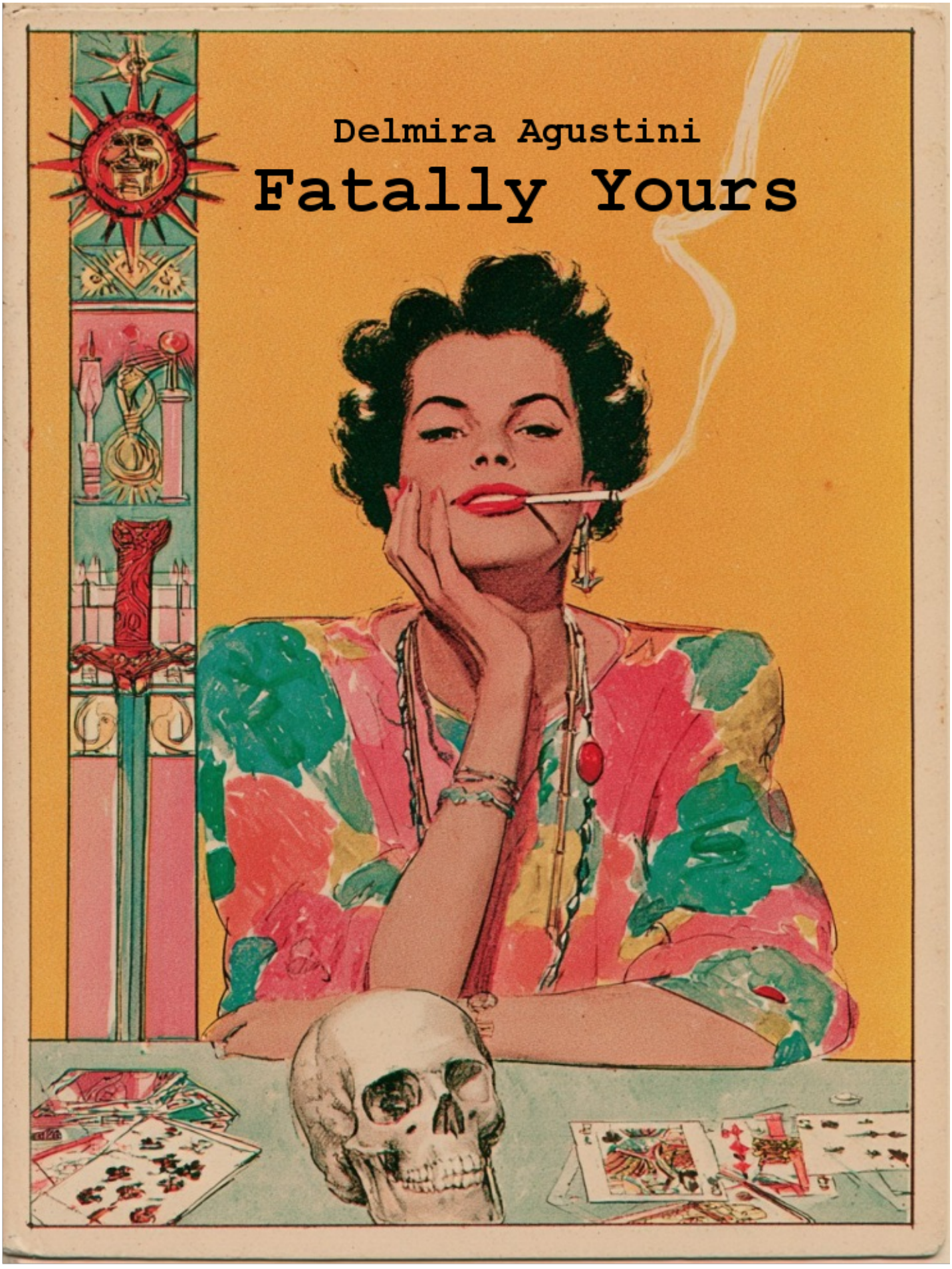
Delmira Agustini

Fatally Yours



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Delmira Agustini

translated from the Spanish
by
Justin Brumby



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Introduction

Uruguay Babylon

The Uruguayan poet Delmira Agustini lived for only twenty-eight years, from 1886 to 1914. Her first volume, *The White Book*, appeared in 1907 when she was twenty-one. It established her as a leading exponent of Decadence and Symbolism in the Spanish-speaking world. Her work created a sensation through its figurative but unambiguous descriptions of female sexual awakening and desire.

In August of 1913, when she was twenty-seven, she married Enrique Reyes. Less than two months after the wedding, she fled to her parents' home and filed for a divorce, which was finalized on June 5, 1914.

But throughout that last year, Agustini was meeting Reyes for sexual assignations in his apartment. On July 6, 1914, at their last tryst, Reyes murdered her.

This ghastly scenario, worthy of Kenneth Anger's *Hollywood Babylon*, is usually the first thing anyone hears about Agustini— and the last thing anyone remembers about her.

The distinguished journalist and historian Diego Fischer's 2013 biography of Agustini, *You'll Be Mine Or No One's*, provides historical detail that deepens the tale into a full-scale Southern Gothic. Agustini's mother, Maria, was an all-controlling tyrant and full-time hypochondriac. She realized her daughter, who was reading and writing by the age of four, was a literary prodigy. She home-schooled her and kept her in isolation like a hot-house flower. Delmira Agustini's only friend was the daughter of the quack doctor who treated Maria's migraines with "magnetized" water.

Maria kept Reyes, an auctioneer and rural property expert, waiting through a five year engagement before the marriage took place—over her objections. Learning of the couple's first

fight, Maria swooped in, essentially kidnapped her daughter, and kept her from Reyes till the divorce could be effected.

Agustini was unable to choose between the man she loved and the mother she obeyed, and attempted to satisfy them both by divorcing him while secretly maintaining the conjugal connection.

We know little of Reyes' character. But a certain violent machismo is a given for any man from Catholic Uruguay at the end of the 19th century. My best inference is that the divorce brought matters to a head. Agustini finally chose her mother over her husband. He expected as much; he had a pistol ready. Trying to wrest the gun from him, she fired one shot that hit the wall. He shot her twice in the head, and then blew out his own brains.

Agustini was used to being controlled: she left her mad tyrranical mother for a mad tyrranical man. Reyes took her life after her mother had destroyed her soul. Agustini was irredemably infantalized. Throughout her life, everyone called her by pet name her mother had given her—*nena*, "baby."

Agustini's father was an enthusiastic amateur photographer, who habitually hid out in his darkroom from his wife's tirades and tantrums. He left us a copious photogaphic record of his daugher, in which we can trace her psychological torment in her weight. She is slender, with delicate features from 1902–1907 (Ages 16–21); her face softens and rounds during her engagement to Reyes from 1908–1911 (Ages 22–25); she becomes full-figured and nearly obese from the time the marriage marriage is planned, 1912–1914 (Ages 26–28).

This tour of the lurid details is offered only because the reader will find less coherent and less accurate partial accounts everywhere else, and it would be remiss not to supply a touchstone of their truth.

But Agustini's poetry *cannot* be appreciated in the light of her tragedy, because her finished work, which is presented here, was all written *before* her marriage. During the five years of their engagement, in keeping with the customs of the time and place, the couple's relations were formal, circumscribed, and supervised. Agustini's erotic poems are works of imagination, which tell us a great deal about her, but nothing about Reyes.

Femininity

Much of Agustini's work is largely, if brilliantly, derivative of the French Symbolist and Decadent poets. What makes her work truly valuable is her exploration of the topography of women's experience.

Fashion was integral to womanhood in turn of the century Montevideo. We should not dismiss it now, misled by the twentieth century's dreary insistence that the personal is the political, and that the political must be dour. Women's greater identification of the physical body with the self favors an engagement with clothing and adornment that rightly resists such puritanic chiding. A woman's clothing choices are an individual work of art, expressive of her self and sensibility, as we see in these lines from *The Gray Muse*,

Pearls wind around her soft neck,
heavy, dense-clustered as pomegranate seeds,
an opalescent rope of naiad's tears.
Wild, silken, madwoman's hair
overflows her shoulders
like a blonde wave of champagne.
He white profile's austere as that of a glacier,
yet soft—it makes a cadence of lines.
As she moves, her shape seems to blur
as though surrounded by a silvery vague halo . . .

Agustini's uninhibited exultation in clothing and perfume puts even Baudelaire's dandyism to the blush. We would

have to turn to the exquisite considerings of fabric choices and incense recipes in *The Tale of Genji* for an adequate parallel.

Another unappreciated aspect of Agustini's art is what one might term her *cosmic* feminism. In Agustini's universe, along with the conventional personifications of the muse and the soul as female, other abstract entities, such as autumn, illusion, and ambition— the forces of life—are women as well. This is a cosmos strikingly unlike that of her French decadent predecessors. Here women are entirely and meaningfully *included*.

Life's Terror

Another characteristic feature of poetry written by women, well exemplified by Agustini, is intense and vivid physicality. Women's deeper awareness of their bodies lead them to paint far more living landscapes, and even oddly animated interiors, such as the animated flowers in *Oriental Scents* or the woven ones in the final lines of *Night entered . . .*

When you look at me, my whole soul blooms;
when you look down, I half expect the flowers
patterning the carpet to come to sudden life.

This intense sense of one's physical being, which will give startling power to her erotic verses, similarly supercharges the horror poems, such as *The Statue.* There she explores, with harrowing clarity, the insight that the female body can be the most empowering and most vulnerable aspect of being a woman,

On your knees! It is so you should behold her
imposing, in august calm,
in her frightful nakedness!
God, grant motion to this body,
give it life! What grandeur sleeps in her form!
Pity it—on its raised base, exposed,
wretchedly defenseless, more naked than a worm . . .

When men write horror, they are fascinated by *situations*—all of Poe's horror stories are odes to claustrophobia. Women's horror is far more *palpably* unsettling, as in these lines from *The Vampire*.

. . . you fell silent, as if you were listening
for you death's approach. I bit down on your wound
to open it—could you feel me?
It was like biting into the molten gold
of a honeycomb.

One would scan the pages of *Dracula* in vain for anything like this sensuality. This characteristically feminine genius for the physical accounts in part for the power of Anne Rice's vampire novels, which transformed the genre deeply and completely. Men excel at fiction of *body horror*—which includes an element of disgust. Women, on ther contrary, can describe *body terror*—which includes an element of awe.

Eros

The most striking quality of Agustini's poetry is its eroticism. Women have a special gift for this kind of writing, of which the parade example is Anaïs Nin's erotica. When men *write* about sex they are either very explicit, or skip elliptically over the action. When they *talk* about sex, men tend to be grimly earnest.

Women have a very different view of the matter. In conversation with other women, when men aren't present, they discuss sex with a candor and hilarity which men would find shocking. When they write serious literature about sex, they tend to favor symbolic and metaphoric expression. This is not done out of a sense of delicacy, but because women are often interested in sex more as an expression of *emotional* than physical reality. Thus women tend to write erotically where men would pornographically.

Agustini's *My Idols* allegorically describes a young girl's sexual awakening. For boys, puberty seems to offer the real, immediate, and gleeful key to life. The corresponding *emotional* awakening for males comes several years later.

For girls, puberty brings on a profound emotional evolution. The body undergoes a nearly Ovidian metamorphosis, and the world of men becomes just as menacing as it was for the Daphne or Europa.

In the days when girls were raised in a more sequestered manner, this change seemed even more like a revelation, a crack in reality. This is the recurrent subject in Tanith Lee's novels: the female hero outgrows an illusory, or dystopic, seeming paradise. For a concise expression of this shift in one's being, once could scarcely improve on Edith Wharton's statement in her short story *Sanctuary*,

> But hitherto she had been like some young captive brought up in a windowless palace whose painted walls she takes for the actual world, Now the palace had been shaken to its base, and through a cleft in the walls she looked out upon life.

In Agustini's poem, the advent of the new, physically real male god who shatters her idols, ends with an allusion to physical maturation could have been written by Baudelaire—if Baudelaire hadn't been so frightened of women,

> I offered the god my heart, which opened now its flower
> of harmony and love in a blossom of blood.
>
> I worshipped him with new desires, different tears.

Her full sexual awakening is described in very appropriately titled poem *Intimate*, a hymn to emotional exploration which is oddly like Rimbaud's *Drunken Boat* in tone. But while Rimbaud's voyage of discovery is a metaphysical acid-trip, Agustini's is a circumnavigation of the heart worthy of Magellan.

The poems in this book were selected from the two voumes published in Agustini's lifetime, *The White Book* (1907) and and *Morning Songs* (1910). These were the poems to which she had put the final hand, and which best represent her art.

Now is a particularly propitious time to rediscover her, and indeed the Decadent and Symbolist poets generally. While some of their literary tropes are quaint, they can also offer a liberating alternative to the austere realism of tentieth century literature, where politics supplied the morality, pop-psychology the piety, and irony an ersatz transcendence. The *fin de siècle* writers were the last literary exponents of the spiritual, and the women among them the only successful ones.

The male writers of the time only arrived at unsatisfying conclusions. Baudelaire's *The Voyage* returned with the old news that drugs offer an antidote to the boredom and horror of life. Rimbaud's *Drunken Boat*, as the title would suggest, brought to port the same pessimistic cargo.

The few male writers who didn't succumb to drugs chose the more wholesome but equally limiting love of God or Country. Whitman ended his trajectory with hymns to nationalism and industry that made him a revolutionary icon in the Soviet Union. Huysmans retreated to Catholicism, resting his troubled head on the sagging breast of Mother Church.

It is the women poets of the *fin de siècle* who came to conclusions that are still useful. Their profound and personal engagement with the physical favored their discovery of *the divine as radically immanent*. When they make use of familiar religious tropes, as Agustini's does with Catholic ones, they are revalorized by reversion to their pagan prototypes, as in *My Prayer*,

. . . my altar is the mountain, wild and melancholy;
the heavens are its dome; the calyx of a lily,
its chalice.

But it is above all in eroticism that Agustini ediscovers the divine, as in these lines from *Supreme Idyll*,

Love is wondrous, invincible, eternal,
its kiss brings Life itself back to life.
The roots of Life are set both in Hell and Heaven,
but its true, eternal fruit can only exist
in this world. Apples of immortality
whose body-hot juice lips can only drink from lips.

Male mystics and poets in the modern world have universally acknowledged, and lamented, that life's lost meaning was to be sought somehow in the feminine. They attempted to recapture it in abstract formulations, from "The Eternal Feminine" (Goethe's *Ewig-Weibliche*, Soloviev's *Vechnoye zhenstvo)*, to the Kabbalistic *Shekhina*, (Indwelling Feminine Presence of God). Their instinct was correct, but the reality they suggested is to be found not in writing *about* women but in writing *by* women.

Agustini gives us visions of this transfigured world. Her magnificently costumed figures who inhabit animated landscapes and no less living interiors, whose erotic sensations are intensified to the point of terror—reopen a world with all the color restored, a dreamlike and magical hyperreality.

Fatally Yours

El Poeta Leva El Ancla

El ancla de oro suena... la vela azul asciende
Como el ala de un sueño abierta al nuevo día.
    Partamos, musa mía!
Ante la prora alegre un bello mar se extiende.

En el oriente claro como un cristal, esplende
El fanal sonrosado de Aurora. Fantasía
Estrena un raro traje lleno de pedrería
Para vagar brillante por las olas.

    Ya tiende
La vela azul á Éolo su oriflama de raso...
¡El momento supremo!... Yo me estremezco: ¿acaso
Sé —oh Dios— lo que me aguarda en los mundos no vistos?

¿Tal vez un fresco ramo de laureles fragantes,
El toison reluciente, el cetro de diamantes,
El naufragio ó la eterna corona de los Cristos?

The Poet Weighs Anchor

The golden anchor, raised above the wave,
stuck by sunlight, rings out its brilliance.
Lift the mizzen! Hoist the blue sail,let it spread,
like a bird or a dream widening its wings
for the downward stroke that will send it aloft!
The canvas catches wind,
propelling us into new day.
O my muse, let's set out, beautiful sea
stretches before our joyous prow.

The east is cloudless as a perfect crystal,
Aurora's rosy beams lead us,
Imagination wears, for the first time,
an extraordinary gown all set with gems
to scintillate as she wanders the waves.

The blue sail gives itself to Aeolus,
the north wind. It extends like an oriflamme,
(the battle standard of France's medieval kings,
that shook its flaming length from the mast of a lance).
This is the moment supreme! I tremble,
do I correctly guess, O God,
what awaits me in unvisited worlds?

A wreath of fresh and fragrant laurel?
A glistening Golden Fleece? A gemmy sceptre?
Shipwreck? A messiah's crown?

Por Campos de Ensueño

Pasó humeante el tropel de los potros salvajes!
Feroces los hocicos, hirsutos de pelajes,
Las crines extendidas, bravías, tal bordones,
Pasaron como pasan pamperos aquilones!

Y luego fueron águilas de expléndidos plumajes
Trayendo de sus cumbres magníficas visiones
Con el sereno vuelo de las inspiraciones
Augustas, con soberbias de olímpicos linajes,

Cruzaron hacia Oriente la limpidez del cielo,
Tras ellas como cándida hostia que alzara el vuelo,
Una paloma blanca como la nieve asoma,
Yo olvido el ave egregia y el bruto que foguea
Pensando que en los cielos solemnes de la Idea
Á veces es muy bella, muy bella una paloma!

Through Fields of Dreams

A herd of wild colts stampeded by,
their overheated hides steaming in morning's cool;
fierce of face: ears pinned, heads high, teeth bared—
shaggy ponies, manes flying in long disorder,
like deranged refrains at the end of every stanza—
they passed fast as a north wind scouring the pampas.

Then came eagles, in a splendor of feathers,
a magnificent vision, rarely seen
save by those who reach the peaks.
They soared with the assurance
of a poet's inspiration. Royal as mountains,
with an arrogance befitting their Olympian breed—
the birds of Zeus.

Then there crossed the cloudless, heading westwards,
a dove, snowy as the host the priest holds high.
I forgot the noble prey-birds, the horses burning past,
realized that in the holy heavens of thought
a gentle dove can be the most beautiful of all.

Noche de Reyes

« Tenía en las pupilas un brillo nunca visto,
Era rubio, muy dulce y se llamaba Cristo!..»

¡Ah sigue! — el mago erguía la frente soberana —

«Mi copa es del Oriente, es sagrado este vino. —
« Allá en Betlhéem, un día legendario y divino,
« Yo ví nacer al niño de estirpe sobrehumana.

«La Miseria lamía su mano... porcelana
« Celeste con el sello de un trájico destino,
« Y Él sonreía siempre á la Miseria, al sino,
« Al cordero de nieve, á la cruz del Mañana...»

Era mi Dios!.. ¡Ah Cristo mi vieja fe os reclama,
Si mi labio está aún dulce de la oración que os llama!
Atravesando cultos, mi rubio, infausto Dios,
No estragué de mi fe los armiños pristinos,
Ah! por todos los templos, por todos los caminos,
Yo iba como en sueños, vagamente, hacia vos...»

Night of Kings

"His eyes had a sparkle never seen before,
he was blond and gentle and his name was Christ."

"Go on," said the magician, raising his face
with awful dignity.

"I will give you to drink from the cup of my experience,
a chalice from the east, full of consecrated wine.
There, in Bethlehem, on a legendary day,
was born a boy of more than mortal race.

"Poverty licked his hand like an adoring dog,
his perfect, porcelain, heavenly hand
with tragic destiny writ in the lines
of the palm. He smiled and smiled, at poverty,
at fate, at his own snowy lamb-like innocence,
at the Cross of his Tomorrow.

"He was my God! O Christ, my childhood's faith claims you,
may this prayer sweeten these lips that implore you.
I've wandered, it is true, through many beliefs,
a spiritual vagrant, my blond, unlucky God,
but never did I stain the white and perfect ermine
of my childhood's capacity for wonder!
Down all the roads I pilgrimed,
I proceeded, as in a dream, as if lost,
only, always, towards you."

Rebelión

La rima es el tirano empurpurado,
Es el estigma del esclavo, el grillo
Que acongoja la marcha de la Idea.
No aleguéis que sea de oro! El Pensamiento
No se esclaviza á un vil cascabeleo !
Ha de ser libre de escalar las cumbres
Entero como un dios, la crin revuelta,
La frente al sol, al viento. Ácaso importa
Que adorne el ala lo que oprime el vuelo ?

Él es por sí, por su divina esencia.
Música, luz, color, fuerza, belleza!
¿A qué el carmín, los perfumados pomos?...
¿Por qué ceñir sus manos enguantadas
A herir teclados y brindar bombones
Si libres pueden cosechar estrellas,
Desviar montañas, empuñar los rayos?
¡Sí la cruz de sus brazos redentores
Abarca el mundo y acaricia el cielo!
Y la Belleza sufre y se subleva...
¡Si es herir á la diosa en pleno pecho
Mermar el torso divinal de Apolo
Para ajustarlo á ínfima librea!

Rebellion

Rhyme's the purple robe of a tyrant;
the brand seared into a slave; shackles
making painful any progress in the march of an Idea.
Don't tell me it's golden! Real thinking
doesn't submit to serfdom in return
for the privilege of jingling. It needs to be free
so it can climb heights; it can't be trimmed
to fit, it has to stay unmaimed, complete—
independent as a deity, hair in the wind,
sun in its face. How can anything
that hampers flight be called an adornment
befitting wings?

Poetry, in its holy essence,
is, all by itself, color—power—beauty!
It needs no lipstick, no spritz of perfume.
Why stiffen its digits by stuffing them in gloves,
forcing them to bang pianos or offer chocolates?
Leave them free and they'll harvest stars,
rearrange mountain ranges, catch lightning bolts.
The redeeming arms of poetry
encompass the world, embrace the sky—
why nail them to the cross of rhyme?
Suffering Beauty herself rises up
in rebellion—it's an arrow in her heart
to force a corset on Apollo's torso
so his heroic form
can slip into a flunky's glittering livery.

Para morir como su ley impone
El mar no quiere diques, quiere playas!
Así la Idea cuando surca el verso
Quiere al final de la ardua galería,
Más que una puerta de cristal ó de oro,
La pampa abierta que le grita «¡Libre!»

To perish in accord with the laws of its being,
a wave wants a beach to die on, not a dike
to be baffled by. A great thought,
having cut its way through with a line of verse,
doesn't want to find at the end of that arduous arcade
that it has to stop and fumble open
a pretty little door of crystal and gold.
No, it wants the pampas, whose wideness
cries out "Liberty!"

La Estatua

Miradla, así, sobre el follaje oscuro
Recortar la silueta soberana...
¿No parece el retoño prematuro
De una gran raza que será mañana?

Así una raza inconmovible, sana,
Tallada á golpes sobre mármol duro,
De las vastas campañas del futuro
Desalojara á la familia humana!

Miradla así — de hinojos! — en augusta
Calma imponer la desnudez que asusta!...
Dios!.. Moved ese cuerpo, dadle una alma!
Ved la grandeza que en su forma duerme...
¡Vedlo allá arriba, miserable, inerme,
Más pobre que un gusano, siempre en calma!

The Statue

See her sovereign silhouette standing out
against the background of the garden,
as clear contoured as if she'd been cut out with a scissors!
She seems to have sprouted on her pedestal
like the first early shoot of the family tree
of some great race to be—

some hale, unshakeable race,
hewn from the hardness of marble
with heroic hits of the chisel,
some great nation destined to replace
humankind, to chase us from the plains of the future!

On your knees! It is so you should behold her
imposing, in august calm,
in her frightful nakedness!
God, grant motion to this body,
give it life! What grandeur sleeps in her form!
Pity it—on its raised base, exposed,
wretchedly defenseless, more naked than a worm,
yet eternally calm!

La Musa Gris

Es honda, muy honda, muy rara, muy blanca.
(Solemne, tremenda blancura de cirio!)
Sus grises ojeras de fiebre de tisis
Hieráticos signos de horrendo ocultismo!
En el blando cuello viborea de perlas
Lágrimas de náyade en granadas sartas!
Ruedan los cabellos de sedo neurótica
En pálida ola de rubio champaña!
Glacial y monástica su blanca silueta
Su suave silueta: cadencia de lineas!
Con rara blandeza sus ritmos que esfuma
Envuélvela trémulo en halo de plata

El gris desmayante del velo de bruma!
Languidos preludian el beso de ópalo
Sus labios plomizos en finos temblores;
Y mecen sus ojos en ondas sonámbulas
Las grises leyendas de livido norte!
Su helante mirada sin fin, de vidente
De esfinge insondable! mirar de ultra alma!
Evoca crispantes visiones sin fondo
monstruousos misterios de muda amenaza!

The Gray Muse

Profound, so profound, weird and pale
with a solemn, ghastly wax-candle pallor—
her eyes are sunken, ringed with gray—
like those of someone fevered by fatal disease—
ringed with symbolic circles, frightful occult signs!
Pearls wind around her soft neck,
heavy, dense-clustered as pomegranate seeds,
an opalescent rope of naiad's tears.
Wild, silken, madwoman's hair
overflows her shoulders
like a blonde wave of champagne.
He white profile's austere as that of a glacier,
yet soft—it makes a cadence of lines.
As she moves, her shape seems to blur
as though surrounded by a silvery vague halo

or a veil made of fog.
through which one glimpses her lead-colored lips—
setting and bezel for the slow, cold,
unholy opal of her kiss.
See how her lips tremble in prelude to it,
while her eyes glow like the spectral legends
of the north, hypnotic as the surge of icy seas.
In her eyes one glimpses a chilling infinity,
it's like staring into the eyes of a seer,
or the yet more cryptic eyes of a living sphinx!
Like looking through someone's eyes to their soul
and then past it, into visionary depths
horrible and bottomless.

Su canto, hondo, opaco, de vuelos sedosos
Se esfuma en la vaga penumbra de un eco,
Un fúnebre eco de pasos velados
Que se hunde en el alma sonando a misterio!
Un toque muy largo, muy largo a misterio!
Oh gris, gris solemne! Oh gris, gris de invierno!
De tercas brumas, de auroras enfermas;
Oh gris de misterio, tú tienes la musa
Más rara, más honda, la Musa suprema!
La livida musa que oprime dos fríos
Simbólicos cirios de anémica cera...

Dos flores de muerte que envuelvan las almas
¡En larga miradas de luz cenicienta!
La Musa tiene dos ojos de acero
Y un alma triste color de ceniza
Hay todo en sus ojos

Y miran tal miran los fuertes fakires
Serpientes esfinges.
Yo sueño al mirarla la tierra bretona
Con creencias que nacen de brumas espesas
Fantamas sombríos, tormentas
Y piedras muy grises en landas siniestras.

Her song is dark, rich, smooth as satin,
the words blur into a twilit distance,
become unintelligible echos; her song
walks with muffled footsteps down,
ever down, her steps ring out as they sink
into your soul—tremendous, incomprehensible
as the call of a church bell.
O gray! Grand imposing gray!
Gray of winter, of obstinate fogs, of sickly dawns.
Strange gray! You express the Muse,
the Muse herself, weird color, deep and supreme,
the blue-gray of the Muse whose eyes,
like ritual candles, signal
the weighty mystery of her being.

Her eyes open slowly, like gray flowers of death,
to enfold your soul, ensnare it
in their grim gaze. Her eyes are the gray of steel;
her sad soul, the color of ashes;
her eyes express all things.

They stare at you as would a snake-charmer
who learned his art in the shadow of the pyramids.
Looking into them, I see the coast of Brittany,
beliefs born of its northern fogs,
phantoms, storms, Druid megaliths . . .

Nardos

En la sala medrosa
Entró la noche y me encontró soñando.

En el vaso chinesco, sobre el piano
Como un gran horizonte misterioso,
El haz de esbeltas flores opalinas
Da su perfume; un cálido perfume
Que surge ardiente de las suaves ceras
Florales, tal la llama de los cirios.
Blandamente yo entorno
Los ojos y abandónome á sus ondas
Como un náufrago al juicio de los mares.

De las flores me llegan dos perfumes
Flotando en el cansancio de la hora,
Uno que es mirra y miel de los sentidos
Y otro grave y profundo que entra al alma,
Abierta toda, como se entra al templo
Y me parece que en la sombra vaga
Surgir los veo de las flores pálidas,
Y tienen bellas formas, raras formas...
Uno es un mago ardiente de oro y púrpuras,
Otro una monja de color de cera
Coma un gran cirio erguida,
Y con dos manos afiladas, lívidas,
Que me abren amplias puertas ignoradas
Que yo cruzo temblando.

Oriental Scents

Night entered the apprehensive room,
found me already dreaming, though not yet asleep.

A Chinese vase stood on the piano,
as if on a wide, mysterious horizon.
It held a sheaf of opalescent flowers,
perfuming the room—a warm perfume
that rose like waves of heat from the bouquet,
as though the stems were sweet, floral candles
and the flowers themselves were flames.
I let my eyes slowly half-close
and gave myself to the waves of scent
as a shipwrecked sailor might abandon himself
to the will of the sea.

In that sleepy hour, it seemed two different perfumes
approached me, floating from the blossoms.
One was myrrh and honey to the senses,
the other—grave, profound,
entering the temple of my soul.
Those scents were spirits, apparitions,
taking on the beautiful forms
of lovely, weird, pale persons.
One was a wizard in that flamed
with red and gold, the other—a nun,
white as a candle, towering, straight
as a taper, with long, delicate fingers.
These two opened doors
that hadn't been in the room before,
portals on wide ways which I entered, trembling.

Muchas cosas me cuentan, muchas cosas,
Las flores de ópalo en su extraña lengua;
Cosas tan raras y hondas, tan difusas
Que el fondo de sombras de la sala,
Que he llegado á pensarme un gran vidente
Que leyera en la calma de las cosas
Formidables secretos de la vida!

¡Oh flores, me embriágais y sois tan blancas!
Tan blancas que alumbráis y yo os contemplo
Como el sello de Dios en las tinieblas.

¡Oh flores hablad mucho! Acá en la sombra
    Vuestras voces me llegan
Como á través del muro inderrocable
Que separa la Muerte de la Vida.

Siento venir el sueño.
Vuestro perfume en sus calladas ondas,
Como á un rey oriental que navegara
Majestuoso de imperio y de pereza
En su barca pomposa, á mi le trae!

Oh flores, hablad más, habladme mucho!
Vuestra voz no es tan clara. Decid, flores.
En la muerte invariable de esa estatua
¿No hay una extraña vida? Decid, flores,
Las tinieblas no son una compacta
Procesión de mujeres enlutadas
Marchando hacia la luz? Decidme, flores,
Que sabeis del misterio de la vida...
De la inmensa leyenda del Calvario...
Que del vuelo supremo de las almas?...

They told me many, many things
in their own strange language, these opal blooms,
things rare and deep and sometimes hard to fathom
as the deepest shadows in the room.
Hearing these, I felt like some great seer
able to read in the stillness
life's frightening mysteries.

O flowers, your whiteness made me drunk,
a white so white it shone of itself in the shadows
like the seal of God imposed, glowing, on the darkness.

O flowers, tell me more!
Your voices reach me through the dimness
as if from beyond the irrevocable wall
dividing Death from Life.

I feel the approach of sleep, your perfume
brings it to me on warm waves of scent.
I meet it like an oriental lord
sailing forth on his ostentatious barge,
majestic in his power and idleness!

O flowers, tell me much, much more!
It's harder now to make out what you're saying.
Tell me, in the steady deadness of a statue,
doesn't there lurk some occult life?
The approaching night, isn't it a troop
of women dressed in mourning, marching
towards some hoped for light? Tell me what you know
of the mysteries of our existence, of Calvary's
tremendous legend, tell me where do souls go
in their final flight?

Las cavernas del sueño: decid, flores!
No serán... el oasis... de la vida?..

The caverns of sleep, tell me, flowers,
are they not, these dreaming grottos,
our best oasis in the desert of life?

Arabesco

Me dormí... la cabeza llena de los derroches
De hechizos, monstruos, gemas de las Mil y una Noches.

Y soñé del Oriente, del fabuloso Oriente,
De enigmas, de leyendas, de conjuros, de fieras,
De filtros hechizados, de largas cabelleras.
Hatchis, perlas, perfumes... La gran pereza ardiente.

El rostro pavoroso de la Esfinje durmiente,
El gran sultan moreno, las hondas bayaderas
De cuerpos misteriosos y ritmos de panteras,
Y el fakir con siniestras pupilas de serpiente.

Es brillante mi corte, soy morena y sultana,
Hacia un país lejano, una bella mañana,
Paso por los desiertos en mi blanco elefante;
Una ola de perfumes llevo en los negros rizos,

Esgrimen mis pupilas sus más fuertes hechizos
Y oculto un raro pomo con tapa de diamante!

Arabesque

I slept, my head full of the extravagant
bric-a-brac of *The Thousand and One Nights*—
spells, monsters, gemmy treasures.

I dreamed a Middle East, a fabled Orient
of enigmas; legends; enchantments; wild animals;
magic potions; intricate braided hair
adorned with coins and amulets;
hashish; pearls; perfumes; the idleness
of a harem in the heat of day—

the unsettling face of the sphinx,
who sleeps through centuries;
a sultan black as an African; dancing girls,
nubile, mysterious as hieroglyphs,
whose bodies move, like panthers,
to a menacing inner rhythm;
fakirs whose eyes are round and lidless
from staring so long into those of their snakes.

My court is dazzling. I'm a moorish sultana,
I ride across desert on my white elephant
to a land so far east it might be the dawn,
my black curls trail precious scent,

my eyes wield spells stranger than those of the djinn,
in my robe I keep a perfume flask
stoppered with a diamond.

Mi Oración

Mi templo está allá lejos, tras de la selva huraña.
Allá salvaje y triste mi altar es la montaña,
Mi cúpula los cielos, mi cáliz el de un lirio;
Allá, cuando, en las tardes lentas, la mano extraña
Del crepúsculo enciende en cada estrella un cirio,

Por entre los fantasmas y las calmas del monte,
Va mi musa errabunda, abriendo un horizonte
En cada ademán... Hija del Orgullo y la Sombra,
Con los ojos más fieros é intrincados que el monte,
Pasa, y el alma grave de la selva se asombra.

Y allá en las tardes tristes, al pié de la montaña,
Serena, blanca, muda, con esplendores de astro,
Erige la plegaria su torre de alabastro...
Y es la oración más honda para mi musa extraña,
Talvez porque hay en ella la voz de la montaña
Y el homenaje mudo de la natura grave...
Es la oración del alma, flor grandiosa y huraña
De los grandes desiertos. En los templos no cabe.

My Prayer

My temple is far off, shy, hidden by jungle;
my altar is the mountain, wild and melancholy;
the heavens are its dome; the calyx of a lily,
its chalice. There, as afternoon transforms
slowly into evening and stars appear
like candles lit by twilight's uncanny hand—

in the mountain's calm, as night nears,
amid the ghastly shadows,
the world seems to widen around my wandering muse,
her every gesture directs to some new horizon.
Daughter of Pride and Darkness,
she passes on. Her gaze is more feral and complex
than this whole living hilly world.
The mountain's own soul regards her
with solemn, astonished eyes.

In the gradual gloom of latest afternoon,
shy, pale, severe and silent,
her prayer rises like an alabaster tower.
glimmering like the stars.
This is my muse's most profound act of worship,
perhaps because she is herself
the silent voice of the mountain.
She alone can put in words nature's solemn homage.
The prayer of the soul is a shy and splendid flower
that opens only in wilderness,
no church could ever hold it.

Mi musa tomó un día la placentera ruta . . .

Mi musa tomó un día la placentera ruta
De los campos fragantes; ornada de alboholes,
Perfumando sus labios en la miel de la fruta
Y dorando su cuerpo al fuego de los soles.

Vivió como una ninfa: desnuda, en fresca gruta,
Engalanando espejos de lagos tornasoles
La gran garza rosada de su forma impoluta.
Volvió á mí como el oro de luz de los crisoles,

Más pura; los cabellos emperlados de gotas
Brillantes y prendidos de abrojos; trajo notas
De pájaro silvestre, más frescura y más fuego.
Yo peinéla y vestíla sus parisinas galas,
Y ella hoy grave pasea por mis lujosas salas
Un gran aire salvaje y un perfume de espliego.

One day my muse chose a pleasant route . . .

One day my muse chose a pleasant route
through fragrant fields, she was gay with a garland
of pink, funnel-shaped bindweed flowers.
She sweetened her lips with the honeyed taste
of wild fruit, gilded her body
with the fire of sunlight.

She seemed as native to the place as a nymph
in a grotto, she thrilled the iridescent mirror
of a pool with her reflection, pink, and perfect
as a heron's. She returned to me,
like the gold an alchemist pours
glowing from his crucible—

purified. In her hair she wore dew-drops
and burrs snagged by chance
as though these were pearls and filigreed pins,
her voice had the tones of a forest bird,
only fresher and more fiery! I combed her hair,
dressed her in Paris fashions
and now she strolls through my luxurious rooms,
dignified, intimidating as a tame tiger,
trailing the scent of lavender.

Visión de Otoño

Fué una tarde de plata. Largas ráfagas frías
Arrastraban chirriando las hojas amarillas.

Pasó... pasó y flotaron sensaciones de tísis...
Dos signos cabalísticos eran sus ojos grises...

Por el parque espectral divagó su silueta...
Temblaba en toda ella un temblor de hoja seca!...

El cierzo, que va en ondas, con sus alas de acero,
La azotaba violento, le agolpaba el cabello.

Bajo los viejos árboles descarnados, grisientos,
Que al cielo se alzan rígidos como manos de espectros;

Pasó... gimió á su paso un chirriar de hojas secas,
Y fué como una ráfaga de un frío de ultratierra.

El sol, rompiendo lento una nube de plata,
Miróla extrañamente con su pupila extática.

Pasó... flotó una helada sensación de misterio,
Un olor de violetas y... se perdió á lo lejos.

Vision of Autumn

It was an afternoon as cool and gray as silver;
big chilly gusts sent yellow leaves
softly grating along the pavement.

She passed by—one felt weirdly unsettled,
as one does at the first hint of sickness.
Her eyes' dark circles seemed like cabalistic symbols.

She slipped like a shadow through the spectral, foggy park;
like a trembling dead leaf, she seemed somehow to flicker.

The north wind, issuing waves of cold
with every stroke of its steel-colored wings,
whipped her hair, fluttered it with buffets.

She passed beneath drab, fleshless trees,
their bare branches raising skeletal hands;

wind-strirred dry leafage whispered its sad complaint
in her wake, as though she herself
were a chill squall whistling in from the world to come.

The sun, breaking through silver clouds,
gave her a strange look with its one ecstatic eye.

She led in, as she passed, a chilling sense of mystery;
there was a scent of violets (which bloom anew
in early fall when the the temperature drops)—
then she was lost in the distance.

Tarde Pálida

Evocadora el alma palidece
Toda velada de un dolor muy vago,
En el cielo lechoso hay un amago
De tempestad, la tarde palidece.

Enmascarado y lento el sol de Otoño
Hácia un poniente turbio se encamina,
Sobre el paisaje soñador se inclina,
Suave y profunda, del exangie Otoño

La tristeza tenaz... Yo que en la pálida
Floresta del dolor junto a mis rosas,
Sé que no aroman nunca más gloriosas
Que del Otoño en una tarde pálida.

Como voces lejanas en la noche
Vienen al alma los dolores viejos,
Cada racha que pasa trae de lejos
Otro dolor y otro dolor... La noche,

Evening's Pallor

The soul feels faint, remembering,
wearing its vague sorrow,
like a full-length tulle veil;
day pales, sky loses its blue,
goes milky, save for a few dark clouds
hinting at a possible storm.

Masked in these, the autumn sun
makes its slow way to a turbid setting,
takes a last look at the fall landscape.
The stubborn sadness of autumn
descends on the whole landscape,
softening it as evening deepens.
The sky, near nightfall, whitens,
losing color like blood.

Among the roses in my gray grove of sadness—
and none have more glorious perfume
than these that bloom in ashen eves
of the dying year—

old woes return to the soul
like distant voices in the night.
As darkness falls, the wind rises,
bringing with each gust a pang
fetched from afar.

Vendrá á borrar la tarde blanquecina,
El cielo será un piélago de sombras...
¿Alma, de que te asombras ?
¿Crees eterna la tarde blanquecina ?

Si, y tú la amabas ya, ¿verdad? la amabas,
Tal llega á amarse un gran dolor amigo,
Hermano aciago, trágico testigo
De largos años... Alma, tú la amabas

Como al gran vaso raro y exquisito
En que apuraras néctares añejos
—El rancio zumo de los males viejos
Tiene un sabor de pátina exquisito. —

Pero el sol cáe, cáe allá á lo lejos
Lento y soberbio, como un rey vencido,
En púrpuras ardientes. —Ya ha caído...
Y en tí perduran los amargos dejos
De un gran pasado triste revivido
En una tarde que murió allá lejos!

Night will black out
the blanched, the ghastly afternoon,
sky will become a deep sea of shadow.
What about this amazes you, my soul?
Did you think the afternoon would go on fading forever?

You were already falling in love with it it, were you?
You were. You loved the graying day
as one comes to cherish a hurt,
a luckless brother, or a friend who's sadly
outlived their best years. You couldn't get enough,

but savored the dregs of day
like last exquisite drops of old cognac
in a precious crystal snifter—
like the wine of remembered pain,
aged to perfection, truly vintage self-pity
that lingers on the palate
deliciously.

Sun finally sets, falls with regal dignity,
a defeated king in robes of burning purple.
It's gone. But you still savor the flavor
of a great sad past, once more vivid in the livid
last traces of this dying-in-the-distance day.

Pasó la Ilusión

Pasa la maga — Sabes? la Graciosa y Profunda
Que abreva en frescos lagos sedientos corazones,
La que esmalta audazmente de gráciles visiones
La gran copa siniestra de la Vida iracunda.

Mis pupilas suspensas de su gracia profunda,
La ofrezco hacerle en cambio de sus rosados dones
Un blanco pedestal de todas mis canciones!
Me mira y alborea su sonrisa que inunda.

Y ungido en la miel rosa de esa sonrisa es suave
El silencio en que envuelve su silueta de äve.
— Por qué vino en la tarde de marfil tan sombría?...
En la bruma muy lejos la perdió la mirada.
Por qué ¡oh Dios! en mi alma queda sin quedar nada
Como queda un perfume, una ardiente alegría ?

The Illusion Left

She left, the sorceress. You know her? Charming, wise,
a cool lake on offer to the thirsting heart;
she boldly paints Life's mean cup
with the primary colors of imagined happiness.

She has that certain flair—you can't take your eyes off her—
I offer to raise her on the white pedestal
of my verse in return for her rosy gifts—
her smile floods over me like light from a sunrise.

Her smile anoints me. I'm consecrated,
fated for happiness. Golden, like honey,
is the silence in which she perches beside me,
sweet bird! Why did she come
in the ash-gray of an extinguished day?

I lost sight of her in the distance, the mist.
Why, O God, did she leave, and leave me
with nothing I could touch, just a trace of her perfume,
the memory of Joy's brief flare?

Batiendo las Selva

Cuando cruzas la selva tras los corzos sedeños
Y albos; la melena feroz, los ojos crueles,
Entre la blanca fuga de tus raros lebreles,
Sobre el corcel de nieve, Nemrod de los ensueños.

Yo deleito mi oído en el vuela sonoro
Del alma misteriosa de tu olifante de oro,
Y golosa y alegre sonrío á la promesa
De la caza exquisita que aromará tu mesa.

Thundering Through Jungle

When you rush through the brush
after white, velvety-pelted deer,
your hair streaming fiercely
as any predator's mane,
cruel-eyed, in the pallid rush
of your grayhound pack, on an ice-white steed,
like Nimrod, "a mighty hunter before the lord,"
a mythic Nimrod
hunting through the forest of a dream—

my ear delights in your golden horn's
call rising like a soul in mystical ascent;
I smile with greedy joy at its promise
of rare game set fragrant on your table.

Variaciones

Áspid punzante de la envidia, ave!
Tú fustigas la calma que congela.
El rayo brota en la violencia, el ave
En paz se esponja y acosada vuela!

Si hay en Luzbel emanación divina
En ti hay vislumbres de infernal nobleza,
Rampante, alada, la ambición fascina —
Y si tu instinto al lodazal se inclina
Reptil tú eres y tu ley es esa!

Mirame mucho que mi mente inflamas
Con la luz fiera de tus ojos crueles...
¡Ah si vieras cual lucen tus escamas
En el tronco vivaz de mis laureles!

Gozaste el día que abismé mis galas,
Cóndor herido renegando el vuelo;
Hoy concluye tu triunfo, hay en las alas
Fatalidad que las impulsa al cielo!

Si de mis cantos al gran haz sonoro
Tu cinta anudas de azabache fiero,
Sabio te sé: de mi auroral tesoro
Lo que dejes caer yo no lo quiero!

Variations on a Theme

Sharp-toothed snake of envy, hail!
You take to task the calm that lets genius cool.
The lightning bolt's born of violence;
the roosting bird only puffs up its plumes
and dully clucks—a threat's what makes it fly!

Lucifer's an angel still,
and from your kinship with him you derive
your hellish patent of nobility.
Rearing up, wings spread, in the guise of ambition,
O Envy, how you fascinate!
And if you like to go low,
and show, at times, you're most home in the dirt—
that's just your nature, reptile that you are.

Look with your fiery, animal eyes
into mine, inflame my brain!
If only you could see, as I do, the brilliance
of your scales, how they glitter as you slither
up the laurel tree that grows the poet's crown.

How you enjoyed making me hate
all I'd done, despise what I'd prized;
I was like a wounded condor renouncing further flights
You knew better, you knew that I could fly higher,
correctly you assessed my Icarus wings.

You tied your savage black ribbon
around the sonorous sheaf of my poems.
I knew you were right to reject those overly innocent
songs of my morning—what you condemned,
I never again could reckon as treasure.

Y esa cinta sombría es la Victoria.
Cuando describes tu ondulado rastro
Por todos los senderos de la gloria
Muerdas sombras de ala, luces de astro.

Forja en la noche tu vida impía
Cruces soñadas á mi blanca musa,
¡Si ha de vivir hasta cegar un día
Tus siniestras pupilas de Medusa!

Mas no huyas, no, te quiero, así, á mi lado
Hasta la Muerte, y más allá, ¿te asombra?
Seguido la experiencia me ha enseñado
Que la sombra da luz y la luz sombra

Y estrecha y muerde en el furor ingente.
Flor de una aciaga Flora esclarecida,
Quiero mostrarme al porvenir de frente,
Con el blason supremo de tu diente
En los pétalos todos de mi vida!

The funeral bunting you hung on my early work
was the flag of victories to be.
The serpentine turns of the winding path
are native to you; you way is beset
with stinging little lessons: but these prove to be
the shadow of your wings and the sparkle of your stars.

Your impious existence is always forging crosses
for my stainless muse, even in my dreams—
someday they'll be satisfied,
those never-closed Medusa eyes of yours
that shine the light of judgement
on my yet lifeless lines.

But don't go. I need you here beside me,
till death, and even after. Does that surprise you?
I've learned by rote that only from shadow
can light be born, and only light makes shade—

an ouroboros of a truth
that bites and tightens around my life
like an endless angry python.

I want to show my face to the future,
like a monstrous flower
created by some fateful, unduly intelligent Flora,
with the pattern of your teeth-marks emblazoned
on every petal of my life.

Mis Ídolos

En el templo colmado de adoraciones graves,
Entre largos silencios y penumbras muy suaves,
Se alzaban revistiendo majestades supremas;
Eran muchos y varios, y á todos yo adoraba
Por igual y á sus pies yo las horas dejaba
Pasar, mudas y lentas, dibujando zalemas
Y deshojando flores, entre olores complejos
De maderas de Arabia y de pétalos viejos.

Mi fe era inconmovible, pintorescos mis ritos;
Prestigiados mis ídolos por los más bellos mitos,
Me llegaban de tierras no vistas, de muy lejos,
Menudos y enigmáticos, en estuches preciosos,
Y los amé por raros pulidos y pomposos.

Y los había bellos hasta el dolor, y feos
Hasta la risa; irónicos, con afilados dientes
Que desgarran sonriendo; rostros de camafeos
Engarzados en cuerpos dúctiles de serpientes;
Monstruos dioses con gestos indecisos y varios,
Miradas de demonios sobre sonrisas santas—
Y en todos el gran sello de raro que á sus plantas
Hacía arder mis pupilas como dos incensarios.

My Idols

In a temple like a cavern filled with hymns
reflected back in reverent echoes,
lined with a tapestry of shadows,
there stood, and seemed to soar, clothed in vast majesty,
idols, numberless and unalike—I adored them all,
passed slow and soundless hours
in endless prostrations, tracing salaams,
scattering petals to add fresch scent
to the complex perfum of rare woods and subtle sachets.

My faith was unshakeable; my rites were picturesque;
my deities were dignified by beautiful myths,
they came from lands I'd never seen, far away.
Some godlings, small and enigmatic,
yet pompous and polished, had arrived in shrines, which
like jewelry boxes. I loved them.

Some were so lovely it hurt to look at them,
others so ugly they made you laugh:
ironical cogs with sharpened teeth,
whose smiles were saw-blades; gods with faces
like beautiful cameos—set on the flexible
necks of snakes; monstrous gods in various poses,
some impossible to parse; god with demonic glances
and the smiles of saints. All of them were stamped
with such grand rarity I stared at them,
my eyes aglow in worship like a pair of incense burners.

Y era tal mi fe pura, y era tal mi cariño
Que á sus pies todo de ellos mi corazón dormía,
Como un vaso sellado que amenaza de lleno,
O el gran capullo hinchado de un gran lirio de armiño.
Y mi vida en un éxtasis dulcemente yacía
Como un gran lago límpido que reflejara el cielo.

Asi bajo los rostros sombríos y risueños
Yo viví sin vivir, largo tiempo, rezando,
O en la rueca tranquila de las horas hilando
Los copos impecables de una seda de ensueños.

Cuando á través del tiempo se abrió la inmensa puerta,
Rechinaron cruelmente los goznes enmohecidos,
Y yo cerré á la luz mis ojos entumidos.
Luego en la gloria de oro de la luz viva y cierta,
Entre un perfume alegre de flores campesinas,
Que sacudió mi espesa borrachera de incienso,

Surgió un ídolo nuevo, palpitante é inmenso!
Y ëran sus divinas pupilas casi humanas
Y sus divinos labios reían á la vida.
Yo miré largamente la gran figura erguida
Sin descubrir las viejas frialdades sobrehumanas,

So pure was my faith and such my love,
so glad was I to be theirs, I thought my too-full heart
would overflow—so I kept it sealed.
I slept at their feet like a loyal dog.
My heart was like the bud of a tremendous lily,
swollen, ready to open and show
its petals, white and perfect as ermine.
My life lay there in tranquil ecstasy
like a pure lake reflecting an electric blue sky.

Thus I loved long beneath their grins,
without really living. I prayed
and let the round of hours turn
easily as a spinning wheel
while I wound out the thread from which I wove
the silk of dreams.

Then came a day when the temple's portal
opened with a slow cruel creak of rusty hinges—
I shut tight my light-stunned eyes—
real and living light poured in golden,a glory,
with the glad perfume of wild flowers,
shaking me out of my incense-heavy stupor

It was a new idol, huge—and this one was alive,
it breathed, had real pusaing vains,
divine and nearly human eyes,
godlike lips that smiled at life.
I looked long and long at its great tall figure,
found in it none of the non-human coldness
I'd learned to associate with deity.

Y comparé mis ídolos imperiosos, irguiendo
Fieramente sus frágiles monstruosidades, y este
Dios que á la vida exhibe, como una flor, sonriendo,
Los sellos indelebles de una estirpe celeste,
Y escuché en mi una extraña discusión de mil voces.
Súbito una alocada racha de primavera
Jugueteó entre mis idolos—vacilaron—cayeron—
Y hubo un gran ruido alegre de porcelana huera!
Yo reí y en mí, fiera; noblemente surgieron
En unísono coro las misteriosas voces,
Cantando las eternas victorias de la vida!

Luego, con los brillantes escombros formé un claro
Altar para el dios nuevo que reinó, simple y fuerte,
En la belleza austera del templo de lo raro
Donde todo vivía como herido de muerte.
Y quité el polvo viejo, las corolas marchitas,
Y traje de los campos alegres margaritas
De vividas corolas y de perfume santo.
Y ofrendé al nuevo dios mi corazón que abría
Como una flor de sangre de amor y de armonía.

Y le adoré con ansias y le adoré con llanto!

I looked back at my idols, proudly erect
in all their fragile monstrosity;
compared them to this new god, divine as any flower,
with a smile that was the incontestable
seal of authentic divinity.
I heard within myself the wierd and troubled hubub
of a thousand discredited deities.
A crazy gust of spring wind played about my idols,
they wobbled, fell with a great glad crash
of hollow porcelain. I laughed to myself,
felt fierce. I heard an accordant chorus
of mysterious voices rise, singing
the eternal victory of Life!

I built a shining altar to the new god
from the glittering debris of dethroned deities.
The new god ruled, simple, strong,
in the austere beauty of that temple of the strange
where everything had lived a wounded half-life.
I swept out the old incense dust and dead petals,
brought in merry daisies from the meadows,
flowers with the bright scent of holiness.
I offered the god my heart, which opened now its flower
of harmony and love in a blossom of blood.

I worshipped him with new desires, different tears.

Íntima

Yo te diré los sueños de mi vida
En lo más hondo de la noche azul—
Mi alma desnuda temblará en tus manos,
Sobre tus hombros pesará mi cruz.

Las cumbres de la vida son tan solas,
Tan solas y tan frías! Yo encerré
Mis ansias en mi misma, y toda entera
Como una torre de marfil me alcé.

Hoy abriré á tu alma el gran misterio;
Tu alma es capaz de penetrar en mí.
En el silencio hay vértigos de abismo:
Yo vacilaba, me sostengo en tí.

Muero de ensueños; beberé en tus fuentes
Puras y frescas la verdad, yo sé
Que está en el fondo magno de tu pecho
El manantial que vencerá mi sed.

Y sé que en nuestras vidas se produjo
El milagro inefable del reflejo;
En el silencio de la noche mi alma
Llega á la tuya como á un gran espejo.

Intimate

In the blue depths of night
I will share with you my life's dreams;
my soul laid bare will tremble in your hands,
your shoulders will share the weight of my cross.

Life's peaks are lonely and cold.
I locked my longings tight inside me
as though I needed no one,
I became a white tower, impassive and pure.

I will open to your soul my deepest mystery:
your soul is capable of entering mine.
I pause before the act. The silence frightens,
it's dizzying as the look down an abyss.
I hesitate, then take strength, relying on you.

I'm sick with living so much in dreams,
I need to drink truth from your pure living springs.
I know that within your heroic heart
is the only fountain that could conquer my thirst.

It's a miracle, the way our lives
echo each other, the way
my soul approaches yours in the silence of night
as it would a great mirror.

Imagina mi amor que habré soñado
En la tumba glacial de mi silencio!
Más grande que la vida, más que el sueño,
Bajo el azur sin fin se siente preso.

Imagina mi amor, amor que quiere
Vida imposible, vida sobrehumana,
Tú que sabes si pesan, si consumen
Alma y sueños de olimpo en carne humana,

Y cuando frente al alma que sentía
Poco el azur para bañar sus alas,
Como un gran horizonte aurisolado
O una playa de luz, se abrió tu alma.

Imagina! Estrechar vivo, radiante
El Imposible! La ilusión vivida!
Bendije á Dios, al sol, la flor, el viento,
La vida toda porque tú eras vida!

Si con mi angustia yo compré esta dicha,
Bendito el llanto que manchó mis ojos!
¡Todas las llagas del pasado ríen
Al sol naciente por sus labios rojos!

Try and imagine what my love was like
when all I could do was dream, trapped
in the mausoleum of icy, required silence.
My love grew greater than reality could,
or fantasy should—I still feel imprisoned,
even under the wide entire sky.

Imagine what my love was, looking for an impossible,
more than mortal life—you know what that weighs.
how much it takes out of one to carry
an Olympian soul and dreams in human flesh.

But then your soul opened before me
like a dawn-gold horizon, a sun-glared beach
open for my soul, which had found
even azure heaven too narrow
for its wings to swim in—

What will it be like, to embrace
this glimmering illusion, now it's turned out to be real?
I thank God, the sun, the wind, the flowers,
all of existence—since it includes you!

If suffering was the price of such happiness,
I bless the tears that stained my cheeks!
All my past wounds are laughable scratches
in the dawn-warmth of your lips.

Ah! tú sabrás mi amor, mas vamos lejos
A través de la noche florecida ;
Acá lo humano asusta, acá se oye,
Se ve, se siente, palpitar la vida.

Vamos más lejos en la noche, vamos
Donde ni un eco repercuta en mí,
Como una flor nocturna allá en la sombra
Yo abriré dulcemente para ti.

You will comprehend my love. But for now, let's go,
let's cross the flowering jungle of tonight;
there are too many people here, they scare me,
I can't bear to hear, to see,
to feel the throb of their lives.

Let's journey far, to the end of the night,
to where no outside sound wakes an echo in me.
There, in the shadows, like a night-blooming flower,
I'll gently spread my petals for you.

Explosión

Si la vida es amor, bendita sea!
Quiero más vida para amar! Hoy siento
Que no valen mil años de la idea
Lo que un minuto azul del sentimiento.

Mi corazón moría triste y lento,
Hoy abre en luz como una flor febea;
¡La vida brota como un mar violento
Donde la mano del amor golpea!

Hoy partió hacia la noche, triste, fría,
Rotas las alas mi melancolía;
Como una vieja mancha de dolor
En la sombra lejana se deslie—
Mi vida toda canta, besa, ríe!
Mi vida toda es una boca en flor!

Explosion

If life is love, I bless life;
give me more, so I can love more!
Today it feels as though a thousand years of thought
aren't worth a minute-long blue interlude of feeling.

My heart was dying a slow, sad death;
today it opened like a sunflower,
burst open like a bud, love storms in me
like a wind-smitten sea!

My depression flapped sadly off,
slowly, into cold and dismal night,
on its crippled wings. Sorrow fades
like a stain, like a shadow erased by day.
My whole life sings, smiles, laughs,
opens like lips for a kiss.

El Intruso

Amor, la noche estaba trágica y sollozante
Cuando tu llave de oro cantó en mi cerradura;
Luego, la puerta abierta sobre la sombra helante,
Tu forma fué una mancha de luz y de blancura.

Todo aquí lo alumbraron tus ojos de diamante;
Bebieron en mi copa tus labios de frescura,
Y descansó en mi almohada tu cabeza fragante;
Me encantó tu descaro y adoré tu locura.

Y hoy río si tú ríes, y canto si tú cantas;
Y si tú duermes, ¡duermo como un perro á tus plantas!
Hoy llevo hasta en mi sombra tu olor de primavera;
Y tiemblo si tu mano toca la cerradura,
¡Y bendigo la noche sollozante y oscura
Que floreció en mi vida tu boca tempranera!

The Intruder

On a night full of sadness and sobbing,
your golden key sang in my lock;
the door opened on icy darkness
and there you were, staining the night
with your white light.

The diamond fire of your eyes lit up everything,
your innocent lips drank from my cup,
you rested your sweet-smelling head on my pillow,
I found your impudence winning, I loved your madness.

Today, I laugh when you laugh, sing when you sing,
and if you sleep, I sleep at your feet
like a dog. I carry your scent of springtime with me
like my shadow. I tremble, remembering
how your lips opened for me like spring's first flower.
.

El Vampiro

En el regazo de la tarde triste
Yo invoqué tu dolor—sentirlo era
Sentirte el corazón! Palideciste
Hasta la voz, tus párpados de cera,

Bajaron—y callaste—pareciste
Oír pasar la Muerte—yo que abriera
Tu herida mordí en ella. ¿Me sentiste?
Como en el oro de un panal mordiera!

Y exprimí más, traidora, dulcemente
Tu corazón herido mortalmente,
Por lá cruel daga rara y exquisita
De un mal sin nombre, hasta sangrarlo en llanto!
Y las mil bocas de mi sed maldita
Tendí á esa fuente abierta en tu quebranto.

¿Por que fui tu vampiro de amargura?
¿Soy flor o estirpe de una especie obscura
Que come llagas y que bebe el llanto?

The Vampire

We lay together,
in the lap of a sad afternoon,
I summoned up your pain, invoked it
like a sorceress. Feeling it throb
was like being able to hold your heart
in my hands. You paled, even your voice
became no more than an echo, your translucent
wax-white eyelids closed—

you fell silent, as if you were listening
for you death's approach. I bit down on your wound
to open it—could you feel me?
It was like biting into the molten gold
of a honeycomb.

Traitress, I squeezed you, drawing ever more, deliciously
from your mortally wounded heart.
I applied the rare, exquisite blade
of my inexplicable cruelty.
I drank your tears, leaned forward to keep drinking
from your fountain, my accursèd thirst
had a thousand mouths to drain you.

How did I become the vampire of your sorrow?
Am I the last descendant of some weird species
that feeds on wounds and drinks tears,
a carnivorous flower of evil?

Supremo Idilio

boceto de un poema

En el balcón romántico de un castillo adormido
Que los ojos suspensos de la noche adiamantan—
Una figura blanca hasta la luz. Erguido
Bajo el balcón romántico del castillo adormido,
Un cuerpo tenebroso. Alternándose cantan.

El

Oh tú, flor augural de una estirpe suprema
Que duplica los pétalos sensitivos del alma,
Nata de azules sangres! Aurisolar diadema
Florecida en las sienes de la Raza! Suprema-
Mente pulso en la noche tu corazón en calma!
¡Oh tú que surges pálido de un gran fondo de enigma
Como el retrato incógnito de una tela remota!
Tu sello puede ser un blasón ó un estigma;
En las aguas cambiantes de tus ojos de enigma
Un corazón herido—y acaso muerto—flota!

Supreme Idyll

sketch for a poem

On the romantic balcony of a castle of dreams,
under a night set with stars like startled diamonds:
a figure all in white, so white she seemed to shine.
On the ground—a dark, tall figure.
They sang this alternating duet.

He

O flower of a splendid, more than mortal race,
you who figure forth the soul's own sensitive petals,
royal blood! Golden, solar diadem
set on the head of an ancient family!
Calm as you are, I feel your heartbeat
reverberate through worlds
as though it were the very pulse of night itself.
I see you rise from the mystery of Being
like the portrait of some unknown sovereign
at the far end of a cavernous alley.
You're set on the night like a seal, a coat of arms,
a radiant stain!
In the enigmatic depths of your eyes
I see your heart, like someone shipwrecked and wounded,
carried by the waters, with helpless gestures,
swayed by the waves, like the drowned.

Ella

Los ojos son la Carne y son el Alma. ¡Mira!
Yo soy la Aristocracia lívida del Dolor
Que forja los puñales, las cruces y las liras,
Que en las llagas sonríe y en los labios suspira.
Satán pudiera ser mi semilla ó mi flor!
Soy fruto de aspereza y maldición: yo amargo
Y mancho mortalmente el labio que me toca;
Mi beso es flor sombría de un Otoño muy largo,
Exprimido en tus labios dará un sabor amargo,
Y todo el Mal del Mundo florecerá en tu boca!

El

Bajo la aurora fúlgida de tu ilusión, mi vida
Extenderá las ruinas de un apagado Averno.

Ella

Vengo cómo el vampiro de una noche aterida
A embriagarme en tu sangre nueva: llego a tu vida
Derramada en capullos, como un ceñudo Invierno!

She

The eyes are flesh and yet they're also soul.
Look at me. My aristocracy is that of pain—
not blue blood, but the black and blue of bruises.
Mine are the dagger, the cross and the lyre;
I smile at wounds, my lips were shaped
not for kisses but for moans.
Satan is the seed from which I grew,
or perhaps the flower I'll become.
I am the fruit of misfortune, of a curse,
I am bitter. My kiss would forever stain your lips.
My mouth is a dark autumnal flower.
If one were to distill the perfume from my petals,
a drop upon your tongue would fill your mouth
with the taste of your own death.

He

You are a red and visionary dawn
that brings no day, only dimly shows
the landscape of my life like a ruined city
in the world of the dead.

She

I come to you like a vampire,
from a night as cold as my own soul,
to drink myself drunk on the warmth of your blood.
I will scatter the buds of your life's springtime
like a sudden, out of sync, winter.

El

Como en pétalos flojos yo desmayo á tu hechizo.
Traga, siniestro buitre, mi pobre corazón!
En tus manos mi espíritu es dúctil como un rizo,
El corazón me lleva á tu siniestro hechizo
Como el barco inconsciente el ala del timón.
¡Comulga con mi cuerpo, devoradora sima!

Ella

Mi alma clavo en tu alma como una estrella de oro;
Florecerá tu frente como una tierra opima,
Cuando, en tu almohada trágica y honda como una sima,
Mis rizos se derramen en una fuente de oro!

El

Mi alma es negra tumba, fría como la Nieve.

Ella

Buscaré una rendija para filtrarme en luz!

El

Albo lirio! A tocarte ni mi sombra se atreve—

Ella

Te abro ¡oh mancha de lodo! mi gran cáliz de nieve—

El

Y tiendo á ti eucarísticos mis brazos, negra cruz!

He

I faint at the force of your magic.
I'm as ready to fall as any dead petal.
Batten on my heart like a vulture,
bend my will as deftly as you set your hair.
I'll obey you without thinking, as a ship does its rudder.
Take me like communion, body and blood.
I fall into your vast black canyon.

She

I've driven my soul into yours
like a golden star nailed into night sky.
In the depths of you bed, profound as the grave,
I'll rest my head on your chest
as if it were a verdant riverbank
along which my hair pours its flowing gold.

He

My soul is dark and chilly
as a snow-covered mausoleum.

She

I'll find a crevice, my light will seep in.

He

White lily! I scarcely dare to touch you
even with my shadow—

She

A lily, I open my pallid chalice—
defile me.

He

I offer you my arms: sacrifice me, black cross!

Ella

Enróscate ¡oh serpiente caída de mí estrella
Sombría á mi ardoroso tronco primaveral!
Yo apagaré tu noche o me incrustaré en ella:
Seré en tus cielos negros el fanal de una estrella
Seré en tus mares turbios la estrella de un fanal.
Sé mi bien ó mi mal, yo viviré en tu vida.

El

Yo enlazo á tus espinas mi hiedra de ilusión.

Ella

Seré en ti una paloma que en una ruina anida;
Soy blanca, y dulce, y leve; llévame por la Vida
Prendida como un lirio sobre tu corazón!

El

¡Oh dulce, dulce lirio! Llave de las alburas!
Tú has abierto la sala blanca en mi alma sombría,
La sala en que silentes las ilusiones puras
En dorados sitiales, tejen mallas de alburas.

Ella

Tu alma se vuelve blanca porque va siendo mía!

El

¡Oh leyes del Milagro! yo, hijo de la sombra
Morder tu carne ¡oh fruto de los soles!

She

Wind around the trunk of my tree
like a serpent constellation descended from heaven.
I will overcome your darkness or become part of it,
a beacon-like star in your tenebrous heavens,
a starry beacon to your midnight sea.
Be you my good, be you my ill,
either way I live only in your life.

He

My deluded ivy overgrows your thorns.

She

I'll be the dove that nests in your haunted ruins.
I'm white, sweet and gentle. Wear me on your life,
hold me, like a lily, to your heart.

He

Sweet, sweet lily, luminous key!
You've opened the white room in my somber soul
where illusory purities, on thrones of gold,
spin light into shimmering thread.

She

Your soul will brighten, becoming one with mine.

He

Such are the laws of the miraculous!
Son of darkness that I am, it is given me
to bite your sweetly yeilding flesh,
fruit ripened by sunlight!

Ella

Soy tuya fatalmente: mi silencio te nombra—

El

Y si la tocas, tiembla como un alma mi sombra,
¡Oh maga flor del oro brotada en mis crisoles!

Ella

Los surcos azurados del ensueño sembremos
De alguna palpitante simiente inconcebida
Que arda en florecimientos imprevistos y extremos;
Y al amparo inefable de los cielos sembremos
De besos extrahumanos las cumbres de la vida!

El

Amor es milagroso, invencible y eterno;
La vida formidable florece entre sus labios,
Raíz nutrida en la entraña del cielo y del averno.
Viene a dar á la tierra el fuerte fruto eterno
Cuyo sangriento zumo se bebe á cuatro labios!

Ella

Amor es todo el bien y todo el mal, el cielo
Todo es la arcada ardiente de sus alas cernidas.
Bajar de un plinto vano es remontar el vuelo,
Y Él te impulsa á mis brazos abiertos como el cielo

El

Oh suma flor con alma, á deshojar en vidas!

She

I am fatally yours. My very silence
calls your name.

He

If you touch so much as my shadow
I tremble to my soul. O magical flower,
white alchemical rose!

She

Let us sow the azure furrows of our dreams
with unimaginable seed:
seething, intense, potentialities!
Let us plant more than mortal kisses
while we stand under heaven on this summit of life.

He

Love is wondrous, invincible, eternal,
its kiss brings Life itself back to life.
The roots of Life are set both in Hell and Heaven,
but its true, eternal fruit can only exist
in this world. Apples of immortality
whose body-hot juice lips can only drink from lips.

She

Love is absolute good and absolute evil,
hovering just under the summit of the sky;
its descents are elevations,
and love it is that drives you into my arms
open for you now as wide as the sky.

He

O love, O flower with a human soul,
plucked into nothingness by human life!

En el balcón romántico de un castillo adormido
Que los ojos suspensos de la Noche adiamantan,
El Silencio y la Sombra se acarician sin ruido.
Bajo el balcón romántico del castillo adormido
Un fuerte claro-oscuro y dos voces que cantan.

On the balcony of a castle of dreams,
watched by the star-sparkling eyes of night,
Silence and Shadow caress each other;
unseen, almost unreal, two voices join.

Lo Inefable

Yo muero extrañamente. No me mata la Vida,
No me mata la Muerte, no me mata el Amor;
Muero de un pensamiento mudo como una herida—
¿No habéis sentido nunca el extraño dolor

De un pensamiento inmenso que se arraiga en la vida,
Devorando alma y carne, y no alcanza á dar flor?
¿Nunca llevasteis dentro una estrella dormida
Que os abrasaba enteros y no daba un fulgor?

¡Cumbre de los Martirios! ¡Llevar eternamente,
Desgarradora y árida, la trágica simiente
Clavada en las entrañas como un diente feroz!

Pero arrancarla un día en una flor que abriera
Milagrosa, inviolable! Ah, más grande no fuera
Tener entre las manos la cabeza de Dios!!

I Can't Express It

It's killing me, weirdly. Not Life, not Death,
not even Love. It's a thought that's killing me,
a thought, serious and wordless as a wound.

A thought so deeply rooted
in my existence that it eats away
at soul and body both, without however
disclosing itself. It's like being pregnant
with a sleeping sun that burns inside you
without ever managing to dawn.

It's torture, to carry within you something
that claws your insides trying to get out;
a seed that never flowers, but sinks its roots
through your center, sharp as a nail,
remorseless as a fang.

If I could only tear it out, see what it was.
Who knows? Perhaps a wondrous, impeccable orchid!
To hold it up, show it—that would be more amazing
than to lift in my hands the severed head of God.

La noche entró . . .

La noche entró en la sala adormecida
Arrastrando el silencio á pasos lentos—
Los sueños son tan quedos que una herida
Sangrar se oiría. Rueda en los momentos

Una palabra insólita, caída
Como una hoja de Otoño. Pensamientos
Suaves tocan mi frente dolorida,
Tal manos frescas. ¿Ah por qué tormentos

Misteriosos los rostros palidecen
Dulcemente? Tus ojos me parecen
Dos semillas de luz entre la sombra,

Y hay en mi alma un gran florecimiento
Si en mí los fijas; si los bajas, siento
Como si fuera á florecer la alfombra!

Night entered . . .

Night entered the bedroom,
drawing after it the silence of a world at last at rest;
you were dreaming so quietly
one could have heard a wound bleed.

A phrase I wasn't expecting came to me,
just fell in my lap like an autumn leaf.
Gentle thoughts touched my troubled brow like cool hands.

Why do anxieties we can't understand
steal the color from our faces?

I saw your eyes glimmer in the dark
like two seeds of light.

When you look at me, my whole soul blooms;
when you look down, I half expect the flowers
patterning the carpet to come to sudden life.

Las Coronas

¿Un ensueño entrañable? ¿Un recuerdo profundo?
¡Fué un momento supremo á las puertas del Mundo!

El Destino me dijo maravillosamente,
"Tus sienes son dos vivos engastes soberanos.
¡Elige una corona, todas van á tu frente!"
¡Y yo las vi brotar de las fecundas manos,

Floridas y gloriosas, trágicas y brillantes!
Más fría que el marmóreo cadáver de una estatua,
Miré rodar espinas, y flores, y diamantes,
Como el bagaje espléndido de una Quimera fatua.

Luego fué un haz luciente de doradas estrellas;
"¡Toma!" dijo, "Son besos del Milagro, ¡éntre ellas
Florecerán tus sienes como dos tierras cálidas!"

Tal pupilas que mueren, se apagaron rodando;
Yo me interné en la Vida, dulcemente, ¡soñando
Hundir mis sienes fértiles entre tus manos pálidas!

The Crowns

Was it just a sweet dream? A thing that really happened,
albeit in a vision? Whatever it was,
it was a moment momentous
as an event taking place at the very gates of existence.

Destiny said to me, amazingly,
"Your noble brow was made to hold a crown.
Choose one!" I watched as they grew into view
in his hands like flowers evolving into wreathes,

tragic chaplets, glorious garlands, shining circlets!
Cold and unalive as a statue, I stood by.
Crowns of thorns, of orchids, of diamonds,
like the loot from the wardrobe of a conceited Chimera!

There was one that shone like a gold-starred halo.
"Take it!" Said Destiny. "This is sainthood,
no other crown will so bless your head."

Then they all faded, withdrew their luminosity
softly as the slow shutting of an eye.
I sank back into the dream that is waking life.
The crown I chose was to feel your hands
cradling my head.

Tu Dormías

Engastada en mis manos fulguraba
como extraña presea, tu cabeza;
yo la ideaba estuches, y preciaba
luz á luz, sombra á sombra su belleza.

En tus ojos tal vez se concentraba
la vida, como un filtro de tristeza
en dos vasos profundos—yo soñaba
que era una flor del mármol tu cabeza,

Cuando, en tu frente nacarada á luna,
como un monstruo en la paz de una laguna,
surgió un enorme ensueño taciturno—

¡Ah, tu cabeza me asustó! Fluía
de ella una ignota vida, parecía
no se qué mundo anónimo y nocturno.

While You Slept . . .

. . . your head was in my hands
like a magnificent jewel.
I tried to imagine its best setting,
admired its color, shape, and luster,
like a connoisseur appraising a gem.

Your eyes were closed,
like vials that held your life's concentrated essence,
the potion of your sorrow—a fluid so precious
it could only be dispensed by the drop.

Your head was like a marble Roman portait,
like a flower manifesting in mineral form—

moonlight made your brow shine like a pearl,
I discerned a huge silent dream
rising in your mind like a monster
slowly surfacing in a black lagoon—

your head frightened me then, for I knew
that within it flowed a life I could never wholly know,
that your dreaming head was an alien,
nocturnal world.

Justin Brumby, a trans man of modest means and uncertain employment, now living in Berlin, holds a doctorate in *Littératures françaises et comparées* from the Sorbonne. A frequent contributor to 96th of October, he has translated Jean Lorrain and Renée Vivien from French, and now turns his hand to Spanish poetry: Agustini, Mistral, Storni and the Ladino verse composed by Jewish women.

Delmira Agustini

Fatally Yours

