

# *A Concordance of Leaves*

TEXT AND TRANSLATIONS

## **A Concordance of Leaves**

(All text by Philip Metres, from his book of poetry *A Concordance of Leaves* published by Diode Editions, except “Prologue”)

### **A Concordance of Leaves: No. 1, Prologue**

as if I could not sing  
except when you sing  
—Pablo Neruda

### **A Concordance of Leaves: No. 2, On drying racks tobacco leaves swim**

*(excerpt from the original poem)*

on drying racks tobacco leaves swim  
wind turns the pages of the book  
we can only read in the rough translation  
of my soon-to-be-brother-in-law

& this is the brother of my soon-to-be-  
brother-in-law, inhaling through the straw

of his cigarette: holds it between ring  
& middle fingers, palm up: the unseen

& inaccessible sea caresses our strange faces—  
blind & we wait for our lines to be read

& this is the cemetery, where the father  
of his father’s father’s father’s father’s

father’s father’s father’s father’s father’s  
buried, bodies marked by broken stone incisors

among neighbors we sip sage tea, *maramia*—  
named after the mother of God—for sage slaked her desert tongue

### **A Concordance of Leaves: No. 3, The Question Factory**

& our family will ask so many questions we will  
be called The Question Factory

& you my future brother will write your answers  
with my slowly disappearing hand

The Question Factory asks: what is a dunum?  
Answer: *slowly disappearing land*

The Question Factory asks: what is that line  
on your skull? Answer: *a failed poem*

*by one who tries to write over everything  
already written over*

The Question Factory: why do you smile?  
*because I still have my teeth*

: where are the doll's missing eyes?  
*in the back of my mind I believe*  
: in what?  
*I believe I hear a song*

: why do you laugh?  
*because I still have my tongue*

*there is a song, & yet*  
I hear no singing

### **A Concordance of Leaves: No. 4, Today el youm**

Today	<i>el youm</i>
My friend	<i>sadiqi</i>
Sweet/Beautiful	<i>halwa</i>
Tree	<i>shajarah</i>
Forbidden [shame]	<i>haram</i>
My name is	<i>ismi</i>
Listen	<i>isma'</i>
It means	<i>y'anni</i>
Sea	<i>bahr</i>
Here	<i>han</i>

**A Concordance of Leaves: No. 5, Scarved sisters are radiant**

scarved sisters are radiant with wide  
mouths & waves & teeth & singing

& though there is the great unhappiness  
framed in silent unsmiling faces

hammered on insides of houses  
watching over all preparations

night is lifting the women  
are drumming the tabla their voices inviting

a heart to break itself & open  
a space another could nest inside

**A Concordance of Leaves: No. 6, And though**

*(excerpts from the original poem)*

& though the border guards will advise us  
this is a dangerous time to visit

& though we had to lie & say we were tourists  
& not guests at our sister's wedding

to spare ourselves the special interrogation  
on the borders of fear / in Ben Gurion

& though some seaside café will split into  
thousands of shards of glassy dreams

& these people will have had nothing to do  
with it, & the bulldozers will doze their roads

so that every road ends in a wall  
every car will pick a path through olive groves

& though we won't see the sea the wind  
will haul it & the whole village will arrive at the village

the children will flock to every flat roof  
to watch the village become the village

& see the wedding from enough distance  
it looks like a story that could be entered

& though the sun will be too bright for the bride  
to see much farther than her own eyes

& though the bullet in the groom will begin  
to hatch in his side, & the stiches in his skull

will sing another verse in the book of dreams,  
& though the bride's questions will beak their shell

years from now, now, now let there be dancing  
in circles, let the village become flung arms

bringing bodies to bodies

**A Concordance of Leaves: No. 7, Because there is a word for love**

because there is a word for love in this tongue  
that entwines two people as one

& there is a word for love in this tongue  
that nests in the chambers of the heart

& a word for love in this tongue that wanders  
the earth, for love in this tongue in which you lose

yourself in this tongue & a word that carries  
sorrow within its vowels & a word for love

that exudes from your pores & a word  
for love that shares its name with falling

## **Innsbruck, ich muss dich lassen** (anonymous)

Innsbruck, ich muss dich lassen,  
ich fahr dahin mein Strassen  
in fremde Land da hin.  
Mein Freud ist mir genommen,  
die ich nit weiß bekommen,  
wo ich im Elend bin.

Groß Leid muss ich jetzt tragen,  
das ich allein tu klagen  
dem liebsten Buhlen mein.  
Ach Lieb, nun lass mich Armen  
im Herzen dein Erbarmen  
daß ich muss von dannen sein.

Mein Trost ob allen Weiben,  
Dein tu ich ewig bleiben  
stets treu, der Ehren fromm.  
Nun muss dich Gott bewahren,  
in aller Tugend sparen,  
bis daß ich wieder komm!

Innsbruck, I must leave you  
For I am traveling the road  
to a foreign land.  
Deprived of my joy  
and knowing not how to get it back,  
I will be in anguish.

I am burdened with great sorrow  
which I can shed only  
through the one dearest to me.  
O my love, leave me not bereft  
of compassion in your heart  
that I must part from you.

My comfort above all other women,  
I remain yours forever,  
always faithful, in true honor.  
And now, may God protect you,  
safe in virtue,  
till I return.

## Nymphes des bois (Jean Molinet, 1435-1507)

Nymphes des bois, déesses des fontaines,  
Chantres experts de toutes nations,  
Changez voz voix tant clères et haultaines  
En cris trenchans et lamentations.  
Car Atropos, très terrible satrape,  
A vostre Ockeghem attrapé en sa trappe.  
Vrai trésorier de musique et chief d'œuvre,  
Doct, élégant de corps et non point trappe.  
Grant dommage est que la terre le couvre.  
Acoustrez vous d'habits de deuil  
Josquin, Pierson, Brumel, Compère,  
Et plourez grosses larmes d'œul :  
Perdu avez vostre bon père.  
Requiescat in pace. Amen.  
*Cantus firmus:*  
Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,  
Et lux perpetua luceat eis.  
Requiescat in pace. Amen.

Nymphs of the woods, goddesses of the fountains,  
Expert singers from all nations,  
Turn your voices, so clear and high,  
To rending cries and lamentation.  
For Atropos\*, the terrible ruler,  
Has seized your Ockeghem in her trap.  
The true treasurer\*\* of music and its masterpiece  
Learned, elegant in body and in no way old-fashioned.  
It is a terrible loss that the earth covers him.  
Put on your mourning clothes  
Josquin, Pierson, Brumel, Compère,  
And weep great tears from your eyes  
Gone is your great father.  
May he rest in peace. Amen.  
*Cantus firmus:*  
Eternal rest give them, Lord,  
And light perpetual shine on them.  
May he rest in peace. Amen.

\* One of the three Fates, whose role it was to cut the thread of human life with her shears.

\*\* or "treasure"