

José Martí (1853–1895, Cuba)

Martí was born to Spanish parents in Cuba. A literary revolutionary as well as a political revolutionary who fought for Cuban independence from Spain, he was sentenced to six years of hard labor when he was a teenager. Based on that experience, Martí wrote "El presidio político de Cuba" (The Political Prison in Cuba [1871]), which served not only as a condemnation of the Spanish authorities but more importantly as a landmark in the evolving Latin American *modernismo* movement to which Martí was a main contributor. After being exiled to Spain, where he received his formal education, he traveled to Mexico, Guatemala, Venezuela, and finally New York, where he worked for the *New York Sun*. Martí's poetry focuses on man, both in terms of human cruelty and the potential for people to adapt and survive. PRINCIPAL WORKS: *Ismaelillo* (1882), *Versos sencillos* (1891), *Versos libres* (1913)

Waking Dream / Sueño despierto

Esther Allen, trans.

I dream with my eyes
open and always, by day
and night, I dream.
And over the foam
of the wide and restless sea,
and through the spiraling
sands of the desert,
upon a mighty lion,
monarch of my breast,
blithely astride
its docile neck,
always I see, floating,
a boy, who calls to me!

Yo sueño con los ojos/ Abiertos, y de día/ Y noche siempre sueño./
Y sobre las espumas/ Del ancho mar revuelto,/ Y por entre las crespas/
Arenas del desierto,/ Y del león pujante,/ Monarca de mi pecho,/ Montado
alegremente/ Sobre el sumiso cuello,—/ ¡Un niño que me llama/ Flotando
siempre veo!

Love in the City / Amor de ciudad grande

Esther Allen, trans.

Times of gorge and rush are these:
Voices fly like light: lightning,
like a ship hurled upon dread quicksand,

plunges down the high rod, and in delicate craft
man, as if winged, cleaves the air.
And love, without splendor or mystery,
dies when newly born, of glut.
The city is a cage of dead doves
and avid hunters! If men's bosoms
were to open and their torn flesh
fall to the earth, inside would be
nothing but a scatter of small, crushed fruit!

Love happens in the street, standing in the dust
of saloons and public squares: the flower
dies the day it's born. The trembling
virgin who would rather death
have her than some unknown youth;
the joy of trepidation; that feeling of heart
set free from chest; the ineffable
pleasure of deserving; the sweet alarm
of walking quick and straight
from your love's home and breaking
into tears like a happy child;—
and that gazing out of love at the fire,
as roses slowly blush a deeper color,—
Bah, it's all a sham! Who has the time
to be noble? Though like a golden
bowl or sumptuous painting
a genteel lady sits in the magnate's home!

But if you're thirsty, reach out your arm,
and drain some passing cup!
The dirtied cup rolls to the dust, then,
and the expert taster—breast blotted
with invisible blood—goes happily,
crowned with myrtle, on his way!
Bodies are nothing now but trash,
pits, and tatters! And souls
are not the tree's lush fruit
down whose tender skin runs
sweet juice in time of ripeness,—
but fruit of the marketplace, ripened
by the hardened laborer's brutal blows!

It is an age of dry lips!
Of undreaming nights! Of life
crushed unripe! What is it that we lack,

without which there is no gladness? Like a startled
hare in the wild thicket of our breast,
fleeing, tremulous, from a gleeful hunter,
the spirit takes cover;
and Desire, on Fever's arm,
beats the thicket, like the rich hunter.

The city appalls me! Full
of cups to be emptied, and empty cups!
I fear—ah me!—that this wine
may be poison, and sink its teeth,
vengeful imp, in my veins!
I thirst—but for a wine that none on earth
knows how to drink! I have not yet
endured enough to break through the wall
that keeps me, ah grief!, from my vineyard!
Take, oh squalid tasters
of humble human wines, these cups
from which, with no fear or pity,
you swill the lily's juice!
Take them! I am honorable, and I am afraid!

De gorja son y rapidez los tiempos/ Corre cual luz la voz; en alta aguja,/ Cual
nave despeñada en sirte horrenda,/ Húndese el rayo, y en ligera barca/ El
hombre, como alado, el aire hiende./ ¡Así el amor, sin pompa ni misterio/
Muere, apenas nacido, de saciado! ¡Jaula es la villa de palomas muertas/
Y ávidos cazadores! Si los pechos/ Se rompen de los hombres, y las carnes/
Rotas por tierra ruedan, ¡No han de verse/ Dentro más que frutillas
estrujadas!// Se ama de pie, en las calles, entre el polvo/ De los salones y las
plazas; muere/ La flor el día en que nace. Aquella virgen/ Trémula que antes a
la muerte daba/ La mano pura que a ignorado mozo;/ El goce de temer; aquel
salirse/ Del pecho el corazón; el inefable/ Placer de merecer; el grato susto/ De
caminar de prisa en derechura/ Del hogar de la amada, y a sus puertas/ Como
un niño feliz romper en llanto;/ Y aquel mirar, de nuestro amor al fuego,/
Irse tiñendo de color las rosas,/ ¡Ea, que son patrañas! Pues ¿quién tiene/
Tiempo de ser hidalgo? ¡Bien que sienta,/ Cual áureo vaso o lienzo suntuoso,/
Dama gentil en casa de magnate!// ¡O si se tiene sed, se alarga el brazo/ Y a
la copa que pasa se la apura!/ Luego, la copa turbia al polvo rueda,/ ¡Y el
hábil catador, —manchado el pecho/ De una sangre invisible—sigue alegre/
Coronado de mirtos, su camino!/ No son los cuerpos ya sino desechos,
Y fosas, y jirones! Y las almas/ No son como en el árbol fruta rica/ En cuya
blanda piel la almíbar dulce/ En su sazón de madurez rebosa,/ Sino fruta de
plaza que a brutales/ Golpes el rudo labrador madura!// ¡La edad es ésta de
los labios secos!/ ¡De las noches sin sueño! ¡De la vida/ Estrujada en agraz!