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## Translator's Preface

*Ilana Dann Luna*

Ignacio Ruiz-Pérez (Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, México, 1976) received his Ph.D. in Hispanic Literatures from the University of California, Santa Barbara. He has published in *Revista de Literatura Mexicana Contemporánea*, *La Palabra y el Hombre*, *Revista de Humanidades del Tecnológico de Monterrey* and *Prolija Memoria*. He has been awarded the following poetry prizes: Premio Nacional de Poesía "Alí Chumacero" (2000), Premio Nacional de Poesía "José Gorostiza" (2004), Premio Regional de Poesía "Rodolfo Figueroa" (2005), and Premio Nacional de Poesía Joven "Salvador Gallardo Dávalos" (2006). Ignacio Ruiz-Pérez is the author of *La canción del desterrado* (2004), *Navegaciones* (2006), and *Deslizamientos* (2007).

The poetry of Ignacio Ruiz Pérez, in his own words, is a "conceptual poetry." His language is rich in texture and culture, evoking vivid images, and juxtaposing them with surprising sensations, enmeshing mythic and literary *topoi* with the scenes of the entirely familiar. From one line to the next he traverses registers from high to low, transporting us through a landscape of sensation, sound, and, above all *ideas*, quite literally creating a unique poetic universe in which he sets into action words against words, playing out battles and love embraces. As a translator this presents both a joy and a challenge. His work does not rely on metered verse, nor rhyme, which mitigates the age-old poetry conundrum of choosing whether to remain "faithful" to style in lieu of meaning or meaning over style. Nevertheless, the task is far from simple. His poems are sonorous and complex, giving preference to ambiguity: images and ideas that contain a multiplicity of meanings, none that exclude the others. While Ruiz Pérez is very much a Mexican writer, and some images, like the undulating of the roof tiles in the poem "Cats," evoke very specific cultural references: the orange, rounded tiles that are typical of many Mediterranean countries (and thereby transplanted as a dominant aesthetic in the colonial architecture of New Spain), his poetry tends toward abstraction and the revelation of universally observable phenomena and sentiment.

I find that each time I read his work there is something new, a new way of seeing linguistic relationships, a new way of experiencing, like a gem that refracts light, kaleidoscopic, ever changing. It was my task as his

translator, to do justice to this polyvalency, the strangeness that certain images convey, the warmth and comfort of others. At the same time, I tried to maintain parallel sound patterns in the translation, to capture the feel and the flow of his work. In order to elucidate the complexities of this process, I will give a few examples from the poem "Cats." In this poem, the word "inquieta" conveys the sensation of disturbance, and at the same time a sense of excitement. The cats' curiosity is awakened by the sound of cars and the young girls that stumble by in a state of inebriation, but to merely translate the word as "disturb" or "bother" excludes the underlying characteristic of piqued interest. I opted for the word "stirs" as it allowed me to convey the idea of movement, disturbance of a previously still surface, for example, and the stirring of desire, a darker sensation that is provoked in these cats. The very same drunken girls posed a problem, as in Spanish their gender is marked linguistically in the article and adjective that describes them—"las" and "ebrias"—and in English it must either be done so with an explicit shift from noun to adjective: "young drunks" (that happen to be girls) to "young drunken girls," an entirely other idea. Their "pechos falsos" or "fake breasts" presented yet another complexity: in Spanish conveying the idea of primping, and exaggeration, but not necessarily silicone. I chose "plumped breasts" to give the sensation of augmentation, highlight their (lost) femininity and at the same time capture an alliterative element with "passersby."

Certainly, as with any translation, there are an infinite number of possibilities that radiate from the original text. The choices that I made were guided by my knowledge of Spanish, my poetic sensibility in English, and most importantly, my direct interaction with the poet himself. I was fortunate to not only collaborate personally, but to work side by side with him, in a give and take, distilling meanings and intentions, and even, in some cases, changing the original poems. This is characteristic of Ruiz Pérez's work. He is a poet in constant motion; his poetry a living, breathing entity that continuously evolves.

## *Poemas / Poems*

## LOS GATOS

*Para Rodolfo Mendoza Rosendo*

Han bajado a dormir en mis venas,  
 a rasgar la luz mínima de la sala.  
 Han subido al sofá y han entrado  
 en los paisajes cenizos de los estantes.  
 Alguien afirmó que eran corceles  
 de un infierno imposible.  
 En realidad son seres diminutos,  
 ligeras ondas en las aguas del Estigia.  
 La niebla se desplaza de norte a sur  
 y salen a recorrer las calles.  
 Les inquieta el ruido de los autos,  
 el tambaleo de las jóvenes ebrias,  
 el carmín de los labios,  
 y los pechos falsos de los paseantes.  
 Brincan de un patio a otro.  
 Se trata de algo más que un ritual,  
 ejecutan ante todo el equilibrio del mundo.  
 De ahí que sus patas se adhieran  
 al movimiento de los tejados.  
 "Son del diablo", me comentó un amigo  
 mientras veíamos una silueta  
 que se agrandaba contra el muro  
 del departamento, una y otra vez,  
 espantando las larvas del silencio.

## Selected Poems by Ignacio Ruiz-Pérez

*Translated by Ilana Dann Luna*

## CATS

*For Rodolfo Mendoza Rosendo*

They have descended to sleep in my veins  
 to scratch the dim light of the living room.  
 They have jumped on the sofa and entered  
 the ashen landscapes of shelves.  
 Someone once said they were steeds  
 from an impossible inferno.  
 Really they are tiny things,  
 light waves on the waters of the Styx.  
 The fog shifts from North to South  
 and they go out to wander the streets.  
 The noise of cars stirring them,  
 the staggering of young drunks,  
 the crimson lips,  
 and plumped breasts of the passersby.  
 They leap from one yard to the next.  
 It's something more than ritual,  
 above all, they balance the world.  
 That's why their paws stick  
 to the movement of roof tiles.  
 "They're the devil's own" a friend told me  
 as we watched a silhouette  
 expand along the wall of an apartment  
 time and again,  
 scaring off the larvae of silence.

**EDGAR ALLAN POE AGONIZA  
EN WASHINGTON COLLEGE HOSPITAL**

El agua que va y viene  
se cuenta en la fijeza del insecto  
antes de morir abrasado.  
¿Qué he visto en el horizonte?  
Sólo gaviotas  
nubes como islas  
veleros que se bambolean  
al pie de los muelles.

(Si digo estas palabras es para ver  
el regreso de los barcos  
en la transparencia del aire.)

Vuelvo la vista cansada  
y el día llega a su fin.

**EDGAR ALLAN POE LAYS DYING  
IN WASHINGTON COLLEGE HOSPITAL**

The water that comes and goes  
is marked in fixation like an insect  
before dying in the flame.  
What have I seen on the horizon?  
Only seagulls  
clouds like islands  
sailboats bobbling  
at the foot of piers.

(If I say these words it is only to see  
the ships return  
on the transparency of air.)

My sight grows tired  
and the day comes to its close.