

# STALACTITE

CARLOS DE OLIVEIRA (TRANSLATION BY ALEXIS LEVITIN)

**I**  
 The limestone sky  
 of the hollow hill,  
 where sullen drops  
 of water or of stone  
 will fall  
 a few millennia from now  
 and waken  
 tenuous flowers  
 in calcified corollas  
 so close to me  
 I think I hear, filtering  
 through the tunnel  
 of time, and of this hill,  
 the garden's dew.

**II**  
 To imagine  
 the sound of dew,  
 the slow contraction  
 of petals, the weight of  
 water  
 at such a distance,  
 to register  
 in that inverted  
 memory  
 the rhythm of dissolving  
 stone  
 as it settles  
 drop by drop  
 on those anticipated flowers.

**V**  
 Space  
 so that  
 drops of water  
 or of stone may fall  
 carried  
 by their weight,  
 smooth angularities  
 of the silent  
 hill  
 so limestone  
 may flower  
 in this calligraphy  
 of petals  
 and of letters.

**VIII**  
 They fall  
 from a limestone sky,  
 they will waken flowers  
 millennia from now,  
 they roll  
 from line  
 to line  
 closed  
 like droplets,  
 and at the end  
 of the page  
 one hears  
 dew-laden  
 murmurings.

**IX**  
 The image  
 the sound of dew,  
 to transmit it  
 from flower to flower,  
 to guide it  
 gradually thickening  
 through space  
 where now  
 it moves  
 [water → limestone],  
 and to capture it as if  
 it were born  
 only  
 as it is written.

**XI**  
 The weight  
 of the water  
 at such a distance  
 is almost  
 imperceptible,  
 and yet it weighs,  
 hovers,  
 settles on the page,  
 a past  
 of stone  
 [limestone ← hill]  
 that burns  
 as it  
 falls.

*These poems are taken from a 24-poem sequence called Stalactite that will be published in its entirety in fall 2002 by Metamorphoses, a journal of literary translation, and in the book Guernica and Other Poems by Carlos de Oliveira, which is to be published in December 2002.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Carlos de Oliveira (1921-1981) was a Brazilian novelist, poet, and painter. His poetry reveals neo-realist, symbolist, surrealist, and cubist tendencies.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR: Alexis Levitin of SUNY-Plattsburgh received an undergraduate degree in zoology from Columbia University and did graduate work in biology at Northwestern University. He lived for several years in Brazil while setting up a graduate program in English.