

L'inedito



RENATA MORRESI

## “Cosmos: a Nocturne”: A Poem By Rachel Blau DuPlessis

“Cosmos: A Nocturne” is marked by the interplay between the singular and the manifold, the minor incident and the massive event, the infra-ordinary and the striking. Readers familiar with DuPlessis’s poetry will recognize this tension: the long-poem *Drafts*, published in several books, started in 1985 and written across thirty years, brings together an inexhaustible drive to question the systems of signification the subject is imbued in (including poetic tradition), the material conditions, accidents and gestures animating one’s life, and the political need to confront major socio-cultural issues, such as global wars and the conundrums of US politics, gender and women’s agency, Jewishness and the dangers of identity, mass destruction and the work of memory. Structured on a rectangular grid numbering 114 poems (with unnumbered poems, collage poems and poems of the interstices to disrupt this apparently fixed architecture), *Drafts*, as the title suggests, is built on “the provisional and the contingent” (Pritchett n. pag.), openly challenging the universalism of Pound’s *Cantos* and sharing H.D.’s palimpsestic strategy, where writing is both rewriting of what was erased and endless glossing at its margins. The status of work-in-progress allows a mode of inquiry which is never oblivious of the historical context of its production and “dare[s] compare the little with the large” (“Draft 72: Nanifesto,” in DuPlessis, *Torques* 97). Full of references, quotations and allusions, not only to literary tradition, but also to newspapers headlines, art exhibitions, scientific research, pop culture, casual conversations, languages such as Esperanto, Latin, Yiddish, German, French, and Italian, DuPlessis’s work cannot be easily reduced to a school or a poetic movement. In fact, her poetic signature signals a daring complexity: mixing the argumentative logic of the essay, the density and the mechanism of poetry, the construction and length one associates to

narrative, her writing insists on saying that poetry matters, right here in the messy and murky world, as an instrument of knowledge and awareness.

*Drafis* has been a massive accomplishment and an on-going generator of poetry, each poem resonating of another poem, each sequence of poems folding on another sequence, each interstice leaving space for another page. “Cosmos” inherits and mirrors the richness of this writing process, reaching out to the heart of DuPlessis’s poetics, which never loses sight of “the mite, the mote, the mute” (95), striving to give account of what is silenced and unspeakable. As the title suggests the time is the night, with its offer of a deep space and a deep time, a scenery that invites a meditation on individual vulnerability as well as facing the challenge of collective responsibility. In it the subject provides a contemplation of the limitless immanence always on the verge of submerging humanity, not in any transcendental sense but in the shape of litter and poison. The meditative mode soon becomes an interrogation of our position in a world literally overwhelmed by our own waste. DuPlessis’s midrashic writing dwells on every single fissure, every single fragment: nothing is dismissed as an object of investigation, no matter how microscopic or apparently insignificant. Refusing the pastoral device of framing a coherent and inspiring view, a traditional setting for the poetic subject to start interrogating the universe, here the subject is found in a space-time “saturated / with pitiless derangements.” The distance necessary to trigger meditation is not given by Nature (an ideal charged with contradictions), but by the dangerous, noisy, darkened space of conflict and confusion typical of existence in the globalized West, with its empty slogans, its constant state of emergency, its “political failure.” Thus, the poem confronts the material and discursive rubbish produced by flawed politics and rhetoric, the results of “natural” disasters (mostly caused by human neglect), as well as the very human disaster of pretending to cope with the global and the cosmic without awareness of our local, unstable, provisional status. The subject’s exploration of “reality” becomes a questioning of our ethical choices and a way to open poetry to critical thinking: “What is to be done? / What could or should we do?” The concern with the ephemeral we find in Rilke’s “Ninth Elegy” is here alluded to in a recurring list of simple words, “house, bread, pitcher, night, door,” so general and common and yet so charged with one’s own experience and

perceptions, in such a way that they end up asking us whether we can take care of all this, or at least dare to accept it: "it's an unfixed archive, / neither all omnivorous / nor all complete."

DuPlessis's work is an elegy full of hermeneutical tension and a linguistic experiment immersed in historical consciousness. Translating DuPlessis into Italian means facing this complexity, but also coming to terms with the dizzying compounds, the wordplays and the coinages, the fibrillating alliterations and rhymes and all the rich soundbox DuPlessis employs. To do this the translator has tried to dialogue with Italian poetry, the one most in love with an experimental and resonant word, from the late twentieth century to today: Zanzotto, Sanguineti, Caproni, Insana, Lo Russo and Giovenale have left their marks in DuPlessis's Italian version (see DuPlessis, *Dieci bozze*). DuPlessis's language, direct and layered at the same time, colloquial but dense with its unsettling extra-systoles, intertwining the high and the low, mixing academic and informal registers, *diverts* the target language, rerouting and amusing it. The (not too secret) hope of the translator of poetry, after all, is that of challenging linguistic numbness while contributing to the interpretation and the dissemination of her work.

### Works cited

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RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

## Cosmos: A Nocturne

1.

I began this far away  
    down-where  
        before dawn  
in a night saturated  
    with pitiless derangements –  
        part dreamed, part head-blood,  
part galloping times,  
    capital letter concepts  
arranged in categories  
    then scrambled, intercut  
        spilling counterpart ides.

ILLJUSTNEST  
    ECO-EATH  
        DISUST  
NOXXUS  
    ASTERAGE  
        ONWRECK.

Every abstract noun  
    an inchoate block  
        that, struck like a rock,  
gushed  
    a water choke,  
        ready at any odd cell-small  
no-sleep-image-anger  
    to cover the world  
        with mud.

Not dreams, not nightmares:

It's sludge of political failure.

Systemic ruptures, looms of dooms on earth.

Yet the quiet gate stayed open,  
the slide into sleep had seemed assured.

It was no help being  
rebar-rigid with rage,  
no particular sense to pit  
extreme heat

caged children

bottled water litter's microbits  
against sleep.

Yet these things burst,  
flooded over, further embittering  
other unstoppable tides.

2.

It seems I have no skin,  
am hungry ghost to haunt the stormed-on streets,  
wading in elements so engulfing and poisonous  
I am about to die again.

3.

The merger of two black holes forms  
one binary black hole – is this really a thing?  
did I say it right?

The person lying flat in awe and fear is  
not quite sure  
what this entails  
except black holes are rare,



and somewhere there.  
 Implosive anti-matter stuff?  
 The inside out of cosmos outside in?  
 A heavy dot with which to rebegin?  
 Galactic collision between long-zone  
 bi-fold double swooshing light-year slough?  
 Although the person seems secure  
 that she is / I am here  
 implacable as astrophysics,  
 though not so impressive  
 nor as long-term,  
 withal the double question  
 does this count?  
 Does it matter being here?

4.

Can this cosmos be trusted  
 with a list of words,  
 daily simples,  
 nothing abstract  
 like WILL or JUSTICE, can it  
     be trusted to accept that  
 nouns (like “home” or “night”)  
     are invested with our feelings?  
 Say: the touch  
     of that particular door,  
 its key to jiggle in a certain way,  
     then a little kick; you’re home.  
 The light flickers  
 the leaves get shadowy luminous  
 endarkened colors shine.

The moon is up.

The door is shut.  
The night is full.  
The world is clear.

Can the cosmos bear  
my pitcher in the shape of a rooster –  
flowery, charming, and (it turned out)  
impractical; can it dare  
the word “mother”  
without evoking  
something mendable;  
can it share our bread.

Does the cosmos  
care to understand  
house, bread, pitcher, night, door?

5.

Yet ferocious mis-management ensues

(a series of if-then clauses follows  
involving plastics  
and electronic waste, generating  
profit, disordering the drinkable, fracking  
plasma fields of cosmic blood)  
from which a flood  
of moral suffering rises above  
last night’s crest.

What is to be done?  
What could or should we do?  
To live in our world, is what I mean.

And is it relief or infinite sadness to think  
 that this will be destroyed,  
 whether we (insomniac mites)  
 do it, or approve, or not?  
 Will be absorbed and be transformed  
 in the long-term normal course of things  
 no matter whether we wake tomorrow  
 or stay awake till light, to say  
 “pitcher, door, house, bread, night.”

6.

Glints of cosmic greenglass pierce our rocks  
 (blackglass! azure arrivals! jewels of song!)  
 all from drifts of dust.

It's cosmic dust.  
 These matter-swirling beauties generate  
 our astonished empathy, considering  
     that all this  
         is innumerable grasps and gasps of cells  
         and minerals hooked into each other's processes  
             where chancy atoms frisk and frost  
             setting night and day in motion  
             where we can see their turns.  
         Does it matter that we can?  
         We see them now.

This place, these multiples, this time  
 barely countable, barely accountable  
 with the numbers we possess –  
 it's an unfixed archive,  
 neither all omnivorous  
 nor all complete

but present as colors, mixed  
and metamorphic,  
just like that.

Crystals of small light fall from a compromised sky.  
And once you know what you must face,  
you try to wake.

April-November 2018

# “Cosmo: Un Notturmo”

Traduzione italiana di Renata Morresi

1.

Ho cominciato da così lontano  
là-dove  
    prima del sole  
in una notte satura  
    di spietati eccessi  
    in parte sognati, in parte pulsanti,  
tempi in parte sfrenati,  
    concetti con la maiuscola  
allestiti in categorie  
    poi rimescolati, interposti  
    riversando idi equivalenti.

MALGIUSNIDO

ECO-MORTE

DISUSTO

NOXXUS

ASTRERA

NOWFRAGIO.

Ogni nome astratto  
un blocco amorfo  
    che, picchiato come roccia,  
ha fiottato  
    acqua che strozza,  
    pronta ad ogni strambo micro-sbocco  
d'odio concreto  
a coprire il mondo  
di fango.

Né sogni né incubi:  
è poltiglia di fallimento politico.  
Fratture sistemiche, telai di tragedie sulla terra.

Tuttavia il passaggio quieto rimase aperto,  
scivolare nel sonno era parso garantito.  
Serviva a poco starsene  
barre rigide di rabbia,  
non sembrava importante porre  
il caldo estremo  
i bambini nelle gabbie  
i microbit di scorie nell'acqua in plastica  
contro il sonno.  
Eppure queste cose esplodono,  
inondate, inasprendo  
altre implacabili maree.

2.

Sembra che io non abbia pelle  
sia lo spettro affamato che infesta le strade devastate,  
guadando tra elementi avvelenati soverchianti così tanto che  
sto per morire di nuovo.

3.

La fusione di due buchi neri forma  
un buco nero binario. Ma davvero è una cosa questa?  
E l'ho detta nel modo giusto?  
La persona che striscia sgomenta e spaurita è  
non tanto certa  
delle implicazioni  
salvo che i buchi neri sono rari,

che stanno là da qualche parte.  
Implosiva anti-materia?  
Il rovescio del cosmo rivoltato in fuori?  
Un punto denso da cui ricominciare?  
Collisione galattica tra lunghe mute bine  
raddoppiate sguscianti da anni luce?  
Sebbene la persona sembri sicura  
di essere qui / che io sia qui  
implacabile come l'astrofisica,  
anche se non altrettanto formidabile  
né duratura,  
nondimeno la doppia domanda:  
questo conta?  
Conta qualcosa stare qui?

4.

Possiamo affidare a questo cosmo  
una lista di parole?  
le semplici quotidiane,  
niente di astratto  
come VOLONTÀ o GIUSTIZIA, possiamo  
fargli accettare che  
i nomi (come "casa" o "notte")  
siano investiti del nostro sentirli?  
Esempio: la foggia  
di una certa porta  
la chiave da scrollare a quel modo,  
poi un colpetto, sei entrata in casa.  
Balugina la luce  
le foglie prendono un chiarore nell'ombra  
i colori spenti tornano a splendere.

La luna è alta.

La porta è chiusa.  
La notte è fonda.  
Il mondo è limpido.

Il cosmo può sopportare  
la mia brocca a forma di gallo?  
a fiori, incantevole, e (venne fuori)  
inservibile; può osare  
la parola "madre"  
senza alludere  
a qualcosa da aggiustare;  
può condividere il nostro pane?

Al cosmo importa  
di capire  
casa, pane, brocca, notte, porta?

5.

Tuttavia un feroce malgoverno ne risulta  
(segue serie frastica di se-allora,  
che implica rifiuti elettronici  
e in plastica, genera  
profitto, intorbida il potabile, frattura  
campi plasmatici di sangue cosmico)  
da cui un'alluvione  
di travaglio morale risale  
la cresta della notte scorsa.

Cosa va fatto?  
Cosa potremmo o dovremmo fare?  
Per vivere in questo mondo, intendo.

Ed è sollievo o infinita tristezza pensare



che questo sarà distrutto,  
non importa quel che noi (acari insonni)  
facciamo o vorremmo?  
Sarà assorbito e trasformato  
nell'infinito e normale corso delle cose,  
che noi si dorma fino a domani  
o si rimanga in piedi fino all'alba, a dire  
"brocca, porta, casa, pane, notte".

6.

Laser di vetro cosmico perforano le nostre rocce  
(vetri scuri! arrivi azzurri! gioielli di canzoni!)  
tutti da derive di detriti.

È polvere cosmica.

Queste perle di materia vorticante generano  
la nostra sbalordita empatia, considerando  
che tutto questo

    è fatto di innumerevoli scosse e soffi di cellule  
    e minerali agganciati in processi reciproci  
        dove atomi aleatori girano e gelano  
        mettendo in moto il giorno e la notte  
        dove li vediamo vagare.  
    Importa che possiamo farlo?  
    Li vediamo, adesso.

Questo posto, questi multipli, questo tempo  
possiamo a malapena contarli, darne conto  
coi numeri che possediamo.

È un archivio nomade  
né del tutto onnivoro  
né del tutto completo  
ma presente come i colori, mescolati

e metamorfici,  
proprio come loro.

Cristalli di luce minima cadono da un cielo compromesso.  
E una volta che sai cosa devi affrontare,  
provi a svegliarti.

Aprile-novembre 2018