

MANEL QUERALT

Vacu  
the suffering being

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Translated by  
ANGEL MIROU



Nivalis

Cover Illustration: Spiral staircase in Gaudi's *Sagrada Familia*.

## **Prologue to the first Catalan Edition**

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If the task of writing a prologue is hard when it comes to an essay, it is even more so when the prologue must be the prelude to a book of poetry. It is not easy to put oneself in the shoes of the author and imagine the stream of thought and feelings which configure a work of poetry. The text is the exteriorization of an interior sphere which aims to make the reader complicit. The poet, rhythmically revealing the voice of his interior, projects to the exterior his deepest identity, shows us the essential core of his self. In that sense, the act of "poetizing" is an act of stripping bare, of unveiling, for the poet shows himself naked before the unknown reader.

The reader while reading the text may relate to that which beats within the interior sphere of the poet. When that happens, poetry ends up being part of our personal baggage. It stops being an intellectual or literary object and becomes a window to one's own subjectivity. Poets often know better than us how to express what we feel deep inside ourselves. They put into words our impressions, our feelings, our emotions. They help us speak to ourselves more accurately, even though we know too well that we never explain ourselves completely, for the word is inadequate to capture the breadth of the human

experience. Poets have the gift for words, the plasticity of imagery and the rhythm necessary for the work to have the desired harmony.

Poetry, then, grants us access to the subjective ocean of the other, even though this route always shows some obstacles. The possibility of missing the essential or misinterpreting the core of the work is always present when one sets out to expound the ideas of a poet. All in all, the effort is worth it, as each text contains unexplored possibilities and each reader makes his own findings. To read poetry is like setting out on a journey from which no return is planned. We do not know where it will lead us, nor what we will be like at the end of the journey. Often it is not a pleasant trip, for we discover spheres of our subjectivity and of existence we would rather not have seen, but a poet is not one who just shows us what is sublime in life, but also what is dark and mean. For this reason, reading poetry demands some fortitude of the soul, because the reader is not always willing to confront himself, nor the limits of his world.

The author of this book which the reader has in his hands has invited me to write a prologue for this poetic work. I feel both grateful and scared of the task involved as it is not easy to describe with an adjective the poetry of Manel Queralt. To start with, we are dealing with a mature poet who already has expressed in other accomplished texts his vision of the world, of man and human existence, who offers the reader a poetry of thinking, a poetry whose

central goal is to make the reader think, to take him to unknown places and to encourage him in the act of thinking. But it is not a purely intellectual poetry for, though it is rich in philosophical concepts "full of metaphysical implications-, it is an intensely passionate poetry which makes the heart of the reader beat faster and induces moods which are hard to define a priori. Whoever is not willing to experience changes in his heartbeat had better not read this poet, for his poetry is a torrent of ideas and feelings which do not leave the reader who comes near them indifferent.

Some poets you read and forget. But some poets you read and cannot ever forget, not only because they have struck a chord in our soul, but because they drain us and leave us out in the cold. Manel Queralt belongs to such a breed of poets. That is why I take the liberty of giving the reader the following warning: what he will find in the following pages is a philosophical poetry, a long poem of personal quest, an honest and at the same time crude exploration of the human condition.

I do not mean in the least to put in a different way what the poet expresses so beautifully in the poetry he presents us-I would not be able to do so anyway-, but to explore the territory he shows us from the point of view of a reader who had the privilege of reading his poetry before it was published as a book. When all is said and done, the purpose of a prologue is not to comment on the work, but

to encourage its reading, to show the reader the value of the work he has in his hands so that he sets out to read it, or rather, to receive it and allow himself to be addressed by it. If this prologue achieves such goal, I will feel justified, for I believe the work is worth it.

In our cultural landscape, this kind of poetry is scarce. Poetry is too often used to rhetorically embellish a discourse or to make a social act more enjoyable, but Queralt's poetry lacks such purposes. It is poetry with a profound existential tone, which stems from a living anguish, in the most Heideggerian sense of the word, and which describes the darkest and most problematic side of human life. The poet rhythmically expresses the experience of the anguish before nothingness, before the confirmation that we are time passing, that we are beings-for-death. Queralt faces the experience of the void, he doesn't disguise how hard such experience is and he invites the reader to follow the same path he has trodden on his own. It is as if the poet is looking for an accomplice, a friendly voice to share his own experience.

Before the chasm of emptiness it is usual to recur to distractions, to escape from things, to disperse into social entertainments. In our society we have at our disposal very strong mechanisms, both in intensity and duration, to keep us amused permanently. Very often poetry serves such purpose, but that is not the goal of Queralt's poetry.

The poet leaves us standing before the horror of the void and at the edge of the cliff he abandons us so that we consider where we are, who we are and what is to provide meaning to our lives. At the core of a culture full of noise and anaesthetizing messages, Queralt's poetry is in a way countercultural, for it does not inhabit the territory of frivolity, but the vast territory of earnest and existential gravity. It is very likely that the post-modern reader won't quite understand the drama of Vacu, the protagonist of the work. If that is the case, it is not the poet's fault, but that of the gap of experience between the poet and the world. But some readers, I am sure, will have bitterly tasted the emptiness which Vacu suffers, and in that sense they will partially identify with the world Queralt creates.

For all these reasons, it can be argued that Queralt's poetry demands a reader who is willing to travel far, willing to submerge himself into the metaphysics of the absurd and touch with his own hands the contingent and redundant character of human existence. We are, but we might not have been. We exist in a world where the magnitude of evil overwhelms us. In fact, the experience of the poverty of being provides a backbone to all the poetry of Queralt. The caducity of all things, the ineluctable passing of time, the contingency of the world and of people, the frailness of self and its links are the main questions in this poetic choice. Everything is perishable in Queralt's world, but the human being does not settle for such contingency, but

feels profoundly uncomfortable and desperately searches for an answer, a sign, a meaning for everything. The experience of this unbearable lightness of being, to use the words of Milan Kundera, creates a sort of suffering which is not corporeal, but of a metaphysical nature.

In Queralt's poetry, suffering becomes the keystone of human existence. The poet wonders what justifies existence, what is the reason why the protagonist, Vacu, wishes to go on being, to fight to stay a being. Vacu is the archetype of the man who responsibly faces his own emptiness and, instead of going off on a tangent, desperately searches for a reason which justifies his existence and guards him from the temptation of nihilism. Queralt places at the very centre of the poem the ultimate philosophical question: What is it that makes life worth living?

Vacu is a frail man, vulnerable, gripped by pain, disoriented within the great labyrinth of existence, opaque and separated from his fellow creatures. The poet forces us to open the window to emptiness, to look beyond what we usually do, and submerge ourselves into the radicalness of our own being. Vacu's Being does not stand on the eternal Being of a God who loves from eternity, but on the deepest Void. In Queralt's poetry there is no trace of that Presence which provides meaning in Golgotha. It rather seems to tell us that assuming that emptiness is the only way to liberation.



In this long poem, the author lyrically and pathetically expresses the experience of the void, of that which the Latin authors called *horror vacui*. The main character of the poem, *Vacu*, which probably stands for the poet, crosses the geography of the absurd and shows us his pains when he faces such experience. The possible dissolution into nothingness, the lack of communication with others, the experience of loneliness, the impotence before the magnitude of evil in the world are ever-present in Queralt's poetry. Needless to say, the reader may or may not share the poet's world view, but in any case, he will have to admit that the point of view which Queralt offers us shakes our convictions and makes us think. If only for that reason, the poetry in this book is already of great value.

The poet says this about the big questions, those which truly hurt us deep inside and which move us, "not much is known, nothing can be said". Queralt's poetry shows, beside great artistic beauty, an intense metaphysical power, because far from moving in a superficial level, it confronts the reader with the great enigmas of existence. In that sense, it awakens us from the sweet dream of not-thinking.

I hope, dear reader, that you know how to savour this poetry which Queralt so kindly presents us. It exudes sincerity, intellectual honesty and a passion for truth. It demands attention and above all a listening attitude. To be able to assimilate its voice, you will have to make an effort

to silence those voices inside your head, adopt a receptive attitude and let yourself be fascinated by the text. Bon voyage, reader!

Man is an apprentice, pain is his master.

**Alfred de Musset**

It is clear that however different from the real one an imagined world may be, it must have something –a form– in common with the real world.

(Translated by C.K. Ogden)

**Ludwig Wittgenstein**

Actually, all living creatures, animals and people, wish to live, and such will only disappears under exceptional circumstances, such as unbearable pain.

**Erich Fromm**

.....

A spiral staircase with steps  
Of granite chained within walls  
And the not too high ceiling of a passage  
Scratched, drilled in rock,  
Where the eye cannot pierce the surface,  
Perhaps it rounds it, shapes it,  
But does not uncover its mysteries.  
One might speculate whether a breath  
Of energy blew on a speck  
Of primal matter and created  
A life and whether later on  
Such compound underwent  
Decisive and extraordinary changes  
To then become then an imprecise  
And braided evolution  
Which would lead us with some conviction  
Here, to this point of the story.  
Perhaps we would go too far if  
We suggested that they, henceforth  
To be known as living beings,  
Succeeded one another and did so  
By selecting the fittest among them  
And casting aside the least adapted.  
Very ancient and indeterminate beings,  
Which we cannot even assure existed

For no one ever saw them  
Nor have we any reliable trace,  
Even more, contrary to what might be thought  
About their rather unlikely  
Existence, without fear of straying  
Too far from reality,  
We might conclude that those creatures  
Drilled a stairway in the rock.  
Likewise we might set ourselves  
The tremendous task of trying  
To decipher a reason, small as it might be, the  
*Why* of beginning a feat  
Like the one we use here by way of an example.  
But the past presents itself to us as muddled  
And we are unable to ascertain  
What the reasons were and therefore  
We will have to bear on our shoulders  
The ignorance of those origins:  
All that appertains to the stairway  
As well as its beginnings elude us.  
We could not tell whether it is all dark  
Inside, we might be wrong  
For we are not quite sure, but  
Within a dim light lived  
Where it came from no one knows:  
An uncertain, unknown source,  
A radiance for centuries absorbed

Through the pores of the stone.  
We may conjecture that once in there  
We would not know what might occur  
If one so reckless should decide,  
-What for, we could never guess-  
To follow the tunnel and climb the stairs.  
Well, surely we would be surprised  
If we were told against all odds,  
Rather implausible but true,  
That someone lives within the rock.  
Hailing from who knows what distant corner,  
Oblivious to such starting point  
Something climbs up from the depths  
Of a darkness that is unknown to us.  
.....

«...Two hundred fifty three thousand and twenty-three  
Two hundred fifty three thousand and twenty-four  
Two hundred fifty three thousand and twenty-five...  
Careful there! Think think why  
Every time you reach this point you get lost  
And have to start the count all over.»  
.....

So we hear the voice of someone talking?  
No surprise, it confirms what we divined.  
But we do not think it is one  
Of those creatures mentioned earlier,  
Natural miners, whose hard task

Proves they must have been a hardy lot,  
But one from a species  
More evolved and sensitive  
Which surely, soon enough we would  
Agree to call this early inhabitant,  
This being, a man.  
We then might think or fancy  
That one ill-fated day, or not,  
There are all kinds of opinions  
For we would never agree  
Over whether he willingly chose  
To come to a strange world,  
A man, we said, arrived,  
How we cannot guess,  
In the midst of the darkness.  
He would have first opened his eyes  
Wide open to avidly suck in  
Images into his tiny brain  
And had we been eyewitnesses  
There, by chance, we might  
Have glimpsed his innocent smile.  
But as far as we are concerned  
We never heard the cries of a child  
Nor one of those guttural baby sounds  
We could not therefore speak  
Of a particular birth; as likely as not  
It is a man, but we will not repeat it,  
All we shall ever know is

That he is weak, and if he looks into the abyss  
Of living, he will succumb in the end.  
Even now we cannot guess his name.  
.....

This staircase exists because Vacu  
Inhabits it and while he is alive it will continue to exist  
If he gets out, and only if  
He manages to do so, which we will not  
Confirm or deny, it might  
Vanish, and face the ultimate risk  
Of perhaps never being seen again.  
Therefore as long as he lives inside and keeps  
Counting the steps, he will always be able  
To climb up or down  
To wherever he chooses, but if he messes up,  
Then he might lose himself in the night.  
The behaviour of this Vacu is  
Like that of any other apprentice, he must  
Repeat ad nauseam  
All actions related  
To climbing the stairs and knowing  
-Before thinking about other things-  
His whereabouts and, in brief, after  
A deep and sound digestion,  
To consolidate and make them his very own.  
And perhaps rather than too lightly  
He seriously might think



He could cross that rough  
Yet even terrain not just  
In a special way but also  
Move up or down as much as possible  
And also count as he did so,  
Adding or subtracting one foot after another  
Keeping in mind the number  
And last but not least keep  
His eyes and ears always alert  
On the watch for any small  
Hidden or insignificant clue,  
Leaving no corner or contour  
Unchecked despite the constant  
Blackmailing of doubts in his mind.  
He should test how solid  
And sound this staircase was.  
With his hands time and plenty of patience  
And as if a ritual  
He might retrace the steps,  
Every fold, every opening, and stroke  
The smooth or rough surface  
Allowing these sensations to go  
Straight to his head.  
.....

«...Four hundred thirty two thousand and twenty-six  
Four hundred thirty two thousand and twenty-seven  
Four hundred thirty two thousand and twenty-eight...»

.....

He kept such routine because he sensed that  
This unwavering belief would somehow  
Check the march,  
The cruel, uncertain flight of time.  
During a break, sitting  
On a step and leaning his back  
Against the rock, his mind reminisces of  
Small bits of the past, of the path  
Walked so far and on the ground he ponders  
On the methods employed.  
There where we first saw him,  
At an indeterminate place in time,  
We think he already possessed some wisdom  
We could never identify  
And if from then until now we add up  
All the knowledge his reason  
May have grasped --which might be  
Very scarce and which he believes was  
Extremely useful --we can perceive  
That in most occasions  
He got lost through simple carelessness,  
A behaviour which we deem  
Rather than showing signs of intelligence  
An incredible stupidity.

.....

It starts as a perception, faint

At first, and the next minute growing  
For sure it feels somewhat  
Like an itch and we cannot recall  
When it started or whether  
There was a time when it did not exist.  
Let us say simply that it will not go,  
That there is a pain which follows Vacu, it settles  
In his bones and never stops.  
Let us imagine it is chronic and turns out  
It is particularly insidious  
For it always works in all but  
Complete and constant secrecy  
--Hell which smoulders his insides--  
And we do not know this but unfortunately  
It probably affects his body and mind.  
It might not be important but  
This new pain will prevent his moving  
To the point that climbing a single step  
Will cause him a string of sharp pains  
Excruciating and unbearable.  
He could silently scream against  
Such pain with which he's been filled  
Since time immemorial; he could  
Beg for mercy but it would do  
No good for these imperatives  
Are useless; even so  
There is an uncontrollable urge

That prompts him to demand answers,  
But he will get no words, just  
Silence and a pure, dreadful suffering.  
.....

He had seized one conquest after  
Another of the space of this stair  
He lived in and Vacu judged himself  
Capable of ruling it in all  
Its long and twisted span.  
Sometimes, though not often,  
He admitted feeling truly  
Proud and lofty, and with renewed  
Strength, for he thought he would  
Take hold of his recent  
Findings and new abilities  
And as he conquered the world  
-At this point we should remember  
That it is limited  
To the passageway drilled in the rock-  
And he knew he also grasped  
Some of those simpler laws  
Which ruled it and hence increased  
The knowledge of the mouldy surrounds  
Through which, to put it in a less  
Pejorative way, he roamed.  
But it was also for this reason,  
That he could discern his own  
Limits, and he found himself increasingly

Humbled before the mysteries  
That the stairways might still hold.  
He realized the delicate  
Situation in which he found himself  
He agonized over not knowing  
What further miseries would assault him  
Harsh and terribly up the stairs.  
What can one expect from such a frail creature?  
Then it was necessary for Vacu to choose  
Either to go on though ignoring  
The rather likely dangers  
And take on the pain that followed him  
Always so chronic and unavoidable  
--Constant torture of body and mind--  
Or to fall back and go down the stair  
And in a moment of great weakness  
To let go and fall, to judge it  
Not worthwhile and to leave it be.  
Hidden in the half-light arises  
The temptation to go back  
To find once more what is familiar  
And well known, just another way  
-The only way, we suspect-to feel safe.-  
But if we did not wish to give  
Sufficient importance to his fragile  
Samples of memories it might turn out

That Vacu had no history,  
It would be as if he never existed.  
But we will not contemplate that now  
For it would be a stupid waste  
Of time and what matters most  
Is to go on, not neglect the pace.  
An enterprising Vacu surrenders himself  
To chances unknown  
Merely glimpsed, to let go,  
To abandon oneself, to connect with the inner  
Emotional and sensory world  
Of the staircase? But it casts a sort  
Of chill or dread because  
The instrument of intuition can  
Release uncontrollable passions  
And fancies and troubles and pangs of anguish.  
If Vacu then wished to discover  
New places he should make his way  
Upstairs uncertainty teetering  
On doubt and deepening and taking part  
In one of many possible actions  
And then, having tested the new  
Action plan and achieved  
Certain clairvoyance, he should act.  
The actions he meant  
To follow he knew by heart;  
If they were proven correct he would

Use them again in further sections of the stairway  
And reject them if they were useless.  
Later on, when the state of matters  
Demanded it, he would revert once more  
To the past strategy that  
Allowed Vacu to face  
Very similar situations  
--such as the occasions  
Which we might think happen too often  
Due to his general tendency to fall  
Or stumble more than twice  
On the same step, an accustomed  
And well-known form  
To name incompetence--  
To overcome again the painful  
And troublesome obstacles of former times.  
He acted he went forward again always  
Worried and scowling awaiting  
The discovery, the final one  
Which would bring peace  
To his troubled mind:  
A monologue which triggers a voice  
Which turns out to be yet another  
Monologue in his mind... and so on,  
Deep within his mind, to infinity.  
What troubled him, what spurred him  
And where did the unease come from?

.....

«...Six hundred sixty-four thousand one hundred and two  
Six hundred sixty-four thousand one hundred and three  
Six hundred sixty-four thousand one hundred and four...»  
.....

There is the inner energy which troubles him  
If he can't express and release  
The excitement he now undergoes  
It would end up increasing the uneasiness.  
He lies down and the steps dig into his head  
Back and butt, he closes his eyes  
And stops thinking about the passage of time.  
While his hand feels for his torpid member  
He caresses the glans and the dirty testicles  
And imagines that someone equally naked  
--he could only see a creature like himself  
For he has no reference of anyone else--  
Threatens him with his erect penis,  
Stretches his legs above him and shoves  
The hard prick in his open mouth  
And pulls him closer so that he masturbates him  
Grabbing him by his hairs and moving  
His head for a better adjustment  
To the needs of his pleasure  
While Vacu grasps him by his buttocks  
To help control the thrust.  
The two are completely turned on for a long time.



Slowly Vacu feels in his hand  
How that torpid member  
Wakes up with a will to grow and  
demonstrate the presence of desire:  
The outcome is thoroughly predictable.  
At the culminating moment the faux double  
Disappears and at the exact point  
Of no return arrives the thick mist  
Of orgasm and it flusters body and mind:  
All blood rushes into his sex.  
But suddenly he perceives an awful  
Stab as if now his penis was pierced  
Through with a thick needle.  
The two of them melting, this experience  
Of pain and pleasure together cannot be described:  
A protuberance of flesh  
Blood red and abnormally swollen,  
Until it explodes with ejaculation  
Until sperm flows and stains  
His hands and the thick brew spreads  
On the floor: an ending without appeal.  
Afterwards, the body twisted by the torment,  
The heart regains its slow beating  
And his breathing becomes deep.  
His face leaning on a cold  
Step, Vacu recognizes the silence  
That comes after excitement.

Pleasure is a gift which comes and goes  
And is always too brief; short-lived moments,  
But suffering has that great staying power,  
Everlasting throughout time.  
Vacu is forced to go on  
Learning to live with the pain.  
.....

As days go by he sets himself the intimate  
Duty of constantly thinking  
About the stones, of never getting distracted  
For the slightest forgetfulness  
Might reopen his torment  
And become-at some point in the future-intolerable.  
Perhaps Vacu deceived himself by thinking  
He would learn too many things but  
In reality we do not know whether he would  
Be able to set his eyes upon  
The essentials and this might  
Prevent him from clearing his mind  
And having the right attitude  
Towards himself and the area around the stairway,  
The semidark atmosphere that surrounds him.  
If he moves forward the steps do not remain fixed, they  
disappear  
Always different, he defers understanding them.  
Vacu has been for a long time confined  
Between these two walls and has been forced  
To dedicate most of his efforts

Counting forward and backward all the steps,  
But he still will tend to keep up  
This attitude even after  
Many years, when it no longer seems necessary.  
Finding himself absorbed just  
In the constant and repeated counting,  
He runs the serious risk of dedicating all  
His energy to this resolve  
And therefore hinder and impoverish  
The search for a reason for existence.  
Vacu thought he had never  
Bumped into any creature like him, nor unlike  
Him for that matter, but in brief,  
Somebody else and this made him feel  
A strange yearning which might  
Turn into sleepwalking.  
He talked to himself and did so by twisting  
His mouth as though he addressed someone  
Walking beside him but,  
It is plain to see, we know there is nobody else.  
Therefore, why the hell did he?  
Feeling round the paths of madness,  
Drifting, he gets lost in nothingness  
And the void which drags him shows  
A creature scarcely self-assured  
Bu with the minimum ability  
To live with all those nights:

The darkneses he carries up and down.  
The most futile and pointless actions  
Torment him, we might  
Be sure that he obstinately  
Takes any tiny,  
Insignificant detail too seriously.  
If we examine him under a magnifying glass we will see  
A few instants frozen in time  
Which will not add up anything other than  
A maimed body and his suffering,  
Deprived of any speech.  
We shall see his pains as a tempest  
Which violently breaks out confined  
In the casing of body and mind.  
Vacu always has pain by his side  
It is with and within him, beyond any  
Chance of observing it from the outside  
And therefore discovering its origin.  
Clenched teeth and frowned eyebrows,  
Angry stare and drowning eyes  
Sleet in the middle of the crazed pupils  
Short moans and a weeping asking for help  
From a body swollen with tremors.  
.....  
When he reflected he could reach  
An approximate conclusion

At least to a vague foreboding  
That despite his limited and minimal  
Knowledge he was looking as though  
By chance for an *absolute* which enveloped  
All that anguished loneliness.  
But he always reached the certainty  
That all those reasons worrying  
Him so much only brought him  
A substitute to which it was impossible  
To recreate its real name.  
Drenched in fear, the vacuity  
Of fearful *nothingness* possessed him:  
The feelings that stem from a vanquished  
Heart look out and fall to the bottom  
Of an abyss from which no one is reborn.  
.....

«...Eight hundred and forty-five thousand and thirty-five  
Eight hundred and forty-five thousand and thirty-six  
Eight hundred and forty-five thousand and thirty-seven...  
If I fall now no one will come after me.  
What is the source of gall,  
The thick spittle, the black expectorations? »  
.....

He then fell silent at once and a white  
Haze covered his irises and quickly  
A blue lightning punctured the pupils  
And the dense fog invaded his brain

Inside the voices reappeared,  
He knew well what this meant.

.....

*Vertigo, queasiness, anguish and delirium*

*Vision of dying children who scream*

.....

That state was like coming to  
After intoxication  
Provoked by the effect of a drug.  
Feeling the bad taste and the swollen tongue,  
Filling his body with the unpleasant  
Sensation caused by stopping  
After a long journey  
At the moment when the regular pace ends  
Causing enough silence  
To allow the voices inside to resonate still.

.....

*Vertigo, queasiness anguish and delirium*

*Vision of men and women shouting*

.....

He always thought about something else  
As he climbed the staircase  
So as not to waste time, as if he wished  
To find some answer further on  
--He knows not what-- sublime or magnificent.  
He often corrected himself turning  
His thoughts to that mystery,

He then seemed to understand what he was looking for.  
Other times, his thoughts wandered,  
And he got lost in his reasoning  
Until he finally gave up the search  
For that name impossible to be uttered.  
But when he wished to push away these  
Thoughts so that they would not distract him  
From the other worries of which he might  
Profit, they started then  
To emerge untimely and stronger.  
Even if he tried his best  
To want to be perfect, he would not know  
How to strip himself of the condition  
Of his weaknesses which are  
The root of his insufficiency.  
There is a something unexplainable  
Which in Vacu's mind is born and slowly  
Arises: obscure images, lost  
Memories and a long standing debate.  
A too muddled whirl of greys,  
Showing no shape nor symbol  
Susceptible of translation or interpretation  
Reaches his consciousness.  
What emerges to the surface  
From conscience to claim  
The right to become real, tangible?  
Vacu is moved, he twists and rises

From the steps and begins to wonder  
-Always climbing the staircase-  
Which behaviour might be this  
Which so hounds him lately.  
Why does he notice it now and not before?  
He wants to try making it crop up again  
And retraces his train of thoughts  
Looking for the exact moment when  
This restlessness began.

.....

He always lives within the same atmosphere  
The dim light which envelops him,  
The dark silence that oppresses his temples?  
He believes again that if he retraces his way  
He will be able to find out the first cause  
Of the effect which brought him to this  
Present and which will have to guide him from now  
On. But after so long,  
The necessary strain is too  
Important for a creature like Vacu  
Who always fought without respite  
In the near dark of this passageway  
Carrying on his shoulders fears and darkness,  
So that from that moment sought for  
In the memories to this point there will not be anything  
Between the return path, he moves aside  
Any obstacle and any alien



Thought, while he firmly closes his eyes  
And with clumsy hands he feels  
His face and body as though Vacu wished  
To tear off the barbed wire that entraps  
And entangles him with terrible pains:  
Which cut his skin and causes deep  
Wounds, to the limit of his suffering.  
.....

*Vertigo, queasiness, anguish and delirium*  
*Vision of dying children who scream*  
*Vertigo, queasiness anguish and delirium*  
*Vision of men and women shouting*  
.....

It then seems that he focuses like never before  
So that no distraction will take him out  
Of this state of critical pensiveness  
And he prepares for a new supreme  
Try, as though he wanted to rebel  
Against this anguish which weighs him down.  
But then, once more,  
He experiences again the void of *nothingness*;  
He stops and for a moment he thinks no more.  
Soon, and not knowing why  
He climbs up and down the stairs again,  
Several times as if he wished  
To retrieve the counting of the steps:  
The safety which a palpable world provides.

He knows his journey through memory  
Has been a failure: It vividly brought him back  
The disillusionment and he felt more wretched.  
.....

«...One million one hundred thousand and fifty-one  
One million one hundred thousand and fifty-two  
One million one hundred thousand and fifty-three...»  
.....

This gallery that climbed up  
Burrowed inside the rock was full  
Of cracks opened in the walls  
Of which a purulent secretion oozed:  
Wounds of the skin of Vacu himself.  
That stair which never ended  
Had forsaken him half-way a tunnel  
Moving up and down towards an end  
Which never came, never was sighted.  
He ran and thought that sweat  
Was blood and pestilent pus which seeped  
From the gashed walls, thick blood  
Which slowly dripped down to  
The steps and soaked his bare feet.  
When the air became noxious,  
Suffocating, the darkness encircled him  
And pressed on him as though a colossus  
Irate and irascible had seized him  
In his hands to crush him.

Though he might shout and scream  
Asking for help, terrified,  
He knew no one would hear him.  
And when he could not move any further,  
Inert, he felt the pulse on his temples  
He wanted to stop his heart, calm it down,  
For it would never do so on its own:  
Free itself and help him rest.  
He was in constant danger. The border  
Between wake and sleep, between real  
And unreal, is a zone exposed  
To the possible obstacles, the pitfalls  
And chasms which at each new step  
Might open and, though it had never  
Happened to him, he was suspicious.  
And whenever he had such thoughts  
His legs trembled,  
Stumbling he slowly climbed up  
As though an abyss might jump upon him.  
In this life of his so machine-like,  
What will happen *tomorrow*?  
And what happened *yesterday* or *the day before*?  
Deep inside Vacu's brain  
All thoughts become lost.  
So, it turns out that trying  
To regain time is a pointless task,  
All efforts are useless?

It starts with a slight imperceptible  
Weariness, like when one day  
We imagine we hear a distant  
Voice which whispers  
In our ears and after paying  
Attention we forget about it because  
We do not believe it real, possible.  
One day, when Vacu no longer expects it,  
That *why* feints and pops its head out  
And everything starts to fall apart.  
He shivers like he is cold, he sits,  
And besieged by darkness, all alone, he cries.  
What is the point of bringing light to a wretch  
Life to those whose have bitterness in their hearts  
Who long for a death that does not come?  
.....

No, Vacu has never been wise in his  
Loneliness, he has never known what to make of it  
And does not believe in any hereafter sunk  
As he is in the mud of misfortune.  
Now, after so long, so much so he cannot  
Remember how long, he hardly has  
An instant of peace:  
In these stairs he is haunted  
By the gasps of the most hideous dreams  
It is then hard to mark the exact  
Moment when Vacu took the subtle step

And his spirit threw in its lot with death.  
Restless and eager to know,  
If only he could look beyond  
Himself and raise  
His gaze above his own  
Fears, he would have the chance  
Of regaining the will to live.  
When one of those voices spoke to him  
A long time ago and managed to silence  
His torment, a new one recites it now  
And restarts the lament at the point  
Where it terrible stopped.

.....

*Vertigo, queasiness, anguish and delirium*

*Vision of dying children who scream*

*Vertigo, queasiness anguish and delirium*

*Vision of men and women shouting*

.....

And we are missing something, but what?  
What makes it worth his while, this remnant,  
To hold on to the staircase?  
Did he not learn from his tragic experience  
He will only find suffering there?  
He constantly makes an extreme,  
Solitary effort, and he knows that in this  
Awareness, this revolt  
He is challenging an answer.

Vacu, an emaciated bag of bones, deformed,  
Wizened by the pains of body and mind  
Almost unable to move,  
Naked, filthy because of his incontinence,  
His skin and lips sore, torn, cut,  
He crawls sluggishly and? He will not make it.  
He coughs, chokes and vomits sputa  
But with his hands he claws steps  
From the stair intending to climb,  
Little by little, the weight of existence.  
After so many years of ceaseless pain,  
He is in a way just a wound,  
His character already inseparable  
From his suffering, an intimate union.  
Inside the stairway dim noises  
Can be heard a sort of murmur  
Made by someone walking, crawling  
An almost inaudible voice can be heard  
A wounded creature, but it is not  
Real words exactly, they resemble  
The laments of an open wound.  
Then, all that can be seen and perceived  
Is compressed into a single image  
Which expresses a long metamorphosis  
Resulting from a prolonged suffering.  
He will eventually find out that agonizing  
May be considered his

True destiny, where suffering  
Is his task, the only task.  
So perhaps now he might glimpse  
That even he, suffering so much, is unique  
And he is all alone, no one will  
Ease or suffer in his stead; there is  
Only one opportunity, and this  
Lies in how he bears it.  
Well, tough luck, but must he go on?  
We do not know. Vacu has nothing left  
To lose in this ridiculous life.  
And therefore we will quickly proceed  
To weave more or less consistent  
Artifices to save the rest  
Although we honestly believe  
That the chances for success  
Are very small. We shall see.  
.....

«...One million three hundred and four thousand and five  
One million three hundred and four thousand and six  
One mill... What? What is this wall doing here?  
It can't be, I don't understand I can't go on!  
The staircase ends and... there are no more steps?! »  
.....

Unable to accept in any way  
The situation, he uttered a terrible  
And horrific scream as if coming

Out of one condemned to the worst tortures  
Born out of the depths of his being  
-Even we are moved by it-  
A scream which has repressed rage  
And pains gathered and soaked  
For years, until now: an entire life.  
But what is this we see? What is going on?  
After all this suffering of his  
A feeling, a strange and quiet  
Sensation of peace invades him  
As though tender, unknown hands  
Caressed his wounds,  
The ones on his body and those in his mind:  
Breathing for a few imperceptible moments  
Without fearing the piercing consequences.  
Then the unthinkable: **Vacu smiles at us!**

.....

We fall silent, at this juncture we are silent.  
Before a suffering creature which has managed  
To bear so much pain all this  
Time, we can only remain silent and watch.

.....



(And so it is that on the most important  
And at the same time radical realities  
We hardly know a thing; there is nothing we can say.  
There is no yesterday or tomorrow. All is now.  
Does this ending reveal  
*Nothingness or transcendence?*  
Is the true and only way out  
Of the staircase precisely  
There where none is possible?)  
.....