

Miguel Hernández

Further Selected Poems

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Dedication (from *The Man Watching*, 1939)

To Pablo Neruda

Pablo: I hear you, I recall you in that land of yours, employing your voice for the struggle, facing the floods that carry off cattle and young girls to hurl them into your breast. I hear your footsteps made to travel the night, echoing once more over the pavements of Madrid, with those of Federico, Vicente, Delia, and my own. I remember the dawns around us that illuminated us with a topaz blue of universal flesh, at the threshold of a tavern confused by tears and frost, like widowers wounded by the moon.

Pablo: A sombre rosebush comes to bloom above me, over a familiar cradle that breaks open little by little, until I glimpse within it, beside a child of suffering, the depths of the earth. Now I remember, and understand more fully that embattled house of yours, and I ask myself: how could it be merely a consulate when Pablo was the consul?

You demand heart, and so do I. See the many mouths ashen with rancour, hunger, death, pallid from lack of song and laughter: parched from not engaging in the profoundest of kisses. But see how people smile with a blossoming sadness, auguring the coming of substantial joy. It will respond to us. And the taverns, gloomy as funeral parlours today, will radiate the most penetrating splendour of poetry and wine.

'Silence of metal sad and sonorous'

(XIV: From '*El Rayo Que No Cesa*', 1936)

Silence of metal sad and sonorous,
swords clustering with love
in the depths of the ruinous bone
of the bull's volcanic regions.

The moistness of feminine gold
smelt, set splendour in his blood:
his roar took refuge among flowers
like a vast hurricane of lament.

He is drowning the tender clover
of coupling and fiery goring
with the grief of a thousand lovers.

Beneath his skin concealed furies
in the cradle of his horns,
are spinning thoughts of death.

'My name is earth though I'm named Miguel'

(XV: From '*El Rayo Que No Cesa*')

My name is earth, though I'm named Miguel.
Earth is my craft and my destiny
and stains what it licks with its tongue.

I'm a sad component of pathways.
I'm a sweetly infamous tongue,
worshipping feet that I love.

Like a nocturnal ox of floods and fallows
that yearns to be a creature worshipped,
I fawn on your shoes, and all around them,
and, made for covering, and made for kisses,
I kiss your heel that wounds me, strew it with flowers.

I set a remembrance of my being
on your biting heel, under your tread,
and at your step I advance
lest your indifferent foot despise
all the love I've raised towards it.

Moister than my face with its tears,
when the glass bleats frozen wool,
when winter closes your window
I fall at your feet, the tip of a wing,
a soiled wing, and heart of earth.
I fall at your feet a molten branch
of lowly honey, trampled, alone,
a heart despised and a heart fallen,
formed like seaweed, ocean's aspect.

Earth, in vain, I'm clothed with poppies,
earth, in vain, emptied I see my arms,
earth, in vain I bite at your heels,
dealing maleficent wing-blows
foul words like convulsed hearts.

You hurt me in treading, printing
the track of your going upon me,
it tears, it ruptures the armour,
of honeyed duality circling my mouth
in the pure and living flesh,
ever begging to be crushed to pieces
by your free and madcap hare's foot.

Its taciturn cream curdles,
a sobbing shakes its tree
of cerebral wool at your tread.
And you pass, and it remains
burning its winter wax before the sunset,
martyr, jewel and grass to the wheel.

Weary of yielding to the whirling
daggers of wagons and hooves,
fear, from the earth, a spawn of creatures
with corrosive skin and vengeful claws.

Fear the earth reborn in an instant,
fear lest it rise and grow and cover,
tenderly and jealously
your reed-like ankle, my torment,
fear lest it drowns the nard of your legs
and rising ascends to your brow.

Fear lest it raises a hurricane
from the bland territory of winter
and bursts in thunder and falls in rain
into your blood harsh and tender.

Fear an assault of offended foam
and fear an amorous cataclysm.

Before the drought consumes it
earth must turn to earth again.

Elegy for Federico García Lorca

(From '*El Viento del Pueblo*', 1937)

Death traverses, with rusty lances,
bearing its cannon, the barren plains
where men cultivate roots and hopes,
raining salt, and scattering skulls.

Green of the gardens,
what skies let happiness thrive?
Sunlight rots the blood, sets it with snares,
and renders the shadows more sombre.

Grief and its cloak
come to meet us once more.
And once more into an alley of tears
rain-soaked I enter.

Ever I see myself within
the shadow of withdrawn bitterness
formed by eyes and staves,
that a candle of agony posts at the entrance
and a furious necklace of hearts.

To weep into a well,
into the one disconsolate source
of water, of sobbing,
of the heart's longing;
where none would see my voice or image,
or would witness the rest of my tears.

I enter slowly, I bow my head
slowly, my heart is torn
slowly, and slowly and blackly
I weep again at the foot of a guitar.

Amidst all the dead of the elegies,
without forgetting the echo of any,
my tear-stained hand chooses one,
who resonates most in my soul.

Federico Garcia
he was once called: dust is his name.
Once he had his place in the sun
today he lies in a hole in the grass.

So much! So much, and now nothing!
Your joyful energy
that energised columns and rows,
you shake and uproot with your teeth,
and now you are sad, and only wish
for the paradise of the grave.
Formed as a skeleton,
dreaming of lead,
armed with indifference and respect
between your eyebrows, you I see, if I gaze.

It has blown away your dovelike life,
that circled the sky and the windows
with foam and cooing
in a torrent of feathers,
that wind, that blows the months away.

Cousin to the apples,
the worm cannot quench your sap,
the maggot cannot consume your death,
and to add fierce health to its fruit
the apple tree will elect your bones.

Though they choke the source of your saliva,
son of the dove,
grandson, of the nightingale and the olive:
you will still be, while the earth turns,
husband of the immortelle
rich soil at the root of the honeysuckle.

How simple death is: how simple,
but how unfairly won!
It can't move slowly, and inflicts
when you least expect it, its turbid wound.

You, the strongest building, ruined,
you, the highest hawk, despoiled,
you, the loudest roar,
hushed, hushed, ever hushed.

May your joyful illustrious blood fall
like a cascade of furious hammers
on those who fatally detained you.
May saliva and sickles
fall on the stains on their brows.

A poet dies and creation feels
the hurt and the dying inside.
A cosmic tremor of icy sweats
shakes the mountains in terror,
and splendour of death the wombs of the rivers.

I hear villages moan and valleys lament,
I see a forest of eyes never dry,
avenues of mourning and veils:
in gusts of wind and leaves,
sorrows on sorrows on sorrows,
tears on tears on tears.

They will not scatter, or blow away, your bones,
volcano of sweetness, thunder of honeycombs,
poet entwined with the bitter and sweet,
who felt the warmth of kisses
between two long files of daggers,
vast love, vast death, vast fire.

To accompany your death,
peopling the corners of sky
and earth, come harmonious flocks,
bolts of blue lightening.
Rattlesnakes hail in abundance,
battalions of gypsies, flutes, tambourines,
showers of bees and violins,
storms of guitars and pianos,
irruptions of trumpets and brass.

But silence exceeds any instrument.

Silent, abandoned, caked with the dust
in the desert of death,
it seems your tongue, it seems your breath,
have shot home the bolt of a door.

As if I walked with your shade,
I walk with mine,
on earth that silence has clothed,
that the cypress would see ever darker.

Your agony grips my throat
like the iron of a gallows,
and I taste a funeral libation.
You know, Federico García Lorca,
I am of those who suffer death each day.

The Winds of the People

(From '*El Viento del Pueblo*', 1937)

The winds of the people carry me,
the winds of the people blow me on,
scattering this heart of mine
and readying my throat.

Oxen bow their heads,
impotently weak,
at their punishment:

lions lift theirs
and at the same time punish
with their clamorous claws.

I am not from a race of oxen,

I am from a race that holds

the mines of lions,

the passes of eagles,

and the ridges of bulls

with pride in the horn.

Oxen never prospered

in the wastes of Spain.

Who spoke of throwing a yoke

over the neck of this race?

Who ever yoked

or hobbled a hurricane?

or kept a lightning bolt

a prisoner in a jail?

Asturians of courage,

Basques of armoured stone,

Valencians of happiness

and Castilians of soul,

labouring like the earth

graceful as wings;

Amdalusians of lightning

born among the guitars

and forged on torrential

anvils of tears;

Estramadurans of rye,

Galicians of rain and calm,
Catalans of firmness
Aragonese of lime,
Murcians of dynamite
fruitfully multiplied,
Leonese, Navarrese, masters
of hunger, sweat and the axe,
kings of minerals,
lords of the tilled soil,
men who among the roots,
like elegant roots,
go from life to death,
go from void to void:
people of ill descent
want to put yokes on you,
yoke you must leave
broken across their backs.
The twilight of the oxen
is the point of daybreak.
Oxen die humble,
clothed in the stink of stables;
the eagles, the lions,
the bulls, die with pride,
and behind them the sky
is un-darkened and endless.
The agony of the oxen
makes the spirit small,
that of the wild creature
enhances all creation.
If I am dying, let me die
with my head held high.
Dead and twenty times dead,
my mouth in the grass,
I'll keep my teeth clenched
and my chin resolute.
Singing I wait for death,
for there are nightingales that sing
above the fusillades
and in the midst of battle.

The Olive Harvesters

(From '*El Viento del Pueblo*', 1937)

Andalusians of Jaén,
proud harvesters of olives,
tell me from your soul, then,
who made the olive groves?

They did not come from nothing,
from money, nor the masters,
only from the silent earth,
and from sweat and toil.

United with pure water,
united with the planets,
the three made the beauty
of the twining trunks.

Rise, white olive tree,
they said at the wind's feet.
And the olive raised an arm
weighty as concrete.

Andalusians of Jaén,
proud harvesters of olives,
tell me from your soul, then,
who nursed the olive groves?

Your blood, your lives,
not the exploiters'
who were enriched by
your sweat's generous stream.

Not that of the owner
who buried you in poverty,
who beat at your brows,
who lowered your gaze.

Trees that your zeal
blessed at midday
were the source of bread
that only others ate.

How many ages of olives,
fettered feet and hands,
suns on suns, and moons on moons
weigh on your bones?

Andalusians of Jaén,
proud harvesters of olives,
tell me from your soul, then,
whose are these olive groves?

Jaén, rise bravely
from your lunar stone,
you'll not be enslaved
nor all your olive groves.

Within the clarity
of oil and its aromas,
they reveal your liberty
the liberty of your loam.

Song of the Soldier Husband

(From '*El Viento del Pueblo*', 1937)

I have sown your womb with love and seed,
prolonged the echo of blood I answered
and I wait in the furrow as the plough waits:
I have reached into the depths.

Dar-haired girl of high towers, lights and eyes,
wife of my skin, deep gulp of my life,
your mad breasts swell towards me, with the leap
of a pregnant doe.

You seem to me like a delicate crystal,
I fear with my lightest touch I'll break you,
and I come with my soldier's skin to reinforce
your veins like a cherry-tree.

Mirror of flesh, support for my wings,
I give life to you in the death they give me but do not take.
Woman, woman, I love you encircled by bullets,
troubled by lead.

Over the fierce coffins in ambush,
over the dead themselves without grave or remedy,
I love you, and long to kiss you with all my heart
until we turn to dust, my wife.

When I reach the battlefield I think of you
my brow not cooling or calming your image,
you approach me like a vast horizon
of hungry teeth.

Write for the battle: feel for me in the trenches:
here with my gun I invoke and fix your name,
and defend your poor womb that awaits me,
and defend your child.

Our child will be born with a clenched fist,
clothed in the clamour of triumph and guitars,
and I will leave my soldiering at the door
toothless and clawless.

One must murder to go on living.
One day I'll enter the far-off shadows of your hair,
and sleep in sheets starched and crackling
sewn by your hand.

Your implacable legs advance towards childbirth,
and your implacable mouth with indomitable lips,
and prior to my solitude of explosions and breaches
you travel a road of implacable kisses.

The peace I am forging shall exist for the child.
And at last in an ocean of irremediable bones
your heart and mine will shipwreck, leaving
a woman and a man, exhausted by kisses.

Letter

(From '*El Viento del Pueblo*', 1937)

The pigeon-house of letters
launches impossible flights
from the rickety tables
where memory leans,
absence's weight,
the heart, the silence.

I hear the wing-beat of letters
sailing towards their fate.

Wherever I go I meet
with women and with men
injured by absence,
worn away by time.

Letters, tales, letters:
postcards and dreams,
fragments of tenderness
hurled towards the sky,
sent from blood to blood
from longing to longing.

*Although beneath the earth
my loving body may lie,
write to me on earth,
so that I can reply.*

In a corner hush
old letters, old scraps.
with the colour of age
coating the writing.
There letters perish
full of trembling.
There ink suffers
and pages fade,
and paper tears,
in a little graveyard
of passions past
of loves to come.

*Although beneath the earth
my loving body may lie,
write to me on earth,
so that I can reply.*

When I write to you
the inkwell stirs,
the cold black well
blushes and trembles,
and a clear human warmth
rises from dark depths.
When I write to you,
my bones begin to write:
I write with indelible ink
of my feelings to you.

There goes my warm letter,
a pigeon forged in flame,
with its folded wings
in the midst its address.
Bird that simply heads for
its nest through air and sky,
your flesh, your hands, your eyes,
and the spaces of your breath.

And you will be naked
beneath your feelings,
unclothed, so as to feel
it all against your breast.

*Although beneath the earth
my loving body may lie,
write to me on earth,
so that I can reply.*

Yesterday a letter remained
abandoned and unclaimed,
hovering over the eyes
of one whose body was lost.
Letters remain alive
speaking for the dead:
Paper, yearning, human,
without eyes to read it.

Though the teeth chatter,
I hear it growing louder
the soft voice of your letter
like an immense clamour.
I'll welcome it in sleep,
if I can't stay awake.
And my wounds will be
flowing wells of ink,
mouths that will tremble
remembering your kisses,
and in their unheard voice
they will murmur: *I love you.*

Last Song

(From '*El Viento del Pueblo*', 1937)

Painted, not void:
my house is painted
with the vast colour
of tragedy and passion.

It will return from depths
of tears where it was carried
with its empty table,
with its ruined bed.

Kisses will flower
over the pillows.

And wrapped around bodies
the sheet will create
its immense tangle
perfumed, nocturnal.

Hatred will die down
beyond the window.

The talons will be gentle.

Grant me this hope.

Each Time I Pass

(From '*Cancionero y romancero de ausencias 1941*)

Each time I pass
beneath your window,
the perfume strikes me
that still floats through your house.
Each time I pass
pass by the graveyard
the power arrests me
that still breathes through your bones.

Carry Me to the Graveyard

(From '*Cancionero y romancero de ausencias 1941*)

Carry me to the graveyard
of worn-out shoes.

At all hours throw me
a pen of wild-broom.

Sow me with statues
rigidly gazing.

Through an orchard of mouths,
promising, golden
my shade will glow.

Grasses, Nettles

(From '*Cancionero y romancero de ausencias 1941*)

Grasses, nettles,
advance into autumn
with silkiness
and a slow tenderness.

Autumn, a flavour
that separates things,
that pulls them apart.

It rains on a roof
as if on a coffin
while the grass-blade grows
like a young wing.

The same sap nurtures
the grasses, the nettles.

Wretched Wars

(From '*Cancionero y romancero de ausencias 1941*)

Wretched wars
when love is not our aim.
Wretched, wretched.

Wretched weapons
those that are not words.
Wretched, wretched.

Wretched men
that die not out of love.
Wretched, wretched.

Lullaby of the Onion

(From '*Cancionero y romancero de ausencias 1941*)

The onion is frost
enclosed and poor:
frost of your days
and of my nights.
Hunger and onions,
black ice and frost
great and round.

In hunger's cradle
my little son lay.
With onion-blood
he was nurtured.
But your blood's
frosted with sugar,
onions and hunger.

A dark-haired woman,
dissolved in moonlight,
spills herself ray by ray
over the cradle.
Laugh, little one,
drink moonlight
if you must.

Lark of my house,
laugh on.
The laughter in your eyes
is the light of the world.
Laugh so that
hearing you, my soul
will fly through space.

Your laughter frees me,
grants me wings.
Solitude it banishes,
pulls down my prison.
Mouth that soars,
heart that is lightning
on your lips.

Your laugh is a sword,
ever victorious.
Conqueror of flowers
and larks.
Rival of sunlight,
future of my bones
and my love.

The flesh flutters,
sudden as an eyelid,
a child as never before
painted.
How many goldfinches
soar and flutter
from your body!

I woke from childhood.
Never wake.
My mouth is sad.
Laugh forever.
Ever in your cradle,
defending laughter
feather by feather.

You're a flight so high,
so extensive,
that your flesh is the sky
newborn.
If only I could
climb to the source
of your flight!

For eight months you laugh
with five orange blossoms.
With five tiny
ferocities.
With five teeth
like five adolescent
jasmine buds.

They'll be the frontier
of kisses tomorrow,
when you feel a weapon
between your teeth.
Feel a flame
run past your teeth
seeking the core.

Fly child on the double
moon of her breast.
It, saddened by onions.
You, satisfied.
Never give way.
Ignore what passes
ignore what happens.

The Last Corner

(From '*Cancionero y romancero de ausencias 1941*)

The last and first corner
for the finest sunlight,
the tomb of this life,
and no room for your eyes.

I would like to lie down there
to disengage from love.

I desire it by the olive tree,
I sense it on the street,
it sinks into corners
where the trees are sunk.

It bores down and deepens
the intensity in my blood.

The moribund olive-trees
all flower in the air
and the lads are left
around them, dying.

Flesh of my movements,
bones of mortal rhythm:
I am dying of breathing,
at all of your gestures.

Heart between stones
anxious to crush you,
you drown in this love
like a sea between seas.

I drown in this love,
and yet I can't drown.

Kiss that comes rolling
from the world's origin
to my mouth for your lips.
Kiss that seeks futures,
mouth a binary star
that throbs between stars
for so many failed kisses,
so many closed mouths
without even one kiss.

What did I do that they commit
so much of my life to jail?

Your dark hair where black
has suffered the ages
of the deepest black
the most stirring:
that eternal dark hair
I travel to reach to
the primal darkness
of your ancestral eyes,
to the corner of dense hair
where you flash lightning.

Like a solitary corner
where a man spurts and burns.

Ay, the corner of your womb;
the alley of your body:
the alley without exit
where I died one afternoon.

Explosives and love
advance through the cities
dazzling, stirring
the people of blood.

The orange-tree tastes of life
and the olive-tree tastes of time.
And between the clamour of both
my passions hold their debate.

The last and first corner
where the corpse of some dead man
hears the lulling of the world
from the river-way of love.

Siesta that has darkened
the sun of moist places.

I would like to lie down there
to disengage from love.

After love, the earth.
After the earth, no one.

Casida of the Thirsty Man

(From '*Cancionero y romancero de ausencias 1941*)

Ocaña, May 1941.

Sand of the desert
am I: a desert of thirst.
An oasis your mouth
where I cannot drink.

Mouth: oasis laid open
to all the desert sands.

A watering-hole in the midst
of a burning world,
that of your body, yours,
that never will be ours.

Body: a sealed well
that thirst and the sun have burned.

To Smile with the Sad Joy of the Olive-Tree

(From '*Cancionero y romancero de ausencias* 1941)

To smile with the sad joy of the olive-tree.
To wait. Never to tire of hoping for joy.
We smile. We gild the light of every day
with this sad joyful vanity of being alive.

Every day I feel freer and more a captive
of that full smile so clear and so shadowed.
Tempests blow over your frozen mouth
while over mine still blows a summer breeze.

A smile rises up over the abyss: grows
like a tremulous abyss, bravely winged.
A smile lifts warmly upwards in flight.

Diurnal, firm, it arrives, no fall, no darkening.
You defy all things, love: you scale them all.
In a smile you were both earth and heaven.

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