

Tepeyolotl* Heart of the Mountain

by Efraín Bartolomé

The big cat still arrived to do damage at times

Rumors were still heard
It was said that a flash of lightning entered and left no trace
other than some blood stains

The hair on the back still stood on end
before the sunken track —well marked in the fresh mud—
on the bank of certain streams where *that* smell remained impregnated

We still found at times his violent claw marks on some tree trunks
We still heard of him
He still ventured upon the pioneer cows
in the new pastures of the mountain

At times male and female dared
and they prowled around the house at night
They drove the dogs mad
and the dogs woke everyone up
They made the farmhands turn pale and take hold of their machetes
They caused the women of the farms to recite prayers
and they didn't leave until the owners took their always-loaded rifles
and shouted and opened the door
and went out with their big lights on their heads
and fired from the corridor against the intense night
and the impassive starry sky

A piece of the sky fell on the back of the beast
and accentuated his shine

I still remember that double light close to the ground
between the sapodilla tree and the *guapac* tree:
the two eyes blazed in the dense darkness

I still remember the arrival of the mule drivers that afternoon
and how at night they released their abundant herd in the tall grass
I still remember the uproar in the early morning
And the crazed neighing
And the thick snorting
And the fear



* Unpublished. Soon to be included in the next edition of *Ojo de jaguar*.

I remember well the violent galloping that approached:
the great drove of mules ran toward the house seeking protection
“*El tigre* becomes brave during a full moon” said a cowboy

I still remember the mule that escaped: it came snorting
—wide-eyed— “trembling like a person”:
gushing blood from its hind quarters

That’s how we saw it before it fell as if dead
and showed its shredded rump:
the skin cut in narrow strips with perfect parallel incisions
as if traced with a *gillette*

I still remember that our cousin from the city wet himself when he saw that
I still remember the eyes of that mule
and its trembling under that sublunar shine
and a desire to not go far from the corral in the days that followed

The hurricane still entered the palm-thatched huts from time to time

We still heard of him

It was still said that a flash of lightning entered
and left no trace other than some blood stains
from that baby “who wasn’t even baptized”
and who he found sleeping in a small hammock

He still defended his territory

He still descended to earth to drink blood

When that happened:
when he sprang from the day or from the night
he left for a long time that atmosphere like dry rain
that memory like a storm
haunting the country house

Little by little they were done away with:
now even their skins aren’t seen at the ranches

Little by little the blood of the victims dried up

Little by little the spirit of the people dried up

There barely remains a vague memory of that flash of lightning on earth.



Translated by Danion L. Doman