

Femispheres

Also by Anamaria Crowe Serrano

Dall'altra parte

The interpreter

Paso Doble

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Femispheres

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Femispheres

For my wonderful children, Rachael and Michael
(a mis hijos encantadores, Raquel y Miguel)

Fireside story wood

Rainwords dropping leafless whispers
on the bark of a Lithuanian tree
 felled forest histories
 silver-laced in the rough silence of a snapshot.

The way a trunk insinuates a tree, the oneness
of our eyes, a touch.

 Me here.

 You there

amongst symbols – a blade of grass, a fairy twig,
shuttered bark flung back.

My room peers into the forest and I am the invisible
roots at your feet.

Mulling this tree, it slowly finds its former fullness
and motion on my wall
the feathered thought that carries it beyond image.
A murmuring of its voices
returns through the naked wood:

 this scarred grain is not a picture
 it is the wounds of a living poem

beyond the shy

 hand

 that clicks unutterable words

Mid-morning meditation

Unable to concentrate on work
suffering an internal knot
over characters and plot – I leave the desk
and the mini mounds of sawdust
vigorously mounting under it.
Woodworm. There is woodworm everywhere.
The house is being slowly eaten alive.
Sometimes it moans. Just a quiet creak
not intending to disturb, accepting
maybe even glad to be so relished.

Unable to concentrate on work
I hang my hair out the open window
spill it all out on the terrace
to get tangled in a dying witch
hazel in a cracked pot.
An ant zigzags across the tiles
an ant without a colony. Unemployed.
An old church pew pulls away
from its joints. It, too, is cracking along the grain
for lack of pious buttocks and bony knees
lack of feet and elbows to scuff it ardently
whispering the worn mantras of the world.
The ant is lost, the pew misplaced.
There is no God.
Pots crack. Beams threaten to give
and kill me in my sleep.
Hazelnuts in groves are going to waste.
The grapes are not yet ripe.
This is the sum of life to date.
It is a blessed day.

All things new

The energy – I hadn't noticed the energy
of your birth
your red face squeezing itself
out of breath – vitality
leading to the incessant questioning
that is all you
sucking, sponge-like, everything
from the birth passage on –
the ecstasy of discovery.
And now that you are gone,
this child's awe behind me
on a flight to Rome, squealing
with delight, rapture at every
movement of the plane
makes me want to cry
at unexpected joy.

Green moments

the green moments of the day
have a sixth sense –
a distant space that quietly embraces
grassy ground, clinging
without thinking.

Wood lice and earwigs find a softness
in its stones that makes them
light, so light you could lift them
and watch fear
scurry to the confused corners of the
earth. Or you can simply watch
knowing life is quaking
within the crevices and in the rock pools,
deep down
where we are deaf
and dumb...

Largo

These tapping
metal-warbling sounds
come clinking
out of their outdoor case.
On a happier day they could be
birds in hands – brief moments
of simple pleasure –
shared feathers flocking...

A touch of untranslatable
about the way the here and now
unlocks their after-spirit
of grief like fits of hailstones
pelting fruit now absent
on this frozen tongue,
looking to drown a thought
in the dregs of winter sunlight,
trying to repair old strings
that have been pulled too tight.

for “Mr. Foo”

The expressions of old men have dug themselves
in the quarry of your wrinkled face
folding into and out of itself like water
washing centuries of sleep off sculpted stone
these hours of your first week.

They have carved the pleasures and pains
of all the lives that went into your making
until the moment you became a thought
drafted in darkness
and they plied their craft on you.

The multiplicity of your face
is proof that you will learn what you already know
everything they taught you
as time grows from days to weeks to needs
of different kinds, and you sweat like them
to find expressions worthy of engraving
on future faces,
to find knowledge that is no different
from quality workmanship
or from your blind instinctive search now
for a nipple to suck.

Pitter patter

for Raquel

Your hand is defiant in mine
straining to be unleashed like insistent rain
and break the silence below –
imprint itself on muddy ground
you love to tread
while you place the whispers soft between us
among the ferns, sure-footed as
echoes
rustling in slow motion,
as you must
in your cavernous way,
for me to listen one last time
and watch you

before letting go

Words on acanthus leaves

words on acanthus leaves a sentence
stretching across the dawn letters in the long
days scribbled on the wind
every time I look drifting by all from you –
no second fails to tick
since you left and the garden cracks
once again
out of its shell memories you planted
last year all those kisses
gone astray aimlessly
pollinating other mouths a cry
in the dark and it could be you calling
from the fragile casket of my dream in the middle of the night
or it could be outside a waft of marjoram or a cat
sometimes it is but it gets harder to tell
which is which.

Translation

To write poetry
is to say the unsayable
take a leap of faith through the empty page and find
its faltering tongue, its blocked ear,
its lazy eye, everything that has no proper place
and embark on a journey with these random parts
nurse them, cajole them, fight with them if you must
until you are one step closer to saying their name.
Ultimately
in the best poetry
love them to life.

To read poetry
is to hear life called
by its many unpronounceable names
because the poet has loved enough to take
that leap of faith for us.

To translate poetry
is to learn the poet's name
relive her faith, her love, her fight on the page
unleash a tongue, unblock an ear, redirect a gaze
restore things to their rightful place, journey
on a barque to bridge all random parts
nurse them, cajole them, fight with them if you must
until you are one step closer to saying their name.
Ultimately
in the best translations
relive to rewrite.

Genghis Khan

Old Khan betrays himself
kneeling on petals
bowing to the earth
pruning pink and yellow roses
in the trodden soil of his son's heart.

His canny face is softening in this afternoon
to the rivulets of his past, wrinkles
scattered across the plains
laborious, bedevilled territory –
the hardest to conquer is his own rose bed.

Who would have thought his hand outstretched
unbridled gesture in the garden of death
would be mistaken for the upright warrior
galloping on his steed,
and his son would respond with his shield?