

# **RENÉ CHAR**

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**TRANSLATED BY DAWN-MICHELLE BAUDE**

## THE ORIOLE

*3 September 1939*

The oriole entered the capital of sunrise.  
The blade of his song silenced the sad bed.  
Everything reached forever its end.

## THE SORGUE

### *Song for Yvonne*

River leaving too early, darting away, alone,  
Present the face of your passion to the children of this land.

River where lightning ends and where my house begins,  
Who wheels the rock of my reason in the way of forgetfulness.

River, in you earth is quivering, the sun anxious.  
Let each of the poor, in his night, make bread from your harvest.

River, often punished, river neglected.

River of apprentices covered with calluses,  
Every wind bows to the ridge of your furrows.

River of empty soul, of rags and suspicions,  
Of old woes reeling, of elms, of compassion.

River of crazies, of the feverish, the knackered,  
Of the sun deserting its plough for the company of a liar.

River of those better than us, river of hatching mists,  
Of the lamp quenching angst around its shade.

River considerate of dream, river that rusts iron,  
Where stars have a shadow they withhold from the sea.

River of relinquished powers and waters pierced with cries,  
Of the storm gnawing the vine, announcing new vintage.

River with unyielding heart in a world craving confinement,  
Keep us violent, but friends of the horizon's bees.

## ARGUMENT

How to live without beholding the unknown?

*Today's men want the poem to be in the image of their life, made with such little consideration, with such little space and burning with intolerance.*

*Because they're no longer able to act supremely, in this fatal preoccupation to destroy themselves via their fellows, because their inert wealth slows them down and enslaves them, the men of today, their instinct weakened, lose. They keep themselves alive while their names turn to dust.*

*Born of the call of becoming and of the anguish of custody, the poem, rising from its wells of mud and stars, will testify almost silently that there was nothing in it that truly did not exist elsewhere in this rebellious and solitary world of contradictions.*

## EVANDE

The summer and our life were of a piece  
The countryside ate the color of your fragrant skirt  
Avidity and constraint were reconciled  
The chateau of Maubec was sinking in clay  
The spin of its lyre would soon collapse  
The vegetal violence made us falter  
A somber, rowing crew drifted from the fleet  
On the mute flint of the torn noon  
It accompanied our accord with tender movements  
Everywhere the sickle needed to rest  
Our rarity was beginning its reign  
(The insomniac wind wrinkling our eyelids  
While turning each night the yielding page  
Wants that each part of you I remember  
Extend to a land of famished age and giant eaves)

It was the beginning of adorable years  
The earth loved us a little I remember.

## REFUSAL SONG

*Beginning of the Partisan*

The poet returned for many long years into the void of the father. Don't call to him, all ye who love him. If it seems that the swallow's wing no longer mirrors the earth, forget this happiness. He who was kneading the bread of suffering is invisible in his shining lethargy.

Ah! May beauty and truth ensure that you come in throngs at the salvos of deliverance!

## HOMAGE AND FAMINE

Woman who vibrates with the tongue of a poet, this torrent of peaceful alluvium, who taught him while he was still only a captive seed of anxious wolf, the tenderness of tall walls polished by your name (acres of Paris, entrails of beauty, my passion rises under your runaway robes). Woman sleeping in pollen of flowers, place upon his pride your frost of limitless medium, so that he remains until the hour of ossified heather the man who, to adore you even more, forever reverses in you the goddess of his birth, the fist of his sorrow, the horizon of his victory.

(It was night. We were cuddling beneath the majestic oak of tears. The cricket sang. How did it know, all by itself, that the land would not die, that we, children deprived of clarity, soon would speak?)

## WATCHERS AND DREAMERS

*for Maurice Blanchard*

Before rejoining the nomads  
The seducers, igniting columns of crude,  
Dramatize the crop

The poetic work begins tomorrow  
The cycle of voluntary death paves the way  
The reign of obscurity sunk reason, the diamond in the mine

Mothers infatuated by the masters of final sigh  
Mothers excessive  
Always digging into the massive heart  
Forever the shivering ferns of embalmed thighs will pass you by  
We will beat you  
You will go to bed

Alone at the windows of rivers  
Faces grand and shining  
Dreaming that nothing is perishable  
In their carnivorous landscape.

## THRESHOLD

When the dam of man was rocked, caught in the colossal crack of the abandoned divine, words in the remote distance, words that wished not to be lost, attempted to resist the exorbitant thrust. Just there, the dynasty of their meaning was decided.

I ran to the outcome of this diluvian night. Rooted in the wavering morning, my belt full of seasons, I wait for you, o my friends who are on their way. Already I sense you behind the horizon's shadow. My hearth never wearies of wishing your homes well. And my cypress scepter laughs heartily for you.

## THE WINDOWPANE

Pure rains, awaited ladies,  
The face that you bathe,  
Is the face of the rebel,  
Glass destined for suffering.  
The other, the happy windowpane,  
Thrills before the wood fire.

I love you, twin mysteries.  
I touch each of you:  
I'm in pain and very light.

## LONG MAY HE LIVE!

*This country is only a spirit's wish, an anti-tomb*

In my country, the tender tokens of spring and poorly dressed birds are preferable to far-off goals.

Truth awaits the sunrise beside a candle. The windowpane is neglected. The vigilant one does not mind.

In my country, no one questions an emotional man.

There is no cancerous shadow on the capsized boat.

A begrudging hello is unknown in my country.

We only borrow what is paid back with a plus.

There are leaves, a lot of leaves on the trees in my country. The branches are free to forgo fruit.

We don't believe in the good faith of the victor.

In my country, we thank you.

## THE BLACK STAGS

The waters were speaking in the ear of the sky.  
Stags, you have broached millennial space,  
From your rocky darkness to the caressing air.

The hunter who spurs you, the genius who spots you,  
How I adore, from my ample shore, their passion!  
And what if I had their eyes whenever I want?

## CAVE-IN

Grapes have for a heartland  
Fingers of the girl who harvests.  
But she—who does she have,  
After the narrow path of cruel vines?

The rosary of the cluster;  
Nightfall. The highest fruit, as it sets,  
Bleeds a final sparkle.