MONCHOACHI TRANSLATED BY ERIC FISHMAN

Sosthenes

Now that you are breathing, That your flesh has released Your body that was knotted like vinestock: Respond.

Early one morning the dead girl Curled in her shroud, While the cat gave herself to Three kittens born under the last moon Groping for A breast.

Receive my aggravation

Unspeakable tree, burdened by its riches Who glistens.

The Unburdening

We can do nothing for the dead: there they are And already they recede.

And this same compact sound As fruit falling in an orchard.

Yet from everywhere we rush before them Hiding, watching for their faces Trying to catch the mystery they now possess Fascinated To see them so radiant, utterly unburdened.

The voices that speak far off Are the sea. They speak of this "Obscure, obscure, obscure" Of the stones Of the laurels. They speak far off Rooting and *ripening* In the wind.

58 ARC POETRY MAGAZINE FALL 2021

Gesture / Spell

The mourners will leave their posts at dawn. They'll go, washing their faces and rinsing their mouths with rainwater that a barefoot child, at the doorstep, will pour in their hands.

But night's still here, and in it speech grows. And as she grows, all things join, merge and rise, flesh and breath, moon's eye, crystal in black earth, vessel's railings, bay's lamps, din from everywhere stranded on the shore, delivering woman, pain, blood, and the tutelary whip,

stone on stone, death after death, strung in a single, endless song of life.

The mourners leave their posts at dawn. They go, washing their faces and rinsing their mouths with rainwater that a barefoot child, at the doorstep ... Even there, day waits outside. And dreaming only of seagrapes, the child's mouth sours. Friends! We die from not knowing we're dying. We've squandered words and speech.

MONCHOACHI TRANSLATED BY ERIC FISHMAN 59

Wolo: Nothing

"Perceive the rhythm that holds mankind"

Archilochus

I. Silence

From silence that doesn't speak, speaking utters:

Who holds the art of joining this and the art of unknotting that. Who stands at both ends.

Or she says:

Make no mistakes.

And:

Cool thing, lustrous water. Who has no wounds, faults, on whom no ears or skin were fitted.

She says as well:

Indigo of shoals, mouth of the lower world who gives breath's wind.

Then this:

Initiate's enclosure Weaving spider, recluse in the ruins. Diviner who throws the *hakata*, the dice.

60 ARC POETRY MAGAZINE FALL 2021

II. Tuning fork

Open a hole in the earth and bury the seed entrusted to the moon's twenty-eight passages Rain falls, she covers the earth overflows the furrows. The wind's route asks the wind bring cinder along, make the camel turn. The sky's fire ripens the corn. A small bird amuses itself among the vultures, A falcon stretches out on the house of clouds. The moon brightens, then another. They bring cattle to fields to graze the morning dew, They fish sheatfish from a little pond and silence from the sea's vulva. They shape sapwood from a fig tree to clothe themselves, They dye skirts with ochre, or with lizard's excrements, They celebrate on the river's banks, large flat boulders exposed at low tide a granite bed on a saffron river. They shake the tree to gather shea fruit. At Cour-Paille: the horse's bare back, hair scorched and the dogs, pink cock the dogs that band together and sniff the rotting fish, white chickens with black heads, spotted guinea fowl among sorghum leaves. They brew beer, mold clay, repair the altar, offer at the forge. The old assemble under the African mahogany, turn towards the setting sun, and sleep on beds of bark.

MONCHOACHI TRANSLATED BY ERIC FISHMAN 61

III. Rhythm

Star between ram horns,

broad half-calabash turned on its head star on its chiseled edges broad half-calabash in water inviting azure sky

> ceaseless comin-goin earth / sky libéraite, spin down saykwed transfòmasion

Magnetic beauty, ecstatic

fused with the pitiless call here call of the great *bastringue*.

Still and silent, untamable: be graceful

Colors and radiance, air tinted by earth all the way up, possessed bodies, charged bodies, tattooed, scarred, painted, modeled modulated, furrowed, adorned– joined, held together Each piece, each fragment, turned from the center inside out toward air and earth, Body bound to gather and magnify scansions world-rhythm world dense on body's openwork strung like the string of a kora, shaped like the bow of a *bòlõ*

respond, retrieve, hold

62 ARC POETRY MAGAZINE FALL 2021

cry beauty, pure force crying appear, enchant, play, wager body N'là ! We there, shaved bright heads : « Black core allnoin » (nos all z'animo !), « smooth head save us from chaos » calabash round and smooth'd with cocorosse light once more multip' vibrations harness, restore murmuring whispering mirages and apparitions Scarred faces, three-part song: raw song air heated to white, bird's piercing voice, scores for the network of trails; tattooed faces calm lake water blue peace that falls in the islands' interlacing; Teeth sharpened to a point, No gossip, no blablabla ears and lips well-well l e n g t h e n e d t'hear well speak well flat mottled gleaming ochre kaolin, mosaic pearls amber an' feathers river white cowries rolling runes Eagle turns in sky Bullroarers' song whirls Above Python's two teats

Without cease the great ballet, sky and earth Without cease, piercing cry Call, long vowel that spells and ceaselessly keeps time.

MONCHOACHI TRANSLATED BY ERIC FISHMAN 63