

MAYDAY

MAYDAY MAGAZINE

Two Poems by Luis Alberto de Cuenca translated from the Spanish by Gustavo Pérez Firmat

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Witches by Jean Veber (1900) from the Art Institute of Chicago

SUICIDAL WITCHES IN A BAR

Witches. Their brooms lined up
in the intergalactic parking lot.
They drink without stopping,
these grim, unnameable women.
The bottles and glasses empty
until finally the witches collapse,
lifeless, on the parquet floor,
while the jazz singers, the waiters,
the row of cocktails on the counter
don't even notice. The witches die,
moaning vilely, grotesquely,
and no one stops before their bodies,
if only to vomit on them or utter
a prayer for their eternal rest.
Day breaks in the midsize Moon
of the planet chosen by the witches
for their alcoholic harakiri.
The daylight, bloodthirsty like a sword.
The daylight, blinding night creatures
and driving them crazy.
As far the brooms, no one knows
what they're for or cares
what happened to their owners.

BRUJAS SUICIDAS EN UN BAR

Las brujas. Sus escobas alineadas
en el aparcamiento intergaláctico.
No dejan de beber estas mujeres
torvas, estas mujeres innombrables.
Van cayendo las copas, las botellas,
hasta que al fin las brujas se desploman,
muertas, en el parqué, sin que se inmuten
los cantantes de jazz, los camareros
ni los libros de cócteles que abruman
la barra del local. Las brujas mueren,
entre estertores viles y grotescos,
y nadie se detiene ante sus cuerpos,
aunque sea tan solo a vomitar
sobre ellos, o a rezar una plegaria
por su eterno descanso. Llega el día
a la Luna mediana del planeta
que eligieron las brujas para hacerse
el haraquiri etílico. Las luces
del día, sanguinarias como espadas.
Luces que ciegan a las criaturas
de la noche y trastornan sus espíritus.
En cuanto a las escobas, nadie sabe

para qué sirven, ni le importa a nadie
qué ha sido de sus dueñas.

THE LITTLE MERMAID

*for Alicia, who left the sea
and came to live in my bathtub*

With your five beautiful sisters,
your grandmother and your father,
you were happy at the bottom
of the ocean, where life thrives under
the silent spell of water's magic wand.
But happiness, like family, tires us,
wears us out, and one day you decided
to break with the past and find a boyfriend
among the men who lived on the surface.
As if that weren't enough, someone
told you that if you fell in love
with a human, you'd be immortal,
which sounded good,
even if you didn't quite believe it.
A witch gave you a pair of legs
(and other things I won't mention).
Satisfied with your new body, you set off
for dry land. It was August and nobody
was surprised to see you on the beach,
naked and smiling, somewhat unsteady
on your brand-new legs, but as long
and perfect as those of Botticelli's Venus.
I was there at the beach, killing time,
getting a tan maybe,
hiding my horror of people
behind a sweet and affable exterior,
when you annihilated the gloom
simply by coming into view.
Then I knew that the glory of desire
would lodge in my soul forever.
And the same thing happened to you
(which is stranger, given that I was not
a prince and had a few extra pounds).
And so began the story of our mad love,
which remains alive today and will live
tomorrow and always, because it's made
from the same combustible material
of which myths and dreams are made.

LA SIRENITA

*para Alicia, que dejó el mar
y se vino a vivir a mi bañera*

Con tus cinco guapísimas hermanas
y tu abuela y tu padre eras feliz
en el fondo del mar, donde la vida
hierve bajo el conjuro silencioso
que urde la vara mágica del agua.
Pero ser feliz cansa, y aun abruma,
como cansa y abruma la familia,
de manera que un día decidiste
romper con tu pasado y buscar novio
entre los hombres de la superficie.
Por si eso fuera poco, alguien te dijo
que si te enamorabas de un humano
serías inmortal, lo que sonaba
bien, aunque no acabases de creértelo.
El caso es que una bruja te dio piernas
(y alguna cosa más que ahora me callo),
y, satisfecha con tu nuevo cuerpo,
pusiste rumbo a tierra. Era en agosto,
y a nadie le extrañó verte en la playa,
desnuda y sonriente, con tus piernas
recién inauguradas, vacilantes
aún, pero tan largas y perfectas
como las de la diosa del amor
en el lienzo de Sandra Botticelli.
Yo estaba por allí, matando el tiempo,
tomando el sol quizá, disimulando
el horror que la gente me inspiraba
detrás de una expresión dulce y afable,
cuando tú aniquilaste mi tristeza
con solo aparecer ante mi vista,
y supe que la gloria del deseo
se instalaba en mi alma para siempre.
Y a ti te pasó igual (lo que es más raro,
teniendo en cuenta que yo no era príncipe
y me sobraban unos cuantos kilos),
y empezó nuestra historia de amor loco,
que hoy continúa viva, tantos años
después, y que mañana estará viva
y siempre vivirá, porque está hecha
de la misma materia incombustible
con que se hace los mitos y los sueños.

A prolific, multifaceted writer and scholar, **LUIS ALBERTO DE CUENCA** possesses one of Spain's most distinctive poetic voices. His poems, elegant yet devious, explore the expressive resources of the conversational register by resort to a variety of materials: classical antiquity, comic books, Hollywood movies, slang, urban culture. He received Spain's National Poetry Prize in 2015 for *Cuadernos de vacaciones*.

GUSTAVO PÉREZ FIRMAT has published several books of poetry in Spanish and English, among them *Sin lengua*, *deslenguado* and *Bilingual Blues*. His books of cultural criticism include *Life on the Hyphen* and *Tongue Ties*. He teaches at Columbia University, where he is the David Feinson Professor Emeritus in the Humanities.

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