

LUCIENNE STASSAERT

Between water and wind

For Régine and Anouk

1. TURNING MOMENTS
(travel impressions)

Autumn leaves swirl
away in the light
of headlights

Much white noise in between
and few words
to say just something –

Noise within and without
at which the silence
at certain moments
achieves top speed.

On waking
in the familiar
unknown

The thought
that life
is detoxification

The one face
and the other
a rearview mirror –

No longer able to be grasped
is what disappears there
before you cut

words into ribbons
as usual
point to the map:

Where to
what for
today

Is it your body
is it not your body
that rants and raves
like a polishing wheel

Just as time ticks
in a village centre
when the moon
brushes past church windows

Leaded apostles
holding their tongues in unison
if this is sleeping or waking

So do spirits, ready
to disrupt from their settings,
bring middle ages perpendicular
in the vizier

Years that rise up
after new revelations
in a emptiness, black in duration

The shimmering
on the high sea
of a copper-red sun
a vibrato –

Over there
the rising
of the other one
a sea of flame

And between the two
flashes of light
as if the sea
has just given birth –

The sun climbs on
unprecedented
the whooshing
afterwards

In once again so much distance.

Hotels on the bow-shot
of the shore
foretell the ossifying
of land and sand.

Street children
light a fire there at dusk
and dance elatedly
round it.

As long as the light
still refuses to become night
Spain comes for a moment
on the screen –

Crickets only begin
to chirp
after that turning moment.

Desert
non-reflecting expanse
of multiplication

Wind sings here
in the blackness
of the night

Whirls out
whirls around
camels sunk in the sand –

The echo
of a subterranean spring
unsoundable, ungrounded.

Desert
sand-mirror
to slake the heat.

In El Oued
faith is interlarded
with silence

A treacherous
chill the night
that in an instant drops

into the lap
of a dumbstruck
hamlet –

Just strew sand
on the hours
halt the images

Which today you
wanted to catch sight of
or rather not:

The blood-warm
throat-slit sheep
in an alley

A turning point
so as not
to lose yourself

In narrow passages
where men-folk
lie in wait

A tinge of lasciviousness
still juggles
in their gesturing

Until the muezzin
calls out the prayer
in the time of Allah.

According as the sun
smokes out your memory
what ferments

inside such a den
becomes in time
no longer unimaginable.

The past too
stretches farther out
than now –

Just admit it.
Just admit everything
in the course of the light

Nothing else any more
than land in sight.

On board
the creaking groaning
before the mooring –

Change distances from
wave trough to a row of houses
and no instrument
to plumb the depths

With a god-indicator:
therefore initial hesitation.

2. NIGHT SCENES

She only lets herself
be heard
when the stage
is in darkness

Leaps up after the stroke
of the gong from my memory
putting me
on a false track

Whether this is my past
in the sound of
a noise-nightmare –

It is her perhaps
or am I hearing him
dreaming aloud
in an earlier sequence.

The nesting-place is known:
here death lays her eggs
in this room, aseptic fall

For some terminal patient
or other –

An aeronaut
who keeps on descending
stamping against clouds

And who disappears from sight
when she bursts open in him.

About this time
I would like
to ask Charon:
take me to the underworld.

Father stands
waiting for me there
with a sealed face.

This time we play dumb
until the ice is broken
until words flow open again
like you and I.

Fields of light at the edge of vision.
I have to go there, break the ice
that preserves them, lets them glide through deeper.

It is likely that they will
touch each other as if by chance.
A dull thud then puts me on the track
of their sunken, false weight.

More than a picture
in which to spend the night
trees leave
someone behind
in search of words
to spend the winter.

Thus a blood-oak brings
me to safety
a summer tree
without a clogging gash
which keeps all its sap
still and in motion
in vaulted branches
like music by Bach.

At night it casts
off shadows
lets its wide-ringed wood
glimmer
in organ notes
towards heaven-far light.

3. BARK CANKER

The cycle BARK CANKER, with trees as the main theme, is based on photographs by Régine Ganzevoort.

I am in an in-between phase
with wounds showing their colours
open on a rough rind

Although young strands of ivy
in a sudden
upsurge further up –

Deceptive now and again is
the echo at the top
of time that unremittingly

Squeaks in my sound-grooves.

Too white to be looked at
my trunk retains
the appearance of a new moon

Present in a scar
that reveals
what a pruning knife is.

The loss is gradually crusted.
What attracts shadow, like a spirit,
is on its way to my ending.

Already half-split
is my shield of age.
Lumps press me
out of my canopy

Where everything that is ready
for dumbness
draws veined punctuation marks
on a parchment half.

One day this one
takes in the other
like a hardened freebooter

From now on I lie ripped
open as after a gestation.
A trident bursts off me.

It lights me out and brings on
labour. Light licks
the putrefaction from my burns.

My bark peels badly.
Time rattles in my heaviness
like a ventriloquist.

He portrays a late afterbirth
of what I wore, bore,
bares the core of hard winters.

But in summer, in fresh shade
of tight-packed leaves
he spans the crown. High in the wind

He creaks as never before.
Death is a breakwater.

Who unyokes me as a bull
a maimed paternal beast
shifts her secret stirrings

to me, setting in me
in bloody bruises and curvatures.

A blowhole is now my beginning –
There she impressed upon me
how hot the lap of the earth is.

She ferments like a boiling spring.

The livors, warty excrescences,
call up nubs of pain
eyes like potter's wheels
in a blind face.

So does wound fever
fester out in pruning cuts before
I begin the death struggle
as a mildewed god.

Death buds
in all my gashes

Springs ashen from my skin
and lets itself be known, named,
heard.

I split out of my past.
It bursts out green

Lets itself soften
in all green, parasitic growth.

Read me as water.
Read the swelling
of my veins
now that leaf-moss creeps up on
me
like a final childhood illness.

Read the white
between the silence
how the wind
speaks in drum language
in bone-dry hollows.

Read me as a testament.

4. WHO ELSE ARE YOU THAN SOMEONE UNKNOWN *an ode to Stanisława Przybyszewska*

The cycle WHO ELSE ARE YOU THAN SOMEONE UNKNOWN is an ode to Stanisława Przybyszewska (1901-35). As an illegitimate child of the then famous Stanislas Przybyszewski, Stanisława bore the name of her mother Aniela Pajak until 1914. It was not until 1919 that she became better acquainted with her father, who advised her to take morphine for creative purposes. Her interest in the French Revolution – the real main theme of her modest oeuvre – resulted in 1929 in the masterly play ‘The Danton Affair’. A film version of it was made in 1975 by no less than the Polish film director A. Wajda. It was also i.a. performed as ‘The Danton Affair’ by The Royal Shakespeare Company in 1986. During the last eight years of her life, Stanisława lived in a shed belonging to the Polish Grammar School in Danzig (Gdansk), where her husband, the artist Jan Panienski, had been a teacher until his sudden death in 1925.

The wide-open eyes
in the face
of a castrated apostle

That close-cropped hair
black and white identity card
betray your self-containment
Stanislawa Przybyszewska.

The fear is within
the harvest over
now that you, without batting an eyelid,
wait for a final blinding.

In shed number 12
you go into hiding
for the rest of your future

So as to set right
the holy fire
of the French Revolution.

There you learn Robespierre
by heart or
how a pure passion

intensifies the notion
of passing through life
as a spirit.

Who else are you than someone unknown.

It sometimes occurs to you
how many voices
morphine allows to speak.

So no one puts
you on the track
of the planetary motion

In your consciousness –
no one else
to be added.

Once more you reach for your violin
look for, as before, the right note
during the singing, sinking, soaring

Until you hear them, one by one, burst
all those disowned bonds and that
which wanted to go on quivering in you

At the end of a diffuse pleasure
between hovering and living, and God.

He could not even
look inside you
as in the eyes of a child
that was to chide him one day.

And you discovered him too late.
You could not keep them apart any more:
the father, the lover, the man
who took you on his lap

Two or three times, and then no more.

He only really began to exist for you
in the prolongation of his obsessive language.
From then on you held a father of printed letters
by the hand, crept inside his skin and

Again with him in bed. The true Stanislas
still had a semblance of Przybyszewski about
him
in a hotel room in Gdansk
where you could taste the ripe fruit of his love

And the charms of morphine.

Time to weigh up his words,
the offprint of his imagination.
You read dead letters in it,
heartrot, shrivelled memories.

The many letters
so as to be mentioned

When you want to
spend the night
on paper with someone:

A time-signal
destined for your writing drawer
and you who

remain in life
poste restante
between the lines

Your shadow blown up
by blue cold
and late hunger.

I read that you knew nothing
else but thirst.

No more words tonight
and no morphine
to lull your fear.

Look: father's sitting
in Lucifer's lap.
Another jerk, and he is gone.

A stroke, and you are hardly
aware of a heart
that scares you with its beating

As if someone wants to force a way in
who weighs more than loneliness.

And you drift off.
Your voice closes up
although your mother hears
what you are missing.

Mother, how far off is it still
before I receive my ration of life,
the kiss which you have denied me

When you died
on a day
when I learned to
spell the word orphan.

Mother, how late will it be
before I become a native
of your world.

Here a dead march sooner or later will sound
keeping step with Nazism
for Jews of flesh and blood.
Tell me: how do I escape this narrow cell.

There is no emergency exit
for your cat. She has been wailing
herself hoarse for hours already

And you are becoming whiter, lie suspiciously
furled like a flag.
You're still there and yet no longer there.

Whoever looks inside
through the window
is nonplussed by

your sunkenness and hurries
towards the remains
of what you were. In broad daylight

You lie floating on the light
that now takes pity on you
and has completely unchecked you.

