

VIRGILIO PIÑERA

The Fall (1944)

translated by Mark Weiss

We had scaled the three-thousand-foot mountain. Not to bury a capsule there at the peak, nor to raise the flag of the bold alpine climbers. After a few minutes, we began the descent. My companion followed me, bound, as is usual in these situations, by the same rope that ringed against my waist. I figure we had descended exactly ninety-eight feet when one of my companion's cleated boots glanced off a rock, causing him to lose his balance and somersault ahead of me. Since the rope wound between my legs, it jerked me hard, and to avoid being tossed over the edge, I had to twist around backwards. He, in turn, directed his fall to the spot I had just occupied. His decision was neither ridiculous nor absurd; on the contrary, he was responding to a profound understanding of those situations still unlisted in the manuals. The force of his movement caused a slight adjustment, and I suddenly saw my companion passing like a meteorite between my legs, and then the jolt from the rope -- fastened, as I mentioned, to his back -- turned me around into my original position of descent. He, undoubtedly obeying the same physical laws as I, and having traveled the distance permitted by the rope, was flipped over backwards, which naturally brought us face to face. We didn't say a word, but both of us knew that the headlong fall was inevitable. And so it happened that, after an indefinite period of time, we began to fall. Because my sole concern was to avoid losing my eyes, I put all my effort into preserving them from the terrible effects of the fall. As for my companion, his only worry was that his beautiful beard -- colored an admirable gray like gothic glass -- reach the plain intact, not even slightly dusty. So, with utmost determination, I covered the bearded portion of his face with my hands; he, in turn, placed his

This reader has been assembled by Slow Reading Club (Bryana Fritz and Henry Andersen) for a collective reading session taking place at Kunsthall Mechelen on May 17, 2025. It has been composed as a response to the exhibition eye
below

ear, curated by Alicja Melzacka. It extends Slow Reading Club's work with Piñera for the exhibition or it amplifies the gaps, or it mimics the doubles.

The reader is considered study material, for use within the collective reading session and may not be sold or distributed outside of that context.

hands over my eyes. Our velocity was increasing by the second, as is required in these cases of bodies falling through space. Suddenly, I looked through the slight spaces between his fingers and saw a sharp rock graze the top of his head. Suddenly I had to turn my own head to confirm that my legs had been separated from my torso by a rock, possibly of calcereous origin, whose serrated edge severed anything that came against it with the perfection of a saw used in the construction of ocean liners. With some effort, it is only fair to admit, we were saving my companion, his beautiful beard, and me, my eyes. It is true that now and then -- every fifty feet or so, as I calculate it -- a part of our bodies would be separated from us. For example, during five such intervals, we lost my companion, his left ear, his right elbow, a leg (I don't remember which), his testicles, and his nose; I, the upper part of the thorax, my spinal cord, my left eyebrow, my left ear, and my jugular vein. But this is nothing compared to what followed. A thousand feet above the plain, all we had left respectively was the following: my companion, his two hands (only to the carpal bones) and his beautiful gray beard; I, my two hands (also only to the carpal bones) and my eyes. A slight fear began to possess us. What if our hands were torn away by another boulder? We kept falling. Approximately ten feet above the plain, a pole left out by a worker capriciously caught the hands of my companion. Seeing my own orphaned eyes left totally unprotected, I must confess with eternal, unforgettable shame, I withdrew my hands from his beautiful gray beard to protect my eyes from any impact. I was unable to cover them, for my hands were immediately caught in the same fashion by another pole pointing in a different direction from the aforementioned pole, at which point we were separated from each other for the first time during the entire descent. But I couldn't complain; my eyes landed safe and sound on the grassy plain and could see a little ways off, the beautiful gray beard of my companion, shining in all its glory.

THERESA HAK KYUNG CHA

Dictée (1982)

Open paragraph It was the first day period She had come from afar period tonight at dinner comma the families would ask comma open quotation marks How was the first day interrogation mark close quotation marks at least to say the least of it possible comma the answer would be comma open quotation marks there is but one thing period There is someone from afar period close quotation marks

—

She mimics the speaking. That might resemble speech. (Anything at all.) Bared noise, groan, bits torn from words. She hesitates to measure the accuracy, she resorts to mimicking gestures with the mouth. The entire lower lip would lift upwards then sink back to its original place. She would then gather both lips and protrude them in a pout taking in the breath that might utter some thing. (One thing. Just one.) But the breath falls away. With a slight tilting of her head backwards, she would gather the strength in her shoulders and remain in this position.

It murmurs inside. It murmurs. Inside is the pain of speech the pain to say. Larger still. Greater than is the pain not to say. To not say. Says nothing against the pain to speak. It festers inside. The wound, liquid, dust. Must break, must void.

Free the back of her neck she releases her shoulders free. She swallows once more. (Once more. One more time would do.) In preparation. It augments. To such a pitch. Endless drone, refueling