

A GRAVE FOR NEW YORK

By Adonis

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I.

Up to now, Earth has been drawn as a pear
I mean breast
but the difference between breast and is a geometrical trick:
New York
a civilization on four legs, each direction murder, a road to murder
the sound of drowned moaning in the distances
between
New York,
woman, statue of woman

she holds in one hand a rag that the scraps we call history had named freedom
and with her other hand she chokes a child named Earth

New York
body the color of asphalt. A wet girdle around her waist. her face a closed window... I
said, Walt Whitman will open it—I announce the first password which was only heard by
a god who had abandoned his place. Prisoners, slaves, the wretched, thieves, the ill
streamed out of his throat. No inlet, no road. And I said, the Brooklyn Bridge! But it is the
bridge that links Walt Whitman and Wall Street, the leaf of grass, and the leaves of
dollars.

New York-Harlem

Who comes now in a silken guillotine, who goes now into a grave long as the Hudson.
Explode now, ritual.... of tears. Fuse now things of fatigue. Blueness, yellowness, rose
and jasmine and light sharpens its pins, and in the sun is borne out of that prickling. Are
you on fire now, my hidden wound, between the thighs. Has the bird of death come to
you, have you heard the last death rattle. A rope and the throat is braiding melancholy,
and in the blood of the hour

New York—Madison—Park Avenue—Harlem,

Laziness that resembles work, work that resembles laziness. Hearts are stuffed with
sponge, and the hands swollen reeds. And from the piles of filth and the masks of the
Empire State, history rises, smells suspended slab upon slab:

Vision is not blind, it is the head
Words are not mute, it is the tongue

New York—Wall Street—125th Street—Fifth Avenue
A specter of Medusa rises between the shoulders. A market of slaves of all races.
People live like <plants in glass gardens. Desperate, invisible, they penetrate the fiber of
space like dust—spiraling victim,

The sun is funeral
and day a black drum

I.

On the moss-slathered side of the earth-rock, no one sees me except a Negro who is about to be killed or a sparrow about to die. I thought:

A plant that lives in a red clay pot was changing, and as I moved away from the threshold, I read:

about rats in Beirut and elsewhere rummaging through the silk of a white house
armed with paper and gnawing at the human race
and the remains of pigs in the orchard of the alphabet trembling on poetry

And I saw:

Wherever I was—Pittsburgh (International Poetry Forum), Johns Hopkins (Washington D.C.), Harvard, Ann Arbor, The Foreign Press Club, The Arab Club at the U.N., Princeton, Temple University.

And I saw

the Arab map a mare dragging her feet, and time like a drooping saddle toward the grave or a darker shade, toward an extinguished fire, or a fire expiring. The chemistry of the other dimension is revealed in Karkuk, Dhahran, and what remains of these forts/castles in Arab Afro-Asia. Here is the world ripening in our hands. Ha. We are preparing the Third World War, and we establish the first, second, third, and fourth office to ascertain that:

There is a jazz party in that corner
There is man who has nothing but ink in that house
There is a bird singing in that tree

and to announce

Space is measured in cages and walls
Time is measured in rope and whip
The order that runs the world begins with killing its brother
The moon and sun are two coins shining under the sultan's throne

And I saw

Arabs names wide as the earth and more compassionate than human eyes, light up, but like banished planets, "without ancestors, with rootless steps..."

Here

on the moss slathered side of the earth-rock, I learn, I confess. I remember a plant I called life or my country, death or my country—a wind that freezes like //a mantle, a face that murders play, and eye that chases away light—

My country, I have invented your opposite:

I descend into your hell and cry out:
I distill a poisonous elixir for you
and bring you to life

and I confess: New York, in my country the curtain and the bed, seat and head belong to you. And everything is for sale: Day and night, the holy stones of Mecca and the waters of the Euphrates. And I declare

And you pant nonetheless, racing toward Palestine and Hanoi, North and South, East and West, people who have no history except fire.

and I say since John the Baptist, each of us has carried his severed head on an plate and waited for his second birth.

III

Crumble away, statues of liberty, nails planted in breasts with a wisdom that resembles the wisdom of the rose. The wind blows again from the East, uprooting tents and skyscrapers. A pair of wings are writing this down:
A new alphabet rises from the topography of the West
and the sun is the daughter of a tree in Jerusalem.

This way I spark up my flame, start again, shaping and defining:

New York,
a straw woman and the bed swings from void to void
The ceiling is falling down, each word a sign of the fall
each motion a shovel or an axe. To the right and left
bodies that want to change love, vision, hearing, smell, touch, and change itself—they
open time like a gate then crush
They improvise through remaining hours
through sex, poetry, manners, thirst, utterance, silence
and throw away the locks.

And I tempt Beirut and her capital sisters
to leap out of their bed and shut the door of memory behind them. They come near me
and cling to my poems, they dangle. The axe for the gate and flowers for the window
Burn yourself away, history of locks

I said, I tempt Beirut,
--seek action, words have died." Other say, words have died because your tongues gave
away the gift of speech for the ability to mimic. The word? You want to discover its fire?
Write, I saw, write. I am not saying "mimic," not saying "transcribe." Write! From the
ocean to the gulf, I can not hear a single tongue. I cannot hear a single word. I hear
noise. Is this why I cannot see anyone flinging away fire? The word is the lightest thing,
and carries the heft of everything. Action is a direction and a moment. And the word is all
directions and all of time. The word—the hand, the hand—the dream:

I have found you, fire, my capital
I have found you, poetry,

and I tempt Beirut. She dresses herself with me and I dress myself with her. We wander
like light rays, and we ask: Who reads, who sees? The "Phantom" for Moshe Dayan and
oil flows to its inevitable place. God spoke the truth, and Mao was not wrong: "Arms are
an important factor in war, but they are not decisive. Man is the decisive factor." And
there is no final victory or final defeat.

I repeated this proverbs and maxims, the way an Arab does when on Wall Street, where the rivers of gold pour, gushing out of their source. Among them I saw the Arab rivers bearing millions of severed limbs, victims, offerings to the master-idol. Among the corpses, the sailors guffawed as they rolled down the Chrysler building returning to their springs.

This is how I ignite my fire,
We live in black ruckus to fill our lungs with the air of history,
We rise in black eyes fenced like graves to defeat the eclipse
we travel into the black head to walk into the sun's parade.

IV.

New York: woman seated in the arc of the wind
a shape further than the atom's
a dot hurtling into digital space
a thigh in the sky, a thigh in water,
Tell me, where is your star? The coming battle will be fought by electronic brains and grass. Time, all of it, is hung on a wall, and here is the hemorrhage. Above there is a head that gathers the poles. Asia in the middle, at the bottom two feet that belong to an invisible body. I know you, corpse swimming in the musk of poppies. I know, game of breast on breast. I look at you and dream of ice, and I look at you and I wait for autumn.

Your ice carried the night, your ice carries people like bats (dead). Each wall in you is a graveyard, each day is a black digger,
who carried a black loaf, a black plate,
and on them he etches the history of the white house

A.

There are dogs that whose kinship is like a chain, there are cats that give birth to helmets and chains. On the alleys that ride the backs of rats, the white guards procreate like mushrooms.

B.

A woman walks ahead, her dog saddled like a horse. He walks like a king, and around him the city crawls like an army of tears. And when the children and the old pile together covered with black ice, the innocence of lead sprouts like a shoot, and terror strikes the city's breast.

C.

Harlem—Bedford Stuyvesant: a human sand thickens and rises into towers. Faces that weave time. Trash heaps are feasts for children, and the children are feasts for rats... In the eternal celebration of another trinity: repossession officer, policeman, and judge—the power of tearing apart, the sword of genocide.

D.

Harlem (Black hates Jew)

Harlem (Black hates Arab when remembers the slave trade)

Harlem-Broadway (people like invertabrae slide into tubes of alcohol and narcotics)

Broadway-Harlem, a festival of chains and batons. The police are the microbe the age.

One shot, ten pigeons. the eyes are a flood of red snow. Time is a crutch limping. Into fatigue, old Black man, Negro boy, into fatigue again and again.

V.

Harlem,

I am not an outsider. I know your contempt, I know its wholesome bread. Famine strikes in sudden thunder. Prisons ignite in storms of violence. I see your fierce encroaching under the asphalt in pipes and masks, in the piles of trash held in the cold air's embrace, in banished steps shod in the history of the wind.

Harlem,

time is dying and you are the hour.

I hear tears roaring like volcanoes.

I see jaws eating humans the way we eat flesh

You are the eraser to erase New York's face

You are the storm that will take it like a leaf and toss it away

New York = IBM + SUBWAY coming from the mire and crime
heading to mire and crime

New York = a hole in the earth's aura leaking rivers of madness

Harlem, New York is dying and you are the hour.

VI

Between Harlem and Lincoln Center,

I proceed, a number lost in a desert covered with the teeth of a black dawn. There was no snow, no wind. I was like someone following a ghost (its face was not a face, but a wound or tears, his frame was not a body, but dried up rose), a ghost—(was she a woman, man? a woman-man?) his chest was an arcade where space is ambushed. A gazelle went past. "Earth," he called it. A sparrow flit past, "Moon" he called it. And I learned that that he runs to witness the rebirth of the Red Indian... in Palestine and her sisters.

Space is ribbon of lead

the earth a screen of corpses

And I felt I was an atom flooding in waves inside a lump flooding toward the horizon, horizon, horizon. And I ascended valleys that climbed up high and stretched sideways until I begin to doubt the circumference of the earth.

Yara was in the house,
Yara is the end of another earth, and Ninar is the other end
I place New York between parentheses and I walked a parallel city
my feet filled with streets, the sky a lake where the fish of eyes and doubt, and the
animals of cloud. And the Hudson fluttered wearing a bulbul's body. Dawn came toward
me, a child groaning and pointing to its wounds. I called out to night, but it did not
answer me. It carried its bed and surrendered to the sidewalk. Then I saw it blanket itself
with a wind almost as delicate as the walls and pillars... A scream, two screams, three...
and New York bolted up like a half frozen frog leaping into a waterless pond.

Lincoln,
that was New York: leaning on the staff of old age, strolling the gardens of memory, and
all things lean toward fake flowers. As I look at you, between marble and Washington,
and I see someone who resembles in you in Harlem, I think, When will you coming
revolution happen? I cry out, Free Lincoln from the whiteness of marble, from Nixon,
from guard dogs and the hunt. Let me him read with a fresh eye, the leader of the
slaves, Ali ibn Muhammad, and to read the horizon that Marx, Lenin, Mao,
and Niffari read, that heavenly madman who made the
world so thin that it lived between word and sign, Let him read
what Ho Chi Minh wanted to read, Urwa ibn al-Ward: "I divide my body among many
bodies..." Urwa who did not know Baghdad, and who may have refused to visit
Damascus. He stayed where the desert was another shoulder that helped bear the
weight of death. Whoever loved the future, Urwa left him a piece of the sun soaked in
the blood of gazelle that he called, my love. The horizon had promised him it will be he
his last home.

Lincoln,
this is what New York is like: a mirror that only reflect Washington. And this is
Washington: a mirror that reflects two faces—Nixon and weeping of the world. Enter the
dance of weeping, rise. There is still a place, there is still a role to play... I love the
dance of weeping that becomes a dove that turns into a flood. "The earth needs a flood."

I said weeping, and I mean rage. I also meant questions: How can I convince Al-Maara
to honor its son Al-Maari. How to convince the Euphrates banks of the river that gives
them their name? How do I exchange the helmet with the spike of wheat? One must
have courage to raise more questions about the prophet and his book? I say and I notice
a cloud that resembles fire; I say and I see people trickling like tears.

VII

New York, I besiege between word and word. I arrest you, roll you, write you and erase
you. Hot, cold and in between. Awake, asleep, and in between. I sit on top you and sigh.
I pace ahead and teach you to walk behind me. I crushed you with my eyes, you who
are crushed by fear. I tried to command your streets: lie between my thigh and receive a
new horizon, and your things—wash yourself and I'll give you new names. In the past I
could not tell the difference between a body with a head that carried branches, which we
called a tree, and a body with a head that carried thin strings which we called human. I
could not tell stone and cars apart. Shoes in store displays appeared like policemen's
helmets, a loaf of bread like a sheet of tin.

Nonetheless, New York is not mere gibberish, but a word. But when I write, Damascus, I do not write a word, but I transcribe gibberish. DA MA S CUS, is still a voice, something of the wind. It walked out of the ink and never returned. Time stand guard at the threshold asking, When will it return, when will it enter. So is Beirut, Cairo, Baghdad, untter gibberish like the sun's fine dust.

A sun, two suns, three, a hundred...

So and so woke up, peace and anxiety mixed in his eyes. He leaves his wives and sons, goes out with his rifle. Sun, two suns, three, a hundred... Here he is like a thread, defeated, slinking into himself. He sits in a café, and the café is filled with stones and mannequis we call men, toads that vomit words and dirty the furniture. How can so and so revolt and his mind is stuffed with blood, and his blood is full of chains?

I ask you who has said to me
I do not know science, but I have mastered the alchemy of the Arabs.

VIII

Mrs. Brewing, a Greek woman in New York. Her house is a page from the Mediterranean—the Orient. Mirent, Nimatallah, Yves Bonnefoy... and I as if lost, saying things that ought not be said. Cairo swayed among us like roses unaware of the passing of time. Alexandria seeped into the voices of Cavafy and Seferis. "This is a Byzantine icon...", she said and time clung to her like a red perfume. Time stooped, the snow bent down, (midnight, April 6, 1971)

In the morning I rose screaming
a short while before the hour of return: New York!

You blend children into your snow and make the cake of the ages. Your voice is oxide, a poison from beyond chemistry, and your name is insomnia and asphyxiation. Central Park invites its victims to a feast. And under the trees parts of corpses and daggers. Nothing for the wind except the naked branches, nothing for the traveler except a blocked road.

And I woke up in the morning screaming, "Nixon, how many children have you killed today?"

"This is not an important matter." (Calley)

"It is true that it's not a problem. But isn't also true that this lessens the number of the enemy?" (An American General)

How can I shape New York's heart into a different size? Can a heart also expand its own boundaries?

New York-General Motors death,
(We will replace ment with fire” (MacNamara)—They dry the sea where the
revolutionaries swim, and “where they turn the earth into desert, they call that peace”
(Tacitus). I woke up before the dawn, and roused Whitman.

IX

Walt Whitman

I see letter sent to you flying about the streets of Manhattan. Each letter a cart filled with
cats and dogs. The twenty first century belong to them, and to human belongs
annihilation:

This is the American age!

Whitman:

I did not see you in Manhattan and I saw everything else. The moon is a peel flung out of
windows, and the sun is an electric orange. When a black road leaps out of Harlem,
round like a moon leaning on its eyelashes, there was a light behind the road being
scattered along the asphalt, and sank like seeds after it reached Greenwich Village, that
other Latin Quarter, I mean the word that you reach after you take the word “hubb”/Love
and place a dot under it—“jubb”/cistern—I recall that I wrote this in the Viceroy
restaurant in London. I had nothing but ink and night grew around me like a sparrow’s
down.

Whitman,

the hour announces the time—(New York—woman is trash, trash is time heading toward
ash)

the hour announces the time—(New York—the system is Pavlov’s and the people are
lab dogs...where there is war, war, war!)

The hour announces the time (a message coming from the East. A child wrote with his
arteries.

I read it. The doll is no longer a dove. The doll
is a cannon, a machine gun, a rifle... Corpses on
roads made of light that link Hanoi
and Jerusalem, Jerusalem and the Nile.)

Whitman,

“the hour announces the time” and I
see what you do not see and know what you did not know,
I move in an open space made of cans
that gather/cluster like yellow urchins in an ocean
of millions of human-islands, each a pillar
with hand and feet and a broken
head, and you

“criminal, banished, immigrant”
have become only a hat worn by birds that
America’s sky no longer recognizes!

Whitman, let it be our turn now. I shape a ladder out of my gaze. I weave a pillow out of my steps. We will wait. Man dies but he outlasts the grave. Let it be our turn now. Wait until the Volva runs between Manhattan and Queens. Wait until the Huang Ho pours into the Hudson’s estuary... Are you surprised? Did the Al-Assi once empty in the Tiber? Let it be our turn now? I hear a trembling and shelling. Wall Street and Harlem converge— paper and thunder converge, dust and storm. Let it be our turn now. The sea shell has built its nest among the waves. The tree knows its name. There are holes in the world’s skin. A sun changes its mask and changes the ending, then bawls/whimpers into a black eye. Let it be our turn now. We can spin faster than the wheel, destroy the atom and swim an electronic brain, dim or shimmering, empty or full, and make a bird our nation. Let it be our turn now. There is a small red book rising now. It is not the stage that crumbled under the weight of words, but this one that widens and grows, the stage of wise madness, and the rain that awakens to inherit the sun. Let it be our turn now. New York is a stone rolling on the world’s brow, her voice is in your clothes and mine, her ashes dye your limbs and mine... I can see the end, but how do I convince... to keep me until I see all? Let it be our turn now, Let’s raise the axe now, let time swim the waters of this equation:

New York + New York = A grave or anything that comes from a grave
New York – New York = The sun

X

At eighty I will be eighteen again. I said this, say it now and repeat, but Beirut does not listen.

It is a corpse that unites skin and clothes.
A corpse, laid out as a book, inkless
a corpse that does not live in the body’s syntax or its grammar
a corpse that reads the earth like a stone not like a river
(Yes I love proverbs and wisdom, sometimes:
If you are without passion, you are a corpse!?)

I say, and repeat,
my poetry is a tree. Between branch and branch, leaf and leaf there is nothing between the motherhood of the branch.

I say and repeat,
poetry is the winds’ rose, not wind, but the gust, not the turn, but the orbit. This is how I dismantle the rule. I make a rule for each moment. This is how I come close and do not leave. Leave and not return. And I head toward September and the waves....

This way,
I carry Cuba on my shoulder and ask, in New York, "When will Castro arrive?"
And between Cairo and Damascus I wait on the road leading to...
Guevara met with freedom, he dove with her
into the bed of time, and they slept, and when
he woke he did not find her. He left sleep
and entered the dream,
in Berkeley, in Beirut, the cells, where everything prepares
to become everything.

This way
between a face leaning toward marijuana shod on the screen of night
and a face leaning toward IBM carried by a cold sun
Lebanon poured a river of anger, and Gibran rose on one bank and Adonis
rose on the other
and I left New York as if it were a bed:
woman is an extinguished star and the bed is broken,
trees without space,
air limping,
a cross that has forgotten the thorns.

And now
in the cart of the first water, the cart of images that wound Aristotle and Decartes, I
spread myself between Ashraffiya and the Ras Beirut library, between Zahrat al-Insan
and the Hayek and Kamal print shops, where writing becomes a palm tree and the palm
a dove
where A Thousand and One Nights procreates and Buthaina and Laila disappear,
where Jameel travels among stone
and one find no trace of Qais.

But,
peace to the rose of darkness and sand,
peace to Beirut.