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## From What Country translated by John Haines

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## FROM WHAT COUNTRY

From what country are you,  
asleep among everyday things with their thirsty mouths,  
life bitten by dreams,  
and that grief you bear without shame down the avenue of monuments  
where forgotten gods and goddesses  
lift arms that are not there and looks of marble.

The old woman was spinning in her garden of ashes;  
mud walls, quagmires, howls at dusk,  
ivies, and cambrics, stiffened there,  
as they watched those flying wheels  
toward which the clay raised a threatening fist.

The country is a name;  
nothing will change if you, born just now, come  
to the north, to the south, to the mist, to the lights;  
your destiny will be to listen to what  
the shadows leaning over your crib have to say.

One hand will give you the power of smiling,  
another will give you spiteful tears,  
another the knife of experience,  
another the desire that turns inward, forming the pool  
of wasted things under your life,  
where snakes, water-lillies, insects, guilty thoughts, break the surface,  
corrupting your lips, the purest thing you have.

Then you won't be able to kiss with innocence,  
nor give life to the realities that cry out to you with tireless tongue.  
Stop, stop, you who are ragged with stars,  
Die while you still have time.

*Translated by John Haines*