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Tohu
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Paul Keineg

TOHU

In Memoriam Paul Quéré

From Keremma to Porz Meur. If I were I, I'd live happily in the horrible blue, far from all literature. Its lies, foremost.

*

Happy sound, oh to lie down on it, on a mile of sea and light. White bands, rearview mirror. Smell of privet and manure. Alleyoop, with love, sandals and hats gone with the wind. Let's run across the sand toward those blurry fishermen. How they lean into the wind, walking, and live the rhythm of tides.

At fifty, in one language, in another and yet another, I'm doing well, I'm doing very well. I no longer adapt. Subdued, futile, to make you kick at ruins. What do you say to the guys that head the pack? More light. And to those who bring up the rear and allow themselves to fall, fall again, and think divine thoughts?

Body within the law, bright birds in the sky of ideas. Down toward Kersioul, dog-roses, two lines by Kervarker written on the blackberries. The bay over there, sun thick as a callus, humming with work, heart of stone. What, no skipper in these waters? nothing but parody?

*

Near Kervrezel, which no longer exists. I turned on my toes to see what's left. The flies are modernizing.

The winter over, it's winter still. The blackbirds envelop us in songs that end badly. I had my heart set on hearing a thrush. My mother said: the winter was hard, the thrushes are dead. Do I hear right? come back, naive songs, country to drive one crazy. So much cruelty out of the towns, out of the mouths of people.

*

The trees, whirled high, touch the ground. I had written something else, but we've scorned them enough, the poor old folks, this winter sky in the midst of summer. Crack the whip; and the crowd, abused, will abuse. The sky all movement, black and grey, so quick the words come out by themselves. You think of what you have lost, you never get back.

*

By the tree trunk, the flagpole. Past master in leashing. By both ears. Hands bound by services rendered. They yield up work in sounds, on the dry side, slim. Are puzzled. Go howling past clouds dressed in red. Like warring wild boars. Like gusts that raise the dust.

*

On ignoble roles. On the failed death scene. Tongue of evil days. Have fought with, have left with. Now, and again, my name carries. My name of saddle, backbone, broad shoulders. The child I perhaps was did not see the night approach, nor the thieves. He left carrying on.

*

Did you see the sun embrace, this morning, the triumphal chariot of the slaughterhouse? Chicken coops, pig sties, always at the heart of our devotions. Soul turned to capital, with the last memories of childhood. Tomorrow is Caesar's. Today, in a glass eye, we follow open wars.

*

On the god of battles, no comment. On his reek, his athletic rump in a sweat, no comment. On his dealings, doubles and provinces, no comment. On his well-dressed kids in the first row, no comment. On their

pleasures, their laughs, no comment. On their games, their exquisite taste, their spirit of geometry, no comment. On their smartness, politeness, brilliant studies, no comment. On their kids' kids, no comment. On their screens and keyboards, their miraculous pictures, no comment. Normal road, penal code, no comment. On handsome chiefs, roundtables, unwritten rules, no comment. On their country before the law, the pursuit of happiness, natural borders, no comment. On our gods with their mallets, our obscure narratives, no comment.

*

Sail ho. Quite
undeserved, white or black,
it moves past.
A sea of storm and war
below our battlements.
Like a how of night
a dungeon hole.

Translated from the French
by **Rosmarie Waldrop**