

GUILLERMO PARRA

MORO / WESTPHALEN

The poet César Moro (1903-1956) left Lima, Peru in 1925 and settled in Paris where he befriended André Breton and joined the Surrealists. Moro was the only Latin American member of the original Surrealist group in Paris. Upon Moro's return to Lima in the mid 1930s he befriended Emilio Adolfo Westphalen (1911-2001). In 1936 they collaborated on a pamphlet that polemicized against the Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro. In 1939 they edited the only issue of the literary journal *El uso de la palabra*. Moro moved to Mexico in the 1938 and Westphalen decided to stop publishing poetry.

I first read Moro and Westphalen while researching the Venezuelan poet Juan Sánchez Peláez (1922-2003). Sánchez Peláez was influenced by their publications from the 1930s, which he first encountered while studying in Chile where he was associated with the Mandrágora group of surrealist poets.

The Spanish novelist Enrique Vila-Matas includes Westphalen in his novel *Bartleby & Co.* as an example of a writer who chose to abandon poetry. Westphalen did however return to poetry again in 1980.

“The Lima poet Emilio Adolfo Westphalen, born in 1911, developed Peruvian poetry by brilliantly combining it with the Spanish tradition and creating hermetic poetry in two books which, published in 1933 and 1935, stunned their readers: *Las ínsulas extrañas* and *Abolición de la muerte*.

Following his initial onslaught, he remained in absolute poetic silence for forty-five years. [...]

Throughout these forty-five years of silence, everyone would ask him why he stopped writing: they would ask him this on the rare occasions Westphalen would let himself be seen, though he never let himself be seen completely, since in public he would always cover his face with his left hand, a nervous hand with long fingers like a pianist's, as if it hurt him to be seen in the land of the living.”

(Enrique Vila-Matas, tr. Jonathan Dunn, *Bartleby & Co.*, New Directions, 2004)

For Moro I have translated from the original Spanish versions in: César Moro, *La tortuga ecuestre y otros textos*, (Caracas: Monte Ávila Editores, 1976). The Westphalen poems are translated from the original Spanish versions in his collected poems: Emilio Adolfo Westphalen, *Simulacro de sortilegios: Poesía completa* (Madrid: Visor Libros, 2006).