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RINCÓN de TRADUCTORES

Poems from *Under Leonardo's Wing*

by Clara Janés

translated by
Ana M. Osan

RT/TC 029 (2022)
ISSN: 2694-2801

Instituto Cervantes at Harvard University (FAS)
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Introduction

Clara Janés was born in Barcelona, where she would begin a degree in philosophy at the *Universitat de Barcelona*. She also finished a *Maître ès arts* in Comparative Literature from the *Université de Paris IV*, Paris-Sorbonne. Her love for literature began at a very early age, and she confesses that her world changed after she read *A Night with Hamlet* (1964), by Czech author Vladimir Holan.

Her extensive work in poetry began in 1964, when she published *Las estrellas vencidas,* after which she has written more than thirty-five books of poetry. Among these, the following should be noted: *Eros* (1981); *Vivir* (1983); *Kampa* (1986); *Lapidario* (1988); *Rosas de fuego* (1996); *Paralajes* (2002); *Los secretos del bosque* (2002); *Fractales* (2005); *Variables ocultas* (2010); *Ψ o el jardín de las delicias* (2014); *Diván del ópalo de fuego (o la leyenda de Layla y Machnún)* (2015); *Kamasutra para dormir a un espectro* (2019); *Bajo el ala de Leonardo* (2021); and *Kráter* (2022). She is also the author of many books in prose which include novels, essays, books of travel and the biography *La vida callada de Federico Mompou* (1975, 1987). Her books have been translated into more than twenty languages and she is also a prolific translator into Spanish, having translated, among others, the works of Marguerite Duras and Katherine Mansfield, plus, in collaboration, the works of Turkish and Persian poets. In 1992, she was awarded the Tutav Foundation Prize from Turkey; in 1997, the National Translation Prize for her entire body of work; in 2000, the Medal of Merit First category of the Czech Republic; and in 2007, the X National Prize for Literature "Teresa de Ávila." In 2015, Clara Janés became the tenth woman to be elected as a member of the Real Academia Española (RAE) where she occupies seat "U". She currently resides in Madrid.

Bajo el ala de Leonardo (*Under Leonardo's Wing*) was originally conceived to be given as a gift and it was not meant to be available for sale to the public. It is the culmination of a series of works printed manually on hand-made paper and born out of Clara Janés' creativity, which adds to her already extensive body of poetic work. Only twenty copies of the book were published and edited by Segundo Santos. Presented here is a selection of the poems included in the book but in a slightly revised version.

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Leonardo da Vinci was ahead of his time in many fields—such as his intuition of the theory of relativity, or his studies regarding water—and this moved Janés to reflect on such issues, given that, once upon a time, she had translated into Spanish many of the texts from the Tuscan genius in collaboration with Franco Tagliafierro, which ended up in the publication of *Leonardo da Vinci, El hombre, la naturaleza y la mirada* in 2014.

During the forced confinement of recent months, Janés went back to da Vinci's work, studying some of his images as if she were entering them. This was a highly effective way to find shelter against this adverse situation and, without realizing it, she went deeply into said images daring at times to play games and to introduce brief poems into them. With the author's permission, three of the original illustrations are included here to give an idea of this image-poem intertextuality.

About the translator

Ana M. Osan was born in the International city of Tangier, Morocco. She holds a Ph.D. in Romance Languages and Literatures from The University of Chicago, and she is currently Professor of Spanish at Indiana University Northwest. She is interested in the poetry of Hispanic women and the translation of poetry. Among the translations she has published are*: Ithaca* (2004) (*Ítaca*) by Francisca Aguirre, which received the Boa Lannan Translation Award; *Narcisia* (2010) (*Narcisia*) and *The Color of Rivers* (2018) (*Del color de los ríos*) by Juana Castro; *Divan of the Opal of Fire (or The Legend of Layla and Majnun)* (2015) (*Diván del ópalo de fuego*), and *Under Leonardo's Wing* (2021) (*Bajo el ala de Leonardo*) by Clara Janés; *La tumba de los reyes* (2015) (*Le Tombeau des rois*) by Anne Hébert; and *Tribute to the Road* (2015) (*Homenaje al camino*) as well as *Cantos to Encounters* (2020) (*Cantos al encuentro*) by Luis Alberto Ambroggio. She is a member of the Academia Norteamericana de la Lengua Española and a corresponding member of the Real Academia Española.

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AN EXPLANATION

At times we find ourselves doing something not exactly knowing why. I had just managed to get a book, *Leonardo da Vinci. The codex Leicester*, and, going over its pages, I stumbled upon a picture I had never seen before. It was the shell of a gastropod meticulously drawn… I scanned it and next to it, I wrote some words by Basarab Nicolescu's: "Affectivity is linked directly to the interaction between subject and object. In the absence of affectivity, the subject turns into an object." And, without further ado, I left the beautiful page.

It was the beginning of the month of February. Fifteen days later the first coronavirus casualty took place in Spain. I kept on reading the book, an essay by Domenico Laurenza about Leonardo. The days went by, and the moment came when we had to go under lockdown, for any uncontrolled movement would mean the end… A little later, I received 12 texts from academician Pedro García Barreno. The lockdown had driven him to create, and he dared me to follow his example.

We had never been in a situation like this before. "To be or not to be." Long before, Parmenides had said, "Whatever is is, and what is not cannot be." For those who could not carry out something scientific or collaborate in search of a solution, the reality was clear: it was all about the affirmation of one's very own being. So…

There it was, that gastropod shell, and Leonardo's book that offered me unknown pictures, for example, a page about the moon, a very detailed study about the different movements of water…

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Unbeknownst to me, I started to live in those pages, to manipulate them at will, and to write on them poems or expressions. I did it with "Stella di Betlemme," "Teorie delle ombre," "Studi sulla resistenza in fisica," "Albero e scritta," "Osservazioni sul volo degli ucelli," "Ludo geometrico," …all the way up to thirteen pages.

I understood that the gastropod shell was a sign, an indication. This lockdown has gifted me with the feeling of being more alive than ever. Harmony, beauty, wisdom encouraged me towards an optimistic creative action in the most difficult moments.

It was Adriana, my daughter, who understood its sense. Suddenly, she said to me, "You have done like Socrates. When they were bringing him the hemlock, he learned a new melody for the flute. 'To what end?' he was asked. 'So that I will be able to play it before I die.'"

Clara Janés

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Stella di Betlemme

More hidden than perfume is
the star in the flower,
the secret light that goes inside,
petal, leaves, stems, down to the roots,
to give an account of being in the universe.

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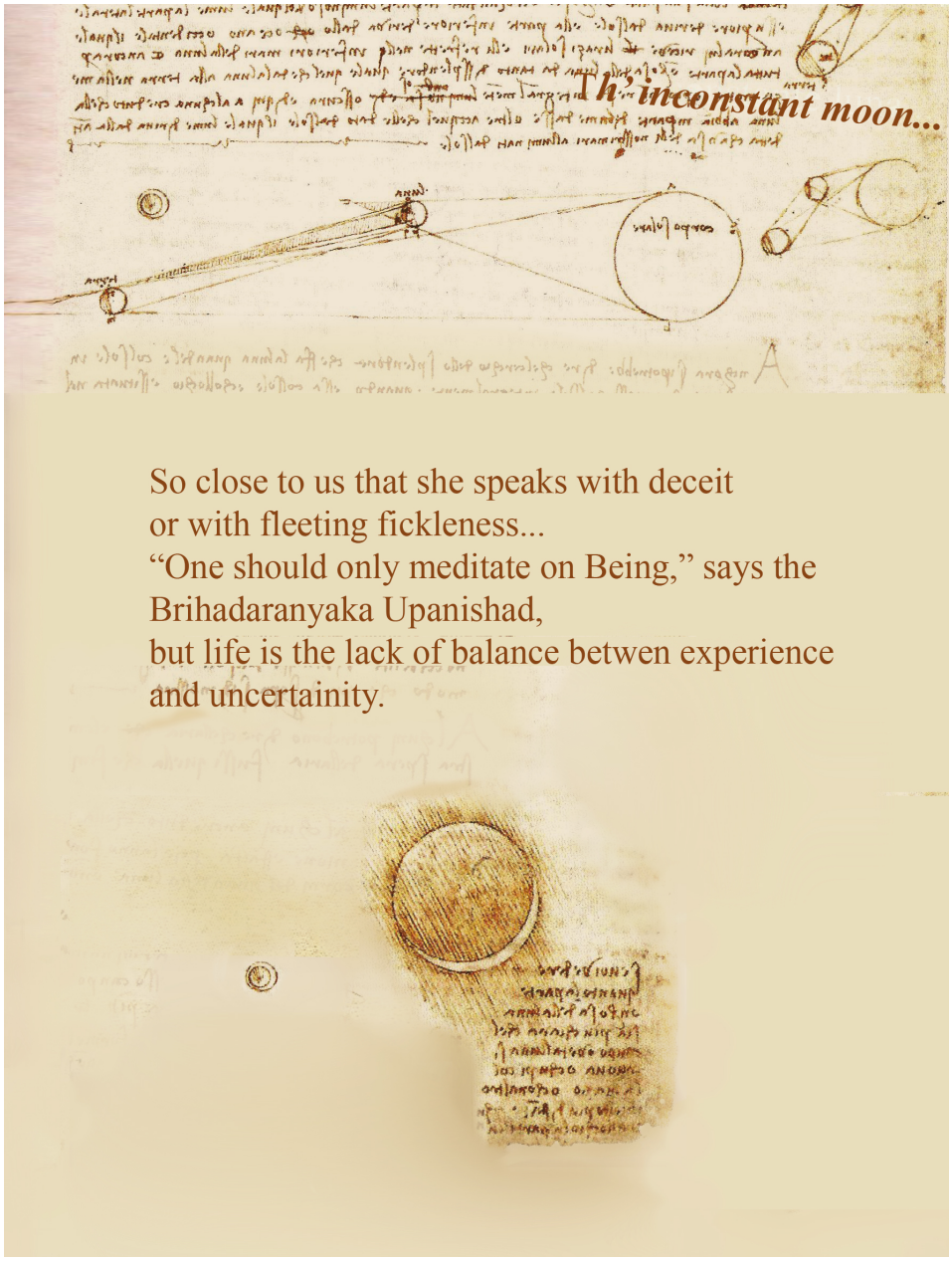

[Translator's note: Brihadaranyaka literally means "great wilderness or forest." The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is credited to ancient sage Yajnavalkya, but it was likely refined by several ancient Vedic scholars.]

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We live
in the darkest night
of not knowing.
In its depth,
we look for the remains
of an orient.
The beloved
who left
lean out in the Styx
of the heart.

[Translator's note: In classical mythology, the Styx was a river in the underworld.]

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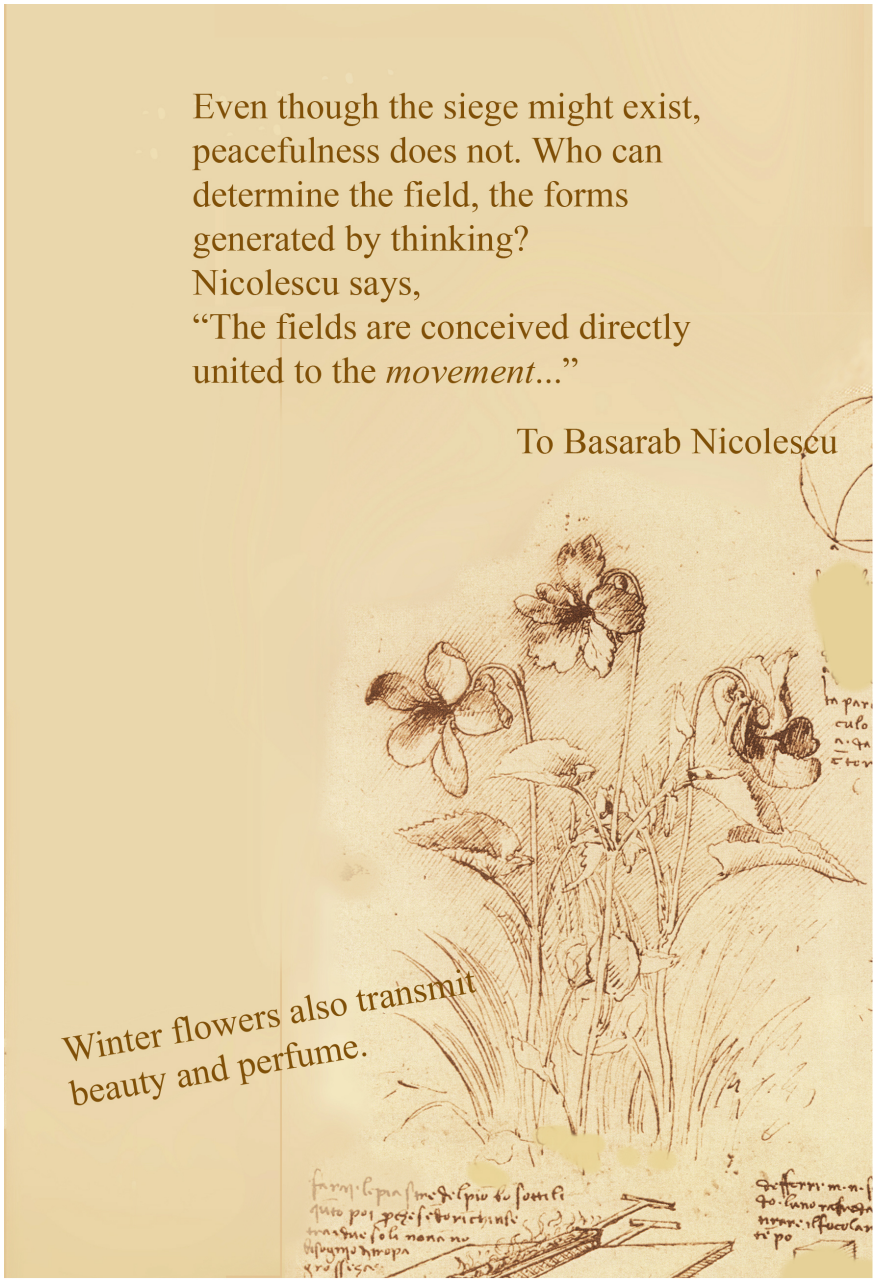

[Translator's note: Basarab Nicolescu is an honorary theoretical physicist at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in Paris.]

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To distance oneself from distance,
and for that,
to get closer to "no,"
to stop valuing existence.
Without existence
there is no possibility
for distance.

All hope
is to be reborn
as grass.

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Tree
piety of permanence
even though
up in heaven
it may fly
dazzled by
the singing
of birds.

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To return to the strength of the trunk,
to the strength
of the sea whip,
the voice transformed into the cry
of expansion,
and to preserve the nest
of the bird of mist
who tells you: you are.

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"Numbers, their truth is not only
irrefutable … but timeless," says
Erwin Schrödinger…
Today is not about a game. There is a
number in time that is lurking…

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As the star inscribed inside
a circle that signifies the Duat,
subterranean and celestial,
this might be the way:
under the earth is the true life,
equivalent to flying.

[Translator's note: Duat is the realm of the dead in ancient Egyptian mythology.]

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