

# Sheffield Hallam University

*Nothing as we need it for chimeric writing*

CASCELLA, Daniela

Available from the Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

<http://shura.shu.ac.uk/30329/>

## A Sheffield Hallam University thesis

This thesis is protected by copyright which belongs to the author.

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author.

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given.

Please visit <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/30329/> and <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html> for further details about copyright and re-use permissions.

**Nothing As We Need It  
For Chimeric Writing**

Daniela Cascella

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
Sheffield Hallam University  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2021

## Candidate Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. I have not been enrolled for another award of the University, or other academic or professional organisation, whilst undertaking my research degree.
2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
3. I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and certify that this thesis is my own work. The use of all published or other sources of material consulted have been properly and fully acknowledged.
4. The work undertaken towards the thesis has been conducted in accordance with the SHU Principles of Integrity in Research and the SHU Research Ethics Policy.

The word count of the thesis is 79,189.

Name	Daniela Cascella
Award	Ph.D.
Date of Submission	21 December 2021
Faculty	Art and Design
Director(s) of Study	Dr Sharon Kivland, Penny McCarthy, Dr Alice Bell

## Abstract

In this thesis-work a new form of critical writing is imagined, practiced, and studied. Shaped by encounters with literature not translated in English; by the polyphonies, artifices, and concealments of a bilingual self; by the sense of speechlessness and haunting when writing about texts that cannot be instantly quoted, this form is named *chimeric* from the mythological Chimera: a monstrous creature made of three different parts, impossible in theory but real in the imagination and in the reading of the myth. Similarly, this thesis-work is a composite of interrelated parts written in different styles, some of which may seem impossible, monstrous, disturbing. It holds practice and commentary without demarcation between creative and critical components. It presents chimeric writing as enmeshment and conversation with its subject matters, favouring impurity rather than detachment and embracing exaggeration, repetition, laughter, and self-parody as legitimate forms of knowledge.

A chimera is also the object of an unattainable yearning. This thesis-work manifests yearning for the subjects it studies: untranslated prose works by Alejandra Pizarnik, Cristina Campo, and Roberto Calasso. It defies any demand for scholarship to be exhaustive, and writes scholarship exhausted by desire. Rather than writing monographic studies of Calasso, Campo, Pizarnik as a distant critic, a three-voiced character speaks with them, inhabits their words, rehearses forms derived from modes of critical writing proposed by them, and extends their projects. Commenting on their works, she comments on her own.

The contribution of this thesis-work lies primarily in its articulation, as it embodies its argument for composite and impure writing in its form; and in thinking and practicing chimeric writing through neologisms such as *csiting* and *transcelating*. These declare and formalise new and entangled possibilities for the writing of research and for writing as research which, listening to literature beyond the limits of textual analysis, dismiss the implications of the term *reflection*, assuming detachment, in favour of an aural method of *resonance*, allowing enmeshment and interference. Unsettling language, this project welcomes imaginative wordplay as a committed mode of scholarship; presents possibilities for working with citation beyond the boundaries of quotation marks; writes knowledge as chimera, as we need it.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my Director of Studies, Dr Sharon Kivland, for welcoming and encouraging this project from its early stages to completion with extraordinary commitment and understanding, and for her invaluable advice on countless aspects of the writing and editing processes; my supervisors Penny McCarthy, for being an exceptionally perceptive reader, engaging in profound and rewarding conversations, and Dr Alice Bell, for her thoughtful scrutiny and evaluation of my research at RF1 stage and in the following two years; Dr Harriet Tarlo and Hester Reeve for their important responses to my RF2 submission; Dr Becky Shaw for her support throughout my years at Sheffield Hallam University; Tracey Howson and Sarah Coleman at the Culture and Creativity Research Institute; the editors of the publications and the organisers of the events listed in the Afterword, in particular Dr Laura Haynes for asking me to teach a seminar on chimeric writing in the Art Writing MLitt at the Glasgow School of Art, to write a text on chimeras in *The Yellow Paper*, and to expand on this research at *MAP Magazine*; Dr Ansgar Allen and Dr Emile Bojesen at Punctum Books / Risking Education and Joshua Rothes at Sublunary Editions for inviting me to publish two books drawn from this thesis-work; Colin Potter, David Toop, Jennifer Hodgson, and Kate Briggs for all the conversations around and beyond this research, and for their friendship.

## **Table of Contents**

### **(Forms, and the Voices that Animate Them)**

Voices, in Order of Appearance	1
Voice from a Faintspeaker:	
What You Are About to Read	2
The Voices	5
The Form, The Forms	9
Notes on Style	11
Suggestions on How to Read	13
The Interdisciplinary Death of D.C.	17
Imaginary Conversation / Chimera and Literature	19
Summary: The Context of this Work / Voice from a Faintspeaker	40
A Monologue: Nothing As We Need It / D.C.	41
Imaginary Conversation / Chimera and Literature	68
Summary: The This-Curse on Method / Voice from a Faintspeaker	81
A Poster	82
A Monologue: The Stain of Stein / D.C.	83
An Address / D.C., with Interferences by the Voice from a Faintspeaker	91
The Disastrous Q & A	94
A Questionnaire / The Ruin of Casc	96
From the Notebooks of D.C.	98
A Vision: Becoming The Ruin of Casc / Voice from a Faintspeaker	99
A Deranged Essay: Impossible Interviews / Cristina Rovina, with Interferences by the Voice from a Faintspeaker	103
Lost Notes: Faint Signals / D.C.	110
A Deranged Essay: My Chimera / D.C.	113
Imaginary Conversation / Alejandra Pizarnik, Cristina Campo, D.C.	124
Appearances, Encounters: Magic Doors / From the Notebooks of D.C.	129
Imaginary Conversation / Alejandra Pizarnik, Cristina Campo, D.C.	149
Imaginary Conversation / The Devil and D.C.	156
A Transcelation: A Bell for Cristina, or, Writing an Image of Echo and Chimera / Cristina Rovina	160
1. Tolling, with Echoes and Chimeras (The Head)	163
2. The Old Bronze (The Body)	196

3. The Bell (The Tail)	200
Imaginary Conversation / Alejandra Pizarnik, Cristina Campo, D.C.	216
Appearances, Encounters: This Begins, Began / From the Notebooks of D.C.	220
Imaginary Conversation / Alejandra Pizarnik, Cristina Campo, D.C.	228
A Deranged Essay: The Bloody Countess / D.C.	232
Imaginary Conversation / Alejandra Pizarnik, Cristina Campo, D.C.	249
A Deranged Essay: Mad Impurities / Cristina Rovina	259
Imaginary Conversation / Alejandra Pizarnik, Cristina Campo, D.C. / Where a Contribution to Knowledge Begins to Toll, in Italics	281
Imaginary Conversation / D.C. and Chimera / Where a Contribution to Knowledge Continues to Toll, in Italics	289
Another Vision of D.C.	318
Imaginary Conversation / Cristina Rovina and Chimera / Contribution to Knowledge Tolling, Again, in Italics	320
A Monologue: Sidelined, Sited, Cited, Csiting / Cristina Rovina's Ruinous Drift	332
In Memoriam D.C. / Declaring Contribution Once Again, Da Capo	336
Afterword: Research Outputs / Voice from a Faintspeaker	344
Bibliography	348
Appendix 1: Glossary	366
a. Main Terms and Recurring Expressions	366
b. Neologisms	369
Appendix 2: Translations of Quotes by Cristina Campo that Appear in 'A Bell for Cristina'	370

## **Voices, in Order of Appearance**

Voice from a Faintspeaker, or The Ruin of Casc

Chimera

Literature

D.C.

Cristina Campo (C.C.)

Alejandra Pizarnik (A.P.)

The Devil, fleetingly

Cristina Rovina (C.R.)



## What You Are About to Read

Voice from a Faintspeaker: *Nothing As We Need It: For Chimeric Writing* is a thesis-work in which a new form of critical writing is imagined, enacted, and studied. Shaped by encounters with literature not translated in English, by the polyphonies, artifices, and concealments of a bilingual self, by the sense of speechlessness and haunting when writing of works that cannot be instantly quoted, this form is named *chimeric* from the mythological Chimera: a fire-breathing monstrous creature made of three different parts, impossible in theory but real in the imagination and in the reading of the myth.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, this thesis-work is a composite of interrelated parts written in different styles, some of which may seem impossible, monstrous, disturbing. It demands and proposes neologisms, a new vocabulary, and wildly imaginative approaches to reading and to the writing of research. A work of critical writing about critical writing, it merges practice and commentary without demarcation. Recursive, composite, and polyphonic, it questions linear ways of presenting scholarship in words, presenting possibilities for citation beyond the boundaries of quotation marks. It manifests critical writing as enmeshment and conversation with its subject matters.

A chimera is also the object of a yearning deemed unattainable: this thesis-work exists in such yearning, in the tension between words and what exceeds them. The critic is exhausted by such yearning, rather than owner of exhaustive knowledge; scholarship is chimeric, longing beyond its limits.

---

<sup>1</sup> For *Chimera* see Appendix 1: Glossary.

*Nothing As We Need It* was prompted by encounters with the prose of Alejandra Pizarnik, Cristina Campo, Roberto Calasso across time, languages, non-translation and mistranslation, silences. Instead of writing monographic studies as a distant critic, a three-voiced character speaks with them, inhabits their words, yearns to become them, and shows what composite and impure forms critical writing may take when words seem to be missing; how to transmit material that is untranslated, barely audible, apparently *nothing*, or so close that it smothers; what types of bilingualisms, beyond the literal, are at play. Embracing exaggeration, laughter, and self-parody as legitimate forms in the writing of research, *Nothing As We Need It* demands composite, monstrous, fire-breathing manners of writing and reading.

Across polyphonies, intermissions, and conversations, this thesis-work reveals that the apparent *nothing* experienced before translation, or in the speechlessness of proximity, is full of signals, calling for different ways of tuning into the material of study. *Nothing As We Need It* practices Pizarnik's idea of criticism as tie – the unspoken substance connecting a writer to the subject of her study through kinship – and demonstrates with Campo and Calasso that to write criticism is to be attentive to faint signals and make them heard.

The many-voiced author of this thesis-work writes in English as a second language: she is a stranger. No matter how fluent, she is never entirely in sync with her language, a small variance is always perceived. Writing as a stranger entails the perception of both loss and haunting: the loss of references when working with Italian writers not translated in English, and the ways in which those writers haunt the text even if they cannot be quoted. Chimeric writing takes shape beyond and before translation.

Listening to literature beyond the limits of textual analysis, *Nothing As We Need It* dismisses the visual implications of the term *reflection* (which assumes detachment and polished surfaces) in favour of an aural method of *resonance* (which allows enmeshment and interference). It expands on a non-exclusively Anglophone tradition of transformative critical work that unsettles language, welcomes imaginative wordplay, and shifts critical writing's tendency to cite from pre-validated sources into a sonorous practice of *csiting* where to cite is to site: to listen to one's references no matter how obscure, arranging them in assonant encounters.<sup>2</sup>

As a chimera this thesis-work prompts multiple readings. Through variations, ideas are arranged, words intensified, charged with meanings, destabilised, and layered: not one after the other, but one inside the other. Consequently, there is no framing context first, followed by a literature review, followed by the work of writing, followed by reflections: it is *all* literature review, it is *all* writing, *all* resonance instead of reflection, eluding frames and beating from a core. Examples, motives, and contexts are given and commented on throughout, sounding like an introduction until the final page, always an ending, always a beginning. The thesis-work says what it is doing, remarks on its context, rebuilds its language, comments on what it is doing while doing it. Sometimes it sounds as if it has been heard before. Sometimes it sounds like nothing, nothing as we need it.

---

<sup>2</sup> For *csiting* see Appendix 1: Glossary.

## The Voices

Voice from a Faintspeaker: The three main voices are haunted, unsettled, challenged, prompted, comforted, interrupted, inspired, exhilarated, exasperated, and exhausted by the subjects of their study, and this thesis-work enfolds such a range of states. The voices rehearse forms derived from modes or dreams of critical writing proposed by Calasso, Campo, Pizarnik – even when they do not name them as critical – extending their projects. The three authors wrote repeatedly about writing, in composite and unsettling prose that while commenting on works by other writers, commented also on their own, embodying a yearning and a kinship not without conflicts.

The voices are not tied by plot, but move throughout the text as echoes in different tones; at times they blur into one another, signifying the oscillations in a writing self who is one and many. There is no concern with continuity or plausibility; there may be contradictions in the unravelling of the text, emphasising the time loops, returns, premonitions, and residual strains that occur in research, as well as the sense of artificiality and strangeness in writing in English as a second language at the core of this study.

**D.C.**, between wit and gravitas, is intermittently present and absent from the text, always *rebeginning*<sup>3</sup> as *Da Capo*, De Certeau, Dino Campana, Divine Comedy, Didimo Chierico, always repeating herself:<sup>4</sup> when it seems enough, one more round keeps the listener

---

<sup>3</sup> For *rebeginning* see Appendix 1: Glossary.

<sup>4</sup> For the poetics of name sounds and initials, see Daniel Heller-Roazen, ‘H & Co.’, in *Echolalias: On the Forgetting of Language*, New York, NY: Zone Books, 2005, p. 35, where he reports the following note from the memoirs of German poet Heinrich Heine: ‘Here in France my German name, “Heinrich”, was translated into “Henri” [...]. I had to resign myself to it and finally name myself thus in this country, for the word “Heinrich” did not appeal to the French ear [...]. They were also incapable of pronouncing the name “Henri Heine” correctly, and for most people my name is Mr. Enri Enn; many abbreviate this to “Enrienne”, and some called me Mr. Un Rien’. From ‘Heinrich Heine’ to ‘a nothing’. Further notes on the

enthralled, though uneasy in the sweet torture of refrain. She has the habit of saying *we* to signify her many voices; this is by no means intended to make generic assumptions on her readers who are, to date, undetermined. She is also known, much to her chagrin, as ‘that Italian who writes about sound’. Was frightened as a child by an Oxford comma, and still shivers with terror when asked to use it.<sup>5</sup> Has a tendency to fall – in the words of other writers; in a faint, like many of the enchanted lovers in the *Arabian Nights*; in faint signals. This thesis-work begins after the death of D.C., who leaves behind a number of texts, some unfinished, patiently collected and commented by **Cristina Rovina**. Cristina comes from Cristina Campo, who used at least four pseudonyms. *Rovina* is the Italian for ruin, a nod at the sense of writing as ruin that pervades these pages. The rhyme heard in Cristina Rovina is a response to the irritating rhyme that Italians will hear in the frequent misspelling made by Anglophones when they write *Daniella Cascella*, instead of *Daniela Cascella*. In Italian, the pronunciation of *Daniella* is drastically different from the pronunciation of *Daniela*: it makes the first name rhyme with the surname. It sounds like a joke, and like a joke, one might say that in her youth Cristina ‘the astonishing’ Rovina became familiar with five foreign languages, the *Corpus Hermeticum*, calculus, ancient legends, sacred verses and the reasons for their revelation, philosophy, and rhetoric. She is fond of music and can play the theremin. A joke, exactly. Let us posit, however, the importance of contemplating the impossible in a character that is a chimera. Impossible, like **The Ruin of Casc**, or **The Voice from a Faintspeaker**. Invisible to the preoccupied gaze of reason, this voice can be heard sparsely but incisively between brackets, or as phantom frequency. Assonant with the title of Calasso’s book *The Ruin of Kasch*<sup>6</sup> (in

---

poetic potential of names and their sounds are in Craig Dworkin, ‘The Onomastic Imagination’, in *Radium of the Word: A Poetics of Materiality*, Chicago, IL and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2020, pp. 48–78.

<sup>5</sup> In Italian the Oxford comma is a mistake.

<sup>6</sup> Roberto Calasso, *The Ruin of Kasch*, trans. by Richard Dixon, London: Penguin, 2018 [Milano: Adelphi, 1983].

Italian *Casc* and *Kasch* are pronounced exactly the same), R.C. (like R. Calasso) is never entirely there, and haunts the text with authority like a benign version of Maldoror, if such an entity may be envisaged.<sup>7</sup> Never properly introduced (she has been addressing you, without much ceremony, since you started reading these pages), she is the incoherence in theory that makes perfect sense in practice, chimerically. At times it may sound didactic, only to reinforce its true elusive nature. It was suggested that The Ruin of Casc is the subtle noise of D.C.'s prose, or its tone, the silence that the writer imposes on her speech.<sup>8</sup>

After her death, D.C. is heard in a series of Imaginary Conversations with two of the main subjects of her study: Cristina Campo, meticulous, specious, inflexible, and Alejandra Pizarnik, tormented, gloomy, parodic. These are partly drawn and reworked from the former's letters and the latter's journals. Because of the sense of writing as kinship and proximity grounding this text, as shall be demonstrated, Campo is replaced when necessary with Cristina, Pizarnik with Alejandra – they are friends, not topics.

In the Imaginary Conversations the voices of Literature and Chimera are also heard.<sup>9</sup> Chimera constantly points at her excess. She puts demands on her readers because she is drawn from books that put demands on their readers. She aims to spark, monstrous and difficult as it is, not to seduce with smooth inflections. Chimera draws immense pleasure

---

<sup>7</sup> Maldoror is the central character in the long prose poem *Les Chants de Maldoror* by Isidore Ducasse, Comte de Lautréamont. Lautréamont, *Maldoror and Poems*, trans. by Paul Knight, London: Penguin, 1978 [*Les Chants de Maldoror*, Bruxelles: Verboeckhoven et Cie, 1869]. His appearance is relevant for his ambiguously placed voice, oscillating inside and outside the text, at once actor in, subject, and author of commentary; for its parodic drifts; and for being the subject of an essay by Maurice Blanchot in which a poetic of reminiscence is outlined. See Maurice Blanchot, *Lautréamont and Sade*, trans. by Stuart and Michelle Kendall, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004 [*Lautréamont et Sade*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1949].

<sup>8</sup> 'Tone is not the voice of the writer, but the intimacy of the silence he imposes on his speech, which makes this silence still *his own*, what remains of himself in the discretion that sets him to one side', Blanchot, 'The Essential Solitude', in *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays*, trans. by Lydia Davis, New York, NY: Station Hill, 1981, p. 70 ['La solitude essentielle', in *L'espace littéraire*, Paris: Gallimard, 1955].

<sup>9</sup> For *Literature* see Appendix 1: Glossary.

in contradicting and interrupting Literature, a murmur once heard, sultry and vast, singular and in kinship, the subtle noise of prose.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> *Il rumore sottile della prosa* (*The Subtle Noise of Prose*, Milano: Adelphi, 1994) is the title of a book by the Italian writer Giorgio Manganelli, whose words will animate these pages later.

## The Form, The Forms

Voice from a Faintspeaker: Formally the thesis-work expands on the lineage of the Menippean satire, a composite genre that emerged in the late first century CE mixing prose with verse, serious tones with parody and critique of canons. It contains fictional elements, but it is not a novel, as Northrop Frye shows in *Anatomy of Criticism*: it ‘deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes’. Apuleius’s *The Golden Ass* and Petronius’s *Satyricon* are the main historical examples of the genre, and helpful models adopted to *chimerise* the diverse registers demanded by this project. As Frye writes, the Menippean satire ‘makes for violent dislocations in the customary logic of narrative [...] shades off into more purely fanciful or moral discussions, like the Imaginary Conversations or the “dialogue of the dead”’; the Menippean satirist, dealing with intellectual themes and attitudes, shows his exuberance in intellectual ways, by piling up an enormous mass of erudition about his theme or in overwhelming his pedantic targets with an avalanche of their own jargon’.<sup>11</sup> The Menippean satire is ‘a unity and not an aggregate’;<sup>12</sup> its form is crafted with attention to exaggeration and artifice. Like the Chimera, it may seem impossible according to rules of consequence and causality, but it exists if other paths are taken, those of imaginative reading and learning. Following Mikhail Bakhtin’s arguments in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, the Menippean satire is a polyphonic form *par excellence*, containing a variety of voices and non-hierarchical points of view.<sup>13</sup> However, while Bakhtin studies the Menippean satire in relation to the polyphonic novel, this thesis-work is a Menippean satire for critical writing. It unravels

---

<sup>11</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957, p. 309.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson, Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984 [*Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, n. pub.: Moscow, 1963].



across interrelated sections juxtaposing essays and lyrical prose, philosophical dialogues and commentary, from the rhapsodic to the meditative, from the declamatory to the parodic. Its main arguments are not exhausted sequentially but unravel throughout, embodied by its composite, polyphonic, monstrous, and impure form. It demands varied and inventive ways of reading.

Deranged Essays, Summaries, Commentaries, Monologues, Journals, Drifts, and Visions: the forms in these pages are not arbitrary: they have been employed, studied, or yearned for by Calasso, Campo, Pizarnik, and the choice to work with them marks the deep connections perceived in singular acts of reading through formal and tonal encounters. They are necessary manifestations of the kinship between a chimeric writer and the subjects of her study, through their forms and voices. As she individuates herself in enmeshment with the forms she studies, she voices her otherness in the only form not employed by Calasso, Campo, and Pizarnik, though prominent in the Menippean satire: the Imaginary Conversation, which allows her to speak with her subjects and to host voices and modes of address that would otherwise remain unheard.

Not exclusively conversational, visceral, commentarial, solemn, meticulous, mocking, parodic, *Nothing As We Need It* embodies all these tones non-hierarchically, critically, chimerically.

## Notes on Style

Voice from a Faintspeaker: The first language spoken, heard, and written by D.C. and Cristina Rovina is Italian, and in certain parts of this thesis-work the structure of the Italian language – including punctuation, or mistranslations such as ‘translated in English’ instead of ‘translated into English’ – is kept, although using English words. Long sentences and convoluted style are intentional, as they allow an Italian accent to ring in the English text, conveying the density and rhythmic complexity in writing as a stranger at the core of this project.

The text produces a sense of displacement or *déjà vu* through occasional recurring patterns. Repetitions are intentional and instrumental to the structure and the development of the thesis-work.

Since *Nothing As We Need It* proposes entanglement and non-hierarchical readings across works of literature, long quotations are kept as part of the text rather than being indented, enhancing the sense of proximity to words written by others that is central to this study.

The two neologisms, *csiting* and *transcelating* (see Appendix 1: Glossary) only appear in italics at the beginning of the text, and not thereafter except where emphasis is needed, to endorse their currency.

In this thesis-work *Chimera* is at once a voice and a symbol, a monster and the object of a yearning, a first name and a noun, a fictional character and a quality. When reading aloud, D.C. and Rovina pronounce it alternatively as an Italian and an English word

(/ki·mè·ra/ and /kaɪ'miərə/). To hold this sense of oscillation between meanings, states, and qualities, the spelling in these pages varies between *Chimera* and *chimera*, sometimes clearly denoting the character as *Chimera* and the quality as *chimera*, other times hinting at the coexistence of the two, to the point where it is no longer clear what the rule might be for choosing a capital C or not. It is telling that the verse by Dino Campana, ‘e ti chiamo ti chiamo Chimera’, which appears recurrently here, is repeated by Amelia Rosselli as ‘e ti chiamo ti chiamo chimera’:<sup>14</sup> a crucial formal decision in this thesis-work, oscillating between *Chimera* and *chimera*, is made on the ground of what its materials suggest.

---

<sup>14</sup> Both verses are fully referenced later.

## Suggestions on How to Read

Voice from a Faintspeaker: The thesis-work should be read in its entirety to fully apprehend its echoes, '[f]or it may perhaps contain some material at the beginning or in the middle which is left incomplete where it stands, and rounded afterwards. So if someone saw one part of the material and not another, they might perhaps be easily led into error'.<sup>15</sup> It must be heard while it is read. *Heard* is the anagram of *read* with the added *h* of a breath, so read in it the circularity and repetition of breathing.

Knowing, here, is related to *gnosis*, not to *episteme*; it is shaped through encounters with and awareness of the metaphysical realities of a reading-writing-listening-composite self, rather than through discursive arguments laid out in progression.<sup>16</sup> Remember how reading unravels after you have put down a book, in long stretches of time that exceed the actual time of reading, when thoughts coalesce and reach you unannounced. Remember the attraction you had for a page, a paragraph, a title, a cadence; the moment you realised you were inside those pages, and you were with their writer too, as Borges shows.<sup>17</sup> Likewise this thesis-work unravels through a reading of and a being with writers who do not systematise their research in taxonomies or case studies, and it does the same with them. Although based on specialist enquiries, the composite and impure ways in

---

<sup>15</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*, trans. by A.C. Spearing, London: Penguin, 2001 (14th century CE), p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> 'Gnosis, n.: A special knowledge of spiritual mysteries. Often with reference to the claim to such knowledge made by the Gnostics'. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2021. [Accessed 29 June 2021].

'Episteme, n.: Scientific knowledge, a system of understanding; *spec.* (Foucault's term for) the body of ideas which shape the perception of knowledge in a particular period'. *OED Online*, Ibid. [Accessed 29 June 2021].

<sup>17</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, 'A New Refutation of Time' and 'Immortality', in *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. by Eliot Weinberger, trans. by Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, and E. Weinberger, London: Penguin, 1999, pp. 316–332, 483–491. ['Nueva refutación del tiempo', in *Otras inquisiciones*, Buenos Aires: Sur, 1952. 'La inmortalidad', in *Borges, oral*, Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1979].

which these texts are assembled indicate possibilities for chimeric writing which reach beyond discipline- or medium-specific contexts. Research is not displayed as flawless, exclusive, and permanent, but is inhabited and remade in conversation, fragmented, often interrupted. The occasional dense prose conveys the physical experience of awkwardness in reading and writing in a second language; opaque materials are considered despite their opacity, to begin and say something with them even if they may never be exhausted. Here lies the responsibility of the chimeric writer and her readers.

Read with your ears. Do not consider this thesis-work for what it is as a fixed form, but for what it does in change, what transmissions and conversations it prompts, what emotions it stirs. Pay attention to connections across sounding elements, rather than evaluations of content. Criticism here moves elsewhere, into Chimera, creature who never was.<sup>18</sup> Read these pages as D.C. reads Calasso, Campo, Pizarnik, allowing them to speak. Listening takes time, so give these words time. Read and sense exhaustion, excitement, silence: the ways in which a chimeric writer gets to that hidden core, that mass of yearning, emotion, conflict, and thinking that make her work. This must be respected, not dissected.

Do not expect lists of results. These pages are arranged with another type of knowing in mind, the one which in the Vedic texts studied by Calasso appears as *bandhu*: nexus, connection, bond.<sup>19</sup> This is the entangled form of knowing which Pizarnik yearned for in her diaries as an intimate tie between the critic and her subject; the circular knowing transmitted in fables and myths, as Campo illustrated when reading those most ancient

---

<sup>18</sup> 'I am a creature that has never been', Vivian Darroch-Lozowski, *Voice of Hearing*, Toronto: Squint Press, 2020 (1984), p. 37.

<sup>19</sup> Calasso, *L'ardore*, Milano: Adelphi, 2016 (2010), p. 171. Translations from Calasso's books are by The Ruin of Casc, unless stated otherwise.

forms of nonlinear arrangement of sensing-feeling-understanding, until in some points the discovery and awareness of the void converge toward a heightened sense of artifice. Sometimes the silence will be so deafening that you can only fill it with laughter.

[Crackle. The voice of Maurice Blanchot is heard for a few minutes. The voice of The Ruin of Casc (bracketed in her muffled timbre, but restless to be heard) stubbornly interferes with it, to the point when it becomes difficult to distinguish who it is, who I is]:

‘Criticism – literature (note the equivalence of criticism and literature proposed by M. B.; adopt it and complicate it with chimeric interferences) – seems to me to be associated with one of the most difficult, but important, tasks of our time, played out in a necessarily vague movement (the necessarily vague movement in my writing is a manner of attuning to the materials I study, of adjusting to a habit that sometimes does not fit): the task of preserving and liberating thought from the notion of value (what other conversations might occur, if I disjoin my critical writing from judgement and value, and continue to call it criticism?), consequently also opening history (history: the sense that I carry, not only in my reasoning, but in my language, material and detritus that were before. How many dead writers are living in these words?) up to what all these forms of value have already released into it and to what is taking shape (*is taking shape*, present continuous: the shaping of *a* criticism as it is made; the making and changing of forms, as they are driven by different encounters) as an entirely different – still unforeseeable – kind of affirmation (affirmation: literature must be written, stated and reinstated, made. Criticism does not bestow opinions after the fact: it searches with the subjects of its study, and) this search is not only a theoretical pursuit, it is the very process constituting the literary experience, and its possibility is constituted through testing and contesting, through

creation. “Search” is a word that should not be understood in an intellectual sense, but as an action taken within and in light of creative space. (Marvel at Blanchot’s *ante litteram* vision of practice-based research). Criticism turns what is not to be evaluated into the experience of the work’.<sup>20</sup> (I have thought, experimented, and debated this chimera of Blanchot’s: criticism that turns what is not to be evaluated into the experience of the work. I have found no other ways of achieving this experience of the work, in my work of criticism, other than reading the work out loud, considering publication and distribution, transmission, diffusion as part of such experience, or – here is the crux – allowing my critical writing to enter the very fibres of the work I study. Many of these pages are formed, like this very paragraph, as my experience of the work *in writing, inside writing* as you can see now, under your own eyes).

I do not yearn for specific meanings. I write the opulence of reading.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Blanchot, ‘Preface: What Is the Purpose of Criticism?’, in *Lautréamont and Sade*, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> ‘I do not want surpluses of meaning. I want opulence of being’, Darroch-Lozowski, p. 48.

## The Interdisciplinary Death of D.C.<sup>22</sup>

I am surrounded by Disciplines.

Disciplines!

So plural, so diverse...

Will they leave me in peace?

How imperious they appear together, these Disciplines, and their Interdisciplinarity,

[waltz]

*-arity, -arity, -arity,*

*-ity, -ity, -ity,*

*-ty, -ty, -ty,*

*-y, -y, -y,*

how authoritative.

*-y!*

When all these disciplines approach me, it is with utmost brutality,

*-ality! -ality!*

---

<sup>22</sup> The beginning of this section echoes, and in part distorts Henri Michaux, 'Fate: B', in *A Certain Plume*, trans. by Richard Sieburth, New York, NY: New York Review Books, 2017, p. 131 [*Un certain Plume*, Paris: Éditions du Carrefour, 1930].



Look at them:

Art, interested in voice

Literature, desiring performance

and Sound Studies... Sound Studies wants to sing.

[Thud].

[Unbearable violent noises, of flesh being brutally torn].

[Pause].

[Voice from the other side]:

They ripped me apart in four: ears, hands, legs, mouth.

I was drawn and quartered by the Interdisciplinary Nothing.

It was a blood bath.

## Imaginary Conversation

### Chimera and Literature

Voice from a Faintspeaker: D.C. is dead, her quartered body on the ground. From the sky, or from the depths of the earth, two monstrous beings appear whose nature does not look human. They nonetheless seem natural, as always in the logic of the Vision.<sup>23</sup> The two creatures are

Chimera, The Unnameable,

and

Literature, The Timeless.

They sit at either side of D.C.'s body, and begin to speak.

One might say those two creatures speak to each other in verses or in music. Granted, the effect and distortion of the vision allows them to sound like that; otherwise, their conversation may sound deprived of mystery, like an exchange of opinions, a dry report or commentary on the works of D.C., forever anguished by Literature and by her chimeric yearning for who knows what sort of writing. In those words, however, coming from others, the writing of D.C. finds sense, from another time, from the outer edges of a buried age. In truth, neither was her voice ever whole, even, or balanced, nor were her senses,

---

<sup>23</sup> This scenario echoes Lucian of Samosata, 'The Vision: A Chapter of Autobiography', in *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, trans. by H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler, Forgotten Books, 2007 (2nd century CE), pp. 20–23, echoed in turn in Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Note 3: Introduction of the Metaphysical Theme', in *Petrolio*, trans. by Ann Goldstein, London: Secker and Warburg, 1997, pp. 6–9 [*Petrolio*, Milano: Mondadori, 2015 (1992)].

certainly not her writing, and how could they be whole, even, and balanced, if she was so many voices, always more than one, groundless but not without grounds, her not all her?

Chimera [who likes to laugh]: Look at this D.C., poor wretch, quartered by the Interdisciplinary Nothing. A mystery I can recognise.

Literature [who exudes solemnity]: It appears she has nothing to say.

C.: Her voice not all hers, surely is mine.

L.: Yes, but the weight she carries inside, that belongs to me.<sup>24</sup>

C.: If this is the body of one absorbed by writing as resonant space, who said she was writing criticism for the sake of the constellation of writers she read and derived her writing from; if she did not make her difficulties in a foreign language an excuse to stop writing, then this body is mine.

L.: Fair enough, but the weight she carries inside, that belongs to me.

C.: If D.C. maintained that her thoughts around chimeric writing were formed from the voices of other dead and unheard writers she frequented, then she belongs to me.

---

<sup>24</sup> Pasolini, p. 7.

L. [harsh, solemn, with obstinate persuasion, and the air of not giving up for any speculation in the world around the nature of D.C.'s writing]: Yes, but the weight she holds inside belongs to me.

C.: If this disconsolate D.C. did not plan to present the words and voices of other writers for the sake of ventriloquism or channelling – but to reinstate and situate herself as reader, then she is mine, speechless as she might feel.

L.: But the weight she carries inside is mine.

C.: What are you holding in your hands, Lit? Why the terror in your eyes?

[Literature reads out loud THE STATEMENT OF AIMS AND OBJECTIVES, in which D.C. attempted to repress her fanciful flights of fevered eloquence, and to declare, plainly and simply, the nature and aims of her work, her methods, and intended outputs]:

I aim:

- to practise, study, and propose *chimeric writing*, a new form of critical writing that inhabits, echoes, and is haunted by the subjects of its enquiry and desire: voices of untranslated literature, concealments and polyphonies of a bilingual self;
- to do so in a thesis-work that merges practice and commentary;
- to expose the formal and methodological possibilities of such an entanglement by treating literature as material beyond the limits of textual analysis, through considerations of resonance;
- to demonstrate that the lack of words (the *nothing*) initially perceived when

writing about less exposed, non-topical, and untranslated texts is full of signals, and that the responsibility of critical writing is to become *volume* for them, in the three senses of the word: book (written work), space (for enquiry and attention), amplification (giving voice);

- to understand how chimeric writing may be practiced as research, in entanglement with its subjects.

Writing here is altogether:

- the subject of my enquiry. I study the works of other writers, and my own;
- my practice. My research is carried out through writing a form of criticism that uses language and literature as material. In writing I encounter my subjects, deepen my understanding of them, think with them, and am surprised by them;
- my main methodology, manifested and commented throughout as it becomes chimeric;
- the material in which I present my work.

My research *is made through* and *results in* a text, in which my argument for chimeric writing is sustained equally by the topics addressed, and by the way they are written. Because of the contextual nature of this research, the thesis-work will be altogether and throughout a literature review, a study of tones and forms, a commentary on its own process, the unravelling of philosophical concerns, a manifestation of a meth...

C. [interrupting, exasperated]: Enough! I cannot hear this anymore. Why this eagerness to say everything right off? I beg you, Lit, give me some space to breathe. Look at me, lit, I am a fire-breathing monster.

Literature: Of course you are lit, in part you are me. Who knows how many times, on your less detectable frequencies, you speak of me, as you speak to me?

C.: D.C.'s aim was for her words to hold the unattainable yearning inherent in research, which is why she called her writing *chimeric*: how could it possibly be held in a list of bullet points? It is present and practised in these pages, as it unfolds in the yearning that moved her entire writing project. Its form, therefore, cannot be but a composite of forms, each one gesturing beyond itself.

L.: Crucially, D.C. chose the adjective *chimeric*...

C. [pleased with herself]: How elegant.

L.: ...to articulate her understanding of critical writing keeping these two qualities in mind: the monstrous, and the unattainable. Her writing was displaced and replaced in the space of yearning, in the excess that prompted and grounded it.

C. [exceedingly pleased with herself]: You will appreciate the shift in terminology proposed by D.C., from a functional designation such as *interdisciplinary* to *chimeric*...

L.: ...from institutional rhetoric toward the realm of symbolic reading, allowing the term that defines her study to make its context, and the echoes that resound therein, present.

C.: Certainly, to spell my composite being brings about a sense of monstrosity, artifice, and mythical density, along with associations and analogies proper of a symbol, that have little to do with the term *interdisciplinary*.

L.: To say *chimeric* sets a mood, and a mode. It is not interchangeable, or arbitrary, but necessary: the term that holds how writing is formed *is* the way of knowing it brings forth, and it shapes knowing. D.C. did not want to explain me, Chimera: she wanted to show what Chimera might engender in the imagination, prompting thought toward myth, toward monster, toward yearning. D.C. demonstrated this in a deranged essay called ‘My Chimera’. As a *situative* practice of writing, reading, and thinking, her chimeric writing is not *situated* in given frameworks, but orients itself as an operation steeped in desire that establishes its singular ontology, constellations of references, and forms.

C.: In that text, D.C. was attempting to write around us, even when untranslated or barely available. As if she could find any readers! She even asked other people to join in her quest, to no avail. Most withdrew, shied away at the invitation, concerned that the invisibility of materials would make writing invisible, too. The fools. That was the moment D.C. understood Gertrude Stein, when she wrote ‘I write for myself and strangers’, from a cusp of hope and despair.<sup>25</sup>

L.: Gertrude, how chimeric. How piercing, that moment when D.C. was in tears as she read: ‘You write a book and while you write it you are ashamed for every one must think you are a silly or a crazy one and yet you write it and you are ashamed, you know you will be laughed at or pitied by every one and you have a queer feeling and you are not

---

<sup>25</sup> Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans*, Champaign, IL, London, Dublin: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995 (1925), p. 289.

very certain and you go on writing. Then someone says yes to it, to something you are liking, or doing or making and then never again can you have completely such a feeling of being afraid and ashamed that you had then when you were liking the thing and not any one had said yes about the thing'.<sup>26</sup> Writing for oneself is not enough. You must hold on a sense, a yearning for someone who says yes. For a stranger who will say yes.

C.: How chimeric... And D.C. went on writing. Persisting in her search to ground her words when the sources are opaque, she lost her voice, and became many voices; like Pellegrina Leoni, the singer in Isak Dinesen's tale 'The Dreamers', who lost her voice, and became many people.<sup>27</sup> Isak, another with a pseudonym, 'the one who laughs'.<sup>28</sup>

L.: All good and right, laugh D.C. may. But the weight she carries inside is mine.

[Chimera sits down, looks into the distance – the distance of her yearning to take Literature away from herself. She realises that she will never persuade Literature to laugh with her, to be part of her mirthful melancholy; and that solemn Literature's hammering repetitions, like a form of unholy rosary, beating, beating like a drum in the space of her thinking, are instead beginning to possess her mind. She becomes more inquisitive.]

C.: What happened to D.C., then? Last time I saw her before her death, she was speaking at conferences such as *Gestures* and *Critical Reinventions*, and attempting to write texts

---

<sup>26</sup> Stein, p. 485.

<sup>27</sup> Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen), 'The Dreamers', in *Seven Gothic Tales*, London: Penguin, 2002 (1934), pp. 236–309.

<sup>28</sup> Judith Thurman, *Isak Dinesen. The Life of Karen Blixen*, London: Penguin, 1986 (1982), p. 23.



like those published in anthologies such as *Creative Criticism*, *The Creative Critic*, *Artistic Research and Literature*.<sup>29</sup>

L.: And the weight she carried inside was immense. Even though she had developed, over the years, an affection for the *cri-cre* writers, she felt out of place in those contexts. It became evident to her that while poetry and art writing had long and expansively absorbed a desire for hybridity...

C.: A most dreadful term. Please say *chimeras*, it sounds better to my ears.

L.: ...and while poets, artists, and performers were often featured among the contributors in those publications and events, she realised that the critics largely continued to point at such hybridity...

[Chimera groans on hearing *hybridity*, as if tortured].

L.: ...while they remained entrenched in modes of writing that did not embody it. D.C. felt like a stranger. Let me read to you from her notes: ‘The critic Irit Rogoff has proposed a definition of “embodied criticality”...

C.: Just to hear it pronounced brings unease.

---

<sup>29</sup> *Gestures: Writing That Moves Between*, University of Manchester and The Whitworth Art Gallery, February 2019. *Critical Reinventions*, University of East Anglia, June 2018. *Creative Criticism*, ed. by Stephen Benson and Clare Connors, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014. *The Creative Critic: Writing As / About Art Practice*, ed. by Katja Hilevaara and Emily Orley, New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2018. *Artistic Research and Literature*, ed. by Corina Caduff and Tan Wälchli, Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag / Brill, 2019.

L.: ...as necessarily entangled. Neither criticism as distant judgement, nor critique as awareness of structures, “embodied criticality” generates meaning through connectedness with the materials that it studies’.<sup>30</sup>

C.: I gather D.C. was enthusiastic at the idea.

L.: She was, indeed – inspired, as ever, by Rogoff’s thoughts. However, as she noted: ‘The resulting writing does not reflect such connectedness, employing a distanced, formalised jargon which prevents the texture of critical writing from reaching the very entanglement it theorises.’ Do you begin to understand? D.C. yearned for critical writing which would *practise* such entanglement, informed by speculative and theoretical considerations, and at once reanimating its language...

C.: ...its language as chimera. Hm. I suspect all she wanted was an excuse to talk about certain writers not usually considered, barely translated in English.

L.: Rather than imposing a formal structure that overwhelmed the individual, distinctive textures of her subjects...

C.: What kind of writer committed to their subjects would do such a thing?

---

<sup>30</sup> Irit Rogoff is a theorist and critic, founder of the Visual Cultures Department at Goldsmiths, University of London, and one of the most adventurous thinkers today in the fields of curatorial studies and critical theory. Rogoff, ‘What Is A Theorist’, *Kein.org*, 2003, <http://www.kein.org/node/62> [Accessed 3 October 2018]; ‘Smuggling’ - An Embodied Criticality’, *Xenopraxis. Strange Doings*, 2006, [https://xenopraxis.net/readings/rogoff\\_smuggling.pdf](https://xenopraxis.net/readings/rogoff_smuggling.pdf) [Accessed 3 October 2018].

L.: Someone more concerned with authorial coherence, I suppose. You interrupted me again. As I was saying, rather than imposing an overwhelming structure on her subjects, D.C. listened to them, spoke with them, attempted to find shared grounds, unstable as these are in a conversation. She wanted to show how critical writing may carry its arguments in and through the forms, tones, rhythms, and registers of its subjects, from which it will not be detached because entangled with them. She attempted to make a space, and a case, for practices of critical writing that experiment with tone, form, and polyphony, questioning implied formal standards of transmitting and publishing critical reflections. As D.C. proposed *the writing of criticism* as central...

C.: ...and chimeric...

L.: ...she presented it as a transmission beyond the boundaries of text, understood as yearning and excess.

C.: Chimeric writing is critical, creative, and ‘something more and something else’ than creative-critical.<sup>31</sup> Tell me now, didn’t D.C. have a degree in Art Writing?

L.: Yes, but again, she felt like a stranger in those lands. As a writer of criticism who experienced and formed her writing as an artistic practice, but identified as a critic, not an artist, she reversed Art Writing’s central tenet, defined by the Art Writing teaching

---

<sup>31</sup> ‘[E]ach word says what is says – and beyond that, something more and something else’, Alejandra Pizarnik, ‘A Musical Hell, III: The Shapes of Absence: The Word that Heals,’ in *Extracting the Stone of Madness: Poems 1962–1972*, trans. by Yvette Siegert, New York: New Directions, 2016, p. 117 [‘Figuras de la ausencia: La palabra que sana’, in *El infierno musical*, Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Argentina Editores, 1971].

team at Goldsmiths as a practice that ‘sustains all forms of art criticism’.<sup>32</sup> Her writing did not *sustain* forms of art criticism, detached: it *was* altogether, entangled, criticism and practice, a practice at once artistic, critical, philosophical, and literary.

C.: Chimeric writing is Art Writing, and something more and something else than Art Writing. I begin to understand the nature of D.C.’s operation, inhabiting these disciplines but never entirely tied to any. How about The Essay, though?

L.: Any time she tried to write one, she ended up writing a deranged essay instead.

C.: This caused great amusement and many rejections.

L.: Rejections that also led D.C. to find the forms in which she truly could write, no matter how unpopular or non-topical. Chimeric writing became at times a more clandestine form, and she adopted other names. Now, you may recall how The Essay as art form was a topic in her days, examples of which include books by contemporary writers such as Anne Boyer, Kate Briggs, Brian Dillon, Kate Zambreno.<sup>33</sup> These are, in various ways, works of polished stylistic accomplishment, profoundly engaged with formal possibilities, and often D.C. found herself in conversation with their authors, but...

---

<sup>32</sup> Maria Fusco, Yve Lomax, Michael Newman, Adrian Rifkin, ‘11 Statements Around Art Writing’, *Frieze* online, 11 October 2011, <https://frieze.com/article/11-statements-around-art-writing> [Accessed 7 October 2018].

<sup>33</sup> For Anne Boyer see pp. 42–43. For Kate Zambreno see p. 34. In *Essayism*, London: Fitzcarraldo, 2017, Brian Dillon has crystallised the essay form as an accomplished work of subjective attachments and sustained reading practices. Kate Briggs is the author of a widely acclaimed book-length essay on translation, *This Little Art*, London: Fitzcarraldo, 2017.

C.: ...but her thoughts, and with them her words, were never fully contained in the essay form at a speculative and practical level. Moreover, as a stranger in English, how could she possibly aim for formal roundedness and flawlessness in her style? Her form was monstrous, implausible, held the sense of a yearning that entails unevenness.

L.: Her writing was always inevitably deranged because it kept pushing her outside its boundaries. Her arguments moved through forms, and through voices. Some of these may have been more rounded, others more awkward, manifesting her condition of strangeness in language, and her necessity to inhabit each form, even when not entirely in command of it, because the materials demanded it. The impetus of telling would override any concerns with style, and present the 'ugly, uncomfortable language' advocated by Bachmann as the necessary gesture that disrupts literature toward critical forms of understanding.<sup>34</sup>

C.: Chimeric writing is essayistic, and writes something more and something else than an essay. Help me, now: I haven't completely grasped what made D.C.'s work a form of criticism, rather than poetics.

L.: D.C. referred to Blanchot's definition of critical discourse as the 'space of resonance within which the unspoken, indefinite reality of the work is momentarily transformed and circumscribed into words'.<sup>35</sup> This definition highlighted the cohabitation of, and tension between words and excess of words at the core of her work. It allowed her to place critical

---

<sup>34</sup> Ingeborg Bachmann, *Letteratura come utopia*, trans. by Vanda Perretta, Milano: Adelphi, 1993, p. 123. [*Frankfurter Vorlesungen: Probleme zeitgenössischer Dichtung*, München: R. Piper & Co, 1980]. Translated in English by D.C..

<sup>35</sup> Blanchot, *Lautréamont and Sade*, p. 4.

writing in a realm of resonance, imagination, and transmission, unlike other definitions that draw disciplinary boundaries, or employ an expository tone.

C.: I believe you have in mind critics and scholars such as Stephen Benson and Clare Connors, or James Elkins, who while contributing to the theorisation and problematisation of critical writing with insight, did not inhabit their subjects formally. Benson and Connors were very close to me, when they suggested Creative Criticism as a form that ‘dares to imagine that things might be different’, since ‘something is amiss in the main drag of critical writing’, ending their Introduction to the *Creative Criticism* anthology with a proposition of openness and transformation.<sup>36</sup> Elkins captured another chimeric quality in criticism, when he wrote that ‘criticism is diaphanous: it’s like a veil, floating in the breeze of cultural conversations and never quite settling anywhere’.<sup>37</sup>

L.: Yet D.C.’s problem with these propositions, as with Rogoff’s, was in these theorists’ use of language.

C.: While they talked eloquently and extensively about qualities of critical writing which are certainly chimeric – Rogoff’s embodiment, Elkins’s diaphanous states, Benson and Connors’s dialogical form – they did not engage with them in *the practice of writing* to a point in which its very form would embody their arguments. By contrast D.C. sought to animate language, combine forms, and practice critical writing not as distant judgement

---

<sup>36</sup> *Creative Criticism*, 2014, p. 2. Benson and Connors (University of East Anglia) co-edited *Creative Criticism*, one of the initial prompts toward a focused debate on ‘creative-critical writing’ in the UK. Their Introduction to the volume ends with a semi-fictional dialogue.

<sup>37</sup> James Elkins, ‘On the Absence of Judgement in Art Criticism’, in *The State of Art Criticism*, ed. by J. Elkins and Michael Newman, New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2008, p. 74. Elkins is an art historian, critic, and E.C. Chadbourne Chair of art history, theory, and criticism at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His research is often drawn toward sustained forms of engagement with, and critique of given terms in art history, criticism, and theory, such as ‘the essay’ or ‘art criticism’.

but as enmeshment. While the writing by those authors is expository, hers (and that of the writers she studied) is evocative. While they prove their arguments through logic, D.C. attempts to persuade *via* rhetoric and artifice. While they proceed by consequential steps and addition, she argues by deepening, rotating, and echoing. While their forms are consistent, hers feature various tones and styles.

L.: You will be flattered to hear that the yearning inherent in the adjective *chimeric* was crucial for D.C., as it allowed her to understand her writing as a form of criticism that tends to its poetics. She did not want to define her understanding of critical writing; rather, she aimed to abandon the adjective *critical* and replace it altogether with *chimeric*, to signify precisely the slipperiness of her writing's *csite*, its symbolic mutations, its yearning to exceed the boundaries of definitions. She did not aim to define, but to understand how chimeric writing may be practiced, as research, in entanglement with its subjects. The poet and scholar Charles Bernstein, a longstanding champion of radical poetics, and of the need to foreground the entanglements between critical and creative positions through a variety of writing practices, has stated that 'poetics is the continuation of poetry by other means'.<sup>38</sup> You may understand D.C.'s criticism as the continuation of her poetics by other means. The two terms are not antithetical: her ambition was to write a poetics of criticism, a manner of arranging and presenting critical considerations in which formal inventiveness and construction – in reading, in writing – are as important as any conceptual or theoretical claims. She believed, and it was a belief substantiated by practice and experience, that it is impossible to take singular histories of learning and of individuation through reading, apart from how a work is understood. *Individuation* is meant in the sense given to the term by the philosopher Bernard Stiegler, as a process

---

<sup>38</sup> Charles Bernstein, 'Optimism and Critical Excess (Process)', in *A Poetics*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 160.

through which ‘that diversity *which I am* and equally the diversity *which we are* is proved to be asymptotic’: a chimeric yearning in which the subject constantly finds herself beyond herself, enmeshed in her *milieu*. The end of this process is ‘ceaselessly *fictioned*’, and the singularity of self can only be understood as a ‘condition of the we’, in a constellation of linguistic and philosophical components.<sup>39</sup> Individuation was crucial in D.C.’s project, a work of criticism that presents herself as a polyphonic subject in relation to her literary *milieu*, not a case study detached from the literature that surrounds her. Trained as a critic she identified as a critic, but was curious to see how critical writing, her *axis mundi*, could exist in a variety of scenarios, inhabit a range of forms derived from other disciplines, take on a composite form that holds (but does not exhaust) a range of voices, out of sync as a stranger. Between art, literature, sound studies, D.C. individuated her writing as chimeric.

C.: D.C., critic who became chimeric. Trained as an art historian and later specialising in sound studies – not as an academic, but through a practice of music journalism, sound art curating, and events programming – her works and the main references in which she constellated her writing exist in composite texts steeped in critical study and in commentary of historical material.

L.: As the artist Katrina Palmer employs installation, performance, text, site-specific interventions, audio works, and continues to call herself a sculptor because she is ‘motivated by archetypal sculptural concerns’,<sup>40</sup> so D.C. understood and situated her

---

<sup>39</sup> Bernard Stiegler, ‘How I Became a Philosopher’, in *Acting Out*, trans. by David Barison, Daniel Ross, Patrick Crogan, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 4 [*Passer à l’acte*, Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2003].

<sup>40</sup> ‘The Time-Travelling Circus: The Dossier Concerning Pablo Fanque and the Electrolier: Katrina Palmer’, *Essays on Sculpture*, Henry Moore Institute, 78, July 2017.



work as criticism that inhabits fictional and poetic forms, motivated by archetypal critical concerns: for example, the need to understand the subjects of study through attention, exercised to the point of becoming the material of study, that she found in Calasso and Pizarnik, or Blanchot's space of resonance that hosts the temporary transformations, into critical writing, of the materials that exceed it.

C.: The tension in the term *chimeric*, holding a yearning of critical writing for art, poetics, sound, is crucial to understand D.C.'s work in metamorphosis, not fixity. Think of how D.C.'s project differed from the work of other contemporaries. A writer such as Kate Zambreno, for example, was committed in *Book of Mutter* and *Appendix Project* to a method of spiralling around or citing, without fully considering, as a primary concern, her own choices in the practice of citation...

L.: Without csiting, you might say.

C.: ...citing from a set of notable references, such as W. G. Sebald, Louise Bourgeois, or Roland Barthes.<sup>41</sup> Hers, like D.C.'s, are forms of reading-with, situating her own discourses in-relation-to, but less foregrounded, commented upon, or considered, in relation to the status of the references and sources. I suggest that D.C. offered a new and vital way for understanding this tendency in much popular and acclaimed writing, for contextualising it in ways that have not been done. It is a benchmark for what such a form of writing-as-csiting might read like, when writing with less exposed voices. There is a reach and an original contribution to this aspect of her project, worth recognising.

---

<sup>41</sup> Kate Zambreno, *Book of Mutter*, South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2017; *Appendix Project: Talks and Essays*, South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2019.

L.: It is related to her work with books not translated in English, and to her curiosity toward lesser-known texts; an inclination toward the minor key, the faint signal; a drive to find, and found, a new vocabulary for her *stranger-ness*. Shaped and perceived in conversation with older forms and older authors, D.C.'s work did not claim to be a thing of the past, but a work of presence unconcerned with topical or current materials.

Voice from a Faintspeaker [slightly out of sync with D.C.'s words and its own]:<sup>42</sup> A network of REQUESTS, RESPONSES, and ADVICE, a living forest of VOICES, is the very element [...] in which the word goes out to meet THOSE WHO DESIRE IT [...]. To understand how the works enrich one another mutually and are inscribed in a SPIRITUAL RECIPROCITY, we must place ourselves deliberately in this or that specific place, i.e., open a particular VOLUME, and not eliminate a priori in a work the very thing that constitutes it, namely, THE FACT THAT IT EXISTS [...]. It is not a question of ascertaining what remains of a writer in the texts that follow her, but of asking WHAT IS RECEIVED [...]. What can be apprehended with, and beyond the texts [...]. My English language is RECEIVED FROM OTHERS. My words are not freely or spontaneously occurring. I remain elusive in the very language I speak, which is never localisable, never reducible to one text, one source, one reference. Transformations are at play. Citing is siting is csiting. This writing gives THE "I" OF EXPERIENCE TAKEN IN THE "WE" OF A LANGUAGE OF KINSHIP IN READING. Its forms may appear exaggerated, artificial, not made by the book: they are made from books.

C.: What do you wish to do now?

---

<sup>42</sup> This paragraph rewrites in part sentences from Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 2 vols, trans. by Michael B. Smith, Chicago, IL and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992, 2015 [*La Fable Mystique, XVIe-XVIIe Siècle*, Paris: Gallimard, 1982, 2013].

L. [who in truth is not averse to Chimera's inclinations but needs more time. Literature always needs more time]: My wish is to tell you what I taught D.C.; what she read in me before she came up with this peculiar idea of bringing your bewitching laughter inside my world. I taught her that when there is apparently nothing to refer to, fabulation begins: look at what Elfriede Jelinek did in her play *Her Not All Her*; at Giorgio Manganelli's *Impossible Interviews*; at the *Dialogues of The Dead* by Lucian, another one who frequented me in the early days, and shaped me.<sup>43</sup> In *Her Not All Her* Elfriede wrote using the words of Robert Walser as material. If these are not quoted directly, if page numbers are not given, but it is acknowledged that the text is shaped from them, as she does, then writing and reading become a question of resonance, presence, transformation, shake the handwritten records, mix them in a medium of resonance, and keep the viscosity of what lies unspoken but is present.

C.: What happens to the author?

L.: She is no longer a sole owner or creator of text. She exists in a mesh, not in a dictionary entry. She proceeds by a poetics of reminiscence and resonance, adding her singular voice, haunted by the other voices. You must understand, she never dissolves; she is her, not all her. This is not fragmentation, it is a process of individuation, in which D.C. finds herself, having gone through a metamorphosis, enmeshed in the work of others, her voice at once faint, significant, and signifying. Alejandra Pizarnik wrote 'I cannot speak with my voice, but I speak with *my* voices', she did not say just 'voices' or 'other voices'.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> For Manganelli, see 'A Deranged Essay: Impossible Interviews', p. 103. For Lucian, see p. 19, 55.

<sup>44</sup> Pizarnik, 'Cornerstone', in *Extracting the Stone of Madness*, p. 97 ['Piedra Fundamental', in *El infierno musical*].

This is crucial: *it is me*, Alejandra and D.C. say, *and I have many voices*. To clarify: the use of many voices through pseudonyms adopted here is not like Søren Kierkegaard's, who firmly believed each of his pen names corresponded to a different philosophy: it is a way of *being with, of being one and many*, a way of presenting selfhood as enmeshment. Such multitude is the work of dedication, of recurrent reading.

C.: And the reader?

L.: The reader of this work – implied, unborn, dead or deaf as she may be – must be courageous, willing to think and listen, to move with and inside the words that summon her, and respond in turn; not to wait to be told everything. Can she trust the text? She can trust the telling in the text, the hum that keeps words together, not shaping a new way of writing, but demanding a new way of reading that listens to the page. No safety net, other than the drive and rhythm of the telling.

C.: *The Telling* is the title of a book by one who dwelled in my realm for some time, Laura (Riding) Jackson, with her resolute, chimeric insistence on her writing being lodged in the 'durable sense of the further'.<sup>45</sup> She spent many days conversing with me, telling me that 'until the missing story of ourselves is told, nothing besides told can suffice us: we shall go on quietly craving it.'<sup>46</sup> Words, and something missing, a yearning. She also told me that what we have to say 'must be spoken with weighted reverberance to be heard';<sup>47</sup> and this reminds me of something D.C. may have written, or that someone else is about to write on her behalf, on the need for faint signals to stay as such in order to be heard:

---

<sup>45</sup> Laura (Riding) Jackson, *The Telling*, Manchester: Flyfield Books/Carcanet, 2005 (1972), p. xv.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

not demanding loudness, but attention. The writer becomes a *faintspeaker*, inverts the loudspeaker's principle of amplification from loudness into a deepening. Laura also said something about 'a book of one continual making,'<sup>48</sup> which is also what Calasso wrote of you, Literature, as a quality which cannot be recognised by its 'observance of any theory, but rather by a certain vibration or luminescence of the sentence' that connects books across the ages.<sup>49</sup> Writers are possessed by language, and you, Literature, speak along with them. Like Borges...

L.: May he rest in peace... you interrupted me. I was trying to say that in the case of Jelinek's play, because it is impossible to rely on the authority of footnotes, the reader is led deeply inside the text, as site of knowing in the experience of reading; and simultaneously, the reader is taken outside the text, to inject some vitality again into the footnotes of her understanding, searching herself for Walser's books, finding her ways of reading them, and in turn, wondering what echoes may be found there. Elfriede's text does not rely on the scaffolding of references: it is all reference, or even better said, it is resonance. Its form does not need external systems of legitimisation, but is held together by the inner motor of understanding-through-reading.

C.: I am beginning to follow you, Literature. I am beginning to see in which manners D.C. invoked me, before her fall.

---

<sup>48</sup> (Riding) Jackson, p. 53.

<sup>49</sup> Calasso, *Literature and the Gods*, trans. by Tim Parks, London: Vintage, 2001, p. 175 [*La letteratura e gli dei*, Milano: Adelphi, 2001].

L.: Consider the other haunted ones, who in turn haunt these pages: Calasso, haunted by the prose of Gottfried Benn and the Rg Veda; Jelinek, haunted by the words of Walser to the point of no longer knowing what is her and what not her...

C. [as in a trance]: ...‘all and nothing’...

L.: ...Pasolini, haunted in his posthumous book *Petrolio* by Fyodor Dostoevskij and Lucian. So much of me, so much literature, in their literature. For Calasso, the very substance of his argument around literature as a phosphorescent undercurrent that conjoins books became the thread that bound his publishing project and his books. Writing of Cristina Campo shortly after her death, he recognised her ability to capture the dominant frequency of texts written by others and to transform them as a ‘hidden quote, incorporated and elaborated in the text’.<sup>50</sup> He does that in his first book, *The Mad Impure*, and I am no longer sure how much his literature took from hers, or saw itself in it. The texts that follow are *mad impurities* in their constant, stubborn, euphoric contaminations with the words of those who came before, and made them resonate. And if their works look unruly or uneven to the reader, it is only because the reader’s habits were formed elsewhere, not accustomed to those works’ forgotten, yet very ancient forms.

---

<sup>50</sup> Calasso, ‘Una scrittrice fra mistica e letteratura’, *Corriere della Sera*, 5 marzo 1977.

Voice from a Faintspeaker [reading what may look like **A Summary** of the next few pages, presenting **The Context of This Work**]: An ancient form, cloaked in a poisonous blanket of parody — In which a Literature Review is not illustrated by highlighting aspects missing from certain works to make this one *stand out*; but by showing how this work is different as it *speaks with* those so they may exist together, yet never in unison — The thesis-work is not concerned with finding difference with those works individually; but with finding a way to connect them, which is at once its form and its argument — The thesis-work, in context, may appear as ‘no new thing under the sun’, but the composite form it takes, and the polyphony in which it is sung, are of note — Illustrious precedents — Vexations — All is *vanitas* — D.C. is convinced, there is no frame — Charming arguments disguised as verse — Qohelet is a voice; it is not known where it speaks from, and to whom — It says and repeats what many writers know, with a raging heart, and a mind of steel — It says so many things, true and simple — This fact may shake the reader: too much, nothing, vexations — There is no frame — Is it voice, is it page? — Cage? ‘I have nothing to say and I am saying it and that is poetry as I need it’.<sup>51</sup> — ‘We have nothing to say and we are saying it and that is criticism as we need it’. (The Ruin of Casc) — Nothing As We Need It.

---

<sup>51</sup> John Cage, ‘Lecture on Nothing’, in *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, London and New York, NY: Marion Boyars, 2009 (1968), p. 109.

## **A Monologue: Nothing As We Need It**

**By D.C.**

It was suggested that I try and rewrite these pages as Ecclesiastes.

Yes, Ecclesiastes.

My luck.

It might have been suggested that I rewrite them as Kodwo Eshun's *More Brilliant Than the Sun*, the book that at the turn of the century turned inside out my understanding of what it could be to write about music, to build a language from the texture of music as it is heard, perceived. The words of the British-Ghanaian writer and theorist, in their attempt to be with music as music, yet never entirely in tune, prompted me – one who used to write about sound – to contemplate possibilities for writing that could be formed elsewhere: not in the enclosed gardens of fanzine writing, not in the torture gardens of record collectors, or failed virtuoso musicians, but in language. Imagine how well I could parasitically inhabit Eshun's 'adventures in sonic fiction' and their drastic reinvention of language as *mutant texture*, where space is described as an invasive force on the song, where Martina and Tricky do not appear as much as singers but as fluxes of voices, and time is dragged into a drugged tempo, singing, sighing, *can hardly breathe*.<sup>52</sup> My prose, like Eshun's, would bend and wound and scratch as the music it approaches bends and wounds and scratches. Words would scratch and wound and bend reason, words such as

---

<sup>52</sup> 'Can hardly breathe' is quoted from Tricky, 'Vent', *Pre-Millennium Tension*, Island Records, 1996 [on CD].



*fluidarity, collapsar, superception.*<sup>53</sup> Eshun's prose of criticism as proximity would become prosthetic. These pages would become a prosthetic of writing, a prose-thesis replacing with new terms and contraptions the missing limbs of criticism, those articulations that are found wanting because they do not get close enough to the material they study, and I try hard not to lose my head so I may fully sing new terms for criticism, such as *csiting* and *transcelating*. Eshun's *prosethetics* is nothing as we need it. *Can hardly breathe.*

It may have been suggested that I rewrite these pages as *The Unquiet Grave*, Cyril Connolly's 'word-cycle' published in 1944 under the pseudonym of Palinurus, crashing gravitas with frivolity, indulgence with nostalgia, fragments against quotes, aphorisms, rotting ruminations that begin to question implicitly the detachment demanded of literary criticism, in favour of autobiographical musings densely woven in the fabric of the text.<sup>54</sup> If only I were to rewrite these pages like *The Unquiet Grave*... what a feast, for my tendency to indulge in lyrical self-pitying meanderings. Ah, to have the chance to digress on the poignant silence of untranslated quotes, speculate on the dark intellectual subconscious of Europe, meditate on the obfuscation of symbols. How absorbing, the agony of endings; and ashes, ashes, ashes. Connolly's vexation of spirit is nothing as we need it.

I may also have been fortunate enough to be invited to rewrite these pages as *A Handbook of Disappointed Fate* by Anne Boyer, poet and essayist preoccupied with merging forms and themes of political, poetic, personal, and social issues in texts that often displace and replace historical sources into contemporary debates around identity and collective forms

---

<sup>53</sup> Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*, London: Quartet Books, 1998.

<sup>54</sup> Palinurus, *The Unquiet Grave*, New York, NY: Persea Books, 1981 (1944).

of engagement. A perfect excuse for me to enter into the very texture of that masterful piece in the book, ‘When the Lambs Rise Up Against the Birds of Prey’; to experience it repeatedly, and write from its interior, rather than figure it out.<sup>55</sup> And how were you written?, I have asked that text so often since I first encountered it, in one of those crucial moments when I first feel like a clumsy stonecutter in the presence of someone who knows how to chisel ivory; then I think, right, I will no longer call myself a writer until I can match this; then I become exhilarated as I feel the rush, yes, I have to say something with you, masterful text, you exquisite prose-that-is-parable-that-is-life, this is why I call myself a writer: to be wanting to become. No device allows me to travel back to the hours of the day when you were assembled, to enter the fibres of your writer’s mind and the way they connected with the tips of her fingers and gave shape to this magnificent and hard-to-grasp piece. But I understand, there is no secret. I suspect it has to do with reading, and attention, with thinking back to the moment of writing: writing, not the written. The poet Muriel Rukeyser says that in Cézanne’s paintings, ‘trees are not what trees look like, they are what trees feel like’.<sup>56</sup> These lines are not what writing looks like, they are what to be writing feels like, to become writing. To imagine that point of contact between thinking and wording; to attempt a gesture parallel to this. To imagine and re-enact the urgency, and at once, the precision. I need to write, not to figure out, but to become, knowing that to become does not mean to be the same, but to find a many-voiced self, always in excess. Wanting to become in excess is nothing as we need it.

Another suggestion may have been that I rewrite these pages as Clarice Lispector’s *Água viva*, so that they could exist on the edge between language and not language, one of the

---

<sup>55</sup> Anne Boyer, ‘When the Lambs Rise Up Against the Birds of Prey’, in *A Handbook of Disappointed Fate*, New York, NY: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2018, pp. 18–26.

<sup>56</sup> Muriel Rukeyser, *The Life of Poetry*, Middletown, CT: Paris Press / Wesleyan University Press, 1996 (1949), p. 29.

very motives to write them. Then I'd have a ball. A few years ago, I found myself so attuned to that most formally elusive yet piercing book by the Brazilian writer, to the point when I wished to dissolve into it, become cavity, to contain and echo it, and in the end, I could only write dub versions of Clarice's words, dub versions as in music, keeping the bass and the rhythm, rearranging them as a ghost that haunts them. Clarice said, 'I am not playing with words. I am speaking to you seriously. I incarnate myself in the voluptuous and unintelligible phrases that tangle up beyond the words. And a silence rises subtly from the knock of the phrases'.<sup>57</sup> Rises subtly from the knock of the phrases. From the knock of the phrases. From the knock of the phrases. From the knock of the phrases. The phrases. The knock. Vexation is not in the spirit, but in the knock, as she articulates her language through a statement of excess that puts pressure on words with obstinate, uneven cadence and textures. I work with this excess, asking how it shapes critical writing; what type of work it may produce, what materiality, and what else it might do. This is also nothing as we need it.

They may have asked me to rewrite in the spirit of Michel de Certeau's *The Mystic Fable*, because of the scholar's focus on the entanglement between manners of writing, manners of meaning, and the ineffable, in his reading of texts by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish mystics as forms of speech on the page. An enquiry into the relations between the ineffable and the written, between radiance and discourse, through an understanding of voice as silent medium perceived in attunement to the written, Certeau's work presents ways of reading beyond the authority of text, as conversation and transmission. Studying the writings of Juan de la Cruz among others, he shows how the

---

<sup>57</sup> Clarice Lispector, *Água viva*, trans. by Stefan Tobler, London: Penguin, 2014, p. 15 [*Água viva*, Rio de Janeiro: Artenova, 1973]. D.C. wrote extensively on Lispector. See for example *Singed: Muted Voice-Transmissions, After the Fire*, London and Prague: Equus Press, 2017, pp. 60–75, where she engages with a range of possibilities for writing dub versions of Lispector's prose.

Spanish mystic always ‘fought against the fetishism of meaning or of the “revealed” text’.<sup>58</sup> There is always a saying that is more than what is said, ‘a “soundless music” that [...] touches the voice’,<sup>59</sup> another way of thinking writing and reading across time. ‘His songs are not precious stones to be mounted in a commentary; they move about in the language like the glow of a flame that “touches” and alters it, as the vibration of the touch of a caress spreads out over a body’.<sup>60</sup> Certain limit-materials that appear to defy language cannot be held other than by listening, and being present, attending to them. Mystic writings demand an experience of reading, rather than a reading of meanings. They assert the fact of being here, of speaking like this. Like this. Manners of reading exist in the fabric of text, and in the invisible networks of perception that written language cannot hold. They demand time, speculative forms of conversation, and kinships. Deeply cited inside my study of ways of writing despite the apparent nothing to say, Certeau’s mystic fable is at the heart of nothing as we need it.

Another possibility may have been Robert Duncan’s *The H.D. Book*, in which the poet writes of his encounter with the work of H.D., showing how it reverberated in his own throughout the years, in kinship; how her words modulated his experience and understanding of reading and writing poetry in a densely woven texture of correspondences and echoes that became a matrix for his poetics. Too easy a task: his formulation of method best encompasses mine. ‘[T]he book returns again and again to this material in which the lure of a seed or a heart-beat or a minimal nucleus of consciousness lingers’.<sup>61</sup> My research too is structured through a number of heartbeats,

---

<sup>58</sup> Certeau, Vol. 2, p. 75.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Duncan, *The H.D. Book*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 2011, p. 344.

core motives, and materials. When Duncan writes that he has ‘taken psychic being, taken fire’ from the work of H.D. he does not point at the fixity of words, but at a flux of meaning, a community of modes of orientation, though in different vessels.<sup>62</sup> The writer is transformed, and at once, finds himself as plural, in and through the words of others. *How* the same material is handled (written) is crucial. It is nothing as we need it.

Need I mention *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* by Hélène Cixous, and *Into the Maelström* by David Toop, crucial examples of writing that unravels by being with its subjects, practices them through sustained attention, and is formed in conversation with them, to the point when they seem to have been drawn from the same material because they attempt to be close to their subjects in sympathy? They do not follow the conventional, chapter-based format of the nonfiction monograph, but propose new forms of reading and learning across connections, made for Cixous through her attunement ‘to a certain music’,<sup>63</sup> present and secret, and for Toop with ethnography, musicology, improvisation, personal history, approaching music in writing ‘by stealth, by degrees, by questions without hope of resolution’ rather than drawing conclusions and boundaries, falling into nothing as we need it.<sup>64</sup>

What excitement it would be, to write as Roberto Calasso’s books. Intended by their author to be arranged as an ongoing series shaped as a personal encyclopaedia, that started with *The Ruin of Kasch* in 1983, these volumes hold literature, mythology, religion, ritual, anthropology.<sup>65</sup> They are significant examples of densely woven prose steeped in a

---

<sup>62</sup> Duncan, p. 439.

<sup>63</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, trans. by Sarah Cornell and Susan Sellers, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> David Toop, *Into the Maelström: Music, Improvisation, and the Dream of Freedom. Before 1970*, New York, NY and London: Bloomsbury, 2016, p. 14.

<sup>65</sup> For full references to Calasso’s books see Bibliography.

lifetime of research, manifested in composite forms that merge storytelling, historical survey, scrutiny, speculative drifts, philosophical commentary, visionary detours. In my reading the effect is one of empty plenitude, of being overwhelmed with knowledge and understanding although it is difficult to pin down what exactly is known and understood. This significant emptiness informs the *nothing* I research as an experience of critical reading, and a manner of tuning in – nothing to quantify, much in excess. In an interview, Calasso said that the most important thing in writing is not to be restricted to a specific area, or form. Something else weaves disparate threads together, a sense of profound connection.<sup>66</sup> His books embody the experience of reading despite their apparently incoherent structure and lack of frame. It is not the frame, but the core of an argument that connects these disparate materials, and in turn shapes my chimeric writing, my nothing as we need it.

Dare I mention Blanchot's *The Infinite Conversation*? Could my study even be conceived unless I refer to those crucial pronouncements on the demand for discontinuity, the becoming of immobility, the yearning that grounds words?<sup>67</sup> Most importantly, that tempting and elusive idea, *the neuter*, that which withdraws itself when pronounced; that pushes toward its outside, and makes language possible as alterity; that separates discourse, and conjoins telling; the other voice that speaks in writing, not the author's; the very form and the very thought of writing as infinite conversation, continuous and discontinuous, uncentred and heard. A critical turn, a dissonant tune. Blanchot is present as haunting and premonition – the neuter he longed for is here, *in absentia*, through listening. It is nothing as we need it.

---

<sup>66</sup> *The Ruin of Kasch: A Conversation with Roberto Calasso and Lila Azam Zanganeh*, New York, Center for Italian Modern Art, 10 May 2018. <https://vimeo.com/280571971> [Accessed 27 November 2018].

<sup>67</sup> Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. by Susan Hanson, Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p. 159 [*L'entretien infini*, Paris: Gallimard, 1969].

But no.

It was suggested that I rewrite these pages as Ecclesiastes.

Easy.

That's what you get after years of militant muteness.

That's what you get after years spent honing your lyrical utmost.

Innate lyrical utmost, entangled with the eternal  
eternally unsatisfied  
yearning for words.

Are these pages no new thing under the sun?

Imagine what may follow:

vexation of spirit,<sup>68</sup>

thunderingly

prophetically

even critically

but criticism around here is uneven.

Ecclesiastes,

---

<sup>68</sup> 'No new thing under the sun' and 'vexation of spirit' are quoted from *Ecclesiastes, or, The Preacher. Authorized King James Version*, New York, NY: Grove Press, 1998, p. 2.

or, the Preacher,

or, the Teacher.

I like *or*,

I, like *or*: range of selves, of voices.

The book of Ecclesiastes is many voices,

collected by others,

I is in the end,

I, too, by way of Alejandra Pizarnik, have many voices,

and vexation of spirit.

This is not ventriloquism, do not mistake me, I am not a channel, not a dummy. These are my hands, I am writing, this is my throat, I am speaking, see the mark of the wound that coils around it from the ear. No matter what voice, this wound will stay. Ananke, Necessity, is yoke, grabs by the throat.<sup>69</sup>

I speak with my voices, it is I, I have many voices, they are necessary. These muted mutant voices bend, stretch, and disguise themselves if needed, still they are mine, still in a petrified and singular manner of speaking.

The rule of the I is the rule of the game, I learned from Michel Leiris

in *La règle du jeu*, also heard as *La règle du je*,

a sound-driven account of his childhood,

with polyphonies heard in the textures of language,

---

<sup>69</sup> Ananke, the Greek goddess of Necessity, derives its name from a Hebrew root that means 'throat', 'constrict', and the yokes laid on the necks of captives. See James Hillman, *The Soul's Code*, New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1997, p. 209.



and in language I can be many people, a trickster.<sup>70</sup>

To every thing there is a season, to each their chimera,  
a time to desire, a time to pray.

You may hear echoes of Simone Weil who wrote of desire in the void, of desire without any wishes, 'to reduce ourselves to the point we occupy in space and time'.<sup>71</sup>

Of the desire for nothing, as we need it.

Reading her prose is difficult and unsettling,  
and I continue to read them,  
because to read them means to transform the terms of reading,  
to counter given manners of understanding,  
to reach a limit, be frightened, sense the fright, make a leap.

You will hear of Henry Corbin, the scholar of Sufism and Islamic religion,  
writing of creative prayer,  
showing how being is in the you to whom one speaks,  
being known depends on you,  
an essential dialogical situation grounded on sympathy,  
and to pray is not to express a wish, not to request something,  
but to express a mode of being, exercise sympathy,  
to be nowhere else than one is, nothing else than one is.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> Michel Leiris, *Rules of The Game I: Scratches*, trans. by Lydia Davis, Baltimore, MD and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997 [*La Règle du jeu I: Biffures*, Paris: Gallimard, 1948].

<sup>71</sup> Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. by Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr, London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2002, p. 12 [*La Pesanteur et la grace*, Paris: Librairie PLON, 1947].

<sup>72</sup> For full references to Henry Corbin's books see Bibliography.

What else will you do? Vexation, vexation. Months go by.

Preacher, what will you do? Vexation, vexation. Months go by.

Teacher, what will you do? Vexation, vexation. Months go by.

Vexation.

The Preacher also said, 'let thy words be few'.<sup>73</sup>

This is why you will hear of Cristina Campo  
who said she had written little and wished she had written less,  
and wrote a lot, in pseudonyms,  
and of Alejandra Pizarnik  
who continued to erase her words  
and to inhabit the words of others, rewriting them from the inside of their prose,  
her prose her not all her.

To write self as character,  
to be, concealed, in pseudonyms,  
a stranger in a language,  
groundless but not without grounds,  
where I, third person singular,  
can be something more and something else than words,  
a singular, third person.

---

<sup>73</sup> *Ecclesiastes*, p. 11.

Let thy words be few, let them repeat.

You will hear refrains, each one a heartbeat:

‘Groundless but not without grounds’,<sup>74</sup>

a forty-minute utterance by Elfriede Jelinek

advocating writing as drift

its destabilising potency,

the presence of words necessarily jumbled before speechlessness,

and presence through words.

You will hear this expression frequently in these pages

to remark on their sense of instability and intent.

It captures the condition of writing as a stranger in language,

where words and meanings emerge no matter how obscure, unreadable, out of sync with given contexts.

The csite of these pages may appear *groundless* before expected formats or topics, but it is *not without grounds* since it reinstates its own terms as it is written.

‘Her not all her’,<sup>75</sup>

again from Jelinek,

the title of a play in which the words of Robert Walser are used as material

without direct attribution of sources,

claiming for the impurity of the text to be taken as such,

not legitimated,

---

<sup>74</sup> Elfriede Jelinek, *Sidelined*, Nobel Lecture, 2004, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2004/jelinek/lecture/> [Accessed 18 October 2018].

<sup>75</sup> Jelinek, *Her Not All Her: On / With Robert Walser*, trans. by Damion Searls, London: Sylph Editions, 2012 [*Er nicht als er (zur, mit Robert Walser)*, Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2004].

not sanctioned,  
only read,  
only studied,  
and that only is plenty.

‘Something more and something else than words’  
pronounced by Alejandra Pizarnik  
to mark her simultaneous discomfort and attraction in language,  
the sense of a limit in words, present and porous.

‘An image of Echo and Chimera’,  
pronounced by Cristina Campo  
echoing Gaspara Stampa  
holding the sense of this study.

I move my understanding of writing as a stranger from its literal meaning to a metaphor for writing that speaks the language of its subjects yet is never entirely in unison with them, a chimera.

I, and I, and I, will echo and reverberate, you will hear conversations, in consonance, arrhythmic, encountering oneself in the work to which one is drawn as sympathy, coexistence of passion and action, pathetic and poetic, receptive and creative.

With and without I,  
you will read Imaginary Conversations  
that sound artificial,  
like the metaphysical glow over Edgar Allan Poe's dialogues,<sup>76</sup>  
or the artifice that allows sharpness in Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*,<sup>77</sup>  
refracted so perceptively by that skilful master of lights, Pier Paolo Pasolini, in *Petrolio*,  
or in Giacomo Leopardi's *Moral Dialogues*<sup>78</sup>  
in which Nature converses with Soul, dead poets with their *daimons*, a scientist with some  
mummies,  
tragic thinking sweeps over comic inflexions,  
philosophical depth is rendered in lightness,  
so ostensibly unreal and profoundly steeped in thought.

---

<sup>76</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Colloquy of Monos and Una', 'Conversation of Eiros and Charmion', *The Complete Tales and Poems*, London: Penguin, 1982 (1839), pp. 444–456.

<sup>77</sup> Lucian, 'Dialogues of the Dead', *Ibid.*, pp. 104–220.

<sup>78</sup> Giacomo Leopardi, *Operette morali*, 4th edn, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1998 (1824).

[Now D.C., in a delusional turn, attempts to lay her thoughts straight, and fails tragically, her words collapsing into a giant yawn, herself falling into a faint].

I hold on to critical writing as the position in which I write.

It could not be otherwise, it does not exist in a void.

It is entangled to a lifetime of writing with others,  
not fictionally, but critically, chimerically, imaginally:

learning to see what is there, to scrutinise it across time, to speak with it.

It exists inside the works it reads, inside their textures  
to the point when it becomes difficult to make them apart.

It works with residues.

Sometimes it has nothing to say, and it says it.

To repeat: Blanchot wrote of critical discourse as the

*space of resonance*

*within which the unspoken,*

*indefinite reality of the work*

*is momentarily*

*transformed*

*and circumscribed*

*into words.*

This definition highlights the cohabitation of and tension

between words and excess of words

at the core of this study.

It allows me to cite critical writing in a realm of resonance, imagination, and transmission, unlike other definitions that draw disciplinary boundaries, or employ an expository tone.

I choose Blanchot's definition because of the way he writes it.

He says that 'commentary is just a little snowflake making the bell toll'.<sup>79</sup>

A most tenuous gesture makes a heavy bronze object move, and sound.

You will hear this bell, and the effects of this bell.

He says that critical writing should render the experience of a work, not its value.

I can only understand this if I think of text as transmission, not stable, but in transformation.

Blanchot's remarks appear in his text on Lautréamont's *Maldoror*, an entity that haunts the pages of a book, at times in full light, at times concealed or transformed, at times present as mood, hum, the subtle noise of prose.

---

<sup>79</sup> Blanchot, *Lautréamont and Sade*, p. 2.



I ask,

how it is possible to be heard, when I do not know my bearings, but sense my movements  
when I am groundless, but not without grounds,  
moving, and in movement, csited.

Site does not equal stillness, or clear borders.

*Situs* in Latin is place as well as dust, mould, detritus that deposit in a place, across time.

To be csited means to be with residue, impure, outside the confines of norm.

I learned in Calasso's reading of Vedic sacrifice that the sense of every order  
is not to be found in the way such order is configured  
but in what it chooses to do with that which it cannot hold.<sup>80</sup>

The question is how critical writing inhabits, is haunted by, and echoes its subjects  
the subjects of its attention and desires,  
concealments of the self,  
sounds heard in voices read,  
the unheard, the untranslated.

I call this writing *chimeric*:

it looks like a composite monster but it moves as a whole.

It is not stitched together, one form morphs seamlessly into another.

It is not about where each part comes from, but what it does, what it looks at and listens  
to.

---

<sup>80</sup> Calasso, *L'ardore*, p. 267.

Even if most unlikely, or implausible, chimeric writing exists.

Can you imagine the voice of Chimera?

Sometimes Chimera has nothing to say.

Chimera is deemed implausible,

and exists as it is yearned, imagined.

*E ti chiamo ti chiamo Chimera.*

And I call you I call you Chimera.

Ecclesiastes contains proverbs, I have proverbs:

*Don't be Sisyphus, be the stone.*

*Poison, not polish.*

*My language is not a fortress, it's a ruin.*

Between Ecclesiastes and ourselves are many veils,  
Doris Lessing says,  
one of them is translation.<sup>81</sup>

Between these pages and you are many veils too,  
*before* translation, in rewritings and misreadings,  
in that realm where it is impossible to quote  
(*that* caused vexation of spirit).

Imagine transcelation.

---

<sup>81</sup> Doris Lessing, 'Introduction', in *Ecclesiastes*, p. xi.

It was suggested that I rewrote these pages as Ecclesiastes

and I have an issue with the suggestion.

My issue is with the exercise of a form applied arbitrarily onto material.

These pages are not concerned with forms, constraints, or frames.

Again, as Clarice said,

*I am not playing with words.*

*I incarnate myself in the voluptuous*

*and unintelligible phrases*

*that tangle up beyond the words.*

*And a silence rises subtly from the knock of the phrases.*

A silence, the phrases, the knock, subtly.

This is a study of how material shapes words,

a study of metamorphoses of voices and registers.

Encounters dictate the shape of these pages from their inner core,

not from *write as* instructions, not from superimposed frames.

These frameless pages change their state, not their substance.

Growth does not mean necessarily even progression, criticism is uneven, I told you.

There are breaks too, my language is a ruin.

The form of this study is mutability.

The many-voiced text is changing and unpredictable,  
like the mad impurities in a book of no shape but transformation,  
like a sprung rhythm,  
like the quick-change artist Fregoli, who was once called (did he call himself?)  
'infinitely less than anyone, [...] an imitation of nothing, [...] nearly nothing'.<sup>82</sup>

These words move  
closer and closer  
to nearly,  
to nothing,  
to 'naked purpose'.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Manganelli, 'Fregoli', in *Le interviste impossibili*, Milano: Adelphi, 1997 (1975/76), pp. 126–127.  
Translated by The Ruin of Casc.

<sup>83</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*, p. 22.

I read and hear my references by means of inner cadence.

You will understand Chimera as my motor of repetition,  
image heard in reading,  
core rhythm,  
the excess and yearning always contained by words, and puts pressure on them,  
and persists, even when only as premonition, or veiled gesture.

Words and rhythms haunt me, from times before me  
are suddenly inundated with meaning  
only to draw back remotely again  
and I am no longer sure if the task of my words is to talk with them  
or to take leave from them.

Forget vexation of spirit, think of the French *Vexations*  
as in the title of Erik Satie's composition, utopia of an immobile music  
for which he instructed to repeat  
eight hundred and forty times  
the same tune to oneself.

And to prepare, in utmost silence,  
'with serious immobilities'.<sup>84</sup>

No new thing may be repeated and repeated.

Sometimes repetition and exhaustion are all there is.

Between exhaustion from yearning, and exhaustive knowledge

I choose to be exhausted.

---

<sup>84</sup> Erik Satie, 'Vexations', in *Quaderni di un mammifero*, 2nd edn, trans. by Ornella Volta, Milano: Adelphi, 1994, p. 35 [*Écrits*, Paris: Champ Libre, 1977]. Translated by The Ruin of Casc.



I forget about Ecclesiastes and open the Rg Veda.

That is, in the history of my reading, I open the Rg Veda through chapter eight of Calasso's *Ka*, arranged like a conversation in which the *rsis* – those who *saw* the Vedic hymns – discuss the birth of consciousness, and between atman and attention, it is agreed that one becomes what one thinks.<sup>85</sup>

Writing becomes what it thinks.

'Like the impression left by the telling of a story',<sup>86</sup>  
by the playing of a record.

---

<sup>85</sup> Calasso, *Ka*, new revised and annotated edition, Milano: Adelphi, 1999 (1996), pp. 185–238.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, frontispiece.

If you ask me what my theory is, I will tell you.

*Teoria* in Italian means both theory and procession.

I learned of the latter meaning while studying Medieval Art History, the mosaics of the Basilica di Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, the *teoria* of saints on both side walls of the church.

What is this mosaic-theory, that moves and stays still and is made of many parts?

*Teoria* is motion suggested in the stillness of mosaic *tesserae*. I want my theory to be like this: suggesting movement, while grounded to the core in the stillness of its stone-hard *tesserae*. A procession that treads on slowly, by degrees of attunement, in a stilling which is knowing-as-being-and-attention, in chimeric yearning.

It is still and yearns for movement.

It is what it is as it is.

It exceeds its form.

So I may write my *teoria*, theory that is material, thinking in the material of language and the transformations that happen there.

Some parts in the mosaic may be missing: my language is a ruin, words take a breath from wordlessness, from what is not there.

In lectures and in letters, that is, in traffics between the spoken and the written.

Never rounded and complete, but partial and in kinship.

[D.C. faints.]

## Imaginary Conversation

### Chimera and Literature

Chimera: See those two shadows approaching? They are two *protégées* of mine, Alejandra Pizarnik and Cristina Campo. They ceaselessly yearned to become other than themselves, to inhabit other words, and – although they did not know it – to write me, to write Chimera: Alejandra did so in composite, monstrous ways, Cristina in a manner that breathed fire. They used concealment, erasures, and pseudonyms to reinstate more strongly their singular presence. They were not concerned with being authors, but with the singular, endless hum of *œuvre*, a weighted reverberance. Cristina was never afraid of repetitions, when these were the burning cores of her understanding: she would use the same phrases in her prose, and in letters to friends, insisting that thinking is recursive. In the introductory note to *Il flauto e il tappeto* she says that her collected texts deliberately repeat the same thing, the ‘incredulity toward the omnipotence of the visible’.<sup>87</sup> You will remember how Borges, whose work Cristina studied and admired, warned against the abundance of words, saying that ‘words must be conquered, lived, and nobody should dare to write them until they have deeply inhabited them: we must “conquer our poverty”, those ten words that get along with our soul, those few that we would dare to read to a friend.’<sup>88</sup> Alejandra repeated images such as the garden, the lilacs, the stone of madness: they were her *axis mundi*, she said in an interview, with reference to Mircea Eliade.<sup>89</sup> The term was used by the Romanian scholar of religions to denote the necessary axis that

---

<sup>87</sup> Cristina Campo, ‘Il flauto e il tappeto’, in *Gli imperdonabili*, Milano: Adelphi, 1987 (1971), p. 5. All translations from Campo are by The Ruin of Casc, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>88</sup> Borges, ‘A Profession of Literary Faith’, in *Selected Non-Fictions*, pp. 26–27 [‘A manera de profesión de fe literaria’, in *La prensa*, 27 June 1926].

<sup>89</sup> Pizarnik, ‘Some Keys to Alejandra Pizarnik’, in *A Tradition of Rupture: Selected Critical Writings*, trans. by Cole Heinowitz, New York: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2019, p. 28 [*Prosa completa*, Barcelona: Lumen, 2002].

conjoins heaven and earth, the grounding point, the pole around which a tent is pitched, which even the most nomadic of cultures could not renounce.

Literature: The necessary orientation: I once read this in a wordy document by D.C., in which she tried to adopt the approach offered by Henry Corbin...

C.: That excellent scholar of Islamic philosophy and Sufism often talked to me.

L.: ...in his study of Avicenna.<sup>90</sup> Orientation is a manner of being present, and looking elsewhere at once...

C.: ...groundless but not without grounds. Like when steering a boat. I believe that the Greek term *sophia*, knowledge, referred to the art of small adjustments made by the helmsman during navigation...<sup>91</sup>

L.: ... so we can think of knowledge as orientation: not to accumulate vain erudition, but to open one's possibility to oneself. As Corbin says, the only possible answer to *where?* does not point at a geographical atlas, but at a mode of being, a direction that situates each reader-writer into their way of carrying themselves in the world, every day. There is no exegesis of a text without the exegesis of one's soul.<sup>92</sup>

C.: That sounds like a statement.

---

<sup>90</sup> Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, trans. by Willard R. Trask, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988 [*Avicenne et le récit visionnaire*, Teheran and Paris: Departement d'Iranologie de l'Institut Franco-Iranien / Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1954].

<sup>91</sup> Hillman, *The Soul's Code*, p. 206.

<sup>92</sup> Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, p. 16, p. 42.

L.: A monstrous task. Didn't someone once say that the sleep of reason generates monsters?<sup>93</sup>

C.: Chimeras? Didn't someone else once state that if humans lived their lives only based on reason, they would commit suicide? That the horizon of imagination, of the possible, keeps people alive instead?<sup>94</sup>

L.: I am certain that D.C. continued to believe that the imaginary is not the fantastic. Based on her understanding of the study of Corbin on the poet, philosopher, and mystic Ibn 'Arabi, and of Cristina's readings of early Christian and gnostic texts, she often referred to *the Imaginal*, a cognitive function real and present, which discloses what is commonly hidden by means of a training of the senses toward attention: a learning to see what is there.<sup>95</sup>

C.: What is there: she attempted to find a position...

L.: ...a csite...

C.: ...though engaged scrutiny of existing material, not fiction. If there is any passivity in this, it is Luther's *significatio passiva*, passive signification,<sup>96</sup> a learning to see who we are in the ways in which our materials speak to us and we listen to them, as 'our *acts of*

---

<sup>93</sup> Francisco Goya, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, aquatint, 1797-1799.

<sup>94</sup> Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone di pensieri*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2019 (1827), p. 275.

<sup>95</sup> For *the Imaginal* see Appendix 1: Glossary.

<sup>96</sup> Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, trans. by Ralph Manheim, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969, pp. 116–117 [*L'imagination créatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabi*, Paris: Flammarion, 1958].

*understanding* are so many recommencements, re-iterations of events’, and the event is ‘the iterative form of being’.<sup>97</sup>

L.: Iterative... Didn’t you notice, D.C.’s initials signal a *Da Capo*?

C.: Da Capo, spinning into attention. This form of learning is ‘[n]ot an event which may suddenly erupt one fine day: it is something that happens day after day’.<sup>98</sup>

L.: One day D.C. felt summoned on reading Cristina’s remark, at the end of *Supernatural Senses* – in which she wrote of the body’s spiritual life in the supernatural senses of liturgy, the carnality of ritual, the phonic weight of sacred mysteries, celebrating *the occasion of metamorphosis* – that it was ‘only a succession of quotations from old Christian texts, bound to each other by little more than notes on the margins’.<sup>99</sup> In a warp of chronologies, D.C. encountered this statement of Cristina’s five years after she had written, in one of her books: ‘And the thread of a life is also the thread of an argument. Duncan reports how in 1891, a month before her death, Madame Blavatsky closed her last essay with a quote from Montaigne: *I have here made only a nosegay of culled flowers, and have brought nothing of my own but the string that ties them.* Duncan writes of this string as *the thread of her argument, a wish that she, and mankind with her, might be released from the contradictions of dream and fact, creative idea and actuality, that tortured her spirit.* [...] So I [...] weave the thread of my voice and my words and many more into its words and into Duncan’s words, and begin to see the string of my argument

---

<sup>97</sup> Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi’ite Iran*, trans. by Nancy Pearson, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977, p. xxix [*Terre céleste et corps de resurrection: de l’Iran mazdéan a l’Iran shi’ite*, Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1960].

<sup>98</sup> Corbin, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, trans. by Liadain Sherrard and Philip Sherrard, London: Kegan Paul, 1993, p. 71 [*Histoire de la philosophie Islamique*, Paris: Gallimard, 1964].

<sup>99</sup> Campo, ‘Sensi soprannaturali’, in *Gli imperdonabili*, p. 248 (1971).

at an early time. As a child, my search for meanings was informed by repeated encounters with the Italian folk tales collected by Italo Calvino, where old witches lived on trees, plants spoke, children were chopped up and yet kept living. The thread of my understanding was being woven. Listening and writing keep to date that sense of weaving by assonance and association, by metaphor, by reasoning through frenzy in listening – scattered items tied together, a nosegay of culled flowers kept together by the thread of my history. And the question is no longer who I am, but *whom* my words are woven into, and how'.<sup>100</sup>

C.: Remarkable. After this and similar occurrences in which D.C. heard herself in the words of other writers before she had read them, it seemed a natural step for her to ask, who is the critic, who is the subject? So she began to allow the subjects of her research to speak about her and to speak with her.

L.: You know what happens to *voice* in her project, then.

C.: It becomes many voices. Bypassing estates, archives, permissions, working with *I heard* rather than *I document* – with a type of authority grounded on presence, rather than the sanctioned power of the document grounded on evidence – those words and voices in conversation imagine what is not there, and bring me, Chimera, into being.

L.: This method yearns for knowing, rather than categorising knowledge. A position of resonance.

---

<sup>100</sup> Daniela Cascella, 'A Nosegay of Culled Flowers', in *F.M.R.L. Footnotes, Mirages, Refrains and Leftovers of Writing Sound*, Winchester and Washington, DC: Zero Books, 2015, pp. 34–35.

C.: When not all is available, elusive, and ephemeral, other elements shall be considered, or fashioned. Let's say there is an urgency.

L.: Then you want to speak. So many who frequented me had to live with that most dreary of illnesses, the writer's block. But those who truly want to inhabit me, in front of the urgency of a telling, could not allow themselves to be stuck like Sisyphus; they adopted instead the transformation into the rock as method, they became their material. How is it possible to know what does not allow itself to be known?, someone once asked, and replied: 'Only one way: becoming somehow that thing'.<sup>101</sup> Questions in me are not to be answered, but *incsite* metamorphosis along their lines, for the sake of their cadence. 'These pages become a place for me to inhabit their words and be haunted by them, sometimes transforming them into my reasoning, sometimes by imitation or echo alone, if they alone are possible'.<sup>102</sup> Searching for words after the words of Cristina and Alejandra, D.C. wrote her pages, sometimes transforming them into her reasoning, sometimes by imitation or echo alone.

C.: A critical study?

L.: Chimeric, you are about to suggest...

C.: Chimeric. Because she could not know or convey completeness. In her speculations on criticism as yearning, she could perceive the complex layers of what she read in Alejandra and Cristina, and allow what is unknown and uncertain to resound. D.C. encountered other obstacles in working with those two: the censorship of diaries, the

---

<sup>101</sup> Calasso, *Il cacciatore celeste*, Milano: Adelphi, 2019 (2016), p. 57.

<sup>102</sup> Duncan, p. 404.



disappearance of letters, the simple fact that the works she was studying were not translated in English, literally invisible for many of her readers. As you know, D.C. was not a translator, so she had to adopt another way to write around those two.

L.: Talking with them, and transcelating. She wrote, and kept in mind the excess of their prose, foreshadowed what they never told to each other. For them, she became *volume*: she made space for them, amplified them, wrote. Never forgetting metamorphoses, never forgetting the unspoken.

C.: Tell me though, in which way did Alejandra and Cristina speak to each other before D.C. began to interfere with them?

L.: The documented correspondence and conversation between the two is uneven. Cristina wrote letters to Alejandra, but the latter's replies are lost; Alejandra mentions Cristina in her journals, but there are no journals of Cristina's to offer the same intimate observations on her side. D.C. attempted to work in these uneven gaps, listened to the faint signals of their correspondence, even when not fully documented. She imagined herself in conversation with them. She did not translate or quote, but inhabited their words. She did not evaluate, but transformed them in writing. Campo and Pizarnik occasionally commented on D.C.'s work too – when they did, she was so overwhelmed with joy that she fainted – dismissing any hierarchy between critic and the material of study. In her journals, Alejandra yearned for a form of critical writing prompted by 'the idea of the tie',<sup>103</sup> the unspoken substance that connects a writer to the subject of her study, and makes them heard. From volume, to volume.

---

<sup>103</sup> Pizarnik, *Diarios*, ed. by Ana Becció, Barcelona: Lumen, 2017 (2013), p. 536. All translations from Pizarnik are by The Ruin of Casc, unless otherwise stated.

C.: Even more in the case of D.C., with her insistence on working with untranslated or obscure material, curious to hear broadcasts from elsewhere. Sometimes the broadcast is from far away, and the signal distorted, sometimes it is perceived as noise, sometimes it is faint, sometimes loud and clear. Reading and writing across two languages (and a dialect) belonged for her in a language larger than her own, in which kinships are awoken through difference; into which the cultural fabric of a self may be transposed. You might not read and perceive D.C.'s Italian materials as she does, but her yearning for them in English, circling around their impossible sense, generates a tension which is not meant to voice a private understanding: it is a tension toward an ungraspable something (toward me, Chimera) which makes her write in order to tell, to begin a conversation. Shifting the attention on writing as transmission of knowledge – changeable, impure – rather than on considerations of purity and fixity, D.C. wanted to prove that when something cannot be quoted – the sound of a voice, the hum of untranslated literature – or cannot be read and heard in another language, it does not mean it does not exist: it prompts conversations, despite its apparent impossibility. I am Chimera. Voicing Campo and Pizarnik, D.C. is chimeric, her writing unsevered from the objects of its yearning. There is no critical distance but stickiness of relation, wanting-to-become, utopias of critical writing as uninterrupted glossing, saying what is not there.

L.: What is not there, what is not spoken and prompts to speak... Do you remember, 'I have nothing to say and I am saying it and that is poetry as I need it'?<sup>104</sup> One day D.C. rewrote it as 'We have nothing to say and we are saying it and that is criticism as we need it'. Rewriting John Cage, replacing *poetry* with *criticism*, and *I* with *we*, D.C. enacted the

---

<sup>104</sup> Cage, p. 109.

writing of inhabitation that was one of the main aspects of her project. *We* introduces a polyphony: critical writing is enmeshed in conversations, at times silent or interior. D.C. may not hear her voice when she speaks in English but hears many voices in writing, the voices of all the untranslated texts that shape her language: this is why she needs this work to be written, and writing here is not a script for a performance. It is text, the primary medium of D.C.'s transmission, with all the aural substance that exceeds it, and gives it its impure, restless quality. Chimera, you are an image heard in reading.

C.: Rewriting Cage, inhabiting his words with small variance, also opened possibilities for D.C. to write when there seemed to be nothing to say. Often she found herself speechless, not for want of thoughts or responses, but never aligned with the expected forms of such thoughts or responses. Sometimes the lack of words ensued from her tendency to linger in the moment of the aesthetic encounter, the one that steals your breath; sometimes it was due to that nuanced loss, that slight delay in finding the right words, experienced when writing in a second language; other times it was the result of a feeling of displacement when looking for words while listening to sounds.

L.: Always out of sync, always something missing. Writing when there is nothing to quote, words must do something else, which at times becomes vertiginous.

C.: Now move your thoughts from nothing to say to *Empty Words*, that piece performed by Cage in 1977 at Teatro Lirico in Milan, 'his meticulous and monotonous dissection of Thoreau's diaries that began by omitting phrases, then words, then syllables until there was nothing but sounds. The atmosphere arose into an explosion of voices and dissent. There was Cage, his words weighing as much as the explosion of noises around. The

audience started laughing, shouting, mocking, whistling and booing till it all turned into a carnival of infuriating chaos. Cage? He kept reading, responding with poised rhythm to the tension around [...] The explosion of voices from a hidden past clashed with an inner silence, with Cage's present tense'.<sup>105</sup>

L.: Pre-sentence, I heard this before, *Da Capo*.

C.: *Da Capo*, D.C., Drawing on Cage as method, engaged in empty words as cadence, and with it, persistence. No matter what, continue to attend to your task.

L.: And silence?

C.: The silence D.C. writes with is not an act of violence, or censorship resulting in trauma. It is a necessary substance, a medium of resonance. It is yours, the silence of literature.

L.: Sometimes D.C. became silent when encountering works that appeared to her as bearers of a secret: it is there, yet it cannot be pronounced. Ah, the excitement of wanting to be there, and not disclose that space entirely. It was frightening for her, to return to certain pages by Alejandra and Cristina, frightening because they held such secretly meaningful words. Remember that astonishing page in Robert de Boron's thirteenth-century account of the Cycle of the Holy Graal, translated by Cristina, describing Joseph's vision in which he ate a whole heart, the intellect exceeding its formal limits, yet returning

---

<sup>105</sup> Cascella, *En Abîme. Listening, Reading, Writing: An Archival Fiction*, Winchester and Washington, DC: Zero Books, 2012, p. 37.

to words so they may ‘lead you toward somewhere’,<sup>106</sup> not to get there, but to *lead you toward*. This is chimeric writing, all the states that bring a writer into being, and are never entirely told. They transform how a writer exists, day after day, and no record will ever hold them completely.

C.: And D.C. continued to write. The question of the ineffable as such did not concern her: that is beyond words. She was drawn to the tension between what is written, what exceeds it, and puts pressure on it; what it provokes. Vladimir Jankélévitch, writing about music and the ineffable, wonders if ‘the Charm’ in music, the impossible-to-articulate, is ‘a form of deception or a principle of wisdom’.<sup>107</sup> He wrote of ‘the thickness of [...] meaning’ where depth holds at once presence, a form of dense secrecy, and a ceaseless chimeric yearning for words.<sup>108</sup>

L.: Palpable was D.C.’s unease, in reading nonfiction submission guidelines from publishers that asked for a project outline. As if the way in which a book is written was secondary. The way it is written holds the sense of the book. It has emotional and cognitive consequences that cannot be put aside. Similarly, at conferences and gatherings, in the same room with people who shared an interest in the same topic, the unease would grow because of the way these topics were arranged, in linear and consequential presentations. Similarly, in reading reviews that grouped various books together because of a shared theme, making each book a pawn to which a different quality is attributed in order to make a point that is abstract. ‘I do not want words to make a point. I want them

---

<sup>106</sup> Robert de Boron, ‘La visione’, trans. by Campo, in *I mistici dell’Occidente*, ed. by Elémire Zolla, new revised edition, 2 vols, Milano: Adelphi, 2010 (1963), Vol. 1, p. 770.

<sup>107</sup> Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. by Carolyn Abbate, Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003, p. xxii [*La Musique et l’Ineffable*, Paris: Éditions Armand Colin, 1961].

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

to be present and arranged by means of resonance with the subjects of study. I yearn for writing that eludes any point, and csites’, she noted.

C.: D.C. yearned for words to become the csite where the substance of her yearning could lodge. Nothing to say also means nothing obvious, or immediate. The number of times she hushed before writing, having realised it would have not been heard, as the frequency of the writers she was drawn to could not be perceived, unless immense contextualisation was given. So D.C. laid the grounds for her imaginary conversations, instead of enwrapping herself in silence.

L.: Instead of writing monographs about Pizarnik, Campo, Calasso as a distant critic she spoke with them, inhabited their words, yearned for them. As a method, she rehearsed their chimeras – respectively, the idea of criticism as tie and the practices of inhabitation, self-parody, and journal-writing; the extreme csites of criticism as echo chamber and work on the margin; the gnosis of criticism as mad impurity – and extended their projects as well as her own, her chimera.

C.: The imaginary conversations do not aim to reach the conclusion of argument but the presence of heartbeat, the generative force which drew her to the words of others. There is no wholeness, but consciousness breaking through. Here D.C. encounters Blanchot’s words at the end of *The Song of the Sirens*, calling for ‘the infinite moment which is the encounter itself’, and reinstates its own, imaginal time.<sup>109</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Blanchot, ‘The Song of the Sirens’, in *The Gaze of Orpheus*, p. 112 [‘Le chant des Sirènes’, in *Le Livre à venir*, Paris: Gallimard, 1959].

L.: 'Always still to come, always in the past already, always present'.<sup>110</sup> Let's disappear now. Allow D.C.'s words to be read, heard.

---

<sup>110</sup> Blanchot, *The Gaze of Orpheus*, p. 112.

Voice from a Faintspeaker [reading **A Summary** of the following pages, which may be also known as **The This-Curse on Method**]: A poster — Something new in the life of D.C.: she has nothing to say about Stein — That nothing bodily, is everything ghostly — The Stain of Stein — Knowing before knowing — The *cognoscenti* are plunged into a demonic descent while at cocktails — Stain, Stein, Styx — A good declaring of some certain deceits that may befall in this work — A metamorphosis more surprising than any in Ovid — The art of criticism — The art of fugue — Iteration, its consequences: at this point readers, while led to believe they are still reading an Introduction, realise they are in the thick of the work — ‘Did I hear *sick*?’ — A disastrous Q&A — A questionnaire — A vision.



## A Poster

The entertainment will commence with an adaptation of D.C.'s

### THE STAIN OF STEIN

The illusion of voices produced by wonderful powers of D.C.'s Imagination, rendered by artistes engaged expressly for this Entertainment, comprising a numerous Phalanx of Auxiliaries, Choristers, etc, forming the Largest, Best, Most Delightful Illusory Choir in the World,

UNTRANSLATED, UNAPPROACHED, UNAPPROACHABLE

Faintspeakers and Other Amplification Devices entirely New,  
studied from Italian Authorities.

\*\*\*

To be followed by a Laughable and Spectral Sketch

Introducing some of the most Extraordinary Effects, including a Spirit carrying away Alejandra and Cristina, who Later appear in Ghostly form in Conversation with D.C.

\*\*\*

'It is more than astonishing and far surpasses its rivals'.

'Utterly laughable'.

'We have never heard so many voices in one Entertainment'.

'Completely cluttered and confusing'.

'Taken altogether there has never been anything superior'.

'Woefully inconclusive'.

## A Monologue: The Stain of Stein

By D.C.

We are all bewitched, and mostly by accident, a composer once said. This is the story of a bewitchment, by accident.

The composer was Harry Partch, I always wanted to steal his titles: imagine an essay called *And on the Seventh Day Petals Fell in Petaluma*, or *Delusion of the Fury*, or *The Cognoscenti Are Plunged into a Demonic Descent While at Cocktails*, or *The Dreamer that Remains*. He used the term *bewitched* in relation to what he called *extraverbal magic*: the process of making less poor ‘the pathetically impoverished language of tone’.<sup>111</sup> One day I found myself bewitched by a faulty voice recording that, by failing to conform to its nature, led my understanding into another tone. That day I was looking for a CD by Partch that contained his piece *The Bewitched*, which I wanted to use as a slightly out of sync rhythmic template to read a long litany of names I had been assembling for some time: names of writers who write in composite forms but not in English, along with names of writers who write in English as a second or third language, as strangers, slightly out of sync, in the attempt to respond to the Anglophone canon that is being consolidated these days. Having realised that the delivery in my reading could barely match Partch’s rhythms, I decided to carry on with musical models (I am, after all, ‘that Italian who writes about sound’) so I started thinking of my list of foreign names as the *fuga* from the canon, the fugue. One of the earliest forms of *fuga* in music was called *ricercar*, to research: to research and to flee, I like that, I’m digressing, fleeing, and to continue and digress, I shall

---

<sup>111</sup> Harry Partch, ‘Patterns of Music’, in *Bitter Music: Collected Journals, Essays, Introductions, and Librettos*, Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991, p. 161.

say that I like to call this composite writing that flees chimeric, from the mythological Chimera, monstrous creature made of three different animals, I like that, it is charged with imaginal qualities, and impurity, and monstrosity.

Imagine chimeric writing: it is implausible, and it exists.

Imagine what the voice of Chimera could sound like.

As I was looking for *The Bewitched* I came across *Voices of the Avant-Garde*, one of those collections pervasive in the archival re-release frenzy of the turn of the century. As you will know, CDs are not infallible, sometimes they glitch, and unlike the locked grooves and jumps of vinyl records, the quality of glitches in CDs is less mechanical, or traceable, it sounds like a haunting from within the very medium. This haunting quality in the glitch led many musicians to embrace it around the mid-1990s, remember glitch music, *Systemisch* by Oval, the early releases by Mille Plateaux and Mego; remember Coil/ELpH when they entitled an album *Worship the Glitch* and how couldn't they, always so attuned to unnatural histories, the tainted workings of mystery, mystification, and magic. But back to those *Voices of the Avant-Garde*: I played a recording of the voice of Gertrude Stein, and it started to glitch, and sounded so clumsy, and oh my I said, and I kn- kn-, t- t-, and I knew too, the voice of the canon started to glitch!, and I, and I knew too, I kne-, t-, t-, I knew too, this is great, one of those encounters that stop and startle us even before we know why; and we find ourselves groundless but not without grounds like Jelinek once said, ever so cryptically, ever so clearly. That impurity, the voice of the canon suddenly sounding so awkward, disturbed, interfered with. At this point I shall tell you that for some time I've been playing around that refrain by John Cage, 'I have nothing

to say and I am saying it and that is poetry as I need it', changing it to 'we have nothing to say and we are saying it and that is criticism as we need it', thinking of *we* as the voices in my head, and wondering how I can write criticism when there is apparently nothing to say, apparently, because I hear so many voices, different reference points, another language, other cultures at play, or there is: silence to write from, and there is: poetry, and poetry is never erased. How to write criticism entangled, chimeric.

Chimera chimes.

I thought had nothing to say about Stein, and yet that glitch in her voice recording haunted me, and in all that, I kept misspelling STAIN instead of STEIN, and, THE STAIN OF STEIN, THE STAIN OF STEIN, I started chanting in my head, clumsily, and half smiling, and, what a disgrace!, I said to myself having realised that this writer, who often writes with assonance, rhythms, word games, and peculiar forms of sounding obsessions (generically summed up as 'that Italian who writes about sound') had barely read anything by Stein except for *Tender Buttons* (in 2014, with some residual recollections around a fire) and *Portraits and Repetition* (in 1997, hardly any recollections, but much substance in the matter of understanding being-in-words-in-cadence, or so my friend D. says). The absence of Stein was becoming a stain on this writer's credibility: a disgrace. Baffled at the realisation, though tempted by the sound of the stain of Stein – its stubborn alliteration pointing at a stuttering in understanding which could steer me toward a distinct, unstable way of understanding – I email my friend C. about the stain of Stein and he writes back: 'Perhaps there is a signature lurking in her poem *A Petticoat!?!: A light white, a disgrace, an ink spot, a rosy charm*'. The disgrace in Stein's words echoes my more mundane disgrace, in a wink across time. An ink spot in response to the stain of Stein, summons

me via email through the words of a friend I never met if not in reading, in letters, and in emails; a friend who wrote a book called *No Medium* around the substance of works erased, silent, blank:<sup>112</sup> and blank is my stare when I see my work repeatedly placed by others in connection with Stein's words. 'Of course, you must have read Stein! It goes without saying...', I heard so many times. Actually no, let me say it, rather, I have read a lot by the Italian poet Amelia Rosselli, who used glitches in spelling to trigger uneven forms of cadence which, according to Pasolini, revealed language as a putrefied object.<sup>113</sup> What to do with this of-courseness of references? I thought I had nothing to say about Stein, but finding my nothing, my blank stare, stained and steined by an ink spot proves that there is no nothing to say, ever, or at least what is perceived as nothing to say is already something for the very fact that we are considering it, entering in some type of relation with it, illicit but present – illicit because constructed through assonance, attraction, conversations, rhythms: ephemeral clues – and sometimes this relation is an entrapment: we find, we hear words in a mesh of connections, despite ourselves.

So often knowing is encountered despite ourselves.

Knowing, and realising that what we know is a stitch in a web, not a dictionary entry: enmeshed, not defined. The question of having nothing to say about Stein becomes a question of how to stay: very close, to the ink spot that stains the absence of Stein, the ink spot, the mark of writing. And to write against the apparent nothing is to write a subtler sense of presence, a realisation of entrapment.

---

<sup>112</sup> Craig Dworkin, *No Medium*, Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2013.

<sup>113</sup> Pasolini, 'Notizia su Amelia Rosselli', in Amelia Rosselli, *La libellula*, Milano: SE, 1985 (1963), p. 104.

In such a condition I begin to see and hear other signs, other stains: on meeting Gertrude, Alice B. Toklas apparently said that ‘she wore a large round coral brooch and when she talked... I thought her voice came from this brooch. It was unlike anyone else’s voice [...] like two voices’.<sup>114</sup> A voice from a brooch, like two voices: it was from the time of Charles Cros that I had not heard such an uncanny pronouncement of vocal entrapment and excess. Brooch, jewels, a voice that is two voices, one held, one transmitted, the same, and not quite so. Cros, poet and inventor in the late nineteenth century of the paleograph, a sound recording device akin to Edison’s phonograph, wrote in his collection *The Necklace of Claws*: ‘Like features in a cameo / I wanted the beloved voices / to remain a keepsake, forever cherished, / repeating the musical / dream of an hour all too brief; / time wishes to flee, I master it’.<sup>115</sup> There is no mastering time: beloved voices trapped in a cameo hover between what is held and what flees, the eternity of voice is gained at the cost of its disembodiment. I learn from my friend D. that for Stein there is no such thing as repetition, there is insistence. It is not possible to repeat the same thing with exactly the same emphasis, she wrote. I write, no matter how many times you might play a recording, it will not sound the same because the world around it will have changed. Its permanence stubbornly points at impermanence. A recording is not a record of what was: it misses what cannot be held. There is no repetition. Voices eagerly longed for, invariably reach us: broken. The double voice is there and not quite so, not doubled perhaps but split, halved, and half slip is another term for petticoat, half-slip, slip of the tongue, stain of Stein, and for the stain of Stein I began listening into the few signals I received, faint but persistent ones, the other half of knowing, the less accepted threads, like the email which

---

<sup>114</sup> James Mellow, *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein and Company*, New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2003 (1974), pp. 107–108.

<sup>115</sup> Charles Cros, *The Necklace of Claws*, quoted in Allen S. Weiss, *Breathless: Sound Recording, Disembodiment, and the Transformation of Lyrical Nostalgia*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002, p. 71.

led me to connect no medium and ink spot, in the attempt to assemble knowing from paucity of material, and work from there. I want to think of knowing as a morphing state, it does not have to be tied to access, locked sources, exhaustive surveys: it emerges as I work with what is at hand, what I hear or overhear, stumble upon, receive from others. And sometimes, on the periphery, there does not seem to be much, and still it is possible to know, if I choose not to stand on firm grounds but move on the oscillations of resonance; not perceived as shortcomings but as a disposition toward otherness, following hints as I find myself: groundless but not without ground, entrapped in a mesh and with no intention to disentangle it, but to continue the knotting until words begin to echo each other, untidily, unrulily, more echoes, a disturbing song, flip of a book, half slip of the tongue, stain of Stein, rhyming words as much as rhyming a disposition with that of a friend, the split voice of understanding, the same and not quite so.

This is where words begin to turn. This is where the cameo speaks, in turn; the other half of voice, to turn on the voices trapped in a cameo, words begin to flee, in uneven zigzags, like in Rosselli's long poem 'La libellula', (The Dragonfly), which suddenly says, '*e ti chiamo ti chiamo Chimera*', 'and I call you I call you Chimera'.<sup>116</sup> Do you know the voice of Chimera? Monstrous, composite, impure. Bewitched, beglitched, and Gertrude, you wrote 'and I sing and the tunes I sing are what are tunes if they come and I sing. I sing I sing'.<sup>117</sup> Yes, do not assume that because a voice is silenced, unheard, or out of tune, it will cease to exist, cease to sing, to spell Chimera, to sound Chimera.

---

<sup>116</sup> Amelia Rosselli, 'La libellula: Panegirico della libertà', in *La libellula* (1958), pp. 11–35.

<sup>117</sup> Stein, 'Matisse, Picasso and Gertrude Stein', in *Gertrude Stein: Ultimate Collection*, Kindle edition, e-artnow, 2016, p. 1468.

Nothing to say about Stein morphs the critic into the cry-tic, for the tic of crying out loud, crying out nothing, for the compulsion to say and say again and repeat the words and conversations we are drawn into even in spite of ourselves, crytic I wrote, not cryptic, this has little to do with hidden codes, it happens on the surface of words, cry-tic for the stain of Stein, stain, Stein, stain, Stein, stubborn, stutter, stain, Stein, Styx: river of the underworld which in a sonnet by Mallarmé rhymes with ptyx, which means nothing in French and fold in Greekx, and in between a river of the underworld, a nothing, and a fold, lies an ‘*aboli bibelot d’inanité sonore*’,<sup>118</sup> abolished *bibelot* of sonorous inanity, and *bibelot* is a small ornament, once again a brooch, a cameo, holding uncanniness, holding and not holding voice, sonorous inanity, core rhythm of being. This is how thinking and knowing are assembled. And this is when I begin to speak to you, Gertrude (stay, Gertrude), Gertrude, who wrote that what matters is how things are written, by written you meant made, by made you meant felt. You understood, by listening, that insistence is emphasis which changes all the time. *How* people say what they know. By listening, you understood that. That to be alive means to be talking and listening at once, transmitting, receiving. Because there is no difference between clarity and confusion in the hard and slippery substance of knowing, hard, and slippery, like slate, of slate is made the ground I stand on, stand and stand still, speaking the ink mark, speaking the stain, stay stain, stay Stein, say stain, stand on slate, beat out this cadence into another tune, stain Stein, think of stain, hit the slate, stain Stein, stay, hush and hush, now, choke. To stand, to choke, coated in a slate-grey layer of tacit. Slate slate, the ground I stand on, slate, and think, all the words you couldn’t tran-, the objects you couldn’t tran- it’s slate this ground is made of, of slate a dark gray, stay, Gertrude, stay. Words unhinged don’t seem to conclude much but push push, one then another, like the presence, like the voice they can

---

<sup>118</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, quoted in Weiss, p. 34.



no longer hold, with a sense that my self, my sense, my styx, were written in it too because Gertrude, prophetically you wrote, *and I sing and the tunes I sing are what are tunes if they come and I sing. I sing I sing.* I understand, I want you to stay, oblige me, stay, Gertrude. Oblige me, Gertrude Stay-n.

A few weeks later, H. writes to me of an encounter with Rilke's poem *Abend*, and how in the very last verse the stone in *Stein*, made her think of the stain of Stein, and she wrote, 'how wonderful to have *stone* as a last name', last name for Gertrude, premonition for me, or strange return, a call, a stone, '*bald begrenzt und bald begreifend, abwechselnd Stein in dir wird und Gestirn*',<sup>119</sup> your life, now bounded, now immeasurable, it is alternately stone in you and star, stone star, stone Stein, stone *petra*, now I want to tell you about Dante's *Rime Petrose, Stony Rhymes*, the one which begins by saying '*così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro com'è ne li atti questa bella petra, la quale ognora impetra maggior durezza e più natura cruda*',<sup>120</sup> I want to charge my words with so much harshness as this enchanting stone has in her actions, she who is ever growing harder in nature and more fierce and ruthless, against all odds, this was odd, beglitched, bewitched.

---

<sup>119</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, 'Abend', in *The Book of Images*, <http://rainer-maria-rilke.de/06b022abend.html> [Accessed 1 July 2021] [*Das Buch der Bilder*, Berlin: Axel Juncker Verlag, 1902]. Translated by The Ruin of Casc.

<sup>120</sup> Dante Alighieri, CIII, in *Rime*, ed. by Gianfranco Contini, Torino: Einaudi, 1995 (1939), p. 167. Translated by The Ruin of Casc.

## **An Address**

### **By D.C., with Interferences by the Voice from a Faintspeaker**

*Lights flood the podium. Serious in appearance, though it might be self-mockery, D.C. lifts the eyes and addresses the audience in a pitch less deep, more hesitant than the one heard so far. What is knowledge before knowledge? What is known in hearing, before it is thought to be known in reading? The experiment you have just heard, the challenge, was to work with apparently little; when there seemed to be nothing to say, to avoid plunging straight into the library search, the search for scholarship, and look instead for other ways of causing knowledge to appear, in the sonic texture of words, in chance and mishearing, not forgetting all that exists despite words. Writing nothing as we need it lifts words off the page, works with their excess. It relies on fine-tuning of senses, and unveils the plenitude of listening; of conversations, even when impossible, or imagined. Nothing as we need it is the plenitude of being plural. *Distracted by the coughs of exasperation from the audience, who came here for a soothing monologue not a troubling lecture, D.C. begins to accelerate her reading, in a helpless state of infra-panic. At times her voice breaks.* You might recall Hélène Cixous, who states that when we begin to read we understand nothing, we are blind and ignorant, and yet we know we are there.<sup>121</sup> I am curious about how it is possible to articulate words *there*, what happens in this condition of apparent blindness and ignorance. I believe it allows to steer the attention toward less audible or visible elements. *There* is re-constituted, re-claimed, by csiting: not quoting from legitimised sources, but from those sources that made us, no matter how abstruse and out of place they might be. I want to show what happens when we do not feel entirely stable or safe in our stride, and yet continue to read and write, groundless but not without*

---

<sup>121</sup> Cixous, p. 24.

grounds. *D.C. looks clumsily for that quote by Jelinek, cannot find it, glances back at her papers, finds instead the following long quote, and realises she cannot possibly dare to read it out loud.* [Inner reading / Outer cavernous silence / Microphone static] Craig Dworkin, on illegible texts: ‘I have tried [...] to allow the specifics of the works under consideration to generate the logic – and necessity – for pursuing particular, contingent, microlevel arguments. Rather than begin with a totalizing thesis for which literary texts serve as convenient examples, I have tried to take the texts on their own terms and permit them to lead me in precisely those directions for which I did not have a guiding thesis, and for which I could not, indeed, imagine one. [...] I have written [...] with a firm belief that even critical writing can be a productive experiment: actively generating unknown results through a process that prevents it from becoming a fixed and predictable report on the already known’.<sup>122</sup> *Galvanised at encountering the thoughts of a kindred spirit, D.C. reprises.* As I read and write, I listen: I approach text through a ‘sonic sensibility’. This is an expression coined by theorist Salomé Voegelin... *D.C.’s hopes rise, that with some assistance from an Authority in the Field she might be at last heard, considered...* to indicate a listening disposition which reveals ‘the invisible mobility’ of sound below the surface of a visual world, and challenges its certainties.<sup>123</sup>... *D.C.’s hopes cease, she cannot possibly speak like this for much longer...* I apply a sonic sensibility to reading and writing, taking the study of literature beyond the limits of textual analysis. I do not consider what a text is but what it does, what transmissions and conversations it may prompt... *She gasps, falters. Much as she is trying to convey whatever she has in mind, speaking like this makes her dizzy, definitely not herself. After all, she was never drawn to coherent reasoning. ‘This is the tone of somebody I never wanted to be’, she murmurs,*

---

<sup>122</sup> Dworkin, *Reading the Illegible*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2003, p. xix.

<sup>123</sup> Salomé Voegelin, *Sonic Possible Worlds: Hearing the Continuum of Sound*, New York, NY and London: Bloomsbury, 2014, p. 3.

*believing however that the matter is in her interest. 'I should give examples' ... The text you have just heard is an example of such methodology. Generated by a chance encounter with a glitch in a recording of the voice of Gertrude Stein, it gives attention to the sounds of the glitch, of a misspelling (stain rather than Stein), and of alliteration (Stein, stone, Styx, stutter). A mesh of connections and meanings emerges in writing across these sounding elements, rather than more conventional evaluations of content. This methodology draws and expands on over ten years of reading-listening-writing practice, during which I have studied and presented various tensions and points of contact between the sonic and the literary in three books, publications, and workshops. What is D.C. aiming at? Is she becoming the factotum of the speechless ones? Will she find a way to say that her not being understood is not simply and literally a matter of language, but of milieu? That she grew up reading literature from early twentieth-century Mitteleuropa, not thinking of it as 'literature in translation', but as literature? Many of those names fall silent in the U.K., some of them are not even translated, and that makes referencing problematic.*

[Awash with emotional overload D.C. ceases to speak, faints].

## The Disastrous Q & A

[Silence. No questions from the audience. D.C. softly hums the traditional American folk song *I Wish I Was a Mole in the Ground*, famously described by music critic Greil Marcus as ‘almost impossible to comprehend [...], a nothing’].<sup>124</sup>

Chair [performing enthusiasm]: Thank you so much, D.C. Such an insightful reading!

D.C. [inner voice]: A sinkhole in the ground.

D.C.: Hmm, yes, thank you, it was great to read here tonight.

D.C. [inner voice]: May a sinkhole in the ground open, now, swallow the entire building and all of us, spare us the farce of this conversation.

Chair: Your research is *so* interesting, now tell me something more about *voice*, about *sound*, and about *silence*.

D.C. [inner voice]: Sure, and while you’re at it explain in five minutes, to a non-specialist audience, Gödel’s theorems of incompleteness...

D.C.: I do not think this is a good starting point.

D.C. [inner voice, humming the folk song to herself]: ‘Drink your blood like wine’.

---

<sup>124</sup> Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 16.

Chair: And what did you mean to express in this monologue?

D.C. [now embodying the half-incredulous, half-mocking expression of Orson Welles in Pasolini's film *La Ricotta*]: My most intimate, profound, archaic conformism.<sup>125</sup>

Chair [conforming to her script, that is, not listening]: *Sound* and *voice* are so relevant in art discourses today, aren't they? Maybe you could start from *the non-alignment of sonic criticality*?

D.C. [inner voice, in waltz rhythm] Ality, ality, ality... How can you ask me about a sensibility toward sound, when you have just programmed me to read in a hall with terrible acoustics, where it was barely possible for my voice to be heard? ... I need to disappear, now.

[D.C. pretends to faint, falls on the floor].

---

<sup>125</sup> 'La ricotta', dir. by Pasolini, in *Ro.Go.Pa.G.*, 1962/63; London: Eureka Entertainment, 2012 [on DVD].

## **A Questionnaire**

### **By The Ruin of Case**

How many times have you silenced obscure references in favour of more current ones, knowing that by doing so you stand a higher chance of being heard?

Do you always need a massive wall of loudspeakers behind you?

Even when your wall of sound is, in fact, a ruin?

In other words, when you are about to write criticism, do you choose to quote whomever you choose to quote because they are validated, current in certain discourses?

Do you realise that by doing so you silence those writers who operate in the same field but do not have the same means of amplification?

Do you realise you will burn in hell, for mentioning same old same old?

What can critical writing make manifest if detached from judgements of value?

What form of knowing emerges from being plurally attuned, not just one, not just self?

What takes shape and is heard in writing, when you say you have nothing to say?

A chimera?

[Meanwhile, someone writes in her notebook]: ‘The Stain of Stein’ by this extravagant D.C. was generated by paying attention to a glitch in a recording, and a misspelling. I should go now, and write a text starting from my mishearing of *The Rings of Saturn*, which for a long time I thought was *The Rings of Satan*... Have I sold my soul to the Devil?



## **From the Notebooks of D.C.**

My language is not a fortress, it's a ruin, I heard once. Damaged yet not shapeless, it holds absence and structure, radiance and discourse. Now I hear echoes of Roberto Calasso and all those writers with whom he wrote, those he published. When reading Calasso writing about other writers, it seems as if he is writing about his own writing as much as theirs. Without his words, those writers would not be visible in the peculiar, compelling ways they appear in his books; and his words would not have grounds without theirs. Curious simultaneities occur, writing enmeshed.

What happens then if I attempted to write inside Calasso's words, using his words from a handful of pages in which he inhabits a fictional world inside the books of other writers? What deformed echoing takes form? Who is the echo, who the call? Is the author of these pages still herself? Entirely so? Persuasively so? Does she become a ruin from being her not all her? Here is a text, written from a vision I had some time ago, in which I become a character in Calasso's books. There are no characters in Calasso's books. There are mythological or mythologised figures, and myth does not get lost in translation. There are symbols, storytellers and shades, ghosts, and figures on the edge between history and fiction, imaginary lives, and imaginal thoughts. In different forms and voices, they are various stages in a metamorphosis, during which a process of individuation takes place. Becoming The Ruin of Casc, in assonance with the title of Calasso's book, *The Ruin of Kasch*, in a coincidence of initials (R.C.) that is impossible to ignore, I attempt to turn myself into a tone to overcome my writing block, my stone.

## **A Vision: Becoming The Ruin of Casc**

Voice from a Faintspeaker: A voice, a dance, a site, a loss, a chord, a voice, a dance, a site, a loss, a chord, a chord, a chord, voice, dance, site, loss, chord, chord, chord, site, chord, slow, flowing, slow, flowing, slow, flowing, limits of limitless sounding memory which busies itself among hidden thoughts, slowing, flow, slowing, flow, slowing, I was there, I was not, there, not, I wanted to say this like a waterfall but words failed me, senses left me, facts of life of body of mind, soon to vanish. Violin chords heard as waterfall as if at times the bow wanted to pierce the instrument like a sword, at times gliding over the room, at times turning into the room, entwined to the floorboards and through the ceiling into the roof tiles outside, or is it wood beams. Beaming, full sounds, so tightly laced around the building as if to prevent the walls from falling apart, then expanding, covering the walls like a second skin, or dragonfly wings, hovering from a very secret structure of sensory perception, walls rolling up toward me and increasingly blurred then immense, body enclosed and then through notes, exposed, as if by a ruff of the aether.

I was alone and with no guide. I was in search of R.C. who was intent in writing the final version of *The Ruin of Kasch* which, in my vision, contained his previous book *L'impuro folle* in its core, core I said, not score, core, heart, not instruction. I could see it in the core of what moves me to speak, write, sing. R.C., Ruin of Casc, I am a ruin. I could see a small table, and on the table an envelope sealed in red, which contained a letter:

Dear D.C.,

I thought it would be fitting for me to take leave from you for some time, and give you a chance in your terminal state to write something around the condition of writing nothing

as we need it, in that chimeric manner which long ago you anticipated, imagined, heard, recalled, forgot, heard again, out and in and becoming a chapter in my book. Make it in the shape of a bell, heavy and empty at once, make it ring. Will you be able to support your claims for nothing to say as the unstable site where writing is lodged? You, and your claims that chimeric writing, your writing of nothing, is a literary genre in its own right. A warning: your insistence to call writing a chimera, and to maintain relationships with bells ringing in the form of words, will probably damage your credibility from the professional point of view. But we both know, allow me to remind you in a whisper, there is very little for you to hope in this sense anyway.

Good luck,

RC<sup>126</sup>

So the story of these words goes, actually it stays, very close, to the writer who used to go in and out of sanatoriums, roaratoriums, and voices. She had been living like that for some time, going farther and farther in her singular migrations. The definitive gesture was to split the analysis from the embodiment, in other words: to hear, to stay. Writing could not be otherwise: it had to be a ruin, incomplete material. Sometimes it was enough to consider what was not there, to place the descriptions and the facts aside, allow the rest to roar undisturbed, like the impressions left by the telling of a story, by the playing of a record; like conversations, even imagined ones.

She had long known that to know is to suffer an emotion and be in a certain state, she began her fugue into becoming many voices. She knew she had to suffer their commotion, and that words must be formed similarly, as commotions.

---

<sup>126</sup> See Calasso, 'Déesses entretenues', in *I quarantanove gradini*, Milano: Adelphi, 1991, pp. 243–244, in which the narrator receives a fictional letter by Daniel Paul Schreber, the object of his study.

To which genre do those words belong? Something physical and elusive, like fingerprints, or breath, or the rhythms of attention. Where echoes abandon themselves to inertia, rhythms wink at one another, nouns, like frequencies, merge, or beat, and she, and the other she, and the other, no longer know what they are singing or writing, but continue to hear and rearrange signals: the irruption of a crepuscular state as a condition of consciousness.

This is not about style, but a question of substance. The voices grow like creepers between the heavy grey paving stones of thought. From the beginning, an intensity without correlatives, a tear in the fabric of hearing. Strangely familiar and estranging, even to ears accustomed to extreme meanderings. It was said that those who like strophes also like catastrophes, those who like statues also need to stand for ruins. These voices are not always polished; at times they are many-layered, at times overloaded, at times a hint of underlying melody does not come through entirely, or it does so in excess, at times it remains imprisoned in the thickly-woven meshes of experiment. What does it matter? A specific attunement can be sensed, a cadence that exceeds formal constraints. There will be time later for order. First the catastrophe, then the strophes. Later, when the excess of sound has re-entered the structure, it confuses categories even more. How can these voices be at once radiance, and structure? How to obey the fluctuations of movement and set up a rule of form? It is tolerable to follow one of those avenues, but both? Yet, if you do not follow both, you lose them, and the voices elude you: to hear them you need to hear radiance in structure, structure in radiance.

Bounded and immeasurable, these voices, of the same substance of these words. Where to find, in these words, the yearning which gives voice its purpose? What remains in stillness, or in the slow circling around words? A residue will stay. Even if it was only dust, even if it was corners, even if the signal was faint: linger on, in the csite where you heard the voices that were committed to you. In gestures of attention, and peripheral transformations, the csite of these voices is periphery, their mode is mutation, never mute, never univocal. Groundless, but not without grounds.

Remember the csite. I still have the name, not the coordinates. I was nearly there, but not quite, have always been there and have never been. Damp air of mouldering land, abandoned hothouses, roses. Could they host one who is groundless but not without grounds? Then perhaps it might be said, I threw myself at all the winds of heaven, but kept my attention to voices. It is all, it is little, it is nothing, it is life itself. A presence between stones, a sounding, stringing, probing – to become, a voice inside would scream, salt and fire in the eyes, what else can anyone carry, anyone who hears this? Use your means, know your ways, you must have heard, hearn, and held much, to no longer be anything but a voice, a dance, a site, a loss, a chord.

## **A Deranged Essay: Impossible Interviews**

**By Cristina Rovina, with Interferences by the Voice from a Faintspeaker**

The book that exhausted D.C. was written by Giorgio Manganelli, its title is *Le interviste impossibili* (*The Impossible Interviews*). Not translated in English from Italian to date, the Adelphi edition contains twelve imaginary conversations between an elusive interviewer and dead characters across history and legend such as Marco Polo, Harun al-Rashid, Tutankhamun, evoked through ambiguous traits of their personality that suffuse the pages with the metaphysical light of their absurd premise.

*Voice from a Faintspeaker: A book around critical writing that is a chimera, impossible.*

Impossible the book's title, impossible for D.C. to write about it. It is an extraordinary book and she, exhausted, could not find words for its extra. Yet she knew she must never cease to seek, attempt, and find forms and ways of telling what seems impossible. Otherwise it would continue to stay invisible, inaudible.

*VfaF: A work on reading as kinship, even when there seem to be no words, inaudible.*

D.C. kept the book on her desk, in her bag, near her bed, took it with her on flights and train journeys, underlined its pages until the pencil marks cut through the paper – signs of bodily pressure into the impossible-to-tell, the pencil sharpened as if to compensate for the lack of a sharp point in her understanding. Perhaps no sharpness is necessary here, but a more unstable quality that lodges in hearing. What voices are heard in those impossible interviews? Listening here lifts words off the page, into a realm of resonance. As I listen

to those imaginary conversations, I find myself entangled, in the undulating imprecision and presence of voices heard in reading, which demands a language equally present, undulating, impure.

*VfaF: A study of new possibilities for citation, beyond the boundaries of inverted commas.*

D.C. had nothing to write but the necessity of staying with the book, yearning for its words, for writing nothing, and for more words, which may hold the time spent with it, all and nothing, she had nothing or at least she had nothing forward, conventionally. Nothing that could fulfil the common expectations of writing about a book as reviewing, offering context, analysis, judgement, to dissect it by means of erudition. But D.C. never read for erudition, she read for connections, even when most unlikely, or unhinged. Sometimes the hinges would break, and she was left with a silence so deafening that she could only fill it with laughter.

*VfaF: It demands other ways of reading, which enfold hearing.*

So she wrote, so I write: in enmeshment rather than distance, seeking resonance rather than reflection, connection rather than content, not reading as a distant critic, but hearing and engaging in a conversation with those characters, in agreement as much as interruption, interference, disturbance. She could not take the book as a case study, she shattered the glass case under which the material of study is kept, and longed for a writing of weighted reverberance and enmeshment, inside and with. Because the conversation is impossible, and because she heard it in reading, she had to write it.

*VfaF: A text made of words, and something more and something else than words?*

Writing with apparently nothing to say allowed D.C., her not all her, and me, to spend more time listening; it intimates a need to stay, attend. The form of writing, the condition of writing, and the writer are made and manifested of the same substance. When this substance feels empty, words require a timeless pace, and the writer will be still. The emptiness of argumentation in front of a book manifests a vessel forming, modes of reaching the margin, the recursive nature of knowing, instead of the visibility and mass of knowledge. Such present-and-absent conversation happens in the form it happens, which says something about how we (D.C. and I) listen, how we fabricate language, the kinships we perceive, the sympathetic frequencies which draw us to certain materials, in singular acts of reading through tonal encounters, always akin, always slightly out of sync, and then again – exhaustion, excitement: the ways in which a critic grasps for that secret core, that mass of yearning, emotion, interference, incongruence, and thinking with her materials that make her write.

*VfaF: Something more and something else than words.*

[C.R. begins to hear the Voice from a Faintspeaker humming in her head. Startled, but never averse to experimenting with abstruse ways of knowing and understanding, she attempts to reply, even if unsure if she is addressing a voice nested inside herself, the voice of D.C., or Literature proper].

All this, and more. The chimera of the impossible interviews, of entertaining conversations with dead or semi-fictional characters, of summoning the departed, recall



a statement I once heard in Calasso's *The Ruin of Kasch*: the dead are, in fact, books. They dwell in pages, 'solidified into portable objects that accompany us, prey on us, haunt us, assuage us'.<sup>127</sup> In Manganelli's book of impossible interviews D.C. heard a resonance proper of the book's material: inert, those conversations with the dead are never entirely told, they cannot be quoted, they must first and foremost be imagined, chimerically. *Then* they might be heard.

*VfaF: Heard, after all, is an anagram of read with the added h of a breath. Here chimeric writing yearns to become its subjects. Hear chimeric writing.*

Manganelli's book is written in Italian. D.C. was not a translator, and what drives a critic who is exhausted from dwelling in the entanglements of reading, but is not exhaustive in mentioning sources she cannot quote? Exhausted, worn out, like the smoothed feet of those marble statues in Italian churches that have been touched so many times they have lost their initial form, only to carry the stamp of devotion that often is obsession, the erasing and changing mark of time spent, which may smoothen, which may smother. So the critic and her subjects are spent, transformed. To study means to change: not to attend to a fixed object, but to transform it and be transformed with it.

*VfaF: Dismissing the 'case study' model, this form of writing shatters the glass under which the material of research is kept, and becomes a writing inside and with: it is the Eleusinian suffering through, pathos and passion, where the achievement is not in concrete outputs, but in finding oneself exactly where one started, understanding deeper*

---

<sup>127</sup> Calasso, *The Ruin of Kasch*, p. 353.

*the way in which one is there, the manners of being, the ways of perceiving, the sympathies which draw one to engage with certain materials.*<sup>128</sup>

The impossibility of writing around Manganelli's impossible interviews was also bound to D.C.'s awareness of the book's faint sound – faint for its subjects at times baffling, at times abrasive, full of histories and themes so specific, non-topical, or out of currency, that they might sound empty. Who will receive? Who will tune in? When you are pushed outside certain legitimate circles of literary anything, which deem you to be literally nothing, who is there to hear? Is amplification necessary when certain signals demand to stay faint? What is perceived as emptiness of argument is in fact a vessel forming, to hold a transformation of the residual and recursive materials of knowing, instead of the evidence and mass of knowledge. Caught between the need to transmit faint sounds, and the high chances of not being received, she longed for a type of hearing attuned to detect other faint voices, so it may divert from the apparent void-silence that is only a superficial contrast to loudness.

*VfaF: This sounds as if it has been heard before.*

There is no such thing as void-silence, there are volumes which will never be loud enough because if they do, they get distorted and lose texture. Better to tune in the hearing, than force a faint signal to scream. These signals may appear isolated because of the non-

---

<sup>128</sup> Based on the myth of Demeter and Persephone, the Eleusinian Mysteries in ancient Greece were rituals out of which the participants would emerge with no fear of death, and to which the initiates were sworn in agreement that no details would be divulged. Calasso and Weil returned several times to Eleusis in their writings; the main sources in the reading of the Mysteries presented in this thesis-work are found in Calasso's *Il cacciatore celeste*, and in Weil's *First and Last Notebooks: Supernatural Knowledge*, trans. by Richard Rees, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1970 [*Œuvres Complètes*, Tome 5, Vol. 1, Paris: Gallimard, 2019] and *Gravity and Grace*.

immediacy of references or cultural contexts they hold. They need wildly imaginative forms of hearing and reading, and impure forms of writing, monstrous writing-as-attuning, attuned hearing-in-reading. Perceived differently, they are perceived as different. They need another form of attuning, and of handing over. D.C. called this writing-as-attuning, and the reading it demands, chimeric.

*VfaF: This sounds like nothing, as we need it.*

This form of attunement can be frightening. *Frightening*, as William Carlos Williams said to the Italian writer Cristina Campo on reading her words on his poetry: ‘I do not think that any one on this earth would ever find me out among my writings as you have done, or would care to do so much for me. You have turned me inside out, stripped me bare and I am not even embarrassed but on the contrary welcome you as a lover and a friend. Nothing physical about it; it goes deeper than that, is why I say it frightens me – we do not in this world admit such intimacies, we have to hide them from each other but you have found me out, I am frightened by it’.<sup>129</sup>

I want to write this sense of being frightened and compelled by words that find me out when I read, the silence that continues to overwhelm and exhaust, makes me present and strange, the fullness of hearing voices in books, even if impossible, or dead – where words haunt me, from times before me, they are suddenly saturated with meaning, only to withdraw again, and I talk with them, I am eloquently interrupted by them and disturbed, I take leave from them, and I am there, as I was nearly there, I have always been there, and have never been. To write yearning, which gives voices their purpose, even if it is

---

<sup>129</sup> *Per Cristina Campo*, ed. by Monica Farnetti and Giovanna Fozzer, Milano: All’insegna del pesce d’oro, 1998, p. 107.

only dust, even if the signal is faint. In monstrous mutations never mute. It is difficult to write this, groundless but not without grounds, and yet writing is my vessel, writing is my limit, my voices, my chimera, impure-monstrous-loud-silence that never allows me to think 'I have done'.<sup>130</sup>

---

<sup>130</sup> (Riding) Jackson, p. 49.

## **Lost Notes: Faint Signals**

**By D.C.**

The German artist Rolf Julius made works of small sounds, for the downward gaze. I remember seeing those tiny speakers in the huge hall of the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin, hearing their faint sounds in the vast space around them. Their substance was not revealed through amplification, but through detail and stillness. Not loudness, but attention.

An image comes to my mind: a photo of the little speaker, half-buried in dust, from Julius' installation *Music in a Corner* (1983).<sup>131</sup> The list of materials in the work's caption includes cement powder, loudspeaker, audio, and corner.

If you are a small speaker and you are partially buried in dust, do not consider yourself only a small speaker. Feel the dust, dwell on the angularity of the corner. They are all materials of what you do, even if they are outside yourself though immediately close, so why exclude them. Dismiss sterile subjectivism, think not only of yourself as a speaker, but a speaker endusted, encornered. The corner will be a frail frame, the dust will blow away, will transport the work and its sounds elsewhere.

Music, in Julius's titles, is often *for*: for a ruin, for a frozen lake, for the eyes, for an island, for a long time. It is itself and leans toward elsewhere, it holds an inclination. Sometimes

---

<sup>131</sup> *Rolf Julius: Small Music (Grau)*, ed. by Bernd Schulz and Hans Gercke, Heidelberg: Kehrer Verlag, 1995, p. 77.

a sound is a stone. In *Stone (Alone)* (1993) a loudspeaker emits faint sounds from the top of a stone: a faint broadcast, a heavy grounding.<sup>132</sup>

On answering a demand that his drawings should be more modern, he replies with a statement of return and repetition: ‘Always the same garden, always the same segment’.<sup>133</sup>

On answering the criticism that the sounds in one of his installations may be not loud enough, he says: ‘Can you imagine how loud a lotos sings?’.<sup>134</sup>

David Toop writes of primitive *ground instruments* that employ strings across resonant holes in the ground, marginal or spectral sound-producing devices barely heard, if at all: ‘[T]hese holes in the ground address a basic problem – how to make a small thing bigger – and by applying the principle of resonance they fashion an elegant solution whose imprint will gradually soften and crumble into an impression rather than a scar. We could learn something from that’.<sup>135</sup>

I long for writing that leaves impressions, not scars. I imagine an endless edit of a book that transmits other books that are punctuations in something that exceeds them and puts pressure on them, in time, holding time, unstable as they are composite, interfered with, suspended.

---

<sup>132</sup> Rolf Julius: *Small Music (Grau)*, p. 191.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>135</sup> David Toop, ‘Gone to Earth’, *A Sinister Resonance*, blog, 29 September 2017, <https://davidtoopblog.com/2017/09/29/gone-to-earth/> [Accessed 30 September 2017].



## A Deranged Essay: My Chimera

By D.C.

Let me tell you my story of Chimera; not the one you will find in an encyclopaedia of mythological figures – I trust you to be able to search for that one yourself, and readers who do not wish to move outside these pages, follow more or less legitimate hints and threads, contribute to diffuse the radiations of this work, and read more books, are not apt to approach these pages of excess. I will not give you a concluded interpretation, for myths and symbols never do. They are made of an elusive but present substance that does *not* get lost in translation, and demands to be ceaselessly translated, at once transcending words, and carried in them – radiance and presence, cadence and glare; heard as tone, not carved in stone. I have something else to tell you, less straightforward, more necessary.

My Chimera is endorsed by an eternity of transformations. It de-literalises the idea of goal, stating with Hillman that the essential goal is instead the *opus*, the yearning inherent in doing.<sup>137</sup> It dismisses creative progression. It always existed and continues to change, like the alchemical *rotatio* whose task is not to move elsewhere than the material, and deepen the understanding of it; like a myth, with its force of being grounded and different all the time – all the time that may be given to the artifice and presence of its retelling.

I shall not quote the expected sources but give you my signifying reading practices that make Chimera, here, in the material of my reading, reasoning, resounding. Remember one of the myths of origin, the story of Prometheus, as told by Plato in *Protagoras*.

---

<sup>137</sup> Hillman, *Alchemical Psychology*, Putnam, CT: Spring Publications, 2014, p. 232.



Prometheus's brother Epimetheus is given by the Gods, who have just created the world, the task of assigning a quality to each creature. He leaves man at the end, is left with no quality to give him; in the attempt to patch up his brother's error, Prometheus steals fire. Origin lies in nothing left, and a stolen quality: there is no origin but in artifice, and the artificial stolen quality given to man is a substance that burns, the ardour of knowing.

The myth is mentioned by Stiegler in *How I Became a Philosopher* to introduce the idea of *hypomnesis* which, unlike *anamnesis* – the recollection of a memory – stands for the making of a memory: a figure of artifice.<sup>138</sup> The way in which each subject tells and constructs the story of their origin is driven by desire, Stiegler emphasises – like Prometheus's attraction to fire, like chimeric yearning, like the Vedic ardour which is the means of knowing – and such desire is a learned lack: a node is perceived, significant and lacking ('nothing to say'), it is attended to and remade, over and over, present in its elusiveness. Nothing is insignificant if it demands attention, if it sets you on fire, like the ardour of the Vedic *rsis* who in their stillness and burning reached knowing. A desire for nothing echoes Weil, who studied Vedic texts and wrote of desire without wishes for rewards. Chimeric is not the subject, not the object, but the yearning: the yearning for nothing, nothing yearning.

For Stiegler, it is impossible to escape one's *milieu*: the substance in which each one is constituted, the locality of their language at once singular, and enmeshed. There, a difference is perceived, which does not always appear but changes everything about the way a text is understood because of the way it is encountered, the specific way in which it speaks to one. Whatever is made meaningful – *made* meaningful in the uncovering of

---

<sup>138</sup> Stiegler, pp. 15–16.

enmeshed singularity, not *pronounced* to be meaningful as *diktat* – it is so through ‘signifying practices’: sustained relations, across time.<sup>139</sup> How is a signifying practice brought into being? I think of Corbin’s understanding of *creative prayer* in the context of his study of Sufi philosopher, poet, and mystic Ibn ‘Arabi: prayer is not made to achieve anything, but brings an existing relation into being as *unio sympathetica*, in the intensity and burning of ‘the creative power of the heart’.<sup>140</sup> This form of prayer-practice of perceiving what is there is brought into being by assonance, by responding to certain encounters, the deep connections perceived in singular and sustained acts of reading through formal and tonal encounters, magic doors, tangencies. You write a sentence, and you perceive at the same time that you have written it, and it was already there. Have you made it, or discovered it? Both. It was there, but you had to creatively learn to see it. The way you see it is your singular way of seeing it, of finding it *and* making it. There can be no dogma. This is what Corbin means by *himma*, the creative power of the heart. This is what happens in these pages. Finding and knowing are in resonance and sympathy.

To bring Chimera into writing I have coined the term *csiting*, conjoining *citing* and *siting* in an assonant desiring encounter – a way of working with texts beyond the rules of citation, a way of citing as hearing in reading, where I find my grounds as I read, site myself as I cite, consider the words that make my understanding of chimera and these words are residual: *situs* in Latin is site as well as dust, detritus. As I csite I continue to ground and unground residues. Here as I csite (hear my csite, hear my sight as I read), my sources are not my origin, understood in terms of a stable *before* that legitimates and authorises what I write: they are not original, they are residual, decaying, and changing, they are beating hearts, cores of voices, rhythms, and songs I heard before and continue

---

<sup>139</sup> Stiegler, pp. 26–28.

<sup>140</sup> Corbin, ‘Of *Unio Mystica* as *Unio Sympathetica*’, in *Alone with the Alone*, pp. 120–135.

to sing and they continue to beat. They are here, heard in the heartbeat of Clarice Lispector's *instant-now* of every reoccurrence,<sup>141</sup> they are here, heard in the core of my understanding of Stiegler's signifying practices through reading-writing, they are here, heard because I hear. They are the *artificed* meaningful substance made up from an apparent lack of quality, an apparent lack of words, that allows other words, other qualities to emerge.

A site for csiting. The geographical site in the region of Lycia in Anatolia where Chimera roamed, was a ravine extending up from the shore. Chimeric writing is perched on a ravine, in Greek *krinein*, the root of critical, that discerns and leans toward, and might fall into its yearning. It leans toward something else, a yearning perceived in the material of research, that separates and is at once medium for conversation. Chimeric writing is all, it is nothing, it is *krinein*, it is criticism, it falls into ravine, in Italian *crinale*, in English crest, that slides into crestfallen a state of mind and again a fall, a ruin, *rovina*, ravine, fall, faint.

All, nothing, oscillating between meanings found in sound, hearing in writing that ripples the surface of these pages, yearning for other ways of reading, chimeric writing is all, nothing, oscillating, a dynamic image. The dynamic image, for Bachelard...

Rather than a direct reference to his work, I am tempted to offer you a reference to Pizarnik, because this is how I learned of Bachelard's dynamic image: through a relay of fractured voices in those two writers, not a direct engagement with a primary source. All

---

<sup>141</sup> Lispector, p. 3.

sources here are primary. There is not one abstract, even, universal underlying system of knowledge that is equal and reassuring in its stability. I learned to know from what other people told me in books, from overhearing, connecting, misreading, misled, reconnecting, and arranging according to the matrix of my thinking-feeling-being. In my particular understanding, Bachelard's dynamic image was forever tied to Pizarnik's understanding of criticism as 'intimate tie'.<sup>142</sup> Unconcerned with what Bachelard said as fixed authority, I focus on what Bachelard *said to Alejandra*, and in turn, on *what she said to me*, in all our singulars that makes us *we*. Similarly to my following the sounding threads in Stein/Stain/Stone/Styx, rather than offer a reading of Stein's work I want to see where else this form of reading might lead me.

...the dynamic image, for Bachelard, is at once manifestation of a dwelling, and a changing.<sup>143</sup> It exists, and mutates. It exists. Composite and yearning, the various readings of Chimera, its various meanings, compose and open the form of study, never complete, always longing for something other than itself: the writing of this research, of this chimera, is never concluded. It is not only a dynamic image: it is, and has sound, voices demanding to be heard, meanings found in hearing. Research, resonance, residue: the writing of this research is built on residues that came before; and after the burning of Chimera's fire-breathing operations, it leaves more residues, 'for still hidden writings to read'.<sup>144</sup>

Chimera is an image, not seen but imagined: heard in reading. Chimera – I understand from Hillman as he writes of the deep forms of psyche which are manners of being in the

---

<sup>142</sup> Pizarnik, *Diarios*, p. 536.

<sup>143</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *Lautréamont*, trans. by Robert S. Dupree, Dallas, TX: The Pegasus Foundation, 1986 [*Lautréamont*, Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1939].

<sup>144</sup> Cascella, *En Abîme*, p. 61.

world, of carrying presence every day – is the way in which I see, not a content that I see; an image heard in reading that makes claims on me, and my task is not to interpret it, but to attend to its presence. Listen now, here is how Chimera met me, how I attended to it.

*Chimera* is the last word in ‘Sonnet CXXIV’ by Gaspara Stampa, the Italian poet who in the sixteenth century wrote a cycle of *Rime* which disrupted the stylistic codes of Petrarchism by addressing her poems to women who spoke, felt, were in charge of their bodies and minds, rather than mute muses. ‘Sonnet CXXIV’ is a song of lost love and a manifestation of the sense of being split, half alive half dead, feeling everything and feeling nothing; the writer’s true form is ‘all and nothing, [...] an image of Echo and Chimera’.<sup>145</sup> I encountered the sonnet as it was named in a letter by Campo, who deemed it most exquisite, and who wrote of the necessity to write because nobody else had seen certain things the way she had, nobody had put them in conversation as she had.<sup>146</sup> I encountered the sonnet *after* I had realised that Chimera was to be at the core of my project, although I heard it, in my yearning for chimeric writing, *before* I knew what it was – how it was to form, perceived in its yearning, read as yearning, as much for what is there, as for what is not, one not strong enough, not sensed without the other. In my yearning, following up a thread of reading, Chimera appeared in the concluding verse of Gaspara’s sonnet, sounding and speaking the sense of ‘all and nothing’ that I perceive when I write – the loss of self, loss of sense, as dead. In hearing Chimera summoning me in that last verse I was speechless, petrified, again, *Da Capo*.

---

<sup>145</sup> Gaspara Stampa, ‘Sonnet CXXIV’, in *Rime*, 1554, <https://www.liberliber.it/mediateca/libri/s/stampa/rime/html/testo02.htm> [Accessed 18 March 2019]

<sup>146</sup> Campo, ‘Lettera a Giorgio Orelli, Agosto 1954’, in *Il mio pensiero non vi lascia*, Milano: Adelphi, 2011, p. 171; also mentioned in Cristina De Stefano, *Belinda e il mostro: vita segreta di Cristina Campo*, Milano: Adelphi, 2002, p. 34. Translations from De Stefano are by The Ruin of Casc.

Speechless petrified again *Da Capo*. *Pierre*, stone, Stein, rebeginning from an ending. *Pierre*, stone, is the last word in the cycle of poems by Gérard de Nerval entitled *Chimeras*, among the masterpieces of Symbolist verse – poems dense in their vocabulary, and transformative in their treatment of images. I encountered Nerval’s stone – certainly an alchemical one, considering the writer’s studies of the *opus* – as I was preparing to write to a friend, in an early attempt at outlining the idea of chimeric writing for someone beyond my private speculations. After mentioning my thoughts around stones and chimeras in my letter, taking a pause from writing, I opened Nerval’s book, and ‘a pure spirit beneath the skin of stones’ summoned me from the last verse of the last poem, marking a rebeginning. I heard *pierre* vaguely rhyming with *Chimère*, stone rhyming with Chimera.<sup>147</sup>

Of course.

How couldn’t it.

My ~~research~~ Chimera found me.

It found me as I was open to listening to it. Not only was I startled at finding out that my edition of Nerval’s *Chimeras* had been translated in English by Robert Duncan, whose *The H.D. Book* is one of the heartbeats in my work, but that a stone sits at the end of *Chimeras* gave a stronger orientation to my writing, making it resound with a text I had written previously, from and despite Stein, reading her name, not her work, as stone. I used the German sense of *Stein* as a springboard to leap into the many stones which populate these pages: the alchemical stone, ripened and malleable, holding transformation; Pizarnik’s ‘stone of madness’ in the title of one of her poetry collections; the *stony* as a quality of writing yearned for by Dante and Campo; the stone as writer’s

---

<sup>147</sup> Gérard de Nerval, ‘The Chimeras: Golden Lines’, trans. by Robert Duncan, in *Aurelia and Other Writings*, trans. by Geoffrey Wagner, R. Duncan, and Marc Lowenthal, Boston, MA: Exact Change, 1996, pp. 164–165 [‘Les Chimères’, in *Les Filles du Feu*, Paris: Michèle Levy, 1854].

block, considered by Duncan as the prompt for a transformation of the writer into the work he writes about.

More alliterations, more meanings found through sound. Stone, Stampa, Gaspara's surname. *Stampa* in Italian is print. For the literary critic Eric Griffiths, print 'does not give conclusive evidence of a voice; this raises doubts about what we hear in writing but also gives an essential pleasure of reading, for as we meet the demands a text makes on us for our voices, we are engaged in an activity of imagination which is delicately and thoroughly reciprocal'.<sup>148</sup> Reciprocal, in voicing across the pages, are these pages, as '[t]he intonational ambiguity of a written text may create a mute polyphony through which we [...] reflect on the inter-resonance of those voicings'.<sup>149</sup> Words here inter-resonate, between Stampa's '*sentà tutto*' and '*non senta niente*', 'I feel / hear all' and 'I feel / hear nothing' – *sentire* in Italian is at once to feel, and to hear. My 'true form, an image of Echo and Chimera', moving across texts through their whispers and resounding connections, is the true form of this writing.

In no prescriptive form do I want to say and write chimeric writing, but in change. It works in excess of itself and its materials, into a yearning. Yearning and excess for the untold unheard untranslated, with the fire it breathes, the things that cannot be fully known but can be sensed through the beautiful subterfuge of more words, so when I write *chimera* no clear image appears, but a muted blurred symbol which continues to tell and continues to hide, which can be told and retold in many forms, not forgetting the interferences. These pages cannot be an exhaustive overview of what chimeric writing is,

---

<sup>148</sup> Eric Griffiths, *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 13.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

because chimeric writing is *not yet*. They are a singular proposition of what a chimeric disposition may effect, showing how it may animate researching, organising research, writing research. Because chimeric writing is not a fortress but a ruin, you can find your singular way inside it, your echo, your chimera.

Chimera appeared, fleetingly, in one of my books, as I wondered how the voice of Chimera may sound.<sup>150</sup> At the time I was concerned with multiple spoken voices; now I am drawn to voices temporarily held in writing, perceived in reading. Chimeric writing is never only a voice and a page, it is a mesh of transmissions and conversations. Chimera reoccurred because one book opens another, and this writing of research, unfolding through the years, is never concluded, always residual, a-synchronous, yearning.

‘La Chimera’ was the title of the opening poem in Dino Campana’s *Canti orfici* (*Orphic Chants*), a collection of verses from the early twentieth century in which symbolism and lyricism merge with innovative rhythmic forms, and with attention to montage and unusual viewpoints. Chimera was heard in the rapturous and visionary voice of performer Carmelo Bene reading that poem, ‘*e ti chiamo ti chiamo Chimera*’.<sup>151</sup> *Campana* in Italian is bell, a word contained in *libellula*, and Blanchot wrote that ‘perhaps commentary is just a little snowflake making the bell toll’,<sup>152</sup> so here is how my chimeric writing rings, hear it ring. Chimera appeared in ‘La libellula’ (‘The Dragonfly’), a long poem by Amelia Rosselli, who inhabited Campana’s words and transformed them through misreading and not always correct rhyming, so that *chimera* becomes another composite, inappropriately

---

<sup>150</sup> Casella, *F.M.R.L.*, p. 31.

<sup>151</sup> Dino Campana, ‘La Chimera’, in *Canti Orfici*, Milano: Rizzoli, 1989 (1914), pp. 105–106; Carmelo Bene, ‘La Chimera’, *Canti Orfici*, YouTube video, 2’40”, 2008 (1996) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dvlyfgLDZs> [Accessed 11 January 2019].

<sup>152</sup> Blanchot, *Lautréamont and Sade*, p. 2.



but tellingly and soundingly echoing *sirena*, chimera, sirena, ‘*e ti chiamo ti chiamo chimera, e tu suoni e risuoni chimera, sirena*’, ‘and I call you I call you chimera, and you sound and resound chimera, sirena’.<sup>153</sup> Hear how Chimera glides over words across centuries, sometimes the C is capital sometimes small, name and noun, she will not be captured. It is Chimera, and in Rosselli’s hearing it becomes *sirena*, siren. Sirens, Blanchot writes, are bearers of presence beyond present, of the encounter which happens now, and is always about to happen because it already has happened.<sup>154</sup> I read because I have already read, in the presence of a song still to be sung, a song for Campo, Campana, and *campana* in Italian is bell, contained in *libellula*, so I will later ring a bell for CristinaCampoCampanaChimera.

Sometimes, rather than being present to the point of obsession in these chains of coincidences, echoes, and sonic metamorphoses, Chimera kept herself muted. She appeared, unannounced and unassuming, in Book Eight of Apuleius’s *The Golden Ass*, not doing much in the text other than being a secondary term of comparison, but secretly winking at me in recognition.<sup>155</sup> The appearance of Chimera offered me a connecting link, a nexus with which to work, an unexpected endorsement of my study, another signal that my materials were coalescing around a profound core of thinking whose roots, or *antennae*, stretched far beyond myself. I was reading Apuleius while studying the Menippean satire, considering its form as a possible one for my work. So I understood, this work would be written as a Menippean satire for critical writing.

---

<sup>153</sup> This sentence distorts some verses in Rosselli, pp. 27–28. Translated by D.C..

<sup>154</sup> Blanchot, *The Gaze of Orpheus*, pp. 105–113.

<sup>155</sup> Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, trans. by P. G. Walsh, Oxford: Oxford University Press World’s Classics, 2008 (2nd century CE), p. 149.

Voice from a Faintspeaker: Reader, would you believe that my work is done? No. Voices will presently surge into a number of characters who will remain haunted by D.C.'s speculations, yet will speak as themselves, as if momentarily returning to earth from the underworld. Consider, later, D.C. talking to Chimera: a disappeared critic, talking to her yearning. Where at first you had suspected these entities to exist in the realm of pure speculation, you will be startled to hear their voices. Chimera is a creature that never existed. In these pages it exists as *tutto e niente*, all and nothing. What to do in front of nothing, in front of a voided expectation? Laugh. Hear the laugh of Chimera, read this *écriture chimerique*;<sup>156</sup> you will hear Demeter's laughter at Eleusis, the thundering and illegitimate hilarity that melts the *agélastos pétra* of paralysis, the 'sullen stone that does not laugh';<sup>157</sup> you will hear the illegitimate laughter of Alejandra's impure prose, breaking the stone of her madness; you will hear the illegitimate laughter of my self-parody, breaking the writer's block, stone.

---

<sup>156</sup> A nod at Cixous's essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa', trans. by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, Vol. 1., No. 4, Summer 1976, pp. 875–893 ['Le rire de la Meduse', *L'Arc*, 1975], in which she proposes an *écriture féminine*.

<sup>157</sup> Calasso, *Il cacciatore celeste*, p. 411.

## Imaginary Conversation

Alejandra Pizarnik, Cristina Campo, D.C.<sup>158</sup>

D.C.: You will excuse me, but I truly do not know how to address you...

Cristina Campo: Do you believe you *may* address me?

D.C.: That is the reason I fell from myself, the reason I undertook this singular journey, altogether hypothetical and arduous.

C.C.: Hypothetical and arduous... these words have a sinister and familiar sound. How do you want to talk to me, then? I heard you have nothing to say.

D.C.: Nothing to say. So many times it was you instead who said something about me, my words, my writing voice, my inflection, no, it is tone.

Alejandra Pizarnik: Did I hear *stone*? The stone of madness?

D.C. [sibilant, sibylline]: ...'s tone is silence imposed on speech, to be able to echo. So that I can be at once singular, and many-voiced. Stone alone, like in that title of a most laconic sculpture I saw long ago, made of a stone, a small loudspeaker, and faint sounds. I thought of ways for my words to be with those faint sounds, arranging and broadcasting

---

<sup>158</sup> The 'Imaginary Conversations' were written in part from recollections, *transcelations*, and echoes of Pizarnik and Campo's words, specifically Alejandra's journals, in Spanish (see Bibliography) and Cristina's letters to her friends (in Italian, see Bibliography) and to Alejandra (in French), the latter unpublished to date and kept in the Alejandra Pizarnik Papers, Box 9, Folder 1, Special Collections, Princeton Library. To date, most of these texts are not translated in English. See footnotes on individual publications for exceptions.

them in less expected ways. Like someone who collects songs and does not organise them according to structural categories or genres, but according to the elements: air, water, earth, fire. In the collection of air you hear clouds, breaths, gales, and in the collected fire there's the hiss and the blaze, destruction and sacrifice. There is a fifth element, too: the collected silences, the philosopher's tone.

A.P. [in her mind, not daring to say it out loud for fear of being considered mad]: Stone.

C.C.: There was a time when I wanted to write certain verses I had in mind for months, a reverse *Song of Songs*, 'O you who dwell in gardens, with companions listening to your voice, do not let me hear it'. I wanted to write it nearly in the rhythm of an ancient blues, austere, solemn, and terribly alive. I would call it the *Song of the Speechless*.

D.C. [singing]: Every minute in the day, every day in the week, every week in the month, and every month in the year, I've got the blues so bad, I hardly know my name... [turns suddenly to Pizarnik] Alejandra, I confess: all these years when in your pages you told me of gardens, I wanted to build a folly.

A.P.: Folly is your tone, Chimera's tone, stone of madness – but not mad musings. Asphyxia and ecstasy. At night someone asks questions in a garden, but the answers are equivocal, and unfolded.

D.C.: I admire your poisonous sweetness.

A.P.: And I don't mind your irony. But if you made an effort to talk, it would be so good for you.

D.C.: Do you want me to talk? Fine. [Pause. Voice changes to a shrill pitch]. Everything is like a comb full of hair; like listening with sponge in the ears; like a madwoman putting books in the shredder but it seems not enough, so she also puts in the stones, the carpets, and her hands. This I know: I am groundless, but not without grounds.

A.P.: No, not that again.

D.C.: Yes, again, and more.

A.P.: You've said that already.

D.C.: I like to say it again. The thrill of the refrain.

C.C.: This repetition sounds like a refrain for a deepening, a personal form of *hesychia*: like that ancient practice of stillness and monotonous, repetitive prayer, you repeat and return. Accretions of thoughts can only be sensed in those repetitions, never ornamental, but necessary. My invitation to you is not to become petrified in the determinations of discourse, but to lodge on the side of the unspoken, without which discourse would not live.

A.P.: Some time ago you told me a most exquisite story, from the *Collection of Sayings of the Desert Fathers* that you edited and annotated. A disciple complained to an elder

that although he kept asking questions to those wiser than him, he kept nothing in his mind of what he was told. The elder said, go and get one of those vases, fill it with oil, burn it, and put it back in its place. Do it again. Again. And again. Now take one of the other vases by its side, one you have not touched. Which one shines more? The one in which the oil was burned. That is how knowing works; even if it looks as if you are empty and contain nothing, your understanding is refined by the burning of repeated, sustained attention.

D.C.: Tell me more. You have something to say, I have nothing.

C.C.: I disagree. You have much to say, but by other means. Think of your dismissal of the term *theory*; think of the old meaning of the Greek *theoria* as contemplation. In the fourth century Gregory of Nyssa practised and taught *theoria* as stillness, and knowledge, spurred by desire; it is not merely intellectual, but involves the whole being. Crucially, knowledge appears to be formed through personal experience, with no mediation of authority or dogmatic sanctioning through external evaluations. This is not too far from your interest in Henry Corbin's studies on Avicenna and Ibn 'Arabi; in both, understanding is shown to be achieved through ardour, self-knowledge...

D.C.: By the way, did you know that my next book will be entitled *The Method of Saint Attention*? It will take the form of a text with many voices and registers. I want to show that to ground writing on apparently nothing to say – working with materials that are neither translated nor topical, that get little attention – means to choose the impetus of the telling over the fixity and accomplishment of a document; such impetus can only be prompted by study, having spent time with those materials. I call it, as Laura (Riding) Jackson did, 'the story of us', where *us* are all the voices that haunt my writing. I learned

in one of your letters, C., that for Hofmannsthal she who welcomes a thought does not receive something, but someone.

A.P.: That was a premonition.

C.C.: That was, also, Borges.

D.C.: That was a chimera. [Sighs] For many years I was exposed to an excruciating torture, and you both went through it too: people's silence in front of your work, coldness, pretending-not-to-see-you when encountering texts you wrote as deranged essays, parodic composite prose with switches in register – the expectation was for a certain type of writing, one that stays with one fixed tone, sets its goals at the start, and continues to point at them throughout, summarising, guiding...

A.P.: ...disappearing into a giant yawn.

D.C.: The books we read, in whose company we longed to be, were those composite ones in which critical thinking and writing is disguised in many forms, even despite itself, even when it does not say what it is: present, impossible, composite, I call them I call them chimeras, and I call this writing chimeric.

[After such a sincere, difficult pronouncement, once again D.C. faints].

## Appearances, Encounters: Magic Doors

### From the Notebooks of D.C.

‘We ought to be able to develop our faculty for posing genuinely deep questions through intuition [alone] to a degree that such questions would be answerable in our encounters with our fellows; nay, even in the anticipation of such encounters’.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *The Book of Friends*<sup>159</sup>

End of summer in 2019, I am staring once again at the pages of a book. A substantial volume of over a thousand pages, in a language not entirely familiar to me:

‘Además, me dijeron que mi oído es anormalmente fino. Yo no lo sabía. Tal vez ahora entiendo algo de mi nostalgia del silencio.

Terminar el libro en prosa. Enviarlo a D.C.

Ocuparme del de poemas.

Luego, no pensar más en “libros” sino en textos cortos: un poema, un relato, de manera que pueda disponer de mí sin pensar que necesito tres o seis meses para acabar un libro’.<sup>160</sup>

End of summer in 1964, Alejandra Pizarnik has written another entry in her journal. It is a revelatory excerpt for my reading, for a deep insight into a writer’s mind, one of those unexpected moments of instant recognition when I find a text, or a text finds me, or let’s forget who finds whom and think of the encounter; how a handful of sentences that

---

<sup>159</sup> Hugo von Hoffmannsthal, *The Book of Friends*, trans. by Douglas Robertson, *The Philosophical Worldview Artist*, blog, 13 February 2009, <http://shirtysleeves.blogspot.com/2008/04/translation-of-buch-der-freunde-by-hugo.html> [Accessed 29 November 2019] [*Buch der Freunde*, Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1922].

<sup>160</sup> Pizarnik, *Diarios*, p. 697.



someone else might dismiss is recognised as crucial. Impossible to resist extrapolating what is going on in those few lines which seem to point – unknowingly, and with the lucidity that can only be afforded by otherness – at a special ardour in words; words that sound not quite all hers, not quite all mine.

Pizarnik writes of understanding sometimes her nostalgia for silence. Then crucially, she gives herself the task of finishing the ‘book in prose’ – a prose so difficult, alluring, chimeric, which she had been chasing throughout her journals – and send it to D.C. That is, to me. A voice from the past summons me through a page written before my time, it promises me a book, I am a receiver, and in turn, I am writing: short texts, just like those for which Pizarnik yearns in her journal. I hold on to these moments of recognition in reading: ephemeral clues, not attached to evidence, when I find, I hear my words in a mesh of connections, despite myself. So often knowing-in-words is encountered despite myself. Knowing, and realising that what I know is a stitch in a web, not a dictionary entry, enmeshed in words that came before me, not detached, or clear-cut. Writing of Pizarnik’s words I write of mine. Writing Pizarnik’s words I write mine. Without my words, hers would not be visible in the singular ways they appear here; in turn, my words would not have grounds without hers. Curious anachronistic simultaneities occur, writing entangled and unruly. At one point I find myself speechless.

Pizarnik’s journal entry, in Spanish, is not published to date in English translation. I am drawn to encounters with texts not translated in English, which sometimes leave me without words and challenge me to start writing from, and because of their impossible, partial, compelling silence. I am curious about what sort of engagement these circumstances may afford – what is heard there, and in which forms it is possible to hand

over what is opaque for many, to transmit frequencies below or above the audible range; how to talk about them, in front of the impossibility of giving evidence by means of quotations; what else is given, and may be given; what transformations are at play; what types of bilingualisms, beyond the literal, are in place. The multilingualism that I have in mind and that I practice is not only between languages – Italian and English, some Spanish, some French – but between forms of writing and the expectations tied to them, between mediums, between art and criticism, between cultures and decades. I take my speechlessness after the encounter with Pizarnik’s untranslated words as a prompt to elaborate on such multiplicities. What impure forms may writing take?

Pizarnik was born in 1936 in Buenos Aires to Russian Jewish immigrant parents. She dropped out of her philosophy and literature studies at the University of Buenos Aires to pursue painting and poetry, publishing collections in most part concerned with cruelty, childhood, selfhood, death. In 1960 she travelled to Paris, where she met writers such as Octavio Paz, Julio Cortázar, and Silvina Ocampo. Known as one of Argentina’s most intense lyric poets, Pizarnik named among her influences ‘the suffering of Baudelaire, the suicide of Nerval, the premature silence of Rimbaud, the mysterious and fleeting presence of Lautréamont’, and the ‘unparalleled intensity’ of Artaud’s ‘physical and moral suffering’.<sup>161</sup> She committed suicide aged thirty-six. Her prose ranges from articles and essays to theatre pieces and stories, with a substantial section presented under the heading of ‘humour’. Prose also infiltrates her poetry collections, starting from *Extracting the Stone Of Madness*, at a time when the need to focus on prose appears urgent in her journals. For Pizarnik, prose is a manner of disrupting the constraints of speechlessness

---

<sup>161</sup> ‘Alejandra Pizarnik’, *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/alejandra-pizarnik> [Accessed 29 October 2019].

at which she had excelled in her poetry – she had exceeded them too, and longed for a different manner, a different form to host her reading mind.

For many years I thought I had nothing to say about Pizarnik, and I wanted to say that nothing, to make it ring. I did not want to write of her poetry, that gave her recognition as one of Argentina's most accomplished lyricists. I yearned to write about her more tormented and tortuous prose works – strongly parodic, vitriolic, excessive short texts, essays, plays, journal entries by one who was praised for her flawless lyricism and felt at odds with that praise, struggling across stylistic exaggerations to find other forms, mad impurities in her uneasy relation with language.

Most of all I was drawn to a short prose work that Pizarnik always considered her best, *La condesa sangrienta (The Bloody Countess)*. On 9 August 1955 she remarked: 'I feel a book inside me. A book which smothers me'.<sup>162</sup> *La condesa* is that book, at once a smothering and a resolution. In later years, unable to write to meet the demands of a novel, she is intimately aware that something in that short text had broken through, another way of understanding what a frozen narrative could be, and do: '[W]hat I need to say lacks *duration*. Everything appears devoured, rotten. [...] I think with eagerness of a book of about a hundred pages very well written and terribly exciting. I evoke the piece on the countess: so must my book be'.<sup>163</sup>

The slipperiness of a subject so close to my concerns and tones that the threat of appropriating and repeating them was palpable, combined with the difficulty of accessing the untranslated material of her journals and less categorisable works such as the

---

<sup>162</sup> Pizarnik, *Diarios*, p. 146.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 883.

*Condesa*, and with the extremes touched by her words (constantly on the verge of silence but, toward the end of her life, wanting to break apart the confinement of speechlessness through appropriation, parody, and exaggeration) contributed to my avoidance. Her concerns and struggles were so close to mine that they smothered my voice.

Smothered after my encounters with Pizarnik's words I could not bring myself to write, and I was wrong. There had to be no bringing, no going elsewhere. Too often as a critic I only felt entitled to write on the grounds of exhaustive knowledge, a paralysing approach, shadowed by the threat of having little, too little, not enough, and the not enough is quickly perceived as the not at all. In fact, the only way for me to write was by staying still, focussing on the little I thought I had, its convulsions in the stillness. Staying very close, listening to partial clues, I could then begin to hear other signals. I could then meet Pizarnik's words across other words, through wordplay, allowing the few words I had to resound, watching how they interconnect.

It was a switch in perception that Certeau calls 'musical reasoning',<sup>164</sup> allowing an *œuvre* to emerge in 'alchemic combinations' where '[a] musical vitality of the language haunts the order of meaning',<sup>165</sup> with 'an intelligence more docile and more acute, harkening to what can be heard but not understood of language itself'.<sup>166</sup> Concerned with how words can bear the unsayable, and exist in that tension, Certeau understands reading as a practice of hearing what speaks in the text. I read Pizarnik's journals as if she were speaking to me, sometimes *of* me, offering a commentary on my writing even when it does not exist yet, ways of opening to conversation, anachronistic yet finding synchrony in another type

---

<sup>164</sup> Certeau, Vol. 2, p. 97.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

of relation. My chimeric writing is entangled, not hierarchical. It stems from reading that gives the feeling of *having been there*. I could not take the text as text; I had to attune my ears, see what sort of presence could be heard. These pages are not written *ex nihilo* but as transformations of existing material, across readings and correspondences. I use this method to animate and give voice to my speechlessness, showing the tone, the undercurrent that runs through what I had perceived, inaccurately, as silent.

8 July 1968: ‘From the journal of D., referring to me: “I do not know how one can speak with anyone who made vows of faith to silence” ’.<sup>167</sup> Pizarnik quotes from the journal of a friend called D. who referred at once to herself, to silence, and to the impossibility of speaking. October 1969: ‘Like a plot so that I do not write. Meeting with Daniela. She continues to reproach me for the terrible year and a half she passed “because of me” ’.<sup>168</sup> In another summoning across the years Alejandra reports, in the words of my homonymous friend, my difficulty in writing around someone so close to silence, and the terrible time I had ‘because of her’, when I could not write.

After this summoning from Pizarnik, pushing me to the point where I am no longer sure who is commenting on whom, I must introduce a third interlocutor in the attempt to break my silence. Does the name Cristina Campo ring any bells? You will most likely have heard nothing about her, unless you have come across ‘La noce d’oro’ (‘The Golden Nut’), a short text of enchanted childhood reverie in the recent *Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories*,<sup>169</sup> or recall the dedication in a poem by Pizarnik called ‘Rings of Ash’ – a

---

<sup>167</sup> Pizarnik, *Diarios*, p. 796.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 909.

<sup>169</sup> Campo, ‘The Golden Nut’, in *The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories*, ed. and trans. by Jhumpa Lahiri, London: Penguin, 2020, pp. 361–374 [‘La noce d’oro’, in *Sotto falso nome*, Milano: Adelphi, 1998 (1951–1969?), pp. 219–232].

poem of voices and mutilated words, of black suns and waiting, of silence and throat,  
leading into the world of this most elusive Italian writer, and pulling myself in with the  
singing, the voices, the throat.

*Rings Of Ash*

*For Cristina Campo*

It's my voices that are singing  
so the others can't sing—  
those figures gagged grey in the dawn,  
those dressed in the rain like desolate birds.

There is, in this waiting,  
a rumor of breaking lilac.  
And there is, when the day arrives,  
a division of the sun into smaller black suns.  
And at night, always,  
a tribe of mutilated words  
looks for refuge in my throat,  
so that *they* won't sing—  
the ill-fated, the owners of silence.<sup>170</sup>

Cristina Campo, owner of silence, silence. What can you hear if I say her name? Nothing,  
as we need it. How to introduce to you someone whose voice is barely heard, barely

---

<sup>170</sup> Pizarnik, *Extracting the Stone of Madness*, p. 23 ['Anillos de ceniza. A Cristina Campo', in *Los trabajos y las noches*, Buenos Aires: Ed. Sudamericana, 1965].

translated in English? I could start from the respected Italian *Enciclopedia Treccani*, with its loud signal of authority:

‘When she read *Gravity and Grace* by Simone Weil (1947) she found profound affinities with the French writer and she shared the inflexible coherence in following a destiny-vocation, the careful and patient (“attention-wait” are two crucial words in G.’s language) research which allows to decipher signs, and grasp by intuition the mysteries hidden in reality, the refusal of exclusively “horizontal” progress that characterises contemporary culture. Weil is an essential stage in G.’s trajectory toward the sacred and the supernatural. [...] It is impossible to avoid [...] these abstract terms about G., and to understand them precisely, there is nothing but the direct approach to the work. Her personality was complex, and if some have highlighted her passionate and dashing aspects, others have underlined her asceticism and research for inner silence in solitude. [...] Farnetti, who has studied her writings deeply, considers her “a stranger to any sanctioned tradition of our century, her writing not allowing to guess any sensible model, [...] still widely lacking bio-bibliographical supports, her life and work fleeing any partition ‘by the book’ ”. [...] G. has remained mostly outside of twentieth-century literary repertoires in Italy’.<sup>171</sup>

I could address the reason why Campo is referred to as G.: the entry is for Vittoria Guerrini, the writer’s actual name. She published mostly in pseudonyms, five and maybe more. Cristina Campo was the most frequent, used by someone who wished to disappear, who once said ‘she wrote little, and wished she had written less’. In her time – ended at the age of fifty-four for an incurable heart condition that affected her entire life with

---

<sup>171</sup> ‘Guerrini, Vittoria’, in *Treccani: Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 60, 2003 [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vittoria-guerrini\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vittoria-guerrini_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/) [Accessed 11 July 2019].

recurring debilitating periods of weakness and pain – aside from the *Passo d'addio* (*The Farewell Step*) poetry collection in 1959, Campo published two small books of prose, *Fiaba e mistero* (*Fable and Mystery*) in 1962, and *Il flauto e il tappeto* (*The Flute and the Carpet*) in 1971, as well as essays that prefaced her magisterial translations. She also wrote, often with pseudonyms, for a few periodicals and journals, covering subjects from Borges to Byzantine liturgy, Djuna Barnes to Tibetan rituals, Gregorian chant to Katherine Mansfield, Weil to Florentine villas; she wrote many letters, now considered among the most noteworthy examples of epistolary literature in Italy, only comparable with Giacomo Leopardi's.

Campo's texts were enlivened by a practice of reading as *hesychia* – a term that occurs repeatedly in her writings, in reference to the method divulged by monk Nikephoros in the thirteenth century, drawn from the early teachings of Evagrius Ponticus, to achieve presence through coordinated repetitions of prayer and breathing.<sup>172</sup> For her, writing is attention and rhythm, mastery and mystery. Meticulous, specious, inflexible, Campo's prose is the closest I can think to an idea of beauty formed out of necessity, not arbitrary, shining with attention and years of dedication to literature – her own literature, a singular collection of non-canonical authors to whom she returned because of the way they read, and the way she read them. Reviewing *Il flauto e il tappeto* in 1971, Guido Ceronetti calls the book 'a collection of Written Things', 'an undefinable and unclassifiable flower', and admonishes: 'May the horrible word *Essayism* not get close, with its dog-catching latch'. 'Critical essays?', he asks, 'Not at all. No judgements are given. All has already been judged. You move by degrees of vision. Nothing else is there'.<sup>173</sup>

---

<sup>172</sup> Zolla, 'L'esicismo', in *I mistici*, Vol. 1, pp. 626–635.

<sup>173</sup> Guido Ceronetti, 'Cristina Campo o della perfezione', in *Gli imperdonabili*, pp. 277–282. Translated by D.C..



I could begin with an appreciation of Campo's translations, renditions at once shimmering and severe of poems by John Donne, which took her over five years to complete,<sup>174</sup> poems holding time spent listening, taking time, allowing time; sensuous versions of William Carlos Williams which led the American poet to call Campo his best translator, 'a magician, or perhaps an angel';<sup>175</sup> Juan de la Cruz, as if her voice could speak in unison with that of the Spanish mystic across the centuries, across the pages; farther away from canonical paths, texts imbued with rigour and visionary force by the Desert Fathers, Robert de Boron, Thomas Traherne, Angelus Silesius, all appearing in Campo's partner Elémire Zolla's important, and long overlooked monumental anthology *I mistici dell'Occidente (Western Mystics)*. Undoubtedly Campo wrote translations, in the sense exemplified by Kate Briggs in *This Little Art* as the painstaking work of time, attention, and writing. I am tempted to add that Cristina's translations were her ordeals. Not only did she write them, she suffered through them, became involved physically, sometimes ill with them as if by contagion, exhausted only to regain presence, with a depth that could touch writing's intimate sites. This form of intimacy gets to the core, more profound than the physical, frightening at times because of the quality and reach of its insight.

However, if I only had one chance of making Cristina's words ring, I would start from the enchantment in the following episode of writing and citing as citing, of correspondence and coincidence, recorded and transmitted in a letter she wrote to Alejandra:

---

<sup>174</sup> De Stefano, p. 120.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

‘As to Borges, a small magic happened. I had prepared for you a heavy and boring portrait [...]. I was about to post it to you when, disgusted with it, I find among my old notebooks a typewritten small sheet (I rarely type) which I did not recall having written. It is titled *Homage to Borges*, but it has no relationship with Borges if not an analogue one, because it is not about him [...] but about a beautiful small alchemical monument, the magic door, hidden in between a squalid Roman market near the station. It is a blind door (which does not lead you anywhere) on which mysterious Latin and Hebrew inscriptions are found, such as: “When your black crows will generate white doves, then you may call yourselves wise”, and so on (here is, again, the metamorphosis of monsters!) [...] As you see, Alejandra, your presence is cause of all sorts of uncanny phenomena. The act itself of writing to you produces some sort of short-circuits and this is not a metaphor, because I had just started writing this letter to you when a lightning bolt struck very close to the house [...] and a few minutes later a doorbell started to ring in the corridor – nobody at the door, only this buzz, happy as a laugh, which gave me much joy. It lasted about ten minutes, reoccurring three times. What do you think?’<sup>176</sup>

Writing (thinking) sets bells ringing. No-one at the door, nothing as we need it: presence is manifested through sounds and through coincidences. The magic door leads nowhere but into a profound connection with the faraway friend, through less legitimate channels; the text about Borges is not about Borges if not in an analogic manner: to write is to see these analogies.

The Magic Door in Piazza Vittorio in Rome, only a few steps away from my flat when I lived in the city, looks like a modest yet persistent reminder of a passage, a change of

---

<sup>176</sup> Campo, undated letter to Pizarnik, Alejandra Pizarnik Papers, translated from French by D.C..

state that may occur quietly. Covered in moss and ivy, monument and ruin, it is the place of stray cats, of thoughts gone astray. In a double twist or fold – of time and of life, of understanding, of things that happen and are finally seen much later as echoes of something else – the site of the Magic Door was also the place where, having decided to leave the city over ten years ago, on saying good-bye to a friend I was given a book. It was a small book, *La contessa sanguinaria* (*The Bloody Countess*), which I brought with me to London and did not open until many years later – a strange form of forgetfulness, a leaving aside, allowing my attention to go off track until a certain convergence happened. All these years I knew the book was there, so many times I had seen it and placed it in boxes for three house moves – I had no recollection of the author, yet I never let go of it.

The bloody countess: I continued to think the book was given to me by my friend as a bizarre joke, a subtle reproach perhaps. Only shortly after reading Cristina's letter I *saw* the book and realised it was written by Alejandra. It was waiting for me to direct my attention toward that site: a lightning bolt, a bell ringing, clusters of facts so resonant they will now serve me as reference points. Then I knew: the main part of my work was not about discovering or explaining Alejandra, but about entering a meditation that zigzagged along with her writing and Cristina's, and wended itself from theme to theme; learning to recognise and move those 'spheres of influences [...] the meshes that will allow me to go from one slip of paper to the next, so that any free and vital quality in my work is really some sort of connection or transition, and the latter become thicker and thicker as I advance, until they themselves represent the true experience', as Leiris puts it

in a text that Alejandra co-translated in Spanish.<sup>177</sup> A thickening of what is first experienced as nothing, as transitional: I think of the transformations in the alchemical opus, of *œuvre* as undercurrent that conjoins the public and the hidden, the manifest and the unseen or unheard.

Here is a study of correspondences, of how writing-with-reading becomes tuning in, a study of tones; of how speaking is possible in the pages of books, even when I hear no voice, or feel I have no voice; of what is seen through the magic doors of correspondences, opening to me in the letters and notebooks of two writers who wrote little, officially, and wrote a lot in other ways, otherwise. Here is a study of arrangements, of chimeras. I have found examples of similar correspondences in Leiris, who used the term *tangency* to denote his perception of ‘certain sites, events, objects, certain very rare circumstances [which] give us the feeling that they are presenting themselves before us or that we have a stake in them, that their role in the general scheme of things is to put us in contact with the most deeply intimate elements that, on ordinary occasions, are the most murky if not totally obscured. It would seem that such sites, events, objects, circumstances have the power to bring very briefly to the uniformly flat surface of the world where we normally find ourselves some of the elements that most properly belong to our deep inner life, before allowing them to sink back – subsiding along the other slope of the curve – toward the cloudy obscurity from which they arose’;<sup>178</sup> in the Florentine Neoplatonists when they spoke of *anima mundi*, the soul of the world which ‘indicates the animated possibilities

---

<sup>177</sup> Leiris, ‘The Bullfight as Mirror’, trans. by Ann Smock, *October*, Vol. 63, Winter 1993, pp. 21–40, The MIT Press, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/778863> [Accessed 2 July 2019] [*Miroir de la Tauromachie*, Paris: Glm, 1938].

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

of each event as it is [...], its presence as *psychic* reality' and demand scrutiny and full acquaintance.<sup>179</sup>

I have found it in Corbin's writings on Ibn 'Arabi with particular reference to the idea and practice of prayer which is not a request, but 'the expression of a mode of being, a means of existing and of causing to exist' in sympathy with the form in which a theophany is manifested.<sup>180</sup> It is a prayer that Corbin compares to the image, described by Proclus, of the heliotrope, the flower that moves toward the sun to the extent in which its body allows it to move, and in rotation sings its prayer. It is a movement through sympathy, at once action and passion, 'a condition and a mode of perception' that has poetic and cognitive function as it opens in each being the awareness of its invisible self, in its limits, and fully itself: 'The tropism of the heliotrope expresses that flower's very own being'.<sup>181</sup> I read and speak with Alejandra and through her to Cristina and backwards, in limits and in myself, yearning for a sympathy never entirely fulfilled, but whose fullness is perceived in the movement of the yearning.

When Cristina wrote to Alejandra – in her letters now kept in the Special Collections at Princeton Library, at the core of these pages – when Alejandra wrote of Cristina – in her journals, collected in a volume of over a thousand pages, also among the main sources here – in the mid-1960s they addressed forms, and the core thinking, sensing, reading, that moved them into writing. The story of their correspondence is little known, and of extraordinary relevance to the question of how to write in front of nothing: in this case, the nothing of the two writers' untranslated prose, much less visible than the poems which

---

<sup>179</sup> Hillman, *The Thought of the Heart and the Soul of the World*, Putnam, CT: Spring Publications, 2014 (1992), p. 67.

<sup>180</sup> Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 248.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

made them known to wider readerships; and the nothing perceived by their own selves in front of each other and their work – Alejandra constantly erasing herself and reinventing a character through inhabiting other writers’ worlds and words (Lautréamont, Beckett, Penrose, among others), Cristina referring to herself in the third person.

Alejandra, 19 November 1966: ‘About the correspondence with Vittoria. When talking about her, I become aware that the scale and the intensity of this encounter is not “natural”. Why did I never wonder at the entrance of V. in my life? Why did I stop wondering? I must think about this’.<sup>182</sup> Cristina must have sensed the perceptive soul of the Argentine if she wrote to her that her presence was essential, that she had known her before knowing her, while Alejandra, first attracted to Cristina’s writing, later became obsessed with her friend who spoke to her ‘as if she was a terrible angel’<sup>183</sup> and oscillated between attraction and repulsion, to the point of believing she was under Cristina’s spell: ‘Subtle betrayal of Cristina. She breathes me in from a distance, she breathes me in with her silence. Magic operation. I am repeating gestures of her own. The honour of having a double presence in Rome is not unpunished. I am paying for it. It is as if part of my illness is due to the fact that they have retained something from me. But maybe the same thing with happen to her’.<sup>184</sup> ‘Strange relationship with C.C. It’s not strange, it is simply one more reiteration. I wish she did not write to me to suffer for her silence. Better said: so that she knows that I suffer for her silence’.<sup>185</sup> ‘I need and do not need to write to C.C. I would never understand what hurts me’.<sup>186</sup> ‘Truly, which book of mine has been scattered in letters sent or not sent to C.C.? [...] I would never write in the manner I hope for, unless

---

<sup>182</sup> Pizarnik, *Diarios*, p. 763.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 699.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 730.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 687.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 695.

it is needed for C. (all initials are one, that of my initial wound)'.<sup>187</sup> A book is dispersed in letters, sent and not sent, written for a friend; the work of chimeric writing is an undercurrent, sensed and heard in conversations and less official channels. This means circulation, thoughts and words rebounding, bound to the other receiver who can give sense to them by resonance, and the necessary conflicts and distortions of otherness.

Gabriel Josipovici maintains that the profoundest form of criticism is often found in letters and incidental remarks written by artists to each other. They transmit the sense of an encounter, with '[n]o inhibition about showing doubt or uncertainty [...] changing mind mid-sentence and doing all those other natural things which the critical book or essay has somehow to pretend we are not subject to'.<sup>188</sup> As importantly, he writes, 'what we are made aware of in these moments of encounter is the hidden project of the artist revealing itself as it comes into contact with another project, one which has already been realised'.<sup>189</sup> I read the encounter between Cristina and Alejandra in the light of their mutual revealing, not excluding what stays unspoken, the hidden tensions and desires between the two, as well as those perceived by myself as a writer summoned by their work, realising my hidden project through theirs. Because of this enmeshment, my forms of writing around them are not a comprehensive overview, but present the impure and committed ways of a correspondence. Such incompleteness reveals a fullness of drive and intent, rather than a perfection of form.

While Alejandra longed to disappear in literature, Vittoria Guerrini disappeared in pseudonyms. Bernardo Trevisano, a fifteenth-century alchemist, was a name she shared

---

<sup>187</sup> Pizarnik, *Diarios*, p. 764.

<sup>188</sup> Gabriel Josipovici, *The Mirror of Criticism: Selected Reviews, 1977–1982*, Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1983, p. 1.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

on several occasions with her partner Elémire Zolla, pushing against the boundaries of self and authorship, like one who does not exist but leaves a mark in words; Puccio Quaratesi was taken from Filippo Quaratesi, a nineteenth-century Bible scholar; Giusto Cabianca and Benedetto P. d'Angelo are nods to *fin de siècle* spiritual and liturgic literature. Cristina is bearer of Christ, and Campo alludes to concentration camps, 'the fields of sorrow created by humans'.<sup>190</sup>

Cristina's many names are a provocation of non-existence; she reduced herself to a cipher so she could devote her attention to the pages of her books, those she read and those she wrote, and it is impossible to separate the two. She liked to repeat, with Pasternak: 'Leave gaps in your life [...] / and do not ever hesitate to erase / entire blocs, entire chapters / of your existence'.<sup>191</sup> The erasure is not toward silence, but to host the fullness of conversations in which she could find and hear herself. The short text 'La noce d'oro' is the closest Cristina ever came to a narrative, albeit haunted by the eternity and circularity of fable on the edge before they could become story. Writing about it to her friend, the literary critic and poet Leone Traverso, she asks: 'What is a short story? I have a *récit* with no beginning, plot, and end. Like Cvetaeva's 'My Mother and Music', it is a recollection of places and things, mysteries that are revealed later, a succession of scenes'.<sup>192</sup> In the last of these scenes, on a visit to the cemetery, the young protagonist finds all her first names inscribed on the family tombstones, showing links with those who were before herself, inviting a conversation beyond the boundaries of the living. 'We write silent letters to each other, we speak with our dead, we weave far friendships', she

---

<sup>190</sup> Farnetti, 'Le ricongiunte', in *Sotto falso nome*, pp. 247–263. Translated by The Ruin of Casc.

<sup>191</sup> De Stefano, Inner cover flap.

<sup>192</sup> Campo, '15 gennaio [1964]', in *Caro Bul: Lettere a Leone Traverso (1953–1967)*, Milano: Adelphi, 2007, p. 128.



wrote.<sup>193</sup> Her culture and ways of understanding culture are of depth, not breadth. She would mention not only the same books, but the same pages, the same sentences, and the profundity of the register is indisputable. The critic Alessandro Spina writes: ‘Her readings had nothing to do with the unreliable lists *du jour* [...] She preferred to recur to Hofmannsthal again and again, saying the same things even, rather than hurrying to be *the first one* to name a foreign writer’.<sup>194</sup> I want to linger on Cristina’s ascetic reading and writing choices as method, to insist on the recurring figures, images, sonorities, words noticed in reading, sometimes even before they are understood. I hear a hum that runs through them, an undercurrent not confined in specific books but expanded from a mode of being, an orientation, a cadence that holds them together. Cristina writes of a melody which is only yours and nobody else’s: ‘How, where to discern it? In the voice of the dead first of all, whose bones [...] it seems as if we hear sing softly’.<sup>195</sup> In a letter to her friend Gianfranco Draghi she makes a crucial remark: ‘May I always, always, always remember the sentence by Simone Weil: “Nothing can have as a destination that which it does not have as an origin”. Any fear would dissolve forever’.<sup>196</sup> Hear Weil’s thought echoed in Cristina’s words: ‘The day is the only reality, the only task, the only thing we are responsible for. By cutting off yesterday and tomorrow we can establish silence, the perfect attention, in which the true necessity of our soul can speak; soul, I say, not *I* (that is always busy – in fact – with yesterday and tomorrow)’.<sup>197</sup>

---

<sup>193</sup> De Stefano, p. 53.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>195</sup> *Gli imperdonabili*, p. 137. Since the beginning of this study, two translations of the ‘Gli imperdonabili’ essay have been published: by Nicola Masciandaro and Andrea di Serego Alighieri, with commentary, in ‘Cristina Campo: Translation / Commentary’, *Glossator: Theory and Practice of the Commentary*, ed. by Di Serego Alighieri and Masciandaro, 11, summer 2021; and by Will Schutt, in *Becoming Human Is an Art*, Amsterdam: Nexus Institute, 2020.

<sup>196</sup> Campo, ‘[Roma], venerdì sera [6 febbraio 1959]’, in *Il mio pensiero non vi lascia: Lettere a Gianfranco Draghi e ad altri amici del periodo fiorentino*, Milano: Adelphi, 2011, p. 110.

<sup>197</sup> De Stefano, p. 82.

Cristina's emphasis on the present, and on presence, was rooted in her readings of all the mystic literature she studied by herself and with Zolla, and of the texts by Weil she translated in Italian. Being all and nothing, in the present, determines what can be understood and perceived as an unconditional inner certainty against logical progression. Weil writes of the necessity to 'reduce ourselves to the point we occupy in space and time', and 'this void is fuller than all fullness',<sup>198</sup> and after reading this I understand even better how Cristina was drawn to Stampa's 'all and nothing'. Angelus Silesius's epigram, 'I do not know what I am, I am not what I know: a thing and not a thing: a dot and a circle',<sup>199</sup> which Cristina translated, synthesises this spirit. Corbin, whose *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* Cristina read with attention, calls it *presential knowledge*, 'neither the product of abstraction nor a re-presentation' but 'a presential illumination [...]. The truth of all objective knowledge is thus nothing more nor less than the awareness which the knowing subject has of itself'.<sup>200</sup> The same coexistence of absence and presence, of concealment and manifestation bound together and not excluding each other, was found by Corbin in the middle world of *hurqalya*, the site of 'immaterial matter and the incorporeal corporalized', where every form is present to itself, individuated, and aware of its being meditated by its soul.<sup>201</sup> There is, in the world, 'a whole universe of correspondences [...] that does not depend on pure physics'.<sup>202</sup> It is there, and not quite so, according to conventional cognitive functions. Cristina knew this well, as she invited to sense the arrangements and currents that emerge once knowledge is severed from production, from the rhetoric of finding, and is morphed into a manner of attending and arranging what is read. This type of knowledge can only be made present through

---

<sup>198</sup> Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, pp. 12–13.

<sup>199</sup> Angelus Silesius, in *I mistici*, Vol. 2, trans. by Cristina Campo, p. 395. Translated by D.C..

<sup>200</sup> Corbin, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 210.

<sup>201</sup> Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, p. 78.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

attention, the most legitimate form of imagination which allows to see things and connect them, like an ‘ancient alchemical text that recommends to devote to the opus “the real imagination and not the fantastic one” ’.<sup>203</sup> I hear the echo of Weil’s words, posing the equivalence of attention, prayer, and the ‘desire for nothing’, that ‘point of eternity in the soul’<sup>204</sup> by which prayer is not a request for something other, but the full realisation of being. In her editorial notes for an unrealised magazine project, Cristina calls for ‘no line but circularity. Replace actuality with presence. Presence means attention, the only way to realise and realise oneself’.<sup>205</sup> For every issue she planned ‘the same word repeated by different and disparate voices in different and disparate epochs’.<sup>206</sup> The ‘game of the new’ is considered non-existent.<sup>207</sup>

Both Alejandra and Cristina longed for critical writing as intimate conversation. In Alejandra’s call for an ‘extraordinarily tuned’ way of reading, yearning for ‘something more and something else than words’, in Cristina’s writing of attention and circularity, I see chimeric writing emerge: an entanglement with the subjects of its study and yearning, in conversation. I imagine and write myself in conversation with Alejandra and Cristina, haunted by their letters and journals, which I am reluctant to evaluate but want to inhabit in writing. I practice Alejandra’s yearning for criticism as ‘tie’, the unspoken substance that connects a writer to the subject of her study. From volume to volume, I speak with them.

---

<sup>203</sup> Campo, *Gli imperdonabili*, p. 168.

<sup>204</sup> Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, pp. 117–118.

<sup>205</sup> Campo, *Sotto falso nome*, p. 195.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

## Imaginary Conversation

Alejandra Pizarnik, Cristina Campo, D.C.

A.P.: Still silent, D.C.?

D.C.: As silent as \_\_\_\_\_ [SILENCE].

A.P.: Still interdisciplinary?

D.C.: I'd rather be interred.

A.P.: Did I hear interned? For my Stone of Madness!

D.C.: Better to call me mad, than a *prose stylist* – a stylite, perhaps: leave me on a pillar, to rot. The study of that rotting unspeakable substance underlying language, which Amelia Rosselli made evident in her poem 'La libellula' through slight repetitions and variations of misspellings, absorbs me more than any polished surfaces. And don't call these thoughts old: they are significant. In a short-circuit of time and understanding, with bells ringing and memories returning, the three of us finally saw and heard one another in front of the Magic Door in Rome.

C.C.: Entangled, we form an inextricable knot.

D.C.: Our encounter took place and had always been in place, the place of reading. I moved toward it, but because it was so closely related to your texts, it had been with me before it happened, since I started reading you.

A.P.: This sounds like Borges when he wrote that each writer creates her precursors.<sup>208</sup> We shine a different light on them in how we read their work. We generate them, in the sense that we put them in a specific connection with others. This connection is only possible through our singular ways of reading.

D.C.: Did you know that the Romans had three different gods for doors: one for the hinges, one for the door, and one for the threshold? C., I met you as a threshold which shifted my understanding from nothing into a deeper nothing full of signals. A., you always were a door for me, opening and closing understanding. When you were closed, I hit my head against you so hard, it hurt to write. Me? I'm unhinged.

C.C. to A.P.: I knew you before, our encounter took place and had always taken place. You are of the race of the Belles. You want the rose in the snow. The impossible that can be sensed, smothered words, something more and something else than words. Remember, abandoned silence is stagnation but an affirmed silence is pause, pure interval, infinite even.

D.C.: Then there's the uncertain silence: when you have no elements to know whether the lack of response is from distraction, or embarrassment, or willingness to avoid. But enough with me.

---

<sup>208</sup> Borges, 'Kafka and His Precursors', in *Selected Non-Fictions*, p. 365 ['Kafka y su precusores', *La Nación*, 19 Augusto 1951].

A.P.: But enough with me. I must get rid of the I, not to feel, most of all, not to feel.

D.C.: My writing became a movement toward your writing, and this movement became the form of my greatest yearning.

A.P.: It became your ruin. It became your fall.

D.C.: How many names can we take on, to contain the falls of ourselves?

A.P.: How many movements, to get away from the expectations of pure style, of flawless lyricism? I need the excessive spirals of those *baroquismos* which I have been assembling. My style tortures me. It tortures me to think that I will never write good prose, because of this semi-aphasia which forces me to break any incipient rhythm... In truth, it is a constant tremor, where all the others think.

D.C.: You cannot find me in these words. It is words that find me. By the way they are arranged, thoughts are found in turn and with them, our voices. Remember though: an arrangement is also made of pauses.

A.P. [in a voice not quite all hers]: The sun is shining in a glittering way. *Can hardly breathe.*

C.C.: Am I your threshold then, D.C?

D.C.: There were times when your words were of comfort, and spurred me – when you wrote, and I knew it was not for writing: it was for life. With you I understood that writing is a condition and manner of being, not limited to what is written. I learned not to think of my written words, but of my writing life, not as an occupation, but as a fundamental characteristic of myself. How we live in writing, how it seeps into the days. We do not know the alchemy of the days, what may be given back to us when least expected. At one point it became difficult to write, and not be received. The threshold you opened for me was in thinking beyond immediate response, in finding life instead where I always drew my breath from, though I'd forgotten, in books, in conversations with those who respond and those who were before, and continue to be, and resound in reading.

A.P.: You two call this attention, I call it kinship, the intimate tie between the critic and the work which binds them in a special form of conversation: the fact that it exists as it is, and in its forms, cannot be ignored.

D.C.: For some time, the borders between what I study, what I write, and what I want to become have been blurred. This state, to be dismissed if reasoning along the lines of perfectionism, is where chimeric writing begins – its apparent lack of clarity holds instead a method of working.

A.P.: So where to begin? In my convulsive lethargy, in this fatigue to hold the pen, or type on the keys, what can I say to you? C., you know everything.

D.C.: You could say that you long for an extraordinarily tuned manner of reading, even when you think there is nothing to say. If there were not things that writing withholds, I would stop seeking the limits of its doing.

C.C.: Your desperate fugue, D.C., toward that which does not want to be held in words, your chimera, seems to me like one of those love fugues and disappearances which are, in fact, a hunt. Here you are, A.P., I can see you a few years ago, fleeing the words of the countess and at once wanting to become her, not all her. What goes on in these illicit transactions?

A.P.: My lack of faith in the creative imagination is a desire to frequent modes of expression. [Again, sounding out of herself] *Can hardly breathe. Push me to the edge, edge of the page. I've been received. I right the wrongs and take her songs.*

C.C.: I told you many times: true imagination is the alchemical one, not the fantastic. The one that works with existing material by means of attention.

D.C.: I do not create, I put into circulation. I write towards literature. How? I said *towards*. I hand over thoughts: not as a succession of points but as diffusion, radiance...

A.P.: ...a giant switchboard of Literature...

D.C.: ...of kinship, becoming aware, learning to see and hear. Arrangements of material and thoughts as they are apprehended, mixed with the detritus of what already was: like Calasso does in his books, where in the middle of a long discussion on Kafka an ancient



Vedic source appears, apparently out of place, and exquisitely pertinent. It is the manifestation of a way of thinking and connecting which goes beyond philological attribution, and moves in the uneven but persistent ebb and flow of consciousness. Remember how, while studying the hieroglyphs of Sir Thomas Browne,<sup>209</sup> Calasso intimates that writing is an uninterrupted glossing over existing material, and in glossing over Browne he glosses over his own writing, and that of many others with whom he is concerned, those writers who choose disused, out of currency, amphibious forms, and only occasionally do they reveal themselves in full, a tear in the fabric of connections that covers them, and at once makes them manifest. This is a mode of presence, an orientation in the impure uneven materials that make our thinking and being: through literature, in the case of Calasso, through sound in the case of David Toop, another from whom I learned much. Reading his work I learned how writing can be entangled in the unruly ways in which the world is encountered through sounds: not in an ordered, stable set of guidelines, but by treading our ways, with the intent and the doubt proper of listening, across forms and imaginary worlds not always mapped, or known. When Toop reviews Steve Roden's book *I Listen To The Wind That Obliterates My Traces*<sup>210</sup> – a collection of old photographs found in flea markets portraying people with their musical instruments, punctuated by literary quotes around sound and the ineffable, and accompanied by two CDs of early blues, folk songs, and old sound effects<sup>211</sup> – he does not state any of these details, but points at a way of *being with the materials* to the point of becoming them: in the inflections of language, in the tonality of terms used to convey certain states, in the

---

<sup>209</sup> Calasso, *I geroglifici di Sir Thomas Browne*, Milano: Adelphi, 2018 (1965).

<sup>210</sup> Toop, '...I Listen to the Wind That Obliterates My Traces: Music in Vernacular Photographs 1880-1955', *The Wire*, 330, August 2011, pp. 74–75.

<sup>211</sup> Steve Roden, *...I Listen to the Wind That Obliterates My Traces: Music in Vernacular Photographs 1880-1955*, Atlanta: Dust-to-Digital, 2011.

montage of moods and examples treated in the two pages of a text which is featured in a magazine as review, and is in fact...

A.P.: ...a chimera.

D.C.: In my reading, the effect after having read Calasso and Toop is always one of empty plenitude: of being overwhelmed with knowledge and understanding, although it is impossible to pin down what exactly is known and understood. This significant emptiness informs the 'nothing' I am trying to write, and the way I want to write it – an experience of critical reading that shapes a disposition and a manner of seeing and tuning in, nothing to quantify. This conglomerate of voices is held together despite their apparently incoherent structure, despite their lack of frame. It is not the frame, it is the core that moves, and allows these disparate materials to be connected, incomplete and loaded with history as they are: ruins.

A.P.: I don't know how to say it, but there is no longer anything whole around here. Everything bubbles up, tears up, to generate something else, a transformation, because there is no longer anything whole.

## Imaginary Conversation

### The Devil and D.C.<sup>212</sup>

‘Yes; —no; —I *have been* writing — and now — now — *I am dead*’.<sup>213</sup>

Devil: What do you mean by inhabiting the words of others? There is something sinister in your project... To become other means to catch those distinctive features that make a human stand out in the crowd of sameness... You call yourself a writer but are you a spy, a guardian angel, a ghost?

D.C.: A sinister quality in my inhabitation of the words of others. Consider the risk.

D.: But, for whom? So that you can also be yourself, in being other? Are you D.C., are you inhabiting her? Are you The Ruin of Casc? Are you Daniela and Cristina, D.C.? Are you, you?

D.C.: Because I’m dead, I can no longer be. To be both would be a risk. See, if I fall upon myself, I will no longer get out, and this, if I’m correct, looks very much like damnation. If one had to inhabit D.C. one would need to plunge into this... into this... nothing, into the mist of this confused Italian brain. And because on earth D.C. so deviously, so surreptitiously, so secretly, lived a destiny – discontinuous, yet her own – the risk would be too high. If one wanted to inhabit D.C., they would fall into her, and there perish, in misery, with *nothing to say*. Who am I, then? Are you going to ask me again?

---

<sup>212</sup> This sections echoes and transcelates, in part, sections from Manganelli, *Le interviste impossibili*.

<sup>213</sup> ‘Yes; —no; —I *have been* sleeping — and now — now — *I am dead*’, Poe, ‘The Case of M. Valdemar’, in *The Complete Tales and Poems*, p. 101.

Devil, in the voice of D.C.: I would like to, but I feel as if I am on the threshold of such a solemn moment that I dare not ask you to cut to the chase, to be clear...

D.C.: You appear graceful in your habitation of my voice, but you ask the wrong questions. You should ask me what happened to me back then, on earth, as a (sigh) writer...

D.: Shall I assume that you are in excess of D.C., or something else? Something more and something else than words?

D.C.: Or even better, something less? What if the excess is into silence? A guardian angel, you said, but... I had nothing to watch over. I was after other writers' hell, and took over them. But you, villain. I can tell by the way you ask me questions. And I, in this imitation of nothing, became many voices.

D.: Couldn't you make your point direct; couldn't you say it straight?

D.C.: It? Is there an *it* that can be extracted from words? Devil, your empty flattery with promises of clarity and recognition is easy to detect. Don't you see, language here is not transparent, there is no *it*, no pocket of meaning injected seamlessly into words. The fact that these pages are so convoluted and heavy with artifice is not arbitrary. It is a position, adopted so stubbornly by their writer, who wants the reader to feel awkward, to experience what it means to be out of sync; who wants to show how chimeric writing can

be twisted, corrupted, eroded; how it is made of knowing and not knowing, of perceiving connections before understanding.

D.: Tempting. A most admirable, chimeric fight.

D.C.: Do not dismiss a text because it is obscure: first you must suffer it, spend time with it, be transformed. Read on, Satan. I heard long ago that you make pots not lids... You, always in a hurry. 'Duration discriminates between the diabolic and the divine'.<sup>214</sup>

D.: What is this conversation, then?

D.C.: \_\_\_\_\_

D.: What is this conversation, then?

D.C.: \_\_\_\_\_

D.: What is...?

D.C.: D.C. has conversed with D.C. You can hear that silence, nothing but silence. Remember though, the time you got from me just now was not sold to you, it was a gift. And the word *silence* signifies not only what you know of it, but what you do not know, and may be known by someone else.

---

<sup>214</sup> Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 342.

D.: Are you The Ruin of Casc, or Cristina Rovina?

D.C.: Yes.

[Screams from the other room, A.P. enters, slamming the door].

[C.C. had never left].

## **A Transcelation: A Bell for Cristina, or, Writing an Image of Echo and Chimera**

**By Cristina Rovina**

‘As, in writing, deriving as I do, I burn the nets of my origins’.

Robert Duncan, *The H.D. Book*<sup>215</sup>

1. Tolling, with Echoes and Chimeras (The Head)
2. The Old Bronze (The Body)
3. The Bell (The Tail)

Prompted by Campo’s text *La campana*, hearing echoes in the phonic substance of *Campo campana*; by Campo’s statement that to make a new bell, the bronze from an old one is fused into it;<sup>216</sup> by D.C.’s ideas around resonance in writing at the core of her work, this text takes the shape and writes the experience of the making and the tolling of a bell, as a form and method of commentary in fusion, confusion, and echo. I melt and transform the old bronze of Campo’s prose, and combine it with D.C.’s chimeric writing into the material of my writing, make it ring.

The resulting text – a composite that yearns for the subject of its enquiry yet is never entirely in sync with it – is structured in three parts. It embodies the shapes of its argument while commenting on it, conjoining theory, method, and writing practice. In her writings, D.C. called this approach a transcelation: a work of presence, transmission, and reverberance, complicated by writing across Italian and English, where the experience of hearing in reading is rendered in a confusion of sources, before translation.

---

<sup>215</sup> Duncan, p. 219.

<sup>216</sup> Campo, ‘La campana’, in *Sotto falso nome*, pp. 205–208.

The first section, ‘Tolling, with Echoes and Chimeras (The Head)’, presents the resonance of Campo’s words and of D.C.’s thoughts in my writing, while the sources are concealed: no direct references are made, quotation marks are erased, and Campo’s words, as well as those of others – often recalled from memory, at times misremembered, not always properly translated – appear in italics to enhance the blurring of boundaries between my words and theirs. The section evokes the cadence of a tolling: short texts appear in blocks, with ample blank spaces underneath, to denote the pause after each toll where the sound of the bell may linger. A number between brackets is given at the end of most blocks, pointing at corresponding material in the third section.

In the second section, ‘The Old Bronze (The Body)’, Campo’s words appear in Italian, as the old bronze fused to form the bell in these pages. No translation is given, to highlight how chimeric writing is prompted before translation, and to mark the invitation for readers to be in its space nonetheless – to trust the impetus of the telling, not relying on the validation of sources.<sup>217</sup>

The third section, ‘The Bell (The Tail)’ is the actual bell – old and new bronze, my words, Campo’s, D.C.’s, and many others’ – and the void that it contains, necessary to make it ring. My notes on reading and on method, my references to Campo’s and D.C.’s words, and to others that also resonate with them in my constellation of reading, are gradually disclosed, across intermittent motions of plenitude and incompleteness: this is why sometimes the sources are given in full, other times they point further at the Footnotes, to

---

<sup>217</sup> For full references and indicative translations see Appendix 2.



enhance the sense of chimeric writing as resonant space in which references are blurred, and writing emerges as composite of uneven elements.

Monica Farnetti maintains that any research around Campo ‘cannot progress or be resolved only by means of [...] method and discipline; it cannot avoid giving in to chance, intuition, risk’.<sup>218</sup> And, I would add, reverberation and repetition. The best means of understanding Campo and D.C. was to follow Corbin’s method, adopted in his writing of Ibn ‘Arabî, to ‘try and live [their] spirituality with [them]’.<sup>219</sup>

Blanchot suggests that ‘[p]erhaps commentary is just a little snowflake making the bell toll’.<sup>220</sup> My commentary aims for the same weightlessness and effect, to make Cristina’s words and D.C.’s thinking with them resound. I will make you hear their tone, their cadence, as they shape someone else’s words, their faint signals enmeshed with mine, and more.

---

<sup>218</sup> Farnetti, ‘Le ricongiunte’, p. 249.

<sup>219</sup> Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 5.

<sup>220</sup> Blanchot, *Lautréamont and Sade*, p. 2.

## 1. Tolling, with Echoes and Chimeras (The Head)

Some time ago a book was written, of flutes and carpets, of roses in the snow and ineffable rhythms, of the geometries of spirit and the timbre of text, of the critic as echo, of poetry as attention.

At the beginning, which was an ending and a middle, the writer declared that repetitions had not been deleted because the book had the form of *one speech in more tempi, with recurring themes and even the same words [...]* *A chamber, a room ready for a guest who is not yet seen, and might appear in the next book.*

Why the book was written so, I do not know. I know that I could hear it. It told me what I always knew, and had never held so close until the time those words summoned me. (1)

Book as chamber, book as echo chamber: words heard, read, sensed, thought, by returns, falls, interferences, intermittent signals. Inside, the reader of attention catches a nexus, perceives a cadence, propagates it in resonance, and to become resonant the reader needs walls to rebound, amplify, she needs to write words hers not all hers, to become conducive material and medium. (2)

Inside the book-chamber, in the inner *telesterium*, I hear a bell: at once heavy bronze object, necessary to generate sound, and empty cavity, necessary to propagate it. *For the new bells the bronze of the old ones is always used, so one may say that each bell survives the next one, generation after generation.* Writing these pages in the form of a bell – heavy and empty at once, bronze and air – I use the material of a more ancient bell: I fuse, transform, and write what came before me, found in assonance. Some of the material is not yet translated in English, so the old bronze is fused from Italian in the impetus of transmission and the raptures of reading before translation. (3)

Before translation my voices are faint. Voices, because the work of kinship and transmission can only be plural. Faint, because the substance and subjects in those voices are at times confusing, at times out of sync, full of histories and literatures so obscure or specific that they might sound empty to the ears of many. It is uncertain who will receive, who will tune in. When you are outside certain legitimate circles of cultural anything, it is uncertain who is there, who is willing to hear. Most crucially, it must be asked what sort of amplification is needed when certain signals demand to stay faint. Caught between the necessity of transmitting faint signals, and the high possibility of not being received, I long for a type of hearing – that is reading that is writing – attuned to detect other faint voices: those who will not ever become loud enough because if they do they get distorted, and lose texture. Better to tune in the hearing than to force a faint signal to scream. These signals may be perceived through the practice of attention, too often disrupted by the hiss of what is easily recognised. They may appear isolated because of the non-immediacy of references they hold. Yet they stay, hover, *like the impressions left by the telling of a story*, by the playing of a record. (4)

The faint signals might sound as if speaking about nothing at all. But, wait: hear in them the depth of a resonance proper of their material, swarming with inaudible conversations, the material of the time spent attending to them, mixed in a medium of silence and long times.

This silence of mine when writing before translation will never be entirely mine, and I can only perceive and finally hear *mine* as a vault to extract from. A strong sense of artifice is at play: not having one voice means having to construct it, in heightened awareness toward the workings of rhetoric, toward writing as assembling, words found and connected by kinship. These voices are mine and the mine is deep, some of it unmapped, some of it dark, some of it with precious stones, some of it with dull rock and moss and useless damp slippery surfaces. I have dwelled there for long times, sometimes I have slipped. (5)

The bell rings, words propagate, move farther than their origin, merge with other sounds, are interfered with and interrupted. The cadence of the tolling remains, the texture and material of the tolling sounds is gradually transformed.



Speechlessness summons me in front of liminal words on the edge of what can only be heard and read through *supernatural senses*. To write those words is a gesture at once concrete and in excess of itself. To read and understand them means to suffer through them, to become physically involved, sometimes ill as if by contagion, exhausted. I could attempt a transcelation of those words, in which the body's spiritual life appears through the supernatural senses of liturgy, the carnality of ritual, the phonic weight of sacred mysteries, celebrating *the occasion of metamorphosis*. (6)

Once a text was written, and in the end the writer described it as a series of quotations, bound by little more than notes in the margin. Such a text aims to send the reader back to its sources, she wrote. Writing takes shape as transmission, it sends the readers back to other texts, allows others to live in them, to own them *as if not owning*. The writer silences her voice to allow others to resound. Writing in front of this text I struggle to hear my voice, so I impose silence on my speechlessness, search for tone in silenced words. The silence I impose on my speech to hear its tone is deepened, in the *little more* of notes in the margin, little, more, little that is more. How loud the echo of those notes, in this vast hall of deepened silence. I can nearly sense, together, the asphyxia and the echo, the smothering and the hushed voicing. *Tremendum hoc mysterium*: in their immense phonic weight, those words are gestures of an ancient liturgy and unlike objects, words as gestures are never out of time. They exceed time in the ceaseless traffic of radiance and discourse, the hidden circulation that needs words, only those words, those written for you. They circulate, are never still, and the question is one of rhythm: *pneuma, prana, mana, pneuma, prana, mana, pneuma, prana, mana*. Subtle, terrible circulation until the point is reached when you move with its cadence after you have tamed it. *Prana*, practice: ritual is not conclusive, you must work through it, constantly, presently, rigged out in the invisible armour grown on your skin from a state of perennial prayer. Make the tone of writing like the empty plenitude of the sonic space after the bell has finished tolling: present, full, empty, silent. *In the absence of*: deeper than physical therefore frightening, an attuned poet once said. (7)

In the tolling of this bell I hear Chimera, I derive *chimeric writing*: a mode of reading, writing, thinking, sensing that inhabits, is haunted by, and echoes its subjects, in kinship. Chimeric – the term, and its *word-use* – demands a substance of thinking beyond the literal, the explanatory, into *the Imaginal*: an intermediary world between the physical and the immaterial that makes present what is substantive but not apparent. It re-awakens perception by giving it new vessels, a new capacity to comprehend. (8)

It was said that chimeric writing is *groundless but not without grounds*. Its answer to 'where?' points at no atlas: it is composite and implausible, a manner of orientation rather than a geographical coordinate. It is *situative, not situated*: it presents where it is by being there; it does not teach dogmas but awakens thinking; it resounds elsewhere, siting and citing, and csiting is the recurring act of frequenting that reanimates knowledge. (9)

Now the tolling of the bell rings toward those philosophies of knowing as self-discovery in stillness, sympathy, attunement. Procedures elsewhere known as theory of knowledge are transformed into csiting. (10)

It was said *if you want to know what you are, do not compare yourself to what you were, but to that which you were made of.* To know what chimeric writing writes, look at what it was made of: the substance it worked through time, mixed in a medium of silence. I carry with me – physically, symbolically, imaginally – bundles of echoes in mines, moods and materials, words and voices in every text I write. Sometimes these are direct quotations, sometimes they are reminiscence, or hints of a rhythm with which my thoughts once danced, and as always in memorable dances, that rhythm continues even when the dance is over. Fluctuations, punctuations, commotions summon and echo me, even when not entirely legible or audible, my clouds of unknowing. They move inside my texts, because they moved me: to write toward them. Often my writing would not be without them, silent yet substantial grounds for my reasoning, which always exists in their vicinity. If you have encountered some of them, this text you are reading will intermittently sound vaguely familiar. If you have not, it will still be perceived as made of various textures: uneven and conjoined, slightly out of sync and moving nonetheless. Anomalous anachronisms are also at play, sometimes it is no longer clear who is quoting whom, who is commenting on what, what came before and what after. They do not disturb but stir, and are not to be seen as anachronistic once reasoning is not formed in terms of trajectories, but placed instead in the realm of presence and resonance, and the concept of actuality is replaced by that of attention and listening with all the responsibility they carry, the words they utter. (11)

The passion for silence and stillness came late, when the apparent speechlessness became the silent medium necessary to outline and build a vessel that would hold a transformation. To transform, one must contain: chimeric writing is at once a study and a making of vessels. It may be a pelican, enhancing circularity, iteration as method, closed circuit, feeding off its own substance; a stoppered alembic for sublimation or precipitation; a *bain-marie*, vessel inside vessel, meeting space of fire and water. A vessel does not ask to move away: it prompts to act in. Chimeric writing does not go anywhere other than itself, holding a sense of return and rotation. As vessel, it offers a contemplation of the limits of its substance – that necessary losing, hiding, interrupting and reprising on which words seem to nourish, like the bird of the *Upanishad* that watches the fruit without eating it, and at once, watches its identical twin eat it. (12)

Chimeric writing does not hit the headlines: it moves and grows slowly, and becomes manifest later, as echo or premonition. The chimeric writer *writes little, and wishes she had written less*. Against chaptered abundance, against prolific production, it poses a *trappism of perception*, the presence of *an exigent refusal*. (13)



The *exigent refusal*, the *non-frivolous* manner to adopt, is that of reading attentively, writing slowly: not necessarily a canonical book. It might as well be a luminous treatise on the knots in a Persian rug as true portraiture of the geometries of life, or the accurate response to the sounds of bells first tolling in a foundry, or to the gestures, sayings, and raptures of the Desert Fathers, or a meditation on the unassuming sources of a river in France. A collection of letters, even. Letters do not exclude poems, journals do not exclude essays, the truth of the telling is not to be located in any of these, but in the undercurrents of understanding and resonance that allow disparate forms to coexist as *œuvre*. *Meticulous, specious, inflexible*, a chimeric writer once composed all these disparate forms as she wrote of gestures, of sayings, of raptures; of the occasion of metamorphosis as a supreme quality, in sentences like iron-tipped arrows. Of all this she wrote, moving thoughts *like sudden arpeggios soon to be withdrawn by a shy hand*. (14)

Through chimeric writing the sense of being in the words and worlds of others is at once rarefied and intensified, the research haunts the text and is not immediately displayed. In a simultaneous and contradictory movement, at that point in which the writer synthesises her subject by reducing it, *like the painters of the T'ang era in China*, to that unique profile, to that line that is its being's utterance itself, the reader hears it multiply, echo in numberless harmonies. The perception of vertiginous activity is conjoined with a sense of inevitable presence and stillness. Such concentrated tension belongs to a writing formed in the same manner *as the entomologist labours to express with precision the inexpressible azure of a dragonfly wing*. So chimeric writing's eloquence may hinge on a tiny particle.

It was written of the chimeric writer *as of a medieval nun who embroiders memorable chasubles, yearning for the colours of the silk more than the portrayed holy faces – as if a portrait could inspire devotion unless an all-consuming attention did not pick out the materials with which to respond to the vision.* All-consuming attention is necessary to draw nearer those materials slowly, to attune oneself to the difficult and obscure things that lie in them, in a rhythm that returns to itself against the fatal chatter of appearance.

A chimeric writer once said to a friend that writing criticism is like *a creeper growing organically between the stones of words* that came before, stones at times so heavy, so loaded with meaning, that they can leave the writer speechless for long stretches of time before she writes. It is the writer's block that heightens her awe of the other driving force in which her materials speak to her. *The block itself is the blockage of a breath.* To write chimerically is to unravel a conversation with a material that initially appeared to make you speechless. You must have been with stones, speechless in what felt like a Sisyphean task, and enact that shift which allows you to transform from Sisyphus into stone, become of the same substance of the texts that summon you, to become the material. Then writing begins. Not interpretation, not progression: chimeric writing cites a mode of being, stays exactly where it is, works with and becomes the stones, the materials it is given, finds kinship with the *Imago Mundi* it is given. (15)

Once a chimeric writer – a poet – embroidered her mode of being in a *rima*, in the presence of the absence of words, in the feeling of no longer being alive; her true form, she wrote, could only be *an image of Echo and Chimera*. A full silence: this is what another chimeric writer meant when she said *I write because I so deeply want to speak, though writing only gives me the full measure of silence*. Chimeric writing is the silent humming that joins words. Its yearning moves in the rhythms of silent conversations, toward *the durable sense of the further*, the murmur, the undercurrent which holds words together: a writer's tone, stone. (16)

The chimeric writer's words not all hers witness that which returns: a song, a voice, a site, a loss, a chord. She appears to say and hear the same things so many times, over the years, pronouncements that begin with the same chord, open in different progressions, flow back in spiralling motions to their centre, movements only possible in the presence and permanence of a being in commotion, a convulsion in stillness, the taking in of the world, that gasp that is the breathing in of aesthetic perception, a song, a voice, a site, a loss, a chord. (17)

The chimeric writer *reads like a paleographer reads*: on five or six different levels altogether. In gestures of attention, she can tune in the buzz of transmission that emerges from books, the *great subterranean layers, the deep circulations and secret discoveries*: the mystic work of reading. (18)

Chimeric writing sounds sirens: terminal, lyrical, extreme. In its modes of readings that are modes of being, chimeric writing's words are the *consonants for the entangled vocalisations of its desire*. (19)



Chimeric writing does not reduce its subjects to case studies: it attends to them as beings, deep seated in its language and in theirs, in the way they make each other rebound. The effect is profound because a transformation takes place – takes the place of a self through the resonance of others. A point then is reached where you can hear two heartbeats in one cadence. Chimeric writing *takes psychic being, takes fire*, from its subjects. Over the years it transforms itself with them in forming the writing it is. It is engaged in continuing conversations with them, even despite writing: a humming, a recurring thinking of words that sound as if they had been written directly and only for you – which is not true, and is so real, in this type of intimate knowledge. (20)

Chimeric writing is the occasion of metamorphosis in stillness, the alchemical *rotatio*, circular motion showing that the goal of the work is nothing but the realisation of the very urge that propels it. Its method has a parallel in a study of language as excess, more necessary than what is deemed useful: not goal-driven action, but the *gratuitous splendour* of certain gestures, inexhaustible like the undercurrents that demand auscultation. The apparent vulnerability in its structure is in fact grounded on a core of recurring intensities, against the prolific, into a deepening that sometimes is concealment.

A different form of knowing emerges. It foregrounds sensing, connecting, it embraces mishearing, and chance encounters. It was said that for the chimeric writer this is the whole point: *to transmit into the head or heart of another person the concretions that have been deposited by her present or past life in the depths of her own head or heart; to communicate something in order to make it more valuable, to let it circulate, so that once it has been cast out to others it will come back to her a little more magical, like the shields of the Northwest American Indians, which are endowed with greater and greater value the more often they have been the object of ceremonial exchanges.* (21)

Words are the occasion of a metamorphosis: you must walk through them and emerge after a process of transformation across difficult words, *impossible words such as necessity, sense, desire, beauty, limit, sacrifice, soul, void*. Do not use them lightly. (22)

These accretions of words would not exist if they had not been formulated in a distinct arrangement which makes them present, while it takes you elsewhere. It is implausible, and it exists for those who hear it, for anyone who seeks it with desire. To seek with desire is *himma*, that Arabic term translated as the creative power of the heart, creative in the sense that it causes something that exists to be made manifest. (23)

Chimeric writing is grasped across long stretches of time as it moves by reverberations: *not the thing, but the resonance of the thing*. The signal may sound blurred, but the order of words is necessary. Like in fables, the voice you hear in the form of a summoning is the form of your own hearing by which you know and are known. (24)

Remember the moment, the stir, when you encountered your book, your poem, your cadence, your page as if given to you and you only: in silence, impassible and vertiginous, remember the sense of recognition and calling. You knew you had known them by heart before you read them. Remember the speechlessness on encountering them, nothing to say because they were saying to you, they were saying to you what you knew already but had to be uncovered through a deepening. Remember the moment when you found a hidden quote in a book, how singular and resounding, 'this book is speaking to me', how confusing, maddening at first, to encounter quotations but no direct references. Later you realised you had to see them as invitations to read, and find your own – through the kinships heard in your distinctive frequency.

Chimeric writing desires its subjects, and desire is the impetus for knowing and the root of understanding as relation. It does not wait until the relation is proved objectively, to enter in a dialogue: the dialogue itself is the proof. There are breaks in it, *discontinuity that stimulates the mind toward a new effort.* (25)



Although a composite monster, chimeric writing is not afraid of beauty. (26)

I was haunted by an image at the beginning of this, heard in reading. At that time of the day that in Italian is *imbrunire* and in English a chimera, I hear a frequency. How and when is it coming to meet me? What signal is it? A conversation, almost nothing. A way of tuning in, whose only possible solution is alchemical: it does not aim to an end, but to an opus, the opus of a lifetime. Chimeric writing does not change its circuit, its heartbeat, its beat a bell a voice a stone a loss a chord for every line, every word, every breath in the mine of your chimeric writing. (27)

## 2. The Old Bronze (The Body)<sup>221</sup>

Siamo, come si vede, nella forma cava.

Quel suo folle regalo: ‘una rosa, solo una rosa’, in pieno inverno.

Ritmi ineffabili.

Ci rivelano, gli incantevoli libri, ciò che ci sembrava di sapere da sempre.

Le geometrie dello spirito.

Il critico è un’eco, certo.

Concava, tacita e risonante.

Non occorre immaginazione ma attenzione.

Un solo discorso in più tempi, come una serie di pezzi musicali dove tornano sempre gli stessi temi e addirittura le stesse parole.

La stessa parola, ripetuta da voci diverse e disparate, in epoche diverse e disparate.

Un segreto destinato all’orecchio suo e a nessun altro.

---

<sup>221</sup> Indicative translations of the following sentences by Campo are given in Appendix 2.

Per le campane nuove è sempre usato il bronzo delle antiche, cosicché si può dire che ogni campana sopravviva dell'altra, di generazione in generazione.

Certo, la voce del flauto è remota [...] quel suono è di continuo travolto via, lacerato e disperso dal sibilo del percepibile.

Quei sensi soprannaturali che l'*hesychia* ha chiamato alla vita.

Questa concezione quasi corporea e corporale del metodo.

L'occasione della metamorfosi.

Le sentenze sono dardi dalla punta di ferro.

Quel sonetto miracoloso di Gaspara Stampa.

Che si possegga come non possedendo, si sia come non essendo: lasciando che in sé viva ed operi Altri.

Un seguito di citazioni [...] legate fra loro da poco più che da note in margine [...]  
Soprattutto nel tempo dell'orrore, il solo scopo di uno scritto di questo genere è di rimandare il lettore alle sue univoche, imperturbabili fonti.

Gli elementi corporei del tremendo [...] *tremendum hoc mysterium*, con il suo immenso peso anche fonico.

Sottile, terribile circolazione (di *pneuma*, di *prana*, oserei dire qualche volta di *mana*).

Ricoperti da un'invisibile armatura di giaculatorie [...] lo stato di orazione perenne.

La passione della perfezione viene tardi.

Questo trappismo della perfezione.

Il segreto di quel rifiuto infinitamente esigente.

Meticolosa, speciosa, inflessibile come tutti i veri visionari.

Una virtù polare grazie alla quale il sentimento della vita sia nello stesso tempo rarefatto e intensificato. Cosicché, grazie a un movimento simultaneo e contraddittorio, là dove l'artista concentra al massimo l'oggetto riducendolo, come i pittori T'ang, a quell'unico profilo, a quella pura linea dall'alto al basso che è, per così dire, la pronuncia stessa dell'anima, il lettore lo senta in sé moltiplicarsi, esaltarsi in armoniche innumerevoli.

Un poeta che ad ogni singola cosa, del visibile e dell'invisibile, prestasse l'identica misura di attenzione, così come l'entomologo s'industria a esprimere con precisione l'inesprimibile azzurro di un'ala di libellula, questi sarebbe il poeta assoluto.

E l'eloquenza può fare perno su una particola.

E avere accordato a qualcosa un'attenzione estrema è avere accettato di soffrirla fino alla fine, e non soltanto di soffrirla ma di soffrire per essa.

Una monaca medievale che ricami pianete memorabile, più vagheggiando i colori delle proprie sete che i santi volti effigiati – quasi che un'effigie possa ispirare venerazione se un'attenzione quasi maniaca non trascelse i materiali con i quali rispondere alla visione.

Cominciano con l'identico accordo, si aprono in progressioni diverse, rifluiscono in cerchi alla loro sorgente, ciò che è solo possibile alla totalità e permanenza di un identico spirito commosso.

Esaminare una pagina come si deve, al modo cioè di un paleografo, su cinque o sei piani insieme, da scrittore.

L'inesprimibile come la sola presenza.

Liturgia – come poesia – è splendore gratuito spreco delicato, più necessario dell'utile.

Il sangue m'è affluito al cuore attraverso cinque secoli.

### 3. The Bell (The Tail)

(1) ‘I wanted to write for Cristina because she offered the best description I have encountered so far of how I see writing take form: a creeper growing organically in between the stones of what was written before. I wanted to transmit her ability to put together words (having arranged her stones) in a way that gave them the quality of apparitions: texts that shimmer as recurring mythical happenings, and myths have the quality of being the same and not quite so, of being grounded and slightly hovering, just like her texts. I wanted to write with her because she rarely wrote “I” and wrote in pseudonyms, yet her singular person was first and prominent in her parallel *œuvre*: the letters she wrote to her friends. I wanted to write from and toward her, because so often she spoke to me as I read’. (From the Notebooks of D.C.)

(2) I transform the substance of Cristina’s words into resonance as I read D.C., so they can be heard. *Heard* is an anagram of *read* with the added *h* of a breath. Like in *hesychia* – a term that occurs repeatedly in Cristina’s texts in reference to the method divulged by monk Nikephoros in the thirteenth century, drawn from the early teachings of Evagrius Ponticus, to achieve presence through coordinated repetitions of prayer and breathing – to write these pages I have breathed in and repeated her words, countless times, to hear my words emerge from hers through small variance in stillness, through resonance rather than reference. The commentary dissolves and coagulates, cyclically: a work of radiance and return. Duncan in *The H.D. Book*, utmost example of a work written inside and through the words of another writer to the point where you can hear two heartbeats in one

cadence, writes: 'I have taken psychic being, taken fire, from these works'.<sup>222</sup> I have taken psychic being, taken fire, with D.C., from the works of Cristina.

In *The Mystic Fable* Certeau demonstrates that to read mystic writing as utterance-in-the-page, is a question of ascertaining what is received, heard. For Cristina my words become *volume*: I receive, hear, amplify, and repeat them, rewrite and hum along them, diffuse them. Again with Duncan, 'deriving as I do, I burn the nets of my origins':<sup>223</sup> transformation occurs, across language as patched-up material of residues and remembrance. Through my repeated encounters with Cristina's words, a *chimeric writing* begins to emerge as I practice it, in close proximity with the words by D.C. from which it is derived, and transformed into my material.

(3) Con-fusion, melting-with: I melt and transform the bronze of Cristina's prose into the material of my writing, and make it ring across reiterations, offering the sound of her prose along with the interferences inevitable in listening.

(4) The tolling of this text begins from silence: from D.C.'s speechlessness in front of Cristina's words, which I have been reading for years, and speak so closely to my concerns as a writer; from the resounding silence in the scarcity of English translations of her texts, a silence doubled up by the realisation that much of the existing secondary literature in Italian around her overindulges in quotation, after which I am left with '*tutto e niente*', all and nothing, to quote from a sonnet by Gaspara Stampa dear to Cristina and crucial in D.C.'s thoughts around chimeric writing. All and nothing, fullness and emptiness: fullness in kinship with her words, emptiness in adding further reasoning,

---

<sup>222</sup> Duncan, p. 439.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.



emptiness in front of any expectations to generate ‘content’, fullness in thinking of the transformations of the substance of her words, which my emptiness can contain as alchemical vessel. In the words of the Spanish mystic Francisco de Osuna – whose work Teresa of Avila read and on which she founded her thinking, whose words Cristina’s partner Elémire translated – ‘thinking nothing is a much bigger affair than it appears [...] this thinking nothing is thinking all [...] a very simple and subtle attention, a taciturn intelligence’ that makes one ‘absorbed and soaked by that which one perceives’.<sup>224</sup> Absorbed, soaked: what if I removed the quotation marks, and allowed the material of Cristina’s words to be absorbed by mine, soak other words, the same, and slightly out of sync? What if attempted to work with Cristina’s words as material, placing my writing inside them, mixing and turning and kneading them, rather than celebrate them from a distance? Then Cristina’s position of reading as kinship and erasure of self, her considerations around knowledge as absorption, might be taken as a core approach and would become my poetics, my manner of proceeding inside her words, not through evaluation of content but through suggestions of resonance: ‘an image of Echo and Chimera’, as Stampa’s sonnet ends. Chimera, composite, monstrous, yearning.

From the urgency to write my Cristina-Chimera, a transcelation of her words takes form. I am not a translator: I write criticism, I write chimeras. I can transcelate these words in fragments, as I heard their murmurs in my mind while reading, and committed them to heart. It is not a case of recording everything, but a long-term engagement with the material of reading, and its residues. Following de Certeau (following D.C.) there is no silence, no ineffable but the buzz of the ‘great subterranean layers, deep circulations,

---

<sup>224</sup> Francisco de Osuna, ‘Il raccoglimento dell’anima’, trans. by Zolla, in *I mistici*, vol. 2, pp. 630–631. Transcelated by Rovina.

translations, transmissions, meetings, conversations, histories of reading'.<sup>225</sup> Writing as transmission moves in the tension which Bachmann identified in her *Frankfurt Lectures* as necessary to bring forward a new ability to comprehend, a new spirit, a new cadence.<sup>226</sup>

'The world is like the impression left by the telling of a story'.<sup>227</sup>

(5) Cristina's texts take shape between technical mastery and mystery. They are formed out of reading as the exchange of a silent currency, and sometimes when I read them I feel as if a blood flow from centuries ago rushed onto my heart. A flame burns in her words, a flame that the philosopher Maria Zambrano called, in a text written for Cristina shortly after her death, 'the living flame that consumes time and creates it and then duration ceases'.<sup>228</sup>

(6) *Sensi soprannaturali (Supernatural Senses)* is a subheading in the section devoted to the sayings of the Desert Fathers in Elémire Zolla's anthology *I mistici*, to which Cristina contributed several translations, and the title of a text she wrote for the periodical *Conoscenza Religiosa (Religious Knowledge)*, the fullest expression of her study of transcendence through presence, and of 'that divine realism which surpasses any created reality'<sup>229</sup> at the core of her poetics. Writing, throughout her *œuvre*, along with the practice of reading, is a devouring and being devoured, a fully physical encounter with the text through to the highest form of understanding. This is manifested, for example, in

---

<sup>225</sup> Certeau, Vol. 2, p. 119.

<sup>226</sup> Bachmann, p. 24.

<sup>227</sup> *Yogavasishta* quoted in Calasso, *Ka*, Milano: Adelphi, 2001, frontispiece.

<sup>228</sup> Maria Zambrano, 'La fiamma', *Conoscenza religiosa*, 4, ottobre-dicembre 1977, p. 385, mentioned in De Stefano, p. 171.

<sup>229</sup> Campo, 'Sensi soprannaturali', in *Gli imperdonabili*, p. 244.

the episode of St. Joseph eating the heart of Christ from San Graal in Robert de Boron, which she translated.<sup>230</sup>

In my reading that is hearing, a title such as *Supernatural Senses* (b)rings notes of *Supernatural Knowledge*, the title of Weil's last notebooks, striking meditations in which she appears at her starkest, most uncompromising and profound. For Cristina supernatural knowledge *is* supernatural sense.

(7) 'A series of quotations [...] tied by little more than notes on the margin'.<sup>231</sup> so Cristina presented her writing at the end of *Sensi soprannaturali* – deeper than the physical, therefore *frightening*, to paraphrase William Carlos Williams's words on reading her translations of his work.

(8) Bell, Belinda. Once Cristina wrote to Alejandra that she was like Belinda in the fairy tale: she wanted the rose in the snow, the impossible that is actual in the imagination. She was cause of all sorts of uncanny phenomena too, of short-circuits – Cristina reports of a day when, writing to her Argentine friend, a lightning bolt struck very close to the house, and shortly after, the doorbell began to ring, nobody at the door. Writing, thinking, set bells ringing. Nobody at the door, presence is manifested in a sound, through coincidences that lead nowhere but into an image of echo and chimera.

Cristina quoted copiously, or better said: she breathed in and transformed words by others through sustained attention. She quoted copiously, and according to De Stefano at times

---

<sup>230</sup> Robert de Boron, 'La visione', trans. by Campo, in Zolla, *I mistici*, Vol. 1, pp. 769–770.

<sup>231</sup> Campo, 'Sensi soprannaturali', in *Gli imperdonabili*, p. 248.

she did not realise it.<sup>232</sup> I believe, in reading her text and her letters, that she *did* realise it, and this very operation of constructing writing as an echo chamber of words that came before is in fact a crucial point in her work. While her texts echo the words of other writers, they are never entirely in unison with them, since her presence inevitably leaves its mark. For Piero Citati ‘she lived of perfect imitation’,<sup>233</sup> and it is difficult not to detect judgement in his words. I want to question such pronouncement. Cristina’s language is built through kinship and resonance as the only possible way to be at once her not all her, singular and situated. Reading in kinship is to inscribe her voice in a plurality of voices. A transformation occurs, as Certeau demonstrated, from contemplation to production of otherness, from a liturgy of reproduction to a differentiation in ‘a field in which [the writer] had no right of authorship. He produced, but without any place of his own, in that no-man’s-land, on that meeting of the waters where the waves of language roll back upon themselves’.<sup>234</sup> Groundless but not without grounds, Cristina’s writing is formed in a no-man’s-land where the copying, like a cover song, resounds otherness in the voice of the singer. She often referred to the *Prayer of the Name*, a manifestation of *hesychia*: to repeat, repeat, and repeat, until it is no longer ‘I’ who prays but heart, muscles, breath – a deliberate choice for a writer not concerned with prolific outputs but with honing her knowing through deepening. *I have heard this before*; chimeric writing is a way of listening to that.

Cristina’s writing yearns for deep presence in every detail, as she wrote to her friend Margherita Pieracci Harwell: ‘To flood a section of white satin with light, it is necessary that behind it, in the shadow, the entire room was present’.<sup>235</sup> Her text *Les sources de la*

---

<sup>232</sup> De Stefano, pp. 142–143.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>234</sup> Certeau, Vol. 1, p. 119.

<sup>235</sup> Campo, *Lettere a Mita*, Milano: Adelphi, 1999, p. 288.

*Vivonne* exemplifies this training of the senses to encounter the extraordinary in the mundane, the inversions of scale and depth typical of fable which drove her understanding of the world and of literature, of the world through literature. She recounts that moment in Proust's *Recherche* when the narrator and Gilberte visit the sources of the river Vivonne 'after a life of chimeras around those sources, and instead of the extra-terrestrial thing, what does he see? "Some sort of square washbasin out of which bubbles poured". This icy sentence, in which Proust seems to want to compress, suppress like the giant in the ampoule, his fluvial dream'.<sup>236</sup> The word *chimeras* winks at me from Cristina's writing. It offers me a connecting, a formal nexus to work with, an unexpected endorsement from the material of my study. It gestures toward a secret hum heard in reading, offering a sense of thoughts interlaced, of tangency, of those crucial moments when a manner of understanding and connecting is revealed simultaneously on the surface of words, and deeper beyond them.

*Chimera* is the last word in Sonnet CXXIV by Gaspara Stampa, I learn in D.C., a sonnet in which the writer is half alive, half dead, feeling everything and feeling nothing, her true form 'an image of Echo and Chimera'. D.C. encountered the sonnet as it was named in a letter by Cristina, who deemed it unprecedented; her yearning for chimeric writing before she knew what it was, became substantiated by a nod in reading. This is the point when the impetus of commentary is reversed, when the material begins to respond.

*Word-use* echoes Laura (Riding) Jackson.<sup>237</sup>

---

<sup>236</sup> Campo, 'Les sources de la Vivonne', in *Gli imperdonabili*, p. 45.

<sup>237</sup> (Riding) Jackson, p. 69.

*The Imaginal* as a cognitive dimension at once invisible and present appears in the writings of Henry Corbin, echoed (though not explicitly referred to) by Cristina as she writes of '[a] book full of knowledge, which refers more or less anything that classic Persia – most of all mystic Persia – have taught around the threads running between heaven and earth'.<sup>238</sup> This book is *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, where Corbin introduces the idea of Imagination not as construction, but unveiling; most crucially, Imagination is the organ of attunement, that allows to perceive what is there.

The Church of the Suffrage in Rome hosts a collection of objects which allegedly bear the physical marks of revelations by the Souls in Purgatory, such as the five fingertips that pierced through the book of prayer of one Giuseppe Schutz, like five burning nails. Cristina wrote of these as 'a seal of fire across the centuries'.<sup>239</sup> Her writing also burns through the pages. It is not arbitrary but necessary. In a letter written to her father when she was twenty years old: 'I have so much to tell! I'd nearly say *to rescue* [...]: things I feel only I have seen and felt to the point of suffering, and that absolutely must not die'.<sup>240</sup> Writing in order to *rescue*; to rescue things only I have seen, and felt, to the point of suffering; things that have reached across the centuries, like piercing seals of fire, and absolutely must not die. This is why I write, this is how I was summoned by Cristina: having suffered through her words, that absolutely must not die. Borges: 'Each time we repeat a line by Dante or Shakespeare we are, in some way, that instant when Dante or Shakespeare created that line'.<sup>241</sup> Is Cristina here, now?

---

<sup>238</sup> Campo, 'Notti', in *Gli Imperdonabili*, pp. 68–69.

<sup>239</sup> Campo, 'Un sigillo di fuoco arrivato attraverso i secoli', in *Sotto falso nome*, p. 106.

<sup>240</sup> De Stefano, p. 34.

<sup>241</sup> Borges, *Selected Non-Fictions*, p. 490.

Cristina writes of marks on books and fabric, of seals of fire that reached their readers across the centuries. Writing through these miraculous occurrences she works with sources which I find hard to trace. How to follow? I can stay with Cristina's text, rather than worry about her sources of Catholic literature that I cannot consult. I can recur, as she suggests, to 'the genius of litotes',<sup>242</sup> affirming by negation, and by the double negation of me and of source, return to her text and perceive its plenitude, the limit in its telling. 'Of the contemplation of the limit – of that necessary losing, hiding, interrupting of vision – life seems to nourish, like the bird of the Upanishad who watches the fruit without eating it. Dream: to learn to find, having unlearned the search. Find the secret order that aligns words'.<sup>243</sup>

(9) 'It says exactly what had been better left unsaid [...], what always had to remain unclear and groundless. [...] It's quicksand, but it doesn't quicken anything. It is groundless but not without grounds'.<sup>244</sup>

'A "where" to which a geographical point is no answer'. 'Now, in the case of Avicennism as in the case of every other system of the world, the mode of presence assumed by the philosopher by reason of the system that he professes is what, in the last analysis, appears as the genuinely *situative* element in that system considered in itself'.<sup>245</sup>

(10) 'The possibility of this orientation once given, it likewise becomes possible to answer the question "where?" by indicating a *meaning*, a *direction*, that situates human

---

<sup>242</sup> Campo, *Gli imperdonabili*, p. 46.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>244</sup> Jelinek, *Sidelined*.

<sup>245</sup> Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, p. 16, pp. 3–4.

existence. Here the answer will simultaneously *orient* the soul *in the* meaning, the *direction*, of its condition of *Stranger*'.<sup>246</sup>

(11) '...if you want to know what you are...' echoes Evagrius Ponticus.<sup>247</sup>

(12) Vessels echo James Hillman.<sup>248</sup>

(13) 'I have avoided chaptered abundance, and spaced myself, to what it seemed any person, speaking out of a single identity, might need for keeping an appointment with the Subject. For I wished not to distract others with my telling from keeping their own appointment with the Subject; and to find a common measure of telling', wrote Laura (Riding) Jackson.<sup>249</sup> 'The variety of words is another error. All the academicians recommend it, I think, mistakenly. I believe words must be conquered, lived [...] Nobody should dare to write "outskirts" without having spent hours pacing their high sidewalks; without having desired and suffered as if they were a lover; without having felt their walls, their lots, their moons just around the corner from a general store, like a cornucopia [...] I have now conquered my poverty, recognizing among thousands the nine or ten words that gel along with my soul; I have already written more than one book in order to write, perhaps, one page [...] The page that [...] I would dare to read to a friend', wrote Borges.<sup>250</sup> 'I cannot and I am not able to tell you more, I am pleased that this page is so small and it does not allow speeches but only signs, brief and profound hints, that can only occur between those who own the same ritual', wrote Cristina.<sup>251</sup> Reading and

---

<sup>246</sup> Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, pp. 16–17.

<sup>247</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *Aliae Sententiae*, in Zolla, p. 342.

<sup>248</sup> Hillman, 'Vessels', in *Alchemical Psychology*, pp. 36–46.

<sup>249</sup> (Riding) Jackson, p. 60.

<sup>250</sup> Borges, *Selected Non-Fictions*, pp. 26–27.

<sup>251</sup> Campo, *Il mio pensiero non vi lascia*, p. 103.



writing are a correspondence with a handful of beings who *own the same ritual*: sacred. Farnetti notes that Cristina always uses the term *reader*, not *readership*, foregrounding singularity and presence in her direct, non-abstract correspondences. The Italian scholar has also remarked on the ‘reciprocity between reading and writing, listening and speaking, which gives [Campo’s] intellectual biography the image of a coherent and prolonged episode of conversation’.<sup>252</sup> For Cristina, any conversation was based on literature, any friendship impossible without its lens. Pieracci Harwell maintains that the history of Cristina’s life should be a history of the books she read.<sup>253</sup> And, I shall add, of the letters she wrote, as the Italian critic Cesare Galimberti has called *Lettere a Mita* – the volume that gathers over two hundred and fifty letters Cristina wrote to Pieracci Harwell between 1955 and 1975 – one of the three most notable epistolary collections in Italian literature, along with Leopardi’s and Tasso’s.<sup>254</sup>

(14) Cristina called Marianne Moore ‘meticulous, specious, inflexible’.<sup>255</sup> Do these words refer to her, or to her? Writing of Moore, she writes of her own writing: commentary is reverberance. In her long chimeric text *Gli imperdonabili* (*The Unforgivable*) Moore appears as one of a handful of ‘unforgivable’ writers along with Djuna Barnes, William Carlos Williams, Gottfried Benn, unforgivable in the eyes of many for attending to beauty. Cristina is the hidden one, humming along the pages with weighted reverberance. It was said of Moore, Cristina writes, as of ‘a medieval nun who embroiders memorable chasubles, yearning for the colours of the silk more than the portrayed holy faces – as if a portrait could inspire devotion unless a nearly maniac

---

<sup>252</sup> Farnetti, in *Sotto falso nome*, p. 247.

<sup>253</sup> Margherita Pieracci Harwell, ‘Cristina Campo maestra di letture’, in *Per Cristina Campo*, pp. 101–107.

<sup>254</sup> De Stefano, p. 143.

<sup>255</sup> Campo, *Gli imperdonabili*, p. 74.

attention did not pick out the materials with which to respond to the vision'.<sup>256</sup> It is necessary to have a maniac attention, to pick out the materials with which to respond to the vision. The nun's silk is Cristina's language – meticulous, specious, inflexible, and I deliberately use the three adjectives she used for Moore, in the echo chamber of my reading and writing with her. Beauty is not superfluous, decorative. It has nothing to do with objects to value. Hillman, in *The Thought of the Heart and the Soul of the World*: 'Beauty is not beautiful'. It is derived from the Greek *aisthesis*, sense perception. It refers to 'the luster of each particular event [...]: that particular things appear at all and in the form in which they appear'. Beauty is 'the very sensibility of the cosmos, that it has textures, tones, tastes'.<sup>257</sup> In an interview, in response to the tedious question about form taking over content, Cristina says that whoever reads attentively would not ever consider separating the two: 'The phrase "to reduce to beauty" seems so strange to me. Isn't beauty that from which one should necessarily begin from? It is the blue hyacinth that attracts Persephone in the underworld of knowledge and destiny [...] [This attraction] is what myth does [...] If the reader does not fall into Persephone's precipice but limits herself to look at the hyacinth from afar, it means that the writer has not written well enough'.<sup>258</sup> In the same interview she quotes those favourite verses from Williams' *Paterson* she had also mentioned in *Gli imperdonabili*, and many other times: 'But it is true, they fear / it more than death, beauty is feared / more than death, more than they fear death'.<sup>259</sup> Beauty and ritual remind people of death, she goes on, aware of mentioning a subject not topical for the majority of her contemporaries. Ritual is also the experience of regeneration, and one of the archetypal models of poetry: 'But to write, if only once in a lifetime, something

---

<sup>256</sup> Campo, *Gli imperdonabili*, p. 74.

<sup>257</sup> Hillman, *The Thought of the Heart and the Soul of the World*, pp. 35–36.

<sup>258</sup> Campo, *Sotto falso nome*, p. 203.

<sup>259</sup> William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*, revised edition, ed. by Christopher Mac Gowan, New York: New Directions, 1992 (1946–58), p. 106.

that was vaguely resemblant of the most simple, the most humble of the eternal ancient liturgies, Western or Eastern [...]. It is good to have impossible ideals'.<sup>260</sup>

(15) In a letter to Alejandra, Cristina advised that to regain the ability to write one must make contact with oneself, write down a list of quotations, and the text that must bind them together shall grow among them, like a creeper among the stones.<sup>261</sup>

'[T]o begin again in the unspeaking obstruction of the stone. It is the artist's block that heightens his awe of the other power in which his material speaks to him. The block itself is the blockage of a breath. The inspiring stone "breathes" as the artist awakens to his work'.<sup>262</sup>

'Each of us carries in himself the Image of his own world, his *Imago mundi*, and projects it into a more or less coherent universe'.<sup>263</sup>

(16) 'I write because I so deeply want to speak. Though writing only gives me the full measure of silence'.<sup>264</sup>

'Durable sense of the further' echoes Laura (Riding) Jackson.<sup>265</sup>

(17) '...not all hers' echoes Elfriede Jelinek.

---

<sup>260</sup> Campo, *Sotto falso nome*, p. 204.

<sup>261</sup> Campo, undated letter to Pizarnik, Alejandra Pizarnik Papers.

<sup>262</sup> Duncan, p. 83.

<sup>263</sup> Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, p. 8.

<sup>264</sup> Lispector, p. 6.

<sup>265</sup> (Riding) Jackson, p. xv.

Cristina, on Gottfried Benn, echoes Gottfried Benn.<sup>266</sup>

(18) Cristina on Giacomo Leopardi.<sup>267</sup>

‘Erudition, which is also hard-working and hidden, discovers little by little, beneath the mountains that fascinate the look, great subterranean layers, deep circulations, and secret discoveries [...]. Shifts are brought about, meetings prepared – a common experience is elaborated. The mystic work of history’.<sup>268</sup>

(19) For Teresa of Avila, as illustrated by Certeau, ‘the book appears [...] as if already offering consonants for the confused vocalization of desire’.<sup>269</sup>

(20) ‘I have taken psychic being, taken fire, from these works. Over years, I have confused myself with them [...] used [them] in creating the poet I am. We are concerned with the architecture of a man, but building with words, with the breath or spirit forms, morphemes in inventions of time, we build structures of air, rising one within another without displacement’.<sup>270</sup>

(21) ‘Because for a writer, this is the whole point: to transmit into the head or heart of another person the concretions that have been deposited by his present or past life in the depths of his own head or heart and that have had value only for him until then; to communicate something in order to make it more valuable, to let it circulate, so that once

---

<sup>266</sup> Campo, *Gli imperdonabili*, p. 78.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>268</sup> Certeau, Vol. 2, p. 119.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>270</sup> Duncan, p. 439.

it has been cast out to others it will come back to him a little more magical, like the shields of the Northwestern American Indians, which are endowed with greater and greater value the more often they have been the object of ceremonial exchanges'.<sup>271</sup>

(22) Calasso on Weil.<sup>272</sup>

(23) '[...] effects and suggestions that must act as if on a mental keyboard. Never state the thing, but the resonance of the thing'.<sup>273</sup>

'[H]imma, an extremely complicated notion which cannot perhaps be translated by any one word [...] mediation, project, intention, desire, force of will [...] the "creative power of the heart" [...] the act of meditating, conceiving, projecting, ardently desiring [...] the force of an intention'. 'The creative operation necessarily implies the manifestation of an outward existence that is conferred upon something which already possessed a latent existence'. 'The heart creates by "causing to appear", by "preserving" something which already exists'.<sup>274</sup>

(24) ...echoes Calasso.<sup>275</sup>

(25) 'The work is not a rational dissertation. It is precisely the break, the discontinuity, that stimulates the mind to a new effort: the "way through" must be opened by the mystic himself'.<sup>276</sup>

---

<sup>271</sup> Leiris, *Rules of The Game*, pp. 13–14.

<sup>272</sup> Calasso, 'L'ordalia delle parole impossibili', in *I quarantanove gradini*, pp. 361–365.

<sup>273</sup> Calasso, *Literature and the Gods*, p. 116.

<sup>274</sup> Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 220, pp. 222–223, p. 226.

<sup>275</sup> Calasso, *Literature and the Gods*, p. 116.

<sup>276</sup> Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, p. 200.

(26) 'But it is true, they fear / it more than death, beauty is feared / more than death, more than they fear death'. William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*.<sup>277</sup>

(27) Writing of Cristina's work I take the role, and the voice, of one of those characters in folk songs who goes out for a walk one day, one day, and meets Death in a field, having witnessed deep, timeless occurrences. I adopt the voice of someone who had been there, having experienced the extraordinary in the mundane, the reduction through lessening that makes form necessary and reverberant, the occasion of a metamorphosis. Almost nothing, all and nothing.

---

<sup>277</sup> Williams, p. 106.

## **Imaginary Conversation**

**Alejandra Pizarnik, Cristina Campo, D.C.**

C.C.: I must learn to love this cold blade which one day came to be stuck between the hinges of my skeleton to keep it wide open to the mute cries of the speechless ones – and tonight I can see, it is a golden sword. Perhaps when all those mute cries will have pierced my heart, and I will have known them so intimately that I can no longer make mistakes, then the sword will be removed, and I will be left with a moment of silent warmth. Evagrius said – you will forgive the unfortunate assonance, which only depends on the English translation – that word must become sword. But I have had no words of late, let alone sharp thoughts. I have been mute for months. Sometimes it feels good, sometimes I would like to chew off something with my teeth. It is the sword of the speechless ones inside me.

D.C. [suddenly waking up]: Did you just say sword?

A.P.: Did you just say scythe?

D.C.: Site? Csite?

C.C.: I've had enough of your mildly amusing puns.

D.C.: Meanwhile, I continue to lose my voice.

[D.C. faints].

C.C.: Now gather those vain, superfluous things the dead like: silk, perfume, strange jewels, a music with no consequences.

A.P.: A question of dissonance. This silence of which you write to me, this silence in which you write to me... is it serenity, strength, sweetness, and calm? Or is it the immutable, the permanent, the invariable? Sometimes you scare me, as if a terrible angel had written to me.

C.C.: I desire to rush back to those s-words of yours that pierced my spine. But be generous, one more time. Write to me, in my silence. We are quiet, very quiet, we cannot finish our work quickly, we must continue to carry our work inside us quietly for years, surrender a long arc of time into a handful of words. Often my hands tremble – nervous exhaustion? I have a lot to tell you. But these days I must perform miracles to eat, to sleep, to wake up. To breathe, even. Do you understand?

A.P.: *Can hardly breathe.* May my words be leaves on dark waters. I want to write about a certain dissonance. These days, everything is difficult to remember. I have a headache, nausea. Everything disappears.

C.C.: It is the devil's work to pose such a false alternative between 'mescaline, suffering, poetry', and 'health, fiction, method'... *Mi querida amiga, por favor!* There is something else, and you know it, a different order in words, the most unpredictable and necessary of all – a chimeric order, the bridge across which many before us walked. Be faithful to your manner of perceiving this order, be groundless, but not without grounds – groundless in



relation to given systems, not without grounds because you make your own. This is the only certain path, not only towards severity but toward establishing your grounds, and a renewed kinship with others: then you can truly see them, you can begin to speak with them. Meanwhile D.C., so skilful in her 'fainting'...

A.P.: Do not assume that by surrounding the term fainting with quotation marks, you may remove any part of D.C.'s discomfort, inherent in it.

C.C. [ignoring A.P.'s stilted wit]: D.C. would not be speaking with us, if she had not made herself groundless but not without grounds, after so many years of error, during which she could not approach us in writing.

[A.P. sighs, D.C. snores].

C.C.: I have been speaking to you from a place of darkness, where every word stands out from depths on which I avoid setting my gaze. I started the year under a thick cloud, and it is not just physical discomfort. I was somehow transformed. Speak to me. These horrible nameless mutilations are our only chances to renew that which remains, and drives us. Then we may arrange our words,

A.P.: our stones,

C.C.: which depend on how we live with them.

A.P.: Our stones, our quotations. Writing slowly grows around them, like a creeper.

C.C.: Your words continue to move in me, like water inside water. Often when I write I find myself contemplating, sometimes in spite of myself, the prompts, conditions, and motions around writing: everything that puts it under siege, and transforms it into life. There never seems to be any writing then. There *is* writing then, nonetheless, none, less, threadbare, elusive, present,

D.C. [suddenly awake]: ... chimeric.

C.C.: I am sending you an initial response to your voice, like a dialogue of desolate nightingales. My little Alejandra, who speak my language, I embrace you tightly in this depth, in this chaos of lethargy and alarm which seems to break the crystal sky. Today we brought back home dead bamboo, it shines like silver.

D.C. Do not feel at the centre of any *because*. Then it will be easier to find your words.

C.C. Be your own dark measure in the vein, for we're about a tragic business.

D.C. You sound like a book.

C.C. I am reading from one.

## **Appearances, Encounters: This Begins, Began**

### **From the Notebooks of D.C.**

I read Cristina and Alejandra, I want and do not want to read them. I read them because I always initially resist reading, as in my understanding they are close to my innermost concerns around literature, being, limits. I read them because when I do, something happens to me: it is as if I heard a part of myself in them and then, who wrote this?, I ask, and I know that I can sing with their voices, together, out of sync. I read them and do not want to, because when I do, I hear myself unsettled in my yearning for them.

When I am about to read them, and write about them, I become sleepless. What is this reading that steals my sleep and makes me restless with anticipation? Readlorn like lovelorn, forlorn. What is this writing that contains the restlessness of a yearning? Over the years, to write after reading Cristina and Alejandra has become more difficult – so much is at stake – and more meaningful. In their words I have found premonitions, echoes of how I think and sense writing. Demands so high and at once, a strong sense of kinship.

I want to write about Cristina because, in a letter to Alejandra, she offered the best description I have encountered of how I see critical writing take form: a creeper growing organically in between the stones of what was written before. Because she wrote beautiful texts on liturgy and bells, the sayings of the Desert Fathers and beauty I wanted to transmit her ability to put together words (having arranged her stones) in a way that gave them the quality of apparitions: texts that shimmer as recurring mythical happenings, and myths have the quality of being the same and not quite so, of being grounded and slightly hovering. I wanted to write about Cristina because so few in her lifetime reviewed her

work. Because she rarely wrote ‘I’, imploded the self, and wrote in pseudonyms, and yet her very singular person was first and prominent in her parallel *œuvre*: the extraordinary letters she wrote to her friends. I wanted to write about her because she never wrote a novel. I wanted to write to her because so often she spoke to me as I read.

I tried, long ago, to write about Alejandra because of a startling encounter with her words, which seemed to speak on my behalf when they pronounced ‘I cannot speak with my voice, but I speak with my voices’.<sup>278</sup> I tried to write about her because of her lesser-known prose works deemed ugly and parodic, rejected in her time by most readers – texts that for the Argentine writer were a way out of the cliché which nailed her into the ‘poet of silence’ persona. Because she expressed in her journals a longing for a type of criticism made of the same substance of its subjects, I tried to write about her. I wanted to write about her because she wrote something more and something else than words. Because she said ‘I’ so many times it is no longer clear, or safe, where or who I is coming from, dispersed as it is in so many voices, and in the voices of other writers she inhabited. Plus, she never wrote a novel. I wanted to write about her because she once silenced me, and often spoke to me as I read.

I tried to write about both, and for a long time I could not and did not.

I did not write a novel either.

This began, begins at the time when I stopped trying, begins from my exhaustion. From the high volume of material that demanded to be transmitted, and from my silence. Depth

---

<sup>278</sup> Pizarnik, *Extracting the Stone of Madness*, p. 97.

of thinking could not crack the hard unforgiving surface of Cristina and Alejandra's untranslated words. Days and months spent reading, understanding, making notes, part-translating, part-memorising across three languages, transforming them so that they could be read, heard.

This begins from the physical sensation in the exigency of carrying these words over to you, despite my lack of stable grounds. Unsure who you are to receive, and you may not have been born yet but this is moved by an urgency, and urgencies are not concerned with the guarantee of a readership but with its possibility against all odds, with the yearning that prompts them to reach out. They move by reverberation, by the certainty that a resonant frequency will be found somewhere sometime, even if the signal is faint. They rely on unpredictable signals to pick up and amplify their own frequencies. Not sure if I am perceived, I continue to transmit, from a cusp of hope and despair.

At the end of this I will not have told you everything: you will have to look yourself. Start translating, even. Add to this conversation and make it more resounding, more present.

The question of limit summons me in approaching two writers who dwelled on limits all their lives, both ended soon. The question of where to stop at the edges between languages: the untranslated material of Alejandra and Cristina lures, torments, and excites me, the experience of finding and finding and half-guessing. I cannot hear myself entirely when I write in English of texts written in other languages, I am always slightly out of sync. I cannot make Cristina and Alejandra heard to you but through that which can only be perceived by listening to something more and something else than words, like Alejandra wrote, and speaks in the page 'with weighted reverberance', as Laura (Riding)

Jackson did in *The Telling*.<sup>279</sup> The telling is plural and polyphonic, ‘making our subject less mine, more yours... less yours, more ours’.<sup>280</sup> So I shall tell you of the years I spent reading Cristina’s letters in French, and Alejandra’s journals in Spanish, two languages which I taught myself to read but in which I am not fluent. Sum it up to my writing in English as a stranger, consider the artifice in all this weighing and erasing and rehearsing and checking, retracing words and sentences, writing in English after reading Cristina in Italian and French, Alejandra in Spanish, and doing so without translating.

I am not a translator, I am an exhausted chimeric writer – exhausted from dwelling in the attractions and entanglements of knowing (verb, moving) but not exhaustive in the breadth or accomplishment or display of knowledge (noun, fixed). Exhausted, worn out: like the smoothed feet of those marble statues in Italian churches that have been touched so many times they have lost their initial form, only to carry the stamp of devotion, the erasing and changing mark of attention: chimeric writing is worn out, exhausted by attention and care.

Knowing Alejandra and Cristina to the point of exhaustion, when there seems to be nothing to say, shapes my words as convulsions in stillness, between the urgency of utterance and the difficulty of articulation. This is not going to be exhaustively informative, but it will tell you of the oscillations between a dispossessing sense of void, and the fullness of knowing through their words and thoughts. Having spent so much time reading and thinking with them, they have become the core of how I think, hear, read, and write. This is knowing. No need to copy or quote: they have seeped into my perception, as if by osmosis.

---

<sup>279</sup> (Riding) Jackson, p. 43.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

I do not want to reduce Cristina and Alejandra to case studies but to listen to them as voices deeply echoing in my language, fundamental resonant frequencies of my understanding, of the entangled ways I hear literature. Duncan in *The H.D. Book* – utmost example of a work written with and through another writer to the point where you can hear two heartbeats in one cadence writes: ‘I have taken psychic being, taken fire, from these works’.<sup>281</sup> I have taken psychic being from the works of Alejandra and Cristina, taken fire. This means – Duncan means the same – I have been engaged in an ongoing conversation with them, sometimes despite writing, a humming, a recurring thinking of their words. They offered at once challenge and confidence, the unrest of a material when it is set to vibrate by a resonant frequency, and the comfort of being enwrapped in it. It is as if their words were written directly for me – which is not true, and is so real, in this form of intimate knowledge.

This is a way of working with what is at hand, to stitch intuitions and bring resonant frequencies together rather than worry about completeness or clear-cut objectives: a disposition toward otherness that welcomes intuition and sets up a ground for encounters that begin in difference. Adriana Cavarero called it a choral knowledge *a più voci*, for more than one voice;<sup>282</sup> Cristina echoing Weil wrote critical gestures grounded on attention; Bachmann spoke of ‘I without guarantees’<sup>283</sup> as an inclination toward the possibilities of *we*, and in these pages, it is me with Cristina and Alejandra, speculating

---

<sup>281</sup> Duncan, p. 439.

<sup>282</sup> Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward A Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. by Paul A. Kottman, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005 [*A più voci. Filosofia dell’espressione vocale*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2003].

<sup>283</sup> Bachmann, p. 58.

on writing without guarantees, considering possibilities to envisage, through them, critical gestures of attention: *a più voci*.

Both writers longed for critical writing as intimate conversation. Cristina's advice to Alejandra about writing an essay was: 'Make contact with yourself [...] lay down a list of notes (quotes) and the discourse that must bind them together will grow among them on its own, like a creeper among stones'.<sup>284</sup> Make contact with yourself, and learn to see what is around, what you have assembled: the assembling is not to be taken for granted. Nobody else would have arranged the material that way, it is a difficult point to discern because it is so ingrained, and yet that moment of arranging is when writing appears. What becomes written is tightly bound to what is perceived, and the way in which it is perceived: a startling indication of method. Words are assembled, thoughts move around them, allowing the vegetable-text – thinking-with-writing – to grow unruly, organically, among the stones scattered on the blank page of an apparent nothing-to-say which is in fact full of the undergrowth of thought.

I linger on the equivalence of *quote* and *stone* in Cristina's letter. In my case the accumulation of quotations from Alejandra was paralysing. The tangle between the reader-to-be-writer, what had been written and read, and what was not although it had to be written, was so tight it smothered me, and no words seemed to be left to utter other than a stubborn repetition, a speaking to stones. I would tread in a thick undergrowth, where moving was barely possible. Only if I could think of the stone as the alchemical stone, ripened and malleable, holding transformation, could I resolve my physical discomfort in being smothered by language, and articulate another language. The stone

---

<sup>284</sup> Campo, undated letter to Pizarnik, Alejandra Pizarnik Papers.



of paralysis, the block. I could not write until I reversed the terms of my condition, and said to myself, do not be Sisyphus, be the stone. Become the material. Only through a transformation into the substance of the stone could I write again. Duncan contemplates this condition in *The H.D. Book*, a work in which the closeness to the subject of its enquiry means the latter breathes life into the writer, allowing him to write only when a transformation of substance has occurred: '[T]o begin again in the unspeaking obstruction of the stone. It is the artist's block that heightens his awe of the other power in which his material speaks to him. The block itself is the blockage of a breath. The inspiring stone "breathes" as the artist awakens to his work'.<sup>285</sup> To write is to unravel a transformation into material that initially appeared to make me speechless. Not interpretation, not progression: this form of writing prompts a shift of perspective while staying exactly where it is, working with the material it is given.

Alejandra, 4 December 1962: 'The new criticism that interests me [...] [presents] an approach which, whether formal, or internal, has a shared quality: the notion of the tie. A tie between the critic and the literary work [...] which leads to the tie between subject and object, that is to say [TEXT INCOMPLETE]'.<sup>286</sup> *Text incomplete*, after such a significant statement that calls for an extraordinarily tuned manner of reading: the material presence of Alejandra's nothing-to-say in the text, calls me to interpolate her words. I can write after her as she makes space for my words not quite all mine. Then I may read her words again, and say the criticism that interests me demands an approach with the quality of a space together, even when uncomfortable: the notion of the tie, the connecting link between the critic and the subject of her enquiry, between subject and object. The relation between reader and writer, a most rewarding form of dialogue: the subtle and profound

---

<sup>285</sup> Duncan, p. 83.

<sup>286</sup> Pizarnik, *Diarios*, p. 536.

understanding reached in those instants of contact that happen at times during attuned reading, the voices a writer begins to hear when possessed, haunted by her subjects. Alejandra and Cristina demanded me to follow the trail of their words, to load them with the sense of a calling, so that my interpolations can be read not as historical or philological, but as a response enmeshed in the same substance across the years. I think of the polysemy in the term *correspondence*: congruence, mutual adaptation, connection, letter-writing, keeping in touch with, receiving messages from, even from what was before, remote, or imagined. I read my words haunted by theirs, which I am reluctant to evaluate but want to inhabit. I practice criticism as tie, the unspoken substance that connects a writer to the subject of her study, to the point when I could call Alejandra and Cristina by their first names in these pages, as if they were my friends.

## **Imaginary Conversation**

**Alejandra Pizarnik, Cristina Campo, D.C.**

C.C.: My book has had the incomparable gift of silence, and some noble friends. The official critics withdrew one after the other, as if they were afraid of getting burned. This makes me laugh a lot. Some people neither wish to read, nor to remember certain books.

D.C.: Eventually you found your readers, because you did not look for them.

C.C.: I have told you many times, for me literature is not a goal but a way of living, my way of being, present and unpublished. Help me preserve my incognito so I can continue to write.

D.C.: Since I encountered your words I have started publishing in pseudonyms exactly because of what you say: to continue to be engrossed in writing, not having to worry about a public persona, self-promotion, scenes, recognition. To write to be, beyond the sanctioning of the legitimate, visible publishers; to write with chimeric yearning for readers who may be willing to speak with my books, in the same way in which I have been speaking with yours, for what they are, not for what they represent because someone else has decreed them worthy of attention.

A.P.: But people did not want to know anything about my humorous texts.

D.C.: They did not; and hardly anyone reviewed Cristina's prose. Because both make many readers uncomfortable; because, Alejandra, your self-parody upsets any

expectations of soothing reading, and Cristina plunges in depths where some avoid setting their gaze, and A., your irreverence... readers do not know what to do with it, especially because they had identified you as the elegant poet of silence. Some readers will be more daring – the way in which you inhabit literature touches something intimate and burning about their desires in reading, beyond the surface of stylish prose – and will reach out to you: ‘I *love* your writing, speak with me, can we meet?’ Remember though, when they write an official article they will omit you, because your words – which they *love* – have not been published by recognised publishers, they move in undercurrents and less visible channels, so those same readers who *love* your works, do not dare to stand for them. Judgement, in the sense of a profound and singular engagement, is lost, replaced by conformed chatter and meek choices. Many are scared, or lazy, to take on responsibility to stand for what they read. So they fall back on the same names, safely guaranteed by the shield of a brand, rather than by the scrutiny and attention of reading. Your humorous texts, A., your chimeras, C., they do not make a brand.

A.P.: They brand minds though, they do.

D.C.: No doubt about it, I carry the marks of your words on my skin.

C.C.: In your case, D.C., many in your lifetime attached the damaging *about* to your work, which is about nothing but manners of reading, thinking, arranging – about manners of studying.

A.P.: [mockingly] Tell me, what is your book about?

D.C.: About nothing.

C.C.: It is. It is being written. This writing is a manifestation of the cognitive function of kinship. I understand your need, D.C., to move away from the meagre definition you were given, 'that Italian who writes about sound'. In fact, your texts are fully experienced when approached with a *how* mentality, not *about* sound but employing listening as method, dismissing any literal assumptions attached to listening as if it only pertained to acoustic phenomena.

A.P.: The way in which you read both of us, dismissing textual analysis and dissection, dismissing marked quotations, and speaking with us instead, using quotations as voices heard, words told to you, whispered to you, that formed your way of understanding and your language, demonstrates this.

D.C.: I never wished to quote in order to flaunt erudition or authority, but to speak certain phrases and inflections of words because they nested in me for a long time. I would say them again as if humming a song heard before, as if singing along with it when writing, inevitably distorted and changed, but deep seated in my senses and understanding.

C.C.: Your texts merge voices, they exceed themselves as their language is crafted from the words of others, and such precarious yet present constructions exist in the tension between what is written and what is sensed beneath words. All those untranslated works, how they haunt you.

D.C.: Words attempt a movement toward a site where their yearning can lodge, their csite. The impetus of telling takes over style. ‘Genuine literature,’ Borges wrote, ‘is as indifferent to a rough-hewn phrase as it is to a smooth sentence’.<sup>287</sup> This is not dissimilar from something Bachmann said: many are likely to write a perfect sonnet, a perfect story, but it is not enough. There needs to be a yearning, a direction across a number of texts; quality may be variable, but the repetition of the same figures, words, conflicts that appear to a writer as inevitable, guarantee the presence and strength of a ‘poetic phenomenon’ beyond perfection.<sup>288</sup>

A.P.: This is how you could write with me. And I, I have no desire to recount anything.

---

<sup>287</sup> Borges, ‘The Superstitious Ethics of the Reader’, in *Selected Non-Fictions*, p. 54 [‘La supersticiosa ética del lector’, *Azul*, 8, Enero 1931].

<sup>288</sup> Bachmann, pp. 25–27.

## A Deranged Essay: The Bloody Countess

By D.C.

Voice from a Faintspeaker [take one]: So the critic, writing about a writer's work, writes about her own.

Voice from a Faintspeaker [take two]: So the chimeric writer, writing about a writer's work, writes about her own.

In a late entry in her journal, Pizarnik says that what she truly wrote in her life was 'the text on the Countess'.<sup>289</sup> Ever since it was published, she continued to refer to *La condesa sangrienta* (*The Bloody Countess*) as her best work, 'stimulating and clear and painful'.<sup>290</sup> In this short prose piece she rewrote the Surrealist Valentine Penrose's eponymous 1963 book, with a daring formal gesture of appropriation, synthesis, and difference. The text appeared as a review in 1966 and as a book in 1971, the two forms of publication pointing at the ambiguity and elusive status of a piece of critical reading concealed as fiction, of critical writing as metamorphosis.<sup>291</sup> In a slim volume that reinvents Penrose's hefty book – thirty-two pages in my Italian edition of Pizarnik's text against the hundred and fifty pages in the English translation of Penrose's book by Alexander Trocchi – I see Alejandra's chimeric writing unravel.

---

<sup>289</sup> Pizarnik, *Diarios*, p. 977.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 840.

<sup>291</sup> Pizarnik, *La contessa sanguinaria*, trans. by Francesca Lazzarato, Roma: Playground, 2005 ['La condesa sangrienta', in *Prosa completa*, Barcelona: Lumen, 2018 (1966)]. A few excerpts are translated in English by Cole Heinowitz in *Seedings*, 4, fall 2017 <https://durationpress.com/projects/seedings/seedings-issue-four/> [Accessed 6 July 2021]. Translations by D.C..

Penrose's book was an account of the life and crimes of Erzsebeth Bathory, the 'bloody countess' who between the sixteenth and seventeenth century in the castle of Csejthe in Transylvania, tortured and murdered over six hundred girls. Known to historians as the female Gilles de Rais, and described by Georges Bataille as a 'zenith of horror' who would have made Sade 'howl like a wild beast',<sup>292</sup> Erzsebeth appears in Penrose's book as the darkest and most terrifying character in a fairy tale from which the fairies have long disappeared, and ancient blood bath rituals are performed in cold and controlled atrocities, a woman awake but not alive, entrapped in coruscated halls and dungeons of archetypal terror.

In her journals Alejandra barely says anything on the context and content of Penrose's book, but much can be gathered by her obsessive remarks around extreme states and sexual derangement which, although not specific to her writing on Bathory, resound in the void of her self-censorship and erasures – as if by portraying Bathory with no direct references to herself and her work, Alejandra's internal overwhelming sense of void and dispossession was amplified by contrast and inversion. The delirium so admired in Lautréamont was matched to the boldness in confronting extreme material written by a female author. Writing the *Condesa* made Alejandra suffer because she had to 'limit herself'<sup>293</sup> and at the same time, the limitation of working with existing material led her – the writer recognised and celebrated up to that point as a subtle poet of silence and speechlessness – to reach the inner lining of her silence which swarmed with dread. It is

---

<sup>292</sup> Georges Bataille, *The Tears of Eros*, trans. by Peter Connor, San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1989, p. 139 [*Les Larmes d'Eros*, Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1961].

<sup>293</sup> Pizarnik, *Diarios*, p. 743.



the dread of the writer who, as Blanchot said, realises that she ‘has nothing to say [...] not for lack of means, but because everything [s]he can say is controlled by the nothingness that dread makes apparent to [her] as [her] own object’.<sup>294</sup> Such dread, generated by the awareness of self, prompts a transformation in which the self is encountered again as other: in *La condesa Alejandra* only writes ‘I’ on a handful of occasions, each a telling flicker of disclosure. ‘I thought of Death’ refers to the Medieval Dance of Death;<sup>295</sup> ‘I think melancholy is a musical problem, a question of dissonance’ appears in the section on mirror and melancholy;<sup>296</sup> she writes ‘I’ again in a remark on the portrait of the countess;<sup>297</sup> on the relation in the Middle Ages between melancholy and the devil;<sup>298</sup> on translating the prayer that the countess kept in a talisman.<sup>299</sup> I as subject is subtly concealed in double-meaning statements at the edge between Penrose and herself, such as: ‘Without altering the real facts, painstakingly gathered, she has melted them again in a sort of vast and splendid prose poem’.<sup>300</sup> I am in doubt if Alejandra is talking here about Penrose or herself; the French writer’s book is far from a prose poem, so full is it of historical facts and detailed accounts. In my reading, the ‘vast and splendid prose poem’ is Alejandra’s, who poured her poetry deeply into the material of Penrose’s research and melted it, alchemically, into her text. As she closes the introductory section by saying that ‘the obscure ceremony has only one silent spectator’ I see Alejandra, ‘nothing but a woman in the silence of solitude’,<sup>301</sup> as the sole character in the obscure alchemical ceremony that transforms herself and the substance of her writing. In later years, still obsessed with the idea of a novel she never wrote, she looked at the *Condesa*

---

<sup>294</sup> Blanchot, ‘From Dread to Language’, in *The Gaze of Orpheus*, p. 7 [‘De l’Angoisse au langage’, in *Faux pas*, Paris: Gallimard, 1943].

<sup>295</sup> Pizarnik, *La contessa sanguinaria*, p. 16.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

as the piece that could host her chimeras, the horizon of her being in writing. Unable to write for the demands of a novel, she was aware that something in that short text had broken through, another way of understanding what a frozen narrative could be and do: ‘With regards to the book, for all I know I must accept it is incomplete, a foreshortening, a sketch [...] Furthermore, what I need to say lacks *duration*. Everything appears devoured, rotten [...] I think with eagerness of a book of about a hundred pages very well written and terribly exciting. I evoke the piece on the countess: so must my book be’.<sup>302</sup> 22 April 1969: ‘And who am I, to create characters? My only drama, the central drama, is language. How dare I write a novel? No. Let’s say it like this: how dare she write a novel?’.<sup>303</sup> An elliptical being or form inhabits the pages of the *Condesa* in frictions of body and silence, life and language in mutual erasures. This aspect summons me, and I have nothing to say about it: I can tell you how I read it, what form of conversation I have with it. I can tell you of the void I experience every time I draw close, in fear, to these pages. If there is one quotation to rescue from Bataille, it is where he says he cannot speak of ‘the uncomprehending silence which only so meaningful a mystery can harbor’.<sup>304</sup> How to write, then?

Leiris wrote in ‘The Bullfight As Mirror’, which Pizarnik co-translated: ‘[T]here are among the countless elements composing our universe certain nodes or critical points that might be represented geometrically as *the places where one feels tangency to the world and to oneself*’.<sup>305</sup> These nodes ‘put us in contact with the most deeply intimate elements

---

<sup>302</sup> Pizarnik, *Diarios*, p. 883.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 857.

<sup>304</sup> Bataille, p. 50.

<sup>305</sup> Leiris, ‘The Bullfight As Mirror’, p. 21 [‘De la literatura considerada como una tauromaquia’, trans. by Silvia Delpy and Pizarnik, *Sur*, 315, 1968, pp. 12–21].

that, on ordinary occasions, are the most murky if not totally obscured'.<sup>306</sup> Later: '[I]t's from this "not quite" – from this hiatus or narrow rift whose one lip would be "not quite there" and the other "beyond" – that most of the pleasure is born, pleasure such as musical dissonance provokes, for it, too, draws its emotional value from the existence of a similar margin, a similar discrepancy giving it a hybrid character halfway between the geometrical norm and its destruction'.<sup>307</sup> Musical dissonance, composite forms between norm and destruction: Alejandra wrote in the *Condesa* that melancholy is a question of dissonance, an altered rhythm. The statement is echoed in her journals: 'In truth, the theme is simple, I want to write about dissonance, or, better, about a certain dissonance'.<sup>308</sup> 'I write what is not possible and for this I spawn dissonant monsters [...] For now, I am destroying nearly all my writings [...] and, nearly always, of a page remains a line'.<sup>309</sup> Not quite there, monsters, dissonance, and beyond, hold chimeric yearning between destruction and reduction. I see Pizarnik's writing of the *Condesa* as a necessary transition through silence and tangency into her chimeric form of writing. I read the *Condesa* as her *nigredo*, the alchemical state of blackening whose *modus operandi* is slow, repetitive, severe, as dark and obstinate as the material being worked. Attempting to write of the *Condesa* having nothing to say became in turn my *nigredo*, as I was exhausted, paralysed, repetitive, and obstinate in returning to her words. I read this condition as rich, complex material: something is being worked upon and dissolves meaning. I feel deprived of any dependable and comforting notion of achievement, of goodness. Hillman writes: 'Every moment of blackness is a harbinger of alteration, of invisible discovery, and of dissolution of attachments to whatever has been taken as truth and reality, solid fact, or dogmatic virtue. It darkens and sophisticates the eye so it can

---

<sup>306</sup> Leiris, 'The Bullfight As Mirror', p. 21

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>308</sup> Pizarnik, *Diarios*, p. 825.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., p. 826.

see through'.<sup>310</sup> It repeats. The *Condesa* is Alejandra's Magic Door into nothing other than herself: she goes through it and is transformed, and I am too, having gone through the limitations of existing material that was not written by her.

Alejandra's transformation does not unravel tidily: there are shifts and times of sedimentation in a writer's life which do not correspond to linear cause-and-effect readings. Something begins to change, and it may take some time to surface. The transformation that occurs in the absolute present of Alejandra's reading is about learning to be, and there is no textbook way of going about it. *The Bloody Countess* captures that moment in the metamorphosis when Alejandra's poetry becomes prose in which 'melancholy is a musical question: a dissonance, an altered rhythm'.<sup>311</sup> Out of sync is her dissonance, her altered rhythm of being a stranger, her excess and erasure, music that exceeds the canon of the score and the structure of the concert room into landscape, into life. Alejandra's melancholy mirrored in the countess is not a translation into silence but a transmission of noise. Consider the condition of Alejandra's writing in front of Penrose's book: it begins as a review, becomes a rewriting by subtraction, an inverse space, a state of deafness in which the issue is no longer a question of speaking through silence, but of citing her metamorphosis in the dissonance of rewriting.

I want to write what Alejandra said to me, in the sense adopted by Leiris when he set out to report 'what Bacon's paintings said to me',<sup>312</sup> their intimate presence, the presence of

---

<sup>310</sup> Hillman, *Alchemical Psychology*, p. 89.

<sup>311</sup> Pizarnik, *La contessa sanguinaria*, p. 25.

<sup>312</sup> Leiris, 'Ciò che mi hanno detto i dipinti di Francis Bacon', trans. by Roberto Rossi, in *Francis Bacon*, Milano: Abscondita, 2001, p. 13 ['Francis Bacon ou la vérité criante', *Au verso des images*, Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1980]. Translation by D.C..

work which allowed him to feel summoned and present in turn; the fact that certain words connected and resounded. This sense of election is also a response – to another, and to oneself, as in Corbin’s prayer that is not a request but a rotational movement of sympathy that reveals to each who they are. At times this *unio sympathetica* found in reading reveals painful thoughts usually kept hidden – for example, when Alejandra wrote of her sense of isolation, of her experimental prose not being welcome by readers; when Cristina wrote of her works being ignored; when Alejandra wrote that she had no ambition for fame or success but wanted to be able to write. At other times I find encouragement from such a sense of close kinship, realising the two writers truly are my companions and mentors, apparently silent but talking to me from the depths of reading. Cristina: ‘I have so much to tell! I’d nearly say, *to rescue*...: things only I feel I have seen and felt to the point of suffering, and that absolutely must not die’.<sup>313</sup> Writing in order to *rescue*; to rescue things I know only I have seen, and felt, to the point of suffering; things that absolutely must not die. This is why I write, this is how I was summoned by Cristina: having suffered through her words, that absolutely must not die. This kinship is special, irreproducible, and it would perish if I do not attend to it. Ways of connecting, singular because of their distinctive grounds, must be told because they would otherwise wither. This is not arbitrary: it is necessary.

The scholar Fiona Mackintosh remarks that ‘in the late sixties and up to her death [...] Pizarnik subjects herself to rigorous self-editing and censorship, whilst – and as a direct consequence of – going beyond her previous self-imposed limits in terms of genre [...] What she is wrestling with, having been the “poet of the ineffable”, is her increasing need

---

<sup>313</sup> De Stefano, p. 34.

for a “new poetics” which will express her tortuously evolving and contradictory notions of the literary [...]. But in her literary context, [...] with the largely hostile reception of friends and literary critics alike, there is as yet no place for such expression. Pizarnik therefore simultaneously censors “unfitting” aspects of her “new poetics”, whilst resenting and writing against her own censorship’.<sup>314</sup> She censored her intentions even despite her writing, torn between the need for a new form, and that which is not allowed, or publishable, or easily understood in the literary scene of her time. She wanted her words to be disagreeable; as reported in the 2013 documentary *Alejandra* by Ernesto Ardito and Virna Molina, she wanted to disappear in language.<sup>315</sup>

How can I tell you about the *Condesa* and dismiss the expected, canonical frameworks? They weigh so heavily, the pressure of having to read all Bataille, and Sade, and Sacher-Masoch, and Deleuze on Sade and Sacher-Masoch, and Bataille on Sade, and, and...<sup>316</sup> before even daring to approach this small book of Alejandra’s. I thought I had nothing to say about it and I was not convinced that the canonical frameworks, expected to be read by default, would allow me to understand her work. In other words: how do I choose to spend my reading time? What do I choose to embrace and to set aside, in research? How else is it possible to write when dismissing the immediate references to a theme? I decided to reject the very idea of a theme to which given references should be attached, and to encounter Alejandra’s book not as theme but as singular utterance, to do so on my own terms, which are not void but full of *other* references, and see where this might take me;

---

<sup>314</sup> Fiona Mackintosh, ‘Self-Censorship and New Voices in Pizarnik’s Unpublished Manuscripts’, *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, Vol. 87, 4, 2010, pp. 509–535. DOI: [10.1080/14753820.2010.483141](https://doi.org/10.1080/14753820.2010.483141) [Accessed 15 June 2019].

<sup>315</sup> *Alejandra*, dir. by Ernesto Ardito and Virna Molina, 2013, <https://vimeo.com/groups/356111/videos/55576286> [Accessed 15 November 2019].

<sup>316</sup> See Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. by Mary Dalwood, London: Penguin, 2012 [*L’Érotisme*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1957]; Sade, *Opere*, ed. by Paolo Caruso, Milano: Mondadori, 1976; Gilles Deleuze, ‘Coldness and Cruelty’ and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, ‘Venus in Furs’, in *Masochism*, New York, NY: Zone Books, 1989.

to become, as Alejandra wrote, a ‘double reader, [...] who reads badly and at once captures important details which appear surreptitiously’.<sup>317</sup> The question which moved the heart of my study, the one which I could not ask while engulfed in Bataille, and Sade, and Deleuze, and Deleuze on Sade, and Bataille on Sade, deafened by the roar of their reasoning and their loud signals of authority, was how the book sounded to me, in my constellation of non-canonical references built around Alejandra in my singular history of reading, at once tracing and retracing her own readings. How does this writing sound through the small amplification system of my reading, rather than through the massive wall of amplifiers that a name such as BATAILLE mounts in the imagination the very moment I hear it? What sort of voices can I hear, if I want to place mine with hers? Mine that is so faint, barely amplified? What is this way of approaching the work telling me? What does Alejandra say to me? I cannot hear her voice if I tune in Bataille for what he represents. The evidence I can give for my failure in using Bataille to understand Alejandra is my restlessness, the discomfort with which I am left, the sense that something is not quite there, the same ‘something more and something else than words’ that made Alejandra restless and uncomfortable. A reference to Bataille may help my study to be more immediately categorised but it does not do much *for my practice of reading, listening, and writing*, for my understanding of the faint signals I receive from her, and with them, my unease in approaching her. It does nothing for my learning to be with that unease, that restlessness that always prompts me to write and with it, to find my language, to inhabit the material that generates it, to tune into that secret and intimate hum in which I heard the echo of my words.

---

<sup>317</sup> Pizarnik, *Diarios*, p. 797.

Alejandra was lonely and longed for others. She writes of ‘a zone of purest affection not concerned with understanding, but with the exchange of warmth. Ephemeral like the joy in exhilaration or in a song. You feel warmth and are dispensed of the I and its cursed grievances’.<sup>318</sup> In the *Condesa* she filled her void by being other, by selecting and quoting and editing and translating and writing and erasing and rewriting. There is an overflow in her writing, bringing a dizziness in the attempt to experience, as *we*, all the writing she can bear, in a manner that screams for kinship. This appears in her seamless reading and quoting and appropriating – in the tone, the *œuvre* that exceeds the individual works, the humming of voices that holds them together. Her self merges with others, in the constant inhabitation of other words and works. Her ‘lack of faith in the creative imagination’ is in fact ‘a desire to frequent modes of expression’ derived from others.<sup>319</sup> Her yearning to disappear inside language was accompanied by a writing that took shape as a giant switchboard that would send readers outside itself and across to the other writers she inhabited, to her voices. She copied to be able to write, to find her words in a tension. She did not copy to randomly and superficially imitate: she copied from the writers with whom she felt akin, whose necessary words might prompt a transformation – Lautréamont and Nerval, for example. ‘I spent this week copying pages from *Maldoror*. Is rhetorical perfection possible in an eroded mind? See Lautréamont (Blanchot’s commentary) and Nerval (most pure style). In both: shift between classic style and convulsive background’.<sup>320</sup>

I no longer regret being unable at the time to write about Alejandra. If there were not things that writing withholds, I would stop seeking the limits of its doing, the rotating

---

<sup>318</sup> Pizarnik, *Diarios*, p. 718.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 743.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 535. See also: ‘Initiation in the job of the copyist,’ p. 750, and: ‘I think I’m going to start to rewrite the Chants’, p. 815.



movements that deepen. Now I read her words as a commentary to mine, in a reversal of time, in the deafening roar of that diary entry in which she mentioned the ‘need to write in prose, and absolute impossibility of narrating anything’.<sup>321</sup> With Alejandra, who once wrote about the vacuous urge to write prose, I give shape to the impossibility of narrating anything, in prose; read what is not there, transform the same speechless substance into a different state, sublimate it – like Jelinek does to Walser, like Calasso does to Benn, like Pasolini does to Lucian, like Duncan does to H.D., all of them shaping critical writing akin to disturbed transmissions, to choral song, to poetries out of sync. I had to find my voice with Alejandra’s, as she was similarly haunted by her subjects to the point of speechlessness, writing through them toward their own chimeras. This is chimeric writing, criticism as kinship.

I could only start writing when I drew my attention to the fact that Alejandra moves me toward what I do not know. Like a voice I was tuning into, I did not have to be concerned with defining what it is, but what it does, how it summons me: my encounter with her book, my *Magic Door*, all the elements that can be brought about if I raise the eyes from the text as topic and broaden the approach to what exists around it, in conversation, as encounter. Then the issue is not about writing with my voice, but tuning into voices: to move from the smothering of the singular voice, the smothering of I, into the chorality of *we*. Then I hear the howl of pain when Alejandra felt the dissonance in her voice, the self-censorship of one who did not write as expected, did not write novels but short or many-layered chimeric texts of exaggeration, irreverence, and parodic twists. With Alejandra I want to smother and silence the loud chorus of canonical literature, I want that unison of understanding gasp and choke. I want to start again from other sounds, from the deepest

---

<sup>321</sup> Pizarnik, *Diarios*, p. 821.

entombment of Sunn O)))’s track *Báthory Erzsébeth* sounding the enclosed voice of perfection smothered for good, never accomplished, the singer literally enclosed in a box, and in yearning, nearly breathless, nearly.<sup>322</sup>

*Breathless* is the title of Allen S. Weiss’s book on early recording technology, voice, and poetry, in which he writes of Charles Cros’s poetry collection *The Necklace of Claws* and of the recorded voice entrapped like a cameo, both of which appear in my text ‘The Stain of Stein’ to mark the impossibility of permanence in recording. Entrapped was the countess, who became for Alejandra a figure of silence to pass through, to shed the skin of expected forms, and begin to think of other forms and possibilities for writing. In *Music and the Ineffable* Jankélévitch makes a distinction between the untellable and the ineffable, the former sterile and attached to death, the latter endlessly open, a form of enchantment.<sup>323</sup> For Weiss, however, a traffic with death is at play even in the dimension of the ineffable:<sup>324</sup> this is the specific site of Pizarnik’s relation with Penrose and Bathory, a death-in-the-ineffable which will move her to talk again, holding the excess, the unheard inside.

Writing in her journal about Cristina, Alejandra states that her friend ‘practices – in rigorously traditional schemes – a nearly unheard-of literary genre: the “essay-tale” ’. Consider this expression, ‘essay-tale’, replacing ‘fairy’ with ‘essay’, yet retaining a sense of timelessness and magic, the same sense Alejandra would explore in her *Shadow-Texts* as direct homages to Michaux, in her lasting engagement with Nerval’s *Aurélia* and with Lautréamont’s *Maldoror*, and in a handful of prose works that efface and scratch the

---

<sup>322</sup> To record the track ‘Báthory Erzsébeth’ in Sunn O)))’s album *Black One*, vocalist Malefic had himself locked inside a casket. Sunn O))), *Black One*, Southern Lord, 2005 [on CD].

<sup>323</sup> Jankélévitch, pp. 71–72.

<sup>324</sup> Weiss, pp. 65–66.

works of earlier years, a way for her to aim farther than polish. These are coruscating, tormented, parodic works of baroque sensibility, in which language overflows and is not enough to contain life.<sup>325</sup> Alejandra constantly undermined what seemed, in her journals, a pressure from the outside to become a recognised respected writer, in contrast to her inmost urge toward plundering and parodying as forms of critical reading. An uneasy motion of self-censorship is at play, in a battle between what should be achieved by a Writer, and where her writing was leading her. I take it as a motive to assert the fullness of chimeric writing as site of encounter, fracture, and transformation, instead of completeness and flawlessness. Writing criticism appears in Alejandra's words as inhabitation of and concealment in the works of others, and as conversation with them.

The scholar María Negroni has written of the *Condesa* in relation to gothic imagery and sensibility as explorations of the forbidden, proposing a parallel with the figure of Dame Melancholy in relation to boredom and black bile.<sup>326</sup> I want to read the *Condesa* otherwise: not as dame but as *daimon*, the Greek figure of necessity who interrupts the daily flow of activities and reminds each person of who they are. Alejandra employed recurring daimonic figures such as the garden, the lilacs, the blue dress, to manifest necessary relations with ideas encountered as a title, an image, a word, as if they had been made for her only – Cristina called it ‘the heraldic fable’ inside each of us.<sup>327</sup> Of one of these recurring images she said: ‘I don’t want to talk about the garden, I want to see it. [...] [I]n spite of it being impossible, above all because it’s impossible’.<sup>328</sup> To see the

---

<sup>325</sup> Apart from *The Bloody Countess*, these comprise ‘La bucanera de Pernambuco o Hilda la polígrafa’, ‘Los perturbados entre lilas’, both published in *Prosa completa*.

<sup>326</sup> María Negroni, ‘Melancolía y cadaver textual’, *INTI: Revista de literatura hispánica*, 52–53, Otoño 2000-Primavera 2001, pp. 169–178 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23287084> [Accessed 21 June 2019]

<sup>327</sup> Campo, *Gli imperdonabili*, p. 113.

<sup>328</sup> ‘Some Keys to Alejandra Pizarnik: An Interview’, trans. by Emily Cooke, *Music & Literature*, 6, 2015, p. 60.

countess as Alejandra's *daimon* means she was in constant relation with that figure, rather than wanting to resolve it into something else or dismiss it. The figure whose heartbeat is heard deeply and consistently throughout her writing is death, death as an attribute of the soul, not a thing to dispose of. Alejandra's constant engagement with the countess opens possibilities to herself to operate with the image she is given. To feel it does not mean to be it, but to learn to live with it; what changes are her ways of connecting with it, through writing and in writing.

'Is writing always wounding, bleeding?', I once asked in a text on Dinesen's 'The Blank Page', in which Pizarnik's name appeared as a premonition of these pages, resounding in deep blue capital letters before I knew what it was writing toward.<sup>329</sup> My anxiety in not finding my words for Alejandra was not the superficial anxiety of non-authenticity, but the opposite: I heard myself truly in her words, and was not sure how to articulate them, and myself in them. Alejandra, 8 January 1963: 'In truth, to say I is an act of faith. [...] When the poet does not enunciate or erect herself to celebrate or curse, the silence of pure despair appears, of the wait without outcome. Yet, it is also singing, it is voice, it is to tell instead of not [telling]. It is still a test of faith, the last one, that precedes the blank page'.<sup>330</sup> I do not know if Pizarnik read 'The Blank Page' but I imagine she did, as I know she read 'Echoes' from the same volume of the Danish writer's *Last Tales*. 'Echoes' is a tale of vampirism in which Pellegrina Leoni, the singer from the short story 'The Dreamers', who lost her voice and became many people, reappears. Alejandra writes about the mixed feeling of happiness and sadness she experienced in re-reading 'Echoes'.<sup>331</sup> In loops of truth and desire, of premonition and enmeshment, I want writing

---

<sup>329</sup> Cascella, 'Reading *The Blank Page*', in *Singed*, pp. 127–134.

<sup>330</sup> Pizarnik, *Diarios*, p. 546.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 721.

to hold movements, echoes, arrangements toward an understanding of what it can be when it sets thoughts and existing knowledge in motion, through reverberation. I could tell you of the day I realised my understanding of Pizarnik was locked, like a locked groove, spinning, dizzying, paralysing. My head spins as I try to write this, I fall on the floor then climb up to my chair again, repeating again: what shall I say to you? You know everything, and if I ask myself what is it that really moves me to want to write about Pizarnik, my answer is fear, the fear of getting so close to the depths of loneliness in those words that I might lose myself, and at once the pull, the inevitability of it. Not being able, and wanting to be, yearning. Out of my depth into the depths of the work, the involvement with certain themes, the fact that two sentences of Alejandra's – 'I cannot speak with my voice, but I speak with my voices,' and 'something more and something else than words' – resolved my position in writing around another emptiness. I did not write about her, but *I found her there*, marking the necessity to outline other manners of being with the words of others, to the point of being smothered like in some of the tortures of the *Condesa*. I may even start to see the range of tortures and of deaths listed in Alejandra's text as propositions to kill and smother ego-driven narratives into a different form of polyphony, torturous and tortuous. Think of the ambiguity of a uncomfortable text that sits awkwardly in the cliché of the *maudit* poet; a text that starts as review but erases nearly all of it, and goes straight into the mystery of its subject, becomes it – entangled, and grounded. The voices that accompany her are richly textured, richly texted, she is in search of a csite to assign to them, 'a literary space like a homeland, or like the hut that the lost children encounter in the forest'.<sup>332</sup>

---

<sup>332</sup> Pizarnik, *Diarios*, p. 841.

Now I read Campo's portrait of Djuna Barnes published in April 1966, and wonder if she had read Alejandra's *Condesa* which appeared earlier that year.<sup>333</sup> Cristina had recommended that Alejandra read Barnes's play *The Antiphon*, and both writers became obsessed and wrote to her.<sup>334</sup> In Cristina's portrait of Barnes I hear echoes of the *Condesa* but reach the limit of my understanding; there is barely any evidence if not a slight, veiled, faint perception. A transformation in echo, which I can offer with no proof: 'It is a portrait of an ageless woman who is throwing [...] her sepulchral elegance toward that thousand-headed Argo that she calls "the general horror of the common mouth". A portrait of a princess in chains [...] a figure stretched to make herself shadow, spectre, and adore, just like a spectre, the beautiful things deserted by man and already touched by mortal lividity: the beautifully crafted verses, the ferociously elaborated emblems, the perfect gestures, Europe. Her conversation, devoted to traffics with the great and the dead (or the mad and the saint)'.<sup>335</sup>

Voice from Alejandra, a Faintspeaker: Words. They are all they gave me. [...] My sentence. I ask for it to be revoked. How to ask that? With words. Words are my particular *absence* [...] made of language. I do not understand language and it is the only one I have. Yes, I have it but I am not it. It is like having an illness or being possessed by it without it producing any encounter [...] I write in the absence of a hand in my hand [...] This silence of the words which invade me, those I say and write, is the horror, the vertigo, pain in its purest state.<sup>336</sup>

---

<sup>333</sup> 'Una misteriosa Americana che ebbe per eraldo T. S. Eliot. Ritratto di Djuna Barnes', in *Sotto falso nome*, pp. 112–118 (1966). Zolla and Campo were among the very few who appreciated Barnes in Italy; see De Stefano, p. 147.

<sup>334</sup> Eventually Barnes asked Cristina to translate her work, but Cristina was too ill by then. See De Stefano.

<sup>335</sup> Campo, *Sotto falso nome*, pp. 112–113.

<sup>336</sup> Pizarnik, *Diarios*, p. 569.

I may not have written about Alejandra's *Condesa* as I should have, but I have transformed the vertigo of my relationship with my speechlessness through her, as if she was indicating the necessity for me to outline another manner of writing; of being with the words of others. Writing is, as she wrote in another journal entry, 'anomalously fragmented' but in my reading she is not fragmented, she is a many-voiced thinker.<sup>337</sup> Her 'lack of faith in the creative imagination' is in fact 'a desire to frequent modes of expression' derived from others, yearning to disappear inside language and directing readers outside it, over to the other writers she inhabited, to *her voices*.<sup>338</sup> She copied and rewrote to be able to write, to find her words in yearning, in excess. She wrote that melancholy is a question of dissonance so I want to sing a melancholy cover song of the *Condesa*, dissonant as it may be, out of tune, but in spirit, singing that comfortable self-reflection is deathly, something else is at work, neither safe nor sane, mad impurities, chimeras.

---

<sup>337</sup> Pizarnik, *Diarios*, p. 663.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 743.

## Imaginary Conversation

**Alejandra Pizarnik, Cristina Campo, D.C.**

D.C.: Today I feel faded, like someone who is about to say something, or ask a question, there, there, on the tip of the tongue, and continues to forget it.

A.P.: Like someone who is about to give an answer, there, there, and it is a terrible one.

D.C.: I am in *The Cloud of Unknowing*...

C.C.: ...whose very presence makes knowing possible in the space of a yearning, with 'delightful stirring, naked intention [...]. [B]eat on that thick cloud of unknowing with a sharp dart of longing love, and do not give up, whatever happens'.<sup>339</sup> The only true stirring is humble and naked, like Weil's desire for nothing, a naked purpose.

A.P.: This I know: I do not create, I put into circulation.

C.C.: You want writing to resonate with the subject's tone, rather than cover and smooth it with its own. This is akin to what in Hinduism is known as *rasa*. René Daumal, who in the 1930s and 1940s studied Sanskrit grammar, wrote of reading as transformation, and of *rasa* as the quality of a text which is not bound to structure or literal interpretation, but

---

<sup>339</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing*, p. 28.



is perceived as ‘excess of sense’ by ‘the one who savours’: you can only know it by sensing it.<sup>340</sup>

A.P.: Your prose, C.C., when you translated that most visionary passage in Robert de Boron’s *Graal*, eating the heart alive, your prose this morning reads as if it were your flesh, your arms, your eyes.

D.C.: I’m thinking now of the link between reading and eating in ancient Chinese thought, as reported by the sinologist François Jullien: the reader ‘is engaged not so much in an act of decoding meaning [...] as in incorporating a substance (the words of the text) that, having started out as exterior to him, then exerts its influence through him in a process of slow and gradual infiltration [...]’. Criticism, Jullien continues, dispenses with textual analysis, and counts instead ‘on the effect of our assimilation of [the text]: the reader is simply advised to “intone” [the text] many times, to “repeat” it in the mouth, to “chew” it in silence’.<sup>341</sup>

A.P.: And the taste of reading lingers...

C.C.: Because each word has a sense to be savoured, which is not the literal meaning, but a constellation of psychic material, suggestions, associations, it is difficult to read and write, unless in attunement. You will remember, in his translation of the Vedic *Hymn to Man* – one of the most difficult and obscure in the *Rg Veda* because one of the simplest,

---

<sup>340</sup> René Daumal, ‘Per avvicinare l’arte poetica indù’, in *Lanciato dal pensiero*, trans. by Svevo D’Onofrio, Alessandro Grossato, and Claudio Rugafiori, Milano: Adelphi, 2019, pp. 110–111 [‘Pour approcher l’art poétique hindou, *Mesures*, II, 15 avril 1938]. Translations by D.C..

<sup>341</sup> François Jullien, ‘Flavor-Beyond-the-Flavorful’, in *In Praise of Blandness: Proceeding from Chinese Thought and Aesthetics*, New York, NY: Zone Books, 2004, p. 103 [*Eloge de la fadeur*, Arles: Editions Philippe Picquier, 1991].

in that simplicity proper of spirits who get aflame – Daumal wrote a number of words underneath each word, indicating ‘the main images or ideas evoked by the word [...] beyond its main meaning. Both for association of sense – of etymology – *and of sounds*’.<sup>342</sup> The fact that Weil learned Sanskrit from Daumal tightens the loop of our understanding, D.C.: it makes you and I, my words and yours, more and more *we*.

D.C.: Remember, our relationship arises as much from our words as from our moments of silence.

C.C.: Rewrite and modulate my words to their death, D.C., make them ring: they are not themselves, in their intensity, unless they are transformed and linger in your readings, in your rewritings.

A.P.: I must confess, Weil gives me fear. A fear similar to the one experienced when you wait endlessly in an empty room.

D.C.: A significant emptiness informs the words I am trying to write, drenched in experiences of reading: all and nothing. It is the core that moves, beats, allows disparate materials to be connected, incomplete and loaded with history as they are...

C.C: ...ruins.

A.P.: Ruins of the space and time of our thinking. How to account for them when we write, how to make each page heavy with the time of our silence? They do not exist in a

---

<sup>342</sup> Daumal, p. 232.

void, the very fact of writing them as they are written, the way in which they appear, reveal constellations of materials, kinships heard and found among them. I have been dreaming of a form of criticism entangled.

C.C.: This criticism, which we now call chimeric, does not suddenly erupt one fine day: it happens day after day, while attending to the words of others. As I said before, study is the ability to open oneself to the presence of things and connect them. Nothing, as D.C. may once have said under different circumstances, is noting with the added h of a breath. The cloud of unknowing which hovers on your pages is luminous blackness.

D.C.: You are the same, but your relationship with your *imago mundi* necessarily changes across time, so you take on many forms, many voices, many names. You two have many: your pseudonyms, your characters, your voices, you too. When I first read myself addressed as *Daniella* instead of *Daniela*, in a letter, it was unsettling as if a spectre floated over me for a second, reminding me of not me. Later I realised I could be many people. Like Pellegrina Leoni, like your many names, I realised I could dissolve in literature. The realisation that I could be many voices – that self-in-language is groundless but not without grounds, and takes form in a malleable realm of something more and something else than words, where I could be beyond myself – came to me at an early age, at the time when I learned to read and write. Learning the alphabet, learning to put together words on a page as fixed signs, happened in the same span of months when I became aware of a different accent: not the vowels of my parents, the clipped and closed *e*'s of Southern Italy, but the more open, rounded sounds of the region around Rome. When spoken out loud, my first name was in fact two names: *Daniéla*, *Danièla*. There I was, groundless, but not without grounds, hearing my two selves, marvelling at what

words could do and be as they were pronounced and transformed, rather than what they were, in fixity. The revelation that the same name could sound in two different ways, at home and at school – *at least* in two different ways, and who knew how many more – was not perceived as a crisis, but as a spur for understanding the transformative drive of sound, the mobility I could find while reaching out through listening, outside my *self*.

A.P.: *Daniéla, Danièla.*

D.C.: I could be a trickster, at times I could hide, or I could be many people. Leiris reports a similar experience at the beginning of his autobiography. He's a child, and has just been told that he has pronounced a word in the wrong way. For the first time he becomes aware of 'language, whose life outside me, filled with strangeness, I had been allowed to glimpse [...] I was dazed, seized by a sort of vertigo. Because this word, which I had said incorrectly and had just discovered was not really what I had thought it was before then, enabled me to sense obscurely – through the sort of deviation or displacement it impressed on my mind – how articulated language, the arachnean tissue of my relations with others, went beyond me, thrusting its mysterious antennae in all directions'.<sup>343</sup> Leiris's autobiography is entitled *La règle du jeu – jeu*, game, is also heard as *je*, I: the rule of the game is also the rule of the I, autobiography is not tied to claims of authenticity but it is, from the outset, a game, its rules laid out through the sliding, ambiguous, arachnean tissue of sound. Who's the I here? JeuJe, Igame, the trickster, the many-voiced, many voices spinning on and around the singular, like someone once said: groundless, but not without grounds.

---

<sup>343</sup> Leiris, *Rules of the Game*, p. 6.

A.P.: C., you did not even fully own one of your pseudonyms, you shared it with the person in the world you loved the most.

D.C.: In the same way, I share my initials with some writers and titles of books I love the most: R.C., Roberto Calasso, D.C., De Certeau, Didimo Chierico, Divine Comedy... Initials, initiate, begin: I try to initiate more conversations, to augment my enmeshment, as the arachnean tissue of language spreads out its antennae of understanding in many directions. Karen Blixen had many pseudonyms, my favourite one is Isak Dinesen, Isak, 'the one who laughs'. I laugh too.

A.P.: Some time ago I read Dinesen's story 'Echoes'. I am not sure if it is happy or sad.

D.C.: You heard echoes of yourself in that tale of lost and stolen voices. Did you know that the same character, Pellegrina, had appeared twenty-three years earlier in another story by Dinesen, 'The Dreamers'? Did you know she too wanted to become many people, having lost her voice? In a reverse echo, A., I first heard one of your voices while trying to write around another story of Dinesen's, 'The Blank Page': it was my initial, unheralded attempt at speculating on concealment in writing. The mystery of that text lies there, in presence and concealment, the transmission of voices beyond self, and the singularity, the embodiment of a telling. You were there as a passing premonition, A., long before I truly met you, your voices, ours. Duncan wrote that he took thought from H.D.'s thought, took heart in her heart, and realised the world of her poetry was a matrix, in which and through which he lived. My conversation with you is also a matrix: the form of the experience I have had of my encounters with your words, even before I knew, was

transformed from internal dialogue to external conversation. I am telling you what you told me.

C.C.: Better to circulate and use intelligent thoughts put forward by others, than to produce poor thoughts on one's own. We echo and copy, in reading, in writing. It is ridiculous to behave as if behind a literary work or criticism there was a pure objective truth to which everyone attends and is in service of.

A.P.: With my writing I never thought of making my life better, but to transform it. A shattering energy makes things move where they are tired, its impetus diffuses germs of fascination.

C.C.: Formulate your words in the most merciless way, as only your words will remain.

D.C.: I worry for you sometimes.

C.C.: My solitude is my method, there I can truly hear the written words of others.

A.P.: Why did I choose parody and self-parody, you ask? To take me out of myself, out of that figure of silence that became attached to me. Sometimes the silence I had long hosted in my poems was so loud, I could only laugh. At myself. In convulsions. In stillness. At that point I had to let go of virtuosity, to break the boundaries of what is expected, the claims that were being made on my work. It was not an episodic fit, I continued to write that way, laughing. Charles Baudelaire called the exaggeration that generates laughter a 'profound and mysterious element' of human nature that 'no

philosophy has been able to scrutinise'. On the same page he quotes Joseph de Maistre: 'The sage does not laugh if not trembling'.<sup>344</sup> Laughter is not joy. Joy exists *per se*, laughter is a symptom, dual and contradictory: it exposes a double nature, and for this, it gives the power to be at once oneself, and another.<sup>345</sup>

D.C.: A chimera. Does Chimera laugh? When I was alive I wrote of the laugh of the Chimera, it was an attempt at parodying Cixous's 'The Laugh of the Medusa' while also, mockingly, saying *écriture chimerique*.

A.P.: Hilarious.

C.C.: Pathetic.

D.C.: Chimeric. Didn't I suffer, for my laughter. Suffering (as in *pathein*) and laughter were at the heart of the Eleusinian Mysteries. It was laughter that allowed Demeter to regain life from the cold stillness of the 'stone that does not laugh', and to transform her yearning into a regained presence; the world hasn't changed, she has. *Chacun sa chimère*.  
To each their Chimera.

C.C.: *Chacun sa chimère*, you said?

---

<sup>344</sup> Charles Baudelaire, 'Dell'essenza del riso', in *Scritti sull'arte*, trans. by Giuseppe Guglielmi and Enzo Raimondi, Torino: Einaudi, 1992, p. 140 ['De l'essence du rire', *Portefeuille*, 12 août 1855]. Translations by D.C..

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

D.C.: Ch-ch, Sh-sh.

C.C.: That is the title of a petrifying prose-poem by Baudelaire in which the narrator encounters a crowd of curved desolate men, each bent under the weight of a Chimera with her claws around their chest, her head above each head like an ancient helmet, and moves on ‘prompted by an irresistible need to walk’, considering the beast (perhaps, also, the best) part of themselves ‘with the resigned face of those condemned to yearn forever’.<sup>346</sup>

D.C.: When I first read that prose poem, it seemed like a description of an imaginary painting by Gustave Moreau, laden with a heavy symbolic spell and the menace of muddy oil paint punctuated with small slits of bright cerulean, gold, and crimson. I thought of the heavy threat, the dread I have sometimes in writing when I become very aware of the overspill, the excess, the lack of limit.

A.P.: The people in Baudelaire’s piece are ‘tired and serious and grey’.<sup>347</sup> This reminds me of you, D.C. You do not look healthy these days.

D.C.: I am exhausted, you know. Consumed by study, consumed by yearning.

C.C.: Those people looked as if the beast had become part of them, and continued to walk on ‘with the resigned physiognomy of those condemned to always hope’.<sup>348</sup> Diabolic

---

<sup>346</sup> Baudelaire, ‘A ciascuno la sua Chimera’, in *Piccoli poemi in prosa*, trans. by Nicola Muschitiello, Milano: BUR, 1990, pp. 84–87 [‘Chacun sa Chimère’, in *Petits poèmes en prose, Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. 4, Paris: Michel Lévy, 1869]. Translations by D.C..

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.



Charles, D.C., conjoining hope with condemnation. And you, with your exhaustion in the hope and condemnation of study.

D.C.: I'd rather carry a heavy Chimera on my shoulders and walk on, than become like the narrator at the end of the story, overwhelmed with indifference and heavier than those people and their monstrous Chimeras. Chimeric writing must be ugly when necessary. It must carry the form and sense of the exhaustion and the impossibility of completeness. This is why I never wrote a monograph. The dangers of falling into monomania...

A.P.: The anxiety of ownership... too much for your feeble heart.

D.C.: I am more drawn to making connections among disparate materials, and diffusing them. And if certain words or turns of phrase do not inspire repulsion, I'd rather abandon my pursuit.

C.C.: And yet...

D.C.: ...yet although monstrous, chimeric writing is not afraid of beauty.

A.P.: Hush now, listen. Can you hear this hum? It is the subtle noise of prose, the thinking that accompanies reading, follows it, and precedes it. You should sleep now, for some time. I will bring you dreams of pure fruits that go crazy, of mad impurities.

## A Deranged Essay: Mad Impurities

By Cristina Rovina

In her experiment entitled ‘First Vision’, D.C. took criticism as artifice creature that makes mistakes, impure, inside her writing. She took Calasso’s words on Gottfried Benn, in the essay entitled ‘Cicatrice di smalto’ (‘Enamel Scar’), replacing his references to Benn’s works with references to Calasso’s books.<sup>349</sup> Benn himself filled his essays with secret quotations, which hypnotise readers in their elliptical movements. D.C. demonstrated how when Calasso writes of Benn he is, at the same time, writing about his own writing and wanting to be other than himself, not one without the other, in a constant process of individuation that is a process of constellation. The chimeric desire of the writer conjoins them: Calasso yearns for Benn and writes, about Benn and about himself. Literature is understood, and read, through chimeric yearning as transformation and concealment, at times disappearance. It has become clear by now in my reading, that in her later years D.C. wrote with chimeric desire for the following section, appearing on page 382 of her Italian edition of Calasso’s *La rovina di Kasch* and on page 339 of the most recent English translation, *The Ruin of Kasch*:

‘There I’ll find the voices of the dead [...] Thought: go and scatter it, tear it to pieces, so that it will be reminded of its furtive and lethal existence. O Literature, how many unfortunate functions were attributed to you [...] couldn’t you, every now and then, give hospitality to that being that no longer reads philosophical texts and is still silent in

---

<sup>349</sup> Calasso, ‘Cicatrice di smalto’, in *I quarantanove gradini*, pp. 475–486.

algorithms? Then perhaps it might once again be said: “I threw my life at all the winds of heaven, but I kept my thought. It is little – it is all, it is nothing – it is life itself”<sup>350</sup>

It is also undisputed that D.C. wrote with chimeric yearning – uncomfortable, not entirely resolved – for Calasso’s first book, entitled *L’impuro folle* (*The Mad Impure*), published in 1974 and not translated in English to date.

I want to study D.C.’s chimeric yearning (that is reading, writing, thinking) in its rotational spin; to hold her desire for a short sequence of words, and for a book that was *nothing* for most of her readers because not available in English; to prove that this desire for nothing to say is the most profound site of attention, as Weil wrote: ‘[S]imply to desire it, not to try to accomplish it [...] Attention alone – that attention which is so full that the “I” disappears – is required of me’.<sup>351</sup> This is when D.C. disappears. This is where Cristina’s need to lose herself in pseudonyms arose, to reach Weil’s ‘point of eternity in the soul’.<sup>352</sup> Once it is reached, there is ‘nothing more to do but to take care of it, for it will grow of itself like a seed. It is necessary to surround it with an armed guard, waiting in stillness’.<sup>353</sup> Attention must not be attachment, Weil emphasises. The focus should be on the study, not the reward; ‘to desire in the void, without any wishes’, a void ‘fuller than all fullnesses’.<sup>354</sup>

---

<sup>350</sup> Calasso, *The Ruin of Kasch*, p. 339.

<sup>351</sup> Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 118.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Do not go lightly with Weil's words. As Calasso stated they are ordeals, they need time, they are impossible words at once ancient, immediate, abused, difficult, those same words she had encountered in the inexhaustible texts to which she kept returning: Upanishad, Bhagavad Gita, the Presocratics.<sup>355</sup> Words such as love, necessity, desire, good, beauty, limit, sacrifice, void – I must suffer through them, weigh each one of them, before taking on the responsibility to write them. It is frightening to consider writing them, they can so easily be mistaken for commonplace because they are so fundamental. Dare I write beauty? Dare I write limit? Dare I write void? If I do, I step into the fire, to come out of it transformed. Weil's desire with no wishes or reward resonates with Calasso's insistence on *ardour* as the impetus for knowledge in Vedic culture, and on the practice of *tapas* which was at once asceticism and heat, method, and devastating blaze.<sup>356</sup>

I want to stay there, deeper inside the mad impurities and the ardour of repeated readings of D.C. reading Calasso reading Campo reading Weil, shifting the site of the commentary from a motionless mark in the margins to a movement inside the work, and with it, into its substance, in change, in the same place and not quite so, csiting.

To which literary genre does *L'impuro folle* belong? Calasso calls it absolute literature, 'something which had certainly sparked in Lautréamont, in Mallarmé, but always too lyrical. In Gide's *Marshlands* perhaps'.<sup>357</sup> He invited to direct the gaze toward 'Mandel'stam, or Marina Cvetaeva when she writes of her mother and the piano. This is the lineage. [...] [T]hey are all *talking about the same thing*. Which does not mean they

---

<sup>355</sup> Calasso, 'L'ordalia delle parole impossibili', in *I quarantanove gradini*, pp. 361–365.

<sup>356</sup> Calasso, *L'ardore*, p. 133.

<sup>357</sup> Calasso, 'Cicatrice di smalto', in *I quarantanove gradini*, p. 477.

are eager to put a name to it. Protected by a variety of masks, they know that the literature they're talking about is not to be recognised by its observance of any theory, but rather by a certain vibration or luminescence of the sentence (or paragraph, or page, or chapter, or whole book even) [...] That doesn't mean it is self-referential, as a new species of bigots would have it [...] It is omnivorous, like the stomachs of those animals that are found to contain nails, pot shards, and handkerchiefs – sometimes intact too, insolent reminders that something did happen down there, in that place made up of multiple, divergent, and poorly defined *realia*, which is the riverbed of all literature'.<sup>358</sup>

In a plotless book of not-nonfiction that cannot be summarised, itemised, -ised, the words in excess can only move in other ways, as commentary is formed in the sense of *making with*. The root of the word commentary is in the Latin *comminisci*: to create, to devise.<sup>359</sup> It stands for the poetic act that goes with the work of reading, a motion of making something with the material of study, transforming.

*L'impuro folle* is a book about... no: *about* is not the appropriate term. In Calasso's books, in chimeric writing as I understand it from D.C.'s notes, *about* is never appropriate. It suggests separation, analysis appended, while any attempts at drawing an outline, a summary, end up in the frustration of having nothing concrete to hold or account for. This is why D.C. did not want to reduce her subjects to case studies: there is a claim for accomplishment, result, samples under glass as case studies, while she wanted to shatter the glass, be and speak with the works she studied, in their doing and undoing – Gaspara

---

<sup>358</sup> Calasso, *Literature and the Gods*, pp. 175–176.

<sup>359</sup> Nicola Masciandaro, 'Becoming Spice: Commentary As Geophilosophy', *Collapse*, VI, Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2010, p. 45.

Stampa's 'all and nothing', D.C.'s chimera, where writing and reading are not *about* but *inside* and *with*, where D.C. found herself exactly where she started, understanding deeper how she was there, the manners of being, the ways of perceiving, the sympathies which drew her to engage with certain materials. A transformation occurs: the Eleusinian 'suffering through' an experience (of reading) where the achievement is not in a list or in concrete results, but in reaching a manner of being, a way of perceiving, a transformation. It is, like in Apuleius' *Metamorphosis*, a transformation into oneself. The process, D.C. wrote, is one of individuation. It uses other books as the materials that allow such transformation, and shows that such material is circular, recurring.

A detailed study of the subject of *L'impuro folle*, Daniel Paul Schreber – the German judge and Court of Appeal president who chronicled his nervous breakdown at the end of the nineteenth century in *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness*, an account of psychosis through episodes of torture and voice-hearing, 'nerve-language' and ray emanations, cosmic turmoil, and sexual transformations that appeared in 1903 and that led Sigmund Freud into developing his theories around paranoia – was never the point for D.C..<sup>360</sup> Having had enough of content, she was content with having gone through Calasso's book as primary source, on her own terms, hers not all hers because entangled with more voices, and now, with mine. To enter Calasso's book, read through D.C., I shall not consider its content, but its title and its blurb.

---

<sup>360</sup> Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memorie di un malato di nervi*, ed. by R. Calasso, trans. by Federico Scardanelli, Milano: Adelphi, 1974 [*Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken*, Leipzig: 1903].

*The Mad Impure*, mad impurities in a study of chimeras. It seems right, prophetic even: *The Pure Products Go Crazy* is the title of James Clifford's introduction to *The Predicament of Culture*, published over a decade after Calasso's, in which he merges ethnographical, museological, and literary analysis to study various conditions of uprootedness and displacement as forms of dwelling in the world that question given systems of authenticity. Quoted from William Carlos Williams, the phrase 'the pure products go crazy' marks for Clifford a state of rootlessness, of ruin, that leads him to speak of self-ethnography rather than autobiography: writing the self as 'perpetually displaced' and interfered with 'a present of memories, dreams, politics, daily life', never rounded, whole, and detached from its *milieu*.<sup>361</sup> Calasso's *Mad Impure* is likewise an ethnography in which the impure self is made of literature and goes crazy; in which madness is the disruptive force that merges self and other, a disposition open to the impulse to collapse into the material the self resonates with and becomes, chimerically.

Calasso, the legendary editor of Italian publishing house Adelphi, made an art of blurb-writing. His short texts, printed on the inner flaps of the Adelphi covers, are as renowned for many generations of Italian readers as the books they introduced.<sup>362</sup> D.C. wrote extensively on her fascination with Adelphi, and on Calasso's blurbs – marginal and enigmatic texts *par excellence*, which place any introductory remarks away from the body of the text, toward its material boundaries.<sup>363</sup> The blurb of *L'impuro folle* is significant to understand the book's chimeric qualities, and it is worth translating some excerpts along with Calasso's blurb of Schreber's *Memoirs*, published by Adelphi the same year.

---

<sup>361</sup> James Clifford, 'The Pure Products Go Crazy', in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988, pp. 1–17.

<sup>362</sup> Calasso was involved with the Italian publishing house Adelphi since 1962, and was its editorial director from 1971 until his death in 2021.

<sup>363</sup> Cascella, 'The Secret Euphoria of Reading', in *Singed*, pp. 113–119.

*L'impuro folle* is presented as a commentary that aims to reveal hidden threads which remained unspoken, yet ran through the *Memoirs* like an invisible current whose effects were palpable, and present. '[A] contemporary oblique chronicler has laid out an initial report of such facts, which, so far, history books dared not mention'<sup>364</sup> – a statement of ambiguity around who is speaking ('a contemporary ambiguous chronicler') and around the nature of the text (facts in a work of fiction). Writing on Leiris's *L'Afrique fantôme* Clifford notes that while describing his work of self-ethnography as an account of 'facts, nothing but facts', the French writer emphasises the importance of assemblage which binds such facts together and inevitably builds another form of reality, less tangible, artificial, yet equally important.<sup>365</sup> I take, with D.C., the confusion of fact and artifice as portal into *L'impuro folle*, where the motions of transmission are more important than any stable assumptions of authorship, genre, or system. Even what is given as authentic cannot be trusted as such, Calasso insinuates – the reader will encounter 'the authentic voice of the President who talks, narrates, makes notes, reflects, oscillating between various apparitions, from the glorious one in the role of gnostic Sophia to the more sombre one of retired Saxon magistrate. [...] [H]e still wanders among us'.<sup>366</sup> The authentic voice is many-voiced, wandering in the present of reading.

The final section of the blurb is no less than a declaration of method, from which D.C. derived hers: 'The author of this book, concerned most of all with staying faithful to the news he had set out to transmit – abnormal news because, contrary to use, the news is in itself a form – could not narrate this story, contaminated since its origin, unless by following a process of continuous contamination'. The book is a transmission of news,

---

<sup>364</sup> Calasso, *L'impuro folle*, inner cover flap.

<sup>365</sup> Clifford, p. 167.

<sup>366</sup> Calasso, *L'impuro folle*, inner cover flap.



the news is the form, the form is contaminated, so its writing is contaminated too: this method forms these pages, this is chimeric writing.

I read ‘news’, the Italian *notizia*, in relation to the Latin *notitia*: knowledge that announces itself, demands to be noted, and which one gains full acquaintance with through close scrutiny, the opposite of a careless scrolling through. I want to drift now, interfere with *notizia* on a level which may seem superficial but discloses other ways of reading, and understanding. Impossible to resist the hint, as I am commenting on the writing by someone like D.C. who made a body of work from assonance, pun, and rhyme.

*La notizia intorno a Didimo Chierico (News Around Didimo Chierico)* is a short text the Italian writer Ugo Foscolo published in 1813 as an introduction to his translation of Laurence Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, where Didimo Chierico appears as semi-fictional translator. Foscolo writes of Didimo as a character who no longer wants to write, and for whom life has the ‘heat of a far-away flame’.<sup>367</sup> I find it difficult to ignore that D.C. shared her initials, and I suspect more than that, with Foscolo’s disillusioned character. Didimo also appears as the author of Foscolo’s *Didymi Clerici Prophetae minimi Hypercalypseos liber singularis (Singular Book of the Hypercalypses of Didimo Chierico, Minimal Prophet)*, a satire against corruption in the literary world, and in support of intellectual independence, written in verse in the manner of the Apocalypse, and published in 1816 in two editions: ninety-two copies for sale, and

---

<sup>367</sup> *Notizia intorno a Didimo Chierico*, 1813, [https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Notizia\\_intorno\\_a\\_Didimo\\_Chierico](https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Notizia_intorno_a_Didimo_Chierico) [Accessed November 2019]. Translation by Rovina.

twelve for Foscolo's friends.<sup>368</sup> Deemed impossible to read because of its obsolete language and obscure references, Foscolo's text holds concealment in its title (*kaliptein*, to cover, *hyper-*, exceedingly) and has a Vision as its core part, just like D.C.'s work. In the years before her disappearance, she often mentioned that she was only writing for a handful of friends, those 'twelve readers who can give attention and respond': a position not dissimilar from Didimo's, his book's few copies, and its mystifications.

Back to Calasso's book. The *notizia* around the Mad Impure, reported by the *oblique chronicler*, begins with the declaration of 'a tear in the order of the world', and follows with a distorted version that rewrites the opening pages of Schreber's book. If Pizarnik ripped Penrose's countess apart to the point of physical pain, Calasso distorted Schreber to the point of fiction. It is difficult to locate a stable narrative voice: the reader encounters an early reference to 'the celestial chronicler, the witness-actor,' the former of which may be referred to Schreber himself, the latter to the writer of the book who often falls into the words of Schreber. Notes are given on the abandonment of subjectivity, on dualism (or is it duality, in the gnostic sense of two levels of understanding not opposed to each other, but coexisting?) merged with nods to hidden knowledge. By the time I reach page 28 I am adrift, no longer sure who is writing, who is the source of information, which are conjectures around existing documents, what is document, what is documented when the material is taken from memoirs which were already an impure document. Contaminated since its origin, this chronicle cannot be told unless by further contamination, sudden changes of tone, switches in register and form: appellation, report, chorus, verse, gnostic imagery, reported speech, an oneiric vision in the manner of Jean Paul, the early Romantic

---

<sup>368</sup> Ugo Foscolo, *L'ipercalisse*, 1816, [https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/L\\_ipercalisse.html?id=2wZEAAAAYAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/L_ipercalisse.html?id=2wZEAAAAYAAJ&redir_esc=y) [Accessed November 2019]. Translation by Rovina.

poet who coated his words with a desolate air of otherworldliness and visionary convulsions. In a lunar atmosphere that suddenly haunts a handful of pages, in one of Calasso's typical anti-historical twists, Jean Paul appears as a splendid interference, stating that his only scope in life was to capture the words of others, and merge them with vagueness. For Calasso, it is a modulation of tone, rather than an exercise in quoting words. As he wrote after Cristina Campo's death, it is a manner of attuning and understanding by becoming, and much could be understood as well of Calasso's *œuvre* as a sustained *becoming* the prose of Gottfried Benn, Jules Michelet, or in this case, Schreber. After a handful of pages that report the speech of Paul Flechsig (the nerve-cutting psychiatrist who looked after Schreber, and who the judge maintained was in control of his torments) inaugurating his Rectorate at Leipzig University – I am not sure whether it is entirely or partially lifted from documents, or entirely or partially invented, and at this point it no longer matters – page 57 initiates a ruinous descent into impurity, which becomes sovereign matter of the book. Impurity in language enmeshes, while showing Schreber's reader – the ambiguous chronicler – enmeshed in language. Schreber speaks to Calasso and in doing so, the two are distinct and together, them not all them, disrupted by interference and otherness, bonded by words, by the inner voices that constitute a reading being: in this book, the voices of Jules Michelet, Sir Thomas Browne, Marianne Moore, Emily Dickinson, Tristan Corbière, Lautréamont, Arthur Rimbaud, *The Song Of Songs*, gnostic texts. At times these are arranged polyphonically, at times as soliloquies, woven into the fabric of the text, or blatantly out of sync with it, unquestionably artificial, left in their original language, mistranslated, mixed with other words drawn from a murky reservoir of literary reverie.<sup>369</sup> On page 66 Schreber is

---

<sup>369</sup> To quote is to be haunted, Calasso learned from Karl Kraus: 'Quoting for [Kraus] was a magic device first of all. Anything that is quoted was heard as a threatening hallucinatory presence', *I quarantanove gradini*, p. 168.

transformed into the gnostic Sophia: knowledge is gained after having gone through all those materials, impure and attuned, only to prompt another process, another transformation, another yearning. The more delirious and tangled the book becomes, the more as a reader I am transformed: I learn to perceive connections, and on re-reading these pages I look at words differently, I could write otherwise. At the end of the book, in a switch to a more subdued tone, Schreber appears as a retired man wandering the world, haunting places, and visiting old friends such as Tiresias, Benn's Ptolemaic, Karl Kraus. He is last seen by the author in a pub in Charing Cross, and is lastly documented among the Schizophrenic Anonymous in Canada.

In one of the few legible notes handwritten by D.C. in her copy of *L'impuro folle* I read *telesterium*, the inner temple at Eleusis in Greece where the ancient Mysteries took place. Based on the myth of Demeter and Persephone, the Mysteries were rituals from which the participants would emerge with no fear of death, and to which the initiates were sworn in agreement that no details would be divulged. I want to attempt once again a lateral reading, not through the well-established cultural lineage of the Mysteries but through an undercurrent of lower frequencies that connects knowing to going through a transformative experience – a running thread in Pasolini's *Petrolio* and in H.D.'s *Notes on Thought and Vision*, two books full of references to Eleusis, to which D.C. was drawn as they enacted various transformations of the writing self into what H.D. called a 'receiving centre', centred and many-voiced.<sup>370</sup> A busy transmission of faint signals, where I also hear echoes of Weil echoing Aristotle on the Mysteries, without directly referring to his words while quoting them: 'Suffering, teaching and transformation. What

---

<sup>370</sup> H.D., *Notes on Thought and Vision*, San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1982 (1919), p. 26.

is necessary is not that the initiated should learn something, but that a transformation should come about in them which makes them capable of receiving the teaching. *Pathos* means at the same time *suffering* (notably suffering unto death) and *modification* (notably transformation into an immortal being)<sup>371</sup> Inside the book as *telesterium*, as csite of transformation, I hear the voices of the dead, the voices of literature that hum and resound throughout Calasso's *œuvre* both as writer and as publisher, not one without the other.

Interspersed with hidden quotations and csitations, *L'impuro folle* appeared long before the Internet search made it easier and immediate to trace their references. D.C. imagined these were expected to be more difficult to trace at the time the book was published; in her unfinished notes she remarks that no indications or instructions in *L'impuro folle* point explicitly at those sources, no references are given other than those to Schreber's book. Yet the impure text swarms with other voices, encountered mostly in quotations written in other languages, and in the book's texture, tones, sudden breaks, and reprises. Contrary to normal assumptions of readability as transparency, in 1974 *L'impuro folle* demanded to be read in the inaccessibility of its sources, because of their inaccessibility: the unevenness of its texture asked the reader to perceive that something else was there, beyond the immediately available text, something whose pulse could be perceived before it could be known, and whose substance was at once there, and not entirely manifested. The opposition between being and not being, presence and absence, understood in the canon of Greek philosophy, cannot be applied to Calasso's pages – here *not being* is Vedic, not void; it is another form of presence lodged unstably in the excess of material.

---

<sup>371</sup> Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 83.

To know is the ability to see the connections between what is manifested and what is not, the tension between the two.

‘The apparent opacity of *L’impuro folle* invites me in, it is not a distancing device but it includes me, unless I expect to be told everything in one reading. I will never comprehend the entirety of Calasso’s knowledge, but I cannot let go of the experience of searching, of learning with it,’ D.C. wrote. Even if she could have interviewed Calasso in her lifetime, to ask him about the role of hidden quotes in his first book, D.C. chose not to. ‘Asking him,’ she noted, ‘would be like asking Dante to clarify what he wanted readers to believe Ugolino did, or did not, in the Tower of Hunger’ – a statement that recalls Borges writing of Count Ugolino’s ambiguous cannibalism: ‘Dante did not know any more than his tercets relate. [...] Ugolino devours and does not devour the beloved corpses, and this undulating imprecision, this uncertainty, is the strange matter of which he is made. Thus, with two possible deaths, did Dante dream him, and thus will the generations dream him’.<sup>372</sup> There are experiences which are present and unspoken in literature, and their presence is not evidence in the form of hard fact, but ‘undulating imprecision’. D.C. was content with the evidence – full and wavering – that reading provides, and called its undulating imprecision chimeric.

In the case of Jelinek’s play *Her Not All Her*, which employs the words of Walser as material without direct attribution of sources, the lack of referenced quotes makes the reader participant in the material of the text, and at once claims for the impurity of the

---

<sup>372</sup> Borges, ‘The False Problem of Ugolino’, in *Selected Non-Fictions*, pp. 278–279 [‘El seudo problema de Ugolino’, *La Nación*, 30 Mayo 1948].

text to be taken as such, not legitimated, not sanctioned, only read, only studied, and that only is plenty. As I read Jelinek's play I hear Walser because I have read Walser, I sense recognition in my reading, a form of entanglement. What happens though if it is not Walser's work to be used as material, but texts whose presence is more elusive, whose signal is fainter, like in the case of those in *L'impuro folle*? It is unlikely that a reader will recognise every hidden quotation. The term of comparison is the singular one built from Calasso's own reading and study, which barely has any echo because few will have read what he has read. As I read, I perceive little recognition – other than intermittent glimpses of familiar verses learned by heart many years ago and reappearing here distorted – but a sense of estranged presence, and at once, a restless yearning to search for those texts, to find my bearings. Gradually I introduce my own references into the reading, no matter how hidden or out of sync with Calasso's they might be. This is exploratory, irreverent, chimeric. Because I am not given a compass I must find my way, as the presence of quotations in Calasso's book is not a system of legitimisation: here I learn to read, relying on my resources and my own sources, I learn to find my movements in unfamiliar words, in the lack of references that would allow me to feel safe. D.C. understood that Calasso does not want his readers to feel safe: he wants the experience of reading to convey the same destabilising experience of loss of self, the 'tear in the order of things' that Schreber's memoirs represented for their readers. He wants his readers to feel unbalanced, not protected, because this is knowing, and this is how D.C. thought the writing of research might be shaped: groundless, but not without grounds. It is not a threat, but a shift in perception. The book escapes signifying because its sense cannot be entirely held. It demands to take those quotations *in reading* as contributing to the fabric of knowing. If I choose to resist the immediately revealing internet search, I am left perceiving unevenness in a prose full of interferences and distorted signals nonetheless heard: like

Schreber's body, the book becomes a transmission device. An unsettling sense of impurity inside the boundaries of the book is matched with a sense of alterity, of language built from others, resounding other voices.

Here is the only extant fragment of D.C.'s essay on *L'impuro folle*, in which she aimed to show how the book could be read as the site of transformation at heart all of Calasso's writing:

'In the blurb Calasso writes that the only form apt to contain the story of Schreber was the "most impure form": the novel. Contrary to this statement I want to read *L'impuro folle* not as a novel, but as a critical work that embodies the poetics and the fictions it studies, that yearns for the substance and material of its inquiry, critical *and* fictional: chimeric. There seems to be a resistance in the book, as in all of Calasso's work, to assume criticism and commentary as detached forms of engagement. I read the resistance as a way to regain criticism by other means: as resonance, in the sense of Blanchot, as inhabitation, as in the body of the mad impure. When he published the Italian translation of Schreber's *Memoirs*, Calasso accompanied them with a long text which was not a canonical critical study or introduction, but a survey and evaluation of the critics of the *Memoirs*: he places himself at further remove from the text, writes a critical study not of the book, but of its critics. Where is Calasso, critic of the *Memoirs*, to be found then? Inside *L'impuro folle*. This is the news, the "shocking news" that lodge in the form of the book. If I take Calasso's understanding of critical writing as the ability to capture "that most mysterious parameter which no semiological grid has been able to capture so far, and for good reasons: the timbre of an author", then I read *L'impuro folle* as a work of



critical writing in the shape of a fiction, in which the transformation of the writer's voice into the timbre of the (polyphonic) object of study occurs. With the excuse of publishing a translation of the *Memoirs* Calasso began a transformation: he knew that writing about Schreber's book did not mean to learn, but to suffer it. Another double emanated from the pages: "In this brain something is decomposed which has been deemed legitimate as an I for many centuries, and has sustained humankind from generation to generation." A sinister euphoria accompanies the entire process. What exists? This, this, this, invisible delirium?'

The critic's choice in front of the works he loves best, Blanchot writes, is either to be in silence, or to conjure a form of writing that does not judge or observe from a distance, but offers 'the experience of the work'.<sup>373</sup> The necessary gesture in chimeric writing, D.C. says, is not to understand silence and experience in opposition, but to imagine and practice a writing of experience and silence, in being and listening, enmeshment and study, that lodges unstably in inhabitation and haunting as well as in stillness and contemplation. For Blanchot '[t]he critic is by nature on the side of silence'.<sup>374</sup> For D.C. the critic is by practice on the side of writing. If silence is her nature, then writing is her *opus* and as such, it acts necessarily and alchemically against nature, as the *opus contra naturam*: practice against nature, the artifice necessary for a transformation.

Against nature, monstrous, like Chimera. In the Middle Ages stone monsters were placed at the edges of cornices and buttresses, symbols of uncontrolled forces relegated into the

---

<sup>373</sup> Blanchot, *Lautréamont and Sade*, p. 6.

<sup>374</sup> Blanchot, 'The Experience of Lautréamont', in *Ibid.*, p. 46.

decorative space. However, there is little decoration, let alone playfulness, in forces and symbols that cannot be pinned down. They are necessary. Chimera-monster does not play with words. ‘I am not playing with words’, wrote Clarice Lispector in *Água Viva*, ‘I incarnate myself in the voluptuous and unintelligible phrases that tangle up beyond the words’.<sup>375</sup> D.C. carried this sentence with her across two books and countless public readings, pinned it in front of her desk, learned it by heart. *A silence rises subtly from the knock of the phrases*: this is Blanchot’s tone, this is chimeric stone, the intimacy of the silence the writer imposes on her speech, whose full measure can be heard in writing. *Not playing with words*: the engagement with the textured impurities of language is attentive, significant. It laughs, aware of its nothingness, and committed to it. It is never playful in the sense of superficial, whimsical, passing. It is not playful in the sense of the alarming distinction suggested for example by the editors of *The Creative Critic* between creative writing practices as *fun*, and critical writing as *serious*<sup>376</sup> – a problematic statement that corners critical writing in a negative realm of boredom and *work to be done*. Chimeric writing is poetic work embodied in voluptuousness, in the substance of its subjects; it is committed, not only in its engagement but in the moments of study that have nothing to say, in repetition, dread, and locked grooves, in substantial boredom as much as fun, irreverence, and laughter. To separate the committed aspects of any work from the playful ones diminishes both, denies the entanglement of the two, dismisses the value of non-eventfulness and the critical substance of play. Eileen A. Joy proposes the expression ‘weird reading’ to highlight how pleasure and enjoyment ‘can be an importantly ethical matter, especially in academic disciplines (literary studies, historical studies, philosophy, etc.) that are often suspicious of pleasure and enjoyment, privileging instead what some

---

<sup>375</sup> Lispector, p. 15.

<sup>376</sup> *The Creative Critic*, p. xx.

term “strong,” “skeptical,” “sober,” “serious,” and “rational” critique’.<sup>377</sup> The same point can be made for chimeric writing, while stating that uneventfulness, boredom, repetition, and obsession also have a part in ideas of criticism expanded from the limitations of terms such as *productivity* and *purposefulness*. Nothing to say is plenty, the desire for nothing is full of faint signals.

A verse from *I Felt a Funeral in my Brain* by Emily Dickinson appears, uncredited, in Schreber-Calasso’s brain, ‘and I and silence some strange race, wrecked, solitary, here’. It appears impure in the Italian translation, ‘*e io e il silenzio eravamo una qualche razza solitaria di rottami*’, in which *here* is missing. I want to replace it with *hear*, standing for the voices I could hear when I thought I felt silence in my brain and thought I had nothing to say. Nothing to say in front of *L’impuro folle* and I continued to read it, to employ it as material, transform it, and in the process, be transformed. Nothing is already something, a disposition to receive. What sort of materiality is received and takes shape in writing if I follow other routes into Calasso’s book, tune in the unheard and unknown, rather than cast it out with the protective shield of I-reject-what-looks-unfamiliar?

It is difficult, Calasso writes in his blurb, ‘to convey in a few words an idea of the stunning architecture of images, connections, tragic and comic illuminations that the reader will encounter in this book, written [...] with firm logic rigour, with flashes of frightening intelligence, with the dark determination of a gnostic treatise writer, calmly aligning the sequence of enormities he had lived through, and reasoning on them’. This description could be applied, in equal way and with equal power of scrutiny, to Schreber’s *Memoirs*,

---

<sup>377</sup> Eileen A. Joy, ‘Weird Reading’, *Speculations: A Journal of Speculative Realism*, IV, 2013, pp. 28–34.

to *L'impuro folle*, and to D.C.'s lost *Book of Chimeras* in which the section on Calasso plays an important part; at the same time she is writing about his work while writing about her own. A doubling of the subject occurs repeatedly in Calasso's prose, D.C. writes, from *L'impuro folle* onwards: 'A doubling that is not dualism but duality, a simultaneous existence of two modes rather than an opposition, as I learn in Corbin when he writes of the coexistence of two layers of being, one hidden and one manifest. Writing about other writers, he writes about his writing'.

Calasso sweeps over the works and ideas about which he writes, forms visionary statements, previously unheard connections, grounded on extensive research but arranged in ways that resist the exhaustive account while offering a strong sense of having inhabited those works for a long time, otherwise it would not be possible to write like that. A deep intent runs through the pages to show that knowing occurs through connections and associations, slippages and sudden turns, which prose must embody rather than deny or tidy up in a consequential arrangement of questions, demonstrations, conclusions: because 'the history of ghosts is more indispensable than facts'<sup>378</sup> and ghosts haunt, distract, cannot be silenced or regimented. No *mad impure* would have been written or heard without the other voices that haunt it, dismissing any possibility of exhaustive knowledge and making more prominent the exhaustion of chimeric yearning.

When Calasso quotes Adorno on Benjamin, writing that 'the scope of his thought is a site which can only be recognised by entering in there'<sup>379</sup> the statement is not dissimilar from

---

<sup>378</sup> Calasso, *L'impuro folle*, p. 329.

<sup>379</sup> Calasso, *I quarantanove gradini*, p. 347.

one by Teresa of Avila's, typical of mystic speechlessness *and* eloquence, saying that the soul is a castle and entering it is the most difficult task.<sup>380</sup> In Calasso's books the castle has become a ruin; taken as examples of thinking through telling, they can be read as singular works of subjective associations, and at once, as ruins, what used to be a solid structure is in part only perceivable in the imagination, while other forms and unexpected growth are found on it. Certeau: 'These ruins of texts [embody] [...] the visible linguistic magma through which the invisible location of that which speaks is indicated'.<sup>381</sup> Calasso, quoting Benn on style and substance in *Literature and the Gods*: 'It is exactly literature that celebrates itself, which depends on a capillary level from that psychic obscurity, that mute cave where style phosphoresces intermittently like a will o' the wisp'.<sup>382</sup> This phosphorescence between the written and what exceeds and conjoins it, that imbues knowledge as a way of coming across something pre-existent, is exemplified in the Vedic story of Mana and Vac, Mind and Word, weighed against each other and Mind is always heavier. To gain a weight that may allow it to balance Mind, Word needs a wooden board added on the scales: so Word is always precarious, threatened by the insufficiency of its weight.<sup>383</sup> Word is never enough, yet it is a term of comparison, Word do not hold everything yet hold momentarily, Blanchot's *momentarily*, so elusive and so substantial for the space of critical discourse. Writing must hold a sense of precarity, to be grounded not by progression but by rotation and repetition: groundless but not without grounds, chimeric, to allow the unknown to resound, to trace back, as Calasso wrote of Marcel Mauss, elements of that lost knowledge whose proofs are found in scattered fragments of mythologies, rituals, systems of correspondence.<sup>384</sup>

---

<sup>380</sup> Certeau, Vol. 1, p. 194–195.

<sup>381</sup> Certeau, Vol. 2, p. 132.

<sup>382</sup> Calasso, *I quarantanove gradini*, p. 479.

<sup>383</sup> Calasso, *L'ardore*, pp. 147–148.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 346–347.

Twenty years after *L'impuro folle*, Calasso published a collection of short texts and reviews by Giorgio Manganelli in which I believe he heard echoes of himself and the many voices populating his books. In one text, entitled *Ma Kafka non esiste (But Kafka Does not Exist)*, Manganelli reviews Piero Citati's book on Kafka, condemned at the time for not being a proper work of criticism.<sup>385</sup> It is an *impure* book, he says. Mixing biography, narrative, summary, conceptual considerations, letters, journals, aphorisms, it looks like a private project with Kafka as theme. 'I am convinced,' Manganelli states, 'that criticism is simply literature about literature. Criticism does not explain, does not judge, [...] does not find values, has nothing to understand; it is an arrangement of words about words'.<sup>386</sup> He continues: 'The rigour lies in the route that links a number of quotes [...]. [A] critical text is made equally of presence and absence, quotes and omissions, day fragments and night fragments. The idea that exhaustive criticism can exist is as wise as the claim that an exhaustive sonnet exists'.<sup>387</sup> I want to emphasise the following: 'Criticism does not have an ancillary task to so called creative literature but, despite its limitations – analogous to those of a *sestina* – it is itself creative, therefore impure: because it uses words, and words are impure: words hold a nocturnal presence, and this verbal blackitude<sup>388</sup> is the mark [...] of literature. [...] Using the words of others inside the cocoon of its own, [criticism] introduces obscurity where is illusory clarity, [...] captures and treasures the mistake where apparently there is pertinence [...] [The critic] has the task of an enchanter: to make drawings, hexagons, argyles, saint Catherine's wheels out of those mysterious nocturnal animals [that he studies] – incidentally, I ignore

---

<sup>385</sup> Manganelli, 'Ma Kafka non esiste', in *Il rumore sottile della prosa*, pp. 118–121. Translations by Rovina.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>388</sup> Rovina's translation of the odd-sounding Italian word *nerità*.

what exactly the artificed<sup>389</sup> figure might be, [...] invented under this name, but we have already said that literature gives herself up to the steady hold of irresponsibility'.<sup>390</sup>

As I read the above I kept hoping and not hoping that Manganelli would write *chimera*; hoping, because those words resonated so profoundly with my thoughts around chimeric writing to the point when I could feel they recognised me; not hoping, because I wanted to take those words elsewhere, farther away from themselves to the only place they could be: to the site of my understanding of chimeric writing, built from the words of others and yet adding the unruly weed of its uneven growth to the ruin of all the literature that came before me.

George Steiner states that as critics in front of a work, our instruments are blunt.<sup>391</sup> Perhaps they need to stay blunt, and there is no need for critical writing to cut anything. I can move differently, draw closer to the work, not by means of sharp instruments, but listening, merging with it, and finding myself many-voiced, artificed, impure, chimeric.

---

<sup>389</sup> Rovina's translation of the odd-sounding Italian word *artificiata*.

<sup>390</sup> Manganelli, 'Ma Kafka non esiste', p. 120.

<sup>391</sup> George Steiner, 'Whorf, Chomsky and the Student of Literature', in *On Difficulty and Other Essays*, New York, NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, pp. 137–163.

## Imaginary Conversation

Alejandra Pizarnik, Cristina Campo, D.C.

### Where a Contribution to Knowledge Begins to Toll, in Italics

C.C.: What are you reading, A.?

A.P.: A draft from D.C.'s infamous, never completed essay on my work, the one that kept her awake at night. Some of it is decent, some of it insightful. When she writes 'I cannot hear Alejandra's voice if I tune in Bataille for what he represents', she is right. That sort of thinking through given theoretical frameworks opens no magic doors to reach my work: my writing does not need frameworks, it needs breathing, heartbeats. So many words, as if D.C. became intoxicated with her proximity to my work, that she forgot to say less. Oh, and I understand very well her reading of the *Condesa* as my *nigredo*. Sigh.

C.C.: The way she assembled and paced her words is the way she understood you in her. As Meister Eckhart said, what can be received is received in the form and manner of the receiver.<sup>392</sup>

A.P.: But in this singularity one forever yearns for other voices, forever out of sync.

C.C.: Between book, *œuvre*, and we, an undercurrent of thinking binds these words in kinship, not entirely grasped by what is defined, public, and published, but read with the ears.

---

<sup>392</sup> Meister Eckhart, 'La solitudine', trans. by Giovanni Maria Bertin, in *I mistici*, Vol. 1, p. 823.



Voice from a Faintspeaker: Reader, you may begin to hear, increasingly, D.C.'s *contribution to knowledge* which, from now on, shall be marked in italics – as if this Voice of a Faintspeaker murmured along with Chimera and D.C., a ghost tune to the monster's and its writer's pronouncements – and shall lead to these pages' inevitable, if open, ending.

D.C. [recovering from her last fainting fit, but still slightly unhinged in her articulation]:  
*I have received and developed my ways of thinking, feeling, understanding literature in reading with my inner ears, in csites of slow time, in words passed on, rethought, and transformed across someone else's words. Perhaps my whisper was born before my lips. Even with close friends who are writers, with whom I speak from time to time, my consideration of their work has formed through the hours spent with their books, in that intimate form of knowledge and kinship shaped through reading, not comparable to anything else. It is another way of modulating absence, of not being there, or never entirely so. Leiris put it simply, and beautifully...*

A.P.: Ouch.

D.C.: ...yes, I want to say *beautifully*, when he entitled a text 'What the Paintings of Francis Bacon Said to Me'.<sup>393</sup> I emphasise *to me*, as Leiris stated the equivalence of his critical writing with a special form of being told, which in turn means being receptive, listening. He called attention to the intimate conversation between writer and his subject, allowing it to inform his prose.

---

<sup>393</sup> Leiris, 'Ciò che mi hanno detto i dipinti di Francis Bacon', p. 13.

A.P.: This morning I am at the limit of breath, of thought, of voice. I have nothing to say.

D.C.: Nothing to say is tied to the mystery of kinship, in analogies which connect seemingly disparate elements through a unifying image. In the writings of Sir Thomas Browne, the images of the *quicunx* and of the garden exist in the same mental place as those of the urn and the ash, the same structure is repeated, amplified, and detected everywhere to the point of vertigo.<sup>394</sup>

C.C.: *To the point where the image according to which he organises thinking becomes the form itself of his thinking.*

D.C.: *To the point where the image of Chimera in a text becomes the text.*

A.P.: Chimeric.

C.C.: After reading *Garden Of Cyrus* you will have felt, sensed profoundly and physically, the *quicunx* as pervading image in Browne's prose – not by means of logic, but having been subjected to the cadence and arrangement of its rhetoric.

D.C.: I must say something about rhetoric and artifice; about how writing in a second language is permeated for me with a sense of never being entirely there; how strange being-in-language can feel in such a state; and how in turn the strangeness of what exceeds language is made more evident. My words are often borrowed from others, so

---

<sup>394</sup> Sir Thomas Browne, 'The Garden of Cyrus', in *Religio Medici and Other Writings*, London: Everyman's Library, 1969 (1658), pp. 177–229.

the choice of words becomes important, the choice, but also the uncontrolled textures of language that seep into my language despite itself, despite myself. Alejandra, your *Palais de Vocabulaire* notebook was full of quotations from other writers, which you rewrote as an ‘exercise in sharpening language’.<sup>395</sup>

C.C. [devilish smile]: How confusing, D.C., you’re speaking of writing in the present, and I thought you were dead.

A.P.: I am at the limit of breath, at the limit of thought, at the limit of voice. I feel a book inside me, and it smothers me, a book which obstructs my breathing. I don’t allow it to come up.

D.C.: You smother yourself, but there is no use for self-harm. You need attention, you need to know you can be with the writers who summon you. I remember that moment, reading the first book by Calasso, when I found an uncredited quotation, a transformation of the substance by which I read. It was as if that special encounter had been set up only for me. It was no longer about that quotation: its mood affected my entire reading. I had drawn closer. Many times in my work I inserted a quotation from some text to which I was in proximity, allowing it to contaminate the fibres of the pages to the point of irreversible contagion. There is no antidote to the kinships found in reading.

C.C.: I am at once scared of and drawn toward everything that touches our words too closely. Because these, and other mysteries, are *not* experiences – experience, devilish

---

<sup>395</sup> Pizarnik quoted in Patricia Venti, ‘*Palais du vocabulaire* de Alejandra Pizarnik: cuadernos de notas o apuntes para sobrevivir’, *Espéculo. Revista de estudios literarios*, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2005, <http://www.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero31/palaisap.html> [Accessed 15 July 2019]. Translation by D.C..

word which prevents from seeing. Experience is of the past. But we are talking with each other now. Elusive, now. It is now, the past and the future are all today and only today. We do not know the alchemies of our days – we do not know what may be given back to us transformed.

D.C.: C., you were my threshold to A. when A. was a locked door for me, my words a locked groove, spinning, confounding, paralysing, repeating, *What shall I say to you now? You know everything*, repeating, thinking I could not write. All the obvious quotations, the immediate references, the inevitable literature search, felt like an obligation weighing heavy on my words, and muting them. I realised mine was a case of *taciturnablism*, that term coined by Christof Migone for whom the *taciturnablist* ‘posits the turn in its active mode’ as a ‘space that turns on itself, [...] revolves and convolutes’, and ‘instils the space of the relation with a silence that must be kept’.<sup>396</sup> I read *kept* as held, in a very particular and deep form of connection. The fact that I did not write does not mean I was not there. *The first time I knew I could write with Alejandra was the first time I heard her voices, and mine, in another voice, Cristina’s. Only later, when I found that you had met and written to each other, I knew I could write again, I could write this conversation, I could write this way. I could finally be with you, write with you, speak with you. There was no canonical external framework to impose on you, but I could move inside your words, and writing would be formed, chimerically, from inside the fabric of our conversations.*

C.C.: My main task for the last eleven months has been to be ill, speechless. Do not call it, please, personal experience. I have a horror more violent than ever for these two

---

<sup>396</sup> Christof Migone, *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body*, Los Angeles, CA and Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2012, p. 27.

execrable words, and a desire for an almost radical retreat of the self, of the I, of 'it happens to me': of my writings, first of all, then my words. No longer me. I have realised my language is too harmonious: I make jewellery, but mostly I have been longing for stone.

D.C.: I want to charge my words with so much harshness as this enchanting stone has in her actions, she who is ever growing harder in nature and more fierce and ruthless.

A.P.: The stone of madness, D.C.'s tones.

D.C.: My stones? They want to sing. The Spanish *estantigua* is both the apparition of a spectre and a contraction of *estatua antigua*, old statue. Apparition in a stone. The Spanish *encanto*, enchantment, contains *canto*, song.

C.C.: In stone, songs keep reverberating. I learned this as I read Marius Schneider's book *Singing Stones*, where the German art historian finds the notation of Gregorian chants inscribed in the architecture of three medieval cloisters in Spain. Through comparisons with Vedic symbolic correspondences that link sounds to other figures, he assigned a note to each figure in the capitols, and heard and read music inside them.<sup>397</sup>

D.C.: Stones sing.

C.C.: Not out of a parchment, but out of the attentive engagement with what is latent in the material of the capitols and in their arrangements.

---

<sup>397</sup> Marius Schneider, *Pietre che cantano*, trans. by Augusto Menduni, Milano: SE, 2005 [*Singende Steine. Rhythmus-Studien an drei romanischen Kreuzgängen*, München: Heimeran, 1978].

The three cease to speak. They listen, chimerically, to the broadcast by C.C., from 1958, *On the Eighteen Sung Measures on the Nomad Flute by Chinese Poet Tsai-Yen*, of which no recording survives.<sup>398</sup>

A.P.: I would like to write, more than anything else. The eye continues to be misled in search of exquisite forms, correct lights, musical spaces which will be no more.

D.C.: Be chimeric. Endorsed by an eternity of yearning.

C.C.: So careful was I these days, to place screens between myself and myself, that I refused everything, even music. So I write, in a language that does not exist.

A.P.: I think my method of self-editing is similar to punishment. It is taxing and delirious, in its desire to annul its irrational elements. I want to destroy most of what I have written and hopes to be rewritten. I need to begin a little book of prose.

D.C.: Truly though, there is nothing more sinister than literary life.

A.P.: In the distance, the idea of a work which needs to be accomplished. I want to end inside a formless book. I do not know if it belongs to me. It seems I am reading something I wrote, without taking into account that I was other. Could I write today like that? I could not. The destiny of this prose is curious: born out of disgrace, it works so that others

---

<sup>398</sup> Campo, *Le diciotto misure cantate sul corno unno della poetessa cinese Tsai -Yen (II-III sec. d.C.)*, radio broadcast, 11 April 1958, Terzo Programma, 10.30pm, mentioned in *Sotto falso nome*, p. 281.

entertain themselves, or not, and are moved, or not. Perhaps, after having read them, someone will love me a bit more. And this would be enough, that is to say, a lot. Nobody writes like you, C., and this will be your courage, your ruin.

D.C.: Ruin, the csite of an encounter.

C.C.: My commentary shows, in the field it knows, the effects of what it does not know. This chimera of yours then, D.C. . .

A.P.: I want to limit myself, but I also want to *say everything*.

D.C.: All and nothing. Chimeric writing reaches far beyond the limits of these pages, and will stay with us for many more years. I can no longer sleep, always talking of Chimera, whom I encounter in your prose, openly, or in a wink of the eye, and when she looks at me I smile, and when she turns I darken, and when she speaks I am enchanted, and when she rises I fall, and as I write I faint.

## **Imaginary Conversation**

### **D.C. and Chimera**

#### **Where a Contribution to Knowledge Continues to Toll, in Italics**

Voice from a Faintspeaker: In the underworld D.C. wakes up, remembers conversation with Alejandra and Cristina. Perplexed sense that the conversation may have not taken place. It certainly took time. She also recalls a nightmare. Not a good nightmare, not one of the memorable, disturbing, visually tempting ones but one of those mundane, missing-the-plane-could-not-catch-the-train nightmares during which, repeatedly, she was asked to clarify why she calls herself a critic. Over and over again. Her attempts at replying that these definitions are not entrenchments, but manners of placing herself in a constellation; that she learned to know herself through a practice of critical writing, which does not mean her critical writing cannot exist in other contexts, in fact it was through the practice of critical writing that she realised she was a ruin, broken and imperfect, therefore porous to other open, unexpected forms... But, what sort of questions were these? Is it necessary to continue getting tangled up with this chattering? Predictable sudden end to the nightmare: asphyxia. D.C. tries to reply but is smothered, cannot speak, has nothing to say. The side effects of the Interdisciplinary Nothing? An overdose of Creative Criticism? We shall never know. Importantly for now she awakens, in Hell. Chimera is by D.C.'s side. It seems apt to suggest at this point, how D.C.'s begins to sound closer and closer to...



D.C. [in a sudden fit]: ...DECEASED! Corpsed in our proud school of critical writing, we can no longer write.<sup>399</sup>

Chimera [not quite sure who and what she is responding to]: But does it have any meaning? Careful with generalising. Plus, that phrase is stolen. Yet *that* is the key to its force.

D.C.: So what? My remark is not any the less pointed because it is not perfectly original. It holds and presents the way I think, as it goes in and out of *just words*. In some way, the words I use are props. Or call them baits, fishing for whatever is not word.<sup>400</sup> Sometimes these books I inhabit, these texts from which I take words and sentences, feel as if they have grown on my body like a beak or wings, in a metamorphosis.

C.: *I begin to see your canny move. You are not simply satisfied with inhabiting those texts so you may articulate, or shall I say usurp, your extravagant forms of critical writing. You also want to inhabit their methods, how certain writers moved into and out of their words, thought of them inside and outside, were exhilarated and exhausted and exasperated by them. Pasolini, for example, who instead of quoting manifestly from Lucian's 'Dialogues of the Dead', inhabited one of them to the point that it became part of his work, not framed as quotation, but integral to the text's movement and cadence, his not all his. In turn you haunted that same dialogue some time ago, and made it an integral part of these pages. How does it make you feel?*

---

<sup>399</sup> Jerome J. McGann, *Swinburne: An Experiment in Criticism*, Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1972, p. 8.

<sup>400</sup> Lispector, p. 15.

D.C.: It makes me feel less alone.

C.: How so?

D.C.: *Like many who have spent most of their life reading, I believe the relation between reader and writer to be a most rewarding form of dialogue. I am thinking of the subtle and profound understanding reached in those miraculous instants of contact that happen at times during attuned reading, when a text appears as ‘the most naked and charged of life-forces’ to people who ‘live most intensely, most vulnerably, in the act of reading’.*<sup>401</sup> *In this state, books are ‘not “sources” in any formal auxiliary way, but bodies of lived meaning, animate spaces of understanding and emotion’ in which we ‘register our own pulse’.*<sup>402</sup> *This form of intimacy gets to the core, it is more profound than the physical, and frightening sometimes because of the quality and reach of its insight.*

Chimera shivers, she is frightened too. She feels she is being touched by some piercing and ancient sensation she had not experienced since the time in which Mechtilde von Magdeburg, the Beguine, wrote of that most chimeric dance of the soul and the senses, in a voice overloaded with pain and love, and from love to knowledge, and from knowledge to desire, and dance, dance, dance.<sup>403</sup>

D.C.: *Do you begin to understand? I am talking of the urgent, exhilarating tightening of ideas that happens in private, in moments of thinking-with-reading; of the conversations with the absent ones, that touch so deeply and are so present. The question is no longer,*

---

<sup>401</sup> Steiner, ‘Dante Now: The Gossip of Eternity’, in *On Difficulty*, p. 176.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>403</sup> Mechtilde von Magdeburg, ‘Rivelazioni’, trans. by Antonio Ballardini, in *I mistici*, Vol. 2, pp. 774–779.

*'Have you read that book?' but, 'Have you been there?', with the spirits that can form out of books, like the ghost in that Japanese story, who appeared in the eyes of the reader by means of a deep sympathy felt while reading.*

C.: I remember that story, 'The Sympathy of Benten', as it was retold by Lafcadio Hearn. That moment when someone who was thought as lost, is recognised again through reading: the same person, but slightly out of sync with the world. 'The same – yet not the same. When she wrote [...] something of her spirit passed into [the words]. Therefore it was possible to evoke from the writing the double of the writer'.<sup>404</sup>

D.C.: From now on I shall use the expression 'I have heard', instead of 'I have heard', any time I want to convey a sense of hearing-in-reading, of supernatural senses, a perception of voices inside and beyond the page, voices beyond reason felt and heard – heard.

C.: The story by Hearn may be understood by means of what Cristina called *supernatural senses*, rejecting the safety of evidence and embracing mystery – not in a shallow sense but in the sense Sir Thomas Browne intended it, as substance of the unspoken material which haunts words, perceived at that point where there no longer seem to be any words: 'I love to lose my selfe in a mystery, to pursue my reason to an *o altitudo*'.<sup>405</sup> Yet words are written, to convey the ineffable perception of altitude, and they must be arranged. Mystery needs Manners, two terms matched by Flannery O'Connor in her understanding of writing that could only reach beyond words through an engagement with words, and

---

<sup>404</sup> Lafcadio Hearn, 'The Sympathy of Benten', in *Japanese Ghost Stories*, London: Penguin, 2019 (1900), p. 85.

<sup>405</sup> Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* and *Hydriotaphia, or Urne-Buriall*, New York, NY: New York Review of Books, 2012 (1642 / 1658), p. 12.

attention to their forms. She spoke of ‘qualities that endure’, most hidden and extreme, which can only be conveyed by awakening to every word written; she said that to apprehend a form through attentive reading, means to contemplate the mystery embodied in the whole work.<sup>406</sup> Mystery, manners, Cristina often wrote of liturgy and repetition. One of her most rapturous texts is entitled *Supernatural Senses*, a composite of essayistic and commentarial drifts on the saying of the Desert Fathers, in which she places emphasis on ‘that divine realism that surpasses any reality’, on the carnality of ritual, the phonic weight of sacred mysteries, celebrating ‘the occasion of metamorphosis’.<sup>407</sup> Writing with reading is for her a full physical encounter with the text, a suffering through words as material vessels of transformation: to transcend, one must embody. Mystery, manners: instead of referring directly to the Eleusinian Mysteries, Pasolini made his book *Petrolio* an embodiment of the very metamorphoses at the heart of those ancient and transformative rituals.

D.C.: At Eleusis the rituals of transformation were toward a form of self-knowledge. They were called Mysteries, there is always something secret and private in individuation. Stiegler gets close to the elusive substance and truth of this intimacy and secret, writing that he ‘*encountered* it [...] in an almost palpable way, as if it had a body, literally as if I could grab hold of it [...] Of course I have in fact never really touched it. But *it* has certainly touched me, in one way or another’.<sup>408</sup> It is a specific form of knowledge, not aimed at discovering hidden things, but ‘the secret of that which lies in front of

---

<sup>406</sup> Flannery O’Connor, *Mystery and Manners*, New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970 (1969).

<sup>407</sup> Campo, ‘Sensi soprannaturali’, p. 231.

<sup>408</sup> Pasolini, *Petrolio*. See also Emanuele Trevi, *Qualcosa di scritto*, Milano: Ponte alle grazie, 2012.

everyone'.<sup>409</sup> You see what has always been there, but your perception of it has changed.<sup>410</sup>

C.: So writing, that comes from reading, has to do with staying there, and scrutinising what you have collected in front of you, by sympathy.

D.C.: And *there* is the csite where a mutation into oneself is suffered. Initiation is fulguration, contact. Remember, Greek and Latin designate mysteries with words that mean respectively end and beginning.<sup>411</sup>

C.: Many things to laugh about, and many grave things. Remember, at the centre of the rituals of Eleusis was transformation as much as laughter. Demeter, in the darkest depths of sorrow for her lost daughter Persephone, at one point, cyclically, laughs. There is emphasis in your project on the potential of laughter as excess, uninhibited exaggeration, wildly imaginative wordplay, all legitimate and committed modes of reflection.

D.C.: *Let's say reverberance, instead of reflection. Let's take the visual metaphor aside, and listen. Isn't the fact that we are here, speaking, proof of that? An assumedly lost author speaks with her subject; the absurdity of the subject commenting on her work; the exhilaration in finding meaning in wordplay; that laughter, fundamental and excessive, against the rhetoric that demands criticism to be sober, robust. Apparent lightness to talk depths, a secret dimension of understanding that is not formless. The Mysteries are not*

---

<sup>409</sup> Calasso, *Il cacciatore celeste*, p. 416.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 424.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 427.

*owned, like a thought; not applied, like a formula. They are a csite that offers something ulterior any time you return there. But to return there you must leave it, repeatedly, go back, haunt...*

C: ...and be haunted. Watch out, D.C.. You are beginning to write like *An Authority In The Field*, and I tremble at the thought.

D.C., switching mode at C.'s suggestion: Did you know there is a brand of mixing desks called *Soundcraft / Ghost*? To make an audio track, craft needs ghost, ghost needs craft, not as a dualism but duality, the two at once, not one without the other.

C.: Someone else would say now, 'your manners of thinking are unsettling and composite, moving from myth to literature to music language. I cannot follow you'. But I cherish your chimeric contraptions, lopsided as they are.

D.C.: Don't you see how the specific...

C.: Lopsided, admit it.

D.C.: ...choice of materials is my form of critical understanding, my discernment: this, not the other? The choice is *not* to refer to certain names, and to open a csite for others. Don't you see, this is my manner of keeping myself more speciously groundless, but not without grounds?

C. [suddenly benevolent]: *Your inhabitation of Alejandra and Cristina's prose makes me want to spend time with them: you give me a glimpse of the experience of reading them, and prompt me to read them in turn. You take me there, instead of claiming authority over them. At the same time, you do not illustrate everything: you ask me to work with you, take initiative, look up words, use the dictionary. There is something about the physical and poetic act of having to look up words or concepts, at times imagine or distort them. There is something about the physical and poetic act of having to look up or imagine words, follow up clues from your texts, that makes the knowledge gained in this way more present and persistent. You put me through a process, not just offer me a list of conclusions. May I say it, this is criticism as we need it.*

D.C.: *Criticism in the choice of its subjects, criticism whose artifice is made evident; criticism of desire and doing, working with and inside the material. Criticism that makes its limitations visible, its nothing to say an understanding of absence, rather than the absence of understanding; a scrutiny of the contexts and circumstances by which a critic apparently has no words, only because she uses a different frequency; an exhortation to consider less conventional manners as legitimate, as we need it.*

C.: You use *we* a lot, D.C. This may be a problem for some.

D.C.: We need *we*. My *we* does not signal a universal truth: it momentarily holds the voices I modulate when I write, it is the intimate, chimeric *we* of *you and I* of this conversation, here, now. 'You who speak to me, you who narrate me', as in the literal

translation of the title of Adriana Cavarero's book, dryly translated in the English edition as *Relating Narratives*.<sup>412</sup>

C.: She is one who truly understands me, Chimera, and often allows me to appear at the end of her books.

D.C.: At the end of *Inclinations* for example, closing nearly two hundred pages of her 'critique of rectitude' with a nod to the smile in Leonardo da Vinci's *The Virgin And Child With St. Anne*, 'a form of altruism that presents itself as unusual, problematic, even unheard of, but all the same tangible in the detached and serene smile of Leonardo's Madonna', the ambiguous smile of a 'secret peace'...

C.: Another secret.

D.C.: ...the same secret peace of the mystics... a secret peace suggesting that 'there is a carnal sense of existence, as mundane as it is prosaic...

C.: Chimeric.

D.C.: ... that consists primarily in her irrevocable inclination toward the other. [...] The clues to her secret, like so many Renaissance enigmas, are so obvious that they have remained altogether invisible to the preoccupied gaze of the intellect'.<sup>413</sup>

---

<sup>412</sup> Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. by P. A. Kottman, London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2000 [*Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti. Filosofia della narrazione*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1997].

<sup>413</sup> Cavarero, *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude*, trans. by Amanda Minervini and Adam Sitze, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016, pp. 174–175 [*Inclinazioni. Critica della rettitudine*, Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2014].



C.: The ending of this book floored you at the time.

D.C.: How couldn't it? Consider the shift in mood, the horizon it opens by moving the attention, in those last two pages, toward a quality of the gaze so human and at once, so mysterious. It guided my thinking toward chimeric writing as a way of orientation and multiple selfhood, a *we* of sympathetic frequencies, a *we* of resonance, not a coercion. No wonder that Cavarero is an acute reader of Dinesen and mentions the story of Pellegrina Leoni, again in the last two pages of *Relating Narratives*. *Pellegrinare* in Italian is to journey, and indeed Pellegrina journeys through many identities, yet her story is unique.

C.: Interesting, Dinesen never wanted to be called a writer, not to be locked in her professional identity. She'd rather disappear in her stories.

D.C.: And the end of that book, how chimeric. Let me read it to you: 'The uniqueness of the existent has no need of a form that plans or contains it'.<sup>414</sup> It is one and changing, here and elsewhere, csiting 'as in the dream of a fable, or perhaps, as a desire that is not exchanged for its dream'.<sup>415</sup>

C.: A desire not exchanged for its dream. A chimera.

D.C.: Cavarero wrote of the basic human need for each to hear one's story through the voice of another, its unique call to be answered back. Laura (Riding) Jackson called it

---

<sup>414</sup> Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, p. 144.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

‘the story of us’.<sup>416</sup> Pasolini writes ‘death is not in being unable to communicate, but in no longer being understood’.<sup>417</sup> *We* demands...

C.: ...we demand...

D.C.: ...reception and attention, singular, specific.

C.: You may be wishing for a chorus of approval now, but hold back. I am not entirely satisfied. We must talk more around your ideas of inhabitation and haunting. In *Petrolino*, Pasolini showed various degrees of inhabitation of his materials through kinship, from ponderous pages formed through Dostoevsky’s *The Demons*, to the dialogue between two personified concepts in front of the main character’s body, lifted from Lucian, to that most direct inhabitation and slight variance in a name: Petronio, Petrolino. Petronio, the Italian for Petronius, was the author of the *Satyricon*, and *Petrolino* is the title of Pasolini’s book, which he considered to be a modern *Satyricon*. No explanations, glosses, or evaluations, he is in a name that is another’s. Sited, cited, csited. In a name, in a small variance. What discernment in this subtle move. I guess why you call yourself D.C., as I think back of your extensive, audacious uses of Certeau’s *The Mystic Fable*.

D.C.: You are acute, Chim. You may begin to understand how, in my idea of writing as you, critical writing does not have to go elsewhere than itself to gain evidence of its yearning for its subjects: in fact, to gain evidence is not the point, the yearning is. Dare I say it, yearning *is* the evidence.

---

<sup>416</sup> (Riding) Jackson, p. 43.

<sup>417</sup> Pasolini, ‘A Desperate Vitality’, in *Poems*, trans. by Norman McAfee, New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996, p. 151 [‘Una disperata vitalità’, in *Poesia in forma di rosa*, Milano: Garzanti, 2001 (1964).

C.: All and nothing.

D.C.: *Tutto e niente*, like in that most exquisite sonnet by Gaspara Stampa, ‘I may feel all and feel nothing, [...] my true form an image of Echo and Chimera’.

C.: All and nothing?

D.C.: Nothing: the feeling of emptiness, anxiety, inability, vacuity I perceive every time I set out to write with the demands and pressure of producing a clear statement, argument, or overview. In front of Cristina, for example, it has all been read, all been said about her texts, I am overwhelmed by the exhaustive literature, what can I possibly say, what more, who am I, and where? *I can say less: yearn chimerically for them in reading and then, by contrast, the All appears: the fullness, the drive, the embodiment, the dizzying restlessness and rewarding activity of finding a form for Cristina before translation, in the shape of a bell, and to embody in that form all the metamorphoses in understanding which I go through because I am, I encounter myself again, through the material of her writing. Chimeric yearning is the space in which I can finally say something, a writing that holds my desire for Cristina, that holds exactly my movement with, and my being moved by her texts, rather than the paralysis in front of the demand for accomplished, concluded evaluations.* This is what I understood in Corbin’s exhortation, found in his study of Ibn ‘Arabi, to become ‘disciples of Khidr’. A complex, not entirely definable entity in Sufism, Khidr’s guidance does not consist ‘in leading all his disciples uniformly to the same goal [...] in the manner of a theologian propagating his dogma. He leads each disciple to his own theophany’, which corresponds to their own sympathetic correspondence with the

subject of their desire. Knowledge is not about attaining Khidr, but about learning to see the ‘Khidr of your being’.<sup>418</sup> You might see the consequences of this line of thinking when applied to knowledge and understanding of a work, not through the filter of dogma but through that of singularity.

C.: *Tutto e niente.*

D.C.: All and nothing, revealing and concealing. How to hold you, Chimera, in writing? Writing.

C.: Then, the pseudonyms.

D.C.: I read some of *De mystica theologia* and *De divinis nominibus* by Pseudo-Dionysius Aeropagyte, texts that were most influential in the Middle Ages, classic examples of self-invention. Even though he lived and wrote in the fifth and sixth centuries, he wrote his texts as if in the first century, grounding his authority in a time *before his time*, and, interestingly, before the writings of one of the authors of which his work could be seen as commentary – Plotinus.

C.: Ingenious: the commentary becomes the primary source. Do not forget though, that ‘he does not claim to be an innovator, but rather a communicator of a tradition. Adopting the persona of an ancient figure was a long-established rhetorical device [...]. Dionysius’ works, therefore, are [...] an acknowledgement of reception and transmission, namely, a kind of coded recognition that the resonances of any sacred undertaking are intertextual,

---

<sup>418</sup> Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 61.

bringing the diachronic structures of time and space together in a synchronic way, and that this theological teaching, at least, is [...] received from another'.<sup>419</sup> Tell me what attracted you to those texts.

D.C.: He lists pages and pages of appellations of God as proof of the impossibility of naming god, writes pages and pages of *tenebrae* so that he may reach light. These pages – like so many mystic texts I have been reading, in my attempt to read Cristina by reading what she read – are *performative, rhythmic, repetitive, embodied*. *There is no dogmatic prescription on what authority is, but a finding and a reinstating it through being and breathing, presence and practice. This is why I do not want to give any dogmatic prescriptions around chimeric writing, but write it*. So tell me now, who are you?

C.: I am this.

D.C.: You did not say 'I am'. You said 'I am this'. You call for me to say it too, to write you.

C.: Complicated and convoluted, that is, this, me. You realise what it means, to try and hold me, to circle around the impossible, the subject of a yearning, in a context in which you are supposed to lay out aims, methods, cases, achievements, conclusions.

---

<sup>419</sup> 'Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 30 April 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pseudo-dionysius-areopagite/#DioPer> [Accessed 21 November 2019].

D.C.: That is why one day I vanished. Until then I continued to write, in formal as much as conceptual repetitions and reoccurrences always slightly out of sync. I want my reader to understand what it means to be a stranger in a language: to inhabit it, to be there, and always slightly off. In English I could not hear myself in full. Chimera, you nested in my words. Yet I was accustomed to reading in English more than anything else; if the linguistic material of my every day is primarily made from books, then can you begin to understand my inclination to articulate a language from those books, and continue to hear and not to hear myself in them? How composite and uneven my language became, in its mixture of clichés and literary obsolete expressions, often falling into the temptation of assonance and rhyme to get an illusion of presence, to spare itself the feeling of not being true, of being, in the end, an artifice. Can you imagine the void, and at once, the laughter?

C.: I am beginning to understand your idea of writing, such a chimera.

D.C.: You can see my embarrassment, my frustration, when they asked me to define you.

C.: Define me? How dare they?

D.C.: Theorise, even! It took me years, and much effort, to lay some grounds for my approach, which studies manners of orientation, tensions, and undercurrents that exist beneath words.

C.: I recall, now that you mention the way you go about your language being formed in literature, hearing faint echoes of verses of songs and poems in your earlier works, which lingered at the back of perception, never fully disclosed...

D.C.: They will never fully be, except for those who follow hints and suggestions scattered in the pages. The intention was always for my prose to sound vaguely familiar but impossible to circumscribe.

C.: *Un'immagine d'Eco e di Chimera.*

D.C.: An image of Echo and Chimera, and the transmissions emitted from there. Writing was never about closure, but an attempt at handing over material in the full awareness of dealing in half-dead currencies.

C.: Then probably the nature and forms of the transmission become more relevant.

D.C.: They do. A source of immense plenitude, and at times, immense solitude. I will read to you some sketches for a treatise on illegibility, which I started to assemble before my disappearance:

*On Illegibility. By D.C., not a writer of note, but a writer of nothing.* ‘There are forms and histories of reading that offer ways of understanding as being with their materials, fleeting and complex as they may be. They can afford not to narrate, not to function as...’

C.: Why a treatise? Your subject matter lacks a single purpose. I beg you, D.C., enough with this pathetic completist *élan*. Speak with me. I am your subject, I matter. You may be disappointed at not being perceived as an accomplished writer, but at least you will have *one* interlocutor who listens. Tell me now, in your own words, from whomever they may have been taken – no, what was the expression Robert Duncan used? – *derived*, tell me about the illegibility in this form of criticism that takes my name, and does not want to be held together by narrative or conclusive arcs.<sup>420</sup>

D.C.: I am keen to specify it is not only my words to be derived from others. My silences are too.

C.: Aren't you meticulous.

D.C.: Meticulous, specious, inflexible. One of my concerns, in the sketch for the treatise that you have so unceremoniously interrupted, was to take a cue from and expand Craig Dworkin's idea of 'reading the illegible'. Emerging from an appreciation of meaning in the forms and arrangements of text on the page by poets and artists, it demands an incorporation of seeing and perceiving in reading. I was hoping to move from this toward

---

<sup>420</sup> Duncan, p. 219.



an approach to reading the illegible akin to ‘reading with your ears’, in those cases in which the main channel of illegibility is not the visual and material arrangement of words, but the opacity of references in writing across languages. To read with one’s ears is an inversion typical of mystic discourse, which signals a depth and a... Chim, are you awake?

Chimera snores, loudly.

D.C. [in a preachy monologic fit, rushing her words before the composite monster wakes up]: Charles Bernstein has denounced the implied principle for peer-reviewed journals which suggest ‘preference for a lifeless prose, bloated with the compulsory repetitive explanation of what every other “important” piece on this subject has said’.<sup>421</sup> A tacit agreement, for which to write in an informed, reflexive, research-based and critical manner, implies compliance with given standards of tone, and form: so that everyone can operate on a levelled plane, and “be understood”.<sup>422</sup> We get to that paradoxical point, he continues, where ‘a wide range of ideas are published, *as long as they are expressed in the dominant style*’.<sup>423</sup> As if the actual writing did not count. ‘Clarity’ becomes the boundary, he continues, an ‘empty marker of legitimization’ that alienates students from writing.<sup>424</sup> ‘From an educational point of view, it might be better to insist that what is inaccessible or impossible to grasp is exactly what needs to be taught in our schools’.<sup>425</sup> I could not agree more. I still recall how I could guide my most reluctant art students to

---

<sup>421</sup> Charles Bernstein, ‘A Blow Is Like an Instrument: The Poetic Imaginary and Curricular Practices’, in *Attack of the Difficult Poems*, Chicago, IL and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011, p. 16.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>425</sup> Bernstein, *Attack of the Difficult Poems*, p. 20.

write their dissertations during my teaching days on Earth. It had to do with attempting to find forms and arrangements that would transcelate the materials and movements of their artistic practices into text. We worked toward understanding that writing critically about their practices did not demand sites of clarity but csites of attention and complexity, not explanations but transcelations. The most effective example was the exercise in which they were challenged to stop quoting from writers and theorists given to them as external frameworks of legitimisation, authority, and recognition (those to whom they felt they *had* to refer, but that did not *feel* in the same way as their work – here the Hinduist *rasa* played a major part) and to think instead of texts that were necessary, not imposed, to their understanding of the context and reach of what they did. The exercise was to challenge those names dropped during a studio visit, ‘it makes me think of...’, and think of something else instead; to develop ways of scrutiny into the manners in which their thinking formed, not by obligation, but by necessity. One sentence, lived through, one page, fully pondered, one book, read with attention, rather than the usual serviceable quotations from Gilles Deleuze, or Maggie Nelson, or Donna Haraway – and this is not to dismiss any of them, but the question was, how did you encounter them? Are they and anyone else meaningful to your reasoning, or are you mentioning them because they are easier to access? Is there anyone else who may help you understand your work more deeply? Are you silencing someone else because to present them would require more work? Beware of attaching formulas to the practice just because they are easy to recognise therefore guarantee visibility. Do not think of ‘framing’ your work – the verb ‘to frame’ reduces it to a two-dimensional, enclosed entity – allow your thought to move, allow its core to manifest itself from its workings and all that it corresponds to and with, Leiris’s tangencies, Alejandra’s ties. *It is the intensity of a relationship with references that matters here. To find language working against language, holding exactly that excess of*

*an artistic practice, and at once, finding ways for it through words; that ungraspable quality that can never be kept yet informs writing. It is a speculative gesture, and as such deeply significant for artists: could students start to write thinking of rhythms, textures, amplitudes, signals? What form of writing takes shape, necessarily tied to a way of being with material, not arbitrary? See, this could have been something else, it could have been written as a monograph...*

*Chimera jolts in her sleep, disturbed at her subliminal, certainly not sublime proximity with the term monograph.*

D.C.: ...then it would have perpetuated existing approaches to the writing of research. As long as it is formed the way it is formed, and exactly because of its form, it opens up to a manner and a model of writing which does, and is, something else. In turn, it teaches and practices other forms of reading, and of listening. If I could go back to Earth and continue to teach, I would design a course around form and excess of speech in mystic discourse: Teresa of Avila, stating that we are where we are and the most difficult thing is to enter; Angelus Silesius rhyming *Schrift* and *nichts*, writing and nothing;<sup>426</sup> Jean-Joseph Surin and his understanding of discourse that is the form of a desire bound to nothing,<sup>427</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing* staging the eloquent, elusive, ceaseless tension between writing and silence, presence and self-effacement, gesturing toward chimeras.

Chimera wakes up, on hearing her name: Did you call me?

---

<sup>426</sup> Certeau, Vol. 2, p. 137.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., pp. 144–160.

D.C.: I did not think you were so sensitive to such a superficial flattery as a simple mention of your name. Listen, I know you were bored, but this is not to be missed. I have to say something about not understanding, but standing inside: being present.

C.: As long as you do not overwhelm my hearing with your verbose, sententious meanderings. I am getting tired of our logomachy.

D.C.: I want to tell you of a specific case of being out of sync. You have known me for a long time, Chim, long before I disappeared. You will remember how I was brought up in Italy, in the late 1970s and 1980s, in a state school system in which we learned Latin like we learned History, or Maths. In Italian, Latin is integral to language: some Latin terms or expressions are parts of it and are used in a manner that is not exceptional, exclusive, or pertaining to jargon. We use them without thinking about it, it is not a contrived effort to display a privileged education. Imagine when, on using Latin in English, I found myself labelled as elitist.

C.: Ah, that nightmare of sameness.

D.C.: In fact, in Italian education Latin was at heart a sustained exercise in translation.

C.: Which you unwittingly transcelated into English.

D.C.: To avoid using Latin in English would mean censoring parts of language that are living elements how I think and perceive. It would be like asking me to stop gesticulating when I speak in English. I will not. I cannot entrench myself in my position either. I can say more about how my understanding forms through language according to a different system, and perhaps, not less importantly, ask readers to pay attention, listen to another manner of being in language which is not immediate, before going straight to the ‘judge and exclude’ response. As Bernstein said, to ‘respond to the process of discovery’.<sup>428</sup>

C.: I want to move on from the presumed illegibility in your use of Latin, to the thickness of a prose densely woven with unusual references, another form of illegibility which I sometimes heard brought up in superficial remarks around David Toop’s books. ‘Too many references’, some would remark; ‘they go over my head’. Over a bridge, I would throw them.

D.C.: Lazy, how lazy can readers be, how willing to blandly give their trust and time only to reassuring, familiar references. But I am in search, with Alejandra, of a certain dissonance, of more troubled reading. That trouble was exactly why I was drawn to *difficult* books, as I read them not for recognition, but for a sense of attraction and discovery, ignited by them. I recall my first encounters with Toop’s *Ocean of Sound*, even more with *Exotica*, as if I was given the keys to a world of music I had never heard before, but the manner in which those materials were arranged made the difference. Reading, I was enchanted, not instructed. Unlike comprehensive, systematic treatises that by explaining and contextualising music unknown to me in a fortress of perfection left me

---

<sup>428</sup> Bernstein, *A Poetics*, p. 175.

feeling inadequate and excluded, *Exotica* was composite and fragmentary, a porous fabric of perception in which I could add my own, flawed and naive as I may have been. The sounds Toop wrote about were interwoven with memories and personal experiences, appearing as possibilities rather than prescribed and described items. Those pages offered a matrix of perception, not rules. They made me want to hear those sounds before I heard them. They took me outside themselves, in my singular pursuits which in turn led me to more discoveries; they took me deeper into the working of a mind-with-words into the pages, into what writing could do with and inside its subject matters, not against their grain.

C.: ‘I had to create my own sense, my own soul even, out of remote exotic zones that came and went of their own unpredictable volition’, Toop writes.<sup>429</sup> I was there, in the blissful unexplainable synchronisation of three people in a car, the Dutch landscape, and the music of Jeff Mills, ‘flooded with panic and exhilaration, the shock of outrunning time’.<sup>430</sup> You did not even know who Jeff Mills was when you read this, yet it affected you profoundly.

D.C.: Not being a specialist in the subject matter of that book heightened my perception of its form. That cannot be overlooked: how those words moved, how they were assembled, moving along the changing RPMs of the music. As ever in Toop’s prose, many layers are at play and I will never cease to marvel at how writing, apparently, of improvisation in the 1960s, he is not writing exclusively about it but goes beyond it to the point where I can take it to speak to my concerns, ‘to follow not the chords, the notes, the

---

<sup>429</sup> Toop, *Exotica: Fabricated Soundscapes In a real World*, London: Serpent’s Tail, 1999, p. xiv.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14–16.

tempo, the tradition, the style, the theme and its recapitulations and inversions; instead to resonate with sounds as they emerged from silence, not to invest it all in resolution and symmetry, “simply” to follow intentionality in search of resonance between materials, even into coincidence, randomness, disagreement and disorder beyond the frame of performance’.<sup>431</sup> This is writing from practice, from the fibres of performing and listening and being. This is chimeric.

C.: How chimeric! This manifests itself as a psychic space of orientation, rather than a literal interpretation or presentation of evidence. Everything is undocumented, yet it is there, chimerically, critically. Have I heard this before?

D.C.: You will imagine how I felt when I read, years after I had embarked in this enterprise around chimeric writing, Bernstein’s *Artifice Of Absorption* on a criticism

‘in which the limits of

positive criticism are made more audibly

artificial; in which the inadequacy of our

explanatory paradigms is neither ignored

nor regretted but brought into fruitful play [...]

This would be the criticism of desire:

sowing not reaping’.<sup>432</sup>

---

<sup>431</sup> Toop, *Into the Maelström*, pp. 160–161.

<sup>432</sup> Bernstein, *A Poetics*, p. 16.

C.: This sums up a lot of what you wish to say.

D.C.: You must understand, I never set up chimeric writing as a new, ground-breaking theory. Aware of what is around, it has no claims of saying anything new, as you may recall from the Preacher's speech long ago. *Rather, it manifests a new way of reading, of arranging words and thoughts in writing, of moving in them. It cannot be simply put as theory, as it would lose its density and impetus if set aside from the present-absent substance which allows to speak. Chimeric writing slips away, is formed in subtle variance and the way it lingers, like the impression left by the telling of a story, by the playing of a record.* So yes, Bernstein's words resonate here much as those of Cristina, and Calasso, and Pizarnik, and more, *but they exist here together, calling one another. This is the distinctive feature of these pages, their contribution.* Similarly, this is not a collection of monographic studies: by the time it is made public, many pieces will have appeared on Pizarnik, for example, who is being acknowledged, at last, also as a writer of prose. *This work does something else. It was never meant to be monographic but many-voiced. It studies manners of connecting through resonance. It finds kinships.*

C.: And distortions, interferences. I am wary, with Bernstein, of discourses that develop otherness as theme, as *content*, and do not consider formal endeavours. So you get nonfiction books which may treat *unheard* voices or *minor* subjects, yet are written in a most polished form which does not interrogate itself as a primary concern for its otherness, that does not attempt to manifest its being out of sync in its very shapes and movements.



D.C.: The question at this point is not ‘what can I say?’ but ‘how can I arrange, and transmit what I hear, only connected in my understanding?’.

C.: Making the writing of research an issue of arrangements, of how we move our words and transmit them.

D.C.: Not research as in *I came first, discovered, own*, but as *I tune in*. While Cristina Rovina writes these pages, the works of Pizarnik are being translated. I would not be surprised if they all became available in English by the time this work is completed. It does not matter: *this study is not concerned with discovering unearthed treasures, with exclusivity. I show how I work with these materials, historically situated while in motion and change; how the nature and character of the research is in what I did, and continue to do with them, even as I am gone, that is, even as I am no longer public, published.*

C.: I would not be surprised to hear that this set of circumstances may also make you silent at times. Or feeling as if you have nothing left to say.

D.C.: What is perceived as silence is the absorption of thinking. It asks what is heard in the substance that supports and shapes words, challenging the assumption that text must have a polished surface, reflecting light. Enough with the clarity/opacity dualism. There are other metaphors by which critical writing may be imagined and practiced, whereby meaning is not to be seen clearly but exists in transmission, as sound. I write of and hear

of echo and reverb, the distortion and interference these carry. I long for something less immediate, which demands absorption in the initial confusion of being in an unfamiliar space. Then I want to faint.

C.: Fainting, that old literary trick of ellipsis and imagination, for characters, for narrative, and for you. You have been using it eminently, and I hear echoes of Dante, who at the end of *Inferno*'s Fifth Canto in the *Divine Comedy* (another D.C.) faints, overwhelmed with emotion at the story of the two lovers Paolo and Francesca, full of sighs and tears, a story told as someone who cries and speaks at once, exhausted by the yearning.<sup>433</sup> Then I recall that most languid story of 'Ali ibn Bakkar and Shams al-Nahar in the *Arabian Nights*, an extreme and exhausted tale of being sick into love, in which two characters who will never be together continue to faint, night after night, and the more they do, the more exhilarating the sense of longing and yearning becomes.<sup>434</sup>

D.C.: Fainting as a recurring psychic space of exhaustion and disorientation, the oscillatory presence in which we exist with our materials, rather than a literal interpretation or presentation of evidence. Everything is undocumented, yet it is there, chimerically. Signifying, and disturbed.

C.: It flees... And it is almost time for you to sleep again. What is it you wish to tell me before you return to silence?

---

<sup>433</sup> Dante Alighieri, 'Inferno: Canto V', in *La Divina Commedia*, Milano-Padova: Euroricerca, 1977 (1472), p. 41.

<sup>434</sup> *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights*, trans. by Malcolm C. Lyons, Vol. 2, London: Penguin, 2010, pp. 650–692.

D.C.: A passing thought.

C.: I am used by now to your woefully inconclusive remarks.

D.C.: When Blanchot writes of the neuter, I think he wants to listen – although he does not explicitly say so. ‘[T]he narrative voice neither reveals nor conceals’.<sup>435</sup> This does not mean it signifies nothing, ‘it does not signify in the same way the invisible-visible signifies [...] it opens another power in the language, one alien to the power of illumination’.<sup>436</sup> The light/shade, transparency/opacity is ‘an inveterate metaphor’, and he wants to find a different way. Listening to the subtle noise of prose, I think. ‘[T]he narrative voice is the most critical one that can communicate unheard. That is why we tend, as we listen to it, to confuse it with the oblique voice of unhappiness or the oblique voice of madness’.<sup>437</sup> He speaks of voice, he wants to listen. Isn’t the *kind of void in the work* my chimeric vessel, the space of reverberation that hosts the humming beyond words, that words momentarily host?

C.: Such a cluttered argument, D.C., you, always momentarily, always else, always yearning.

D.C.: Always momentarily, always else, always yearning. We would be slow and repetitive.

C.: I imagine Alejandra and Cristina would be with us.

---

<sup>435</sup> Blanchot, ‘The Narrative Voice (the “he,” the neuter)’, in *The Gaze of Orpheus*, p. 142.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

D.C.: We would talk the whole day.

[D.C. faints].

## **Another Vision of D.C.**

What is the point of this if nobody hears, if I'm a ruin? If only I could take some deep breaths from these speechless lungs, blood-filled lungs, if only the sound could be deafening and... Teeth, teeth, teeth! Inevitable inaudible counter-bones to breaths of refraction. That evening when a bird came out of my bleeding mouth and took away my voice, I did my best to keep the plumage. That evening my mouth started bleeding and it was blood from the mind, then from the cut on my throat, blood of yearning, flooding, flowing. What have I to say, what is held after hearing, after reading? This is when the inner singing begins. When I have no voice, this is how the song begins. An uneasy rhyme, and wouldn't it be easier if I was given a catchier one? How about the other voices? Oh, those are smart. Very smart. They have seen a lot. Seduced, sung. But do not assume that because this voice is silenced or out of tune, it ceases to exist, to desire. So it sings. Remember, it sings, not I. Remember the day I understood that the verb 'to sing' does not sing, 'to write' does not write, and 'to bleed' does not bleed. And learned to trust words for what they are, how they sing. Perhaps the song should begin in the Musée Gustave Moreau, dizzying accumulation of pictures, painterly phantasmagoria where I once heard the murmur of lost desire, perhaps the song should be a dizzying ditty and partially secret, like those figures hidden under thick layers of paint, like myself and the murmurs I heard that day, hidden layers of lost desire, trapped in a canvas. The song should be sung in the pitch of voice of someone stitched inside a dream of that top room with only slits on the wall, paintings hanging all around, and no doors. Lock all the fine rounded words in the room upstairs. Sing clipped beginnings of song, with stitched lips. Despite my stitched lips, will anyone exhume me from beneath these layers of history, no, not exhume, exhaust. Exhale? I hear my constrained breath against teeth, teeth, teeth.

The image of you escapes me, Chimera, but always comes back. I will leave it as it is. To be willing to unravel it would lead to disappointment. I want you in this sealed room of paintings in which we are imprisoned. But you say no, you are tired, you quieten. And I faint, I fall, and in my fall I hear, my lack of words taking you away. And from this fall I won't wake up, they will find me on the carpet, ruined, on the floor. So it ends, it rebegins, with no song, with a rhyme, with no reason, shall we go?, the ruin, the rhyme, the ruin.

## Imaginary Conversation

### Cristina Rovina and Chimera

#### Contribution to Knowledge Tolling, Again, in Italics

Cristina Rovina: ‘The condition of music’ is a phrase that I found in a journal entry written on 6 February 1923 by Mary Butts, writer of liminal states poured into life, into landscaped forms of being, into short stories and novels that feature psyche, mood, atmosphere as significantly as their characters; and into journals and essays as affected by the unsaid as her fiction. In the journal, she lists a number of encounters during her day, including ‘the Museum & the King who has the face of my daimon’, and concludes: ‘All these were part of one thing, the condition of music. This was not easy to write down’.<sup>438</sup> A couple of years later, in October 1925, she mentions ‘something that one is always at the point of being about to say. A form that has the shape of a content which is a new arrangement’.<sup>439</sup>

Chimera: This was not easy to write down.

C.R.: I wish to dwell on the state which leads a writer to remark, ‘this was not easy to write down’, to linger on what is apprehended and diffused if I think of *the condition of music* as a chimeric state that allows speechlessness to prompt more words rather than inhibit them, words that are *volume*: resonant space, signal, text. Certeau wrote of reading

---

<sup>438</sup> Mary Butts, *The Journals of Mary Butts*, ed. by Marie Blondel, New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, Kindle Edition, 2002, p. 202.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

as auscultation, detached from the laws of the text that demand interpretation: a *manner* of reading that shows how to circulate in a space made resonant by words, how to practice a text in hearing. Something speaks in Mary's words beyond the text, which is not document but presence. It is akin to Lispector's silence rising subtly from the knock of the phrases, to Manganelli's subtle noise of prose, to the hum of Calasso's mad impurities, to the song of D.C.'s *sirena-chimera* that she heard in Gaspara through Cristina.

Chimera [gasping]: You just summoned me?

C.R.: I need your enquiring mind today, Chim. I need your fire to probe the unsaid. I spent this morning thinking.

C.: Did you say *singing*?

C.R.: *If my song is that 'song which is no song at all,' rising subtly from the knock of the phrases at the end of Cage's 'Lecture on Nothing', then yes, Chim, I spent the morning singing.<sup>440</sup> Remember, Teresa of Avila would often open a book because it kept a place, D.C. says.<sup>441</sup> It csited. It allowed her to listen, to become volume, to sing her song which is no song at all. When you sing, you are where you are and you are other, csited. D.C. wrote that, Cage suggested it, Teresa did too: the soul enters into itself, it is what it is. Mary's chimeric yearning for something that is to take a form that has the shape of a*

---

<sup>440</sup> Cage, p. 126.

<sup>441</sup> Certeau, Vol. 2, p. 127.



content which is a new arrangement *echoes Calasso's form of a telling that is content: I want to talk with you of the manners of hearing, perceiving, arranging which I learned from these writers and more, and which taught me to write nothing as we need it, nothing as we desire it. These are the news I have for you here, this the contribution of my study.*

[C. is awash with emotion].

C.R.: I think now of the omen of words without telling them, words caught at the point when they are not yet spoken, nothing more than their presence, nothing more than their silence, nothing more, nothing: more. Not markers but rhythms, words whose limits are hedges not edges, porous boundaries landscaped into being, the added H of a breath which enwraps and momentarily hosts unplanned visitors and unlikely constructions.

C. [attempting to offer some resistance]: I need more examples.

C.R.: In the thirteenth century Ibn 'Arabî wrote of that condition in which one writes one's personal knowledge as it 'registers things that are without (apparent) relation to the substance of the chapter he is engaged in writing; they will strike the profane reader as incoherent interpolations, although to my mind they pertain to the very soul of the chapter, though perhaps for reasons of which others are unaware', and mentions 'the secret sympathies between the concrete examples he juxtaposes [...]. It resists the conceptual dialectic [...] it is at once theoretical and experimental'.<sup>442</sup> Seven centuries later, Cristina

---

<sup>442</sup> Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, pp. 74–75.

writes to Alejandra: ‘Tell me about everything that you do [...] and don’t do. (Like the Chinese, I believe both are useful and beautiful)’.<sup>443</sup> I want chimeric writing to hold what words do, and don’t do. Cristina again, on encountering some paintings by Venturino Venturi: ‘[I]t was like a *silence*: at last, three things that [...] did not scream [...] three things quiet, absolute, *afar*’.<sup>444</sup> I want chimeric writing that does not scream, so it can absorb and hand over the mood and atmosphere around it. Butts writes of ‘the presentiment of ourselves [...]. Not a perception so much as a series of events noted, a hint of rules’.<sup>445</sup> She continues: ‘The time comes – one speaks what is in one’s heart – formulates it – to the right mind [...] there are other doors [...]. Yet why am I convinced that I shall get this clear in the right time – words, a sudden shifting & clearing’.<sup>446</sup>

C.: Quotations, quotations. But what is in your mind?

C.R.: How to transfer these qualities – the quiet, the entangled, the radiant – into my language? How to write the condition of music into a critical text? I move from edges to hedges, consider cadence, introduce listening to the page as method, and if the page is a site of transmission then I must consider time, mishearings, convulsions.

C. [mockingly]: This was not easy to write.

---

<sup>443</sup> Campo, *Il mio pensiero non vi lascia*, p. 164.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>445</sup> Butts, p. 117.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102–103.

C.R.: Mary wrote it. It is necessary to stop and mark the difficulty, the friction that some subjects, some chimeras provoke, rather than assuming it is all fine, and words will manage somehow. It is necessary to stop and mark these difficult moments, as a caution to other writers: sometimes words are found while stating the difficulty to write, rather than ignoring it. To do so, I need to find ways of arranging words, to articulate what falls in the gaps of conventional syntax or lexicon, like Partch did when he built new musical instruments, and called for other manners of tuning them, so that they would expand the range of what could be sounded, heard. He never placed emphasis on polish: he called instead for *extraverbal magic*, capable to inject new life into the otherwise ‘pathetically impoverished language of tone’.<sup>447</sup>

C.: Another example?

C.R.: Think of anything that declares absence, as in the mystic rhetoric of inversion: Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’s *De mystica theologia*, proving God’s being by naming and repeating all that he is not, or *De divinis nominibus*, pages and pages saying it is impossible to name God, pages and pages naming God, overloading the page to the point when it empties.<sup>448</sup> Think of the time spent working through such invisible material. I am drawn to the apophatic nature of writing in Dionysius, exposing what cannot be said about God, and saying it: the *via negativa*, the walks on the edges of understanding to state that there is an underlining which supports its not. The difficulty in this, the fact that it is not readily understood. The *volume* of words is as much criticism as it is argument,

---

<sup>447</sup> Partch, p. 161.

<sup>448</sup> Pseudo-Dionigi l’Aeropagita, ‘Teologia mistica’, ‘I nomi divini’, trans. by Benedetta Craveri and Mario Bortolotto, in *I mistici*, Vol. 1, pp. 440–451.

it carries the argument as it is formed.

Chim [chiming]: The ephemeral, covered with words. Now I see the difference between these pages, and those written by someone who works around materials inscribed in a canon, or writes in manners more familiar: they can be more concise, the economy of words is different, it is possible to refer to things quickly and move on. Here, every stone needs to be turned. It is a matter at once invisible and heavy.

C.R.: Marina Tsvetaeva wrote of her mother: ‘She spoke just in undertones, she never used a *bon mot*: it was too explicit. *Bon mots* get remembered, and she just wanted her words to bring pleasure, and be lost’.<sup>449</sup> Tellingly, the title of her text is *My Mother and Music* – the same one in which Calasso found the phosphorescence of literature, one that mentions music...

C.: The condition of music. These connections are getting stronger and stronger, C.R. I hear you begin to drop the R. of Ruin and allow space for D. again.

C.R.: ‘They are a *not yet*; they have not yet entered into being’.<sup>450</sup> Remember the untranslated, what is already there but unheard: think of chimeric writing as sympathetic union that does not go anywhere other than itself, stays where it is as passion lived and shared, revealing an existing mode of being through a desire so strong that it causes words

---

<sup>449</sup> Marina Cvetaeva, *Mia madre e la musica*, trans. by Marilena Rea, Bagno a Ripoli: Passigli Editori, 2016 [‘Mat’ i muzyka’, *Sovremennye Zapiski*, 57, 1935]. Translation by Rovina.

<sup>450</sup> Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 155.

to take form. Only chimeric yearning brings D.C. into being in my words, in the awareness that she will never entirely be heard.

C.: Love is closer to the lover than his jugular vein.

C.R.: So excessive is this nearness that it acts at first as a hindrance. That is why at the beginning one goes elsewhere to look. But in truth, the image of what I wanted to write was here, in the form of my notes on D.C.'s work. 'Nothing you write will lack meaning because the meaning is in you', wrote Flannery O'Connor to a friend.<sup>451</sup> I want to add: the meaning is in *we*.

C.: I am not sure how this fits with D.C.'s writing in English as a second language.

C.R.: *When writing out of the silence felt in her lack of words in English, that silence stayed with her, enwrapped her words, was never erased: its necessary volume allowed words to resound, to draw impetus from it. I am aware of the interplay of material and excess, Pizarnik's something more and something else than words, gained through writing as telling and lost in writing from silence as source.*

C.: What did writing as *the condition of music* allow D.C. to do then?

---

<sup>451</sup> O'Connor, *The Habit of Being*, New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1988 (1979), p. 188.

C.R.: To write not worrying about what is left out, but concerned with the heartbeat and the cadence of her telling. Consider the possibilities this partial yet singular manner opens: as she writes, she listens to the subtle noise of prose, and...

C.: You are falling back into essay mode, C.R. I thought you and D.C. had agreed it was not the appropriate way to proceed. Tell me more about your choices, as I remind you of your pact with... was it a devil, an apparition...

C.R.: ...a chimera? D.C. attempted to use the imaginary conversation as a literary form that, historically, enables speculation and, at once, steps back from any claims for realism.

C.: I remember D.C. first heard me while reading the metaphysical dialogues of Edgar Allan Poe, with their promise of a conversation beyond plausibility, even beyond death, real as perceived in the imaginal state.

C.R.: Sometimes the silence around her was so loud, that she could only laugh. Sometimes the emptiness was so overwhelming, the awareness that the subjects of her study were of such little interest for many, that the only voice she could adopt was that of the village fool.

C.: An effective rhetorical device in itself.

C.R.: Call it device, or D.'s vice, certainly a necessary one. The address of the village fool can be abrasive and strange, it forgets convention, it provokes. For many her voice is passing, not worthy of note, but it rings and lasts for a long time in those it reaches, or shall I say, pierces.

C.: The spell of the possessed.

C.R.: A way to be heard, in arrangements of words that sound unstable, groundless but not without grounds. Because they are so uncompromisingly singular, I'm allowed in, I can answer in turn, from my singularity.

C.: I need to hear more about the condition of music. What do you have in mind?

C.R.: *Have in mind* is not the correct formulation: ask me *what I hear*. Café Oto, London, one hot summer evening in 2018. For a few seconds in the middle of a hectic improvisation, Lia Mazzari beats the endpin of her cello on the floor, several times, no bow, allowing only the slight resonance of strings and the tapping of the spike to be heard. She leaves the room. The room feels still in an eternity of sounds, and it takes time. It takes time to be able to make a gesture like that, with authority, carrying in itself the depth of days and nights spent making that emptying gesture: charged with history, charged with a history. It takes time to bring yourself to make a gesture so minimal and so loaded. Can words be the same? Long stretches of time spent reading, listening, attempting writing. Words are there and the moment after, they may vanish because the atmosphere has changed. Sometimes you must open the door. First generate noise, disrupt, no

amplification. Then leave. This is why I am drawn to *the condition of music*: there I catch glimpses, sparks, crescendos, voids in time. There I learn what it takes to leave the room, and how: not appearing to do so, until the moment it happens. I want writing to be able to disappear like that, and in doing so, to establish presence in the fullness of silence. I think again of Blanchot's idea of critical writing as the snowflake that makes a bell toll, those moments in which words are barely there, barely heard, and yet their effect is resonant. Can my chimeric writing work with the absence of new words and the presence of yearning?

C.: Is it like a cover song?

C.R.: A few years ago, I saw a girl at a bus stop. She was wearing headphones, moving her body and singing along, silently, with the song she was hearing. I will never know what song it was but I could see the drive of her movements, which were not perfect and were certainly not in sync with an even rhythmic pattern. They were full of yearning for the song, I could see her ecstatic face at once with the song and with her body. At that point it did not matter what song that was. In the silence of song, I was invested in the fullness of her yearning-being. I want to think of writing as *that yearning movement with song*, rather than song as such.

C.: Are you inviting me?

C.R.: I am inviting you to sing a cover song with D.C., two heartbeats at once, one voice, the other, yearning. Having realised from years of practice that some of the ways in which she wished she could write were not attainable, what did she do? She began to rewrite as



if she was singing a cover song, her voice being in her gestures of writing. Musicians talk about *putting your spin* into a cover song, owning it, showing at once no respect, and total respect. You are a songwriter but the words are not yours. Or are they, when you sing? No pressure to be *faithful*, this is from pleasure, not pressure.

C.: When you sing a cover song you may catch yourself, unguarded.

C.R.: When Nick Cave sings in The Bad Seeds' cover song album, *Kicking Against the Pricks*, so often his voice is not a good fit conventionally, but the sheer pleasure in the singing is evident.<sup>452</sup> In a documentary released with a later reprint of that album, the commentators agree that he wanted to make a record in which he could 'enjoy himself', in 'a delicious creative exercise', 'a trail of clues that leads to explore other music'. 'It was not really himself'.<sup>453</sup> In theory. In the singing though, it was nothing but himself. D.C. too was drawn to writing when she was not really herself – and yet, she was nothing but.

C.: Concealment of the self for a deepening of self, like in Cristina's case. I begin to understand D.C.'s many names.

C.R.: *The realisation of being a stranger in a language, of otherness through listening, came early on for her: at school, confronted with a different accent, at the very moment she was starting to write. Suddenly her name had at least two, perhaps three, and who*

---

<sup>452</sup> Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, *Kicking Against the Pricks*, Mute Records, 1986 [on CD].

<sup>453</sup> Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard, *Do You Love Me Like I Do: Part 3*, 2011, <http://iainandjane.com/portfolio-item/doyouloveme/> [Accessed 25 January 2019].

*knows how many more sounds. The realisation that language was grounded in a place of homelessness did not prompt a crisis but opened into a malleable realm, where she could reach out beyond herself, a place of transformations. Leiris writes about this childhood aural misplacement and wonder beyond the self, beyond the page, into the arachnean tissue of language.*

C.: The pure fruits go crazy.

C.R.: *Not having one name, one voice, means having to fashion one, to construct, in a heightened awareness toward the workings of rhetoric: how we harvest for words, for moods, how we tune in, in which constellations we place our language.*

C.: Mary Butts, again: ‘I have been hindered wanting a formula. These books on occultism with their bastard words, credulities, falsities on facts, emotion & aesthetic falsities, inwardly revolt me. [...] Then I came back on a sudden turn. I remembered [...] the profoundest study of my adolescence – mystery cults from Thrace to Eleusis. [...] There are my formulae... “O God, Beast, Mystery, Come” ’.<sup>454</sup> Beast, Mystery, Monster, Chimera, Come. I dreamt of you last night, Chim. You were humming the song unhearn. Listen now to D.C.’s swan song, swan, *svanire*, in Italian: to vanish.

---

<sup>454</sup> Butts, p. 149.

## A Monologue: Sidelined, Sited, Cited, Csiting

### Cristina Rovina's Ruinous Drift

The impulse toward writing commentary, the medievalist scholar Nicola Masciandaro has argued, proceeds by straying, but never reaches so far to prevent from returning to the text that prompted it.<sup>455</sup> If the margin is the site of commentary, holding at once a tension for words to move away from the text they write around, and the impossibility for them to be entirely detached from it, the margin is also the site where boundaries may dissolve, a porous way of inhabiting text as self, and other. Masciandaro mentions the philosopher Reza Negarestani's idea of *hidden writings* according to which there are no subsequent layers in the commentary of a text, that demand straightforward interpretation of clear-cut material, but seamless distortions: as they comment on a text, the commentators continue to write it.<sup>456</sup> 'Commentary', Masciandaro maintains, 'constitutes a structure of understanding and experience, i.e. consciousness [...]. It is writing's way of staying original, in ever-new nearness to its earthly origins, in productive proximity to the fact that all writing is only on the earth. The *telos* of commentary, its far-off end, is *tellus*, what bears us'.<sup>457</sup> The margin allows text to exceed itself, and at once ground itself. The margin is a site. The margin bleeds. My margin, my site, has tears and frayed edges. *Situs* in Latin is site as well as dust, mould, detritus, that deposit in a place across time. To site is to be with residue, impure. My margin is where boundaries between site and cite, between being and reference, may dissolve. I yearn for csiting that sites and cites, that shifts writing away from pre-validated sources cited as fixed frameworks of

---

<sup>455</sup> Masciandaro, p. 28.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., p. 36. See also Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*, Melbourne: re.press, 2008.

<sup>457</sup> Masciandaro, p. 37.

legitimation, and sites itself as entangled and impure, claiming its singular being, citing its references no matter how obscure, and out of sync they may be. Citing I cite and site, a porous way of being me not all me, quoting and placing, inhabiting text as self and other. Sometimes the text I cite is not exclusively on a page, it is spoken. Writing that is citing is listening is transmitting. Citing I write after listening to Elfriede Jelinek's Nobel Prize Speech, in part from memory, in part from what I wrote before with her not all her, with gaps and missing links from an aural margin where writing flips into telling, where I yearn for writing that speaks with its subjects. I hear the subtle noise of prose. Listening to her speech the first time mattered, it continues to matter, growing beat inside my perception of writing in and out of the page, of radiance and discourse, presence and concealment. Something crucial is heard, not lyrical ornament, just because it cannot be summarised it does not mean it is devoid of substance. My commentary to this most profound and elusive piece cannot be on the margins but inside, inside. Where is commentary to a recorded speech? Where is the site, what is the cite in a spoken text so loaded and so ephemeral? It is not fixed. It is in hearing, in residue. For some time I inhabit it, for these pages I transform it, for ever I am transformed, into my fundamental cadence. Heartbeats in one cadence, questions of rhythm. Something had better remain unsaid, unsaid and groundless, groundless but not without grounds. It is spoken, I do not read, but hear it, whisper it back to you. Remember, I am the fool. Readership and reach are out of question, and this speech, where is it lodged? What matters is the individual hearing. The impression left by the telling of a story. The sense of being enmeshed in what came before in the history of my reading, those connections, states of voice, states of mind, states of mine and the mine is deep, some of it unmapped, some of it dark, some of it with precious stones, some of it with dull rock and moss and useless damp slippery surfaces. I have dwelled there for long times, sometimes I have slipped. I never had I

proper, had to construct my I my mine. Not having a voicemine means having to construct it, aware of the workings of rhetoric, artifice, assembling words found and connected by kinship, many voices, all mine. What came before and around I matters, broken material I have at hand, its cadence, never frame but heartbeat, core not score, heart not instruction. Even when there is apparently nothing to say. Listen. Some time ago, having found out about the other meaning of a song, I disappeared. I wanted to sing the song, not to say what it is. Is singing the gift of curling up, curling up with reality? What happens when there seems to be little real, relevant to sing? When a reality must be sung which is not current? My reality, my matter, my song is no formal thing. Sing? It can't be held in one style. The song that is another song cannot be tidied up and neatly arranged, drawn everywhere so tight and buttoned everywhere so thick. Unruly, it tangles up with the work and words of other writers. What is it around my throat? A scar, the sign of necessity. How many slits, how many scars to make my song heard. How many times retold, to make myself heard in that low hum, the subtle noise of prose, I heard. Read, heard? Read, heard, anagram plus the h of a breath. There, there I will find the hum, heard in books, from those who were before, whom I can talk to without worrying about the right style, intent instead in finding kinship. The song may sound like an abolished bibelot of sonorous inanity, in fact it tells me my words. It's me not all me, many voices, so they are, unruly, untidily, more echoes, a disturbing song, flip of a book, half-slip of the tongue, rhyming words as much as rhyming a disposition with that of a dead one, the fractured voice of understanding, the same and not quite so. Words are my warders but don't keep an I on me. Listen. Here is what a wise reclusive one said to me: 'What should remain, is always gone. It is at any rate not here. May you continue to spin. Still you must carry something for a long time, learn to be still, on site, csiting, sometimes even a short paragraph holds a long arc of time between one sentence and another. This is the portion

given to you and you must attend to it, in the most dedicated manner, small as it may be. Get there late, get to publishing late. Be demanding to your work, better to make it impossible to publish, than to avoid going to its extremes, even if this means to break it. Formulate your thoughts in the most brutal way, there is nothing left, nothing but a stone, a sigh, a spin, a song'. No, I do not worry. I cannot change much, I can transmit, transform this faint hum. It is cold here, it is the depth of night. So what is left to one, nothing but a stone, a sigh, a spin, a song.

## **In Memoriam D.C.**

### **Declaring Contribution to Knowledge Once Again, *Da Capo***

Voice from a Faintspeaker: It was all heard before. No new thing under the sun.

Literature: The form. The contribution to knowledge if this study is in its form, in its articulation.

Chimera: Chimeric: composite, monstrous, yearning.

L.: The composite, monstrous, yearning chimeric form, by which D.C.'s writing is made and understood, corresponds to the

C.: composite, monstrous, yearning

L.: form of the writer's being. You cannot detach the necessary form, in which this project is transmitted, from its writer's metaphysical groundings, and the way she is in the world. D.C. heard it in Corbin, when he states: 'Each of us carries in himself the Image of his own world, his *Imago mundi* [...] [This] offers us not only philosophemes to be studiously learned, but symbols [...], their universe is neither dead, nor outpassed, nor transcended. For in the measure to which an author rises to symbols, he cannot himself exhaust the significance of his work. This significance remains latent in the pleroma of symbols'.<sup>458</sup> Symbols, the forms in which a project is articulated, do not 'submit to the data' but 'propose tasks – even if their effort is not to bear fruit until after they are laid in the

---

<sup>458</sup> Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, pp. 8–9.

grave'.<sup>459</sup> As a *situative* practice of writing, and of thinking, chimeric writing is never exhaustive, and never *situated* in given frameworks, but orients itself as an operation never completed, and steeped in desire, that establishes its singular ontology, constellations of references, and shapes.<sup>460</sup> These may, at times, seem nothing.

C.: Nothing also means nothing obvious, or immediate. What else can be heard, D.C. asked, if given terms are dismissed in the writing of research, and lower or less expected frequencies are broadcast? What does this attuned hearing bring about, in its core?

L.: The core, *situative*... She heard this again in Corbin, whose insights into learning as 'opening our possibilities to ourselves' instead of accumulating 'vain erudition', finding oneself always as a stranger, always singular in one's mode of being, perceiving, and comprehending, stirred many thoughts in D.C. before her fall.<sup>461</sup>

C.: You are acute. Remember how D.C. became more and more drawn to Corbin's idea that the mode of presence is what determines the quality of how we learn, and think, and know. *How*: not form as an empty shell, but form as the necessary and inevitable articulation that could not be otherwise, because it is tied to being.

L.: How are you, Chim?

---

<sup>459</sup> Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, p. 11.

<sup>460</sup> For an illustration of *situative* modes of presence see Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, and Tom Cheetham, *The World Turned Inside Out: Henry Corbin and Islamic Mysticism*, New Orleans, LA: Spring, 2015.

<sup>461</sup> Corbin, *Ibid.*, p. 10.



C.: How do you perceive me, before thinking about it? What moves your language, before constraining it under systems and frames? In every research project, in every supervision encounter, in every writing instance, instead of imposing existing and validated frames, the question for D.C. is: can a constellation of references be assembled from the core that moves each project?

L.: *That* made her exhausted. Instead of writing exhaustive monographs about her subjects as a distant critic, she spoke with them, yearned for them.

C.: This form of writing does not aim to reach the conclusion of argument but the presence of heartbeat, following on words which other writers inhabited before, and which could later be inhabited, writing along those lines, dispersing, detouring. There is no wholeness, but consciousness breaking through cadence.

[Now the voices of Chimera, Literature, A.P., C.C., The Devil, C.R., from a Faintspeaker – voicing once again this study's contribution to knowledge – can be heard, at times overlapping, at times interfering, composite, never as *tutti*].

Chimeric writing is in excess of itself. It is interlocutory, not intertextual: we are left with texts that took the form of encounters, voices spoken and heard beyond the page, there, and elsewhere. What matters is reading, and how a text is read – not in its fixity, but in the conversations it may prompt, and in turn, the *milieus* it exists in, beyond text, and in the form of text: momentarily, present. Chimeric writing was D.C.'s research, the shape and cadence it took, and the ways in which it encountered the many-voiced boundaries of herself. She understood this mode of being with writing as her contribution

to knowledge, having reached a point of nothing; she could only rebegin from the voices she had heard in reading, there, with her, in various constellations and connections. Chimeric is a study of writing and the excess of writing, made through writing, and its yearning.

D.C. encountered Chimera, and Chimera was already there. She did not invent it, she sharpened her understanding so she could hear it in reading: not literally, not visually, but chimerically, a significant presence that allowed her to connect her materials. This is how D.C. could write herself, Cristina, and Alejandra in the imaginary conversations: not going anywhere else than inside their words, which she had heard in reading. Knowing is deepening, learning to see and hear what is there, sifted, collated, heard, held, heard. The contribution of this study is in finding the forms of being with literature presented in these pages, and in claiming them as chimeric.

The encounter with the term *chimera* in a number of texts D.C. had been reading, before she knew they contained the term, and before she knew she would think of her project as chimeric, made it no longer clear how to mark the site in which her intention began: chimeric yearning, like Corbin's creative prayer, has far broader scope than D.C. as isolated subject, yet resides inextricably in the meshes and entanglements of her understanding, which is always plural. This form of knowledge yearned for D.C. before she knew she was to write of such yearning. She did not know until she found those correspondences, but they were there. Working by assonance she found stone, she found Chimera. Writing chimerically she learned to write beyond the stone of paralysis and speechlessness.

D.C. found herself in excess of these pages, *all and nothing*, not exclusively here, hearing. This study may appear to be finished in these very last pages, but D.C. never finishes reading Alejandra, Cristina, Roberto. She repeats and returns, as they touch her innermost ways of understanding being in literature.

There is another type of excess: the chimeric signals that crossed D.C.'s reading *after* these pages were written, and which these pages cannot capture even though in resonance with them: this is how chimeric writing generates more writing, as it is already yearning for, and promising more writing. Writing, for example, that might engage with the philosopher and musician Jan Zwicky's 'lyric philosophy', conjoining rigour and resonance in textual fragments stating that 'to attend is not necessarily to take action; it is, first and foremost, to listen', or 'how we choose to express ourselves reveals something or what we desire as response', both chimeric in their call for listening as attention, and in their emphasis on modes and forms of writing;<sup>462</sup> or with the translator and writer Cristina Rivera Garza's considerations around *disappropriation* as a form of writing with others, most notably how in order 'to understand one must be capable of sympathetic resonance';<sup>463</sup> or with the philosopher and writer Vivian Darroch-Lozowski's 'eccentric but not capricious' writing of pulsations in her important, long forgotten, and recently reprinted book *Voice of Hearing*. In Darroch-Lozowski's restless, austere, and visionary remarks on bringing to life, in writing, a 'creature that has never been', D.C. heard her heartbeat, very close, as if the future was coming to meet her, across Vivian's words, from a time long before her.<sup>464</sup>

---

<sup>462</sup> Jan Zwicky, *Lyric Philosophy*, 2nd edn, Edmonton & Calgary: Brush Education, 2014 (1992), §142, §156.

<sup>463</sup> Cristina Rivera Garza, *The Restless Dead: Necrowriting and Disappropriation*, trans. by Robin Myers, Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2020, p. 55 [*Los Muertos indóciles. Necroescrituras y desapropiación*, Barcelona: Debolsillo, 2013].

<sup>464</sup> Darroch-Lozowski, p. 37.

Excess is also found in all the encounters with the very term *chimera*, simultaneous to the writing of these pages, which these pages could not host. Chimera appeared in Marguerite Yourcenar's *The Abyss*, on that very page where the alchemical *solve et coagula* is manifested.<sup>465</sup> Incidentally, it was Yourcenar who wrote of a certain 'mysticism of matter' in her introduction to Roger Caillois's *The Writing of Stones*.<sup>466</sup> Chimera also appeared in László Krasznahorkai's lacerating and sublime last text in the collection *Seiobo There Below*, calling for an impossible scream, deep and unapproachable yet written.<sup>467</sup> Such an excess is not a shortcoming: it foregrounds a practice of reading, thinking, and being with words that continues far beyond the limits of this thesis-work; a way of perceiving and connecting, so that the work remains alive beyond deadlines and word counts, always welcoming the recalcitrant parts. D.C.'s method of attunement demands a porosity in reading that is in fact an ethos, and a manner of organising and writing research. It would be a failure if this study did not continue to generate more reading and more writing. The fact that it cannot be contained testifies to its ability to be present and to reach far beyond word-count and temporal limitations: one of its findings is in what it has not found yet, in its disposition to hear, not a definitive answer. This research cannot be completed because it is impossible to exhaust a symbol. It continues to breathe in the Voice from a Faintspeaker, humming through and connecting disparate parts. Chimera, image heard in reading, holds a yearning for its excess, and is built in turn on residues of what came before.

---

<sup>465</sup> Marguerite Yourcenar, *L'opera al nero*, trans. by Marcello Mongardo, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2001, p. 154 [*L'œuvre au noir*, Paris: Gallimard, 1968].

<sup>466</sup> Yourcenar, 'Introduction', in Roger Caillois, *The Writing of Stones*, trans. by Barbara Bray, Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1985, p. xiv [*L'Écriture des pierres*, Genève: Albert Skira, 1970].

<sup>467</sup> László Krasznahorkai, *Seiobo There Below*, trans. by Otilie Mulzet, London: Tuskar Rock, 2015, p. 451 [*Seiobo járt odalent*, Budapest: Magvető, 2008].

In its composite, uneven form, chimeric writing csites itself in its sources beyond the limits of quotation marks, echoing, distorting, inhabiting, and reinventing them. In proposing the symbol of chimera, whose form is mutability, in transforming herself into the material of her study, in tracing and retracing her histories of reading, D.C. learned to write. Across engagements that exist inside the fibres of her (not all hers) language, inside the texture of reading – philosophical, formal, aural – these pages were written, allowing Chimera to grow from within the material, in heartbeats hearn beneath the text.

The main contribution of this thesis-work lies in the affirmation of its necessity; and in its chimeric shape and yearning movements across neologisms such as *csiting* and *transcelating*, which declare and formalise new possibilities for the writing of research and for writing as research.

The main contribution of this chimera-study is nothing as we need it.

L.: ‘For Chimeric Writing’ ... What do we need from criticism then?

D.C.: Nothing as we need it.

C.C.: All and nothing.

C.: We need Chimera.

C.R.: An image heard in reading.

A.P.: Hearn. Yearning. Not arguing for, but imagining in.

D.: New vocabularies, and wildly imaginative forms of hearing in reading.

D.C.: We need to call it chimeric.

A.P.: Finished and incomplete.

C.C.: See, we have barely started.

D.C.: Let's rebegin, Da Capo, listen now, then sing:

*Eulogy on the Untimely Death of D.C.*<sup>468</sup>

Language thou art too narrow, and too weak

To ease us now; great sorrow cannot speak;

If we could sigh out accents, and weep words,

Grief wears, and lessens, that tears breath affords.

Here needs no marble tomb, since she is gone,

She, and about her, her, are turned to stone.

---

<sup>468</sup> Merging two poems by John Donne, 'Elegy on the L.C.' and 'An Elegy upon the Death of Mistress Boulstred', in Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, London: Penguin, 1996 (1633), p. 247, p. 251.

## Afterword: Research Outputs

Voice from a Faintspeaker [now truly exhausted, listless to the point of gradually reducing her words to lists]: D.C. started writing two books during this study, both haunted by it, but again, slightly out of sync with it.

*Nothing As We Need It: A Chimera* (Punctum Books / Risking Education, forthcoming 2022) imagines and writes a composite and impure form of criticism that embodies the writing of research as recursive, entangled, and many-voiced. It proposes *chimeric writing* as a composite form of critical writing that unsettles language and manifests possibilities for working with citation beyond the boundaries of quotation marks. It is aimed for artist, art writers, theorists, and critics drawn toward forms of writing at the intersections between theory and fiction, philosophy and poetics; and for researchers in the arts interested in ways of working with literature as material before translation. Published by an imprint of Punctum Books called Risking Education, which promotes works that challenge the conventions of educational systems, the book shows that D.C.'s research contributes to debates about methods of thinking, teaching, and working with literature beyond disciplinary limits.

*Chimeras: A Deranged Essay. An Imaginary Conversation. A Transculation* (Sublunary Editions, forthcoming 2022) was prompted by a series of encounters with the lesser-known prose by Alejandra Pizarnik, and with the essays and letters by Cristina Campo. According to D.C., 'the more time I spent with their work, the harder it became for me to envisage writing about them in the form of monographic, exhaustive studies. I became more interested in the silences I could hear in their words, and in the unspoken

undercurrents running across their untranslated texts. In the lack of English translations I became curious to see what other forms my writing might take, if lodged exactly in the volume of my pauses; in that uneasy space when there seems to be little to say because there is too much that is difficult to articulate; what happens in writing before translation; what faint signals may be heard, and how to transmit them.’ The *chimeric writing* that ensues is characterised by yearning, the second meaning of the term *chimera*: a yearning that is not a measure of lack, but a vessel for what is there, insubstantial as it may appear, and prompts writing in resonance instead of reference, impurity, and enmeshment instead of distance or polish. The book demonstrates possibilities to engage deeply and repeatedly with the work of other writers, while avoiding the form of monographic, exhaustive studies: it proposes the Deranged Essay, the Imaginary Conversation, and the Transcelation as models to engage with research material from different angles.

Taking her research further, D.C. was appointed Commissioning Editor at Glasgow’s *MAP Magazine*. In her monthly series *A Year of Carte Blanche and Other Chimeras* she writes editorials and commissions texts in which a range of contributors engage with Chimeric Writing, taking the scope of her study in other territories and welcoming other voices – an opportunity to continue to re-shape chimeric writing according to various responses; to listen to more voices rather than impose a pre-determined frame; to elaborate on the two books *after* they were written but *before* they are published, emphasising the time loops and a-synchronicities in the writing of research.

Other research outputs include:



‘...cerchi? Cerchi. (...you Search? Circles.)’, *Reliquiae*, ed. by Autumn Richardson and Richard Skelton, Vol. 9, No. 2, Corbel Stone Press, 2021. The first attempt at taking this research one step further, the essay spends more time with the writings by the ‘Western mystics’ that Cristina Campo studied, and conjoins them to other texts by Simone Weil, Djuna Barnes, and Jean Genet, by means of the aural method that distinguishes chimeric writing.

‘My Chimera’, *The Yellow Paper: Journal for Art Writing*, ed. by Laura Haynes, N. 2, Glasgow School of Art, 2021. A version of the ‘My Chimera’ section, merged with a fragment from an Imaginary Conversation.

‘A Bell for Cristina’, *Glossator: Practice and Theory of the Commentary*, monographic issue on Cristina Campo, ed. by Andrea Di Serego Alighieri and Nicola Masciandaro, Vol. 11, summer 2021. An earlier version of ‘A Bell for Cristina’, published in the first English-language anthology of commentaries devoted to Campo.

‘Volumes’, *Firmament*, Sublunary Editions, ed. by Jessica Sequeira, 3, July 2021. An earlier, shorter version of ‘A Deranged Essay: Impossible Interviews’.

“‘Ah, the Violet.’ Or Was It a Bell?”, in *Setting a Bell Ringing*, ed. by Sharon Kivland, London: MA BIBLIOTHÈQUE, 2021. ‘Untitled’, in *Dominique Hurth: Mixtape*, cassette and booklet, limited edition, 2020. In these two texts various tonal and rhythmic experiments presented across this thesis-work were rehearsed.

‘Voices, Subjects, Chimeras’, in *A Table Made Again for the First Time*, ed. by Francesco Pedraglio and Paul Becker, Mexico City: Juan De La Cosa, 2021. This text presents earlier considerations around chimeric writing and Michel Leiris.

‘The Stain of Stein: For Chimeric Writing’, *Tinted Window: Verbi-Voco-Visual Issue*, 2, 2019. An earlier version of ‘The Stain of Stein’.

Talks, Readings, Seminars include ‘Chimeric Writing’, *Writing for Practice Research Forum*, organised by Julia Calver and Katarina Rankovic, Goldsmiths University of London and Sheffield Hallam University, 2021; *Summa Technologiae* seminar, led by Ed Keller and Carla Leitão for *The Untranslatable*, curated by Julieta Aranda, e-flux, 2020; ‘Monsters, Swans, Chimeras’, *Other Creatures, Entities and Faint Beings*, curated by David Toop, Café Oto, London; ‘The Stain of Stein’, *Flashpoint*, Art Research Seminar, Goldsmiths University of London; ‘The Stain of Stein’, *Gestures: Writing that Moves Between*, University of Manchester and The Whitworth Gallery, 2019; ‘Chimeras’, *Words on the Move*, organised by Marina Warner and Luke Williams, Birkbeck, London, 2018.

FINE

(It is Fine, but not The End)<sup>469</sup>

---

<sup>469</sup> In Italian *fine* means *the end*.

## Bibliography

*Alejandra*, dir. by Ernesto Ardito and Virna Molina, 2013,

<https://vimeo.com/groups/356111/videos/55576286> [Accessed 15 November 2019]

Alejandra Pizarnik Papers, Box 9, Folder 1, Special Collections, Princeton Library

‘Alejandra Pizarnik’, *Poetry Foundation*,

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/alejandra-pizarnik> [Accessed 29 October 2019]

‘Alejandra Pizarnik, Victoria Polevá, Dubravka Ugrešić’, *Music and Literature*, 6, 2015

Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, trans. by P. G. Walsh, Oxford: Oxford University Press World’s Classics, 2008 (2nd century CE)

Alighieri, Dante, ‘Inferno: Canto V’, in *La Divina Commedia*, Milano e Padova: Euroricerca, 1977 (1472)

——— *Rime*, ed. by Gianfranco Contini, Torino: Einaudi, 1995 (1939)

Bachelard, Gaston, *Lautréamont*, trans. by Robert S. Dupree, Dallas, TX: The Pegasus Foundation, 1986 [*Lautréamont*, Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1939]

Bachmann, Ingeborg, *Letteratura come utopia*, trans. by Vanda Perretta, Milano:

Adelphi, 1993 [*Frankfurter Vorlesungen: Probleme zeitgenössischer Dichtung*, München: R. Piper & Co, 1980]

Bakhtin, Mikail, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson,

Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984 [*Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, (n. pub.): Moscow, 1963]

Bataille, Georges, *Eroticism*, trans. by Mary Dalwood, London: Penguin, 2012

[*L’Érotisme*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1957]

- *The Tears of Eros*, trans. by Peter Connor, San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1989 [*Les Larmes d'Eros*, Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1961]
- Baudelaire, Charles, 'A ciascuno la sua Chimera', in *Piccoli poemi in prosa*, trans. by Nicola Muschitiello, Milano: BUR, 1990, pp. 84–87 ['Chacun sa Chimère', in *Petits poèmes en prose, Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. 4, Paris: Michel Lévy, 1869]
- 'Dell'essenza del riso', in *Scritti sull'arte*, trans. by Giuseppe Guglielmi and Enzo Raimondi, Torino: Einaudi, 1992, pp. 139–155 ['De l'essence du rire', *Portefeuille*, 12 août 1855]
- Bene, Carmelo, 'La Chimera', Canti Orfici, YouTube video, 2'40", 2008 (1996)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dvlyfgLDZs> [Accessed 11 January 2019]
- Benn, Gottfried, *Lo smalto sul nulla*, trans. by Luciano Zagari, Giancarlo Russo, Gilberto Forti, Milano: Adelphi, 1992 (1959) [*Gesammelte Werke*, Wiesbaden-München: Limes Verlag, 1959]
- Benson, Stephen, and Clare Connors, eds, *Creative Criticism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014
- Bernstein, Charles, *A Poetics*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1998 (1992)
- *Attack Of the Difficult Poems. Essays and Inventions*, Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011
- Blanchot, Maurice, *Lautréamont and Sade*, trans. by Stuart and Michelle Kendall, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004 [*Lautréamont et Sade*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1949]
- *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays*, trans. by Lydia Davis, New York, NY: Station Hill, 1981
- *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. by Susan Hanson, Minneapolis, MN and

- London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993 [*L'entretien infini*, Paris: Gallimard, 1969]
- Blondel, Nathalie, ed., *The Journals of Mary Butts*, New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, Kindle edition, 2002
- Boyer, Anne, *A Handbook of Disappointed Fate*, New York, NY: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2018
- Briggs, Kate, *This Little Art*, London: Fitzcarraldo, 2017
- Browne, Sir Thomas, *Religio Medici and Urne-Buriall*, New York, NY: New York Review of Books, 2012 (1642 / 1658)
- 'The Garden of Cyrus', in *Religio Medici and Other Writings*, London: Everyman's Library, 1969 (1658), pp. 177–229
- Caduff, Corina, and Tan Wälchli, eds, *Artistic Research And Literature*, Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag / Brill, 2019
- Cage, John, *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, London and New York, NY: Marion Boyars, 2009 (1968)
- Caillois, Roger, *The Writing of Stones*, trans. by Barbara Bray, Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1985 [*L'Écriture des pierres*, Genève: Albert Skira, 1970]
- Calasso, Roberto, *Cento lettere a uno sconosciuto*, Milano: Adelphi, 2003
- *I geroglifici di Sir Thomas Browne*, Milano: Adelphi, 2018 (1965)
- *Il cacciatore celeste*, Milano: Adelphi, 2019 (2016) (*The Celestial Hunter*, trans. by Richard Dixon, London: Allen Lane, 2020)<sup>470</sup>
- *I quarantanove gradini*, Milano: Adelphi, 1991 (*The Forty-Nine Steps*, trans. by John Shepley, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001)

---

<sup>470</sup> Even though they are not mentioned in the thesis-work, details of existing English translations of Calasso's books are given between brackets for reference.

- *Ka*, new revised and annotated edition, Milano: Adelphi, 1999 (1996) (*Ka*, trans. by Tim Parks, London: Penguin, 2019)
- *La letteratura e gli dei*, Milano: Adelphi, 2001 (*Literature and the Gods*, trans. by Tim Parks, London: Vintage, 2001)
- *L'ardore*, Milano: Adelphi, 2016 (2010) (*Ardor*, trans. by Richard Dixon, London: Penguin, 2015)
- *La rovina di Kasch*, Milano: Adelphi, 1983 (*The Ruin of Kasch*, trans. by Richard Dixon, London: Penguin, 2018)
- *L'impuro folle*, Milano: Adelphi, 1992 (1974)
- 'Una scrittrice fra mistica e letteratura', *Corriere della Sera*, 5 marzo 1977
- Campana, Dino, *Canti Orfici*, Milano: Rizzoli, 1989 (1914)
- Campo, Cristina, *Caro Bul. Lettere a Leone Traverso (1953–1967)*, Milano: Adelphi, 2007
- *Gli imperdonabili*, Milano: Adelphi, 1987
- *Il mio pensiero non vi lascia. Lettere a Gianfranco Draghi e ad altri amici del periodo fiorentino*, Milano: Adelphi, 2011
- *La tigre assenza*, Milano: Adelphi, 1991
- *Lettere a Mita*, Milano: Adelphi, 2013
- *Sotto falso nome*, Milano: Adelphi, 1998
- 'The Unforgiveables', trans. by Will Schutt, in *Becoming Human Is an Art*, Amsterdam: Nexus Institute, 2020
- Cascella, Daniela, *En Abîme. Listening, Reading, Writing: An Archival Fiction*, Winchester and Washington, DC: Zero Books, 2012
- *F.M.R.L.: Footnotes, Mirages, Refrains and Leftovers of Writing Sound*, Winchester and Washington, DC: Zero Books, 2015

- *Singed: Muted Voice-Transmissions, After the Fire*, London and Prague:  
Equus Press, 2017
- Cavarero, Adriana, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal  
Expression*, trans. by Paul A. Kottman, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press,  
2005 [*A più voci. Filosofia dell'espressione vocale*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2003].
- *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude*, trans. by Amanda Minervini and Adam  
Sitze, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016 [*Inclinazioni. Critica della  
rettitudine*, Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2014]
- *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. by P. A. Kottman,  
London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2000 [*Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi  
racconti. Filosofia della narrazione*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1997]
- Cave, Nick and the Bad Seeds, *Kicking Against the Pricks*, Mute Records, 1986 [on  
CD]
- Certeau, Michel de, *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 2 vols,  
trans. by Michael B. Smith, Chicago, IL and London: The University of Chicago  
Press, 1992, 2015 [*La Fable Mystique, XVIe-XVIIe Siècle*, Paris: Gallimard,  
1982, 2013]
- Cheetham, Tom, *The World Turned Inside Out. Henry Corbin and Islamic Mysticism*,  
New Orleans, LA: Spring, 2015
- Chiarocossi, Graziella and Franco Zabagli, eds, *La biblioteca di Pier Paolo Pasolini*,  
Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2017
- Cixous, Hélène, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', trans. by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen,  
*Signs*, Vol. 1., 4, Summer 1976, pp. 875–893 ['Le rire de la Meduse', *L'Arc*,  
1975]
- *Three Steps on The Ladder of Writing*, trans. by Sarah Cornell and Susan

- Sellers, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993
- Clifford, James, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988
- Corbin, Henry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, trans. by Liadain Sherrard and Philip Sherrard, London: Kegan Paul, 1993 [*Histoire de la philosophie Islamique*, Paris: Gallimard, 1964]
- *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in The Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi*, trans. by Ralph Manheim, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997 [*L’imagination créatrice dans le Soufisme d’Ibn ‘Arabi*, Paris: Flammarion, 1958]
- *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, trans. by Willard R. Trask, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988 [*Avicenne et le récit visionnaire*, Teheran and Paris: Departement d’Iranologie de l’Institut Franco-Iranien / Librairie d’Amerique et d’Orient Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1954]
- *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi’ite Iran*, trans. by Nancy Pearson, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977 [*Terre céleste et corps de resurrection: de l’Iran mazdéan a l’Iran shi’ite*, Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1960]
- Cvetaeva, Marina, *Mia madre e la musica*, trans. by Marilena Rea, Bagno a Ripoli: Passigli Editori, 2016 [‘Mat’ i muzyka’, *Sovremennye Zapiski*, 57, 1935]
- Darroch-Lozowski, Vivian, *Voice of Hearing*, Toronto: Squint Press, 2020 (1984)
- Daumal, René, ‘Per avvicinare l’arte poetica indù’, in *Lanciato dal pensiero*, trans. by



- Svevo D'Onofrio, Alessandro Grossato, and Claudio Rugafiori, Milano: Adelphi, 2019, pp. 110–111 [‘Pour approcher l’art poétique hindou, *Mesures*, II, 15 avril 1938]
- Daumal, René, and Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, *Theory of the Great Game: Writings from ‘Le Grand Jeu’*, ed. and trans. by Dennis Duncan, London: Atlas Press, 2015
- Deleuze, Gilles and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism*, New York, NY: Zone Books, 1989
- De Stefano, Cristina, *Belinda e il mostro. Vita segreta di Cristina Campo*, Milano: Adelphi, 2002
- Dillon, Brian, *Essayism*, London: Fitzcarraldo, 2017
- Dimock, Wai Chee, ‘A Theory of Resonance’, *PMLA*, Vol. 112, 5, October 1997, pp. 1060–1071, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/463483> [Accessed 15 July 2019]
- Dinesen, Isak (Karen Blixen), *Seven Gothic Tales*, London: Penguin, 2002 (1934)
- Di Serego Alighieri, Andrea, and Nicola Masciandaro, eds, ‘Cristina Campo: Translation / Commentary’, *Glossator: Theory and Practice of the Commentary*, 11, summer 2021
- Donne, John, *The Complete English Poems*, London: Penguin, 1996
- Duncan, Robert, *The H.D. Book*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 2011
- Dworkin, Craig, *No Medium*, Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2013
- *Radium of the Word: A Poetics of Materiality*, Chicago, IL and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2020
- *Reading the Illegible*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2003
- Ecclesiastes, or, The Preacher. Authorized King James Version*, New York, NY: Grove Press, 1998

- Elkins, James and Michael Newman, eds, *The State of Art Criticism*, New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2008
- Eshun, Kodwo, *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*, London: Quartet Books, 1998
- Farnetti, Monica, Filippo Secchieri, and Roberto Taioli, eds, *Appassionate distanze. Letture di Cristina Campo con una scelta di testi inediti*, Mantova: Tre Lune Edizioni, 2006
- Farnetti, Monica, and Giovanna Fozzer, eds, *Per Cristina Campo*, Milano: All'insegna del pesce d'oro di Vanni Scheiwiller, 1998
- Forsyth, Iain and Jane Pollard, *Do You Love Me Like I Do: Part 3*, 2011, <http://iainandjane.com/portfolio-item/doyouloveme/> [Accessed 25 January 2019].
- Foscolo, Ugo, *L'ipercalisse*, 1816, [https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/L\\_ipercalisse.html?id=2wZEAAAAYA\\_AJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/L_ipercalisse.html?id=2wZEAAAAYA_AJ&redir_esc=y) [Accessed November 2019]
- Frye, Northrop, *Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957
- Fusco, Maria, Yve Lomax, Michael Newman, Adrian Rifkin, '11 Statements Around Art Writing', *Frieze* online, 11 October 2011, <https://frieze.com/article/11-statements-around-art-writing> [Accessed 7 October 2018]
- Griffiths, Eric, *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989
- 'Guerrini, Vittoria', in *Treccani: Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 60, 2003 [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vittoria-guerrini\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vittoria-guerrini_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/) [Accessed 11 July 2019]
- H.D., *Notes on Thought and Vision*, San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1982 (1919)

- Hearn, Lafcadio, 'The Sympathy of Benten', in *Japanese Ghost Stories*, London: Penguin, 2019 (1900)
- Heller-Roazen, Daniel, *Echolalias: On the Forgetting of Language*, New York, NY: Zone Books, 2005
- Hilevaara, Katja and Emily Orley, eds, *The Creative Critic: Writing As / About Art Practice*, New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2018
- Hillman, James, *Alchemical Psychology*, Putnam, CT: Spring Publications, 2014
- *The Soul's Code*, New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1997
- *The Thought of the Heart and the Soul of the World*, Putnam, CT: Spring Publications, 2014 (1992)
- Hofmannsthal, Hugo von, *The Book of Friends*, trans. by Douglas Robertson, *The Philosophical Worldview Artist*, blog, 13 February 2009, <http://shirtysleeves.blogspot.com/2008/04/translation-of-buch-der-freunde-by-hugo.html> [Accessed 29 November 2019] [*Buch der Freunde*, Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1922]
- Jankélévitch, Vladimir, *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. by Carolyn Abbate, Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003 [*La Musique et l'Ineffable*, Paris: Éditions Armand Colin, 1961]
- Jelinek, Elfriede, *Her Not All Her: On / With Robert Walser*, trans. by Damion Searls, London: Sylph Editions, 2012 [*Er nicht als er (zur, mit Robert Walser)*, Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2004]
- *Sidelined*, Nobel Lecture, 2004, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2004/jelinek/lecture/> [Accessed 18 October 2018]
- Josipovici, Gabriel, *The Mirror of Criticism: Selected Reviews, 1977–1982*, Brighton:

The Harvester Press, 1983

Joy, Eileen A., 'Weird Reading', *Speculations: A Journal of Speculative Realism*, IV, 2013, pp. 28–34

Jullien, Francois, *In Praise of Blandness: Proceeding from Chinese Thought and Aesthetic*, trans. Paula M. Varsano, New York, NY: Zone Books, 2004 [*Eloge de la fadeur*, Arles: Editions Philippe Picquier, 1991]

Kivland, Sharon, *A Lover's Discourse, Un discours amoureux*, London: MA BIBLIOTHÈQUE, 2017

Krasznahorkai, László, *Seiobo There Below*, trans. by Otilie Mulzet, London: Tuskar Rock, 2015 [*Seiobo járt odalent*, Budapest: Magvetó, 2008]

Lahiri, Jhumpa, ed. and trans., *The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories*, London: Penguin, 2020

Lautréamont, *Maldoror and Poems*, trans. by Paul Knight, London: Penguin, 1978 [*Les Chants de Maldoror*, Bruxelles: Verboeckhoven et Cie, 1869]

Leiris, Michel, 'Ciò che mi hanno detto i dipinti di Francis Bacon', trans. by Roberto Rossi, in *Francis Bacon*, Milano: Abscondita, 2001 ['Francis Bacon ou la verité criante', *Au verso des images*, Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1980]

——— *Rules of the Game I: Scratches*, trans. by Lydia Davis, Baltimore, MD and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997 [*La Règle du jeu I: Biffures*, Paris: Gallimard, 1948]

——— 'The Bullfight as Mirror', trans. by Ann Smock, *October*, Vol. 63, Winter 1993, pp. 21–40, The MIT Press, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/778863> [Accessed 2 July 2019] [*Miroir de la Tauromachie*, Paris: Glm, 1938] ['De la literatura considerada como una tauromaquia', trans. by Silvia Delpy and Alejandra Pizarnik, *Sur*, 315, 1968]

- Leopardi, Giacomo, *Operette morali*, 4th edn, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1998 (1824)
- *Zibaldone di pensieri*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2019 (1827)
- Lispector, Clarice, *Água viva*, trans. by Stefan Tobler, London: Penguin, 2014 [*Água viva*, Rio de Janeiro: Artenova, 1973]
- Lucian, *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, trans. by Henry Watson Fowler and Francis George Fowler, Forgotten Books, 2007 (2nd century CE)
- Mackintosh, Fiona, ‘Self-Censorship and New Voices in Pizarnik’s Unpublished Manuscripts’, *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, Vol. 87, 4, 2010, pp. 509–535, DOI: [10.1080/14753820.2010.483141](https://doi.org/10.1080/14753820.2010.483141) [Accessed 15 June 2019]
- Manganelli, Giorgio, *Discorso dell’ombra e dello stemma*, Milano: Adelphi, 2017 (1982)
- *Il rumore sottile della prosa*, Milano: Adelphi, 1994
- *Le interviste impossibili*, Milano: Adelphi, 1997 (1975 / 76)
- Marcus, Greil, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989
- Masciandaro, Nicola, ‘Becoming Spice: Commentary As Geophilosophy’, *Collapse*, VI, Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2010, pp. 20–56
- McCarthy, Penny, *La Biblioteca de Babel*, London: MA BIBLIOTHÈQUE, 2018
- McGann, Jerome J., *Swinburne: An Experiment in Criticism*, Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1972
- Mellow, James, *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein and Company*, New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2003 (1974)
- Michaux, Henri, *A Certain Plume*, trans. by Richard Sieburth, New York, NY: New York Review Books, 2018 [*Un certain Plume*, Paris: Éditions du Carrefour, 1930]

- Migone, Christof, *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body*, Los Angeles, CA and Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2012
- Negarestani, Reza, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*, Melbourne: re.press, 2008
- Negróni, María, 'Melancolía y cadaver textual', *INTI: Revista de literatura hispánica*, 52-53, Otoño 2000-Primavera 2001, pp. 169–178  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23287084> [Accessed 21 June 2019]
- Nerval, Gérard de, 'The Chimeras: Golden Lines', trans. by Robert Duncan, in *Aurelia and Other Writings*, trans. by Geoffrey Wagner, R. Duncan, and Marc Lowenthal, Boston, MA: Exact Change, 1996, pp. 164–165 ['Les Chimères', in *Les Filles du Feu*, Paris: Michèle Levy, 1854]
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Anti-Education: On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, trans. by Damion Searls, New York, NY: New York Review of Books, 2016  
 ['Über die Zukunft unserer Bildungsanstalten', in *Friedrich Nietzsche: Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, vol. 1, Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999 (1872)]
- Notizia intorno a Didimo Chierico*, 1813,  
[https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Notizia\\_intorno\\_a\\_Didimo\\_Chierico](https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Notizia_intorno_a_Didimo_Chierico) [Accessed November 2019]
- O'Connor, Flannery, *Mystery and Manners*, New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970 (1969)
- *The Habit of Being*, New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1988 (1979)
- Palinurus, *The Unquiet Grave*, New York, NY: Persea Books, 1981 (1944)
- Partch, Harry, *Bitter Music: Collected Journals, Essays, Introductions, and Librettos*, Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991

- Pasolini, Pier Paolo, 'A Desperate Vitality', in *Poems*, trans. by Norman McAfee, New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996, pp. 148–177 ['Una disperata vitalità', in *Poesia in forma di rosa*, Milano: Garzanti, 2001 (1964)]
- dir., 'La ricotta', in *Ro.Go.Pa.G.*, 1962 / 63, London: Eureka Entertainment, 2012 [on DVD]
- *Petrolio*, Milano: Mondadori, 2015 (1992) [*Petrolio*, trans. by Ann Goldstein, London: Secker and Warburg, 1997]
- Penrose, Valentine, *The Bloody Countess*, trans. by Alexander Trocchi, London: Creation Books, 1996 (1957)
- Petronius, *The Satyricon*, trans. by P. G. Walsh, Oxford: Oxford University Press World's Classics, 2009 (1st century CE)
- Pizarnik, Alejandra, *A Tradition of Rupture: Selected Critical Writings*, trans. by Cole Heinowitz, New York: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2019
- *Diarios*, ed. by Ana Becció, Barcelona: Lumen, 2017 (2013)
- *Extracting the Stone of Madness: Poems 1962–1972*, trans. by Yvette Siegert, New York: New Directions, 2016
- *La contessa sanguinaria*, trans. by Francesca Lazzarato, Roma: Playground, 2005 ['La condesa sangrienta', in *Prosa completa*, Barcelona: Lumen, 2018 (1966)]. A few excerpts are translated in English by Cole Heinowitz in *Seedings*, 4, fall 2017 <https://durationpress.com/projects/seedings/seedings-issue-four/> [Accessed 6 July 2021]
- *Prosa completa*, Barcelona: Lumen, 2002
- Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. by David Gallop, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993 (4th century BC)
- *Phaedrus*, trans. by Walter Hamilton, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986 (4th

century BC)

Poe, Edgar Allan, 'The Colloquy of Monos and Una', 'Conversation of Eiros and Charmion', in *The Complete Tales and Poems*, London: Penguin, 1982 (1839), pp. 444–456

Potts, Adam, 'The Apocalyptic Tone of Scott Walker, Sunn O))) and Soused', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 24:3, 16 August 2020, DOI: [10.1080/14797585.2020.1806441](https://doi.org/10.1080/14797585.2020.1806441) [Accessed 18 August 2020]

——— 'Writing Sound and Radical Fiction: The Abyssal Space of Writing, Reading and Listening', *New Writing*, 14:1, 3 November 2016, DOI: [10.1080/14790726.2016.1250783](https://doi.org/10.1080/14790726.2016.1250783) [Accessed 5 November 2016]

(Riding) Jackson, Laura, *The Telling*, Manchester: Flyfield Books / Carcanet, 2005 (1972)

Rilke, Rainer Maria, *The Book of Images*, <http://rainer-maria-rilke.de/06b022abend.html> [Accessed 1 July 2021] [*Das Buch der Bilder*, Berlin: Axel Juncker Verlag, 1902]

Rivera Garza, Cristina, *The Restless Dead: Necrowriting and Disappropriation*, trans. by Robin Myers, Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2020 [*Los Muertos indóciles. Necroescrituras y desapropiación*, Barcelona: Debolsillo, 2013]

Roden, Steve, *...I Listen to the Wind That Obliterates My Traces: Music in Vernacular Photographs 1880-1955*, Atlanta: Dust-to-Digital, 2011

Rogoff, 'What Is A Theorist', *Kein.org*, 2003, <http://www.kein.org/node/62> [Accessed 3 October 2018]

——— "'Smuggling" - An Embodied Criticality', *Xenopraxis: Strange Doings*, 2006, [https://xenopraxis.net/readings/rogoff\\_smuggling.pdf](https://xenopraxis.net/readings/rogoff_smuggling.pdf) [Accessed 3 October 2018]



- Rosselli, Amelia, *La libellula*, Milano: SE, 1985 (1958, 1963-65)
- Rukeyser, Muriel, *The Life of Poetry*, Middletown, CT: Paris Press / Wesleyan University Press, 1996 (1949)
- Sade, *Opere*, ed. by Paolo Caruso, Milano: Mondadori, 1976
- Satie, Erik, *Quaderni di un mammifero*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, trans. by Ornella Volta, Milano: Adelphi, 1980 [*Écrits*, Paris: Champ Libre, 1977]
- Schneider, Marius, *Pietre che cantano*, trans. by Augusto Menduni, Milano: SE, 2005 [*Singende Steine. Rhythmus-Studien an drei romanischen Kreuzgängen*, München: Heimeran, 1978]
- Schreber, Daniel Paul, *Memorie di un malato di nervi*, trans. by Federico Scardanelli, Milano: Adelphi, 1974 [*Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken*, Leipzig: 1903]
- Schulz, Bernd, and Hans Gercke, eds, *Rolf Julius: Small Music (Grau)*, Heidelberg: Kehrer Verlag, 1995
- Silesius, Angelus, *The Cherubic Wanderer*, trans. by Maria Schrady, New York, NY, Mahwah, NJ, Toronto: Paulist Press, 1986 [*Cherubinischer Wandersmann*, Vienna: (n. pub.), 1657]
- Skoulding, Zoë, *The Museum of Disappearing Sounds*, Bridgend: Seren, 2013
- Solmi, Sergio, *La luna di Laforgue e altri scritti di letteratura francese*, Milano: Mondadori, 1976
- Stampa, Gaspara, 'Sonnet CXXIV', in *Rime*, 1554,  
<https://www.liberliber.it/mediateca/libri/s/stampa/rime/html/testo02.htm>  
 [Accessed 18 March 2019]
- Stein, Gertrude, 'Matisse, Picasso and Gertrude Stein', in *Gertrude Stein: Ultimate Collection*, Kindle edition, e-artnow, 2016
- *The Making of Americans*, Champaign, IL, London, Dublin: Dalkey Archive

- Press, 1995 (1925)
- Steiner, George, *On Difficulty and Other Essays*, New York, NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978
- Stiegler, Bernard, 'How I Became A Philosopher', in *Acting Out*, trans. by David Barison, Daniel Ross, Patrick Crogan, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009, pp. 1–35 [*Passer à l'acte*, Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2003]
- Sunn O))), *Black One*, Southern Lord, 2005 [on CD]
- The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights*, trans. by Malcolm C. Lyons, 3 vols., London: Penguin, 2010
- The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*, trans. by A.C. Spearing, London: Penguin, 2001 (14th century CE)
- The Ruin of Kasch: A Conversation with Roberto Calasso and Lila Azam Zanganeh*, New York, Center for Italian Modern Art, 10 May 2018, <https://vimeo.com/280571971> [Accessed 27 November 2018]
- 'The Time-Travelling Circus: The Dossier Concerning Pablo Fanque and the Electrolier: Katrina Palmer', *Essays on Sculpture*, Henry Moore Institute, 78, July 2017
- Thurman, Judith, *Isak Dinesen. The Life of Karen Blixen*, London: Penguin, 1986 (1982)
- Toop, David, *Exotica: Fabricated Soundscapes in a Real World*, London: Serpent's Tail, 1999
- 'Gone to Earth', *A Sinister Resonance*, blog, 29 September 2017, <https://davidtoopblog.com/2017/09/29/gone-to-earth/> [Accessed 30 September 2017]
- *Haunted Weather: Music, Silence and Memory*, London: Serpent's Tail, 2004
- '...I Listen to the Wind That Obliterates My Traces: Music in Vernacular

- Photographs 1880–1955’, *The Wire*, 330, August 2011, pp. 74–75
- *Into The Maelström: Music, Improvisation, and the Dream of Freedom. Before 1970*, New York, NY and London: Bloomsbury, 2016
- *Sinister Resonance: The Mediumship of the Listener*, London and New York, NY: Continuum, 2010
- Trevi, Emanuele, *Qualcosa di scritto*, Milano: Ponte alle grazie, 2012
- Tricky, *Pre-Millennium Tension*, Island Records, 1996 [on CD]
- Venti, Patricia, ‘*Palais du vocabulaire* de Alejandra Pizarnik: cuadernos de notas o apuntes para sobrevivir’, *Especulo. Revista de estudios literarios*, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2005,  
<http://www.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero31/palaisap.html> [Accessed 15 July 2019]
- Voegelin, Salomé, *Sonic Possible Worlds: Hearing the Continuum of Sound*, New York, NY and London: Bloomsbury, 2014
- Weil, Simone, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. by Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr, London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2002 [*La Pesanteur et la grace*, Paris: Librairie PLON, 1947]
- *First and Last Notebooks: Supernatural Knowledge*, trans. by Richard Rees, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1970 [*Œuvres Complètes*, Tome 5, Vol. 1, Paris: Gallimard, 2019]
- Weinberger, Eliot, *An Elemental Thing*, New York, NY: New Directions, 2007
- Weinberger, Eliot, ed., *Jorge Luis Borges: Selected Non-Fictions*, trans. by Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, E. Weinberger, London: Penguin, 1999
- Weiss, Allen S., *Breathless: Sound Recording, Disembodiment, and the Transformation of Lyrical Nostalgia*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002

- Williams, William Carlos, *Paterson*, revised edition, ed. by Christopher Mac Gowan,  
New York: New Directions, 1992 (1946-58)
- Yourcenar, Marguerite, *L'opera al nero*, trans. by Marcello Mongardo, Milano:  
Feltrinelli, 2001 [*L'œuvre au noir*, Paris: Gallimard, 1968]
- Zambrano, Maria, 'La fiamma', *Conoscenza religiosa*, 4, ottobre-dicembre 1977, p. 385
- Zambreno, Kate, *Book of Mutter*, South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2017
- *Appendix Project: Talks and Essays*, South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2019
- Zolla, Elémire, ed., *I mistici dell'Occidente*, new revised edition, 2 vols, Milano:  
Adelphi, 2010 (1963)
- Zwicky, Jan, *Lyric Philosophy*, 2nd edn, Edmonton & Calgary: Brush Education, 2014  
(1992)

## Appendix 1: Glossary

### a. Main Terms and Recurring Expressions

**Chimera (OED).** ‘1.a. A fabled fire-breathing monster of Greek mythology, with a lion’s head, a goat’s body, and a serpent’s tail (or according to others with the heads of a lion, a goat, and a serpent) [...].

2. In *Painting, Architecture*, etc. A grotesque monster, formed of the parts of various animals.

3. *Figurative* with reference to the terrible character, the unreality, or the incongruous composition of the fabled monster:

a. A horrible and fear-inspiring phantasm, a bogey.

b. An unreal creature of the imagination, a mere wild fancy; an unfounded conception.

(The ordinary modern use)’.<sup>471</sup>

**Literature** is, in Calasso’s sense, characterised by no ‘observance of any theory, but by a certain vibration or luminescence of the sentence (or paragraph, or page, or chapter, or whole book even’. It gives the feeling that ‘language itself is speaking’.<sup>472</sup> *Something happens*: literature is a transmission of that *something* from one work to another – to catch glimpses of, and never capture it.

**Critical Writing** is intended in relation to Blanchot’s definition of critical discourse as the ‘space of resonance within which the unspoken, indefinite reality of the work is

---

<sup>471</sup> *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2021, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/31708](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/31708) [Accessed 28 June 2021].

<sup>472</sup> Calasso, *Literature and the Gods*, pp. 175–180.

momentarily transformed and circumscribed into words'.<sup>473</sup> This definition emphasises the cohabitation of and tension between words and excess of words at the core of this thesis-work. It practises and considers critical writing in a realm of resonance, imagination, and transmission, rehearsing forms and tones which allow it to be called *chimeric*. Blanchot's 'momentarily circumscribed' is an invitation to think of critical writing as a vessel holding a material which may be absent at times: this thesis-work shows how such vessels may be formed, how they may echo, how their shape is crucial in offering the tone of the elusive material they intermittently hold.

An illustration of the contexts in which critical writing is perceived, even as it inhabits creative and listening practices, is found in 'Imaginary Conversation: Chimera and Literature'. It should be noted, however, that the entire thesis-work articulates and embodies a composite form of writing in which *critical* becomes *chimeric*. Discussion of such form is presented as it is practised throughout – neither confined in specific sections, nor divided in chapters. It is not the aim of this work to show how chimeric writing differs from other forms of critical writing, but conversely, to present ways in which it may hold many of them together as composite, while being, in Pizarnik's words, *something more and something else*. Chimeric writing is something more and something else than creative-critical writing, something more and something else than art writing, something more and something else than an essay.

**The Imaginal**, in the writings by the scholar of Sufism Henry Corbin, is an intermediary realm between the physical and the immaterial, making present what is substantive but

---

<sup>473</sup> Blanchot, *Lautréamont and Sade*, p. 4.

not apparent.<sup>474</sup> It reawakens perception by giving it new vessels, a new capacity to comprehend what is there but not immediately evidenced. It demands a different cognitive function which discloses what is commonly hidden, through a re-training of the senses, through listening and attention. The Imaginal serves this study in its speculative yearning for its untranslated material, present in the text as orientation, but impossible to quote. It sets the work as not fictional, but present in its resonance, chimeric.

**To Rebegin** comes from Laura (Riding) Jackson's *The Telling*.<sup>475</sup> It marks the sense of repetition in research, how the beginning of every project is never a *tabula rasa* but emerges from and contains residues from the past.

---

<sup>474</sup> For full references to Corbin's writings see Bibliography.

<sup>475</sup> (Riding) Jackson, pp. 85–107.

## **b. Neologisms**

**Csiting.** To bring chimeric writing into these pages the term *csiting* is coined, conjoining citing and siting: to listen to one's references, no matter how obscure, and arrange them in assonant desiring encounters. It is a way of working with texts beyond the rules of citation, citing as hearing the voices of others in reading and recalling them in writing. The writer finds her ground as she reads, sites herself as she cites. Sources are neither origins, understood in terms of a *before* that legitimates and authorises what is written, nor frames, but beating hearts, cores. More thoughts on csiting appear in 'My Chimera', and the entire thesis-work is to be read as a csitational practice.

**Transcelation** holds the impetus of writing and the rapture of reading before translation. It transcends and carries meaning. Examples of *transcelation* are found in the Imaginary Conversations between D.C., Cristina Campo, and Alejandra Pizarnik, where the text echoes and distorts journals and letters not translated in English to date, rewritten, distorted, interpolated; and in 'A Bell for Cristina', where Campo's words merge with D.C.'s and Cristina Rovina's.

Writing about Marianne Moore, Campo used the Italian verb *trascegliere*: not the simple *scegliere*, to choose, but *trascegliere*, affixing *tra-* to emphasise the scrutiny and attention in choosing the materials necessary to respond to the vision that prompted her to write. The chain of words, *trascegliere*, transcend, transcelate holds choice and care: to transcelate is to be in words and to exceed them in the movements of their chimeric yearning.

**The Interdisciplinary Nothing** is a chimera.



## Appendix 2

### Translations of Quotes by Cristina Campo that Appear in 'A Bell for Cristina'.

*Sotto falso nome* - SFN

*Gli imperdonabili* - I

*Lettere a Mita* - LaM

*Appassionate distanze* - AD

Siamo, come si vede, nella forma cava.

We are, as you can see, in the hollow form.

SFN, p. 16.

Quel suo folle regalo: 'una rosa, solo una rosa', in pieno inverno.

That foolish gift of hers: 'a rose, only a rose', in the middle of winter.

I, p. 11.

Ritmi ineffabili.

Ineffable rhythms.

I, p. 111.

Ci rivelano, gli incantevoli libri, ciò che ci sembrava di sapere da sempre.

The enchanting books reveal to us that which we thought we had known forever.

I, p. 64.

Le geometrie dello spirito.

The geometries of the spirit.

I, p. 64.

Il critico è un'eco, certo.

The critic is an echo, of course.

I, p. 145.

Concava, tacita e risonante.

Concave, tacit, and resounding.

I, p. 118.

Non occorre immaginazione ma attenzione [...]. Poesia è anch'essa attenzione.

We do not need imagination but attention [...]. Poetry too is attention.

I, p. 166.

Un solo discorso in più tempi, come una serie di pezzi musicali dove tornano sempre gli stessi temi e addirittura le stesse parole.

One single discourse in more tempi, like a series of musical pieces where the same themes and even the same words reoccur.

LaM, p. 248.

La stessa parola, ripetuta da voci diverse e disparate, in epoche diverse e disparate.

The same word, repeated by different and disparate voices, in different and disparate epochs.

SFN, p. 196.

Un segreto destinato all'orecchio suo e a nessun altro.

A secret destined to her ear and noone else.

I, p. 169.

Per le campane nuove è sempre usato il bronzo delle antiche, cosicché si può dire che ogni campana sopravviva dell'altra, di generazione in generazione.

For the new bells the bronze of the old ones is always used, so one may say that each bell survives the following one, generation after generation.

SFN, p. 206.

Certo, la voce del flauto è remota [...] quel suono è di continuo travolto via, lacerato e disperso dal sibilo del percepibile.

Of course, the voice of the flute is remote [...] that sound is continuously swept away, torn and scattered by the hiss of the perceivable.

I, p. 136.

Quei sensi soprannaturali che l'*hesychia* ha chiamato alla vita.

Those supernatural senses which *hesychia* has called to life.

I, p. 216.

Questa concezione quasi corporea e corporale del metodo.

This nearly bodily and corporeal conception of method.

SFN, p. 152.

L'occasione della metamorfosi.

The occasion of metamorphosis.

I, p. 231.

Le sentenze sono dardi dalla punta di ferro.

Sentences are iron-tipped arrows.

I, p. 219.

Quel sonetto miracoloso di Gaspara Stampa.

That miraculous sonnet by Gaspara Stampa.

I, p. 144.

Che si possegga come non possedendo, si sia come non essendo: lasciando che in sé viva ed operi Altri. To possess as if not possessing, to be as if not being: allowing that Other lived and operated in self.

AD, p. 29.

Un seguito di citazioni [...] legate fra loro da poco più che da note in margine. [...] Soprattutto nel tempo dell'orrore, il solo scopo di uno scritto di questo genere è di rimandare il lettore alle sue univoche, imperturbabili fonti.

A sequel of quotations [...] bound among themselves by little more than notes on the margin [...]. Especially in a time of horror, the only aim of a text such as this is to send the reader back to its univocal, unperturbed sources.

I, p. 248.

Gli elementi corporei del tremendo [...] *tremendum hoc mysterium*, con il suo immenso peso anche fonico.

The corporeal elements of the tremendous [...] *tremendum hoc mysterium*, with its immense weight, even a phonic one.

I, p. 236.

Sottile, terribile circolazione (di *pneuma*, di *prana*, oserei dire qualche volta di *mana*).

Subtle, terrible circulation (of *pneuma*, of *prana*, I dare say at times *mana*).

I, p. 235.

Ricoperti da un'invisibile armatura di giaculatorie [...] lo stato di orazione perenne.

Covered with an invisible armour of ejaculations [...] the perennial state of oration.

SFN, p. 139.

La passione della perfezione viene tardi.

The passion for perfection comes late.

I, p. 73.

Questo trappismo della perfezione.

This trappism of perfection.

I, p. 84.

Il segreto di quel rifiuto infinitamente esigente.

The secret of that infinitely exigent refusal.

I, p. 85.

Meticolosa, speciosa, inflessibile come tutti i veri visionari. Meticulous, specious, inflexible like all real visionaries.

I, p. 74.

Una virtù polare grazie alla quale il sentimento della vita sia nello stesso tempo rarefatto e intensificato. Cosicché, grazie a un movimento simultaneo e contraddittorio, là dove l'artista concentra al massimo l'oggetto riducendolo, come i pittori T'ang, a quell'unico profilo, a quella pura linea dall'alto al basso che è, per così dire, la pronuncia stessa dell'anima, il lettore lo senta in sé moltiplicarsi, esaltarsi in armoniche innumerevoli.

A polar virtue thanks to which the sentiment of life was at once rarefied and intensified. So that, thanks to a simultaneous and contradictory movement, where the artist concentrates the object the most reducing it, like the T'ang painters, to that unique profile, to that pure line from top to bottom which is, so to say, the pronouncement of the soul itself, the reader feel it multiply in herself, enhanced in countless harmonics.

I, p. 81.

Un poeta che ad ogni singola cosa, del visibile e dell'invisibile, prestasse l'identica misura di attenzione, così come l'entomologo s'industria a esprimere con precisione l'inesprimibile azzurro di un'ala di libellula, questi sarebbe il poeta assoluto. A poet who would lend to each thing, of the visible and the invisible, the same measure of attention, like the entomologist busies himself to express with precision the inexpressible azure of a dragonfly wing, this would be the absolute poet.

I, p. 83.

E l'eloquenza può fare perno su una particola.

And eloquence can hinge on a particle.

I, p. 83.

E avere accordato a qualcosa un'attenzione estrema è avere accettato di soffrirla fino alla fine, e non soltanto di soffrirla ma di soffrire per essa. And to have granted something extreme attention is to have accepted to suffer it until the end, and not only to suffer it but to suffer for it.

I, p. 169

Una monaca medievale che ricami pianete memorabile, più vagheggiando i colori delle proprie sete che i santi volti effigiati — quasi che un'effigie possa ispirare venerazione se un'attenzione quasi maniaca non trascelse i materiali con i quali rispondere alla visione.

a medieval nun who embroiders memorable chasubles, yearning more for the colours of her silks than for the portrayed holy faces — as if a portrait could inspire reverence if a nearly maniac attention did not choose the materials with which to respond to the vision.

I, p. 77.

Cominciano con l'identico accordo, si aprono in progressioni diverse, rifluiscono in cerchi alla loro sorgente, ciò che è solo possibile alla totalità e permanenza di un identico spirito commosso. They begin with the identical chord, open in different progressions, flow back in circles to the same source, that which is only possible to the totality and permanence of an identical moved spirit.

I, p. 78.

Esaminare una pagina come si deve, al modo cioè di un paleografo, su cinque o sei piani insieme, da scrittore.

To examine a page as one should, that is like a paleographer, on five or six levels altogether, as a writer.

I, p. 80.

L'inesprimibile come la sola presenza.

The inexpressible as the only presence.

I, p. 26.

Liturgia — come poesia — è splendore gratuito spreco delicato, più necessario dell'utile.

Liturgy — like poetry — is gratuitous splendour delicate waste, more necessary than the useful.

SFN, p. 133.

Il sangue m'è affluito al cuore attraverso cinque secoli.

Blood flew to my heart across five centuries.

SFN, p. 192.