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## Translator's Preface

*Pavneet Aulakh*

I owe my love of Jaime Gil de Biedma to a friend of mine from Madrid who gifted me with an edition of his poems. That this gesture should have been the occasion for my introduction to his work is so befitting of Gil de Biedma's poetry, which, with its intimate tone, often gives the reader the sense of sitting down with an old friend, one with an imagination capable of ranging poetic traditions from Donne to the Modernists.

In fact, the poetic project of the Modernists, whom Gil de Biedma studied at Oxford, presents a compelling analogy for the freedom of form and language that characterizes his style. Against the highly wrought neoclassicism cultivated by the State under Franco's rule, Gil de Biedma developed a poetry of sensuality couched in a language of intimate address. Writing primarily in free verse, he occasionally introduces formal techniques like end-rhyme into his poems, but they often serve, as in Pound and Eliot, to echo discarded structures. And like Eliot and Pound, Gil de Biedma terrifically uncovers the musical richness of demotic speech.

As the comparison I have been drawing will suggest, it is Gil de Biedma's directness that paradoxically makes him a challenging poet to translate. Without the scaffolding of a consistent form to translate, how do you find the equivalent for free verse? How do you retain the rhythms of the colloquial in the translation? My aim throughout, and this is partially informed by the relative obscurity of Gil de Biedma in the United States, has been to be as faithful to the syntax, line lengths, rhythms, and colloquialisms of the original as English would allow. That and the hope, to quote Rolfe Humphries, that my translations wouldn't make Jaime Gil de Biedma "cringe, wince, or look for the nearest exit."

## PEEPING TOM

Ojos de solitario, muchachito atónito  
que sorprendí mirándonos  
en aquel pinarillo, junto a la Facultad de Letras,  
hace más de once años,

al ir a separarme,  
todavía atontado de saliva y de arena,  
después de revolcarnos los dos medio vestidos,  
felices como bestias.

Te recuerdo, es curioso  
con qué reconcentrada intensidad de símbolo,  
va unido a aquella historia,  
mi primera experiencia de amor correspondido.

A veces me pregunto qué habrá sido de ti.  
Y si ahora en tus noches junto a un cuerpo  
vuelve la vieja escena  
y todavía espías nuestros besos.

Así me vuelve a mí desde el pasado,  
como un grito inconexo,  
la imagen de tus ojos. Expresión  
de mi propio deseo.

## PEEPING TOM by Jaime Gil de Biedma

*Translated by Pavneet Aulakh*

Eyes of a loner, my amazed little boy  
who I spied spying us  
in that patch of pines, beside the Faculty of Arts,  
it's been more than eleven years,

since I got up to leave  
still dazed with spit and sand  
after rolling around, the two of us half-dressed,  
happy as beasts.

Your memory, it's funny  
with such a concentrated intensity of symbols,  
remains bound to that story,  
my first experience of requited love.

At times I wonder what became of you.  
And if at night now lying next to a body  
the old scene returns  
and you still spy our kisses.

Just so, it returns to me from the past,  
like an incoherent cry,  
the image of your eyes. The look  
of my own desire.