQUERED COUNTRIES: RECOGNIZABLE ONLY BY THE WOUNDS WRITTEN ON THEIR SIDES. HIS HANDS WERE CAVERNS, HOARDING THEIR SHADOWS AND LEAVING PEOPLE TO THEIR LATE EVENING LANTERNS. HIS HANDS WERE VALLEYS HEMMED IN BY DREAMS: ONE COULD HEAR IN THEM THE FAR OFF ECHO OF GESTURES MADE LONG BEFORE. HIS HANDS WERE CITIES WITH METERED LIGHTS, WITH MARKET STALLS OF SCHEDULES, AND WITH PEOPLE AT THEIR WINDOWS.

WATER THREADED BETWEEN HIS FINGERS UNTIL IT WAS NO MORE THAN A GLOVE OF DREAMS: SOON HIS HAND CLOSED AGAIN OVER THIS FLEETING STUFF THAT ALREADY EXISTED ONLY BECAUSE OF THE FEVER IT HAD JUST EASED. BUT BREAD WAS DIFFERENT, AND ALWAYS LEFT SOMETHING BEHIND: A WHITE VEIL LAY OVER HIS SKIN, TORN HERE AND THERE BY DIPS AND SWELLS, THE UNDULATIONS OF THE PALM. THE OCEAN, BOATS, HAD PASSED THIS WAY. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ LIKED THAT HIS HAND WAS THE LANDSCAPE OF THESE THINGS. HE LIKED THAT BREAD AND WATER PASSED OVER IT, LEAVING A TRACE AS TANGIBLE AS A SNOWFALL OF FLOUR, AS BARELY VISIBLE AS A SATIATED THIRST.

HIS HANDS WERE LIKE SOLDIERS COMING BACK FROM CONQUERED COUNTRIES:  
RECOGNIZABLE ONLY BY THE WOUNDS WRITTEN ON THEIR SIDES.

I have a photograph of your hand. It is just this, just your hand, swaddled in bandage and glove. You took the photo yourself after having split your palm and the tough tender web between thumb and forefinger on the edge of a metal shelf. You bandaged it, and then you finished the job. The shelf was assembled when I came home and the glove was still over the wound. I remember the pride shining in you – so quietly – as in all your proud moments. I felt it too. Pride in what your body could do, how, even wounded, it carried on. A soldier who created instead of destroying, builder of bicycles and shelves. A few days later you pinned the photograph up on the wall. When the rest of us went through your things (only a month later) I pulled it down and slid it between the pages of a book.

HIS HANDS WERE CAVERNS, HOARDING THEIR SHADOWS AND LEAVING PEOPLE TO  
THEIR LATE EVENING LANTERNS.

Mornings when the dark was just beginning to peel back you were up already beside the huge window. Holding your cup of strong coffee, standing in the space that you kept clear for taking portraits and for thinking, looking out over train tracks and trees. Like you were gathering yourself up for each day, storing the best energy until it expanded within and lifted you, like a breath, up into the world. You would pull a chair over to the loft where I slept, stand on it on tiptoe to reach your hand over and touch my hair, saying, every time, *bye sweetie, have a good day*, the words lilting in the rises and valleys of your voice. I always wanted to say, *don't go*.

HIS HANDS WERE VALLEYS HEMMED IN BY DREAMS: ONE COULD HEAR IN THEM THE  
FAR OFF ECHO OF GESTURES MADE LONG BEFORE.

I have another photograph. It is us in front of the pyramid at Chichen Itza, two years ago now, exhausted from the sun; your hand has moved my hair aside, your fingers press gently into the angle where my neck meets my shoulder, your fingers are long and beautiful. Just before this we walked beside the wall of skulls and then inside the pyramid where I was terrified, weighed down as though a dark dream pressed angrily on the centre of my chest. I don't look at this photo now – I had to put it away, you understand. I can feel it too clearly, looking at it; I can want them too ferociously, those hands, to gather me up into days that are longer, now.

6.

IN HIS YOUTH HE HAD, JUST LIKE HIS SON, CHOSEN SILENCE. STILL SO YOUNG, HE HADN'T BEEN ABLE TO MAKE AN ALLY OF IT – IT WAS TOO SOON. BUT ALREADY HE COULD FEEL THAT A DAY WOULD COME WHEN HIS BROW, HIS HANDS AND HIS STEPS WOULD GROW A LITTLE QUIETER. THEN SOMETHING WOULD BEGIN – THE HEIGHT OF YOUTH WOULD BE OVER. AS HE WAITED HE LEARNED TO RECOGNIZE THE FIRST SIGNS OF THE INWARD TURNING TO COME. BECAUSE HE WAS STILL LITTLE, HE DIDN'T ATTRIBUTE MUCH IMPORTANCE TO THESE THINGS: THE WIND CLIMBING THE WALLS AND BLOWING EVILLY, THE HOURS THAT PASSED OVER THINGS WITH THE SOUNDS OF ENDS TO COME. ALREADY IT SEEMED TO HIM THAT WHEN BOATS LEFT THE PORTS IT WAS WITH LOW VOICES.

AND NOW THAT THAT WAS DONE, NOW THAT CHILDHOOD, ADOLESCENCE AND THE FIRST YEARS OF ADULTHOOD HAD PASSED, SOMETHING WAS COMING - HE COULD FEEL IT.

7.

HE REMEMBERED EVENINGS LIKE THE HULLS OF SHIPS. HE DESCENDED TO THEM LIKE TREES TO THEIR ROOTS AND PRESSED HIS EAR TO THEIR IRON, GATHERING, AS THOUGH HE WERE FILLING A BASKET. THERE HE HAD HIS REFUGES FROM THE PLANET'S NOISE. THERE HE SAW RIVERBANKS TEEMING WITH NEWBORN ANIMALS IMPATIENT TO RUN. AT THE WINDOW OF HIS HOUSE WAS NO BIRD SEEKING THE WIND, ONLY THE MOON CLINGING ONTO ITS DARK SIDE. IN THE HOURS WHEN THE WINDOW-WASHER RESTED, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ WENT OUT AND WROTE ON THE WALLS OF THE CITY THE TWO QUESTIONS HE WOULD CARRY WITH HIM ALL HIS LIFE, BENEATH HIS JACKET: WILL I HAVE BEEN A GOOD INHABITANT OF THE EARTH? WHOSE STUDENT WILL I HAVE BEEN?

AT THE WINDOW OF HIS HOUSE WAS NO BIRD SEEKING THE WIND, ONLY THE MOON  
CLINGING ONTO ITS DARK SIDE.

I come to the country now without you and the nights are long, my body waiting for something impossible, a pearl in the night's long shadows, a horizon marked by a light that won't leave. Birds have been here. This morning I came downstairs and saw it on the sill: the young grouse, its head flung back, its body soft and still and surrounded by shards of glass from the windowpane. The violence of its death scattered all around. There must have been no moon, that night.

But why was it flying so low? And what dream was it following, when it crashed?

These questions clamor, but tiredly, slower than the moths gathering now at the lamp. Tonight there is no bird, just this limp body and the shadow, or sky, or soul that sits near it, that still begs these questions as though they are crumbs that might sustain it on its sojourn into darkness, if darkness is where dead birds go. *Follow me*, it says.

And I have a dark, eager, unbridled thought to follow this ghost bird.

*Can you take me to Galen?*

IN THE HOURS WHEN THE WINDOW-WASHER RESTED, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ WENT OUT AND WROTE ON THE WALLS OF THE CITY THE TWO QUESTIONS HE WOULD CARRY WITH HIM ALL HIS LIFE, BENEATH HIS JACKET: 'WILL I HAVE BEEN A GOOD INHABITANT OF THE EARTH? WHOSE STUDENT WILL I HAVE BEEN?'

Jacques folds me under his wing like a sheaf of water from a long rain, rain that has been falling since yesterday. Galen died yesterday. Today would have been his thirtieth birthday. When Jacques hugs me, then, now, his belly meets me first, round and sure, and for one moment I am lifted – into a different life, a life lived vigorously – in spite of all there is to lose. It is a blessing, being lifted; his long fingers are plant stems, robust tomato shoots vivified by the rooftop sun. He, too, was widowed young. His long fingers come together in prayer position and he tells me his Buddhist name – illustrated in this gesture of bringing the hands together – it means taking the good with the not-so-good, accepting the dark with the light. And so, quite simply, Jacques became my teacher (he would say, 'dharma friend'). I only ever saw two drops fall from Jacques' eyes – two tears in the kitchen and then his heart turned to the rest of us, we had tears enough.

Jacques, WILL I, too, HAVE BEEN A GOOD INHABITANT OF THE EARTH?

Jacques told me once to ride my own horses. I knew it meant that he admired me, and would protect me, like a father. I step into sun with Jacques, I taste wine differently, I am young, I am brimming with life, I am able to heal, I am sad, I am everything.

In the hours before the garbage trucks trundle through, someone paints the town blue. A brick here, a pothole there, the same incommensurable open sky blue. Someone light as the bones of a bird, sure as the shadow of a tall elm. Galen's good friend takes me out to show me these signs of a life lived lightly. *You couldn't help but be happy*, I say, painting sky-holes, painting blue bits, painting the town secretly just to show the rest of us a little window of absurdity. It's not even absurd, it's so – elemental, this blue – but who would think? Whether it perplexes or delights, it has opened something – for a moment – just a crack.

This seems to be what everything is coming to be about.

Galen knew this well in his own work. I remember speaking with him about creating an opening with art, lying on the grass at the garden. I remember the angle of his body and the feeling that something was being opened up before me. I was both excited and made shy by his conviction. I didn't need to be. In his own work seriousness came hand in hand with great playfulness. With his friends, he would step into a space of constant invention, they could make anything, and this is why I call him a true artist, because he knew his place in the world and he knew that the world is a playground.

WILL I HAVE BEEN A GOOD INHABITANT OF THE EARTH?

Will I have learned about the cracks, the darknesses and the bravery needed?

Something crouches in the space between door and wall, in the hollow behind the ribs. Its soundlessness is loud as a howl. It draws the dark to it and the dark comes fast. When it moves it is quick black oil in a river – if I could be a river too I would coil away but those spaces I speak of, door and wall, hollow behind the ribs, those are inside me. That darkness is my own. So, I hold my ground, this little earth of me, for all its inhabitants. Jacques laughs with his eyes open wide, wide, when I say, I can't be afraid of my own darkneses, they're mine.

Will I have learned about love, and tucking the mosquito net in?

A mosquito is whining that mad long thin sound, threatening, and I tuck the corners of the mosquito net in. We are inside, Galen and I. Thirty steps from our door the ocean shushes, shunts pebbles and shells, forth and back. Thirty strokes more and the black craggy rock arches up between the waves, pools of unimaginables in all its crannies. I climb with him up out of the bed, part the mosquito nets. The sun teases out the salt on our skin so there are a hundred hotter points as we walk. I am a universe of salty stars fallen into the ocean, walking with my lover. I am a universe, I hold it inside. Over the craggy rock we both realize flip-flops were not so practical, laughing as we slip-slide down. There is a photo, two, three, taken there on the other side of that great divide: San Agustinillo to Mazunte. Both of us together, separate gleams in our eyes illuminating the same thing.

WHOSE STUDENT WILL I HAVE BEEN?

I have been the student of loss, student of cracks and chaos. I have been a student of wise and maddening dreams, of the real measure of a day – they are not so long. I have been a student of the light, the way it walks across this floor growing longer, the way it still offers itself up from lakes and snow and pale grasses even when the sun has gone down. I have been a student of connections that go far beyond this low-rise building to places I don't have the maps for. A student of spirit; of each moment.

Jacques gave me and keeps giving me the gift of opening eyes heart mind mouth arms everything to the present. It's all you can do. I asked for a miracle and there was none, there were a thousand. I wanted earth shaking and things crashing down, I wanted reversal. I wanted Galen to come back – I got the radiance of sun against west end buildings at 5:00, and dreams where he spoke to me but still the distance between us gaped. The lesson of loss is the hardest one. It is the most elemental.

The miracles we are allowed are small – *they don't open the ocean, but they can open the heart.* Canoeing away from the island where he had scattered his wife's ashes all those years before, Jacques looked back, and there, falling from the sky, coming down by the hundreds, thousands, only just there in the air above the island: white snowflakes shifting, falling like a benevolent hand just there on that ground and nowhere else, for him.



8.

AT NIGHT, HE GOT UP TO WATCH THE RAIN, ITS NARROW DANCE. THE SKY THEN WAS NO LONGER THE SAME – ALL THE STREAKS OF LIGHT HAD LEFT, AND THERE WAS NOTHING LEFT OVERHEAD BUT THE SLOW BELLIES OF WHALES TRAILING THEIR SPRAY. THIS FELL TO EARTH LIKE A NIGHT, AND MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ THOUGHT TO HIMSELF: THE RAIN IS ALWAYS A NIGHT UPON THE NIGHT. HE HAD ALWAYS LOVED THIS SOMEWHAT FEARFUL MARRIAGE OF RAIN AND THE NIGHT, THIS UNION OF ELUSIVE THINGS THAT – IN THE DEEPEST HOURS – DESCEND UPON US. HE WOULD STAY AT THE WINDOW FOR A LONG TIME, UPRIGHT LIKE THE DROPS; HE DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO EXPLAIN THIS MIRACLE OF WATER THAT RISES ABOVE EVERYTHING AND THEN FALLS AGAIN LIKE THE TEARS OF HEAVY ANIMALS.

AT NIGHT, HE GOT UP TO WATCH THE RAIN, ITS NARROW DANCE. [...] HE DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO EXPLAIN THIS MIRACLE OF WATER THAT RISES ABOVE EVERYTHING AND THEN FALLS AGAIN LIKE THE TEARS OF HEAVY ANIMALS.

Two years ago on May 10<sup>th</sup> the lightning pulled me out of bed to watch. The sky was strangely calm, the air almost noiseless in spite of bursts and bolts striking through pale clouds some miles away to the south. I had a thought to call a cab and watch the storm with Galen from his expanse of window – a thunderstorm would be a better reason than most – but his window faced north, and it was late.. On May 12<sup>th</sup>, Galen was killed.

Now, this October, a cold rain that feels like November, pooling where my rain cape ends and before my boots begin in dark cold patches of denim. I watch the way the patterns of rain and wind crisscross over the surface of the water.

But it is the sound of water more than the sight that carries me away, swirls and somehow is the culmination of all things, all thoughts. And I think of what a friend of mine said, how she held a dead bird in the palm of her hand in the forest and it became all death, all things dying. I think of the way water has of moving, endlessly and unconsciously. The way water can carry you away and simultaneously call you back to yourself, as though you had never left, your blood moving like red and blue birds in the mornings.

9.

THINGS, OBJECTS, INSPIRED IN HIM THE HIGHEST RESPECT. THE HAMMERED STONE, OUTLINED WITH FIRE, THAT IN ANCIENT TIMES GAVE RISE TO HUMAN BEINGS AND THEIR SKYWARD OMENS. TABLES WHOSE CLOTHS CONJURED DREAMS AND FEASTS. INK THAT CRACKED OVER WORDS. EVEN THIS PAPER THAT LED THEM, FOLDED, TO HIS FEW READERS. THIS CHAIR WHERE HE SAT FOR A MOMENT'S REST. ALL THE SPADES DRIVEN INTO THE GROUND, DELVING INTO THE RICH EARTH OF THE VEGETABLE GARDENS. THE COAT EMBRACING THE BODY. THE WINDOW WHERE THOUGHTS WERE COMPOSED IN THE LOVELY ORDER OF HALF-CLOSED LASHES. THE LAMP, THE LAMP THAT HE CARRIED IN HIS FIST, ITS LIGHT ALWAYS LEANING TOWARDS EVENING.

THINGS, OBJECTS, INSPIRED IN HIM THE HIGHEST RESPECT. TABLES WHOSE CLOTHS CONJURED DREAMS AND FEASTS.

At Rush Cove with your parents on a late summer afternoon we conjured wooden horses and old doors, laid them out end to end and threw cloths over them, set some thirty places. Then we snuck away to your cabin and time and the light slipped away from us in delirious strokes, moving in the loft to the rhythm of oars on a shaded river, curving past reeds and rushes and the slap of waves into inlets where no one would find us. There was a moon and the murmur of voices rising to a clamor in the field as we came closer. Lamb sausages on the grill, arugula and pear salad in bowls, pickled wild leeks in vinegar and maple syrup. With red cheeks and starry eyes, we joined the feast.

THE WINDOW WHERE THOUGHTS WERE COMPOSED IN THE LOVELY ORDER OF HALF-CLOSED LASHES.

Back in the city, you still craved open space. The window was your main reason for choosing the studio apartment, and so you understood well when I felt the lack of a view in my house on Lansdowne Avenue. For my birthday you promised me a large format photograph from our Mexico trip – *a view for your wall*. You had me choose. I decided on the sea and the ruins at Tulum, spun with sun and fresh open space – then you died, before printing it.

A hundred times you stood at that window, a thousand, looking out to where your thoughts composed themselves, in the open space above the limits of our enclosure, above the train tracks, the roads, and the treetops that moved gently, wisely, as though they might reveal some secret.

THE LAMP, THE LAMP THAT HE CARRIED IN HIS FIST, ITS LIGHT ALWAYS LEANING TOWARDS EVENING.

Arriving at Rush Cove again after dark, we fill our arms with blankets, food, the guitar, and follow the dark path carved out by years of contemplation, years of quiet gratitude for this place. The Coleman lantern is in your hand – its light leans forward, creating a pact between us and the night.

10.

EVERY DAY WAS LIKE A NEW LAND. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ APPROACHED EACH ONE LIKE A SAILOR DROPPING ANCHOR ON THE FRINGES OF AN ISLAND, FEELING LIKE HE WAS TAKING POSSESSION OF A WORLD BOTH OPEN AND CLOSED, FREE AND CAPTIVE: SURROUNDED BY A SEA. MORE THAN ANYTHING, THE SOLITUDE OF THAT WORLD SEDUCED HIM. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF HIS SON, WHOSE PRESENCE HE ALWAYS TRIED TO PROLONG, HE WISHED THAT OTHERS WOULD LEAVE HIM TO HIS RETREAT SO THAT HE COULD CONTINUE TO BUILD INSIDE HIMSELF, ACCORDING TO HIS OWN PLANS, THE DWELLING PLACE HE HAD BEGUN ONE DAY, HE COULDN'T REMEMBER WHEN. THIS HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH MISANTHROPY. SIMPLY HE NEEDED THE KIND OF INSULAR WITHDRAWAL THAT HE COULD ONLY FIND WITHIN HIMSELF. MOST OFTEN HE WENT THERE TO FIND PEACEFUL COVES, CALM AND AFFABLE CRABS, AND NOURISHING, WASHED UP HULLS.

HE HAD READ, IN HIS EARLY YEARS, THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE OF *ROBINSON CRUSOE*. ONE THING HAD STRUCK HIS IMAGINATION MORE THAN ANY OTHER DETAIL OF THE TEXT: THAT THIS TIME AWAY FROM ALMOST ALL OTHER CIVILIZATION COULD HAVE BEEN A SOURCE OF SUCH UNHAPPINESS FOR THE FAMOUS CASTAWAY. BECAUSE ROBINSON, WISHING RELENTLESSLY FOR AN END TO HIS CONFINEMENT ON THE ISLAND, DID NOT REST UNTIL THE CREW OF A VESSEL, APPEARING FINALLY ON THE SHORE, DELIVERED HIM FROM THE HELL FATE HAD THROWN HIM IN SOME TWENTY-EIGHT YEARS EARLIER. WHY THIS DESPAIR? MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ HAD WONDERED WHEN HE WAS 11, TURNING THE PAGES OF THIS FABULOUS BOOK FOR THE FIRST TIME, THIS CORNERSTONE OF HIS HUMAN CAREER. HE NEVER SAW IN THAT CHARACTER, RECLUSE AMONG RECLUSES, ANYTHING BUT THE MOST FORTUNATE OF MEN. A FREE MAN, OR ALMOST: SURROUNDED BY HIMSELF, ONLY HIMSELF.

11.

SOME EVENINGS, THE WIND ROPED THE BUILDINGS TOGETHER AND HAULED THE CITY AWAY LIKE A BOAT ON WAVES. EXCEPT THAT IT WAS A STRANGE VOYAGE, FULL OF MOVEMENT, YES, BUT A MOVEMENT THAT WAS QUICKLY ABORTED: THE CITY RESISTED, ANCHORED TO ITS BURROWS OF LIGHT.

THE CHILD HAD BEEN PUT TO BED AND HAD FALLEN ASLEEP, ENTRUSTED TO THE CARE OF A GOOD AND GENEROUS NEIGHBOUR, AND NOW MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ LEFT THE HOUSE FOR AN ADVENTURE IN THE STREETS. HE FELL IN WITH THE CROWD. NOT THAT HE WAS SEEKING A SENSE OF BELONGING – THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN A SIGN LINKING HIM TO HUMANITY, AND HE FELT SO LITTLE RELATION TO IT. HIS QUEST WAS ELSEWHERE, HALFWAY, IT SEEMED TO HIM, BETWEEN SKY AND EARTH. HE SLIPPED THE REINS THROUGH THE HARNESS OF THE STARS.

BIT BY BIT, THE CITY FORGED HALOS OF LIGHT – THE FIRST BRIGHT BANDS GATHERED ON LANDINGS. CROWDS PRESSED TOGETHER ON STREET CORNERS: THERE STOOD THE PORTRAIT OF A CENTURY. THEN IT WAS THE HOUR WHEN THE HIGH TOWERS LIT UP. AT THEIR FEET, THE BOULEVARDS WERE SPLICED BY STEAMERS, SPARKLING AND UPRIGHT. TAXIS CARRIED YOUNG PEOPLE UNBALLASTED OF THEIR DEATHS TO BOARD THEM, DOCKING AT FORESTS OF BUILDINGS. TIDES STOPPED AT RED LIGHTS. HE WALKED IN THIS NIGHT OF NOISES AND DISREALITY, IN THIS SEA OF FACES, BODIES, LAUGHTER, LIGHT AND WORDS. HIS FACE WAS REFLECTED IN THE WINDOWS. THE HOURS PASSED, THE NIGHT DID ITS JOB.

IN THE END, THE RISING DAWN ENLISTED MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ. ADS DOZED IN THE WINDOWPANES. A STREETLAMP COUGHED AND WENT OUT. ONCE, HE HAD READ ON THE FRONT PAGE OF THE NEWSPAPER: *GOD IS DEAD*. BUT WHAT DID THAT MATTER TO HIM – GOD AND HIS BITING WING, HIS DEAF SILENCE? TIME RESOUNDED IN THE YEARS LIKE WATER IN PARCHED JARS. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ WAS YOUNG.

ONCE, HE HAD READ ON THE FRONT PAGE OF THE NEWSPAPER: *GOD IS DEAD*. BUT WHAT DID THAT MATTER TO HIM, GOD AND HIS BITING WING, HIS DEAF SILENCE? TIME RESOUNDED IN THE YEARS LIKE WATER IN PARCHED JARS.

Galen, I have lost the universe. Two summers ago I stood under a sky stark and beautiful enough to make you believe but I was as far from it as the moon is from the earth, and I was as cold as that white moon spangled with ruffled clouds.

Rush Cove was lost to me, too. Magical land with its lime-green mossed-over boulders. The land where you found me. Where the path to your cabin became familiar, its white birches, its contours, the flat stone that rocks slightly with a low sound each time we step on it. The cabin too, its three walls of wood and one of stone, the ledge where we stashed dried figs and chocolate. The land where your silences became familiar, and mine to you – became something we shared, like water or a rolled cigarette. What is that land without you? Bleached bones. Flotsam.

At one time I read in the pages of my mind this story – the legend of your cabin’s fourth wall:

O-ne-sha the Mover was restless: it was in his nature and his name. So this day was no different from other days when he pushed between the trees and leaves and even through the stones down at the beach, always in motion, carrying this-or-that from here-to-there. He would pick up a seed from one part of the forest and bring it over to another, where it had the chance to grow into a new tree; or he would use his hands, big and flat as twenty paddles together, and with a come-and-go motion, whip the lake into waves. And sometimes, down there on the sheer smooth sheets of rock just below the water – those pale shelves that crane out into the cold waters of Georgian Bay – sometimes the water would sway beneath the motion of his hands to reveal a large boulder, shaped like this-or-that animal, and O-ne-sha would take a liking to it, as a magpie to a glint of mica. Then he would wade out a little further in the cold clear waters, clasp the boulder in his arms, and carry it back up to the land, between the needled trees, stepping up the cliff like a stair, and into the leaved tree woods where the sun was the painter of patterns on the forest floor. He would walk with his treasure until he chose a spot to put it down – he never paused after changing a stone’s place, just ambled off to move something else. (And so he was more like your shifting, restless brother than like you, because you would have taken time to sit and ponder the change, and to listen to the forest, where there are always a hundred noises).

This is how the boulder that is the fourth wall of your cabin came to be there: O-ne-sha saw a stone like a bear hunched over, and when he walked up the hill he came to the hollow in the land – a tiny valley like the palm of a hand – and that is where he left it. That is where – many, many days and storms and seeds and waves and thoughts and years and dreams later, you came upon it: that same gentle cleft, that same humble stone, sleeping there, and you chose that spot, just as O-ne-sha did.

On the day you died the landscape was different. No leaf-patterns or magic boulders, oh no, only pavement and steel ties.

I have this to say, only this: that there was no God, no Mover on that day – there were none, or they all turned their backs or tripped while carrying some heavy stone, or forgot, stirring the water with their giant, useless hands. Closing their eyes in their deaf silence. On that day there was a moment that was a mistake, a moment when love left a hole big enough for some nameless gasping chaos to reach in and wrench you away.

And now I move, I am restless as O-ne-sha, with this one question in my arms:

What can it be, this life, that gave me such abundance and then stole it all away?



12.

POETS, AMONG OTHERS, MADE THE ABDOMEN A SYMBOL OF FERTILITY – OF ALL BEGINNINGS. IT SEEMED TO MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ THAT, ON THE CONTRARY, DEATH HAD MADE ITS NEST IN HIS BELLY. HIS END WAS RESTING INSIDE HIM. WASN'T THE ABDOMEN THE FIRST PLACE THAT NOURISHMENT WENT, THE RECEPTACLE ON WHICH ALL LIFE DEPENDED, AND, UPON LEAVING THE WORLD, DIDN'T IT DETERMINE WHAT WOULD COME NEXT – DIDN'T IT EVEN PROGRAM THE END? THERE, IN THE HOLLOW AND FOLDS, A SUN WAS IN SLOW DECLINE; ONE DAY, BURNT DOWN TO ASHES, IT WOULD BREATHE WHITE INTO HIS HAIR, AND LITTLE BY LITTLE THE SURENESS OF HIS STEP WOULD GROW COLD. SOMETHING LAY THERE – A REMINDER OF THE BREVITY OF DAYS: YESTERDAY, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ HAD BEEN A CHILD; NOW HERE HE WAS, AN ADULT. FROM THE BEGINNING DEATH HAD BEEN PLACED IN THE CENTER OF HIS BODY LIKE AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE WRITTEN IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PAGE. SO FOR HIM, THE POETS WERE MISTAKEN: THE ABDOMEN WAS NOT THE SYNONYM OF BEGINNINGS. IN FACT, HE FELT THAT IT WAS EXACTLY THE OPPOSITE. I CAME INTO EXISTENCE BEGINNING WITH DEATH, HE OFTEN SAID TO HIMSELF. ALL THE TIME THAT WOULD PASS FROM HIS BIRTH ONWARD WOULD BE CHARGED WITH THIS SINGULAR REALITY. EACH DAY HE THOUGHT TO HIMSELF: IT'S AT THE END THAT I WILL BE BORN.

EACH DAY HE THOUGHT TO HIMSELF: IT'S AT THE END THAT I WILL BE BORN.

And if death was just another door?

A friend dreamed that she followed you through a doorway to a place where she could not stay. *It was full of the most incredible music*, she said.

She said you were surrounded.

She said there was light.

13.

LAWS WERE WRITTEN ON WALLS, PACKAGES, AND STREET SIGNS, IN THE COURTS, AT CUSTOMS, AND ON STREET CORNERS. THEY DIDN'T MEAN MUCH TO HIM; HE WENT TO PLACES WHERE MORE INTERESTING THINGS AWAITED: HE SAT ON TERRACES AND WATCHED THE SLOW-GROWING EDIFICE OF CARS, STRETCHING OUT ALONGSIDE THE CROWDS. HE LIKED THESE CROWDS TOO, LOADED WITH SOULS AND HASTE, SWELLING WITH ECCENTRIC PREGNANCIES. ON HIGH-PERCHED ROOFS, CRANES APPROACHED THE FLOCKS CONTAINED WITHIN THE CLOUDS. THEIR METAL ATE THE HEIGHT IN MOUTHFULS, BIT AT THE REAL LIKE THE DAWN AT A FRUIT. A RAIN DESCENDED, THREW ITS FIBER ON THE WORLD. SUDDENLY, A FLIGHT OF COAL: DARKNESS. THE SKYSCRAPERS FELL INTO THE LAKE TO THE RIGHT OF URSA MAJOR. THESE WERE THE DAYS OF MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ ON EARTH, HIS GAZE TURNED TOWARDS THE LIGHT.

SUDDENLY, A FLIGHT OF COAL: DARKNESS.

When I wrote to you a week after you died it was because I wanted to help you in some way to cross over. I didn't need to unburden myself; I needed to give you something concrete and essential of me, though I realized the madness of physicality.

The postcard I chose was one you would have liked. It had a bicycle on the front. The day was impossibly bright as I stood at the window of your apartment with a box of matches, a thin slab of marble as my hearth. I held a corner of the card and watched it bend and twist with orange, blue and black, reducing itself to whiteness.

I tipped the marble out the open casement. Suddenly, a flight of ashes: dazzling. The back of my neck prickled as the air filled with this silver flight, particles that paused and shifted in midair, lifting rather than falling, magic, sparkling with life like poplar leaves in sun.

14.

AND THEN ONE DAY, SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENED.

MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ LOST HIS SON. ON THAT DAY, THE CHILD, NOW TWELVE YEARS OLD, DISAPPEARED WITHOUT A TRACE. NO ONE SAW HIM AGAIN. DID HE RUN AWAY? WAS HE KIDNAPPED? WAS THERE AN ACCIDENT? NO ONE KNEW FOR CERTAIN.

THERE WAS AN INVESTIGATION, OF COURSE; LEADS WERE FOLLOWED, ALL OF WHICH PROVED FALSE. THE NEIGHBOUR WHO SOMETIMES LOOKED AFTER HIM WAS QUESTIONED. NOTHING SHOWED IN HER APART FROM THAT SORT OF DISTRESS THAT INVADES THE FEATURES AND IS, ONE MIGHT SAY, THE FACE'S TRANSLATION OF GREAT SORROWS RISING FROM THE DEPTHS OF BEING. IN SHORT, WHATEVER THE CAUSE, THE CHILD'S DISAPPEARANCE REMAINED A MYSTERY.

ON THAT DAY, FOR MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ, YOUTH DIED. ON THAT DAY, THE HOUSE DIED. IN THE STREET, THE NEIGHBOURS LOWERED THEIR EYES AS THEY PASSED, SENSING THAT JUST THERE, SO CLOSE, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ WAS CRYING ALL AROUND THE LITTLE BED. ON THAT DAY, THE CITY DIED, AND ON THAT DAY, HALF OF EVERYTHING DIED. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ WAS LIKE A BOOK UNMASTED. HE HAD JUST LOST THE GREATEST PART OF HIMSELF, EVERYTHING THAT, FOR TWELVE YEARS, HAD MADE OF HIM A HUMAN BEING AMONG HUMAN BEINGS.

AND THEN ONE DAY, SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENED.

I was in my new hot pink kitchen listening to Billie Holiday (*I got a man, crazy for me...*) and stirring green onions in a pan when the doorbell rang.

I was expecting you. I stepped quickly, lightly down the hallway, rushing to greet you.

*Galen was killed in a bike accident.*

ON THAT DAY, FOR MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ, YOUTH DIED.

What of all our plans, what about my young life? I'm not supposed to know this grief, not yet, learning a crone's lessons while I still want to be a maiden.

On that day the land died - beautiful brave place where we found each other, where we would have been going, three days later.

ON THAT DAY, THE CITY DIED, AND ON THAT DAY, HALF OF EVERYTHING DIED.

Every five blocks of this city there is a place that holds another memory of you. *My own body* is a reminder of you.

MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ WAS LIKE A BOOK UNMASTED. HE HAD JUST LOST THE GREATEST PART OF HIMSELF, EVERYTHING THAT [...] HAD MADE OF HIM A HUMAN BEING AMONG HUMAN BEINGS.

15.

IN THE MONTHS THAT FOLLOWED, HE LEFT THE CITY MANY TIMES AND WENT WALKING IN THE FORESTS WHERE THE BUSTLE OF INTERSECTIONS AND GRAND AVENUES COULDN'T REACH HIM. BECAUSE MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ OFTEN THOUGHT OF THE TREE THE CHILD HAD SO LOVED, AND EVEN MORE OFTEN, OF THE SKY THAT STOOD OVER IT THROUGH THE YEARS. HE WOULDN'T HAVE KNOWN HOW TO SAY WHY, BUT IT WAS CLEAR THAT HE NEEDED THIS SKY NOW, RESTING ON THE TOPS OF TREES LIKE A BENEVOLENT HAND BLESSING THEM.

HE WANDERED LIKE THIS FOR LONG HOURS THROUGH THE FIELDS, ON THE PATHWAYS, AND IN THE SHADE OF THE WOODS. DUST FROM THE PATHS INSCRIBED HIS AGE ON HIS ANKLES. OFTEN, NOTHING MOVED – EVEN THE LEAVES HUNG FROM BRANCHES AS THOUGH FROM COAT HANGERS. IN THE GROVES, ANIMALS DREAMED THEIR GRAMMAR OF SHADOWS. THEN – ALL OF A SUDDEN – CLOUDS OF BIRDS WOULD PASS, AS THOUGH THEY HAD JUST BEEN REMINDED OF THEIR TASK. HE THOUGHT OF THE SUNDAY WHEN THE CHILD HAD BEEN SEEN FOR THE LAST TIME. SUDDENLY THINGS HAD BEEN MORE SERIOUS THAN USUAL. IT WOULD ALWAYS BE SO, FROM THAT MOMENT ONWARD.

WHEN HE GOT HOME, HE STRUGGLED TO FIND SLEEP, AND WHEN, BROKEN WITH FATIGUE, HE FINALLY SANK INTO IT, HE OFTEN DREAMED A STRANGE DREAM. HIS DOG, WHO HAD DIED YEARS EARLIER, WAS RUNNING TOWARDS HIM. AT THE SAME MOMENT THAT HE FELT THE BIG YELLOW PAWS OF THE ANIMAL IN HIS HANDS, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ RAISED HIS EYES AND SAW HIS SON SMILING ON THE DOORSTEP OF THE HOUSE. THE CHILD WAS HOLDING A LARGE BALL IN HIS ARMS AND ONE MIGHT HAVE SAID THAT THE BALL WAS HIS WHOLE LIFE, HELD, HELD BACK LIKE THAT BETWEEN HIS TWO SMALL ARMS, TOO SHORT STILL.

UPON WAKING, THIS THOUGHT STAYED FOR A LONG TIME IN MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ'S GRIEVING MIND: WE SAY OF CERTAIN THINGS THAT THEY ARE UNSPEAKABLE, BUT I DON'T BELIEVE IT. AREN'T LANGUAGES INVENTED BY HUMANS?

SO THEY ARE BOTH MADE OF THE SAME STUFF. ONE DAY I WILL KNOW THE WORDS TO  
DESCRIBE THE EXTRAORDINARY JOY, MIXED WITH SORROW, THAT I FELT AGAIN LAST  
NIGHT.



HE THOUGHT OF THAT SUNDAY WHEN THE CHILD HAD BEEN SEEN FOR THE LAST TIME. SUDDENLY THINGS HAD BEEN MORE SERIOUS THAN USUAL. IT WOULD BE THAT WAY, ALWAYS.

The last time I saw you it was a day with sun, cars, bikes, people. I walked between market stalls as though through a church or a forest, stopped in the shade of an empanada shop. I was handing my money over the counter when I looked out and saw you: unexpected, bright, alert, turning your wheels slowly, taking time to look around.

You caught my eye and winked.

I slipped out and kissed you with eyes alight, as though chancing upon you, kissing you, there, on your bike, in the middle of the market street, was the most ordinary thing in the world. It was – the most blessedly ordinary thing.

We went together to meet my friend at the café on the corner. You told her about your plans for the little house in the alley near our old school, and drew a diagram on a napkin of how you would change it, when it was yours: a whole floor of studio space with an immensity of light, a writing room for me. Someone I had met the week before put his hand on my shoulder, sat down. And so I talked to him while you talked to her.

I should have been talking to you.

A friend walked past and you gave him your portfolio for the website. You had been so full of energy when you finished it the night before, and so full of light when you stopped by the park where I worked two days before that, brimming with it, your hair wild – you had come into the rink house and lifted me into your arms – *they want to show my work*, you had said.

We stepped outside in the market and a different friend stopped to talk, and then someone else you knew, and I kissed you again and said,

*See you later.*

My hand on the soft inner side of your upper arm, your hand on my shoulder.

WHEN HE GOT HOME, HE STRUGGLED TO FIND SLEEP, AND WHEN, BROKEN WITH FATIGUE, HE FINALLY FELL INTO IT, HE OFTEN DREAMED A STRANGE DREAM.

On the night that you died I dreamed, and in the dream I came up a flight of stairs to find you crouched down watching a shadow-puppet play. Only they were not shadows, but lights. Light beings. There was a distance between us so great it ached and I could not touch you. I picked up my guitar and sat down nearby. I tried to play Redemption Song but all that would come out from the singing wood under my hands was Another Lonely Day. I asked: how can I be with you, now that you are a spirit? And you told me to *leave negativity behind*, to keep my mind and heart on the good. I realized in that moment that this was a dream so I could touch you – and I did, my hand on your arm, just like that last time.

WE SAY OF CERTAIN THINGS THAT THEY ARE UNSPEAKABLE, BUT I DON'T BELIEVE IT.  
AREN'T LANGUAGES INVENTED BY PEOPLE? SO THEY ARE BOTH MADE OF THE SAME  
STUFF. ONE DAY I WILL KNOW THE WORDS TO DESCRIBE THE EXTRAORDINARY JOY,  
MIXED WITH SORROW, THAT I FELT AGAIN LAST NIGHT.

Many nights I lay awake willing that joy to enter me, and finally it would come: warm knowing tingling through my blood like stars. In those moments I was wild with happiness – but even the time it takes to write that sentence makes this not wholly true, because in reality the very moment I felt it flood through me I was rocked by a sadness just as deep, and it became such that the sadness was like the vessel, the ocean floor, and the love was the water that filled it.

WE SAY OF CERTAIN THINGS THAT THEY ARE UNSPEAKABLE, BUT I DON'T BELIEVE IT.  
I never wanted to make art out of your death and so I tried to close my mouth and mind. I never wanted to make of it a mythology. What I am doing here is not art, not myth, it is just what I do – it is making the connections and chasing after memories, holding them in my two hands like birds with broken wings.

AREN'T LANGUAGES INVENTED BY PEOPLE? Aren't lives?

We live, we lose everything, and then we tell ourselves our own stories to give shape to our existence. We tell stories, we remember, we sing again and again the songs of those who have gone before. Our voices come like tiny beacons out of a very dark night. We are here – and so we tell the story of being. In the telling we make it what it is, we perform strange alchemy, we make our selves.

SO THEY ARE BOTH MADE OF THE SAME STUFF.

ONE DAY I WILL KNOW.

ONE DAY I WILL KNOW THE WORDS.

ONE DAY I WILL KNOW THE WORDS TO DESCRIBE THAT EXTRAORDINARY JOY.

Love, tonight, at the edge of this  
sea of stars, I don't need words. All there is  
is here – a light from the beginning of the world  
and this warm knowing, in us and all around us,  
stars tingling through our blood – it is us, our edges erased, love,  
tonight, I am,  
we are, full.

MIXED WITH SORROW.

Love does not leave – how could it leave? The heart that was a well, so full, gets buried in a metal box but the love cannot. Only – every time I think of it – every time I unearth it, by accident or by intent, there is something just as huge that looms, like a skyscraper over a humble garden. At the foot of the CN Tower there is a garden with the most delicate leaves: golden oregano, thyme, lavender. And so the love grows quiet in the presence of such looming sorrow but it is still fed, somehow, nourished by the forgetful earth, the faithful earth. When will there be a forest again, rich in oaks and birds? When will there be wintergreen, low and shining, ferns meek and intent upon their spirals, but also the strength of old trees that have felt so much slow growth and reach so patiently, ceaselessly, towards the breathing sky? When will there be a forest?

16.

HE WOULD GO TO COLLECT HIMSELF IN THE SMALL ROOM THAT HAD BECOME USELESS. THE CHILD DID NOT SEE HIS FATHER'S LIPS GLOVED WITH THE OLD SONG, NOR THE SPEAR IN HIS PIERCED HEART; HE DIDN'T HEAR THIS MAN'S VOICE SPEAKING HIS NAME. BECAUSE HIS NAME WAS LOST IN THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF PAINFUL MEMORIES. AND HIS NAME WAS A HULL STRANDED ON A SANDBANK OF SHADOWS.

HE WOULD OPEN THE WINDOW AND LISTEN TO THE WORLD MAKING NOISE. HE COULD SEE STORMS FAR AWAY, BRINGING, AS THEY CAME CLOSER, THE MURMUR OF TIRED BIRDS WHO HAD RETURNED TO SAY: "WE SEE NOTHING NOW BUT SUNS KEPT LOCKED AWAY. SURRENDER MARKS THE EYES OF PEOPLE DARKLY, AND THEY SAY THAT TOMORROW, RAINS WILL STUMBLE UPON THE STONES."

HE TOUCHED HIS FOREHEAD: A FEVER MADE IT HOT. HE WISHED THAT ONE OF THOSE EXHAUSTED BIRDS, RAIN FOLDED UNDER ITS WING, WOULD COME AND SIT THERE.

AND HIS NAME WAS A HULL STRANDED ON A SANDBANK OF SHADOWS.

I took your ashes to North Beach on Haida Gwaii.  
Up there, there is only the light of the sky.  
Traders arriving would have had no long row of electric lights,  
just miles of grey sand under grey clouds, open water all the way to Alaska.

Silence of eagles, lip of light far out where the clouds stop.  
The sound of your name on my lips is a labyrinth, a stranded hull.  
Your ashes, white, are passed from my hand into the ocean's stormy one,  
cold around my ankles.

17.

HIGHER UP THERE SURELY BREATHED SKIES THAT ESCAPED THE SENSES. HE SENSED THEIR EXISTENCE, AS ONE MIGHT DIVINE THE ROOTS OF TREES BENEATH THE SOIL, CREEPING TOWARDS THE UNDERBELLIES OF PATHWAYS. HE WANTED TO KNOW THESE SKIES. HE HOPED THAT CORRIDORS WOULD BE LIFTED UPWARDS. HE ACCOMPANIED CROWDS IN THEIR CASEMENTS OF BUSES, THEN CLIMBED WITH THEM THE LONG VINE OF ESCALATORS. IN ATTICS, HE RECEIVED NEWS OF PLANES AND SPARROWS. A CHAIR WAS HELD FOR HIM ON THE ROOFTOPS. HE WROTE THE ITINERARY OF SMOKE IN NOTEBOOKS, SENT TELEGRAPHS TO BLACKBIRDS, ASSIGNED MISSIONS TO AIR BALLOONS. THEN HE WENT HOME. HE WOULD HAVE LIKED TO HAVE A DOG WAITING FOR HIM, RUNNING TO MEET HIM, WAGGING ITS TAIL. THE WORDS IMPRISONED IN THE ANIMAL'S BODY WOULD HAVE LIVED A BRIEF LIFE ON ITS MUZZLE – AND WOULD HAVE MADE, LIKE AN UNEXPECTED DANCE IN THE HOLLOW OF HIS HAND, A SKY.

THE WORDS IMPRISONED IN THE ANIMAL'S BODY WOULD HAVE LIVED A BRIEF LIFE ON ITS MUZZLE – AND WOULD HAVE MADE, LIKE AN UNEXPECTED DANCE IN THE HOLLOW OF HIS HAND, A SKY.

The cat sashays over, purring already, and tilts her face up to mine, conveying with her green eyes the words imprisoned in her small body, *why aren't you petting me?* On my lap she flexes her claws in pure pleasure, always the hunter.

Galen confessed that his cat was his best friend for years, through high school; and I think of him crouching down in the streets near my house in the afternoon, or late at night on our way home, greeting neighbourhood cats, his big gentle hand on them. I imagine that teenager that he was stretched out on his back on the upper bunk, the cat on his belly, stroking her as he puzzled and mused and made little exclamatory noises to accompany his internal dialogue – *hm!* – sometimes, a small chuckle. And what words lived in her, watching that long-limbed, creative-minded human?

18.

IT WAS SIMPLY THAT THE WORLD WAS TOO SMALL. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ HAD TO LIFT HIS GAZE ABOVE THE LIMITS OF HIS ENCLOSURE. HE LOVED SPACE, AND THE INHABITANTS OF ITS VAST PRAIRIE: METEORS, PLANETS, STARS, AND SUNS, BUT ALSO AIRCRAFTS, ENGINES, AND ROCKETS. BECAUSE THEY MADE IT POSSIBLE TO WANDER WAY OUT THERE, AND THEN RETURN, BRINGING BACK FRAGMENTS OF SCIENCE, A LIGHT THAT TRANSLATED WORLDS. HE WAS CAPTIVATED BY THE INCREDIBLE VESSELS CATAPULTED UP THERE, INHABITED BY PEOPLE WHOSE HANDS WERE GLOVED WITH AIR, OCCUPIED WITH THEIR FABULOUS EXPEDITION. AT TIMES, A MECHANICAL BREAKDOWN FORCED THEM TO TAKE LIGHT STEPS OUTSIDE. THERE THEY WERE SUSPENDED FROM NOTHINGNESS AS FROM DREAMS. ONE FALSE MOVE, ONE METEORIC DISTRACTION, AND A TOOL WOULD SLIP FROM A GLOVE, CONDEMNED TO SPIN TOWARDS THE FULL INFINITY OF ORBITS, TO SLIDE FOREVER BETWEEN THE ASSEMBLIES OF STARS. AH! THE LAUGHABLE ENLARGEMENT OF OUR HUMAN DOMAIN! AND YET, THERE WERE FEW DAWNS WHEN MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ DID NOT DREAM OF THOSE PLIERS, THAT FUGITIVE KEY, MOVING TOWARDS THE NEXT CONTINENTS.



MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ HAD TO LIFT HIS GAZE ABOVE THE LIMITS OF HIS ENCLOSURE.

On the way to the National History Museum and Art Gallery in Mexico city you lean out the bus door, quite calm, making the driver and me nervous. *It's fine*, you say, but finally step back in. Such brightness and noise in that city, constant smell of exhaust.

I couldn't really imagine your death then, not at all, despite the nervousness. We never really believe someone we love could die until they've been bitten away. Sway of our bodies over the bus floor, under the ceiling almost too low for you to stand up.

At the history museum there is a room full of wacky heads behind glass, sculpted illustrations of the stages of our evolution; another room holds the giant stone circle of a Mayan calendar with all the dates it contains: its own ending, ours.

Outside, four eccentric acrobats with voluminous pants and implacable faces climb to the top of a towering pole. We are forced to lift our gazes way, way up, above the limits of our enclosure. My neck soon hurts - I put my head in your lap. At the top, the acrobats pause, attach themselves to coiled ropes wound around the top of the pole, position themselves, then drop backwards in synchronized movement. I switch to give you a turn lying in my lap. The ropes sway them down the long spinning descent. They are like swings on a carnival ride, or spinning pendulums - placid in the air, upside down in lotus position.

Across the street in the gallery, I stand for a long time in front of the Two Fridas. I can look them in the eye: Frida in her white dress and no one else to comfort her but the second Frida in blue. Unreal clouds behind them. She is alone and not alone; she will never be married to anyone but herself.

Around the corner from the painting is a mirror, an envelope of paper, and a box of crayons. I come and find you, simple as a child, and bring you there to draw with me. My lines are clear and curving - blue, and green, and brown. I draw just one of me that fills the page. When I look up from my drawing, your page has two figures on it: you, and me, and I feel a flash of guilt, but I am pleased too, and I can make it up, this moment of negligence when you were thinking of both of us.

On the way out I stop to buy a postcard of the Two Fridas - paler on their small cardboard square. When I come out of the shop you pull me up a flight of stairs to the landing centered under the dome of the gallery hall. *Say something*, you say. Your voice throbs against the ceiling and walls, reflected in waves. I sing a note, O, hear the building give it back to me.

I roll the papers of our portraits together. On yours, our arms overlap. The lines are short and light, and you've got the solid shape of your nose right, the curve of my eyebrow, and the angles of your moustache.

19.

HE COPIED OUT IN HIS NOTEBOOK THE WORDS THAT ALWAYS TROUBLED HIM, AND THAT HE HAD READ MANY TIMES, IN *MEMOIRS OF HADRIAN* BY MARGUERITE YOURCENAR: "THIS MORNING IT OCCURRED TO ME FOR THE FIRST TIME THAT MY BODY, MY FAITHFUL COMPANION AND FRIEND, TRUER AND BETTER KNOWN TO ME THAN MY OWN SOUL, MAY BE AFTER ALL ONLY A SLY BEAST WHO WILL END BY DEVOURING HIS MASTER."

AS THOUGH IN ECHO TO THESE WORDS, SUDDEN MEMORIES OF THE CHILD CAME FLASHING BACK, STRIKING AGAINST HIM LIKE A VEHEMENT FEVER. LIGHTNING PIERCED HIS FLESH, AND A RAGING SEA FULL OF SHARDS OF BROKEN GLASS FLUNG ITSELF RELENTLESSLY AT HIS SIDES. PAIN ITSELF WAS INCARNATED IN HIS VOICE; IT MADE DARK CIRCLES UNDER HIS EYES, A REMINDER OF THE SKELETON BURIED LONG AGO BENEATH HIS SKIN. HIS HOUR WAS COMING.

PEACE, AFTER SUCH TORMENT, TOOK ON EXTRAORDINARY SIGNIFICANCE. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ WELCOMED IT WITH THE THIRST OF ONE WHO HAS BEEN BROUGHT BACK FROM THE DEAD. THIS TOOK THE FORM OF SILENCE – A PARTICULAR, RARE SILENCE. A SILENCE OF THE ORGANS, INERT: PERMEATED WITH DEATH. IT WAS AT THESE TIMES ABOVE ALL THAT HE LEARNED THAT DEATH ACCOMPANIED HIM EVEN IN THE HOURS WHEN HE WAS MOST ALIVE – THAT IT WAS HIDDEN AWAY INSIDE HIM. INERT. HE KNEW IT WAS WAITING; WAITING FOR HIM, SILENT, PEACEFUL, AND THAT IT WASN'T UGLY.

SUDDEN MEMORIES OF THE CHILD CAME FLASHING BACK, STRIKING AGAINST HIM LIKE A VEHEMENT FEVER. LIGHTNING PIERCED HIS FLESH, AND A RAGING SEA FULL OF SHARDS OF BROKEN GLASS FLUNG ITSELF AGAINST HIS SIDES.

At first, I closed my mind like a coffin on certain thoughts that flung themselves at me, shards of glass: your soft shoulder under my head in the mornings, the valleys of your voice. Then, like a madwoman chasing pigeons in the square, I scrambled to gather every moment with you (there are so many more!). I felt an immense responsibility - I recognized that I am the only one now to carry those moments; that my low voice is the only one that can speak them. No one else was there.

But it is brutally lonely being the sole keeper. And I become the funambulist, walking a tight line between the present and the places where you still are, laughing, living. Memory is hard ground, hard as concrete against my cheek.

It is like living in shades, I think, like existing as two ghosts, one who walks with you, still, always, and one who walks alone.

I didn't go mad, though. That would have been too easy.

20.

BUT THERE WAS A LIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE BODY'S SHADOWS: THE SKELETON, THAT WHITE VESSEL SPANGLED WITH FOAM, IMMOBILE ON A SEA ENCLOSED BY THE SKIN AND ON WHICH THE ORGANS, THE MUSCLES, MOTHER OF PEARL AND TISSUE FORMED STRANGE PIECES OF FLOTSAM. THE SKELETON, THOUGH ANCHORED, STILL COVERED ITS SHARE OF DISTANCES. ITS MOVEMENT WASN'T CALCULATED LEANING OVER MAPS, WITH INSTRUMENTS OF COPPER WORN DOWN BY SALT ON THE FINGERTIPS. IT WAS A PROGRESS OF HANDS LINED WITH CONFESSIONS, OF SEEDLINGS THREADED THROUGH THE EYE OF THE EARTH, AN EXTENSION OF FIELDS: THE MARK OF TIME UPON EACH OF US FROM THE MOMENT OF OUR BIRTH.

THERE WAS A LIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE BODY'S SHADOWS: THE SKELETON, THAT  
WHITE VESSEL SPANGLED WITH FOAM...

But I dream a darker skeleton:

I am climbing this dark  
mountain alone

all these edges call sharply  
for me to fall  
and keep falling.

That red devil death  
scuttles close behind

I hear the clatter of his papier-mâché limbs  
jostling, like hooves on hollow rock!

Then suddenly - up ahead - how  
does he do it, that devil? -

he vaults from atop a rock  
slinging his limbs and grinning at me  
(that ghastly painted grin)

I seize his leg and swing - so hard!  
His glue-and-paper head smashes on the ground  
again and again -

but I cannot break him.  
I cannot kill that devil death.

If you could see me, you would laugh, not unkind,  
at me with such determination creasing my brow.

Laugh-lines I loved fanning from the edges of your eyes.

21.

HE ENTERED CEMETERIES GLADLY. WHEN HE PUSHED OPEN THEIR IRON GATES, A PEACE ALMOST AS GREAT AS THE FEELING OF HIS BODY REVIVED FROM A FEVER CAME OVER HIM. CLEARLY HE FOUND, IN THESE NARROW ROWS CARVED OUT BY CONTEMPLATION, COMFORT OF A KIND: HOW TOTAL IT WAS, THE SILENCE OF THE DEPARTED! MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ MOVED ACROSS THE LAWNS AND THE ONLY SHADOW FALLING ON HIM WAS THAT OF THE OAKS. HE READ LOVING WORDS ENGRAVED ON THE TOMBSTONES BY THOSE WHO SURVIVED. THIS THOUGHT CAME TO HIM: NOWHERE ELSE ARE LOVE AND DEATH SO INTIMATELY LINKED THAN HERE. MAYBE ETERNITY HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT. HE OBSERVED THE TREES. HE KNEW THAT THEIR ROOTS ATTENDED TO THE DEAD – THAT THEY WERE ENGAGED IN THE MYSTERIOUS AND CONTRADICTIONARY WORK OF CHAINING TO THE EARTH BODIES THAT YET WERE NOW SO FREE.

HE OBSERVED THE TREES. HE KNEW THAT THEIR ROOTS ATTENDED TO THE DEAD – THAT THEY WERE ENGAGED IN THE MYSTERIOUS AND CONTRADICTIONARY WORK OF CHAINING TO THE EARTH THESE BODIES THAT YET WERE NOW SO FREE.

Tangled in the filament of the farthest roots: only nerve endings, single hairs. As the roots thicken, moving closer to the body of the tree, the thin extremities are trapped – fingers and the bones of the feet, but also bones of the inner ear and the long vine of the small intestine. The dead rise, moving away from the darkest depths and the prodigal heat of the center of the earth – they rise, because they are still closer to the living than to that inhuman core. It has not been so long since they last saw the sun, the squirrels twitching their tails watching dogs; it has not been so long since the dog threw her copper body against them in desperate joy for returning home again. Here, close to the surface, in the densest network of roots and memory, they are caught – torsos threaded through and through – and I am caught with them. This is the trap of remembering what has been lost – a thousand memories fallen into disuse, a thousand paths – the trap that also sets them free. But I am not one of the dead.

22.

IT WASN'T DURING HIS VISITS TO THE CEMETERY THAT THE STRONGEST IMAGES OF HIS SON CAME BACK TO HIM. BECAUSE HE STILL CONTINUED TO HOPE THAT HE WOULD SEE HIM AGAIN, ALIVE, AND NOT ONCE HAD HE IMAGINED HIM DEAD. NO, IT WAS THE SEA, SEEN ON TELEVISION OR IN ADS POSTERED AROUND TOWN, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT MOST OFTEN MADE RECOLLECTIONS OF THE CHILD RISE UP FROM THE FOLDS OF HIS MEMORY.

ONE DAY WHILE HE WAS LINGERING IN FRONT OF ONE OF THESE POSTERS, HE SAID TO HIMSELF: I WAS THE FATHER OF AN ISLAND. BECAUSE IN HIS MIND, THE CHILD HAD POSSESSED EVERY CHARACTERISTIC OF AN ISLAND. HE WAS ALONE, SURROUNDED, UPRIGHT, INHABITED BY LIVES AND DANGERS THAT BELONGED ONLY TO HIM. THERE WERE TIMES WHEN THE TIDES HAD UNDONE HIM, JUST AS THEY DO WITH BEACHES: DISAPPOINTMENTS, ALARMS, OR VARIOUS DROWNED THINGS WOULD SURFACE UNEXPECTEDLY. BUT THE TIDES HAD ALSO BROUGHT BOTTLES WHOSE BELLIES HAD UNWOUND SECRET BECKONINGS. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ HAD DREAMED OF KNOWING THE SECRETS ENCLOSED INSIDE HIS SON. HIS WHOLE LIFE AS A FATHER HAD BEEN DEDICATED TO THIS QUEST. UP UNTIL THE DAY THE WORKERS HAD COME TO TAKE DOWN THE ELM, THE CHILD, IN KEEPING WITH HIS SECRETS THERE, PERHAPS, HAD SCATTERED BEHIND HIM LITTLE BITS OF CHILDHOOD, SMALL CRUMBS. FOR A LONG TIME MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ HAD GATHERED THEM, PROLONGING HIS OWN DAWNS WITH THIS BREAD. HE HAD GATHERED THEM IN THE INCONGRUOUS HOPE THAT HE COULD GIVE THEM BACK TO HIS SON ONE DAY (OR AT LEAST GIVE HIM BACK SOME OF THAT AERIAL LIGHTNESS OF THE TREES) ONCE THE MORE DIFFICULT DAYS OF ADULTHOOD HAD COME.

IN FRONT OF THE AD, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ THOUGHT TO HIMSELF: I WAS THE FATHER OF AN ISLAND. THEN, TURNING HIS EYES AWAY: HERE I AM NOW, THE FATHER OF A BOAT.

WHAT IS A BOAT? AN ISLAND THAT HAS ESCAPED.



IT WASN'T DURING HIS VISITS TO THE CEMETERY THAT THE STRONGEST IMAGES OF HIS SON CAME BACK TO HIM.

But rather, past the cemetery gates, on the road that splices the mountain.

We came to Montreal together three years ago. We walked along St. Laurent and Mont Royal in the snow and scavenged friends' pullout couches to sleep on. No privacy and yet we desired each other like wildfire, sweepingly: one night we drove up the mountain to a less-frequented parking lot and steamed up the windows. When I first moved here, three months after you died, I walked on the mountain praying that I wouldn't chance upon that parking lot, and for months - months of walking on the east side, no higher than Place Belvedere, it seemed that it had miraculously, benevolently vanished, a product only of our desire, a magic island appearing only for us, for that one night.

But then one December day I went walking in the cemetery, and when I came out, the angle of light and my position were such that I recognized the place.

We *were* on an island, though, that night, banks of clouds on the close horizon of the car windows, warm against the winter outside.

23.

GOD WAS OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE TO HIM. STILL, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ STOPPED AT ALMOST ALL THE CHURCHES HE PASSED ON HIS WAY. THE BELLS, LIKE AIRPLANES, METEORS, EDIFICES AND TALL TREES, EXERCISED THE SAME MUTE PULL ON HIM: IN ORDER TO MEASURE THEIR TRAJECTORY, HE HAD TO LIFT HIS GAZE.

AND YET HE ENTERED CHURCHES WITH HIS EYES LOWERED. HE HAD LONG WONDERED WHY. THEN HE SAW THAT HE WAS GOING TO DIE ONE DAY – THAT HE WAS PROMISED TO THE EARTH, NOT TO THE SKY, KINGDOM OF THE STARS. HE PROBABLY SENSED THIS – HE HAD A FEELING ABOUT IT, WHICH IS TO SAY HE FELT IT IN HIS FLESH. AND HE RESPONDED, AND PREPARED HIMSELF IN SOME WAY: IN THE CONTEMPLATION THAT CHURCHES INSPIRED IN HIM, THERE WAS ALWAYS THIS IDEA OF CLOSENESS WITH THE EARTH – THE IDEA OF A LOW JOY.

HE ENTERED CHURCHES AS THOUGH THEY WERE HIS HOME, AND MAYBE THIS WAS BECAUSE HE WAS IN HIS HOUSE: SOMETHING ALWAYS AWAITED HIM, AND IT WAS NEVER GOD.

MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ STOPPED AT ALMOST ALL THE CHURCHES HE PASSED ON HIS WAY.

This is what happens:

I am walking, sure  
of myself and the winter I'm in. I pass  
a church, its wide brown stones -  
and anyone walking by would see I was alone -

but there is suddenly a second church,  
warm, wide-stoned and brown, and I stop  
in its welcome shadow, and there  
you are - with me.

Adjusting your camera, squinting  
thoughtful into the sun.

I become two:  
but even the one who walks with you  
still, always, weeps already for the loss.

24.

TIME PASSED. IN NESTS, EVEN THE BIRDSONG UNRAVELED. MISTS WORE THIN AGAINST TREES, ROOFTOPS, AND ELECTRICITY POLES. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ MEASURED THE WANINGS, THE DECLINING ANGLE OF YEARS. AT TIMES HE FELT THAT HIS STEPS, RIPENED BY INTERMINABLE WANDERINGS IN THE CITY, WERE FILLING IN WITH LOOSE SAND. HE WOULD GET LOST AND THEN – EVEN IN THE HEART OF THE CITY – HE WOULD HAVE TO RESET HIS COURSE BY THE COMPASS OF THE CONSTELLATIONS. ALL THE SAME, HIS HEAD WAS OF STUBBORN SUNS, HIS HEART OF STRAIGHT GRAIN, HIS BODY OF ROADS READY TO HATCH. BUT IN THE PARKS HE WALKED WALLED IN BY AGEING LEAVES. LIGHT CAME OVER THINGS LIKE FERRETING BEAMS OF STARS. EVERYTHING FLED. WERE THE MORNINGS MOORED TO SPARROW HAWKS?

TIME PASSED. IN NESTS, EVEN THE BIRDSONG UNRAVELED.

I began immediately to leave the dates off my pages of writing. The first word I wrote was your name: *Galen, everything feels wrong*. That was the beginning. I left the dates off and I wrote to you – one endless letter of my grieving heart.

For a whole book I wrote no dates, but I was simultaneously marking time: feeling all through me the anniversary days: the first, second, and third weeks, the first month, the forty days. Every time the twelfth of the month rolled back around I would know why it was such a hard day.

Time doesn't stop – it just keeps on and on, unraveling me.

I remember writing, *a week, only, already*, and I remember your friend (who had called your cell phone right after he heard and left a long raw message) saying, *seven suns have risen and set since he left – one day it will be a hundred, then a thousand*.

WERE THE MORNINGS MOORED TO SPARROW HAWKS?

You came with me first to Tulum, green sea,  
the cabaña we rented a thin forest, sun landing  
on the sand floor between brown branches of walls  
and the palm leaves dry overhead,  
the bed sprung full and hard,  
mosquitoes at night.

Afternoons we loved best,  
we loved.  
A woman spied us  
from outside, through the gaps.  
I hung up a blanket and  
came back to you.

Everything, now, becomes a letter to you.  
The sun on this spider's web,  
the mornings moored to seabirds.

25.

THIS, MOREOVER, NEVER CEASED TO AMAZE HIM: SEASONS FOLLOWED SEASONS, AND HE WAS STILL ON EARTH, ALIVE. FOR A LONG TIME HE HAD THOUGHT HE WOULDN'T SURVIVE THE CHILD'S DISAPPEARANCE. AND NOW HERE HE WAS, TAKING INVENTORY OF CENTURIES, WITH SCRATCHES FROM THE SUN'S CLAWS MARKING THE CORNERS OF HIS EYES, AND FOAM AND SILVER BIRCH BARK SPRINKLED THROUGH HIS HAIR. PIGEONS USED TO COME AND SIT ON HIS SHOULDER. NOW THE WORLD SETTLED ITS PEBBLES ON THE BACK OF HIS NECK, THAT REED. FROM THE LIGHT BROKEN BY THE ANGLES OF STREETS, BOUTIQUES, FACES, AND CARS, HE RETAINED ONLY A LITTLE: LIFE WENT BY, LIFE WENT BY. THE CITY SHAPED ITS RACE OF STALLS AND NOISES; FAR OFF THE FOREST PRODUCED ITS HARES.

WHAT WAS AT THE SUMMIT OF BUILDINGS? EMPTY SPACE, ATTACHED TO UNIMAGINABLE BIRDS. YES, TIME WAS FLEEING. ALREADY MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ WAS NOT ENTIRELY OF THE WORLD OF HUMAN BEINGS. HE WAS THE FASCINATED SPECTATOR OF THESE MIRACLES: THE MORNING FOLLOWING THE NIGHT, THE LEAVES FALLEN AND THEN RISEN AGAIN TO THE BRANCHES. AND THE SUMMER REAPPEARED, AND ALREADY IT WAS CHRISTMAS AGAIN THIS YEAR.

THIS, MOREOVER, NEVER CEASED TO AMAZE HIM: SEASONS FOLLOWED SEASONS, AND HE WAS STILL ON EARTH, ALIVE. FOR A LONG TIME HE HAD THOUGHT HE WOULDN'T SURVIVE THE CHILD'S DISAPPEARANCE.

Jan places her hand in the center of my chest up high where she has placed it before and says, *Breathe. What a long road we have been given.*

That night we have a meeting at your parent's house for the trust fund. We sit around Jan and Jim's table and discuss the artistic eye, talk about selecting someone with a sensibility similar to yours and worthy. Across the table: a woman with a flower in her hair - a friend. I hear her say the word *beauty* and I wince. How can we possibly speak for you? How can anyone possibly think that they can see as you saw, without your eyes?

I go out to the backyard. Stones underfoot are uneven and cold and there is no light, no match to light a candle, ah, Galen, the last time I was here it was also without you, it was the day after. Still it's you I see with your elbows on this weathered table. It's you I want so fiercely I could tear out my own lungs and just stop breathing.

Then there is someone behind me, someone's arms around me. It doesn't even matter who - but it's Jan, Jan who came on such silent feet I didn't even know until she was holding me. *You know, don't you (her hand on my heart) how special you were to him? You have to know that you hold that inside you, to be the most special person to someone so wonderful.*

I could call Jan at any hour and say, *I'm falling apart*, and she would say, *hold on, we're coming.*

*But it's so hard to breathe, Jan.*

*I know. And every breath takes us further away from him.*

That was it: we both wanted to stop time, thought that if we could just stop taking breath we could stay close to you.

Nine months after you died I wrote to Jan, I said, *Today is a hard day: nine months is how long we were allowed with each other.*

Not thinking about what nine months would mean to a mother.

*Nine months is the time it takes for a child to be formed and born and I'm left wondering what is the gestation period for being able to hold the truth of someone's passing.*

Galen, what is the gestation period for understanding?



26.

ONCE, HE WAS PREY TO AN INFINITELY VIOLENT EMOTION. HIS SON HAD BEEN GONE FOR SOME YEARS ALREADY. ONE DAY WHILE HE WAS TURNING THE SOIL IN THE LITTLE VEGETABLE GARDEN LAID OUT IN THE YARD, HE DISCOVERED A METAL BOX THAT HAD CLEARLY BEEN BURIED THERE BY THE CHILD. WITH HANDS TREMBLING, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ UNEARTHED THE PRECIOUS BOX: THOUGH ITS SMALL METAL BODY WAS GNAWED BY THE FEVERS OF THE EARTH, IT WAS NEVERTHELESS A SURVIVOR OF ITS STAY IN SHADOWS. AS FOR THE CONTENTS, THEY HAD NOT RESISTED – ALL THAT WAS LEFT WERE THE MILDEWED SCRAPS OF A PIECE OF PAPER FROM WHICH THE WORDS HAD BEEN ERASED, GIVING WAY TO A RESIGNED SILENCE. THE CHILD'S LETTER, THAT INCREDIBLY INNOCENT WITNESS OF HIS TEN YEARS, HAD GROWN MUTE IN THIS PARODY OF A MANIFESTO. STILL, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ HAD TO STRUGGLE FOR A MOMENT TO DELIVER THE BOX FROM AN ASTONISHING NETWORK OF ROOTS. LIKE THE REMAINS OF OUR BODIES, HE THOUGHT THEN, CAPTIVE, HELD BY FORCE IN THE EARTH THAT SEEMS OTHERWISE MOSTLY UNINTERESTED IN THE SOUL.

BUT MAYBE, TOO, IT WAS JUST THAT THE SOUL DID NOT CARRY ENOUGH WEIGHT. JUST A PARODY OF A MANIFESTO.

ONCE, HE WAS PREY TO AN INFINITELY VIOLENT EMOTION. HIS SON HAD BEEN GONE FOR SOME YEARS ALREADY. ONE DAY WHILE HE WAS TURNING THE SOIL IN THE LITTLE VEGETABLE GARDEN LAID OUT IN THE YARD, HE DISCOVERED A METAL BOX THAT HAD MOST CERTAINLY BEEN BURIED THERE BY THE CHILD. WITH HANDS TREMBLING, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ UNEARTHED THE PRECIOUS BOX: THOUGH ITS SMALL METAL BODY WAS GNAWED BY THE FEVERS OF THE EARTH, IT WAS NEVERTHELESS A SURVIVOR OF ITS STAY IN SHADOWS.

Last night in a dream I got a letter from you, delayed two years. You've been dead these twenty-two months. That word – dead – is still a brick heaved at my stomach. The letter is an anomaly – a miraculous escapee of time, and I tremble to hold it in my hands. The messenger is that red skeleton, limbs clattering. I close the door in his grinning face. He has tried to break me before – as I have tried to break him in return, but I couldn't do it – I couldn't kill that devil death.

Last night in a dream I got a letter from you and I hoped the group around me would understand when I left them to read it, you have been dead these almost two years. Your absence has made of you a myth, my mythology, and that is not what I wanted. I just wanted to talk with you in the evenings, put your photographs up around the house, read you my poems, and maybe, sometime later, have a child together. That word – child – starts a crack, higher up this time, like stitches coming unsewn in my chest. Or like I am that red skeleton and my breast is made of paper and plaster.

Last night in a dream I got a letter from you, delayed all these long months, its edges darkened by its stay in the shadows. Your photograph is on the outside, you are so young, you are just about to leap. You are beautiful. Inside, the letter is not a letter but a meal, in three courses. I begin to eat with my mind on other things, on how long it's been. Only when I have eaten almost the whole thing do I realize this and regret sweeps through me, there is never going to be another chance to be here and now, there is never going to be another last letter from you.

And I believed when I woke that this was what your letter was saying to me: be awake, taste everything; and I thought, maybe I got it wrong when I said everything, now, becomes a letter to you, the sun on this spider web, the mornings moored to seabirds – maybe I got it wrong and everything, now, is a letter *from* you.

27.

EVERYTHING HE CARRIED IN HIS ABDOMEN: THIS DOG'S SOUL, THESE LIVING YEARS SEWN TOGETHER WITH SNOW, THESE HORSES GALLOPING TOWARDS THE BANKS TO DRINK THE RIVERS, THESE OTTERS FINELY CARVED BY WATER AND BURROWS, THESE PUMAS ROVING THE GRASSY WAYS, THESE ROOTS RISEN HIGH ONLY TO FLATTEN THEMSELVES IN THE LIGHT, THESE CITIES TUNED TO THE ACTS OF THE SUN, ALL OF THIS INNER LIFE ESCAPED FROM HIM, DAY AFTER DAY. SUNS BROKE HIM WITH THEIR DAWNS. HIS BODY SUFFERED FROM THE CRACK OF EACH GESTURE. WHAT IS THE BODY OF A MAN WHO SEARCHES WITHOUT EVER FINDING? THE CLOTHING OF A POOR CHILD.

FOR A LONG TIME, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ HAD KNOWN THAT EVERYTHING DOWN HERE ENDS. HE HAD NOTHING MORE PRESSED AGAINST HIS FOREHEAD THAN THE LAWS OF THE SUN. BUT INSIDE HIM, WORLDS TREMBLED, DEEP STRONG VALLEYS, MADE OF HALF-DAYS AND HOPE, AND WHICH SEEMED SO REAL THEY COULD BE CALLED BIRTHS.

THESE LIVING YEARS SEWN TOGETHER WITH SNOW.

*This is just one season in your life*, Jacques said. Out in the country there is snow already and the fields flatten themselves beneath it, coming to know themselves as quiet contained things. They forget everything else. Their edges are embroidered with the lace of frosted branches. In this season, grey and white have a hundred tones: in late afternoon, for example, after the sun has fallen behind the hills, the shadows that lengthen down their snowy sides are blue. These years I am alive still, but it is just one season, and winter is a limited way to live.

THESE HORSES GALLOPING TOWARDS THE BANKS TO DRINK THE RIVERS.

I have a recurring dream. In it I am standing with a long clear distance between myself and the horizon. Often it is fields that lay themselves out before me. And every time a bird is born inside me that sees me with nothing in my hands, nothing but my hands to take me from here to there, nothing but myself to ensure my survival and a thousand miles to cover. But I am so tired. Then, the horses come – their weight upon the earth is tremendous, their sound. They do what I wish I could do – they traverse incredible distances, carrying nothing with them, unburdened, unafraid, bending their heads to cold secret streams, sweat rolling clean off their backs.

THESE ROOTS RISEN HIGH ONLY TO FLATTEN THEMSELVES IN THE LIGHT.

The growth of trees: an unimaginable slowness. Imagine reaching upward for fifty, a hundred, five hundred years. As branches lean in imperceptible degrees closer to the sun, think of the roots underneath, mirroring the movement above ground. Imagine the earth as the sky. Some days when I sit down to write, I look out my window at the trees and it is almost unbearable to know that I will be gone long before them. A week before Galen died, a tree became my mantra – and only after did I see how much I needed that strength. I tried to become all this: tall, grounded, and strong, leaves my hair, sweet wood my heart.

28.

THE FEVERS AND THE AGITATION CAUSED BY HIS WOUNDED MEMORY CREATED IN HIM A STRANGE PHENOMENON. BECAUSE OF THEM HE FELT THAT HE WAS LIVING SIMULTANEOUSLY WITHIN HIS BODY AND SEPARATE FROM IT. THIS BODY BETRAYED HIM: MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ EXPECTED IT TO DO ITS JOB, BUT IT WAS OFTEN MORE OF AN ODD STOREKEEPER, MORE PREOCCUPIED WITH THE INVENTORY OF ITS ORGANS THAN WITH THEIR PROPER FUNCTIONING. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ WOULD HAVE LIKED TO GAIN STRENGTH, TO DISTILL AND THEN HURL SUITABLE BLOOD INTO HIS VEINS, TO CELEBRATE ITS MECHANICS, TO TUNE HIS HEART TO THE HIGH SONG THAT, IN HIS MIND, WISHED TO LIVE. BUT THIS BODY DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO BEND TO REQUESTS. IT DID AS IT PLEASED, AS THOUGH FULFILLING THE REQUESTS OF SOME OTHER THAN THE ONE WHO ENSURED ITS SUBSISTENCE. AND SO, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ WAS BOTH BESIDE AND WITHIN HIMSELF, AT ONCE THE OBSERVER AND THE OBJECT OF THE TRESPASSES, THE CONTORTIONS, AND THE BRUTALITIES THIS ORGANISM CAUSED AND WHOSE TORTURE HE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO ENDURE.

AND PERHAPS IT WAS ALSO PARTLY FOR THIS REASON THAT MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ FELT MORE THAN EVER LIKE HE WAS LIVING BESIDE LIFE. NOT IN DEATH, BUT OUTSIDE OF LIFE, MEANING AS THE SPECTATOR, OBSERVING IN MINUTE DETAIL AS THINGS CONSUMED THEMSELVES. AS FAR BACK AS HE COULD REMEMBER, NOT A DAY HAD GONE BY WHEN THESE WORDS DID NOT SURFACE INSIDE HIM: ALL THESE PEOPLE, HOW DO THEY DO IT? HOW DO THEY LIVE AS THOUGH THEY WERE UNAWARE OF THEIR DEATH AT THE END? THE WORLD, AS IT WAS, WAS NOT HIS MASTER. THE BODY WAS. HE HAD LEARNED THESE THINGS FROM IT.

AND PERHAPS IT WAS ALSO PARTLY FOR THIS REASON THAT MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ FELT MORE THAN EVER LIKE HE WAS LIVING BESIDE LIFE. NOT IN DEATH, BUT OUTSIDE OF LIFE, MEANING AS THE SPECTATOR, OBSERVING IN MINUTE DETAIL AS THINGS CONSUMED THEMSELVES.

If I had a mirror that I could hold up to myself from just after you died, it would show this: a woman who looked tired, thinner, bruised a bit around the eyes, but alright.  
No one can see what it's like inside:

(Walls turn  
hollow, leach out behind -

I am hurled backward  
down a howling corridor

a thousand moments fallen into disuse -  
I cannot use them all!).

No one can see the ways in which I become less - of the world - nor can they see that the space I have entered is sacred. On the bus, I dreamed of airplanes crashing; on my bike, of truck wheels; on bridges, of all that space. All that beautiful space, wherever you were.  
At night I was a seer speaking to you in dreams, bringing back half-answers.

No one can see that sidelong time, that dim yellow desert. I walked through it with what grace was given and then, being lucky, was called back. Some days the love of others was like a wind that roped me and hauled me back across the divide.

I remember how the world shone, though, from there - red leaves on young trees, brightness like I'd never believed.

29.

AFTER THE CHILD'S DISAPPEARANCE, THE DAWN HAD CEASED TO BATHE THE HOUSE IN ITS NEW COLOURS. IN THE PARK, THE TREES WERE NO LONGER MOVED BY ANYTHING BUT THE WIND: THE BIRDS SEEMED TO HAVE DESERTED THE PLACE. IN THE EVENING THE SOUNDS OF NEON SIGNS, ON CORNICES AND ON WALLS, ROSE UP FROM THE STREET. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ WOULD GO OUT TO THE PLACE WHERE SIGNS NEVER DIED. THEIR RAYS EXPLODED INTO THE DARKNESS DETHRONED. HE WALKED BENEATH THE WHITE LANCE OF AN AD. HIS FACE WAS REFLECTED IN THE DROPS LEFT BY THE RAIN. HE OBSERVED THE CARS LEFT TO THE MERCY OF THE CITY, THE SIDEWALKS KNEELING FOR PEDESTRIANS, THE LIGHT COMING OUT OF ESTABLISHMENTS.

HE POSSESSED ONLY A LITTLE, DEEP DOWN: THE NIGHT THAT CLOSES LATE, THE RADIO AIRBORNE ON ITS ANTENNAE LIKE GULLS LEAVING THE MAST. HIS HAIR ALWAYS LEANING TOWARDS THE GLEAMING SIDEWALK WHEN IT RAINED. A CERTAIN SCENT ON HIS SHIRT WHEN THE SEASONS SET OFF AGAIN. THE CURVE IN THE STAIRCASE, THE COMFORT AND THE MELANCHOLY OF KNOWING THAT ALL IS PASSING, CROWNED WITH CONTOURS.

WHAT WAS HE MADE OF? HE WAS BORN OF A STONE, BUILDING HIS DAYS OUT OF THE WOOD OF A FEW WRECKED BOATS. BUT WHAT WAS HE MADE OF? SO LITTLE SEPARATED HIM FROM THOSE STRETCHED OUT BENEATH THE EARTH, CHEEK TO CHEEK WITH THE ANIMAL DENS. YES, WHAT WAS MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ MADE OF? OF PEBBLES, OF BUSHES AND OF A FEARFUL HEART WHEN THE WINDOWS GREW DARK. OF A LITTLE BIT OF DAY, AND THE THINGS IT EMBRACES.

HE POSSESSED ONLY A LITTLE, DEEP DOWN:

The night when a miracle of stars came over the city whose lights usually chase them away.

You wrote: *It will be a night I remember well, the black city and the sweetest heart I've met since I don't know when.*

We found out later, from battery powered radios and people suddenly complicit and grinning as they passed each other on the street, that the power was out all the way along the eastern rim and down into New York.

Barbeques were rolled out, the contents of freezers emptied. Firecrackers sparked through the neighbourhood. We hadn't even kissed yet.

You cooked couscous with a soldering torch, chicken on the barbeque, and steamed kale over the grains. We had these few things: wine, the dark city stretched out below, THE NIGHT THAT CLOSSES LATE, THE RADIO AIRBORNE ON ITS ANTENNAE LIKE GULLS LEAVING THE MAST.

We chose love, and an incredible scent began to follow us. It came when our love was best: riding the tandem bike through the heat in the Don Valley, lying side by side in the loft. Like steam rising from freshly baked molasses bread, the heat of bodies in the sun. It comes to me still sometimes.

Those were the times when our bodies were most joyful, and when the solstice shifts the balance of night and day I am reminded of that CERTAIN SCENT ON YOUR SHIRT WHEN THE SEASONS SET OFF AGAIN.

Near the summer's end, I wrote: *Galen is someone who keeps me reminded of the present – who holds me from flying forward to disasters or sournesses or what ifs.*

We admired each other for similar reasons, with a certain leverage of philosophy in those reasons. In the car we read sections from Anne Carson to each other – *What is the connection between wantonness and wetness?* you read to me, I remember this because you pronounced “wanton” “won-ton” and I didn't correct you right away. We must have been full of desire, reading that inside the heat of August and the speed of the car and the new sparkling electric yes –

I had that certainty; now all I have is THE CURVE IN THE STAIRCASE, THE COMFORT AND THE MELANCHOLY OF KNOWING THAT ALL IS PASSING, CROWNED WITH CONTOURS.



30.

OUT OF EACH HOUR GIVEN TO HIM HE MADE A KIND OF MIRADOR, AN OBSERVATION POST. HE KEPT A LOOKOUT FOR A RAIN OF BURROWS, A SNOW OF STRAIGHT INK. HE WAITED FOR A NIGHT WHEN HIS SON, SOMEWHERE BELOW, WOULD SURELY BE ADMIRING THE STARK, PIERCING BEAUTY OF THE STARS. BUT SOMETHING – ENDLESSLY, AND IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING – CALLED MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ BACK TO HIS HUMAN TASK. HE WALKED THE STREETS, AND THE SUN MULTIPLYING AGAINST THE WINDOWPANES THREW ITSELF AT HIM LIKE A THOUSAND PUPPIES PLAYING.

BUT SOMETHING – ENDLESSLY, AND IN SPIITE OF EVERYTHING – CALLED MONSIEUR  
BARTOLOMÉ BACK TO HIS HUMAN TASK.

I am of the living again,  
and this bereaves me.

For a year I was like glass – poised to shatter –  
but also clear: so clear that I could see  
spirits. The universe was a round sacred thing,  
glass like me. Jan says,  
*I have this image of it being smashed,*  
and I understand, and this hurts too.  
*But you're too young,* she says.

Maybe this is why I am still  
out here, looking at snakes on the road,  
looking at the way leaves shape themselves,  
as though they might tell me something.

31.

HE LEFT THE CITY MORE AND MORE OFTEN. BUT HE WENT LESS OFTEN TO WALK ON THE TRAILS AND BENEATH THE TREES. HE WOULD TAKE A TAXI, ASKING THE DRIVER TO BRING HIM TO WHERE THE LAST HOUSES WERE PLANTED. THEN HE WOULD STAND STILL AND OBSERVE THE HORIZON. THE LIGHT THAT HE SAW, FAR AWAY BETWEEN THE HILLS, WAS DIFFERENT THAN THE LIGHT HE HAD LEFT BEHIND HIM. IT WAS A LIGHT OF THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD – IN THAT PLACE, THE EARTH CARRIED ON ITS BACK ONLY FISH, GREEN LIMES, AND STONES PLANNING THE LIVES TO COME. THE COUNTRYSIDE LAID ITSELF DOWN BEFORE THIS THRESHOLD OF CLARITY. BEHIND MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ, THE CITY WAS POISED ON A PEDESTAL.

YES, SOMETHING COMPELLED HIM TO ESCAPE THE CITY. DURING THE TAXI RIDE, WHICH THE DRIVER WOULD DOUBTLESSLY HAVE WISHED TO BE MORE ANIMATED, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ DIDN'T SPEAK AT ALL. IN THE TANK, THE CARBON BURNED, FREED FINALLY FROM ITS DESTINY AS A FOSSIL. THE RADIO WAS ON BRINGING NEWS OF AN AGITATED WORLD: PEOPLE WERE FIGHTING HERE, PEOPLE WERE THIRSTY THERE, PLANES WERE HURLED AT SKYSCRAPERS, A DICTATOR FELL.

SOMETIMES HE WASN'T CONTENT TO STAY STANDING STILL LOOKING FAR AWAY. ONCE HE WAS OUT OF THE CAR HE BEGAN TO WALK, ADVANCING TOWARDS THE HORIZON HEMMED IN BY COUNTRYSIDE. HE TOOK TO DREAMING THE SECULAR RHYTHM OF THE TALL TREES. HE CROSSED OVER WOODEN BRIDGES, WALKED ALONG GRAVEL ROADS, TRAVERSED FIELDS BRISTLING WITH PRICKLES TO ARRIVE AT THE EDGE OF A FOREST. HE WENT TO CALCULATE THE NUMBER OF RINGS DRAWN IN THE WOOD OF ANCIENT CEDARS THAT HAD BEEN CUT DOWN AND LEFT THERE BY A PEASANT. HE BECAME PART OF THE THOUGHTFUL TRIBE OF SLOWNESS.

AT THE END OF THE DAY HE RETRACED HIS STEPS, HAILED ANOTHER TAXI IN THE SUBURBS AND WENT HOME. MOST TIMES, THE NIGHT WAS ALREADY FAR ALONG WHEN HE FINALLY SLIPPED BETWEEN THE SHEETS.

SOMETIMES HE WASN'T CONTENT TO STAY STANDING STILL LOOKING FAR AWAY. ONCE HE WAS OUT OF THE CAR HE BEGAN TO WALK, ADVANCING TOWARDS THE HORIZON HEMMED IN BY COUNTRYSIDE.

Love, did I tell you  
how I was pulled to climb  
under the fence to the train tracks  
after you died? That long view, so generous –  
it gave me only one choice.

I walked hemmed in by warehouses and memory  
until the dream came back to me:

you with your hair askew,  
crossing over tracks to the other side.  
You look back and smile, patient or impatient,  
brimming with energy. I stamp my feet. I can't keep up,  
you didn't wait for me,  
you didn't wait!

I walk until the patrol guards tell me  
to go home, this is no place for me.

It is a long walk back  
to where I started from.

32.

ONE NIGHT, TWO SWALLOWS CAME TO THE WINDOW. ONE SAID TO HIM, "WAKE UP, THE DAY IS LENGTHENING OVER THE WORLD, EVERYTHING IS BREAKING OPEN AND CALLING TO YOU, COME WITH ME." LIKE A SOUL THAT WON'T LEAVE THE HOUSE THOUGH ITS OCCUPANT HAS DEPARTED, THE OTHER ONE STAYED, ITS SMALL BODY WATCHFUL IN THE CURTAIN'S NOCTURNAL TREMBLING.

ONE NIGHT, TWO SWALLOWS CAME TO THE WINDOW.

I pause at the casement –  
wanting to be sure.  
Not trusting, now, what messengers bring, but full  
(thankfully) of curiosity yet –  
half-days and hope still pushing me on.

In June I sat at the rim of the park –  
green bowl curving out from under my feet.  
Far on the other side: trees.  
You know how that feeling catches you out sometimes?  
That feeling, or knowledge, of being in the world –  
of Being –  
and even though we are built to lose everything  
faraway trees are suddenly close –  
resonating, like sound in a concert hall.

Now birds are speaking at my window.  
I lean in to hear:

ONE SAID TO ME, WAKE UP, THE DAY IS LENGTHENING OVER THE WORLD, EVERYTHING  
IS BREAKING OPEN AND CALLING TO YOU, COME WITH ME.

But when I push open the window  
I am made of sails stripped from ships, their hulls  
stranded in shadows, and that bright bird flies away.  
The second bird is in your hands.  
*This is for you.* The smallest, shivering bird:  
its heart glows, a tiny red thing  
through the thin skin of its breast and you kiss me  
on the lips and fly away, untethered.  
The bird and I turn to stone.

There was once a living bird,  
I remember. That one is gone.

LIKE A SOUL THAT WON'T LEAVE THE HOUSE THOUGH ITS OCCUPANT HAS DEPARTED,  
THE OTHER ONE STAYED, ITS SMALL BODY WATCHFUL IN THE CURTAIN'S NOCTURNAL  
TREMBLING.

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I: L'ÎLE ÉVADÉE

1.

IL PRENAIT DES NOTES. TOUTE SA VIE, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ N'AVAIT FAIT QUE PRENDRE DES NOTES. IL DONNAIT DES TITRES AUX AVERSES, INVENTAIT DES CHAPITRES DANS LESQUELS DES CHOSES ORDINAIRES SE PRODUISAIENT, DANS SES RÉCITS IL METTAIT TOUJOURS LES OISEAUX À LA PREMIÈRE PAGE. IL EN FAISAIT PARFOIS DES LIVRES, DANS LESQUELS LES GENS DISAIENT RECONNAÎTRE LES MIROITEMENTS DE L'ENFANCE. MAIS C'ÉTAIT TROP FACILE À DIRE, IL N'ÉTAIT PAS TRÈS ATTIRÉ PAR L'ENFANCE, IL LUI AVAIT FALLU DES ANNÉES POUR FAIRE TAIRE UN PEU LA SIENNE ET LUI PRÉFÉRER L'ÂPRE BEAUTÉ DES CHOSES. DANS SES LIVRES IL Y AVAIT TOUJOURS CE MALENTENDU: LES ENFANTS QU'IL DÉCRIVAIT N'EN ÉTAIENT PAS, IL S'AGISSAIT BEL ET BIEN D'ADULTES, EN QUI SURVIVAIT CE JE-NE-SAIS-QUOI QUI POUVAIT RAPPELER L'ENFANCE MAIS QUI ÉTAIT EN FAIT TOUT AUTRE CHOSE, QUELQUE CHOSE QUE MONSIEUR BARTLOMÉ AVAIT PRIS DU TEMPS À BIEN NOMMER.

UN JOUR, EN RELISANT QUELQUES PASSAGES ICI ET LÀ, IL AVAIT VU QUE LES GENS DANS SES HISTOIRES AVAIENT TOUS CECI EN COMMUN: C'ÉTAIENT DES HOMMES ET DES FEMMES QUI ATTENDAIENT UN AVÈNEMENT, DES SOLITAIRES QUI NE POUVAIENT VIVRE SANS LES AUTRES, DES RÊVEURS ASSIÉGÉS PAR LA RÉALITÉ, DES AMOUREUX QUI NE SAVAIENT PAS QUOI FAIRE DE LEUR INTELLIGENCE, DES ÊTRES LIBRES EMPRISONNÉS EN EUX-MÊMES. ALORS IL AVAIT COMPRIS POURQUOI ON VOYAIT LÀ TANT D'ENFANCE: IL AVAIT CRÉÉ SANS LE SAVOIR UNE PETITE SOCIÉTÉ D'INADAPTÉS, DE GENS QUI NE COMPRENAIT PAS ENCORE LE MONDE DANS LEQUEL ILS VIVAIENT. IL AVAIT DÉPEINT DES ÊTRES QUI À LEUR FAÇON PRENAIENT DES NOTES POUR PLUS TARD, DONNAIENT DES TITRES AUX PLUIES POUR TENTER DE LES RECONNAÎTRE SI JAMAIS ELLES REVENAIENT UN JOUR. MAIS CHAQUE PLUIE ÉTAIT DIFFÉRENTE ET AUCUNE NE TOMBAIT SUR LE MONDE PLUS D'UNE FOIS, C'EST POURQUOI SANS DOUTE MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ ÉTAIT SI FASCINÉ PAR ELLES. C'EST POURQUOI AUSSI IL PRÉFÉRAIT LES OISEAUX. CAR LES OISEAUX, EUX, REVENAIENT, ET TOUJOURS DE LOIN, COMME PRÉCÉDANT LES HOMMES DANS LEUR INLASSABLE MARCHÉ VERS L'AVENIR.

2.

IL AVAIT UN JEUNE FILS. C'ÉTAIT UN ENFANT CALME ET PLEIN DE SILENCES, QUI AVAIT SES JEUX À L'OMBRE D'UN ORME IMMENSE PLANTÉ DANS LA COUR DE LEUR MAISON, RESCAPÉ MIRACULEUX DES TENTACULES DE LA GRANDE VILLE. LES ANNÉES, EN CE TEMPS-LÀ, PASSAIENT COMME CETTE OMBRE SUR LE DOS DU GARÇON: LÉGÈRES, FRAÎCHES, LONGUES, ABRITEUSES DE PROJETS D'OISEAUX.

DEPUIS TOUJOURS L'ENFANT DISAIT : «CET ARBRE EST MON FRÈRE.» PUIS, UN JOUR, IL AVAIT FALLU ABATTRE L'ORME PARCE QUE LA MALADIE S'ÉTAIT MISE DANS LE FEUILLAGE, SUR L'ÉCORCE, PARTOUT. DES OUVRIERS ÉTAIENT VENUS AVEC DES TRONÇONNEUSES. LE NEZ ÉCRASÉ CONTRE LA VITRE, LE FILS DE MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ AVAIT VU UNE À UNE LES BRANCHES S'EFFONDRE DANS LA COUR. ENSUITE LES OUVRIERS ÉTAIENT REPARTIS. PENDANT UNE HEURE L'ENFANT S'ÉTAIT TRAÎNÉ LES PIEDS DANS LA SCIURE. POUR LUI, L'ENFANCE S'ÉTAIT TERMINÉ LÀ. PEUT-ÊTRE FUT-CE SA PREMIÈRE TRISTESSE, QUI SAIT? MAIS QUELQUE CHOSE ÉTAIT TOMBÉ EN MÊME TEMPS QUE LES BRANCHES ET GISAIT À PRÉSENT SOUS SES PIEDS, DANS LA POUSSIÈRE DE CET ARBRE INCONCEVABLEMENT PLUS PETIT QUE LUI DÉSORMAIS. LA COUR ÉTAIT INONDÉE DE LUMIÈRE, C'EST LA SEULE FOIS OÙ IL AVAIT CRIÉ DES INJURES AU SOLEIL.

3.

MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ N'ÉTAIT GUÈRE CONNAISSEUR DES CHOSES DU CIEL. LA PRIÈRE DES HUMAINS, LES FEUILLAGES SURMONTANT LES GRANDS ARBRES, CERTAINES MUSIQUES AUSSI : TOUT CE QUE Y ÉTAIT ÉTABLI LUI DEMEURAIT ÉTRANGER, LOINTAIN. L'UNIVERS DE MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ ÉTAIT FAIT DE RUES, DE MAISONS, DE VOITURES, DE CHAISES, DE CAHIERS, DE MONNAIES. IL AVAIT ÉTÉ MIS AU FERS DANS UNE CALE NOMMÉE LA TERRE. ALORS COMMENT PARLER DE CET APPEL POUR LES CHOSES AÉRIENNES QUI RÉSONNAIT EN LUI, DE CET ESPACE QUI S'Y DÉPLOYAIT, VASTE COMME UN FIRMAMENT? CAR RIEN, N'EST-CE PAS, N'ÉTAIT PLUS ANCRÉ, PLUS TERRESTRE QUE LE CORPS. COMMENT BAPTISER CETTE CHOSE LÉGÈRE SE MÊLANT AU LEST DES MEMBRES, DES ORGANES, DES OS, DU SANG? L'ÂME? L'ÂME ÉTAIT DONC UN CIEL ENCHEVÊTRÉ À L'HOMME?

4.

EN GÉNÉRAL, DU RESTE, LE CIEL NE SE MÊLAIT PAS À LA TERRE. MAIS IL ARRIVAIT QUE, LES COULEURS DE L'AURORE S'ÉTENDANT PLUS QUE D'HABITUDE, LE MONDE SE HISSÂT VERS LUI ET S'Y ASSOCIÂT. CE MÉLANGE ÉTAIT À L'IMAGE DES HEURES À VENIR, ANNONÇANT UNE CONCORDANCE RARE DES CHOSES TERRESTRES ET CÉLESTES. ALORS, DES AUTOROUTES PRENAIENT DE VITESSE LES SOLEILS. UN AVION PASSAIT, QUI RÊVAIT DE PISTES. DES MAISONS S'ANIMAIENT, BAPTISÉES PAR UNE PLUIE. PUIS C'ÉTAIT LE CRÉPUSCULE: À LA GROUPE DES CLOCHERS, LES VITRAUX S'ENDORMAIENT. PENCHÉ À SA FENÊTRE, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ BAINAIT SON VISAGE AUX DERNIÈRES LUMIÈRES. LE PARC ÉTAIT VEILLÉ D'ÉTOILES, CES ÎLES.

5.

SES MAINS ÉTAIENT COMME LES SOLDATS REVENANT DES PAYS CONQUIS: ON NE POUVAIT LES CONNAÎTRE QU'À LA BLESSURE ÉCRITE SUR LES FLANCS. SES MAINS ÉTAIENT DES CAVERNES, JALOUSES DE LEURS OMBRES ET LAISSANT AUX HOMMES LEURS LANTERNES TARDIVES. SES MAINS ÉTAIENT DES VALLÉES ENCAISSÉES DE SONGES: ON Y ENTENDAIT L'ÉCHO LOINTAIN DE GESTES EXÉCUTÉS LONGTEMPS AUPARAVANT. SES MAINS ÉTAIENT DES VILLES AUX LUMIÈRES TARIFÉES, AUX ÉTALS D'HORAIRES ET DE GENS AUX FENÊTRES.

L'EAU FILAIT ENTRE SES DOIGTS JUSQU'À NE PLUS ÊTRE QU'UN GANT DE SONGES: BIENTÔT LA MAIN SE REFERMAIT SUR CETTE MATIÈRE FUYANTE, QUI DÉJÀ N'EXISTAIT QUE PAR LA FIÈVRE QU'ELLE VENAIT D'APaiser. MAIS LE PAIN, LUI, LAISSAIT TOUJOURS QUELQUE CHOSE: SUR LA PEAU SE COUCHAIT UNE VOILE BLANCHE, TROUÉE ICI ET LÀ PAR LES CREUX, LES RENFLEMENTS, LES ACCIDENTS DE LA PAUME. LA MER, LES BATEAUX ÉTAIENT PASSÉES PAR LÀ. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ AIMAIT QUE SA MAIN SOIT LE TERRAIN DE CES CHOSES-LÀ. IL AIMAIT QUE SUR ELLE PASSENT LE PAIN ET L'EAU, LAISSANT UNE TRACE AUSSI TANGIBLE QUE LA NEIGE D'UNE FARINE, AUSSI PEU QU'UNE SOIF ASSOUVIE.

6.

DANS SA PREMIÈRE JEUNESSE IL AVAIT, TOUT COMME SON FILS, APPELÉ LE SILENCE. SI JEUNE ENCORE, IL N'AVAIT PAS PU S'EN FAIRE UN ALLIÉ, C'ÉTAIT TROP TÔT. MAIS DÉJÀ IL AVAIT SENTI QU'UN JOUR VIENDRAIT OÙ SON FRONT, SES MAINS, SES PAS SE TAIRAIENT UN PEU. ALORS QUELQUE CHOSE COMMENCERAIT, L'EXTRÊME JEUNESSE AURAIT FUI. EN ATTENDANT, IL AVAIT SU RECONNAÎTRE LES PREMIERS SIGNES DES RECEUILLEMENTS À VENIR. ENCORE PETIT, IL ACCORDAIT PEU D'IMPORTANCE À CECI: LE VENT QUI GRIMPAIT À L'ÉDIFICE EN SIFFLANT MAUVAISEMENT, LES HEURES QUI VENAIENT SUR LES CHOSES AVEC LES BRUITS DE FINS PROCHAINES. DÉJÀ IL LUI SEMBLAIT QUE C'ÉTAIT À VOIX BASSE QUE LES BATEAUX QUITTAIENT LES PORTS.

ET MAINTENANT QUE CELA ÉTAIT ACCOMPLI, QUE L'ENFANCE, L'ADOLESCENCE ET LES PREMIÈRES ANNÉES DE L'ÂGE ADULTE ÉTAIENT PASSÉES, QUELQUE CHOSE VENAIT, IL LE PRESSENTAIT.

7.

IL SE SOUVENAIT DES SOIRÉES SEMBLABLES À DES CALES. IL Y DESCENDAIT COMME LES ARBRES AU RACINES, APPUYAIT L'OREILLE À LEUR FER AINSI QU'ON EMBLIT UN PANIER. IL Y AVAIT SES REPAIRES DE BRUITS DE PLANÈTE. IL Y VOYAIT DES RIVAGES PLEINS DE NAISSANCES D'ANIMEAUX IMPATIENTS DE COURIR. À LA FENÊTRE DE SA MAISON, NUL OISEAU CHERCHEUR DU VENT, MAIS LA LUNE AGRIPPÉE À SA FACE CACHÉE. À L'HEURE OÙ LE LAVEUR DE CARREAUX SE REPOSAIT, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ SORTAIT, PUIS ÉCRIVAIT SUR LES MURS DE LA VILLE LES DEUX QUESTIONS QU'IL ALLAIT PORTER TOUTE SA VIE SOUS SA VESTE: AURAI-JE ÉTÉ UN BON HABITANT DE LA TERRE? DE QUI FUS-JE L'ÉLÈVE?

8.

LA NUIT, IL SE LEVAIT POUR REGARDER LA PLUIE, SA DANSE ÉTROITE. LE CIEL ALORS N'ÉTAIT PLUS LE MÊME, TOUTES LES LUEURS AVAIENT FUI, À PRÉSENT IL N'Y AVAIT PLUS LÀ-HAUT QUE LE VENTRE LENT DES BALEINES TRAÎNANT AVEC ELLES DES EMBRUNS. CELA TOMBAIT SUR LA TERRE COMME UNE NUIT, ET MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ SONGEAIT : LA PLUIE, C'EST TOUJOURS UNE NUIT SUR LA NUIT. DEPUIS TOUJOURS IL AIMAIT CE MARIAGE UN PEU EFFRAYANT DE LA PLUIE ET DE LA NUIT, CETTE UNION DE CHOSES INSAISSABLES QUI, AU PLUS PROFOND DES HEURES, DESCENDENT SUR NOUS. IL RESTAIT LONGTEMPS À LA FENÊTRE, DEBOUT COMME L'EAU, IL NE SAVAIT PAS COMMENT EXPLIQUER CE MIRACLE DE L'EAU QUI SE LÈVE AU-DESSUS DES CHOSES ET QUI RETOMBE TELS LES PLEURS DE LOURDS ANIMEAUX.

9.

LES CHOSES, LES OBJETS LUI INSPIRAIENT LE PLUS HAUT RESPECT. LA PIERRE COGNÉE, COIFFÉE DE FEU, DE LAQUELLE AUX TEMPS ANCIENS SORTIRENT L'HOMME ET SES AUGURES VERTICAUX. LES TABLES OU NAISSAIENT DANS LA NAPPE DES SONGES ET DES REPAS. L'ENCRE QUI CRAQUAIT SUR LES MOTS. CE PAPIER MÊME QUI LES MENAIT, PLIÉS, JUSQU'À SES QUELQUES LECTEURS. CETTE CHAISE SUR LAQUELLE IL S'ASSOYAIT POUR UN INSTANT DE REPOS. TOUTES LES BÊCHES ENFONCÉES, FOUILLANT LA TERRE GRASSE DES POTAGERS. LE MANTEAU ENSERRANT LE CORPS. LA FENÊTRE OÙ SE COMPOSAIENT DES PENSÉES DANS LE BEL ORDRE DES CILS MI-BAISSÉS. LA LAMPE, LA LAMPE, TOUJOURS APPUYÉE AU SOIR QU'IL EMPORAIT DANS LE POING.

10.

CHAQUE JOURNÉE ÉTAIT AINSI QU'UN SOL NOUVEAU. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ L'ABORDAIT COMME LE NAVIGATEUR MOUILLANT L'ANCRE AUX FRANGES DES ÎLES, AVEC LE SENTIMENT D'INVESTIR UN MONDE À LA FOIS OUVERT ET FERMÉ, LIBRE ET DÉTENU: CERNÉ D'UNE MER. PLUS QUE TOUT, LA SOLITUDE DE CE MONDE-LÀ LE SÉDUISAIT. EXCEPTION FAITE DE SON FILS, DONT IL CHERCHAIT TOUJOURS À PROLONGER LA PRÉSENCE À SES CÔTÉS, IL ESPÉRAIT DES AUTRES QU'ILS LE LAISSENT À SON RETRAIT, QU'IL PUISSE CONTINUER DE BÂTIR EN LUI, SELON SES PROPRES PLANS, LA DEMEURE QU'IL AVAIT COMMENCÉE UN JOUR, IL NE SAVAIT PLUS QUAND. LA MISANTHROPIE N'Y AVAIT AUCUNE PART. SIMPLEMENT, IL AVAIT BESOIN DE CETTE SORTE DE REPLI INSULAIRE QU'IL NE SAVAIT POSSIBLE EN NUL LIEU SAUF EN LUI-MÊME. LE PLUS SOUVENT, IL Y FRÉQUENTAIT DES ANSES TRANQUILLES, DES CRABES APAISÉS ET AFFABLES, DES CALES ÉCHOUÉES ET NOURRICIÈRES.

IL AVAIT LU, DANS SES PREMIÈRES ANNÉES, L'EXTRAORDINAIRE AVENTURE DE *ROBINSON CRUSOË*. UNE CHOSE AVAIT FRAPPÉ SON IMAGINATION, PLUS QUE TOUT AUTRE DÉTAIL DU RÉCIT: QUE CE SÉJOUR EXCLUANT PRESQUE TOUTE CIVILISATION AIT PU ÊTRE POUR LE CÉLÈBRE NAUFRAGÉ UNE SOURCE DE SI GRAND MALHEUR. CAR ROBINSON, APPELANT SANS RELÂCHE LA FIN DE SON CONFINEMENT DANS L'ÎLE, N'EUT DE REPOS QUE LORSQUE L'ÉQUIPAGE D'UN VAISSEAU, PARAISSANT À LA FIN SUR SES RIVES, LE DÉLIVRA DE L'ENFER OÙ LE SORT L'AVAIT JETÉ QUELQUE VINGT-HUIT ANNÉES PLUS TÔT. POURQUOI CE DÉSESPOIR? AVAIT PENSÉ MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ À ONZE ANS, EN TOURNANT POUR LA PREMIÈRE FOIS LES PAGES DE CE LIVRE FABULEUX, PIERRE ANGULAIRE DE SA CARRIÈRE HUMAINE. AU FIL DES ANS, IL AVAIT RELU AU MOINS VINGT FOIS CETTE HISTOIRE. IL NE VOYAIT JAMAIS EN SON PERSONNAGE, SOLITAIRE PARMIS LES SOLITAIRES, QUE LE PLUS FORTUNÉ DES HOMMES. UN HOMME LIBRE, OU PRESQUE: CERNÉ DE LUI-MÊME, QUE DE LUI-MÊME.

11.

CERTAINS SOIRS, LE VENT ENCORDAIT LES IMMEUBLES ET EMPORAIT LA VILLE COMME UNE BARQUE SUR LES FLOTS. SEULEMENT C'ÉTAIT UN PÉRIPLÉ ÉTRANGE, CERTES PLEIN DE MOUVEMENT, MAIS UN MOUVEMENT TÔT AVORTÉ: LA VILLE RÉSISTAIT, ANCRÉE À SES TERRIERS D'ÉCLAIRAGE. L'ENFANT COUCHÉ PUIS ENDORMI, CONFIE À LA GARDE D'UNE VOISINE BONNE ET GÉNÉREUSE, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ SORTAIT DE CHEZ LUI POUR UNE ÉCHAPÉE DANS LES RUES. IL SE MÊLAIT À LA FOULE. NON PAS QU'IL Y CHERCHÂT UN SENTIMENT D'APPARTENANCE, UN SIGNE QUI LE LIerait À CETTE HUMANITÉ AVEC LAQUELLE IL SE RECONNAISSAIT SI PEU DE PARENTÉ. SA QUÊTE ÉTAIT AILLEURS, À MI-CHEMIN, LUI SEMBLAIT-IL, DU CIEL ET DE LA TERRE. IL ENFILAIT UNE LAISSE AU LICOU DES ÉTOILES.

LA VILLE PEU À PEU INVENTAIT DES HALOS, ON RECUEILLAIT AUX PALIERS LES PREMIÈRES ÉPAISSEURS. DES FOULES SE PRESSAIENT AU COIN DES RUES: LÀ SE DRESSAIT LE PORTRAIT D'UN SIÈCLE. PUIS C'ÉTAIT L'HEURE OU LES HAUTES TOURS S'ALLUMAIENT. À LEURS PIEDS, LES BOULEVARDS ÉTAIENT TAILLÉS DE PAQUEBOTS, ÉTINCELANTS ET DEBOUT. DES TAXIS EMPORAIT À LEUR BORD DE JEUNES GENS DÉLÉSTÉS DE LEUR MORT, ABORDANT À DES FORÊTS D'ÉDIFICES. DES MARÉES S'ARRÉTAIENT AUX FEUX ROUGES. IL MARCHAIT DANS CETTE NUIT DE BRUITS ET D'IRRÉALITÉ, DANS CETTE MER DE VISAGES, DE CORPS, DE RIRES, DE LUMIÈRES ET DE PAROLES. SON VISAGE SE REFLÉTAIT DANS LES VITRINES. LES HEURES PASSAIENT, LA NUIT FAISAIT SON OUVRAGE.

À LA FIN, L'AUBE LEVÉE ENRÔLAIT MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ. PARTOUT LES AFFICHES S'ASSOUPISSAIENT DANS LES VITRES. UN RÉVERBÈRE TOUSSAIT, PUIS S'ÉTEIGNAIT. UNE FOIS, IL AVAIT LU À LA UNE DU JOURNAL: *DIEU EST MORT*. MAIS QUE LUI IMPORTAIENT DIEU ET SA MORSURE D'AILE, ET SON SILENCE DE SOURD? LE TEMPS RÉSONNAIT DANS LES ANNÉES COMME L'EAU DANS LES JARRES ASSOIFFÉES. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ ÉTAIT JEUNE.

12.

LES POÈTES, PARMIS D'AUTRES, FAISAIENT DU VENTRE LE SYMBOLE DE LA FÉCONDITÉ, C'EST-À-DIRE DE TOUS LES COMMENCEMENTS. IL SEMBLAIT À MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ QU'AU CONTRAIRE LA MORT AVAIT FAIT SON NID DANS LE SIEN. EN LUI REPOSAIT SA FIN. LE VENTRE N'ÉTAIT-IL PAS LE PREMIER SÉJOUR DE LA NOURRITURE, LE RÉCEPTACLE DONT TOUTE VIE DÉPENDAIT ET, PARTANT, NE RÉGULAIT-IL PAS LA SUITE DES CHOSSES, N'EN PROGRAMMAIT-IL PAS MÊME LE TERME? LÀ, DANS CES CREUX ET CES REPLIS, UN SOLEIL DIMINUAIT LENTEMENT, QUI SOUFFLERAIT UN JOUR DE SA CENDRE SUR LES CHEVEUX, REFROIDISSANT PEU À PEU L'ASSURANCE DU PAS. QUELQUE CHOSE ÉTAIT COUCHÉ LÀ, QUI RAPPELAIT LA BRIÈVETÉ DES JOURS: HIER, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ AVAIT ÉTÉ ENFANT, VOICI QU'IL ÉTAIT ADULTE. DÈS LE DÉBUT, LA MORT AVAIT ÉTÉ POSÉE AU MILIEU DE SON CORPS,

COMME UN MESSAGE IMPORTANT QU'ON ÉCRIT AU CENTRE DE LA PAGE. POUR LUI, LES POÈTES SE TROMPAIENT DONC: LE VENTRE N'ÉTAIT PAS SYNONYME DE COMMENCEMENT. IL AVAIT EN FAIT LE SENTIMENT EXACTEMENT INVERSE. JE SUIS VENU À L'EXISTENCE EN COMMENÇANT PAR LA MORT, SE DISAIT-IL SOUVENT. TOUT LE TEMPS QUI S'ÉCOULA APRÈS SA NAISSANCE FUT IMPRÉGNÉ DE CETTE RÉALITÉ SINGULIÈRE. CHAQUE JOUR IL SONGEAIT: C'EST À LA FIN QUE JE NAÎTRAÏ.

13.

DES LOIS ÉTAIENT ÉCRITES SUR LES MURS, LES EMBALLAGES, LES PANNEAUX ROUTIERS, DANS LES TRIBUNEAUX, AUX DOUANES, AU COIN DES RUES. IL NE LES ENTENDAIT PAS BEAUCOUP, IL ALLAIT LÀ OÙ DES CHOSSES PLUS INTÉRESSANTES L'ATTENDAIENT : IL S'ASSOYAIT AUX TERRASSES ET REGARDAIT LE LENT ÉDIFICE DES VOITURES COUCHÉ LE LONG DES FOULES. IL AIMAIT AUSSI CES FOULES-LÀ, CHARGÉES D'ÂMES ET DE HÂTES, POURSUIVANT D'EXCENTRIQUES GROSSESSES. SUR LES TOITS HAUT PERCHÉS, DES GRUES S'APPROCHAIENT DES TROUPEAUX CONTENUS DANS LES NUAGES. LE MÉTAL MANGEAIT LA HAUTEUR, MORDAIT AU RÉEL COMME L'AUBE DANS UN FRUIT. UNE PLUIE DESCENDAIT, JETAIT SUR LE MONDE SA TISSURE. SOUDAIN, UNE ENVOLÉE DE CHARBON ; L'OBSCURITÉ. LES GRATTE-CIEL TOMBAIENT AU LAC DROIT DE LA GRANDE OURSE. C'ÉTAIENT LES JOURS DE MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ SUR LA TERRE, SES REGARDS APPUYÉS À LA LUMIÈRE.

14.

ET PUIS, UN JOUR, UN DRAME SURVINT.

MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ PERDIT SON FILS. CE JOUR-LÀ, L'ENFANT, ALORS ÂGÉ DE DOUZE ANS, DISPARUT SANS LAISSER DE TRACES. ON NE LE REVIT PLUS. FUGUE? ENLÈVEMENT? ACCIDENT? ON NE LE SUT PAS D'AVANTAGE. UNE ENQUÊTE FUT BIEN SÛR MENÉE, DES PISTES FURENT SUIVIES, QUI TOUTES SE RÉVÈLÈRENT FAUSSES. ON INTERROGEA LA VOISINE QUI EN AVAIT PARFOIS LA GARDE. RIEN NE PERÇA D'ELLE HORMIS CETTE SORTE DE DÉTRESSE ENVAHISSANT LES TRAITS ET QUE LE VISAGE TRADUIT, DIRAIT-ON, DES GRANDS CHAGRINS VENUS DES PROFONDEURS DE L'ÊTRE. BREF, QUELLE QU'EN FÛT LA CAUSE, LA DISPARITION DE L'ENFANT DEMAURA UN MYSTÈRE.

CE JOUR-LÀ, POUR MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ, LA JEUNESSE EST MORTE. CE JOUR-LÀ, LA MAISON EST MORTE. DANS LA RUE, LES VOISINS PASSAIENT EN BAISSANT LES YEUX, DEVINANT QUE LÀ, TOUT PRÈS, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ PLEURAIT AUTOUR DU PETIT LIT. CE JOUR-LÀ, LA VILLE EST MORTE, ET CE JOUR-LÀ, LA MOITIÉ DES CHOSSES EST MORTE. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ ÉTAIT COMME UN LIVRE DÉMÂTÉ. IL VENAIT DE PERDRE LA PLUS GRANDE PART LUI-MÊME, TOUT CE QUI DEPUIS DOUZE ANNÉES AVAIT FAIT DE LUI UN HOMME PARMIS LES HOMMES.

15.

DANS LES MOIS QUI AVAIENT SUIVI, IL AVAIT MANTES FOIS QUITTÉ LA VILLE, ÉTAIT ALLÉ MARCHER DANS LES FORÊTS, LÀ OÙ L'AGITATION DES CARREFOURS ET DES GRANDS BOULEVARDS NE POUVAIT L'ATTEINDRE. CAR MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ PENSAIT SOUVENT À CET ARBRE QUE L'ENFANT AVAIT TANT AIMÉ, ET PLUS ENCORE À TOUT CE CIEL QUI L'AVAIT SURPLOMBÉ AU FIL DES ANS. IL N'AUROIT PAS SU DIRE POURQUOI, MAIS VOICI QU'IL AVAIT BESOIN, À PRÉSENT, DE CE CIEL-LÀ, POSÉ SUR LE SOMMET DES ARBRES COMME UNE MAIN BIENVEILLANTE.

IL ERRAIT AINSI DE LONGUES HEURES PARMIS LES CHAMPS, SUR LES SENTIERS, À L'OMBRE DES BOISÉS. LA POUSSIÈRE DES CHEMINS ÉCRIVAIT SON ÂGE À SES CHEVILLES. SOUVENT, RIEN NE BOUGEAIT, LES FEUILLES MÊMES PENDAIENT AUX BRANCHES COMME À DES CINTRES. DANS LES BOSQUETS, LES BÊTES RÊVAIENT LEUR GRAMMAIRE D'OMBRES. PUIS D'UN SEUL COUP DES NUÉES D'OISEAUX PASSAIENT, CEUX-CI COMME RAPPELÉS SOUDAINEMENT À LEUR DEVOIR. IL PENSAIT À CE

DIMANCHE OÙ L'ENFANT AVAIT ÉTÉ VU POUR LA DERNIÈRE FOIS. LES CHOSSES TOUT D'UN COUP AVAIENT ÉTÉ PLUS GRAVES QUE D'HABITUDE. CE SERAIT AINSI, DÉSORMAIS.

DE RETOUR CHEZ LUI, IL PEINAIT À TROUVER LE SOMMEIL. ET QUAND, BRISÉ DE FATIGUE, IL Y SOMBRAIT ENFIN, IL FAISAIT SOUVENT UN RÊVE ÉTRANGE. SON CHIEN, MORT DES ANNÉES PLUS TÔT, COURAIT VERS LUI. EN MÊME TEMPS QU'IL SENTAIT LES GROSSES PATTES BLONDES DE L'ANIMAL SUR SES MAINS, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ LEVAIT LES YEUX ET APERCEVAIT SON FILS, SOURIAIT SUR LE SEUIL DE LA MAISON. L'ENFANT TENAIT ENTRE SES BRAS UN BALLON, ET ON AURAIT DIT QUE CE BALLON ÉTAIT TOUTE SA VIE, TENUE, RETENUE AINSI ENTRE SES DEUX PETITS BRAS ENCORE TROP COURTS. AU RÉVEIL, CETTE PENSÉE RESTAIT LONGTEMPS DANS LA TÊTE ENDEUILLÉE DE MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ : ON DIT DE CERTAINES CHOSSES QU'ELLES SONT INDICIBLES, MAIS JE N'EN CROIS RIEN. LES LANGUES NE SONT-ELLES PAS INVENTÉES PAR LES HOMMES? ELLES SONT DONC FAITES DE CE QU'ILS SONT. UN JOUR JE SAURAI LES MOTS POUR DÉCRIRE LA JOIE EXTRAORDINAIRE, MÊLÉE DE TRISTESSE, QUE J'AI RESENTIE CETTE NUIT ENCORE.

16.

IL ALLAIT SE RECUEILLIR DANS LA CHAMBRETTE DEVENUE INUTILE. L'ENFANT NE VOYAIT PAS LES LÈVRES DE SON PÈRE GANTÉES DE LA CHANSON PASSÉE, NI LA LANCE DANS LE COEUR PERCÉ, IL N'ENTENDAIT PAS LA VOIX DE CET HOMME PRONONCER SON PRÉNOM D'ENFANT. CAR SON PRÉNOM ÉTAIT PRIS DANS LE MÉANDRE DES SOUVENIRS DOULOUREUX. ET SON PRÉNOM ÉTAIT UNE POUPE ENSABLÉE DE TÉNÉBRES.

IL OUVRAIT LA FENÊTRE, ÉCOUTAIT BRUIRE LE MONDE. IL PERCEVAIT AU LOIN DES ORAGES QUI, EN S'APPROCHANT, RAMENAIENT LA RUMEUR D'OISEAUX FATIGUÉS, REVENUS POUR DIRE : "ON NE VOIT PLUS MAINTENANT QUE DES SOLEILS ÉCROUÉS. PARTOUT DES REDDITIONS CERNENT LES YEUX DES HOMMES, ET ON ANNONCE QUE DEMAIN LES PLUIES TRÉBUCHERONT SUR LES CAILLOUX."

IL TOUCHAIT SON FRONT, UNE FIÈVRE LE CHAUFFAIT. IL SOUHAITAIT QU'UN DE CES OISEAUX FOURBUS, LA PLUIE PLIÉE DESSOUS SON AILE, VIENNE S'Y ASSEoir.

17.

PLUS HAUT SANS DOUTE VIVAIENT DES CIELS QUI SE DÉROBAIENT AUX SENS. IL EN PRESSENTAIT L'EXISTENCE, COMME ON DEVINE SOUS LA TERRE LES RACINES S'AVANÇANT VERS LES SOUTES DES CHEMINS. IL VOULAIT CONNAÎTRE CES CIELS. IL ESPÉRAIT QUE SE LÈVENT LES CORRIDORS. IL ACCOMPAGNAIT DES FOULES ENVELOPPÉES D'AUTOBUS, PUIS GRIMPAIT AVEC ELLES LA LONGUE PLANTE DES ASCENSEURS. AUX GRENIERS, IL PRENAIT DES NOUVELLES DES AVIONS ET DES MOINEAUX. ON LUI PROMETTAIT UNE CHAISE SUR LES TOÎTS. IL INSCRIVAIT DANS DES CAHIERS L'ITINÉRAIRE DES FUMÉES, TÉLÉGRAPHIAIT AUX MERLES, CONFIAIT DES MISSIONS AUX NACELLES. PUIS IL RENTRAIT CHEZ LUI. IL AURAIT VOULU QU'UN CHIEN L'ATTENDE, COURE À SA RENCONTRE EN AGITANT LA QUEUE. LES MOTS PRISONNIERS DU CORPS DE L'ANIMAL AURAIENT VÉCU UNE PETITE VIE SUR LE MUSEAU, CELA AURAIT FAIT AU CREUX DE LA MAIN COMME UNE DANSE INESPÉRÉE, UN CIEL.

18.

C'EST QUE LE MONDE ÉTAIT TROP PETIT. IL FALLAIT À MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ PORTER LE REGARD AU-DELÀ DES LIMITES DE SON ENCLOS. IL AIMAIT L'ESPACE, LE PEUPLE DE SA VASTE PRAIRIE : MÉTÉORES, PLANÈTES, ASTRES, SOLEILS, MAIS AUSSI APPAREILS, ENGINs, FUSÉES. CAR ON S'Y PROMENAIT DÉSORMAIS, PUIS ON EN REVENAIT, RAPPORTANT PAR-DEVERS SOI DES FRAGMENTS DE SCIENCE, UNE LUMIÈRE QUI TRADUISAIT DES MONDES. IL ÉTAIT CAPTIVÉ PAR LES INCROYABLES VAISSEAUX CATAPULTÉS LÀ-HAUT, HABITÉS PAR DES GENS AUX MAINS GANTÉES D'AIR,

S'AFFAIRANT À LEUR EXPÉDITION FABULEUSE. PARFOIS, UN BRIS MÉCANIQUE LES FORÇAIT À DES SORTIES LÉGÈRES, ILS ÉTAIENT ALORS SUSPENDUS AU NÉANT COMME À DES RÊVES. UN FAUX GESTE, UNE DISTRACTION FULGURANTE ET UN OUTIL S'ÉCHAPPAIT DU GANT, CONDAMNÉ MAINTENANT À FILER VERS L'INFINITÉ PLEINE DES ORBITES, À GLISSER POUR TOUJOURS PARMİ L'ASSEMBLÉE DES ÉTOILES. OH! LE DÉRISOIRE AGRANDISSEMENT DE NOTRE DOMAINE HUMAIN! ET POURTANT, PEU D'AUBES VENAIENT SANS QUE MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ AIT RÊVÉ DE CETTE PINCE, DE CETTE CLÉ FUGITIVE, S'AVANÇANT AU DEVANT DES PROCHAINS CONTINENTS.

19.

IL RECOPIAIT DANS SON CAHIER CES MOTS TOUJOURS TROUBLANTS, MANTES FOIS LUS DANS MÉMOIRES D'HADRIEN DE MARGUERITE YOURCENAR : «CE MATIN, L'IDÉE M'EST VENUE POUR LA PREMIÈRE FOIS QUE MON CORPS, CE FIDÈLE COMPAGNON, CET AMI PLUS SÛR, MIEUX CONNU DE MOI QUE MON ÂME, N'EST QU'UN MONSTRE SOURNOIS QUI FINIRA PAR DÉVORER SON MAÎTRE.»

COMME EN ÉCHO À CES PAROLES, DES SOUVENIRS FOUDROYANTS DE L'ENFANT LUI REVENAIENT, S'ABATTAIENT SUR LUI COMME UNE FIÈVRE VÉHÉMENTE. DES ÉCLAIRS PERÇAIENT LA CHAIR, UNE MER DÉMONTÉE, SATURÉE DE TESSONS, S'ACHARNAIT SUR SES FLANCS. LA DOULEUR ELLE-MÊME S'INCARNAIT DANS SA VOIX, LE CERNAIT SOUS LES YEUX, RAPPELAIT LE SQUELETTE JADIS ENFOUI SOUS LA PEAU. SON HEURE VENAIT.

LA PAIX, APRÈS UNE EXPÉRIENCE PAREILLE, REVÊTAIT UN SENS INOUÏ. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ L'ACCEUILLAIT AVEC LA SOIF DE RESSUSCITÉ. CELA PRENAIT LA FORME DU SILENCE, D'UN SILENCE PARTICULIER, RARE. UN SILENCE D'ORGANE, INERTE : IMPRÉGNÉ DE TRÉPAS. C'EST LÀ, SURTOUT, QU'IL APPRENAIT QUE LA MORT L'ACCOMPAGNAIT MÊME AUX HEURES LES PLUS VIVES, QU'ELLE ÉTAIT TAPIE EN LUI-MÊME. INERTE. IL SAVAIT QU'ELLE ATTENDAIT, QU'ELLE L'ATTENDAIT, SILENCIEUSE, PAISIBLE, ET QU'ELLE N'ÉTAIT PAS LAIDE.

20.

MAIS IL Y AVAIT UNE LUMIÈRE AU MILIEU DES TÉNÈBRES DU CORPS : LE SQUELETTE, CE BLANC VAISSEAU ÉMAILLÉ D'ÉCUME, IMMOBILE SUR UNE MER QUE FERMAIT LA PEAU, ET SUR LAQUELLE LES ORGANES, LES MUSCLES, LES NACRES, LES TISSUS FORMAIENT D'ÉTRANGES ÉPAVES. LE SQUELETTE, ANCRÉ, PARCOURAIT CEPENDANT SON LOT DE DISTANCES. CAR SON AVANCÉE N'ÉTAIT PAS DE CELLES QUE L'ON CALCULE PENCHÉ SUR LES CARTES, À L'AIDE D'INSTRUMENTS DONT LE CUIVRE EST USÉ PAR LE SEL DES DOIGTS. C'ÉTAIT UN PROGRÈS DE MAINS DESSINÉES D'AVEUX, DE SEMIS FAUFILÉS DANS LE CHAS DE LA TERRE, UN ALLONGEMENT DE PRÉ : LA MARQUE DU TEMPS IMPARTI À CHACUN, DÈS LORS QUE NOUS SORTONS DE LA NAISSANCE.

21.

IL ENTRAIT VOLONTIERS DANS LES CIMETIÈRES. QUAND IL POUSSAIT LEUR GRILLE, UNE PAIX PRESQUE AUSSI FORTE QUE CELLE DU CORPS REVENU DES FIÈVRES MONTAIT EN LUI. SANS DOUTE TROUVAIT-IL DANS CES ALLÉES ÉTROITES, CISELÉES PAR LES RECEUILLEMENTS, UNE SORTE DE RÉCONFORT : QU'IL ÉTAIT PLEIN, LE SILENCE DES TRÉPASSÉES! MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ AVANÇAIT SUR LES PELOUSES, LA SEULE OMBRE SUR LUI ÉTAIT CELLE DES CHÊNES. IL LISAIT SUR LES TOMBES LES MOTS AIMANTS GRAVÉS LÀ PAR LES SURVIVANTS. CETTE PENSÉE LUI VENAIT : NULLE PART AILLEURS QU'ICI L'AMOUR ET LA MORT NE SONT PLUS INTIMEMENT LIÉES. PEUT-ÊTRE L'ÉTERNITÉ Y ÉTAIT-ELLE POUR QUELQUE CHOSE. IL OBSERVAIT LES ARBRES. IL SAVAIT QUE LEURS RACINES SE CHARGEAIENT DES MORTS, QU'ELLES EFFECTUAIENT UN MYSTÉRIeux ET CONTRADICTOIRE OUVRAGE, ENCHAÎNANT À LA TERRE CES CORPS POURTANT SI LIBRES À PRÉSENT.



22.

CE N'ÉTAIT PAS AU COURS DE SES VISITES AUX CIMETIÈRES QUE LES IMAGES LES PLUS FORTES DE SON FILS LUI REVENAIENT. CAR TOUJOURS IL CONTINUAIT D'ESPÉRER LE REVOIR VIVANT, ET PAS UNE FOIS NE L'AVAIT-IL IMAGINÉ MORT. NON, C'ÉTAIT LA MER, APERÇUE À LA TÉLÉVISION OU SUR LES AFFICHES PLACARDÉES EN VILLE, PAR EXEMPLE, QUI LE PLUS SOUVENT FAISAIT SOURDRE DES REPLIS DE SA MÉMOIRE LES SOUVENIRS DE L'ENFANT.

UN JOUR QU'IL S'ATTARDAIT DEVANT L'UNE DE CES AFFICHES, IL S'ÉTAIT DIT : J'AI ÉTÉ LE PÈRE D'UNE ÎLE. CAR À SES YEUX, SON FILS AVAIT POSSÉDÉ TOUTES LES CARACTÉRISTIQUES ÉVOQUANT CELA. IL AVAIT ÉTÉ SEUL, ENTOURÉ, DEBOUT, PEUPLÉ DE VIES ET DE DANGERS QUI N'APPARTENAIENT QU'À LUI. PARFOIS, AINSI QU'ELLES LE FONT AVEC LES PLAGES, DES MARÉES L'AVAIENT DÉFAIT : DÉCONVENUES, ALARMES, NAUFRAGES VARIÉS ÉTAIENT SURVENUS. MAIS AUSSI, DES MARÉES AVAIENT AMENÉ DES BOUTEILLES, DONT LE VENTRE AVAIT DÉROULÉ POUR LUI DES APPELS SECRETS. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ AVAIT RÊVÉ DE CONNAÎTRE CES SECRETS ENFERMÉS EN SON FILS. TOUTE SA VIE DE PÈRE AVAIT ÉTÉ CONSACRÉE À CETTE QUÊTE. JUSQU'AU JOUR OÙ LES OUVRIERS ÉTAIENT VENUS ABATTRE L'ORME, L'ENFANT, EN CONFORMITÉ PEUT-ÊTRE AVEC SES SECRETS-LÀ, AVAIT SEMÉ DERRIÈRE LUI DES MORCEAUX D'ENFANCE, DES MIES. PENDANT LONGTEMPS, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ LES AVAIT RECUEILLIS, PROLONGEANT DE CE PAIN SES PROPRES AURORES. IL LES AVAIT RECUEILLIS AVEC L'ESPOIR INCONGRU QU'IL POURRAIT UN JOUR LES RENDRE À SON FILS (OU DU MOINS LUI REDONNER UN PEU DE CETTE LÉGÈRETÉ AÉRIENNE QUE POSSÈDENT LES ARBRES) LORSQUE VIENDRAIENT LES JOURS AUTREMENT DIFFICILES DE L'ÂGE ADULTE.

DEVANT L'AFFICHE, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ AVAIT SONGÉ : J'AI ÉTÉ LE PÈRE D'UNE ÎLE. PUI, DÉTOURNANT LES YEUX : ME VOICI LE PÈRE D'UN BATEAU. QU'EST-CE QU'UN BATEAU? UNE ÎLE ÉVADÉE.

23.

DIEU L'INDIFFÉRAIT. CEPENDANT, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ S'ARRÊTAIT À PRESQUE TOUTES LES ÉGLISES RENCONTRÉES SUR SON CHEMIN. LES CLOCHERS, COMME LES AVIONS, LES MÉTÉORES, LES ÉDIFICES ET LES GRANDS ARBRES EXERÇAIENT SUR LUI LA MÊME SOURDE ATTIRANCE : IL FALLAIT, POUR EN MESURER LA TRAJECTOIRE, LEVER LE REGARD. ET POURTANT IL ENTRAIT DANS LES ÉGLISES EN BAISSANT LES YEUX. IL AVAIT LONGTEMPS CHERCHÉ POURQUOI. PUIS IL AVAIT VU QU'IL ALLAIT MOURIR UN JOUR, QU'IL ÉTAIT PROMIS À LA TERRE, ET NON AU CIEL, QUI EST LE FIEF DES ÉTOILES. SANS DOUTE RESSENTAIT-IL CELA, IL LE RESSENTAIT, C'EST-À-DIRE QU'IL LE SENTAIT DANS SA CHAIR. ET IL Y RÉPONDAIT, S'Y PRÉPARAIT, EN QUELQUE SORTE : DANS LE RECUEILLEMENT QUE LUI INSPIRAIENT LES ÉGLISES, IL Y AVAIT TOUJOURS CETTE IDÉE DE RAPPROCHEMENT AVEC LA TERRE, CETTE PERSPECTIVE D'UNE JOIE BASSE.

IL ENTRAIT DANS LES ÉGLISES COMME CHEZ LUI, ET PEUT-ÊTRE EN EFFET ÉTAIT-IL LÀ DANS SA MAISON : QUELQUE CHOSE, TOUJOURS, L'ATTENDAIT, ET CE N'ÉTAIT JAMAIS DIEU.

24.

LE TEMPS PASSAIT. DANS LES NIDS, MÊME LA CHANSON DES OISEAUX SE DÉFAISAIT. LES BROUILLARDS S'USAIENT SUR LES ARBRES, SUR LE SOMMET DES MAISONS, SUR LES POTEAUX DES FILS ÉLECTRIQUES. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ MESURAIT LES DÉCOURS, L'ANGLE DÉCROISSANT DES ANNÉES. IL SENTAIT PARFOIS SES PAS, MÛRIS PAR D'INTERMINABLES VAGABONDAGES DANS LA VILLE, S'ENGRANGER DE SABLE MEUBLE. IL S'ÉGARAIT, PUIS, MÊME AU COEUR DE LA VILLE, DEVAIT S'EN REMETTRE AU COMPAS DES CONSTELLATIONS. POURTANT SA TÊTE ÉTAIT DE SOLEILS OBSTINÉS, POURTANT SON COEUR ÉTAIT DE CÉRÉALE DROITE, POURTANT SON CORPS ÉTAIT DE ROUTES PRÊTES À ÉCLORE. MAIS DANS LES PARCS IL MARCHAIT MURÉ DE

FEUILLES VIEILLISSANTES. LA LUMIÈRE VENAIT SUR LES CHOSSES COMME DES FURETS D'ÉTOILES. TOUT FUYAIT. LES MATINS ÉTAIENT-ILS AMARRÉS AUX ÉPERVIERS?

25.

CELA D'AILLEURS NE CESSAIT DE L'ÉTONNER : LES SAISONS SE SUCCÉDAIENT ET IL ÉTAIT ENCORE SUR CETTE TERRE, VIVANT. LONGTEMPS IL AVAIT CRU NE PAS SURVIVRE À LA DISPARITION DE L'ENFANT. ET VOILÀ QU'IL RECENSAIT LES ÉPOQUES, QUE LA GRIFFE DES SOLEILS MARQUAIT SA PEAU AU COIN DES YEUX, QUE DES ÉCUMES ET DES ÉCORCES DE BOULEAU SE RÉPANDAIENT SUR SES CHEVEUX. DES PIGEONS VENAIENT AUTREFOIS SE POSER SUR SON ÉPAULE. LE MONDE MAINTENANT ASSOYAIT SES GALETS SUR SA NUQUE, CE ROSEAU. DE LA LUMIÈRE ROMPUE AUX ANGLES DES RUES, DES BOUTIQUES, DES VISAGES ET DES VOITURES, IL NE RETENAIT QUE PEU DE CHOSE : LA VIE PASSAIT, LA VIE PASSAIT. LA VILLE MODELAIT SA COURSE D'ÉTALS ET DE BRUITS, AU LOIN LA FORÊT FABRIQUAIT SES LIÈVRES. QU'Y AVAIT-IL AU SOMMET DES IMMEUBLES? LE VIDE, ACCROCHÉ À D'INIMAGINABLES OISEAUX. OUI, LE TEMPS S'EN ALLAIT. DÉJÀ MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ NE SE TENAIT PLUS ENTIÈREMENT PARMI LES HOMMES. IL ÉTAIT LE SPECTATEUR FASCINÉ DE CES MIRACLES : LE MATIN SUCCÉDANT LA NUIT, LES FEUILLES TOMBÉES PUIS REMONTÉES AUX BRANCHES. ET L'ÉTÉ REPARAÎSSAIT, ET C'ÉTAIT NOËL CETTE ANNÉE ENCORE.

26.

IL AVAIT ÉTÉ UNE FOIS LA PROIE D'UNE ÉMOTION INFINIMENT VIOLENT. SON FILS N'Y ÉTAIT PLUS DEPUIS QUELQUES ANNÉES DÉJÀ. UN JOUR QU'IL RETOURNAIT LA TERRE DU PETIT POTAGER AMÉNAGÉ DANS LA COUR, IL AVAIT DÉCOUVERT UN COFFRET, MANIFESTEMENT ENTERRÉ LÀ PAR L'ENFANT. LES MAINS TREMBLANTES, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ AVAIT EXHUMÉ LA PRÉCIEUSE BOÎTE, PETIT CORPS DE MÉTAL RONGÉ PAR LES FIÈVRES DE LA TERRE, NÉANMOINS SURVIVANT DE CET OMBREUX SÉJOUR. LE CONTENU QUANT À LUI N'AVAIT GUÈRE RÉSISTÉ : CE N'ÉTAIT PLUS QUE LES LAMBEAUX MOISIS D'UNE FEUILLE DE PAPIER D'OÙ LES MOTS AVAIENT ÉTÉ EFFACÉS, D'OÙ LA PAROLE S'ÉTAIT TUE POUR FAIRE PLACE À UN SILENCE RÉSIGNÉ. LA LETTRE DE L'ENFANT, TÉMOIN FORMIDABLEMENT INNOCENT DE SES DIX ANS, S'ÉTAIT MUÉE EN UN MANIFESTE DÉRISOIRE. CEPENDANT, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ AVAIT DÛ COMBATTRE UN MOMENT AFIN DE DÉLIVRER LE COFFRET D'UN ÉTONNANT RÉSEAU DE RACINES. AINSI DES RESTES DE NOS CORPS, AVAIT-IL ALORS PENSÉ, CAPTIFS, RETENUS DE FORCE DANS LA TERRE QUI PAR AILLEURS NE PARAÎT PAS BEAUCOUP S'INTÉRESSER À L'ÂME.

MAIS PEUT-ÊTRE, AUSSI, L'ÂME N'ÉTAIT-ELLE QUE DE TROP PEU DE POIDS. QU'UN MANIFESTE DÉRISOIRE.

27.

TOUT CE QU'IL PORTAIT DANS LE VENTRE : CETTE ÂME DE CHIEN, CES ANNÉES VIVES COUSUES DE NEIGE, CES CHEVAUX S'AVANÇANT VERS LES BERGES POUR BOIRE LES RIVIÈRES, CES LOUTRES OUVRAGÉES D'EAU ET DE TERRIERS, CES PUMAS ERRANT DANS L'HERBE DES PASSAGES, CES RACINES MONTÉES HAUT SE TERRER DANS LA LUMIÈRE, CES VILLES ACCORDÉES À L'ACTE DU SOLEIL, TOUTE CETTE VIE INTÉRIEURE S'ÉCHAPPAIT DE LUI JOUR APRÈS JOUR. DES SOLEILS LE BRISAIENT DE LEURS AUBES. IL ÉPROUVAIT DANS SON CORPS LA CASSURE DE CHAQUE GESTE. QU'EST-CE QUE LE CORPS D'UN HOMME QUI CHERCHE SANS JAMAIS TROUVER? UN VÊTEMENT D'ENFANT PAUVRE.

DEPUIS LONGTEMPS, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ SAVAIT QUE TOUT FINIT ICI-BAS. IL N'AVAIT PLUS, APPUYÉES AU FRONT, QUE LES LOIS DU SOLEIL. MAIS EN LUI-MÊME TREMBLAIENT DES MONDES, DES VALLÉES BASSES ET PUISSANTES, FAITES DE DEMI-JOUR ET D'ESPÉRANCES, ET QUI PARAÎSSAIENT TANT RÉELLES QU'ON AURAIT DIT DES NAISSANCES.

28.

LES FIÈVRES ET L'AGITATION CAUSÉES PAR SA MÉMOIRE BLESSÉE CRÉAIENT EN LUI UN CURIEUX PHÉNOMÈNE. À FORCE, IL LUI SEMBLAIT VIVRE EN MÊME TEMPS DANS SON CORPS ET COMME SÉPARÉ DE LUI. CE CORPS LE TRAHISSAIT : MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ ATTENDAIT DE LUI QU'IL FASSE SON TRAVAIL, MAIS CE N'ÉTAIT SOUVENT QU'UN CURIEUX MAGASINIER, PLUS PRÉOCCUPÉ DE L'INVENTAIRE DE SES ORGANES QUE DE LEUR BONNE MARCHÉ. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ AURAIT VOULU QU'IL CUMULE DAVANTAGE DE FORCES, DISTILLE PUIS LANCE À L'ASSAUT DES VEINES UN SANG CONVENABLE, QU'IL CÉLÈBRE SES MÉCANIQUES, QU'IL ACCORDE LE COEUR À LA CHANSON HAUTE QUI, DANS LE CERVEAU, VOULAIT VIVRE. MAIS CE CORPS-LÀ NE SAVAIT PAS SE PLIER AUX REQUÊTES. IL FAISAIT À SA GUISE, COMME EXAUÇANT UN AUTRE QUE CELUI QUI LUI ASSURAIT POURTANT LA SUBSISTANCE. AINSI MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ ÉTAIT-IL À CÔTÉ DE LUI ET EN LUI, À LA FOIS L'OBSERVATEUR ET L'OBJET DES BRIS, DES TORSIONS, DES VIOLENCES QUE PROVOQUAIT SON ORGANISME ET DONT IL FALLAIT OBLIGATOIREMENT ENDURER LA TORTURE.

ET SANS DOUTE AUSSI ÉTAIT-CE UN PEU POUR CELA QUE MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ SE SENTAIT VIVRE, PLUS QUE JAMAIS, À CÔTÉ DE LA VIE. NON PAS DANS LA MORT, MAIS À CÔTÉ DE LA VIE, C'EST-À-DIRE COMME LE SPECTATEUR, OBSERVANT AVEC MINUTIE LES CHOSES SE CONSUMER. D'AUSSE LOIN QU'IL SE SOUVINT, PAS UN SEUL JOUR N'AVAIT PASSÉ SANS QUE CES MOTS N'AFFLEURENT EN LUI-MÊME : MAIS TOUS CES GENS, COMMENT FONT-ILS POUR VIVRE COMME S'ILS IGNORAIENT QU'IL Y A LEUR MORT TOUT AU BOUT? LE MONDE TEL QU'IL S'ORGANISAIT N'ÉTAIT PAS SON MAÎTRE. LE CORPS L'ÉTAIT. IL AVAIT APPRIS DE LUI CES CHOSES LÀ.

29.

APRÈS LA DISPARITION DE L'ENFANT, L'AUREORE N'AVAIT PLUS BAINÉ DE SES COULEURS NEUVES LA MAISON. DANS LE PARC, LES ARBRES N'ÉTAIENT PLUS AGITÉS QUE PAR LE VENT : LES OISEAUX PARAISSENT AVOIR DÉSERTE. LE SOIR, DES BRUITS DE NÉONS, DE CORNICHES ET DE MURS MONTAIENT DE LA RUE. MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ SORTAIT DE CHEZ LUI, ALLAIT LÀ OÙ LES ENSEIGNES NE MOURAIENT JAMAIS. LEURS POULS ÉCLABOUSSAIENT L'OMBRE DÉTRÔNÉE. IL MARCHAIT SOUS LA LANCE BLANCHE D'UNE PUBLICITÉ. SON VISAGE SE REFLÉTAIT SUR LES FLAQUES LAISSÉES PAR LA PLUIE. IL OBSERVAIT LES VOITURES JETÉES EN PÂTURE À LA VILLE, LES TROTTOIRS AGENOUILLÉS POUR LES PASSANTS, LA LUMIÈRE SORTIE DES ENDROITS.

IL POSSÉDAIT PEU DE CHOSE, AU FOND : LA NUIT QUI FERME TARD, LA RADIO ENVOLÉE DES ANTENNES COMME DES MOUETTES QUITTANT LES MÂTS. SES CHEVEUX TOUJOURS PENCHÉS SUR LA CHAUSSÉE LUISANTE, AU MOMENT DE LA PLUIE. UN PARFUM SUR SA CHEMISE QUAND LES SAISONS REPARTAIENT. LA COURBE DE L'ESCALIER, LE RÉCONFORT ET LA MÉLANCOLIE DE SAVOIR TOUTES CHOSES PASSAGÈRES, COURONNÉES DE CONTOURS.

DE QUOI ÉTAIT-IL FAIT? IL ÉTAIT NÉ D'UNE PIERRE, BÂTISSAIT SES JOURNÉES DU BOIS DE QUELQUES BATEAUX SABORDÉS. MAIS DE QUOI ÉTAIT-IL FAIT? SI PEU LE SÉPARAIT DE CEUX ALLONGÉS SOUS LA TERRE, JOUXTANT LES TANIÈRES. OUI, DE QUOI ÉTAIT FAIT MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ? DE CAILLOUX, DE BOSQUETS ET D'UN COEUR APEURÉ QUAND NOIRCISSE LA FENÊTRE. D'UN PEU DE JOUR, ET DES CHOSES QU'IL ÉTREINT.

30.

IL FAISAIT DE CHAQUE HEURE QUI LUI ÉTAIT DONNÉE UNE SORTE DE MIRADOR, UN POSTE D'OBSERVATION. IL GUETTAIT UNE PLUIE DE TERRIERS, UNE NEIGE D'ENCRE TENDUE. IL ATTENDAIT UNE NUIT DONT SON FILS ADMIRAIT SANS DOUTE, QUELQUE PART ICI-BAS, LA BEAUTÉ GRAVE ET FULGURANTE DES ÉTOILES.

MAIS QUELQUE CHOSE, SANS CESSER ET MALGRÉ TOUT, RAPPELAIT MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ À SA TÂCHE D'HOMME. IL MARCHAIT DANS LES RUES, LE SOLEIL MULTIPLIÉ SUR LES VITRES SE JETAIT SUR LUI COMME MILLE JEUX DE CHIOTS.

31.

IL QUITTAIT DE PLUS EN PLUS SOUVENT LA VILLE. MAIS IL N'ALLAIT PLUS TELLEMENT MARCHER DANS LES SENTIERS ET SOUS LES ARBRES. IL PRENAIT UN TAXI, DEMANDAIT AU CHAUFFEUR DE LE MENER LÀ OÙ ÉTAIENT PLANTÉES LES DERNIÈRES MAISONS. PUIS IL RESTAIT À OBSERVER L'HORIZON. LA LUMIÈRE QU'IL APERCEVAIT AU LOIN DANS LES COLLINES N'ÉTAIT PLUS LE MÊME QUE CELLE QU'IL AVAIT LAISSÉE EN ARRIÈRE. C'ÉTAIT UNE LUMIÈRE DE DÉBUT DU MONDE, LA TERRE À CET ENDROIT NE PORTAIT PLUS SUR LE DOS QUE DES POISSONS, DES LIMONS, DES PIERRES PLANIFIANT LES VIES À VENIR. LA CAMPAGNE SE COUCHAIT SOUS CETTE CLARTÉ DE SEUIL. DERRIÈRE MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ, LA VILLE ÉTAIT POSÉE SUR UN SOCLE.

OUI, QUELQUE CHOSE LUI COMMANDAIT DE FUIR LA VILLE. DURANT LE TRAJET EN TAXI, QUE LE CHAUFFEUR AURAIT SANS DOUTE VOULU PLUS ANIMÉ, MONSIEUR BARTOLOMÉ NE PARLAIT GUÈRE. DANS LE RÉSERVOIR, LE CARBURANT BRÛLAIT, LIBÉRÉ À LA FIN DE SA DESTINÉE FOSSILE. LA RADIO ÉTAIT ALLUMÉE, RAPPORTANT LES NOUVELLES D'UN MONDE AGITÉ : ON SE BATAIT ICI, ON AVAIT SOIF LÀ-BAS, DES AVIONS ÉTAIENT LANCÉS CONTRE DES GRATTES-CIEL, UN DICTATEUR TOMBAIT.

PARFOIS, IL NE SE CONTENTAIT PLUS DE RESTER SUR PLACE À REGARDER AU LOIN. UNE FOIS DESCENDU, IL COMMENÇAIT À MARCHER, IL AVANÇAIT VERS L'HORIZON OURLÉ DE PAYSAGES. IL SE PRENAIT À RÊVER DU RYTHME SÉCULAIRE DES GRANDS ARBRES. IL PASSAIT DES PONTS DE BOIS, ENFILAIT DES ROUTES GRAVELEUSES, TRAVERSAIT DES CHAMPS HÉRISSÉS D'ÉPIS, PUIS ARRIVAIT À L'ORÉE D'UNE FORÊT. IL ALLAIT CALCULER LES ANNEAUX DESSINÉS DANS LE BOIS DE TRÈS VIEUX CÈDRES COUPÉS, PUIS LAISSÉS LÀ PAR UN PAYSAN. IL ENTRAIT DANS LA PENSIVE TRIBU DE LA LENTEUR.

AU BOUT DU JOUR IL REBROUSSAIT CHEMIN, HÉLAIT UN AUTRE TAXI DANS LES FAUBOURGS ET RENTRAIT À LA MAISON. LE PLUS SOUVENT, LA NUIT ÉTAIT DÉJÀ FORT AVANCÉE LORSQU'IL SE FAUFILOTTAIT ENFIN ENTRE LES DRAPS.

32.

UNE NUIT, DEUX MOINEAUX SONT VENUS À LA FENÊTRE. L'UN D'EUX LUI A DIT : « LÈVE-TOI, IL EST TARD SUR LE MONDE, TOUT SE BRISE ET T'APPELLE, VIENS AVEC MOI. » COMME UNE ÂME QUI NE QUITTE PLUS LA MAISON POURTANT DÉSSERTÉE PAR SON OCCUPANT, L'AUTRE EST RESTÉ, SON PETIT CORPS VEILLANT DANS LE TREMBLEMENT NOCTURNE DU RIDEAU.