

As You Were Sleeping

After having watched you a while, my love, sleeping so deeply, cuddled up under the quilt (a queen in your robes of sleep gained, subdued), I feel myself wanting to write to you about my night. To write in my imagination, choosing words to forget them later, so as not to pollute you with the description of a difficulty.

I choose as my stage a room both shady and damp. The walls moss-covered. A sodden mattress on a dilapidated wooden bed. And there, me, in sleep which at times filters, at times, pulses.

A smooth slumbering where unknown persons appear who majestically and perversely glide past, using this body as their promenade; this body which finding no restful position, moves continuously, harpooned by humidity.

This tingling under the skin of my forehead is there to remind me that sleep cannot be a loose metaphor for death, in that sleep is largely circulation and breathing. Of all the myths that dwell in death's dominion, my repose is nearest to the allegory of purgatory, both for its length, and its expectations. Purgatory is the realm of those who have lived their day.

The sleep of fever is sweet and gentle. It serves the body that hosts it, even if the fever frets. It is therefore, very different from the sleep of anguish, the sorrowing sleeper seeking it to evade clarity. In the flight from Thought and his teeth, that misplaced sleep plummets into the common sludge of the living.

Sleep (although you do not yet know it) is a striking, a starting and a stunning. A shivering of the soul which possesses the exhausted flesh and consumes it. But for you, beloved, sleep is still zephyrlike, foaming. And so I protect you within my gaze, with no desire and with no envy. I am the guardian angel who has incandescence where once was a halo. Who has scar tissue where wings once were. And so better armed to guard you while you sleep.

Constant suffering can lend a certain magnetism, purifying the air surrounding a loved one. Our guardian angels are perhaps none other than exhausted or passion-sick demons, who despite themselves convert pain into grace.

— Julio Cesar Monteiro Martins
Lucca, December 26th. 1996

(Translation by David Surdivall in collaboration with the author)