

Black Stone Lying on a White Stone

I will die in Paris, on a rainy day,
on some day I can already remember.
I will die in Paris—and I don't step aside—
perhaps on a Thursday, as today is Thursday, in autumn.

It will be a Thursday, because today, Thursday, setting
down
these lines, I have put my upper arm bones on
wrong, and never so much as today have I found myself
with all the road ahead of me, alone.

César Vallejo is dead. Everyone beat him,
although he never did anything to them;
they beat him hard with a stick and hard, also

with a rope. These are the witnesses:
the Thursdays, and the bones of my arms,
the solitude, and the rain, and the roads...

ROBERT BLY AND JOHN KNOEPFLE

Piedra negra sobre una piedra blanca

Me moriré en París con aguacero,
un día del cual tengo ya el recuerdo.
Me moriré en París—y no me corro—
tal vez un jueves, como es hoy, de otoño.

Jueves será, porque hoy, jueves, que proso
estos versos, los húmeros me he puesto
a la mala y, jamás como hoy, me he vuelto,
con todo mi camino, a verme solo.

César Vallejo ha muerto, le pegaban
todos sin que él les haga nada;
le daban duro con un palo y duro

también con una sogá; son testigos
los días jueves y los huesos húmeros,
la soledad, la lluvia, los caminos...

Gabriela Mistral (pseudonym of Lucila Godoy Alcayaga)

Chile, 1889–1957

In Lucila Godoy's youth, her sweetheart, a railway clerk, committed suicide because of a misappropriation of funds. and as one of her biographers states, "The echo of that shot was the birth of the poet, Gabriela Mistral."⁴² In 1914 she submitted three "Sonnets of Death" to a national poetry contest and was awarded first prize. Her symbolic pseudonym combined the names *Gabriel*, the archangel, and *mistral*, the wind that often sweeps across southern France.

Gabriela's profound maternal instinct was partially fulfilled a few years later when she adopted and reared the illegitimate son of her brother, who simply abandoned the child. But at age fifteen the boy (affectionately called "Yin-Yin") also committed suicide. Unable to accept this second "rejection" of her love, the poet insisted until her dying day that Yin-Yin had been murdered.

Gabriela wrote some of the most passionate poems of love, loss, and death in the Spanish language. Maternity and religion were also strong themes in her poetry. She became a mouthpiece for all of the frustrations and yearnings of the women of her culture. The body of her poetic output is very limited, but its quality is high. In 1945 she was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, and was the first Latin American writer to be so honored.

In Latin America she was as much loved as a person and public figure as she was for being a poet. She was a teacher, college professor at Barnard College in New York, journalist, educational administrator, and consul. Wherever she lived (Chile, Brazil, Mexico, Europe, United States), her home was a mecca for writers from many lands. Despite her international reputation she was always warm, approachable, encouraging, a friend to the great and humble folk equally. Undoubtedly she was the most deeply and widely loved woman in Latin America during this century.

The Prayer

Lord, often have my words in burning tone
Beseeched your mercy for another's need,

El ruego

Señor, tú sabes cómo, con encendido brío,
por los seres extraños mi palabra te invoca.

42. Sidonia C. Rosenbaum, *Modern Women Poets of Spanish America* (New York: Hispanic Institute, 1945), 174.

But now I pray for one who was my own,
My cup to drink, my honeycomb, my seed,
Marrow of my bones, sweet reason of my day,
Song to my ears, and binding of my dress;
Lord, since for those unknown I often pray,
Forgive the one I loved, your wrath suppress.

I swear that he was good, his soul contrite,
His gentle heart brought love to everything;
By nature he was pure as summer light,
The bearer of a miracle like the spring.

That he does not deserve my prayers, you say,
Whose fevered lips have never sought your grace,
Who without waiting for a sign from you one day
Smashed in his temples like a shattered vase.

But Lord, I say to you my hands caressed
Both the white lily of that silken brow
And the tormented heart in that dear breast;
It had the softness of an opening flower.

That he was cruel? Love was my shield and lever;
He knew my body's depths were his to shatter;
That he has stained my pool of joy forever?
Oh, Lord, I loved him so, it did not matter!

Here I stand now, with head and eyes bent low,
A suppliant this long evening as I speak;
Night after night I shall continue so
If you delay the answer that I seek.

The iron that drills, a cold pleasure renews
When it opens like sheaves that love encloses,
And the rough Cross (how well you know, King of the
Jews),
Is softly borne like a garland of roses.

Forgive him, Lord, touch him with wind and light,
Your words a thousand fragrances enfold;
Each drop of water will be dazzling, bright,
The desert will bear flowers, stones turn to gold!

The dark eyes of wild beasts with tears will flow,
The peaks you forged of stone (Lord, save him!)
Will weep through the white eyelids of their snow,
And the whole earth will know that you forgave him.

JOHN A. CROW

Sonnet on Death

From the dark crypt where men put you away,
I'll lower you into the sun-drenched ground;
They did not know I'd share your grave some day,
That both of us would rest beneath this mound.

Vengo ahora a pedirte por uno que era mío,
mi vaso de frescura, el panal de mi boca,
cal de mis huesos, dulce razón de la jornada,
gorjeo de mi oído, ceñidor de mi veste.
Me cuidó hasta de aquellos en que no puse nada.
¡No tengas ojo torvo si te pido por éste!

Te digo que era bueno, te digo que tenía
el corazón entero a flor de pecho, que era
suave de índole, franco como la luz del día,
henchido de milagro como la primavera.

Me replicas, severo, que es de plegaria indigno
el que no untó de preces sus dos labios febriles,
y se fue aquella tarde sin esperar tu signo,
trizándose las sienes como vasos sutiles.

Pero yo, mi Señor, te arguyo que he tocado,
de la misma manera que el nardo de su frente,
todo su corazón dulce y atormentado
¡y tenía la seda del capullo naciente!

¿Que fue cruel? Olvidas, Señor, que le quería,
y que él sabía suya la entraña que llagaba.
¿Que enturbió para siempre mis linfas de alegría?
¡No importa! Tú comprendes: ¡yo le amaba, le amaba!

Y amar (bien sabes de eso) es amargo ejercicio;
un mantener los párpados de lágrimas mojados,
un refrescar de besos las trenzas del cilicio
conservando, bajo ellas, los ojos extasiados.

El hierro que taladra tiene un gustoso frío,
cuando abre, cual gavillas, las carnes amorosas.
Y la cruz (Tú te acuerdas ¡oh Rey de los judíos!)
se lleva con blandura, como un gajo de rosas.

Aquí me estoy, Señor, con la cara caída
sobre el polvo, parlándote un crepúsculo entero,
o todos los crepúsculos a que alcance la vida,
si tardas en decirme la palabra que espero.

Fatigaré tu oído de preces y sollozos,
lamiendo, lebrez tímido, los bordes de tu manto,
y ni pueden huírme tus ojos amorosos
ni esquivar tu pie el riego caliente de mi llanto.

¡Di el perdón, dilo al fin! Va a esparcir en el viento
la palabra el perfume de cien pomos de olores
al vaciarse; todo agua será deslumbramiento;
el yermo echará flor y el guijarro esplendores.

Se mojarán los ojos oscuros de las fieras,
y, comprendiendo, el monte que de piedra forjaste
llorará por los párpados blancos de sus neveras:
¡Toda la tierra tuya sabrá que perdonaste!

Soneto de la muerte I

Del nicho helado en que los hombres te pusieron,
te bajaré a la tierra humilde y soleada.
Que he de dormirme en ella los hombres no supieron,
y que hemos de soñar sobre la misma almohada.

I'll tuck you in the sunlit earth and leave
 You sleeping like an infant sweet and mild;
 The earth will form a cradle and receive
 Your body gently as a wounded child.
 Then I shall scatter dust and powdered roses,
 And in that cloud of moonlike smoke perceive
 Your face imprisoned underneath these stones;
 Such is the resting place my heart imposes,
 Because at this dark depth no hand will thief
 Or fight with me for your handful of bones!

JOHN A. CROW

The Thinker

The Thinker's chin rests on a furrowed hand,
 His thought is that man's flesh belongs to the grave;
 That mortal clay must bow to fate's demand.
 But hates the end of all that beauty gave.
 With love he trembled in his fiery spring,
 When autumn came the cold truth drained his will:
 That *we must die* has brought that brow its sting,
 And grips the tortured bronze that night must fill.

His sinews writhe in a fixed agony,
 And terror grips each fiber of his frame,
 Rent like fall leaves by God's almighty breath
 Which calls that bronze to life. There is no twisted tree
 Seared by the plain's hot sun, no wounded lion in pain
 Contorted like that man who ponders death.

JOHN A. CROW

The Helpers

While my baby sleeps,
 the earth, unaware,
 helps me to finish him.
 The grass makes his hair,
 the date-palm his fingers,
 and the beeswax his nails.
 The seashells give him hearing,
 the red strawberry his tongue,
 the rivulet brings him smiles,
 and the mountain sends him patience.

(I left my baby unfinished
 and I am confused and ashamed:
 scarcely a brow, scarcely a voice,
 scarcely a size you can see.)

They carry things, go and come,
 enter and leave the door,
 bringing tiny chipmunk ears,
 teeth of mother-of-pearl.

In three Christmases he will be another,
 changed from head to toe.
 Tall as a reed he will stand,
 straight as the pine tree on the slope.

Te acostaré en la tierra soleada, con una
 dulcedumbre de madre para el hijo dormido,
 y la tierra ha de hacerse suavidades de cuna
 al recibir tu cuerpo de niño dolorido.

Luego iré espolvoreando tierra y polvo de rosas,
 y en la azulada y leve polvareda de luna,
 los despojos livianos irán quedando presos.

Me alejaré cantando mis venganzas hermosas,
 ¡porque a ese hondor recóndito la mano de ninguna
 bajará a disputarme tu puñado de huesos!

El pensador de Rodin

Con el mentón caído sobre la mano ruda,
 el Pensador se acuerda que es carne de la huesa,
 carne fatal, delante del destino desnuda,
 carne que odia la muerte, y tembló de belleza.

Y tembló de amor, toda su primavera ardiente,
 y ahora, al otoño, anégase de verdad y tristeza.
 El "de morir tenemos" pasa sobre su frente,
 en todo agudo bronce, cuando la noche empieza.

Y en la angustia, sus músculos se hienden, sufridores.
 Los surcos de su carne se llenan de terrores.
 Se hiende, como la hoja de otoño, al Señor fuerte

que la llama en los bronceos . . . Y no hay árbol torcido
 de sol en la llanura, ni león de flanco herido,
 crispados como este hombre que medita en la muerte.

Ayudadores

Mientras el niño se me duerme,
 sin que lo sepa ni la tierra,
 por ayudarme en acabarlo
 sus cabellos hace la hierba,
 sus deditos la palma-dátil
 y las uñas la buena cera.
 Los caracoles dan su oído
 y la fresca roja su lengua,
 y el arroyo le trae risas
 y el monte le manda paciencias.
 (Cosas dejé sin acabar
 y estoy confusa y con vergüenza:
 apenas sienes, apenas habla,
 apenas bulto que le vean.)

Los que acarrear van y vienen,
 entran y salen por la puerta
 trayendo orejitas de *cuye*
 y unos dientes de concha-perla.

Tres Navidades y será otro,
 de los tobillos a la cabeza:
 será talludo, será recto
 como los pinos de la cuesta.

Then, like a crazy woman.
I will proclaim him through the town
with a shouting clearly heard
by the hills and meadows around.

DORIS DANA

One Word

I have in my throat one word
that I cannot speak, will not free
though its thrust of blood pounds me.
If I voiced it, it would scorch the living grass,
bleed the lamb, fell the bird.

I have to cut it from my tongue,
find a beaver's hole,
or bury it beneath lime and more quicklime
lest, soul-like, it break free.

I wish to give no sign of what I live
as this word courses through my blood, ebbs and flows,
rises, falls with each mad breath.
Though Job, my father, burning spoke it,
I will not give it utterance
lest it roll vagrant
and be found by river-women,
twist itself in their braids,
or mangle and blaze the poor thicket.

I wish to throw seeds so violent
they burst and smother it in one night
leaving not even a syllable's trace.
Or rip it from myself
with the serpent's severing tooth.

And return it to my house, enter and sleep,
torn from it, sliced from it;
wake after two thousand days
newly born out of sleep and oblivion.

Never again to remember the word between my lips,
that word of iodine and alum stone,
or ever again that one night,
the ambush in a foreign land,
the lightning bolt at the door
and my flesh abroad with no soul.

DORIS DANA

The Immigrant Jew

I go farther than the west wind,
farther than the stormy petrel I fly.
never sleep for walking.
A woman cut off from the earth,
they left me only the sea.

Home and habits and household gods
stayed behind in my village

Y yo iré entonces voceándolo
como una loca por los pueblos,
con un pregón que van a oírme
las praderías y los cerros.

Una palabra

Yo tengo una palabra en la garganta
y no la suelto, y no me libro de ella
aunque me empuje su empujón de sangre.
Si la soltase, quema el pasto vivo,
sangra al cordero, hace caer al pájaro.

Tengo que desprenderla de mi lengua,
hallar un agujero de castores
o sepultarla con cales y cales
porque no guarde como el alma el vuelo.

No quiero dar señales de que vivo
mientras que por mi sangre vaya y venga
y suba y baje por mi loco aliento.
Aunque mi padre Job la dijo, ardiendo,
no quiero darle, no, mi pobre boca
porque no ruede y la hallen las mujeres
que van al río, y se enrede a sus trenzas
o al pobre matorral tuerza y abraze.

Yo quiero echarle violentas semillas
que en una noche la cubran y ahoguen
sin dejar de ella el cisco de una sílaba.
O rompémela así, como a la víbora
que por mitad se parte con los dientes.

Y volver a mi casa, entrar, dormirme,
cortada de ella, rebanada de ella,
y despertar después de dos mil días
recién nacida de sueño y olvido.

¡Sin saber más que tuve una palabra
de yodo y piedra-alumbre entre los labios
ni saber acordarme de una noche,
de una morada en país extranjero,
de la celada y el rayo a la puerta
y de mi carne marchando sin su alma!

Emigrada judía

Voy más lejos que el viento oeste
y el petrel de tempestad.
Paro, interrogo, camino
¡y no duermo por caminar!
Me rebanaron la Tierra,
sólo me han dejado el mar.
Se quedaron en la aldea

with linden trees and banks of reed grass
on the Rhine that taught me to speak.

I do not bring the mint
whose scent would make me weep.
I bring only my breath,
my blood, my anxiety.

I am two. One looks back,
the other turns to the sea.
The nape of my neck seethes with good-byes
and my breast with yearning.

The stream that flows through my village
no longer speaks my name;
I am erased from my own land and air
like a footprint on the sand.

With each stretch of road
all that was mine recedes,
a gush of resin, a tower,
a grove of oak trees.
My hands forget their ways
of making cider and bread.
With memory blown clean by the wind,
I arrive naked at the sea.

DORIS DANA

A Pious One

I must see the lighthouse keeper,
go to his craggy rock,
feel the wave break in his mouth,
see the abyss in his eyes.
I want to find him, if he lives,
that old salt man of sea.

They say he looks only eastward,
walled-up alive at sea.
When I shatter his wave, I wish
he would turn his eyes from the abyss to me.

He knows all there is to know of night
which has become my bed and path;
he knows the octopus, sponge, and undertow,
and the senses slain by a scream.

His chastened breast
is spat upon by tides,
is shrilled by gulls,
is white as the maimed.
So still, so mute and unmindful
as though unborn.

But I go to the lighthouse tower
to climb the knife-edged path
and be with the man who will tell me
what is earthly and what divine.
In one arm I bring him a jug of milk,
in the other, a sip of wine.

casa, costumbre, y dios lar.
Pasan tilos, carrizales
y el Rin que me enseñó a hablar.
No llevo al pecho las mentas
cuyo olor me haga llorar.
Tan sólo llevo mi aliento
y mi sangre y mi ansiedad.

Una soy a mis espaldas,
otra volteada al mar:
mi nuca hierve de adioses,
y mi pecho de ansiedad.

Ya el torrente de mi aldea
no da mi nombre al rodar
y en mi tierra y aire me borro
como huella en arenal.

A cada trecho de ruta
voy perdiendo mi caudal:
una oleada de resinas,
una torre, un robledal.
Suelta mi mano sus gestos
de hacer la sidra y el pan
¡y aventada mi memoria
llegará desnuda al mar!

Una piadosa

Quiero ver al hombre del faro,
quiero ir a la peña del risco,
probar en su boca la ola,
ver en sus ojos el abismo.
Yo quiero alcanzar, si vive,
al viejo salobre y salino.

Dicen que sólo mira al Este,
—emparedado que está vivo—
y quiero, cortando sus olas
que me mire en vez del abismo.

Todo se sabe de la noche
que ahora es mi lecho y camino:
sabe resacas, pulpos, esponjas,
sabe un grito que mata el sentido.

Está escupido de marea
su pecho fiel y con castigo,
está silbado de gaviotas
y tan albo como el herido
¡y de inmóvil, y mudo y ausente,
ya no parece ni nacido!

Pero voy a la torre del faro,
subiéndome ruta de filos
por el hombre que va a contarme
lo terrestre y lo divino,
y en brazo y brazo le llevo
jarro de leche, sorbo de vino . . .

On he goes listening to seas
in love with nothing but themselves.
Perhaps now he listens to nothing.
Fixed in forgetfulness and salt.

Y él sigue escuchando mares
que no aman sino a sí mismos.
Pero tal vez ya nada escuche,
de haber parado en sal y olvido.

DORIS DANA

Carlos Pellicer

Mexico, 1899–

Carlos Pellicer, unlike most of the contemporary Spanish American poets, is profoundly optimistic. He clearly believes that man will prevail, that he can find harmony, peace, beauty, fulfillment. The Mexican critic, Alfonso Reyes, points out that Pellicer's eyes are sharp and clear in their perception of the visible world. His universe is vibrant, filled with color, movement, and rhythm. He is adept at capturing the perishable moment and scene imperishably. His poems are wholesome, strong and overflowing with the deep stir of life—an existential life that does not need to look beyond itself for substance or meaning.

My Will to Live That Has No Paradise

My will to live that has no paradise
Looks downward without seeing what goes on.
Is this the light of evening or of dawn?
My will to live that has no paradise . . .
Nor can the shadows of a noble grief
Exalt my fortune-favored flesh and breath.
A statue's life, unpopulated death
Without desire's bold cultivation or relief.

A dreamless sleep now quiets and brings shade
To the prodigious realm before my gaze
Reduced to the gray village man has made.
Without a kerchief's absence and reprise
Time passes with its cluster of drab days.
My will to live that has no paradise . . .

JOHN A. CROW

Soneto

Mi voluntad de ser no tiene cielo;
sólo mira hacia abajo y sin mirada.
¿Luz de la tarde o de la madrugada?
Mi voluntad de ser no tiene cielo.

Ni la penumbra de un hermoso duelo
ennoblece mi carne afortunada.
Vida de estatua, muerte inhabitada
sin la jardinería de un anhelo.

Un dormir sin soñar calla y sombrea
el prodigioso imperio de mis ojos
reducido a los grises de una aldea.

Sin la ausencia presente de un pañuelo
se van los días en pobres manojos.
Mi voluntad de ser no tiene cielo.

José Gorostiza

Mexico, 1901–1973

A professor of Mexican and Spanish American literature, Gorostiza, like Valéry and Rilke, was intensely subjective. He was inspired by the traditional reservoir of popular Spanish poetry, as were Lorca and Alberti in Spain, but he wrote in a deceptively simple style that often had deep philosophical overtones. His poems express a withdrawal from contemporary life and give voice to his country's characteristic cult of death. As his compatriot, Juan José Arreola, once said: "The Mexican is characterized by two things: his love for flowers and his obsession with death."⁴³ Gorostiza fuses this death-beauty syndrome in his poetry.

43. Juan José Arreola, in a lecture delivered at U.C.L.A., November 18, 1972.