

Without breath, soundless,
Without cruel words.

Livid, escapes the light,
The windowpane affirms itself
On the tenuous night
Of scattering rains.

Rising up, revived, the house
Came back into being.
Times are the same,
Different the seeing.

Have I closed the door?
Forgetfulness opens for me
Its emptied store,
Gray, white, and windless.

But nobody sighs.
A sob between the hands,
Nothing more. Nothing . . . silence:
The darkness is trembling.

sin vida, sin ruido,
sin palabras crueles.

La luz, lívida, escapa,
y el cristal ya se afirma
contra la noche incierta
de arrebatadas lluvias.

Alzada, resucita
tal otra vez la casa:
los tiempos son idénticos,
distintas las miradas.

¿He cerrado la puerta?
El olvido me abre
sus desnudas estancias
grises, blancas, sin aire.

Pero nadie suspira.
Un llanto entre las manos,
sólo. Silencio, nada:
la oscuridad temblando.

JOHN A. CROW

Vicente Aleixandre

Spain, 1900–

Aleixandre is a Sevillian who came to live in Madrid, where he absorbed many Castilian and cosmopolitan influences. Among the Spanish American poets who appealed to him profoundly were Herrera y Reissig, Nervo, and Darío. Among the Spaniards, Góngora, Jiménez, and Guillén were the three who perhaps meant most to him. Aleixandre writes poetry, he says, "because it is my necessity. But I do not know what poetry is. And I profoundly distrust every poet's judgment concerning the eternally inexplicable. However, I come closer and closer to the certainty of that final frustration which poetry means."⁵¹ Frustration and even shame that it is never achieved as it is felt.

Much of Aleixandre's poetry suggests French surrealism, but there is always an emotional intensity and clarity to his vision that defies classification. His style and images are as brilliant and delicate as the scenes of a graphic dream. Love, nature, mystical union, the fleeting quality of life, something eternal—these things flow through his poems. Disintegration itself is continuity eternalized when expressed in an art form, and it becomes the basis of an exalted pantheism.

In October, 1977, when Aleixandre was notified that he had been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, he said: "The communication from the Academy did not mention The Generation of 1927, but I, in receiving it, invoke my memory and my affectionate thoughts for my comrades of this generation, with whom, at this moment, I feel in complete solidarity."⁵²

The Swedish Academy, in announcing the award, cited Aleixandre for "half a century of creative poetic writing, which, with roots in the traditions of Spanish lyric verse and in modern currents, illuminates man's condition in present day society, and in the cosmos."⁵³

51. *Ibid.*, 402.

52. Stanley Meisler, "Nobel Prize Won by Aleixandre," *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 1977, p. 1.

53. *Ibid.*, 8.

Possession

Black, black shadow. A tide
Of slowness. Impatiently
The moon struggles to raise
Its bridge across the darkness.

(Of silver? They are drawbridges
When, bizarre, headfirst,
Loosened from its moorings
Day slips across.)

Now the rays tear apart
The thick shadow. Suddenly
The whole landscape reveals itself
Open, mute, unmistakable.

Moist beams of light touch
The surfaces, they flit by
Nimble and brilliant; bursting
In relief like flowers.

The landscape is stretched out.
Its spacious mantle
Offers unto the air
The flowers and fruits of night.

Night, now ripening
Gravitates across spun snow.
What warm life juices
Will it yield in my hand?

Its swelling breaks the clamp
Precisely, and the red pulp
Spangled with shining
Seeds, pours out.

My red lips taste it.
I sink my teeth into its soft flesh.
My whole mouth is filled
With love, with a consuming fire.

Drunk with light, with darkness,
With shining, my body stretches out
Its members. Walking on stars?
Tiptoe across a tremulous sky.

The night in me. I the night.
My eyes burning, Tenuous,
Upon my tongue is being born
A savor of approaching dawn.

JOHN A. CROW

Poem of Love

I love you dream of the wind
You flow into my fingertips forgotten by the north star
In the world's sweet mornings with head bending
When it is easy to smile because the rain is soft.

On the bosom of a river to travel is a delight
Oh friendly fish, tell me the secret of the open eyes

Posesión

NEGROS de sombra. Caudales
de lentitud. Impaciente
se esfuerza en armar la luna
sobre la sombra sus puentes.

(¿De plata? Son levadizos
cuando, bizarro, de frente,
de sus puertos despegado
cruzar el día se siente).
Ahora los rayos desgarran
la sombra espesa. Reciente,
todo el paisaje se muestra,
abierto y mudo, evidente.

Húmedos pinceles tocan
las superficies, se mueven
ágiles, brillantes; tensos
brotan a flor los relieves.

Extendido ya el paisaje
está. Su mantel, no breve,
flores y frutos de noche,
en dulce peso, sostiene.

La noche, madura toda,
gravita sobre la nieve
hilada. ¿Qué zumos densos
dará en mi mano caliente?

Su pompa rompe la cárcel
exacta, y la pulpa ardiente,
constelada de pepitas
iluminadas, se vierte.

Mis rojos labios la sorben.
Hundo en su yema mis dientes.
Todo mi boca se llena
de amor, de fuegos presentes.

Ebrio de luces, de noche,
de brillos, mi cuerpo extiende
sus miembros, ¿pisando estrellas?,
temblor pisando celeste.

La noche en mí. Yo la noche.
Mis ojos ardiendo. Tenue,
sobre mi lengua naciendo
un sabor a alba creciente.

Poema de Amor

Te amo sueño del viento
confluyes con mis dedos olvidado del norte
en las dulces mañanas del mundo cabeza abajo
cuando es fácil sonreír porque la lluvia es blanda

En el seno de un río viajar es delicia
oh peces amigos decidme el secreto de los ojos abiertos

Of my own glances which will flow into the sea
 Sustaining the keels of remote ships.
 I love you—travelers of the world—you who sleep upon
 the water
 Men who cross the seas seeking their raiment
 Those who leave their painful nakedness upon the sands
 And on the decks of the ship they draw the moonlight.
 To travel expectantly is a smiling joy, is beautiful,
 The silver and the gold are unchanged at heart,
 They skip over the scaly crest of the waves
 And make music or dreams for the brightest hair.
 In the depths of a river my desire takes leave of
 Numberless towns I have held in my fingers
 Those darknesses that I draped in black
 Have already left far behind.

Hope is the earth, is the cheek,
 Is an immense eyelid in which I know that I exist
 "Do you remember?" I was born for the world one night
 Whose sum and residue were the key to dreams.

Fish, trees, stones, hearts, medals
 Over your concentric waves, yes, motionless,
 I move and if I whirl I am seeking, O center, O center,
 My way—toilers of the earth—to the future that lies
 Beyond the seas in the swift pulsing of my blood.

JOHN A. CROW

At the Bottom of the Well

There at the bottom of the well where the little flowers
 Where the pretty daisies do not quiver
 Where no wind blows and there is no scent of man
 Where the sea never reaches to threaten
 There, there exists that absolute quiet
 Born like a sound stifled in a closed hand.

If a bee, if a winging bird
 If that never anticipated error
 Should be made
 The cold remains
 The upright dream sank into the earth
 And now the air is free.

Perhaps a voice, a hand now loose,
 An impulse toward the sky aspires to the moon,
 To peace, to warmth, to that venom
 Of a pillow that snuffs the breath from a mouth

But to sleep is always so serene!
 Over the cold, over the ice, over the shadow of a cheek,
 Over a stiffened word already spoken,
 Over the very same and always virgin earth

A slab of wood at the bottom, Oh numberless well,
 That illustrious smoothness which proves
 That a human back is contact, is dry cold,
 Is always a dream, even if the face is rubbed away.

Clouds may pass. No one knows

de las miradas mías que van a dar en la mar
 sosteniendo la quilla de los barcos lejanos
 Yo os amo—viajadores del mundo—los que dormís sobre
 el agua

hombres que van a América en busca de sus vestidos
 los que dejan en la playa su desnudez dolida
 y sobre las cubiertas del barco atraen el rayo de luna
 Caminar esperando es risueño es hermoso
 la plata y el oro no han cambiado de fondo
 botan sobre las ondas sobre el lomo escamado
 y hacen música o sueño para los pelos más rubios

Por el fondo de un río mi deseo se marcha
 de los pueblos innúmeros que he tenido en las yemas
 esas oscuridades que vestido de negro
 he dejado ya lejos dibujadas en espalda

La esperanza es la tierra es la mejilla
 es un inmenso párpado donde yo sé que existo
 ¿Te acuerdas? Para el mundo he nacido una noche
 en que era suma y resta la clave de los sueños

Peces árboles piedras corazones medallas
 sobre vuestras concéntricas ondas—sí—detenidas
 yo me muevo y si giro me busco oh centro oh centro
 camino—viajadores del mundo—del futuro existente
 más allá de los mares en mis pulsos que laten.

En el fondo del pozo

Allá en el fondo del pozo donde las florecillas
 donde las lindas margaritas no vacilan
 donde no hay viento o perfume de hombre
 donde jamás el mar impone su amenaza
 allí, allí está quedo ese silencio
 hecho como un rumor ahogado con un puño

Si una abeja si un ave voladora
 si ese error que no se espera nunca
 se produce
 el frío permanece
 El sueño en vertical hundió la tierra
 y ya el aire está libre

Acaso una voz una mano y suelta
 un impulso hacia arriba aspira a luna
 a calma a tibieza a ese veneno
 de una almohada en la boca que se ahoga

¡Pero dormir es tan sereno siempre!
 Sobre el frío sobre el hielo sobre una sombra de mejilla
 sobre una palabra yerta y más ya ida
 sobre la misma tierra siempre virgen

Una tabla en el fondo oh pozo innúmero
 esa lisura ilustre que comprueba
 que una espalda es contacto es frío seco
 es sueño siempre aunque la frente esté borrada

Pueden pasar ya nubes. Nadie sabe

That sound. Do bells exist?
I remember that the color white or the shape
I remember that the lips, yes, were even speaking

It was the hot summer season. Immolating light
It was then when the sudden flash of lightning
Was caught in suspension—wrought of iron—
Time of sighs or of worship me
When the birds never lost their feathers

Time of softness and permanence
The galloping feet did not tread the breast
The hooves did not remain, they were not waxen.
Tears ran like kisses
And in the ear the echo was solidified

Thus eternity was the passing moment
Time was only a tremendous hand
Clasping the long strands of hair

Oh, yes. In that deep silence or dampness
Beneath the seven mantles of the sky, I do not know
The music congealed into sudden ice
The throat that collapses across the eyes
The intimate curl that disintegrates upon the lips

Asleep like a piece of cloth
I feel the little herbs growing, the soft green
That uselessly awaits its upward curve

A hand of steel over the grasses,
A heart, a forgotten plaything,
A spring, a file, a kiss, a piece of glass

A crystal flower which thus impassively
Sucks from the earth a silence or a memory

JOHN A. CROW

Song for a Dead Girl

Tell me, tell me the secret of your virgin heart;
Tell me the secret of your body beneath the earth;
I want to know why you are now turned to water,
Those fresh swirls where naked feet are bathed with
foam.

Tell me why over your flowing hair,
Over your softly caressed grasses,
Falls, skips, touches tenderly, disappears,
A burning or solemn sun that touches you
Like a wind that bears only a bird or a hand.

Tell me why your heart like a tiny forest
Waits beneath the earth for impossible birds,
That total song which is made by dreams
When they pass noiselessly over the eyes.

Oh, you, song that to a dead or a live body,
That to a beautiful being who sleeps under the ground
You are singing with the color of stone, of lips or kisses,
You are singing as if mother-of-pearl were sleeping or
dreaming.

Ese clamor ¿Existen las campanas?
Recuerdo que el color blanco o las formas
recuerdo que los labios, sí, hasta hablaban

Era el tiempo caliente. Luz inmólame
Era entonces cuando el relámpago de pronto
quedaba suspendido hecho de hierro
Tiempo de los suspiros o de adórame
cuando nunca las aves perdían plumas

Tiempo de suavidad y permanencia
Los galopes no daban sobre el pecho
no quedaban los cascos, no eran cera
Las lágrimas rodaban como besos
Y en el oído el eco era ya sólido

Así la eternidad era el minuto
El tiempo sólo una tremenda mano
sobre el cabello largo detenida

Oh sí, En este hondo silencio o humedades
bajo las siete capas de cielo azul yo ignoro
la música cuajada en hielo súbito
la garganta que se derrumba sobre los ojos
la íntima onda que se anega sobre los labios

Dormido como una tela
siento crecer la hierba el verde suave
que inútilmente aguarda ser curvado

Una mano de acero sobre el césped
un corazón un juguete olvidado
un resorte una lima un beso un vidrio

Una flor de cristal que así impenetrable
chupa de tierra un silencio o memoria

Canción a una muchacha muerta

Dime, dime el secreto de tu corazón virgen;
dime el secreto de tu cuerpo bajo tierra;
quiero saber por qué ahora eres un agua,
esas orillas frescas donde unos pies desnudos se bañan
con espuma.

Dime por qué sobre tu pelo suelto,
sobre tu dulce hierba acariciada,
cae, resbala, acaricia, se va
un sol ardiente o reposado que te toca
como un viento que lleva sólo un pájaro o mano.

Dime por qué tu corazón como una selva diminuta
espera bajo tierra los imposibles pájaros,
esa canción total que por encima de los ojos
hacen los sueños cuando pasan sin ruido.

Oh tú, canción que a un cuerpo muerto o vivo,
que a un ser hermoso que bajo el suelo duerme
cantas color de piedra, color de beso o labio,
cantas como si el nácar durmiera o respirara.

That waist, that frail curve of a sad breast,
 Those ringlets of hair untouched by the wind,
 Those eyes where only silence now resides,
 Those teeth of well defended ivory,
 That breeze which does not move the ungreen leaves . . .

Oh, you, laughing sky, you pass like a cloud;
 Oh happy bird, laughing upon a shoulder;
 Fountain that, fresh spurt of water, entwining you with
 the moon:
 Soft grasses walked upon by two adorable feet!

JOHN A. CROW

The Old Man and the Sun

He had lived a long time,
 He often leaned there, a very old man, on the trunk of a
 tree,
 on a very thick trunk in the late afternoon when the sun
 was going down,
 I used to pass by at that time and would stop to observe
 him.
 He was old, he had a wrinkled face, and his eyes were
 lifeless,
 rather than sad.
 He would lean against the tree, and the sun would first
 reach him
 softly biting his feet,
 and it would stay there for a while as if in a huddle.
 Then it would climb and slowly submerge him,
 immersing him,
 gently tugging at him, making him one with its sweet
 light.
 Oh, that living, enduring oldness, how it would dissolve!
 All that eagerness, the story of his sadness, the traces of
 his wrinkles,
 the misery of his eroded skin,
 how it would slowly be filed away in little fragments, and
 then vanish!
 Like a rock that softly crumbles in the destructive torrent
 surrendering to love's loud cry,
 the old man, in that silence, was slowly being consumed,
 slowly giving himself.
 And I saw the powerful sun slowly bite him with a great
 love
 and lull him to sleep
 so as to take him bit by bit, so as to gently dissolve him
 in its light,
 like a mother who tenderly lifts her child back to her
 breast.
 I passed there and saw him. But at times I saw only a
 trace.
 Scarcely a frail thread of being.
 What remained afterwards of that loving old man,
 that sweet old man, had already become pure light,
 and very slowly it too was carried away by the last rays of
 the sun,
 like so many other invisible things of this world.

JOHN A. CROW

Esa cintura, ese débil volumen de un pecho triste,
 ese rizo voluble que ignora el viento,
 esos ojos por donde sólo boga el silencio,
 esos dientes que son de marfil resguardado,
 ese aire que no mueve unas hojas no verdes . . .

¡Oh tú, cielo riente, que pasas como nube;
 oh pájaro feliz, que sobre un hombro ríes;
 fuente que, chorro fresco, te enredas con la luna;
 césped blando que pisan unos pies adorados!

El viejo y el sol

Había vivido mucho.
 Se apoyaba allí, viejo, en un tronco, en un gruesísimo
 tronco, muchas tardes cuando el sol caía.
 Yo pasaba por allí a aquellas horas y me detenía a
 observarle.
 Era viejo y tenía la faz arrugada, apagados, más que
 tristes, los ojos.
 Se apoyaba en el tronco, y el sol se le acercaba primero, le
 mordía suavemente los pies
 y allí se quedaba unos momentos como acurrucado.
 Después ascendía e iba sumergiéndole, anegándole,
 tirando suavemente de él, unificándole en su dulce luz.
 ¡Oh el viejo vivir, el viejo quedar, cómo se desleía!
 Toda la quemazón, la historia de la tristeza, el resto de las
 arrugas, la miseria de la piel roída,
 ¡cómo iba lentamente limándose, deshaciéndose!
 Como una roca que en el torrente devastador se va
 dulcemente desmoronando,
 rindiéndose a un amor sonorisimo,
 así, en aquel silencio, el viejo se iba lentamente anulando,
 lentamente entregando.
 Y yo veía el poderoso sol lentamente morderle con mucho
 amor y adormirle
 para así poco a poco tomarle, para así poquito a poco
 disolverle en su luz,
 como una madre que a su niño suavísimamente en su
 seno lo reinstalase.
 Yo pasaba y lo veía. Pero a veces no veía sino un sutilísimo
 resto. Apenas un lévisimo encaje del ser.
 Lo que quedaba después que el viejo amoroso, el viejo
 dulce, había pasado ya a ser la luz
 y despaciosísimamente era arrastrado en los rayos
 postreros del sol,
 como tantas otras invisibles cosas del mundo.