

NIGHTS THAT MAKE THE NIGHT:
SELECTED POEMS OF VICENT ANDRÉS ESTELLÉS

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~~SS~~ all changes are OK

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TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

Born in 1924 in the village of Burjassot near Valencia, Vicent Andrés Estellés grew up in a family of bakers and spent his childhood living behind a forn where bread was baked in wood-fired ovens every night. Burjassot lies in the Valencian horta, an area whose lush citrus groves and hot-blooded inhabitants were so vividly depicted by Blasco Ibáñez in novels like La barraca (The Shack). After studying journalism ~~for several years~~ ^{in 1948} in Madrid, Estellés returned to his native region, where he joined the staff of Las Provincias, a daily newspaper. He remained there until his recent retirement, working both as an editor and as the author of short poems published every day under the heading "Bon Dia." He has also contributed to the other Valencian daily, Levante. His primary vocation, however, has been literary rather than journalistic. His Complete Works (poetry) run to eight volumes at present count, and he has ^{written} published plays, children's books, and novels as well. Much of his success has been due to ~~the~~ ^{& the success} musical versions of his poems, performed and ~~recorded~~ by the actor Ovidi Montllor, the singer Maria del Mar Bonet, and others.

When Estellés brought out his first book in 1953, he was an isolated figure in the Valencian Land, a region that--although seventy-five percent of its three million inhabitants speak Catalan--had produced nothing of literary interest in that language for centuries. In the fifteenth century, Valencians had played a leading role in Catalan literature's initial golden age. Particularly notable were Joanot Martorell, whose Tirant lo Blanc (1490), a novel of sex, war, and politics in the Mediterranean, was praised by

You need rougher quotations that illustrate what you're saying.

if it's permitted
i shall evoke the days of my childhood.

i stole the trees' bounty
and devoured it in a cornfield

fiery of the hunger
The ~~savagery~~ is underlined by the verbs "stole" and "devoured."

Nonetheless, the scene is also pastoral. Estellés's child leaves the real world of his village, which he at first hears only "far off" and then not at all. In the pastoral realm of the cornfield, he plays out fantasies born of ~~hunger and frustration~~ *deprivation*, freeing himself momentarily from socially-imposed scarcities and inhibitions. The two most idyllically "Horatian" lines in the poem are placed exactly at its center, and each one is further emphasized by being printed as a separate stanza:

Does E. use this kind of colloquialism?
it was ~~very great~~ *very nice* to hang around there.

a sadness and a laziness invaded me.

These lines form a momentary point of balance between the language of ~~lustful~~ hunger that precedes them and the language of ~~gluttonous~~ *gluttonous* sexuality that follows.

gains urgency
The sexuality, like the hunger, is ~~made as ravenous as possible~~ *urgent* by the verbs ("mount each other" and "roll around"), and by the image of the two children eagerly embracing in the dirt. *from* Under the impact of desire, the everyday world blacks out entirely. Only the barking dog penetrates the poet's consciousness, and the poem's final lines underline the feeling of ~~bestiality~~ *liberation from familial & societal constraints*.

i no longer heard my father's voice.
some dog kept barking in a farmhouse.

Much of the impact of "if it's permitted" comes from its unexpected intersections of tones. These tones range from the meditative ("a sadness and a laziness invaded me") to the *sensual* colloquially direct ("and i'd take hold of your breasts--that was what i liked best").

Doesn't sound very savage.

Quote the lines - otherwise about 4 lines from w. the too little emphasis.

Climent, founder of publishing houses, magazines, theatrical groups, language schools and the like. In the past two decades, the number of Catalan-language books, plays, radio and television shows has grown enormously, while the poetic resurgence that Estellés initiated has given rise to a whole school of gifted young Valencian writers.

One of the most prolific of contemporary ~~Catalan-language~~ ^{writing in Catalan} poets,

Estellés has explored a variety of styles and voices. ~~What ties his~~

^{Underlying all his} ~~work together~~ is a set of thematic preoccupations, ~~which have been~~

^{whose essence} ~~well described by~~ Joan Fuster, ^{catches precisely:} "In their final reduction, Vicent

Andrés Estellés's themes have the elemental nakedness of everyday

life: hunger, sex, death." ~~In the same essay, Fuster goes on to~~

^{Fuster also pinpoints Estellés' development of} ~~discuss the particular form these themes took in the era after the~~

Spanish Civil War:

Love came to be what he (Estellés) says it was: furtive nooks, stifled desires, meticulous fantasies. And hunger: rationing, the black market, restrictions on electricity. Beneath the surface, in Estellés's poetry, there is a kind of fierce excitement about bread, about what he ate as a child, about the stimulating aroma of a now-starved healthiness. Like death: death was then more "death" than ever: it wasn't just one man or woman or child who died.

Hunger and ^{sex} ~~death~~ are obviously central in poems like "if it's permitted," which appears in ~~Estellés's~~ ^{This} Horatians. ~~The book's~~ title

is partly ironic: an indirect reference to the phony classicism that Franco's fascist government was pushing after the Civil War.

The reference to Horace is nonetheless a genuine one. It evokes

both the Latin poet's satires and his vivid depictions of Mediterranean

rural life. Estellés's Mediterranean landscape is at once ^{an empirical realm charged} ~~a real and~~

^{with} ~~a poetically created place, full of both brutal~~ passions and ^{residue of} ~~literary~~ fantasy.

In "if it's permitted" the poet, after a mock-ceremonious opening, plunges quickly into ^{the first of these} ~~a savage realm of primary desires:~~

Cervantes as "the best book in the world." Another important early figure was the confessional poet Ausiàs March, whose tortured personal idiom, though rooted in Provençal troubadour verse, took him far beyond that style's conventions:

Let others rejoice and celebrate holidays,
first praising God, then enjoying sports.
Let squares, streets and delectable gardens
overflow with fine tales of noble deeds
while I go out to walk among tombstones
questioning the damned as they burn in Hell;
and I know they will answer, for alone among the living
I accompany them, always, in their endless laments.

Despite the five hundred years separating Estellés from March, there are some interesting parallels--in particular their rough, caustic language and obsessive treatment of sex and death. Estellés's work also reflects the special character of Valencia: more rural, more provincial, and more passionately "southern" than Catalonia proper (the provinces of Barcelona, Girona, Lleida and Tarragona). The Valencian Land (including the provinces of Alacant, Castelló de la Plana, and Valencia) has often been called the "Catalan Andalusia." Like Andalusia itself, it was reconquered from the Moors relatively late, though by the Catalan King James the Conqueror rather than by Castilians.

With the unification of Spain under Ferdinand and Isabella, Catalan literature, which had flourished in both Barcelona and Valencia, went into a three-hundred-year decline. But while the Barcelona cultural revival dates from the mid-nineteenth century, in Valencia it has taken place in the past forty years. Estellés's role in this revival would be hard to overestimate, but much credit must also go to the folksinger Raimon; the essayist Joan Fuster, whose We, the Valencians provoked a radical shift in consciousness in his area; and the indefatigable cultural impressario Eliseu

Like the poem's several levels of awareness, its various tones of voice keep interrupting and penetrating each other. They create a complex tension between the realms of reverie and lust, poetry and hunger, classical idyll and raw reality.

If we turn from "if it's permitted" to the sequence of twenty three-line poems called "Illicit Homage to Lluís Milà" (Milà was a sixteenth-century Valencian musician and author), we can see the same sort of interpenetration of tones and motifs in a different formal context. Some of the short poems in "Illicit Homage" present moments of pure ^{energy and} beauty:

bull who runs loose through the field
green are the poplars
and there's a river nearby with singing washerwomen

Others center starkly or grotesquely on death:

after committing the murder and washing himself
he went to the movies
when the show ended they found him dead in his seat

Still others present what Fuster called the "furtive nooks, stifled desires, meticulous fantasies" of deformed sexuality:

the groom grabbed one of her breasts
he put it in his pocket
and left her forever on the corner of the avenue

Each of these passages occurs in a poem with a single tonal focus. But many of Estellés' poems are complex mixtures ~~in which these~~ motifs of ~~three do~~. In many of them, sex, nature, and death criss-cross and violate each other ~~more~~ abruptly:

he looked at her one last time
the twilight was full of pigeons and grain
they'd beheaded her

The first of the lines just quoted
In this piece the opening line is a popular literary cliché. Then the imagery suddenly shifts to a scene suggestive of Valencia's lush agricultural plenitude. But Estellés quickly cuts ^{against} through this lyrical moment with the abrupt and brutal "they'd beheaded her." In

repetition the end, the realms of sex, nature and death tend to merge, coloring each other with their normally distinct emotional charges. In "if it's permitted," we see this merger in the line "i forgot everything, night fell on me." Here the sex takes place in a cornfield and the poet's excitement is described in terms that suggest death. This deliberate blurring of boundaries is even clearer in "Illicit Homage," for the style is more elliptical and the interruptions more unexpected.

hooker

Example?

Like other poets of his generation (Gabriel Ferrater, for example), Estellés draws his poetic power from a combination of literary sources and everyday speech, with more ~~emphasis on~~ ^{of} the latter than had been customary before him. Another shift is his increased self-exposure: a willingness to reveal his private fears and obsessions in a relatively direct way. Though Estellés is often harshly irritable, he can also achieve moments of lyric transcendence. An example would be a poem like "I See from Back Porches" in Book of Exiles, which builds to a deliberately distanced vision:

there, on the other bank, on the other side of the wind.
There are girls drying their long hair
and browning their backs and their thighs and their breasts.

In the poem just quoted? Estellés's girls, ^{in the poem just quoted} however, also occupy a specific spot: those banal back porches where underclothes are hung out to dry. The poet works his way toward a moment of pure beauty through a mass of quotidian detail. He achieves this moment briefly and then loses it, as he plunges into the despairing alienation of "the air's full of bottles with messages from the shipwrecked."

Like all Catalan-language authors of his generation, Estellés began publishing at a time when his native language led a furtive, underground existence. Both Catalonia and Valencia had been on the

losing side in the Civil War, and after Franco's victory in 1939,
the use of Catalan outside the home was forbidden. People were
fined for speaking it in the streets, and offices were hung with
signs reading: "Don't bark; use the imperial language" (i.e.

✓ Castilian). Had authors like Estellés ^{acquiescence in the} ~~succumbed to their fate as~~
✓ ^{decreed} ~~defined~~ by the fascists, they would have disappeared or turned into

✓ ~~mummified~~ vestiges of a dead culture. ^{But just} The opposite, ^{has} ~~however,~~ has

occurred. Since 1952, Valencian literature has recovered a vitality
it had not possessed for many centuries ^{a vitality that combines} ~~and that has everything to~~

~~do with the mixture of whimsy~~ ^{with} ~~and high seriousness, of artistic~~
~~experimentation and love for the Mediterranean's past, and people that~~ ^{and genuine}
~~we find so brilliantly realized in Estellés's poetry.~~ ^{tradition: the very qualities}

DAVID H. ROSENTHAL

NEW YORK CITY, 1988

✓
IMMORTAL BELOVED, SLOW, . . .

Immortal beloved, slow
presence, inexorable

goddess, pure,
growing in soft

steady rain, in woodsy
memory toward days'

tangled roots.

The words
I haven't told you, trees

that fruitlessly grow,
immortal beloved,

raw

forehead against this misty
evening pane . . .

✓ [CALMCLARITY, YOU COME], . . .

Calm clarity, you come
in golden afternoon
to the leaves, down narrow
dusty lanes between tender green
hedges, you come when I
no longer hope; silent
imminence, trembling
peace, fragile crystal,
veil--barely--that a shout,
a breath, a bird . . .

[FOG'S MUTE HORSES] . . .

Fog's mute horses
rise through
evening, fog's slow
horses, down
through silence, into
words, slow horses,
vague huge
forms, slow cottony
horses, ashes,
fog, possible worlds,
what yesterday
was longed for and today
is gone, riderless
horses, fog,
fog's slow horses.

FROM THE PARIS HOTEL

IV

Of slow obstinacies, silent affairs,
fruits that fall from wagons and rot;
like one who gathers a corpse's ashes in his hands
and, undoing the stature of silence and waiting,
makes an everyday pile, vaguely adorable.
I've caused pain, evening falls beyond the sooty windows,
everyone's gone home.
I should still keep on writing slowly,
I don't know how many times, certain unique things:
water's warmth, sperm's sputum. saliva.

? ✓
Sputum = saliva

VII

The woman who sells stuff, at night, outside
a bar, a cabaret; the woman attendant
in the ladies' bathroom; the woman who
dries the dishes and leaves her three kids in bed
and goes out to do certain things at night, by the river;
and the woman who has a son and hasn't
heard from him since the war and prays to St. Anthony;
the woman who washes the coffee cups
and the woman who sweeps rooms
in this old hotel for feverish hours and couples;
the woman who irons, and the woman who sews,
the woman who shows off women,
cataloguing their graces,
patting their breasts, slapping their bottoms
and then brings in the basin and observes the copulations;
and the woman who prays for her husband's job
and her son's and daughter's; and the woman who had
a first boyfriend; and the woman who
wants to get pregnant tonight,
to have a child.

XI

A city evening, lights in windows,
wetness, a slow longing just to lie,
to wait like a stone, just to wait,
a feeling of failure in your bones,
a childish desire to be young and good,
to love, wholly, some nameless whore,
some ephemeral whore inscribed in no document,
and be tender, obsequious, and noble with her
and see her doubt all her views,
a sudden shocked gleam in her eyes,
and take her arm and stroll,
looking in store windows, and lie down together poorly,
and lie down together sadly, to feel cold and huddle together.
To persist, totally, in failure, Françoise.

XV

Maybe someone died in this bed where I lie,
 maybe these sheets momentarily
 shrouded some corpse, some poor unknown stiff
 the courts took into custody;
 maybe someone died who'd come to settle
 an affair, some business. Surely someone died
 in this bed where I lie, any old night,
 far from his home, his village, his family,
 his barnyard and geraniums, his wife and parents.
 Some teenager knelt on this bed,
 dedicating his feverish hymn to Onan.
 Someone couldn't sleep, pacing to and fro,
 worried, smoking, up all night.
 Maybe, one night, a woman gave birth,
 a baby howled, a virgin cried out,
 what they call adultery was committed.
 Maybe, in this bed, a child died.

XVIII

I see the guest, that guest who every evening
gravely descends the staircase, with an air of enormous dignity,
well dressed, and slowly approaches the comptoir
and asks, in a falsely casual tone
if anyone phoned that day. "No sir,"
they reply. And he mumbles "That's strange . . ." He walks away
and then turns and comes back and tells them:
"If anyone calls, say . . . No. ^{Have} ~~Let~~ them call back later."
Any day now
they'll buzz him and he'll be sleeping
in his room and he'll have to go down
as he is, maybe wrapped
in a sheet. He'll descend the stairs,
feet first, on four men's shoulders,
and won't ask if anyone phoned
and, who knows, perhaps--perhaps--that funereal silence
will be broken by a ring.

XIX

Mild regrets, reluctant confessions,
truces requested and truces imposed,
promises made but not kept,
things asked for and forgotten gifts,
perhaps trust and perhaps hope,
daily insistences, solicitations,
instant fervors, panics, forgettings.

XXI

Since there are children without parents and parents without children
 and girls at the movies with hands buried between
 their ^{thighs} legs, and a rosary at home
 and the foot-soldier killed in a fall from the battlements
 and the man who bakes bread and the one who carries a yardstick
 to take measurements for coffins
 and since there are streetcar drivers who work New Year's
 Eve and drains in sinks and there's
 the elevator with its dirty yellowish light waiting
 while the concierge gets drunk on wine
 and pisses down the stairwell and her daughter's scared
 and her husband's doing it with the doctor's wife
 and the terrible streetcars with their metallic clang
 and the doctor's busy cracking walnuts
 while the concierge keeps on pissing down the stairwell
 banging her tits against the doors
 and the son of the ^{lady harpist} ~~claw-lady~~ who died three days ago
 weeps and weeps and lights a candle and sticks it in
 a wine bottle and contemplates Sophia Loren
 and the Swiss girl calls down the hallway
 and the cousin follows her brandishing the candelabra
 and the girl who goes to bed earlier and earlier
 and a chill like a hand creeps up her thighs
 and for a second she thinks her ass has gotten smaller
 and the neighbors who both died of poisoning
 the other day and the woman and her daughter don't

feel like eating and whimper like rats
 and the cousin and the Swiss girl sleep brutally
 and the candelabra's burning and the bedspread's burning
 those noble cavaliers buried in cloisters
 while the concierge pisses down the stairs
 and the husband's worn out and the doctor's wife
 leaves and grabs the doctor and calls him a bastard
 and sticks him between her thighs and everything catches fire
 and the dirty pictures in the toilets
 and the skull bouncing down the steps.

THE INTERMISSION

I

Rage, vengeance,
law
Lsuits unresolved
except with daggers
cautiously poking,
deadly, through damask.

II

We stuck the candle
in that old skull;
then, kneeling on the mat,
we wept
for I don't know how many things.

III

They're like pieces,
points of glitter, panes,
bottoms of goblets, nails
pulsing on the sand
of an autumn beach.

IV

Some subjects
were forbidden;
certain watchwords
blew through the room
extinguishing the candles.

V

Fourteen colts
whinnied behind
two mares;
rustling of Botticelli's
living grove.

VI

In that tiny room
they fingered rosary beads
while the corpse
rotted in its niche
and termites gnawed the table.

VII

Trees grow
toward ever greater silence,
words, slender
shoots, crossing kingdoms
of wine and banners.

VIII

I can no longer complain
--I'm afraid--of certain things.
I can only keep
naming them
in a clearer and clearer hand.

IX

In the cloister,
beneath long tombstones
lay fourteen counts,
a prince, two marquises
and the owner of a clothing store.

X

Verses and verses.
Words and words.
I'd split
my head on a rock
if that were all.

XI

We descended
those steps, singing;
in the basement
we couldn't see; amid canticles
we ascended the steps we'd come down.

XII

An entire sunset
in the yellow of well-bred
marble,
solemn with tapestries;
lovers on a straw mat.

XIII

I'd only sing
that instant body,
tanned, two months ago,
plenitude of Santa Ponça's
irreplaceable midday.

XIV

There was also
a beached sailboat,
nitrous flowers,
hard nakedness,
such learning.

XV

Maybe it's neither
a book nor a poem.
✓ Maybe it's--barely--
a dreadful urge
to get a few things out.

XVI

There are sinister places
behind the old tapestries:
soldiers dying,
slow silent coituses,
astute exercises.

XVII

It falls like a star,
like a cool stone,
of drizzle, hard,
down all the steps,
filling the night with glass.

XVIII

Without battles,
on straw mats,
o illicit lovers,
the forbidden
you taste forbiddenness
without love, without rage.

XIX

So much hope,
so many pennants,
so many words!
We use stones
to crack olives.

XX

I write for you now,
when I no longer want
to speak or write.
But I must keep on writing;
otherwise you'll read me.

FROM THE MONOLOGUE

I

Formal as they come, with damask's
evident ~~prestige~~^{pomp}: an exclusive place of silence
--lateral conflicts of neat fabrics
sometimes colorless as they hang, unfaded.
Thus the architecture, thus the song. Strictly
formal, and refined: there's a point, imperceptible,
when it cracks up, comes apart--purified, now, its contours dissolving.

V

✓ Possibly theatrical, slowly conceived,
carefully constructed, like some^{where}place one plans
to keep silent, sit, stay, without haste or sleepiness,
now exclusively attentive to certain things,
with entire lucidity, all passion spent,
around four or five A.M.,
when the sick man has died and you still don't understand,
nor do you realize there's anything to be understood.

VI

It's not that this is no time for prayers.

It's simply that you feel good, sitting

there before it, with no more tears,

just enjoying yourself, but not enjoying yourself:

it's more precisely that you no longer desire anything--you remain,

just remain, all you want

is to stay like that--but not like that:

just to stay, with no wish to talk,

not like before, when you prayed precipitously

and named things and ^{burned} ~~singed~~ them

--naming them made them start--

stabbing them with a dagger, perhaps burning them

with a poet's or child's malice--

as if only one thing had to occur--

Resurrection of the Flesh, as if one would live

to see the day--suddenly one can't remember.

Nothing matters, or more exactly, there's nothing left.

Neither murders nor defiantly erect phalli^o

nor deaths. As if you'd arrived ahead of time

and now had to wait, nights and days and centuries,

like that, patiently, for it must begin,

must be--one doesn't know, one remains, unhurriedly,

one feels safe, perhaps unwittingly--

without formulating the thought.

bestial?
scolded?

phalluses [or oi]

VIII

Starting from certain matters there's no reason to name
 --vices, misfortunes, sins, so many things,
 passing through certain losses and stupors,
 arriving at certain conclusions,
 and admitting, finally, the establishment of an order
 different and definitive--you arrive at silence's
 innermost structure, you find that words are made of wood
 and not bone--slats and nails.

DECLARATION

The old boards
in the corridor groan.
The shadows pass
of angry poems
you decided not to write.

AUGURIES

You return, old grief,
familiar, intensely sweet,
and I can't complain.
Archaic beggars watch
over four live insomniac coals.

ENIGMA

It's raining against the windowpanes.

Nothing veils the rain.

An old sadness

unveils you--

objectified, they say.

DOCUMENT

The black cart
crossed nights and rains.
And inside farmhouses,
around the fire, they sat and listened.
But they knew it all

and kept quiet
with an ancient silence,
while the old cart,
its wheels ungreased,
breathed and creaked darkly.

It crossed centuries
like an ancient grief.
From century to century
they cautiously awaited it
behind well-bolted doors.

Like a stone.
A no longer propitious sky.
Like a stone.
The moon in mid-sky,
like a dead stone.

CANTICLE

Commend? praise?

i ^{praise}~~recommend~~ shadows
that ancient horror.

i groped the white
walls of a hostile world.

✓ in the mirror i contemplated
murders' long blood. *the long blood-smear of murder*

Commend? praise?

i ^{praise}~~recommend~~ shadows.
^{i've} ~~i~~ said it and i'll say it again.

with my touch i recalled
a still-humble world

of unceasing sorrows
of snares and dangers.

i touched a word
mother jug jasmine.

i curled up and spent
the whole night like that

keeping watch over a word
a love an instinct

a feeling of roots
painfully ancient.

FORERUNNERS?

FORERUNNERS
~~PRECEDENTS~~

devout voices uttered
respectable words

that you would have spoken
who knows how many years ago.

you recognized them.
you tried in vain

to cram grief and fear
inside them.

they would wait for you
forever.

they were born
just to wait.

heads nodded
familiarily.

if you try to get it open
you can't find the lock.

or you fumble in your pockets
for another key.

centuries have passed;
everything's still the same.

water fell, it's raining
cats and dogs.

WINTER

You saw dusk's
high windows,
its flaming panes.
You saw poor lovers
returning home.

OUR PATH'S LIKE A KIND OF CURB...

Our path's like a kind of curb.

In vain we try to walk side by side

for we can only go forward one at a time.

It's so rough that our feet are torn.

The pain rises to our throats.

Our hearts are raw as our feet.

~~Angrily~~ ^{Angrily}, we ~~experience~~ ^{have our} moments of tenderness;
~~tenderly~~ ^{tender}, we often despise one another.

NIGHTS THAT MAKE THE NIGHT

I

Night is my kingdom. I have a tremendous urge
to write at night, to read at night,
to think at night, to weep at night,
to lie down, to slowly cease to exist
sinking, thus, in my habitual shipwreck.
I write last words, startling, unexpected,
hot and sudden, with a dread of falling
into irreparable forgetfulness of this and that
as I drown, sink into
sleep, into that tiny non-being
and I write and write and write, then send
swift shipwrecked bottles,
swift shipwrecked messages,
longing for svelte and peaceful beaches, for
any[#] place I'll never see.
Swiftly I write, make a will
listing whatever might come in handy,
and I experience a tender cartographic yearning,
I jot down the location
of my body, my heart at the moment of shipwreck;
all I do is send messages and bottles,
toss things into the sea, sometimes with a clear
wish to be an anchor, which I don't always admit.
The night is my kingdom, my sea, the last
instant of my shipwreck, I write as salt

(no #)

and waves fill my lungs, all of me,
 ✓ while the bitterness of shipwreck ~~chews~~ ^{gnaws eat's away} at my flesh.
 Then I go down as gracefully as I can,
 I cover my body with a sheet,
 carefully position my head on the pillow,
 carelessly flick off the light and pray
 with open eyes; finally I understand that everything's
 impossible, and I close my eyes, I close them,
 and I'm gnawed--minutes later--by some fishes
 gnawing my eyeballs, my body and head,
 nightly implacable fish that
 besiege me daily as I come and go,
 ✓ as I do this and that, and at night emerge from
 inconceivable places and gnaw me, gnaw
 my heels, my eyes, my belly and back . . .

II

Now I'd like to write a nice poem
and talk about certain things you still can find that are nice
in my opinion, or according to the neighbor next door.
I want to be nice, today I want to say nice things.
I'd go through the whole house on my knees
looking for nice things, praying that today I'd be given
certain things that were really nice.
I've gotten out of the habit of nice things;
everyone knows what the things of this world are . . .
I've lost the habit, I don't know where I left them,
maybe at the café, maybe on a bench
by some promenade, it's possible, it's possible . . .
How ~~can~~^{should} I know? But now it's night
and frankly it's no time to go out searching
for nice things, gentle things, nice things
precisely. The café's closed now,
the promenade is dark, you can find certain women
who want certain things, I'm tired, I'm not in the mood
to do anything, it's better to go to bed,
tomorrow'll be another day and by then I'll be over
this desire, this flaming mania
for nice things that's suddenly come over me.
That's suddenly come over me. I mean: that's come to me.

FROM BOOK OF EXILES

I: 10

Mud, rain, wind, muddy streets,
water, water streaming from rooftops;
muddy streets, muddy shoes,
fog, the village and that gash in a tree trunk.
Mud, rain, mud, wet things.

new section?

I: 17

There's the clanking of iron, smoke-blackened facades,
walls with names and obscene graffiti,
sinister ropes swaying down the stairwell,
the smell of frying oil, hotels that rent by the hour,
a redhead's splendid buttocks.
And then streetcars, coins to drop in telephones.
And more: the dining room, sad warrens,
sad back porches, sad copper wires,
a sensation of rubble, of fragments,
the sardine-bucket down there by the door.
And more: the landing,
ardent lovers, pale and sweaty,
and the light, the yellowish light, and bleach, the wash basin,
bleach with a week's dirty clothes,
thick, the conjugal smell of salt.
And a neighborhood of iron, of whistles, of smoke.
And the vacant lot, the lot with sad domestic,
daily remains, a shoe,
used cotton, orange peels,
potato skins and amorous memories,
pieces of tin, glass, a handle from a jug,
the bottom of a smashed goblet, part of a comb, a hunk of iron,
things delicate and sad, funereal.
And the silence of women on their way to market
and beds to be put away with greasy, thin
sheets and thing in sinks,
plates, spoons, pots, and the sun, that seems to belong somewhere else.

I: 19

I know it all. Each day I know
everything I must do, everything I mustn't do.
Amid torn standards, clouds of dust,
amid failure and waiting, the wood on station
benches with rubble worn smooth
by use, ^hin_^scriptions cut with knives,
hearts pierced by arrows, black fingernails,
dreadful adjectives, the smell of undershirts.

new section?
II:2

Now the river, certainly, which can be sensed.

Now the trees, suddenly. First come the trees;

with the trees, the wind; then, in the background, a stretch
of wall; then you start to sense the river.

They lit a fire for us; we ate lunch; then

we slept. The woman told us it was time. Time.

The train whistles; it passes through vineyards, countless vineyards,
cold, solitude, a vast winter evening.

new Section?
III: I

Full of remorse, my head between my knees,
I want to weep and can't. I feel mortal hatred
and great pity for everything I hate.
I know I should weep, filled with remorse.
Bathsheba! Bathsheba! Lime on a terrace,
exalted, that day, to the power of salt . . .

how section? III:4

I see from back porches--domestic back porches
where family affairs are neatly displayed,
conjugal affairs, hygienic things,
and this with the clothesline's trembling syntax--,
I see from back porches, where starch is exalted
my pure Country, my only Country,
there, on the other bank, on the other side of the wind.
There are girls drying their long hair
and browning their backs and their thighs and their breasts.
The air's full of bottles with messages from the shipwrecked.

I HAVE FOUR DAUGHTERS LORD, . . .

i have four daughters lord you don't know what that means in times like these. i tried to bring them up as best i could. i'm a widow. my husband died right after the war; he couldn't get over losing it. he left me and my daughters all alone. we had to get out of our village with just the clothes on our backs before they made our lives absolutely impossible. i was used to big farmhouses with barnyards and lemon trees and if they're fixed up right some geraniums and jasmine. i wasn't made to live in an apartment like this. my daughters grew up. i could feel them slipping away, how life swept them off to dance be kissed and fondled by the river to have their bellies swell up to know delight and humiliation. all i could do was wait up for them every night, one by one, behind these windows this balcony in a corner of the dining room. i saw night fall. i saw those sinister grieving violins. my heart grew wrinkled. old prayers came back to me, fragments from the sermons of ^(?) organyà. they came home one by one, the first so tired she didn't say a word and collapsed on her bed with all her clothes on. then another with ~~red~~ ^{flushed} cheeks. then a third who headed straight for the bathroom and i heard that mysterious rush of water in the bidet. then the other. i'm here and still see them from this spot you allotted me Lord, i see them come home from this corner of the dining room i see them come through vacant lots through the darkness while those sinister grieving violins float above my brain.

Maybe because I felt good on the terrace,
 I've tried to think, to see, to look,
 to see something in particular.
 I saw lights on a car crossing an avenue.
 I started writing. I think of a river, a slow river,
 a river full of big leaves, a broad river, very long,
 and wooded banks, tall and green,
 an old, slow vessel, dirty, painted white,
 and great stillness, silence, an enormous sun.
 A nun takes a flock of orphans for a walk;
 a man, leaning on a bicycle,
 chats with an opulent, red-headed girl.

ILLICIT HOMAGE TO LLUÍS MILÀ

To Francesc Brines
mas tendrán sentido
QUEVEDO

1

it's spring
joyous you outstripped nude
the water's trees

2

blackhaired myrtle
through the water returned a hawk from lisbon
o moon moon moon

3

your body was gold
children's voices in the square
it was water

4

roughly he grabbed her hair
he dragged her along the floor toward the bed
the breeze rustled a curtain

5

her breasts were just emerging
she didn't dare look at them
like traffic lights

6

he looked at her one last time
the twilight was full of doves and grain
they'd beheaded her

7

the moonlight came in from the balcony
it sat down on the bed
and slowly took off its stockings

8

bull who runs loose through the field bull
green are the poplars
and there's a river nearby with singing washerwomen

9

don't go in the tavern
streetcars pass full of people
beneath an umbrella two lovers kiss on the mouth

10

intensely green trees trees o trees
a fountain is heard among the leaves
under the bed your red high-heeled shoes

11

you spilled onto the floor
there was a basket of oranges on the table
we loved to listen to mozart with the window open

12

the tango rose through her legs
it pinched her bellybutton
water streamed from her breasts

13

the goldfinch was singing o mother how the goldfinch sang
the children whipped up the soap into lather
the bread fell in breadbaskets

14

the groom grabbed one of her breasts
he put it in his pocket
and left her forever on the corner of the avenue

15

up the wooden stairs up those stairs
the drunk was climbing carrying sailors' stories
the steps echoed like empty coffins

16

the logs came down the river
lovely was life lovely and very laudable the parson knew
taller than wheat the poppies burst forth

17

after committing the murder and washing himself
he went out to the movies
when the show ended they found him dead in his seat

18

sitting on the rug they passed the guitar
sweetly they strummed it they sang and rocked it
she unbuttoned her blouse for the five and gave her breast

19

alone in the house
she took off her shoes and socks and went barefoot
life's crazy sapling

20

she ironed in front of the window
falsely recalling an adolescence
he was a carpenter by trade

CROSSING THE NIGHT

Translate

Tant que no sai qui m'ajut en aquest cas

--Jordi de Sant Jordi

The third-class carriage crossed the night,
dirty night of esparto grass, la Mancha's vast night,
sacks between legs, wooden suitcases.
The squalid light burned all night long
in that car's squalid passageway,
a light the color of piss.
Men peddled knives from Albacete;
hoarse voices asked for water.
Hot water dripped from the locomotives.
Bulks stood amid shadows in stations.
Lands of night, vast empty land.
A wooden train with piss-colored lights chugged through it.
In Chinchilla, two by two, the prisoners climbed aboard,
their wrists bound together with pieces of rope,
thousand-day beards on their yellow faces.
Those squalid trains crossed the night,
third-class carriages, night of esparto grass.
Standing between two cars, you pissed off the platform.
Moans of love could be heard in the washroom.
The safe-conduct--if I remember--cost six quinzets.

some young people from palmar came to see me.

we're going to have a valencian week and we'd like you
to give a talk.

what day? august 5th.

it's fine with me.

before them it was a student from almàssera.

sunday we're getting together at porta coeli.

could you say a few words?

it's fine with me. do you have a permit?

we've applied for one.

next came a couple from sueca.

we're going to celebrate 500 years of printed
books in valencia and we'd like you to read some
poems.

it's fine with me. but

you'll have to submit the poems

in catalan and accurate castilian translations
to the authorities.

we'll take care of it. the reading'll be may 20th.

it's fine with me.

alpera calls from alacant.

vicent, can you come on the 12th? sure i'll come.

there'll be a bunch of your friends. you can read some
poems, whichever you'd like.

no, listen pal. you'll have to submit them in duplicate
to the authorities:

catalan and castilian.

ah, yes, of course. we'll take care of it.

the 12th? the 12th.

see you then. thanks. don't mention it.

FROM HORATIANS

For Eliseu Climent i Rosa

I

there's nothing i like as much
as garlanding roast peppers
with virgin olive oil.

then i sing happily, i talk to the oil, to the fruits of the earth.

i love roast peppers
--not too roasted, that ruins them--
but with the inside easy to get at
when you lift off the burnt skin.

i spread them on the plate in an exciting sequence
and garland them with oil and a pinch of salt
and i dunk lots of bread,
as the poor people do,
in the oil mixed with salt and flavored by the roast peppers.

then i pick up a bit of pepper
and a bit of bread between my thumb
and my index finger, i raise them avidly,
eucharistically,
i stare at them in the air.
sometimes i reach a point of ecstasy, of orgasm.

i close my eyes and gulp down the motherfucker.

VII

i've never been afraid of death.
it's a fear i've never felt.
i've accepted in silence, without
writing elegies or necrologies,
the deaths of relatives
and friends. with the grave, mystery opened
its meanings. and i kept on, i went back to the streets.

an appearance of life.

i've never been afraid of death.

but now it bothers me.

i think about it sometimes, though not dramatically.

like hearing the wind in the buds, like someone who notices his
eyes fill with tears while he's reading,

like someone who one day looks at his wife naked, worn out by childbirths.

what will remain of us all?

i'd trade everything for one fragment by sappho.

how will they see us?

maybe i'll be a roman clown.

XV

if it's permitted

i shall evoke the days of my childhood.

i stole the trees' bounty

and devoured it in a cornfield

as cool as a wine cellar in those days.

and i heard far off, through the streets of my village,

my father's voice selling fish and calling the women.

it was ~~real~~ ^{wonderful} nice to hang around there.

a sadness and a laziness invaded me.

sometimes you'd come

and i'd take hold of your breasts--that was what i liked best--

we'd mount each other and roll around in the plowed field.

i forgot everything then, night fell on me.

i no longer heard my father's voice.

some dog kept barking in a farmhouse.

XIX

this caress of yours
 in our bed's nocturnal intimacy,
 which countless women, at the same time, are probably executing,
 sometimes seems created by you
 just for me.

XXXV

i like, in the early morning, to dig in my garden:
chard, lettuce, radishes, tomatoes;
with slow bucketfuls, i water the short furrows.
i pull up weeds.

today the newspaper said men had landed on the moon;
bent over the furrow, i turned to look up at it,
i couldn't see a thing and went back to work.

XXXVIII

i spent the afternoon and the ev^ening drinking.

the wine inflamed desire, benign memories.

when i got into bed, i tried
to execute a coitus like the ones i'd remembered
but the wine, which inflamed my desire, also doused my potency.

six or seven times you cursed me.

finally i fell asleep while you tried to wake me up.

i can't imagine how you must have resolved it.

XLI

i lit a bonfire on the mountaintop.
 night came in like a ship.
 slowly the fire went out.
 now it's night on the mountain
 and a fire still glows in the ashes.
 i look at the firmament, i listen to
 the night's small rustlings, memories
 return, a dog barks
 somewhere. i'm ignorant
 of many things, the moon rises,
 as in a certain elegy by ovid.
 i evoke a few friends, fates
 utterly diverse. our time:
 how will it be remembered?
 how will they judge it?

i slowly return from the mountaintop to my house.

XLV

the sea painfully rocks the ships in the harbor;
their anatomy creaks.

light and smoke come from taverns
where people eat meat and drink wine.
a couple comes out with their arms around each other,
they share a long kiss
and go off down the street.
they'll lie down in the shadow of some vessel and do it.
shouts and out-of-tune singing come from the tavern.

tomorrow first thing in the morning we'll set out
a sailor tells me.

somewhere a pony whinnies.

LIV

my cousin came by today
with a record by raimon.

raimon sang
and the stone and the wind sang.

i squeezed isabel's hand.

when the record ended
my cousin was full of joy,
isabel and i were crying.

when will the gods or whoever put an end
to this situation.

i could rip out the walls.
isabel went in the kitchen

and brought me a glass of water.

LV

the night rises like one of sappho's hymns.
i've talked a lot with my father.
often i recall those silences too
that swelled naturally, like a tranquil pregnancy.
i've talked to him about all the things
a person talks about with a good friend.
my father was my best friend,
without ever ceasing, however, to be
my father. there was no rigidity
in our varied daily relationship.
i think this was shown by
my adolescence. ovid's pleasant
drivel amused me, the poor guy,
scandalizing even the kindest
gods, but i couldn't
do it, i still felt some last twinge of shame.
my father worried about
my health. maybe the fatherland
or caesar or western civilization would need me
some day; i had to be
ready just in case. i've
had girlfriends and mistresses. i never
thought of getting married and becoming
a peaceful husband, a prudent paterfamilias
like so many men i see. when my father
died, i went on living like
before. maybe i wrote better or drank

more or went in more for the pleasures
of the bed. now i think i could have made
some compatriot happy by discreetly
dedicating a poem to her, giving her
a child, strolling with her beside
the sea, the wheat fields, the vineyards.
i'm about to get sad. at dusk
my eyes glisten. i always wait for
my father's return or
maybe my return home to him
to eat some cracked olives
a bit of cheese some
almonds a glass of wine
a little of each
nothing at all
polished off
in silence
he
and
i.

WITH BEFUDDLED, HALTING STEPS, LIKE A DRUNK'S...

With befuddled, halting steps, like a drunk's,
I think of, I see myself on certain stinging streets,
stumbling toward the street, the house where you live:
I see and pity myself, yet I can do nothing
but shut my eyes in recndite terror,
cravenly burying my face in the pillow
just as I trip and fall between the wheels.

MAJORCA

Muggy heat, fig trees,
 women in black who
 briefly raise their heads
 and stare into the distance;
 hats of woven palm fronds,
 cracked earth,
 ants. Days
 went by, steps of
 tired wood that time
 and years extenuate. *will more.*

SONG

I shut the door
and lock it. I listen
to rising murmurs.
In the dark, in silence,
I await a unique moment.

A unique moment.
I've bolted the door.
Everyone respects
this worthy silence,
which prepares me for the other.

The other silence,
that greedy profit.
Like a stone,
somewhere, immobile,
I wait only for this.

The sea, nocturnal,
old water beast,
returns, ^{seamed} ~~with seams~~
^{like} ~~as if~~ of ancient clay, *seamed and cracked
like ancient clay*
confused regrets.

#

PERHAPS THEY'RE . . .

Perhaps they're

unexpected demands,

or even more:

✓ what^{ever}, ancestral, asks for

✓ understanding ^{and} ~~or~~ forgiveness.

It never finds them.

Nocturnal, fraudulent, it returns.

The enigma, already posed,

will never be resolved.

It will last for centuries.

THAT MERMAID CAME--THE ONE WHO COMES EVERY FRIDAY--

that mermaid came--the one who comes every friday--

? ✓ her breasts ^{hardly concealed by} slipped ^{tiny} through her ~~little~~ hands
which could only hold a few tears.

? ^{Savage} a dark bailiff from sueca had raped her
one saturday night, sheltered between two waves.
weeping, she showed the gash he had made.

is life possible under these circumstances?

i beg you to tell me, you who know geometry.

i've written letters to all kinds of people but no one replies.

FLERIDA

translate

Los qui amau, preneu aquesta cendra.

--Roís de Corella

On

Certain nights, in the dark, that sad blind man appears
at the head of your bed and touches, with trembling hands,
with numb hands, a blind man's hands, hesitant, your body,
as though trying to ~~recognize~~ ^{recall} an old delight,
while you, meanwhile, keep silent in your marriage bed,
your eyes, full of tears, wide-open in the dark.

The hands persist, stiffly and fruitlessly.

In the dining room, on your modest table,
stand the remains of a supper. Your children must be sleeping;
your husband sleeps beside you.

The blind man mutters a name, your name, and you keep quiet;
muttered and bitten into, your name sears the air.

As the first light seeps through the cracks,
that blindman leaves, shuffles down the hall,
groping his way, bitter, along the city's biblical walls.

[BRIGHT SAILBOATS] . . .

Bright sailboats
of midday!

What an urge
to live on!
And yet . . .

Children's voices
call me. I listen.
But don't speak.

Flickering
breezes, flickering
innocence.

Life, I adore
you!

I look at my hands,
empty.