

Federico García Lorca

Odes and Others

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Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Invocation to the Laurel | 3 |
| Double Poem of Lake Eden | 6 |
| Death | 8 |
| Ode to Walt Whitman | 9 |
| Ode to Salvador Dalí | 14 |
| Casida of One Wounded by Water | 19 |
| Casida of the Golden Girl | 20 |
| Gacela of the Bitter Root | 21 |
| Gacela of Dark Death | 22 |
| Casida of the Weeping | 23 |
| Casida of the Branches | 24 |
| Casida of the Impossible Hand | 25 |
| Index of First Lines | 26 |

Invocation to the Laurel

1919 For Pepe Cienfuegos

Over the horizon, lost in confusion,
came the sad night, pregnant with stars.
I, like the bearded mage of the tales,
knew the language of stones and flowers.

I learned the secrets of melancholy,
told by cypresses, nettles and ivy;
I knew the dream from lips of nard,
sang serene songs with the irises.

In the old forest, filled with its blackness,
all of them showed me the souls they have;
the pines, drunk on aroma and sound;
the old olives, burdened with knowledge;
the dead poplars, nests for the ants;
the moss, snowy with white violets.

All spoke tenderly to my heart
trembling in threads of rustling silk
where water involves motionless things,
like a web of eternal harmony.

The roses there were sounding the lyre,
oaks weaving the gold of legends,
and amidst their virile sadness
the junipers spoke of rustic fears.

I knew all the passion of woodland;
rhythms of leaves, rhythms of stars.
But tell me, oh cedars, if my heart
will sleep in the arms of perfect light!

I know the lyre you prophesy, roses:
fashioned of strings from my dead life.
Tell me what pool I might leave it in,
as former passions are left behind!

I know the mystery you sing of, cypress;
I am your brother of night and pain;
we hold inside us a tangle of nests,
you of nightingales, I of sadness!

I know your endless enchantment, old olive tree,
yielding us blood you extract from the Earth,
like you, I extract with my feelings
the sacred oil
held by ideas!

You all overwhelm me with songs;
I ask only for my uncertain one;
none of you will quell the anxieties
of this chaste fire
that burns in my breast.

O laurel divine, with soul inaccessible,
always so silent,
filled with nobility!
Pour in my ears your divine history,
all your wisdom, profound and sincere!

Tree that produces fruits of the silence,
maestro of kisses and mage of orchestras,
formed from Daphne's roseate flesh
with Apollo's potent sap in your veins!

O high priest of ancient knowledge!
O solemn mute, closed to lament!
All your forest brothers speak to me;
only you, harsh one, scorn my song!

Perhaps, oh maestro of rhythm, you muse
on the pointlessness of the poet's sad weeping.
Perhaps your leaves, flecked by the moonlight,
forgo all the illusions of spring.

The delicate tenderness of evening,
that covered the path with black dew,
holding out a vast canopy to night,
came solemnly, pregnant with stars.

Double Poem of Lake Eden

'Our cattle graze, the wind breathes.'
- *Garcilaso*

It was my ancient voice
ignorant of thick bitter juices.
I sense it lapping my feet
beneath the fragile wet ferns.

Ay, ancient voice of my love,
ay, voice of my truth,
ay, voice of my open flank,
when all the roses flowed from my tongue
and grass knew nothing of horses' impassive teeth!

Here are you drinking my blood,
drinking my tedious childhood mood,
while in the wind my eyes are bludgeoned
by aluminium and drunken voices.

Let me pass the gates
where Eve eats ants
and Adam seeds dazzled fish.
Let me return, manikins with horns,
to the grove where I stretch
and leap with joy.

I know a rite so secret
it requires an old rusty pin
and I know the horror of open eyes
on a plate's concrete surface.

But I want neither world nor dream, nor divine voice,
I want my freedom, my human love
in the darkest corner of breeze that no one wants.
My human love!

Those hounds of the sea chase each other
and the wind spies on careless tree trunks.
Oh ancient voice, burn with your tongue
this voice of tin and talc!

I long to weep because I want to,
as the children cry in the last row,
because I'm not man, nor poet, nor leaf,
but only a wounded pulse circling the things of the other side.

I want to cry out speaking my name,
rose, child and fir-tree beside this lake,
to speak my truth as a man of blood
slay in myself the tricks and turns of the word.

No, no. I'm not asking, I, desire,
voice, my freedom that laps my hands.
In the labyrinth of screens it's my nakedness receives
the moon of punishment and the ash-drowned clock.

Thus I was speaking.
Thus I was speaking when Saturn stopped the trains,
when the fog and Dream and Death were seeking me.
Seeking me
where the cows, with tiny pages' feet, bellow
and where my body floats between opposing fulcrums.

Death

To Isidore de Blas

What effort!

What effort the horse makes

To be a dog!

What effort the dog to become a swallow!

What effort the swallow to be a bee!

What effort the bee to become a horse!

And the horse,

what a sharp shaft it steals from the rose!

what grey rosiness lifts from its lips!

And the rose,

what a flock of lights and cries

caught in the living sap of its stem!

And the sap,

what thorns it dreams in its vigil!

And the tiny daggers

what moon, and no stable, what nakedness,

skin eternal and reddened, they go seeking!

And I, in the eaves,

what a burning seraph I seek and am!

But the arch of plaster,

how vast, invisible, how minute,

without effort!

Ode to Walt Whitman

By the East River and the Bronx
boys sang, stripped to the waist,
along with the wheels, oil, leather and hammers.
Ninety thousand miners working silver from rock
and the children drawing stairways and perspectives.

But none of them slumbered,
none of them wished to be river,
none loved the vast leaves,
none the blue tongue of the shore.

By East River and the Queensboro
boys battled with Industry,
and Jews sold the river faun
the rose of circumcision
and the sky poured, through bridges and rooftops,
herds of bison driven by the wind.

But none would stop,
none of them longed to be cloud,
none searched for ferns
or the tambourine's yellow circuit.

When the moon sails out
pulleys will turn to trouble the sky;
a boundary of needles will fence in memory
and coffins will carry off those who don't work.

New York of mud,
New York of wire and death.
What angel lies hidden in your cheek?
What perfect voice will speak the truth of wheat?
Who the terrible dream of your stained anemones?

Not for a single moment, Walt Whitman, lovely old man,
have I ceased to see your beard filled with butterflies,
nor your corduroy shoulders frayed by the moon,
nor your thighs of virgin Apollo,
nor your voice like a column of ash;
ancient beautiful as the mist,
who moaned as a bird does
its sex pierced by a needle.
Enemy of the satyr,
enemy of the vine
and lover of the body under rough cloth.

Not for a single moment, virile beauty
who in mountains of coal, billboards, railroads,
dreamed of being a river and slumbering like a river
with that comrade who would set in your breast
the small grief of an ignorant leopard.

Not for a single moment, Adam of blood, Male,
man alone on the sea, Walt Whitman, lovely old man,
because on penthouse roofs,
and gathered together in bars,
emerging in squads from the sewers,
trembling between the legs of chauffeurs
or spinning on dance-floors of absinthe,
the *maricas*, Walt Whitman, point to you.

Him too! He's one! And they hurl themselves
at your beard luminous and chaste,
blonds from the north, blacks from the sands,
multitudes with howls and gestures,
like cats and like snakes,
the *maricas*, Walt Whitman, *maricas*,
disordered with tears, flesh for the whip,
for the boot, or the tamer's bite.

Him too! He's one! Stained fingers
point to the shore of your dream,
when a friend eats your apple,
with its slight tang of petrol,
and the sun sings in the navels
of the boys at play beneath bridges.

But you never sought scratched eyes,
nor the darkest swamp where they drown the children,
nor the frozen saliva,
nor the curved wounds like a toad's belly
that *maricas* bear, in cars and on terraces,
while the moon whips them on terror's street-corners.

You sought a nakedness like a river.
Bull and dream that would join the wheel to the seaweed,
father of your agony, camellia of your death,
and moan in the flames of your hidden equator.

For it's right that a man not seek his delight
in the bloody jungle of approaching morning.
The sky has shores where life is avoided
and bodies that should not be echoed by dawn.

Agony, agony, dream, ferment and dream.
This is the world, my friend, agony, agony.
Bodies dissolve beneath city clocks,
war passes weeping with a million grey rats,
the rich give their darlings
little bright dying things,
and life is not noble, or sacred, or good.

Man can, if he wishes, lead his desire
through a vein of coral or a heavenly nude.
Tomorrow loves will be stones and Time
a breeze that comes slumbering through the branches.

That's why I don't raise my voice, old Walt Whitman,
against the boy who inscribes
the name of a girl on his pillow,
nor the lad who dresses as a bride
in the shadow of the wardrobe,
nor the solitary men in clubs
who drink with disgust prostitution's waters,
nor against the men with the green glance
who love men and burn their lips in silence.
But yes, against you, city *maricas*,
of tumescent flesh and unclean thought.
Mothers of mud. Harpies. Unsleeping enemies
of Love that bestows garlands of joy.

Against you forever, you who give boys
drops of foul death with bitter poison.
Against you forever,
Fairies of North America,
Pájaros of Havana,
Jotos of Mexico,
Sarasas of Cádiz,
Apios of Seville,
Cancos of Madrid,
Floras of Alicante,
Adelaidas of Portugal.

Maricas of all the world, murderers of doves!
Slaves to women. Their boudoir bitches.
Spread in public squares like fevered fans
or ambushed in stiff landscapes of hemlock.

No quarter! Death
flows from your eyes
and heaps grey flowers at the swamp's edge.
No quarter! Look out!!
Let the perplexed, the pure,
the classical, noted, the supplicants
close the gates of the bacchanal to you.

And you, lovely Walt Whitman, sleep on the banks of the Hudson
with your beard towards the pole and your hands open.
Bland clay or snow, your tongue is calling
for comrades to guard your disembodied gazelle.

Sleep: nothing remains.

A dance of walls stirs the prairies
and America drown itself in machines and lament.
I long for a fierce wind that from deepest night
shall blow the flowers and letters from the vault where you sleep
and a negro boy to tell the whites and their gold
that the kingdom of wheat has arrived.

Ode to Salvador Dalí

A rose in the high garden that you desire.
A wheel in the pure syntax of steel.
The mountain stripped of impressionist mist.
Greys looking out from the last balustrades.

Modern painters in their blank studios,
Sever the square root's sterilized flower.
In the Seine's flood an iceberg of marble
freezes the windows and scatters the ivy.

Man treads the paved streets firmly.
Crystals hide from reflections' magic.
Government has closed the perfume shops.
The machine beats out its binary rhythm.

An absence of forests, screens and brows
Wanders the roof-tiles of ancient houses.
The air polishes its prism on the sea
and the horizon looms like a vast aqueduct.

Marines ignorant of wine and half-light,
decapitate sirens on seas of lead.
Night, black statue of prudence, holds
the moon's round mirror in her hand.

A desire for form and limit conquers us.
Here comes the man who sees with a yellow ruler.
Venus is a white still life
and the butterfly collectors flee.

Cadaqués, the fulcrum of water and hill,
lifts flights of steps and hides seashells.
Wooden flutes pacify the air.
An old god of the woods gives children fruit.

Her fishermen slumber, dreamless, on sand.
On the deep, a rose serves as their compass.
The virgin horizon of wounded handkerchiefs,
unites the vast crystals of fish and moon.

A hard diadem of white brigantines
wreathes bitter brows and hair of sand.
The sirens convince, but fail to beguile,
and appear if we show a glass of fresh water.

Oh Salvador Dalí, of the olive voice!
I don't praise your imperfect adolescent brush
or your pigments that circle those of your age,
I salute your yearning for bounded eternity.

Healthy soul, you live on fresh marble.
You flee the dark wood of improbable forms.
Your fantasy reaches as far as your hands,
and you savor the sea's sonnet at your window.

The world holds dull half-light and disorder,
in the foreground humanity frequents.
But now the stars, concealing landscapes,
mark out the perfect scheme of their courses.

The flow of time forms pools, gains order,
in the measured forms of age upon age.
And conquered Death, trembling, takes refuge
in the straightened circle of the present moment.

Taking your palette, its wing holds a bullet-hole,
you summon the light that revives the olive-tree.
Broad light of Minerva, builder of scaffolding,
with no room for dream and its inexact flower.

You summon the light that rests on the brow,
not reaching the mouth or the heart of man.
Light feared by the trailing vines of Bacchus,
and the blind force driving the falling water.

You do well to place warning flags
on the dark frontier that shines with night.
As a painter you don't wish your forms softened
by the shifting cotton of unforeseen clouds.

The fish in its bowl and the bird in its cage.
You refuse to invent them in sea or in air.
You stylize or copy once you have seen,
with your honest eyes, their small agile bodies.

You love a matter defined and exact,
where the lichen cannot set up its camp.
You love architecture built on the absent,
admitting the banner merely in jest.

The steel compass speaks its short flexible verse.
Now unknown islands deny the sphere.
The straight line speaks of its upward fight
and learned crystals sing their geometry.

Yet the rose too in the garden where you live.
Ever the rose, ever, our north and south!
Calm, intense like an eyeless statue,
blind to the underground struggle it causes.

Pure rose that frees from artifice, sketches,
and opens for us the slight wings of a smile.
(Pinned butterfly that muses in flight.)
Rose of pure balance not seeking pain.
Ever the rose!

Oh Salvador Dalí of the olive voice!
I speak of what you and your paintings tell me.
I don't praise your imperfect adolescent brush,
but I sing the firm aim of your arrows.

I sing your sweet battle of Catalan lights,
your love of what might be explained.
I sing your heart astronomical, tender,
a deck of French cards, and never wounded.

I sing longing for statues, sought without rest,
your fear of emotions that wait in the street.
I sing the tiny sea-siren who sings to you
riding a bicycle of corals and conches.

But above all I sing a shared thought
that joins us in the dark and the golden hours.
It is not Art, this light that blinds our eyes.
Rather it is love, friendship, the clashing of swords.

Rather than the picture you patiently trace,
it's the breast of Theresa, she of insomniac skin,
the tight curls of Mathilde the ungrateful,
our friendship a board-game brightly painted.

May the tracks of fingers in blood on gold
stripe the heart of eternal Catalonia.

May stars like fists without falcons shine on you,
while your art and your life burst into flower.

Don't watch the water-clock with membranous wings,
nor the harsh scythe of the allegories.

Forever clothe and bare your brush in the air
before the sea peopled with boats and sailors.

Casida of One Wounded by Water

I want to descend the well,
I want to climb the walls of Granada,
To gaze at the heart graved
By the dark stylus of waters.

The wounded child moaned
With a crown of frost.
Ponds, cisterns and fountains
Raised their swords in the air.
Ay what fury of love, what a wounding edge,
what nocturnal murmurs, what white deaths!
What deserts of light went destroying
the sand-dunes of dawn!
The child was alone
With the sleeping town in his throat.
A fountain that rises from dream
guarded him from thirsts of seaweed.
The child and his agony face to face,
Were two green entangled showers.
The child stretched on the ground
his agony bent on itself.

I want to descend the well,
I want to die my death by mouthfuls,
I want to fill my heart with moss,
To see the one wounded by water.

Casida of the Golden Girl

The golden girl
bathed in the water,
and the water turned to gold.

The weeds and branches
in shadow surprised her,
and the nightingale sang
for the white girl.

And the bright night came,
clouded dark silver,
with barren mountains
in the umber breeze.

The wet girl
was white in the water
and the water, blushed.

The dawn came without stain,
with its thousand bovine faces,
stiff and shrouded there
with frosty garlands.

The girl of tears
bathed among tears,
and the nightingale wept
with burning wings.

The golden girl
was a white heron
and the water turned her gold.

Gacela of the Bitter Root

There's a bitter root
and a world of a thousand terraces.
Not even the smallest hand
shatters the gate of waters.

Where are you going, where, where?
There's a sky of a thousand windows
– a battle of bruised bees –
and there's a bitter root.

Bitter.

Sore on the sole of the foot,
on the inside of the face,
and sore in the cool trunk
of the freshly cut night.

Love, my enemy,
bite on your bitter root!

Gacela of Dark Death

I want to sleep the sleep of apples,
far from the tumult of cemeteries.
I want to sleep the sleep of that child
who longed to cut out his heart at sea.

I don't wish to hear that the dead lose no blood;
that the shattered mouth still begs for water.
don't wish to know of torments granted by grass,
nor of the moon with the serpent's mouth
that goes to work before dawn.

I want to sleep for a while,
a while, a minute, a century;
as long as all know I am not dead;
that in my lips is a golden manger;
that I'm the slight friend of the West Wind;
that I'm the immense shadow of tears.

Cover me, at dawn, with a veil
since she'll hurl at me fistfuls of ants;
and wet my shoes with harsh water,
so her scorpion's sting will slide by.

For I want to sleep the sleep of apples
learn a lament that will cleanse me of earth;
for I want to live with that hidden child
who longed to cut out his heart at sea.

Casida of the Weeping

I've closed my balcony
for I don't want to hear the weeping,
yet out beyond the grey walls
nothing is heard but weeping.

There are very few angels singing,
there are very few dogs barking,
a thousand violins fit in the palm of my hand.

But the weeping's a dog, immense,
the weeping's an angel, immense,
the weeping's a violin, immense
the tears have silenced the wind,
and nothing is heard but weeping.

Casida of the Branches

Through the trees of Tamarit
have come the hounds of lead
waiting for the branches to fall,
waiting till they shatter themselves.

Tamarit has an apple tree
with an apple on it that sobs.
A nightingale gathers the sighs
and a pheasant leads them off through the dust.

But the branches are happiness,
the branches are like us.
They don't think of rain, they sleep,
as if they were trees, just like that.

Sitting, their knees in water,
two valleys awaited the Fall.
The twilight with elephantine step
leant against trunks and branches.

Through the trees of Tamarit
are many children with veiled faces
waiting for my branches to fall,
waiting till they shatter themselves.

Casida of the Impossible Hand

I want no more than a hand,
A wounded hand, if possible.
I want no more than a hand,
even if I spend a thousand nights with no bed.

It would be a pale lily of lime,
a dove it would be, chained to my heart,
the guard it would be, who on my last night
would deny the moon entrance wholly.

I want no more than that hand
for daily unction, the white sheet of my dying.
I want no more than that hand
to bear a wing of my death.

All the rest passes.
Blush now without a name. Perpetual star.
The rest is the other; sad breeze,
While the hosts of leaves flee.

Index of First Lines

| | |
|---|----|
| Over the horizon, lost in confusion,..... | 3 |
| It was my ancient voice | 6 |
| What effort!..... | 8 |
| By the East River and the Bronx | 9 |
| A rose in the high garden that you desire. | 14 |
| I want to descend the well,..... | 19 |
| The golden girl..... | 20 |
| There's a bitter root..... | 21 |
| I want to sleep the sleep of apples, | 22 |
| I've closed my balcony | 23 |
| Through the trees of Tamarit | 24 |
| I want no more than a hand,..... | 25 |