The Calculus of Imaginaries

Poems by
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The dogs are barking. 
I see them stretching their chains 
in a straight line noses 
sighting eyes to some point 
in the fields. I see nothing 
but they bark 
they strain 
against the trees till the bark 
chips off to the ground. Five minutes 
of this and raised lips 
close on teeth eyes 
lose focus the links grow slack 
and they turn toward their 
houses and the shade.

Ribs cave 
beneath fur the wood grunts 
as they collapse 
and in one gesture 
rest 
their jaws on their front 
paws— 
a rush of breath 
and dust flies 
one inch before them 
settles just outside.

In the fields the wind 
bends pale grasses and releases them.
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
dampens the desert
drops snow
where snow seldom falls and drought
where metal rusts as a matter of course.

Then there are flowers.

Whose child are you anyway?
I can almost hear you
crying out “No sé! No sé!”
Oh so beautifully.
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.

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.
Maxima Culpa

for Andrzej Nadolny

You kneel down
like an acolyte on the southbound
train’s floor an altar now
elevated by sacrifice a man
turning blue
gasping before you
touch his wrist
find the risk
of your mouth on his
infinitesimal.

You do not ask
how among so many passengers so densely packed
he fell
or how he spread himself
out full length on his back
without touching a shoe. So many shoes
surround him now as if they had all
come of their own accord to worship
this space he now has
apart from them.

You take deep breaths—
breathe and arrest
breathe and arrest—
then into his trachea expel them;
from your lungs to his
whatever can live in this air will
and will not otherwise as now you must
compress his chest rest and compress
rest and compress.

Now the fist that once pounded
your altar boy’s breast for forgiveness
pounds open-handed his heart.
You want to hear it.
The beating
is only your own.

And the words you once spoke before a priest
return in English as if they were
untranslatable
    as if they were the Latin
your father once spoke kneeling
before you knew him:

    Mea culpa
      mea culpa
    mea maxima culpa.
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.