

Fall 2002
Chicago, Illinois

TRANSLATIONS

FREE

LVNG IO
an independent journal of poetry, fiction, & art
FREE

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P.O. BOX 3865
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The Sailing Island

ADAPTED BY NATHANIEL TARN

Hawai'i

There is the Sailing Island,
the swiftly fleeing land,
no man has seen before:
poised to begin long voyage
to the far shores' horizon,
great land of birth, of light,
great land of death, of dark,
where food and drink abound,
where souls fly in to roost,
(waters for gods to lap up
in their mouths). The Island
like a flock of birds, dreams
flocking, wheeling around the
clouds, the fleeting shadows
floating along the land. The
Sailing Island is like a travel
bird flashing in silver flight,
now launched upon the wind.

From the "Kumulipo"

Born is rough weather,
born the booming sea,
the foam breaking born,
the waves roaring born,
born the receding waves,
the rumbling sound,
the souging sound,
the earthquake,
born is the stormy night,
the sea rises above the beach,
little by little drowns the land,
to the inhabited places,
dead is the tide sweeping in
from the earth's navel
it's a warrior wave:
many who came there vanished
born from the night of plenty,
lost in the roaring sea,
lost in the passing night.

from “*The Djanggawul Cycle*”

Arnhem Land, Australia

What is that song? That is Black
Cockatoo. Why is it calling out,
from the sacred tree with such a
feeble cry? The sun is hidden: a
bird saw the red sunset, the red
reflections on the clouds, it saw
the glare of the sun’s glow, saw
sinking sun, a spreading sunset.
Cloud shadows falling cross it,
making it cold. Grasps the tree
with claws, rasping and pecking
just like the magic water-stick
stabs at the ground. It cocks its
head from side to side, up in the
leaves of the topmost branches,
hearing the sea-roar. That cry?
The bird looks back at us as we
prod the ground with a Water Stick.
It has seen clouds arising on the
sea, has seen the clouds there in
the Place of Stars. Giving its long-
drawn cry it watches as we make
new country with the Water-Stick.
It saw the water, heard roar of ri-
sing tides, the spreading foam, it
cried from the top branches. Cry-
ing its long-drawn cry, calling the
sacred names of the new land.

from "*The Flight of the Chiefs*"

Fiji

And now the Eldest man speaks out
"Listen, Flight-of-the-Chiefs, go all
of you, go and insert a poplar mast,
then let The-Greatest-Prow be cast
to easy ride the waves upon the sea."
Bending eyes downward on the sea
each place you saw was only water.
A hurricane was rising on the land.
Up-rooted palms around the village
and made the pines chatter together.
Teeth of the storm: a wind/rain mar-
gin, black wall approaching across
the water. Yard and boom clashing.
Yet the great ship sails unconcerned.
But the wind drags her sail deep in-
to water, her bow plunging into the
second depth, wedges into the rocks
of the sea floor. "Now listen then: In
light of this fair day, we die. Now all
of us forever have been ended. Pre-
pare to wear your patterned cloths,
cover your faces with black paint:
it's a bad thing, death without color!"
Lightning is at both ends and, at its

center: the face of day. Bracelets of
conch shell, he dons them both, and
now the hero diving down. Shoulders
the stem of The-Greatest-Prow: slow-
ly it rises—The-Greatest-Prow once
more a floating thing. Speeding over
the waters in a race to war, they row
out to the shallows of Rotuma. The sea
is but another sky inverted—sail-
ing is flying before the days of flight.

from *“The Bride of the Great Son of Kone”*

New Caledonia

She walked for days in search
of a new home, arriving Kone
as the sun went down. Stood
at the heading of a path. The
master of that place is at his
chieftain's house, sweeping
the ground (according as the
grasses grow light or dark)
with no hushed aim in mind.
He sees the woman leaning
against a tree, shimmering
fresh, the light declining, a
sun-breeze rivering her hair,
bringing the curls down on
her forehead so that her bu-
sy hands work ceaselessly to
liberate her eyes & the snow
bracelets round those wrists
exhibit firm and lovely skin.
Chief anchored speechless.
“Where is one from?” man
asks. She tells her story. He
takes her to his mother; she
lives there several days. The
tribe's brought in to build a
house, lay out some fields &
gardens. These given her, &
more. Now an adoption, then
a marriage.

*“The god of set purpose sang the finest of song
through the meanest of poets”*

I am Tynnichus, the Chalcidean,
who Socrates says
never wrote a poem worth mention—
but for one, which is our finest.
(It is, he says, “in everyone’s mouth.”)

I am, he says, like a bee winging the air
and like an iron ring.
I am only words:
The winged fillets of “magnet” Gods.

My mind was taken away.
I was out of my wits.
I am very happy I need not apologize
for any improperly fanciful fits.

Yet, I am still stupid and unable
and can’t remember the poem Socrates favors.

Did I write about Athens?
I seem to remember soldiers.
My honeyed tongue must have touched on
the nobility of beauty and justice.

My words certainly were instructive.
Perhaps I wrote on love’s glory.
Oh, that would be grand!
I could go to the grave without shame
after such lust and pedagogy!

The gods, too, must have figured,
as it's true, dear Socrates,
the gods of set purpose
took over this imbecile mouth.

But I am this possibility
of not properly speaking.
This great aridity of divinity,
this fabulousness of a stricken dumbness.

And I am what any mouth chokes on,
an alien deepness unspeaking. I am the margin
and the center, the contradictory "case."
I am not so unwise, Socrates, to not see
that my speech undoes thee; your
conversation would never include me.
I'd ionize words, make them clean from
your unhappy sovereignty.

And I am in everyone's mouth as
the voice of no one. I am tintinabulating
Tynnichus. The voice is resonant
and takes away your throat, your ears.

after Plato's Ion

Record of a Consummation

TRANSLATED FROM THE KOREAN BY HEINZ INSU FENKL
AND WALTER K. LEW

I.

Twenty-three years old—March—coughed-up blood. The beard I had cultivated so carefully for six months I trimmed off with a razor one day, leaving just a butterfly under my nose. And with my packets of Chinese medicine prepared, I went to a secluded hot spring called B, which had just opened. And it would have been good just to die there.

But my yet unfurled youth grabbed hold of the medicine crock and prolonged things with a big fuss about “Saving my life”—there was nothing I could do about it. Every night, I brooded resentfully under the cold lamplight of the inn.

Unable to resist for more than three days, I had the old innkeeper lead me out to the house where I’d heard the sound of drums at night. And that’s where I met Keumhong.

“How old are you?”

Almost as ripe as a green chili pepper, the pungent girl was quite fierce. Sixteen? I was thinking nineteen at most, when she said,

“I’m twenty-one.”

“What about my age, how old do I look?”

“I don’t know—forty? Thirty-nine?”

I just went, *Hnnngh!* and, sitting down with my arms stiffly folded in front of me, tried to act more and more dignified. We parted without incident that night, but—

The next day Mr. K the artist came. He’s a friend I play around with, so to speak. I had no choice but to shave off the mustache dangling and drifting like a butterfly under my nose. At sunset, we hurried off to see Keumhong.

“You look like a man I’ve met somewhere.”

“The gentleman with the mustache who came here last night? I’m none other than his son, you know, even our voices are the same, right?” I said, trying my wit. After a while the party broke up and, stepping down into the courtyard, I whispered into K’s ear:

“What do you think? Nice, right? Why don’t you try playing around once?”

“Forget it—you try.”

“Either way, let’s haul her back to the inn and decide by rock-paper-scissors.”

“Good idea.”

But since K side-stepped the affair by pretending to go out to the latrine, I won Keumhong by default. That night she didn’t hide the fact that she had once borne a child.

“When?”

“I was sixteen when I put up my hair, seventeen when I had the baby.”

“A son?”

“Daughter.”

“Where is she?”

“She died in her first year.”

I put aside the medicine that had been prepared for me and became completely immersed in making love to Keumhong. This may sound awful, but the power of her love put an end to my bloody coughing and so—

I never left tips for Keumhong. Why? Because night and day either she was in my room or I was in hers—

Instead—

I advised her of the philandery of Mr. Wu, who had studied in France. As I suggested, Keumhong went to a “private

bathhouse” with him. This bathhouse was a rather obscene facility. But when I saw Mr. Wu’s shoes lined up next to Keumhong’s on the doorstep of the obscene facility, I didn’t feel bad.

I also recommended her to a lawyer named C who was staying in the room next to mine. C was so inspired by my ardor that he couldn’t help but burgle into Keumhong’s room himself.

But my beloved Keumhong was always with me. And sometimes she would play the coquette, showing off to me the many ten-won notes she had received from Wu, C, and the like.

But then the first anniversary memorial of my uncle’s death forced me to return to Seoul. Keumhong and I searched out a pleasant spot under fully-blown peach blossoms where a mineral spring bubbled past a pavilion, and we enjoyed a day of wistful parting there. At the bus stop I pressed a ten-won note into her hand. Saying she would use it to reclaim a watch she had pawned, she burst into tears.

2.

Keumhong became my wife and we loved each other completely. We agreed not to ask each other about bygone times. The past! There was no reason to be concerned about my past, and so one could say it was the same as promising not to ask about hers.

Keumhong was barely twenty-one, but she was better than a woman of thirty-one. She was better than a thirty-one-year-old woman, but to me she looked like a seventeen-year-old girl, and to Keumhong I looked like a forty-year-old man

when I was really only twenty-three, and what's more, because I was a little screwy, I seemed like a teenager. In the whole world, there was no couple as wonderfully cute and cuddly as we were.

Idle time—

A year passed, and in August, that convulsive time that's too late for summer and too early for fall—

A nostalgia for bygone days came over Keumhong.

Since I just lay around sleeping all day and night, I was boring as far as she was concerned. So she went out and met people who weren't boring, and she had fun doing things that didn't bore her, and when she came back—

Well, it wouldn't be too much to say that her constricted lifestyle began to make progress in leaps and bounds, off into her nostalgia.

Except this time she didn't show off to me. Not only that, she hid things.

It must have been that Keumhong found the whole business entirely unbecoming of her. What was there to hide? Hiding nothing would have been fine. Even bragging would have been fine.

I didn't say a word. To help her entertain more conveniently, I sometimes went and slept at Mr. P's house. I remember now that P said he pitied me.

And it's not that I didn't think that way myself. I mean, a man's wife is supposed to guard her virtue!

"Keumhong kind-heartedly committed adultery in order to wake me out of my indolent life" is how I want to interpret things, positively. But for that woman to attempt a pretense of wifely decorum, so abundant in this world, was, shall we say, her one and only fault.

Since she wanted to make a placard of her fake chastity, I of course went out more frequently, and to facilitate Keumhong's enterprise, I even left my room wide open for her. But even under such conditions, time flows by.

One day without any justification, I got a terrible beating from Keumhong. I went out crying from the pain and couldn't come back for three days. Keumhong was too scary.

When I returned on the fourth day, she had gone away, leaving a dirty sock in the unheated corner of the room.

Several friends came and consoled me, now pathetically deserted, with unpleasant gossip about Keumhong, but I found their interest entirely incomprehensible.

Someone had seen Keumhong and a man boarding a bus and heading off to faraway Mt. Kwanak in Kwacheon, but if that's really the case, the guy was apparently afraid I would come after him and raise a ruckus, so he must have been quite a coward.

3.

I decided to renounce humanity temporarily, and since I didn't make use of memory's nimble skills, after two months I clean forgot even the three characters of Keumhong's name. One day during this suspended period, she divined an auspicious time and came back to me like a returned letter. I was shocked.

Keumhong looked so drastically emaciated that it was very sad. Without rebuking her, I ordered some beer, fish crackers and beef rice soup for us, and tried to comfort her. Keumhong didn't throw an angry fit like she used to, but wept as she recriminated me. I couldn't help but start crying myself.

“But it’s too late. At least we had two months together, didn’t we? Let’s break up, hmm?”

“Then what will happen to me, hmm?”

“Get married if you find the right man, hmm?”

“Then will you get married, too? Hmm?”

Perhaps even when breaking up, she wanted to leave me some consolation. This is the style in which I separated from Keumhong. When she left, she gave me a pillow as a present.

But about this pillow—

It was a pillow for two. Even though I didn’t want it, she repeatedly forced it upon me, and for two weeks I tried my head on it alone. But the pillow was too long. Not only that, the strange smell of someone else’s hair grease disturbed my sleep.

One day I jotted off a note to Keumhong. “I’m terribly sick and bedridden, come quickly,” it said.

When she came to see me I really was pitiful. It must have seemed that, if left alone, I would starve to death in a few days. She rolled up her sleeves and said that, starting that day, she would go out and earn the money to feed me and keep me alive.

“O—K—”¹

It was heaven on earth—though the day itself was a bit chilly. I was, however, too lazy to sneeze.

Two months like this? No, it must have been at least five. Keumhong suddenly left again.

After about a month of waiting for Keumhong to get *homesick*² I got sick of waiting and threw together our dishes and household things, sold them all, and went back “home” for the first time in 21 years.

When I returned, our house was in ruins. Yi Sang, unworthy

¹ Yi Sang transcribes here into Korean the English word “Okay” (or “O.K.”).

² The English word “homesick” is transcribed here into Korean.

son, had turned the decrepit household into a patch of weeds and mugwort. During those roughly two years—

All of a sudden I too had become decrepit. I had consumed 27 years.

That all women in the world have some whorish element in them, I alone am firmly convinced. Nevertheless, when handing silver over to a prostitute I never once thought of her as one. This may seem like a theory disproven by my life with Keumhong, but it is in fact true.

4.

I penned a few short stories and a few lines of verse, doubling the humiliation of my decomposing mind and body. On top of this, it had gotten to the point where it was too hard for me to survive in this land. Anyway, to put it nicely, I had to go into exile.

Where shall I go? I bragged to everyone I met that I was going to Tokyo. Not only that, I told some friends I was going to study electrical engineering, and when I met my school teacher I said I intended to investigate the printing of high-quality limited editions; to close friends I said I was going to master five foreign languages, and when things got serious, I even shot my mouth off about planning to study law *Bang!* Most of my friends seemed to fall for it. But there were a few who didn't believe my false advertising. At any rate, it was a fact that Yi Sang, now a pauper with forever empty, flapping pockets, wasn't beyond firing off a few last blanks.

One day as I continued to shoot blanks as usual while drinking with some friends, a man tapped me on the shoulder. He was somebody known as "Kim-san."

“Kim-san (Yi Sang is really Kim-san, too³), it has been quite a while. Say, Kim-san, there’s someone who would definitely like to meet with you once. How about it, Kim-san?”

“Who is it? A man? A woman?”

“Like they say, if it’s a woman, isn’t it more fun?”

“A woman?”

“Kim-san, it’s your old wife.”

In other words, Keumhong had shown up in Seoul. If she’s here, she’s here—but why was she looking for me?

I got Keumhong’s address from Kim-san and vacillated about what to do. The address was her younger sister Ilshim’s house.

Finally having made up my mind to meet her, I found Ilshim’s house, and:

“I heard your sister’s here.”

“Oh—Brother-in-law, I thought you had passed away! Well, it’s about time you showed up. Please come in.”

Keumhong was still haggard. The exhaustion from her battles on life’s front-line shone in her face.

“I came to Seoul because I missed you, you bastard. What else would I come to Seoul for?”

“So didn’t I come to see you, too?”

“I heard you got married.”

“Hey, I don’t want to hear that sour note.”

“Then, you mean you didn’t?”

“Right.”

Immediately, a wooden pillow came flying at my face. Just as in the past, I showed her my ungainly grin.

A wine table was brought in. I had a cup and Keumhong had a cup. I sang a verse in the northwestern style and she sang a verse from the southwest.

The night was already deep and the consummation of our

³ Yi Sang’s given name was Kim Haegyeong. In Japanese, “-san” is routinely added to a person’s name to mean something like Miss, Mrs., or Mr.

talk was that this would be our final separation in life. Beating the small table *ttak, ttak* with silver chopsticks, Keumhong sings a wistful song I have never heard before:

“Cheating is dreaming, cheated is dreaming, winding, wending, wandering world, set your shadowy heart on fire, *unnh, unnh!*”

“She combs her hair”

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY ANDREW RATHMANN

She combs her hair like the hair of a corpse:
she carries the blue shard under her blouse.

She wears her piece of the world on a string.
She knows the words, but she only grins.

She mixes her smile with wine in a glass:
you'll have to drink it to live in this place.

You're the image the shard will show,
if she ever contemplates life here below.

Crystal

You won't find your mouth on my lips.
There's no stranger at the gate,
no tears in the eye.

Seven nights higher
 red found its way to red.
Seven hearts deeper
 a hand banged on the gate.
Seven roses later
 the fountain rustled.

Danger: Shipwreck Ahead

TRANSLATED FROM THE PORTUGUESE BY CHRIS DANIELS

This page, for instance,
wasn't made to be read.

It was made to be pallid,
a merely stolen Iliad,
a thing kept quiet,
a leaf long fallen
going back to its branch.

It was made to be beach,
Andromeda, maybe, Antarctica,
Himalaya, sensed syllable,
it was made to be ultimate,
something yet unmade.

Words brought from afar
by the waters of the Nile,
one day this page, papyrus,
will have to be translated
into symbol, Sanskrit,
into every Indian's dialect,
will have to say good day
just to what's murmured at the ear,
will have to be rough stone
where someone drops the glass.
Isn't that how life is?

Beyond Soul (A Gram Later)

My far-off heart's going on again.
It's waving. It wants to come back.

On my chest, a bronze plaque:

NOT HIRING, NO VACANCY.

What good's that little thing?
It won't stop beating.

It's acting like a clock
that's gone totally insane.

Who needs that weepy gadget?—
I'm fine, far as I can see,
and emptiness outside flows
smoothly into me.

More or Less on Time

Sentenced to be precise,
if I could just be a vague
will-o-wisp over a lake,
equally deceptive
to flier, swimmer, liar,
mosquito, frog, snake.

Sentenced, to be precise,
to a time so refined,
a time so timeless
it might as well be space,
myself, surprisingly precise,
t-square, measure, compass,
what I don't want wanting.

Invernacular

This language isn't mine.
It's plain as day.
When meaning goes away,
a word stays behind.
Maybe I'm just lying.
Or am I lying truth?
So I say myself—just,
Maybe—I could barely say.
This isn't my tongue.
The language I speak mutes
a distant song,
the voice, beyond, not a word.
The dialect you utilize
on the left bank of the phrase,
that's the speech that lusofies
me, half, maybe, inside.

“the glorious charger”

the glorious charger
sees the shadow of the lash
and runs, chevaline splendor
in labyrinths of crine
incited by the wind
annuls chimera space
consuming time
pyre incinerates heroes
there were pulsions of sky
and avidity over the sea
cerulean polar plains
jaguar-hide sky
and zodiacal slides
dolorous pelagic plains
where fish graze
and the octopus-knot slaughters the sun
Here the fable founders
in wave-tossed nausea
wounds its hooves against the stars
and pierced by the blades
of horoscopic beasts
becomes a little turbid
vigil falls into dream,
lucid and sudden—: a martyr
Remain on earth, horse
eye full of stars
straw body of the waves
and the heart in the breast
made a slumbering top!

“the wind’s a god too”

the wind’s a god too
seen only in his effect
panicking trees
banners
trembling water
a boat sailing off

he teaches me
to suffer out of sight
to silently enjoy
my own passing
never the same
place twice

to that god who lifts
the dust of the road
and leads it off to fly
i consecrate this sigh

may he raise it well
till it becomes a gale

Or, I Will not Live!

TRANSLATED FROM THE PERSIAN BY FATEMEH KESHAVERZ

If there was a dreamer
Bold enough
To desire the nameless jewel of your beauty,
What would he purchase it with?
The palm of the earth holds nothing that is not yours.
The one who gives in to separation and still lives
Deserves the wretchedness he lives through,
But do not be fair,
Do not give him what he deserves,
For that will not be you.
With every breath I spread my heart and my soul beneath
your feet,
What is the good of the soul that is not the dust on which
you walk?
Your sky is blue,
Auspicious to all who soar up high.
Misery is the lonely wretched bird
that is not permitted in that sky.
Dose the one drowned in accidental waves of misfortune
not swim to the safety of being your friend?
Why should there be a limit to praising you?
or to those living only to give that praise?
Specks of dust in the air dance the glory of your name.
I simply repeat what Nizami wrote long before I spoke:
“Do not desert me! For I will not live to see what happens
next!”

The Garden that Lives in Your Greenness

Softly, like the soul, you move in the core of my being
Gracious, like a cypress, you stand to keep my garden green!
Leave if you must! But not without me.
You do not think I will live without a soul?
You do not think my eyes will see
without the brightness of your smile, in the black hole that is your
absence?
Tearing the seven skies open, crossing the seven stormy seas
Heroes do these in legends, in tales that are not true.
What will I not do if you look at me once, the way lovers look at
one another?
And see that I am bewildered beyond words.

You came and all crumbled, wickedness and faith submitted to my
will,
Seeing you became the faith, the sole object of worship.
No shape, no form, no food, no sleep! How much freer can one
desire to be?
O my Joseph! Walk in through that door, smiling, one more time!

With your kindness I grew gentle, so subtle I could not sense my
own self
Free of harsh thoughts, I traveled within far and wide
Till the most concealed chamber of my being
opened before my very eyes
There you sat quietly
wearing the body, and the soul I thought was mine!

Now you are looking beyond where I sit.
Do you see the flowers bursting out of their ragged clothes,
dancing as they bloom in your love?

Do you see the narcissus drunken and sleepy-eyed?
And the branches pregnant with abundance, bustling with life?
No walls surround the garden that you gave me,
The garden that lives in your greenness.

Philosophia

I don't know much
and it's nonsense
to talk about what
I don't know.

If my poems are any good
I'll be remembered
for what I already am
but if they're bad
why should I continue?

If men had two lives
one for fun and games
and the other for work
perhaps we could sweat first
get the goodies later.

But since 'tain't so
and we've got one mix
for a short time
how can we separate
what's fun from what's not?

I suppose we forget
that we don't live forever
just this short time
to muddle through.

Crime And Punishment

A simple yearning in him asks martyrdom of everyone, because everyone can suffer, you can, and if you cannot receive it, this martyrdom within one, it becomes one with the majority that has thrown itself from or into all probable windows. And if the slender interior of a girl starts to feel sad for him, it is obviously very dangerous for him, for I saw that small pretty bird had stolen the insight into his inner workings, and then finished, becalmed. In the end, the twisted wick of the candlestick had flickered for a long instant, light slightly tilting in across the estrangements. Upon entering, it was a level to him, a drop of true tension on the sheets, dripped where it had penetrated the innermost. It was fully, purely there during one moment of unalloyed animal joy. But with this one moment he broke quietly, much like a silent, slight storm hovering suddenly above the desk.

Awe and Adornment

TRANSLATED FROM HEBREW BY PETER COLE

Awe and Adornment	for Life Everlasting;
Brilliance and Blessing	for Life Everlasting;
Counsel and Crown	for Life Everlasting;
Daring and Dread	for Life Everlasting;
Ease and Endurance	for Life Everlasting;
Firmness and Faith	for Life Everlasting;
Grandeur and Glory	for Life Everlasting;
Honor and Hymn	for Life Everlasting;
Idea and Intention	for Life Everlasting;
Justice and Joy	for Life Everlasting;
Knowledge and Kingdom	for Life Everlasting;
Learning and Luster	for Life Everlasting;
Modesty and Mystery	for Life Everlasting;
Nobility and Number	for Life Everlasting;
Oneness and Order	for Life Everlasting;
Purity and Pride	for Life Everlasting;
Quality and Quintessence	for Life Everlasting;
Rule and Redemption	for Life Everlasting;
Splendor and Song	for Life Everlasting;
Triumph and Tribute	for Life Everlasting;
Understanding and Uplift	for Life Everlasting;
Valor and Vision	for Life Everlasting;
Wonder and Wisdom	for Life Everlasting;
Exultation and Expression	for Life Everlasting;
Yearning and Yielding	for Life Everlasting;
Zenith and Zeal	for Life Everlasting.

Hymn of Divine Glory

I offer up songs
and weave these hymns—
 for you, Lord,
my soul now yearns:

it yearns for the shadow
and shelter of your power,
 to know the secret
of your mystery's plan.

Whenever I speak
of your glory and honor,
 my heart moans
and sighs for your love.

Therefore I praise
your glorious splendor,
 and honor your name
with songs of love.

I will tell of your glory
though I have not seen you—
 name and compare you,
whom I have not known.

*

Through your prophet's word
and your servant's council,
 you have given your glory's
resplendence form—

they limned your greatness
and strength in creations
 in accord with the force
of your wondrous cause.

You were drawn in words
but not as you are,
 depicted in light
of what you have done;

in limitless visions
your likeness was cast,
 but through all comparison
you are One.

They saw in you youth
and then old age—
 your hair was black,
and then it was gray,

in judgment age,
and in battle youth,
 as a man of war
whose hand held sway.

On his head he set
salvation's helmet,
 his arm of right
and holiness prevailed,

with the dew of light
his locks were filled—
 with splintered drops
of night, his curls.

I adorn him as he
takes delight in me—
 he will be a crown
of splendor for me;

like choice gold
is the glow of his head—
 engraved on his brow
is his name and glory.

In majesty's splendor,
for glory and honor,
 for him his people
fashioned a crown;

the plaits of his hair
are like those of youth,
 his black and twisting
locks flow down.

Righteousness is
his majesty's splendor—
 may it always be set
as his highest joy—

and his treasured nation
in his hand is resplendence,
 a royal miter
of beauty and awe.

He bore them and then
adorned them with grace;
 in his sight they were precious
and he brought them glory.

His glory is upon me,
and mine upon him;
 he is near to me
whenever I call him.

He comes out of Edom,
ruddy and bright—
 from treading the winepress
his robes are red;

to the meek one he showed
the phylacteries' tie—
 an image of God
at the back of his head.

He delights in his people
and adorns the humble,
 dwelling in praises
and among them raised.

Your word's inception
is truth as it calls—
 so seek out a people
who seek you in faith,

and let the mass
of my hymns ascend,
 and my song approach
your palace's entrance.

May these praises I offer
be a crown to your station,
 as my prayers to you
like incense rise—

may the song of the poor
have the worth in your eyes
 of the praises sung
by the offering priests;

may my blessing come near
to you who provides,
 who in righteousness brings
on action and birth;

may you receive my words
as the finest fragrance
 and before them nod
your head in return;

and may my musing
be sweet to your ear,
 as my soul for you,
my Lord, now yearns.

Incantation against Lilith

Veiled in velvet, are you here?

Leave off, leave off:

You shall not enter,
you shall not withdraw.

It is neither yours nor your share.

Return Return:

The sea is swelling;

its waves are calling.

I hold to the holy portion—

I am held in the holiness of the king.

Hymn for the Second Sabbath Meal

*Prepare the feast
of perfect faith,
the delight of the holy king.
Prepare the feast of the king.*

*This is the feast
of the Ancient Eminence;
the Impatient One and Field of Apples
assemble with Him for the feast.*

*

I've arranged this meal
of the Sabbath morning
and call in it now
to the Ancient Eminence,

that he cast his light
through the Sanctification,
with fine wine
which gladdens the soul.

May He send us goodness
so we see His worthiness;
may he show us His secret
in a whisper expressed,

disclosing the meaning
of the twelve loaves—
one letter of His Name
doubled and thin,

and the heavenly ravel
all lives within.
May the power increase
so she reaches His head.

Rejoice, you reapers,
aloud and give voice—
and utter a word
sweet as nectar—

before the Lord
of all worlds,
in veiled words
you'll speak new things

to adorn the table
with the mystery's treasure,
which is hidden and deep,
and not to be uttered.

These words, then,
will be woven as heaven
with new skies—
and so that sun's

oil of anointing
will flow on high,
and He'll turn to His partner
who has been alone.

I wash my hands
with a single vessel
for the other side
which is insubstantial.

With three I call
through the cup of the blessing
to the cause of causes,
the Holy of Old.

The Blessing

Through you will the blessing be brought to Israel,
through the secret of the valley of Ishmael,
for the redeemer has come to restore
through the secret of the valley of Ishmael.

He said: My Lord has heard
his servant who has served—
he, who within him is found
through the secret of the valley of Ishmael.

The acronym holds redemption;
for the jubilee year is his foundation;
he sanctified what was profane
through the secret of the valley of Ishmael.

Zvi, our teacher, is the redeemer;
he established the upper splendor
in primordial space where she takes shelter
through the secret of the valley of Ishmael.

In a certain town fell the letter tet,
where no one is dead, this is Truth;
all that is good within it exists
through the secret of the valley of Ishmael.

These things are seen as though through a veil,
and they are most abstruse as well,
but in them I have found the real
through the secret of the valley of Ishmael.

In the forest of deep grief

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY GEOFFREY O'BRIEN

In the forest of deep grief
walking alone one day
I happened on the goddess of love
and she called to me, and asked where I was going.
I answered that by evil chance
I was long since exiled to these woods
and could truly call myself
the lost man who doesn't know where he's going.

Her smile was humble
as she answered, "Friend, if I knew
how you got in such trouble
I'd help any way I can.
A while ago I set your heart on the right path
for every pleasure, I don't know who lured you from it.
It hurts me now to see that you've become
the lost man who doesn't know where he's going."

"Alas," I said, "sovereign princess,
you know my case, do I have to tell you?
Death did it, who is rough to everyone,
Death has taken from me her I loved
and who had everything I hoped for
and who guided me. Alive,
she lived with me so well that I was never
the lost man who doesn't know where he's going.

I'm blind, I don't know where I should go.
With my stick, so I don't trip,
I wander tapping out a path here and there.
Pity me then, that am thus forced to become
the lost man who doesn't know where he's going."

The Young Maid

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY PETER O'LEARY

I

At the fountain, when it's dawning
You can see her standing spellbound
Drawing water, when it's dawning.
Buckets up then going down.

In the beechtrees jackdaws flutter—
She appears as if a shadow.
Her yellow hair is all aflutter;
Courtyard rats begin to chitter.

Coaxed back now from endless ruin
She does lower dazzled eyelids.
Grasses bend in arid ruin
To her footfall's heavy treads.

2

Quiet shifting in the chamber—
Manor long in desolation.
In the lilacs by the chamber
A blackbird sings its lamentation.

Silver image in the mirror
Appearing foreign in the twilight,
Fading paler in the mirror
Graying what was once so bright.

A boy sings dreamlike in the darkness.
She freezes from a shuddering pain.
Red drops spatter through the darkness.
At the door the south wind strains.

3

Nights above the barren meadows
She is tossed in fever dreams.
The wind is sullen in the meadows
The moon is strewing with its beams.

The stars are all etiolated,
Exhausted, without any mirth.
Her cheeks grow waxy, etiolated.
Foulness shivers on the earth.

The pipe smokes sadly in the pool
And she freezes in a cower.
There crows a cock. Beyond the pool
Hard and gray the morning glowers.

4

In the smithy rings the hammer
And she flits about the door.
Glowing red he swings the hammer
Lifeless she appears all over.

As in a dream she's hearing laughter.
She stumbles into the smithy's shed
Turning shy before his laughter
So like the hammer hard and rude.

The room explodes with brightened sparkles
And by helpless gestures bound
She snatches wildly after sparkles
And tumbles dirtied to the ground.

5

Stretched out slender in her bed
She wakes on sweetened fright impaled
And sees the way her filthy bed
In streaming golden light is veiled.

Jasmine blossoms at the window
And the blue in the sky grows thin.
Sometimes winds bear on the window
The chimes of the clock within.

Shadows glide across the pillow.
The noontide hour does not bend.
Breathing hard into her pillow,
Her mouth appears an open wound.

Evenings hung with bloody linens,
Clouds that swag the muted woods,
Sparrows quarreling. Linens
Hide it all in blackened shrouds.

She lays completely white in darkness.
Under the roof a coo breathes out.
As flies will swarm a corpse the darkness
Overwhelms her open mouth.

Dreamlike sounds come from the village—
A fiddle starts; everyone dances;
A hovering face floats through the village;
Her hair is drifting through the branches.

The Mask

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY JEREMY BILES

Among the enigmas proposed to each of us by a brief life, that which is associated with the presence of masks is perhaps most charged with trouble and meaning. Nothing is human in the unintelligible universe outside of naked faces, which are the only open windows in a chaos of strange or hostile appearances. Man only escapes his insupportable solitude at the moment when the face of one of his fellow men emerges from the void of all the rest. But the mask returns him to a more redoubtable solitude: because its presence signifies that even that which usually reassures us is suddenly charged by an obscure will to terror when what is human is masked—and nothing remains but animality and death.

The masquerade can be reduced to the comedy that men play. This means that reflection and habit have caused masks to lose the power of "nocturnal terror" which had at first belonged to them. However, this degradation is never such that the ancient terror could no longer be representable. For each of us, under a puerile form, the terrifying sense of a mask still lives in an obscure region of the consciousness. It is natural that this feeling is hidden to the degree that the development of intelligence humanizes the world by pronouncing its forms foreseeable. But the dark chaos which makes up the deep underside of infantile representations is itself a representation no more deserving of scorn than the civilized universe of books. The mask still possesses the power to appear in the threshold of this serene and reassuring world of boredom like an obscure incarnation of chaos.

If I now attempt to visualize the mask, letting myself go all the way to the point of my puerile naivete—something done not by feigning, but with a strength sustained by a sentiment of profound exaltation—I can recall in this presence much more than the simple hostility of chaos. Because THE MASK IS CHAOS MADE FLESH. It is present before me as a likeness, a fellow man, and this likeness, which stares at me, has taken into itself the figure of my own death: by this presence chaos is no longer a foreign nature to man, but is man himself animating with his pain and joy that which destroys him, man hurled down into the possession of this chaos which is his destruction and decay, man possessed by a demon, incarnating the intention of nature—to make him die and rot. That which is unceasingly communicated from face to face is also precious to human life, as reassuring as light. But when communication is definitively broken by a brutal decision, when the mask returns the face to the night, man is nothing more to himself than hostile nature, and hostile nature is animated in its entirety by the unpredictable passion of the masked man.

There is no longer any representation opposed to that of science. While science makes of every possible appearance a reality conforming to the reason of man, the mask no less resolutely confuses the world and the living man, but it makes of a man's presence in the world an expression of savage nature at the same time that it animates the spheres of the sky and the earth with a suffering or cheerfully cruel life. The mask in truth divinizes rather than humanizes the world. Because the presence that it introduces is no longer the reassuring presence of the sage: a divine force issues from the

depths of natural animality and is evident when it suddenly erupts. The norms and rules, the laws of social life or of nature, subjugate neither the mask nor the god. Violence, animality, and the “antisociality” of these sacred figures are marked as strongly as the goodness or the intellectual and social character of an integral God of morality and reason. But the savage destruction of human normality—which properly takes part in divine nature—is revealed by the animal and by the mask; it is hidden in the venerable image to which the scorn of Pascal gave the name “God of philosophers.”

That which is communicated by way of open faces is the reassuring stability of order, founded on the serene surface of the ground between men. But when the face is closed and covered by a mask, it no longer participates in stability or the ground. The mask communicates incertitude and the menace of unexpected changes, unforeseeable and as insupportable as death. Its irruption liberates that which had been enchained for the maintenance of stability and order. If one wants to re-present rigorously this mortal opposition of night and day, one must take leave of the elements that science envisages. Science is always conducted according to results which can be foreseen and repeated without end: through this, these results acquire the character of substance and independence from time. It is always possible to reproduce the fall of a body and to predict its acceleration. It is, on the contrary, impossible to inscribe outside of time a change such as death that takes place once and for all. The fall of bodies has the character of eternity, or can at least pretend to have it; the death of such a being, on the contrary, exposes the character of time, in which each moment rejects to nothingness the one which preceded

it. Time does not destroy the fall of bodies which remains foreign to it; but it destroys the mortal beings which are in its possession. Now the open and “communicative” face causes between one man and another this consciousness that human life is located in a social order as substantial, as true, as the eternal fall of solid bodies: it is the face of homo sapiens in self-assured possession of its science. But a mask suffices to throw this homo sapiens back into a world of which he knows nothing, because it has the nature of time, with its violent and unforeseeable changes. Time causes old man Eternity to enter into the chaos ceaselessly being born from its night. Time is incarnated in the loving man, young and masked. Torrential life sends homo sapiens fleeing to the platitudes of scholarly treatises; homo tragicus rages alone in the noise of annihilation and the mortal destruction of a history of which nothing is known—a history of which nothing can be known but a past forever buried, forever vain.

Insofar as it is consciousness, life is more a question than a response. What is nature? the world? and what is time, which projects them in its unappeasable fall? And what of this man himself, whose own life he interrogates? The affirmations that successive centuries have given in response have been accumulated and constructed, and their vain work long ago brought about the disappearance of the ancient form of an enigma that still lives and pursues its drunken gait: the charged insolence of the mask gave way to tranquil skepticism. The collapsed void follows after the incarnation of savage drunkenness accomplishing the tragic destiny of man. Puerile representations made of each nocturnal form a frightening mirror of this insoluble enigma, the mortal being confronting himself: but wisdom displaced the illusory games of the

night—in order to substitute for them the conventions of the day in the serene face. He alone is happy who, beneath the full sun, recovers this intimate point of total obscurity from which a great storm rises anew. Happy is he who, disgusted by empty and satisfied faces, decides to cover himself with a mask: he will rediscover first the stormy drunkenness of all that which dances to death on the cataract of time. He will perceive that the responses were only like nibbled bones, thrown to the dogs as the proper formulas for maintaining the peaceful enslavement of work. His joy will then be reborn from the nocturnal terror of his childhood, because the noise of the night where he sinks down intoxicates him no less profoundly than a desire for nudity.

Caroline Tolton provided help with this translation

Tenth Pythian Ode

TRANSLATED FROM THE GREEK BY K.M. KOENIGS

Blessed, Lacedaimon!
Fortunate, Thessaly: the progeny of Heracles alone
—a forefather matchless in contest—rules both.
Is this boast untimely? Certainly Pytho
invokes me, and Pelinna,
and Aleus' sons, who wish me, for Hippocleas,
to lead the splendid male chorus in acclaim.

Fruits of victory he's tasted:
a throng of neighbors heard the valley of Parnassus
proclaim him best in boys' double run.
Apollo, a man's final achievement and first attempt
are made more dynamic when divinity drives him.
He attained this win with help of your counsels;
yet the son has followed the father's tracks:

twice triumphant at Olympia in the war-ready
wares of Ares,
Phricias also raced to a stadion wreath
in the deep meadow under craggy Cirrha.
May meet fortune in march of time
augment their stately wealth.

Of the splendours of Hellas they hold
no small share; let not envious vengeance from the gods
visit them. A god alone
enjoys ever-quiet heart, but blessed indeed
the man whose praise is widely sung,
who with winning limbs or deftness afoot
takes top prizes by daring and might

and living still sees his son
in turn wearing Pythian crowns.
Never will he scale the red summit of the skies;
yet toward such vain shores as we
mortal men would aspire, he sails the utmost
course. Not over land nor sea seek to find
the wondrous way to the Hyperboreans.

Once man-leading Perseus feasted with them,
entering their homes,
attending as they sent perfect tribute of asses
to deity. In these most delightful rites
Apollo takes highest pleasure
and smiles seeing the raging lust of the beasts.

The Muse stands not outside
their practiced ways: singing circles of virgins
are stirred to dance by high-sounding lyre and flute,
their hair wound with golden laurel,
gaily they join the feast.
Neither disease nor wasting age sits
with this hallowed race: far from stress and strife

they dwell, free
from overjust Nemesis. Braced by his bold heart
Danæ's son once went—Athene his guide—
to this land of privileged people. He slew
Medusa, bearing away her head
seething with serpent locks—a stony death
for the schemers of Seriphus. Not for me to wonder

at the workings of the gods:
this is not beyond belief.
—But let fall the oar, quickly fix anchor
frontship to sea floor, safeguard from jutting rock.
The most brilliant of praise poems rushes
like the honeybee, notion to notion.

While Ephyrians sow my sweet ode
along the Peneus, I wish
to make Hippocleas greater still with songs,
a wonder to friends as well as elders,
a marvel for young maidens.
Different desires rule different hearts.

Each man strives toward something; when he
seizes it let him hold tight his hardsought gain.
Scanning thought cannot part the clouds of the coming year.
I've trusted the fond fellowship of
Thorax, busy on my behalf, who
harnessed this four-horsed chariot of the Muses
friend to a friend, guide to a guide, graciously.

As gold is proven true by touchstone,
so too the righteous mind.
I shall commend his worthy brothers
who carry Thessalian custom to new heights, widening
its fame: highborn men inherit from their fathers
the noble piloting of states.

from *souljam*

TRANSLATED FROM THE TURKISH BY MURAT NEMET-NEJAT

forty-five

even if the whole house moves, a few curtains and laces
must linger, till the axis is broken
snapping into the nocturnal white noise consciousness of
 memory's
all...

forty-six

a blur of moans.

let my heart beat like a rose
running fast from the scene

forty-seven

Chrysler in a sudden
act
of a musical rudderless
shudder
sinking through

the darker hued water -
black and white

inkar
t -
(*murder*
calligrams),

carrying janet leigh's body
in the trunk

body/trunk, *psychotic*

you are carrying the body in the body / the definition
of obsession.

forty-eight

the veiled, the one differentiated from the others, whose being
kissed sets off sirens, what is his fate?

tutorial inspires erotic capture.

whispers of bravo breathe on and brush the innocent heart.
the novice's merit badge nicks blood most often.

worm burrowing into island pantry

forty-nine

i realize. some of us never spawned street names.

i realize. some of us never spawned nick names.

fifty

the blue of the dome disappeared

tonight the path of my angels will track
through a blind
alley.

(backed up eyelashes thwart
the unfolding of the door)

fifty-three

rain, brain. awesome harmony, a giant tumor
of knee jerk reactions. to insinuate into this tumor:
to be cross-examined by a bureaucracy

fifty-four

my soul the bribe given my body

fifty-five

seeing birds passing over you
if i could break their wings

is there any
lover of whose *hands hands only* statues are made,
oh, thine incorporeal hands!

fifty-six

mine gaseous hands.

fifty-seven

no other state, our doomed authority.

frost on your smoky face

fifty-eight

but in our room of the toys, dreams are shaking off
anxiously their dust.

sixty

being small boned i could barely stand a kiss.

how the use of perception's least
common denominator, which we may call linear logic,
would in what field, in which application
gain supporters for us, and how the con
of searching for consensus in the aesthetic field
and
splitting intelligence and use
from creativity, would have a historically
utilitarian function?

Incident on the Street

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY W. MARTIN

Once there was a man who jumped off a tram, but so ineffectively that he fell under an automobile.

Traffic on the street came to a halt, and a police officer undertook to find out just how this misfortune had occurred.

The chauffeur was a long time in explaining something to him, gesturing with his finger at the automobile's front wheels.

The officer felt these wheels with his hand and wrote something down in his notebook.

All around, a rather large crowd assembled.

There was one citizen with dull eyes who kept falling off a pillar.

There was one lady who kept turning to look at a second lady, who, for her part, kept turning to look at the one lady.

Afterwards the crowd dispersed and the street traffic returned.

But the citizen with the dull eyes continued to fall off the pedestal for a long time after that, but in the end even he stopped.

At that point a man carrying a chair, clearly a recent purchase, slid under the tram with a flourish.

Again, the police officer came; again, a crowd formed, and traffic came to a halt, and the citizen with the dull eyes again started falling off the pillar.

And then after that everything was fine again; and even Ivan Semyonovich Karpov dropped by the cafeteria.

What They Sell in the Stores These Days

Koratygin stopped by Tikakeyev's, but Tikakeyev wasn't home.

Tikakeyev was at the store just then, where he was buying sugar, meat, and cucumbers.

Koratygin hung around by Tikakeyev's door, and was just getting ready to write a note, when who should he see but Tikakeyev himself approaching with an oilskin sack in hand.

Koratygin noticed Tikakeyev and shouted:

"I've been waiting for you here for a whole hour!"

"Not true," said Tikakeyev. "I only left my house twenty-five minutes ago."

"Well, I don't know about that," said Koratygin, "when I've been here for a whole hour."

"Stop lying!" said Tikakeyev, "Lying is shameful."

"My good man!" said Koratygin. "You'll have to choose your words more carefully next time."

"It seems to me..." Tikakeyev started to say, but Koratygin interrupted him:

"Well, if it seems to you..." he said. But here Tikakeyev interrupted Koratygin and said:

"Same to you!"

These words so infuriated Koratygin that he held his finger to one nostril and out of the other nostril blew snot onto Tikakeyev.

At that Tikakeyev pulled the largest cucumber out of his bag and beat Koratygin over the head with it.

Koratygin clutched his head with his hands, fell down, and died.

What big cucumbers they sell in the stores these days!

[untitled]

The streets were growing silent. People were standing at the intersections, waiting for trams. Some, having lost hope, were walking. And so at one of the intersections on the Petrograd Side only two people were left. One of them was a man of very short height with a round face and ears that stuck out. The other was just a teensy bit taller and, it was apparent, had a crippled left leg. They did not know one another, but their common interest in the tram brought them into conversation. The cripple initiated it.

“I really don’t know,” he said, as if to no one in particular.

“Maybe it’s not worth waiting.”

Roundface turned to Cripple and said:

“No, I think it still might come.”

Losses

Andrei Andreyevich Porkov bought a wick at the market and took it home.

On the way, Andrei Andreyevich lost the wick and went into a store to buy 150 grams of Poltavsk sausage. Then Andrei Andreyevich went into a milk union and bought a bottle of kefir; then at one of the stalls he drank a little mug of kvass and got in line for a newspaper. The line was fairly long, and Andrei Andreyevich stood in line for twenty minutes at least, but the fellow ahead of him got the last one.

Andrei Andreyevich hung out there a while and went home, but along the way he lost the kefir and stopped in at the bakery, bought a French roll, but lost the Poltavsk sausage.

Then Andrei Andreyevich went straight home, but along the way he fell, lost the French roll and broke his pince-nez.

Andrei Andreyevich arrived home in an extremely bad mood and went right to bed, but it took him a long time to fall asleep, and when he finally did get to sleep, he had a dream: it seemed he had lost his toothbrush and was brushing his teeth somehow with a candlestick.

Reeds

TRANSLATED FROM THE LATIN BY JOHN TIPTON

Heaven's master no more evil to Io
could endure, called the child the bright
Pleiad bore him, & ordered Argus' death.
Without delay grabs feet wings & branch,
potent sleep bearer, puts on his hat;
so equipped, from father Jove's keep Mercury
descends to Earth, there doffs his cap,
removes the wings, merely keeping the branch;
makes like a shepherd driving goats over
the countryside playing a set of reeds.
Juno's guard is taken by the sound.
"Whoever you are do sit with me"
urged Argus, "indeed, there's no better grazing
& see, good shade for a shepherd."
The Atalantan sat and through many topics
spent the day talking & playing,
trying to defeat watching eyes with reeds.
But Argus fought back soft sleep's domination—
whenever one set of his eyes slept
another watched. He asked (for the pipe
was recently discovered) *how* it was discovered.
The god said "In Arcadia's frigid mountains
among the Nonacrian hamadryads the swiftest was
a naiad whom the nymphs called Syrinx.
More than once she'd eluded pursuing satyrs
and gods who frequent dark wild forests
& redoubts. She zealously honored the Ortygian
virgin goddess. With her hitched-up skirt
you would mistake her for Diana (if

her horned bow were made of gold,
you would). Coming from the Lycian hill
Pan with pointed pine crown saw her.”
Mercury told what words Pan used, how
he cast promises after the fleeing nymph.
She ran to the sandy river Ladonia
but there the water impeded her course.
She begged her liquid sisters change her.
Pan, when he thought he had Syrinx,
instead of nymph he embraced marshy reeds.
Then he sighed—his breath across straws
made a thin sound like a complaint.
The god was captive of the music.
‘This will remain our conversation’ he said
and various reeds he joined with wax.
The resulting instrument retains the girl’s name...

At this point Mercury saw that all
eyes were abed and lidded in sleep.
He immediately stopped talking & strengthened sleep,
touching Argus’ eyes with the charmed branch,
straightway struck nodding Argus with hooked sword
where neck meets head—gory, from rock
tossed—staining the abrupt cliff with blood.
Argus, whatever light all your eyes held
was extinguished—hundred eyes occupy one night.
Juno plucked them for her peacock’s feathers
and filled the tail with starry gems.

Metamorphoses 1, 668-723

Writing Nathanaël

Je voudrais m'approcher de toi plus encore.
—André Gide, *Les nourritures terrestres*

Beginning with another text. Somewhere in the middle. Definitely not at the beginning, or what is generally understood as the beginning. Somewhere else. In hesitation and ambiguity. Not about the body itself (replete with evidence). But process. The problem at hand begins in another book with other words and some very lofty ideals. What could have been a translation. One word rent from one language battered into some new shape to conform to the needs of another language: Made To Fit. I got caught in the middle. Caught between le livre and the book. Between Nathanaël and nathalie. There is a manuscript but I will not produce it, at least not yet. Language takes, sometimes it gives. In this case, I feel it did nothing but take. This is my testimony.

But back a bit. I am not fond of explanations. Neither of giving nor of receiving them, but in this case, exceptions will be made. This, it appears, will be a book of exceptions, so I'll begin with this one: an explanation. *Je Nathanaël* began as a translation project. One that I had envisioned as trans-e-lation (cf. Erin Mouré), although I confess, it did get the better of me, and so here I am doing things a little ass-backwards, which is fine, given the subject matter at hand (it will come soon enough). The work is done, now I must undo it. What I'm getting at is this: that one book is not equal to another, and trying to pull *Je Nathanaël* into English has become a very hazardous endeavour. Something is most definitely lost in the process. I'm not convinced that that much is gained. So while

Writing Nathanaël sprang from the hip of *Je Nathanaël* it is quite a different being altogether, and necessarily so. Take the two and hold them side by side. They bear some resemblance—at least in name—but turn to page 12 in both or either, each will be telling you different things. A bilingual mind lacks ease of transfer. And as I have said elsewhere the problem with translation is a tendency to avoid the difficult words. I am certain of at least one thing: all words are difficult. So what makes this text a translation of another and where do I get off using such language when in fact (and in fiction), they bear very little resemblance to one another. Some parts here and there match up, but the rest are singularly different. There is no Chapter One to refer back to. It is perhaps trite and stultifyingly obvious to suggest that each language offers up its very own questions, conclusions and modus operandi. But it is so obvious, that perhaps it needs pointing out. I am not interested in writing the same book twice. *Je Nathanaël* is in fact two books. It exists once in French and once in English. It isn't the same book, nor can it be, which is why what I propose as translation is at best blasphemy. I have, in keeping with Gide, burned all the books in me. Indeed, it was necessary to ensure as honest a process as possible.

André Gide wrote *Les nourritures terrestres* in 1917-1936, and wet himself repeatedly coveting a boy, Nathanaël, his much desired and imagined apprentice in the art of living and loving. He went so far as to write him two volumes, the first was followed by *Les nouvelles nourritures*, all of which are passion-filled, elated and at times dramatic prescriptions for a life lived fully and to the fullest, a life lived fervently. Nathanaël does not exist, not outside of Gide's exquisite text,

but he does not exist within either, and this is my primary gripe with the whole tradition of love inside and outside of literature. I am perhaps being unfair to Gide, he is not the first, nor will he be the last, writer to use a young man so selfishly. We are all guilty, I suppose, of using our personages, as means to some literary end. And off we go, leaving them for years unwritten standing at street corners, sitting beneath trees or clambering their way out of subway stations. I count myself among the culpable.

Still, a question nags at me, and were Gide sitting in front of me today, I would ask him, “But what have you done with him?” Nathanaël does not belong to Gide anymore than he belongs to his readership. And you might well ask the same question of me. Well, I have come to look for him.

In reading *Les nourritures terrestres* at a time when I was asking some very exacting questions of my own body, I soon realized that Nathanaël was and is my sexual and linguistic other. One body conceals another. This became a sort of truth that I began to live by. Nathanaël is possibility. Because he does not exist, he has the potential to exist. As long as nothing has been said, everything remains to be said. About desire. About the body. About language. Perhaps in this sense Nathanaël is truly free. Every road is open to him. Nonetheless, I would like for him to die. At least then, he will have lived.

But back to the problem of translation, which is really a problem of spillage. The goal of a translation, in some respects, is to contain a text, and containment is the antithesis of this particular project. In pulling Nathanaël from Gide’s text, in pulling the body away from gender prescriptions, in pulling the poem away from language, I am allowing for

desire. And perhaps a distinction needs to be made between desire and literature, between desire and society, between desire and lust even. I intend desire as something of the earth, the (com)pulsion that roots the tree to soil and frees it from that very hold. It is that impossibility that I am leaning into and the certainty that it is attainable. Society is of no interest here. It merely constrains and delineates. Who one loves is too often a function of so many dictates that it is too tedious to go into. Words are hermaphroditic. Desire is transsexual (the term is so sterile). Language is capable of anything. So long as it is freed from the tongue. So long as it is freed from the body. Language is transformative. It comes to us always in a new form and in so doing changes us constantly.

So Writing Nathanaël or translating what is ultimately an untranslatable text is really a project involving the translation of the echo. Touching what doesn't exist. If Nathanaël inhabits the interstices of language, and if the essence (l'essentiel) of language is breath, then words become an impediment to reading. I am back once again to burning books. When a word leaves the body it comes back to us in a new form: that is what I mean by the echo. It is untranslatable by definition because it is always shifting away from itself toward something new. A word spoken is not the same word heard. Could not the same be said of desire and why the need for a rule book anyway? Those of us who are in the business of writing words down are really in the business of breaking bodies. Not all will agree, but it is true as it applies to this work, now. Nathanaël remains unbreakable, only because he is still anticipating his first breath. Not the breath I or Gide would grant him, but his very own. He has desires of his own to contend with. Bodies to break. Hearts to inhabit. Nathanaël is all echo.

Somehow he gives form to desire. He is that fluid. That changing. That unwritten.

While grammar books would have us think otherwise, language really gives form to hybridity (so much cross-pollination). The same holds true for the body (as concept and as physical entity). What medical literature has to say is of no interest here. Different and same do not apply. What I'm getting at is neither one nor other, but somewhere in between. And that is where I have positioned Nathanaël. Or that is the place in which I found him. Where he is now is irrelevant really. Bodies are breaking all the time. They are stepping outside of themselves. Spilling over. That is what bodies do. Language does it too as evidenced by the repeated attempt by translators to render one text into an altogether different culture, and by the inevitable failure of such attempts. If only we could allow for the breaking (down) of languages and bodies. So to text. Where the line breaks (apart) something unforeseen emerges. I am again with the idea of spillage and *par la force des choses* of translation. The break is (must be) unexpected. A translation is a calculated process. It leaves so little room for spontaneity. So why bother at all and more pertinent to my situation perhaps, what do I hope to gain by engaging in an activity that I have prejudged as futile at best, (self) destructive at worst.

Perhaps then this is a book about a book rather than a book imitating a book. It is not the thing I had intended. It is a book leaving a body in several directions at once, none of them anticipated. What will follow then is a trajectory or a record of an elusive body, of a thing or being tracked through

and across gender and place. Disparate pieces coming together to form an unlikely whole. Gide would have made Nathanaël into a reflection of his own desires and wants, of his own inhibitions. He would have given him a single (if singular) voice and waited for him to sing. He made him into a book. He gave him nothing.

Excerpts from *Je Nathanaël* (in translation),
Montréal, VLB éditeur, 2003.

[INSERT: Scatologue

Books don't show the way but insist on remaining. So how do you leave the book and enter directly into the body? We are jealous of one another's bodies and yet we each have one. I would undress my tongue and dip it willingly into ice cold water would invite you to meet me where the body becomes transparent where lucidity is a function of flesh where nothing is for sale and everything is given away. I would invent rude words for your mouth show you the true colour of blood. Love in the raw is life renewed. But of this write nothing down not a thing. Be wary of the heat that emanates from the unwritten page. Everything remains to be said so long as we have said nothing. Most importantly do not fear dirtying yourself. Love washes the body clean of perfection.]

[INSERT : A Fuckable Text

What is a fuckable text and is it only fuckable in English? Is there such thing as a literary hard-on? Who wants Nathanaël? I do I do. Only he doesn't exist. He is not kissing you. He

leaves no crease on your mattress. He doesn't break your heart. The tiled floor is cold and your feet are bare. Nathanaël is long gone he was never here not even once. He is a queer boy a loveable boy maybe even a fuckable boy and we are all wet or hard turning pages imagining his breath. You cannot even mourn him because he is not dead. He is not dead because he is not alive. Nobody knows who Nathanaël is. Have you seen him? I have only seen him from behind and that was in a painting and not a very good one at that. I hear that he likes to run in the rain and sleep with his eyes open.]

[INSERT: Letter To Nathanaël

My dear Nathanaël I will not write you. Every day I take your name into my mouth. I take it and give it away. I would like to inhabit it as you do. Know what it means to belong to no one. Not to exist. Or rather to exist infinitely. I am tired of envisioning the body differently of searching out the right word to express what belongs neither to language nor to silence. You are right not to answer. To carry on quietly. As for me I am running and I'm still lost. I would like to speak to you of the disjointedness between word and voice. Between touch and breath. Between skin and flesh. I'm a little like you I don't exist either. If I were to say: *I am* I would be lying at least a little bit. Languages despise me for living as I do. What I can't stand about books is the noise they make. You know how to cultivate silence. I am learning from you. I am learning to be silent. I am learning to love beside love or beside the definitions that weigh love down. The body leaves itself, that's a good thing. Mine does at any rate. Nathanaël I did not find you in any book. In any poem. I found you

inside of me. I invited you to dance. We danced to the same beat. Only differently. I sit every day in my garden. Some days I lie in the grass or in the snow depending on the weather. Sometimes it rains. Breath precedes the body Nathanaël. I am breathing differently.]

IN WINTER

Love gives. At the corner of two streets a boy takes me into his arms. He has a hard-on. I feel him against me through his pants. I feel shy but I don't stop. I want to invite him into me. When I am sad I think of him. I reinvent him with my fingers. He pulls my face toward his. I would like to touch him but it's cold and my hands are stuffed in the pockets of my jacket. I imagine us in front of a fireplace. I don't know if this is true love but I hope to see him again. We share a beer in a bar. He does not tell me his name. I tell him mine freely. I give. He takes.

I'm not interested in keeping a diary. I write down whatever I want. What I am not afraid to forget. The rest I keep to myself. Forgetting is necessary. I would like never to know where I'm going.

Wind tears. I don't read anymore. I do a lot of walking.

People are looking for me. Today I feel beautiful. I have a hard-on. It's not narcissism. I don't know what it is. I'm hard and I'm beautiful. Everything is possible. The body doesn't lie.

All bodies are guilty of something. All of them. I have decided not to travel any more. Not to dip my feet into the river either. I water the plants. Nobody is kissing me. I am a hundred years old.

People think I am mute or even crazy. It's not true. But I'm tired of explaining. I pay particular attention to colours. To the way they bleed into one another.

Words are not coming. I sleep on the floor. The mail wakes me everyday. I am waiting to begin.

Psalm 50 (51)

TRANSLATED FROM THE SEPTUAGINT BY MICHAEL O'LEARY

For the end, a Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet came to him after he had gone to Bathsheba

Have mercy on me, God,
by your great tender mercy.

By the abundance of your compassion
wipe away my transgressions.
Wash me wholly of my transgressions
clean me free of my sins.

I know the hell of my transgressions,
against me always is my sin.
Against you alone have I sinned;
I did my wickedness in your presence
so that in your sentence you're justified
and you'll win should you be tried..

Look, I was born in transgression
my mother conceived me in sin.
Look, I know you love the truth
you've shown me the secrets of your wisdom.
Purge me with hyssop, I'll be whole.
Wash me, I'll be whiter than snow.
Let me hear the joy and the rejoicing
these aching bones will join in.

Turn your face away from my sins;
wipe away all my transgressions.
A clean heart, God, is what I need
rectify the right spirit in my very spleen.
Don't shun me, please, away
don't take your holy spirit away from me.
Bring me back to the exultation
a guiding spirit to your salvation.

I'll teach your ways to the lawless
even the godless will seek your blessing.
Deliver me from blood, God, God of my salvation
my mouth will shout out your praises.
Lord, open my lips
my tongue will sing only of your justice.
Because if you had wanted
a sacrifice I would have given it.

But you find no pleasure in
the all burnt offering.
True sacrifice to God
is a broken spirit.
God won't despise
a broken and lowly heart.

In your goodness, Lord, do good to Zion
build up the walls of Jerusalem.
Then it will be pleasing,
then you'll savor the all-burnt offering.

Then they'll take up bulls on your altar.

After Archilochus

Like Odysseus under the ram
you cling beneath your lover—
seeking to pass for him
by pressing close, supine.

Amongst the tangled curls,
who could tell one from the other?
Not I, who wade against the waves
with darkened eye and darkened mind.