had crashed through the walls . . . The windows were smashed to smithereens . . . On the floor, among my books, I found shrapnel . . . But my masks were gone . . . Masks collected in Siam, Bali, Sumatra, the Malay Archipelago, Bandung . . . Gilded, ashen, tomato-red, with silver eyebrows, blue, demonic eyebrows, lost in thought, my masks had been my sole keepsakes from the Orient I had gone to alone that first time, which had received me with its odor of tea, dung, opium, sweat, the intensest jasmine, frangipani, fruit rotting in the streets . . . Those masks, a reminder of the purest dances, of the dancing before the temple . . . Wooden drops colored by myth, the residue of a mythology of flowers that sketched dreams in the air, customs, demons, mysteries alien to my American nature . . . And then . . . Perhaps the militiamen had leaned out the windows of my house between shots with the masks on to strike terror into the Moors . . . Many masks had been left there smashed, spattered with blood . . . Others had rolled down from my fifth-floor apartment, wrenched off by a bullet . . . Franco's advance lines had taken up their positions in front of them . . . The horde of illiterate mercenaries had screeched past before them . . . Thirty masks of Asian gods rising from my house in their last dance, the dance of death . . . A moment of respite . . . The positions had reversed . . . I sat looking at the debris, the bloodstains on the mat . . . And through the new windows, the gaping holes left by the gunfire . . . I stared far off, beyond the campus, toward flatlands, toward ancient castles . . . Spain looked empty to me . . . It looked as if my last guests had gone off forever . . . With masks or without, in the middle of the shooting and the war chants, the mad rejoicing, the incredible defense, death or life, all that was over for me . . . It was the last silence after the feasting . . . After the last feasting . . . With the masks that had gone, with the masks that had fallen, with those soldiers I had not invited in, Spain had gone for me . . .

6

I Went Out to Look for the Fallen

I PICKED A ROAD

I RECEIVED my activist's card much later in Chile, when I enrolled in the party officially, but I believe I had looked upon myself as a Communist during the war in Spain. Many things had contributed to my deep conviction.

My contradictory friend, the Nietzschean poet León Felipe, was a very likable man whose most attractive quality was his anarchist's proclivity to indiscipline and his mocking rebelliousness. At the height of the civil war he fell easily for the blustery propaganda of FAI (Iberian Anarchist Federation). He was often at the anarchist fronts, where he lectured on his theories and read his iconoclastic poems. These reflected an ideology that was vaguely libertarian, anti-clerical, capped with invocations and blasphemies. His words captivated the anarchist groups that blossomed like hothouse flowers in Madrid while the rest of the people were at the battlefront, which was coming closer and closer. These lawless groups had painted the trolleys and buses half red and half yellow. With their long hair and beards, wearing bullets strung into necklaces and bracelets, they played a leading role in Spain's carnival of death. I saw several of them in symbolic leather shoes, half red and half black, which must have put the shoemakers to a lot of trouble. And don't let anyone think it was all innocent show. They carried knives, revolvers, rifles, and carbines. Groups

of them would park themselves at the main entrances of buildings, smoking and spitting, showing off their hardware. Their main concern was to collect rents from terrorized tenants or make them hand over their jewels, rings, and watches.

León Felipe was on his way back from one of his pro-anarchist lectures late one night when we ran into each other at the café on the corner of my block. The poet was wearing a Spanish cape that went very well with his Nazarene beard. On the way out, the elegant folds of his romantic attire brushed against one of his touchy co-religionists. I don't know if León Felipe's bearing, that of an old-time hidalgo, annoyed that "hero" of the rear guard, but I do know that we were stopped a few steps farther on by a bunch of anarchists headed by the man who had considered himself offended at the café. They wanted to check our papers, and after they had glanced at them, the Spanish poet was taken away between two armed men.

As he was being led off to a place of execution near my house, where firing squads often kept me awake at night, I saw two armed militiamen coming back from the front. I explained who León Felipe was, the offense he had been accused of, and was able to obtain my friend's release thanks to them.

This ideological chaos and gratuitous destruction gave me a lot to think about. I heard of the exploits of an Austrian anarchist, an old, nearsighted man with a long blond mane, whose specialty was taking people "for a walk." He had formed a squad which he dubbed "Dawn" because it went into action at daybreak.

"Haven't you ever had a headache?" he would ask his victim.

"Yes, of course, sometimes."

"Well, I'm going to administer an excellent painkiller," the Austrian would say, pointing his revolver at the other's forehead and pulling the trigger.

Gangs like these roamed Madrid's pitch-black nights. The Communists were the only organized group and had put together an army to confront Italians, Germans, Moors, and Falangists. They were also the moral force that kept the resistance and the anti-Fascist struggle going.

It boiled down to this: you had to pick the road you would take. That is what I did and I have never had reason to regret the choice I made between darkness and hope in that tragic time.

RAFAEL ALBERTI

Poetry is an act of peace. Peace goes into the making of a poet as flour goes into the making of bread.

Arsonists, warmongers, wolves hunt down the poet to burn, kill, sink their teeth into him. A swordsman left Pushkin mortally wounded under the trees in a dark and gloomy park. The fiery horses of war charged over Petöfi's lifeless body. Byron died in Greece, fighting against war. The Spanish Fascists started off the war in Spain by assassinating its greatest poet.

Rafael Alberti is a kind of survivor. He was marked for death a thousand times. One of those times, in Granada, like Lorca. Another time death waited for him in Badajoz. They looked for him in sun-drenched Seville and in Cádiz and Puerto de Santa María in his home province, to kill him, to hang him, and so deal poetry another death blow.

But poetry has not died, it has a cat's nine lives. They harass it, they drag it through the streets, they spit on it and make it the butt of their jokes, they try to strangle it, drive it into exile, throw it into prison, pump lead into it, and it survives every attempt with a clear face and a smile as bright as grains of rice.

I knew Alberti when he walked through the streets of Madrid in a blue shirt and a red tie. I knew him fighting in the ranks of the people when not too many poets were following that difficult course. The bells had not yet tolled for Spain, but he knew what might be coming. He is a man from the south, born near the singing sea and cellars filled with wine as golden yellow as topaz. There his heart took fire from the grape and song from the wave. He was always a poet, but he himself did not know this in his early years. Later all Spain would know it, and still later, the world.

For those of us who have the good fortune to speak and know the language of Castile, Rafael Alberti embodies all the resplendent qualities of Spanish poetry. He is not only a born poet but also a master craftsman. Like a red rose blooming miraculously in winter, his poetry contains a flake of Góngora's snow, a root from Jorge Manrique, a petal from Garcilaso, a fragrance of mourning from Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer. The true essences of Spanish poetry come together in his crystalline wineglass.

His red rose threw its brilliance over the road for those who tried to stop Fascism in Spain. The world knows this heroic and tragic story. Alberti wrote epic sonnets, he read them in barracks and at the front, and he invented poetry's guerrilla warfare, poetry's war against war. He invented songs that grew wings under the thunder of artillery fire, songs that later soared over the entire planet.

A consummate poet, he showed how useful poetry could be at a moment that was critical for the whole world. In this, he resembles Mayakovsky. This application of poetry for the benefit of the majority is based on strength, tenderness, joy, on man's true nature. Without it, poetry gives off sound, but it doesn't sing. Alberti's poems always sing.

NAZIS IN CHILE

Once again I returned to my country, third class. In Latin America there were no eminent writers, like Céline, Drieu La Rochelle, or Ezra Pound, who turned traitor to serve Fascism, but there was a strong Fascist movement nurtured, with or without financial aid, by Hitlerism. Groups sprang up everywhere whose members dressed like storm troopers and raised their arm in the Fascist salute. And they weren't just small groups. The old feudal oligarchies of the continent sided, and still side, with anti-Communism of any kind, whether it came from Germany or the creole ultra-left. What's more, let's remember that people of German descent make up the bulk of the population in some parts of Chile, Brazil, and Mexico. Those areas were easily seduced by Hitler's meteoric rise and by the fabled millennium of German greatness.

More than once, in those days of Hitler's resounding victories, I literally had to walk through a street, in some small village or town in the south of Chile, under forests of flags bearing the swastika. Once, in a small southern town, I was forced to pay an involuntary tribute to the Führer in order to use the telephone. The German owner of the establishment which had the only telephone in town had managed to place the instrument so that, to take the receiver off the hook, you had to raise your arm to a portrait of Hitler, whose arm was also raised.

I was editor of the magazine *Aurora de Chile*. All its literary

weapons (we had no others) were aimed at the Nazis, who were swallowing country after country. Hitler's ambassador to Chile donated books, by authors of the so-called neo-German culture, to the National Library. We countered by asking our readers to send us German books that were faithful to the real Germany, the Germany banned by Hitler. It was a momentous experience. I received death threats. And many neatly wrapped packages arrived with books smeared with filth. We also received whole collections of *Der Stürmer*, a pornographic periodical that was sadistic and anti-Semitic, edited by Julius Streicher, deservedly hanged in Nuremberg years later. German-language editions of Heinrich Heine, Thomas Mann, Anna Seghers, Einstein, Arnold Zweig, also trickled in. And when we had nearly five hundred volumes, we took them to the National Library.

We were in for a surprise. The National Library had padlocked its doors to us.

Then we organized a march and entered the university's hall of honor carrying pictures of the Reverend Niemoeller and Carl von Ossietzky. Some kind of ceremonial act was taking place, presided over by Don Miguel Cruchaga Tocornal, the Foreign Minister. We set the books and portraits down carefully on the speaker's dais. The battle was won. The books were accepted.

ISLA NEGRA

I made up my mind to throw myself into my writing with more devotion and energy. My visit to Spain had given me added strength and maturity. The bitterness in my poetry had to end. The brooding subjectivity of my *Veinte poemas de amor*, the painful moodiness of my *Residencia en la tierra*, were coming to a close. In them, I now believed, I had struck a vein, not in rocks underground, but in the pages of books. Can poetry serve our fellow men? Can it find a place in man's struggles? I had already done enough tramping over the irrational and the negative. I had to pause and find the road to humanism, outlawed from contemporary literature but deeply rooted in the aspirations of mankind.

I started work on my *Canto general*.

For this, I needed a place to work. I found a stone house facing the ocean, in a place nobody knew about, Isla Negra. Its owner, a

Spanish socialist of long standing, a sea captain, Don Eladio Sobrino, was building it for his family but agreed to sell it to me. How could I buy it? I submitted a projected *Canto general*, but it was turned down by Editorial Ercilla, my publisher at the time. In 1939, with the help of another publisher, who reimbursed the owner of the house directly, I was finally able to get my house on Isla Negra to work in.

I felt a pressing need to write a central poem that would bring together the historical events, the geographical situations, the life and struggles of our peoples. Isla Negra's wild coastal strip, with its turbulent ocean, was the place to give myself passionately to the writing of my new song.

"BRING ME SPANIARDS"

But life wrested me away almost at once.

The chilling news of the Spanish exodus reached Chile. More than five hundred thousand men and women, combatants and civilians, had crossed the French border. In France, under pressure from reactionary forces, Léon Blum's government herded them into concentration camps, dispersed them to fortresses and prisons, massed them together in its African possessions near the Sahara.

In Chile the government had changed. The vicissitudes of the Spanish people had brought fresh strength to Chile's popular forces and we had a progressive government now.

Chile's Popular Front government decided to send me to France on the noblest mission I have ever undertaken: to get Spaniards out of their French prisons and send them to my country. And so, like a radiant light from America, my poetry would spread among throngs of human beings burdened with suffering and heroic like no other people. My poetry would become one with material assistance from America, which, by taking in the Spaniards, would be paying an age-old debt.

Virtually an invalid, just recovering from an operation and with one leg in a cast—such was my health at the time—I left my haven and went to see the President of the Republic. Don Pedro Aguirre Cerda received me warmly. "Yes, bring me thousands of Spaniards. We have work for all of them. Bring me fishermen; bring me Basques, Castilians, people from Extremadura."

A few days later I left for France, still in my cast, to fetch Spaniards to Chile. I had a specific mission. My appointment papers stated that I was consul in charge of the immigration of the Spaniards. I showed up at the Chilean Embassy in Paris flashing my credentials.

My country's government and political situation were not what they had been, but the Embassy in Paris was still the same. The idea of sending Spaniards to Chile infuriated our smartly dressed diplomats. They set me up in an office next to the kitchen, they harassed me in every way they could, even going so far as to deny me writing paper. The wave of undesirables was already beginning to reach the doors of the Embassy: wounded veterans, jurists and writers, professionals who had lost their practice, all kinds of skilled workers.

They had to make their way against hell and high water to get to my office, and since it was on the fourth floor, our Embassy people thought up a fiendish scheme: they cut off elevator service. Many of the Spaniards had war wounds and were survivors of the African concentration camps; it broke my heart to see them come up to the fourth floor with such painful effort, while the cruel officials gloated over my difficulties.

A DIABOLICAL CHARACTER

To complicate my life, the Popular Front government sent me word of the arrival of a chargé d'affaires. This made me very happy, because a new department head at the Embassy would be able to rid me of the many stumbling blocks the old diplomatic personnel had put in my way to impede the immigration of the Spaniards. A slender youngster with a pince-nez that gave him the air of an old bookworm came out of the Gare Saint-Lazare. He must have been twenty-four or twenty-five. In a high-pitched, effeminate voice broken by emotion, he told me that he accepted me as his boss and that the sole purpose of his coming was to act as my helper in the great task of sending to Chile "the glorious vanquished of the war." My satisfaction at having a new assistant continued, but this character made me uncomfortable. In spite of the adulation and excessive attention he lavished on me, something about him did not ring true. I found out later that, with the triumph of the Popular Front in Chile, he had done an abrupt

about-face, leaving the Knights of Columbus, that Jesuit organization, to become a member of the Communist youth movement, which was avidly recruiting members and was delighted with his intellectual qualifications. Arellano Marín wrote plays and articles, was an erudite lecturer, and seemed to know everything.

World War II was almost upon us. Paris waited every night for the German bombings, and every home had instructions on how to protect itself from the aerial attacks. I went home to Villennes-sur-Seine every evening, to a small house facing the river, which I left with a heavy heart every morning to return to the Embassy.

Within a few days the new arrival, Arellano Marín, had assumed an importance I had never attained. I had introduced him to Negrín, Álvarez del Vayo, and a few leaders of the Spanish parties. A week later the new functionary was on familiar terms with almost all of them. Spanish leaders whom I didn't know went in and out of his office. Their extensive conversations were a mystery to me. From time to time he called me over to show me a diamond or an emerald he had bought for his mother, or to confide in me about a very cute blonde who made him spend more than he should in the Paris cabarets. Arellano Marín became a close friend of the Aragons, especially of Elsa, when the Embassy took them in to protect them from anti-Communist repression; he regaled them with attentions and little presents. This person's psychology must have intrigued Elsa Triolet, for she mentions him in one or two of her novels.

I gradually realized that his greed for luxury and wealth was growing before my very eyes, which have never been too wide awake. He slipped easily from one make of automobile to another and rented luxurious homes. And each day the cute blonde seemed to be driving him more and more out of his mind with her demands.

I had to go to Brussels to attend to a critical problem involving the emigrants. As I was leaving the unpretentious hotel where I was staying, I literally ran into my new assistant, the elegant Arellano Marín. He made a loud fuss over me and invited me to dine that same day.

We met at his hotel, the most expensive in Brussels. He had had orchids placed on our table. Naturally, he ordered caviar and champagne. During the meal I was silent and preoccupied, listening to my host rave on about his lavish plans, his upcoming pleasure trips, the jewels he had bought. I was listening, I felt, to a nouveau riche with certain symptoms of insanity; his penetrating eyes, his cocksure pronouncements—all of it made me sick. I decided to take a drastic step and tell him openly what was on my mind. I suggested that we have coffee in his room, because I had something to say to him.

As we were on our way upstairs, two strangers walked up to him at the foot of the grand staircase. He told them in Spanish to wait for him, he would be down in a few minutes.

Once we were in his room, I thought no more about the coffee. Ours was a strained conversation. "I believe you're heading down the wrong road," I said to him. "You are becoming money-mad. Maybe you're still too young to understand this, but our political obligations are a very serious matter. The fate of thousands of immigrants is in our hands, and this can't be taken lightly. I don't want to know anything about your affairs, but I do want to give you a piece of advice. There are a lot of people who say, at the end of an unhappy life: 'Nobody gave me advice, nobody warned me.' That's something you won't be able to say. I've made my speech. And now I am leaving."

I looked at him as I said goodbye. Tears rolled down his eyes to his mouth. I could have bitten my tongue. Had I gone too far? I went to him and put my hand on his shoulder. "Don't cry!"

"It's just that I'm furious," he said.

I left without another word. I returned to Paris and never saw him again. When they saw me coming down, the two strangers who had been waiting for him hurried up to his room.

The conclusion of this story came much later, in Mexico, when I was Chilean Consul General there. One day I was invited to lunch by a group of Spanish refugees and two of them recognized me.

"Where do you know me from?" I asked.

"We are the two fellows who went up to speak to your countryman, Arellano Marín, when you came down from his room in Brussels."

"Oh, and what happened then? I've always been curious about it."

They told me something extraordinary. They had found him swimming in tears, hysterical, and he had sobbed out: "I've just

had the biggest shock of my life. Neruda has gone to turn you in to the Gestapo as dangerous Spanish Communists. I couldn't talk him into waiting even a few hours. You have only minutes to get away. Leave your suitcases with me, I'll watch them for you and send them on later."

"The bastard!" I exclaimed. "Thank heavens you managed to escape from the Germans, anyway."

"Yes, but the suitcases contained ninety thousand dollars that belonged to the Spanish workers' unions, and we never set eyes on that money again."

Still later, I heard that this diabolical character had made an extended pleasure tour of the Near East with his Parisian lover. Incidentally, the cute blonde who had been so demanding turned out to be a blond male student from the Sorbonne.

Sometime afterward, his resignation from the Communist Party made news in Chile. "Strong ideological differences compel me to make this decision," he said in his letter to the newspapers.

A GENERAL AND A POET

Each man who emerged from the defeat or from captivity was a novel with chapters, tears, laughter, loneliness, and idyls. Some of these stories really amazed me.

I met an air-force general, tall and lean, a military-academy man with all kinds of titles. There he was, roaming the Paris streets, a quixotic shadow from the Spanish soil, old and straight as the poplars of Castile. When Franco's army split the Republican zone in two, this general, Herrera, had to go the rounds in pitch darkness, inspect defenses, give orders right and left. On the blackest nights, he flew his airplane, with all its lights out, over enemy territory. Every now and again, gunfire from the Franco side barely missed his craft. But the general became bored with flying in the dark. So he learned Braille. Once he had mastered this writing for the blind, he went on his dangerous missions reading with his fingers, while below him the fire and the pain of the civil war raged on. The general told me that he had read *The Count of Monte Cristo* and was just getting into *The Three Musketeers*, when his night reading in Braille was interrupted by defeat and exile.

Another story I recall with deep feeling is the story of the Andalusian poet Pedro Garfias, who ended up in exile in Scotland at the castle of some lord. The castle was always empty, and Garfias, a restless Andalusian, went to the local tavern every day; speaking no English, only a gypsy Spanish that even I could not always understand, he drank his solitary beer in silence. This wordless customer attracted the tavernkeeper's interest, and one night, when the other drinkers had left, the tavernkeeper begged him to stay and they went on drinking silently next to the hearth, whose fire sputtered, doing the talking for the two of them.

This invitation became a ritual. Each night, Garfias was welcomed by the bartender, lonely like him, with no wife or family. Little by little their tongues loosened up. Garfias told him about the Spanish war, with exclamations, oaths, and curses that were typically Andalusian. The other man listened in religious silence, not understanding a word, of course.

The Scotsman, in turn, poured out his miseries, probably the story of a wife who had deserted him, the exploits of his sons, whose pictures in military uniform decorated the fireplace. I say "probably," because during the long months that these strange conversations lasted, Garfias did not understand a word either.

Still, the bond of fellowship grew stronger and stronger between the two lonely men, each speaking with deep feeling about his own affairs in his own language, inaccessible to the other. Seeing each other every night and talking into the small hours became a necessity for both.

When Garfias had to leave for Mexico, they said goodbye, drinking and talking, embracing and weeping. The feeling that bound them so deeply was the sundering of their two solitudes.

"Pedro," I often said to the poet, "what do you think he was telling you?"

"I never understood a word, Pablo, but when I listened to him I always felt, I was always sure, that I knew what he meant. And when I talked, I was sure that he also knew what I meant."

THE "WINNIPEG"

One morning when I got to the Embassy, I was handed a pretty long cable by the officials. Everyone was smiling, which was odd,

since they no longer even greeted me. There had to be something in the message that delighted them.

It was a cable from Chile, signed by the President himself, Don Pedro Aguirre Cerda, from whom I had received clear instructions to put the Spanish exiles on a ship bound for Chile.

I was shocked to read that our good President, Don Pedro, had learned that very morning, much to his surprise, that I was arranging for the Spanish emigrants to go to Chile. He asked me to deny this outlandish news immediately.

What was outlandish to me was the President's cable. The job of organizing, screening, selecting the immigrants had been hard, lonely work. Fortunately, Spain's government-in-exile had understood the importance of my mission. Yet new and unexpected obstacles presented themselves daily. Meanwhile, hundreds of refugees were leaving or preparing to leave the concentration camps in France and Africa, where thousands of them were crowded together, and go to Chile.

The Republican government-in-exile had succeeded in buying a ship, the *Winnipeg*. It had been converted to increase its passenger capacity and was waiting, tied up at the pier at Trompeloup, a little port near Bordeaux.

What should I do? This time-consuming and vital work, on the brink of the Second World War, was the crowning point of my life. The hand I held out to the persecuted meant their salvation, and showed them the true nature of my country, which welcomed and championed them. The President's cable was about to collapse all these dreams.

I decided to talk things over with Negrín. I had had the good luck to make friends with President Juan Negrín, Minister Alvarez del Vayo, and some of the other members of the Spanish Republican government. Negrín was the most interesting. Spanish high politics had always seemed to me a bit parochial, provincial, shortsighted. Negrín was cosmopolitan, or European, anyway. He had studied in Leipzig and had university standing. In Paris he kept alive, with all dignity, the flimsy shadow that a government-in-exile is.

We talked. I explained the situation, the President's strange cable, which in fact made me look like an impostor, a charlatan offering a people in exile a pipe-dream asylum. There were three possible ways out. The first, a revolting one, was simply to announce that the immigration of Spaniards to Chile had been called off. The second, a dramatic one, was to air publicly my objections, consider my mission ended, and put a bullet through my head. The third, a defiant one, was to fill the ship with immigrants, go aboard with them, and set out for Valparaíso without authorization, come what may.

Negrín leaned back in his armchair, puffing on his huge cigar. Then a melancholy smile crossed his lips and he said: "Can't you use the telephone?"

In those days, telephone communication between Europe and America was intolerably difficult, with hours of waiting. Between deafening noises and abrupt interruptions, I managed to hear the Foreign Minister's voice far away. In a broken conversation, with phrases having to be repeated twenty times, without knowing whether we were getting through to each other, screaming our heads off and hearing only the ocean's trumpet blasts in reply, I thought I made it clear to Minister Ortega that I wasn't obeying the President's countermand. I also felt sure I had heard him ask me to wait until the following day.

Naturally, I spent a troubled night in my tiny Paris hotel. The next afternoon, I learned that the Foreign Minister had resigned that morning. He would not accept the withdrawal of my authority, either. The Cabinet tottered, and our fine President, after a temporary disruption due to pressures beyond his control, recovered his authority. I received a fresh cable with instructions to go ahead with the immigration.

We finally put them aboard the *Winnipeg*. Husbands and wives, parents and children, who had been separated for a long time and were coming from one or the other end of Europe or Africa were reunited at the embarkation point. The waiting crowd surged forward as each train came in. Rushing up and down, weeping and shouting, they would recognize their dear ones among those putting their heads out the windows in clusters. Everyone eventually got aboard ship. There were fishermen, peasants, laborers, intellectuals, a cross section of strength, heroism, and hard work. My poetry, in its struggle, had succeeded in finding them a country. And I was filled with pride.

I bought a newspaper. I was strolling down a street in Villennes-sur-Seine. I was passing by the ancient castle whose ruins, scarlet with vines, lifted small slate towers skyward. That ancient castle

where Ronsard and the Pléiade poets met centuries ago captured my imagination with its stone and marble, its hendecasyllables set down in ancient gold characters. I opened the newspaper. The Second World War had broken out that day. The newspaper which my hands dropped in that old, lost village said so in bold characters in smudgy black ink.

Everyone had been expecting it. Hitler had been gobbling up territories, while English and French statesmen scurried with their umbrellas to offer him more cities, kingdoms, human beings.

A great smoke drift of confusion filled people's consciences. From my window in Paris I looked out on Les Invalides and I saw the first contingents leaving, youngsters who had not yet learned how to wear their soldier's uniforms but were marching straight into death's gaping mouth.

Their going was sad, and nothing could disguise that. It was like a war lost beforehand, something inexpressible. Chauvinist groups prowled the streets, hunting down progressive intellectuals. To them, the enemy was not Hitler's disciples, the Lavals, but the flower of French thought. At the Embassy, which had undergone a significant change, we received the great poet Louis Aragon. He spent four days there, writing day and night, while the hordes searched for him to take his life. In the Chilean Embassy he finished his novel *Passengers of Destiny*. The fifth day, he left for the front, in uniform. It was his second war against the Germans.

In those twilight days, I grew accustomed to the European lack of resolve, which does not permit continual revolutions or earthquakes yet allows the deadly poison of war to permeate the air we breathe and the bread we eat. In constant fear of bombings, the great metropolis blacked out every night, and this darkness shared by seven million people, a thick darkness in the heart of the city of light, still clings to my memory.

At the end of this era, I am alone once more in newly discovered lands, as if this whole long voyage had been a waste. I go into an agony, into a second solitude, just as in the throes of birth, in the alarming beginning, filled with the metaphysical terror from which the spring of my early poems flowed, in the new twilight

my own creation has provoked. Where am I to go? Which way should I return, aim for, which way to silence or a breathing space? I turn the light and the darkness upside down and inside out, and I find nothing but the emptiness my hands built with such deadly care.

And yet what has always been closest to me, the most fundamental, the most extensive, the completely unexpected, would appear in my path for the first time now. I had thought hard about all the world, but not about man. Cruelly and painfully, I had probed man's heart; without a thought for mankind, I had seen cities, but empty cities; I had seen factories whose very presence was a tragedy, but I had not really seen the suffering under those roofs, on the streets, at every way station, in the cities and the countryside.

As the first bullets ripped into the guitars of Spain, when blood instead of music gushed out of them, my poetry stopped dead like a ghost in the streets of human anguish and a rush of roots and blood surged up through it. From then on, my road meets everyman's road. And suddenly I see that from the south of solitude I have moved to the north, which is the people, the people whose sword, whose handkerchief my humble poetry wants to be, to dry the sweat of its vast sorrows and give it a weapon in its struggle for bread.

Then space opens out, makes itself deep and permanent. We are now standing squarely on the earth. We want to take infinite possession of everything that exists. We are not looking for any mystery, we are the mystery. My poetry is becoming a material part of an atmosphere that extends infinitely, that runs under the sea and under the earth both, it begins to enter galleries of startling vegetation, to speak in broad daylight with the specters of the sun, to explore pits of minerals hidden deep in the secretive earth, to establish forgotten links between autumn and man. The air dims and at intervals thunderbolts of phosphorescence and terror light it up; a new structure that is far from the evident, from trite words, looms on the horizon; a new continent rises from the innermost substance of my poetry. I have spent years settling these lands, classifying this kingdom, touching its many mysterious shorelines, soothing its foam, going over its zoology and the length of its geography; in this I have spent dark, solitary, remote years.

7

Mexico, Blossoming and Thorny

My government sent me to Mexico. Oppressed to the breaking point by the memory of so many painful experiences and such chaos, in 1940 I came to the Anáhuac plateau, to breathe what Alfonso Reyes hailed as the most transparent region of the air.

Mexico with its prickly pear and its serpent; Mexico blossoming and thorny, dry and lashed by hurricane winds, violent in outline and color, violent in eruption and creation, surrounded me with its magic and its extraordinary light.

I traveled through it for years, from market to market. Because Mexico is to be found in its markets. Not in the guttural songs of the movies or in the false image of the Mexican in sombrero, with moustache and pistol. Mexico is a land of crimson and phosphorescent turquoise shawls. Mexico is a land of earthen bowls and pitchers, and fruit lying open to a swarm of insects. Mexico is an infinite countryside of steel-blue century plants with yellow thorns.

The most beautiful markets in the world have all this to offer. Fruit and wool, clay and weaving looms, give evidence of the incredible skill of the fertile and timeless fingers of the Mexicans.

I drifted through Mexico, I roamed over all its coasts, along its steep coastlines set ablaze by uninterrupted flares of shimmering lightning. I came down from Topolobampo in Sinaloa, past names indigenous to this hemisphere, harsh names willed to Mexico by the gods, when men less cruel than those gods came to rule its lands. I traveled through all those mysterious and majestic syl-

lables from the dawn of time. Sonora and Yucatán; Anáhuac, rising like a cold brazier that draws to itself the mixed aromas of the land, from Nayarit to Michoacán, from where you can make out smoke from the islet of Janitzio, and the odor of corn and maguey drifting up from Jalisco, and sulphur from the new volcano, Paricutín, blending in with the wet fragrance of fish from Lake Pátzcuaro. Mexico, the last of the magic countries, because of its age and its history, its music and its geography. Working my way like a tramp over those rocks forever scourged by blood, rocks crisscrossed by a wide ribbon of blood and moss, I felt mighty and ancient, worthy to walk among such timeless things. Abrupt valleys partitioned off by immense walls of rock; tall hills that looked as if cut level with a knife; immense tropical forests teeming with timber and serpents, birds and legends. In that vast land made habitable as far as the eye can see by man's struggle through the ages, in its huge spaces, I found that we, Chile and Mexico, are the two countries most unlike each other in all America. I have never been moved by the conventional niceties of protocol that lead the ambassador of Japan, looking at Chile's cherry trees, to find that we are alike; or the Englishman experiencing the fog along our coast, or the Argentine or German seeing our snow, to find that we are much like all other countries. I delight in the diversity of landscapes on this planet, the varied products of the earth in every latitude. I don't mean to detract in any way from Mexico, a place I love, by describing it as not even remotely resembling our ocean-washed and grain-rich land. I only hold up its differences so that our America may be seen on all its levels, its great heights, and its depths. And in America, perhaps on the whole planet, no country is more profoundly human than Mexico and its people. In its brilliant achievements, as well as its gigantic errors, one sees the same chain of grand generosity, deep-rooted vitality, inexhaustible history, and limitless growth.

We made a turnoff one day—into fishing villages whose nets are so diaphanous they look like huge butterflies returning to the waters to pick up the silver scales they are missing; through mining centers whose metal turns from hard ingot to resplendent geometric forms almost as soon as it is out of the depths; over roads where Catholic convents loom, thick and thorny like giant cactus plants; through markets where the rich colors and flavors

of vegetables displayed like flowers make you dizzy—and crossing Mexico like this, we reached Yucatán, the submerged cradle of the oldest race in the world, the idolatrous Maya. There the earth has been shaken by history and by the germinating seed. Side by side with the century plant, the ruins steeped in human intelligence and sacrifices are still growing.

Having crossed the last roads, we come to the vast territory where the ancient peoples of Mexico left their embroidered history hidden away in the jungle. There we find a new water, the most mysterious water on earth. It is not sea, stream, river, or any of the waters we know. In Yucatán the water is all under the ground, which may crack open suddenly, producing enormous jungle pools whose sides, overgrown with tropical vegetation, leave open to view, down below, a very deep water, deep as the sky, and green. The Mayas discovered those fissures in the earth called *cenotes* and deified them with their strange rites. Like all religions, in the beginning theirs consecrated necessity and fertility, and the land's aridity was vanquished by those hidden waters, for which the earth had opened.

Then for thousands of years on the rims of the sacred pools, first the indigenous and then the invaders' religion increased the mystery of the waters. From the banks of the *cenote*, after nuptial ceremonies, hundreds of virgins decked with flowers and gold and laden with jewels were hurled into the whirling, bottomless waters. Garlands and golden crowns would float up from the depths to the surface, but the maidens stayed in the mud of the bottom, held fast by their gold chains.

Thousands of years later, only a tiny portion of the jewels has been recovered and they are in the display cases of Mexican and U.S. museums. I went into that wilderness, not in search of gold, but seeking the cries of the drowned maidens. In the shrieks of the birds I seemed to hear the hoarse anguish of the virgins; and in their swift flight, as they swept over the gloomy deeps of the timeless waters, I saw the yellow hands of the dead young girls.

Once I watched a dove light on a statue that stretches its bright stone hand over the eternal waters and the air. An eagle may have been after it. It did not belong in that place whose only birds—the roadrunner with its stammer, the quetzal with its fabulous plumes, the turquoise hummingbird, and the birds of prey—conquered the jungle for their rapine, for their splendor. The dove

lighted on the statue's hand, like a white snowflake among tropical rocks. I gazed at her because she came from another world, from a measured and harmonious world, from a Pythagorean column or a Mediterranean round number. She had stopped on the edge of the darkness, she respected my silence, for I had become part of this original American, blood-stained, ancient world, and my eyes followed her flight until they lost her in the sky.

THE MEXICAN PAINTERS

Mexico's intellectual life was dominated by painting. Mexican painters covered the city with history and geography, with civil strife, with fierce controversies. José Clemente Orozco, lean, one-armed titan, has his place on an elevated peak, a sort of Goya in his phantasmagorical country. I talked to him often. The violence that haunted his work seemed alien to his personality. He had the gentleness of a potter who has lost his hand at the potter's wheel but feels he must go on creating worlds with his other hand. His soldiers and their women, his peasants gunned down by overseers, his sarcophagi with horrible crucified bodies, are immortal in our native American painting, bearing witness to our cruelty.

By this time Diego Rivera had done so much work, and so much squabbling with everyone, that this burly painter was a legend. Looking at him, it seemed strange to me that he didn't have scaly fishtails or cloven hoofs. Diego Rivera had always been a fabricator. In Paris, before the First World War, Ilya Ehrenburg had published a book about his exploits and hoaxes: *The Extraordinary Adventures of Julio Jurenito*. Thirty years later Diego Rivera was still a great master as painter and teller of tall stories. He used to recommend the eating of human flesh as a healthy diet much favored by the greatest gourmets. He gave out recipes for cooking people of all ages. At other times he went to great lengths theorizing on lesbian love, maintaining that it was the only normal relationship, as proved by the oldest historical remains found in excavations he himself had directed.

Sometimes he would ramble on for hours, working his hooded Indian eyes and telling me all about his Jewish background. At other times, forgetting the previous conversations, he swore to me that he was General Rommel's father, but this confidence must be

kept very secret, as its disclosure could have grave international consequences. His extraordinarily persuasive tone and his serene way of delineating the minutest and most incredible details made him a marvelous charlatan whose charm can never be forgotten by anyone who knew him.

David Alfaro Siqueiros was in jail then. Someone had sent him on an armed raid of Trotsky's home. I met him in prison, and outside as well, because we used to go out with Commandant Pérez Rulfo, the warden, to have a drink somewhere where we wouldn't be noticed too much. We would return late at night and I would bid David goodbye with an embrace, and he would stay there behind bars.

On one of those trips back from the streets to the prison with Siqueiros, I met his brother, Jesús Siqueiros, a most unusual man. "Crafty," in the good sense of the word, comes closest to describing him. He glided alongside the walls without making a sound or any perceptible movement. Suddenly you noticed him right behind or beside you. He seldom spoke, and when he did speak, it was barely above a whisper. Which did not prevent him from hauling around, just as quietly, forty or fifty pistols in a small bag. It was just my luck to open the bag once, absentmindedly, and discover with a shock the arsenal of black, pearl, and silver handles.

It all meant nothing, because Jesús Siqueiros was as peace-loving as his brother David was tempestuous. Jesús was also a gifted artist and actor, a mime. Without moving his body or his hands, without letting out the slightest sound, acting only with his face, whose lines he changed at will, turning it into a series of masks, he gave vivid impressions of terror, anguish, joy, tenderness. He bore that pale, ghostly face through the labyrinth of his life, emerging, from time to time, with all those pistols that he never used.

Those volcanic painters kept the public in line. Sometimes they got into tremendous debates. During one of these, having run out of arguments, Diego Rivera and Siqueiros drew huge pistols and fired almost as one man, not at each other, but at the wings of the plaster-of-Paris angels on the theater's ceiling. When the heavy plaster wings started falling on the heads of the people in the audience, the theater emptied out and the discussion ended with a powerful smell of gunpowder in a deserted hall.

Rufino Tamayo was not living in Mexico at this time. Complex and passionate, as Mexican as the fruit or the woven goods in the markets, his paintings came to us from New York.

No parallel can be drawn between the painting of Diego Rivera and that of David Alfaro Siqueiros. Diego has a classicist's feeling for line; with that infinitely undulating line, a kind of historian's calligraphy, he gradually tied together Mexico's history and brought out in high relief its events, traditions, and tragedies. Siqueiros is the explosion of a volcanic temperament that combines an amazing technique and painstaking research.

During clandestine sorties from jail and conversations on every topic, Siqueiros and I planned his final deliverance. On a visa I personally affixed to his passport, he traveled to Chile with his wife, Angélica Arenales. The people of Mexico had built a school in the Chilean city of Chillán, which had been destroyed by earthquakes, and in that "Mexico School" Siqueiros painted one of his extraordinary murals. The government of Chile repaid me for that service to our nation's culture by suspending me from my consular duties for two months.

NAPOLEON UBICO

I decided to visit Guatemala and set out by car. We passed through the isthmus of Tehuantepec, Mexico's golden region, with its women dressed like butterflies and a scent of honey and sugar in the air. Next we went into the great forest of Chiapas. We would stop the car at night, intimidated by the noises, the jungle's telegraph messages. Here, there, and everywhere, thousands of cicadas transmitted a deafening sound. Enigmatic Mexico spread its green shadows over ancient structures, remote paintings, jewels and monuments, colossal heads, stone animals. All this lay about in the forest, the untold riches of fabulous Mexico. Across the border, on the highest ridges of Central America, the narrow Guatemalan road dazzled me with its lianas and mammoth vegetation; and later with its placid lakes, high up in the mountains, like eyes forgotten by wasteful gods; and finally with its pine forests and broad primordial rivers where manatees peered out of the water like human beings.

I stayed for a week with Miguel Angel Asturias, who had not

yet become known for his successful novels. We realized we were born brothers and spent almost every day together. In the evening we would plan visits to faraway places on mountains shrouded in mist or to United Fruit's tropical ports.

Guatemalans did not have the right of free speech, and no one talked politics. The walls had ears and could turn you in. Sometimes we would stop the car on a high plateau and make sure nobody was lurking behind some tree, and we would discuss the situation avidly. The despot's name was Ubico and he had been running the country for a good many years. He was a corpulent man, with cold, cruel eyes. His word was law, and nothing in Guatemala was done without his explicit approval. I met one of his secretaries, now my friend, a revolutionary. For arguing back about something, some petty detail, he had been bound on the spot to a column in the presidential office and whipped mercilessly by Ubico himself.

The young poets asked me to give a poetry reading. They sent Ubico a telegram requesting permission. All my friends and many young students filled the auditorium. I was happy to read my poems, they seemed to open a tiny crack in the window of a vast prison. The chief of police sat conspicuously in the front row. Later I found out that four machine guns had been trained on me and the audience, ready to burst into action if the chief of police interrupted the reading by leaving his seat in a huff.

But nothing of the kind happened, the man stayed and listened to my poems to the end.

Later someone wanted to introduce me to the dictator, a man with a Napoleon complex. He liked to wear a lock of hair on his forehead, and had his photograph taken a number of times in Bonaparte's famous pose. I was told that it was dangerous to turn down the offer, but I preferred not to shake his hand and went back to Mexico as fast as I could.

ANTHOLOGY OF PISTOLS

Mexico in those days was more gun-toting than gunfighter. There was a cult of the revolver, a fetishism of the .45. Colts were whipped out at the drop of a pin. Parliamentary candidates and newspapers would start their "depistolization" campaigns, but

would quickly realize that it was easier to pull a Mexican's tooth then wrest his beloved gun from him.

Once a group of poets entertained me with an outing in a flower-laden boat. Fifteen or twenty bards met at Lake Xochimilco and took me on this ride, hemmed in by water and blossoms, over canals and through a maze of everglades used for flowery rides since the time of the Aztecs. Every inch of the boat is decorated with flowers, overflowing with marvelous patterns and colors. The hands of the Mexicans, like the hands of the Chinese, are incapable of creating anything ugly, whether they work in stone, silver, clay, or carnations.

Well, during the ride, after a good many tequilas, one of the poets insisted that, as a special honor of a different kind, I should fire into the sky his beautiful pistol whose grip was decorated with silver and gold designs. The colleague nearest to him whipped out his own pistol and, carried away with enthusiasm, slapped aside the first man's weapon and invited me to do the shooting with his. Each of the other rhapsodists unsheathed his pistol on the instant, and a free-for-all ensued: they all raised their guns over my head, each insisting I choose his instead of one of the others. As the precarious panoply of pistols being waved in front of my nose or passed under my arms became more and more dangerous, it occurred to me to take a huge, typical sombrero and gather all the firearms into it, asking the battalion of poets for their guns in the name of poetry and peace. Everyone obeyed and I was able to confiscate the weapons and keep them safe in my house for several days. I am the only poet, I believe, in whose honor an anthology of pistols has been put together.

WHY NERUDA

The salt of the earth had gathered in Mexico: exiled writers of every nationality had rallied to the camp of Mexican freedom, while the war dragged on in Europe, with victory upon victory going to Hitler's forces, which already occupied France and Italy. Among those present were Anna Seghers and the Czech humorist Egon Erwin Kisch, who has since died. Kisch left some fascinating books and I greatly admired his wonderful talent, his childlike curiosity, and his dexterity at legerdemain. No sooner had he entered my house than he would pull an egg out of his ear or

swallow, one by one, as many as seven coins, which this very fine, impoverished exile could well use for himself. We had known each other in Spain, and when he showed incessant curiosity about my reason for using the name Neruda, which I was not born with, I kidded him: "Great Kisch, you may have uncovered the secret of Colonel Redl"—the famous Austrian spy case of 1914—"but you will never clear up the mystery of my name."

And so it was. He died in Prague, having been accorded every honor his liberated country could give him, but this professional interloper was never able to find out why Neruda called himself Neruda. The answer was so simple and so lacking in glamour that I was careful not to give the secret away. When I was fourteen, my father was always at me about my literary endeavors. He didn't like the idea of having a son who was a poet. To cover up the publication of my first poems, I looked for a last name that would throw him completely off the scent. I took the Czech name from a magazine, without knowing it was the name of a great writer loved by a whole nation, the author of elegant ballads and narrative poems, whose monument stood in Prague's Mala Strana quarter. Many years later, the first thing I did when I got to Czechoslovakia was to place a flower at the foot of the bearded statue.

THE EVE OF PEARL HARBOR

Wenceslao Roces, from Salamanca, and Constancia de la Mora, a Republican as well as a relative of the Duke of Maura, and the author of the book *In Place of Splendor*, which was a best seller in North America, and the poets León Felipe, Juan Rejano, Moreno Villa, Herrera Petere, and the painters Miguel Prieto and Rodríguez Luna used to come to my house. They were all Spaniards. Vittorio Vidali, the famed Commandant Carlos of the Fifth Regiment, and Mario Montagnana, Italian exiles, full of memories, amazing stories, and possessed of a culture always in flux. Jacques Soustelle and Gilbert Medioni were also there. They were Gaullist leaders, representatives of Free France. Mexico also swarmed with voluntary or forced exiles from Central America: Guatemalans, Salvadorians, Hondurans. All this gave it an international flavor, and sometimes my home, an old villa in the San

Angel neighborhood, pulsated as if it were the heart of the world.

In connection with Soustelle, who was then a left-wing socialist and who years later, as political leader of the attempted rebel coup in Algiers, would cause President de Gaulle so much trouble, something happened to me that I must tell about. We were far into the year 1941. The Nazis had laid siege to Leningrad and were penetrating farther into Soviet territory. The foxy Japanese military leaders, committed to the Berlin–Rome–Tokyo axis, were in a spot: Germany might win the war, and they would be deprived of their share of the spoils. Various rumors were circulating around the globe. Zero hour, when the mighty Japanese forces would be unleashed in the East, loomed closer. Meanwhile, in Washington, a Japanese peace mission was curtsying and bowing to the United States government. There wasn't the slightest room for doubt that the Japanese would launch a surprise attack, for blitzkrieg was the bloody order of the day.

To make my story clear, I must mention that an old Nipponese steamship line linked Japan to Chile. I traveled on those ships more than once and I knew them very well. They called at our ports and their captains spent their time buying scrap iron and taking photographs. They touched shore at points along the coastline of Chile, Peru, and Ecuador, going as far as the Mexican port of Manzanillo, where they pointed their bows toward Yokohama, across the Pacific.

Well, one day, while I was still Consul General of Chile in Mexico, I received a visit from seven Japanese who were in a rush to obtain a Chilean visa. They had come from San Francisco, Los Angeles, and other ports on the North American west coast. A certain uneasiness was written across their faces. They were dressed well and their papers were in order; they could have been engineers or business executives.

I asked them, of course, why they wanted to take the very first plane to Chile, having just arrived in Mexico. They replied that they intended to catch a Japanese ship in Tocopilla, a nitrate-shipping port in northern Chile. I countered that there was no need to travel to Chile, at the other end of the continent, for this, because that same Japanese line called at Manzanillo, which they could reach even on foot, if they wished, with time to spare.

They exchanged embarrassed glances and smiles, and talked

among themselves in their own language. They consulted the secretary of the Japanese Embassy, who was with them. He decided to be open with me and said, "Look, colleague, this ship happens to have changed its itinerary and won't be coming to Manzanillo any more. And, therefore, these distinguished specialists must catch it at the Chilean port."

A confused vision flashed across my mind: this was something very important. I asked for their passports, photographs, for data about their work in the United States, etc., and told them to return the next day. They objected. They had to have the visas immediately and would be willing to pay any price. I was playing for time. I explained that I did not have the authority to issue visas on the spot, we would discuss it the next day.

I was left to myself.

Little by little, the puzzle unraveled in my mind. Why the hasty flight from North America and the pressing need for the visas? And why was the Japanese ship changing its route for the first time in thirty years? What could it mean?

Then it dawned on me. Of course, this was an important, well-informed group, Japanese spies beating a hasty retreat from the United States because something critical was about to happen. And that could be nothing but Japan's entry into the war. The Japanese in my story were in on the secret.

The conclusion I had reached left me in an extremely nervous state. What could I do? I did not know the English or the North American representatives of the Allied nations in Mexico. I was in direct contact only with those officially accredited as General de Gaulle's delegates, who had access to the Mexican government. I got in touch with them at once and explained the situation. We had at hand the names of the Japanese and vital information about them. Should the French decide to take steps, the Japanese would be trapped. I presented my arguments eagerly at first, and then impatiently, before the indifferent Gaullists. "Young diplomats," I told them, "here is your chance to cover yourselves with glory. Find out the secret of these Japanese spies. As for me, I won't give them the visa. But you have to make a quick decision."

This fast and loose game lasted two days longer. Soustelle took no interest in the matter. They would do nothing, and I, a Chilean

consul, could take it no further. Since I refused to grant them a visa, the Japanese immediately obtained diplomatic passports, went to the Chilean Embassy, and made it in time to take the ship in Tocopilla. One week later, the world would wake up to the news of the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

MYSELF AS MALACOLOGIST

Years ago a newspaper in Chile printed a story about my good friend, the celebrated Professor Julian Huxley, who arrived in Santiago and asked for me at the airport. "Neruda the poet?" the newsmen questioned him.

"No. I don't know any poet by the name of Neruda. I want to speak to Neruda the malacologist."

That Greek word means "specialist in mollusks."

I was delighted by this story, which was intended to nettle me. It could not possibly be true, because Huxley and I had known each other for years and he is a sharp fellow, much more quick-witted and genuine than his well-known brother, Aldous.

In Mexico I roamed the beaches, dived into the clear, temperate waters, and collected magnificent seashells. Later, in Cuba and elsewhere, I swapped and bought, received as gifts and filched (there's no such thing as an honest collector), gradually swelling my sea treasure until it filled room after room in my house.

I owned the rarest specimens from the China Sea and the Philippines, from Japan and the Baltic; Antarctic conches and polimytas from Cuba; painter shells dressed in red and saffron, blue and purple like Caribbean dancers. One of the few specimens I did not have, I admit, was a land snail from Brazil's Mato Grosso. I saw one once but couldn't buy it, and I was not able to travel into the jungle to get one. It was all green, as beautiful as a new emerald.

I became such an avid collector that I visited the most remote seas. Friends also began to hunt for conches, to become snail-crazed.

When I had gathered together fifteen thousand shells, they filled every last shelf and began to spill from tables and chairs. Books on conchology or malacology—call it what you will—overflowed my library. So one day I took my whole collection

and carried it to the university in huge crates, making my first donation to my Alma Mater. It was a famous collection by then. Like any good South American institution, my university received it with praises and panegyrics, and buried it away in a basement. No one has seen it since.

"ARAUCANÍA"

While I was far away, at my post on the islands of the remote archipelago, the sea hummed to me and the silent world was filled with things that spoke to my solitude. But cold and hot wars corrupted the consular service and eventually made each consul an automaton, without personality, unable to make any decisions for himself, and his work became suspiciously close to that of the police. The Ministry insisted on my checking the ethnic origins of immigrants; Africans, Asians, and Jews could not enter my country.

This stupidity reached such extremes that I, too, became its victim when I started a handsome magazine (without a subsidy from the national treasury) and named it *Araucanía*. On the cover I used the picture of a lovely Araucanian wearing a toothy smile. That's all the Foreign Minister needed to give me a severe dressing down for what he considered something debasing, even though Don Pedro Aguirre Cerda, whose pleasant and noble face had all the features of our mixed race, was President of the Republic.

It is common knowledge that the Araucanians were crushed and, finally, forgotten or conquered. What's more, history is written by the conquerors or by those who reap the spoils of victory. There are few races worthier than the Araucanian. Some day we'll see Araucanian universities, books printed in Araucanian, and we'll realize how much we have lost with their clarity, their purity and volcanic energy.

The absurd "racial" pretensions of some South American countries, which are themselves the results of many national origins and mixed breeding, are a colonialist vice. They want to set up a dais where a handful of snobs, scrupulously white or light-skinned, can appear in society, posturing in front of pure Aryans or pretentious tourists. Fortunately, all this is becoming a thing of

the past and the UN is filling up with black and Mongolian representatives; in short, as the sap of intelligence rises, the foliage of all the races is gradually displaying all the colors of its leaves.

I ended by getting fed up and one day I resigned from my career as Consul General forever.

MAGIC AND MYSTERY

Furthermore, I realized that the Mexican world—repressed, violent, and nationalistic, cloaked in its pre-Columbian civility—would get along without my presence or approval. When I decided to return to my country, I understood less about Mexican life than when I came to Mexico. Arts and letters thrived in rival circles, but God help any outsider who sided with or against any individual or group: everyone came down on him.

When I was almost ready to leave, I was honored with a monstrous public demonstration: a dinner for almost three thousand persons, not counting hundreds who couldn't even get in. Several Presidents sent congratulations. Still, Mexico is the touchstone of America, and it was not an accident that the solar calendar of ancient America, the node of irradiation, wisdom, and mystery, was carved there.

Everything could happen, everything did happen there. The only opposition newspaper was subsidized by the government. It was the most dictatorial democracy anyone can imagine.

I recall a tragic event that left me badly shaken. A strike was dragging on in a factory, with no solution in sight. The strikers' wives got together and agreed to try to see the President and tell him perhaps of their privations and their distress. Of course, they had no weapons. Along the way they got some flowers to present to the head of state and his wife. A guard halted the women as they were entering the palace, and they were allowed no farther. The President would not receive them; they would have to go to the appropriate government bureau. Anyway, they must vacate the premises. It was an ultimatum.

The women pleaded their cause. They wouldn't be any trouble. They just wanted to deliver the flowers to the President and ask if he could do something to settle the strike soon. Their children had no food; they couldn't go on like that. The officer of

the guard refused to relay any message. And the women would not go.

Then a volley of shots from the direction of the palace guard splintered the air. Six or seven women were killed on the spot, and many others wounded.

A hasty funeral took place on the following day. I had believed an immense procession would follow the caskets of the assassinated women, but only a few people showed up. Oh, yes, the union leader made a speech. He was known as a prominent revolutionary. His speech at the cemetery was in an irreproachable style. I read the entire text the next day in the newspapers. It did not contain a single line of protest, not a single angry word or any demand that those responsible for such an atrocity be put on trial. Two weeks later, no one even spoke of the massacre. And I have never seen it mentioned in writing by anyone.

The President was an Aztec ruler, a thousand times more untouchable than England's royal family. No newspaper could criticize the exalted functionary, either in jest or seriously, without suffering immediate consequences.

Mexican dramas are so clothed in the picturesque that one comes away astounded by all the allegory—allegory that is every day more remote from the essential throb of life, the blood-spattered skeleton. The philosophers have become euphuistic and launch into existentialist dissertations that seem foolish under a volcano. Civilian action is intermittent and difficult. Submission takes on varying aspects that stratify around the throne.

But every kind of magic is always appearing and reappearing in Mexico: from the volcano born before a peasant's eyes in his humble orchard, while he was planting beans, to the wild search for the skeleton of Cortés, who, rumor has it, rests in Mexican soil with his gold helmet protecting the conquistador's skull these many centuries, and the no less intense hunt for the remains of the Aztec emperor Cuauhtémoc. Lost four centuries ago, they keep showing up here and there, safeguarded by secretive Indians, only to sink back time and again into unfathomable darkness.

Mexico lives on in me like a small stray eagle circulating through my veins. Only death will fold its wings over my sleeping soldier's heart.

8

My Country in Darkness

MACCHU PICCHU

The Ministry lost no time in accepting the voluntary end to my career.

My diplomatic suicide gave me the infinite pleasure of being able to return to Chile. I believe a man should live in his own country and I think the deracination of human beings leads to frustration, in one way or another obstructing the light of the soul. I can live only in my own country. I cannot live without having my feet and my hands on it and my ear against it, without feeling the movement of its waters and its shadows, without feeling my roots reach down into its soil for maternal nourishment.

But, before getting back to Chile, I made another discovery that was to add a new layer of growth to my poetry.

I stopped in Peru and made a trip to the ruins of Macchu Picchu. There was no highway then and we rode up on horseback. At the top I saw the ancient stone structures hedged in by the tall peaks of the verdant Andes. Torrents hurtled down from the citadel eaten away and weathered by the passage of the centuries. White fog drifted up in masses from the Wilkamayu River. I felt infinitely small in the center of that navel of rocks, the navel of a deserted world, proud, towering high, to which I somehow belonged. I felt that my own hands had labored there at some remote point in time, digging furrows, polishing the rocks.