

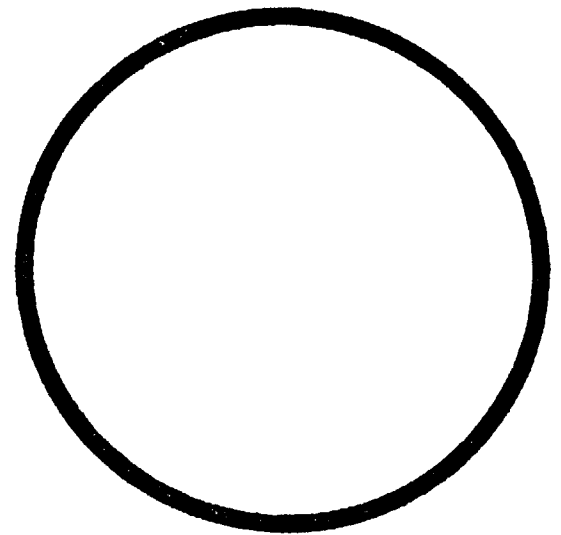
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MONIQUE WITTIG

Les Guérillères

Translated from the French by

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When it rains the women stay in the summer-house. They hear the water beating on the tiles and streaming down the slopes of the roof. Fringes of rain surround the summer-house, the water that runs down at its angles flows more strongly, it is as if springs hollow out the pebbles at the places where it reaches the ground. At last someone says it is like the sound of micturition, that she cannot wait any longer, and squats down. Then some of them form a circle around her to watch the labia expel the urine.

The women frighten each other by hiding behind the trees. One or other of them asks for grace. Then they chase each other in the darkness, ill-wishing the one who is caught. Or else they search gropingly, scenting the one whose perfume is to be honoured. Amomum aniseed betel cinnamon cubeb mint liquorice musk ginger clove nutmeg pepper saffron sage vanilla receive homage in turn. Then the wearers of these perfumes are chased in the dark as in blindman's-buff. Cries laughter sounds of falling are heard.

shedding many tears, complaining that no sea-breeze got up to drive away the smell, supporting under the arms and groins one of them who has fainted, while the vomit accumulates around them on the surface of the water.

In dull weather the women may shed hot tears, saying that in the sunshine the roofs of the houses and the walls are of quite another colour. Mist spreads over the water over the fields about the houses. It penetrates through closed windows. Someone arrives to visit the house. She cannot see it. The huge paintings in vivid colours disappear behind orange vapours. Then she slumps to the ground demanding to be entertained. They tell her in great detail the story of the woman who, speaking of her vulva, used to say that thanks to that compass she could navigate from sunrise to sunset.

If anyone walks on the hillside she can hardly remain upright. Through the hedges white colchicum and violets or pink-capped mushrooms can be seen. The grass is not tall. Heifers stand in it, in great number. The houses have been shuttered since the autumn rains began. There are no little girls playing in the gardens. There are no flowers in the flower-beds. A few toys lie about, a painted wooden hoop a red and blue olisbos a white balloon a lead rifle.

Some of the women swim letting themselves drift toward the last splashes of sunlight on the sea. At the most luminous spot when, dazzled, they try to move away, they say that they are assailed by an unbearable stench. Later they are seized with vomiting. Then they begin to moan as they strain their arms, swimming as fast as they can. At a certain point they collide with the floating decaying carcase of an ass, at times the swell of the sea reveals sticky shapeless gleaming lumps of indescribable colour. They say that they shouted with all their might,

The women visit the market to obtain provisions. They pass by the stalls of fruit vegetables bottles of pink blue red green glass. There are piles of orange oranges ochre pineapples mandarines walnuts green and pink mangos blue nectarines green and pink peaches orange-yellow apricots. There are melons water-melons paw-paws avocados green almonds medlars. There are cucumbers aubergines cabbages asparagus white cassava red pimentos gourds. Wasps coming and going settle on the bare arms of the young women selling them.

The huntresses have dark maroon hats, and dogs. Hearing the rifle-shots, Dominique Aron says that the bird is still flying, the hare still running, the boar the deer the fox the wart-hog still afoot. It is possible to keep a watch on the surroundings. If some troop advances up the road raising a cloud of dust the women watch its approach shouting to those within for the windows to be closed and the rifles kept behind the windows. Anne Damien plays, Sister Anne do you see anything coming, I see only the grass growing green and the dusty road.

At evening a horse harnessed to a cart goes by. The cart carries a heap of cut beetroots or potatoes or grass for fodder. Long before and long after it passes the sound of the hooves striking the tarred road can be heard. The horse on its way is not being driven by anyone.

THAT WHICH IDENTIFIES THEM LIKE
THE EYE OF THE CYCLOPS,
THEIR SINGLE FORENAME,
OSEA BALKIS SARA NICEA
IOLA CORA SABINA DANIELA
GALSWINTHA EDNA JOSEPHA

Somewhere there is a siren. Her green body is covered with scales. Her face is bare. The undersides of her arms are a rosy colour. Sometimes she begins to sing. The women say that of her song nothing is to be heard but a continuous O. That is why this song evokes for them, like everything that recalls the O, the zero or the circle, the vulval ring.

By the lakeside there is an echo. As they stand there with an open book the chosen passages are re-uttered from the other side by a voice that becomes distant and repeats itself. Lucie Maure cries to the double echo the phrase of Phénarète, I say that that which is is. I say that that which is not also is. When she repeats the phrase several times the double, then triple, voice endlessly superimposes that which is and that which is not. The shadows brooding over the lake shift and begin to shiver because of the vibrations of the voice.

The women are seen to have in their hands small books which they say are feminaries. These are either multiple copies of the same original or else there are several kinds. In one of them someone has written an inscription which

they whisper in each other's ears and which provokes them to full-throated laughter. When it is leafed through the feminary presents numerous blank pages in which they write from time to time. Essentially, it consists of pages with words printed in a varying number of capital letters. There may be only one or the pages may be full of them. Usually they are isolated at the centre of the page, well spaced black on a white background or else white on a black background.

After the sun has risen they anoint their bodies with oil of sandalwood curcuma gardenia. They steady one foot on a tree-trunk. Their hands rub each leg in turn, the skin glistening. Some of them are lying down. Others massage them with their fingertips. The bare bodies gleam in the strong morning light. One of their flanks is iridescent with a golden lustre. The rising sun does likewise when it sends its rays slanting across the erect rounded tree-trunks. The arcs of the circles so touched reflect a little of the light, their outlines are blurred.

There are peat-bogs above the hills. The mud they are made of has the colour of henna. They seethe, there are

surface explosions, bubbles. A stick stirred around within them is caught by viscous soft bodies. It is not possible to fish these out. As soon as any pressure is exerted on them they slip away, they escape. The women say that at times the bursting of the bubbles is accompanied by groans murmurs. The sun dries up the bogs. The vapour that ascends then has a nauseating odour.

The gipsy women have a mummified corpse which they bring out when it is not raining, because of the smell of the body which is not quite dry. They expose it to the sun in its box. The dead woman is clothed in a long tunic of green velvet, covered with white embroidery and gilded ornaments. They have hung little bells on her neck, on her sleeves. They have put medallions in her hair. When they take hold of the box to bring it out the dead woman begins to tinkle everywhere. Every now and then someone goes out on to the three steps that lead up to the caravan to look at the clouds. When the sky is obscured two of them set about shutting the lid of the box and carrying it inside.

FLORA ZITA SAVA CORNELIA
DRAUPADI JULIENNE ETMEL
CHLOË DESDEMONA RAPHAELA
IRIS VERA ARSINOË LISA
BRENDA ORPHISE HERODIAS
BERENICE SIGRID ANDOVERA

The little girls search in the bushes and trees for the nests of goldfinches chaffinches linnets. They find some green canaries which they cover with kisses, which they hug to their breasts. They run singing, they bound over the rocks. A hundred thousand of them return to their houses to cherish their birds. In their haste they clasped them too tightly to themselves. They ran. They bent down to pick up pebbles which they cast far away over the hedges. They took no heed of their chirping. They climbed straight up to their rooms. They removed the birds from their garments, they found them lifeless, heads drooping. Then they all tried to revive them by pressing them to their mouths, letting their warm breath fall on them, lifting the limp heads, touching their beaks with a finger. They remained inert. Then a hundred thousand little girls bewailed the death of their green canaries in the hundred thousand rooms of the hundred thousand houses.

Whatever the time appointed to begin the work, they must hurry to get finished before sunset. The bottoms of the ladders are visible placed on the ground, the tops are hidden in the jumble of fruit and foliage. The baskets at the foot of the trees are filled at times to overflowing. There are *belles de Choisy* English cherries morellos marascas Montmorency cherries *bigaudelles* white-hearts. They are black white red translucent. Wasps hornets are busy around the baskets. Their buzzing can be heard in

whatever part of the meadow one happens to be. The women climb into the trees, they descend arms laden with fruit. Some have baskets hooked to their belt. Some stand still at different heights on the rungs. Others move about among the branches. One sees them jump to the ground and get rid of their burden. The slanting rays of the sun glance over the leaves making them glitter. The sky is orange-coloured.

The women say that they expose their genitals so that the sun may be reflected therein as in a mirror. They say that they retain its brilliance. They say that the pubic hair is like a spider's web that captures the rays. They are seen running with great strides. They are all illuminated at their centre, starting from the pubes the hooded clitorides the folded double labia. The glare they shed when they stand still and turn to face one makes the eye turn elsewhere unable to stand the sight.

When the moon is full the drum is sounded on the main square. Trestle tables are erected. Glasses of every colour are put out and bottles containing differently coloured liquids. Some of these liquids are green red blue, they

evaporate if they are not used as soon as the cork that seals them has been drawn. Everyone may drink until she falls dead-drunk or until she has lost her self-control. The odour of the drugs which have been allowed to escape from the bottles stagnates on the square, sickeningly sweet. Everyone drinks in silence standing or lying down on carpets unrolled in the street. Then they have the little girls brought out. They are seen standing half asleep bewildered hesitant. They are invited to try their strength on the whimpering outstretched bodies. The children go from one to the other trying to wake them up, using stones buckets of water, shouting with all their might, squatting down to be at the level of the ears of the sleeping women.

Marthe Vivonne and Valerie Céru make a report. They say that the river is rising up between its banks. The fields of flowers by its banks are swept away by the waters. Avulsed corollas, upside down, eddy capsized in the current. All along the river there is an odour of putrescence. A noise like that of a broken flood-gate is heard. Overturned boats drift by. Whole trees are carried away, their fruit-laden branches trailing in the water. Marthe Vivonne and Valerie Céru say they have not seen any corpses of animals. They say that for a long while on the way back they heard the rushing of the river, the shock of the current against its bed.

AIMEE POMA BARBA
BENEDICTA SUSANNA
CASSANDRA OSMONDA
GENE HERMINIA KIKA
AURELIA EVANGELINE
SIMONA MAXIMILIANA

The excursions with the glenuri on their leashes are not without difficulty. Their long filiform bodies are supported on thousands of feet. They constantly endeavour to move away to some place other than where they are. Their innumerable eyes are grouped round an enormous orifice that serves them as a mouth as well as taking the place of a head. It is filled by a soft extensile membrane that can become taut or relaxed, each of its movements producing a different sound. The harmony of the glenuri may be compared to fifes drums the croaking of toads the miaowing of rutting cats the sharp sound of a flute. The excursions with the glenuri are constantly being interrupted. This is because they systematically insinuate themselves into any interstice that affords passage to their bodies, for example the gates of public gardens, the grills of drains. They enter these backwards, they are stopped at a given moment by the size of their heads, they find themselves trapped, they begin to utter frightful shrieks. Then they have to be freed.

The women say that in the feminary the glans of the clitoris and the body of the clitoris are described as

hooded. It is stated that the prepuce at the base of the glans can travel the length of the organ exciting a keen sensation of pleasure. They say that the clitoris is an erectile organ. It is stated that it bifurcates to right and left, that it is angled, extending as two erectile bodies applied to the pubic bones. These two bodies are not visible. The whole constitutes an intensely erogenous zone that excites the entire genital, making it an organ impatient for pleasure. They compare it to mercury also called quicksilver because of its readiness to expand, to spread, to change shape.

Daniela Nervi, while digging foundations, has unearthed a painting representing a young girl. She is all flat and white lying on one side. She has no clothes. Her breasts are barely visible on her torso. One of her legs, crossed over the other, raises her thigh, so concealing the pubis and vulva. Her long hair hides part of her shoulders. She is smiling. Her eyes are closed. She half leans on one elbow. The other arm is crooked over her head, the hand holding a bunch of black grapes to her mouth. The women laugh at this. They say that Daniela Nervi has not yet dug up the knife without a blade that lacks a handle.

Martha Ephore has made all the calculations. The engineers were mistaken. Or else the water arriving from the mountain slopes is insufficient to feed the lake beyond the barrage, even in time of spate. Or else they have been at fault over the position of the construction which they have sited too far upstream in relation to the junction of the water-courses. Every morning the engineers arrive at the dam which they patrol in all directions, marking the still fresh cement with the imprint of their feet, so that after they leave a team of masons have to busy themselves getting rid of them. Some of the women run with umbrellas held high, giving orders. Others walk about calmly. By the shore of the lake or what ought to be the lake young girls in bermudas stroll about holding each other by the hand.

The women say that the goddess Eristikos has a pin head and yellow eyes. They say that the goddess Eristikos adores perfumes. In her honour they wear next the skin garments made of fragrant herbs. They set them on fire at nightfall by putting a light to each sprig. They are grouped in circles, their garments are incandescent in the darkness. They stand motionless, arms extended on either side of their bodies. The burning herbs crackle and give off an odour. Smoke clouds disperse. When the heat reaches the skin they savagely tear off their tunics and cast them in a heap. That is why they must continually manufacture new ones.

CALYPSO JUDITH ANNE
ISEULT KRISTA ROBERTA
VLASTA CLEONICE RENEE
MARIA BEATRICE REINA
IDOMENEA GUILHERMINA
ARMIDE ZENOBIA LESSIA

hands, saying, I salute you, great Amaterasu, in the name of our mother, in the name of those who are to come. Our kingdom come. May this order be destroyed. May the good and the evil be cast down. They say that Clemence Maïeul often drew on the ground that O which is the sign of the goddess, symbol of the vulval ring.

The women say that any one of them might equally well invoke another sun goddess, such as Cihuacoatl, who is also a goddess of war. Thus on the occasion of the death of one of their number they might use the song of mourning which is a glorious song. Then they sing in unison, Strong and warlike daughter, my well-beloved daughter/valiant and tender little dove, my lady/you have striven and worked as a valiant daughter/you have overcome, you have acted like your mother the lady Cihuacoatl/you have fought with valour, you have used shield and sword/arise my daughter/go to that good place which is the house of your mother the sun/where all are filled with joy content and happiness.

There exists a machine to record divergences. It is placed on an agate plinth. This is a parallelepipedon of low stature, at the centre of a meadow studded with daisies in spring, marguerites in summer, white and blue saffron in the autumn. The calculations taking place within the machine are continuously registered as clicks clicking high-pitched sounds as of tinkling bells, noises like those of a cash-register. There are lights that go out and come on at irregular intervals of time. They are red orange blue. The apertures through which they shine are circular. Every divergence is ceaselessly recorded in the machine. They are scaled to the same unit whatever their nature. The position in the field of the machine for recording divergences resembles that of a certain fountain guarded by young girls bearing flaming swords. But the machine is not guarded. It is easy of access.

The women recall the story of the one who lived for a long time where the camels pass. Bareheaded beneath the sun, Clemence Maïeul incessantly invokes Amaterasu the sun goddess, cutting her abundant hair, abasing herself three times on the ground which she strikes with her

The women leap on the paths that lead to the village, shaking their hair, their arms laden with dog-faced baboons, stamping the ground with their feet. Someone stops, tears out a handful of her long hair and lets the strands go one by one with the wind. Like the balloons that little girls release on holidays, rising into the sky, light unsubstantial filiform and twisting, they are blown upward by the wind. Or perhaps the women sing in unison a song that includes these words, Who till now sucked at my nipple/a monkey. Then they throw down all the baboons and begin to run, chasing them into the shade of the wood until they have disappeared in the trees.

They say, how to decide that an event is worthy of remembrance? Must Amaterasu herself advance on the forecourt of the temple, her face shining, blinding the eyes of those who, prostrate, put their foreheads to the ground and dare not lift their heads? Must Amaterasu raising her circular mirror on high blaze forth with all her fires? Must the rays from her slanting mirror set fire to the ground beneath the feet of the women who have come to pay homage to the sun goddess, the greatest of the goddesses? Must her anger be exemplary?

IDO BLANCHE VALENTINA
GILBERTA FAUSTA MONIMA
GE BAUCIS SOPHIE ALICE
OCTAVIA JOSIANA GAIA
DEODATA KAHV VILAINÉ
ANGE FREDERICA BETJE

The women say that references to Amaterasu or Cihua-coatl are no longer in order. They say they have no need of myths or symbols. They say that the time when they started from zero is in process of being erased from their memories. They say they can barely relate to it. When they repeat, This order must be destroyed, they say they do not know what order is meant.

What was the beginning? they say. They say that in the beginning they are huddled against each other. They are like black sheep. They open their mouths to bleat or to say something but no sound emerges. Their hair their curls are plastered against their foreheads. They move over the smooth shining surface. Their movements are translation, gliding. They are dazed by the reflections over which they pass. Their limbs gain no adhesion anywhere. Vertically and horizontally, it is the same mirror neither hot nor cold, it is the same brilliance which nowhere holds them fast. They advance, there is no front, there is no rear. They move on, there is no future, there is no past. They move flung one against the other. The movements they initiate with their lower limbs or with their upper limbs multiply the changes of position. If there had been an initial change of position it would be a fact that contradicted their unchanging functioning. It would be a fundamental variation that contradicted the unitary system, it would introduce disorder. They come and go ensheathed in something black and glittering. The silence is absolute. If sometimes they try to stop

to listen to something, the sound of a train, a ship's siren, the music of X X, their attempt to halt propels them from one side to the other, makes them sway, gives them a fresh departure. They are prisoners of the mirror.

The women say that the feminary amuses the little girls. For instance three kinds of labia minora are mentioned there. The dwarf labia are triangular. Side by side, they form two narrow folds. They are almost invisible because the labia majora cover them. The moderate-sized labia minora resemble the flower of a lily. They are half-moon shaped or triangular. They can be seen in their entirety taut supple seething. The large labia spread out resemble a butterfly's wings. They are tall triangular or rectangular, very prominent.

They say that as possessors of vulvas they are familiar with their characteristics. They are familiar with the mons pubis the clitoris the labia minora the body and bulbs of the vagina. They say that they take a proper pride in that which has for long been regarded as the emblem of fecundity and the reproductive force in nature.

They say that the clitoris has been compared to a cherry-stone, a bud, a young shoot, a shelled sesame, an almond, a sprig of myrtle, a dart, the barrel of a lock. They say that the labia majora have been compared to the two halves of a shellfish. They say that the concealed face of the labia minora has been compared to the purple of Sidon, to tropic coral. They say that the secretion has been compared to iodized salt water.

They say that they have found inscriptions on plaster walls where vulvas have been drawn as children draw suns with multiple divergent rays. They say that it has been written that vulvas are traps vices pincers. They say that the clitoris has been compared to the prow of a boat to its stem to the comb of a shellfish. They say that vulvas have been compared to apricots pomegranates figs roses pinks peonies marguerites. They say these comparisons may be recited like a litany.

OTTONE KAMALA POMARA
SIGISMUNDA MARCELINA
GALATEA ZAIRE EVELINA
CONSTANCE ANNUNCIATA
VICTORIA MARGUERITE
ROSE JULIA AGLAË LEDA