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Poems by Juana Rosa Pita

Translated by Erin Goodman

Translator's Note: Juana Rosa Pita's words draw us in from some faraway shared space, a voice that is at once universal and unique. Despite being considered one of the most important contemporary Cuban and Latin American poets, her work has only sporadically been translated to English. Several paradoxical themes are consolidated in her poetry: love and loss; exile and homeland; religion and physics; spirituality and wonderment at the connectedness of the universe, juxtaposed with science and our finite existence on this earth.

In her poetry one often finds these "sorbos de luz" (*sips of light*, as Juana Rosa calls them)—aphorisms that pop into mind spontaneously, as in "Autumn Quartet" and "Spring Partita." A bilingual collection of more than a hundred of Juana Rosa Pita's poems that I've translated over the last decade is forthcoming from Song Bridge Press in 2021, to be called *The Miracle Unfolds*. I consider it a great privilege to have developed a wonderful and profound collaboration with this woman whose poems resonate so deeply, and the translations of which we now share a spiritual ownership.

The original music that accompanies the audio reading for "Autumn Quartet" is by John Vogel, TW's production editor.



Autumn Quartet

1

Among its confusions
life gives us chords,
to form little musical jewels.

2

October arrives, gray; yet,
the cold doesn't reach
homes where fires blaze.

3

Silence only reigns
if it harbors complicit intentions,

articulated by a gaze.

4

One word suffices
for the innersea
to unfurl a melody.

Cuarteto de otoño

1

Entre sus confusiones
la vida nos da acordes
con que hacer joyeles de música.

2

Octubre llega gris, no obstante,
el frío no se siente
donde es de casa el fuego.

3

Sólo vive el silencio
si custodia intenciones cómplices
que la mirada enuncia.

4

Una palabra basta
para que del marítimo
se desate una melodía.

- [5]



Spring Partita

1

I live between two languages
and in neither am I an exile:
mestizo is my verb.

2

God knows what paintbrush
gave the Cape Cod hydrangeas
their Botticellian blue.

3

A song that doesn't belong to us
—although it carries our voice—
forges a path.

4

Allegory of living
often creates a poem,

or a piece of music.

5

Let this sip lose itself
in a beautiful moment,
lived or yet to be lived.

6

One can be content
with little in life,
if that little is immense.

Partita de primavera

1

Habito entre dos lenguas
y en ninguna soy exiliada:
mestizo es mi verbo.

2

Sabe Dios qué pincel
da azul botticelliano
a las hortensias de Cape Cod.

3

Se abre camino un canto
que no nos pertenece
aunque lleva voz nuestra.

4

Alegoría del vivir
a menudo hace un poema
o una pieza de música.

5

Que se pierda este sorbo
en un hermoso instante
vivido o por vivir aún.

6

Puede uno contentarse
con poco en la vida
siempre que el poco sea inmenso.

- [5]

Art Information

- “[Crujiente](#) [6]” and “[Vyšehradský Cemetery](#) [7]” © Sarah Simon; used by permission.



Juana Rosa Pita is a poet, writer, editor, and translator. She was born in Havana in 1939, and left Cuba in 1961. Since then she has lived in many cities, including Washington, Caracas, Madrid, New Orleans, Miami, and Boston, where she currently resides. The author of over two dozen volumes, she is the recipient of numerous prizes, including first prize for Latin American poetry from the Institute of Hispanic culture in Málaga, Spain, the ‘Letras de Oro’ prize from the Iberian Studies Institute in Coral Gables, and the VIII Premio Pisa Internazionale Ultimo Novecento.



Erin Goodman is a translator and editor based in Arlington, Massachusetts, as well as TW's copy editor. Her poetry and short fiction translations have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Lifted Brow*, *Poetry International Rotterdam*, *spoKe*, *Los Angeles Review*, and *New England Review*, and in *La Guagua Poetry Anthology: Celebrations & Confrontations* (Loom Press, 2019).

For more information, see [Erin's website](#) [8].

Source URL: <https://mail.talkingwriting.com/sips-light>

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