

Three Poems

By Miguel Hernandez

Translated by Thomas Merton

This issue of The Merton Seasonal concludes the publication of Merton's translations of the Spanish poet Miguel Hernandez. (See the Summer issue, pages 7-12, and the Fall issue, pages 12-14, for further information.) The first of the poems, "Qué quiere el viento," is taken from Hernandez's Cancionero y romancero de ausencias (Songs and Ballads of Absence), mainly composed during and after his first stay in prison in 1939 but not published until 1958 in Argentina. The second, "Canción Última," is the final poem in El hombre arecha (Man the Spy) – eighteen poems written toward the end of the Spanish Civil War but not published until long after his death that express his disillusion with the war that he had initially supported strongly. The final poem, "A Mi Hijo" ("For My Son"), is an elegy from Ultimos Poemas for his child Manuel Ramón, who died in September 1938; Merton's note indicates that it was translated on November 26, 1966. The first translation is untitled and the latter two retain the Spanish titles.

The January wind
 What does it want to do
 Roaring down the ravine
 Rattling all the windows
 While my arms
 Coat and enfold you?

To defeat us
 Drag us away

Defeated, dragged off
 Our two lives hauled apart
 What more does it want
 This wind
 With its mounting fury?

To estrange us.

Cancion ultima

Painted is my house
 Not empty, painted
 With the color of the greater
 Passions and disgraces.

From laments
 Where it was exiled
 It shall return
 With its deserted table
 Its bed in ruins

Kisses will bloom again
 Upon the pillows
 The sheet shall build
 About our bodies its intense
 Nocturnal
 Fragrant vine

Outside the window
 Hate grows dim.

The claw shall turn kind

Leave me this hope!

A Mi Hijo

You refused to close your eyes, my own
 Dead boy and they remain two swallows
 Open to the sky: its color crowned with Junes
 As dew and leaves for morning regions

Today is like a day under the ground: dark
 Under the ground, rainy, no one there
 Witness unlit by sun, my future body
 As under ground I would possess* you buried

Since you are dead the mornings bring no joy
 Finding no fire-joy in the suns, your eyes;
 October beats its wings against our windows
 You let in fall and night fell on the seas
 The sun devoured you, deep and only rival

And the far shadow flung out of his flame;
 Light thrust you down and took you all the way
 Swallowed you whole: gone back to the unborn.

Ten months in light coming around the sky
 Dead sun, buried, eclipsed, betrayed to night
 Your skin dried up not passing through its day,
 Dawned on one side only your body

Declined to its setting. And the bird inquires
 Where are you body of the east, flesh born of dawn
 Needed for joyfulness baby of embracing
 Laughter so only some few flowers

Die with your smile. Gone gone
 Like the summer swallow from the ice
 Escaping on new-fledged delicate wing
 Wrecked in the seasons of enemy flight

Flower unable to grow teeth
 Or reach the lightest signs of fury
 Life like leaf of opening lip
 Leaf that falls with the first sound.

No use to you were the sea's counsels. . .
 I come from knifing the soft sun
 From burying bread in oblivion
 I come from spreading over eyes

A handful of nothing: green-red-brown
 Green-blue-gold
 Latent colors of life and gardens
 Middle of flowers for your feet
 Dark, black, sad; grave white rigid.

Woman in the corner: look it is day
 (Eyes without setting, always on the dawn)
 But in your womb, your eyes my woman,
 Desolate the night – it keeps on falling.

*Merton enclosed this word in parentheses and put the Spanish original (*haberte*) in the margin, perhaps indicating he was not satisfied with his translation here.