

**AURORA**  
**PURA LÓPEZ COLOMÉ**

**TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH  
BY FORREST GANDER**

**DP**

THESE TRANSLATIONS IN THIS BOOK ARE DERIVED  
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**AURORA**

## PRISM

Those coveting health—  
I saw them making their way along the worn path,  
the one trailing from the city  
to the far flung parts of the world,  
part of my own wounded humanity,  
a sweet apparition for whomever awaits me,  
living within but apart from me,  
in my thirst, my shifting  
moments of tribulation and peace.  
I was that. They were me.

They ascend toward Chalma, the pilgrims. Knowing that, on the way, their  
dry branch will break into blossom. Most are young. They carry water, a  
sleeping pallet, their daily lives. A few elders. Children on their shoulders.  
The sanctuary in search of its premises.

At once, with a single question  
their antiquity awoke.  
For what do they petition  
the Lord they worship,  
a Lord whose body  
is mortified by today's exhaustion  
and yesterday's misery?  
To go on crying in fury or impotence,  
to sicken and sicken,  
to testify to, to endure the absence of . . .  
at the very core of the horn of plenty,  
to be able to forget, yes,  
the seven or eight year old ghost  
impetuously flying without the tail or string  
by which it might be tugged back to earth,  
to forget the future history,  
the missing relinquishments to love.

*That?*

Oh, body, love and Lord,  
show me a tree made in your image,  
synagogues, shrines, mosques,  
filled out with your being.

They've made camp. Night. Groups of men over here, mixed groups over there, women with babies and children farther off. Around the campfires, standing, squatting. They share neither food nor coffee, each bringing out their own dinner, without making excuse for . . . and celebrating by sitting on the hard ground, letting rocks bruise their thighs, nursing the baby in front of strangers. The warmth whelms from the nearness of arms, backs, necks, breasts; not from fire. From blood. There are those falling asleep, those about to, and those keeping vigil. None need a roof.

We are all destined  
to the measure of breath  
by which the stars are singing.  
A communion of luminous bodies,  
I prayed in terror, in envy,  
a particular rotation,  
a particular translation,  
the joy of the indispensable.  
Nothing more.

The next morning, full of admiration and rapture, I returned to those places, hoping to breathe in the last smells of what was dreamed and shared. Going back as though to touch the votive stone, the feet or hands of the worn image of some miraculous saint:

I found nothing but garbage.  
The Lord's mouth agape,  
stinking breath.

# AURORA

## TO GOOD SHELTER

1.

The other world.

Light opened its doors to me  
when I wanted to follow,  
against the day,  
the course of this grave  
dream, ensombered.

A golden waterfall,  
fine needles,  
penetrating my blindness:  
crystal dust,  
the unseen word,  
*dawn.*

Fresh the balance.

Fresh the brilliance.

Gift of group weddings,  
paradise in the apple of science,  
the true juice,  
ripe pleasure.

2.

This world.

A sound sometimes dry,  
metallic,  
at times rubbery,  
has settled the morning for good.  
It has darkened little by little  
the songs of various birds,  
the croak of the daily,  
wind among hedges,  
the green yearning.

A man places with inexhaustible precision  
one tile after another on the roof of the house.

He must be the owner.

His work is like no other,  
constant, intended, without refrain.

The noise he makes has no echo,  
but goes off,

*off in search of the dawn.*

Those who live below,  
they will become voices  
returning, feeding on themselves  
beneath the roof.

**3.**

The owner has deigned to smile at me.  
The gold of his teeth  
has cut my talk to the quick.  
It's about time,  
I would say, if I could.  
To good shelter.



I.

You construct the days,  
the edifices of your life.  
Speaking with things,  
mixed up in them, you go,  
bit by bit, through  
the rhythmic waves  
of dream.

I see you watching the gestures.  
The acts, the nature  
of miracle.  
Like this, the base of your petals  
begins to close.  
Palpable, its absence,  
under my eyelids.

## II.

The wind circles  
the spaces you inhabit  
whispering caresses.  
My hand melts  
there,  
where nothing  
is missing.  
Your skin has been cauterized  
sweetly.  
And you're still alive.

### III.

Many your heavens,  
plentiful your spheres  
turning as one singular  
open earth,  
in whose center boils  
the water of light.  
Its remembrance brings vision  
to those who desire nothing  
seconds before death.  
The ear, and within,  
the brief echo of a void.

#### IV.

Tuning up, breaking through,  
quick fingers of light  
passing  
over the crystal keyboard.  
Slow sketch,  
new-born blue:  
points of light gleaming  
against the dark shells.

v.

Thanks to the spoke of the beginning,  
I could put together, almost blurred,  
the silhouettes  
of perfect trees,  
drunken and slender bodies;  
I rose on its grace  
like a willow,  
which is how I saw myself in the water  
where thought trembled,  
its poor essence shuddering  
before the higher thresholds to come.

VI.

*Dawn,*  
your eyes are the air.  
They take themselves  
in and become aware  
of themselves in the hollow of an echo.  
That, there.

You come to the world  
drinking it in, for the most part,  
with each breath.  
You've dredged that lagoon  
of smiles, surprises,  
fear, weeping, mystery:  
from between your lips the *name* of things  
is pouring.

**VII.**

So disposed,  
the drops suspended  
at the tip of each leaf  
announce the heavens,  
shrouds of autumn or of winter  
still exhaling the desire  
to coalesce into newness.

*Waterfall of laughter,  
hair in the air of torrential rain,  
ceaseless tears of underground caves.*

**VIII.**

White.

Almost snow,  
and so humid  
that you foresee nothing,  
*from your fresh corpse*  
*you rose alone,*  
*resplendently,*  
*unembraceably resuscitated.*

The forest, the stream, this garden  
have left behind the sepulchre,  
its valleys,  
its swampy grassland  
leading to the soul's drought.  
A tear-burst  
sprouts from the water soaked branches.  
Like intent serpents  
whose young make their own way.  
Language slithers off.



**IX.**

Above your calm,  
a drowsy veil undulates,  
airily:

like a full-sailed ship  
run aground in the inner bay,  
my body;  
yours,  
always benign, the tide  
over time soaks us  
to the core.  
My joy is such,  
that I barely begin to fathom it.

What do you listen to,  
I ask,  
if it isn't a song  
leaving your lips,  
it must be hunger, the sincere thirst  
of this wailing  
wall which  
is the flesh.  
One note from you  
would have opened my ears  
and eyes:  
so to say,  
filling me with time  
from then on.

x.

Again a hollow penetrates everything  
and converts it into an emblem,  
ether, human mutability.

*Nothing alters the apparent  
mitigation of faith.*

*Happiness  
is fleeting.*

*Dust very fine.*

Just as I'm about to come across  
your voice in this place lush  
with natural beauty,  
and while I'm immune to you,  
you go on, inapprehensible,  
a horse stepping over  
the shadow of some hoofprints  
hidden in the turmoil  
of my skull.

*Upon transfiguring*

After that haze,  
the air's pure spring  
opens into a ventricular flower,  
fully illuminating  
the passage.

Welcome.

You will pour out  
a ceaseless longing,  
an eternal hope,  
*may it happen,*  
*may it be born,*  
*may it be reborn.*

Maybe you will figure out the expected route.  
Maybe,  
free already  
from your aching body,  
you will follow ardour's path.  
Maybe you will discover more sensual pleasures.

You will be blessed.

Let me dream  
your substance indissoluble,  
*touch the face of dawn,*  
return as myself, *to myself,*  
always wakeful.

## DEATH OF THE KISS

*You, prayer,  
you, blasphemy,  
you, razor in the prayer  
of my silence*

—Paul Celan

## FONS

I wanted to find you inside me  
knowing the concavities of that dark place  
would give me vertigo.  
I wanted, I searched out your face.  
I wanted, any way I could, to contemplate  
the part of you within me  
that would bring along the rest  
and join my mouth to yours, others,  
to see how the dream goes.  
To know that in all, there are two  
salivas, rivers of life,  
influent, influential,  
*to know*  
that I know, what I know,  
fiery tongues submerged  
in this sea of enigmas,  
gold, bathed in gold,  
the Word comes forth spoken;  
written down it is death,  
a divine substance eternally  
kissing the foam of a marine light.

*Mors osculi*

formed of loving, desiring, deciphering the pure,  
the impure figure, a language that says

*In the beginning*

conjugated and sublimated:

*I am that I am,*

come to me,

approach with your mouth open,

feel my breath,

fill yourself on the Name,

open your eyes and you will see

*Nothing.*

## ORIGO

I'm waiting outside the third grade class. The exam will be oral, individual: triumphant. All the world trembles. It's a test on *national language*. I've got cotton-mouth, I'm pasty, my tongue's dry. I'm all sterile gusto, stuffed and suffocating. I enter. Close the door. I go slowly up the dais. "Conjugate whatever you want in any tense." Without a second's hesitation: to lie, the present imperfect of my con jury. Transparent, revealed, my tongue *exalted*.

## FONS

Reanimated, spirit restored,  
reincorporated, body restored,  
I contemplate between dreams  
a scene I've made off with  
like the one who stole fire,  
like the one who opened the devil box  
out of curiosity,  
like the one who saw her equal  
and her life's love  
were the same and so effortlessly  
brought them together.  
I took exactly  
what was not mine,  
with the eyes.  
I saw the sea in your entrails:  
in your surface, mud.  
I kissed you like a shipwreck,  
like one who insufflates the word.  
With my lips I traveled  
this entire continent,  
Adam, from dirt, Nothing.  
I knew myself in your substance,  
grounded there,  
emitting aromatic fumes,  
an amatory banquet of ashes.

## ORIGO

Agency of inhumations. Insistently, I ask each of several people: what does it mean? Someone answers: to inter. Others advise me to keep quiet. The word is exequy. *Voice* of funeral rites. I kept thinking of humidity and later of humus, and my laughter broke loose. It appeared, the day before, in a book of natural sciences: completely decomposed vegetal matter, part of the organic soil. Slime. Inhume, to bury, so soon? So much better if I could put my cheek close. Smell its smell. Although yearnings for corruption would be exhumed.



## FONS

Eat the bread,  
drink the wine,  
and live, right?  
Right.  
Of word and deed.  
Of deed in word.  
I give my word  
and it returns to my mouth.  
I swallow it, digest it, retch.  
How many times have I said  
*my spirit is nearing affliction's  
peak and I don't know how  
to christen the suffering*  
and how many others have I vomited  
*I'm so sorry  
my most sincere condolences.*  
I remember, in passing,  
the living water, that dazzlement,  
one of many nights,  
my heart beating over my chest  
so its angelic rise and fall  
could be seen,  
the heart, pure spirit,  
molded from eaten words.  
It speaks of the invisible,  
the ineffable forces rising and falling  
from the wellspring to the terror.  
A beating of wings more intense  
than the stroke of a chisel.  
It leaps into the throat like an echo  
of power, subtle,  
*Un soplo en el corazón*  
creationary,

*a heart murmur*  
inviting the dream  
*los ventrículos del corazón*  
and cashing life's chips in  
*the chambers of the heart*

Enough. The pump sings:  
spurting between diastole and systole.  
Out, out from here.  
The tongue of pleasure,  
of circumlocution waits,  
not the tongue of the seminal kiss  
in the maw of the prophet:  
"And it will come to pass in the final days,"  
God says,  
"that my spirit will spill across all flesh  
and your sons will prophesize, and your daughters,  
and your young will see visions  
and your elders dream dreams."  
In every one, a shard of glass.  
Tower fallen over fallen man  
over the grains of sand  
that assemble anew  
the wailing wall,  
and the parapet like *razor in the prayer* . . .  
A word of Yours would suffice to heal my spirit.  
Which one? The breath or the murmur?  
The spirit-giving breath  
or the soft sound holding forth  
like wind in the leaves?  
Pulsations, throbbing around the doors of the body,  
*open me,*  
around the portals of the world,  
*close me,*  
around every threshold.

## ORIGO

There is a writing inside being which explains why I go around consuming, conserving, transforming. It is. Another seeks and finds answers, far off. Is. But, in which should the confession be articulated? How vent pleasure if there is no banquet? I've already been told this means avidly abandoning oneself to a gross pleasure. A pleasure in un-burying. Behind the screen, the vicar's mouth emits a rarefied air, something untranslatable: *Presérveme, Ah Señor, en Tu misericordia. Pues, saber Tu Verdad es la Vida.* Tongues inside and outside, serpents chasing each other, touching, kissing, decaying. Their papillas are pupils, set in search of a face. In them, that keenest note, the ecstasy so intense it "sometimes results, accidentally, in the death of the body, a way of dying known as death by the kiss...."

## FONS

Naked scripture,  
projector of opaline bodies.  
Nights reading,  
cultivation, cult of The Letter.  
*I pray in tongues*, I murmured,  
to decipher my destiny,  
that dark assignment  
of brilliant skin and dregs of flesh.  
Fruit going rotten when it is touched,  
when the finger isn't lifted from the line,  
when the finger isn't lifted from the sore.  
I stretch out my arm which speaks  
of branches, bifurcation,  
inscriptions in the other's  
tombstone.  
Arm, severed part, amputated  
from the kiss.  
Salvation's tablet,  
rope at the neck,  
sheets tossed from the window,  
an escape interwoven with veins  
stretched to the point of rupture.  
One after another,  
my life's voices have been tied off  
like clipped arms:  
to mean—to stretch—to reach.  
The long, the short parts, yes,  
they defeat the distances.  
Now their syllables curse me:  
  
"Already you've understood,  
you've stretched toward yourself,  
even just a little;

welcome to the paradise  
of perfect omissions,  
to shadings dissolved in....”

Who do you kiss,  
who do you touch,  
to whom are you joined  
gift of fire,  
ethereal slipknot?  
After veils of silence  
from the deep chamber’s bed  
the word of the Beloved listens:  
*breath...soplo...*

## ORIGO

Calm winds filled out the sails of the boat that carried my mother, after not too long a trip, to these lands adamic with misery. There, with that imperceptible shuffle, she began learning to speak the truly essential: good morning, good evening, until later... She brought, her only luggage, the one small “chest” containing her dearest possession: a beautiful doll, the exact replica of the child she once had been, with some little dresses for life’s special occasions: everyday clothes, Sunday clothes... Bearing her passage of time in her arms. I don’t know whether she kissed the ground that received her, whether her mother tongue was swollen with excrescences. God only knows how she will be integrated into her surroundings in that “New World.” Not long ago, someone who often kissed her in life was trafficking in what on paper they call “dry remnants.” So, there you have it! I always had the secret knowledge that exhume and inhume would end up meaning the same thing. Something that in a puff of laughter, human as humus, *dehisces*, *disperseds*, *dislocates*, arranges here and now my own unhinging, *discharges*, drawn from the old dyscharge, “to shoot a weapon,” an ambivalence confirmed in testimonies from the Golden Century: *dyscharge* or *discharge*: “shooting off” or better, “matter issuing from a wound.”

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Mexico City in 1952, Pura López Colomé studied literature at UNAM. She published literary criticism, poems, and translations in a regular column for the newspaper *Unomásuno*. The author of several important books, including *El sueño del cazador*, *Un Cristol en Otro*, *Aurora*, and *Intemperie*, she is also the translator into Spanish of works by Samuel Beckett, H. D., Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, and others. Robert Hass notably incorporated lines from a poem by Pura López Colomé in his own poem, “English: An Ode” in his most recent book, *Sun Under Wood*. In 1998, The Academy of American Poets brought López Colomé to New York, and The Lannan Foundation flew her to Santa Fe to give readings of her work. Most recently, Seamus Heaney invited Pura López Colomé to Ireland, where they read together to receptive audiences.

Pura López Colomé’s own poetry is philosophical and exacting, pared into sharp, dark lines, obsidian shards. Her imagination, like Celan’s, is marked by a kind of moral severity located in language itself; the poems are less concerned with representing the observable surface of life than with tracing the melodies and absences of a spiritual vision. “I have no interest in sincerity,” she once told me. “Sincerity and veracity are distinct.” Her concerns have necessitated the unconventional approach to language that marks her work, its philosophical tones and its often dialogic form.