

*Best Literary
Translations*

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In the Meantime / Mientras llega

Luis Alberto de Cuenca

translated from the Spanish by Gustavo Pérez Firmat

North American Review

Keep our love to yourself. All of it.
With its fire quenched by the drizzle
of time. With its buzz imperceptible
to the rest of the world. With its magic,
black or white (depending). A broken,
dilapidated love, a sofa without springs.
Lie on it to wait for death. In the meantime,
allow your memories of me to devour you.

Translator's Note

Confined and bored during the years of the pandemic, I got into the habit of listening to radio programs from Spain. The way Spaniards spoke reminded me of my paternal grandparents, who were Spanish, and of other people I had grown up around in Cuba. My favorite program was a weekly late-night show about movies and music called *Cowboys de Medianoche* (*Midnight Cowboys*). Luis Alberto de Cuenca, one of Spain's most celebrated poets and a life-long cinephile, was one of the regulars. Every show ended with a poetry spot: he would read one of his poems. I liked the poems and got hold of some of his books. Paging through them, I came across "In the Meantime."

I wrote it in English as if it had been my poem, as if it were being composed for the first time. If Luis Alberto was the ventriloquist, I was the dummy, mouthing his words as if they were my own, which in fact they were. And so I felt free to take liberties: to reword, rework, abridge (at times a pithy utterance in Spanish, if translated word for word, comes off as long-winded in English). Rather than for literalism, I aimed for consistency of tone and intention. It is said that a translator betrays his originals. This is probably true, as it is that translation, like reading, can be an instrument of discovery: without expecting it, you find yourself in another's words, as I have.