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## Japanese garden; IX; Flags behind the fog

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**JOSÉ WATANABE**

*Japanese Garden*

The stone,  
among the raked white sand,  
was not brought by violent nature.

It was chosen by the spirit  
of a quiet man  
and placed,  
not in the center of the garden,  
but rather skewed to the East,  
also by his spirit.

Not much taller than your knee,  
the stone asks you for silence. There is so much noise  
made by empty and arrogant words  
that struggle dishonorably  
to represent  
the errors of the world.

Look at the stone and learn: it,  
in the floating light of the afternoon,  
with tact and humility,  
it represents  
a mountain.

**IX**

Narrator

It was midnight  
and the palace of Creon seemed to be a ship anchored and secure.  
The wind had slackened  
and the torches consumed themselves with flames static and blue.

Contemplating the building, I thought of the modes of power:  
a ruthless man sleeps in silk, I said to myself.

Suddenly  
in the highest room a light ignited and then another  
and I saw Creon pace and pace troubled. Was he awakened  
by a nightmare  
or the sting of distrust that trembles in the flesh of all  
tyrants?

Creon

The guard's tongue spoke superstitious words. Seeing no tracks,  
he and the simple men with him  
thought a god had tried to bury the corpse of  
Polyneices.

What god would bother himself  
with the man who arrived at the city gates  
raising red torches  
eager to set temples, altars and sacred treasures on fire?

Or have we reached the time in which false gods  
honor traitors?

No: now I see: the innocence of the guard was faked  
and the burying god was a shrewd lie  
to conceal his paid guilt.

There are citizens angry because they do not occupy a place by my  
side.

Eyes that I send throughout the city  
have seen that behind my back they shake their heads and mutter  
diatribes.

They are not hurt by the corpse on the hill, they are hurt by my power,

and to undermine it  
 they allowed coins to fall into the venal palm of the guard.  
 Yes, my servant's shameful, risky acts  
 can only be explained by greed.  
 And then they wished to confuse me like the innocent king of the  
     fables  
 replacing a god with a madman who kneeled before me  
 and spoke confused words between cries and spittle.

Power and betrayal are on the same coin.  
 The day of my first command I had my first felony:  
 the mortuary mask of Polyneices disappeared, the one  
 I fashioned so the enemy may have a face  
 before beneath the sun, as I ordered, he may lose his features.

Oh traitors, tremble, because neither will simple death be enough  
     for you.

***Flags behind the Fog***

An old age sad and obscure hangs about the port,  
 more rust on the dock  
 and suspicious bars on the shoreline  
 where before there were houses ringed by stubborn herb.

One night, when a mist dense and murky  
 covered the world, I walked groping  
 along the planking of the dock. Still a youth,  
 perhaps I sought the joyful terror of dwindling away.

I went on feeling the railing with my hands, its metal  
 joinings, the ropes of the crab traps  
 tied to the rusted keels. The crabs  
 prowled by night among the gutted fish and their innards  
 that rolled in the deep sea  
 or wound themselves like serpents around the pilasters of the dock.

I listened to the gentle push of the waves  
 at the sides of the small boats that  
 in the mornings they went out to gather nets  
 passing between the warships stationed in the bay.

A dog, as blind as me, whimpered  
in the bottom of a boat.

Then I saw someone, in the distance, waving  
flags behind the fog.

I was awestruck and mute. No footnote  
on beauty will ever speak truly of those flags.