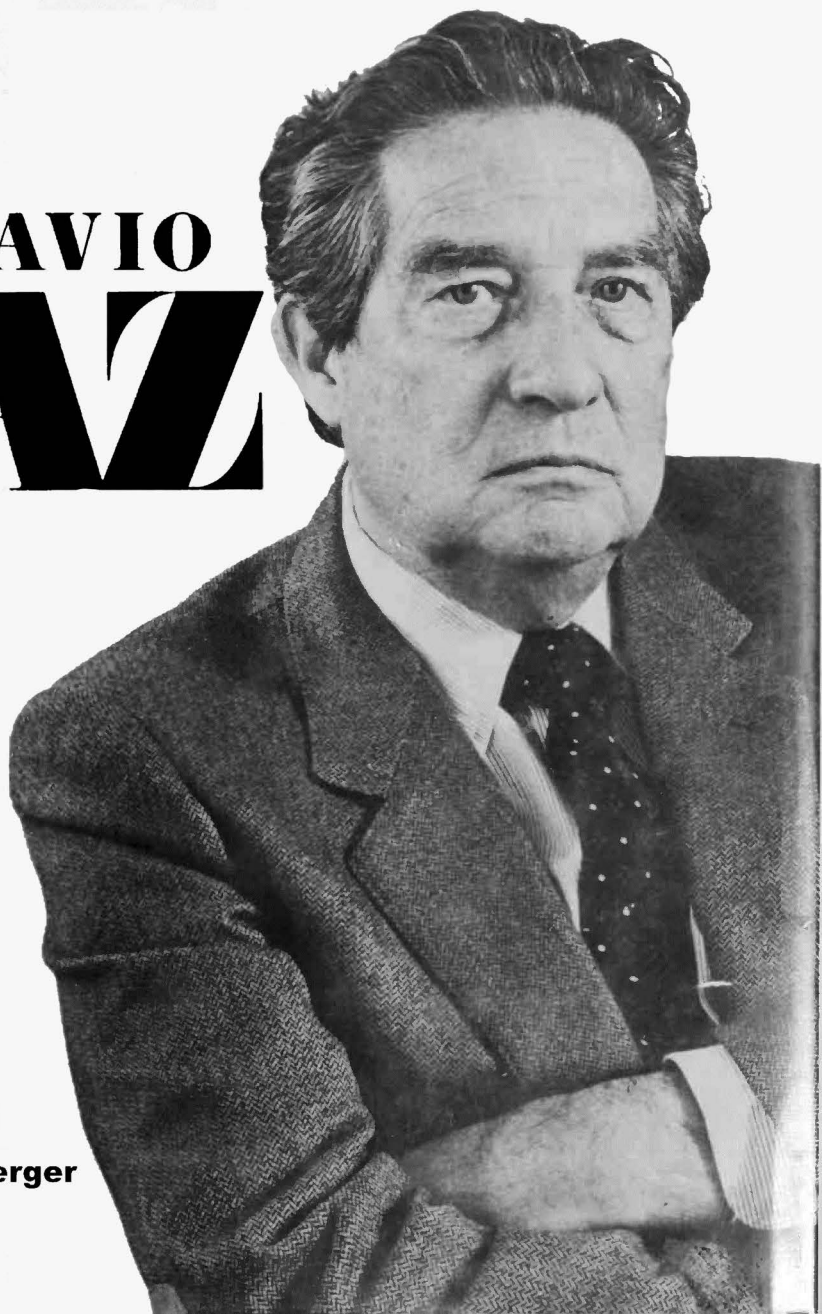


# SELECTED POEMS

OCTAVIO  
**PAZ**



Edited by  
Eliot Weinberger

# OCTAVIO **Paz**

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## SELECTED POEMS

**Edited with an introduction  
by Eliot Weinberger**

Octavio Paz, asserts Eliot Weinberger in his introduction to these *Selected Poems*, is among the last of the modernists "who drew their own maps of the world." For Latin America's foremost living poet, his native Mexico has been the center of a global mandala, a cultural configuration that, in his life and work, he has traced to its furthest reaches: to Spain, as a young Marxist during the Civil War; to San Francisco and New York in the early 1940s; to Paris, as a surrealist, in the postwar years; to India and Japan in 1952, and to the East again as his country's ambassador to India from 1962 to 1968; and to various universities in the United States throughout the 1970s.

A great synthesizer, the rich diversity of Paz's thought is shown here in all its astonishing complexity. Among the

*(continued on back flap)*

(continued from front flap)

sixty-seven selections in this volume, a gathering in English of his most essential poems drawn from nearly fifty years' work, are Muriel Rukeyser's now classic version of "Sun Stone" and new translations by editor Weinberger of "Blanco" and "Maithuna." And since for Paz, forever in motion, there can be no such thing as a "definitive text," all the poems have been revised to conform to the poet's most recent changes in the original Spanish. Besides those by Rukeyser and Weinberger, the translations in the *Selected Poems* are by G. Aroul, Elizabeth Bishop, Paul Blackburn, Lysander Kemp, Denise Levertov, Mark Strand, Charles Tomlinson, William Carlos Williams, and Monique Fong Wust.

[Also available by Octavio Paz: *Configurations*, New Directions Paperbook 303; *A Draft of Shadows*, NDP489; *Eagle or Sun?* Cloth & NDP422; *Early Poems 1935-1955*, NDP354.]

*Jacket photograph of Octavio Paz by Nina Subin; design by Denise Breslin*

**NEW DIRECTIONS**

80 Eighth Avenue

New York 10011

# OCTAVIO PAZ

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Selected Poems

**Also by Octavio Paz**

*Configurations*  
*Early Poems 1935–1955*  
*Eagle or Sun?*  
*A Draft of Shadows*

# OCTAVIO PAZ

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## Selected Poems

Edited by ELIOT WEINBERGER

Translations from the Spanish by G. AROUL,  
ELIZABETH BISHOP, PAUL BLACKBURN, LYSANDER KEMP,  
DENISE LEVERTOV, MURIEL RUKEYSER, MARK STRAND,  
CHARLES TOMLINSON, WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS,  
MONIQUE FONG WUST, and the editor

A NEW DIRECTIONS BOOK

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# Introduction

Mexico, perhaps more than China, is the Middle Kingdom. In the current political moment, its centrality lies on a north-south axis: for North Americans, as the relatively stable, partially friendly buffer state between “us” and the turmoil we misunderstand in Central America; for Mexicans, as a nation placed between the closing jaws of Northern imperialism and Southern revolt.

Historically, however, Mexico was a Middle Kingdom between the oceans, between East and West. Before the arrival of Cortez in 1519 the country was, it seems likely, the eastern edge of the transpacific cultural network—one that will never be fully known, but which is apparent in various artworks across the ocean: China, Japan, and India; Polynesia; Mexico, Peru, and Ecuador. With Cortez, of course, Mexico became the western end of the Spanish Empire, with a European language and religion, and with a government no more enlightened than its Aztec predecessor.

There is a navel (*xi*, in Nahuatl) in the middle of the word Mexico, and the navel of the Middle Kingdom was the city Tenochtitlán, today’s Mexico City, built literally on the water, but facing no sea. It was the capital of an empire that radiated from its ring of volcanoes and pyramids: an expanding self-absorbed sun, devoted to feeding, with art and blood, the other, celestial sun.

Mexico—a xenophobe whom strangers won’t leave alone—has been the center of a global mandala. It is this configuration that Octavio Paz has, in his life and in the work, traced to its furthest reaches. A great synthesizer, he has transformed the picture while simultaneously drawing his own self-portrait.

Born in a suburb of Mexico City in 1914, Paz began at the center and followed the Mexican mandala in three directions. East: as a young Marxist to the Spanish Civil War, and as a surrealist to Paris in the late 1940s. North: to San Francisco and New York during the Second World War, and in the 1970s to various American universities. West: to India and Japan in

1952, and as the Mexican ambassador to India from 1962 to 1968.

From the U.S. he gained a vision of overdevelopment and a view of his own country on the outskirts of history and the pathos of its nationalistic ardor. From Europe, the belief in poetry as "the secret religion of the modern age"; that the revolution of the word is the revolution of the world, and that both cannot exist without a revolution of the body: life as art, a return to the mythic lost unity of thought and body, man and nature, I and the other. From India, and his studies of Buddhism and Tantrism: the revelation of passion binding the world in illusion, and of passion as the liberator of the world: that in the moment of absolute integration, the world dissolves, "transparency is all that remains."

He is "a man in love with silence who can't stop talking," a restless mind, forever curious, in seemingly perpetual motion. There is something Aztec in this, despite that society's bloody singlemindedness and rigidity: In Nahuatl, the artist is *tlayolteuanni*, he who sees with his heart. Heart, *yollotl*, comes from the word movement, *ollin*. Living hearts were flung down the steps of the temples to feed the sun, to keep it moving. Time was a turning wheel, the familiar sun stone. For the Aztecs, the great terror was *stasis*—that the sun, time, the world would stop. Paz's mobility, though of course the product of an individual temperament, oddly fits the ancient scheme. Had he been born in Tenochtitlán, he might have been one of the poet-princes, but I imagine him as a *pochteca*, one of that mysterious band of pilgrims who wandered the empire in search of the "Land of the Sun."

Paz is generally read as Latin America's great surrealist poet—that is, as an exotic European. Yet he remains inherently Mexican, despite the fact that he has always been a cosmopolitan and never a regionalist or an indigenist. Like the hero of a Sufi parable, Paz traveled abroad to find what was always at home. He discovered synesthesia in Rimbaud's colored vowels, not in the Aztec "painted songs." He practiced dissolving the poet's ego through automatic writing and Japanese renga, but he came from a tradition that did not distinguish between poet and poem, where the poet declared, "God has sent me as a messenger./I am transformed into a poem."

The famous last line of "Hymn among the Ruins," "words that are flowers that are fruits that are acts," could have been written equally by a surrealist or by a member of the Aztec Brotherhood of poets. In the Nahuatl lyric form called *xopan-cuicatl*, a celebration of life and of cyclical time, the poet and the poem become a plant that grows with the poem; the plant becomes the fibers of the book in which the poem is painted; and the fibers of the book become the woven fiber of the mat, the symbol of worldly power and authority. Paz's preoccupation with pairs is also strangely Nahuatl: The Aztecs tended to describe the world by two aspects—poetry was "flower and song," fame "mist and smoke," pleasure "wind and heat"—"so that," as Angel Garibay writes, "through the union of these two will come a spark which will bring understanding."

Paz's great Tantric poem "Blanco" owes much to Mallarmé and to Pound's ideogrammic method—each image self-contained and discrete, understood (like the Chinese ideogram itself) only in relation to the other lines, written and unwritten; each a centripetal force drawing the other images and meanings toward it, an implosion that leads to the explosion of the poem. Yet "Blanco" was also designed as an Aztec book, a folded screen. Those screens of painted songs, images rather than what we would call writing, were "read" as mnemonic devices: the reader created the text, the text created itself, as "Blanco" with its variant readings intends.

The surrealists sought a way out of European rationalism and bourgeois capitalist values by recovering their own archaic history and by immersing themselves in the surviving indigenous cultures of the world. Paz, on a similar quest—to free himself from the straitjacket of ex-colonial provincialism, that child more orthodox than its parent—went to Europe to discover the other, heretical and subterranean, European tradition. It is an irony of the age: while Paz was writing on de Sade and Fourier, his friend the French poet Benjamin Peret was translating the Mayan *Book of the Chilam Balam of Chumayel*.

The surrealist motto—"liberty, love and poetry"—applies in varying degrees to most of the modernists of the first half of the century: women and men dedicated to the imagination, to social revolution, to the transformation of all the arts, to the integration of life and art. It seems incredible that that era has

passed, that we have entered an age of specialized arts practitioners. Surely others will come, but at the moment Paz is among the last of the poets who drew their own maps of the world.

To read all that Paz has written would probably take a few years; to absorb it, a few lifetimes. The latest edition of his collected (not complete) poems alone fills some 700 pages. The selection here is largely derived from the four previous New Directions collections (*Early Poems*, *Configurations*, *Eagle or Sun?*, and *A Draft of Shadows*). Some of the translations, however, have never appeared in book form, including the long poem "Maithuna" and the present version of "Blanco." In most cases the poems chose themselves; Paz advised, but I must take the blame for the final selection.

For Paz, forever in motion, there is no definitive text. His tendency to revise his earlier work has even caused one academic critic to complain that Paz does not "respect" his own poems. The present translations have been revised from the earlier volumes to correspond to the most recent versions of the poems, those published in the Seix Barral edition *Poemas* (1935-1975). Where available, the original translators have made the revisions. With the translations of Paul Blackburn, Muriel Rukeyser, and William Carlos Williams, this was, sadly, not possible. I have, with reluctance, slightly altered some of their translations. These changes, signaled in the notes, involved deleting or adding a few lines or words. In no instance have I attempted to "improve" a translation, changing the English where the Spanish has not changed. Nevertheless, students of Blackburn, Rukeyser, and Williams should refer to the original translations, all of which remain in print.

Special thanks—again and always—to Peter Glassgold at New Directions and to Octavio Paz.

ELIOT WEINBERGER

# The bird

In transparent silence  
day was resting:  
the transparency of space  
was silence's transparency.  
Motionless light of the sky was soothing  
the growth of the grass.  
Small things of earth, among the stones,  
under identical light, were stones  
Time sated itself in the minute.  
And in an absorbed stillness  
noonday consumed itself.

And a bird sang, slender arrow.  
The sky shivered a wounded silver breast,  
the leaves moved,  
and grass awoke.  
And I knew that death was an arrow  
let fly from an unknown hand  
and in the flicker of an eye we die.

[M.R.]

# Two bodies

Two bodies face to face  
are at times two waves  
and night is an ocean.

Two bodies face to face  
are at times two stones  
and night a desert.



Two bodies face to face  
are at times two roots  
laced into night.

Two bodies face to face  
are at times two knives  
and night strikes sparks.

Two bodies face to face  
are two stars falling  
in an empty sky.

[M.R.]

## Poet's epitaph

He tried to sing, singing  
not to remember  
his true life of lies  
and to remember  
his lying life of truths.

[M.R.]

## The street

A long and silent street.  
I walk in blackness and I stumble and fall  
and rise, and I walk blind, my feet  
stepping on silent stones and dry leaves.  
Someone behind me also stepping on stones, leaves:  
if I slow down, he slows;  
if I run, he runs. I turn: nobody.

Everything dark and doorless.  
Turning and turning among these corners  
which lead forever to the street  
where nobody waits for, nobody follows me,  
where I pursue a man who stumbles  
and rises and says when he sees me: nobody

[M.R.]

## (Untitled)

The hand of day opens  
Three clouds  
And these few words

[M.R.]

## Fable

Ages of fire and of air  
Youth of water  
From green to yellow  
                                    From yellow to red  
From dream to watching  
                                    From desire to act  
It was only one step and you took it so lightly  
Insects were living jewels  
The heat rested by the side of the pond  
Rain was a willow with unpinned hair  
A tree grew in the palm of your hand  
And that tree laughed sang prophesied  
Its divinations filled the air with wings  
There were simple miracles called birds

Everything was for everyone  
                    Everyone was everything  
There was only one huge word with no back to it  
A word like a sun  
One day it broke into tiny pieces  
They were the words of the language we now speak  
Pieces that will never come together  
Broken mirrors where the world sees itself shattered

[E.W.]

## Native stone

*For Roger Munier*

Light is laying waste the heavens  
Droves of dominions in stampede  
The eye retreats surrounded by mirrors

Landscapes enormous as insomnia  
Stony ground of bone

Limitless autumn  
Thirst lifts its invisible fountains  
One last peppertree preaches in the desert

Close your eyes and hear the light singing:  
Noon nests in your inner ear

Close your eyes and open them:  
There is nobody not even yourself  
Whatever is not stone is light

[M.R.]

# Object lesson

## 1. ANIMATION

Over the bookcase  
between a T'ang musician and a Oaxaca pitcher  
incandescent, lively,  
with glittering eyes of silver-paper  
watching us come and go  
the little sugar skull.

## 2. MASK OF TLALOC CARVED IN TRANSPARENT QUARTZ

Petrified waters.  
Old Tlaloc sleeps, within,  
dreaming rainstorms.

## 3. THE SAME

Touched by light  
quartz has become cascade.  
Upon its waters floats the child, the god.

## 4. GOD WHO COMES FORTH FROM A CERAMIC ORCHID

Among clay petals  
is born, smiling,  
the human flower.

## 5. OLMEC GODDESS

The four cardinal points  
are gathered in your navel.  
In your womb the day is pounding, fully armed.

6. CALENDAR

Facing water, days of fire.  
Facing fire, days of water.

7. XOCHIPILLI

In a day's tree  
hang jade fruit,  
fire and blood at night.

8. CROSS WITH SUN AND MOON PAINTED ON IT

Between the arms of this cross  
two birds made their nest:  
Adam, sun, and Eve, moon.

9. BOY AND TOP

Each time he spins it,  
it lands, precisely,  
at the center of the world.

10. OBJECTS

They live alongside us,  
we do not know them, they do not know us.  
But sometimes they speak with us.

[M.R.]

# In Uxmal

## 1. THE STONE OF THE DAYS

In the court, the sun stone, immobile;  
above, the sun of fire and of time turns;  
movement is sun and the sun is stone.

[E.W.]

## 2. NOON

Light unblinking,  
time empty of minutes,  
a bird stopped short in air.

## 3. LATER

Light flung down,  
the pillars awake  
and, without moving, dance.

## 4. FULL SUN

The time is transparent:  
even if the bird is invisible,  
let us see the color of his song.

## 5. RELIEFS

The rain, dancing, long-haired,  
ankles slivered by lightning,  
descends, to an accompaniment of drums:  
the corn opens its eyes, and grows.

#### 6. SERPENT CARVED ON A WALL

The wall in the sun breathes, shivers, ripples,  
a live and tattooed fragment of the sky:  
a man drinks sun and is water, is earth.  
And over all that life the serpent  
carrying a head between his jaws:  
the gods drink blood, the gods eat man.

[M.R.]

## Riprap

#### 1. FLOWER

Cry, barb, tooth, howls,  
carnivorous nothingness, its turbulence,  
all disappear before this simple flower.

#### 2. SHE

Every night she goes down to the well  
next morning reappearing  
with a new reptile in her arms.

#### 3. BIOGRAPHY

Not what he might have been:  
but what he was.  
And what he was is dead.

#### 4. BELLS IN THE NIGHT

Waves of shadows, waves of blindness  
on a forehead in flames:  
water for my thought, drown it out!

5. AT THE DOOR

People, words, people.  
I hesitated:  
up there the moon, alone.

6. VISION

I saw myself when I shut my eyes:  
space, space  
where I am and am not.

7. LANDSCAPE

Insects endlessly busy,  
horses the color of sun,  
donkeys the color of cloud,  
clouds, huge rocks that weigh nothing,  
mountains like tilted skies,  
a flock of trees drinking at the stream,  
they are all there, delighted in being there,  
and here we are not who are not,  
eaten by fury, by hatred,  
by love eaten, by death.

[M.R.]

8. ILLITERATE

I raised my face to the sky,  
that huge stone of worn-out letters,  
but the stars told me nothing.

[E.W.]



# *from The poet's works*

## III

Everyone had left the house. Around eleven I noticed that I had smoked my last cigarette. Not wanting to expose myself to the wind and cold, I searched every cranny for a pack, without success. There was nothing to do but put on my overcoat and go downstairs (I live on the fifth floor). The street, a beautiful street with tall buildings of gray stone and two rows of bare chestnut trees, was deserted. I walked about three hundred yards against the freezing wind and yellowish fog only to find the shop closed. I turned toward a nearby café where I was sure to find a little warmth, some music, and above all cigarettes, the object of my search. I walked two more blocks, shivering, when suddenly I felt—no, I didn't feel it: it passed, quickly: the Word. The unexpectedness of the meeting paralyzed me for a second, long enough to give it time to return into the night. Recovered, I reached and grabbed it by the tips of its floating hair. I pulled desperately at those threads that stretched toward the infinite, telegraph wires that inevitably recede in a glimpsed landscape, a note that rises, tapers off, stretches out, stretches out . . . I was alone in the middle of the street, with a red feather between my livid hands.

## IV

Lying on my bed, I crave the brute sleep, the mummy's sleep. I close my eyes and try not to hear that tapping in some corner of the room. "Silence is full of noise, and what you hear," I say to myself, "you do not truly hear. You hear the silence." And the tapping continues, louder each time: it is the sound of horses' hooves galloping on a field of stone; it is an ax that cannot fell a giant tree; a printing press printing a single immense verse made up of nothing but one syllable that rhymes with the beat of my heart; it is my heart that pounds the rock and covers it with a ragged coat of foam; it is the sea, the undertow of the chained sea that falls and rises, that rises and falls, that falls and rises; it is the great trowels of silence falling in the silence.

## VII

I write on the glimmering table, my pen resting heavily on its chest that is almost living, that moans and remembers the forest of its birth. Great wings of black ink open. The lamp explodes and a cape of broken glass covers my words. A sharp sliver of light cuts off my right hand. I keep writing with this stump that sprouts shadows. Night enters the room, the opposite wall puckers its big stone lips, great blocks of air come between my pen and the paper. A simple monosyllable would be enough to make the world burst. But tonight there is no room for a single word more.

## XI

It hovers, creeps in, comes close, withdraws, turns on tiptoe and, if I reach out my hand, disappears: a Word. I can only make out its proud crest: Cri. Cricket, Cripple, Crime, Crimea, Critic, Crisis, Criterion? A canoe sails from my forehead carrying a man armed with a spear. The light, fragile boat nimbly cuts the black waves, the swells of black blood in my temples. It moves further inward. The hunter-fisherman studies the shaded, cloudy mass of a horizon full of threats; he sinks his keen eyes into the rancorous foam, he perks his head and listens, he sniffs. At times a bright flash crosses the darkness, a green and scaly flutter. It is Cri, who leaps for a second into the air, breathes, and submerges again in the depths. The hunter blows the horn he carries strapped to his chest, but its mournful bellow is lost in the desert of water. There is no one on the great salt lake. And the rocky beach is far off, far off the faint lights from the huts of his companions. From time to time Cri reappears, shows his fatal fin, and sinks again. The oarsman, fascinated, follows him inward, each time further inward.

## XII

After chopping off all the arms that reached out to me; after boarding up all the windows and doors; after filling all the pits with poisoned water; after building my house on the rock of a No inaccessible to flattery and fear; after cutting out my tongue and eating it; after hurling handfuls of silence and mono-

syllables of scorn at my loves; after forgetting my name and the name of my birthplace and the name of my race; after judging and sentencing myself to perpetual waiting and perpetual loneliness, I heard against the stones of my dungeon of syllogisms the humid, tender, insistent onset of spring.

[E.W.]

## The blue bouquet

I woke covered with sweat. Hot steam rose from the newly sprayed, red-brick pavement. A gray-winged butterfly, dazzled, circled the yellow light. I jumped from my hammock and crossed the room barefoot, careful not to step on some scorpion leaving his hideout for a bit of fresh air. I went to the little window and inhaled the country air. One could hear the breathing of the night, feminine, enormous. I returned to the center of the room, emptied water from a jar into a pewter basin, and wet my towel. I rubbed my chest and legs with the soaked cloth, dried myself a little, and, making sure that no bugs were hidden in the folds of my clothes, got dressed. I ran down the green stairway. At the door of the boardinghouse I bumped into the owner, a one-eyed taciturn fellow. Sitting on a wicker stool, he smoked, his eye half closed. In a hoarse voice, he asked:

“Where are you going?”

“To take a walk. It’s too hot.”

“Hmmm—everything’s closed. And no streetlights around here. You’d better stay put.”

I shrugged my shoulders, muttered “back soon,” and plunged into the darkness. At first I couldn’t see anything. I fumbled along the cobblestone street. I lit a cigarette. Suddenly the moon appeared from behind a black cloud, lighting a white wall that was crumbled in places. I stopped, blinded by such whiteness. Wind whistled slightly. I breathed the air of the tamarinds. The night hummed, full of leaves and insects.

Crickets bivouacked in the tall grass. I raised my head: up there the stars too had set up camp. I thought that the universe was a vast system of signs, a conversation between giant beings. My actions, the cricket's saw, the star's blink, were nothing but pauses and syllables, scattered phrases from that dialogue. What word could it be, of which I was only a syllable? Who speaks the word? To whom is it spoken? I threw my cigarette down on the sidewalk. Falling, it drew a shining curve, shooting out brief sparks like a tiny comet.

I walked a long time, slowly. I felt free, secure between the lips that were at that moment speaking me with such happiness. The night was a garden of eyes. As I crossed the street, I heard someone come out of a doorway. I turned around, but could not distinguish anything. I hurried on. A few moments later I heard the dull shuffle of sandals on the hot stone. I didn't want to turn around, although I felt the shadow getting closer with every step. I tried to run. I couldn't. Suddenly I stopped short. Before I could defend myself, I felt the point of a knife in my back, and a sweet voice:

"Don't move, mister, or I'll stick it in."

Without turning, I asked:

"What do you want?"

"Your eyes, mister," answered the soft, almost painful voice.

"My eyes? What do you want with my eyes? Look, I've got some money. Not much, but it's something. I'll give you everything I have if you let me go. Don't kill me."

"Don't be afraid, mister. I won't kill you. I'm only going to take your eyes."

"But why do you want my eyes?" I asked again.

"My girlfriend has this whim. She wants a bouquet of blue eyes. And around here they're hard to find."

"My eyes won't help you. They're brown, not blue."

"Don't try to fool me, mister. I know very well that yours are blue."

"Don't take the eyes of a fellow man. I'll give you something else."

"Don't play saint with me," he said harshly. "Turn around."

I turned. He was small and fragile. His palm sombrero covered half his face. In his right hand he held a field machete that shone in the moonlight.

"Let me see your face."

I struck a match and put it close to my face. The brightness made me squint. He opened my eyelids with a firm hand. He couldn't see very well. Standing on tiptoe, he stared at me intensely. The flame burned my fingers. I dropped it. A silent moment passed.

"Are you convinced now? They're not blue."

"Pretty clever, aren't you?" he answered. "Let's see. Light another one."

I struck another match, and put it near my eyes. Grabbing my sleeve, he ordered:

"Kneel down."

I knelt. With one hand he grabbed me by the hair, pulling my head back. He bent over me, curious and tense, while his machete slowly dropped until it grazed my eyelids. I closed my eyes.

"Keep them open," he ordered.

I opened my eyes. The blade burned my lashes. All of a sudden, he let me go.

"All right, they're not blue. Beat it."

He vanished. I leaned against the wall, my head in my hands. I pulled myself together. Stumbling, falling, trying to get up again, I ran for an hour through the deserted town. When I got to the plaza, I saw the owner of the boardinghouse, still sitting in front of the door. I went in without saying a word. The next day I left town.

[E.W.]

## Hurry

In spite of my torpor, my puffy eyes, my paunch, my appearance of having just left the cave, I never stop. I'm in a hurry. I've always been in a hurry. Day and night a bee buzzes in my brain. I jump from morning to night, sleep to waking, crowds to solitude, dawn to dusk. It's useless that each of the

four seasons offers me its opulent table; useless the canary's morning flourish, the bed lovely as a river in summer, that adolescent and her tear, cut off at the end of autumn. In vain the noon sun and its crystal stem, the green leaves that filter it, the rocks that deny it, the shadows that it sculpts. All of these splendors just speed me up. I'm off and back, cough and hack, I spin in a grin, I stomp, I'm out, I'm in, I snoop, I hear a flute, I'm deep in my mind, I itch, opine, malign, I change my suit, I say adieu to what I was, I linger longer in what will be. Nothing stops me. I'm in a hurry, I'm going. Where? I don't know, know nothing—except that I'm not where I should be.

From when I first opened my eyes I've known that my place isn't here where I am, but where I'm not and never have been. Somewhere there's an empty place, and that emptiness will be filled with me and I'll sit in that hole that will senselessly teem with me, bubble with me until it turns into a fountain or a geyser. And then my emptiness, the emptiness of the me that I now am, will fill up with itself, full to the brim with being.

I'm in a hurry to be. I run behind myself, behind my place, behind my hole. Who has reserved this place for me? What is my fate's name? Who and what is that which moves me and who and what awaits my arrival to complete itself and to complete me? I don't know. I'm in a hurry. Though I don't move from my chair, though I don't get out of bed. Though I turn and turn in my cage. Nailed by a name, a gesture, a tic, I move and remove. This house, these friends, these countries, these hands, this mouth, these letters that form this image that without warning has come unstuck from I don't know where and has hit me across the chest, these are not my place. Neither this nor that is my place.

All that sustains me and that I sustain sustaining myself is a screen, a wall. My hurry leaps all. This body offers me its body, this sea pulls from its belly seven waves, seven nudes, seven whitecaps, seven smiles. I thank them and hurry off. Yes, the walk has been amusing, the conversation instructive, it's still early, the function isn't over, and in no way do I pretend to know the end. I'm sorry: I'm in a hurry. I'm anxious to get rid of my hurry. I'm in a hurry to go to bed and to get up without saying: good-by I'm in a hurry.

[E.W.]

# Plain

The anthill erupts. The open wound gushes, foams, expands, contracts. The sun at these times never stops pumping blood, temples swollen, face red. A boy—unaware that, in some corner of puberty, fevers and a problem of conscience await him—carefully places a small stone on the flayed mouth of the anthill. The sun buries its lances in the humps of the plain, crushing promontories of garbage. Splendor unsheathed, the reflections from an empty can—high on a pyramid of scraps—pierce every point of space. Treasure-hunting children and stray dogs poke in the yellow radiance of the rot. A thousand feet away, the church of San Lorenzo calls the twelve o'clock Mass. Inside, on the altar to the right, there is a saint painted blue and pink. From his left eye stream gray-winged insects that fly in a straight line to the dome and fall, turned to dust, a silent landslide of armor touched by the sun's hand. Whistles blow in the towers of the factories. Decapitated pricks. A bird, dressed in black, flies in circles and rests on the only living tree on the plain. And then . . . There is no then. I move forward, I pierce great rocks of years, great masses of compacted light, I go down into galleries of mines of sand, I travel corridors that close on themselves like granite lips. And I return to the plain, to the plain where it is always noon, where an identical sun shines fixedly on an unmoving landscape. And the ringing of the twelve bells never stops, nor the buzzing of the flies, nor the explosion of this minute that never passes, that only burns and never passes.

[E.W.]

# Capital

The screaming crest of dawn flames. First egg, first peck, decapitation and delight! Feathers fly, wings spread, sails swell,

and wing-oars dip in the sunrise. Oh unreined light, first light rearing. Landslides of crystals burst from the mountain, tympanum-tamping timpani explode in my head.

Tastes nothing, scents nothing, the dawn, girl still nameless, faceless still. Arrives, moves forward, pauses, heads for the outskirts. Leaves a train of murmurs that open eyes. Becomes lost in herself. The day with its hasty foot crushes a small star.

[E.W.]

## Obsidian butterfly

They killed my brothers, my children, my uncles. On the banks of Lake Texcoco I began to weep. Whirlwinds of salt-peter rose from Peñon hill, gently picked me up, and left me in the courtyard of the Cathedral. I made myself so small and gray that many mistook me for a pile of dust. Yes I, mother of flint and star, I, bearer of the ray, am now but a blue feather that a bird loses in the brambles. Once, I would dance, my breasts high and turning, turning, turning until I became still, and then I would sprout leaves, flowers, fruit. The eagle throbbed in my belly. I was the mountain that creates you as it dreams, the house of fire, the primordial pot where man is cooked and becomes man. In the night of the decapitated words my sister and I, hand in hand, leapt and sang around the I, the only standing tower in the razed alphabet. I still remember my songs:

*Light, headless light  
Golden-throated light  
Sings in the thicket green*

They told us: the straight path never leads to winter. And now my hands tremble, the words are caught in my throat. Give me a chair and a little sun.

In other times, every hour was born from the vapor of my breath, danced a while on the point of my dagger, and disap-



peared through the shining door of my hand mirror. I was the tattooed noon and naked midnight, the little jade insect that sings in the grass at dawn, and the clay nightingale that summons the dead. I bathed in the sun's waterfall, I bathed in myself, soaked in my own splendor. I was the flint that rips the storm clouds of night and opens the doors of the showers. I planted gardens of fire, gardens of blood, in the Southern sky. Its coral branches still graze the foreheads of lovers. There love is the meeting of two meteors in the middle of space, and not this obstinacy of rocks rubbing each other to ignite a sparking kiss.

Each night is an eyelid the thorns never stop piercing. And the day never ends, never stops counting itself, broken into copper coins. I am tired of so many stone beads scattered in the dust. I am tired of this unfinished solitaire. Lucky the mother scorpion who devours her young. Lucky the spider. Lucky the snake that sheds its skin. Lucky the water that drinks itself. When will these images stop devouring me? When will I stop falling in those empty eyes?

I am alone and fallen, grain of corn pulled from the ear of time. Sow me among the battle dead. I will be born in the captain's eye. Rain down on me, give me sun. My body, plowed by your body, will turn into a field where one is sown and a hundred reaped. Wait for me on the other side of the year: you will meet me like a lightning flash stretched to the edge of autumn. Touch my grass breasts. Kiss my belly, sacrificial stone. In my navel the whirlwind grows calm: I am the fixed center that moves the dance. Burn, fall into me: I am the pit of living lime that cures the bones of their afflictions. Die in my lips. Rise from my eyes. Images gush from my body: drink in these waters and remember what you forgot at birth. I am the wound that does not heal, the small solar stone: if you strike me, the world will go up in flames.

Take my necklace of tears. I wait for you on this side of time where light has inaugurated a joyous reign: the covenant of the enemy twins, water, that escapes between our fingers, and ice, petrified like a king in his pride. There you will open my body to read the inscription of your fate.

[E.W.]

# A poet

“Music and bread, milk and wine, love and sleep: free. Great mortal embrace of enemies that love each other: every wound is a fountain. Friends sharpen their weapons well, ready for the final dialogue to the end of time. The lovers cross the night enlaced, conjunction of stars and bodies. Man is the food of man. Knowledge is no different from dreaming, dreaming from doing. Poetry has set fire to all poems. Words are finished, images are finished. The distance between the name and the thing is abolished; to name is to create, and to imagine, to be born.”

*“For now, grab your hoe, theorize, be punctual. Pay your price and collect your salary. In your free time, graze until you burst: there are huge meadows of newspapers. Or, blow up every night at the café table, your tongue swollen with politics. Shut up or make noise: it’s all the same. Somewhere they’ve already sentenced you. There is no way out that does not lead to dishonor or the gallows: your dreams are too clear, you need a strong philosophy.”*

[E.W.]

## Huastec lady

She walks by the riverbank, naked, healthy, newly bathed, newly born from the night. On her breast burn jewels wrenched from summer. Covering her sex, the withered grass, the blue, almost black grass that grows on the rim of the volcano. On her belly an eagle spreads its wings, two enemy flags entwine, and water rests. She comes from afar, from the humid country. Few have seen her. I will tell her secret: by day, she is a stone on the side of the road; by night, a river that flows to the flank of man.

[E.W.]

# Toward the poem

(STARTING-POINTS)

I

*Words, the profits of a quarter-hour wrenched from the charred tree of language, between the good mornings and the good nights, doors that enter and exit and enter on a corridor that goes from no place to nowhere.*

*We turn and turn in the animal belly, in the mineral belly, in the belly of time. To find the way out: the poem.*

*Stubbornness of that face where my gazes are broken. Armed mind, unconquered before a countryside in ruins after the assault on the secret. Volcanic melancholy.*

*The benevolent papier-mâché pout of the Chief, the Leader, fetish of the century: the I, you, he, spinners of spider webs, pronouns armed with fingernails; faceless divinities, abstractions. He and we, We and He, nobody and no one. God the Father avenges himself in all these idols.*

*The moment freezes, compact whiteness that blinds and does not answer and dissolves, iceberg pushed by circular currents. It must return.*

*To rip off the masks of fantasy, to drive a spike into the sensitive center: to provoke the eruption.*

*To cut the umbilical cord, kill the Mother: the crime that the modern poet has committed for all, in the name of all. The young poet must discover Woman.*

*To speak for the sake of speaking, to wrench sounds from the desperate, to take dictation from the fly's flight, to blacken. Time splits in two: hour of the somersault.*

II

*Words, phrases, syllables, stars that turn around a fixed center. Two bodies, many beings that meet in a word. The paper is covered with*

*indelible letters that no one spoke, that no one dictated, that have fallen there and ignite and burn and go out. This is how poetry exists, how love exists. And if I don't exist, you do.*

*Everywhere solitary prisoners begin to create the words of the new dialogue.*

*The spring of water. The mouthful of health. A girl reclining on her past. The wine, the fire, the guitar, the tablecloth. A red velvet wall in a village square. The cheers, the shining cavalry entering the city, the citizens in flight: hymns! Eruption of the white, the green, the flaming. Poetry: the easiest thing, that which writes itself.*

*The poem creates a loving order. I foresee a sun-man and a moon-woman, he free of his power, she of her slavery, and implacable loves streaking through black space. Everything must yield to those incandescent eagles.*

*Song dawns on the turrets of your mind. Poetic justice burns fields of shame: there is no room for nostalgia, for the I, for proper nouns.*

*Every poem is fulfilled at the poet's expense.*

*Future noon, huge tree of invisible leaves. In the plazas, men and women sing the solar song, fountain of transparencies. The yellow surf covers me: nothing mine will speak through my mouth.*

*When History sleeps, it speaks in dreams: on the forehead of the sleeping people, the poem is a constellation of blood. When History wakes, image becomes act, the poem happens: poetry moves into action.*

*Deserve your dream.*

[E.W.]

# Hymn among the ruins

*Where foams the Sicilian sea . . .*

Góngora

Self crowned the day displays its plumage.  
A shout tall and yellow,  
impartial and beneficent,  
a hot geyser into the middle sky!  
Appearances are beautiful in this their momentary truth.  
The sea mounts the coast,  
clings between the rocks, a dazzling spider;  
the livid wound on the mountain glistens;  
a handful of goats becomes a flock of stones;  
the sun lays its gold egg upon the sea.  
All is god.  
A broken statue,  
columns gnawed by the light,  
ruins alive in a world of death in life!

*Night falls on Teotihuacán.*

*On top of the pyramid the boys are smoking marijuana,  
harsh guitars sound.*

*What weed, what living waters will give life to us,  
where shall we unearth the word,  
the relations that govern hymn and speech,  
the dance, the city and the measuring scales?*

*The song of Mexico explodes in a curse,  
a colored star that is extinguished,  
a stone that blocks our doors of contact.  
Earth tastes of rotten earth.*

Eyes see, hands touch.  
Here a few things suffice:  
prickly pear, coral and thorny planet,  
the hooded figs,  
grapes that taste of the resurrection,  
clams, stubborn maidenheads,  
salt, cheese, wine, the sun's bread.

An island girl looks on me from the height of her duskiness,  
a slim cathedral clothed in light.  
A tower of salt, against the green pines of the shore,  
the white sails of the boats arise.  
Light builds temples on the sea.

*New York, London, Moscow.*

*Shadow covers the plain with its phantom ivy,  
with its swaying and feverish vegetation,  
its mousy fur, its rats swarm.*

*Now and then an anemic sun shivers.*

*Propping himself on mounts that yesterday were cities,  
Polyphemus yawns.*

*Below, among the pits, a herd of men dragging along.  
(Domestic bipeds, their flesh—  
despite recent religious prohibitions—  
is much-loved by the wealthy classes.  
Until lately people considered them unclean animals.)*

To see, to touch each day's lovely forms.  
The light throbs, all darters and wings.  
The wine-stain on the tablecloth smells of blood.  
As the coral thrusts branches into the water  
I stretch my senses to this living hour:  
the moment fulfills itself in a yellow harmony.  
Midday, ear of wheat heavy with minutes,  
eternity's brimming cup.

*My thoughts are split, meander, grow entangled,  
start again,  
and finally lose headway, endless rivers,  
delta of blood beneath an unwinking sun.  
And must everything end in this spatter of stagnant water?*

Day, round day,  
shining orange with four-and-twenty bars,  
all one single yellow sweetness!  
Mind embodies in forms,  
the two hostile become one,  
the conscience-mirror liquifies,

once more a fountain of legends:  
man, tree of images,  
words which are flowers become fruits which are deeds.

*Naples, 1948*

[W.C.W.]

## Is there no way out?

Dozing I hear an incessant  
river running between dimly discerned, looming  
forms, drowsy and frowning.  
It is the black and white cataract, the voices,  
the laughter, the groans, of a confused  
world hurling itself from a height.  
And my thoughts that gallop and gallop and get  
no further also fall and rise, and turn  
back and plunge into the stagnant waters of  
language.  
A second ago it would have been easy to grasp a  
word and repeat it once and then again,  
any one of those phrases one utters alone in a  
room without mirrors  
to prove to oneself that it's not certain,  
that we are still alive after all,  
but now with weightless hands night is lulling the  
furious tide, and one by one images recede,  
one by one words cover their faces.

The time is past already for hoping for time's  
arrival, the time of yesterday, today and tomorrow,  
yesterday is today, tomorrow is today, today all  
is today, suddenly it came forth from itself  
and is watching me,  
it doesn't come from the past, it is not going  
anywhere, today is here, it is not death—  
no one dies of death, everyone dies of life—it

is not life—instantaneous fruit, vertiginous  
and lucid rapture, the empty taste of death  
gives more life to life—  
today is not death nor life,  
has no body, nor name, nor face, today is here,  
cast at my feet, looking at me.

I am standing, quiet at the center of the circle  
I made in falling away from my thoughts,  
I am standing and I have nowhere to turn my eyes  
to, not one splintered fragment of the past  
is left,  
all childhood has brought itself to this instant  
and the whole future is these pieces of  
furniture nailed to their places,  
the wardrobe with its wooden face, the chairs  
lined up waiting for nobody,  
the chubby armchair with its arms spread, obscene  
as if dead in its bed,  
the electric fan—conceited insect—the lying  
window, the actual without chinks or cracks,  
all has shut itself up in itself, I have come back  
to where I began, everything is today and  
forever.

Way off there, on the other side, shores extend,  
immense as a look of love,  
there the night clothed in water displays its  
hieroglyphs within hand's reach,  
the river enters singing along the sleeping plain  
and moistens the roots of the word freedom,  
there enlaced bodies lose themselves in a forest  
of transparent trees,  
under the leaves of the sun we walk, we  
are two reflections that cross swords with  
each other,  
silver stretches bridges for us to cross the night,  
stones make way for us,  
there you are the tattooing on the jade breast fallen  
from the moon, there the insomniac diamond  
yields



and in its empty center we are the eye that never  
blinks and the transfixion of the instant  
held within itself in its splendor.

All is far off, there is no way back, the dead  
are not dead, the living are not alive,  
there is a wall, an eye that is a well, all that is  
pulls downwards, the body is heavy,  
thoughts are heavy, all the years are this minute  
that is dropping interminably down,  
from that hotel room in San Francisco I stepped  
right into Bangkok, today is yesterday,  
tomorrow is yesterday,  
reality is a staircase going neither up nor down,  
we don't move, today is today, always is today,  
always the sound of trains that depart each night  
towards night,  
the resort to toothless words,  
the boring through of the wall, the comings and  
goings, reality shutting doors,  
putting in commas, the punctuation of time, all  
is far off, the walls are enormous,  
the glass of water is thousands of miles away, it  
will take me a thousand years to cross my  
room again,  
what a remote sound the word life has, I am not  
here, there is no here, this room is some-  
where else, here is nowhere, little by little  
I have been shutting myself and I find no  
exit that doesn't give onto this instant,  
this instant is I, I went out of myself all at  
once, I have no name and no face,  
I am here, cast at my feet, looking at myself  
looking to see myself seen.

Outside, in the gardens that summer has ravaged  
a cicada rages against the night.  
Am I or was I here?

*Tokyo, 1952*

[D.L.]

# The river

The restless city circles in my blood like a bee.  
And the plane that traces a querulous moan in a long S, the  
trams that break down on remote corners,  
that tree weighted with affronts that someone shakes at midnight  
in the plaza,  
the noises that rise and shatter and those that fade away and  
whisper a secret that wriggles in the ear,  
they open the darkness, precipices of a's and o's, tunnels of  
taciturn vowels,  
galleries I run down blindfolded, the drowsy alphabet falls in the  
pit like a river of ink,  
and the city goes and comes and its stone body shatters as it  
arrives at my temple,  
all night, one by one, statue by statue, fountain by fountain,  
stone by stone, the whole night long  
its shards seek one another in my forehead, all night long the  
city talks in its sleep through my mouth,  
a gasping discourse, a stammering of waters and arguing stone,  
its story.

To stop still an instant, to still my blood which goes and comes,  
goes and comes and says nothing,  
seated on top of me like a yogi in the shadow of a fig tree, like  
Buddha on the river's edge, to stop the instant,  
a single instant, seated on the edge of time, to strike out my  
image of the river that talks in its sleep and says nothing and  
carries me with it,  
seated on the bank to stop the river, to unlock the instant, to  
penetrate its astonished rooms reaching the center of water,  
to drink at the inexhaustible fountain, to be the cascade of blue  
syllables falling from stone lips,  
seated on the edge of night like Buddha on his self's edge, to be  
the flicker of the lidded instant,  
the conflagration and the destruction and the birth of the instant,  
the breathing of night rushing enormous at the edge of time,  
to say what the river says, a long word resembling lips, a long  
word that never ends,

to say what time says in hard sentences of stone, in vast gestures  
of sea covering worlds.

In mid-poem a great helplessness overtakes me, everything  
abandons me,  
there is no one beside me, not even those eyes that gaze from  
behind me at what I write,  
no one behind or in front of me, the pen mutinies, there is  
neither beginning nor end nor even a wall to leap,  
the poem is a deserted esplanade, what's said is not said, the  
unsaid is unsayable,  
towers, devastated terraces, Babylons, a sea of black salt, a blind  
kingdom,

No,

to stop myself, to keep quiet, to close my eyes until a green spike  
sprouts from my eyelids, a spurt of suns,  
and the alphabet wavers long under the wind of the vision and  
the tide rolls into one wave and the wave breaks the dike,  
to wait until the paper is covered with stars and the poem a  
forest of tangled words,

No,

I have nothing to say, no one has anything to say, nothing and  
nobody except the blood,  
nothing except this coming and going of the blood, this writing  
over the written, the repetition of the same word in mid-poem,  
syllables of time, broken letters, splotches of ink, blood that goes  
and comes and says nothing and carries me with it.

And I speak, my beak bent over the paper and someone beside  
me writes while the blood goes and comes,  
and the city goes and comes through his blood, wants to say  
something, time wants to say something, the night wants to  
speak,  
all night long the man wants to say one single word, to speak his  
discourse at last, made up of moldered stones,  
and I whet my hearing, I want to hear what the man says, to  
repeat what the drifting city says,  
all night the broken stones seek one another, groping in my  
forehead, all night the water fights the stone,  
the words against the night, the night against the night, nothing  
lights up the opaque combat,

the shock of arms does not wrench away a single gleam to the  
stone, one spark to the night, no one grants a respite,  
it is a fight to the death between immortals,

No,

to offer retreat, to stop the river of blood, the river of ink,  
to go back upstream, and that the night turn upon itself  
display its bowels,  
and that the water show its heart, a cluster of drowned mirrors,  
may time thicken and its wound be an invisible scar, scarcely  
a delicate line upon the skin of the world,  
let the words lay down their arms and the poem be one single  
interwoven word,  
and may the soul be the blackened grass after fire, the lunar  
breast of a sea that's turned to stone and reflects nothing  
except splayed dimension, expansion, space lying down upon  
itself, spread wings immense,  
and may everything be like flame that cuts itself into and freezes  
into the rock of diaphanous bowels,  
hard blazing resolved now in crystal, peaceable clarity.

And the river goes back upstream, strikes its sails, picks up its  
images and coils within itself.

Geneva, 1953

[P.B.]

## Sun stone

*La treizième revient . . . c'est encor la première;  
et c'est toujours la seule—ou c'est le seul moment;  
car es-tu reine, ô toi, la première ou dernière?  
es-tu roi, toi le seul ou le dernier amant?*

Gérard de Nerval, "Arthémis"

willow of crystal, a poplar of water,  
a pillar of fountain by the wind drawn over,  
tree that is firmly rooted and that dances,  
turning course of a river that goes curving,

advances and retreats, goes roundabout,  
arriving forever:

the calm course of a star  
or the spring, appearing without urgency,  
water behind a stillness of closed eyelids  
flowing all night and pouring out prophecies,  
a single presence in the procession of waves,  
wave over wave until all is overlapped,  
in a green sovereignty without decline  
a bright hallucination of many wings  
when they all open at the height of the sky,

course of a journey among the densities  
of the days of the future and the fateful  
brilliance of misery shining like a bird  
that petrifies the forest with its singing  
and the annunciations of happiness  
among the branches which go disappearing,  
hours of light even now pecked away by the birds,  
omens which even now fly out of my hand,

an actual presence like a burst of singing,  
like the song of the wind in a burning building,  
a long look holding the whole world suspended,  
the world with all its seas and all its mountains,  
body of light as it is filtered through agate,  
the thighs of light, the belly of light, the bays,  
the solar rock and the cloud-colored body,  
color of day that goes racing and leaping,  
the hour glitters and assumes its body,  
now the world stands, visible through your body,  
and is transparent through your transparency,

I go a journey in galleries of sound,  
I flow among the resonant presences  
going, a blind man passing transparencies,  
one mirror cancels me, I rise from another,  
forest whose trees are the pillars of magic,  
under the arches of light I go among  
the corridors of a dissolving autumn,

I go among your body as among the world,  
your belly the sunlit center of the city,  
your breasts two churches where are celebrated  
the great parallel mysteries of the blood,  
the looks of my eyes cover you like ivy,  
you are a city by the sea assaulted,  
you are a rampart by the light divided  
into two halves, distinct, color of peaches,  
and you are saltiness, you are rocks and birds  
beneath the edict of concentrated noon,

and dressed in the coloring of my desires  
you go as naked as my thoughts go naked,  
I go among your eyes as I swim water,  
the tigers come to these eyes to drink their dreams,  
the hummingbird is burning among these flames,  
I go upon your forehead as on the moon,  
like cloud I go among your imagining  
journey your belly as I journey your dream,

your loins are harvest, a field of waves and singing,  
your loins are crystal and your loins are water,  
your lips, your hair, the looks you give me, they  
all night shower down like rain, and all day long  
you open up my breast with your fingers of water,  
you close my eyelids with your mouth of water,  
raining upon my bones, and in my breast  
the roots of water drive deep a liquid tree,

I travel through your waist as through a river,  
I voyage your body as through a grove going,  
as by a footpath going up a mountain  
and suddenly coming upon a steep ravine  
I go the straitened way of your keen thoughts  
break through to daylight upon your white forehead  
and there my spirit flings itself down, is shattered  
now I collect my fragments one by one  
and go on, bodiless, searching, in the dark,

the limitless corridors of memory  
the doors that open on empty living-rooms  
where every springtime withers and rots away  
the jewels of thirst are burning at the base,  
the face obliterated at memory,  
the hand which will dissolve if I even touch it,  
threads of those spider-webs in chaos over  
the smiling of a past that falls away,

I search where I come face to face with daylight,  
search without finding, I search for a moment,  
for a face of lightning-flash and thunderstorm  
running among the enormous trees of night,  
face of all rain in a garden of shadows,  
insistent water that flows along my side,

I search without finding, and I write alone,  
no one is here, and the day ends, the year ends,  
I have gone down with the moment, all the way down,  
the road is invisible over all these mirrors,  
they repeat and reflect forever my broken image,  
I pace the days, the moments pave this roadway,  
I step upon the thinking of my shadow,  
I pace my shadow in search of my one moment,

I seek the day live as a live bird,  
I seek the five o'clock sun of afternoon  
tempered red by the red walls of *tezontle*:  
an afternoon hour, ripening its clusters,  
and as it bursts the girls emerge in light  
from that rose-colored center and they scatter  
out from the terrace of the college building,  
tall as the autumn one girl walking onward  
involved in light among the far arcades  
and space girdles her round in a bright garment  
of a new body more golden and transparent,

a tiger the color of light, a dark-brown deer  
loping along the outskirts of the night,  
a girl glimpsed once as she that once reclined

along the greenest balconies of the rain,  
the endless unnumbered adolescent face,  
I have forgotten your name, was it Melusine,  
Laura, Isabel, Mary, Persephone,  
your face is all their faces and none of them,  
you are all the times and never any of them,  
you take on the likeness of a tree, a cloud,  
you are all birds and now you are a star,  
now you resemble the sharp edge of a sword  
and now the executioner's bowl of blood,  
the encroaching ivy that overgrows and then  
roots out the soul and divides it from itself,

writing of fire on the slab of jade,  
the cleft in the rock, serpent-goddess and queen,  
pillar of cloud, and fountain struck from the stone,  
the nest of eagles, the circle of the moon,  
the seed of anise, mortal and smallest thorn  
that has the power to give immortal pain,  
shepherd of valleys underneath the sea  
and guardian of the valley of the dead,  
liana that hangs at the pitch of vertigo,  
climber and bindweed and the venomous plant,  
flower of resurrection and grape of life,  
lady of the flute and of the lightning-flash,  
terrace of jasmine, and salt rubbed in the wound,  
a branch of roses for the man shot down,  
snowstorm in August, moon of the harrowing,  
the writing of the sea cut in basalt,  
the writing of the wind upon the desert,  
testament of the sun, pomegranate, wheat-ear,

a face of flames, face that is eaten away,  
the adolescent and persecuted face  
the years of fantasy and circular days  
that open upon the same street, the same wall,  
the moment flares up and they are all one face,  
the procession of faces of this calling,  
all of these names are unified in one name,  
all of these faces are now a single face,



all centuries are now a single instant  
and throughout the centuries of centuries  
the path to the future shut by these two eyes,

there is nothing before me, but a moment  
recovered tonight, standing against a dream  
that is dreamed of images all intertwined,  
sculptured in permanence against the dream:  
a moment torn from the zero of this night,  
lifted up forcibly, feature by feature,  
meanwhile, beyond it, time, spilling its guts,  
and hammering, banging on the door of my soul,  
the world, with its blood-spattered calendar,

only a moment while the capitals,  
the names, strong flavors, the brightness of all things  
crumble away within my sightless forehead,  
while the mute heavy grieving of the night  
beats down my thinking and my skeleton  
and my blood courses more deliberately  
and now my teeth begin to relent, my eyes  
begin to cloud over; and the days and years  
go heaping up their high and empty horrors,

time in an ancient gesture folds its fan  
and there is nothing behind its images  
the moment plunges into itself and floats  
encircled by death among the threatenings  
of the enormous mournful yawn of midnight,  
and wholly threatened by the hullabaloo  
of death enlivened by energy and masked,  
the moment plunges and it pierces itself,  
closes as a fist closes, like a perfect  
fruit that ripens inwards in its own good time  
spontaneously, drinks itself, and scatters,  
the numinous moment shines, pierces itself,  
and ripens inward, ripens and puts forth roots,  
it grows within me, it completely fills me,  
lavishes out on me delirious branches,  
the thoughts flying within me are its birds,

and in my veins its mercury circulates,  
the tree of the mind, its fruit tasting of time,

and life! to be lived, vivid nevertheless,  
time that turns into a great surf approaching,  
withdrawing without ever turning back,  
the past is not the past, but it is here, now,  
and in the silence of the present, it fills  
into another moment which vanishes:

facing an afternoon, stone and saltpeter,  
an enormous fleet of invisible razors,  
you write a red and indecipherable  
writing upon my skin and these open wounds  
cover my body, a burning suit of flame,  
I burn and am not consumed, I long for water,  
and in your eyes there is no water, but stone,  
your breasts are stone, your belly is stone, your loins  
are made of stone, your mouth has the taste of dust,  
your mouth tastes to me of an envenomed time,  
your body has the taste of a pit without  
any exit, a hall of mirrors reflecting  
the eyes of one thirsty man, a corridor  
returning forever to its starting point,  
and I in blindness, you take me by the hand  
along these endless obstinate galleries  
into the center of this circle; erect,  
you stand like lightning frozen into an axe,  
the flaying light drawing and fascinating  
as the built scaffold of death to the condemned,  
flexible as a braided whip and slender  
a twin weapon, a weapon like the moon,  
and keenness of your speaking penetrates  
my breast, leaving me empty and desolate,  
you rip up all my memories by the roots,  
I have forgotten my name, and now my friends  
go grunting among the hogs, or lie and rot  
eaten by the sun, beneath the precipice,

now there is nothing in me but one vast wound,  
a gap with no possible way of healing,  
a now without windows, a turn of intellect  
moving on itself, repeating and reflecting,  
it loses itself in its own transparency,  
self-knowledge that is shot through by the eye  
that watches itself watching, drowning itself  
in clarity:

I saw your frightful armor,  
Melusine, at dawn, in your green scales burning,  
you slept, in coils and entangled with the sheets,  
and like a bird you shrieked on awakening  
whitened and dwindled away, endlessly, broken,  
nothing remained of you except that shrieking,  
and at the end of the years, I find myself  
with a cough and poor eyesight, turning over  
old photographs:

nobody, you were no one,  
nobody, a heap of ashes and a broom,  
a knife with a notched edge, a feather duster,  
a few feet of skin suspended on some bones,  
a dried-out bunch of something, a black hole  
and there at the bottom of the hole two eyes  
eyes of a girl drowned a thousand years ago,

those looks buried at the bottom of the pit,  
looking at us from the beginning of time,  
the young girl in her seeing an old mother  
who sees within her grown son a young father,  
the mother's seeing of a lonely daughter  
who sees in the kingly father a young son,  
looks that look into us to the furthest depth  
of life, that are the traps and snares of death  
—is it the opposite? is falling in those eyes  
the way back to the true and central life?

to fall, to return, to dream, and let me be  
the dream of the eyes of the future, another life,  
other clouds, and die at last another death!  
—tonight is my life, and this single moment

which never stops opening, never stops revealing  
where my life lay, who I was, what your name is  
and what my own name is:

was it I planning  
for summer coming—and all coming summers—  
in Christopher Street—this was ten years ago—  
with Phyllis in the bright hollows of whose throat  
the sparrows could come to drink, drinking the light?  
on the Reforma did Carmen say to me  
'this air is dry, it's always October here',  
or did the other one say that, the one I lost,  
or did I invent it, did nobody say it to me?  
Was it I riding through a Oaxaca night  
that was black-green and enormous, like a tree,  
soliloquizing like the fantastic wind;  
coming back to my room—always a room somewhere—  
could the mirrors really not recognize me?  
at the Hotel Vernet did we see dawn  
dance with the chestnut trees—'it's late already'—  
and did you do your hair and did I watch  
the stains on the wall without saying a word?  
did we go up the tower together, and see  
the day descending on the outer reef?  
did we eat grapes at Bidart? was it we  
buying gardenias at Perote?

names, places,  
streets and streets, faces, streets, circles,  
railway stations, a park, the single rooms,  
stains on the wall, somebody combing her hair,  
somebody singing beside me, somebody dressing,  
rooms, places, streets, names, rooms,

Madrid, nineteen hundred and thirty-seven,  
on the Plaza del Angel seeing the women  
doing their sewing and singing with their sons,  
and then the shriek of the siren and their shriek,  
houses brought down and crawling in the dust,  
the towers cloven, the faces running spittle  
and the hurricane of engines, I hold static:  
two naked people loving one another

for the sake of defending our eternal portion,  
our rationing of time and of paradise,  
to touch our root, to reach ourselves in touching,  
to recover our inheritance pirated  
by robbers of life in a thousand centuries,  
these two took their clothes off and they kissed  
because these nakednesses, woven together,  
can overleap time and are invulnerable,  
nothing can touch them, they go to the origins,  
there is no You nor I, tomorrow, yesterday, names,  
there truly two become only one body and soul,  
O total being . . .

there are rooms that are adrift  
among the great cities that go foundering,  
furnished rooms, city streets, names striking like wounds,  
the room whose windows look out on other rooms  
all papered in the same discoloured paper  
where a man in shirt-sleeves reads his newspaper  
or a woman irons; the room lit bright in spring  
and, entering, the branches of the peach tree;  
the other room: outside it is always raining,  
there is a courtyard with three rusted children,  
rooms that are ships, and that are rocking and singing  
in a gulf of brilliance; or the submarines:  
silence dispersed upon the greenness of waves  
and everything that we touch phosphoresces;  
memorials to a luxury whose pictures  
are eaten away over the threadbare carpets;  
trap-doors, cells, oubliettes, enchanted caverns,  
cages of birds, and rooms with numbers on them,  
everything is transfigured, everything is in flight,  
all these moldings are clouds, and every door  
opens on the sea, the field, the air; each meal  
is now a celebration; sealed tight as shells,  
time cannot hope, besieging them, to conquer,  
there is no time here, no wall: space, space is here,  
open your hand and gather these riches in,  
cut all the fruits, this life is here to eat,  
lie at the foot of this tree, and drink the water!

everything is transfigured and is sacred,  
and each room is now the center of the world,  
tonight is the first night, today the first day,  
whenever two people kiss the world is born,  
a drop of light with guts of transparency  
the room like a fruit splits and begins to open  
or burst like a star among the silences  
and all laws now rat-gnawed and eaten away,  
barred windows of banks and penitentiaries,  
the bars of paper, and the barbed-wire fences,  
the stamps and the seals, the sharp prongs and the spurs,  
the one-note sermon of the bombs and wars,  
the gentle scorpion in his cap and gown,  
the tiger who is the president of the Society  
for the Prevention of Cruelty and the Red Cross,  
the pedagogical ass, and the crocodile  
set up as savior, father of his country,  
the founder, the leader, the shark, the architect  
of the future of us all, the hog in uniform,  
and then that one, the favorite son of the Church  
who can be seen brushing his black teeth  
in holy water and taking evening courses  
in English and democracy, the invisible  
barriers, the mad and decaying masks  
that are used to separate us, man from man,  
and man from his own self

they are thrown down

for an enormous instant and we see darkly  
our own lost unity, how vulnerable it is  
to be women and men, the glory it is to be man  
and share our bread and share our sun and our death,  
the dark forgotten marvel of being alive;

to love is to struggle, and if two people kiss  
the world is transformed, and all desires made flesh  
and intellect is made flesh; great wings put forth  
their shoots from the shoulders of the slave, the world  
is real and to be touched and the wine is wine,  
the bread can taste again, the water is water,  
to love is to struggle, is to open the doors,

to stop being a fantasy with a number  
condemned to the sentence of the endless chain  
by a faceless master;

and the world is changed  
when two people look at each other, recognizing  
to love is to take off our clothes and our names:  
'Allow me to be your whore', these are the words  
of Heloise, but he gave in to the law,  
he took her to be his wife, and as reward,  
later, they castrated him;

better to have the crime,  
the suicidal lovers, or the incest  
between two brothers, as between two mirrors  
falling in love and loving their reflections,  
better to venture and eat the poisoned bread,  
better adultery on beds of ashes,  
the ferocious passions, and delirium,  
its venomous ivy, and the sodomite  
who carries for his buttonhole carnation  
a gobbet of spit, better be killed by stoning  
in the public square than tread the mill that grinds  
out into nothing the substance of our life,  
changes eternity into hollow hours,  
minutes into penitentiaries, and time  
into some copper pennies and abstract shit;

better take chastity, the invisible flower  
swaying among the evening stalks of silence,  
the difficult diamond of the saints of heaven  
which filters out the desires and satiates time,  
makes marriages of quietude and movement,  
sings the song of solitude, her corolla,  
a petal of crystal is, she sings, each hour,  
the world is stripping itself of all its masks  
and at its center, vibrating, transparent,  
that being we call God, the nameless being,  
contemplative of itself in nothingness,  
the faceless being emerging from its self,  
sun of suns, fullness of presences and names;  
I follow my delirium, rooms, rooms, streets,

walk groping and groping down the corridors  
of time and over and under its staircases  
I feel along its walls and, not advancing,  
I turn to where I began, I seek your face,  
walk doubtfully these dim streets of my own self  
under a timeless sun and you beside me  
walk with me like a tree, a river going  
walk with me speaking to me like a river,  
grow like a stalk of wheat among my fingers,  
throb like a squirrel warm among my fingers,  
flying become a thousand birds, your smiling  
has covered my body with sea-foam, your head  
is a nebula in small between my hands,  
the world grows fresh and green while you are smiling  
and eating an orange

and the world is changed  
if two people shaken by dizziness and enlaced  
are fallen among the grass: the sky descending,  
the trees pointing and climbing upward, and space  
alone among all things is light and silence,  
and pure space opens to the eagle of the eye,  
and it sees pass the white tribe of the clouds,  
the body's cables snap, the soul sails out,  
now is the moment we lose our names, and float  
along the border-line between blue and green,  
the integrated time when nothing happens  
but the event, belonging, communicating,

nothing happens, nothing, you become calm, blinking  
(silence: an angel crosses over in this moment  
enormous as the life of a hundred suns),  
has nothing happened but the flickering eyelid?  
—and the banquet, the exile, the first murder,  
the jawbone of an ass, the city-battering sound  
and the unbelieving gaze of the dead man  
falling on the embers of the burning field,  
and Agamemnon's lowing, immense howl,  
the repetitious crying of Cassandra  
a louder sound than the sound of waves crying,  
and Socrates in chains (the sun is rising,



to die is to awake: 'Crito, I owe a  
cock to Aesculapius, for being cured of life'),  
the jackal who gives tongue among the ruins  
of Nineveh, the shadow Brutus beheld  
the night before the battle, Moctezuma  
lying on his bed of thorns, insomnia,  
the journey in the tumbril, the way to death  
—the interminable journey made still longer  
for Robespierre progressing inch by inch  
holding his shattered jawbone in his hands—  
Churruca acting as if his vat were a throne  
of scarlet, and the measured steps of Lincoln  
getting ready, that night, to go to theater,  
the rattle in Trotsky's throat and then his moan  
as of a wild boar, Madero and his gaze  
answered by nobody: why are they killing me?  
the balls, the guts, the alases, silences  
of the saint, the criminal, and the poor devil,  
graveyards of phrases and of those anecdotes  
that the old dogs of rhetoric scratch over,  
delirium, whinnying, the obscure noises  
which have to do with death, this panting frenzy  
of life getting itself born, the scraping sounds  
of bones macerated in ferocity  
and the mouth of foam that is the prophet's mouth  
and his cry and the cry of the torturer  
and the cry of the victim . . .

they are flames

the eyes are flames and those who gaze are flaming  
the ear is fire and the fiery music,  
live coal the lips and the tongue firebrand,  
the one who touches and the one who is touching,  
thinking and thought, and the thinker is a fire  
and all things burn and the universe is flame,  
and nothing burns like the rest, nothing which is  
nothing except a thought in flames, ultimate smoke:  
there is no victim and no torturer . . .

and the cry

that Friday afternoon? and then the silence  
covering all the air with symbols, silence

which speaks without speaking, does it say nothing?  
are they nothing at all, the cries of men?  
does nothing happen in time but time passing?

—nothing happens, only the flickering eyelid  
of the great sun, hardly a movement, nothing,  
the unredeemable boundaries of time,  
the dead are all pinned down by their own dying,  
they cannot die again of another death,  
they are untouchable, locked in their gestures,  
and since their solitude and since their dying  
this only can they do: stare sightless at us,  
their death is simply the statue of their life,  
perpetual being and nothingness without end,  
for every moment is nothing without end,  
a king of fantasy regulates your pulse  
and your last gesture carves an impassive mask  
and lays that sculpture over your mobile face:  
we are the monument raised to an alien  
life, a life unlived, not lively, hardly ours.

—and this our life, when was it truly ours?  
and when are we truly whatever we are?  
for surely we are not, we never are  
anything alone but spinning and emptiness,  
crazy faces made in the mirror, horror,  
vomit; life is not ours, it is the others',  
it is not anybody's, all of us are  
life—the bread of the sun for all the others,  
all of those others who are us, we ourselves—  
I am the other when I am myself, my acts  
are more my own when they are everybody's,  
because to be myself I must be other,  
go out of myself, seek my self among others,  
those others who are not if I do not exist,  
others give me the fullness of my existence,  
I am not, there is no I, We are forever,  
and life is otherwise, always *there*, farther,  
beyond thee, beyond me, eternal horizon,  
life that is dying for us, life that is made for



carry me through to the far side of this night,  
the place where I am You, equals Ourselves,  
kingdom of persons and pronouns intertwined,

gateway of being: open your being, awaken,  
learn then to be, begin to carve your face,  
develop your elements, and keep your vision  
keen to look at my face, as I at yours,  
keen to look full at life right through to death,  
faces of sea, of bread, of rock, of fountain,  
the spring of origin which will dissolve our faces  
in the nameless face, existence without face  
the inexpressible presence of presences . . .

I want to go on, to go beyond; I cannot;  
the moment scatters itself in many things,  
I have slept the dreams of the stone that never dreams  
and deep among the dreams of years like stones  
have heard the singing of my imprisoned blood,  
with a premonition of light the sea sang,  
and one by one the barriers give way,  
all of the gates have fallen to decay,  
the sun has forced an entrance through my forehead,  
has opened my eyelids at last that were kept closed,  
unfastened my being of its swaddling clothes,  
has rooted me out of my self, and separated  
me from my animal sleep centuries of stone  
and the magic of reflections resurrects  
willow of crystal, a poplar of water,  
a pillar of fountain by the wind drawn over,  
tree that is firmly rooted and that dances,  
turning course of a river that goes curving,  
advances and retreats, goes roundabout,  
arriving forever:

*Mexico City, 1957*

[M.R.]

# Dawn

Cold rapid hands  
draw back one by one  
the bandages of dark  
I open my eyes  
                    still  
I am living  
                    at the center  
of a wound still fresh

[C.T.]

# Here

My steps along this street  
resound  
                    in another street  
in which  
                    I hear my steps  
passing along this street  
in which

Only the mist is real

[C.T.]

# Landscape

Rock and precipice,  
more time than stone, this  
timeless matter.

Through its cicatrices  
falls without moving  
perpetual virgin water.

Immensity reposes here  
rock on rock,  
rocks over air.

The world's manifest  
as it is: a sun  
immobile, in the abyss.

Scale of vertigo:  
the crags weigh  
no more than our shadows.

[C.T.]

## Certainty

If it is real the white  
light from this lamp, real  
the writing hand, are they  
real, the eyes looking at what I write?

From one word to the other  
what I say vanishes.  
I know that I am alive  
between two parentheses.

[C.T.]

# Touch

My hands  
open the curtains of your being  
clothe you in a further nudity  
uncover the bodies of your body  
My hands  
invent another body for your body

[C.T.]

# Duration

*"Thunder and wind: duration."*  
I Ching

I

Sky black  
    Yellow earth  
The rooster tears the night apart  
The water wakes and asks what time it is  
The wind wakes and asks for you  
A white horse goes by

II

As the forest in its bed of leaves  
you sleep in your bed of rain  
you sing in your bed of wind  
you kiss in your bed of sparks

III

Multiple vehement odor  
many-handed body

On an invisible stem a single  
whiteness

IV

Speak listen answer me  
what the thunder-clap  
says, the woods  
understand

V

I enter by your eyes  
you come forth by my mouth  
You sleep in my blood  
I waken in your head

VI

I will speak to you in stone-language  
(answer with a green syllable)  
I will speak to you in snow-language  
(answer with a fan of bees)  
I will speak to you in water-language  
(answer with a canoe of lightning)  
I will speak to you in blood-language  
(answer with a tower of birds)

[D.L.]

## Last dawn

Your hair lost in the forest,  
your feet touching mine.  
Asleep you are bigger than the night,  
but your dream fits within this room.





—glass cement stone iron—  
formidable chimeras appear  
raised up by calculus  
multiplied by profit  
by the side of the anonymous wall  
sudden poppy

Salamander  
Yellow claw a scrawl  
of red letters on a  
wall of salt  
Claw of sunlight  
on a heap of bones

Salamander  
fallen star  
in the endlessness of bloodstained opal  
ensepulchred  
beneath eyelids of quartz  
lost girl  
in tunnels of onyx  
in the circles of basalt  
buried seed  
grain of energy  
in the marrow of granite

Salamander, you who lay dynamite in iron's  
black and blue breast  
you explode like a sun  
you open yourself like a wound  
you speak  
as a fountain speaks

Salamander  
blade of wheat  
daughter of fire  
spirit of fire  
condensation of blood  
sublimation of blood  
evaporation of blood



Salamander

Hanging bridge between eras

bridge of cold blood

axis of movement

(The changes in the alpine species

the most slender of all

take place in the mother's womb

Of all the tiny eggs no more than two mature

and until they hatch

the embryos are nourished on a broth

composed of the doughy mass of their aborted brother-eggs)

The Spanish Salamander

black and red mountaineer

The sun nailed to the sky's center does not throb

does not breathe

life does not commence without blood

without the embers of sacrifice

the wheel of days does not revolve

Xólotl refuses to consume himself

he hid himself in the corn but they found him

he hid himself in the maguey but they found him

he fell into the water and became the fish axólotl

the Double-Being

'and then they killed him'

Movement began, the world was set in motion

the procession of dates and names

Xólotl the dog, guide to Hell

he who dug up the bones of the fathers

he who cooked the bones in a pot

he who lit the fire of the years

the maker of men

Xólotl the penitent

the burst eye that weeps for us

Xólotl

larva of the butterfly

double of the Star

sea-shell

other face of the Lord of Dawn

Xólotl the axólotl

## Salamander

solar arrow

lamp of the moon

column of noonday

name of woman

scales of night

(The infinite weight of light  
a half-drachm on your eyelashes)

Salamander

back flame

sunflower

you yourself the sun

the moon

turning for ever around you

pomegranate that bursts itself open each night

fixed star on the brow of the sky

and beat of the sea and the stilled light

open mind above the

to-and-fro of the sea

The star-lizard, salamandria

saurian scarcely eight centimeters long

lives in crevices and is the color of dust

Salamander of earth and water

green stone in the mouth of the dead

stone of incarnation

stone of fire

sweat of the earth

salt flaming and scorching

salt of destruction and

mask of lime that consumes the face

Salamander of air and fire

wasp's nest of suns

red word of beginning

The salamander

a lizard

her tongue ends in a dart

her tail ends in a dart  
She is unhissable      She is unsayable  
she rests upon hot coals  
queens it over firebrands  
If she carves herself in the flame  
she burns her monument  
Fire is her passion, her *patience*

Salamander

Salamater

[D.L.]

## Happiness in Herat

*For Carlos Pellicer*

I came here  
as I write these lines,  
at random:  
a blue-and-green mosque,  
six truncated minarets,  
two or three tombs,  
memories of a poet-saint,  
the names of Timur and his lineage.

I met the wind of the hundred days.  
It spread sand over all the nights.  
It scourged my brow, scorched my lids.  
Daybreak:

                    dispersion of birds  
and that sound of water among stones  
which is the peasant's footsteps.  
(But the water tasted of dust.)  
Murmurs in the plain,  
appearances  
                    disappearances,  
other whirlwinds  
insubstantial as my thoughts.  
Wheeling and wheeling

in the hotel room, on the hills:  
this land a camels' graveyard  
and in my brooding  
always the same crumbling faces.  
Is the wind, the lord of ruins,  
my only master?

Erosions:  
minus grows more and more.

At the saint's tomb  
I nailed a nail  
deep into the lifeless tree,  
not,  
like the others, against the evil eye:  
against myself.  
(I said something—  
words the wind took away.)

One afternoon the heights convened.  
The poplars walked around  
while standing still.

Sun on the glazed tiles  
sudden springtimes.

In the Ladies' Garden  
I climbed to the turquoise cupola.  
Minarets tattooed with characters:  
that Cufic script became clear  
beyond its meaning.  
I did not have the vision without images,  
I did not see forms whirl till they disappeared  
in immobile clarity,  
in the Sufi's being-without-substance.  
I did not drink plenitude in vacuity  
nor see the two and thirty signs  
of the Bodhisattva's diamond-body.  
I saw a blue sky and all the shades of blue,  
and the white to green  
of the spread fan of the poplars,  
and, on the tip of the pine tree,  
the black-and-white ouzel,

less bird than air.  
I saw the world resting upon itself.  
I saw the appearances.  
And I named that half-hour:  
Perfection of the Finite.

[L.K.]

## Apparition

If man is dust  
those who go through the plain  
are men

[C.T.]

## In the Lodi gardens

*For Claude Esteban*

The black, pensive, dense  
domes of the mausoleums  
suddenly shot birds  
into the unanimous blue

[E.W.]





was covered with leaves and eyes  
was the rumor pushing forward  
a swarm of images

(I set down now a few  
twisted strokes  
                                black on white  
diminutive garden of letters  
planted in the lamp's light)

The car raced on  
through the sleeping suburb  
                                I raced  
to follow my thoughts  
                                mine and others  
Reminiscences left-overs imaginings  
names

                The remains of sparks  
                the laughter of the late parties  
                the dance of the hours  
                the march of the constellations  
and other commonplaces  
Do I believe in man  
                                or in the stars?

I believe  
                (with here a series  
of dots)  
                I see

A portico of weather-eaten pillars  
statues carved by the plague  
a double line of beggars  
                                and the stench  
a king on his throne  
                                surrounded  
by a coming and going of aromas  
as if they were concubines  
pure almost corporeal undulating  
from the sandalwood to the jasmine  
and its phantoms

Putrefaction  
fever of forms  
fever of time  
ecstatic in its combinations  
The whole universe a peacock's tail  
myriads of eyes  
other eyes reflecting  
modulations  
reverberations of a single eye  
a solitary sun  
hidden  
behind its cloth of transparencies  
its tide of marvels  
Everything was flaming  
stones women water  
Everything sculptured  
from color to form  
from form to fire  
Everything was vanishing  
Music of wood and metal  
in the cell of the god  
womb of the temple  
Music  
like the wind and water embracing  
and over the entwined sounds  
the human voice  
a moon in heat at midday  
stela of the disembodied soul  
  
(I write without knowing the outcome  
of what I write  
I look between the lines  
My image is the lamp  
lit  
in the middle of the night)  
  
Mountebank  
ape of the Absolute  
cowering  
pothook

covered with pale ashes  
a sadhu looked at me and laughed  
watching me from the other shore  
far off, far off  
watching me like the animals like the saints  
Naked uncombed smeared  
a fixed ray a mineral glitter his eyes  
I wanted to speak to him  
he answered with a rumble of bowels  
Gone gone

Where?  
To what region of being  
to what existence  
in the open air of what worlds  
in what time?

(I write  
each letter is a germ  
The memory  
imposes its tide  
and repeats its own midday)

Gone gone  
Saint scoundrel saint  
in beatitudes of hunger or drugs  
Perhaps he saw Krishna  
sparkling blue tree  
dark fountain splashing amid the drought  
Perhaps in a cleft stone  
he grasped the form of woman  
its rent  
the formless dizziness  
For this or that  
he lives on the ghat where they burn the dead

The lonely streets  
the houses and their shadows  
All was the same and all different  
The car raced on  
I was quiet

among my runaway thoughts

(Gone gone  
Saint clown saint beggar king damned  
it is the same

always the same

within the same

It is to be always within oneself  
closed up in the same

Closed up on oneself

rotted idol)

Gone gone

he watched me from the other shore

he watches me

from his interminable noon

I am in the wandering hour

The car races on among the houses

I write by the light of a lamp

The absolutes the eternities

their outlying districts

are not my theme

I am hungry for life and for death also

I know what I know and I write it

The embodiment of time

the act

the movement in which the whole being

is sculptured and destroyed

Consciousness and hands to grasp the hour

I am a history

a memory inventing itself

I am never alone

I speak with you always

you speak with me always

I move in the dark

I plant signs

[L.K.]

# Village

The stones are time  
centuries of wind  
the people are stone  
turns upon itself and sinks  
into the stone day

The wind  
The trees are time  
The wind

**There is no water here for all the luster of its eyes**

[C.T.]

# Daybreak

Hands and lips of wind  
heart of water  
eucalyptus  
campground of the clouds  
the life that is born every day  
the death that is born every life

I rub my eyes:  
the sky walks the land

[E.W.]

# Nightfall

What sustains it,  
half-open, the clarity of nightfall,  
the light let loose in the gardens?

All the branches,  
conquered by the weight of birds,  
lean toward the darkness.

Pure, self-absorbed moments  
still gleam  
on the fences.

Receiving night,  
the groves become  
hushed fountains.

A bird falls,  
the grass grows dark,  
edges blur, lime is black,  
the world is less credible.

[E.W.]

## On reading John Cage

Read

unread:

*Music without measurements,  
sounds passing through circumstances.*

I hear them within me

passing outside,

I see them outside me

passing within me.

I am the circumstance.

Music:

I hear within what I see outside,

I see within what I hear outside.

(I can't hear myself hearing: Duchamp.)

I am

an architecture of sounds

instantaneous

on

a space that disintegrates itself.

(*Everything*

*we come across is to the point.*)

Music

invents silence,

architecture

invents space.

Factories of air.

Silence

is the space of music:

an unextended

space:

there is no silence

save in the mind.

Silence is an idea,

the *idée fixe* of music.

Music is not an idea:

it is movement,

sounds walking over silence.

(*Not one sound fears the silence*

*That extinguishes it.*)

Silence is music,

music is not silence.

Nirvana is Samsara,

Samsara is not Nirvana.

Knowing is not knowing:

recovering ignorance,

knowledge of knowing.

It is not the same thing to hear

the footsteps of this afternoon

between the trees and houses

as it is



to see this same afternoon now  
between the same trees and houses  
after having read

*Silence:*

Nirvana is Samsara,  
silence is music.

*(Let life obscure  
the difference between art and life.)*

Music is not silence:

it is not saying

what silence says,

it is saying

what it doesn't say.

Silence has no sense,  
sense has no silence.

Without being heard

music slips between both.

*(Every something is an echo of nothing.)*

In the silence of my room

the murmur of my body:

unheard.

One day I shall hear its thoughts.

The afternoon

stands still:

yet—it walks.

My body hears the body of my wife

*(a cable of sound)*

and responds to it:

this is called music.

Music is real,

silence is an idea.

John Cage is Japanese

and is not an idea:

he is sun on snow.

Sun and snow are not the same:

sun is snow and snow is snow

or

sun is not snow and snow is not snow

or

John Cage is not American

*(U.S.A. is determined to keep the Free World free,  
U.S.A. determined)*

or

John Cage is American

*(that the U.S.A. may become*

*just another part of the world.*

*No more, no less.)*

Snow is not sun,

music is not silence,

sun is snow,

silence is music.

*(The situation must be Yes-and-No,*

*not either-or)*

Between silence and music,

art and life,

snow and sun

there is a man.

This man is John Cage

*(committed*

*to the nothing in between).*

He says a word:

not snow not sun,

one word

which is not

silence:

*A year from Monday* you will hear it.

The afternoon has become invisible.

[M.F.W. and G.A.]

## Writing

I draw these letters

as the day draws its images

and blows over them

and does not return

[E.W.]

# Concord

*For Carlos Fuentes*

Water above  
Grove below  
Wind on the roads

Quiet well  
Bucket's black      Spring water

Water coming down to the trees  
Sky rising to the lips

[E.W.]

# Exclamation

Stillness

not on the branch  
in the air

not in the air  
in the moment  
hummingbird

[E.W.]

# Wind from all compass points

The present is motionless  
The mountains are of bone and of snow  
they have been here since the beginning  
The wind has just been born

ageless

as the light and the dust

A windmill of sounds

the bazaar spins its colors

bells motors radios

the stony trot of dark donkeys

songs and complaints entangled

among the beards of the merchants

the tall light chiselled with hammer-strokes

In the clearings of silence

boys' cries

explode

Princes in tattered clothes

on the banks of the tortured river

pray                    pee                    meditate

The present is motionless

The floodgates of the year open

day flashes out

agate

The fallen bird

between rue Montalambert and rue de Bac

is a girl

held back

at the edge of a precipice of looks

If water is fire

flame

dazzled

in the center of the spherical hour

a sorrel filly

A marching battalion of sparks

a real girl



you are named  
date  
Datia  
castle of Leave-If-You-Can  
scarlet stain  
upon the obdurate stone  
Corridors  
terraces  
stairways  
dismantled nuptial chambers  
of the scorpion  
Echoes repetitions  
the intricate and erotic works of a watch  
beyond time  
You cross  
taciturn patios under the pitiless afternoon  
a cloak of needles on your untouched shoulders  
If fire is water  
you are a diaphanous drop  
the real girl  
transparency of the world  
  
The present is motionless  
The mountains  
quartered suns  
petrified storm earth-yellow  
The wind whips  
it hurts to see  
The sky is another deeper abyss  
Gorge of the Salang Pass  
black cloud over black rock  
Fist of blood strikes  
gates of stone  
Only the water is human  
in these precipitous solitudes  
Only your eyes of human water  
Down there  
in the cleft  
desire covers you with its two black wings  
Your eyes flash open and close  
phosphorescent animals

Down there  
the hot canyon  
the wave that stretches and breaks  
your legs apart  
the plunging whiteness  
the foam of our bodies abandoned

The present is motionless  
The hermit watered the saint's tomb  
his beard was whiter than the clouds  
Facing the mulberry  
on the flank of the rushing stream  
you repeat my name

dispersion of syllables  
A young man with green eyes presented you  
with a pomegranate

On the other bank of the Amu-Darya  
smoke rose from Russian cottages  
The sound of an Usbek flute  
was another river invisible clearer  
The boatman

on the barge was strangling chickens  
The countryside is an open hand

its lines  
marks of a broken alphabet

Cow skeletons on the prairie  
Bactria

a shattered statue  
I scraped a few names out of the dust  
By these fallen syllables  
seeds of a charred pomegranate  
I swear to be earth and wind

whirling  
over your bones

The present is motionless  
Night comes down with its trees  
night of electric insects and silken beasts  
night of grasses which cover the dead  
meeting of waters which come from far off

rustlings  
     universes are strewn about  
 a world falls  
     a seed flares up  
 each word beats  
     I hear you throb in the shadow  
 a riddle shaped like an hour-glass  
     woman asleep  
 Space    living spaces  
 Anima mundi  
     maternal substance  
 always torn from itself  
 always falling into your empty womb  
     Anima mundi  
 mother of the nomadic tribes  
     of suns and men  
 The spaces turn  
     the present is motionless  
  
 At the top of the world  
 Shiva and Parvati caress  
     Each caress lasts a century  
 for the god and for the man  
     an identical time  
 an equivalent hurling headlong  
     Lahore  
     red river black boats  
 a barefoot girl  
     between two tamarinds  
 and her timeless gaze  
     An identical throbbing  
 death and birth  
 A group of poplars  
 suspended between sky and earth  
 they are a quiver of light more than a trembling of leaves  
     Do they rise  
     or fall?  
  
 The present is motionless  
     It rains on my childhood







# Maithuna

My eyes discover you  
naked

and cover you  
with a warm rain  
of glances

•

A cage of sounds

open  
to the morning

whiter  
than your thighs

at night  
your laughter

and more your foliage  
your blouse of the moon

as you leap from bed

Sifted light

the singing spiral  
spools whiteness

Chiasm

X

planted in a chasm

•

My day

exploded  
in your night

Your shriek  
leaps in pieces

Night  
spreads

your body  
washing under

your bodies

knot  
Your body once again

•

Vertical hour  
                    drought  
spins its flashing wheels  
Garden of knives  
                    feast of deceit  
Through these reverberations  
                                    you enter  
unscathed  
                    the river of my hands

•

Quicker than fever  
you swim in darkness  
                            your shadow clearer  
between caresses  
                    your body blacker  
You leap  
            to the bank of the improbable  
toboggans of how when because yes  
Your laughter burns your clothes  
                            your laughter  
soaks my forehead my eyes my reasons  
Your body burns your shadow  
You swing on a trapeze of fear  
the terrors of your childhood  
                            watch me  
from your cliffhanging eyes  
                            wide-open  
making love  
            at the cliff  
Your body clearer  
                    Your shadow blacker  
You laugh over your ashes

Burgundy tongue of the flayed sun  
tongue that licks your land of sleepless dunes  
hair unpinned

tongue of whips

spoken tongues

unfastened on your back

enlaced

on your breasts

writing that writes you

with spurred letters

denies you

with branded signs

dress that undresses you

writing that dresses you in riddles

writing in which I am buried

Hair unpinned

the great night swift over your body

jar of hot wine

spilled

on the tablets of the law

howling nude and silent cloud

cluster of snakes

cluster of grapes

trampled

by the cold soles of the moon

rain of hands leaves fingers wind

on your body

on my body on your body

Hair unpinned

foliage of the tree of bones

the tree of aerial roots that drink night from the sun

The tree of flesh

The tree of death

•

Last night

in your bed

we were three:

the moon      you & me

•

I open  
the lips of your night  
damp hollows  
unborn  
echoes:

whiteness  
a rush  
of unchained water

•

To sleep to sleep in you  
or even better to wake  
to open my eyes  
at your center  
black white black  
white

To be the unsleeping sun  
your memory ignites  
(and  
the memory of me in your memory

•

And again the sap skywise  
rises

(salvia your name  
is flame)

Sapling  
crackling

(rain  
of blazing snow)

My tongue  
is there

(Your rose  
burns through the snow)  
is

now  
(I seal your sex)  
dawn  
from danger drawn

[E.W.]

# The key of water

After Rishikesh  
the Ganges is still green.  
The glass horizon  
breaks among the peaks.  
We walk upon crystals.  
Above and below  
great gulfs of calm.  
In the blue spaces  
white rocks, black clouds.  
You said:

*Le pays est plein de sources.*

That night I dipped my hands in your breasts.

[E.B.]

# Sunday on the island of Elephanta

## IMPRECATION

At the feet of the sublime sculptures,  
disfigured by the Muslims and the Portuguese,  
the crowds have left a picnic of garbage  
for the crows and dogs.

I condemn them to be reborn a hundred times  
on a dungheap,

and as for the others,  
for eons they must carve living flesh  
in the hell for the mutilators of statues.

### Shiva and Parvati:

not as gods

but as images  
of the divinity of man.

You are what man makes and is not,  
what man will be  
when he has served the sentence of hard labor.

**Shiva:**

your four arms are four rivers,  
four jets of water.

Your whole being is a fountain  
 where the lovely Parvati bathes,  
 where she rocks like a graceful boat.

**The sea beats beneath the sun:**

it is the great lips of Shiva laughing;

the sea is ablaze:

it is the steps of Parvati on the waters.

### Shiva and Parvati:

the woman who is my wife

and I

ask you for nothing, nothing

that comes from the other world:

**only**

the light on the sea,

the barefoot light on the sleeping land and sea.

[E.W.]



# Blanco

*Blanco*: white; blank; an unmarked space; emptiness; void; the white mark in the center of a target.

As it is not possible to reproduce here all of the characteristics of the original edition of the poem, it should be mentioned that *Blanco* was meant to be read as a succession of signs on a single page. As the reading progresses, the page unfolds vertically: a space which, as it opens out, allows the text to appear and, in a certain sense, creates it. It is something like the motionless voyage offered by a roll of Tantric pictures and emblems: as we unroll it, a ritual is spread out before our eyes, a sort of procession or pilgrimage to—where? Space flows, engenders a text, dissolves it—it passes as though it were time. This arrangement of temporal order is the form adopted by the course of the poem: its discourse corresponds to another which is spatial: the separate parts which comprise the poem are distributed like the sections, colors, symbols, and figures of a mandala. . . . The typography and format of the original edition of *Blanco* were meant to emphasize not so much the presence of the text but the space that sustains it: that which makes writing and reading possible, that in which all writing and reading end.

*Blanco* is a composition that offers the possibility of variant readings:

- a) in its totality, as a single text;
- b) the center column, excluding those to the left and right, is a poem whose theme is the passage of the word from silence to silence, passing through four stages; yellow, red, green, and blue;
- c) the lefthand column is a poem divided into four moments corresponding to the four traditional elements;
- d) the righthand column is another poem, in counterpoint to the left, and composed of four variations on sensation, perception, imagination and understanding;
- e) each of the four parts formed by the two columns may be read, ignoring the division, as a single text—four independent poems;
- f) the center column may be read as six separate poems; those of the left and right as eight.

*By passion the world is bound,  
by passion too it is released.*  
The Hevajra Tantra

*Avec ce seul objet dont le  
Néant s'honore.*  
Stéphane Mallarmé

a stirring  
                    a starting  
a seedling  
                    still sleeping  
a word at the tongue's tip  
unheard                      inaudible  
                    incomparable  
fertile                              arid  
                    ageless  
she buried with open eyes  
blameless                      promiscuous  
                    the word  
speechless                      nameless

Climbing and descending  
the mineshaft ladder:  
deserted language.  
A lamp beats  
beneath penumbra skin.  
                                    Survivor  
amidst sullen confusions,  
                                    it rises  
on a copper stem,  
                                    resolves  
into a foliage of clarities:  
                                    retreat  
for fallen realities.  
                                    Asleep  
or extinct,  
                    high on its pole  
(head on a pike)  
                    a sunflower  
charred light  
                    above a vase

of shadow.

In the palm  
of a fictitious hand,  
a flower  
not seen nor thought:  
heard,  
appears,  
a yellow  
chalice of consonants and vowels,  
all burning.

the shadow of the fire on the wall	<i>flame circle by lions</i>
your shadow and mine in the fire	<i>lioness in the circus of the flames</i>
	<i>soul amidst sensations</i>
the fire knots and unlaces you	
Bread Grail Coal	<i>fireworks fruit</i>
Girl	<i>the senses open</i>
you laugh—naked	<i>in the magnetic night</i>
in the gardens of the flame	
The passion of compassionate coals	

A pulse-beat, insisting,  
a surge of wet syllables.  
Without saying a word  
my forehead grows dark:  
a presentiment of language.

*Patience patience*

(Livingston in the drought)

*River rising a little.*

Mine is red and is scorched  
between flaming dunes:

Spanish castles of sand, shredded playing cards,  
and the hieroglyph (coal and water)  
fallen on the chest of Mexico.

I am the dust of that silt.

River of blood,

river of histories

of blood,  
                     dry river:  
 mouth of the source  
                                     gagged  
 by an anonymous conspiracy  
 of bones,  
 by the grim rock of centuries  
 and minutes:  
                     language  
 is atonement,  
                     an appeasement  
 of him who does not speak,  
                                     entombed,  
 assassinated  
                     every day,  
 the countless dead ones.  
                                     To speak  
 while others work  
 is to polish bones,  
                                     to sharpen  
 silences  
                     to transparency,  
 to undulation,  
                                     the whitecap  
 to water:

the rivers of your body  
 country of pulse-beats  
 to enter you  
 country of closed eyes  
 water without thoughts  
 to enter me  
 entering your body  
 country of sleepless mirrors  
 country of waking water  
 in the sleeping night

*the river of bodies*  
*stars reptiles microorganisms*  
*torrent of sleepwalking cinnabar*  
*surge of genealogies*  
*games conjugations mimicries*  
*subject and object abject and absolved*  
*river of suns*  
*"the tall beasts with shining skin"*  
*seminal river of the worlds wheeling*  
*the eye that watches it is another river*

watching I watch myself  
 as if to enter through my eyes

*what I see is my creation*  
*perception is conception*

into an eye more crystal clear      *water of thoughts*  
what I watch watches me      *I am the creation of what I watch*

delta of the arms of desire      *water of truth*  
on a bed of vertigo      *truth of water*  
Transparency is all that remains

Desert burning  
from yellow to flesh color:  
the land is a charred language.  
There are invisible spines, there are  
thorns in the eyes.

Three satiated vultures  
on a pink wall.  
It has no body no face no soul,  
it is everywhere,  
crushing all of us:

this sun is unjust.  
Rage is mineral.

Colors  
are relentless.

Unrelenting horizon.  
Drumbeats drumbeats drumbeats.  
The sky blackens  
like this page.

Scattering of crows.  
Impending violet violences.  
The sand whirls up,  
thunderheads, herds of ash.  
The chained trees howl.  
Drumbeats drumbeats drumbeats.  
I pound you sky,

land I pound you.  
Open sky, closed land,  
flute and drum, lightning and thunder,  
I open you, I pound you.

You open, land,  
your mouth filled with water,  
your body gushes sky,

you crack, land,  
and burst,  
your seeds explode,  
the word grows green.

unlaces spreads *arid undulation*  
 rises erects into an Idol *between arms of sand*  
 naked as the mind *shines multiplies self-denies*  
 in the reverberation of desire *is reborn escapes in self-pursuit*  
 turning turning *vision of hawk-thought*  
 around a black idea *goat in the rock cleft*  
 fleece at the joining *naked place*  
 in a naked woman *snapshot of a pulse-beat of time*  
 firefly tangle of beings *real unreal quiet vibrating*  
 unmoving beneath the sun unmoving *burnt meadow*  
 the color of earth *color of sun on sand*  
 the grass of my shadow *on the joining place*  
 my hands of rain *darkened by birds*  
 on your green breasts *holiness enough*  
 woman stretched out *made in the image of the world*  
 The world a bundle of your images

From yellow to red to green,  
a pilgrimage to the clarities,  
the word peering out from blue  
whirlpools.

The drunk ring spins,  
the five senses spin  
around the centripetal  
amethyst.

Dazzlement:  
I don't think, I see  
                                —not what I see,  
but the reflections, the thoughts I see.  
The precipitations of music,  
crystallized number.  
An archipelago of signs.



the black lips of the prophetess *O r a c l e*  
whole in each part you divide yourself *spirals*  
*transfigurations*  
the bodies of the instant are your body *time world is body*  
thought dream incarnated *seen touched dissolved*

observed by my ears	<i>unfolding horizon of music</i>
sniffled by my eyes	<i>bridge hung between color and smell</i>
caressed by my scent	<i>aroma nakedness in the hands of air</i>
heard by my tongue	<i>canticle of flavors</i>
eaten by my touch	<i>feast of mist</i>

to inhabit your name	<i>to depopulate your body</i>
to fall in your shriek with you	<i>house of the wind</i>

The unreality of the watched  
makes the watching real.

In the center  
of the world of the body of the spirit  
the cleft                      the splendor

No  
In the whirlpool of disappearances  
the whirlwind of appearances

Yes  
The tree of names  
No

is a word  
Yes  
is a word  
they are air nothing  
they are  
this insect  
fluttering among the lines  
of an unfinished

unfinishable  
page



Thought  
                     fluttering  
 among these words  
                                     They are  
 your footsteps in the next room  
 the birds that return  
 The neem tree that protects us  
   protects them  
 Its branches mute thunder  
 douse lightning  
 In its foliage the drought drinks water  
 They are  
                     this night  
                                     (this music)  
 Watch it flow  
                                     between your breasts  
 falling on your belly  
                                     white and black  
 nocturnal spring  
                                     jasmine and crow's wing  
 tabla and sitar  
                                     No and Yes  
 together  
                     two syllables in love  
  
 If the world is real  
                                     the word is unreal  
 If it is real the word  
                                     the world  
 is the cleft the splendor the whirl  
 No  
                     the disappearances and the appearances  
   Yes  
 the tree of names  
                                     Real unreal  
 are words  
                     air they are nothing  
 Speech  
                     unreal  
 makes silence real

Being still  
is a strand of language  
Silence  
seal  
scintilla  
on the forehead  
on the lips  
before it evaporates  
Appearances and disappearances  
Reality and its resurrections  
Silence rests in speech

The spirit  
is an invention of the body  
The body  
is an invention of the world  
The world  
is an invention of the spirit  
No Yes  
unreality of the watched  
transparency is all that remains  
Your footsteps in the next room  
the green thunder  
ripens  
in the foliage of the sky  
You are naked  
like a syllable  
like a flame  
an island of flames  
passion of compassionate coals  
The world  
bundle of your images  
drowned in music  
Your body  
spilled on my body  
seen  
dissolved  
makes the watching real

*Delhi, 23 July-25 September, 1966*

[E.W.]

# The Grove

*For Pere Gimferrer*

Enormous and solid  
but swaying,  
beaten by the wind  
but chained,  
murmur of a million leaves  
against my window.  
Riot of trees,  
surge of dark green sounds.  
The grove,  
suddenly still,  
is a web of fronds and branches.  
But there are flaming spaces  
and, fallen into these meshes,  
—restless,  
breathing—  
is something violent and resplendent,  
an animal swift and wrathful,  
a body of light among the leaves:  
the day.

To the left, above the wall,  
more idea than color,  
a bit of sky and many clouds,  
a tile-blue basin  
bordered by big, crumbling rocks,  
sand cast down  
into the funnel of the grove.  
In the middle  
thick drops of ink  
spattered  
on a sheet of paper inflamed by the west;  
it's black, there, almost entirely,  
in the far southeast,  
where the horizon breaks down.  
The bower

turns copper, shines.

Three blackbirds  
pass through the blaze and reappear,  
unharméd,  
in the empty space: neither light nor shade.  
Clouds  
on the way to their dissolution.

Lights are lit in the houses.  
The sky gathers in the window.

The patio  
enclosed in its four walls  
grows more and more secluded.  
Thus it perfects its reality.

And now the trash can,  
the empty flower pot,  
on the blind cement  
contain nothing but shadows.

Space closes  
over itself.

Little by little the names petrify.

[E.B.]

## Immemorial landscape

*For José de la Colina*

Airily flutters  
slips  
among branches trunks poles  
lazily  
hovers over  
the high electric fruit  
it falls  
aslant  
now blue  
on the other snow

Made  
of the same immaterial as shadow  
it casts no shadow  
As dense  
as silence  
this snow  
is snow, but it burns

Headlights  
drill quick tunnels  
collapsed  
in a moment  
Night  
riddled  
grows inward  
grows night  
Obstinate cars  
go by  
all  
in different directions  
to the same destination

One day  
the streetlights will explode  
from their iron stalks

One day  
the bellowing river of engines  
will be choked

One day  
these houses will be hills  
once more

the wind in the stones  
will talk only to itself

Aslant  
among the shadows  
unshadow  
will fall

almost blue  
on the earth

The same as tonight  
the million year old snow

[E.W.]

# Trowbridge Street

1

Sun throughout the day  
Cold throughout the sun  
Nobody on the streets  
parked cars  
Still no snow  
but wind wind  
A red tree  
still burns  
in the chilled air  
Talking to it I talk to you

2

I am in a room abandoned by language  
You are in another identical room  
Or we both are  
on a street your glance has depopulated  
The world  
imperceptibly comes apart  
Memory  
decayed beneath our feet  
I am stopped in the middle of this  
unwritten line

3

Doors open and close by themselves  
Air  
enters and leaves our house  
Air  
talks to itself talking to you  
Air  
nameless in the endless corridor

Who knows who is on the other side?  
Air  
turns and turns in my empty skull  
Air  
turns to air everything it touches  
Air  
with air-fingers scatters everything I say  
I am the air you don't see  
I can't open your eyes  
I can't close the door  
The air has turned solid

4

This hour has the shape of a pause  
This pause has your shape  
You have the shape of a fountain made  
not of water but of time  
My pieces bob  
at the jet's tip  
what I was am still am not  
My life is weightless  
The past thins out  
The future a little water in your eyes

5

Now you have a bridge-shape  
Our room navigates beneath your arches  
From your railing we watch us pass  
You ripple with wind more light than body  
The sun on the other bank  
grows upside-down  
Its roots buried deep in the sky  
We could hide ourselves in its foliage  
Build a bonfire with its branches  
The day is habitable

The lightest sounds build  
quick sculptures  
Echoes multiply and disperse them  
Maybe it will snow  
The burning tree quivers  
surrounded now by night  
Talking to it I talk to you

## Objects & apparitions

*For Joseph Cornell*

Hexahedrons of wood and glass,  
scarcely bigger than a shoebox,  
with room in them for night and all its lights.

Monuments to every moment,  
refuse of every moment, used:  
cages for infinity.

Marbles, buttons, thimbles, dice,  
pins, stamps, and glass beads:  
tales of the time.

Memory weaves, unweaves the echoes:  
in the four corners of the box  
shadowless ladies play a hide-and-seek.

Fire buried in the mirror,  
water sleeping in the agate:  
solos of Jenny Colonne and Jenny Lind.



“One has to commit a painting,” said Degas,  
“the way one commits a crime.” But you constructed  
boxes where things hurry away from their names.

Slot machine of visions,  
condensation flask for conversations,  
hotel of crickets and constellations.

Minimal, incoherent fragments:  
the opposite of History, creator of ruins,  
out of your ruins you have made creations.

Theater of the spirits:  
objects putting the laws  
of identity through hoops.

“Grand Hotel de la Couronne”: in a vial,  
the three of clubs and, very surprised,  
Thumbelina in gardens of reflection.

A comb is a harp strummed by the glance  
of a little girl  
born dumb.

The reflector of the inner eye  
scatters the spectacle:  
God all alone above an extinct world.

The apparitions are manifest,  
their bodies weigh less than light,  
lasting as long as this phrase lasts.

Joseph Cornell: inside your boxes  
my words became visible for a moment.

[E.B.]

*For José Alvarado*

**Ramón López Velarde**

99

I lack air

lack body

lack

the stone that is pillow and slab

the grass that is cloud and water

Spirit flickers

Noon

pounding fist of light

To collapse in an office

or onto the pavement

to end up in a hospital

the pain of dying like that

isn't worth the pain

I look back

that passerby

nothing now but mist

Germination of nightmares

infestation of leprous images

in the belly brains lungs

in the genitals of the college and the temple

in the movie houses

desire's ghost population

in the meeting-places of here and there

this and that

in the looms of language

in memory and its mansions

teeming clawed tusked ideas

swarms of reasons shaped like knives

in the catacombs in the plaza

in the hermit's well

in the bed of mirrors and in the bed of razors

in the sleepwalking sewers

in the objects in the store window

seated on a throne of glances

The vegetation of disaster

ripens beneath the ground

They are burning

millions and millions of old notes

in the Bank of Mexico

On corners and plazas  
on the wide pedestals of the public squares  
the Fathers of the Civic Church  
a silent conclave of puppet buffoons  
neither eagles nor jaguars

buzzard lawyers

locusts

wings of ink    sawing mandibles  
ventriloquist coyotes

peddlers of shadows

beneficent satraps

the cacomistle    thief of hens  
the monument to the Rattle and its snake  
the altar to the mauser and the machete  
the mausoleum of the epauletted cayman  
rhetoric sculpted in phrases of cement

Paralytic architecture

stranded districts

rotting municipal gardens

mounds of saltpeter

deserted lots

campes of urban nomads

ants' nests worm-farms

cities of the city

thoroughfares of scars

alleys of living flesh

Funeral Parlor

by a window display of coffins

*whores*

*pillars of vain night*

At dawn

in the drifting bar

the enormous mirror thaws

the solitary drinkers

contemplate the dissolution of their faces

The sun rises from its bed of bones

The air is not air

it strangles without arms or hands

Dawn rips the curtains  
City  
heap of broken words

Wind  
on the dusty corners  
turns the papers  
Yesterday's news  
more remote  
than a cuneiform tablet smashed to bits  
Cracked scriptures  
languages in pieces  
the signs were broken  
atl tlachinolli  
burnt water was split

There is no center  
plaza of congregation and consecration  
there is no axis  
the years dispersed  
horizons disbanded  
They have branded the city  
on every door  
on every forehead  
the \$ sign

We are surrounded  
I have gone back to where I began  
Did I win or lose?

*(You ask  
what laws rule "success" and "failure"?  
The songs of the fishermen float up  
from the unmoving riverbank*

Wang Wei to the Prefect Chang  
from his cabin on the lake

But I don't want  
an intellectual hermitage  
in San Angel or Coyoacán)

All is gain  
if all is lost  
I walk toward myself



Sixth floor:

clatter and surf,  
battle of metals,  
glasshatter,  
engines with a rage now human.

The night

is a disjointed murmur,  
a body  
self-embraced, tearing itself apart.

Blind,

fumbling to bind its pieces,  
it gathers  
its broken names and scatters them.

With lopped fingers  
the city touches itself in dreams.

I am not at the crossroads:

to choose

is to go wrong.

I am

in the middle of this phrase.

Where will it take me?

Rumbling tumble,

data and date,

my birthfall:

calendar dismembered

in the hollows of my memory.

I am the sack of my shadows.

Descent

to the slack breasts of my mother.

Wrinkled hills,

swabbed lava,

sobbing fields,

saltpeter meals.

Two workmen open the pit.

Crumbled

mouth of cement and brick.

The wracked box appears:

through the loose planks

the pearl-gray hat,  
the pair of shoes,  
the black suit of a lawyer.  
Bones, buttons, rags:  
sudden heap of dust  
at the feet of the light.  
Cold, *unused light*,  
almost sleeping,  
dawn light,  
just down from the hills,  
shepherdess of the dead.  
That which was my father  
fits in that canvas sack  
a workman hands me  
as my mother crosses herself.  
Before it ends  
the vision scatters:  
I am in the middle,  
hung in a cage,  
hung in an image.  
The beginning drifts off,  
the end vanishes.  
There is neither start nor finish:  
I am in the pause,  
I neither end nor begin,  
what I say  
has neither hands nor feet.  
I turn around in myself  
and always find  
the same names,  
the same faces,  
and never find myself.  
My history is not mine:  
a syllable from that broken phrase  
the city in its circular fever  
repeats and repeats.  
City, my city,  
affronted stela,  
dishonored stone,  
name spat out.



Your story is History:  
fate  
masked as freedom,  
errant,  
orbitless star,  
a game  
we all play without knowing the rules,  
a game that no one wins,  
a game without rules,  
the whim of a speculative god,  
a man  
turned into a stuttering god.  
Our oracles  
are aphasic speech.  
Our prophets  
seers with glasses.  
History:  
coming and going  
without beginning  
without end.  
No one has gone there,  
no one  
has drunk from the fountain  
no one  
has opened the stone eyelids of time,  
no one  
has heard the first word,  
no one will hear the last,  
the mouth that speaks it talks to itself,  
no one  
has gone down in the pit of the universes,  
no one  
has returned from the dungheap of the suns.

History:  
dump and rainbow.  
Scale  
to the high terraces:  
seven notes  
dissolved in clarity.  
Shadowless words.



the word that came down in tongues of fire  
smashed  
the account and the count of the years  
the chant of the days  
was a rain of scrap iron  
slagheap of words  
sand primers  
crushed screams  
hoofmuz zlebridlehar nessbit  
whinnying waning Cains  
Abels in rubble  
partisan assassins  
pagan pedagogues  
slick crooks  
the woofs of the one-eyed dog  
guide of the dead  
lost  
in the coils of the Navel of the Moon

Valley of Mexico  
lips in eclipse  
lava slobber  
Rage's rotten throne  
obstinate obsidian  
petrified  
petrifying  
Rage  
broken tower  
tall as a scream  
smeared breasts  
tense brow  
greendry bloodsnot  
Rage  
nailed in a wound  
ragerazor gazeblade  
on a land of tines and spines

Circus of mountains  
theater of clouds  
table of noon  
mat of the moon  
garden of planets  
drum of rain  
balcony of breezes  
seat of the sun  
ball-game of the constellations  
Bursting images  
impaled images  
the lopped hand leaps  
the uprooted tongue leaps  
the sliced breasts leap  
the guillotined penis  
over and over in the dust over and over  
in the courtyard  
they trim the tree of blood  
the intelligent tree

The dust of stuffed images  
The Virgin  
crown of snakes  
The Flayed  
The Felled-by-Arrows  
The Crucified  
The Hummingbird  
winged spark  
flowerbrand  
The Flame  
who speaks with words of water  
Our Lady  
breasts of wine and belly of bread  
oven  
where the dead burn and the living bake  
The Spider  
daughter of air  
in her house of air  
spins light







I am at the entrance to a tunnel.  
These phrases puncture time.  
Perhaps I am that which waits at the end of the tunnel.  
I speak with eyes closed.

Someone

has planted

a forest of magnetic needles  
in my eyelids,

someone

guides the thread of these words.

The page

has become an ants' nest.

The void

has settled at the pit of my stomach.

I fall

endlessly through that void.

I fall without falling.

My hands are cold,

my feet cold,

—but the alphabets are burning, burning.

Space

constructs and deconstructs itself.

The night insists,

the night touches my forehead,

touches my thoughts.

What does it want?

2

Empty streets, squinting lights.

On a corner,

the ghost of a dog

searches the garbage

for a spectral bone.

Uproar in a nearby patio:

cacophonous cockpit.

Mexico, circa 1931.

Loitering sparrows,

a flock of children

builds a nest

of unsold newspapers.



In the desolation  
the streetlights invent  
unreal pools of yellowish light.  
Apparitions:  
time splits open:  
a lugubrious, lascivious clatter of heels,  
beneath *a sky of soot*  
*the flash of a skirt.*  
*C'est la mort—ou la morte . . .*  
The indifferent wind  
pulls torn posters from the walls.

At this hour,  
the red walls of San Ildefonso  
are black, and they breathe:  
sun turned to time,  
time turned to stone,  
stone turned to body.  
These streets were once canals.  
In the sun,  
the houses were silver:  
city of mortar and stone,  
moon fallen in the lake.  
Over the filled canals  
and the buried idols  
the *criollos* erected  
another city  
—not white, but red and gold—  
idea turned to space, tangible number.  
They placed it  
at the crossroads of eight directions,  
its doors  
open to the invisible:  
heaven and hell.

Sleeping district.  
We walk through galleries of echoes,  
past broken images:  
our history.  
Hushed nation of stones.  
Churches,



like stars,  
burning.

The girandola is burning,  
the adolescent dialogue,  
the scorched hasty frame.  
The bronze fist  
of the towers beats  
12 times.  
Night  
bursts into pieces,  
gathers them by itself,  
and becomes one, intact.  
We disperse,  
not there in the plaza with its dead trains,  
but here,  
on this page: petrified letters.

3

The boy who walks through this poem,  
between San Ildefonso and the Zócalo,  
is the man who writes it:  
this page too  
is a ramble through the night.  
Here the friendly ghosts  
become flesh,  
ideas dissolve.

Good, we wanted good:  
to set the world right.  
We didn't lack integrity:  
we lacked humility.  
What we wanted was not innocently wanted.  
Precepts and concepts,  
the arrogance of theologians,  
to beat with a cross,  
to institute with blood,  
to build the house with bricks of crime,  
to declare obligatory communion.

Some  
became secretaries to the secretary  
to the General Secretary of the Inferno.

Rage  
became philosophy,  
its drivel has covered the planet.  
Reason came down to earth,  
took the form of a gallows  
—and is worshiped by millions.

Circular plot:  
we have all been,  
in the Great Flayhouse of the World,  
judge, executioner, victim, witness,  
we have all  
given false testimony  
against the others  
and against ourselves.  
And the most vile: we  
were the public that applauded or yawned in its seats.  
The guilt that knows no guilt,  
innocence  
was the greatest guilt.

Each year was a mountain of bones.

Conversions, retractions, excommunications,  
reconciliations, apostasies, recantations,  
the zig-zag of the demonolatries and the androlatries,  
bewitchments and aberrations:  
my history.

Are they the histories of an error?  
History is the error.

Further than dates,  
closer than names,  
truth is that  
which history scorns:  
the everyday  
—everyone's anonymous heartbeat,  
the unique  
beat of every one—  
the unrepeatable

everyday, identical to all days.

Truth  
is the base of time without history.

The weight  
of the weightless moment:

a few stones in the sun  
seen long ago,

today return,  
stones of time that are also stone  
beneath this sun of time,  
sun that comes from a dateless day,

sun  
that lights up these words,

sun of words  
that burn out when they are named.

Suns, words, stones,  
burn and burn out:

the moment burns them  
without burning.

Hidden, immobile, untouchable,  
the present—not its presences—is always.

Between seeing and making,

contemplation or action,  
I chose the act of words:

to make them, to inhabit them,  
to give eyes to the language.

Poetry is not truth:  
it is the resurrection of presences,

history  
transfigured in the truth of undated time.

Poetry,

like history, is made;  
poetry,

like truth, is seen.

Poetry:  
incarnation  
of the-sun-on-the-stones in a name,  
dissolution  
of the name in a beyond of stones.

Poetry,  
suspension bridge between history and truth,  
is not a path toward this or that:  
it is to see  
the stillness in motion,  
change  
in stillness.  
History is the path:  
it goes nowhere,  
we all walk it,  
truth is to walk it.  
We neither go nor come:  
we are in the hands of time.  
Truth:  
to know ourselves,  
from the beginning,  
hung.  
Brotherhood over the void.

4

Ideas scatter,  
the ghosts remain:  
truth of the lived and suffered.  
An almost empty taste remains:  
time  
—shared fury—  
time  
—shared oblivion—  
in the end transfigured  
in memory and its incarnations.  
What remains is  
time as portioned body: language.  
In the window,  
battle simulacrum:  
the commercial sky of advertisements  
flares up, goes out.

Behind,  
    barely visible,  
                    the true constellations.  
Among the water towers, antennas, rooftops,  
a liquid column,  
    more mental than corporeal,  
a waterfall of silence:  
    the moon.  
                    Neither phantom nor idea:  
once a goddess,  
    today an errant clarity.  
My wife sleeps.  
    She too is a moon,  
a clarity that travels  
    not between the reefs of the clouds,  
but between the rocks and wracks of dreams:  
she too is a soul.  
    She flows below her closed eyes,  
a silent torrent  
    rushing down  
from her forehead to her feet,  
    she tumbles within,  
bursts out from within,  
    her heartbeats sculpt her,  
traveling through herself  
    she invents herself,  
inventing herself  
    she copies it,  
she is an arm of the sea  
    between the islands of her breasts,  
her belly a lagoon  
    where darkness and its foliage  
grow pale,  
    she flows through her shape,  
rises,  
    falls,  
    scatters in herself,  
                    ties

herself to her flowing,  
she too is a body.                      disperses in her form:

Truth  
is the swell of a breath  
and the visions closed eyes see:  
the palpable mystery of the person.

The night is at the point of running over.

**It grows light.**

The horizon has become aquatic.

To rush down

from the heights of this hour:

**will dying**

be a falling or a rising,

a sensation or a cessation?

I close my eyes,

I hear in my skull

the footsteps of my blood,

**I hear**

time pass through my temples.

**I am still alive.**

The room is covered with moon.

**Woman:**

fountain in the night.

I am bound to her quiet flowing.

[E.W.]



# A draft of shadows

*Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up  
Foster'd alike by beauty and by fear . . .  
W.W. The Prelude (I, 265-266)*

Heard by the soul, footsteps  
in the mind more than shadows,  
shadows of thought more than footsteps  
through the path of echoes  
that memory invents and erases:  
without walking they walk  
over this present, bridge  
slung from one letter to the next.  
Like drizzle on embers,  
footsteps within me step  
toward places that turn to air.  
Names: they vanish  
in a pause between two words.  
The sun walks through the rubble  
of what I'm saying; the sun  
razes the places as they dawn,  
hesitantly, on this page;  
the sun opens my forehead,  
balcony  
perched within me.

I drift away from myself,  
following this meandering phrase,  
this path of rocks and goats.  
Words glitter in the shadows,  
and the black tide of syllables  
covers the page, sinking  
its ink roots  
in the subsoil of language.  
From my forehead I set out  
toward a noon the size of time.

A banyan's centuries of assault  
on the vertical patience of a wall  
last less than this brief  
bifurcation of thought:  
the seen and the foreseen.  
Neither here not there,  
through that frontier of doubt,  
crossed only by glimmers and mirages,  
where language recants,  
I travel toward myself.  
The hour is a crystal ball.  
I enter an abandoned patio:  
apparition of an ash tree.  
Green exclamations,  
wind in the branches.  
On the other side, the void.  
Inconclusive patio, threatened  
by writing and its uncertainties.  
I walk among the images  
of an eye that has lost its memory.  
I am one of its images.  
The ash tree, sinuous liquid flame,  
is a murmur rising  
till it becomes a speaking tower.  
Garden turned to scrub:  
its fever invents creatures  
the mythologies later copy.  
Adobe, lime and time:  
the dark walls that are and are not.  
Infinitesimal wonders in their cracks:  
the phantom mushroom, vegetable Mithridates,  
the newt and its fiery breath.  
I am inside the eye: the well where,  
from the beginning, a boy is falling,  
the well where I recount the time  
spent falling from the beginning,  
the well of the account of my account,  
where the water rises  
and my shadow falls.

Patio, wall, ash tree, well,  
dissolve into a clarity in the form of a lake.  
A foliage of transparency  
grows on its shore. Fortunate  
rhyme of peaks and pyramids,  
the landscape unfolds  
in the abstract mirror of the architecture.  
Scarcely drawn,  
a kind of horizontal comma ( , )  
between the earth and sky:  
a solitary canoe.  
The waves speak Nahuatl.  
A sign flies across the heights.  
Perhaps it is a date, conjunction of destinies:  
bundle of reeds, the omen of the pyre.  
The flint and the cross, keys of blood:  
have they ever opened the doors of death?  
The western light lingers,  
raising symmetrical fires  
across the rug, changing  
this scarlet book I skim  
(engravings: volcanoes, temples,  
and the feathered cloak stretched over the water:  
Tenochtitlán soaked in blood)  
into a chimerical flame.  
The books on the shelf now are embers  
the sun stirs with its red hands.  
My pencil rebels against dictation.  
The lake is eclipsed  
by the writing that names it.  
I fold the page. Whispers:  
they are watching me  
from the foliage of the letters.

My memory: a puddle.  
A muddy mirror: where was I?  
My eyes, without anger or pity,  
look me in the eye  
from the troubled waters

of the puddle my words evoke.  
I don't see with my eyes: words  
are my eyes. We live among names;  
that which has no name  
still does not exist:  
*Adam of mud,*  
not a clay doll: a metaphor.  
To see the world is to spell it.  
Mirror of words: where was I?  
My words watch me from the puddle  
of my memory. Syllables of water  
shine in a grove of reflections,  
stranded clouds, bubbles above a bottom  
that changes from gold to rust.  
Rippling shadows, flashes, echoes,  
the writing not of signs, but of murmurs.  
My eyes are thirsty. The puddle is Stoic:  
the water is for reading, not drinking.  
In the sun of the high plains the puddles evaporate.  
Only some faithless dust remains,  
and a few intestate relics.  
Where was I?

I am where I was:  
within the indecisive walls  
of that same patio of words.  
Abd al-Rahman, Pompeii, Xicontencatl,  
battles on the Oxus or on top of the wall  
with Ernesto and Guillermo. Thousands of leaves,  
dark green sculpture of whispers,  
cage of the sun and the hummingbird's flash:  
the primordial fig tree,  
leafy chapel of polymorphous,  
diverse and perverse rituals.  
Revelations and abominations:  
the body and its interwoven languages,  
knot of phantoms touched by thought  
and dissolved with a touch,

pillory of blood, idée fixe  
nailed to my forehead.  
Desire is the master of ghosts,  
desire turns us into ghosts.  
We are vines of air on trees of wind,  
a cape of flames  
invented and devoured by flame.  
The crack in the tree trunk:  
sex, seal, serpentine passage  
closed to the sun and to my eyes,  
open to the ants.

That crack was the portico  
of the furthest reaches of the seen and thought:  
—there, inside, tides are green,  
blood is green, fire green,  
green stars burn in the black grass:  
the green music of elytra  
in the fig tree's pristine night;  
—there, inside, fingertips are eyes,  
to touch is to see, glances touch,  
eyes hear smells;  
—there, inside is outside,  
it is everywhere and nowhere,  
things are themselves and others,  
imprisoned in an icosahedron  
there is a music weaver beetle  
and another insect unweaving  
the syllogisms the spider weaves,  
hanging from the threads of the moon;  
—there, inside, space  
is an open hand, a mind  
that thinks shapes, not ideas,  
shapes that breathe, walk, speak, transform  
and silently evaporate;  
—there, inside, land of woven echoes,  
a slow cascade of light drops  
between the lips of the crannies:  
light is water; water, diaphanous time

where eyes wash their images;  
—there, inside, cables of desire  
mimic the eternities of a second  
the mind's electric current  
turns on, turns off, turns on,  
flaming resurrections  
of a charred alphabet;  
—there is no school there, inside,  
it is always the same day, the same night always,  
time has not yet been invented,  
the sun has not grown old,  
this snow is the same as grass,  
always and never the same,  
it has never rained, it always rains,  
everything is being, and has never been,  
a nameless people of sensations,  
names that search for a body,  
pitiless transparencies, cages of clarity  
where identity cancels itself in its likenesses,  
difference in its contradictions.  
The fig tree, its lies and its wisdom:  
wonders of the earth  
—trustworthy, punctual, redundant—  
and the conversations with ghosts.  
An apprenticeship with the fig tree:  
talking with the living and the dead.  
And with myself.

The year's procession:  
changes that are repetitions.  
The way and the weight of time.  
Dawn: more than light,  
a vapor of clarity  
changed into gravid drops  
on the windowpanes and on the leaves:  
the world grows thin in these vibrating geometries  
until it becomes the edge of a reflection.  
The day buds, breaking out among the leaves,

spinning over itself,  
surging, again incarnate,  
from the vacuum into which it falls.  
Time is filtered light.  
The black fruit bursts  
in the flesh-colored blossoms,  
the broken branch leaks sour, milky sap.  
The fig tree's metamorphosis:  
burnt by autumn, transfigured by autumn's light.  
It rises through diaphanous spaces,  
a bare black virgin.  
The sky is a revolving lapis lazuli:  
its continents wheel *au ralenti*,  
geographies without substance.  
Flames in the snow of the clouds.  
The afternoon turns to burnt honey.  
Silent landslide of horizons:  
light falls from the peaks,  
shadow overflows the plain.

By the light of a lamp—night now  
mistress of the house,  
and the ghost of my grandfather  
now master of the night—  
I would penetrate silence,  
bodiless body, time  
without hours. Each night books,  
transparent fever machines, raised within me  
architectures built above an abyss.  
A breath of the spirit creates them,  
a blink of the eye tears them down.  
I gathered wood with the others,  
and wept from the smoke  
of the horse-tamer's pyre;  
I wandered on the floating grove  
the turbulent green Tagus dragged along:  
the liquid thicket curling  
behind the fleeing Galatea;  
I saw, in bunches of grapes, the shades clustered

to drink the blood in the pit:  
*better to live as a peasant,*  
*breaking clods of dirt for a dog's ration,*  
*than to rule this pale nation of the dead;*  
 I was thirsty, I saw demons in the Gobi;  
 I swam in the grotto with the siren  
 (and later, in the cathartic dream,  
*sendendo i drappi, e mostravami 'l ventre,*  
*quel mi svegliò col puzzo che n'uscia);*  
 I engraved on my imaginary tomb:  
*Do not move this stone*  
*My only riches are bones:*  
 those memorable *freckled pears*  
 found in Villaurrutia's basket of words;  
 Carlos Garrote, eternal half-brother,  
*God save you,* he cried, as he knocked me down,  
 and it was, in the mirrors of recurrent insomnia,  
 I myself who had wounded me;  
 Isis and Lucius the ass; Nemo and the squid;  
 and the books marked with the arms of Priapus,  
 read on diluvial afternoons,  
 body tense, eyes intent.  
 Names anchored in the bay  
 of my forehead: I write because the druid,  
 under the murmuring syllables of the hymn,  
 ilex planted deeply on the page,  
 gave me the branch of mistletoe, the spell  
 that makes words flow from stone.  
 Names accumulate their images,  
 images their vaporous  
 conjectural confederations.  
 Clouds and clouds, a phantom gallop  
 of clouds over the peaks  
 of my memory. Adolescence,  
 land of clouds.

The big house,  
 stranded in clogged time.  
 The plaza, the great trees



where the sun nestled,  
the tiny church: its belfry  
only reached their knees,  
but its double tongue of metal  
woke the dead.  
Under the arcade, in military sheaves,  
the cane, green lances,  
sugar rifles;  
at the portal, the magenta stall:  
the coolness of water kept in the shade,  
the ancestral palm-mats, knotted light,  
and on the zinc counter  
the miniature planets  
fallen from the meridian tree,  
sloes and mandarins,  
yellow heaps of sweetness.  
The years turn in the plaza,  
a Catharine wheel,  
and do not move.

My words,  
speaking of the house, split apart.  
Rooms and rooms inhabited  
only by their ghosts,  
only by the rancor of the elderly  
inhabited. Families,  
breeding-grounds for scorpions:  
as they give ground glass to dogs  
with their pittance, so they nourish us with their hates  
and the doubtful ambition of being someone.  
They also gave me bread, gave me time,  
open spaces in the corners of the days,  
backwaters to be alone with myself.  
Child among taciturn adults  
and their terrifying childishness,  
child in passageways with tall doors,  
rooms with portraits,  
dim brotherhoods of the departed,  
child survivor

of mirrors with no memory  
and their people of wind:  
time and its incarnations  
resolved in the simulacra of reflections.  
In my house there were more dead than living.  
My mother, a thousand-year-old girl,  
mother of the world, my orphan,  
self-sacrificing, ferocious, stubborn, provident,  
titmouse, bitch, ant, wild boar,  
love letter with spelling mistakes;  
my mother: bread I'd slice  
with her own knife each day.  
Under the rain,  
the ash trees taught me patience,  
to sing facing the violent wind.  
A virgin who talked in her sleep, my aunt  
taught me to see with eyes closed,  
to see within, and through the wall;  
my grandfather, to smile at defeat,  
and for disasters: *in affliction, conviction*.  
(This that I say is earth thrown over  
your name: *let it rest softly*.)  
Between vomit and thirst,  
strapped to the rack of alcohol,  
my father came and went through flames.  
One evening of flies and dust,  
we gathered, among the rails and cross-ties  
of a railway station, his remains.  
I could never talk to him.  
I meet him now in dreams,  
that blurred country of the dead.  
We always speak of other things.  
As the house crumbled, I grew.  
I was (I am) grass,  
weeds in anonymous trash.

Days,  
like a free mind, an open book.

I was not multiplied by the envious mirrors  
that turn men into things, things into numbers:  
neither power nor gain. Nor sanctity either:  
heaven for me soon became an uninhabited piece of sky,  
an adorable and hollow beauty.  
Sufficient and changing presence:  
time and its epiphanies.  
God did not talk to me from the clouds;  
from the leaves of the fig tree  
my body spoke to me, the bodies of my body.  
Instantaneous incarnations:  
afternoon washed by rain,  
light just coming out from the water,  
the feminine mist of plants,  
skin stuck to my skin: succubus!  
—as if time at last were to coincide  
with itself, and I with it,  
as if time and its two times  
were one single time  
that still was not time, a time  
where always is *now* and anytime *always*,  
as if I and my double were one  
and I was no longer.  
Pomegranate of the hour: I drank sun, I ate time.  
Fingers of light would part the foliage.  
Bees humming in my blood:  
the white advent.  
The shot flung me  
to the loneliest shore. I was a stranger  
in the vast ruins of the afternoon.  
Abstract vertigo: I talked with myself,  
I was double, time split apart.

Amazed at the moment's peak,  
flesh became word—and the word fell.  
To know exile on the earth, being earth,  
is to know mortality. An open secret,  
an empty secret with nothing inside:

there are no dead, there is only death, our mother.  
The Aztecs knew it, the Greeks divined it:  
water is fire, and in its passage  
we are only flashes of flame.  
Death is the mother of forms . . .  
Sound, the blindman's cane of sense:  
I write *death* and for a moment  
I live within it. I inhabit its sound:  
a pneumatic cube of glass,  
vibrating on this page,  
vanishing among its echoes.  
Landscapes of words:  
my eyes, reading, depopulate them.  
It doesn't matter: my ears propagate them.  
They breed there, in the indecisive  
zones of language, the villages in the marsh.  
They are amphibious creatures, they are words.  
They pass from one element to another,  
they bathe in fire, rest in the air.  
They are from the other side.  
I don't hear them: what do they say?  
They don't say: they talk and talk.

I leap from one story to another on a  
suspension bridge of eleven syllables.  
A body, living but intangible, the air  
in all places always and in none.  
It sleeps with open eyes,  
it lies down in the grass and wakes up as dew,  
it chases itself, talks to itself in tunnels,  
is a bit that drills into mountains,  
a swimmer in the rough seas of fire,  
an invisible fountain of laments,  
it lifts two oceans with a hand,  
and walks through the streets, lost,  
a word in limbo in search of meaning,  
air that vanishes into air.  
And why do I say all this?  
To say that, at high noon,

the air was populated with phantoms,  
sun coined into wings,  
weightless change, butterflies.  
Night fell. On the terrace  
the silenciary moon officiated.  
A death's-head, messenger  
of the souls, the enchanting  
enchanted by the camelias  
and the electric light, was,  
over our heads, a fluttering  
of opaque conjurations. *Kill it!*  
the woman shouted  
and burned it like a witch.  
Then, with a fierce sigh, they crossed themselves.  
Scattered light, Psyche . . .

Are there messengers? Yes,  
space is a body tattooed with signs, the air  
an invisible web of calls and answers.  
Animals and things make languages,  
through us the universe talks with itself.  
We are a fragment—  
accomplished in our unaccomplishment—  
of its discourse. A coherent  
and empty solipsism:  
since the beginning of the beginning  
what does it say? It says that it says us.  
It says it to itself. *Oh madness of discourse,  
that cause sets up with and against itself!*

From the moment's peak flung down  
into an afternoon of sexual plants,  
I discovered death.  
And in death I discovered language.  
The universe talks to itself,  
but people talk to people:  
there is history. Guillermo, Alfonso, Emilio:  
the patio where we played was history,

it was history to play at death together.  
The clouds of dust, the shouts, the tumbles:  
gabble, not speech.  
In the aimless give-and-take of things,  
carried along by the revolutions of forms and times,  
everyone battles with the others,  
everyone rebels, blindly, against himself.  
Thus, returning to their origin,  
they pay for their injustice. (Anaximander)  
The injustice of being: things suffer  
one with the other and with themselves  
for to be is the desire to be more,  
to always be more than more.  
To be time is the sentence; history, our punishment.  
But it is also the proving-ground:  
to see, in the blot of blood  
on Veronica's cloth, the face  
of another—always the other is our victim.  
Tunnels, galleries of history:  
is death the only exit?  
The way out, perhaps, is toward within.  
The purgation of language, history consuming itself  
in the dissolution of pronouns:  
not *I am* nor *I even more so*  
but more being without I.  
In the center of time, there is no more time,  
but motion become fixity, a circle  
canceled by its revolutions.

Noon:

the trees in the patio are green flames.  
The crackling of the last embers  
in the grass: stubborn insects.  
Over the yellow meadows,  
clarities: the glass footsteps of autumn.  
A fortuitous meeting of reflections,  
an ephemeral bird  
enters the foliage of these letters.  
The sun, in my writing, drinks the shadows.

Between the walls—not of stone,  
but raised by memory—  
a transitory grove:  
reflective light among the trunks  
and the breathing of the wind.  
The bodiless god, the nameless god  
whom we call by empty names—  
by the names of the emptiness—  
the god of time, the god that is time,  
passes through the branches  
that I write. Dispersion of clouds  
above a neutral mirror:  
in the dissipation of the images,  
the soul already is, vacant, pure space.  
Motion resolves in tranquility.  
The sun insists, fastened  
in the corolla of the absorbed hour.  
Flame on the water-stalk  
of the words that say it,  
the flower is another sun.  
Tranquility dissolves in itself. Time  
elapses without elapse. It passes and stays. Perhaps  
although we all pass, it neither passes nor stays:  
there is a third state.

A third state:  
being without being, empty plenitude,  
hour without hours and the other names  
with which it appears and vanishes  
in the confluences of language.  
Not the presence: its presentiment.  
The names that name it say: *nothing*,  
double-edged word, word between two hollows.  
Its house, built on air  
with bricks of fire and walls of water,  
constructs and deconstructs and is the same  
from the beginning. It is god:  
it inhabits the names that deny it.

In the conversations with the fig tree  
or in the pauses of speech,  
in the conjuration of the images  
against my closed eyelids,  
in the delirium of the symmetries,  
the quicksands of insomnia,  
the dubious garden of memory,  
or in the rambling paths,  
it was the eclipse of the clarities.  
It appeared in every form  
of vanishing.

Bodiless god,  
my senses named it  
in the languages of the body.  
I wanted to name it  
with a solar name,  
a word without reverse.  
I exhausted the dice box and *ars combinatoria*.  
A rattle of dried seeds,  
the broken letters of names:  
we have crushed names,  
we have scattered names,  
we have dishonored names.  
Since then, I have been in search of the name.  
I followed a murmur of languages,  
rivers between rocks  
*color ferrigno* of these times.  
Pyramids of bones, rotting-places of words:  
our masters are garrulous and bloodthirsty.  
I built with words and their shadows  
a movable house of reflections,  
a walking tower, edifice of wind.  
Time and its combinations:  
the years and the dead and the syllables,  
different accounts from the same account.  
Spiral of echoes, the poem  
is air that sculpts itself and dissolves,  
a fleeting allegory of true names.



At times the page breathes:  
the swarm of signs, the errant  
republics of sounds and senses,  
in magnetic rotation  
link and scatter  
on the page.

I am where I was:  
I walk behind the murmur,  
footsteps within me, heard with my eyes,  
the murmur is in the mind, I am my footsteps,  
I hear the voices that I think,  
the voices that think me as I think them.  
I am the shadow my words cast.

[E.W.]

## Flame, speech

I read in a poem:  
*to talk is divine.*  
But the gods don't speak:  
they make and unmake worlds  
while men do the talking.  
They play frightening games  
without words.

The spirit descends,  
loosening tongues,  
but doesn't speak words:  
it speaks fire.  
Lit by a god,  
language becomes  
a prophecy  
of flames and a tower  
of smoke and collapse

of syllables burned:  
ash without meaning.

The word of man  
is the daughter of death.  
We talk because we are mortal:  
words are not signs, they are years.  
Saying what they say,  
the words we are saying  
say time: they name us.  
We are time's names.

To talk is human.

[M.S.]

## Sight, touch

*For Balthus*

Light holds between its hands  
the white hill and black oaks,  
the path that goes on,  
the tree that stays;

light is a stone that breathes  
by the sleepwalking river,  
light: a girl stretching,  
a dark bundle dawning;

light shapes the breeze in the curtains,  
makes a living body from each hour,  
enters the room and slips out,  
barefoot, on the edge of a knife;

light is born a woman in a mirror,  
naked under diaphanous leaves,  
chained by a look,  
dissolved in a wink;

it touches the fruit and the unbodied,  
it is a pitcher from which the eye drinks clarities,  
a flame cut in blossom, a candle watching  
where the blackwinged butterfly burns;

light opens the folds of the sheets  
and the creases of puberty,  
glows in the fireplace, its flames become shadows  
that climb the walls, yearning ivy;

light does not absolve or condemn,  
is neither just or unjust,  
light with impalpable hands raises  
the buildings of symmetry;

light escapes through a passage of mirrors  
and returns to light:  
is a hand that invents itself,  
an eye that sees itself in its own inventions.

Light is time reflecting on time.

[M.S.]

## Homage to Claudius Ptolemy

(PALATINE ANTHOLOGY 9.577)

I am a man: little do I last  
and the night is enormous.  
But I look up:  
the stars write.  
Unknowing I understand:  
I too am written,  
and at this very moment  
someone spells me out.

[E.W.]

# Stars and cricket

The sky's big.  
Up there, worlds scatter.  
Persistent,  
Unfazed by such a night,  
Cricket:  
Brace and bit.

[E.W.]

# Wind and water and stone

*For Roger Caillois*

The water hollowed the stone,  
the wind dispersed the water,  
the stone stopped the wind.  
Water and wind and stone.

The wind sculpted the stone,  
the stone is a cup of water,  
the water runs off and is wind.  
Stone and wind and water.

The wind sings in its turnings,  
the water murmurs as it goes,  
the motionless stone is quiet.  
Wind and water and stone.

One is the other, and is neither:  
among their empty names  
they pass and disappear,  
water and stone and wind.

[M.S.]

# Epitaph for no stone

Mixcoac was my village. Three nocturnal syllables,  
a half-mask of shadow across a solar face.  
Clouds of dust came and ate it.  
I escaped and walked through the world.  
My words were my house, air my tomb.

[E.W.]

This side

*For Donald Sutherland*

There is light. We neither see nor touch it.  
In its empty clarities rests  
what we touch and see.  
I see with my fingertips  
what my eyes touch:  
shadows, the world.  
With shadows I draw worlds,  
I scatter worlds with shadows.  
I hear the light beat on the other side.

[E.W.]

# Author's notes

[EDITOR'S NOTES IN BRACKETS]

## OBSIDIAN BUTTERFLY

Obsidian butterfly: Itzpapálotl, goddess sometimes confused with Teteoinan, our mother, and Tonatzin. All of these female divinities were fused in the cult which, since the 16th century, has worshiped the Virgin of Guadalupe.

## SUN STONE

The well-known Aztec calendar measured the synodical period of the planet Venus—for the ancient Mexicans one of the manifestations of the god Quetzalcoatl, the Plumed Serpent. The calendar begins, as the poem does, at Day 4 Olín (Movement) and ends 584 days later at Day 4 Ehécatl (Wind), the conjunction of the planet and the sun: the end of a cycle and the beginning of another. *Sun stone* is composed of 584 lines of eleven syllables each.

## HAPPINESS IN HERAT

“Memories of a poet-saint”: the Sufi mystic and theologian Hazrat Khwaja Abdullah Ansar. There is an almost withered tree in the garden which surrounds his tomb. Devotees drive iron nails into the tree to ward off the evil eye and to cure toothaches.

“the turquoise cupola”: on the mausoleum of Gahar Shad, the wife of Shah Rakh, the son of Timur, Governor of Herat.

“the two and thirty signs”: according to the Mahayana Sutras, certain signs appear on the bodies of Boddhisattvas (the future Buddhas), usually 32 in number. Nevertheless, the same texts insist on the illusory nature of these signs: what distinguishes a Boddhisattva from other beings is the absence of signs.

## IN THE LODI GARDENS

The mausoleums of the Lodi Dynasty (1451-1526) in Delhi.

## VRINDABAN

One of the sacred cities of Hinduism, on the outskirts of Mathura. According to legend, Krishna spent his childhood and youth in the forest of Vrindaban, now a barren plain, producing wonders, seducing the cowgirls, and falling in love with Radha.

“sadhu”: a wandering ascetic.

“blue tree”: Krishna is blue and black, like the Mexican god Mixcóatl.

“Perhaps is a cleft stone/ He grasped the form of a woman”: certain stones are symbols of the Great Goddess, particularly those whose form suggests a vulva (yoni).

“Gone gone”: the expression “Gone gone to the Other Shore” occurs frequently in the Prajnaparamita Sutra. It means: knowledge has crossed over from this bank, the phenomenal world, to the other, Perfect Wisdom.

## ON READING JOHN CAGE

The italicized quotations are from Cage’s book, *A Year from Monday*.

“Nirvana is Samsara/ Samsara is not Nirvana”: in Mahayana Buddhist literature we find the formula “Nirvana is Samsara, Samsara is Nirvana,” which sums up one of the central ideas of the Madhyamika school: the ultimate identity of phenomenal (Samsara) and transcendental (Nirvana) reality. Both are merely aspects of the void (Sunyata), and true wisdom transcends their apparent duality. But the poem says something slightly different . . .

## WIND FROM ALL COMPASS POINTS

“If we had the munitions/ You people would not be here”: Mexican history schoolbooks attribute this statement to General Anaya when he surrendered the Plaza de Churubusco to

General Scott, the head of the U.S. troops that invaded Mexico in 1847.

Santo Domingo: the poem was written during the American intervention in the Dominican Republic.

"Tipoo Sultan planted the Jacobin tree": the facts referred to here are historical.

Datia: the palace-castle in the walled city of the same name, in Madhya Pradesh. Built on a black, craggy promontory it towers over the city and the plain. According to Fergusson, it is the finest example of palace architecture in the 17th century. Built by a prince pledged to the Emperor Jahangir, the castle was never inhabited, except by bats and snakes: its owner was assassinated before he could move in, and since then no one else has dared try.

"In a fig-leaf you sail": an allusion to the children's book, *Almendrita* ("Little Almond").

#### MAITHUNA

Maithuna: the erotic couples that cover the walls of certain Buddhist and Hindu temples; sexual union; the path of illumination, in Tantric Buddhism and Hinduism, through the conjunction of *karuna* (passion) and *prajna* (wisdom). *Karuna* is the masculine side of reality and *prajna* the feminine. Their union is *sunyata*, the void.

The seventh section of the poem is an imitation of Li Po.

#### SUNDAY ON THE ISLAND OF ELEPHANTA

The sculptures in the Shivaite caves of Elephanta (7th century) are among the most beautiful in Indian art. The reliefs represent scenes from the legends of Shiva and Parvati. The religious fervor of the Portuguese mutilated, but did not destroy, their beauty.

#### RETURN

"the pain of dying . . .": Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902).

"whores/pillars": "Crepúsculos de la ciudad II" [an untranslated early Paz poem].



“atl tlachinolli”: a Nahuatl expression meaning “burnt (something)/water.” The hieroglyph is often found on Aztec monuments. Alfonso Caso states that “water” also means blood, and that “burnt (something)” alludes to fire. The opposition of water and fire is a metaphor of cosmic war, modeled, in turn, on the wars between men. Cities and civilizations are founded on an image: water and fire was the metaphor of the foundation of the city of Mexico. It is an image of the cosmos and man as a vast contradictory unity.

Tragic vision: the cosmos is movement, and the axis of blood of that movement is man. After wandering for some centuries, the Mexica founded Mexico Tenochtitlán precisely in the place indicated in the auguries of their god Huitzilopochtli: the rock in the lake; on the rock, a nopal, the plant whose fruit symbolizes human hearts; on the nopal, an eagle, the solar bird that devours the red fruit; a snake; white water; trees and grass that were also white . . .

#### IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS PHRASE

“unused light”: Fray Luis de León, “A Francisco de Salinas.”

#### THE PETRIFYING PETRIFIED

“the one-eyed dog”: Xólotl, the double of Quetzalcoatl; the god who, in penance, pulled out an eye and descended to the underworld in the form of a dog.

“navel of the moon”: Mexico is a word composed of *metztli* (moon), *xicli* (navel) and *co* (place): the place of the navel of the moon; that is, in the navel of the lake of the moon, as the lake of Mexico was called.

Chanfalla: Cervantes, *El retablo de las maravillas*.

#### SAN ILDEFONSO NOCTURNE

“Sky of soot”: Ramón López Velarde, “Día 13.”

“C’est la mort”: Gérard de Nerval, “Artémis.”

## A DRAFT OF SHADOWS

[The Spanish title, "Pasado en claro," means "clean copy" (as in the preparation of a manuscript) but with the added resonance of "pasado" (past/passed) and "claro" (clear or bright, in all their uses). The English title is a collaborative invention.]

## NOTE ON THE TRANSLATIONS

[As explained in the Introduction, the following changes have been made in the translations to correspond to Paz's revision of the Spanish text: "The Bird": one line deleted. "In Uxmal": the first poem replaced by another. "Riprap": an eighth poem added. "Hymn among the ruins": p. 23, lines 14-16 added. "The River": p. 29, lines 3-8 are a condensation and rearrangement of the earlier version. "Wind from all compass points": p. 70, lines 29-34 added.]

