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mOthertongue Editors
University of Massachusetts Amherst

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mOthertongue

a multilingual journal of the arts



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From the editors

Language is essential. Without it, we would lose communication—and also a tremendous medium for art. As English becomes increasingly dominant as a form of universal communication, we run the risk of missing the beauty of other languages. To this end, mOthertongue seeks to offer a place for authors working in their native languages to publish their works. By seeing the dark beauty in a fiercely written German poem, or the lyrical cadence of an eerie Spanish short story, we all benefit. These works give insight into other cultures, but also into the exquisite beauty of each language.

The Five College community is one of cultural diversity. mOthertongue seeks to offer a medium for the expression of this diversity through art. In this edition of mOthertongue you will find poetry, prose, photography, and drawings all published in the native languages of the authors. We hope that you find these selections as thought provoking, witty, and exemplary of our rich culture as we do.

After studying multiple languages it becomes apparent that expression in general is limited when confined to a single tongue. Individual languages have weaknesses and strengths, and no language is perfect. The mOthertongue project is proud in its mission to reveal the truly sublime through these mother tongues collectively.

Coup De Fil
by Masha Babyonyshev



We hope you enjoy the following works of art as much as we do.

Sincerely,

Josephine Harrington: editor-in-chief

Caleb B. Koufman: editor

L. Isaac Simon: editor

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pug by Heather Maes

Written Approval
by Stephanie Ambroise

you can use my body
as an Etch-a-Sketch
and draw
unto me
your beliefs
in
black and white

your marvelous frown of
concentration
moves me
and I
swear, I
could drown
in the crease of your brow

and although this work
is agonizing,

isn't it good of me to make it
so
whatever

projection of your soul
you imprint on me,

if you don't like it,
you can just shake me,
and it vanishes?

Inspirado en Cortázar

by Nadia Bercovich

Automatizado esta el ser humano para respirar. Los pulmones se expanden y se contraen a un ritmo constante, añadiendo y quitando aire de los mismos a través de la conveniente purificadora natural que llamamos nariz. En ocasiones explícitas este proceso sencillo se complica por periodos de tiempos variados. Ya sea por causa de una reacción inesperada, como puede ser una sorpresa o un susto, o cualquier otra alternativa similar. Dada alguna de estas situaciones, los músculos de los pulmones paran repentinamente encarcelando al último suspiro entero, por lo general generoso, y manteniendo en cuenta semi-inconcientemente la retención de oxígeno adquirida para activar el próximo respiro justo antes de colapsar.

Nuestros sabios cuerpos, entrenados por la madre naturaleza propia, nacen cultos y expertos en el campo de las reacciones mecánicas. Esos instintos no aprendidos, que estudiados nos enseñan a entender el comportamiento humano. Dentro de esta ciencia maravillosa, una condición bastante común y bien conocida por varios, se la debemos al más cruel de los placeres humanos, a la habilidad de querer. Esta condición no tiene ningún nombre explícito, aunque tampoco la necesita, basada en experiencia personal la descripción general incluye lo siguiente: El primer síntoma es muy sutil pero inconfundible, cada inhalar pesa un poquito más, y se corta involuntariamente avisándonos que esta fuera de nuestras manos el porvenir de los siguientes eventos. Mientras tanto, las cejas se fruncen apenas, lo suficiente para cambiar la típica expresión facial de una ausencia en particular, a una seriedad rotunda. Inmediatamente después e inevitablemente, se siente tragar una nada llena de pensamientos confusos, que con la boca reseca tardan más de lo habitual en recorrer el trayecto de la garganta. Y luego, casi al final de la sublime experiencia, el músculo más poderoso del cuerpo entero, se prepara palpitando fuertemente porque sabe exactamente lo que esta por pasar. En ese momento, respirar se complica más con cada segundo que pasa, porque prohibirles a esas emociones salir a la superficie e inhalar simultáneamente, requiere de una concentración no existente en nuestras mentes. Consecuentemente, aquel punto fijo al

que decidimos entregarle nuestra mas sincera mirada, se torna borroso y se rasga por uñas de pestañas a la distancia, hasta que es definitivo, y ya no vemos mas que aquella oscura coraza mojada. Impermeable la misma, permite que nuestros pensamientos se rebalsen hacia los costados de las elípticas figuras, arrastrando por las paredes verticales toda sensación imaginable en conjunto. En su travesía dejan por detrás un sendero salino capaz de opacar cualquier percepción ajena a la del momento mismo, desvaneciendo como por arte de magia todo sonido a nuestro alrededor, dejándonos sordos e incapaces de controlar el resto de nuestros sentidos.

Eventualmente, recolectados los pensamientos, llegan hacia los inquietos y sedientos labios, todavía sin interés de ser verbalizados, e incluso mezclados y desorientados. Algunos deciden hallar su propio camino al esquivar a la absorbente y rojiza interrupción transitoria, evaporándose y estirándose hacia el agudo margen de esa superficie. Y lo que queda de ellos cae en libertad pura solo por un instante, como si hubiesen imanes llamándolos desde el otro lado, hasta que desaparecen por completo absorptos por la realidad. Es entonces cuando recobramos con paciencia nuestros básicos sentires. Las pupilas dilatadas sufren la reducción repentina que la minima luz incita, y el mas minúsculo intento de redimir la sensibilidad de nuestros labios, con las lenguas todavía anudadas en la garganta, nos deja exhaustos. Intensa es la sensación plastica que esos lamentos salados laminaron sobre nuestra delicada piel, y todavía mas poderoso es el sentimiento mixto de alivio e impotencia que confunde nuestro ser.

Inspired by Cortázar

by Nadia Bercovich

When it comes to breathing, the human being is automated. The lungs expand and deflate at a constant rhythm, adding and replacing the air within them, through the convenient natural purifier we address as the nose. In specific situations, this simple process turns more complex for different amounts of time. It could be due to a sudden unexpected reaction, such as a surprise, or a sudden scare, or other similar alternatives. If one of these situations occurs, the lung's muscles tend to stop all of a sudden, incarcerating the last inhaled air completely within the lungs. This event is usually abundant, since the clever body knows to semiconsciously retain a specific amount of oxygen within us, until the last possible moment when we are on the verge of a collapse and so the next breath is activated.

Our wise bodies, trained by Mother Nature herself, are born experts in the world of mechanical reactions. Those unlearned instincts, rather, studied by society, teach us to understand human behavior. Within this marvelous science, a well-known and certainly common condition in many individuals' lives, we owe it the cruelest of human pleasures, the ability to love. This condition does not have a specific name, although it does not need one. Based on personal experience, the general descriptions that follow involve: The first symptom is subtle but unmistakable, each breath seems to weigh a little more, until it stops abruptly and involuntarily, letting us know that what is about to happen next is completely out of our hands and control. Meanwhile, our eyebrows frown just barely, enough to change the typical facial expression of distracted carelessness to a rotund seriousness. Immediately and inevitably after this, we seem to swallow a strong sense of nothingness filled with confusing thoughts, as our extremely parched mouths delay their trajectory through our throats and into our stomachs. Almost at the end of this sublime experience, the most powerful muscle of our entire body prepares itself by strongly beating at a quicker pace, anticipating exactly what is about to happen.

At this point, our breathing seems to require more effort with every second that goes by, because prohibiting those emotions from surfacing and

simultaneously inhaling some air requires a type of concentration that does not exist within our then crowded minds. Consequently, that fixed point in the distance to which we decide to award our most sincere last stare, turns blurry and is torn to pieces through nails of eyelashes that have minds of their own, until it is definite, and we are no longer able to see past that humid bark-like and obscure cover that distances us from the rest of the world. This impermeable structure allows for our thoughts to overflow only through the sides of the elliptical figures, dragging through the vertical walls every possible feeling imagined, intertwining with one another. Along their travels, these creatures leave behind a sea-salted path so potent that it overpowers any perception beyond the ones related to that precise moment, disintegrating completely, as if magically, every single sound that surrounds us, leaving us deaf and incapable of controlling the rest of our senses.

Eventually, our recollected thoughts arrive to the unstable and jittery thirst-starving lips, still with no interest of being verbalized, and mixed up and disoriented. Here, some choose to find their own way by avoiding the burgundy, absorbent, transitory interruption, and evaporating, stretching towards the acute margin of the surface that holds them. The parts that remain fall in pure liberty only for an instant, as if there were a magnet calling them from the other side, until they disappear, completely absorbed by reality. It is then that we recuperate, with patience, our basic senses. The pupils that had grown fat and lazy in the dark suffer a sudden reduction that the minimal sign of light induces, and the most miniscule attempt to redeem the sensibility of our lips, with our tongues still tied up in a knot in our throats, leaves us exhausted. Intense is the plastic-like sensation that those strongly salted laments laminated over our delicate skin, and even more powerful are the mixed feelings of relief and helplessness that are left to confuse our being.

Träume eines Sandkorns

All unser Tun in dieser Welt
hat weder Zweck noch Sinn.
Das zielstrebenste Schiff zerschellt
am Fels des Irrtums. Von Beginn
an nicht mehr als ein ein'zges Korn
im Sandsturm, der sich Leben nennt.
Egal ob Liebe, Freundschaft, Zorn-
alles verbrennt, alles verbrennt.

Alles Streben wird zu Staub,
Der Wandel wird's verschlingen.
Des Universums Ohr ist taub,
egal wie schoen wir singen.
Im Rausche der Unendlichkeit -
was ist ein ein'zges Korn aus Sand?
Am Horizont naht uns're Zeit.
Nichts hat Bestand, nichts hat Bestand.

Umsonst ist jede Niederkunft.
Doch brüllen wir mit aller Kraft,
mit allem Wahnsinn der Vernunft,
und aller uns gegeb'nen Macht
- im Wissen, dass wir kentern -
ins dunkle Nichts des Alls hinein:
"Hier steh' ich mit all meinem Sein -
und werde dich verändern!"

Dreams of a grain of sand

Everything we do within this world
neither has an end nor a purpose.
The most ambitious ship shatters
at the rock of error. Straight from the start
we're no more than a grain of sand
within a sandstorm, called our life.
Nothing matters, love, friendship, rage -
everything burns, everything burns.

All pursuing becomes dust.
Change will raven all of it.
The universe's ear is deaf,
no matter how beautiful we sing.
Within the rush of all infinity,
what is a single grain of sand?
Our time approaches at the horizon.
Nothing sustains, nothing sustains.

Worthless is every single birth.
But we shout with all we've got,
with all the insanity of rationality
and all our given power
- - knowing that we'll overturn -
- into the darkness of outer space:
- "Here I stand with all I am -
- and I will change you!"



寂しいロボ
誰もが大好き
人間はけち

さびしいロボ
だれもがだいすき
にんげんはけち

コーリ・ギールス

Oil and Blood

Lonesome Robot
Everybody loves
Humans are petty

Cory Gillis



Photo by Emily Zona

Catullus 70
by James Taber

Nulli se dicit mulier mea nubere malle
 quam mihi, non si se Iuppiter ipse petat.
Dicit: sed mulier cupido quod dicit amanti,
 in vento et rapida scriber oportet aqua.

My girl said she would like to marry no one else but me,
 Not even if Jupiter Himself were courting her.
So she said: but what a woman says to her eager lover
 May be written quickly in swift water and the wind.

INSOMNIO
por
Borja Cabada Añón

Una habitación a oscuras. Una cama. Nada más. Blanco se estremece. Despierta sobresaltado, levantando la cabeza y apoyando los codos en el colchón. No ha sonado la alarma. Pero está despierto. Ni siquiera ha abierto los ojos aún, pero su mente ya ha empezado a andar, y eso le molesta. Las terribles imágenes que lo han atormentado mientras dormía aún permanecen en su retina, alimentando su malestar, cavando una tumba en su interior. El corazón le late a toda prisa. "Sólo ha sido un sueño. Tranquilo. No pasa nada", piensa. Sus palabras parecen sosegarlo. Poco a poco recupera la calma, hasta que finalmente vuelve a recostarse, y lanza un gruñido, una queja, molesto por el percance. "Necesito seguir durmiendo", se dice. Es algo inevitable, no lo puede remediar. Decide cambiar de postura, y se gira hacia el otro lado de la cama. Buenas noches de nuevo, Blanco. Dulces sueños... Fundido en negro.

"Espera".

La habitación. Blanco abre los ojos. "¿Por qué me he despertado?" Presta atención a los sonidos a su alrededor. El reloj no suena. No hay tic-tac. No hay ruido en la sala de al lado. No hay música. Ni bullicio en la calle. Ni histeria. Ni disturbios. Ni disparos. Ni rimas. Ni palabras. Ni diálogo. Ni descripciones. No hay. No. Hay. Tampoco.

La ventana está cerrada. Apenas entra un hilo de luz. "Quizás alguien está llamando a la puerta," piensa a la vez que mira hacia ella, "es una posibilidad". Blanco fija su atención en cualquier sonido que pueda proceder del otro extremo del apartamento. No. "Espera un momento." Blanco advierte que la puerta de la habitación está cerrada. Todas las noches la cierra él mismo. Aunque alguien estuviera dando golpes atroces al otro extremo, afuera, en el rellano, desde ahí sería incapaz de percibirlo. "Quiero silencio absoluto, ¿me entiende?" le dice al tío de la tienda. "Esta puerta es especial. Robusta. Triple cerrojo. Y cierra herméticamente," le contestan. Permanece atento, los músculos tensos. Aguanta la respiración. No se escucha nada.

Entonces vuelve a relajar el cuerpo, y deja entrar aire en sus pulmones. "A lo mejor el teléfono está sonando", piensa, "Sí. Tiene que ser eso. Incluso con la puerta cerrada, el ruido del teléfono puedo oírlo. Entre otras cosas,

porque lo tengo justo a mi lado. Junto a la cama. En el suelo". La lógica de su razonamiento satisface a Blanco. Realmente eso podría despertarle. "Compruébalo entonces", se dice. Alarga el brazo fuera de la cama y roza el auricular con los dedos. "No, un momento", se detiene, "Antes de eso, tienes que hacer memoria". Blanco no recuerda haber escuchado el sonido del teléfono. Aunque también es posible que sus sentidos estén entumecidos después de tan pocas horas de sueño, y que el teléfono no sólo haya sonado, sino que esté sonando aún. "Entonces", piensa, "descuelga. Agarra el auricular, y ponle fin a esto". Pero Blanco se resiste. Necesita seguir durmiendo. Apenas ha conseguido dormir un par de horas, y su cuerpo le está pidiendo a gritos que se olvide de todo, que deje de pensar y de buscar excusas que lo mantengan despierto. "No es nada, seguro", intenta convencerse. Se da la vuelta y se cubre por entero con las mantas. Busca de nuevo su sitio en la cama, una esquina de paz, un resquicio de comodidad en su cuerpo dolorido. El roce de las sábanas es atronador, amplificado por el silencio de la habitación. Demasiado ruido. Mueca de disgusto. Hasta que todo se asienta. Y después, silencio otra vez.

Respira.

El tiempo ha cambiado. Ya no hace frío. No como antes. Y eso le fastidia. Blanco empieza a sudar. Comienza a agobiarse bajo las mantas, a ahogarse en su propio aliento. Ataque de ansiedad. Empieza a hiperventilar, se remueve inquieto, se hunde cada vez más entre las mantas, atrapado, doblegado, asfixiándose. La sábanas se adhieren a su cuerpo húmedo, se introducen en él por la boca, como si hubieran cobrado vida, sofocándolo, oprimiendo su rostro, pegándose a sus pulmones, presionando sobre ellos. La cama comienza a engullirlo, lentamente, la habitación se hace cada vez más pequeña, y más oscura, y negra, y maldita. "Oxígeno. Necesito oxígeno. Respirar. Dentro. Fuera. Vamos, ya lo has hecho antes". Sus extremidades se retuercen, y tiene que hacer algo, calmar a su corazón, pero le tiemblan las manos, el sudor se torna frío, no encuentra la forma de salir, y tira, tira, tira, desbocado, gritando, enloquecido, hasta que en un último esfuerzo consigue sacar las sábanas de los pies de la cama. Se destapa.

Aire.

Alivio.

Respira hondamente. Cierra los ojos. "Mucho mejor así... mucho mejor...", su ritmo cardíaco se normaliza, "... mejor...", el sudor empieza a secarse, "... mucho...", las manos dejan de temblarle, "... así".

Pero algo le desorienta. Algo que no consigue entender ni ubicar en su rutina, que resuena en su mente, al fondo, como una melodía lejana, una música ahogada, que perturba su recién adquirida calma y confunde aún más su mente adormecida y aletargada por la falta de oxígeno durante el incidente con las sábanas. Blanco mira hacia el techo con los ojos entreabiertos, y frunce levemente el ceño, intentando comprender. Hasta que finalmente una idea le sobreviene clara y concisa: el teléfono sí está sonando.

Abre los ojos de par en par. Descuelga apresurado. Pone el auricular en el oído izquierdo y se prepara para hablar. Nada. De su boca no sale ni un sonido. Una desagradable sensación de sequedad en la garganta le impide materializar palabra alguna. Inspira. Intenta producir algo de saliva y tragar para reanimar sus cuerdas vocales.

“¿Aún sigue en la cama, Sr. Blanco?” le preguntan desde el otro lado de la línea.

Es la voz de una mujer. No parece muy contenta. Blanco se sorprende. Se aclara la garganta y finalmente consigue mascullar un par de palabras.

“¿Quién es?” Su voz suena ronca y aplastada.

“Ya es hora de levantarse, Sr. Blanco. Su ropa está preparada en la silla”. Su tono de voz es firme. “Tiene diez minutos”.

“Espere, espere. ¿Diez minutos para qué?”

“Va a llegar tarde al funeral”. Ahora sí que parece molesta y enfadada, como si la pregunta de Blanco le estuviera haciendo perder el tiempo. “De hecho, va a hacer que todo el mundo llegue tarde”.

“¿Funeral? ¿Qué funeral? ¿Acaso ha muerto alguien?”

“Diez minutos, Sr. Blanco. Diez”. Y sin más, cuelga.

Blanco está confuso. Deposita lentamente el auricular en su sitio, y se incorpora en la cama hasta quedar sentado en ella. “¿Quién ha muerto?”, se pregunta. Blanco siente que la cabeza le va a estallar. Migraña matutina. Mal sueño. Maldición de Ondina. Hunde el rostro en sus manos, masajeándose las sienes. Después alza la vista y en la oscuridad de la habitación consigue discernir una silla al lado de su cama. Hay ropa cuidadosamente dispuesta sobre ella. Camisa blanca, traje y corbata negros. Blanco se levanta y se aproxima a la silla. Está muy cansado. Inexplicablemente cansado. Los párpados le pesan demasiado como para mantener los ojos completamente abiertos mientras recoge el atuendo. El dolor de cabeza es tan fuerte, que Blanco siente el latir de su corazón resonando y palpitando en su frente. Como si estuviera drogado, cegado por la jaqueca, empieza a vestirse sin siquiera saber por qué

o a dónde se espera que vaya.

Después se dirige a la puerta, con paso arrastrado y lento, somnoliento. Hay un pedazo de papel clavado en ella. Blanco lo recoge, y lo examina extrañado. No recuerda haberse dejado una nota a sí mismo antes de acostarse. Hay algo escrito. “Tumbese”, dice el trozo de papel. “Con mucho gusto”, piensa Blanco. Regresa entonces a la cama, y sin desvestirse, se deja caer sobre ella, inerte, boca arriba. Respira profundamente. Ojos cerrados. Contento...

Inconsciente...

Entumecido...

Inmóvil...

Aturdido...

Frío...

Adormilado...

El tacto de la tierra en su rostro es tan cálido...



New Orleans by Richard Garey

INSOMNIA
by
Borja Cabada Añón

A darkened room. A bed. Nothing else. Blank shivers. He wakes up startled, lifting his head up from the pillow and propping himself up on his elbows. The alarm doesn't go off. But he's awake alright. His eyes are not even open yet, but his mind is already running, and that bothers him. The terrible images that haunted him while he was sleeping are still flashing through his head, feeding his discomfort, digging a grave inside of him. His heart is beating so fast. "It was just a dream. Calm down. It's nothing", he thinks. His words seem to soothe him. Little by little, he pulls himself together, till he finally lies back down, and grunts, annoyed by the mishap. "I need to go back to sleep". It's inevitable. Unavoidable. He decides to change his position, and turns around to the other side of the bed. Good night again, Mr. Blank. Sweet dreams... Fade to black.

"Wait".

The room. Blank opens his eyes. "Why did I wake up?" He pays attention to the sounds all around him. The clock is not making any noises. There's no tick-tock. No din from the room next door. No music. No uproar on the streets. No hysteria. No riots. No shooting. No rhymes. No words. No dialogue. No descriptions. There's not. There. Is. Not. Either.

The window is closed. There's barely any light. "Maybe someone's knocking on the door", he thinks, while looking at it, "it's a possibility". Blank focuses his attention on whatever little sound that might be coming from the other end of the apartment. "No, wait a second". He notices that the door to his room is closed. He locks it himself every night. Even if there was someone banging on it, out in the hall, he wouldn't be able to perceive it. "I want absolute silence, got it?", says to the guy at the store. "This one is special. Sturdy. Triple lock. Airtight". He's listening, muscles tensed, holding his breath. But he can't hear anything.

Then he goes back to normal, relaxes, and lets the air in. "Perhaps the phone is ringing", thinks to himself, "yes. That's gotta be it. Even if the door was locked, I could hear the phone from here. Mainly because it's right by my side, next to the bed. Down on the floor". The logic in his reasoning seem to satisfy Blank. That could have really woken him up. "Go

check then", says to himself. He reaches his arm out of the bed to touch the receiver with his fingertips. "No. Hold on", he stops, "before that, I need to rewind a little bit". Blank doesn't remember hearing the phone ring. Although, it might also be that his senses are still numbed from having slept only for a few hours. In that case, not only could he not remember the phone having rung; it might even be that it's still ringing, and he would not be able to notice it because of that. "Then", he thinks, "pick up. Grab the handset, and get this over with". But Blank is resistant to that thought. He needs to go back to sleep so bad. He has barely slept a few hours, and his body is begging him to forget about everything, to stop thinking and making excuses that keep him awake. "It's nothing, for sure", tries to convince himself. He turns around again, and covers himself with the blankets, looking for the right spot on the bed, a corner of peace, a scrap of comfort in his sore body.

The friction of the sheets is like a thunder, amplified by the silence of the room. Too much noise. Blank grimaces. Till everything settles down. And then, silence again.

Breathes.

The weather has changed. It's not cold any more. Not like before. And that irritates him. Blank starts to sweat, to grow anxious under the blankets, to suffocate in his own breath. Panic attack. He begins to hyperventilate, shuddering, restless, sinking into the bedclothes, trapped, ensnared, stifling. The sheets stick to his wet body, slip inside of him through his mouth, as if they were alive, asphyxiating him, pressing against his face, glued to his lungs, crushing them. The bed begins to swallow him, slowly, painfully; the room becomes smaller and smaller, and darker, black, cursed. "Oxygen. I need oxygen", thinks to himself, "Breathe. In. Out. Come on. You've done it before". His extremities contort, and he has to do something, calm his heart down, but his hands are shaking, his sweat turns cold, and he can't find a way out, and pulls, pulls, pulls, out of control, screaming, deranged, till he finally manages to pull the sheets out of the foot of the bed, and desperately kicks them away.

Air.

Relief.

Deep breath. He closes his eyes. "Much better now... much better...", his heartbeat begins to get normalized, "... better...", his sweat body starts to dry off, "... much...", his hands cease to tremble, "... now".

But something bewilders him; something that he can't quite understand nor identify, that resonates in his mind, at the back, like a distant melody, or muffled music; something that perturbs his new calmness, and puzzles his lulled mind, numbed by the lack of oxygen during the incident with the sheets. Blank looks up at the ceiling, and frowns, trying to comprehend. Then, all of a sudden, it falls on him: the phone is ringing.

Eyes open. Picks up. Quickly. Puts the end of the receiver on his left ear, and gets ready to speak. Nothing. Not a single sound comes out of his mouth. A really unpleasant feeling of dryness in his throat prevents him from materializing a word. Breathes in. Tries to secrete a little bit of saliva, and gulps it, so as to reanimate his vocal cords.

"Still in bed, Mr. Blank?" , somebody asks him from the other end of the line. It's a woman's voice. She doesn't sound very happy. Blank is surprised. He manages to clear his throat and finally mutters a bunch of words.

"Who is it?"

His voice sounds hoarse and smashed.

"It's time to get up, Mr. Blank. Your clothes are ready, on the chair". Her tone of voice is firm. "You have ten minutes".

"Wait, wait. Ten minutes for what?"

"You're going to be late for the funeral". Now she really seems angry and annoyed, as if she were wasting her time answering stupid questions. "In fact, you're going to make everybody late".

"Funeral? What funeral? Did somebody die?"

"Ten minutes, Mr. Blank. Ten". And hangs up.

Blank is baffled. He slowly puts the handset back on the phone, and sits up on the bed. "Who could've died?", he wonders. Blank feels like his head is about to explode. Morning migraine. Bad dreams. Ondine's curse. His face sinks into his hands, and he starts to rub his temples. Then he looks up, and in the darkness of the room he manages to distinguish the silhouette of a chair next to his bed. There are clothes on it, carefully displayed. White shirt, black suit and tie. Blank gets up, and approaches the chair. He's tired. Inexplicably tired. His eyelids are too heavy now to keep his eyes completely open. He picks up the garments. The headache is so strong and painful, that Blank is able to feel his heartbeat throbbing and pulsating on his forehead. He starts to get dressed, not even knowing why he's doing that nor where he's expected at, just as if he were drugged,

blinded by the neuralgia.

Once he's done, he walks toward the door, in a slow and dreary pace. There's a piece of paper pinned on it. Blank takes it, and examines it, bemused. He doesn't remember leaving a note for himself there when he went to bed. There's something written on it. "Lie down", it reads. "With pleasure", he thinks. Then he walks back to the bed, and, without getting undressed, he falls onto it, inert, face up. Deep breath. Eyes closed. Contentment.

Unconscious...

Cramped...

Motionless...

Benumbed...

Cold...

Drowsy...

The touch of the soil on his face is so warm...



smoking monster by Heather Maes

Dandelion

by Pierre Magdelaine

It really looked like snow, or maybe cotton. On the green field, white spots scattered randomly, downy and round. Earthly constellation. The wind – the wind rocked them, sometimes tore them apart, not harshly, and sowed their feathers away on the next ones. Blades of grass bowed under the dew's yoke. To the East, a white light pierced the azure sky. Pastel. The silence was that of these countrysides' dawns, stirred only by the frail breeze and the fields' whisper. There, a bird's cry. And suddenly the storm, feet, in haste; yellow gusts, two dresses. Rumble of a run, young folly, thunder of a laugh and a fall... nothing more, for a moment, and then laughter, again, ethereal. Impetuous steps – jumps? – the trampled grass' shiver... shouts thrown to the wind, and silence anew.

A girl crouches, suddenly mute. Before her eyes – grey? – one thousand dandelions sway in rhythm. A sharp cry makes her look up, her lips torn in a slight smile. Briskly her hand dives in the wild grass, plucks a blade. First blood: vermillion on her short brown fingers. Raises her hand to her mouth, salty taste, and fleshy taste. The blade of grass plucked between her fingers, before her teeth she whistles. Strident – laughter answers, a few words... maybe? A few steps. Her hand draws toward a stem, which she curtly breaks before bringing the flower to her lips. Burnt umber.

The wind drops.

She upraises for a while the perfect orb, stands up, earth on her knees. She closes her eyes, and her figure tenses as she concentrates – not a sound to disturb her meditation. And then she opens her eyes; slowly her lips stretch forward. She blows.

One by one the florets are torn off and fly away. White stars blown to the air. Whish bearing. Forlorn... to the vagaries of a first, and last, flight.

She dances. Her bronze arms embracing the wind.

She sings.

Dent de lion

by Pierre Magdelaine

On aurait dit de la neige, ou du coton, plutôt. Sur l'étendue verte, des taches blanches parsemées au hasard, duveteuses et rondes. Constellation terrestre. Le vent – le vent les berçait, parfois les déchirait, pourtant sans rudesse, et semait leurs aigrettes sur leurs voisines. Les brins d'herbe ployaient sous le poids de la rosée. A l'est une lueur blanche perçait l'azur. Pastels. Le silence, c'était celui de ces aubes de campagne, troublé seulement par la légère brise et le murmure des champs. Là, le cri d'un oiseau.

Et puis brusquement l'orage, des pas, précipités ; bourrasques jaunes, deux robes. Grondement d'une cavalcade, course folle, tonnerre d'un rire et une chute... plus rien, un instant, et puis un rire, encore, aérien. Les pas – bonds ? – impétueux, le frisson de l'herbe piétinée... des cris jetés au vent, un nouveau silence.

Une fillette s'accroupit, soudain muette. Devant ses yeux – gris ? – oscillent en cadence des milliers de pissenlits. Un cri tout à coup lui fait lever la tête, le coin de ses lèvres se tord en un léger sourire. Brusquement sa main plonge dans l'herbe vive, en arrache un brin. Premier sang – vermillon sur ses doigts courts et bruns. Porte à sa bouche, goût de sel, goût de chair. Le brin d'herbe pincé entre ses doigts, devant ses dents, elle siffle. Stridente – un rire lui répond, quelques mots... peut-être ? Quelques pas. Sa main se tend vers une tige, qu'elle brise sèchement avant de porter la fleur à ses lèvres. Terre de Sienne.

Le vent tombe.

Elle considère un temps l'orbe parfait, se relève, de la terre sur les genoux. Elle ferme les yeux, et ses traits se tendent alors qu'elle se concentre – pas un son ne trouble sa méditation. Et puis elle ouvre les yeux ; doucement, ses lèvres s'étirent vers l'avant. Elle souffle.

Une à une, les aigrettes se détachent et s'en vont. Etoiles blanches soufflées au loin. Porteuses de souhaits. Abandonnées... aux aléas d'un premier, et dernier, vol. Elle danse. Ses bras d'airains étreignant le vent.

Elle chante.

Potential

by Stephanie Ladroga

Staircases go

neither up nor down but remain

open-ended- [no meaning applied until a foot in one direction
falls upon the first stair].

Ability to transcend barriers of

the human form (do you want to do you want to do you need to cross
them

to find
yourself?)

forces certainty into minds that are made to be uncertain

breaking down loneliness

in favor of the promise at the top | bottom

where he's waiting with (parody) solidarity and truth.

[(replace love with his noise and color and certainty)-
dichotomies where none should be].

why do we punish questions with answers?

afraid to admire the way the air breathes?

(it's okay to sit in silence and stare at white walls

Without painting them.)

he holds you in the palm of his numbered (eyes)

whispering beauty but screaming out Names.

need him-

(and that would be defeat)

let him-

(and that would be surrender)

believe him-

(and that would be submission)

and you could kill him-

but that would be bad manners.

Birdcage

by Stephanie Ladroga

(We) See ourselves as (in)finite
Our work as vain, our love as feeble
Purposeless free-will
[but what you call free-will I call mind-rape]
and it's all formulaic after all.
The irony of accidencence/coincidence with
(the end of Fate- replaced by Magnetic Fields and Numerals)
I want only to see the air breathe
 stare at white walls
 and hear nothing but my heart- think of nothing but myself (the irony of
free thought
is that it's selfish)
I am a machine with a circulatory system instead of oil
and blood and gaskets- except for (free-will)
But our free-will is given to us in catchy tunes and bright colors (lull us to
sleep, lull us to corpse husks)
 [spoon fed idolatry makes it all easier to swallow]
although I still wear traces of the paint.
Ascertaining that we choose correctly
 Infallible finity is true freedom- fate a sugar substitute.
[stay in the cage- there are better things than freedom.]



Photo by Emily Zona

Rara

by Kathuska Jose

They come marching down on Easter

Vaksin bind beneath their fingers
wooden sticks hammer metal pipes—
their voices chanting in unison.

Yellow flags wheeling across air
Baton scraping against *güiro*
festive feet begin to follow—

They come marching down on Easter

Definitions

Rara: a festival of music performed by Rara bands during Easter week in Haiti

Vaksin: bamboo trumpets usually made of metal

Güiro: percussion instrument; originated from the Taino Indians

Una Etapa de Alcoholismo

by Nadia Bercovich

Te destapo-- y te agarro con firmeza,
y tu aroma familiar me hace pensar--
con mis labios me aproximo a una aventura
pero me intoxico hasta antes de llegar.

Se que ahogar estas locuras con tu elixir
no es sano, pero se siente normal,
mi adiccion en algun punto fue elegida,
pero hoy no tengo ganas de parar.

Yo creia que era inmune a esta bebida,
que una etapa de alcoholismo era y no mas--
pero hoy estoy segura de los hechos,
soy adicta a este efecto de verdad.

Y aunque años de sanidad me quites,
y aunque me destruyas en ciertos aspectos
esas horas de de delirios y sonetos
los prefiero sobre sobriedad enserio.

Entonces hoy, que es Diciembre todavia,
no me saques de las manos mi bebida
que el invierno en Boston llega con demencia--
y para sentir que me congelo-- esta tu ausencia.

Alcoholism

by Nadia Bercovich

I uncover you and grip you firmly
And your familiar sent makes me think
With my lips I approximate to an adventure
But I intoxicate before I reach my destination

I know drowning my madness in your elixir
Isn't healthy but it doesn't feel so wrong
My addiction at some point seemed to be chosen
But today I just can't find the strength to stop

I thought once I was immune to this beverage
Just a face of alcoholism, nothing more
But today that I am certain of the evidence
I'm addicted to the feelings it provokes

And though years of sanity you take away
And though you destroy me in certain aspects
Those nights of deliriousness and sonnets
I prefer them over sobriety, honest.

So today that it is December still
Don't take my drink away from this tight grip
Because winter in Boston hardens most life's aspects
And to feel I'm freezing alive I've got your absence.



Penguins by Heather Maes

Amor n'Asturianu

by Maria Carcelen

Ella díxo-y:

“Quita les madreñes
y xube al horru a esperar
por mi.

Quita la saya
y lava'l to pechu con agua
y mar.

Quita'l paxellu
y vamos festexar el nuesu
antroxu.

Quita la vergoña
y atrévite a amar
n'asturianu.”

L'aire güel a sidra
cubriendo'l golor del sudu;
les cares grotesques y allegres
enfrentense nes places llavaes d'alcohol.

Les gaites imanten el silenciu
escondiendo metanes too
el calláu ximíu d'un
orgasmu.

Love in Asturian

by Maria Carcelen

She said:

“Take off your wooden clogs
and climb the *borru* to wait
for me.

Take off your petticoat
and wash your breast with water
and sea.

Take off your mask
and let's celebrate our own
carnival.

Take off your shame
and dare to love
in Asturian.”

The air smells like cider
covering the scent of sweat;
grotesque but happy faces
confront in the plaza
washed by alcohol.

The bagpipes magnetize the silence
hiding among their tunes
the quiet moan of an
orgasm.

*Il pleure dans mon coeur
Comme il pleut sur la ville.*



Photo by Masha Babyonyshev

