

Pablo Neruda

Residencia en la Tierra

A Stay on Earth

(1925-1931)

Translated by Lewis Hyde

I

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## DEAD GALLOP

Like ashes, like seas breeding into themselves,  
in the sunken slowness, in the formless,  
or the way one hears from high up on the roads  
the strokes of a bell crossing in a cross,  
having that sound already separate from the metal,  
confused, acting heavy, working itself to dust  
in the same grinding place of forms so far away,  
or remembered or not seen,  
and the aroma of the plums that rolling to the ground  
are rotting in time, infinitely green.

All of that going so fast, so lively,  
but still not moving, like an idle wheel spinning on itself  
those wheels in motors, that is.  
Existing like the dry stitches on the seams of a tree,  
quieted, all over the place, in such a way,  
all the limbos mixing up their tails.  
That is, where to? or from? or on what shore?  
The ceaseless, uncertain spinning, so silent,  
like the lilacs all around the nunnery,  
or when death comes to the tongue of an ox  
who falls headlong (look out!) and his horns want to blow.

So therefore, in the motionlessness, stopping oneself, looking  
around,  
then, like an immense fluttering of wings, overhead,  
like dead bees or numbers,  
aw, that thing my white heart cannot enclose,  
in great numbers, in tears that barely seep out,  
people trying so hard, miseries,  
black deeds suddenly uncovered  
like frost, huge disorder,  
sea-like, for me who comes in singing  
as if carrying a sword among unarmed men.

O.K. then, what is it makes up this rising of doves  
that runs between night and time like a wet ravine?  
That sound that's gone on so long  
that it falls scattering stones on the road,  
or better, when only one hour  
suddenly starts growing and keeps on growing forever.

Inside the ring of summer  
one time the huge gourd-plants pay attention--  
stretching out their compassionate leaves--  
out of that, out of the thing that needs so much from itself,  
out of the fullness, plants darkened with heavy drops.

## ALLIANCE (SONATA)

With glances filled with dust, fallen to the floor  
or with the soundless leaves that are burying themselves.  
With metals that have no light, having emptiness,  
having the absence of the day that fell dead all of a sudden.  
And high up in your hands the shining out of butterflies,  
the drawing out of butterflies whose light has no end.

You used to guard the trail of light, of broken beings  
that the abandoned sun tosses to the churches as it sets.  
Darkened by glances, by the stuff of bees,  
your material, like an unexpected fire that runs away,  
precedes and follows the day, its family of gold.

Lurking around, the days try to get by in secret  
but they fall inside your voice of light.  
Oh lady of love, along your slowness  
I have laid out my dream, my quiet path.

With your body like a timid number that gets suddenly extended  
out to the quantities that mark the edges of the earth,  
behind the quarreling of the days, days made white by space,  
days made cold by slow deaths and dried-up sensations,  
I feel your low belly burning and your kisses going by  
forming fresh swallows in my dream.

Sometimes the thing that your tears have become  
climbs up to my forehead like age, and there  
the breakers are beating, breaking themselves with death:  
their motion is humid and decaying, final.

# THE HORSE OF DREAMS

Seeing myself in mirrors, useless,  
with a liking for weeks and movie theatres and papers,  
I pull the captain of hell out of my heart,  
I set down sad clauses no one can define.

I wander around, soaking up illusions,  
I chat with the tailors in their nests:  
every once in awhile they sing the cold, dead song  
that scares away the evil spirits.

Up in heaven there is an endless country.  
It has the rainbow's superstitious carpets  
and foliage like the evening prayer:  
I am going there, no without a certain fatigue, (t)  
walking on the earth taken from rather fresh graves.  
I am dreaming among those vague green plants.

(t) I walk on through used-up documents, through starting-places,  
dressed like the first people, the discouraged people:  
These are the things I love: the worn-out honey of respect,  
the sweet catechism in whose pages  
the violets are sleeping, grown old and faded;  
and the brooms, so helpful and compassionate,  
looking, no doubt, full of sorrow and certainty.  
I destroy the whistling rose and the happy nervousness:  
I break the cherished edges: and even more  
I wait for a time without time, without clocks:  
a taste I have in my soul depresses me.

What a day has come to me! What light honors me!  
How milky it is, tactile and thick!  
I have heard its red horse whinny,  
naked, shoeless and shining.  
It carries me up over the churches  
and we gallop through the barracks abandoned by the soldiers  
and an impure army chases me.  
His eucalyptus-leaf eyes steal the shadows  
and his bell-like body gallops, gallop and gong.

I need a flash of lightning that won't stop shining,  
I need a fun-loving mourner to come take my inheritance.

# THE DAWN'S FRAIL...

The day of the people without luck, the pale day starts to seep out  
with a cutting, frigid smell, with all its glory turned grey,  
(no little bells) dripping the dawn all over the place:  
it's a shipwreck in nothing, everything soaked in tears.

Because the damp, quiet shadow has given up everywhere,  
given up the useless complaints, so many earth-bound places  
where it had to take over all the way down to the pattern of roots,  
because it's gone away from all the sturdy form that was defending.  
I am crying in this invaded place, in this confusion,  
in the growing taste, putting my ear  
in the pure circulation, in the growth,  
adrift, yielding the path to this rising thing,  
to this thing coming up in chains and carnations,  
I am dreaming, still holding up my moral remains.

There's nothing hurried, nothing happy, no self-confident form,  
everything seems to be making itself in obvious poverty,  
the earth's light comes from beneath its eyelids  
not like the ringing bell but more like tears:  
the day's bit of weaving, its frail linen,  
we could use it to bandage the sick, we could wave  
good-bye with it, in back of the absent thing:  
this is the color that just wants to replace,  
cover and drink and conquer, invent distances.  
I am alone among all this worn-down stuff  
and the rain falls on me and it resembles me,  
it resembles me with its extravagance, all alone in the dead world,  
forced into falling, with no form of its own.

# UNITY

Some unity, some dense thing, sits on the bottom  
saying its number, its same sign, over and over.  
It's so clear the stones have brushed against time,  
their fine material smells like age  
and the water the sea brings, full of salt and dreams.

A similar thing, just one motion, surrounds me:  
the weight of the mineral, the light of the skin,  
stick to the sound of the word night:  
the ink of wheat, of ivory, of weeping,  
things made of leather, of wood, of wool,  
grown old and colorless and alike,  
these all cluster about me like walls.

I work like a deaf man, circling above myself  
the way the crow circles over death, the crow in mourning.  
I am thinking, alone in the endless part of seasons,  
in the middle, encircled by geography that won't talk:  
an incomplete temperature falls from the sky,  
a powerful empire of chaotic unities  
comes together again, closing me in.

## A TASTE

Out of false astrologies, out of such dismal customs,  
poured into endlessness and forever carried at the side,  
I have saved an inclination, a solitary taste.

Out of conversations that are worn down like old boards,  
as meek as chairs, with words kept in service  
like slaves to a secondhand desire,  
having that consistency of milk, of the dead weeks,  
of the air chained on top of cities.

Who could boast of any firmer patience?  
My common sense wraps me up in a tight skin  
the color of reunion, like a snake:  
my creatures are born out of a long rejection:  
aw, with a little alcohol I could say good-by to this day  
that I've chosen, the same as all the days on earth.

I live full of a common-colored substance that's silent  
like an old mother, a patience that's steady  
like a church's shadow or the sleep of bones.  
I go about full of those profoundly laid out waters,  
readied, sleeping sadly at attention.

My guitar-like insides have an ancient air,  
dry and resonant, permanent, never moving,  
like a faithful food, like smoke:  
an element at rest, a living oil:  
a bird of sternness guards my head:  
a changeless angel lives in my sword.



## THE ABSENCE OF JOACHÍN

From now, like a parting that took place far away,  
in the funeral stations of smoke, on lonely docks,  
from now I see him tumbling into his death,  
and I can feel the days of time shut behind him.  
From now, harshly, I can feel that he's leaving,  
tumbling into the waters, into certain waters, into a certain sea,  
and then, as he strikes, the drops lift up, and I feel a noise,  
I feel a decided and deaf noise making itself  
a splash of water whipped up by his weight,  
and from some place, from some place I feel these waters leap  
and splatter,  
these waters are splattering all over me, living like acid.

His habits of dreaming and of endless nights,  
his disobedient soul, his prepared pallor,  
all of these sleep with him at last, and he sleeps,  
because at the sea of dead people his energy falls right down,  
violently sinking in, coldly joining in.

## MADRIGAL WRITTEN IN WINTER

In the deep of the deepest sea,  
in the night of endless lists,  
the way a horse crosses galloping  
your quieted quieted name.

Shelter me in your shoulder, ay, protect me,  
appear me in your mirror, suddenly,  
over the lonely, nocturnal foil,  
blooming out of the dark, behind you.

Flower of the soft and rounded light,  
attend me your mouth of kisses,  
violent from parting,  
fine and determined mouth.

So then, in the long and the long,  
from forgetfulness to forgetfulness, the rails  
and the cry of the rain share my room:  
things the dark night keeps alive.

Receive me in the afternoon of thread,  
when the arrival of night fashions  
its clothing and a wind-filled star  
is pulsing in the heavens.

Bring your absence down to me,  
heavily, covering up my eyes,  
and cross me with your life, supposing  
that my heart is destroyed.

## GHOST

How you rise out of the past, arriving,  
pale and dazzled student;  
the steady, swollen months  
still ask your voice for comfort.

Those eyes used to fight like oarsmen  
in the dead infinity  
with hope for dreams and the stuff  
of beings coming out of the sea.

From the distance where  
the smell of the earth is different  
and the evening comes weeping  
shaped like dark poppies.

At the height of unmoving days  
the insensitive, daylight young man  
used to sleep on your light ray  
confidently as if on a sword.

All the while the loneliness-flower grows  
in forgetfulness in the shade  
of endless time, moist, spread out,  
like the earth in a long winter.

## SLOW LAMENT

In the night of the heart  
the drop of your slow name  
flows and falls and breaks  
and unrolls its water in silence.

Something wants its subtle pain  
and its infinite, short affection,  
like a lost person's footstep  
suddenly heard.

Suddenly, suddenly listened to  
and spread around in the heart  
with sad persistence and growth  
like a cold dream of autumn.

The earth's thick wheel  
sets the damp rim of forgetfulness  
rolling, cutting time  
into halves that can't be reached.

Their hard bowls cover your soul  
spilled out over the cold earth  
with its poor blue sparks  
flying in the voice of the rain.

## NIGHTTIME COLLECTION

I have beaten the angel of dream, the mournful, allegorical:  
 he wouldn't stop trying, his dense footstep is coming  
 all wrapped in snails and crickets,  
 sea-like, perfumed with sharp fruit.

This is the wind that shakes the months, a train whistle,  
 the temperature passing over the bed,  
 the opaque noise of a shadow  
 that drops into endlessness like a rag,  
 distances that keep repeating, a wine whose color is confused,  
 a dusty passing of bellowing cows.

Sometimes his big black basket falls on my chest,  
 his bags full of authority cut into my shoulders,  
 his great quantity of salt, his half-opened army  
 runs over and turns over the things in heaven:  
 and he gallops in our breathing and his footstep is a kiss:  
 and, with essential energy, with dignity of design,  
 he plants his sure saltpeter in our eyelids:  
 he comes into places that are ready as if he owned them:  
 suddenly, noiselessly, he prepares his substance  
 and nothing stops him from spreading out his prophetic food.

Quite often I'll recognize his soldiers,  
 their size, their arms all rusted by the air,  
 and he needs space so violently  
 that he climbs down into my heart searching for it:  
 he is the keeper of tablelands no one can get to,  
 he dances with tragic people and with ordinary people:  
 at night his airy acid breaks into my skin  
 and deep inside of me I hear his instrument trembling.

I hear the dreams of old friends and women I've loved,  
 dreams whose pulse breaks me down:  
 I pace their carpet stuff in silence,  
 I chew deliriously at their poppy light.

What opaque cities I run through  
 with these sleeping corpses who often dance  
 tied to the weight of my heart!  
 My dusky shadow-steed swells up like a giant,  
 and over the aged gamblers, over the whore houses with worn  
     out stairways,  
 over the beds of naked girls, between football players,

we go, tight-waisted with the wind:  
 and then those smooth fruits of the sky fall into our mouths,  
 the birds, the ringing convent bells, the comets:  
 that one who fed himself on pure geography and shuddering,  
 maybe that one saw us go sparkling by.

My comrades, far away on a broken and fugitive ship,  
 their heads resting on barrels,  
 friends of mine without tears, women with cruel faces: (e)  
 midnight has come and a death gong  
 clangs all about me like the sea.  
 There's a taste in my mouth, the salt of the sleeper.

The paleness of the sluggish district attends  
 each body as faithfully as a death sentence:  
 a cold smile, sunken,  
 eyes covered up like tired boxers,  
 a breathing that devours ghosts, deafly.

The air is criminal in that dampness of birth,  
 with that gloomy occasion, closed up like a storeroom:  
 there the walls have a sad crocodile color,  
 the make-up of a sinister spider:  
 you walk on softness the way you step over a dead monster:  
 the huge, bulging black grapes  
 dangle from the ruins like wine skins:  
 when the time comes to size us up, oh Captain,  
 open the voiceless locks and wait for me:  
 in there we should dine dressed in mourning:  
 the one who's sick with malaria will guard the doors.

My heart, it's late and without shores,  
 the day, like a poor table-cloth put out to dry,  
 is waving surrounded by beings and extension:  
 in the atmosphere there is a piece of every living being:  
 and if you look closely at the air beggars begin to appear,  
 lawyers, bandits, postmen, dressmakers,  
 and a little bit of every occupation, a humiliated remains  
 that wants to work at its task inside of us.  
 I am searching from long ago, I inquire without arrogance,  
 beaten, no doubt, by the evening.

## WE TWO TOGETHER

You are so pure, made from the sun or the fallen night,  
 your white orbit is so triumphal, measureless,  
 and your breast of bread with its elevated climate,  
 your crown of black trees, beloved one,  
 and your lonesome animal nose, nose of a wild sheep  
 that smells of shadow and of sudden, tyrannical flight.

Now then, ~~what splendid weapons are~~ my hands <sup>are such splendid weapons,</sup>  
~~now identified~~ their bone shovel and their fingernail lily, <sup>are so dignified</sup>  
 and the position of my face, and the rental of my soul  
 are located here on the justness of earthly power.  
 My vision that works like the night is so pure,  
 fallen from dark eyes and a ferocious need,  
 (m) and this symmetrical statue of mine with its twin legs  
 rises up every morning to the wet stars,  
 my manly arms, my tattooed chest  
 where the fuzzy hairs stick in like a tin wing,  
 my white face formed for the deepness of the sun,  
 my hair made of rituals, of black minerals,  
 my forehead going into things like a blow or a road,  
 my skin, skin of the mature son, destined for the plow,  
 my eyes with their eager salt, eyes of a quick marriage,  
 my tongue, soft girlfriend to the dike and the boat,  
 my teeth like a white schedule, symmetrically impartial, (m)  
 the skin that forms an empty place at my forehead  
 and then turns on my shoulder and is flying in my eyelids,  
 and folds back over my deepest sensation,  
 and grows down to the roses on my fingers  
 and on my bone chin, roses on my luxurious feet.

And you, like a month of stars, like a steady kiss,  
 like the structure of a wing, or the first signs of autumn,  
 girl, my partisan, my lover,  
 the light makes its bed under your huge eyelids,  
 golden like oxen, and within you the rounded dove  
 keeps on building her white nests.

Your mad-apple health stretches out without limit,  
 made of white pinchers and the metal bloom of waves;  
 the trembling cask where your stomach is listening,  
 your hands, daughters of the wheat flour and the sky.

You look so much like the longest kiss,  
 its fixed shaking seems to feed you,  
 the push of its ember, of its overturned banner,  
 goes pulsing through your kingdoms, rising up trembling,  
 and then your head turns thin with hair,  
 and its warrior shape, its dry circle,  
 suddenly collapses into lines of thread  
 like the edges of swords or the last remains of smoke.

## TYRANNY

Oh heartless lady, daughter of heaven  
help me in this lonesome hour  
with your weapon's frank indifference  
and your cold feel for forgetfulness.

An entire time like an ocean,  
a confused hurt like a newborn being  
cling to the thick root of my soul  
chewing at the center of my security.

Such a heavy pulse shakes my heart  
like a wave made out of all the waves,  
and my desperate skull lifts itself up  
in an effort to leap or to die.

Some unfriendly thing trembles in my certainty,  
growing from the same place my tears grow,  
like a plant, thorny and hard,  
made of bitter, chained-up leaves.



## SERENADE

The color of poppies lies down on your forehead,  
an echo of the widow's black dress, oh pitied one:  
when you run behind the trains, in the fields,  
the skinny workman turns his back  
and the sweet bullfrogs bloom, trembling, from your footprints.

The young boy without memories waves and inquires about  
his forgotten purpose,  
his hands move through your atmosphere like birds,  
and everything near him is heavy with water:  
crossing through his unfinished thoughts,  
trying to get ahold of something, oh, hunting for you,  
his pale eyes pulse in your net  
like lost instruments that suddenly flash.

O I remember that first day of thirst,  
the darkness closed in against the jasmine flowers,  
you used to pull back into your deep body  
also, like a drop, trembling.

But you quiet the great trees, and above the moon, overdistance,  
you watch over the sea like a thief.  
I'm desperate. Oh night, my overtaken soul  
asks you for the metal that it needs.

## SUNLIT SUFFERING

From the passion that's left over and dreams of ashes  
 I come with a colorless canopy and an obvious cortege,  
 a metal wind that lives alone,  
 a mortal servant dressed in hunger,  
 and in the freshness that comes down from the tree, in the  
     sun's essence  
 that puts its astral health into flowers,  
 when pleasure comes to my gold-like skin,  
 you, coral ghost with tiger's feet,  
 you, funeral occasion, igneous gathering,  
 trying to trap this land where I manage to live  
 with your moon spears that tremble a little.

Because the window that the empty noon cuts across,  
 no matter when, has a better air on its wings,  
 frenzy puffs the suit up and the dream puffs up the hat,  
 an extreme bee burns and keeps on burning.  
 Now, what unexpected footstep is crunching down the roads?  
 What dismal station's steam, what crystal face,  
 and more than that, what is that noise of an old cart full of corn?  
 Ay, one by one, the wave that weeps and the salt that breaks  
     itself to bits,  
 and the time for heavenly love that goes flying by,  
 these have spoken like guests, these have made a space in the waiting.

Out of distance taken to its end, out of faithless resentments,  
 out of hereditary hopes blended with shadow,  
 out of tearingly sweet favours  
 and days like a vein of clear rock and a flowery statue,  
 what lives on in my scanty conclusion, in my frail production?

Who isn't missing and, at the same time, a neighbor  
 in my yellow bed and my starry substance?  
 I have an effort that jumps, an arrow of wheat,  
 and an arc on my chest that's clearly waiting,  
 and a thin heartbeat made of water and stamina,  
 like a thing that breaks itself down forever.  
 It cuts into the bottom of my separations,  
 it puts out my power and puts up my pain.

## MONSOON IN MAY

The season's wind, the green wind  
 loaded with space and water, experienced in misery,  
 rolls up its banner made of sad leather,  
 made of some disintegrated substance, like the coins of charity:  
 thus, cold and plated with silver, a day has been covered up,  
 as fragil as the crystal sword of a giant,  
 among so many forces that protect its timid sigh  
 and its falling tear and its useless sand,  
 surrounded by powers that cross and creak,  
 like a man in a battle without any clothes  
 lifting up his white branch, his uncertain certainty,  
 his drop of shivering salt in the middle of the invasion.

With such a weak flame and such an unsteady fire  
 what relaxation could I begin, what poor hope could I love?  
 What'll we raise the hungry hatchet against?  
 Get out of what material, run away from what lighting?  
 Its light, barely made of length and trembling,  
 trails like the train of a sad bride's dress  
 adorned with mortal dreams and whiteness.  
 Because everything that the shadow touched and chaos coveted  
 presses down, liquid, suspended, deprived of peace,  
 defenceless between spaces, beaten by death.

Ay, and it always happens that a hoped-for day--  
 toward which letters, ships, businesses raced--  
 dies, sedentary and damp, with no sky of its own.  
 Where is its tent full of odor, its deep foliage,  
 its quick cloud bank like a hot coal, its living breath?  
 The day, standing there, dressed in a dying glow and an opaque  
     fish scale,  
 will see the rain divide into its two halves  
 and fit them tightly to the water-fed wind.

## THE ART OF POETRY

Between shadow and space, between army posts and virgins,  
given a singular heart and mournful dreams,  
so quickly pale, my forehead withered,  
every day of my life dressing me in the mourning clothes  
of an enraged widower,  
ay, for every invisible water that I drink sleepily  
and from all the sound I take in, trembling,  
I have the same absent thirst and the same cold fever  
an ear that's being born, an off-center anguish  
as if thieves or ghosts might come in,  
and in a husk with fixed and profound extension,  
like a humiliated waiter, like a slightly hoarse bell,  
like an old mirror, like the smell of an empty house  
where the guests come in at night, hopelessly drunk,  
and there's a smell of clothing thrown on the floor, and the  
absence of flowers.

--perhaps put in some other less melancholy way--  
but, the truth, suddenly, the wind that whips my chest,  
the nights made of an infinite substance, that fall down in my bedroom,  
the noise of a day that burns in sacrifice  
all of these things are begging me, sadly, for my prophetic vision,  
and there's a knocking of objects that call out and aren't answered,  
and a movement that never lets up, and a confused name.

**THE SHADOWY SYSTEM**

From each one of those days that are black like old bits of iron,  
and opened up by the sun like big red oxen,  
and barely held up by the air and by dreams,  
and suddenly, irrecoverably removed from sight,  
nothing has taken the place of my troubled beginning,  
and the unequal measures that flow through my heart  
are scheming there, day and night, all alone,  
and they enclose disordered and sad quantities.

So then, like a lookout who has turned senseless and blind,  
incredulous and condemned to a painful spying,  
in front of the wall where all the days of time unite,  
my different faces seek shelter and link themselves together  
like huge flowers, heavy and pale,  
stubbornly substituted and finished.

## ADONIC ANGEL

Today I lay beside a pure girl  
as if by the shore of a white ocean  
as if at the center of a burning star  
of slow space.

From her lengthy green look  
the light fell like a dry water  
in transparent and deep circles  
of fresh force.

Her breast, like a fire with two flames,  
burned in two places lifted up,  
and came to her feet in a double river,  
large and clear.

A golden climate barely ripened  
the daylight contours of her body  
filling it up with expanded fruit  
and hidden fire.

## SONATA AND DESTRUCTIONS

After so much, after vague distances,  
having only confused kingdoms and uncertain territories,  
traveling with my poor hopes,  
my unfaithful companions and suspicious dreams,  
I love the firmness that still survives in my eyes,  
I hear my rider galloping in my heart,  
I eat away at the sleeping fire and the ruined salt,  
and at night, in the dark air, in the fugitive mourning clothes,  
I feel I'm the one who guards the edges of encampments,  
I'm the traveler armed with sterile resistances,  
stopped among lengthening shadows and trembling wings  
and my stone arm defends me.

Among the studies of weeping there is a confused alter,  
and when I sit with the evenings that have no perfume,  
in my abandoned bedrooms where the moon is living,  
and the spiders of my estate, and the destructions that are so dear to me,  
I am fond of my own lost being, my imperfect substance,  
my silver attack and my eternal loss.  
The damp grape burned, and its funeral water  
is still shaking, still staying,  
and the sterile patrimony, and the trecherous household.

Who made a ceremony of ashes?  
Who loved what is lost, who protected what is final?  
The father's bone, the dead ship's wood,  
and his own end, his similar escape,  
his sad force, his miserable god?

So I am lying in wait for what is inanimate and painful,  
and the strange witness that I carry,  
with cruel efficiency and written in ashes,  
is the form of forgetfulness that I prefer,  
the name I give to the earth, the worth of my dreams,  
the unending quantity I split up  
with my winter eyes, during each day of this world.

II



## THE NIGHT OF THE SOLDIER

I perform the night of the soldier, the time of the man who doesn't get depressed or destroyed, of the guy who's been thrown away by the ocean and a wave, who doesn't know that the bitter water has set him apart and that he's growing old, little by little and without fear, who dedicates himself to all the accepted parts of life, no catastrophes, no absences, living inside of his skin and his clothes, quite sincerely hidden. So then here I am with my happy, stupid buddies who smoke and spit and get horrendously drunk, and who fall down all of a sudden, sick to death. Because, where is the soldier's aunt, his girlfriend, his mother-in-law, his sister-in-law? Maybe they're dying from ostracism and malaria, they turn cold and yellow and decide to move to a star made of ice, to a refreshing planet where they can finally take it easy surrounded by glacial fruit and young women. And their corpses (maintained by alabaster angels), their poor fire-corpses will go there in order to sleep far away from the flame and the ashes.

I walk through the days that collapse, days obliged by the evening to give up, doing a senseless guard duty, and I go among the Mohammedan shopkeepers, among the folk who adore the cow and the cobra, I walk along with my plain face, not adorable. The months are not changeless and sometimes it rains: a saturation, quiet like sweat, falls from the sky's heat, and these wet feathers weave together and grow longer above the huge green plants, over the backs of fierce beasts, all along a certain silence. Night waters, the monsoon wind's tears, a salty saliva falling like the froth from a horse, and slow to grow, poor to splatter, amazed to flight.

Now, where is that professional curiosity, that dejected kindness which opened a hole simply by taking a rest, that luminous consciousness whose glow dressed me in deep blue? I go breathing, like someone's son, toward the heart of an obligatory method, of a firm physical patience, the result of meals and ages piled up every day; I go, deprived of my uniform of revenge and my golden skin. At my feet the hours of a solitary season are turning and a day made of night-shapes and day-shapes is almost always halted above me.

Therefore, from time to time, I go to visit the girls with their young hips and eyes, people in whose elegant hair a yellow flower flashes like lightning. They wear bracelets and rings on every toe and bands about their ankles and, what's more, colored necklaces, necklaces that I take away to examine because I'd like to surprise myself in front of a firm and unbroken body, and I don't soften my kisses. I take the weight of each now statue in my arms and silently drink her living cure with masculine thirst. Stretched out, watching the runaway creature from below, climbing up her nude being, up to her smile: gigantic

and triangular toward the top, lifted into the air by two global breasts that are fixed before my eyes like two lamps lit with white oil and sweet energy. I take shelter in her dark-skinned star, in that skin's warmth, and motionless under my chest like a defeated enemy, with limbs that are too thick and weak, with a helpless quivering: or better, on top of herself like a pale wheel, split up into crosses and fingers, fast, deep and circular, like a star in disorder.

Ay, every passing night leaves a thing made of discarded charcoal that burns up in solitude, that falls down amidst funeral things, covered in debris. I usually show up at these endings carrying all my useless weapons and full of broken objections. I protect the clothes and the bones that are gently saturated by that semi-nocturnal material: it is a temporal dust that starts sticking to me, and the god of substitution sometimes keeps watch at my side, breathing steadily, holding up the sword.

## COUNTERFEIT MESSAGES

Those days used to mislead my sense of prophesy, the stamp collectors would come into my house and, hidden there at all hours of the season, they would attack my letters, forcing fresh kisses from them, kisses submitted to a long sea residence, and incantations that protected my fate with feminine wisdom and defensive calligraphy.

I lived beside other houses, other people and trees that tended to be pompous, great tents of passionate foliage, emerging roots, the shovels of vegetation, the frank coconut palms, and among all this green foam I would go with my cocky hat and my entirely novelesque heart, with my stride weighted down by splendor, because to the degree that my powers fed off themselves and, destroyed in dust, tried to find symmetry like the dead people in cemeteries, to that degree the familiar spots and the expanses I scorned until then and the faces that bloomed in my despair like slow plants would all shift around me in secrecy and terror, like bunches of leaves that suddenly turn around one autumn.

Parrots, stars and moreover the authorized sun and a rude humidity gave birth in me to a selfish love for the earth and anything that covered it, and a satisfaction like an old house feels for its bats, the delicacy of a woman nude down to her fingertips, these took advantage of my shameful faculties as if they were firm, weak weapons, and depression put its mark on my weaving, and the love letter, pale with paper and fear, withdrew its trembling spider that barely weaves and ceaselessly unweaves and weaves. Naturally I fell toward the pain, fell from the light of the moon drawn out by circumstances, and more, from its cold axis that the birds (swallows, geese) cannot tread even in the fever of their migration, fell from its blue, sleek, gemless skin like a man who falls wounded by a white weapon. I'm subject to a special blood and that substance--answering the sea and the night by turns--made me change and suffer, and those sub-celestial waters sapped my energy and the bartering part of my disposition.

In that historical way my bones became quite influential in my planning: the relaxation, the mansions by the seashore attracted me, not for security but with finality, and having once arrived at the place, surrounded by the more motionless and mute choir, subjected to the final hour and its perfumes, unfair to the imprecise geographies and mortal supporter of the cement armchair, I militantly await the time, and with the adventrue's foil stained by forgotten blood.

## THE HOMELESS

Unbeatable season! A pale north wind gathered at the edges of the sky, an invading and washed-out air, and it was always there, close to everything that the eyes took in, like a thick milk, like a stiff window shade. So that the being felt isolated, submitted to that strange substance, surrounded by a neighboring sky, with the mast broken in front of a whitish sea coast, abandoned by solid things, faced with an impenetrable flow of time and inside a house of fog. Damnation and horror! To have been wounded and left there, or to have chosen the spiders, the mourning suit and the priest's robes. To have lain in wait, hugely fed up with this world, and to have chatted about sphinxes and gold and prophetic destinies. To have fastened the ashes to my street clothes, to have kissed the earthly beginning with its taste of forgetfulness. But no. No.

The rain's cold materials that fall darkly, sorrows without resurrection, forgetfulness. So much space stays forever in my lightless suit, in my bedroom that has no portraits, and the day's slow, direct ray condenses itself so, until it becomes just one dark drop.

Steady movements, vertical pathways to whose final flower one sometimes rises, gentle or brutal friends, absent doors! Everyday I eat a drowsy bread and drink an isolated water!

The locksmith howls, the horse trots, the horseman soaked with rain, and the coachman with the long whip coughs, the damned! Out to the longest distances, everything else remains motionless, covered by the month of June, and its damp vegetation, its silent animals, merge together like waves. Yes, what winter sea, what sunken kingdom is trying to survive and, apparently dead, is crossing this thick surface with tall mortuary sails?

Often, when the evening has come, I put the light beside the window, and I look at myself, held up by miserable bits of wood, stretched out in the dampness like an aged coffin, between the rudely weak walls. I dream, from one absence to another, and to another distance, experienced and bitter.

## THE YOUNG KING

As a continuation of what has been read and a preface to the following page I ought to guide my star to the territory of love.

Homeland bounded by the two long hot arms, land of long and parallel passion, place of gold systematically defended by a mathematical and military science. Yes, I want to marry the most beautiful woman in Mandalay, I want to give my earthly wrapping over to the sound a woman makes cooking, to that rustle of skirts and bare feet that move and mix like wind and leaves.

Love for a girl with small feet and a big cigar, with amber flowers in her pure, cylindrical hair-do, and love for walking in danger like a fleshy, heavy-headed lily.

And my wife at my side, beside my murmur so come from far away, my Burmese wife, the daughter of the king.

Then I kiss her rolled-up black hair and her sweet, everlasting foot: and the night now close by, its will unchained, I listen to my tiger and weep for my absent one.

## NIGHT BUSINESS

I call out to reality with difficulty, like the dog, and I also howl. How I'd love to set up the way the rich man talks to the boatman, to paint the giraffe, to describe accordions, to celebrate my muse that's coiled about my aggressive middle, my resistant middle. That's how my middle is, my whole body, a wakeful and drawn-out battle, and my kidney's are listening.

Oh God, there are so many frogs at home in the night, whistling and snoring with the throats of forty-year-old people, and the curve that surrounds me from the greatest distance is so thin and starry. They'd weep in my case, the Italian singers and the doctors of astronomy encircled by this black dawn, even their hearts defined by this sharp sword.

And later that condensation, that unity of the night's elements, that assumption placed behind everything, and that cold so clearly held up by the stars.

A curse on so much dying that never sees, on so many who are wounded by alcohol and unhappiness, and praise for the night-watcher, for the intelligence that is I, surviving worshiper of the heavens.

## BURIAL IN THE EAST

I work at night, surrounded by cities,  
by fishermen, by potters, by corpses burned  
with saffron and fruit and wrapped in scarlet muslin:  
those terrible dead people pass under my balcony  
ringing their chains and copper flutes,  
strident and pure and mournful, they whistle  
amid the color of the heavy, poisoned flowers  
and the scream of the ashen dancers  
and the mounting monotone of the tom-toms  
and the smoke from the logs that burn and smell.

Because once the turn has been taken by the turbulent river,  
their hearts--either stopped or starting up a bigger motion--  
will roll around, burned, with leg and foot made fire,  
and the trembling ash will fall on the water,  
it will float like a bouquet of chalky flowers  
or like an extinct fire left by travelers so powerful  
that they made something burn on top of the black water, they  
swallowed up  
a breath that had disappeared and a potent liquid.

III



~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

## A GENTLEMAN WITHOUT COMPANY

The young homosexuals and the love-mad girls  
and the long widows who suffer from a delirious inability to sleep,  
and the young wives who have been pregnant for thirty hours,  
and the hoarse cats who cross my garden in darkness,  
these, like a necklace of throbbing sexual oysters,  
surround my solitary house,  
like enemies set up against my soul,  
like members of a conspiracy dressed in their pajamas  
who exchange, as passwords, thick and lengthy kisses.

The gleaming summer leads the lovers out  
in indistinguishable, melancholy regiments,  
made up of fat and thin and happy and sad pairs:  
under the elegant coconut palms, beside the sea and the moon,  
there is an endless life of trousers and petticoats,  
a rustle from the stroking of silk stockings,  
and women's breasts that shine like eyes.

The small-time employee, after so many things,  
after the weekly boredom and the novels read in bed at night,  
has once and for all seduced the woman next door  
and takes her to the miserable movies,  
where the heroes are either colts or passionate princes,  
and he strokes her legs covered with soft hair  
with his hot, damp hands that smell of cigarettes.

The late afternoons of the seducer and the nights of husbands  
come together like two bed-sheets and bury me,  
and the hours after lunch when the young male students  
and the young female students, and the priests are masturbating,  
and the animals fornicate frankly,  
and the bees smell of blood, and the angry flies are buzzing,  
and the cousins play strange games with their girl-cousins,  
and the doctors look furiously at the husband of the young patient,  
and the hours in the morning when the professor, as if absent-minded,  
finishes up his marital duty and breakfast,  
and still more, the adulterers who love each other with true love  
on beds high and long like ocean liners:  
surely and eternally, this huge forest  
surrounds me, breathing and entangled,  
with huge flowers like mouths and rows of teeth  
and black roots shaped like fingernails and shoes.

## RITUAL OF MY LEGS

I've been here a long time looking at my long legs,  
with infinite and curious tenderness, with my usual passion,  
as if they were the legs of a divine woman  
sunken deeply in the abyss of my thorax:  
and the thing is, the truth is, when time, when time passes,  
over the earth, over the roof, over my impure head,  
and it passes, the time passes, and at night in my bed I don't  
feel that a woman is breathing, sleeping naked at my side,  
then, strange dark things take the place of the one who's absent,  
viscious, melancholy thoughts  
sow heavy possibilities in my sleeping-room,  
and so, then, I look at my legs as if they belonged to some  
other body  
and were firmly and softly fixed onto my bowels.

Like the stalks of plants or adorable, female things,  
they rise up from my knees, cylindrical and thick,  
with the confused and compact material of existence;  
like the rough, bulky arms of a goddess,  
like trees monstrously clothed in people,  
like immense, fatal lips—thirsty and calm—  
there they are, the biggest part of my body:  
completely substantial, they don't contain anything complicated  
like sense organs or trachea or intestines or ganglia:  
nothing, nothing but the pure, the sweet and thick of my own life,  
but nonetheless guarding that life completely.

People really go through this world  
hardly remembering that they have a body and inside of it, life,  
and there's a fear, a fear in the world of words that refer to  
the body,  
and so everyone speaks favorably of clothing,  
it's possible to talk about trousers, about suits  
and women's undergarments (Madam's stockings and garters),  
as if garments and suits went around in the streets completely empty  
and the world had been taken over by a dark and obscene cloakroom.

Clothes have existence, they have color, form, design,  
and quite a bit of space in our myths, too much space,  
there are too many pieces of furniture and houses in the world,  
and my body lives among and under so many beaten-down things,  
thinking steadily about slavery and chains.  
Well, my knees, like knots,  
personal, functional and obvious,

dryly separate the halves of my legs:  
 and actually two different worlds, two different sexes  
 aren't as different as the two halves of my legs.  
 From the knee down to the foot a hard form  
 appears, mineral, coldly useful,  
 a creature of bone and persistence,  
 and my ankles are nothing now but nude intention,  
 the exact and the necessary conclusively laid out.

There are my legs, not sensual,  
 but short and firm and masculine, endowed  
 with bunches of muscles like complementary animals,  
 and there's a life there too, a solid, subtle, sharp life  
 that stays there without trembling, waiting and acting.  
 At my ticklish feet,  
 hard like the sun, open like flowers,  
 perpetual, magnificent soldiers  
 in the grey war of space,  
 everything ends, life definitely ends in my feet,  
 strange and hostile things begin there:  
 the names of the world, unlikely things and things that limit,  
 the noun and the adjective that won't fit in my heart,  
 these all begin there with dense, cold consistency.

Always,  
 manufactured products, stockings, shoes  
 or simply the infinite air  
 will be between my feet and the earth,  
 carrying to an extreme what is isolated and solitary in my being,  
 something firmly assumed between my life and the world,  
 something clearly unbeatable and unfriendly.

# THE PHANTOM OF THE FREIGHTER

Distance sheltered over tubes of foam,  
 salt in ritual waves and definite orders,  
 and the smell and sound of an old ship,  
 of rotting timbers and broken iron,  
 and weary machines that howl and weep  
 pushing the prow, kicking at the sides,  
 chewing complaints, swallowing and swallowing distances,  
 making a noise of bitter water over the bitter water,  
 moving the old ship over the old water.

Storerooms inside, dusk-filled tunnels  
 visited by the intermittent daytime of ports:  
 sacks, sacks that a sullen god has stored up  
 like grey animals, rounded and eyeless,  
 with soft grey ears,  
 and enviable stomachs stuffed with wheat or copra,  
 sensitive bellies of pregnant women,  
 pitifully dressed in grey, waiting  
 patiently in the shadows of a painful movie theatre.  
 Suddenly the waters outside  
 are heard going by, running like an opaque horse,  
 with a noise like hooves on the water,  
 swift waters, sinking again in the waters.  
 Then there's nothing but time in the cabins:  
 time in the miserable, lonely dining room  
 motionless and visible, like a big disgrace.  
 Smell of leather and cloth, densely worn out,  
 smell of onions and oil, and more,  
 smell of somebody floating in the corners of the ship,  
 smell of somebody without a name  
 who comes down the stairs like a wave of air,  
 and crosses hallways with its absent body,  
 and watches with its eyes that death preserves.

It watches with colorless, sightless eyes,  
 slow, and it goes by shaking, no shadow, no presence:  
 the noises wrinkle it up, objects pass right through it,  
 its transparency makes the dirty chairs shine.  
 Who is that phantom without a phantom's body,  
 whose light footsteps are like flour scattered at night,  
 and whose voice is fathered by nothing but objects?

Like little boats inside of the old boat,  
 the furniture moves around filled with its silent being,  
 loaded with its disintegrated and hazy being:

the closets, the green tablecloths,  
the color of the curtains and of the floor,  
everything has suffered the slow emptiness of its hands,  
and its breathing has worn everything out.

It slips and slides, it descends, transparent,  
air in the cold air that runs over the boat,  
it leans on the railing with its hidden hands  
and watches the bitter sea fleeing in back of the boat.  
Only the waters refuse its influence—  
a forgotten phantom's color and smell—  
and fresh and deep they unfurl their dance  
like lives of fire, like blood or perfume,  
new and strong, they rise up, united and reunited.

Without tiring themselves, having neither habit nor time,  
green with quantity, efficient and cold,  
the waters feel the black stomach of the boat and wash  
its material, its broken crusts, its iron wrinkles,  
the living waters eat at the shell of the ship,  
dealing in long flags of foam  
and salt teeth that fly in droplets.

The phantom looks at the sea with its eyeless face:  
the circle of day, the cough of the ship, a bird  
on the round and lonely equation of space,  
and once again it goes down into the life of the ship  
dropping on the dead time and the wood,  
sliding into the black kitchens and cabins,  
slow with air and atmosphere and desolate space.

## THE WIDOWER'S TANGO

Oh Maligna, now you've found the letter, now you've cried with rage,  
and you've insulted the memory of my mother  
calling her a rotten bitch and the mother of dogs,  
now you've drunk the afternoon tea alone, lonely,  
looking at my old shoes, empty forever  
and now you can't recall my illnesses, my night dreams, my meals,  
without cursing me at the top of your lungs as if I were still there  
complaining to me about the tropics, about the coolies,  
about the poison fevers that hurt me so much  
and about the dreadful Englishmen whom I still hate.

Maligna, the truth, what in immense night, what a lonely earth!  
Once again I've come to lonely sleeping rooms,  
to eating my cold breakfast in restaurants, and once again  
I throw my pants and shirts on the floor,  
my room doesn't have any coat racks, it has no portraits of anyone  
on the walls.  
How much of the shadow that's in my soul I would give to have you back,  
and how threatening the names of the months seem to me  
and how the word winter sounds like a sorrowful drum.

Later you'll find, burried by the coconut palm,  
the knife I hid there for fear you'd kill me,  
and now, suddenly, I'd like to smell its kitchen steel  
accustomed to the weight of your hand and the shine of your feet:  
under the dampness of the earth, among the deaf roots,  
of the languages of men only that of the poor could know your name,  
and the heavy earth doesn't understand your name  
made out of impenetrable, divine substances.

Just - This is how it hurts me to think about the clear day of your legs  
resting like suspended and firm water from the sun,  
and the swallow that lives in your eyes, sleeping and flying,  
so - and the dog of rage that you shelter in your heart,  
and this is also how I see the dead who are between us from now on,  
the long lonely space that surrounds me forever.

line  
missing

I'd give this wind from the gigantic sea for your rough breathing  
heard in the long nights without a trace of forgetfulness,  
uniting itself with the atmosphere like the whip on the horse's hide.  
And just to hear you pissing in the dark at the back of the house  
as if you were spilling a thin, trembling, silvery, insistent honey,  
how many times I would deliver up this chorus of shadows I possess,  
and the sound of useless swords that can be heard in my soul,  
and the pidgeon of blood that's all alone on my forehead  
calling for things that are missing, missing people,  
substances strangely inseparable and lost.

November 2000 revision

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## VERSES TO BE SUNG

The viny rose consumes  
and climbs to the top of the saint:  
time, with its thick claws,  
attaches it to that weary being:  
it puffs and swells in the stony veins,  
it binds the pulmonary chord and then  
it listens and it breathes for a long time.

I long to die, long to live,  
tool of iron, infinite dog,  
motion of a heavy ocean  
with its old, black surface.

My gradual guitar resonates  
in the shade, being born in the salt  
of my being, like the fish in the salt  
of the sea. For whom? to whom?

Ay, what a constant closed-up country:  
neutral in the zone of fire,  
motionless in the awful spinning,  
dry while everything is wet.

Then, between my knees,  
beneath the root of my eyes,  
my soul keeps on sewing:  
its horrible needle's at work.

I survive in the middle of the sea,  
all alone so madly hurt,  
keeping on so all alone,  
so hurtfully abandoned.

## COLD WORK

Maybe you can't hear the deaf moan  
of time, echoing in your sweet,  
perpetual sphere? Tell me about it.

Can't you feel--in a slow way,  
in anxious and trembling work--  
the persistent night that comes back?

The trembling witness is recording  
dried salt and airy blood,  
the tumbled flow of rivers.

Dark increase of walls,  
rough growth of doors,  
mad groups of sensations,  
the thirsty circulation.

Space boils and breeds  
all about, in an infinite way,  
in endless dissemination,  
with its definite, armed muzzle.

In the race of beings  
can't you hear the constant victory  
of time, slow like the fire,  
sure, thick and strong as Hercules,  
accumulating its bulk  
and adding its sad fibre?

Like a perpetual plant, it makes  
its thin and pale thread grow,  
wet with the falling drops,  
without sound, in loneliness.

## IT MEANS SHADOW

What hope is there in thinking about it, what clear sign,  
 what conclusive kiss is there to bury in the heart,  
 to submit at the start of desertion and intelligence,  
 soft and sure on the eternally tossed waters?

What new dream-angel's swift, vital wings  
 could I attach to my sleeping shoulders for endless security,  
 so that the road among the stars of death  
 would be a violent flight that started many days, months and  
 centuries ago?

Perhaps the natural weakness of the anxious and suspicious beings  
 is suddenly trying to find a permanent place in time and in  
 the earth's limits,  
 perhaps the weariness and the insatiably piled up ages  
 are stretching themselves out, like the moon wave of a newly made ocean,  
 over the beaches and over bitterly deserted lands.

Ay if only what I am could go on existing and ceasing to exist,  
 and if only my obedience was ordained with such iron conditions  
 that the shaking of deaths and of births didn't disturb  
 the high place I want to reserve eternally for myself.

So let this be what I am, in some place, in all time,  
 a set up and secure and passionate witness,  
 carefully destroying himself and ceaselessly preserving himself,  
 clearly engaged in his original duty.