

CHILDBIRTH. SANTA CRUZ DE LA SIERRA, BOLIVIA, 1941

*the match
shows the distances
between things
reveals oppositions symmetries when everything
was dark
and then
everything goes dark
again*

*but in all those tiny flashing gleams
how many
revelations fit
a wire, scorched and discarded, in a corner
a red dress
amid a jumble of cups plates
on the table in a weird marriage of places
and times
a hammock in the jungle the damp belongings
of the prospector the logger
who felled the embaúbas the chickens
sleeping on thatch stools
in Vincenzo's tiny yard*

*how many illuminations
that last just as long as the match's
transitive
flame*

*the matches bring it all to life
like a childbirth but here
many lives at a time
brought together*

*a box of matches these writings a box
where my body takes a seat
and sitting
imagines a body
of tales*

Illumination and childbirth are the same thing
in my grandmother's adoptive tongue

she illuminates, *alumbra, da a luz.*
She gives birth to a boy
with Lenin's big head, Anna Stefania
ship's captain,
this ship
of broken waters.
Yes, there's the ship,
foundering, leaking,
with her at the helm
captain of a birth
this birth
she gives orders
ties knots
waves a bloody flag
from the darkest porthole,
Anna Stefania bursts
and it's like tightened cordage snapping
and then she's
open, red
like a pomegranate
adrift in the grass
once it has sated
the hunger of the birds.

I'M HERE TO FIGHT EPIZOOTICS

*or matches can be forbidden
and then
between the fingers of a child
who roasts ants
mutilates
snails
studies the way they stiffen
instantly
retracting their antennae
eyes and mucus membranes
the matches are small lessons
on matter
and its cruelest
characteristics*

That opacity of a name that enlarges
the person you imagine.
Think
of all the strange creatures, the vermin,
the longleggedgodawful monsters
that populate the plagues
your grandfather fought so fiercely
under that hybrid name:
Marcelo di Abiamo du Nancy,
neither French nor Brazilian nor Italian
disguised as a foreigner, disguised
as a foreigner, disguised
as an agronomist
in Bolivia,
in the thirties.
The immense dragnets
against epizootics from the east
journeys stretching from month to month
through forest and lagoon,
into a land of salt and silver
to save the livestock,
amidst all those insects
so many insects:
dung-eating
beetles, like comical
stinking Sysiphi

wind-scorpions more fluid
than the idea of ugliness
cicadas spreading their metallic din
over lands that had once been green.

The journey measured by horrifying arthropods
clouds of black flies,
cycles defined by butterflies
at night,
pure white butterflies, wars
among the ants,
hordes of insects migrating,
carrying their withered larvae to safety,
and storms
of queen ants,
carnivorous wasps, amputated
spiders filled with worms, gravedigger
flies and emerald ones:
translucent hopes,
eclipsed by broad sweet veins,
fireflies
delineating
the drizzly nights
and the smells.

While at home, Anna Stefania,
cloaked in skeins of yarn and patience
knits and studies while waiting for her man.

How
did that viscous time roll on,
that decade of the thirties?
Surrounded by *mirabilia* in a country
with so many mines
and so little food, and still,
it was possible,
without putting on airs,
to pee like an Argentinean
in a round
hammered
silver basin,
listening to the tinkle of your urine
that came out tinted with *ater*

(atra, atrum)

yes, opacity of soot,
descending,

and, at the same time,
the tinkling
of leaks from swollen ceilings
interrupting,
in the spare kitchen
the tiny parlor lacking in furniture,
furnished with fissures,
the daily conversations
weighted with echoes.

And, like a record of the afternoon,
there's a floral tablecloth, the flowers
like thumbtacks
on a map.
records of a passage
out on the farthest edge.

