

SALVATION

The island vanishes
And again the young woman scales the wind
and discovers the death of the prophet bird
Now
it's the vanquished fire
Now
it's the flesh
the leaf
the stone
lost in the source of torment
like the mariner in the horror of civilization
purifying the fall of night
Now
the young woman finds the mask of infinity
and cracks the wall of poetry.

ORIGIN

We have to save the wind
Birds are burning the wind
in the hair of the solitary woman
who returns from nature
and weaves torments
We have to save the wind

POEM FOR EMILY DICKINSON

On the other side of the night
her name awaits her,
her surreptitious yearning for life,
on the other side of the night!

Something weeps in the air,
sounds outline the dawn.

She thinks of eternity.

JUST A NAME

alejandra alejandra
beneath I am me
alejandra

THE CAGE

Outside the sun shines.
It is nothing more than a sun
but men look at it
and then sing.

I do not know about the sun.
I know the angel's melody
and the warm sermon
of the last wind.
I know how to scream until dawn
when death descends naked
on my shadow.

I weep underneath my name.
I wave scarves in the night
and ships thirsty for reality
dance with me.
I hide nails
to mock my sick dreams.

Outside the sun shines.
I dress in ashes.

FEAR

In the echoes from my deaths
there is still fear.

Do you know of fear?

I know fear when I say my name.

It is fear,

fear with a black hat on

hiding rats inside my blood,

or fear with dead lips

drinking up my desires.

Yes. In the echoes from my deaths

there is still fear.

THE ABSENT ONE

I

My blood wants to settle.
They have taken away its reason for love.
Bare absence.
I make myself mad, pluck my feathers.
What would the world say if god
had so abandoned it?

II

Without you
the sun drops like an abandoned corpse.

Without you
I coil in my arms
and take my life with me
to beg for fervor.

FROM THIS SHORE

*I am pure
because the night is gone that clos'd me
in its deadly black.*

W. BLAKE

Even when my love
shines in my blood
like a choleric star,
I rise from my corpse
and careful not to step on my dead smile
walk toward the sun.

From this shore of nostalgia
all is angel.
Music is friend of the wind
friend of the flowers
friends of the rain
friend of death

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

On one than more occasion, Alejandra Pizarnik referred to *making* poems, as opposed to writing them. On July 9, 1960, while living in Paris, she wrote “I made two poems. And yesterday another two. I think I won’t ever be able to make a novel, because I’ve nothing to tell in many pages...”¹ But what does to *make* a poem mean—and, indeed, to *make* a novel? And, more importantly for me, as Pizarnik’s translator, how does the use of the verb *to make* in the context of writing poems guide my work of translation? In *This Little Art*, Kate Briggs poses a similar question: “do we *write* translations or do we *make* them? Or, indeed, do we *do* them?”² She hastens to add this is a question that “setting the practice of translation in relation to tables, to craft and workmanship, was always going to raise.” Indeed, the chapter in which she reflects on this is called “Maker of Wholes (Let’s Say of a Table).” Briggs suggests that the translator’s work is analogous to the work of craftsmanship that goes into making a table. For her these questions go back to Barthes’s use of the verb *faire* (to make or do) rather than *écrire* (to write) in relation to the novel. Pizarnik is thinking along the same lines as Barthes: she makes poems, she has worked that out: she will “continue exploring the technique. What’s essential is form.”³ But she wants to *make* a novel: “cantar en vez de cantar” (to retell instead of sing).⁴

For Pizarnik writing is akin to doing or making—not unlike “the activity of the dressmaker at her table, piecing together her bits and pieces of material,” as Briggs tells us. What are Pizarnik’s “bits and pieces of material”? In the first instance, language, words—the words she would collect obsessively in

1 *Music and Literature*, No. 6, p. 14.

2 Kate Briggs, *This Little Art* (London: Fitzcarraldo, 2017), p. 269.

3 Journal entry of July 9, 1960.

4 Journal entry of June 26, 1962.

her notebooks labelled as *Palais du Vocabulaire*, as well as the words of others (transcribed in her numerous *Reading Diaries* (*Diarios de Lectura*)—all brought together in the painstakingly slow process of *making* a poem. Amongst her “bits and pieces of material” are also a handful of central images, which make their first appearance in these early poems of *The Last Innocence* and *The Lost Adventures*, and will, from this moment onwards, remain a constant presence in her poetry. One of the “original” images (from “origin,” or “our origins,” as Pizarnik states in her letter to Clara Silva discussed in the prologue by Ana Becciu) concerns the wind, about which she says:

I love the wind although, exactly, my imagination is in the habit of investing it with awful forms and colors. When the wind overwhelms me, I go to the woods, I go off in search of the garden.⁵

In one quotation, three central images or metaphors: the wind, the woods, the garden. And this process, as her interviewer Martha Isabel Moia hastens to add, happens at night: all night long Pizarnik *makes* the night, she *writes* the night.

Her desire to make “terribly exact poems”⁶ led her to conceive of the page as space. A *workspace*, we could add—her dressmaker’s table, her artist’s canvas. For Pizarnik the work of making poems was, at times, akin to drawing: when a word eluded her, she would draw in the empty space something that alluded to it.⁷ In these early collections, the “brief intense poem,” exact in its presence on the space of the page, was already here, and here to stay.

5 In “Some Keys to Alejandra Pizarnik: An Interview,” in an interview conducted by Martha Isabel Moia and first published in *El deseo de la palabra* (Barcelona: Ocnos, 1975) and quoted here in Emily Cooke’s translation, *Music and Literature*, No. 6, p. 60.

6 *ibid.*, p. 61.

7 Pizarnik in Ivonne Bordelois, *Correspondencia Pizarnik* (Buenos Aires: Seix Barral: 1998), p. 57.