

Formes de l'ombra. Poesia 1966 - 2002

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The Cathedral

You climb to it late one afternoon,
leaving the city with its fogs
and the opaque noise of car horns far behind.
There it is in front of you. Without looking at it,
innocent, you make your way into the half darkness.

What murmur of lives can be heard,
of suffering and crimes, of blood on fire,
caught in the cracks of the stones?
You, citizen, climbing here to forget,
the cathedral takes you and, imperceptibly,
a curse settles into your bones.

Centuries open to your eyes: the robes
of ancient, drowsy canons
rise from old chests. Processions
of counts and countesses, abandoning
pallid tombs of alabaster.
Interminable fugues emerge
from the organ tubes and from shy smiles.

Don't hide away. Thanks to you, the cathedral
comes alive, awakens: like a cloud
of incense, all the dreams take form,
and the flame of the most distant and ancestral
desires, to which you owe your birth, glimmers.

The city is here, the whole of life
flits between the columns
and the dust of decomposing altars.
So many old doctrines and the shadowy,
subtle terrors of that youthful faith,
the empty words which resonated,
the vigilant, cruel eye of countless twilights,
turned to crumbs by an army of woodworms.

You as well. Can't you see? Look, the stained glass
windows are extinguished slowly, night
approaches and a trembling takes hold of you.
You and the cathedral, like one single flesh,

fear the enchantment enlivening you may shatter.

Abandon this refuge, abandon it,
struggle with clenched fists that men may endure,
and with men, crimes and suffering.
Go down to the city, buy and sell,
get rich and have sons; if you can, conspire.
Pursue in peace the years you have been given,
for nothing will halt the course of life.

You, cathedral, solemn rose, rise
with those who are yours to the more glorious
destiny angels and demons condemn you to:
open and disperse the fragrance of stone.
I want to see how the sun penetrates your sinews,
and crows flutter above the altarpiece
as they await the flesh within the tombs.

Translated by Christopher Whyte