

Eduardo Parra Ramírez*

THE HERO, THE BORDER

Illustrated by Armando Fonseca**



She was blond, but she didn't act blond. When she walked by there was a light echo of perfume from very far away. She told stories like few could. And her clothing clung to her in a way that my 12 years greeted devotedly three times a week. She was my Spanish teacher. Seen from afar, she offered the hostilities of her looks. From up close, she was a day in the country with cheese and grapes. She was the first to speak to me of Don Quixote. She made me want to read it as much as a landscape filled my eye, the nylon learning underneath the desk in the classroom, the drop of honey for those damned by desire. She said her name was Gloria. That's what she said. And she wanted us to be readers. One day, aware of the humble origins of the students at León Felipe Middle School, she asked us for a list of the books in our home libraries. A list she supposed would be short, and rightly so. After reviewing them, she entrusted us with reading our books. She introduced us to the inhabitants of our own homes, one by one. And Gloria, unsuspecting of the fiery animal she was unleashing, recommended that I read *El poema de Mío Cid* (The Poem of My Cid) and then she gave me a written opinion. Oh, Gloria, I never thanked you. The days when I was Álgar Fáñez, the one sent by Zorita, and Martín Antolínez, the worthy Burgalese. Shortly after that, as happens when one book leads you to another, the *Poema de Gilgamesh* (The Epic of Gilgamesh), a new threshold of those that postpone true truth. I would sit reading in the schoolyard. The balls would whiz by my head centimeters away. The beef tacos were rapidly disappearing. All the girls, open white notebooks on their knees, were waiting. And I only wanted to receive the stampede of words. And it was 11 o'clock and here she was arriving: in the previous chapter, our hero was in trouble and Enkidu

, time is the border,

appeared. How is Gilgamesh going to fight Humbaba without his friend? I mean, knowing that you're full of death and sharing your own heroic consciousness when only your friend believes in you. I have the book open before me, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, and my adolescence is suddenly upon me. The foundations of my love for the written word. Am I weeping? I feel that same moisture in my eyes, that ancient warmth that enveloped me when I met he who had girt on the sword in a good hour. And it does not abandon me. I read in the subway in a diner in the study in the classroom and the feeling persists. I hope it never ends. That Enkidu will not go to the underworld. That it doesn't go away

* Writer, editor, and teacher of literature; eduparra70@hotmail.com.

** Visual artist: Armando Fonseca; armandofonseca@gmail.com.

like adolescence. I re-read, I take my time with the footnotes, I pretend I don't understand. That my delaying tactic will get me the result I want. One day I dream that I write the beginning of an essay about the condition of being a hero. And I want to believe, as Paz said, that we burn and don't leave a trace. And I want to believe that I know what I'm saying

, before the border is the awakening,

when, already asleep, I write, "Vehicle for heroic deeds, for epics, the poem registers a relationship of a voyage." The myth has survived in the visceral form of a poem. All mythology aims to trace the route of the origin, the clarifying genesis that orients us; it

also aims to establish the logics of a much-needed cosmogony, with the impetus of a fantastical breath and the rigors of a body of provable knowledge. That cosmogony will be the basis on which science will be built. All mythology offers patterns based on which behavior takes shape, is molded. It determines the hero's rewards and the transgressor's punishments. It nourishes the will to carry out its own worship, ensuring its continuation by introjecting the sacred idea of tradition. It postpones reflexive investigation into



the unexplored mystery of the abyss in favor of the monolith of faith. All mythology represents the unifying idea around which social wills, by nature divergent, aggregate. The theme with which mythology offers us its version of history is the perpetual confrontation of Good and Evil. The Homeric poems, the Cid, Gilgamesh lavish the reader with heroic actions, offering testimony of sacrifice. They notify us of the will of he who abdicates his individuality in favor of the collective good. In that sense, poetry has been able to establish itself in the collective consciousness, to belong to history, and testify to it. Anyone who reads knows that he is fulfilling the cycle that it launched millennia ago. A cycle in which the work is fulfilled, time is concentrated, and the human is witnessed. He who finishes the book closes its pages

and the border is consciousness because

, encompassed by a feeling of recovery, I close the pages with the impression that a wild part of me has been returned. I am a version of that same adolescent, without Gloria, with glorious interiors. A life of books. The joyous weight of the ink. I have Enkidu, Gustavo, Álvar Fáñez, Paco the Alchemist, Cruz the Gaucho, Dán Lee, Sancho Panza. I'm not alone in the schoolyard. And I return, as a teacher, to the schoolroom. Now there are young poets trying their luck at the same incandescent bonfire in whose crimsonness I also was able to pronounce my own word. I receive the young letters; I host them in my silence if there is still some significance in that fact. I will read them as if they were desperate messages from the shipwrecked of many centuries ago, just as I wanted to be read myself,

, the border is oblivion,

but not skimming like forgettable texts are read. What miracle of balance is it that makes a text remain trapped in the folds of memory? Is it the merit of a text that was able to survive time or of fate that opens the door to books that arrive just at the right moment when you need them? The fact is that Gloria never gave me a comment on my paper. She didn't ask me why I signed it Martín Antolínez or why in my report Ximena was called Gloria or why I wept when I read. That's okay, Gloria. Although incomprehensible, certain silences are not uninhabitable. There's something heroic in not saying everything. In today's times, there's increasingly little room for heroes. Perhaps, today, the heroic is not resisting, like Gilgamesh, or returning, like The Cid, but escaping. Fleeing from blather, getting outside the self, abdicating the adult life, emerging from forgetfulness. **MM**