



**Epitopou (5th edition)**  
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Installation / performance  
**Mike Schertzer**

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## **Confluence** *(texts by Pablo Neruda & Mike Schertzer)*

A conversation.  
I speak because a conversation is what I desire.  
An exchange. A response, not applause,  
not rebuke, not approval nor ridicule.  
I want to hear a voice that speaks  
*swimming* words.  
And so I speak, I write, I listen and I wait.  
And I speak, and I write, and I listen and I wait...  
and I wait

for I was born in order to be born, to contain the steps  
of all that approaches, of all that beats on my breast like a new  
trembling heart

held briefly  
in arms where the moist and trembling quiet of memory  
comes unbound from the throb of what cannot live  
in the space of a single life

I remember no more than a day  
which, who knows, was never destined for me,

an interminable day  
which had never begun.

This is a story of ports  
where one arrives by chance and climbs the hills  
and so many things come to pass.

There is one hour alone, long as an artery,  
and between the acid and the patience of crumpled time  
we voyage through  
parting the syllables of fear and tenderness

we all have the words we deserve

I labour silently, circling around myself

but there is a door in every word

a radical empire of mingled unities  
draws itself together, surrounding me

there are certitudes  
a man can never get over.

I want to measure how much I do not know  
and this is how I arrive  
casually, I knock, they open, I enter and see  
yesterday's portraits on the walls,  
the dining-room of the woman and the man,  
the chairs, the beds, the salt-cellars,  
only then do I understand  
that there they do not know me.  
I leave and I know not which streets I walk,  
nor how many men that street devours,  
how many poor and tantalizing women,  
working people of various races  
and lamentable remuneration

if a ruin could speak it would confess

from false astrologies and somewhat dismal rites,  
changed into the undying and always laid aside,

I have kept a tendency, a solitary savour

in my corner of this universal weakness

I cannot measure the road that may have had no country

darkness is a map with too many roads

where a destination or a place of beginning  
must be imagined  
and then remembered,

where direction  
is a matter of intention

being lost is the always daring  
lover of being  
found

in this world, rushing, subsiding,  
I need more communication,  
other languages, other signs;  
I want to know this world

here, where the sky has been shed  
by a heaven that has crawled elsewhere

the evening speaks  
over me

a language I do not recognize  
takes me by the hand

the hand inside the hand,  
the unreachable reaching

I wished to swim in the most ample lives,  
the widest estuaries,  
and when, little by little, man came denying me  
closing his doors and paths so that I could not touch  
his wounded existence with my divining fingers

saddled with bad companions, with diffident dreams  
I love that tenacity which still survives in my eyes

In the science of tears a shrine one can't make out

*from this day forward  
every thought  
an exile*

Who loved the lost , cared for the absolute?  
The father's bone, the dead wreck's timber,  
his own goodbye, his very own escape,  
his own sad strength, his miserable god?

I lie in wait, then, for the inanimate, the hurt,  
and the strange testament which I uphold  
with cruel method, written in ashes  
in the form of oblivion which I prefer,  
the name I give the earth, the value of my dreams,  
the endless quantity which I divide  
with my weary eyes, every day of this world

the only remaining wilderness is my voice

I meet the storm and its voice of rupture,  
its voice from an old book, its hundred-lipped mouth,  
and it tells me something, something the wind  
devours every day

the unmeasured and unsound  
heaven has been approximated  
above us

I weep in the midst of what is invaded, amid the uncertain,  
amid the growing savour, lending the ear  
to the pure circulation, to the increase,  
without direction giving way to what is approaching,  
to what issues forth dressed in chains and carnations,  
I dream, burdened with my moral remains

*to be is effortless  
fanaticism*

How much does a man live, after all?  
Does he live a thousand days, or one only?  
For a week, or for several centuries?

*as the tip of fervor wanders*

I have lived  
for one day

How long does a man spend dying?  
What does it mean to say 'for ever'?

Lost in this preoccupation,  
I set myself to clear things up.

I sought out knowledgeable priests,  
I waited for them after their rituals,  
I watched them when they went their ways  
to visit God and the Devil.

They wearied of my questions,  
They on their part knew very little.  
They were no more than administrators.

Medical men received me  
in between consultations,  
a scalpel in each hand,  
saturated in aureomycin,  
busier each day.  
As far as I could tell from their talk,  
the problem was as follows:  
it was not so much the death of a microbe—  
they went down by the ton,  
but the few which survived  
showed signs of perversity.

They left me so startled  
that I sought out the grave-diggers,  
I went to the rivers where they burn  
enormous painted corpses,  
tiny bony bodies,

emperors with an aura  
of terrible curses,  
women snuffed out at a stroke  
by a wave of cholera.  
There were whole beaches of dead  
and ashy specialists.

When I got the chance  
I asked them a slew of questions.  
They offered to burn me.  
It was all they knew.

In my own country the dead  
answered me, between drinks:  
'Get yourself a good woman  
and give up this nonsense.'

I never saw people so happy.

Raising their glasses they sang  
toasting health and death.  
They were huge fornicators.

I returned home, much older  
after crossing the world.

Now I ask questions of nobody.

But I know less every day

I must pay for the grace  
I may never attain

Of the many men who I am, whom we are,  
I cannot settle on a single one.  
They are lost to me under the cover of clothing.  
They have departed for another city.

When everything seems to be set  
to show me off as a man of intelligence,  
the fool I keep concealed in my person  
takes over my talk and occupies my mouth.

On other occasions I am dozing in the midst  
of people of some distinction,  
and when I summon my courageous self,  
a coward completely unknown to me  
swaddles my poor skeleton  
in a thousand reservations.

When a stately home bursts into flames,  
instead of the firemen I summon,  
an arsonist bursts onto the scene,  
and he is I. There is nothing I can do.  
What must I do to single out myself?  
How can I put myself together?

All the books I read  
lionize dazzling hero figures,  
always brimming with self-assurance.  
I die with envy of them;  
and, in films where bullets fly on the wind,  
I am left in envy of the cowboys,  
left admiring even the horses.

But when I call upon my dashing being,  
out comes the same old lazy self,  
and so I never know just who I am,  
nor how many I am, nor who we will be being.  
I would like to be able to touch a bell  
and call up my real self, the truly me,  
because if I really need my proper self,  
I must not allow myself to disappear.

While I am writing, I am far away;  
and when I come back, I have already left.  
I should like to see if the same thing happens  
to other people as it does to me,  
to see if as many people are as I am,  
and if they seem the same way to themselves.  
When this problem has been thoroughly explored  
I am going to school myself so well in things  
that, when I try to explain my problems,  
I shall speak, not of myself, but of geography

if you have followed me here  
it's because you are also out of  
breath

Sometime, man or woman, or traveler  
afterwards, when I am not alive,  
look here, look for me here  
between the stones and the ocean,  
in the light storming  
in the foam.  
Look here, look for me here,  
for here is where I shall come, saying nothing,  
no voice, no mouth, pure,  
here I shall be again the movement  
of the water, of  
its wild heart,  
here I shall be both lost and found—  
here I shall be perhaps both stone and silence

to speak forbidden trees

to insinuate the grub  
burrowing beneath an oath

to wed imponderables  
and toss their vows  
into exasperation

to gather the petals of  
a fugitive season  
and wear them into battle

to approach concision with alms

to scream birds into being

to bless the rot  
of untimely truths

to wipe the earth from your knees  
for the last time

in a world without a sky

a statement is a sin

I stride along with calm, with eyes, with shoes,  
with fury, with forgetfulness,  
I pass, I cross offices and stores full of orthopedic appliances,  
and courtyards hung with clothes on wires,  
underpants, towels and shirts which weep  
slow dirty tears

beneath this bridge  
I have wept  
for your footsteps

leaning into the afternoon I cast my sad net nets  
towards your oceanic eyes

*how did love come to you*

through a tear in the fabric of your blindness  
with a promise protruding from its stem  
in the morning of every caress  
retreating, heartward and worldless  
a stain of belonging  
on the lip of an effort  
asleep in the arms of its silence

*how did love come to you*

Between lips and lips there are cities

within your secret name there is a window  
the world is desperate to enter

it crossed the bridge of my unfinished body  
and then vanished

it stole my voice to use as a map



Body of my woman, I will persist in your grace  
My thirst, my boundless desire, my shifting road  
Dark river-beds where the eternal thirst flows  
and weariness follows, and the infinite ache.

the lover bleeds  
where no one thinks to look

while the guests are arriving  
she stands in the back yard  
clutching the fence  
because she is sinking and cannot swim

If only you would touch my heart,  
if only you would put your lips to my heart,  
your delicate mouth, your teeth,  
if you would place your tongue like a red arrow  
where my crumbling heart is beating,  
if you would blow over my heart, near the sea, crying,  
it would ring with an obscure sound, the sound of train wheels,  
of dreams,  
like the to and fro of waters,  
like autumn in leaf

for every leaf there comes a day when it realizes  
that what it thirsts for is not to be found in trees

I want  
to do with you what spring does with the cherry trees.

fence after speechless fence

I collapse  
before your ripeness

At night, in your hand  
my watch shone  
like a firefly  
I heard its ticking  
like a dry rustling  
coming

from your invisible hand.  
Then your hand  
went back to my dark breast  
to gather my sleep at its beat.

The watch  
went on cutting time  
with its little saw.  
As in a forest  
fragments  
of wood fell,  
little drops, pieces  
of branches or nests  
without the silence changing,  
without the cool darkness ending,  
so  
the watch went on cutting  
from its invisible hand  
time, time,  
and minutes  
fell like leaves,  
fibres of broken time,  
little black feathers.

I placed  
my arm  
under your invisible neck,  
under its warm weight,  
and in my hand  
time fell,  
the night,  
little noises  
of wood and of forest,  
of divided night,  
of fragments of shadows,  
of water that falls and falls:  
the  
sleep fell  
from the watch and from  
both your sleeping hands,  
it fell like a dark water  
from the forests,

from the watch  
to your body,  
out of you it made the nations,  
dark water,  
time that falls  
and runs  
inside us.

And that was the way it was that night,  
shadow and space, earth  
and time,  
something that runs and falls  
and passes.

And that is the way all the nights  
go over the earth,  
leaving nothing but a vague  
black odour, a leaf falls,  
a drop  
on the earth,  
its sound stops,  
the forest sleeps, the waters,  
the meadows,  
the fields,  
the eyes.

I hear you and breathe,  
my love,  
we sleep.

the moon buries your secret name  
amongst the bones of my tired village

Between the lips and the voice something goes dying.  
Something with the wings of a bird, something of anguish  
and oblivion.

in that other place  
where my life is  
decorated  
with the stain of every moment

I reach for the holes  
in the lid of your voice

In the old days I went through life  
in the grip of a tragic love and cherishing  
a little leaflet of quartz  
and I nailed life down with my eyes,  
I shopped for generosity, walked  
in the market of greed, inhaled  
the most secret fumes of envy, the inhuman  
hostility of masks and men.

I lived a world of everglades  
where the sudden flower, the madonna lily  
devoured me in her shivering foam  
and wherever I set my foot my soul sideslipped  
into the jaws of death.

This is the way my poetry as born – no sooner than  
redeemed from nettles, won  
out of solitude like a punishment,  
or how it set apart its most mysterious flower  
in the brazen garden, as if to bury it.  
Locked out this way, like the dark waters  
that live in its deep channels  
I ran this way and that seeking the solitude  
of every being, the daily hatefulness.

but I have a hidden body  
that the world has never held,  
a hidden mouth the world cannot hear

and I have built an incomprehensible ladder  
and I have set it against the dark sky

and all this time I have been climbing

crossing his unfinished thoughts,  
trying to reach something, oh in search of you  
his pale eyes flutter in your net

I am the sentence  
love serves

and I listen to his instrument trembling within me,  
I hear the dream of old companions and of beloved women,  
dreams whose throbbing shatters me

he who nourished himself on pure geography and shuddering

my heart, it is late and without shores

to know something is to endure its disfigurements

Perhaps the natural weakness of anxious and distrustful creatures  
fitfully craves some stay in time, some space to fill

because when a brick is held to the ear  
one can hear the crumbling  
of everything that has ever been  
created in the image of permanence

Let what I am be then, in some part, at all times,  
set and secure, a passionate witness,  
taking itself to pieces carefully, unendingly preserving  
the obvious pledges made, the original duty.

our calling is  
to kneel  
beneath acceptance  
so that all of our prayers will begin,  
as they end

*I remember*

I have to remember everything,  
keep track of blades of grass, the threads  
of the untidy event, and  
the houses, inch by inch,  
the long lines of the railway,  
the textured face of pain.

If I should get one rosebush wrong  
and confuse night with a hare,  
or even if one whole wall  
has crumbled in my memory,

I have to make the air again,  
steam, the earth, leaves,  
hair and bricks as well,  
the thorns which pierced me,  
the speed of the escape.

Take pity on the poet.

I was always quick to forget  
and in those hands of mine  
grasped only the intangible  
and unrelated things,  
which could only be compared  
by being non-existent.

The smoke was like an aroma,  
the aroma was like smoke,  
the skin of a sleeping body  
which woke to my kisses;  
but do not ask me the date  
or the name of what I dreamed—  
I cannot measure the road  
which may have had no country,  
or that truth which changed,  
which the day perhaps subdued  
to become a wandering light  
like a firefly in the dark.

in this  
waiting sickness

every voice that manifests more than  
the echoes of a collapsing conscience  
cascades  
into the heart  
and all that is crucial  
ossifies  
and I am bound, with everyone else,  
to fathom  
how I have been, how we all  
have been  
marrowed with

the will to stand  
upright

Someone is listening to me and, although they do not know it,  
those I sing of, those who know  
go on being born and will fill up the world.

what we do not write for those who do exist,  
we write for those who do not exist

When I close a book  
I open life.  
I hear faltering cries  
among harbours.

I come out of books to people orchards  
with the hoarse family of my song

I have never understood  
  
with each conscripted breath  
  
the multitudes  
I must outlast

I learned about life  
from life itself,  
love I learned in a single kiss  
and could teach no one anything  
except that I have lived  
with something in common among men,  
when fighting with them,  
when saying all their say in my song

I wipe indictments from my eyes  
  
each day can bear more than sacrifice  
  
the wretched have not stolen the earth  
yet

I hear them

stumbling through necessity  
they word me,  
as they word all,  
away from the otherwise-  
inlands  
away

I am  
herded  
towards their certain  
and their blessed  
contagion,

towards their all-knowing  
retreat of omnitude

*begin*  
*again*

So, through me, freedom and the sea  
will make their answer to the shuttered heart

a word is time in retreat,  
a poem is its complete surrender

I am not sure that I make myself understood: when night  
approaches from the heights, when the solitary poet  
at his window hears the galloping horse of autumn  
and the trampled leaves of fear rustle in his arteries

everything falls into the hands which I raise  
into the midst of the rain

from the wall that has always been my limit  
I watch

love  
in its uniform of sacrifice

erases its name  
because it does not recognize itself  
in words

How much of the shadow that is in my soul I would give to have you back,  
the names of the months sound to me like threats  
and the word winter is like the sound of a lugubrious drum

calling to things which have vanished, to beings which have vanished,  
to substances incomprehensibly inseparable and lost.

I cannot lift the night  
into its morning

even exhaustion has a lock and a key

and I must pay for this  
proximity to

grace—

it limps as it sweeps  
time and consequence  
into corners,

and it hums  
a lullaby I remember  
the beginning is the end:

*there is nothing that you owe  
you have always been free to go*

Now the heavy eyelid  
covers the light of the eye  
and what was once living  
now no longer lives;  
what we were, we are not.  
And with words, although the letters  
still have transparency and sound,  
they change and the mouth changes;  
the same mouth is now another mouth;  
they change, lips, skin, circulation;  
another being has occupied our skeleton;  
what once was in us now is not.  
It has gone, but if they call, we reply;  
'I am here', knowing we are not,  
that what once was, was and is lost,

is lost in the past, and now will not return.

wreathed and unquiet  
my heart is  
the captive of its own longing for  
that far and  
fatal shore  
it has never left

While things make up their minds for me,  
I leave my will and testament,  
my shipshape box of tricks,  
in order that, with many readings,  
no one can ever learn too much  
if not the never-ending motion  
of a man clear and confused,  
a man of rain and happiness,  
energetic and autumn-bound.

And now behind this very page  
I go and do not disappear:  
I'll jump into transparency  
like a swimmer in the sky  
and then I'll get back to growing  
till I'm so small one day  
that the wind will take me up  
and I won't know my own name  
and I won't be any more when he wakes:

and then I'll sing in silence

because exhaustion is the privilege of the defeated,  
because time is a selfish lover,  
because the shelter I have claimed as my own has admitted  
the heavens as its proper roof,  
because I have at last parted the branches and stepped into  
the clearing where words cannot stand,  
I will for the sake of formality, for the sake of closure,  
deliver one final message.  
I will slide it beneath the gates, the gates that never open inward,  
the gates that never admit anyone.  
It is for the citizens, for the thriving and the seething,  
for the elaborate processions and institutions of endlessness,

for the silence that blows in over the walls and through your windows and  
over your sleep,  
it is for the life that sometimes gathers enough courage to crawl out from  
the corner of what is called *living* that  
I leave this—  
*you too have weapons.*

