

Max Wickert

## Miscellaneous Translations



TO THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST

--anonymous Spanish Sonnet (?Sor Juana de la Cruz)

Don't woo my love, my God, with threats of doom.  
Fear will not father fearless love for you.  
Don't lure my soul with promised ecstasy:  
Love born of promises is true love's tomb.

You, Lord, need neither threat nor promise, whom  
my crimes thrice tripped, and who to pay their due  
compelled yourself to be compelled for me  
thieflike to hang, to steal my love. Black gloom

and utmost suffering gladly suffered show  
from what unbounded springs your love must well.  
How did I love that you should love me so?

If you did all your love on loveless me bestow,  
what need you promise Heaven, threaten Hell?  
Not Heaven, not Hell, but Love makes my love grow.

--translated 1958, unpublished

MEPHISTO'S LULLABY (after Goethe)

Vanish at once,  
you gloomy vaults  
piled up high,  
let in the sky  
that more invites us,  
blue and bright,  
than your austere,  
unfriendly light!  
Let clouds dissolve  
and make appear  
the glinting stars,  
each star the sphere  
of a milder sun  
than the sun we know.  
To and fro  
from afar  
the off spring of heaven  
hover and beckon,  
bent to wherever  
yearnings are,  
and yearning leaps  
to follow where  
the off spring of heaven  
hang in air.  
The streamers of  
their garments flutter  
on high and cover  
the open fields  
and the arbors where lovers,  
lost in thought,  
give their lives away  
for a life unsought.  
Leafy close follows  
on leafy close.  
Green sprout the vines.  
Each tendril glows

each ponderous grape  
drops to the press  
in a wild plunge  
to drunkenness.  
Wine foams and flows  
in trickling waves  
through veins of rock  
and crystal caves,  
rushes away

from heights and spills  
in sheets round green,  
contented hills.  
There drink of joy  
all winged things  
and soar toward  
the sun, the sky,  
the shining island  
realms that sway  
in latitudes  
of liquid day,  
where crowds intone  
enchanted songs  
and dancers strew  
the meadows in throngs—  
some swirling aloft  
toward the peaks,  
some skimming abroad  
across wide lakes,  
some pinioned at  
a dizzy height,  
all seeking life,  
seeking the light  
of distant, loving  
stars, the yes  
of single, endless  
blessedness.

--translated 1984, unpublished

THE READER

--after Rilke

I've been reading a long while, ever since  
the afternoon leaned with a rush of rain  
against the windows. I heard no more of the winds.  
My book was heavy and hard.  
I stare at the sheets as at faces when  
they go dark with musing or a start.  
Time bulged behind the reading I did.

Suddenly something outshines my pages. Instead  
of the timid words that tangle and blend  
I am reading *Evening! Evening! Evening!* everywhere.  
Yet I do not look up, and still I read  
those long stretched rows until  
the words roll off their strings whither they will.

Then I know.

    Above the brim-full,  
shimmering gardens, the heavens are vast.  
Once again the sun had to be gone.

Now summer night rushes in far as the eye can wander.  
All scattered things are now recast  
in modest groups. Dark on long roadways, people walk.  
What little happens still is heard so strangely far,  
it seems to signify something more.

If now I look up from my book,  
nothing will be alien, all will have size.  
The outside is what I am living in,  
and, here as there, limitless, everything.  
Only I weave myself on more tangled looms  
when things find a measure in my eye  
for the solemn simplicity of their mass.

Earth grows beyond herself and seems  
to embrace the entire sky:  
The nearest star is like the farthest house.

--translated 1969, unpublished