

# Revolution goes through walls

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Preface by Jean-Luc Nancy

SplitLevel Texts



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**Beaded Water: Preface**

— Jean-Luc Nancy

On 17 December 2010 a young Tunisian man set himself on fire in Sidi Bouzid. That was the signal. A few months later in Cairo, *Tabrir Square* flares up and rediscovers its soul: liberation, independence.

Very quickly, the girl from Egypt crosses the sea, heading straight to *Tabrir*.

She photographs, cinematographs, polygraphs. She also has agraphia.

She writes and what she writes butts up against a glass wall — that is what she says, what she writes.

It is a story of walls. They bar the way, resist, block. But they have cracks too. And you can also stick photos posters graffiti poems screams on them.

Above all, in the end the walls they murmur. A fine, discrete murmur that crosses the walls like her brother crossed the wall between life and death.

What goes through this way is the revolution, she says: a lost word but a murmur of which crosses. Crosses the girl from Egypt, come home — *from where?* She comes — come back as before to see and nurse Mohammad, come back to see and take care of the visible as much as of the invisible.

A mother tells her daughter that the Square is a place for men but this girl, maybe all girls, knows it should make way for girls.\* Make way for girls, little girls and women, the revolution is a girl.

*Tabrir*, a name that will live — the name of a square in Cairo that will remain as the name of an opening, a breach, a gaping hole, from behind which there is no coming back.

Egypt will not come back nor any other country around the White Sea into which the Nile spreads.

\* (*la Place majuscule, celle qui dit « place, place ! »*) Nancy plays on the word *Place/Square* and the imperative “*place à*” — “*make way.*”

From a breach that is also a wound.

But from a spring nonetheless.

A spring: water beads on *Tabrir* — she says. That's how things are set alight: as water distributed by a young girl to the fighters, as water that will refuse to wash off the blood on the general's hands.

This is the spring and she who keeps it flowing. Drink, drink, the weather is still very hot.

— Jean-Luc Nancy

**For my brother Mohammad**

**I would like to say**

**I would like to say, I don't know the road to paradise...** that my tongue, the people, and that man sitting contemplating the railway lines in a deep meditation nobody will ever know, existed. My house existed — in a place I am still seeking. It wasn't in this village where I witnessed other children being born on the same blood-stained mattress I was born on in the same room to which the midwife regularly came, when she went away with the bit and took away the tongue. I saw myself searching for that old mattress stained with the blood of all those who had already come into the world so there would be another child around here. I saw myself not looking for a house but making the search for a house my way. So much blood dried like rust as each cut of the scalpel breached my skin, each cut of the scalpel piercing me, as I lay deadened, anesthetized. I would have loved the time of the anesthesia to lead me to the day you are no more, a day you can calculate for 50 dollars on the net.

**I would like to say**

I write about what I lost, about my vanished blood, about my laughter frozen into a mask, about this young girl who was chased away because she sighed next to the wheat dunes, that stuffed the young girls' mouths with secrets, about this girl who was and is no more, about another one I saw spinning under the ceiling of the empty living room, her dress on fire, she calls to her master to save her, and standing naked in front of all those men. I say: I want neither father nor mother, nor to have them put on my road, or slipped into my story. Without them, I remain, and in spite of them all, I am:

I don't know the road to paradise  
I didn't save you from hell  
Sharia, that void, didn't strike me,  
I will not go to the one who has gone and will inevitably return  
I wrote lines, licked the drops from the face

I said: she is of those whose past bears the present  
she dashed along the wide avenue trying to cross  
like me, you also are a traveler  
without coyness, you come bearing that light,  
or is it this myth that kills us  
Shoot!  
Kill, ash-dark bird!  
Fall to earth on your feathers  
that a wind blowing from the Sahara scatters  
sand dunes, purple light  
that you cross from where you are not,  
this Sahara, our home.  
There, two poles.  
The coming will not come  
visiting rather  
he is your guest  
suddenly shy when he sets foot,  
vanishes enchanted

to where your awakening is  
you, the sublime Magus  
Amon  
tell me, where you keep your remains  
where can I find what leads me to them  
You, the Thing, the Non-being  
when they appeared, fire had covered the light

I write on your whereabouts  
to meditate on you,  
to envision  
imagine  
your shadow,  
you, sublime creature  
Be, a little, that I may see you

*Cairo*, imaginary date; written unthinkingly 31 November 2013

**Water drops on Tahrir**

## A Gaze, It Is Blue

It was a grain of sand  
opened time where the roads cross  
I had no fear of myself but the mirrors terrified me when I looked at all  
these stories  
Salt was  
a mountain appearing with each picture pulled from memory's box  
The years harbor ships I journeyed on and others I wished I had seen  
even from afar

*Renal failure* carved on a coin  
you toss  
pictures you'll forget are drawn in the air  
When the other mountain rose  
on its peak two boys grown from years of dialysis  
I split from the one who was asleep  
my shadow crossed walls  
returning to a place, or a certain hour

Death was a promise of water that never left his insides

In the dusty place, I perceived a tent  
transparent in the light  
A revolution's face lit up  
it was a glowing ring whirling  
a voice sprang from a red brick forest's clamor  
or from the asphalt's rising columns of white gas  
an instant has fallen from time  
Where have you gone, writer of the letter?  
Where are you now, who sleep in the blue gaze?  
This mountain of faces throws eyes to the street  
to my lens

spits the taste of salt  
on the side of the path

I had a brother...and another brother  
he flew away with the fugitives  
soared from a bed under repair  
there was basil at the *Nasser Institute*  
I had two brothers; now only one with eagles  
I had a vast heart my chest couldn't hold, the other elsewhere  
She is the one who comes to go  
the un-homeland became a place  
there, a glass of tea and an icon in which I imprisoned my face  
that loved weeping

The angel of history runs facing the past  
they'll come to it carrying on their heads this map  
with this slogan  
that crossed the places of the valley without knife or blade  
yet the grass was the people who want...\*

Your voice disappeared  
while you hit the wall next to the bed  
screaming with your fists  
I learnt that the disobedience of cities and streets slept in your heart  
your body became a tree and your screams  
strayed to the ground of the Square, one after the other  
then dawn water drops on a stone plateau

There was a bag I would have carried, climbing over any barrier  
I look at you, shrouded and resuscitated  
from a stay of several years  
"You, how are you doing, how are you?"

You were dying voiceless

\**The main slogan in all the Arab revolutions was: The people want the regime to fall.*

I whispered into his ears with all the others  
after he died

“Raise your voice Mohammad, Mohammad: raise your voice.”

*Cairo*, 6 October 2011 — *Italy*, 20 August 2012

## Mina and Mohammad, Blood and Water

In the house I live in from time to time  
I saw him on a screen talking to a lens: "I am sure this is my brother"  
he held a handful of blood and a crushed body part  
around him eyes hovered like a flock of flying grains  
in the house of stupor  
I said what would my body be like if crushed by the caterpillar treads of  
    a tank  
driven by that man, does he have eyes?  
The sign entered the frame  
Horus' eye pierced by a sword  
the eye of the "military police"  
from which pus pours still.

My brother's kernel will take flight in a swarm of seeds and land in a  
    clay pot of Egypt

M, the letter meem, م  
a little circle and a stalk rise one day from the pot into flesh and body  
your name appears  
on a piece of your crushed flesh a small pool of your coagulated blood  
decorates mud  
absorbed by this earth  
encircled by a fence of uncooked bricks  
another name germinates

Living Martyr

The enemy is in front of you  
the sea behind  
Do as you please!  
To drown in blood is still possible  
I see the earth opening its mouth to slake its thirst

I saw him walking in the desert  
wearing a suit  
The lines of his body  
shimmer out in the sun, he screams  
“I am thirsty, I am thirsty”

Be another brother  
you were other!  
The blood brother was one, the water brother was one, the eye brother  
was one, the brother of the brotherless was one  
now trees walk to where you stand  
Today a grove will reach us  
borne by golden birds  
Christ will rise again in *Tabrir*  
in *Maspero*  
in *Talaat Harb*  
in the valley's plateau  
in the *Ezbah Al Nakhl*  
in *Mancheia Nasser*  
and in the *Pyramid Gardens*  
from its secret another brother will rise for me, for you, for all  
a unique brother from dusk to sundown the ants will never walk across

*Paris, 15 October 2011 — Italy, 1 August 2012*