

ANTONIO GAMONEDA

from DESCRIPCIÓN DE LA MENTIRA

Translated from the Spanish by Sara Gilmore

Your voice in bloodstained dates surges from substances distributed over
the sea

and its metal flies in circles, flies with poisonous wings over that body, now
gold, now blind in fruit too sweet.

Cotton, greener than the flashes of lightning from childhood, exhales omens
that darken the description of the sea, the description of the sea under
indifferent eyes.

And feminine oils seethe in the celebration of summer.

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This is the day of heat. At the foot of the wall desired by a single bird—bearer
of tears in afternoons of boredom—you look at the urns of salt, the slender
rust of the flagpoles, the mortal length of flags.

There is denial: wounds, liquids born of disdain, lips on the backs of your
daughters.

Obscenity, funereal sweetness, who does not drink from your yellow hands?

(excerpt from page 15)

A woman, absorbed in the white, blind in immobile linens, speaks of me
in a commemorated time; she says my name in another age, under the
leaves of a great wind. She is the mother of the dead and this power is
in her tongue.

As the holly in frozen places, my name grows in invisible forms,
and, exposed to that silence, the light of disappearance opens.

Tremor of reversed channels, looks of improbable faces: this is what's left of
our actions. Days passed before; there was blood in serenity
and the days were thick upon my eyelids.

A woman draws descriptions (brightness is in death, like steel in long edges,
brightness is in death):

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the earth boiling (that noiseless clamor) and the imprisoned substance boil-
ing. An extraction of men toward phosphorescent places, toward the
common washing place, under the bird of prey, of daybreak,

and, macerated in their teeth, sacrificed in their chalices, days under
infected waters.

Reality is scared away on these lips expert only in invisible forms.

The ferment of my childhood ends; the horror ends and the hollow is vast.

Earth stripped of its tombs, mothers turning gray in the vertigo.

Is what remains of my father land.

(excerpt from page 31)

Grass like silence. Grass crossed over by insects stubborn in mirth.

This rest that never ends under sunlit pages... Watch over the grass.

This is the light accumulated by the deceased and codices attributed to
incest, to stories with fugitive animals.

Everything is mortal in serenity; there is a country for the disillusioned
and its vision as white as the drug of eternity.

You, in the pantry of hybrids, you open the book of envy, you read the elec-
tric cantos learned from your brothers, you are blue in indignity.

My future resides in regret. Before your empty bowls my future is a follower
of insects.

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And the heart grows heavy in worn out works.

What do you know of the lie? Under the scab of weariness, in the hives of
cowardice,

a distinguished metal, a bunch of burned fingernails

dig deep into death. It is the passion of uselessness;

it is the happiness of masks gathered in study of grass, green and coveted in
estuaries of shadow,

singular conciliated species, singular and resistant to the skill of memory, to
the censure of tired men; fresh like the scream of a lark under waters.

O the lie in the heart emptied by an invisible knife.

(excerpt from page 37)

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

When Descripción de la mentira was published in 1977, Antonio Gamoneda had gone seventeen years without publishing a book of poems. Critic and novelist Julio Llamazares remembers what came out of this long silence was “a complete discovery. The poetry was distinctive, hermetic, but beautiful, and above all, full of interpretations.” Many of these interpretations have hinged on the political resonances of the years in which Spain transitioned from dictatorship to democracy. Verses in the work such as “Some learned to travel gagged. They were more capable. They foresaw a country with no need for betrayal—a country without truth” seem to speak directly of the long years of censorship, oppression, and social injustice. This outraged, politically-charged voice intersects with language of rapture and ecstasy, of violence and sexuality. It charts an interior trajectory, addressing the phantoms of an ever-shifting other and probing the origins of memory at the threshold of death.

Written in long verses, Descripción is considered a single poem, composed of fragments of varying lengths—some of a single line, some spanning two pages. The fragments are separated by blank spaces, pauses that seem to enhance the overall rhythmic structure of the poem while all the time threatening a fall into silence. Sustained by waves, the poem acquires a particular texture through the use of obsessive words, images, and ideas that run throughout. Often the meaning of these obsessive words—face, tongue, health, silence, truth, betrayal—is multifarious, evoking concepts that are able to contain complex, even opposite, gestures without falling into contradiction and absurdity. In this way, Descripción becomes the relentless interrogation of life after the disappearance of univocal concepts and ideals. Perhaps this is its most important achievement, marking it as social or political poetry—it is a response to the problem of expression after catastrophe. Because it originates from this genesis of catastrophe, from an initial wound (invisible, if not for memory), Edmond Jabès' words come to mind when he asks us to “Mark the first page of the book with a red marker. For, in the beginning, the wound is invisible.”