

*Give me your laurel branches, O my love,
To see that all has gone.*

Stone in the water, voice in the wind,
Edges of love escaping the bloody trunk.
Enough to touch the pulse-beat of our love
For flowers to break in bloom for other children.

Pure emptiness for me revolving, for you in the dawn
Keeping the trace of bloody branches
Some plaster profile, calmly sketching
The immediate surprise of the pointilliste moon
Watching the solid forms that seek their void
Mistaken dogs, half-eaten apples.

When in my bed I count the murmurs of linen
You have come, my love, to cover over my shelter.
The hollow of an ant can fill the wind,
But you go crying lost across my eyes.

No, not across my eyes. Today you show
Four ashen rivers in your arms,
In the rough barracks where the captive moon
Devours a sailor before the children's eyes.

*To see that all has gone.
O obstinate departed love!
Yield not your emptiness.
Let mine be lost on air!
To see that all has gone.*⁴⁰

*dame tus ramos de laurel, amor,
para ver que todo se ha ido.*

Es la piedra en el agua y es la voz en el aire
bordes de amor que escapan de su tronco sangrante.
Basta tocar el pulso de nuestro amor
para que broten flores sobre otros niños

Ruedan los huecos puros por mí, por ti, en el alba
conservando las huellas de las ramas de sangre
y algún perfil de yeso, que tranquilo dibuja
instantánea sorpresa de luna apuntillada.
Mira formas concretas que buscan su vacío
perros equivocados y manzanas mordidas.

Cuando cuento en la cama los rumores del hilo
has venido, amor mío, a cubrir mi tejado.
El hueco de una hormiga puede llenar el aire,
pero tú vas gimiendo sin norte por mis ojos.

No, por mis ojos no, que ahora me enseñas
cuatro ríos ceñidos en tu brazo,
En la dura barraca donde la luna prisionera
devora a un marinero delante de los niños.

*Para ver que todo se ha ido
¡Amor inexpugnable, amor huido!
No, no me des tu hueco.
¡que ya va por el aire el mío!
Para ver que todo se ha ido.*

ROLFE HUMPHRIES

César Vallejo

Peru, 1895–1938

Vallejo, well known for his Communist affiliation, was a poet of mixed blood who throughout his brief life was barely able to keep body and soul together with his journalistic writings; he died in poverty in Paris, at the age of forty-three. Vallejo's poetry explodes from his tortured inner consciousness in an almost total disregard for established literary elegance. His poems have been compared to German expressionism, but they also embody elements of Peruvian indigenism.

Vallejo traveled in Russia, a country he greatly admired; he chanted a paean to the Spanish Republicans destined to defeat in Spain's bitter civil war, and he was a defender of the humble masses and of leftist causes generally. His involvement with human suffering was obsessive and overwhelming. Vallejo was the outstanding initiator in his group in Peru, and after his death his reputation grew until he became known as one of the finest poets of his generation. His attitude may be aptly characterized by his famous statement: "The day I was born, God was sick."

Robert Bly, who has translated many of Vallejo's poems, characterizes his first book *Los heraldos negros* (*The Black Messengers*) as "a staggering book, sensual, prophetic, affectionate, wild. It has a kind of compassion for God, and compassion for death . . . and it moves with incredible leaps of imagination. I think it is the greatest single collection of poems I have ever read."⁴¹

40. This poem is from Lorca's *The Poet in New York*, written mainly in 1929–1930, during the poet's long stay in the city, but not published until 1940. Robert Bly calls it "the greatest book ever written about New York," but Roy Campbell, a contemporary poet of equal stature, characterizes it as "slightly mephitic." I lived at the same place as Lorca during most of his time in New York and frequently accompanied him on his jaunts about the city. My own impression is that in this book Lorca is out of his element and thus tends to overwrite in a kind of high-pitched frenzy. Even so, it contains flashes of fine poetry.

41. Robert Bly (ed.), *Neruda and Vallejo: Selected Poems* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 170.

Dregs

This afternoon it is raining as never before,
And I do not want to go on living, my heart.

This afternoon is sweet, why shouldn't it be,
It is dressed in sorrow gracefully like a woman.

This afternoon in Lima it is pouring. And I remember
The cruel caverns of my ungratefulness,

My block of ice lying upon her poppy,
Stranger than her: "Don't be like that!"

My fierce black flowers, a savage
Hail of stones, and glacial distances,
And the silence of her dignity
Will paint its final period in flaming oils.

And that is why this afternoon, as never before,
I am going about with this owl, with this heart.
And other women pass; and seeing me depressed
They take a little of you
From the chasms of my pain.

This afternoon it is raining, it is pouring down,
And I do not want to go on living, my heart.

JOHN A. CROW

The Black Messengers

There are blows in life, so brutal. "What can I say!"
Blows like God's hatred; as if feeling them,
The backwash of everything suffered
Were dammed up in the heart. "What can I say!"

They are not many; but they exist. They open dark lines
In the boldest faces and strongest back.
Perhaps they are the wild colts of savage Attilas;
Or the black messengers sent to us by Death.

They are the pitfalls of the Christs of the soul,
Of a beloved faith blasphemed by Fate.
These bloody blows are the cruching sounds
Of a piece of bread burned in the door of the oven.

And man, Poor mankind! He turns his eyes, as if
He were suddenly called from behind by a clap of the
hands;
He turns his frenzied eyes, and everything that has been
lived
Is dammed up, like a puddle of guilt, in the look on his
face.

There are blows in life, so brutal, "What can I say!"

JOHN A. CROW

Leaf-Storm

Moon! Crown of a gigantic head
Dropping your leaves in yellow shadows,

Heces

Esta tarde llueve, como nunca; y no
tengo ganas de vivir, corazón.

Esta tarde es dulce. ¿Por qué no ha de ser?
Viste gracia y pena; viste de mujer.

Esta tarde en Lima llueve. Yo yo recuerdo
las cavernas crueles de mi ingratitud;
mi bloque de hielo sobre su amapola,
más fuerte que su "No seas así!"

Mis violentas flores negras; y la bárbara
y enorme pedrada; y el trecho glacial.
Y pondrá el silencio de su dignidad
con óleos quemantes el punto final.

Por eso esta tarde, como nunca, voy
con este buho, con este corazón.

Y otras pasan; y viéndome tan triste.
toman un poquito de ti
en la abrupta arruga de mi hondo dolor.

Esta tarde llueve, llueve mucho. ¡Y no
tengo ganas de vivir, corazón!

Los heraldos negros

Hay golpes en la vida, tan fuertes. ¡Yo no sé!
Golpes como del odio de Dios; como si ante ellos,
la resaca de todo lo sufrido
se empozara en el alma. ¡Yo no sé!

Son pocos; pero son. Abren zanjas oscuras
en el rostro más fiero y en el lomo más fuerte.
Serán tal vez los potros de bárbaros atilas;
o los heraldos negros que nos manda la Muerte.

Son las hondas caídas de los Cristos del alma,
de una fe adorable que el Destino blasfema.
Estos golpes sangrientos son las crepitaciones
de algún pan que en la puerta del horno se nos quema.

Y el hombre. Pobre. ¡Pobre! Vuelve los ojos, como
cuando por sobre el hombro nos llama una palmada;
vuelve los ojos locos, y todo lo vivido
se empoza, como charco de culpa, en la mirada.

Hay golpes en la vida, tan fuertes. ¡Yo no sé!

Deshojación sagrada

¡Luna! ¡Corona de una testa inmensa,
que te vas deshojando en sombras gualdas!

Red Crown of a Jesus who is thinking
Sweet tragedies of emeralds.

Moon! Frenzied heart of the sky,
Why do you drift like that, inside the cup,
Filled with blue wine, toward the West,
Like the sad hull of a ship in distress?

Moon! And because you have flown in vain.
You are a holocaust of scattered opals,
Perhaps you are my gypsy heart
That wanders in the blue weeping poetic lines . . .

JOHN A. CROW

Footsteps Far Away

My father is sleeping. His majestic face
Tells me of a peaceful heart;
He is so sweet now . . .
If there is anything bitter in him, it may be me.

There is loneliness in the house; there are prayers;
And there is no news of the children today.
My father wakes up, he is listening
To the flight into Egypt, the blood-stopping good-bye.
He is so near now;
If there is anything far away in him, it may be me.

And my mother is walking out there in the orchard,
Tasting a taste that already has no taste.
She is now so gentle,
So much wing, so much going away, so much love.

There is loneliness in the house without a sound,
Without news, with greenness, without childhood.
And if there is something broken this afternoon,
And that falls and creaks,
It is two old white crooked roads.
Down them my heart is walking.

JOHN A. CROW

Anger

Anger that breaks a man into children
That breaks the child into equal birds
And the bird, then, into little eggs;
The anger of the poor
Has an oil against two vinegars.

Anger that breaks the tree into leaves,
The leaf, into unequal buds,
And the bud into telescopic grooves.
The anger of the poor
Has two rivers against many oceans.

Anger that breaks the good into doubts,
And doubt, into symmetrical arcs,
And the arc, then, into unexpected tombs.

¡Roja corona de un Jesús que piensa
trágicamente dulce de esmeraldas!

¡Luna! Alocado corazón celeste
¿por qué bogas así, dentro la copa
llena de vino azul, hacia el oeste,
cual derrotada y dolorida popa?

¡Luna! Y a fuerza de volar en vano,
te holocaustas en ópalos dispersos:
¡tú eres tal vez mi corazón gitano
que vaga en el azul llorando versos! . . .

Los pasos lejanos

Mi padre duerme. Su semblante augusto
figura un apacible corazón;
está ahora tan dulce . . .
si hay algo en él de amargo, seré yo.

Hay soledad en el hogar; se reza;
y no hay noticias de los hijos hoy.
Mi padre se despierta, ausculta
la huida a Egipto, el restañante adiós.
Está ahora tan cerca;
si hay algo en él de lejos, seré yo.

Y mi madre pasea allá en los huertos,
saboreando un sabor ya sin sabor.
Está ahora tan suave,
tan ala, tan salida, tan amor.

Hay soledad en el hogar sin bulla,
sin noticias, sin verde, sin niñez.
Y si hay algo quebrado en esta tarde,
y que baja y que cruje,
son dos viejos caminos blancos, curvos.
Por ellos va mi corazón a pie.

La cólera

La cólera que quiebra al hombre en niños,
que quiebra al niño en pájaros iguales,
y al pájaro, después, en huevecillos;
la cólera del pobre
tiene un aceite contra dos vinagres.

La cólera que al árbol quiebra en hojas,
a la hoja, en botones desiguales,
y al botón, en ranuras telescópicas;
la cólera del pobre
tiene dos ríos contra muchos mares.

La cólera que quiebra al bien en dudas,
a la duda, en tres arcos semejantes,
y al arco, luego, en tumbas imprevistas;

The anger of the poor
Has a sword against two daggers.

Anger that breaks the soul into bodies,
The body, into dissimilar organs,
And the organ, into octaves of thought.
The anger of the poor
Has a central fire against two craters.

JOHN A. CROW

The Day I Was Born

The day I was born
God was sick.

Everyone knows that I am alive,
That I am evil . . . and they do not know
of the December of that January.
Well, the day I was born
God was sick.

There is a void
in my metaphysical breath
that no man can probe:
the cloister of silence
that spoke out in open flame.

The day I was born
God was sick.

Brother, listen, listen . . .
Good. And don't leave me
without taking Decembers,
without leaving Januaries.

Well, the day I was born
God was sick.

Everyone knows that I am alive,
that I am still chewing . . . And they do not know
why in my poems creak,
like the obscure distaste of a coffin,
rasping winds
disentwined by the inquisitive
Sphinx of the Desert.
Everyone knows . . . And doesn't know
that Light is consumptive,
and Shadow full . . .
And they don't know that Mystery synthesizes . . .
that it is the sad, musical
hunchback that distantly heralds
the meridian passage from boundaries to Boundaries.

The day I was born
God was sick,
deathly.

KATHARINE E. STRATHDEE
AND MARY H. PARHAM

la cólera del pobre
tiene un acero contra dos puñales.

La cólera que quiebra al alma en cuerpos,
al cuerpo, en órganos desemejantes.
y al órgano, en octavos pensamientos;
la cólera del pobre
tiene un fuego central contra dos cráteres.

Yo nací un día

Yo nací un día
que Dios estuvo enfermo.

Todos saben que vivo,
que soy malo; y no saben
del diciembre de ese enero.
Pues yo nací un día
que Dios estuvo enfermo.

Hay un vacío
en mi aire metafísico
que nadie ha de palpar:
el claustro de un silencio
que hablo a flor de fuego.

Yo nací un día
que Dios estuvo enfermo.

Hermano, escucha, escucha . . .
Bueno. Y que no me vaya
sin llevar diciembres,
sin dejar enero.

Pues yo nací un día
que Dios estuvo enfermo.

Todos saben que vivo,
que mastico . . . Y no saben
por que en mi verso chirrían,
oscuro sinsabor de féretro.
luyidos vientos
desenroscados de la Esfinge
preguntona del Desierto.
Todos saben . . . Y no saben
que la Luz es tísica,
y la Sombra gorda . . .
Y no saben que el Misterio sintetiza . . .
que él es la joroba
musical y triste que a distancia denuncia
el paso meridiano de las lindes a las Lindes.

Yo nací un día
que Dios estuvo enfermo,
grave.

Masses

At the end of the battle,
 When the fighter was dead, a man came toward him
 And said to him "Do not die, I love you so!"
 But the corpse, alas, went on dying!

Then two approached him and repeated it,
 "Do not leave us! Courage! Come back to life!"
 But the corpse, alas, went on dying.

Then twenty came, a hundred, a thousand, five hundred
 thousand,
 Clamoring, "So much love and nothing can be done about
 death!"

But the corpse, alas, went on dying.

Millions of individuals surrounded him,
 With a common entreaty, "Stay with us, brother!"
 But the corpse, alas, went on dying.

Then all the men of the earth
 Surrounded him; the corpse looked at them sadly, full of
 emotions;
 Sat up slowly,
 Embraced the first man; and began to walk . . .

H. R. HAYS

Little Responsory for a Republican Hero

A book lay beside his dead belt,
 A book was sprouting from his dead body.
 They raised the hero
 And, corporeal and sad, his mouth entered our breath.
 We were all sweating, dog tired,
 As we traveled the moons were following us;
 And the dead man, too, was sweating with sadness.

And a book, in the battle of Toledo,
 A book, a book behind, a book above, was sprouting from
 the corpse.

Poetry of the purple cheek, between reciting it
 And keeping it silent,
 Poetry in the moral letter that accompanied
 His heart.
 The book remained and nothing more, since there are
 No insects in the tomb
 And the air under the edge of his sleeve continued to
 grow moist
 And to become gaseous, infinite.

We were all sweating, dog tired,
 And the dead man, too, was sweating with sadness.
 And a book, I saw it, feeling it,
 A book behind, a book above,
 Sprouted from the violent corpse.

H. R. HAYS

Masa

Al fin de la batalla,
 y muerto el combatiente, vino hacia él un hombre
 y le dijo: "¡No mueras; te amo tanto!"
 Pero el cadáver ¡ay!, siguió muriendo.

Se le acercaron dos y repitiéronle:
 "¡No nos dejes! ¡Valor! ¡Vuelve a la vida!"
 Pero el cadáver ¡ay!, siguió muriendo.

Acudieron a él veinte, cien, mil, quinientos mil,
 clamando: "¡Tanto amor, y no poder nada contra la
 muerte!"
 Pero el cadáver ¡ay!, siguió muriendo.

Le rodearon millones de individuos,
 con un ruego común: "¡Quédate hermano!"
 Pero el cadáver ¡ay!, siguió muriendo.

Entonces, todos los hombres de la tierra
 le rodearon; les vio el cadáver triste, emocionado;
 incorporóse lentamente,
 abrazó, al primer hombre; echóse a andar . . .

Pequeño responso a un héroe de la república

Un libro quedó al borde de su cintura muerta,
 un libro retoñaba de su cadáver muerto.
 Se llevaron al héroe,
 y corpórea y aciaga entró su boca en nuestro aliento;
 sudamos todos, el ombligo a cuestras;
 caminantes las lunas nos seguían;
 también sudaba de tristeza el muerto.

Y un libro, en la batalla de Toledo,
 un libro, atrás un libro, arriba un libro, retoñaba del
 cadáver.

Poesía del pómulo morado, entre el decirlo
 y el callarlo,
 poesía en la carta moral que acompañara
 a su corazón.
 Quedóse el libro y nada más, que no hay
 insectos en la tumba,
 y quedó al borde de su manga el aire remojándose
 y haciéndose gaseoso, infinito.

Todos sudamos, el ombligo a cuestras,
 también sudaba de tristeza el muerto
 y un libro, yo lo ví sentidamente,
 un libro, atrás un libro, arriba un libro
 retoñó del cadáver exabrupto.

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.