

Chronicles of a Village
by Nguyễn Thanh Hiện

Nguyễn Hoàng Quyên translates from the Vietnamese

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these are the chronicles of my village, always bearing the traits of nostalgia, remembrance, stories of yesterday, yesteryear, yestercentury or yestermillennia, lucid and precise, yet cloudy and buoyant, an abundance of news, an overabundance perhaps, reads like some sort of novel, or some kind of novella, or some minor essay shaped into literary form, they, the news that always expands, contracts, urges, pressures, evokes, invokes, at last they lead to apparently inevitable explosions, shattering the burnished grandiose narratives that keep trying to conceal the fatal historical disabilities of a land.

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these are the chronicles of my village, always bearing the traits of nostalgia, remembrance, stories of yesterday, yesteryear, yestercentury or yestermillennia, and i don't quite have the strength to arrange them chronologically, because in my memory, the past is a collection of motley beings that know how to eat and how to breathe, sometimes they make me endlessly baffled, if not stone-blind before the world.

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in my village there were sounds that felt regular like rainfall, not entirely like rainfall, more like someone was drumming a beat in the forest, transmitted from one generation to another, as if there could be no other way, and so, regular like rainfall, the past resembles persistent beings nested in my memory, i still remember in my village there were sounds as if someone was drumming a beat in the forest, while i went to the fields to

chase away the birds, i went to the fields to chase away the rice-stealing birds, the month of december, ripe rice, the birds returned, the grey vault of sky kept lowering, lowering, as if sieges of secrets were pressing on my troubled thoughts, the month of december, rice fields ripened, i, the birds, and the breed of sound like someone is drumming a beat in the forest, the language of objects procreated since the day humans saw the connection between things, the language of the wind chime, the breed of sound like someone was drumming a beat in the forest, summoned in the fault-ridden river, summoned as the deer stole from the forest, as the birds stole from the humans, the month of december, upland rice ripened, the birds returned, the vault of sky above the fields seemed to forget that it was an era of sharp distinctions, of disoriented, agitated, dissatisfied beings across misty borders, a human walked in the middle of the inevitable transformation, carrying the body of an immense sky as well as the minutiae of subjects bloated with earthly myopia, i went to the fields to keep the birds from stealing the ripening rice of my family, and yet i ended up mesmerized by them, craning my neck heavenward to see if i could see the bird in the fable my mother once told, *one day the bird returned to perch on the edge of the backyard well, there's a guest, there's a guest*, cried the bird perching on the edge of the well in my mother's tale, why would a bird call itself a guest of the humans, why was i out in the fields chasing away the guests of humans, i went to the fields to chase away the birds and yet i could hear a wavering within, all of a sudden the winds of dawn emerged, the wind chime was again stirring in the air as if someone was drumming a beat in the forest, the birds swooped down on my family rice field only to hurriedly soar away, why would guests of humans steal from humans, the winds ceased again, the wind chime was no longer moving, the birds once more swooped down on my family rice field, only much later, endowed with the humble capital of bookish knowledge, did i finally contemplate my way into the rhythm of being, the wind made the wind chime vibrate, the birds from the rice fields flew skyward, wayworn after the journey, ecstatic dreams coalesced into the pillar that carried the weight of the house of being, consciousness or contemplation, all the same, is a manifestation of it, someone gave the pillar a name, someone conscious of the central pillar in the house of being, at dawn one could hear the wind blowing over the mountaintop, or rather, the wind blowing over the fields in my village, making the wind chime quiver into sound as if someone was drumming a beat in the forest, the birds stole rice, and did not steal rice, i sat down on the edge of the rice fields to gaze at the birds, the wind chime kept stirring the air as if someone was drumming a beat in the forest, i hurriedly raised

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my arm heavenward, i raised my waving arm, now i no longer could tell whether i was chasing away the birds or waving at the birds, as if there was still something shared here between heaven and earth, all was one, Parmenides from ancient Greece once said, it seemed that the ripening rice fields, the birds, the wind chime and i all took flight from a common

passage of birthing.

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