

Two sonnets by Mercè Rodoreda, translated by Rebecca Simpson

Ulysses on the Island of Circe

In the confusion of an ignominious herd
you find yourselves beneath rough skin
with mouths stretched into snouts,
snuffling around the trough.

That was all it took, O companions, the gnawing
incessant hunger, all balled up
in the wild labyrinth of the gut,
the malevolence of a wily goddess!

May all the insults suffered serve you
when you are upright on coarse feet,
arms ending in fork-like hands!

At the peak of honour or sunk in servitude
begin again with patient courage
the difficult adventure of being humans.

Ulisses en l'illa de Circe

En la barreja d'un folcat d'oprobri
ara ja sou sota rasposa pell
amb boques afuades en musell,
grinyoladissos al voltant de l'obi.

Haurà bastat, oh companyons, la quera
incessant de la fam, tota cabdell
pel laberint feréstec del budell,
la malvestat d'una deessa artera!

Que us valguin totes les viltats rebudes
quan sereu verticals sobre els peus rudes,
braços capçats per les forçades mans!

En cims d'honor o en conca de servatge,
recomenceu amb pacient coratge
l'aventura difícil d'ésser humans.

Ulysses on the Island of Circe was published in 2024 in the leading literary magazine AGNI (AGNI 99), and long listed in the US anthology, Best Literary Translations 2026.

Two sonnets by Mercè Rodoreda translated by Rebecca Simpson (contd.)

[The Miller Woman's Lament]

My knees are ruined, I'm done in,
and I have to mill three sacks by tomorrow;
the other girls trooped off without me
before the sky was caught in a web of stars.

Hands sunk in flour,
my brain - tinier than a grain of wheat -
dreams of a soft bed, clean sheets
and a warm bath to rid me of fine dust.

O crusty bread, wrought gold bar!
What an effort it takes, before the oven
can turn your grey paste golden-brown!

So much dust, so much work is poisoning me;
the summer of the fields dwindles beneath my eyes.
Spit, spit, spit, and no-one will ever know.

[*El plany de la molinera*]¹

Tinc els genolls romputs, estic baldada,
i he de moldre tres saques per demà:
l'estol de mes companyes em deixà
abans que el cel fos pres per l'estelada.

Mans enfonsades dintre la farina,
mon cervell, més petit que un gra de blat,
somnia llençols nets, lilit estovat
i un tebi bany que em lliuri de polsina.

Oh pa torrat, barra d'or tornejada!
Quants de fatigs abans que una fornada
torni ta pasta grisa en color bru!

Tanta pols, tanta feina m'emmetzina,
l'estiu dels camps sota mos ulls s'abrina;
tres cops hi escupo i no ho sabrà ningú.

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¹ T.N.: Titles in square brackets in *Agonia de Illim* (Godall Edicions, 2022) provided by the editor, Abraham Mohino Balet.
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