Ashley Halpé

from

PASAN
A threnody for Lanka

Horror, horror, horror, tongue nor heart
Cannot conceive or name thee
...
Ay’ay’yō

from a Pasan of Jacomo Gonsalvez
...
Memory is our shield, our only shield
Anne Ranasinghe

I

Our only shield
The burden, therefore, of silence.
   I remember
From that earlier kindly and accustomed world
Of tutorial and Common Room,

Das volk dichtet. The people composes.

The people, we, composed
A symphony of silences.

And as music holds within itself
Silence, as ‘words after speech reach
Into silence,’ so the converse
Also proved true, this silence,
Transsonic, held within itself
The screams, the shots, the moans, the
Lamentations. Are these mourners
Blessed, and shall they laugh, as He
Promised? He

Himself mourned
With passionate piety by my people,
Dúva to Katāna and further, to

Vahacōtté, Ash Wednesday to Good Friday

*Ay’ay’yō* . . . rapt, devotional mimesis

II

. . . . . . . . Imagine

A head,
The eyes, the eyeballs finely veined in delicate pink over eggshell blue, in one corner, the left, a black clot with an orange-red surround, jagged, wicked; the eyeballs out, pushed out, globed, the pupils black black points in a brownblack circle circled by the veined whites the blooded lids the ditchsockets parted by half a nose above blubbery leaky lips over a most beautiful firm strong chin above rags and tatters white thongs and trails of skin hair veins tangled and streaked above, above nothing imagine a head above imagine all the above above nothing

move
two feet right, by the pool, our ornament, a head above all the, yes, and two more, yes, and another three, yes yes and and yes retch yes gag yes

Remember

“it is evil to forget”¹

the dismembered memberless gazes stares, the screaming of children as school-bus stalled and stuttered, and in the pond lotuses gazed gazed at the bluest sky

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¹ Elie Weisel, quoted by Anne Ranasinghe.
III

. . . The burden, therefore, of silence, now
The duty of memorial, the duty
Of expiation, now that we seem
To have written them off, written off
The faceless martyrs, as well as
The hapless victims of those who became martyrs,
The torture, the bodies hacked—or fried—
Numbed faces, the shots, the moans, the

Lamentations, ayī'ay'yō; . . . give me

Such a one as our Lylie Godridge, give me
That rapt voice, sacramentally resonant
To intone for me, for us,
Out of a beautiful evening silence,

Liberam e

—that voice of silence, Fauré—
Deliver us, deliver me, O Lord, not
From memory, from history, no
But from our sour sins,
Our guilty complicities, comforts, silences . . .

Liberam e, Domine

De morte aeternum