

Poems & Transpositions

Mary Oppen

MONTEMORA SUPPLEMENT

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Transpositions from the Prophets & others

SPIRITUAL CANTICLE OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

(Bride) Where did you hide, lover
And leave me moaning?
Like a stag you fled
Having wounded me
I went crying after you, and you were gone.

Shepherds that go far back
By way of the sheepfolds to the hill
If by chance
You see the one I love the most
Tell him I fell sick, and suffer, and die.

Seeking my lover
I will go to the mountains and riversides
I will not gather flowers
Nor will I fear the wild beasts
I will pass beyond forts and frontiers.

Woods and meadows
Planted by my lover's hand
Green meadow
Enameled with flowers
Tell me if he has passed by.

Lavishing grace
He passed by these groves
In haste,
And having looked at them
Left them clothed in beauty.

Oh, who has the power to heal me?
You who just now yielded yourself
Do not send me
Any more messengers today
Who do not tell me what I want to hear.

All those who wander
Tell me of your many graces,
All these wound me more
And leave me dying
Of, I don't know what, behind their stammering.

How do you persevere
Oh life, not living where you live
Having as reason to die
Your lover's arrows
Carrying life within yourself?

Why since you wounded this heart
Don't you heal it?
And then, since you have stolen it
Why do you leave it
Not carrying away what you have stolen?

Take away my torments
Since no one else can undo them
Let my eyes see you
Because you are their light
And only for you would I want to have them.

Oh, crystal fountain!
If in that silvered-over semblance
Would form suddenly
The desired eyes
That I have traced deep within me.

Withdraw them, my lover
Because I am taking flight!

(*Bridegroom*) Return dove!
The injured stag
Appears on the hill
Refreshed by the breeze of your flight.

(*Bride*) My lover, mountains
Solitary wooded valleys
Strange islands
Noisy rivers
And the whistling of pleasant breezes

The quiet night
At the moment of dawn's coming
Silent music
Sounding solitude
This supper that refreshes and inspires love.

Our green bed, surrounded by caves
The lions leashed
Hung with purple
Built of peace
Crowned with a thousand gold shields.

Following your footprint
Maidens roam the road.
At the touch of the spark
To the spiced wine
Flowings of divine balsam.

In the inner wine cellar
I drank of my lover
And when I went out, through all the valley
I no longer knew anything.
And I lost the cattle I was following.

There he gave me his breast
There he taught me a very sweet knowledge
And I gave him myself
Withholding nothing.
There I promised to be his wife.

My soul has employed itself
And all my abundance in his service
I no longer tend the cattle
Nor have I any other work
Now that my acts are love.

So now, if from today
I am no more seen nor found in the fields
You will say that I am lost
That I fell in love
Lost myself, and was found.

Flowers and emeralds
Gathered in the cool mornings
We shall make into garlands
Blossoming in your love
And bound with one hair of mine.

You considered that one hair
Fluttering on my neck,
You glanced at it
You were caught in it
And you were wounded in one of my eyes.

When you looked at me
Your eyes imprinted your grace in me
For this you loved me.
In this way my eyes deserved
To adore what they saw in you.

Do not despise me
For if you found me dark
Now surely you can look at me
After seeing what grace and beauty
You left in me.

Catch me the foxes!
For it is now our vineyard is flowering.
In the meantime
While we gather a cluster of roses
Let no one appear on the mountain.

Be still, cold, dead north wind
Come south wind, that remembers love.
Breathe through my orchard
Let the fragrances overflow.
My love will graze among the flowers.

(*Bridegroom*) The bride has entered the pleasant orchard
Of her desire.
She rests as she likes best
Laying her neck
On the sweet arms of her lover.

Beneath the apple tree
There with me you were married
There I gave you my hand
And there was restored in you
Your mother's lost innocence.

The swift birds
Lions, deer, leaping bucks
Woods, winds, streams
Waters, breezes, ardors
And the fears of the night watches:

By the pleasant lyres
And the siren's song, I conjure you
Cease your angers!
And do not touch the wall!
So my beloved will sleep more securely.

(*Bride*) O nymphs of Judea!
While the amber perfumes
The flowers and roses
Stay on the outskirts
And do not so much as touch our thresholds!

Hide yourself, my dear
Turn your face to the mountains
And do not speak
But see the company
Going with her through strange islands.

(*Bridegroom*) The little white dove
Has returned to the ark with the branch;
Now the turtle dove
Has found her longed-for mate
On the brook's green banks.

She lived in solitude
In solitude she built her nest
In solitude he guides her
Himself, also alone, and in solitude
Wounded by love.

(*Bride*) Let us rejoice, my lover
Let us see ourselves in your beauty.
To the mountain and to the hill
Where the pure water flows
We go deeper into the thicket.

Then to the high caverns of rock
So well hidden
We shall go
And there enter
And taste the new wine of pomegranates.

There you will show yourself
To be what my soul claims.
Then you will give me
My darling
What you gave me on that other day.

Breath of wind
Song of sweet cedar-bird
The grove and its living gift
In the serene night
With flame that consumes without pain

No one saw it!
Nor did Amminadab appear
The silent siege
And the cavalry
Descended.

LOVE'S LANCE

Following love's lance
And not lacking hope
I flew so high, so high
That I captured what I sought.

That I might capture what I sought
In this divine launching
The flight so convinced me
That from sight I lost myself.
Even though in this trance
In flight though I faltered;
Yet love already was so high
That I captured what I sought.

When I went up higher
The vision dazzled me
And the most difficult conquest
Was achieved in darkness;
More by being of love the lance
I made a blind and dark leap
And rose up so high, so high
That I captured what I sought.

The higher I went up
In this pursuit so high
The lower, more subdued
And abased I found myself,
I said: No one will be able to capture it,
And sank so low, so low
That I captured what I sought.

In a strange way
My one flight surpassed a thousand
Because the hope of heaven
Attains as much as it hopes for;
My only hope was this flight
In hoping I was not disappointed
Because I flew so high, so high
That I captured what I sought.

(St. John of the Cross)

ON A DARK NIGHT

On a dark night
With love-longings aflame
Oh, unearthly adventure!
I went out without being noticed
My house being now still.

In darkness and secure
By the secret ladder
Oh, unearthly adventure!
In darkness and in ambush
My house being now still.

On that night fore-known
In secret, for no one saw me
Nor did I glance at anything
Without other light and guide
But that in my burning heart.

This guided me
More certainly than noon-day light
To where he awaited me
Whom I have known so well
Where no one else appeared.

Night which itself guides
Night more lovely than the dawn
Night that itself unites
Lover with beloved
Lover in lover transformed.

On my flowering breast
Which I kept for him alone
There he stayed sleeping
And I caressed him.
Fanned by the cedars

The wind from the turret
Blew through his hair.
With his serene hand
On my wounded neck
And all my senses suspended

I remained myself and I forgot myself
My face rested on my lover:
Everything stopped, and I was outside myself
Leaving me watched over
Forgotten among Mary's lilies.

(St. John of the Cross)

SHULAMITE

I have compared you
To a company of horses

Behold you are fair, my love.

His mouth is sweet
Yes, he is altogether lovely,
This is my lover, and this is my friend,
Daughters of Jerusalem.

Who is she that looks forth
As the morning star
Fair as the moon
Clear as the sun
Terrible as an army with banners?

Before I am aware
My soul makes me like the chariots of Amminadab

Return, return O Shulamite
That I may look upon you
What do I see in the Shulamite

Like the meeting of two armies?

Blow up a trumpet on the new moon
Where I hear a language I do not understand.
Rain fills the pools
It goes from strength to strength

Passing through the valley
Makes a well
I shall drink from the brook on the way.

VISION OF THE SOLITARY CITY

Howl, fir tree
The cedar is fallen
Howl, oak of Bashan
The vintage forest is come down

They come for violence
Take men as fishes of the sea
Take them with hooks
Catch them in nets
Gather them in their drags.

Noise of crying at the fish gate
Howling from the second gate
A great crashing from the hills.

Write the vision large that he who reads it may gather strength
For at the end it shall speak.

A city sits solitary that was full of people
They search the city with candles.
The sea coast is dwelling for shepherds.
On the remnant of sea coast
Flocks lie down.

Cormorant and bittern
Lodge in the lintels
Their voices sing in the windows

Stones cry out of the wall
Beams out of the timber answer.

Behold the stone!
I will engrave it

Upon one stone shall be seven eyes
And I will see by night.

A man is riding among myrtle trees
Behind him are red horses
Speckled and white horses

I will smite every horse with astonishment
And the rider with madness.

Awake north wind
Blow south wind
Come from the four winds, breath

I am their song
I am their music

I have been young and now am old
And I live deliciously.

"Lamps at night
where feelings are deep caverns
that were dark and blind"

at times our mouths are filled with laughter
and our tongues with singing
we talk together

happiness is mysterious
in his hand there is a cup
and the wine is red.

Praise

the stars of light

sun and moon

fire, hail

snow, fog

stormy wind

mountains and hills

fruit trees and cedars

beasts and cattle

creeping things and birds

young men, girls

old people and children

Praise

praise in dancing

praise in singing

praise in playing on instruments

sing a new song.

Where is the dwelling of the lions
Feeding place of young lions
Where they walk in secret places?

Old lions walk
And lion cubs
And no one is afraid.

Ants are a people
Not strong
Yet they prepare for winter.

Rabbits are a feeble folk
Yet they live in rocks and briars.

Locusts have no king.

The spider takes hold with her hands
And is in every house.

Out of the heart four things arise
good and evil
life and death

and the tongue their ruler

Mountains shall bring peace to the people
And the little hills
Vapors ascend from the ends of the earth
Rain comes down on the mown grass
Lighting for the rain
And wind out of the treasures.

There shall be a handful of seeds
In the earth on the top of the mountain
And they of the cities shall flourish like grass of the earth.

The heavens are covered with clouds
Rain is prepared for earth
Grass grows on the mountains.

She gives food to young ravens
Her words run swiftly.

At first she will go with you in devious ways
she will bring fear and cowardice upon you
torment you with her discipline

if you wander she will forsake you
leave you to your downfall
until she can trust your soul
trust you with her judgments

then she will come back to you and make you glad
Was she not present when God made the world

simply I learned about her
she is a spirit

intelligent holy unique
clear certain

she hastened to make herself known

I love her as I love my life
I sought her to live with me
I watched for her

dawn found her sitting at my gate

He speaks lies
death comes out of his mouth

he is a cloud without water
in a time of drouth

he is a wave raging out of its own confusion

he is a tree of autumn
twice dead
plucked by the roots

Troubled so I cannot speak
I remember my dream in the night
I remember your works
I remember your wonders
For you are a wonder to many
And they talk of your works.

Waters see you
Thunder and lightning
Light the earth
Earth trembles and shakes.

Your way is on the sea
The footstep is not known
Of those far off upon the sea.

Stranger on the earth
I walk in liberty
Utter dark sayings
What we hear and know
What our fathers tell us.

Man did eat angel's bread
An east wind blew
And the south wind came on!

A man was famous
According as he lifted up axes
Upon thick trees
But now they break down carved work.
They return at evening
And go round about the city
At evening let them return
And go round about the city
Let them wander up and down.

I found trouble and sorrow
Round about me like bees
Horror has taken hold of me
I am gone like the shadow.

I am fearfully and wonderfully made
I am first to see the dawning of the morning

I cry out
my eyes see dawn before the night watch

I wail
more than they who watch for morning

I say
more than they who watch for morning

they are grass
that grows on house-tops
it withers before it is grown

They go up by the mountains
They go down by the valleys
What man now living shall not see death?

My life is large
a room to move freely in

when you are threatened

my strength fails
I feel forgotten as a dead woman
out of mind

Leave me not in anger
Nor forsake me
Do not be silent to me
For fear I then be silent forever.

Turn my sadness
Into dancing
Turn my mourning
Into gladness

He shall call and I shall answer
My soul had almost dwelt in silence
I watched
And was alone as a sparrow on the housetop
Now I walk the wings of the wind.

“And in the time of rest
sleep and night change knowledge”

Troubled in the visions of her heart
in the time of safety she rose up
wondered that there is no fear

such things happen to all flesh,
woman and man

“We have seen only a part of all that is”

I was given birth!

and I am given the number of my days
and my time

I can talk, I have a tongue and eyes and ears and a heart
and I am among the people

A serpent strikes between wide open thighs
like a blade seeking its sheath

in the fall of sunset
with the burden of the male in her loins

in an arched gesture
she carries the world toward evening

(Anne-Marie Albiach)

THE WORD

I carried home a wonder or a dream
from an undiscovered country

the twilight weird, the norn found
a word
within her precincts

I grasped it close
it shines

she sought it long and told tidings of her country
"where nothing is the same as here"

I'm left without the word
the wonder

(Stefan George)

DAVID SINGS TO SAUL

King
hear how my instrument

flings out
distance

through which

stars meet us in their knowing
and we fall like rain
and a flowering follows

(Rilke)

MOSELLE

What color is that water now?
Hesperus has brought evening shadows
And filled the Moselle with green hillsides.
Hilltops waver in the moving water
And little vine leaves tremble, in absence
Filling your wine glass with small waves.

*(Ausonius, born at Bordeaux
died 395 at Bordeaux)*

11775-11778

Poems

Sing A Song Like Shattered Glass

IT IS A LIFE

1

It is a life
mind takes me where it will go

happy?
strange full of doubts and fears
shakes my love for myself

something happens to me
a stumbling
concealed from view or flashing

deep hidden
my own powers frighten me

BEGIN
(my voice in my dream)

strangers
apprentices

wandering to perfect our skills
disaster draws us and a kind of happiness

I borrow my first breath
ancestors sound in my voice

but what I see and what I feel
happens to me

concealed from view or flashing
the occulting light leaves me in darkness

but the door I push
opens toward me

as a bird
a place her own
to which she will return

“but I have no home
for I have set on fire the forest
in which I was enchanted”

a stranger
as were all my mothers
ask

this path
now
receive an answer in sleep

what thickening fog tears my gaze from myself

where all the silenced
speak in my voice
shake my love for myself

but deep within
“the forest shimmers in a lovely light”

**"Silence is bright, is always present,
is part of the brightness of earth"**

Picard

And speech is bright
it needs no candle

as two people converse
silence listens
and can then be heard

words also shine
bright as fire

sojourners here
we name in all the languages of earth

the words for rock
to make the rock be rock

though we name
granite basalt pebble stone

the rock is held unaltered in the mind
as rock in earth remains itself

DREAMS

galloping free as wind
no reins and
my horse is dead

running beside me and
from a dog-faced mask
eyes (not a dog's)
look out

*

In my glass house
debris scattered all about
I place sweet water for hummingbirds
seed for bright-winged
birds fly their way
through as though
the world were
shattered glass

*

although she cries
Help!
it is I who drown

are they lying in sand
looking through beach grass

are they huddled
in a VW
veiled in hanging hair

anxious
behind
the apertures of glass

* * *

slip fingers
from cat's-cradle
loop and
name the
by-passed years
blood-strange brother
where in passed-by places bloom
cherry and early apple
and birds return

Wind drives clouds
against the clear sky

sharp deep dark

mountains in great strides

draw near
the city

night comes
 (inside this shell
blue earth's
taut skull
 the sky
holds us all

At midnight
I arise
the rock of childhood
stands in my house.

deer run wild in
words of beauty

she finds her soul with words

Deliver me from the hands of strange children
deliver my eyes from tears
and set my feet from falling
I walk in the land

The stone the builders refused
is now the head of this corner
it is marvelous
in our eyes

from the rising of the sun to the
going down of the sun
this is the day
in which we find ourselves

Love for another has shaken and
perhaps destroyed
herself
part of herself
left behind a stranger
no remembering
rid be rid of those lapsed images
impostures
dreams and words

in sleep she disappears
she tells it
it changes
but what has been is not entirely gone
herself she takes forward

Love for another has shaken
perhaps destroyed
herself different
herself left behind
no remembering
rid be rid lapsed images impostures
dreams and words she disappears
in sleep
she tells
it changes but it is not entirely gone it
is herself she takes forward

our boat makes a way for us

it is a free passage
held in the surges

or standing on the sea of glass

our words move towards
each other

They passed by together
they saw it and marvelled
they were troubled
and hasted away

MONTEMORA

I come as a guest
entering my own life

and the tree that leans lends
me its strength

what my mothers said,
the dreams
I disappear into in sleep

in safety I dream danger
I open my eyes
startled that I am safe

we walk in autumn stubble
the field not ours
small houses unfurnished empty
we enter
and it is our home

MONTEMORA

1

Homero Aridjis, Karen Brodine, Chuang-tzu, Cid Corman, Allen Fisher, A.C. Graham, Vicente Huidobro, Philippe Jaccottet, Mark Kirschen, Geoffrey O'Brien, George Oppen, Mary Oppen, Octavio Paz, Tom Pickard, Carl Rakosi, Charles Reznikoff, Rai Sanyo, Burton Watson.

2

Charles Reznikoff interview, Amiri Baraka, Karen Brodine, Basil Bunting, Cid Corman, Harold Dull, Allen Fisher, Michael Heller, Vicente Huidobro, Mark Kirschen, Kenji Miyazawa, Lorine Niedecker, Geoffrey O'Brien, Mary Oppen, Tom Pickard, Ryōkan, Mokichi Saito, Hiroaki Sato, Colin Simms, Gael Turnbull, Burton Watson, anonymous poems from FRELIMO.

3

Basil Bunting interview, Homero Aridjis, Jane Augustine, Amiri Baraka, Karen Brodine, William Bronk, Chuang-tzu, Cid Corman, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Clayton Eshleman, Roy Fisher, A.C. Graham, Jonathan Griffin, Sakutarō Hagiwara, Michael Heller, Vicente Huidobro, Mark Kirschen, Hugh MacDiarmid, Toby Olson, George Oppen, Octavio Paz, Jerome Rothenberg, Hiroaki Sato, Iain Sinclair, John Taggart, Kōtarō Takamura.

MONTEMORA

4

Hugh MacDiarmid, Eugenio Montale, George & Mary Oppen interviews; Lorca's letters, supplement on tanka (Watson & Sato). Agrippa d'Aubigné, Homero Aridjis, Jane Augustine, Anita Barrows, William Bronk, Anna Chaves, Jonathan Chaves, Chuang-tzu, Rachel Blau Du Plessis, Milan Exner, Roy Fisher, A.C. Graham, Jonathan Greene, Jonathan Griffin, Michael Heller, Jeremy Hilton, DuBois Hus, Mark Kirschen, Mervin Lane, Karin Lessing, George Oppen, Octavio Paz, Omar Pound, Carl Rakosi, Charles Reznikoff, Jerome Rothenberg, Gustaf Sobin, José Juan Tablada, Yüan Hung-tao. Ahearn on Zukofsky, Bertholf on Niedecker, Eshleman on Vallejo, Montale on Croce, Rothenberg on Eliade & more . . .

5

The Poetry Business (letters & statements from 18 poets); **6 Japanese Women Poets** (tr. Watson & Sato); Anita Barrows, William Bronk, Basil Bunting, Martin Dodman, Rachel Blau Du Plessis, Clayton Eshleman, Milan Exner, Solomon ibn Gabirol, Jonathan Griffin, Lee Harwood, Gerrit Kouwenaar, Mark Kirschen, Harris Lenowitz, Karin Lessing, Octavio Paz, Omar Pound, Carl Rakosi, Pierre de Ronsard, Gustaf Sobin, Nathaniel Tarn, Gael Turnbull, Paul van Ostaijen, Rosemarie Waldrop, Kenneth Cox on Louis Zukofsky & more . . .

MONTEMORA

6

A special issue featuring Aimé Césaire, Edmond Jabès, Octavio Paz, Kotaro Takamura & Rachel Blau DuPlessis on H.D. and the muse of the woman writer.

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Wind Chrysalid's Rattle by Gustaf Sobin

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