

*Octavio Paz*MEXICO
1914-1998

Essayist, poet, diplomat, and cultural historian, Octavio Paz is Mexico's foremost man of letters of the twentieth century. His most famous prose work, *El laberinto de la soledad* (*The Labyrinth of Solitude*, 1961), explored the complexities of the Mexican psyche. In its unique combination of Indian and European sensibilities, Paz contended, the Mexican consciousness resists both the linguistic hegemony of the Spanish language and the cultural "otherness" of the United States. At the same time, Paz' other essays and poems have explored more universal and international issues of contemporary life, especially questions of psychic alienation and integration.

Paz himself has rejected the dreamy lyricism of his earliest work, as in *Luna silvestre* (*Sylvan Moon*, 1933). Although his early poems were heavily influenced by Surrealism and by Asian philosophy, the history of Paz' poems is a track of restless formalism, ranging from tight imagistic perceptual moments, as in *A la orilla del mundo* (*On the Edge of the World*, 1942) and *La estación violenta* (*The Violent Season*, 1958), to the broader inclusiveness of poems based on Aztec models, to even more humanly universal techniques and themes, as in *Blanco* (*White*, 1967). In politics, Paz describes himself as a "disillusioned leftist." In the 1930s he fought on the side of the Spanish Republic. As a diplomat in the 1950s, he represented Mexico in several countries, including France, where he became friends with the Surrealists, especially Breton. Paz served also as ambassador to India, although he resigned that position in protest against the "Tlatelolco Massacre" (in which students were killed by government security forces, shortly before the opening of the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City). Since 1971 Paz has edited the influential magazine *Vuelta*.

The common thread that unites these various literary and social identities is Paz' enduring commitment to the complex communicability of metaphorical language. "Poetry makes things more transparent and clearer and teaches us to respect men and nature," Paz insists. A writer of interpenetrations—of solitude and solitariness, of clarity and allusiveness, of Mexican specificity and international applicability—Paz won the 1990 Nobel Prize in literature.

Misterio

Relumbra el aire, relumbra,
el mediodía relumbra,
pero no veo al sol.

Y de presencia en presencia
todo se me transparenta,
pero no veo al sol.

Perdido en las transparencias
voy de reflejo a fulgor,
pero no veo al sol.

Y él en la luz se desnuda
y a cada esplendor pregunta,
pero no ve al sol.

Mystery

Glittering of air, it glitters,
noon glitters here
but I see no sun

And from seeming to seeming
all is transparent,
but I see no sun.

Lost in transparencies
I move from reflection to blaze
but I see no sun.

The sun also is naked in the light
asking questions of every splendor,
but he sees no sun.

*Tout pour L'œil,
rien pour les oreilles!*

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

Entre montañas áridas
las aguas prisioneras
reposan, centellean,
como un cielo caído.

Un mitad violeta,
otra de plata, escama,
resplandor indolente,
soñoliento entre nácares.

Nada sino los montes
y la luz entre brumas;
agua y cielo reposan,
pecho a pecho, infinitos.

Como el dedo que roza
unos senos, un vientre,
estremece las aguas,
delgado, un soplo frío.

Vibra el silencio, vaho
de presentida música,
invisible al oído,
sólo para los ojos.

Sólo para los ojos
esta luz y estas aguas,
esta perla dormida
que apenas resplandece.

¡Todo para los ojos!
Y en los ojos un ritmo,
un color fugitivo,
la sombra de una forma,
un repentino viento
y un naufragio infinito.

Himno entre ruinas

donde espumoso el mar siciliano...

Coronado de sí el día extiende sus plumas.
¡Alto grito amarillo,

Lake

*All for the Eye,
nothing for the ears!*

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

Between arid mountains
the imprisoned waters
rest, sparkle,
like a fallen sky.

One half violet,
the other silver, a fish-scale,
a lazy glittering,
drowsing in mother-of-pearl.

Nothing but mountains
and the light in the mist;
water and sky rest,
breast to breast, infinite.

Like a finger brushing against
breasts, a belly,
a thin, cold breath
shivers the waters.

The silence vibrates, vapor
of presaged music,
invisible to the hearing,
only for the eyes.

Only for the eyes
this light and these waters,
this sleeping pearl
that barely gleams.

All for the eyes!
And in the eyes a rhythm,
a fugitive color,
the shadow of a form,
a sudden wind
and an infinite shipwreck.

1944

trans. Rachel Benson

Hymn among the Ruins

Where foams the Sicilian Sea.

GÓNGORA

GÓNGORA

Self crowned the day displays its plumage.
A shout tall and yellow,

caliente surtidor en el centro de un cielo
imparcial y benéfico!
Las apariencias son hermosas en esta su verdad
momentánea.

El mar trepa la costa,
se afianza entre las peñas, araña deslumbrante;
la herida cárdena del monte resplandece;
un puñado de cabras es un rebaño de piedras;
el sol pone su huevo de oro y se derrama sobre el mar.
Todo es dios.
¡Estatua rota,
columnas comidas por la luz,
ruinas vivas en un mundo de muertos en vida!

*Cae la noche sobre Teotihuacán.
En lo alto de la pirámide los muchachos fuman marihuana,
suenan guitarras roncás.
¿Qué yerba, qué agua de vida ha de darnos la vida,
dónde desenterrar la palabra,
la proporción que rige al himno y al discurso,
al baile, a la ciudad y a la balanza?
El canto mexicano estalla en un carajo,
estrella de colores que se apaga,
piedra que nos cierra las puertas del contacto.
Sabe la tierra a tierra envejecida.*

Los ojos ven, las manos tocan.
Bastan aquí unas cuantas cosas:
tuna, espinoso planeta coral,
higos encapuchados,
uvas con gusto a resurrección,
almejas, virginidades ariscas,
sal, queso, vino, pan solar.
Desde lo alto de su morenía una isleña me mira,
esbelta catedral vestida de luz.
Torres de sal, contra los pinos verdes de la orilla
surgen las velas blancas de las barcas.
La luz crea templos en el mar.

*Nueva York, Londres, Moscú.
La sombra cubre al llano con su yedra fantasma,
con su vacilante vegetación de escalofrío,
su vello ralo, su tropel de ratas.
A trechos tiritita un sol anémico.
Acodado en montes que ayer fueron ciudades, Polifemo bosteza.
Abajo, entre los hoyos, se arrastra un rebaño de bombres.
(Bípedos domésticos, su carne
—a pesar de recientes interdicciones religiosas—
es muy gustada por las clases ricas.
Hasta hace poco el vulgo los consideraba animales impuros.)*

impartial and beneficent,
a hot geyser into the middle sky!
Appearances are beautiful in this their momentary truth.
The sea mounts the coast,
clings between the rocks, a dazzling spider;
the livid wound on the mountain glistens;
a handful of goats becomes a flock of stones;
the sun lays its gold egg upon the sea.
All is god.
A broken statue,
columns gnawed by the light,
ruins alive in a world of death in life!

*Night falls on Teotihuacán.
On top of the pyramid the boys are smoking marijuana,
harsh guitars sound.
What weed, what living waters will give life to us,
where shall we unearth the word,
the relations that govern hymn and speech,
the dance, the city and the measuring scales?
The song of Mexico explodes in a curse,
a colored star that is extinguished
a stone that blocks our doors of contact.
Earth tastes of rotten earth.*

Eyes see, hands touch.
Here a few things suffice:
prickly pear, coral and thorny planet,
the hooded figs,
grapes that taste of the resurrection,
clams, stubborn maidenheads,
salt, cheese, wine, the sun's bread.
An island girl looks on me from the height of her
duskiness,
a slim cathedral clothed in light.
A tower of salt, against the green pines of the shore,
the white sails of the boats arise.
Light builds temples on the sea.

*New York, London, Moscow.
Shadow covers the plain with its phantom ivy,
with its swaying and feverish vegetation,
its mousy fur, its rats swarm.
Now and then an anemic sun shivers.
Propping himself on mounts that yesterday were cities,
Polyphemus yawns.
Below, among the pits, a herd of men dragging along.
(Domestic bipeds, their flesh—
despite recent religious prohibitions—
is much-loved by the wealthy classes.
Until lately people considered them unclean animals.)*

Ver, tocar formas hermosas, diarias.
Zumba la luz, dardos y alas.
Huele a sangre la mancha de vino en el mantel.
Como el coral sus ramas en el agua
extiendo mis sentidos en la hora viva:
el instante se cumple en una concordancia amarilla,
¡oh mediodía, espiga henchida de minutos,
copa de eternidad!

*Mis pensamientos se bifurcan, serpean, se enredan,
recomienzan,
y al fin se inmovilizan, ríos que no desembocan,
delta de sangre bajo un sol sin crepúsculo.
¿Y todo ha de parar en este chapoteo de aguas muertas?*

¡Día, redondo día,
luminosa naranja de veinticuatro gajos,
todos atravesados por una misma y amarilla dulzura!
La inteligencia al fin encarna,
se reconcilian las dos mitades enemigas
y la conciencia-espejo se licúa,
vuelve a ser fuente, manantial de fábulas:
Hombre, árbol de imágenes,
palabras que son flores que son frutos que son actos.

Nápoles 1948

Piedra nativa

La luz devasta las alturas
Manadas de imperios en derrota
El ojo retrocede cercado de reflejos

Países vastos como el insomnio
Pedregales de hueso

Otoño sin confines
Alza la sed sus invisibles surtidores
Un último pirú predica en el desierto

Cierra los ojos y oye cantar la luz:
El mediodía anida en tu tímpano

Cierra los ojos y ábrelos:
No hay nadie ni siquiera tú mismo
Lo que no es piedra es luz

To see, to touch each day's lovely forms.
The light throbs, all darters and wings.
The wine-stain on the tablecloth smells of blood.
As the coral thrusts branches into the water
I stretch my senses to this living hour:
the moment fulfills itself in a yellow harmony.
Midday, ear of wheat heavy with minutes,
eternity's brimming cup.

*My thoughts are split, meander, grow entangled,
start again,
and finally lose headway, endless rivers,
delta of blood beneath an unwinking sun.
And must everything end in this spatter of stagnant water?*

Day, round day,
shining orange with four-and-twenty bars,
all one single yellow sweetness!
Mind embodies in forms,
the two hostile become one,
the conscience-mirror liquifies,
once more a fountain of legends:
man, tree of images,
words which are flowers become fruits which are deeds.

trans. William Carlos Williams

Native Stone

Light is laying waste the heavens
Droves of dominions in stampede
The eye retreats surrounded by mirrors

Landscapes enormous as insomnia
Stony ground of bone

Limitless autumn
Thirst lifts its invisible fountains
One last peppertree preaches in the desert

Close your eyes and hear the song of the light:
Noon takes shelter in your inner ear

Close your eyes and open them:
There is nobody not even yourself
Whatever is not stone is light

trans. Muriel Rukeyser

Aquí

Mis pasos en esta calle
 Resuenan
 En otra calle
 Donde
 Oigo mis pasos
 Pasar en esta calle
 Donde

Sólo es real la niebla

Here

My steps along this street
 resound
 in another street
 in which
 I hear my steps
 passing along this street
 in which

Only the mist is real

1961

*trans. Charles Tomlinson**Certeza*

Si es real la luz blanca
 De esta lámpara, real
 La mano que escribe, ¿son reales
 Los ojos que miran lo escrito?

De una palabra a la otra
 Lo que digo se desvanece.
 Yo sé que estoy vivo
 Entre dos paréntesis.

Certainty

If it is real the white
 light from this lamp, real
 the writing hand, are they
 real, the eyes looking at what I write?

From one word to the other
 what I say vanishes.
 I know that I am alive
 between two parentheses.

1961

*trans. Charles Tomlinson**Pueblo*

Las piedras son tiempo
 El viento
 Siglos de viento
 Los árboles son tiempo
 Las gentes son piedra
 El viento
 Vuelve sobre si mismo y se entierra
 En el día de piedra

No hay agua pero brillan los ojos

Village

The stones are time
 The wind
 Centuries of wind
 The trees are time
 The people are stone
 The wind
 Turns upon itself and sinks
 Into the stone day

There is no water here for all the lustre of its eyes

1968

trans. Charles Tomlinson