

# POEMS

*Juan Carlos Vargas*

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## Tidepool

Pulchritude of cowrie, primped in finery  
 Starred like mica, cernuous on rocks,  
 Awaiting the light limpud stroke  
 Of the watery note

Aphonic trumpets lie in gala apparel  
 To wear this day across  
 The parallel persistences  
 Of this shore

Dextral drawstring bags tenant  
 Wave-wrought dens of jasmine,  
 Underlings ride at ease on jollyboats,  
 The same tiny leaking caravel  
 Tugging landward still

What life we suppose improvising  
 In these blended archways of the seen,  
 Avenues and crossing streets  
 Venues of forests so Casbah-thick  
 Someone could get lost in there.  
 Now a taxiload of juveniles  
 Arrives

And someone wearing incandescent  
 Headgear is forced to walk  
 The gangplank, a fulcrum of rosewood light  
 Teetering above a black scalloped hearse, a young  
 Lachrymose eye gazing back  
 Across

The imperishable sunburn of midday  
 And dark in the rebus of its ravine,  
 A neighborly yellow-pincer drowsing rod

(In snaring the self-evident) wakes turbans  
 Of colored happenstance, a winged mote melting  
 There in the wet light's unresolved embrace

## Where

Our *costumbrista* of this coast, stripped  
 In chocolate threadbares, sits undisturbed  
 In the arenose tracings of his age  
 Pondering in archaic repose his thimble-  
 Sized-average-towers-of-mind  
 From the distant window  
 Of his gaze

And stipples his underfoot of water  
 With but a diorama of such fountaining thought  
 That his apprentice, a monastic green-  
 And-gold monocled snail munching at  
 The Five-and-Ten loses his way  
 Upon the altar of his reflections.  
 Sundown.

Summertime closing, my shattering  
 Vespering shore. The carousel slowing,  
 The equator's tit for tat. An about-  
 Face, amygdaline and sunglassed,  
 Our *costumbrista's* shimmering last  
 Colored thoughts bearing grays  
 And golds to the final leaf  
 Of day.

## Mountain

Hinterland of grit and loam,  
 A tree-lined battlement  
 That knows by rote a midland's pitch.

I shan't try—climb this ancient treetop calling.

*Climb and you shall find  
 A nightblooming presence,  
 Groundstuff gruel for a  
 Graveside edge, a slipknot  
 Of frayed bracts and wind chimes*

*Traveling down a lush earthenware,  
The lost junctures of stump and stone.*

Precaution gone north pointless to plea.  
Five clouds upon the screen, a pathway  
Flecking a dream life, yucca flowers  
Pronouncing red quietly in the wind.

I steal a look, a stern vision  
Backpedaling from airy pane to oval gift,  
Dirt's husk and hide—it wouldn't speak.

I step over muteness, a gruff  
Groundcover, knee-deep in elephant grass,  
The curved posture of saplings  
Straightening my slow harvest  
Of shortening steps.

*Climb and you shall find  
Wrapped in sateen, a mist-inlaid  
Interior, a windward mask  
Never to be touched by human hand,  
The timberline length of a cloud-  
Spree parceling itself mistily out  
Over a lost pastorage.*

No spun relief of wind or self,  
Bear left northwesterly;  
Clouds in a distant thinning rain, a

Frayed falling as I tumble out of  
Then into a dissolving cloud-nest.

Still a land rises, boots sinking in.

Cheek to cheek, each risking so  
Little, the mist and I split up.

Midway up the peach bloom of spring  
I slip north, bend through plant music,  
**A near winter's rainy green, buckboard rough**  
Along each color frill  
(You had heard), rides empty in.

*Climb and you shall find  
A furtive pool of lunscent  
Residue streaking a stone  
Slab with stenciled haze,  
A cartpath urging forth  
An all-night rural spring.*

Opacity outstripping mist, piece by visible piece.  
Confusion benumbed. The bittersweet source  
Of the long-sought-after will die-from-it.

So still in bare fractions, criblike, I climb up  
A retreat as out-of-body blood frogleaps  
Years over an acre's hemlock edge.

Plantdown riffling sun-flaked branch, chipped  
Brickwork of bluegray haze where the longbow  
Of day tightens driest in the arc.

I'll hope to westward, the clearest chanting  
Nights of sun, never dreaming . . .

*Plough and you shall find  
The flame of stone that lights a  
Cliffside's sheered dark magnitude,  
A fluting jaguar bone,  
The very voice of dirt,  
Amid a daybound scent  
That makes a song  
Of the idyll of the wind.*

Yearlong compressed to day, outer coils  
Of smoke riddle cold peasant air, profile  
Of ruddy slope on wan relief, an early  
Sultry summer slips past.

Intrepid ages should not betray.

Strips of sky like *lianas* standing  
Forest in a line. A stray leaf shooting lengthwise  
Indigo rapids. Air shaft like a torn medieval sleeve,



Stones set in a half-mortal, breathing mulch.

*Plough and you shall find*

*The prodigal preserve of a farmer's*

*Dark prosperity, a fabric*

*Of the least intent, a decrescendo*

*Of depths that laces with flocks*

*Of paths the woodgatherer's*

*Steps above.*

Thunderheads color the letter of the horizon.

(You had heard), fishpond cloud above, silvered-blue

Fish going intermittently to watery seed.

Shall trees recount their spheres in the turning dark

Or awe drain the mind to a slope's resolve?

Air in farflung emptiness, a silence like a purpose

Emerging (let truth be swayed). Fuchsia batch

And nibs of blue. Wool-warm of color,

A window of blue, in the theme

Of blue. River, sea and shimmering pool,

A watery cadaverous world of drop to drop

Asleep at last below on the sard-streaked wavering

Lines and slow curves of wood.

## Rain

or call it curry-

comb

of air, zillion

rich,

liquid bolus,

freshpots of steaming air,

shifting

a whole

season above

a weather-vane,

a small

distorted

misty thing

of wave

ferrying

high

above liquid cam-

pa-

niles, each a

lithe

string of insis-

tence caught in the

sodden

light of

temporary

localities

that might

a window-

box shake whose

rootlets

a drop will

an

outdoors winnow from a

still

country day-or

split

up in the splash-

ing light of a dry-

ing beam and

offer their

light impressions

to a brown-stained

ledge

that

stirs its waking

splinters to

meet then

hold-

rising

in

like-

nes-

s

blends.

## Feather and Seraphim

Noon. A summercamp of butterflies,

Two black-headed

Trogons languishing in  
 Latitudes, the maestro  
 Of the marimba, our dehydrated god,  
     Asleep in the shade (like  
 The one I found one morning  
 Perishing

In the dim contours of my faithless coral  
 Bed), a sung  
     Mass of liquid gold chiming  
     Silently from the nave of  
 Of the plaza's ruined church, euphony favoring  
     The western shore, not mine on  
     Northern points where taxies shuttle  
 Back and forth

The fragrance of amaryllis even as it dies  
 And couples  
     Embrace the matter-of-fact,  
     The infinitesimal in their hands,  
 The riddle of what might have been  
     Asleep between them like  
 The suppliant air. Passing pitfall  
 Question in

Your wisdom the obituary of  
 Annoyance:  
     An old woman sits, in the  
     Piracy of all that shines,  
 And threads into a skirt of maize a design  
     Of failed intent: This  
     Handprint of seraphim, driftwood,  
 The benumbed print

Retains the epitaph of our longing:  
 Witness, distant  
     From the arc of all that basks:  
     Feather and seraphim  
 Entwined as never before below the  
     Hymn of her horizon  
     As a buttermilk-bright almondtree  
 Recites simply

The grieving green genius of her leaves  
 And beneath  
     Her tree a bird lands in pools

Of fretted gold to the softest  
 Windpipes of praise, the smallest blue  
     Riddle of love I once  
 Understood just beyond the silvered  
 Sunbeams drawing her sudden leaves.

## A Bruegel Winter Scene

Awakened by  
 Your thin voice  
 Beneath the night

I wintered villages  
 Down  
 The soft corners

Of your thighs  
 As another season  
 Of snow

Had passed  
 Down thin shoots  
 Of earth

And when you slept  
 In your dreams  
 I could see the pure

Light of cut  
 Glass turning  
 Above the dream-tinted

Soft stones of the night  
 Draped in and still  
 Holding fallen snow.

