
Despite a number of rather questionable decisions by the translator concerning the text selection and the treatment of scholarship, we still can be thankful for having this highly influential Persian fable collection available in a modern English translation. This makes it now possible to pursue global literary studies further, establishing meaningful bridges between India, Persia, the Arabic world, and medieval Europe.

Gustavo Pérez Firmat. *Viejo Verde*. Charlotte, NC: Main Street Rag, 2019. 89p.

JOY LANDEIRA
UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

Some poets whisper sweet nothings, and then there is Gustavo Pérez Firmat in the guise of a Dirty Old Man (D.O.M), a *Viejo verde*—“green old man” to translate the Spanish expression literally—who whispers slightly off-color and sour somethings. The dirty is a little bit bawdy and body, with cracks and wisecracks, wrinkles and tinkles and an eye that twinkles. *Choteo* is the Cuban word for it, a concept that GPF has developed in previous poetic and essayistic work. The poignant “somethings,” often internally rhymed, but unrhymed at verse end, tear at the heartstrings and cause tears of laughter and of sadness to spring and fall. Followers of Pérez Firmat will recognize about half of his Dirty Old Man collection from previous appearances as individual poems in literary journals. Thoughtfully, he has combined the earlier *poemas sueltos* along with new ones, as a present, he claims, to himself on his seventieth birthday. It’s not the color, but the off-color that makes a green old man fresh and fertile. That’s a good way to think of these poems, dirty old man jokes that reveal a lot about their author, both the humorous and the serious way of gliding along the edge of taste and gilding every observation with old-manly wisdom, self-evaluation and revelation.

Pérez-Firmat dedicates the volume to Mrs. D.O.M., his wife Mary Ann Pérez. She gets the credit for the author’s back-cover photo and for everything from dying his hair in 15 minutes to putting up with his rants that should be directed at his ex-wife “(the only / error she will ever admit to is having married him)” (11), to keenly evaluating his

dreams, “My dear, dear Dirty Old Man, you never change. / Familiar things in unfamiliar places always scare you” (33). She is only solid personal relationship he clings to, the “blind spot” on his glaucoma eye chart (70).

The D.O.M. reminisces in a conversational interior monologue that combines third-person talking to—and about—himself, babbling and sharing confidences. He discloses details of his New Year’s Eve breakup with his first wife and breakaways from other family members—the scotch-drinking Cuban father whose aquamarine and diamond ring he now owns, that does not make a difference (“He slips it onto his finger. It changes nothing”); his parents (“Are you close to your parents. Yes, they are both dead.”), siblings, who he disregards, and his “bequeathed by marriage” granddaughters, who tease him by grabbing a cigar from his hand. Barely acknowledged, the D.O.M.’s family members seem to have slipped out of his life. So has his desire to return to Cuba, “so sure that he will not return/ that only the odd chance of waking up one morning in the country his father lived for rattles him” (18). His memories, literally, go up in smoke, as he asks a woman at carwash to blow second-hand smoke in his face because it makes him think of his parents (68).

Certain prose snapshots depict him as aging--propping a heating pad against back of chair (53), listening to Lawrence Welk reruns (83), and musing out the window at birds and squirrels (53). Yet, the D.O.M. still takes pleasure in: his “dropping a pencil trick” to look up blonde’s skirt on train; or having a dermatologist write her phone number on the back of his prescription (58); or remembering and regretting Other women (62-64); or planning a medically enhanced “date night” with his wife (“No prostate. . . No problem”) (61), and admits, “What you lack in virility you make up in affection” (39). The biographical in-beddedness and embeddedness of GFP’s forays give us insight into this poet as D.O.M., but also as a caring old professor. He learns his students names, discusses Borges poetry with them (45), and “He never found a reason to treat students the way he treats himself.” Wistfully, he says farewell to the classes at the end of every semester, even as he hides out in his “hidden 4th floor bird nest of an office” with the “door locked to bar his colleagues.” “Imagine a lone wolf/ who dislikes sheep so much/ that he will not even eat them: D.O.M. at a faculty meeting” (41).

His bird’s nest office reflects an ongoing affinity with birds

that is one of the unifying images of reverie and calm. His “backyard birdland” with its bird feeder and birds that “migrated from his other country” often inspires poetic flights of fancy. In contemplating migratory birds, he connects with them: the squawking grackle that reminds him of his youth, the preening cardinal of his middle age, and now “he’d be a finch/ among finches, though he knows he is one nuthatch away/ from turning into a titmouse” (23). No longer wishing for *Next Year in Cuba*, the title of his own immigration story and of the words of the annual New Year’s toast for exiled Cubans, Gustavo Pérez Firmat, in *Viejo verde*, has nested with Mary Anne, his goldfinch (36), in the US, and, just like Laurence Welk, this *maestro* keeps on singing his song.

Philip Pullman. *The Book of Dust. Volume one: La Belle Sauvage*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017. 449p.

PETER FIELDS

MIDWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY

La Belle Sauvage, the first volume of *The Book of Dust*, reminds us how exceptionally important young adult literature has become in regard to grown-up speculative topics, not least of which would be the nature of consciousness itself. Pullman, often accused of being anti-Christian, is probably better understood as the anti-Lewis, mining similar territory as *The Narnia Chronicles* if only to offer his own brilliant take on Lewis’s motifs, especially the possibility of plural universes (recall the “wood between the worlds” in *The Magician’s Nephew*). Pullman’s universe also ingeniously employs Enochian angels. HBO has announced the first season of its own adaptation of Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*, the trilogy most notable for its first volume, *The Golden Compass* (originally titled *Northern Lights*). It became a 2007 movie starring Nicole Kidman as Mrs. Coulter, the villainous mother of the young protagonist, Lyra Belacqua (also known as Lyra Silvertongue) for her consummate skill with storytelling and lying.

In this first volume of *The Book of Dust*, a prequel to *His Dark Materials*, eleven-year old Malcom Polstead is the infant Lyra’s most faithful guardian. He uses *La Belle Sauvage*, his beloved canoe, to rescue her from the clutches of the Magisterium’s violent, repressive, and murderous investigative agency (known by the initials CCD), and to