

SAMPLER

*The Book, Behind the Dune*

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Andrés Sánchez Robayna

*The Book,  
Behind the Dune*

SAMPLE

*translated  
from Spanish by*  
Louis Bourne

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## ANDRÉS SÁNCHEZ ROBAYNA

What do we expect nowadays from those who write, paint or compose music, or from those who revive tragedies from other centuries on the stage? Regarding the world's present state, that ship which is dislocated and perhaps ends up sinking, is it better for us to hear unceasingly, in texts and images, only the breaking apart and the cracking of the shipwreck, or is it better to face the storm? Now then, this determination can only be taken by those that keep in their memory the fundamental necessities of existence, its simplest aspirations, conscious that life always partakes of death but also of birth, always has despair but also resurrection. And so it is those few who should speak, in the same way that it is they whom it is essential to listen to. Without a shadow of doubt, it is necessary to announce the danger, foresee the coming disaster, but not with words of mere fright, uselessly repeated, but from the deep, still living, totality of the man and woman of our time, scared, confused, but continuing to be attached to daily existence on an earth that, even today, preserves the largest part of its mysterious beauty.

This voice, as much positive as negative, with even more positivity than negativity on being able to preserve the kindnesses of hope, constitutes, at least in poetry, the first, as well as the most difficult, of tasks to which those who write should devote themselves. And therefore the most authentic poets of this period of crisis may be those who separate themselves from the fascination that languages increasingly exercise—language in itself, owing to the fruitless games its signifiers allow—because they know that words only have reason for being and value by evoking a reality that transcends—with all their infinite and, at the same time, immediately perceptible, depth—the merely superficial signifieds that are the obligatory effect of conceptual thought. Poets, those that deserve this name, can, without any doubt, resort to images, even the most daring, gratuitous and disconnected ones, at a glance, from the evidence of the earthy site, be it in the desires and affections of the particular existence which is the only reality as well as a criterion for truth.

Great poetry not only goes beyond the mirages that never stop stirring up—darkening—the partial representations involved in our analytical languages, but they also go as directly as possible to the flower blooming, the daybreak dawning, the child playing, the misfortune striking, the joys that give strength.

For this reason, I am delighted to see this work by Andrés Sánchez Robayna translated into French.<sup>1</sup> I do not know much Spanish, but, yes, enough to have been able to appreciate from the first day, some time ago, now, that Andrés Sánchez Robayna feels comfortable in poetry, that he knows what ‘the new time’ expects of us which Rimbaud foresaw as ‘very severe’; and this makes him one of those minds that both reflection as well as creation can count on in the debate that now, more than ever, sets poetry up against simple literature. I am delighted to be able to read *The Book, Behind the Dune* better, on having the original text at hand, and I even promise myself, one day not far off, to take advantage of this beautiful poem to reflect on poetry under the patronage that Sánchez Robayna himself has, moreover, wanted to present.

At the beginning of his work, he indeed quotes some verses by Wordsworth from his *Prelude*, one of the greatest works of Western poetry, one of those that help poetry lovers recognize themselves in it. And how better, perhaps, to understand what is poetically true and worthwhile in life than to listen with him to those words that remind us that we only have a place and destiny on earth in ‘infinity’, in the ‘hope that can never die’ and in this ‘something evermore about to be’, which is surely what poets of every century have been trying to reach, pledging their desire, their effort, their always frustrated and always recovered beliefs? Sánchez Robayna offers us a poem, but he also incites us to question the poetic in this century, and this double contribution in the same work is, in itself, a proof of its quality, timeliness and importance for us.

Yves Bonnefoy

(translated by Louis Bourne)

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<sup>1</sup> This preface was originally written for the French translation.

whether we be young or old,  
Our destiny, our being's heart and home,  
Is with infinitude, and only there;  
With hope it is, hope that can never die,  
Effort, and expectation, and desire,  
And something evermore about to be.

—W. W., *The Prelude*, VI, 603-608

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To  
M. and A.

SAMPLER



## NOTE

As much for its nature as for the demands of its theme (centred, in good part, on my formative years), *The Book, Behind the Dune* contains some quotations from various classical and modern texts. Because of their length and their unquestionable importance in the structure of one of the fundamental motifs of the poem, I only would like to mention here the quotation in fragment XI from Saint Augustine's *Confessions* (Eleventh Book, Chapter 27) in the well-known translation by Father Ribadeneyra.

A. S. R.

June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2001

## NOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION

On the suggestion of some readers and friends, I have decided to include, under 'Notes', a fuller account of the quotations and main references the poem contains.

A. S. R.

February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2003

## I

Ahora,  
en la mañana oscura del desceñido octubre,  
en que, umbroso y en calma, yace el mar  
entregado a la pura aquiescencia del cielo,  
al deslizarse de las nubes blancas  
que un gris ya casi mineral golpea,  
marmóreo, dilatado,  
ahora,  
mientras el tiempo gira  
a punto de ser siempre alumbramiento,  
sin dar a luz más que el instante cierto  
y siempre tembloroso,  
y damos vueltas en su vientre ciego,  
y entrega solamente  
un puñado de arena  
que vemos escurrirse entre las manos,  
mientras un niño juega,  
después de echar los dados  
ahora,  
sólo ahora,  
el comienzo  
comienza.

## II

Todo comienzo es ilusorio.  
Todo comienzo es sólo un enlazarse  
del principio y del fin en la cadena  
del tiempo, es el instante  
en que creímos ver el nacimiento  
y el nacimiento es sólo un acto  
de lo incesantemente renacido

## I

Now,  
on the dark morning of October unleashed,  
when the sea lies shady and calm,  
delivered to sky's pure acquiescence,  
on sliding down from the white clouds  
that an almost mineral grey pounds,  
marmoreal, extensive,  
now,  
while time turns  
on the verge of always being illumination,  
giving birth to nothing but the sure and always  
trembling instant,  
and we turn around in its blind womb,  
and it delivers only  
a handful of sand  
we see slipping away in our hands,  
while a boy plays,  
after throwing dice,  
now,  
only now,  
the beginning  
begins.

## II

Every beginning's deceptive.  
Every beginning's only a linking  
of beginning and end in the chain  
of time: the instant  
when we believed we saw birth  
and birth as only an act  
of what is unceasingly reborn—

—es decir, estas líneas semejan un comienzo  
pero el comienzo surge a cada instante,  
como la lluvia que esta tarde  
vi caer sobre el mar  
y esta tarde es tan sólo una tarde del tiempo que renace  
en un eterno recomienzo  
y la lluvia y la tarde se han hundido en el tiempo  
en el que ruedan siempre las nubes agolpadas  
sobre los mármoles celestes

y la línea inicial es un comienzo  
y la línea final será un comienzo.

### III

Allí, en aquella parte  
del libro que se abre  
de mi memoria, escucho  
un rumor de arboledas, un barranco interpuesto  
entre laderas altas en las que recorría  
las piedras, las veredas,  
la tarde en la que, solo, me alejé de la casa  
y grabé en una piedra,  
bajo los cielos cómplices,  
la inicial de mi nombre  
para dejar señal  
del nombre y su secreto.

Y los cielos copiaban  
el color de la tierra.

that is, these lines resemble a beginning  
but the beginning springs up at every instant,  
like the rain I saw  
this afternoon falling over the sea,  
and this afternoon's just an afternoon  
in an eternal restarting of time  
and rain and afternoon have sunk into the time  
in which crowded clouds always roll  
on celestial marbles

and the initial line is a beginning  
and the final line will be another.

### III

There, in that part  
of the book opening  
in my memory, I listen  
to a rustling of groves, a cliff intervening  
between high slopes on which I crossed  
the stones, the paths,  
the afternoon when, alone, I left the house  
and etched on a stone,  
beneath colluding skies,  
the initial of my name  
in order to leave the name's  
sign and its secret.

And the skies copied  
the colour of earth.

#### IV

Me seguía un perrillo  
hambriento y fiel. Yo era  
fiel también a sus pasos, y no sabría decir,  
ahora, quién seguía  
a quién. Y exploraba con mi hermana,  
o con algún amigo, y muchas veces solo,  
los pasajes del fuego sediento, el verano  
en las bellas laderas, o los felices charcos  
del otoño insular. En lo más alto  
de los árboles hice un mirador  
sobre la casa y sobre los caminos  
que hasta ella llevaban, la camisa  
manchada por el níspero de julio  
y con tierra en las manos, descalzo  
sobre la tierra húmeda y rojiza.

¿Podré decir, así, que el cielo  
como manto allá arriba protegía  
con su extendida claridad mis pasos?  
Amada tierra de esplendor, cavé  
desde entonces en ti, y en ti me acogerás.

#### V

Cada día, una página  
del desplegado libro de la luz  
se entregaba a mis ojos. ¡Fulgurante blancura  
pisada por los pasos del niño que corría  
sobre los médanos solares!  
Luego, sobre la hierba, restañaban  
las heridas manantes.

#### IV

A little dog followed me,  
hungry and faithful. I, too, was  
faithful to his steps, and wouldn't know  
how to say now who followed  
whom. And I explored with my sister,  
or with some friend, and many times alone,  
the thirsty fire's passages, the summer  
on the lovely slopes, the island autumn's  
glad puddles. In the trees'  
highest perch I made a lookout  
over the house and the roads  
that led up to it, my shirt  
stained by July loquats,  
with dirt on my hands, barefoot  
on the moist, reddish earth.

May I say, then, that the sky  
like a cloak there above protected  
my footsteps with its sprawling brilliance?  
Beloved earth of splendour, I have dug  
since then in you, and in you you'll welcome me.

#### V

Each day, a page  
from the unfolded book of light  
offered itself to my eyes. Radiant whiteness  
trampled by the footsteps of a boy who ran  
over solar sand dunes!  
Later, on the grass, running  
wounds stopped bleeding.

Oh renacida claridad,  
aprendí pronto a amar, cerca de los naranjos,  
la pedrería de la luz, el sol  
cortado por las hojas en la hierba,  
multiplicados soles diminutos  
en el agua sencilla, en el estanque  
y en las claras acequias. Aprendía.

## VI

Los pies desnudos en la tierra, sobre  
las uvas para el vino de noviembre,  
sobre las piedras del barranco seco,  
sobre la luz y su deshacimiento.

El pie dejaba  
su huella por los mundos, se manchaba  
con el limo solar. En las acequias  
se lavaba tan sólo  
para poder ser uno con el sol.

Pisaba el pie la luz.

El sol tenía  
la anchura del pie humano.

## VII

El rumor de los árboles  
y su texto infinito se escribían  
con negros caracteres en el ojo  
del sol. Y desde allí,  
en remolino prieto, resbalaban  
cayendo en la mirada como una fundición



O reborn brightness,  
I soon learned to love, near the orange trees,  
the precious stones of light, the sun  
sliced by blades in the grass,  
tiny suns multiplied  
in simple water, in the basin  
and in clear water channels. I learned.

VI

Bare feet on earth, on  
grapes for November wine,  
on stones of the dry ravine,  
on the light and its undoing.

The foot left  
its print on worlds, stained  
with solar slime. In the water channels  
it was washed only  
to be one with the sun

The foot trod the light.

The sun had  
the width of a human foot.

VII

The rustling of trees  
and their infinite text were written  
with black characters in the sun's  
eye. And from there,  
in a dark, tight swirl, they slipped  
into my gaze like a melting

de oro y hojas exactas  
sobre el punto del iris.

Oh desasida claridad,  
echado sobre el césped contemplaba  
la avalancha solar, el aluvión  
suave de nuestra luz  
abrazando los mundos. Yo habitaba  
en las torres del sol.

### VIII

¿Era Sirio o Capella, Vega o Pólux?

Cuántas veces la vi temblar, arriba,  
tras las montañas que tomaba  
la espesura nocturna, entre las hojas  
vibrátiles de abril, o echado yo,  
las manos en la nuca,  
por la arena de agosto,  
sobre la lenta duna que aún guardaba el calor,  
y cuántas veces quise  
penetrar por su nombre en el secreto  
silabario del cielo,  
y saber la palabra que escribían  
las luminarias renacientes, claro  
secreto escrito en el fulgor supremo,  
en la curva estelar del cielo tembloroso.

### IX

Rosa carnal del risco, oscuro nudo  
de pétalos que abrazan los soles y las lunas

of gold and precise leaves  
on the dot of the iris.

O brightness loosed,  
stretched out on the grass, I pondered  
the solar avalanche, our  
light's soft flood  
embracing worlds. I dwelled  
in towers of the sun.

### VIII

Was it Sirius or Capella, Vega or Pollux?

How many times I saw it tremble above,  
behind the mountains, taking on  
the thickness of night, among April's  
quivering leaves. Or I stretched out,  
hands beneath nape,  
along the August sand  
on the sluggish dune still holding diurnal heat.  
And how often, through  
its name, I wanted to delve into the secret  
syllabary of heaven,  
and know the word written  
by renascent lights, a bright  
secret inscribed in the supreme glow,  
in the trembling sky's stellar curve.

### IX

Carnal cliff rose, dark knot  
of petals hugging suns and moons

y los aires que soplan desde el mar atezado,  
animal que reposa: mira pasar a un niño.

Tú que fuiste mirada y que gobiernas  
las horas y los días y las noches  
en lo invisible que renace, mira  
a un niño abandonar tu paraje aterido.

Míralo despoblar tu reino absorto,  
dejar tu compañía para siempre,  
el grácil contubernio. Un niño deja  
el exento país entre el gorrión y el góngaro.

## X

Comenzaba a saber  
(pero sólo del modo en que ignorarlo  
es una forma de conocimiento)  
que, al igual que el silencio  
ha de ser una parte del decir, que al igual  
que la visión del cielo  
forma parte del cielo,  
una nube interior, muy parecida  
a la que fluye quieta en la mañana  
hecha de transparencia entrecruzada,  
se alza hasta la visión  
de la nada que somos, y que es todo.  
Y la visión humana  
se llega a transformar en la experiencia  
de esta nada que está en ninguna parte.  
Es una nube. Sólo  
años después sabría que su nombre,  
entre otros nombres justos que la llaman  
y el nombre conseguido de los nombres,

and breezes blowing from the bronzed sea,  
animal in repose: behold a boy walking by.

You who were a gaze governing  
hours, days and nights  
in the invisible and reborn, behold  
a boy abandoning your frozen spot.

Look at him leaving your entrancing kingdom,  
forsaking your company forever,  
the happy cohabitation. A boy leaves  
the open country between sparrow and spike.

X

I began to know  
(but only in the manner that not knowing  
is a form of understanding,  
that, just as silence  
must be a part of speech, just as  
the vision of heaven  
forms part of it,  
an inner cloud, so similar  
to the one flowing quietly in the morning  
made of interwoven transparency,  
rises toward the vision  
of the nothingness we are, that is everything.  
And human vision  
manages to be transformed into the experience  
of this nothingness that is nowhere.  
It's a cloud. Only  
years later would I know its name,  
among the other right names we call it  
and the name obtained from all names,