



# MATERIAL EXERCISES

BLANCA VARELA

Translated from the Spanish by Carlos Lara

Flesh wounds, flies, flowers, and freedom. Blanca Varela's *Material Exercises* is a declaration of divine oblivion vis-à-vis a violent mysticism. Here, no soul ascends to commune with a vengeful deity: salvation is not achieved from bodily punishment but found in the poetic possibility that emerges from the corporeal tension between tactility and spirituality, night and day, the cogito and the empirical, where language is both god's first gift to humankind and the cadaver in which the sacred father decays with his mortal creation. Translated by Carlos Lara, *Material Exercises* is a display of the vatic exorcism of the unconscious and a phenomenological investigation of space and intersubjective incarnation.

"When I read Blanca Varela, I feel like she's pinning my flesh to a table and coaxing a soul out of me. *Material Exercises* is an axe that cleaves meat from spirit, matter from memory, metaphysics from the world of things; yet it is also the gesture—celebratory and terrifying—of fusing them back together. Carlos Lara's translation is pitch-perfect. Poet of a kindred violence, he just might be Varela's perfect translator." —Kit Schluter, author of *Pierrot's Fingernails*

BLANCA VARELA (1926–2009) was born in Lima, Peru. She studied at the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, where she met Sebastián Salazar Bondy, Javier Sologuren, Francisco Bendejú, and Jorge Eduardo Eielson, with whom she would define a Peruvian poetry movement called "la Generación del 50." Her work has been translated into English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Russian, among other languages. She won the Octavio Paz Prize for Poetry in 2001 and was the first woman to win the Federico Garcia Lorca City of Granada International Poetry Prize in 2006. Varela was honored in 2007 with Spain's Queen Sofia Prize for Ibero-American Poetry.

CARLOS LARA is a translator and ex-poet from Chula Vista, California. His version of Blanca Varela's *Canto villano* (*Rough Song*) was published by The Song Cave in 2020. With Tamas Panitz, he also translated *The Selected Poems of Charles Tomás* (Schism, 2022). He is the author of *Subconscious Colossus* (Schism, 2021), *Like Bismuth When I Enter* (Nightboat, 2020), *The Green Record* (Apostrophe, 2018), and, with Will Alexander, *The Audiographic As Data* (Oyster Moon, 2016). He lives with his wife and son in Los Angeles.

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