

## Introduction

OCTAVIO PAZ is a living poet. His towering presence in the world of literature is still felt today, for he unveils the beauty in words that lay bare the inner workings of human nature.

Paz the poet is also an alchemist who synthesises lyricism and sophisticated intellect yet whose words nevertheless remain grounded in everyday life. He may be timeless but his earthly existence could not have had any better backdrop than the troubled twentieth century and, in particular, Mexico, a country riddled with conflicts and contradictions. Those difficult times were, paradoxically, a vital source of energy for his creative process.

Paz was unique. By intellect and instinct, he distrusted utopias of any kind, exposing them, whether political or aesthetic. Always passionate, he might be called “The Last Surrealist”; Surrealism was a reference throughout his whole life:

A tree's grown inwards  
from my temples.  
Veins are its roots  
nerves its branches  
and thoughts its tangle of leaves.  
—from “A tree within” (*Árbol adentro*)

A convinced liberal and democrat, his creativity was forged by his conscience, which became a crucible for his social and aesthetic criticism. He used to say that by living the present, we enjoy our share of eternity. Chronos sets us a trap. Paz unlocks the shackles of the past while untying the knot of an anguished future.

Octavio Paz's poetry is a tribute to life. *The Double Flame*<sup>1</sup> of our existence crackles between the deep blue and the red in all his

---

<sup>1</sup> The title of one of his most representative works.

works. The flame is all life, intensity and heat: eroticism and love, consciousness and integrity.

From very early on, Paz was enticed by the cultures and literary traditions of India, China and Japan, echoes of which permeate his work. In his travels in the East and in his studies, he discovered a new way of seeing poetry and life. In his reach and depth, he continues to be the inspiration for new creative work.

Octavio Paz would have turned one hundred on 31 March this year; we thought that the best way to remember this great poet would be to spark a creative process and invite poets to contribute their own work inspired by him. The result of the overwhelming response is this poetic “conversation” that crosses decades, cultures and oceans.

The link between Paz and Hong Kong—a city both Chinese and cosmopolitan, that beats with an incredibly vital rhythm—is a natural one. This collection of poems by fellow poets from Hong Kong, Asia and beyond is a worthy tribute to a man who knew no borders.

*Germán Muñoz, Tammy Ho Lai-Ming, Juan José Morales*  
*Hong Kong, August 2014*