

It is stunned by the sunshine, like so many other days,  
This day on the island.  
In the backstage, inalterable, the mountains stand out.  
Firm against the horizon, the crossed arms figure of a native  
rises up.

A tremulous breeze rushes in from the uninhabited plain  
And toys with the fine jet wisps of hair  
That pour down the slopes of the native's head.

The chieftain's face looks grave,  
As his eyes scrutinize the approaching uncommon figure  
That his destiny prefigures,  
As it sways up and down across the bumps of the sea.

His candidness lends him no suspicion,  
No presages come to his temples.  
Nothing stirs him, he bets on nothing.

He is unaware that the children of his children  
Will not endure on these islands,  
For exhausted they will fall and won't rise anymore.

But others, transfigured, will come to take over their pain,  
Others that, like them,  
Will live side by side with sadness  
And will bear on their skin and their skulls  
The same scream of the sun.

## Ode to Tortuga

You are so near and so lost,  
trapped between the sky and the sea,  
prodigally historical and minutely small,  
time-disinherited Island.

You, that kept treasures in your entrails,  
You, that were a safety box for the merchants of fear  
and harbored in your beaches and woodland  
unfearful and unruly men: buccaneers, filibusters, and adventurers.

Just the mention of your name scared banners away  
or made them take a detour. You were the setting for arduous battles  
and desperate wars, some fought to depopulate you  
and others to own you, and excessively cruel and fiery  
were the men that competed for you.

Today, you are just a word lost in some book  
and some palm trees clinging to the beach,  
so dispossessed and so closely distant from Santo Domingo  
as the country that now owns you: Haiti.

## The Funeral Home

It is obliquely across from my house,  
this otherworldly hotel where the dead  
take swift but interminable naps,  
under the compassionate looks and the shared sorrows  
of grief-contorted faces.

Day after day silent guests in their wooden clothes  
are introduced into the sober dwelling  
where silence is thick and the hours last long.

It is painted in faint colors,  
as a token of the discretion expected  
when the dead are to be mourned,  
that this dwelling takes in  
with no distinctions or exceptions,  
and its confines are demarcated  
by the breath exhaled by the flowers,  
breath that hangs from the windows.

This house is always inhabited  
and ghosts in broad daylight  
you don't know it but they grab at you.  
They are so many those people  
that yearly pass by this home,  
that not even in Dante's hell  
has death damaged so many so much.

This sad enclosure for calm affliction  
and restrained weeping is another link  
in the chain devised by men  
in their trade with life and with death.

## Cemetery

Imponderably present and ephemeral  
like the shadows that inhabit it  
is this manor of the dead.

Everyday its residents die a little more  
in these cold premises, dead  
in the middle of the life  
lived in the great city.

Orchard of death sowed with graves,  
here you do not grow fruit  
but you reap memories.

Silence hangs from every corner  
only disrupted by the sighs of the dead  
after the last of the living has left.

The whisper of the wind lulls the mahogany  
and the pine trees and surreptitiously  
enters into the mausoleums, thus mitigating  
the boredom that spills over its walls,  
and stirring the paths that populate  
this corpse-devouring ground.

I know that in the middle of its sleep  
vigilance, latent and untiring,  
is watching over its walls  
the arrogant crumbly matter  
of its future guests.

I do not forget that I am also one of them.

## Condemned

I imagine that on some clock its hands slowly  
use up the space separating the numbers,  
and here nonetheless the afternoon dissolves itself  
into early semidarkness that seeps through the bars  
and cast a shadow over my soul.

Today is my last day and it was my last morning:  
I have been sentenced to die at daybreak.

My only annoyance is that others may dispose  
of my life like something no longer useful or needed.  
For the rest, I am untroubled. It is a consolation to reflect  
that life is a mere repetition of everyday occurrence.

Today is my last day, it was my last morning  
and will be my last afternoon.

Still a consolation: What will I miss?

My lips and my mouth have already relished  
the unmistakably taste  
of the most delicious food and of unique drinks.  
My eyes have meticulously hung on strange landscapes  
and my skin has been joined by other skins  
in a warm brief touch of love,  
in a burning exchange of feelings.

The rumor of waves has made me sleep  
and by the roar of the wind have I been awakened,  
at times, a look from a *she* has been enough  
and others not a caress my vanity has satiated.

In the tragedy of others I have found safety,  
in that of my kin, helplessness.

Rain has wetted me, the sun has dried me up,  
I have sold and I have bought,  
I have been loved and have been hated,  
I have not loved but have never hated,  
one can kill without hating;  
I have rolled around in pleasure,  
pain has wreaked on me havoc.

What will I miss? What should worry me  
is not what I would miss,  
but that which I have already missed,  
and which I'll never get back, even if the remains  
of the afternoon never get away from the bars  
that help define the gentle window.

Today is my last day, it has already been my last morning  
and my last afternoon and will be my last evening:  
The scaffold awaits me at daybreak.