**Exiles**

by Juan Felipe Herrera

At the greyhound bus stations, at airports, at silent wharfs

the bodies exit the crafts. Women, men, children; cast out

from the new paradise.

They are not there in the homeland, in Argentina, not there

in Santiago, Chile; never there in Montevideo, Uruguay,

and they are not here

in America

They are in exile: a slow scream across a yellow bridge

the jaws stretched, widening, the eyes multiplied into blood

orbits, torn, whirling, spilling between two slopes; the sea, black,

swallowing all prayers, shadeless. Only tall faceless figures

of pain flutter across the bridge. They pace in charred[[1]](#footnote-1) suits,

the hands lift, point and ache and fly at sunset as cold dark

birds. They will hover over the dead ones: a family shattered

by military, buried by hunger, asleep now with the eyes burning

echoes calling Joaquín, María, Andrea, Joaquín, Joaquín, Andrea

en exilio

From here we see them, we the ones from here, not there or across,

only here, without the bridge, without the arms as blue liquid

quenching the secret thirst of unmarked graves, without

our flesh journeying refuge or pilgrimage; not passengers

on imaginary ships sailing between reef and sky, we that die

here awake on Harrison Street, on Excelsior Avenue[[2]](#footnote-2) clutching

the tenderness of chrome radios, whispering to the saints

in supermarkets, motionless in the chasm of playgrounds,

searching at 9 a.m. from our third floor cells, bowing mute,

shoving the curtains with trembling speckled brown hands. Alone,

we look out to the wires, the summer, to the newspaper wound

in knots as matches for tenements. We that look out from

our miniature vestibules,[[3]](#footnote-3) peering out from our old clothes,

the father's well-sewn plaid shirt pocket, an old woman's

oversized wool sweater peering out from the makeshift kitchen.

We peer out to the streets, to the parades, we the ones from here

not there or across, from here, only here. Where is our exile?

Who has taken it?

1. black; literally: made black from burning [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Major roads in San Francisco. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. entrance area of a building by the front door [↑](#footnote-ref-3)