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Repartee translated by David Keller and Donald Sheehan

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REPARTEE

I 'Arsenio' (she writes me), 'I here "taking the air"
among my somber cypresses think
that it's time to suspend the so much
by-you-for-me desired suspension
of all worldly illusions; that it's time
to set sail and hang up
the *epochè*.

Don't tell me the weather's foul, that even turtle-doves
have flown south with a flicker of wings.
I cannot live on memories any more.
Better the bite of ice than your torpor
of sleepwalking, O late awakened.'

II Scarcely out of adolescence
I was thrown for half my life
into the Augean stables.

I didn't find the two thousand oxen,
I didn't even see a single animal;
yet in the runways forever thickening
with manure I stumbled on
gasping for breath. But day by day
crescendoed lowings that were wholly human.
He wasn't seen, even once,
though the hinds still waited
for the call to arms: overjammed funnels,
pitchforks, kitchen-spits, and a rotting row
of saltimbocca. And not
once did He show
a royal robe's hem or diadem's tip
above the ebony bastions, excremental.

