

The Desert

SAMPLER

ALSO BY MARÍA DO CEBREIRO

In English:

I am not from here (Shearsman Books, 2010)

POETRY

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Nós, as inadaptadas (2002)

Non queres que o poema te coñeña (2004)

O barrio das chinesas (2005)

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AS EDITOR

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María do Cebreiro

The Desert

SMPLER
Q
deserto

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by Keith Payne

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Contents

8	Nota sobre escultura / A Note on Sculpture	9
12	Ismaël et Agar dans le désert / Ismaël et Agar dans le désert	13
14	A noite / The Night	15
16	Os cervos / The Deer	17
18	Os trazos / The Traces	19
22	O dioivo / The Flood	23
30	O deserto / The Desert	31
32	A columna / The Column	33
34	O sangue / The Blood	35
38	O frío / The Cold	39
40	As tesouras / The Scissors	41
44	A pele / The Skin	45
48	A besta humana / The Human Beast	49
52	O corazón / The Heart	53
54	As ilusíons / The Illusions	55
56	O corpo / The Body	57
60	Deucalión / Deucalion	61
62	O amor / Love	63
66	Nota da autora / Author's Note	67
	The Author	69
	The Translator	70

SAMPLE

O DESERTO

SAMPLER

THE DESERT

SAMPLER

NOTA SOBRE A ESCULTURA

Vin o filme deitada e non era consciente de estar entrando no noso propio filme que era feito de pel e mais de luz, como antes das partículas de vidro que estalaron no medio do verán e fixeron de súpeto visibles os vértices que nunca antes vira do seu corpo. *A verdade é unha nai sen fillos, un río en crecente.* Os amantes levaban mortos a eternidade toda, pero eu cría estar vendo unha cousa e vía outra. Cría estar perdida no medio dun camiño e estaba perdida dentro doutro. E de súpeto os corpos xa non eran de amantes. Dúas cartas procuraron o misterio e a primeira¹ era filla da segunda². A calcinación é o único que queda. É o contrario das placas. Non se ergue. É unha fronteira lenta, como o frío nos dedos. Como se o lume carecese de lingua e non de mans, e as mans fosen de tempo. Mirei as xeometrías e os cortes

¹Fragmento da primeira carta: *Unha nena observa na praia a torre de area que ergueu co seu caldeiro. A onda pasa e acháiao, retirase e acháio máis, así varias veces ata que a torre queda convertida nun pequeno outeiro suave e húmido sobre a praia. A imaxe sería áinda más intensa se estivese no submundo. Sería magma e non auga o que pasase sobre a súa construción, e operaría un efecto diferente. (...) Pero faremos ben en pensar dúas cousas: a primeira, que ao contrario do mar o magma solidifica o que está destinado a permanecer en nós; a segunda, que non terá piedade (non a coñece) calcinando aquilo que non dea resistido a súa aperta abrasiva. Creo que é ese o proceso que percibes, e alégrame a consciencia e a calma coa que o fas. Podemos ser insubmisos a todo agás a nós mesmos. (...) Non teñas presa. Despois virán outras experiencias, pero esta en concreto desde logo que te conformará.*

² Fragmento da segunda carta: *Fixéchesme lembrar ese momento do filme *Viaggio in Italia* no que a parella contempla o molde da outra parella que quedara inmovilizada para sempre cando a lava do Vesubio os sepultou en Pompeia. Mellor dito, o que lembrei foi algo moi curioso que lera sobre o filme. Era algo así como que no filme todo o mundo os 'vé' abrazados, pero en realidade eles non están abrazados, e nin sequera se pode saber se estaban xuntos, se eran home e muller, ou pai e filla, ou irmáns. Pero cando os vemos alí, fosilizados logo do volcán, restituímos o vínculo onde non o hai, como se sentísemos que é imposible que nas experiencias límite non haxa unha man que nos colla ou un brazo que nos sosteña. E non o hai, claro. Ou se cadra si que o hai (...).*

A NOTE ON SCULPTURE

I watched the film slumped unaware of watching our own film
that was also made of skin and light, like before when the glass particles
that shattered in midsummer suddenly revealed all the vertices of his body
that I had never seen before. *Truth is a mother without children,*
a river rising. The lovers have been dead an eternity, but I thought
I was seeing one thing when I was seeing another, lost halfway along
one path when I was lost on another. Suddenly the bodies were no longer
lovers. Two letters solved the mystery; the first¹ the daughter of the second².
Calcination is all that remains. Unlike plates. It doesn't rise.
It is a numb frontier, like cold fingers. As if the fire lacked a tongue
but not hands, the hands kept time. I watched the geometries and cuts left

¹ Fragment of the first letter: *A little girl on the beach watches a tower of sand that she had raised up with her bucket. The wave comes up and flattens it, withdraws and flattens it again, and so on until the tower is softened to a small, wet clump on the beach. The image would be even more intense if it was the underworld. It would be magma and not water washing over her construction, and it would have a different effect. (...) We do well to consider two things: first, unlike the sea, magma sets what is destined to stay with us; and second, it will not pity, (it knows no pity), searing that which does not resist its caustic embrace. I believe this is the process you perceive, and I am cheered at the knowledge and calm with which you do so. We can defy everything but ourselves. (...) Do not rush. There will be other experiences, but you will clearly be marked by this one.*

² Fragment of the second letter: *You have reminded me of that moment in the film 'Journey to Italy' when the couple contemplate the cast of another couple that have been bound forever since the lava of Vesuvius buried them in Pompeii. Rather, what I remembered was something really odd I had read about the film. It was something like, although everyone in the film 'sees' them embracing, in truth they are not embracing, and you cannot know if they are together, if they were husband and wife, or father and daughter or siblings. But when we see them there, petrified by the volcano, we restore a link where there is none, as if we felt that in extreme situations there will be a hand to hold us, or an arm around us. And of course, there is none. Or perhaps there is (...).*

que deixan os días sobre a carne e a pedra saíu ao mundo como unha segunda pel.
Toquei a súa carne e os seus límites como se me prendese a algo, como se alguén
fose capaz de apañar algo da miña natureza difusa e puidese condensalo.
Como se me pechasesen nun frasco de cristal e me desen ao vento porque o mar
sería sólido de máis para sostermel. O escultor coñece todo o que no mundo hai
de dureza. É iso o que volve firmes as súas mans. Regálallas ao aire
e os paxaros que pasan saen da fiestra. Con suavidade fan o seu niño
entre a palla. A súa calor esmaga cada pao até que se disolve a xeometría.
A casa dos paxaros non é a pedra, pero a pedra é o lugar no que descansan.

SAMPLER

on the flesh by the days as the stone rose to the world like a second skin.
I touched flesh and its borders as if fastening myself to something, as if
someone was capable of capturing something of my diffuse nature and condensing it.
As if they locked me in a glass flask and tossed me to the wind because the sea
was too solid to have me. The sculptor knows everything in the world
about density. That is why his hands are firm. He delights the air
and birds fly through the window to gently nest in the straw.
Their heat softens every twig dissolving geometry.
The birds' house is not made of stone, but stone is the place they rest.

SAMPLER

ISMAËL ET AGAR DANS LE DÉSERT

(*Un cadre de François-Joseph Navez*)

Onde estabas ti cando eu fundaba a terra (...)

cando as estrelas da alba cantaban a coro?

—Libro de Xob 38: 4-7

Repara nos dentes do río, na súa mordedura de auga calma. Repara no tacto do río entre os dentes da pedra, que necesita máis dun cento de anos para se conmover.

A culpa non é da súa mocidade. É que onda o corpo del, ela é a pedra.

O ceo baixa negro e eu comprendo que teño dúas pernas pero só un corazón.

Que teño dous pulmóns pero un só corpo. Que a vibración do sangue é circular e alterna.

Comprendo que o deserto ten a extensión exacta para verte,

que o tamaño do mundo foi alterado de xeito substancial cando nacíches

e que nin se expandiu nin se encolleu. Que fuches, coma os santos, concibido

pero non enxendrado. Que coma eles podes ouír voces pero non a túa voz.

Agar era unha escrava no medio deserto. Ismael é o profeta dos feridos,

a voz dos animais, o pé dos coxos. Ismael é o misterio da chuvia antes da nube,

o esqueleto dos barcos, a parte azul da chama. Ismael planta estrelas nos campos de cereal.

Sementa millo e medo en cada páxina. Deixa as flores vermelhas

entre o limo do lago. Deixa a cinza na boca, a herba fresca no ventre.

Nas mans, auga salgada. O deserto ama os fillos ilexítimos. A súa lei é a loucura e a calor³.

³ *A morte é o único que nos instrúe, pero só cando aparece. Cando falta é esquecida por completo. Os que poden vivir coa morte poden vivir na verdade, só que esa experiencia é case intolerable. (...) A morte é a gran destrutora de todas as imaxes e de todos os contos, e os seres humanos nunca poderán representala por completo. O seu último recurso consiste en apoiarse na dor, en tratar de enganar a morte a cambio da dor. E o sufrimento alimenta as imaxes. Alimenta as imaxes más fermosas.*

ISMAËL ET AGAR DANS LE DÉSERT

(A painting by François-Joseph Navez)

*Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation (...)
while the morning stars sang together?
—Book of Job 38: 4-7*

He watches the river's teeth, the calm water's bite. He watches the river's touch
between the stone teeth that need more than a hundred years to be moved.

His youth is not to blame. Close by his body, she is stone.

The sky darkens and I see I have two legs but only one heart.

That I have two lungs but only one body. The blood's oscillation is circular
and alternate. I understand the desert is the perfect reach to see you,
when you were born the scale of the world shifted substantially
and it neither expanded nor contracted. You were like the saints, conceived
but not engendered. Like them you hear voices but not your own.

Hagar was a slave in the middle of the desert. Ishmael the prophet of the wounded,
voice of the animals, foot of the lame. Ishmael the mystery of rain before the cloud,
skeleton of boats, blue of the flame. Ishmael plants stars in the grain fields.

He sows corn and fear on every page. Leaves red flowers
in the silt of the lake. He leaves ash in his mouth, fresh grass in her belly.

His hands, salt water. The desert loves the illegitimate. Its law is madness and heat.³

³ Death is the only thing that instructs, but only when it appears. When not there, it is completely overlooked. Those who can live with death can live truly, except this is almost intolerable. (...) Death is the great destroyer of all images and all stories, and humans will never be able to fully represent it. Their only recourse is to count on pain, to try and cheat death with pain. And suffering nourishes the images. It feeds them, makes the images more beautiful...

A NOITE

Prepárome contigo para cruzar a noite,
igual que os músculos se preparan para o movemento
e a quietude se prepara para a presa.

Non creo na identidade entre o ben e a beleza.

Creo na pel da noite, en que no mundo hai pregos,
dimensíons incontables e deformes, e o silencio dos astros
pode ser un estrondo sen harmonía ninguna,
e non hai unha lei do relampo nin unha lei do vento.

Porque en ti non desexo nada que as outras mulleres
poidan desexar e outros homes admiren.

Sei ver, sen conmoverme, as dúas partes distintas
do teu rostro, e o xeito no que unha emprega a linguaaxe
da outra para ocultar o distintas que son entre si
e con respecto a aquilo que o rostro garda.

Non podo adiviñar os teus segredos porque un segredo
non pode adiviñarse, pero vexo que os hai
e gústame que os haxa, e atrévome a medir a fondura
do que calas. Son o lume cravado no ventre
dos cavalos. A fouce que cando arde curva o ferro

(*Para o relampo, o ferro é mel.*

Todos vivimos segundo o noso código).

THE NIGHT

We ready ourselves to cross the night,
like muscles ready to spring
the quiet that's ready to quicken. I don't
believe in the coincidence of goodness and beauty.
I believe in the night's skin, in the world that overlaps
in endless warped dimensions, that the silence of stars
could well be a clamour for disharmony.

Lightning observes no law, no law to the wind.
Because there's nothing in you I crave like
other women might crave and other men admire.
I can see, without being moved, the two sides
of your face, and how one side uses the other's
tongue to hide the difference between the two,
as well as what's kept hidden by ~~your~~ face.

I'll never fathom your secrets because a secret
can't be fathomed, but you have them,
and I like that, and am mad to plumb the depths
of your descent. I'm the flame nailed in the horses'
belly. The iron curves when the sickle burns

(*To the lightning, iron is honey.*

We each live according to our own code).