

Mexico's New Poetry

Julio Trujillo and Luigi Amara

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The years between 1929 and 1936 were incomparable for Spanish-language poetry: *Poeta en Nueva York* (Poet in New York) by Federico García Lorca was published (1929), as were *Sermones y moradas* (Sermons and Dwellings), by Rafael Alberti (1930); *Residencia en la tierra* (Residence on Earth), by Pablo Neruda (1933); *La destrucción o el amor* (Destruction or Love), by Vicente Aleixandre (1935); *Nocturnos* (Nocturnes) by Xavier Villaurrutia; *Muerte sin fin* (Death without End), by José Gorostiza; and some of Ricardo Molinari's and Luis Cernuda's best poems. The Spanish Civil War and World War II interrupted this brilliant flood.

From the end of the 1930s to the second half of the 1940s, Spanish-language poetry oscillated between two enthusiasms: political didactics and neoclassical rhetoric. José Lezama Lima, a Cuban poet who managed to distance himself from avant garde prescriptions and, at the same time, take advantage of its initial lessons of freedom began the reaction against this dual trend. One characteristic title is *La fijeza* (Fixed-ness) (1944). For Lezama, poetry goes beyond the fetishes of the time: novelty and change. Together with the great explosion he represented, a notable constellation of poets emerged: Octavio Paz, Enrique Molina, Nicanor Parra, Jaime Sabines, Roberto Juarroz, Alvaro Mutis. For all of them, originality stopped being a determining criteria. The poet was no

longer the creator of an unusual voice, but one of the many voices that converge in the invention of a poem.

The critique of the idea of the author, fundamental for reformulating ideas about poetry current at the time, became sharper in the 1960s: the poet elaborated verbal objects that lacked an existence of their own; a poem is an artefact that changes with each reading, or, in other words, with each reading, a different poem occurs.

From the strictest point of view, good poems, those destined to become classics, contain the potential for reading the reader, for compensating him for a world that only exists within him. The poem explodes in a here-and-now that may happen anywhere and at any time: a poem dated Mexico City, 1972, begins again one evening in 1999 in the hands of a Peruvian reader in some Lima neighborhood. The past and the future stop being the place for nostalgia or postponed assurances; poetry is a place where all times converge.

A generation is defined by its affinities and differences with preceding generations. Poetry does not evolve; it experiences the changes that each new writing engenders in its changing order. Every time a poet finds a characteristic expression, it forces tradition to readjust. Like gestures previously unnoticed, some traits of poetry written today by authors born in the 1960s and 1970s become visible in that written by their predecessors: there they were, waiting for a future poem to give them body and shadow.

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It is not strange, then, that when we approach the best poems of the new Mexican poets, we get the impression that poetry from before is revived: we read Octavio Paz and Xavier Villaurrutia, Alf Chumacero and Rubén Bonifaz Nuño, Jaime Sabines and Salvador Novo with other eyes. Or, their poems read us in another way: they spell the changes that our recent reading have effected in us. We can expect the same effect in the future: the poetry of poets born in the 1990s is already unthinkable without the attempts by those who will shortly become their colleagues of the soon-to-be-past millennium. This means, as T.S. Eliot wanted, an essential agreement between the new and the old.

From that point of view, it should not be surprising that Julio Trujillo (Mexico City, 1969) will become a classic of Spanish-language poetry. His work enters the tradition through the doors of the second Latin American avant garde, that other avant garde, disillusioned and secret, that opposes a furtive passion, exploring, to the obligation to innovate at all costs. This is where it meets up with that abundant national postmodernism (Ramón López Velarde, José Juan Tablada, Alfonso Reyes) and the singular Mexican version of pioneer avant gardes: Carlos Pellicer—above all Pellicer—José Gorostiza, Xavier Villaurrutia, Salvador Novo and Jorge Cuesta.

Julio Trujillo's incursions pick that territory where the interior and the exterior commune: language. However, for the author of *Una sangre* (One Blood),¹ language cannot be "processed". Quite to the contrary: the poet is the laboratory of language. Perhaps for this reason, all the voices that sing out in his poetry surprise us with their different timbre: Trujillo gives them an extraordinary trust in the powers of the word. For example, the way in which a tinge of Neruda submits to the nakedness of the things that celebrate coinciding with themselves in "This Lemon."

An essential note in this book: the categorical elimination of the word "*como*" (like). For Trujillo,

the shortcut that separates language from things is not to be found either in the thing or in the language, but in the consciousness that names it. When he tells us, "Everything is what the eyes manifest,"² he is saying that the fruits of language mature in the light of the viewer's glance. To make things show themselves it is enough to call on them with the glance, "the eyes of thought." Trujillo's particular conceptism begins and ends with the senses: if Gorostiza's intellectual circumspection bends over language until it freezes in the transparency of a glass, the reasoning hedonism of this young author spins the emblematic glass in the deepest recesses of the eye until it reinvests it with its truth as a glass:

(the glass rises
because it spins toward the iris
if it weren't such a clean vortex
one breath would easily shatter it).³

A decisive presence: Carlos Pellicer, particularly the twenty-something Pellicer of *Colores en el mar* (Colors in the Sea), *Piedra de sacrificios* (Sacrifice Stone), 6, 7 *poemas* (6, 7 Poems), *Hora y 20* (20 after the Hour) and *Camino* (Road). From the joyous, celebratory voice that lives in these titles, Trujillo obtains the confidence in the world and the body that fans his poetry. But if Pellicer attempts to discover an essential underlying order every time he is confronted with the world's confusion, Julio Trujillo rejoices in finding beautiful names for chaos, like in this fragment of "Xurandó":

It's barely raining.
Droplets are told by a hidden zinc.
The rain forest
has always been a full sponge:
It all overflows
all its pores are pools
and each pool lives drowning
in its own excess.⁴

Trujillo's enthusiasm takes off in meandering blood, an addicted, scouring blood that like the sea, fluctuates between "outside" and "in here", between surprise and anxiety. This is why the poet lives in wait of everything liquid: the sea, water, blood: a trip toward the germ, a race toward the navel, an immersion in verbal water that as it absolves us of form, disseminates us.

If in Trujillo, the outside is a challenging space, a place inhabited by noisy fauna, for Luigi Amara (Mexico City, 1971), the tumult of the world awaits invisible on the walls of his room. In his second book, *El cazador de grietas* (Hunter of Crevices),⁵ Amara traces a providential space for the immobile traveler:

At the poem's center there is a dwelling
where silence spreads
like one clear drop
advancing across the paper.

You appreciate the dead air,
four naked walls,
not one shape to muddy
the floor's indolence.⁶

The bareness of the walls that recreate the whiteness of the paper is the key to this poetics of the imminent: Amara lives pursuing what is coming, what only exists as a "next-to-you-ness." This is not exploring visible crevices, but waiting for their appearance. To meet the white abyss (the wall, the sheet of paper, death), the pursuer waits for the rent, a fault in the irreproachable surface of all becoming. The Ahab of these poems is permanently bound to his fascination for calm surfaces, a window of a world in which the things "that happen" repeat themselves unto immobility.

Surprise awaits in the most trivial of appearances: a spider that like a shooting star crosses the ultra-white firmament of a wall; the body of an insect falling on the impeccable surface of a reservoir. The quietude that perturbs Luigi Amara nests

in the "reservoir of the spirit." And the changes that barely break that propitiatory quietude only confirm the supremacy of silence, of the vacuum. "Not one shape more for the multiplicity of things," he says, and then immediately turns inward to the density of the vacuous.⁷ This author seems to assume that writing is done from the silence in this book in which silence assumes body and volume until it becomes the fine fabric on which the music of the world trembles. To prove this, suffice it to listen to "El sonido del lápiz" (The Sound of the Pencil).

Amara's music resounds in its meanings, which is why the rhythm and melody seem to subordinate themselves to the meaning in his poems: not a word that fills a sonorous line, but, as Richard Aldington wanted, "the word that stabs with an image of beauty, disgust or weariness."⁸

As writer Gabriel Zaid quite rightly says, it is uncommon in Mexico for young poets to write the newest poetry. Trujillo and Amara are two exceptions, and today we must add them to the list of noteworthy poets: Ramón López Velarde, Carlos Pellicer, Jaime Sabines and Ricardo Castillo. **MM**

NOTES

¹ Julio Trujillo, *Una sangre*, Tristán Lecoq Coll. (Mexico City: Trilce Ediciones, 1998).

² Julio Trujillo, "Celebración de las cosas," op. cit., p. 23.

³ Julio Trujillo, "Hacia el germen," fragment, op. cit., p. 19. Translated by John Oliver Simon.

⁴ Julio Trujillo, "Xurandó," op. cit., p. 56. Translated by John Oliver Simon.

⁵ Luigi Amara, *El cazador de grietas* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes-Fondo Editorial Tierra Adentro, 1998).

⁶ Luigi Amara, "Cuatro muros desnudos," fragment, op. cit. p. 15. Translated by John Oliver Simon.

⁷ Luigi Amara, "Cuando falta el invierno," op. cit., p. 20.

⁸ Richard Aldington, "Notas personales sobre la poesía," José Luis Justes Amador, trans., in *Poesía y poética* (Mexico City) (Fall, 1997), p. 34.