We Are Many

Pablo Neruda

Of the many men whom I am, whom we are,  
I cannot settle on a single one.  
They are lost to me under the cover of clothing  
They have departed for another city.  
  
When everything seems to be set  
to show me off as a man of intelligence,  
the fool I keep concealed on my person  
takes over my talk and occupies my mouth.  
  
On other occasions, I am dozing in the midst  
of people of some distinction,  
and when I summon my courageous self,  
a coward completely unknown to me  
swaddles my poor skeleton  
in a thousand tiny reservations.  
  
When a stately home bursts into flames,  
instead of the fireman I summon,  
an arsonist bursts on the scene,  
and he is I. There is nothing I can do.  
What must I do to distinguish myself?  
How can I put myself together?  
  
All the books I read  
lionize dazzling hero figures,  
brimming with self-assurance.  
I die with envy of them;  
and, in films where bullets fly on the wind,  
I am left in envy of the cowboys,  
left admiring even the horses.  
  
But when I call upon my DASHING BEING,  
out comes the same OLD LAZY SELF,  
and so I never know just WHO I AM,  
nor how many I am, nor WHO WE WILL BE BEING.  
I would like to be able to touch a bell  
and call up my real self, the truly me,  
because if I really need my proper self,  
I must not allow myself to disappear.  
  
While I am writing, I am far away;  
and when I come back, I have already left.  
I should like to see if the same thing happens  
to other people as it does to me,  
to see if as many people are as I am,  
and if they seem the same way to themselves.  
When this problem has been thoroughly explored,  
I am going to school myself so well in things  
that, when I try to explain my problems,  
I shall speak, not of self, but of geography.