I look at the small waves of a new day on the Atlantic.

On either side of its bow, the ship leaves a white, blue, and sulphuric gash of water, foam, and churned-up depths.

The portals of the ocean are trembling.

Over them soar diminutive flying fish, silver and translucent.

I am on my way back from exile.

I gaze at the waters a long time. I am sailing over them to other waters: the tormented waves of my country

huge green palace of

10

Voyage and Homecoming

A LAMB IN MY HOUSE

I HAD a relative, a senator who, having triumphed in some recent elections, came to spend a few days at my house in Isla Negra. That's how the story of the lamb begins.

Well, the senator's most enthusiastic supporters came to throw a feast for him. On the first afternoon of the feasting, a lamb was cooked in the Chilean country style, with a huge fire outdoors and the animal's body stuck on a wooden spit. This is called "roast on the stick" and is enjoyed with lots of wine and plaintive creole guitars.

Another lamb was being kept for the following day's festivities. While his fate hung in the balance, he was tethered outside my window. All night long, he moaned and cried, bleating and complaining of his loneliness. It was heartbreaking to listen to the lamb's modulations, so much so that I decided to get up at dawn and abduct him.

I put him in a car and drove a hundred and fifty kilometers to my house in Santiago, where the knives would not get him. He had no sooner arrived than he set to munching greedily on the choicest things in my garden. He loved the tulips and didn't spare a single one. He didn't take liberties with the rosebushes, for thorny reasons, but he gobbled down the gillyflowers and the lilies with uncanny delight. There was nothing I could do but tether him again. And he set to bleating at once, obviously trying to move my heart as he had done before. I was desperate.

Now the story of Juanito and the story of the lamb will join. At about that time there had been a farm laborers' strike in the south. The landowners in the area, who paid the tenant farmers only twenty cents a day, ended the strike with sticks and jail sentences. One country boy was so scared that he hopped a moving train. The boy's name was Juanito; he was a devout Catholic and knew nothing of the things of this world. When the conductor on the train came by to check the tickets, the boy said he didn't have one, he was going to Santiago, he thought trains were for people to get on and travel whenever they had to. Naturally, they were going to put him off. But the third-class passengers—country people, as always big-hearted—took up a collection and paid the fare.

Juanito walked the streets and squares of the capital with a parcel of clothes under his arm. He didn't know anyone and so did not talk to anyone. In the country it was said that in Santiago the thieves outnumbered the other people, and the boy was afraid they would take the shirt and espadrilles he carried wrapped in newspaper under his arm. In the daytime he roamed the busiest streets, where people were always in a hurry and jostled out of their way this Kaspar Hauser fallen from another star. At night he also sought the most crowded neighborhoods, but these were the avenues with cabarets and night life, and he looked even more outlandish there, a pale shepherd lost among sinners. Without a cent to his name, he couldn't eat, and one day he collapsed on the ground in a dead faint.

A crowd of curious people gathered around the boy lying on the street. He had fallen in front of a small restaurant. He was carried inside and set down on the floor. It's his heart, some said. It's his liver, others said. The restaurant owner came over, took one look, and said, "It's an empty stomach." The corpse revived as soon as it had had a few mouthfuls. The proprietor set him to washing dishes and took a great liking to him. He had reason; the country boy washed mountains of dishes and was always smiling. Everything was going well; he had a lot more to eat than in the country.

The city wove its spell in a strange way to make the shepherd and the sheep meet one day in my house.

The shepherd felt like seeing the city and ventured a little beyond the mountains of dishes. He went down one street eagerly, crossed a square, and found everything fascinating. But when he tried to go back, he couldn't. He hadn't taken down the address of the hospitable premises that had taken him in, because he didn't know how to write, and he searched for them in vain. He never found them again.

Touched by his predicament, someone told him to come to me, Pablo Neruda, the poet. I don't know why the fellow suggested this. Probably because in Chile people are in the habit of passing on to me any strange thing that wanders through their heads, and of blaming me, moreover, for whatever happens afterwards. These are strange national customs.

Anyhow, the boy came to my house one day and made the acquaintance of the captive animal. Having taken charge of a lamb I didn't need, I found it easy to take the next step—taking the shepherd under my wing. I gave him the job of seeing to it that the gourmet lamb did not devour my flowers exclusively but from time to time also sated its appetite on the grass in my garden.

They took to each other on the spot. During the first days, as a formality, the boy tied a string around the animal's neck, like a ribbon, and led him from place to place. The lamb ate incessantly, and his personal shepherd, too; both roamed all over the house, even into my rooms. It was a perfect kinship; they were linked by mother earth's umbilical cord, by the natural law of man. Many months went by. Shepherd and lamb rounded their anatomies with fat, especially the ruminant, who blew up to such proportions that he could barely follow his master around. Sometimes he came cautiously into my room, regarded me with indifference, and went out, dropping a small rosary of dark beads on the floor.

It all came to an end when the peasant started to pine for the provinces and told me he was returning to his remote corner of the world. It was a last-minute decision, he had to keep a vow he had made to the Virgin who was patroness of his home town, and he couldn't very well take the sheep. It was a tender parting. The shepherd took the train, with his ticket in hand this time. It was all very sad.

What was left in my garden was not a lamb but a serious, or rather, a fat problem. What was I to do with the creature? Who would look after him now? I had too many political commitments.

My house was a wreck after the persecutions my militant poetry had brought down on me. The lamb took up his plaintive tune once more.

I looked the other way and told my sister to take him with her. Alas! This time I was sure he would not escape the roasting stick.

AUGUST 1952 TO APRIL 1957

The years between August 1952 and April 1957 will not be detailed in my memoirs, since I spent almost all this time in Chile and nothing out of the ordinary happened to me, no adventures that would amuse my readers. But I ought to mention some important things that occurred during those years. I published *Las uvas y el viento*, which had been written earlier. I worked intensely on *Odas elementales*, *Nuevas odas elementales*, and *Tercer libro de las odas*. I organized a Continental Congress of Culture, held in Santiago and attended by outstanding personalities from all the Americas. I also celebrated my fiftieth birthday in Santiago, and prominent writers came from all over the world: Ai Ch'ing and Siao Emi came from China; Ilya Ehrenburg flew in from the Soviet Union; Drda and Kutvalek from Czechoslovakia; and among the Latin Americans present were Miguel Angel Asturias, Oliverio Girondo, Norah Lange, Elvio Romero, María Rosa Oliver, Raúl Larra, and many others. I donated my library and other property to the University of Chile. I made a trip to the Soviet Union, as juror for the Lenin Peace Prize, which I myself had received during this period, when it was still called the Stalin Prize. Delia del Carril and I separated for good. I built my house La Chascona and moved into it with Matilde Urrutia. I started the magazine *Gaceta de Chile* and edited several issues. I took part in the electoral campaigns and other activities of Chile's Communist Party. The Losada publishing house in Buenos Aires brought out my collected works on Bible paper.

JAILED IN BUENOS AIRES

At the end of this period I was invited to a Congress for Peace which was to meet in Colombo, on the island of Ceylon, where I had lived so many years ago. It was April 1957.

An encounter with the secret police may not seem dangerous, but if it's the secret police of Argentina, that is something else again—not without humor, but with unpredictable consequences. This particular night, just in from Chile and en route to far-off lands, I fell into bed exhausted. I was just starting to doze off, when several policemen burst into the house. They ransacked the place: they picked up books and magazines, they rummaged in closets, and went through the underwear. And they had already taken away the Argentine friend in whose house I was staying, when they discovered me in my room at the back of the house.

"Who is this man?" they asked.

"My name is Pablo Neruda," I said.

"Is he sick?" they questioned my wife.

"Yes, he is sick and very tired after his trip. We got here today and we're flying to Europe tomorrow."

"Well, well," they said, and left the room.

They were back an hour later with an ambulance. Matilde protested, but this had no effect on them. They had their orders. They were to take me in, weary or fresh, healthy or sick, dead or alive.

It was raining that night. Thick drops came down from the heavy Buenos Aires skies. I couldn't understand it. Perón had already been ousted. In the name of democracy, General Aramburu had overthrown tyranny. Yet, without knowing how or when, whither or wherefore, whether for this or that, for nothing or everything, dead tired and ill, I was on my way to prison. The stretcher on which the four policemen were carrying me became a knotty problem as we descended stairways, entered elevators, crossed hallways. The four litter-bearers suffered and puffed. To make their distress even greater, Matilde told them in a honeyed voice that I weighed 110 kilos. And I really looked it, in sweater and overcoat, with blankets pulled up over my head—bulging like a huge mass, like Mt. Osorno the volcano, on the stretcher Argentine democracy had proffered me. I imagined, and this eased my phlebitis symptoms, that the poor devils sweating and puffing under my weight were General Aramburu himself carrying the stretcher.

We followed prison routine, and I was booked and my personal effects confiscated. I was not even allowed to hang on to the

juicy detective story I had with me to keep from being bored. But I really didn't have time to get bored. Bars clanged open and closed. The stretcher went through courtyards and iron doors, penetrating deeper and deeper, past banging noises and locks. Suddenly I found myself in the middle of a crowd, the rest of the night's prisoners, more than two thousand of them. I was to be held incommunicado; no one was allowed near me. Yet hands reached under the blankets to shake mine, and one soldier put down his gun and held out a sheet of paper for my autograph.

Finally they deposited me upstairs, in the farthest cell, with a tiny, very high window. I wanted to rest, to get some sleep, sleep, sleep. I couldn't. Day had broken and the Argentine prisoners were making an ear-splitting racket, a deafening uproar, as if they were watching a soccer match between the River and the Boca teams.

Some hours later, the community of writers and friends had gone into action in Argentina, Chile, and several other countries. They took me from my cell, carried me to the infirmary, returned my belongings, and set me free. I was about to leave the prison, when one of the uniformed guards came up to me and put a sheet of paper in my hands. It was a poem he had dedicated to me, written in crude verse, filled with careless slips, innocent like all popular art. I imagine few poets have received a poetic homage from the men assigned to guard them.

POETRY AND POLICE

One day on Isla Negra the servant girl told us: Ma'am, Don Pablo, I'm pregnant. Soon after that, she had a baby boy. We never knew who the father was. She didn't care. What she did care about was that Matilde and I should be the baby's godparents. But it was not to be. We couldn't do it. The nearest church is in El Tabo, a cheerful little village where we fill up the station wagon with gas. The priest bristled like a hedgehog. "A Communist godfather? Never. Neruda will not come in that door, not even if he carries your child in his arms." The girl went back home to her brooms, crestfallen. She did not understand.

Another time, I watched Don Asterio suffer. He is an old watchmaker, well on in years, the best maker of chronometers in

Valparaíso. He repairs the navy's instruments. His wife was dying –his old companion. Fifty years of matrimony. I thought I ought to write something about him. Something that would help him a little in his bitter moment. Something he could read to his dying wife. So I thought. I don't know if I was right. I wrote the poem. In it I put my admiration and my feelings for the craftsman and his craft. For that life, so pure among the ticktocks of old clocks. Sarita Vial took the poem to a newspaper. The newspaper, *La Unión*, was run by Señor Pascal, a priest. He would not publish the poem; it wouldn't be published. Neruda, its author, was an excommunicated Communist. He would not. The woman died– Don Asterio's old companion. The priest would not publish the poem.

I want to live in a world where no one is excommunicated. I will not excommunicate anybody. I would not tell that priest tomorrow: "You can't baptize So-and-So, because you are an anti-Communist." I would not tell another priest: "I will not publish your poem, your creation, because you're an anti-Communist." I want to live in a world where beings are only human, with no other title but that, without worrying their heads about a rule, a word, a label. I want people to be able to go into all the churches, to all the printing presses. I don't want anyone to ever again wait at the Mayor's office door to arrest and deport someone else. I want everyone to go in and come out of City Hall smiling. I don't want anyone to flee in a gondola or be chased on a motorcycle. I want the great majority, the only majority, everyone, to be able to speak out, read, listen, thrive. I have never understood the struggle except as something to end all struggle. I have never understood hard measures except as something to end hard measures. I have taken a road because I believe that road leads us all to lasting brotherhood. I am fighting for that ubiquitous, widespread, inexhaustible goodness. After all the run-ins between my poetry and the police, after all these episodes and others I will not mention because they would sound repetitious, and in spite of other things that did not happen to me but to many who cannot tell them any more, I still have absolute faith in human destiny, a clearer and clearer conviction that we are approaching a great common tenderness. I write knowing that the danger of the bomb hangs over all our heads, a nuclear catastrophe that would

leave no one, nothing on this earth. Well, that does not alter my hope. At this critical moment, in this flicker of anguish, we know that the true light will enter those eyes that are vigilant. We shall all understand one another. We shall advance together. And this hope cannot be crushed.

NEW ENCOUNTER WITH CEYLON

A universal cause, the fight against atomic death, was taking me back to Colombo. We crossed the Soviet Union en route to India in the TU-104, a marvelous jet making the flight just to carry our huge delegation. Our only stop was Tashkent, near Samarkand. The airplane would set us down in the heart of India two days later.

We were flying at ten thousand meters. To cross the Himalayas, the giant bird soared even higher, close to fifteen thousand meters. From that altitude, an almost motionless landscape can be seen. The first barriers come into view, blue and white spurs of the Himalayas. Somewhere below, the awesome Abominable Snowman walks around in his terrifying solitude. Then, on the left, Mt. Everest's mass looms like one more small irregularity in the diadems of snow. The sun beats down on the entire strange landscape; its light cuts out profiles, jagged rocks, the commanding sight of the snowy silence.

The American Andes, which I have crossed so many times, come to mind. The disorder, the Cyclopean fury, the raging desert of our mountains do not prevail here. The Asian mountains appear more classical to me, more well-ordered. Their domes have shapes like monasteries and pagodas in the infinite vastness. The solitude reaches farther out. The shadows do not rise like walls of awe-inspiring stone but spread out like the enigmatic blue gardens of a colossal monastery.

I remind myself that I am breathing the most rarefied air in the world and watching from the skies the tallest peaks on earth. It's a unique sensation in which are mingled clarity and pride, speed and snow.

We are flying to Ceylon. Now we are losing altitude over the hot regions of India. We left the Soviet craft in New Delhi to take this Indian airplane. Its wings quiver and creak in violent storm clouds. In the middle of this seesawing motion, my thoughts go down to the flowering island. At twenty-two I lived a lonely life in Ceylon, writing my bitterest poetry there, surrounded by the beauty of nature's paradise.

I am returning, a long time afterwards, for this impressive reunion in behalf of peace, whose cause the government has espoused. I see great numbers, perhaps hundreds, of Buddhist monks, in groups, dressed in their saffron tunics, immersed deep in the meditation that marks Buddha's disciples. By fighting against war, destruction, and death, these priests reaffirm the ancient sentiments of peace and harmony preached by Prince Siddhartha Gautama, known as Buddha. How far from this—I think—is the church of our American countries, a church like Spain's, official and belligerent. How comforting it would be to true Christians if they saw Catholic priests fighting from their pulpits against the gravest and most terrifying of crimes: atomic death, which slaughters millions of innocent people and leaves its biological maculae in the human race for all time.

I went off, guessing my way through the narrow streets, to look for the house where I had lived, in the suburb of Wellawatte. I had a hard time finding it. The trees had grown. The face of the street had changed.

The old place where I had written so many painful poems was going to be torn down soon. Its doors were worm-eaten, the tropical dampness had damaged its walls, but it had stood there waiting for this final moment of parting.

I found none of my old friends. And yet the island knocked on the door of my heart again with its sharp sound, with its immense scintillation of light. The sea was still humming the same old tune under the palms, over against the reefs. I followed the forest tracks again, I saw the elephants again, with their majestic walk, blocking the paths, again I felt the headiness produced by overpowering perfumes, and I heard the sound of green things growing and the life of the forest. I reached the rock of Sigiriya, where a mad king had built his fortress. As in other days, I paid homage to the huge statues of Buddha in whose shadow men walk like tiny insects.

And I went away once more, knowing that this time I was never to return.

SECOND VISIT TO CHINA

From this peace congress in Colombo I flew across India with Jorge Amado and Zelia, his wife. The Indian planes were always crammed with turbaned passengers, covered with colors and loaded with baskets. It seemed impossible to squeeze so many people into an airplane. A crowd got off at the first airport, and another piled in to take its place. We had to go on beyond Madras, to Calcutta. The plane shuddered under the tropical storms. A day like night, darker than true night, suddenly covered us, and then left to make room for a glaring sky. The plane began staggering again; lightning and thunder illuminated the sudden darkness. I watched Jorge Amado's face go from white to yellow and from yellow to green. And he saw the same mutation of color produced in my own face by the terror that gripped our throats. It started to rain inside the plane. The water came in in heavy drops that reminded me of my house in Temuco in winter. But ten thousand meters up, those leaks did not amuse me. The amusing thing, though, was a monk sitting behind us. He opened an umbrella and with Oriental serenity went on reading his texts of ancient wisdom.

We arrived uneventfully in Rangoon, Burma. The thirtieth anniversary of my residence on earth fell just about then, my residence in Burma, where I, a complete unknown, had written my poems. In 1927, to be exact, at the age of twenty-three, I landed in this same Rangoon. It was delirious with color, a torrid and fascinating place, and its languages were impenetrable. The colony was being exploited and preyed on by its English rulers, but the city was clean and luminous, its streets sparkled with life, the shop windows displayed their colonial temptations.

It was a half-empty city now, with bare shop windows, and filth piled up in the streets. A people's struggle for independence is not an easy road. After the people's uprising and the flags of freedom, we must open our way through hardships and storms. To date, I don't know the story of independent Burma, so cloistered is it beside the powerful Irrawaddy River, at the foot of its

golden pagodas, but—over and beyond the garbage in its streets and the sadness rippling past—I was able to imagine all those dark dramas that shake up new republics. It was as if the past still oppressed them.

Not a trace of Josie Bliss, my pursuer, the heroine of my "Tango del viudo." No one could supply me with information about her life or her death. The neighborhood where we had lived together no longer even existed.

Now we are flying away from Burma, crossing over the mountain spurs that separate it from China. An austere landscape, with an idyllic serenity. From Mandalay the plane soared over the rice paddies, over the baroque pagodas, over millions of palm trees, over Burma's fratricidal war, and entered the serene, linear calm of the Chinese landscape.

In Kunming, the first Chinese city across the border, our old friend, the poet Ai Ch'ing, was waiting for us. His broad dark features, his large eyes brimming with mischief and kindness, his quick intelligence, were once more a promise of pleasure during this long journey.

Like Ho Chi Minh, Ai Ch'ing belonged to the old Oriental stock of poets conditioned by colonialist oppression in the Orient and a hard life in Paris. Coming from prisons in their native land, these poets, whose voices were natural and lyrical, became needy students or waiters in restaurants abroad. They never lost confidence in the Revolution. Very gentle in their poetry but iron-jawed in politics, they had come home in time to carry out their destinies.

In Kunming, the trees in the park had undergone plastic surgery. They had taken on unnatural forms, and sometimes one could make out an amputation packed in mud or a contorted limb still in bandages, like an injured arm. We were taken to see the gardener, the evil genius who reigned over such an unusual garden. Stumpy old firs had not grown beyond thirty centimeters, and we even saw midget orange trees covered with miniature oranges like golden rice grains.

We also visited a bizarre stone forest. Each rock was elongated like a monolithic needle or bristled like a wave in a still sea. We discovered that this taste for rocks with strange forms was

centuries old. Many huge rocks with puzzling shapes decorate the squares in ancient Chinese cities. In bygone days, when governors wanted to give the emperor the best present they could find, they sent him some of these colossal stones. The presents took years to reach Peking, the huge bulks pushed for thousands of kilometers by dozens of slaves.

China does not seem enigmatic to me. On the contrary, even in the middle of its formidable revolutionary drive, I couldn't help looking at it as a country built thousands of years ago, constantly solidifying, stratifying itself. An immense pagoda: men and myths, warriors, peasants, and gods go in and out of its ancient structure. There is nothing spontaneous here, not even a smile. One looks everywhere in vain for the small, rough-hewn objects of popular art, made with errors in perspective, art that so often borders on the marvelous. Chinese dolls, pottery, wrought stone and wood, reproduce models that are thousands of years old. Everything has the seal of the object perfected and then repeated.

I had my most pleasant surprise in a village market where I found some cicada cages made of very fine bamboo. They were magnificent, one room superimposed on another with architectonic precision, each with its own captive cicada, forming castles almost three feet high. As I looked at the knots holding the bamboo strips together, and the tender green color of the stems, it seemed to me that the hand of the people, the innocence that can work miracles, had sprung back to life. Seeing my admiration, the peasants would not sell me that castle filled with sound. They gave it to me. And so the ritual song of the cicadas accompanied me for weeks, deep into Chinese territory. Only back in my childhood do I remember having received gifts as memorable and rustic as this.

We start our travels on a ship carrying a thousand passengers, peasants, workers, fishermen, a vigorous throng of people, up the Yangtze. Headed for Nanking, for several days we follow the broad river filled with vessels and work projects, crossed and furrowed by thousands of lives, everyday concerns and dreams. This river is China's main street. Very wide and tranquil, the Yangtze sometimes narrows and the ship has a difficult time passing through its tyrannical gorges. The extremely high walls on either side seem to meet overhead in the sky, where from time to

time a tiny cloud can be glimpsed, sketched with the mastery of an Oriental brush, or a small house among the scars in the rock.

Few landscapes on earth have such overwhelming beauty. Perhaps the violent mountain passes of the Caucasus or our solitary and forbidding Strait of Magellan are comparable.

I observe that a noticeable change has taken place during the five years I have been away from China, and it is more pronounced as I travel deep into the country this time.

This impression is confused at first. What do I notice, what has changed in the streets, in the people? Ah, I miss the color blue. Five years ago at this same time of year I visited the streets of China, always overflowing, always throbbing with human lives. But everyone was dressed in proletarian blue then, some kind of twill or light workingman's tweed. Men, women, and children wore it. I liked this simplified dress with its varying shades of blue. It was a beautiful thing to see innumerable blue specks crossing streets and roads.

This has changed. What has happened?

The textile industry has simply grown big enough in these five years to clothe millions of Chinese women in all colors, in flowers, stripes, and polka dots, in all varieties of silk; and enough also for millions of Chinese men to wear other colors and better fabrics.

Now each street is a delicate rainbow of China's exquisite taste, of this race that doesn't know how to make anything ugly, this country where the most primitive sandal looks like a straw flower.

Sailing on the Yangtze, I was struck by how faithful the old Chinese paintings are. Up there on the mountain pass, a twisted pine tree like a minuscule pagoda brings to mind the old imaginative prints. There are few places more unreal, more fantastic and surprising than these mountain passes that rise above the great river to incredible heights and display, in any fissure in the rock, age-old signs of this wonderful people: five or six meters of newly planted vegetables, or a small temple with a five-tiered roof, for contemplation and meditation. Farther up on the bald crags we seem to make out the tunics or the vaporous wisps of the ancient myths; they're just clouds and an occasional flight of birds, painted so often by the oldest and wisest miniaturists on earth. A profound poem comes out of this magnificent world of nature, a poem as brief and bare as the flight of a bird or the silver

lightning streak of water that flows, almost without stirring, between walls of rock.

But what is definitely extraordinary about this landscape is to see man working in tiny rectangles, on some little green dab on the rocks. All the way up, on the tip of the vertical walls, wherever there is a recess that holds a little bit of cultivable ground, there is a Chinese farming it. The Chinese mother earth is vast and hard. She has disciplined and shaped man, making him an instrument of work, tireless, subtle, and dogged. The combination of vast land, extraordinary human labor, and the gradual elimination of all injustice will make the people of this beautiful, far-flung, and profound China thrive.

During this voyage on the Yangtze, Jorge Amado seemed edgy and depressed. Many aspects of life aboard the ship irritated him and Zelia, his wife. Zelia, however, has a calm temperament that can carry her through fire without getting burned.

One of these irritants was the fact that, against our wishes, we were being treated as privileged persons on the trip. With our special cabins and private dining room, we felt uncomfortable in the middle of hundreds of Chinese squeezed together everywhere on the boat. The Brazilian novelist looked at me with sarcastic eyes and dropped one of his witty, biting remarks.

In truth, the revelations about the Stalin era had snapped a coiled spring deep within Jorge Amado. We are old friends, we have shared years of exile, we had always been united by a common conviction and hope. But I believe I have been less sectarian than he; my nature and my Chilean temperament inclined me toward an understanding of others. Jorge, on the other hand, had always been inflexible. His mentor, Luis Carlos Prestes, spent nearly fifteen years of his life in prison. These are things that cannot be forgotten, they harden the spirit. I justified Jorge's sectarianism to myself, without sharing it.

The report of the Twentieth Congress was a tidal wave that drove all of us revolutionaries to take new stands and draw new conclusions. Many of us had the feeling that, from the anguish produced by those painful revelations, we were being born all over again. We were reborn cleansed of darkness and terror, ready to continue the journey with a firm grip on the truth.

Jorge, on the other hand, seems to have started a different stage in his life on board that ship, between the marvelous cliffs of the Yangtze. From then on, he became quieter, more moderate in his attitudes and declarations. I don't believe he lost faith in the revolution, but he fell back more on his work and divested it of the direct political character that had marked it until then. As if the epicure in him had suddenly come out into the open, he threw himself into writing his best books, beginning with *Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon*, a masterpiece brimming with sensuality and joy.

Ai Ch'ing, the poet, was head of the delegation that guided us. Every night Jorge Amado, Zelia, Matilde, Ai Ch'ing, and I ate in our private dining room. The table was covered with golden and green vegetables, sweet-and-sour fish, duck and chicken cooked in unusual ways and always delicious. After several days this exotic fare stuck in our throats, no matter how much we liked it. At last we found an opportunity to get away from such tasty dishes, but our road was rough, and took a turn that became more and more twisted, like a branch on one of those contorted trees.

My birthday happened to come along around this time. Matilde and Zelia made plans to treat me to one of our own Occidental dinners that would break our diet. It was to be a very modest treat: a chicken we would roast our way, with a tomato-and-onion salad fixed Chilean-style, to go with it. The women made a big mystery of this surprise. They went secretly to our good friend Ai Ch'ing. The poet said a bit uneasily that he would have to talk to the others on the committee before giving an answer.

Their decision surprised us. The whole country was going through a wave of austerity. Mao Tse-tung had passed up his birthday celebration. Considering these severe precedents, how could mine be celebrated? Zelia and Matilde replied that what we had in mind was just the opposite: in place of that table covered with rich food—chickens, ducks, fishes that often went untouched—we would have one single chicken, a very modest chicken, prepared, however, our own way, in an oven. A new meeting between Ai Ch'ing and the invisible committee in charge of austerity measures concluded with the answer, on the following day, that there was no oven on the ship we were traveling on. Zelia and Matilde, who had already spoken to the cook, told Ai

Ch'ing that there was a mistake, a magnificent oven was warming up, waiting for our possible chicken. Ai Ch'ing squinted and his eyes gazed into the Yangtze's waters.

On that July 12, my birthday, we had our roasted chicken on the table, the golden booty of the controversy. A couple of tomatoes and slices of onion brightened a small dish. The huge table stretched on beyond it, embellished, as it was every day, with dishes gleaming with luscious Chinese food.

In 1928 I had passed through Hong Kong and Shanghai. That China was a colony ruled with an iron hand—a paradise of gamblers, opium smokers, brothels, nighttime muggers, phony Russian duchesses, sea and land pirates. In contrast to the great banking institutions in those huge cities, the presence of eight or more gray battleships revealed the insecurity and the fear, the colonial extortion, the death throes of a world beginning to smell like a corpse. With the sanction of contemptible consuls, the flags of many countries waved over the privateers of Chinese and Malay criminals. The bordellos were financed by international companies. I have already told elsewhere in these memoirs how I was attacked on one occasion, stripped of clothes and money, and abandoned on a Chinese street.

All these memories came back to me when I arrived in the China of the Revolution. This was a new country; I was struck by its ethical cleanliness. The defects, the small conflicts and misunderstandings, a good deal of what I am recounting, are just minor details. My predominant impression has been that of watching a triumphant change in the vast land of the oldest culture in the world. Countless experiments were underway everywhere. Feudal agriculture was about to undergo a change. The moral air was as clear as after the passing of a cyclone.

What has estranged me from the Chinese revolutionary process has not been Mao Tse-tung but Mao Tse-tungism. I mean Mao-Stalinism, the repetition of a cult to a socialist deity. Who can deny Mao the political personality of a great organizer, of the great liberator of a people? How could I fail to be impressed by his epic halo, his simplicity which is so poetic, so melancholy, and so ancient?

Yet during my trip I saw hundreds of poor peasants, returning from their labors, prostrate themselves, before putting away their tools, to salute the portrait of the modest guerrilla fighter from Yünnan, transformed into a god now. I saw hundreds of persons waving a little red book, the universal panacea for winning at ping-pong, curing appendicitis, and solving political problems. This adulation flows from every mouth, and every day, from every newspaper and every magazine, from every notebook and every other kind of book, from every almanac and every theater, from every sculpture and every painting.

In Stalin's case, I had contributed my share to the personality cult. But in those days Stalin seemed to us the conqueror who had crushed Hitler's armies, the savior of all humanity. The deterioration of his character was a mysterious process, still an enigma for many of us.

And now, here in plain sight, in the vast expanse of the new China's land and skies, once more a man was turning into a myth right before my eyes. A myth destined to lord it over the revolutionary conscience, to put in one man's grip the creation of a world that must belong to all. I could not swallow that bitter pill a second time.

In Chungking my Chinese friends took me to the city's famous bridge. I have loved bridges all my life. My father, the railroad man, instilled in me a great respect for them. He never called them bridges. That would have been a desecration. He called them works of art, a distinction he never conceded to paintings, sculptures, or poems, of course. Only to bridges. My father took me many times to contemplate the marvelous Malleco viaduct in the south of Chile. Until now, I had believed that the bridge stretching between the green of the southern mountains, tall and slender and pure, like a steel violin with taut strings ready to be played by the wind of Collipulli, was the most beautiful bridge in the world. The monumental bridge that spans the Yangtze is something else again. It is China's most magnificent feat of engineering, carried out with help from Soviet engineers. And in addition, it represents the end of an age-old struggle. For centuries, the city of Chungking was divided by the river, which kept it behind the times, slow, and isolated.

The enthusiasm of the Chinese friends who are showing me the

bridge is too much for my poor legs. They make me go up towers and climb down to great depths, to look at the water, which has been running its course for thousands of years, crossed today by this ironwork several kilometers long. Over these rails trains will run; these are bicycle paths; this enormous avenue will be for pedestrians. All this grandeur overwhelms me.

In the evening, Ai Ch'ing takes us to dinner in an old restaurant, home of the most traditional kind of cooking: a shower of cherry blossoms, a rainbow of bamboo salad, hundred-year-old eggs, lips of a young she-shark. Words can't do justice to this Chinese cooking in all its complexity, its fabulous variety, its extravagant inventiveness, its incredible formality. Ai Ch'ing gives us some pointers. The three supreme precepts for a good dinner are: first of all, flavor; second, aroma; third, color. These three elements of a meal must be respected to the letter. The flavor must be exquisite. The aroma must be delicious. And the color must be appetizing and harmonious. In this restaurant where we are going to eat—Ai Ch'ing said—another virtuoso element comes into play: sound. To the huge porcelain dish surrounded by delicacies is added, at the last minute, a small cascade of shrimp tails; falling onto a red-hot metal griddle, they produce a flute-like melody, a musical phrase that is always repeated the same way.

In Peking we were received by Ting Ling, who headed the writers' committee chosen to welcome Jorge Amado and me. Our old friend Siao Emi, the poet, was also there with his German wife, a photographer. Everything was pleasant and merry. We took a boat ride among the lotus flowers on the huge artificial lake built for the amusement of the last Empress. We visited factories, publishing houses, museums, and pagodas. We ate in the most exclusive restaurant in the world (so exclusive that it has only one table), catered by the descendants of the Imperial House. We, the two South American couples, met in the home of the Chinese writers to drink, smoke, and have a good time, as we would have done anywhere on our own continent.

I would hand the daily newspaper to my young interpreter, whose name was Li. Pointing to the impenetrable column of Chinese characters with my finger, I would say: "Translate for me."

He would start right in in his newly acquired Spanish. He read me editorials on agriculture, accounts of Mao Tse-tung's swimming feats, Mao-Marxist apologies, military news that bored me the moment he began.

"Stop," I would say. "Maybe you'd better read to me from this column."

And so I got the surprise of my life one day when I put my finger in a sore. It was a reference to a political trial in which the accused were the very friends we were seeing every day. They were still part of our "welcoming committee." The trial seemed to have been underway for some time, but they had never said a word about being under investigation, nor had they mentioned that their futures hung by a thread.

Times had changed. All the flowers were wilting. When these flowers bloomed, on orders from Mao Tse-tung, innumerable slips of paper had appeared in factories and workshops, in universities and offices, on farms and in hamlets, denouncing injustices, extortions, dishonest actions by leaders and bureaucrats. And just as the war against the flies and the sparrows had been called to a halt by order of the supreme commander, when it was disclosed that their destruction would bring unexpected consequences, so the period that had come in with the opening of the corollas also ended drastically. A new order came from above: hunt out the rightists. And immediately, in every organization, on every job, in every home, the Chinese began to force confessions out of their neighbors or to confess their own rightism.

My friend, the novelist Ting Ling, was accused of having had a love affair with one of Chiang Kai-shek's soldiers. It was true, but it had happened before the great revolutionary movement. She gave up her lover for the Revolution, and from Yenan, with her baby in her arms, she made the long march of those heroic years. But this did not help her. She was stripped of her position as president of the Writers' Union and sentenced to wait on tables at the restaurant of the same Writers' Union she had headed for so many years. However, she did her work as a waitress with so much pride and dignity that she was soon transferred to the kitchen in a remote peasants' commune. This is the last news I had of this great Communist writer, one of the most important figures of Chinese letters.

I don't know what became of Siao Emi. As for Ai Ch'ing, the poet who accompanied us everywhere, his fate was very sad. First he was sent off to the Gobi Desert. Later he was allowed to write, as long as he never signed his writings with his own name, a name already famous in and outside China. So he was condemned to literary suicide.

Jorge Amado had left for Brazil. I would take my leave a little later with a bitter taste in my mouth. I still have it.

THE MONKEYS OF SUKHUMI

I have returned to the Soviet Union and have been invited to make a trip to the south. When I get out of the airplane, after crossing vast territories, I have left behind me the great steppes, the factories and the highways, the large Soviet cities and the smaller towns. I have come to the imposing Caucasus Mountains populated by firs and wild animals. At my feet, the Black Sea has dressed up in blue to receive us. An overpowering scent of blossoming orange trees comes from everywhere.

We are in Sukhumi, capital of Abkhazia, a small Soviet republic. This is legendary Colchis, the land of the Golden Fleece, which, six centuries before Christ, Jason had come to steal—the Greek country of the Dioscuri. Later, in a museum, I will see an enormous bas-relief in Greek marble, recently dredged out of the waters of the Black Sea. On these shores the Hellenic gods celebrated their mysteries. Today the mystery has been replaced by the simple, hard-working life of the Soviet people. These are not the same people you see in Leningrad. This land of sunlight, wheat, and huge vineyards has another tone, a Mediterranean accent. These men walk differently, these women have the eyes and hands of Italian or Greek women.

I am living in the home of the novelist Simonov for a few days and we go swimming in the Black Sea's warm waters. Simonov shows me the beautiful trees in his orchard. I recognize them and at each name he gives me I repeat like a patriotic peasant: "We have it in Chile. We also have this kind in Chile. And that one, too."

Simonov looks at me with a waggish smile. I tell him: "I'm

really sorry that you'll probably never see the wild grapevine at my home in Santiago, or the poplars gilded by the Chilean autumn. There's no other gold like it. If only you could see the cherries blossom in spring and know the scent of Chile's boldo tree. If you could see how the peasants set the golden ears of corn on the roofs along the Melipilla road. If you could dip your feet in the pure, cold waters of Isla Negra. But, my dear Simonov, countries put up barriers, they play at being enemies, they exchange fire in cold wars, and we humans are cut off from one another. We reach the sky in fantastic rockets, but we don't reach our hands out in brotherly love."

"Perhaps things will change," Simonov says, smiling, and he flings a white stone at the gods submerged in the Black Sea.

The pride of Sukhumi is its fine collection of monkeys. Taking advantage of its subtropical climate, the Institute of Experimental Medicine has bred every kind of monkey in the world there. Let's go in. In huge cages we shall see fidgety and stolid monkeys, enormous and minuscule ones, hairless and hairy ones, monkeys with thoughtful faces or with a spark in their eyes. There are also sullen monkeys, and despotic ones.

There are gray monkeys and white monkeys; apes with tricolored rumps; thickset, serious ones, and others that are polygamous and won't let their females eat without permission, which they concede only after solemnly devouring their own food.

The most advanced biological studies are conducted at this institute. The monkey is used for the study of the nervous system, of heredity, and for delicate investigations into the mystery of life and its prolongation.

A small she-monkey with two babies catches our eye. One follows her around constantly, and she carries the other in her arms with human tenderness. The director tells us that the small monkey she babies so much is not hers but an adoptive child. She had recently given birth when another female, who had also just had a baby, died. This mother promptly adopted the orphan. From then on, her mother love, her every minute of sweetness, was given to the adopted child even more than to her own. The scientists believed that such intense maternal calling would lead her to adopt other babies that were not hers, but she has rejected

one after the other. Her attitude obeyed not simply a life principle but an awareness of the solidarity of mothers.

ARMENIA

Now we are flying toward a hard-working and legendary country. We are in Armenia. Far off, to the south, Mt. Ararat's snowy peak towers over Armenia's history. This, according to the Bible, is where Noah's ark came aground to repopulate the earth. A hard undertaking, because Armenia is rocky and volcanic. The Armenians farmed this land with untold sacrifice and raised their national culture to the highest place in the ancient world. The socialist society has brought extraordinary development and flowering to this noble, martyred nation. For centuries, Turkish invaders massacred the Armenians or made them their slaves. Every rock on the plateaus, every tile in the monasteries has a drop of Armenian blood. This country's socialist renaissance has been a miracle and gives the lie to those who speak, in bad faith, of Soviet imperialism. In Armenia I visited spinning mills that employ five thousand workers; immense irrigation and power works; and other powerful industries. I covered the cities and rural areas from end to end and I saw only Armenians, Armenian men and women. I met only one Russian, a blue-eyed engineer among the thousands of black eyes of this dark-skinned people. The Russian was running a hydroelectric plant on Lake Sevan. The surface area of the lake, whose waters empty out through just one channel, is too large. The precious water evaporates and parched Armenia is unable to gather its riches and put them to use. To beat the evaporation, the river has been widened. Thus the lake's level will be lowered, and at the same time, with the added water in the river, eight hydroelectric stations, new industries, gigantic aluminum plants, electric power and irrigation for the whole country, will be created. I shall never forget my visit to that hydroelectric plant overlooking the lake, whose pure waters mirror Armenia's unforgettable blue sky. When the journalists asked me for my impressions of Armenia's ancient churches and monasteries, I answered them, stretching things a little: "The church I like best is the hydroelectric plant, the temple beside the lake."

I saw many things in Armenia. I think Erivan is one of the most beautiful cities I have seen; built of volcanic tuff, it has the harmony of a pink rose. I shall never forget my visit to the astronomical observatory of Binakan, where I saw the writing of the stars for the first time. The trembling light of the stars was picked up; very fine mechanisms were taking down the palpitation of the stars in space, like an electrocardiogram of the sky. In those graphics I observed that each star has its own distinct way of writing, tremulous and fascinating, but unintelligible to the eyes of an earth-bound poet.

At the zoo in Erivan I went straight to the condor's cage, but my countryman did not recognize me. There he stood in a corner of his cage, bald-pated, with the skeptical eyes of a condor without illusions, a great bird homesick for our cordilleras. I looked at him sadly, because I was going back to my country and he would remain behind bars forever.

My experience with the tapir was something different. Erivan's zoo is one of the few that own a tapir from the Amazon, the remarkable animal with an ox's body, a long-nosed face, and beady eyes. I must confess that tapirs look like me. This is no secret.

Erivan's tapir was drowsing in his pen, near the pond. When he saw me his eyes lit up; perhaps we had met in Brazil once. The zoo keeper asked me if I would like to see him swim and I answered that I would go around the world just for the pleasure of watching a tapir swim. They opened a small door for him. He threw me a happy look and plunged into the water, puffing like some fabled sea horse, like a hairy triton. He rose up, lifting his whole body out of the water; he dived under, stirring up a stormy rush of waves; he surfaced, drunk with joyfulness, he huffed and puffed, and then he went on with his incredible acrobatics at top speed.

"We've never seen him so happy," the zoo keeper said to me.

At noon, during the lunch given for me by the Society of Writers, I told, in my speech of thanks, about the feats of the Amazonian tapir and I spoke about my passion for animals. I never skip a visit to the zoo.

In his answering speech, the president of the Armenian writers said: "Why did Neruda have to go visit our zoo? This visit to the

Society of Writers would have been enough for him to find all the animal species. Here we have lions and tigers, foxes and seals, eagles and serpents, camels and macaws."

WINE AND WAR

I stopped off in Moscow on the way back. For me, this city is the seat of so many accomplished dreams, and also the residence of some of my dearest friends. For me, Moscow is a feast. As soon as I get there, I go out alone into the streets, happy to breathe, whistling cuecas. I look at the faces of the Russian men, the eyes and the braids of the Russian women, the ice cream sold on street corners, the popular paper flowers, the shop windows, in search of new things, little things that make life important.

Once again I went to visit Ehrenburg. The first thing my good friend showed me was a bottle of Norwegian liquor, aqua vitae. The label had a great painted sailing ship. Somewhere else were the departure and return dates of the ship that had taken this bottle to Australia and brought it back to its native Scandinavia.

We began to talk about wines. I recalled my young days, when the wines of our country traveled abroad, in great demand because of their excellence. They were always too expensive for those of us who wore railwayman's clothing and lived a stormy Bohemian life.

In every country I would take an interest in tracking down the wine, from the time its life began at the "feet of the people" until it was bottled in green glass or cut crystal. In Galicia, Spain, I enjoyed drinking Ribeiro wine, which is sipped from a cup and leaves a thick stain like blood on the porcelain. I remember a full-bodied wine in Hungary, called bull's blood, whose onslaughts make the violins of the gypsies tremble.

My great-great-grandparents owned vineyards. Parral, the town where I was born, is the cradle of the crude musts. From my father and uncles, Don José Angel, Don Joel, Don Oseas, and Don Amós, I learned to tell the difference between new wine and filtered wine. It was hard for me to follow their liking for the unrefined wine that runs out of the cask, with its original and irreducible heart. As in all things, it was difficult for me to return to the primitive, the early lustiness, after having learned

the subtle distinctions of taste, having relished the epicurean bouquet. The same thing occurs in art: you wake up one morning with Praxiteles' Aphrodite and end up living with the savage statuary of Oceania.

It was in Paris that I tasted a noble wine in the noblest of homes. The wine was Mouton-Rothschild, with an impeccable body, undescribable aroma, perfect smoothness. It was at the home of Aragon and Elsa Triolet.

"I've just received these bottles and I am opening them especially for you," Aragon said.

And he told me the story.

The German armies were gaining ground in French territory. France's most intelligent soldier, poet and officer Louis Aragon, reached an advance post. He commanded a detachment of male nurses. His orders were to go beyond this post to a building located three hundred meters ahead. The captain in charge there stopped him. He was Count Alphonse de Rothschild, younger than Aragon and as quick-blooded as he.

"You can't pass beyond this point," he said. "The German fire is too close."

"My instructions are to get to that building," Aragon replied pertly.

"My orders are that you are not to go on, you must stay right here," the captain replied.

Knowing Aragon as well as I do, I am sure that during the argument sparks flew like hand grenades, answers like sword thrusts. But it didn't even last ten minutes. Suddenly, before the startled eyes of Rothschild and Aragon, a grenade from a German mortar struck the building, converting it instantly to smoke, rubble, and smoldering ashes.

And so France's first poet was saved, thanks to the stubbornness of a Rothschild.

Ever since then, on the anniversary of this incident, Aragon receives several *bonnes bouteilles* of Mouton-Rothschild from the vineyards of the count who was his captain during the last war.

Now I am in Moscow, at Ilya Ehrenburg's home. This great guerrilla of literature, as dangerous to Nazism as a division of

forty thousand men, was also a refined epicure. I could never tell if he knew more about Stendhal or about *foie gras*. He relished Jorge Manrique's verses with as much gusto as he showed when he tasted Pommery et Greno. He was in love with everything French, with the body and soul of delicious and fragrant France.

Anyway, after the war, the rumor spread through Moscow that some mysterious bottles of French wine would go on sale. On its march toward Berlin, the Red Army had taken a fortress-cave filled with Goebbels's insane propaganda and also with the wines he had appropriated from the cellars of noble France. Papers and bottles were shipped to the general headquarters of the victorious army, the Red Army, which took the documents in for study but didn't know what to do with the bottles.

They were splendid glass bottles that flashed their dates of birth on very special labels. All were of illustrious origin and celebrated vintage. Romanée, Beaune, Châteauneuf-du-Pape rubbed elbows with blond Pouilly, amberescent Vouvray, velvety Chambertin. The entire collection was distinguished by chronological indications of the most excellent vintages.

Socialism's egalitarian attitude saw to it that these sublime trophies from the French wine presses were distributed in the liquor stores at the same prices as Russian wines. As a restrictive measure, it was decided that each buyer could purchase only a limited, specified number of bottles. Socialism's intentions are the best, but we poets are the same everywhere. Each of my comrades-in-letters sent relatives, neighbors, friends to buy, at incredibly low prices, bottles of incredibly high lineage. They were sold out in one day.

A quantity I will not disclose reached the home of Ehrenburg, Nazism's unconditional enemy. And that's why I find myself in his company now, talking of wines and drinking with him a part of Goebbels's cellar, in honor of poetry and victory.

PALACES RETAKEN

Magnates have never invited me to their big mansions and, truthfully, I was never very curious about them. In Chile the national pastime is the closing sale. People crowd to the weekly auctions that are so typical of my country. Each of these lordly homes is doomed. When the time comes, to the highest bidder go the grating that wouldn't let me pass—me or the common people of whom I am one—and with the grating, armchairs, bleeding Christs, old-fashioned portraits, dishes, spoons, and the sheets between which so many useless lives were procreated, all change hands. The Chilean loves to walk in, touch, and look. Few of them buy anything, in the end. Then the building is pulled down and fragments of the house are put up for sale. The buyers carry off the eyes (the windows), the intestines (the staircases); the floors are the feet; and finally, even the potted palms are divided up.

In Europe, on the other hand, the huge houses are maintained. We can sometimes get a glimpse of the portraits of dukes and duchesses whom only some lucky painter saw in the buff, to the delight of those of us who still enjoy painting and those curves. We can also pry into the secrets, the curious crimes, the wigs, and those astounding files, the tapestried walls, which absorbed so many conversations destined for the electronic entertainments of the future.

I was invited to Rumania and arrived as planned. The writers took me to their collective country house, in the middle of the beautiful Transylvanian forests, to get some rest. The Rumanian writers' residence had once been the palace of Carol, the madcap monarch whose extra-regal loves became the talk of the world. The palace, with its modern furniture and its marble baths, was now at the service of Rumanian thought and poetry. I had a very good night's sleep in Her Majesty the Queen's bed, and the next day was dedicated to visiting other castles converted into museums and houses for rest and vacationing. I was accompanied by the poets Jebeleanu, Beniuc, and Radu Boureanu. In the verdant morning, deep into the fir groves of the ancient royal parks, we sang out of tune, laughed at the top of our lungs, shouted out poems in every language. Rumanian poets, with their long history of suffering during the monarchic-Fascist regimes, are at once the most courageous and the most cheerful poets in the world. That band of troubadours, as Rumanian as the birds in their forest lands, so unshakable in their patriotism, so entrenched in their revolution, and so intoxicatingly in love with life, opened my eyes. In few places have I acquired so many brothers so quickly.

I told the Rumanians about my previous visit to another noble palace, to their great delight. It was the Liria Palace, in wartime Madrid. While Franco marched with his Italians, his Moors, and his swastikas, dedicated to the holy work of killing Spaniards, the militiamen occupied this palace, which I had so often seen—every time I went down Argüelles Street—in 1934 and 1935. I would give it a glance of respect, not from a feeling of servitude toward the new Duke and Duchess of Alba, who had no power over me, a hopeless American, and a half-savage poet, but fascinated by the majesty that silent, white sarcophagi possess.

When war broke out, the Duke stayed in England; after all, his last name is really Berwick. He remained there with his best paintings and his richest treasures. With the Duke's flight in mind, I told the Rumanians that after China's liberation, Confucius' last descendant, who had made a fortune from a temple and the bones of the dead philosopher, also went away, to Formosa, with paintings, table linens, and dinnerware. And with the bones, too. He must have settled there comfortably, charging visitors a fee to view the relics.

From Spain in those days the appalling news went out to the rest of the world: HISTORIC PALACE OF THE DUKE OF ALBA LOOTED BY THE REDS, LEWD SCENES OF DESTRUCTION, LET'S SAVE THIS HISTORIC JEWEL.

I went to see the palace, since I would be allowed in now. The purported looters were at the door in blue overalls, guns in hand. The first bombs were being dropped on Madrid by the German army's planes. I asked the militiamen to let me pass. They went over my papers carefully. I was all set to take my first steps into the opulent halls when they stopped me, horrified: I hadn't wiped my shoes on the huge mat at the entrance. The floors literally gleamed like mirrors. I wiped my shoes and went in. The empty rectangles on the walls showed where the absent paintings had been. The militiamen knew everything. They told me that for years the Duke had been keeping the paintings in a London bank, in a good, strong safe. The only things of any importance in the great hall were trophies of the hunt, innumerable antlered heads and snouts of a variety of small beasts. The most striking trophy was an immense white bear standing on two legs in the center of the room, with its two polar arms open wide and a stuffed head

that was laughing, with all its teeth bared. It was the militiamen's favorite, they brushed it every morning.

Naturally, I was interested in the bedrooms where so many Albas had slept, with their nightmares brought on by the Flemish ghosts who came to tickle their feet at night. Those feet were gone, but the largest collection of shoes I have ever seen was conspicuously there. The last Duke had not increased his art collection, but his collection of shoes was unbelievable and incalculable. Long, glassed-in shelves that reached the ceiling held thousands of shoes. There were special ladders, like those in libraries, so one could take the shoes down, daintily by the heels, perhaps. I looked closely. There were hundreds of pairs of very fine riding boots, yellow ones and black ones. There were also some of those high shoes, with little plush vests and mother-of-pearl buttons. And scores of overshoes, pumps, and gaiters, all with their shoe trees inside, making them look as if they had solid legs and feet at their beck and call. If the glass case were opened, they would all run off to London in search of the Duke! One could have a wonderful time with these shoes, which ranged the length of three or four rooms. A wonderful time with one's eyes, and only with one's eyes, because the militiamen, shouldering arms, wouldn't let a fly touch those shoes. "Culture," they said. "History," they said. And I thought of the poor boys in espadrilles, holding off Fascism on the terrible summits of Somosierra, buried in snow and mud.

Beside the Duke's bed was a little print in a gold frame whose Gothic characters caught my eye. *Caramba!*, I thought, it must be the Albas' family tree. I was wrong. It was Rudyard Kipling's "If"—that uninspired, sanctimonious poetry, precursor of the *Reader's Digest*, whose intellectual level, in my opinion, was no higher than that of the Duke of Alba's shoes. May the British Empire forgive me!

The Duchess's bathroom will be exciting, I thought. It evoked so many things. Above all, that madonna reclining in the Prado Museum, whose nipples Goya set so far apart that one thinks how the revolutionary painter must have measured the distance kiss by kiss until he had left her an invisible necklace reaching from breast to breast. But I was wrong again. The bear, the musical-comedy boot shoppe, "If," and, finally, instead of a goddess's bath

I found a circular room, fake Pompeii, with a step-down tub, vulgar little alabaster swans, tacky *lampadaires;* in short, a bathroom for an odalisque in a Hollywood film.

I was leaving the place with the glum feeling that I had been cheated, when I had my reward. The militiamen invited me to lunch. I went down to the kitchens with them. Forty or fifty of the Duke's household servants and attendants, cooks and gardeners, continued to cook for themselves and the militiamen who guarded the mansion. They considered me a distinguished visitor. After some whispering, much coming and going, and receipts being signed, they brought out a dusty bottle. It was a hundred-year-old Lachryma Christi, from which I was barely allowed to take a few sips. It was a molten wine, made of honey and fire, severe and impalpable at the same time. Those tears of the Duke of Alba's will not be easy for me to forget.

A week later the German bombers dropped four incendiary bombs on the Liria Palace. From the terrace of my house I saw the two birds of omen flying over. A red glare told me immediately that I was watching the palace's final minutes.

"That same afternoon I went past the smoldering ruins," I tell the Rumanian writers, to end my story. "There I discovered a touching detail. With fire falling from the sky, with explosions shaking the earth, and the bonfire growing, the noble militiamen managed to save the white bear only. They were almost killed in the attempt. Beams were crashing down, everything was ablaze, and the huge well-preserved animal refused to pass through windows or doors. I saw it again, for the last time, with its white arms open wide, dying of laughter, on the palace garden's lawn."

ERA OF COSMONAUTS

Moscow again. On the morning of November 7, I watched the people's parade, its athletes, its glowing Soviet youth. They marched with sure and firm step through Red Square. They were being observed by the sharp eyes of a man dead many years, the founder of this security, this joy, and this strength: Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, immortal Lenin.

This time there were few weapons in the parade. But for the first time the enormous intercontinental missiles were rolled out. I

could almost have touched those huge cigars with my hand—so innocent-looking, yet capable of carrying atomic destruction to any point on the planet.

The two Russians who had come back from the sky were being decorated that day. I felt as if I too had wings. The poet's job is, in great measure, like a bird's. It was precisely in the streets of Moscow, along the shores of the Black Sea, among the mountain passes of the Soviet Caucasus, that I was tempted to write a book on the birds of Chile. The poet from Temuco had every intention of investigating birds, of writing about the birds of his remote land, about sparrows and chercanas, mockingbirds and finches, condors and queltehues, while two human birds, two Soviet cosmonauts, soared into space and left the whole world dumfounded with admiration. Feeling them over our heads, seeing with our own eyes the cosmic flight of the two men, we all held our breaths.

They were decorated that day. Next to them were their relatives—their origins, their earthly roots, roots of the people. The old men had huge peasant moustaches, the old women's heads were covered with the large shawl that is so typical of the villages and the countryside. The cosmonauts were just like us, people from the country, the village, the factory, the office. In Red Square, Nikita Khrushchev welcomed them in the name of the Soviet nation. Later we saw them in St. George's Hall. Gherman Titov, the number-two astronaut, a nice boy, with big radiant eyes, was introduced to me.

"Tell me, Commander, as you flew through the cosmos and looked at our planet, could you make out Chile clearly?" It was like saying to him: "You understand, don't you, that the important thing about your trip was to see little Chile from up there."

He did not smile as I expected him to, but thought it over for a few seconds and said to me: "I do remember some yellow mountain ranges in South America. You could tell that they were very high. Maybe that was Chile."

Of course it was Chile, Comrade.

On the fortieth anniversary of the socialist revolution, I left Moscow by train, for Finland. As I crossed the city on my way to the station, fireworks, huge sheaves of skyrockets—luminous,

phosphorescent, blue, red, violet, green, yellow, orange—soared very high, like volleys of cheers, like signals of mutual understanding and friendship going out from this night of victory toward all the countries in the world.

In Finland I bought a narwhal's tooth and we continued our journey. In Gothenburg we boarded the ship that would take us back to America. America and my country also keep step with life and with the times. Well, when we passed through Venezuela en route to Valparaíso, Pérez Jiménez, the tyrant, the U.S. State Department's pet baby, bastard son of Trujillo and Somoza, sent enough soldiers for a war, to stop me and my wife from getting off the ship. But by the time I reached Valparaíso, freedom had already kicked out the Venezuelan despot; the majestic satrap had hightailed it to Miami like a rabbit running in its sleep. The world has been moving fast since the first sputnik's flight. Who would have believed that the first person to knock on my cabin door in Valparaíso to welcome us would be Simonov, the novelist I had left swimming in the Black Sea?

11

Poetry Is an Occupation

THE POWER OF POETRY

It has been the privilege of our time—with its wars, revolutions, and tremendous social upheavals—to cultivate more ground for poetry than anyone had ever imagined. The common man has had to confront it, attacking or attacked, in solitude or with an enormous mass of people at public rallies.

When I wrote my first lonely books, it never entered my mind that, with the passing years, I would find myself in squares, streets, factories, lecture halls, theaters, and gardens, reading my poems. I have gone into practically every corner of Chile, scattering my poetry like seed among the people of my country.

I am going to recount what happened to me in Vega Central, the largest and most popular market in Santiago, Chile. An endless line of pushcarts, horse wagons, oxcarts, and trucks come in at dawn, bringing vegetables, fruits, edibles from all the truck farms surrounding the voracious capital. The market men—a huge union whose members are badly paid and often go barefoot—swarm through the coffee shops, flophouses, and cheap eating places of the neighborhoods near the Vega.

One day someone came to fetch me in a car, which I climbed into without knowing exactly where or why I was going. I had a copy of my book *España en el corazón* in my pocket. In the car they explained to me that I was invited to give a lecture at the union hall of the Vega market loaders.

When I entered the ramshackle hall, a chill like that in José