

POETS OF CHILE

A Bilingual Anthology
1965-1985



Selected and Translated by
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SERGIO MANSILLA

(1958)

Due to its isolated geographical location and strong indigenous culture, the island of Chiloé is still the repository of a rich mythology. It is said that clandestine cells of witches persist even today in some of the more remote areas. The poetry of Sergio Mansilla, who was born and raised in a tiny island village where his parents worked as *campesinos*, is filled with the mythological characters that populated his childhood dreams. The following poems contain references to the deformed sailors who live in the phantom ship called *El Caleuche* and also to *la voladora*, the woman who vomits her intestines and transforms herself into a bird (*la bauta*) so she can carry messages for the witches. The landscape of Chiloé—the sea, the forests, the rain and wind, and the green rolling hills planted with potatoes—is a key element in Mansilla's poetry. Sergio Mansilla lives and works as a school teacher in Osorno in southern Chile. He got his start as a poet with the *Aumen* group in Castro, Chiloé.

ÁNIMAS ERRANTES

*Al caer la tarde una multitud de muertos
vuelve a sus casas,
buscan sus tierras y sus hogares
que la memoria les recuerda.*

*Vuelven, y a cada paso queda
un espacio íntimo vacío
que llenan las estrellas
con brillantes luciérnagas rojas-violetas.*

*Multitudes de sombras andan
en la noche por los campos
y su paso hace andar los molinos a agua
y quejarse los árboles, como agonizantes
abandonados en hondanadas remotas.*

*Llegan al umbral de sus casas
y ven la humilde cocina iluminada
por dos toscos chonchones de grasa.*

*Sus casas están cerradas, como durmiendo,
y alzan la mano para llamar a la puerta.*

*Al llamado, sale un niño a abrir;
mas, aunque mira atentamente,
no ve a nadie: sólo distingue vagamente
un paisaje solitario donde apenas
se escucha el lejano canto de las aves nocturnas.*

WANDERING SOULS

At dusk the multitude of the dead
returns to where it lived.
They look for their lands and homes
that memory brings back.

They return, and at each step
an intimate space empties
and the stars fill it
with violet fireflies of light.

Multitudes of shadows move
through the night across the fields
and their steps make the waterwheels turn
and the trees complain like the dying
abandoned in remote valleys.

They stand at the doorways of their houses
and see the humble kitchens lit
by two crude oil lamps.

Their houses are closed, as if asleep,
and they lift their hands to knock on the door.

When he hears the knocking, a child opens the door.
But even though he keeps staring,
he doesn't see anyone—only a vague
lonely landscape where the distant cry
of night birds can scarcely be heard.