



Ivan Argüelles

From *Ilion—A Transcription*

*ἔπιλον*

wrestling in their sleep the two Ajaxes  
and Diomedes the huge            primordial ooze  
of consciousness the pinprick of light  
day surprises and the enormous grey welkin  
descending toward the oneiric cavity  
fosses ditches moats ramparts walls  
cities ten deep slumbering one upon the other  
palaces submerged in the morass of tangled sleep  
labyrinthine dream of girls like cigarettes  
pirouetting over onyx floors speaking jabber  
and from the Hesperian distance the sea song  
a whistling of contested winds in the small shell  
held to the deathless ear  
                                 tomorrow will be different  
it says in the small ledger in the temple of Hera  
hard by the road to Halicarnassus  
in their yellowed sweat-soaked sheep  
wrestling    the greater earth  
                 the lesser earth        who was  
naming things never before seen

who was placing carefully the incense brazier  
who was not yet awake yet talking talking  
something about the other life the stranger one  
bucklers and greaves and helmets  
a peacock's cry out in the middle of nowhere  
a courtyard empty but for the clay urns  
filled with an indecipherable circular script  
and the small drizzle of ennui in the drain pipes  
smoke from a distance hinted an encampment  
the roster of ships of women left behind  
in dormers thick with perfume and sperm  
rose water sprinkled in the obscure mirror  
where memory of a face fades  
someone yelling departure the full moon  
still atilt in the western rim  
who remembers *that* who recalls the shudder  
weighing anchor the drowsy head of slumber  
falling from the body immemorial the

it will all come to naught islands

floating in the verger  
blossoms like syllables  
spelling a magic name  
but here in the ditch folded over twice  
the mind in its perpetual narcolepsy  
fevered thoughts fail to grasp and javelins  
sharp flying objects boomerangs  
catch in full flight the unwary soul  
Hector! who dared one and all  
to single combat would Diomedes or  
the Ajaxes twain not come forth tottering  
all the rest is written in backward Minoan glyphs  
tortured spirits flung head first  
into the narrow crevice called Hades  
what aping gods with barking heads do laugh  
watching the mortal spray make air incarnadine  
somewhere else cliffs stand erect in their siesta  
geological shelves morph intrinsically into heavens  
massive cloud banks release a thousand years of hail  
no intelligence is there to register the trajectory  
of many-thundered lightning the gift of Zeus  
hurled from his Dardanian bower  
reclining drunk beside white-armed Hera  
and thousand-headed ants swell the lists of helium  
that circle the variable and dying planet  
this is a sleep within this sleep and shifts of red  
layer the multiple city where lie unfathomable  
mythical heroes drenched in the shower of fear

a single mind has this conceived  
written on one leaf over and over  
it starts in darkness and revolves into  
another darkness repeating the same  
but never ending the same tale  
an excursion into the Unknown the baleful  
who tossed the dice who drew lots  
who won the stolen girl who lost her  
fighting fists flying swords drawing blood  
I found the leaf with nothing on it  
of itself the writing happened all at once  
repeating itself in circularities of heat  
grammatical incisions syntactic occlusions  
absence of harmony absence of prosody  
I wrote the leaf with nothing on it  
it repeated itself writing and unwriting  
erasing the blanks creating the blanks  
issuing forth from an exhausted vein  
the tumult and cries of a thousand dead  
naming them whatever I could imagine  
burying them digging them up again  
putting words in their mouths  
sewing up their lips sealing their ears  
the *Sirens* with wings of molten wax  
shrilled the epithets I had long forgotten  
I crumpled the leaf I tossed it aside  
it came back at night crawling  
it came back at night crawling  
it was war between red and black ants  
it was unrecorded miasma and code  
it was the repetitious phraseology  
that brings heroes to the unwilling page  
that engenders gods beneath the lintel  
it was the work of a single mind  
a madness dappled contraries fugues!

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Ivan Argüelles, a Mexican-American innovative poet, is the author of many publications, among them: *The Invention of Spain*; “*That*” *Goddess*; *Hapax Legomenon*; *Madonna Septet* (2 vols.); *Comedy*, *Divine*, *The*; *FIAT LUX*; and most recently *Duo Poemata*. His 1989 publication, *Looking For Mary Lou* won the William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America. His selected early poems, *The Death of Stalin*, received The Before Columbus Foundation National Book Award in 2010. He is the identical twin of New Age Prophet, José Argüelles.