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Freedom under the Word

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Freedom under the Word

Arielle Concilio

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of the

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Preface

Libertad bajo palabra, Octavio Paz's collection of his first books, has been published in Spanish in five different versions since 1949, with the last in 1988. The 1949 edition contains 74 poems in six different books: *On the Shore of the World*; *Rest*; *Vigils*; *The Sunflower*; *Puerta Condemned Door*; *Hymn among the Ruins*. Because none of these editions have been published in English, the English-language reader has no access to his earliest work and the multiple versions that reveal his poetics of variation, elaboration, and revision. In his revisions, he excludes and includes, elaborates and cuts, and reorganizes poems and sections. In the 1988 edition, editor Enrico Mario Santí writes that Paz's revisions are an "evolving interpretation of the self portrait" ("una cambiante interpretación del autorretrato") (19).¹ José Quiroga suggests that the collection's "reorganization over time speaks of a desire to collect and circumscribe a particular period of [his] life...in a manner not unlike that of Charles Baudelaire in *Les Fleurs du mal*, Walt Whitman in *Leaves of Grass*, Ezra Pound in *Cantos*, and...Luis Cernuda in *La realidad y deseo*" (10). But Quiroga also "underscore[s] that *Libertad bajo palabra* is not...linear" (11). The poems are never chronologically organized, but presented according to Paz's individual "afinidades de tema, color, ritmo, entonación o atmósfera" (affinities of theme, color, rhythm, intonation, or atmosphere) that he names in an "advertencia" to the 1968 edition.² The radical cuts in many of the poems (often including entire stanzas) also suggest an "eternal cycle of creation-destruction and re-creation" (Quiroga 25). *Libertad bajo palabra*, in its multiple forms, is a collection of fragments, a work forever in flux, consistent with Paz's belief

¹ Translations are my own. *Libertad bajo Palabra*, 1988 ed.

² *Libertad bajo Palabra*, 1968 ed., 7.

that a text is ever evolving, never complete, always in the process of becoming another text. His later theory that “every text is a translation of a translation” questions the very idea of an ‘original,’ and hence, encourages the creativity of the translator (Paz, Traducción 10).

This thesis includes translations of every poem within the collection that has never before appeared in English, as well as complete translations of *Rest, Vigils*, and *The Sunflower*. Though the original project also proposed new translations of previously translated poems, the sheer immensity of the collection and time constraints of the project led me to focus on those poems that have never appeared in English. Additionally, Muriel Rukeyser and Eliot Weinberger offer excellent renderings, many of which (such as “Hymn among the ruins”) I believe cannot be improved. Because some previously translated poems, however, are based on later, drastically revised versions (some to the point where one may consider whether they are indeed the same poem), I offer new translations (primarily those in *Rest, Vigils*, and *The Sunflower*) in which I sometimes assume greater creative license, or present renderings that offer alternative interpretations. In re-translating these poems, I first complete my own translation before reading the prior version and then noting similarities or differences. Often I retain my own rendering, but note the alternative. In those instances where I prefer another rendering to my own, I note the phrase or word I have borrowed and why. Notes indicate all of Paz’s edits made to individual poems in the later editions. A list of the subsequent editions and prior translations is included in the bibliography.

The collection’s title translates most literally as *Freedom on Parole*. But this translation carries a legal connotation that would require a shift in emphasis on this aspect at the expense of the work’s fundamental concern with and exploration of language. Paz’s first English-language translator, Muriel Rukeyser, renders the title as *Freedom and the Word*. But this translation

obscures the hierarchical indication of the preposition “bajo” (“under”) that positions the “Word” or language above “freedom.” My rendering (*Freedom under the Word*), then, highlights this hierarchical relation between poet and words, and parallels it with the struggle among the translator and the source and target languages.

Freedom under the Word explores and uses language as a means of creating the world, its objects, concepts, and ideas. Freedom is positioned *under* language because the former is a construct born of language. The former cannot exist independently of the latter. Language itself can also be oppressive, as in the translator’s struggle to find a term that reveals the sense of the Spanish in English. The word “entrañas” for example, is most literally rendered as “entrails,” or “bowels,” but more closely refers to one’s “heart,” or “core”—both the physical and emotional center and essence of one’s being. While in “Forgotten,” rendering “entrañas” as “core” seems most appropriate in the line, “y más—en tus entrañas” (“and further—in your core—”), in “Noon,” the “shivering womb” offers a more central, emotional image than “entrail” or the less-specific “core.”

The poet’s own battle with words may be seen in “Words,” in which words assault the poet, who in turn literally flings, beats, and strips the unruly linguistic units to conform them to his art. Though he becomes a “Master of the word” in “Midnight Soliloquy,” words first “domesticate” him, revealing a complex, interchanging relation between the poet and his medium.

But Paz attempts to overcome the violence in his relation with language through paradoxical imagery and antinomies, as Thorpe Running points out in “Octavio Paz and the Magic of the Word” (1996). Antinomies such as “enemy” and “friend” in “The Prologue” or “heaven” and “hell” in “Neither Heaven nor Earth” allow him to explore opposites to reconcile

them in moments of aesthetic transcendence. To reconcile these dichotomies, he often blurs borders, (whether in “The Prologue,” in which the poet’s first act is to “eras[e] frontiers,” or in “Beyond Love,” in which the poet finds himself “on the border of being and becoming”). Blurring boundaries not only leads him to transcendental moments where the boundary between self, world, and other break down, but also to the moment and space of the poem’s birth. Though these images steadily recur throughout the collection, Paz’s antinomies “are not necessarily predictable,” and hence, eliminate “any idea of a fixed reference” (Running 35).

Despite the lack of a “fixed” center, Paz often creates patterns through diction or imagery. Though I mostly maintain these patterns by consistently using the same word in English, I sometimes choose a different rendering that seems to better suit the context of the individual poem. In “Destiny of the Poet” I first render “perdidas” (“lost”) as “dissolved”; when it appears later as the last word of the poem, I retain the literal meaning of “lost.” Other times, I use the same English word for which Paz uses two different Spanish words (both of which have the same meaning). In “The Mirror” I render “tiempo hueco” as “hollow time” (the most literal translation); in “Nocturne” (“Nocturno”), however, I render “los vocablos huérfanos” as “hollow words.” While “huérfanos” most literally translates to “orphaned,” when referring to words or language, it better translates to “hollow.” In such cases I am careful to note these distinctions, to clarify that this is not Paz’s pattern.

My attempt to maintain patterns also is manifested in my rendering of the first book’s title: *On the Shore of the World (A la orilla del mundo)*. The title may be rendered as “On the edge of the world,” signifying the extremes between life and death, the universe and the infinite of the unknown. But “orilla,” also meaning “shore,” frequently appears throughout the collection in the context of rich maritime imagery. The shore also acts as an edge, or boundary

between land and sea—the human world and the unknowable ocean. Because “orilla” often appears throughout the collection in the latter context, and provides a more specific image, I choose the latter rendering.

In *Vigils*, Paz continues to explore borders and language and the liminal state of consciousness between sleeping and waking. The title refers to both the state of sleeplessness, or watchfulness, and to the act of watching. As he writes in “The Mirror”: “there is a night, a day/a hollow time...”. This liminal appears in such poems as “Insomnia” and “Question.” But the section also darkly explores the process of self-annihilation and rebirth of the poet through the act of writing. In “Dispatch” (“Envío”), earlier titled “While I Write” (“Mientras escribo”), and later “Writing” (“Escritura”) the poet questions his identity in the act of making poetry: “To whom does he write he who writes to me?” (“¿A quién escribe el que escribe por mí?”). The act of writing temporarily annihilates the self to give birth to the poet before resurrecting the self at the poem’s completion: “he writes to no one, calls no one,/writes to himself, is forgotten before redeemed,/returning again as me” (“no escribe a nadie, a nadie llama,/a sí mismo se escribe, en sí se olvida,/y se rescata, y vuelve a ser yo mismo”). Ending with “Envío,” (which I render as “Dispatch” to retain the denotation of murder) suggests the death of one version of the poet in this section, and the rebirth of another in the next.

After this rebirth, the poet drives on with full force, presenting more than 25 poems in the third section titled *Rest*. According to José Quiroga, the 1988 version of *Rest* (appearing as the fifth section in the collection) signifies a “moment of creative and productive rest” (21). The 1949 edition, however, tirelessly hurtles forward, exploring exercises in form and rhyme, such as “Wind” and “Spiral,” the sonnet “June,” and the longer companion poems of “Noon” and “Midnight.” Though it was radically rearranged, and divided into two sections, *Rest* (which

included earlier poems, such as “Jardín”), and *Condicion de nube (Phase of Cloud)* (which includes the majority of the poems that appear in the 1949 section) the sheer immensity and variability of the section (as it appears in this first edition) offer one of the richest and most challenging experiences in the translation process. Poems that follow a strict rhyme scheme and form, such as “Wind” present the translator with a choice between retaining form at the expense of literalness, or retaining meaning at the expense of form. Because Spanish more readily offers rhymes than English, I forego reproduction of the exact rhyme scheme in favor of remaining faithful to the sense of the Spanish. Yet this does not mean that form falls to the margins in my translations. English offers rich opportunities for half or internal rhymes that I believe produce a similar effect in the Spanish. In “Wind,” instead of reproducing the rhyme at the end of the second and fourth lines of each quartet, I seize on opportunities to create half rhymes, such as “poppy” (“amapola”) with “algae” (“algas”) or “body” (“desnuda”). These rhymes do not always naturally arise from literal translation; “algas del aire” (“algae of the air”) requires a change to the English possessive form (“the air’s algae”) to create a half-rhyme at the end of the line. Additionally, “desnuda” does not necessarily imply a “body.” The word is more commonly used as an adjective, but the indefinite article (“una”) indicates its use as a noun and more generally, denotes a “naked being,” or a “naked one.” The “body,” then, must be gleaned from the context; since an image of the poppy quivering in the wind precedes “una desnuda,” I link the two, and change the indefinite article to the definite to closer ally them. But the translation of the line does not end there. The form, rhymes, and sounds ally with the images of the wind, flowers, and other objects in the poem, creating a sense of interconnectedness, softness, and weightlessness. To reproduce this, I forgo the harsh “k” sound in “naked” and replace it with the softer, monosyllabic “bare.” The choice of “drift” over “float” (“flotan”) also

represents a decision to find a softer English equivalent that also allows for the reproduction of the sense of continuity throughout the poem by repeating the same verb more often than it appears in the Spanish. I follow a similar interpretive process in the following poem “Spiral,” in which I attempt to reproduce the unembellished, arresting metaphor of the “clavel” (“carnation”) as the “cohete” (“rocket”) in the harsh “k” and “t” sounds in English. Though these are only a few examples, they acutely reveal the intricacies and challenges involved in the translation process.

Issues of rhyme and form are not the only ones that appear in *Rest*. In Spanish, two sets of verb forms exist to distinguish between two simple past tenses, the imperfect tense (used for states of being, conditionals, or to express habits) and the preterit (which indicates completed actions). When translating the imperfect into English, one must revert to the progressive form to clarify the incompleteness of the action. According to Gregory Rabassa, however, “if we always translate [an imperfect] in the progressive form...we can fall into an unnatural monotony as the sense of that particular action might be better served by [the preterit]” (Treason 80). But Paz rarely employs the imperfect and, when he does, it often signifies an important shift. In “The Bird” (“El pájaro”), the first stanza employs the imperfect to describe the natural world as a living, breathing, autonomous entity. In the second stanza, however, the preterit “sang” (“cantó”) cuts through this serene, continuous setting. The use of the preterit throughout the rest of the stanza makes the appearance of the bird in the first line of the second stanza all the more startling, while its violent death in the image of the “[quivered sky]” both multiplies the action’s violence, and underscores its intrusion on the natural world’s “self-absorbed” serenity. Even the short lines and overall length of the second stanza (it has nearly less than half the number of lines as the first) mimics the sharp and definite actions expressed by the preterit. To reproduce this

distortion between the stanzas, I felt it important to retain all of the imperfect forms.

Weinberger's and Rukeyser's versions render the last imperfect of the first stanza as a preterit; this seems to diminish the disturbance that occurs in the second half of the poem.

The poet returns to the rhymed form in "Poet's Epitaph," which caps the section, and again seems to mark the death of the poet. Like the poems that precede it, it too offers the translator a challenge in the rhyme scheme. Only five lines, it employs repetition and rhyming infinitives:

Quiso cantar, cantar
para olvidar
su vida verdadera de mentiras
y recordar
su mentirosa vida de verdades.

Because Spanish infinitives of the same stem always rhyme, the rhyme scheme here does not pose the same challenge as it would for a writer in English. Staying closer to the literal meaning, then, is prioritized in the English rendering. To maintain some sense of the mirroring in sound and image of "olvidar" ("to forget") and "recordar" ("to remember"), however, I render the latter as "not to forget." I continue this pattern of mirroring in the rendering of "mentirosa" ("lying") as "untrue." Though one may argue these decisions overemphasize the words "to forget" and "true," I opt for creative license here, as both Rukeyser and Weinberger offer more literal translations.

A new poet is again reborn in *The Sunflower*, the ten-poem, "tightly organized" section whose poems "show [a] marked preference for a longer poetic line" (Quiroga 34). Paz must have recognized the strength of this section, as it is the only one in the entire collection that remains completely intact, and reappears in the original order (though not as a separate book, but later under the larger *Semillas para un himno*, or *Seeds for a Psalm*) in subsequent editions.

Even Rukeyser provides a translation of all but two poems (“Body on View” and “On the Shore”). Like those that precede it, the poems here explore language’s power to create the world (“Written in Green Ink”), the annihilation of the self (“Forgotten”), and liminal states of being (“Beyond Love”). Because the majority of these poems appear in English, I take more creative liberty in the translations. In “Your Eyes” I render “pulsación tranquila del mar a mediodía” (which Rukeyser translates as, “the easy heartbeat of the sea at noon”) to “whispering rhythm of the sea at noon.” While “whispering rhythm” slightly de-anthropomorphizes the sea, it seems to create a more enchanting, even hypnotizing effect than “easy heartbeat.” It also contains an extra syllable that more closely aligns with the Spanish rhythm. Other changes do not represent creative decisions, so much as clarifications. While Rukeyser retains the original Spanish title of “Salvas,” I choose to render it as “Healed,” as opposed to “saved” (the now outmoded irregular past participle of “salvar”).

While in *The Sunflower* I felt it important to retain Paz’s marked “preference for a longer poetic line,” in *Condemned Door* paring the lines emphasizes the desolation that pervades the section. *Condemned Door* returns to the image of the forbidden, locked door that first appears in “The Prologue,” meditating on the relation between freedom and imprisonment. While this section later included many poems that explore the “self imprisoned in an ego that needs liberation and communion,” such as “City Twilight” and “The Fall,” the “sense of imprisonment that...surrounds modern man” still underscores the poems here (Quiroga 26). The futility of the search for freedom, and the desire that underscores it appears in Eve’s search for a key to paradise in “Eve’s Dream,” and the speaker’s desire to escape reality through memory or dreams in “The Wall.” The merciless repetition of “nothingness” and “no one” that the speakers of poems such as “The Shadow” and “The Visitor” must confront at every turn reinforces the sense

of solitude and estrangement that runs through the section. The minimal punctuation (in comparison to prior sections) also emphasizes the desolation, and looks ahead to the absence of punctuation in “Seeds for a Psalm.”

Because *Freedom under the Word* has undergone significant changes in later editions, I do not employ a standard method in the translations; instead, I examine each poem individually, as well as how it functions in relation to other poems in the section, and its evolution throughout editions. The immense variety of styles of the text also necessitates an equally vast range of translation methods and flexibility. Sometimes I am more attentive to rhyme, other times to meter, or diction. Though Paz writes that these “poems are unfinished and endless verbal objects,” my translations attempt to capture the earliest version of what he considered his “first real book,” contributing to the body of work, and casting light on his early poetics as a writer and critic.³

³ “Los poemas son objetos verbales inacabados e inacabables...mi verdadero primer libro” (LBP 4, pp. 11-12).

Freedom under the Word

(The Prologue)

Out there, where the frontiers end, the roads are erased. Where the silence begins. I advance slowly, and people⁴ the night with stars, with words, with the breathing of remote water that waits for me where the dawn begins.

I invent the eve, the night, the day that follows that rises from its bed of stone and looks about the painfully dreamed world with clear eyes. I sustain the tree, the cloud, the rock, the sea, the presentiment of felicity—inventions that flicker and fade before the dispersing light.

And then, the arid sierra, the adobe village, the meticulous reality of a puddle and a dull *pirú*,⁵ of some idiotic children who stone me, of a resentful town that condemns me. I invent terror, hope, noon—father of the sun's delirium, of the glittering delusions, of the women who castrate their lovers of the hour.

I invent the burn and the scream,⁶ the masturbation in the latrines, the visions in the dump, the prison, lice⁷ and the syphilitic sore,⁸ the struggle for soup, the denunciation, the viscous animals, the ignoble associations, the nocturnal interrogations, the examination of conscience, the judge, the victim, the witness: You are all three. To whom will you now appeal and with what sophistries to destroy your accuser? Useless are the cries, the appeals, the allegations. Useless to knock on locked doors. There are no doors—only mirrors.⁹ Useless to close your eyes or return among men:¹⁰ this lucidity will never abandon me. I will smash the mirrors, shatter my image—which every morning is piously remade by my accomplice, my informer—. ¹¹ The solitude of consciousness and the consciousness of solitude, the daily bread and water, the night without water. Drought, countryside devastated by a lidless sun, atrocious eye, oh consciousness, pure

⁴ I have borrowed this rendering, which is more similar in sound and rhythm to the Spanish “pueblo” than “populate,” from Rukeyser.

⁵ A *pirú* is a tree native to Central America, of the Anacardiaceae family, and similar to the California pepper tree. Though Rukeyser renders it as a “pepperpoint” in the *Selected Poems of Octavio Paz*, there is no direct equivalent in English. Retaining the Spanish also creates an internal rhyme (with “puddle” and “dull”) that can be more difficult to reproduce in English. Moreover, I have retained the Spanish “sierra” and “adobe” that have no direct equivalent in English, and exist as fully-assimilated imports in English.

⁶ Though “aullido” translates directly to “howl,” and is onomatopoeic in English, I have rendered it as “scream” to create an internal rhyme with “latrines,” and alliteration (with “scream,” “struggle,” “soup”).

⁷ Rendering the singular “piojo” to the plural “lice” in English eliminates the possibility of confusing alternative definitions of the singular “louse.”

⁸ Because the more etymologically precise “chancre” (from the original “chancro”) is uncommon in English, I have opted for a more semantically clear rendering that also produces alliteration.

⁹ Paz does not include an em dash here, and removed the others in subsequent editions. My addition of the em dash in this sentence replaces the comma—increasing the shock the reader experiences at the moment the reader realizes that there are no exits (or entrances) to the reality that the poet has created.

¹¹ This echoes the last line from Charles Baudelaire’s “Au lecteur” (“To the Reader”): “— my likeness, — my brother!” It also echoes the “accomplice” in Baudelaire’s “Les Litanies de Satan” (“The Litany of Satan”).

present where past and future burn with neither splendor nor hope. All flows into this endless eternity.¹²

Out there, where the roads are erased, where the silence ends, I invent despair, the mind that conceives me, the hand that draws me, the eye that unveils me. I invent the friend who invents me, my fellow man; and woman, my opposite: Tower that I crown with flags, walls that my sea foam scales, devastated city slowly reborn under the domination of my eyes.¹³

Against the silence and the chaos, I invent the Word, freedom that invents itself and invents me every day.

¹² “Desembocar” normally precedes the preposition “en,” or “in.” The preposition’s absence literally illustrates the endlessness of “eternity” (“eternidad”). While Rukeyser renders the line as: “...this eternity which leads nowhere,” ending with “eternity” seems the most effective at mimicking the line’s perpetuity. Rukeyser’s rendering also removes the paradoxical water imagery the verb suggests in its alternate meaning of “to flow.” Though a more literal translation, such as “all flows into this eternity which does not end” mimics the perpetuity of the line by lengthening it, ending on the word “end” negates it.

from **On the Shore of the World**

Neither Heaven nor Earth

Behind heaven,
behind the light and its razor,
behind the walls of saltpeter,
behind the streets that always lead to other streets.¹⁴

Behind the bristling glass of my skin,¹⁵
behind my claws and my teeth
fallen in the well of the mirror.
Behind the door that is closed,
the body that is open.
Behind, bloody love,¹⁶
purity that destroys,
talons of silk, lips of ash.

Behind, earth or heaven.

Seated at the tables
where they drink the blood of the poor:
the table of money,
the table of glory and of justice,
the table of power and the table of God
—the Holy Family in the Manger,
the Fountain of Life,
the broken mirror in which Narcissus
drinks of himself and never quenches his thirst
and the liver, food of prophets and vultures...

Behind, earth or heaven.

Cohabiting secretly¹⁷
in sleepless sheets,¹⁸
bodies of lime and plaster,¹⁹
ashes that stiffen

¹⁴ In the 1988 edition, the first two stanzas are combined.

¹⁵ Rukeyser renders this line as “bristling windows.”

¹⁶ Rukeyser chooses “carnivorous,” though the word is closer to “bitter.”

¹⁷ Borrowed from Rukeyser.

¹⁸ Paz later changed this line to: “Las sábanas conyugales/cubren cuerpos entrelazados,/piedras entre cenizas” (The conjugal sheets/cover intertwined bodies./stones between ashes).

¹⁹ Later editions reveal a change from “yelo” (ice) to “yeso” (plaster), suggesting a typo in the 1949 edition. I have thus rendered the line here as “plaster.”

when the light touches them,²⁰
as the nightly wind
rattles calcined bones;²¹
and the tombs of stones or words,
the Tower of Babel, their silent partner²²
and yawning heaven
and hell biting its tail
and the resurrection
and the day of the life everlasting,
the day without twilight,
the visceral paradise of the fetus.²³

I used to believe in all this.
Today, I sing alone²⁴
on the shore of wailing.
Wailing too will do for a pillow.²⁵

²⁰ In another edition, this was changed to: “piedras, cenizas ateridas,” which Rukeyser renders as: “stones, ashes stiff with cold.”

²¹ Paz later cut the 7th and 8th lines of this stanza. He replaced them with: “Cada uno en su cárcel de palabras/y todos atareados,/la Torre...” (Each one in its prison of words/and all busy constructing/the Tower...).

²² A rendering borrowed from Rukeyser.

²³ Rukeyser rendered “feto” as “embryo.”

²⁴ Paz combined the second and third lines of this stanza, and changed them to: “Hoy duermo a la orilla del llanto” (Today I sleep on the shore of wailing).

²⁵ A rendering borrowed from Rukeyser.

The Stranger

The night is born on mirrors of mourning.
somber, damp branches
gird its waist and breast,
its blue body, infinite and tangible.
Silence doesn't fill it: silent murmurs,
phantom fish, slip by, phosphoresce, escape.

The night is green, vast, and silent.
The night is violet and blue,
made of fire and water.
The night is made of smoke and black marble.
On its shoulders it bears a bending river,
a silent cascade of black plumage.

The night is an infinite kiss of infinite darkness.²⁶
Everything melts in that kiss,
everything burns on those limitless lips,
and the name and the memory
are a bit of ash and oblivion
in that heart that dreams.

Night, a sweet beast,
mouth of dream, eyes of hardened, rabid flames;
ocean,
infinite and limited expanse like a body caressed in shadows;
vulnerable and voracious like love,
transfixed at the break of dawn like a deer on the edge of a
whisper or fear;
river of velvet and blindness,
silent breathing of a limitless heart that pardons:
the misery, the hollow,
what wears a mask,
crosses your solitude, alone with its soul.

Your silence calls it,²⁷
your black wings graze its skin
where boundless oblivion throbs,
but it closes the pores of its soul
to the infinity that tempts it,
self-absorbed in its futile battle.

²⁶ This stanza was cut from later editions.

²⁷ This stanza was cut from later editions with the exception of the last line. Following this last line was the last line of the next stanza.

No one follows it, no one accompanies it.
In its mouth the eloquent lie is nested,
its heart full of phantoms
and the emptiness makes the heartbeats deserts.
Two yellow dogs, weariness and fervor bicker in its soul.
Its mind always runs through the same deserted rooms,
never finding the form that exhausts its impatience,
the wall of mercy or death.
But even its heart opens its wings,
a red eagle in the desert.

Night's pipers dream.
The world sleeps and sings.
The sleeping sea sings
and an absorbed eye trembles,
the sky a mirror where the world gazes upon itself,
a bed of transparency for its nakedness.

It marches alone, inexhaustible, eternal,
encarcerated in its infinity,
a solitary thought,²⁸
a phantom searching for a body.

Nothing, night, quenches its endless thirst,
ceaseless pendulum,
hunger not from being but from emptiness.

²⁸ This line was cut from later editions. The following line ended the poem in the later versions.

On the Avenue

The sun sleeps on the tops of the chestnut trees,
the wind lazily blows,
softly humming, the leaves wriggle their fingers,
and someone, an invisible air, dances an age-old dance.
I walk beneath interlacing lights, embracing branches,
an underwater avenue lit with green,
impalpable yet flesh:
green ending in gold,
light ending in taste, light one can touch,
the vibrant, human air is made of wings,
a hollow left by a luminous body that escapes!

This avenue leads to the Green Paradise,
to the kingdom that promises winter pastures:
the green eternal leaf,
the water, ever-youthful,
mother earth, ever-virginal,
the slender light ever resting between enduring tree trunks,
always the wind, always free, always lips, always wind.

As the light flickers between the leaves,
men, women, children, bicycles pass,
sleepwalking, self-absorbed fish.
Everyone passing, no one stopping.
Each on his own errand:
to the theater, to mass, to the office, to death,
to get lost in someone else's arms,
and be recovered in someone else's eyes,
to remember or forget that they are alive.
No one wants to reach the end,
where the flower is fruit and the fruit lips.

I'd like to stop them,
stop a girl,
pluck her by the ear and plant her between two chestnut trees;
sprinkle her with summer rain;
watch her take root in the earth like two hands enlaced in the night;²⁹
grow and sprout leaves, and raise a singing bower between the tops of her
branches:
arms that carry a child, a treasure, a pot of water, the basket of bread that sustains
eternal life;
blossom into those white flowers that wear red, painted flowers on

²⁹ The image and rendering recalls Rukeyser's translation of "Dos cuerpos" ("Two Bodies"): "Two bodies face to face/are at times two roots/laced into night" (*SP* 25).

their wings,
snow-flowers,
white flowers that fall from the chestnuts like serpents or smiles;
brush her skin of musk, sap, and light, softer than the salt torso of the
statue on the shore;
speak with her in a tongue from a faraway tree,
stand still with her in the silence of the tree opposite;
wrap her with arms as intangible as the drifting air,
surround her, not as the sea surrounds an island, but as it buries it;
rest on her as the cloud anchors an instant in the waveless sky, suddenly darkens,
and falls in wide drops,
falling in wide drops,
drops of fire,
drops of blood turning from white to red,
as the seedling falls when the sprig bursts in the air,
as the star falls in the deep womb of the night,
as the bird falls in flames and the forest alights.

Midnight Soliloquy

I was asleep in the civilized rat's room,
when someone whispered these words in my ear:
"You sleep, haunted by ghosts risen from your own mind,
and in your delirium, others kiss or kill,
press against other lips, penetrate other bodies
and each day a boundless world is born from their hands,
the stone lives and rises,
and everything, the dust itself, becomes flesh in breathing form."

I opened my eyes and tried to grasp the intangible visitor,
to grab him by the throat and wrench out his secret made of smoke,
but I saw only a shadow lost in silence, air in the air.
I was alone again, in the insomniac's desert night.
A cold fever kicked in my brain,
a sunken sea boiling beneath seas of ice.
The fallen years ran through my veins,
dates of blood that once shone like lips,
lips in whose creases gleamed gulfs of luminous shadow,
I believed that in the end, the earth would tell me its secret,
breasts of wind for the crazed and desperate,
eloquent blisters already burst.³⁰
God, Heaven, Friendship, Revolution, or Country.

And among everything it rose,
only to drown itself again,
like the shipwreck on its last attempt,
my youth, my buried youth,
savage innocence domesticated by words, bespectacled precepts,
pure water, a mirror for the tree and cloud,
that so many virtuous souls clouded.

Master of the word, of water, of salt
beneath my force everything was reborn, as in the beginning;
if my fingertips grazed their infinite torpor,
things transformed their form into another,
perhaps more secret, but suddenly unmasked,
to respond to my astonished questions,
the fire became smoke,
the tremor of the tree's leaves, the transparent water,
the meek grasses and the moss between the stones and stones
became tongues.

³⁰ The Spanish "vejigas" is a medical term that literally means "bladders," or "blisters." Since Paz sometimes makes use of medical terms, or imagery such as sores (in "The Prologue"), I have rendered it as the latter. The image remains curious, however, with the adjective "elocuentes" ("eloquent").

From atop its green stalk, a red flower spoke
and only I understood its ciphered tongue;
each night a magic word opened the doors to the heavens
and the same sun of solid gold paled before my wooden sword.

A sky always full of ships and shipwrecks,
wind-tattered ghosts,
I navigated amidst your floes of mist
and was shipwrecked on your illusory reefs;
I lost myself amongst your silent growth of spindrift
touching your birds of reflections and crystal,
dreaming on your silent, deserted beaches.
Youth, fruit consumed by the years,
a paper ship abandoned in the silt from an afternoon rain,
do you remember that tree, that lush, silent island,
as tall as an endless stroke of luck,
golden at noonday,
now dark with birds in the afternoon of torpor and tedium?
Do you remember that bougainvillea that ignited its sumptuous,³¹ catholic flames on
the gray brushwood,
do you remember it, that afternoon of awe when you saw it as if you had never seen it before,
a purple stair to ascend the sky?
Do you remember the fountain, the verdin on the stone,
the bird puddle,
the violets with narrow bodices, ever hiding behind their leaves' curtains,
the lilies waiting in line to receive afternoon communion,
the snow-white gannet and its yellow scream, trumpet of the flowers,
the fig tree with finger-like leaves, a Hindu goddess,
and the thirst that its honey ignites?
A kingdom in the dust, a blockaded grave,³²
a sky sold for a few trifles of wisdom!

None of that fervor,
a fire consuming nothing, not even its own ash,
none of those tears, none of that exhilaration,
none of that urge to be light in air,
wandering again, lost in space.

I loved the glory of the livid mouth and eyes of diamond,
I loved love, loved its lips and bones,
I dreamed of a world where the word could create
and the same dream would have been abolished
because to desire and produce would be like flower and fruit.
But glory is hardly a cipher, so often mistaken,

³¹ This line marks the beginning of a new stanza in the 1988 edition.

³² "sepulcro tapiado" (a blockaded grave) was excised in later editions.

love leads to hate and disgust,
and who now dreams of the Communion of the Living
when everyone receives communion at Death?

Alone again, I touched my heart,
where the elders told us courage and hope were born,
but abandoned and ardent, it only throbbed
an indecipherable syllable,
the debris of a buried word I don't know.

“At this hour,” it told me, “some love and meet death on others’ lips,
others deliriously dream that they are death,
and others, more simply, die on the fronts,
for defending a word,
a key of blood that locks or unlocks the doors to Tomorrow.”
Blood to baptize the new age that the haughty prophet predicts,
blood the businessman must wash his hands of,
blood for the glass of the orators and tyrants,
oh heart, waterwheel of blood, what wastelands do you water?
Whose dry, immortal lips do you quench?
Perhaps the lips of a god, of God who thirsts, thirsts for us,
an abyss that nothing fills, a Nothing that only thirsts?³³

I planned to leave at night³⁴
and receive communion with my fellow sinners at dawn,
but as lightning strikes the solitary pilgrim,
an ashen conviction pierced my soul:³⁵
the sun had died and an eternal night was dawning,
blacker and darker than any other,
and the world, the trees, men, all, myself,
were only ghosts from my dream,
an eternal dream with neither day nor the possibility of awakening,
a dream that never again would moisten the silent froth of dawn,

³³ “Un abismo que nada llena” (an abyss that nothing fills) was later removed.

³⁴ Beginning with this line, the stanza was changed to:

Intenté salir y comulgar en la intemperie con el alba
pero había muerto el sol y el mundo, los árboles, los animales y los hombres,
todos y todo, éramos fantasmas de esa noche interminable
a la que nunca ha de mojar la callada marea de otro día.

I planned to leave and receive communion in the open dawn,
but the sun and the world had died, the trees, the animals and the men,
all and everything, were ghosts of this endless night
that has never wet the silent tide of another day.

³⁵ The Spanish verb here is closer to “overwhelmed” or “startled,” but “pierced” offers a more violent image and creates an internal rhyme.

a dream for which the trumpets at the Final Judgment would never play.
Because nothing, not even death, will end with this dream.

On a Portrait

*For the painter Juan Soriano*³⁶

The wind doesn't dream,
but sleeps in its caves,
on the top of the sky that has been detained,
with its stars and shadows.
The moon flames between clouds of gesso.
The vampire with his rosy mouth,
hell's harpist, spreads his wings,
and the paralyzed hour, suspended
between one abyss and the next.

And the things awaken, revolved on themselves,
mingled in silence
with the hidden horror³⁷
that his true being inspires.
And the gesso angels awaken,
the angels of fire,
and the Nahual and the coyote and the howl,
the spirits that bathe themselves in sorrow
on the frozen beaches of hell,
and the child that dances and sleeps
in a carton of flowers.

A young girl enveloped in yellows
moves forward, stops,
slightly leaning into life.
The velvet and peach
are stitched on her dress,
the pallid reflections of her hair
are like dawning gold,
her slender throat
autumn on the river,
and the light on her skin
sun in winter.

For whom does she wait, hesitating
between terror and hope,
yellow awe?

³⁶ A Mexican painter (1920-1985), to whom Paz dedicated various essays. See, among others, "Rostros de Juan Soriano" in *Las peras del olmo* (1957). Note from LBP (1988).

³⁷ In the 1988 edition: "el horror y la delicia" (the horror and the delight).

For whom do they search, those entranced eyes,
and whom do those floating hands
caress or forget?

On the border of barely being
what does she desire, from whom does she flee
as a slow feather of splendor and misery?

Suspended, she doesn't breathe,
nor does her necklace of green eyes glitter
on her breast of spindrift.
She doesn't move, doesn't breathe. She stops
at the edge of nothing.
Behind, the locked door.
Dimmed lights
gleam against the motionless wall.
Invisible wings spread
over her naked skin of silence.

Nocturne³⁸

Shadow, trembling shadow of voices.
The black river drags sunken marbles.
How to speak of the assassinated air,
of the hollow words,³⁹
how to speak of the dream?

Shadow, trembling shadow of voices.
Black scale of flaming irises.
How to speak the names, the stars,
the ivory⁴⁰ birds of the nocturnal pianos
and the obelisk of silence?

Shadow, trembling shadow of voices.
Statues knocked down on the moon.⁴¹
How to speak, camellia,
the least flower among the flowers,
how to speak your white geometries?

How to speak, oh Dream, your silence out loud?

³⁸ Not to be confused with the later “Nocturno” in *El girasol*. Paz may have changed the later poem’s title to “Agua Nocturna” to avoid confusion.

³⁹ “Huérfanos” also refers to “orphaned,” but refers to “hollow,” or “empty” when used to describe “words.” Weinberger renders it as the former.

⁴⁰ “Albos” is a literary term for “white.” The rendering here is borrowed from Weinberger (2012).

⁴¹ A later version reads: “Estatuas derribadas de la luna,” which Weinberger renders as: “statues pulled down from the moon,” echoing the previous pulling action of the “black rivers.”

Autumn⁴²

In flames, in autumns aflame,
my heart sometimes burns,
pure and alone. The wind wakes it,
touches its core and suspends it
in the light that smiles for no one:
what random beauty!⁴³

I search for hands,
a presence, a body,
that tears down walls
and bears inebriated forms,
a touch, a sound, a turn, a wing,
celestial fruits in the naked light.

I search inside myself,
bones, intangible violins,
dark delicate vertebrae,
lips that dream lips,
hands that dream birds...

And something that no one knows and “never” says
falls from the sky,
from you, my God and my adversary.

⁴² Paz heavily edited later editions to a single stanza: “El viento despierta/barre los pensamientos de mi frente/y me suspende/en la luz que sonr e para nadie:/cu anta belleza suelta!/Oto o: entre tus manos fr as/el mundo llamea.” (The wind wakes,/sweeps thoughts from my mind/and suspends me/in the light that smiles for no one:/what random beauty!/Autumn: between your cold hands/the world flames (Weinberger 2012).

⁴³ A rendering borrowed from Weinberger’s translation of the edited version (2012).

Insomnia

I remain far from dreams.
My mind abandons its tide,
I move among scorched stones
and turn to the room that entombs me:
the shoes, the family ties await,
the smiling teeth
and the inflicted hope:
tomorrow the sirens will sing.

(And in my blood
another song rises: I only tell my song
to those who come with me...)⁴⁴

Sordid inventor of ghosts,
of obscure, little gods,
dust, a lie in the morning.
Uprooted of cholera and joy.⁴⁵
Tied to my living
and untied from my life.
With no other lips than these, my own,
that no other tongue recognizes nor moistens;
with no image than my own,
that of my shadow,
wandering between death and contempt,
immobile prisoner of itself,
seated on a rock, in a chair,
that a frozen wave assaults: tedium and nothing.

Insomnia, dark mirror,
scornful moor,
pit of burning blood,
restless consciousness that precedes the self.

⁴⁴ An allusion to the anonymous Spanish ballad, "Romance del Infante Arnaldos" ("The Ballad of Count Arnaldos"). These two lines are sung by the mariner in the ballad, and refer to his magic song.

⁴⁵ In the 1988 edition, this line marks a heavily edited version of the stanza that concludes the poem:

Desterrado de la cólera y de la alegría,
sentado en una silla, en una roca,
frente al ciego oleaje: tedio, nada.
Atado a mi vivir
y desasido de la vida.

Uprooted of cholera and joy,
seated in a chair, on a rock,
facing the blind surf: tedium, nothing.
Tied to my living
and untied from my life.

The Mirror

There is a night, a day,
a hollow time without witnesses,⁴⁶
without tears, without oblivion, endless;
moor without waves,
island of ice between the days;
a night with no one
but its own doubled solitude:
a black, desolate mirror.

It returns from nocturnal
flowing lips,
slow waves of coral and sap,
of desire, high
as the flower beneath the rain, a sleepless
necklace of fire round night's neck,
or returns from itself to itself,
and among impenetrable mirrors, a face
reflects my face, a face
disguising my face.

The obstinate borders,
the feverish and sickly skeletons of love—
burn
(because my being exhales and is ash,
is pyre and is ash,
inhales and is ash),
and among the mirror's cruel illusions
I burn and am burned, dazzle and lie
an advancing I, dead,
a dagger of smoke that feigns
the evidence of blood from the wound
and an I, my penultimate I,
that only begs oblivion, shadow, nothing,
a final lie that ignites and burns.

From one mask to the next
there is always a questioning, penultimate I.
And I drown myself, never touching myself.

⁴⁶ Hollow-creates a pattern with the previous “huérfanos” though here the literal translation is “hollow.”

Question

Leave me, yes, leave me, god or angel, demon.
Leave me alone, angelic flock,
alone with myself, with my multitude.

I am with one like me,
who doesn't recognize me but shows me my weapons;
who embraces and wounds me
—and calls himself my son—;⁴⁷
with one who escapes with my body;
who hates me because I am him.

Look, you who flee,
my loathsome brother,
you who ignite the terrestrial bonfires,
you of the islands and the flames,
look at yourself and tell me:
what runs,
what raises torches and tongues
to summon the sky—and burns it—;⁴⁸
what lives among the waters,
in a dark bit of delicious earth;⁴⁹
what is a slowly descending star;
what is like a resounding shot
is it yours, your being, made of hours
and insatiable minutes?

Who knows what a body is,
a soul,
and the place where they converge
and why the body is illuminated
and the soul darkened,
until they are merged, flesh and soul,
in a single, living shadow?
And are we that image that we dream,
dreams stolen upon time,
dreams of time to outwit time?

In solitude I question,
of solitude I question.
And I tear open my mouth, lover of words
and gouge out my eyes

⁴⁷ Paz removed the second em dash from later editions.

⁴⁸ Paz again removed the em dashes from later editions, changing the line to: “para llamar al cielo y lo incendia.”

⁴⁹ Paz removed this line from the 1988 edition.

bloated with lies and illusions,
and fling what time
deposits in my soul,
glittering misery,
receding wave...

Beneath the pure sky,
tranquil metal, self-absorbed splendors,
naked, I question:
I'm escaping by erasing everything,
I'm marking a soft shadow on the water,
fresh oblivion already obliterated:⁵⁰
a mirror inside a mirror.

⁵⁰ Paz deleted this line from subsequent editions.

The Egoist

I don't want your world, God,
this world I inhabit
like an imprisoned phantom,
bitter light so quickly darkened.

I don't want a world with all of you,
cunning apostates
of heaven or hell.

Birth and death are the borders,
borders that neither my desire shatters
nor my anguish surpasses.

Neither the impenetrable cloud of aerial marble,
nor the torn water
nor this earth of living dead
that neither conceives nor claims me,
nor the ruin nor the jubilation
that beat through my veins,
harvest my fruit,
for my single tear,
rattle their birth,
their infinite course,
their finish in another slender birth.

I don't want this world, no, that not even
the body in which I reside do I recognize as mine.
Surrender, let it split with the air,
the nothing that cloaks me,
invisible, thirsty, without memory.

Sea in the Afternoon⁵¹

Tall walls of water, tall towers,
sudden black waters against nothing,
impenetrable, green-gray waters,
sudden white waters, dazzling.

Waters like the origin of the waters,⁵²
like the origin itself before the water,
waters washing away the waters,⁵³
annihilating what the water pretends to be.

The thunderous tiger of the waters,⁵⁴
the thunderous claws of one hundred tigers,
the hundred paws of the water, the hundred tigers
with a single paw against nothing.

Naked sea, sea thirsty for seas,⁵⁵
deep with stars if tall with foam,
white escapee from a seascape prison
in starry boundaries exploding,

what memories, what rocks, ice, and islands,⁵⁶
formless confusion of waters and nothing,
what seas, burning prisoners,
sing inside you, within your breast?

What secret violence, what lips,⁵⁷
touch your flaming-green skin?
With which desolate waters, lonely coasts,
which invisible seas, sea, do you ally?

Where do you begin, sea, where do you spill?
Where do you begin, time, my life,
army of smoke and lies,
where are you going, pulse, flesh, dream?

⁵¹ Later dedicated to Juan José Arreola, the Mexican short-story writer.

⁵² "Origin" here is borrowed from Weinberger.

⁵³ Weinberger renders the line: "Water flooded by water, washing away/what water pretends to be."

⁵⁴ The rendering of this stanza is borrowed from Weinberger. Weinberger, however, changes the second line from "cien tigres" ("a hundred tigers") to the singular, "the tiger."

⁵⁵ This stanza is again borrowed from Weinberger with only a minor change to the second line: Weinberger renders "si" ("if") to "and."

⁵⁶ Paz changed this stanza to: "¿qué memorias, deseos prisioneros,/encienden en tu piel sus verdes llamas?/En ti te precipitas, te levantas/contra ti y de ti mismo nunca escapas" ("what memories, imprisoned desires,/ignite their green flames on your skin?/You plunge in yourself, rise up/against yourself and from yourself never escape.")

⁵⁷ This stanza and the following two were removed in the 1988 edition.

Where do you empty, thirsty nothing?
I am not the stone that is plunged,
I am its fall, and also the abyss,
the circle of shadow in which it sinks.

Shipwreck yourself, sea, insatiable mirror,⁵⁸
eternity where thirst is salt,
the salt foam, vertigo the foam,
and foam and thirst, vertigo and salt are nothing.

⁵⁸ This stanza was replaced with: “Tiempo que se congela o se despeña,/tiempo que es mar y mar que es lunar t mpano,/madre furiosa, inmensa res hendida/y tiempo que se come las entra as” (“Time that freezes or hurls itself down/time that is a sea and a sea that is a lunar iceberg,/a wrathful mother, a colossal, wounded beast/whose bowels time consumes”).

The Fall

*In memory of Jorge Cuesta*⁵⁹

It opens chasms in all of creation,
time opens the heart of the living being,
and in the depth of the fleeting rhythm⁶⁰
the man is plunged, bled dry.

Vertigo of the self-consumed minute!
In the abyss of my native being,
in my original nothing, I lust:
facing myself, devoured.

The soul loses its salt, its yeast,
submerged in concentric echoes,
darkly drowning in its ashes.

Time flows with an impenetrable force;
it sustains nothing, not even my fall;
it elapses alone, silently, interminably.

II

Fugitive of my being, that purges me
of the former certainty of myself,
I search for my salt, my name, my baptism,
the waters that washed away my sin.

Touch and sight leave me only mist,
mist of myself, lie and mirage:
what am I but the chasm in which I plunge,
and what, if not the non-being that fills me?

The mirror that I am abandons me;
I am plunged into the horror of not-being,
a falling in my infinite self

And nothing remains but the profane pleasure
of reason, falling in the ineffable,
frozen intimacy of its emptiness.

⁵⁹ Cuesta was a Mexican poet, essayist, and member of the generation of *Contemporáneos*. According to LBP 5 (1988): "He was a friend of Paz during their youth, and was the first to review his work (*Raíz del hombre*) in 1937. In 1942 Cuesta committed suicide. The first version of the two sonnets, titled "La caída" was published as part of the series "Crepúsculos de la ciudad."...At the end of LBP 1, it is included as a separate composition. For commentary on the relation between paz and Cuesta, see *Xavier Villaurrutia, en persona y en obra*" (LBP 1988).

⁶⁰ "La hondura" was later changed to "sombra," or "shadow" (LBP 1988).

Teardrop

A single, shimmering, round tear,
burning salt-burn,
clear, bitter, crystalline sun,
rolling through an infinite riverbed,
tumbling toward nothing.

Its trail of calcined stone,
saltpeter beneath the sun.

Who shed this tear
rushing down,
endlessly running over
the aridity of the flesh or stone,
its fire never moistening
the dry and thirsty lip?

This tear doesn't mourn me,
nor does it mourn the dream I never was
nor the life that I am.

Salt of the soul distilled in hells,
you know, (if you know), nothing.
You are stone and not tear,
and you weigh the heart like stone,
since you don't mourn me, but bury me.

City Twilight⁶¹

*For Rafael Vega Albela,
who suffered here⁶²*

I

The last sun devours exposed remains;
the battered, wounded sky is a grave;
light dims on the dilapidated wall;
dust and saltpeter blow across its deserts.

The ashtrees rise higher, awaken
and darken the silent square,
as blindly felt and chained
as a never-healing sore.

Streets leading nowhere,
streets endlessly treaded,
endless delirium of the sleepless mind.

Everything that names or evokes me
lies in you, a city; emptiness lies
within your tombstone breast.

II⁶³

Mute, as a silent crag
detached from the sky falls, stiff,
the sky detached from its weight,
collapsing on itself, stone and pit.

Dusk burns in its massacre;
between the ash and the yawn

⁶¹ According to the 1988 edition: "The collective title of this series of sonnets alludes and responds to *Los crepúsculos del jardín* (1905) by Leopardo Lugones.

⁶² A friend of Paz who committed suicide.

⁶³ Paz later added this note to the second sonnet: *Hasta hace años las agencias funerarias de la ciudad de México tenían sus negocios en la Avenida Hidalgo, al lado del Parque de la Alameda, en el tramo que va del Correo a la iglesia y plazuela de San Juan de Dios. Frente a la iglesia había un pequeño mercado de flores, especializado en coronas y ofrendas fúnebres. El barrio era céntrico y aislado a un tiempo. desde el anochecer las prostitutas recorrían la Avenida Hidalgo y las callejas contiguas. Uno de sus lugares favoritos era el espacio ocupado por las funerarias, iluminado por la luz eléctrica de los escaparates donde se exhibían los ataúdes.*" (LBP 1988, 129)

"Until some years ago, funeral homes in Mexico City had their businesses on Avenida Hidalgo, next to the Alameda Park, on the stretch that goes from the post office to the church and the square of San Juan de Dios. Facing the church was a small flower market specializing in wreaths and funeral offerings. The district was centrally located and isolated at a time. At dusk, prostitutes roamed the Avenida Hidalgo and the adjoining streets. One of their favorite places was the space occupied by the funeral parlors, illuminated by the electric light of the storefronts where they displayed the coffins."

I cross streets where livid and made of gesso,
a dark, dizzying life beats;⁶⁴

leprosy of pallor on the quivering
stone, a sore turns to every wall;
on ceilings above coffins where

the daily domestic death thrives,
whores furtively emerge, a dark breath,⁶⁵
petrified in the illusory night.

III

On the shore now detached from myself,
I touch the destruction that in me dares,
touch ash and nothing, what the sky rains
in its dark fall.

Drowned in my shadow-mirror I fear
the abandonment of the breath that moves me:
phantom force of snow, touch and color,
scent and thirst, sound—flee.

The sky bleeds dry on the cobalt
of a sea hard with mineral foam;
I rise, look at myself in the steel

of the worn stone and asphalt:
the opaque, mechanical dead
trample not my shadow, but my true body.

IV

(Sky)

Cold metal, indifferent knife,
solitary moor without a morning star,
borderless plain, all steel,
tearless sky, well, blind fountain.

Impassable, fixed, persistent,
total wall, with neither doors nor knobs,
between the thirst that reflects you,
and another promised, absent sky.

⁶⁴ The line was later changed to: “calles en donde, anónimo y obseso,/fluye el deseo, río sinuoso” (“streets where anonymous and obsessed,/desire flows, a sinuous river”)

⁶⁵ This and the following line were changed to: “”surgen, petrificadas en lo oscuro,/ putas: pilares de la noche vana” (“petrified in the darkness,/whores emerge: pillars of the illusory night”).

Speech tastes of numb glass,
silence bristling in the wind,
the sleepless, remorseful heart.

Nothing moves you, sky, nor inhabits you.
The soul burns root and birth
and in itself drowns and is plunged.

V⁶⁶

Immortal time flows and on its beat
only throbs with futile insistence,
deaf avidity of nothingness, indifference,
pulse of sand, meaningless mercury.

Time already dead and wrung dry
the age, the dream, and the innocence lie,
a handful of aridity in my consciousness,
futile cipher of the man and his twin.

I turn around: I am not the trail of mist
of myself, but the absence that I abandon,
the echo of the silence of my cry.

Everything collapses or freezes:
all that remains of the man is his desert,
a monument of ice, wail, crime.

VI

The hours, their intangible sorrow,
their weightless weight, their emptiness,
the senseless horror, the thirst that I quench
facing the mirror and its glacial glimmer,

my being that multiplies in masses
and then denies itself in a profane reflection,
everything, an inexorable river,
crawls toward nothing, a single certainty.

I move toward myself; toward the mute,
solitary borders with no exit:
hard waters, opaque and naked

slowly pierce my consciousness
opening a secret wound in me
that only flows futilely, impatiently.

⁶⁶ This sonnet later became a separate poem titled "Monumentos."

Dispatch⁶⁷

When the ink hits the paper,⁶⁸
at any solitary hour,
who guides the pen?
To whom does he write, he who writes for me,
on a shore made of lips and dream,
a tranquil hill, a gulf,⁶⁹
a shoulder on which to forget the world forever?

Someone in me writes, moves my hand,
selects a word, stops,
hesitates between the green mountain and blue sea,
contemplates what I write
with an icy ardor.
All is burned in this fire of justice.⁷⁰
But this judge is also a victim,
and upon condemning me, is condemned:
he writes to no one, calls no one,
writes to himself, is forgotten
before redeemed, and returns again⁷¹
as me.

⁶⁷ An early version of this poem was titled "Mientras escribo," or "While I Write," while a later version was changed to "Escritura," or "Writing." The title here is the only one to denote to "kill or assassinate." The idea of the writer being killed through the act of writing aligns with the collection's exploration of the annihilation of the self and its subsequent rebirth. One might suggest that Paz changed the earliest title because it directly refers to an "I." The latest, however, may signify a desire to avoid the connotations of commerce in the second title, and focus simply on the act of "writing" itself.

⁶⁸ Because Rukeyser has translated this poem, I stray from a more literal rendering. The replacement of "writes on" ("escribe") with "hits," and the mono-syllabic half rhyme of "ink" and "hits" seems to better emphasize the moment of writing as a transformative event.

⁶⁹ Rukeyser rendered this line as "hill of stillness, abyss."

⁷⁰ A rendering borrowed from Rukeyser.

⁷¹ "Rescatar" also means "to ransom," again relating to the idea of commerce or exchange.

Destiny of the Poet⁷²

Words?

Yes, made of air

and in the air,

dissolved.⁷³

Let me lose myself

between

words.

Let me be the air

on living lips,⁷⁴

a wandering breath

formless,⁷⁵

a momentary aroma

dissipating

in the air.

Even light in itself is lost.

⁷² Though this poem has been translated by Rukeyser, my rendering here illustrates the more creative role I assume as translator. My use of visual space mimics the transience of the words that are lost in the page's whiteness.

⁷³ While "se pierde" translates to "lost," my choice of "dissolved" represents the creative role I assume as translator in this rendering. "Dissolved" also frequently appears in Paz's poems, and hence, creates a greater sense of unity among the work as a whole.

⁷⁴ "Living" does not appear in the Spanish, but is borrowed from Rukeyser. Though the words are "lost," their presence is very much alive, as they are born from the living mind of the poet.

⁷⁵ The Spanish "sin contornos" (literally, "without contours") seems to negate the ethereality of the words of the poem by describing them in two separate, broken words. "Formless," in its singularity, seems more successful at echoing and spatially illustrating the ethereality of the words, and produces consonance with the following line.

Noon

A still splendor drowns and blinds me,
a dazzled empty circle,
because in the same light its light conceals it.

I close my eyes and rely on my shadow
this intangible bliss, this minute,
that binds me to its voracious eternity.

Within me beats, flower and fruit,
the imprisoned light, burned ruin,⁷⁶
live coal, since I darken what is lit.⁷⁷

Now shivering womb, its diamond,⁷⁸
within me the calcined day is fused,⁷⁹
inner ember, dying coral.

The pierced splendor of the world
beats on my eyelid, and its thorns
blind me, a gated paradise.

Shadows of the world, warm ruins
dream beneath my skin and their deaf throb
drowns my deserted mines.

Slow and tenacious, the sunken day
is a hot, tremulous shadow,
a black sea that swells without sound,

a dark, secret thirst that feels
forms it no longer sees and senses them
at my touch, dissolved in my current.

The body within the blood drowns us
and suddenly the body vanishes, without a thaw,
a wave, a disintegrating vibration.

Midnight of the body, all sky,

⁷⁶ The first of a series of inversions Paz employs.

⁷⁷ While “darken” is a correct rendering, “enluto” more closely translates as: “to make mourn” or “to make grieve.” “Darken” emphasizes the light and dark imagery throughout the work.

⁷⁸ “Entraña” is a difficult word to translate; it most literally means “entrails.” In Spanish idiom, however, it frequently refers to the “core” or “heart.”

⁷⁹ “Se funde” also translates as “fuse.” “Built,” however, creates a closer rhyme with the previous “lit” than “melt.” Rhyme features prominently in this poem with an aba, bcb, etc. rhyme scheme.

forest of pulsations and thicket,
night-noon of the subsoil,

is this falling in a dark womb
of the same light as that of noon
that erects what it touches into sculpture?

—The body is infinite and melody.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Readers should be aware of Paz's play on "melodía" (melody) with "mediodía" (noon).

Arcs

*For Silvina Ocampo*⁸¹

Who sings on the shores of the page?⁸²
Leaning over, facing the river
of images, I see myself, slowly and alone,
separated from myself: oh pure letters,
constellation of signs, incisions⁸³
in the flesh of time, oh inscription,
a line in the water!

I move among entwined
pastures, among transparencies,
among islands I move along the river,
on the smiling river that slides and glides
and doesn't pass, smooth thought.
I move further from myself, stop
without stopping on a bank and follow,
down river, among arcs of entwined⁸⁴
images, the pensive river.

I follow, wait for myself there, go to meet myself,
smiling river that twines and untwines
a luminous moment between two poplars,
lingers on a smooth stone,
and detaches from itself and follows,
down river, in search of itself.

⁸¹ Argentine essayist, short-fiction writer, and poet.

⁸² Another rendering: "Who sings on the edges of the paper?"; The Spanish "orillas" more commonly refers to "waves." Because Paz frequently uses the image, I have retained it. According to Thorpe Running, the line is "a Mallarméan question, asking what effect the blank spaces could have on the poem, as well as where the poetic voice comes from" (Running 36). This remains a fundamental concern throughout Paz's work, and one that I take up in "Destiny of the Poet."

⁸³ A reference to Stéphane Mallarmé's "Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard" ("A Throw of the Dice will Never Abolish Chance").

Lake

*Tout pour l'oeil, rien pour les oreilles!*⁸⁵

Among arid mountains
imprisoned waters
rest, sparkle,
a fallen sky.

Half violet,
the other silver, a fish-scale,
indolent splendor,
sleepy among mother-of-pearl.

Nothing but the mountains
and the light among mist;
water and sky rest,
breast to breast, infinite.

As the finger that grazes
breasts, a belly,
a cold, delicate breath,
shivers the waters.

The silence vibrates, a steam
of music foreseen,⁸⁶
invisible to the ear,
only for the eyes.

Only for the eyes
this light and these waters,
this sleeping pearl
that scarcely glistens.

All for the eyes!
And in the eyes a rhythm,
a fleeting color,
the shadow of a form,
a sudden gust,
and an infinite shipwreck.

⁸⁵ “All for the eye, none for the ears!” from Charles Baudelaire’s poem, “Parisian Dream” from *Les fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*, 1857). Baudelaire’s poem is divided into two parts: the first consists of 13 quatrains, the second, two. All of the lines contain eight syllables and follow an abab rhyme scheme. According to Enrico Mario Santi’s note in the final, annotated 1988 edition of *Libertad bajo palabra*, “The poem recounts a dream of illusory objects that culminates in the experience of an ‘eternal silence.’ Paz’s poem, therefore, reverses the meaning of Baudelaire’s quote.” In the 1988 edition, Paz cuts the second quatrain from “Lake.”

⁸⁶ I have retained Paz’s inversion.

Girl

*For Laura Elena*⁸⁷

You name the tree, girl.
And the tree grows, slowly and full,
suffocating the air,
with its green glare,
until we become the green gaze.

You name the sky, girl.⁸⁸
And the blue sky, the white cloud,
the morning light,
penetrate your core
until it becomes sky and transparency.

You name the water, girl.
And the water sprouts, where I don't know,
bathes the black earth,
the flower becomes green again, gleams on the leaves
and we become wet mist.

You say nothing, girl.
And from the silence sprouts⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Paz's daughter from his first wife, Elena Garro.

⁸⁸ Paz radically revised the poem beginning with the second stanza. Below is the revised version with my translation:

Nombras el cielo, niña.
Y las nubes pelean con el viento
y el espacio se vuelve
un transparente campo de batalla.

Nombras el agua, niña.
Y el agua brota, no sé dónde,
brilla en las hojas, habla entre las piedras
y en húmedos vapores nos convierte.

No dices nada, niña.
Y la ola amarilla,
la marea de sol,
en su cresta nos alza,
en los cuatro horizontes nos dispersa
y nos devuelve, intactos,
en el centro del día, a ser nosotros.

You name the sky, girl.
And the clouds fight with the wind
and the space becomes
a transparent battle field.

You name the water, girl.
And the water sprouts, where I don't know,
gleams on the leaves, speaks among the stones
and transforms us into wet mist.

You say nothing, girl.
And the yellow wave,
the sunny tide,
lifts us on its crest,
scatters us on four horizons
and returns us, intact,
to the center of the day, to be ourselves.

⁸⁹ Rendering this verb as "sprouts" rather than "is born" echoes a later line in "Visits": "Out of silence sprouts a tree of music," and the earlier image of "water sprout[ing]."

life, in a wave
of yellow music;
its golden tide
lifts us to plenitude
returns us to ourselves, lost.

Girl who lifts and revives me!
Wave without end, boundless, eternal!⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Paz cut this stanza from later editions.

June

*Beneath the sky ran faithful June
dragging dates in its fresh waters...⁹¹*

You arrive again, transparent river,
all sky and greenery, frozen clouds,
rain showers or loose hair,
plenitude, motionless, fluent wave.

Your light moistens a budding date;
your hands graze glimmering forms,
your lips kiss shadows already kissed,
your eyes see, your heart foresees.

Hour of eternity, all presence,
time overflows and flows in you,
and everything is revived before dissolved!

The heart foresees and swells,
illusory plenitude that no one touches,
but it also remembers and, blind, weeps.⁹²

⁹¹ The first verse of Paz's Sonnet IV (LBP 5, 78).

⁹² Paz later changed the line to: "hoy es ayer y es siempre y es deshora" (today is yesterday and is always an unseasonable hour).

Summer Night

Pulsating, you caress the night's body,
summer in whose rivers you bathe,
murmur in which the stars suffocate,
breath through a mouth
of lips of earth.

Earth of lips, mouth
where a dying hell gasps for air,
lips on which the sky rains
and water sings and paradises are born.

The night's tree is aflame
and its embers are stars,
are pupils, birds.
Sleepwalking rivers flow.
Tongues of incandescent salt
gleam against a dark beach.⁹³

Everything breathes, lives, flows:
light in its flicker,
the eye in its gaze,
the heart on its beat,
night in its infinite.

A dark birth without waves,
is born in the summer night.
And on your pupil all the sky is born.

⁹³ "Gleam" does not appear in the Spanish, but appears throughout the collection. The addition here especially connects it to "Girl."

Midnight

It's the secret noon,
only vibrating darkness of the core,⁹⁴
silent plenitude of the living thing.

From the soul, ruin and shadow,
vertigo of ash and emptiness,
sprouts a faint fire,
a slender music,
a column of pure silence,
a darkened river
that rises from its bed
and flows, in the air, toward the sky.

Singing, from its shadow
—and further, from its nothingness—, the soul.
Naked of its name the being sings,
in the spell of existing uncertainty,
in love with its own song.

And it is not the bitter mouth,
no nor the soul, self-absorbed in its mirage,
nor the heart, a dark cataract,
that sustains the song,
by singing in the dazzled silence.

Loving itself
and resting on itself
it spills and overflows
and is elevated
on a song we do not hear,
music of the music,
silence and plenitude,
rock and tide,
sleeping immensity
in which shapes and sounds dream.

It's the secret noon.
The soul sings, facing the sky,
and dreams of another song,
only vibrating light,
silent plenitude of the living thing.

⁹⁴ The word “entraña” reappears here in the companion poem to “Noon.” See note 3 in “Noon.”

Spring Ahead

A naked blue winter sky, pure
as the mind, as the thought
of a girl who awakens, cold
as the dream of a statue without memory.

The sea scarcely breathes, scarcely glitters;
the sleeping light dreams of the grove,
the meadow and flower dream. But the wind is born
and banners flutter through space.

From the sleeping sea it rises to the hill
and its invisible being is an ocean
that whirls and sings, willowy and hanging
over yellow eucalyptus.

From the hill down to the sea again
lie lips murmuring leaves
on a naked, sleeping body,
on the transparency of silence.

Day opens its eyes and awakens
to an unforeseen spring,
a yellow rose naked in the cold air,
linen in the air or loose hair.

The red flower sways and sheds petals,
like the flower, day weeps petals,
and naked in the light, in vibrations, falls,
scattering wet salt over the sea.

The wind spins and sings and stops,
a sweet hurricane over the eucalyptus.
Everything my hands touch, flies away.
The world is full of birds.

The Bird

A silence of air, light, and sky.⁹⁵
In the transparent silence
day was resting:
the transparency of space
was the transparency of silence.
The sky's motionless light was slowing⁹⁶
the growth of the grass.
The earth's insects, between stones,
beneath identical light, were stones.
Time was sating itself in the minute.
In the self-absorbed stillness⁹⁷
noon was being consumed.⁹⁸

And a bird sang, a slender arrow.
A wounded silver breast, the sky quivered,⁹⁹
the leaves shook,¹⁰⁰
the grass awoke...
And I felt that death was an arrow
shot from an unknown hand¹⁰¹
and when our eyes open we die.¹⁰²

⁹⁵ Paz later eliminated this line.

⁹⁶ The Spanish "sosegar" has multiple, paradoxical meanings: to silence, still, slow, or soothe; Though Rukeyser chooses the latter, "to slow" not only creates an internal rhyme with "motionless," and "growth," but also aligns with Paz's use of paradoxes.

⁹⁷ A rendering borrowed from Weinberger (2012).

⁹⁸ "Consumar" translates as: "to consummate," "to complete," or "to perfect." The English "to consume" is closer to "consumir." While Rukeyser and Weinberger render the line as "Noon consumed itself," I retain the imperfect tense to intensify the impact of the past tense in the following stanza.

⁹⁹ While the absence of a comma in the Spanish is most likely an error, it creates ambiguous alternatives: "A wounded silver breast quivered the sky," or "The sky quivered a wounded silver breast." Less commonly, the verb "vibrar" may refer to the English verbs "to throw" or "to dart." Paz may have purposely chosen this verb, as it would have recalled the "arrow" from the previous line. Though "vibrar" is closer to the English "to vibrate," "quivered" provides a pun that links it to the "arrow."

¹⁰⁰ "Shook" provides a stronger, more violent image of the bird's death than "se movieron" ("moved").

¹⁰¹ An "unknown hand" is Rukeyser's rendering.

¹⁰² Rukeyser provides an alternate, though less literal rendering: "and in the flicker of an eye we die."

Silence

And out of background music
sprouts a note
that while vibrating grows and softens
until it is muted in another music,
sprouting from the background of silence
another silence, a spired tower, a sword
that rises and grows and suspends us,
and while rising
memories, hopes,
half-truths and half-lies,¹⁰³
fall
and we want to scream but in the throat
the scream dissolves:
and we are brought to silence
in which the silences are mute.

¹⁰³ Instead of rendering the line more literally (“little lies and big ones”), I opt for a rendering that obscures the distinction between truth and reality, (a theme present throughout the collection), and that echoes “Poet’s Epitaph.”

New Face

Your hair, a setting sun,
is lost among black, soft clouds.
The night erases nights from your face,
pours oil on your dry eyelids,
burns thought into your mind,
and behind thought
memory.¹⁰⁴

Among the shadows that drown you
a new face dawns.
And I feel that at my side,
it is not you who sleeps,
but that girl you once were,
and who was only waiting for you to sleep
to return and meet me.

¹⁰⁴ The spacing here provides a pause that mimics the distance of memory.

Engaged¹⁰⁵

Stretched out on the grass¹⁰⁶
a girl and a boy.
Eating oranges, sharing kisses
two waves exchanging foam.

Stretched out on the shore
a girl and a boy.
Eating lemons, sharing kisses
two clouds exchanging foam.

Stretched out underground
a girl and a boy.
Saying nothing, never kissing,
exchanging silence for silence.

¹⁰⁵ Title borrowed from Rukeyser.

¹⁰⁶ “Tendidos” may be rendered as either “stretched out,” or “lying [down].” Choosing the former more closely aligns with the spatial-visual symmetry of “girl” and “boy.”

Two Bodies

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

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

Two bodies face to face
are at times two roots
in the night entangled.¹⁰⁷

Two bodies face to face
are at times two knives
and the night the lightning.¹⁰⁸

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

¹⁰⁷ The inversion here retains the symmetry of “night” in the last line of each stanza. I have also borrowed “entangled” from Weinberger to maintain the rhythm of the last line in the first four stanzas.

¹⁰⁸ Rukeyser provides an alternate rendering of the line: “and night strikes sparks.”

Life in a Glimpse

Lightning or fish
in the night of the sea,
and birds, lightning
in the night of the forest.

The bones are lightning,
in the night of the body.
Oh world, all is night
and life the lightning.

Thirst

To search for myself, Poetry,
I searched for myself in you:
a castaway star of water
drowned my core.
To search for you, Poetry,
I shipwrecked myself.

Later I only searched for you
to flee from myself:
a thicket of images
in which I lost myself
But after winding and turning
Again I found myself:

the same drowned face
in the same nakedness;
the same mirror-waters
from which I have not drunk;
and at the mirror's edge
the same death of thirst.

The Rock

I lived by dreaming
and it was my life
to walk worn paths
and always depart.

I awoke from a dream
and it was my life
a chained being
and a longing to flee.

Chained to the rock,
I fell back asleep.
The dream is the cord,
dying, the rock.

The Knife

The knife is a bird of ice.
It falls, pure, and freezes the air,
as the scream freezes in silence,
the suspended blood thins
at the edge of a hair and the instant
splits into two livid halves...
Deserted world, cold sky
where a gray comet hisses and disappears.

Notes on Insomnia¹⁰⁹

1

The clock gnaws
my heart
vulture
with the patience of a rat.

2

At the height of the instant
I told myself: "I am eternal
in the peak of time."
And the instant fell
into the next, an eternal abyss.

3

Vivir and morir rhyme,
amar and penar rhyme,¹¹⁰
oh time, endless rhyme,
to end is to begin.

The Wall

I found myself facing a wall
and on the wall, a sign:
"Your future begins here."

5

What will it be like to die?
To leap into the abyss
or will the abyss be what seizes us?

Dawn of Victory

With its cold glass
dawn tears open the sky.

¹⁰⁹ According to Jason Wilson, Paz borrows the structure of this poem (seven stanzas), and the phrase "roer el reló" from Juan José Tabalada's "El reló de sombra" from *El jarro de flores* (1922). Xavier Villaurrutia later adapted the phrase in his "Suite del insomnio" from his book *Reflejos* (1926) (Wilson 171).

¹¹⁰ Retaining the Spanish preserves both the rhyme and meaning. A literal translation renders: "To live and to die rhyme, /to love and to lose rhyme."

The world dawns
through the pallid wound,
bloodless.

Native Nostalgia

In the identical blue
identical stars
gleam and ignore us.
...But every cock crows on his own dunghill.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ A Spanish *paremia*, or pithy proverb.

Facing the Sea

1

It rains in the sea.
Mother Nature,
at the sea that is of the sea
and that dries up the inheritance.

2

Has the wave no form?
In a moment it is sculpted
and in the next collapses
in the one that emerges, round.
Its movement is its form.

3

The waves retreat
—haunches, backs, napes of the neck—
but the waves return
— chests, mouths, foam—.

Thirst

The sea is dying of thirst.
Writhing, alone,
on its sand bed.
Dying of thirst for air.

5

The sea's thirst is an endless thirst:
it dies and never stops dying.

Rhetoric

*Poets in the branch*¹¹²

Birds sing, sing
without knowing what they sing:
in their throat their understanding.

Form

Form that adjusts to movement
is not the prison of thought, but the skin of thought.

Clarity

The clarity of transparent crystal
is a clarity that does not satisfy me:
clear water is running water.

¹¹² Paz removed the subtitles from the later editions.

Mystery

Glittering of air, it glitters,¹¹³
noon glitters,
but I see no sun.

And in the presence of presence,
all is transparent,
but I see no sun.

Lost in the transparencies
I go from reflection to blaze,
but I see no sun.

And the sun is also naked in the light,
and questions every splendor,
but it sees no sun.

¹¹³ Rendering borrowed from Rukeyser.

The Branch

Singing on the point of the pine
a bird, detained,
tremulous on its trill.

Rising, an arrow in the branch,¹¹⁴
it vanishes between wings
and in music escapes.¹¹⁵

The bird is tinder
that sings, burning alive
in a yellow note.

I raise my eyes: nothing.
Silence above the branch,
above the broken branch.

¹¹⁴ “Se yergue” from the infinitive, “erguirse” has multiple definitions: to swell or puff (with pride), to straighten, or rise. “Rise” seems to make the comparison of the bird to the arrow clearer.

¹¹⁵ “Derramarse” also has several definitions: to scatter, spread, or escape; though “escape” is more obsolete, it relates to the image of the bird “detained” in the branch, and can also indicate the loss or abandonment of the self in sensual pleasure.

Wind

The leaves sing,
the pears dance in the tree;
the rose drifts,
a rose of the wind, not the rose bush.

Clouds and clouds
silently drift, the air's algae;
all of space
drifts with them, an invisible force.

All is space;
It shivers the stem of the poppy
and the bare body
flutters in the wind at the wave's edge.

I am nothing,
a body that drifts, light, surf;
everything is in the wind
and the wind is always air adrift.

Spiral

Like the carnation atop its stalk,
like the carnation, is the rocket:
a carnation that is shot.

Like the rocket, the torpedo:
it climbs toward the sky and explodes,
the song of a bird in a pine.

Like the carnation and like the wind
the snail is a rocket:
petrified movement.

And the spiral in every thing
diffuses its vibrations in rotations:
the movement never ceases.

Yesterday the conch was a wave,
tomorrow light and wind, sound,
echo of the echo, a conch.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Paz cut this stanza from subsequent editions.

Clouds

Look at those white islands in the sky!
Look at the white feathers of their birds
flying among the foliage of their ice floes,
watch them float and melt,
illusory archipelago, phantom!

Islands of the sky, breath suspended in a breath,
treading lightly as the air,
treading over beaches, leaving a footprint lighter
than the shadow of the wind upon water!

And as the air itself is lost
among the leaves in the foliage of the mist,
the air be lips without a body,
a body without weight, a force without shores!

Poet's Epitaph

He wanted to sing, sing
to forget
his true life of lies
not to forget
his untrue life of truths.

The Sunflower

Healed

Tower of walls of amber,
single laurel in a plaza of stone,
unforeseen gulf,
smile in a dark corridor,
ebb of a river flowing between palaces,¹¹⁷
effulgent comet that blinds me and vanishes...¹¹⁸

Bridge under whose arches endlessly races life.

¹¹⁷ “Andar” is closer in meaning to “movement” than “ebb,” but the latter is more specific to a river, thus, providing a clearer image.

¹¹⁸ I have rendered “dulce” (sweet) as “effulgent” in an attempt to provide a clearer image, rhyme (with “comet”), and to align it with the previous “ebb” through alliteration.

Your eyes

Your eyes are the homeland of lightening and tears,
silence that speaks,
tempests without wind, sea without waves,
captive birds, sleepy golden beasts,
topaz as profane as truth,
autumn in a patch of forest where light sings on the shoulder of a tree and all the leaves are
birds,
beach that the morning finds constellated with eyes,¹¹⁹
basket of fruits aflame,
lie that nourishes,
mirrors of this world, doors from the beyond,
whispering rhythm of the sea at noon,¹²⁰
flickering absolute,
moor.

Body on View

¹¹⁹ “Constellated” appears later in the poem “Written in Green Ink.”

¹²⁰ “Tranquila” is closer in meaning to “calm,” or “tranquil,” but “whispering” animates the sea (which Paz frequently personifies), and more closely matches the rhythm of the Spanish.

And once again, the shadows were lifted and displayed a body:
your hair, a silent solar river, thick bushy autumn, waterfall of golden leaves,
your mouth and the white discipline of its cannibalistic teeth, prisoners in flames,¹²¹
your skin, the color of golden-brown bread and your eyes of burnt sugar,
places where time does not elapse,
valleys that only my lips know,
the moon's canyon scaling your throat from between your breasts,
petrified cascade of the nape of your neck,
high plateau of your abdomen,
endless shore of your side.

Your eyes are the fixed eyes of a tiger,
and a minute later, the moist eyes of a dog.

There are always bees in your hair.

Your back quietly flows beneath my eyes,
like the river's back illuminated by the blaze.

Night and day, sleeping waters beat against your earthen waist,
and on your coasts, as immense as the sandy shores of the moon,
the wind blows through my mouth, its long groan cloaking the bodied night with
two gray wings,
like the shadow of the eagle, the solitude of the moor.

The nails upon your fingers and toes are made of summer crystal.

Between your legs, a well of sleeping water,
a bay where the night sea calms and quiets, a black foam horse,
a cave at the foot of the mountain concealing a treasure,
mouth of the furnace where the holy hosts are made,
smiling lips, half-open and terrible,
nuptials of light and shadow, of the visible and the invisible
(out there, await the resurrection of the flesh and the day of the life everlasting).

Land of blood,
the only earth that I know and that knows me,
the only land in which I believe,
the only door to the infinite.

Nocturne¹²²

¹²¹ The image of "cannibalistic teeth" recalls the image of the Shulamite bride's teeth in the Song of Solomon in which the bridegroom compares parts of her body to images in nature: "Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn..." (Song of Solomon 4:2).

The night with the eyes of a horse that tremble in the night,¹²³
the night with eyes of water in the field asleep,
is in your eyes of a horse that trembles,
is in your eyes of secret water.

Eyes of shadow water,
eyes of well water,
eyes of dream water.

Silence and solitude,
like two little animals guided by the moonlight,¹²⁴
they drink from those waters,
they drink from those eyes.¹²⁵

If you open your eyes,
the night opens its doors of moss,
opens the secret kingdom of the water
that flows from the center of the night.¹²⁶

And if you close them,
a river, a current, sweet and silent,
floods you from within, flows forward, and darkens you:
the night dampens riverbanks in your soul.

Lightning at Rest

¹²² In subsequent editions of the poem, Paz changed its title to “Agua Nocturna,” commonly translated as “Water Night,” but translates more precisely to “Nocturnal Water.”

¹²³ Because the original title refers to a musical composition, I lengthened the rhythm of the lines to match the Spanish, as opposed to compressing them.

¹²⁴ The addition of “light” provides an extra syllable that more closely echoes the rhythm of the Spanish.

¹²⁵ In later editions, the last two lines of this stanza appear in reverse order. Paz may have switched them in subsequent editions to create a rhyme with “ojos.”

¹²⁶ I have borrowed the rendering of this stanza from Eliot Weinberger (2012).

Stretched out
noon-stone,
eyes half-open half-closed¹²⁷
where the white turns blue,¹²⁸
a half-closed smile.
Half rousing, you shake your lion's mane.
Later you lie down,
a delicate striation of lava in the rock,
a slumberous light ray.
While you sleep,
I stroke and polish you,
slim axe,
arrow with which I set the night on fire.

Far off, the sea is fighting with swords and plumes.

Written in Green Ink

¹²⁷ The addition of "half-closed" is a creative choice used to highlight the blurring of borders present within the poems.

¹²⁸ Separating this line from the former again reflects a creative choice that underscores the importance of the blending of boundaries within the collection.

Green ink creates gardens, jungles, meadows,
foliage where letters take refuge and sing,
words that are trees,
phrases that are green constellations.¹²⁹

Oh whiteness, let my words descend and enshroud you
like a shower of leaves on a snow covered field,
like ivy on the statue,
the ink on this page.

Arms, waist, throat, breasts,
brow as pure as the sea,
the nape of your neck, a grove in autumn,
glittering teeth biting a blade of grass.¹³⁰

Your body is constellated in green images,
like a tree's body covered in green shoots.
Never mind how much the little scar glimmers:
look up at the sky and its emerald tattoo of stars.

Visits

¹²⁹ Though Rukeyser changes the verb from “are” to “appearing,” retaining the Spanish verb “to be” (“son”) affirms the equivalence between “phrases” and “constellations” by denying the more comparative relation.

¹³⁰ “Glittering” does not appear in the Spanish, but frequently appears throughout the collection. Its addition here creates a more startling, threatening image that recalls the “white...cannibalistic teeth” from “Body on View.” The consonance of the hard “t” in this line further suggests the image’s violence.

Across the city night of stone and drought
the countryside enters my room.
It extends green arms dangling bracelets of birds,
bracelets of leaves.
It takes a river by the hand.
The country sky also enters
with a basket of freshly cut jewels.
And the sea beside me,
sweeps the whitest of trains across the floor.
Out of silence sprouts a tree of music.
From the tree hang¹³¹
all the luminous words
that gleam, and ripen, and fall.
Within my forehead, the cave where light dwells...
But all has been peopled with wings.
Tell me, is it really the country traveling from so far,
or is it you, these dreams that you dream by my side?¹³²

On the Shore

¹³¹ “Suspended” or “hanging” images frequently appear in the poems. Separating the lines allows for a break after “hang” that allows the “fruit” to “hang” from the following line.

¹³² Paz removed the final two lines in the 1968 edition of *LBP*.

All that gleams in the night,
necklaces, eyes, stars,
serpents of flaming colors,
gleams on your arms curving like rivers,
on your neck where the day awakens.

Your body gleams.
They say you have left the phosphorescent sea.¹³³

The bonfire setting fire to the forest,
the lighthouse, a giraffe's neck
the eye, insomnia's sunflower,
are tired of watching and waiting.

Go out,
nothing shines greater than the eyes that see us.
Contemplate me who contemplates you.
Sleep,
forest's velvet,
moss on which I rest my head.

The night's blue waves are erasing these words,
written lightly in the palm of a dream.

¹³³ Paz removed these two lines from subsequent editions.

Forgotten¹³⁴

Close your eyes, and lose yourself in the darkness
under the blood-red forest of your eyelids.¹³⁵

Sink into those spirals of sound
that buzz and whirl and fall,
but echo in the distance, far off,
all the way to the eardrum,
a deafened waterfall.

Plunge into the darkness,
drown yourself in your skin,
and further—in your core;
let the bone, its livid flash,
dazzle and blind you,
and among chasms and gulfs of hell
open its blue plume, the will'-o-the-wisp.¹³⁶

In that liquid dream shadow
bathe in your nakedness,¹³⁷
surrender your form, your foam
(no one knows who left it on the shore);¹³⁸
lose yourself in yourself,
infinite in your infinite being,¹³⁹
sea losing itself in another sea—
forget yourself and forget me.

In that forgetfulness with neither age nor end
lips, kisses, love—all is reborn:¹⁴⁰
the stars are daughters of the night.

Beyond Love

¹³⁴ I have borrowed this rendering from Rukeyser.

¹³⁵ The addition of “blood” to the image of “red foliage” echoes the violence of the destruction of the self in the poem.

¹³⁶ In English and European folklore: a ghostly light on a bog or marsh seen by nighttime travelers. In Spanish (“fuego fatuo”), the myth has different meanings in rural areas of Latin America. In Argentina (“luz mala”), it refers to a light that floats a few inches from the ground. In Venezuela, the light represents the wandering spirit of the Spanish conquistador, Lope de Aguirre.

¹³⁷ The addition of the preposition “in” echoes its later repetition in the stanza and more closely aligns the “self” with the “sea.”

¹³⁸ The rendering this line comes from Rukeyser: “(no one knows who flung it on the shore)” (37).

¹³⁹ Moving “infinite” to the following line again creates symmetry within the stanza.

¹⁴⁰ The em dashes in this line and in the previous stanza are my insertions. In the fourth stanza, the em dash cuts short the continuous action of the “sea losing itself” by refocusing the attention on the reader in the command that ends the stanza. In the fifth stanza, the em dash suggests an infinite list of objects, concepts, and experiences that are recreated by the poet through the act of destruction.

Everything threatens us:
time, that in living fragments severs¹⁴¹
what I have been
 from what I will become,¹⁴²
as the machete splits the snake;
consciousness, a labyrinth of mirrors,
hypnotic gaze lost in itself;
words, gray gloves, disguises;¹⁴³
our names rising between you and me.¹⁴⁴
walls of emptiness that no trumpet can shout down.¹⁴⁵

Neither dream and its village of broken images,
nor delirium and its prophetic sea foam,
nor love, with its teeth and claws, are enough for us now.
Beyond ourselves,
on the border of being and becoming,
a life more alive reclaims us.

Outside, the breathing night stretches,
full of great, warm leaves,
of mirrors at war:
fruit, talons, eyes, foliage,
backs that glisten,
bodies making their way through other bodies.

Lie down here along the shore of so much foam,
of so much life unconscious and surrendered:
you too belong to the night.
Lie down and stretch out, breathing whiteness,
pulsate, oh flayed and brazen star,¹⁴⁶
pause of the blood between now and immeasurable time.

from **Condemned Door**

¹⁴¹ “Severs” is a stronger, more violent rendering of the Spanish “dividir” (to “divide”).

¹⁴² The spacing of this line is borrowed from Weinberger (2012).

¹⁴³ Though “máscaras” more closely translates to “masks,” “disguises” creates an internal rhyme.

¹⁴⁴ In subsequent editions, these lines are radically altered: “la conciencia, la transparencia transparada,/la mirada ciega de mirarse mirar;/las palabras, guantes grises, polvo mental sobre la yerba,/el agua, la piel;” (consciousness, the transparency pierced through,/the sightless look of seeing oneself looking;/words, gray gloves, mental dust on the grass,/water, skin;) (Rukeyser 37).

¹⁴⁵ A rendering borrowed from Rukeyser, and a reference to the walls of Jericho: “As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people raised a great shout, and the wall went down flat...” (Joshua 6:20).

¹⁴⁶ Later editions of the poem again reveal radical changes placed before the final line. While Paz frequently cuts lines, here, he adds: “late, oh estrella repartida,/copa,/pan que inclinas la balanza del lado de la aurora” (throb, star divided,/drink and glass,/bread that weighs down the scales on the side of daybreak”) (Rukeyser 39).

The Wall

Let me remember you or dream you,
love, a certain lie lived
more than through the senses, through the soul.¹⁴⁷

Behind memory, in that limbo
where memories, music, desires¹⁴⁸
dream their rebirth into sculpture,
your flowing hair falls, your smile,
a door of whiteness, even smiles
and still encourages that floral expression¹⁴⁹
that the air moves. Yet
the fever of your hand, where
those running rivers that drench certain dreams,
raises tides inside me
and even sounds your steps that the silence¹⁵⁰
covers with soft waters, as the water
is to the sleepwalking buried sound.

Close your eyes; born are joys, pleasures,
bays of beauty, stolen¹⁵¹
eternities, live flowing images,
unleashed delights, high tide,
idleness that overflows the breast of abandonment.¹⁵²
Joys, days with wings of breath,
light as the shadow of the birds!
And your slender voice opens
a blind paradise on my breast, an agony,
the well-remembered hell of lips
(the roof of your mouth: a red sky, abyss
where your teeth sleep, conch
where the wave hears its crash),
the voracious infinity in some eyes,
a pulse, a touch, a body that flees,¹⁵³
the shadow of a scent, the promise
of a sky without waves, full, eternal.

¹⁴⁷ This stanza was cut from the 1988 edition.

¹⁴⁸ This line was changed to: “donde el pasado: culpas y deseos,” (“...where the past: faults and desires.”).

¹⁴⁹ This line and the next were cut and replaced with the following line (“la fiebre...”).

¹⁵⁰ This line and the rest of the stanza were cut and replaced with: “y aún oigo tu voz— aunque no hay nadie” (“and I even hear your voice—though there is no one”).

¹⁵¹ This line starts the second stanza.

¹⁵² This and subsequent lines were all cut and replaced with the line beginning with “tu paladar” in parentheses.

¹⁵³ This line ends the stanza in the 1988 edition.

But a wall blocks the path and everything stops.¹⁵⁴
My heart throbs and flames in darkness.
The deaf stone strikes
with a blind and arid fist
and its beat sounds like a rain of ash in desert.

Goodbye, Home

¹⁵⁴El tiempo que nos bitaceo se
mi corazón a obscuras es un puño
que golpea—no un muro ni un espejo:
a sí mismo, monótono...

*Time that makes us undoes us.
My heart is a fist in the darkness
that strikes neither a wall nor a mirror;
only itself, monotonously...*

It's early morning.
I want to say goodbye to this little world,
the only true world.

Goodbye to this painful opening of the eyes
to the day that rises:
disguised in its cape the dream flees
from the site of its crime
and the soul is an empty plaza.

Goodbye to the chair,
where I hung my suit each night,
a daily hangman;
and to the armchair, rock in my insomnia,
cliff that neither the lightning split
nor the thirst cracked.

Goodbye to the truthful mirror,
where I left my mask
by descending to the bottom of the end
(and I never descended:¹⁵⁵
Have you no depth, only surface?)

Goodbye to the little sky of the window,
where sometimes the roses peep out¹⁵⁶
and stray angels one morning crossed.

Goodbye to the dawn, silent thaw of the night,
and to the mist that blindly climbs the hill,
a disappearing docile flock.

To the dress of snowflakes, to the plum tree
I say goodbye, and to that bird,
a bit of breeze in a branch.

With pure, little words¹⁵⁷
I say goodbye to the river:
“your waters always seemed to me the same waters.”

I'd like to say goodbye to you, kiss your skirt,¹⁵⁸
child, woman, ghost of the shore,

¹⁵⁵ The line was later changed: “—y nunca descendí.”

¹⁵⁶ This and the next two lines were cut from the 1988 edition.

¹⁵⁷ This line was cut, while the last line of the stanza was broken into two.

¹⁵⁸ This line and the following stanza were cut from the 1988 edition.

always say goodbye
as the river says to the bank
in an endless farewell.

Mother, I'd like to say goodbye
and what your lips blew on my spirit:
"those ravings were butterflies."

I'd like to say goodbye to these presences,
memories of morning,
names I have enclosed here on my breast,
but I'm always afraid they will wake and say
goodbye.

The Visitor

I found myself amidst the mist.
Faces of mist, wavering forms,
a world that never dares
and before being dissolves.

I crossed abandoned streets.
On a corner a boy smiled.
I wanted to touch his skin,
know if he was real or only mist.
My hand disappeared in his hair
and in his eyes I saw the cold amazement
of that first touch with nothing.
And I left him in an absorbed chill.

A light wind rocked me.
In a garden a woman was singing.
“It’s me,” she said, “don’t you remember me?”
Soft, soundless snow
my words dissolved in the silence.
And I kissed her to see if she was real.
On her stone mouth
fluttered lips of air,
as if a thought would kiss her.
Calmly, I left her
to her fate as a statue.

A light wind rocked me.
Gray walls and streets.
People of stone or flesh,
people swollen with pride
at being real flesh-and-blood stone.
But suddenly alone,
a mirror, eyes, silence,
unyielding cliffs opened:
the minute emptiness, consumed,
and the endlessness of the emptiness,
and the waiting and the tedium without waiting,
and the daily horror of being real.

A light wind rocked me.
Streets and solitude. A cry. Nothing.
Exhausted at the end of a ghost-world
I lost myself amidst the mist that made me.

The Shadow

To shed skin or wear it
we embrace the darkness,
that the flayed flesh
dressed us in in shadow.

In the open eyes
the shadow falls, and then the eyes
are what falls in the shadow
and the shadow is liquid eyes.

To drown in those eyes,
is not to be those eyes
that don't see, but that caress
as the waves if they are wings,
as the waves if they are lips!

But the eyes of the shadow
harden in our eyes
and should we scratch the wall or slip
on the rock, the shadow drives us back:
in that stone there is no oblivion.

We go inside, black tunnel.
“Walls of lime. A bee buzzes light
between the hot, fallen green
of the grass. Maternal fig tree:
the scar of the tree trunk, among the leaves,
was a voracious, feminine mouth,
live in springtime. At noon
it was sweet to clamber up the branches
and suspended in the green emptiness
in the sun, eating a blackened fig.”

Nothing was yesterday, nothing tomorrow,
everything is now, everything *is* now,
and we don't know in which wells it falls,
nor if beneath that endlessness
God or the Devil waits
—or simply no one.

We fled to the light that doesn't lie
and on a scrap of paper
wrote words with no response.
And sometimes
the blue lines turn red
and hurt us.

The Return

In the middle of the road

I stopped. I turned from time
and instead of walking toward the future
—no one waits for me there—
I turned to the well-beaten path.

I left the line where everyone,
since the beginning of the beginning, waits
for a ticket, a key, a sentence,
while disillusioned hope waits
that opens the door of the centuries
and someone says: there are neither doors, nor centuries...

I crossed streets and squares,
gray statues in the cold dawn
and only the living wind among the dead.
Behind the city the country and behind the country
the night in the desert:
my heart was night and desert.
Later I was stone in the sun, stone and mirror.
And later from the desert and the ruins
the sea, and above the sea the black sky,
immense stone of worn letters:
the stars revealed nothing.

I reached the end. The broken down doors
and the sword-less angel, dozing.
Within, the garden: interwoven leaves,
the breathing of almost living stones,
the taste of the magnolias and, naked,
the light among the tattooed trunks.

The water in four arms embraced
the green and red meadow.
And in the middle the tree and the girl,
a mane of birds of fire.

The nakedness didn't weigh me down:
it was like water and air.

Beneath the green light of the tree,
asleep among the grass,
was a long white feather
abandoned by the wind.

I wanted to kiss it, but the sound of the water
tempted my thirst and its transparency

invited me to contemplate myself.
I saw an image tremble in its depth:
a crippled thirst and a broken mouth,
oh greedy old man, grape vine, will-o'-the-wisp.
I covered my nakedness. I left quietly.
The angel smiled. The wind blew
and its sand blinded me.

Wind and sand were my words:
We don't live, time is what lives us.

Eve's Dream¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ The title was changed to "Virgen" ("Virgin") in later editions.

I

She closes her eyes and inside
she is naked and a child, at the foot of the tree.
The tiger, the bull rest in her shadow.
Three lambs of mist she offers to the tiger,
three doves to the bull, blood and feathers.
*The tiger doesn't want prayers of smoke,
nor the bull doves: it's you they want.*
And the doves fly, the bull flies,¹⁶⁰
and she too, a naked milky way,
flies across a dark, visceral sky.
A venomous dagger, cat's eyes
and golden wings of rattan mat
follow her through the air. And she fights
and defeats the serpent, defeats the eagle,
and over the horn of the moon ascends...

II

Through space the maiden spins.
Wandering clouds, whirlwinds, air.
The sky is a yawning mouth,
a wolf's mouth where stars,
piercing lightning laugh.
Dressed in white lilies she nears
and while asleep she pulls his teeth
and flings them in the ageless air:
twinkling islands, fallen stars,
scattered salt fell on the tablecloth,
the wounded heron was a rain of feathers,
the guitar broke, and the mirror,
like the moon, shattered.
And the statue fell. Virile members
writhed in the dust, alive.

III

Rocks and sea. The worn sun
burns stones that the sea turns bitter.
Sky of stone. Sea of stone. No one.
Kneeling, she digs the sand,
digs out the stone with her broken claws.
Why dig up statues from the dust?

¹⁶⁰ This line marked the beginning of a new stanza within the section in the 1988 edition.

The mouth of the dead is dead.
 On the carpet she joins the pieces
 of her infinite jigsaw puzzle.
 But she's always missing one, only one,
 a secret, no one knows where it is.
 The guests talk in the drawing room.¹⁶¹
 In the garden, in the shadows, the wind howls.
It's buried at the foot of the tree. Who?
The key, the word, the ring...
 But it's too late, everything is dark,¹⁶²
 the visitors leave, and her mother
 tells them: good night, good night...

IV

At the foot of the tree again. Nothing:
 cans, broken bottles, a knife,
 the remains of an already rusty Sunday.
 Wounded and alone, the bull Samson bellows
 through the endlessness of the night in ruins
 and the bald lion, the unpainted tiger
 prowl the yellow meadows.
 She wanders off from the deserted garden¹⁶³
 and returns home through rainy roads.
 She calls, but no one answers; goes through
 but behind every door, no one,
 and she goes from no one to door until she reaches
 the last door, boarded up,
 the one her father locks every night.
 She looks for the key but she's lost it,
 she pounds, scratches it, pounds,¹⁶⁴
 pounds for centuries,
 and with every century the door grows taller,
 more locked, more door, with every knock.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Rendering borrowed from Weinberger (2012).

¹⁶² In subsequent editions, Paz changed this line, and added the following in the stanza:

<p>“Pero es muy tarde ya, todos se han ido, su madre sola al pie de la escalera es una llama que se desvanece y crece la marea de lo oscuro y borra los peldaños uno a uno y se aleja el jardín y ella se aleja en la noche embarcada...”</p>	<p>But following the stanza he has left, only her mother at the foot of the stairs is a fading flame and the tide rises from the darkness and erases the steps one by one and the garden recedes and she departs, sailing into the night.</p>
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¹⁶³ Rendering borrowed from Weinberger.

¹⁶⁴ “Pound” is borrowed from Weinberger.

She no longer tries, only waits,
seated on a little chair, until someone opens;
Now she's an old woman, as old¹⁶⁶
as the dust that sleeps in the corners:
*Lord, open the doors of your cloud,
open your badly healed scars,
rain on my wrinkled breasts,
rain on my bones and the stones,
let your seed break the rind,
the scab of my caked blood.
Return me to the night of the Origin,
from your detached rib let me be¹⁶⁷
an opaque planet that your light alights.*

Hotel Room

¹⁶⁵ Borrowed from Weinberger.

¹⁶⁶ This line and the following were cut from later editions.

¹⁶⁷ This line is borrowed from Weinberger; Rukeyser renders it differently: "*and from your side let me be taken out.*"

I

Silence and solitude surround me.¹⁶⁸
Outside the night grows, indifferent
to the petty fight of men.
The streets are now night, the sky night;
everything closes its eyes, abandons itself,
leans its head on another's chest.

Sometimes a sound, barely a murmur,
rises from beyond, from the world, a faint wave,
and dies among the ice of my mind.
My solitary heart beats
its same eternal syllable of blood.
Does it count the sand of insomnia,
fear the depth of the emptiness?
It calls no one and no one answers:
marks its step, the steps of death.

II

In the ashen light of remembrance
that wants to redeem what has already lived
the phantom yesterday burns. Am I
what dances at the foot of the tree and rants
with clouds that are bodies that are waves,
with bodies that are clouds that are beaches?
Am I what touches the water and sings the water,
the cloud that flies, the tree that sprouts leaves,
a body that awakens and answers it?
Phantom time burns:
yesterday burns, today burns, and tomorrow.
Everything that I dreamed lasts a minute
and everything that has lived is a minute.
But the centuries or minutes don't matter:
the star's time is also time,
a live drop of blood in the emptiness.¹⁶⁹

III

Phantom lights cross my window.
The city is lit and a dull noise,
the soul in sorrow, ascends the stair.
I open the door: no one. For whom do I wait?
Every minute time opens the doors
to an endless waiting for the unexpected...
Close my eyes, open my senses,

¹⁶⁸ This stanza, as well as stanzas III and V were eliminated in the 1968 and subsequent editions.

¹⁶⁹ This line was changed to: "gota sin sangre o fuego: parpadeo" ("drop of blood or fire: flickering").

search for the eternity on lips,
carry the cross and drink your vinegar,
in mourning bury me in the office
or make me drunk on liquor and tears
like the Mexican crocodiles,
every minute time opens the doors
to an endless dying.

IV

The river of the past grazes my mind with its cold hands
and its memories escape
beneath my stone eyelids.
Its path never ends
and I fling it from myself.
Does the past flee from me?
Do I flee with it, and is the one who flings it
a hollow shadow that pretends to be me?
Maybe it's not he who flees: I move away
and he doesn't follow me, strange, consumed.
The one I was remains on the bank.
He never remembers me, nor looks for me,
nor contemplates me, nor bids me farewell:
he contemplates, searches for another fugitive.
But the other doesn't remember him.

V

Am I only in time? Am I only time?
An image that flees from itself
and moves farther while approaching?
Am I a becoming that never becomes?
What I was yesterday—the clouds, the girl,
and at the turn of any moment
the uninvited shadow of death—
I wasn't, didn't become, never will be:
yesterday was still occurring
and never ended and never comes.
“After time,” I think, “is death
and I finally will be there, when it is not.”
But there is no after nor before
and death doesn't wait for us at the end: it is in us
dying with us little by little.

VI

There is no before or after. Am I still living
what I lived?
What I lived! Was I? Everything flows:
I am still dying what I lived.
Time has no end: it pretends to be lips,
minutes, death, skies, pretends to be hells,
doors that lead nowhere and no one crosses.
There is no end, nor paradise, nor Sunday.
God doesn't wait for us at the end of the week.
He sleeps, our cries don't wake him.
Only silence wakes him.
When everything quiets
and the blood, the clocks, the stars no longer sing,
God will open his eyes
and we will return to the kingdom of his nothingness.

To call the bread the bread and what appears
on the table the daily bread;
to give one's labor and to give rest
and to the momentary paradise and to the hell
and to the body in the instant that they request;
to laugh as the sea laughs, the wind laughs,
without which the laughter sounds like broken glass;
to drink and while drunk seize life,
its round and fleeting plenitude;
to dance the dance without missing a step
and to sleep beside a luminous body,
a sun stretched out on a shore;
to touch the hand of a stranger
on a day of stone and agony
and feel that the hand has the stability
that the hand of a friend didn't;
to taste solitude without the vinegar
to twist my mouth, nor the mirror to reflect
my grimaces, nor the silence
to stiffen my grinding teeth:
these four walls—paper, gesso,
thin carpet, and a yellow light bulb—
are not even the promised hell;
that desire that no longer hurts me,
frozen by fear, a cold sore,
the passion of un-kissed lips:
the clear water never stops
certain bodies are opened only once
and there is fruit that falls when ripe;
to discover the sky in someone's eyes,
the same sky where as a child I got lost,
and to get lost again in those eyes;
to know how to divide the bread and distribute it,
the bread of a common truth,
the truth of bread that sustains us all,
by whose yeast I am a man,
a fellow man among my fellow men;
to fight for the life of the living,
to give life to the living, to life,
and bury the dead and forget them
as the earth forgets them: in fruit...
And that at the hour of my death it manages
to die like men and grants me
forgiveness and the life everlasting
of the dust, of the fruit, and of the dust.

Recompense

As on the wall broken nails engrave
a name, a hope, a curse,
on the paper, on the sand I write
these poorly strung together words.
Between their dry syllables perhaps
one day you'll stop: tread on the dust,
scatter the ash, I know weightless
as the weightless and memory-less light,
that shines on every leaf, on every stone,
gilds the grave and gilds the hill,
nothing stops nor rushes it.

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