

A winter landscape photograph showing a snow-covered ground in the foreground with dry, brown reeds. In the middle ground, there are several bare trees with intricate branch structures, some of which are leaning over a body of water. In the background, there are tall evergreen trees. The sky is overcast and grey.

# Taking Place

**Selected Poetry  
& Translations**

**Bill Jungels**



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# Taking Place

poems

all poems and translations  
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## March Snow

knows that no radiant  
uplifted face will await it  
with outstretched tongue.  
More than indifferent,  
those that went before receive it  
crusted and blackened  
with traffic. Its fate  
is just to briefly cover over  
this disgrace. Why  
does it fall so willingly, fall  
and fall through grey air  
moving towards or from a  
thousand others, tracing  
an invisible scribble  
or dance in the air that will never  
be seen. It falls  
it is in the dance heedless  
of the light or of the place  
it will rest in the crook  
of some tree or the crotch of some curb.

March, 2004

## **night drive 65 mph**

stripes of light in air  
walking towards me out of the darkness

around the edges of the old farm house  
blocking the lamp in the yard.

the landscape is de-sexed, but beautiful  
with a presence beyond genitalia.

traces, red away, yellow toward  
weighted with some answer to my question

then gone by in a breath and trembling  
of everything in which I am held.

billboard lights will pierce this diffuse presence  
and I will return to the city.

the landscape is desexed as though the body  
had withdrawn  
into the dark sea.

1995 New York State Thruway



## **Now that we see we've a thousand faces**

and no center now  
that space goes on and on and on  
now that everything that happens  
now that everything that is  
is on the Internet  
now that happiness is so many bubbles gone on the water  
if there is a God (yes, God)  
s/he is a person  
in the terms that we  
only guesss but  
once knew  
before we knew  
so much  
and this person is a lover (yes, lover)  
so that's really not over and my gangrenous heart (yes, heart)  
would rather  
loose a great celestial fart  
than give up  
by smothering  
this longing

2021

**Great  
Northern**

the rumble begins  
again in pelvis  
& chest I hear  
again the low  
moan and Bob  
Cronin and I  
flip through the back  
screen door  
to the cinder littered  
yard and the tracks  
the Great

Northern's light is swaying at the far  
curve and soon our whole bodies vibrate  
rocked by the shaking of cross ties we  
pause midway afraid to enter the sanctum  
and as the engines pass diesels whirr  
a steady hum under the pounding of coal  
load pressing steel on steel and near  
now enough to touch cars looming by one  
by one and now we run and run  
against their implacable blur long  
long long moment in which

we are still

and now they are gone and we are

small amid the Minnesota oat fields  
dotted by a few houses and barns  
and lined by the long still singing tracks

the fingers of the hand  
that writes this are  
curved with accumulation  
on the bone the back  
of the hand dotted  
with age spots like  
farm houses on the  
satellite view the pen  
then is the line of the tracks  
but even the cells  
in my bones have changed  
five times since then tell  
me Bob how  
is it then what is it  
then feels in this chest  
the same great tremble  
before the awful that  
that chest felt then

2022

## Private

*In this world, the private life is an illusion,  
Barbara. When a person  
is tortured, no one retains a private life.* (tr. author)  
- Ariel Dorfman, Konfidenz

The speech is not aimed at Chile.....  
My evaluation is that you  
are a victim of all left-wing groups around the world.  
- Henry Kissinger to Pinochet just before his address  
on human rights to the OAS

I'm not going to address the torture word.  
- Donald Rumsfeld

Soften them up.

They thought  
that they had "private parts",  
places of yearnings sealed  
in shadow that open to only  
the invited touch. Their faces,  
their eyes were in light to tell  
who they were, they thought,  
only adolescent boys  
masturbating in toilet stalls  
draw bodies without faces.  
(Cover  
her face with a hood and remove  
her clothes. Prod  
her genitals. Show her the picture  
you take.)

He thought  
that he had private feelings,  
that sealed in some chamber of the heart,  
were loyalties that could never  
be broken, whispered words  
that would forever be  
known to one person only.

(Give him  
the gun: Shoot  
your family or die with them...  
First, make him  
reveal the most intimate details  
of his life. The rest  
will come easy.)



We thought

that we had private vows,  
that deep inside there was  
at least one place - call it  
the soul, call it  
JesusBuddhaJehovahAlla,  
call it love – that could not  
be touched. Were we all wrong?

Now in the Buffalo night,  
when my hand caresses  
your breast, I always see  
them coming and crushing that hand cut-  
ting that breast. I hear them  
making me repeat every  
tender thing I ever said to you,  
or wished I'd said. I feel  
them touching us, hurting us  
wherever they like. I taste  
the foul body fluids  
that they force into my mouth. And I smell  
the swooning ether of our  
burning flesh. They break the hands of  
Victor Jara again and again  
on the stadium steps. Endlessly they machine gun  
and burn the people in their church  
in El Mozote, in Acteal, in their mosque  
in Sarayavo, in al –Aqsa, and in their synagog  
in Cologne, in Warsaw.

They do it with permission  
of men we empower.  
They do it in our name,

unless we resist.

Bill Jungels  
May, 2004

## Gages Lake, IL

The skate blades skir the ice  
of the frozen lake  
The ice thickens in the deep  
of the post Christmas winter  
Above the thickening ice, brittle wind,  
Below, still so much unfrozen,  
still currents, still springs  
strong enough to flow out of the earth, still  
bass, still glittering in the ice softened light  
Above we glide on water with  
as much abandon as so many  
Jesuses. Below  
in some deep place the  
plane and bones of the intended Sears heir.  
Do we know the touch where our  
blades ride on the ice  
Do we know the life that still finds  
oxygen in the current below  
Do we know the grimace of  
the calavero that peers from  
the cold cockpit?  
We know the brittle wind  
We know that our boat was docked there  
and just about here a boy drowned at the beach.  
We know the arcs and groves  
we have made in the ice.  
We know here where the raft sat  
the breast of the prettiest girl spilled  
from her swimsuit as she pulled herself up.  
We know the leafless trees of  
the shore and the empty cottages.  
We glide on what we know  
sustained by what we can't know.  
The skate blades skir the ice.

## Jasper

First there is the rain, a  
steady enough crackle that you  
sometimes forget about  
it. Then there are the wet  
slidings of car treads, the  
hum of the CN diesel so  
low it would almost be a  
sound of the earth like the  
mountains were moving a-  
gain. Bells bells bells bells bells bells bells bells and  
linking and unlinking slow  
motion thud and the breath punched  
out of the solar plexus. The  
horns: born, be  
born, stretched and bent and  
somewhere underneath all this  
  
the sound of the mountains

## Death Valley

In the middle of Death Valley  
Una huella  
Footprint  
In the middle of Death Valley  
Equidistant from the grey ridges  
And the red ridges  
Exactamente en el medio  
De la valle de la muerte  
At the precise lowest point  
Where all the continent whirls  
Down the drain  
A footprint  
En medio  
In the middle of Death Valley  
Where the line between the peaks  
Intersects the line around your chest  
Someone has stepped  
As though someone could step  
On geometric phantasmogora  
As exact as  $\pi$   
As elusive  
In the exact middle of Death  
Valley  
Between all colors all mountains  
All trees all waters all houses  
All objects made and unmade  
This footprint  
Which I made in a dream  
But not me  
Because it would have to be someone  
Left bleaching in the sun  
A hundred thousand years  
Surrounded by all Sequoias  
Surrounded by all flights of birds  
Surrounded by all fish  
Nevertheless  
In the middle of Death Valley  
A miracle  
A footprint  
That belongs.





**Whenever you pass through a door**

there is a little wind  
whether a welcoming flutter  
or a gasp of the pain  
of your entry

so small it is best known  
by the cloth  
that rustles on your thigh

Perhaps it is the noise  
of worlds jostling one another  
before they brace back  
against the door

Amplified, it pops a microphone  
full of empty spaces

I think it is something  
in us

automatic, autonomous  
hoarding our dark  
changing the faces

Buffalo, 197?  
revised 12/29/96

## **Thoughts in the Hen House**

Brown chicken, white chicken,  
Rooster with green and red,  
But there's something about the shape

Like little boats  
They cruise the waving grass.

Chicken shit and sawdust  
soothe the frayed brain.

Water in the bucket clearer and cooler  
For a feather floating on it.

Pick a beak full  
  raise the neck to swallow  
Drink, water, drink, water, drink, water.

There's something about the shape.

Sitting on an egg she laid  
A chicken spreads out in the hay  
Like an egg cracked in the pan.

A chicken in a spasm to lay an egg  
Looks like a pulsing human heart.

Late 1970s  
Revised 12/29/96 and 2/2004

**Falling asleep with my hand on your breast,**

your hand on mine,  
you are open,  
and a clear pool opens  
in you.

You pull me after as you  
slip into water and  
I am a waking dream of you  
gliding on still water,  
hardly moving my legs,  
moved by your motion towards the center.

After a time a pool opens  
in me and merges and  
we float  
entwined  
until morning.

2002



### **Little Amulet**

Sometimes a shadow  
in the blue bathtub  
where some old movie has  
made death sinister.

Cut off the top of a carrot.  
Look at the black ring  
where it has grown  
together with the earth.

**pienso en tu sexo**

for John Berger

*On the line by Vallejo, that I mis-translated*

think in your sex  
and the redehyed morning  
will want to start a new life with you

trees will follow you home  
on the bus from the park

the torso of a woman  
turning on the rim of a field  
will release its good rain  
and the concrete's cracks  
will break its back  
and return the earth to your feet

think in your sex  
think the curled hair of the woman  
think the hand on your lighted table  
in your sex  
and you will draw a fine line  
think typewriter  
think saltshaker  
think houseflie in your sex  
think the doorstep  
think the lilacbush  
and the car  
in your sex  
and you will be able to let them go

the snow can be known only in your sex  
as it falls in the darkened street  
the jewelweed  
mowerblade  
telephone

only your sex knows the cold  
dark of the water  
table beneath the house where you sit  
or of the tables of stars above

think in your sex and  
the small mouths farside the moon  
promise  
it will always come again  
think  
think in your sex

Buffalo, 1972

revised 12/30/96 & 2/16/05

## **Light in my eyes**

I could not rise and pull the blinds  
Sick  
so I turned

When I came back  
it was no longer in my eyes

having moved from its winter noon

but a slice of light  
smaller than a portion of cake  
or ice cream  
lay on the pillow next to me

I did not lift my eyes from it  
ever  
My mind knew it grew smaller  
but could not see  
except in the memory of moments ago

A bright point at the middle remained  
constant  
until it was not so big as my eye  
until it was thin as the rim of dirt  
under my thumbnail  
and then it became an even  
pale glow

and then my eyes were left alone

Buffalo 197?

## Plains

The closer you get to earth  
the larger the sky becomes.  
A knife slices your vision  
eye to eye. At night  
the darker of two darknesses  
vibrates up to your sex and you  
are an "X" across the line  
the only line that divides  
you. Then the immense ocean  
of softer darkness to which  
you cannot really attach  
your arms or  
any part of your body is  
by far the greater part  
of you.

There are times when lying in one of these fields, looking  
up, you become a butterfly mounted on a board. And  
that immensity you cannot touch is free to  
touch and scrutinize you all over.  
What you first want to do is roll over and  
face the earth, dig your fingers in. But you  
must not. The stars, if you lie still enough and  
long enough, will touch you and give you permission  
to draw near the darkness and know  
one moment of its life.

## **Killing the pig**

Now the hoof hangs from the raised tractor bucket  
blades fill the transept of the barn  
and shred this years straw  
to a dust which our lungs turn to gum  
The steel mallet sinks long  
into deep gelatin  
dark purple the  
fatty tissue away from light  
A sharp edge  
changes dark into water  
red in a full bucket  
carried to the house's kitchen

Then there is the scraping of the hide  
with the scalding water  
the long field leaning in on the men  
and a few children  
gathered round the cauldron  
with a carcass scratched pink

And then there is the removal of skin  
and the sorting  
and the counting  
of the intestines and the muscles  
and meat

Everything made of steel  
rests in a hammock of membrane  
Cutting edges lie still in lard

The brains are poured into a cup  
A small boy binds the snout  
to the end of an old broom handle  
to push down the gutters of the milking room

March 1972  
published "Stiver's Row" fall 1973

## **How I got religion**

Walking down the long mauve hallway  
(heels hard against  
hardness) of the  
Medical Surgical Building of the  
Buffalo Psychiatric Center.

The “clients” are lined along the wall  
for something  
to be done  
to them  
in the small rooms.

A wheeled stretcher, alone, draped  
in white sheets, against  
one wall, a head  
on the pillow  
the broom handle body,  
no doubt, beneath the sheets.

Wrinkles. Tuft of gray  
hair. Rotten teeth  
show as the head is  
singing, this woman is singing faultlessly  
from Handel’s Messiah  
the Allelujah Chorus.

## getting there

telephone pole,  
a stand of birches, hedge row,  
snow patch, elm skeleton, farmhouse, another  
telephone pole,  
the barn, roll of embankment blots  
out, sticks of dead corn return, tele-  
phone pole,  
wheat rows, one cow was  
brown, house, barn  
pole and

nothing,  
still, in a meadow with eyes closed,  
the shrill falling whistle of a cardinal.

Spring, 1970



## **Editing Documentary**

Elinor Ulman is saying  
that Miriam's cowboy is really  
a self portrait –

I juxtapose a freeze frame  
of Miriam with her cowboy  
over her shoulder

with a freeze frame of  
Elinor Ulman with Miriam  
over her shoulder

I smile  
to see me smiling  
in the glass of the Steenbeck  
viewer  
over the picture of Elinor  
Ulman and Miriam.

**Swiss Army Knife**  
to my children

you will look at the worn red plastic  
where I scratched my initials,  
see where the case cracked off  
near the white toothpick.  
when you fold out  
the small blade  
will you wonder how I broke  
off the point  
wonder if you were there, if  
you should have noticed.  
the worn blade of the awl  
nicked and dulled -  
was that punching longer  
or shorter holes  
in my belt or  
drilling holes in one of my crude  
imitation Tlingit carvings?  
For a time, the object will seem  
warm and almost  
frightening with the presence  
of my hand, the oil  
of my skin. Will it  
lose its center like all  
my objects cast adrift  
without me? Will it be able  
to tinge its aura of increasing distance  
with love?

## **Between the bundling and the separating of the grain**

In the pod of oat  
the warble of a little bird struggles

to free itself.  
My love and I examine the piles of

cut stalks.  
If the stick I prod with should,

Instead of smashing the delicate clam shells of the oats,

gently brush open their lips,  
the music would fuse my love and I in body  
together forever.

Minnesota/Baltimore

## **Though you have little respect for your body**

and would allow medical students to joke over its supposedly lifeless dissections – a generous way of acting beyond death but one that violates my constant desire to unite our two bodies – it is not that jealousy, which I admit to know in life, I expect to persist beyond. It is rather desire which, whether it continue then in some form or not, I now project beyond our two deaths and imagine our dust or ashes commingled. Your body is broken now and cannot move freely in embrace or trance. Allow me to see our two dusts dance.

## **Pool, Kincaid Stream, State of Maine**

The boulder stands in the moon  
In the water in the bend  
Of the stream between Cass's Corner  
And Skowhegan in  
Somerset County in Maine on  
The eastern part of the north  
American continent.  
Right now  
The water reflects  
No one, neither Penobscot  
Nor Pere Rasles or myself or  
My love. We are not there,  
Only the moon. But we have been there, each  
In our day. I don't know what  
the others did, only me and  
my love. They don't know what we did  
because we came after. They  
touched one another and touched  
this rock. There was  
a moment when they might  
have understood. That moment  
is gone. The moment of my love  
and I is also gone. We tried to  
bless the rock with our love  
and failed. It wasn't  
needed. The moment  
of the water has gone and  
another has come. The  
boulder stands in the moon  
between the rains of late July  
and the snow of November  
between the flood and the  
drought the cycles of the sun  
that have run since some  
glaciaer dropped it there  
and the cycles of the moon  
to come.

## **When the geese rise off the marsh**

You can't breath  
First there is the absurd flapping  
Like some 30s foley man madly  
Shaking kid leather gloves.

But  
When the geese rise off the marsh  
You cannot breathe  
You cannot suck a breath  
When the geese  
    But it isn't the geese  
It is the ground, the water  
That cries  
When the geese rise  
When the geese cry out  
It cuts you into  
One  
piece that bonds with the land  
One piece that bonds with the earth  
And the pieces that bond with the air  
And the fire of  
Their throats  
It cuts you  
When the geese rise off the marsh  
It returns you  
To the earth  
Of North America  
Before we misread it

When the geese rise off the Marsh  
It cancels all that we have written  
All that we have spoken  
It cancels our disarticulated breath

When the geese rise  
Off the marsh  
The earth and the water rise the cry  
Is theirs when  
The geese  
Rise the cries  
Of these  
Rise in  
Us annul us re  
Turn us to America  
North  
When the geese rise off the marsh.

## Moment in a continuum

I stand by the screen door  
thinking how I should follow  
holy poverty.

An empty train goes by:  
there's cars and then cars  
and then cars  
and then nothing.

**Stephen at two with the painted  
Indian mask of a donkey**

He can hold this  
bright thing  
to his face and believe  
he is changed  
because he has seen me do it.  
He can cry ee-yore ee-  
yore in a silly  
sing-song voice again  
and over again and  
the joy does not seem to go out  
of it.

                    He shall  
put it down and  
push a car or  
wander tottering through large rooms  
sampling life  
and he shall come back to it ee-  
yore ee-yore and stick  
his face to  
the side  
for us to see  
him laugh, for him  
to see our  
amazement  
that he can again be  
not a donkey. Shall wander through  
large rooms and  
climb steps  
with a child's solemn dignity, his appraisal  
of each height,  
or put up his arms to be  
carried up to be put to bed to sleep  
to wake again and be. Be ee-yore.



One day he will wake and come  
near the bed  
where we sleep  
to tell  
his hunger and we will mumble  
our powerlessness to wake till he  
will wander through  
empty rooms  
and see early slant light  
on enamel and  
pour the cold milk into a glass  
for himself. He will spread  
the few drops that spill in arabesques over  
the table top and will want it to make  
some pattern, will wander  
through empty rooms and see  
the bright mask  
on the wooden floor.

He will raise it to his face and smell  
the paper mache  
of its white inner  
layers. His lips  
will form the sound  
ee-yore  
and he will hear it echo  
in that room  
and he will peer  
through two peep  
holes at the dark furniture and the white  
walls. So hard  
it will be to lower  
the mask. Like leaving those rooms  
like leaving us sleeping in that bed forever.

## **Her**

You'd think that time  
slicing a new piece  
off the moon each night  
would leave her  
permanently broken.  
Time takes and takes  
till there's nothing left:  
bereft of her  
the sky is cold stars  
like a virgin's body  
that has just expelled  
blood and ovum.

Time stands still.

The will that makes things go  
again is the moon's.  
It grows like a mushroom  
or a belly  
that has just taken the dark  
into itself.

Bill Jungels  
Pittsburgh 196?

**From “Our History’s Inner Landscapes”**

Wedded together with our Lambretta motor scooter  
we hung on  
though I didn’t know how to control the thing  
and rolled us over  
around one of those left side curves near Birmingham,  
racked myself  
trying to start by rolling down the gravel  
  in front of the Pitti Palace,  
got our baggage sheared off  
by a passing car as we tried to U turn  
  somewhere near Soisson,  
and had a bee sting me  
in the right testicle through my pants  
  at 40 mph. approaching Paris.

The nurse at The American Hospital thought I said  
on the phone that I “had a beast in me.” What kind,  
she wanted to know.

Buffalo, circa 1974

## **For Georgiana, in sorrow**

Only a few cars now.

In the dark the motion  
of an old man across the street.  
What is happening to me?

I can't hear him on the other side  
of the window, but he keeps walking  
out of a life he never entered.

Why have I been cruel all week,  
insulted her to make  
her spirit sick? Her face just grows

clay and her eyes shudder. My face  
must look strange from out there,  
a face in a window, crumbled  
crying, a white blind behind, and

then jerked into a yawn  
by the time and the need to breathe.

Fall, 1969

## **Dark interlude**

They have something to do with violins,  
the flicking insects collected  
on these two squares of light,  
the upper windows of the old farmhouse.  
Thousands from the dark countryside,  
they strain here toward  
the bare bulb dangles  
in the center of the room;  
and only the music of their pop  
against glass and scrape  
over screens hints why;  
violins, vi-  
olins, why do they insist  
on the violins?

And when the man within  
closes his book and leaves, flick-  
ing out the light, only  
the dark face of the moon  
knows what becomes  
of them and their music?

Minnesota, 1963 revised 12/29/96  
revised 2/15/04

## A Maine August Bouquet

for Georgiana

In a Buffalo night's phosphorous  
flowers I called by name  
in the attention of summer light  
return, like hard candy in a  
clenched bag on Halloween

chocolate chip, ginger snap, jujube,  
nibs, good and plenty, flowers  
have names like this.

And most flowers are good to eat

or dried and boiled they'll wean  
the body from some mistake.

I

The first time I ever saw yarrow  
I'd already drunk its pungent  
broth to soothe my throat,  
but I couldn't know that these  
tiny freckles had such a taste.

II

Liveforever  
does, I am sure  
dried and left to hang  
brightly in the minds  
of those who have looked at you  
as I have looked at you today.

All by yourself you have made my mind  
that mud you grow upon  
and pressed your umbrel of purple, pink  
thousands of stars  
into me, making me rock  
- a lithograph of you -

III

I want to go into the jewel weed's  
small conch, but I am afraid.  
Someone is blowing on its  
hot carbon –  
touch me not.

#### IV

When the tiny white stars of the bedstraw  
stick by their tendrils to the legs  
of my pants, they are telling me  
that could I amass enough to make a mat  
for my love and I, we could float entwined  
in galaxies

but there are only a few clumps.

#### V

The turtleheads are dead  
in spite of their appearance as blossoms  
on green plants.  
Is there no one to wash the dead?  
The rain has tried and failed.

#### VI

The Canada lily hangs  
so that to look into it you must  
go near the ground and see  
the open blue sky behind  
lustering the inside cone  
like a girl's open mouth  
catching light on wet sides  
that bathe in diffuse light  
a long delicate tongue.

#### VII

Evening primrose  
is not prim at all  
though the English  
fence it in their gardens.

At home here  
you lean your scraggly yellow heads  
in both sides of the dirt road  
as I drive home  
before dark.

Your brightness opens  
to the semi darkness  
as it opens to me.

You are so friendly  
that, if I were hungry  
I would eat your roots.

### VIII

I mistook the mullein  
for one of your children  
but he grows out of himself  
more elaborately  
                                whirling  
spike after spike  
through spike  
each to droop  
                                a leaf  
until the petals bulge  
curled secret and obscene  
between the ever smaller leaves

then one at a time  
they burst  
like some delicious  
                                prolonged  
orgasm of the earth  
each a perfect innocent pansy like flower.



Can we wonder that  
the Penobscot  
would drag the smoke of your leaves  
drag those spikes  
drag swirl of smoke leaves  
growing inward  
into lungs  
seized in a tight spasm of asthma  
to open there  
your sweet release.

Some frock coated puritan  
must have named devil's paintbrush  
which I pray  
muzzle me  
in its orange and yellow fuzz

Perhaps that same puritan  
brought heal all  
which, with its purple  
intricate smallness might  
spare its name  
to stand for all flowers.

Yet

Flower  
Flow  
Flourish  
Flora

through the latin to

Floures  
    monthly  
        flow

every month of the summer  
new species

blood of the steeplebush  
flooding the late meadow

finally  
sign not so much  
        of health  
or even potency

as of our mutual  
        over  
            flow.

published in Rappot, 1976

# Translations

translations of poems by  
**Efraín Bartolomé**

Casa de los monos

### **House of the Monkeys**

Why speak  
Of the guayacán which watches over fatigue  
Or the drum of the cedar where the hatchet strikes

For what reason name the foam  
In the mouth of the Rio Lacanyá  
Mirror of the leaves      Cradle of lizards  
Source of the macabiles with astonished eyes

Perhaps this tongue will turn into an orchid,  
The singing voice of the partridge  
The snorting breath of the puma

My hand would have to be a black tarantula writing  
A thousand flocked monkeys would be my gladdened chest  
The eye of the jaguar would give itself quickly  
   skillfully with the image  
   But nothing happens      Only green silence

Then why speak

That this love fall from the tallest ceiba  
That it fly and cry and regret

That this astonishment smother itself until it turns into earth  
Aroma of jobos  
Water dog  
Leaf cover

notes:

Guayacán - broad trunked hardwood tree;  
wood used in cabinet making

Macabiles - fresh water fish of Lacondón and Guatemala

Jobo - plant of the cashew family

Leaf cover - hojarasca can also be read as “dense foliage”  
or in the special sense of “Leaf Storm” as Marquez’s  
story title is translated.

Water dog - Perro de agua can also translate as  
“poodle” or “spaniel”,  
but neither has the right resonance for us

## **Cartas desde Bonampak**

For Balam, my son

I

It's raining  
For days it's raining.

Today I awoke with a sensation of luke warm solitude.  
From my hammock I hear the even crackle of the rain.

Days ago the rubber tappers killed a large tiger: it pained me,  
But I would like to take the skin for you to sleep in.

Yesterday I went out to walk in ruins under the rain:  
One day we will be together walking among these trees,  
Contemplating these stones.

The rain makes one feel a tremulous air which gets to  
The bones and leaves momentarily

And returns

Quieter yet than before.

Give thanks to the rain.  
Thanks to the morning which advances with secretive tread,  
Thanks to the jaguar that leaves his footprint  
over the pliant earth of the forest.

Thanks to my compañera hammock, to the sky unleashed  
To my childish memory of seven months  
uprooted since your first day.

## **Bienandanza De la Lluvia**

The good fortune of the rain

Silence hurls itself down against the tulips

September rains

Night leaps over the spine of the hill Chacashib  
And rips the residues of day

I welcome you

Night of toads and crickets  
Welcome the birds that take refuge under  
the eaves of the house

The black butterflies

soul of our dead  
The rain that drums on the roof tiles  
palm trees and pools

The night spills its essence of coffee  
And memory moves in circles  
Like the wildcat in his trap

In the densest pollen of the night  
The silence coils

like a snake.



## **Jaguar**

A tactile sun

Through the intricate jungle of my nerves  
I watch him walk

Perfect son of the day and the young shadow

Soft flash:  
Silent stroller of my veins.

.

## Retorno al Chamenhá

Return to Chamenhá

“ This is the river where one day I pierced the back of fear” I told him.

“These trees, the parents of these others, the grandparents of those  
watched me pass

It was the time of the parrots.

Canchishal existed:

Densest woods of canchish bordering Chamenhá

Marsh that increased with the rain until it fulfilled its name: Dead  
Water

The silence goes out from every corner, from the thick  
Canopy of the trees, from the water crossed by the violent hoofs  
Of the horse, from the wing of the pea birds and the macaws,  
from the verdure  
Covered with leaf blanket

I swam in this river: submerged my silence in  
This green serpent’s body, in the quiet fury”

\_ Can we go papa?

The boy and I return to the path.

Animals and plants, reserved as ever, from their depths  
Recognize me.

*Pea - Chara Papán bird (Brown Jay) common from southern Texas  
to Panama along on the Atlantic side. Blueish gray with white  
underbelly. Very raucous call.*

translation of a poem by

**Nezahualcóyotl**

15th century regent

of Texcoco

## **Cheer Yourselves**

Cheer yourselves with the flowers that intoxicate,  
these here in our hands.  
Now let's put on  
the necklaces of flowers.  
Our flowers of the season of rain,  
fragrant flowers,  
now open their corollas.  
The bird flits about there,  
chatters and sings,  
comes to know the house of the gods.  
Only with our flowers  
do we cheer ourselves,  
only with our songs  
does our sadness die.  
Oh lords, with these  
your ennui dissipates.  
He who gives life invented them.  
He who invented himself  
has made them descend,  
pleasant flowers;  
with this our ennui is dissipated.

bill jungels, freely translated from the Spanish  
of Miguel León-Portilla, who translated from  
the original Náhuatl

translations of poems by  
**Juan Gelman**

## Bother

He who is bothered  
by the word *heart* should  
consult a cardiologist.  
That word, oh poets  
little connected with life,  
doesn't hear the  
whip insistent  
in the gesture of a man  
from the disaster who begs  
with a son in diapers.  
See See  
what happens in a fur-  
tive street and the silhouette  
of a shame without refuge.

## Animals

The bitterness I stepped on and that stepped on me  
is a rare animal.

It lives in  
customs of disaster.

The night that extends its fearfulness  
on one sole corner  
doesn't move in the orphans of the tongue.

The beauty of the breast  
opens its limitless (roofless)  
beehive in this suffering  
of the poor of the world.

Sing your self forgetfulness over there!

It's not allowed in this house  
of the misery of work.

Leaves that fall. Scars  
of that which never was.

## Walls

The carpet knows  
the filth that we leave fall, dust  
at times barely visible  
like the nothing that  
waits each day. From what  
are you made and your  
pains at dusk  
that the color doesn't interrupt?  
You seem a punishment  
that can't be swept away.  
You have to climb  
walls of love  
by your rungs  
and return the jewels.



## Dance

From your waist descend  
colonias from inside  
like impatient of love.  
What is this money  
that your dancing coins?  
In the hill of desire  
the sun is left over.  
Security is your beauty,  
woman that time extinguishes  
in the labyrinth of Eros where  
he is sad who doesn't know.  
To love you is necessary, to live is not.

