Classic Poetry Series

Robert Desnos

- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

Cascade

What sort of arrow split the sky and this rock? It's quivering, spreading like a peacock's fan Like the mist around the shaft and knot less feathers Of a comet come to nest at midnight.

How blood surges from the gaping wound, Lips already silencing murmur and cry. One solemn finger holds back time, confusing The witness of the eyes where the deed is written.

Silence? We still know the passwords. Lost sentinels far from the watch fires We smell the odor of honeysuckle and surf Rising in the dark shadows.

Distance, let dawn leap the void at last, And a single beam of light make a rainbow on the water Its quiver full of reeds, Sign of the return of archers and patriotic songs.

Dove in the Arch

Cursed!
be the father of the bride
of the blacksmith who forged the iron for the axe
with which the woodsman hacked down the oak
from which the bed was carved
in which was conceived the great-grandfather
of the man who was driving the carriage
in which your mother met your father.

Ebony Life

A frightening stillness will mark that day

And the shadow of streetlights and fire-alarms will exhaust the light

All things, the quietest and the loudest, will be silent

The suckling brats will die

The tugboats the locomotives the wind will glide by in silence

We will hear the great voice which coming from far away will pass over the city

We will wait a long time for it

Then at the rich man's time of day

When the dust the stones the missing tears

form the sun's robe on the huge deserted squares

We shall finally hear the voice.

It will growl at doors for a long while

It will pass over the town tearing up flags and breaking windowpanes.

We will hear it

What silence before it, but still greater the silence

it will not disturb but will hold guilty will brand and denounce

Day of sorrows and joys

The day the day to come when the voice will pass over the city A ghostly seagull told me she loved me as much as I loved her

That this great terrible silence was my love

That the wind carrying the voice was the great revolt of the world

And that the voice would look kindly on me.

Epitaph

I lived in those times. For a thousand years I have been dead. Not fallen, but hunted; When all human decency was imprisoned, I was free amongst the masked slaves.

I lived in those times, yet I was free.
I watched the river, the earth, the sky,
Turning around me, keeping their balance,
The seasons provided their birds and their honey.

You who live, what have you made of your luck? Do you regret the time when I struggled? Have you cultivated for the common harvest? Have you enriched the town I lived in?

Living men, think nothing of me. I am dead. Nothing survives of my spirit or my body.

Fairy Tale

Many times upon a time
There was a man who loved a woman.
Many times upon a time
There was a woman who loved a man.
Many times upon a time
There was a man and there was a woman
Who did not love the ones who loved them.

Once upon a time Perhaps only once A man and a woman who loved each other.

I Have Dreamed of You so Much

I have dreamed of you so much that you are no longer real. Is there still time for me to reach your breathing body, to kiss your mouth and make your dear voice come alive again?

I have dreamed of you so much that my arms, grown used to being crossed on my chest as I hugged your shadow, would perhaps not bend to the shape of your body. For faced with the real form of what has haunted me and governed me for so many days and years, I would surely become a shadow.

O scales of feeling.

I have dreamed of you so much that surely there is no more time for me to wake up. I sleep on my feet prey to all the forms of life and love, and you, the only one who counts for me today, I can no more touch your face and lips than touch the lips and face of some passerby.

I have dreamed of you so much, have walked so much, talked so much, slept so much with your phantom, that perhaps the only thing left for me is to become a phantom among phantoms, a shadow a hundred times more shadow than the shadow the moves and goes on moving, brightly, over the sundial of your life.

Identity of Images (Identité des images)

I am fighting furiously with animals and bottles In a short time perhaps ten hours have passed one after another

The beautiful swimmer who was afraid of coral wakes this morning

Coral crowned with holly knocks on her door Ah! coal again always coal

I conjure you coal tutelary genius of dreams and my solitude let me let me speak again of the beautiful swimmer who was afraid of coral

No longer tyrannize this seductive subject of my dreams

The beautiful swimmer was reposing in a bed of lace and birds

The clothes on a chair at the foot of the bed were illuminated by gleams the last gleams of coal

The one that had come from the depths of the sky and earth and sea was proud of its coral beak and great wings of crape

All night long it had followed divergent funerals toward suburban cemeteries

It had been to embassy balls marked white satin gowns with its imprint a fern leaf

It had risen terribly before ships and the ships had not returned

Now crouched in the chimney it was watching for the waking of foam and singing of kettles

Its resounding step had disturbed the silence of nights in streets with sonorous pavements

Sonorous coal coal master of dreams coal

Ah tell me where is that beautiful swimmer the swimmer who was afraid of coral?

But the swimmer herself has gone back to sleep
And I remain face to face with the fire and shall remain
through the night interrogating the coal with wings of
darkness that persists in projecting on my monotonous
road the shadow of its smoke and the terrible
reflections of its embers

Sonorous coal coal pitiless coal

If You Only Knew

Far from me and like the stars, the sea and all the trappings of poetic myth,

Far from me but here all the same without your knowing,

Far from me and even more silent because I imagine you endlessly.

Far from me, my lovely mirage and eternal dream, you cannot know.

If you only knew.

Far from me and even farther yet from being unaware of me and still unaware. Far from me because you undoubtedly do not love me or, what amounts to the same thing, that I doubt you do.

Far from me because you consciously ignore my passionate desires.

Far from me because you are cruel.

If you only knew.

Far from me, joyful as a flower dancing in the river at the tip of its aquatic stem, sad as seven p.m. in a mushroom bed.

Far from me yet silent in my presence and still joyful like a stork-shaped hour falling from on high.

Far from me at the moment when the stills are singing, at the moment when the silent and loud sea curls up on its white pillows.

If you only knew.

Far from me, o my ever-present torment, far from me in the magnificent noise of oyster shells crushed by a night owl passing a restaurant at first light.

If you only knew.

Far from me, willed, physical mirage.

Far from me there's an island that turns aside when ships pass.

Far from me a calm herd of cattle takes the wrong path, pulls up stubbornly at the edge of a steep cliff, far from me, cruel woman.

Far from me, a shooting star falls into the poet's nightly bottle.

He corks it right away and from then on watches the star enclosed in the glass, the constellations born on its walls, far from me, you are so far from me.

If you only knew.

Far from me a house has just been built.

A bricklayer in white coveralls at the top of the scaffolding sings a very sad little song and, suddenly, in the tray full of mortar, the future of the house appears: lovers' kisses and double suicides nakedness in the bedrooms strange beautiful women

and their midnight dreams, voluptuous secrets caught in the act by the parquet floors.

Far from me, If you only knew.

If you only knew how I love you and, though you do not love me, how happy I am, how strong and proud I am, with your image in my mind, to leave the universe.

How happy I am to die for it.

If you only knew how the world has yielded to me.

And you, beautiful unyielding woman, how you too are my prisoner.

O you, far-from-me, who I yield to.

If you only knew.

Long Long Ago

Long long ago I went through the castle of leaves

Yellowing slowly in the moss

And far away barnacles clung desperately to rocks in the sea

Your memory better still your tender presence was there too

Transparent and mine

Nothing had changed but everything had aged at the same rate as my temples and my eyes

Dón't you just love that platitude? Let me go it's so rare for me this ironic

satisfaction

Everything had aged except your presence

Long long ago I went through the surf on a lonely day

The waves were unreal even then

The hulk of the shipwreck you knew about - remember that night of storms and kisses? - was it a ship or a delicate woman's hat rolled by the wind in the spring rain? - was there too

After that its happiness and dancing in the hawthornes!

The aperitifs had changed the names and colors

Of the rainbows framing the mirrors.

Long long ago you loved me.

Lying Down

To the right, the sky, to the left, the sea. And before your eyes, the grass and its flowers. A cloud, the road, follows its vertical way Parallel to the plumb line of the horizon, Parallel to the rider. The horse races towards its imminent fall And the other climbs interminably. How simple and strange everything is. Lying on my left side I take no interest in the landscape And I think only of things that are very vague, Very vague and very pleasant, Like the tired look you walk around with Through this beautiful summer afternoon To the right, to the left, Here, there, In the delirium of uselessness.

Sky Song

The flower of the Alps told the seashell: "You're shining" The seashell told the sea: "You echo"

The sea told the boat: "You're shuddering"
The boat told the fire: "You're glowing brightly"
The fire told me: "I glow less brightly than her eyes"
The boat told me: "I shudder less than your heart does when she appears"
The sea told me: "I echo less than her name does in your love-making"
The seashell told me: "I shine less brightly than the phosphorus of desire in your

hollow dream"

The flower of the Alps told me: "She's beautiful"

I said: "She's beautiful, so beautiful, she moves me."

Sleep Spaces

In the night there are of course the seven wonders

of the world and the greatness tragedy and enchantment.

Forests collide with legendary creatures hiding in thickets.

There is you.

In the night there are the walker's footsteps the murderer's

the town policeman's light from the street lamp and the ragman's lantern There is you.

In the night trains go past and boats

and the fantasy of countries where it's daytime. The last breaths

of twilight and the first shivers of dawn.

There is you.

A piano tune, a shout.

A door slams. A clock.

And not only beings and things and physical sounds.

But also me chasing myself or endlessly going beyond me.

There is you the sacrifice, you that I'm waiting for.

Sometimes at the moment of sleep strange figures are born and disappear.

When I shut my eyes phosphorescent blooms appear and fade

and come to life again like fireworks made of flesh.

I pass through strange lands with creatures for company.

No doubt you are there, my beautiful discreet spy.

And the palpable soul of the vast reaches.

And perfumes of the sky and the stars the song of a rooster

from 2000 years ago and piercing screams in a flaming park and kisses.

Sinister handshakes in a sickly light and axles grinding on paralyzing roads.

No doubt there is you who I do not know, who on the contrary I do know. But who, here in my dreams, demands to be felt without ever appearing.

You who remain out of reach in reality and in dream.

You who belong to me through my will to possess your illusion

but who brings your face near mine only if my eyes are closed in dream as well as in reality.

You who in spite of an easy rhetoric where the waves die on the beach

where crows fly into ruined factories, where the wood rots

crackling under a lead sun.

You who are at the depths of my dreams stirring up a mind

full of metamorphoses leaving me your glove

when I kiss your hand.

In the night there are stars and the shadowy motion of the sea,

of rivers, forests, towns, grass and the lungs

of millions and millions of beings.

In the night there are the seven wonders of the world.

In the night there are no quardian angels, but there is sleep.

In the night there is you.

In the daylight too.

The Ring of Stars

In order to make a star with five branches Where six would have been the same A circle must first be drawn In order to make a star with five branches ...

A ring!

One did not take so many precuations
In order to make a tree from many branches
Trees that hide the stars
Trees!
You, full of nests and song birds
Covered with branches and leaves
That you lift as far as the stars!

The Voice of Robert Desnos

So like a flower and a current of air the flow of water fleeting shadows the smile glimpsed at midnight this excellent evening so like every joy and every sadness it is the midnight past lifting its naked body above belfries and poplars I call to me those lost in the fields old skeletons young oaks cut down scraps of cloth rotting on the ground and linen drying in farm country I call tornadoes and hurricanes storms typhoons cyclones tidal waves earthquakes I call the smoke of volcanoes and the smoke of cigarettes the rings of smoke from expensive cigars I call lovers and loved ones I call the living and the dead I call gravediggers I call assassins I call hangmen pilots bricklayers architects assassins I call the flesh I call the one I love I call the one I love I call the one I love the jubilant midnight unfolds its satin wings and perches on my bed the belfries and the poplars bend to my wish the former collapse the latter bow down those lost in the fields are found in finding me the old skeletons are revived by my voice the young oaks cut down are covered with foliage the scraps of cloth rotting on the ground and in the earth snap to at the sound of my voice like a flag of rebellion the linen drying in farm country clothes adorable women whom I do not adore who come to me obeying my voice, adoring tornadoes revolve in my mouth hurricanes if it is possible redden my lips storms roar at my feet typhoons if it is possible ruffle me I get drunken kisses from the cyclones the tidal waves come to die at my feet the earthquakes do not shake me but fade completely at my command the smoke of volcanoes clothes me with its vapors and the smoke of cigarettes perfumes me and the rings of cigar smoke crown me loves and love so long hunted find refuge in me lovers listen to my voice the living and the dead yield to me and salute me the former coldly the latter warmly the gravediggers abandon the hardly-dug graves

and declare that I alone may command their nightly work

the assassins greet me
the hangmen invoke the revolution
invoke my voice
invoke my name
the pilots are guided by my eyes
the bricklayers are dizzied listening to me
the architects leave for the desert
the assassins bless me
flesh trembles when I call

the one I love is not listening the one I love does not hear the one I love does not answer.

Under Cover of Night

To slip into your shadow under cover of night.

To follow your footsteps, your shadow at the window. That shadow at the window is you and no one else; it's you.

Do not open that window behind whose curtains you're moving.

Shut your eyes.

I'd like to shut them with my lips.

But the window opens and the breeze, the breeze

which strangely balances flame and flag surrounds my escape with its cloak.

The window opens: it's not you. I knew it all along.