

The Calculus of Imaginaries

Poems by
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El Niño 1997

No se puede vivir sin amar were the words on the house

—Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano*

Out of the almost endlessly parched
earth of northern Chile

yellows

reds

blues.

Wildflowers not seen for decades
arise. *Arriba!* in the Atacama.

Sin flores no se puede amar.

Sin amor no se puede vivir.

A homeless man must be
drunk again. *No es posible* he mutters and
as if he were right

reports

of rodents rampaging of rat crap floating in zephyrs
resonate over the air waves

as if the lungs of local residents

were screaming mantras were shrieking "*Hanta!*

Hanta! Hanta! Hantavirus

you are killing us" *Sin muerte*

no se puede vivir. In Acapulco

the little children haunt the streets

out of thirst. *Agua*

agua por favor.

Sin agua no se puede vivir.

El niño strange child

your warm breath dries up the riviera

The Clock

Light flickers in the stream's bed
softly
 light that further downstream
grows on the water blinding.

This light in the tunnel by the tracks
glints from rock midway in darkness.

Certain days we crouch near the edge. The stillness
of small fish balancing near the pond's surface
is limitless: their eyes never blink their bodies
angled in a random cluster are minutes that do not turn
in the green water in the afternoon light.

Bounce

Three mornings he sits
on a bench in the courthouse square
rubber ball bouncing
from concrete to his hand
mustache flashing
above pursed lips.

Pock. Pock. Pock.

The small sphere strikes this large one.
In shorts sneakers and a baseball cap
belly bulging below the T-shirt
he never speaks
and never misses.

What love we ask
could he ever have? And later
we gasp for breath and want no more
than his power to look again and again
at what comes back
and to hold it.

Rotation

Quiet as the vultures
wheeling in the high winds
dark wings still against the light—

clock
of the moment the gliding
the invisible
eyes the beautiful tilt

of feathers circling
last breaths below—

an eternity of air

taken in
let go.