

Rafael Alberti

Twenty Poems

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Naming The Dawn

(A embestidas suaves y rosas)

With gentle red assaults, Dawn, I was granting you names:
Mistaken dream, Angel without exit, Falsehood of rain in the trees.

At the edges of my soul, that recalls the rivers,
Indecisive, hesitant, still.

Spilt star, Confused light weeping, Glass without voice?

No.

Error of snow in water, is your name.

The Dead Angels

(Buscad, buscadlos)

Search, search for them:

In the insomnia of forgotten conduits
In gutters blocked by the muteness of litter.
Not far from the pools incapable of retaining a cloud,
A lost eye
A broken ring
Or a trampled star.

For I've seen them:

In the rubble momentarily appearing in the mist.
For I've touched them:
In the exile of a defunct brick,
Come to naught from a tower or a cart,
No longer beyond the crumbling chimneys,
Nor the tenacious leaves that stick to shoes.

In all of that.

More in those stray splinters consumed without flame.
In those sunken absences broken furniture endures.
Not far from the names and signs that grow cold on the walls.

Search, search for them:

Beneath the drop of wax that buries the word in the book,
Or the signature on the corner of a letter,
That brings the dust rolling in.
Near the forgotten fragment of a bottle,
The sole of a shoe lost in the snow,
The razor-blade abandoned at the edge of a precipice.

What I Left, For You

(Dejé por ti mis bosques, mi perdida)

For you I left my woods, my lost
Grove, my sleepless dogs,
My important years, those banished
Almost to my life's winter.

I left a tremor, a shock
A brilliance of un-extinguished fire,
I left my shadow on the desperate
Blood-stained eyes of farewell.

I left sad doves beside a river,
Horses in the sand of the arena,
I left the scent of the sea, I left to see you.

For you, I left everything that was mine.
Give me, Rome, in exchange for my pains,
All I have left in order to attain you.

Song 8

(Hoy las nubes me trajeron)

Today, the clouds brought me,
In flight, the map of Spain.
How small over the river,
How vast over the meadow
The shadow that it cast!

It was full of horses
The shadow that it cast.
I on horseback, for its shade,
Sought my village and my home.

I went into the yard that once
Was a fount of water.
Though it was not a fount
The fount sounded forever.
And water that did not flow
Returned to grant me water.

Mauve-Moon-Of-Ice

(Las floridas espaldas ya en la nieve)

The flowery shoulders now in the snow
And the ivory tresses in the wind.
Dead water in the brow, the pensive
Tinted halo of the moon when it rains.

Oh what a clamour in the brief breast;
What a palm in air the solitary breath,
What a floe caught in the firmament,
The bare foot, with the courage to die!

Arms of the sea, crossed, on the frozen
Salver of night; cold breasts,
From which, rigid, dawn is served;

Oh legs like two celestial rivers,
Mauve-moon-of-ice, shrouded
Beneath the oceans of my eyes!

My Roe Deer

‘On Avila, my eyes...’ XVth Century

(Mi corza, buen amigo)

My roe deer, dear friend,
My white roe deer.

The wolves slew her
In the depths of the water.

The wolves, dear friend,
That fled across the river.

The wolves slew her deep in the water.

Peñaranda de Duero

(Por qué me miras tan serio)

Why look so serious, dear road?

You have four grey mules,
A horse in front,
A carriage with green wheels,
And the road,
All to yourself,
Dear road.

What more do you need?

(Note: Peñaranda de Duero is a village in the province of Burgos)

For Federico García Lorca

(Sal tú, bebiendo campos y ciudades)

Go, drinking fields and cities,
Transformed to a great deer of water,
Be the ocean of bright dawns,
The kingfisher's nest on the waves.

That I might go on hoping for you, deadened,
A done reed, in the high solitudes,
Wounded by the air, and needing
Your voice, alone among the storms.

Leave me to write, frail cold reed,
My name in the running water,
Let the wind cry, solitary, river.

My name dissolved now in your snows,
Turn again to your upland slopes,
Deer of spray, king of the mountain stream.

The Dove

(Se equivocó la paloma)

The dove was wrong.
The dove was mistaken.
To travel north she flew south,
Believing the wheat was water.
Believing the sea was sky,
That the night was dawn.
That the stars were dew,
That the heat was snowfall.
Your skirt your blouse,
Your heart her home.
(She fell asleep on the shore,
You at the tip of a branch.)

'If my voice dies on land'

(Si mi voz muriera en tierra)

If my voice dies on land,
Carry it down to the sea,
And leave it there on the shore.

Carry it down to the sea,
And appoint it the captain
Of a white man of war.

Oh my voice adorned
With naval insignia,
An anchor over my heart,
And over the anchor a star,
And above the star the wind,
And above the wind a sail!

'If I was born a farmhand'

(Si yo nací campesino)

If I was born a farmhand,
If I was born a sailor,
Why do I have to be here,
If it's not where I want to be?

On the finest day, city
Which I have ever sought,
The finest day – silence! –
I'll have disappeared.

Alba Of The Dark Night

(Sobre la luna inmóvil de un espejo)

Above the still moon of a mirror,
I praise a fraternal circle
Of green pines, red with old gold,
Transfiguration of the king of day.

Tender silver, starved of reflection,
Dies now. From the glass – cold plate –
Speaks the voice of agonized moisture:
– Sun has gilded my tongue, why complain?

The gates of its setting, now closed,
Shroud the fields in mourning. Black curs
Growl, at who knows what, concealed.

Dreams decapitated, wearied,
Over the high tomb of the hills,
The stars of the valley wither.

The Ballad Of What The Wind Said

(La eternidad bien pudiera)

Eternity may well
Be only a river
Be a forgotten horse
And the cooing
Of a lost dove.

As for the man who distances
Himself from men, the wind comes
Telling him other things now
Opening his ears
And eyes to other things.

Today, I distanced myself from men,
And alone, in this gully,
I began to gaze at the river,
And saw a horse all alone,
And listened all lonely
To the cooing
Of a lost dove.

And the wind came close,
Like someone passing by,
And told me:
Eternity may well
Be only a river
Be a forgotten horse
And the cooing
Of a lost dove.

The Collegiate Angels

(Ninguno comprendíamos el secreto nocturno de las pizarras)

None of us understood the secret darkness of the blackboards
Nor why the armillary sphere seemed so remote when we looked.
We only knew a circumference can be other than round
That an eclipse of the moon confuses flowers,
And advances the timing of birds.

None of us understood a thing;
Nor why our fingers were made of India ink
And afternoon closed compasses for dawn to open books.
We only knew that a straight line, if required, can be curved or broken,
And wandering stars are children ignorant of arithmetic.

The Angel Of Numbers

(Virgenes con escuadras)

Virgins with set-squares
And compasses, watching over
The heavenly blackboards.

And the angel of numbers,
Pensive, flying
From 1 to 2, from 2
To 3, from 3 to 4.

Cold chalk and sponges
Streaked and erased
The light of deep space.

No sun, moon or stars,
Or the sudden green
Of lightning and thunder,
Or air. Only mist.

Virgins with set-squares
Or compasses, weeping.

And on the dead blackboards,
The angel of numbers,
Lifeless, shrouded,
On the 1 and the 2,
On the 3, on the 4...

The Bull Of Death

(Negro toro, nostálgico de heridas)

Black bull, nostalgic for wounds,
Charging your watery landscape,
Examining letters and luggage,
On those trains that run to arenas.

What do you dream in your dreams,
What hidden longings redden the journey,
What systems of watering and drainage
Rehearse your plunge in the sea?

Nostalgia for the man with a sword,
For gangrene and femoral blood;
Not even your keeper denies you.

Hurtle bull, to the sea: charge, at nothing,
And as you would wound, grant death
To a matador of salt, sand, and spray.

Invitation To The Air

(Te invito, sombra, al aire)

Shade, I invite you to the air,
Shade of twenty centuries,
To the truth of air,
Of air, of air, of air.
Shadow that never left
Your cavern, or to earth
Returned a jot of that sound,
That at birth brought you air
Of air, of air, of air.
Shade without light, delving
For the profundities
Of twenty tombs, twenty
Hollow centuries without air,
Of air, of air, of air.
Shade, to the summits, shade,
Of the truth of air,
Of air, of air, of air!

The Cry

(Vendo nubes de colores)

I sell clouds of colours,
Ellipses, reddened
To temper the heat!

I sell purple cirrus,
And pink, dawns
And golden sunsets!

The yellow star
Of the heavenly peach
Caught in the green branches,

I sell the snow, the flame,
And the song of the crier.

Coming And Going

(Por la tarde, ya al subir)

In the afternoon, ascending
In the evening, in descending,
I want to tread the blue
Snow of Jacaranda.

Is blue afternoon, ahead?
Is that lilac night, behind me?
I want to tread the blue
Snow of Jacaranda.

If the sombre bird should sing,
Let its blue be that blue,
I want to tread the blue
Snow of Jacaranda.

If the blackbird warbles,
Let his warbling be lilac,
I want to tread the blue
Snow of Jacaranda.

Blue snow now, on the way,
And lilac snow, returning;
I want to tread the blue
Snow of Jacaranda.

*(Note: Jacaranda is a tropical and sub-tropical genus
of shrubs and trees with blue/purple flowers)*

Blue

(Llegó el azul y se pintó su tiempo)

1.

Blue arrived, and its time was painted.

2.

How many blues did the Mediterranean give?

3.

Venus, mother of the sea of blues.

4.

The blue of the Greeks rests, like a god, on columns.

5.

The delicate Medieval blue.

6.

The Virgin brought her virgin blue; blue Maria, blue Our Lady.

7.

To his palette it descended. It brought the most secret heavenly blue.
Kneeling, he painted those blues. The angels baptised him with blue.
They named him: Beata Blue Angelico.

8.

There are celestial palettes like wings, descended from the white of clouds.

9.

The blues of Italy, the blues of Spain, the blues of France...

10.

Raphael had wings. Perugino also had wings that shed blues on his paintings.

11.

Brushes are feathers when their colour comes from you, indigo blue.

12.

Venice of Golden Titian blue.

13.

Rome of blues. Poussin among the pine-trees.

14.

Tintoretto blues envenom me.

15.

Alcohol sulphur phosphorous blue El Greco. El Greco blue poisonous verdigris.

16.

On Velasquez' palette I acquire another name: I am called Guadarrama.

17.

When I twine amongst nacreous flesh, I am called Rubens' joyous blue vein.

18.

And in dawn on the lakes, with a blue that repeats the echoes of night: Patinir.

19.

There's an immaculate Murillo blue, forerunner of the brilliance of chromes.

20.

Tiepolo too gave blues to his century.

21.

I am a sash, a thin dilute light blue Goya ribbon.

22.

I might say to you: – You are lovely, lovely as the glorious blue of ceilings.

23.

Explosions of blue in the allegories.

24.

In Manet's blue the echoes sing of a distant blue of Spain.

25.

I am also named Renoir. They call out for me. But I respond at times in a blue voice transparent with lilac.

26.

I am the bluish shadow, the clear silhouette of your body. A scandal through aged eyes.

27.

The Balearics gave their blue to painting.

28.

Sometimes the sea invades the painter's palette, and grants him a blue sky it only gives in secret.

29.

The shadow is bluer when the body that casts it has vanished.

30.

Ecstatic blue is nostalgic for having been pure blue in motion.

31.

Even if blue is not in the picture, it envelops it like a fan of light.

32.

One day blue said: – Today I have a new name. They call me: Blue Pablo Ruiz, Blue Picasso.

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