Mesándel Virtusio Arguelles - Kristine Ong Muslim

Fourteen Pictures

1

The mouth of the old man

remains open
to speaking as if repeatedly

breathing on the words
so as to relinquish them wholly

to the wind while earnestly
listening nothing is heard

by the old man in the middle
2

In the hollow of their mouths

the hymn for darkness seems in tune
Marked by eyes that roll back

in extreme terror
while huddling in front

in an inexplicable urge to congregate
when traveling to Saint Isidore

Night crawls past sanity's remains

Left behind by a dwindling sanity
3

Crashing any moment now is

the blade

eISSN 1847-7755; doi: 10.15291/sic/1.8.lt.2

against whoever invites to the dining table
this widow, who volunteered to redeem

the Israelites, according to the Apocrypha
Her expression is meek

yet intent on fulfilling what she took upon herself:
behead the enemy without faltering

There is no need to rinse

even when the hands are bloodstained
4

A combination of terror and madness

is on the face of the god swallowing
his offspring

As if aware of his utter depravity

yet lacking power
even in his divinity

to overcome an immense hunger

like that of a beast
His eyes nearly bulge out of their sockets

in intense craving and incredulity
The hollow of his mouth is vast

Swallowing the insides
5

The witches convene

The two main characters

are on the opposite sides:
the great he-goat to the left

and the maiden is seated
on the right side that had been lopped off

during restoration, according to the note
the over fifty-inch distance across

The edge of what was painted had vanished

You disappeared in the middle of the canvas
6

Discovered upon close examination:

the veil was painted only at the end
It cast a pall over the docile face

of a lady who leaned against a rock
her slightly bent body

The arm rests against the head
The piece of cloth is so light

but cannot be lifted
7

Nothing else can be uncovered

except for what's in the beginning:
orphaned dog in a piece of land

Only the head is visible overhead
Deeply unsettling

is that gaze from the pit
where only the eyes can be seen

Whatever's in front is at the brink

of exclusion and salvation
8

Where were the two going—

to a nearby mountain
where horsemen

were likely to go
or somewhere much farther than the unknown

places the painter visited as he succumbed
to isolation at Quinta del Sordo

with his demons

the creatures wrenched from silence
and perhaps, with the precious Leocadia

9

Compared to the figurines at the threshold to the right

the long queue on the left is more prominent
at the back: those who were hazily sketched

The blurry-faced ones in the procession
They make up most of the artwork

if not the loss of the painter
who chose to distance himself from the public

without ever leaving the public behind
The shadows could not leave him

10

What is concealed by the hand

that was concealed by the hands
that created the fourteen pictures

on the walls that spanned

the entirety of his sanctuary

What the paintbrushes insisted on

What was held by the form

in his hands kept secret
from everyone

11

The only one looking up

among the men reading
from the same book appears not to have time

for knowledge that can alter

any condition
Filling a blank that has been reserved

Ending in the unseen
12

The two strangers wield something for beating

each other and are likely bloodied from the brawl
even though the painting shows only one of them

to have bloody streaks on the face
Both are knee-deep in mud

in a duel where there's no retreating
until the end. Whoever will win

stays locked up where he has escaped
13

They seem to float in air:

The Daughters of Night
Doling out destinies to those on the ground

like the person they're with on the canvas

The hands were tied

yet he was still able to paint

those who tied his hands:
Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos

14

Along with owls and bats

also common in his works
are the witches

Depictions of the deterioration of form
like the senile folks before the dinner table

in the picture. The gaze and the grin etched
on the face of the old man at the center

you take to mean as his readiness to feast



Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License