Vicente Huidobro

Selected Poems

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The original texts of the poems in this volume are based on those in the author’s Obra
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and also on the first edition of Horizon carré (Paris: Éditions Paul Birault, 1917).

The text of ‘Non serviam’ is based on the version printed in Escritos sobre las artes, ed.
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printed in the volume, Manifestes (Paris: Editions de la Revue Mondiale, 1925), although
a number of typographical errors and misquotations have been quietly corrected.

The texts of the interviews follow the versions printed in A la intemperie (entrevistas
1915/1946), ed. Cecilia García-Huidobro Mca. (Santiago de Chile: Ocho Libro Edi-
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INTRODUCTION

Vicente Huidobro was born in Santiago de Chile in 1893; he died of a brain haemorrhage in Cartagena, Chile on 2 January 1948, a few days before his fifty-fifth birthday.

Huidobro came from a wealthy patrician family. Unlike many youths of his age and class, Huidobro dedicated himself to literature. ‘At the age of seventeen,’ he was to write in 1926, ‘I said to myself: “I must be the first poet of America”; then, as the years passed, I said: “I must be the first poet of my language”; finally, my ambitions soared and I said to myself: “I have to be the first poet of my century’.’ Modesty was not one of Huidobro’s defining characteristics.

After some early literary successes and the publication of several books, Huidobro left Chile with his family in late 1916, bound first for Madrid, and then for Paris. While he very much wanted to see what was happening in the world’s artistic capital, the initial impetus for the move had in fact been the avoidance of further scandal at home, from which Huidobro had not long before disappeared to Buenos Aires with Teresa Wilms Montt (1893-1921). The pair certainly had an affair, but the event also had a somewhat more gentlemanly aspect, as Huidobro had engineered Teresa’s escape from the Santiago convent in which she had been immured by her irate husband, following her affair with one of his cousins. Teresa was to develop her own literary career in Buenos Aires and would later move on to Europe, where she was to commit suicide in 1921. Huidobro continued to remember her long afterwards, and the daring escape to Argentina prefigured his later exploits with Ximena Amunátegui, who was to become his second wife.

In Paris he threw himself into the artistic avant-garde, founding a Cubist magazine, Nord-Sud, with Pierre Reverdy and establishing friendships with Juan Gris, Picasso, Picabia and Lipchitz, as well as with poets such as Apollinaire, Cendrars and Cocteau. In July of 1918, to escape the war, he moved to Madrid where he participated in the tertulia (literary salon) of Ramón Gómez de la Serna at the Café Pombo; he also came into contact with significant young writers such as Gerardo Diego, Jorge Luis Borges) and Juan Larrea.

In 1918 Huidobro was obliged to return to Chile for his sister’s wedding. He hoped to take literary Santiago by storm, but instead he met with a blank wall of conservatism and indifference. He went back to Paris...
in 1920 and, in 1921, published a selected poems, *Saisons choisies* [Selected Seasons], accompanied by a statement of his own aesthetic principles, ‘La Création pure’. But Huidobro’s Creationism—a kind of literary cubism, which argued for the independence of artistic works from observable reality—was soon overtaken by Surrealism and the craze for automatic writing, which he rejected as ‘the reduction of poetry to a simple, after-dinner, family pastime’. Creationism was a useful label, a marketing slogan in modern terms, under which attention was sought, and gained. As is still the case today, commentators happily discussed the supposedly attendant theories rather than the works that exemplified them.

In 1925, political changes in Chile attracted his attention and Huidobro, always thinking in the grandest terms, saw an opportunity to become the political leader of a new Chile. Even his mother contemplated her son as King Vicente I of Chile. The (pipe)dream of a Huidobro monarchy, however, was not to be realised. In 1925 he also issued two further collections of poetry in French, *Automne régulier* [Ordinary Autumn] and *Tout à coup* [Suddenly], which seem to show him somewhat stuck for a way forward, although signs of development were in fact to be found as, at the same period, he was publishing sections from the work-in-progress *Altazor*, in Spanish, in literary journals.

Huidobro had married young, to Manuela Portales Bello (1894-1965), likewise the scion of an upper-crust family, with whom he had four children and from whom he later separated to form a new and scandalous relationship with the sixteen-year-old Ximena Amunátegui (1910-1975), with whom he would go on to have a fifth child. The beginnings of this relationship, in which, after meeting her at a costume ball, Huidobro published a long love poem, ‘Pasión, pasión y muerte’ [Passion, Passion and Death] in Santiago’s *La Nación* newspaper on Easter Saturday, obliged Huidobro to leave Chile, first for Paris, then for New York in 1927 where he came close to becoming involved in the film business. He met Douglas Fairbanks and Gloria Swanson, and even won a prize of US$10,000 (ca. $150,000 in 2019 dollars) for his film-script, *Cagliostro*—later converted into a novella—as being the best candidate for a new movie. Nothing came of this, because of the arrival of the talkies shortly afterwards, which immediately rendered the expressionist style of *Cagliostro* out of date.

Huidobro’s former colleagues in the Parisian avant-garde evidently saw the furore over an under-age paramour, and the Presidential campaign, as signs of madness. It is not clear what they thought of the press photos of Huidobro with Hollywood starlets, although one can hazard a guess.
When Ximena reached her majority in 1928, Huidobro left New York and travelled secretly to Chile where he scooped her up from outside her convent school—as a subterfuge, she had sought permission from the nuns to go to the dentist—and the pair fled to Argentina. A former family maid had acted as go-between for the pair. Within a few months the couple reappeared in Paris where they were married in a Muslim ceremony, the only procedure that would legalise their union. In the following years in Paris Huidobro completed his two major works, Altazor and Temblor de cielo [Skyquake]—although parts of the former date back as far as 1919—as well as the novel Mío Cid Campeador (available in this series under the title El Cid).

In 1932 economic realities in Europe necessitated Huidobro’s return to Chile. Politically at this time, he was a man of the Left, although in the 1940s he would become a militant anti-Communist. At the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Huidobro organised Chilean intellectuals in support of the Republic and in 1937 he was in Spain, with Lister’s troops on the Aragón front and took part in literary conferences in Madrid and Valencia.

By the end of the 1930s, however, Huidobro was thoroughly disillusioned with politics, which he described as the art of lying, of concealing, of falsifying, of dirtying life, of buying and selling consciences’. He was also deeply affected by the death of his mother, and then by the collapse of his second marriage: Ximena had found new love with a younger suitor, the Argentine-born poet Godofredo Iommi (1917-2001), going on to marry him after her divorce from Huidobro.

Escaping these events, Huidobro went to France in 1944 as a war correspondent for newspapers in Montevideo and Buenos Aires and was with the Allied troops in Germany, even broadcasting from Paris on The Voice of America. During the war Huidobro was wounded twice and was obliged to go to London for medical treatment. When at last in 1945 he returned to Chile it was with a new partner, Raquel Señoret (1922-1990), who had previously been married to an English writer and was the daughter of the Chilean Ambassador to the United Kingdom. The couple set up home in Cartagena, a coastal resort south of Valparaíso. In the short time left to him, Huidobro took little interest in contemporary Chilean poetry.

The above summary of Vicente Huidobro’s life does little justice to one of the most flamboyant, gifted and relentlessly innovative poets of the 20th century. His literary theories are best presented as expounded by himself in the two manifestos appended to this selection of his work. He had the grandest notion of the function of the poet, and he did his best to live up to
it. His literary presence is still felt in Latin American poetry and, as with his contemporary, the Peruvian César Vallejo, there is a growing appreciation of his work in the English-speaking world. His poetry is wonderfully experimental, sometimes outrageous, narcissistic, and egotistical in a quasi-Whitmanesque fashion, but it constitutes a splendid corrective to our sometimes lazy view of the trajectory of 20th-century poetry.

* 

The selection here has its origins in a long-desired project of the late Michael Smith (1942-2014), an Irish poet who had already been working on versions of Huidobro’s poems for some time when I first met him in Dublin in 2003. Our relationship flourished thereafter and Shearsman has since published all of Michael’s own poetry, and a veritable library of his translations from a range of Hispanic authors, some of them the fruit of joint labours with Luis Ingelmo, some with Valentino Gianuzzi and, very occasionally, with others. There is at least one more volume to come at the time of writing this introduction. When reviewing Michael’s original draft of the Huidobro volume, I felt that it needed a number of additions in order to give a better sense of the author’s work throughout his life; some of these additions are in my own translations, and some are by Eliot Weinberger, and all help to give a more balanced view of the poet’s work.

It was while working out what else to translate for this volume that I decided to go further and translate the remainder of the author’s 1916-1918 publications myself (other than those translated by Eliot Weinberger)—which are crucial in his development as a poet—and publish those as separate volumes in matching editions. Michael’s translations have been given preference to my own in this volume, however, whenever there was a choice, except in the case of Skyquake. I had already translated the latter several years ago, and that is also now available as a separate volume in this series. My own versions thus appear in the volumes Arctic Poems, Square Horizon and Skyquake, and Eliot Weinberger’s in Equatorial & other poems. More information is contained in those four volumes for those who wish to pursue the author’s story.

Eventually we will publish translations of Huidobro’s last three poetry collections, Ver y palpar, El ciudadano del olvido and Últimos poemas, and perhaps even the two French volumes from 1925—which I rate much less highly—but that is likely to take another 2 or 3 years.

Tony Frazer
April 2019
Mi espejo, corriente por las noches,
Se hace arroyo y se aleja de mi cuarto.

Mi espejo, más profundo que el orbe
Donde todos los cisnes se ahogaron.

Es un estanque verde en la muralla
Y en medio duerme tu desnudez anclada.

Sobre sus olas, bajo cielos sonámbulos,
Mis ensueños se alejan como barcos.

De pie en la popa siempre me veréis cantando.
Una rosa secreta se hincha en mi pecho
Y un ruiseñor ebrio aletea en mi dedo.
THE WATER MIRROR

My mirror, current through the nights,
Becomes a stream and moves off from my room.

My mirror, deeper than the world
Where all the swans drowned.

It is a green pool on a rampart
And in it your anchored nakedness sleeps

Above its waves, under sleepwalking skies,
My dreams move off like ships.

Standing on the poop you’ll always see me singing.
A secret rose swells in my chest
And a drunken nightingale flutters on my finger.

translated by Michael Smith & Luis Ingelmo
NOUVELLE CHANSON

Pour toi, Manuelita

En dedans de l’Horizon
QUELQU’UN CHANTAIT
Sa voix
N’est pas connue

D’OÙ VIENT-IL

Parmi les branches
On ne voit personne

La lune même était une oreille

Et on n’entend
aucun bruit
Cependant
une étoile découverte
Est tombée dans l’étang

L’HORIZON
S’EST FERMÉ

Et il n’y a pas de sortie
NEW SONG

For you, Manuelita

Inside the horizon
SOMEONE WAS SINGING

The voice
Is unknown

WHERE DOES IT COME FROM

Amid the boughs
No one is seen

Even the moon was an ear

And no sound
is heard
Yet

a loose star
Has fallen into the pool

THE HORIZON
HAS BEEN CLOSED

And there is no way out
AÉROPLANE

Une croix
s’est abattue par terre

Un cri brisa les fenêtres
Et on se penche
sur le dernier aéroplane

Le vent
qui avait nettoyé l’air
A naufragé dans les premières vagues

La poussée
persiste encore
sur les nuages

Et le tambour
appelle quelqu’un
Que personne connait

Des mots
derrière les arbres

La lanterne qu’on agitait
était un drapeau
Il éclaire autant que le soleil

Mais les cris qui enfoncent les toits
ne sont pas de révolte
Malgré les murs que ensevelissent

LA CROIX DU SUD

Est le seul avion
qui subsiste

from Horizon carré, 1917
AEREOPLANE

A cross
    just fell to the ground

A scream shattered the windows
And all leaned over
    the last aeroplane

The wind
    that had cleansed the air
Wrecked on the first waves

The thrust
    still persists
above the clouds

And the drum
    summons someone
No one knows

Words
    behind the trees

The lantern someone waved
    was a flag
It shines just like the sun

But the screams that pierce the roofs
    are not of rebellion
Despite the walls that bury

THE SOUTHERN CROSS

It is the only plane
    that survives

translated by Michael Smith & Luis Ingelmo
Aquella casa sentada en el tiempo
Sobre las nubes que alejaba el viento
Iba un pájaro muerto
Caen sus plumas sobre el otoño

Un niño sin alas
Mira en la ventana

Un niño sin alas
El balandro resbala
Y bajo la sombra de los mástiles
Los peces temen trizar el agua

Se olvidó el nombre de la madre
Tras la puerta que bate como una bandera
El techo está agujereado de estrellas

Cae de su barba un poco de nieve

from Poemas árticos, 1918
CHILD

That house
  sitting on time
Over the clouds
  the wind was blowing away
A dead bird drifted by
Its feathers fall on the autumn

A wingless child
  \{ The yacht glides
Looks out the window
  And under the shadow of the masts
\}
  The fish fear the shattering of the water

The mother’s name was forgotten

Behind the door that slaps
  like a flag
The roof is pierced with stars
  Grandpa is asleep
A little snow
  falls from his beard

Translated by Michael Smith & Luis Ingelmo
Aquel pájaro que vuela por primera vez
Se aleja del nido mirando hacia atrás
Con el dedo en los labios

Os he llamado

Yo inventé juegos de agua
En la cima de los árboles

Te hice la más bella de las mujeres
Tan bella que enrojecías en las tardes

La luna se aleja de nosotros
Y arroja una corona sobre el polo

Hice correr ríos
que nunca han existido

De un grito elevé una montaña
Y en torno bailamos una nueva danza

Corté todas las rocas
De las nubes del este

Y enseñé a cantar un pájaro de nieve
Marchemos sobre los meses desatados

Soy el viejo marino
que cose los horizontes cortados

from Poemas árticos, 1918
That bird that flies for the first time
Moves away from its nest, looking back
Finger on lip
I have called you

I devised water-games
On the tops of trees

I made you the loveliest of women
So lovely you reddened in the evening

The moon moves away from us
And flings a crown onto the pole

I made non-existent rivers
flow

With a shout I raised a mountain,
And we danced a new dance around it

I picked all the roses
From the Eastern clouds

And I taught a snowbird to sing
Let us walk on the unleashed months

I am the old sailor
who sews the torn horizons

translated by Michael Smith & Luis Ingelmo
YA VAS HATCHOU

J’ai été partout et nulle part comme un air de musique

J’ai vu l’amour et le cheval antique
Les vagues de la mer mourant de peste
Le train la vie le pleur qui résoud son théorème

Et niché sur un nuage voyageant vers l’Est
Un oiseau qui chantait oublié de lui-même

Au fond je t’aime
Tu es plus pâle que l’heure et tu fais la légende
Tes paupières sont la seule chose qui s’envole
Et tu es bien plus belle que le retour du pôle

Pendant la nuit
Ton cœur luit

Toi seule vis
Dehors c’est la fin du monde et du violoncelle
Una larme tremble au bord du ciel

La terre s’éloigne et se dégonfle
Tels que tes yeux et ta figure

La chambre s’est vidée par la serrure

from Automne régulier, 1925
YA VAS KHACHU*

Like a musical air I have been everywhere and nowhere

I have seen love and the old horse
Sea waves dying of the plague
The train life despair which solves its theorem

And nestled in a cloud travelling eastwards
A bird which sang forgotten even by itself

And deep down I love you
You are paler than the hour and you have the legend
Your eyelids are the only things that fly
You are much more beautiful than the return from the Pole

Throughout the night
Your heart shines

Only you live
Outside it’s the end of the world and of the cello
A tear trembles at the edge of the sky

The earth moves away and deflates
Just like your eyes and your face

The room has been emptied by the lock

* The title is a transliteration of the Russian, Я вас хочу (I want you) (Ed.).
ALTAZOR — CANTO II

Mujer el mundo está amueblado por tus ojos
Se hace más alto el cielo en tu presencia
La tierra se prolonga de rosa en rosa
Y el aire se prolonga de paloma en paloma

Al irte dejas una estrella en tu sitio
Dejas caer tus luces como el barco que pasa
Mientras te sigue mi canto embrujado
Como una serpiente fiel y melancólica
Y tú vuelves la cabeza detrás de algún astro

¿Qué combate se libra en el espacio?
Esas lanzas de luz entre planetas
Reflejo de armaduras despiadadas
¿Qué estrella sanguinaria no quiere ceder el paso?
En dónde estás triste noctámbula
Dadora de infinito
Que pasea en el bosque de los sueños

Heme aquí perdido entre mares desiertos
Solo como la pluma que se cae de un pájaro en la noche
Heme aquí en una torre de frío
Abridgo del recuerdo de tus labios marítimos
Del recuerdo de tus complacencias y de tu cabellera
Luminosa y desatada como los ríos de montaña
¿Irías a ser ciega que Dios te dio esas manos?
Te pregunto otra vez

El arco de tus cejas tendido para las armas de los ojos
En la ofensiva alada vencedora segura con orgullos de flor
Te hablan por mí las piedras aporreadas
Te hablan por mí las olas de pájaros sin cielo
Te habla por mí el color de los paisajes sin viento
Te habla por mí el rebaño de ovejas taciturnas
Dormido en tu memoria
Te habla por mí el arroyo descubierto

from Altazor, 1931
Woman your eyes are the world’s furniture
The sky rises higher in your presence
The earth extends from rose to rose
The air extends from dove to dove

When you go you leave a star in your stead
You let your lights fall like the passing ship
While my bewitched song follows you
Like a faithful and melancholy snake
And you turn your head behind some star

What battle is waged in space?
Those lances of light among planets
Glitter of ruthless weapons
What bloodthirsty star will not yield?
Where are you in your sad nightwalking
Bestower of the infinite
That strolls in the forest of dreams

Here I am astray in desolate seas
Lonely as the feather a bird drops in the night
Here I am in a tower of cold
Sheltered by the memory of your maritime lips
By the memory of your pleasures and your hair
Bright and loose like mountain rivers
Could it be you’d go blind since God gave you these hands?
I ask you again

The arch of your eyebrows stretched as your eyes’ weapons
In winged triumphant defence assured with flower pride
Beaten, the stones speak through me to you
The waves of skelless birds speak through me to you
The colour of windless landscapes speaks through me to you
The flock of silent sheep speaks through me to you
Asleep in your memory
Bare, the stream speaks through me to you

translated by Michael Smith & Luis Ingelmo
La yerba sobreviviente atada a la aventura
Aventura de luz y sangre de horizonte
Sin más abrigo que una flor que se apaga
Si hay un poco de viento

Las llanuras se pierden bajo tu gracia frágil
Se pierde el mundo bajo tu andar visible
Pues todo es artificio cuando tú te presentas
Con tu luz peligrosa
Inocente armonía sin fatiga ni olvido
Elemento de lágrima que rueda hacia adentro
Construido de miedo altivo y de silencio

Haces dudar al tiempo
Y al cielo con instintos de infinito
Lejos de ti todo es mortal
Lanzas la agonía por la tierra humillada de noches
Sólo lo que piensa en ti tiene sabor a eternidad

He aquí tu estrella que pasa
Con tu respiración de fatigas lejanas
Con tus gestos y tu modo de andar
Con el espacio magnetizado que te saluda
Que nos separa con leguas de noche

Sin embargo te advierto que estamos cosidos
A la misma estrella
Estamos cosidos por la misma música tendida
De uno a otro
Por la misma sombra gigante agitada como árbol
Seamos ese pedazo de cielo
Ese trozo en que pasa la aventura misteriosa
La aventura del planeta que estalla en pétalos de sueño

En vano tratarías de evadirte de mi voz
Y de saltar los muros de mis alabanzas
Estamos cosidos por la misma estrella
Estás atada al ruiseñor de las lunas
Que tiene un ritual sagrado en la garganta

from Altazor, 1931
The surviving grass bound to adventure
Adventure of light and horizon blood
With no more covering than a withering flower
If there is a little wind

The plains are lost under your frail grace
The world is lost under your visible tread
For all is artifice when you are present
With your dangerous light
Innocent harmony above fatigue and oblivion
Element of tear that rolls inwards
Built of haughty fear and silence

With instincts of infinitude
You make time and heaven doubt
Far away from you everything is mortal
You send agony throughout a night-humbled earth
Only what thinks of you tastes of eternity

Here’s your star going by
With your breath of distant labours
With your gesturing and walk
With the magnet space that greets you
That divides us with night-leagues

Yet I warn you we are sewn
To the same star
We are sewn by the same music stretching
From one to the other
By the one giant shadow shaking like a tree
Let’s be that bit of sky
That patch where the mysterious adventure unfolds
The planet’s adventure that erupts in dream-petals

You would try in vain to escape my voice
And to climb over the walls of my praises
We are sewn by the same star
You are tied to a nightingale of moons
That has a sacred ritual in its throat

translated by Michael Smith & Luis Ingelmo
ANUNCIO

Es increíble el número de muertos que hay en la tierra. Pero muchos se interesan más por el número de monederos falsos que hay en el cielo. Yo he dicho esto hace algunos años. ¿En dónde he dicho esto?

Yo soy tan grande como mi soledad. Y también podría cantar para ser más alto y más grueso o para andar más rápido o para ser más liviano.

Podría tener la dimensión de alguno de mis cantos y como ellos ser realidad en el intersticio que dejan dos estrellas.

¿Qué diría el mar si resucitara?

¡Ah!, me olvidaba… Sí, me olvidaba deciros, que el mar murió tan resignado que nadie pudo hablar durante largo tiempo, y murió aquella noche cuando Altazor tendió la mano a Isolda y ella volvió a su lámpara para hacerla llorar.

Y fue Altazor el que lloró.

Lluvia en su raíz, nacimiento de vértebras y de algas tan dolorosas como el cráneo después de la batalla de los descubrimientos y el peso de tanta luz repentina. Pero a la lectura del dulce testamento las tempestades volvieron a su saco, se cubrieron el rostro con el manto desgajado, cantaron en voz baja en sus entrañas más azules que las primeras carretas por el camino y se pusieron sus zapatos de silencio para recordar con dignidad.

El dulce testamento decía: Vienes cayendo y vas subiendo como yo, como el precioso animal de la noche que fui durante años, como el punto que se desprende de un pedazo de cielo, como zócalo mismo de universo sobre sus incontables ojos circulares.

Altazor se cubría el rostro en los dos segundos anteriores al vértigo, cuando las luces empezaban a nacer y a morir con tal velocidad, que el pelaje de los caballos y de los mundos entristecidos caía ante los ojos y dejaba la ley desnuda detenida un momento en espera de las fauces de la compasión.
ANNOUNCEMENT

It’s incredible the number of dead people there are on this earth. But many are more interested in the number of counterfeiters that exist in the heavens. I’ve been saying this for many years. Where did I say this?

I am as great as my solitude. And I could also sing my way to being taller and heavier, or to walking more quickly or to being lighter.

I could have the proportions of some of my songs and like them be reality in the gaps left by the stars.

What would the sea say if it were resurrected?

Ah! I was forgetting… Yes, I was forgetting to tell you that the sea died, resigned to the fact that no-one had been able to speak for such a long time, and died on that night when Altazor offered his hand to Isolde and she returned to her lamp to make it weep.

And it was Altazor who wept.

Rain at his root, birth of vertebrae and of seaweed as sorrowful as the skull after the battle of discoveries and the weight of so much sudden light. But upon reading the sweet testament the storms returned to their bag, covered their faces with torn cloaks, sang softly in their innards bluer than the first wagons on the highway and put on their shoes of silence so as to remember in dignified fashion.

The sweet testament said: You fall down and you rise up like me, like the gorgeous nocturnal animal that vanished for years, like the point detached from a piece of sky, like the very plinth of the universe above their innumerable round eyes.

Altazor covered his face in the two seconds prior to his vertigo when the lights began to be born and to die with such speed that the coats of horses and of saddened worlds fell before his eyes and left the law naked for one moment awaiting the jaws of compassion.

translated by Tony Frazer
MIRADAS Y RECUERDOS

El mar que los suspiros de los viajeros agita
Corre tras de sus olas barridas por el viento
El infinito busca una gaviota
Para tener un punto de apoyo lógico y blando

Cómo haremos
El cielo se suena con las alas que ama
Mientras yo busco al pie de mi poema
Una estrella que cruje
Como la rueda de un coche que se lleva los últimos recuerdos

Nada será encontrado
El pozo de las cosas perdidas no se llena jamás
Jamás como la mirada y los ecos
Que se alejan sobre la bruma y sus animales inmensos
LOOKS AND MEMORIES

The sea that stirs travellers’ sighs
Runs after its windswept waves
The infinite looks for a gull
To find a logical and soft fulcrum

What can we do
The sky whirs with wings it loves
While I search at the foot of my poem
A star crunching
Like the wheel of a car taking one’s last memories away

Nothing will be found
The well of lost things is never full
Never, like the gaze and echoes
That move away on the mist and its immense animals

translated by Michael Smith & Luis Ingelmo
FUERZAS NATURALES

Una mirada
para abatir al albatros

Dos miradas
para detener el paisaje
al borde del río

Tres miradas
para cambiar la niña en
volantín

Cuatro miradas
para sujetar el tren que
cae en el abismo

Cinco miradas
para volver a encender las estrellas
apagadas por el huracán

Seis miradas
para impedir el nacimiento
del niño acuático

Siete miradas
para prolongar la vida de
la novia

Ocho miradas
para cambiar el mar
en cielo

Nueve miradas
para hacer bailar los
árboles del bosque

Diez miradas
para ver la belleza que se presenta
entre un sueño y una catástrofe
NATURAL FORCES

One look to down the albatross
Two looks to halt the landscape
  on the river’s edge
Three looks to change the girl into
  a kite
Four looks to stop the train
  falling into the abyss
Five looks to once again light the stars
  extinguished by the hurricane
Six looks to prevent the birth
  of the aquatic child
Seven looks to prolong the life of
  the fiancée
Eight looks to change the sea
  into sky
Nine looks to make the trees in
  the forest dance
Ten looks to see the beauty that appears
  between dream and catastrophe

translated by Michael Smith & Luis Ingelmo
PRELUDIO DE ESPERANZANZA

Cantas y cantas hablas y hablas
Y ruedas por el tiempo
Y lloras como lirio desatado
Y suspiras entre largos agonizantes que no saben qué decir
A veces también ríes con tus huesos de gran noche
Señalados en su sitio de esqueleto
Designados en su trozo de tierra saludando al cielo.
Pide conformidad para tus altos intereses
En el país de la esperanza que despierta en tus costillas
Pide lección al árbol acusado por sus excesos
Y sus alas habituadas a todo trance
Recuerda la salida del río escucha la sombra adentro de la flor

Cantas y cantas hablas y hablas
Y sueñas que la especie olvidará tinieblas
Pronto pronto el olvido del llanto
Las lágrimas armadas de tan lejana luz.
Como animales numerados que van saliendo del mar
Pronto el olvido de tanta sombra suspirada
Pronto el futuro de horizontes que conoce su pasión

Cantas y cantas
Y tienes una voz acumulada
Tienes una voz con ciertos lados dolorosos
Y ciertos rincones impacientes
Y gotas de astros perdidos por su tierno corazón
Tienes cascadas en tus regiones más pensadoras
Tienes objetos convertidos en vidrio al fondo de tus ojos
Tienes rutas nacidas para el oscuro sonar de la garganta
Puedes hacer un nudo de puertas con tus enigmas
Y así mismo desatar el tiempo entre sonidos y presagios
Puedes dar una parte a tu luz en el camino mismo

Hablas y hablas
Y ya sabemos que es como el ruido de la lluvia
Que cae de cabeza sobre el campo

from El ciudadano del olvido (1924-1934), 1941
PRELUDE TO HOPE

You sing and sing you talk and talk
And roll on through time
And weep like a wild lily
And sigh in long uncertain gasps that don’t know what to say
At times too you laugh with your bones from the great night
Articulated correctly in the skeleton
Fixed to their bit of earth greeting the sky.
Beg approval for your high interests
In the land of hope which awakens in your ribs
Beg lessons from the tree accused by its excesses
And its wings accustomed to whatever difficulty
Listen to the river’s departure listen to the shadow inside the flower

You sing and sing you talk and talk
And you dream that the species will forget darkness
Soon soon forgetting your weeping
Tears armed with such a distant light
Like numbered animals emerging from the sea
Soon forgetting so many desired shadows
Soon the future of horizons that know your passion

You sing and sing
And you have a voice stored up
You have a voice with some painful sides
And some impatient corners
And drops of stars lost by its tender heart
You have waterfalls in your most thoughtful regions
You have objects converted into glass in the depths of your eyes
You have roads born for the dark sound of your throat
You can make a knot of gates with your enigmas
And just like that unleash time amongst the sounds and portents
You can give a part of it to your light there on the road

You talk and talk
And we already know that it’s like the sound of the rain
Falling headfirst onto the fields

translated by Tony Frazer
Pero tu ruido lleva sueños y puntas de hojas pensativas
Lleva un bronce que ha escarbado cenizas y montañas
Cantas y cantas lloras y lloras
Y en tu llorar hay el combate de la muerte y de la marcha
Todas las últimas batallas con su color de límite
Y en tu silencio crecen árboles tan decididos como las borrascas
Y la muerte obedece a su mundo tembloroso
Ardiendo en sueños de clave visionaria
Hablas y hablas miras y miras
Y sientes la corteza que te separa de las ansias ajenas
Sientes desde adentro de ti mismo
Los impulsos del mundo los latidos de la tierra
Y los tormentos de todas las crisálidas
En su escafandra de enigmas
Sientes las alas ciegas de tus signos jadeantes
Y esa agua olvidada de sus mares que corre en tus arterias

Cantas y cantas ríes y ríes
Y tienes una dulzura que te come los huesos
Y oyes crujir la tierra que no sabe su nombre
Y le duelen los árboles
Le duele el mar con todas sus olas
Le duele el paso de los hombres
Y los arroyos oscuros que se entrecruzan
En un pacto ungido por la nobleza de sus años

Lloras y lloras miras y miras ríes y ríes
Y te detienes pensativo en medio de tantos ecos
En esta tierra de entusiasmos secretos
En estos vientos que traen apariencias de destinos.
Y contempresas de un lado el empezar del mundo
Del otro la noche de vidrios espantados
Y te vas y buscas ansioso
Esa música rasgada por donde se evade la casa
Y desaparece moviendo el corazón entre fantasmas.
Cuando el sol te reemplaza de repente
Qué quieres que te diga
A tiempo de mirar caen las plumas
Como vejez de palabra en traje de alma

from *El ciudadano del olvido (1924-1934)*, 1941
But your noise bears dreams and tips of thoughtful leaves
Bears a bell which has dug up ashes and mountains
You sing and sing weep and weep
And in your weeping there is the fight between death and progress
All the final battles with their boundary colour
And in your silence trees grow as resolutely as storms
And death obeys its trembling world
Burning in dreams with a visionary slant
You talk and talk you watch and watch
And you feel the kindness that separates you from the longing of others
You feel from deep inside yourself
The desires of the world the throbbing of the earth
And the torture of all chrysalids
In their diving suits of enigmas
You feel the blind wings of your gasping signs
And that forgotten water from its seas which runs through your veins

You sing and sing you laugh and laugh
And have a sweetness that eats away your bones
And you can hear the earth creaking, the earth that doesn't know your name
And the trees hurt it
And the sea hurts it with all its waves
It is hurt by the steps of men
And the criss-crossing dark streams
In a pact anointed by the nobility of their years

You weep and weep you watch and watch you laugh and laugh
And stop in thought amidst so many echoes
In this earth of secret enthusiasms
In these winds which bear the illusion of fate.
And you contemplate from one side the beginning of the world
From the other the night with frightened windows
And you go away and look anxiously
For that torn music through which the house escapes
And disappears moving the heart amongst phantoms.
When the sun suddenly replaces you
What do you want me to say to you
As I watch the feathers fall
Like an elderly word costumed with soul

translated by Tony Frazer
Qué quieres que te diga
El mundo baja por tus angustias a tu encuentro

Cantas y cantas hablas y hablas
Y te olvidas de todo para que todo te olvide
Hablas y hablas cantas y cantas
Lloras y lloras miras y miras ríes y ríes
Y te vas en silueta de aire

from *El ciudadano del olvido (1924-1934)*, 1941
What do you want me to say to you
The world bows to your distress when meeting you

You sing and sing you talk and talk
And you forget everything so that everything forgets you
You talk and talk you sing and sing
You weep and weep watch and watch laugh and laugh
And you go away silhouette of air

translated by Tony Frazer
Venía hacia mí por la sonrisa
Por el camino de su gracia
Y cambiaba las horas del día
El cielo de la noche se convertía en el cielo del amanecer
El mar era un árbol frondoso lleno de pájaros
Las flores daban campanadas de alegría
Y mi corazón se ponía a perfumar enloquecido

Van andando los días a lo largo del año
¿En dónde estás?
Me crece la mirada
Se me alargan las manos
En vano la soledad abre sus puertas
Y el silencio se llena de tus pasos de antaño
Me crece el corazón
Se me alargan los ojos
Y quisiera pedir otros ojos
Para ponerlos allí donde terminan los míos
¿En dónde estás ahora?
¿Qué sitio del mundo se está haciendo tibio con tu presencia?

Me crece el corazón como una esponja
O como esos corales que van a formar islas
Es inútil mirar los astros
O interrogar las piedras encanecidas
Es inútil mirar ese árbol que te dijo adiós el último
Y te saludará el primero a tu regreso
Eres sustancia de lejanía
Y no hay remedio
Andan los días en tu busca
A qué seguir por todas partes la huella de sus pasos
El tiempo canta dulcemente
Mientras la herida cierra los párpados para dormirse
Me crece el corazón
BALLAD OF WHAT WON'T RETURN

She came towards me through her smile
Along the path of her grace
And changed the hours of the day
The night sky turned into a dawn sky
The sea was a leafy tree full of birds
The flowers rang out peals of joy
And my heart began wildly perfuming itself

The days keep moving on throughout the year
Where are you?
My gaze expands
My hands are extended
Solitude opens its doors in vain
And the silence is filled with your footsteps from days past
My heart expands
My eyes grow longer
And I would like to ask for other eyes
To set them there where mine end
Where are you now?
What place in the world is being warmed by your presence?

My heart expands like a sponge
Or like those corals that form islands
It is useless to observe the stars
Or to question the hoary stones
It is useless to look at that tree the last one to bid you farewell
And the first to greet your return
You are the essence of distance
And there is no cure
The days keep pursuing you
Why follow their footprints everywhere
Time sings sweetly
While the wound closes its eyes to fall asleep
My heart expands

translated by Tony Frazer
Hasta romper sus horizontes
Hasta saltar por encima de los árboles
Y estrellarse en el cielo
La noche sabe qué corazón tiene más amargura

Sigo las flores y me pierdo en el tiempo
De soledad en soledad
Sigo las olas y me pierdo en la noche
De soledad en soledad
Tú has encendido la luz en alguna parte
¿En dónde? ¿En dónde?
Andan los días en tu busca
Los días llagados coronados de espinas
Se caen se levantan
Y van goteando sangre
Te buscan los caminos de la tierra
De soledad en soledad
Me crece terriblemente el corazón
Nada vuelve

Todo es otra cosa
Nada vuelve nada vuelve
Se van las flores y las hierbas
El perfume apenas llega como una campanada de otra provincia
Vienen otras miradas y otras voces
Viene otra agua en el río
Vienen otras hojas de repente en el bosque
Todo es otra cosa
Nada vuelve
Se fueron los caminos
Se fueron los minutos y las horas
Se alejó el río para siempre
Como los cometas que tanto admiramos
Desbordará mi corazón sobre la tierra
Y el universo será mi corazón

from El ciudadano del olvido (1924-1934), 1941
Until it breaks its horizons
Until it leaps over the trees
And collides with the sky
The night knows which heart is the more bitter

I follow the flowers and get lost in time
From solitude to solitude
I follow the waves and get lost in the night
From solitude to solitude
You have turned on the light somewhere
Where? Where?
The days keep pursuing you
Days wounded and crowned with thorns
They fall they rise
And they keep dripping blood as they go.
The roads of the earth search for you
From solitude to solitude
My heart expands terribly
Nothing returns

Everything is changed
Nothing returns nothing returns
The flowers and grasses depart
Perfume only just arrives like a peal of bells from another province
Other gazes and other voices come
Other waters come into the river
Other leaves come suddenly into the woods
Everything is something else
Nothing returns
The paths have gone
The minutes and the hours have gone
The river has left forever
Like the comets we admired so much
My heart will be spilled over the earth
And the universe will be my heart

translated by Tony Frazer
LA POESÍA ES
UN ATENTADO CELESTE

Yo estoy ausente, pero en el fondo de esta ausencia
Hay la espera de mí mismo
Y esta espera es otro modo de presencia
La espera de mi retorno
Yo estoy en otros objetos
Ando en viaje dando un poco de mi vida
A ciertos árboles y a ciertas piedras
Que me han esperado muchos años

Se cansaron de esperarme y se sentaron

Yo no estoy y estoy
Estoy ausente y estoy presente en estado de espera
Ellos querrían mi lenguaje para expresarse
Y yo querría el de ellos para expresarlos
He aquí el equívoco, el atroz equívoco

Angustioso lamentable
Me voy adentrando en estas plantas
Voy dejando mis ropas
Se me van cayendo las carnes
Y mi esqueleto se va revistiendo de corteza

Me estoy haciendo árbol
Cuántas veces me he ido convirtiendo en otras cosas
Es doloroso y lleno de ternura

Podría dar un grito pero se espantaría la transubstanciación
Hay que guardar silencio Esperar en silencio
POETRY IS
A CELESTIAL ASSAULT

I am absent but deep in this absence
There is the waiting for myself
And this waiting is another kind of presence
The waiting for my return
I am in other objects
I am off on a journey giving a little of my life
To some trees and some stones
That have awaited me for many years

They wearied of waiting for me and sat down

I am not here and I am here
I am absent and I am present in a state of expectation
They wanted my language so as to express themselves
And I wanted theirs to express them
This is the error, the terrible error

A wretched man of sorrows
I am entering these plants
Shedding my clothes
All my flesh falling away
And my skeleton is covering itself with bark

I am turning into a tree
How often have I turned into other things
It is painful and full of tenderness

I could cry out but the transubstantiation would be frightened off
One must keep silent Wait in silence

translated by Tony Frazer
Y he aquí que una buena mañana, después de una noche de preciosos sueños y delicadas pesadillas, el poeta se levanta y grita a la madre Natura: *Non serviam*.

Con toda la fuerza de sus pulmones, un eco traductor y optimista repite en las lejanías: “No te serviré”.

La madre Natura iba ya a fulminar al joven poeta rebelde, cuando éste, quitándose el sombrero y haciendo un gracioso gesto, exclamó: “Eres una viejecita encantadora”.

Ese *non serviam* quedó grabado en una mañana de la historia del mundo. No era un grito caprichoso, no era un acto de rebeldía superficial. Era el resultado de toda una evolución, la suma de múltiples experiencias.

El poeta, en plena conciencia de su pasado y de su futuro, lanzaba al mundo la declaración de su independencia frente a la Naturaleza.

Ya no quiere servirla más en calidad de esclavo.

El poeta dice a sus hermanos: “Hasta ahora no hemos hecho otra cosa que imitar al mundo en sus aspectos, no hemos creado nada. ¿Qué ha salido de nosotros que no estuviera antes parado ante nosotros, rodeando nuestros ojos, desafiando nuestros pies o nuestras manos?

Hemos cantado a la Naturaleza (cosa que a ella bien poco le importa). Nunca hemos creado realidades propias, como ella lo hace o lo hizo en tiempos pasados, cuando era joven y llena de impulsos creadores.

Hemos aceptado, sin mayor reflexión, el hecho de que no puede haber otras realidades que las que nos rodean, y no hemos pensado que nosotros también podemos crear realidades en un mundo nuestro, en un mundo que espera su fauna y su flora propias. Flora y fauna que sólo el poeta puede crear, por ese don especial que le dio la misma madre Naturaleza a él y únicamente a él.”

*Non serviam*. No he de ser tu esclavo, madre Natura; seré tu amo. Te servirás de mí; está bien. No quiero y no puedo evitarlo; pero yo también me serviré de ti. Yo tendré mis árboles que no serán como los tuyos, tendré mis montañas, tendré mis ríos y mis mares, tendré mi cielo y mis estrellas.

Y ya no podrá decirme: “Ese árbol está mal, no me gusta ese cielo…, los míos son mejores”.

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160 Read in Santiago, 1914; first published in *Antología*, 1945
And so it is that one good morning, after a night of beautiful dreams and subtle nightmares, the poet gets up and shouts at Mother Nature: *Non serviam*.

With all the strength of his lungs, a translator and optimist echo repeats in the distance, ‘I will not serve you.’

Mother Nature was ready to go off and kill the young rebel poet, when he, doffing his hat and making a graceful gesture, exclaimed, ‘You are a lovely old lady.’

That *non serviam* remained engraved on one morning of the history of the world. It was not an arbitrary shout, it was not a superficial act of rebellion. It was the result of a lengthy revolution, the totality of multiple experiences.

The poet, fully aware of his past and of his future, proffered to the world the declaration of his independence from nature.

He no longer wishes to serve it as a slave.

The poet says to his brothers, ‘Until now we have done nothing but imitate the world in its aspects, we have created nothing. What did we produce which was not there before us, surrounding our eyes, challenging our feet and our hands?

We have sung the praises of Nature (which matters little to it). We have never created our own realities, as she does or did in past times, when she was young and full of creative impulses.

We have accepted, without further reflection, the fact that there cannot be other realities than those that surround us, and we have not thought that we also can create realities in our world, in a world that expects its own fauna and flora. Flora and fauna which only the poet can create, by virtue of that special gift which Mother Nature herself gave to him and only to him.’

*Non serviam*. I do not have to be your slave, Mother Nature; I will be your master. You will avail yourself of me; that’s fine. I do not wish to nor can I avoid it; but I will also avail myself of you. I will have my own trees which will not be like yours, I will have my own mountains, I will have my own rivers and seas, I will have my own sky and stars.

And no longer will you be able to say to me, ‘That tree is bad, I don’t like that sky…, mine are better.’
Yo te responderé que mis cielos y mis árboles son los míos y no los tuyos y que no tienen por qué parecerse. Ya no podrás aplastar a nadie con tus pretensiones exageradas de vieja chocha y regalona. Ya nos escapamos de tu trampa.

Adiós, viejecita encantadora; adiós, madre y madrastra, no reniego ni te maldigo por los años de esclavitud a tu servicio. Ellos fueron la más preciosa enseñanza. Lo único que deseo es no olvidar nunca tus lecciones, pero ya tengo edad para andar solo por estos mundos. Por los tuyos y por los míos.

Una nueva era comienza. Al abrir sus puertas de jaspe, hino una rodilla en tierra y te saludo muy respetuosamente.
I will reply to you that my skies and my trees are mine and not yours, and they don’t have to look alike. You will no longer be able to overwhelm anyone with your exaggerated pretensions of a doddering and pampered old woman. Now we are escaping from your snare.

Goodbye, my lovely little old woman; goodbye, mother and stepmother, I am not rejecting or cursing you for my years of slavery in your service. They were the most precious education. The only thing that I want is never to forget your lessons, but I am now old enough to roam these worlds alone. Both yours and mine.

A new era is beginning. On opening its doors of jasper, I thrust a knee in the earth and I greet you very respectfully.

(1914)

translated by Michael Smith & Luis Ingelmo