

## **Nobel Prize in Literature 1977**



**Vicente Aleixandre**

The Nobel Prize in Literature 1977 was awarded to Vicente Aleixandre *"for a creative poetic writing which illuminates man's condition in the cosmos and in present-day society, at the same time representing the great renewal of the traditions of Spanish poetry between the wars"*.

When **Vicente Aleixandre** published his first volume of verse in 1928, *Ambito*, he was already closely associated personally with the greatly gifted Spanish poets who have given this epoch in Spanish literature the name, "The Second Golden Age". In its conception of poetry's essence and mode of expression, the vigorous group had something in common with the surrealism that had appeared in France and spread its manifestations from there. Iberian literary circles, however, preferred to assert their independence and drew a literary borderline along the Pyrenees. They were kindred but not allied, and south of the border, the differences were stressed by giving other names to the corresponding impulses in style - ultraism, creationism. It has also happened that the similarities have been recognized and the Gallic term accepted, but the admission has been worded in a

challenging way: Spanish surrealism has given the French surrealism what it has lacked - a poet. The poet referred to was Vicente Aleixandre.

There was in fact good reason for the literary frontier dispute. It could be claimed that the Spanish current had not only taken a divergent course but also had another origin. When this unusually promising generation of Spanish writers banded together to strike their big blow, it was no coincidence that they did so at a spectacular ceremony they themselves had staged on the three hundredth anniversary of Góngora's death. They share the extravagantly ornamented imagery and the abrupt allusion technique with the French surrealists, but to an equal degree, with the baroque style, especially in its Spanish variant. Furthermore, the penchant for hairsplitting and clear-cut antitheses on the one hand, and for motifs from everyday life on the other, which characterizes much in Spanish modernism and builds on its tradition from the first golden age, is actually incompatible with "l'écriture automatique", the basic article of faith in the new doctrine from the Seine. And some of the Spaniards did voice their mistrust in this form of inspiration and communication; one of them was, and is, Aleixandre.

His first collection of poem appeared the year after the Góngora anniversary. This means that he was not one of the standard-bearers for the re-orientation of Spanish poetry; that march was well on the move. But he was already one of the company. He had contributed to their magazines and he was their contemporary. Precocity is hardly Aleixandre's literary characteristic, whereas constant renewal is. He won his place in the group immediately, and it was his own. It was confirmed as time went on, and his position became more and more prominent, founded on a prolific production with masterpieces such as *La destrucción o el amor*, 1935 (*Destruction or Love*), *Sombra del paraíso*, 1944 (*The Shadow of Paradise*), *Nacimiento último*, 1953 (*The Last Birth*), and *En un vasto dominio*, 1962 (*In a Vast Dominion*), as perhaps the most important.

There is no formula that sums up this continuously developing poetry, extensive both in time and choice of subject. But if we seek a recurrent impression, a theme which manifests itself in Aleixandre's work at different stages and in various ways, we can call it:

the strength to survive. It is true also of his physical life, his personal existence. In 1925, three years before his début, he fell ill with severe and never-cured renal tuberculosis; since then he has, in brief, been bedridden or a captive at his desk. The civil war came, and from his bed he listened to the bombs exploding. When it was over and his friends and fellow-writers went into exile, they had to leave the invalid behind. But mentally, too, he survived the Franco regime, never submitting, and thus becoming a rallying-point and key figure in what remained of Spain's spiritual life.

Exemplary, revered, and a guide, frail but unbroken, Aleixandre showed even in his writings the same strength to survive and, what is more, always to renew himself, to explore other means and motifs. His inspiration has neither weakened nor dried up - on the contrary, he has attained a simplicity of expression and a warm openness both to existence and to the reader, which formerly he was not capable of or did not strive for. In this way, strangely enough, his two most recent collections of poems - *Poemas de la consumación* (*Poems about Perfection*) from 1968, and perhaps, above all, *Diálogos del conocimiento* (*Dialogues of Insight*), published as recently as three years ago - form the peak hitherto of Vicente Aleixandre's half century-long writing career.

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