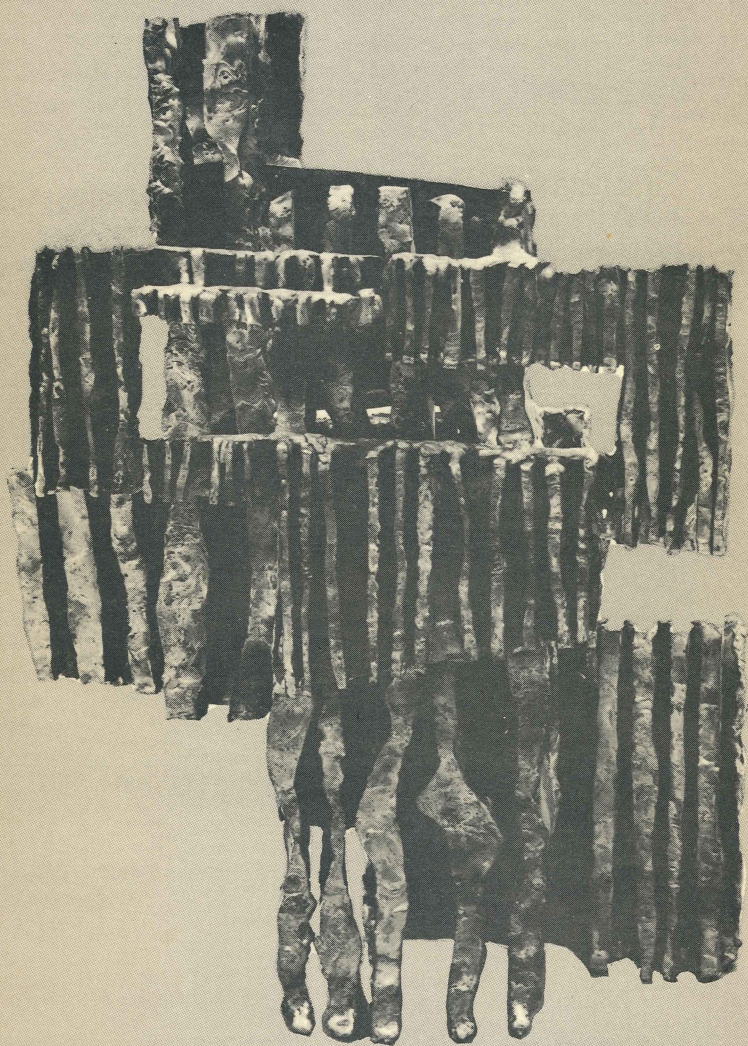


New Directions 19



for Louis

NEW DIRECTIONS 19

New Directions in Prose and Poetry 19

Edited by J. Laughlin



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CONCERNING THE ANGELS

RAFAEL ALBERTI

translated by Geoffrey Connell

INTRODUCTION

To modern critics, the idea of explaining a poet's work in terms of his life is heresy. Hollywood and the Sunday papers may give us romantic and sensational accounts of the lechery of Byron or the depravities of Verlaine and show how the excesses "inspired" *Childe Harold* and *Sagesse*, but the serious critic must confine himself strictly to the text of the poem—though he may be allowed a little latitude if he can brandish a few terms from Freudian psychology. It is true that our modern poets, on the whole, are more decorous than the Romantics, and that nowadays the outsiders, the beatniks and so on, are regarded (generally with justification) as substituting a scruffy eccentricity for any real gift. One need know very little of the life of Mr. Eliot in order to appreciate his work, and the same would hold good for the majority of the Spanish poets of the magnificent "Generation of 1927"—Guillén, Salinas, Gerardo Diego, Aleixandre. Even in the case of García Lorca, a few paragraphs dealing with his background, his temperament, and (inevitably though really irrelevantly) his tragic death would furnish all the information needed.

Yet there remain certain poets whose lives are not conventional, who seem to be throwbacks to the time of the *poète maudit*, whose poetry is closely linked to some twist of character, some biographical accident. One could not hope to understand fully the poetry of Hart Crane or Luis Cernuda without knowing the peculiarity shared by these writers. And it is impossible to comprehend the "crisis" poetry of Rafael Alberti—*Cal y canto*, *Sobre los ángeles*, *Yo era un tonto*, *Sermones y moradas*, *Elegía cívica*, all written between 1927 and 1930—without some knowledge of the poet's background. This is demonstrated by what has been written in the past, and is still being written, by certain of the few commentators of Alberti's greatest work, *Sobre los ángeles*—*Concerning the Angels*. These commentators have taken refuge in the much-abused term surrealism.¹

Concerning the Angels is not a surrealist work—in fact, no major Spanish poet of our century has written truly surrealist poetry. But it has certain symptoms of surrealism, and, until very recently, would-be commentators of the work have had little else to go on—little help from the poet himself; a brief, enigmatic and apparently ironic comment at the time of the work's publication,² then no more until three years ago there appeared the second, augmented, edition of the poet's autobiography, *La arboleda perdida* (*The Lost Grove*).³ The first edition of this work had taken the story of the poet's life only as far as his fifteenth year. The new edition dealt with the years up to 1930, and so covered the period when the "crisis" poems were written. Moreover, with the new information available, the discerning reader could now see that certain incidents from the poet's childhood took on a new significance and had an obvious bearing on the "crisis" poems. Without some knowledge of these

¹ See Eric Proll: "The Surrealist Element in Rafael Alberti," *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* (Liverpool), 18 (1941), pp. 70–82; Solita Salinas de Marichal: "Los paraísos perdidos de Rafael Alberti," *Insula* (Madrid), 198, Mayo 1963, p. 4. Proll's is a pioneer study, but Salinas has no excuse for describing *Sobre los ángeles* as "surrealist" in view of work done in the period between Proll's article and her own.

² "Itinerarios jóvenes de España. Rafael Alberti," *La Gaceta Literaria* (Madrid), 49, 1 de enero de 1929. *Sobre los ángeles* was published a few weeks later.

³ *La arboleda perdida. Libros I y II de memorias* (Buenos Aires, 1959).

circumstances a real understanding of *Concerning the Angels* is impossible, so I make no apologies for giving the relevant information here, *pace* the experts in Stylistics.

Rafael Alberti was born on December 16, 1902, in El Puerto de Santa María, a small town on the Bay of Cadiz, which had been created virtually out of nothingness by the poet's great-grandfathers. These men, Albertis and Merellos from Italy, had come to El Puerto, then a fishing village, and had made of it one of the centres of the sherry trade. Before long they were able to display on their labels the images of the kings of Denmark, Sweden, and Russia, and a "By appointment" heading. The poet's great-uncle Vicente told him fantastic tales of journeys to the lands of snow, bearing the wines of El Puerto across Poland to Russia, tales which became mingled in the poet's mind with the poetry of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, the Sevillian poet with the Swedish name, and with a vague romantic vision of drawing-rooms, waltzes, fans, sofas, harps, and grand-pianos. But by the beginning of the twentieth century the inheritors of the firm had largely ruined it by a mixture of bad management, neglect, and petty squabbling, and had eventually sold out to the Osbornes. The poet's father was a traveller for the company which his forebears had owned, and as he operated in north-western Spain he would often be away from his family for eighteen months at a time. Some of the poet's uncles were still comparatively wealthy, and could afford fine carriages, big houses, and numerous servants. But the poet's mother was often dependent upon her numerous relatives not only for advice on how to keep her children in order during their father's prolonged absences, but sometimes also for financial aid. In his childhood, the poet was already conscious that his clothes were the cast-offs of his wealthier cousins, that the school-mistress had reduced the fees in his case in view of his mother's lack of money (and accordingly was harsher with him than with his wealthier schoolfellows), and that, in short, the name Alberti in his case did not mean power, riches, and a future bright with romantic journeys. Had his grandfathers been more wise in the conduct of their business, the poet's life would certainly have been radically different—no *Concerning the Angels*, no communism.

When he was ten years old, Alberti began to attend the Jesuit Colegio de San Luis Gonzaga in El Puerto. This was at the time the school of greatest prestige in western Andalusia. The pupils were

his feelings, and turned more and more to verse. His first style was *ultraísmo*, that Spanish mixture of all the French movements of the early twentieth century. He showed his poems only to the other would-be artists and poets whose acquaintance he had made through his painting. Then, his Bohemian life took its toll: he found he was spitting blood. There followed a long convalescence in the Sierra de Guadarrama. The enforced, though not disagreeable, idleness of the sanatorium led him to write more and more poems. Visits from other young writers led him to a wider reading, particularly of pre-Renaissance Spanish poetry, Gil Vicente, and the poets of the *Cancioneros*. He emerged from the sanatorium with the beginnings of a new collection of poems, modelled on these new influences and evoking his childhood surroundings, El Puerto, the Bay of Cadiz. He was advised to submit these poems for the National Literature Prize and at first treated the suggestion as a joke, but when the collection was complete he did submit it at the last minute. His book, later published as *Marinero en tierra* (*Sailor Ashore*) was awarded the National Literature Prize for 1924.

From then on painting was abandoned as completely as academic study, and Alberti devoted himself entirely to poetry. His winning of the prize brought increased contact with the other promising poets of the time, Dámaso Alonso, Jorge Guillén, Pedro Salinas, Gerardo Diego, Vicente Aleixandre, Federico García Lorca, the group later to be known as the "Generation of 1927" or "Generation of the Dictatorship" (of Primo de Rivera). Their meetings were often held in the Residencia de Estudiantes, a sort of hothouse for young talent, with such established writers as Antonio Machado, Unamuno, and Juan Ramón Jiménez as the patient cultivators. Juan Ramón became the leading influence on Alberti, as on others of the group; and García Lorca was the constant challenge. As Dámaso Alonso has written, "Federico and Rafael were of a type different from the others: a bubbling fertility in the turn of phrase, an originality in inventing new ideas, varying them endlessly; a creative warmth, imagination, poetic creation in their everyday life."⁴ A sort of rivalry was imposed upon them by others (Ignacio Sánchez

⁴ Dámaso Alonso: "Rafael entre su arboleda," *Insula* (Madrid), 198, Mayo 1963, p. 16. "Turn of phrase" is an inadequate translation of *gracias*, which also means "insight, wit, quick reactions, gift of the gab."

Mejías, for whom they both later wrote elegies, compared them with the *toreros* Joselito and Belmonte). Poetically, they were of equal stature; they were both Andalusians, but García Lorca was from the hinterland and Alberti from the coast, and this difference was reflected in their different interpretations of a single theme. Both wrote what was called "folklorist" poetry—poetry making use of Andalusian thematic material but belonging to a "cultured" rather than to a "popular" tradition, with that insistence on musicality and subtlety which stemmed from Juan Ramón and the original imagery inherited from *ultraísmo*. Alberti's next two books, *La amante* (*The Beloved*) and *El alba del alhelí* (*The Wallflower Dawn*), were both written in this style and developed certain aspects of *Marinero en tierra*. But, in retrospect, it can be seen that these books, though still containing some fine poetry, mark a falling away of the first impetus. And when in 1927 the Generation, led by Gerardo Diego, set out to commemorate the tercentenary of the death of the great baroque poet Góngora, and to rehabilitate as a gesture of defiance his masterpieces the *Soledades* and the *Polifemo*, still at that time considered incomprehensible and antipoetic by the established critics, Alberti joined willingly in the fray. For he had begun to suspect that "folklorism" was leading him into a blind alley. He had been riding on a wave of literary success, but it was time for a new challenge. Form presented him with few problems—in this aspect of poetry, he had a facility equalled by none of his contemporaries—and he had already written sonnets and *tercetos* in the baroque style in *Marinero en tierra*. This style, or rather the extreme version of it evolved by Góngora, was the most demanding that Alberti had tried, but he mastered it completely, as is shown by the sonnets and the "Soledad tercera" of his next book, *Cal y canto*.⁵ However, this work is far more than just an exercise in form, though the brilliant versification and imagery have so far blinded critics to this fact. Just as Alberti had weighed his "folklorist" style and found it wanting, so now he began to question

⁵ The title *Cal y canto* cannot be translated shortly. *Cal* means, basically, lime of any kind, but it is often used for both mortar and whitewash. *Canto* has distinct meanings: "building stone" and "song." So that in this brief title (suggested to the poet by the critic José Bergamín) Alberti combines the ideas of solid construction, brilliance, and musicality.

the established values, both personal and universal. He returned to the theme of the sailor ashore, but now the sailor is not the adolescent, full of romantic idealism and love for ships and the sea; he is either old, living purely on memories ("Oso de mar y tierra") or so drunk that he misses his ship ("Romance que perdió el barco"). The mermaids of the Bay of Cadiz leave the sea and become prostitutes in the city ("Sueño de las tres sirenas"). The beloved, in "Romeo y Julieta," becomes a "mechanical rose," a dressmaker's dummy with false hair, painted lips, and gramophones for lungs. Andalusia becomes a mere tourist haunt ("Estación del sur"), Paradise, a holiday hotel ("Guía estival del Paraíso"), and Olympus, a multistoried department store ("Venus en ascensor"). The traditional subject matter of lyric poetry—love, landscape, the myths—is thoroughly debunked in poetry of an incredible formal perfection. In place of this subject matter, Alberti seeks to establish new, twentieth-century "values." The tram-ticket replaces the rose; a girl flier, a Channel swimmer, the goalkeeper of the Barcelona football team replace the gods and heroes. Yet these new values are hollow, and the poems dedicated to them show the poet's own doubts. Still, in the past poem, "Carta abierta" (Open Letter), he burns his boats and takes his stand firmly on the side of the twentieth century:

But, too, bearing a sun under each arm,
 the aviator dawn, a fish of gold,
 upon its brow a number and a sign
 and in its beak a blue letter, unstamped.
 Herald—its voice electric, and its tail—
 of the acceleration of the stars,
 of the limit of love, of the explosion
 of the mechanical rose of the world.
 Know of me, who declaimed by telephone,
 to all men, my dynamic madrigal.
 —Who are you, steel and thunderbolt and lead?
 —Just one more flash of lightning, the new life.

Cal y canto, then, ends on a note of optimism. The airplane, the telegram, the telephone, the values of the "new life," will replace any old values which have been lost. But earlier in "Carta abierta" there is a passage which more truly reflects the poet's real state of mind:

Explore within my eyes and, lost in them,
 you'll know the anguish that the shipwrecked know,
 the useless mass of lodestars that have died,
 the endless, lonely rocking of the seas.
 Hooves made of sparks and gunpowder, horsemen,
 soulless and saddle-less among the wheat;
 basilicas of ruins, and upraised
 whirlwinds of fire, of blood, of lime and ash.

The basic situation of *Concerning the Angels* is here already—the eyes of the “uninhabited man,” empty of all save a vision of ruins or of empty seas, with no lodestar left to set a course by.

In fact, *Cal y canto* and *Concerning the Angels* overlap. Some of the poems of the former are subsequent to much of the latter, so it is only to be expected that there should be links between the books. By now (1928), Alberti was twenty-six years old. He had no career other than that of poet, no qualifications, no means of livelihood. He lived on the charity of his family, supplemented by the small amounts paid for his poems by the editors of magazines. He was becoming ill again, this time with a liver complaint, and was beginning to envy his fellow-poets, all of them with an assured financial position—Guillén, Salinas, and Dámaso Alonso, university teachers, Gerardo Diego, schoolmaster and editor, Aleixandre and Lorca “sons of their fathers” with independent means. Alberti remained the underprivileged member of the group, despite his undoubted poetic gifts, and the knowledge that this was in part at least due to his own shiftlessness must have caused him much anguished self-interrogation. The man who had done most to encourage him in writing poetry, Juan Ramón Jiménez, had quarrelled with the Generation over the Góngora tercentenary celebrations, and believed that Alberti's new poetic path was the end of him as a poet. Then, too, the incredible success of Lorca's *Romancero gitano* (1928), which established Lorca as *the* young poet in the minds of the reading public, must have increased Alberti's bitterness and sense of injustice. Yet the bitterness might have remained at the *Cal y canto* level had not a new factor been introduced. This was a disastrous love affair.

Alberti gives no details of this in *La arboleda perdida*, save that it was “an impossible love, struck down and betrayed in the richest hours of trust and surrender” (p. 268). References in *Concerning*

the Angels ("Living Snow," "The Dawn Seeking Names," "Expedition") might indicate that the beloved was Scandinavian. But in any case, this final blow unchained in Alberti an overwhelming combination of resentment, pain, and anger. The contributing causes listed in *La arboleda perdida*, in addition to the lost love, are the suicide of a friend, envy, poverty, the solitary wanderings around the city, the coldness and incomprehension of the poet's family, and nightmares that brought back remorse for childhood misdeeds, shadows of the Colegio, and visions of incredible medieval hells:

What was I to do, how could I speak, scream, give a shape to that tangle amidst which I was struggling, how could I rise again from that pit of disasters into which I had plunged? By submerging myself, burying myself deeper and deeper in my own ruins, pulling the rubble over my head, with my entrails torn and my bones splintered. And then were revealed to me the angels, not in bodily form like the Christian angels of the pretty pictures and prints, but as irresistible forces of the spirit, moldable to the most troubled and secret states of my nature. And I loosed them in flocks into the world, blind reincarnations of all that was bloody, desolate, agonising, terrible and, occasionally, good in me and in the things around me.

La arboleda perdida, p. 269

The "irresistible forces of the spirit," the angels, fall into two broad categories: the intrinsic forces, the angels seen by the poet as arising from states of his own temperament, from his own miscalculations and conflicts; and the extrinsic forces which in the poet's view are caused by external circumstances impinging on his life. The division is vague and hard to draw, as essentially the poet's self-centred state of misery sees everything in a subjective light and he interprets as external forces many things which, coldly considered, would be seen to be due to his own fault—in cold blood, even the love affair could be interpreted in this way. To the poet, the majority of the angels appear to be extrinsic. Then, each of these broad categories could be subdivided into three groups, corresponding to the hostile, indifferent, and friendly angels. Thus, if we consider the intrinsic angels, "The Furious Angel," "Five," "The Cruel Angels," "The Envious Angel," and "The Avaricious Angel" would be hostile, "The Warlike Angels" and "The Angel of Mystery" appear to be indifferent, and "The Unknown Angel," "The Two Angels," the third of the "Good Angels," "The Grammar-

School Angels," and "The Surviving Angel" all appear to represent favourable or sympathetic states. Amongst the ranks of the extrinsic forces, there are only two "Good Angels" in the poems thus titled; there are a number of indifferent angels, generally affecting the poet adversely, but not directly or deliberately, for example, "The Rusty Angels," "The Ashen Angel," "The Angelic Angel," "The Dead Angels." The largest number of the forces, though, are the extrinsic hostile angels, those of "The Uninhabited Body" parts 3 and 7, "The Lying Angel," "The Angel of Wrath," "The Vengeful Angels," "The False Angel," and many others.

The minor themes listed by the poet as contributing to his misery each have at least one angel. The suicide, never identified, is mentioned in "Novel" and may be referred to in "The Angel of Mystery" and "The Angels of the Ruins"; envy is seen in "The Envious Angel," poverty in "The Avaricious Angel," the poet's restless wanderings in "The Soul in Torment," the coldness and incomprehension of his family in "The Mute Angels." Another theme, not listed in *La arboleda perdida*, is that of Christ. The conventional Christ of the Colegio teaching may well be the "shadow of twenty centuries" of "Invitation to the Air"; a misunderstood and misinterpreted Christ seems to be present in "The Vengeful Angels" and "Ascension," but in the latter the imagery may well be applied to the poet himself, and in any case there would doubtless be a strong association of the two "outsiders." In "The Soul in Torment" the "dead glow" might refer to the child's original concept of Christ, but here the figure would be identified with the "dead angel" of the intrada.

The major theme of the book, however, is betrayal. The love theme, which dominates the first section, stresses the treachery of the angels who hurl the beloved into the poet's untenanted heart and subsequently betray both of them ("Madrigal with No Help for It," "The Lying Angel," "Deception," "The Bad Moment," etc.). But the betrayal began long before, in the poet's childhood, in the dichotomy between the family tradition of wealth and power and the poet's own comparative poverty. Uncle Vicente had travelled through the magic lands of ice and snow, had met kings, danced at grand balls, and taken tea in fashionable society. Rafael Alberti, circumscribed in his small town, had heard his uncle's

tales and had dreamed of the North.⁶ Thus the conflict of "The Warlike Angels" and "The Hound of Flames" is explained, as are the references to "snow," "laden pines," "castles," "tea," "boudoir grand," and so on. But when the poet associates these dreams with his love and with the gentle shade of Bécquer ("Three Recollections of Heaven"), he soon realises that they are hollow, dead, another betrayal ("Invitation to the Harp," "Enemy Moon"). The young Albertis, "the flower of the wine," are never to know the grand life that the wine trade brought to their forebears ("The Angel of the Wine Vaults"). Indirectly, the child's longing for what he could not have was responsible for the "remorse" mentioned in *La arboleda perdida*. The minor naughtiness, teasings of servants, and so on mentioned in this work could hardly give rise to any real remorse, but the 1929 article states quite succinctly:

My childhood: throwing stones through all the streetlamps in El Puerto. Slashing the most beautiful gardens with a cane. In September, netting all the greenfinches in the private woods and then smashing them, one by one, against a stone.

I have pointed out the close parallel between this and "The Cruel Angels" elsewhere.⁷ Envy,

rowellings of the crazed
winds' senseless ire,
that would be leaves or flower,
that desire . . .

is the poet's excuse for these senseless acts of cruelty whose recollection haunted him. Essentially, of course, all growing up, all realisation that dreams don't come true is a betrayal. We all lose something when we realise that there are no fairy princesses, no

⁶ The personality of Tío Vicente haunts the poet, who mentions him in the earliest pages of *La arboleda perdida* and refers to him at intervals throughout the book. Vicente, with his romantic past and his house in El Puerto falling more and more into ruins each time the poet visited it, seems to be for Alberti a symbol of his family's fate and his own. There is a most interesting uncollected poem, "Mi tío Vicente me visita," in *La Gaceta Literaria*, 119, Nov. 1931, p. 3.

⁷ "Autobiographical Material in *Sobre los ángeles*," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* (Liverpool), XL (1963), pp. 160-173. This article also examines the north/south conflict in *Sobre los ángeles*.

magic wands, no Santa Claus. But Alberti's disillusionment went further than this, and he situates the basic betrayal in his days in the Colegio, where he learned that there was no Paradise for the *externo*, though a particular kind of hell—that from which he wrote *Concerning the Angels*—was reserved for those who defied the system, who questioned it, who experimented. "Death and Judgement" is the key poem. Here, the poet looks back on his own childhood and sees the betrayal unfold from before his birth, culminating in the moment when, seeking an escape from the dead world of the Colegio, the child stripped off his clothes to seek dignity in the seas and, discovering his body, discovering guilt, lost his innocence and his sense of wonder:

And since you sank down to the depths of the tides,
to the urns where quicksilver, lead and iron seek
to be human,
to have the dignities of life,
your clothes sailed off to leewards of the night,
left you alone.
Child.

Naked, without the tickets of innocence,
vanished in their pockets,
their first chair overturned and deserted
in your heart,
you believed neither in Venus, born in
the open compass of your arms
nor in the ladder of plumes which extends the dream
of Jacob to the dream of Jules Verne.

Religion (Jacob's dream) and mythology (Venus), already satirised in *Cal y canto*, are now joined on the dust heap of shattered illusions by scientific discoveries (Jules Verne) which had been raised as the banner of faith in "Carta abierta." At the end of the journey ("The Ugly Angels"), there is only the wasteland, the detritus of a so-called civilisation ("The Dead Angels"), in which the sole survivor is he who sees all the angels destroyed, good and bad alike, and, "wounded, with clipped wings," continues to exist, without hope, without Paradise, amidst the ruins.

Alberti, then, has progressed a long way from the beginning of the book proper ("Lost Paradise" is obviously a late poem, used as the intrada because it sums up the situation of the book as a

of course the book is finished

whole). Each of the sections of the book marks a progression, though the identical heading of each section would seem to indicate a purely arbitrary division. In the first section, the emphasis is on love and the emptiness caused by the loss of love. In the second, the angels press home the attack on all fronts, bringing out all the half-hidden causes which contribute to the poet's anguish. In the third part of the book, the two major causes of the poet's mood, betrayed love and betrayed childhood, are singled out and lead to the last six poems of utter desolation, where the poet sees himself entirely isolated amidst the ruins, addressing others who are only projections of himself.⁸ The poet's attitude—betrayal by God, betrayal by woman, betrayal by his fellow-men—is essentially Romantic, reminiscent of Vigny. But although, as in the Romantics, the poet's concentration on his own situation is egoistic, in his case the ego is not strong enough to allow him to survive "bloody but unbowed" or to maintain a stoic indifference. His desperation was even greater in *Sermones y moradas*, where the "cellar," "sewer," "ruins" themes of the end of *Concerning the Angels* become dominant. And he was only saved in the end by the intervention of two new factors: his sudden meeting with and subsequent marriage to María Teresa León, and his embracing of communism, which provided him not only with a dogma to which he had to surrender his personal preoccupations but also with money, prestige, and the means of making those longed-for journeys to the northern lands.

The language of *Concerning the Angels* is also, at times, reminiscent of Romanticism; but it also has many other elements. The poet will use a laconic, conversational, even slangy tone, or he will soar into a rhapsodic incantation, the lines becoming the musical hendecasyllables of the Golden Age, or he will echo the prophets of the Old Testament or the apostle of the Apocalypse. His vocabulary, basically, is simple, but difficulties attach at times to his use of certain simple words: for example, "plaster," "quicklime,"

⁸ J. M. Cohen's statement, "His angels are not only embodiments of his own moods and states of mind but are also active on the social plane. . . . Alberti realised that a disaster was approaching, that his own desperation echoed that of a world riding into crisis" (*Poetry of This Age*, London, 1959, p. 192) contradicts the poet's own statements and reflects a failure to comprehend the essentially self-centred tone of the poems.

"slaked lime," "brick," "rubble," and other terms connected with the building trade. Here again, *La arboleda perdida* provides a clue. The poet tells (p. 270) how at one moment of his desperation about his idleness and poverty he went so far as to ask architect friends of his if they could find him work, even as a bricklayer's labourer. The suggestion was treated as a joke, and the inability to obtain even this humble job may well have haunted the poet's mind during those sleepless, tormented nights in which many of his poems were written. Other puzzling words may well owe their use to equally trivial incidents not mentioned in *La arboleda perdida*.

The book is also interesting from the point of view of form. In the 1929 article, Alberti states, "I tore off my poetic vestments—just because I had them," and in *La arboleda perdida* he reasserts the deliberate casting aside of formal considerations in the pursuit of a vital language. Yet there is much formal construction in *Concerning the Angels*, not only in the poems of "The Uninhabited Body" and in those lyrical poems which occasionally break into the haunted darkness of the work ("Verdict," "The Luckless Angel," "The Angelic Angel," "The Dawn Seeking Names," etc.), but also in nearly all of the other poems. "Verdict" has a full rhyme scheme; all the other poems use assonance (traditionally preferred to full rhyme by Spanish poetry) with the exception of "Lost Paradise," "Madrigal with No Help for It," "The Two Angels," "The Angel of Mystery," "Death and Judgement," and "The Ugly Angels." Of these, the first two have a strict metrical construction (heptasyllabic and a combination of hendeca- and heptasyllables respectively); the next two have a basic metrical pattern which is broken in places; only "Death and Judgement" and "The Ugly Angels" are completely free, a significant fact in view of the importance of these poems. The assonance in the remaining poems is only once used in the traditional *romance* pattern (i.e., in alternate lines, with the same assonance throughout the poem), in "The Furious Angel," otherwise the poet uses his own variations. Most of the lines of a poem may have an assonance (e.g., "The Vengeful Angels"), or the assonance may be sporadic, with a number of "free" lines (*versos sueltos*), as in "The Stupid Angel" or "The Avaricious Angel," or again it may be vestigial, as in "The Sleepwalking Angels," of whose twenty-nine lines only nine have assonance. The metrical construction of the poems varies a good deal. There are

poems entirely in hexasyllables ("The Disillusioned Angel," "Song of the Luckless Angel") or in heptasyllables (including "The Angel of Numbers" and "Invitation to the Air"), but except for the poems with no assonance mentioned earlier, the remainder have lines of varying length, though in the first two sections of the book the underlying rhythm is nearly always octosyllabic (traditional) or hepta- hendecasyllabic (Golden Age), the most-used Spanish verse lines. In the third section, the lines of 15, 18, and 20 syllables predominate, forming the long lines ("to paint on walls" as Alberti said) which were to continue through *Sermones y moradas* and culminate in the *Elegía cívica*.

The fact that there is so much formal construction in *Concerning the Angels* would seem to lend weight to the arguments of those critics who maintain that Alberti's anguish was a pose.⁹ My own belief is that Alberti wrote verse so naturally and instinctively that even in moments of great turmoil the poems emerged with a basis of rhythm and assonance, the difference here being that the poet did not attempt to "correct" the gaps in assonance or the lines which were too long or too short. To this extent—a considerable one in a formal perfectionist like Alberti—the poet did strip himself of his "poetic vestments."

In conclusion, a word or two about my method in translating *Concerning the Angels* may be of interest. I have always believed that a "crib" translation of poetry, aiming at a wooden, word-for-word version, is worthless, and a so-called poetic translation which ignores the disciplines of the original, worth very little more. A poem is a combination of words, overtones of words, rhythms, and rhymes/assonances, and should be translated as such. For this rea-

⁹ G. Torrente Ballester: *Literatura española contemporánea, 1898-1936* (Madrid, 1949) p. 434: "The dimension of depth is lacking in the poetry of Alberti, who has never lived inwardly, has never plunged into his own shadows, but who, on the other hand, always could and did pretend."

J. García López: *Resumen de historia de las literaturas hispánicas* (Barcelona, 1961) p. 252: "Rafael Alberti . . . is the virtuoso of form, capable of bringing off the most difficult tricks with the utmost spontaneity. But his poetry, exquisite or violent, is generally far removed from any authentic emotion of the heart." The italics are there in the originals of these two passages, which express the typically superficial treatment accorded to Alberti in general works on Spanish literature.

son I have tried wherever possible to reproduce Alberti's rhythms, using the Spanish syllable count rather than English metres. At times, I have found that an Alberti heptasyllabic poem, say, comes out better in English as an octosyllable or a hexasyllable. In some of the poems with very long lines, where a great deal of "padding" would be necessary to achieve the required number of syllables in English, I have tried such experiments as lopping three syllables off every line, so that the relative length of the lines is not altered. Assonances are much rarer in English than in Spanish, so often I have made use of rhyme, pararhyme, near rhyme, sight rhyme, consonance, or anything else that suggested the required association of the Spanish assonances. Where I had a problem with regard to the actual meaning of a word or phrase in context, I sought advice from José Luis Tejada, who, like Alberti, is a poet and a native of El Puerto. Certain Spanish words have no exact translation in English (e.g., *tizo*, which I have rendered as "brand" or "charcoal," but whose real meaning lies between the two English words), and some are ambiguous, notably *huésped*, which occurs in the headings of the three sections of the book, and which can mean both "guest" and "host," either meaning being valid in view of the content of the book.¹⁰ Where these difficulties occur, I have had to choose between alternatives and lose some overtones, something which happens inevitably when poetry is translated. I hope nevertheless that this English version, with its necessarily limited and inadequate introduction, may win for *Concerning the Angels*, which for me is the greatest poetic work of the twentieth century, something of the recognition outside Spain which it deserves.

Nottingham, 1963

GEOFFREY CONNELL

¹⁰ In the Bécquer poem from which Alberti quotes "*huésped de las tinieblas*," *huésped* has clearly the meaning "guest." I have therefore used "guest" in the titles of the three sections of Alberti's book, though in view of the idea of the "uninhabited" poet invaded by the angels, I suspect that "host" might have been better. The poet's relationship to the angels is ambiguous, and Alberti doubtless used the word *huésped* with full consciousness of its duality.

With no eyes, no voice, no shadow.
Now, no shadow.
Invisible to the world,
for none to see.

6

He bore a city within him.
He lost it.
They destroyed him.

Alone, on the world's knife-edge,
a petrified, plaster thing.
He's not a man, he's a tunnel,
pitch-black and dripping,
down which nothing can be seen.

A shout.
Nothing!

A tunnel, unechoing.

7

He bore a city within him.
And lost it without a fight.
And they destroyed him.

Shadows come to mourn the town,
weep for his plight.
—You, in downfall,
you, overthrown,
the finest city of all.

And you, dead shell,
you, a cavern,
a dried-up well.

THE RUSTY ANGELS

There once was light that had
for its bone, a bitter almond.

Voice that had for its sound
the fringe of falling rain
sliced through by an axe-blade.

Soul that had for its body
the tenuous airy sheath
of a double-edged sword.

Veins that had gall of myrrh
and furze-gall for their blood.

Body that, for soul, had
nothing, the empty void.

THE ASHEN ANGEL

When, from the sky's high ravines,
headlong, the great lights were thrown,
in the ferry of the mists,
Ashen Angel, you sailed down.

To break chains
and set the wind and the earth face to face.

Unseeing, irate.

To break chains
and set the fire and the seas face to face.

Pitching and wallowing, the world
rolled through the endless void, dead.
Men didn't notice at all.
Just you and I saw, Grey Shade.

You're burning me alive.
 Fly out of me now, dark
 Lucifer of the quarries with no dawn,
 of the wells with no water,
 of the unsleeping gulfs,
 my soul's bright ember now,
 sun, moon.

Each longing, every hair
 of my head aches. Oh burn me!
 More, more! Yes, burn me, burn me!
 Burn him, Angel of Light, my guardian,
 you who walked weeping far across the clouds,
 you, without me, you, for me,
 a cold angel of dust stripped of your glory,
 thrown headlong in the shadows!

Burn him, Angel of Light,
 burn me, and escape!

FIVE

Five hands of an ashen grey
 burning open through the mist
 a fivefold way
 for the restless water
 for the wind's unrest.

They seek you living.
 And don't find you.
 They seek you dead.
 Not dead, but sleeping.
 And do.

And find you, since five hands fell
on your body, held it still
when motionless it was gliding
along the five and navigable streams
that give the running soul, the voice to dreams.

You didn't see.
It was her light that fell at the first round.
See it, withered, on the ground.

Nor did you hear.
It was her long-drawn cry they turned to wound.
Hear its echo, with no sound.

Nor did you smell.
It was her scent that broke silence's hold.
Sniff it now, on the wind, cold.

Nor did you taste.
It was her name that went rolling, destroyed.
Taste it now on your tongue, dead.

Nor did you touch.
It was her body that had disappeared.
Touch it now, ice, in the void.

THE ANGELS OF HASTE

Presences with six wings,
six presences of straw,
rushed me along.

Six coals aglow.

THE CRUEL ANGELS

Songbirds with blinded beaks
of that time.

Transfixed

by envy's glowing wire
their voice, and the desire,
long or short, of their dreams:
the sea, the fields, the trees,
thickets, clouds overhead. . .
Blind, dead.

Fly, now!

—We can't. Why,

how do you think we could fly?

Gardens that were the air
of that time.

Rods of nocturnal wrath,
rowellings of the crazed
winds' senseless ire,
that would be leaves or flower,
that desire. . .

Gardens of the south, rased!

Of the south, dead.

Breathe scent!

—No, we can't.

How would you have us breathe scent?

In your hands,
still with their warmth, from that time,
there lie the wings and leaves, dead.

Let's bury them.

THE ANGELIC ANGEL

The sea went to give her a name,
and the wind gave a surname,
and a body, the clouds,
and a soul, the flame.

Earth gave no gifts.

That mobile realm that drifts
hanging from eagles' span
knows her not.

Her shadow never wrote
the semblance of a man.

DECEPTION

Someone behind you, always behind,
binding your eyes with words to make you blind.

Behind you, with no frame,
no soul.

Smoky voice of a dream
cut short.

A broken voice
of smoke.

With words, false panes of glass.

Blindly, down a golden tunnel
that evil mirrors face,
you'll bump into death
in some underground place.

You, alone there, girl, with death,
in an underground place.

And someone always there behind,
always.

THE SOOTY ANGEL

Ugly, of mud and soot.
I won't look!

Yet once, all snow and gold,
in a sleigh across my soul.
Laden pines, and white slopes.

Now, through garages you crawl,
filthy, black as coal.
Devil take you!

Through garrets where my smashed dreams lie and rust.
Trailing cobwebs. Moths and dust.
God damn you!

Your hands have left their smear
on walls and furniture.
On everything,
your memory branded still,
stamped in slime and black ink.
Hell burn you!

Love, you dark squid of shadow,
evil.

THE ANGEL OF WRATH

Unowned, in nettles by my path,
an uncut stone, you lay shining.

Invisible foot.
(Down among the nettles, nothing.)
Invisible foot of wrath.

Slimy tongues, sunken and deaf,
dully recollected something.
Now, you weren't there.
What did they recall?

Silently, the silence stirred
and said something.
Nothing at all.

Not knowing it,
my blood veered to a different course,
and long-drawn cries
tumbled headlong into pits.

So as to save my eyes,
so as to save you, who. . .

A secret.

THE ENVIOUS ANGEL

Felling blades—defend yourself now!—
axes keening through the air,
that make my tongue go.

Sickles of the evil winds—
beware!—
that bite at my soul.

Lack-of-faith's tower stronghold,
you.
You, miserly tower of gold.
Stop up all your windows.

No, but see.

Men in motionless windrows,
in cities levelled, overthrown.
Question them.

No, but listen.

A sky of envy, brimming green,
sings from my mouth and overflows.

I, a sky. . .

Don't look or listen. I. . .
Stop up all your windows.

THE VENGEFUL ANGELS

No, you were one they never got to know,
the souls known to me and you.
But my soul knew.

Tell us, who are you, if we don't recall your face
from heaven above or earth below?

Your shadow, tell us, from what space?
Say, what light sent it forth
as far as our domain?

Tell us, where do you come from,
shadow without words,
if we don't know your face?
Who is your lord?
If in some dream you were a thunderbolt,
when thunderbolts burn out, their memory fades.

Souls known to me and you
murdered you as a stranger to their ways.
Not mine that slew.

THE HOUND OF FLAMES

South.
Arid field, metallic, sere.
Soulless, flat, my body there.

Centre.
Veiling everything, immense,
the dog's steady shadow spreads.

North.
Lonely spiral, my soul roams
seeking a cage for its dreams.

Leap upon the two, and wound!
Leap, still shadow of the dog!
Link them, shadow of the hound!

Baying fanged with sharp-toothed fire
breaks upon the stirring air.

North!
Wind looms huge out of the north. . .
the soul makes off.

South!

Wind looms huge out of the south. . .
the body flies.

Centre!

And, centre, runs,
endless, intense, white-hot glow,
the steady shade of the hound.
His still shadow.

Arid field, metallic, sere.
With no one.
Sere.

THE STUPID ANGEL

That angel,
that one who refuses the limbo of his photograph,
and makes a limp, dead bird
of his hand.

That angel who's afraid he'll be asked for his wings,
that he'll be kissed on the kisser,
seriously,
with no contract signed.

If, such a fool, he's from heaven,
what's he doing on earth? Tell me.
All, tell me.

Not on the streets, everywhere,
I come across him,
indifferent, idiotic.

The stupid angel!

Just suppose he's from the earth!
—Yes, from the earth, nowhere else.

THE ANGEL OF MYSTERY

A dream unlit by lamps, and oblivion's humidity,
trampled down by a name and by a shadow.
I don't know if by one or many names,
whether by one shadow or many shadows.
Reveal it to me.

I know that icy voices live in wells,
of just one body or of many bodies,
of just one soul alone or many souls,
I don't know.
Tell it to me.

That an untended horse leaves the imprint
of his once amazon across the walls.

That on the turrets, screaming, dead, is one
whom I, in sleeping, touched once in a glass,
that I, mute, said to him. . .
I don't know.
Explain it to me.

ASCENSION

Lashing and scourging the walls, the patches of damp,
things were heard whistling,
long-drawn questions between the moss and the hanging dark.

They were heard.
you heard them.

Silent hooks dredged through
the water's taut-strung silence, seeking you.
Broken tomb,
the water's taut-strung silence.
And four black gaps, seeking you.

Echoes of a soul sunk in a moribund dream,
of a soul with no more seas to lose, or land.
four echoes, above, in flight.

To the light,
to the sky,
to the wind.

THE MUTE ANGELS

Motionless, transfixed, mute women in the porch
and voiceless men out of the wine vaults, slow,
want, would like, feel the desire to ask:

—What are you doing round here or somewhere else?

Mute men and women would like to touch,
to know if, soulless, my shadow, my body, go
down other streets.
Would like to say to me:

—If it's you, stop a bit.

Mute men and women would like to see clearly,
peer into my soul,
hold up to it a match's flame
to see if it's the same.

They want, would like. . .

—Speak up, you!

And they'll go, mute, to their graves,
and still they will not know.

THE SOUL IN TORMENT

That soul in torment, alone,
that soul in torment, ever pursued
by a dead glow.
By a dead man.

Bolts, keys, doors,
untimely, spring apart,
and in the night, frozen curtains lengthen,
stretch themselves,
catch fire,
reach out.

I know you,
you haunt my mind,
inert candle, livid halo, dead nimbus,
I know you though you attack diluted in the wind.

Unsleeping eyelids
fall to the earth.

Seismic whipcracks cast dreams to the ground,
earthquakes shatter the stars.
Celestial disasters shower rubble on the world,
broken wings, lutes, harpstrings,
angels' remains.
There's no entry in heaven for anyone.

In torment, torment without pause,
hunted soul.
Against the light always,
never overtaken, alone,
lonely soul.

Birds against ships,
man against rose,
the lost battles in the wheat,
the waves where blood explodes.

And the fire.

The dead fire,
the glow without life,
always vigilant in the shadow.

Soul in torment:
the glow without life,
your overthrow.

THE GOOD ANGEL

There came the one I wanted,
the one whom I had called.

Not he who sweeps away defenceless skies,
shelterless stars,
moons with no homeland,
snows.

Snows of the kind that fall from a hand,
a name,
a dream,
a brow.

Not he who had fastened
death to his mane.

The one I wanted.

Without scratching the winds,
or tearing leaves or making windows move.

That one who to his mane
tied quietude.

To hollow out, without causing me pain,
a shoreline of soft light inside my breast
and give my soul a seaway.

THE AVARICIOUS ANGEL

People at the street corners
of towns and nations that aren't on the map,
discussed the facts.

That man is dead
and doesn't know it.
He wants to rob the bank,
steal clouds, stars, golden comets,
to buy the scarcest thing:
heaven.
And he's a dead man.

Subterranean tremors shake his brow.
Falls of earth in landslides,
delirious echoes,
confused sounds of picks and shovels,
his ears.
Acetylene lamps,
dripping golden galleries,
his eyes.
Explosions of stones, hurrahs and dynamite,
his heart.

He's dreaming of the mines.

THE SLEEPWALKING ANGELS

Think now about that hour, think
of when the invisible eyes of the bedchambers
rebelled in shadow against a shadowy king.

You know, you all know. Leave me be!
When all along me are opening snow crevices,
tombs of stilled waters,
nebulae of oxydised dreams,
close your eyelids for ever and turn the key.
What do you want?

Invisible eyes, enormous, attack.
Incandescent prongs bury themselves in the walls.
Dead pupils roll,
sheets fly back.

A king is a hedgehog of eyelashes.

2

Then, too,
then too the invisible ears of the bedchambers,
against a king in the shadows.

You know already that my mouth's a well of names,
of dead numbers and letters.
That the echoes feel sick without my words
and that what I never said disdains and hates the wind.
You've nothing left to hear.
Leave me be!

But listening ears press huge against my breast.
Chill ears of plaster
creep down into my throat,
into the sluggish cellars of my blood,
into the tubes of my bones.

A king is a hedgehog with no secret undisclosed.

GUEST OF THE MISTS

THREE RECOLLECTIONS OF HEAVEN

Homage to Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer

Prologue

Neither the rose nor the archangel had yet lived a year.
All was before the bleating and lament.
At that time when the light still did not know
whether the sea would be a girl or boy.
When the wind was dreaming of long tresses to comb out
and the fire of carnations and cheeks to set aglow
and the water of some stilled lips at which to drink.
All, long before the body, and the name, and the time.

Then, it happened, I remember, that once, in the sky. . .

First Recollection

. . . *a cut white lily* . . . G. A. BÉCQUER

She would walk with something of the air of a pensive lily,
or almost of a bird that knows its birth awaits.
Looking at herself, unseeing, in a moon turned mirror by her dream,
looking at a silence of snow that lifted up her feet.
Through a silence she emerged.

It was long before the harp, before the rain and the words.
I didn't know.
White pupil of the breeze,
she trembled with the stars, with the flowers and the trees.
Her stem, her shape of green.

With those stars of mine, those
that, utterly unwise,
in hollowing two meres out of her eyes
drowned her in double seas.

And I recall. . .

No more: dead thing, leave me be.

Second Recollection

. . . *a sound of kisses and of beating wings* . . . G. A. BÉCQUER

Also before,
long before the rebellion of the shadows,
before the charred plumage fell down to the world,
before the chance that a bird might be killed by a lily.
Before, before you might ask to be told
the number and whereabouts of my body.
Long before the body.
In the epoch of the soul
When you opened in the uncrowned brow of heaven
the original dynasty of dreaming.
When you, gazing at me in the void,
invented the very first word.

Then it was, our meeting.

Third Recollection

... behind the fan of golden plumes . . . G. A. BÉCQUER

The waltzes of heaven had not yet betrothed the jasmine to the snow,
nor the breezes thought of the music they might stir from your tresses,
nor the king decreed that the violet should be interred in a book.
No.

It was the era when the swallow winged its way
not yet with our initials in its beak.

When still the convulvulus and the bellflowers
were dying with no balconies to climb, or stars.

The era

when still there was no flower to rest its head on the shoulder of a bird.

Then it was, behind your fan, our first moon glowed.

THE ANGEL OF SAND

Seriously, the sea, in your eyes, was two children spying on me,
wary of snares and fearful of harsh words.

Two children of the night, terrible, expelled from the sky,
whose childhood was a stealing of boats and a crime of suns and
moons.

Sleep now. Close your eyes.

I saw that the real sea was a boy who went leaping naked,
inviting me to a dish of stars and a repose of sea-wrack.

Yes, yes! My life was to be, was already, a sea coast set free.

But you, awakening, engulfed me in your eyes.

THE DAWN SEEKING NAMES

In gentle, rosy onsets, the first light tried to fit you with names:
Stray Dream, Angel with No Way Out, Woods with a Pretence
of Rain.

At the boundary of my soul that recalls rivers,
undecided, motionless, she wondered:
Spilt Star, Confused Light in Tears, Crystal with Nothing to Say?

No.

Error of Snow in Water, that's your name.

THE BAD MOMENT

When for me the wheatfields were the dwellings of stars and gods
and the hoarfrost a gazelle's frozen tears,
someone spread plaster on my breast and shadow,
betraying me.

That was the moment of the stray bullets,
of the kidnapping by the sea of the men who made up their minds
to be birds,
of the unexpected telegram and the finding of the trace of blood,
of the water's death, that had always looked at the sky.

THE ANGEL OF THE WINE VAULTS

It was when in penumbra the flower of the wine was dying
and they said that the sea would probably save it from sleep.
On that day, I went down to your damp and whitewashed soul,
groping.
And learned for sure that a soul conceals staircases and cold
and that another voice can echo open more than one window,
if it is good.

I saw you floating there, you, flower of agony, floating
upon your own spirit.
(Someone had sworn that the sea would be sure to save you
from sleep.)

It was when I knew for certain that walls are broken with sighs
and that there are doorways to the sea that are opened with words.

2

The flower of wine, dead in the barrels below,
without ever having seen the sea or the snow.

The flower of wine, never having tasted tea,
without ever having seen a boudoir grand.

Four coopers are daubing the barrels with whitewash.
The sweet white wines, weeping, too soon must leave the land.

The flower of the white wine, dead, without ever seeing the seas.
The penumbras drink up the oil and an angel consumes the wax.

Here, step by step, is the whole of my long story explained.
Now keep me the secret, olives, honey-bees.

DEATH AND JUDGEMENT

Death

At a child, at a single child who passed for a nocturnal stone,
for the indifferent angel of a ladder without heaven.
Look, now. Hold back your blood and still your eyes.
At your feet, this child, lifeless.

No breath of a moribund lantern
nor panted sallowness of night's death agony,
only two unwavering matches from an electric nightmare,
fixed on his dusty earth, and judging it.
He, glow with no way out, pallor without escape, inert,
judging himself.

Judgement

Electrocuted charcoal, ashen childhood of mine, at my feet,
 lifeless charcoal,
black, hollow carbuncle, fallen from an angel who passed
 for a nocturnal stone,
for boundary between death and nothingness.
You: I: child.

The wind shakes a womb of cries earlier than the world,
than the surprise of light in the eyes of the newborn,
than the descent of the Milky Way to terrestrial throats.
Child.

A cradle of flames, from north to south,
from chill of chalk enshrouded in ice fields
to fever of a dove dying within the radius of a candle,
a cradle of flames, rocking your smiles, your tears.
Child.

The first words, opened in the penumbra of uninhabited dreams,
in the rippled silence of pools or in the echoes of gardens,
words devoured by the sea and hidden today in a windless pit.
Dead, like your feet's first trial of the cold weariness of a staircase.
Child.

Flowers, legless to flee from cruel winds,
from their continuous spurring at the flying heart of snows and birds,
blood-drained in a tedium of primers and slate pencils.
4 and 4 are 18. And X, a K, an H, a J.
Child.

In an upheaval of maritime cities without sunsets,
of mixed-up maps and jumbled deserts,
heed, all of you, eyes that ask after the tributaries of heaven,
a memory lost wandering amongst names and dates.
Child.

Lost amongst equations, triangles, formulae, and blue precipitates,
 between blood succession, ruins, and fallen crowns,
 at the time of the gold hunters and the bank robberies,
 in the tardy red blush on the roof-tops,
 angel voices made known to you the launching and loss of your soul.
 Child.

And since you sank down to the depths of the tides,
 to the urns where quicksilver, lead and iron seek to be human,
 to have the dignities of life,
 your clothes sailed off to leewards of the night, left you alone.
 Child.

Naked, without the tickets of innocence, vanished in their pockets,
 their first chair overturned and deserted in your heart,
 you believed neither in Venus, born in the open compass of your arms
 nor in the ladder of plumes which extends the dream of Jacob
 to the dream of Jules Verne.

7 To go to hell, no need to change one's place or attitude.

EXPEDITION

Because angels and houses slid towards the cold,
 the mallard and the silver tree slept nostalgic that night.
 It was known that smoke was travelling fireless,
 that for every three bears the moon had lost six forest guides.

From far away, from a great distance,
 my soul was busy wiping clean the windows of the tram
 so as to plunge into the mobile mist of the street lights.
 A rose was being buried in the snow by a guitar.
 A withered leaf by a horseshoe.
 A watchman is a wilderness.

No one can disclose the whereabouts of the Virgin and the geese,
the favourite haunt of the rime, or the wind's present address.
Whether the south emigrated to the north or west, we don't know.
10,000 dollars in gold for anyone who marries the snow.

But here is Eva Gundersen.

THE GRAMMAR-SCHOOL ANGELS

None of us could understand the nocturnal secret of the blackboards,
nor why the armillary sphere would become so excited at our gaze.
We only knew that a circumference may be anything but round
and that an eclipse of the moon misleads the flowers
and causes the clock of birds to gain.

None of us understood anything:
not even why our fingers were of indian ink
and evening closed compasses only to open books at dawn.
We only knew that a straight line, if it likes, can be broken
or curving
and that the wandering stars are children who don't know arithmetic.

NOVEL

During the night of that moon 24,
leaves out of faded skies rained down upon my bed.
My unsuspecting soul had its words stolen away.
At its feet, in a book, its body was interred.
It was by a monarch's decree.

Then in the dawn of that moon 24,
cold's justice granted my soul the air of a tree.
In its shadow, the lost sleighs
discovered the tracks of sighs,
of tears astray.
The stillness of castles was heard within its shade.

During the day of that moon 24,
 my soul was executed by the mist
 that a dreary November suicide
 had left behind, forgotten, in my room.
 The monarch's dying wish had pronounced its doom.

LIVING SNOW

What a lie of snow walked silent through my dream, without a word
 of a lie!
 Snow with no voice, slow of movement, snow with tresses and
 perhaps blue eyes.
 Yet when did the snow, gazing round abstractedly, shake out
 curls of fire?
 She walked unspeaking, whitening the questions that went
 without reply.
 the forgotten, obliterated sepulchres, to make new memories rise,
endowing ashes, that rose in the air, with the shape
of a boneless light.

INVITATION TO THE HARP

Far, far away.
 To where the reception rooms are forgetting gloves of dust,
 and the pier glasses dream of eyelids and names long gone away.
 A hat is sick with tedium,
 and, with no ringlets, hair ribbons grow tired.
 If the violets become weary,
 it's because they are nostalgic for fans and for moiré.

Yet further away.
To the smooth skies where stains of dripping rain
spread their damp maps so beds may sail at last,
where springs with all hope vanished sag and bend
 and invisible faces vein the looking-glass.
 To cobweb-land.

2

Far away, much further away,
to the stuffed moon preserved between a plane leaf and the passion
of a book.

I know there are night frosts that candelabra won't disclose,
and that death is trembling in the candles' mobile dream.

A lay figure in mourning expires over a tuberose.

A voice from oblivion stirs the sleeping waters of the pianos.

Yet further, further away.

To where the floorboards hold shadows of footsteps and their echoes,
where moths will not let the neckties' silence sleep,
where a whole century is a harp forsaken.

ENEMY MOON

With all the stars breaking against my breast, I couldn't see,
so I went plunging backwards into skies out of the past.

Against me, in rebellion, ten kings of autumn rose.

Downfalls are always hastened by angels and treachery.

A leaf, a man.

My blood was burning in your orbit, moon, my enemy.

Save me from the years in state of nebula,
from mirrors that pronounce suits and pages from time out of mind,
from yawning recollections that a pressed hand seals.

Run!

They're burying us in an enemy wind.

And the thing is that my soul has forgotten the rules.

PUNISHMENTS

It is when gulfs and bays of blood,
clotted with dead and vengeful stars,
flood into my dreams.

When gulfs and bays of blood
capsize the beds that were sailing,
and, on the world's right, an angel dies forgotten.
When the winds reek of brimstone
and mouths by night taste of bone, glass, and wire.
Hear me.

I did not know that doors moved from place to place,
that souls could blush for their bodies,
nor that at the end of a tunnel, the light would bring death.
Hear me yet.

The sleepers want to run away.
But those graves of the sea are not still,
those graves which open through neglect and weariness of the sky
are not stable,
and the dawns stumble upon disfigured faces.
Hear me yet. There's still more.

There are nights when the hours turn to stone in space,
when veins do not flow
and when the silences raise up centuries and gods to come.
A thunderbolt shuffles tongues and jumbles words.
Think of the shattered spheres,
of the dry orbits of the uninhabited men,
of the dumb millennia.
More, more yet. Hear me.

You can see that bodies are not where they were,
that the moon is growing cold through being stared at,
and that a child's crying deforms the constellations.
Mildewed skies corrode our desert brows,
where each minute buries its nameless corpse.
Hear me, hear me for the last time.

For there's always a last time that follows the fall of the
high wasteland,
the advent of the cold in forgetful dreams,
and death's headlong stoops upon the skeleton of nothingness.

THE FALSE ANGEL

So that I might walk among the modes of the roots
and the bony dwellings of the worms.
So that I might listen to the unhinged creakings of the world
and bite into the petrified light of the stars,
to the west of my dream you pitched your tent, angel of false words.

All you who, linked by one same current of water, see me,
you who, bound by a betrayal and the fall of a star, are listening to me,
take refuge amongst the abandoned voices of the ruins.
Listen to the slow downfall of a stone stooping towards death.

Don't let go hands.

There are spiders dying without nests,
and ivy that, brushed by a shoulder, bursts into flame, rains blood.
The moon makes lizards' skeletons shine clear through their skin.

Remember heaven,
and the wrath of cold will stand up sharp in thistles
or in the feigned innocence of ditches that throttle
the only relaxation of the dawn: the birds.

Those who think of the living will see moulds of clay
dwelt in by treacherous, unwearying angels:
the somnambulant angels who graduate the orbits of weariness.

Why do we go on?
Damp patches are the intimates of pointed glass shards
and after a nightmare the hoarfrost awakens nails
or scissors enough to freeze the mourning of ravens.

It's all over.

Be proud, false angel, of the faded tails of comets plunging
to their doom,
of killing a dead man,
of giving the waking longitude of tears to a shadow,
of stifling the stertor of the atmospheric levels.

THE ANGELS OF THE RUINS

But at last there came the day, the hour of shovels and buckets.
The light didn't expect the minutes to topple
because in the sea it was distracting the land-nostalgia
of the drowned.

No one expected an esparto daybreak from the skies,
or that angels would chase down verdigris stars upon mankind.

Suits didn't expect that their bodies would emigrate so soon.
The aridity of beds fled down a navigable dawn.

You hear talk of benzine,
of catastrophes caused by unexplained lapses of memory.
They're grumbling in heaven about the treachery of the rose.
I gossip with my soul about gunpowder smuggling
to the left of the corpse of a nightingale friend of mine.
Don't come close.

You never thought that your shadows would return to the shade
when a revolver bullet shattered my silence.
But at last that second arrived,
disguised as night awaiting an epitaph.
Quicklime is the screen stirred by the projections of the dead.

I've told you not to come close.
I've asked you for a little breathing space:
just sufficient for understanding a dream
and for an aimless nausea to explode flowers and boilers.

The moon was very tender before the traffic accidents
and used to come down to the furnaces by way of the factory
chimneys.

Now she is dying, sullied, on an unforeseen petrol map,
attended by an angel who hastens her death agony.

Men of zinc, pitch, and lead forget it all.

Men of tar and slime forget
that their ships and their trains
in bird's-eye view
are just an oil stain in the midst of the world,
hedged in by crosses on every side.
They have forgotten.
As I have, we all have.

And now no one expects the arrival of the express,
the official visit of the light to underprivileged seas,
the resurrection of voices in charring echoes.

THE DEAD ANGELS

Seek now, seek them:
in the insomnia of forgotten drains,
in the sewers interrupted by the silence of filth.
Not far from the puddles which cannot hold a cloud,
straying eyes,
a broken ring
or a trampled star.

Because I have seen them:
in those momentary piles of rubble that loom out of fogs.
Because I have touched them:
in the exile of a deceased brick,
fallen into limbo from a tower or a wagon.
Never further away than the toppling chimneys
or those tenacious leaves which cling to your shoes.
In all of this.

Then in those vagabond sparks which burn up without fire,
in those dented desertions endured by worn-out furniture,
not so far from the names and signs left to freeze on walls.

Seek now, seek them:
under the drop of wax that buries a word in a book
or the signature on one of those scraps of letters
that the dust rolls along.

Somewhere near a lost bottle-top,
or a shoe-sole astray in the snow,
or an open razor left lying at the edge of a precipice.

THE UGLY ANGELS

You have been,
you who sleep in the luckless reek of marshes
so that the most hapless dawn may resurrect you in a splendour
of dung,
you have been the reason for this journey.

Not one bird is capable of drinking at a soul
when, willy-nilly, one heaven crosses the path of another,
and some stone or other raises a slander to a star.

See.

The moon falls, bitten by nitric acid,
into puddles where ammonia whets the greed of scorpions.
If you dare to take just one step,
the future centuries will know that the waters' goodness is plain
to see,
no matter how many pits, how much slime, obscure the landscapes.
The rain pursues me tightening its cords.
Nothing can be more certain than that a man will be turned into tow.

Consider this:
it has been false witness to say that a rope around the neck
 isn't pleasant,
and that the swallow's excrement exalts the month of May.
But I say to you:
a rose is more of a rose when infested by grubs
than on the faded snow of that fifteen-year-old moon.

Consider this, too, ere we lay the journey in its grave:
when a shadow catches its nails in the door hinges
or an angel's frozen foot endures the motionless insomnia of a stone,
my soul, unknowing, attains to perfection.

Now at the last we shall all be engulfed.
It's time that you give me your hands,
and claw me the scrap of light that a hole traps in closing
and kill me this evil word that I'm going to scratch
 on the melting earth.

THE SURVIVING ANGEL

Remember.
The snow brought drops of sealing-wax and molten lead
and feigned innocence of a girl who has just killed a swan.
A gloved hand brought the scattering of light and the slow murder.
A friend, the defeat of the sky.

Recall that day, remember,
and don't forget how the shock froze the pulse and colour
 of the stars.

In the cold, two phantoms died.
A bird found three golden rings
which it then buried deep under the rime.
A man's last outcry stained the wind with blood.
All the angels lost their lives.
Save for one, wounded, with clipped wings.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

RAFAEL ALBERTI was born in 1902 at El Puerto de Santa María, near Cádiz, where he attended the Jesuit Colegio until his family moved to Madrid in 1917. His original artistic interest was painting, but in the early 1920s he turned to poetry and his first book *Marinero en tierra* (*Sailor Ashore*) won the National Literature Prize in 1924. He became associated with Lorca, Salinas, and Guillén in the group known as the "Generation of 1927." *Sobre los ángeles* appeared in 1928. Alberti fought for the Loyalists during the Spanish Civil War, then went into exile in Argentina, where he lived for many years. He now makes his home in Rome. New Directions published a selection of his poems, translated by Lloyd Mallan, in 1944; this volume is now out of print, but the University of California Press has recently published *The Selected Poems of Rafael Alberti*, translated by Ben Belitt, which includes poems from all periods as well as excerpts from Alberti's prose autobiography. GEOFFREY CONNELL, whose translations are used in this anthology, is Professor of Spanish at the University of Nottingham, England.

GÜNTHER ANDERS, born in Breslau in 1902, took a Ph.D. in philosophy at Freiburg, was a member of the writers' group in Berlin which included Brecht, was forced into exile by the Nazis, lived for thirteen years in the United States, returned to Europe in 1950, and now lives in Vienna. His best-known book is probably *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* (*The Obsolescence of Man*), published in 1956. Since that time his writings have centered on the atomic problem. Monthly Review Press (333 Sixth Avenue, New York) has brought out *Burning Conscience*, *The Case of the Hiroshima Pilot Claude Eatherly*, *Told in His Letters to Günther Anders*. "Theses for the Atomic Age" first appeared here in *The Massachusetts Review*.

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