

## LITTLE FIGURES, BIG SHADOWS

Trivial demonstrations and improvised landfills, under my window a game is being played and the rules are well hidden. Those who ignore them will remain excluded, ingenuous to its alphabet and its initials. Its application is simulated in the wastelands, through the fences, at the top of the mounds. Infertile soils host its protocols and its tacts, common conventions that are chatted about at the edge of the pavements. Its ground concedes turbulence, effervescence and other juvenile euphorias: abandoned cars, languishing cans, cooled comments and cigarette stubs.

All stories and controversies written on paper towels and tucked in the back pockets of the underpants are resistant to laundries, bad flu and bad weather. They preserve old dialects and ballads, defeats at raffle games and the hymns whistling over declining radios, accompanied by fluffy dices clutched to the rear-view mirror and the *best of*'s come boasting from the glove.

A singular energy unraveled by plastic tables, extensions and lined up bottles to scatter their future corpses and the dozen pieces of meat getting out of the grill.

Accomplices are standing, sometimes lying on wide ochre mattresses, rags tied around their shins, around purple and sweltering bruises:

*Relics of an old T-shirt,  
Home-team armband,  
Or bleached sweatshirt.*

Their fuchsia and snotty noses passively crushed against the fodder, against a perceptible end of summer, against the end of furies and burning disarrays, branding irons and misplaced ambitions. All these tics, ticks and particles that crawl like quackgrass, the summoning of all our spirits, the fair attribution of symptoms, accents and gaits, in the usual sheds for improper meetings.

In the attic, artificial neon light, noble gases and cursed gasoline fill up four walls serve as an enclosure.

*Four,*

*Five,*

*Six breaths...* The belly that inflates then deflates like a well-cushioned balloon, like your grandfather's armchair, like my malnourished pockets. While observing them straight through their pupils, they confine themselves to muddy puddles in jugs, cataracts of whey or serum, pitchers of *Kro* cut with water.

When the wounds leave ruffled back paws, when large black eyes culminate up to the membrane, reach the ears and coat them like morning dew, the marks, frostbites and arid sores disappear, announcing the beginning of the last slumber, the end of the heatwave phases.

Among the filthy conventions and dubious portraits, from the piles of tires and crosses, to the faulty turns that confine them, vending machines and out-of-order houses behind which they hide and all the fronts that need to be repainted, germinate curious fondness, picturesque practices and all the phantasms of valley bottoms, failed versions of Elvis and other faded icons.

All these folklore fantasies are usually pinned to the wall, between two trophies of a bowling game and three bouquets of artificial sunflowers, motifs of disenchantment and disillusion. A step backward against a step forward, on dissolved desert lands, lands covered with dissolvent, able to produce both heaven and hell. The chores in the kitchen, in the fields, or the bedroom are carried out as an act of worship and demand, while some wait in the sitting-room, leaning at tables that are too wobbly, too shaky or too big.

It's the declaration of the end of the time of the bucolic myth.

Here, boredom plays the role of a crutch or a gallows. It supports crooked legs, worn-out socks and run-down sneakers, suspends time, dull jeans and dusters. It justifies the signatures on crumbling car wrecks and iron skeletons, crams the earth, shapes the paths, bears witness to obscure practices on fuel-soaked plantations. The curve of the circuits and the trail of the machines testify the infernal cycle of destinies associated with remote landscapes; loops made one after the other, they take to heart the same tunes of bastard and sacred profoundnesses, hand-made bumps and dim perspectives.

In the hollows of the plates and small spoons, the residue leaves an abrupt aftertaste, a greenish, chalky taste, an obscure and opaque layer. A consoling coating against nostalgia, against sites with no real places, a reservoir of homesickness, a bulge of belonging, and a refuge from modernity:

*Ashtray on bellies,  
Matches in the pocket,  
Vicious windows, vitreous eyes,  
and pale varnished chairs...* resemble bones of an outdated idyll, where morality and order prevail.

Against the tacky porcelain, sparkling sets of bracelets, metal hoops and gilded rings rattle around wrists and on the counter of the little pub. They hold carved nicknames, yellowed jewelry, rusty engravings, and red lockets dangle around the necks. Further down, the wide-open palms reach for twenty-something-bills, conceal tough coughs and foolish tattoos.

No one here needs the weather to know where the wind is coming from, no map to know the shortcuts, no excuses to let us know that we will not be spending the next few seasons elsewhere, that we will spend them sitting on porches, letting our ears be filled with our respective dreams, decoding the vibrating alphabet on traffic signs, spurious directions and enfranchised flags.

*The collected jerseys necessarily end up in scraps,  
On motocross wheels,  
In the trunk of the trucks  
And on the foreheads,* slippers on feet in front of the entrance.

Early in the morning, their bodies linger on the back seats, in the dampness of the fresh daybreak and orphaned shoes, gullible flowers withering under soles and shattered voices resulting the drunkenness. Tired of having to drag oneself back up the heap in vain, the hallucinated hills, the joyless roads and the roadless districts, it is the deceitful illusion of quietness and definitively the end of spring.

On the spared windows, the ardor of unquenched violence is still being reflected, memories and vaporous amulets are left on a vast fence.

In front of the jail castles, the car debris, dressed up fetishes, or family members are honorably displayed, the sprayed symbols and diffuse stencils near the wobbly coats-of-arms indicate their cradle while wild grass invades the hubcaps and the windshield, ready to force the doors to burst open.

Supermarket signs form the foundation and electrified wires the barricade. The same slums, profiles, and contours stand in the middle of the brown-fields; distributing shocks equally and keeping the rats away. Between the fallow squares, the central alleys are scattered with buckets full of water that have entirely sunken into the ground and are used by rodents, harmful squatters regarding crops, with destinies that point towards these holes. Fundamental traps, fatal containers, or improvised graves, the all-in-one quagmire scares away potential glances.

Further down, in regular intervals stand numerous huts made out of five wave-shaped steel sheets accommodating pots, pans, and razors blades, potential weapons on which intrusive rays of sunshine deflect.

Crumpled up aluminum relics, carbon bones of a smoldering fire, among the damned yards and the damned buckets, the night gives way to all the scarecrows and their companions, to the nasty stench from the time when they were not only dummies. A sloppy dream or a funny nightmare, they escape in tenacious darkness as one escapes the day, heavy silence and everything else, as one escapes brambles and as one escapes time.

Accidental apparitions in barren paradises, intense beats of spits and hisses of nearby rifles: it is the meandering song of personal chapel bells, of stray dogs and all the patterns that are repeated by snoozing landscapes, white caravans and half tilted panels.

The roads secretly unfold gleaming tarpaulins, famous chromes and airbrushes: the cabins filled with neon lights and nameplates all make sense in the comfy horizon of the seemingly submissive nights. The asphalt exhales narcotics, so the scenery transforms into a vast mist of dirty white smoke, a vast turmoil for those who stagnate.

Down below, beaches with exotic and paradoxical names unveil fine sand and vigorous torrents, murky and watery waves, carry away inflatable plastic buoys. At the receding water level, under a blazing sun, under resinous trunks and chaotic thorns, one can get surprised by the unexpected vividness of satin pajamas, dropped and later forgotten there.

When it storms, the harsh glow reveals irregular clouds and bright flashes, an abuse reserved to coppices;

*The spray strokes,  
Milk bricks,  
Lids amidst the leaves.*

At the end of the day, the rain returns to the main artery that splits the landscape in two, one tarred curve after the other, swallowed up by the summits, one after the other. All these never inaugurated lands, in the shadow of the freeway and the cigarette smoke that comes out of them, that comes out of the roofs, the pines, the naphthas and the nostrils, preyed upon patched-up inner tubes.

Undisturbed, the stained tiles have only taken different directions, the dusty store banner and transmission lines, that are high-frequency although stretched less, make irritation and headaches familiar to those living underneath.

Board fences and barbed wires form the shameful retreat for the private herb patches, the purgatory of garbage cans, chimney ashes, dog kennels and orange peels.

In the fortuitous shelters, gardens transform into asylums, brutal and daily dances take place, dances of collars, leathers and chains, which sink into the earth, while fangs and paws go scarlet.

They immerse themselves in antiseptic baths of mercury to the point of suppressing the troubles and discomforts which are frequently exchanged with clandestine cousins; the deep cuts have learned to clog more quickly when in contact with limping animals and beasts or when in contact with tongues on shopping carts.

And among the freaky crossbreeds, forbidden merbromin, heedless reliance and idle threats, their exhausted bodies, side by side on the sidewalk, simply remind us of poor echoes and poor speeches, a parade of children of poorly divided children.

In the backyards, lawns and boys collide with the shabby above-ground pools crowned with moss, a second home for flies, lice and mosquitoes, preventing them from seeing their reflection in the water. And if their nights were not an anthology of tortuous tracks, if all their scars were undetectable, they would not be sitting on the edge of the same creeks, buzzing the same melody, repeating the same words.

Under my window, a game is being played, and the rules are well hidden. Those who ignore them will remain excluded, ingenuous to its alphabet and its initials.

Its codes allow untangling the catalogs of rambling weeds, the tormented paths, the shadows of imaginary friends and phantoms, when the day slips away, when no one remembers the sound of his own name. Dwellers are witnesses of long projects, laborious constructions, and numerous ruins: they are tracked down and explored by many, to withstand those aphasic moments, phases of dreariness or fuss, phases of drowsiness or fever.

A romantic substrate or a utopian veil for the first ones to settle down, but potential burden for the ones that follow: it is the century's evil and it prioritizes every wrinkle, every dimple, freckle and drop of sweat in a disturbing harmony, a rigorously constructed devotion and meticulousness.

It organizes the compilation of fingerprints and some dust, the rests of sawdust and detergent tears. It structures the championships of dirt deposits on doorways and mops that serve as doormats, vacuum cleaners, or fake fur. It classifies the specters of filthy overalls, extended high waist pieces merge into metal straps, rusty joints, white unions with cobalt glints, propagation of raw and oozing velvet, grease and tallow glitches. It combines all the make-up flasks and trinkets piling up powder and pollen on radiators, allergies to reminders or reminders to allergies, fake pearls, and other household products.

Here, every poultry and stained-glass turkey serve as a figure of resistance, corroded crests or medals stand for all those who live alike, who line up quietly and hand down traditions to their offspring.

The perpetual and perpetuated flow of the lousy legacy.

Between the living-rooms, ketchups and sofas, the debts and the leftovers of lost values languish, as timeworn protocols and unclassifiable beliefs.

The draughts that break our silence and the ticking of clocks,

*Slam doors,*

*Close windows,*

*Join nude legs suffering spasms in shorts that are too loose, livid skins embrace thighs that barely fit.*

Projections rubbed off on pale fences, from rough gardens to ill-famed garages, all discontentment and boiling entropy leaves their folds and imprints, the witty marks and intact evocations, that are gradually allowed to wither away.

Promising lands turn out to be desolate, in the fleeting temporality of deep landscapes, promiscuity is laborious, anecdotes expired and flees seem familiar. Tyred graveyards, barren wastelands, illicit races... excess of souvenirs and mischiefs, thousands of stories left on recalcitrant fields:

*It is odds and ends for attendants and sweet poison for loyal birds.*

Arsenic for the inert harriers, who wait on timberworks and at the top of the wooden posts, all these gregarious and silent predators, conspirators of good omens, guardians of landmarks and watchmen of memories, contingent companions of highways exits.

To all the disappearing fret noises that lurk under our windows, to the tenfold increase of dogs in our neighborhoods, *Marlboro* in our sleeves and the excuses for not taking them out. To all the mornings that keep us awake, to the frenzies that consume until there is nothing left to eat, to the scoundrel thoughts and fictions, the illusions that drag us to the pavement where the trash belongs. To the false mythologies and truthful rituals, to the fog and the foggy minds, to the blotting papers and all the stains too occult, too resistant on the rigid costumes and obsolete rides.