

For all its investigations, *Drift* is insular; it avoids complete engagement with its subject matter in order to emphasize the totality of modernity's narrow focus on individual gain. Ethical obligation remains evasive throughout, even when directly addressed in "Log" or when the consequences of its neglect are brutally relayed in "Report." It is one of *Drift*'s many drifts.

Gwendolen Muren

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José Antonio Mazzotti, *Sakra Boccata*. Brooklyn, NY: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2013. 70pp. \$14

Sakra Boccata. Simultaneously "sacred mouthful," "devil's foul breath," and a euphemism for cunnilingus, the title of José Antonio Mazzotti's book resists easy and direct translation. *Sakra* in Italian (*sacra*) means sacred, but in Quechua (*saqra*) it signifies a "mischievous demon," obscenity, or mere ugliness. *Boccata* in Italian "refers to strongly exhaled or foul breath," but in Spanish the equivalent would be *bocanada*, a word that can be divided into "boca" (mouth) and "nada" (nothing), thus connoting an impotent silence that the title, in its pregnant untranslatability, seems to both qualify and refute. But *Sakra Boccata*, foremostly, describes a plural-tongued invocation, a prismatic orison to the "amber goddess" that signifies nothing obtusely specific, and yet, in its aural repletion, sets into motion an ecstatic androgynous lyric that celebrates the "primordiac flesh" of She, "Mother of all mortals," who "appear[s] even on Chicago walls" in a splendid shattered moonlight that effaces crude solar distinctions and the worn semantics of the everyday. Mazzotti achieves an alchemy of the word that does not gesture at shamanic transformation but enacts it in the aural fabric of these polytongued poems.

The title's blend of Italian, Spanish and Quechua represents Mazzotti's own heritage as a Peruvian poet with Milanese roots who writes in Spanish but is grounded in the high-ridged richness of Quechua culture. The aural complexity of the title indicates the amount of layering—erotic, linguistic, and alchemical—present in the polyform language and construction of *Sakra*'s twenty-eight poems. Twenty-eight is the number of days it takes the moon to orbit the Earth, and as such the poem sequence might be conceived as a lunar cycle that traces the moon's shifting erosion and rebirth. The "She" who features in the poems (the She who is invoked by *Sakra Boccata*) goes unnamed; She is instead a principle, an aspect, a depth, a surface that changes face (or body) with each poem. Perhaps it is blasphemous to give her a name other than what She arouses or evokes, stimulates or engenders, disguises and reveals. An organic, alliterative *eros* provides a regular impetus for image-coherence and prognostication:

Mussel every night when the bonfires howl and birds do not fly overhead
 Mussel because this mounting is sweeter than a cardinal's melody
 At the hour of the Holy of
 Holies the delights of the fingertips
 Are dissolved in the mouth
 The music crawls
 With the strength of caparisons
 Mussel clean and oblong secretly opening
 Its aroma of sandalwood its sweetness
 Of lemonade

Clayton Eshleman's translation of poem 6, sterling as it is, cannot quite capture the dense aurality at work in Mazzotti's original. "Mussel" is the direct translation of "choro" (at least in Chile and Peru, when it doesn't also mean, in the vulgar, "vagina"), but Mazzotti's use of "choro" also derives from an epigraph by Brazilian poet Manuel Bandeira that heads the poem: "*Eu canto assim como que eu choro*" (translated as "I sing exactly like I cry"). Here the Portuguese word for crying (*chorar*) stands in for the equivalent Spanish word (*llorar*), the two words blended sonically across the languages by the variation in Spanish pronunciation in certain regions of South America. *Lloro* becomes *choro* becomes *mussel*. "*Choro porque este canto es más dulce...*" is translated as "Mussel because this mounting is sweeter..." a rendition that inevitably loses some of the original's aural interplay. "Chanto" evokes the Spanish-Portuguese "canto" ("I sing because this song is sweeter...") but also directly translates, colloquially, to *fucking*: "chanto," from the verb "chantar," is Peruvian slang for "intercourse." Eshleman makes note of this pun and chooses "mounting" as the closest approximation in English: one "mounts" during intercourse, but one could also "mount" a song, a composition, *un chanto/llanto/canto*.

Mussel, for all its marine inadequacy, manages to signal the erotic hypostasis of Mazzotti's *Sakra* poems: one sucks at the texture of the poems, one savors the saline residue in the emptied shell. When the mussel throbs, it morphs, it becomes muscle, it flees the condemnatory sunlight:

Ah throb silver mollusc follow your road
 [...]
 Golden mollusc
 Crawl through the brooks
 Escape at dawn

Mazzotti's neologism, "mollusc" (*molúsculo* in Spanish), combines mollusk with muscle, animating the dark-drawn invertebrate with sexual life, rendering it capable of kinetic sentience. Why the mollusk? Throughout Western culture,

this creature stands for sexual prodigiousness. In the motifs of classical art, such as the figure of Venus Anadyomene, the sea shell symbolizes the female vulva, an erotic theme that Mazzotti recasts from Botticelli's famous image of Venus rising from the sea. In Linnaean taxonomy, moreover, some mollusks, like the clam, the oyster, and the mussel, are bivalves: invertebrate organisms housed by the shell, two hinged valves that open and close. Such bivalvia have the capacity to change sex, to switch gender as a way of accommodating the partner. In Mazzotti's language, the bivalve's ability to change sex, to survive in an ontological motility symbolically enclosed by two valves (the *anima* as well as the *animus* in a single body), draws comparison to "the secret of two," the Venusian science of lovemaking in which androgynous coexistence (two bodies merging and indistinguishable) is at its highest pitch:

The secret of two is a miracle
Of the free, those heavenly bodies who pass each other on the highways
and for barely an instant
Look at each other as lastingly as comets.

The freedom spoken of here is what Raúl Zurita, in the prologue to the book, describes as the "desire to devour and to be devoured by the other in an extreme realization of a merger with the beloved." The secret of two is equally *chanto* and *canto*, sex and song, and each is a form of crying, a transmission of fluids, a bleeding into each other, a merger of words and bodies. Freedom to change sex in the act of love resembles the freedom of comets on a Baudelairean stroll: freedom to gaze lastingly at passersby, to desire them, to be desired by them, and to be changed by this desire.

Within such cosmic freedom astrological compulsion abounds, a paradox that Mazzotti maintains by troping the macaronic unruliness of his own language with images not just of sexual profusion but also of alchemical transmutation: the crossing of stars for the unfortunate, or for the fortunate, the revival of the moon, radiant on the surface of a lustful ocean "awaiting the longed for moment," as Mazzotti has it,

When the Sun goes out in an interregnum with the Moon
In broad daylight and seaweed and caparisons sing
And the flesh of the ocean rests from its knives
It's the hour in which fish swallow their own anxiety
Throbbing in Chaos
Moon of Scorpio on the lance point
The slope of the wave rises
Raises up its foaming hand intending to touch them

The sun/moon dyad conventionally mimics the male/female dyad, but Mazzotti, like the bivalve and “molluscle,” continuously absconds from daylight and solarly, favoring the dark fold of the ocean, the pagan shadowplay of moonlight in which forms shapeshift and bodies switch genders. The androgyne, the alchemical achievement of a perfect union of the two sexes, makes an appearance in this setting:

Spirits formerly of the divine body
Live joined and jumbled obverse and reverse
A perfect androgyne self-sufficient
Double joy double bristling
The past and the future concentrated and the present
Open like an infinite arc
[...]
There's a lunar eclipse on the back of Scorpio
The astrologers point out the harmony of the cycle
Look within yourself look deep
You'll find the leather bag in which the male's face
And the female's nape float up front
Or inside out they touch each other stretching forth their hands

The co-presencing of *anima/animus* recalls another Botticelli work, *Mars and Venus*, in which Love, awake and conquering, and War, asleep and conquered, cohabit an intimate space of conjugal relations. While Venus gazes at a sleeping Mars, their legs entwined in the aftermath of what might have been a vigorous session of *chanto*, a mischievous satyr (we might call him, in the Quechua tongue, a *sagra*) blows a conch at the ear of a probably dreaming and susceptible god of war. Strikingly, the conch, representing Venus, seems to be placed at the tip of Mars's lance (“Moon of Scorpio on the lance point”). While this symbolism clearly mimics the act of heterosexual love, the positioning of the conch on the lance figures, more intriguingly, the basic principle of the androgyne: Venus already lies within Mars, and Aries equally rests in Aphrodite. Mazzotti, for his part, makes sure we understand what sort of conch he writes to: “Your Konch is that throbbing spongy muscle / That never stops throbbing.” The mussel, the molluscle, the Konch, are her qualities and caparisons. And Mazzotti lies at “the center of the earth between two legs / Suddenly happy / Like a sea animal / Slimy with ink.” Mazzotti's stylus, like Mars's lance, rests inside the bivalve and, slimy with the ink of fluidic signatures, is stimulated into an ecstatic outburst of hybridic growths and transmutations.

This double-folded immersion in the conch is a return to *omphalos*, to the concentric life of the acephalic mollusk, which recovers the innocence of the child-like androgyne by returning to the womb at the originary state

in which chromosomes have not yet been sorted out. The nameless She, the “Sakra Wound,” holds in her nothingness a plurality of names, an aural splendor that multiplies rather than recedes:

Because you hold the Name of many
And the beauty of all
The solitude of boats at night
The strength of nacre upon swallowing its pearl
At the bottom of that funnel it rolls unto its origin
Searching for the Conca
Vity of its childhood

The split of concavity into “Conca” (evoking, in Spanish, *concha*) and “Vity” (in Spanish, “Vidad,” which suggests *vida*, or life) repeats the dyadic split, only this time in terms of sameness rather than difference; the *conch* is already *life*, the spectral womb of the goddess. If there is a goddess invoked by *Sakra Boccata*, She is Killa, the Quechua word for “moon,” which Mazzotti alchemizes into *LoKilla*, the Spanish diminutive of *loca*, and which Eshleman in turn translates as “LittleKrazyOne” (“Oh LittleKrazyOne Queen my Queen”). In cultivating a rich aural fabric that incorporates Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Quechua (and, via Eshleman, English, too), Mazzotti constructs a poetry of the moon, for the moon, and by the moon, an authentically *lunatic* lyric that swarms language and explodes its categorical binaries into androgynous depths.

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Harold Jaffe, *Induced Coma: 50 and 100 Word Stories*. Fort Wayne, IN: Anti-Oedipus Press, 2014. 170pp. \$13.95

While Harold Jaffe’s writing has been dubbed “literary terrorism” by numerous critics (and even his own publishers), one would find it difficult to categorize *Induced Coma: 50 and 100 Word Stories*, his most recent volume of docufiction, as terroristic. Rather, Jaffe’s meticulous deconstructions of mainstream “news” articles and various other online and print sources demonstrate the consciousness of an artist who is struggling with, as he calls it, “writing in a dying world.” The terror is therefore not of Jaffe’s conscious doing, but the result of his ability to remove the blinders set forth by a rapidly deteriorating culture, one that does not want to acknowledge the extent to which it has succumbed to various millennial diseases: virtual solipsism, televised suicide, crimes against the environment, repressed sexuality, and an increasing disconnect between cultures, within families, and ultimately, from oneself.