

César Vallejo:

**Los heraldos negros De zwarte herauten
Tiempo Tiempo.**

Paris, October 1936

To My Brother Miguel In Memoriam

Black Stone on Top of a White Stone

ZWARTE STEEN OP EEN WITTE STEEN

LOS HERALDOS NEGROS

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

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

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

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

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

DE ZWARTE HERAUTEN

Er vallen klappen in het leven, zo'n harde.. . Ik weet niet!
Klappen als van Gods haat; alsof in hun aanschijn,
de branding van al het geledene
de ziel drassig zou maken... Ik weet niet!

Er vallen er weinig; maar ze vallen...
[Ze trekken donkere groeven
in het hardste gelaat en in de sterkste rug.
Zullen ze misschien de veulens zijn van barbaarse attila's;
of de zwarte herauten die de Dood ons zendt.

Het zijn de diepe vallen van de Christussen van de ziel,
van een aanbiddelijk geloof belasterd door het Lot.
Deze bloedige klappen zijn het geknisper
van een brood dat voor ons verbrand wordt
[aan de deur van de oven.

En de mens... Sukkel... sukkel! Hij draait de ogen, zoals
wanneer een schouderklopje ons roept;
hij keert zijn dolle ogen, en al het geleefde
wordt drassig, als een poel van schuld, in onze blik.

Er vallen klappen in het leven, zo'n harde.. . Ik weet niet!

Tiempo Tiempo.

Mediodía estancado entre relentes.
Bomba aburrida del cuartel achica
tiempo tiempo tiempo tiempo.
Era Era.
Gallo cantando escarbando en vano.
Boca del claro día que conjuga
era era era era.
Mañana Mañana.
El reposo caliente aun de ser.
Piensa el presente guárdame para
mañana mañana mañana mañana.
Nombre Nombre.
¿Qué se llama cuanto heriza nos?
Se llama Lomismo que padece
nombre nombre nombre nombre.

Paris, October 1936

From all of this I am the only one who leaves.
From this bench I go away, from my pants,
from my great situation, from my actions,
from my number split side to side,
from all of this I am the only one who leaves.

From the Champs Elysées or as the strange
alley of the Moon makes a turn,
my death goes away, my cradle leaves,
and, surrounded by people, alone, cut loose,
my human resemblance turns around
and dispatches its shadows one by one.

And I move away from everything, since everything
remains to create my alibi:
my shoe, its eyelet, as well as its mud
and even the bend in the elbow
of my own buttoned shirt.

translated by Clayton Eshleman

To My Brother Miguel In Memoriam

Brother, today I sit on the brick bench of the house,
where you make a bottomless emptiness.
I remember we used to play at this hour, and mama
caressed us: "But, sons..."

Now I go hide
as before, from all evening
lectures, and I trust you not to give me away.
Through the parlor, the vestibule, the corridors.
Later, you hide, and I do not give you away.
I remember we made ourselves cry,
brother, from so much laughing.

Miguel, you went into hiding
one night in August, toward dawn,
but, instead of chuckling, you were sad.

And the twin heart of those dead evenings
grew annoyed at not finding you. And now
a shadow falls on my soul.

Listen, brother, don't be late
coming out. All right? Mama might worry.

translated by James Wright

Black Stone on Top of a White Stone

I shall die in Paris, in a rainstorm,
On a day I already remember.
I shall die in Paris-- it does not bother me--
Doubtless on a Thursday, like today, in autumn.

It shall be a Thursday, because today, Thursday
As I put down these lines, I have set my shoulders
To the evil. Never like today have I turned,
And headed my whole journey to the ways where I am alone.

César Vallejo is dead. They struck him,
All of them, though he did nothing to them,
They hit him hard with a stick and hard also
With the end of a rope. Witnesses are: the Thursdays,
The shoulder bones, the loneliness, the rain, and the roads...

translated by Thomas Merton

ZWARTE STEEN OP EEN WITTE STEEN

'Ik zal sterven in Parijs bij striemende regen,
op een dag die ik me nu al herinner.
Ik zal sterven in Parijs - en ik heb geen haast -
wellicht een donderdag, zoals vandaag, in de herfst.

Een donderdag, omdat vandaag, donderdag, terwijl ik
deze regels opschrijf, mijn vingers weerspanniger zijn
dan ooit en ik vandaag, zoals nog nooit voordien,
omkijk en mezelf met heel mijn weg alleen vind.

César Vallejo is dood. Ze mishandelden hem,
allemaal, zonder dat hij hen wat gedaan had;
ze sloegen op hem met knuppels en ook

met een riem. Getuigen daarvan zijn
de donderdagen, de stroeve vingers,
de eenzaamheid, de regen, de wegen...'

César Vallejo

César Abraham Vallejo was born on March 16, 1892, in Santiago de Chuco, an isolated town in north central Perú. Vallejo's grandmothers were Chimú Indians and both of his grandfathers, by a strange coincidence, were Spanish Catholic priests. He was the youngest of eleven children and grew up in a home saturated with religious devotion.

Vallejo entered the School of Philosophy and Letters at Trujillo University in 1910, but had to drop out for lack of money. Between 1908 and 1913, he started and stopped his college education several times, working in the meantime as a tutor and in the accounts department on a large sugar estate. At the sugar estate, Vallejo saw thousands of workers arrive in the courtyard at dawn to work in the fields until nightfall for a few cents a day and a fistful of rice. Seeing this devastated Vallejo and later inspired both his poetry and his politics.

In 1913 Vallejo enrolled again at Trujillo University and studied literature and law, and read voraciously about determinism, mythology, and evolution. After receiving a Master's Degree in Spanish literature in 1915, Vallejo continued to study law until 1917. However, his life in Trujillo had become complicated by a tortured love affair and he moved to Lima. Vallejo found work as the principal of a prestigious school. At night he visited opium dens in Chinatown and hung out in the Bohemian cafés, where he met the important literary figures of the time, including Manuel Gonzalez Prada, one of Peru's leading leftists. When Vallejo's *Los heraldos negros* was published, in 1919, it was received enthusiastically. Vallejo then began to push his talent in a new direction. Vallejo lost his teaching post for refusing to marry a woman with whom he was having an affair. In 1920, after his mother's death and the loss of a second teaching job, Vallejo visited his home. During a feud that broke out before his arrival in Santiago de Chuco, an aide to the subprefect was shot and the general store burned to the ground. Vallejo, who was actually writing up the legal information about the shooting for the subprefect, was blamed as an "intellectual instigator." In spite of protest telegrams from intellectuals and newspaper editors, he was imprisoned for 105 days. When released on parole, he left for Lima, embittered by the affair.

In 1922, Vallejo published *Trilce*, a book written while in hiding before his arrest. *Trilce*, which placed Latin American poetry in the center of Western cultural tradition, appeared to come out of nowhere. Vallejo continued to teach while in Lima, but in the spring of 1923 his position was eliminated. Fearing that he could still be forced to go back to jail, he accepted the invitation of his friend Julio Gálvez to go to Paris. Vallejo left Peru for good in June 1923.

Vallejo and Gálvez nearly starved in Paris. It wasn't until 1925 that Vallejo found his first stable job in a newly opened press agency and began to receive a monthly grant from the Spanish government to continue his law studies at the University of Madrid. Since he was not required to stay on campus Vallejo remained in Paris, where he continued to receive the money for two years. The grant, plus the income from articles, enabled Vallejo to move into the Hotel Richelieu in 1926 and frequent exhibitions, concerts, and cafés. He met Antonin Artaud, Pablo Picasso, and Jean Cocteau. The somber, straightforward works he wrote during this period form a bridge between *Trilce* and the densely compassionate and bitter poetry he would write in the thirties.

In 1927, he received news from home that the tribunal in charge of his old case had given orders to arrest him, which confirmed his intuition to leave Peru. He left his post at the press agency and refused further grant payments. His economic situation worsened. By 1928, he had begun to read Marxist literature and appeared to be an actively committed Communist. In September of 1928 Vallejo made the first of three trips to Russia; he returned to form the Peruvian Socialist party with other expatriates.

In January 1929, Vallejo and Georgette Philipart, whom he met soon after his arrival in Paris, moved in together. Vallejo's Marxist studies continued, and he decided no longer to publish poetry, devoting himself instead to writing a book of Marxist theory. In 1930, Vallejo wrote his first drama. He continued to write scripts in the years to come, leaving nearly 600 pages of unpublished material at his death. Vallejo was arrested by the police in a Paris railroad station in December and ordered to leave France within three days. He returned to Madrid where, in 1931, he wrote his only novel, *El tungsteno*. When the Monarchy fell and the Republic was proclaimed, Vallejo officially joined the Spanish Communist party and, once *Rusia en 1931* was published, was even temporarily famous. Despite his success, however, he could not find a publisher for his new material.

In January 1932, Georgette Philipart returned to Paris to find their apartment sacked by the police. Meanwhile, Vallejo was desperately trying to establish publishing connections in Madrid. Finally obtaining a resident permit in February 1933, Vallejo left for Paris with nothing but the clothes on his back. The conditions of the permit forbade him to engage

in any political activity whatsoever; the years between 1933 and 1936 were the least documented in Vallejo's adult life and may well have been his darkest. Vallejo and Philipart married in 1934, and their financial situation took a turn for the worse. Finally, in 1936, Vallejo found a teaching position, and the Fascist uprising in Spain in July of that year inspired him to a spectacular display of sustained creativity. Absorbed by the Loyalist anti-Fascist cause, Vallejo began to build a "popular poetry," incorporating war reportage, while at the same time becoming more hermetic than ever before. In July 1927 he left again for Spain, which was deep in civil war, and took part in the Second International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture. Among the 200 writers attending, Vallejo was elected the Peruvian representative. While in Spain, Vallejo visited the front briefly and saw the horror with his own eyes. Back in Paris he wrote a fifteen-scene tragedy, *La piedra cansada*, and then in one sustained push, from early September to early December, fifty-two of the fifty-four poems that make up *Sermón de la barbarie*, along with the fifteen poems of *España, aparte de mí este cálize*. In early March 1938, the years of strain and deprivation, compounded by heartbreak over Spain, as well as exhaustion from the pace of the previous year, finally took their toll. Vallejo contracted a lingering fever, and by late March he could not get out of bed. Despite medical attention, his condition worsened. No one knew how to heal him; at one point, his wife even enlisted the help of astrologers and wizards. On the morning of April 15, the Fascists finally reached the Mediterranean, cutting the Loyalist territory in two. At more or less the same moment, Vallejo cried out in delirium, "I am going to Spain! I want to go to Spain!" and he died. It was Good Friday. The clinic records state that he died of an "acute intestinal infection." His body was buried at Montrouge, the "Communist" cemetery in southern Paris. In the 1960s, Georgette, who was living in Lima, had his remains moved to Montparnasse, where they now reside.

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