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REVIEW**

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LATIN AMERICA

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COLOMBIA COSTA RICA CUBA EL SALVADOR
MEXICO PANAMA PERU URUGUAY

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¡Ay!

Like our opening poem, this issue just can't contain its excitement. You may be surprising people in the library or on the subway with a few *gritos* of your own before it's over. Stick with us—we'll keep your castanets clicking!

This is *Atlanta Review's* first major expedition into a continent of non-English poetry. Treading the depths of this poetic Amazonia is a daunting prospect. Our lives will be in the hands of our translators and guides. But never fear: Steven Ford Brown and his intrepid crew will paddle our dugout canoe up a river of pure inspiration.

The ghost of Latin American history hovers over our fiction piece. The boyhood friend of the dictator "El Perro" evokes some deeply unsettling thoughts on the symbiotic relationship between historians and history. It's not surprising that the author, George Rabasa, also spent his childhood in Latin America.

Lawrence Russ's "Noche en Español" gets the issue off to a thrumming start, and Amy Herring's "All Heart" will prepare you for a hearty feast, including some highly unusual dishes from the Amazon. As you'd expect in a Latin America issue, we'll fight a few bulls, both real and imaginary. But we'll also kiss foxes in Japan, float along Australia's Murray River, absorb the excessive atmosphere in Russia, and floor it on the German autobahn. After a good roll in the mud, you'll be ready for the showers.

¡Hasta la vista!

Dan Veach
Editor & Publisher

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Noche en Español

para mi amor, María

Before you brought me this maraca romance
and these crazy animals
and God's horizon,

my heart was a Russian hovel
full of Yiddish dust.
I chewed on the stale blackbread dark,
sipping my sour borscht.

Oy vey, no levitation was allowed.
No spice and no oranges, no sunlit nakedness!
No Latin syncopation,
no monkeys, no silk!

So today, after running around in a ring,
dodging the bull for hours,
what a joy, coming home, to discover
that the soul of this summer night has turned Spanish!

Who cares that my brain tells a lie
when it says that these flowery scents on our path
are jasmine, oleander, myrrh?
Look, the stars are spangles glinting
up and down a flamenco dancer's dress.
And those glowing clouds are odalisques
lolling on the velvet divan of the sky
like so many "Naked Majas,"
like you!

¡Ay! My body vibrates with a memory
of the night, just after we met,
when I took you to hear the Romeros—
Papa Celedonio, Pepe, Célin
and dashing baby brother Ángel.

In the silvery thunder from their guitars,
you embodied my Goyaesque dream,
with your barely-more-than-hands'-breadth waist,
your black lace bodice hugging
the sweet arabesque of your bosom,
and your long, full skirt of blood-red roses
sewn onto ravishing black!

¡Ay! I was only a novice
in the bullring of rampant desire.
And how your beauty gored me!
But even the *fascistas* of my thwarted past,
the guilts, the jealousies, the brutal self-doubts,
leapt to their feet as my heart beat out
¡Olé! ¡Olé! ¡Olé!

For there, by my side, was the long-sought muchacha
of my *cante jondo fantasía*.

And now, as I climb this walk,
the castanets click faster and faster inside me.
El Brujo Amor is laughing like mad, both loco and sane!
Already, I feel myself buried
in the Andalusian garden of your hair.
Looking down, the moon, your devoted duenna,
is wrapped in her dark mantilla.
Her skin is pock-marked and cold.
Yet she, too, is luminous with memory tonight.
She understands well, and approves with her silence,
my passionate Spanish intent.

Like a gypsy Mona Lisa, with a lingering wink,
she smiles

and lets me pass.

¡Olé!

Lawrence Russ

All Heart

I want to write a big poem, a fat poem, a poem whose breasts bulge out of her dress. I want a womanly one, with huge hips, who wedges her way between tables of men clunking down baskets of bread and mugs of dark beer. I want one who throws her head back unafraid to show her yellowed, crooked teeth when she laughs.

I want one you could seek out in the kitchen, off-kilter from all that tavern noise, knowing you'd be enveloped in soft cleavage and flour. She'd cup your powdered wig to her chest and understand.

I want one you would think of with longing, long after your carriage has pulled away, and is swaying gently in the warm autumn night, taking you back to those elegant, thin-boned poems that swirled before you in a confusion of ballgowns and flawless skin, which lie lifeless now, in books tossed by the side of your bed, unloved, forgotten, half-read.

Amy Herring

Foxes' Wedding Day

from a Japanese legend

Children are told to stay inside when rain flashes in lemon light, clear beads falling from a cloudless sky, for on such a day the foxes marry.

Innocents know what they must do, how to slip out of the house, shed the adult suit, leave it like a cast-off skin at wood's edge,

find thing after thing to love, dark bodies of trees pressing themselves against blue air, thick leaves arching to receive liquid strokes, water coalesced into seeds with swollen bellies, each bearing a crescent of light,

and when the small red fox touches its glistening lip to the grin of its mate, they know it is time to go home, full of light, full of rain.

Gayle Eleanor

Bones

Mouse bones rattle,
tiny dice in my pocket.
Two femurs and a tibia
begged me to pick them up
as they lay exposed
on the scarp of talus
that plunges, broken,
to Virginia creek.
Even the smallest life
has a story.

Your feet would have pattered
quick rain across my palm,
eyes black droplets
scintillant with knowing,
cone nose and a whit of whiskers
leading the way,
your whole being a-quiver,
a drum roll
in a brown velvet purse.

You labored in the dark
the way characters in our dreams
toil through the nights,
birthing, building,
leaving occasional traces
as testimony
to chimerical deeds.

When hawk or owl or coyote
came for you,
in the shattered seconds
after scream and scuttle,
did you relax
into the deep sweetness of death,
strangely grateful for the jagged grip
that held you finally secure?

And did your bones,
after a life in shadows,
enjoy the warm sunlight
that bleached them
such a luminous white?

Gayle Eleanor

Altiplano

Andean ladies lave
rebozos and otros
in every weather immersing
underthings, etc.
in icy tarns under
the hover of low heaven.

Hat-headed, they wrench
low-Celsius water from
intricates of geometric
splendor finger-woven,
eye-alive.

Milling by hand the energy
of purpling corn, tending
the peppers centered
between thunder undulations
bouncing among the mountains.

Evenings with their weathered
husbands they sup
a wrath of chile, colored
corn, blue rice and beans.
Outside—the falling stars of snow.

Christ and their older
gods adjust cold altitudes
to reach their specially
tuned aortas and erect
their personal pyramids.
Sundays they change their hats.

Ben Passikoff

Song of the Cloud Maiden

Sometimes I dream how it might have been—
the umbilical cord-cutting mother and her assistant

present me to the sun over the Sangre de Cristo
Mountains, let the ruddy spirit of dawn pour

over my cheeks, my squeezed-shut eyes white
as a perfect ear of corn. The Hunt Chief, my father,

has a sand painting of a buffalo made in my honor,
and he recites a short prayer, rubs medicinal water

from an abalone shell onto my buckskin-soft feet.
I am from this land of spearpoints, sacred mountains,

basket dance and place of endless cicada singing.
I am *poeh*, a life cycle on the path to emergence.

I dip my hands in the dark pottery bowl used
by my father in his naming ceremony, decades past,

and let water, cool as clothes on a line snapping in the wind,
spill between my fingers, the valleys of my flesh

that echo with wild aster, saguaro, the sky-rupture
yelp of a single wolf still on the hunt into morning.

Maya Quintero

One, for Once

With half a field still unmowed I swerved
the tractor away from work and drove downhill
to where the winding tree-lined river curved
across the valley floor, as if my will
for once was one with the way the contours lay,
and I could somehow do what the water had done
in flowing, both to force and to follow a way
along, to make desire and duty one.
I stopped the tractor and idled the engine down
but kept it running—diesels are hard to start—
and walked downhill from sun-baked tan and brown
to shaded, leafy green, into the heart
of what this valley was before the land
was cleared and fenced and farmed, and only to shore
the banks against a flood was a narrow band
of trees allowed to stay. Utility more
than beauty saved them and yet the two,
that once, were one. At the river's edge I knelt
and gazed and felt the cooling breeze that drew
along its course, an hour away from snowmelt.
The mirrored surface rippled with the breeze,
so as I watched the pulsing image there
it gave me back myself among the trees
all waved and woven as one with water and air.
I reached into the image and made it more
than image. My hands and their reflection met.
I lifted water and let it pour
along my arms, then more and higher, to wet
my face and hair, and then at last to drink.
It cleared my eyes, it cooled and cleaned my skin,
it made my chest go tight. It made me think
the world outside was one with the one within.
But then the sulphurous smell of diesel came,
the breath of the engine I had not shut off.
The muttering tractor gave an impatient cough.
Sometimes desire and duty are not the same.

Richard Wakefield

Brightleaf

A path once smoothed this creek edge—
limb cuts, uproot, laurel slash,
passage enough to get corn
and brightleaf to Boone, though now
the one way blazed by water.
I have rock-stepped and waded
into a gorge that narrows
like a book slowly closing,
what sunfall cliff-snagged, leaf-seined,
a place named for what it was:
Dismal, Shut In, where I find
family lore confirmed, a squared
plot of slant-land, full acre
of white petals surrounding
chimney stub once homestead. Here
a new bride planted hundreds
of dogwoods so coming springs
branches flared with white blossoms,
waking an orchard of light
against that bleak narrative
of place name, a life scratched out
on ground as much rock as dirt.
Decades passed as she raised what
might look from distant summit
like a white flag unfurled, though
anything but surrender.

Ron Rash

What It's Like Now

All my first young loves are now
old women. Well. One by one

they write to me. I'm getting
smaller, they say. Please forget.

And I do note lately how the stars
seem more precious, how the bean fields

nearing harvest lie more supple
with their encapsulated secrets, although

I thought old men would know more
about earth or love or mornings than I do,

standing at sunrise in my own backyard,
married for years, dazzled by my ignorance.

Robert King

One Moment, the Next

These deer, those, the ones my mother spotted
startled by the car in our vacation forests,
the ones I happened upon, older, in the brush
beside the Yellowstone who stood and stared me out,

those my second wife fed by hand with leaves
near Mesa Verde, and these—calm, almost satisfied—
I slow and point out to my grand-daughters
are, I realize after all, the same dozen deer.

This would explain why they are calmer each time
I see them—older, familiar, hardly looking up.
In a few more years, really, with patient eyes,
they'll learn to act as if I weren't there at all.

Robert King

Sometimes I Wish I Had a Theory of Poetry

I read about Ryszard Krynicki's
"Linguistic poetry" and Karpowicz's
"Mallarmean" objectification
Of language and Czerniawski's
"Specific relativism" that stems
Like a branch from the tree of British
Linguistic philosophy,

And I hide my poems
With their prairie plainness,
Their beets and trains and sparrows
In shame,

And I wonder how I got
To this plain corner, this non-abstract
Joining of plain streets where my words
Are as simple as a handful of raisins
In the palm of my hand.

Wasn't I paying attention
In Sandra Bartky's Philosophy class?
Or was my time for learning these things
In my twenties when too often
I was drunk or hungover?

And clearly it's too late now
For me to stiffen my lines
With philosophical verve. Derrida
And Foucault are as beyond me
As Bakhtin's Russian with
Its Cyrillic pagodas.

My mind gravitates
(Oh that heavy, slow word)
To pauses, and I find I like
To sit in a hard chair and stare
Out a window at the prairie
And drink green tepid tea.

John Guzlowski

Elephants Never Forget

From eight miles out you can see across the Atlantic to Margate's elephant, six-story survivor of rust and rot. Born one of three siblings, to the brain of a New Jersey financier, its body has outlasted them all. Photographs fix the history, faint winking lights of a life span much like a father's.

Threatened with a wrecking ball, the elephant was moved inland and repaired, tin and paint restored, despite heated protest and expense. You can visit the elephant, lean from the howdah, to stroke a shoulder, on certain days at certain hours rather like a nursing home.

You can climb the winding staircase of a rear leg to the gastric pink interior, and then on to the cavern behind the grey trunk and red rimmed eyes. A phrase or two is etched in the timbers. A swallow flits in the rafters of the head like a lost thought something like Alzheimer's.

There is a platform behind the window eyes. From here you can see blank sky meet the horizon of the Atlantic, watch storms gather and approach, or simply stand with the elephant staring out at the flat empty restless sea just like a daughter.

Marion Boyer

Acceleration

People talk about *theater* or *drama* in reference to everyday experience but when did the curtains ever part to reveal you sitting there next to me in our old BMW while crossing the bridge over the Stör on a clear winter afternoon with a sky like clear blue glass *scratched* as you said from all the various jet trails you turning your head to the right looking off towards the western horizon across all those flat green acres of northern Germany me glancing over at you without you being aware of it seeing you sitting there content in the warm sunlight coming through the windshield absorbed in your own personal thoughts of god knows what & then the attendant cascade of psyche-encompassing emotions that suddenly engulfed me as I caught a glimpse of the tiny set of wrinkles at the corner of your eye immediately remembering how seriously you took your fortieth & most recent birthday then me being catapulted into that crushing orbit of conceptual thinking dealing with time & age & destiny & what it means to be alive & what it means to be in love & how we all deal with getting old & the passing of time & the laying aside of certain dreams & desires in favor of various creature comforts & a predictable easiness into which we all are slipping deeper & deeper from day to day ultimately precluding even the remotest possibility of any manifestation of true happiness or satisfaction & then us coming down off of the bridge & onto the autobahn me putting the gas pedal calmly & purposely to the floor leaving what I had been thinking about behind us like the clouds of blue exhaust as we accelerated in a mechanical rush of pure power & motion the tachometer & the speedometer both rising steadily the car hurtling forward on the smooth asphalt temporarily eclipsing all thoughts of time & the passing thereof & cleanly bringing to an end the inner spectacle of today's particular drama in a manner so thorough & final that it's bordering on the surgical?

Mark Terrill

Burnout

was what the game was called,
the game of catch Dad and I played.
You stand 50 feet away at first

and throw the ball hard as you can
to your partner, your opponent. It's
a dialectic of quick heat. You need

nerves like wrought iron, nimble
reflexes, a well-padded glove.
We had just argued at dinner,

black clouds flexing in the window.
My hair was too long and Dad
demanded to know what was in

the aromatic baggie
he turned up in my glove box.
It was 1969, and he invested

every ounce of righteous energy
he could muster in firing the ball
at me in the backyard. *Tradition*

thunked like a sledgehammer
into my mitt; then *family*,
the American Way. I hurled back

a dorsal-carpal-popping *carpe diem*,
Happy Hour haze, recreational sex.
At 40 feet he wound up like a man

with too many arms, and sent me
reeling on my heels, the ball a spike
in my blistering palm. So I smoked

the next one at his sweaty temple.
Steady job, Dad's return sung out,
the webbing of my Jimmy Piersall

mitt snapping back but holding.
Hedonistic hijinx, I slung back.
Eight-to-five, Albert Camus, credit

rating, Mr. Zig Zag, Windsor knot....
With only 30 feet between us, Mother
intervened with two deep blue bowls

of chocolate chip ice cream.
We dropped our steaming gloves
in thick clover. *It's nearly dark*, she said,

someone could get hurt in this game.

Jeff Worley

The Bullfight

At midlife Alberto still loves the entrance
of the matador. "All tight spangle suit
and a little cap like a Mickey Mouse cap with ears."

He steps in, cuts a slow strut around the Circulation Desk,
startling up music in the deserted stacks, bunched
roses, trumpets, carnival streamers....

His shaggy black hair flies loose
with his exuberance. "And he looks up and down
for the most famous person there...

or, the prettiest girl!" he turns, lifts
his postman cap to air and pretends to fling it
"to Her! to Her! like that,

as if to say, all this—was for HER!" Then the toro is
set loose. "And a little man runs up and stabs
spikes in its neck (Humph!) two hands like

that!" Compact body arched just out of reach
from where the animal passes— "to mark a place...
for later." A boy chases a girl out of

Children's, shaking behind her a long paper snake. Alberto
hurries on: "while the bull lowers its head
for the horses," (he bends double, briskly

taps one finger at the base of his neck) "the rider stabs
over and over, a hole, just here, between
the *banderillas*. Now the crowd is going

crazy.... "Men pour red wine into their mouths, without touching
their lips!" (And they get very drunk?) "Very...
very drunk, but it's very bloody," he hangs

his head, casting a gleam out a corner of his eye....

"Then the matador returns with a huge cape...."

(his chest swells) "I love the color, the

people, the excitement!" He stops, bows slightly
to his Lady, as he struts, swirls, recalls, twirls.
When he brings the bull

to full fury, exhausted, he leaves and returns with the small
muleta cape, "held straight along the top
where the sword is hidden...." The crowd

roars in time to the passes in a sickening heat. Alberto
steps back, left, not facing me. The silence
tenses. "Slowly, he lowers the cape to the ground,

and the fascinated bull bends a maddened face down to it...."
Then with out-stretched arms, hands clenched, Alberto
rises up and thrusts the sword into the hole

straight through to the heart! In that plunging,
Alberto and I exhale in the same darkness.
Now he's quiet, like fire

going out in sand... a boy, subdued to shoe-scuffle
innocence. Solemn, he shudders once, as if shrugging
something off his shoulders.... "They kill the bull!"

He hoists up his heavy sack of Christmas mail. "I like
everything. Everything! But—they kill the bull.
...I didn't like that.

I never went to another bullfight."

Marilyn E. Johnston

Bullfight at Valdemorillo

A dead-bolt is drawn. The blunt, black
mass plunges into the light. A cat-like
charge, sand-spray from the skidding hooves.
A primal darkness fills the makeshift ring
on the edge of town, flowing out over
the iron plains of Old Castile, rousing wolves.
Bats stir in ancient caves and grin.
The stone horns slam the barrier,
raking the top rail, seeking the men.

Only ordered ritual and a red cloth
now holds at bay Spain's secret fear
that the animal-kings might yet return
out of the night-forests of the past.
Gently the matador invites the fury
towards his chest, coiling the wrath
around him, piercing the crowd
with his redemptive power. Trumpets call
for one last line to be drawn.

They stand apart—then throw towards
a minotaur embrace. The man stands back,
salutes. The bull coughs blood and sinks.
The country crowd sighs, relieved.
Nature's best is a black sack, dragged out
by mules, one horn ploughing the sand.

Kevin Murray

Doña Inez in *El Jardín de las Orquídeas del Olvido*

Our across-the-street neighbor in Havana,
who lived alone in a huge house we called
La Mansión de las Mentiras, whose orchid

garden became world famous, its golden carp
ponds like broken mirrors in such luscious
greens. *Colibrí* and *zun-zun* caught their

reflections, this stillness of motion, the way
the koi broke the shine of the pond's surface,
made the lotus flowers shimmer in despair.

Some said Doña Inez's husband hung himself
in the bathroom, with his own belt because
he couldn't tell her of his affair with an American

woman in Old Havana, and from the day he died,
Doña Inez retreated into the cool penumbra
of her mansion, a ghostly shape at dusk and dawn.

She never slept. Our mothers gossiped about her
loneliness, the way they claimed her orchids
glowed in the night, pistil powder like elixir,

a curse or love potion—women came
to gather at the wrought iron gates for a glimpse
of the rare flowers in blossom. We, the children,

jumped the back fence and stole goldfish
from her ponds, brought them home to our bowls,
watched as they gulped down air, mouthed secrets

into the night when the only sounds we
heard came from two guard dogs in Doña Inez's
orchid garden, right there where our dreams surged.

Virgil Suárez

Doña Inez Tends Her Flowers & Watches a Road Construction Crew Build Up a Sweat

*Man and nature are busy where light beats
so white it turns the shadows rosy gold.*

—Paul Verlaine, *Sagesse*, Book iii, part xx

Political prisoners brought to this part of Havana
tar the new road. She can see them from her
porch, below her potted orchids, which she hides
behind and looks at the men—bronzed, glazed
with a sheen of sweat work—without shirts,
their muscles like rope pulleys. They dig
with shovels, bent backs to the harsh sun—

she feels the stirring between her moist thighs
as she pretends to water her own plants. One
man in particular, the one with short hair, keeps
looking her way, but can he see her? Here behind
her potted bromeliads, blushed with crimson
the way her cheeks must be. The last man who
visited her was the doctor, a man much older than

she, to bring her father's signed death certificate,
thin paper like a dead sparrow, which she held
in her hands and almost puckered her lips to blow
away into the thin air. Her memories lived
here, alone with her. The first day these men
worked out on the road, she heard their voices
and remembered the boys' choir in Firenze, Italy.

The way dirty boys look when they think ugly
thoughts, naughty, and she reaches down, touches
the hem of her dress, presses against the rail, a flutter
of her hands wanting desperately to be held in this light,
in this shadow. If she were brave enough she'd offer
the men water, a chance to come in and cool themselves,
but they are prisoners. She hears them chant

in unison, their sweet voices rising above the scrapes,
the digging, the jackhammers in the distance. This
trembling under her feet, crawling up her legs into
her chest, there a pair of clenched hands, holding her
steady, caressing her—this rapture in light and shadow.

Virgil Suárez

LATIN AMERICA

Feature Section

edited by

Steven Ford Brown

*Argentina • Bolivia • Brazil
Chile • Colombia • Costa Rica
Cuba • El Salvador • Mexico
Nicaragua • Panama • Peru
Uruguay*

After Neruda, After Paz

*Poetry is only that which has fallen
from combat with the angel.*

—Jorge Carrera Andrade

I am grateful to Dan Veach for the opportunity to edit a special issue of Latin American poets for *Atlanta Review*. Having read Latin American poetry in both Spanish and English for many years, I have grown to love the story of its self-creation and evolution almost as much as the poetry itself. The struggle of the Latin American poet has not been unlike the struggle of the countries of the continent towards independence and self-definition. The modernist impulse as it swept through the cultural capitals of the world early in the past century introduced new ideas about how an artist could view the world and his place in it. The result of the various literary experiments of the past one hundred years is that Latin American writers turned their gaze from Europe to the possibilities of their own landscapes and literatures. But the story I've always found most compelling is that of the writers themselves who set sail to chart their own independent paths.

Even after all these years, I still find myself returning to reread the poetry of Pablo Neruda (1894-1973), a magician who could animate and levitate the simplest objects of a room or landscape. His is a poetry of commonality. I still feel drawn to the prosaic and political dynamism of Pablo de Rokha (1894-1968), a Chilean poet who never found an audience in English. Nicolás Guillén of Cuba introduced into Latin American poetry the songs, spirit, and traditions of Africa as carried throughout the Caribbean by slaves. The splintering shock of the *humano* poems of César Vallejo (1892-1937), about the perpetual struggle with life and death, are among the most powerful ever written on the continent. And who can forget Rubén Darío (1867-1916), the cosmopolitan dandy who helped break the hold of the French symbolists in the early part of the century? The books, stories, and personalities of so many others—Borges, Drummond de Andrade, Huidobro, Jose Lesama Lima, Mistral, Orozco, Pizarnik, Gonzalo Rojas, Velarde—are the powerful and interesting legacy of a literature in the twentieth century that sought to break out of the Spanish museum of its birth.

These Latin American poets possess "a telluric root," as Jorge Carrera Andrade has described it, in contrast with the domesticated voice of much contemporary American poetry. Our poetry has too often become little more than an ego surrounded by words. Observation and art have been starved in the process. Certainly there are American poets who write with great passion, precision and eloquence, but the proliferation of poetry as a popular literary form has led to a tamer art in which the native animal impulse has been turned out to pasture to graze.

Having already edited various books and anthologies demarcated by gender, geography, language, or historic time frames, it was refreshing to be able to cast a net and simply gather the voices of poets who interested me. I used a net composed of e-mail messages, telephone calls, faxes, and referrals. The strands of the net wound through Miami towards Havana, extended from Boston to Mexico City, and passed through New York and Georgia to Bolivia and the Amazon.

I searched for voices I found compelling. I combed through my cache of anthologies, the new poetry anthology just sent from Mexico City, the anthology of Cuban poets I found on a recent trip to Paris, and the referrals of friends attending literary conferences in Brazil or Chile. E-mails popped up on my computer, faxes drifted from the fax machine to cover the floor with poems, and telephone lines—sometimes faulty and suspect—led me toward poets in far away places who possessed the poems I wanted.

The end result is a collection of voices from the new generation of poets writing today in Latin America. There was no particular slant towards gender, ethnicity, geography or language. Although I wanted the newest poets, the poets of tomorrow, I've understood that such terms are relative. Because translation can lag a decade or two behind the poets who are actively writing and publishing, even a poet who is in his or her seventh decade can still be new to an American reader. Nonetheless, my primary focus here is on the generation of poets to come to prominence after Neruda and after Octavio Paz. But as one poet in this collection commented to me: "It's very difficult to be a Latin American poet writing today in the shadow of Neruda and Paz." The rough equivalent might be for younger poets in the United States trying to write today in the immediate shadow of Whitman, Dickinson, Williams, or Stevens.

Lastly, something should be said about the translators and translation. The pleasure here is in the reading of the poems. However, the heroes of this issue are the translators who labored to bring these poems to life in a new language. In essence, they are the voice behind the voice. The translators spent long hours in a room before a glowing computer screen or laboring at a desk over drafts of poems from the Portuguese or Spanish to produce vibrant works of literature. They have made this issue possible. In particular, I am grateful to Jennifer Clement of Mexico City, Cola Franzen of Cambridge, and Daniel Shapiro of New York City for leads, suggestions, and encouragement.

Steven Ford Brown
Boston, February 2001

Life:

seal my pact with you.
Sink your blue arms
through the arc of my mouth,
spill like a river
through the brackish galleries of my body, arrive
like a thief, like that one
upon whose brow they suddenly print
the burning impact of good fortune,
like one who can no longer hide magnificent news
beneath the overcoat and wants to laugh alone,
and there is the love that sloshes head to toe
and tinges everything,
and there is not a soul who sees it and doesn't want
to kiss her palms two times.

Life: loom within my flesh, in the marine
labyrinth of my core,
and care with irrepressible rapture
for this infinitesimal child
plotted by the crossing of fire of two sexes.

For him I must break my heart in two
to cover his diminutive soles.
Life: place over his head at the height of a bird
the roof of your hand. Never abandon
this cub of man who looks at you
from the silvery dream of his pot of moon.
Place, with wild lightness, your inaugural kiss
on those ribs of a toy walnut ship. Don't abandon him,
he is your earthly animal, the fistful of feathers
where the wind splits.

Life: welcome this being
who fits within a peach.
In his name I name you his godmother.

I raise up my womb for you.

Life: open your arms.

The Night of Graphite

A woman
predicts the echo of the earth in her entrails.
She shakes her tambourine, her cupola of flesh.
She is being named in clamor.
There are baroque sirens roaming through her room,
an invisible knuckle,
a battering ram that pushes and wants to touch the air,
to come out to see her, to bite the mother verb,
to assault her breasts,
to be a hummingbird.

A woman
hurls herself into the night,
travels on a silver rail,
heedless of the rain and the clamor of the silence.
Her heart stings like an indomitable verb.
She remembers the ferment of spouse she drank,
the nine languid moons.

A woman
has crossed the aura of a city in sleep,
the graphite night.
She unknots her cloister, she delves into her entrails.
She waits no longer.
There is no turning back.
She utters the blue song of whales.
She is swearing love
to a stranger.

A woman
celebrates
nuptials of fire
with life.

from *The Season of Fever*

III

This treaty points out
honestly
that shyness and its dream
find no better master
than the peaceful niche
of the vagina
and they design for me
a virginal and lasting
peace.
The treaty points this out.
Being Latina and sweet and true-
ly inclined
toward a chaste tension of the hip.
And no shame
on seeming pure
the intentions of
so many priests.
The groom content,
the father cheered,
since in Central America
he always finds
his daughter virgin and asexual.
This treaty teaches
the male to master
and impregnate
in Central America
and the Panamanian State.
And against this phallic
omnipotence
my workers' rebellion
defends me.

Because I take the point of my breasts,
little bells
of razor-sharp iron
and I banish
this reliable hymen
that muzzles me
in chauvinist sting
and on a long list of
colonial heritage.
And I scratch this treaty from the brains
with the anger of a quetzal
I destroy it,
with military stealth
I chew and pulverize it,
as if it were dead, crumpled and confused
I kill it and rekill it
with my open, bright red sex,
cardinal handful of happiness,
from this America of flesh and fire
my America of fury, *la Central*.

from *The Season of Fever*

X

Give me your spoonful
of light
because I suffer.

Passion has torn me
with the sweetest
nibbles.

A fluttering of ovaries
is bursting
with daffodils.

Your fruit of exhausted
leopards,
tiny.

Give me your peace of froth,
hundred dawns,
those of wheat.

Give me your flesh
to drink
because I suffer.

*translated from the Spanish
by Kirk Andersen*

Nicomedes Suárez Arauz *Bolivia*

from *Edible Amazonia: God's Amazonian Recipe Book*

Candied Papaya

Slice an overripe papaya
removing the black seeds,
decayed teeth of the tropics.

Peel the papaya
and weigh it.

Add an equal amount
of sun.

From March to May
place it in a mixture of water
and barrel of sky.

Carry the pieces to a pot
containing a light syrup,
enough to cover the fruit.

Sprinkle on them
twenty thousand granulated
myths.

This way sunsets in Amazonia
will be like candied papaya,
a fragrant and delicious treat.

Lemon Jam

*To Martín Espada,
defender of the downtrodden*

Take ripe lemons
with a nice thick rind.
Scrape away the peel of day,
making sure no bitterness remains.

Squeeze from it the juice,
leaving rinds
free of pulp.

Place in fresh water,
changing the water often
in this hot climate.

To make syrup, weigh the day,
add an equal amount of sugar,
and place over a gentle fire.

As with all jams,
once the syrup is just right,
place lemon rinds in it,
cooking the mixture until convinced
it's reached the right consistency.

Thus, each morning
the sun will rise, sweet,
with no bitterness at all,
among the Yanomami huts set ablaze
and tribesmen
infected with fatal viruses
by white gods.

Caramelized Brazil Nuts

Make a syrup of sugar and milk.
When thickened
add ground nuts until the mixture
detaches from the pot.

Then add ground cinnamon,
the rusty armor
of Lope de Aguirre and his soldiers
to give it the right golden caramel color.

Milk Jam Delight

Mix 3/4 kilogram of brown sugar
with
3 liters of European milk.
When thickened
add 28 toasted Indian girls
as it continues to thicken.

Add two yolks of belated sun
and let cool.

Add two egg whites
of sliced river.

Whip well and empty
one more jungle village
out into oblivion.

Amazonian Writer's Ink

Blend lukewarm water
with lemon juice
and fermented milk.

Dissolve night
in the Río Negro,
add petroleum
to the Río Napo.

In Iquitos throw into the Amazon
beetles, dragonflies,
army ants, spiders,
finely ground scorpions.

When the ink is ready
scribble in the sky
with Renaissance calligraphy
a flock of vultures
that will peck the flesh
from the carcasses of the days.

*translated from the Spanish
by Steven Ford Brown
with the author*

Juan Carlos Galeano *Colombia*

Star

A boy who finds a star in a field is told by his mother
it belongs in the backyard with the animals and tools.

But in the backyard the pickax and the broom argue all the time.

The ax argues that the world was built thanks to him.
"Yes, but we always sweep up your mess," the broom tells him.

A hen shaking her lunch worm stares at them.

The boy doesn't care about the hen, but worries about the tools' fighting.
"I don't want my star to be wounded," he thinks.

The star wakes then falls asleep again in a corner.

It's not a bad idea that the family decides to move to town
and take the star to the psychiatrist.

Table

to Luiz Moro

Often the table dreams of having been born an animal.

But if it had been an animal, it would not be a table.

If it had been an animal, it would have fled like the others
when chainsaws arrived to take the trees that were going to be tables.

In the house a woman comes every night and rubs a warm rag
over its haunches as if it were an animal.

With four legs, the table could leave the house. But she thinks
about the chairs around her, and an animal wouldn't abandon her family.

The table's favorite thing is when the woman tickles her
while gathering bread crumbs left by the children.

*translated from the Spanish
by Angela Ball*

Vomit

Many Indians cannot put the nightmare to sleep.

The rivers and lakes vomit animals, trees, and people.

"Something must have upset the river and lakes," someone says.

The vomit covers the earth and expands throughout the universe.

It's a good thing the Indians built their houses in the shape of boats.

Eraser

to Roberto Fernández

The man who needs space in his mind for important things
rubs a giant eraser across the expanse of his forehead every night.

He erases thoughts of his homeland and awakes every day
with fewer square miles of memory.

His parents tell him to erase carefully, not to take a chance
and one day risk erasing them.

The man assures them he has had a lot of practice,
for he only erases the land and things that are not important.

He tells them he knows how to remove the leaves from trees,
leaving intact houses and people.

*translated from the Spanish
by Delia Poey and Virgil Suárez*

Self-Portrait in the Doorway

You go into your father's house
to visit your childhood
and the handle of the door
comes loose in your hand.

You go through the hall
that took you to your room
and find shadows
seated on the benches.

There's an indoor garden
in the room where you slept
but how skinny the bed is
and chilly, the walls.

Street cries
no one sees or hears
come in through the broken window
with the air, the night.

Your mother is dead now.
Your father is dead now.
In the pear tree no one picks the pears,
no one reads the paper in the shop door.

Your childhood home
is a ruined paradise.

Author Self-Portrait at Ten

In the schoolyard,
girls with fat legs
are playing house.

With wooden swords
the boys play at slaying each other,
lopping off their short little shadows.

Stopped, wan
and unsociable, atop a stone,
I follow my eyes down into the town.

There is my house. There
I am, pointing a shotgun
at the birds I love so much.

Suddenly, my belly's being riddled.
I am the bull's eye of all this loveliness.
I've written my first poem.

Author Self-Portrait at Eleven

Glued to the window,
my face reflected the sad glass.
The train of life was leaving behind
passes, precipices and dust.

Even though his being sat elsewhere,
my father was there, eating an apple in front of me.
The few passengers appeared lost,
as if they already belonged to the forgotten.

On walls, the light pasted up distances
as if the sun were shunting by into memory.
Aboard the train, your life swept into an abyss,
face glued to the sad glass.

Author Self-Portrait at Age Sixteen

He smokes his first Tiger
between the pines on Altamirano;
the town lies at his feet, a sleeping
body of adobe and tile.
Lank, longhaired,
beardless, he makes love
to everything: lark, oak,
the butterfly and the distance.
The days skip by without name or date,
ignoring the cage of hours,
the same as a desire
that could take shape anywhere.
There below, the streets
are an open hand
between whose fingers
the sun plays at
throwing its knives.
On the ridge the yap
of a fox is heard, a hind's bleat;
drunk on green rain
his eyes enter the underbrush.
The sun yellows his face,
paints his hands with its setting.
He leaves his shadow between the pines,
his Tiger, crushed out on the ground.

*translated from the Spanish
by George McWhirter*

Self-Portrait at Fifty-Four Years Old

I am Homero Aridjis,
I was born in Contepec, Michoacán,
I am fifty-four,
with a wife and two girls.

In the dining room of my house
I had my first loves:
Dickens, Cervantes, Shakespeare
and the other Homer.

One Sunday evening
Frankenstein emerged from the village movie house
and at the stream's edge
gave his hand to a boy, who was me.

Prometheus, made from human scraps,
continued on his way, but ever since,
through that meeting with the monster,
the verb and the horror are mine.

*translated from the Spanish
by Martha Black Jordan*

Ana Ilce Gómez *Nicaragua*

Hourglass

Measuring time is the chore
of those who have not loved.

I forgot the sand that continued to fall
grain by grain.

That's how I met love's requirements.
If my hour arrives I will not know
whether I am arriving
or leaving
I only know that living without respite
I paid what the god of fire
charged me.

Summer Street

The dry afternoon scratching the tiled roofs.

Two children jumping in a funnel of orange dust.

A shadow like that of an old woman passing, a breeze of sadness
in her trail.

Time that elapses.

The soul that turns the color of earth.

The afternoon that bends like an arc
beneath which children pass
holding their mothers' hands.

The rain that does not fall.

Only the lime in the air that bleaches temples.

Only the fire that penetrates blood and stains eyes yellow.
Only life like a dead animal
stretched out under the sky.

And the sun and air drying the cardinal marrows of time.

And the lugubrious wind, steppe-like.

And the heavy footsteps.

And the children grown old returning beneath the afternoon arc.

And the stones.

This Winter

*For Juan Aburto, for all my beloved dead, who
for reasons I don't understand, have left in winter.*

This winter brings me news of widows
and funerals
of exiles and hopeless shipwrecks
of people who, with their music, have departed
for the most nebulous or transparent region. No one knows for sure.

This winter brings me bitter biographies
and an immense urge to cry
over lilies and pages.

It's as if suddenly all the baldness
and ashes in the world came together
to give me bad days, and how very bad.

Of course I don't know whether they are going,
or coming back by some stroke of luck
don't know whether they wave good-bye with their handkerchiefs
or whether they remain forever between my lines.

I only know that despite death life grows
like a tree
grows in the mist and brings us to maturity
for harvesting,
reaping,
or the gathering of grapes.

This winter brings me other burdens
like not knowing
a joy sharp enough to shatter silence
or pulses
long enough to reach the other side of anguish.

Brothers, truly
this winter I am caught in a downpour
of sorrow, the habit
of looking back
in search of a sign, a thread, the connection
to those immortal souls
 who gaze at me
and humanely resist
telling me
 good-bye

*translated from the Spanish
by Nancy Abraham Hall*

David Huerta *Mexico*

Machinery

Here love eats its bread
of dazzling angles; here it puts on
its spruced-up clothes. This is where
it is made in pain. Its nation is none other
for here it is born, increases, and is wholly illuminated.
Centimeter by centimeter, it acquires its burning face;
by the thousands, it possesses its distinguished members.
How love gets drenched here, how its heart
grows clear, how its orb's rounded grains of sand
are polished by the handful.
It distills its liquors of white-hot cold
and perfects the star which must contain
more than itself: death, abyss, freedom, light,
pure hate. Place of love, thus, that which goes around here
slashing the air with its blades of flowers
and with the water of silence made of nothing but time.
Love, large as it is, does fit in this body
and to it must submit. Such is the law
that fuels it in its splendor and ceaselessly
floods it, gives it bread, forgets it. Irremediably.

Cancellation of a Construction Project

"Tell Nimrod," he told me, "to return
the crockery but that he can
keep the silverware." Outside,
as in a painting by the Elder B,
cumulonimbus and diffuse patches of bright light
mounted a backdrop for the end
or beginning of the world
—what does it matter at this stage in the game.
(And here I am, talking about stages!)
The Tower would not be finished
on time. Cancelled contracts,
massive layoffs, union problems
with the third shift, wasteful spending, call it what you will.
C'est dommage. The bearded Authors
of the OT memo, hunched over their tablets,
no longer had time to prepare
a proper account (nor was there any money
to pay them.) That explains
the paltry lines dedicated to us.
That, in my opinion, and the neurosis of the boss.

Light from Parallel Worlds

A light that seemed to join parallel worlds
entered the room:
it fused into one monstrous figure
a line from Tetris and the palest yellow corner
of the Garden of Earthly Delights, Bosch's famous painting.

It filled my head with pathetic telephonemes,
with minuscule lectures on intertextuality,
with Jessye Norman's whisper mangled
by the weather report.

That light made me see with my eyes
the genesis of the "fire of the gaze,"
particular geometries and pataphysical toys:
in the trigger of the untimely minute there opened
a Des Essintes collection, a Canterel park,
astronomies sprung from the glove of Jorge Spero.

Art nouveau filigrees interlocked
with the short circuit's spirals and iron. The room
closed upon itself and the light disappeared
—but what came was not darkness but "the colour
out of space." Discretely, I brought my hands
to my face, my palms empty,
said to myself three times—three, thrice—
that I should calm down.

My body seeped toward the Venice
of its inner canals,
a magic of benzodiazepine.
And I slept, hoping to find in dreams
the key to the parallel worlds
and the light that joined them.

*translated from the Spanish
by Mark Schafer*

Idea for a Naïve Tapestry

I, an obscure mailman pedaling along, believe that this is how it happens.
Today, Judgement Day, time will come to an end.
I pedal through cities, go out into the countryside,
enter the towns with only one street,
and those beings who leave
their bowl of soup to open their door to me
have the same look on their faces wherever I go.
The faces of those who will be saved and of those who will founder
have the same look of farewell to everything.

We were perfectly fine, they say, with this soup
on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday,
with the job we would leave next week,
that it grieves us to hear this news.
So this is the Last Day, looking just like the rest,
a rainy day in one of the rainy months of the year.
From now on there will be no winter days
nor summer afternoons
nor the dark night under the stars.
One more year and we would be gods....

It would have to be on a Sunday and a rainy one.
All the angels watch us go in our raincoats,
they shift in their seats, smile:
pity the men who seek to be free of mud stains,
dry from the rain,
overtaking the mailman to say that he has made a mistake
and that they are neither to blame nor are they saints.

This is a day in a season in which the rain is plentiful,
the soup grows cold,
the dogs fight with the cats.
Tomorrow must be another day.

Chair on the Run

We left our clothes on the chair
and the chair ran off.
The maiden made of thread and the bodiless blacksmith ran off.
The roof burst into clouds,
the walls turned into a compass of flocks on the lam:
smoke in the north, snow from the east, ashes to the south,
blackness westward.

We search for our clothes—the maiden, the blacksmith—
in the metallic forests where crickets rub their sandpaper.

An animal with a voice had seen them:
he was praising her nonexistent hair,
she reciprocated by kissing his tattoos.
The walls returned,
the rooftop perched,
the chair was on its way,
no word on the lovers.
They were fleeting fabric the river takes,
they were a sleeve in midair.

A Forest, a Ladder

There was something theatrical in the rustling branches
as she passed, a hint of a stage
and then nothing.
She disappeared between two trees, descended a ladder,
touched your face with her slender fingers, calling you Prince.

If a minute were the stair on which the two of you stood,
kissing each other,
and you could still detect the perfume that has stirred up the wind
when she cleaves the space between two trees.

What is the forest rehearsing with the body inside it,
white shadow between electrical branches?
And what are you doing but loving her,
pursuing the minute you can no longer find
—a forest, a ladder—
but which grows inside you until you're practically choking?

*translated from the Spanish
by Mark Schafer*

Consuelo Tomás *Panama*

from Accidents and Accident Prone

I have crashed against the sky this morning.
The word I didn't say
opened a crater in the center of my mouth.

What was left of me I had to pick up with one of the spoons
that dwarves use to gulp down dawn and omens.

For them, it's been quite difficult to identify me.

The ivory that buttresses my earthly posture
now spirals inside risqué dreams.

Muddied illusions stipple the lungs,
the brain is full of sparrows, injured but alive,
and chandeliers sparkle over rites of decorum.

I have squandered the sands of time
on castles that won't protect anyone
and left a pinch to leave a trail.

From three nerves saved from collapse
belly laughs and drum rolls erupt.

Only as such have they known
the one who is that splendid corpse.

*translated from the Spanish
by Zöe Anglesey*

I

I have no reason to be different from the land
I've no reason to be better or worse than the land that clothes my soul,
and clothes the souls of others who walk along the streets,
and make mistakes, like me.

I have a right to the sea and the air like others
better or worse than me.

I've already had too much right to the shadows
and the grinding of teeth.

I have the right not to feel
absolutely alone upon the earth.

Rain

It is raining upon all the surface of the air,
and it's like the birth of death,
for it loves to be shrouded in the waves of the heights.

The lake beats beneath the water of the air
because the clouds descend with their great truth
to write their blue surface.

Hush, I'm drinking my coffee,
and I'm so distant from myself,
and I've been getting so small
that soon I expect to be erased.

Lord of the House of Time

But how could we stay here,
beside what is beautiful,
the beautiful painting of the painter,
the lovely sculptured cup
the flowers of the garden.

The wind has scattered ashes on my hair,
and in the climbing vine I hear the voice
of an old friend who has died.

The breaking day must also die.

It will have to work like the friend,
and bear leaves and fruits and seeds.

Then it will take shelter in the dusk,
like my friend has taken shelter in the deep earth.

*Translated from the Spanish
by Elizabeth Gamble Miller*

Before the Pacific

Yellow blood on the dunes.
A day in ruin.

Something was looking upward.
Not long ago
someone was trying to fly.
Sown in the sand:
dark noon in the fig grove;
an absurd smile of salt
in brown foam on the beach.

Stars come. Powerful, filled
with secrets and on time.
Impassive and heavenly Venus
drops a ray of oblivion.

In free air,
a day in ruins,
messy beds of the afternoon.
Things talk among themselves,
move toward each other.
The wind perceives and orders.

Nobody Will Open the Door for You

Nobody will open the door for you.
Keep banging on it.
On the other side is music. No. It's
the phone.
You're wrong.
It's a noise of machines, electric panting,
hissing, lashes.
No, it's music.
No. Someone is crying very slowly.
No. It's a stabbing siren, a huge steep tongue
licking the empty colorless sky.
No it's fire.
All wealth, miseries, all men,
all
things fade at hot noon.
You're alone, on the other side.
They don't want to let you in.
Look again, climb, yell. Useless.
I know it's the small, transparent, coiled,
meaningless worm.
With your tiny mortal eyes, turn the apple
over, measure it
with your muddy stomach and heat its impregnable
plumpness.
You, small worm, worm-mouth, worm-hate, master
of death and
life. You can't go in. They say.