

The Spanish Trilogy

From me and from this cloud, which wildly covered
The star that shone just now, look there! from me,
And from these mountains, taking on the night,
Night-winds just now, (and from me); from the stream
Down in the abyss, catching the fractured
Clearing in heaven, and from me; to make
One single thing of all this, Lord, and me;
From me and the feeling with which the tired flock
Penned within the fold, takes to itself
The great dark absence of the world – from me,
And every light in the dark houses, Lord,
To make one thing; and from the strangers, for I know
None of them, Lord, and from me and from me –
Just to make one thing; from the sleepers,
The strange old men in the hospice, coughing
Harshly in their beds, from children at strange breasts,
All drunk with sleep, from much that's inexact
And always me; from naught but me and from all
I do not know, to make the thing, Lord, Lord, Lord,

The thing that – earthwards from beyond – just like a meteor,
In all its gravity, weighs nothing but arrival.

II

Why must one go, loading upon himself
These alien things, perhaps just as a bearer
Lugs the basket filling with purchases –
All meaningless to him – from one market stall
To the next, trailing along behind,
And cannot ask: Master, why's there a banquet?
Why must one stand as lonely as a shepherd,
Exposed to this excess of influence,
Partaking of this space full of events,
So that he, leant on some tree in the landscape,
Could have his destiny, doing no more.
Yet he has not in his too open gaze
The quiet blessing of the flock. He has
Nothing but world, world in every vision,
In every inclination world. What gladly
Belongs to others forces itself in his blood, blindly, like
Discordant music, changes and passes on.

He rises in the night and has the bird-call
Out in the dark already in his being,
And feels courageous, taking every star
Into his sight, heavy – oh not like someone
Who makes this night to a feast for his lover,
Spoiling her with the heavens of his feeling.

III

May I remember this heaven, when once more
I have the clangour of cities about me, and
Vehicles snarled in the streets, may I,
Hemmed in by the crowd, once more recall
This earthy mountain edge, which the herd
Treads on its way home from afar.
May my spirit be of stone
And the shepherd's daily round seem fitting to me,
As he wanders, brown from the sun, and, taking aim,
Hems in his herd with a stone's throw, wherever it threatens to fray.
Slow of step, not light-footed, his body lost in thought
But in his stillness he's splendid. A god
Might slip into his shape and be not thereby lessened.

By turns he lingers and quickens his steps, like the day.

And the shadows of clouds

Pass through him, as though this vast space

Were thinking slow thoughts for him.

Be he who he may for you. Like the flame that blows by night

In the lamp's mantle I make my dwelling in him.

A glimmer grows still. Death

Might see its way clearer.

Translated from the German by Tony Stephens and Tom Morton.

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