

1

At what time must the birds lined up in gardens, trees, and cages sing?

Look to the law.

2

Let's appoint the village madman. Chief Justice on the Court of Appeals, with a vote and veto and seat at the table, a sane example to the debating powers-that-be and the people who in their hours of contemplation rest in chairs set out on the sidewalk, when twilight bloodies the screen with scrolls and pictures to make us believe that, of course, here it is, the disgusting fleshy finale.

Let's appoint the village madman.

3

We'll go around the world. Walking. Just for the exercise.
As preparation. For one reason or another. Because the New
Year. Because no one can take us seriously. Just for show.
But a real show.

Tiring, for sure. Some will die and others crawl. But while
the world obsesses over absolute kingdoms, we are walking,
always walking, disinterested, to our own beat. If you lose
the beat, as everyone knows and repeats, you can never win.
Come in to see us. We're totally starched and ironed. Eyes
on the horizon. Swallowing wind, clouds, elastic borders.
Always staring, and clocking in.

The same mold. The same handiwork. Without saying a
word—that's forbidden—without hearing a single word,
having no destination, cursing birth itself, heading for the
scrim of another world.

Men walking to where men don't exist.

4

Birthdays, celebrations. I died when it was time for high school. Since then we've seen only exhumations and the ongoing examinations—legal and illegal, underwater or lit by the moon—so today I'm asking for a little peace, a natural interval in which to behold the meager imagination deployed in observances for the dead.

Landscapes, communal feasts, and faces immortalized in bank calendars; traveling families and sports teams beaming for the comic camera; academics and diplomats holding a forum in the Republic of Cunaní.

But what, dear God, do you say if what matters most is the photo.

Never forget the photo.

5

Enough huffing and puffing to show you can blow away storm clouds. Thank you; but we're tired of the spectacle with its endless supply of birds and so much hopping in and out of pockets.

Enough already with your tales of personal miracles and unprecedented surprises (as old as the hills) given that no one can see through the window or the cowl. Stop, please, if just for a moment, tastelessly bragging about the group's competence which consists, in sum, of turning flesh into newsprint.

So as not to annoy, so as to clear the sky and earth of so much progress and to restore the enigma of history, I recommend that the highest and next highest powers—well, all the powers—legislate one more step back toward night: reinstate slavery. We will return to strip the perpetual present of so much wonder.

6

Dear friends: Farewell. Death comes between us. Leaving its trademark everywhere, on the loose at all hours, observing no holidays or holy days. Happily entertained.

You abided by the instructions and after the erasures and revisions you climbed on the tables to clap for the recount. Consequences even today. Until tomorrow. Until never again.

7

Definitive sentences do not appear in these pages unless they were previously published in the newspaper of record—as the law decrees and horizons vanish.

8

Lovely performance of *The Moors Overture* from '36 with the uniformed—yes uniformed—trumpeters in the balconies of the church and, below, in the street, the open-mouthed populace and powers-that-be. From a gate in the tower a solo machine gun marks the beat with regular blasts and, now that it's used far less than before, it inspires old yearnings for battle, enchanting the whole Sunday mob of children, parents, and balloons.

Isn't there one damn soul around here who understands the meaning of all this?

9

An excess of music entangles the hair and birds soften the heart. What do we get from flying in another language. Let's get out of here. It's a fantasy to think, like everyone else, that the parade will disappear, swallowed up by the fiery horizon.

Back from the bar crawl. Here they are, all out of control. Hollering, bursting into the house.

Mama, they signed up for the army!

It's the holidays, the movie house is full, the promenade overflows.

A few are leaning against telephone poles.

Already going bald, young men bang on their drums. Eyebrows arch above violins. Impossible to hold back tears. The birds refuse to fly; they perch, seated, as attentive as if they were in class. It's an illusion to think they sleep in trees; that they escape out the window; that they peck at the air; that velocity is gained with the feet drawn up; or that they are free.

Binoculars, mama!

10

If you put your ear to the naked earth, you will precisely hear the murderers' names.

11

Can we go on like this? Wherever one goes, on a walk, to work, to the desert, to the seashore, a hollow, a shelter, anyplace in the shade, there's a message, a sign at the foot of the column, in official gardens, among trees, even in ponds and underwater currents, in the tunnel, yes, under the bridge, in the office of the district attorney, by all the evidence, from every one of our pores, we are birthing the half-dressed dead.

12

They have sent me to the bottom of the sea. Without oxygen, of course. In street clothes, with blue envelope in hand.

13

Payment is due.

Who am I to extend credit in the middle of the musical avenue?

Payment is due, cash down on the counter or onscreen—you're free to count your bills or hit enter—but payment is being drawn on the earth, by the riot of flowers and lawns rolled out by the mile, as though it were all a gift of nature, born of a point in space, growing and stretching until it reaches us (how is it possible to conceive of something so beautiful?)

14

Advancing and retreating in a strange movement through the fog, the sea was giving us clues, and then erasing them. Appearing in the fabric of the horizon were rents of unsuspected clarity and shifting shadows, small rips at first, then blots that became forms: caves, animals, constructions hanging by a thread over the water where words and messages and fears from another world could only be read and repeated by the waves.

Then the earth pitched down in front of us, reaching for the coast which—along with your heart—kept absolute silence.

15

“*Noche*, from the Latin *nox*, from the Greek *nyctos*, descended in turn from the Sanskrit *nakta*.

In German one says *nacht*; in English, *night*, in Portuguese, *noite*; in French, *nuit*, in Catalan, *nit*, in Walloon, *nute*.” In Chile, night is eternal.