

Two Poems

By Miguel Hernandez

Translated by Thomas Merton

This issue of The Merton Seasonal continues the publication of Merton's translations of the Spanish poet Miguel Hernandez. (See the Summer issue, pages 7-12 for further information.) The first poem included below, dated Sept. 25 in Merton's reading notebook, is a translation of "Un carnívoro cuchillo," the opening poem from Hernandez' second volume, El rayo que no cesa (The Unending Thunderbolt) (1936), which established his reputation. On the page facing this translation in his reading notebook, Merton writes, "Hernandez El Rayo que no Cesa Bite. Wit. Sharpness. Sophistication. Hardness. Subtlety. Thistles & lemons. Shadowed by trouble, covered with its dust after its explosion. Trouble like a faithful & unfortunate barking dog Relentlessness of it. He sleeps alone on top of it. He wears it like a crown. It sows [?] leopards all around him. It does not leave in him one good bone It grows up around him like a field of thistles. How much trouble for one man to die. 'Face of a potato recently taken out of the ground' said Neruda of him – unjustly! His wife said when questioned by writers [?] 'Though I do not remember what color Miguel's eyes were I was happy to come across some writing which he said that [sic] they were green . . .' 'Eyes' said R. Alberti 'of a lost horse watching, scanning everything for a secure path.'" The second poem, "Enmudecido el campo, presintiendo la lluvia" is from Ultimos poemas. This poem is left untitled, by Hernandez and by Merton.

A meat-eating knife
With sweet homicidal wing
Keeps flying and fluttering
All around my life

Twitching metal ray
With flashing fall
It pecks my side to build
A sad nest there

My breast a balcony
Of youth is flowering
Black curls, my heart
My heart white hairs!

Such is the evil power
Of the ray all around me
That I go to my youth
like the moon to the village

On my lashes I gather
 Salt of soul, salt of eye
 Spiderweb flowers
 Of my sorrows I gather

Where shall I go that perdition
 May not find me out?
 Your fate; the shore
 And mine is the sea

Rest from this hurricane
 Labor, love, hell
 Can never be.
 In spite of me my pain
 Will make me last forever

But in the end I'll beat you
 Secular bird and ray
 Heart, for no man
 Can make me doubt death

Go on, dagger, go on
 Flying and biting. One day
 Time will turn yellow
 On my photograph.

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Dumbstruck country presentiment, rain
 Earth's original void reappears
 Sometimes the sky's joy
 Turns to sorrow
 Over a thirsty shepherd

The dead called out by rain
 Raise themselves up out of their places
 Earth becomes a new-dug
 Fragrant grave
 The trees exhale their last
 And deepest odors
 Ready now to expire

Beneath the rain the voices of clocks
Attain great age, the anguish
Of the final hour:
Clang the signals of wounds –
Visible and of others
Inward bleeding

All is now friendly, collected, intimate.
Under the rainy sign
As though beneath the earth all things
Seemed to desire their last repose

Down comes the rain enchanted
Like transparent blood
I feel myself invaded by earth's damp
That will submit me to the dark
Forever and to downpours

Slowly the wounded sky
Bleeds out. The green
Deepens the shadow in the leaves
The trunks and the dead darken
In the rain's passion.