

Victor Manuel Mendiola

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VÍCTOR MANUEL MENDIOLA

**Your Hand, My Mouth
—Selected Poems—**

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The original poems published here are all drawn from the author's collected poems, *Tan oro y ogro* (1987–2002) (UNAM, Mexico City, 2003), with the exception of 'Tu mano, mi boca', which appeared in the book of the same name published by Editorial Aldus, Mexico City, 2005.

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Para Jennifer

For Jennifer

MADAME X UN RETRATO DE JOHN SINGER SARGENT

1

Ella está detenida en un espacio
¿de su recámara? ¿del vestidor?
¿del baño? ¿Desde qué ángulo interior
ella inclina su torso muy despacio?

La miro pensativa en la labor
del cuadro: el traje negro en largo lacio,
seda con luz de perla. En el palacio
—¿la casa es un palacio?— está el color.

Pero el color proviene de otra parte:
del rostro y de los hombros. La blancura
termina y recomienza en esa cara

como si fuera inaccesible un arte
más vivo que este rostro en la pintura.
En el retrato el corazón se aclara.

MADAME X

A PORTRAIT BY JOHN SINGER SARGENT

1

She is held in a space.
Is it her bedroom? Dressing room?
Her bathroom? From what interior angle
Does she slowly bend her torso?

She is pensive in the artistry
of the painting: the sleek, long black dress
is silk with a pearl light. In the palace—
is the house a palace?— there is colour.

But the colour comes from elsewhere:
from her face and shoulders. The whiteness
ends and beings in that face

as if it were inaccessible to find an art
more alive than that countenance in the painting.
Through the portrait my heart gains clarity.

Pero si observas bien, el pelo es rojo;
rojo negro que viene del espacio
del cuarto en donde un lento pincel lacio
ha encerrado la luz con un cerrojo.

Insisto: toda avanza muy despacio
y ella, el pelo cogido en un manojo,
apenas se desplaza por el ojo
que la admira. En la mesa, un cartapacio

imaginario la detiene. Ella
no mira los papeles; ella mira
en sentido contrario, donde luce
la luz. La lentitud la hace más bella.
En la luz, su cabello me conduce
a este color que en bien y en mal delira.

But if you look carefully, her hair is red,
black red that comes from a space
in the room where a measured, fine paintbrush
has enclosed the light with a lock.

I insist: everything moves slowly
and she, her hair gathered up,
barley enters through the eye
that admires her. An imaginary

notebook on the table stops her. She
does not look at the papers; she looks
in the opposite direction, where the light

lights up. The listlessness makes her more beautiful.
In the light her hair drives me, in good and in evil,
to this color that leads to delirium.

Imaginé que, si el vestido fuera
rojo, el cuadro también daría gozo.
Ví que en la luz había un orgulloso
color de llama y una enredadera

de sangre desatándose. Ví un pozo
de luz en el pincel—donde cualquiera
tiembla—y supe la mano y la tijera
que hicieron el vestido tan hermoso.

Pero me percaté de que el rubí
del vestido de seda provenía
no de él sino de quien lo lleva puesto;

sólo de Madame Equis. Y sentí
que todo en ella estaba en armonía:
la luz del rostro con la sed del gesto.

Imagine if the dress were
red, the painting would also dazzle.
In the light I saw a proud
color of flame and a climbing vine

of unraveling blood. I saw a well
of light in the paintbrush—where anyone
trembles—and I knew the hand and the scissor
that made such a beautiful dress.

But I also understood that the ruby
silk dress came not from the one
who makes it but from the one who wears it;

only from Madame X. And I felt
that all in her was in harmony:
the light of the face with the thirst of a gesture.

No me puedo quitar el pensamiento
de cómo debió ser la piel desnuda
de Madame Equis. No me cabe duda
de la blancura de los hombros; siento

el temblor de los pechos y la aguda
sensación de algo que se entrega lento
y se derrama en un cristal violento
y el corazón gratuito y sin ayuda.

Presiento el largo de sus largas piernas,
aunque fueran pequeñas; la medida
de sus pies, la cascada dividida

que abandona su espalda en dunas tiernas
y la sombra en la sombra de esa raya
que el tacto esconde y que la boca calla.

I cannot stop the thoughts
of what Madame X's naked skin was like.
I have no doubt about the whiteness
of her shoulders. I feel

the quake of her breasts and the sharp
sensation of something that gives slowly
and overflows into a smashed glass
with a gratuitous and unaided heart.

I can imagine the length of her long legs,
although they may have been short. The measure
Of her feet, the divided cascade

that abandons her back in tender dunes
and the shadow in the shadow of that opening
that a touch hides and the mouth quiets.

Translated by Jennifer Clement

BLANCURA

Al hacer el amor
pienso que la blancura de tu cuerpo
pierde sentido sobre
la blancura del mío
como si fuera inútil
que un color se disuelva
sobre el mismo color.

Pero un minuto más tarde comprendo
que las calladas olas pálidas
de nuestros cuerpos
sí tienen un sentido,
porque cuando se encuentran
son el paisaje
de un ruido tan callado,
móviles ondas quietas,
y que nos apretamos
de la misma forma
que se aprieta un cristal
bajo la presión del viento
rompiéndose en un abrazo
de astillas y hendiduras,
fragmentándose
en un silencio de agua y aire
dentro de nuestra carne
en la noche del cuarto.

Y que tiene sentido
romper tu espejo contra el mío
para mirar
en las quebradas piezas reunidas
mis pies o hallar tu boca

WHITENESS

When making love
I think your body's whiteness
loses meaning over
the whiteness of mine
as if it were useless
to have one color dissolve
over the same color.

But one minute later I understand
that the rising pallid waves
of our bodies
do have meaning.
This is because, when they find each other,
Our bodies are the landscape
of such a quiet sound—
mobile still waves.
And I understand that we hold tight
in the same way
that a windowpane
tightens under the wind's pressure
to shatter in an embrace
of splinters and cracks—
fragmenting
in a silence of water and air
within our flesh
in the night of the room.

And I understand that it has meaning
to break your mirror
against mine
to see
my feet or find your mouth

en la blanquísimá repetición
de nuestros cuerpos.

in the broken, reunited pieces,
in the whitest repetition
of our bodies.

Translated by Jennifer Clement

LA NOVIA DEL CUERPO

1

Aquí veo una mano
y aquí, en el otro extremo,
hallo la otra.
Han descendido
por la pendiente
de mis dos brazos
en un lodo de sangre.
Miro mis manos
sobre la cama
y me dan miedo antes de tocarte.

THE BRIDE OF THE BODY

1

Here, I see a hand
and here, in the other extremity,
I find the other.
They descend
along the slope
of my two arms
in a clay of blood.
I see my hands
over the bed
and they make me afraid
before I touch you.

Roto, adentro de mí,
me coso por afuera.
Agujas y tijeras
me colocan los brazos,

pegostean mi cara,
me despuntan el ojo.
He recibido un pie
y he entregado una mano,

he tomado un zapato
y me he puesto un perfume.
Con esa mano pido
a la novia del cuerpo;

con esa mano sola
me pongo una cabeza,
me dibujo la frente,
me acomodo la boca
para morder tus piernas.

Broken on the inside,
I sew on the outside.
Needles and scissors
Set my arms in place,

affix my face,
prick my eye.
I have receive a foot
and give a hand,

I take a shoe
and put on perfume.
with this hand I ask
the bride of the body;

with only this hand
I put on a skull,
I draw a forehead,
I adjust the mouth
To bite your legs.

. . . apagamos la luz. La oscuridad
nos despertó con un abrazo ciego.
La oscuridad siguió sin rumbo y sueño
y todo estaba en orden y en un murmullo horizontal.
Nos estiramos sobre el largo lecho
de nuestra cama
como quien se echa hacia atrás
a la inmovilidad.
Nos oímos oírnos en silencio.
Puse mi mano sobre tu mano
y sostuve la rama de tu brazo;
puse mi pie sobre tu pie
y sentí como aumenta la pequeñez del ser.
Mi boca nunca tocó la raya de tu boca
y nos quedamos despiertos muchas horas.

. . . we turn off the light. The darkness
woke us up with a blind embrace.
The darkness continued without direction and dream
and all was in order and in a horizontal whisper.
We stretched out over the length
of our bed
like those who throw themselves backwards
to an immobility.
We listened to ourselves hearing ourselves in silence.
I placed my hand over your hand
and supported the branch of your arm;
I put my foot over your foot
and felt how the smallness of being increases.
My mouth never touched the line of your mouth
and we remained awake for many hours.

Translated by Jennifer Clement