L'homme ouvert : an exploration of Jean Sénac and his poetic works

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L’HOMME OUVERT:
AN EXPLORATION OF JEAN SÉNAC AND HIS POETIC WORKS

by

Yolande G. Schutter

A Thesis
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

College of Arts & Sciences
Department of English
2012
“L’homme Ouvert” is a thesis that focuses on the translation of a full body of work by the poet Jean Sénac. Jean Sénac was a French-Algerian poet of the mid-20th century. He was a French-speaking Pied-noir homosexual whose life and poetry revolved around the facets of his complex identity and the search for a way to unify those different parts together into a greater, comprehensive whole. This thesis also discusses the poet’s origins and how they affect his work, in addition to situating him and his work within his time as modernist, queer, post-colonial minor literature.

The primary goal of this thesis is to translate Sénac’s book *Avant-corps*, which includes within it *Poèmes Iliaques* and *Diwân du Noûn*, in a fashion that is faithful to his poetics, his history, and his investment in the power of language. *Avant-corps* had not, until now, been translated into the English language in its entirety. With this translation I seek, of course, to expand the poet’s audience as well as introduce his poetics to a greater, current academic audience.
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Jean Sénac was born Jean Comma on November 29th, 1926 in Beni Saf, Algeria near Oran. The simplicity inherent in the birth of a new, healthy child was all but nonexistent for Sénac, beginning with the nature of his mother’s pregnancy. His mother, Jeanne Comma, was probably raped resulting in the poet’s conception. The rape is suggested in several places including his semi-autobiographical novel Ébauche du Père:

This bowed head is the mother crying. Poor childhood, it was my gift. I saw the world through the good heavens. My mother is Spanish. She made me like this. One day, he took her by the throat. Everyone told her ‘kill him.’ […] She kept me. I am her shame. I am her pride, her legend

(Ébauche 21-22).

Jeanne Comma was indeed Spanish, but whether or not Sénac’s life began with her rape, the pregnancy was “shameful enough […] that she went to Beni Saf to hide her accouchement” (Temime 16). Sénac’s father remained unknown to him, only referred to as “un Gitan,” a gypsy (d’Eaubonne 107).

The absence of Sénac’s father quickly became an obsession. As a child at school he was so ashamed of his being a bastard that he lied to his friends, telling them he had a father “like everyone else” (Temime 18). In 1930, when Sénac was just four years old,
his mother married Edmond Sénac who proceeded to give the poet the surname he would carry for the rest of his life. Shortly thereafter, in 1931, Sénac’s little sister Laure-Thérèse was born, but Edmond Sénac abandoned the family almost immediately after her birth.

With the departure of Sénac’s temporary father figure, a number of things happened: firstly, his mother was left the space in her life “to immerse herself again into a superstitious and delirious religion” and to take her children with her in the plunge (Temime 21). His childhood was not unhappy, though it was poor and often difficult. His mother’s religious compulsion led her to dress him and his sister up in religious costumes and instilled in them both a strong Catholic guilt. Sénac battled this guilt as long as he lived, especially in regards to his being homosexual: his “intimate self [was] marked by a love-desire that [was] incompatible with his Christian education” (Œuvres 791).

Though Jeanne Comma, now Sénac, instilled in her children this “fear of sin,” she also loved them and cared for them as best she could (Temime 23). She gave notions of vibrancy and multiplicity to her children— ones that Sénac kept close to his heart: “My mother put Carnival in our blood” he wrote, and “[she] bent over backwards to make sure we knew were multiple” (Ébauche 59, Temime 29). The notion of plurality became crucial to the poet.

With the departure of his stepfather, Sénac’s obsession with the father intensified:

“I will ceaselessly return to the Father. He is my thirst and my abyss. He is my compact

5 “de se replonger dans une religion superstitieuse et délirante.”
6 “être intime marqué par un amour-désir incompatible avec son éducation chrétienne.”
7 “dans la crainte du péché.”
8 “Ma mère nous a mis Carnaval dans le sang;” “[elle] s’est évertuée à nous démontrer que nous sommes plusieurs.”
image, my most confident of transparencies” (Ébauche 18). In his adult life, Sénac established the concept of Father in two ways: he adopted “the impossible father” in the writer Albert Camus, and became a father through the adoption of a son, Jacques Miel, who he met in 1956 (d’Eaubonne 107).

Sénac’s relationship with Camus began when he fell in love with Camus’s writing: “He [read] a text by Camus for the first time and, certain of his calling, [decided] to dedicate his life to writing” (Temime 31). At this point he had been enlisted in the army since October of 1944, spending most of the war in offices as he worked for a Catholic chaplain. Writing— namely poetry— became his freedom: “I know I have the gift…” he wrote in 1948 from the Rivet sanatorium where he arrived in March of 1947 to regain his health after paratyphoid fever, “Now I want the language. As a writer, it is the style that advances the thought […] I am learning the difficult trade of the artist, of the artisan of language” (Temime 38). Sénac struck up a written correspondence with Camus from the sanatorium and then met the author in person in March of 1948. Their relationship progressed from one between a pupil and mentor to that of a son and father; Camus referred to him as “mi hijo,” “my son” in Spanish, and greatly admired his work: “You have a talent that owes nothing to no one,” he wrote to Sénac, “luminous and sound, with real courage” (Peroncel-Hugoz 15). Their relationship deepened until 1954 when they began to break over Sénac’s support of the FLN and Camus’s inability to

9 “Je reviendrai sans cesse sur le Père. Il est ma soif et mon néant. Il est mon image compacte, ma transparence la plus ferme.”
10 “le père impossible.”
11 “Il lit pour la première fois un texte de Camus et, certain de sa vocation, il décide de consacrer sa vie à l’écriture.”
12 “Je sais que j’ai le don;” “Maintenant je veux la langue. Chez un écrivain, c’est le style qui fait avancer l’idée […] J’apprends le dur métier d’artiste, d’artisan de la langue.”
13 “Vous avez un talent qui ne droit rien à personne, lumineux et sain, avec une vraie bravoure.”
commit to Algeria’s pending independence from France. Though Camus had publicly stated his disapproval of the “colonial regime’s injustices,” as the French-Algerian war intensified Camus retreated and kept quiet on the subject (Temime 75). Sénac was unable to respect this silence. The relationship was pulled taut until it broke.

When Sénac was left with a surname that wasn’t truly his, his conquest of names began. Born as Jean Comma, he proceeded to Jean Sénac, and then throughout his life cycled through other names: Gérard Comma, Janot le Poète, Christian Pérès, and Yahia El Wahrani. He often came back to the importance of names in his poetry, and this concern became a reflection of his complex identity: “his name was borrowed, as was his nationality” (Myth 31). For Sénac, life began with a name as if naming gave identity and meaning of life to individual, object, or even concept. “We live because we are named. All life is created within us through the name it exalts” he wrote in his preface to Poèmes Iliques— everything began in the name and everything returned to the name (Œuvres 447). It is up to the poet to help us return to this fusion of existence, flesh, and language suggested through the significance of name.

The quest for the father and the preoccupation with the name fused into a lifelong search for an identity whose range was explored through poetry, and thus we return to the birth of the poet Jean Sénac: “I am born Algerian. This birth! [it] leaves me naked” (Ébauche 17). When he was born in 1926, Algeria had already been under French colonial rule for three-quarters of a century, and would be until Algeria’s independence

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14 FLN: Front de Libération Nationale, the national liberation front during the French-Algerian war.
15 “injustices du régime colonial.”
16 “Nous vivons parce que nous sommes nommés. Toute vie se fait en nous par le nom qu’elle exalte.”
17 “Je suis né algérien. Cette naissance! […] me laisse nu.”
thirty-six years later in 1962. Born of a Spanish woman, Sénac joined the ranks of the Pieds-noir.\textsuperscript{18} Though his mother was Spanish, he looked to the French culture and language to ground himself. He was called many things: “French poet of Algeria,” poet “of French origin,” “Algerian of French Origin,” poet “Of European origin” (Roditi 23, Mazo 40, Peroncel-Hugoz 15, Akika 10).\textsuperscript{19} He inhabited the middle territory, the no man’s land, in “The difficulty of being native to an Arab world and of expressing himself in French, the language of the occupant” (d’Eaubonne 107-108).\textsuperscript{20} But the French language was as home to him as his native Oran, his bastard youth, his sexuality, and his religious roots. These aspects of his identity were questioned only in relation to the socio-political situation into which he was born and lived.

There was a sense in his writing that these facets of his being meant everything, and yet they were also meaningless. His identities mingled, informed one another, and borders blurred. His quest for the father “vaguely [confused] itself with that of carnal love,” but it was the same as the lyre confusing itself with the thigh in his poems, or the sea confusing itself with saliva (Temime 20).\textsuperscript{21}

Sénac didn’t dwell on his sexual preference, even in his writing, until 1968’s \textit{Avant-Corps}, the text through which he “came out” to his public. Before that, it was a source of stress and anxiety but only from the perspective of his Catholic upbringing. Sénac had been taught to find a way around his sexual preference during the many years that he was not openly gay. Homosexuality, for a strict Catholic family like his, was

\textsuperscript{18} Either a French citizen who lived in Algeria before its independence in 1962, or a person born in Algeria of European descent.
\textsuperscript{19} “Poète français d’Algérie;” “français de souche;” “algérien d’origine française;” “D’origine européenne.”
\textsuperscript{20} “La difficulté d’être natif du monde arabe et de s’exprimer en français, langue de l’occupant.”
\textsuperscript{21} “se confond[ant] obscurement avec celle de l’amour charnel;” see “First iliac poem” on p.21 and “Conquering others with our five senses” on p.93.
synonymous with sin. Sénac convinced himself that he could fix himself if only he found the right woman: “I wandered all night in the alleys and toward the seaport, searching for some place that might tear me from my anguish. A woman who would finally be my mooring. A woman who would solve everything” (Ébauche 47). Once he “came out” in Avant-Corps, it became clear that though his homosexuality certainly had a part in making him who he was, it was not an identity to which he subscribed himself entirely: “This isn’t important,” he said of it in an interview, “it is simply one component of my being that deserves as much not to be ridiculed as my socialist convictions” (Peroncel-Hugo z 35).

Meanwhile, as Jean Sénac sought to fuse his identities into one comprehensive whole, the concepts of the corpoème and the corps total were born. Both were terms coined by the poet, the first a fusion of the French words for “body” and “poem,” the latter the result of the corpoème’s success: the Total Body. The corpoème was the best that either body or poem could offer: a “communal voice” through which “the dreams of body, soul, and spirit [became] one dream” (Duncan 62, 72).

With his personal dedication to his work, Sénac’s literary career began to blossom. He was never a superstar like his adopted father Camus or René Char who would become his mentor and a great supporter of his work, but he gathered and maintained a strong system of support and admiration. In 1943 he founded the

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22 “J’ai traîné toute la nuit dans les ruelles et vers le port, à la recherche de quelque lieu qui m’arracherait à l’angoisse. Une femme qui serait enfin ma vraie bitte d’amarrage. Une femme qui réglerait tout.”
23 “Cela n’est pas important, c’est simplement une composante de mon être qui mérite autant de ne pas être bafouée que ma conviction socialiste.”
Association littéraire des poètes obscurs, and in 1946 Lélian, a group of young artists and writers. In 1949, after having left the Rivet sanatorium for Algiers at the end of the year in much better health, Sénac founded the literary review *M.* and then *Soleil* later that year followed by *Terrasses* in 1953. These reviews were endorsed by a number of big literary names, many of whom contributed or promised to contribute to them: René Char of course, as well as Kateb Yacine, Mouloud Feraoun, and Emmanuel Roblès.

Sénac was mostly housed by friends in Algiers, amongst them painters and other writers. After he regained his health, his political stance solidified and became a source of inspiration for his work beginning in 1949 with a publication in *Bulletin des amis des lettres françaises*. He always felt strongly about his country and its numerous cultures and languages but these feelings hadn’t, until this point, been overtly political; “he is not a master of thinking. But he is a master of loving […] he has the clear and painful perspective of the just” (Bencheikh 16).²⁴ He was poet before all else, and it was often his emotions that drove him rather than calculated thought processes. It was this emotional fount from which he maintained his political strength and drew his hope and constant optimism for “the utopia of a plural Algeria,” despite circumstantial and emotional setbacks (Bencheikh 10).²⁵

He thus began to dedicate his writing to political progress, “fus[ing] the theme of revolutionary favor with that of physical desire and emotional loss,” other themes that pervade his writing (*Myth* 32). Sénac’s *corpoème* became not just a vessel in his search for his personal identity but also that of the fight for a new national Algerian identity.

²⁴ “il n’est pas un maître à penser. Mais il est un maître à aimer […] il a le regard clair et douloureux du juste.”
²⁵ “l’utopie d’une Algérie plurielle.”
Sénac left Algeria in 1954 for Paris and remained there for the duration of the French-Algerian war until 1962. “I need Paris to get away,” he wrote in a 1950 letter to René Char, “for culture, for re-tightening, shock trials”— but Algeria was everything else for him, “motherland of absurd happiness in conjunction with grief, tenderness, death” and he never lost sight of his origins (“Lettre à René Char” 104).26

The years in Paris were useful but difficult times for Sénac. He moved there with grant money to spend time writing but the money ran out and afterwards he had a difficult time maintaining a job. He lived there “poor and fulfilled,” mostly through the benevolence and generosity of friends and connections (Lettre à Albert Memmi 110).27 He did a great deal of writing from Paris and solidified his politics there as well, joining the Fédération de France du FLN. He was able to insert himself into the literary circles of the time and it aided his thinking about his home country and the freedom it lacked: “what was possible in a colonized country is so much more beneath the free skies of Paris” (“Lettre à Gabriel Audisio” 116).28 Sénac sought through his writing and literary circles to affirm “for the youth the real face of France and to denounce one more time the colonial lie” (Trois Lettres à François Mauriac 114).29

His writing expanded and improved: “he went from an often opaque type of writing to a clear, simple, direct language but still carried by a lyrical effusion” (Kaouah 14).30 It was from Paris that he wrote his first large collection of poems, Poèmes, greatly encouraged by Camus, which officially entered him into the literary world in 1954. But

26 “J’ai besoin de Paris pour l’éloignement ;” “la culture, le resserrement, l’épreuve des chocs ;” “patrie du bonheur absurde à la mesure de la peine, de la tendresse, de la mort.”
27 “pauvre et comblé.”
28 “ce qui a été possible dans un pays de colonisation l’est d’autant plus sous le ciel libre de Paris.”
29 “pour nos jeunes le vrai visage de la France et dénoncer une fois de plus le mensonge colonial.”
30 “il est passé d’une écriture souvent hermétique à un langage clair, simple, direct mais porté par l’épanchement lyrique.”
Sénac, who had held small jobs here and there, no longer found work from 1958 forward. This tightened his already meager financial situation. The poet became distracted from what Paris could offer him. He never truly belonged in the City of Light; he was fixated on his home country of Algeria even as he loved the country to which it still belonged.

He left Paris for three months in the summer of 1959 to spend time in Spain. That autumn he returned to France at which point he spent increasing amounts of time in Châtillon-en-Diois, where he purchased a “shepherd’s house” with an advance from a friend of his in exchange for a painting by the artist Louis Nallard (Temime 123).31

“Marginal in Paris, he would be even more so in Algiers,” but he still returned to Algeria on October 30th, 1962, the Algerian independence having been attained on July 3rd of the same year (Temime 85).32 In 1963, Sénac was one of the founders of the Union des Écrivains Algériens and he began a successful radio career with “Le Poète dans la Cité” and then in 1967 he continued with “Poésie sur tous les fronts.” At this point his message was a fiercely political one and poetry was the vehicle for his political beliefs.

Sénac was a dramatic person in many ways. He was idealistic, believing in a new Algeria that could not exist: “He wished for a plural Algeria, open to the Mediterranean, the world, holder of an exemplary beauty” (Pour 9).33 But this openness was just the dream of the few. In a manifesto written in 1953 Sénac wrote, “Algeria was diversity at the start, through its customs, languages, countryside, rich diversity” (“Notes pour un Manifeste” 120).34 He was not wrong. Having been under European colonial rule for a century at this point, numerous languages and cultures were woven together in Algeria.

31 “maison du berger”
32 “Marginale à Paris, il le serait encore plus à Alger,”
33 “Il souhaitait une Algérie plurielle, ouverte à la Méditerrané, au monde, porteur d’une beauté exemplaire”
34 “L’Algérie était diversité au départ, par ses coutumes, ses langages, ses paysages, riche diversité”
Though this diversity was inarguable, the moment of independence for Algeria was a time to turn back to the country’s rigid Muslim roots.

After he returned to Algeria post independence, Sénac was described as “bothersome” and “cumbersome” to the political agenda of the time; “there was no place for him as a gay French-Algerian poet in a socialist state founded on Arabo-Muslim principles” (Temime 11, 12, “Jean Sénac” 3). But Sénac felt most at home when around the Arabic people of Algeria— he shared his plight of exclusion and marginality with them. He grew up with them, or as he wrote, “against [them]. But really against, against. At which point one day we would wake up almost glued to each other, Siamese twins. Like them, I was Outcast, profoundly […] They were called ‘bastard,’ I was the bastard” (Ébauche 69). The Arabic world, however, wouldn’t have him.

When Sénac came home to Algeria, though just thirty-six years old he only had ten more years to live. During those ten years, his quality of life deteriorated. He was slowly nudged out of almost every literary and political circle to which he belonged. His radio shows were censored and then shut down, and he fell out of favor with the politicians of the time, losing his government appointed post in the education department as power was transferred via coup d’état from Ahmed Ben Bella37 to Houari Boumediene on June 19th, 1965. His written works, too, were refused publication.

In 1969, Sénac moved to what he would call his “cave-vigie,” a dark, dank, almost uninhabitable cellar. It is interesting to note that though he was impossibly

35 “encombrant,” “gênant.”
37 The first leader of the newly independent Algeria.
optimistic, even he was human in his unhappiness, yet he continued to cling to his romantic dreams. In 1972 he wrote in a letter to his friend Ahmed Taleb: “Ten years ago, coming back to this country, I met with you and we dreamed, despite the wound of the summer of ’62, of a generous revolution as possible. And then there was beauty and horror, faith and disillusionment, tenacious hope” (Lettre à Ahmed Taleb 141). To his friend and poet Jean Pélégri, he wrote the following in a letter just months before he died: “It’s so dark in this cellar, but the sea, the sea… […] I am at my lowest point, but happy too, more and more bare, sure, lost” (Le Boucher 89). It is clear that even at his lowest point, Sénac was still warmed by the beauty of the sea and recognized truth in his lost state. He continued to lose hope and yet, despite his now deplorable state of life, he insisted on noting the positive, the useful, the ends to his strife, even regarding his impending death.

At the end of his life, Sénac applied for official Algerian citizenship. He was denied. At that point, “In the eyes of many, he [remained] a foreigner and also a gaouri, a traitor. Result: he [was] pushed aside, voluntarily forgotten in Algeria like in France;” the marginalization only heightened after his death (Temime 135). Jean Sénac was assassinated, it was thus unnerving when we wrote about his death in poems, letters, and prose as just barely a middle-aged man: “They’ll kill me or they’ll have me assassinated…” he wrote, “They’ll make of me a new García Lorca” (Temime 13). The

38 “Il y a dix ans, rentrant au pays, je te retrouvais et nous rêvions, malgré la blessure de l’été ’62, d’une révolution généreuse possible. Puis il y eut la beauté et l’horreur, la foi et les désillusions, l’espérance tenace.”
39 “Il fait si noir dans cette cave, mais la mer, la mer… […] je suis au plus bas, et puis heureux aussi, de plus en plus dépouillé, sûr, perdu.”
40 “Aux yeux de beaucoup, il reste un étranger et, aussi, un gaouri, un infidèle. Résultat: il est progressivement mis à l’écart volontairement oublié en Algérie comme en France.”
41 “Ils me tueront ou bien ils me feront assassiner…;” “Ils feront de moi un nouveau García Lorca.”
poet was killed in his “cave-vigie” on the night of the 29th to the 30th of August, 1973. He was stabbed between five and thirteen times. No one was convicted of the crime and his murder saw little publicity. In the December 1973 edition of France-Pays arabes, René Char wrote a short text in Sénac’s honor, and in it, simply, “we have lost the Verb” (Temime 147). Sénac was not yet forty-seven years old.

This is the first time the entirety of Avant-corps, complete with Poèmes Iliaques and Divân du Noûn, has been translated into the English language. With these translations I seek to draw a great poet’s work into a larger canon and, as such, to fight the powers that marginalized him and his work during his lifetime and continue to today. Jean Sénac’s voice is one of multiplicity, diversity, and complexity, and his belief in the ability to unite these disparate parts of one’s identity is vital in our increasingly global culture.

“What I want to write is my flesh, my tumors, my flaws” Jean Sénac writes, “What I want to say is life” — and with that, in the following work, he succeeds (Shuddering Longing 153, Ébauche 50).

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42 “nous avions perdu le Verbe.”
43 “Ce que je veux écrire, c’est ma chair, mes tumeurs, mes failles;” “Ce que je veux dire c’est la vie.”
AVANT-CORPS

précédé de
POÈMES ILIAQUES

et suivi de
DIWÂN DU NOÛN

à Mireille
et Jean de Maisonseul
AVANT-CORPS

preceded by
ILIAC POEMS

and followed by
NOÛN DIVAN

to Mireille
and Jean de Maisonseul
Poèmes qui se croyaient à l’affût d’un désastre! Mais que le soleil tende ses jarrets sur leurs bifurcations et les voici rassemblés pour des matinées sans épave.

Je les écrits depuis ces millénaires où le premier poète balbutia sur un roc notre énigme, et nos lèvres qualifiées créèrent d’un même sursaut le nom de l’Homme et sa légende irréfragable: Dieu.

Nous vivons parce que nous sommes nommés. Toute vie se fait en nous par le nom qu’elle exalte. Et toute la tentative du poète, dans l’espace de ses tourments, ne vise qu’à reconstituer ces syllabes d’où le Visage pourrait surgir vivant du seul amour. Qu’il soit, même en son pur chaos, et notre écriture ne serait plus envolée absurde vers une lune de papier mais cosmogonie racinée à la terre et prise en charge de la lune des cosmonautes.

Car si le poème plaque en nous les fragiles extases d’Onan, il ne prend sa voix que transmis. Écrire, c’est toujours répondre à quelqu’un quand bien même ce quelqu’un serait le jumeau noir en nous qui se cache et nous persécute, exigeant de notre vigilance de perpétuelles mutations.

Se taire, c’est aussi répondre, aménager avec des mots blancs des haltes de suggestions. Dans cette absence radicale du langage, une part de l’être s’écrit. Silence de syllabes inquiètes, de bonds retenus. À Emmaüs, les pèlerins ne reconnaissent le Christ que lorsque le pain fut rompu. Vanité des paroles de route! Mais paroles de route, pain rompu, tout est ici nécessaire à la reconnaissance du poème: notre méthode est peut-être un Transfiguratisme.

La poésie ne peut avoir de répit ni se limiter à ses circonstances. Le langage est l’instrument le plus inouï d’exploration et de connaissance du temps. Par sa perturbation présente, il nous fait contemporain de tout le passé et de tout l’avenir du monde. Le poète est condamné à tout dire, à avouer le monde, depuis le fœtus où tout fut gravé. Mais transcrire, c’est aussi déchiffrer, ordonner le message et lui restituer son feu. C’est arracher le corps à ses ténèbres et lui donner dans le vocabulaire un espace de transmission. C’est inventer. Qu’un mot s’accorde à un autre mot et le mythe met en place l’image à souffle continu: l’univers respire, l’homme existe.

Inscrits dans l’événement le plus banal et transitoire, ces poèmes ouvrent ma fenêtre sur la mer. Aux cris des baigneurs, aux vaisseaux lointains, se joignent les tentations des sirènes et de la licorne. Cette aventure iliaque, cet avant-corps ne sont que des prolégomènes vers un verbe réconcilié, une chair heureuse, le Corps Total.

Toute vie est hermétique, toute vie est ouverte. Ici, j’ai raconté un moment de mon parcours vers le gué de la quarantaine. Dérision et Mystère. Mais ceux qui donnent accès à la poésie dans leurs veines sauront y retrouver ce chant d’ongle que l’homme n’a cessé de nourrir depuis la première caverne.

Pointe-Pescade, 26 février 1967
Poems who believed themselves on the brink of disaster! But that the sun might tend to its popliteal bifurcations and here they are, brought together for mornings without wreckage.

I have been writing them since the millennia when the first poet stammered our riddles from atop a rock, and our qualified lips created from the same spurt the name of Man and his conclusive legend: God.

We live because we are named. All life is created within us through the name it exalts. And the poet’s every attempt, within the space of his torments, is intended only to re-form these syllables from where the Face could emerge— alive— from just love. That he might exist, even in his pure chaos, and our writing would no longer fly off absurdly toward a paper moon, but rather cosmogony rooted to the earth responsible for the astronauts’ moon.

For if the poem flattened within us the fragile ecstasies of Onan— it only takes its voice when transmitted. To write is always to respond to someone even when that someone is the black twin inside us who hides and persecutes us, demanding the vigilance of our perpetual mutation.

To shut up is also to respond, to build halted suggestions with white words. In this radical absence of language, one piece of our being writes itself. The silence of worried syllables, stifled leaps. At Emmaüs, the pilgrims only recognize Christ once bread is broken. Vanity of the speech of the road! But road’s speech— broken bread— everything is here that is necessary for the poem’s recognition: our method is maybe a Transfiguration.

Poetry can have neither respite nor can it limit itself to its circumstances. Language is the most incredible instrument of exploration and knowledge of all time. Through its present disruption, it makes all of the past and present of the world contemporary. The poet is condemned to say everything, to confess the world, from the fetus where everything is engraved. But to transcribe is also to decode, to ordain the message and rebuild its fire. It is to tear the body from its darkness and to give it a space in vocabulary for transmission. It is to invent. That one word harmonizes with another word and the myth puts in place— with continuous breath— the image: the universe breathes, man lives.

Inscribed in the most banal and transitory event, these poems open my window onto the sea. Onto the cries of the bathers, the faraway vessels, joining with the temptations of the sirens and the unicorn. This iliac adventure, this avant-corps, they are just prolegomena toward a reconciled verb, a happy flesh, the Corps Total.

All of life is hermetic, all of life is open. Here, I tell of a moment of my path toward the ford of the quarantine. Derision and Mystery. But those who give access to poetry in their veins will know there to find this fingernail song that man hasn’t stopped feeding since the first cave.

Pointe-Pescade, February 26, 1967
POÈMES ILIAQUES

Je me souviens dessus ta cuisse
La plume folle d’un ara.

Alger, 1946
ILIAC POEMS

On your thigh, I remember
The mad feather of a macaw.
Algiers, 1946
À l’orée de ta lyre
Une cicatrice me parle
De conquêtes. Le verbe
Dans don délire nuptial
Traque le mot jusqu’à la moelle.
Sur le Môle, l’enfant s’arrache aux cotonnades
Et prélude à la nuit.

T’aimer
Serait rendre aux syllabes
Un sourire innocent.

Ils inventèrent la première plaie.
L’arbre y secoua ses ravines.
La nuit prit. Tout autour
La parole ne fut plus qu’un nuage tuméfié.

Amour,
Qu’allions-nous faire sur ces territoires?
Poussés par quel secret?

Le cerne de tes yeux et le bleu de l’épaule
   C’est toute une nuit pour mon Voyage.
Je serre dans mon point un galet. Leurs injures
Ont brisé les oursins.

Toute la mer s’écoule
Comme si j’étais ouvert en deux.
FIRST ILIAC POEM

1

At your lyre’s edge,
A scar speaks to me
Of conquests. Verb,
In its conjugal delirium,
Tracks word to marrow.
On the Môle, child tears himself from cotton,
And preludes night.

To love you
Would be to return to the syllables
An innocent smile.

2

They invented the first lesion;
the tree there shook its ravines.
Night took. Circumfluent,
Speech was nothing more than tumid cloud.

Love,
What will we do in these realms—
Propelled by which secret?

3

The bags around your eyes and the blue of your shoulder;
   Everything is— for my Voyage— one night.
Here, I clench a pebble. Their insults
Shattered sea urchins.

Entire sea slips by
As if I were opened in two.
Mais toi
Tu nargues le trident de cet Ordre Moral,
Tu instaures
Le tendre plaisir des rivages,
Une architecture radieuse,
Le pain et l’audace pour tous.

Vers tes hanches ce n’est pas seulement le bonheur qui augure
Ou cette grande fête des adolescents sur la digue,
Ce n’est pas seulement dans ta salive le poème comme un poisson,
Mais déjà une moisson
Armée de notre solitude.

Le jour approche où la santé
Eclatera comme un plongeon.

Au niveau de ton pas
Je jette mes mots fous,
Qu’ils dissolvent la boue
À tes pieds adorables
Où mes lèvres iront
Ranimer le poème,
Où mes baisers sauront
Recharner l’univers.

C’est à ce point précis où l’élan et la source
Enrichissent ma langue
Que j’affirme, le temps d’une halte,
Non plus mon empire lunaire
Mais l’humble déraison d’ajuster à l’orgasme
Le souffle même de mes mots.
But you—
You scoff at this Moral Order’s trident;
You establish
The tender pleasure of shoreline—
Radiant architecture—
Bread and nerve for all.

It is not simply happiness that your hips foretell,
Or the adolescents’ party on the seawall—
The poem, like fish, is not simply in your saliva
But already a harvest
Armed with our solitude.

The day approaches when health will
Explode like the loon.

I throw mad words
On the plane of your footfall,
That they might dissolve the mud
At your adorable feet—
Where my lips will go
To revive the poem—
Where my kisses will know
To reincarnate the universe.

It is at this precise point where impetus and spring
Enrich my tongue—
That I might declare—in the time of standstill—
Not my lunar empire,
But the humble unreason of adjusting my breath
And words to orgasm.
Iliaque
Parce que là où est ta lyre
Là est mon poème,
Et mon soleil,
Immense comme une main.
Iliac,
Because where your lyre is,
There is my poem
And my sun:
Vast as one hand.
Cette prise du corps non comme une bataille
Mais comme si la mer s’engouffrait dans l’entaille
Où l’âme scintillait de girelle et d’oursin.
Et ce rêve arrondi: mon poème ou ton sein?
Je ne sais plus. Le verbe au remblai des bavards
Est ce silence aigu de la chair en son dard.
Les murs eux-mêmes sont ce livre où tu m’inventes
Tandis qu’entre nos bras mille planètes ventent.
Je t’aime et je voudrais que les mots soient précis
Comme ta peau à l’heure où l’univers dit oui.
Unlike a battle, this hold on the body
Is as if gash engulfed sea
Where, with sea urchins and wrasse, the soul gleams.
My poem or your breast?— this rounded dream.
I don’t know anymore. Verb is the talkers’ ballast,
Acute silence of spearhead flesh.
The walls themselves are this book where you invent
Me, while between our arms one thousand planets vent.
I love you and I would like that my words are precise—
Like your skin at the instant the universe says yes.
DEUXIÈME POÈME ILIAQUE

1

Une girelle un peu d’ombre et le vœu des regards
Voilà dans l’étendue farouche du soleil
Notre halte.
D’un rocher à l’autre, d’un creux
De sable à l’angle de la digue
Les syllabes se poursuivent, les mots s’assemblent, le livre
S’épanouit.
Émerveillé, le souffle en moi frais comme un fruit de mer,
Je recopie mon vocabulaire d’été.

2

Et le mot
Comme une effusion d’eau
Prend la forme elle-même de nos corps.
Écrire devient
Une anatomie vertigineuse
(Avec tous les risques de l’embolie
Et le plaisir patient de lever sous tes lèvres
Un sens terré.)

3

J’aime écrire parce que c’est
Te couvrir de caresses,
Nommer ta chair dans son plus féroce au-delà,
Et boire, à même nos songes,
D’une même bouche épurée,
Ces mots fous de soleil et d’orange sanguine!
SECOND ILIAC POEM

1

A rainbow wrasse, a bit of shade, wish of the gaze,
Here in the savage expanse of the sun:
Our standstill.
From one boulder to the next, one sand
Hollow to the angle of the seawall,
Syllables chase each other; words assemble themselves; the book
Blossoms.
I marvel, breath in me cool as ocean’s fruit,
And copy down my summer idiom.

2

And word—
Like water’s bloodshed—
Takes, herself, the form of our bodies.
To write becomes
A dizzying anatomy
(With all the risks of embolism
And the patient joy of lifting beneath your lips
A buried meaning).

3

I love to write because it is
To cover you with caresses,
To name your flesh in its fiercest hereafter,
And to drink— from our dreams,
From one purified mouth—
These crazed words of sun and blood oranges!
De moi à moi tu es
Le sourire qui conduit aux forges secrètes.

Armé de lunettes marines et d’un harpon bleu,
Tu captures les paroles agressives.

Au soir, nous allumons sur le sable un feu de varech
Et tu danses, juste vêtu d’un mot.
From me to me you are
The smile that courses to hidden forges.

Armed with navy glasses and a blue harpoon,
You catch hostile speech.

At night, we light a seaweed fire on the sand
And you dance, dressed with just a word.
NI LE BAISER

Dans la maison lustrale
Il y a tant de graffiti
Que les murs en sont vierges
Et de nouveau la parole possible.

Mais nous nous taisons et la mer
En nous roule, siècle après siècle,
Déchets et feux. Ce soir
Nous ne nommerons rien.
In the lustrum house
there is so much graffiti
that the walls are virgin,
and to speak is newly possible.

But we shut ourselves up, and the sea
roils within us— century upon century—
garbage and fire. Tonight,
we shall name nothing.
ÉMERSION

Ce rythme régulier de raclement de gorge
C’est la mer le poème instituant sa forge.
La nuit rien ne te vient. Mais parmi le varech
Le galet descendu de la colline avec
Les odeurs de pétrole et de piment scintille.
Tes yeux boivent. Ton corps, ému, se déshabille.
Tu plonge. Les oursins montent du petit jour.
Des mots! Ce sont les mots dilatés de l’amour!
Tu t’accordes alors si bien à ta présence
Que les syllabes font des flammes à tes hanches.
This regular rhythm of throat scratching
Is the forge generated by the poem and sea.
At night, nothing comes to you. But the pebble
Gleams amongst the seaweed fallen down the knoll
With the odors of gasoline and spices. Your body—
Moved—undresses itself. Your eyes drink.
You dive. From breaking day the sea urchins rise.
Words—love’s words grown wide!
You are so well attuned to your own presence
That syllables ignite at your hips.
PET-EN-GUEULE

C’est une étoile une girelle
C’est une murène un mérou
Sur ta peau un érésipèle
Un cri qui te jette à l’égout.

C’est quand tout le soleil te bonde
Ce cataclysme entre tes joues
Une éclipse entre tes genoux
Et le poème qui te fonde.
PET-EN-GUEULE

It is rainbow wrasse, star;
It is moray eel, grouper,
An erysipelas on your skin,
A cry that throws you down the drain.

It is when the whole sun overfills you—
This cataclysm between your cheeks,
An eclipse between your knees—
And the poem that founds you.
TROISIÈME POÈME ILIAQUE

1

Tu tords ton maillot jusqu’à l’âme.
Je suis entre tes mains, ruisselant, le poème.
Et tous ces mouvements pour ajuster ton corps
Au nylon rouge, tout ce galbe
Sacralisé, immobile, éclatant,
Qu’est-ce sinon le geste du poème?
Tes jeux, tes sauts, sur les tripodes
Gravent les syllabes essentielles.

2

Seule une caméra pourrait rendre mon art poétique:
Tes muscles, tes fous rires,
Ballet de signes sur les blocs.

3

Le Môle, mon cahier
D’où rituellement je ramène
Mon mythe: vos graphismes.

4

Contre leur morale révulsée
La gloire pudique de vos corps.
THIRD ILIAC POEM

1

You wring your bathing suit tightly to its soul.
I am between your hands, dripping, poem.
And all these movements to adjust your body
To red nylon, all this sacred
Shaping, immobile, brilliant—
What else is the gesture of the poem?
Your games— somersaults— engrave
Vital syllables on tripods.

2

Only a camera could make my art poetic.
Your muscles, your crazed laughs:
Ballet of signs on blocks.

3

Le Môle, my notebook,
From which I usually bring back
My myth: your handwriting.

4

Against their appalling morality:
The chaste glory of your body.
À chaque pore une note.
Au bout du voyage le chant.
A note for every pore.
At the end of voyage: song.
À LA POINTE DE L’AUBE

1

La rougeur sur l’îlot et le blanc indiscible
De la dernière étoile dans le premier matin,
La mer prise de chair de poule et raclant au métronome ses os,
Le noir qui cède au bleu, le bleu qui cède au jaune,
De ce balcon où l’univers m’impose l’harmonie,
À travers tempêtes, microsillons, désordres,
En cette saison où les autobus déversent leurs corbeilles d’adolescents dorés,
Face aux navires qui croisent vers le nord,
Je m’enracine et règne.

2

Entre bleu et blanc tout est blanc.
Ou noir.
Les mouettes, par couple, approchent.
Mais avant la jubilation
Le silence, sec et friable.
Déjà les violentes cymbales
Interrogent le cœur.
Blush on the islet and unspeakable white
Of the first morning’s last star;
The sea, overtaken by goose bumps and scratching its bones down to a metronome;
Black yields to blue, blue yields to yellow—
From this balcony where the universe imposes on me its harmony
Through storms, microgrooves, chaos.
During this season where buses pour forth their baskets of golden adolescents
Before the ships crossing to the north:
I take root and reign.

Between blue and white, all is white.
Or black.
The seagulls, in pairs, approach.
But before the festivities:
Dry, brittle silence.
The violent cymbals already
Interrogate the heart.
POUBELLES PRÉCIEUSES

Si j’ai un roi pour me parler
De la tendre beauté du monde
Qu’il me ferme les yeux
À l’heure où le soleil en moi se dévergonde.

Le roc aux nus
rocher d’adolescents
syllabaire
la crique aux nus

mélancolie psalmodie
Coran Mosquée haut-parleur sapin.

Et le poète se met en route
Avec à son flanc la gibecière pour les mots.

Il se réveille, Gulliver à son comble, tout habité d’agitations.

Innominé sans fin, dans le grand feu des algues
Parcourant tout l’espace de sa condamnation.

Les voyous de l’autogestion
Voyous de la révolution
Le poète est un voyou
(Chams de Tabriz, Rimbaud, Essenine, Voznessenski,
Evtouchenko, Allen Ginsberg, Genet, Artaud, Anna Gréki,
Patrick Mac’Avoy, Yahia S. Ben Hadji).

La mer d’Aksouh
Quand la vague au bord retrousse ses lèvres:
Regarde, elle sourit

Pour voir la nuit d’Aksouh il faut savoir
Lever les yeux, dormir à la belle étoile.
Dénuement, notre chance!

Torse-galet de Jean de Maisonseul,
“Alexandre devant Ecbatane” d’Ipoustéguy:
Poèmes iliaques, ordalies vers le Corps Total.
Avancer dans cette matière vers un Trans-figuratisme.
PRECIOUS TRASH

If only I had a king to tell
Me of the world’s tender beauty,
Then he would close my eyes
As the sun corrupts itself inside me.

Bedrock of nudes—
Sea-rock for
Grammar-book adolescents—
cove of nudes—

psalmody melancholy,
Qur’an Mosque fir-tree loudspeaker.

And the poet takes to the road,
His shoulder bag of words by his side.

He wakes: Gulliver at his end, overtaken with turmoil.

Endlessly untitled in the great seaweed fire,
Running through the space of his disparagement.

Self-management delinquents—
Revolution delinquents—
The poet is delinquent—
(Chams de Tabriz, Rimbaud, Essenine, Voznessenski,
Evtouchenko, Allen Ginsberg, Genet, Artaud, Anna Gréki,
Patrick Mac’Avoy, Yahia S. Ben Hadji).

Aksouh’s sea,
When the wave on the coast rolls up his lips—
Look— she smiles.

To see Aksouh’s night one must know how
To raise one’s eyes, to sleep beneath the stars.
Destitution, our chance!

Maisonseul’s stone-torso,
Ipoustéguy’s “Alexandre devant Ecbatane:”
Iliac poems, ordeals toward the Corps Total.
To go forth within this material toward Trans-figuratism.
Sur mon passeport:
“Les gens qui ne peuvent projeter d’ombre
Ne meurent jamais de taches de soleil.”
(Bob Kaufman, “Poèmes de Prison”.)

“Belle comme la victoire du Viêt-nam.”

Grillon sur tous mes murs:
“Ce qui vient au monde pour ne rien troubler ne mérite ni égards ni patience.” (René Char.)
On my passport:
“People who can’t cast shadows
Never die of freckles”
(Bob Kaufman, “Jail Poems”).

“Beautiful, like the victory of Vietnam.”

Crickets on all my walls:
“Those who come into the world not to disrupt have earned neither respect nor patience”
(René Char).
AVANT-CORPS

L’homme sera un corps pur.
ANTONIN ARTAUD

Libre, c’est-à-dire exilé parmi les vivants.
JEAN GENET

...Non point dans les espaces connus de nous,
mais entre ces espaces...

ABDUL ALHAZRED
d’après H. P. Lovecraft
Man will be a pure body.
ANTONIN ARTAUD

Free, that is to say, exiled amongst the living.
JEAN GENET

...Not within the spaces known to us,
but between those spaces...
ABDUL AHAZRED
after H. P. Lovecraft
Des mots, je les ai jetés sans savoir,
À la merci du soleil, des oursins.

À la merci des seins goulus,
Mes mots, des bols de mains avides.

Tout dévorés d’or et de vide,
Des mots funestes, intrépides.

Crin froid, crinière des chevaux,
Quelques mots peut-être de trop.

À la merci dans le matin
D’une lèvre qui voulait boire.

Des mots, mes ordres, mes déboires,
Ma mie, mon môle et mon purin.

Et pour te tailler au burin
Bloc de douleur, nulle mémoire,
Des mots!

Le lait à l’aube sur le pas.
Le mégot qui traîne son froid.

Les cils qui font une prison.
Bonjour comme une déraison.
Words— I threw them unknown
To the mercy of sun and sea urchins.

At the mercy of greedy breasts—
My words: bowls of avid hands.

Devoured by gold and void—
Grievous words, intrepid words.

Cold horsehair, horses’ mane—
Maybe a few words too many.

At the mercy of one lip,
Thirsty in the morning.

Words— my orders— my disappointments,
My sweetheart, my breakwater, my fertilizer.

And to carve you— block of pain,
Zero memory— with a chisel.
   Words!

Milk on the step at dayspring,
The cold of the cigarette butt is lagging.

Eyelashes form prisons.
Hello, like unreason.
La main tâtonne, se reprend.
Dans la poche pas même un dinar.

Le trolley, l’odeur, il est tard.
Le soleil n’est plus qu’un cafard
   Qui vire au rouge
   Au rouge
   Au rouge
Sans même que l’âme se torde.

Sur le bureau tout est en ordre.

3

Tu as compris, je ne t’aime pas!
Je ne…Tenez, genoux, bien droit.

Les pavés se sont entrouverts.
Mais nous sommes restés en l’air.

Pas…C’est drôle que continue
La petite musique nue…

T’…Passez au napalm mon cœur.
Je laisse avec ses joues en fleurs
   Aime
Aime de son aime pas
Dans l’étang fou du café crème.

Chaque jour c’est Hiroshima.

4

Le soleil a quitté les mots.
Le poème est un beignet froid.

Aujourd’hui tous vos oripeaux,
Et vos slogans et vos effrois…
The hand fumbles, pulls itself together. 
Not even one dinar in my pocket.

Trolley, smell— it's late. 
The sun is nothing but a hypocrite
   Veering to red
   To red
   To red
The soul doesn’t even twist.

Everything is in order on the desk.

3

You understand— I love you not! 
I don’t…Hold, knees, nice and straight.

The cobblestones half-parted. 
But we remained aloft.

Not…It’s funny that music continues 
Little and nude…

You— Pass my heart through napalm. 
I leave it with its cheeks in bloom
   Love
Love of its un-love 
In the mad pond of creamy coffee.

Every day is Hiroshima.

4

The sun has quit the words. 
A cold donut is the poem.

Today, all your terrors, 
Your specious finery, your slogans…
Quand un amour s’en va,
Le verbe abandonne nos bras.

Langage de mégot, plus banal
Qu’un ticket de bus, qu’une larme.

Toute la mort et tout le mal
(Ton corps ouvert en deux, ton âme)

Pour pas même un premier printemps,
Une tumeur, un premier lieu,
Des lèvres.

(Au plus noueux de notre fièvre
Balbutier les syllabes
So-leil.)

Pour pas même une miette de Dieu
À se mettre sous la dent.
When a love goes,
The verb abandons our arms.

Cigarette butt language, more
Banal than a bus ticket, a tear.

All that is death and wrong
(Your body opened in two, your soul)

Not even for a first springtime:
A tumor, primary place,
   Lips.

   (At the most tangled instant of our fever
   Stumbling over syllables
   S-sun.)

Not even for a crumb of God
To place between your teeth.
PREMIÈRE LETTRE À ANTOINE

Comme un ancien soleil que les microsillons lacèrent
(Tonnes de guêpes à ne plus savoir
Si c’est le miel ou l’espace qui fond),
De l’est à l’ouest, sur ce boulevard de hérons,
Je fouille (mes derniers yeux enfuis dans les poubelles).

Je te cherche et je sais Où tu es.
Je t’aime et mes bavardages s’effritent.
C’est la grande panique de l’aube
(Notre-Dame est rasée! Notre-Dame est rasée!)

Quel pas sinon ta jambe ailée?
Quel regard sinon ton absence
Qui m’envahit, qui me contient?

Il y a ce maquis derrière tes dents noires
Où nul ne vient qu’il n’ait d’abord brûlé ses mots.
Caverne où l’on s’éprend de l’Océan Tragique.
(Ne parle pas, je parle trop.
J’écoute le reflux et tes pupilles montent.
Vers quoi? Vers nous?
Là où tu es mes breloques se brisent.
“Nous,” ce diamant droit, les arlequins le brouillent.)

Combien de temps de moi à Nous?
De toi à Nous combien de lunes?
D’entre les néons je t’épèle.
Corps Total à peine impatient.
Mais qui ne sait déjà plus ni mordre ni espérer.
BEFORE THE BODY

FIRST LETTER TO ANTOINE

Like an ancient sun cut by microgrooves
(Tons of wasps not knowing
If it’s honey or space that’s melting),
From east to west on this boulevard of herons,
I rummage (my last eyes escaped into the garbage).

I look for you, and I know Where you are.
I love you— my prattle evaporates.
It is sunrise’s greatest fear
(Notre-Dame is leveled! Notre-Dame is leveled!)

What step but that of your winged leg—
What gaze but that of your absence
Invading me, confining me?

Scrubland behind your black teeth
Where no one ventures who didn’t already burn his words.
Cavern where one falls in love with Ocean, Tragic.
(Don’t talk— I talk too much.
I listen to the ebb and your pupils rise.
Toward what— Us?
Where you are my charms break.
“Us,” this right diamond, clouded by harlequins.)

How much time from me to Us—
From you to Us, how many moons?
From among the neon lights I spell you out.
Corpse Total— hardly impatient—
But which knows neither to bite nor to hope.
DEUXIÈME LETTRE À ANTOINE

Le désordre, la peur
Nous met des bubons aux chevilles.
Quel chahut sur tous ces visages avariés!
Quel printemps désaxé pour répondre au refus!

C’est drôle, Antoine…
Et si le cœur soudain ne savait plus aimer?
Batter avec le soleil et sur la peau sourire?

Et mon tourbillon peut-il être
À la fois Centre et Alentour?

L’air ne ramasse plus ses éclaboussures de feu
Là où la rose a mis son ombre.
La rose à plaies, la fleur des sables,
Le couteau lové sur le Temps.

Le sang des choses nous éclabousses l’âme.
Rouges, gris, nous avançons.
À l’affût de quelle transparence?
De quel exact silence où veillent des taureaux?
SECOND LETTER TO ANTOINE

Disorder, fear
Plagues our ankles with cysts.
What chaos on these rotten faces—
What unhinged springtime in response to refuse!

It’s funny, Antoine…
What if the heart, all of sudden, didn’t know how to love?
How to fight with sun and smile on skin?

Can my whirlwind be—
At once— Center and Circumference?

Air no longer picks up its shards of fire
Where the rose places her shade.
The rose has cuts, flower of sand,
Knife coiled on Time.

The blood of things splashes our souls.
Reds, grays— we move forward.
On the lookout for which lucence—
Which perfect silence where bulls keep vigil?
TROISIÈME LETTRE À ANTOINE

Pourquoi viennent-ils à moi
Me parler d’un Espace
Où leur innocence s’exile?

Saccagés, hésitants,
Et jusqu’au bout détruisant leur Regard,
Pourquoi sous tant de crasse
Gardent-ils une peau si douce?

Une fois de plus quittant tous ces errants de l’aube
Je rêve
Vers ton sommeil imaginé.
THIRD LETTER TO ANTOINE

Why do they come to me
To talk of a Space
Where their innocence is exiled?

Devastated— hesitant—
And through to the end they are destroying their Gaze.
Why, beneath such filth,
Do they keep such soft skin?

Once more I quit all these strays of dawn
And dream
Toward your imagined slumber.
Dans le soleil, Antoine,
Tu ne vas pas brûler
Mais ramener ton corps à son juste galet.
Ici sont les cendres, là-bas
L’os dénudé pour que le Poème s’écrive.

Non pas brûler
Mais contenir
—Ô l’oursin des pupilles à l’heure où le soleil te tire de l’écume!
Ici sont les cendres, là-bas
Un diamant de bouse sèche.
In the sun, Antoine,
You will not burn
But bring your body back to its rightful rock.
Here are the cinders, over there the
Bone, stripped, so that the poem can write itself.

Not burn,
But contain
—O pupils’ sea urchin at the hour when the sun pulls you from sea foam!
Here are the cinders; over there,
A diamond of dried dung.
CINQUIÈME LETTRE À ANTOINE

Une tasse, rien d’autre que la tasse!
Que je sois écrasé d’urine et de mépris!
Puisque je ne tiens pas tes gestes de beauté!
Puisque tu vas livrer ta gueule à leur salpêtre!
Non pas la mort, l’horreur:
J’ai vécu hors de l’âme!
A teacup, nothing but a teacup!
That I might be flattened by urine and contempt
Because I don’t have your beautiful gestures—
Because you’ll deliver your face to their saltpeter!
Death is not the horror—
I have survived outside of the soul.
SIXIÈME LETTRE À ANTOINE

Non, tu vois, je ne suis qu’une ombre, la plus conne,
Qui jappe à tes genoux.

(Lettre d’Antoine à Isabelle:
Rimbaud est mort! Faut-il le croire?)
SIXTH LETTER TO ANTOINE

No— you see— I am but a shadow, the stupidest, 
That yips at your knees.

(Letter from Antoine to Isabelle: 
Rimbaud is dead! Must we believe it?)
SEPTIÈME LETTRE À ANTOINE

Des tonnes de foin vert
Pour toucher la brindille
De flamme qui ne brûle
Qu’au moment de mon doigt.

Mais traverser le pur élément de l’effroi,
Le verglas et la lie en ses plages acerbes.
Peut-être à l’aube connaîtrons-nous de l’herbe
Sa transparence et ses prodigieux beffrois?
SEVENTH LETTER TO ANTOINE

Tons of young hay—
To touch the twig
Of fire that only burns
At the instant of my finger.

But to cross the pure element of fear—
In his bitter beaches: dregs and black ice.
Maybe at sunrise will we know grass:
Its belfries, towering and clear?
Il n’est pas de clairière plus ouverte que le mot
Lorsque tu l’enclos dans l’incertitude.
Les couleurs les plus imprévues te mordent la peau,
Le délire s’éternise sous un ongle.
Dérision! dérision! ton impuissance jubile!
— Cabri cerné de satellites, de neutrons, qu’es-tu
Sinon ce tronc de cèdre à la dérive
Où l’écume cède mot à mot d’inutiles secrets?

Voici le soir. Un grand cercle de nostalgie— auréole ou microsillon.
Dans son fichu de laine noire, le cœur,
Qui se penche au balcon, épèle
Un nom— comme édenté, profus, risque inutilisable,
Risque où ne peuvent plus de piéger les oiseaux.

La beauté passe en morse au-dessus des tripodes.
Un espace te perce— d’Ailleurs.
Tu sais, tout envahi d’angoisses et d’horreurs,
Que ces cellules en toi qui montent et prolifèrent
C’est autre chose qu’Hiroshima!— Peut-être le dernier assaut
Des mots à la Porte où tu rêves?

La terre bascule. Un être
Balbutiant colle à tes lèvres ses
Lèvres— Boue, gloire hallucinée— ô barre
De soleil pour nier quelle humanité morte?

En toi vient s’ouvrir une planète ardente.
Toutes tes portes battent.
Sors des vertèbres. Sors!
SKETCH OF A TOTAL BODY

NOVEMBER’S ORDEAL

to Antoine Steimer

1

There is no clearing more open than the word
As you bind it in uncertainty.
The most unexpected colors bite at your skin—
Madness is perpetuated beneath a fingernail.
Derision— derision— your jubilant impotence—
Baby goats surrounded by satellites, neutrons. What are you
Besides this cedar trunk, adrift
Where sea foam yields word to word, of useless secrets?

Here is nightfall. A large nostalgic circle—aureole or microgroove.
In his black wool headscarf, the heart,
Leaning over the balcony, spells
A name: edentulous, profuse, unusable risk—
Risk where the birds can no longer trap themselves.

Beauty passes over tripods in Morse code.
A space pierces you from Elsewhere.
You know that, everything overrun with angst and horror,
The cells inside you rise and proliferate—
It’s something other than Hiroshima! Maybe words’
Last assault on the Door to your dreams?

The earth shakes. A bumbling
Being glues to your lips his
Lips— Mud, hallucinated glory— O which dead humanity
Does the sun’s staff deny?

An ardent planet opens itself in you.
Your doors thrash.
Come out of your vertebrae— come out!
J’ai quitté la tribune et les palabres de café, j’entre
Dans un nuage acide
En route vers ces îles où les serpents sont déliés, les nerfs,
Les verbes qui ne connaissent d’autre conjugaison que la mort.

L’heure est peut-être venue de vivre
Comme si nous n’étions plus au centre de la mort
Les superbes grelots (les grelottants trésors ²),
L’heure est peut-être venue de dire
Quelque chose d’amical, salive sur ta plaie,
De silencieux
Comme un galet au travail dans le désert.

J’ai quitté tous mes frères pour croire à la fraternité
— Pour bâtir, même de bouse,
Une maison sans proie— et ses fenêtres sur les astres.
Je reviendrai, armé de mon corps,
Sachant de chaque son la syllabe saignante.
Je serai le Rayon Visible
Donc vos siècles obscurs ont préparé l’accueil.

Dans mon nuage acide
Je suis en route vers vous.

Cette terre est la mienne avec son amère liturgie,
Ses éclats orduriers, ses routes torves,
L’âme saccagée, le peuple las.

Mienne avec son soleil cassant comme un verglas,
Les dédales affamés où nos muscles se perdent,
Et tant de vanité qui pousse comme une herbe
Là où rêvaient des hommes-rois.

Avec son insolent lignage, ses cadavres climatisés,
Ses tanks et la puanteur du poème
À la merci d’un cran d’arrêt.
I left the tribunes and endless café discussions; I am entering
Into an acid cloud
En route to these isles where snakes are untangled— nerves—
Verbs that know no other conjugation than death.

The hour has perhaps come to live
As if we were no longer at the center of death.
The magnificent bells (the shivering treasures ⋆).
The hour has perhaps come to say
Something amicable— saliva on your wound—
Of silence,
Like a pebble at work in the desert.

I left all my brothers so that I could believe in fraternity
And build, even out of dung,
A victim-less house, its windows on the stars.
I will return, armed with my body,
Knowing each sound’s bleeding syllable.
I will be the Visible Beam
For which your dark centuries prepared the reception.

In my acid cloud,
I am en route toward you.

This earth is mine with its bitter liturgy,
Lewd radiance, baleful roads,
Devastated soul, weary people.

Mine with sun breaking like black ice,
The starving mazes where our muscles lose themselves,
And so much vanity— growing there as weeds—
Where man-kings once dreamed.

With its insolent lineage, air-conditioned corpses,
Tanks and stench of the poem—
At the mercy of a switchblade.
À l’heure de dérision je l’appelle à tue-tête.
Une aile où se poser! Un sourire habitable!
Une jambe affermie où commence un chemin!

Je ne la quitterai pas. Escaladant le mythe.
Je connais ses chardons, ses genêts, sa torpeur,
Mais toujours dans le roc insinuant l’espace
Un escargot secret— et tel ongle rageur!

Cette terre est la mienne entre deux fuites fastes,
Deux charniers, deux désirs, deux songes de béton,
Et le chant d’une flûte en mes veines surprend
Le mal de Boabdil sous les murs de Grenade.

Mienne hors de la raison, mienne hors de vos saisons.
Vous pouvez mordre et mordre,
Sur une science si tendre, une joie si têtue,
Le chaos n’aura pas de prise.

Contre le temps brûlé
Je fomente,
Fragile et soutenue de tendresse et d’audace,
Une veilleuse
— Ta veilleuse! ô périssable éternité!

Le sourire à la fronde suffit à ramener
À peine une ombre dans l’ortie
— Mais d’une rose!
“Merci” sur la lèvre enfantine
Pousse plus avant qu’une digue
Notre connaissance du jour.

(La claudication des vieilles sous leur voile
Ne ralentit pas plus qu’une icône
Le sang.)

Pas un silex ni un noyau de datte
Ni le désordre ni l’œillet
Mais le sourire qu’il a placé
Dans sa fronde lorsqu’il m’a visé.
At the hour of derision I call at the top of my voice
For a wing where I may rest—a habitable smile—
The strong leg from where the path begins.

I won’t leave it, scaling the myth.
I know its thistles, its jennets, its torpor—
But always in the rock is the secret snail
ImPLYing space, and the furious fingernail.

This earth is mine between two auspicious leaks,
Two mass graves, two longings, two concrete dreams,
And the song of a flute in my veins overtaking
The evil of Boabdil beneath the walls of Grenade.

Mine beyond reason, mine beyond season.
You can bite and bite,
On such a tender science, stubborn joy—
Chaos will have no hold.

Against burnt time
I foment,
Fragile and supported by tenderness and audacity,
A nightlight—
your nightlight—O ephemeral eternity!

The slingshot’s smile needs only to bring back
The beginnings of a shadow in the nettle
—But of a rose!
“Thanks,” on the childish lips,
Pushes our daily knowledge farther forward
Than the seawall.

(The old ladies’ claudication beneath their veil
Fails to slow blood more than
An icon.)

Not flint nor the pit of a date,
Nor disorder nor carnation—
But the smile that was placed
In his slingshot when he aimed at me.
Un enfant
Pour vaincre le temps.
Éternité, ô périsssable!
Ô le bleu de la mer! Ma poubelle ineffable!

Dans l’espace du mot de ton âme à tes lèvres,
De ton rire à ma plaie, mille couleurs soulèvent
Des tonnes d’ultrasons, et je nage ébloui
Pour la première fois citoyen de ma vie.
A child
To vanquish time.
Eternity, O ephemeral—
O the blue of the sea— my ineffable garbage!

In the space of the word from your soul to your lips,
From your smile to my wound: one thousand colors lift
Tons of ultrasounds and I swim— blinded,
For the first time, citizen of my life.
ALGER, VILLE OUVERTE!

Nous sommes à l’orée d’un univers fabuleux qui va nous être révélé d’un instant à l’autre, brutalement. Approches de l’Éblouissement, que ceux qui ont un Corps Total se vivent!

1

Quel tintamarre, ce silence! Toutes ces couleurs qui se choquent!
Les gens d’Ailleurs nous touchent la peau
Et vous ne Les entendez pas!

Seules vous suffisent vos petites querelles de terrasses,
Vos territoires limités, un morceau d’ombre entre vos nerfs!
Nous sommes déjà d’une autre Nation,
Tout envahi d’un homme qui connaît ses cellules
Et leur élan dans ses moindres recoins.

Notre corps vibre, multiplié, comme s’il était déjà quelque âme gigantesque,
Au-delà de l’horreur et du chaos tenant
La première seconde qui réintègre le sang
Sans passé ni future mais bousculé du Rêve.

Nous sommes présents à la Totalité de l’Espace et du Temps.
Le clef enfouie dans nos vertèbres.

Alger s’ouvre au Cosmos!
Et vous, Habitants Intérieurs, j’entends déjà entre mes sens
S’émouvoir vos vastes cohortes…

2

À l’instant de toucher de la plume le Lieu,
Autour de moi les Habitants se liguent,
Dérivent ma main, bloquent le mot.

Apaisés, ils retournent aux jardins qui me ceignent.
À la vigie, dans leur seconde-millénaire, les plus jeunes m’épient:
Que l’espace entre eux et moi ne soit pas révélé,
ALGIERS: OPEN CITY

We are at the edge of a fabulous universe that, from one moment to the next, will reveal itself to us, brutally. The dazzling surrounding area—only those who have a Corps Total live!

What an uproar, this silence, all these clashing colors—
People from Elsewhere touch our skin
But you don’t hear Them!

Only you are satisfied with your little terrace quarrels,
Your limited territories, a piece of shade between your nerves.
We are already another Nation,
Permeated by a man who knows his cells
And their élan in each of their recesses.

Our body vibrates, multiplied, as if already a gigantic soul.
Beyond the horror and the reigning chaos,
The first second that reintegrates blood
Without past or future, but shaken by Dream.

We are here at the Totality of Space and Time.
The key is buried in our vertebrae.

Algiers is open to the Cosmos.
And you, Internal Habitants—I already hear your vast cohorts,
Moved—between my senses.

At the instant of the quill touching the Place,
Around me the Habitants join forces,
Diverting my hand, blocking the word.

Calmed, they return to gardens encircling me.
At the vigil, in their millenary-second, the youngest spy on me—
That the space between them and me is not revealed
(Je les sens), que je ne les vois pas.

Vus, je deviendrai leur Seigneur.
Possesseurs d’un empire que nous ne parcourons pas,
Nous sommes les dieux sans la formule.

Sur le seuil de la Vie
Nous ne savons pas que toute vie est déjà dans nos mains.
Et nous délirons, tuméfiés, dans nos ombres
Quand la lumière en nous et tout autour de nous fait un si prodigieux vacarme!

Ce soir nous déclarons l’Algérie Terre Ouverte
Avec ses montagnes et sa mer,
Notre corps avec ses impasses.

Dans nos rêves à profusion que s’engouffre le Vent d’Ailleurs!

Citoyens inconnus nos Portes sont atteintes.
Ne tardez plus!
(I feel them), that I do not see them.

3

Seen, I would become their Lord.
Possessors of an empire we shall not traverse.
We are gods without methods.
On Life’s threshold,
We don’t realize that life is already in our hands.
Delirious, tumid: in our shadows
When the light in us and all around us makes such a prodigious din!

4

Tonight we declare Algiers: Open Land.
With its mountains and sea—
Our bodies and their impasses.

The Wind from Elsewhere amply rushes into our dreams—

Unnamed citizens, our Doors are beyond reach.
Don’t delay—
Pas plus pesant qu’un seau d’ordures
    Je t’invente
Pas plus pesant qu’un seau à vermouth
    Je t’invente
Pas plus pesant qu’un saut de cabri
    Je t’invente
Pas plus pesant qu’un seau d’eau de mer
    Je t’invente
Pas plus pesant qu’un seau de citrons
    Je t’invente
Pas plus pesant qu’un saut dans le vide
    Je t’invente
Pas plus pesant qu’un seau de béton
    Je t’invente
Pas plus pesant qu’un seau d’écrevisses
    Je t’invente
Pas plus pesant qu’un seau de Sion
    Je t’invente
Pas plus pesant qu’un seau de poivre
    Je t’invente
Pas plus pesant qu’un seau de fripes
    Je t’invente
Pas plus pesant qu’un sot-l’y-laisse
    Je t’invente
Pas plus pesant qu’un seau de lilas
    Je t’invente
Pas plus pesant qu’un seau de guêpes
    Je t’invente
Pas plus pesant qu’un saut de gouape
    Je t’invente
Pas plus pesant qu’un seau de lune
    Je t’invente
Pas plus pesant qu’un seau de hanches
    Je t’invente
Pas plus pesant qu’un sottisier
Que le seau d’un baiser sur ta gorge éblouie
Je t’invente et me noie dans le seau de ta vie.
No heavier than a pail of garbage,
    I invent you—
No heavier than a pail for vermouth,
    I invent you—
No heavier than a pale goat’s leap,
    I invent you—
No heavier than a pail of seawater,
    I invent you—
No heavier than a pail of lemons,
    I invent you—
No heavier than impaling yourself on the void,
    I invent you—
No heavier than a pail of concrete,
    I invent you—
No heavier than a pail of crawfish,
    I invent you—
No heavier than the pales of Zion,
    I invent you—
No heavier than a pail of pepper,
    I invent you—
No heavier than a pail of frippery,
    I invent you—
No heavier than pale oyster meat,
    I invent you—
No heavier than a pail of lilacs,
    I invent you—
No heavier than a pail of wasps,
    I invent you—
No heavier than the pale of a miscreant,
    I invent you—
No heavier than a pail of moon,
    I invent you—
No heavier than a pail of hips,
    I invent you—
No heavier than a paling fool—
Than the pale of a kiss on your swollen throat.
I invent you and drown myself in your life’s pail.
Les mots sont des bâtards
Qui courent tout le temps
D’un faubourg à un autre
En cherchant des aubaines

Les mots sont des bâtards
Insoucieux de leur haine
Où est ton père?
Où est ton front?

Les mots sont mes bâtards
En bâtard de ma peine
J’enfante dans le lit
De leurs microsillons

Les mots sont des bâtards
Aux portes d’Ecbatane
Plus forts que des fusées
Dans leurs pauvres tartanes

Les mots sont des maris
Et je suis leur amant.
Words are bastards;
Running all the time
From one district to another,
Hunting for bargains.

Words are bastards,
Un-bothered with their hatred.
Where is your father—
Your front?

Words are bastards,
Bastardized by my effort,
Birthing myself in the bed
Of their microgrooves.

Words are bastards
At Ecbatane’s gates,
Stronger than missiles
In their poor fishing boats.

Words are husbands—
I am their lover.
La fenaison te laisse
Un hymne de guêpes, la peau
Cède, la mer s’écarte
Et s’engloutit le dur silence de l’amour.

Ton visage entre deux reflets
Où mon pied nu divague:
Galet sans trace qu’une vague
Jette aux confins du cœur.

Mais je surprends du bout de la plume les passes
Où ton galbe fleurit.
Tant de bleu, tant de vert, et mille interférences
Pour à peine un peu d’ocre où le poème rit!

Mais se taire? La main va plus vite que l’âme
Et sans même toucher la flamme
La rime est déjà cendre au bout de mon élan.

Quel immense, pourtant, mouvement solitaire
Où des peuples s’engouffrent et le rot de la terre
Fait une boue de notre sang.

Tu sculptes ta santé dans ces furies, corsaire!
Et doucement le mot comme un bouc épuisé
Pose sur ton genou ses cornes ébranlées.

Demain, de tout cela que sable et que misère.
J’entends tout à nouveau: la jouissance du père,
Le refus de la mère et son ventre écorché.
Je nais dans la descente imprévue du poème.

Demain j’écris ce que mon fœtus a gravé.
SUMMER OF THE POEM

The hay harvest leaves you
A hymn of wasps; your skin
Cedes; the sea distances herself
And disappears the stony silence of love.

Your face amid two reflections
Where my naked foot digresses—
Impression-less stone, which a wave
Throws to the borders of the heart.

But I startle— from the tip of the quill— the places
Where your silhouette blooms.
So much blue, green— a thousand interruptions
For just a touch of ochre where the poem can laugh.

But to keep quiet? Hands move faster than the soul:
Without even touching the flame,
Rhyme is already ash at the edge of my élan.

What a lonely movement— immense—
In which entire peoples are devoured and the earth’s belch
Turns our blood to mud.

Corsair, you sculpt your health from these squalls!
Softly, like an exhausted goat, word
Rests its head upon your knee, its horns atremble.

Tomorrow— from all of this— only anguish and sand.
I hear everything anew: the father’s explosive pleasure,
The mother’s refusal, her flayed stomach.
I am born in the unanticipated descent of the poem.

Tomorrow, I write that which my fetus inscribed.
HUÎTIÈME LETTRE À ANTOINE

Viens, puisque tu n’es plus qu’une anarchie de couleurs
Indistinctes,
Un fracas de syllabes,
Un circuit délabré entre la syncope et l’oracle.
Viens, puisque tout désir est cendre sous les cendres,
Et nos rêves
Barbelés dans les ronces.

Viens,
Un désordre baroque a déjà livré notre lit aux brocanteurs.

Pour notre voyage il ne reste
Qu’une planche de bois blanc
Et un galet.

Viens.
J’ai rejoint les barbares.
Nous t’attendons.
EIGHTH LETTER TO ANTOINE

Come— since you are nothing but an anarchy of
Indistinct colors,
Crash of syllables,
Dilapidated circuit between syncopation and oracle.
Come— since desire is but ashes beneath ashes,
And our barbed wire
Dreams in the brambles.

Come—
Baroque disorder already delivered our bed to the secondhand shop.

For our travels, we have
But one plank of white wood
And one stone.

Come—
I went back to the heathens.
We are waiting for you.
Comment pourrait-il y avoir une place pour toi
Dans ce cœur
Puisque tu es ce cœur?

Comment lui donnerais-tu son rythme sa couleur
Puisque tu es sa substance?

Comment pourrais-tu être présent
Puisque tu es présence?

Terni
Puisque tu es masse de mes cellules?

Te voir?
Tu es toute la vue en moi,
Le centre de la mer,
Le noyau de l’Obiou,
Le secret de ma moelle et mon impact stellaire.

Si tu mourrais un jour je ne le saurais pas:
Mon cœur cesserait de battre— Tu
Cesserais de battre!

Comment?
Comment savoir puisque ma connaissance c’est toi.

Ô Cœur!
How could there be space for you
In this heart,
Since you are this heart?

How would you give it its beat, its color,
Since you are its substance?

How could you be present,
Since you are presence?

Tarnished,
Since you are the mass of my cells?

To see you?
You are all the sight in me:
Center of the sea,
Pit of Obiou,
Secret of my marrow and my starry impact.

If you died one day, I wouldn’t know:
My heart would stop beating—You would
Stop fighting!

How—
How to know, since you are my knowledge.

O Heart—
AVEC NOS CINQ SENSE CONQUÉRIR LES AUTRES

Les mots m’ont envahi, m’ont ligoté.
Je croyais être libre, ils ont tout retourné, ils circulent
D’un membre à l’autre, des ongles aux vertèbres, du cœur
À la lune, cet empire
Où je règne sans regarder, sans tenir, depuis des millénaires aussi sûr que ma peau.
Le temps… (Silence.)

Je voudrais m’arrondir (comme jadis!)
Au creux d’un verbe réconcilié
Avec ma forme,
Partir
Vers mes sujets réels,
Quitter ce rêve vague
Pour entrer dans le Corps Total.
Je voudrais… La mer s’engouffre dans ma bouche,
Plaque ses méduses sur mes phrases informulées (les vraies!), me hante.
Le ciel prend le relais— tout ce bleu! séduction! conjugaisons bouchées!

Mes amarres depuis longtemps rouillent à quai
— Parfois des enfants les éveillent et leur concert gonfle la nuit de figures inquiètes.
Dans l’univers de l’Entre où je rassemble mes os dans les ailes,
Je les retrouve néanmoins, d’une insoutenable beauté,
Adolescents dont la seule mémoire provoque un orgasme farouche.

— Un jet jusqu’au trône de Dieu!
Je retrouve mes mots, leur garde rouge m’habite, leur fantaisie me désaltère,
Tout passe de l’invasion à l’accueil. Et là…
(Un mot qui soit le sourire du mot!)

Je voudrais (comme au Tassili recommencer ma fresque!)
Brûler ces langues qui me peuplent depuis la pierre,
Briser ces pierres gravées qui tapissent mes os,
Voler de mon propre silence
Vers ton silence (ces sons qui m’entrent dans les pores!)
Je voudrais… Mais la déploration est plus forte que la fable.
Quelques éclats suffisent à désintégrer l’homme dans le poème.
Words have flooded me, bound me.
I thought I was free. They turned everything around. They circulate
From one limb to another, fingernails to vertebrae, heart
To the moon— this empire,
Where I’ve reigned without looking, without holding, for millennia as sure as my skin.
Time… (Silence.)

I would like to round myself out (like days gone)
At the hollow of a verb, reconciled
With my form—
To leave
Toward my real subjects—
To quit this vague dream—
To enter into the Corps Total.
I would like… The sea, surging in my mouth,
Leaving its jellyfish on my unformed sentences (the real ones); it haunts me.
Sky takes over— all this blue: seduction, clogged conjugations—

My moorings at the dock have long been rusting.
Sometimes children wake them and their concert swells the night of troubled figures.
In the universe of In-Between where I gather my bones in my wings,
I find them— nonetheless— of an unbearable beauty—
Adolescents of which the only memory provokes a savage orgasm

— A jet all the way to God’s throne!
I find my words again, their red guard inhabits me, their fantasy quenches me.
Everything goes from invasion to reception. And there…
(That a word could be the smile of word!)

I would like (like restarting my fresco at Tassili)
To burn these languages populating me since the stone—
To break these carved stones upholstering my bones—
To steal from my own silence
Toward your silence (these sounds that enter me through my pores!).
I would like… But regret is stronger than fable.
A few bursts are enough to disintegrate man within the poem.
Nous réintégrerons la terre par le mythe.
Nous dénouerons les mots afin que le poème
Sur l’étendue du corps étende sa fraîcheur.
J’appellerai au fond de ta gorge les pilotes
Barbaresques et les princesses de l’Amirauté.
Comme ce collier à ton cou qui parfume la ville
Peut-être demain le poème…
Nous réintégrerons le soleil par le mythe.
VESSEL

We will reintegrate earth through myth,
Disentangle words so that the poem,
On the expanse of the body, stretches out its coolness.
I will call barbarian pilots from the base of your throat
And the princesses of Admiralty.
Like this necklace at your neck which perfumes the city,
Maybe tomorrow, the poem…
We will reintegrate sun through myth.

*to J.-E. Bencheikh*
LE PAQUET REVERDY

Et soudain de mes yeux j’ai vu se craqueler
Tout le mur du poème.
Des citoyens silencieux se sont déversés sur ma peau.
J’en avais plein les tempes, plein les cils— et le nombril comblé—, plein les chevilles.
Des morpions! Fabuleusement colorés et discrets
— Mais parfois arrogants à l’aube dès qu’ils pressentaient le passage des barques sous mon balcon.

Je fais les cent pas sur ma page.
Passée à la chaux, c’est là que mon soleil s’ajuste le mieux au néant.
Le rêve n’est plus fouetté— ni harcelé, peut s’arrondir.
Et que j’avance en équilibre sur cette boule
Ou qu’elle résume son kyste sous ma langue,
C’est toujours une grande fête, une orbite atteinte, la pensée en libation!

Mais toi, voyeur très loin là-bas vers les vertèbres,
Affûtant chaque fois pour d’autres les javelots que tu reçois,
As-tu repéré le signe?
La syllabe que nous attendions pour lier nos phrases disjointes,
Remettre debout ce corps disloqué?
And suddenly, with my own eyes, I saw the poem’s
Entire wall crumble.
Silent citizens poured themselves onto my skin.
I was fed up with temples, eyelashes, fulfilled navels, ankles.
Genital crabs! Fabulously colored and discreet
— But arrogant sometimes, at sunrise, when they showed the way for the ships below my balcony.

I took one hundred steps on my page.
Whitewashed, it is there that my sun adjusts best to the void.
Dream is no longer beaten nor harassed; it can round itself.
That I advance, balanced on this ball,
Or that she resumes her cyst beneath my tongue,
It’s always a big party— an inaccessible orbit— libation of thought!

But you, far away voyeur, over there toward the vertebrae,
Sharpening the javelins you take each time for the others—
Did you notice the sign—
The syllable we were waiting for to link our disjointed sentences,
To put this dislocated body back on its feet?
J’ai marché dans la nuit avec ton pas nocturne,
Les pieds glacés— des trombes!
Te convaincre du jour— même assailli d’éclipses!—,
Des corps tout engloutis d’amour— cette saveur de la peau par son seul abandon,
Sans autre recours que sa propre Grâce—,
Te convaincre d’un après-midi sur la digue,
Possible, où les nerfs ne sont plus noués,
D’un bleu où les os ne craquent plus,
D’une odeur autre que la suie,
De lectures apaisantes comme un jeu d’orange à midi.

Tu refusais: “La nuit c’est le passage des prodiges!”

Qu’avons-nous à faire de ces météores qui ne savent qu’augmenter notre interrogation?
(Fracasser les mythes inutiles, ceux qui nient notre corps,
Respirer l’iode non le silex!
Vivre!)

Tu frémissais toi qui ne rêves que d’interminables agonies.
Dans la nuit, dans le froid tu ramenais nos membres,
Mais au poing je gardais, plus entêté qu’une ombre,
Le son qui remettrait la fugue sur son arche
Et tes muscles d’aplomb.

Nous entrerons alors,
Hors des mesquines nuits obscènes et sournoises,
Par mille planètes ouvertes,
Corps déployé,
Dans la Nuit des Matins.
GLORIOUS TERRACES

to Patrick Mac’Avoy for Antoine

I walked at night with your nocturnal steps,
Frozen feet— rainstorms—
To convince you of the day, even plagued by eclipses.
Bodies: engulfed by love. This taste of skin by its single abandonment,
With no other way out than through its own Grace—
To convince you of an afternoon on the seawall,
Possible, where nerves aren’t tangled anymore.
From a blue where bones don’t crack,
A smell other than soot,
Soothing readings like a child’s game at noon.

You refused: “Night is the prodigy’s passage!”

What can we do with these meteors that know only how to augment our interrogation?
(Smash the useless myths— those that deny our bodies.
Breathe iodine, not flint—
Live!)

You trembled; you who dream only of interminable agonies.
In the night, the cold, you brought back our limbs
But I kept in hand— more obstinate than a shadow—
The sound that would replace the fugue on its ark
And your leaden muscles.

We will enter then—
Besides the petty-minded, insidious, obscene nights—
  By one thousand open planets:
  Deployed body
  In the Night of Mornings.
À CORPS AVEC JACQUES

Ce corps enveloppé de brebis et d’abois,
Fumant d’herbes et de pétrole,
Dans la confiante dualité de l’épouse,
Plaque minéralogique sur le ciel
(Du seul département où règnent nos racines),
Ce corps arraché à mes plus délirants espaces,
Renâclant contre les saisons hermétiques,
À coups de bêche harcelant sous ma peau les trésors
De la Drôme— le Trésor d’Alger—,
Plus improbables qu’une Cité du Couchant sous mes ongles,
Corps sur son tracteur fuyant vers des Caraïbes,
Se déchiquetant de rencontres pour à l’aube se recomposer nu,
Insinuant des passages pour mieux prendre à la gorge le mot,
Fakir de la guitare traversé de ses cordes,
Déjà multiplié dans les noms issus de nos rêves,
Vrombi jusqu’à l’espace et cadastré dans le plus exigeant éveil,
Mordu de cruelles audiences et par ses morsures jusqu’à la mer
Conduisant une nostalgie de musées, de presqu’îles et de délits,
Corps lié, délié tandis que nous roulions vers Corps,
Galets entre tant de galets, à peine plus sonores.
TO CORPS WITH JACQUES

This body enveloped by ewes and baying,
Smoking with herbs and gasoline,
In the trusting duality of the spouse.
Mineralogical slab on the sky
(From the only region where our roots reign),
This body torn from my most outrageous spaces,
Reluctant against the hermetic seasons,
At the blows of the spade harassing beneath my skin. Treasures
Of the Drôme— the Treasure of Algiers—
More improbable than a Sunset City under my fingernails.
Body on its tractor escaping to the Caribbean,
Tearing its encounters to shreds so, at dawn, it can recompose itself, naked,
Insinuating passages to better understand the word at the throat.
Guitar fakir navigating his chords,
Already multiplied in the names from our dreams,
Zooming into space and registered in the most rude awakening.
Bitten by cruel audiences and its tooth marks all the way to the sea,
Driving a nostalgia of museums, peninsulas and crimes.
Bound body, untangled as we were driving toward Corps—
Pebbles between so many pebbles— hardly echoing.
TANDIS QUE VIENT LE 4

1

Furtif, intolérant, que retient-il ses crocs, sa trombe!
Il jubile d’un jet à l’endroit où je tombe
Pour prendre souffle et mettre en mon souffle la force
Triomphale de la poussière!

C’était la trinité lacérée mais ouverte,
Quatre accroche ses roues dans ma verte lucarne,
Resserre son carré, me livre au froid vacarme
Des graffiti— Il n’est de pire tourbillon qu’un cimetière!

La jeunesse c’était cette corde de jasmins
Au cou et tout ce vent d’audace dans les mains,
C’était les cinq piquants du soleil dans la tempe,
Jusqu’à la honte le plaisir, jusqu’aux tortures le devoir.

Quatre qui vient plaquer son long nez (ou sa gifle)
Contre mes hanches et lapider mes guêpes pourra-t-il
Sur mon croissant tracer la figure de style
Qui rende sa rougeur à l’étoile qui saigne?

2

Quarante ans. J’arrive les mains brûlées
Dans un univers de charbon.
Je ne saisirai plus. Mais seulement transmettre
Un peu de flamme, un peu de cendre
(Le rouge à lèvres des vieillards!)
WHILE THE 4 ARRIVES

Furtive, intolerant, what do his fangs retain— his waterspout?
He gloats of a jet where I fall
To take breath and to put, in my breath, force of dust,
Triumphant.

It was the lacerated— but open— trinity.
Four hooks its wheels into my green skylight,
Re-tightens its square, delivers me to the cold din.
Graffiti— there is no worst whirlwind than a cemetery!

Youth was this string of jasmine
Around my neck and this audacious wind in my hands;
It was these five sun-spikes at my temple—
Pleasure all the way to shame, duty to torture.

Four that comes pinning its long nose (or its slap in the face)
Against my hips and stoning my wasps— could he
Trace, on my crescent, the type of face
That renders its blush to the bleeding star?

Forty years. I arrive, hands burned,
In a charcoal universe.
I will seize no more, just transmit
A bit of flame, a bit of ash
(Old man’s lipstick!).
PANOPLIE DE POUSSIÈRE

Et pourtant c’est la mer en ce sépulcre qui résonne,
La blanche tunique des adolescents, l’interrogation
De la vigne vierge, c’est l’espace
Qui roule la pierre de Pâques. Fuis,
Ô perpétuel vivant!

Ce chant de tous les fruits qui colore ta peau
Il n’est pas prêt de se laisser vaincre
Par les crêcelles froides ni la patience
Des cadences bien ordonnées, ô impatient! ni par
Le roseau docile du désert.

Ainsi ne sont pas mortes encore les tempêtes!
Pas encore l’alphabet des planètes
Ni d’un siècle à l’autre (d’un os à l’autre)
Ton ambitieuse (avidé!) symphonie!

Comme si dans tes mains les lignes sans obstacle
Te conduisaient aux Dominations,
Comme si le Verbe éclairait tes os d’une moelle
Purifiée et sans fin naissante,
Comme si…

La première signification
Cherche à sortir, ton corps résonne,
Le galet avale la mer, une syllabe
Tourne en trombe
Dans l’innommé vocabulaire où s’engloutit
Ta vie, ta mort…
Ô vivant, fuis!
Meanwhile it’s the sea that resonates in this sepulcher,
Adolescents’ white tunics, interrogation
Of the virgin vine. It is space
That rolls away the Easter stone. Escape—
O perpetual living.

This song of all the fruits that color your skin,
Not ready to let itself be vanquished
By cold rattles, nor the patience
Of well-ordained cadences— O impatient— nor by
The docile desert reed.

Neither are the tempests dead yet,
Or the planets’ alphabet.
Nor from one century to another (from one bone to the next):
Your ambitious (avid—) symphony!

As if in your hands the lines, without obstacle,
Drove you toward Dominations;
As if Verb lit up your bones of purified
Marrow and without new ends;
As if…

The first sign
Looks to leave. Your body resonates.
The stone swallows the sea. Syllable
Turns in its waterspout
In the unnamed vocabulary where your life
Swallows itself up, your death…
O living, run—
Tant d’issues
Pour te conduire où?

Dans la plume du hibou
Le poème fait son trou.

Dans la jambe du voyou
Le poète s’essouffle, s’essouffle.

Le mot meurt, le genou claque.
Tant d’issues pour une flaque!
PANOPLY OF DUST, II

So many exits—
To drive you where?

In owl’s feather,
The poem makes its hole.

In bandit’s leg,
Poet is winded, winded.

Death dies; knee slams.
So many exits for a puddle!
Pour cet angle où le chiffre t’atteint,
Où te voici accroupi depuis des lointains,

Où tu invoques tous les saints de ta naissance
Et tous les prophètes de ta résistance,

Où tu ne sais plus si barbu, imberbe
Ou rasé, ta figure dans l’herbe,

C’est l’avenir ou c’est le passé qui t’attend
Et fait ce bruit de mots dérangés dans ton sang.

Où tu voudrais t’arrondir dans ta terre
Comme un hérisson ou comme un oursin au fond de sa chimère,

Ou comme le soleil au centre de ta fournaise
Alors que les poètes à tes oreilles hurlent des fadaises,

Pour cet instant qui est comme ton premier rendez-vous avec le jour
Tu voudrais bien boucler encore sept poèmes en deux jours,

Et t’avancer vers tes quarante années solitaires
Avec ce paquet de quarante poèmes comme une lumière,

Non pour éclairer ta vie ou tes copains ou que sais-je
Mais pour sauter dessus ce feu comme jadis à la Saint-Jean devant ta maison oranaise.
**SEVEN POEMS IN TWO DAYS**

For this angle where the number attains
You, crouching from your origins—

Where you invoke your birth’s saints
And the prophets of your resistance—

Where you don’t know your body in
The grass—bearded, bald or shaven—

Making this noise of upset words.
It is the future or past that awaits you in your blood

Where, in your earth, you would like to make yourself round—
Like a hedgehog or a sea urchin at the end of its dream world,

Or like the sun at the center of your furnace
While the poets at your ears scream nonsense.

For this moment—like your first meeting with the day—
You would love to finish another seven poems in two days.

And toward your forty solitary years you progress
With, like a light, this packet of forty poems—

Not to illuminate your life or your friends or what-have-you,
But to jump on this fire, like Saint-Jean in days gone, outside your Oranian home.
CHANSON DE MORTAISE

Pour le pêne et le sautereau
Pour le tenon et pour le buffle
Pour la poulie et le poulot
La mortaise s’est faite belle.

Pour l’épine et le clavecine
Pour l’épinette et la binette
Pour le réa et les réaux
La mortaise s’est faite belle.

Le poète s’est-il fait beau?
SONG OF THE MORTISE

For bolt and jack,
For tenon and buffalo,
For pulley and poppet—
The mortise made itself beautiful.

For thorn and harpsichord,
For spinet and hoe,
For sheave and wheels—
The mortise made itself beautiful.

— Did the poet?
POÈME À L’ÉTAL DES BOUCHERS

Au Viêt-nam
En Indonésie
En Afrique du Sud

Au Viêt-nam
En Angola
Aux Antilles

Au Viêt-nam
En Grèce
En Palestine

Au Viêt-nam
En Espagne
Aux Etats-Unis

Au Viêt-nam
Au Congo
En Bolivie

Au Viêt-nam
Au Portugal
En Haïti

Au Viêt-nam
Au Nigeria
Au Yémen

Au Viêt-nam
À Formose
Au Québec

Au Viêt-nam
Et parfois derrière
ce mur

Vous ne voulez pas un petit dessin, non!
BUTCHER’S BLOCK POEM

In Vietnam
In Indonesia
In South Africa

In Vietnam
In Angola
In the Antilles

In Vietnam
In Greece
In Palestine

In Vietnam
In Spain
In the United States

In Vietnam
In the Congo
In Bolivia

In Vietnam
In Portugal
In Haiti

In Vietnam
In Nigeria
In Yemen

In Vietnam
In Formosa
In Quebec

And at times behind
this wall

Wouldn’t you like a little drawing, no!
Le jour commence entre tes dents, à peine balbutié, fenêtre
Sur la mer. Soleil sur tes lèvres: la plage
Où le poème s’étend.
Voici notre été. Je ne fais
Que transcrire le bourdon gracile de ton corps.
( Je pense à ces fêtes sur les collines arides de Bou Saâda,
À ses processions dans les presqu’iles espagnoles.)

Mais le jour commence et je sais
Que là tu es vivante
Dans le galbe de mes syllabes,
Le colin-maillard de mes rythmes.
Prendre ta main c’est presque tracer le poème.

Prendre ta main c’est mettre sur leur fusée porteur
Les outils de notre conscience, les bijoux
Du zodiaque, les couleurs fantastiques que libère
Notre passion— santé de l’hallucinogène!
( Je ne veux pas de LSD, je veux
Ton rire sur le bleu d’Alger!)

Prendre ton rire c’est déplier les phrases,
Les donner au vent, d’un baiser
Les ramener au nord où dans son maillot bleu
Le poème s’apprête à sauter sur la digue.
( Dans l’euphorie des fritures nous touchons presque des lèvres le bonheur
— Presque…)

Avons-nous jamais su que l’imagination
Est l’insecte qui troue le poème, notre chair, l’horizon,
Un froid destructeur sans élytre?
Avons-nous jamais su combien de décombres et d’horreurs
Entrent dans le bleu des dieux, dans le nuage de la mer?
Que le gâchis s’éternise au détour d’une image,
Bouche le cœur, et la rue tremble comme une eau trouble,
La voix s’envase, le diamant n’est plus qu’un stylet.

Mais tu reprends le mot à sa plaie et tu chantes,
Tu ouvres sur nos incendies la forêt
Day begins between your teeth, barely stuttered, window
On the sea. Sun on your lip: the beach
Where the poem stretches out.
Here is our summer. I transcribe only
The slender staff of your body.
(I think of those parties on the arid knolls of Bou Saâda—
Of these processions in the Spanish peninsulas.)

But day begins and I know that
There, you live—
In the curve of my syllables,
The blind man’s bluff of my rhythms—
To take your hand is to trace the poem, almost.

To take your hand is to place on their booster rocket
The tools of our conscience, gems
Of the zodiac, fantastic colors that free
Our passion— hallucinogenic health!
(I don’t want LSD; I want
Your laugh on the blue of Algiers.)

To take your laugh is to unfold sentences,
Give them to the wind, bring them north
Of a kiss where in his blue bathing suit,
The poem is about to jump onto the seawall.
(In fried euphoria, we almost touch the lips of happiness
— Almost…)

Did we never know that the imagination
Is the insect that pierces the poem— flesh, horizon—
A cold, elytron-less destructor?
Did we never know how much debris, how many horrors,
Enter into gods’ blue, into the cloud of sea?
That waste lingers at the detour of the image—
Stoppers the heart— and the road trembles the way water troubles.
The voice gets stuck; the diamond is nothing but a stylus.

But you take the word back to its wound and you sing;
You open the forest on our fires—
Ignifuge (lentisques au bord de la mer). 
Plus rien n’est redoutable, j’écris.

Invention frémissante, Eros,
Lorsque d’une enjambée tu biffes la plage,
Les baigneurs se retournent, émerveillés,
Jusqu’à ce qu’à nouveau tu jaillisses de l’écume,

Poésie, Corps Total!
Fireproof (pistachio trees at the water’s edge).  
Nothing left is formidable— I write.

2

Simmering invention— Eros—  
When from a stride you cross out the beach,  
Swimmers turn around in wonder  
Until, once again, you gush sea foam,

Poetry, *Corps Total*—
CONSTANT MIROIR DE L'ÉGLANTIER

Feu de laves givrées à ton sein
Je péris
De ne pouvoir jamais surprendre fugitive
La déploration du viol et sur tes gencives
Cette fresque d'engoulevents!

Qu’ils soient archanges ou dominations les mots
N’ont pas la rude odeur du Père
Ni sa joue de terre à chardons
(Ce Lieu où vivre et d’où prendre l’élan
Sinon toute planète est morte toute lune
Interdite).

Dès lors
L’écriture elle-même est fuite perpétuelle du sang vers mes cavernes,
Remontée en ton sein pour surprendre l’Éclair: ton Cri
Et Son Visage!

(Reclus des falaises tourbillonnantes
Mère ténébreuse avec toi
Je règne à l’affût je traque
Son râle je place entre tes lèvres
Son miroir.)

Mais viendra-t-il mon alouette
Mon pilon mon premier poème
Mon seul soleil où je grandis?
THE WILD ROSE’S CONSTANT MIRROR

Fire of frosted lava at your breast—
I perish
Of never being able to overtake the fugitive,
Deploration of rape and on your gums,
This nighthawk fresco.

That they might be archangels or dominations, words
Don’t have the harsh stench of the Father,
Nor his earth-thistled cheek
(This Place is for living and from whence to take impetus—
Else the whole planet is dead, the entire moon
Forbidden).

From— during—
Writing, she is perpetual flight of blood toward my caverns,
Rising back into your breast to surprise, by your Scream and His Face—
The flash of Light.

(Withdrawn from the whirlwind cliff tops,
Dark mother with you,
I reign in the blindness. I follow
The whine placed between your lip and
His mirror.)

But will my skylark come—
My pestle, my first poem—
My only sun where I grow?
En guise
de choix
d’un
  corps
je dis
merde
  à tout
  et
  je dors.
ANTONIN ARTAUD
By way of choice
of one
    body
I say
shit
to everything
    and
    I sleep.

ANTONIN ARTAUD
À la Pointe-Pescade (Alger), au bord de la mer, des jeunes gens et le Maître du Noûn passent leur nuit à dialoguer, établir le rêve, vivre intensément leur été. Tandis qu’autour d’eux (la plage, la chambre) et en eux se livre le Combat avec l’Ange (avec l’Homme).

Le Noûn est la lettre arabe N qui engage mystérieusement une sourate du Coran et dont la forme mythique, ☼, ouvre sur le Signe des Deux terres.

Le caractère ë est un point d’ironie.
At Pointe-Pescade (Algiers), at the seaside, young people and the Master of Noûn spend the night in conversation, establishing the dream, living their summer intensely. Meanwhile, around them (the beach, the room) and in them the Angel’s Battle (with Man) wins.

The Noûn is the Arabic letter N that mysteriously engages a sura of the Qur’an and of which the mythic form, ☪, opens onto the Sign of the Two earths.

The character ☪ is a point of irony.
LOUANGE

LE POÈME AU GUÉ DE JABBOK

Mot à mot, silence à silence,
De la touffe opaline à la dure vertèbre,
Ma page tu la connais.

Poussière dispersée, famine en tourbillon,
La trompette sonnera une seule fois,
Ma page sera sous ton regard.

Tous les plaisirs du Môle,
Ta saliva dans l’herbe,
Un radar dans les oxalis,
Le sillage d’un ongle dans le pelage du fennec,
Un clou de girofle, un peu d’écume à mon balcon,
D’une seule lecture dans la page.

Cette stèle de graffiti,
Cette nuit d’interrogations,
Cet œil de cyclope, ce gouffre de jade,
Tandis que sonnera une seule fois la trompette.

Lumière réfractée en son propre soupir,
Mésange sur la plaie diluvienne. Quel Ange
Frappe une fois de plus à la hanche celui
Qui osa arracher à ses ailes une plume
Pour achever la Création?
Word to word, silence to silence,
From opaline tuft to hard vertebra—
You know my page.

Dispersed dust, whirlwind famine,
The trumpet will ring once;
My page will be beneath your gaze.

All the pleasures of the Môle—
Your saliva in the grass,
Radar in the wood sorrels,
Slipstream of a fingernail in fennec’s fur,
One clove, a bit of sea foam at my balcony,
— Of one single reader in the page.

This graffiti stele,
Interrogation night,
Cyclops’s eye, jade chasm—
As long as the trumpet rings once.

Refracted light in its proper breath,
Chickadee on the diluvian wound. Which Angel
Knocks the hip a second time— the one
Who dares tear from his wings one feather
To reach Creation?
DE MON BALCON SUR LA MER

1

Ce que tu sais des corps
Au point panique de l’orgasme
C’est un peu contre chaque mort
Le vol imaginé de l’âme,
La racine que rien— ni le temps— ne flétrit.

Voix nubile pour engloutir
Les barrissements de la flamme
Et dans la page infinie bleue
L’ordre nocturne du butor.

Plumes bavardes de l’ara
Pour maintenir une arabesque,
Pour exhumer hors de son drap
Le pur dialogue d’une fresque!

2

Corps cessez, corps cessez
De me donner une âme!
Je crois alimenter ma flamme
Quand je n’épurer que ma plaie.

Reptiles cessez donc
De mettre vos couleurs
Et vos miroirs errants
Dans le verbe en chaleur!

Ô vulgaire clarté!
Ô plongées ineffables!
Tant d’impure durée
Pour animer ma fable!

Mon chant monte de l’étroite ruine du sablier.
FROM MY BALCONY OVERLOOKING THE SEA

1

What you seize from these bodies
At the panic point of orgasm,
Is just a little bit against each death:
Imagined flight of the soul,
The root that nothing— not even time— blackens.

Nubile voice to swallow
The trumpeting of flame—
And in the infinite blue page,
The nocturnal order of boor.

Talkative macaw feathers
To maintain an arabesque,
Unearth outside of its sheet
The pure dialogue of a fresco—

2

Cease body— cease body—
Giving me a soul!
I believe I feed my flame
While I purify my only wound.

Therefore cease, reptiles,
Putting your colors
And your errant mirrors
Into the verb in heat!

O vulgar clarity—
O ineffable diving—
So much impure duration
To animate my fable!

My song climbs from the narrow ruins of the hourglass.
Emergez mon Diwân
Dieux panicographiques!\(^iv\)
Sur la pierre écrivez,
Ô carbone magique,
De Thésée à Djeha
La Geste de Saveur!

Bucranes, panicauts
Sont déchus de la frise;
Califes de la mer
La poésie est prise
À vos muscles nouveaux.

Tout un homme est à naitre
Au bout de ces tripodes,
Corps aux algues tenu
Autant qu’à l’horizon.
— Ils ont atteint le point
De retour au Poème!

(Corps savant, corps sauvé,
Corps sacré, corps-poème!)
Emerge my Divan—
Panicographic gods!
Write on stone,
O magic carbon,
Of Thésée to Djeha—
Gesture of Taste!

Bull skulls, purple thistles
Are stripped of their curls:
Caliphs of the sea.
Poetry is taken
To your new muscles.

An entire man is to be born
At the tips of these tripods,
Body of seaweed held
As long as is the horizon.
— They reached the point
Of Return to the Poem.

(Knowing body, saved body,
Sacred body, \textit{corps-poème}— )
I

SIGNES

Une écriture de sexe, d’opale miellée, flamboyante,
D’opale de feu d’El Asnam (une écriture
De souffle de dragon, de dents fraîches d’une rose
En son précipice alternant les vingt-six plaies du vocabulaire),
Une écriture de bleu d’épaule, de toison brune
Où la sueur et la salive ont délavé la pure audace
Du poète du premier mot. Une écriture
À l’aigu de vos cuisses comme une menace de paix.
A sex writing, honey-colored opal, flamboyant,
Fire opal of El Asnam (a writing
Of dragon’s breath, rose’s cool teeth—
And its precipice alternating the twenty-six wounds of vocabulary).
Writing of the blue of the shoulder, of brown fleece
Where sweat and saliva faded the pure nerve
Of the first word’s poet. A writing
At the sharp corner of your thighs like a menace of peace.
J’écris c’est mon seul territoire
Ce sont chemins où vous passez
L’oiseau traqué de vos mémoires
Lisse ici ses ailes lassées
Je suis le cristal de vos urinoirs
Je suis votre aveu vos travaux vos ré-
Table à la si laide rose vos poires
De la Saint-Jean-d’é-
Té
J’écris c’est ma seule victoire
Sur le pus dont mon or est fait
Et toi-même soleil tu fais
Notre corps tout parcheminé.
I write— it’s my only territory.
They are paths where you pass,
The bird tracked by your memories—
Smooth here, its wings weary.
I am the crystal of your urinals:
your confession, your work, your re-
Tables of such ugly pink, your pears
Of Saint-Jean-of-Sum-
mer.
I write— it’s my only victory
Over the pus from which my gold is made.
And you— sun— you make
Our body into parchment.
ONZAIN DE LA CLAIRENCE

Et de nouveau l’Homme surgit
Et Jacob en boitant hisse son cri
De ses poings aux tessons de la muraille
Et le protège. Il a nommé, il paye,
Silencieux. Étreinte ou souffles échangés
(L’haleine de l’Homme bouscule la vallée,
Trompette, envase le labyrinthe,
Tonne). Leur plainte
Est si douce qu’Anna elle-même rougit.
La page troublée ouvre la main, son nid
Éclate en strophes jaculatoires.
And once again Man emerges
And Jacob, limping, heaves his cry
From his fists to the shards of the high wall
And protects it. He names; he pays,
Silently. Embrace— or exchanged breaths
(Man’s bad breath shakes the valley,
Trumpet— silts up the labyrinth,
Thunders). Their complaint
Is so soft that Anna herself blushes.
Troubled page opens the hand; its nest
Bursts in ejaculatory strophes.
Je croyais qu’on mangeait les mots
(dit Antar), qu’on les mastiquait lèvres à lèvres
— gomme non pour effacer mais pour que ta salive
déchaîne ses reflux en moi, gomme pour…
Je savais (dit Lila) que les mots n’étaient pas des fruits,
que les poètes mentaient (une casserole sur le balcon soudain
se décrochait, s’affalait sur le sable— rires, ou brouhaha—
Lila se mordait le poignet).
Pas des fruits (dit Antar)
mais comme un besoin, une urine.
Pour rien alors (dit Bilâl).
Un besoin (Antar). Donc ni utiles ni nécessaires (Bilâl,
obsséé des possibilités de la derbouka— son aguet de butor—
sa surprise vers les roseaux).
Un besoin c’est capital (dit Lila en ramenant de l’eau de mer).

(Intervenait toujours pour forcer les visages— leur donner force— à vaincre leurs
routines d’ombre, pour muscler les syllabes, des hanches vers…) Les mots sont des
cuisses (dit Yahia— puis se tut. Bilâl pesait de son sourire sur la nuit. Sortit—
braguette à la merci de toutes les étoiles). Les mots sont des cuisses (Bilâl sentait en
lui…) Les mots…

Cuisses. Si donc Jacob s’arc-bouté et prend assise
Sur le cri des pleureuses ou la surprise
D’un berger entre deux roseaux,
L’Ange tamponne sa peau
D’une consonne bleue où le combat s’éclaire;
Pour qui sait lire il y a là toute injustice du Père,
Ses tricheries, la corde, la glu dans le pommier;
INTERROGATION

1

I thought we ate the words
(Antar says), that we masticated them lip to lip
— erasers not to erase but so that your saliva
bursts from its ebb tide, gums for…
I knew (Lila says) that words were not fruits,
that poets lied (a saucepan on the balcony suddenly
unhooked itself, collapsed on the sand— laughter, or brouhaha—
Lila bit her fist).
Not fruits (Antar says)
but like a need, a urine.
For nothing, then (Bilâl says).
A need (Antar). So neither useful nor necessary (Bilâl,
obessed with the possibilities of the derbouka— his boor’s surveillance—
his surprise toward the reeds).
A need is capital (Lila says, bringing back seawater).

2

(He always intervened to push the faces, give them power, defeat their shadow routines,
muscle syllables, verse hips…) Words are thighs (Yahia says— then he shuts up.
Bilâl weighed of his smile on the night. Exits— fly zipper at the mercy of all the
stars). Words are thighs (Bilâl felt in himself…)— Words…

3

Thighs. Then if Jacob braces himself and takes it seated—
Cry of mourners or the surprise
Of a shepherd between two reeds.
Angel swabs his skin
From one blue consonant where the battle is illuminated.
For those who can read there is, over there, all the injustice of the Father:
His trickeries, the cord, birdlime in apple tree.
L’Ange ne fait que rappeler
La première impudence et sur la hanche exalte
Ce chant de dérision en un chiffre de basalte.
Nous l’appellerons Noûn.

4

Une imprévoyance car l’ongle
Qui entre dans la chair est un soc. Le sillon
Qu’elle creuse (dit Antar) est prolifération de pus, une absence de carination.
Oooh (dit Bilâl) si on allait se taper un bain?
Et nous parlerons de nos ongles (dit Lila).
Parlerons? (dit Bilâl) Nous jouerons avec!

5

C’est un sein, une route en marche, une circonférence en action…
Le grand circoncis ? (dit Bilâl)
…C’est (reprit Yahia) la volonté du Sagittaire, l’étoile et la flèche, le cancer…
L’étoile et le croissant (dit Lila), toute l’audace de la nuit recueillie en un signe.
La terre et le soleil, la lune, l’orbite (dit Antar) du premier mot, du dernier mot, autour de l’œil.
Le Noûn! (Qui donc au juste dit?)

6

Sur son rocher le génie du Noûn
Armaî son harpon, toussait.
Personne n’y prenait garde. Alors
Il retirait son slip, dans l’effusion des cris
Plongeait.

On voyait son petit corps nu, ce fuseau d’oranges fuser
Vers un colloque de girelles.

Parfois son rire à la surface crevait la transparence.
The Angel only reminds one
Of the first impudence, and on the hip exalts
This derision song and a number made of basalt.
We will call it Noûn.

An impropriety, because fingernail
That enters into flesh is a plowshare. The furrow
She digs (Antar says) is the proliferation of pus, an absence of carnation.
Ooooh (Bilâl says) and if we went and drew ourselves a bath?
We would talk of our fingernails (Lila says).
Talk? (Bilâl says) We’ll play with them!

It is a breast, working road, circumference in action…
The grand circumcision ?(Bilâl says)
…It is (Yahia starts up again) the will of Sagittarius, star and arrow, cancer…
Star and crescent (Lila says), all of night’s audacity collects in one sign.
Earth and sun, moon, orbit (Antar says) from the first word— from the last word around the eye.
Noûn! (Who then just spoke?)
A trace of God on the fingernail. But God— but the fingernail? (Yahia says).

On his rock the genie of Noûn,
Armed with his harpoon, was coughing.
No one paid attention. So
He took off his shorts— in the effusion of screams—
Dove.

We saw his little naked body, this spindle of oranges, bursting
Toward a school of rainbow wrasse.

At times his laugh at the surface would puncture the translucence.
(Puis repartait— Son plongeon comme une sourate sur le bandeau d’une mosquée.)

7

Car tu es troupeau et nous t’avons marqué au Noûn.
Mais se rebiffe Jacob et la ruse de l’Homme
Ne touche pas sa chair au-delà des caniveaux
Où les siècles croupissent— les terribles oiseaux
Échappent à Dieu, leur vol le tance—,
Où les siècles blanchissent hors de la transparence,
Filent une trame policière, un écran, un labyrinthe
Où Jacob feint parfois de projeter ses plaintes
Mais Tout se passe ailleurs vers cet autre alphabet
Dont Dieu n’a jamais pu approcher le secret.

8

Et c’est là que Jacob est vainqueur. La cohorte
Des Anges peut lacérer ses côtes; comme sur une porte
L’Homme (l’Ange privilégié, le chef)
Tambouriner de la nuit à l’aube, plaquer des tampons, bref,
Hurler tout un alphabet d’Éden et sa cabale
Dans le sang même de Jacob prostré, que dalle!
Dieu— à cette réponse qu’il implore— n’a pas accès
Et se consume dans sa création comme en un abcès.

9

(Bilâl écoute, cessant de remonter son pantalon à taille basse.
C’est comme si la mer ou quelque Ange frôlait
Sa tignasse.
Prodige que la pensée— une vaste divagation!—
S’écrire, comme au revers de son crâne, en mots communs, courus,
Avec ces mots inanimés tellement ils ont servi
— Mais crus et tout de même utilisables.)
(Then he would leave again— His diver like a sura on the mosque’s blindfold.)

7

Because you are of the herd and we have marked you as the Noûn’s.
But Jacob rebels and Man’s ruse
Does not touch his flesh beyond the gutters
Of rotting centuries— terrible birds
Fleeing from God, their flight the arraignment
Where centuries bleach outside of transparency.
They escape a police plot, a screen, a labyrinth
Where Jacob feigns projecting his complaints—
But Everything happens elsewhere toward this other alphabet,
Of whose secret God could never approach.

8

And it is there that Jacob is conqueror. The cohort
Of Angels can lance his sides, like on Man’s
Door (privileged Angel, chief)
Drumming from night ‘til dawn, striking the stamp. In short,
Howling an entire alphabet of Eden and its cabbala
In despondent Jacob’s own blood— fuck-all!
God— at this answer he implores, hasn’t access
And consumes himself in his creation like in an abscess.

9

(Bilâl listens, having stopped hitching up his low-riding trousers.
It’s as if the sea or some Angel brushed against
His shock of hair.
Wonder at that thought— a vast divagation—
Writes itself, like the reverse of its skull, in common words— popular—
With these inanimate words how much they have served,
But raw and unusable all the same.)
Et moi (dit Antar) une fois mangés, les mots,
Je n’sais pas si on les digère.
N’est-ce pas eux qui nous font ces cloques sur la peau
Au matin lorsqu’on se réveille?

Ou les moustiques ? (dit Lila).

Il prenait certains chewing-gums pour des papillons de nuit, il…
Vers la Réserve une lanterne demeurait toute la nuit— sur cette terrasse où des ivrognes inventaient un vocabulaire
…de Pointe ?
…il…claquait des mains: ces moustiques!
Les chewing-gums qu’il collait sur des murs tout autour des son lit, moules du souffle, de l’haleine, argile des paroles non prononcées, pensées, pierre écrites d’un vécu qui ne sera jamais transmis, fruits clos, forclos, odes marquées au sceau d’Onan, il allait comme ses papillons de nuit vers le Noûn et s’y brûlait la langue.

Tu veux un autographe
L’enfant du Noûn entrebâilla la serviette de couleurs qui lui ceignait les reins, et brandissant son sexe:
Tu veux un autographe
But (Antar says), once eaten—the words—
I don’t know if we can digest them.
Isn’t it them that cause those blisters on our skin
In the morning when we wake?

Or the mosquitoes *(Lila says).*

He mistook certain chewing-gum for night butterflies, he…
Toward the Reserve, a lantern remained lit all night—on this terrace where the drunks
invent a vocabulary
…of Pointe *
…he…was clapping his hands: these mosquitoes!
The chewing-gum that he stuck to the walls around his bed, mold of breath, of bad
breath, the clay of unsaid words, thoughts—stones written of a life that will never be
shared—closed fruits—foreclosed—odes marked with the seal of Onan,
he
went like his night butterflies
toward *Noûné*,
and there he burnt his tongue.

You want an autograph.
*Noûné*’s child half-opened the towel of colors that he tied around his waist
and brandished his sex:
You want an autograph.
Les blocs du Môle de se sont pas fendus cet après-midi-là, ni les tripodes, ni l’immense cheminée de la cimenterie en face.

Et il fallut que l’enfant toujours nu, impudique, fût pris de désir baroque d’une serviette— rideau d’un théâtre d’où allait cingler vers nos os la seule réplique qui annonçait l’été,
la preuve (dit Yahia).

La preuve de quoi? (dit Bilâl).
De l’écriture, je suppose, de quelque mystère enfoui sous des syllabes, quels alcools (dit Antar).
Du poème et du corps, du corps écrit, du Corpoème (dit Yahia).

Et Jacob déjà grattait à l’ongle la marque
Du Ciel, envenimée de mouches bavardes, de parques,
Gratta
it au canif l’arc-en-ciel purulent
Dont les poètes allaient l’habiller, ce chiendent
Dont Delacroix a fait un cèdre, cet érésipèle:
L’Ange et Jacob— si beau avec au flanc l’ombre épanouie d’une aile!

Tout ça (dit Lila) ça se passait du côté de la Palestine arabe?
Mais cette nuit-là (dit Bilâl) Dieu appela Jacob: Israël!

Et tous nous avons vaincu Dieu! Jacques sur son tracteur, Patrick dans sa Ballade— et
The blocks of the breakwater did not split themselves that afternoon, nor the tripods, nor the immense chimney opposite.

And it was necessary that the still-naked child, shameless, was seized by the baroque desire for a towel— theatre curtain where the only replica announcing summer sailed toward our bones— proof (Yahia says).

Proof of what? (Bilâl says).
Of writing, I suppose, of some mystery escaped under the syllables, some alcohols (Antar says).
Of the poem and body— of written body— of *Corpoème* (Yahia says).

And Jacob scratched already with his fingernails the mark
Of the sky, aggravated by talkative flies, the fates—
Scratched with his penknife the purulent rainbow
With which poets were going to clothe him, this couch grass
Of which Delacroix made a cedar, this erysipelas.
Angel and Jacob: so beautiful with blossoming shadow of a wing at their side!

All this (Lila says) was it happening on the side of Arab Palestine?
But that night (Bilâl says) God called Jacob: Israel!

And all of us have conquered God: Jacques on his tractor, Patrick in his Ballade, and
Mohamed à Médine, non?
Cette Palestine c’est ici, c’est notre île aux chardons, c’est Nanterre, le Viêt-nam, Peñiscola, la “Cafet” ou Damas. Tiens, Yahia, c’est sur ton îlot (dit Antar). Quand on y entraîne des filles, ces lits de plumes (d’éponges) dans le roc, ça n’est pas la trace du combat?
Cet Israël, regarde, c’est ce lit, cette taie qui fuit. Prends cette plume: c’est pas la preuve que cette nuit même un Ange?…

Ce Gué de Jabbok, cette Médina, c’est ce livre. Et je l’ai dans ma main (dit Lila), il parle sur mon cœur, comme un galet de quatre sous!

Il y met une telle frénésie ce boiteux
Qu’il va bien boiter à la fin avec le cri de Dieu
Ouvert à son flanc comme un livre!
Il n’y a rien à lire, mais lui, ivre
De toute cette nuit engloutie en lui, brode
Toute une histoire, et un vocabulaire avec des mots larges comme des tripodes.
Où les baigneurs viennent coincer leur pied.
Il boite, alors il faut que tous on boite, et sa plaie
Il en fait un piège où notre plaisir sombre.
Allez vite vous rhabiller et passez du soleil à l’ombre!
S’il croit que nous allons nous laisser prendre à son chloroforme,
Que notre bouche de sa plaie va prendre la forme
Pour répéter que Dieu est fort et que nous l’avons vaincu
Mais qu’à la fin des fins c’est nous qui l’avons dans l’écu,
Eh bien le grand Monsieur Jacob il se trompe,
Et si nous devons emboucher une trompe
C’est pour célébrer la joie d’un reflet dans l’eau
Et le simple bonheur d’une peau qui se colle à une autre peau!

Si vous saviez, la peau d’un Ange, dit Jacob ²
Mohamed at Medina, no?
Palestine, it’s here; it’s our island of thistles; it’s Nanterre, Vietnam, Peñíscola, “Cafet” or Damascus. Here, Yahia, it’s on your islet (Antar says). When we lead the girls there, these featherbeds (of sponges) in the rock— isn’t it the trace of battle?
Israel— look— it’s this bed, pillowcase that runs away. Take this feather: is it not the proof that this very night an Angel?…

Ford of Jabbok— this Medina— it is this book. And I have it in my hand (Lila says); he speaks on my heart, like a fourpence pebble.

He makes such a frenzy, this gimp,
That he’ll still be limping at the end with cry of God
Open at his side: a book!
There is nothing to read but him, drunk
With all this night swallowed in him, embroidering
A whole story, and a vocabulary with words as large as tripods.
Where the swimmers come to wedge their feet.
He limps, so we all need to limp, and of his wound
He makes a trap where our pleasure darkens.
Come on quick— let’s get dressed and leave sun for shade!
If he thinks that we’re going to fall for his chloroform,
That our mouth in his wound will take shape
To repeat that God is strong and that we vanquished him,
But that at the end of ends it is us who has him in the coat of arms—
Well, the big Mister Jacob made a mistake.
And if we were to raise to our lips a horn,
It is to celebrate joy in water’s reflection
And the simple happiness of one skin pressing itself against another!

If you know, the skin of an Angel, Jacob says ʾ
(dit Bilâl).

22

L’enfant du Noûn, très loin de ce combat,
Plongeait de la digue des Turcs.

Lunettes, palmes, il fouillait l’eau
De son sourire
Et parfois ramenait
Une dorade.

23

(De chenilles passaient sur la route, traînant des canons. Vers Jabbok.)

Gaza, ô ma gazelle, est prise! (avait chanté Lila. Et vers Peniel nous engagions nos armes.)

24

Il suffisait d’ouvrir le balcon,
De descendre sur la plage,
De se dénuder comme un empereur pour le sacre,
Et d’avancer.
Là il y a Bougie, là Tigung, Là Hyères,
Ici Ilion,
Là Beyrouth, là Alexandrie,
Là Peñiscola,
Ici Gênes (Jacques tu t’en souviens— et ce banc sous les palmes, le rôdeur nocturne, les poires volées?),
Ici Gibraltar, là, mon cœur, Ithaque
La route est vaste, libre. La nuit claire.

Il suffirait d’avoir la force.
Voilà (dit Yahia). C’est pourquoi moi aussi j’aime la mer.
(Bilâl says).

Child of Noûn, so far from battle,
Dove from the Turkish seawall.

Glasses— palms— he sifted through the water
Of his smile,
And sometimes brought back
A sea bream.

(Caterpillars passed on the road, dragging cannons. Toward Jabbok.)
Gaza, my gazelle, is taken! (sang Lila. And toward Peniel we engaged our arms.)

One just had to open the balcony,
Descend onto beach,
Strip like an emperor for the sacred,
And go forth.
There, Bougie, Tizgirt,
Hyères—
Here, Ilion—
There, Beirut, Alexandria,
Peñiscola—
Here, Genoa (Jacques, you remember— this bench beneath the palms, nocturnal prowler,
stolen pears?),
Here, Gibraltar— there, my heart, Ithaque.
The road is vast, free. Night is clear.

One would only need the strength.
Here (Yahia says). This is why I also love the sea.

L’espace est offert. Il n’y a pas d’obstacle.
Il y a la mer (dit Lila).
C’est vrai, il suffirait (Bilâl épatait son nez à la vitre).

Et la plaie en une rose d’écume s’épanouit et brille.
Syllabes effervescents, ô mangeur de lentilles!
Faut-il que nous soyons tous fascinés
Par quelle atroce nostalgie pour croire à ton ciné,
Et comme Tiski ou Timour sentir que notre tendon se brise
À l’instant de l’élan, que quelqu’un à sa guise
Taillade et creuse comme sur une ardoise le mot
Non pas de passe mais d’impasse! Sommes-nous sots
Pour consentir soudain à écrire de notre inquiétude cette fable,
Ce sablier tourné et retourné, ce sable
À perte de mémoire qui nous glisse comme une moelle entre les syllabes,
Ce sang!

Plutôt que de perdre la raison, les poètes appellent à la rescousse (dit Yahia) leurs pairs et fouillent dans leurs mots. Fouinent. Une image, c’est sur leur front un chiffon de vinaigre.
Une diversion. La folie patiente. On peut repartir pour des émotions. Jusqu’à l’heure où finalement on perd pied dans l’espace. Il ne reste plus qu’à hurler:— le seul mot sauvé du désastre!— “Crénom!”

(Pour tel autre, l’éternité commença à l’orgasme. Belle mort! On voit (dit Lila) que tu n’étais pas à la place de la fille!)
Space is offered. There are no obstacles.
   There is the sea (Lila says).
   It is true, one would only need— (Bilâl, impressed his nose to the window).

And the wound in one sea foam rose opens and shines.
Effervescent syllables, o eater of lentils—
Do we all need to be fascinated by some atrocious nostalgia
In order to believe in your cinema,
And like Tiski or Timour feeling that our tendon is breaking
At the instant of élan, that someone in his guise digs
And slashes the word like on slate—
Not of pass but impasse! Are we stupid
To consent suddenly to writing a tale of our disquiet.
This hourglass is turned and turned around— this sand—
Endless memory that slides us like the marrow between syllables
— This blood!

Rather than losing reason, poets call their pairs for help (Yahia says) and they search their words. Rummaging. An image, it is on their brow, a vinegar rag. A diversion. Patient folly. We can leave again toward emotions, until the hour when we finally lose footing in space. There is nothing left but to scream— the only words saved from the disaster—
“Holy shit!”

(For others, eternity begins with orgasm. Beautiful death— We see (Lila says) that you were not there in place of the girl!)
Et ce Baudelaire, n’est-il pas, lui, le Maître de tes Mots? Tu nous cites toujours Char (ton Dieu), Artaud, Genet, Otero, Hikmet, Voznessenski, Ginsberg, Retamar, Whitman, Lorca, Verlaine, Éluard, Rimbaud, Louise Labé, Aragon, Brecht— mais ce Baudelaire dont tu ne nous parles jamais et, qu’avec Racine, tu relis chaque soir? (dit Lila).

“Et plus tard un Ange, entrouvrant les portes…,” n’est-ce pas avec ces mots que ton corps a grandi? (reprit Yahia. Et nouant sa serviette de bain autour de son front, il s’en fit le Turban des Doges).

(“…cette séduisante vigueur des corps souples…” En se déployant sur la natte, Bilâl entrait tout cru dans la phrase de Proust.)

(Le Maître du Noûn, las de la mer, s’approcha d’eux, les caressait.)

Enfants, enfants, enfants (dit-il comme s’il les enfantait).

Alors la plaie comme un arc se tendit
Et la cohorte des mots…
And this Baudelaire, isn’t he the Master of your Words? You’re always citing Char to us (your God), Artaud, Genet, Otero, Hikmet, Voznessenski, Ginsberg, Retamar, Whitman, Lorca, Verlaine, Éluard, Rimbaud, Louise Labé, Aragon, Brecht— but what of this Baudelaire of whom you never speak to us and, only with Racine, you reread every night? (Lila says).

“Et plus tard un Ange, entrouvrant les portes…” isn’t it with these words that your body grew? (Yahia takes up again. And knotting his beach towel around his forehead, he makes himself the Turban of the Doges).

(“…cette séduisante vigueur des corps souples…” As he spreads himself out on the mat, Bilâl enters cold into Proust’s phrase.)

(Master of Noûn, bored with the sea, approaches them, touches them gently.)

Children, children, children (he says, as if he was babying them).

So the gash like an arc extends, And the cohort of words…
Louange.
In praise.
ÉTREINTE

1

Ce que vous me dites de lui, Djami, est si étrange!
Je m’attendais d’un commerçant et vous me parlez comme d’un Ange!
Mais cette prose de la chair, cette cruauté sur le Harar, cette grande paix,
Jamais, Djami, tandis que vous ouvriez sa chair en deux et que le silence vous jetait tous les deux, haletants, nus, sur le sable, chacals,
Jamais comme un galet roulé Dieu sait par quel torrent un poème n’est venu, là, comme un météorite sur le sable?
(C’est ainsi, dit Yahia, que j’aurais éperdument interrogé Djami.)

2

On ne tourmente pas la douleur (dit Lila,
Et Antar :) On n’interroge pas le désert.

3

Du poème étreint il ne reste que ce bleu à la gorge.
Des titanques forge,
Des orgues de basalte
Que ce murmure entre la chemise et la dent.
De votre appel (dit le Maître du Noûn)
Que cette cendre de cigarette un instant qui noircit votre puce
Puis disparaît
Avec les civilisations.

4

Ce n’était pas de plume ni d’esprit mais de quelque matière
Comme de chair. Et si doux quand la prise soudain vers la lumière

155
EMBRACE

1

What you tell me of him, Djami, is so strange—
I was expecting a shopkeeper and you speak of him as if he were an Angel!
But this flesh-prose, this cruelty on the Harar, this big peace,
Never— Djami— as long as you open his flesh in two and the silence threw you both,
  breathless, naked on the sand, jackals,
Never like a rolled stone, God knows by which torrent the poem didn’t come, there, like a
  meteorite on the sand?
(It’s like this, Yahia says, that I would have interrogated Djami madly.)

2

We do not torment pain (Lila says,
  and Antar :) We do not interrogate the desert.

3

Of the poem that is embraced, there is left nothing but blue at the throat.
  Titanic forges—
  Basalt church organs—
  That this whisper enters shirt and tooth.
  From your call (says Master of Noûn),
  That this cigarette ash be the instant that blackens your thumb
  Then disappears
  With the civilizations.

4

It was neither feather nor spirit but of some material
  Like flesh. And so soft when taken suddenly toward light;
Glissait (cuisse ou le coude, l’épaule) que Jacob
Savait que ce combat qui lacérait sa robe
De nomade rusé n’était pas de haine et tissait
Entre eux une tunique
Unique
Et pour qu’ils y tiennent que soudain leurs corps s’unissaient
En une chair spirituelle
Mai animale tout de même et si belle!
Il n’y a pas d’affrontement qui ne soit une épousaille
Pensait Jacob, et il se disait: Qu’il s’en aille,
Qu’il s’en aille vite! Et avant l’aube! Avant que je n’abandonne mes deux femmes et mes
onze enfants et mes troupeaux
Pour sa seule toison et ses ailes qui deviennent comme ma peau.

Il n’y a pas de pensée. L’ordre de la pensée est un mensonge, un alibi pour ne pas
désespérer, vertigineusement. Le cerveau n’est pas une merveille électronique. Il n’y a
que le tourbillon confus, profus, d’où émergent les seuls déchets tenaces que nous
érigeons en stèle. Sur notre angoisse. Il y a le geste de la chair qui happe quelques signes
au vol, les traces. Cette pauvre maison de quelque mille mots dont nous devons nous
suffire! Dérisoire abri (ô Youcef Sebti!) pour notre déluge. Nous sommes déluge. Ni
ordre. Mais quelques phrases de guingois. Une fougère dans la houille. Une fougère,
lorsque tout arde, qu’est-ce? Qu’est-ce? (répétait Yahia tandis que Bilâl déjà ronflait sur
son genou, tous les autres endormis sur des nattes. Seul le Maître du Noûn veillait, et
l’écoutait sans doute, en fumant une cigarette, une autre, bout filtre, sans avaler la
fumée).

(Bilâl se leva pour aller boire.)

(Lila rougissait) “…le joint brillant du cri et de la joie” (dit Antar), cet extraordinaire
aveu d’Anna Gréki m’obsède.
Il assume une planète là où nous commençons à céder (dit Yahia).
It was sliding (thigh or elbow, shoulder)— Jacob
Knew this fight would cut his cunning nomad’s
Dress— that it was not of hatred. It wove
Between them a tunic—
Unique
So they would maintain their bodies suddenly uniting
Into one spiritual flesh—
But animal all the same and so beautiful!
There is no confrontation that is not espousal,
Thought Jacob, and he told himself: That he leaves—
Quickly— and before dawn! Before I abandon my two wives and my eleven children and
my herds
For his only fleece and his wings that become like my skin.

5

There is no thinking. The order of thinking is a lie, an alibi so as not to lose hope, vertiginously. The brain is not an electronic marvel. There is only the confused, profuse maelstrom, from where tenacious scraps that we erect in steles emerge. On our anguish. There is gesture of flesh that catches a few signs in flight— traces. This poor house of a couple thousand words which should suffice! Pathetic shelter (o Youcef Sebti!) for our deluge. We are deluge. Nor order. But a couple lopsided sentences. A fern in the coal. A fern— as everything burns— what is it? What is it? (Yahia repeated as Bilâl already snored on his lap, all the others asleep on the mats. Only Master of Noûn was awake, and he surely listened to him, smoking a cigarette— an other, filtered— without swallowing the smoke).

6

(Bilâl got up to get a drink.)

7

(Lila was blushing) “…the brilliant joint of the cry and joy” (Antar says), I am obsessed
with Anna Gréki’s extraordinary confession.
He assumes one planet, where we begin to give way (Yahia says).
C’est comme Godard. Tu as vu *Pierrot le Fou*? Ce soir-là (dit Yahia) j’ai eu une raison acceptable de repousser mon suicide. Peut-être de vivre, de creuser, de consentir aux mots. Godard, Bach, Dubuffet, Stockhausen, Char, Hikmet, Nallard, Ipoustéguy, la victoire du Viet-Nâm. Nous pouvons passer le gué.

S… disait qu’il éprouvait le suicide comme un insoutenable excès de beauté, une impossibilité à regrouper le regard, à unifier le cœur (dit encore Yahia). Au soupir de Gide: “Devoir quitter tout ça!” il répondait par un tournoi d’une déchirante avidité: “Comment vivre sans avec tout ça!” Il était incapable de se séparer un seul de ses sens du toucher. Doucement, consciemment, il en périssait.

“La Casbah ne s’assiège pas.” Dans le Noûn, il y a toujours une issue vers le haut (les terrasses? l’esprit?). J’ai vu chez Khadda les signes réintégrer le Corps et cette audace du passé donner à l’avenir sa forme. Ces beaux dessins où il essaie de “recharner l’arabesque de ses ancêtres” (comme l’écrivait Berque à propos des illustrations de “La rose et l’ortie”). Benanteur, lui, parti du signe, semble ne vouloir en préserver que la trace, l’aura (comme jadis à Peñiscola, Nallard partait des “cuisines” de la plage vers un été transfiguré — notre Été Vert!). Il s’acharne — avec quelle téméraire subtilité! — à broyer ses aveux, à resabler tout son Orient. Khadda engage le Noûn dans son dépassement lyrique, Benanteur le ramène à son point de minutie. Avec l’École du Noûn débouche sur une métaphysique (dit le Maître du Noûn en se grattant la barbe somme si s’y livrait quelque combat de poux ?) Chacun à sa manière (à sa matière) passe le Gué de Jabbok et arrive à Peniel. C’est en cela que tous les deux sont grands.

7 bis

It’s like Godard. Did you see *Pierrot le Fou*? That night (Yahia says) I had an acceptable reason to push back my suicide. Maybe to live, dig, consent to words. Godard, Bach, Dubuffet, Stockhausen, Char, Hikmet, Nallard, Ipoustéguy, the victory of Vietnam. We can cross the ford.

8

S... was saying that he felt the suicide was an unbearable excess of beauty, an impossibility of regrouping the gaze, of unifying the heart (Yahia continues). At Gide’s sigh: “One must leave all this!” he responded with a tournament of divisive eagerness. “How to live without— with all this!” He was incapable of separating himself from a single one of his senses of touch. Softly, consciously, he perished.

9

“The Casbah is not besieging itself.” In the *Noûn*, there is always an exit upwards (terraces? the spirit?). I saw at Khadda’s the signs to reintegrate Body and this audacity of past to give its form to future. These beautiful drawings where he tries to “re-carnate the arabesque of his ancestors” (like Berque wrote about the illustrations of “La rose et l’ortie”). Benanteur himself, part of the sign, seems only to want to preserve the trace, the aura (like in days gone at Peñiscola, Nallard leaving the “kitchens” of the beach toward a transfigured summer— our Green Summer!). He perseveres— with such rash nuance— to destroy his confessions, grout his entire Orient. Khadda engages *Noûn* in his lyrical overtaking; Benanteur brings it back to his point of minutia. With them, School of *Noûn* opens onto the metaphysical (Master of *Noûn* says, scratching his beard as if he were releasing lice ¹). Each to his own way (to his own way) cross the Ford of Jabbok and arrive at Peniel. It is in this that they are both grown.

10

A frail sheet of skin cuts as badly as a blade. A crust of bread. Your fingers, have they been subjected to this? (Antar says).

160
(Le génie du Noûn ramena un plein journal de beignet :) C’est seulement pour ceux qui se baignent! (Les lettres volèrent en éclats. Bientôt tout le monde fut à la mer. Bleu, bleu-vert, bleu-gris, bleu-bleu, les corps eux-mêmes abricots bleus!)

12

Il y a toujours dans la mer une méduse, un ange,
Une pieuvre, un matin, la nuit, la nuit sans fin parmi les algues.
Il y a toujours un combat dont nos muscles n’ont pas encore saisi le sens.
Et donc encore moins notre esprit (dit Yahia).

13

Il y a toujours dans la mer une savate ? (dit Bilâl
— et ramenait triomphalement le pur vestige d’une civilisation du bien-vivre).

14

S’il s’arrache au sang cette marque sur le tendon
C’est parce qu’elle avoue, non une défaite mais l’abandon
À son plaisir, non une ruse mais la grâce
D’un corps aillé s’interrogeant à sa hanche comme dans une glace
Et y lassant sa face. Bleue. Ou noire. Comme la nuit
Qui désormais n’en a plus fini d’être présente sur ce jour épanoui
Mais inquiet (Si quelque passant devine
Le sens absolument évident de se signe
Et détruisant le Temple tire Dieu de sa plaie
Comme une face radieuse, toute radieuse encore de son péché!
Si la volupté soudain éclate et ouvre la terre
En deux et qu’on se rendre compte que cette douleur-là, ce Noûn, c’est tout simplement le vulgaire
Bleu à l’épaule— et pis ici, à la hanche!— de l’amant!)
Et Jacob frotte et frotte et polit et fabule pour les siècles des siècles vers l’os iliaque cette marque appelante, ce terrible aimant.

161
(Genie of Noûn will bring back a newspaper full of donuts :) They’re only for those who go swimming! (The letters are shattered. Soon everyone is in the sea. Blue, blue-green, blue-gray, blue-blue— the bodies themselves: blue apricots!)

There is always in the sea jellyfish, angel, Octopus, morning, night, endless night amongst the seaweed. There is always a battle of which our muscles have not yet understood the reason. Thus, even less so, our spirit (Yahia says).

There is always in the sea an old slipper (Bilâl says — and he triumphantly brings back a pure vestige of a civilization of wellness).

If he tears himself from blood— this mark on the tendon—
It is because it swears not defeat or ruse, but abandon,
The grace of a winged body in wonder
To its pleasure, at his hip like in a mirror
And leaving his face there. Blue. Or black. Like evening
That, henceforth, isn’t finished with being present on this day, beaming—
Rather worried (If a few passersby
Guess the absolutely obvious direction of this sign,
And destroying the Temple, pull God from his wound, a radiant
Face— completely radiant even because of his sins!
If the sudden delight collapses and opens earth in two
And we realize that this pain here, this Noûn,
Is simply vulgar blue at the shoulder— and worse here, at the hip— of lover!).
And Jacob scrubs and scrubs, polishes and invents for centuries and centuries toward the iliace bone marked appellant— this terrible lover.
Les mots, dans tout cela? (dit Lila).
Maiuls sont (dit le Maître du Noûn) ce combat lui-même, cette frénésie, cette ruse, ce plaisir, cette plaie, cette claudication, cette marque—cet…orgasme?
La hanche de Jacob est notre ardoise ?
Oui, ne ris pas, Bilâl. Brisée à l’emboîture par la violence du mot!

Et n’oubliez pas (dit Antar) que dans le ventre de sa mère il tenait déjà le talon de son jumeau.
Toute sa vie (dit Yahia) il fut étreinte et ruse. Tant de mesquinerie, de marchandage, avait besoin de la Maison de Dieu et d’échelles et d’anges. Il n’est de grande poésie qui ne sente son purin.
Ce que j’aime en Jacob c’est l’homme dans sa laideur, toujours haussée d’un point jusqu’au sublime, jusqu’au geste. Lavée. Passée à fresque. Ce que j’aime dans cet homme face à l’Homme (dit Yahia) c’est sonhumanité, la nôtre.

Qui veut encore des beignets? (dit le génie du Noûn).
Toi, fous-nous la paix! (rugit Bilâl—et il le visa avec son harpon).

Beignets, baigner, Peniel (pensait le Maître du Noûn, et il rêvait à l’alchimie des mots. Car l’alchimie, qui est une science capitale (en exil) à laquelle il faudra bien revenir un jour, est aussi une transmutation par le Mot. One peut nous brûler vif, l’Homme finira bien par se découvrir!).
The words in all of this? (Lila says).
   But they are (says Master of Noûn) this fight, frenzy, ruse, pleasure, wound, claudication, mark—this...orgasm?
   Jacob’s hip is our slate.
   Yes—don’t laugh, Bilâl. Broken at the place where they fit together by violence of word!

And don’t forget (Antar says) that in the belly of his mother he already held the heel of his twin.
   All his life (Yahia says) he was embraced and ruse. Mean tricks, haggling—he needed the House of God, ladders and angels. He is only grand poetry to those who don’t smell his manure.
   What I love about Jacob is the man in his ugliness, always raised to the point of sublime, to gesture. Washed. Passed under fresco. What I love in this man in front of Man (Yahia says) is his humanity, ours.

Who wants more donuts? (says Genie of Noûn).
   You, leave us alone! (growls Bilâl—and he aims at him with his harpoon).

Donuts, to swim, Peniel (thought Master of Noûn, and he dreamt of the alchemy of words. Because alchemy, which is a capital science (in exile) to which one should well return one day, is also a transmutation through Word. We can burn ourselves fiercely; Man will end up discovering himself.).

Combat de Jacob et de l’Hanche (? (dit Bilâl. Plongea).

(Le Maître du Noûn était sorti. Lila servait le thé parfumé à l’orange amère. Et des oranges noires de Blida. “...Il y a en lui un perpétuel créateur d’espérance, même lorsqu’un nœud de douleurs étreint le poème” (dit Jamel-Eddine. Jean, qui à cette époque se battait sur ses toiles avec de vastes vibrations blanches, dit :) “Cette trace à l’emboîture de l’âme est un ozalid pour on ne sait quel plan…” Le fils du Noûn apporta des girelles. Yahia ouvrit la bouche, rit, se tut.)

Le centre de la terre, tu l’as noirci de tes péchés,
Et cette pierre de ton péché, maintenant tu l’adores.

Dès que sur la plage (la page) tu place un signe— même un point— ça y est ça commence. Mille on ne sait quoi se mettent en marche, partout, rejoignent un passé, un avenir, entraînent on ne sait quels luminaires, quels peuples. N’écris pas une Bible, écris simplement “Israël” et tu vois tout ce qui se met à bouleverser l’Orient et l’Occident. Ou “communisme.” Même un point, je vous dis. Ce sont les mots— cette chose de rien du tout— qui font le monde. Le mot (dit le Maître du Noûn) est créateur d’énergie, agit notre planète.
Embrace of words. Confrontation all the way to aurora.

Battle between Jacob and the Hip (Bilâl says—dives).

(The Master of *Noûn* has gone out. Lila served the bitter orange tea. And the black oranges of Blida. “...There is in him a perpetual creature of hope, even in the midst of a knot of pain embracing the poem” (Jamel-Eddine says. Jean, who at this point was battling on his canvases with vast white vibrations, says :), “This path to the stoppers of the soul is an ozalid for we don’t know which map...” The son of Noûn brings with him rainbow wrasse. Yahia opens his mouth, laughs, shuts up.)

The center of the earth, you blackened it with your sins—
And this stone of your sins, now you love it.

As soon as you are on the beach (the page) you place a sign—even a point—here we go, it starts. A thousand we don’t know whats start marching, everywhere, bringing together past, future, leading we don’t know which lights, which peoples. Don’t write a Bible, write simply “Israel” and you will see everything that tries to overthrow Orient and Occident. Or “communism.” Even a point, I tell you. It is words—this thing of nothingness of everything—that make the world. The word (says Master of *Noûn*) is the creator of energy, moves our planet.
L’agite (dit Lila).
Les tremblements de terre, tout de même? (dit Bilâl).

Tout ce combat, Jacob, ne fut que pour un mot,
Que pour être nommé et multiplier ainsi tes troupeaux,
Combat des mots entre eux, dans la nuit, de l’ombre avec l’ombre,
La plume avec la plume, le poil avec le poil, le nombre
Avec le nombre, le goût avec le goût,
Anges déracinés qui sortis de l’égout
Savent échanger cette eau lustrale qu’on appelle salive,
Torrent où se baigne le verbe avant que l’air (le feu) ne le dérive
Vers quelque page nue, île aux chardons, Éden
Où de nouveau reprend le poème serpentueux de la haine
Et de l’amour. Ô chair
Posée sur le monde comme le mot le plus obscur et le plus clair!
Noûn! D’une seule lettre nous avons vécu et nous allons nous taire.

(À l’aube, deux hommes se baignèrent, nus.)
The movement (Lila says).
The trembling of earth, all the same? (Bilâl says)

All this combat, Jacob, is done for but one word,
But to be named and accordingly multiply your herds—
Combat of words between them, in the night, from feather with feather
Shadow with shadow, taste with taste, hair with hair,
Number with number.
Uprooted angels that exit the sewer
Know how to change this lustral water that we call saliva— torrent
Where the verb bathes itself before air (fire) diverts
It toward some naked beach, island of thistles, Eden
Where the serpentine poem
Takes hold anew of hatred and love. O flesh
Placed on the world like the most obscure and clearest
of words— Noûn— from one letter we have survived and we will quiet.

(At dawn, two men bathe in the sea, naked.)
LOUANGE, II

ORDRES

Jette dans l’eau commune le
Tison ardent du foyer des sacrifices.
Arrache tes plumes de la nuit.
(Il restera ce bleu là où fut ton Autre âme.)
Purifie-toi. Nage. Retrouve ton
Ombre.
ORDERS

Throw in the communal water
Ardent firebrand of the hearth of sacrifices.
Tear your feathers from the night.
(This blue will remain where your Other soul was.)
Purify yourself. Swim. Find again your Shadow.
POUR UN NOM
(de mon balcon sur la mer)

1

Borborygmes sous l’eau et voici qu’un nom fuse,
Éclabousse ta solitude.
Chant de fraîche écume, la nuit
Devient lisible.

2

Appels, ragots, injures,
Labyrinthe pour quelle voix?
Minotaure ou mérou,
Quel nom, et venu d’où?

3

Tu crois l’appel du Père (du Fils
Ou de quel Ange en toi?),
Tu ouvres la fenêtre:
Une fourmi volante vient s’abattre sur ta joue.
FOR A NAME

(from my balcony overlooking the sea)

Gurgling underwater and here is just one name that rings out,
Splashsing solitude.
Song of fresh sea foam— night
Becomes legible.

Calls, gossip, insults:
Labyrinth for which voice?
Minotaur or grouper:
Which name, and from where?

You believe in the call of the Father (from the Son
Or from which Angel within you?).
You open the window—
A flying ant swoops down onto your cheek.
Tu connais le désordre de mon sang.
C’est sous les sifflets que je monte au jour.
Si je regarde je ne peux plus écrire: le bleu envahit tout.
— Jubilation de l’âme, que fersons-nous des mots!

Apporte le plat de bois.
Jette le buis sec sur ma page.
Il n’est nourriture que de feu.

La tête sur un galet,
Tu sais bien que ton règne
Est un musée d’orties!

Cette écriture qui bouche les pores!
Ces pores qui bouchent l’écriture!

Oh, dormir…
Plume
Pour une taie.
You know the disorder of my blood.
I climb toward day beneath these whistles.
If I look I can no longer write: blue takes everything over.
— Soul’s jubilation, what will we do with words—

Bring me the dish of wood.
Throw the dry boxwood on my page.
It is but food for fire.

The head on the galets—
You know well that your reign
Is museum for nettles!

This writing that clogs the pores—
Pores that clog writing!

Oh, to sleep…
Plume
For a pillowcase.
DE MON BALCON SUR LA MER, II

(Lutteurs de Céphisodote sur la mer pointilliste)

C’est là que j’ai vécu dans les voluptés calmes,
Au milieu de l’azur, des vagues, des splendeurs
Et des esclaves nus, tout imprégnés d’odeurs,
Qui me rafraîchissaient le front avec des palmes,
Et dont l’unique soin était d’approfondir
Le secret douloureux qui me faisait languir.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

1

…Pour exhumer hors de son drap
Le pur dialogue d’une fresque…

2

…Reptiles cessez donc
De mettre vos couleurs
Et vos miroirs errants
Dans le verbe en chaleur…

3

Panique et pierre,
Bucranes…
…le point
De retour au Poème…
FROM MY BALCONY OVERLOOKING THE SEA, II

(Fighters for Cephisodotus on the pointalist sea)

It is there that I lived in the delights, calm,
In the middle of the blue, the waves, the splendors
And the naked slaves, all pregnant with odors
That cooled my brow with palms,
The only care of which
Was to deepen the painful secret that made me languish.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

1

…To exhume outside of his sheet
Pure dialogue of fresco…

2

…Reptiles: stop
Putting your colors
And your errant mirrors
Into the verb in heat…

3

Panic and stone,
Bull skulls…
…the point
Of return to the Poem…
I

SIGNES II

Affres de l’ombre. Soc! La lettre
(Noûn!) aux lèvres démentes. Main lasse
De tracer la perpétuelle grimace.
Écriture d’exil.
Pangs of shadow. Plowshare— the letter
(Noûn!) to denied lips. Hand weary
Of tracing the perpetual grimace.
Exile writing.
Un livre, encore un p’tit livre, et quoi.
Une guerre, encore une p’tite guerre, et quoi.
Un ange, encore un p’tit ange, et quoi.
Serpentaire, secrétaire, encore un p’tit serpent, un p’tit secret, et quoi.
II

SCRIBES II

A book—then again a little book, so what.
A war—then again a little war, so what.
An angel—then again a little angel, so what.
Secretary bird, secretary—then again a little snake, a little secret—so what.
Tu as reçu ton nom. Tu es purifié.
Et
Moi
J’erre,
Nomade sans Jabbok,
Persécuteur sans Damas,
Prophète sans Médine,
Épave.
Il suffirait pourtant que de ma bave,
Au détour d’un tripode, l’Homme se lève et que je sois
Nommé!
WORD’S TRIUMPH OR SCORN

(eleven lines)

You got your name; you are purified.
And
Me
I wander:
Nomad without Jabbok,
Persecutor without Damascus,
Prophet without Medina—
Wreck.
Though it would suffice that from my drool,
At the detour of tripod, Man gets up and that I might be
Named!
Notes

1 Translation: “Man Open,” from his poem of the same title.
1 “Le Môle” is the name of a mountain in the Haute-Savoie region of France, but can also be translated as a jetty or breakwater. As its meaning is unclear in this context, I have left the French word in this instance to retain ambiguity. In future uses of the term, its intention is clearer and I have chosen one or the other of its translations.
1 A children’s playground game.
1 “Panicographique” is Sénac’s neologism that seems to combine the technical tone of the “-cographique” ending with the French word for panic, “panique,” and the French term for thistles, “panicaut.”
1 The former French name for Béjaïa, Algeria while it was under French rule; also the French word for candle.
1 The name of a former French “département” in Greece; also the French name for Ithaca.
POSTFACE

HABITER SA LANGUE

In translating for a time and for a specific future, one asks oneself, “In what spirit will each succeeding age listen to me who have written [/translated] thus” (Longinus 106). There is a battle in the act of translation between remaining true, preparing for a future audience, and capturing the present audience’s attention. Such a battle is infinitely more pertinent when, in translating a writer like Jean Sénac, one is not just attempting to preserve a relationship between the text and its readers, but is in fact working to create this relationship.

Jean Sénac has been very little translated into the English language; the largest body of translated work to date is a 2010 collection of Selected Poems by Katia Sainson and David Bergman. Being one of the first to translate any poet’s work, it is vital to remember one’s place in the greater scheme of the literary world. Ben Belitt, a translator of Pablo Neruda, urges others not to arrive at the work of translating from a selfish perspective. Instead, translation should be infinite and flexible, catering to the inevitability that it will be molded, de-formed, and re-sculpted for each coming age, audience, and culture that the translated texts encounter.

The “infinite” aspect of translation also refers to the impossibility of any translated text, especially of poetry, to satisfy a singular demand. There must be “some

45 “To live one’s language” (Bencheikh 21).
46 See Adam’s Dream by Ben Belitt: “the interest [was] all too finite and inflexible” (Belitt 53).
allowable ambience of pluralism in the whole premise of multi-cultural translation […] there is no universal motive, like ‘fidelity,’ which all translation should serve” (Belitt 32). Instead, one reaches toward imitation, transcription, and the creation of a new sublime commonality between all those forces which come together in a poem— one strives toward “some least common denominator of continuing energy” in the original work and that energy’s persistence in the translated piece (Belitt 27).

There are endless complications in translating poetry, more perhaps than in any other type of text because of the specificity of the language and the depth of the cultural and linguistic connotations. Rewards, however, are not absent. “[T]he immediate aim of translation is pleasure and not truth”— the pleasure of the experience of the poem, but also the pleasure the translator feels in working with the poem, with that writer, with that writer’s talent. “[Translation] compels and seduces one into writing poetry other than one’s own;” with me, its seduction has been complete (Belitt 17, 15).

I began translating the work of Jean Sénac in 2007 with the guidance of professors and mentors. His work quickly became a thread to which I kept returning. As I researched the act (art? work?) of translation, I encountered more and more accounts of the impossibility of it all, especially in regards to that most concise form of expression: poetry. And yet with Sénac’s work the process, though not simple, felt obvious.

Sénac’s writing does not yet have the type of following that, for instance, Neruda’s does, and perhaps therein lay my comfort in rearranging his words, omitting unnecessary articles and redundant exclamation points. Though it is complicated to make such decisions inherent in translation, it is a great deal simpler to remove unnecessary punctuation than it would be to attempt to inject more flesh into a text in need. Sénac’s
poetry is not one of perfection, but the flesh—the body (in the most physical sense)—is never lacking in his work.

Sénac was aware of his own faults: “Je suis trop emporté par le cœur” he wrote in a letter to friend and mentor René Char: “I am too carried away by the heart” (“Lettre à René Char” 102). His overly emotional tendencies often extended into his poetry. These sentimental qualities in his work feel at times naïve, over-dramatic. The poet is certainly carried away by this heart, but in his work it is a strong, beating heart, an energy that pervades his political work as much as his personal poetry. This continuous energy is just what Belitt was referring to when he spoke of the “common denominator of continuing energy” in a poetic work. As translator, it is this energy I sought to grasp—with Sénac, his individual words do not carry quite the weight as those of other, more concise poets. It is his energy, this heartbeat that is absolutely necessary to translate from the original language, an energy that lives within the many nouns Sénac loved.

The term “alchemy” resurfaces in writings about Jean Sénac, “the alchemy of the verb,” the “alchemy of language” (d’Eaubonne 109, Œuvres 796). Alchemy is fully invested in the essentially magical ability of transmutation. In Avant-Corps Sénac is obsessed with the sea, sea foam, sea walls, rocks, pebbles, hips, thighs, and lyres. For Sénac, this alchemy is between the physical world, that of his environment and that of the body, and the world of language. At the base of this notion is his interest in the ability to transform, to exert one’s mental power onto the physical (or one’s physical power onto the mental) and to see actual change result of it. It is the combination of the mental and the physical that he is convinced will lead him to a sense of truth and power and to a

47 “l’alchimie du verbe;” “alchimie de la langue.”
complete identity. His studies (poems) toward the *corpoème* are his versions of experimenting toward the transmutation of lead into gold.

To discuss alchemy in relation to Sénac’s poetry is first to recognize the importance of the physical in his work, and then to note the poet’s obsession with naming. With this progression from the physical to the name, the name to spirit, and spirit back to the physical all completed through poetry, readers of his work will begin to believe in the same magic of words that the poet himself believed in. The poem is a catalyst in the search for an identity and the path through which completeness can be achieved: “This is an essentially magic view of the poem. Not magic in the sense of doing something that you mean to do in the end, but in the sense of causing things to happen” (Olson).  

Sénac was fixated on the physical—the physical body of course, but more interestingly the physicality of the words, syllables, and rhythms that compose a poem. This viewpoint was uncommonly broad in spectrum: what, for Jean Sénac, was included in this idea (and ideal) of the physical? The sun and sea, the adolescents pouring forth from buses—all are as physical to the poet as the syllables used in uttering their names. The poems in *Avant-Corps* are filled with rainbow wrasse, vertebrae and orgasms all placed on as physical a plane as syllables, verbs, and even silence: “Word to word, silence to silence, / From opaline tuft to hard vertebra— / You know my page” (*Œuvres* 506).  

Sénac imbues the energy of the world, the transmutations of the body, and the power of language into these nouns, until the word “rock” is inseparable from the actual

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48 Page number not available.
49 See “À la pointe de l’aube” by Jean Sénac from *Poèmes Iliques* (*Œuvres Poétiques* 460).
50 “Mot à mot, silence à silence, / De la touffe opaline à la dure vertèbre, / Ma page tu la connais.”
rock on the beach, the idea of the rock in one’s mind, and the history, present, and future that a rock may behold. For him, it is simply returning the rock to its name and the heartbeat back to the rock:

Every word which is used to express a moral or intellectual fact, if traced to its root, is found to be borrowed from some material appearance. Right means straight; wrong means twisted. Spirit primarily means wind; transgression, the crossing of a line; supercilious, the raising of the eyebrow.

(Emerson 7).

Everything goes back to the names of things. The name is life for Jean Sénac, and it is his calling as poet to find the syllables, sounds, and images that will reconstitute all of our names, and consequently return us to our origins and open the doors out onto our futures. Sénac believes in the power of name in an almost biblical sense.

A name for Sénac is a kind of physical embodiment of a feeling, person or experience. He himself cycled through a handful of names at different times his life: he was born Jean Comma, adopted the surname “Sénac” from his stepfather as a young boy, but also referred to himself as Gérard Comma, Janot le Poète, Christian Pérèz and Yahia El Wahrani. In tune with his identity crisis as a gay pied-noir, a French-speaking bastard of Spanish descent born in Algeria, there exists in his work the sense that if he could just find the right name (for himself, for his experiences, for his loves and life, even for the rocks on the beach) that he could make sense of it all. A name is a concise encompassment of a greater whole—the whole reflects upon the name and the name reflects upon the whole.

Unable to find the ideal name/form for himself, Sénac instead came up with the concept of the corpoème and the Corps Total, both entities that would forgo his need for a name, concepts that were so influential for Sénac that they became as physically real as
the body he inhabited. “I am approaching the Body. I write,” he says, “‘Spoerme, corpoème, corps total, it is, Sénac says, but ‘palpable’ writing’ (Œuvres 17).”

Sénac’s obsession with the physical is translated into an obsession with form. This helps to situate him, in his way, as a modernist poet. Born in 1926, he was born into the middle of the interwar period understood to be the crux of high modernism and the time during which it flourished. Of course, Sénac was born in Algeria, far from the American and British/European modernist sensibilities, but as the son of a Spanish woman and as a native French speaker, his connection to the mainland was never far beneath the surface of his identity. When modernism is discussed as a time defined by war and crisis and thus resulting in the commitment to finding a sense of wholeness through art, Sénac and his poetry easily fit into the greater modernist sensibility. Sénac was born in Algeria when it was a French colony, a place that was stirring with hopes toward the fight for independence which would follow in the summer of 1962. The crisis of war, displacement, chaos and lost/clouded identities was a crisis that Sénac grew to live and breathe. He believed in the independence of a progressive Algeria of multiplicity, modernity, and respect for differing people, languages, and beliefs. His own identity was inseparable from the plights of the greater Algerian cultural identity. Sénac left Algeria in 1954 not to return until after its independence in 1962, and “his obsession with identity found its perfect epiphany with the independence of the country. Love and revolution

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51 Spoeurme is a word halfway between “sperm” and “poem;” “ ‘J’approche du Corps. J’écris.’ Spoeurme, corpoème, corps total, il n’est, dit Sénac, d’écriture ‘palpable.’ ”
[would] finally fuse within him and by him” (Œuvres 792).52 Or so he would hope.

The corpoème and the Corps Total were forms as real as any other— he sought shape/form in his poems of course, but also in the company he kept, the political ideals he adhered to, his home country of Algeria, his body and the bodies of others. He equates form with nothingness, “the incarnation of words” with “the hole, which space, which life, which body”— all of these creating a space, a new form, where “poet and poem live in the truth of this instant” (Notes sur le Corpoème 86; 84).53 Everything is body— even nonbeing— and body is everything.

Precisely because the form is as necessary to the essence as the essence to itself […] absolute reality must not be conceived of and expressed as essence alone […] but as form also […] Only then is it grasped and expressed as real and actual (Hegel 8).

The truth of Sénac’s identity was inexorably affixed to this Hegelian relationship between self, form, and otherness or lack of form. The perfection Sénac sought with the Corps Total and the corpoème was one which was birthed from the very complication and imperfection it strove to escape: “Per se the divine life is no doubt undisturbed identity and oneness with itself, which finds no serious obstacle in otherness and estrangement, and none in the surmounting of this estrangement,” or in Sénac’s words, “All the horrors of the world and all the sympathies exist in one body. Bronzed skin and purulence. The

52 “son obsession identitaire a trouvé sa parfaite épiphanie avec l’indépendance du pays. L’amour et la révolution vont enfin fusionner en lui et par lui.”
53 “l’incarnation des mots;” “le trou, quel espace, quelle vie, quel corps;” “poète et poème v[ient] dans cette vérité d’un instant.”
adorable breath and the bladders [...] Exist in one body” (Hegel 8; Notes sur le Corpoème 88).54

In The H.D. Book, Robert Duncan discusses the relationship between poetry and form; he begins with H.D. and imagism but continues through into a vast and explicative investigation of modernism. “‘Am I the god?’ Pygmalion asks: ‘or does this fire carve me / for its use?’” (Duncan 52). Does the form make the poet or does the poet make the form? Does Sénac create the Corps Total and the corpoème or do they create him? Going back to Hegel, it is useful to ask: does this matter? The direction in which the creation moves neither defines nor withholds meaning from the relationship between creator and that which is created. When writing of H.D.’s work, Duncan could very well be writing about Sénac: “the sense increases that as the artist works to achieve form he finds himself the creature of the form he thought at first to achieve [...] The fire is indeed to carve the poet for its use” (Duncan 52-53).

Sénac’s life is defined by its search for the higher form—truth—the Corps Total and the corpoème, and these higher forms are defined by the poet’s life. “Le jour viendra,” he writes, “The time will come when the poem will become man with fists, perfectly adjusted to the lucid emotion I feel. The poem will end up expressing exactly the insurrection and the smile” (Lettre à René Char 104).55 Here, one begins to see how poem is but an extension of the body, so much that in its truest form, it returns full-circle to the physicality of a smile.

54 “Tout l’horreur du monde et toute la sympathie existent dans un même corps. La peau ambrée et la purulation. L’adorable haleine et les vessies [...] Coexistent dans un même corps.”
55 “où le poème deviendra l’homme au poing, ajusté parfaitement à l’émotion lucide que j’éprouve. Le poème finira par dire exactement l’insurrection et le sourire.”
Sénac’s book *Avant-Corps* is united by its preface to the first group of poems *Poèmes Iliaques* dwelling on the authority of the name, and the last poems of the last group, *Diwân du Noûn*, which do the same. Sénac writes the following in the preface:

We live because we are named. All life is created within us through the name it exalts. And all attempts by the poet, within the space of his torments, is but intended to rebuild these syllables from which the Face could emerge, alive with one love

(Œuvres 447).56

In “Premier Poème Iliaque,” the first poem in the first series, he displays his previously described investment in the power of names and words: moving toward “your lyre’s edge” is the same as moving “[toward] your hips” (Œuvres 449).57 It is “at this precise point where impetus and spring / Enrich my tongue”— “the lyre formed by the hips […] is] the emblem of the instrument destined for the cantor of this carnal divinity” (Œuvres 450, 451, d’Eaubonne 120).58 The hips become an instrument used in attaining the physical, the physical embodying the spiritual. Sénac’s play on words continues with his “tongue” being “enrich[ed].” In French, as in English, the word “tongue” can mean either the physical body part or it can mean language itself, again melding the physical with the name.

Sénac explores this relationship between the power of language, its meaning, its physical components, and the body’s and the world’s physical counterparts throughout *Avant-Corps*, and it is all in the name of identity. “Pour un nom” is one of the last poems

56 “Nous vivons parce que nous sommes nommés. Toute vie se fait en nous par le nom qu’elle exalte. Et toute la tentative du poète, dans l’espace de ses tourments, ne vise qu’à reconstituer ces syllabes d’où le Visage pourrait surgir vivant du seul amour.”

57 “l’orée de la lyre;” “Vers tes hanches.”

58 “à ce point précis où l’élan et la source / Enrichissent ma langue;” “la lyre formée par les hanches […] l’emblème de l’instrument dévolu au chantre de cette divinité charnelle.”
of *Avant-Corps*, “For a name,” and it describes what one might experience in the search for a name, name at this point being equated with identity:

Calls, gossip, insults:
Labyrinth for which voice?
Minotaur or grouper:
Which name, and from where?

((Œuvres 531).\(^{59}\)

It is as if the poet would weather anything for a name, the right name. The threats could be as serious as that of a minotaur or as minor as a fish’s, and he would experience whatever ordeal necessary to solidify this name, this identity. The problem is not the threat, but the poet’s confusion. He doesn’t know which labyrinth to wander through, or which creature to stand up to—nor does he know which voice to listen for. Sénac is lost and his identity is lost with him. “For a name” is the title of the poem, and the weight of the blank spaces before those words is heavy: what would Sénac do “For a name?” And yet he thwarts his own efforts at pinning down an identity for himself— the title is subverted by its subtitle: “(from my balcony overlooking the sea)” (Œuvres 531).\(^{60}\) Will he fight a minotaur or navigate a labyrinth from his balcony? Or is he isolating himself from his own presumed failure?

The poems in *Avant-corps* are written in the late 1960s, a difficult time for Sénac. His poetic style in the book is eager and often emotionally driven, with numerous exclamation points, earnestly asked questions, and overly dramatic moments. In keeping with this hyperbolic effect, his belief in the fluidity of language between mediums is

\(^{59}\) “Appels, ragots, injures, / Labyrinthe pour quelle voix? / Minotaure ou mérou, / Quel nom, et venu d’où?”

\(^{60}\) “(de mon balcon sur la mer).”
sometimes overtly stated: “And word— / Like water’s bloodshed— / Takes, herself, the form of our bodies” (Œuvres 453). 

It is in poems like “Fatrasies” (“Salmagundi”) and “Poème à l’étal des bouchers” (“Butcher’s block poem”) that Sénac admits to the meaninglessness of words, exploring the power of meaninglessness as well as admitting to its inadequacies. In “Fatrasies” he toys with the sounds of the French words “sceau,” “seau,” “saut,” and “sot” in a list form which when spoken, all sound exactly alike (Œuvres 480). Every component of the list is followed with “Je t’invente,” “I invent you,” as if he could invent the “you” with just his words, and yet as the list progresses, those same words seem to lose all their meaning, mingling with each other and returning to the base from which they emerged: sound (Œuvres 480-81). This return of words to meaninglessness is a mechanism Sénac uses in “Poème à l’étal des bouchers” as well. It, too, is a list poem comprised almost entirely of the names of countries until, with consistent repetition, they become meaningless, placeless, but in turn, more physical. The places/meaning in both poems morph into the basic sounds with which they were created, language’s most physical of attributes, until language itself and its sound are married.

Words, syllables, body and sun “are [all] loaded with energy capable of incarnation;” they are each capable of naming (Notes sur le Corpoème 83). Sénac attempts to use his poetry to unite these otherwise disparate entities and energies into the corpoème in a search for wholeness: “More and more, poem approaches the body that he worships, until it endeavors to confuse itself with it in the corpoème” (d’Eaubonne

61 “Et le mot / Comme une effusion d’eau / Prend la forme elle-même de nos corps.”
The corpoème is meant to fuse poem and body until both are quenched and as a result, the Corps Total is born. Sénac himself isn’t always convinced of this—his methods fail as often as they might succeed. As much of his obsession with the corpoème and the Corps Total is traceable to biographical circumstances, so is both his belief in their effectiveness as well are his moments of weakness, depression, and disbelief. He is generally an impossibly optimistic man in life and in his writing. Despite his being poor and wanting much of his life and his inability to solidify his identity, “renouncement nor abandon never seized Sénac, always luminous even in pain” (de Ceccatty 10). Yet pain was certainly a significant part of his life, and it weakened his convictions.

Though he was famously optimistic, even Sénac felt the faults of his poetics. Avant-Corps was published in 1968, just five years before he would be assassinated. Though the work begins with a manifesto-like preface declaring the power of names, poetry, and language, by the end of the book weaknesses both in the theories of the corpoème and the beliefs of the poet himself become apparent. Sénac is well aware that his “want of identity, or oneness with [him]self, would be hi[s] dissolution”—it is already unraveling him (Hegel 24). He is becoming increasingly desperate and impatient in letters he writes to his friends. Much of the issue is that through the corpoème, Sénac sought to unite his hybridity. It was his goal but also the difficulty of his expression.

Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority—its rules of recognition.

(Bhabha 1884).

62 “De plus en plus, le poème s’approche du corps qu’il célèbre, jusqu’à s’efforcer de se confondre avec lui dans le corpoème.”
63 See introduction.
64 See introduction for biographical details.
65 “le renoncement, l’abandon n’ont saisi Sénac, toujours lumineux dans la douleur.”
He sought to subvert his representation, Pied-noir, bastard child, gay French-speaking Algerian, and to emboss this perspective onto the greater national Algerian identity that was attempting to shut him out. Sénac’s poetry, whether we speak of his earlier political poetics or his obsession with name and the physical world in defining his own identity, was a minor poetry in the vein of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s famous “What is a minor literature?” His problem was that of “tear[ing] a minor literature away from its own language, allowing it to challenge the language and making it follow a sober revolutionary path” (Deleuze 1780). It is the same goal as that of Bhabha’s: a minor discourse “enter[ing] upon the dominant discourse” (Bhabha 1884).

It had been a simpler situation for Sénac before the Algerian independence because he had been trying to politically subvert the then French colonial power over Algeria, its culture and its peoples, through his poetics. The situation grew increasingly more complex after the start of independence in 1962. At this point Sénac went from attempting to fight the colonialist power to fighting his own beloved country. The minor subverted the major power— became the major power through the war for independence— but Sénac found himself still a minor in his country.

He was “never officially Algerian;” he was “eternally exiled from one of the two worlds to which he belonged” (Akika 11, Dubu 183). But he chose to fight for his unofficial Algerian identity because “Algerian he was, deeply, through the knowledge of his people, of the history and the culture of Algeria, his homeland” (Déjeux 61). It is interesting to note that while he was excluded in infinite directions, Sénac also chose his

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66 “ne fut donc officiellement jamais algérien ;” “Eternellement exilé de l’un des deux mondes auquel il appartenait.”

67 “Algérien, il l’était, profondément, par la connaissance de son peuple, de l’histoire et de la culture de l’Algérie, sa patrie.”
own exile in many ways. He chose not to learn Arabic, not to be quiet about his love of colonialist French culture; he chose to leave Algeria during the war; he chose to return to it afterwards, when it was still unsafe for a man of his political and cultural views. And marginalization provides its own sense of inclusion, amongst all those who are similarly marginalized. Sénac felt connected to Frederico García Lorca and Pier Paolo Pasolini in his political exile and poetics of the marginalized. Though some argue that “Those who were born to grow up in Algeria did not choose it,” they are, simply, Algerian, whether official or not, others argue that “Sénac, he chose his homeland and his people, at his own risks and to his own peril” (Pour 33, 19).

His exile, though, ran deeper than simply a cultural exile—it was “a poetic and human exile” (Œuvres 10). He desperately wished to be a “poet of love finally reconciled with himself” (Œuvres 794). It is crucial to remember that what Sénac believed was part of “himself”—the physical forms around him, the sun, the sea, the bodies of the young Algerians on the beach, the French language, the missing father, the sound of words in your mouth, the lost identity of a pluralist Algeria. He described himself as “hungry,” his soul as “young, thirsty, hesitant, anxious” (“Lettres à André Breton” 92, “Lettre à Albert Camus 96).

The last poem in the final collection in the book is entitled “Triomphe ou dérision du nom.” It reads as follows:

You got your name; you are purified.

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68 “Sénac, lui, choisit sa patrie et son peuple, à ses risques et périls;” “Ceux qui sont nés pour grandir en Algérie ne l’ont pas choisi.”
69 “un exil poétique et humain.”
70 “faim;” “jeune, assoiffée, hésitante, anxieuse.”
And
Me
I wander:
Nomad without Jabbok,
Persecutor without Damascus,
Prophet without Medina—
Wreck.
Though it would suffice that from my drool,
At the detour of tripod, Man gets up and that I might be
Named!

(Œuvres 535).\textsuperscript{71}

There is jealousy in those first few lines, and sadness and loneliness follow. Everyone
around him seems to have a name—if only he could find his.

As far as exiles are concerned, Jean Sénac, in many ways, chose his death. He
“preferred to die amongst his friends of misfortune rather than survive on an earth where
he would feel at once a stranger and a deserter,” he chose to stay in an increasingly
dangerous land, musing about his own death in poems and letters (Temime 7).\textsuperscript{72} And
though he had all but lost his confidence in the powers of language over identity, he
remained the poet known for signing his name, even in the most difficult of times, with a
childlike drawing of the sun. “When I am dead,” he wrote, “you will place my body on
the sea… You will understand why my death is optimistic” (Le Boucher 35).\textsuperscript{73}

Through the translation of his work, a greater audience will have to ability to look
toward the sun of his poetry, and through new eyes and across changing cultures, the
search for his identity need not be in vain. Any dedicated audience, any marginalized

\textsuperscript{71} “Tu as reçu ton nom. Tu es purifié. / Et / Moi / J’erre, / Nomade sans Jabbok, / Persecuteur sans Damas, / Prophète sans Médine, / Épave. / Il suffirait pourtant que de ma bave, / Au détour d’un tripode, l’Homme se lève et que je sois / Nommé!”
\textsuperscript{72} “préféré mourir parmi ses amis d’infortune que de survivre dans une terre où il se serait senti à la fois étranger et déserteur.”
\textsuperscript{73} “Quand je serais mort […] vous mettrez mon corps sur la mer… Vous comprendrez pourquoi ma mort est optimiste.”
thinker, can find in his work a way of piecing together the parts that have every potential and energy within them to make a whole, and Jean Sénac’s death can indeed be optimistic.
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