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My Grandfather's Death

Vicente Aleixandre

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Poems of Vicente Aleixandre · *Translated by Stephen Kessler*

VICENTE ALEIXANDRE (b. 1898) came of age in Madrid in the mid-1920s alongside such other young Spaniards as Federico García Lorca, Rafael Alberti, Jorge Guillén, Luis Buñuel, Pedro Salinas and Salvador Dalí. Aleixandre's fourth book, *La destrucción o el amor* (Destruction or Love), published in 1935, established him as one of the major poetic voices of this generation. When the Civil War broke out a year later many of the most brilliant writers and artists associated with this group were either killed or imprisoned—Lorca and Miguel Hernández being two of the best known in this country—or went into exile. Due to a severe kidney disease which made him a semi-invalid, Aleixandre remained at his family home in Madrid, where he has lived ever since, continuing to write a number of important and influential books demonstrating the great range of his stylistic virtuosity and vision, his attitudes and ideas.

For younger Spanish poets, Aleixandre has been a vital link with a generation which has since become legendary in the Hispanic world for its inventive genius. In 1977 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

My Grandfather's Death

I passed on tiptoe
and could still hear the heavy breathing of the sick man.

And I sat down in my little boy's room,
and I went to bed.
I could hear people entering and leaving the house, and way in the
background,
like a murmur, the long sound of the tossing sea.

I dreamed that he and I went out in a boat.
And what fish we caught! And how beautiful the smooth sea was.
And what a fresh breeze under the long sunlight.
He had the same kind face as always,
and with his hand he pointed out the sparkles,
the hazy happy coastline, the little crests of water.
And how happy I was alone with him in the boat . . .
Alone with him, so big and secure a presence for me out there: alone with
him on the sea.
"Let's not get there so soon!" I said . . . And he laughed.
He had white hair, as always, and those blue eyes they tell me I have too.
And he began to tell me a story. And I began falling asleep.
Ah, rocked out there on the sea. With his voice pushing us along.
I slept and I dreamed his voice. A dream within a dream . . .
And I dreamed I was dreaming. And way inside, another dream. And
deeper another, and another,
and I at the bottom dreaming him, with him beside me, and both of us
flying into the dream inside.

And suddenly the boat . . . As if it struck something.
I opened my eyes! (And no one, and my room.)
And there was an utter silence as of arrival.

(From *Poemas varios*, 1967)