



DUELO [DUEL]
by Luís Quintais
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from: DUELO, 2004
[Duel]

The Map and the Territory

Boredom was the space where we waged
the battle of our lives. The teacher
talked and we didn't listen
enthralled as we were
by the time contained in our graph paper,
by our guesses and our criss-crossing shots.

Today we know (from habit or evasion)
that the metaphor is this: a blind attempt
to hit the objects floating
on the grid, battleships
that will sink, if we're adept
at drawing and reading shapes.

Most of us, however, discover
the greater difference: the map is not reality.
Reality meanders over a vast territory
for which there is no metrics,
only a dream of metrics.
The heavy shadow covers the little truth
we manage to salvage and, moving,
destroys its legacy.

You know nothing because you remember nothing.



The Dream of Language

You'll write about the subjection of animals.
But not today. Remember how the panther
still moves in the literature-free cage

it inherited. You'll remember. But not today.
Because today's the day when metaphors
awaken, the chest opens up, and language

resembles an invention in progress.
A vigil of metaphors filling up the night,
as if it and its mantle and its symbols

were covered by an eternal Saint Elmo's fire.
Today's the day when night becomes day,
when language celebrates animals

after the animals have perished
but with no trace of them surviving
in memory or in longing. Just language,

just meaning and sound echoing inside
meaning, with no possibility of a beginning
asserting itself, no possibility of an end.

You too will have to wake up
to the vigil of metaphors,
to the dream of language.

Fear

Layer on layer on layer:
the submerged remnant of your life.
Now and then
some shift, some twist, some force
that you'll know by its effect, announces
the imminent collapse.

Give what's left of your future
to that house's reinforcement.
Give it your attention and your affliction.
Give it the intelligence of your fear.

The World as Representation

"The world is my representation."
What type of image
flashes in my mind
when, at night, a dog howls
as if its flesh
were not flesh of its flesh
but a thick veil
covering its pain
and making it sharper?

I fling open a window
and pursue the trail and the rage
of that extraordinary dog,
that dog that exists somewhere
past seeing.

The night I'd ignored becomes visible,
but not that rage, that dog's absolute rage,
even though my eyes go blind
from searching, with a desperate will,
for light.



For Animals

For animals eternal Treblinka

The memory I've been given is rife with martyrdom. Mother took me by the hand. We had reached the sacrificial perimeter. The sound of chickens facing the end. Their innocent clucking. The hushed violence of exposed carcasses. Guts, the stench of screaming guts. There were stands within the perimeter calling for truth and commerce. The plump, flayed meats lightly swayed, hanging from large metal hooks. Soaked feathers littered the ground. A decapitated chicken embraced the world. Narrow furrows inside the perimeter carried off the blood to a place I imagined to be far away, as far as a faraway country. The guttural agony subsided. People were drawing their drapes for the peaceful midday meal.





From: ANGST, 2002

Flowers and Other Nameless Species

Nothing in nature has a name.
As if it were a botanical garden
with only the vaguest indications, preferably in Latin.

Linnaeus would laugh at my happy ignorance,
at this knowledge that blithely
delights in not knowing.

Colors, shapes, inebriating fragrances,
the senseless, sensation-filled vertigo of a forest,
the vegetable atmosphere of a greenhouse,

the flowers like open sex organs – are they
sex organs? – which I dive into as visitors look on.
They'd be shocked to find out that nothing in nature –

is “nature” this voluptuous game
of self-ignorance? – has a name. It's all organic essence
not found in herbariums, all disproportion,

all a dream of indecipherables slowly rotting
before this virtuous classificatory ignorance
bursting with life inside me.

translated from the Portuguese by Richard Zenith

A Certain Innocence

Birds devour the garbage.
Gluttony makes them scramble,
contriving ambushes, machinations

which the soul has no part in.
Their wings go flap flap flap
in the black plastic. You stop.

Something makes you observe.
With aphorisms you sanctify
the reasons of those who despair.

What does poetry do?
It redeems and redeems and redeems
like those wings thrashing

the black plastic, flap flap flap.
You sanctify the reasons
of those who despair,

the anguishing implications
of the imagination, the world
going out like the light

in the room of childhood,
thrashing the sumptuous plastic,
all that you turned your back on

and that doesn't demand to exist.
What does poetry do?
It redeems certain types of things

through a certain type of words a certain
type of wings flap flap flap a certain type
of desperate reasons.

