

"I run to death, and death meets me as fast, / And all my pleasures are like yesterday," wrote John Donne in a sonnet that asks God how any creation of His could possibly come to ruin. It's a common question, and God, as we know, doesn't speak. The various ways of approaching this issue involve the differences between fiction and poetry. Many fiction writers palliate their unease by returning to childhood, while poets tend to focus on the dusk with their quintessential attentiveness. The tone of a twilight gaze can redefine an entire body of work. Some succumb to a fiery but disappointed skepticism, typical of older writers (the Jorge Guillén of *Final*), as if unconsolated by having celebrated the splendors of reality when they realize that the splendors themselves amount to nothing. This isn't the case of Mirta Rosenberg. Her work is born of a will to accommodate the passions, reminding them that only words can possess their objects, and the poems adapt to the passing years with forms always forged out of assent. This will concerns the versatility of her lines, a clear-eyed trust in grammar, the value of poetic license, and the strict breadth of her lexicon. Rosenberg is an admirable namer and musicalizer. In her early work, such as *Recortes de un diario íntimo* [*Diary Clippings*, 2006], tools she has never abandoned—alliteration, internal rhymes, anaphora, sinuous argumentation—clash with an explicit desire to resist conclusions. Which is to say, to never surrender to faith: "... Un lugar de ausencia se reclama / de verdad, donde la llama excuse alguna / decepción: una cuestión de tiempo y de tensión..." ["An absent place is truly / claimed, right where the flame may justify a kind / of disappointment: the stuff of time and tension..."]. But now it seems that this extemporaneous conceptism had made a pact with the dwindlings of the body and perception, and with the ensuing shifts in perspective. *El paisaje interior* [*The Inner Landscape*] is a book of losses and reductions, of the body drawing closer to the ground and the gaze rising up, and of gratitude to the need for language. Language, after all, is what brings things and presences together—whether cats, a friend, or a flowering cherry branch—as long as the poem doesn't obscure them. These are leaner, more epigrammatic poems, written against waiting and late disappointments. They are songs of shouldering maturity: "El paisaje interior, Manley Hopkins, / sangra por la herida, sutura el yo. La verdad, / la ilusión, son leudantes / de la vida. Ir adelante, arriba, / avanzar hacia allá, tener pensamientos, / evitar los adjetivos. No calificar. // Sentarse y saber dominar" ["The inner / landscape, Manley Hopkins, / bleeds from the wound, / sews up the I. Truth, / virtue, illusion, are the leaven / of life. To go ahead, above, / is to move toward there, have thoughts, / abstain from abjectives. To not evaluate. // To sit and know how to dominate." Like the moon on a clear winter night, Rosenberg's poems shine brighter the narrower they wane. And the voice—that rough, resolute, unhurried voice—expands in sparseness. Not only does it converse with Manley Hopkins, with Iris Murdoch, with Socrates; so too does it absorb the remarkable translations that have been inseparable from Rosenberg's art for so long. Translations that enrich the book, as they have many times before, and invite us, if we wish, to keep expanding it ourselves.

-Marcelo Cohen

**Poems from EL PAISAJE INTERIOR / THE INNER LANDSCAPE
by Mirta Rosenberg**

Translation from the Spanish by Robin Myers

[from the section **“Things That Become Names”**]

I

Devising virtue out of error,
I'm where my head was and saw all
as far as the eye could see,
for it—not I—was never lost:

within the tunnel's half-seen
darkness, up ahead, it came to mind
—devising truth from virtue—that the head
was the light's entire occurrence.

And it occurred, while I enclosed
myself within my form,
devising from the organs my own home:
the west, the east; entirety without a window,

a happy city set off-center
within the layout of the occasion.
The smeared horizon
withdrew, approached, and altered everything

and everything to make a place for me:
below, above, shared land, around, and center.

So where did each thing happen, where did everything
take place? My childhood, youth, virtue, and error?

Time occupied the place: it rose, ascended,
set, ended. Although little, not defined
entirely, the world—the head, the body—
took on the contour of the content,
lengthening the spine of *I*.

Twenty Years of My Life

return, retained behind the limpid water of your eyes,
and there I see us, from age twenty until forty,
in an abuse of autobiography,

the burning years, the years we lost things every day,
poems' patient matter, cut and left as stubble, dry,
before it met the plow again at sixty.

Wouldn't it be late, audacious, ill-advised,
resuming our shared company
now, at this age whose syntax, isolated, deeper, steady,

subjects us to the oscillations and quick desires
of a calendar with its holidays of lunacy,
of old shared habits—though what else counts but living, really?

The burning years have thus been baptized
Maria, product of my faculty
for naming. And, for more reasons than one, the tenacity,

the will within that name, yields a new calm, an ecstasy
in spite of how the pampered body, always idle
in spirit, groping on its journey

forward, rebels, grows evident, refutes the new tranquility.
But we are calm, I say, not ashes: red-hot words, like laughter, rise
into and warm all nights, even the darkest and most wintry.

(lelé, maría)

[from the section **“The Inner Landscape”**]

Dawn and wind
under the slow sky
and all this light
also for me:
to slowly shift
from here to there
without adjectives
and with difficulty,
to talk by phone
—nothing significant—
to drill and think
in words that furthermore occur
outside of me, to be an army,
to cook potatoes
and squash and peas
and eat them like a feast.

Words, it seems,
don't meet their end.

From here to there, in any event,
as the day exhibits
its evening sky
en route to darkness
and the words with their inventory
—invalid and clumsy—
of what has happened and what is.
To not do the math.

To sit and count one's breaths,
one inhalation at a time.
To finish.

*

I don't know why
I now see more.
This seated atmosphere
did not entrap my head, resolved
to rise in stature,
to occur up there,
to govern. The inner
landscape, Manley Hopkins,
bleeds from the wound,
sews up the *I*. Truth,
virtue, illusion, are the leaven
of life. To go ahead, above,

to move toward there, have thoughts,
abstain from adjectives. To not evaluate.

To sit and know how to dominate.

*

To know how to dominate oneself.

Sitting with one's head
in the clouds, to contemplate
their passing, high and ugly,
to govern one's ideas,
one's words an army
that moves from here to there
under the orders of the *I*,
which goes to battle, loses it.

To sit and capitulate.

*

To exit Mother toward
the other public, social mother world.

I listen, speak, you speak to me.

The adjectives begin:

a lovely poetry reading,
a fine interpretation, interesting
structure, things
that make one think.

The *I* shifts to subjunctive:

that I may be your enemy.

To sit and let be.

*

How does a house begin,
Mother, how does it come to be
as small as this one.

How was it that I followed her
how was it that she followed me
if not to leave me planted.

I am the seed.

And yet the house is mine,
as are the words that live inside.

Mother. Mother. I. Today.

A house as small as this,
the things I couldn't cast aside
or give away, the words that fill it.
They have no end within a house
as small as this.

To sit here planted
growing foliage and new branches.

*

It is infatuation:
the love of love,
the hate of hate
make objects blurry
and words skinny,

a shadowless illusion.

Lucidly, hate and love alone
make things transparent
but with a shadow of their own
and words, resilient,
are not a copy of the thing
where *I* takes on a living form.

I love and hate you,
yes and no,
as I have done for so many years
that the damage is clear:
we are I and I and you.

To sit and learn *two*.

*

Should you give me up for dead,
despite my fear, I am still seated here.
Let it not be said of someone that he's happy if
he's not dead yet,
the final chorus of Oedipus says,
as if, while the animal of the self
is living, it could only see
things at its height.
Happy is higher than we can go
or maybe farther below.

But if you give me up for dead,

the door swings open,
and how I loved you,
such energy I spent.
It's mid-afternoon
and in the darkness I ascend;
the hazy shadows are what ends.
To see the root,
even unhappy, intuit
the light at the end of the tunnel.

To sit and seek the exit.

*

The only happy mortal,
says Sophocles,
is the dead mortal.

To sit and think
and be the one to think
it's love and not an injury,
the way you wish me
disappearance,
authentic happiness.

*

Happy is she, Witold Gombrowicz,
who in the tenth month
and on the seventh day
turns sixty,

delighted to have made it
and be able to keep accounts.

It's the Day of Atonement,
a fine occasion
for my whole Jewish family
to grant me absolution
for I never did anything to them
nor requested anything of them.
Here, seated
with my own Book of Numbers,
as long and asymmetrical as the humerus,
not Levite, not Kohanite,
I see that I'm an entire people,
if I include my pain, my reading, and
myself. A census of my life
affords this polished line,
and Gombrowicz is right:
"There is no horror that does not find love."
There isn't, no, and oh!
there's also nothing better.

To sit and even in the darkness
keep following the letters.

Mirta Rosenberg

[De la sección “Cosas que se vuelven nombres”]

Yo

Haciendo del error virtud,
estoy donde mi cabeza estuvo y vio todo
hasta donde alcanzaba la vista,
porque ella —no yo— nunca se perdió:

en la entrevista oscuridad
del túnel, adelante, dio a pensar
—haciendo de virtud verdad— que esa cabeza
era todo el acontecimiento de la luz.

Y ella acontecía mientras yo
dentro del cuerpo me encerraba,
haciendo de cada órgano mi casa:
oeste o este era un todo sin ventanas,

una feliz ciudad descentrada
en la cuadrícula de la ocasión.
El horizonte desprestigiado
se retiró, se acercó, cambió todo

y todo para que entrara yo:
abajo, arriba, ejido, centro y alrededor.
¿Dónde pasó cada cosa, dónde todo
sucedió? ¿Infancia, juventud, virtud, error?

El tiempo fue quien pasó: salió, subió,
se puso y terminó. Aunque poco, no del todo
definido, el mundo —cabeza y cuerpo—
cobró la forma del contenido,
agrandó la o del yo.

Veinte años de mi vida

vuelven embalsados tras el agua clara de tus ojos
y allí nos veo de los veinte a los cuarenta,
en un abuso de autobiografía,

los años de arder y perder algo cada día,
paciente materia de los versos, donde quedó en rastrojo
para volver a su cultivo a los sesenta.

¿No será tarde, no será un acto de arrojo,
temerario, reanudar la mutua compañía
a esta edad cuya sintaxis, más honda, segregada y lenta

nos somete a oscilaciones y súbitos antojos
de un calendario con feriados de manías,
viejas compartidas, aunque la vida sea todo lo que cuenta?

Los años de arder, por esta facultad que alojo
de nombrar, han recibido el bautismo de María.
Y por más de un motivo la voluntad que alienta

en ese nombre trae una calma nueva y alegría
pese a que el cuerpo consentido, siempre flojo

de espíritu y avanzando a tientas,

se rebele, haciéndose notar, y la desmienta.

Pero digo calma somos, no cenizas: palabras al rojo,
como risas, caldean aún la noche más oscura y la más fría.

(lelé, maría)

[De la sección “El paisaje interior”]

Madrugada y viento
bajo el cielo lento
y esta luz también
para mí:
lentamente ir
de acá para allá
sin adjetivos
y con dificultad,
hablar por teléfono
—nada personal—
ejercitarse y pensar
en palabras que acontezcan además
fuera de mí, ser un ejército,
cocinar papas
zapallos y guisantes
y comérselos como un festín.

Las palabras, está comprobado,
no llegan a su fin.

De acá para allá todavía
cuando el día ostenta
su cielo vespertino
en camino a la oscuridad
y las palabras con su recuento
—inválido y a tientas—
de lo que pasó y lo que es.
No hacer cuentas.

Sentarse y contar el aliento,
una respiración por vez.
Terminar.

*

No sé por qué
veo más. Esta
atmósfera sedente
no atrapó mi cabeza
obstinada en ganar altura,
acontecer allá arriba,
gobernar. El paisaje
interior, Manley Hopkins,
sangra por la herida,
sutura el yo. La verdad,
la virtud, la ilusión, son leudantes
de la vida. Ir adelante, arriba,
avanzar hacia allá, tener pensamientos,
evitar los adjetivos. No calificar.

Sentarse y saber dominar.

*

Saber dominarse.

Sentada con la cabeza
en las nubes, contemplar
cómo pasan, altas, feas,
disciplinar las ideas,
las palabras un ejército
que va de acá para allá
bajo órdenes del yo
da pelea, le va mal.

Sentarse y capitular.

*

Salir de Mamá al mundo
madre pública y social.
Escucho, hablo, me hablás.
Empiezan los adjetivos:
un buen recital de poesía,
gran lectura, interesante
estructura, cosas
que hacen pensar.
El yo pasa al subjuntivo:
que yo sea tu enemigo.

Sentarse y dejar pasar.

*

Cómo empieza una casa

Mamá, cómo termina

tan chica como ésta.

Cómo fue que seguí a esa

mujer cómo fue que me siguió

para después poder plantarme.

Soy esa semilla.

Pero la casa es mía

y las palabras que tiene adentro.

Mamá. Mamá. Yo. Hoy.

Una casa tan chica como ésta,

cosas que no supe descartar

o regalar y palabras que la atestan.

No tienen fin en una casa

tan chica como ésta.

Sentarse y aquí plantada

soltar hojas y nuevas ramas.

*

Es la infatuación:

el amor al amor,

el odio al odio,

vuelven las cosas opacas

y las palabras flacas,

ilusión que no hace sombra.

El amor solo y el odio claramente

vuelven las cosas transparentes

pero con sombra propia

y las palabras fibrosas
no son copia de la cosa
donde encarna el yo.

Te amo y odio,
sí y no,
y desde hace tantos años
que el daño está claro:
somos yo y yo y vos.

Sentarse y aprender el dos.

*

Si me das por muerta,
pese al miedo sigo aquí sentada.
No se diga de alguien que es feliz
si no está muerto todavía,
dice el último coro del Edipo,
como si vivo el animal del ser
sólo pudiera ver
las cosas a su altura.
Feliz queda más alto
o tal vez muy por debajo.

Pero si me das por muerta
se abre la puerta,
y cuánto te quería,
cuánto trabajo.

Es de día

y subo a oscuras,
la tiniebla opaca lo que se termina.
Aun infeliz,
ver la raíz,
intuir la luz al final del túnel.

Sentarse y buscar la salida.

*

El único mortal feliz,
dice Sófocles,
es el mortal muerto.

Sentarse a pensar
y ser quien piensa
que es amor y no una ofensa
tu manera de desearme
desaparición,
felicidad auténtica.

*

Dichosa aquella, Witold Gombrowicz,
que en el mes diez
cumple sesenta
el día siete
y se alegra de haber llegado
y de poder hacer la cuenta.

Es el Día del Perdón,
buena ocasión

para que toda mi familia judía
me ofrezca absolución
porque jamás les hice nada
ni pedí. Aquí
sentada con mi propio Libro de Números,
largo y asimétrico como el húmero,
ni levita ni coanita,
advierto que soy todo un pueblo
si tengo en cuenta el dolor, mis lecturas aplicadas
y yo. El resultado de censar mi vida
trae esta frase pulida,
y Gombrowicz tiene razón:
“No hay horror que no consiga amor”.
No, no hay, y ¡ay!
tampoco hay nada mejor.

Sentarse y aun a oscuras
proseguir con la lectura.