

CRITICISM

VOLUME

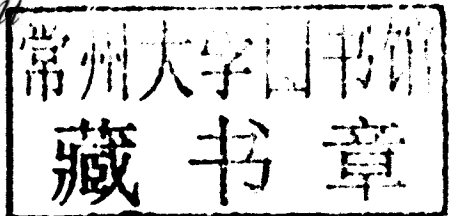
150

Poetry Criticism

*Excerpts from Criticism of the Works
of the Most Significant and Widely
Studied Poets of World Literature*

Volume 150

Lawrence J. Trudeau
Editor



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Preface

Poetry Criticism (PC) presents significant criticism of the world's greatest poets and provides supplementary biographical and bibliographical material to guide the interested reader to a greater understanding of the genre and its creators.

This series was developed in response to suggestions from librarians serving high school, college, and public library patrons, who had noted a considerable number of requests for critical material on poems and poets. Although major poets and literary movements are covered in such Gale Literary Criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC), *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC), *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC), *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800* (LC), and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* (CMLC), librarians perceived the need for a series devoted solely to poets and poetry.

Scope of the Series

PC is designed to serve as an introduction to major poets of all eras and nationalities. Since these authors have inspired a great deal of relevant critical material, PC is necessarily selective, and the editors have chosen the most important published criticism to aid readers and students in their research.

Approximately three to six authors, works, or topics are included in each volume. An author's first entry in the series generally presents a historical survey of the critical response to the author's work; subsequent entries will focus upon contemporary criticism about the author or criticism of an important poem, group of poems, or book. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from critics who do not write in English whose criticism has been translated. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Gale's Literary Criticism Series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a PC volume.

Organization of the Book

Each PC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the author's name (if applicable).
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises poetry collections and book-length poems. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. In the case of authors who do not write in English, an English translation of the title is provided as an aid to the reader; the translation is either a published translated title or a free translation provided by the compiler of the entry. In the case of such authors whose works have been translated into English, the **Principal English Translations** focuses primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting those works most commonly considered the best by critics.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. All individual titles of poems and poetry collections by the author featured in the entry are

printed in boldface type. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.

- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Citations conform to recommendations set forth in the Modern Language Association of America's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (2009).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** describing each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

Cumulative Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Gale, including *PC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in *PC* as well as in *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, *Drama Criticism*, *Short Story Criticism*, and *Children's Literature Review*.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *PC* by nationality, followed by the number of the *PC* volume in which their entry appears.

An alphabetical **Title Index** lists all individual poems, book-length poems, and collection titles contained in each volume of *PC*. Titles of poetry collections and separately published poems are printed in italics, while titles of individual poems are printed in roman type with quotation marks. Each title is followed by the author's last name and corresponding volume and page numbers where commentary on the work is located. English translations of titles published in other languages and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published so that all references to discussion of a work are combined in one listing.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces an annual paperbound edition of the *PC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

Citing Poetry Criticism

When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as Modern Language Association (MLA) style or University of Chicago Press style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

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Glen, Heather. "Blake's Criticism of Moral Thinking in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*." *Interpreting Blake*. Ed. Michael Phillips. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978. 32-69. Rpt. in *Poetry Criticism*. Ed. Michelle Lee. Vol. 63. Detroit: Gale, 2005. 34-51. Print.

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Claribel Alegría

1924-

(Full name Clara Isabel Alegría Vides) Nicaraguan-born Salvadoran poet, novelist, short-fiction writer, biographer, essayist, editor, translator, and author of children's literature.

The following entry provides criticism of Alegría's life and works. For additional information about Alegría, see *PC*, Volume 26.

INTRODUCTION

One of Central America's foremost female poets, Alegría is best known for documenting the violent political struggles of her native region. She divides her work into two categories, literary-poetic pieces and *letras de emergencia* (emergency letters). The first category refers to the subjective and lyrical verse she published early in her career, the second to the socially committed poetry she produced from the mid-1960s onward. The emergency letters form the poetic parallel to a series of prose *testimonios* (testimonials) Alegría cowrote with her husband, Darwin J. Flakoll, bearing witness to death squads, massacres, and acts of political terror in Central America. The greatest influences on Alegría's mature work have been the Sandinista Revolution, which overthrew the longstanding dictatorship of the Somoza family in Nicaragua in 1979, and the civil war in El Salvador that lasted from 1980 to 1992, pitting left-wing guerillas against government forces acting in the interests of a national elite. In a career that has spanned seven decades, Alegría has published more than forty volumes in a range of genres. Despite her versatility as a writer, she has always considered herself foremost a poet. In 2006, Alegría was awarded the prestigious Neustadt Prize for International Literature; she was the first Central American writer to be so honored. In her acceptance speech for the prize, Alegría (2006) explained the centrality of poetry to her life's work and the labor of resistance: "In the region from which I come, Central America, we love poetry, and at times we use it to denounce what is happening around us. There are many fine testimonial poems. The poet, especially where I'm from, cannot and should not remain in an ivory tower."

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Alegría was born on 12 May 1924 in Estelí, Nicaragua, to a Nicaraguan father, Daniel Alegría, and Salvadoran mother, Ana Maria Vides. When Alegría was an infant, the family

was forced into exile because of her father's opposition to the United States' occupation of Nicaragua and his support for Nicaraguan guerrilla leader Augusto César Sandino. The Alegrias fled north to Santa Ana, El Salvador, the hometown of Vides's family, who were members of the coffee-plantation elite. Alegría enjoyed a life of privilege growing up in Santa Ana but later recalled, in her 1988 essay "The Writer's Commitment," the 1932 *matanza* (massacre) at Izalco, El Salvador, as an antecedent to her awakening social consciousness: "Thirty thousand peasants were slaughtered in El Salvador when I was seven years old. I remember with hard-edged clarity when groups of them, their crossed thumbs tied behind their backs, were herded into the National Guard fortress just across the street from my house, and I remember the *coup de grace* shots startling me awake at night." The peasant massacre is the subject of Alegría's first work of fiction written in collaboration with Flakoll, the novel *Cenizas de Izalco* (1966; *Ashes of Izalco*).

In 1943, Alegría left El Salvador to study at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. While there she began her literary career under the tutelage of the renowned Spanish poet and future Nobel laureate Juan Ramón Jiménez and, in 1947, married Flakoll, a journalism student. In 1948, she received her bachelor's degree and published her first volume of poetry, *Anillo de silencio* (*Ring of Silence*). In the 1950s, Flakoll's position with the U.S. Foreign Service took the couple to Mexico, Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay. In the early 1960s, they lived with their four children in Paris, where they became part of a left-wing circle of intellectuals and writers that included such famous authors of the Latin American Boom as Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, and Mario Vargas Llosa. Following Flakoll's resignation from the diplomatic corps, the family settled in Majorca, Spain, for twelve years, a period in which Alegría composed three new volumes of poetry, including *Sobrevivo* (1978; *I Survive*), for which she was awarded Cuba's Casa de las Américas Prize.

After the triumph of the Sandinistas in 1979, Alegría and Flakoll spent six months traveling in Nicaragua gathering firsthand information for their historical chronicle of the revolution, *Nicaragua: La revolución sandinista* (1982; *Nicaragua: The Sandinista Revolution*). There followed several anthologies of Latin American prose and poetry as well as two testimonials devoted to the lives of victims of political warfare in El Salvador: *No me agarran viva* (1983; *They Won't Take Me Alive*), a book that describes the life and death of a young guerrilla commander and mother,

and *Para romper el silencio* (1984; *To Break the Silence*), which describes the torture of political prisoners. Flakoll and Alegría returned to Nicaragua in 1985 to help with the reconstruction effort. At this time Alegría began composing experimental prose narratives, most notably *Luisa en el país de la realidad* (1987; *Luisa in Realityland*), a novel that consists of fictionalized memories of her Salvadoran youth related through alternating prose vignettes and poems. After Flakoll's death in 1995, Alegría renewed her commitment to poetry.

MAJOR WORKS

Alegría's division of her work into two categories—literary-poetic works and emergency letters—reflects the transformation of her poetic voice from the autobiographical “I” to the collective “we.” The first category includes the introspective, sentimental, lyrical verse that typifies her several early collections, from the publication of *Ring of Silence* in 1948 to *Huésped de mi tiempo* (*Guest of My Time*) in 1961. The second category traces her transition to social and political activism, beginning with *Vía única* (1965; *One Way*). In “The Writer's Commitment,” Alegría charted her development from a self-involved, upper-class poet to a writer of testimonial poetry documenting violent abuses of power in Central America. Three events were crucial in cementing her commitment to improving the lives of the poor and disenfranchised: the Cuban Revolution of 1959, which made her believe in the possibility of an end to U.S. intervention in Latin America; the overthrow of the Somoza regime in Nicaragua in 1979; and the assassination in 1980 of San Salvador's Archbishop Oscar Romero, killed for his public denunciation of the repressive and violent tactics of the United States-supported junta government.

Themes of death, war, exile, suffering, and loss pervade Alegría's mature poems. Highlights of Alegría's later career include the several bilingual Spanish/English collections published by the University of Pittsburgh Press and Curbstone Press. The first such volume to appear was *Flores del volcán/Flowers from the Volcano* (1982), which describes a history of suffering dating back to pre-Columbian times and imagines social upheaval erupting from the volcanoes of Central America to combat the long history of imperialist oppression. In the title poem Alegría links government atrocities to American intervention: “Gold disappeared and continues / to disappear on the *yanqui* ships, / the golden coffee mixed with blood.” The poem “Sorrow” embraces the legacy of famous Hispanic poets martyred, imprisoned, or exiled in the struggle for liberation, among them Federico García Lorca, Roque Dalton, Victor Jara, and Pablo Neruda. Alegría's effort to name the dead in order to keep their struggle alive continues in *Mujer del río Sumpul* (1987; *Woman of the Sumpul River*). The title poem combines poetry with

the testimony of peasant women in recalling the deaths of some three hundred villagers killed by Salvadoran government troops as they tried to escape across the Sumpul River into Honduras. The poem “My Paradise in Mallorca,” also included in this volume, describes the genesis of Alegría's commitment to the revolutionary cause in Nicaragua: “I didn't know who Sandino was until my father explained / while we breasted the waves / and I was born . . . /—my hand in my father's hand—/ hating the Yankee minister / and Somoza.” The poems of *Fugas/Fugues* (1993), *Umbrables/Thresholds* (1996), *Saudade/Sorrow* (1999), and *Soltando amarras/Casting Off* (2003) are personal meditations on death, grief, time, and separation that make use of mythical allusion to suggest the possibility of redemption through political struggle. Like *Woman of the River*, *Fugues* is notable for its criticism of the *machismo* culture under which the women of Central America suffer. *Sorrow* is a series of forty-seven brief love letters describing the sense of loss Alegría experienced with the death of Flakoll in 1995. *Halting Steps* (2013) is an English-language retrospective of Alegría's career that includes poems from all of her previously published collections as well as several new poems.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Alegría is recognized as a major voice in the struggle for human rights and social reform in El Salvador and Nicaragua. It was not until the 1980s, however, that she became well known outside the Hispanic world, a recognition that was largely due to the diligent efforts of two translators, Flakoll and the American poet Carolyn Forché. Alegría is often associated with “la generación comprometida” (committed generation), Salvadoran writers and intellectuals from the middle and upper classes who worked to expose the injustices occurring in Central America on behalf of those less privileged. Alegría's accounts of torture, disappearance, and death have been studied as important commentary on the relationship between history and memory. Teresa Longo (1992) argued that Alegría's work not only serves as a record of injustice but also constitutes a form of resistance. Forché observed in her introduction to *Flowers from the Volcano*, “Alegría is a poet who calls herself a cemetery, willing to provide herself as a resting place for those whose bodies have never been recovered, the friends whose flesh has been mutilated beyond recognition. . . . [The poems] are testimonies to the value of a single human memory, political in the sense that there is no life apart from our common destiny.” Forché's comments highlight a dominant thread in the criticism of Alegría's writings: the intimate connection between her personal experience of political and cultural exile and the oppression of her people. Jo Anne Engelbert (1994: see Further Reading) credited Alegría and her contemporaries with inaugurating a new tradition in Hispanic elegiac poetry that is “at once personal and collective”—poems in

which the “dead mingle promiscuously with the living.” “The dead invoked by Alegría,” Engelbert noted, “are disconcertingly active; they do not, cannot, rest. They rise and leave the cemeteries to seek justice.”

Scholars have stressed the importance of Alegría’s innovations in the testimonial form to her project of reviving and correcting the historical record. The form has been especially influential in documenting the unprecedented numbers of women in El Salvador and Nicaragua who participated in popular militias and revolutionary agendas, not only via transcribed oral accounts, such as those included in Alegría’s *Woman of the River Sumpul*, but in an abundance of firsthand testimonials as well. In the 1980s, the *testimonios* became a popular and effective outlet for women to share their often unacknowledged contributions as guerrilla soldiers, mothers, and activists, and to demand justice and equality for their sex. Yvette Aparicio (2006) pointed out that Alegría’s poem “Pequeña patria” (“Small Country”) contains an implicit critique of leftist rhetoric for its exclusion of female voices. Jennifer Beatson (2008) examined the intersection of the private and the political in terms of Alegría’s marriage to Flakoll. In an essay examining Alegría’s revision of ancient myths from a feminist perspective, Marcia Phillips McGowan (2004) sought recognition for Alegría’s “testament of hope” as a vital component of her testament to turmoil: “Hope emerges not only . . . from the elegiac quality of Alegría’s verse, but from the continuous use of redemptive images and the revisionist myth making that pervades her last three volumes. I believe that Alegría’s legacy of hope, which emerges from a background of carnage, death, and exile, is as great a contribution as her testimonial verse—indeed that it is inseparable from it.”

Janet Mullane

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*This volume contains the poem "Pequeña patria" ["Small Country"].

†Bilingual edition.

‡This volume contains the poems "Flores del volcán" ["Flowers from the Volcano"] and "Saudade" ["Sorrow"].

§This work is a novel in prose and poetry.

||This volume contains the poems "Mallorca, mi paraíso" ["My Paradise in Mallorca"] and "Mujer del río" ["Woman of the River"].

#This volume contains the novellas *Álbum familiar* [*Family Album*], *El detén* [*The Talisman*], and *Pueblo de Dios y de Mandinga* [*Village of God and the Devil*].

CRITICISM

Teresa Longo (essay date 1992)

SOURCE: Longo, Teresa. "Claribel Alegría's 'Sorrow': In Defiance of the Space Which Separates." *Latin American Literary Review* 20.39 (1992): 18-26. Print.

[In the following essay, Longo explores Alegría's incorporation in the poem "Sorrow" of fragments of the lives and

works of Latin American poets exiled, imprisoned, or martyred by repressive regimes, including Neruda, Jara, Dalton, and García Lorca. Longo argues that this intertextuality bears collective witness to horrific social injustices and at the same time reveals poetry's essential role as a form of resistance.]

y el poema río ... el poema que todos escribimos / con
lágrimas / y uñas / y carbón

[the river poem ... / the poem that we are all writing / with
tears, with fingernails and coal]

Claribel Alegría

In a recent essay entitled "The Hour of Poetry," John Berger argues that today, as never before, poetry's most essential role is one of resistance. According to Berger, poetry is becoming the force which opposes "more absolutely than any other" the social injustices—the "monstrous cruelties"—which define the modern world. In response to the question, "what is the [contemporary] labour of poetry?" (249), Berger offers the following analysis:

Every authentic poem contributes to the labour of poetry. And the task of this unceasing labour is to bring together what life has separated or violence has torn apart. Physical pain can usually be lessened or stopped by action. All other human pain, however, is caused by one form or another of separation. And here the act of assuagement is less direct. Poetry can repair no loss, but it defies the space which separates. And it does this by its continual labour of reassembling what has been scattered.

(249)

Claribel Alegría's vision of the role of contemporary writing closely parallels the poetic theory proposed by John Berger. In a 1984 essay on writing and commitment the Salvadoran poet maintains that she finds herself writing more and more about the "misery, the injustice, and the repression" that reign in her country ("The Writer's Commitment" 309).¹ In the same essay, Alegría adds that "in Central America today, crude reality inundates and submerges the ivory tower of 'art for art's sake'" (310). "It matters little whether our efforts are admitted into the sacrosanct precincts of literature. Call them newspapering, call them pamphleteering, call them a shrill cry of defiance" (311). To write is to resist repression.

The poem "Sorrow" from the collection *Flores del volcán* [*Flowers from the Volcano*] ²(1982) is one of Alegría's many efforts to respond to contemporary society's "crude reality."³ As Electa Arenal has aptly noted, "'Sorrow' ... evokes with chilling immediacy the murdered, the imprisoned, the tortured, and the 'disappeared.' These themes are underscored [in the poem] by quotations from García Lorca, Antonio Machado, Miguel Hernández, Pablo Neruda, and a popular Argentine tango" (22). To Electa Arenal's remarks I would add that the evocation of the

imprisoned, the tortured and the disappeared—especially of Alegría's fellow Salvadoran, Roque Dalton—goes beyond an underscoring of the work's thematic content. Indeed, to use Berger's terminology, the "labour" of Alegría's poetry consists of a reassembling of "what has been scattered" (Berger 249): like Alegría herself, the poets whose works are quoted in "Sorrow" all suffered forced separations—exile, imprisonment or death—from their native countries. When Alegría incorporates their work into her poetry, she defies that separation. At the same time, she draws attention to the very significant role which intertextuality plays in her work. In my analysis of "Sorrow," I argue that for Alegría, intertextuality serves a dual purpose: "Sorrow"'s intertext initially reveals the extremely repressive, negative situation which frames the context of contemporary writing; the same intertext ultimately becomes the force which converts poetry into a labour of resistance.⁴

Alegría begins "Sorrow" with a declaration of the poem's intertextual composition: "Voces que vienen / que van / que se confunden" (18) ["Voices that rise and are gone" (19)].⁵ Among the poems which constitute "Sorrow"'s intertext, poetry by Roque Dalton—to whom Alegría dedicates "Sorrow"—is of exceptional significance. Alegría introduces her fellow Salvadoran's contribution early in the text: the lines, "cuando sepas que he muerto / no pronuncies mi nombre" ["when you learn that I am dead / don't utter my name" (my translation)] (19) appear in the poem's first section immediately after Alegría's declaration of "Sorrow"'s intertextual make-up. As the poem progresses, these lines from the Revolutionary poet's "Alta hora de la noche" ["At the Peak of Night"] echo throughout each of "Sorrow"'s eight sections.

In section one, Alegría evokes the presence not only of Roque Dalton but also of Victor Jara—"¿eres tú Victor Jara?" (18) ["Is that you, Victor Jara?" (19)], Federico García Lorca—"verde que" ["green, I want you green" (19)] and Pablo Neruda—"puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche" ["Tonight I can write the saddest verses" (18)]. As we know, Lorca was executed and his body thrown into an unmarked grave while the Falangists were occupying Granada in 1936 (Francisco García Lorca 180); Neruda was forced into exile in 1949;⁶ Chilean security forces assassinated Victor Jara in 1973 (Forché 85); and Roque Dalton was killed in El Salvador in 1975 (Arnson 30). In "Sorrow," these poets' lives, together with fragments of their poetry reemerge as "un enjambre de sombras / rostros que ya no existen" (18) ["these shadows of faces / that no longer exist" (19)]. Here in the negative, "no existen" ["no longer exist"], the "no" reminiscent of Dalton's "no pronuncies" ["don't utter"] surfaces as a sign of the life-negating, silencing powers which dominate modern society.

In the second section of "Sorrow," as Alegría recounts her search for García Lorca's unmarked grave, she appropriates an intertextual fragment by Antonio Machado: "el crimen

fue en Granada" (20) ["the crime was in Granada" (21)]. The poetry which Alegría quotes here is, in its own right, a model of writing as an act of resistance: Machado had said, "Que fue en Granada el crimen / *sabed*—¡pobre Granada!—¡en su Granada!" ["The crime was in Granada / know this—¡poor Granada!—¡in his Granada" (my translation)] (Alonso 29).⁷ The poet's "sabed," ["know this"] suggests that Machado⁸ envisioned his writing as a means of *making known* the truth. Alegría's appropriation of the Machado poem stresses her own poetic convictions concerning the labour of contemporary poetry: for the Salvadoran writer, poetry attempts to make known the truth—to counter the silence which stems from repression. At the same time, Alegría's "**Sorrow**," also reveals the overwhelming difficulties against which modern poetry struggles: "y *no entiendo* / los ademanes vagos / las señales / el crimen fue en Granada / en su Granada / todo el mundo lo sabe / pero *nadie es capaz* de un detalle preciso / de decir por ejemplo / allí mismo lo echaron / al borde de ese olivo" (20) ["*I do not understand* / vague gestures and directions / the crime was in Granada / in his Granada / everyone knows that / but *no one is capable* / of the precise detail / of saying for example / they flung his body down / at the foot of that olive tree" (21)]. Again, the "no" of Dalton's "no pronuncies" echoes throughout the text in order to underscore the silence characteristic of a repressive social order. In addition, Alegría's use of the present tense in "pero *nadie es capaz* / de un detalle preciso" (20) ["but no one *is* capable / of the precise detail" (21)] suggests that the kind of events—which in 1936 resulted in Lorca's death, and in Machado's exile—⁹ continue to define the context of modern writing.

The poem's third and fifth sections reveal the uncertain, extremely negative situation of contemporary Hispanic poets who, like Alegría herself, have lived in exile.¹⁰ Dalton's poetry again resonates throughout the text: "Un tatuaje en la frente / nos señala / ... nos olfateamos en el metro / ... y *no sabemos* si es nuestro sudor / o la carroña de la patria" (24-26) ["This mark on our foreheads / betrays us / ... we sense one another in the Metro / ... *we don't know* if it is our sweat / or the rotten taint of our land" (25-27)]. Alegría defines the expatriated writer as one whose life is marked by "helplessness," "stagnant dreams" and "shame" (27). She summarizes the exiled poet's bleak existence in the lines "a *no tener* un cinco en el bolsillo / ... y *nadie tiene* un cinco" (26-28) ["*not having* even small change ... and *no one has* even small change" (27-29)]. Here, echoes of Dalton's work resurface in the negatives, "a *no tener*" ["not having"] and "*nadie tiene*" ["no one has"]. In addition, Alegría's "*no sabemos*" ["we don't know"], "*nadie tiene*" ["no one has"] and Roque's "no pronuncies" ["don't utter"] ultimately merge in this section of the poem with an intertextual fragment from an Argentine tango: "al mundo *nada le importa* / yira yira" (26) ["*nothing matters* to the world / yira, yira" (27)].¹¹ Again, as in the "Lorca section," the poem communicates

a certain hopelessness: "salgo a la calle / a caminar *sin rumbo*" (34) ["I return to the street to wander" (25)]. Faced with the negativity of world indifference, poetry's labour of resistance emerges as a near-to-impossible task.

The poet's hopelessness reaches its climax in sections four and six of "**Sorrow**" when she writes of Roque Dalton's death.¹² In the following lines, Alegría recalls hearing the news of the assassination: "Obstinadas / confusas / me llegan las noticias / hechos truncados / fríos / frases contradictorias / que me acosan / así llegó tu muerte / Roque Dalton / ... en los signos borrosos / de un periódico ... / en imágenes rotas / imprecisas" (28-30) ["Stubborn / confused / the news comes to me / truncated facts / cold, contradictory sentences / that pursue me / that is how your death arrived, Roque Dalton / ... in the smudged headlines ... in broken images" (29-31)]. Here, the adjectives, "confusas" ["confused"], "truncados" ["truncated"], "contradictorias" ["contradictory"] and "borrosos" ["smudged"] emphasize Alegría's suffering as she reacts to Dalton's murder. At the same time, this focus on the indefinite reveals the poet's frustration—her difficulty in uncovering (and making known) the truth, and thus fulfilling her labour as a poet. The language which begins, here, as an uncertainty—an imprecise understanding of Roque's assassination—is significant because, like much of "**Sorrow**," it reveals the vacuousness of the present world situation. Indeed, the "no" in Dalton's own "no pronuncies" is a sign of this contemporary emptiness; it also stresses the life-negating, silencing powers of repression.

In addition, in sections four and six of "**Sorrow**" the negatives reminiscent of Dalton's "no pronuncies" become exceptionally prominent: "siguen llegando ecos / acusaciones falsas / y *nunca sabré* quién te mató pero estás muerto / Roque Dalton / y envolvieron tu muerte / en la neblina" (30) ["the echoes are still coming back / the false accusations / *I'll never know* who killed you / but you are dead, Roque Dalton, and they wrap your death in fog" (31)]. Previously in the poem, Alegría suggested that, even today, no one can offer precise information concerning events like Lorca's death. Her lament serves, above all, as a criticism of contemporary civilization—as an insinuation that, especially today—"nadie *es capaz*" (20) ["no one *is* capable" (21)], society suffers from violations of basic human rights. Now, Alegría's references to "false accusations"¹³ and to the unclear or unknown events surrounding Dalton's death fulfill a similar function. The lines, "y envolvieron tu muerte / en la neblina" ["and they wrap your death in fog"] in reference to the death of a prominent Salvadoran revolutionary, emphasize the political repression against which the poet labours. Historians inform us that at the time of "**Sorrow**"'s publication, government repression in El Salvador was strong: the killing of Salvadorans who opposed the military order in the late 1970s occurred at the rate of 1000 per month (Skidmore and Smith 327). The "neblina" ["fog"] about

which Alegría writes is a sign not only of the stifling of information about Roque Dalton, but also of the overwhelming repression—the stifling of human rights—which prevailed in her country.¹⁴

As we have seen, a great deal of **“Sorrow”** is devoted to the unveiling of the contemporary threat to human dignity. And **“Sorrow”**’s intertext, due to its incorporation of Dalton’s “cuando sepas que he muerto / no pronuncies mi nombre” [“when you learn that I am dead / don’t utter my name”], reveals the negative, repressive situation which frames the context of contemporary writing. Yet in Dalton’s “Alta hora de la noche,” from which Alegría appropriates this intertextual fragment, there are, of course, additional lines which the poet does not quote. Among these is the positive declaration: “Pronuncia flor, abeja, lágrima, pan, tormenta” (83) [“Say flower, bee, tear, bread, storm”].¹⁵ This line from “Alta hora de la noche” is of particular significance because the same kind of life-affirming language also resonates throughout much of **“Sorrow.”** Therefore, in spite of its repressive context, in spite of what appears to be an impossible task, **“Sorrow”** also reveals poetry’s strength as a force of resistance.

In the Lorca section, for example, in addition to the negatives, “y no entiendo” [“and I don’t understand”], “nadie es capaz” [“no one is capable”] and “te negaron la lápida” [“there is no tombstone”], we also hear, “pero alguien dejó un árbol / un olivo / alguien que supo / lo dejó” (24) [“but someone left a tree, an olive / someone knew and left it standing” (25)]. Thus, in response to the repression surrounding Lorca’s death, the poem offers a declaration of life. Alegría’s incorporation of a fragment from Miguel Hernández’s “Aceituneros” [“Olive Workers”] later reinforces this declaration: “andaluces de Jaén / aceituneros altivos / decidme en el alma ¿quién? / quién levantó los olivos?” [“Andalucians of Jaén / proud olive workers / tell me in your heart, who? / who raised the olive trees?” (my translation)] (34). The intertextualization of Hernández’s poem reveals **“Sorrow”**’s own declaration of the positive: Hernández’s “olivos” [“olive trees”], like Dalton’s “flor” [“flower”] and “abeja” [“bee”], are signs of a natural inclination toward the affirmation of life. At the same time, in “Aceituneros,” Hernández’s choice of the adjective, “altivos” [“proud”]¹⁶—in order to describe the olive workers—implies that their’s is a dignified labour. It is also a labour which defies and resists repression.¹⁷ According to Alegría, poetry’s labour of resistance is also a dignified and life-affirming act.

Yet as we have seen, resistance often emerges as a near to impossible task. This is the case in Alegría’s portrayal of the seemingly aimless existence of the exiled writer. Nevertheless, even in her portrayal of exile, Alegría ultimately succeeds in countering the negative—“no sabemos” (26) [“we don’t know” (27)] and “nada le importa” (26) [“nothing matters” (27)]—with positive statements from “Alta hora de la noche.” Alegría responds to Dalton’s

life-affirming, “Pronuncia ... lágrima” [“Say ... tear”] (83), with the images, “un llanto endurecido” (24) [“calloused tears” (25)] and “mirada húmeda” (26) [“damp eyes”], which like “shame” and “hopelessness,” also define the life of the exiled writer. But in opposition to “shame” and “hopelessness,” the poet’s “tears” primarily suggest that beyond repression, there are also signs of life. Furthermore, in “Alta hora de la noche,” the life-affirming, “Pronuncia ... lágrima” [“Say ... tear”] (83) is followed by an even stronger statement: “Pronuncia ... tormenta” [“Say ... storm”] (83). This second statement—which Alegría communicates via an intertextual fragment from César Vallejo—concludes the exile section: “me moriré in París con aguacero” / un día del cual tengo ya el recuerdo” (28) [“I will die in Paris with a heavy rain shower / on a day of which I still have memory” (29)]. As Dalton’s work becomes more pronounced, its implications also become more forceful: the response to the denial of human dignity and life is an inevitable storm of resistance.

Echoes of Roque’s work continue to penetrate the last two sections of **“Sorrow”**: sections seven and eight offer a commentary on repression from the point of view of the writer as a political prisoner. As it has in the previous sections of the poem, Dalton’s “no pronuncies” reemerges as a sign of the repressive social context which defines modern writing: ¿Quién sembró los barrotes? / sólo una luz palúdica / me llega desde afuera / no hay sol / no hay pájaros / no hay verdes” (36) [“Who raised the bars? / a gray light filters from outside / there is no sun / there are no birds, no foliage” (37)]. In section seven, however, the poet ultimately appropriates the negative in order to convert it into a life-affirming sign of resistance: “vuelvo a mi rosario / no estoy sola / están ellos / los huéspedes de paso” (40) [“I return to my rosary / I am not alone / they are here / the transient guests” (41)]. The poet’s “no estoy sola” [“I am not alone”] conveys **“Sorrow”**’s most fundamental message: the labour of poetry “is to bring together what life has separated or violence has torn apart” (Berger 249). Again, **“Sorrow”** unites the voices of the exiled, the tortured and the murdered: “están Víctor / Violeta / el poeta pastor / salto alegre del catre / y tropiezo con Roque” (40) [“there are Víctor and Violeta / the shepherd poet / I leap from my cot / and stumble into Roque” (41)]. The poem thus resists repression by defying the space which separates. And as the poet assumes a collective voice, she empowers her work as an act of resistance: ... grabo en el muro: / más solos están ellos / que nosotros” (40) [“I scratch on the wall: / they are more alone than we are” (41)].

As we know, Roque Dalton’s poetry is an essential empowering component in **“Sorrow”**’s collective voice. In addition to the “no” of Dalton’s “no pronuncies”—and Alegría’s “no hay ...” [“there is no ...” (36)]—the affirmative “Pronuncia flor, abeja, lágrima, pan, tormenta” [“Say flower, bee, tear, bread, storm”] (83) resurfaces in the poem’s final sections: in response to imprisonment, we hear “no estoy sola / están ellos / y hay vino / y guitarras / y