

# Latin American poetry struggles for dignity and human values

by Elias Letelier-Ruz

At the moment when nations see themselves facing betrayal by those who try to destroy their autonomy, handing them over to foreign wealth, the true international mafias promote wars for the purpose of protecting their selfish interests. Poetry is not relegated to the margins of this process. It is integral to it.

The poetic art of Latin America suffers from the pounding of dictators who crush poets against walls as if they were dealing with ordinary non-conformists. They are sent into exile, tortured, condemned to prison. Their corpses disappear in some clandestine cemetery or are merely abandoned on the edge of a ditch in order to intimidate the rest of the intellectuals.

The killing of men, women, and children is dealt with in poetry by means of simple and symbolic language, by means of a critical attitude which sets forth ways in which moral values, lost due to repression, can be found again. But the poetic act goes against the law imposed by the executioner, and the disobedient ones have to pay for their crimes.

*Each day the dead become more intractable.*

*At first they were compliant:  
we gave them stiff collars and  
flowers*

*we praised their names in lengthy  
lists -  
those national enclosures  
those distinguished ghosts  
the marble monstrosities.*

*The corpse subscribed to the pur-  
suit of glory,  
going once more to the ranks and  
marching in time to the old music.*

*Oh no!*

*Since then,  
the dead are different.*

*Today they grow ironic,  
they question.*

*It seems to me they realize more  
and more each time  
that they are the majority.*

*- Roque Dalton, Salvadorean poet  
killed in 1975 upon returning to  
work for his people.*

This is how one gets killed!

There is the crime of love, the killer motivated by passion in which jealousy and the fear of losing the loved one exists. One kills and one dies for beliefs both great and small.

Innocent people have always been persecuted. The raid of Herod because of the prediction of a Messiah had as its object the elimination of an imminent danger. It is better to behead the Messiahs in their prime.

When Africa, in the latter half of this century, began to come to a boil, Western Colonialism believed that by killing Patrice Lumumba, a black African pacifist revolutionary, it had done the civilizing crusade of the white man a favour.

Martin Luther King was a black preacher, a pacifist, in America, a country propagated by whites. He had to be killed. And he was killed, according to the rules, in accordance with the tactics of shooting or machine gunning someone in the midst of a crowd.

Pope John Paul II, "a man of God" demonstrated his complete innocence "in this world" upon seeing the purplish red of his blood running down his white vestments,

the vestments of a man who crusaded for peace. This is the man who asked himself, "Why me?" And then everyone asked himself, "Why him?"

Aldo Moro was judged and sentenced in darkness. Pope Paul II was sentenced in the same way. The executioner from Turkey was nothing more than the executing arm of an ultra secret and unappealable verdict in which the accused, an innocent person, lacked any right to a defense.

Poets and innocent people receive the same sentence.

In Latin America, poets are condemned by a black hand, by an international hand, that possesses a program of international killing and which sees these people as political agitators, and for that reason must kill them in their prime, thereby dismembering the literary movement, a liberating movement, dangerous to the interests of prevailing economic groups.

The defense of poets is to avoid the killers and exploiters of the people by summoning the people to organize a social foundation and fight to once again find their human values, and to show the evolutionary process of our species relates not only to things but also to the dignity and values of human beings.

*Article translated by Carole A. Hartzman, Assistant Professor of Spanish, Mount Saint Vincent University. Poem from "A Fist and the Letter; Revolutionary Poems of Latin America"; bilingual edition translated by Roger Prentice and John M. Kirk. Pulp Press, Vancouver, 1979.*



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