I discovered Mexican poet Ulalume González de León in the fall of 1982 in Frances Mayes’s graduate workshop on the prose poem at San Francisco State. Our text, Michael Benedikt’s *The Prose Poem an International Anthology*, featured a long prose poem in fifteen parts, “Anatomy of Love,” and I was instantly enthralled by the language: richly erotic imagery blending anatomical and scientific vocabulary in an unconventional syntax. To discover just how this poem’s magic worked, I experimented with the seventh part, “*a la recherche du corps perdu*” (on the search for the lost body). I dismantled the language, organizing the words by parts of speech; then I assembled them in new patterns, rather like the process of recombinant DNA, to create a kind of “mutant” poem. This became “Lost Body,” the title poem of my first collection.

Thirty years later, wanting to read more of González de León work, I Googled the name, not knowing at the time that this mysterious poet was a “she” --a confusion she apparently didn’t mind and even courted during her life. Oddly enough, the first entry that came up was *my* name. I had no idea how this could be, until I realized that the one reference to her name in English on the Internet was my poem, with its epigraph referencing Gonzalez de Leon. Immediately I wanted to rectify this and find a way to bring this poet’s life and work to a wider English-speaking audience. Working with fellow Sonoma County poets John Johnson and Nancy Morales, we set to work translating some of her poems.

González de León was the daughter of poets Roberto and Sara de Ibáñez. Whether it was the incantatory power of her name, inspired by the poetry of Edgar Allen Poe, or the company of artists and poets who frequented her parents’ home in Montevideo, Uruguay, Ulalume proved a precocious child. She began writing poetry at age four, studied at a French Lycee, and after earning her baccalaureate and a government scholarship, she studied literature and philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris.
There she met her husband, artist and architect Teodoro González de León. She resumed her studies at the University of Mexico, and later became a nationalized Mexican citizen.

In the 1960s and 70s, González de León was an inspirational leader of a generation of Latin American women writers experimenting with language and challenging the traditional identities of women, marriage, and relationships. She won many literary awards for her visionary essays, stories, and poems, and worked on the editorial boards of the journals *Plural* and *Vuelta*, under the direction of Octavio Paz, who considered her “The best Mexican poet since Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz.” She also translated the work of Elizabeth Bishop, Ted Hughes, Lewis Carroll, and e.e. cummings.

Given my first experimentation with Gonzalez de Leon’s language, it pleased me to learn that she believed that everything had already been written, and that each writer is actually rewriting, reshuffling, and reconstructing a part of the one great poem. This idea of stolen or reworked language is so important to her that when her collected works were published, she chose the title *Plagios*, which translates “Plagiarisms.”

Most of all, what draws me to this poet is a sense of the ephemeral nature of identity, how dependent upon the ever-shifting ground of language and memory, and a quality Octavio Paz described as “a geometry of air.” Translating her poems has been a challenge because, in Paz’s words, “if we seek to touch them, they disintegrate.” Nonetheless, her work resonates so deeply, our goal is to bring these poems into English equivalents that retain the original complexity and delicacy of her language.