

Hordes of Writing

Also by Chus Pato:

In Galician:

Urania
Heloísa
Fascinio
A ponte das poldras
Nínive
Heloísa
m-Talá
Charenton
Hordas de escritura
Secesión

In Galician and Spanish:

Un Ganges de palabras
(selected poems edited and translated by Iris Cochón)

In English:

Charenton
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Pillage Laud
A Frame of the Book
O Ciudadán
Little Theatres
O Cadoiro
Expeditions of a Chimæra (with Oana Avasilichioaei)
O Resplendor

CHUS PATO

Hordes of Writing

translated from Galician by
Erín Moure

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Animality and Language

To bring Chus Pato's words into English, the translator must travel at breakneck speed, trying not to trip over tree roots and go flying. I still end up with skinned knees. Pato topples all lyric convention, and in a rush of grammatical and visual leaps, brings us face to face (kiss or collide!) with the traumas and migrations of Western Europe, with writing itself, and the possibility (or not) of poetry accounting for our animal selves: our selves who will die.

The urgency of her task is such that Pato wriggles out of any known form of the poem, and out of the confines of the book. The poems translated here are those of *Hordes of Writing*, the third volume in her projected pentalogy *Method*, in which she refashions the way we think of the possibilities of poetic text, of words, bodies, political and literary space, and of the construction of ourselves as individual, community, nation, world.

"I wanted to write a book that did not derive its structural unity from free verse, but from a horde of words: a protective mechanism borne deep inside it, but with maximum freedom, and mobility," says Pato. "The horde is the perfect mode of human relation because it is the perfect protective space for human beings, like the mother's womb. It also makes us think of constant movement, of mobility like the barbarians had, with their absolute freedom."

Chus Pato comes from a very literate culture (think of the riches of the medieval *cantigas*), albeit one small in numbers, that flourishes despite being under siege, yet it passes almost unperceived by readers in English. I think it critical to my own culture to bring discomfiting—and exhilarating—work such as Pato's into Canadian literature, into literature in English, to perturb us and upend our views of writing's possibilities.

Her work returns freedom to us, not that of the individual speaking from an illusory autonomy constructed on the invisibility of others, but the freedom to be organism among others and receive others as organisms, migrants, blastulæ, lives. "The poet is he or she whose muse has been integrally destroyed," writes Pato.

But there is always a remnant, she says, and from this remnant the poet picks up the pen again, and keeps writing.

“Rather than letting the world into my writing,” says Pato, “I kick writing out into the world.” Her works—such shock mechanisms—have made her one of the most revered and iconoclastic figures in Galician literature.

Erín Moure
September 2010

for Manuel

Position yourself in front of the narrowest

now veer 180 degrees
then the granite dilates and you're born (this word of blood)
head first, like Lenz, on January 20, in the mountains

now you and I (linguistic mammals) are here, on this stony bench,
because you wanted to show me this tree under which Friar
Martíño held his *Colloquium of 24 Rustic Galicians*

from close up the treetop is circular, spongiform, and the trunk an
umbilical cord that links us acoustically to the core of the planet

we transmigrate to a branch, like twins, so that we'll be oak or
placenta, which means we're in the midst of it¹ or *La connaissance
infinie*

a birth is a republic of trees

¹ It wasn't uncommon to mummify the pharaoh's placenta after birth, keeping it forever as talisman . . . The ancient Egyptian custom of bearing the placenta before the sovereign in processions existed from the 4th millennium BCE up to the age of the Ptolemys: from it came later cults of veneration of the flag.

Poetry is a republican discourse: speech that is its own law and own purpose, and in which all parts are free citizens who have the right to speak their minds so as to come to agreement.

FRIEDRICH SCHLEGEL

Thermidor

(first episode)

[■]

Let's start with (Hrg) at the bus stop with a bag of animalcule

reason finds nothing strange in this snapshot; the protagonist does what she always does, only this time she has to cover a distance of 2000 kilometres, which isn't so rare either

(the green slate floor of the airport in the country where it always rains)

and she stands up as hero, as multitude, as protagonist, any episode that unites us

[■]

It's best to sleep with the window open, rocked by wind and the torrential mix of every water, or on high peaks, or on the banks of the great fluvial arteries of her continent and with them (the arteries) on the sled of one of her woman ancestors she crossed the Rhine, frozen, and continued on foot along Imperial trails toward the country of great forests // heading always toward the purple of sunset, from the Black Forest over the pass from the Jura to the Vosges, the wide Saône plain, fertile fields of Champagne and Poitou (Jurassic), the region of the Landes or the cradle of Aquitaine (Tertiary), the icy passes of the Pyrenees, the Cretaceous nation of the Basques, the Cantabrian cordillera and the Navia River

—when will you write of the Suevi people meeting the hero or heroine . . . ?

—I decide that the heroine meets some historical figure, I decide this so as to extend the time of narration, confuse it, make it real. In this case the difficulty lies in choosing the figure, finally I make it a collective exodus: I'm interested in describing the itinerary. There's no vision, no voice; if there were it'd detail ice and waters flowing in the earth's core, the whiteness of the horizon, blue of the sky, the pelts, weapons, horses, the cold and this strange adventuress who's welcomed as family, the contrast between Germanic voices and the protagonist's language. And so on. Once decided, the rest is force, propulsion, perception and commotion, womb and logic of language

the heroine imagines a round thatched house with a single space for meals, work and love and falls asleep exhausted and her body scarcely touches the planet

—do all girls play games of recovery from ecological disasters?

—some do

(reader / author-she)

—they all have toy bathyscaphes?

—not all, some do

[■]

Not even her continual transit, this perpetual state of passage: all sorts of signs, feelings, messages, whatever

like the monstrous face of freedom, that slalom of abysses



A penchant for rest that manifests in a slowing of mental processes and relaxation of the body until images of terrestrial harmony flow, thus forests (and always, always, oak woods that derive unclassifiable pleasure from the damp soil, grey clarity of the skies or scant solar rays), plus ocean (and always, always, the Atlantic) and coastline: sands, dunes, marine birds but also—halfway between the surface of the waters and the abysmal deeps—images of submersion that invariably bring her to her double placenta which in the months of her own gestation allowed her to develop the requisite organs for what she identifies as “origin”: the passion for walking, and language. Sometimes in these navigations she visualizes her daughters and through this watery flood she enters in lamination with all the nutritive forces of the species, because of this, enunciation always, always reiterates a rhythm // sanguine

time, anyone’s or nobody’s // an elevated consumption of words



It hits her right in mid-crosswalk, after deciding to walk from bus stop to hotel, she realizes she’s too laden with baggage; and when she showers, the water gives her lovely curls and after getting ready for a first meeting she told herself that not only was she all primed and glowing but she’s far more stunning now than in her youth and soon she walks the sidewalk as if she never, never daydreams and she realizes how much she’d like it if she were with Antón Lopo right now that she is the happiest protagonist of a novel on earth and she doesn’t think at all of nausea

—and then?

—Marta and Publio arrived but Marcelo had to go defend the Austro-Hungarian border

[■]

Thus years went by—she said—and the need for verbal communication lost ground to an automatic proliferation of corporeal symptoms: lakes, vertigo, disorientation, disinterest she herself noticed and even, speaking as a woman who, feeling violated, finds strength to speak and emits words close to a language of madness and even uses an inconclusive scriptural protocol in which no term is arrived at with pleasure but only with exhaustion or fatigue and in this retreat of the voice she felt progressively closer to a vaporization of presence or headed definitively to an ending or notion of death

(...) curiously and despite it all, the reason for her wanderings was simple proximity to certain artworks; these almost never provoked emotion in her (I recall her in Munich impassive in front of Altdorfer's *Battle of Alexander at Issus*). It was never the experience of Cezanne's painting that moved her but the direct sight of the Montagne Sainte Victoire and the painter's effort faced with this mountain, faced with the canvas, and Cezanne striding back and forth, over and over, under scorching mountain light and that final encounter of the painter with the mountain and the final syncope. The mountain and its direct contemplation at dawn, from a service station on the ten-lane motorway in Provence, headed to Marseilles or Monaco

delirium is public and triple: a photographer, a painter and an older writer. Shoeless and sleepy I ask what they're doing there:

the painter drapes a blanket over my shoulders, I wrap my arms around his neck in a sign of infantile-erotic submission and he brings me back to bed. Around 3 p.m. we dine: by then the photographer had time to explain to the writer that the painter's relationship with me is the fruit of a violent and inadmissible passion that at its height involved attempted murder, regardless we kept on seeing each other in a state of exhaustion and extenuation joined to a kind of dementia or retreat of reason

abstraction, as you know—the photographer continued politely—can't be represented. This is what it means to him: an inconceivable state of intelligence, a current state of signs

[■]

The orange marble floors at the airport in the country where it hardly ever rains

[■]

For someone not very susceptible to suggestion, the illusion of bodily belonging, even for brief instants, was gratifying

she'd have liked to have dedicated a large part of her life to the cultivation of pleasure, which gave her the idea of setting up, in the way of the monks of Ménilmontant, Fourierist phalansteries or the city of *New Harmony*, utopian-revolutionary harems or bordellos where a community of women and men willingly reach the ideal of a phratria of bodies

in general the erotic scenes she imagined were the fruit of these *Weltanschauung*, thus the fling with an English aristocrat (she was presented in a circus cage and gilded with gift ribbon)

or with a 15th century gentleman in the Brabant (ergastulum, physiological splendour, torn clothing, gloom)

some people's judgments of Sade she found superfluous and banal, in her opinion the literary works of the Marquis (one of her bedtime favourites) could only be understood as another inventory and as the writer's attempt to make bearable the dark *night of the world*

her intelligence was ferocious, slow to accumulate (due to distraction, inattention and laziness) and avid toward language. She could anticipate the amorous struggle just by her response to a text, detect perfectly with which author/ess it would be possible, and if so who would win her over, who would conquer her and to whom she would surrender. Before a body or a piece of fiction her reaction was the same, so that it could be said that she didn't distinguish between body and writing

Cecilia, voice: Imperial dome

(an entire life at the barricades)

[■]

Generally in her youth she travelled and we can confirm she only lived in art galleries because these buildings lifted her spirits, and only did the food suit her there (especially at the Gulbenkian Foundation, the Tate or the small Vasarely collection). Today the

spinning not only hadn't stopped, it had sped up and increased in amplitude but she had no way to get to a museum, exceptionally some accident might detain her in a city, thus Irish Iron-Age lunulas or peatbog mummies in the snowy city of Dublin

she greeted mobility as one facet of freedom and this made her a lucky protagonist, despite it being true that freedom is polyhedral and its facets and crevices innumerable. The weakness that attacked her from time to time, the forgetting of the rules of pugilism, was evidence of her ever growing need to go back or find a way to take cover

the storm space in Missolonghi when she was recovering from a fractured vertebra, her slow walk to the balcony and the palm trees and araucarias and thistle of Lord Byron, dead in the war against the Turks for Greek independence, and sarcophagus

—all this you're writing, is it true?
(and the author/she answered the reader, who is an infinity or two)
—it's a chronicle
—and if it were a poem?
—then it would speak of storm potential or time's acceleration

[■]

But nothing can be captured, not the ramification of open arteries, nor the volcano of incandescent lava, not even the perpetual glacier

nor any new form of basic life or colonization of moss or lichen . . .

hers was not a genuinely revolutionary temperament, rather rebellious and loyal, engrossed in a scar that healed only slowly //

this fake lock as atmosphere // solitary childhood among the less favoured, from whom she was separated only by the thinnest of membranes cast by her father to protect her, especially among her schoolmates who with time's passage swelled the lines of desolation and emigration to the British Isles and central Europe

the absence of fascist protection in her family, time spent in the ancestral village, and a certain type of intelligence able to tell lies from truth had conditioned Hrg's later decision, and thus it was always impossible for her to relinquish the idea that private ownership of the means of production was not only corrupt and immoral but abominable, this and her belief in the radical equality of all human beings

all this fuelled her revolutionary activities which you can't exactly say she chose, but that she found it impossible to dislodge them from her path

from the past, from her childhood, she maintained certain friendships and a clandestine but ongoing presence in murky dives like *The Little Red Lighthouse* or *Tabanaco*, or even more dubious and recondite dumps: the *Suevia* or the *Paradise*

or her never fatal attraction to her currently uprooted, jailed or dead comrades

so it was, in the stony native city of the author

in which Ophelia was brutally run over when she tried to identify her brother amid the corpses of the victims of the latest bombardment