

**DOLDRUMS**

Abdellatif Laâbi

*Translated from the French by Andrew Zawacki*

Surrender

small pledge of allegiance  
and the earth goes pale

safe but not sane

the splinter plunders

this tadpole accuses

and for starters who will I stick up my toe or thumb to

I accuse yet again

this time surrender

small pledge of allegiance

it's too much

vast vast the fire vast

and the vast bombs

and this cursed Archimedes at the window

turns turns a vast seism

blows up the baobab's greening

turns turns the scorpion dance

and the arachnid's suicide

black like my face

or this crow watching over me

turns turns the axis turns

double

the crowd of sharded abysses

double facet

you die

but your place is an electric chair

there will be no letting up

Into the garbage poem

Into the garbage rhythm

Into the garbage silence

the word thunders

its first victim is me  
nevertheless I extract it  
and chuck it  
at you

I accuse yet again  
and myself to start with  
of being your social animal  
your strapped for cash cow  
this dry moolah  
amid the soil  
the tree  
where I lay myself down  
and the centuries' crank handle turns turns  
the weapons' brew turns

**MINED**

our globe is mined  
terrestrial life is mined  
our human voices are polluted  
when the equations turn turn  
the cube roots of missiles  
Stop you airlift of ruins  
bastard Shem  
blow your nose  
you also look pekid  
and my face is afire  
like dry cilantro  
my face that no longer resembles me  
my face  
falls  
cluster of ants and spit  
my face cries out

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My body lifts up  
a poem wrings me  
I jack it off  
like a rancid fetus  
I detach it

place it under your gills  
 your haywire lenses  
 it's no vaccine I serve you  
 hocus pocus or lighthearted truths

Lord give us our share of the daily absurd  
 and shield us from our overwhelming freedom

I emasculate you  
 in your husbandly pride  
 your strident culture  
 your floor level babble  
 you make my text ugly  
 you snuff me out  
 you soften me up  
 you dissect me in mini ceremonies  
 how-are-you-doing and health-is-what-matters  
 you fling your blandness  
 your single-storey manners at me  
 your flatlined familiarity  
 you dumb me down to a blueprint my brothers  
 but barely sully my torso  
 I've roots  
 a route of subterranean signs  
 a breath of unknown elemental stuff

Get out my body  
 scar furred hyenas  
 empty my bilgewater blood from your blies  
 begone  
 for good saltpeter and trash  
 I've slammed my life shut  
 on alms  
 to your oblivion  
 I'm going  
 I leave you my carapace  
 my appetite and my everyday talk  
 I exile myself among you  
 I hold my tongue

I pull my anger in  
 my brotherhood that takes you aback  
 my words worn down by othering you  
 freeze beneath your gaze  
 poems stalk me  
 foment

the charges  
 my putting to death

It's freezing  
 someplace inside my brain  
 a glass wall shatters in my temples  
 a people gnashes its teeth  
 let's say children die  
 a woman aborts  
 a man sells his body  
 a cry stops me cold  
 blasphemy hurled  
 at the entrails of heaven  
 the cemetery repopulates  
 with hands  
 It snows on the graves  
 somewhere there  
 in my brain

strong wind  
 people united  
 you explore my history  
 you exclude yourself from my rigid perception

walks  
 hanged or guillotined  
 wanks  
 squatting

your stride  
 but shuttle body  
 sweats  
 walks

walks  
 hush the horizon  
 the pillory  
     undo the language  
                     form the word  
 return to me  
 sarcophagus down in the dungeon  
 take my hand  
 suck in your tummy  
 heave your heresies  
     drool  
 I don't like your blue Tuareg moon  
 stomp on the recipe  
 wind body mellowed  
 citadel's crenels  
 horde of convicts  
 hide your gripes  
 disguise your hunger  
 your fag ends of hope  
 your round the bend headwind from hand to mouth  
 coarse and mine own  
     morsel  
 mundane  
 you come from out the stunted dawn  
 from the clanking of centuries  
 and give your name up  
 Pubescent  
 tallying of ages  
 you affect nothing but my freedom  
 you seize only my freedom  
 you don't know me  
 but stay  
 don't pity me  
 don't plead me not guilty  
 don't lie to the crowd  
 to clear me

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You  
 you've got but a day  
 haze from the levees  
 edges of towns  
 you should speak  
 ducking out after would be easy  
 they'll stone you  
 so say what a dagger can conjure  
 between the eye and the wound  
 speak of this blood  
 boils off in your breath  
 tell them  
 if your reach exceeds your grasp  
 or else what  
 dream of paradise  
 of butterfly hours  
 or flitting angels all ambrosial  
 you stand guard  
 your torch is the word  
 exploding in your arteries  
 don't titter  
 I'm serious  
 a serious swollen with gas  
 I bloat myself  
 to erupt at the crossroads  
                     at the pits  
                             at water's source  
 Once polluted  
     my life sterilized of the world  
 I accuse yet again  
 surrender  
 small pledge of allegiance  
 but this humanity I couldn't care less  
 its copulations  
 its thin-skinned skin  
 its coitus between two cuts of meat

Peoples with no memory

none

peoples of slag and hail

mine are muscular

dark skinned

with a callused hide

and turns turns the noria

to a null tempo

turn the seasons at random turn

the colossal gusts of locusts turn

rags

typhus

trachoma

the buildings hold back

when death turns turns

in the alleys

mucky

like my face

dispossessed of this face

a mole has muddied by night

my face

multiplied in all the faces

that shout

voice of the gut

of sex

and of a sickly dignity

unwritten

that pussyfoots

through a bombing

by catapults

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