

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

rag and tatters

white thongs and trails of skin hair veins

tangled and streaked above, above

nothing

imagine a head above imagine alltheabove

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

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, *ayi'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,

Libera me

—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 . . .

Libera me, Domine

De morte aeternum