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Belated Hymns I, IV, V translated by Mark Waggener

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Jaime Siles

Belated Hymns

I

Gods or God, a series
of diverse figures, draws near me.
They compose a scene
that by chance I have seen before in a stained glass window.
They are not a page from a book. They arrive
clustered in the shadow
of a hollow branch that bears the days
wherein flower, pallid from pleasure,
the hours' miserable fruits of living miserably.
Now and then they peer out
and their eyes are flashes of light:
indications, not-they
who write my not-me,
my not-I, my not-memory
on the other side of the view of my not-eyestrain.
There, where translucence is a language,
words sweat out a trans-I,
they permeate the person:
they equinox him,
they solstice him,
they freeze him.
But where there is no language or light through a transparent body
everything assumes the form of a sunset.
Gods or figures
or figures and gods
or figures of gods
in the signs of the air
written by light.
The light, the only sign
in which I might find myself,

revive myself, read myself
with that uncertainty of a beginning
that shows through, that clarifies,
holds, and marks its end.

My end is this
horizontal and geometric wound
that, in the bottom of the glass,
does not end, and calmly
like a steady march,
begins to elapse.

Like a smudge, the sky
fixes upon its movement in that glass—
like a heron,
its neck curves;
like a heron,
its clouds distance themselves
in the wet petals
of a single breath.

IV

All reflex appears in what was,
as all remembrance appears in what is given.
There is never a return to the time of what was,
because it takes place in the real.
Not in the moment
the eyes remember, not the space
that the moment takes back, not that moment happening
over there and at this time.
They form together
an instance of permeable time,
where the *was* deepens the given
in a process of mutual sense
where both coincide
in a transparency of vision.
Like them, I see
the sharp profile of the araucaria.
It follows the air of its sky
like days, the small branches
in which they sound diluted—
its intimate and final tremor.
Like branches time reverberates.
Like leaves time is a rumor.
It sounds asleep
in the space that builds its images.
It sounds asleep from its own rumor.
Its bottom, like water's loam, is transparent:
it takes the form of a wave, and in each circle it projects
successive images of a center that is rumor.
The rumor of the leaves
grows in the form of wind.
A not-yet flame becomes shining.
A not-yet flame preludes its ash.
Its acoustic contour flames against the air.
Sculpture without leaves, the statue of light.
The successive lights give voice to images:
they build not a center but a prism,
that multiplies light in their vision:
they catalyze it in a rumor of signs.
They are the encountered.

They who are no longer there.
I see the leaves groaning like rigging.
Sails on the algae of the sea.
Inside is Nolde. In an image
something always returns: all that I was
comes forth.
I am those signs but not their images.
I am in their images, but within them there is no I.
Branches are memory darkening in leaves.
At their borders, the sun's phosphorus
resonates: it erases the waters
and, in their interior, their echoes dive.
The leaves drink the darkness of the sun.
Together, they build the night
the cleargreen, the aquamarine, the wheregreen
still not passed together in the also.
I think, or I listen to, that which I cannot hear:
I listen to the branches. Air without breathing.
A light's rustle grows from its depth:
its eyes project. Its breathing
arrives. Inside I listen to it.
Inside where I hear
its breathing.

V

Like the moments' inexpressible light
when time is mere future,
not an instant passed nor passing
but a glass in flames that preludes—
not the sweet systems of the flesh—
but the eyes' apocalypse,
the gas of an expression
and desolation's ruin.

The night then

breaks for us the blue body in two halves
of which one is hell and the other, paradise,
and we, the simultaneous negation of both
in the precise sum of the two.

In the glass we hear

a crackle of images and shadows
from the white fragrance of gardenias
forming the benzene ring of God
—its tide, its salt, and its waves—
until the color in flight retreats.

All is there within the point
before the time of the voice.

All is passed except this point in time.

Translated from the Spanish by Miles Waggener