HABIB TENGOUR

Empedocles's Sandal

Das Land, wo sonst the Purpurtraube gern
Dem bessern Volke wuchs und goldene Frucht
Im dunkeln Hain, und edles Korn, und fragen
Wird einst der Fremde, wenn er auf den Schutt
Von euern Tempeln tritt, ob da die Stadt
Gestanden?...

Hölderlin; Der Tod des Empedokles

Traces/ Renown/ Shades/ Urns/ Life(s)/ Epoch/ Zenith
Lucid/ Strangely/ Suspended

Stop
a pause of short duration the closed
space compelled remembrances tears
they are not necessary
the dictionary tempers the banality of the stereotype
a nostalgia emerges in the description of the place

like a circumscribed exile
like the eye dimming after the junction

handicap of the code
unusual names at night fall
despite the invocation's depth
the usages intermingle on the asphalt
the trace vainly sought there effaced
it is visible

o heart you weaver
the times don't change that fast their duration
nor the embrace that follows where a soul decyphers itself
a proliferation of signs but

the loud voice the one
that unties the tongues and curbs the discourse
alas
so many lethal traps on the way
the angels refuse to accompany us
the lights blink ostentatiously
the harangues lead us far from the encampment

This is the moment

to enter surreptitiously I go in
my purpose my utterance to open the door
to say under the dictation of a continuous effusion
to align a text without history
for a moment to enjoy the stopping
to reveal the splendor and brilliance of the vestiges
without giving in to the letter's subterfuges

Paris november rue Saint-Antoine Constantine
cité du 20 août Paris again
examine each of these addresses

a small light rift whips the clouds

Itinerary
of precise annotations the return therein
envisioned I know
the tracings the dwellings and the hunger
the hesitation to take to the road is real

renown by auction
victims interrogate who kills and reason

pomp makes sense only if sustained
a hollow word illusions
charisma is not a copyright trademark
danger metamorphoses the limbs
there is nothing to brag about today

the days have become flat right after the exchange
the rivers advance in error in the moonlight
I hesitated a long time before coming
what is man without the praise that precedes him
you he; me for a long time tightly in your arms
without a word
the eyes closed I believed

passion an outburst of eloquence ah
how to get rid of that one there image
to put fire to the house what an adventure
country or metaphor causes prejudice
the brothels have five stars

the city rejects you as you step off the bus
it fears the look devoured by exile
the limitless pretension of the accomplished witness
he knows how bitter all food is
the quick incendiary glance at the sidewalk cafés

elsewhere

there are bars where the name imposes itself
the throat forges a name
customers attentive to the mordant killer wit
beauties day envies their black stockings

neither the bus nor the town-hall square have doubts
the lover's glory when the glasses clink
nor the play of mirrors where friendship melts

trajectory fixed
meeting inevitable

there is no sales point nor waiting room
where you didn’t exercise your gifts in pure loss
fascinated by the tenebrous beauty of forgetting
that grabs the sonorous cohorts in the city
a short-circuit


Lemurs
night escapades
to watch your secretive ways of appearing
from the
bird
in the tumult the thirst
my head will roll at the edge of the river

the bits of green become visibly rarer
the raised walls
    jostle
    the talk of lovers
the hands unlock at the call of the setting?

black blood revives chthonic speech
it upholds the enterprise of chimerical periplos
that quest loudly proclaimed in public
companions perished
    far from the atavistic
pains of the libations
that punctuate mourning
from memory to question these dear beings

I accosted my father in the thick of so many dead
unable -- did I dare -- to deliver my message
I had fortified myself with lion's blood as
the bar flies call red wine

I lost my way along the boundaries of the two worlds

in my pocket the right to enter
your coins barely buy one round
the soul of things can you put a price on it
how much the assessment

moribund rituals
    reference points
dissolving formulas
windows giving on roofs
open on an ancient canvas that challenges you
access to the sky's colors jealously closed off

to conform to the roads' tracings
giving to the prescribed charities
    here lies choice
    in the programmed debris
lush spectacle
smiles and congratulations
facade

the complaints of those who are not dead reach you
you know burning hate a secret remedy
...
the long sliding night introduces to the telling
of adventures the magnanimous outlaw hero
the poem carries along since the art of weaving
the assembly settles there as if around a fire
each one dreams of his kin left with no worries
the rhythms are favorable for enjoyable meetings
but sometimes the poet strains to blur
the narration's weft through an excess of figures

the bird that takes its flight at midnight is blind

Interpreter,
the lexicon at work
far in the abyss the wandering gait
no care taken
with the staging neither obscure rhetoric
nor this imperious vanity of surging forth

sun
the instant contains its light — cursive resonance
it dazzles the cantankerous audience you
undecided your gear
slung across your back chains
the house is narrow
you declaim what you know onto a canvas
a sorting out occurs invisible
scattered traces
to describe the table the luminous circle
it is possible to forget oneself in the description of objects while
carefully watching
the precision of the study time
that one's not sparing with embellishments
you enhance the declamation at the risk of perturbing the reception
to catch depends on to the baited trap
the chant doesn't harmonize with the voice
something you no longer doubt
urns preserved the spirits of the ancestors
dogs for the circumstance
the occurrence demands vagueness to the detriment of
urgency the celebration in fireworks
one by one
   all
tutelary deities
praise consecrates them at the vault's summit
once the tower has been abolished

obsession
from quarrel to break
the argument contracts then loses itself
in the blackness of the invoked night
system of control
ineffectual despite the forces deployed
deliberate not to keep the warning shots
the blade
I was walking
up Boulevard Mohamed V. Kalachnikovs firing. The city safe
no longer for night wanderings.
The moon exposes the flaneur to danger.

life hangs on a thread
but the needle and the hand and the freezing lover
at the gate of the labyrinth
fear of the worst hastens the cadence
a breath missing to calm the grief
from the announcements to the road crossings

the blue-gray mysteries of the traveling show

Letters
bricolage of symbols gathered in neighboring
countries
the golden thread imprints on the memory
countries
the one I question answers to no
demand
rigid it invents for itself
a republic in which reading commands
summary hierarchy

in the scenery

a hidden laser

modern he said
to tread territories made to measure
where the places knot into a tight rope
to live truly
to be god
to claim it loudly
reckless pride

you the Impeder-of-wind with bronze sandals
you the Obscure who loves to disguise yourself
and I all alone tracking you
lives a concise inventory the detail
adorns the gathering
the fragments are classified
to observe a usage
just as white milk curdles

was it in Heidelberg on a road in Sicily
in Evry or in Mostaganem by the seaside
ill-used infinite
few words carry when the tension increases
alternation of the forms does not resolve much
nor do the rivets of love assemble
I remain an orphan

neither wine of Anderin flowing freely nor bravado
at the moment when the clan wobbles
neither catalyzing places a sequence of cast names
nor beauties offering themselves along the way
nor the poetic lineage you claim
nor this hard to decipher manuscript nor
any allegiance excluded
rupture

Always
this array of set-backs
you register

stifled passion
far the epic gesture

the solemn declamations at the tribune
dwellings of Maya Asma Awf or Khawla
recall of pure form
era of imprecation
the loved one veils herself
usury eye and soul
and the heart's expression
and these memorable debris under the ashes
pangs at rising
at dusk a life comes to a close
a novel
torsion
the star blinks
a town in tatters
screams

you envisage death
daily reception
to disappear swallowed by a mechanism
radically no longer to exist never
scholastic divagation
the views of the mind deteriorate the momentum of the word
the South is wild

there I am confronted by the formulas
ceaselessly stating identity to pass
unnoticed
to sound a fortuitous jubilation
at the outcome of a quest
disposed to welcome a meaning that escapes me
enigma resolved as soon as stated
to love, an art wherein to take one's distances
inside of the unhoped for

they will call your surrender wisdom
quintessence the sterility of the soil
and age adds to the bitterness

Obviously
at its zenith
the law has to concede suicide to the poet
assure the inheritance
grandly
there is a truth here difficult to grasp
the tomb is sealed

the beautiful to resay it
the road already traced by a mortal's audacity

rustling of the myth
discoveries of listening
smoke

elasticity of the rays

passion consumes you
love roots itself in your eyes

you have handy cliches
a large library
advice that succeeds with illustrated examples
and you tremble when the loved one appears
is it a life
a belated madness
a mystery that isn't one
sun or rain

your impatience unbalances nature
where are you at the hour of regrets

the people get drunk on the drunkenness of the masters
each judges according to his manner
an illusory feast takes over custom
blood transforms itself into a philter

waiting for day
acting

above the head death the road is straight
it is not vengeance of a wounded chest
it is not surrender to decline
audacity shatters at the descent of the verse
the clamors feed on themselves
to exalt oneself by your name the torment has ripened

the accent isn't new
to recognize

the grace of a flash
when the soul shatters

happy
in her kernel a poem constructs
to perish
    the elements fuse
        by hate or by love
        invention
that which retains the guest in the house
that which terrorizes the virgins of Tamim
that which persuades the number
the titration is deceptive

Igneous
the soul in its crystal
the way constellated waves deploy themselves
    harnessing
ONE engenders destroys yet alternates
he keeps me captive
corruptible

the sweet water in the sea on which the fish feed is not
an irrefutable argument against the establishment of paradise on
earth other elements of a subtle nature enter into
the composition of the air man breathes which inserts the
human species into a specific animal category
man is like a weathervane at the heart of the whirlwind
    the sky attracts him
Aristotle's disciples debated physics meteorology
natural science
    then one did not consider armed struggle in the
cities in order to impose a thesisa phenomenon that
keeps spreading as does repression the system has seized up
to analyze sea water or to examine the conditions of the ground can
in no way unscramble the mechanism does that mean that in
this process it is necessary to sink with the logic of the ancients
the trace of the poem in fragments initiates formal audacities
    a rhythm pursues you this is no longer the time to evade
meaning the words order themselves

the year ends white
    wishes crackle on all sides
from the orient to the occident is it but a reflection
light effluvia when the moon scatters
hail-stones

what remains accessible in the face to face
this country where the violet grape once loved
to grow for a better people, and the golden fruit
in the dark thicket, and noble wheat, and some day
the stranger will ask, treading through the rubble
of your temples, if that's where the city
rose...
this sovereign generosity
this evil which hardens in the apple of the eye
these plaints without notification
a salute to the dead friends

Ochre
maturity, it ends with the day
the questions left hanging

you observe the flight of a flock of starlings
bad news is spreading
from the palms of Bahrain to the villages of Iraq

a tenacious worry
the long crossing from deserts to cities
these buried peoples with strange languages

there are only scattered signs
truth surprises you
at a metro gate

this visible and invisible world is decomposing
science assures the poet of his wording
the risks hidden in the hands' palms
let's leave tears and blood

our friends are everywhere
the voyage completes itself
by day as by night
all things astounded

Parceled
out they glitter under the moon
motionless
the white armed virgin flies over the offerings

Translated from the French by Pierre Joris