

Consumed by Fire:
Poems by Anabelle Aguilar Brealey
Translated from Spanish by Diana Manole with the author



As part of our commitment to featuring the work of women writers and translators, we're excited to share today seven poems by the Costa Rican-born poet, **Anabelle Aguilar Brealey**, translated from Spanish by **Diana Manole**. These beautiful poems are part of Aguilar Brealey's anthology "She-Wolf Trail" that includes selections from nine poetry books. The poems, originally published in *Consumidas por fuego* (*Consumed by Fire*, Uruk Editores, San José, 2011), take the reader on a virtual gallery tour, investigating the life and work of painters, sculptors, and photographers, blending gracious images, and passionately advocating for women's rights. They are accompanied by an insightful translator note that documents Diana Manole's process, illuminating her word choices and offering the back story behind these translations.

We'd love to hear from you! Follow us on Twitter [@TranslateMonth](#), tag us [@TranslateMonth](#) and share using [#TranslationMonth](#), join our mailing list, submit a translation month event, or like our [Facebook](#) page. We hope you'll join us and celebrate your favorite translations of women writers from all over the world in September and beyond.

—*Claudia Serea and Loren Kleinman*

Translator's Note

Born in Costa Rica and living in Canada since 2014, Anabelle Aguilar Brealey has decided to compile “She-Wolf Trail,” an anthology including selections from nine poetry books, and publish it in her Spanish mother tongue, as well as in English and French, the official languages of her new country. As we met at a festival in Val-David, Quebec, a few years ago, she asked me to translate these poems into English with her support. Working on this project has helped me discover a sophisticated writer who sublimates cultural references, blends gracious and atrocious images, gives meaning to formal experiments, and passionately advocates for human and especially women’s rights. Think whimsical, but fierce sociopolitical activism!

The seven poems published on National Translation Month have thematic unity and visual diversity, while providing exciting translation challenges. They are part of the collection [Consumidas por fuego](#) [Consumed by fire], published in 2011 by Uruk Editores in San José, Costa Rica. According to Lidia Salas’s [review](#) for The Writers’ Circle of Venezuela, this book is based on “an investigation of the life and work of painters, sculptors, and photographers... which spans the last three centuries” (my translation) and three continents. Part of Aguilar Brealey’s forthcoming anthology, these works bear the characteristics of the entire original collection, as Salas explains them. The poet does not describe the artists’ lives and paintings but creates her own “daguerreotypes that hang on each page, like in a gallery [using] dialogue, images, emotional and conceptual content” (Salas). She also returns to these women their voices from an even more urgent twentieth-century civic perspective and merges historical references with allusions to the political turmoil in Venezuela, where Aguilar Brealey lived for over four decades. In “As such,” for example, Italian photographer [Tina Modotti](#)’s fictional reflections on her involvement in the Spanish Civil War echoes the poet’s own experience with the [Bolivarian Revolution](#) “in this death / we call life.”

To translate this series, I have first read or re-read the artists’ biographies and looked at their work. This has aided me better understand how Aguilar Brealey transfigures specific details in life and visual art in a Freudian manner, adding several semiotic layers and literary metaphors. Indeed, the poems’ speakers remind us of these artists’ creative passion, independent spirit, and dignity that challenged patriarchy and its treatment of women as domestic assets. “Vegetal” seems to make come true [Georgia O’Keefe](#)’s wish, when painting her oversized flowers, but without the hypersexualized male gaze the artist [publicly deplored](#): “Well — I made you take time to look at what I saw and when you took time to really notice my flower, you hung all your own associations with flowers on my flower and you write about my flower as if I think and see what you think and see of the flower — and I don’t.” The symbolism of [Black Iris](#) (1926) and [Oriental Poppies](#) (1928), for example, determined my word choices, walking the fine line between sensuality and obscenity, such as “the provocative black iris” and, respectively, “the boisterous bewilderment / of red poppies.”

As I did not know [Remedios Varo’s work](#) before this project, the oneiric poem, “Departure,” took me by surprise. When I asked for clarifications, Aguilar Brealey told me about the “mysterious and strange artist who created her paintings like an alchemist.” Still, the lines “hicimos cadáveres / con dibujos colectivos,” revealed their meaning only after I learned about the Surrealist technique “[exquisite corpse](#)” and looked at one of the [works](#) created by Varo and others using it. In my translation, I have then taken the liberty to add “exquisite” to facilitate the understanding of this cultural allusion: “we made exquisite corpses / through collective drawings.” This poem’s ending is an example of Aguilar Brealey’s postmodern playfulness and self-irony, with the speaker abruptly switching from morbid images to her cats: “mis gatos / irán al paraíso / porque su realidad / no es cotidiana.” I came to a dilemma I have encountered many times: I perfectly understood its meaning but did not know how to translate it. After several days of trying synonyms of “quotidian,” which did

not do justice to the naturalness of the original, I opted for “because the everyday / isn’t their reality,” reversing the syntax.

Researching everyday objects has also been necessary to understand and then preserve the specificity of each culture and period, which Aguilar Brealey instills into these poems. “Now Suzanne,” for example, evokes French painter [Suzanne Valadon](#). The poem starts with “El cauterio de hierro / se clava / inflamando / mi cuerpo.” At first, I thought of iron chastity belts, but quickly understood I was mistaken. As I discovered through research and the author has confirmed, “El cauterio de hierro” refers to the iron cautery, “a metal rod heated in a flame,” according to *Collins Dictionary of Medicine*, used since Antiquity to stop heavy bleeding. To Aguilar Brealey, this is a metaphor of patriarchal oppression, “a weapon that makes women artists create paintings or anything in the arts with a burning passion,” as she told me.

Translating in context each poem and occasionally each word has been my main strategy to achieve linguistic, cultural, and poetic accuracy, when dealing with complex references, as well as some words’ time-dated connotations in the source and/or target languages. For instance, I have used “paintings” instead of “pictures” (“Poppies”) to make sure no twenty-first century reader might think of photographs; though I am usually concerned about [foreignization](#), I have kept the more nuanced Spanish “[guitarróns](#)” (“Frida or Sadjá”); every time it was possible, I have chosen the synonym with Latin roots closer to the original, as in “tempestuous/tempestuoso,” “inflaming/inflamando,” and “vigorous/vigorosos” (“Now Suzanne”). Above all, I have done my best to mirror in English the surprising grace and weightlessness of these poems that reflect upon gender oppression and women artists consumed by the need to create.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Anabelle for this opportunity that has enriched my understanding of women visual artists and Latin-American poetry, for her generous and thoughtful clarifications, and delightful self-irony. My thanks also go to my son, Tudor Manole, for proofreading the texts in English, to Diego O'Brien and Andrés O'Brien, Anabelle's grandsons, and especially to Sharon Goodier, my poet friend from Toronto, who checked the correctness of our translations.

—*Diana Manole, translator*

Selections from *Consumidas por fuego* (***Consumed by fire***, Uruk Editores, Costa Rica, 2011)
by Anabelle Aguilar Brealey
Translation from the Spanish by Diana Manole with the author

Without voice or body
Artemisia Gentileschi (Italy, 1593-1652)

Wise water
in a silver bowl
rinses my hands

those who mold
my shapeless matter watch me
 raunchy old men
 swindlers and rowdies
 playing God

Chiaroscuro
leads me to drama
 its sound
 can be very sad

no fountains or gardens
just a wall

Don't look
impertinently
into my distraught eyes
that unsettle you

it's easier to wash myself
than go mad

Sin voz ni cuerpo
Artemisia Gentileschi (Italia, 1593-1652)

Agua sabia
en un cuenco de plata
enjuaga mis manos

los que moldean
mi materia informe me observan
 viejos libidinosos
 estafadores y pendencieros
 jugando a demiurgos

El claroscuro
me lleva al dramatismo
 su sonido
 muy triste puede ser

ni fuentes ni jardines
solo un muro

No mires
con impertinencia
mis ojos de angustia
que tanto te incomodan

lavarme es más fácil
que enloquecer

Veritas

Rachel Ruysch (Holland, 1664-1750)

Stones gleaming like animals
insects like coiled eyes
in stone

there are forests on my table
with hints of honeysuckle

glowing snakes
lie down among the flowers
entangled
under a dark breath

an abundance of peaches and walnuts
in the bucolic space
seeking the mouth
of the anxious young man
who approaches
ignoring that
pleasure is useless
when the end is near

Veritas

Las piedras brillan como animales
los insectos como piedras
de ojos ovillados

en mi mesa hay bosques
con madreselvas insinuantes

las serpientes luminosas
se recuestan entre flores
enredadas
bajo un respiro oscuro

la profusión de duraznos y nueces
en el bucólico espacio
busca la boca
del ansioso joven
que se acerca
ignorando que
es inútil el placer
cuando el fin se acerca

Poppies

Mary Cassatt (United States, 1844-1926)

On the field
the child gathers
red flames
holding in his arms
the sepia-coloured stems
he has no basket
doesn't believe
in accumulation

he enjoys the silence
later
some sesame cookies

two cut-out silhouettes
in the background
against the sky
barely visible

they aren't necessary
how shy is this child

Amapolas

El niño recoge
las llamas rojas en el campo
toma
los tallos color sepia
no tiene cesto
no cree
en la acumulación

disfruta del silencio
después
de unas galletas de sésamo

al fondo dos figuras
recortadas
frente al cielo
apenas pálido

no son necesarias
huraño es el niño

Now Suzanne
Suzanne Valadon (France, 1865-1938)

Iron cautery
nailed
into my body
inflaming it

tempestuous fire
that turns
into canvas

my sketches
hidden among
the marmalades
for winter
my paintings
hidden
for years

I raised a goat
to devour
my paltry drawings
the perfection of a work
is reached
in just thirteen years

my waist
is garnished
with a bunch of carrots
 I playfully
 scared you with
 my paint-smeared hands

you are Adam
I am Eve
the germs
of shameless nudity
lyrical and
rancid

I stood up
from the striped quilt
with sharp edges
rhythmic
in its colors
bright and vigorous
I've said
I think
what I had to say
Ahora Suzanne

Suzanne Valadon (Francia, 1865-1938)

El cauterio de hierro
se clava
inflamando
mi cuerpo

incendio tempestuoso
que se convierte
en lienzo

mis bocetos
escondidos
entre mermeladas
de invierno
mis cuadros
ocultos
durante años

crié una cabra
para que devorara
mis triviales dibujos
la perfección de una obra
se obtiene
en apenas trece años

mi cintura
adornada
con un manojo de zanahorias
 en carcajadas
 te asusté con mis manos
 sucias de pintura

Adán eres tú
yo soy Eva
el germen
de la desvergonzada desnudez
lírica y
olorosa

me levanté
de la colcha a rayas
de bordes vivos
rítmica
en colores
brillantes y vigorosos
he dicho
creo
lo que tenía que decir

Vegetal
Georgia O'Keefe (United States, 1887-1986)

I enlarge flowers
so their splendor
won't be ignored

I minimize them
to make them look colossal

I celebrate
his sensuality
in the provocative black iris
which envelopes me
within its petals
becoming unrecognizable

I meditate on
the unbearable
 uncertainty
inside the lily
a seducer
that breathes
on the rose-hued background

I live
in the boisterous bewilderment
of red poppies
 in front of the camellias
 with their modesty

none of them conceal
the depth of
my soggy smell
but some echo
in their stems
my passionate spine
natural and unique

Vegetalia
Georgia O'Keeffe (Estados Unidos, 1887-1986)

Amplió las flores
para que no se ignore
su esplendor

las minimizo
para que se sientan colosales

celebro
en su sensualidad
al sugerente íride negro
que me envuelve
con sus pétalos
haciéndose irreconocible

medito sobre
la insoportable
 incertidumbre
del interior del lirio
seductor
que respira
sobre el fondo rosa

vivo en
la ofuscación estertórea
de las amapolas rojas
 ante la humildad
 de las camelias

ninguna esconde
el fondo de mi
olor húmedo
solo algunas reflejan
en sus tallos
mi apasionada espina
natural y única

As Such

Tina Modotti (Italy, 1896-1942)

Why put them in order
as if art fits
into a diaphragm

if we can't control
the Indian's misery
of spicy cocoa

neither the war
its fury
because it celebrates evil
in this death
we call living

Tal cual

Para qué acomodarlos
si el arte cabe
en un diafragma

si no puede controlar
el indio su miseria
de cacao picante

ni la guerra
su furia
porque celebra el mal
en esta muerte
que llamamos vida

Frida or Sadja
Frida Kahlo (Mexico, 1907-1954)

Today's like
the last day
 warm
 profuse

with a sense of fortune
distanced
from words

still leaves
in the astonished patio

canvases upstairs
waiting
like white shrouds

the green of the parakeets
and the waterseller's whistling

the agonizing howl
of Miss Capulina

and the eyes of others
of the monkeys
staring into mine
with fruity tenderness

far away the mariachis
their sad guitarróns

Where did the fear come from?

if only a fleeting word
was missing
to save the world

Frida o Sadja
Frida Kahlo (México, 1907-1954)

Hoy es como si fuera
el último día
 cálido
 espeso

con el sentido de fortuna
alejado
de las palabras

las hojas estáticas
en el asombrado patio

los lienzos esperando
arriba
como mortajas blancas

el verde de los pericos
y el aguador silbante

el aullido agónico
de la señorita Capulina

y los ojos ajenos
de los monos
atentos a los míos
con ternura frutal

lejanos los mariachis
triscan los guitarrones

¿De dónde vino entonces el espanto?

si faltaba tan solo
una palabra fugaz
para salvar al mundo

Departure
Remedios Varo (Spain 1908-1963)

In my insomnia I see
three floating eyes
a burning candle
 and opened doors
 seeking the fourth way

insects fly
with parchment wings
aglow
and raise their antennas

we made exquisite corpses
through collective drawings
 sold bed sheets
 in Argelia
 to wrap the dead

from the wardrobe
clouds
levitate
seeking transmigration
in the mourning profile

my cats
will go to paradise
because the everyday
isn't their reality

Salida
Remedios Varo (España 1908-1963)

En el insomnio
veo tres ojos flotantes
una vela encendida
 y puertas abiertas
 buscando la cuarta vía

los insectos vuelan
con alas luminosas
de pergamino
y elevan las antenas

hicimos cadáveres
con dibujos colectivos
 vendimos sábanas
 en Argelia
 para envolver muertos

desde el armario
levitan
las nubes
buscando transmigrar
en el perfil doliente

mis gatos
irán al paraíso
porque su realidad
no es cotidiana

Atrium

Margarita Bertheau (Costa Rica 1913-1975)

The sun-warmed tiles
wait for rain
the corridor
is covered
in verbena leaves

not even birds
can be heard

there are no flowers in the room
just a gas lamp
and a bed with cotton sheets
ironed and perfumed

two steps
and many doors
lead to the patios
with enameled leaves

I'm mirrored
in the neatness of the field
while an iguana looks
at me
shy and shimmering

in the kitchen
there is a fire
steam rises
a volcanic plume
thick and spectral
from the pot of an electric blue
the vulnerable water
of the coffee
resurrected heated
in the tin kettle

without wood
the oven rests
confident in
the goodness of the day's
first loaf of bread

Atrio
Margarita Bertheau (Costa Rica 1913-1975)

La soleada teja
espera la lluvia
el corredor
se tapa
con hojas de verbena

aquí no suenan
ni los pájaros

no hay flores en el cuarto
tan solo una lámpara de gas
y una cama con ropas de algodón
planchadas y olorosas

las dos gradas
y múltiples puertas conducen
a los patios
de hojas esmaltadas

me reflejo
en la pulcritud del campo
mientras me mira
una iguana
tímida y brillante

en la cocina
hay lumbre
sale el vapor
pluma volcánica
espesa y espectral
de la olla azul eléctrico

el agua vulnerable del café
resucita entibiada
en el caldero de lata

el horno reposa
vacío de leña
seguro
de la bondad del pan
del día primero

About the author



Anabelle Aguilar Brealey was born in Costa Rica, where she earned a Bachelor in Biology, and spent more than four decades in Venezuela, working as a high school teacher and Counselor of the Embassy of Costa Rica to Venezuela; she also served as a member on the Board of Directors of the Writers' Circle of Venezuela. For political and family reasons, she left Venezuela in 2014, emigrated to Canada, and is now a Canadian citizen.

Anabelle has published nineteen Spanish-language books in Costa Rica, Venezuela and Spain: seven collections of short stories; the book-length essay *The Archangel's Onion* (2002) about the work of Eunice Odio, a Costa Rican poet; and eleven collections of poetry, most recently *Profanación del huerto* (Orchard Desecration, 2016) and *Niño empolvado por explosión de guerra* (Child Powdered by War Explosion, 2019). Her poetry is included in several Spanish-language anthologies and has been featured at readings in Venezuela, Costa Rica, Mexico, at Smith College in Massachusetts, United States, and at the International Festival of Writers and Artists in Val-David, Quebec, Canada. These are the first translations of her work into English.

About the translator



Diana Manole is a Romanian-Canadian scholar, literary translator, and the author of nine collections of poetry, short fiction, and drama in her home country. The winner of the 2020 Very Small Verse Contest of the League of Canadian Poets, Diana's English-Romanian poetry book, *Praying to a Landed-Immigrant God*, is forthcoming from Grey Borders Books in 2020. She has also translated or co-translated seven poetry collections, while her co-translations with Adam J. Sorkin of selected poems by Moldovan Emilian Galaicu-Păun won 2nd prize in the 2018 John Dryden Translation Competition in the UK. Diana holds a doctorate from the University of Toronto and teaches academic and practical courses in theatre, literature, and creative writing at universities in Canada. These are her first translations from the Spanish with Anabelle Aguilar Brealey.