

Ósip

Álvaro Mata Guillé.
Translated by Daniela Negrete.

*“Is it possible that I really exist,
and that true death comes?”¹*

Ósip Mandelstam would ask himself,
in a transcribed text,
no one knows by whom,
nor when,
on one of the walls of the prison,
drenched by a black sun,
awaiting the night,
of the graves

;

going and coming
is an illusion,
another mirage
I would tell myself,

while I would listen without listening to the rain,
while I looked without looking at the birds,
while I escaped without escaping from that place
without place,
from the country of the absent,
of the names,

while the dead leaves,
like snow,
clinked on the rocks,
asking the mirror cloistered in time,
by the abyss,
by the abandonment,
by my death

;

far from there,
the trees would flee from the horror,
trying to decipher the song of the birds lying on the snow,
while Ósip,
was still among the graves,
in the paleness of the breath,
on the dry teeth. The prison
would extend to the streets,
to the cities,

it would reach the hallways,
the bedrooms,
the benches,
it would mix to the wind. Ósip,
would try to disguise his mutation into dust,
speaking with the clouds,
with the parks,
with other trees

;

sometimes
they would hallucinate with the drops reflected in the water,
with a bird that would twitter,
the wind in a cloud
or with the leaves on the tree,

but
his eyes would accumulate the mist from the tombs,
the cold,
the ashes. His face
showed between the teeth,
emaciated arms,
legs,
the sun
was not the sun,

some branches would fall,
the haze would come near,
the lethargy

;

they searched for him
between the cedars and almond trees,
in the sepulchers, in the caverns,
in the dead listings,
between faces of cadavers
and skeletons,

they spelled the shadows,
the names,
the silence in the silence,

but,
only the muteness
took hold of the strangeness

;

why remain,
he would ask himself,
drifted by the rumor of some birds,
those which fluttered amongst the dead,
in other shadows,
farther from the snow,

why exist,
he would insist on asking,
while the birds would distance themselves from the urns,
toward the forest

;

other times,
he would try to describe the opacity of the drops on the leaves
accumulated like dust on the crevices,
in the puddles,
in the fog,
in the order of things:

explaining the fear,
the prow, the torture,
the discouragement,
trapping them in a crumbled paper,
in the walls,
in a brick,
in the clay forming pools in the roughness of the cement
on the floor. The passing
of a cloud,
a bird,
the this, the that,
would at times fill the cavities of his eyes,

the rain corroding the blood,
the mouth,
the bones

;

on the benches,
by the hand of Nadezhda
embraced,
they would forget the choking,
the blackness of the sockets,
the under-eye circles,
the sutures,

the birds fluttering on the bones,
the paleness left on the clay among the dead.

It is said,
he died in a month of December, in March,
in January, in May,

when the snow
and the smoke,
would emanate from the graves

;

*“could it be possible that it really exists,
and true death come?”*

he would ask himself,
accompanied by some birds that fluttered,

by the graves,
by a black sun

.

¹ Quoted by Nadiezhda Mandelstam, in her book *Against All Hope*.