



Charles Olsen translates four poems from *Bestial* (Papeles de Trasmoz, Olifante, 2019) by the Colombian poet Lilián Pallares

Abstract

Lilian Pallares is a Colombian poet and actress living in Spain where she has recently published her third collection of poems *Bestial* (Olifante, 2019). Together we share our passion for writing and have created the shows *Agita Flamenco* and *Palabra Azul, poesía del agua*, performing in Venice, Madrid, Barcelona and Soria. As well as travelling to Colombia with Lilián, I have been present during the creation of many of these poems and at the moments that inspired some of them. This shared journey and the insight into her world and cultural background, as well as her being on hand to ask any questions I may have, has been a great help during the translation process. The poems in *Bestial* are grouped into four sections: *Primitiva*, *Carnal*, *Viperina* and *Insurrecta* (Primitive, Carnal, Fork-tongued and Insurgent) and I have selected one from each for this translation. They draw on Lilián's Afro-Colombian roots, mixed with her life in Madrid and her experience of black culture and African dance. They gradually move from the universal to the personal and autobiographical, particularly her relationship with her late father.



Charles Olsen translates Colombian poet Lilián Pallares

La mujer semilla

Cuentan que por la noche sale a rondar los campos. De sus maracas brotan ríos de agua dulce y en su cadera un golpe de tambor endiablado.

Tiene pie bravo y mirada esquiva, y la piel recubierta de arena mojada.

Desnuda sube a lo alto de la colina, cantando la canción que le susurra el viento, y cuando la luna despliega su larga pollera blanca, acaricia su vientre fecundo hasta que el sol la esconde de vuelta en la profundidad de la tierra.

The seed woman

At night, as the story goes, she emerges to wander the countryside. From her maracas sprout rivers of fresh water and in her hips the diabolic beat of a drum.

Bravely she steps with evasive eyes, her skin caked in wet sand.

To the top of the hill she climbs, naked, singing the song the wind whispers to her, and when the moon unfolds its large white dress, she caresses her fertile belly until the sun hides her again in the depths of the earth.

Aguardiente

Ni el pudor,
ni el calor del verano me quitan estas ganas.

Quiero llamar a cada uno de mis amantes,
invitarles a mi casa, que vengan en fila india
con las palabras no dichas y los besos no dados.

Sentarnos a beber aguardiente,
a compartir mi fiebre,
y como buenos amigos
brindar por los sudores y las camas revueltas,
contarnos las infamias y escuchar
canciones que en verdad duelan.

Amarnos sin planear la próxima venganza.

Aguardiente¹

Neither modesty
nor the summer heat take away my desire.

I want to call each one of my lovers,
invite them round, arriving in line
with unsaid words and ungiven kisses,

to sit and drink aguardiente,
share my fever,
and like good friends
toast the sweat and the unmade beds,
tell each other of our disgraces and listen
to songs that truly hurt.

Love one another without planning the next revenge.

1 *Aguardiente is a Colombian anise-flavoured liqueur.*

Mi ataúd

Cargo un ataúd,
duerme a mi lado cada noche.
Es marrón, de madera antigua con tapa defectuosa,
cuna de mis orígenes.
¿Es un performance, una penitencia,
o acaso un accesorio extravagante?
preguntan los incrédulos.
He deseado algunas veces deshacerme de él,
empujarle escaleras abajo, arrojarlo por la ventana,
ahogarlo en la bañera, prenderle fuego,
inclusive, estrellarlo contra un camión.
Pero supera toda lógica:
Mi ataúd y yo somos inseparables,
nos une el vacío.

My coffin

I carry my coffin,
each night it sleeps at my side.
It is brown, of antique wood with a broken top,
cradle of my origins.
Is it a performance, a penitence,
or perhaps an extravagant accessory?
the sceptics ask.
Sometimes I've wanted to get rid of it,
push it down the stairs, throw it out the window,
drown it in the bath, set it on fire,
even toss it under a truck.
But it goes beyond all logic.
My coffin and I are inseparable,
we are united by emptiness.

Compasión

Veo llorar a la niña que fui.
Está esperando en la cocina a que su madre llegue,
mientras borracho su padre escucha rancheras.
A oscuras, estrenando su ropa del siete de diciembre, sabe
que no encenderá las velas ni jugará a las chispitas mariposas,
que cuando la canción acabe tendrá que poner otra
y servir un trago más de ron.
Por eso
a escondidas, detrás de la nevera,
sin que él la vea, prueba un sorbo.
Cree así mitigar el sufrimiento
de quien se siente cómplice.
En su corazón sabe que su madre no volverá.
Quiero abrazar a esa niña y secar sus lágrimas.
Pero ella tiene que ser fuerte
y mantenerse en pie toda la noche
hasta que la cabeza de su padre caiga al suelo.

Compassion

I see the child I once was, crying.
She waits in the kitchen for her mother to arrive
while her drunk father listens to Mexican folksongs.
In the dark, with new clothes for December the seventh, she knows
she won't be lighting the candles or playing with sparklers,
that when the song ends she'll have to change the record
and pour another rum.
So,
hidden behind the fridge
out of his sight, she tries a sip
believing it can mitigate the suffering
to which she feels an accomplice.
In her heart she knows her mother won't return.
I want to hug this girl and dry her tears.
But she has to be strong
and stay on her feet all night
until her father's head falls to the floor.

Bio

Artist and poet Charles Olsen (b. Nelson, 1969) moved to Spain drawn by Velázquez and flamenco guitar. In 2018 he was awarded the III Antonio Machado Poetry Residency in Segovia and Soria. He runs the Spanish poetry project *Palabras Prestadas*, and *Given Words* for New Zealand's National Poetry Day, and has published two bilingual collections of poetry, *Sr Citizen* (2011) and *Antípodas* (2016). His poetry films have been shown at international festivals and featured online in Moving Poems, Poetry Film Live and Atticus Review.