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UDP

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DIANA'S TREE  
ALEJANDRA PIZARNIK

*Introduction by*  
Octavio Paz

*Translated from the Spanish by*  
Yvette Siegert

*Diana's Tree* by Alejandra Pizarnik (*Chem.*): a verbal crystallization formed by the amalgamation of ardent insomnia and dazzling clarity in a solution of reality subjected to the highest temperatures. The product of this alloy contains no trace of lies. (*Bot.*): Diana's tree is transparent and gives no shade. It gives off its own light, brief and glimmering. It is native to the arid lands of the Americas, where the inhospitable climate, the inclement discourses and pontifications, and the general opacity of the sentient species, its neighbors, all serve to stimulate, through a well-documented phenomenon of compensation, the bioluminescent properties of this plant. It has no roots; its trunk is a column of slightly obsessive light; its leaves are small, each one covered with four or five lines of a phosphorescent script; and its petioles are elegant and aggressive, with jagged edges. The flowers are diaphanous, the pistils distinct from the stamens, the former being axillary, solitary and almost somnambulant, while the latter are shaped like spikes, fuses, or, more rarely, thorns. (*Myth. & Ethn.*): the ancients believed that the bow of the goddess Diana was a branch from this sacred tree. The scar on the trunk was thought to be the (female) sex of the cosmos. This could

be an allusion to certain lore about a fig tree (sap from the younger branches being milky and lunar). The myth includes references to human sacrifice, suggesting that on the night of the new moon, the body of an adolescent (whether male or female, we do not know) was quartered, in order to encourage the reproduction of images in the mouth of the priestess (herself an archetype of the union between the lower and higher planes). Diana's tree is one of several male attributes of the female deity. Some see this as further proof of the hermaphrodite origins of grey matter and, perhaps, of all matter. Others argue that the tree was a means of expropriating the male solar substance, whereby the ceremony would symbolize nothing less than the magical mutilation of the sun's primordial rays. Given our latest findings, it is impossible to settle in favor of either one of these hypotheses. Let us note, however, that the celebrants of this ritual afterwards would swallow incandescent coals, a custom that is practiced to this day. (*Blaz. & Her.*): a talking coat-of-arms. (*Phys.*): for a long time, scientists denied the physical existence of Diana's tree. Owing to its extraordinary transparency, very few people can actually see it. Indeed, the preconditions for achieving the necessary visual acuity include solitude, concentration, and a generally exquisite sensibility. Individuals who have built a reputation on their intellects sometimes complain that, for all their credentials, they still *can't see anything*. Let us redress their misconceptions by bearing in mind that Diana's tree cannot be perceived as a corporeal thing. Rather, it is an (animate) object that

lets us see beyond it; it is a natural instrument to aid our visual faculties. Furthermore, a quick experiment by an unorthodox critic should suffice to dispel once and for all any lingering prejudices from the ranks of the ivory tower: When placed out in the sun, Diana's tree reflects its light and harnesses its rays into a central focal point called a *poem*, which lets off a luminous heat that can burn, smelt or even vaporize its skeptics. We recommend this experiment to the literary critics of our language.

Octavio Paz  
*Paris, April 1962*

DIANA'S TREE

1.

I have made the leap from myself to the dawn.  
I have placed my body alongside the light  
and sung of the sadness of the born.

2.

These are some possible versions:  
a hole, a trembling wall...

3.

only thirst  
silence  
no encounter

beware of me, my love  
beware of the silent woman in the desert  
of the traveler with an emptied glass  
and of her shadow's shadow

4.

*For Aurora and Julio Cortázar*

NOW THEN:

Who will stop plunging their hands in search of  
tributes for the forgotten girl?

The cold will pay. The wind will pay. As will the  
rain. And the thunder.

5.

for just a brief moment of living  
the only one with open eyes  
for just a minute of seeing  
little flowers on the brain  
dancing like words in a mute man's mouth

6.

she undresses in the paradise  
of her memory  
she knows nothing of the fearsome fate  
of her visions  
she is afraid of not knowing how to name  
what doesn't exist.

7.

She leaps, shirt on fire,  
from star to star,  
from shadow to shadow.  
She dies of a distant death  
this lover of the wind.

8.

An illuminated memory, a gallery haunted by  
the shadow of what I wait for.  
It's not true that it will come. It's not true that it won't.

9.

These fossils gleaming in the night,  
these words like precious stones  
in the living throat of an ossified bird,  
this gorgeous green,  
this searing lilac,  
this heart that is nothing but mystery.