FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Stet: Selected Poems
Jose Kozer
Mark Weiss, translator
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Cuban-American poet Kozer, the author of thirty-seven previous books and regarded as the leading Cuban poet of his generation, is presented here in the first bilingual edition of his work. His inspiration appears to be the outcry of a tortured soul who has lived long enough to become fatigued with even torture and has arrived at a kind of wry wit suffused with a bitter nostalgia and a desperate search for identity. His struggle weaves a fabric composed of tangled cultures, ethnicities, and language that can only be reported as a kind of literary EEG.

Translator-editor-publisher Mark Weiss sets the stage with an incisive introduction which compares the pared-down verbiage of the "new" poetry with the dense prolixity that has characterized Spanish-language poetry down through the ages. Poet Kozer's work exuberantly embraces the description. The poem condenses space, time, and sensory perception into a single image. In the poet's observation of a scene, for example, a particular shade of blue may register not only visually, but recall in the same moment a scrap of color hidden among dense clouds on a day years ago, a flash of the edging on a particular girl's petticoat, with the effect that the image not merely describes, but evokes its resonance.

The translations are brilliant as Weiss plunges into this dense forest of syntax, synesthesia, and coined language, and ends up with a real poem in standard American English: academic when necessary, colloquial when called for. Rather than a mere gloss of the Spanish text, it appears that the translator has plunged into the heart of each poem until he gains the attention of the same muse who inspired the original.

A special treat awaits the bilingual reader. In a poem about Havana, tidy-housekeeper Mama is cleaning for a special day, in language evoking the mixed European backgrounds of herself and Papa, and even erasing traces of a departed Jewish Grandpa. Outside:

> *… afuera la calle era una fiebre de mulatas encendidas, / la calle*
> *se desbocaba en la triple iridiscencia de un bongó cubano. / y las*

tres lindas cubanas movían trémulas las nalgas de una / canción. /
mientras mi madre ordenaba decisivamente los espejos.
… outside was a tumult of inflamed mulatas / the street
overflowing with the triple flame of the bongo / and three lovely
Cubans, their cheeks quivering, swayed to the
rhythm of a song. / While my mother straightened the
mirrors for once and all.

In the Spanish version, what the mulattas shake to the music is the Spanish word "nalgas," which means (colloquially) "buns," translated discreetly as "cheeks." Comparing the sensibilities of these two poets is possibly the most delightful aspect of the work.

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