

## Prayer for Vicente

You were vigorous, always speaking truth.  
They—the law, corridor and badge—  
chained your neck to a river stump  
and laughed as you choked on toxic water,  
sinking out of Argentina like a scuttled barge.

Now, free of all the attachments and turmoils  
I drink glasses of yellow liquid  
which dribbles, under pressure from a city tap  
and stinks of you, poetic amphibian,  
your brain confined to mud, lips  
gelatinous like the skins of priests;  
what exudes is  
truth, indulgent, strained—  
the sharp mineral majesty of golden poison-cups.

God, hear me out:

that church, low-roofed, once beautiful  
with children singing and the blind man's  
well-fed gentle rat;  
that holy annex now off-limits, crowded  
with contraband;  
that purple cluster of flowers grown  
through the jeep track by the guardhouse,  
growing, pushing, wild things  
hopeless in their colours  
as the mandates of Nietzsche.

Christ, tell your father  
of that fugitive—proud, unarmed,  
arrested with rapid vanity, meeting torture  
and death unfairly, struggling to the end  
to continue breathing; tell him  
of the boy soldier Vicente,  
unable to fire the head-shot,  
who gave the poet cigarettes until the bleeding  
stopped  
then rolled the corpse into a ditch, hitched  
his long ride home on a manure truck  
while generals with dyed hair and foreign whores  
dined with cardinals.

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