

phosphorescent, blue, red, violet, green, yellow, orange—soared very high, like volleys of cheers, like signals of mutual understanding and friendship going out from this night of victory toward all the countries in the world.

In Finland I bought a narwhal's tooth and we continued our journey. In Gothenburg we boarded the ship that would take us back to America. America and my country also keep step with life and with the times. Well, when we passed through Venezuela en route to Valparaíso, Pérez Jiménez, the tyrant, the U.S. State Department's pet baby, bastard son of Trujillo and Somoza, sent enough soldiers for a war, to stop me and my wife from getting off the ship. But by the time I reached Valparaíso, freedom had already kicked out the Venezuelan despot; the majestic satrap had hightrailed it to Miami like a rabbit running in its sleep. The world has been moving fast since the first sputnik's flight. Who would have believed that the first person to knock on my cabin door in Valparaíso to welcome us would be Simonov, the novelist I had left swimming in the Black Sea?



Poetry Is an Occupation

THE POWER OF POETRY

IT has been the privilege of our time—with its wars, revolutions, and tremendous social upheavals—to cultivate more ground for poetry than anyone had ever imagined. The common man has had to confront it, attacking or attacked, in solitude or with an enormous mass of people at public rallies.

When I wrote my first lonely books, it never entered my mind that, with the passing years, I would find myself in squares, streets, factories, lecture halls, theaters, and gardens, reading my poems. I have gone into practically every corner of Chile, scattering my poetry like seed among the people of my country.

I am going to recount what happened to me in Vega Central, the largest and most popular market in Santiago, Chile. An endless line of pushcarts, horse wagons, oxcarts, and trucks come in at dawn, bringing vegetables, fruits, edibles from all the truck farms surrounding the voracious capital. The market men—a huge union whose members are badly paid and often go barefoot—swarm through the coffee shops, flophouses, and cheap eating places of the neighborhoods near the Vega.

One day someone came to fetch me in a car, which I climbed into without knowing exactly where or why I was going. I had a copy of my book *España en el corazón* in my pocket. In the car they explained to me that I was invited to give a lecture at the union hall of the Vega market loaders.

When I entered the ramshackle hall, a chill like that in José

Asunción Silva's poem "Nocturno" ran through me, not only because winter was so far along but because the atmosphere in the place gave me quite a shock. About fifty men sat waiting for me on crates or improvised wooden benches. Some had a sack tied around their waist like an apron, others covered their bodies with old patched undershirts, and still others braved Chile's cold July, bare from the waist up. I sat down behind a small table that separated me from that unusual audience. They all looked at me with the fixed, coal-black eyes of the people of my country.

I remembered old Lafertre. He had given such impassive spectators, who don't move a facial muscle but fasten their eyes on you, a name that made me chuckle. Once, on the nitrate pampa, he had said to me: "Look, there at the back of the hall, leaning against that column, two Mohammedans are watching us. All they need is the burmooose to look like the fearless believers of the desert."

How should I handle this audience? What could I speak to them about? What things in my life would hold their interest? I could not make up my mind, but disguising my desire to run out of there, I took the book I was carrying with me and said to them: "I was in Spain a short time back. A lot of fighting and a lot of shooting were going on there. Listen to what I've written about it."

I should explain that my book *España en el corazón* has never seemed to me an easy book to understand. It tries to be clear, but it is steeped in the torrent of overwhelming and painful events.

Well, I thought I would just read a handful of poems, add a few words, and say goodbye. But it didn't work out that way. Reading poem after poem, hearing the deep well of silence into which my words were falling, watching those eyes and dark eyebrows following my verses so intently, I realized that my book was hitting its mark. I went on reading and reading, affected by the sound of my own poetry, shaken by the magnetic power that linked my poems and those forsaken souls.

The reading lasted more than an hour. As I was about to leave, one of the men rose to his feet. He was one of those who had a sack knotted around his waist. "I want to thank you for all of us," he spoke out. "I want to tell you, too, that nothing has ever moved us so much."

When he finished talking, he couldn't hold back a sob. Several

others were also weeping. I walked out into the street between moist eyes and rough handclaps.

Can a poet still be the same after going through these trials of fire and ice?

When I want to remember Tina Modotti, I have to work as hard as if I were trying to scoop up a handful of mist. Fragile, almost invisible. Had I or had I not known her?

She was still very lovely then: a pale oval framed by two black wings of hair, gathered at the back, and huge velvety eyes that go on watching across the years. Diego Rivera put her face into one of his murals, glorified with crowns of plants and spears of corn.

This Italian revolutionary, an extraordinary artist with a camera, went to the Soviet Union a long time ago to take photographs of its people and monuments. But she was caught up in the uncontrollable rhythm of socialism in full progress and flung her camera into the Moscow River, vowing to consecrate her life to the most menial work of the Communist Party. I met her while she was carrying out this vow in Mexico, where I was deeply moved by her death one night.

This was in 1941, and Vittorio Vidali, Commandant Carlos, was her husband. Tina Modotti died of a heart attack in a taxi, on her way home. She knew that she had a bad heart, but she never mentioned it, so that they wouldn't make her cut down on her revolutionary work. She was always ready to do whatever no one else wanted to do: sweeping offices, going long distances on foot, sitting up nights to write letters and translate articles. She nursed the Republican wounded during the Spanish war.

She had gone through a tragic experience while living with the remarkable Cuban youth leader Julio Antonio Mella, exiled in Mexico at the time. Gerardo Machado, the tyrant, sent several gunmen from Havana to kill the revolutionary leader. They were coming out of the movies one afternoon, Tina leaning on Mella's arm, when he collapsed under a burst of machine-gun fire. They toppled to the ground together, she with the blood of her dead companion all over her, while the assassins fled, protected by the police. To crown it all, the same authorities who protected the criminals tried to pin the murder on Tina Modotti.

Twelve years later, Tina Modotti's strength quietly ebbed away. The Mexican reactionaries tried to expose her to infamy

again by surrounding her death with scandal, as they had once tried to involve her in Mella's death. Carlos and I stood watch over the tiny corpse. Seeing such a tough and courageous man suffer is not easy. That lion bled when they rubbed the caustic poison of slander into his wound by reviling Tina Modotti again, now that she was dead. Red-eyed from weeping, Commandant Carlos let out a roar of pain; in her small exile's coffin, Tina seemed to be made of wax. I was helplessly silent before the grief that filled the room.

The newspapers covered whole pages with sensational filth. They called her the "mystery woman from Moscow." Some added: "She died because she knew too much." Deeply moved by Carlos's savage grief, I decided to do something, and I wrote a poem challenging those who were smearing our dead friend's good name. I sent it to all the newspapers, without any hope that it would be published. Wonder of wonders! On the following day, instead of the new and juicy exposes promised the evening before, it was my outraged and insolent poem that made the front pages of all the newspapers.

The poem's title was "Tina Modotti ha muerto" ("Tina Modotti Is Dead"). I read it that morning at the cemetery in Mexico, where we left her body to lie forever under a slab of Mexican granite. My lines are engraved on that stone.

The Mexican press did not write another line against her.

It was in Lora, many years ago. Ten thousand miners had shown up for the meeting. The coal-mining district, in constant agitation over its traditional poverty, had filled the Lora town square with miners. The political speakers talked on and on. An odor of coal and sea brine floated in the sultry noon air. The ocean was close by; under its waters the dark tunnels, where these men dug out the coal, stretched for more than ten kilometers.

Now, at high noon, they listened. The speaker's platform was very high and from it I could make out that sea of blackened hats and miners' helmets. I was the last speaker. When my name and my poem "Nuevo canto de amor a Stalingrado" ("New Love Song to Stalingrad") were announced, something extraordinary occurred, a ceremony I can never forget.

As soon as they heard my name and the title of the poem, the

huge mass of people uncovered their heads. They bared their heads because, after all the categorical and political words that had been spouted, my poetry, poetry itself, was about to speak. From the raised platform I saw that immense movement of hats and helmets: ten thousand hands went down in unison, in a ground swell impossible to describe, a huge soundless wave, a black foam of quiet reverence.

Then my poem outdid itself. It took on, as it never had before, a tone of combat and liberation.

This other incident happened when I was still quite young. I was the student poet wearing a dark cape, thin and underfed like any poet in those days. I had just published *Crepusculario* and I weighed less than a black feather.

I went into a run-down cabaret with some friends. This was in the heyday of rancos and troubling gangs of toughs. Suddenly the dancing stopped and the tango broke up like a glass smashed against a wall.

Two notorious thugs were gesturing animatedly and insulting each other in the middle of the dance floor. Whenever one stepped forward to get in a blow, the other backed away, and with him the crowd of music lovers huddling for protection behind the barrier of tables also retreated. They looked like two primitive beasts dancing in a clearing in a primordial forest.

Without thinking, I stepped forward and lashed out from behind my scrawny impotence: "You miserable bullies, fat-brained apes, you despicable scum, stop annoying people who're here to dance, not to watch a two-bit farce!"

They exchanged looks of surprise, they couldn't believe their ears. The shorter one, who had been a boxer before becoming a thug, stepped in my direction, ready to murder me. And the gorilla would have done it, if a well-aimed fist had not floored him. His opponent had finally decided to hit him.

While the fallen champion was being dragged out like a sack, and people at the tables were holding bottles out to us, and the dance girls beamed at us eagerly, the giant who had landed the knock-out blow tried, understandably, to join the victory celebration. But I turned on him like a firebrand: "Get away from here! You're no better than he is!"

A little later, my moment of glory was over. My friends and I had gone down a narrow corridor, when we made out a kind of mountain, with the waist of a panther, blocking the exit. It was the other pugilist from the underworld, the winner I had whipped with my words, who barred our way, waiting to get even.

"I've been waiting for you," he said to me.

He headed me toward another door, with a light shove, while my friends took to their heels like scared rabbits. I stood there helplessly, face to face with my nemesis. I glanced around quickly to see what I could grab to defend myself. Nothing. There was nothing. Only the heavy marble tops of the tables and the wrought-iron chairs, which I couldn't possibly lift. Not a flower-pot or a bottle or even a measly walking stick someone might have forgotten there.

"Let's have a little talk," the man said.

I realized how useless it was to try anything, and I thought he just wanted to size me up before devouring me, like a tiger facing a little fawn. I sensed that my only defense lay in not showing how scared I was. I returned the shove he had given me, but I couldn't budge him an inch. He was a brick wall.

Suddenly he threw back his head and the look of a wild animal left his eyes. "Are you Pablo Neruda, the poet?" he said. "Yes, I am."

He hung his head. "What a bastard I am! Here I am, face to face with the poet I truly admire, and he has to tell me what a no-good bum I am!" And he went on wailing, with his head in his hands: "I'm just a hood, the other guy I had the fight with is a cocaine pusher. We're the scum of the earth. But there's one clean thing in my life. It's my girl, my girl's love for me. Look at her, Don Pablo. Look at her picture. I'll tell her sometime that you actually held it in your hands. It'll make her so happy."

He handed me the photograph of a smiling girl. "She loves me because of you, Don Pablo, because of your poems, which we've learned together by heart."

And right then and there he started reciting: "Deep inside you, a sad boy like me kneels, with his eyes on us . . ."

Just then the door burst open. It was my friends coming back with armed reinforcements. I saw their shocked faces crowding the doorway.

I walked out slowly. The man stayed behind alone, without moving an inch, reciting: "For that life burning in her veins they would have to murder my hands"—defeated by poetry.

The airplane piloted by Powers on a spying mission over Soviet territory fell from an unbelievable altitude. Two fantastic missiles had hit it and brought it down from the clouds. Newsmen rushed to the secluded mountain spot from which the rockets had left the ground.

The marksmen were two solitary boys. In that vast world of fir trees, rivers, and snows, they munched apples, played chess and the accordion, read books, and stood watch. They had aimed upward, to defend their Russian motherland's wide sky.

They were plied with questions: "What kind of food do you eat? Who are your parents? Do you like to dance? What books do you read?"

Answering this last question, one of the young men responded that they read poems and that Pushkin, the classic Russian writer, and the Chilean Neruda were two of their favorite poets.

I felt infinitely happy when I heard about this. The missile, which had gone up so high and forced pride to plunge so low, had somehow carried an atom of my impassioned poetry.

POETRY

. . . How many works of art . . . There's not enough room in the world for them any more . . . They have to hang outside the rooms . . . How many books . . . How many little books . . . Who can read them all . . . ? If they were food . . . If, during a wave of great hunger, we tossed a salad, cut them up, poured some dressing on them . . . We've had it . . . We're fed up . . . The world is drowning in a flood tide of books . . . Reverdy said to me: "I notified the post office not to deliver them. I couldn't open them. I had no more space. They were climbing up the walls, I was afraid of a disaster, they were going to cave in on my head . . ." Everybody knows Eliot . . . Before becoming an illustrator and a playwright, and writing brilliant criticism, he used to read my poems . . . I was flattered

... No one understood them better . . . Then one day he started to read me his own, and I ran off selfishly, protesting: "Don't read them to me, don't read them to me" . . . I locked myself in the bathroom, but Eliot read them to me through the shut door . . . I was depressed . . . Fraser, the Scottish poet, was there . . . He blasted me: "Why do you treat Eliot like that?" . . . I replied: "I don't want to lose my reader. I have cultivated him carefully. He has become familiar even with the wrinkles in my poetry . . . Eliot has so much talent . . . He can draw . . . He writes essays . . . But I want to keep this reader, to preserve him, to water him like an exotic plant . . . You understand me, Fraser . . ." Because, actually, if this continues, poets will publish only for other poets . . . Each will pull out his little book and put it in the other's pocket . . . his poem . . . and he will leave it on the other's plate . . . One day Quevedo left his under a king's napkin . . . that was truly worthwhile . . . Like poetry in a town square at high noon . . . Or letting the books wear out, fall in shreds between the fingers of mankind . . . Well, this thing, where one poet publishes for other poets, doesn't tempt me, doesn't lure me, only drives me to bury myself deep in nature's woods, before a rock or a wave, far from the publishing houses, from the printed page . . . Poetry has lost its ties with the reader, he's out of reach . . . It has to get him back . . . It has to walk in the darkness and encounter the heart of man, the eyes of woman, the strangers in the streets, those who at twilight or in the middle of the starry night feel the need for at least one line of poetry . . . This visit to the unexpected is worth all the distance covered, everything read, everything learned . . . We have to disappear into the midst of those we don't know, so they will suddenly pick up something of ours from the street, from the sand, from the leaves that have fallen for a thousand years in the same forest . . . and will take up gently the object we made . . . Only then will we truly be poets . . . In that object, poetry will live . . .

LIVING WITH THE LANGUAGE

I was born in 1904. In 1921 one of my poems came out in a magazine. In 1923 my first book, *Crepusculario*, was published. I am writing these recollections in 1973. Fifty years have gone by since

that exciting moment when the poet hears the first cries of the printed infant, alive, kicking, and doing its best, like any other newborn, to call attention to itself.

You can't live an entire lifetime with a language, stretching it lengthwise, exploring it, poking around in its hair and its belly, without having this intimacy become second nature to you. That's what happened to me with Spanish. The spoken language has other dimensions: the written language acquires unexpected elasticity. Using language like clothes or the skin on your body, with its sleeves, its patches, its inspirations, and its blood and sweat stains, that's what shows a writer's mettle. This is style. I found that my time was in a ferment over the revolutionary trends in French culture. These always attracted me, but somehow they were not the right fit of clothes for my body. Huidobro, a Chilean poet, took charge of the French innovations, adapting them admirably to his way of life and expression. At times, it seemed to me, he outdid his models. Something of the kind happened, on a larger scale, when Darío burst in upon the scene of Hispanic poetry. But Darío was a huge elephant, a music-maker who shattered all the glass windows in the Spanish language of his time to let in the air of the world. And it came in.

Our language sometimes separates us Latin Americans from the Spaniards. However, it is the ideology of the language, more than anything else, that causes the split. Góngora's frozen beauty is not made for our latitudes, but there is no poetry from Spain, not even the most recent, without an aftertaste of Góngora, without his richness. Our American stratum is dusty rock, crushed lava, clay mixed with blood. We don't know how to work in crystal. Our elegant poets sound hollow. A single drop of Martín Fierro's wine or of Gabriela Mistral's turbid honey is enough to put them in their place: standing stiffly in the parlor like vases with flowers from someone else's garden.

Spanish became a gilded language after Cervantes, it took on a courtly elegance, it lost the wild power it had brought in from Gonzalo de Berceo and the Archpriest of Hita, it lost the genital fire that still burned in Quevedo. The same thing happened in England, in France, in Italy. Chaucer's extravagances, as well as Rabelais's, were castrated; the precious style inherited from Petrarch made emeralds and diamonds glitter, but the source of greatness began to burn itself out.

This earlier wellspring had everything to do with the whole man, his freedom, his prolific nature, his excesses.

At least that was my problem, although I didn't put it in those terms, not even to myself. If my poetry has any meaning at all, it is this tendency to stretch out in space, without restrictions, and not be happy to stay in a room. I had to break out of my limited world by myself, not having traced it out within the framework of a distant culture. I had to be myself, striving to branch out like the very land where I was born. Another poet of this same hemisphere helped me along this road, Walt Whitman, my comrade from Manhattan.

CRITICS MUST SUFFER

The Songs of Maldoror, basically, form part of a great serial story. Don't forget that Isidore Ducasse took his pseudonym from a novel by the feuilletonist Eugène Sue: *Latréaumont*, written in Châtenay in 1837. But Lautréaumont, we know, went much further than Latréaumont. He went much lower, he wanted to be Satanic. And much higher, a fallen archangel. At the height of his unhappiness, Maldoror celebrates the marriage of heaven and hell. Fury, dithyrambs, and agony make up the irresistible waves of Ducasse's rhetoric. Maldoror: Maldolor.

Lautréaumont planned a new phase; he repudiated his gloomy side and did the prologue to a new optimistic poetry he never had the chance to write. The young Uruguayan was carried off by death in Paris. But the promised change in his poetry, the swing toward goodness and health, which he did not fulfill, has stirred up much criticism. He is venerated for his sorrow and condemned for his move toward joy. The poet must torment himself and suffer, he must live in despair, he must go on writing his song of despair. This has been the opinion on one social level, the opinion of one class. This cut-and-dried formula was followed by many who succumbed to the suffering imposed by unwritten, but still cut-and-dried, laws. These invisible laws condemned the poet to the hovel, worn shoes, the hospital, the morgue. That made everyone happy: everybody had a good time and few tears were shed.

Things changed because the world changed. And we poets sud-

denly led the rebellion toward joy. The unhappy writer, the crucified writer are part of the ritual of happiness in the twilight of capitalism. Taste was skillfully channeled toward the build-up of misery as a catalyst for great creativity. Decadent living and suffering were prescribed for writing poetry. Hölderlin, mad and unhappy; Rimbaud, embittered, perpetually wandering; Gérard de Nerval, hanging himself from a lamppost in a small, run-down side street; they gave the last years of the century not only the paroxysm of beauty but the road of suffering. Dogma made this road of thorns the poet's inbred prerequisite for the creations of the spirit.

Dylan Thomas was the last of those steered to his martyrdom. Oddly, these ideas of the old surly bourgeoisie still hold true in the minds of some. Minds that don't take the world's pulse through its nose, which is where it should be taken, because the world's nose smells what is in the future.

There are critics like creeping gourd plants whose guide shoots and tendrils seek out the latest sigh in fashionable trends, terrified that they will miss out on something. But their roots remain steeped in the past.

We poets have the right to be happy, as long as we are close to the people of our country and in the thick of the fight for their happiness.

"Pablo is one of the few happy men I have known," Ilya Ehrenburg says somewhere in his writings. I am that Pablo, and Ehrenburg is not wrong.

That's why I am amazed that magazine reviewers, who should know better, worry about my material well-being, although my personal affairs should not be part of the critic's concern. I realize that the chance that I may be happy offends many. But the fact is, I am happy inside. I have a clear conscience and a restless intelligence.

To those critics who seem to begrudge poets a better standard of living, I suggest that they should be proud that books of poetry are printed, sold, and fulfill their mission of giving critics something to think about; they should be happy that writers are remunerated and that some, at least, are able to make a living from their honest labor. The critics should proclaim their pride in this, instead of always trying to spoil things.

That's why a short time ago, when I read the paragraphs devoted to me by a young critic, a brilliant ecclesiastic, I didn't think his brilliance prevented him from blundering badly.

According to him, my poetry was weakened by the happiness in it. He prescribed suffering for me. According to this theory, appendicitis should produce excellent prose, and peritonitis might possibly produce some sublime poems.

I continue to work with the materials I have, the materials I am made of. With feelings, beings, books, events, and batties, I am omnivorous. I would like to swallow the whole earth. I would like to drink the whole sea.

SHORT AND LONG LINES

As an active poet, I fought against my own self-absorption and so was able to settle the debate between the real and the subjective deep within myself. I'm not trying to hand out advice, but my experiences may possibly help others. Let's take a quick look at the results.

It is natural for my poetry to be subjected to serious criticism as well as exposed to the vicious attacks of slander. It's part of the game. I have no voice in this part of it, but I do have a vote. For the critic who gets down to essentials, my vote is in my books, in all my poetry. For the unfriendly slanderer, I also have a vote, and it, too, consists of my unbroken creative activity.

If what I am saying sounds vain, you are right. Mine is the vanity of the craftsman who has practiced his craft for a good many years with a love that has never faltered.

And if I am satisfied about one thing, it is that one way or another, at least in my own country, I have made people respect the occupation of poet, the profession of poetry.

At the time I began to write, there were two kinds of poets. Some belonged to the upper crust and earned respect because of their money, which helped them reach legitimate or illegitimate standing. The other family of poets were the militant wanderers of poetry, bar lions, fascinating madmen, tormented sleepwalkers. And let's not overlook those writers tied down, like the galley slave to his oar, to the little stool in government offices. Their dreams were almost always smothered by mountains of official

stamped paper and by terrible fear of their superiors or of being laughed at.

I started life more naked than Adam but with my mind made up to maintain the integrity of my poetry. This ingrained attitude was not only valuable in itself but also stopped fools from laughing at me. And afterwards, the fools who had a heart and conscience accepted, like the good people they were, the grim realities stirred up by my poetry. And those who were ill-willed gradually became afraid of me.

And so Poetry, with a capital P, was shown respect. Not only poetry but poets as well. All poetry and all poets.

I am keenly aware of this service to the people, and I won't let anyone snatch this merit from me, because I like to wear it like a medal. They can question everything else, but what I am telling now is solid history.

The poet's die-hard enemies will put forward many arguments that are no longer valid. They called me a hungry bum when I was young. Now they attack me by making people think I am Mr. Big, owner of a fabulous fortune, which I don't own but would love to own, among other things to upset them even more.

Others measure the length of my lines to prove that I chop them up into small fragments or stretch them out too far. It doesn't matter. Who sets up the rules about shorter or longer, narrower or wider, yellower or redder lines? The poet who writes them is the one who determines what's what. He determines it with his breath and his blood, with his wisdom and his ignorance, because all this goes into the making of the bread of poetry.

The poet who is not a realist is dead. And the poet who is only a realist is also dead. The poet who is only irrational will only be understood by himself and his beloved, and this is very sad. The poet who is all reason will even be understood by jackasses, and this is also terribly sad. There are no hard and fast rules, there are no ingredients prescribed by God or the Devil, but these two very important gentlemen wage a steady battle in the realm of poetry, and in this battle first one wins and then the other, but poetry itself cannot be defeated.

It's obvious that the poet's occupation is abused to some extent. So many new men and women poets keep cropping up that soon

we'll all look like poets, and readers will disappear. We'll have to go looking for readers on expeditions that will cross the desert sands on camels or circle the sky on spaceships.

Poetry is a deep inner calling in man; from it came liturgy, the psalms, and also the content of religions. The poet confronted nature's phenomena and in the early ages called himself a priest, to safeguard his vocation. In the same way, to defend his poetry, the poet of the modern age accepts the investiture earned in the street, among the masses. Today's social poet is still a member of the earliest order of priests. In the old days he made his pact with the darkness, and now he must interpret the light.

ORIGINALITY

I don't believe in originality. It is just one more fetish made up in our time, which is speeding dizzily to its collapse. I believe in personality reached through any language, any form, any creative means used by the artist. But out-and-out originality is a modern invention and an electoral fraud. There are some who want to be elected Poet Laureate in their country, their language, or in the world. So they run in search of electors, they fling insults at those who seem close enough to compete for the scepter, and poetry turns into a farce.

Still, it is essential to keep one's interior bearings, to stay in control of the additional material that nature, culture, and a socially-committed life contribute to bringing out the best in the poet.

In the past, the most noble, the consummate poets, like Quevedo, for example, wrote poems headed with this warning signal: "Imitation of Horace," "Imitation of Ovid," "Imitation of Lucretius."

For my part, I keep up my own tone, which gathered strength by its own nature as time went along, like all living things. There is no doubt that feelings are a major part of my earliest books, and so much the worse for the poet who does not respond with song to the tender and furious summons of the heart! Yet, after forty years of experience, I believe that the poet can take a firmer grip on his emotions in his work. I believe in guided spontaneity. For this, the poet must always have some reserves, in his pocket, let's say, in case of emergency. First, a reserve of mental notes on

established poetic forms, of words, sounds, or images, the ones that buzz right past us like bees. They must be caught quickly and put away in one's pocket. I am lazy in this respect, but I know I am passing on some good advice. Mayakovsky had a little notebook he was constantly going into. There is also the reserve of feelings. How can these be preserved? By being conscious of them when they come up. Then, when we face the paper, this consciousness will come back to us more vividly than the emotion itself.

In a substantial part of my work I have tried to prove that the poet can write about any given subject, about something needed by a community as a whole. Almost all the great works of antiquity were done strictly on request. The *Georgics* are propaganda for the farming of the Roman countryside. A poet can write for a university or a labor union, for skilled workers and professionals. Freedom was never lost simply because of this. Magical inspiration and the poet's communication with God are inventions dictated by self-interest. At the moments of greatest creative intensity, the product can be partially someone else's, influenced by readings and external pressures.

Suddenly I interrupt these observations, which are a bit on the theoretic side, and I start remembering the literary life in Santiago when I was a young man. Painters and writers worked in a creative ferment, without public response. An autumnal lyricism hovered over painting and poetry. Each artist tried to be more anarchic, more demoralizing, more disorderly than the others. There were deep and troubled stirrings among Chile's social classes. Alessandri made subversive speeches. On the nitrate pampas the workers, who would create the most important people's movement on the continent, were organizing. Those were the holy days of the struggle. Carlos Vicuña, Juan Galdúf. I quickly joined the student anarcho-syndicalist movement. My favorite book was Andreyev's *Sacha Yegulev*. Others read Artsybashev's pornographic novels and attributed an ideological thrust to them, exactly as people do today with existentialist pornography. Intellectuals made themselves at home in bars. The good old wine gave poverty a glittering golden aura that lasted till the next morning. Juan Egana, an extraordinarily gifted poet, was going to pieces, headed for the grave. A story was making the

rounds that he had inherited a fortune and had left all his money in bills on a table in an abandoned house. His drinking companions, who slept by day, went out at night to fetch wine by the keg. But Juan Egaña's poetry is a beam of moonlight that has never sent the slightest shudder through our "lyric forest." This was the romantic title of the wonderful modernist anthology put out by Molina Núñez and O. Segura Castro, a very complete book, filled with greatness and generosity. It is the *Summa Poética* of a chaotic era, marked by huge gaps as well as pure, resplendent poems. The personality who made the greatest impression on me was Aliro Oyarzún, the dictator of the new literature. No one remembers him now. He was an emaciated Baudelairean, a remarkable decadent, Chile's Barba Jacob, tormented, cadaverous, handsome, and mad. He spoke with a cavernous voice from the top of his tall stature. He invented a hieroglyphic style of stating aesthetic problems which is peculiar to a certain segment of our literary world. His voice soared; his forehead was a yellow dome of the temple of intelligence. He would say, for example: "the circle's circularity," "the Dionysian in Dionysius," "the obscurity of the obscure." Yet Aliro Oyarzún was no fool. In him were combined the paradisiacal and the infernal sides of a culture. He was a cosmopolite who gradually killed his real nature with his theories. They say he wrote his only poem in order to win a bet, and I can't understand why that poem is not in all the anthologies of Chilean poetry.

BOTTLES AND FIGUREHEADS

Christmas is approaching. Each Christmas takes us closer to the year 2000. We poets of today have been struggling and singing for happiness in the future, for the peace of tomorrow, for universal justice, for the bells of the year 2000.

Back in the thirties, Sócrates Aguirre, the subtle and excellent man who was my superior at the consulate in Buenos Aires, asked me, one December 24, to play Santa Claus, or Old Saint Nick, at his house. I have bungled many things in my life, but nothing had ever turned out as badly as my Old Saint Nick. The wads of cotton in my beard kept slipping off, and I got things all mixed up

when I passed the toys around. And how could I disguise the voice that the climate of southern Chile had turned into a twang, nasal and unmistakable, from my earliest years? I had to use a trick: I spoke to the children in English, but the children pierced me with several pairs of black or blue eyes and showed more suspicion than seemed proper in well-brought-up youngsters.

Who would have guessed that among those children was one destined to become a dearest friend, an important writer, the author of one of the best biographies written about me? I am speaking of Margarita Aguirre.

In my house I have put together a collection of small and large toys I can't live without. The child who doesn't play is not a child, but the man who doesn't play has lost forever the child who lived in him and he will certainly miss him. I have also built my house like a toy house and I play in it from morning till night.

These are my own toys. I have collected them all my life for the scientific purpose of amusing myself alone. I shall describe them for small children and for others of all ages.

I have a sailboat inside a bottle. In fact, I have more than one. It's a whole fleet. They have their written names, masts, sails, prows, and anchors. Some come from far away, from other tiny little seas. One of the most beautiful was sent to me from Spain, in payment for the rights to a book of my odes. Above, on the mainmast, is our flag, with its tiny lone star. Almost all the others, however, are the work of Señor Carlos Hollander. Señor Hollander is an old seaman and he has reproduced for me many of the famous and majestic ships that came from Hamburg, Salem, or the Breton coast to load nitrate or hunt whales in the South Seas.

When I go down Chile's long highway to find the old sailor in Coronel, and into the southern city's smell of coal and rain, I actually enter the tiniest shipyard in the world. In the small parlor, the dining room, the kitchen, the garden, are accumulated, all in order, the parts that will be inserted into the clear bottles which the pisco has vacated. Don Carlos's whistle is a magic wand touching prows and sails, foresails and topsails. Even the tiniest puff of smoke from the port passes through his hands and is re-created to

rise from a new bottled ship, gleaming and fresh, ready to set out for some chimerical sea.

In my collection the ships that have come out of the modest hands of the navigator from Coronel stand out from the others bought in Antwerp or Marseilles. For not only did he give them life, he also embellished them with his knowledge, pasting a label on each that tells the name and number of the ship's feats, the voyages it saw through wind and tide, the cargoes it distributed, fluttering across the Pacific with sails we shall never see again.

In bottles I have famous ships like the powerful *Potosí*, and the grand *Prussia*, from Hamburg, wrecked in the English Channel in 1910. Captain Hollander also delighted me by making me two versions of the *María Celeste*, which in 1882 was converted into a star, into a mystery of mysteries.

I am not about to reveal the navigational secret that lives on in its own translucence. I mean, how the tiny ships got into their loving bottles. Being a professional deceiver, and in order to mystify, I gave a detailed description, in an ode, of the long-drawn-out and minutely detailed work of the mysterious shipbuilders and recounted how they went in and out of their sea bottles. But the secret still stands.

The figureheads are my largest toys. Like so many of my things, these figureheads have been photographed for newspapers and magazines and have been discussed in a friendly light or with spite. Those who are well disposed toward them laugh understandingly and say, "What a crazy guy! Look at the kind of thing he's decided to collect!"

The mean ones see things differently. Soured by my collections and by the blue flag with a white fish which I hoist at my home in *Isla Negra*, one of them said, "I don't run up my own flag. I don't have figureheads."

The poor man was whining like a little kid who is jealous because other kids have tops. All this time, my figureheads from the sea smiled, flattered by the envy they aroused.

One should really refer to them as prow figureheads. They are figures with a bosom, sea statues, effigies from lost oceans. When he built his ships, man was trying to endow the prows with a higher meaning. In ancient days he placed on his ships the figures

of birds, totem birds, mythical birds cut in wood. Then in the nineteenth century the whaling ships had symbolic figures carved for them: half-nude goddesses, or republican matrons with Phrygian caps.

I own both male and female figureheads. The smallest and most delightful, which Salvador Allende has often tried to take from me, is the *María Celeste*. She belonged to one of the smaller French vessels and may possibly have sailed only in the Seine's waters. She is darkish, carved in oak; many years and voyages have given her a dusky complexion for all time. She is a small woman who looks like she's flying, with signs of a wind carved into her lovely Second Empire clothes. Her porcelain eyes look out over the dimples in her cheeks, into the horizon. And strange as it seems, these eyes shed tears every winter. No one can explain it. The brown wood may possibly have pores that collect the humidity. But the fact is that those French eyes weep in winter-time and I see *María Celeste's* precious tears roll down her small face every year.

Images, Christian or pagan, awaken religious sentiments in human beings. Another figurehead of mine spent several years where it suited her best, facing the sea, in her slanting pose, excitedly as she had sailed on her ship. One afternoon *Matilde* and I discovered some of *Isla Negra's* devout ladies who had climbed over the fence, like newspapermen trying to get an interview, and were kneeling in the garden before the figurehead, in the glow of quite a few candles, which they had lit to her. Maybe a new religion had been born. At any rate, although the tall, solemn figure resembled *Gabriela Mistral* very much, we had to discourage these pious ladies from so innocently continuing to worship the image of a lady of the sea who had sailed the most sinful oceans of our sinful planet.

I have taken her out of the garden since then, and she is now closer to me, beside the fireplace.

BOOKS AND SEASHELLS

A bibliophile of little means is likely to suffer often. Books don't slip from his hands but fly past him through the air, high as birds, high as prices.

And yet, after many tries, out comes *thé pearl*.

I remember the bookseller García Rico's surprise, in Madrid in 1934, when I offered to buy an old set of Góngora's works that cost only a hundred pesetas, in monthly payments of twenty. It was very little money, but I didn't have it. I paid punctually, in five months. It was the Foppens edition. This seventeenth-century Flemish publisher printed, in peerless type, the work of the masters of Spain's Golden Age. I only enjoy reading Quevedo in editions where the sonnets are bravely deployed for battle, like tough fighting ships.

Later I lost myself in the forest of bookshops, in the suburban nooks and crannies of second-hand bookstalls and the cathedral naves of the marvelous bookstores of France and England. My hands came out covered with dust, but from time to time I obtained a treasure, or at least the thrill of thinking that I had.

Ready cash from literary prizes helped me to buy some editions at outlandish prices. My library grew to a considerable size. Antique books of poetry brightened it, and my bent for natural history filled it with magnificent books on botany, illustrated in full color, and books on birds, insects, and fish. I found wonderful travel books in various parts of the world; incredible *Don Quixotes*, printed by Ibarra; Dante folios in exquisite Bodoni type; even a Molière from a very limited edition prepared, "Ad usum Delphini," for the son of the King of France.

But, actually, the loveliest things I ever collected were my sea-shells. They gave me the pleasure of their extraordinary structure: a mysterious porcelain with the purity of moonlight combined with numerous tactile, Gothic, functional forms.

Thousands of tiny undersea doors opened for me to dip into, from the day Don Carlos de la Torre, the noted Cuban malacologist, gave me the best specimens from his collection. Since then I have crossed the seven seas, wherever my travels took me, stalking and hunting down shells. But I must confess that it was the sea of Paris that, wave after wave, washed ashore most of my shells for me. Paris had transported all the mother-of-pearl of Oceania to its naturalist shops, to its flea markets.

Finding the exquisite contours of the *Olivæ textilina* under the city's sargasso, among broken lamps and old shoes, was easier than plunging my hands in among the rocks of Vera Cruz or Baja California. Or catching the spear of quartz that tapers off, like a

sea poem, into *Rostellaria fusus*. No one can take away the thrill I felt when I pulled out of that sea the *Spondylus roseo*, a large oyster studded with coral spines. Or when, farther on, I opened the white *Spondylus* with its snowy barbs like stalagmites in a Gongoran grotto.

Some of these trophies may have had a historic past. I remember that in the Peking Museum the most sacred box of mollusks from the China Sea was opened to give me the second of the only two specimens of the *Thatcheria mirabilis* in existence. And thus I was able to own that remarkable work of art in which the ocean gave China the style for temples and pagodas that still survives in those latitudes.

It took me thirty years to collect a large library. My shelves held incunabula and other books I treasured: first editions of Quevedo, Cervantes, Góngora, as well as Laforgue, Rimbaud, and Lautréamont. I felt as if these pages still preserved the touch of the poets I loved. I had manuscripts by Rimbaud. In Paris, Paul Eluard gave me, as a birthday present, Isabelle Rimbaud's two letters to her mother, written in the hospital at Marseilles where the wanderer had one leg amputated. These were treasures covered by the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and by Chicago's voracious book collectors.

I covered so many parts of the world that my library grew much too large, beyond the normal bounds of a private library. One day I gave away the wonderful collection of shells it had taken me twenty years to put together and the five thousand volumes I had selected with so much love from so many countries. I gave them to my country's university. And they were accepted by the rector, with beautiful words, as a dazzling gift.

Any genuine person will imagine the rejoicing with which this gift of mine must have been received. But there are also people with twisted minds. An official critic wrote some furious articles protesting vehemently. When will it be possible to stop international Communism? he raved. Another gentleman made a fiery speech in parliament attacking the university for having accepted my marvelous cunabula and incunabula, and threatened to cut off the subsidies the national institute receives. Between them, the writer of the articles and the parliamentarian launched an icy

wave over the small world of Chile. The rector of the university paced up and down the halls of Congress, looking sick.

Incidentally, twenty years have gone by and no one has ever seen my books or my shells again. It's as if they had slipped back into the bookstores and the ocean.

BROKEN GLASS

Three days ago I came back to my home in Valparaíso, after being away a long time. Huge cracks in the walls were just like wounds. Disheartening rugs of shattered glass covered the floors of the rooms. The clocks, also on the floor, grimly recorded the time of the earthquake. How many lovely things Matilde's broom was now sweeping up from the floor; how many rare objects the earth's tremors had turned into trash.

We have to clean up, to put things back, and start all over again. Paper is hard to find in the middle of the mess; and then, it's hard to collect one's thoughts.

My last work was a translation of *Romeo and Juliet* and a long love poem in archaic meter, a poem that was never completed.

Come on, love poem, get up from among the broken glass, the time to sing has come.

Help me, love poem, to make things whole again, to sing in spite of pain.

It's true that the world does not cleanse itself of wars, does not wash off the blood, does not get over its hate. It's true.

Yet it is equally true that we are moving toward a realization: the violent ones are reflected in the mirror of the world, and their faces are not pleasant to look at, not even to themselves.

And I go on believing in the possibility of love. I am convinced that there will be mutual understanding among human beings, achieved in spite of all the suffering, the blood, the broken glass.

MATILDE URRUTIA, MY WIFE

My wife is from the provinces, like me. She was born in a southern city, Chillán, fortunately famous for its peasant-made pottery, unfortunately notorious for its disastrous earthquakes.

Speaking to her in my *Cien sonetos de amor*, I have told her all I feel.

Perhaps these poems make clear how much she means to me. Life and the land brought us together.

It may interest no one else, but we are happy. We share the time we have together in long sojourns on Chile's lonely coast. Not in summer, when the coast, dried up by the sun, is yellow and desert-like. But in winter, yes; when the rains and the cold dress it up in an extraordinary flowering of green and yellow, blue and purple. Sometimes we go up from the wild and solitary ocean to the nervous city of Santiago, where together we weather the complicated existence of others.

Matilde sings my songs in a powerful voice.

Everything I write and everything I have is dedicated to her. It's not much, but it makes her happy.

Now I'm watching her sink her tiny shoes into the mud in the garden, and then she also sinks her tiny hands as deep as the plant has gone down.

From the earth—with her feet and hands and eyes and voice—she brought me all the roots, all the flowers, all the sweet-smelling fruits of happiness.

AN INVENTOR OF STARS

A man was asleep in his room in a Paris hotel. Since he was an incurable night owl, don't be surprised when I tell you it was twelve noon and the man was still sleeping.

He had to wake up. The wall on his left suddenly collapsed, demolished. Then the one in front of him crashed down. It wasn't a bombing. From the freshly opened pits, moustachioed workers emerged, picks in hand, and taunted the sleeper: "*Eh, lève-toi, bourgeois! Have a drink with us!*"

The champagne was uncorked. The mayor came in, with a tricolor sash across his chest. Music burst out, the notes of the Marseillaise. What was behind such strange goings-on? Well, two lines of the Paris Métro, then under construction, had met underground, just below the floor of the dreamer's hotel room.

From the moment that man told me his story, I decided to become his friend, or rather his devotee, his disciple. Since such

extraordinary things happened to him, and I didn't want to miss any of them, I followed him across several countries. Captivated by this phenomenon's wild imagination, Federico García Lorca adopted a position similar to mine.

Federico and I were sitting in the Correos Café, across from Madrid's Cibeles Fountain, when the sleeper from Paris burst in upon our tête-à-tête. Though he was strapping and round as a globe, he looked sick. Once again, something words failed to describe had occurred to him. He had been in his truly modest Madrid hideaway, trying to set his music sheets in order. For I have forgotten to mention that our hero was a wonderful composer. And what happened?

"A car pulled up at the door of my hotel. Then I heard footsteps come up the stairs and go into the room next to mine. Later the newcomer began to snore. It started off as a whisper. Then the air shuddered. The closets, the walls moved under the rhythmic impact of the tremendous snores."

It had to be some wild animal. When the snoring broke into a torrent, our friend no longer had any doubts: it was the Horned Boar. In other countries his uproar had shaken basilicas, blocked highways, stirred up angry seas. What was this planetary menace up to, this abominable monster that threatened the peace of all Europe?

Every day he told new and chilling episodes about the Horned Boar. Federico, I, Rafael Alberti, the sculptor Alberto, Fulgencio Díaz Pastor, and Miguel Hernández—we welcomed him eagerly, and bid him goodbye anxiously.

Then one day he arrived with his old round-bellied laughter. And he told us: "The terrifying problem has been solved. The German Graf Zeppelin has agreed to transport the Horned Boar. It will drop him in the Brazilian jungle. He will live off the giant trees. There's no danger that he will drink up the Amazon at one sitting. There he will go on deafening the earth with his thunderous snoring."

Listening to him, Federico exploded with laughter till he had to shut his eyes. Then our friend mentioned the time he went to send off a telegram and the telegraph operator persuaded him never to send any more telegrams, only letters, because people were scared out of their wits when they received those winged

messages, some even died of shock before opening them. He also told us about the time he went to look in on an interesting auction of thoroughbred horses in London. He raised his hand to greet a friend, and the auctioneer gave him, for £10,000, a mare for which the Aga Khan had bid £9,500. "I had to take the mare to my hotel and return it the next day," he said.

Now the fabulist can't tell the story of the Horned Boar, or any other story. He died here in Chile. In life, Acario Cotapos was the name of this spherical Chilean, a composer through and through and a prodigal source of unparalleled stories. I had the honor of speaking at the funeral of this man whose memory it was impossible to bury. All I said was: "Today we deliver into the shadows a splendid human being who gave us a star every day."

ELUARD THE MAGNIFICENT

My comrade Paul Eluard died a short time ago. He was so wholesome, so solid, that I found it painful and difficult to accept his loss. He was a blue and rosy Norman, tough-looking but delicate. The war of 1914, in which he was gassed twice, left him with shaky hands for the rest of his life. Yet Eluard always made me think of a sky-blue color, of deep, still water, of a gentleness aware of its own strength. Paul Eluard's poetry was so clear, transparent like drops of spring rain against a windowpane, that he may have seemed an apolitical man, a poet who would have nothing to do with politics. He was not. He had strong ties with the people of France, its causes, and its struggles.

Paul Eluard was firm. A kind of French tower with a passionate lucidity that is not the same as passionate stupidity, which is so common.

In Mexico, where we had gone together, I saw him for the first time on the verge of a dark pit—he who always kept a quiet place for sadness, a place as ready as the one reserved for wisdom.

He was worn out. I had convinced him, had dragged him, a Frenchman to the core, to that distant land, and there, the same day we buried José Clemente Orozco, I came down with a dangerous case of phlebitis that tied me to my bed for four months. Paul Eluard felt lonely, lonely and in darkness, as helpless as a blind explorer. He didn't know anyone, no doors were thrown

open to him. The loss of his wife weighed heavily on him; he felt all alone here, without love. He would say to me: "We have to see life together with someone, to share every fragment of life with someone. My solitude is unreal, my solitude is killing me."

I called up friends and we made him go out. They took him off, grumbling, to ride over Mexico's roads, and at some bend in one of those roads he came across love again, his last love: Dominique.

It's very hard for me to write about Paul Eluard. I shall go on seeing him near me, alive, with the electric blue deepness, that could see so much and so far, burning in his eyes.

He had left French soil, where laurels and roots are woven together in a fragrant heritage. His tall stature was all water and stone, with ancient vines climbing up on it, bearing flowers and flashes of light, nests and transparent songs.

Transparence, that's the word. His poetry was crystal hard as rock, water standing still in its singing stream.

Poet of the highest kind of love, fire pure as noon, in France's disastrous days he planted his heart in the center of his country and out of it came fire that was decisive in battle.

And so it was natural for him to join the ranks of the Communist Party. Being a Communist, for Eluard, meant reasserting the values of humanity and humanism with his poetry and his life.

Let no one believe that Eluard was less political than poet. His clear-sightedness and his formidable dialectical reasoning often astonished me. Together we examined many things, men and problems of our time, and his lucidity has always been of great help to me.

He did not lose himself in surrealist irrationalism, because he was not an imitator but a creator, and as such he pumped bullets of clarity and intelligence into the dead body of surrealism.

He was my friend in everyday life and now I have lost his affection, which was part of my daily bread. No one will be able to give me what he has taken with him, because his active brotherly spirit was one of my life's treasured luxuries.

Tower of France, brother! I lean over your closed eyes, they will go on giving me the light and the greatness, the simplicity and the honesty, the goodness and the naturalness you sowed on earth.

PIERRE REVERDY

I would never call Pierre Reverdy's poetry magical. This word, catchword of an era, is like the hat of a fake magician at a fair: no wild pigeon will emerge from it and fly away.

Reverdy was a physical poet, he named and touched numberless aspects of earth and sky. He named the things and the splendor of the world.

His own poetry was like a vein of quartz, subterranean but filled with light, inexhaustible. Sometimes it threw off a hard glitter, like the sheen of some black mineral torn with difficulty from its thick covering of earth. Suddenly it flew out like a spark from a match, or hid in the gallery of its mine, far from the light of day, but faithful to its own truth. Perhaps this truth, which identified the substance of his poetry with nature, this Reverdian tranquillity, this unflagging honesty, gradually paved his way to oblivion. He was eventually taken for granted by others, like a natural phenomenon, a house, river, or familiar street that would never change its outward appearance or its place.

Now that he has gone away, now that a tremendous silence, greater than his own noble and proud silence, has carried him off, we realize that he is no longer here, that this unique light is gone, buried in earth and sky.

I say that someday his name, like an angel coming back to life, will knock down the unjust doors of oblivion.

Without trumpets, with the lyrical silence of his magnificent and enduring poetry around him like a halo, we shall see him at the last judgment, at the Essential Judgment, dazzling us with the simple timelessness of his work.

JERZY BOREJSZA

Jerzy Borejsza is no longer waiting for me in Poland. Fate reserved for this old émigré the chance to rebuild his country. When he went back to it as a soldier, after being away for many years, Warsaw was just a pile of rubble. There were no streets, no trees. No one was waiting for him. Borejsza, a dynamic wonder, worked with his people. Colossal plans sprang from his head, and then a tremendous initiative: the House of the Printed Word. One by

one its stories were built; the biggest rotary printing presses in the world arrived; and now thousands upon thousands of books and magazines are printed there. Borejsza was a tireless, down-to-earth man who converted dreams into action. His daring plans materialized, like the castles in dreams, in the new Poland with its incredible vitality.

I hadn't met him. I went to see him at the vacation camp where he was waiting for me, in northern Poland, in the Masurian Lakes region.

When I got out of the car, I saw an ungainly man in need of a shave, wearing only a pair of nondescript shorts. With the energy of a wild man, in a Spanish learned from books, he shouted: "Pablo, non habrás fatiga. Debes tomar reposo." (Which in English would sound something like this: "Pablo, no have tired. You must take repose.") As a matter of fact, he did not let me "take repose" at all. His conversation was profuse, multiform, surprising, and punctuated by exclamation points. He described seven different construction plans to me in the same breath, with an analysis of several books that contributed new interpretations of history and life thrown in for good measure. "The true hero was Sancho Panza, not Don Quixote, Pablo." For him, Sancho was the voice of popular realism, the true center of his world and his time. "When Sancho runs things, he does it well, because it is the people running things."

He used to pull me out of bed early, always shouting at me: "You must take repose," and he would lead me through fir and pine forests to show me the convent of a religious sect that had migrated from Russia a hundred years before and still clung to its old rites. The nuns received him with a blessing. Borejsza was all tact and respect with those religious women.

He was gentle and active. The war years had been terrible. One day he showed me the revolver used to execute a war criminal, after a summary trial. A notebook had been found where he had painstakingly written down all his crimes. Old people and children strangled by his hands, little girls raped. They had surprised him in the very village where he had committed his atrocities. Witnesses filed past. His incriminating notebook was read to him, and the insolent assassin had only this to say for himself: "I would do it again if I could start all over." In my hands I had the note-

book, and the revolver that had extinguished the life of a heartless criminal.

They catch eels in the Masurian Lakes, which multiply until you lose track of their number. We set out to go fishing very early, and we were soon watching the eels, quivering and wet, like black belts.

I became familiar with those waters, their fishermen, and the scenery around them. From morning till night, my friend got me to go up and come down, to run and to row, to meet people and learn all about trees. All this to the shout of: "Here you must take repose. There is no place like this for resting."

When I left the Masurian Lakes, he gave me a smoked eel, the longest I have ever seen.

This strange walking stick complicated my life. I wanted to eat it, because I am very partial to smoked eels, and this one, having come straight from its native lake, without a store or any other go-between, was above suspicion. But during that time there was eel on my hotel menu noon and night, and I didn't have a chance to serve myself my private eel. It started to prey on my mind.

At night I would put it out on the balcony to get some fresh air. Sometimes, in the middle of an absorbing conversation, I remembered that it was noon and my eel was still outdoors, in the full sunlight. Then I would lose all interest in the subject under discussion and would dash out to put my eel in a cool place in my room, in a closet, for instance.

I finally met an eel lover and gave him, not without qualms, the longest, tenderest, and best smoked eel that ever existed.

Now the great Borejsza, a scrawny, dynamic Quixote, an admirer of Sancho Panza like the other Quixote, sensitive and wise, builder and dreamer, is resting for the first time. He rests in the darkness he loved so much. Near his resting place, a world he gave his volcanic energy and his inexhaustible fire to is still being created.

GYÖRGY SOMLYÓ

In Hungary, I love the way life and poetry, history and poetry, time and the poet, intertwine. In other countries this matter is discussed more or less naively or one-sidedly. In Hungary every

poet is committed before he is born. Attila Jozsef, Endre Ady, Gyulla Illyés are natural products of a great interchange between duty and music, between mother country and darkness, between love and pain.

György Somlyó is a poet I have seen grow in confidence and strength over a span of twenty years. A poet with fine tones that soar like a violin's, a poet who concerns himself with his own life and with other lives, a Hungarian poet down to his bone marrow—Hungarian in his generous readiness to share the reality and the dreams of a people. A poet of faithful love and active commitment, his universality bears the unique stamp of the great poetry of his country.

A poet, young but mature, who deserves to be heard by our time. A quiet poetry, transparent and intoxicating like the wine from our golden sands.

QUASIMODO

Italy's earth holds the voices of its ancient poets deep within itself, where it is purest. Walking on the soil of its fields, passing through parks where the water sparkles, going over the sands of its small blue ocean, I felt as if I were stepping on diamond-like substances, hidden accumulations of crystal, all the luster stored up by the centuries. Italy gave European poetry form, sound, grace, and rapture; she pulled it out of its early formlessness, out of its coarseness dressed up in sackcloth and armor. Italy's light transformed the rags of the medieval minstrels and the iron trappings of the chansons de geste into an abundant flow of cut diamonds.

For poets like us, recent arrivals to culture from countries where anthologies begin with poets of 1880, it was amazing to find in Italian anthologies poems dating back to the 1230's or 1310 or 1450, and between these dates the dazzling tercets, the passionate artistry, the depth and the gem-like surface of Dante, Cavalcanti, Petrarca, Poliziano.

These names and these men gave their Florentine light to our sweet-toned and powerful Garcilaso de la Vega, to good-natured Boscán; they lighted Góngora's way and shaded Quevedo's melancholy with a thrust of their own darkness; they molded the sonnets of England's Shakespeare and threw light on the essences

of France, making the roses of Ronsard and du Bellay burst into bloom.

So a poet born in Italy has a difficult road cut out for him, a starlit road that demands living up to a brilliant heritage.

I have known Salvatore Quasimodo for years and I can say that his poetry has a conscience that seems phantasmagorical to us because of its profound and fiery burden. Quasimodo is a European who makes the most of his learning, his sense of balance, and all the weapons of his intelligence. Yet his position at the center of Italian poetry, as the outstanding contemporary poet of an intermittent but inexhaustible classicism, has not turned him into a warrior locked up in his tower. Quasimodo is a perfect example of the universal man, who does not get up in arms to split the world into West and East; instead, he considers it his obligation, as a man of his time, to knock down cultural barriers and show that poetry, truth, freedom, peace, and happiness are gifts that belong to all alike.

The colors and sounds of a world that is sad but orderly are combined in Quasimodo. His sadness is not Leopardi's hopeless uncertainty but represents the earth settling down to let things grow in the evening; the feeling of reverence given off by that time of day when scents, voices, colors, and bells watch over the work of the seeds that are deep in the ground. I love the poet's tight language, his classicism and his romanticism, and most of all I admire the way he has steeped himself in the tradition of beauty, as well as his power to transform everything into a language that is true and moving.

I lift a fragrant crown of Araucanian leaves over the sea and the distance and release it into the air so that life and the wind will carry it off and lay it on Salvatore Quasimodo's brow. It is not the Apollonian laurel crown we have so often seen in the portraits of Francesco Petrarca. It is a crown from our unexplored forests, made of leaves that have no name yet, leaves soaked in the dew of southern dawns.

VALLEJO LIVES ON

Vallejo was a different kind of man. I shall never forget his great yellow head, like those one still sees in old windows in Peru.

Vallejo was serious and pure in heart. He died in Paris; he was killed by the polluted Paris air, by the polluted river from which so many dead people have been fished. Vallejo died of hunger and asphyxia. If we had brought him back to his Peru, if we had let him breathe Peruvian air, maybe he would still be alive and writing poetry. I have written two poems, on different occasions, about my dear friend, my good comrade. I believe they tell the story of our friendship, which was never interrupted by time or distance. The first, "Oda a César Vallejo" ("Ode to César Vallejo"), is in the first volume of *Odas elementales*.

In the last few years, during the small literary war kept alive by little soldiers with ferocious teeth, Vallejo, César Vallejo's ghost, César Vallejo's absence, César Vallejo's poetry, have been thrown into the fight against me and my poetry. This can happen anywhere. The idea is to wound those who have worked hard, to say, "This one is no good; but Vallejo was good." If Neruda were dead, they would throw him in against Vallejo alive.

The second poem, whose title is a single letter, the letter *V*, is in *Extrañario*.

In seeking the ineffable, the tendril or thread that ties a man to his work, I speak of those who had something, or a great deal, to do with me. We shared some part of our lives and now I have survived them. I have no other way of fathoming what some people have taken to calling the mystery of poetry; I would call it the clarity of poetry. There must be some connection between a man's hands and his work, between the eyes, the viscera, the blood of man and his work. But I have no theory. I don't go around with some dogma under my arm ready to drop it on somebody's head. I am like almost everyone else: everything looks bright to me on Monday, everything looks dark on Tuesday, and I believe this is going to be a bright-and-dark year. The coming years will be a lovely blue.

GABRIELA MISTRAL

I have already mentioned that I met Gabriela Mistral in my home town of Temuco. But later she broke with that town forever. Gabriela was midway through her difficult, hard-working life,

and she looked monastic, like the Mother Superior of a strait-laced school.

It was around this time that she wrote her poems of the mother and child, poems worked in flawless prose, polished and graceful; for her prose was often her most penetrating poetry. She describes pregnancy, birth, and growth in these poems, and some confused gossip went around in Temuco, some vague word, unintentionally ugly, coarse talk that hurt her feelings as a maiden lady, some rumor spread by those railroad and lumber people whom I know so well, rough-mannered and impetuous people who call a spade a spade.

Gabriela felt offended, and was offended until the day of her death.

Years later, in the first edition of her great book, she inserted a long, useless note protesting the things that had been whispered about her in those mountains at the end of the world.

At the time of her memorable triumph, of her Nobel Prize, she had to pass through Temuco on her way to receive the honor. The schoolchildren waited for her at the railroad station every day. The schoolgirls came, spattered by the rain and quivering with copihues. The copihue is the southern flower, the lovely, wild corolla of Araucania. A useless wait. Gabriela Mistral managed to pass through at night, she took a night train so as not to accept Temuco's copihues.

Well, does this speak ill of Gabriela? It simply says that the wounds were still raw, deep within her soul, and would not heal easily. It merely shows that love and rancor struggled in the soul of this writer of such magnificent poetry, as they do in any human being's soul.

For me she always had the open smile of a good friend, a smile like flour sprinkled on the dark bread of her face.

But what were the prime elements that went into the oven of her work? What was the secret ingredient of her poetry, which was always filled with pain?

I'm not going to investigate this, and I'm sure I would not find it out, and if I do find out, I am not going to tell.

The wild mustard blooms this month of September; the countryside is a rippling yellow carpet. Here on the coast the south

wind has been thrashing about with magnificent fury for the past four days. The night is filled with its resonant stir. The ocean is at once an open green crystal and a vast whiteness.

You come here, Gabriela, beloved daughter of these wild mustard blossoms, these rocks, this giant wind. We all welcome you joyously. No one will forget your songs to the hawthorns, to the snows of Chile. You are Chilean. You belong to the people. No one will forget your lines to the naked feet of our children. No one has forgotten your "cursed word." You are a moving friend of peace. For those and other reasons, we love you.

You come, Gabriela, to the wild mustard plants and the hawthorns of Chile. It is only right that I give you the true welcome of the blossoms and the thorns, in keeping with your greatness and our unbreakable friendship. September's doors, made of rock and of springtime, swing open for you. Nothing makes my heart happier than to see your wide smile enter this sacred land made to blossom and sing by the people of Chile.

It's my good luck to share with you the essence and the truth which, because of our voices and our words, will be honored. May your magnificent heart rest, live, fight, sing, and have offspring, in the Andean and ocean solitudes of our country. I kiss your noble forehead and render homage to your universal poetry.

VICENTE HUIDOBRO

The great poet Vicente Huidobro, who looked at everything through mischievous eyes, harassed me with numberless pranks, sending me childish anonymous letters attacking me, and constantly accusing me of plagiarism. Huidobro is typical of a long line of incurable egocentrics. This way of defending one's ground in the dog-eat-dog life of the times, which conceded no importance to the writer, was characteristic of the years immediately before the First World War. In America, this aggressive narcissism re-echoed D'Annunzio's arrogant effrontery in Europe. This Italian writer, who threw out or violated the canons of the petite bourgeoisie, left a volcanic wake of Messianism in America. His most scandalous and revolutionary disciple was Vargas Vila.

It's difficult for me to speak ill of Huidobro, who honored me, throughout his life, with a spectacular ink-slinging war. He crowned himself the "God of Poetry" and did not think it was right that I, so much younger than he, should be part of his Olympus. I never quite understood what that Olympus was all about. Huidobro's group creationized, surrealized, and devoured the latest fashions from Paris. I was infinitely inferior, and hopeless country boy from the backwoods, a hayseed.

Huidobro was not content to be the extraordinarily gifted poet he really was. He also wanted to be Superman. There was something childishly attractive about his pranks. If he were alive today, he would have offered his services, as the only qualified volunteer for the first voyage to the moon. I envision him proving to the scientists that his cranium is the only one on earth genuinely endowed with the form and flexibility to adapt itself to space travel.

Anecdotes give a good picture of him. For instance, when he returned to Chile after the last war, old by then and nearing his end, he used to show everyone a rusty telephone and say, "I myself took it from Hitler. It was the Führer's favorite telephone."

One time he was shown a bad academic sculpture, and he said, "How awful! It's even worse than Michelangelo."

A wonderful story in which he played the leading role in 1919, in Paris, is also worth telling. Huidobro published a pamphlet called *Finis Britanniae*, in which he predicted the immediate collapse of the British Empire. When no one paid attention to his prophecy, the poet decided to disappear. The press took up the case: "Chilean diplomat mysteriously kidnapped."

A few days later he was found lying outside the door of his home. "Some English Boy Scouts kidnapped me," he declared to the police. "They had me tied to a column in a basement and forced me to shout a thousand times: 'Long live the British Empire!'" Then he passed out again. The police, however, examined a package he had under his arm. It was a new pair of pajamas bought by Huidobro himself three days before in one of the better Paris shops.

The whole story came out. And the poet lost a friend, the painter Juan Gris. He had steadfastly believed in the kidnapping

and had suffered greatly because of the imperialist outrage against the Chilean poet. And he never forgave him that lie.

Huidobro is a crystalline poet. Every facet of his work glitters and gives off a contagious joy. Throughout his poetry there is a European brilliance, which he crystallizes and radiates in a play of light filled with grace and intelligence.

What surprises me most about his work when I reread it is its diaphanous quality. This literary poet, who followed all the trends of a complicated era and decided to ignore nature's solemnity, lets a steady flow of singing water run through his poems, a rustle of air and leaves, and a grave humanness that completely takes over his later and his last poems.

From the delightful workmanship of his Frenchified poetry to the powerful forces in his most important writing, there is in Huidobro a struggle between playfulness and fire, escapism and immolation. This struggle makes for quite a show, taking place in plain view, with a dazzling clarity, and almost always deliberately.

There is no doubt that a prejudice in favor of seriousness has kept us away from his work. We agree that Vicente Huidobro's worst enemy was Vicente Huidobro. Death snuffed out his contradictory and impossibly playful life. Death brought a curtain down over his perishable life but raised another to leave the dazzling aspect of him in full view forever. I have proposed a monument for him next to Rubén Darío. But our governments are penny pinchers when it comes to putting up statues for artists, just as they are free spenders with senseless monuments.

We couldn't possibly think of Huidobro as a political figure, in spite of his swift incursions into revolutionary territory. He was as irresponsible toward ideas as a spoiled brat. But that's water under the bridge, and we ourselves would be irresponsible if we set to jabbing pins into him at the risk of damaging his wings. Let's say, instead, that the poems to the October Revolution and in memory of Lenin's death are Huidobro's fundamental contribution to the awakening of mankind.

Huidobro died in 1948, in Cartagena, near Isla Negra, not before writing some of the most heartbreaking and profound poems I have read in all my life. Shortly before his death, Huidobro

visited my home in Isla Negra with my good friend and publisher, Gonzalo Losada. Huidobro and I talked together as poets, as Chileans, as friends.

LITERARY ENEMIES

I suppose major and minor conflicts have always existed, and will go on existing, between writers in all parts of the world.

The number of great suicides in the literature of our American continent is considerable. In revolutionary Russia, envious persons drove Mayakovsky into a corner and he finally pulled the trigger.

Petty grudges are exacerbated in Latin America. Envy sometimes even becomes a profession. It is said that we inherited this trait from a colonial Spain that had hit rock bottom. It's true that in Quevedo, Lope de Vega, and Góngora we often come across the wounds they inflicted on one another. For all its fabulous intellectual brilliance, the Spanish Golden Age was an unhappy age, with hunger prowling outside the palaces.

In the past few years the novel has taken on a new dimension in our countries. The names of García Márquez, Juan Rulfo, Vargas Llosa, Sábato, Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, and the Chilean Donoso are heard and their writings read everywhere. Some of them were christened together as the "boom"; it's also common talk that they are a group who blow each other's horn.

I have met most of them and find them remarkably wholesome and generous. I understand, more clearly every day, why some of them have had to leave their countries to look for a more tranquil atmosphere to work in, far from the reach of political animosity and ever-increasing envy. Their reasons for voluntary exile are irrefutable: their books have become more and more essential to the truth and the dream of our Americas.

I've had qualms about mentioning my personal experiences with envy in its extremes. I wouldn't want to seem egocentric, excessively taken with myself, but it has been my luck to draw the envy of such dogged and colorful persons that the story is worth telling.

These nagging shadows may have made me angry at times. And yet they were in fact performing a strange duty, against their

will—building my reputation—as if they were part of a campaign whose sole objective was to sound my name abroad.

The tragic death of one of these shady adversaries has left a kind of empty place in my life. He kept up his private war against everything I did for so many years that I miss it now.

Forty years of literary persecution is something exceptional. I get a certain pleasure from looking back at this lonely battle of a man against his own shadow, for I myself was never an active participant.

Twenty-five journals were published by that one editor (it was always he) just to destroy me as a writer, to accuse me of all kinds of crimes, treacheries, poetic exhaustion, public and secret vices, plagiarism, sensational sexual aberrations. Pamphlets also appeared and were diligently distributed; newspaper articles that were sometimes humorous; and finally a whole book called *Neruda y yo* (*Neruda and I*), a fat volume packed with attacks and insults.

My adversary, a Chilean poet older than I, fanatical and domineering, was more bluff and bluster than the real thing. This type of fiercely egocentric writer is common in the Americas. Their sourness and self-sufficiency may take different forms, but their D'Annunzian ancestry is tragically patent.

On inclement mornings in our impoverished latitudes, we poets, for the most part in rags and starving, had to step around the vomit of drunks while foraging for handouts. In those wretched surroundings, oddly enough, literature produced bullies, survivors of the picaresque life. A tremendous nihilism, a false Nietzschean cynicism made many of our poets hide behind masks of delinquency. Quite a few steered their lives down this short cut to crime and self-destruction.

My legendary antagonist sprang from that background. First he tried to seduce me, to get me snarled up in the rules of his game. This went against the grain of my country-boy, petit-bourgeois upbringing. I didn't have the nerve for it, and I didn't like being an opportunist. Our hero, on the other hand, was an expert at taking advantage of any situation. He lived in a world of continuous farce, where he cheated himself by playing the bully's role, as profession and protection.

It's time to identify this character. His name was Joe Blow. He was a strong, hairy man who tried to impress people with both his

rhetoric and his physique. One time, when I was only eighteen or nineteen years old, he proposed that he and I bring out a literary review. The review would be made up of just two sections: one where he would declare, in various tones, in prose pieces and poems, that I was a powerful and brilliant poet; and another where I would proclaim to the four winds that he possessed absolute intelligence and unlimited talent. Everything would be perfect this way.

I was very young, but I felt that this would be stretching things too far. Yet I had a hard time dissuading him from it. He was amazing at publishing reviews, and it was incredible to watch the way he scraped up funds to keep up his eternal pamphleteering.

He traced out a precise line of action in the isolated, wintry provinces. He had already made up a long list of doctors, lawyers, dentists, agronomists, professors, engineers, top men in public office, et cetera. Enveloped in the aureole of his voluminous publications, reviews, complete works, epic and lyric pamphlets, our personage would arrive on the scene as the bearer of universal culture. He would solemnly offer all this to the obscure men he visited, and then he deigned to charge them a few miserable escudos. Confronted by his high-flown words, the victim gradually shrank down to the size of a fly. Blow generally departed with the escudos in his pocket and left the fly behind, completely snowed under by the greatness of Universal Culture.

At other times, Joe Blow introduced himself as an expert in agrarian advertising and offered to prepare for the back-country farmers of the south de luxe monographs on their estates, complete with photographs of the owners and the cattle. He would put on quite a show, arriving in riding breeches and a fireman's boots, wrapped in a magnificent, exotic houppelande. Mingling flattery and veiled threats of unfavorable publicity, our man left the farm country with a number of checks. The landowners were stingy but realistic and handed him a few bills to get rid of him.

Outstanding among the distinctive traits of Joe Blow, Nietzschean philosopher and compulsive writer, was his intellectual and physical hooliganism. He was a professional bully in Chile's literary life. For many years he had a small court of poor devils who danced attendance on him. But life has a habit of implacably taking the wind out of the sails of these opportunists.

My irascible adversary's tragic end—he committed suicide in

his old age—made me hesitate a long time before writing down these recollections. I am finally doing it, because I feel that this is the right time and place. An immense cordillera of hate runs through the Spanish-speaking countries; it eats away at the work of writers, with anxious envy. The only way to end this kind of destructive viciousness is to publicly show it up when it is there.

The sensationalist politico-literary harassment unleashed against me and my work by a shady Uruguayan with a Galician last name, something like Ribeyro, has been just as insane and grim. For several years now, this fellow has been publishing pamphlets in Spanish and French, in which he takes me apart. The fantastic thing about this is that his anti-Neruda doings not only overcrowd printing paper that he himself pays for, but he has also spent money on expensive trips, with my destruction always in mind.

This strange character traveled to Oxford University when it was announced that I would be made doctor *honoris causa*. The Uruguayan versifier arrived with his fantastic charges, all set to tear my literary reputation to shreds. I was still wearing my scarlet gown, after receiving the honorary distinction, when the Oxford dons gleefully told me, over the ritual glass of port, about his charges against me.

Even more unbelievable and daring was this same Uruguayan's trip to Stockholm in 1963. There was a rumor that I would receive the Nobel Prize. Well, the fellow visited members of the Academy, gave interviews to the press, spoke over the radio to make the flat statement that I was one of Trotsky's killers, hoping to have me disqualified for the prize with these threats.

Time proved that the man always ran into bad luck, and both in Oxford and in Stockholm he lamentably lost his money and the fight.

CRITICISM AND SELF-CRITICISM

There is no denying that I have had some good critics. I am not referring to well-wishers at literary banquets, and I am not talking of the insults I unwillingly provoked.

I am referring to other people. Of the books written about my

poetry, apart from those by enthusiastic young critics, I must name the one by Lev Ospovat, the Russian, as among the best. This young man went so far as to master Spanish, and saw my poetry with an eye on more than just sense and sound: he placed it in the perspective of the future, applying to it the northern lights of his world.

Emir Rodríguez Monegal, a critic of the first rank, published a book on my poetry and titled it *El viajero inmóvil (The Motionless Traveler)*. You can see at a glance that this scholar is nobody's fool. He perceived at once that I like to travel without stepping out of my house or leaving my country or even going out of myself. (In a copy I have of that marvelous mystery novel, *The Moonstone*, there is an illustration I like very much. It shows an elderly English gentleman wrapped in his houppeleande, or macfarlane or heavy frock coat or whatever it is, sitting in front of the fireplace, a book in one hand, his pipe in the other, and two drowsy dogs at his feet. That's how I would like to remain forever, before the fire, near the sea, with two dogs, reading the books it was such hard work to collect, smoking my pipes.)

Amado Alonso's book, *Poesía y estilo de Pablo Neruda (Poetry and Style of Pablo Neruda)*, is highly valued by many people. His passionate probing into the shadows, seeking diverse levels between words and slippery reality, is of great interest. Furthermore, Alonso's study reveals the first serious concern for the work of a contemporary poet in our language. And that honors me far too much.

To study and explain my poetry, many critics have come to me, among them Amado Alonso himself; he would corner me with questions and lead me to the wall of clarity, where I often could not follow him, at that time.

Some believe I am a surrealist poet, for others I am a realist, and still others do not believe I am a poet. They are all partly correct and partly incorrect.

Residencia en la tierra was written, or at least begun, like *Tentativa del hombre infinito*, before the heyday of surrealism, but we can't always trust dates. The world's air transports poetry's molecules, light as pollen or hard as lead, and those seeds land in the furrows, or on people's heads, giving everything an air of spring or of battle, producing flowers as well as missiles.

As for realism, I must say, in my own interest, that I detest realism in poetry. Moreover, poetry does not have to be surrealist or sub-realist, though it may be anti-realist. And it is anti-realist with all reason, with all unreason; that is, with all poetry.

I love books, the solid substance of the work of poetry, the forest of literature, I love all of it, even the spines of books, but not the labels of the schools. I want books without schools and without classifying, like life.

I like the "positive hero" in Walt Whitman and Mayakovsky, that is, in those who found him without a formula and brought him, not without suffering, into the intimacy of our physical life, making him share with us our bread and our dream.

Socialist society has to put an end to the mythology of an age of speed, in which poster ads are more valued than the merchandise, in which the essentials are tossed aside. But a writer's deepest need is to write good books. I like the "positive hero" found in the turbulent trenches of civil wars by the North American Walt Whitman and the Soviet Mayakovsky, but there is also room in my heart for Lauréamont's mourning-clad hero, Laforgue's sighing knight errant, and Baudelaire's negative soldier. Beware of separating these halves of the apple of creation, for we may cut open our hearts and stop living. Beware! We have to demand of the poet that he take his place in the street and in the fight, as well as in the light and in the darkness.

Perhaps the poet has always had the same obligations throughout history. It has been poetry's distinction to go out into the street, to take part in this or that combat. The poet didn't scare off when they said he was a rebel. Poetry is rebellion. The poet was not offended when he was called subversive. Life transcends all structures, and there are new rules of conduct for the soul. The seed sprouts anywhere; all ideas are exotic; we wait for enormous changes every day; we live through the mutation of human order avidly: spring is rebellious.

I have given all I had. I have thrown my poetry into the ring, and I have often bled with it, suffering the agonies and praising the moments of glory I have witnessed and lived through. I was sometimes misunderstood on one ground or another, and that's not really so bad.

A critic from Ecuador has said that there are no more than six pages of real poetry in my book *Las uvas y el viento*. The Ecua-

dorian happened to read my book without love because it was a political book, just as other super-political critics detested my *Residencia en la tierra* because they considered it too inward and gloomy. Even such an eminent writer as Juan Marinello condemned it in the past on moral grounds. I believe both are guilty of the same mistake, which springs from a common source.

At times I, too, have spoken harshly of *Residencia en la tierra*, but in doing so, I did not have in mind its poetry but the rigidly pessimistic air breathed by my book. I cannot forget that a few years ago a boy from Santiago killed himself at the foot of a tree and left my book open at the poem "Significa sombras" ("It Means Shadows").

I believe that both *Residencia en la tierra*, a dark and gloomy but essential book within my work, and *Las uvas y el viento*, a book of wide spaces and abundant light, have a right to exist somewhere. And I am not contradicting myself when I say this.

In fact, I have a soft spot for *Las uvas y el viento*, perhaps because it is my most misunderstood book; or because it was in its pages that I set out on my wanderings through the world. It contains the dust of roads and the water of rivers; it contains creatures, continuities, and places beyond the seas I had not known until I discovered them in my many travels. I repeat, it is one of the books I love most.

Of all my books, *Estravagario* is not the one that sings most but the one that has the best leaps. Its leaping poems skip over distinction, respect, mutual protection, establishments, and obligations, to sponsor reverent irreverence. Because of its disrespect, it's my most personal book. Because of its range, it is one of the most important. For my taste, it's a terrific book, with the tang of salt that the truth always has.

In *Odas elementales* I decided to deal with things from their beginnings, starting with the primary state, from birth onward. I wanted to describe many things that had been sung and said over and over again. My intention was to start like the boy chewing on his pencil, setting to work on his composition assignment about the sun, the blackboard, the clock, or the family. Nothing was to be omitted from my field of action; walking or flying, I had to touch on everything, expressing myself as clearly and freshly as possible.

An Uruguayan critic was shocked because I compared some

stones to small ducks. He had established that small ducks, and some other kinds of small animals, are not material for poetry. Literary refinement has come to this kind of flippancy. They are trying to force creative artists to deal only with sublime themes. But they are wrong. We'll even make poetry from those things most scorned by the arbiters of good taste.

The bourgeoisie demands a poetry that is more and more isolated from reality. The poet who knows how to call a spade a spade is dangerous to a capitalism on its last legs. It is more convenient for the poet to believe himself "a small god," as Vicente Huidobro said. This belief, this stand, does not upset the ruling classes. The poet basks in his own divine isolation, and there is no need to bribe or crush him. He has bribed himself by condemning himself to his heaven. Meanwhile, the earth trembles in his path, in his dazzling light.

Our Latin American countries have millions of illiterates; this cultural lag survives as a heritage and a privilege of feudalism. In the face of this stumbling block of seventy million illiterates, we can say that our readers have not yet been born. We must speed up the birth, so that we and all poets will be read. We must open America's matrix to bring out her glorious light.

Literary critics are often happy to render service to the notions of feudal promoters. In 1961, for example, three of my books appeared: *Canción de gesta*, *Las piedras de Chile*, and *Cantos ceremoniales*. Critics in my country did not even mention these titles during the entire year.

When my poem *Aituras de Maccbu Picchu* was first published, no one in Chile dared mention it, either. Its publisher went to the offices of Chile's bulkiest newspaper, *El Mercurio*, which has been in existence almost a hundred and fifty years; he had with him a paid announcement of the book's publication. They accepted it on condition that my name be removed.

"But Neruda is the author," Neira protested.

"That doesn't matter," they said.

Aituras de Maccbu Picchu had to appear as an anonymous poem in the announcement. What good had the newspaper's hundred and fifty years of life been to it? In all that time, it had not learned to respect the truth, or the facts, or poetry.

Sometimes the negative passions turned against me are not merely a bitter reflex of the class struggle, but obey other causes. I have more than forty years of work and several literary prizes to my credit, and my books have been published in the most surprising languages, yet not a single day goes by that I do not receive a jab or a pommeling from the envious elements around me. My house is a case in point. I bought this house in Isla Negra, in a deserted spot, when there was no drinking water or electricity here. With the proceeds from my books, I repaired and refurbished it; I bought wooden statues now dear to me, old ships' figureheads that found shelter and rest in my home after long journeys.

But there are people who can't bear the thought that a poet has achieved, as the fruit of widely published work, the material comfort all writers, musicians, and painters deserve. Reactionary hacks, who are behind the times and are constantly demanding honors for Goethe, deny today's poets the right to live. For instance, my owning an automobile drives them crazy. According to them, the automobile is the exclusive right of businessmen, speculators, brothel managers, usurers, and crooks.

To gall them even more, I'll leave my house in Isla Negra to the people. Someday it will be used for union meetings and as a place where miners and peasants can go to get some rest. That will be my poetry's revenge.

ANOTHER YEAR BEGINS

A newspaperman asks me: "How do you see the world during this year that is just beginning?"

I answer: "At this precise moment, at 9:20 a.m. on January 5, to me the whole world looks absolutely rosy and blue."

This has no literary, political, or personal implications. This means that from my window my eyes are struck with wonder by huge beds of pink flowers, and that, farther out, the Pacific and the sky come together in a blue embrace.

But I realize, and we know it, that there are other colors in the landscape of the world. Who can forget the color of all the blood senselessly spilled in Vietnam every day? Who can forget the color of the villages leveled with napalm?

I answer another of the journalist's questions. As in other years, during these 365 days I'll publish a new book, I am sure of it. I caress it, I rough it up, I write it every day.

"What is it about?"

What can I answer? My books are always about the same thing: I always write the same book. I hope my friends will forgive me, because, on this new occasion and in this new year filled with new days, I have nothing to offer them except my poems, the same new poems.

The year just ended brought victories to all of us on earth, victories out in space and along its routes. During the year, all men wanted to fly. We have all traveled like cosmonauts in our dreams. The conquest of space belongs to all of us, whether it was North Americans or Soviets who were the first to draw a nimbus around the moon and eat the first New Year's grapes on the moon.

To us poets should fall the greater portion of the gifts discovered. From Jules Verne, who gave man's dream of space its first flying machine in a book, to Jules Laforgue, Heinrich Heine, and José Asunción Silva (without forgetting Baudelaire, who discovered its evil spell), the pale planet was investigated, sung, and put into print by us poets, before anyone else.

The years go by. You wear out, thrive, suffer, and enjoy life. The years take life away or restore it to you. Farewells become more frequent; friends enter or get out of jail; they go to Europe and come back, or simply die.

Those you lose when you are far away from the place where they die seem to die less; they go on living in you just as they were. A poet who outlives his friends tends to fill in his work with an anthology of mourning poems. I did not go on with mine, I was afraid that human grief in the face of death might become monotonous. You don't want to turn into a register of dead people, even if they are very dear to you. In 1928 in Ceylon, when I wrote "Ausencia de Joaquín" ("Absence of Joaquín") on the death of my friend Joaquín Cifuentes Sepúlveda, the poet, and later in 1931 in Barcelona, when I wrote "Alberto Rojas Giménez viene volando," I thought no one else would die on me. Many have. Nearby, in the Argentine hills of Córdoba, lies buried my dearest Argentine friend, Rodolfo Araoz Alfaro, who left our Chilean Margarita Aguirre a widow.

In this year that has just ended, the wind carried off the fragile frame of Ilya Ehrenburg, my very dear friend, heroic defender of the truth, a titan at crushing lies. And this same year, in Moscow, they buried the poet Ovadi Savich, who translated Gabriela Mistral's poetry as well as mine and did it not only faithfully and beautifully but with shining love. The same wind took away my brother poets Nazim Hikmet and Semyon Kirsanov. And others.

Che Guevara's official assassination, in poor Bolivia, was a bitter blow. The telegram announcing his death ran through the world like a cold shiver of reverence. Millions of elegies tried to join in tribute to his heroic and tragic life. Poems, many of which did not rise to the occasion, came pouring out all over the world. I received a telegram from Cuba, from a literary colonel, asking me for mine. I have not written it yet. I believe that such an elegy must contain not only immediate protest but also the profound echo of the painful story. I shall ponder over that poem until it ripens in my mind and in my blood.

I am deeply touched that I am the only poet quoted by the great guerrilla leader in his diary. I remember that Che told me once, in front of Sergeant Retamar, that he often read my *Canto general* to the pioneering, humble, glorious bearded guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra. In his diary, where it stares out like a premonition, he copied out a line from my "Canto para Bolívar" ("Song for Bolívar"): "Your small dead body like a brave captain's . . ."

THE NOBEL PRIZE

There's a long story behind my Nobel Prize. For many years my name was always mentioned as a candidate but nothing happened.

In 1963, things got serious. The radios said repeatedly that my name was very strong in the voting in Stockholm and I would probably be the winner of the Nobel Prize. So Matilde and I put into effect home-defense plan number 3. We laid in supplies of food and red wine and hung a huge padlock on the old gate in Isla Negra. I threw in a few mysteries by Simenon, expecting to be under siege for some time.

The newsmen got there fast, but we kept them at bay. They could not get past the gate secured with the huge bronze padlock, which was as beautiful as it was powerful. They prowled behind the outer wall like tigers. What were they trying to do, anyway?

What could I say about a debate in which only the members of the Swedish Academy on the other side of the world were taking part? Still, the journalists didn't hide their intentions of squeezing blood from a turnip.

Spring had come late to the South Pacific coast. Those solitary days helped me commune with the spring season by the sea, which, though late, had dressed up for its solitary festivities. In summer not a single drop of rain falls; the earth is marly, rough, rocky; not one green blade is to be seen. In winter, the sea wind unleashes fury, salt, foam from enormous waves, and then nature looks oppressed, a victim of these terrible forces.

Spring starts off with a widespread yellow operation. Everything is covered with innumerable tiny golden flowers. This tiny, powerful crop spreads over hillsides, circles rocks, presses on toward the sea, and springs up in the middle of our everyday paths, as if it were throwing us a challenge, proving to us that it is there. Those flowers had to endure an invisible life such a long time, the desolate denial of the barren earth kept them under such a long time, that they can't seem to find enough room for their yellow abundance now.

Then the tiny pale flowers burn out and everything is covered by an intense violet bloom. Spring has a change of heart from yellow to blue, and then, again, to red. How did the tiny, nameless, innumerable corollas replace one another? The wind shook out one color one day and another color the next day, as if spring's national colors kept changing in the lonely hills, and various republics took turns sporting their invading banners.

At this time of year the cactus flowers on the coast. Far from this region, on the ridges of the Andean cordillera, the cacti loom like giants, striated and thorny, like enemy columns. The cacti along the coast, on the other hand, are small and round. I have seen them crowned with twenty scarlet buds, as if some hand had left drops of blood there, a passionate tribute. Then they burst open. Facing the ocean's huge whitecaps are thousands of cacti lit up by their full-blown flowers.

The old century plant at home drew its suicidal bloom from deep within itself. This plant, which is blue and yellow, gigantic and fleshy, has lasted more than ten years beside my door, shooting up until it was taller than I. And now it is flowering only to die. It built up a powerful green spear that rose to a height of

seven meters, interrupted by a dry inflorescence, lightly covered by a fine, gold dust. Then all the colossal leaves of *Agave americana* plummet down and die.

Here, next to the tall dying flower, another titanic blossom is being born. No one outside my country will know it; it only grows on these Antarctic shores. It is called chahual (*Puya chilensis*). This ancestral plant was worshipped by the Araucanians. The ancient Arauco no longer exists. Blood, death, time, and later the epic songs of Alonso de Ercilla, closed the ancient history of a tribe made of clay, rudely awakened from a geological dream to defend its invaded country. When I see its flowers come up again, over centuries of obscure dead, over layers of bloodstained forgetfulness, I believe that the earth's past blooms in spite of what we are, in spite of what we have become. Only the earth goes on being, preserving its own nature.

But I forgot to describe this flower.

It's a Bromeliacea with sharp, saw-toothed leaves. It erupts by the roadsides like green fire, arraying its panoply of mysterious emerald swords. And suddenly one colossal flower, a cluster, is born at its waist, an immense green rose as tall as a man. This sole flower, made up of tinier flowers that assemble into a single green cathedral crowned with gold pollen, gleams in the light from the sea. It is the only green flower of its huge size I have ever seen, a solitary monument to the waves.

Peasants and fishermen in my country forgot the names of the small plants long ago, and the small flowers have no names now. They forgot them little by little, and the flowers eventually lost their pride. They became all mixed up and obscure, like stones the rivers drag down from the Andean snow to unfrequented parts of the coast. Peasants and fishermen, miners and smugglers, remained true to their own rough life, to continuous death and the everlasting resurrection of their duties, their defeats. To be a hero in undiscovered territories is to be obscure; these territories and their songs are lit only by the most anonymous blood and by flowers whose name nobody knows.

Among these flowers there is one that has invaded my whole house. It's a blue flower with a long, proud, lustrous, and tough stem. At its tip, swarms of tiny infra-blue, ultra-blue flowers sway. I don't know if all human beings have the gift of seeing the sublimest blue. Is it revealed to a select few? Does it remain

hidden, invisible to others? Has some blue god denied them its contemplation? Or is it only my own joy, nursed by solitude and converted into pride, gloating because it has found this blue, this blue wave, this blue star in riotous spring?

Last, I shall mention the docas. I don't know if these plants exist anywhere else; multiplied by the million, they drag their triangular fingers over the sand. Spring filled those green hands with rare crimson jewels. The docas have a Greek name: *Aizoaceae*. Isla Negra's splendor on these late-spring days is the *Aizoaceae* that spill out like an invasion from the sea, like the emanation of the sea's green grotto, like the juice from the purple clusters stored up by Neptune far off in his wine cellar.

The radio has just announced that a good Greek poet has received the famed prize. The journalists have departed. Manilde and I are finally left in peace. We solemnly withdraw the huge padlock from the old gate, so that anyone, as usual, may come calling at my door unannounced. Like spring.

In the afternoon the Swedish ambassador and his wife came to see me. They brought me a basket filled with bottles and an assortment of delicacies. They had prepared it to celebrate the Nobel Prize which they had considered a sure thing for me. We didn't really feel sad about it and drank a toast to Seferis, the Greek poet who had won. As he was leaving, the ambassador took me aside and said, "I'm sure the press will interview me, and I don't know anything about him. Can you tell me who Seferis is?"

"I don't know who he is either," I answered in all honesty.

Every writer on this planet earth would really like to get the Nobel Prize sometime, whether he admits it or not.

In Latin America particularly, the various countries have their candidates, plan their campaigns, draw up their strategy. They have lost the prize for some writers who should have had it. Rómulo Gallegos is a case in point. His work is copious and dignified. But Venezuela is an oil country—in other words, a country with money—and it was decided to use this to get him the prize. An ambassador to Sweden was appointed whose ultimate goal was to obtain the honor for Gallegos. He was free with dinner invitations; he had the works of the members of the Swedish Academy published in Spanish by printing houses in Stockholm. All this must have appeared excessive to these

sensitive and reserved men. Rómulo Gallegos never found out that the exaggerated efficiency of a Venezuelan ambassador may have deprived him of a literary honor he deserved so well.

In Paris I was once told a sad story edged with cruel humor. This time it was about Paul Valéry. His name was banded about in France, even in print, as the strongest candidate for the Nobel Prize that year. Trying to ease the nervous tension produced by the imminent news, on the morning the verdict was under debate in Stockholm, Valéry left his country house very early, with his cane and his dog.

He returned from his outing at noon, for lunch. The minute he opened the door, he asked his secretary: "Were there any phone calls?"

"Yes, sir. You had a call from Stockholm a few minutes ago."

"What did they have to say?" he asked, obviously moved.

"It was a Swedish newspaperwoman who wanted to know your views on the women's suffrage movement."

Valéry himself used to tell this anecdote with some irony. And the truth is that this great poet, so impeccable a writer, never received the celebrated prize.

As for me, no one can say I wasn't very careful. In a book by a Chilean scholar praising Gabriela Mistral, I had read about the letters my austere countrywoman sent out in many directions, without compromising her austerity but driven by her natural desire to improve her chances for the prize. This made me more reticent. I no sooner learned that my name was being mentioned as a candidate (and I've lost track of how many times it was mentioned) than I made up my mind not to return to Sweden, a country I had been attracted to since boyhood, when Tomás Lago and I set ourselves up as true disciples of an excommunicated drunken Protestant minister by the name of Gösta Berling.

Besides, I was tired of being mentioned every year but never getting anywhere. It grated on me to see my name listed in the annual competition, as if I were a race horse. On the other hand, some literary and popular Chilean writers felt slighted by the Swedish Academy's indifference to them. It was a situation bordering dangerously on the ridiculous.

At last, as everyone knows, I was awarded the Nobel Prize. In 1971 I was in Paris, where I had just arrived to take up my post as

Chilean ambassador, when my name began to appear in the news once again. Matilde and I frowned. We were used to the annual disappointment and had grown hard-skinned. One night in October of that year Jorge Edwards, our Embassy's counselor and a writer as well, came into the dining room of my home. Thrifty by nature, he offered to make a very simple bet with me. If I was given the Nobel Prize that year, I would treat him and his wife to dinner in the best restaurant in Paris. If it was not given to me, he would treat Matilde and me.

"Agreed," I said. "We'll have a splendid dinner at your expense."

A part of the secret reason for Jorge Edwards's risky bet began to leak out on the following day. I found out that a friend of his had called him from Stockholm. A writer and a journalist, she had told him that this time Pablo Neruda had every chance of winning the Nobel Prize.

The newsmen began to call long-distance. From Buenos Aires, from Mexico, and, above all, from Spain. There it was a foregone conclusion. Naturally, I refused to make any statement, but my doubts began to surface once more.

That evening Artur Lundkvist, my only Swedish friend who was a writer, came to see me. Lundkvist had been in the Academy for three or four years. He had come from Sweden to visit the South of France. After dinner I told him the fix I was in, having to reply to the long-distance questions of newsmen who had already conceded me the prize.

"I want to ask you one favor, Artur," I said. "If it is true, I would really like to know before it comes out in the papers. I want to be the first to tell Salvador Allende, with whom I have shared so many battles. It would make him very happy to have the news first."

Lundkvist, Academician and poet, looked at me with his Swedish eyes, very seriously. "I can't tell you a thing. If there is anything to it, the King of Sweden will let you know by telegram, or else the Swedish ambassador in Paris will."

This was on the nineteenth or twentieth of October. On the morning of the twenty-first, the anterooms at the Embassy started to fill up with newsmen. Television crews from Sweden, Germany, France, and Latin America showed an impatience

at my silence—due solely to lack of information—that threatened to turn into mutiny. At eleven-thirty the Swedish ambassador called and asked me if I would receive him, without saying what about. This did nothing to slacken the tension, since the interview would not take place until two hours later. The telephone kept on shrilling hysterically.

Then one of the Paris radio stations released a flash, a last-minute news bulletin, announcing that the Nobel Prize for 1971 had been awarded to the "poète chilien Pablo Neruda." I immediately went down to face the noisy assemblage from the news media. Fortunately, at this moment my old friends Jean Marcenac and Aragon appeared. Marcenac, a fine poet and a brother to me in France, let out shouts of joy. For his part, Aragon seemed happier at the news than I. Both helped me through the hard test of parrying the journalists.

I was just getting over an operation. Anemic and shaky on my legs, I had little desire to move about. Friends came to dine with me that evening. Matta, from Italy; García Márquez, from Barcelona; Siqueiros, from Mexico; Miguel Otero Silva, from Caracas; Arturo Camacho Ramírez, from Paris itself; Cortázar, from his hide-out. Carlos Vasallo, Chilean, traveled from Rome to go with me to Stockholm.

The telegrams grew into such mountains that I still have not been able to read or answer all of them. One of the countless letters I received was odd and a bit menacing. It was written from Holland by a husky black man; this was obvious from the newspaper clipping he sent along. "I represent," the letter said, more or less, "the anti-colonialist movement in Georgetown, British Guiana. I have requested a pass to attend the Nobel Prize ceremony in Stockholm. I was informed at the Swedish Embassy that evening dress is a requirement, absolutely necessary for this occasion. I have no money to buy a tail coat and I shall never wear a rented one, it would be humiliating for a free man from America to put on used clothing. I am therefore informing you that, with the little money I can scrape together, I shall travel to Stockholm to hold a press conference to denounce the imperialist and anti-popular character of this ceremony, even if it is being held to honor the most anti-imperialist and most popular of the world's poets."

In November, Matilde and I traveled to Stockholm. A few old friends went along with us. We were given rooms in the luxurious Grand Hotel and from there we could see the beautiful cold city, the Royal Palace across from our windows. Also staying at the hotel were the other laureates of that year, in physics, chemistry, medicine, etc., and several celebrities, some articulate and very fine-mannered, others as simple and rustic as mechanics whom chance had brought out of their workshops. Willy Brandt, the German, was not staying at the hotel; he would receive his Nobel Peace Prize in Norway. It was a pity, because, of all the award winners, he was the one I would have been most interested in meeting and talking to. I only managed to see him later at the receptions, where we were always separated by three or four people.

We had to have a practice session for the grand ceremony, and Swedish protocol actually made us stage it where it would be held. It was really comical to see such serious-looking people get out of bed and leave their hotel at a specific hour, go punctually to an empty building, climb several flights of stairs without missing a step, march left or right in strict order, sit on the stage in the same armchairs we would occupy on the day of the ceremony. All this, facing television cameras, and in an enormous empty hall where the seats of honor for the King and the Royal Family stood out, also forlornly empty. I have never been able to understand just what whim would make Swedish television film that rehearsal performed by such terrible actors.

The day the prize was to be awarded started off with the St. Lucia festivities. I was awakened by voices chanting sweetly in the hotel corridors. Then blond Scandinavian maidens crowned with flowers, their faces lit by burning candles, burst into my room. They brought me breakfast as well as a gift, a beautiful long painting of the sea.

A little later, something happened that stirred up the Stockholm police force. A letter for me was delivered at the hotel reception desk. It bore the signature of the wild anti-colonialist from Georgetown, British Guiana. "I have just arrived in Stockholm," it read. His attempt to call a press conference had failed,

but as a revolutionary man of action, he was taking certain steps. It couldn't be possible that Pablo Neruda, the poet of the humiliated and the oppressed, would receive the Nobel Prize in tails. Consequently, he had bought a pair of green scissors which he would use to snip off the "tails of your cut-away, and any other appendages..." "So I am doing my duty and warning you. When you see a black man stand up at the rear of the hall, equipped with a huge pair of green scissors, you can guess exactly what is going to happen to you."

I handed the strange letter to the young diplomat assigned to me by Swedish protocol, who followed me around on all my errands. I told him, with a smile, that I had received another letter in Paris from the same crank and that I didn't think we should worry about him. The young Swede disagreed. "With all the dissenters around at this time, anything can happen. It is my duty to warn the Stockholm police," he said and sped off to carry out what he considered his duty.

I should point out that Miguel Otero Silva was among those who had gone with me to Stockholm; an important novelist and a brilliant poet, he is not only a perfect representative of the American conscience but also an incomparable friend. There were just a few hours left before the ceremony. During lunch I mentioned that the Swedes had taken the incident of the letter of protest quite seriously.

Otero Silva, who was lunching with us, slapped himself on the forehead. "Why, I wrote that letter with my own hand; I was just pulling your leg, Pablo. What are we going to do now, with the police looking for a writer who doesn't exist?"

"You'll be taken off to jail. For your practical joke about the wild man from the Caribbean," I said to him, "you'll be punished instead of the man from Georgetown."

Just then, my young Swedish aide, back from warning the authorities, joined us at the table. I told him what had happened. "It was a practical joke. Its author is having lunch with us right now."

He dashed out again. The police had already gone to all the hotels in Stockholm, looking for a black from Georgetown, or some such place. And they didn't relax their precautions. As we went in to the ceremony, and as we came out of the celebration

ball, Matilde and I noticed that, instead of the usual ushers, four or five hefty young fellows rushed forward to take care of us—solid, yellow-haired, scissors-proof bodyguards.

The Nobel Prize ritual had an immense, disciplined, and calm audience, which applauded politely, in the right places. The aged monarch shook hands with each of us; gave us the diploma, the medal, and the check; and we returned to our seats on the stage, which was no longer squalid, as it had been during the rehearsal, but covered now with flowers and occupied chairs. They say (or said it to Matilde to impress her) that the King spent more time with me than with the other laureates and pressed my hand longer, treating me with obvious friendliness. Perhaps it was a reminiscence of the ancient kindness of the palace toward the troubadours. In any case, no other king has shaken my hand, for a long or even a brief moment.

No doubt, that ceremony, carried out with such strict protocol, had the proper solemnity. Perhaps the solemnity given to important occasions will always exist in the world. Human beings seem to need it. But I found a charming similarity between the parade of eminent laureates and the handing out of school prizes in any small country town.

CHILE CHICO

I was coming from Puerto Ibáñez, still awed by the great General Carrera Lake, awed by its metallic waters, a paroxysm of nature comparable only to the turquoise-blue sea of Varadero in Cuba, or to our own Petrohué. And then the savage falls of the Ibáñez River, with the full effect of their terrifying grandeur. I was also shaken by the isolation and the poverty of the people in the neighboring towns, near the gigantic source of energy but without electricity, living among countless sheep, but dressed in cheap rags. At last I came to Chile Chico.

There at the end of the day the wide twilight was waiting for me. The everlasting wind was cutting up the clouds like quartz. Rivers of light isolated one huge block the wind was holding up between the earth and the sky.

Cattle lands and sown fields struggling under polar pressure

from the wind. The earth rose all around, turning into the hard rock towers of Roca Castillo, sharpened points, Gothic spires, nature's granite battlements. The irregular Aysén mountains, round as spheres, tall and flat as tables, intensified the rectangles and triangles of snow.

And the sky was working on its twilight with sheer silks and metals: a yellowness shimmered in the sky, like an immense bird suspended by pure space. Everything went through abrupt mutations, changing into a whale's mouth, a fiery leopard, glowing abstract forms.

I felt the immensity spreading out in formation overhead, picking me to witness the dazzling Aysén range with its cluster of hills, waterfalls, millions of dead and blighted trees accusing their ancient killers with the silence of a world about to be born, for which everything was in readiness: the ceremonies of the sky and the earth. But there was something missing—shelter, collective organization, houses, man. Those who live in such difficult solitudes need a common bond as vast as the huge spaces around them.

I left as the twilight was going dim and the night was coming on, overpowering, blue.

SEPTEMBER FLAGS

In the southern part of the Latin American continent, September is a wide-open, flowering month. This month is also decked in flags.

At the beginning of the last century, in 1810, in the month of September, insurrections against Spanish dominion broke out or consolidated in many territories of South America. In September we South Americans commemorate the emancipation, honor our heroes, and welcome spring, spreading out so far and wide that it reaches across the Strait of Magellan to blossom as far down as southern Patagonia and Cape Horn.

The regular chain of revolutions that sprouted from Mexico to Argentina and Chile was very important for the world.

The leaders were dissimilar. Bolívar, warrior and courtier, gifted with the brilliance of a prophet; San Martín, inspired organizer of an army that crossed the tallest and most hostile mountain

ranges of the planet to fight the decisive battles of Chile's liberation; José Miguel Carrera and Bernardo O'Higgins, who established the first Chilean armies as well as the first printing presses and the first laws against slavery, abolished in Chile many years before it was abolished in the United States.

Like Bolívar and some of the other liberators, José Miguel Carrera came from the aristocratic creole class. The interests of this class clashed sharply with those of the Spaniards in America. The people were not an organized entity but an enormous mass of bondsmen at the service of Spanish rule. Men like Bolívar and Carrera, readers of the Encyclopedists, students from the military academies in Spain, had to break through walls of isolation and ignorance to stir up a national spirit.

Carrera's life was brief and resplendent as lightning. *El házar desdichado* (*The Unfortunate Hussar*) is the title I gave to a book about him I put together and published some years ago. His fascinating personality drew antagonisms down on his head the way a lightning rod draws sparks during a storm. He was finally shot in Mendoza by the rulers of the newly declared Argentine Republic. His desperate desire to overthrow the Spanish yoke had put him at the head of the wild Indians of the Argentine pampas. He besieged Buenos Aires and came very close to taking it. But he really wanted to free Chile and his heart was so set on it that he started premature civil and guerrilla wars that led him to his death. During those turbulent years, the revolution devoured one of its most brilliant and courageous sons. History has pinned the blame for this bloody deed on O'Higgins and San Martín. However, the history of the month of September, month of spring and banners, covers with its wings the memory of the three heroes of the combats waged in the vast setting of the wide pampas and the eternal snows.

O'Higgins, another of Chile's liberators, was a man of humble beginnings. His would have been an obscure, peaceful life if he had not met in London, when he was only seventeen, an old revolutionary who was making the rounds of all the courts of Europe, seeking assistance for the cause of American liberation. His name was Don Francisco de Miranda and he had the powerful affection of Empress Catherine of Russia, one of many friends. He arrived in Paris with a Russian passport, and the doors of all the chancelleries of Europe were open to him.

It's a romantic story, with such a "period" air that it sounds like an opera. O'Higgins was the natural son of a Spanish viceroy, a soldier of fortune of Irish descent, who had been governor of Chile. Miranda made it a point to look into O'Higgins's family background when he realized that the young man could be very useful to the insurrection of Spain's American colonies. Someone has told the story of the exact moment when Miranda told the young O'Higgins the secret of his birth and plunged him into insurgent action. The young revolutionary fell to his knees and, throwing his arms around Miranda, sobbed out the promise to leave immediately for his country, Chile, and lead the rebellions against Spanish power there. O'Higgins was the one who won the final battles against colonial rule and is considered the founder of our republic.

Miranda was taken prisoner by the Spaniards and died in the horrible La Carraca prison, in Cádiz. The body of this former general of the French Revolution and teacher of revolutionaries was bundled into a sack and thrown into the sea from the top of the prison wall.

Exiled by his countrymen, San Martín died a lonely old man in Boulogne-sur-Mer, France.

O'Higgins, Chile's liberator, died in Peru, far from everything he loved, banished by the creole landowning class, which quickly took over the revolution.

On my way through Lima a short time ago, in Peru's Museum of History, I discovered some paintings done by General O'Higgins in his final years. All those paintings have Chile as their theme. He painted spring in Chile, the leaves and the flowers in September.

This September I have sat down to remember the names, the events, the loves, and the sorrows of that age of insurrections. A century later the peoples are stirring again, and a turbulent current of wind and fury is waving the flags. Everything has changed since those far-off years, but history goes on its way and a new spring fills out the interminable spaces of our America.

PRESTES

No Communist leader in America has had such a hazardous and extraordinary life as Luis Carlos Prestes, a Brazilian political and

military hero. His true life and his legend long ago hurdled ideological barriers, and he has become a living embodiment of the heroes of former times. And so, when I received an invitation in Isla Negra to visit Brazil and meet Prestes, I promptly accepted. Besides, I learned that no other foreigner had been invited, and this flattered me. I felt that I was somehow attending a resurrection from the dead.

Prestes had just been freed after more than ten years of detention. These long confinements are nothing exceptional in the "free world." My friend Nazim Hikmet, the poet, spent thirteen or fourteen years in a Turkish prison. As I write these memoirs, six or seven Communists have been entombed in Paraguay for twelve years, with no communication whatever with the outside world. Prestes's German-born wife was turned over to the Gestapo by the Brazilian dictatorship. The Nazis chained her up aboard the ship taking her to martyrdom. She gave birth to a girl, who lives with her father today, rescued from the teeth of the Gestapo by Doña Leocadia Prestes, the leader's indefatigable mother. Then, after giving birth in a prison yard, Luis Carlos Prestes's wife was beheaded by the Nazis. All those martyred lives would guarantee that Prestes was never forgotten during his long years in prison.

I was in Mexico when his mother died. She had traveled all over the world, demanding her son's freedom. General Lázaro Cárdenas, ex-President of the Mexican Republic, telegraphed the Brazilian dictator, requesting a few days of freedom for Prestes, to attend his mother's funeral. In his message, President Cárdenas personally guaranteed Prestes's return to jail. Getulio Vargas's answer was negative.

I shared the world's indignation and wrote an elegy to Doña Leocadia, bringing in the memory of her absent son and vehemently denouncing the tyrant. I read it at the tomb of the noble lady who had knocked in vain at the doors of the world for her son's liberation. My poem began on a sober note:

*Señora, you have made our America greater.
You gave it a pure river whose waters flow abundantly,
a giant tree with infinite roots,
a son worthy of his deeply rich country.*

As the poem progressed, however, it turned on the Brazilian despot more and more violently.

I read it everywhere, and it was reproduced in leaflets and postcards that reached all parts of the continent.

During a stopover in Panama once, I included it in one of my readings, after I had finished reciting my love poems. The hall was jammed and the heat of the Isthmus had me perspiring. I had just started to read my invectives against Vargas when I felt my throat drying up. I broke off and reached for a glass I had near me. At that moment, I saw someone dressed in white hurrying toward the rostrum. Thinking it was a general helper in the hall, I held out the glass to let him fill it with water. But the man in white brushed it aside indignantly and addressed the gathering, shouting excitedly: "I am the Brazilian ambassador. I want to protest: Prestes is nothing but a common criminal . . ."

At these words, the audience cut him off with ear-splitting whistles. A black student, with shoulders as broad as a wardrobe, got up in the middle of the hall and, with his hands threateningly aimed at the ambassador's throat, thrust his way toward the rostrum. I rushed in to protect the diplomat, and luckily I managed to get him out of the place without any further damage to his high office.

With such credentials, my trip from Isla Negra to Brazil to take part in the popular celebration seemed natural to the Brazilians. I was stunned when I saw the crowd packed into Pacaembú Stadium, in São Paulo. I'm told there were more than 130,000 people. Their heads looked very tiny in the vast circle of the stadium. Small of stature, Prestes, who was at my side, seemed to me a Lazarus who had just walked out of the grave, neat and dressed up for the occasion. He was lean and so white that his skin looked transparent, with that strange whiteness prisoners have. His intense look, the huge violet circles under his eyes, his extremely delicate features, his grave dignity, were all a reminder of the long sacrifice his life had been. Yet he spoke as calmly as a general after a victory.

I read a poem in his honor, written a few hours earlier. Jorge Amado changed only the Spanish word "*albatiles*," bricklayers, for the Portuguese "*pedreiros*." Contrary to my fears, the poem read in Spanish was understood by the multitude. After each line of my slow reading, there was an explosion of applause from the Brazilians. That applause had a deep resonance in my poetry. A poet who reads his poems to 130,000 people is not the same man,

and cannot keep on writing in the same way, after such an experience.

At last I find myself face to face with legendary Luis Carlos Prestes. He is waiting for me in the home of some friends of his. All of Prestes's features—the small stature, the leanness, the whiteness of onion-skin paper—take on the precision of a miniature. His words also, and perhaps his thinking, seem to match his physical make-up.

For a man of his reserve, he is very friendly with me. I believe he is giving me the kind of benevolent treatment we poets frequently receive from others, a tolerance half-tender and half-evasive, very much like that adopted by grownups toward children.

Prestes invited me to lunch one day the following week. Then one of those disasters occurred to me that can only be blamed on fate or my irresponsibility. It so happens that, although the Portuguese language has its Saturday and Sunday, it does not single out the other days of the week as Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, etc., but with devilish names like *segunda-feira*, *têrça-feira*, *quarta-feira*, skipping, however, the first *feira*. I get all tangled up in those *feiras*, and never know which day is which.

I went to spend a few hours at the beach with a lovely Brazilian friend, ever mindful, however, that Prestes had set the luncheon date for the next day. On the *quarta-feira* I discovered that Prestes had waited for me in vain on the *têrça-feira*, with the table set, while I idled away the hours on the beach at Ipanema. He looked for me high and low, but no one knew where I was. In deference to my special tastes, the ascetic captain had ordered excellent wines that were difficult to obtain in Brazil. We were to have had lunch alone.

Every time I remember this story, I could die of shame. I have been able to learn just about everything in my life, except the names of the days of the Portuguese week.

CODOVILLA

When I was about to leave Santiago, I heard that Victorio Codovilla wanted to talk to me. I went to see him. We were always good friends, right up to his death.

Codovilla had been a member of the Third International and possessed all the faults of the time. He was authoritarian, a personalist, and always thought he was right. He imposed his judgment on others easily and cut through their will like a knife going through butter. He was always in a hurry when he came to meetings, giving the impression that he had thought out everything and had all the answers ready, and seemed to listen to the opinions of others out of politeness and with a certain impatience; then he would issue peremptory orders. His tremendous ability and his knack of summing things up were overpowering. He worked without respite, imposing that same rhythm on his fellows, and always gave me the feeling that he was one of the great political thinking machines of the day.

He always showed a very special feeling of understanding and deference toward me. This Italian—transformed and utilitarian in public life—was human to a fault, with a profound artistic sense that made him understand errors and weaknesses in men of culture. But this did not stop him from being implacable, and at times deadly, in political life.

He was worried, he told me, about Prestes's misinterpretation of Perón's dictatorship. Codovilla believed Perón and his movement were an offshoot of European Fascism. No anti-Fascist could sit back quietly and accept Perón's increasing power or his repeated repressive actions. Codovilla and the Argentine Communist Party believed, at this time, that insurrection was the only answer to Perón, and wanted me to talk with Prestes about this. It's not a mission, he told me, but I sensed some preoccupation behind his usual cocksure front.

After the Pacaembú rally, I had a long talk with Prestes. It was impossible to find two men who were more dissimilar, more diametrically opposed. A hefty man brimming with health, the Italo-Argentine invariably seemed to take over a whole room, a whole table, everything around him. Thin and ascetic, Prestes looked frail enough for a puff of wind to sweep him out the window. Yet I discovered that, behind their appearances, the two men were equally tough.

"There's no Fascism in Argentina. Perón is a caudillo but not a Fascist," Prestes said, answering my questions. "Where are the brown shirts? The Fascist militias?"

"Besides, Codovilla is wrong. Lenin says that insurrection is not

something to play with. And you can't always be declaring war without soldiers, with only volunteers to count on."

Deep down, these two men, so different from each other, were inflexible. One of them, probably Prestes, was right about these things, but the dogmatism of both these admirable revolutionaries often built up an atmosphere around them that I found impossible to breathe.

I should also add that Codovilla was a man of vitality. I was very much in favor of his fight against the hypocrisy and puritanism of the Communist era. Our great Chilean of the old-time party days, Lafertte, was an obsessively militant teetotaler. Old Lafertte also growled constantly against love affairs and flirtations, outside the pale of the Civil Registry, between men and women of the party. Codovilla defeated our limited teacher with his own limitless vital capacity.

STALIN

Many people have thought that I am or have been an important politician. I don't know where this famous legend got started. One day I was frankly surprised to see my picture, as tiny as a stamp, included in a two-page spread in *Life* magazine in which it had put on display the leaders of world Communism, for the benefit of its readers. My likeness, stuck in somewhere between Prestes and Mao Tse-tung, seemed a funny joke to me, but I did not disabuse anyone, because I have always detested letters of rectification. Aside from this, it was amusing to have the C.I.A. fall into this error despite the five million agents it has throughout the world.

The longest contact I have maintained with any of the key figures of world socialism was during our visit to Peking. It consisted of a toast I drank with Mao Tse-tung during a ceremony. As our glasses touched, he looked at me with smiling eyes and a broad grin that was half friendly and half ironic. He held my hand in his, squeezing it a few seconds longer than customary. Then he returned to the table he had left.

On my many visits to the U.S.S.R. I saw neither Molotov nor Vishinsky nor Beria; not even Mikoyan or Lirvinov, more sociable and less mysterious than the others.

I saw Stalin at a distance, more than once, always in the same spot: the platform which strands high over Red Square and is crowded with high-level leaders every year on May 1 and November 7. I spent long hours in the Kremlin, as part of the jury for the prizes that bore Stalin's name, without ever meeting him even in a hallway. He never came to see us during our voting sessions or lunches, and he never had us called in even for a word of greeting. The prizes were always awarded unanimously, but there were times when the debate for the selection of the winning candidate was hard-fought. I always had the feeling that, before the final decision was made, someone on the jury panel rushed the possible outcome of the voting to the great man to see if it had his blessing. But I really can't recall a single time when we had any objection from him, and although he was obviously close by, I don't recall that he ever acknowledged our presence there. Without doubt, Stalin cultivated his mysteriousness systematically; or else he was extremely timid, a man who was his own prisoner. It is possible that this trait had much to do with the strong influence Beria had over him. Beria was the only one who went in and out of Stalin's rooms unannounced.

However, on one occasion I did have an unexpected encounter, which even now seems remarkable to me, with the Kremlin's mystery man. The Aragons—Louis and Elsa—and I were on our way to the Kremlin to take part in the meeting that would decide the Stalin Prizes that year. Heavy snowstorms held us up in Warsaw. We would not make our appointment on time. One of the Russians with us radioed ahead to Moscow, in Russian, the names of the candidates Aragon and I favored—who, by the way, were approved at the meeting. But the strange thing about this is that the Russian, who received a reply over the telephone, called me aside and surprised me by saying, "I congratulate you, Comrade Neruda. When the list of possible winners of the prize was submitted to Comrade Stalin, he exclaimed: 'And why isn't Neruda's name among them?'"

The following year, I received the Stalin Prize for Peace and Friendship among Peoples. I may have deserved it, but I still ask myself how that withdrawn man ever found out that I existed.

Around that time I heard of other similar interventions by Stalin. When the campaign against cosmopolitanism was grow-

ing more intense and the starched-collar sectarians were calling for Ehrenburg's head, the telephone rang one morning in the home of the author of *Julio Jurenito*. Lyuba answered. A vaguely familiar voice asked: "Is Ilya Gregorievich there?"

"That depends," Lyuba answered. "Who are you?"

"This is Stalin," the voice said.

"For you, Ilya, some joker," Lyuba told Ehrenburg.

But when he got to the telephone, the writer recognized Stalin's well-known voice: "I spent the night reading your book *The Fall of Paris*. I am calling to tell you to keep on writing books as interesting as this one, dear Ilya Gregorievich."

Maybe that unexpected call made the great Ehrenburg's long life possible.

Another case: Mayakovsky was already dead, but his obstinate reactionary enemies attacked the poet's memory tooth and nail, determined to wipe him off the map of Soviet literature. Then something happened that upset these designs. His beloved Lili Brik wrote a letter to Stalin pointing out how shameful these attacks were and passionately defending Mayakovsky's poetry. His assailants, who thought themselves invulnerable, protected by their collective mediocrity, were in for a rude jolt. On the margin of Lili Brik's letter, Stalin noted down: "Mayakovsky is the best poet of the Soviet era."

After that, museums and monuments sprang up in honor of Mayakovsky and many editions of his extraordinary poetry were published. His opponents froze, struck powerless by Jehovah's trumpet blast.

I also learned that among Stalin's papers found after his death there was a list that read: "Do not touch," in his own handwriting. That list was headed by the composer Shostakovich, followed by other eminent names: Eisenstein, Pasternak, Ehrenburg, et cetera.

Many have believed me a die-hard Stalinist. Fascists and reactionaries have described me as a lyric interpreter of Stalin. I am not particularly put out by this. Any judgment is possible in a diabolically confused era.

The private tragedy for us Communists was to face the fact that, in several aspects of the Stalin problem, the enemy was right.

This revelation, which was staggering, left us in a painful state of mind. Some felt that they had been deceived. Desperately, they accepted the enemy's reasoning and went over to its side. Others believed that the harrowing facts, implacably brought to light during the Twentieth Congress, proved the integrity of a Communist Party which survived, letting the world see the historical truth and accepting its own responsibility.

If it is really true that we all shared this responsibility, the act of denouncing those crimes led us back to self-criticism and analysis, elements essential to our doctrine, and gave us the weapons needed to prevent such horrible things from happening again.

This has been my stand: above the darkness, unknown to me, of the Stalin era, Stalin rose before my eyes, a good-natured man of principles, as sober as a hermit, a titanic defender of the Russian Revolution. Moreover, this small man with his huge moustache had become a giant in wartime. With his name on its lips, the Red Army attacked and demolished the power of Hitler's demons.

And yet I dedicated only one of my poems to this powerful personality. It was on the occasion of his death. Anyone can find it in my collected works. The death of the Cyclops of the Kremlin had world-wide impact. The human jungle shuddered. My poem captured the feeling of that panic on earth.

A LESSON IN SIMPLICITY

Very put out about it, Gabriel García Márquez told me how some erotic passages of his marvelous *One Hundred Years of Solitude* had been cut in Moscow.

"That's not right at all. I told the publishers.

"The book doesn't lose anything by it," they replied, and I saw that they had made the cuts without malice. Still, they did make them."

How can these things be set right? Each day, I am less and less of a sociologist. Aside from my general Marxist principles, aside from my dislike of capitalism and my faith in socialism, I understand humanity's persistent contradictions less and less.

We poets of this age have had to make a choice. The choice has not been a bed of roses. The terrible, unjust wars, the continual

pressures, money's aggressiveness, all injustices have made themselves felt with greater intensity every day. The decrepit old system has baited its hooks with conditional "freedom," sex, violence, and pleasures paid for in easy monthly installments.

Today's poet has looked for a way out of his anguish. Some have escaped into mysticism, or the dream of reason. Others are fascinated by the spontaneous and destructive violence of the young; they have become immediatists without realizing that, in today's belligerent world, this experience has always led to repression and sterile agony.

In my party, Chile's Communist L'arry, I found a large group of simple people who had left far behind them personal vanity, despotism, and material interests. I felt happy knowing honest people who were fighting for common decency, for justice.

I have never had any difficulties with my party, which, although modest, has achieved extraordinary victories for the people of Chile, my people. What more can I say? My only hope is to be as simple as my comrades, as persistent and invincible as they. We never learn enough about humility. I was never taught anything by individualist pride, which entrenches itself in skepticism so as not to espouse the cause of human suffering.

FIDEL CASTRO

Two weeks after his victorious entry into Havana, Fidel Castro arrived in Caracas for a short visit. He had come to thank the government and the Venezuelan people publicly for the help they had given him. This help had consisted of arms for his troops, and, naturally, it was not Betancourt (recently elected President) who supplied them, but his predecessor, Admiral Wolfgang Larrazábal. Larrazábal had been a friend of the Venezuelan leftists, including the Communists, and had acceded to the act of solidarity with Cuba that they had asked of him.

I have seen few political welcomes more enthusiastic than the one the Venezuelans gave the young victor of the Cuban revolution. Fidel spoke for four uninterrupted hours in the huge square of El Silencio, the heart of Caracas. I was one of the 200,000 people who stood listening to that long speech without uttering a word. For me, and for many others, Fidel's speeches have been a

revelation. Hearing him address the crowd, I realized that a new age had begun for Latin America. I liked the freshness of his language. Even the best of the workers' leaders and politicians usually harp on the same formulas, whose content may be valid, though the words have been worn thin and weakened by repetition. Fidel ignored such formulas. His language was didactic but natural. He himself appeared to be learning as he spoke and taught.

President Betancourt was not there. He dreaded the thought of facing the city of Caracas, where he had never been liked. Every time Fidel mentioned him in his speech, whistles and catcalls broke out, which Fidel's hands tried to silence. I believe a definite hostility was established that day between Betancourt and the Cuban revolutionary. Fidel was neither Marxist nor Communist at the time; his words had nothing to do with either ideology. My personal opinion is that the speech, Fidel's fiery and brilliant personality, the enthusiasm he stirred up in the multitude, the intensity of the people of Caracas listening to him, troubled Betancourt, a politician of the old school of rhetoric, committees, and secret meetings. From then on, Betancourt has persecuted with implacable brutality anything at all that smacked of Fidel Castro or the Cuban revolution.

On the day after the rally, while I was on a Sunday picnic in the country, some motorcycles came to us with an invitation to the Cuban Embassy. They had been looking for me all day and had finally discovered my whereabouts. The reception would be that same afternoon. Matilde and I went straight to the Embassy. The guests were so numerous that they overflowed the halls and gardens. Outside, there were swarms of people, and it was difficult to get through the streets leading to the building.

We crossed rooms packed with people, a trench of arms holding cocktail glasses high. Someone led us down corridors and stairs to another floor. Celia, Fidel's closest friend and secretary, was waiting for us in an unexpected part of the house. Matilde remained with her, and I was taken into the next room. I found myself in a kind of servant's room, a gardener's or chauffeur's. In it there was only a bed someone had hurried out of, leaving it all messed up, with the pillow on the floor, and a small table in a corner; nothing more. I thought I would be led from there to

some cozy little sitting room to meet the Commandant. Well, that's not what happened. Suddenly the door opened and Fidel Castro's tall figure filled the frame.

He was a head taller than I. He came toward me with quick strides.

"Hello, Pablo!" he said and smothered me in a bear hug.

His reedy, almost childish voice, took me by surprise. Something about his appearance also matched the tone of his voice. Fidel did not give the impression of being a big man, but an overgrown boy whose legs had suddenly shot up before he had lost his kid's face and his scanty adolescent's beard.

Brusquely, he interrupted the embrace, and galvanized into action, made a half turn and headed resolutely toward a corner of the room. I had not noticed a news photographer who had sneaked in and was aiming his camera at us from the corner. Fidel was on him with a single rush. I saw him grab the man by the throat and start shaking him. The camera fell to the floor. I went over to Fidel and gripped his arm, frightened by the sight of the tiny photographer struggling vainly. But Fidel shoved him toward the door, making him disappear. Then he turned back to me, smiling, picked the camera off the floor, and flung it on the bed.

We did not speak of the incident, only of the possibility of a press agency for all of Latin America. I think Prensa Latina was born of that conversation. Then we went back to the reception, each of us through his own door.

As I was returning from the Embassy with Marilde an hour later, the terrified face of the photographer and the instinctive speed of the guerrilla leader, who had sensed the intruder's silent entry behind his back, came into my mind.

That was my first meeting with Fidel Castro. Why did he object so savagely to being photographed? Did his objection hide some small political mystery? To this day, I can't understand why our interview had to be kept so secret.

My first meeting with Che Guevara was entirely different. It took place in Havana. It was almost 1:00 a.m. when I went to see him at his office in the Department of Finance or Economy, I don't quite remember which, where he had invited me. He had set

our appointment for midnight, but I arrived late. I had attended an interminable official ceremony for which I had been seated with the presidium.

Che was wearing boots and regimentals, with pistols at his waist. His clothes struck a discordant note in the banking atmosphere of the office. Che was dark, slow-speaking, with an unmistakable Argentine accent. He was the kind of man you talk with unhurriedly on the pampas between one maté and the next. His sentences were short and rounded off with a smile, as if leaving the discussion up in the air.

I was flattered by what he told me about my book *Camito general*. He would read it to his guerrillas at night, in the Sierra Maestra. Now, years later, I shudder when I think that my poems accompanied him to his death. Through Régis Debray I learned that, till the very end in the Bolivian mountains, he kept only two books in his duffel bag: a math book and my *Camito general*.

Something that Che told me that night threw me off quite a bit but perhaps explains his fate. His look wandered from my eyes to the darkened window of the office. We were talking of a possible North American invasion of Cuba. I had seen sandbags scattered at strategic points in the Havana streets. Suddenly he said, "War . . . War . . . We are always against war, but once we have fought in a war, we can't live without it. We want to go back to it all the time."

He was thinking out loud, for my benefit. I was frankly startled, listening to him. For me, war is a menace, not a goal.

We said goodbye and I never saw him again. Afterwards, there was his fighting in the Bolivian jungle, and his tragic death. But I keep on seeing in Che Guevara the pensive man who in his heroic battles always had a place, next to his weapons, for poetry.

Latin America is very fond of the word "hope." We like to be called the "continent of hope." Candidates for deputy, senator, president, call themselves "candidates of hope." This hope is really something like a promise of heaven, an IOU whose payment is always being put off. It is put off until the next legislative campaign, until next year, until the next century.

When the Cuban revolution came, millions of South Americans had a rude awakening. They couldn't believe their ears. This

wasn't in the cards for a continent that has lived hoping desperately against hope. Suddenly here was Fidel Castro, a Cuban no one had heard of, seizing hope by its hair, or its feet, and not letting it fly off but seating it at his table; that is, at the table and in the house of the peoples of America.

From then on, we have made great strides on this road of hope now turned into a reality. But we live with our hearts in our mouths. A neighboring country, very powerful and highly imperialist, wants to crush Cuba, hopes and all. The masses of all the Americas read the paper every day, listen to the radio every night. And they sigh with satisfaction. Cuba exists. Another day. Another year. Another five years. Our hope has not had its head chopped off. Its head will not be chopped off.

THE LETTER FROM THE CUBANS

Writers in Peru, among whom I have always had many friends, had long urged that I be given an official decoration by their country. I confess that medals of this kind have always seemed a bit silly to me. The few I had were pinned on my chest without love, for duties performed, for time put in as consul; that is, as an obligation or a routine. I passed through Lima once and Ciro Alegria, the great novelist of *The Starving Dogs*, who was then the Peruvian writers' president, insisted that his country should give me a decoration. My poem *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* had gone on to become a part of Peruvian life; perhaps in those lines I had expressed sentiments that had lain dormant like the stones of that remarkable structure. Moreover, the President of Peru at that time, the architect Belaunde, was my friend and reader. Although the revolution that later ousted him violently gave Peru a government that was unexpectedly open to the new roads of history, I still believe that Belaunde was a man of irreproachable honesty, whose mind was set on somewhat chimerical goals that finally turned him away from terrifying reality and separated him from the people he loved so deeply.

I accepted the decoration, this time not for consular services but for one of my poems. Besides, and this is not the least of it, there are wounds separating the people of Chile and Peru that have yet to be healed. Not only athletes, diplomats, and statesmen must take pains to stanch that blood from the past, but poets

also, and with all the more reason, for their souls have fewer frontiers than the souls of other people.

Around that same time I made a trip to the United States, where an international congress of the P.E.N. club was to be held. My friends Arthur Miller, the Argentine Ernesto Sábato and Victoria Ocampo, the Uruguayan critic Emir Rodríguez Monegal, the Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes, were among those invited. Writers from almost all the socialist countries of Europe also attended.

When I got there, I was told that the Cuban writers had also been invited. At the P.E.N. club they were surprised that Carpenter had not come, and I was asked if I could clear this up. I went to see the representative of Prensa Latina in New York, who offered to cable a message to Carpenter. The answer given through Prensa Latina was that Carpenter could not come because the invitation had arrived too late and the North American visas had not been ready in time. Someone was lying now: the visas had been issued three months before, and three months before, the Cubans had known about the invitation and had accepted. Evidently there had been a higher-up, last-minute decision, against attending.

As always, I did what I had to do. I gave my first poetry reading in New York, to such a large crowd that closed-circuit television had to be set up outside the auditorium so that hundreds of people who could not get in could see and hear. I was touched by the echo my poems, violently anti-imperialist, stirred up in that North American crowd. I understood many things there, and in Washington and California, when students and ordinary people showed approval of my words against imperialism. I learned on the spot that the North American enemies of our peoples were also enemies of the North American people.

I gave several interviews. The Spanish-language edition of *Life* magazine, edited by parvenu Latin Americans, distorted and mutilated my opinions. They did not correct this when I asked them to. But it was nothing very serious. They had suppressed a paragraph in which I condemned the war in Vietnam and another about a black leader who had just been assassinated. Only years later did the newspaperwoman who edited the interview acknowledge that it had been censored.

During my visit I discovered—and this does honor to my com-

rades, the North American writers—that they exerted relentless pressure to see that I was granted an entry visa to the United States. I believe the P.E.N. club even threatened the State Department with an open letter of censure if it continued to deny me an entry permit. At a public gathering where she received an award, the most respected figure in North American poetry, the elderly poet Marianne Moore, took the floor to say how happy she was that my legal entry into the country had been obtained through the united action of the poets. I was told that her words, which were vibrant and moving, drew a tremendous ovation.

The outrageous fact is that I had barely returned to Chile after that tour, which was marked by my most combative political and poetic activity, a major part of which was used to defend and support the Cuban revolution, when I received the well-known slanderous letter from the Cuban writers, accusing me of little less than submission and treason. I no longer remember the words used by my public prosecutors. I can say, however, that they set themselves up as instructors in revolution, pedantic teachers of the norms by which writers of the left must be guided. With arrogance, insolence, and flattering words they hoped to reform my poetry as well as my social revolutionary work. My decoration for my Macchu Picchu poem and my attendance at the P.E.N. club congress, my statements and my readings, my acts and words condemning the North American system, spoken right in the lion's mouth—all this was called into question, falsified or maligning by those writers, many of them newly come into the revolutionary camp, and many of them justly or unjustly in the pay of the new Cuban state.

This bag of injustices bulged with signatures, requested with suspicious spontaneity from the committees of writers' and artists' associations. Delegates rushed about Havana looking for signatures from entire guilds of musicians, dancers, and artists. Artists and writers who were passing through, who had been generously invited to Cuba and filled the most fashionable hotels, were asked to sign. Some of the writers whose names were printed at the bottom of the unjust document later sent me surreptitious messages: "I never signed it; I found out what it was all about after seeing my name, which I never signed." A friend of Juan Marinello's told me that the same thing had happened to him, although

I haven't been able to check on that. I have verified it in other cases.

The affair was a ball of wool or snow or ideological skulduggery that must be made to grow bigger and bigger at all costs. Special agencies were set up in Madrid, Paris, and other capitals, whose sole job was to send out copies of the lying letter, in huge batches. Thousands of those letters went out, especially from Madrid, in bunches of twenty to thirty copies for each addressee. In a gruesome way, it was amusing to receive those envelopes, decorated with stamps bearing Franco's portrait, while inside the envelopes Pablo Neruda was accused of being a counterrevolutionary.

It is not up to me to ferret out the motives for that fit of rage: political chicanery, ideological weakness, literary spite and envy—and who knows what else—were responsible for this battle of so many against one. I was told later that the enthusiastic editors, promoters, and hunters of signatures for the famous letter were the writers Roberto Fernández Retamar, Edmundo Desnoes, and Lisandro Otero. I don't recall ever reading Desnoes and Otero or meeting them personally. Retamar, yes. In Havana and Paris he tagged behind me constantly with his adulation. He used to tell me that he had published many essays and articles praising my work. I really never considered him important, just one more among the political and literary arrivistes of our time.

Perhaps they fancied that they could harm or destroy me as an active revolutionary. But when I got to Teatinos Street in Santiago to take up the matter for the first time with the party's central committee, they had already formed their opinion, at least politically. "It is the first attack against our Chilean party," I was told.

We were living through serious conflicts at the time. Venezuelan, Mexican, and other Communists were having ideological disputes with the Cubans. Later, in tragic circumstances but in silence, the Bolivians also dissented.

The Communist Party in Chile decided to award me, in a public ceremony, the Recabarren medal, which had recently been established and was to go to its best activists. It was a levelheaded response. The Chilean Communist Party endured this period of divergences intelligently, it stuck by its intention of analyzing our disagreements internally. In time, all traces of a fight have been

wiped away. A clear understanding and a fraternal relationship exist between the two most important Communist Parties of Latin America.

As for me, I continue to be the same person who wrote *Carrión de gesta*. It is a book I still like. I can't forget that with it I became the first poet to devote an entire book to praising the Cuban revolution.

I understand, of course, that revolutions, and particularly those who take part in them, fall into error and injustice, from time to time. The unwritten precepts of the human race affect revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries equally. No one can escape errors. A blind spot, a tiny blind spot in a revolutionary process is not very important within the larger context of a great cause. I have continued to sing, love, and respect the Cuban revolution, its people, its noble protagonists.

But everyone has his failings. I have many. For instance, I don't like to give up the pride I feel about my inflexible stand as a fighting revolutionary. Maybe that, or some other flaw in my insignificant self, has made me refuse until now, and I will go on refusing, to shake hands with any of those who knowingly or unknowingly signed that letter which still seems ignominious to me.

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Cruel, Beloved Homeland

EXTREMISM AND SPIES

FORMER anarchists—and the same thing will happen tomorrow to the anarchists of today—very often drift off toward a very comfortable position, anarcho-capitalism, the refuge of political snipers, would-be leftists, and false liberals. Repressive capitalism considers Communists its biggest enemies, and its aim seldom misses the mark. All those individualist rebels are delighted, one way or another, by the reactionary know-how, the strong-arm method that treats them as heroic defenders of sacrosanct principles. Reactionaries know that the danger of change in a society is not in individual revolts but in the organization of the masses and in a widespread class consciousness.

I saw all this clearly in Spain during the war. Some anti-Fascist groups were playing out a masked carnival before Hitler's and Franco's forces, which were advancing on Madrid. Naturally, I don't include anarchists like Durruti and his Catalans, who fought like lions in Barcelona.

Spies are a thousand times worse than extremists. From time to time, enemy agents hired by the police, reactionary parties, or foreign governments filter in among the activists of revolutionary parties. Some of them carry out special missions of provocation; others are patient observers. Azev's is a classic case. Before the fall of Tsarism, he took part in numerous terrorist acts and was