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978-3-7356-0289-3

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THE TRIUMPH OF THE RAT

Moris

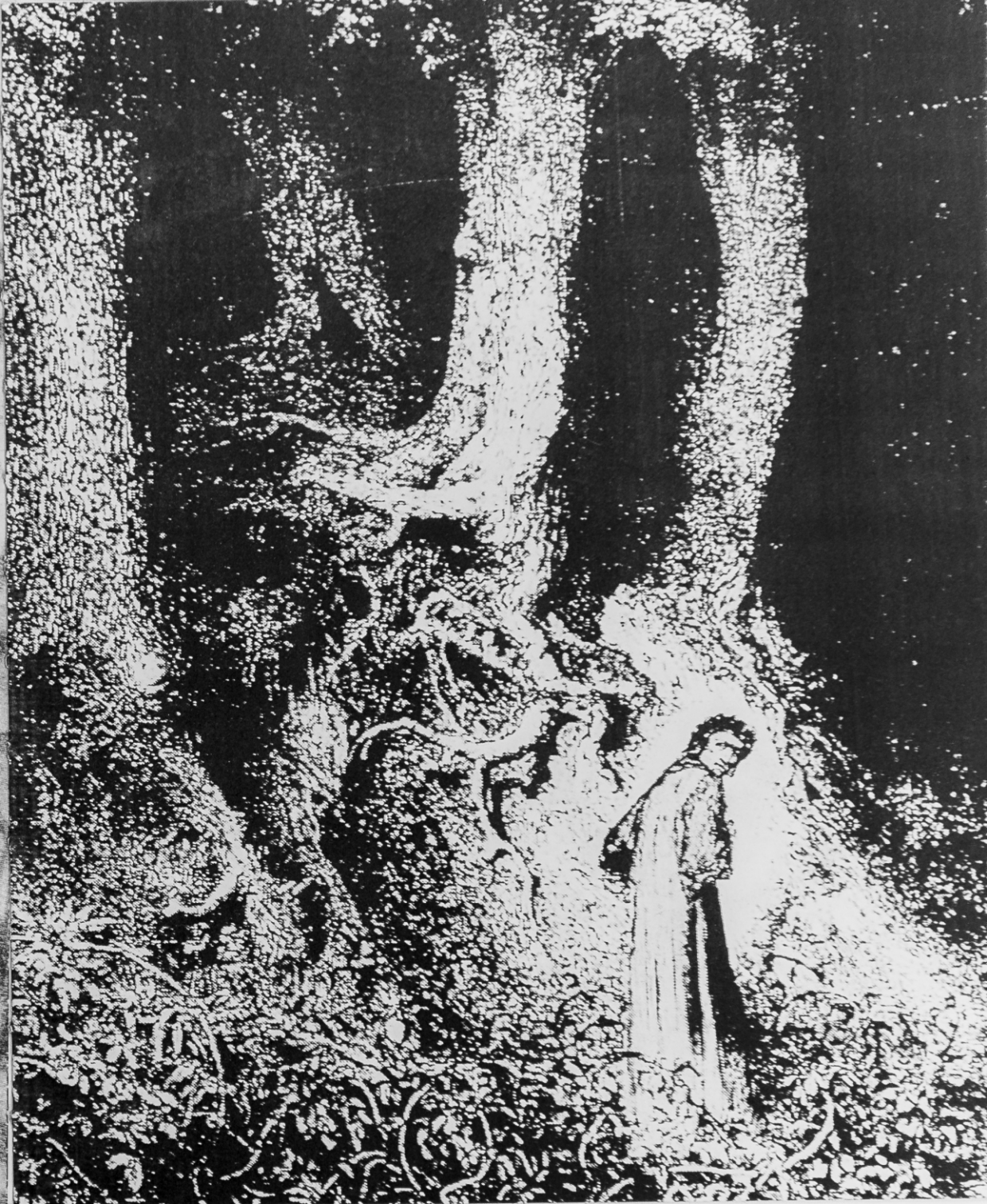


THE TRIUMPH OF THE RAT

Moris



KERBER



»THE TRIUMPH OF THE RAT«; OR, THE INFERNO OF DAILY LIFE

Andrea Jahn

Through me you enter into the city of woes,
through me you enter into eternal pain,
through me you enter the population of loss.

—Dante, »The Divine Comedy«¹

It is a strange calm that lies over the exhibition—almost ghostly. For the things with which the artist, born in Mexico City in 1978, confronts us already have their lives behind them. It is the banality of death that is omnipresent in them, because they are in the way and at first do not even look like works of art—paving stones, shards of glass, knives, leather jackets, and again and again concrete blocks and loaves of bread—symbols of a seemingly threadbare story of violence that Moris places before our eyes like open wounds and through which he guides us, as Dante does his readers through the horrors of the inferno in his *Divine Comedy*. Like him, Moris is a quiet observer of the transgressions and crimes that people commit out of irresponsibility or selfishness or greed. He too is familiar with the circumstances and knows the weaknesses of his fellow human beings, who accept the most bestial features amid the increasing brutalization of (Mexican) society.²

It is a world that is all too familiar and at the same time seems alien, a world in which death and violence are on the agenda—with all their cruelty, absurdity, and ordinariness—as in Luis Buñuel's famous film *Los Olvidados* (*The Forgotten Ones*) about the children in the slums of Mexico City, whose shocking scenes are processed in the two-part video work in the first room. Above it all hangs the Mexican flag—or what's left of it³—the artist calls this installation *Forgotten Horizon* and implies by that the lost future that was symbolized by the eagle as emblem on its national flag after the Mexican War of Independence. As if it were a symbol of

the impotence of government, the flag appears to be stuck in concrete, in the face of the corrupt machinations of those who have in truth seized control of the country: drug barons and criminal politicians whose contemptuous practices are vividly dramatized by the artist. That is how he links his objects to a narrative in the room.

While the end of the Mexican flag that is soaked in concrete hangs down heavily onto the floor, its colors are also covered by the concrete's dead gray. In his *Funerary Monument* next to it, Moris placed the neck of a broken bottle in concrete, which on the other side is pressing the model of a small head to the floor—as a loving memory of the dead—which is thus overpowered beneath the weight of raw violence. Diagonally opposite it the artist placed the gagged head of a plastic German shepherd on a similar concrete pedestal; like all the animals, in Moris's work, it refers proverbially to human nature.

Opposite this on the wall side is *Empty Pockets*: a row of moneybags from the central bank of Mexico that were once filled with money—a memorable image of a society marked by corruption and mismanagement, in which »empty pockets« symbolize the collapse of a system. Just one step further, we almost stumble over a small concrete cube in which only a tuft of hair can be seen, suggesting the worst. The artist called this work *The Blind One* or *Concrete Head*, allowing himself a macabre joke with an allusion to Concrete Art. His references to the history of art are numerous elsewhere as well, as is demonstrated particularly well by his installation in the second part of the exhibition, which he presents as reference to Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

Moris belongs to a generation of young Latin American artists whose work results from the raw materials cast off by the megalopolis Mexico City. After completing his degree at the Escuela Nacional de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado (ENPEG) »La

Esmeralda,« he discovered the artistic potential of the demimonde and the favelas where he lives and works. His characteristic feature as an artist is bringing together the authentic traces of that milieu, the materials of the street, in order to present it anew in the exhibition space. The violence and poverty in the slums of the big city thus find their way into his environments in which bourgeois categories such as high and low culture collide. He records their fault lines in subtle works such as *The Ground Is Easier to Clean than Blood*, a canvas into which the marks of a »perreo party« have been inscribed—and its excesses of drugs, alcohol, and sex. The artist does not work with scandalous images but rather with quiet, almost insignificant traces of the physical and mental destruction that such orgies leave behind, not least on the participants themselves.

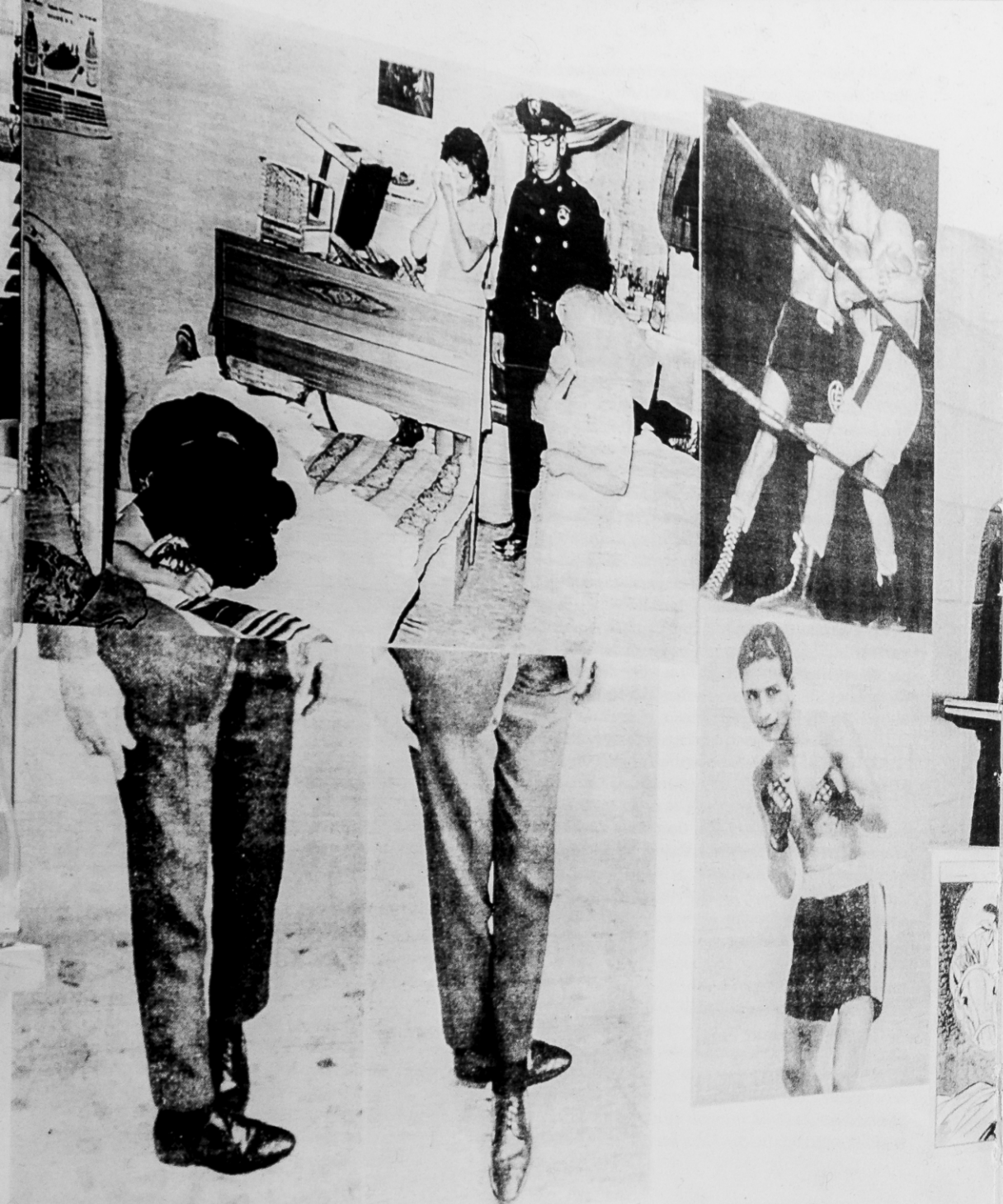
In his installations Moris evokes a world in which the most banal things develop an incredible power, an impact that punches us in the stomach emotionally. His assemblages of everyday objects evoke associations whose effect goes far beyond that of, say, the anonymous flood of images that the Internet brings us. His art consists of materials »from hell« that get under our skin.⁴

The havoc this world wreaks can also be sensed in the second room, at the entrance to which Moris receives us with images of a supposed idyll: rows of blue skies that the artist has cut out of landscape paintings acquired at flea markets. *Broken Heaven* is the title of this work, a broken heaven that marks the beginning of a path that leads unavoidably to hell. And so we are standing before a kind of gates of hell, which Moris has set up very much in the spirit of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Like Dante with Virgil, we too wander through the room guided by the artist. In contrast to Dante's *Inferno*, however, the hell we encounter in Moris's exhibition is not a realm of the dead but an underworld in which we see, sense, and hear what it must be like when a human being becomes an animal, driven by greed, revenge, the instinct of asserting oneself in a world that no longer has any room for humanity. It is the world Moris has known since childhood, where he still lives and works. In this position, he is not only a critical observer of the conditions in the poor neighborhoods of Mexico City but is also familiar with them, speaking their language and understanding their codes.

What he records, takes up, and processes artistically in his installations are found objects from a reality that he experiences up close every day. It is the struggle for survival—ranging from self-defense to self-destruction, from defensive techniques to suicide, the desperate face of which unfolds its full relentlessness in this very room. It is the poverty of the favelas, which Moris, like Dante, certainly documents as someone affected by it. Not coincidentally, the Tuscan poet appears in the middle of a collage of athletes, hunted animals, and the hanged: Gustave Doré's famous *Dante Lost in the Woods* symbolizes nothing less than the position of the artist immediately surrounded by the horrors and tortures of hell.

Moris's installations and sculptures are physically palpable and at times all but unbearable, arrangements of knives, broken bottlenecks, paving stones, and again and again loaves of bread to be defended. *The Breathing of a Beast* is the title of one of these works. With its very individual aesthetic, it dominates the first half of the room not only visually but above all acoustically: hung from a hair-raising construction of dirtied remnants of fabric and paving stones, a worn butcher's knife is being sharpened on stone slabs that recall, not coincidentally, an installation by Carl André. But this Minimalist floor sculpture conceals an essential asset: two loaves of white bread, tied together and constantly circled by the knife blade. With a scratching noise, it digs its traces into the stone and into our consciousness. It is an inexorable struggle for survival that the artist packs into a metaphorical image of the endless circling of the knife around the bread of life. Opposite it, in *Rats Trying to Kill Us*, we encounter more loaves of bread, lined up and supported by paving stones to form a floor sculpture. Bread pierced by shards of glass or cast in concrete, making it inedible, so that you break your teeth on it, just like on life in the Mexican megalopolis.

Moris illustrated this »staying alive somehow« in a kind of enormous canvas: a wall of dirty T-shirts he collected from people who make a living cleaning the windshields of cars waiting in line. We cannot help but see and smell the dirt and sweat of their work. By carefully arranging these dirty T-shirts above and next to one another, he combines thirty portraits into a group portrait in which the entire relentlessness and severity of life on the street



EVIDENCE FROM HELL

Ralf Christofori

What I do is repeat a phrase: «If you enter hell, you must return with a piece of evidence.» So it is my task to descend into hell and return with these pieces of evidence so that people can see them.¹

— Moris

At the beginning of the film is a title sequence in which the director makes it clear that there is no occasion for hope, no reason for optimism. Nowhere. The model for it is real life. But the title sequence does not say that. It doesn't have to. Luis Buñuel's film *Los olvidados* (*The Forgotten Ones*) of 1950 leaves no doubt about it.

The film tells the story of Pedro and Jaibo, two boys in the slums of Mexico City. It begins comparatively harmlessly with a play bullfight in which the members of a gang of youths go at each other, snorting like humans and animals. Over the course of the plot it gets rawer. A blind musician is subjected to the blind pleasure in violence. He is beaten down with stones and cudgels by three youths—until he finds himself eye to eye with a chicken. Most of the power struggles and wrestling matches between members of the gang of youths that follow in the film end in blood and, in the worst case, death. Murder is followed by betrayal, betrayal by murder. The hard life causes nightmares on a nightly basis which, when seen by the light of day, scarcely differ from reality. A vicious circle that draws the youths further and further down into the abyss. Hopelessly pessimistic right up to the end, when the blind musician sums it up: «They should have been killed before they were even born.»

Sixty-five years after it was made, the Mexican artist Moris integrated Luis Buñuel's prizewinning film *Los olvidados*,² which has largely fallen into oblivion, into his video installation *o.T.* (2015). The film runs on the upper of two stacked monitors. In Moris's installation, however, it does not tell a story. Instead, Moris sequenced the feature film into voids

and excerpts. The voids are shown by test patterns and sounds like those developed for televisions in the 1950s and 1960s. The excerpts of scenes from the film that Moris shows do follow the original chronology of Buñuel's film. But they stand alone: scenes of violence isolated from the narrative context. The lower monitor shows a series of film images and voices in a similar sequence of cuts, and the noises of a film projector are heard. The black-and-white film shows a Mexican attack dog put on a leash—presumably a pit bull terrier—wearing a stud collar. It seems anything but aggressive: approaching the camera occasionally and then withdrawing to the shadow again.

As a viewer, one inevitably makes a connection between the two monitors, between human being and animal, between violent youths and the attack dog. They aren't like that by nature but are taught and socialized to be like that. One fate leads to another; the images permeate each other. And enthroned above it all is a sculpture that recalls an antenna. The signal it receives and broadcasts is unequivocal: *The Vultures Are Hungry*, is the title of the sculpture. It is made of materials Moris seeks and finds in the enigmatic milieus of his native city: wood, stone, old bicycle tires, and falcon claws.

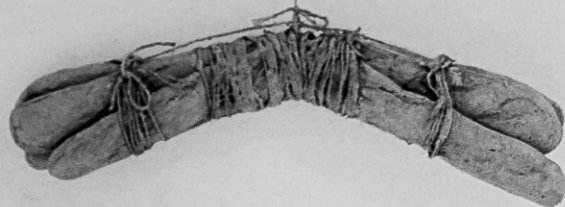
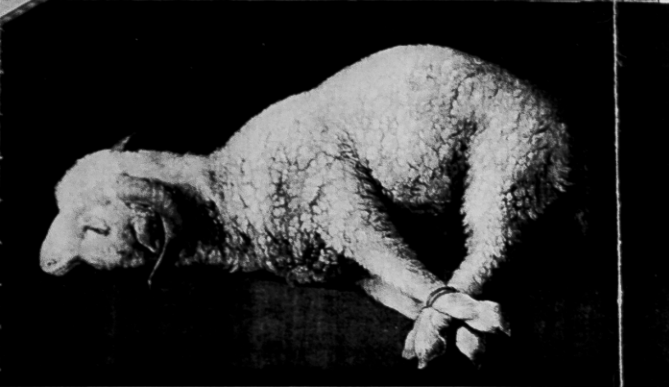
Moris' artistic work nearly always derives from the context of his immediate surroundings in Mexico. But it also makes many references to models and precursors in the recent history of art. The artist seeks and finds *objets trouvés* from which he creates his own works. Not infrequently, following the model of Arte Povera, he works with «poor» materials, though he by no means regards them as worthless. That the work described here inevitably brings aspects of Surrealism into play with Luis Buñuel's film *Los olvidados* only seems unusual at first glance, since both men follow the same impulse of uncovering the forgotten or hidden realities of life in order to penetrate them. «For the Surrealists, the challenge was surely to «overthrow images», and in that way to alter forms of representation. But it was













TALLER DE MORIS

Francisco Hernández

der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland
— Paul Celan

0

Evolución temprana de la bestia.
Evolución perfecta.
Pórtico para una serie de cielos recortados,
adheridos al techo.
Medio cuerpo de Cristo saliendo de una hoz.
Comienzo a escuchar. La hoz es una voz.
En el zumbido de mis oídos tiene cabida
lo que veo.
¿Cristo es la bestia?
Animal dominante, macho de alguna secta
con bandera blanca de lino,
martillos, espinas, grupo de jazz, cuarteto,
delirio dispuesto a no pensar en mi sordera,
ni en mi ceguera en caso necesario.
Plegarias, acordes, lamentos inútiles.
Sólo el piano en mitad del sonido:
la veracidad del placer resuena
en la voz fronteriza de lo pensado.
Evolución pétrea de la bestia.
Evolución perfecta:
a ningún sitio conduce.
Repiqueo para dedos eléctricos.
Yo simplemente resulto el amanuense,
o el trayecto sin ninguna distancia
o una especie de mapamundi
donde no aparece Alemania.

1

Salvo la luz, en el aire no hay nada.
Nada se hunde ni se levanta.
Con redondez tan clara, la luna
en el taller de Moris se multiplica.
Algunas grietas crecen; son fisuras,
afluentes caudalosos buscando cráteres
donde puedan convertirse en collares de estanques.
El taller de Moris es una bola de cristal,
una hoguera en un terreno baldío,
un piso de arena con una mesa que lo comprime.
Sobre esta mesa, mi foto
es la foto de mi padre.
Él es yo: metamorfosis redundante.
Me veo peinado a su manera,
hablo con su tono de voz
y engaño a mi madre con mi esposa.

2

La dentadura de mi padre
avanza hasta donde duermo.
Sube a mi cuello de postura infantil,
para después morderlo sin hacer caso
de mi grito.
Manchada por gotas de sangre,
la cuna es una paila hirviendo.
Mi madre regresa y la dentadura
se sumerge otra vez en su vaso de agua.
Fragmentos de Bartók, tocados
por Keith Jarrett,
salen de una cajita de música.
Mi madre se despide. Primero me persigna.
Después acaricia mi calvicie prematura.