

A Grave ... because of New York

I

Until now, the Earth was depicted as a pear¹

I mean a breast

Yet, there is only a technical manoeuvre² between breast and globe:³

New York,

A four-legged civilization; every part of it is death or a road to death,
and in the distance are the means of the drowned.

New York,

A woman—the statue of a woman

in one hand she holds a scrap named freedom by documents
we call history and in one hand she smothers a child whose
name is Earth.

New York,

a body the color of asphalt. Around her waist is a damp girdle, her face
is a closed window... I said: *Walt Whitman* open it—"I speak the
password primeval"⁴—but no-one hears it save a god who does not
return to his dwelling-place. The prisoners, the slaves, the despairing,
the thieves, the diseased⁵ spew forth from his throat, and there is no
opening, no path. And I said: *Brooklyn Bridge!* But it is the bridge that
connects *Whitman* and *Wall Street*, that connects leaves—grass⁶ and
paper—the dollar...

¹ This line is reminiscent of a line from Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" (hereafter "Myself"), XXXIII, 31:
here the pear-shaped balloon is floating aloft.

² *Hila* means "ruse, artifice, stratagem". The translation "manoeuvre" does not, unfortunately, retain the connotation associated with the word in Arabic. (Hazo's "engineering trick" was tempting.)

³ *ash-Shahîda* means not only oblong but the Earth as well, much as "globe" has the two meanings in English. For this reason I have used "globe," not "oblong".

⁴ This is Whitman, "Myself", XXIV, 10, most likely a translation from the French: Adonis has only a basic knowledge of English. The French (Asselineau, p. 56) reads:

⁵ This list is from "Myself", XXIV, 12-14:
Je profite le mot de passe des premiers âges

Through me many long dumb voices,

Voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and slaves,

Voices of the diseas'd and despairing and of thieves and dwarfs

The French reads:

Voix des interminables générations de prisonniers et d'ésclaves,

Voix des malades et des désespérés, des voleurs et des avortons

(Asselineau, p. 56)

⁶ Surely a reference to Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

New York-Harlem,

Who is it that comes in a guillotine of silk, who is it that goes to a grave the length of the *Hudson*? Explode, you season of tears, cling together, you trifles of exhaustion. Blue, yellow, rose, jasmine: the light sharpens its pins, and in the pinprick the sun is born. Have you ignited, wound, concealed between thigh and thigh? Has the bird of death come to you and have you heard the death rattle? Rope, and the neck twisted in pain; and in the melancholy is the clock...⁷

New York-Madison-Park Avenue-Harlem,

laziness resembling work, work resembling laziness. Hearts are filled with sponge and hands are swollen like sugar cane. And from the heaps of filth and the masks of the *Empire State*, the odors suspended slab upon slab raise history up high:⁸

sight is not blind, the head is,
speech is not barren, the tongue is.

*New York-Wall Street-125th Street-Fifth Street,*⁹

A Medusean spectre ascends between buttress and buttress. A slave market of every race. Men living like plants in glass gardens. Invisible wretches submerged like dust in the web of space—spiraling victims:

the sun is a funeral
and the day a black drum.

II

Here,

On the mossy side of the Earth-rock, no-one sees me but a Black who is about to be killed or a sparrow about to die, I pondered: a plant living in a red flowerpot was transformed as I distanced myself from the threshold, and I read:
about rats in Beirut and other ones strutting in the silk of the *White House* armed with documents¹⁰ and nibbling mankind,

⁷ I translate *sā'a* as "clock" because of evidence later of its use in this meaning.

⁸ I read *ya'ū* ʔ-*tārīkha rawā'īhu tatadalla*... where the agent is masculine because *rawā'īhu* is removed. I considered *ya'ū* ʔ-*tārīkhu rawā'īha* where *ʿalā* would have to be transitive but this usage is extremely rare. I also considered *ya'ū* ʔ-*tārīkhu rawā'īha* where *ʿalā* is intransitive and *rawā'īha* a *lamyiz* but still opted for my third and preferred reading.

⁹ I suspect Adonis means Fifth Avenue but he uses *shārī* here and uses *āfīnyū* earlier so I opted to retain "Street" whether it is a mistake or not.

¹⁰ *bīʔ-wwaraq* could mean leaves, banknotes, documents, paper... I settled on documents. Once again the various meanings cannot be retained, most notable of which are those of money and leaves (Whitman).

about the remaining swine in the garden of the alphabet trampling poetry.

And I saw:

wherever I was—Pittsburgh (*International Poetry Forum*), Johns

Hopkins (Washington),¹¹ *Harvard (Cambridge, Boston)*, *Ann Arbor (Michigan, Detroit)*, *The Foreign Press Club*, *The Arab Club at the United Nations Headquarters (New York)*, *Princeton*, *Temple (Philadelphia)*.

I saw

the Arab map like a horse dragging its feet and time drooping like a saddlebag toward the grave or toward a darker shadow, toward the dying fire or toward an extinguished fire; the chemistry of another dimension is discovered in *Karkuk* in *Dahran* and that which remains of the fortress of Arab *Afyo-Asiz*.¹² And here is the world ripening in our hands. Come! Let's prepare for the Third World War, let's establish the first, the second, the third and the fourth agencies to reaffirm:

- 1- In that direction is a jazz party,
 - 2- In this house is a man who owns nothing but ink,
 - 3- In this tree is a sparrow that sings,
- and to announce:
- 1- Space is measured in terms of cages or walls,
 - 2- Time is measured in terms of a rope or a whip,
 - 3- The régime that builds the world is the one that begins by killing its brother,
 - 4- The sun and the moon are two dirhams beneath the Sultan's throne,

and I saw,

Arabic names in the expanse of the earth, more compassionate than the spring, shining but shining like a neglected star "he has no ancestors, and in his steps are his roots..."¹³

Here,

On the mossy side of the Earth-rock, I realize and I acknowledge.

I remember a plant that I call life or my country, death or my country—a

¹¹ I have corrected Adonis' *jin*. Perhaps Adonis means Johns Hopkins' School of Advanced International Studies in Washington D.C. Hazo, however, mentions his visit to Baltimore and not Washington: here, perhaps, is a genuine peccadillo on the part of the poet.

¹² This is a term that gained currency with the Soviets. Interestingly enough I found the following line in Whitman's "The Sleepers", VIII, 3:
The Asiatic and African are hand...

¹³ The quotation marks led me to believe that this was from *Leaves of Grass* but I could not locate it. I stumbled upon the phrase while reading *Aghāni Mihyar ad-Dimashqi*: it is in '*Faris al-Kalimat al-Gharibat-Mazmur*'.

wind that freezes like a blanket, a face that kills the revelry, an eye¹⁴ that fends off the light, and I am the first to oppose you my country,

I sink into your fire and I scream out:

*I infuse in you a poisonous elixir
and I give you life,*¹⁵

and I acknowledge: *New York*, in my country yours are the curtain and the bed, the chair and the head. And everything is for sale: the day and the night, the Black Stone of Mecca and the waters of the Tigris. And I announce: in spite of this you pant—you compete in *Palestine*, in *Hanoi*, in the North and the South, in the East and the West, with people whose only history is fire,

and I say: ever since *John the Baptist*, every one of us carries his severed head in a tray and awaits the Second Coming.¹⁶

III

You crumble you statues of liberty, you nails sunk into chests by a logic that counterfeits the logic of the rose. The wind rages a second time from the East, uprooting the tents and the skyscrapers. And there are two wings that write:

a second alphabet rises from the undulations of the West,
and the sun is the daughter of the tree in the garden of
Jerusalem.

Thus do I light my flame. I begin anew, I fashion and I forge:

New York,

a woman made of straw and the bed swings from void to void, over here is the dilapidated roof: every word is a

sign of a fall, every movement is a shovel or a pick.¹⁷

And on the left and right are bodies that want to change
love sight hearing smell touch and change—that
open time like a portal that they break,
and the remaining hours improvise

¹⁴ It is impossible to reproduce the Arabic grammar: "wind," "face" and "eye" are in the accusative.

¹⁵ There are no quotation marks but this line is boldfaced. I could not find it in Whitman and did not come across it in Adonis.

¹⁶ *Willada* means "birth" but I opted for "Coming" because of the currency of that expression in English.

¹⁷ I initially translated *fa's* as "axe" but I found the following line in "Myself", XXXXIII, 132 and opted for "pick".

I heard the distant click of their picks and shovels

sex poetry morals thirst speech silence
and destroy the locks.¹⁸

And I goad Beirut and her sister cities,
she leaps from her bed and closes the doors of memory behind her. She
draws close, she hangs from my odes and dangles, the pick is for the gate
and the flowers for the window, burn you history of locks.

I said: I goad Beirut,

— “Seek action. The word has died!”¹⁹ say the others.

The word has died because your tongues have abandoned the habit of
speech for the habit of mime. The word? Do you want to discover its fire?
Then, write. I say write, I do not say mimic, and I do not say transcribe.
Write—from the ocean to the Gulf I do not hear a single tongue, I do
not read a single word. I hear noise. Because of this I do not notice
anyone throwing fire. The word is the lightest thing and yet it contains
everything. The verb is a direction and an instant, and the word is all
directions and all time. The word—the hand, the hand—the dream:

I discover you O fire, O capital-city of mine,
I discover you O poetry,

and I goad Beirut. She clothes me and I clothe her. We flee like a ray
and we ask: who reads, who sees? The *Phantom* belongs to *Dayan* and *Oil*
flows to its resting-place. By God, *Mao* was not mistaken:

“weapons are a very important factor in war, but they are
not decisive. Men, not weapons are the decisive factor,” and
there is no such thing as final victory nor is there total defeat.

I repeated these proverbs and maxims, as the Arabs do, on *Wall Street*,
where rivers of gold of every hue flow coming from the sources. And I
saw among them Arab rivers bearing millions of corpses, victims and
gifts to the *Lord Idol*. And between victim and victim sailors guffaw while
they roll down the *Chrysler Building* returning to the sources.

Thus do I light my flame,
we live in a black clamour so that our lungs can be filled with the wind
of history,
we emerge from black eyes hedged in like tombs so that we can conquer
the eclipse,
we travel in the black head so that we can escort the coming sun.

¹⁸ This line echoes “Myself”, XXIV, 5-6:

UnscREW the locks from the doors,
UnscREW the doors themselves from their jambs.

¹⁹ Perhaps another Whitman quote or maybe one from Adonis. I could locate neither.

IV

New York, woman seated in the arc of the wind,
 a body more remote than the atom,
 a point hurrying in the space of numbers,
 a thigh in the sky and a thigh in the water,
 say where is your grass?²⁰ The struggle between the plants and the com-
 puters is impending. The whole epoch²¹ is suspended on a wall and here
 is the bleeding. Up high is a head that unites axis to axis, at the waist
 is *Asia*, and down below are two feet that belong to an unseen body. I
 know you, you corpse swimming in musk and poppy. I know you, you
 plaything of breast upon breast, I look at you and I dream of snow and
 I look at you and I await autumn.
 Your snow carries the night, your night carries people like dead bats.
 Every wall in you is a graveyard. Every day is a black gravedigger,
 carrying a black loaf, a black tray, etching in them the history
 of *The White House*:

A-

There are dogs lined up²² like a shackle. There are cats giving birth to
 helmets and chains. And in the alleyways that slink along the backs of
 rats, the white guard propagates like mushrooms.

B-

A woman walking behind her dog bridled like a horse. The dog walks like
 a king and around him the city crowds like an army of tears. And where
 the children and elderly, enveloped in a black skin, huddle, the innocence
 of bullets sprouts like a seed and terror strikes the heart of the city.

C-

Harlem-Bedford Stuyvesant: the sand of people thickens into tower upon
 tower. Faces weave destiny. The garbage is a banquet for the children
 and the children are a banquet²³ for the rats...in the eternal feast is
 another trinity: the tax-collector, the policeman, the judge—the power of
 destruction, the sword of annihilation.

D-

Harlem (the Blacks hate the Jews),
Harlem (the Blacks do not like the Arabs when they remember the slave
 trade),

²⁰ *Na'im* means both "stars" and "grass". Given the context I opted for "grass".

²¹ *ʿAsr* means "afternoon", too. I opted for "epoch".

²² Form VI of *r-b-t*, *tarābata*, is coined; form III means "to line up, to position oneself".

²³ *Walāʾim* is the plural "banquets" but I have used the singular in both cases because it reads better in English.

Harlem-Broadway (people enter the flasks of alcohol like invertebrates)
Broadway-Harlem, a festival of chains and sticks, and the police are a
 microbe of time. A single shot, ten pigeons. The eyes are boxes surging
 in a red snow and time is a crutch that hobbles. Onward, to exhaustion,
 old Black man, young Black boy. To exhaustion again and again.

V

Harlem,

I do not come from outside: I know your hatred, I know its delicious
 bread. There is only sudden thunder for the famine, there is only the
 lightning-bolt of violence for the prisons. I notice your fire advancing
 beneath the asphalt in pipes and masks, in heaps of waste, the throne of
 the cold wind embracing it, in banished steps shod in the history of the
 wind.

Harlem,

Time is dying and you are the clock:

I hear tears rumbling like volcanoes,
 I notice jaws eating mankind as they eat bread.
 You are the eraser with which to wipe away *New York*,
 you are the gate with which to pick her up like a
 leaf and cast her away.

New York = I.B.M. + SUBWAY coming from the mud and crime going
 to the mud and crime.

New York = a perforation in the terrestrial covering from which
 gushes forth madness in rivers upon rivers.

Harlem, New York is dying and you are the clock.

VI

Between *Harlem and Lincoln Center*,

I proceed like a wandering number in a desert enveloped by the teeth of
 a black dawn. There was no snow, there was no wind. I was like one who
 followed a spectre (the face was not a face but a wound or tears, the figure
 was not a figure but a dried-up rose), a spectre—(is it a woman? a man?
 is it a woman-man?) carrying bows on its breast and ambushing space.
 A gazelle ran by summoned by the earth, and a sparrow appeared sum-
 moned by the moon. And I realized that it rushed to see the resurrection
 of the *Red Indian*...in *Palestine* and her sisters,

and space is a ribbon of lead,
 and the earth a screen of the dead.

And I felt as if I were a mere speck flowing in a mass itself flowing toward
 the horizon the horizon the horizon. And I sank into riverbeds that

stretch on and on and that run parallel, and it occurred to me to doubt the roundness of the Earth...

And in the house was Yara,²⁴

Yara is a side of the second Earth and *Ninar* is another side. I placed *New York* between parentheses and I walked in a parallel city. My feet filled with the streets, and the sky is a lake in which swim the fish of spring and thought and the animals of the mist. And the *Hudson* was fluttering like a crow wearing the body of a nightingale. And the dawn advanced toward me like a child wailing and pointing to his wounds. I called to the night and it did not answer. He carried his bed and surrendered to the sidewalk. Then I saw him enveloped in a wind of which I have found none more delicate besides the walls and pillars... a scream, two screams, three... and *New York* jumps up like a half-frozen frog leaping in a waterless pond.

Lincoln

that is *New York*: leaning against a staff of old age and strolling in gardens of nostalgia, everything inclining toward an artificial flower. And while I look at you, amidst all that marble in Washington, and I see who resembles you in Harlem, I wonder: when will your impending revolution come? And I raise my voice: free *Lincoln* from the whiteness of marble, from *Nixon*, and from the watchdogs and hunting-dogs. Let him read with a new eye the *Black leader 'Alī ibn Muḥammad*,²⁵ and let him read the horizon that *Marx* and *Lenin* and *Mao Tse Tung* read, and that *an-Niffarī*²⁶ read, that heavenly madman who made the whole world transparent and permitted it to live between the word and the sign. And to read what *Ho Chi Minh* had wished to read, and '*Urwa ibn al-Ward*: '*I divide my body into many bodies...*' and '*Urwa* did not know *Baghdad*, and perhaps he

²⁴ Yara is the daughter of Mirene Ghossein, with whom Adonis stays when he is in the U.S. and who has translated some of Adonis' poems with Samuel Hazo. *Ninar* is Adonis younger daughter.

²⁵ 'Alī b. Muḥammad az-Zanjī, known as Ṣāhib az-Zanj, led the negro slave rebellion in Southern Iraq between 255/868 and 270/883. He is said to have been of Arab origin and claimed he was an 'Alid, taking the title Mahdī. He did not, however, subscribe to Shi'ī but to Khārījī doctrine. After initial success his rebellion was quelled by al-Muwāffaq who offered him a free pardon which he refused. He was subsequently killed in battle.

²⁶ 'Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Ḥasan an-Niffarī is an ... obscure figure in the history of Islamic mysticism. He appears to have flourished in the first half of the fourth century of the Hijra and according to Ḥajjī Khalīfa died in 354'. He is the author of *Kitāb al-Mawāqif* and the *Kitāb al-Mukhābāt*, from the Introduction to the translation of which I have taken the above quotation by Arberry. Adonis has a poem entitled 'an-Niffarī' and the second *ḥaṣṣ* of '*Aḡāṭim an-Nahār wa'l-Layl*' is entitled *ḥaṣṣ al-mawāqif* after an-Niffarī's categories.

refused to visit *Damascus*. He remained where the desert is a second shoulder, a partner of the bearer of death. And he left to whomsoever loves the future a piece of the sun soaked in the blood of a gazelle²⁷ to which he called out: my beloved! And he reached an agreement with the horizon whereby his home would be the last.

Lincoln,

that is *New York*: a mirror that reflects nothing but Washington. And this is Washington: a mirror that reflects two images²⁸—Nixon and the weeping of the world. Join the dance of the weeping; arise. There is still place, there is still music²⁹... I love passionately the dance of the weeping that transforms into a dove that transforms into a flood. “The world is in need of a flood...”

I said weeping and I meant anger. I meant also the questions: How do I convince *al-Ma Sārra* of the existence of *Abū ḡ-ṢAlāʿ?* The banks of the Euphrates of the Euphrates? How do I replace the helmet with the spike of grain? (One needs courage to submit other questions to the Prophet and to Scripture), I say and I notice clouds adorned with fire; I say and I notice people flowing like tears.

VII

New York,

I confine you between a word and a word. I seize you, I roll you; I write you and I erase you. Hot cold, a hybrid. Awake asleep, a hybrid. I sit above you and I sigh. I precede you and I instruct you to walk behind me. I annihilated you with my eyes, you, one pulverized with fright. I tried to command your streets: throw yourselves down between my thighs so that I may grant you another dimension; and to command³⁰ your thighs: wash yourselves so that I may give you new names.

I could not find a difference between a body with a head bearing branches that we call a tree, and a body with a head bearing fine threads that we call man. And I confused a stone and a car, and shoes appeared in the shop-windows like a policeman's helmet and a loaf like a sheet of zinc.

²⁷ *Ghazala* also means “the disc of the sun”.

²⁸ I translate *wajhān* as “images” because I feel that “image” best conveys in English the variety of meanings that *wajh* conveys in Arabic.

²⁹ I prefer the meaning of “musical number” and by extension “music” to the feast “rǧīe” for *dawr*.

³⁰ *Asṭyāʿ* is *badal* (in apposition) to *shawāʿir* which is the *maḡʿūl bihi* (object) of the verb *ānarru*. Because the construction is unclear I have chosen to repeat *ānarru* in translation.

In spite of this, *New York* is not drivel but a word. But when I write: *Damasus*, I do not write a word but I ape drivel. *Dāl Mīm Shīn Qāf*... all still noise, I mean something of the wind. It flowed out of my ink once, never to return. Time stands guarding the threshold asking: when will you return, when will you enter? Likewise, Beirut, Cairo, Baghdad are sheer drivel like the fine dust of the sun...

a sun, two suns, three, a hundred...³¹
 (*a man*³² gets up, in his eyes tranquility mixed with anxiety. He quits his wives and his children and leaves carrying a rifle. A sun, two suns, three, a hundred... here he is like a thread, defeated, huddling within himself. He sits in a coffee-shop. The coffee-shop is filled with stones and puppets that we call men, with frogs vomiting speech and soiling the seats. How can a *man* rebel when his mind is filled with blood and his blood filled with chains?)

I ask you, you who say to me:

I know nothing of science and yet I
 specialize in the alchemy of the Arabs.

VIII

Mrs Brewing, a Greek woman in *New York*. Her house is a page from the book of the Mediterranean. *Mirene*, *Ni'mat Allāh*,³³ *Yves Bonnefoy*³⁴ ... And I am like one who is lost and who says things that should not be said. *Cairo* was scattering timeless roses among us and *Alexandria* was motley with the voices of *Cavafy*³⁵ and *Severius*. "This is a Byzantine icon..." she said and time clings to her lips like a red perfume. Time was askew and the snow reclined, (midnight, April 6, 1971)

and I sat up in the morning screaming a little before the hour
 of my return:³⁶ *New York!*

³¹ An echo, perhaps, of "Myself", II, 21:

...there are millions of suns left...

³² I initially translated *fulān* "so-and-so," then the generic "Joe" then "someone" but settled on "a man" because it was the one that read most fluently in English.

³³ I am not sure to whom Adonis is referring. I suspect it is either Ni'mat Allāh b. Aḥmad, known as Khalīl Šūfī (d. 940/1533) or Ni'mat Allāh Wālī, the Persian mystic (d. 730-1/1329-30).

³⁴ "Yves Bonnefoy has long been considered the most important poet to have emerged in France since the Second World War. He is also a literary and art critic of the first rank, a celebrated translator of English poets, particularly of Shakespeare, and a specialist in the problem of the relation of poetry to the visual arts". (Naughton, *The Poetics of Yves Bonnefoy*, p. ix).

³⁵ Konstantinos Petrou Kabaphes, better known as Constantine Cavafy (1863-1933), was a Greek poet born in Alexandria where he spent most of his life and for which he became known as the "Poet of the City". Although his output was small (about 150 poems), Cavafy is ranked among the great modern Greek poets.

³⁶ Here I think is meant Adonis' return to Lebanon from New York.

You mix the children with

ice and you make afternoon cakes. Your voice is oxide, a poison from which chemistry draws away, and your name is insomnia and suffocation. *Central Park* gives a banquet for its victims, and beneath the trees are spectres of corpses and daggers. The wind is left with only naked branches, the traveller with only a closed path.

And I sat up in the morning screaming: Nixon, how many children

have you killed today?³⁷

-“That is not an important issue?” (Calley)

-“It’s true that this is a problem. But is it not true that this also reduces the number of the enemy?” (an American General)

How can I give the heart of *New York* another expanse? Is it a heart that also expands beyond its limits?

New York-General Motors is death,

“We shall replace men with fire!” (*McNamara*)—they dry out the sea in which swim the revolutionaries and “where they make of the Earth a desert and call it peace!” (*Tacitus*).

And I woke up before dawn, and I woke up *Whitman*.

IX

Walt Whitman,

I notice letters to you flying in the streets of *Manhattan*.³⁸ Every letter is a vehicle full of cats and dogs. To the cats and dogs belong the twenty-first century and to man belongs annihilation:³⁹ this is the American age!

Whitman,

I did not see you in *New York* and I saw everything. The moon is a crust flung from the apertures, and the sun is an electric orange. And when a black road jumped from *Harlem* to the orbit of a moon reclining on its eyelashes, there was behind the road a light scattered about the extent of the asphalt, and sunk in like a seed, after it arrives at *Greenwich Village*, that other Latin Quarter, I mean the word that you get after you take

³⁷ Although I have not been able to confirm it, I believe that this is a line from Allen Ginsberg.

³⁸ This line echoes “Myself,” XX, 16-17:

To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow,
All are written to me, and I must get what the writing means.

The French reads:

Vers moi convergent les objets perpétuels de l’univers en un flot perpétuel,
Tous sont écrits pour moi et il faut que je découvre le sens de ce qui est écrit.

(Asselineau, p. 52)

³⁹ This is a *double entendre*: *ibida* means both “eternity” and “annihilation”.

the word *hubb* and put a dot beneath the *hâ*? (I remember that I wrote that in the Viceroy Restaurant in London, and all I had was ink. And the night was growing like down on a sparrow).

Whitman,

“the clock indicates the moment”⁴⁰ (*New York*—woman is rubbish, and rubbish is time heading toward the ashes)

“the clock indicates the moment” (*New York-Paolovian* conditioning, and people are like experimental dogs...where there is war, war, war!)

“the clock indicates the moment” (a letter come from the East.

A child wrote it with his artery. I read it: the puppet⁴¹ is no longer a dove. The puppet is a canon, a machine-gun, a rifle...corpses in roads of light connecting *Hanoi* and *Jerusalem*, *Jerusalem* and the *Nile*.)

Whitman,

“the clock indicates the moment” and

“I see what you did not see and I know what you did not know,”⁴²

I move in a vast expanse of tin cans
that cluster around one another
like cancers in an ocean
of millions of people-islands; every one
a pillar with two hands, two feet and a
severed head.

And you, “you criminal, you exile, you emigrant”⁴³

all that’s left is a hat worn by birds unknown to the *American* sky! *Whitman*, let it be our turn now. I make a ladder of my spectacles. I weave my steps into a pillow, and we shall wait. Man dies but he is more eternal than the grave. Let it be our turn, now. I wait for the *Volga* to flow between *Manhattan* and *Queens*. I wait for the *Hwang Ho* to empty where the *Hudson* empties. Are you surprised? Did the *Orontes* not flow into the

⁴⁰ “Myself,” XLIV, 10. The French:

L’horloge indique l’heure—mais qu’indique l’éternité?

⁴¹ *Duman* (singular *dumya*) also means “effigy, doll, statuette” but I prefer the mechanical associations of “puppet”.

⁴² This is another quotation I could not locate in Whitman. Perhaps it is Adonis.

⁴³ These words occur in “The Sleepers”, I, 44:

The emigrant and the exile, the criminal that stood in the box
The French reads:

L’émigrant, l’exilé, le criminel qui a comparu au banc des accusés
(Asselineau, p. 311)

Tiber? Let it be our turn now. I hear a convulsion and a roar of thunder. *Wall Street* and *Harlem* meet—leaves meet the thunder, dust meets the wind. Let it be our turn, now. The seashell builds its nests in a wave of history. The tree knows its name. And there are perforations in the skin of the world, a sun changes the masks and the end and waits in a black eye. Let it be our turn, now. We are able to turn faster than the wheel, to destroy the atom and to swim in an electronic computer that is pale or shimmering, empty or full, and to take a homeland from the birds. Let it be our turn, now. There is a little red book rising. Not the stage I tore to pieces beneath the words but this one that expands and grows, a stage of wise madness, and the rain that clears away so that it can inherit the sun. Let it be our turn, now. *New York* is a rock that rolls on the forehead of the world. Her voice is in your garment and in my garment, her coal-blackness stains your limbs and my limbs.⁴⁴ I am able to see the end, but how can I convince time to spare me so that I may see. Let it be our turn, let us raise the pick, now. And let time swim in the water of this equation:

New York + *New York* = the grave or the thing that comes from the grave,

New York - *New York* = the sun.

X

In the eighties I shall begin at eighteen. I said this repeatedly and Beirut did not hear.

A corpse this is, which merges the skin and the garment

A corpse this is, prostrate as a book not as ink

A corpse this is, which does not live in the morphology of the body nor its grammar

A corpse this is, which reads the Earth as rocks or a river (yes I love proverbs and truisms, sometimes:

if you are not passionate, you are a corpse!)

I say and I repeat,

my poetry is a tree and there is nothing between branch and branch, between leaf and leaf except the motherhood of the trunk.

I say and I repeat,

poetry is a rose of the wind. Not the wind, but the place where the wind blows, not the revolution but the orbit. Thus do I invalidate *Grammar*, and I establish a rule for every moment. Thus do I draw near and do not

⁴⁴ I could have substituted "mine" for the second "garment" and the second "limbs" in this sentence but I chose to repeat them to retain the cadence of the Arabic.

leave. I leave and do not return. And I head toward *September*⁴⁵ and the wave.

Thus,

I carry *Cuba* on my shoulders and I ask *New York*: when does *Castro* arrive? And between *Cairo* and *Damascus* I wait for the road that leads...

...*Guevarra* met with freedom. He sank with her in the bed of time and they slept. And when he awoke he did not find her.

He left sleep and entered the dream,

in *Berkeley*, in *Beirut* and the remainder of the beehives, where everything is ready to become everything.

Thus,

between one side that inclines toward *Marijuana* borne by the screen of night,

and one side that inclines toward *IBM* borne by a cold sun,

I cause Lebanon to flow as a river of anger, *Gibran* rising on one bank and *Adonis* rising on a second bank.⁴⁶

And I left *New York*, as I leave my bed:

woman is an extinguished star and the bed breaks:

as trees without space,

as crippled wind,

as a cross that does not remember the thorn.

And now,

in a torrent of first water, a torrent of pictures that wound *Aristotle* and *Descartes* I distribute myself between *al-Ashrafyya* and the bookstore of *Raʿs Bayrūt*, between *Zahratu ʿl-Ihsān* and the *Hayak* and *Kamal Press* where writing transforms into a palm tree and the palm tree transforms into a dove

where the *Thousand* and *One Nights* multiply and *Buthayna* and *Layla* hide where *Jamāl* travels between rocks and rocks, and not a soul finds *Qays*

But,

peace to the rose of oppression and the sand

peace to *Bayrūt*.

(New York, March 25-Bikfayya, May 15, 1971)

Rrall/Duke University

Translated by SHAWKAT M. TOORAWA

⁴⁵ Adonis uses its Arabic name *Aylūt* which I chose to translate because I felt that little was lost in the translation.

⁴⁶ Perhaps an oblique reference to Jubrān (I retain the common English spelling in the translation) and Adonis as *ruptures* in the spectrum of Arabic poetry (Jayyusi).