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PEN INTERNATIONAL

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El periódico de PEN Internacional

The Writer Next Door Mon voisin l'écrivain Mi vecino el escritor



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THE WRITER NEXT DOOR PEN CHARTER

The PEN Charter is based on resolutions passed at its international congresses and may be summarised as follows:

PEN affirms that:

- 1 Literature knows no frontiers and must remain common currency among people in spite of political or international upheavals.
- 2 In all circumstances, and particularly in time of war, works of art, the patrimony of humanity at large, should be left untouched by national or political passion.
- 3 Members of PEN should at all times use what influence they have in favour of good understanding and mutual respect between nations; they pledge themselves to do their utmost to dispel race, class and national hatreds, and to champion the ideal of one humanity living in peace in one world.
- 4 PEN stands for the principle of unhampered transmission of thought within each nation and between all nations, and members pledge themselves to oppose any form of suppression of freedom of expression in the country and community to which they belong, as well as throughout the world wherever this is possible. PEN declares for a free press and opposes arbitrary censorship in time of peace. It believes that the necessary advance of the world towards a more highly organised political and economic order renders a free criticism of governments, administrations and institutions imperative. And since freedom implies voluntary restraint, members pledge themselves to oppose such evils of a free press as mendacious publication, deliberate falsehood and distortion of facts for political and personal ends.

La charte du PEN est basée sur les résolutions adoptées à ses Congrès Internationaux, et peut être résumée comme suit:

Le PEN affirme que:

- 1 La littérature ne connaît pas de frontières et doit rester la devise commune à tous les peuples en dépit des bouleversements politiques et internationaux.
- 2 En toutes circonstances, et particulièrement en temps de guerre, le respect des oeuvres d'art, patrimoine commun de l'humanité, doit être maintenu au-dessus des passions nationales et politiques.
- 3 Les membres de la Fédération useront en tout temps de leur influence en faveur de la bonne entente et du respect mutuel des peuples; ils s'engagent à faire tout leur possible pour écarter les haines de races, de classes et de nations, et pour répandre l'idéal d'une humanité vivant en paix dans un monde uni.
- 4 Le PEN défend le principe de la libre circulation des idées entre toutes les nations et chacun de ses membres a le devoir de s'opposer à toute restriction de la liberté d'expression dans son propre pays ou dans sa communauté aussi bien que dans le monde entier dans toute la mesure du possible. Il se déclare en faveur d'une presse libre et contre l'arbitraire de la censure en temps de paix. Le PEN affirme sa conviction que le progrès nécessaire du monde vers une meilleure organisation politique et économique rend indispensable une libre critique des gouvernements, des administrations et des institutions. Et comme la liberté implique des limitations volontaires, chaque membre s'engage à combattre les abus d'une presse libre, tels que les publications délibérément mensongères, la falsification et la déformation des faits à des fins politiques et personnelles.

Los Estatutos del PEN se basan en las resoluciones aprobadas durante sus Congresos Internacionales y pueden resumirse así:

El PEN afirma que:

- 1 La literatura, aunque de origen nacional, no conoce fronteras, y debe permanecer como moneda común entre los países, aunque existan conflictos políticos o internacionales.
- 2 En toda circunstancia, y especialmente en tiempo de guerra, las obras de arte, y el patrimonio de la humanidad en general, deben permanecer intactos y protegidos de las pasiones nacionalistas o políticas.
- 3 En todo momento, los miembros del PEN deben hacer uso de la influencia que posean en favor del buen entendimiento y del mutuo respeto entre las naciones; deben comprometerse a hacer lo máximo por erradicar odios raciales, de clase y entre naciones; y deben promover el ideal de una humanidad que viva en paz, en un mundo solidario.
- 4 El PEN defiende el principio de la transmisión sin barreras del pensamiento, dentro de cada nación, así como entre las naciones. Sus miembros se comprometen a oponerse a toda forma de supresión de la libertad de expresión en su país de origen y dentro de la comunidad a la cual pertenecen, así como en el ámbito mundial dondequiera que esto sea posible. El PEN se declara partidario de una prensa libre y se opone a la censura arbitraria en tiempos de paz. Cree que el avance necesario del mundo hacia formas políticas y económicas altamente organizadas hace que la libre crítica de los gobiernos, de las administraciones e instituciones sea imperativa. Y, puesto que la libertad implica una restricción voluntaria, los miembros se comprometen a oponerse a vicios informativos tales como publicaciones insidiosas; falsedad deliberada de los acontecimientos y distorsión de los hechos con fines políticos y personales. Ser miembro del PEN es una opción asequible y sin distinción de nacionalidad, lengua, raza, color o religión a todos los autores debidamente calificados, a los editores y traductores que se acojan a estos propósitos.

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Editor's Note

We can't claim credit for this issue's theme. It takes its cue from International PEN's first festival of world literature, **Free the Word!**, which was held with great success in London from 11–13 April 2008 and had as its theme 'The Writer Next Door'. (Catch the highlights at www.internationalpen.org.uk.) Many of this issue's contributors featured at the festival as speakers and readers: Alberto Manguel, Alexis Wright, Nii Ayikwei Parkes, Maria Francesca LoDico, Yang Lian, sjón, Maureen Freely and Lulu Norman.

The theme was meant to stimulate a variety of responses, but, overall, to evoke a sense of community; of new encounters with old friends or chance, even improbable, encounters with new ones; of writing from unexpected places, or – at the same time – from everywhere at once. Special guest writer Alberto Manguel takes his departure from Cees Nooteboom: 'The writer next door always lives in Siberia.' Indeed, there are Siberian gaps between the concerns of the writers in these pages. And yet ...

Our second special guest writer Chantal Montellier conjures up the alienated Antonin Artaud, formerly a resident of her neighbourhood. (She also brings the *bande dessinée* to our magazine for the first time.) Gary Klang recalls the community of latter-day Communards that sprang up for a brief moment forty years ago this month in Paris, allowing him to feel, for the first time: '*Je vivais enfin dans une société humaine.*' Travelling curmudgeon Peter Gonda baffles over his sudden elevation to VIP status in India, while transplanted Chilean and Paris native Victor Flores notes the moment during a promising chat when '*comencé a extrañar el español.*' Also within these pages are a suicide note/love letter; an elegiac eulogy; writing from prison; writing about prison writing; and much more, each work marking its own territory and holding open a door to the next ...

Making its debut in this issue is the newest and, we hope, brightest incarnation of a formerly regular *PEN International* feature, 'Found in Translation'. Every issue will present one or more works, translated into English, French and/or Spanish for the first time. We would like to thank Bloomberg for its generous support in helping to make this possible.

Mitchell Albert, Editor

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The 'Context:' series resumes in September 2008 with 'Context: Latin America & the Caribbean'.

SPECIAL GUEST WRITER

Alberto Manguel

The Mind as Siberia

The writer next door always lives in Siberia.
Cees Nooteboom

I owe the discovery of László Földényi to Cees Nooteboom who, in one of his epistolary assaults, insisted that I should read him and sent me a Spanish translation one of his essays, 'Dostoyevski Reads Hegel in Siberia and Bursts into Tears'. Among the many paths that lead us to read a book (all of which have something mysterious about them) is that of the title. We may not be immediately attracted to a book called *The Divine Comedy* or *Les contemplations*, but only a soul of stone can resist 'Dostoyevski Reads Hegel in Siberia and Bursts into Tears'. I read it immediately, in one sitting, and then again, and then once again, for luck. The contents amply justified the magnificent title. My ignorance of Hungarian is word-perfect: my reading was therefore limited to only a few of Földényi's works in Spanish and German, yet enough to judge him, in my view, a brilliant, original, clear-cut thinker whose illuminations I gladly followed through philosophical, historical and aesthetic considerations. His books on melancholia, art and criticism are masterworks.

Long ago, Copernicus's discoveries shifted the self-centred vision of our world to a corner that has since constantly shifted further and further towards the margins of the universe. The realisation that we, human beings, are aleatory, minimal, a casual convenience for self-reproducing molecules, is not conducive to high hopes or great ambitions. And yet, what Nicola Chiaromonte called 'the worm of consciousness' is also part of our being, so that, however ephemeral and distant, we, these particles of stardust, are also a mirror in which all things, ourselves included, are reflected. This modest glory should suffice us. Our passing (and, on a tiny scale, the passing of the universe with us) is ours to record: a patient and bootless effort begun when we first started to read the world. What we call history is that ongoing story that we pretend to decipher as we make it up. This Dostoyevski fully understood when he said that, if our belief in immortality were destroyed, 'everything would be permissible'. Like history, immortality need not be true for us to believe in it.

From the beginning, history is the story told by its witness, true or false. In Book VIII of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus praises the bard who sings the misfortunes of the Greek 'as if he had been there or heard it from the lips of another'. The 'as if' is of the essence. History, then, is the story of what *we say* has happened, even though the justifications we give for our testimony cannot, however hard we try, be justified. Centuries later, in a dusty German classroom, Hegel would

divide this 'invention of what took place' into three categories: first, history written by its assumed direct witnesses (*ursprüngliche Geschichte*); second, history as a meditation upon itself (*reflektierende Geschichte*); third, history as philosophy (*philosophische Geschichte*), which eventually results in what we agree to call world history (*Welt-Geschichte*), the never-ending story that includes itself in the telling. Emmanuel Kant had earlier imagined two different concepts of our collective evolution: *Historie* to define the mere recounting of facts and *Geschichte*, a reasoning of those facts – even an *a priori Geschichte*, the chronicle of an announced course of events to come. For Hegel, what mattered was the understanding (or the illusion of understanding) of the entire flow of events as a whole, including the riverbed and its coastal observers, and in order to better concentrate on the main, from this torrent he excluded the margins, the lateral pools and the estuaries.

Földényi imaginatively suggests that this is the horror Dostoyevski discovers: that history, whose victim he knows he is, ignores his existence, that his suffering goes on unnoticed or, worse, serves no purpose in the general flow of humankind. What Hegel proposes, in Dostoyevski's eyes (and in Földényi's) is what Kafka would later say to Max Brod: 'There is hope, but not for us.' Hegel's caveat is even more terrible than the illusory existence proposed by the idealists: we are perceived but we are not seen.

Such an assumption is, for Földényi (as it must have seemed to Dostoyevski), inadmissible. Not only can history not dismiss anyone from its course, but the reverse is also true: the acknowledgement of everyone is necessary for history to be. My existence, any person's existence, is contingent to your being, to any other person's being, and both of us must exist for Hegel, Dostoyevski, Földényi to exist, since we (the anonymous others) are their proof and their ballast, bringing them to life in our reading. This is what is meant by the ancient intuition that we are all part of an ineffable whole in which every singular death and every particular suffering affects the entire human collective, a whole that is not limited by each material self. The worm of consciousness mines but also proves our existence; it is no use denying it, even as an act of faith. 'The myth that denies itself,' says Földényi wisely, 'the faith that pretends to know: this is the grey hell, this is the universal schizophrenia with which Dostoyevski stumbled on his way.'

Our imagination allows us always one hope more, beyond the one shattered or fulfilled, one as yet seemingly unattainable frontier that we'll eventually reach only to propose another lying further away. To forget this limitlessness (as Hegel tried to do by trimming down his notion of what counts as history) may succeed in granting us the pretty illusion that what takes place in the world and in our life is fully understandable. But this reduces the questioning of the universe to catechism and that of our existence to dogma. As Földényi argues, what we want is not the consolation of that which seems reasonable and probable, but the unexplored Siberian regions of the impossible.

Ahmad Ebrahimi

Lara Frankena

Poems

Ahmad Ebrahimi

Schrödinger's Cat

Is it the observer
who brings the world into existence
or something from outside
that aborts the wave of perception
and allows the mass of being to emerge?

Like an unwritten poem
crawling in, overpowering and subjugating one's mind
bereft of tangible existence
until it reveals itself on paper.

Yet the very moment that it is written
something always goes missing.

Lara Frankena

Quelques mots de conseil

You must, he says, be *très maigre*.
You pad the midsection and insert
a sack of pigeon blood mixed with vinegar,
pour éviter la coagulation.

The costume you must embellish
with a certain quantity of sequins
to mark the place where *l'épée*
devait entrer et sortir du ventre.

It is preferable to request a sword
from any military man in attendance,
for then there will be no questions
regarding the quality of the blade.

Maria Francesca LoDico

The Disappearing Sicily

I

Papa holds me in his arms, one hand against my tummy, his thumb spread wide.

Part of me is twisted around to face the camera, my left arm awkwardly wrapped around his neck as if I'm about to fall out of his grasp. Perhaps my legs dangle against his waist or my knees dig into him. The photo hides this, and whenever I hold my niece, Ava, I note her cherubic limbs against my body.

My head leans slightly away from his, one a miniature of the other. He is handsome and suave, a figure right out of Visconti or Antonioni, his face a replica of the ancient busts in the Capitoline Museums in Rome. A quick mental review of past boyfriends makes me think: I've never been with a man of comparable beauty. Do such men exist anymore? In Canada?

His lupine eyes look straight ahead while my gaze falls off-camera. My lips are pursed; his smile reveals several gaps between his teeth. I'd forgotten those gaps.

I cannot continue to look at his face, especially those eyes. My gaze wanders to his right hand: The curved fingers are loose and relaxed, as if I were weightless. The cuticles look dirty, as if he had been working at the garage with his brothers. But there would have been no garage yet, only the flower shop. There is a slight space between his index finger and the middle one wide enough for a cigarette.

I'm wearing small hoop earrings and a white dress with puffy sleeves. His shirt is ... blue, perhaps brown? My hair is short, renegade curls spilling towards the edges of the image. His face, cropped just above the hairline and at the left ear, and his hands frame me.

The black-and-white photograph was taken in a booth in Montreal in 1969. I was two and had just been sent back from Sicily. I was born in Montreal, but Mamma and Papa sent me to Nonna and Nonno when I was a baby because they had been overwhelmed with work and had another baby on the way. In Sicily I learned to walk and to talk. In Sicily I learned to love.

I didn't know who my parents were when I returned. I wailed for months for my grandparents, I am told. I wouldn't eat or sleep or let anybody near me, I am told. The photo booth outing with my father provided a momentary distraction, I am told. I don't remember any of this.

The creased photo is smaller than my palm. All four corners are dog-eared. I have never seen the others in the strip from which it has been unevenly cut. I bring it closer to my face and notice a slight discolouration. Despite its small size the photo had at some point been folded horizontally. I trace the paper scar on papa's chin.

This is the earliest image of us together. Our relationship begins with the three square inches on this photograph.

II

Papa died of a heart attack on 3 June 1998. Mamma found him in the garden among the vegetable seedlings they had just bought.

He had been puttering away in solitude, the flat-leaf parsley still in plastic planters, the curly red-leaf lettuce in polystyrene. The basil, potted in the bottom half of a wine barrel sawed in two, only hinted at the sweet fragrance it would soon release. It was hard to believe that the rows of scrawny plants would become lush with cherry tomatoes, that the berries left behind by the blue-violet star-shaped flowers would ripen into aubergines.

Papa could probably see Mamma through the kitchen window, lace curtains pulled back to reveal her face over the sink.

Three months short of his sixtieth birthday he was just starting to leave the day-to-day business of the flower shop to my younger brother. This last detail – my father was a Sicilian through and through who, since childhood, had been working *come un cane, porca miseria*, like a dog – made us even more inconsolable, *porca miseria*.

My memories of the wake are hazy. I remember the flowers at the funeral parlour: cascading over the foot of the coffin, fifty-nine *Cattleya* orchids flown in from Vancouver; overhead, a 'CARO PAPA' framed in blue satin next to a sunburst of orange mums; opposite the casket, at the other end of the room, a magnificent wreath of 200 red roses hovering high against the wall; all around, lilies, anthuriums ... birds of paradise, gingers ... gladioli, chrysanthemums ... daisies, carnations. Baskets and sprays ... a star, a half-moon, a cross ... a single heart, a double heart, an open heart ... a dove and the gates of heaven, all made of flowers. I wouldn't have been surprised if the furniture had also been made of flowers. It was difficult to breathe among the hundreds of mourners – *condoglianze*, *bbeddamatri*, *bbeddamatri*, *condoglianze*, shake-shake, kiss-kiss, sign of the cross, *Ave Maria piena di grazia* ... hug-grab-clutch-grasp-grabgrabgrab, the airlessness, their breath, and the smell of the flowers they had sent a sickening mix. Papa's sister, Zia Carmela, had flown in from Sicily; it was her first trip abroad, and she was mesmerised by all the faces from her past – so many old villagers that she had grown up with – and she began a lamentation in Sicilian dialect that reverberates still: *u munnu unu paisi, il mondo un paese*, the world a village, theworldavillage.

Shake-shake, kiss-kiss, *bbeddamatri*, *condoglianze*, *bbeddamatri*, *bbeddamatri*. I had no choice but to let them ... grabgrabgrab ... I recoiled at each ... hug-grab-clutch-grasp ... kiss-kiss, shake-shake ... my eyes bounced from papa in the open coffin to the wreath of roses, 200 luscious reds, and back: papa, reds, papa, reds, the wreath, my heart.

Amid incantations of the Rosary I overheard stories, countless stories in singsong, murmured, moaned, wailed, whispered, a bereft ventriloquism: 'I couldn't get him to use an ashtray,' said Sebastiano's daughter, Sandra. Papa started every day at Pasticceria San Marco, a few doors down from the shop, with an espresso and an apricot *cornetto*. Sebastiano, his best friend, had passed away two years earlier. 'There he was every morning, jittery, chain-smoking, and I

couldn't get him to use an ashtray. So he'd leave trails of himself everywhere,' said Sandra. 'There were burn marks all over the counter where he'd forget his cigarette.'

The man in these stories was unfamiliar. He had been so tense around me, his bookish, untraditional daughter. He was a loner whose independence, I knew, had constituted a deep wound in his marriage. I could have talked to this other man, a man who loved reggae and Haitian music – we found the cassettes in his old Buick; a man who occasionally went to the museum or *i filmi Americani* by himself; a man who had befriended non-Italians in business when the others, including his brothers, were ethnically insular – there was Williams, a black man who had given him those cassettes, and there were many Jews, they gave him his start up on Queen Mary Road, especially Sam, a wholesaler, he was the one who sent the wreath with 200 roses and flew in the orchids. This was a man who ran away from the seminary in a faraway Sicilian town and walked home because the priests were doing 'unspeakable things' to the boys.

I see Papa most clearly at the flower shop where his delicate artistry had been at great odds with his general gruffness. He is dishevelled and breathes heavily through nose hairs my mother had failed to clip. He haggles on the phone with Sam, receiver pinned to his ear, a cigarette dangling from his lips. Blossoms and foliage are scattered all over the counter in front of him. His permanently stained and scarred hands work the knives, shears, and pruners, snip-snip. He is in constant motion. He trims and cuts and arranges, snip-snip, making beauty. Ash from his cigarette falls onto a rose. He fans the petals and blows away the burned particles – and returns the cigarette to his lips.

My brother Angelo's story: It's a few days before Mother's Day, one of our busiest weeks, it can make or break us, thousands of buds in stock ...

'... and the main fridge breaks down! Madonna, what a mess. Mom's freaking out, "O Dio, we're gonna lose everything," Dad's screaming at everybody. Ben, who takes care of the fridges, he's on vacation. Dad, desperate, calls this guy from the Yellow Pages.

"It's the compressor," says the guy. "I can fix it, replace this part here, but it'll cost. Pay me cash and –"

"Just fix it," says Dad.

'A week later the fridge stops working again. You know the drill: Mom's freaking out, Dad's screaming at everybody ... Ben fixes the fridge, no problem, this drainage tube came loose. Dad asks him about the compressor. "I can't see nothing different. It was probably the same tube." Ben would know: he installed the fridge.

'Dad gets real quiet, you know how when he got so still it's kind of freaky?

'A few weeks later Dad's in one of his moods. So he calls the Yellow Pages guy: "Will you take cash again?"

'Of course, he comes right away. Dad brings him to the walk-in fridge in the basement. Closes the door. Says, real calm: "Last time you fucked me, but you fucked me good. I want you to *think* about what you did to me."

'Dad locks the guy in. He waits an hour. Goes back to the fridge, hands him a phone: "You get one call." The guy looks shit-in-his-pants scared.

'He makes his call, and Dad locks him in again. In twenty minutes some other guy shows up with an envelope full of cash.

'Daddy never laid a finger on anybody, but he got his money back.'

Such a man's world, a man's man, a stark contrast to this other man I had known, whose plaintive wail to his dead mother I felt like a constant dull ache.

III

Sicily, 1995, three years before Papa's death. We enter the ICU with his brother, Carmelo, a doctor, the only professional in the family. Nonna, my grandmother, is hooked up to many machines. We stand behind a glass partition, and it is as if the Atlantic still separates us. My father, Nonna's eldest, was the first of her five children to leave, sailing from Napoli at fourteen to join a father he barely knew who had been working in Canada.

I cannot look directly at her face. I see tubes, wisps of hair, bedsheets, machines. But I cannot look at her face. The Atlantic lies between us, and my father reaches out to touch her face but the glass casts a reflection of his fingers back at us.

She dies a few hours later. She was seventy-two years old. I had flown to Sicily with my father and his brothers as soon as Zio Carmelo called to tell us of her brain hemorrhage.

We are spirited away, hush, hush, to a room with no windows. The cement floor is bloodstained. In the middle of the room, a marble table with a bloody sink.

The doctor and nurse arrange Nonna's body on the marble. Nonno, my father and my uncles look away. The nurse removes the hospital gown.

Zia Carmela begins to wail. I stand next to her unrolling a pair of new nylons. She kisses Nonna, she caresses her face, her arms, her knees. The nurse binds Nonna's feet with cotton. Zia Carmela takes the nylons from my hands, she covers one foot, then the other, she rolls the nylons up Nonna's legs, I lift her torso, she rolls the nylons up to the waist. Nonno, my uncles, my father huddle in a corner, they look away. I unfold the black dress, it has been ironed. A wailing Zia Carmela and the nurse lift Nonna, the doctor holds the bandaged head. I slip the dress onto the body.

Nonno stands over Nonna's head; he kisses her forehead, her temple, her cheeks, her lips. Zio Onofrio and Zio Giuseppe kiss her hands, their tears spilling onto the fingers. Zia Carmela smooths out the dress; she keeps smoothing it out, smoothing it out. My father caresses her legs. I stand at her feet, by the bloody sink.

Two security guards carry a coffin into the room. The men gently place Nonna in the coffin. Zia Carmela covers her body with a white embroidered linen sheet, perfectly pressed. The guards close the coffin and we spirit Nonna away, hush, hush, to Ioppolo Giancaxio, *caro paese*.

The villagers pay their respects. The open coffin is in the middle of the living room. A rosary falls over her hands. A spray of red roses covers the lower part of Nonna's body. Window shades shut out the rest of the world. The family stands at the head of the coffin. The guests shake all of our hands and kiss Nonna's forehead. It seems as if the entire village is here. The priest stands at the foot of the coffin and we recite the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Nonno caresses Nonna's cheeks. He shouts: 'Fifty-eight years we were married! You were a girl of fifteen. A headache, you said it was only a headache! Come back, come back, come back!' He looks like one of the withered old men from Giacomo Pirozzi's photo series, 'The Disappearing Sicily'. Stark and grainy, black-and-white, clichéd images of ancient Sicilians, weary, abandoned, some smiling to reveal

large gaps between rotting teeth; crooked women with moustaches, their black handkerchiefs tied tightly under their chins; the rugged men, with their pipes and *coppolas*, riding their mules.

There is a steady stream of comings and goings, a steady supply of participants in this public spectacle. Zia Carmela leads a sobbing Nonno away from Nonna; she adjusts the woolen cap covering his bald head.

My father's lament: 'I should never have left you. I should have come back when it was possible. I should never have left you, Mamma. I never even knew you.' He is shaking, crying like a baby, slouched over the coffin. He caresses her tenderly with his fingers.

IV

In 2006 Mamma finally decided to sell the two-storey brick house Papa had built. She bought a smaller place close to the flower shop. My brother had married and had a baby on the way.

We packed slowly. The emptier the house, the more I felt my father's presence. We left the master bedroom for last. Mamma had been sleeping on the first floor since Papa's death. Their bedroom remained unchanged except for a shrine of mementos. As we sorted through Papa's clothes, I was reminded of something Mamma said to me at the funeral eight years earlier: 'When we married, we were so young. We mostly grew up without fathers. So we each expected for the other to be the adult.'

My niece's arrival in August distracted us from the move. Healthy at birth, Ava ended up in intensive care a few days later with too much sodium in her blood and severe dehydration. By December she was smiling in my arms as the priest sprinkled her head with water and ministered the baptismal blessing. I was sole godparent to Ava – Ava of the calm temperament, Ava of the blond hair and blue eyes despite her Sicilian and Filipino roots.

After the ceremony my family gathered at a Greek restaurant. Ava was content in my arms, the cotton ruffled tights straining against her diapered bum. My brother and his wife, Geraldine, were making the rounds, and I wondered when it would be the right moment to give them my present, a single pearl accompanied by a Fellini quotation: 'All art is autobiography. The pearl is the oyster's autobiography.' I planned to give Ava one pearl every year until her eighteenth birthday, when she could turn the separate gems into a piece of jewellery or a work of art or a bowl of pearls.

I saw traces of Papa in the faces of my uncles and of myself in their children, especially my kinky-haired cousins Angelo, Francine, Frangina, Joey and Carmelina. I was the oldest and least traditional – unmarried, living on my own, a writer – and I didn't see them often.

Stashed under the table was a time capsule I had organised for Ava, a box of memories (objects, photos, souvenirs, letters) gathered from everyone in the room for her to open when she was older. I had asked my mother to contribute a letter about Papa so Ava could know him. A few days earlier Mamma had called me at work. It was hectic because I was leaving my job at an academic publisher to write a first novel. I hadn't officially told my family because I didn't want to deal with their questions about the risk I was taking in giving up a stable job.

'Fra, I finished. It's all in an envelope, the locket your father gave me when we were *sposini*, photos, my letter. It's seven pages ...' She began to read.

'Mamma, not right now ...' I stared hopelessly at the manuscripts on my desk. I was about to cut her off again, but something about her tone surprised me: it was unsentimental. I was quickly drawn into her narrative about her husband, the florist, my father.

I was unprepared for her conclusion: '... Ava, *tesoro*, no words can do your Nonno justice. If you want to know him, look to your godmother. She has his eyes, his curiosity, his creativity, his strength. And she is secretive like him, self-protective, always withholding a part of herself. But I suspect that with you she will hold little back. Go to your godmother, Francesca, and you will know your grandfather, Gaetano.'

It was warm in the restaurant, the smell of grilled octopus a gentle undertow towards memory. I nuzzled the nape of Ava's neck, covered her with butterfly kisses, breathing her in, the clash of smells and my family speaking our Sicilian dialect pulling me back, back, back. My head was filled with images from the novel I was writing, *The Giants of Agrigento*, a magic realist fable set in a Mediterranean landscape of salt mines, almond blossoms, blood oranges and cactus pears. A wise old donkey watches over prancing marionettes, a tarantula bites us all into a hysterical tarantella, and giants rule amongst the ancient ruins ...

Maluy Benet Salinas

Una pluma roja burdeos

Carmen llegó a Trikisha a mediodía. Subió la única calle importante que había, en aquel trozo flotante de suelo rojo y vegetación, y encontró la casa que le habían indicado. Llamó repetidamente a la puerta hasta que una voz desde el interior inquirió:

–¿Quién es?

–Busco a Gin.

–¿Quién la busca?

–No me conoce, me envía Henry.

–¿Qué Henry?

–Henry, de la isla de Mukishi.

Al abrirse la puerta, apareció en el umbral una mujer gruesa, de edad indefinible, con un traje blanco salpicado de flores rojas. La hizo pasar. El interior estaba a oscuras y Carmen tardó un rato en adaptarse. Al fin, vislumbró un espacio reducido con unos pocos muebles desvencijados.

–Siéntese, siéntese, enseñuida vuelvo, cuando lo hizo llevaba un vaso que Carmen pensó, por el color del líquido, que contenía agua.

–Usted dirá.

–Estoy de vacaciones con mi marido en la isla de Mukishi y el otro día conocí a Henry ...

–Vayamos al grano que no tengo todo el día. Si quiere que le tire las cartas, es un precio; y si quiere que me ponga en contacto con algún espíritu, es otro. Usted dirá.

–Pues ... No lo sé.

–Quien no lo sabe soy yo. Depende de lo que quiera averiguar. El pasado, el futuro...

–Querría conocer hechos del pasado. Cosas que le sucedieron a una persona.

–Entonces lo mejor es un contacto con la ultratumba. Venga conmigo.

Carmen la acompañó con la desazón pegada a la piel. Cuando Henry le explicó lo que hacía una médium, le pareció todo tan fácil, tan racional... Ahora, incluso, lo encontraba misero. Por un momento deseó huir. Pero siguió a Gin hasta una habitación aún más pequeña que la anterior donde había una mesa, una cortina que se adivinaba roja y un altarcillo con flores de plástico llenas de polvo. Gin se sentó e invitó a Carmen a que hiciese lo mismo en la única silla que quedaba libre.

–¿Con quién quiere que contacte?

–Con mi madre.

–Sí, bien. Pero, ¿cómo se llama?

–Rosa.

–Cuando vea que estoy en trance, pregunte lo que quiera averiguar.

—Y ¿cómo sabré que lo está?, osó decir con un hilo de voz.

—No se preocupe que lo sabrá, respondió Gin un poco enfadada.

Aquel día había venido Mardoc. Ya hacía dos meses que no se veían y ella tenía ganas de sexo. Su relación no se podría denominar estable. Aunque nunca lo habían hablado, Gin intuía que Mardoc debía tener una familia, mujer y seguramente hijos, pero sencillamente no se lo había preguntado. Tampoco importaba mucho. Mardoc había llegado a la vida de Gin el día en que él se quedó en la única pensión-hotel, propiedad de la médium, que había en la minúscula isla de Trikisha, y desde entonces, cuando por su trabajo de vendedor-repartidor volvía Mardoc, dormía en la cama de Gin. A ella le venía bien esta relación. Por su sentido de la independencia y su poca paciencia para seguir las normas que tenían las mujeres para casarse, no era la más indicada para formar una familia. De todas formas, tampoco pensaba esforzarse por encontrar un marido. Siempre había ganado dinero con su facilidad para entrar en trance, leer las cartas o cualquier otro medio adivinatorio.

Aquella mañana, sin embargo, en que había llegado la turista que le había enviado Henry, no estaba para lo que le pedía, tenía la cabeza en Mardoc y en la fiesta que se montarían juntos. Pero no la podía echar porque Henry le proporcionaba mucha clientela y si no la trataba bien, le cortaría el suministro. Ya lo había hecho una vez que, por culpa de su afición a la ginebra, no pudo atender a un cliente como debía. Para asegurarse que nada fallaría, se preparó un brebaje que, por sus componentes, sabía a demonios, y montó el escenario sobre la mesa: velas oscuras, raíces, estampas de santos, algunos huesos del pollo que se había comido el día anterior ... Estos utensilios eran para impresionar a la visitante. Gin tenía experiencia y había nacido con una gran facilidad para el trance; a veces, no necesitaba tomar nada, pero hoy tenía la cabeza en otro lugar y no quería fallar. Carmen la miraba cada vez más nerviosa. ¿Podría hablar con su madre? Sinceramente, no lo creía. Entonces, ¿por qué estaba con aquella mujer tan estafalaria? Había tenido que mentir a su marido diciéndole que se iba de compras. Por cierto, que tendría que adquirir algunas cosas antes de volver al hotel si no quería quedar en evidencia delante de él. Bien pensado lo que le deseaba preguntar a su madre era una majadería, pero una majadería que no había podido olvidar en toda su vida. A quien le explicase el motivo por el que estaba con una médium, no se lo creería.

Todo había empezado cuando Carmen cumplió nueve años. Sus padres siempre habían celebrado los aniversarios. Si en casa había poco dinero, nunca faltaba una fiesta con un pastel casero bien adornado y, cuando las cosas iban mejor, una tarta de pastelería con mucha fruta escarchada que era la que más gustaba a Carmen. Aquel año vivía en casa un chico moreno, muy agradable. Carmen no sabía por qué en casa siempre había alguien viviendo. Quizá porque la casa era grande, quizá porque a sus padres les gustaba hacer favores y siempre había algún amigo que tenía un familiar que estaba por aquellas tierras del sur donde ellos se habían trasladado por motivos de trabajo. La cuestión era que aquel año le tocó a un chico del que no recordaba ni su nombre. De su noveno aniversario sólo le habían quedado en la memoria dos regalos de todos los que le hicieron: un libro de Heidi en una edición que combinaba el texto y las viñetas con una historia abreviada. De manera que, según el nivel del lector o su estado de ánimo, se podía

leer rápidamente siguiendo los dibujos; o bien, con más paciencia, el texto entero. El otro regalo era una pluma estilográfica, delgada y más pequeña que las que tenía su padre, de color roja burdeos. Carmen la cogió con toda la ilusión del mundo y cuando iba a quitarle el capuchón para ver como era el plumín, su madre la cogió diciéndole:

–Dame. Yo te la guardaré hasta que seas más mayor.

Se la arrancó. Fue como si a la hora de meterse en la boca el manjar más deseado, cuando le está rozando los labios, nota su sabor y su olor le acaricia la nariz, alguien se lo quitase de un manotazo. Por más que protestó, lloró y se enrabió no consiguió nada.

–No te preocupes que yo la guardaré.

Pero, ¿dónde? Porque, en la primera ocasión en que se quedó sola en casa, registró a fondo todos los cajones – en eso era una experta – y no la encontró. Cada vez que se cambiaban de casa, que era a menudo, le volvía a preguntar a su madre, mientras metían todas las cosas en cajas.

–¿Dónde está mi pluma roja mamá?

–La tengo guardada. Ya te la daré cuando seas mayor.

Respondía siempre. Pero se hizo mayor y más mayor, y se murió de vieja su madre. Cuando desmontaron la casa de los padres pidió a todos los que estaban que por favor no tirasen nada y que le avisaran si encontraban una pluma estilográfica roja burdeos. Pero nadie la encontró. Bien pensado, ¿qué importancia podía tener, a aquellas alturas de la vida, una pluma? Carmen tenía muchas plumas estilográficas y de buenas marcas. No sabía por qué los amigos y familiares se las regalaban, a pesar de que no le gustaba escribir con pluma, y nunca las usaba. Pero era su pluma estimada que no tuvo tiempo ni de descubrir. ¿Qué derecho tenía su madre a quitársela? Había actuado sin tener en cuenta sus sentimientos, como siempre. Sólo se preocupaba por ella, el resto de la familia se tenía que adaptar o sufrir la furia de contradecir sus deseos.

Ahora se encontraba ante aquel espantajo que tenía los ojos entornados y la cabeza gacha sobre la mesa. ¿Estaría ya en trance? ¿Debería hacerle la pregunta? ¿Y si la respuesta no le gustaba? Quizá sería mejor irse. Separó la silla de la mesa procurando no hacer ruido e intentó levantarse poco a poco.

–¿Dónde vas Carmen?, la voz de su madre, alta y clara le hizo volver a sentarse.

–Pues, me marchaba.

–¿Me has hecho venir para irte?

–No, te he hecho venir porque quiero que me respondas a una pregunta, una pregunta que me está amargando la vida.

–Ya será para menos. ¡Tu siempre tan dramática!

–¿Dónde metiste mi pluma estilográfica roja burdeos?

–¿Qué pluma?

–La que me regaló aquel chico que vivía con nosotros cuando cumplí nueve años.

–Y ¿cómo puñetas quieres que me acuerde de una cosa que pasó hace tantos años?

–Pues porque necesito saberlo. Me dijiste que la guardaste en un cajón del aparador.

–Pues, allí estará. Búscala y no me hagas venir para una idiotez.

–No estaba. La busqué poco después y ¡no estaba!

–¿Tú estás loca o qué? ¿Por una pluma de nada montas este sarao?

–No pienso dejarte en paz hasta que me digas donde está.

–Está bien, no es cuestión de volver del más allá cada dos por tres y, como eres cabezota por naturaleza, estoy segura que no pararás hasta obtener una respuesta.

–¡Puedes estar bien segura! Con los años he ganado en terquedad.

–La regalé a los pocos días.

–¿Que la regalaste? ¿A quién?

–¿Te acuerdas de Adela, la hija de los propietarios de la zapatería donde tú ibas a jugar a veces?

–Una vez, fui una vez y aquella niña me caía muy mal.

–Pues a aquella chica se la regalé. Era su santo o su aniversario y quería agradecerle que se quedaran contigo cuando el papá y yo nos fuimos de viaje a Sevilla.

–No puede ser cierto. Pero ¿cómo pudiste regalar mi pluma?

–Ay hija, ¡qué pesada que eres! Sólo era una pluma y yo no tenía tiempo de ir a comprar un regalo para aquella niña.

Carmen se levantó de la silla, que cayó al suelo, y el estruendo que produjo hizo volver en sí a Gin. Sin esperar a que se recobrase, Carmen dejó el dinero que habían acordado antes y salió a la luz de la calle más enfadada que cuando entró.

–Mejor hubiese sido no saber la verdad. Eso me pasa por fisgona.

La brisa de la mar, al ponerse la barca en marcha, la fue tranquilizando.

–Quizá es hora de enterrar la pluma estilográfica roja burdeos, pensó Carmen mientras observaba como se acercaba el horizonte.

André Gorz

Extrait du récit

Lettre à D. : Histoire d'un amour

Nous n'étions pas pressés. J'ai dénudé ton corps avec précaution. J'ai découvert, coïncidence miraculeuse du réel avec l'imaginaire, l'Aphrodite de Milos devenue chair. L'éclat nacré de ta gorge illuminait ton visage. J'ai longuement contemplé, muet, ce miracle de vigueur et de douceur. J'ai compris avec toi que le plaisir n'est pas quelque chose qu'on prend ou qu'on donne. Il est manière de se donner et d'appeler le don de soi de l'autre. Nous nous sommes donnés l'un à l'autre, entièrement.

Pendant les quelques semaines qui ont suivi, nous nous sommes retrouvés presque tous les soirs. Tu as partagé le vieux canapé défoncé qui me tenait lieu de lit. Il n'avait que soixante centimètres de large et nous dormions serrés l'un contre l'autre. À part le canapé, ma chambre ne contenait qu'une bibliothèque faite des planches et de briques, une immense table encombrée de papiers, une chaise et un réchaud électrique. Tu ne t'étonnais pas de mon cénobitisme. Je m'étonnais que tu l'acceptes.

Avant de te connaître, je n'avais jamais passé plus de deux heures avec une fille sans m'ennuyer et le lui faire sentir. Ce qui me captivait avec toi, c'est que tu me faisais accéder à un autre monde. Les valeurs qui avaient dominé mon enfance n'y avaient pas cours. Ce monde m'enchantait. Je pouvais m'évader en y entrant, sans obligations ni appartenance. Avec toi j'étais *ailleurs*, en un lieu étranger, étranger à moi-même. Tu m'offrais l'accès à une dimension d'altérité supplémentaire – à moi qui a toujours rejeté toute identité et ajouté les unes aux autres des identités dont aucune n'était la mienne. En te parlant en anglais, je faisais mienne *ta* langue. J'ai continué jusqu'à ce jour à m'adresser à toi en anglais, même quand tu répliques en français. L'anglais, que je connaissais principalement par toi et par les livres, a été dès le début pour moi comme une langue privée qui préservait notre intimité contre l'irruption des normes sociales ambiantes. J'avais l'impression d'édifier avec toi un monde protégé et protecteur.

La chose n'aurait pas été possible si tu avais eu un fort sentiment d'appartenance nationale, d'enracinement dans la culture britannique. Mais non. Tu avais à l'égard de tout ce qui est *british* un recul critique qui n'excluait pas la complicité avec ce qui vous est familier. Je disais de toi que tu étais une *export only*, c'est-à-dire un de ces produits réservés pour l'exportation et introuvables en Grande-Bretagne même.

(Galilée, 2006)

Saw Wei

February 14th

Arensberg said:
 Only once you have experienced deep pain
 And madness
 And like an adolescent
 Thought the blurred photo of a model
 Great art
 Can you call it heartbreak.
 Millions of people
 Who know how to love
 Please clap your gilded hands
 And laugh out loud.

In the original Burmese, the first syllables of each line are pronounced as follows: Ar (Arensberg), Na (pain), Yu (mad), Gyi (great), Hmu (blurred), Gyi (age/big), Than (million), Shwe (gilded). Connected, the syllables then construct the phrase Ar-na-yu-gyi Hmu-gyi Than Shwe ('Senior General Than Shwe is mad with power'). Than Shwe is the leader of Burma's oppressive ruling military junta.

The 'Arensberg' of the poem likely refers to Walter C. Arensberg, an American steel magnate and poet fascinated by acrostics and anagrams, and author of The Cryptography of Shakespeare (1922).

The author was arrested in January 2008 after the publication of this poem in a Rangoon-based weekly magazine, which sold out after word spread of the poem's subversive acrostic device. Saw Wei is being held incommunicado.

Translated from the Burmese by Anonymous

Catherine Eden

The Runner

You never made it past fifteen.
Hard and electric and always moving,
sure of yourself and of me,
that I would always follow you,
my dark straight arrow,
buzzing and direct.
You never slept well
and even now I doubt it's you
lying quietly in the cemetery.
I think there are drums in the afterlife
and you're playing them and drinking Diet Coke,
and laughing at Richard, who kept asking you out.

I've enlarged that day like a photo in my head,
flat and immense.
You'd made fun of my glasses
and asked me to do your homework,
almost in the same sentence.
I unzipped myself from your side, sulking.
I was ignoring you, and my thoughts
were small and acid like cheap sweets.
I knew exactly where you were on the road.

I glanced up and away
and then my eyes caught you
and I was sick and thumping inside
and it was like you were moving through water
and the car was a silver-grey shark
and everything was slow and quiet
like the bottom of the sea.

It lasted seconds.

There you were on the road
and your black hair was still moving.
I touched it. It was warm in the sun.
Someone pulled me away, a teacher.
I can't forgive her still.

Afterwards we moved away.
We left at midnight like double agents,
defecting to another town.
But I never could outrun you.

Now I carry you like a thistle under the skin.
I have all the power of the living
and you have all the power of the dead
and we are blind runners who never meet.

In my dreams I see you running still.
You call me and I answer
with my ageing heart,
less urgent but more tender,
and I think you are listening
in a way you never did before.

I believe I could save you now.

FOUND IN TRANSLATION

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PEN International welcomes the return of a feature from the magazine's bygone days, now rejuvenated and brought to the fore in a starring role. Made possible with support from Bloomberg, 'Found in Translation' will comprise at least one story, excerpt, poem or essay per issue, newly rendered from any source language into English, French or Spanish. The works will have either never before been published in these languages, or will have been previously published for a limited readership only.

There is a debate to be had about the degree of second-language proficiency in many countries today, as well as the viability for publishers in certain markets to make works in translation a priority. Here we simply champion the translator's art in and of itself – as a matter of moral and aesthetic beauty forever enriching the grounds of literature.

In this issue Maureen Freely gives us *Vüs'at O. Bener* of Turkey, Lulu Norman and Ros Schwartz present *Albert Cossery* of Egypt and France, and Medeine Tribinevicius translates *Jurgis Kuncinas* of Lithuania.

Vüs'at O. Bener

Havva

Translated from the Turkish by Maureen Freely

Vüs'at O. Bener (1922–2005) is considered one of the most important Turkish short story writers of the post-1950 generation. Influenced by contemporary classical music, he strove to structure his stories as economically as possible. *Bener's* work characteristically evokes disturbing alternate realities with its distinctive style – fragmented, cryptic and suffused with dark tendencies.

My hair is soft. Havva's is like a goat's. My mother shaved her head twice with a razor so it would grow, but it didn't grow! It stayed short. And her nose is so ugly. It's as flat as a pancake. It looks just like the nose on that monkey in our schoolbook. I don't like her one bit. She's filthy. She's a thief.

My mother gave her a good hiding today. What did she expect? She cut

up that beautiful carpet in our guest room. Is she crazy or what? My mother asked her: 'Girl, why did you cut up that carpet?'

This is what she said: 'There's a bird caught inside,' she said. 'A white bird. I was going to help it out.' Now – you've seen that bird. She's learned one thing. 'Never again, Ma'am. Never again.' She says it over and over.

She could at least make herself useful. But what does she know about how things should be done? You leave her on her own, and all she does is fiddle a little bit here, a little bit there. She's soooo lazy. And as if that weren't bad enough, she's soooo slow. Eight hours later, she still has her hands in the dishwasher. And she's never full. Good, huh?

So listen to what happened the other day. My mother went out for a visit. We stayed at home with this one. Recep, our neighbour the *imam's* son, walked past our house. He turned around and passed our house again. Then he sat down on the pavement across the road and began to sing. He was practically howling, the filthy boy. This one was sitting on the divan. Then suddenly she jumped up and ran off. I got frightened. Then I got curious; I wanted to know where she'd gone. So I went and watched her from behind. She'd gone into the kitchen; she'd opened the window and was waving, the shameless hussy. But I'm telling my mother. She has it coming, this girl. But she would know enough to take my stained pinafore from its hiding place and show it to my mother. What can I do? It's a black mulberry stain. I can't get it out. I've tried hard to. God willing, something bad will happen to her, then we'll be free of her. Dear God, won't you please kill her?

So what did I say? What did she expect? So much the better. Her leg's swollen up like a tree stump. She went out to pick some grapes during the night, and she fell right on top of the night light. The broken glass went right into her foot. Idiot.

And my father showed such mercy. He went and took this ugly girl to Istanbul. We were left alone. My mother cried in secret. She's been upset for a month now. If only this Havva had never come here.

But she did. And now we're just fine.

Yesterday my mother said: 'If I put ten onion heads in front of this girl, would she eat them I wonder?'

'Let's do that, mother,' I said. 'Let's see if she eats them.' So we did. And by God, she ate them all! We were soooo shocked. Tears were pouring down her cheeks, but she kept eating. Then my mother asked: 'Can you smoke a cigarette, too, girl?'

'I can,' she said.

'Then take this and smoke it.' But hadn't my mother put salt inside that cigarette? When it started making popping noises, she got so frightened that she threw the cigarette away and scurried off. We almost died laughing.

Now we hear that Haci the milkman even pulled a knife on Recep, and all for this girl. Wouldn't she mention it to my mother? My mother got so angry. 'What kind of language is that?' she said. 'You'd better make sure I don't hear that again. If I do, I'll kill you.' That's what my mother told her, but still she

tells me: 'He really pulled out a knife, girl!'

Whenever we go out, my mother locks her in inside the house. If she didn't, this girl would just get up and go. One day she came *this* close to dying. There was coal in the brazier. Hey, idiot, why don't you open the window? The things she's put us through. We made her eat yoghurt with garlic. My stomach's churning. She fouled herself.

Fatma Hanim says: 'This girl has as many lives as a cat. She can't seem to die.' She's right. She eats like a pig. Whatever you give her. When I ate two little sweets that were supposed to be for guests, I got rapped on the palms of my hands ten times. All because of her. What does she know, all she does is cause trouble.

But she's strange, my mother. She puts her head on my knees; that's how she lies down. Sometimes it feels like what she's really doing is pushing down on my knees. My knees ache, but I can't pull them away. She looks at me so strangely.

Then one day I heard this through the door. My father saying to my mother: 'Open your mouth so I can spit in it.'

And my mother said: 'Oh, you can't be serious, sir!' Then my father let out a huge laugh.

'I was just trying you on, you silly woman! Why don't you just open your mouth for once, to see if I spit?' I could hardly believe my ears.

Why were they talking like that? So many times I almost asked my mother, but then I didn't. Because then they'd know I'd been listening through the door. Anyway, I'm scared to death of my mother. When she gives you a beating, you'd better not make a sound. Let alone scream. I don't scream, but I cry. That crazy girl doesn't cry. She just screams at the top of her lungs. How many times my father's said: 'This girl just isn't working out. Let's send her back to her village.' Let her go, then. Let's get rid of her.

My mother says: 'I feel sorry for this girl. She has no one. And she's strong. She's useful to me. In any case, we need someone.' So if we were doing her so much good, you'd think she'd sit quietly. But then she doubled up and said she had a stomach ache. Her breath smelled so bad! Then, suddenly, she found a worm and frightened me with it. That's why I lost my appetite. And I didn't tell my mother. If I did, then *she'd* tell my mother it was me who broke our water jug. But Mestan broke it when he was bouncing around.

He didn't break it, but that was what I told my mother. What can I do. At the end of it, there's a beating.

Havva's been ill for three days now. Inside the house it stinks like a corpse. No matter what we did, it didn't work. Such a commotion. Some said diarrhoea, some said fever. The doctor, I forget his name, said she had something.

God help us, we all could have died. Then later he said it wasn't. It's good I go to school. Otherwise I couldn't have stood that stink.

But anyway, they put her in the room next to the coal shed. My father

had the house distempered. My mother burned the calendar. The walls in my room are green. Sometimes I go downstairs and look at her through her window. She just lies there thrashing back and forth. A grown girl, acting like a baby. What's happened to her? But she can't die, can she? She gets better again. They were going to cut off her leg in Istanbul. If only they had. That way she'd sit still in a corner. It's all thanks to her dirty mouth that I get into all this trouble. Now she's sorry. But what is that worth? My mother pressed her, and she said this. She peeled off the bottom of the oil tin we'd thrown into the rubbish; she'd eaten that, and that was why she got sick. The neighbours say she was poisoned by the rusty tin. My mother said: 'Perhaps if we send her to school.'

Today my mother was crying. My poor mother. She beats me all the time, but I love her so much. How many times has she pulled apart her beautiful dresses to sew me a new dress for the holidays? 'Havva might die, my girl,' she said. 'I'm crying for her.' Right then I felt like I might explode. I started to cry, too.

'Havva's going to die! Don't let her die, Mother!'

'We can't be sure, my girl. God will decide. Run away now. Don't cry.' That's what my mother said, but I kept crying. Then I went downstairs and looked through the window into her room. Please, God, don't let her die. Please, God, don't kill her!' I said. There she was, thrashing on the bed. Suddenly my stomach began to ache. I wanted to scream, but I couldn't make a sound. It was getting dark. It stayed there, just where I was. After a while, our dog came to my side, wagging his tail. I patted our dog on the head. Then we went together to the head of the stairs. My stomach stopped aching.

A little later, my father and my mother came back with the doctor. And I watched through a crack in the door. The doctor gave Havva an injection in her arm. Havva didn't scream. The three of them stood there and waited. My father was playing with the pimple on his chin.

Then my mother looked into my father's face. My father leaned over and whispered into the doctor's ear. The doctor nodded. Then Havva opened her eyes. My mother went to Havva's side and kneeled next to the bed. 'Havva, my girl, are you all right, my dear child?' she asked. 'Look, you're getting better. Is there anything your heart desires? What shall I cook for you?' At first Havva said nothing. Then she opened up her eyes very wide.

'Baklava,' she said.

Then she died.

Gary Klang

Souvenirs de mai '68

Nous habitons mon frère Serge, Bobby Labrousse et moi au 34, de la rue Gay-Lussac. Un immeuble typiquement parisien, avec une minuterie qui ne donnait pas le temps de monter et, à l'entrée, une vieille concierge suivant toutes les allées et venues comme un flic qui s'ennuie. Au-dessous, Madame Paul Fort, la femme du poète, jeune fille de quatre-vingt cinq ans.

Pourquoi cette digression sur le 34 ? Parce que les événements ont commencé juste devant notre immeuble. C'est là exactement qu'a été érigée la première barricade. Dans la nuit du 10 au 11 mai 1968, le Quartier latin se trouva soudain en état d'effervescence. Les étudiants affluaient de partout, et près du Luxembourg les Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité (CRS) attendaient en piaffant. Je me trouvais devant le 34 avec Madame Fort, Bobby, Ernst Wilson, O'Garro et Gérard Aubourg (dont la barbe de faux clochard s'étalera peu après en première page du journal *Minute*, forçant notre homme à se mettre au vert pendant deux mois).

Mai '68 commença sans préméditation. Quelqu'un proposa de dépaver la rue et de faire des barricades, afin de se protéger des CRS appelés « SS ». Tout s'enchaîna ensuite très rapidement. Je fus témoin d'une scène typique. Un journaliste se débattait de toutes ses faibles forces, essayant désespérément de photographier les étudiants qui, eux, voulaient lui confisquer son appareil.

—Camarades, foutez-lui la paix, il ne fait que son boulot.

Cohn-Bendit avait parlé.

Cette simple phrase suffit à calmer les ardeurs et l'homme de la presse put prendre ses photos. (Quarante ans après, je vois encore Dany le Rouge, sourire aux lèvres, s'amusant du spectacle comme un enfant.) Tout allait bien mais, vers minuit, la fête tourna à la confrontation lorsque les CRS attaquèrent. Croyant faire peur, ils aggravèrent les choses. En plus de dépaver, les étudiants brûlèrent toutes les voitures qu'ils rencontraient sur leur passage. Celles de notre rue furent transformées en bûchers dont l'hérétique était l'ancien système. Un voisin en brûla quatre, et un de nos amis perdit une main dans cette nuit folle : un CRS lui avait balancé une grenade « non offensive » !

Quand la police arriva à hauteur du 34, nous avions installé chez nous une infirmerie improvisée. Nous soignâmes cette nuit-là nombre de blessés. Je me souviens d'un homme qui eut le tympan crevé et de l'appartement rempli comme une salle de bal musette. Tous mes amis s'y trouvaient ainsi que Jules Badeau (surnom donné à un locataire de l'immeuble) qui avait passé la soirée chez nous et dans le nez duquel Bobby introduisit une plume d'oie prise dans un vieux coussin, harassé qu'il était d'entendre déconner Jules. Sans oublier Tête de Poisson, autre surnom qui qualifiait une stalinienne pleine d'enthousiasme pour des lendemains

chantant des airs de balalaïka. Nous passâmes la nuit sur pied, respirant à pleins poumons les gaz que nous lançaient les CRS. Je ne me rappelle plus à quelle heure nos amis rentrèrent chez eux. O'Garro resta avec nous pour ne pas être pris dans une rafle, et n'ayant pas assez de lits, nous dûmes le laisser sur une chaise où il dormit, assis, tant bien que mal.

Le lendemain, notre rue était un champ de bataille : voitures brûlées, chaussée déparée, barricades aplaties après la nuit de bagarre. A partir de ce jour, le quartier se referma sur lui-même.

Interdit d'interdire ! L'imagination au pouvoir !

Après l'expérience de la terreur macoute en Haïti, où régnait un médecin fou, j'allais vivre l'utopie réalisée. Et ici je prie le lecteur de croire que je pèse chaque mot et que rien n'est exagéré. Pendant plusieurs jours, dans ce quartier où il n'y avait plus ni loi, ni police, je sus ce que voulait vraiment dire le mot « Fraternité ». L'homme n'était plus un loup pour l'homme, mais un frère au sens le plus fort. On adressait la parole à n'importe qui et chacun partageait ce qu'il possédait. J'ai vu de vieux messieurs, qui avaient guerroyé en '14, tutoyer les jeunes et se faire tutoyer par eux spontanément, comme si la chose allait de soi. J'ai vu des cercles se former dans les rues avec des gens qui ne se connaissaient pas la veille. Pour qui a vécu parmi les Parisiens, gens parfois raides et compassés, on comprendra sans mal ce que cela signifiait. C'est à cette époque qu'O'Garro me dit que, pour une fois, il ne souffrait d'aucun racisme. En abolissant la loi et les contraintes, en chassant la police du Quartier latin, on avait comme par magie rendu l'homme vrai et libre.

Au lieu d'une meute d'enragés, mai '68 avait fait de nous des Frères. J'affirme que c'est la seule fois où j'ai connu un sentiment de bonheur absolu. Je vivais enfin dans une société humaine. Il n'y avait ni stress, ni agressivité. Aucune barrière entre les hommes. Tous ces murs invisibles et absurdes qu'ils mettent entre eux pour mieux souffrir. Mai '68 avait tout balayé.

Levés à n'importe quelle heure, nous nous rendions dans la rue, notre royaume. Afin de refaire le monde. Nous nagions dans le farniente, sans nous demander ce qui se passerait lorsque le général de Gaulle réagirait, et l'Utopie nous semblait naturelle. C'est ainsi qu'il fallait vivre et non stressés, pressés, aigris contre le monde entier. Révise ta copie, Président Sarkozy.

En plus de discuter, nous allions à des réunions improvisées à la Sorbonne. Un jour, le Pape nous rendit visite, je veux dire Jean-Paul Sartre en personne. Il voulait dialoguer avec les jeunes. Une autre fois, Aragon lui aussi daigna se déplacer. Mais il n'eut pas la chance du photographe, car Cohn-Bendit l'interpella en lui disant que ce n'était pas la place d'une crapule stalinienne.

Le mot fit mouche comme beaucoup d'autres. De ce jour, les communistes devinrent des crapules staliniennes, et je date de '68 la dégringolade du parti de Georges Marchais, le début de la fin des nostalgiques du Palais d'hiver. Mai, ce fut le refus de toutes les dictatures, qu'elles fussent de gauche ou de droite. Désir absolu d'harmonie. Sous les pavés la plage !

Si grande était notre joie qu'un de nos amis haïtiens perdit toute peur des macoutes à partir des événements de '68. Il était arrivé à Paris, traumatisé par un séjour à la prison-mouroir de Fort-Dimanche. Il se retournait en marchant, de peur d'être suivi, et ses nuits étaient hantées par des cauchemars. Il fut guéri par l'Utopie et jamais plus ne fit de rechute. Mai '68 fut la psychothérapie la plus formidable

qu'on pût imaginer. Les habitants du Quartier latin comprirent d'un seul coup qu'il y avait autre chose dans l'existence que l'aigreur et le ressassement. Autre chose que l'exclusion. Le bonheur était possible !

La fête dura quelques jours, mais pas assez. La vie « normale » reprit le dessus, autrement dit le stress, les engueulades, l'écart entre les hommes. De Gaulle se ressaisit, décidé à se défaire de la chienlit. André Malraux défila sur les Champs-Élysées, et tout « rentra dans l'ordre ». La fête avait pris fin. La terre est une vallée de larmes. Tu gagneras ton pain à la sueur de ton front.

Je compris alors que tout gouvernement, fût-il démocratique, n'était qu'un pis-aller. Le bonheur est dans l'absence de contraintes. Oh, je sais bien qu'on ne pouvait pas toujours vivre de la sorte. Il fallait que ce soit « business as usual », que les usines tournent et que les enfants aillent à l'école. Mais je sais aussi que cela n'est pas le bonheur. J'ai appris également (corollaire de ce qui précède) que Rousseau a raison. L'homme naît bon, la société le déprave. Ou plutôt, l'homme naît neutre. Durant la période utopique de mai, tous ceux que j'ai côtoyés étaient devenus bons. Spontanément. Ici les mots me manquent pour dire ce que j'ai ressenti. Il est des expériences inexprimables. Comme le disait si bien Rimbaud, vrai fils de mai avant la lettre :

« Moi ! moi qui me suis dit mage ou ange, dispensé de toute morale, je suis rendu au sol, avec un devoir à chercher et la réalité rugueuse à étreindre. Paysan. »
En 2008 le Rêve est mort.

L'imagination au rancart ! Sous les pavés, la haine !

Voici venu le temps des petits hommes.

Simon Kirwin

This Is What Buenos Aires Might Have Been

Written on the Avenida de Mayo, 2004

They made me stay in this hotel.

I got my toenails pressed.
They dry-cleaned my shoes.
Ice came with drinks,
even hot drinks.

They cleaned the bathroom every time
I looked in the mirror.
I sneezed, they called a doctor.
I coughed, they called an undertaker.

I cursed, they called the priest.
I shouted, they called a shrink.
Got a fresh Bible delivered every morning.
I asked for fresh coffee, it came in an instant.

Room service was a new room.
When it got too noisy, they stopped the traffic.
When the lights dimmed, they shot the electrician.
I left a tap dripping, they tortured the plumber.

When I asked for the bill, they feigned ignorance.
When I asked for a taxi, they asked what colour.
When the lift broke down, I was carried to my room.

I had to ask for sugar this morning.
They fired the waiter.
And when I left?
When I left?
What happened when I left?
They pulled the place down.

Paul Burge

Michael

At Finchcocks Piano Museum in Goudhurst, Kent, friends, poetry, food, recollections, wine, and of course pianos, seen and heard – one thumping a drum as well (!) somewhere in its throat or belly, another playing Liszt gently, edgily, a third, small, to be taken to picnics, playing delicate, exquisite Mozart – together on a sunshine April afternoon to remember with Anna, Michael, a year and more after his death, teacher of voice and meeter with people.

Dear Michael, dear man, exacting intellectually, exacting of the heart, no fuzziness there. But so wide a heart; so many different kinds of us his friends; so sure a heart, 'Then you cannot buy my flat,' to a viewer who told of racist opinions; or, my gift one birthday was every Jack Aubrey book by Patrick O'Brian then in paperback (sixteen); or, in a room of machines and kindness, stuck through with tubes, after ten days, two weeks, the first day of consciousness, completely at one with a friend who was now leaving and would come back in a week. 'You will,' he appealed, with a voice not yet quite used to talking.

And to their right, Anna, as simple part of the love between Michael and herself, sitting to one side acknowledging their friends' time with him, his with her; Anna, Anna and Michael, Michael and Anna, who shared more aspects of love than many of us.

They didn't sell their flat: filled with books, lain with Turkish carpets, polished wood underneath, hung with pictures of flowers and plants and cows and iconic farm tools; long, long conversations on theatre and books and things political and philosophical, musical and, of course, painterly, astute, acute, worth always, sentiment never, the measure.

And here and here and here (but never crowdingly!), stones, carved wood, pieces of silver, shells, to be handled, to be talked of, to be parts of conversations. What else could his work be but to show people how to talk to each other better? Shaping voices, chicken-curry cook, roll-up smoking, storyteller (his characters of the Tarn and Garonne long and wide with life), mushroom hunter (I never went on any of the pursuits) in deerstalker (do I remember that correctly?) and, certainly, in caped coat, a dead ringer for Sherlock Holmes.

The violin playing would need no dubbing; one evening by a fire, listening to Novotny, whom he had not heard before, playing Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin, sitting wrapt – the word was made for his attentiveness of ear and mind and soul; their disciplines must test the performance; through them, at one and alone with the music, now the heart did not lead, but waited for other approval.

But in another aspect this attentiveness turns as it must, being of Michael, again and again to people, to those he was with; with him you were never unattended. Conversation, mealtimes, time with him, even when he was ill, ended in time with your time. He lived by people.

And time with him is gone, conversations not had, meals not shared, thoughts not told, yes, of course, how it is ... and for others nearer him? O.

And Anna, Anna and Michael, Michael and Anna, husband and wife, friend and friend, companions in heart, a rainbow of love between them. This absence, this incompleteness, is a loss that can be numbered and in some way, after a time, perhaps, agreed. But that I cannot tell you this, my friend!

Michael McCallion, a friend of the author, died in December 2004.

Azar Nafisi

Dangerous Liaisons: Secular and Religious Intellectuals in Iran

Over the last 150 years, the process of modernization in Iran has seen both convergence and confrontation between religious and secular modes of thought. It has been a thrillingly dangerous relationship; some within the religious establishment fought for modernization and change, while some secular intellectuals sided with the most reactionary aspects of tradition.

Iranian writers and intellectuals have been central to this mêlée of tradition and modernization, religion and secularism, but their role has mainly been discussed in terms of political participation and ideological positions, emphasizing the political ‘message’ of a work or its author. However, one should resist the tyranny of politics over other fields; democracy is manifested not just in the political freedom of individuals and ideas, but also in the autonomy of and interactions between different realms of human endeavor.

Thinkers like Theodor Adorno, Richard Rorty and Paul Ricoeur, and authors such as Milan Kundera and Carlos Fuentes believe the novel is essentially democratic because of its polyphonic nature (to borrow a term from the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin). The novel is not merely a reflection of ‘reality’ but a way of perceiving and interpreting the world through what Rorty calls the ironist’s point of view. The ironic attitude becomes a method of comprehension by which the world is perceived through an awareness of its contradictions, paradoxes, and anomalies. Works of imagination offer an alternative way of viewing, comprehending, and controlling reality. Whenever imagination is mutilated, transformed into a handmaiden of politics or ideology, reality itself will become impoverished and incomplete.

Shahrnush Parsipur’s *Touba and the Meaning of Night* (1989) begins at the end of the nineteenth century, during the last turbulent years of the Qajar dynasty. Iranian society, deep in social, political, and cultural crisis, is critically questioning its own traditions and norms. Western thought begins directly to influence and change Iran’s traditional, closed society. The heroine’s father, an *adib* (poet-scholar), walks the streets, deep in thought. An Englishman on horseback runs him down then, angry at the *adib*’s inattention, whips him across the face.

The incident creates a big scandal in the town. It is arranged that the foreigner should go to the scholar’s house and apologize. This simple confrontation is probably a footnote in the life of the Englishman, but it transforms the *adib*’s life forever. The change is presented at first through small details. For example, at that time very few Persian homes had Western furniture; even the well-off sat on carpeted floors, leaning against huge cushions. The *adib*, in order to properly receive the foreigner, must borrow Western-style chairs. The Englishman’s presence

breaks another rule. In most Persian houses it is still customary to remove one's shoes when entering a house. The foreigner, ignorant or heedless, enters the *adib's* inner sanctum with his boots on. Thus the act of apology meant to humble the foreigner turns into a gesture of his superiority.

The most important result of this encounter is the *adib's* startling discovery that the Earth is round. For several days he contemplates this discovery. Instinctively recognizing the connection between the foreigner's presence, the roundness of the Earth and future upheavals, he announces: 'Yes, the Earth is round; the women will start to think, and as soon as they begin to think, they will become shameless.'

In very few pages the author depicts the predicament that has confronted traditional Iranian society for over a century: not just economic and political exploitation by a stronger and predatory West but, more alarming, the fact that this encounter could change a whole way of looking at the world, opening up many 'unthinkable' possibilities.

Many intellectuals at the time discovered this alternative perspective, which both intrigued and frightened them. This discovery was partly the result of increasing contact with the West, but also partly because the old ways of ruling and interpreting the world – shaped by a despotic monarchy and reactionary clergy – no longer worked. Iran from the mid-nineteenth century had entered a period of political, social, and cultural crisis, and its encounters with the West generated understanding and solutions for those crises. Ironically, the very West that exploited also possessed the means for liberation and progress.

The fight against political absolutism involved resistance against religious orthodoxy and the push for a secular, pluralistic society. Most threatening about Western thought were the ideas of the rights of citizens and the sovereignty of the individual. The most suppressed elements in society, women and minorities, now became the most subversive. They articulated the need for individual autonomy and pluralism through political confrontations, but also through the new cultural forms of drama, fiction, film, and journalism. Literature and art, irreverent and disobedient, are filled with ambiguity and irony. The idea of Satan and heresy thus became identified with Western thought.

Not accidentally, one of the most important social and religious movements of the time, the Babi movement, had as its charismatic leader the female poet Tahereh. Tahereh had no contacts with the West; she came from a very religious family and was given in marriage to an orthodox Muslim man. Yet she instinctively associated the ideas of pluralism and freedom with the liberation of women and the radical transformation of religion. She was, allegedly, the first woman to bare her head publicly, denouncing the rule of both despotism and religious reaction. The Shah, under pressure from reactionary clerics, put her under house arrest and later had her murdered in secret.

But there were others, like Alamtaj Esfahani, a simple housewife born over 110 years ago. Alamtaj, though permitted education at home, was forced as a teenager into marriage with an already married man over twice her age. She wrote poems in secret, hiding them inside the books of Hafez and Rumi. After her death, her son discovered her poetry and published it. Her work places her on a par with any feminist in the world.

Alamtaj's poems are testimony to the liberated, open-minded imagination of a woman who never physically left the oppressive realm of her domestic life. In her poems she questions her lot as a woman, employing many words and concepts deemed taboo or un-poetic. Decades before the Islamic Revolution, she casts doubt on tenets that have become law since 1979, such as marrying girls as young as nine or forcing women to marry men they don't love. Alamtaj appreciates the West in different ways, marveling in one poem at the simplicity of the Singer sewing machine. In another poem, welcoming the 'breeze' of freedom from the West, she predicts that 'future Iranian women' will liberate themselves.

Such women were not blindly in love with Western life; most revolutionaries, clerical or not, had a strong sense of loyalty to Iran and its interests. The same women who demonstrated against the veil also boycotted foreign goods, protesting Western exploitation and imperialism.

Many clerics joined the movement for change; others chose the path of confrontation. Famously, in 1909, Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri, the highest-ranking anti-constitutionalist cleric, was executed for his anti-revolutionary views. In opposing modernism, he condemned certain manifestations of the 'toxic' Western world destroying the minds of Iranian youth, namely novels, films, music, minority rights, and women's education. This is, more or less, the discourse Islamic revolutionaries adopted when they first usurped power. It is no accident that Ayatollah Khomeini was an avid follower of Nuri.

Nuri and his followers did not merely object to the contents of novels or films, but to their very forms. To them the world was static, generalized, and under control; all of a sudden, it seemed out of control. Through fiction, drama, and film, it had become varied, fickle, irreverent, colorful. These imaginative forms went against the absolutist frame of mind that polarizes the world into Good and Evil. They emphasized life's contradictions and paradoxes, celebrated the individual, and negated the ability of any ideology to interpret the world. Nuri was right to see them as innately heretical.

Ironically, the 1979 revolution made many secular and religious intellectuals aware of this point. Revolutionary Islamists claimed that all that was modern was Western and therefore irrelevant to Iranian society, and that modern Iranian women – like me – were foreign to our culture and history. To test the truth of such claims, many of us engaged in a critical dialogue with our history. (I had never known about the aforementioned amazing women of Iran's past until returning to my country in 1979.) This quest not only changed the secular intellectuals, but also provided the grounds for the reform movement within Islamic intellectual circles.

As for religious intellectuals, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, the well-known Iranian filmmaker and writer, is a good example. During the first years of the revolution, Makhmalbaf, then the most promising and militant of Muslim writer-directors, claimed in a notorious interview that new Iranian Islamic culture did not need famous Western directors, such as 'that damned Fellini and Buñuel', or veteran Iranian filmmakers. He declared that the Iranian directors Bahram Beyzai, Masoud Kimiai and Dariush Mehrjui should all be 'executed'. Makhmalbaf, who showed his films in prisons to 'educate' political prisoners, felt no need for secular elements, considering them agents of the West. He and his Islamist comrades boasted that they would create 'Islamic' cinema, 'Islamic' literature, 'Islamic' democracy and

even 'Islamic' human rights. They learned their lesson the hard way, and at great expense.

Makhmalbaf and his associates did not recreate or reinvent film or literature; rather, film and literature recreated them. As time went by, Makhmalbaf's medium changed him; the camera did not pick up just one version of reality, but many, in constant motion and change. Film itself, like Sheherazade, mesmerized Makhmalbaf; while he claimed that 'the world is black and white', the camera countered: 'The world is full of colors.'

From the highly ideological films of his first years, Makhmalbaf gradually moved to the despairing and demoralized *Marriage of the Blessed* (1989) following the war against Iraq. Stylistically, this film presents a paradox; its main character is a war hero, a devout Muslim revolutionary who returns from the front to his fiancée and home. He is horrified by what he sees; the Western elements he had fought against have returned during his absence. The world of the film is one that has betrayed the most important ideals of the revolution.

The film shows the influence of the two elements Makhmalbaf had once so vehemently denounced. He uses the very techniques of the avant-garde filmmakers he had condemned; moreover, captivated by the most common of 'Western' allurements, he chooses a beautiful, blue-eyed actress for the lead female role, and dubs his hero with the voiceover used for the veteran French actor/sex symbol Alain Delon, who was very popular in pre-revolutionary Iran.

Makhmalbaf's later films move away from his own early revolutionary ideals, towards those he had so casually dismissed. His *Once Upon a Time, Cinema* (1992) is an enthusiastic appreciation of decades of Iranian film, celebrating the pioneering works of the directors he had wanted executed a few years earlier.

I met Makhmalbaf behind the scenes of Abbas Kiarostami's *Close-Up*. In an interview lasting many hours, he tried to convince me that he no longer believed in absolutes. When I asked how he now felt about his ideological position in *Marriage of the Blessed*, he replied: 'Perhaps art can give us the possibility of living several times. Every individual can live only once, and only from one perspective. Art can create other, and different, perspectives.'

The above is an edited and abridged version of a talk given in 2007 at The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC, and published in Denmark.

Víctor Flores Morales

Des gens bien, quoi

París, 16ème, Porte d'Auteuil.

Era una de esas veladas simpáticas. Música étnica, risas, humo y bastante licor. En el ambiente daba vueltas una pizca de onda bo-bo ('bourgeois bohème') que curiosamente no me incomodaba. Alrededor oía hablar inglés, francés, francés *à la con* (pelotudo) y español con acento Latinoamericano. Afortunadamente los que me habían invitado estaban allí. Si no, ¿cómo explicar mi presencia? Era la primera vez que encontraba gente así ... tanta gente así.

Aunque mi llegada pasó más bien desapercibida, creí sentir un par de miradas escrutadoras sobre mi sien. Luego de aproximadamente media hora de aclimatación, o más bien dicho de 'aculturación', todo comenzaba a fluir de la manera habitual para esta clase de *soirée*.

En París, la cuestión de mis orígenes siempre ha servido para entre abrir la puerta. ¡Le Chili! exclama la gente. ¡Pinochet! ¡Allende! Y luego un silencio incómodo.

Me pregunto si el prefecto de origen magrebí del departamento del Jura sentirá lo mismo ... tedio de que te recuerden cada cinco minutos que eres extranjero. Y luego esa sensación fastidiosa de estar allí y al mismo tiempo no estar. De no pertenecer al lugar, de jugar otro juego.

A medida que la noche avanzaba me sorprendió la cantidad de gente bonita por metro cuadrado. De manera refleja traté inmediatamente de localizar a las bellezas de turno, a las cuales podría admirar durante el resto de la noche. Desde un lugar discreto y a prudente distancia, claro está. Esa noche resultaba más fácil detectar a las otras, a aquellas que conozco bien. Demasiado bien.

Con mi etiqueta de extranjero pegada en la frente, y en consecuencia, catalogado como no peligroso por ajeno a los códigos de competencia del lugar, iba por ahí y por allá cruzando palabras y oyendo frases hechas. Estaba en eso cuando apareció Isa, Isadora para ser exacto.

Luego de que la dueña de casa nos presentara y sin que se lo preguntase, Isa me explicó que llevaba ese nombre en honor a una escultora venezolana que sus padres habían conocido a fines de los setenta. Gracias a ella, la adaptación de la familia había sido menos difícil y los lazos con el lugar se habían perennizado.

Al escucharla me bastaron sólo unos cuantos nanosegundos para saber que era demasiado tarde.

Me conmovió su perfecto dominio de sí y de su sonrisa. También me gustó un ligero desfase de rapidez entre sus párpados (puede que a esas alturas ya estuviera alucinando). Pero por sobretodo me cautivó su acento.

Sus años en América latina habían dejado una clara huella en su español y de

alguna manera hacían que Isa no entrara en mi catálogo de arquetipos parisinos. Tal vez el contacto con el *au-dé-là* de la línea del Ecuador marcara también su carácter. Me pareció que carecía de la aburrida arrogancia parisina.

Comenzamos a hablar de lugares diversos en Latinoamérica. De las latas de coca-cola que cubren el piso de las iglesias de Chiapas, de los guías de Machu pichu y sus teorías descabelladas sobre ovnis y experimentos genéticos y de los viajes sobre el techo de los buses en Ecuador.

Como se trataba de la primera vez que hablábamos creo que ambos nos sentimos un poco obligados a tocar temas menos superfluos. Cuestión de demostrar que no sólo nos interesábamos en anécdotas simpáticas.

—¿Sabes una cosa? lanzó con una soltura que yo creía reservada a las personas que se conocen desde hace tiempo.

—¿Mmm?

—Hay algo que me entristece de América latina. Su incapacidad de salir adelante. ¿Crees que se debe a un problema estructural o a la influencia de Estados Unidos?

—Eeehh.

Recordé una conversación similar oída al pasar en algún café, y como no se me ocurrió nada nuevo, repetí.

—Creo que se trata de una mezcla entre ambas cosas. Dije con la seguridad de un primer día de escuela.

—Tal vez tengas razón, dijo sonriendo. Lástima que ya no se pueda vivir allá. Fueron los mejores años de mi vida.

A estas alturas no sabía por qué ella insistía en hablar en español. No es que me molestara su acento, al contrario, me derretía completamente. Pero no me dejaba ordenar las ideas. Durante un silencio incómodo pensé en lo curioso que resultaba oírle decir ‘fueron los mejores años de mi vida’. Si ni siquiera había cumplido treinta años.

Iba a tratar de reivindicar mi lamentable performance haciendo un comentario esperanzador sobre el comercio con equidad o la necesidad de crear sociedad civil, pero me interrumpí. Hubiera sido aún peor.

En pleno silencio y mientras ella miraba el techo, una manija invisible de mi malsano subconsciente se activó. Me pregunté si no estaría frente de una de esas tantas europeas que, no desprovistas del todo de conciencia social, y sintiéndose culpables a morir por su riqueza, tratan de equilibrar la desigualdad del mundo acostándose con tipos de países pobres. Confieso que me hubiera gustado.

Lamentablemente el fin de mis lucubraciones llegó rápido. De la nada se nos acercó un tipo y se nos quedó mirando. Lamentablemente no se trataba de una equivocación. Él estaba efectivamente marcando su territorio. Hice un intento por ignorarlo, pero Isa rápidamente nos presentó, esta vez en francés.

—Este es mi novio Philippe. Philippe, Marcelo; Marcelo, Philippe.

—Encantado, contesté con una mueca mientras sentía como nuestro lazo lingüístico desaparecía ineluctablemente.

En ese momento comencé a extrañar el español.

Alain Mabanckou

Lettre au soleil

Soleil

Voici ma lettre recommandée
avec accusé de réception

Je te somme ici et maintenant
d'honorer le tribut de lumière
que tu dois à la motte de Terre
qui cabriole autour de toi

Ta course révolutionnaire
et le halo sphéroïdal de tes embrasures
ne m'impressionnent plus
Je t'attendrai au tournant
entre la timidité de l'Aurore
et la confusion de l'Azur

Ma rage sera à son midi,
tatouée d'une rancoeur immarcescible
J'irai s'il le faut
te dénicher dans la poussière stellaire
et l'immensité vagabonde de la Galaxie
Je porterai alors plainte auprès de l'Eclipse
pour te ridiculiser en plein zénith
devant l'humanité qui révère tes vertus ...

Jeff McMahon

Heywood Broun: The Writer We Need Now

Coffee rings on the cover testify that my 1935 copy of Heywood Broun's *It Seems to Me* served for some of its life as a coaster. But when I found this collection a decade ago in a second-hand bookshop in California, the genie was still alive in its tawny pages, and he rolled up his sleeves and coached me to better writing. Now I use his writing to coach others. After a class last quarter at the University of Chicago, a promising undergraduate journalist said: 'Thank you for assigning Heywood Broun. I've never read anything like it.'

Like what? Here's Broun (pronounced *broon*) upon the death sentence of Sacco and Vanzetti, the shoemaker and the fish peddler executed by the state of Massachusetts in 1927 on dubious murder charges:

The men in Charlestown prison are shining spirits, and Vanzetti has spoken with an eloquence not known elsewhere within our time. They are too bright, we shield our eyes and kill them. We are the dead, and in us there is not feeling nor imagination nor the terrible torment of lust for justice.

Broun wrote a column for *The New York World*, a more liberal newspaper than anything in today's illiberal media, but the *World* was not liberal enough for him. After *World* editor Ralph Pulitzer spiked Broun's column on Sacco and Vanzetti, Broun published a commentary in *The Nation* calling the *World* cowardly, and was soon without either column or job.

The *World* fired a journalist that the world has never replaced. No columnist today compares in courage, compassion or eloquence. The closest we have may be Nicholas Kristof, who has written on the prison at Guantánamo Bay – which, as an obvious injustice perpetuated against likely innocents by a corrupt government exploiting racism and fear, is the Sacco and Vanzetti of our time. But examine Nicholas Kristof's equivalent lines:

The most famous journalist you may never have heard of is Sami al-Hajj, an Al-Jazeera cameraman who is on a hunger strike to protest abuse during more than six years in a Kafkaesque prison system. Mr. Hajj's fortitude has turned him into a household name in the Arab world, and his story is sowing anger at the authorities holding him without trial. That's us. Mr. Hajj is one of our forgotten prisoners in Guantánamo Bay.

Lovely that Kristof awoke to the cause, but his effort neither burns with passion nor brims with eloquence; it fizzles with journalese – *protest abuse, authorities*

– and cliché – *household name, sowing anger*. I cannot imagine Broun having to make a confession like this one by Kristof: ‘Most Americans, including myself, originally gave President Bush the benefit of the doubt and assumed that the inmates truly were the worst of the worst.’

Nor can I imagine Broun cloaking a confession by generalizing it to ‘most Americans’. Kristof’s excuse: *But all the kids were doing it!* Broun chides all the kids and alters the debate. He not only deplores the condemned men’s offenders, he refocuses their defenders:

Already too much has been made of the personality of [Judge] Webster Thayer. To sympathizers of Sacco & Vanzetti he has seemed a man with a cloven hoof. But in no usual sense of the term is this man a villain. Although probably not a great jurist, he is without doubt as capable and conscientious as the average Massachusetts judge.

Notice the care taken by that middle sentence: *in no usual sense of the term is this man a villain*. It absolves no one of villainy. Broun took the themes for his Sacco and Vanzetti commentary – *death, life, blindness, light* – from an outburst in the courtroom. When Judge Thayer read the sentence, a woman shouted: ‘It is death condemning life!’ So Broun varies his themes with occasion, but regardless of theme he blends compassion and eloquence. Often he sharpens them with wit and humor.

When a Brooklyn parson was crusading against a sex education pamphlet, Broun chased him from the gates of Jerusalem to the walls of Elsinore with a fusillade of punchlines:

Canon William Sheafe Chase is not the first pessimist to insist that nature has tricked us all into a sorry mess and that sex is a fundamental blunder of creation. In that case Hamlet was quite right in urging a nunnery upon Ophelia, but the Canon is almost the first critic to insist that the melancholy Dane was altogether normal.

When not tilting against the windmills of his time, Broun observes its quietest poignancies. In ‘A Spring Sunday’ he sees a young couple kiss in a taxi, and their relationship flashes before his eyes. In ‘Marry in Haste’ he punctures the notion that young couples should go slow and think carefully before slipping on the ring: ‘Marriage must remain among the extra hazardous risks,’ he writes. ‘The best chance is to take a short, sharp sprint before jumping.’ In ‘Marion the Cat’ Broun admires the pluck of a feline companion who, lost for a week, finds her way back to his Manhattan high-rise apartment ... expecting.

She is a nuisance. My impending responsibility for new arrivals fills me with terror, and yet if a cat selects this single apartment out of all New York as just the proper influence for impressionable kittens I must admit that the compliment is greatly received. A cat is nobody’s fool, and if Marion feels that this place has prospects and that I am a promising young author you can’t expect me to set her straight.

The promising young author published *It Seems to Me* at age forty-six. Five years later he was dead of pneumonia. He had time to found the Newspaper Guild, serve as its first president, and publish a few collections of commentary – now out of print – that every columnist ought to read, because Broun would sooner lose his column than lose his grip on justice.

Accused by Pulitzer of expressing 'his personal opinion with the utmost extravagance', Broun replied: 'I spoke only to the limit of my belief and passion. This may be extravagance, but I see no wisdom in saving up indignation for a rainy day. It was already raining. Besides, fighters who pull their punches lose their fights.'

Broun coaches not just fighters, but writers, and we all ought to read him whether we aspire to commentary or poetry or fiction. He sharpened his daggers at the Algonquin with Dorothy Parker. Journalism couldn't keep either of them from writing literature.

I bought my coffee-stained copy of *It Seems to Me* for \$8.50, 'as is'. It previously belonged to a Frank O'Connor, who had splashed his autograph across the inside cover. It could have been any of many Frank O'Connors – probably not the Irish playwright, who lived in Cork and Dublin; more likely the American actor, husband of Ayn Rand. I imagine Frank reading *It Seems to Me* aloud to Ayn in bed at night, charging her thought battery with Broun's compassion and eloquence before she drifts off to dream. But I imagine that scene as *what might have been*. How might Broun have elevated Rand's dry libertarian prose? What if he had served as her coach instead of her coaster?

Melissa Patiño Hinostroza

Los días

Día 4

Mi nueva vida me ha llevado a latir en forma de embrión o de mundo. Tengo una interconexión con el embrión de cada ser humano. Vi todos los corazones de los embriones. Los sentí latir al ritmo de mi método y he tenido que entrar en crisis porque no supe que más hacer.

Mi nueva vida me dio su hombro robusto y me mostró su torso flácido. Me consoló al mostrarme su rostro y en él mas corazones inflamados y en ellos miles de rostros sudorosos, disparejos. Y en ellos el mío tan distinto a mi anterior vida recostado en el hombro de la nueva.

Mi nueva vida me ha sentado frente a ella, me ha nombrado con decoros guardiana del latir. ¿Me lo merezco? ¿Cómo mi minúsculo latir puede latirse para cuidar a otros? Cuidar el ritmo del latir y su espectáculo de apasionamiento. Cuidar la regularidad del latir y los cardiacos sentimientos de culpa. ¿Quién es culpable? 'ama a los otros como a ti misma'. Cerré los ojos y vi al mundo como un embrión a punto de abortar.

Día 5

Siempre es una sorpresa los cambios a los que me conduce mi nueva vida. Siempre tan coqueta como una muchacha de veinte años que es culpable de cuidar el latir. Siempre tan sabia como una muchacha de veinte días de encierro corriendo para no creerse nada.

Mi nueva vida me prepara algo grande, lo sé. Me pretende liberar de los temores y de los sabios consejos de las paredes. Me recuerda mi amnesia obligatoria para la sumisión. Mi nueva vida me ha envejecido rápidamente porque me ha cansado. ¿Luego del quinto día podré descansar?

No puedo sentirme apenada al lado de mi nueva vida, aunque sigo entrando en crisis, las lágrimas están para desinflamar mis mejillas.

Hoy mi novísima vida ha encargado desfallecimiento con una melodía que ha besado mi frente y se ha acostado conmigo a contar latidos. En esta nocturnidad revisaré algunos corazones antes de dormir.

Día 6

Hoy he despertado con el rostro iluminado de polvo. Es un día que promete aire inédito. Mi nueva vida quitó las sábanas de un tirón, me sacudió la cara y me tocó el cuerpo para ejercitarlo. Fue corriendo a traer el desayuno que ordenó en la recepción de la prisión; café, jugo de papaya y huevos revueltos.

Iremos a visitar a tu padre, me ha dicho, y mis ojos se han roto; hace mucho que no sé como ubicarlo. Hace mucho que mi padre se olvidó de mis ojos – ahora rotos y sucios – ¿cómo es que lo encontraremos? El está esperándonos. Hoy es día de visita.

B. E. Hopkins

Excerpt from the novel

Translated from the Gibberish

With a bit of effort, Daniel managed to make it to his feet and stumble to the corner. He had decided to walk to the Rocks to think, to absorb this moment and to contemplate its repercussions. He nearly fell flat on his back attempting a bell-kick.

'I'm drunk!' he shouted. 'God help me, I'm drunk!'

A veil of trees obscured the view of the valley below as Daniel inched his way toward the Rocks. He could hear voices from farther up the hill. 'Who's that?' one asked.

When he arrived, three shapes were perched on the Rocks. 'Hey, man,' another said. 'That you, Daniel?' asked a third.

'Adam?'

'Yeah. Come on up!' Daniel grasped Adam's hand. Across the street there was a gap in the trees. Lipping the rim of the rock, Daniel could see the lights of the town below.

'What are you doing?' Adam asked. 'Where is everybody?'

'I don't know. Who's up here?'

'Josh, Randy, and me. Are you drunk?'

'A little.'

'So, anyhow,' said Josh. 'As I was saying: It's after class and I'm talking to the professor, and I tell him the problem I had with his lecture ...'

As Josh continued, Adam leaned closer to Daniel. 'Josh here was just regaling us with a marvelous little anecdote about one of his *college* courses. Some very exciting stuff about something he called ... "metaphysics", I believe, was the word he used.' He pretended to hold up a microphone: 'Let's listen in ...'

'How do we know, for example,' Josh was saying, 'that there really is something – waves, for example, or particles even ... *gravitons* – keeping us on the ground? Newton never defined gravity beyond a *tendency* of objects to attract. We may have elaborated on this with Einsteinian physics and quantum mechanics, et cetera, but we have yet to explain the *force* behind the attraction. Forget gravity, what about *time*? Is time, for example, an immutable law governing the universe, or are we a necessary part of the whole equation – in our role as *observers*? What is it to *become*? Are there events and progressions? When is something *more* or *less* than it was, or what it will be? For example, when precisely does a seed stop being a seed and begin to be an oak?' Josh looked at each of them in turn. 'Potential? Actualization? Form? Design? Cosmogony, cosmology, ontology, entelechy, entropy? Here? There? Who? Am? What? Was? Is? Will be? Why?'

'Yes, Josh,' Adam said with an exasperated sigh. 'Why? Why, every time I see you, do you go on these tirades? What was it last weekend? Something about "Why

must I eat?" Rub chin, rub chin. "How do I know if I don't eat, I will die?" By cock and balls, you'd think one year of junior-college philosophy made you Socrates!

Josh laughed, wagging his head. 'Watch, I can see *you* – a tab, and a half-hour later, the conversation we'd be having!'

Randy looked puzzled, shaken – disturbed even. He nodded. 'What if nothing's real?' he asked, gazing up at the night sky. 'What if this is all something I made up? And you're all part of my imagination –'

'Holy sausage,' said Adam. 'Here comes another one!'

'Or what if I'm really somewhere *else*,' Randy went on, 'tripping my balls off, imagining *this*?'

'Tripping that you're tripping ...' Josh pondered, rubbing his thin, pointed goatee. They fell silent a moment.

'We're all alone, you know,' said Josh then – distantly, as though he were contributing to a different conversation. 'Each of us.' He lit a cigarette and leaned back. Each time Josh took a drag, Daniel could almost make out the faces of the other young men staring blankly. Josh continued: "'The martyrs go hand in hand into the arena,'" says Huxley.' He paused. 'But "they are crucified alone."'

Daniel sat up straighter. This was the one part of Huxley that had so thrilled him he'd memorized it. "'Embraced, the lovers desperately try to infuse their insulated ecstasies into a single self-transcendence, in vain.'" He noted how the cherry of Josh's cigarette bobbed in the darkness before it flared again.

'Guess he never met the right girl,' said Adam.

'Whether solipsists or not,' Josh continued, oblivious to Adam's comment, 'we are doomed to suffer and enjoy alone.'

'*And a rock feels no pain, and an island never cries ...*' sang Adam. 'But what about enjoying other people's suffering? Or suffering their enjoyment? Take me, for example: By my pubes, I swear I've got carpal tunnel syndrome from frigging my girlfriend off.' He flexed his hand and offered them his fingertips to smell, waving them away as they went to whiff. 'It's worse than Nintendo thumb!'

'Why the hell don't you just have sex?' Randy asked.

'Because' – now Adam humbled a bit – 'honestly, it freaks me out.'

They gasped. *This* from the man who had managed (miraculously!) to acquaint himself intimately with Allison Hull and Mariah Semper in the same evening, and while he was a freshman yet? He who had wrested from quaint Sammy Slather, the seventeen-year-old virgin Homecoming Queen, her innocence, and who, moreover, had had the temerity to deflower her in the basement of her father's home? Of everyone at the party that night, Adam's catalogue of renowned sexual feats was rivaled only by the legendary prowess of their host MacGill, whose acute satyriasis and well-known cunning acts of cunnilingus were an inspiration to the teenage men of this and five neighboring counties.

Adam continued with an explanation: 'Because every time we do it, she misses her period and we wonder "Are we pregnant?" and "Do we make an appointment?" and "What will our parents say?" and I worry about what we'll do. I mean, her mother gets pregnant if you sit next to her on the couch. Anyway, it's just not worth it. I mean, it is, but it isn't – so we don't.'

Adam surveyed the shock on their faces, then broke the pregnant pause, shouting: 'Call me "The Reverend Adam Wyckoff, unholily celibate and masturbating

infidel extraordinaire!" Besides, it's like my Uncle Yahweh used to say: "Vimmen are shpareribs." And she wants me to give her another bone? I think not!" He chuckled, but then his face darkened. 'Put away your pity for me. It's really not so bad. The trick is, boys, you have to treat yourself. Wine and dine yourself, as it were – build up some anticipation. See, you start out with the Sears catalogue, browse the fall fashion section before moving on to ladies' hosiery and underwear. Then proceed to Victoria's Secret and get an eyeful of some fancy lingerie. Finally, move on to *Playboy*. By balls, I swear in the end you'll feel like you just had a date with a supermodel.'

'So what's the deal then?' Josh asked. 'Sex aside, are you guys still tight?'

'*She's* very tight ...' Pause for laughter. 'Hell, tonight I'm a bit tight ... Daniel's already admitted *he's* a little tight.' Adam paused again to ham it up. 'But what is "tight", you know? I mean: No, not at all. But whatever ...'

The others sighed collectively as though they were watching a burning byre with Adam, his spear-shaft and his shield on his chest, drifting out and away upon the whale-road, ne'er again to go a-viking.

'What a serious discussion about my sex life we're having!' said Adam (from Valhalla). 'What the hell were we talking about before?'

'Solipsism ...' Daniel reminded them.

'Oh, yes!' Adam sighed. 'So, anyhow, back to my shitty sex life ...'

But they fell silent. A strong breeze stirred, and they shivered.

'Winter's comin',' Adam observed matter-of-factly.

'I'm startin' to feel it,' Randy murmured, bringing his legs up to his chest.

'Oh, I've been feeling it for a while,' Josh said.

'Got a light?' Adam asked, pulling a cigarette from his pack. Josh hummed and lit Adam's cigarette. The flame on his lighter was so high it nearly singed Adam's eyebrows.

'Jesus, ever think of turning that down?'

'It's a personal trademark,' Josh replied.

'It's a fire hazard,' said Adam.

Another period of silence.

'All right,' said Adam all of a sudden. 'Somebody tell me. What the fuck is "solipsism"?''

Josh proceeded with an explanation, and the argument began anew. After a lengthy digression, another salvo of Josh's not-quite-Socratic philosophical inquiries, they returned to the topic of the force that attracts.

'But undoubtedly,' Adam said, shaking his head, 'gravity *does* exist. I mean, here we are – here on the Rocks, *not* floating off into space. Josh, you make it sound so complicated, like it's magic or something, without looking at the simple fact that we are sitting here, now, held down by it, whatever *it* is. And what does it matter? One day, I'm sure, we'll figure out *what* it is, *how* it works, and what to call whatever the thing is that makes it work.'

'The Cartesian in me wants to agree with you –' Josh began.

'See!' Adam interrupted. 'You're doing it again! Dragging in your pack of philosophical catchphrases to make everything more complex than it is. Look: Here is the rock, here is me – on the rock. Thank you!'

'But don't you see, you're oversimplifying it! Your unfounded faith in science –'

'Yes, science! Science it is. I wouldn't call faith in science unfounded. If anything, my parents dragging me to church on Sunday, in my opinion, is unfounded. Your mumbo-jumbo, abacadabra crap is, in my opinion, unfounded. What is founded is my ass on this rock! Science is the religion of today, Josh. Everyone seems to know this except for you and your nineteen-year-old junior-college philosophy types.'

'I'm not even talking about religion!' Josh napped. 'All I'm saying is that science is *grounded* in philosophy, and I'm asking "how" the same way a scientist does. But what you fail to see is that science has limitations that pure philosophy – thinking and arguing – can go beyond. And since you brought it up, *religion* can also explore things that science can't. What does science really have to say about our connection to the universe – I mean our *relationship* with the universe? Science can't explain away the fact that humans universally, culturally speaking, participate in a supernatural, mysterious – *whatever* – simply by denying it. What about art or emotion or beauty? What can science *really* say about them?'

'Plenty!' Adam returned. 'Ever heard of psychology? Anthropology? And what does religion have to say about art, anyhow, except that images are bad?'

'*Christianity* says that,' Josh interjected. 'But then we must ask *why* does Christianity say that images are bad? That seems to me to be more a question for a philosopher or theologian than a scientist.'

'Call a frickin' sociologist!' Adam barked.

'Call an artist,' said Daniel.

Randy, who had been paying close attention all along, chimed in with: 'If science is grounded in philosophy, what can philosophy come up with that science can't?'

'Thank you!' Adam cheered.

Josh thought a moment before proceeding. 'It's just ... Science refuses to see its shortcomings. The fact of the matter is, just as Adam said, science is the modern-day religion of the industrialized world. For most people, a priest or a minister is there for a type of metaphysical comfort – a kind of "just in case it's true", that they keep around to ease a lingering superstitious fear of all things beyond comprehension.'

'Stop dodging, already!' Adam jeered.

'It requires the same amount of faith that religion used to. Everyone who doesn't understand science, the people who don't understand the specifics – like the formulas, for example, or the concepts – take it on faith that these scientists, these priests of science, are right. I don't see too much of a difference between scientists of today and the pharaohs of ancient Egypt!'

Adam harrumphed. 'Talk about oversimplification!'

'If it was announced tomorrow that scientists had discovered that the theory of natural selection was wrong, and that animals actually mutate based on some type of instinctual impulse, and the news reported that this had been agreed upon by all the big guys of science – wouldn't we all accept the fact? Wouldn't all of us then be taught what was completely false yesterday?'

'But that's not going to happen, is it?' Adam said.

'Probably not ... But the point is' – Josh rubbed his chin once more and lit another cigarette – 'we would have to accept it. For me, the charm of philosophy is that it doesn't presume too much. I believe in an absolute – I have faith in it,

whether I call it God or something else – but I don't see anything absolute in the proclamations of science. There's more going on in the universe than science can show. I'm convinced of it!

'Well, Jesus loves you for it,' Adam said. Josh sighed and took a deep drag off his cigarette.

Randy's attention had waned, and now he was gazing down absently at his hand, which he waved back and forth every second or so. The others watched him for a moment, then Josh waved his lit cigarette back and forth through the air between himself and Randy. 'Whoa!' Randy muttered.

'I believe in fun,' said Adam. 'I believe in a good time. I believe in girls.' The others hummed their assent. 'You know, I guess I believe in a lot of things. But I believe in the world. I imagine I don't know too much about what's beyond it – you know, I can't say for sure about all that. But I think that's magic enough. For me, at least. The world is magic enough for me without any explanations ...'

They sat still for a moment.

'What do you believe in, Randy?' Josh asked finally, just as interested now as his companion in the floating red dot he continued to push through the darkness.

'I believe ...' Randy replied slowly, 'that I ... that I'm *totally* fucked up ...'

'Daniel, you've been quiet awhile,' Adam said. 'What are you thinking about? What do you believe in?'

Daniel felt himself sinking into his drunken state, and he spoke slowly and deliberately. 'I don't know,' he said. 'I'm not sure. But I wonder ... I wonder, is all. I mean, I don't have a religion or anything. I wasn't brought up anything, and in a way I kind of miss that. I wonder what it all is, what it's all about, where we're going ...' He stopped a moment to think. 'I guess I believe in what Josh was talking about earlier: attraction. It all comes down to that – gravity, strong and weak nuclear forces, chemical bonds, relationships. Everything's based on that. Life demands so much attraction. So I guess the only thing I truly believe in is attraction ... I'm not sure what it means, but I have faith in beauty.'

'What do you mean?' Josh asked. 'In beauty as God or a reflection of God, or what?'

'As a thing, but not a *reflection*. As something – maybe something almost magic, I don't know.' Daniel paused, his thoughts carrying him away from the others. 'Like primitive man in awe of ...' he began. Then: 'And I wonder about the force of her.'

'Her?' asked Adam.

'I mean *it*.'

Josh posed the question again: 'What is the force of it? Is it universal? Is it just relative? Is it a harmony of elements, form, function, or a representation of –'

'No, no, no!' Adam shouted. He stared at Daniel, comprehension smoldering in his eyes. 'None of that! He doesn't mean *that*! Do you, Daniel?'

'I suppose not,' Daniel said, trying to find the words. 'It's not the *how* of it. I don't care about aesthetics, really. It's the *the*-ness. Or, no. Better: the *it*-ness of beauty. The individuality of it. Yes, the *radiance* of it, but more than that!'

'What?' Josh asked. 'Do you mean the femininity of it? The eternal feminine in art? Love?' Josh continued with another catalogue of questions and concepts. Listening to him made Daniel feel even drunker. He hung his head between his

legs, tired and dizzy, and when he could take no more of Josh's philosophical divagations he raised his head.

'No! All that's bullshit. Don't – don't sex it. I'm not talking about a concept or a form or an image. It's something much, much simpler. Beauty is just ... beauty. It's the unity of it. The lifeness of it – the *experience* of it. The radiance of everything seeming to come together, or actually coming together, all at once, in one spot of space and time, in *now* – in a woman, or a sunset, or a moment. It's the universality of it contradicted by the brevity of it. Not that it's male or female, but that it's both at once – all things, at once! Beauty, not as a woman, but as a hermaphrodite.'

Josh said nothing.

'Nyaaaa!' Daniel drawled with a long laugh, and none of them was quite sure what he meant by it.

Again, they were quiet.

Daniel drifted away in a smile, sinking back now into his thoughts. He imagined Laura, at her house, reading the fifteen sonnets he had just given her, and he repeated in his head what he had written, mumbling his favorite lines softly. In his drunken fever, he felt invigorated, as though he had been initiated into a new rite of life. Again, he looked down at the town, the starry night reflected in the brimming bowl below. The wind bore up to him the soft sounds of slumber, and he seemed to soar above the lights upon the viewless wings of Poesy. He hovered in anticipation of an omen, half-expecting the lights below to jump up like cannon fire or meteors heedless of the law of gravity. They're mine, those lights! he thought – and attempting a swifter conjecture, he leaned and reached out his hand to grasp them.

He slipped and, falling from the Rocks, heard the cries of the others above him like a distant *frater ave atque vale* – downward-plunging into darkness, forever down and down, until he landed dully on the dewy grass.

'Jesus, man!' Randy gasped in fright. 'You see that, man? I mean, did you *see* that?'

'*Wha? Wha?*' Josh whispered, suddenly tense, looking all around.

Randy started laughing maniacally now above Daniel, rambling to Josh about what he'd seen. Daniel, below, was laughing softly, too, as Adam swooped down from the Rocks.

'Daniel, are you all right?' Adam asked, stooping to help him.

Daniel tried to stop, to catch his breath and say he was fine. He gave up and lay back a moment in the grass, enjoying the cool dew on his hot nape. Adam grabbed Daniel's arm and made him sit up, and Daniel, with a sort of madness in his eyes, whispered to him: '*I did it! I gave them to her. O, I did! Shit, I gave them to her ...*' He paused a moment, almost worried, then laughed again silently. Adam laughed with him and crouched low next to him on the lawn, and they laughed and laughed.

(Unpublished, 2008)

Yang Lian

1989

who says the dead can embrace?
like fine horses manes silver grey
standing outside the window in the freezing moonlight
the dead are buried in the days of the past
in days not long past madmen were tied onto beds
rigid as iron nails
pinning down the timbers of darkness
the coffin lid each day closing over like this

who says the dead are dead and gone? the dead
enclosed in the vagrancy of their final days
are the masters of forever
four faces of their own on four walls
butchery yet again blood
is still the only famous landscape
sleeping in the tomb they were lucky but they wake again in
a tomorrow the birds fear even more

this is no doubt a perfectly ordinary year

Translated from the Chinese by Brian Holton

Sophie Bassignac

Extrait du roman

Les Aquariums lumineux

La cour de l'immeuble rappelait un peu celle d'Hitchcock mais Claire n'était pas Grace Kelly. Installée depuis quatre ans dans ce vieux quartier de Paris, elle pensait n'avoir pas atterri là par hasard et n'imaginait plus vivre ailleurs. Cette cour était une boîte rectangulaire de cinq étages au fond pavé. En son centre, une sculpture de jeune éphèbe portant une corne d'abondance et entouré de hautes plantes vertes dissimulait les poubelles. Les propriétaires se partageaient une vingtaine d'appartements, les chambres de bonne changeant sans cesse de locataires. Une subtile hiérarchie liée au nombre de millièmes rappelait, lors de la réunion annuelle du syndic, que même si le vote restait démocratique, les revendications ne devaient pas outrepasser les mètres carrés de chacun. Il régnait là le plus grand calme en hiver. Aux beaux jours, les fenêtres s'ouvraient et la vie de tous se déversait en vrac dans la cour.

« Tu fais une connerie », avait mystérieusement lancé son père en visitant, les mains dans les poches, ce deuxième étage lumineux mais traversant. Connaissant l'influence que cet homme avait sur elle et vraiment décidée à acheter ce trois-pièces, Claire s'était abstenue de lui demander des explications. Elle avait fait peindre tous les murs en jaune par un vieil artisan hongrois contacté par annonce. Elle fut très troublée d'apprendre sa mort quelques mois plus tard et se souvint de cet homme sympathique qui lui avait dit, un peu moqueur, « quand vous en aurez assez de ce jaune canari, je vous repeindrai tout en bleu, ou en vert, comme vous voudrez ». Elle pensa aux appartements qu'il laissait derrière lui. Que devient tout ce que nous accomplissons après notre mort ? se demandait-elle alors. Ne fais rien et tu ne mourras pas. Ne laisse aucune trace derrière toi. Ces pensées très secrètes ne lui apportaient cependant aucun réconfort.

« Tu vas supporter cet endroit ? » avait demandé sa mère, penchée à la fenêtre. Claire s'était gardée de répondre que cette cour correspondait parfaitement à son obsession des endroits clos. Elle s'ajoutait à la liste déjà longue des objets et phobies qui la fascinaient tout en la faisant suffoquer. Il y avait les sulfures qu'elle aurait voulu collectionner en plus grand nombre si elle en avait eu les moyens, les kaléidoscopes et les boules en plastique remplies de neige artificielle. Celles-ci s'entassaient, perdant leurs eaux jaunies, dans quatre cartons au fond de la cave. Et puis côté phobie, elle entretenait sa terreur de la noyade, des tunnels, des grottes, des souterrains, des trains fantômes, en y mourant régulièrement d'asphyxie, la nuit, en rêve. Selon elle, cette perturbation s'expliquait par une naissance sûrement compliquée, une sortie laborieuse du ventre maternel. Le plus simple eût été de questionner sa mère mais elle se gardait bien d'aborder ce sujet hautement miné d'un point de vue affectif et n'en faisait donc pas une histoire.

Un matin d'hiver, M. Ishida arriva dans l'immeuble presque furtivement. En une heure, deux déménageurs silencieux avaient monté chez lui une vingtaine de cartons identiques et quelques meubles neufs. Le soir même, Claire vit son voisin japonais prendre le thé dans son salon comme s'il avait toujours vécu dans la cour. Elle éprouva une attirance immédiate pour cet homme souriant et aimable. Il fut très rapidement et tacitement adopté par les propriétaires, d'habitude très suspicieux concernant les étrangers. Il parlait très bien français, s'habillait avec élégance, avait des horaires de bureau, s'absentait parfois quelques jours, jamais plus, était abonné au *Herald Tribune*. Trois semaines après son arrivée, il sidéra Claire en l'invitant à prendre le thé. C'était un matin sous le porche. Elle émit une hypothèse qu'elle adopta, finalement : il voulait connaître sa voisine pour éviter entre eux tout soupçon de voyeurisme, leurs appartements se faisant face dans la cour. Et puis Claire connaissait sa tendance à trouver suspect tout ce qu'elle ne décidait pas elle-même.

La jeune femme se réjouissait de ces invitations de plus en plus fréquentes. Ishida s'étonnait du plaisir qu'elle prenait à ces moments de conversation polie, au cours desquelles elle ne montrait jamais aucun signe de lassitude. Il prit note des bizarreries de Claire et se garda de les juger. En véritable mystique du quotidien, maintenue hors d'eau par une répétition scrupuleuse des mêmes gestes, elle semblait vivre le rituel du thé chez son voisin comme une sorte d'expérience religieuse. Il s'en amusa, s'en agaça, s'y habitua et finit, lui aussi, par prendre un étrange plaisir à cette relation inattendue. Il n'avait pas imaginé que cette invitation formelle se transformerait en habitude.

(Denoël, 2008)

Peter Gonda

A Few Years Ago in Chennai

I met Giri in a bar across from the High Courts, and took him for a low-level crook who had probably just conned a judge into being released from custody. It was worse: he was a goddamn lawyer. ‘Number One Lawyer in Chennai!’ he would shout into my ear every ten minutes. He had approached my table and asked: ‘Excuse me, good sir, may I sit beside you?’

I’d nodded.

‘May I ask what your good name is, sir?’

I told him.

‘It is an honour to meet you, Mr Peter. I am Giri.’ An honour? Nobody had ever used that one on me before. I asked if he was of the Brahmin caste.

‘How did you know, Mr Peter?’

There’s a saying in India, one V. S. Naipaul reliably informs us: ‘If you meet a Brahmin and a snake in the road, kill the Brahmin first.’ Why don’t I ever listen to good advice!

Giri was twenty-five, at the top of his class in law school, an expert shooter, horseman and pilot: to hear him talk, you’d think you were sitting across from friggin’ Hindiana Jones! He would soon be going to New York to study at Columbia University, he said, just as his mentor had done. *Here comes the bullet*, I thought.

‘May I ask a great favour of you, Mr Peter?’

I nodded.

‘Would you come with me now and meet my mentor? It would honour me greatly.’

I really couldn’t see how; I had no idea why he’d want this; I had to catch a plane in a few hours: all good reasons not to go along, but I went anyway. In the rickshaw, Giri revealed his reasons. He wanted me to pretend I’d known him for the last three years, to build him up a big shot. For God knows what all, I agreed.

We arrived at his mentor’s house and stepped into a darkly lit room with wall-to-wall law books. Reclining in a chair before us was Giri’s mentor – a dead ringer for Marlon Brando himself, circa *The Godfather*. Giri began yammering away in Tamil. Brando, meanwhile, gave me the stink eye.

We were formally introduced. I started in right away, telling him what a great man he was, and all that Giri had told me of him. He replied in kind, going on about the big man I was. What the fuck had Giri been telling him?!

He began speaking of his days at Columbia (‘I was Number One at Columbia’), describing how, unlike many of his peers who went over, he had decided to return. ‘What do you think of that?’

The hero you are! Ram Krishna, is what I thought. ‘Most wouldn’t have,’ is what

I ventured.

'I came back to change India,' he said.

'Start by getting rid of those *maderchots*, the Shiv Sena,' I replied, invoking Indian's notorious militant nationalist party.

'You know of them!' Brando's brow rose. 'Giri, your friend is very wise.' Giri beamed.

'What other thoughts do you have on India?' Brando asked. *Who am I, Mahatma freakin' Gonda over here?* I thought. Ah, but what the hell. I had more complaints. We chatted for another hour when I remembered my flight. Brando told Giri to get me to my hotel, chop chop.

In the rickshaw, Giri began crying. I hadn't even known lawyers could cry.

'You have no idea what you've just done for me!' *He's right about that one*, I thought. I had no idea what had just transpired. And I never will.

But Giri had more requests.

'How long is your penis, may I ask?' *No, he may not*. But I answered, needing as ever to know where this was leading.

'It's right there in the average zone. Six inches, no big deal.'

'No big deal! You are a horse of some kind! Here look at this ...' And he began to unzip.

'Are you insane!?' I shouted. 'Don't be showing me that in public! We'll be stoned to death over here!' He stopped. 'Just *tell* me. Don't *show* me.'

'Two miserable inches, my good sir.'

'No, no, I mean erect.'

'Two miserable inches,' he repeated sullenly. Then came the next bullet. 'Please talk to my fiancée,' he said, aiming a mobile phone at me. 'Tell her it's normal.'

Why in hell would she believe me? Well, that was so far beyond me at that point. I simply told him to dial her number. Giri made another introduction, and I started in lying again. I told the girl that her sexual woes were completely unfounded. I told her I wished I had half of what Giri was nervously scratching at. I told her I'd seen many, in several locker rooms, and that she should be proud of Giri and his great big bloody elephantine *shmuckalovich*. I handed the phone back to Giri. The couple spoke a few more words, then Giri hung up and gave me a big, fruity hug.

I tried to dissuade him from accompanying me to the airport, but he was having none of it. He called me a taxi. Patiently, he watched me pack, and off we went. En route, I pondered. How did a schmuck like myself warrant such respect and gratitude for having done nothing more than be Western and lie my damn ass off? For pretending to be what I'm not, to seemingly intelligent Indians?

For three months I'd travelled in India – forty-three cities, towns and whatnot. I'd seen much, and endured more. I'd entered through Chennai, and now I was exiting the same way. Only now could I make the connection: the British! This was all their work. This is what colonialism tasted like. This is what it does.

Giri noticed I had grown very quiet, and it worried him. I apologized for my silence.

Then I left the country.

Contributors

Sophie Bassignac est née en 1960. Durant son enfance, elle se rêve archéologue ou journaliste, mais finit par devenir professeur d'anglais puis attachée de presse. Elle se consacre aujourd'hui à la lecture et à l'écriture.

Vüs'at O. Bener (1922–2005) was a Turkish short story virtuoso known for crafting intense, often depressing narrative worlds of abstracted reality. He died shortly before he was to be fêted as Author of the Year at the twenty-fourth Istanbul Book Fair.

Maluy Benet Salinas es una escritora, traductora y fotógrafa valenciana, autora de libros de narrativa infantil *Els visitant de Mont-violat* y de literatura juvenil *L'Últim paradís i Mitsatge en un reltotge: Un passeig sentimental per l'escola des Carolines*. Ha ganado los premios literarios Ciutat de Xàtiva, L'Encobert, L'Alcúdia y otras. Como fotógrafa ha ilustrado el libro *Sentiments* (Grupo 10), ha colaborado en la publicación *La Comunitat Valenciana* de Christopher Makos y en la exposición de Sebastiao Salgado (2003).

Paul Burge teaches the Alexander Technique in London and Spain. He published *The Matter About Words* in 1992.

Roland Cros vit et travaille à Paris. Photographe, il s'est intéressé au rugby à la corrida, à la boxe, à la religion et à la scène punk indépendante française. Réalisateur de documentaires pour la télévision, il parcourt la terre à la rencontre de ses contemporains. Dessinateur et graveur autodidacte, il manie aussi bien la gouge sur le linoléum que la tronçonneuse sur le bois. Son registre est résolument brutaliste associant satire sociale et politique à des recherches formelles dans l'ombre des grands expressionnistes allemands de l'entre deux guerres (Beckmann, Grosz ou Dix) qui sont ses références. Il reçoit les courriels à rcros@free.fr.

Ahmad Ebrahimi is a poet, literary critic and translator born in 1954 in Iran. He is the founder and coordinator of Iranian PEN in Exile.

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Peter Gonda is a photographer and screenwriter who makes his home in Montreal, Canada, when not travelling the globe. Episodes from his wandering life appeared in *The Hour*, a Canadian weekly, as a column titled 'Meetings with Ridiculous Men'. He is currently working on his first novel, *Drinking and Driving in Chechnya*.

André Gorz est né Gérard Horst à Vienne en 1923. Philosophe, journaliste et personnalité extrêmement discrète, il est l'auteur d'une pensée qui oscille entre philosophie, théorie politique et critique sociale. Disciple de l'existentialisme de Jean-Paul Sartre, il rompt avec celui-ci après 1968, et devient l'un des principaux théoriciens de l'écologie politique. Auteur de nombreux ouvrages y compris *Le Traître* (1957), il est aussi co-fondateur avec Jean Daniel, en 1964, du *Nouvel Observateur*, sous le pseudonyme de Michel Bosquet. Il met fin à ses jours à l'âge de quatre-vingt-quatre ans, avec sa femme Dorine, atteinte d'une grave maladie, le 22 septembre 2007 dans sa maison de Vosnon, France, par injection létale. C'est à elle qu'il avait consacré en 2006 le livre *Lettre à D.*, une ode à Dorine.

Brian Holton was born in Scotland and educated at the University of Edinburgh and the University of Durham. At Newcastle University, he was director of the UK's first Chinese Translating and Interpreting programme. He currently teaches Chinese-English Translation at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. His publications include several volumes of work by Yang Lian as well as translations of Chinese poetry into his native Scots tongue.

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Simon Kirwin lives in London, likes old keyboards and performs his poetry to a squeeze-box drone. 'This Is What Buenos Aires Might Have Been' is taken from a collection of poems inspired by his travels around South America, *Joe Mendoza Is a Tout* (available from littleilvertrumpet@gmail.com).

Gary Klang est né en Haïti et vit à Montréal depuis 1973. Docteur ès lettres de la Sorbonne avec une thèse sur Proust, il est auteur de poèmes, de romans, de nouvelles et d'essais ; il a aussi fait jouer une pièce de théâtre à la télévision. Il est membre du Conseil d'administration du PEN Club Québec, et président, depuis 2005, de la section de Montréal de la société des Écrivains francophones d'Amérique. Sa dernière publication est un recueil de poèmes, *Il est grand temps de rallumer les étoiles* (2007).

Maria Francesca LoDico is a Montreal-based writer and cultural journalist. Her work has aired on Canadian television and appeared in many Canadian publications. 'The Disappearing Sicily' won First Prize in the Accenti Magazine Literary Awards. A former restaurant critic, she is the editor of the *Montreal Zagat Survey* and co-creator of *World Bites*, a television series about food and identity. She is currently working on a novel based on her childhood in Sicily.

Alain Mabanckou est né en 1966 au Congo-Brazzaville. Il a publié des livres de poésie couronnés par le Prix Jean-Christophe de la Société des Poètes Français, puis fait paraître un premier roman en 1998, *Bleu-Blanc-Rouge*, qui lui vaut le Grand Prix Littéraire d'Afrique Noir. Il était professeur des littératures francophones à l'Université du Michigan, et enseigne maintenant les études francophones et la littérature comparée à UCLA. Son roman *Verre cassé* (2005) a reçu nombreux prix y compris le Prix des Cinq Continents de la Francophonie. *Mémoires de porc-épic* (2006) a reçu nombreux prix y compris le Prix Renaudot. Son roman *African Psycho* (2003) était publié en traduction anglaise en 2007.

Alberto Manguel is an internationally acclaimed novelist, essayist, editor, anthologist and translator, and is the author of several award-winning books including *A Dictionary of Imaginary Places* and *A History of Reading*. He was born in Buenos Aires, became a Canadian citizen in 1982 and now lives in France, where he was named Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

Jeff McMahon searches newspapers, magazines and the cobwebby vaults of history for commentary writers who soften the bludgeon of their arguments with the caress of their language. His own commentaries have won national recognition in the US from the National Society of Newspaper Columnists and two Golden Quills from the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors. He lives in Chicago, teaches writing at the University of Chicago and serves as the editor of *Contrary* magazine.

Azar Nafisi is a Visiting Professor and the director of the SAIS Dialogue Project at the Foreign Policy Institute of Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, DC. She is best known as the author of the international bestseller *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*. She has also written extensively for US and UK newspapers. She is currently working on two books, one tentatively titled *The Republic of the Imagination*, about the power of literature to liberate peoples, and the other called *Things I Have Been Silent About*, about culture, history and loss.

Melissa Patiño Hinostroza, estudiante y poetisa peruana de veinte años se encuentra detenida desde febrero pasado por cargos de terrorismo. Hasta antes de su detención, Patiño participaba en el grupo literario 'Círculo del Sur' en Lima y en un programa de poesía en la radio. Hasta la fecha, el gobierno peruano no ha presentado pruebas que la vinculen con actividades terroristas. Patiño arriesga una pena de hasta veinte años de cárcel.

Saw Wei is one of Burma's leading poets, well known for his romantic poems, and a performance artist. Until the time of his recent arrest, he headed White Rainbow, a poetry recital group working to raise money for orphans with AIDS. In 1988 he was dismissed from his job at the government communication office for taking part in that year's uprising. He was incarcerated early in 2008. No information has been made public about his detention or any charges against him.

Yang Lian was born in Switzerland in 1955 and grew up in Beijing. One of the first of the young 'underground' poets publishing the literary magazine *Jintian*, his poems became well known in the 1980s, especially when one of them was criticised by Chinese authorities. He went into exile in 1989. He has published numerous collections of poetry and prose. His book *Where the Sea Stands Still: New Poems* was a 'Poetry Books Society Recommended Translation' (UK, 1999). Recent translations of his work into English include *Unreal City* (2006). His website is www.yanglian.net.

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