



Peru

Peruvian Literature

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PERUVIAN LITERATURE

The literary history of Peru may be divided into four periods of unequal length and importance. The first extends from prehistoric times down to the conquest of the great empire of the Incas by the Spaniards under the leadership of Pizarro and Almagro. In this period the ancient Peruvians reached their highest point of development along political, economic and cultural lines in the years just preceding the overthrow of the Inca theocracy, and it is to the Spanish conquerors and colonists that we owe for the most part what knowledge we have of the indigenous products of a literary nature. The second period (1535-1810) covers the long colonial régime during the greater part of which Lima with its viceregal court was the literary as well as political center of the Spanish colonies in South America. Then came the comparatively short period of the Wars of Independence (1810-1826), at the end of which Peru was put into possession of the political freedom that had been gained from Spain by the combined efforts of the Liberator of the North, Simon Bolivar, and the Liberator of the South, José de San Martín. The fourth period, the hundred years of national independence, is the most important and demands the greater part of our attention.

PRE-HISPANIC PERIOD

Of all the races indigenous to the American continent none had made greater progress toward civilization before the coming of the Europeans than the Peruvians. The only race that could be considered a rival for first place was the Mexican, superior in some ways, inferior in others. Politically, the tribal confederation of the Mexicans, dominated by the Aztecs, was a much more primitive organization than the great Peruvian empire, in which, under the ecclesiastical control of their Inca rulers, many millions of people were enjoying the advantages of a communistic form of government of the best type. Economically, too, the Peruvians had made greater progress; the domestication of animals, agricultural improvements, the development of the art of weaving, metal work, pottery, these stand as proof that if they had not yet attained a state of civilization they were very close to it. In one important particular they were surpassed by the Aztecs; the system of picture writing

Jesuits in 1767, the censorship of the Church became less strict; the infiltration of new political and philosophical ideas stimulated the studies of scientists and scholars. The institutions of education were reformed and scientific and literary societies came into existence. A good beginning in periodical literature was made by *El Mercurio Peruano*, a notable publication that has continued intermittently down to the present day.

III. WARS OF INDEPENDENCE

In most of the South American countries the struggle for independence was productive of much patriotic poetry and political writing during the years from 1810 to 1825. Such was not the case with Peru. Lima enjoyed many privileges as the capital of the oldest viceroyalty; colonial traditions were most deeply rooted there; the need of political independence was not so keenly felt by the pleasure-loving Limenians, the majority of whom were more interested in social activities, in material and aesthetic pleasures than in political affairs. Had the patriotic leaders in the cause of independence in the other parts of South America not believed that the complete emancipation of the whole continent from Spanish rule was the only basis of permanent independence of any part of it, Peru would have remained for many years a Spanish colony. Peru did not declare its independence until the great Argentine patriot, San Martín, had arrived with his liberating army from the south. Until then the Peruvians who desired independence were helpless in the presence of the strong royalist forces concentrated in their country, the stronghold of Spanish power in America. The vigorous campaign of San Martín, followed by that of the Liberator of the North, Simón Bolívar, brought to a successful conclusion in 1824 the Wars of Independence, gave political freedom to Peru and established the permanent independence of all the Spanish colonies in South America.

Although the great majority of Peruvians were at first indifferent to independence, there were some who were willing to sacrifice their lives to its cause. One of these was a young poet of Arequipa, Mariano Melgar, executed in 1814 in his twenty-third year for the part that he had taken in an unsuccessful rebellion against Spain. He did not live long enough to get beyond the experimental stage, but the fine melody and delicacy of sentiment in his love poems and elegies were such as to give promise of high literary achievement.

He was most successful in his *yaravies*, written in imitation of the indigenous Inca love poems of the same name.

Peru has a share at least in the glory of the greatest poet of the Wars of Independence, José Joaquín Olmedo, one of the most inspired poets that Spanish America has yet produced. Born in Guayaquil when that city belonged to the Peruvian viceroyalty and educated in the University of San Marcos, he wrote much of his poetry in Peru; but his native city became later part of the Republic of Ecuador, so that Ecuador has now good right to consider him her most illustrious son.

No other writers of the brief period from 1810 to 1825 need be mentioned. With the final withdrawal of Spanish troops from Callao in 1826, the life of Peru as an independent nation began. The fourth period in its literary history, coinciding with the century of national independence, is, as might well be expected, the richest in literary production.

(To be Continued)

GEORGE W. UMPHREY

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Sigue lloviendo. El día es triste y largo.
 En el remoto gris se abisma el ser.
 Llueve... Y uno quisiera, sin embargo,
 que no acabara nunca de llover.

The rain continues. The day is long and sad.
 Within the grayish distance one is lost.
 It rains... And nevertheless one wishes
 the rain would never stop.

1917

trans. Julie Schumacher

José Santos Chocano

PERU

1875-1934

The "poetic trumpet" of the South American continent, José Santos Chocano celebrates himself, his place, and his race with a daring that recalls Whitman's. Writing as if in opposition to the fascination with French culture and French models (as in works by Darío, Lugones, and others), Chocano blares his prophetic advocacy of local cultural forms. At the same time, he maintains that some Continental models can be useful; he argues for a cultural realignment with Spain, and he reminds Peruvian readers of the glories and heroism of the conquistadores. Conversely, Chocano wrote many of his vigorous declamatory poems, including those in the Whitman-like *Alma América* (*American Spirit*, 1906), while in prison for political activity considered seditious by the Manuel Estrada Cabrera government of Guatemala. Chocano alternately befriended and opposed strong leaders at extremes of the political spectrum. After killing another poet, Chocano spent time in prison, was pardoned, and went into exile in Chile. Eventually his idealistic, sometimes bombastic tone was to influence Darío and others toward an aesthetic of overt political anti-imperialism. Chocano's series *Tres notas de nuestra alma indígena* (*Three Notes of Our Indigenous Spirit*, 1941 posthum.), in which the poem "¡Quién sabe!" ("Who Knows?") appeared, was a touchstone in the *indianismo* movement. The poem was admired at first for its sympathy and light irony, but later was criticized for its apparent idealization of Indian passivity and victimization.

In form, Chocano's poems belong to a Modernist tradition. He imitates Lugones, for instance, in welcoming the liberties that free verse makes possible, but he is suspicious of the licence the form seems to invite. The result is at times a peculiarly moving hybrid, as befits a mestizo who trumpets both his noble Spanish lineage and his Indian heritage. Chocano's radical sonnets aggressively celebrate the spirit of Andean place, including its animals and plants, with a compassionate descriptive splendor. Significantly, they do so in a form derived directly from classical Spanish models.

Blasón

Soy el cantor de América autóctono y salvaje;
 mi lira tiene un alma, mi canto un ideal.
 Mi verso no se mece colgado de un ramaje
 con un vaivén pausado de hamaca tropical...

Cuando me siento Inca, le rindo vasallaje
 al Sol, que me da el cetro de su poder real;
 cuando me siento hispano y evoco el Coloniaje,
 parecen mis estrofas trompetas de cristal...

✱ A Manifesto

I sing America, in its wild and autochthonous state;
 my lyre has a soul, and my song has an ideal.
 My poem does not hang from a branch,
 calmly swinging like a tropical hammock...

When I feel Incan, I honor that king,
 the Sun, who offers me the scepter of his royal power;
 when I feel Spanish, I invoke the Empires;
 my strophes seem like crystal trumpets...

Mi fantasía viene de un abolengo moro:
los Andes son de plata, pero el León de oro;
y las dos castas fundo con épico fragor.

La sangre es española e incaico es el latido;
¡y de no ser Poeta, quizás yo hubiese sido
un blanco Aventurero o un indio Emperador!

1906

Los volcanes

Cada volcán levanta su figura,
cual si de pronto, ante la faz del cielo,
suspendiesen el ángulo de un velo
dos dedos invisibles de la altura.

La cresta es blanca y como blanca pura:
la entraña hierve en inflamado anhelo;
y sobre el horno aquel constrastra el hielo,
cual sobre una pasión un alma dura.

Los volcanes son túmulos de piedra,
pero a sus pies los valles que florecen
fingen alfombras de irisada yedra;

y por eso, entre campos de colores,
al destacarse en el azul, parecen
cestas volcadas derramando flores...

1906

El sueño del caimán

Enorme tronco que arrastró la ola,
yace el caimán varado en la ribera:
espinazo de abrupta cordillera,
fauces de abismo y formidable cola.

El Sol lo envuelve en fúlgida aureola;
y parece lucir cota y cimera,
cual monstruo de metal que reverbera
y que al reverberar se tornasola.

Inmóvil como un ídolo sagrado,
ceñido en mallas de compacto acero,
está ante el agua extático y sombrío,

a manera de un príncipe encantado
que vive eternamente prisionero
en el palacio de cristal de un río...

1906

My imagination comes from ancient Moorish blood:
the Andes are of silver, but León is of gold;
I fuse both races with a noise like a thunder.

My blood is Spanish and Incan in its throb;
if I were not a poet, I might have had the job
of a white Adventurer, or Incan emperor!

trans. Andrew Rosing

The Volcanoes

Each volcano lifts its profile
as if abruptly from the face of the sky
invisible fingers from on high
lifted the corner of a hanging veil.

White, pure white, the crest of the mountain,
while its breast seethes with enflamed desires;
the head's ice strains against the body's fire,
like a pure soul rising past a passion.

Volcanoes are rubbly mounds of rock,
but at their feet the valleys, green
and rainbow-scattered as an Asian rug;

there, among those fields of color,
outlined against the blue, they seem
like tumbled baskets, spilling flowers...

trans. Andrew Rosing

The Dream of the Caiman

Enormous tree-trunk crawling on the waves,
the alligator wallows up the river's wall:
spine like a sudden mountain-range,
jaws an abyss, and formidable tail.

The sunlight wraps him in an aureole
like shining armor and a plumed cuirass:
glaring in the light, a monster of metal
that echoes the sun's iridescence.

Motionless as a sacred idol,
adrift in the water, écstatic
and sleepy, wrapped in strong steel mail,

like a prince who lives in an enchantment,
held a prisoner forever
in the crystal palace of a river...

trans. Andrew Rosing

PERU

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Dream of the Caiman

Enormous log dragged by the wave—
caiman beached on the river shore:
backbone a broken cordillera,
formidable tail, jaws an abyss.

The sun wraps him in a dazzling aureole—
a seeming mail-coat and heraldry,
a metal monster who shimmers
and whose shimmering lays a sheen.

Unmoving as a sacred idol
girt in a mesh of compact steel,
he lies against the still, dark water

like an enchanted prince
who lives an eternal prisoner
of the river's palace of glass.

PERN



Jose Joaquin Olmedo
1780-1847

Peru has a share at least in the glory of the greatest poet of the Wars of Independence, José Joaquín Olmedo, one of the most inspired poets that Spanish America has yet produced. Born in Guayaquil when that city belonged to the Peruvian viceroyalty and educated in the University of San Marcos, he wrote much of his poetry in Peru; but his native city became later part of the Republic of Ecuador, so that Ecuador has now good right to consider him her most illustrious son.

The ode for which he is best remembered, *La victoria de Junín: Canto a Bolívar* (1825; "The Victory at Junín: Song to Bolívar"), commemorates the decisive battle won there by the forces of the liberator Simón Bolívar against the Spanish armies. Neoclassical in form, yet Romantic in inspiration and imagery, the *Canto a Bolívar* is considered by many critics the finest example of heroic poetry written in Spanish America.

Junin's Victory (1825)

Singing to Bolivar

The horrendous thunder, which bursts in thunder
and deaf rumbling dilates
Through the inflamed sphere,
God announces that in heaven he prevails.

And the lightning that Junin breaks and drives away
The Hispanic crowd,
That more fierce than ever threatened
Eternal blood and fire servitude,
And the song of victory
That in thousand echoes runs, deafening
The deep valley and enriscada summit,
Proclaim Bolivar in the land
Referee of peace and war.

The superb pyramids that to heaven
Bold human art raised
To speak to the centuries and nations,
Temples, do slaves hands They
deified their tyrants in pomp,
Ludibrio are of time, who with his
weak wing touches them, and knocks them down,
After easily playing the fleeting wind I
erase its lying inscriptions;
And under the rubble confused
Among the shadows of the eternal forgetfulness
Oh of ambition and misery example!
The priest lies, the god and the temple.

But the sublime mountains, whose front to

the etheric region rises,
who see the storms at their plant
Shine, roar, break, dissipate;
The Andes ... the huge, great
Moles sitting on gold bases,
The earth with its weight balancing, will
never move. They, mocking
Of other people's envy and of the long time
The fury and the power, will be eternal
Of Freedom and Victoria heralds,
That with deep echo
At the last age they would say of the world:
"We saw of Junin the field;
We saw that when unfolding
Of Peru and Colombia's flags,
The legions of the altars are disturbed,
Fierce the fierce Spanish fled,
~~Or asks for surrendered peace.~~
Vencio Bolivar: Peru was free;
And in triumphant pomp Sacred freedom
In the temple of the Sun was placed. "

Who is he who slows down moves
On the hill that dominates Junin
? That the field from there measures, and the site
of combat and defeat desina?
? that the contrary host observes, account,
and in his mind the broken and disordered,
and the bravest to condemn death,
an eagle flow rate is pleased
From the high sky to spot their prey
that between evil safely herd grazes?
who the one that already descends
Soon and warned to the fight?
Prenada in storms surrounds her
tremendous cloud: the brightness of her sword
It is the living reflection of glory;
His voice thunder; His look is lightning.
Who is the one who, when the battle is locked,
Ufano as a victory nuncio,
An impetuous steed fatigued,
It runs incessantly everywhere ? ...
Who, but the son of Colombia and Mars?

Its voice is: "Peruvians,
Look there the hard oppressors
of your homeland. Brave Colombians,
In a hundred crude victorious battles,

Look there the fierce enemies
That looking for you come from Orinoco:
His is the strength, and the courage is yours,
Your will be the glory;
Well, deal with courage and for the country
It is the best omen of victory.
Rushed: that
whoever dares most the triumph has been:
Who does not expect to win, is already defeated. "He

says; and to the point, what fleeting cars
That, given the signal, leave, and in dense
sand and dust whirlwinds roll ,
The axes
burn , the ground trembles , Confused Narrow scares the sky,
And in the midst of the eagerness each one fears
That the others may come forward; so
the orderly squadrons,
That of the iris reflect the colors
Or the image of the sun on its banners,
They advance to the lid. Oh! Who feared,
Who, that his impetute himself lost them!

Such the hero shone
through the first rows running.
His voice is heard, his steel shines
Do more the struggle and the danger grows;
Nothing can resist you ... And it is fame,
oh unheard of wonder!
That the beautiful name of Colombia written
On his forehead around despedia
Rays of light so vivid and effulgent,
That dazzled Spanish faints,
Trembles, loses his voice, movement:
Only for the escape has breath.

Thus, when at night some wicked man
will unload his raised arm,
if he suddenly throws lightning at the sky, he
is stunned, and the stalking tremulous loose;
Deadly ice to his fury happens;
Tremble and horrified back.
There is no more fighting. The enemy
The whole field and victory yields.
He flees like an injured deer; and where he flees there he
finds death. The horses
that were their hope in the fight,
wounded, frightened, through the field

or between the roaming rows, splashing the
ground in blood that their mane drips;
They knock down the rider, run him over,
And the catervas go terrified,
Or in others they terrorize.

The confusion grows, the terror grows,
And to the impulse of the air, that vibrates It
rises in clamor and screams full,
Tremen the summits that the thunder respects.
And running the winner in both
For tops of corpses and wounded,
Postra who flees, forgives the surrendered.

iPadre of the universe, radiant sun,
God of Peru, omnipotent moderator
The ardor of your unrelenting car,
And do not hide your inadequate light! ... One
more hour of light! ... But this hour
It was not that of Destiny. The god heard the
vow of his people, and from the forehead
The siege of diamonds descended.
In a fleeting ray the golden horizon,
In greater disc less light offers,
And fast behind the Andes it darkens.

The night had its mantle,
And the relics of the lost side,
With their sad and stunned leaders,
They run without knowing where they are frightened,
And from their very shadow they shudder;
And finally in the darkness hiding
His affront and dread, disappear.

Victoria for the homeland! Oh God! Victoria!
iTriunfo to Colombia and Bolivar gloria!