## ROBERT LIMA WRITERS ON MY WATCH

POEMS

### Robert Lima

### Writers on My Watch



Poems



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I dedicate this chapbook to the memory of Paul West (1930-2015), Novelist, Poet, Memoirist, and Friend, who was a recognized master of the English language. I treasure the numerous autographed works of his gifted me.

R. L.



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"Dichotomy" in (Borges) Simply a Man of Letters

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"First Respects" in Pivot

"Gwendolyn Reading in Black Voice" in Say that the River Turns: The Impact of Gwendolyn Brooks / Shooting Star Review

"Horizon" in (Borges) Simply a Man of Letters

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"A Tomos" (formerly "Lucretius" in *Delta Epsilon Sigma Bulletin / The Literary Tabloid*)

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The front and back covers are designed by Keith Lima.

#### Writers on My Watch

AMIRI BARAKA JORGE LUIS BORGES ANDRÉ BRETON JOSEF BRODSKY **GWENDOLYN BROOKS** LEONARD COHEN DEMOCRITUS JAMES DICKEY ROBERT FROST FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA TONY HILLERMAN RANDELL JARRELL LEUCIPPUS JACKSON MACLOW HOWARD MOSS DYLAN THOMAS RAMON DEL VALLE-INCLAN MARIO VARGAS LLOSA PAUL WEST WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS YEVGENY YEVTUSHENKO MAO ZSEDONG

#### The Poems Listed Alphabetically

After an Anonymous Eighth-Century Gaelic Poet Afterwords Anasazi Aphorism A Tomos Bard Bestiary Breton Casa Grande Closed Hearing Dichotomy Dylan's Walk DT Eyes Figure of Jackson Mac Low First Respects Gwendolyn Reading in Black Voice Hallelujah Man Horizon Janus Lorca Lorca's End Movement in Voices Randell Jarrell Went from Town Riding on his Pony R. Frost - Franconia, NH Southern Draw Southwest The Golden Isles To William Carlos Williams: "In Memoriam" Virtuosity

# WRITERS ON MY WATCH

#### AFTER AN ANONYMOUS EIGHTH-CENTURY GAELIC POET

That long and cold day in Great Moor foreshadowed devastating nights with rain, no trifle, lashing through the ancient wood that sheltered life, the clean wind howling a great roar.

The gusts had broken his resolve, had crushed the poet's spirit with their great, relentless icy thrusts, had drowned him in his human plight. He suffered endlessly in time!

To voice his sad condition to the King, (upon the distant star-bright throne), like Job before his deity, who lacked a sense of human suffering or need, he wrote the pain in "Wind" and "Storm."

The poems shout of wind consuming life like twigs beset by raging crimson fire ordained by Heaven for a purpose that the poet's reason cannot quite surmise. There was no course but deep despair.

His grief took form in plaintive words that still describe our meager state (a hopeless fear yet shakes the mien when Nature's elemental powers rear). There is no respite from the cruel wind.



#### AFTERWORDS

On Mario Vargas Llosa PEN AT PENN February 14, 1991

After words that Vargas Llosa & Oviedo said, the Russian loomed up suddenly on stage-quite tall & gaunt, with ruddy face & hair, a raunchy tie of orange-red set off against the jacket's camel hue--to take possession of the honored guest and of our ears.

At dinner, Yevtushenko rambled on and on. Directing his accented twang to Mario's face, the table-hopping voice curtailed all speech but his, its so-so Spanish nurtured years ago in Castro's Cuba and Bolivia's heights, where he had haunted Che Guevara's path.

Tyrant of the banquet table all night long, he soon insisted that we clear away our talk like dirty dishes and listen only to his voice declaim a poem (in Spanish) he had written down in honor of the Comandante's savage death that fateful day when hunters felled their prey.

"A la izquierda, siempre a la izquierda," said as he ranted from my right (his left, of course), made his impassioned utterance first rise then fall like the Bolivian hills where Che Guevara died. The leftist words he'd spoken to the captors then had nearly cost the Russian poet his own life.

Emphatic in recounting that old death, Yevgeny placed Guevara's corpse where plates had been (a somber Valentine) in front of dinner guests. (A tired Vargas Llosa had retired to bed by then and was not forced to witness how surrealistically a fatuous symbiosis was attempted on that night.)

#### ANASAZI

For Tony Hillerman

The Old Ones left the tribal land, no trace about arroyos, campgrounds, other sites, no way to read the footfalls of their trek.

The land was left to die, alone

except for sherds of their ceramic ware,

ladders that they climbed to caves in cliffs,

the buried dead and other bones,

the petroglyphs on cavern walls,

the kivas of their hallowed rites

the birth sipapu bred on Mother Earth. Their outward spiral opened into time and took them well beyond their holy place while yei whispered on the remnant wind.



#### APHORISM

For Jorge Luis Borges

The blind man is one from whom the Universe has been stolen without redress but for the MIND'S EYE



#### A TOMOS

On Leucippus and Democritus

They are indivisible, everlasting and thus, in a persistent flow ...

We lose atoms from the moment of our birth

and being near inert will not suffice to curb the flow

too soon we will be one with all the universe and cease to be the one that we have barely known



#### BESTIARY

For Jorge Luis Borges

Ancient monsters, degenerate and wild, adorn the pages in this exercise of matter overcome by mind's imaginings, decadent with hard illusions, rampant stratagems



Behind the Beast there lies the Beauty that all things possess.

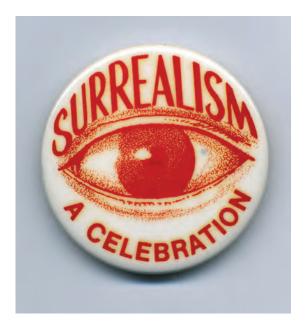
#### BRETON

On André Breton

#### BRETON.

A random thought in my antennae . . . a moment of otherworldliness given precision automatic processes bypassing ratiocination unrelated simultaneities hopscotch faces . . . names umbilical cord nourishing all through the athanor of the magus-alchemist-hierophant through half-a-century-time and distances of the world and universe micro and macro together

UNISON.



#### CLOSED HEARING

On Howard Moss, reading ...

The words hang on the ears like Spanish moss, dangling, nearly lifeless without feeling or innocence intruding on one's expectations with dank, loose greyness, never quite touching, hanging about fecklessly, Moss having grown in years within the schema of tall buildings without a single bound rather than on tree limbs of some vital swamp wherefrom it could hang and mean



#### **DICHOTOMY**

#### For Jorge Luis Borges

#### I. A VERSION OF JUDAS

"I am a concept of the Son, complex but logical, therefore misinterpreted, consequently, mankind's goat the tragic sacrifice . . .

"I am excellent for conversation; have me with your main course.

"I could have come as Pharaoh, Mahomet, Alexander, or the greatest Khan, demolished all your kingdoms and made the victory sign.

"If I had chosen, Mormons could have been my people. Or I could have been born in black or brown with pinkish hands riding backseat buses yet, not man-deprived as I. "I could have been made of laughter, been a giraffe, prancing balletomane, or a single tear enough.

"I am ponderous yet. I, Judas, chose to be myself. I, Son of God, Second in His Figure, Redeemer!

"I was born a protestant; I could have chosen to be Christ.

> "God really dwells in Hell and I, Judas, stir the ashes resurrecting redemption for eternity."

#### **II. SOLILOQUY**

"I am Christ. I hang upon my trestle cross wondering your eyes can see, having your spit and gall, moving my hands on spikes.

"Your tribute words sing sky-round; my veins disgorge pulsating blood.

"I am Christ, and you have made my death bearing me to Golgotha, pounded to a cross, panoramic, mounted on a sea of skulls, cadenced, rippling the sky of storms. "I am Christ, a waking dead man of history stirruped on a straddled mountain, forced to serve eternal."

#### DYLAN'S WALK

On Dylan Thomas



Above the estuary of Laugharne, seeing gentle as the water rolled ashore and out again to sea, he strode on his high walks with power of figure, mighty ken, and rolling voice that carried, like the tide, its own eternal gait.

Above the estuary of Laugharne, poised within his flimsy wooden perch [aerie for the eagle in the man], he overlorded sea and land and made them his through Bardic voice.

#### DT

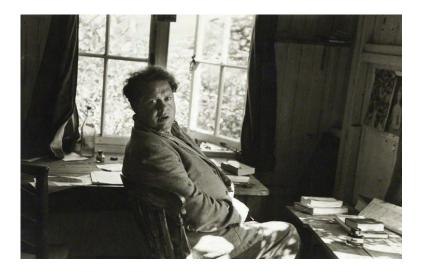
On Dylan Thomas

He did not go so gently "into that good night"

but drank himself into oblivion's dark

instead of burning, raving on his "close of day"

but then he had not reached "old age" as yet and, taken unaware that Light was spent, he drank at bars 'til spirits took his own away He had not raged "against the dying of the light" for in his way he knew that "dark is right" on that November night.



#### EYES

For Jorge Luis Borges

Blind man,

blind man,

the star is black

the sun extinct

the moon eclipsed

What demon

has swallowed

your light?

Blind man,

Blind man,

the star is near

the sun is harnessed

the moon is walked

What god has stolen your mind?

#### FIGURE OF JACKSON MACLOW

You, sitting there across four pieces of wood, shaped, wait the meantime of the air-conditioner, the espresso machine, pulling your hair beard away elastic face to your breath.

You, whispered in laughter in another across abused and nervous until yourself were an across harsh in constrained bitterness of defense-excommunicated.



#### FIRST RESPECTS

On Mao Zedong

I hadn't thought of it at all. The death had seemed to me too far removed in many ways.

Yet, suddenly, I found myself where large funereal wreaths marked out a zone of sympathy connected beyond space to where the body lay across the nautical and the terrestrial miles.



Mao's visage here surrounded by real faces of inscrutable demeanor [yet heavy with the weight of loss] expressing in their stillness last respects.

The cadences of formal rites the bows, the handshakes the occasion to imbibe the moment's silence in the presence of a death that will not die.

#### GWENDOLYN READING IN BLACK VOICE

On Gwendolyn Brooks



"Ugly" is bad enough but she stretched it out in black, deep in her gut, and brought it to the surface, making it rise up throaty:

ÜÜÜGʻLI

The little boy in the poem came alive through her grave black voice belching the ugliness he felt when Black is supposed to be

BÜ'TI FOOL

#### HALLELUJAH MAN

Leonard Cohen, In Memoriam



The worn fedora topping grizzled face Of troubadour in grey, guitar in hand, Whose shrouded voice sings of Suzanne In a staccato chant of trials and tribulations, And of love once had then lost Pulsing into senses of the throng.

Bard of poetry & song, The people clasp your cadences, The raspy tone & smoky depth That secret strife and secret night Have given soul to voice of old To thrill and to elate. A perfect harmony of tune & word, A hallelujah sound that tolls the bell At break of day throughout the throes Of sturm und drang endured Through life's demanding trek While angels back your plaint With voices dulcet and demure. A sadness throbs upon farewell For you have etched Your wisdom in flamenco riffs But yet will sing upon your perch A lasting paean to love and woes In jazzy, bluesy notes at light's demise within the tower of song.

Rest In Peace, For everybody knows Your voice will still resound, Dancing to the end of love, O Hallelujah Man!

#### HORIZON

For Jorge Luis Borges



where the eye sees too far where the mind thinks too large matter shapeless, indistinct beyond dimension or perspective troglodytic and extinct like the bloody sunset

#### JANUS

For Leroi Jones / Amiri Baraka

#### Ι

I remember you "back when,"

the Village as a setting for your shouts of anger and disdain . . . you being then among the loudest first to cry out foul in voice and verse

the Sixties, in the Fuck You years, before the anger metamorphosed into guitar voice, and flower power followed fists and clubs into the streets

You wore the name of king in that old time but it didn't fit your rousing style, the cause you battled to uphold with words for actors and yourself

#### Π

Today, you own a name with Africa inside. And, in Dakar, I hear again your shouts, your anger, your disdain and you are king, as once before, but now it fits in this, the continent where your ancestors live.

#### III

The old back home still use your early name. To them you haven't changed, you said to me. But you know that you've recomposed yourself-become two poets now--looking, like the god, in two directions, with two miens, at once presiding over doors to old-time haunts and gates that usher in the future wail.

#### LORCA

On Federico García Lorca (1898-1936)

Eyes breaking against paving stones of ashen streets

Roots of the cry in the mocking of cacophony and spit

Syntax of sound without cursive sense terrible in its length and cavernous depth

Soul moan into night of torn flesh and severed heart

Head rolling to and fro on impact of the lead's hot plunge, the boot's emphatic thrust, the coup-de-grace

No longer a matter of time or place

Earth's entrails in red damp unmarked, apart from identity

The solitude of neverness

#### LORCA'S END

Some words are mute When they are confronted By the frigid night, The arid night Of the assassins

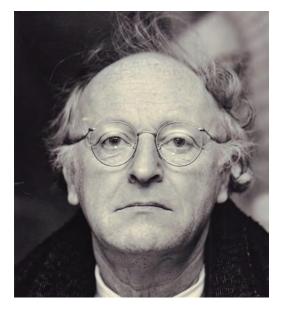
He died, A Black Squad as his host Led by an enemy of old, A man whose lewdness He did not caress



#### **MOVEMENT IN VOICES**

Josif Brodskii, Reading February 22, 1973

Poems gifted without sense conveyed reaching ears as epic song, alien sound intrinsic in cadenzas of a cantor's minstrelsy Meaning sensed in body talk, emboldened gestures, ritual mien, orthodoxy's ancient liturgy making theatre for the eyes



Utterance and movement meshed to stir the deep resources, just beyond the scheme of sense, lying in the venue of the dream

# RANDELL JARRELL WENT FROM TOWN RIDING ON HIS PONY

Randell Jarrell, Reading

At one moment he was there in life and big as with his beard gone (as he would be soon) reading his poems well and being a poem sitting on the sofa of a Hunter College Bronx lounge

The next picture has him with a coffee cup and cookie crumbs, a co-ed at each side relishing and touching seeking signatures on their libidos



He autographed their books

The man loved it all as poetry

#### R. FROST - FRANCONIA, NH

On Robert Frost

The flag is down beside your name, painted folksily along the length of your old battered box, leaning slightly above knotty pole (as once you must have rested there) among wildflowers and the weeds.

No mail has been picked up, delivered in these many years. The flag is down beside your name: a signal you're no longer here.



# SOUTHERN DRAW

For James Dickey Columbia, S.C. November 23, 1974

I: Reception

Good ol' boy J.D. bowing with rocky grace kissing the hands of belles relentlessly tremulous in their décolletage admiring his colossus of a man

He was bigger than life in his mint-julep setting bourbon in hand e y e s towering like beacons sleeping above the crowded room II: Reading

He moved out loud read with baited breath as if he were tilting at windmills lurched emphatically (recovered only slightly) went on drawling Neruda hip-shooter with pin-ball moves and mouthful words that stung and a Jim Beam smile the size of Carolina that said hell was ok if fair-haired was your game



III: Respite

In the end it ended with relief catharsis of applause Good ol' boy J.D. poet alive carried it off by the seat of his pants with every possible hitch

# SOUTHWEST

For Tony Hillerman

The Moon, one night from fullness, witnessed the cold breath of Winter riding roughshod in the pocket of Wind over dark hills trembling without the overcoat of their deciduous leaves.

Owl hooted. Coyote bayed. Bat winged.

Somewhere, Night carried an air played by Kokopeli on his flute, his silhouette bent into the dark in curvature against the Moon, the song heralding transcendence.



## THE GOLDEN ISLES

For Ramón del Valle-Inclán

As old hexameters resound with solar lust of gods and beasts, and at the darkening of day, when long-winged birds depart from marble ruins, the wind resuscitates among last laurel trees the calming murmur of Socratic fugues-philosophy of stellar caste which transmigrated out of myths and fables told relentlessly within the span of man in time.

The tracks of the celestial bull still lie upon the blue sea's edge. The joyous songs are still becoming in the shepherds' flutes of night.



# TO WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

"In Memoriam"

It is your joy in having still the thought--"Our sons"-in timelessness

Not as new images of your Paul, your Bill, but as "Our younger," "Our elder"

And your children's children still, as it should be, "Our own" is had in your reality

Forever should be ours

# VIRTUOSITY

On Paul West

Patience and Fortitude are virtues that define the character of the man's whole life and work.

He fought with fierceness through the blatant symptoms that encroached upon his mind, denying access to his thoughts, to put in writing the wondrous words he'd mastered all his life.

He kept his patience and with fortitude, stayed in quietude as mind closed up and left him in a nether place, where darkness reigned, adrift beyond the pale where words became delusional.

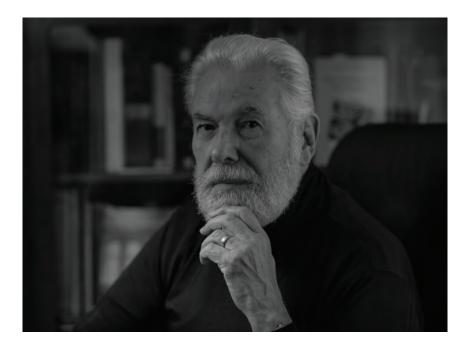
Roiling and detained in passage, astir, his words were fighting through to utterance.

And so, when rare lucidity allowed him to express his voice, he told his scribe the story that he'd held. It was a tale of the privation and frustration felt when mental faculties were shackled into absence.

This tale was different from his previous prose, venting bizarre thoughts obscurity had prompted that cast upon him spells of separation, otherness, leaving but a state of vacancy, bereft of self.

Patience and Fortitude are the guardian lions that define the staircase to the main library's gates. And as they guard the world of books, himself become a Literary Lion, is virtually enshrined.





#### About the Author

ROBERT LIMA is a Cuban-born award-winning poet, and an internationally-recognized critic, bibliographer, playwright, and translator. He retired after 40 years in the teaching profession as Professor Emeritus of Spanish and Comparative Literatures at The Pennsylvania State University, as well as Fellow Emeritus of the Institute for the Arts and Humanistic Studies. Previously, he had taught at Hunter College, CUNY, and abroad in Perú and Cameroon, lecturing widely in the U.S. and overseas.

He earned the B.A. in English (1957) and the M.A. in Theatre and Drama (1961) at Villanova University. His Ph.D. in Romance Languages and Literatures was awarded in 1968 (GSAS) with departmental honors by New York University, which also presented him The Founders Day Award. At NYU, he was fortunate to have had three prominent figures as his professors: Francisco Ayala, Joaquín Casalduero and Ernesto Da Cal. He is an Academician of the Academia Norteamericana de la Lengua Española and a Corresponding Member of the Real Academia Española. He has been honored as a Distinguished Alumnus by Villanova University, inducted into the Enxebre Orden da Vieira in Spain, initiated in Phi Kappa Phi, and named Knight Commander in the Order of Queen Isabel of Spain by His Majesty King Juan Carlos I. A second knighthood, in the Imperial Hispanic Order of Charles V, was bestowed on him at The Alcázar in Segovia, Spain, by the His Serene Highness, the Prince of Borbón.

Among his numerous books are The Theatre of García Lorca (Las Américas, 1963), Ramón del Valle-Inclán (Columbia UP, 1972), An Annotated Bibliography of Valle-Inclán (Penn State U. Libraries, 1972), Dos ensayos sobre teatro español de los veinte (U. de Murcia, 1984), and Valle-Inclán. The Theatre of His Life (Missouri UP, 1988). He has translated Valle-Inclán's aesthetico-mystical treatise The Lamp of Marvels (Lindisfarne Press, 1986) and his selection of short dramas Savage Acts: Four Plays (Estreno, 1993). Other recent books are Dark Prisms. Occultism in Hispanic Drama (UP of Kentucky, 1995; also in paperback, 2009) and Valle-Inclán. El teatro de su vida (Editorial Nigra, Spain, 1995), Ramón del Valle-Inclán: An Annotated Bibliography (Grant & Cutler, 1999), The Dramatic World of Valle-Inclán (Boydell & Brewer, 2003), Stages of Evil. Occultism in Western Theatre and Drama (UP of Kentucky), published in 2005, and The International Bibliography of Studies on the Life and Works of Ramón del Valle-Inclán (Orlando Press, 2008). The Spanish version of Dark Prisms was published in 2010 in Madrid by Editorial Fundamentos. Words of Power. Adages, Axioms and Aphorisms was published in California by Floricanto Press, while his memoir ;Some People! Anecdotes, Images and Letters of Persons of Interest appeared in 2015, as did Provenance and Residuals. Bringing the Past Forward, his autobiography. His newest books are Ikons of the Past. Poetry of the Hispanic Americas (2018) and Across the Spectrum. Hispanic Cultural Heritage (2019). His new book of poetry is Elementals (2019).

He selected for publication, edited, and translated Barrenechea's *Borges the Labyrinth Maker* (NYU Press, 1965), the first critical study on Borges in English, as well as edited and contributed to *Borges and the Esoteric*, a special issue of *Crítica Hispánica* (Duquesne UP, 1993). Also, he has published well over one hundred fifty refereed articles in a variety of fields.

In 1974, he created "Surrealism--A Celebration," a multifaceted event in honor of the 50th anniversary of the Surrealist Movement. Included were theatre productions, music concerts, films, displays of rare publications, paintings, sculpture, jewelry and other objects, presentations by leading art historians, artists, and literary critics. And a Surrealist banquet. Elements of these events appeared in a special 1975 issue of *Journal of General Education*, which he edited

Over six hundred of his poems have appeared throughout the U.S. and abroad in periodicals, anthologies, and in his poetry collections Fathoms (1981), The Olde Ground (1985), Mayaland (1992), Sardinia / Sardegna (2000), Tracking the Minotaur (2003), The Pointing Bone (2008), The Rites of Stone (2010), Self (2012), Por caminos errantes (2014), Celestials (2017), Cancionería Cubana (2017), Ikons of the Past. Poetry of the Hispanic Americas (2018), and Elementals (2019). Poems of Exile and Alienation (with Teresinka Pereira, 1976) and Corporal Works (1985) are two of his chapbooks. From 1959 to 1965, he was involved in the New York City poetry movement, reading throughout Greenwich Village and the East Village with such as David Ignatow, Paul Blackburn, Diana Wakoski, Denise Levertov, Robert Kelly, et. al.

He has been elected to membership in PEN International and the Poetry Society of America. From March through August 2004, Penn State University Libraries exhibited "The Poetic World of Robert Lima," a retrospective of his poetry career from 1955 to that year. The first poetry competition by Phi Kappa Phi was won by his poem "Astrals," which appears in the honor society's journal *Forum.* Another major exhibit of his poetry was "Word and Image: The Poetry of Robert Lima," held at The Bellefonte Art Museum in conjunction with April, National Poetry Month, in 2017. He was invited to record his poetry in Spanish and English at The Library of Congress Hispanic Division, joining such luminaries as Jorge Luis Borges, Mario Vargas Llosa, Octavio Paz, and Gabriel Garcia Márquez, among others, in the LOC Archive.

His biography appears in Who's Who in the World, Who's Who in America, Who's Who in the East, World Who's of Authors, and in other international and national directories.

