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The Pyramid of Quetzacoat translated by K. H. Anton

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The Pyramid of Quetzacoat

I saw from the stairway
 the night
 and saw, one
 after another
 the heads of the executed.

The torch-pine's flames were dying out; drunken,
 the priests snored in their couches,
 gluttoned with flesh, with reddened
 hands
 and vestments.

"And I will leave this shitty country."
 "Monotza," he said
 "straighten up."
 They will again confuse order
 with fear. In vain
 I cleared off their hearts from slavery!
 —I must leave.

Blood on the first stair
 Blood of those crushed by the word
 They demanded greatness
 and nourished the mighty with their submission.
 They reared giants to groan under their weight.
 —I must leave.

Blood on the second stair
 Blood of those who raised the drum and the testicle.
 They have been liberated! They have succeeded
 in keeping the step:
 In ranks
 intoxicated
 with the march, they have come!
 —I must leave.

Blood on the third stair. Don't you listen to
 the guerrilleros' shout on the mountain ridges?
 At night you watch the bivouac fires and hear
 the distant song. . . They are echoes!
 On the high
 red-weed rock, on the bare
 cliff the voices come back
 and the peasants make the sign of the cross
 and cry.

Don't you listen to the shout of the massacred in the mountain ridge?

Blood on the fourth stair. "Who are you?"

The interrogator asked me
While the flashlight blinded me.
He had been my friend.

(Treachery always speaks about friendship in the past tense)

"Tezcatlipoca," I said: "I am Quetzacoatl
why does my innocence hurt you?"

Blood on the fifth stair: In Mojoa
(on the road to Puerto Soley)
the soldiers came down.

They were taking him away, tied up and barefoot
tied up they were taking him away, and blindfolded.

"Pablo Antonio," he used to write me,
"there are orders to get me,
because of the epigram. Tell Adelita about it!"

And the ones who presented butterflies as offerings
and the weavers of fables
and the girl dancers
—endowed with small playful bodies, with joyous waists—
they fled.

Blood on the sixth stair.

I was asleep, running a fever, when they came in
Insults by the edge of the bed woke me up.
"Look," they said,
"there sleeps the dreamer,
let's kill him,
that way we shall see what is the use of dreams."

Blood on the seventh stair

Blood on the seventh and eighth stair.

(Watch out, your steps!
Do not slip on your people's blood!)

Oh my friends, exasperated by the just
Oh the really moving ones,
whom Monsenior has classified as evildoers:
my little brothers on the Friday afternoon
beaten by the police,
tortured, to find out the net lines
of the last assassination attempt.
Your blood lies on all the stairs
that lead to glory.

Blood tracks.

Blood tracks.

(Bourgeois men and women peep through their windows)
And you stop and look to the valley
the well-shaped and white city besieged by misery
 It is Tula sinking
—How many times I wished to gather your children
as the hen gathers her chicks!

And I descended from the pyramid.

And I led my steps toward the sea.
It was already dark
when I saw Our Lady in the East, over the lofty moon,
—shreds of the mantle in the thistles—

“Trace back

your steps and climb the hill:
my children are hungry!”

and the wind was roaring in the valley
of tears.

Pablo Antonio Cuadra

*Translated from the Spanish
by K. H. Anton*