

2017

An Interview with Caribel Alegría

Salvador Peralta

Gregory Fraser

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/bpr>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#), and the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Peralta, Salvador and Fraser, Gregory (2017) "An Interview with Caribel Alegría," *Birmingham Poetry Review*. Vol. 44, Article 15.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/bpr/vol44/iss2017/15>

This content has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of the UAB Digital Commons, and is provided as a free open access item. All inquiries regarding this item or the UAB Digital Commons should be directed to the [UAB Libraries Office of Scholarly Communication](#).

Salvador Peralta and Gregory Fraser

An Interview with Claribel Alegría

FRASER:

Just to start things off, are you working on anything new?

ALEGRÍA:

Well, I have to confess something, and it's not public yet. Yes, I am writing a long poem, and I've been working on it for about ten months. I think—I *think*, but don't know—that it is finished, but I am going to let it rest for about six or seven months, and then I will read it again and see what happens. It's over thirty pages, and mostly I don't believe in long poems. But I was sort of pushed to do it—I don't know by what person or what force—but the name of it is *Amor sin Fin* [*Love without End*].

PERALTA:

How did the poem come about? You say it just thrust itself upon you?

ALEGRÍA:

I don't know what happened to me, but it was like a voice dictating to me. I am not involved, only an instrument. And so I am working on that. I am just giving it the last touches, and then I am going to put it to sleep for about six months. Then if I like it, I'll give it to my translator.

FRASER:

Does your daughter still translate your poetry?

ALEGRÍA:

No, not anymore. Now I work with Daisy Zamora. She is a very good Nicaraguan poet—very, very good. She read the poem and loved it. She and her husband, the poet George Evans, plan to help me with publication. They are good friends of mine, and do a wonderful job, but I don't know what will happen with the book, because probably I will be dead by then [chuckles] ... I don't know.

FRASER:

So you imagine the poem being a book unto itself ...

ALEGRÍA:

Yes, yes. But it is going to be a very thin book. Because it's going to be about thirty or forty pages, almost a ... how do you call that? ... a chapbook. And I don't know why, but I have the feeling that this is my last work. I have that feeling. Maybe it's because I don't have any more to say ... who knows? Or maybe another poem or two will come. I don't know—nobody can tell. [chuckles]

FRASER:

That's right, and you've been working on it for ten months, you said?

ALEGRÍA:

Yes, for ten months. And now it's very long. I'm used to short poems, you know. But this poem is like all my work combined together.

FRASER:

Are the lines characteristically short? Your poems tend to move in little clips of language.

ALEGRÍA:

Yes, they are short. Also, I believe the music is very important. But we'll see what happens. Meanwhile, as I said, in a week or two I will put the poem aside and that's it. I feel empty, but also I feel that things are coming to me, and that I am thirsty to receive them. I've been open to receiving lately.

PERALTA:

So before this project, ten months ago, you were writing, but they were shorter poems?

ALEGRÍA:

That's right, almost all my poems are short. I have some long ones, yes, but almost all are short.

FRASER:

Do you have any shorter poems that are not published?

ALEGRÍA:

No, I don't have anything.

FRASER:

You have nothing that isn't published?

ALEGRÍA:

No. The reason I don't have any is because if I don't like it, I destroy it. I destroy poems every year. I burn them!

FRASER:

Really?

ALEGRÍA:

When we were living in Mallorca, we had a house in the Deya that had a chimney. My husband would say, “Claribel, are you sure?” I would say, “Yes, I am sure.” On the last day of every year, December 31st, I would gather up the poems, and throw them in the flames [laughter].

FRASER:

Oh, my gosh! Well, that’s a good way. You just clear yourself and start the new year fresh.

ALEGRÍA:

That’s right. I don’t have anything. Only that one long poem.

PERALTA:

In another interview, you have said that you work on something until you feel that it’s complete. You keep working, and you keep working. How do you know when a poem is ready—where you feel comfortable with it, or feel willing to share it?

ALEGRÍA:

It’s very difficult. With this long poem, it’s going to be very, very difficult, because I still don’t know. It’s something like an interior feeling. Don’t you agree? I was telling my son the other day, “You know, the poem probably could’ve been better, much better, but this is the most I can give.” At the moment, though, I feel satisfied. What else can I do? If this poem is mediocre, it’s because I am mediocre [chuckles].

PERALTA:

So are you going to put it down for six months, wait for December 31st, and if you don’t like it, are you going to burn it?

ALEGRÍA:

Right! [chuckles]

FRASER:

Don't do that!

PERALTA:

We'll rescue it if you do. [laughter] It's so very interesting—this sort of cathartic process, but at the same time this cleansing ritual. I guess that you have a way of going through your poetry and saying, "This is good, and this is not."

ALEGRÍA:

But, I am so grateful for poetry (don't you feel the same way?). Poetry sustains us. When my husband died ... you know we were very united. When he died, I thought I would never write again. I took a trip by myself to Asia, where I didn't want to know anyone and no one knew me. I even thought of suicide. I thought I would never write again. And then poetry came. That's where the book *Saudade* came from. It's dedicated to my husband.

PERALTA:

Was there a particular feeling that kept you going through the process of mourning? Or did poetry help you approach the process of mourning?

ALEGRÍA:

I don't know but, it was amazing. I was suddenly writing a lot, and that book was written in a short time. I can be very lazy, but this one came in a short time. A poem came to me, a poem that says, *No puede conmigo la tristeza, la arrastro*

hacia la vida y se evapora. Loneliness is no match for me. I drag it into life.

PERALTA:

A minute ago you said that you think this new poem is the last thing you have to say?

ALEGRÍA:

Right now is different. I feel like an empty cup, but now I am very happy because I am ready to receive.

FRASER:

Yes, you look happy. It makes me wonder if, here toward the end of your career, you might have some advice for younger poets around the world, or something to tell the poetry community. You are a major international figure, and people want to hear what Claribel Alegría has to say.

ALEGRÍA:

I thank you. Thank you for what you tell me, but I say, poetry to me is something sacred. If you want to be a poet, it's very difficult. You have to listen to that voice, follow that voice. Never put poetry to the service of anything. No! We are at the service of poetry, and you have to read a lot to feed off of other poets. You have to get fed by other poets, to write all the time, even if it's one line a day. You have to be disciplined and humble. You should read your poem when you think it's fine, then read something else by a great poet that you admire, and then see the difference. Sometimes that is so sad [chuckles].

FRASER:

I do that all the time ...

ALEGRÍA:

I do, too. I do, too. Humility helps you, and reading helps you, and discipline helps you. Saying, “I don’t like these politics,” and saying, “I am going to put it in poetry,” I think that’s wrong. Because then you don’t write poems, you write a pamphlet. I don’t have anything against pamphlets—they’re very good. But we can’t put poetry there. Sometimes, your poetry reflects your way of thinking, but you are not putting your poetry in the service of something else.

PERALTA:

So you don’t want your poetry to become a tool, but to be a conduit for the ideas that emanate from ... wherever they come from ...

ALEGRÍA:

Before we are poets we are human beings, and we do have compromises as human beings. You get horrified at the injustices, at the violence, at all of the terrible things happening in all of the world. And that is reflected in your poetry, because it has touched you very deeply. But you are not putting your poetry in the service of politics.

FRASER:

Who are the poets you turn to as a measure of quality for yourself?

ALEGRÍA:

In Spanish and in English, or just in Spanish?

FRASER:

Both.

ALEGRÍA:

In Spanish, César Vallejo. I love César Vallejo. When I read his poems, I feel so sad. [laughter] In English, you know who I love, and have translated? Emily Dickinson.

FRASER:

You translated Dickinson?

ALEGRÍA:

I translated Dickinson. It came out in the *Nuevo Diario* a long time ago, in the beginning of the 1980s. I love her very much. Ezra Pound, I love. I also like very much some of the poetry of T. S. Eliot. I am doing lots of rereading now, and I like it. I am now rereading a book by Eliot about poetry. I think it's fantastic. And I think some of his poetry—*The Waste Land*, for instance—is so wonderful. But usually when I write a poem, or read a poem, I go to a Spanish writer first. Out of the Spanish poets, I love Antonio Machado. Juan Ramón Jiménez was my mentor, and I loved him, but Antonio Machado—I feel him more.

PERALTA:

Is there something in particular about Machado's work, and about Vallejo's work, and about Eliot's work—a thread that runs through them—that inspires or excites you?

ALEGRÍA:

Yes, yes there is! It is what you call *amalgama*, the synthesis of everyday life with philosophy. But it's not abstract philosophy. It's like—I don't know—everyday philosophy with everyday scenes. It's so real, so ours, and yet that scene elevated. These poets always stay with us. They always stay with the human beings that we are.

PERALTA:

Would you say that they have their feet firmly on the ground, but at the same time they aspire to touch on something far beyond?

ALEGRÍA:

That's right. Without lifting their feet off the ground, they fly. And they give us other scenes, so many beautiful philosophical scenes. I like that, a lot.

PERALTA:

I can clearly see that in your own work.

ALEGRÍA:

You do?

PERALTA:

Absolutely.

ALEGRÍA:

How wonderful.

PERALTA:

In fact, at the very end of *Halting Steps*, there's a poem called "Testament," which you dedicate to your children, and you talk about a ladder that is unfinished, that is broken, cracked, and creaking. And you want the children to repair it, to build it, to climb it toward the light. That's precisely the kind of "firmly on the ground" scene. I can even see my own children climbing that creaky ladder. But at the same time, that turn at the end—toward the light—gets me

thinking philosophically, about what that might possibly mean to them, to me, about so-called “higher” things.

ALEGRÍA:

How wonderful! [chuckles] Well, if you don’t mind, I’ll tell you the story of “Testament.” I was pacing up and down, because the doctor always wants me to walk about fifteen minutes in the morning. And I was walking, you know, and all of a sudden, I said, “What am I going to give my children? My poetry.” I said, “I am going to give them my life. This is what I am going to do.” And then I saw in my sill my life like a ladder, and then I wrote that poem, and then I went and I wrote the poem, and I said, “this is it, this is my life with the broken rungs, one or the other was all right, another one was impossible, this is my life and this is my poetry.” So I went and I wrote the poem. But listen to this that I think is miraculous.

The next day I received an email from my grandson, who is a painter, and he said, “Lala,” (they call me “Lala,” the grandchildren) “yesterday I started painting and suddenly in my mind was a scene of an escalator.” Can you imagine? So we both were thinking of the same thing, and he put it in painting and I in poetry. I think it’s miraculous.

FRASER:

Is that his painting on the cover of *Halting Steps*?

ALEGRÍA:

Yes, it is. So we both were thinking the same thing. He put it in a painting, and I put it in poetry.

PERALTA:

That poem was specifically written to your children, but at the same time do you have something to say to anyone inter-

ested in your poetry? In other worlds, do you have a testament for us?

ALEGRÍA:

What is my testament? I tell you, you have to love poetry. You have to be possessed by poetry. And you have to be humble, and you have to read a lot, and go to the classics. Don't forget the classics. It's wonderful to read what we have now, fantastic, but don't forget the classics. They have all the riches in the world, and they help us a lot. That, and be ready to be humiliated. And to humiliate yourself.

PERALTA:

Be ready to be sad?

ALEGRÍA:

[Laughter] To read a lot, to be disciplined, to write even one line.

FRASER:

You mention the value of the classics, and you also suggest that it's important to read contemporary poets—to have a mixture of readings and constant absorption. This teaching was passed down to me, as well, from my mentors. You worked with Juan Ramón Jiménez, one of the great poets of the world, and I studied with Adam Zagajewski. He said the same thing: read the classics and the contemporaries. Zagajewski won the Neustadt Prize, as did you. I think you won in 2004, and he won in 2006. This is a huge honor—often called “The American Nobel.” The prize is given out every other year, and I think thirty writers have won it since 1976. Out of those thirty writers, only four have been women.

ALEGRÍA:

Machismo! [laughter]

FRASER:

Yes. And two of those women were prose writers, which means that there were two female poets awarded this important prize, this grand international recognition. One was Elizabeth Bishop, and the other was you.

ALEGRÍA:

I like Elizabeth Bishop very much. But, yes, isn't that amazing? It's getting a little bit better, but not much. You know, I'll never forget, about five or six years ago there was an editor—he still lives, he's very intelligent, very good. And I said, if two books of poetry come to you, and you can only publish one, because you don't have the means to publish two, and the two of them are equally good, which one would you publish—the woman or the man? And he said, the man, because it sells more. It's sad.

PERALTA:

So some editors have forgotten what you said earlier. That poetry is not a tool.

FRASER:

We know, of course, that there are women poets of equal talents, equal force, but often we're not exposed to them as much. So who would you suggest we should be reading more among the women poets, especially in Latin America? You are one of the greatest poets in the world, man or woman. But we don't have enough representation of women. So being a female poet, your voice about poetry written by women is very important.

ALEGRÍA:

You want me to name women that I like right now?

FRASER:

Yes, please.

ALEGRÍA:

Well, she died already, but in Mexico, there was a poet called Rosario Castellanos. She was very good. I love Marianne Moore, and Adrienne Rich, but they have already died, too. I mentioned Daisy Zamora—she is very good. And Carolyn Forché. I translated one of her books, *Gathering the Tribes*, the one that won the Yale.

FRASER:

Clearly, there's going to be a great flourishing of poetry by woman in the next decades, the numbers are going to even out eventually, and your work has made that possible in many, many ways. That's a testament, a legacy, certainly, that you and your family can be proud of.

PERALTA:

We've talked a lot about poetry, and you also spoke of politics. But we're curious how you see those two interacting, because you are a committed activist as well as a poet.

ALEGRÍA:

As you know, I was born here in Nicaragua. My father was Nicaraguan, and my mother was Salvadorian. Back then, the country was occupied by North Americans, and my father was against it. My father was a medical doctor, and because he was against the occupation, they threatened to kill him.

The Marines. My mother was very afraid. She was Salvadorian, so she said, “I don’t know what you’re going to do, but the child and I are going to live in El Salvador, with my family, because I am so scared here.” I was nine months old. And my father understood, so we went to live in El Salvador, in Santa Ana.

My father was so Nicaraguan. During my childhood, he was always talking about Nicaragua, so I would hear about it often. But I grew up in El Salvador, and for a while it was not a place of suffering. It was a place of childhood. My grandparents loved me, and I had lots of uncles and aunts there. But then, when I was seven years old, when this terrible thing happened: “La Matanza”—the genocide of indigenous people in El Salvador—in 1932. That was awful, and you know, children are not stupid. I listened to all the conversations of my parents and their friends. And then the National Guard was in front of my house. My brother and I slept in the front room, and from our window, we saw terrible scenes. I have said that many times, so maybe I should no more.

FRASER:

No, say it again, it’s important.

ALEGRÍA:

Well, the guards would take the peasants with their hands tied behind their backs, and the Colonel would slap them. And then my father, who was very courageous, would yell at the Colonel, “Don’t! This is cowardly—to do this to a man who can’t defend himself.” And so my brother, who was six years old, and I, who was seven and a half, would say, “Ahh, my dad is going to die, my dad is going to die!”

And then my Nana, who was an Indian from Izalco, would tell me, “Did you hear the shots this morning?” and I’d say, “Yes.” And she would say, “Remember those men that you saw yesterday? They were killed, they were shot.” All of this impressed me, impressed me so terribly. And when I heard

people in my family talking about defending the regime of the president, I was so furious. I guess then I started to be political. That's when it started, in that way. It marked me so much. But then I gave up. I thought that nothing was ever going to change, that the United States protects the regimes in power, no matter how awful. They protected Martínez, Somoza, Carias, Ubico. All of them worked together. So I thought I cannot do anything, and I tried to push that away from me. Until I started writing my poetry, writing about my mother, and all of that difficulty.

Later came the Cuban Revolution, which touched me, because I thought, if the Cubans have done it, we can do it, too. Why not? I was living in Paris, and Carlos Fuente was living there, too. I was talking about revolution all the time, all the time, and Carlos said to me, "Claribel, you have to write a book, saying all of this." I knew that I could not write poetry in that service. But my husband, who was a journalist, said, "Let's write it together." So he and I wrote *Cenizas de Izalco* together. And from then on, I started to see my people. I started loving more of my people, knowing that I had to do something for them—write testimonies, write books. I was obsessed with my country, with Latin America. I know all of this reflects in my poetry, but I didn't put poetry to that service.

PERALTA:

I understand.

ALEGRÍA:

Because anything that flowers reflects in my poetry. This conversation will probably reflect in my poetry.

PERALTA:

We hope so very much. [laughter]

ALEGRÍA:

You see, I never want to use my poetry. If my poetry wants to use me, and reflect all of those things, then fine. But I don't consider them political. Maybe they are, maybe they are. I don't know. But that history is what woke me up. Before that, I was very egocentric.

FRASER:

I think that one of the signs of a poet with great depth and reach is that she can combine love of people and love of justice. The work doesn't necessarily have to point toward actual political events, or horror, or trauma, even though it may sometimes. But there's always that sense that we are human together, and that poetry is a necessary part of the human experience.

ALEGRÍA:

That is wonderful what you say. Poetry is a necessary part of the human experience. That's right. Now, would anyone like another glass of rum?

PERALTA AND FRASER:

Yes, sure, we're not driving, so ... [crystal bell rings calling housekeeper to bring more rum]

PERALTA:

In some of your poetry, you suggest that you haven't been able to speak for your people to the extent that you would like to. And that you have somehow failed them, or not lived up to their pain, not reflected their pain enough. Do you still feel that way?

ALEGRÍA:

I feel guilty sometimes, I do. My husband, who was a North American, helped me a lot. He said, “Let’s write books of testimonies. Because this is the story of the people.” We wrote several books together. But you’re right, I have felt guilty. I don’t feel so guilty anymore, though. I could not have done much more than what I have done, and I have tried. Especially in my prose work.

PERALTA:

Would you say that the prose you have written more directly captures that pain?

ALEGRÍA:

That’s right. When we heard that Somoza had fled Nicaragua, and the whole country was celebrating, it was my husband’s idea to go. We were living in Mallorca, and he said, “You’re always talking about how awful Somoza is, how terrible Nicaragua is now, with what is happening to the people.” He said, “I suggest that you and I go, and spend six months there. We’ll rent a house, talk to people, and then come back here to write the book.” I am so happy he said that.

It’s a book that is historic. It has not been published in English yet, but it’s historic—and testimonial. It starts with William Walker, and goes up to the day of liberation, to the 19th of July, 1979. We travelled Nicaragua by bus, by car, by train, by plane, by everything. We interviewed students, we interviewed *Comandantes*, we interviewed scholars, we interviewed people from the streets. That mix, I think, helped. My husband wrote a beautiful prologue, saying that Nicaragua now had to write a new future for itself.

FRASER:

When was that published in Spanish?

ALEGRÍA:

In Spanish, it was published 1982. It was published in Mexico by Editorial Era. Then it was published here in Nicaragua.

PERALTA:

From my perspective, it is the definitive work of what happened, of how the process of the resistance, the revolution, unfolded in Nicaragua, the perspective of those who lived through it.

ALEGRÍA:

Now my son, Erik Flakoll—he lives in Boston, but he comes here—he has a new project to interview some of the people here, and some of the photographers, to document the last fifty years of Nicaraguan history. He wants to put it all over Nicaragua, in order to give the children a better sense of the past. Because a lot of the young people here don't know anything about the revolution. He wants to give them a better idea of what, when they go to vote, what they are voting for. Don't you think that's a beautiful project?

PERALTA:

I'm going to have to look it up.

FRASER:

You have mentioned that your political consciousness, your absorption of the political surround, forms only a part of your existence as a poet. You are not serving a particular political agenda as a poet, you say, that politics is simply embedded in who you are, and that political material comes out naturally, when it must, on the page.

I think the same is true in your work when it comes to love. Throughout your poetry, I get the sense that your feel-

ings of love—for your husband, your children, for the people of Latin America—is so powerful that it cannot be described in full, that it lies beyond language. And this seems to be a kind of paradox for the poet—to try to put into words something that lies beyond words.

ALEGRÍA:

That is very difficult, yes. Usually the first line comes to me. And that first line dictates more and more to me. As I said before, I feel that I am an instrument.

FRASER:

So, you're infused with love, and then ... what I admire about your poetry is that you always weave in tensions, too. There are a lot of marital poems, where there is clearly some kind of difficulty in the relationship, but somehow the love for one another transcends that difficulty. It seems like that first line comes to you, and then you work through the piece and capture the complexity of that bond. You have a great gift for that.

ALEGRÍA:

We think alike. But the inspiration goes if you don't work. Many lines have come to me in my dreams.

PERALTA:

How do you capture a dream?

ALEGRÍA:

Well, you know, I dream and then I wake up, and I say, "This line, this is a line of poetry," and I write it down. I have a little pad on my night table, and I write it down. And sometimes it stays there, and sometimes I put it in my workbook, where I put down scenes like today, scenes that will stay with

me. Or I write down scenes or passages that I read in another book, or that come to me in dreams.

PERALTA:

You call it “semillero”—it’s a seed garden.

FRASER:

A seed garden, that’s exactly right. But what I wanted to say is that I think you’re a tremendous love poet, and a tremendous poet of social consciousness, social justice. But even more, I think your greatest gift is how you blend those two—how you blend the struggle of human coexistence, at the larger social level, with the beauty and the struggle of human coexistence at the microcosmic level of spousal love or the love of the mother for her children. It’s a great achievement.

And I think, too—and this may make you feel a little uncomfortable, and I don’t mean it to—but I think there’s a great love of the self in your writing, as well. I think of that poem about the mirror, “The Intruder,” where the speaker looks in the mirror and doesn’t know the face of the woman she sees. It’s beautiful. And then she threatens to turn the mirror around in the end. But there’s this great question of the love of the self, this sense that the poet or the person has a duty to love the self, too.

ALEGRÍA:

It is true, it is true. You know, I have an obsession with mirrors. And in this new poem, the long one that I told you about, I talk about my obsession with mirrors, my obsession with words, my obsession with mythology. I am not Claribel. I am Penelope and I am Persephone, you know all of that. But I do have that self love, also. I feel that. Probably I am narcissistic.

FRASER:

You have to be able to love the self in order to love other people, I think.

ALEGRÍA:

I think so, too.

FRASER:

And I think you have a great love of the self that is proper and right and necessary. You don't shy away from that in your poems. It's there. And all of those other loves are there, too. It's part of what makes your poetry so powerful.

ALEGRÍA:

All the loves are there. In this long poem, something opens up, and I am in a land that is unknown to me, and I jump out of time. But time stops to ask me, "What are you doing?" And I say, "I am looking for something." Then off I go.

It's a long journey, but at the end I come back to that first scene. It is my childhood home—that is what I left—my beloved home. I was walking in a straight line, and then I came back to that scene. We'll see what happens.

FRASER:

Whatever you do, don't put it in the fireplace! [laughter]

PERALTA:

Leave it for the mirror! [laughter]

PERALTA:

I want to tell you a quick story. When my daughter was about

twelve months old, I used to put her in front of a mirror, and she wouldn't recognize herself. Because children don't recognize themselves until a certain point. At one point, though, I put her in front of a mirror, and she reached out her arms toward the mirror. And then pointed and touched the glass, and it was like some spark happened.

When I read your poetry, that is the same feeling, the same spark, I get when you talk about mirrors and reflections. It's that child finding its self for the first time. It's just a whole new world. And so I wanted to say that, and I just wanted to ask you what you think accounts for your whimsical and beautiful curiosity with reflections in all different forms. I guess maybe the question is: How do you reflect that into your work, how do you reflect yourself, how do you reflect everything?

You know, you're like a prism. Light comes through you, and you don't stop it. You move it, you channel it, you color it, you texture it. And that's what your writing feels like to me. Anyway, I wanted you to talk a little bit about that concept of the reflections, of the mirrors. What does that mean to you?

ALEGRÍA:

Well, first I am going to refer to something we spoke about earlier. We were saying that you have to love yourself in order to love others. I do have a little poem, it was dedicated to Juan Gelman. At the time I wrote that poem, I loved Juan Gelman as a poet. Gelman was terribly worried, terribly wounded, because his son and daughter-in-law, who was pregnant, were taken away by the police in Argentina. Then his son disappeared, the daughter-in-law gave birth, and the authorities killed her. And some of the guards took the child. It was awful. And so he cried sometimes, because he was very close to us. So I wrote a little poem that said *porque aprendí a quererme, puedo sangrar por tus venas ...* "Because I learned to love myself, I can bleed through your veins." The poem is called "Querencias."

PERALTA:

And that's a mirror ...

FRASER:

It's so interesting, because you can define the poet that way, on some level. A poem is not necessarily dedicated to just one other person. It's dedicated to everybody on the planet. "Because I loved myself, I could love you." In this way, you could give your poems to everyone. That is the resonance of a piece like that.

ALEGRÍA:

Exactly. In my book *Voices*, it is certainly that. Right now, though, I am much more akin to nature. And I feel like a frog, like the voice of a frog. And I feel like a little river, and I feel like a dragonfly. All of that, I am feeling now. At the end of my life, much more I tend to all the universe, all the universe. I am part of the universe.

FRASER:

Is there anything that we missed? Is there anything else that you want to say?

ALEGRÍA:

I have had a wonderful time with you.

PERALTA:

We have, too. It's just been fabulous.

ALEGRÍA:

If you want my son for anything—because I am 91 now—he

is wonderful, and he will help you with anything.

PERALTA:

I must say that you really do not sound like someone who is 91. I am 44 now, and I hope that I sound and look as good as you do when I am 50! [laughter]

ALEGRÍA:

I am at the end of my life, but today has been different. When you first contacted me, I said to myself, "Do I answer them, or do I tell them no?" Right now, I don't want to write any more prologues. I don't want to make any presentations. I don't want to write articles. And I don't want to do any more interviews. But this has been wonderful. And you know, something told me, "Tell them yes."

PERALTA:

Your answer felt like it came from a dream.

FRASER:

We are honored.

ALEGRÍA:

Que lindo rato! I had a wonderful time! Let's not lose touch. Cheers! [glasses clink and laughter]