

Venezuelan Poetry: 1921-2001

Edited and translated by Guillermo Parra

Includes translations by Anne Boyer and Cedar Sigo & Sara Bilandzija

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Portable Country

Guillermo Parra

The first Venezuelan-American artist I ever noticed was Devendra Banhart. His acoustic albums, *Rejoicing in the Hands* and *Niño Rojo*, were a minor revelation for me when I first heard them in December of 2004. It was during a visit to my family's house in Florida, and I sat in my old room playing these records repeatedly for days, feeling a sense of immediate recognition. Those infinite riches I looped in a little room for two weeks would eventually have a big influence on my own work. In the fall of 2003, I had started the blog *Venepoetics* with the idea of translating and writing about a handful of Venezuelan poets. *Venepoetics* would turn out to be the beginnings of an anthology called *Venezuelan Poetry: 1921-2001*. These English translations of twenty Venezuelan poets are my version of Venezuelan-American folk culture, hybrid and lo-fi.

Venezuelan Poetry: 1921-2001 includes a handful of texts each by poets whose work is emblematic of 20th century Venezuelan literature. It goes without saying that my selection is incomplete and highly personal. I intend for it to serve as an introductory sample of poetry from a country that remains unknown on literature's global stage. My choices are dependent on personal taste, as well as what I've been able to find during visits to Caracas between 2001 and 2010. Books from Venezuela rarely circulate abroad so this makes the task of researching Venezuelan poetry a matter of ingenuity, PDF files, photocopies, university libraries and contacts with Venezuelan writers via e-mail, blogs, Facebook and Twitter.

I have chosen two particular years as reference points for the anthology as a convenient frame for the 20th century. In 1921, the poet whose work inaugurates modern Venezuelan literature, José Antonio Ramos Sucre, published his first book, *Trizas de papel* [Paper Shreds], a collection of prose poems, essays and miniature short stories that was later incorporated into a subsequent book. During his lifetime, Ramos Sucre was acknowledged as a brilliant and admired poet whose work appeared regularly in Caracas newspapers and literary magazines. However, his radical reinterpretation of what poetry might accomplish was not fully understood in Venezuela until decades after his death. It was only in the sixties, when his work was championed by younger poets and critics aligned with the counterculture and the avant-garde, that his reputation as a foundational figure for Venezuelan literature was established.

In the spring of 2001, Juan Sánchez Peláez published a handful of new poems in *Verbigracia*, the now-defunct literary supplement of the newspaper *El Universal*. These would turn out to be his last published work during his lifetime. Sánchez Peláez's first book, *Elena y los elementos* [Helen and the Elements], was a turning point in Venezuelan poetry when it appeared in 1951, serving as a guide for several generations of avant-garde writers with its ecstatic, surrealist poems imbued with an oneiric sensuality. Over several decades, Sánchez Peláez would go on to pare

down his work, adopting a more austere and minimalist style that is exemplified by his elegant final poems. I interpret his death as representing the end of Venezuela's 20th century in poetry. I first read Sánchez Peláez in Providence, RI in 1997 and everything after that encounter was utterly changed for me as a poet and reader. His work almost immediately pulled me into its dark orbit. It was Sánchez Peláez who led me to Ramos Sucre a decade later when I was researching Venezuelan literature in Caracas.

I'd like to briefly address the topic of Venezuelan invisibility for the reader to consider. While Latin American countries such as Argentina, Colombia, Mexico and Peru have produced writers whose work has been translated into English, with many of them becoming global classics, Venezuelan literature is terra incognita. When one mentions Venezuelan literature in the English-speaking world the immediate reaction is silence, as there are no reference points to guide readers. Even the ongoing political conflict in Venezuela that has made international headlines in recent years has not been enough to break that silence around Venezuelan literature. This is partly a problem of translation and research, as well as a result of the unequal circulation of culture in an age of empire. But the invisibility of Venezuelan literature has yet to be theorized and it remains an enigma. I'm fascinated and disturbed by this invisibility, so I translate.

In 1968, the poet and novelist Adriano González León (1931-2008), a member of the avant-garde writers and artists collective El Techo de la Ballena, published the novel *País portátil* [Portable Country]. González León's book evokes the contrast between 19th century rural Venezuela and the sprawling Caracas of the late 20th century. Its protagonist is a Marxist guerrilla who carries a suitcase across Caracas on a dangerous secret mission. The book's title is based on the notion of Venezuela as a compact, transferable entity, a country that after the arrival of petroleum in the 20th century shifted the national discourse away from its agrarian foundations toward a postmodern, fractured identity. Although *País portátil* was awarded the prestigious Seix Barral Biblioteca Breve Prize in Spain, González León's work never circulated much beyond Latin America. The invisibility of Venezuelan literature is a problem that will have to be deciphered by those of us who care about the country's contributions to that amorphous entity known as World Literature. With that in mind, I present *Venezuelan Poetry: 1921-2001* as a portable country, a prelude to a much longer, more inclusive book. I think of these translations as a form of Venezuelan-American field recordings, DIY and outside the academy.

For readers interested in other translations of Venezuelan poetry, I recommend several titles: Juan Calzadilla, *Journal with No Subject*, translated by Katherine M. Hedeon & Víctor Rodríguez Núñez (Salt Publishing, 2009); Eugenio Montejo, *The Trees: Selected Poems 1967-2004*, translated by Peter Boyle (Salt Publishing, 2004); *5 Poems by Jose Ramos Sucre*, translated by Cedar Sigo & Sara Bilandzija (Blue Press Books, 2008); my own translations of José Antonio Ramos Sucre, *From the Livid Country* (Auguste Press, 2012) and *Selected Works* (University of New Orleans Press,

2012); Ana Enriqueta Terán, *The Poetess Counts to 100 and Bows Out: Selected Poems*, translated by Marcel Smith (Princeton University Press, 2002).

I include three wonderful translations by my friends Anne Boyer and Cedar Sigo & Sara Bilandzija. Sigo and Bilandzija deserve credit for being the first translators of Ramos Sucre into English, with their 2008 chapbook listed above. Most of my own translations emerged from my experiences among the community of poets I was blessed to be a part of in Durham, North Carolina between 2006 and 2012. Among these comrades, Joseph Donahue and Dianne Timblin have been particularly helpful with their commentary on my translations. My wife, the Venezuelan fiction writer and scholar Dayana Fraile, has offered invaluable editorial suggestions. Finally, I'm grateful to Adam Clay, Matthew Henriksen and Tony Tost for their interest in this project and their support at *Typo* and *Fascicle*.

Pittsburgh
Spring 2013

José Antonio Ramos Sucre

Prelude

I would like to stay between the empty dark, cruelty on earth hurts my senses, life an affliction. Flailing love has turned my insides bitter, memories long deserted rise again, pounding my shores. Howling wolves at night crowd the snowy desert.

Movement, tiresome sign of reality, respects my fantastic asylum. I will have scaled it arm & arm with death. Death is a pale Beatrice, floating high above the flood of the moon. She will visit the sea of my grief, beneath her spell I will rest eternally, no longer lament beauty nor impossible love.

Translated by Cedar Sigo & Sara Bilandzija

The Fugitive

I was sprinting forward with throbbing feet, emptiness ahead. Hail the rain upon black ground. I was hoping to take shelter in a forest of birch trees, thrashed from the storm. I hid awhile in the hole of an upturned tree. Roots arranged in a crown of defense against the brown bear. I sent away the bats with my bloody fists & screams. I was stunned by a blow to the head. Hallucination turned to nightmare in my hiding place. The only escape I knew was further on.

I crossed mud covered in huge reeds, entering a second desert. I held off on starting a fire for fear of being caught. I slept buried in the cold. I could barely make out the shape of the messengers, bringing word from higher up. They followed me on horseback with their black dogs, fire in their eyes & rabid barking. The riders boasted a squirrel's tail.

I divined upon crossing the borders the light of my asylum & ran to crouch at the feet of God. The icon listens with eyes down & smiles sweetly.

Translated by Cedar Sigo & Sara Bilandzija

Valdemar's Daughter

The pines appear humble at the foot of the palace that was raised with the

exaltation of birds of prey by arrogant men. Its hulk conceals for some time the ascent of the moon after it has evaded the ridge of the mountain. Its imposing fabrication depresses the bold project of the Norseman, who merely approaches in peace. It is in accord with the rugged place where the torrent falls from the silent peak, frequented by eagles, and where the mystery of the neighboring jungle reigns. It receives from the mournful past a tremendous majesty that the prattling elves disturb with the night's favor.

The concealed flower in a grove is not consumed with more misfortune than the nobleman's daughter in the modesty of the tower, very close to the restless clouds in the flight of the glacial winds. She delays amid the tempest with the daring of the bird in the vertex of a mast. She alleviates herself from the frozen clime, from the desert landscape, from the dark green tree with the spectacle of the snow. She then recalls the white and cold marble that guards the remains of her mother, at whose side she yearns to rest.

She barely enjoys the company of the familiar deer, whose branched head discourages the tender gala of the mountains and prefers the mirror of motionless lakes. She has him under her feet when she rouses the deep and tremulous anguish of the harp.

She sings the amorous winter lament that attains funereal nuptials with the earth; the wandering of the seafarers on the unpopulated sea; the threat of the deformed fish and the mass of the ice floe; the shipwrecked man's fainting in the immense night; the white and fierce moon, a nuncio of death.

She escapes captivity by means of the mystical strength of the exalted and solitary song. She cultivates the divine attribute in the manner of the pious exercise that consumes life and hurries time. She awaits the final hour with a melodious hymn for deserving in such a manner the place that the country's faith augurs amid the winged and errant souls. Fortunate hope, liberal rescue from hard confinement: once free and with the new form, she will follow the birds on the journey to the festive and musical South.

Myth

The king knows about the mutinies and disturbances provoked by the discontents throughout the capital. At each step he receives a messenger of gloomy semblance. He strikes up a startled dialogue regarding an ambiguous piece of news.

The sovereign imagines the devastation of a fertile zone and the extermination of its farmers. A wild tribe has taken advantage of the kingdom's confusion and has invaded it in carts armed with sickles. Some shameless witches, counselors to the savage *caudillos*, vociferate their prophecies amid the black residue of the bonfires. Through the heated air a red sun, of a warm country, is distinguished.

The men of the wild tribe transport some leather tents on the backs of their disfigured dogs, avid for blood, and establish themselves with their women, throughout and comfortably, in caverns practiced in the ground. They reserve the tents for their chiefs.

The king consults in vain the remedy of the state with the old captains, of pontifical beard and brief elocution.

The prince, his son, ensues to interrupt the council, where a grievous silence reigns. He invents the healthy means and recommends them in an easy discourse. He possesses the virtual idea and the redemptive verb. He has just left the company of the bewildered.

The veterans withdraw ceremonious and hopeful and bind themselves to his orders. The young man's presence suppresses the fluctuations of victory and neutralizes the rebels' stratagem.

The hero has faced the danger with the assistance of an enthused throng.

The day of his return, the beautiful women intone, from the terraces of the capitol palaces, a hymn of secular antiquity in praise of the rainbow.

The Swan's Daughter

Goethe greeted the presence of Marie Antoinette in Frankfurt am Main, a pause on the road from Vienna to Paris, with the only French verses from his pen.

I step off the paddle steamer and visit the Benedictine abbey on a peaceful shore of the Danube. An affable young man referred to me the origin of the building, facing a solitary chapel. The monks had built it at the edge of the ancient civilization, undamaged from the vestige of Caesar.

The monks erected the abbey, expiatory monument, with the goal of eliminating the outcome of a profane affection from the memory of men and they chose the same spot where a pair of proud lovers threw themselves to their deaths in the current.

The monks facilitated the rescue of Vienna, besieged by the Muslim. They went to the encounter with Sobieski, the hero of the primitive quiver and the Homeric shield, and guided him to where the chieftain of the infidels, assured of his victory, was freely conversing with his sons over a Bokara tapestry.

The young man described for me with sadness the monks' neglect of the reverend house, on a bitter day. The victors of a war were leveling the retinue and the village with the straw on the ground and they were scattering the enraged voice of their mechanisms of death in the desolate field.

The young man assigned the origin of the hecatomb to Marie Antoinette's wedding and celebrated her whiteness in fervent terms, wherein shone a chimerical love for the martyred queen. The last director of the pious establishment divined the consequences of the nuptial journey and abstained from glancing at the retinue. The ascetic had locked himself in a place unscathed by the rumors of the sensible world.

The young man finished the lively apology of his heroine by citing the epithalamium of Goethe, the thinker who was a captive to the marmoreal beauty of Helen and a believer in the return of her ghost.

Antonia Palacios

That Dark Animal of Sleep (excerpts)

I'm surrounded by somber airs. They suffocate me and silence my words. They are words from distant times, when the roads were spacious trails and I would travel them in a transparency that was granted me by chance. Everything seemed at hand and distant. They were times of lucid summers, of trees where birds of vivid colors would build their nests and from the earth rose a warm vapor, a silent fog that would settle over the patio. Windows with balusters seemed to protect a dense quietude that kept the screams and wails very far away. Today I'm sharpening the ear to listen once again to those secret words I hadn't yet discovered, they would arrive, burning and trembling at a previously set hour. They came and went. They stopped for a fugitive instant that barely contained my breathing. I evoke them this afternoon of dark airs and feel how they deny themselves to me.

I'm against everything, the one who told me I love you, the bird that flew off, the diaphaneity of the sky, the downhill trail and the trail that crawls upward. A cloud passes and the air passes. The voice is dissolved in space and there's a perennial longing in the earthly spot where I find myself, an annulment of everything as though a giant sponge had erased life. I recall the other times, the transparency of the air, the bonds of love, the infinity of hours cultivating each instant and that taste for things, that recreation of touch, my fingers on an animal's skin.

I'm listening to the trembling of a distant night. A night that murmurs amid its dense foliage. I'm barely listening to it from this closed place where my spirit drags itself over hard foundations that wound me without bleeding. I want to penetrate the night, know of its occult aroma, have it fill me slowly with its stillness, its adventure. Go towards other continents where the night turns, raises small things that soar intact in a flight toward the skies. This night is magic, its curvature in sleeplessness. The wind carries me in its fervor to imagine another recondite and generous night that could illumine me completely from afar, from outside, and clear up this babbling subdued without violence. This night is so long.

Here where I've stopped I listen to strange sounds, flights of invisible birds, and I think of a firmament only my mind retains. Stilled I'm awaiting some diaphanous delivery, an ignored promise. The air is tinged with an impossible color and the wind intensely shakes the crossroad trees. In these parts of the world behind white mountains no one dares pass. Maybe the fear of death, a quick death with no time for pain. I hope the night will sprout with its mystical torment, its mantle of darkness. A star might shine in this wide open air that never has any end.

The house collapsed. It left some scattered dust, slabs of hard cement. It also left memories scattered everywhere. The roof that overflowed with the stirring of doves also came down. I don't want to rebuild the house, lift new walls, or doors, or roof tiles, or a small window through which the world passed, or that wide threshold where the front door towered and I would penetrate the days, nights, seeking my warmth there. The house collapsed, a transparent house where the day would light up and a thick darkness would tremble at night. Nothing was left of the house, not the light on the walls nor the patio's splendor. Only silence moves through the vast empty space and the sterile words whose thin filaments the wind will dissolve. I will remain in the open air watching the fog in the trees until the arrival of death, a house erected by time that will never collapse.

Vicente Gerbasi

My Father, the Immigrant (excerpts)

I

We come from the night and toward the night we go.
The earth stays behind wrapped in her vapors,
where the almond tree, the child and the leopard live.
The days stay behind with lakes, reindeer, snow,
with austere volcanoes, with charmed jungles
where fear's blue shadows hover.
The tombs stay behind at the foot of the cypress,
alone in the sadness of distant stars.
The glories stay behind like pyres that muffle
secular gusts of wind.
The doors stay behind complaining in the wind.
Anguish stays behind with its celestial mirrors.
Time stays behind like tragedy in man:
life-creator, death-creator.
Time who lifts and wastes the columns
and murmurs in oceans' millenary waves.
The light stays behind washing mountains,
the children's parks and the white altars.
But also night with its pained cities,
the daily night, what is not yet night,
but instead, brief pause trembling in fireflies
or passing through spirits with agonized fists.
The night that descends again toward light,
waking flowers in taciturn valleys,
refreshing the water coils in the mountains,
launching horses toward blue cliffs,
while eternity, within gold lights,
moves quietly through astral plains.

II

We come from the night and toward the night we go.
The steps in dust, the blood's flame,
the forehead's sweat, the hand on shoulder,
the wail within memory,
everything is shut down by rings of shadow.
Time lifts us with ancient cymbals.

With cymbals, with wine, with laurel branches.
Besides, twilight agreements drop into spirit.
Grief digs with its wolf claws.
Listen inwardly to the infinite echoes,
the enigma's horns in your distances.
Within rusted iron, there are glimmers into which the spirit
desperately falls,
and stones that have passed through man's hand,
and lonely sands,
and watery lamentations in river beds at dusk.
Yelling into the abyss, reclaim
that inner gaze moving toward death!
Heliotrope reflections, passionate hands
and dream lightning all repose among the hours.
Come to the deserts and listen to your voice!
Come to the deserts and scream to the skies!
The heart is a calm solitude.
Only love rests between two hands
and descends with a dark murmur in the seed,
like a black torrent, like a blue pollen,
with the tremor of fireflies hovering in a mirror,
or the scream of beasts that break their veins
in avid nights of insomniac solitude.
While the seed brings visible and invisible death.
Summon, summon, summon your lost face
on the shores of that great specter!

Juan Sánchez Peláez

The eyes of the owl
closed on the plain
of death
in the solitude
of horses
that die
looking at a star's path.
The eyes of the owl
closed watching the window
with one eye
on a squirrel
and another on the lightning.
The eyes of the owl

saw a horse
come into my house
forced to abandon
the plains,
the horse of an alley
in Paris
with its cart
full of cabbage.
The owl hid
in a chamber
of sadness,
in the poverty of the world
he saw his final shirt.
He put it on his father
who still loves him.
The owl
Juan Sánchez Peláez
deteriorated by skeletons.

Elizabeth Schön

Almost A Country (excerpts)

I was born in Borburata. There was a green plant holder in the hallway; the water would hurl itself down and would echo inside the clay jug with a sound like small coins falling. A fountain stood out in the patio; the ferns bunched up around it and formed a greenish, humid awning that smelled pleasant. The pillars were round, made of wood, and nails that sometimes injured, jutted out of the cracked sections.

The house had few rooms. The rooftops were made out of *cañabrava* wood and mangrove beams; that's where the spiders wove their hives, which packed the edges of the wooden framework. On the headpieces of the beds and in the water jugs, the moths and a fine, golden sand brought in by the wind from the distant sea would always accumulate. Two little stoves were always turned on; occasionally, a fly or a bee, who had been hunting the soup that was being cooked, would scorch itself within the embers.

Behind the yard, where an *apamate* tree grew, ran a gorge. The cows would go there to drink, while the thrushes picked at their feathers and I thought of the day I would live in Caracas, Caracas which I imagined as if it were the most beautiful, immense palace inhabited by glorious men.

Juan is my friend and he has such black and such large eyes that it's impossible for the sun to ever make them fade one day.

I met him one afternoon, he didn't ask my name, he stood there observing me, quietly, calmly; he contemplated the mountains through the windowpanes, with the multitude of houses spread around them: hats the wind would have tossed. I told him my name was Lucía and with a soft, tender voice he began to repeat it, as though I'd told him the name of a continent, a lake, a forest he was anxious to observe.

Next to the stairs of El Calvario, I say to Juan:

"Let's not descend the steps too quickly."

"Lucía, if you want to know this city you have to hurry. Caracas is too big, so much that I almost mistake her for a country."

We descend quickly. Since I'm happy, I remain quiet. Juan has told me not to speak when I'm content; it's better to be quiet, and this way the happiness doesn't

end. It actually remains intact, like certain gifts that are stored so as to not be damaged or broken.

Juan has arrived punctually. I like his suit, it is the color of medlar. He doesn't say a word to me; but it doesn't matter.

We stroll through Plaza Altamira. A green grass, with yellow tones, surrounds the plaza. There are bushes, round pines, benches. The obelisk is a mast, an immense needle. Beyond the avenues, many buildings lift themselves up, with balconies, doors and ferns the breeze moves.

We sit down on a bench. The pond, placed in the center of the plaza, is wide, long; the sun penetrates there and transforms itself, beneath the water, into a white shell. A small boat, with a yellow chimney, sails slowly, its dark anchors and the metallic rigging. It stumbles into the shore and stays still; around it: water, space, sky too high above, with the stars hidden amid the clouds.

Juan stands up. He runs to the corner. He chooses a fallen branch and begins to touch it.

Then he puts something warm into my hands, somewhat scratchy, it's a nest full of newborn pigeons! I imagine the sun must have been like this when it was born and they placed it above the earth.

Oval Light (excerpt)

Clarity of thought
is charged by the limit
of the sphere and the star
even from the good that
will not stagnate on your hand
or stay trapped
in the polished axles of beginnings
Rather, the soul
is filled by your skin, by your weeping,
even by your distances
creating your double fence of dreams
so that the root of vigor might thread around you
and burst into the transparency of feeling
Then the petal will detach
toward the luminous mirrors of roundness
and anxiety

toward the ever quiet depths of your own, unique,
expectant
And we ask ourselves
why such an urge
if the secret crowns of the skies
never move away
that is the soul of the voice
that is love?

Juan Sánchez Peláez

Possession

The world weighs malicious and solemn in my roots.
I accept your hands, your joy, my delirium.
If you return, if you dream, your image in the night
will recognize me.
My blood of magic flows toward you, beneath the
prophecy of dawn.

Innocence

When I place my brow on that melody, I recover for an instant the
lost city.

I live without wood or fire, dreaming at your feet.

Because we find ourselves in the world, the frightening flame
covers us. From head to toe I am the great hesitation of man.
Bleak, I swallow fog and oblivion by the pitcher.

Poetics

We weren't going to make incursions into the place occupied by the ray with arms of
oak: its fury would clear our poor head, full of wine and vain illusions. You are the
one speaking to me, sir who arranges the sparklers in a row (I repeat their echo,
swallow their desire and their thorn); it is you who stains the paper on the table,
while the actual hunt occurs where there are no limits, maybe in this visceral crevice
at the edge of the beautiful fable and the distant luster.

We Are Surrounded by Strangeness

We are surrounded by strangeness
with its spring that drinks us

Strange, the red grapes
we will continue chewing

strange
the vast April moments
where your path and mine
might coincide
at the edge of thick trees
and beloved countries

crude winter's guard
is stalking us
and we ignore the weight of our arms
if they'll be of any use
if the air will be fresh or humid in April
or if the flowering grenadine will sustain us in distress.

Rafael Cadenas

Defeat

I who have never had a trade
who have felt weak facing every competitor
who lost the best titles for life
who barely arrive somewhere and already want to leave
 (believing that moving is a solution)
who have been denied in anticipation and ridiculed by
 the most able
who lean against the walls so I won't completely collapse
who am a target of laughter even for myself
who thought my father was eternal
who have been humiliated by professors of literature
who one day asked how I could help and the answer was a
 loud laugh
who will never be able to start a home, nor be brilliant, nor
 triumph in life
who have been abandoned by many people because I barely
 speak
who am ashamed of acts I haven't committed
who have needed little incentive to start running down
 the street
who have lost a center I never had
who have become the laughing stock of so many people for
 living in limbo
who never found anyone who would put up with me
who was omitted in favor of people more miserable than me
who will spend my whole life like this and who next year
 will be mocked many more times for my ridiculous
 ambition
who am tired of receiving advice from others more lethargic
 than me ("You're so slow, get with it, wake up")
who will never be able to travel to India
who have received favors without giving anything in return
who traverse the city from one end to another like a feather
who let myself be pulled along by others
who have no personality and don't want to have one
who muffle my rebellion all day
who haven't joined the guerrillas
who haven't done anything for my people
who don't belong to the FALN and all these things and others
 whose enumeration would be interminable make me
 desperate

who cannot escape my prison
who have been dismissed everywhere for being useless
who actually haven't been able to get married or go to Paris
 or have a serene day
who refuse to acknowledge facts
who always drool on my story
who am an imbecile and more than an imbecile from birth
who lost the thread of the discourse being executed within me
 and I haven't been able to find it
who don't cry when I feel the desire to do so
who arrive late to everything
who have been ruined by so many marches and
 countermarches
who desire perfect immobility and impeccable speed
who am not what I am nor what I am not
who despite everything maintain a satanic pride even if
 at certain hours I've been humble to the point of
 bringing myself to the level of stones
who have lived in the same circle for fifteen years
who thought I was predestined for something beyond
 the everyday and have achieved nothing
who will never wear a tie
who can't find my body
who have perceived my falsehood in lightning flashes and
 haven't been able to topple myself, sweep away
 everything and create my indolence, my flotation,
 my wandering a new freshness, and obstinately
 commit suicide within arm's reach
I will get up off the ground even more ridiculous to keep
 mocking others and myself until the day of final
 judgment.

New World

1

I have burned the formulas. I stopped performing exorcisms. My legacy, the ancient power, remains distant. Bonfire's breath in my nostrils, my disintegrated language, the still-humid shadow of a dilemma.
Another life proceeds in darkness like a vein of water.
The entire displacement has existed in order to exile me, to live within another articulation.

2

Dawn papers. They always refer to the adopted homeland, the one I have given myself. Papers piled up as though for ceremony.
Sacrifice to an ebony god.

3

Those invariable writings.

I always return to the same language. Leather haunted by an animal. A fugitive, though present like an ancestor's life. Weaving over weaving, love's dead tongue, a fire which has made me an addict of an insinuating cult.

4

The dawn does not return my final amulet. An old man signals from a beach. I try to return to the springs, but I don't know the road.

5

My shadow enters.
It brings a serpent, a buffalo, a woman, a house, a pier.
The intoxication of savage copper.
Advance, advance.
Drug.

Overpowers what I observe.
Begins to mark here and there, everything.
Then escapes to join the animal.

Lost like a bird amid leaves.

6

Memory embarks in search of escaped things. Possessions belonging less to their owner than to air. What a wooden chest wants to protect was not born for words. I am the only one who labors to steal it from the eyes.

What tongue will bring forth the treasures without touching them?
In the depths a sick king watches my departure.
I hand him a box with an anxious ruby.

7

I proceed, making way through the roughness, toward the spot where my future portrait is kept.

8

A remote fire sustains me. I borrow from its red aura.
Hallway toward incandescence, you deny installments.

9

Vegetable orgy.

A naked woman lies beneath the rain.

Textures where an absence watches itself.

Guide me, aromatic cave.

10

Traces never recovered.

Suddenly, a graze. The universe of the skin. The thread lost on the journey.

I am bathed by what lives, by what dies.

Each day is the first day, each night the first night and myself, I am also the first resident.

Francisco Pérez Perdomo

I Saw Her Wandering

I saw her wandering
amid the trees that swayed
and fanned her pale beauty
as if emerged from a print.
Magically her tunic
seemed to dissolve through the air.
I directed toward her from the depths
of my memory beautiful and silent
words. The words crossed
time and tremulous
they arrived at her ears that listened
to my eulogies in the rumors of the past.
She kept a hermetic silence. An ambiguous
smile covered her impenetrable semblance.

Like Black Veils

Like black veils the clouds were floating.
Below the hunched
man was clumsily walking.
A great silence weighed on his head.
He opened and closed his sunken eyes
and glanced upwards occasionally.
Distant lightning seemed to dazzle him.
Infinity spoke to him in a very low voice.
He was abandoning the outside world.
Elusive, overwhelmed by secrets,
he returned to his room
barely illuminated by a reddish light.
His mind was burning amid virtual fires.

A Phantasmal Voice

It was talking and
talking in a low voice
and without stopping
and sibilant
to the winds of the plateau.
Summer was arriving.
The storm was tearing apart
the trees of the forest.
It was talking and its voice was
a very dry murmur
amid the shadows.
It was emerging, no one knows,
from what unknown place.
It was something like that, hoarse,
as if flowing
from the limitless edges
of the earth.
It was something vain.
A voice that was heard
down below
from the depths of the dust.
A phantasmal voice.
With its nails, it was scratching
the walls. Our
ghosts, said Valle
Inclán, are the noises
that are produced inside
ourselves by
our own remorse.

I Now Leave My Balance

Francisco they call me.
My soul has been forged
in the great vigils
and the dark days. And
I am from these places.
Likewise in these mountains
my ancestors
lived and died. I am
from here and this is my seal.
Now and from day to day I combat

my shadow. The enigmas
that presented themselves
at each instant
and ever to Oedipus,
torment me
constantly. I am not
immune to anything. I have
never emerged unscathed.
The infallible formulas
of love have rushed
to the precipice and torture me
without end. Blind harpies,
willing to immolate me,
become more and more enraged
with my life. In the distance
is heard, time and again,
the tolling of the dead.
In the neighboring cemetery,
lie my elders.
I never say a word.
And imagination
survives us with no need
to invent any fable.
I invent absolutely
nothing, much less
in this unfathomable void.
All the beings from these
districts know me
and call me Francisco.
I am from these hills
and belong to these sullen
mountains. I am from here
and in these very same places
I now leave my balance.

Juan Calzadilla

The Trip

To Allen Ginsberg, in memoriam

I'm fucked when I cross my arms
and paralyzed in the mold of my shoes
I watch without daring to cross the street
and take roads that might disperse me
or that, oh, don't lead anywhere.

I'm fucked when I cross my arms.
And my dazed mind curbing my impulse
doesn't order me to advance a single step
to get out as soon as possible from the matter
that has me fucked when I cross my arms.

And if I advance for a while it's only a misstep
fearful that the world might come crashing down,
before I arrive at the chosen spot,
to the plaza where at sunrise
the naked people sing and dance
and where paradise has yet to be lost.

And action and the minutes
and uncatchable love in its mire all pass
detached from time that throws them
far from the place from where
within the jail of my old body I watch,
fucked because all I do is cross my arms.

Down there in the street the traffic's chin
nuzzles irresponsibly.
And the sketch of the rain sprouts in the battered frieze.
The frondless tree seeing itself in the glass
will never trace in the map of my window
the path that would take the insomniac to the country of magic,
if like me, crossing my arms,
he wasn't fucked for good.

(1997)

Cocktail

Too many programs.
Too many cocktails meetings
conventions congresses rites festivals
Too many free agents in the market
and if you add yourself to this
you'll end up seeing there's
too many lazy people like you
yawning in front of a painting
barely standing each other
to later reject each other
with a superficial handshake
and a see you later. Gentlemen,
this farce never stops
and despite it we survive.

The Poem

Write it. Write it anyways. Write it as though finally there were nothing to say.
Write it. Even if it's just to show that what you had to say hasn't chosen you to say
it.

Barbarian's Alchemy

Rimbaud discards his poet's investiture to assume his Eurocentric condition. In the African colonies he finds, oh, his next plunder. What follows isn't poetry.

On the other hand, Blaise Cendrars is a reclaimant of the colonialist Rimbaud. In his adventures in Africa he goes in search of a photographic alchemy of the verb. For him poetry starts to be something that's not exclusively in words, but in the glance, in his Kodak and in journeys.

As for me: I'm one of those who thinks of his work as something exterior to myself. I'm not much of a protagonist. The place where I find myself, in relation to my work, isn't very defined, not even in a journey to the interior of my own self.

Of the Text

Some have experienced the feeling of poetry to such an extreme degree that the fact of having expressed it in their lives with the same intensity by which they would like to have written it, has incapacitated them and, for that reason, exempted them from putting it into words.

But doesn't the nature of poetry consist of the act of living it? No. As it doesn't consist of the act of writing it. It consists of writing itself. This is why the true poet doesn't have a real existence.

Ramón Palomares

Dance

I have broken the sun
I am a card that shines
my stars are by the cliff.

I was over there laughing, once
and my hair hung down my shoulders and I sang
and everyone stood still and remained
enchanted.

She has come over the hilltops wrapped in fire;
her mouth's complaint flies
and her songs fly and so do her alluring lips that explode
into night irises;
from midnight to three, from midnight to three
fatal
at dawn.
When the musician tightens the *cuatro* strings
and feet rotate
and the living room burns.

I won't stop returning
I will illuminate the windows
I will tangle the mare's mane.
I won't stop returning.
I won't stop returning.

Paramaconi

So that Paramaconi arrived, the Toromaina
(Look what you bring on your back
—A ditch, a coffin I bring, a coffin
—Not a wound, an abyss, a coffin)

And it really was very deep

And Ulloa said

“You can tell this one has death
He’s dead, you can see his death”

I’m the piece you still haven’t eaten
—the last one— said Paramaconi

Premonitions

To Juan Sánchez Peláez

He saw a noose, it hung in his house.
There was a corpse outside
It was a fine and cruel noose
coming out the corpse’s mouth.

He saw a town, he heard screams,
they were coming to kill him
he was carrying a musket, he was sweating

Then he saw a few cows grazing
and a clear and shining valley
and wars

He looked somewhere else
Isabel was in her hammock, swinging,
and beside her birds and enormous glowing leaves
That’s where the sea began to grow

Then Francisco started to lose himself
to lose himself

Dinner

Don’t eat me Francisco
because I’m your death
Me, thick meat of tomatoes and oregano,
me, the salt
I’m your knife

Don't eat me Francisco
because I'm your edge, your arrow tip,
Me, the deer
the mountain pork
the avocado and the potato
I'm your burial candle,
your incense, your coffin

Don't eat me Francisco because I'm your holy water,
the vegetables, me
your shovel, your pick
the place where they dig your grave
Don't eat me, son, don't eat me,
because then you won't be able to vomit me

And Francisco ate his night, his edge, his arrow tip
and he ate his shovel and his pick
and the coffin
and the candles they didn't place for him.

Víctor Valera Mora

3 Liter Masseratti

At six hundred kilometers per hour I question everything
I have neither peace nor calm and I say question everything
I let myself be taken I like everything that happens to me
the animal I am atop cathedrals sniffing
my excessive ease my savage mouth
opening and closing frightening doors
the micromachine that films dreams
a stairwell a torch to burn the new Babylon
I assault the circle from above from below
tonight I will sleep on the rooftop tiles so as to not compromise anyone
and on the way I piss in the writers' park
we conduct ourselves within and without
January without a turtleneck sweater is full of conflict
nothing falls by its own weight except misfortune
at this speed I'm the only one
who has seen the distance and the immediacy of disorder
I know such deities that it makes me laugh
so thus we have the man without a hat and who needed
to work with a hat and went out into the street with his naked woman
on his head and at the bus stop he ran into his best friend
who asked him
"that's not Eloísa!" and he said
"yeah but I don't think it's too obvious" and his best friend answered
"well actually not too much"
and when he entered the office everything blew up and afterward
it became habitual and at a certain point in time
he got someone to make a few repairs in those places
where they make buckles and fix hats and they lined her
all inside with red taffeta and they circled her waist
with a brilliant ribbon
and you don't say decorated with exotic bird feathers
because it's a serious matter as I should know and the need was such
that it was forgotten
and he left his woman hanging from a little nail and took off
like any hallucinating man with any self-worth I am hopeless
what we haven't seen yet is an elephant cemetery
nor a ghost ship nor the consecration of spring
I'm all about a three liter masseratti
a potent machine
an agonizing agony of turbines
better yet if it brings along the sonnets to Orpheus

how long does it take to write a great poem
to then inscribe it in posterity's grand prix
I couldn't care less about those who are anxious for time not to kill them
I wear my jacket backwards and walk on whistling
notice I said jacket
and I said straitjacket and I said insulin and I said metrasol
but don't notice I didn't say occupational therapy or crooked rooster
what we still haven't seen is not my rabid jealousy
nor the manuals of econometry for business managers
we need directional bars and axle points
high octane and battery acid
I was telling Cecilia that no world of water
was an obstacle for those long and beautiful legs of hers
we need nuts and bolts fine coils
clear platinums and resistant cranks
throw the academic nettle eaters into the cold
now is when Che is about to really wage war
we need to dress ourselves in mountain
insurgent or dead without memory
swallow me with beer my love I'm an oyster
blood of my blood
love beneath the inventory of your eyes
love without understanding that two are enough for closeness
love you have to put the least strange papers in order
and take the plane at the lost paradise terminals
love whom I look at with the right-hand sun to fly without return
in the soluble wind
Old man Origenes considered
that we would enter rolling in the form of a sphere
my problem is something else what is poetry for
all yankees are sons of bitches
we have to kill them wherever they might be
I can't live without conflict
this morning I woke up desperately in love with North Korea
I want a nuclear explosion
we have worked too hard for the gods
under the radiance of the mushroom we will make them work
even faster I throw the house through the window
the wise penologist says the verb to make is limitless
we can sing dance write read
and also steal cheat rape offend
that's what we're doing my children
I turn women into weapons of war
and then they decide vertiginously
the commander entered through the northeast coast
my favorite drink is one part

vodka with one part gin a dash of lemon
I can break my teeth on this pamphlet
my life is worth nothing
I like everything voraciously
my face drives the landscape crazy
I celebrate myself in poetry
like someone who celebrates their wedding with a knife
this was said this was sustained
everyone is the absence of all subjects
I am submerged
it costs a lot to maintain a vulture
to explain with certainty
how the future will come to your lives
to say to predict to go even deeper
the infinite always naked
my heart is more luminous
than all the suns swallowed by the earth
We won't go to the movies to see the life of god's lamb
it's obvious he was born in isnotú in the state of trujillo
and since one is also from that state
and what the hell is that man doing here
I'm enervated by the chauvinism of the great village
hey! guerrillas
verb tenses don't matter at all
according to what we've weighed seen and measured
terrible days will come
whoever plans on crying like a blessed creature
let him start
me inside the bubble I dance pata pata
today I received a letter from my love my love is about to arrive
I write big sticks because this agony doesn't belong to today
this agony is not the daughter or the patrimony of liberated weapons
venezuelan death was already without us
dumb death
death without papers without pay without complaint
death the masts and spars of the powerful
old habit with bad habits
enormous turkey buzzard devouring the poor alive
pride what no one can deny us
is the irresistible transcendence from our falling
and the enemy's violent death
we learned how to kill a leap forward
we talk for a long time about the pituitary gland
that unknown tyrant sitting in our turkish chair
we have to throw him out so that there be total confusion
the problem is finding the door filling the room with water

even if while doing that we depart from order sub-order species
the dwelling of the old lineage
we must deepen so as to continue
don't forget I cross the labyrinth at six hundred kilometers
the square root of a ray of light plus all dreams
we are unhinged but even this is not stupid of us
that's why I said critically
what we still haven't seen is the country rotating madly
I am at my task
who can rest on the edge of a blade
a barrel of gunpowder is a barrel of gunpowder
of course the experts will say what else could it be
what I'm talking about is where can we find one so we can blow up the established
codes
one gets entangled in each fiasco of fear this doesn't provide dividends
I live in the same place how many would want to see me dressed in wood
today we are open air but tomorrow
the man bent his waist forward
his left eye rolled on the ground without flinching
I mean the man was unflinching not the eye that would be something
then grabbing it carefully he put it back in place
at that instant he died of fright it was backwards he saw himself from within
if you want history make it yourself
urgently we still need directional bars
the most radiant new years news
the vietcong commandos take the offensive
they want something more
for endless amounts of people a lamp chop
or veal or milk about two and a half kilograms
60 cloves of garlic 1 glass of rum
2 tenths of a liter of very sweet white wine
a bit of pork fat salt and pepper
if we begin at sunrise by sunset the fire will be ready
surrounding the most terrible chess board
they will dine on something that has been rolling our way for centuries
leg of ham in garlic in the style of Heraclitus of Ephese
then we'll have trout in red wine the reddest
served under the radiance of our flags
we live in constant combat
let each person choose their destiny
a man walks giving and receiving blows
behind him he leaves semantics and the duties of a citizen
water and fish at the same time
he destroys the possible so as to not be annihilated
he forces us to carry pistol vapors on our napes
may no one sleep peacefully

oh that love of his for the war of the masses
offended you will say this is not a poem
and you're right maybe it's a lullaby
now I know I'm completely crazy
but the litany is done the joke is done
beginning with me the word is a shiver
there you have this
I climb in and start up my potent 3 liter masseratti
bursting I smash my brains into a wall
then the other hell

Mérida, 1968

Miyó Vestrini

Next Winter (excerpts)

IX

The country, we'd say
we put it on tables,
we carried it everywhere,
the country needs
the country waits,
the country tortures,
the country will be,
they execute the country,
and we'd be there in the afternoons
waiting for some mourner
to tell him
don't be an idiot
think of the country.

XX

Sadness
dawns
in the door to the street.
Not in vain
have I been so cruel,
not in vain
do I wish
each afternoon
for death to be simple and clean
like a shot of warm anise
or a slap whose echo is lost in the mountain.

The Phone Call

When I asked him why he hadn't called

he explained he'd been buried alive
and they hadn't given him a phone.
On his thin chicken lips,
there is no,
or there was no,
daring at all.
Everything was strictly legal.
Is it that you don't even believe in God?
If it wasn't easy
you wouldn't try.
Significance,
signifying,
significant,
sign.
I went to the balcony
and looked toward the park,
irritating brotherhood of squealing kids
and retarded birds.
I heard the remote control switching channels,
on mute.
At my back I felt,
his desire to put on his pants
and leave.
I went to the kitchen to peel potatoes.

One Weekday II

Squeezing his eyelids to avoid the midday light,
was never a problem for Modigliani.
The truth is always waiting for us
at the bottom of a bottle,
he warned,
long before he stretched his women's necks.
It's degrading to eat in bed,
but I do it,
at the risk of losing *el flaco's* company.
The bed unmade,
the book by Lévi-Strauss and Didier,
the chewable paper napkin,
how many years hanging around here?
On my stomach to watch TV,
facing the ceiling to be loved,

elbow folded for sleep.
Life doesn't form part of the great laws of the universe:
I'm a solitary chance
in this space of rituals and penumbra.
Now I escape to the perspective of those climbing onto a bus
or pissing behind a tree.
A chimpanzee eating a turkey and mustard sandwich.
It's April and the myopic eyes blink
in successive delicious messages:
pomo, party, babes, gays, borderline.
Living cells that unknot me and tell my memory.
I touch my little thing, tidy from so much iodized soap,
washed
and thoroughly washed again.
Island smelling of iodine.
Little thing disposed to the entrance of fungus, herpes, bacteria,
bugs, foams, plastics, coppers and rubbers.
Come here, kid.
El flaco caresses me with a paternal hand:
don't reprimand your little thing,
it's much more useful than art.
The boy with the violin starts up again over my ceiling.
I can see him, chubby cheeks, buck teeth,
smelling of swollen polyps and tonsils,
an enormous callus on his chin.
And there he goes with the scales,
nasal,
raspy,
idiotic.
Fuck, screams the Spaniard on the fifth floor.
My mother would say to me,
tu me fais grincer les dents,
nothing to do with the
tu me tue, tu me fais du bien,
from *Hiroshima mon amour*.
Anyways, long before,
Shakespeare had determined
that every man ends up killing what he loves.
The folds of the sheets hurt my back
just like the horoscope announced this morning.
Tidy and full refrigerator.
The beer can with its frosted edges
and the ham wrapped in aluminum foil.
A matter of values:
Walkman, gastronomy, Zen, cool, humanism,
no one will be defrauded by manipulative practices.

I choose the beer
and run to bed again.
I ask myself if the rights of man are truly
an ideology.
Fernando, the only alcoholic bartender who's not retired,
speaks in rhymes:
the night is dark
and I don't have my lark.
As I see it, he's one of the few who live
human rights as morals.
I cup the pillow,
suck my finger,
and wait for *el flaco* to arrive.
There's days like that.

Luis Alberto Crespo

I grow thin from going far

Saying gone words

With no shadow to hear you

Beating the gate with the crown
Tilting my whole body in disgrace

What you thought was fixed

in your eyes does not return

Hours and hours of clouds

Death
was drifting watching them
on the street

Time passes continues
over you who are blind
without knowing it

Take care of my desolation

That I might listen to the family again
in the wire

And what's my name
when I'm in black
and try to calm a rabbit's heart

In the drizzle
wet
with that sad gold on my clothes

Remember me so I don't get lost
Don't get impatient in the brightness

Leave me on the shore
the thing nailed

Enlighten me with what brings you down

Lay me out over myself
only over myself

Place yourself as abyss

Abandon me
Let me go

9

Sometimes
a great breath retained is immensity

Sometimes
I open my hands and read your book

As ever
the letter m is someone who burns

Sometimes
a door closes invisibly
Walcott would say
It is exile
my father says
or a curve in the heights.

Hanni Ossott

From the Country of Sorrow

I will show you fear in a handful of dust.
T.S. Eliot

Who am I? ... "The light that falls on this gate, on this ground?"
Am I the trees and the plants? Maybe the sea?
I am hills, shorelines, water bathed in light
I am a body tired of so much wandering
a body and a soul tired of fear
I am fear.

From the depths and the dark I listen and tremble
I hear the depths, the dark, the difficulty
the contradictions, all the opposite poles
the blackness, the whiteness, the exchanges
as if the white gathered the black
as if the black gathered the white.

Who am I?
First a sorrow, then the endurance.

I see ships, multiple ships that touch my shore.

The ships glow in the night
—I see their flags
they are the arrival, the end
though not the cure for the most ancient wound.
I see sick, ancient, grieving ships
and inside crutches, disability, anxiety.

Who am I?

The sun burns me, lights my skin on fire, illuminates my eyes
I begin to burn, I am burning
I respond with love to the midday sun.

I have sought you out to know who I am,
and I don't know who I am

The leaf storm has dragged me
Maybe to save me

My body is covered by a vegetable carpet
the leaves' down caresses me
I have sunk into the green
I sleep, sleep, sleep
so everything will pass, so everything will finish passing.

Now I'm the bird I buried in the garden
I sleep under the earth so everything will pass
I want to avoid the pain and horror. Oblivion, oblivion...

I think, it's no longer time for the undertow
each wave dictates a continuity to me
it dictates to us
my continuity is a subtle station, imperceptible
to those who hurry.

You arrived from the country of sorrow. Going where, where?

The sea opens in me, vast
to wash me, water me
little by little I go to it
with respect.

And far off I see the ships
ships freighted with weeping, with contained indignation
magdalen ships.

"Did you write the poem, did you do it well?
I ask you."

Who am I? I went looking for you
But it was in Venice that I saw you
Your things were over there
table cloths, jewelry, a garnet, topazes
Venice: rest for melancholy.
I suffer
Me, who am I?
I want to go to the beach, I want to look at the sea
I want to look at the earth trembling from the sea's love
I will adore beauty, the splendors
The city forces me to work
and meanwhile I sigh
sigh.
After so much pain I think things will accommodate themselves
a mending here, another over there
I'm exhausted

—three and a half is old enough
to understand everything
life, death, abandonment, distances.

I'm not a daughter of war, I sigh...
I'm a granddaughter

I'm going to take this past slowly, with delays
(my husband's a humorist and he laughs, he laughs at me and he's right)
My father would also say: "You have to laugh"
but he couldn't laugh, from so much sorrow.

Who am I? I think I'm a lit-up pansy
a fuchsia pansy
hanging over the wall.
I have placed my flowering over the wall
so it will be more beautiful
so it will soften
maybe I want to hide or forget about
such a rough stone. The wall.
The Berlin wall.

I don't want horror I want tolerance
the house, friends, books,
the garnet of love, siblings.

I want the sea and the fallen leaves to be resolved in me.

Where are you? Tell me, who am I?

The trees are silent, there are no crickets
only the metallic makes noise
machines and money make themselves felt
I hear cars and in the distance a strike
nothing's happening here!
but the lights are on
and the heart is in flames.

I'm a witness to this. And to that
I'm a witness.
It doesn't matter. There's the *apamate* blossom
You said it was the *apamate* blossom
I have seen the cherry blossom
it was so beautiful. Doctor, it was so beautiful.

Ah, so much pressure, I sometimes lack the strength.

Everything we have to care for: ourselves, the earth, the soul
let us suppose poetry as well
 and children, the child within
 the kitchen, lucidity in the kitchen
the list is too long
 and it's too much for us women
 will men be able to help us?
 hear us?
too much weight; yes, too much weight
 too much pressure.

Venice, Venezuela
 I sigh, tremble, burn
My husband works and it's nighttime. The cats scream.

I hear the sea, the conch informs me
Not everything is resolution, but something should be resolved
 something like a payment
 but what?, I don't know...

What am I? I listen to something within me, a voice, maybe
 something that wants to come out
 something clear
 that I don't understand now, that murmurs.

Am I from the Middle Ages?
 my dead are left behind
 behind and nearby
 they, the mourners
 the ones who didn't understand absurdity
 their own absurdity
 the ones who still couldn't see themselves
 they, the adolescents
 the ones who suffered, who were in pain.

Once I said: The sea within me doesn't let me sleep
 Now I know,
 I know what the vigil means
 I'm paying attention
 I'm wearing seaweed stuck to my body.

Who am I? A path? A road?
 A highway between city and city?
 Am I an interval, a lapse?
Not conciliation, no. But something more

Let's see, I should clarify myself, or maybe not.

I see a line of palm trees, a fog
 There are two or three there
 a man, a woman
 two men
 far off, children

I know what that means
 Sandstone, sad dust amid the light
 points I intercept
My heart is in flames, beat by beat
 there is no forge
 I am calm.
The house is here, here the fires and the waters
 here the hearth
"But you, you suffered so much, for all this"

Ah... my passion. Ah... my pardons
Clarity, divine light, come to me.

The sun burns and scalds, consecrates itself facing my autumn
The sun speaks to me, against autumn, against ruin
 —but I am also the autumn.

Ah quick fruit so close to sadness
everything beautiful in you, peach fuzz
 is given away to be a fig
 as if it were an exchange
 between the difficult and the fresh.

My boundary, such clarity!
Oh earth, I must do so much to understand you
 I have to be so meticulous.
Now I live in the detail, in fragments, in strokes
 on the line of a face.

Who am I?
I don't have a face, surely, I'm sure, I don't have a face
 my eyes fly further away
 my cheekbones are blunt
 my hair flutters or becomes docile
 the light makes it brilliant, shrinks it
 fires burn inside me

and now I want something like peace

something like the everyday
I tremble lit up with so much passion
(My husband is sleeping... finally; that way he won't hear me
my husband knows when I think, when I feel,
my resonance reaches him and it's strong.)

I'm in my room, in my "own room"
There's the German squirrel
the dolls: the English one, the one from Mérida
the Venezuelan one, the Italian one
there's the primitive bird
the wood carving
there's the photo of the balcony into nowhere

Greece, Germany, Venezuela, London, Venice, Egypt.
The cares.
It's too much. Enough. Enough.
I lack strength
I have left the poem, the word
I have spoken too much.

There's hardly any guilt
only the dying shadow of what we are
shelter
we want shelter
the barges with their lights
the flags
the canons, the bullets, the invisible bullets
no longer enter me

I only hear the voice of the crickets
the voice of the earth
the voice of nature
remains, almost bellowing
like an imploration
who listens?
who's there?
who's speaking?
I knock on the doors

It's not the one inside who asks
It's the one outside
the demolished one
the tired one
the exhausted one

And my voice draws itself out, extends itself
Who's there?

The ray of light has been cut short

I should sleep, it's nighttime
the angels will cover us
like a couple in love
sheltered

My solitary soul pulses and I see the reflections
over there's a notebook, over there's a pencil
a coffee grinder
and Steinberg's signature, whom I don't know

The cricket jumps and jumps —full of freedom in itself
I activate, activate and don't understand
I try to understand, slowly
my childhood and my old age make it impossible
I'm forty years old.

God, what do I mean... who am I?
There's a dawn, yes
and a midnight
there's an undulating body
there are women with a scarf tied around their head
and that means something, a mourning perhaps
black scarves to hold desperation
I think everything has meaning
I know about everything with meaning

Who am I? Do I have a meaning?
Am I a word, a wind, a plant?
My heart aflame. I cry, I burn...
There I go, like the shade of destinies
The feather of my feather is burning
fluttering, following the breeze

Sea, I trust you to provide others their limit
like the beach
I'm absorbed facing you, almost frightened
all my risks are retracted
Care. Care. Care. We'll have to move with more care.

What else? The stars are right there. Silent.
And there is work. Heart.
If all this has been bad... then what?
Then there will be no correction.

Who am I? The miracle of an error?
The window opens

Guilt is ventilated
The sun radiates

On the coast lies a sailor
the woman cries
distress, distress, distress
There's no end to this war
this horrible war
this destruction
my soul has been split in two
pity for my angels
Holy cross

I've cried. The earth sublimates me. Vegetables.
Flesh
Man sublimates me
and because of him I am beyond him
between junk and sighs
That's why I clean the house
And that solitary scream... what might it be?

Enough.

It is the light of the Moon that illuminates me today.

November, 1985

Armando Rojas Guardia

Persecution of Poetry

When I was looking for you
here, in this house
where simple things
build walls around habit
and appease me, help me sleep
on a tangible floor,
solidly sustained;
when I wanted you to arrive
daily like tea,
recognizable and aromatic
like the smoke from my pipe,
calm like lamp light,
vibrant like all the insects
attracted by that glow
that protects me from the night
and makes repose sweet
and introverts it;
when you were able to be Coltrane,
erudite sax that accompanies
a frugal dinner; or maybe Rilke
read when I get up from the table
(Rilke domesticated: some verses
to take advantage of the hours for rest
as suits a laborious man);
finally, when the lethargy
that precedes the habit of sleep
led me, attentive, towards the bed
to find you oneiric and somnambulant
suddenly the certainty, even corporeal,
arrived that you existed nowhere
not even in the everything
of this orderly life of peace,
in no sensitive place
and under no comforting light
(nor in the story of dreams).
Still and insomniac in the silence,
I knew you were in back: only the reverse
of each object, only the spine
of all the words of the poem
(unreachable spine, of course,
but that magnetizes the music of the verse),

barely the void of forms
where they are unleashed, already free
to be resolved in graceful nothingness
–a sweet, compact nothingness–
around which revolve, unknowingly,
every language of man, every gesture,
the entire syntax of things,
sharp night, snow of language,
that deafens the roar of the pages
and blurs lines like this one
with which I speak the parliament
of an actor never accustomed
to the theater's enormous muteness
when everyone has left and the curtain
is only stirred by the wind,
the frozen wind of the night,
the sidereal wind, that doesn't applaud,
or laugh, or cry, and dissipates
stage machinery, special effects and scenes,
in other words, this decorative fiction
(pipe and tea, lamps, insects,
Coltrane, Rilke, notebook dream)
abandoned at last: useless.

Mysticism of the Tree

Trees are sacraments of peace.
They teach me the difficult art of patience,
firm in their vertical poise
facing wind and the uncountable whip of rain.
Its tranquility is traveled by silence
as leaves, like lips, only invite
you to watch another flower, inner and secret
which can't be described in words.
They speak to spirit, not the ear.
The patient gouge, ever unveiling itself ascendant
by an effect of the religious attraction of light
that elevates it, over the years,
skyward; it seems to weigh on its branches
give us an exact sensation
of standing in front of a luxuriant
sacred receptacle. A tree's calm illuminates.

shining pulchritude floats
giving back our soul.

Miguel James

My Girlfriend Ítala Eats Flowers

My girlfriend appeared trembling in a bookstore
She showed me lonely street papers and slashed whores
She gave me lovely stones and seashells
An old engraving of untied horses
My girlfriend was on her way from the sun and looked like a gypsy
She told strange stories about twin souls
My girlfriend had a blue dress
She fell in love with me and my sandals
My girlfriend would read Boris Vian
She took a shower bleeding and gave me a body that smelled like nothing
I fell in love with my girlfriend
I braided my hair and took her to the movies
My girlfriend had an ugly blonde child
We would inhabit the city of fog or beyond the seas
My girlfriend became my girlfriend
My girlfriend pashira and ficus colony of herbs graft of flower-eating doves
I loved my girlfriend
My broke girlfriend sold earrings in the markets
She would bring me mandarins when I was in solitary confinement
She would undress in front of bored old men
I was my girlfriend
She adored Fabio and had a balcony to jump from
And it's just that my sad girlfriend looked like a desolate Maga
My girlfriend was a star
I would have died without my girlfriend
One day my girlfriend said we were looking like open wounds under the sky
That she'd take up the lab books again
That she'd stop sleeping at the foot of the bridge
I didn't pay attention to my girlfriend
I let her mix Pelusa rock and biology texts
Víctor's punctual visits and kitchen habits
Johnny's accurate punches
And it's just that my girlfriend didn't wanna eat flowers any more
So then I thought about giving her what she deserves
I'd take her to the mountain top
I'd bathe her in the trail's creek
Then I'd bombard her with bougainvillea petals from above
I'd spray her with French perfumes
And knowing she was in ecstasy I'd cover her with baby poo
So she wouldn't stop being my girlfriend
So she wouldn't get sick of eating flowers

And it's just that sometimes I don't feel like being my girlfriend's boyfriend
Sometimes I don't feel like being anyone's boyfriend
But yesterday I saw my girlfriend
She had ripped shoes and she gave me a glass pearl
We looked at a strange dress that cost as much as two hundred cigarette boxes
We talked about banquet fruits with bread and jelly
Because you really start to get sick of eating flowers
But I told my girlfriend that we'd always eat flowers
And I understood my girlfriend
And my girlfriend understood me
But sometimes I worry about my girlfriend
Because my furious girlfriend is capable of hoisting the boy and hitting him like a
piñata
She'd shoot her mom on a holiday
She'd blow up the lab with sodium
Because my girlfriend is a beast
She's a chill she's a star
And I love my girlfriend
And I know she'll appear on the avenue singing
She'll scream absurdities only I understand
She'll put a knife to my belly button
She'll say: "Man, take off your pants"
Because my girlfriend's my girlfriend
Because I know my girlfriend
My eternal girlfriend my girlfriend Ítala
My crazy girlfriend
Ganja plant
Sun
And spring.

Better Days Are Ahead

Better days are ahead. The days of the child musicians in tune with the parks. The days of the orbiting earth and other meetings like kisses. I say better days are ahead. Days with cigars and beautiful women. Days of brides like flowers. Better days will come. Days without hate or war. Days of moon and sun. The days fiery red candles will come for dinner. Happy days are coming. Seas and friends will come. The sunrays speak of the day. I mean the day of the next big star. They say better days are ahead. The dream day will come. The days of marvel are to come. Legitimate police. Days bright as fire that sound like thunder. Days of angels and guitars. Days of metal trumpets. Better days are ahead. Do not be discouraged. The days of paid debts and banquets of grapes will come. The days like circuses will come. The tamed

lions and elephants and hyenas will come. The days of the peaceful jungle will come. A long trip of days like song. The vast Nile now a furrow. The days of liquid flames, of flying men, of galaxies, of women who will come as the night.

Translated by Anne Boyer

Nidia

Nidia

I've stopped under the bridge
I haven't been able to continue
The rain is falling
And I imagine your arrival
You say:

"*Guapo*, this umbrella's for both of us
Follow me to where the world ends"

So I answer:

"Nidia, I've got sixty *bolívares* in my pocket
We can drink beer, buy cigarettes
Later on doesn't matter"

And off we go

I tell you, "Let the rain soak our hair
I love you just the same without an umbrella"
And you give me two of your kisses
So I'm not sure if you want me to kiss you deeply
Or if you'll take off running
Under May showers

Nidia

Our newborn springtime
Mine and yours
Because you should know
Dad has gone off
And I don't wanna stay home with mom
I wanna be less alone
I wanna be with you
And the nights are really cold
And all the other girls I know are really mean
And you're so hippie
And the outline of your tits entertains me
All this rushed through my head under the bridge
While it stopped raining and you didn't arrive

So I've crossed the University
I've taken pen and paper from Alis and Roberto
And I've gone to a bar
To write this down for you
Thinking I'll read it to you tonight over the phone.

Against the Police

My entire Oeuvre is against the police
If I write a Love poem it's against the police
And if I sing the nakedness of bodies I sing against the police
And if I make this Earth a metaphor I make a metaphor against the police
If I speak wildly in my poems I speak against the police
And if I manage to create a poem it's against the police
I haven't written a single word, a verse, a stanza that isn't against the police
All my prose is against the police
My entire Oeuvre
Including this poem
My whole Oeuvre
Is against the police.

Martha Kornblith

Prayers for An Absent God (excerpts)

That's why I became a poet
because time passes slowly in solitude.
Isn't it merely a dangerous moment
maintains our composure?
Doesn't madness depend
on our single, fragile chord?
Doesn't she lean on one term alone,
on the exact term,
that saves
or damns us?

That poet who stares at me.
Every night
he leaves class,
explains a verse,
shooes the flies away from the water fountain,
drinks a sip,
shakes off his blue jeans.
And he keeps doing this, always
sad,
concise.
Sometimes
the audience cheers,
and he searches his pockets,
sinking his forehead into the theater box
while I think:
Him
and the blank page.

I remain, staring at the word,
the ruins my first verse began,
only things speaking themselves forever and never,
there will be no more talent emerging from the fragments,
only the others' letters announce a disaster.

It Is Tuesday

It is Tuesday
I read Kristeva
("melancholia is sterile
if it does not become a poem")

It is Tuesday
and a month ago
my left hand
burned in living flesh.
I met a doctor
whom I loved madly.
That man washed
my blood
that man cleaned
my burned skin
with indulgence.
That man met
my weeping
but that weeping
was not a weeping
that came from within
it was a different
weeping,
an outside weeping.

It is Tuesday
I read Kristeva:
("I inhabit the secret
crypt of a wordless
pain")
To him I dedicate
"Love can surge from
pain, the deepest
love."

It is Tuesday
and I read Kristeva:
"Melancholia is
a perversion,
it is up to us

to guide it into
words and life”

When the Government Falls

When the government falls
I will be habitually alone.
Since I will have postponed
the errands
—as always—
from taking so much time
to imagine you,
my pantry will be
empty
and I will wander without
a grain of bread,
or relatives, or neighbors
or painkillers, alone.
I will be a woman in a
country at war
who thinks of you
habitually
—alone—

María Antonieta Flores

ogun

it will always be the winds of the north sea
and your lips pronouncing your name

it will always be your body under his body
surprised

it will always be to love in a foreign tongue

suffering the storm
friezing words with pain

three nights written in the present
an always of the instant

your slow saliva gulped in anguish

walls filtered by desire
always the signal

always misfortune

and a trembling in thirsty lips

sunday 8 a.m.

soaked by morning rain
clement in its scarcity
you return with the sound of the violent woman

in her lean body with the grease of the days' filth
her desire to kill that man

so much violence you've learned during the long week
you pine for the calming of this anguish

quickly buying bread
the newspapers

the walk in the rain

moving away from the scream of a woman demanding her money

this threat of the displaced madmen
these women with cut bodies

furious furious

on another street
two men not far from each other
sleep on the sidewalk under signs of misery

violent hangover sleep

and not too far away
(you know it you feel it)
a woman brandishes the tip of a broken bottle

on a corner she drinks
the cheapest bottle of alcohol
while her standing body convulses

while you write and the rain worsens

fires over the stones and in the abysses

a fog of sand

the mist over a city
sunk in fear

history returns in violence
mortar dissolves in words

i encase myself in the silence of your eyes
steeds have no pity

something about their name terrifies me
the threat of being without my tongue

this lightning bolt

breathing breaks my night

contrary wind

you implore the trees
to take on the ailments that have befallen you

slow leaves
barely the rain's tribute

your sibilant breathing unleashes
the story that murders your days

the emptiness your viscera enclose

amid foliage
the flight of birds

urged on by serenity
you stop to write this poem

a captive
in shredded tendons

Patricia Guzmán

Song of the Task (excerpts)

I have spent the entire night under the birds

Where is the pain?

At the end of the white bird that lurches into me

Don't make noise

If you breathe, you will move its wings

Separate yourself without eating

Your stomach is full of sleeping angels

Can you hear how much water you have in the heart?

Hurry

The dead are gone already

Lay out the tablecloth and invite

It's good that it be known

I scream while I sleep

I have spent the entire night under the birds

If he is an angel he lives in a tree

He asks me to not turn out the light

He asks me to look at him naked

He says he loves me with his mouth closed

(I want to bathe him in the river)

If he is an angel he is nervous

Life falls from his hands

He doesn't want to come to my house

He knows the solitude of beauty

(I haven't been able to erase his smell from my door)

He has sky under his eyelids

He loses weight on top of me

If he is an angel he is nervous

My body falls from his hands

If you're afraid of roses

Fill the garden with prayers

(It will be useless, you won't be able to save yourself)

Who said they don't have lips?

They kiss us from head to toe without using their tongues

High heights

High heights

And one single heart: good flesh, bad flesh

Roses are swords

Fill the garden with prayers

Roses are good

(They sing slowly, slowly)

I have wanted to learn how to sing, I have always wanted

And I've said so to my sisters

I've told them to listen to me

I've told them to let me know I sing

I've told them not to kiss me on the mouth while I sing

Not to invite anyone to hear me

I have wanted to learn how to sing, I have always wanted

I don't know why they don't hear me

If I know the voice is called with the hand

If I won't enter anyone's sky

If I won't drink the water of others

The song is good

And one does not forget being sad

Luis Enrique Belmonte

I Write

I write to scare off debt collectors
and to slip through the cracks of grey days
I write to understand those who suddenly lose their voice
and to listen to the cord played by the desert wind
and to lose what I have and to win and lose again
I write so the gypsies will take me with them.

Passageway

The owls arrived.
In the blackest part of night,
when only bodies
hardly illuminate.

It was a macabre song
like the chipped tooth in the sink,
like the handcuffed man stumbling,
like the shoe in the ditch.

But the bodies kept
lighting the transit.
Bodies entwined,
bodies dreaming,
bodies with a hummingbird inside.

A light
in the passageway wandered
by the living who got lost
chasing a strange aroma
and the dead who return
for a piece of bread.

The passageway,
the scream of the rooster,
the day's sting,
the gleam of the new world
in your eyes that open.

The Bird of Hope

They marked the door with knife stabs,
belched out our names,
spit on the mailboxes,
threw sulfur in the garden.

But we,
we wove the blankets.

We were singing at a whisper, in the dark.

Pale,
bathed in dust,
we kept
scraping the floor.

Inside there was a bird that shivered
injured, blind, soaked.

We Don't Know

We don't know who ministers our shadows.

We watch those who dig and dig,
preparing the dirt for the dead.

They insist,
but they only pull out
shells,
splinters,
broken sacks.

We still don't know
the source of the pulse,

the final breath,

the time of volcanoes,

the warmth of the bird in your hand,

the endless pit of lost words.

We don't know.

Eduardo Mariño

V

1. *Tomorrow*, the thousandth augury, the fearsome memory, God's remorseful urge, the moribund sacrament, the terrible gods miserably cornered at the tip of the dream; childhood decrees a spectral silence, all of this, the challenge and the awe from me a promise:
2. *Never*, the sentences, the hanging moons, the hands drowning in the fog, the wax boiling in the eyes, lying, subjugating. Celaeno, evening goodbyes, inequalities in the final skin that consecrate the least of man's rights, of the illuminated dream that drags its name and its disgrace; the walls erase all signs of names and the secret senses awaken an ironic nostalgia of seas, suns that fall, heroes, unfinished journeys, stories that turn and turn without a face, without a number, nameless, timeless:
3. *Yesterday*, a sail on the horizon, a candle on your table, a cave in the sand, a bloodless conquest, packed with previous attempts. The Word names the prohibited altars and the astonishing lines of Fire. I know that the hard spiral of this immense crucible of ignominies spies on me with its terrible, black, open and restless hair, its tiny tiger's smile and the dagger at its belt, cruelly sharpened, eternal, inextinguishable in my side, its blade, the weak gratings that occasion the misfortune of a single caress:
4. *Eternity*, of whose secret songs someone has said they reveal the time and place of a revenge. With certainty I know it corresponds to its infallible condition of witness, to consider this wound a triumph, an overwhelming defeat or simply a grateful reminder for the Dharma of these hours under the sign of the Desert of Fire.

Terrace from No Voice

Some hand will nervously seek the nervous company of another hand in the penumbra, one chair will slowly approach another and a silence like forbidden skin will come to swing behind the melody. I loose my eyes toward the door, distant like all doors, disquieting like my own exit, like no exit; I look outside and only guess at the rumor of your barefoot steps disturbing me in the night.

Siboney

The light conceals you, but your sickly lineage has measure and a corporeal nature:
make pain, now, make sangria of insides. Move your soul to the least modest side
and it will be nighttime and you will be outside, where no one observes you, under
the light, this light.

Leaving the Lavish Recital

Sometimes love
I feel embarrassed for poets:
So much lacerated intent
so much forced ego
and yet
they are always sad
they are always scarce.

Regarding Job 27:9

Just as the dry leaves
hide themselves
in the depths of the forest.

Will the overwhelming city
by any chance hide
its solitary poets?

Notes

The poems by **José Antonio Ramos Sucre** (Cumaná, Venezuela, 1890 - Geneva, Switzerland, 1930) translated here are taken from his three main books, *Timon's Tower* (1925), *The Forms of Fire* (1929) and *The Enamel Sky* (1929). Ramos Sucre worked as a teacher and as a translator for the Venezuelan Foreign Ministry in Caracas. During the last year of his life he lived in Europe. Largely overlooked during his lifetime, his work was rediscovered by young avant-garde poets and critics in the 1960s and he is now acknowledged as a foundational figure of contemporary Venezuelan literature. Poet and critic Francisco Pérez Perdomo has described his writing as "...one of the most innovative produced by Latin American poetry."

Antonia Palacios (Caracas, 1904 - 2001) was a novelist, essayist and poet. Her autobiographical novel *Ana Isabel, una niña decente* (1949) is a classic of Venezuelan fiction, required reading in Venezuelan high school curriculums. In the 1970s, Palacios began to publish the poetry that would make her one of the most influential poets in Venezuela at the end of the 20th century. In the late 1970s and early 1980s she ran the legendary writing workshop Calicanto out of her home in Caracas. Dozens of young writers participated in Calicanto, which served as a major cultural reference point for Venezuelan literature. She received the National Prize for Literature in 1976.

The son of Italian immigrants to Venezuela, **Vicente Gerbasi** (Canoabo, 1913 - Caracas, 1992) published his first major collection, *Mi padre, el inmigrante*, in 1945. This long poem is considered one of the first surrealist texts of Venezuelan literature. In 1937 he cofounded the literary group Viernes. Gerbasi was awarded the National Prize for literature in 1968. He worked as a diplomat and was Ambassador for Venezuela in several countries, including Haiti, Israel and Poland.

Poet, playwright and essayist **Elizabeth Schön** (Caracas, 1921 - 2007) published nearly two-dozen books and was awarded the National Prize for Literature in 1994. During her later years, she frequently welcomed and mentored younger poets at her home in Caracas. In a blurb for Schön's final book, *Luz oval* (2007), María Antonieta Flores wrote: "A voice that suffers collective injustice and suffering, in which we can find the nation, the district of childhood and the house, spaces that shelter the inner self."

In *The Princeton Encyclopedia Poetry and Poetics*, Luis Miguel Isava cites the importance of **Juan Sánchez Peláez** (Altigracia de Orituco, 1922 - Caracas, 2003) for Venezuelan poetry: "A herald of the Generación de los 60, Juan Sánchez Peláez [...] is considered the most revolutionary, complex, and stimulating Venezuelan poet of the 20th c. His poetry bore some thematic resemblance to previous poets (Ramos Sucre, Gerbasi), but distinguished itself by a revolutionary lang. that combined the grammatical transgressions of the avant-garde with a singular and tender intimacy..." Sánchez Peláez worked as a teacher, journalist and diplomat in Spain,

France, Colombia and the United States. In 1969 he was a Fellow at The University of Iowa's International Writing Program, and in 1975 he received the National Prize for Literature.

Rafael Cadenas (Barquisimeto, 1930) is arguably Venezuela's most important living poet. His third book, *Los cuadernos del destierro* (1960), marked a turning point for Venezuelan poetry. It invoked the rising influence of José Antonio Ramos Sucre and foreshadowed the emergence of the political and poetic avant-gardes of the sixties. In the seventies, Cadenas's work shifted toward a minimalist and contemplative aesthetic that he continues to explore today. In 1986, he received a Guggenheim Fellowship and lived in Boston, where he conducted research on American literature at Harvard's Widener Library. His collected works, including poetry and essays, has been published in Spain and Mexico in recent years.

Poet and critic **Francisco Pérez Perdomo** (Boconó, 1930) belonged to the literary groups Sardo and El Techo de la Ballena in the 1950s and 1960s. A life-long scholar of José Antonio Ramos Sucre, his anthology of that poet's selected works in 1969 was the first mass-market volume of Ramos Sucre and it has continued to be reprinted in subsequent editions. Pérez Perdomo's own poetry has followed a singular path since his first book appeared in 1961. His poems evoke the rural landscape of his native city in the mountainous Andean region of western Venezuela. Nightmares, ghosts and hallucinations populate his visionary texts, making them seem part of a single, life-long poem written in installments over several decades. He was awarded the National Prize for Literature in 1980.

Equally renowned as a poet and painter, **Juan Calzadilla** (Altagracia de Orituco, 1931) is currently the Director of Venezuela's National Gallery of Art in Caracas. He was a member of the radical collective of writers and artists El Techo de la Ballena in the sixties. Calzadilla was an early scholar of José Antonio Ramos Sucre's work and was influential in the recovery of his poetry. Calzadilla's poetry could be considered conceptual, in that it undermines and analyzes itself by means of humor, sarcasm and a visionary poetics that blur the lines between poetry and criticism. A selection of his work in English was published in the volume, *Juan Calzadilla*, tr. Katherine M. Hedeem and Víctor Rodríguez Núñez, *Journal with No Subject* (Salt Publishing, 2009).

Born in the mountains of Trujillo state, **Ramón Palomares** (Escuque, 1935) has created an oeuvre that blends surrealist gestures with the distinct regional dialects of the Venezuelan Andes. Palomares was a member of the literary groups Sardo and El Techo de la Ballena in the 1950s and 1960s. He worked as a teacher in Caracas and as a professor in Mérida. He was awarded the National Prize for Literature in 1974 and the Víctor Valera Mora Poetry Prize in 2006. Patricia Guzmán writes of his work: "A strange and simple voice destined to expand 20th century Venezuelan poetry... Strange by virtue of the prophetic, kabalistic and magical accent that the poet stamps upon it. And simple, because of the arduous linguistic task to which Ramón Palomares dedicates himself..."

Víctor Valera Mora (Valera, 1935 - Caracas, 1984) is Venezuela's most important and popular political poet. He joined the communist party as a teenager and was jailed during the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez in the 1950s. He studied Sociology at the Universidad Central de Venezuela, where he became part of the literary group La Pandilla de Lautréamont [The Lautréamont Gang]. His first book was published in 1961 and his poems throughout the sixties expressed solidarity with the leftist guerrilla groups that emerged during that decade in Venezuela. He lived in Italy during the seventies and in 1979 published his final book, *79 poemas stalinistas*.

French-born **Miyó Vestrini** (Nimes, France, 1938 - Caracas, Venezuela, 1991) grew up in Maracaibo, where she emigrated as young child and eventually became a member of the poetry group Apocalipsis. In Caracas during the seventies, she participated in La República del Este, the informal and influential gatherings of writers and artists in the bars and cafés of Sabana Grande Boulevard. She worked as a journalist in Maracaibo and Caracas and was twice awarded Venezuela's National Prize for Journalism. She published three books of poetry and left behind a final collection that was published after her death by suicide.

Recently named Venezuela's Ambassador to UNESCO, **Luis Alberto Crespo** (Carora, 1941) is a poet, essayist and journalist. He is the author of more than twenty books and in recent years has been the director of the cultural foundation Casa Nacional de las Letras Andrés Bello. Beginning in the late 70s he was the director for 16 years of *Papel Literario*, the legendary literary supplement of the newspaper *El Nacional*. His poetry and essays have been very influential on several generations of Venezuelan poets in recent years.

Poet, essayist and translator **Hanni Ossott** (Caracas, 1946 - 2002) published her first book in 1975. She lived for a time in London and Athens and eventually worked as a professor of Literature at her alma mater, the Escuela de Letras of the Universidad Central de Venezuela. The poets she translated into Spanish include Emily Dickinson, D.H. Lawrence and Rainer Maria Rilke. The poem included here is from her seminal book, *El reino donde la noche se abre* (1986).

Armando Rojas Guardia (Caracas, 1949) published his first book in 1979, with poems that reflected his experience as a member of the spiritual community Solentiname, which the poet Ernesto Cardenal established in Nicaragua. Throughout his career as a poet and essayist, Rojas Guardia has repeatedly addressed the tensions and confluences between his Catholicism and his homosexuality. He was a member of the group Tráfico in the early 1980s and was the author of their manifesto that advocated for a poetry rooted in the language of the everyday and the urban experience. Since his earliest publications, Rojas Guardia's poems and essays have often displayed a notable mystical component.

Raised in Caracas from a young age, **Miguel James** (Port of Spain, Trinidad, 1953) emerged in the 1990s as an original voice in Venezuelan literature, with poems that are at once colloquial and visionary. He studied Literature at the Universidad Central de Venezuela. His books include eight collections of poetry and a novella. James hasn't published anything since 2007 and now lives in Trinidad, but his status as a legendary poet continues to grow among readers in Venezuela.

Martha Kornblith (Lima, Peru 1959 - Caracas, Venezuela, 1997) moved to Caracas from her native Peru as a young girl. She attended the Universidad Central de Venezuela, where she met the fellow writers with whom she would participate in the literary group *Eclepsidra*. Kornblith published her first book in 1995 and two posthumous collections after her suicide in 1997. While her oeuvre is relatively brief, her poems continue to gain new readers to this day in Venezuela and throughout Latin America.

A prolific poet since the 1990s, **María Antonieta Flores** (Caracas, 1960) is also an essayist, critic and university professor. For several years now she has published the online literary journal *El Cautivo*. The poems included here are translated from her collection *La voz de mis hermanas* (2005). Most recently, she has maintained an active presence on her Twitter account (<https://twitter.com/epifitas>), which is closely followed by fellow writers in Venezuela and Latin America.

During the 1990s **Patricia Guzmán** (Caracas, 1960) edited *Verbigracia*, the influential literary supplement of the newspaper *El Universal*. She received a PhD in Latin American Literature from the Sorbonne, where she conducted research on the Venezuelan poets Vicente Gerbasi, Ramón Palomares and Luis Alberto Crespo. She has published four collections of poetry. Of her work, Luis Alberto Crespo writes: "Patricia Guzmán's poetic oeuvre is given to us as an experience of initiation from the body to its aura..."

From a relatively young age, **Luis Enrique Belmonte** (Caracas, 1971) began to receive accolades for his poetry, winning major prizes in Venezuela and in Europe during the 1990s. He studied Psychiatry at the Universidad Central de Venezuela and did graduate work in Barcelona, Spain. He has published eight collections of poetry, as well as a novel. In 2010, *BOMB* Magazine published four of his poems in English translation. Belmonte is also a violinist and has performed informally with fellow poets on certain occasions.

Poet and fiction writer **Eduardo Mariño** (San Carlos, 1972) published his first book of poetry in 1995, a collection of hallucinatory, expansive prose poems entitled *Por si los dioses mueren* [In Case the Gods Die]. After that, his poetry shifted radically toward enigmatic minimalist forms. He has received various regional and national prizes in Venezuela, including the Fernando Paz Castillo National Prize for Poetry in 2002. Since 1999, he has worked in the Ministry of Culture and Sports for the state of Cojedes. In recent years, he has also served as a director of the Cojedes state

branch of the National System of Printing Presses. Monte Ávila Editores in Caracas has recently published his collected short fiction.

Translators

Sara Bilandzija is a fiction writer and occasional translator living in Los Angeles, California. Her work has appeared in *Try!*, *Vanitas*, *Greetings* and *Big Bell*. Her collaboration with Cedar Sigo on the translation of a selection of poems by José Antonio Ramos Sucre was published by Blue Press Books in 2009. She teaches English and composition in the heart of Little Armenia at Los Angeles City College.

Anne Boyer (Topeka, KS, 1973) is a poet whose works include *My Common Heart*, *The Romance of Happy Workers*, *Anne Boyer's Good Apocalypse*, and *Selected Dreams with a Note on Phrenology*. She is an Assistant Professor of the Liberal Arts at the Kansas City Art Institute.

Guillermo Parra (Cambridge, MA, 1970) has published the translations José Antonio Ramos Sucre, *Selected Works* (University of New Orleans Press, 2012) and José Antonio Ramos Sucre, *From the Livid Country* (Auguste Press, 2012). Since 2003 he has written the blog *Venepoetics*, dedicated to the translation of Venezuelan and Latin American literature into English. He lives in Pittsburgh where he is working on a bilingual edition of the *Collected Works* of José Antonio Ramos Sucre.

Cedar Sigo studied writing and poetics at the Naropa Institute. He is the author of seven books and pamphlets of poetry, including two editions of *Selected Writings* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2003 and 2005) *Expensive Magic* (House Press, 2008) and most recently, *Stranger In Town* (City Lights, 2010) His poems have been included in many magazines and anthologies, and he has published poetry books and magazines under the Old Gold imprint. He has given readings and performances at The Poetry Foundation, the Poetry Project at St. Marks Church, Bowery Poetry Club, PS1 Museum of Contemporary Art, Beyond Baroque, San Francisco Poetry Center, The San Francisco LGBT Center, Intersection for the Arts, and Small Press Traffic, among others. He has collaborated with visual artists including Cecilia Dougherty, Frank Haines, Will Yackulic and Colter Jacobsen. He lives in San Francisco.