

literal

Latin American Voices



Caravana de exilios y otras mudanzas Cuba, México, Perú, Uruguay

Mario Vargas Llosa

► The Persistence of Memory / **La memoria pertinaz**

Ilan Stavans ► **La invención del amor** / The Invention of Love

\$4.50 US \$45.00 MEX



Verónica Albin • Liliana Blum • Fernando Castro • Eduardo Milán • Himilce Novas • Mónica María Parle
• Argentina Rodríguez • Steven J. Stewart • Ida Vitale • Miguel Ángel Zapata

L I T E R A L

Founder and Chief Editor

Rose Mary Salum

Art Direction and Graphic Design

Snark Editores S.A. de C.V.

Contributing Editors

Debra D. Andrist, Ph. D.

Malva Flores

Guadalupe Gómez del Campo

David Medina Portillo

Estela Porter

Associate Editors for English-language

Ángela McEwan

José Antonio Simón

Contributing Writers

Verónica Albin

Liliana V. Blum

Fernando Castro

Eduardo Milán

Himilce Novas

Mónica María Parle

Argentina Rodríguez

Ilan Stavans

Mario Vargas Llosa

Steven J. Stewart

Ida Vitale

Miguel Ángel Zapata

Contributing Translators

Toshiya A. Kamei

Patrick Madden

Anahí Ramírez Alfaro

Rose Shapiro

José Antonio Simón

Steven J. Stewart

Contributing Photographers

Janda Wetherington

Alfredo de Stéfano Farías

• Editorial Offices

Literal. Latin American Voices
770 South Post Oak Lane, Suite 530
Houston, TX 77056

• Subscriptions

Please fax a request: 713/ 960 0880
Phone: 713/ 626 14 33
E-mail: info@literalmagazine.com

• Distributors in the US and México

Ingram Distributor
Ubicuity Distributors

• Distribución en locales cerrados:

Publicaciones Citem,
Av. del Cristo 101, Col. Xocoyahualco,
Tlalnepantla, Edo. de México
Tel.: 5238-0260

• Distribución en librerías:

Comercializadora Alieri,
Censos 22, Col. El Retoño, México, D.F.,
Tel.: 5672-0523

• Responsable de circulación y distribución a nivel nacional:

Comercializadora Alieri,
Censos 22, Col. El Retoño, México, D.F.,
Tel.: 5672-0523

Opinions expressed in signed articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Literal, its directors or editors. The magazine does not accept responsibility for the advertising content. The editors reserve the right to make changes in material selected for publication to meet editorial standards and requirements. No parts of this magazine may be reproduced in any manner, either in whole or in part, without the publisher's permission. Request for permission should be made in writing to the magazine. Literal does not assume responsibility for original artwork. Unsolicited manuscripts and artwork are accepted but will not be returned unless accompanied by SASE. ISSN Number: ISSN 1551-6962. Federal Tax Exemption No. 45-0479237.

Certificado de derechos de autor: en trámite. Licitud de título: en trámite. Licitud de contenido: en trámite.

Esta entrega tiene como eje central la experiencia del exilio en sus manifestaciones diversas, fatales o elegidas. Tema recurrente que recorre gran parte de la literatura y la expresión artística contemporáneas, inseparables de los accidentes trágicos de la Historia. En este orden, pensamos, adquieren sentido pleno las palabras de Mario Vargas Llosa quien, en la entrevista que ocupa nuestras páginas, advierte: "mis residencias son cambiantes, Lima, Madrid, Londres y París. Lo que es estable o, mejor dicho, lo que da una gran estabilidad a mi vida es mi trabajo".

Con este número asimismo llegamos al primer año de vida. Breve lapso en el que *Literal* se ha hecho merecedora a una nominación por parte del Maggie Awards en la categoría de revistas semestrales, así como de dos distinciones otorgadas por el Lone Star Awards, la primera en la categoría de revista en general y, la segunda, en el panel de diseño gráfico. Gratos reconocimientos sin duda que nos obligan a estar a la altura de nuestras expectativas y ampliar nuestros horizontes.

Consecuentes con ello, a partir de este número *Literal. Voces latinoamericanas* contará con distribución nacional tanto en Estados Unidos como en la República Mexicana. De este modo queremos confirmar nuestra intención original de establecer un puente de enlace entre las diversas expresiones literarias y artísticas de la América hispana y Estados Unidos.



This publication has, as its central theme, exile in its different forms, fatal or elected. It is a recurring theme that covers a great part of contemporary literature and other artistic expressions, which are inseparable from tragic accidents of History. In this order, we thought, the words of Mario Vargas Llosa acquire full meaning when he says in the interview published among these pages: "My residencies are changing: Lima, Madrid, London and Paris. What is stable, or rather, what gives great stability to my life is work."

With this issue we reach our first year of life. A brief space in time in which *Literal* has become worthy of a nomination on behalf of the Maggie Awards in the category of semiannual publications, in addition to two distinctions awarded by Lone Star Awards, the first in the general magazine category, and the second in the graphic design panel. Pleasant acknowledgements, no doubt, by which we are obliged to remain at the height of our expectations and to expand our horizons.

Consequently and beginning with this issue, *Literal. Latin American Voices* will have distribution at the national level both in the United States and Mexico. This way, we would like to confirm our original intention of bridging the diverse literary and artistic expressions of Hispanic America and the United States.

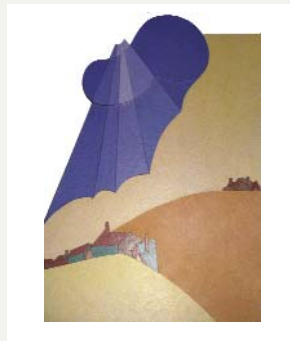
C O N T E N T S

La memoria pertinaz / The Persistence of Memory A Conversation with Mario Vargas Llosa Miguel Ángel Zapata	4
The Invention of Love / La invención del amor Ilan Stavans	18
Love and Loss A Conversation with Ilan Stavans Verónica Albin	24
To Adorn the Saints Liliana V. Blum	30
En el dorso del cielo y otros poemas Ida Vitale	32
Querencia Eduardo Milán	38
The Necessity of Speaking A Conversation with Eduardo Milán Steven J. Stewart	40
Kcho: Some Man is an Island / Algún hombre es una isla Fernando Castro	44
Super Novas A Conversation with Cuban-American Writer Himilce Novas Mónica María Parle	51
Zoé Valdés y la nostalgia Argentina Rodríguez	54



De Stéfano

14



Ingrid Hansz

34



Kcho

44

LA MEMORIA PERTINAZ

THE PERSISTENCE OF MEMORY

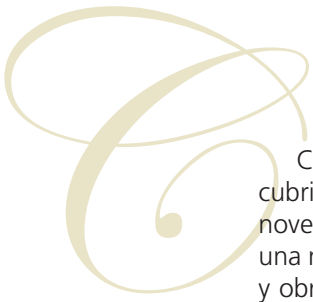
A CONVERSATION WITH MARIO VARGAS LLOSA

► MIGUEL ÁNGEL ZAPATA

TRANSLATED TO ENGLISH BY ROSE SHAPIRO

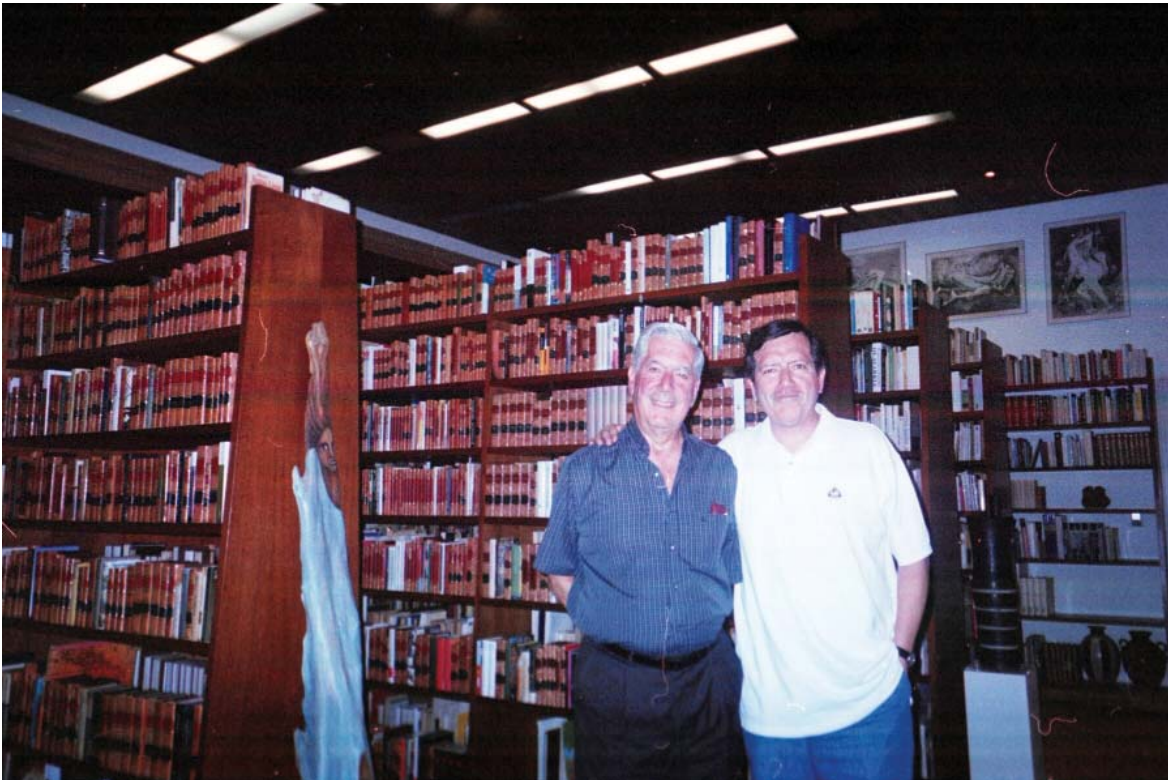
Mario Vargas Llosa (Arequipa, Perú, 1936) vive cada año entre Lima, Madrid, París y Londres. Este verano tuve la suerte de encontrarlo en su casa del malecón de Barranco, donde conversamos un rato frente al mar azulino de la costa limeña. Mario Vargas Llosa es tal vez el novelista latinoamericano más talentoso en la actualidad, demostrable al leer sus ya clásicas novelas.

Mario Vargas Llosa (Arequipa, Peru, 1936) spends part of every year in Lima, Madrid, Paris, and London. This summer I had the good fortune to meet with him in his house overlooking the sea in Barranco (Lima), where we spoke for a while by the azure sea of the Lima coast. Mario Vargas Llosa is perhaps the most talented contemporary Latin American novelist, and many of his novels are now classics.



Cada novela o escrito suyo es un nuevo descubrimiento, nada se repite. Tiene una obra novelística sumamente pareja, acompañada por una notable obra ensayística, además de crónicas y obras de teatro. Su libro más reciente, *La tentación de lo imposible. Victor Hugo y Los miserables* (Alfaguara, Madrid, 2004) es un lúcido estudio de *Los miserables*, desde la mirada de un escritor que conoce bien su oficio. Entre sus obras se pueden mencionar *Los jefes*, *La ciudad y los perros*, *La casa verde*, *Conversación en la catedral*, *Pantaleón y las visitadoras*, *La tía Julia y el escribidor*, *La guerra del fin del mundo*, *Historia de Mayta*, *¿Quién mató a Palomino Molero?*, *EL hablador*, *Elogio de la madrastra*, *Lituma en los Andes*, *Los cuadernos de don Rigoberto*, *La fiesta del chivo*, y *El paraíso en la otra esquina*. En el 2002 recibió el Premio

Every one of his novels or other writings is a discovery; he never repeats himself. His novelistic oeuvre is evenly masterful, accompanied by a notable body of essays, chronicles, and dramatic works. His most recent book, *The Temptation of the Impossible: Victor Hugo y Les Miserables* (Alfaguara, Madrid, 2004), is a brilliant study of *Les Miserables*, from the point of view of a writer who truly knows his craft. Among his works we can mention *The Bosses*, *The City and the Dogs*, *The Green House*, *Conversation in the Cathedral*, *Pantaleon and the Visitors*, *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*, *The War at the End of the World*, *The Real Life of Mayta*, *Who Killed Palomino Molero?*, *The Storyteller*, *In Praise of the Stepmother*, *Death in the Andes*, *The Notebooks of Don Rigoberto*, *The Feast of the Goat*, and *The*



PEN/Nabokov y en el 2004 el Premio Internacional Una Vida para la Literatura (Premios Grinzane Cavour). Escuchar a Mario es siempre una muy grata experiencia intelectual.

Way to Paradise: A Novel. In 2002 he received the Pen/Nabokov Prize, and in 2004 the Premio Grinzane Cavour (Turin, Italia). To listen to Mario is always a great intellectual experience.

Miguel Ángel Zapata: Mario, con esta vista preciosa que tienes aquí yo podría escribir un poema todos los días...

Mario Vargas Llosa: Sí claro, pero yo no podría escribir una novela todos los días, aunque sí podría avanzar algo en una novela todos los días.

M. A. Z.: Entonces definitivamente el ambiente, el entorno, la naturaleza sí ayuda en el proceso de escribir y de crear.

M. V. LL.: Sin ninguna duda. Hombre, yo creo que cuando tú estás obsesionado con una historia escribes igual sea cual sea el entorno. Un ambiente agradable, como éste por ejemplo, que es un paisaje cambiante y bonito, porque ver el mar en la mañana no es lo mismo que verlo a la hora del crepúsculo, no es lo mismo que verlo con sol o nublado, a mí me resulta no sólo grato sino también estimulante.

M. A. Z.: Tú vives en distintos países ¿cómo haces para continuar con tus trabajos al cambiar de espacios?

M. V. LL.: Efectivamente, digamos mis residencias son cambiantes, Lima, Madrid, Londres y París. Lo que es estable, o, mejor dicho, lo que da

Miguel Ángel Zapata: Mario, with this beautiful view that you have here I could write a poem every day.

Mario Vargas Llosa: Yes, of course, but I couldn't write a novel a day, although I can certainly progress a little bit every day in whatever novel I am working on.

M. A. Z.: Then you would say quite definitely that the environment—one's surroundings, nature itself—supports the process of writing and creating?

M. V. LL.: Without a doubt. Yet I also believe that when you are obsessed with a story you write in the same mode regardless of your surroundings. A pleasant environment, like this one for example—a lovely landscape in constant change, because the sea in the morning is not the same as the sea at twilight, not the same as the sea when it is sunny or cloudy—is not only pleasing to me but also stimulating.

M. A. Z.: You live in different countries. How are you able to continue working as you move around?

M. V. LL.: Indeed, my residence changes; I live in Lima, Madrid, London, and Paris. What is sta-

una gran estabilidad a mi vida es mi trabajo, porque yo no paro nunca de trabajar. Salgo de Lima, llego a París y al día siguiente retomo, continúo el trabajo donde lo dejé en Lima, y me pasa exactamente lo mismo cuando paso de Lima a Madrid a París o a Londres. Llego a un escritorio donde tengo absolutamente las cosas que necesito para trabajar, los disquetes, las tarjetas, los libros indispensables con los que tengo que desplazarme. Mis rutinas son las mismas, trabajo mañana y tarde, comienzo en las mañanas, y esto no ha cambiado desde hace muchísimo tiempo. La verdad es que cuando, además de escribir, tenía trabajos alimenticios, era distinto, pero desde que pude dedicarme fundamentalmente a escribir mi rutina es la misma, durante la mañana de una manera más creativa, en la tarde corrigiendo, releyendo, tomando notas para el trabajo del día siguiente. En las tardes hago siempre la investigación, me acompaña siempre como algo complementario al trabajo creativo. Esa rutina la respeto rigurosamente. Trabajo durante la semana en el libro que estoy escribiendo, y los fines de semana los dedico a los artículos, porque escribo artículos periodísticos un par de veces al mes.

ble—rather, what gives great stability to my life—is my work, because I never stop working. I leave Lima and arrive in Paris, and the next day I take up the work where I left it in Lima, and it is the same when I go from Lima to Madrid to Paris or to London. In each city I come to a desk where I have absolutely everything I need to work: diskettes, index cards, the indispensable books that I feel I must take with me wherever I go. My routine is always the same: I begin work in the morning and continue in the afternoon, and this has not changed in a very long time. The truth is that it was a different story when, in addition to writing, I had to work to make a living, but since I have been able to devote all of time to writing my routine is the same. In the morning my work is more creative; in the afternoon I correct, reread, and take notes for the following day's work. In the afternoon I always do research, which complements the creative work. I respect that routine rigorously. I work during the week on the book I'm writing, and on the weekends I devote my time to writing articles; I write newspaper articles a couple of times a month.

Generally speaking, the point of departure is memory; I believe all the stories I have written have been born of some lived experience that has remained in my memory and that becomes an image, fertile ground for imagining a whole structure around it.

M. A. Z.: ¿Cuál es el punto de partida de tu escritura?

M. V. LL.: Generalmente el punto de partida es la memoria; creo que todas las historias que he escrito han nacido siempre como fruto de alguna vivencia que ha quedado en la memoria y que se convierte en una imagen muy fértil para fantasear algo alrededor de ella. Ése ha sido casi siempre el punto de partida de todo lo que he escrito.

También he seguido una pauta, prácticamente desde el primer cuento que escribí: tomo muchas notas, hago fichas, hago unos esquemas antes de empezar a redactar. Para poder comenzar a escribir necesito por lo menos una estructura aunque sea muy general de la historia. Y luego pues comienzo a trabajar. Hago primero un borrador, que es lo que más trabajo me cuesta. Una vez que lo tengo para mí el trabajo es mucho más agradable, ya escribo de una mane-

M. A. Z.: What is the point of departure for your writing?

M. V. LL.: Generally speaking, the point of departure is memory; I believe all the stories I have written have been born of some lived experience that has remained in my memory and that becomes an image, fertile ground for imagining a whole structure around it. It's also true that I have always followed an outline, almost since my first story: I take many notes, I make index cards, and I make some plot sketches before beginning to compose. In order to be able to begin writing I need at least a structure, though perhaps a very general one, for the story. And then I can begin to work. I first produce a draft, which is the part of the work that is hardest for me. As soon as I have it the work is much more pleasant; I can write more confidently, more securely, because I know that the story is there. This has been a con-

ra más confiada, más segura, porque sé que la historia está allí. Esto ha sido una constante en lo que he escrito: hacer una investigación que me familiarice con el tema, la situación, la época en la que está situada la historia.

M. A. Z.: Es el caso de Flora Tristán y Paul Gauguin.

M. V. LL.: Sin ninguna duda. Claro, se trataba de dos personajes históricos, pero en otros casos aunque no es un tema histórico, pues viajo a los sitios donde ocurre la historia, leo testimonios, periódicos de la época, pero no con un afán de reproducir una verdad histórica, sino para sentirme familiarizado, contaminado del medio en el que yo quiero situar los personajes y la anécdota. Luego corrijo mucho, rehago mucho. Para mí en realidad —eso lo dijo una vez José Emilio Pacheco— me pareció muy exacto, lo que me gusta más no es escribir sino re-escribir. Es la pura verdad. Cuando corrijo y rehago lo que he hecho, es cuando realmente gozo más escribiendo.

M. A. Z.: Y cuando terminas una novela, y sale publicada ¿la vuelves a leer? Buscar tal vez carencias, no sé...

M. V. LL.: No. La última vez que la leo es en las pruebas, y después no, procuro no leerlas. A veces lo hago cuando trabajo con algún traductor y releo obligado para corregir erratas, pero en general no me gusta volver sobre lo escrito y publicado.

M. A. Z.: Pero tal vez hayas leído un fragmento... y quizá hayas pensando que te hubiese gustado cambiar cierta sección de la novela, como sucedía en poesía con Valéry, Juan Ramón Jiménez, y ahora con Pacheco, cuya lúcida poesía es un continuo corregir...

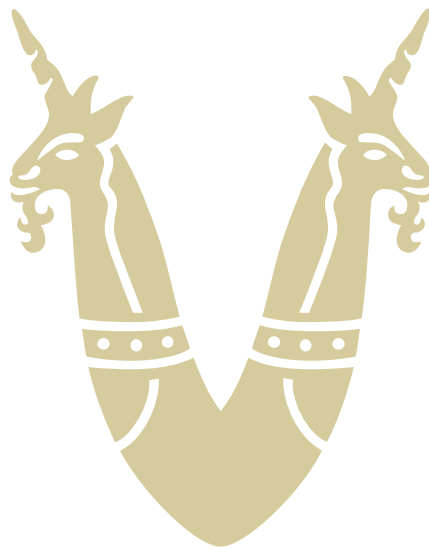
M. V. LL.: Claro, me ha pasado siempre, y es una de las razones por las cuales no me gusta releerme, cada vez que me releo pienso que hubiera podido trabajar la historia un poquito más...

M. A. Z.: José Emilio corrige sus poemas ya publicados en nuevas ediciones, eso es saludable en el caso de la poesía...

M. V. LL.: Yo en cambio a diferencia de Pacheco hago sólo correcciones de erratas pero no del texto ya publicado.

M. A. Z.: ¿Cuáles son tus libros predilectos?

M. V. LL.: Pues mira, serían *Madame Bovary*, varias de Flaubert, elegiría, *Luz de agosto*, quizás *Santuario*, de Faulkner, *Moby-Dick*, de Melville, *La guerra y la paz*, de Tolstoi, *Esplendor y miseria de cortesanas* de Balzac, *Ulises* de Joyce, *El Quijote* de Cervantes, *Tirant lo Blanc*, que para mí fue importantísimo, ya que me dio la idea de la novela como una totalidad, o sea como un mundo cerrado sobre sí mismo, en fin, elegiría cientos de títulos...



stant in what I have written: doing research that will familiarize me with the theme, the situation, the period during which the story takes place.

M. A. Z.: As is the case with your novel about Flora Tristán and Paul Gauguin.

M. V. LL.: No doubt. Of course, that work dealt with historical personalities, but in other cases, although I'm not working with a historical situation, I anyway travel to the places where the story takes place, I read testimonies, newspapers of the period, not with the aim of reproducing a historical truth but rather to feel familiar with, immersed in, the environment in which I want to situate the characters and the story. Then I correct a lot, rewrite a lot. For me, to tell you the truth—this is something José Emilio Pacheco once said, and it seems right on the mark to me—what I like best is not writing but revising. It's the absolute truth. When I correct and revise what I have already done, that is when I really enjoy writing the most.

M. A. Z.: And when you finish a novel and it's published, do you read it again? To look for faults, perhaps, I don't know. . .

M. V. LL.: No. The last time that I read it is in proofs, and after that I try not to read it again, if I can help it. Sometimes when I work with a translator I am obligated to reread in order to correct errors, but in general I don't like to revisit what I've already written and published.

M. A. Z.: But perhaps you've read a fragment and thought that you would have liked to change a section of the novel, as was the case with Valéry, Juan Ramón Jimenez, and now with Pacheco, whose brilliant poetry is in a continual state of revision.

M. V. LL.: Of course, that has happened to me often, and it is one of the reasons I don't like to reread my own work once it's published. Every time that I reread my own work I wonder whether I could have worked on the story a little bit more.



M. A. Z.: ¿Lees Poesía?

M. V. LL.: Leo poesía, releo mucho a los autores que a mí me han impresionado, empezando por Rubén Darío, que ya casi no se lee mucho, y que sigo creyendo que sigue siendo el padre, el maestro mágico de la verdadera poesía en español, releo a Neruda que fue un amor de juventud, Baudelaire, quizás el poeta que admiro más entre todos los poetas, a Eliot que me gusta muchísimo, no sólo como poeta sino también como ensayista.

MAZ.: Entonces Baudelaire te ha estremecido, porque la poesía también influye en los escritores de prosa, ¿no?

M. V. LL.: Si claro él, pero también todos los autores que he leído y que me han hecho estremecer, y me han llevado a reflexionar y han gravitado sobre lo que yo soy, sobre mi sensibilidad, ahora, cómo se puede digamos seguir, rastrear a un autor como Joseph Conrad, justamente ahora estoy releendo a Conrad...

M. A. Z.: ¿Qué estás releendo de él?

M. V. LL.: El año pasado leí *Lord Jim*, me pareció una obra maestra, extraordinaria, pero por otro lado, empiezo a leer *Nostromo*, y me ha parecido una descripción de una América Latina llena de pintoresquismo, de clichés, de lugares comunes. Es la primera vez que me decepciona una novela de Conrad.

M. A. Z.: What are your favorite books?

M. V. LL.: Well, here we go. They would be *Madame Bovary*, several of Flaubert; I would also choose Faulkner's *Light in August* and perhaps *Sanctuary*, Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Balzac's *Scenes from a Courtesan's Life*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Cervantes's *Quixote*, and *Tirant lo Blanc*, which was very important to me because it gave me the idea of the novel as a totality, a world unto itself. Well, I could choose hundreds of titles.

M. A. Z.: Do you read poetry?

M. V. LL.: I do. I tend to reread many of the authors who have most impressed me, starting with Rubén Darío, who is these days not so often read and who I still think remains the father, the magical master, of true poetry in Spanish. I also reread Neruda, whom I loved in my youth, and Baudelaire, perhaps the poet I admire most among all poets. I like Eliot very much, not only as a poet but also as an essayist.

M. A. Z.: So Baudelaire has moved you greatly; poetry also influences prose writers.

M. V. LL.: Yes, Baudelaire, most definitely, but also all the authors I have read and who have moved me and caused me to think deeply, who have greatly influenced who I am, my sensibility. But, now, how could one follow in the footsteps of an author like Joseph Conrad? In fact, right now I'm rereading Conrad.

Leo poesía, releo mucho a los autores que a mí me han impresionado, empezando por Rubén Darío, que ya casi no se lee mucho, y que sigo creyendo que sigue siendo el padre, el maestro mágico de la verdadera poesía en español...

M. A. Z.: Cambiando de latitudes, ¿sigues viendo a José María Arguedas como en tu libro *La utopía arcaica*?

M. V. LL.: Sí. Creo que Arguedas fue un caso extraordinario en la literatura peruana por su enraizamiento en dos culturas, las cuales llegó a conocer y vivir profundamente, desde adentro. Esto le dio una visión del Perú que muy difícilmente tienen los escritores peruanos, ya que carecen de ese tipo de experiencia. Creo que Arguedas escribió una gran novela, *Los ríos profundos*, donde volcó su experiencia de dos culturas, la visión de un mundo autosuficiente creado a partir de una realidad histórica y social pero completamente trasmutada en arte, gracias a una lengua, a una sensibilidad. Después no creo que llegó a alcanzar la perfección de *Los ríos profundos*, aunque escribió relatos que son muy lindos. En estas novelas fracasó, por razones no literarias, sino por razones de tipo sociológico, etnológico, como es el caso de *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo*.

M. A. Z.: Novela que no terminó...

M. V. LL.: Se quedó en una versión muy avanzada, pero todo Arguedas es un escritor muy representativo de un estado de cosas, dramático, seguramente es el escritor peruano que he leído y releído más... El caso de Arguedas no sólo es interesante como escritor sino como un testigo privilegiado de nuestro país, del drama de las culturas encontradas y sometidas, de la bipolaridad de la sociedad peruana, y su testimonio es genuino y auténtico. Su persona tiene una significación que desborda lo puramente literario.

M. A. Z.: Hablemos un poco ahora de la ficción y lo autobiográfico. En *La tía Julia y el escribidor*, o en *El hablador*, ¿apareces tú como personaje camuflado?

M. V. LL.: No, aparece un ser que a veces lleva mi nombre y en otros casos aprovecha de experiencias que yo he tenido, pero aparece siempre dentro de un contexto y viviendo experiencias que son mucho más diversas de las que yo he tenido, de tal manera que ninguna de mis novelas es exclusivamente autobiográfica, ni siquiera

M. A. Z.: Which works of his are you rereading?

M. V. LL.: Last year I reread *Lord Jim*, which struck me as a masterpiece, extraordinary; but, on the other hand, I picked up *Nostromo*, and I find it a description of a Latin America full of quaintness, clichés, and commonplaces. It's the first time that one of Conrad's novels has disappointed me.

M. A. Z.: Do you still feel the same way about José María Arguedas as you did in your book *La utopía arcaica*?

M. V. LL.: Yes. I believe that Arguedas was an extraordinary case in Peruvian literature, because of his roots in two cultures, both of which he came to know and experience profoundly, from within. This gave him a vision of Peru that only with great difficulty do other Peruvian writers accomplish, since they lack that experience of two worlds. I think Arguedas wrote a great novel, *Los ríos profundos*, into which he poured his experience of two cultures, the vision of a self-sufficient world created from a historical and social reality but utterly transformed into art, thanks to a language, a sensibility. I don't think he achieved the perfection of *Los ríos profundos* in his later work, although he wrote some very lovely stories. In those novels he failed not for literary reasons but for sociological and ethnological ones, as is the case with *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo*.

M. A. Z.: A novel he never finished...

M. V. LL.: He left it almost finished, and in all of his work Arguedas shows himself to be a writer who clearly wants to represent a state of affairs very graphically. Certainly, he is the Peruvian writer that I have read and reread most often. Arguedas is interesting not only as a writer but also as a uniquely positioned witness to the drama of our country—the drama of discovered and conquered cultures—and of the bipolarity of Peruvian society, and his testimony is genuine and authentic. Arguedas has meaning for Peru that goes beyond the purely literary.

M. A. Z.: Let's speak for a bit now about fiction and autobiography. In *Aunt Julia and the*

We have a very fragile democracy, and the worst way to preserve it is to change the rules of the game, or to change the procedures that are fundamental to a democracy. Now, while there are many reasons to criticize this government, there have also been many indisputably good moves...

la que lo parece más, como es *La tía Julia*... Claro, ahí he aprovechado un momento de mi vida, pero incluso en la historia del varguitas que quisiera ser un escritor, hay mucho más de invención que de memoria personal, la autobiografía es un recurso literario, como en *El hablador*...

M. A. Z.: ¿Cómo fantaseas este aspecto?

M. V. LL.: Los datos biográficos están disueltos en datos inventados, fantaseados, como dices. Al final todo esto último, lo inventado termina prevaleciendo. Ahora, si me preguntas si la literatura tiene una raíz autobiográfica, creo que sí, inevitablemente creo que el punto de partida es siempre la memoria: hay unas imágenes que te da la memoria, que te han acompañado mucho tiempo, y ésa es la materia prima con la que trabaja un escritor. Pero es una materia prima desde donde partes para construir un mundo. No creo que sea una experiencia muy distinta de la del poeta, el poeta también parte de una memoria, de una vivencia de la vida, de la gente, de la realidad conservada a base de recuerdos.

M. A. Z.: ¿Crees que existe una literatura latinoamericana judía fuerte, una presencia, como es el caso de *La vida a plazos de don Jacobo Lerner* de Isaac Goldemberg?

M. V. LL.: *La vida a plazos* me parece una magnífica novela. Por otro lado yo he tenido un interés en Israel por razones políticas no religiosas, y fue una experiencia maravillosa la que tuve en Israel. Pero nunca he leído a un escritor por su raza o su religión ni siquiera por sus convicciones políticas. A los creadores los leo por su talento simplemente, y el talento se da en cualquier aspecto cultural, como es el caso de Kafka.

M. A. Z.: Y ahora hablando de los críticos de tu obra, ¿a quiénes mencionarías como los que han acertado en sus aproximaciones?

M. V. LL.: David Gallagher, escribió un ensayo sobre *Conversación en la catedral*, que para mí fue muy sorprendente, recuerdo sobre todo una idea, decía... más o menos así... en esa novela se demuestra que el poder es sucio, y la prosa de la

Scriptwriter or in *El hablador* do you appear as a camouflaged character?

M. V. LL.: No. Sometimes someone appears who has my name and in other ways takes advantage of experiences that I have had, but he always appears in a context and living experiences that are much more diverse than those I have had, such that none of my novels is exclusively autobiographical, not even the one that most seems to be, which is *Aunt Julia*. Sure, in that case I took advantage of a moment in my own life, but even in the story of Varguitas, who would have liked to have been a writer, there is much more imagination than personal memory. Autobiography is a literary resource, as in *El hablador*.

M. A. Z.: How do you transform this aspect; that is, how do you make the autobiographical into the literary?

M. V. LL.: Biographical facts are subsumed in imagined, or, as you put it, transformed facts. In the end, that which is imagined wins out. Now, if you are asking me whether literature has an autobiographical source, I would say so; I can't help but believe that the point of departure is always memory: you get images from memory, images that have been with you a long time, and that is the primary material with which a writer works. But it is a primary material from which you depart in order to create a world. I don't think this experience is very different from that of the poet. The poet also starts from memory, from an experience of life, of people, of reality as it is constructed in remembrance.

M. A. Z.: Let's turn to the critics of your work. Whom would you mention as those who have hit the mark in their approaches to your writing?

M. V. LL.: David Gallagher wrote an essay about *Conversation in the Cathedral* that really surprised me; what I remember most of all is the idea—I think it's more or less like this—that that novel shows that power is dirty and that every time the novel dealt with the theme of power its prose style itself became dirty; that is, he pointed

novela cada vez que se acerca al poder se ensucia, o sea que la novela de alguna manera somatiza lo que la novela quiere mostrar. También José Miguel Oviedo ha hecho unos análisis muy serios, rigurosos, sobre todo de las estructuras, de las técnicas, y he aprendido de sus acercamientos. Por último, el libro de Efraín Kristal fue muy revelador para mí, él relee prácticamente los libros que yo he dicho que me han impresionado, y entonces encuentra en esos libros muchas fuentes, muchos modelos que yo he aprovechado. Es uno de los libros que me ha interesado más y que ha sido muy instructivo sobre lo que yo hago, y me ha demostrado que por más que uno trabaje muy racionalmente como lo hago yo preparando sus historias, uno no tiene la distancia suficiente para saber exactamente lo que uno hace en el papel.

M. A. Z.: ¿Qué me dices de los poetas peruanos que te interesan y que lees?

M. V. LL.: Vallejo, por supuesto, César Moro, del cual fui un lector precoz cuando nadie lo conocía, lo leí a raíz de su muerte, y a raíz de un ensayo muy dramático de André Coyné, y desde esa vez comencé a buscar cosas de él, e incluso ayudé a publicar libros inéditos de César Moro. He sido un lector muy devoto de la poesía peruana, sobre todos los años que viví en el Perú; fui un lector muy entusiasta e incluso escribí un ensayo sobre Carlos Germán Belli.

M. A. Z.: Un poco sobre la política en el Perú. ¿Estarías de acuerdo en que se deba dejar al presidente Toledo terminar su mandato (como lo señala la constitución) o hacer caso a sus enemigos que no lo quieren dejar que culmine su periodo de gobierno?

M. V. LL.: Sí pienso que debe terminar su mandato y que se mantengan los plazos constitucionales. Nosotros tenemos una democracia muy frágil, y la peor manera de conservarla es alterar las reglas del juego, o cambiar las formas, que es lo fundamental en una democracia. Ahora bien, aunque hay muchas razones para criticar este gobierno, como son los casos de corrupción, también ha habido muchos aciertos que son indiscutibles, que nadie reconoce, por ejemplo la situación del Perú en América Latina. Probablemente el Perú sea el país que ha progresado más en los últimos años en el campo económico.

M. A. Z.: ¿Qué piensas de la reciente toma de la comisaría de Andahuaylas por Antauro Humala y los etnocaceristas?

M. V. LL.: Es una muestra de primitivismo, de subdesarrollo y de estupidez. Se trata de un pequeño grupo. Desgraciadamente hay un clima tan hostil, de tanta beligerancia contra el gobier-

out that the all aspects of the novel in some ways reflect what the novel is trying to argue. Also José Miguel Oviedo has made some very serious and rigorous analyses of, above all, structures and techniques in my work, and I have learned a lot from his approaches. Finally, Efraín Kristal's book was a revelation for me. He reads practically all of the books that I have said influenced me and finds in those books many sources and models that I have in some way used in my work. It is one of the books that has interested me most and been most instructive in terms of showing me how I proceed; and it taught me that as much as one works rationally and systematically on one's stories, as I do, one does not have the necessary critical distance to know exactly what one is doing on paper.

M. A. Z.: What can you say about the Peruvian poets who interest you and whom you read?

M. V. LL.: Vallejo, of course. And César Moro, of whom I was an early reader, back when no one knew who he was. I started reading him upon his death, inspired by a very dramatic essay by André Coyné, and since that moment I began looking for his work, and I even helped published some of his unpublished work. I have been a very devoted reader of Peruvian poetry, during all the years I have lived in Peru, and a very enthusiastic one, as well. For instance, I wrote an essay about our great poet Carlos Germán Belli.

M. A. Z.: A few words about politics in Peru. Do you agree that President Toledo should be allowed to finish his term in office (as the constitution mandates), or should we listen to his enemies, those who do not want him to finish his term?

M. V. LL.: Yes, I believe he should finish his term and that the constitutional terms of office should be maintained. We have a very fragile democracy, and the worst way to preserve it is to change the rules of the game, or to change the procedures that are fundamental to a democracy. Now, while there are many reasons to criticize this government, there have also been many indisputably good moves, ones that no one recognizes—for example, the situation of Peru with respect to the rest of Latin America—. Peru has likely been the country that has progressed the most in the past few years in terms of economic development.

M. A. Z.: What do you think of the recent taking of the police station of Andahuaylas by Antauro Humala and the *etnocaceristas*?

M. V. LL.: It is a display of primitivism, of underdevelopment, and of stupidity. It involves only a small group. Unfortunately, there is such a



no y contra todas las instituciones establecidas, que detrás de Humala se ha volcado todo un estado de ánimo que resulta muy engañoso, las encuestas indican que ha habido un apoyo de 34% o 40% de apoyo a Humala. Yo no lo creo. Ocurre que el descontento busca cómo manifestarse y de ahí su identificación con el ultra nacionalismo, el racismo y demás idioteces de Humala.

M. A. Z.: Ellos y otros grupos han hablado mucho recientemente de la penetración chilena en el Perú...

M. V. LL.: Yo creo que lo peor que podríamos hacer es caer en el antichilenismo que están agitando un grupo de demagogos malintencionados porque generalmente los que agitan el antichilenismo son gente que está comprometida con la dictadura de Fujimori, muchos de ellos con juicios por ladrones y por corruptos. Clarísimamente se trata de una cortina de humo para ver si en el caos que se quiere crear se salen con la suya. La guerra del Pacífico ocurrió hace mucho tiempo, y lo peor que podríamos hacer es seguir con los ojos fijos en esa guerra lamentable en la que, por supuesto, Perú y Bolivia fueron los sacrificados. Eso quedó atrás y las guerras de hace un siglo no pueden enemistar a los pueblos, las guerras muchas veces son conflictos creados por los gobiernos o los intereses creados exclusivamente para su beneficio y siempre el sacrificado es el pueblo.

M. A. Z.: ¿El nacionalismo es una de las peores taras, no te parece?

Nationalism, in its various forms, has impoverished us and made us more underdeveloped, and it has therefore been the reason regional treaties have never worked...

hostile climate, with so much belligerence towards the government and established institutions, that in the wake of Humala we find considerable animosity, which turns out to be very deceptive. The surveys indicate that Humala has 34% to 40% support in Peru; I don't believe it. What happens is that discontent finds a way to manifest itself, and thus we see its identification with extreme nationalism, racism, and other of Humala's idiocies.

M. A. Z.: That group and others have had a lot to say recently about Chile's penetration in Peru...

M. V. LL.: I think the worst thing we could do is to fall into the anti-Chile rhetoric that a group of ill-intentioned demagogues is spouting, because generally those who rail against Chile are those who are committed to the dictatorship of Fujimori, many of them accused of thievery and corruption. Most certainly, that business is a smokescreen so that in the ensuing chaos they might be able to get away with their own mischief. The War of the Pacific happened a long time ago, and the worst thing we could do is to keep looking to that unfortunate war, in which of course Peru and Bolivia were the sacrificial lambs. Wars that were fought a century ago must not create enmity between peoples; wars are often conflicts created by governments or by the interests that are the only ones who benefit from these conflicts; the people are always those who pay.

M. A. Z.: Nationalism is one of the worst defects, don't you think?

M. V. LL.: Of course. Nationalism, in its various forms, has impoverished us and made us more underdeveloped, and it has therefore been the reason regional treaties have never worked in spite of the great efforts to create pacts or common markets. We must combat nationalism. It is a blessing that not only Chilean but also Brazilian, Colombian, and Ecuadorian capital is coming to Peru, to develop our sources of wealth, since in the end the rules of the game are set not by them but by our governments. Now, if the government is inept and corrupt, naturally those investments are coming to Peru under very unfavourable conditions. Therefore we must demand transparency and honesty of our government.

M. A. Z.: This government has not been transparent.

M. V. LL.: Of course not. I think there are, unfortunately, many corrupt people in this government, and I think one of Toledo's most serious errors was to surround himself with untrustworthy people. It is one of the things that have most damaged his popular image and that has allowed his enemies to attack his administration. Among

M. V. LL.: Claro. Los nacionalismos nos han empobrecido, atrasado, por eso han sido la razón por la cual nunca han funcionado los tratados regionales, los grandes intentos de crear los pactos o mercados comunes.

Hay que combatir el nacionalismo. Es una bendición que vengan capitales no sólo chilenos, sino también brasileños, colombianos, o ecuatorianos, para desarrollar nuestras riquezas, ya que por último las reglas del juego no las fijan ellos sino nuestros gobiernos.

Ahora si el gobierno es inepto y corrupto naturalmente van a venir en condiciones desfavorables para el Perú, entonces hay que exigir limpieza, transparencia y honestidad a nuestro gobierno.

M. A. Z.: Este gobierno no está siendo transparente...

M. V. LL.: Claro que no. Pienso que hay muchos corruptos en este gobierno por desgracia, y creo que uno de los grandes errores de Toledo fue rodearse de gente poco confiable. Es una de las cosas que más lo ha perjudicado en la imagen popular, lo que ha permitido que sus enemigos ataquen su gobierno. Entre ellos se encuentran por supuesto muchos corruptos del fujimorato, que además tienen los medios de comunicación, están llenos de veneno, de odio, y tratan de crear caos por todos los medios, para poder librarse de las condenas y los juicios.

M. A. Z.: ¿En qué proyecto literario andas ahora Mario?

M. V. LL.: Ando metido en una novela, después de terminar el ensayo de Víctor Hugo.

M. A. Z.: ¿De qué se trata?

M. V. LL.: Es una novela que está construida por una sucesión de cuentos, cada capítulo es un relato y se puede leer como un relato independiente y, al mismo tiempo, como capítulo de una historia que los engloba a todos estos relatos. Cada uno de esos relatos ocurre en una ciudad y en una época distinta en lo que sí aprovecho mi propia experiencia, en las ciudades en las que viví; en fin, en lo demás no es autobiográfica en absoluto...

M. A. Z.: ¿Ya tienes título?

M. V. LL.: Sí: *Travesuras de la niña mala*

M. V. LL.: ¿Te gusta ese título?

M. A. Z.: Me encanta. Sería tal vez el primer título de esas novelas donde sí se manifiesta tu discurso erótico.

M. V. LL.: Es un título provisional, claro, pero ahí estamos...



those untrustworthy people are of course many corrupt characters from Fujimori's administration, who moreover have control over the media and who are full of poison and hate and who try to create chaos by all means possible in order to evade condemnation and the rule of law.

M. A. Z.: What literary project are you pursuing now?

M. V. LL.: I am in the midst of writing a novel, which I started after finishing my essay on Victor Hugo.

M. A. Z.: What is it about?

M. V. LL.: It's a novel that is constructed as a series of short stories; every chapter is a story that can be read independently and, at the same time, as a chapter of a novel that encompasses all the stories. Each one of these stories occurs in a different city and a different period, which indeed allows me to make use of my own experience of the cities in which I have lived—but other than that it's not at all autobiographical—.

M. A. Z.: Do you already have a title for it?

M. V. LL.: Yes. *Travesuras de la niña mala*. Do you like it?

M. A. Z.: I love it. It would be perhaps the first title of yours to manifest your discourse on the erotic.

M. V. LL.: It's a provisional title, of course, but there we are...

• Adelanto de entrevista de próxima publicación: *Hofstra Hispanic Review*, Fall 2005, No. 1, Vol. 1.



d e S t é f a n o

habitar el vacío

fotografías cortesía de:

De Santos Gallery

1724-A Richmond Ave., Houston, TX 77098.

Ph (713) 520-1200

Fax (713) 520-1202

www.desantosgallery.com

◀cuchillos para que
deje de llover
2003, impresión cromógena, 100x127 cm



espejismos ▶
2002, impresión cromógena, 100x127 cm

manguera para
el agua que se fue ▶
2002, impresión cromógena, 100x127 cm



escalera al cielo ▼
2003, impresión cromógena, 100x127 cm



e l s o l ▲

2002, impresión cromógena, 100x127 cm



c i r c u l o d e f u e g o e n e l d e s i e r t o ▼

2002, impresión cromógena, 100x127 cm

h a b i t a r e l v a c í o



b o l s a d e n u b e s ▲
(2002, impresión cromógena, 100x127 cm)

Alfredo de Stéfano Farías nació en Monclova, Coahuila, en 1961. Sus obras se encuentran en diversas colecciones particulares de Estados Unidos, México, Francia y España así como en la Bibliothèqure Nacional de París, la Freedman Gallery de Estados Unidos, el Internacional Institute of Photographic Arts de San Diego, California y el Lowe Art Museum de Miami, entre otros. Ha tenido numerosas exhibiciones colectivas e individuales.

THE INVENTION

OF LOVE › LA INVENCION DEL AMOR

► ILAN STAVANS

TRADUCCIÓN AL ESPAÑOL DE ANAHÍ RAMÍREZ ALFARO

Ilan Stavans is the Lewis-Sebring Professor of Latin American and Latino Culture at Amherst College. He is also Professor of Poetry at Columbia University. His books include the best-selling *The Hispanic Condition* (1995) and *On Borrowed Words: A Memoir of Language* (2001). He is also the editor of *The Oxford Book of Jewish Stories* (1998), *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda* (2003) and the 3-volume set of *Isaac Bashevis Singer: Collected Stories* (2004). Random House published *The Schocken Book of Modern Sephardic Literature* (2005), which he edited. His groundbreaking 4-volume *Encyclopedia Latina* (Grolier/Scholastic), the first reference book to comprehensively address every aspect of Hispanic life in the United States, has been released recently. *Dictionary Days: A Defining Passion* (Graywolf), an autobiographical meditation on words and multilingual lexicons, has just appeared. And in November, Penguin Classics will bring out his anthology *Rubén Darío: Selected Poetry and Prose*.

WHO INVENTED LOVE? Animals don't know a thing about it: many mate and separate. Since language—verbal, that is—is a unique human quality, no other animal expresses affection and becomes neurotic about it.

Or do they? In my childhood, I had a dog, a Cocker-Spaniel named Cookie—in Spanish, Cuki. She enjoyed sitting on my brother's bed as well as mine for long hours, looking out the window at the passers-by, airplanes, the sun-

¿QUIÉN INVENTÓ EL AMOR? Los animales no tienen ni la más mínima idea de lo que es: muchos se aparean y se separan. Dado que el lenguaje —el oral, es decir— es una cualidad única de los seres humanos, ningún otro animal expresa cariño y se vuelve neurótico por haberlo expresado.

¿O les pasa también a ellos? En mi niñez tenía una perra, una *cocker spaniel* que se llamaba *Cookie* —la Cuki en español—. Le encantaba sentarse en la cama de mi hermano o en la mía por largas horas; miraba por la ventana a la gente en la calle, los aviones, el atardecer. Disfrutaba especialmente de las tardes lluviosas, cuando una nube de nostalgia descendía sobre ella. Se ponía taciturna. Su talante era contemplativo, casi filosófico. Me es imposible saber en qué estaba pensando Cuki en esos momentos. Sin duda era una mascota ávida de amor.

En el vecindario Cuki tenía la reputación de ser solitaria; disfrutaba de la compañía de la gente, mas no de la de otros perros.

Vivió con nosotros por más de una década. Cuando mis hermanos y yo salimos de casa, Cuki también decidió cambiar de vida: un día salió por la puerta después del desayuno y desapareció.

Durante semanas la buscamos en vano.

Aproximadamente un año después mis papás se mudaron a un departamento a varios kilómetros de distancia. Un día manejaban por casualidad por la antigua colonia cuando vieron a Cuki en un parque del barrio. Me dijeron que andaba con un montón de perros callejeros malandrines. Mis papás le chiflaron. Le llamaron por su nom-

Love is abrasive, rowdy, obstinate, indomitable. Also, love is orderly, flexible, civilized.

It is, in short, the sum of all contradictions and its negations as well.

Pero regresemos al tema del amor: los acadios, caldeos, fenicios, sumerios, babilonios, egipcios, normandos, toltecas, vikingos y quechuas no tenían una palabra para definirlo y, por lo tanto, no sabían nada de él...

set. She particularly enjoyed rainy afternoons, when a cloud of nostalgia descended on her. She would grow taciturn. Her gesture was contemplative, almost philosophical. What went on in Cuki's mind in such moments is impossible for me to know. She certainly was a love-starved pet.

In the neighborhood Cuki was known as a loner, enjoying the company of people but not of other dogs.

She lived with us for more than a decade. When my siblings and I left home, Cuki also decided to change her life: one day after breakfast, she walked out the door and disappeared.

For weeks we looked for her in vain.

Approximately a year later, my parents moved to an apartment several miles away. One day they happened to drive by the old neighborhood when they spotted Cuki in a nearby park. They told me she was with a bunch of rowdy street dogs. My parents whistled. They called her name repeatedly. Cuki finally turned around. For a minute or two she looked at them with the same concentration she had when sitting on my bed. Then, in a pose of indifference, she looked at her canine friends.

It took her less than a second to confirm the choice she had already made: Cuki rejoined her bunch.

She was never seen again.

Her love was significant, no doubt. But human love is different. Is it passion that makes a difference?

Passion is defined by the *OED* in a bizarre, almost mysterious fashion: "An eager outreaching of the mind... a vehement predilection." Of the mind, I say? Wasn't passion intimately rooted in the heart? And what does it mean to allow the mind to outreach, and to do so eagerly?

But back to *love*: The Acadians, Caldeans, Phoenicians, Sumerians, Babylonians, Egyptians, Normans, Toltecs, Vikings, and Quechuas didn't have a word for it, and hence didn't know a thing about it.

But we do... isn't that what matters? For love is a modern invention.

The word itself—*amore* in Italian, *любовь* in Russian, *amour* in French, *بيك* in Arabic, *amor*

bre varias veces. Finalmente la Cuki volteó. Los miró durante uno o dos minutos con esa misma concentración que mostraba cuando estaba sentada en mi cama. Luego, con un aire de indiferencia, miró a sus amigos caninos.

Le llevó menos de un segundo confirmar la decisión que ya había tomado: Cuki se quedó con sus cuates.

Nunca la volvimos a ver.

Su amor era importante, no cabe duda. Pero el amor humano es distinto. ¿Es la pasión lo que lo hace diferente?

En el *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, el diccionario más completo de la lengua inglesa, la *pasión* se define de manera estrambótica, casi misteriosa: "Un lance impaciente de la mente ... una predilección vehemente". ¿De la mente, me pregunto yo? ¿No está la pasión íntimamente arraigada en el corazón? ¿Y qué significa permitir que la mente tenga un lance impaciente?

Pero regresemos al tema del *amor*: los acadios, caldeos, fenicios, sumerios, babilonios, egipcios, normandos, toltecas, vikingos y quechuas no tenían una palabra para definirlo y, por lo tanto, no sabían nada de él.

Pero nosotros sí... ¿no es eso lo que importa? Pues el amor es una invención moderna.

La palabra misma —*amore* en italiano, *любовь* en ruso, *amour* en francés, *بيك* en árabe, *amor* en español, *liebe* en alemán, *love* en inglés —me recuerda la definición que Herbie Hancock dio del jazz alguna vez: "Es algo muy difícil de definir pero muy fácil de reconocer"—. Basta ir a la farmacia más cercana para admirar la sección de tarjetas para toda ocasión: las tarjetas Hallmark se han dado a la tarea de definir el amor de mil maneras cursis. También hay que prestar atención —¡se necesita valor!— a las películas de Hollywood: desde "¡Francamente, querida, me importa un carajo!" de Clark Gable, hasta "amor significa nunca tener que pedir perdón", de Ali McGraw. Las posibilidades son —para bien o para mal— infinitas.

El amor es abrasivo, pendenciero, obstinado, indomable. También es metódico, flexible, civilizado. En resumen, es la suma de todas las contradicciones y sus negaciones también. ¿Puede el

Yes, the essence remains the same but the formulation is far less frigid than the OED, more warmhearted and—excuse the cliché—quixotic. The happiness for what is good and the suffering for what is bad? Ah, this is sheer melodrama.

in Spanish, *liebe* in German, *love* in English—remind me of the definition Herbie Hancock gave for *jazz*: “It is something very hard to define but very easy to recognize.” Go to your local drugstore and admire the greeting-card section: Hallmark Cards has made it its duty to define love a thousand different corny ways. Or pay attention—if you dare!—to Hollywood movies: from Clark Gable’s “Frankly my dear, I don’t give a damn!” to Ali McGraw’s “Love means not ever having to say you’re sorry,” the possibilities are—for better or worse—infinite.

Love is abrasive, rowdy, obstinate, indomitable. Also, love is orderly, flexible, civilized. It is, in short, the sum of all contradictions and its negations as well. Can a lexicon encompass, in a single definition, such opposing thoughts? Can it say what it means and not simplify it at the same time?

Francesco Petrarca, in his *Life of Solitude* in the fourteenth century, might have been among the first to codify it and the correspondents Abelard and Heloise the first to experience it as *ethos*. But within Western civilization (whatever the concept means, if it means anything at all), each culture defines love differently. To prove the point, I looked it up in a handful of translingual dictionaries, not in too many in order to keep the scientific experiment within approachable boundaries.

First, of course, my *OED*. It takes the Oxford dons five pages and twelve columns to define it. “That disposition or state of feeling with regard to a person which (arising from recognition of attractive qualities, from instincts of natural relationship, or from sympathy) manifests itself in solicitude for the welfare of the object, and usually also in delight in his presence and desire for his approval.” No soon did I finish reading the definition that I remembered Dr. Johnson’s *A Dictionary of the English Language*. He included in it the word *deosculation* to describe “the act of kissing.” Only the lovable but love-conflicted British master would come up with such unromantic expression! Happily, oblivion has swept the term away. Otherwise, imagine a love scene in which Steve tells Arielle: “Let me deosculate you, for my heart burns in desire...”

diccionario envolver en una sola definición estos conceptos opuestos? ¿Puede decir lo que significa sin simplificarlo al mismo tiempo?

En su *De vita solitaria*, Francesco Petrarca pudo haber estado entre los primeros en codificar el amor en el siglo XIV, y Abelardo y Eloísa entre los primeros en experimentarlo como un *ethos* según vemos en sus epístolas. Pero dentro de la civilización occidental (lo que esto signifique, si es que significa algo) cada cultura define el amor de manera diferente. Para probar el punto busqué la definición en algunos diccionarios bilingües; no en muchos para mantener el experimento científico dentro de límites viables.

Primero, desde luego, recurrí a mi *OED*. Les lleva a los catedráticos de Oxford cinco páginas y doce columnas para definirlo. “El estado emocional que tiene que ver con una persona que (surgiendo a partir del reconocimiento de cualidades atractivas, de los instintos de una relación natural o de afinidad) se declara afanosa por el bienestar del objeto, y comúnmente fascinada también por su presencia y deseosa de su aprobación”. Tan pronto como acabé de leer la definición recordé el *A Dictionary of the English Language* del Dr. Samuel Johnson, el primer gran diccionario moderno de la lengua inglesa, en donde incluyó la palabra *deosculation* (del latín *osculum* que dio, también, nuestra palabra castellana “ósculo”) para describir “el acto de besar”. ¡Sólo al adorable (aunque poco conecedor del amor) genio inglés se le pudo haber ocurrido una expresión tan poco romántica! Por fortuna el olvido ha enterrado esas voces. De lo contrario tendríamos que imaginar una escena de amor en donde Steve le dice a Arielle: “Me permites que te oscule, porque mi corazón arde de deseo...”

El *Trèsor de la langue française* es igualmente prolífico en su definición, además de ser más candente. *Amour*, reza, es la “*attirance, affective ou physique, qu’en raison d’une certaine affinité, un être éprouve pour un autre être, auquel il est uni ou qu’il cherche à s’unir par un lien généralement étroit*”. Una libre traducción sería: “atracción, tanto física como afectiva que, basada en una cierta afinidad, puede experimentarse hacia otro ser, con el cual uno busca unirse en un lazo

The *Trèsor de la langue française* is equally fertile in its definition, if also more ardent. *Amour*, it states, is the “*attirance, affective ou physique, qu’en raison d’une certaine affinité, un être éprouve pour un autre être, auquel il est uni ou qu’il cherche à s’unir par un lien généralement étroit.*” A loose translation: Draw, either physical or affective, that based on certain affinity, can be experienced toward another being, with whom one seeks to be united in a generally internal link. The French, as usual, bring in mystery to the art of love. There is an element of uncertainty, of plenitude in this definition. Then the erudition of the *Trèsor* refers the reader to a 1937 novel by Jacques Chardonne, quoting its syrupy line “*L’Amour, c’est beaucoup plus que l’amour.*” No, love is sometimes more than just love, but also sometimes less.

I then went to María Moliner’s *Diccionario del uso del español*. In its second edition, *amor* is described as “*sentimiento experimentado por una persona hacia otra, que se manifiesta en desear su compañía, alegrarse con lo que es bueno para ella y sufrir con lo que es malo.*” An English interpretation: a feeling experienced by one person to another, which manifests itself in the desire for company, in the happiness for what is good to that person and suffering for what is bad. Yes, the essence remains the same but the formulation is far less frigid that the *OED*, more warmhearted and—excuse the cliché—quixotic. The happiness for what is good and the suffering for what is bad? Ah, this is sheer melodrama.

Salvatore Battaglia’s *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* includes pages and more pages in Italian on the word *amore*. The definition states: “*Affetto intenso che tende al possesso del suo oggetto e all’unione con esso, e spinge a preservarne l’essere e procurarne il bene.*” An attempt at translation: intense affection one possesses toward another object and its union with it, which requires its preservation and procures its well-being. The Italians appear to emphasize affection. They don’t describe the entities experimenting love as human but simply as objects. Unlike Moliner, they don’t talk about adversity: suffering? Bad fate? No, love, in plain words, is the need for possession.

The *Deutsches Wörterbuch* by Brockhaus Wahrig announces this methodical definition for *Liebe*: “*tiefempfundene Zuneigung, starke gefühlsmässige Bindung an einen anderen Menschen, verbunden mit der Bereitschaft, zu helfen. Opfer zu bringen, für den anderen zu sorgen usw.*” An English version: Deeply felt attraction toward another person, measured strongly

generalmente intrínseco”. Los franceses, como es la costumbre, introducen misterio en el arte del amor. Existe un sentido de incertidumbre, de plenitud, en esta definición. Así pues la erudición del *Trèsor* refiere al lector a una novela de 1937 de Jacques Chardonne y cita su frase melosa: “*L’Amour, c’est beaucoup plus que l’amour.*” No, el amor es algunas veces más que el amor, pero algunas otras también es menos.

Entonces busqué en el *Diccionario del uso del español* de María Moliner. En la segunda edición, *amor* está definido como “*sentimiento experimentado por una persona hacia otra, que se manifiesta en desear su compañía, alegrarse con lo que es bueno para ella y sufrir con lo que es malo.*” Sí. El tenor es el mismo, pero la redacción es mucho menos frígida que la del *OED*, es más cariñosa y —disculpen el cliché— quijotesca. ¿Felicidad por lo que es bueno y sufrimiento por lo que es malo? Ajá, eso sí que es puro melodrama.

El *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* de Salvatore Battaglia incluye páginas y páginas en italiano de la palabra *amore*. La definición dice: “*affetto intenso che tende al possesso del suo oggetto e all’unione con esso, e spinge a preservarne l’essere e procurarne il bene.*” Una traducción tentativa sería: el cariño intenso que uno posee hacia otro objeto y su unión con éste, que requiere su conservación y procura su bienestar. Parece que los italianos enfatizan el cariño. Ellos no describen las entidades que experimentan el amor como humanas, sino simplemente como objetos. A diferencia de Moliner, no hablan de la adversidad: ¿sufrimiento?, ¿mal sino? No, el amor es, en pocas palabras, la necesidad de poseer.

El *Deutsches Wörterbuch* de Brockhaus Wahrig advierte esta definición metódica de *liebe*: “*tiefempfundene Zuneigung, starke gefühlsmässige Bindung an einen anderen Menschen, verbunden mit der Bereitschaft, zu helfen. Opfer zu bringen, für den anderen zu sorgen usw.*” Una versión en español: atracción muy intensa hacia otra persona que se mide estrictamente por sentimientos de unión y que incluye una disposición para ayudar, sacrificar y preocuparse por la seguridad de la otra persona. Los alemanes no solamente lo han descrito más matemáticamente, sino también con más religiosidad. La conexión establecida por la definición es más espiritual: incluye sacrificio, unión más allá de lo inmediato y la agonía de querer que la otra persona esté segura y a salvo.

Finalmente encontré esta definición de *любовь* en ruso: “*Чувство глубокой привязанности, дрепанности*

through feelings of bonding together, which includes readiness to help, to sacrifice and to worry about the other person's security. The Germans not only have described it more mathematically but also more religiously. The connection established by the definition is more spiritual: it includes sacrifice, bonding beyond the immediate, and the agony of wanting the other person safe and nearby.

Finally, I found this definition of *любовь* in Russian: "Чувство глубокой привязанности, преданности кому чужому, основанное на признании высокого значения, лояльности, на общих целях, интересах ит." Again, an attempt at translation: A feeling of profound connection and dedication to someone or something which includes the sharing of interests. For the Russians love is a form of keenness and preservation, a sense of commonality that gives place to a partnership.

All this to say that the disparity between languages—and between cultures—is, invariably, a source of enjoyment. The attempt of foreign speakers to communicate with one another always results in humorous circumstances. Watch a Belgian engage in business with an Iranian while they communicate in English and you might witness some hairs being pulled off. Or observe a Peruvian and a Lithuanian in a classroom discuss philosophical issues in German and you're likely to wonder if a couple of pints of Guinness wouldn't help to accomplish the task a bit faster.

This brings back the memory of when my wife Alison gave birth to Joshua. By then I had been in the United States more than half a decade. While I was proficient in English, its nuances often eluded me. Alison was my living dictionary, allowing me to grasp elusive meanings. These meanings would come after a hilarious exchange.

One day, for instance, I heard the baby cry.
"He's angry," I said. "He needs to be fed..."
"Angry?" Alison answered. "Why would Josh be angry? He simply needs to be fed."
"Precisely... Since he's angry, he needs to eat."
"Did you do something to him, Ilan?"
"Me?"
"So why would he be angry?"
"Oh, please..."
"Do you mean upset?" she replied as she proceeded to give Josh a bottle.
"It's all the same."
"No, it isn't" Alison added.
"What's the difference?"
"Ilan, don't you know the difference between angry and upset?"
"I don't. Aren't they synonymous?"

кому чужому, основанное на признании высокого значения, лояльности, на общих целях, интересах ит". Una vez más, una traducción tentativa sería: un sentimiento de profunda conexión y dedicación hacia alguien o algo, que incluye el compartir intereses. Para los rusos el amor es una forma de entusiasmo y conservación, un sentido de afinidad que da lugar a una colaboración.

Todo esto para decir que la disparidad entre idiomas —y entre culturas— es invariablemente una fuente de goce. El intento que hacen los hablantes de lenguas distintas por comunicarse siempre culmina en situaciones graciosas. Basta observar a un belga haciendo negocios, en inglés, con un iraní y seguro que los veremos metidos en camisas de once varas. Lo mismo con un peruano y un lituano en el aula tratando temas filosóficos en alemán para los cuales un par de tarros de Guinness seguro ayudarían a alcanzar el objetivo un poco más rápido.

Esto me recuerda cuando Alison, mi esposa, dio a luz a nuestro hijo Joshua. En ese momento yo ya llevaba en los Estados Unidos más de un lustro. Si bien ya podía expresarme bien en inglés, sus matices se me escapaban con frecuencia. Alison era mi diccionario viviente, lo cual me permitía comprender significados efímeros. La epifanía invariablemente llegaba después de un intercambio gracioso.

Un día, por ejemplo, oí llorar al bebé.

—Está *angry* —dije—. Hay que darle de comer.

—¿Enojado? —respondió Alison—. ¿Por qué va a estar enojado Josh? Simplemente hay que darle de comer.

—Exactamente... está *angry* porque necesita comer.

—Ilan, ¿qué le hiciste?

—¿Yo?

—¿Entonces por qué va a estar enojado?

—Ay, por favor...

—¿Quieres decir *upset*? —me dijo mientras se acercaba a darle la mamila.

—Es lo mismo.

—No, no es lo mismo —respondió Alison.

—¿Cuál es la diferencia?

—Ilan, ¿no sabes la diferencia entre estar *angry* y estar *upset*?

—No, no la sé. ¿No son sinónimos?

Alison comenzó a reírse. Rápidamente me mandó al diccionario donde descubrí que *angry* significa "levemente afectado por un problema", mientras que *upset* se define, entre otras posibilidades, como "una alteración física o (más comúnmente) mental". En otras palabras, en una la acción proviene del exterior y en la otra es el

Pero no se trata de aceptar que en todos los idiomas hay gran cabida para los disparates... y en el amor también. El amor y los disparates son universales. La pregunta sería más bien: ¿el concepto del amor es el mismo en un lugar que en otro?

Alison started laughing. She quickly sent me to the dictionary, where I discovered that *angry* means “Passively affected by trouble,” whereas *upset* is defined as, among other things, “A physical or (more commonly) mental disturbance or derangement.” In other words, in one the action comes from the outside and in the other it is the product of internal change.

Why didn’t I know to distinguish between these terms? Easy: in Spanish the two are one and the same. I’ve seen Spanish/English-English/Spanish dictionaries differentiate them by establishing the former as *enfadado* and the latter as *trastornado*. But speakers—in Mexico, at least—use one instead of the other and vice versa. How could I have known that among Anglo-Protestants one needs to reckon with so many shades of a baby’s emotions?

Needless to say, the issue is far more sophisticated when it comes to adult love. The traffic of affection between two individuals is challenging enough in any language. It can only become more taxing when the lovers don’t speak the same tongue—and have no interpreter. Cervantes states in “The Dogs’ Colloquy,” part of his *Exemplary Novels*, that “it is as easy to say something stupid in Latin as it is in the vernacular.” But it isn’t a matter of recognizing that every language allows ample room for foolishness... and love, too. Love and foolishness are universal. Rather, the question is: Is love in one place the same as love in another?

Oftentimes, the best way to find a definition in a dictionary is to simply look up the wrong word. Years ago I read the best definition for *love*. I found it in a Hallmark card: “Love is a *maelstrom*.” I looked up *maelstrom* in the *OED*: “A famous whirlpool in the Arctic Ocean on the west coast of Norway, formerly supposed to suck in and destroy all vessels within a long radius.”

producto de un cambio interno.

¿Por qué no supe distinguir estos dos términos? Es fácil: en español los dos son uno. He consultado diccionarios español/inglés, inglés/español que los diferencian reconociendo el primero como *enfadado* y el segundo como *trastornado*. Sin embargo los que hablamos español —en México, al menos— usamos el uno o el otro y da igual. ¿Cómo iba yo a saber que entre los angloprotestantes uno tiene que tomar en cuenta tantos matices en las emociones de un bebé?

Sobra decir que el asunto se vuelve mucho más sofisticado cuando se trata del amor entre adultos. El intercambio de cariño entre dos individuos resulta todo un desafío en cualquier idioma. Sólo puede convertirse más oneroso cuando los amantes no hablan la misma lengua —y no tienen un intérprete—. Cervantes dice en pocas palabras en el “Coloquio de los perros”, parte de sus *Novelas ejemplares*, que “es igual de fácil decir algo estúpido en latín que en lengua vernácula”. Pero no se trata de aceptar que en todos los idiomas hay gran cabida para los disparates... y en el amor también. El amor y los disparates son universales. La pregunta sería más bien: ¿el concepto del amor es el mismo en un lugar que en otro?

A menudo la mejor manera de encontrar una definición en un diccionario es simplemente buscar una palabra incorrecta. Hace años leí la mejor definición de *amor*. La encontré en una tarjeta Hallmark en inglés: “El amor es un *maelstrom*”. Busqué la palabra *maelstrom* en el *OED*: “Conocido vorágine en el Océano Ártico en la costa occidental de Noruega de tal magnitud y alcance que en otros tiempos se pensaba que el impetuoso remolino succionaba y destruía todas las embarcaciones en su paso”.

LOVE AND LOSS

A CONVERSATION WITH ILAN STAVANS

► VERÓNICA ALBIN

VERÓNICA ALBIN: How should one define the word *love*?

ILAN STAVANS: As a most amorphous human emotion, capable of incorporating extremes: attraction and repulsion, exultation and misery, Eros and Thanatos.

V. A.: In *Dictionary Days: A Defining Passion* (2005), you devote a brief chapter to the word in different languages: Russian, German, French, Italian, Spanish... Which do you prefer?

I. S.: Phonetically, *amor*, in Spanish, is the most beautiful. A derivation from the Latin *amor*. In Greek, *eros*. The Romance languages play upon the same sounds: *amour*, *amore*, *amor*, *l'amor*, and, the inspired Romanian variation, *iubire*. In Medieval German it is *lieb*, from the Latin *libens*, connected, as you might suspect, to *libido*. In any case, I learned about love, physically and emotionally, in Mexico. It is thus fitting that the language of Cervantes would hit closer to my heart.

V. A.: Not Yiddish?

I. S.: For me *liebe* is a term of endearment toward the community. My upbringing in Mexico in the sixties was defined by a Bundist philosophy, brought by Jews from Eastern Europe, where it fermented at the end of the 19th century. For Bundists the link between people depended on cultural empathy. The others, *los otros*, was often stressed as the depositories of selfless love.

V. A.: Obviously, your suggestion—and what the chapter in *Dictionary Days* is about—is that love is understood differently around the globe, depending on the coordinates of time and space.

I. S.: Who can prove that what Cleopatra felt for Antony is the same that Heloise felt for Abelard? For that matter, is it possible to be sure

VERÓNICA ALBIN: ¿Cómo se debe definir la palabra *amor*?

ILAN STAVANS: Como un sentimiento humano amorfo a lo sumo, capaz de incorporar extremos: afinidad y aversión, júbilo y pesar, Eros y Tánatos.

V. A.: En *Dictionary Days: A Defining Passion* (2005) dedicas un pequeño capítulo a la palabra en distintos idiomas: ruso, alemán, francés, italiano, español... ¿En qué idioma la prefieres?

I. S.: En cuanto a sonido, *amor*, en español, es la más eufónica. Derivada del latín *amor*. En griego, *eros*. Las lenguas romances se deleitan de una misma musicalidad: *l'amour*, *l'amore*, o *amor*, *l'amor* y, la variante rumana, *iubire*, que está colmada de inspiración. En alemán medieval, es *lieb*, del latín *libens*, vinculada, como es de esperarse, a *libido*. De cualquier forma, fue en México donde aprendí sobre el amor, tanto el físico como el emocional. Es por eso que la lengua de Cervantes es la que me brota cuando del corazón se trata.

V. A.: ¿No el iddich?

I. S.: Para mí, *liebe* es un término para expresar cariño hacia la comunidad. La manera en que me crié en México en los años 60 estaba definida por la filosofía bundista que había florecido a finales del siglo XIX en la Europa oriental y que llegó con los judíos a México. Para los bundistas, el vínculo entre los seres humanos dependía de afinidad cultural. Era sobre *los otros* donde se vertía el amor desinteresado.

V. A.: Obviamente, lo que estás sugiriendo —y de lo que trata el capítulo en *Dictionary Days*— es que el concepto del amor no es el mismo en todas partes, sino que está en función de las coordenadas de espacio y tiempo.

... fue en México donde aprendí sobre el amor, tanto el físico como el emocional. Es por eso que la lengua de Cervantes es la que me brota cuando del corazón se trata.

there is any kind of symmetry between what lovers feel for each other? Did Romeo love Juliet the same way Juliet loved Romeo? These are obnoxious questions but they prove our openness toward the concept of love. What is it, really? Might it be studied scientifically? Does it always need to be left to poets to “calibrate” it? Is there a way to measure it?

V. A.: Are poets those who come closest to describing it, then?

I. S.: Sure, and to define it as well. Since love is irritatingly ethereal, you might do better by going to Ovid, Shakespeare, Baudelaire, Christina Rossetti, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Apollinaire, Yeats, Neruda... than to the *OED*, *Larousse*, and the *Diccionario de autoridades*, for instance.

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red:
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.

I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.

I love to hear her speak; yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound:
I grant I never saw a goddess go,
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:

And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

The loved one's powers in Shakespeare's poem are earthly, imperfect, human—yet incandescent. No lexicon is able to come remotely close to what love is—its subtleties, its importunities, its delights—as poems do. Metaphor is love's niche. Lexicons are too chaste, too prudish. They are bastions against eroticism. Show me a definition able to replicate the incantatory metaphors in Robert Herrick's famous eulogy “Upon the Nipples of Julia's Breast”:

Have ye beheld (with much delight)
A red rose peeping through a white?

I. S.: ¿Quién puede demostrar que lo que sentía Cleopatra por Marco Antonio es lo mismo que lo que sentía Eloísa por Abelardo? Y, ya que en esas andamos, ¿hay manera alguna de estar seguro de que exista simetría entre lo que los dos amantes sienten? ¿Acaso Romeo amó a Julieta de la misma forma en que Julieta amó a Romeo? Son interrogantes molestas pero demuestran que el concepto del amor no tiene nada de hermético. ¿Qué es realmente? ¿Puede estudiarse científicamente? ¿Debemos siempre dejarlo en manos de poetas para ‘calibrarlo’? ¿Hay cómo medirlo?

V. A.: ¿Son entonces los poetas los que lo describen con mayor precisión?

I. S.: Seguro, y son ellos también los que más se aproximan a su definición. Aun así, como el amor es exasperantemente etéreo, correrás con más suerte recurriendo a Ovidio, Shakespeare, Baudelaire, Christina Rossetti, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Apollinaire, Yeats, Neruda... que al *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Larousse* o al *Diccionario de autoridades*, por ejemplo.

Los ojos de mi amada no parecen dos soles,
y el coral es más rojo, que el rojo de sus labios.
Siendo blanca la nieve, sus senos son oscuros,
y si el cabello es negro en ella es hierro negro.

He visto rosas rojas, blancas y adamsadas,
mas nunca en sus mejillas encuentro tales cosas.
Y en algunos perfumes, existe más deleite,
que en ese dulce aliento que emana de mi amada.

Amo escuchar su voz y sin embargo, entiendo,
que la música tiene un sonido más grato.
No he visto caminar por la tierra a una diosa,
pero al andar mi amada, va pisando la tierra.

Mas juro y considero a mi amada tan única,
que no existe en el mundo, ilusión que la iguale.

*(Edición de Ramón García González,
Instituto Cervantes, Soneto 130)*

Los poderes de la amada en el soneto de Shakespeare son terrenales, imperfectos, humanos —mas son incandescentes—. Ningún diccionario puede acercarse siquiera a lo que es el amor —sus malabares, sus importunidades, sus

An immigrant's journey isn't qualified in geographical terms: the miles you've traveled. Instead, it is about inner transformations. How have you changed since you left the place of origin? In my own case, since 1985, when I moved to the United States, I began a slow yet dramatic process of acculturation.

Or else a cherry (double grac'd)
Within a lily? Centre pac'ed?
Or ever mark'd the pretty beam,
A strawberry shows, half drown'd in cream?
Or seen rich rubies blushing through
A pure smooth pearl, and orient too?
So like to this, nay all the rest,
Is each neat nipple of her breast.

Love doesn't only change from language to language. It undergoes changes across time too. Our elastic understanding of it today isn't the same from the one espoused by Plato in the 4th century BCE. Nor is it like courtly love in the Renaissance. Stendhal's approach to it is different from Proust's and Freud's.

V. A.: I Googled the word *love*. I came up with 500,000,000 hits.

I. S.: In the language of the Internet, the amount is a synonym of infinity. It's like saying: "I have a million chores to accomplish." A million is a figure of speech, just like *The Thousand and One Nights* doesn't include 1,001 tales. In Arabic, the number means all numbers together.

V. A.: As the polyglot that you are, to which concept of love do you subscribe? Would you describe your views of it as shaped by Hispanic civilization?

I. S.: My wife would probably say yes, but I'm not sure myself. When I was an adolescent, I used to love *a la mexicana*. I've become an American, though. Am I less effusive, more constrained? Maybe so. An immigrant's journey isn't qualified in geographical terms: the miles you've traveled. Instead, it is about inner transformations. How have you changed since you left the place of origin? In my own case, since 1985, when I moved to the United States, I began a slow yet dramatic process of acculturation. Are there traces of the Ilan Stavans who left Mexico? If so, are those traces still reachable? Do I love nowadays *a la gringa*?

V. A.: Did Mexican Jews have a style of love of their own?

goces— como lo logra la poesía. La metáfora es el nicho donde reside el amor. Los diccionarios son demasiado castos, demasiado pudorosos. Son baluartes contra el erotismo.

El amor no sólo varía de idioma a idioma, sino que cambia también con el paso del tiempo. Nuestra conceptualización elástica del amor no es comparable con la que tenía Platón en el siglo IV AEC. Tampoco puede cotejarse con el amor cortesano renacentista. Asimismo, Stendhal no lo aborda de la misma manera que Proust o Freud.

V. A.: Busqué en Google la palabra *amor*. Me arrojó 500,000,000 aciertos.

I. S.: En el idioma de Internet, esa cifra es sinónimo de infinidad. Es como decir: "Tengo un millón de cosas que hacer". Un millón es una figura retórica, de la misma forma en que *Las mil y una noches* no tiene 1,001 cuentos. En árabe, esa cifra es todas las cifras juntas.

V. A.: Al ser políglota, ¿a qué concepto del amor te adhieres? ¿Considerarías que ves el amor desde una perspectiva del mundo hispánico?

I. S.: Alison, mi mujer, probablemente te diría que sí, pero yo no estoy tan seguro. Cuando era adolescente, quería yo *a la mexicana*. Pero ahora soy americano. ¿Soy menos efusivo, más medido? Tal vez. La trayectoria del que emigra no debe valorarse en términos geográficos: los kilómetros recorridos. De lo que se trata es de transformaciones internas. ¿Cómo has cambiado desde que dejaste atrás la tierra que te vio nacer? En lo que a mí se refiere, desde que me mudé a Estados Unidos en 1985 me embarqué en un proceso lento pero dramático de aculturación. ¿Quedan rastros del Ilan Stavans que salió de México? De ser así, ¿están aún accesibles dichos rastros? ¿Acaso sé querer ahora sólo *a la gringa*?

V. A.: Los judíos mexicanos, ¿tenían su manera propia de querer?

I. S.: La mimesis es una característica de la vida judía. Tan pronto los judíos se percatan de los patrones de un nuevo entorno, rápidamente incorporan dichos patrones y pasan a formar parte de su comportamiento natural. Para demostrar que son

I. S.: Mimesis is a feature of Jewish life. No sooner do Jews figure out the patterns of a new environment, they quickly incorporate those patterns into their natural behavior. In order to prove themselves authentic, they parade those patterns in ways only an outsider might do. Eventually they become so confident in them they actually start suggesting new patterns for the environment to adopt. Yiddish-speaking immigrants from the Pale of Settlement to Mexico loved the only way they knew how: the European way. Their descendants negotiated a change between the old ways and the new. In the past couple of decades, their grandchildren—the third generation—are opening unforeseen vistas.

V. A.: In *On Borrowed Words: A Memoir of Language* (2001), you recall your sexual initiation. But the scene isn't about love, I think. Do you remember the moment you discovered its "extremes," as you've called them: attraction and repulsion, exultation and misery, Eros and Thanatos?

I. S.: For me love and literature have always been interconnected. Years ago, while still in Mexico, I read Denis de Rougemont, in *L'Amour et l'Occident* in French. It was about how Petrarch, even more than Plato, defined the way Western civilization approaches love. De Rougemont's style is self-important, grandiose. In any case, I remember reading it just after I had finished Mario Vargas Llosa's comic novel *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*, which is about a semi-incestuous relationship between Marito, the author's alter ego, and his aunt. At one point Marito says something about Petrarch, something to the effect that he "invented" our views on love.

V. A.: It's the exact same word you use in *Dictionary Days*.

I. S.: I was puzzled. Love isn't an "invention," like penicillin and electricity. I needed some context. So I read Petrarch's *Canzoniere* and, soon after, de Rougemont's ruminations. It was a rather impressionable period in my life. I was eager to understand—to describe rationally—what I was experi-



auténticos, manifiestan esos patrones sólo como lo haría alguien de afuera. Con el paso del tiempo se sienten tan cómodos con ellos que empiezan realmente a sugerir nuevos patrones para que el entorno los adopte. Los inmigrantes de la Europa oriental que hablaban iddich al llegar a México sabían querer como sabían querer: *a la europea*. Sus descendientes abrieron brecha entre las viejas costumbres y las nuevas. En las últimas dos o tres décadas, sus nietos —la tercera generación— se están abriendo horizontes no previstos.

V. A.: En *On Borrowed Words: A Memoir of Language* (2001) mencionas tu primera experiencia sexual, tu *desquite*, vamos, pues la escena que describes no creo que se trate de amor. ¿Recuerdas el momento cuando descubriste sus "extremos", como los has denominado: afinidad y aversión, júbilo y pesar, Eros y Tánatos

I. S.: Para mí, el amor y las letras han siempre estado entrelazados. Hace años, cuando estaba aún en México, leí a Denis de Rougemont en *L'Amour et l'Occident* en francés. Es sobre cómo Petrarca, más todavía que Platón, fue quien definió la manera en que el Occidente aborda el amor. El estilo de de Rougemont es ensimismado, pretencioso. De cualquier forma, recuerdo que lo leí justo después de que había yo terminado la novela cómica de Vargas Llosa *La tía Julia y el escribidor*, que se trata de una relación pseudoincestuosa entre Marito, el alter ego del autor, y su tía. En algún momento Marito dice algo sobre Petrarca, algo sobre que

El amor no es un "invento", como la penicilina o la electricidad. Necesitaba contexto. Así que leí el Canzoniere de Petrarca y, al poco tiempo, las meditaciones de de Rougemont. Estaba yo en un momento de mi vida en que mucho podía influírme. Estaba ansioso por entender —para describir de manera racional— lo que estaba sintiendo.

Literature isn't therapy. It is not meant to cure. It's only useful as a form of empathy, making you realize that however unique you might believe to be the door you're about to cross, others have gone through it before—and left inspired testimony of it.

encing. You see, around that time I had fallen madly for an older Parisian woman—let me call her “Brigitte”—who had come to Mexico to study. I had been in love before with *una niña bien*. An inconsequential relationship, in retrospect. It isn't that I was not in control of myself; the image presupposes the possibility of chaos, i.e., the overriding of all rational thinking. I was under the sign of passion—passion running amok, on the verge of insanity—. Nothing of that was possible with *la niña bien*. Ours was a conventional liaison, a friendship, really. It was the opposite with Brigitte. *Fuego*—no other images come quicker to mind—: fire... Every time I was with her, I was shaken by a sense of oceanic emotion, a feeling of being beyond myself, as if I had become part of the cosmos. Do I remember what her mind was like, how she processed thought? Brigitte was intelligent, but that of hers didn't interest me. It was her body I was hypnotized by: the lines of her profile, the shape of her hair, her minute breasts, the tactile sensation every time I let my hands touch her waist. I couldn't get enough of her. I sought words to survey my inner landscape. I even challenged myself to write poetry. But I'm no poet... Language for me is an instrument for surveying ideas, not for singing to what Shakespeare, in a superbly baroque twist, referred to as “love's labour's lost.”

V. A.: How long did the relationship with Brigitte last?

I. S.: In chronological time, maybe a year. An eternity in existential time. But every night was its own circle of creation. I was ecstatic while those

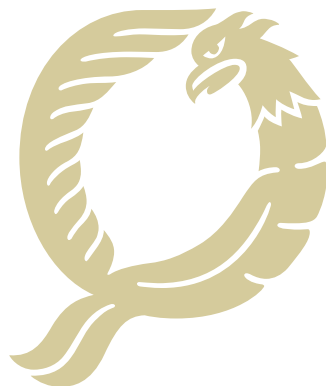
había “inventado” la manera en que nosotros vemos el amor.

V. A.: Esa es la palabra exacta que usaste en *Dictionary Days*.

I. S.: Me quedé perplejo. El amor no es un “invento”, como la penicilina o la electricidad. Necesitaba contexto. Así que leí el *Canzoniere* de Petrarca y, al poco tiempo, las meditaciones de de Rougemont. Estaba yo en un momento de mi vida en que mucho podía influirme. Estaba ansioso por entender—para describir de manera racional— lo que estaba sintiendo. Sabes, es que justo en esa época estaba yo prendado de una parisina mayor que yo—llamémosla “Brigitte”— que estaba estudiando en México. Me había yo enamorado antes de *una niña bien*. Una relación inconsecuente, ahora que lo miro de lejos. No es que no estuviera yo en control de mis emociones; la imagen presupone la posibilidad del caos, es decir, algo que superaría todo pensamiento racional. Estaba yo bajo el signo de la pasión—pasión descabellada, al borde de la locura—. Nada de eso era posible con *la niña bien*. La nuestra era una relación convencional, una amistad, realmente. Con Brigitte era lo opuesto. *Fuego*—no hay ninguna otra imagen que venga tan rápido a la mente—: incendio... cada vez que estaba yo con ella, me veía yo sacudido por una emoción oceánica, una sensación de estar fuera de mí, como si formara yo parte del cosmos. ¿Me acuerdo cómo era su intelecto, como procesaba los pensamientos? Brigitte era inteligente, pero esa parte de su ser no me interesaba. Era su cuerpo lo que me tenía hipnotizado: las líneas de su perfil, la forma de su pelo, sus senos diminutos, la sensación táctil cada vez que mis manos exploraban su cintura. No me cansaba de ella. Busqué palabras para poder hacer un levantamiento de mi topografía interna. Incluso me impuse el reto de escribir poesía. Pero no soy poeta... el lenguaje para mí es un instrumento para examinar ideas, no para cantarle a lo que Shakespeare, en un tropo excelsamente barroco, denominó “love's labour's lost”: los trabajos de amor perdidos.

V. A.: ¿Cuánto tiempo duró la relación con Brigitte?

I. S.: En tiempo cronológico, tal vez un año.



nights lasted. The moment they finished, I was fearful. Anna Akhmatova's poem about separation, translated from the Russian by Stanley Kunitz, is perfect:

I wring my hands under my dark veil...
"Why are you pale, what makes you reckless?"
—Because I have made my loved one drunk
With an astringent sadness.

While I lived through the encounters, I recall thinking to myself: I must remember all this in detail. One day I'll write about it and my only source will be memory.

V. A.: Have you?

I. S.: Not yet.

V. A.: Will you?

I. S.: Maybe you've just got me started...

V. A.: Did the readings that occupied you then—Shakespeare, de Rougemont, Petrarch, Vargas Llosa—change your encounters with Brigitte?

I. S.: No, they only intensified them... Literature isn't therapy. It is not meant to cure. It's only useful as a form of empathy, making you realize that however unique you might believe to be the door you're about to cross, others have gone through it before—and left inspired testimony of it.

V. A.: What happened in the end?

I. S.: My descent into madness left a lasting impression. It took me a long time to recover. For years I would see Brigitte in dreams, the Brigitte of the past: svelte, sardonic, tempestuous... I wished I could have kept those images; they had become some sort of sustenance. But not long ago, on a trip to Biarritz, France, I saw her again. She looked different: heavier, more mature, and I did too, of course. The encounter somewhat spoiled the memory. It's difficult to invoke the Brigitte of the past without superimposing the silhouette I came across in Biarritz. For some reason, she had acquired a copy of de Rougemont's book in English translation and had saved it for me. I was grateful, of course, but disillusioned. Brigitte was a French part of my Spanish past. I now still saw her, as before, with my metabolism, but my metabolism had now switched to English. I felt an instinctive rejection of the English translation of the book. Furthermore, as I browsed through it I picked up on a number of liberties the translator had taken, beginning with the title: *Passion and Society*. I always thought I had been in love with Brigitte. But perhaps I was simply consumed by passion. What is the connection between love and passion? Might one exist without the other?

Una eternidad en tiempo existencial. Pero cada noche consistía en su propio círculo de creación. Mientras esas noches duraron, estaba yo extático. En el momento en que acabaron, tuve pavor. La "Canción desesperada" de Neruda sobre la separación lo invoca a la perfección:

Te ceñiste al dolor, te agarraste al deseo.
Te tumbó la tristeza, todo en ti fue naufragio!

Al vivir la relación, recuerdo haberme dicho: tienes que recordar cada detalle. Un día voy a ponerlo en papel y mi única fuente será la memoria.

V. A.: ¿Lo has hecho?

I. S.: No, todavía no.

V. A.: ¿Lo harás?

I. S.: Creo que me acabas de llenar el tanque de gasolina...

V. A.: Las lecturas que te ocupaban entonces—Shakespeare, de Rougemont, Petrarca, Vargas Llosa—¿cambiaron tus encuentros con Brigitte?

I. S.: No, sólo los volvieron más intensos... la literatura no es terapia. Su propósito no es curar. Es útil únicamente a manera de empatía, dándote a conocer que aun cuando pienses que el umbral que estás por cruzar es único, otros ya lo han cruzado, y han dejado testimonio elocuente al respecto.

V. A.: ¿Cómo acabó el asunto?

I. S.: Mi caída en la locura me dejó marcado. Me tomó mucho tiempo recuperarme. Durante años veía yo a Brigitte en sueños, la Brigitte del pasado: esbelta, sardónica, tempestuosa... deseaba haber podido retener esas imágenes; se habían transformado en un tipo de sustento. Pero no hace mucho, en un viaje a Biarritz, Francia, la volví a ver. Se veía distinta: un poco más de peso, de más madurez, y yo también, claro. El reencuentro empañó mis recuerdos. Me es difícil invocar la Brigitte del pasado sin superponerle la silueta que encontré en Biarritz. Por alguna razón, ella había adquirido una copia del libro de de Rougemont en traducción al inglés y lo había guardado para darme. Le estaba agradecido, por supuesto, pero desilusionado. Brigitte era una parte en francés de mi parte en español. Aún la podía yo ver, como en antaño, con mi metabolismo, pero mi metabolismo ahora veía en inglés. Sentí un rechazo instintivo a la traducción en inglés del libro. Además, cuando lo estaba ojeando, me percaté de varias licencias que se había tomado el traductor, empezando por el título: *Passion and Society*. Siempre había yo pensado que estuve enamorado de Brigitte. Pero tal vez estaba yo consumido por la pasión. ¿Cuál es la relación entre el amor y la pasión? ¿Puede el uno existir independientemente del otro?

TO ADORN THE SAINTS

► LILIANA V. BLUM

TRANSLATED TO ENGLISH BY TOSHIYA A. KAMEI

In the streets of San Cordelio de Cocoyótl, orange peels, leaves of tamales, dust, and people jostle rhythmically against the wind. The village observes once again the day that flaunts the name of its patron saint. Every villager celebrates with dances, songs, and an excessive practice of some of the deadly sins. Suddenly, in the bell tower, a woman appears. The men who celebrate in the courtyard of the church raise their eyes and see Ludivina Castañón, naked and dangling by her hands from the rope of the bell, her breasts swaying to the rhythm of the clapper. Like popcorn when it stops popping, the noises of the fiesta fade one by one. The men urinating suspend their golden trickles, frozen in a perfect arch from their penises to the ground, even though some of them lose their aim and wet their neighbors. The dancers in the courtyard stop their bodies in figurine-like poses, taking off their masks with surprise. Between sniffles of mucus and resentment, the crybabies clean their noses with the back of their hands and become hushed. The ardent solitary candle intensifies its flame. Even the eyes of the adorned icon seem to become larger with interest. In a moment, all eyes are on the bell tower. Jaws drop, pupils marvel, imaginations run wild.

Ludivina Castañón keeps swinging under the bell, naked as a fish, the queen of the fiesta, of the church, of the whole village. From below, the celebrants can't take delight in the exact details on a larger scale. They can't see the texture of her freckled skin, spotted and sweet-smelling like the peel of ripe bananas. Nor they can appreciate the delicacy of her hairdo, full of hairspray, so vertical and fantastic, a beehive on her head. But much more difficult is to discover and understand the virginity Ludivina Castañón has painfully endured in each pore, in each cell of her body, for many years.

In the village, they had always suspected that Ludivina Castañón had a touch of madness.

There even existed the myth that in her boarding house, exclusively for men, the mature single lady played the piano in her birthday suit just when her tenants were having their afternoon snacks. But it was nothing more than a rumor. No man in the village could testify with absolute certainty to Ludivina's alleged exhibitionism. On the other hand, all the women who attended mass every day saw the devout woman receiving Holy Communion. She was always dressed austere and modestly, with a rosary and the Bible in her hand. No one dared speak ill of her, that is, no one had the audacity to do so openly at least, or if anything only some sympathetic commentary: "Poor Ludi, so lonely and helpless, no man to look after her and watch out for her."

But this day is not like any other; there is no whispering behind anyone's back. Here she is, in front of the whole village, exposing her fallen breasts, her smooth hips, and her pubes, an unspoiled forest, while the bell tolls wildly. Some of the women waver between covering their children's eyes and their husbands'. However, the most avid look certainly belongs to Catarino, the sacristan, who, by the way, doesn't consider celibacy as one of the requirements for being assistant to the priest. For example, on his "menu" he includes, along with the sheep and hens from the corral, the ladies in the red light district, who give him a discount once in a while. A chubby and generous man, at last he crosses himself, overcome by anguish. How many times has he undressed Ludivina Castañón with his eyes when she got in line to receive Holy Communion! It's true, he has dreamed of stripping all women who attended mass of their clothes. Still, Catarino suspects Ludivina's madness is a divine punishment for his carnal thoughts. "Mea culpa, mea culpa," he strikes his brown and hairless chest.

Suddenly, silence returns to the village. Confident that the entire village watches her, Ludivina has stopped pulling the rope of the bell tower. The old men are about to burst into speculation about her motive. The women can't resist exchanging shocked and caustic critiques of Ludivina's body. The men want to shout something vulgar—anything—because their simple nature doesn't inspire them to do anything else in a situation like this. The priest assumes responsibility of the matter. After all, Ludivina is in the bell tower of *his* church and is a member of *his* flock. So he whispers a few words to an altar boy who apparently has some sort of mental defect. The boy goes out running and returns in a few minutes with the news that the naked woman has closed the door and bolted herself inside the bell tower.

Before someone can curse or come up with a brilliant idea on how to take Ludivina Castañón out of her confinement, something happens. She goes up to the window so that the people can have a better look at her. Between her breasts, which are like two giant pink-nosed caterpillars hanging over her belly, she holds a brown-feathered pigeon. Then she kisses its oval head and lets it fly. The creature, as if led by San Jorge, gracefully perches on the sacristan's shoulder. When Catarino is about to put the bird down to take it home—well, you know what for, maybe for a lonely moment when the sheep aren't around—someone notices the piece of paper around its claw. "It's a carrier pigeon," says Doña Coccocha and snatches the unhappy bird from the unhappy sacristan. By the authority bestowed by God and none other than the Pope himself, Father Girasol opens the sheet of paper before his face, adjusts his glasses, and reads the following note aloud, as if he were giving one of his best sermons.

I'm my own hostage. I'll be locked up here until the next conditions are met:

1. Send a man to the bell tower. He must be young and attractive. Well, at least he should have good equipment and deliver the goods.

2. The man must stay with me at least one night and must be at my complete disposal.

3. The man must bring a garnish of strawberries and guavas, as well as red wine and a pizza with mushrooms.

4. If someone comes to rescue me, or rather, if the man doesn't turn up within the next three hours, I swear I'll jump from the window and all of you, people of San

After all, Ludivina is in the bell tower of *his* church and is a member of *his* flock. So he whispers a few words to an altar boy who apparently has some sort of mental defect. The boy goes out running and returns in a few minutes with the news that the naked woman has closed the door and bolted herself inside the bell tower.

Cordelio de Cocoyótl, will be responsible for my death.

Yours sincerely,

Ludivina Castañón

The married women, forcefully but discretely, squeeze the arm of their husbands so that no one will offer himself as a volunteer. The adolescents are itching with their hormones and recently awakened lust, but no one dares say a word. Ludivina, the virginal señorita Castañón, couldn't be further from the sex goddess they would dream of. The priest excuses himself by default while the old men are, sadly, defeated by the gravity of the passing years. It all seems to point to Catarino, the sacristan—he's the only choice! Father Girasol forgives his sin beforehand for being a pious man on a mission to save a life. He'll later make sure that those two become man and wife. "I'll have to sacrifice myself," sighs the sacristan with feigned resignation. He knows very well that when all's said and done, it would suit him well to have a female companion of his own species instead of the pigeon, just for a change. Some women run to bring wine and fruits and ask for a pizza by telephone—no peculiar thing these days. With modernization and the free market, the tiny village, despite its dirt roads, has been flooded with franchises of greasy pizzas and telephone companies that fight for the few inhabitants' business.

In the midst of the uproar, no one remembers the patron saint of San Cordelio de Cocoyótl. His image, dressed up in fine clothes and carrying a crown veneered with gold, sheds a tiny teardrop: from now on, he'll have no one to adorn him.

EN EL DORSO DEL CIELO

Y OTROS POEMAS

► IDA VITALE

EN EL DORSO DEL CIELO

No es casual
lo que ocurre por azar:
un fragmento de nada se protege
del no ser, se entrecruza
de signos, impulsos,
sís y noes, atrasos y adelantos,
trazos de geometría celeste,
coordenadas veloces en el tiempo
y algo ocurre.
Lazos para nosotros pálidos,
son obvios para lo que no vemos,
y nosotros la ventana abierta
desde donde la tela blanca vuela
cubierta de diseños.
Pero uno llama azar
a su imaginación insuficiente.

ERROR CALCULADO

Palabras de mar profundo
a cada instante suben a morir
por cientos, contaminados peces.
Entre ellas no se auxilian,

temen el riesgo, mueren.
No saben lo que saben.
Quien las ama y acoge
¿las libra del silencio
que las pone entre olvido
y magia encarcelada?
¿Juega con más peligro?

Un soplo vaga por la tarde.
Sigue la leve leva:
que tu entusiasmo
no se rinda al retenido canto.

FORTUNA

Por años, disfrutar del error
y de su enmienda,
haber podido hablar, caminar libre,
no existir mutilada,
no entrar o sí en iglesias,
leer, oír la música querida,
ser en la noche un ser como en el día.

No ser casada en un negocio,
medida en cabras,

sufrir gobierno de parientes
o legal lapidación.
No desfilan ya nunca
y no admitir palabras
que pongan en la sangre
limaduras de hierro.
Descubrir por ti misma
otro ser no previsto
en el puente de la mirada.

Ser humano y mujer, ni más ni menos.

SI CIEGAS

Si cielo, si azul, si ciegas,
bajo un sol de soles,
silencio.
Distantes nubes coloquiales fingen
el arabesco imprevisible
que la vida impone en tu vida.
No anticipes más sueños, mira
distante, ese pájaro alto, convexo,
que busca otro límite, sombra.

TRUEQUE

Las diez: pariente pobre
del aguerrido mediodía.
Entre las plantas brilla
un ojo de vidrio o breve
pájaro veneciano.

Súbito nace lo diminuto
o invisible, mínimas flores,
brotes de hojas y aún

el ácaro horrendo.
Esto aquí.
Quizás ahora un cuerpo
culmine, mina de muerte,
en el errátil universo.

Sin órbita,
nuestra imaginación
trueca lo áureo por letras,
letras por polvo,
volar por lastre sordo,
explosión por silencio sin canto.

ÚLTIMA NOCHE DE ALGÚN AÑO

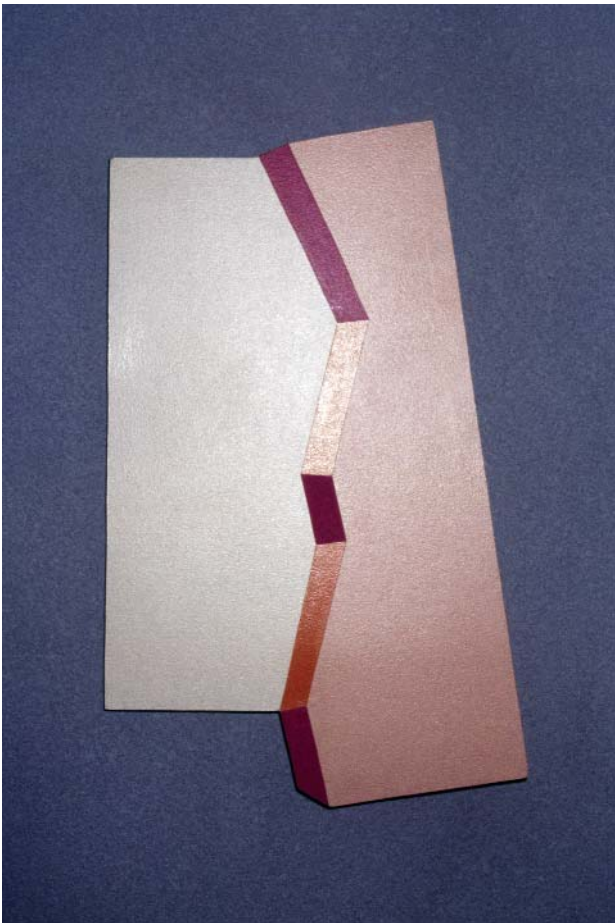
Después del día limpio,
en la esperada noche subió,
nítida en su único signo,
la cohetería de júbilo uniforme.
El pequeño destello rozó apenas
las silenciosas alfombras de la noche
antes de morir,
como apartado, también él,
de la distante fiesta.
¿Aspiraba a estar solo,
tan seguro de sí?

¿Toda esperanza es mórbida?

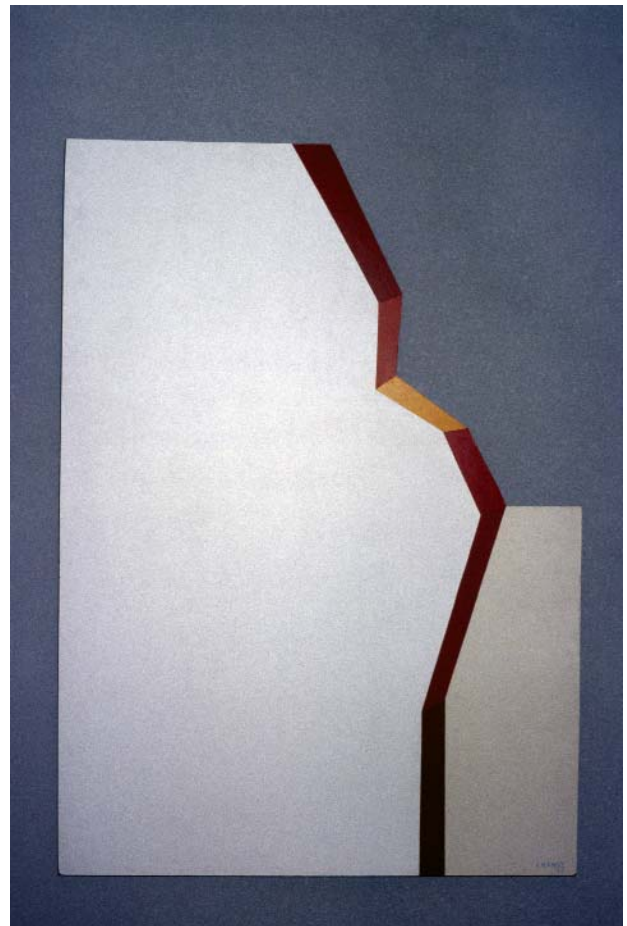


▲ tormenta / storm, 1982 • swedish cardboard, collage acrylic

ingrid hanzs ▶ **búsqueda : forma**
a n d o t h e r p i c t u r e s



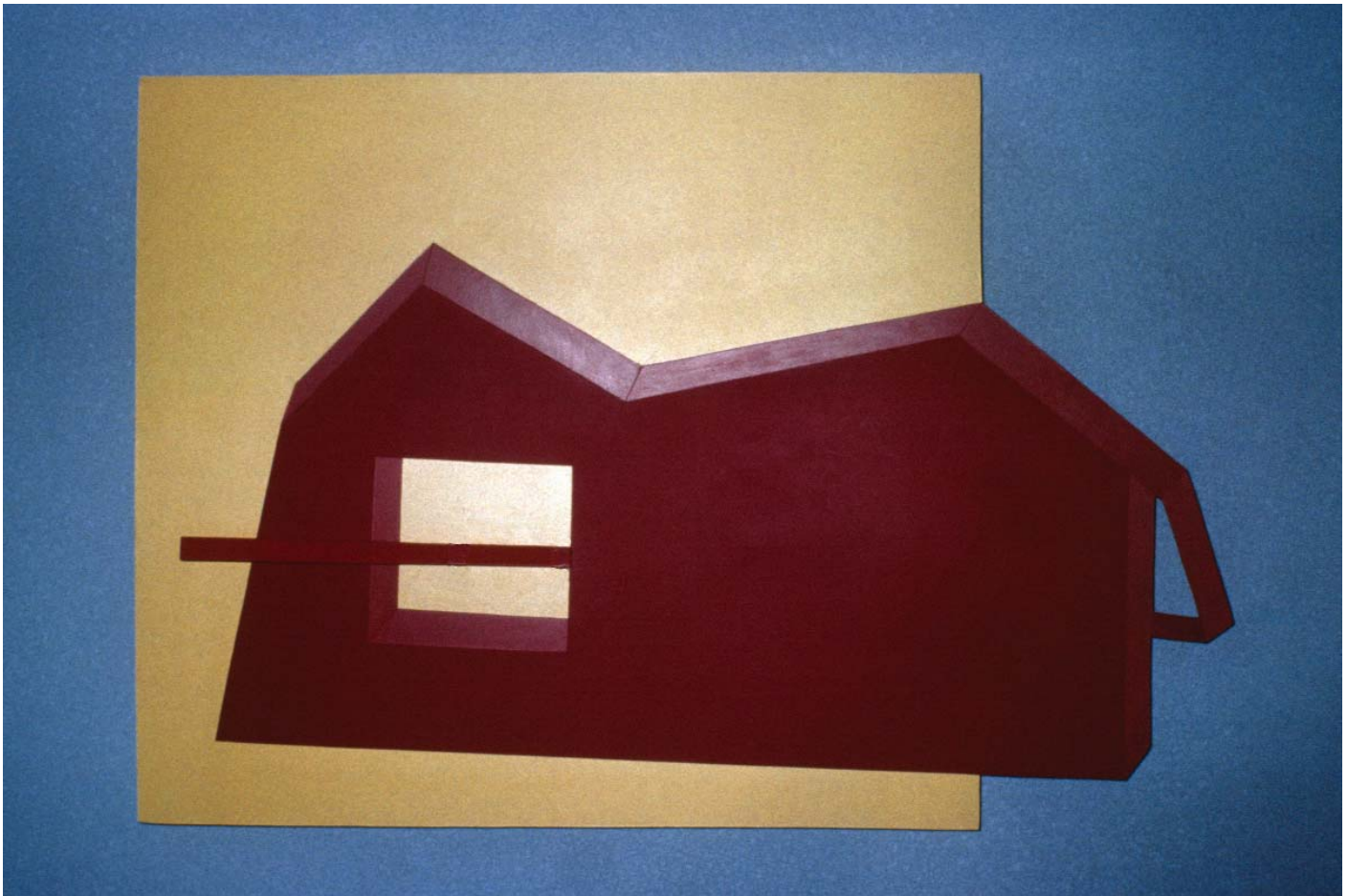
▲ bloque / block, 1982 • acrylic on duraboard



bloque 108 / block 108, 1982 • acrylic on duraboard ▲

soleado / sunny, 1983 • swedish cardboard, collage acrylic ▶

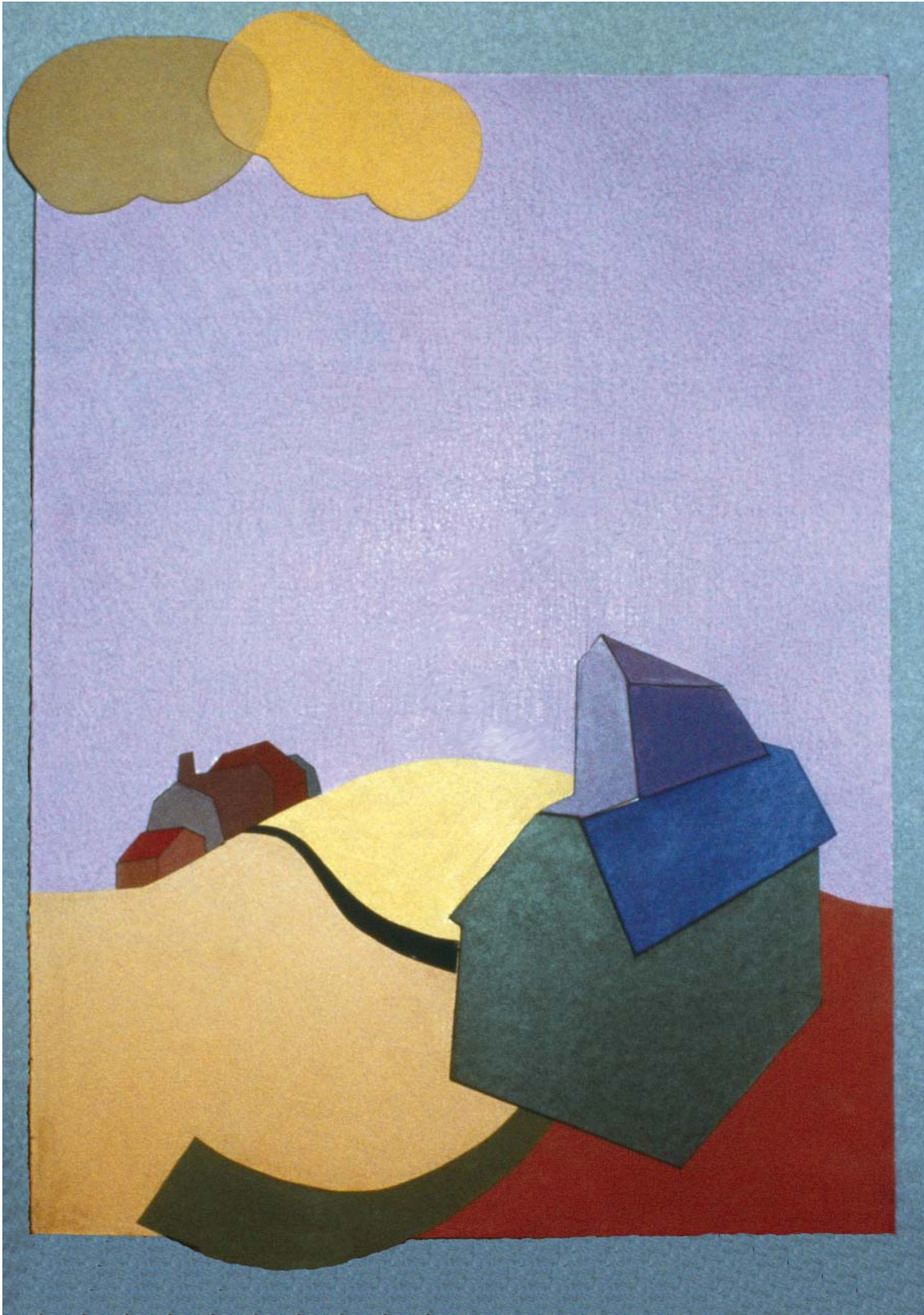
▼ rojo sobre amarillo / red on yellow, 1988 • acrylic on duraboard



Ingrid Hansz nació en Florida, Uruguay. Alumna de Alexandre en el museo de su ciudad natal, en 1973 ingresó al Centro de Expresión Artística (CEA) dirigido por el reconocido pintor uruguayo Nelson Ramos.

Ha participado en diversas exposiciones y concursos de arte en los que ha recibido menciones especiales y premios a nivel nacional. Algunas de sus obras se encuentran en el Museo de Maldonado en Punta del Este.

Actualmente es profesora de la Universidad Rice.



QUERENCIA

► EDUARDO MILÁN

TRANSLATED TO ENGLISH BY STEVEN J. STEWART AND PATRICK MADDEN

[THIS IS A CONTINENT COMPRISED]

This is a continent comprised
of words, not a continent comprised
of rage, not a cup about to
overflow. This is only a distant approximation
trying to get closer. The compromised
people began to appear in public places
begging for food. Not only on the corners
of insomnia when the stoplight is red.
The spectacle is no longer the clown, the fire-eater.
It's no longer the child who knocks on the outside mirror
who detains his knuckle, his nakedness. Gentlemen of
Japan:
Are the objects closer than they appear?
It can't be, all that came before cannot be.
This is just a continent comprised of words,
just a poem that will not explode.

[WE BELIEVED THAT THE HORROR WOULD LEAVE US]

We believed that the horror would leave us
when we moved. A residence
is after all a house. Why did we believe it?
In this new house, beautiful with its grand
windows and great plants and tiny
garden and tiny Alejandro.
We said, "Something has been given back to us."

Something
essential like life cut down in its prime,
let us say life, love defended
inch by inch, meaning with the palms
up, open, cupped,
with their lifelines toward the sky,
defenseless. Meaning not with the knuckles,
with the veins interlaced hiding
like creepers or with the roots going down,
ashamed. We didn't want the vegetation fleeing
toward the swamp. Rather the not-horror,
the not-hanging of the voice from the other side.

[IT'S ELEVEN O'CLOCK, GABRIELA]

It's eleven o'clock, Gabriela
comes and tells me and that
hits me hard. Of course
it's eleven, love, what other
time could it be? For someone
who decided to get neither too far away
nor too close, except to
someone like you who sings the exact hour,
sings the meaningless hour waking him
just to remind him of the time,
these are bonds.

[THIS ISN'T THE POEM I'D PREFER]

This isn't the poem I'd prefer
but it's the only one I have now. It arises
like a pain that pierces
a child, a senseless pain, a spine
without a fish, a kind of distant pain.
Like when a Stratus blocks my path
without warning. Or more painful, colder:
like when it's a train. Or a better
image, at least sharper,
drier: like when you escape, love,
leaving me with only the scent of your sex.

[REAL WORDS ARE NOT]

Real words are not
true words. Real words
are the words of the poem when they are
physical (they were previously made flesh:
the gods carried them off).
But they're not true because they don't tell
the truth. And this is the schism, the fall,
the fire: the poem wants to tell the truth
beyond its poetic truth. And this
the gash, the wound, the hemorrhage
caught in a glass that isn't a glass
but longs to be a Latin American country.

[THE POEM COMPREHENDED AS GRACE]

The poem comprehended as grace
distances itself from the pain of men
every day in more pain, from Pain Monday
through Palm Sunday. Here, on the Earth,
this happens: the poem comprehended as grace
heads the order of the spirit, a strange
island among the disordered. The love
of small things, love of the fragile
word, not the grandiloquent, what's left over,
what's almost caressed by the hands, like a
pear, a pinwheel, an origami, it's a type
of altar. Before the poem comprehended as grace
we fall on our knees, a genuflection in the lofty
tradition of humanity.
The knees, like wheels, for their part,
occupy the ancient space of the feet
upon the earth, our only consolation.

- The Spanish versions of "We Believed That the Horror Would Leave Us" and "This is a Continent Comprised" both appear in *Querencia, gracias y otros poemas* (Galaxia Gutenberg-Círculo de Lectores, Barcelona, 2003).

The Spanish versions of the rest all appear in *Razón de amor y acto de fe* (Visor Libros, Madrid, 2001).

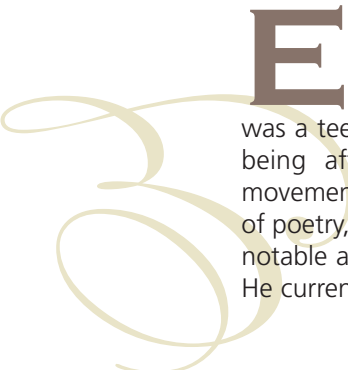
All of the English versions will appear in *Everything is Connected. Selected Poems and Essays of Eduardo Milán* (ed. Antonio Ochoa, Word Power Press, Edinburgh, 2005).

THE NECESSITY OF SPEAKING

A CONVERSATION WITH EDUARDO MILÁN

► STEVEN J. STEWART

TRANSLATED TO ENGLISH BY STEVEN J. STEWART AND PATRICK MADDEN



Eduardo Milán was born in Rivera, Uruguay in 1952. His mother died when he was a year old, and when he was a teenager his father was sent to prison for being affiliated with the Tupamaro guerrilla movement. Milán has published numerous books of poetry, several collections of criticism, and two notable anthologies of Spanish-language poetry. He currently resides in Mexico.

Steven J. Stewart: You were born and raised in Uruguay but have lived in Mexico for many years. Do you consider yourself a Uruguayan poet or a Mexican poet? Or is there for you and your work a significant distinction between the two?

Eduardo Milán: I consider myself a Uruguayan poet in sensibility, poetic conception, and formation. In any case, Mexico has offered me a lot in terms of knowledge and experiences. My children were born here, my wife is Mexican. But there is something else that is significant: when you leave a country for certain reasons (political ones in my case: in Uruguay there was a military dictatorship in 1979, my father was imprisoned), painful reasons, you enter into a foreign territory that is a territory that has to do with the poetic. We're all fond of repeating that poetry is a non-place. But we all know that it is, or can be, the place of the foreigner. Or that it can be so. So I feel like a Uruguayan poet who lives in a foreign country in a particular place: Mexico. It's not difficult, as a poet, to feel solidarity with all those who have been expelled from their homeland. And it's also not difficult to feel the need to put down roots. Poetry is a problem of place. In my case, it touches on a problem of place that happened to me when I was a year and a half old: orphanhood, the loss of my mother. It's a fundamental question in my life, like the imprisonment of my father. I was always a little

outside, a little "out of place." Being foreign is a kind of physical, specific authentication of previous losses. And in that respect Mexico has treated me well. All of which doesn't mean that I don't feel a tremendous nostalgia for Uruguay. And a great admiration for the Uruguayan people, for their capacity for resistance. What I'm telling you means, among other things, to be Latin American, a Latin American poet: to focus on poetry as an act of searching for a difficult stability in the midst of a quandary called Latin America. For me, no poetry exists outside of this consciousness: the consciousness of a precise physical place where you live, a place in the end that can at the same time be a poetic non-place. Though this sounds like a game it's not: it's a complex coexistence.

S. S.: What is your role as a Latin American poet?

E. M.: I don't believe I have any special consciousness as a Latin American poet. In any case, what I ask of Latin American poets is that they have a clear sense of their tradition, the precariousness of its beginnings, the never-resolved turbulence of its history, the richness that is going against the current can mean—though at this time it's not possible, I believe, to speak in these terms: counter-currents and currents coexist in social environments determined by interconnected circumstances. I don't believe that Latin America is destined to fulfill an important mission at a global level—as we managed to believe towards the end of 1950 with the Cuban Revolution. I don't believe that contemporary Latin American poetry is destined to teach the general poetic world something that it doesn't know. We don't have any secrets—the narrative *boom* wasn't an act of magic: it was a lie, except for two presences, Cortázar and Donoso—and two absences: Rulfo and Onetti. Therefore, it's a matter of taking on what touches us in reality and in history without forgetting our brief and heroic tradi-

I consider myself a Uruguayan poet in sensibility, poetic conception, and formation. In any case, Mexico has offered me a lot in terms of knowledge and living. My children were born here, my wife is Mexican. But there is something else that is significant: when you leave a country for precise reasons (political ones in my case: in Uruguay there was a military dictatorship in 1979, my father was imprisoned), painful reasons, you enter into a foreign territory that is a territory that has to do with the poetic.

tion: the one that goes from Darío to the youngest of us. But this is the case: it's necessary to be aware; it's not possible to have poetic writing that doesn't recognize the ground which sustains it. The end of the world—which I don't believe in—isn't an alibi.

S. S.: What influence can poetry have nowadays on the world beyond that of poetry?

E. M.: I don't know whether poetry can have any specific influence. Whatever influence poetry might have would be welcome. Poetry helps us to live, it can save someone's life. Poetry is a marginal language with respect to other languages. And that has nothing to do with poets who get together and read out loud for whole audiences. The type of language is marginal, it sounds like it's from another time or a child's game, like a waste of time, like feigned seriousness, all together. In general it refuses to produce "true effects" or it plays with them. There's a zone of the poetic that seems to take place somewhere else. But opening up perception, generating consciousness—aesthetic, political, ecological, historic, whatever type—is not a vain task. Poetry awakens and educates, as always. I don't know if it can promise something that afterwards might be difficult to make good on. I think about a phrase by Schiller, of a dangerous utopian grandiosity: "What today we see as beauty, tomorrow we will see as truth." You would have to replace, without letting the phrase lose its projective capacity, "beauty" with another poetic value. Because beauty is no longer an essential poetic value. It's not possible to have two passions simultaneously that are as strong as passion for reality and passion for beauty. If the 20th century was the century of "passion for reality," as Žižek says recalling Badiou, it's very difficult to get out of this predicament and vindicate the utopian quality of beauty. The "real," viewed in this way, is a devastating magnet.

S. S.: In your view, which contemporary writers (from Latin America or other parts of the world)

have been able to have greater influence, and why?

E. M.: To stick with Latin America and poetry, there are few poets who have influenced beyond the continent or the language. Models of this would be Vallejo and Neruda. They are most exemplary in their most radical moment, Vallejo in *Trilce* and Neruda in *Residencias*. But I don't know if they've been influential because of their radicalism. I think not. Their capacity for impact is in their work that is more "communicative" in terms of reception, *Poemas humanos* for Vallejo and *Canto general* for Neruda. There is someone who breaks from the mold: Nicanor Parra. His radicalism consists in his radical communicativeness—a communicativeness that doesn't reject but rather accentuates the absurdity of communication—. The influence of Parra on certain North American poetry is known. I don't know if Rulfo has had a notable influence outside of his own language. I suppose he has. A writer who, having read Rulfo, hasn't been touched by his writing hasn't understood anything. This is more or less what Hemingway said of someone who, having read Pound, hasn't been influenced by Pound. But it's different. Writers can depend a lot on their reading and the diffusion of their cultural and political contexts from which they



As far as a poem: a poem is what most closely approximates what a time period determines a poem to be. A fragmentary image of a time period given by means of language. But it's a fragment. Coherence forms historically. For us what exists is the consciousness of the fragment. And the imagination that, that fragment, has a place in the historical formation of the language.



come. Pound had the history that he had. But he's a North American poet. And this is independent of whether or not he's a great poet. The governments of the dominant countries at any given time—if the cultures were acting “with autonomy” nothing would happen—claim the historic part of their writers. And that's okay. What's not okay are the hegemonic bundles that one has to swallow when in a situation of dependence. To say nothing of the language. Writers of languages that presently have a certain hegemony will be writers who are more present than others at the cultural level. In this historic moment I believe that the influence of some writers in environments “foreign” to their culture is naturally due to dissemination—a novelist is disseminated more than a poet—or to a solidly constructed system of relations—for example, a personal publicity campaign—or to the relationships the writer has to Power. To think about the equality of conditions in the present is to be on the fringes.

S. S.: Why do you mention the members of your family (your father, your wife and children) in your poems so often?

E. M.: My family is all that I have—“having” is a way of alluding to a reality of proximity and of dependence on this proximity—apart from a few friends. So that it's the attempt, once again, one more time, to recreate what was lost in the begin-

ning. A need to speak so that they can continue to be (though I know that their existence doesn't depend on my words), a way of wanting to reunite through words in the midst of an order of things, of a political, social, and economic system that is conceived, thought about, and set in motion to separate. Speaking of my loved ones is also, for me, a way of facing this precise order of things that I've just alluded to.

S. S.: Your poems also often have a political flavor. How does politics influence your art as a poet?

E. M.: The issue of politics is of primary importance in my life. I suppose I inherited it directly from my father, a political prisoner in an Uruguayan jail during the period that the military dictatorship lasted (1973-1985). I left Uruguay because of the military dictatorship and because my father was in jail. So that's present. The political, though not necessarily in any evident way, is always manifested in a writer's stance. Now, given the level of evidence of the social breakdown in which we live, at times the issue of politics appears in a more palpable way. There doesn't necessarily have to be a symbiotic or cause-and-effect relationship between political consciousness and poetry. What I cannot tolerate is that writing whose language cannot succeed in disguising the fact that it fears being contaminated by political issues. Its effect is somewhere between shame and revulsion. It's not an act of provoking reality with the sublime: it's an act of cowardice.

S. S.: You write a lot about the act of writing poems, in such a way that much of your work is meta-poetic. For you, what is poetry? What is a poem?

E. M.: The question of meta-poetry is always present in what I do. It's a defining trait—in its radical insistence—of modernity. Something is in crisis when it has to be recognized so often. What happens in poetry is that that “something is in crisis” doesn't necessarily mean that “something is rotten in Denmark”. Poetry is, in some deep way, language that makes itself evident, repetition. Meta-poetry is always latent in poetry, in the same way

as anti-poetry. It's a language that enjoys great freedom, that doesn't have to pay tribute to either reason or coherence. It's matter of a happiness. This doesn't mean that one isn't more than he believes when facing the threat of rhetoric itself, of stiffness, of saturation or banality. In my particular case existence was always a bit strange. Something had to be familiar. It happened to be the language of poetry. As far as a poem: a poem is what most closely approximates what a time period determines a poem to be. A fragmentary image of a time period given by means of language. But it's a fragment. Coherence forms historically. For us what exists is the consciousness of the fragment. And the imagination that that fragment has a place in the historical formation of the language. For that reason it's so important for poets to be located in their time. It's not out of a moral deficit: it's out of the possibility of a place in the whole. Fundamental: don't try to compete with Quevedo. Lihn says it clearly: "I can reiterate poetry." Exactly: reiterating is not repeating.

S. S.: With the translations that Pat Madden and I have been doing, and with *Everything is Connected*, the book of your translated poems and essays edited by Antonio Ochoa that is going to be published shortly in Scotland, your work is being introduced to the English-speaking world. What would you hope for English-speaking readers to take from your work?

E. M.: Well, there is that measure of stupor, of waiting, of not really knowing. You could say to yourself, "That person I admire might read me. Or that other person." You never know. The book is a joy to me. The translations you did with Pat improve upon some of the poems in linguistic terms. There arise alliterations unforeseen in Spanish as is the case with the poem "Cuando caí encontré a mi padre" ["When I Fell I Found my Father"]. And keep in mind that the alliterative game is not my weakest point. On the other hand, my admiration for English-language poetry is

something I'm always aware of. And it's evident in certain poems. But it will always be a matter of entering into other ears, into another's experiences of language.

S. S.: What are you writing now? How does it compare to the work you've already done?

E. M.: After *Querencia, gracias* [*Longing, Thanks*] (Galaxia Gutenberg, 2003), which was a type of integrated poem, written in series in the manner of Hugo Gola—one poem continued into the next, by way of motives, words or intuitions that were previously indicated—my book *Acción que en un momento creí gracia* [*Action that I Once Thought was Grace*] (2005) was published by Igitur, also in Spain. Before that, *Ostras de coraje* [*Oysters of Courage*] had been published by Filodecaballos of Guadalajara, Mexico; it's a book that referred to the state of things generated by the events of September 11 and the invasion of Afghanistan and the worldwide threat that the United States and international terrorism, neither to the same degree or for the same cause, constituted. A reference, the historic moment, dealt with it from the intimacy of language, to phrase it that way. One cannot compete with other languages like those of the media that, though highly redundant, are enormously efficient with respect to their diffusion. This year *Los poemas* [*Poems*], *Tablas* [*Tables*], and *Por momentos la palabra entera* [*For Moments the Whole Word*] will also be released, three books that develop writing that tries to unite an intimate word, spoken in a soft voice, with historical contingency. I don't know if they put an end to a cycle, nor to what degree they differ from my previous writing. What I do know is that for a long time I've been trying to write a poem that can capture with a greater amplitude of possible consciousness "what's happening" without fleeing, clearly, from historical occurrences nor, and this is more difficult, from the timeliness of language as an entity that "is known."

KCHO: SOME MAN

IS AN ISLAND / ALGÚN HOMBRE ES UNA ISLA

▶ FERNANDO CASTRO



▲ Kayak • Installation, 2002

Photography by Janda Wetherington

Pictures courtesy of Pan American Art Gallery,
3303 Lee Parkway, Suite 101
Dallas, TX 75219

Ph (214) 522-3303, Fax: (214) 521-3577
www.panamericanart.com

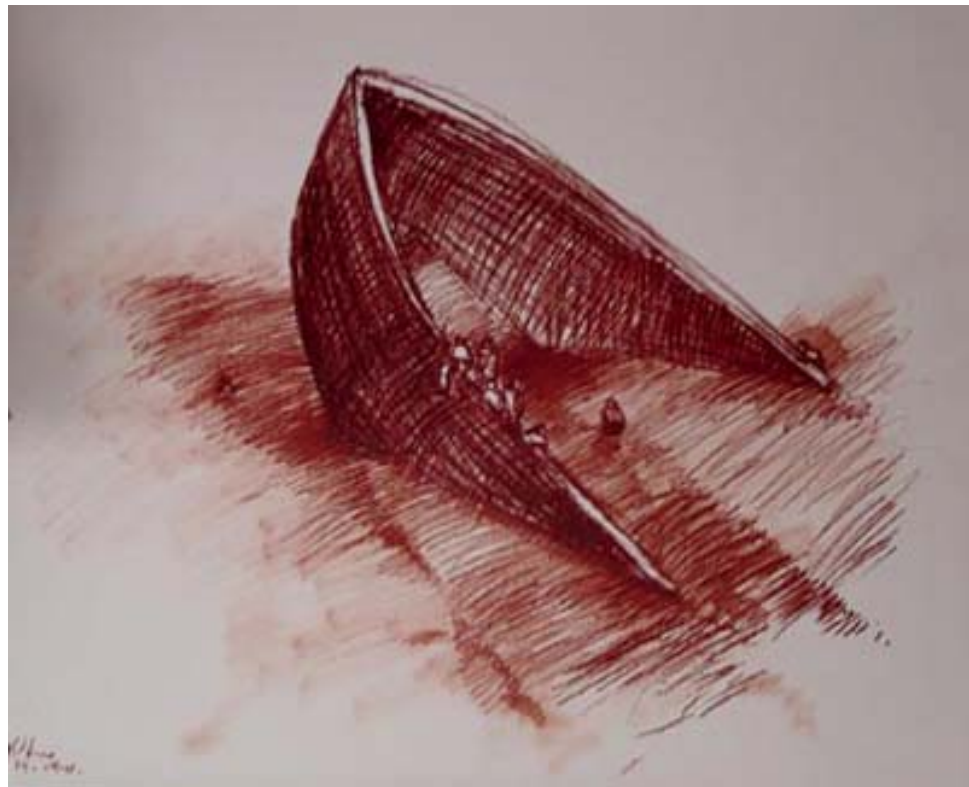
*Even a gulf may be an island,
Even a rock, a bird, and even
a hollow thought*

Alberto Eusebio Ramírez

UNFORTUNATELY INTELLIGENCE IS AMONG THE VIRTUES most difficult to possess among those for whom it is always under suspicion of subversion, and the *oeuvre* of the Cuban artist Kcho is above all intelligent. If Kcho's *oeuvre* walks along landmarks that have been and are political it is only because his central concerns—migrations and insularity (particularly, Cuba's insularity)—implies an ocean of human relations among which is power.

Kcho has stated that his works begin with a title. In fact, his poetics evidences how certain concepts seek to be incarnated in works with which they enter into relations of tension, of metonymy, of contradiction, of metaphor, of irony, etc. The first version of *Para olvidar* (*In Order to Forget*, 1995) that Kcho showed at the Kwang-Ju Biennial was a wooden boat floating on bottles. These are two objects of the literature of the sea and of forgetting. On the one hand, the vehicle with which one flees never to come back, or the one with which one returns only to find what is no longer there, or the one with which one simply goes fishing. On the other hand, the empty bottles a drunk gulped down to drown painful memories, or the ones a shipwreck survivor used to send hundreds of messages that perhaps nobody found, or simply empty liquid containers. Kcho's *oeuvre* seems to generate a dialectical movement that makes interpretations swing from one extreme to the other only to settle back into the facts of the raw materials. Both the wooden boat and the glass bottles are blunt as well as fragile objects whose main use is to contain something yet one is meant to keep liquid out and the other one in.

Kcho's works are usually constructed with second-hand materials and found objects: "I like working with used materials because of the concentrated energy that emanates from them [...] I do not work with debris but with past life." Not surprisingly, Kcho has great admiration for the work of Pablo Picasso (cubist *collages*) and of Marcel Duchamp (*readymades*). Some have read into this aspect of Kcho's poetics a reference to recycling as a way of life for Cubans during the "Special Period" of scarcity that followed the collapse of the Soviet block. It is always possible—and Kcho does little to prevent it—to discover in his works a critical sub-text about the Cuban



DESAFORTUNADAMENTE LA INTELIGENCIA ES UNA DE LAS virtudes más difíciles de poseer entre quienes ésta siempre está bajo sospecha de subversión, y la obra del artista cubano Kcho es sobretodo inteligente. Si la obra de Kcho transita por hitos que han sido y son políticos es porque sus preocupaciones centrales —las migraciones y la insularidad (en particular, la insularidad de Cuba)— implica un océano de relaciones humanas entre las que figuran las del poder.

Kcho ha manifestado que sus obras comienzan con un título. De hecho, su poética pone en evidencia cómo ciertos conceptos buscan encarnación en obras con las que consecuentemente entran en relaciones de tensión, de metonimia, de contradicción, de metáfora, de ironía, etc. La primera versión de *Para olvidar* (1995), que Kcho mostró en la Bienal de Kwang-Ju, era un bote flotando sobre botellas. He aquí dos objetos de la literatura del mar y del olvido. Por un lado el vehículo con el que se huye para no volver, o con el que se regresa para ya no hallar lo esperado o con el que simplemente se pesca. Por otro lado, las botellas vacías que algún ebrio consumió para entumecer las memorias, o las que un naufrago usó para enviar cientos de mensajes que quizá nadie halló o las que simplemente se usan para contener líquidos. La obra de Kcho parece generar un movimiento dialéctico que empuja las interpretaciones de un extremo a otro, sólo para

▲ Shipwreck II •
Oil stick on
canvas, 2005.



▲ Archipelago Series • Installation, 2003.

political situation, but if there is one, it is not a partisan critique, but a reflective and even an existential one.

His ambivalent political-philosophical relationship with the Cuban socialist regime may very well be expressed in the work *La jungla* (The Jungle, 2001)¹, a sculptural construction that combines Vladimir Tatlin's unrealized *Monument to*

▼ Archipelago Series • Installation, 2003.



resolverse al final en los hechos de la materia prima. Tanto el bote de madera como la botella de vidrio son objetos contundentes y a la vez frágiles cuyo uso principal es contener algo; sólo que el primero debe mantener afuera el líquido mientras que el segundo está diseñado para tenerlo adentro.

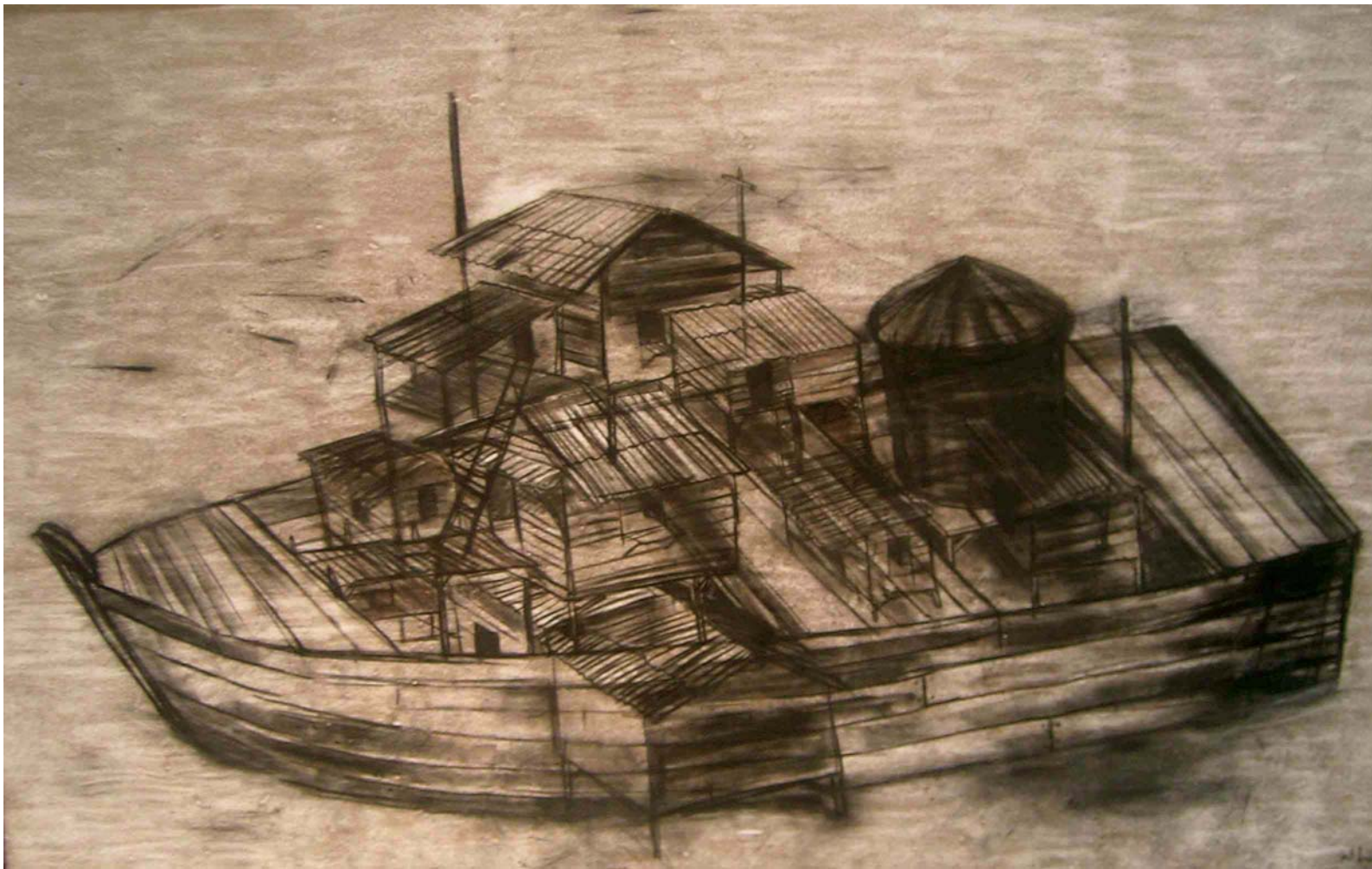
Por lo general las obras de Kcho están hechas con materiales ya usados y objetos hallados: "Me gusta trabajar con los materiales usados, por la energía concentrada que emana de ellos [...] Yo no trabajo con desechos, sino con vida pasada". No debe sorprendernos entonces su admiración por Pablo Picasso (*collages* cubistas) y por Marcel Duchamp (*readymades*). Hay quienes han visto en esta poética de Kcho una referencia al reciclaje como modo de vida de los cubanos durante el "período especial" de escasez que comenzó tras la caída del bloque soviético. Siempre es posible —y Kcho no hace mucho por evitarlo— descubrir en su obra un subtexto crítico de la situación política cubana; pero si la hay, no es una crítica partidaria, sino una crítica reflexiva e incluso existencial.

Sus ambivalentes relaciones filosófico-políticas con el régimen socialista cubano bien podrían expresarse en su obra *La Jungla* (2001)¹, una construcción escultural que combina el nunca realizado Monumento a la III Internacional (1920) de Vladimir Tatlin con los cañaverales erótico-antropomórficos de la obra maestra de Wilfredo Lam que lleva el mismo título (1943). *La III Internacional* (1919) fue la cima que consolidó al comunismo como cabeza del movimiento mundial del proletariado. Tatlin fue comisionado por Lenin para diseñar un modelo en madera del monumento que —de haber sido realizado— habría tenido 2,000 pies de altura. La reinterpretación de Kcho de ambas obras es una endeble torre construida con delgadas ramas. Es importante notar que Tatlin —además de fundador del Constructivismo— fue marino y carpintero de barco. ¿Es esta obra una reflexión sobre la construcción del proyecto utópico de una sociedad socialista con los frágiles materiales de la escasez? ¿Identifica Kcho a Tatlin, a Lam y al socialismo como figuras paternas?

En la exhibición de Kcho en el New World Museum (Houston) hubo también una segunda versión de *Para olvidar* (2000). En ésta el bote fue reemplazado por un muelle de verdad apropiado y reconstruido por Kcho. Llantas viejas amortiguan el impacto de los botes que puedan atracar en él y hay botellas vacías donde uno esperaría que hubiera agua. Este muelle (o uno parecido) —sin las botellas— es parte de una tercera obra

the *III International* (1920) with the erotic anthropomorphic bamboo forest of Wilfredo Lam's masterpiece bearing the same name (1943). *The III International* (1919) was the summit that consolidated communism as the head of the proletarian world movement. Tatlin was commissioned by Lenin to design a wooden model for a monument that—had it been built—would have been 2,000 feet tall. Kcho's reinterpretation of these works is a fragile tower constructed with slender twigs.

llamada *El Camino de la nostalgia* (1996). Las semejanzas entre diversas obras es una indicación de cómo funciona la mente creativa de Kcho. De pronto, los mismos objetos —con ligeros cambios— son instancias de diferentes conceptos. Al sustituir el muelle por el bote ya no estamos en tránsito sino en espera de una llegada o a vísperas de una partida. El muelle es metáfora de la memoria falible. Es lo último que se recuerda al partir, o es lo primero que se pisa al



is worth noting that Tatlin—in addition to being the founder of Constructivism—was a sailor and ship carpenter. Is this work a reflection about the construction of the utopian project of a socialist society with the meager materials of scarcity? Does Kcho identify Tatlin, Lam and socialism as paternal figures?

In the Kcho exhibit at the New World Museum (Houston) there is a second version of

dejar atrás lo que se ha de olvidar, o es la familiaridad de lo cotidiano que nos hace olvidar lo presente.

La regata (1994), instalación que se exhibió en la 5a Bienal de La Habana, es central en la obra kchiana. Consta de docenas de pequeños botes de juguete, zapatos viejos y otros escombros playeros que a su vez dibujan la forma de una embarcación mayor. El título disfraza con un

▲ Archipelago Series • Mixed media on canvas, 2003.



▲ Untitled •
Bronze
sculpture, 2003.

Para olvidar (In Order to Forget, 2000). In this newer work the boat was replaced by an actual dock which Kcho appropriated and reconstructed. Old tires cushion the impact of boats that might dock there and empty bottles stand where one might expect water. This dock (or one like it)—sans bottles—is part of yet another work called *El camino de la nostalgia (The Road to Nostalgia, 1996)*. These overlaps between different works are an indication of how Kcho's creative mind works. Suddenly, the same objects—slightly altered—are instances of different concepts. Once we replace the dock for the boat we are no longer in transit but waiting for an arrival or in the eve of a departure. The dock is a metaphor for fallible memory. It is the last thing one remembers as one leaves, or it is the first thing one steps onto when one leaves behind what one will forget, or it is the familiarity of daily events that makes us forget the present.

Regata (Regatta, 1994), an installation that was shown at the 5th Havana Biennial, is a seminal piece in Kcho's oeuvre. It consists of dozens of small wooden toy boats, old shoes and other beached debris that come together in the shape

humor muy cubano lo que pudiera estar pasando cuando una flotilla de embarcaciones toma un rumbo definido. "El mundo está hecho de migraciones", ha escrito Kcho. Lo que pudiera ser una referencia a los "marielitos", a Elián González o a otros intentos locales de emigración o exilio; Kcho lo entiende como un caso más general de la condición humana. Alguna vez los taínos migraron de isla en isla caribeña y los españoles llegaron a Cuba de manera similar. En la historia reciente los vietnamitas huyeron masivamente de su tierra en embarcaciones improvisadas y los nativos mexicanos siguen cruzando el Río Grande como lo han venido haciendo por miles de años. *La regata* reúne las primeras destrezas de carpintería que Kcho aprendió de su padre para hacer juguetes con el objeto de hacer arte contemporáneo.

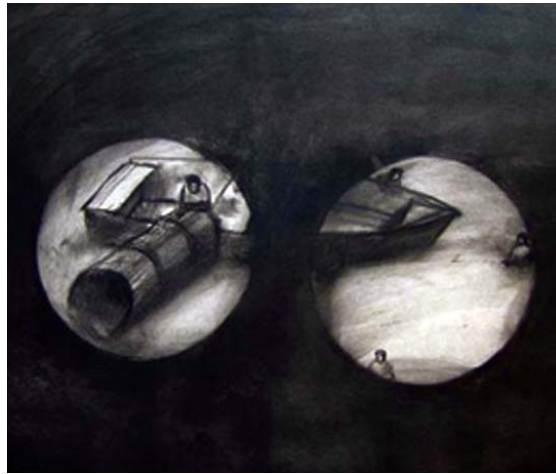
La exhibición de Kcho en Houston incluyó varios dibujos. Aunque Kcho alguna vez ha expresado cierto desdén por la pintura, el dibujo es el instrumento de su pensamiento visual. El dibujo es tan importante para él que la obra que presentó en la Bienal de Venecia —aunque no es dibujo sino una instalación con forma de bote



of a yet larger boat. The title camouflages with a very Cuban sense of humor what may be going on when a flotilla of vessels suddenly takes a definite direction. "The world is made of migrations," wrote Kcho. What might be a reference to "Marielitos," to Elián González, or other local attempts of emigration and exile, Kcho understands as a more general case of the human condition. At some point Tainos migrated from one Caribbean island to the other and the Spaniards arrived in a similar way. In recent history, the Vietnamese massively fled their land on board improvised vessels and Mexican natives continue to cross the Rio Grande as they have been doing for thousands of years. *Regata* brings together the first skills for making wooden toys Kcho learned from his father with the game of making contemporary art.

Kcho's exhibit in Houston included several drawings. Although Kcho once expressed a certain disdain for painting, drawing is the instrument of his visual thinking. Drawing is so important for him that the work that he presented at the Venice Biennial—although not a drawing but rather an installation shaped like boat by a row of chairs—is titled *Sólo cuando dibujo comprendo lo que pienso* (Only when I draw I understand what I think, 1999). The rhetoric of Kcho's drawings bears some resemblance to those of the South African artist William Kentridge although for the latter they are always the vehicles for animated videos whereas for Kcho they are either ends-in-themselves or ideas destined to become installations. Says Kcho, "I like drawing because of its intensity; it is like poetry." In fact, the objects he draws are intensely poetic: propellers, oars, tire tubes, huts, boats, docks, etc.

The polyptych *Binoculars* is a series of drawings grouped in five panels. They resemble the vision of someone who observes a group of peo-



◀ Binoculars, polyptych of 5 panels • Graphite on heavy paper, 2005.

sugerida por una hilera de sillas —se titula *Sólo cuando dibujo comprendo lo que pienso* (1999). La retórica de los dibujos de Kcho se asemeja a los dibujos del sudafricano William Kentridge, aunque para éste ellos son siempre vehículos para el video animado mientras que para Kcho son fines en sí mismos o medios con destino de instalación. Dice Kcho: "El dibujo me gusta por su intensidad, es como la poesía". De hecho, los objetos que dibuja son intensamente poéticos: hélices, remos, neumáticos de llanta, chozas, botes, muelles, etc.

El políptico *Binoculares* es una serie de dibujos agrupados en cinco paneles. Remedan la visión de alguien que divisa a través de binoculares a un grupo de gente a bordo de barcasas. En estos dibujos (mas no en la visión binocular) lo que el ojo derecho ve es ligeramente distinto a lo que ve el ojo izquierdo. En un caso, el ojo izquierdo ve a alguien armado a bordo del bote que el ojo derecho no ve. Este es el tipo de ambigüedad que abunda en la obra de Kcho. Al ver estos dibujos uno se hace muchas preguntas. ¿Quién observa? ¿Es la guardia costera cubana o la guardia costera estadounidense? ¿Es un observador neutral? ¿Quiénes son observados? ¿A dónde van? ¿Llegan o se van?

Kcho: "Nunca he entendido por qué en Cuba, siendo una isla, al mar se le ve como un peligro, cuando debe ser algo tan cercano, tan querido. Es cierto que a la vez es hermoso y ries-

Me gusta trabajar con los materiales usados, por la energía concentrada que emana de ellos (...) Yo no trabajo con desechos, sino con vida pasada.

“Nunca he entendido por qué en Cuba, siendo una isla, al mar se le ve como un peligro, cuando debe ser algo tan cercano, tan querido. Es cierto que a la vez es hermoso y riesgoso, pero todo lo que define a Cuba ha llegado por el mar”.

ple aboard boats through binoculars. In these drawings (albeit not in binocular vision) the portion of the visual field the right eye sees is different from what the left eye sees. In one case, the left eye sees an armed man aboard the boat that the right eye does not see. This type of ambiguity is frequent in Kcho's oeuvre. When one sees these drawings one is prompted to ask many questions. Who observes? Is it the Cuban Coast Guard or the U.S. Coast Guard? Is it a neutral observer? Who is observed? Are they coming or going and where?

Kcho: “I have never understood why in Cuba, being an island, the sea is considered dangerous, when it should be something very close and loved. It is certainly risky and beautiful, but everything that defines what Cuba is has arrived by the sea.”

Ironically, Kcho can leave the island of Cuba freely but so far the American museums that have shown his work have been unable to procure him a visa to cross the sea into the United States.²

NOTES

1 This work is a reinterpretation of an earlier one by Kcho: *A los ojos de la historia (Before the Eyes of History, 1992)* that included a conical coffee filter at the tower's highest point.

2 We thank Armando Palacios, director of the New World Museum, and to Roberto Borlenghi, proprietor, Janda Wetherington, director of the Pan-American Art Gallery, for their priceless collaboration and information



Naufragio I • Oil stick on canvas, 2005. ▲

goso, pero todo lo que define a Cuba ha llegado por el mar”.

Irónicamente, Kcho puede salir de la isla de Cuba libremente, pero hasta ahora los museos estadounidenses que han mostrado su obra no han podido conseguirle visa para que pueda cruzar el mar hasta los Estados Unidos.²

NOTAS

1 Esta obra es una reinterpretación de una obra anterior de Kcho: *A los ojos de la historia (1992)*, que incluía un filtro de café cónico en la cima de la torre.

2 Agradecemos a Armando Palacios, director del New World Museum, a Roberto Borlenghi, propietario, y a Janda Wetherington, directora de la Pan-American Art Gallery, por su invaluable colaboración e información.

SUPER NOVAS

A CONVERSATION WITH CUBAN-AMERICAN WRITER

HIMILCE NOVAS

► MÓNICA MARÍA PARLE

One imagines that being part of a prominent literary and intellectual family in the exiled, 1960's-era, Cuban-American community of New York City would be a heavy mantle to bear, and yet, essayist, poet, and fiction writer Himilce Novas' talent seems weightless. Her creative forays volley from teaching to radio commentary and from incisive essays to the wonderfully lyrical novels and stories that have won her wide acclaim. Her two novels *Mangos, Bananas, and Coconuts* (Arte Público Press, 1996; Riverhead/Putnam, 1997) and, more recently, *Princess Papaya* (Arte Público Press, 2004) have garnered her the acclaim of critics and her peers. Of her newest novel, Isabel Allende said, "Her writing is universal and timeless. *Princess Papaya* is beautifully rendered, chilling, touching, and haunting." From the first line, Novas' storytelling weaves an enthralling spell. The novel follows a Cuban-American family in post-9/11 New York City as they confront the mysteries of their past and the failures and betrayals of their present reality. From a greedy doctor who performs late-term abortions to a young child with extraordinary spiritual powers to a poet who has lost her muse, Novas creates a cast of characters that challenge the reader to reexamine the world in which they live. Ever courageous and unafraid to challenge mainstream thought and writing, I had the opportunity to chat with Himilce about her life and her work.

M. P.: When you sat down to write *Princess Papaya*, what came to you first: A character? An image? A scene?

H. N.: One sees (or perhaps I should speak only from my own experience and say "I see," although it is arguable that there is a common denominator to all writers, and thus when I say "one sees," I probably mean "I see and I think

the writer sees") a character against the backdrop of a *situation*, a life unfolding in a particular corner of a world. Then, to that character other characters accrue. These become the "cast" of the story that is being told, hummed, and droned inside me and which I'll eventually decal onto the written page.

I should clarify that *that* original character around which the story unfolds is ultimately not necessarily the "main" character in the written story—at least not to the naked eye. She/he is perhaps the heart or vena cava, but the work itself depends on the equipoise, gestalt, synergy, and interplay between the characters, their lives, their compounded fate, and their aggregated substance.

M.P.: One of your characters is Victoria Lobo, who has lost her husband in the events that unfolded on 9/11. Since 9/11 has dominated political and social conversation and thought in the US and abroad for four years, I wonder at the challenge it poses as a subject of fiction. Was there anything you felt you had to represent with regard to survivors? Was there anything that you insisted you would not represent?

H. N.: 9/11 was metaphor and catalyst to depict the violent and unexpected loss of a loved one. It gave me a prism for Victoria Lobo to see her husband's life immolate before her on the TV screen. I could have equally chosen a different random act, such as a traffic accident or a drive-by-shooting along some anonymous highway. But by choosing the plane en route to NY from Boston crashing into the WTC tower, I chose a collective grave, a grave in the collective unconscious, a funeral larger than life that all readers had already attended and considered and mourned. That is, I drew the reader to a *familiar ground zero*. However, the 9/11 attack *itself* was not part of the story.

For me, the random act of Francisco's sudden death and deconstruction was the point—i.e. the seeming senselessness of the accidental victim and the impact it had on the attending characters, particularly Victoria. I guess one thing my choosing 9/11 certainly *did not* represent was a political message. It was the personal message, the lives lost and the lives shattered as a result of a senseless act that I was after. Of course, politics and the broad flux and efflux of human actions impact the individual, so in that sense politics was the silent presence in the story.

M. P.: Your father, Lino Novas Calvo, is one of the most acclaimed short story and novel writers in Latin America and the Caribbean. Do you see his fingerprint in your own work?

H. N.: We each have our own highly individual voice and I cannot say that his writing directly influenced mine, either stylistically or thematically. Also, *I am an American writer writing in English* and one cannot underestimate language and cultural point of view when looking at a writer's work. But my father did teach me a lot about literature and about the craft of writing itself. He also taught me how to read and write by reading me his translations of Faulkner, Joyce, and Hemingway (among many others) before I was 4 years old. Most of all, he taught me that a *writer writes*.

I also think that his sense of *honra* and his fairness and his humility and his compassion for those who are unjustly treated and persecuted helped to shape my own view of life and ergo my literary compass. Both he and my mother, Herminia del Portal, were seminal in that sense, as well as in the most fundamental sense. I learned from both and miss them terribly.

M. P.: I'm interested in how language interacts with the stories you're telling. Obviously, there is the issue of a writer's facility with language that comes into play, but for someone like you who is bilingual, are there any other conscious decisions that inform your writing in English? Does it change you as an AMERICAN writer?

H. N.: I am actually quadrilingual: English, Spanish, French, and Italian. I have translated works from all four languages (art books, articles, etc) and write and speak all fluently and "natively." I learned all four at the same time. *However, my innermost language is English*. That is my ready-think voice, my knee-jerk, and my writer's pen. I don't have to think about language when I write. (I do not write in translation, after all!) It thinks me, and *you cannot tell the dancer from the dance*. As Alexander Pope said about

Newton: *he lisped in numbers for the numbers came*. I am an American writer who writes in English, the same as Emily Dickinson was an American writer who wrote in English, or John Dos Passos. Language to me is the same as air you breathe. I take it in, and I release it. Then I suck it in again, and by virtue of this simple exercise, I stay alive.

M. P.: How do you think it affects the characters when their lingua franca is English (their dialogue, their thoughts). Do you think it changes who they are?

H. N.: If I write about characters whose language is English, there is no language question in terms of language per se, but there are questions vis a vis the characters' social class, education, intelligence, regional provenance, and so on, which, of course, always inform speech. That goes for characters who think in Spanglish, Cajun-English, or any other linguistic hybrid. I must tell it *as it is*, the way an actor must do a perfect accent and not a mockery of one or a soprano must hit that perfect c over high c and nothing in between. I hear it, I know it, and I do it.

If I write about a character whose English is wanting and/or speaks in translation, then *that* is reflected in how his/her speech pattern is expressed, and it is up to my artistry to convey that.

If I am writing about a character who is speaking in, say, Spanish, I convey that with my own linguistic sleight of hand and may pepper his/her sentences with Spanish words for *Sazón* and *coloratura*. You can find an example of this in Chapter 5 of *Princess Papaya* with the character named Dolores, a Cuban living in Cuba, who is forced into prostitution as a means of survival but ultimately uses it as a private weapon against the Castro regime

If you are asking me whether language changes the way people think, the answer is both *no and yes*. *No* because underneath all language is the universal human language. *Yes* because each culture has a predetermined set of values and its own singular *weltanschauung*, which informs both linguistic meaning and intent, as well as what you say and what you *don't* say.

It is up to the writer's own art and genius to modulate all that *within* the text and context of the novel itself—never letting it stick out like a thesis, as that would not be literature. In the end, one's work must be a seamless garment, and the reader should understand and discern the story intuitively, not be expected to dissect it like a frog.

M. P.: How do you feel about translations of your own work? Do you play an active role, or do

you view the translation as a separate artistic product?

H. N.: I do not like to translate my own work at all. It would be like saying something twice and second-guessing myself in the process. I'd rather spend the time working on something new. However, I do like to check for accuracy and fidelity with a fine-tooth comb.

M. P.: Your characters occupy a very real and familiar environment, and yet they witness magic in their daily lives. Is that your view of the world or is this something unique to the Cuban American communities you're depicting?

H. N.: I suppose the same way my left brain interacts with my right brain. The one needs the other. I don't know that life through the magic lens is unique to the Cuban-American experience per se. Perhaps it has more to do with the artist's eye—or *this* artist's eye.

M. P.: Do you privilege fiction or non-fiction? Do you think either is more powerful or more apt to tell a particular story?

H. N.: Do you mean prefer or lean more to one or the other, like favoring the right leg over the left? Well, in any case, the two are not related at all. Writing fiction is the same as composing music. The artist is born. I did not choose it. I just am. There is no preferring there. A writer writes. No sense asking the mocking bird why it sings.

M. P.: Is your work autobiographical?

H. N.: My fiction is *not* autobiographical. Perhaps some day I'll write my memoirs or *some* memoirs and that will be autobiographical. As I said before, I write what I live, feel, see, know, remember, and touches my human heart. And, to borrow from Whitman, *I contain multitudes*. I weep with those who weep, and I am not alien from the human condition.

M. P.: All of your work very much weaves in the intersection of society's morés and values with the lives of individuals. In this novel, several of your characters represent people that are often critiqued by mainstream values: the doctor giving abortions, the curandera, couples engaged in forbidden affairs, the hermaphrodite. Are you drawn to these characters?

H. N.: Yes, those characters clamor for a voice, long for grace, understanding and transcendence. I'm interested in considering the whole of them from an independent lens. I ponder their contradictions and complex humanity away from the myopic eye of prejudice or condemnation or society's expectations.

M. P.: I recently saw a film by a young filmmaker about Cali, Colombia. She said that she

wanted to focus on a positive depiction of Cali since everything she'd seen was negative. Do you feel pressure to represent a particular community? Are you concerned about negative depictions of that community?

H. N.: No, I don't feel any pressure to represent any community. I am not interested in propaganda or morality plays where characters stand for things or ideas or, worse, *ideals*. I don't want to *spin* anything, good or bad. It's both song and knee jerk reaction. It is, ultimately and fundamentally, poetry. Robert Lowell said, "It's not *what* a poem means but *how* a poem means." That's what my literature is about, *how*.

M. P.: I had a professor who argued that the tradition of the public intellectual critiquing the American lifestyle in newspapers and essays was dying. You're a scholar, a fiction writer, an essayist, and a radio commentator, which puts you in a wonderful space to comment on the culture around you. What do you think are the responsibilities of intellectuals today? Do they have a place in the community at large?

H. N.: I do agree that, certainly, the bully pulpit as *literary genre* where the thinker/essayist lambastes injustice seems to be defunct—but the advent of the blog is perhaps filling the void that your professor identified, though not entirely.

I believe everyone is called upon to speak out against unfairness and to relieve human suffering in one measure or another. And, of course, from whom much is given, much is expected. So, if a writer can *articulate* the wrong and the right and point the way to solutions, then he/she must speak out, write and shout and say "*ouch!*" for as long as it takes in as many venues as possible. To stand by silently and let oppression rule in any guise is not acceptable in my view.

M. P.: And the dreaded question: Are you working on anything new?

H. N.: I've finished a novel about Chinese slave trade in the US and am working on a story (a novel) about destiny/providence. I'm also drafting a lot of letters in defense of same sex marriage and undocumented immigrants these days.



ZOÉ VALDÉS Y LA NOSTALGIA

► ARGENTINA RODRÍGUEZ

En 1967 se publica la antología *Aquí once cubanos cuentan* (México, 1967), del crítico José Rodríguez Feo, fundador junto a Lezama Lima de la revista *Orígenes*, y luego, con Virgilio Piñera, de *Ciclón*. El antologador reclamaba en ese entonces la necesidad de nuevos asuntos en la narrativa cubana, la que hallaba todavía demasiado apegada a exámenes críticos del pasado. Acerca de ello comentó en estos términos:

Sólo en la medida en que esta literatura tiene una intención moral, puede justificar su existencia hoy día. Lo mejor de la literatura que se hace hoy en Cuba tiene como fin no sólo mostrarnos las entrañas de esa sociedad que estamos aboliendo. Tiene también el efecto saludable —quizás sin proponérselo *directamente*— de templar nuestro espíritu contra el retorno de ese pasado. Por eso gran parte de nuestra literatura se sitúa en el pasado.

Ese exorcismo del pasado que ejecutaba entonces la narrativa cubana, tuvo en un autor como Guillermo Cabrera Infante, nacido en 1929, una realización plena. Tomó de su realidad la frustración diaria, el vacío existencial y también las historias de la lucha contra la dictadura de Batista para convertir este material en su principal sustento literario.

Años más tarde, otros autores se encargarían de dar nuevos rumbos a la narrativa cubana; ellos asumieron directamente la épica de la realidad contemporánea para tratar de expresarla en términos artísticos. Conciben su obra dentro de la Revolución —como época y también como tema— y traen personajes nuevos: luchadores revolucionarios, traidores, milicianos y apátridas. Ambientes nuevos: Girón, Escambray, escuelas de milicias, cañaverales con trabajadores volunta-

rios, cooperativas. Y un lenguaje nuevo: el idioma de la guerra, la consigna revolucionaria. El referente es inmediato, esencialmente épico.

En los años setenta —“el quinquenio gris” de la narrativa cubana, como lo definió Ambrosio Fornet— la mala apreciación política de los fenómenos artísticos truncó una línea consecuente de la narrativa cubana, la cual abortó en un realismo socialista aburrido y complaciente. Muchos autores, por tanto, se sumieron en el silencio.

Nacidos a partir del año de 1950, los ahora “nuevos” narradores y narradoras cubanos se convierten en la voz dominante de la última década, tal vez debido a una cualidad básica que recorre toda su producción: este grupo, lejos de admirar, alabar o reafirmar la realidad —histórica o actual— la interroga desde una perspectiva esencialmente ética, sólo comprometida con la responsabilidad estética del artista, a su vez comprometida con su realidad. Esta es la generación a la que pertenece Zoé Valdés.

Significativamente, la herencia literaria que recogió esta generación no está directamente emparentada con la obra de sus antecesores literarios sino mucho más cercana a los narradores nacidos en los cuarenta, en especial a un autor que se mantuvo solitario durante muchos años, Reinaldo Arenas, cuya obra alucinada y llena de resonancias fabulatorias permaneció ignorada y olvidada en la narrativa cubana.

Hechos tales como el éxodo masivo hacia Estados Unidos desde el puerto del Mariel en 1980, el regreso temporal al país de los que habían partido después del 59, el llamado “proceso de rectificación de errores y erradicación de tendencias negativas” iniciado en 1985 contra lo que se creían verdades y logros establecidos, entre otros fenómenos, vinieron a demostrar que la realidad cubana no era perfecta, ni definitiva.

La narrativa cubana recibe de esta generación el aporte de un personaje y un ambiente hasta entonces desconocido para la literatura cubana: el joven marginal. El marginalismo no como una fuente de conflictos puramente delictivos sino como los conflictos de un sector de la juventud cubana cuyas existencias bordean la ilegalidad y la alienación.

Zoé Valdés, como Reinaldo Arenas, constituyen una realidad disidente dentro y fuera de Cuba. Ambos encarnan la fuerza y la apertura de la literatura cubana que se da gracias o a pesar de su insularidad. Literatura impregnada de un mundo de vanguardia, cosmopolita, en el que el nacionalismo y el cosmopolitismo no resultan ideas opuestas.

En Zoé Valdés encontramos el deleite de la palabra por la palabra misma; una invitación a disfrutar el lenguaje —el lenguaje de la calle, del solar—; un texto abierto donde las palabras son las depositarias del juego. La autora nos hace una propuesta: jugar con las palabras como objetos manipulables. Y nos recrea situaciones sólo conocidas por los que permanecieron en la isla —los que padecieron los estragos después de despertar del sueño romántico de la Revolución. Así, por ejemplo, en *Café nostalgia* Ana le dice a Mar, la protagonista, cuando ésta le aconseja matricularse en Medicina o Pedagogía (las únicas carreras que el Ministerio de Educación ha decidido abrir, pues la Revolución no necesita artistas, sólo médicos o maestras: “la vocación no existe —advierte el slogan revolucionario— la vocación es el deber cumplido”):

—¡Ya le dije que no estudio más, que de ahora en adelante me fijaré en los exámenes como una caballa, está bueno de que la estén comprando a una que si el pueblo necesita médicos y maestros! ¡Coño, ni qué fuéramos una nación de fronterizos, once millones de analfabetos y enfermos! ¡El pueblo también necesita artistas, vayan p’al carajo, aquí no cambia el discurso! Dime, ¿quién tiene la culpa? No me lo digas, ya lo sé, el imperialismo. ¡Pues yo quiero ser actriz, gran actriz, y eso no quita que esté contra el imperialismo! ¿O es que querer ser actriz es un concepto pro-imperialista? ¡Voy a terminar encantada con el imperialismo! ¡Le dan tanta importancia que algo bueno debe de tener!

(Valdés 1998: 165)

Situación que parece rayar en lo grotesco y lo absurdo y que, sin embargo, resulta la esencia de lo cotidiano en Cuba. “La nada cotidiana” como

bien dice Zoé Valdés al titular una de sus novelas esenciales. Leer a Zoé Valdés es adentrarse en un mundo pantagruélico en el cual abundan lo hiperbólico y la comedia —y quizá, por eso mismo, el dolor—. Dolor que comparte con un autor tan significativo como Virgilio Piñera, poeta, crítico, dramaturgo y narrador cubano, que influyó de manera decisiva en la obra de esta autora, particularmente a partir de la lectura de su poema monumental *La isla en peso* (1943).

La escritura rítmica de Zoé Valdés une lo popular de los boleros con lo culto. Y es en *Te dí la vida entera* que percibimos la influencia de Cabrera Infante. Los mundos de ambos escritores se acercan, se imbrican. Más que situaciones de hechos dramáticos, estos autores nos brindan situaciones de ambiente (diferentes barrios, diferentes ámbitos). Obras que hablan más a las sensaciones que a las ideas. Mundo visual, de olores, sabores. Representación de un microcosmos (La Habana), formas de experimentar la sexualidad, lo prohibido. Obras que pintan un mural, que nos dan la representación alegórica de una situación; que brindan la imagen de La Habana, de una forma de sentir, de volver a capturarla.

La literatura de Zoé Valdés es también la expresión de una voz: la de la disidencia. El fenómeno de dos literaturas con una vertiente. Pues el punto de unión de los escritores y escritoras cubanas reside en los orígenes, en compartir un pasado. La literatura de los disidentes, en el exilio, se nutre de un deseo: apropiarse de una tradición para legitimar su exilio, para establecer una memoria cultural. Una memoria que podría permanecer en el silencio dentro de Cuba —en los silenciosos y los silenciados—. Memoria que es necesario volver testimonio, de brindarle una voz.

Los escritores y escritoras cubanas no nos hablan de “la experiencia gozosa”, como decía Reinaldo Arenas. La literatura cubana siempre está permeada por la política y por la nostalgia. En *Café nostalgia* nos dice su autora: “Cada vez somos más numerosos los desperdigados por el mundo. Estamos invadiendo los continentes; nosotros, típicos isleños que, una vez fuera, a lo único que podemos aspirar es al recuerdo. Aferrados al nombre de las calles apostamos a una geografía del sueño. Dormir es regresar un poco.” (Valdés 1998: 126); “de nuevo me atacó la angustia de no poder recuperar un sitio en el mundo, un espacio en mi isla imaginaria, un lugar donde por fin pudiéramos hallarnos todos reunidos.” (Valdés 1998: 312) Y nos reitera: “Me invadió la desolación, la terrible certeza de que el isleño que se muda a un continente

Hofstra Hispanic Review
Revista de Literaturas y Culturas Hispánicas

A peer-reviewed journal published three times a year (October, February, and June). *The Hofstra Review publishes articles, interviews, creative work, and book reviews in English and Spanish dealing with Hispanic literature and culture.*

Editorial Board: Luis García Montero (Universidad de Granada), Isaac Goldemberg (Latin American Writers Institute of New York), Oscar Hahn (University of Iowa), Gwen Kirkpatrick (Georgetown University), Efraín Kristal (University of California-Los Angeles), José Antonio Mazzotti (Tufts University), Víctor Manuel Mendiola (México), Antonio Muñoz Molina (Instituto Cervantes, Nueva York), Julio Ortega (Brown University), José Emilio Pacheco (University of Maryland), Randolph D. Pope (University of Virginia), Doris Sommer (Harvard University).

Advisory Board: Donald E. Axinn, Billy Collins, Roberto González Echevarría, Charles Simic, Mario Vargas Llosa.

Book Review Editor: Miguel Gomes, University of Connecticut-Storrs.

Subscriptions by mail: *Hofstra Hispanic Review*. 107 Hofstra University. Department of Romance Languages and Literatures. Hofstra University. Hempstead, New York 11549. Institutions \$75.00 Individuals \$50.00.

Miguel-Angel Zapata, Editor
HofstraHispanicReview@hofstra.edu.
Hofstra University
107 Hofstra University
Department of Romance Languages and Literatures
Hempstead, New York 11549

nunca podrá hallar tranquilidad, jamás su esperanza será igual, penderá del sobresalto." (Valdés 1998: 297)

"Ella viene de una isla que quiso construir el paraíso". Con estas palabras inicia *La nada cotidiana* de Zoé Valdés, para continuar: "Ella es como cualquier mujer, salvo que abre los ojos a la manera de las mujeres que habitan las islas: hay una tranquila indiferencia en sus párpados." (Valdés 1995: 15) La prosa de Zoé Valdés, sus cadencias y ritmos, se hallan muy cercanos a los de la poesía. Como bien sabemos, ella es, ante todo, poeta. Y esta poeta nos trae a la mente a otra gran poeta, quien falleció en 1997 en su casa del Vedado, en la calle E y 19, "La calle de Los Baños" como se le llamaba porque llegaba directo al mar. Me refiero a Dulce María Loynaz, Premio Cervantes 1992. quien en uno de sus poemas dice:

La criatura de isla paréceme, no sé por qué, una criatura distinta. Más leve, más sutil, más sensitiva.

[...]

La criatura de isla trasciende siempre al mar que la rodea y al que no la rodea. Va al mar, viene del mar y mares pequeñitos se amansan en su pecho, duermen a su calor

como palomas.

[...]

Ella es toda de aire y de agua fina. Un recuerdo de sal, de horizontes perdidos, la traspasa en cada ola, y una espuma de barco naufragado le ciñe la cintura, le estremece la yema de las alas...

Tierra Firme llamaban los antiguos a todo lo que no fuera isla. La isla es, pues, lo menos firme, lo menos tierra de la Tierra.

(Loynaz 1993: 162)

Este es también el universo de Zoé Valdés donde habitan mujeres como Patria, quien, por amor, quiso llamarse Yocandra; la Niña Cuca; Mar; todas ellas hechas de recuerdos, nostalgia, música, humor, desparpajo, sensualidad, olores, sabores. Mujeres inasibles que poseen una lógica a toda prueba: "que la vida es corta y uno no se dio el lujo de nacer por hueco tan estrecho para romperse la cabeza con tan extravagante manera de ordenar lo que es redondo y viene en caja cuadrada, lo inexplicable." (Valdés 1998: 59) Son criaturas de isla, de recuerdos de sal y horizontes perdidos: "Si pudiera elegir... (nos dice Mar en *Café nostalgia*) Evocaría el silencio, empecinada en callar la añoranza." (Valdés 1998: 177).