

Pasando Revista: Luis Bravo (Uruguay)

The translation of the title does not encompass all its various meanings, although it is the best introduction to the scope of this work in progress. The corpus includes my poems, published in magazines and broadsides, anthologies, flyers, and on CDs, as well as in other formats, but not as yet in any of my books. The project begins with a poem published in the magazine “Imágenes” (Montevideo, 1978) and flows right into the series “Poems of Isfahán” written after my trip to Irán in 2006. These poems from Isfahán were censored by an Uruguayan magazine but later published by 45RPM (an internet magazine) in 2010.

The poetic corpus I work with was published over a span of thirty years —from the military dictatorship in Uruguay (1973-1985) through the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century. Much water has flowed under the bridge during all these years and I have found that recovering these poems, with the corresponding illustrations (pictures, drawings, photography, done by other artists or myself) constitutes a personal way of digging into my own writing history, as well as into the cultural memory of that period.

Each published poem has its own history, the context in which it was published, the style that defines it, its referents, even some anecdotes. The idea is to have facsimile reproductions of the poems, including the original illustrations, juxtaposed with my comments —the products of re-reading them so many years later—along with any more current version of the poem that may have sprung up in later years. So “Pasando revista” is a polysemic title that provides an inkling to the content of the book: a mixture of poems and comments seen through the lens of my personal history that make a trans-textual object: a poetry book and a “book of memories” simultaneously.

The comments are actual annotations, chronicles and even anecdotes related to the context of the poem, the aesthetic appreciation or the historic context. They provide a key to grasp the circumstances surrounding their publication in certain magazines at that particular time. These keys, these annotations, may relate to the writer I was back then, or may refer to social or aesthetic intents of the magazines at the time. In this way the work focuses in particular angles that branch out from the intimate personal to the wider collective memory, from the approach to writing poetry to other more universal topics. They would be like Polaroid pictures of a past brought back, or a binnacle that maps the way for re-reading thirty years of poetry writing and cultural change.

“Pasando revista” is not an anthology (although in a way it works like one), but more like a photo album or a scrapbook of poems. It creates a time line through which I can see my attempts, vacillations, even my changes of style. In this respect, “Pasando Revista” is a revision of the poetic lines that traversed my creation as well as taking stock of my work. Many of these poems have been re-written, or migrated to the oral form, changing again and again.

“Pasando revista” is also a gathering, a placing together of all those poems “lost in yellowing papers” that never found harbor in a book, even when some of them had become (at the time of writing or committing them to print) closer to me than the rest of my work.

This re-viewing then becomes an action happening simultaneously with the re-reading, re-writing, re-making of something with its own history.

Here is, then, one of those diachronic mirrors that at this moment of my life, past the half century, is an imperative for me and my relationship with my work.

I have found some surprises along the way, and since the book is not yet finished, I shall probably encounter more. For instance, I found the poem below, published in a then-“underground” magazine that attempted to document what was happening in the early years after the military dictatorship ended. This was back when we were still trying to re-discover our liberties and put them to good use, manifesting ourselves through our creations. The poem is called “Last night I lost a poem in the hem of my pillow” (1988) and it was direct result of a dream concerning a conversation that our group of young Uruguayan poets had with Nicanor Parra (the Chilean poet who won the Cervantes Prize in 2012). It is a long poem, with three parts, mixing prose and verse, oneiric narration and images; it was illustrated by a series of repeated images in black and white from “The Scream” by Edward Munch.

The third part of the poem refers to the military take-over in Chile where the President Salvador Allende was murdered on September 11, 1973. In that section the poem and its comment (that I have translated for this occasion) say:

*I saw
that date between letters and crosses coming forward within the poem
an 11 with rachitic legs like a prisoner printed
and I saw
columns of soldiers holding their fingers of smoke
a burning body
a boy whose screams
provoked laughter and barking among Roman centurions
in whose plastic skulls
reflected the human smoke
I saw
how their mouths out the tongues of fire
melting the lead from the nightmare*

*and I saw
a sky polished glass blind, suffocating events*

(I remembered that I had not written a poem about the tragedy of Chile. Chile is a country where poetry had its own hell. Montale Bruno, a Santiguan poet also born in 1957, tells how a black flag (which is not symbolizing anarchism) climbs the pole of the Plaza de Armas, a ghost that flies under a leaden sky as the crowd below goes round and round, evenly paced, increasingly alien to the circumstances).

*even saw — just before awakening
moving cemetery crosses
banding the circus tent
in which poets resist barricaded inside their artifacts³*

Note 3 Nicanor Parra told me then that in 1976 young artists from all disciplines generated in the "tent" one of the first acts of resistance against Pinochet's military regime. Since the 1980's it has been well-documented public knowledge that the tactical, organizational and financial input of the United States Secret Service was instrumental for the success of the Chilean coup d' etat of September 11, 1973. While the date September 11 in the poem refers only to the coup suffered by Chile in 1973, it has been striking to re-read it and find that the dream images here recorded can also be linked with the series of attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, at the World Trade Center in New York.

POESIA

Prosa de fondo

Sonaba una música de gotas de agua desintegrándose, como cuando los músicos están afinando cada uno sus instrumentos y las notas se tocan al azar y componen a su antojo otra partitura lateral y los ejecutantes se percatan y siguen zapando, pisando con apuro en un terreno no habitado que los deslumbra. En medio de tal acústica se acerca Rubén trayendo a modo de partitura al invisible. Tres en Uno, y veo que detrás alguien dibuja con sombras chinas la cabellera ondulante de Delmira. Inefable: el mismo poema que había escrito Pablo me lo muestra ahora Rubén como si fuera su última composición.

Y TODO CAMBIO FURTIVAMENTE QUE ES COMO SIEMPRE CAMBIAN LAS COSAS

El tres en uno se venía revelando como una foto cuando va poblándolo el blanco por instantes imprecisos donde el cuerpo de las letras parecen mariposas fugaces que vuelan y al irse dejan en su lugar otros cuerpos soliendo el folaje.

Me dispuse a copiar el texto, con la oculta codicia de hacerlo mío con la velada sospecha de que en el fondo me quedaría con las gotitas de agua desfilando en mis oídos, como un grifo roto.

(toda esta escena del sueño me resulta de lo más ajena. En la realidad, palabra que subrayo para que no se caiga, siento una gran aversión a "copiar" poemas. Recuerdo a una quinceañera que gastaba sus tardes copiando poemas en un cuaderno de "Mis trabajos" y aquellas hojas se llenaban de versos Nervos y Heredias y la hacían suspirar; yo mientras, desbordaba con espasmos de tristeza provocados por aquellas dulturas suspirantes mezcladas con letras prolijas, de bic azul, que con el tiempo desiste; todo a la vez tan lejano y cálido y tan vejo antes de tiempo, como si uno aquí a los quince empezara su carrera ascendente a la vejez madura, mientras los limones están todavía jugosos y sueltos y verdes, con los peczones a flor de piel)

3

11 de setiembre, vi esta fecha saliendo entre letras y cruces
que avanzan o salen del poema

un 11 como las pájaras raquíticas del poema preso o impreso,
y vi las columnas de soldados cuyos dedos sostenían el cuerpo quemándose del muchacho cuyos alaridos provocaban el latido y la risa de los romanos en cuyos cascos de plástico

reflejaba el humo humano y de su boca salían las lenguas de fuego que intentaban fundir el plomo de la pesadilla mientras el cielo reflejaba los acontecimientos como un vidrio diego

(recorté al instante que no había escrito ningún poema sobre Chile. Chile era un país, donde la poesía tenía su propio infierno. Bruno Montané, poeta santiaguino, nacido también en 1957, cuenta como "una bandera negra (que no es la del anarquismo) sube por el asta principal de la Plaza de Armas y como en sueños ves a los señores y señoras que siguen dando vueltas y vueltas, como si no pasara nada")

Antes de despertar vi un cementerio móvil.
Las cruces avanzando rodeando la carga de circo
anillando el lugar donde los poetas leen sus artefactos. (3)

EPILOGO

Las cabezas de los gorriones se mueven rápido
picochando y de pronto se detienen y me miran
locos a la una a las dos y ahora miran extrañados
como ardo yo oso hormiguero sobre la mesa
picochando palabritas
y no puedo encontrarle las tres cabezas al sueño

y en la silla se ve una figura larga como un pan blanco acibillado de humos descolocados por donde la harina se busca a sí misma algo que se parece a un fantasma de cordillera.

LEASE AQUI

