

the guard refused to relay any message. And the women would not go.

Then a volley of shots from the direction of the palace guard splintered the air. Six or seven women were killed on the spot, and many others wounded.

A hasty funeral took place on the following day. I had believed an immense procession would follow the caskets of the assassinated women, but only a few people showed up. Oh, yes, the union leader made a speech. He was known as a prominent revolutionary. His speech at the cemetery was in an irreproachable style. I read the entire text the next day in the newspapers. It did not contain a single line of protest, not a single angry word or any demand that those responsible for such an atrocity be put on trial. Two weeks later, no one even spoke of the massacre. And I have never seen it mentioned in writing by anyone.

The President was an Aztec ruler, a thousand times more untouchable than England's royal family. No newspaper could criticize the exalted functionary, either in jest or seriously, without suffering immediate consequences.

Mexican dramas are so clothed in the picturesque that one comes away astounded by all the allegory--allegory that is every day more remote from the essential throb of life, the blood-spattered skeleton. The philosophers have become euphuistic and launch into existentialist dissertations that seem foolish under a volcano. Civilian action is intermittent and difficult. Submission takes on varying aspects that stratify around the throne.

But every kind of magic is always appearing and reappearing in Mexico: from the volcano born before a peasant's eyes in his humble orchard, while he was planting beans, to the wild search for the skeleton of Cortés, who, rumor has it, rests in Mexican soil with his gold helmet protecting the conquistador's skull these many centuries, and the no less intense hunt for the remains of the Aztec emperor Cuauhtémoc. Lost four centuries ago, they keep showing up here and there, safeguarded by secretive Indians, only to sink back time and again into unfathomable darkness.

Mexico lives on in me like a small stray eagle circulating through my veins. Only death will fold its wings over my sleeping soldier's heart.

My Country in Darkness

MACCHU PICCHU

THE Ministry lost no time in accepting the voluntary end to my career.

My diplomatic suicide gave me the infinite pleasure of being able to return to Chile. I believe a man should live in his own country and I think the deracination of human beings leads to frustration, in one way or another obstructing the light of the soul. I can live only in my own country. I cannot live without having my feet and my hands on it and my ear against it, without feeling the movement of its waters and its shadows, without feeling my roots reach down into its soil for maternal nourishment.

But, before getting back to Chile, I made another discovery that was to add a new layer of growth to my poetry.

I stopped in Peru and made a trip to the ruins of Macchu Picchu. There was no highway then and we rode up on horseback. At the top I saw the ancient stone structures hedged in by the tall peaks of the verdant Andes. Torrents hurled down from the citadel eaten away and weathered by the passage of the centuries. White fog drifted up in masses from the Wilkamayu River. I felt infinitely small in the center of that navel of rocks, the navel of a deserted world, proud, towering high, to which I somehow belonged. I felt that my own hands had labored there at some remote point in time, digging furrows, polishing the rocks.

I felt Chilean, Peruvian, American. On those difficult heights, among those glorious, scattered ruins, I had found the principles of faith I needed to continue my poetry.

My poem *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* was born there.

THE NITRATE PAMPA

At the end of 1943 I arrived in Santiago once more. I settled down in a house I bought on the installment plan. I piled all my books into this house surrounded by huge trees, and took up the hard life again.

Once more I sought my country's beauty, the loveliness of its women, nature's overpowering splendor, the work of my fellows, the intelligence of my countrymen. The country had not changed. Fields and sleeping villages, heartbreaking poverty in the mining regions, elegant people crowding into the country clubs. I had to make a decision.

My decision brought me harassments as well as moments of glory.

What poet could have regretted that?

Curzio Malaparte, who interviewed me some years after what I am about to relate, stated it well in his article: "I am not a Communist, but if I were a Chilean poet, I would be one, like Pablo Neruda. You have to take sides here, with the Cadillacacs or with people who have no schooling or shoes."

These people without schooling or shoes elected me senator on March 4, 1945. I shall always cherish with pride the fact that thousands of people from Chile's most inhospitable region, the great mining region of copper and nitrate, gave me their vote.

Walking over the pampa was laborious and rough. It hasn't rained for half a century there, and the desert has done its work on the faces of the miners. They are men with scorched features; their solitude and the neglect they are consigned to has been fixed in the dark intensity of their eyes. Going from the desert up to the mountains, entering any needy home, getting to know the inhuman labor these people do, and feeling that the hopes of isolated and sunken men have been entrusted to you, is not a light responsibility. But my poetry opened the way for communication, making it possible for me to walk and move among them and

be accepted as a lifelong brother by my countrymen, who led such a hard life.

I don't remember whether it was in Paris or Prague that I was seized by a small doubt about the encyclopedic knowledge of my friends there. Most of them were writers, and the rest, students.

"We are talking a lot about Chile," I said to them, "and it's probably because I am Chilean. But do any of you know anything about my country, which is so far away? For example, what vehicle do we use for locomotion? Elephant, car, train, airplane, bicycle, camel, or sleigh?"

Most of them replied earnestly: elephant.

There are no elephants or camels in Chile. But I can see how puzzling a country can be that starts at the frozen South Pole and stretches upward to salt mines and deserts where it hasn't rained for eons. As senator-elect of the inhabitants of that wilderness, as representative of innumerable nitrate and copper workers who had never worn a shirt collar or a tie, I had to travel those deserts for many years.

Coming into those lowlands, facing those stretches of sand, is like visiting the moon. This region that looks like an empty planet holds my country's great wealth, but the white fertilizer and the red mineral have to be extracted from the arid earth and the mountains of rock. There are few places in the world where life is so harsh and offers so little to live for. It takes untold sacrifices to transport water, to nurse a plant that yields even the humblest flower, to raise a dog, a rabbit, a pig.

I come from the other end of the republic. I was born in green country with huge, thickly wooded forests. I had a childhood filled with rain and snow. The mere act of facing that lunar desert was a turning point in my life. Representing those men in parliament—their isolation, their titanic land—was also a difficult task. The naked earth, without a single plant, without a drop of water, is an immense, elusive enigma. In the forests, alongside rivers, everything speaks to man. The desert, on the other hand, is uncommunicative. I couldn't understand its language: that is, its silence.

Over a period of many years the nitrate corporations established veritable principalities, dominions, or empires on the

pampas. The English, the Germans, invaders of every kind, took over the productive regions and gave them company names. They imposed their own currency; they prevented any kind of assembly by the people; they banned political parties and the people's press. You could not enter the premises without special permission, which, of course, very few were able to obtain.

One afternoon I spoke to the laborers in a machine shop in the offices of the María Elena potassium-nitrate mine. The floor of the huge workshop was, as always, slushy with water, oil, and acids. The union leaders and I walked on a plank that kept us off that mire. "These planks," I was told, "cost us fifteen strikes in a row, eight years of petitioning, and seven dead."

The deaths occurred when the company's private police carried off seven leaders during a strike. The guards rode horses, while the workers, bound with ropes, followed on foot over the lonely stretches of sand. It took only a few shots to murder them. Their bodies were left lying in the desert sun and cold, until they were picked up and buried by their fellow workers.

Years before that, things were much worse. In 1906, for example, the strikers went from the nitrate-mine offices down to the city of Iquique to take their demands directly to the government. Exhausted by the journey, several thousand men gathered in the town square, in front of the school, to rest. They were going to see the governor in the morning, to lay their petitions before him. But they never had the chance. Troops led by a colonel surrounded the square at daybreak and began shooting and killing, without a word. More than six thousand men fell in that massacre.

In 1945, things were better, but sometimes it seemed to me that those days when people were exterminated were coming back. Once, for instance, I was denied the right to address a gathering of workers in a union hall. I called them out of the hall and in the middle of the desert I started to explain the situation to them, to consider the possible ways out of the conflict. There were about two hundred of us. Suddenly I heard the purr of motors and saw an army tank approach to within four or five meters of where I was speaking. The turret's lid lifted and a machine gun pushed up through the opening, aimed right at me. Then, alongside the weapon, an officer stood up straight, nattily dressed but dead

serious, and proceeded to stare at me while I went on with my talk. That's all it came to.

The faith of the huge working class, many of them illiterate, in the Communists was born with Luis Emilio Recabarren, who began his struggles in that desert region. From a simple worker-agitator, an old-time anarchist, Recabarren became a phantasmagoric and colossal presence. He filled the country with unions and federations. Eventually he published more than fifteen newspapers devoted exclusively to the defense of the new organizations he had created. All this without having a cent. The money was raised thanks to the new conscience awakening among the workers.

I had a chance to see Recabarren printing presses that had been through heroic service and were still doing the job forty years later. Some of those presses had been smashed up by the police and had later been carefully repaired. Huge scars could be detected under the lovingly soldered seams that had set them in motion again.

During those long tours I grew accustomed to staying in the humble houses, shacks, or huts of the men of the desert. There was almost always a group with banners waiting for me at the company gates. Then I would be shown the place where I was to be lodged. All day long, men and women filed through my quarters with complaints about working conditions, or with personal problems. Sometimes their grievances were the kind a foreigner might consider comical, capricious, or even grotesque. For instance, the shortage of tea could spark off a strike that would have serious consequences. Are typically British needs like that conceivable in such a desolate region? In fact, the Chilean people can't live without having tea several times a day. Some of the barefoot workers who asked me unhappily why the exotic but indispensable beverage was so scarce argued by way of apology: "If we don't drink it, we get a terrible headache."

Those men locked inside walls of silence, in the loneliest region and under the loneliest sky, had a healthy political curiosity. They wanted to know what was going on in Yugoslavia, in China. They were deeply interested in problems and changes in

the socialist countries, the outcome of the big Italian strikes, rumors of war, revolutions breaking out in far-off lands.

At hundreds of rallies, in places remote from one another, I heard the same request: to read my poems. They were often asked for by title. Of course, I never knew if all these people understood some or many of my poems, or if they didn't. It was difficult to tell in that atmosphere of absolute silence, of reverence, in which they listened to me. But what does it matter? There are quite a few poems by Hölderlin and Mallarmé that I, who am one of the most literate of fools, have never been able to fathom. And I have read them, I confess, with the same great reverence.

Sometimes dinner took on a more festive air and there was stewed chicken, *ravioli* on the pampas. The fare that most often found its way to our plates was something I had a hard time sinking my teeth into: fricassee of guinea pig. Conditions had turned this small creature, born to die in laboratories, into a popular dish.

In the many houses where I stayed, the bed I invariably was assigned had two monastic features: snow-white sheets, so stiff they could have stood up by themselves; and a hardness comparable to the desert floor's. These people did not know what a mattress was, only some bare boards as unyielding as they were flat.

Still and all, I slept the sleep of the blessed. I had no trouble dropping off into the deep sleep I shared with a legion of comrades. The day was always dry and incandescent like a live coal, but night spread its coolness out on the desert under a crown exquisitely studded with stars.

My poetry and my life have advanced like an American river, a torrent of Chilean water born in the hidden heart of the southern mountains, endlessly steering the flow of its currents toward the sea. My poetry rejected nothing it could carry along in its course; it accepted passion, unraveled mystery, and worked its way into the hearts of the people.

I had to suffer and struggle, to love and sing; I drew my worldly share of triumphs and defeats, I tasted bread and blood. What more can a poet want? And all the choices, tears or kisses,

loneliness or the fraternity of man, survive in my poetry and are an essential part of it, because I have lived for my poetry and my poetry has nourished everything I have striven for. And if I have received many awards, awards fleeting as butterflies, fragile as pollen, I have attained a greater prize, one that some people may deride but not many can attain. I have gone through a difficult apprenticeship and a long search, and also through the labyrinths of the written word, to become the poet of my people. That is my reward, not the books and the poems that have been translated, or the books written to explicate or to dissect my words. My reward is the momentous occasion when, from the depths of the Lora coal mine, a man came up out of the tunnel into the full sunlight on the fiery nitrate field, as if rising out of hell, his face disfigured by his terrible work, his eyes inflamed by the dust, and stretching his rough hand out to me, a hand whose calluses and lines trace the map of the pampas, he said to me, his eyes shining: "I have known you for a long time, my brother." That is the laurel crown for my poetry, that opening in the bleak pampa from which a worker emerges who has been told often by the wind and the night and the stars of Chile: "You're not alone; there's a poet whose thoughts are with you in your suffering."

I became a member of Chile's Communist Party on July 15, 1945.

GONZÁLEZ VIDELA

The bitter wrongs my comrades and I sought to bring before the senate had a tough time reaching the senate floor. The comfortable parliamentary room seemed padded to keep out the cries of the wretched masses. My colleagues in the opposition were true experts in the art of eloquent patriotic address, and I felt smothered under the tapestry of bogus silks they rolled out.

Our hopes rose suddenly; one of the presidential candidates, González Videla, swore to see that justice was carried out, and his lively eloquence won him great popularity. I was made his campaign manager and carried the good news to all parts of the country.

The people elected him President by a landslide.

But, in our creole America, Presidents often go through an

extraordinary metamorphosis. In the instance I am speaking of, the new chief of state quickly changed his friends, he married his family into the "aristocracy," and was gradually transformed from a mere demagogue into a potentate.

But González Videla does not fit the pattern of the typical South American dictator. Bolivia's Melgarejo and General López of Venezuela have recognizable grass roots. These men show some glimmer of greatness and seem to be driven by a compulsion both desolate and implacable. At least, they were leaders who braved battles and bullets. González Videla, however, was the product of smoke-filled back-room politics, an irresponsible and frivolous clown, a weakling who put on a tough front.

In the fauna of our America, the great dictators have been giant saurians, survivors of a colossal feudalism in prehistoric lands. The Chilean Judas was just an amateur tyrant and on the saurian scale would never be anything but a poisonous lizard. Yet he did enough damage to seriously scar Chile, setting the country back hundreds of years. Chileans looked at one another in embarrassment, not quite understanding how it had all happened.

The man was an equilibrist, an acrobat who played to all sides. He managed to work his way into a spectacular left-wing role, and in this comedy of lies was the undisputed champion. No one questions that. In a country where politicians tend to be or seemingly are overly serious, people welcomed the advent of frivolity, and when this conga dancer changed course in midstream, it was much too late: the prisons were crammed full of political victims, and concentration camps were even set up, such as the one at Pisagna. A police state was then established, as a national novelty. The only course left open was to bide one's time and go underground to fight for the return of decency.

Many of González Videla's friends, persons who had struck by him right to the end of his electoral campaign, were hustled off to prisons on the high cordillera or in the desert, because they could not accept his metamorphosis. In fact, the upper class around him, with its economic power, had once more swallowed our country's government, as it had done so often before. This time, however, the digestion was not pleasant and Chile went through a malaise that wavered between shocked daze and agony.

With the protection of the United States, the President our

votes had elected turned into a vile, bloodthirsty vampire. His conscience surely made him lose sleep, though he set up, near the presidential palace, private garçonnières and whorehouses, complete with carpets and mirrors, for his carnal pleasures. The contemptible creature had an insignificant but twisted mind. The same evening he launched his great anti-Communist repression, he invited two or three workers' leaders to dinner. When the meal was over, he went down the palace stairs with them and embraced them, wiping away a few tears as he said, "I am weeping because I've ordered your detention. You'll be arrested as you go out the door, and I don't know if I'll ever see you again."

A BODY DIVIDED

My speeches became virulent and the senate was always filled to listen to me. My ouster was soon demanded and obtained, and the police were given orders to arrest me. But we poets have in us a large proportion of fire and smoke.

The smoke went into the writing. The historical parallel to all that was happening to me was dramatically close to our ancient American themes. In that year of hiding and danger, I finished my most important book, *Canto general*.

I moved from house to house, every day. Doors opened to receive me everywhere. It was always people I didn't know, who had somehow expressed their wish to put me up for a few days. They wanted to offer me asylum even if only for a few hours, or for weeks. I passed through fields, ports, cities, camps, and was in the homes of peasants, engineers, lawyers, seamen, doctors, miners.

There's an old theme, a "body divided," that recurs in the folk poetry of all our countries. The popular singer imagines his feet in one place, his kidneys somewhere else, and goes on to describe his whole body, which he has left behind, scattered in countryside and cities. That's how I felt in those days.

Among the heart-warming places where I stayed, I recall a two-room house hidden away on one of the poorer hills of Valparaíso. I had to keep to a part of one room, and a small section of window from which I could observe the life of the port. From that humble watchtower, my eyes took in only a fragment of the

street. At night I would see people busting past. It was a poor area, and the narrow street, a hundred meters below my window, monopolized all the light in the neighborhood. Dumpy little stores and junk shops lined it.

Trapped as I was in my corner, my curiosity knew no bounds. Private speculations and conjectures. Sometimes I would find myself in a quandary. Why, for example, would passers-by, whether indifferent or in a hurry, always pause at one store? What fascinating merchandise was displayed in that window? Whole families would stop for long minutes, with children on their shoulders. I couldn't see the rapt look on their faces as they gazed into the magic window, but I could imagine it.

Six months later I learned that it was just a shoe-store window. Shoes are man's greatest interest, I concluded. I vowed to study, investigate, and put this matter down in writing. I have never had the time to carry out this intention, this vow made in such odd circumstances. Yet quite a few shoes have gone into my poetry. They tap their way through many of my lines, although I never set out deliberately to put shoes in my poems.

Visitors would suddenly drop in at the house and carry on long conversations; it never entered their minds that close by, separated by a flimsy partition of cardboard and old newspaper, was a poet, with God knows how many professional man-hunters on his trail.

Saturday afternoons, and Sunday mornings as well, the sweet-heart of one of the girls in the family would come to the house. He was not in on the secret. He was a young worker, the girl's heart was his, but he hadn't won their full confidence yet. From my peephole I would watch him get off the bicycle he used on his egg route in the huge working-class neighborhood. Not long after, I would hear him enter the house humming a tune. He was a threat to my tranquility. I call him a threat because he insisted on courting the girl a few centimeters from my ear. She would invite him to go make platonic love in some park or at the movies, but he resisted heroically. And I cursed under my breath at the innocent egg man for being such a stay-at-home.

The rest of the people in the house were in on the secret: the widowed mother, the two delightful daughters, and the sons, who were seamen. They unloaded bananas in the harbor and were

sometimes fit to be tied because no ship would hire them. From them I heard that an old ship was being scrapped. With me directing the operation from my hidden corner, they removed the lovely figure from the ship's prow and hid it in a storehouse down in the port. I got to know her years later, when my escape and exile were a thing of the past. As I write these memoirs here beside the sea, that handsome woman carved in wood, who has a Greek face like all the figureheads on old sailing ships, gazes at me with her wistful beauty.

The plan was to ship me out with one of the boys, in his cabin, and put me ashore with the bananas when we reached Guayaquil. The seaman explained to me that when the ship dropped anchor at this port in Ecuador I was to appear on deck suddenly, like a well-dressed passenger, smoking a cigar, although I have never been able to smoke one. Since I was on the verge of departure, the family decided it was time I had the right kind of suit made—elegant and tropical—and I was duly fitted.

My suit was ready in less than no time. I've never had so much fun as I had when I received it. The women of the house took their notions of style from a celebrated film of the day: *Gone with the Wind*. What the boys, on the other hand, considered the last word in elegance was something they had picked up from the dance halls of Harlem and the bars and cheap dance joints of the Caribbean world. The double-breasted jacket was fitted with a belt and came down to my knees. The trousers hugged me at the ankles.

I put away this picturesque attire, styled by such kindly people, and never had the opportunity to wear it. I never came out of hiding on any ship, and I never went ashore with the bananas in Guayaquil, dressed like a phony Clark Gable. On the contrary, I chose the cold way out. I departed for Chile's far south, the far south of the Americas, intending to cross the mountains.

A ROAD IN THE JUNGLE

Ricardo Fonseca had been the secretary general of my party until this time. He was a strong-minded man with a smile, a southerner like me, from the cold climate of Carahue. My life underground, my hideouts, my clandestine excursions, the publication of my

pamphlets, had been entrusted to Fonseca; most important of all, he had carefully kept secret the places where I had stopped. During my year and a half in hiding, the only one who always knew where I would eat or sleep each night was my young and radiant leader and secretary general, Ricardo Fonseca. But his health gradually wasted away until the only thing remaining was the green flame that peered out of his eyes; his smile dimmed gradually, and one day our good comrade left us forever.

While the party was underground, a new leader was elected, a husky man, a longshoreman from Valparaíso, Galo González, a complex man with a deceptive and deadly-earnest face. I should mention that there was never a personality cult in our party, although it was an old organization that had survived all the proverbial ideological weaknesses. The Chilean conscience, the conscience of a people that has accomplished everything with its own hands, always rose above these. We have had very few caudillos in the history of Chile, and our party mirrored this.

Yet, aided by the banning of the party, the pyramidal politics of the Stalin era also produced a somewhat rarefied atmosphere in Chile. Galo González could not stay in touch with the bulk of the party. The persecution was being stepped up. There were thousands of prisoners and there was a special concentration camp on Pisagua's desert coast. Galo González led an outlaw's life filled with revolutionary activity, but the lack of contact between the leaders and the general body of the party became more and more pronounced. He was a great man, a wise man of the people, and a courageous fighter.

Instructions for the next step in my flight reached him and were carried out to the letter this time. I was to be taken somewhere a thousand kilometers from the capital and would go on from there across the cordillera on horseback. Argentine comrades would be waiting for me along the way.

We left at sundown in the safety of an automobile we were lucky enough to get. My friend Dr. Raúl Bulnes, then a doctor in the mounted police, took me in his automobile, which was above suspicion, to the outskirts of Santiago, where the party's organization took over. In another car, specially equipped for a long trip, an old party friend, the chauffeur Escobar, was waiting for me.

We stayed on the road day and night. In the daytime, I

bundled up in blankets to increase the effect of my disguise of beard and glasses, especially when we went through towns and cities, or when we stopped for gas.

I passed through Temuco at noon. I didn't stop anywhere; no one recognized me. As luck would have it, my old Temuco was my exit route. We crossed the bridge and the village of Padre Las Casas. We halted a fair distance from the city and sat down on a rock to have a bite to eat. There was a creek far down the slope, and the sound of its waters came up to me. It was my childhood saying goodbye. I grew up in this town, my poetry was born between the hill and the river, it took its voice from the rain, and like the timber, it steeped itself in the forests. And now, on the road to freedom, I was pausing for a moment near Temuco and could hear the voice of the water that had taught me to sing.

We set out again. Only once did we go through a moment of anxiety. From the middle of the highway, a determined-looking carabinieri officer flagged down our car. I was struck dumb, but the scare turned out to be groundless. The officer asked us to drive him a hundred kilometers along the road. He sat beside the driver, Comrade Escobar, and carried on a friendly chat with him. I made believe I was sleeping, so as not to speak. Even the stones of Chile knew my poet's voice.

Without any untoward incidents, we arrived at our destination, a timber estate that looked uninhabited. Water lapped at it on all sides. First you crossed vast Lake Ranco to land among thickets and giant trees. From there you proceeded on horseback for a stretch, until you came to a place where you caught another boat, on Lake Maihue this time. One could barely make out the owner's house, camouflaged by the hilly countryside, by the giant vegetation, by nature's unfathomable hum. I've heard people say that Chile is the last corner of the world. That place overgrown with jungle, hemmed in by snow and lakes, was indeed one of the last habitable spots on this planet.

The house in which I was given a room was makeshift, like everything in the area. A cast-iron stove, filled with firewood that looked as if it had just been cut from the forest, burned day and night. Heavy rain from the south pelted the windows without respite, as if it were fighting to break into the house. The rain

dominated the sunless forest, the lakes, the volcanoes, the night, and turned savagely on that human shelter for obeying different laws and not accepting its victory.

I barely knew Jorge Bellet, the friend who was waiting for me. An ex-flier, a cross between a practical man and a prospector, in boots and a short heavy combat jacket, he had the air of a born leader, a military man's cocky attitude that somehow fitted into the surroundings, although the colossal trees of the forest were the only troops in formation there.

The lady of the house was a very frail, whining woman afflicted with neurosis. The humdrum solitude of the place, the everlasting rain, the cold, all seemed a personal affront to her. She spent a good part of the day whimpering, yet the house was run like clockwork and the food was wholesome, fresh from the forest and the water.

Bellet managed the lumber company, which specialized in railroad ties for Sweden and Denmark. The saws cutting the huge logs ground out their shrill lament all day long. First you heard the deep underground thud of the felled tree. Every five or ten minutes the ground shuddered like a drum in the dark at the hard impact of crashing rauli, mañiu, and larch trees, giant works of nature, seeded there by the wind a thousand years before. Then the saw sectioning the bodies of these giants struck up its whine. The metallic sound of the saw, grating and high-pitched like a savage violin, following the obscure drum of the earth welcoming its gods, created the tense atmosphere of a legend, a ring of mystery and cosmic terror. The forest was dying. I heard its lamentations with a heavy heart, as if I had come there to listen to the oldest voices anyone had ever heard.

The big boss, the owner of the forest, was a man from Santiago whom I hadn't met. His visit, slated for later on in the summer, was feared. His name was Pepe Rodríguez, and I was told he was a latter-day capitalist who owned looms and other mills, a busy, dynamic, electrifying man, and an out-and-out reactionary, a prominent member of Chile's most extreme right-wing party. I was passing through his domain without his knowledge, and those qualities of his were an asset to me. No one would possibly come to look for me here. The civil authorities and the police were loyal subjects of the great man whose hospitality I was enjoying,

and there was little or no chance that I would ever run into him.

My departure was imminent. The snows were about to come down on the cordillera, and the Andes are no joking matter. My friends studied the road conditions every day. To say "roads" is to stretch the word. In reality, we would be venturing out over tracks the humus and the snow had blotted out long ago. The wait was becoming torture. Also, my friends on the Argentine side must be looking for me by this time.

When everything seemed to be ready, Jorge Bellet, captain general of the timberland, warned me that something had cropped up. He looked down in the mouth as he said it. The owner had sent word that he was on his way and would arrive in two days.

I was upset. We hadn't quite completed our preparations. After all the tedious work, there was now great danger that the proprietor would discover that I was staying on his land. Everyone knew he was a close friend of my persecutor, González Videla. And everyone knew González Videla had put a price on my head. What should we do?

From the outset, Bellet was all for confronting Rodríguez, the owner. "I know him very well," he told me. "He's quite a man, he will never turn you in."

I objected. The party's instructions called for absolute secrecy, and Bellet was proposing that we violate those instructions. I said so. We had a heated discussion. And after weighing the political pros and cons, we decided that I should go to an Indian cacique's house, a cabin nestled at the foot of the jungle.

I moved into the cabin and there my situation became very precarious. So much so that finally, after many objections, I agreed to meet Pepe Rodríguez, the owner of the business, the sawmills, and the forests. We settled on a neutral point, neither his house nor the cacique's cabin. At sundown I saw a jeep approaching. A man who was both mature and youngish, with graying hair and set features, got out of the jeep with my friend Bellet. The first thing he said was that, from then on, he would be responsible for my safety. Under those circumstances, no one would dare try anything against me.

We talked without much warmth, but the man gradually won me over. It was very raw out and I invited him into the cacique's

house, where we continued our conversation. At a word from him, a bottle of champagne, another of whiskey, and some ice appeared.

At the fourth glass of whiskey, we were arguing in loud voices. The man was an absolutist in his convictions. He was well informed and said interesting things, but the edge of insolence in his voice infuriated me. We both banged on the cacique's table with the palms of our hands, but we finished the bottle in relative peace.

Our friendship was a lasting one. One of the best things about him was his unconditional frankness, the frankness of a man who is used to running things. But he also read my poetry in an extraordinary way, with such an intelligent and virile voice that my poems seemed to be born all over again.

Rodríguez went back to the capital, to his businesses. He made one final gesture in my behalf. He called his subordinates together around me and said to them, in his typical voice of command: "If any obstacles come up within the next week to keep Señor Legarreta from crossing into Argentina through the smugglers' pass, you will open another road so he can get to the border. Drop all work on the timber, and open that road. Those are my orders." Legarreta was my name at the time.

Pepe Rodríguez, that domineering, feudal man, died two years later, bankrupt and persecuted. He had been accused of heading a big smuggling operation and spent many months in jail. That must have meant unbearable suffering for a man with such an arrogant nature. I have never known for certain if he was guilty or innocent of the crime he was accused of. But I did learn that our oligarchy, who years before would have lost sleep hoping for an invitation from the generous Rodríguez, deserted him as soon as they saw him on trial and broken. As for me, I still stand by him and can't put him out of my memory. Pepe Rodríguez was a small emperor who gave orders to open sixty kilometers of road in the jungle to help a poet reach freedom.

THE ANDEAN MOUNTAINS

The Andean mountains have hidden passes, used by smugglers in the old days, so hostile and difficult that the rural police no longer

bother to patrol them. Rivers and precipices block the traveler's way.

My companion Jorge Bellet headed the expedition. Our five-man escort, expert horsemen and road scouts, was joined by my old friend Victor Bianchi, who had come to the region as surveyor in some land disputes. He did not recognize me. I had a heavy beard after a year and a half of living in hiding. As soon as he knew about my plan to cross the jungle, he offered us his invaluable services as veteran explorer. He had once climbed Aconcagua on a tragic expedition in which he had been one of the only survivors.

We traveled single-file, protected by the solemn hour of dawn. I had not ridden a horse in many years, not since childhood, but here we were, on our way to the pass. The southern Andean forest is populated by huge trees set apart from one another: giant larches and mayten trees, as well as tepa and coniferous trees. The rauli trees have an amazing girth. I stopped to measure one. It had the diameter of a horse. The sky overhead can't be seen. Below, leaves have been falling for centuries, forming a layer of humus the hoofs of the mounts sink down into. We were passing through one of primitive nature's great cathedrals.

Our way took us through hidden and forbidden territory, and we accepted even the flimsiest indications we could follow. There were no tracks, no trails; my four mounted companions and I wove in and out, overcoming such obstacles as powerful trees, impassable rivers, enormous crags, desolate snows, guessing more often than not, looking for the road to my freedom. My companions were sure of their bearings, the best way between the thick clumps of vegetation, but, to be on the safe side, they notched the bark of the huge trees here and there with a machete, blazing a trail to guide them back, once they had left me to my fate.

Each one moved along, absorbed in that solitude without boundary lines, in the green and white silence: the trees, the long vines, the humus deposited by hundreds of years, the partly fallen trees suddenly becoming another roadblock. It was all the dazzling and secretive work of nature and at the same time a growing threat of cold, snow, and pursuit. It all came into play: solitude, danger, silence, and the urgency of my mission.

Sometimes we followed a dim trail left by smugglers perhaps or by common outlaws fleeing from justice; we wondered how many had perished, surprised by winter's icy hand, in the heavy snowstorms that break loose in the Andes and surround the traveler, burying him under seven stories of snow.

On either side of the trail in that wild desolation, I saw something that looked like the work of human hands. Broken branches piled together, they had endured many winters; a vegetable offering from hundreds of travelers, tall wooden tombs to remember the fallen, to remind us of those who had not been able to go on and had been left there forever, under the snows. With their machetes, my companions also lopped off those branches that touched our heads, diving at us from the tops of the huge conifers, from the oaks whose last leaves were fluttering before the coming of the winter storms. And on each grave mound I, too, left a memento, a wooden calling card, a branch from the forest to adorn the tomb of some unknown traveler.

We had to cross a river. Those small springs born on the Andean peaks plummet down, unload their vertiginous, crushing power, turn into waterfalls, tear up land and rocks with the energy and speed gathered in those staggering altitudes. But this time we came upon a pool, a huge mirror of water, a ford. The horses went in, lost their footing, and swam to the other side. My mount was soon almost totally covered by the water, I began to sway unsteadily, my drifting feet thrashed about, while the animal struggled to keep its head above water. So we went across. And no sooner had we reached the other shore than my guides, the peasants who accompanied me, grinned and asked: "Were you very scared?"

"Very. I thought my end had come," I replied.

"We were behind you with a rope ready in our hands," they said.

"My father fell in right there," one of them added, "and the current dragged him away. We weren't about to let the same thing happen to you."

We went on, eventually entering a natural tunnel opened in the impressive rock perhaps by a powerful river that has since disappeared or by a spasm of the earth that created this formation in the mountains, dug this canal in the hinterlands, excavated from

the rock, the granite which we were now entering. A little farther on, the mounts kept slipping, they would try to get a footing in the rocky depressions, their legs buckled, sparks flew from their shoes. I was thrown from my horse and sprawled out on the rocks more than once. My horse was bleeding at the nose and legs, but we stubbornly continued on our vast, magnificent, grueling way.

There was something waiting for us in that wild forest. Suddenly we came out into a neat little meadow, an unbelievable vision, nestled in the mountain's lap: crystalline water, green grass, wild flowers, the murmur of streams, and a blue sky over us, a generous light unbroken by foliage.

We stopped inside this magic circle, like guests in a holy place: and even holier was the ceremony in which I took part. The cowboys dismounted. A bull's skull had been set down in the center of the hollow, as if for some ritual. My companions approached it in silence, one by one, and left a few coins and some food in its bone sockets. I joined them in that offering intended for rough-mannered men who had strayed away like Ulysses, for fugitives of every breed, who would find bread and assistance in the dead bull's eyepits.

But the unforgettable ceremony did not end here. My rustic friends shed their hats and started a strange dance, hopping around the abandoned skull on one foot, retracing the circles of tracks left by the dances of so many others who had passed that way before. There with my inscrutable companions I came to understand then, in some only vaguely defined way, that communication existed between people who did not know one another, that there was solicitude, pleas and answers to those pleas, even in the most far-flung and out-of-the-way places in the world.

Farther along, that night, just before we were to cross the frontier that would separate me from my country for many years, we came to the last mountain gorges. Suddenly we saw a burning light, a sure sign of human life, and coming closer, we found several ramshackle sheds that looked empty. We entered one of them and saw, by the firelight, huge logs burning in the center of the room, bodies of giant trees that burned there day and night, releasing, through cracks in the roof, smoke that drifted in the dark like a heavy blue veil. We saw piles of cheeses,

racked there by those who had curdled them at that altitude. Several men, huddled together like sacks, were lying next to the fire. In the silence, we heard the strings of a guitar and the words of a song, born of the live coals and the darkness, bringing us the first human voice we had met on our trip. It was a song of love and faraway places, a lament of love and yearning addressed to spring, which was still far off, to the cities from which we came, to life's infinite spaces. They didn't know who we were, they knew nothing about the fugitive, they didn't know my poetry or my name. Or did they know it, did they know us? Anyway, we sang and are next to that fire, and later we walked through the dark into some crude rooms. A thermal spring passed through them, volcanic water we plunged into, a warmth that broke from the mountains and drew us close to itself.

We splashed around happily, washing, cleansing off the heaviness of our long ride. We felt refreshed, born again, baptized, when we set out at dawn on the final kilometers that would take me away from the shadows hovering over my country. We left on our horses, singing, with a new air filling our lungs, a breath that drove us on to the great highway of the world waiting for me. When we tried—this is still fresh in my mind—to give the mountaineers some money to pay for the songs, the food, the thermal waters, the bed and the roof, that is, for the unexpected welcome we had met, they refused our offer without even considering it. They had done what they could for us, that's all. And "that's all," the silent "that's all," implied many things, perhaps recognition, perhaps our common dreams.

SAN MARTÍN DE LOS ANDES

An abandoned shack marked out the frontier for us. I was now a free man. On the cabin's wall I wrote: "Goodbye, my country. I am leaving, but I take you with me."

A Chilean friend was supposed to be waiting for us in San Martín de los Andes. This little mountain village in Argentina is so tiny that all I had been told, by way of instructions, was: "Go to the best hotel. Pedrito Ramírez will be waiting for you there." But such is life: there wasn't one best hotel in San Martín de los Andes; there were two. Which one should we pick? We decided on the more expensive one, located on the edge of town, after

discounting the first, which we had seen on the lovely town square.

It so happened that the hotel we chose was so posh that they wouldn't take us in. The effects of several days' journey on horseback, the sacks on our shoulders, our bearded and dusty faces, drew hostile looks. Anyone would have been afraid to let us in. And more so the manager of a hotel whose customers were British aristocrats from Scotland, who came to Argentina for salmon fishing. There was nothing aristocratic about us. The manager gave us the *vade retro*, alleging, with theatrical glances and gestures, that the last available room had been taken ten minutes before.

Just then an elegant man, obviously an army officer, appeared in the doorway, accompanied by a blonde who looked like a movie star. He roared in a thundering voice: "Hold it. No one kicks Chileans out! They're staying right here!" And we stayed. Our protector looked so much like Perón, and his lady so like Evita, that we all thought: It's them! But later, after we had washed and dressed, and were sitting at table enjoying a bottle of suspect champagne, we found out that the man was the commander of the local garrison and she an actress from Buenos Aires who was paying him a visit.

We passed ourselves off as lumbermen raring to make a good deal. The commander called me the "Mountain Man." Victor Bianchi, whose friendship and love of adventure had made him come that far with me, got hold of a guitar and charmed the Argentine men and ladies with his suggestive Chilean songs. But three days and their nights went by, and Pedrito Ramírez had not come for me. I was beside myself. We didn't have a clean shirt left, or any money for new ones. A good lumberman, Victor Bianchi said, should at least have clean shirts.

Meanwhile, the commander gave a lunch for us at his garrison. We became better friends and he confessed to us that, for all his physical likeness to Perón, he was anti-Perón. We spent long hours arguing about who had the worse President, Chile or Argentina.

One morning, Pedrito Ramírez burst into my room. "You bastard!" I shouted at him. "What's kept you so long?" The inevitable had occurred. He had been patiently waiting for me to come to the other hotel, the one on the square.

Ten minutes later, we were rolling over the pampa. And we

rolled day and night. Once in a while, the Argentines would stop the car to sip some maté tea, and then we would set off again across that interminably monotonous land.

IN PARIS WITH PASSPORT

Naturally, my biggest headache in Buenos Aires was to get myself a new identity. The false papers I had used to cross the Argentine border would be no good to me for a transatlantic trip or to move around in Europe. How was I going to get new ones? Alerted by the government of Chile, the Argentine police were looking high and low for me.

In this tight spot, I recalled something that lay hidden in my memory. Miguel Angel Asturias, the novelist, my old Central American friend, was, I thought, in Buenos Aires, on a diplomatic mission for his country, Guatemala. Our faces had a vague likeness. By common consent, we had classed ourselves as *chompipe*, an Indian word for "turkey" in Guatemala and part of Mexico. Long-nosed, with plenty to spare in face and body, we shared a resemblance to the succulent bird.

He came to see me in my hideout.

"Friend *chompipe*," I said to him, "lend me your passport. Allow me the pleasure of arriving in Europe as Miguel Angel Asturias."

Let me say that Asturias has always been a liberal but has stayed out of activist politics. Yet he didn't think about it twice. A few days later, between "Señor Asturias this" and "Señor Asturias that," I crossed the wide river separating Argentina and Uruguay. I went into Montevideo, got past airports and police lookouts, and finally reached Paris, disguised as the eminent Guatemalan novelist.

But in France my identity posed a problem once more. My brand-new passport would never get me past the implacable close scrutiny of the Sûreté. I would have to give up being Miguel Angel Asturias and turn back into Pablo Neruda. But how could I, when Pablo Neruda had never arrived in France? Miguel Angel Asturias had.

My advisers made me check in at the George V Hotel. "There, among international celebrities, no one is going to ask you for your papers," they said. So I stayed there for several days, with-

out giving much thought to my mountain clothes, which struck a discordant note in that rich and elegant world.

And then Picasso showed up, whose kindness matched his genius. He was as thrilled as a little boy, because he had just given the first speech of his life. Its theme had been my poetry, my persecution, my absence. Now, with brotherly feeling, the inspired minotaur of modern painting got me out of my predicament, taking care of all the details this involved. He spoke to the authorities; he called up a good many people. I don't know how many marvelous paintings he failed to paint on account of me. I felt very badly that he was losing time so precious to him.

A congress for peace was meeting in Paris at this time. I showed up at the congress at the last minute, just to read one of my poems. All the delegates applauded and embraced me. Many had thought me dead. They couldn't imagine how I had dodged the relentless persecution of the Chilean police.

On the following day Alderete, a veteran newspaperman for France-Press, dropped in at my hotel. "When the press gave out the news that you were in Paris," he said, "the Chilean government roundly denied it. Your double had showed up here; Pablo Neruda was in Chile, they were hot on his trail, it was only a matter of hours till his arrest. What should we answer back?"

I recalled that during an argument about whether Shakespeare had or had not written his works, a preposterous and finespun discussion, Mark Twain had chipped in: "It wasn't William Shakespeare who really wrote those plays, but another Englishman who was born on the same day at the same hour as he, and who died on the same day, and, to carry the coincidences still further, was also named William Shakespeare."

"Say that I am not Pablo Neruda," I told the newspaperman, "but another Chilean who writes poetry, fights for freedom, and is also called Pablo Neruda."

Getting my papers straightened out was not easy. Aragon and Paul Eluard were helping me. In the meantime, I had to lead a semi-clandestine life.

One of the places where I took shelter was Mme Françoise Giroux's home. I shall never forget this highly original and intelligent lady. Her apartment was in the Palais-Royal, next door to

Colette's. She had adopted a little Vietnamese boy. The French army was doing the work the North Americans would take over later on: killing innocent people in far-off Vietnam. So she adopted the child.

I remember that one of the most beautiful Picassos I have ever seen was in this house. It was a very large painting, from his precubist period. It showed a pair of red plush drapes, falling, coming together like the two halves of a window, above a table. A loaf of long, French bread spanned the table from end to end. The painting inspired reverence. The enormous loaf of bread on the table was like the central figure in an ancient icon, or like El Greco's *St. Maurice* in El Escorial. I gave the painting my own title: *The Ascension of the Holy Bread*.

One day Picasso himself came to visit me in my hideout. I led him over to the painting he'd done so many years before. He had forgotten it completely. He started going over it very earnestly, sinking into an extraordinary and rather sad absorption very seldom seen in him. He spent more than ten minutes in silence, stepping up close to the forgotten work and then back.

"I like it more all the time," I said to him when he ended his contemplation. "I am going to suggest that my country's national museum buy it. Madame Giroux is prepared to sell it to us."

Picasso turned his head toward the painting once more, his eyes piercing the magnificent loaf, and his only comment was: "It's not bad at all."

I found a house for rent that seemed an extravagance to me. It was on Pierre-Mille Street, in the fifteenth *arrondissement*, that is, to hell and gone. It was a neighborhood of workers and poor people. You had to travel for hours on the Métro to get there. What attracted me to the house was that it looked like a cage. It had three floors, tiny hallways and rooms. It was a tall bird cage defying description.

The ground floor, which was the largest and had a wood-burning stove, I made into a library and a room for entertaining, which I did from time to time. Some friends, almost all Chileans, moved into the upper floors. José Venturelli and Nemesio Antúnez, painters both, and others I can't remember, stayed there.

About this time, I received a visit from three outstanding figures in Soviet literature: the poet Nikolai Tikhonov, the play-

wright Alexander Korneichuk (who was also a government official in the Ukraine), and the novelist Konstantin Simonov. I had never seen them before. They embraced me like a long-lost brother. And, besides a hug, each gave me a resounding kiss, one of those Slavic kisses between men that are a sign of friendship and respect, and which I had a hard time getting used to. Years later, when I understood the meaning of those brotherly, masculine kisses, I had occasion once to begin an anecdote with these words: "The first man who ever kissed me was a Czechoslovakian consul . . ."

The Chilean government did not want me. Did not want me at home or abroad. Wherever I went, I was preceded by notes and telephone calls asking other governments to make things difficult for me.

I found out that there was a file on me at the Quai d'Orsay which said, roughly: "Neruda and his wife, Delia del Carril, make frequent trips to Spain, carrying Soviet instructions back and forth. They receive these instructions from the Russian writer Ilya Ehrenburg, with whom Neruda also makes clandestine trips to Spain. In order to keep closer contact with Ehrenburg, Neruda has rented and moved into an apartment in the same building where the Soviet writer lives."

It was a string of lies. Jean Richard Bloch gave me a letter for a friend of his who was an important official in the Ministry of Foreign Relations. I explained to the functionary that they were trying to get me deported from France on the basis of the wildest assumptions. I told him that I was very eager to meet Ehrenburg but, unfortunately, had not yet had the honor. The important functionary threw me a look of pity and promised to investigate. This was never done, however, and the absurd charges were allowed to stand.

So I decided to introduce myself to Ehrenburg. I knew he went to La Coupole every day, where he lunched at a Russian hour, that is, around sundown. "I'm Pablo Neruda, the poet, from Chile," I said to him. "According to the police, we're close friends. They claim that I live in the same building as you. Since they're going to throw me out of France because of you, I wish to meet you, at least, and shake hands."

I don't believe Ehrenburg ever blinked at any phenomenon in

the world. And yet I saw something very much like a look of stupefaction emerging from his shaggy brows, from under his angry mop of gray hair. "I also wanted to meet you, Neruda," he said. "I like your poetry. But, to begin with, have some of this *choucroute à l'Alsacienne*."

From then on, we became great friends. I believe he began to translate my *España en el corazón* that same day. I must admit that the French police unintentionally provided me with one of the most gratifying friendships I have ever had, and also presented me with the most eminent of my Russian translators.

One day, Jules Supervielle came to see me. By then I had a legal Chilean passport in my own name. The aging and noble Uruguayan poet very seldom went out any more. I was touched and surprised by his visit.

"I've brought you an important message. My son-in-law, Bertaux, wants to see you. I don't know what it's about."

Bertaux was the chief of police. We went to his office. The old poet and I sat down facing the officer across his desk. I have never seen more telephones on one table. How many were there? No fewer than twenty, I believe. His intelligent and shrewd face looked at me across the forest of telephones. I was sure every line to Paris's underground life was there on that overloaded spot. I thought of Fantômas and Inspector Maigret.

The chief of police had read my books and knew my poetry surprisingly well.

"I've received a request from the Chilean ambassador to take away your passport. The ambassador claims that you are using a diplomatic passport, and that would be illegal. Is this information correct?"

"I don't have a diplomatic passport," I replied. "This is simply an official passport. I am a senator in my country, and as such, I have a right to this document. What's more, here it is. You may examine but not take it away, because it is my private property."

"Is it up to date? Who renewed it?" Monsieur Bertaux asked me, taking my passport.

"It's up to date, of course," I said to him. "As for saying who renewed it, that's something I can't do. The Chilean government would remove that official."

The chief of police examined my papers slowly. Then he picked up one of his numberless telephones and asked to be put through to the Chilean ambassador. The telephone conversation took place in my presence.

"No, Mr. Ambassador, I cannot do it. His passport is in order. I don't know who renewed it. I repeat, it would be wrong to take away his papers. I cannot, Mr. Ambassador. I am very sorry."

The ambassador's insistence was plain, and a slight note of irritation was also evident in Bertaux's voice. He finally put down the receiver and said to me: "He seems to be your determined enemy. But you can stay in France as long as you wish."

I left with Supervielle. The old poet couldn't quite understand what was going on. For my part, a feeling of triumph mingled with revulsion went through me. The ambassador who was harassing me, collaborating with my persecutor in Chile, was the same Joaquín Fernández who boasted of his friendship with me and who never passed up a chance to play up to me, who that same morning had sent me a little affectionate message via the Guatemalan ambassador.

ROOTS

Ehrenburg, who was reading and translating my poems, scolded me: too much *root*, too many *roots* in your poems. Why so many?

It's true. The frontier regions sank their roots into my poetry and these roots have never been able to wrench themselves out. My life is a long pilgrimage that is always turning on itself, always returning to the woods in the south, to the forest lost to me.

There the huge trees were sometimes felled by their seven hundred years of powerful life, uprooted by storms, blighted by the snow, or destroyed by fire. I have heard titanic trees crashing deep in the forest: the oak tree plunging down with the sound of a muffled cataclysm, as if pounding with a giant hand on the earth's doors, asking for burial.

But the roots are left out in the open, exposed to their enemy, time, to the dampness, to the lichens, to one destruction after the other.

Nothing more beautiful than those huge, open hands, wounded

or burned, that tell us, when we come across them on a forest path, the secret of the buried tree, the mystery that nourished the leaves, the deep-reaching muscles of the vegetable kingdom. Tragically and shaggy, they show us a new beauty: they are sculptures molded by the depths of the earth: nature's secret masterpieces.

Once Rafael Alberti and I were walking together, with waterfalls, thickets, and woods all around us, near Osorno, and he pointed out that each branch was different from the next, the leaves seemed to be competing for an infinite variety of style. "They look as if they had been selected by a landscape gardener for a magnificent park," he said. Years later, in Rome, Rafael remembered that walk and the natural abundance of our forests.

That is what it was like. It isn't, not any more. I grow sad, thinking of my wanderings as a boy and as a young man, between Boroa and Carahue, or around Toltrén in the hills along the coast. How many discoveries! The graceful bearing and the fragrance of the cinnamon tree after the rain, the mosses whose winter beard hangs from the forest's innumerable faces!

I pushed aside the fallen leaves, trying to uncover the lightning streak of some beetles: the golden carabus, who dresses in iridescence to dance a minuscule ballet under the roots.

Or later, when I rode across the mountains to the Argentine side, under the green domes of the giant trees, an obstacle loomed up ahead: the root of one of them, taller than our mounts, blocking our way. Strenuous work and the ax made the crossing possible. Those roots were like overturned cathedrals: greatness laid bare to overwhelm us with its grandeur.

9



Beginning and End of Exile

IN THE SOVIET UNION

IN 1949, my exile just over, I was invited for the first time to the Soviet Union, to the celebration of Pushkin's sesquicentennial. The twilight and I came at the same time to my appointment with the cold pearl of the Baltic, the ancient, new, noble, heroic Lenin-grad. The city of Peter the Great and Lenin the Great has "angel," like Paris. A gray angel: steel-colored avenues, lead-colored stone palaces, and a steel-green sea. The most magnificent museums in the world, the treasures of the Tsars, their paintings, their uniforms, their dazzling jewels, their ceremonial dress, their weapons, their tableware, were all before my eyes. And the new, immortal mementos: the cruiser *Aurora*, whose cannons backed Lenin's thought, knocked down the walls of the past, and opened history's doors.

I was there for an appointment with a poet dead over a hundred years, Alexander Pushkin, author of imperishable legends and novels. This prince of poets of the people holds the heart of the great Soviet Union. To celebrate his sesquicentennial, the Russians had reconstructed the palace of the Tsars, stone by stone. Each wall had been rebuilt exactly as it had existed in the past, rising again from the dusty rubble to which it had been reduced by Nazi artillery. The old blueprints of the palace, the documents of the times, were consulted to reconstruct the luminous windows, the