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"To Roosevelt"

Rubén Darío

Félix Rubén García Sarmiento (1867-1916) adopted the pseudonym Rubén Darío when he began writing at the age of fourteen. In 1886 he abandoned his native Nicaragua to adopt a life of constant travel throughout Latin America and Europe. His first major collection of writings, *Azul*, was published in 1888 and established Darío as the founder and principal figure of *modernismo* (modernism) in Latin American literature. Cultivated in the relatively stable, cosmopolitan urban climate of the late nineteenth century, the modernists looked to France for literary inspiration, and in doing so radically transformed traditional Spanish verse. In 1898 the Argentine newspaper *La Nación* sent Darío to cover events in Spain in the aftermath of its war with the United States. That war affected the poet deeply. His poem "To Roosevelt" was first published in the Spanish literary journal *Helios* in February 1904.

To Roosevelt

The voice that would reach you, Hunter, must speak
in Biblical tones, or in the poetry of Walt Whitman.
You are primitive and modern, simple and complex;
you are one part George Washington and one part Nimrod.

You are the United States,
future invader of our native America
with its Indian blood, an America
that still prays to Christ and still speaks Spanish.

You are a strong, proud model of your race;
you are cultured and able; you oppose Tolstoy.
You are an Alexander-Nebuchadnezzar,
breaking horses and murdering tigers.
(You are a Professor of Energy,
as the current lunatics say).

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You think that life is a fire,
that progress is an irruption,
that the future is wherever
your bullet strikes.

No.

The United States is grand and powerful.
Whenever it trembles, a profound shudder
runs down the enormous backbone of the Andes.
If it shouts, the sound is like the roar of a lion.
And Hugo said to Grant: "The stars are yours."
(The dawning sun of the Argentine barely shines;
the star of Chile is rising . . .) A wealthy country,
joining the cult of Mammon to the cult of Hercules;
while Liberty, lighting the path
to easy conquest, raises her torch in New York.

But our own America, which has had poets
since the ancient times of Nezahualcóyotl;
which preserved the footprints of great Bacchus,
and learned the Punic alphabet once,
and consulted the stars; which also knew Atlantis
(whose name comes ringing down to us in Plato)
and has lived, since the earliest moments of its life,
in light, in fire, in fragrance, and in love —
the America of Moctezuma and Atahualpa,
the aromatic America of Columbus,
Catholic America, Spanish America,
the America where noble Cuauhtémoc said:
"I am not on a bed of roses"—our America,
trembling with hurricanes, trembling with Love:
O men with Saxon eyes and barbarous souls,
our America lives. And dreams. And loves.
And it is the daughter of the Sun. Be careful.
Long live Spanish America!
A thousand cubs of the Spanish lion are roaming free.
Roosevelt, you must become, by God's own will,
the deadly Rifleman and the dreadful Hunter
before you can clutch us in your iron claws.

And though you have everything, you are lacking one thing:
God!