

# The Unending Errantry García Ponce, Essayist<sup>1</sup>

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For Roberto Vallarino (†)

In his own introduction to his essay *La errancia sin fin: Musil, Borges, Klossowski* (The Unending Errantry: Musil, Borges, Klossowski), which won the 1981 Anagrama Prize for Essay in Barcelona, Juan García Ponce winks at the reader, denouncing a supposed “suspicious ambivalence,” in the sense of whether he has used the three authors who have most occupied his thoughts lately to illustrate with their works “certain concerns” of his own, or he has picked them “to seek a certain meaning that covers and unifies them,” or “significant points of contact among their works that prove the continuity of a self-same question.” Making his critical method explicit, García Ponce has said that works pick both their authors and their readers, so that the “suspicious ambivalence” will have to be understood as an invitation to enter into a vicious circle that, in any case, is very healthy because it incites and is fertile.

ART: THOUGHT

Roland Barthes has made it clear how pleasure can be obtained from the “retold pleasure” that is all criticism that replaces in the reader the position of the critic’s *confidant* turning him into his *voyeur*. The only appropriate reading with texts as delightful as this one is an approach that makes it

possible to enjoy the pleasure of the other, in this case of

finding solace in the problems that those works put before the reader and seeking a kind of pleasurable repetition of its creative task from a complicity that tends, more than to distance and critical objectivity, to the identification both with conflicts dealt with and the way of expressing and resolving them.

Does García Ponce “use” Musil, Borges and Klossowski, perhaps, as he himself says, in a “spurious” way to read his own work, or is it they who, reflected in the mirrors of his reading, manifest themselves in his re-writing in solidarity? In this sense, the essay aspires to—and achieves—being a voyeur of Musil, Borges and Klossowski, and so on *ad infinitum*. Could a wall be put around this kind of unending errantry?

Writing, as a form, García Ponce says, makes us see how “art shows its close relationship with the space of thought.” Musil, Borges and Klossowski are all thinkers, and metaphysical ones at that. Distrusting the power of abstract language to think what they want to think (the unthinkable), they give themselves over to the quest for literary forms that give flesh (like a sheet given to a ghost) to this “impossible” appearance, to offer in what is imaginary, as a simple tactic in the game, the tautological “This is this”, and to say, with a language that is useless, something different from what it says. And, speaking of voyeurism, we should

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again remember Barthes, when he says that the instrument that plays the role of the eye is always the text, which, as Ángelus Silesius used to say, is “The eye through which I see God, the same one through which God sees me.”

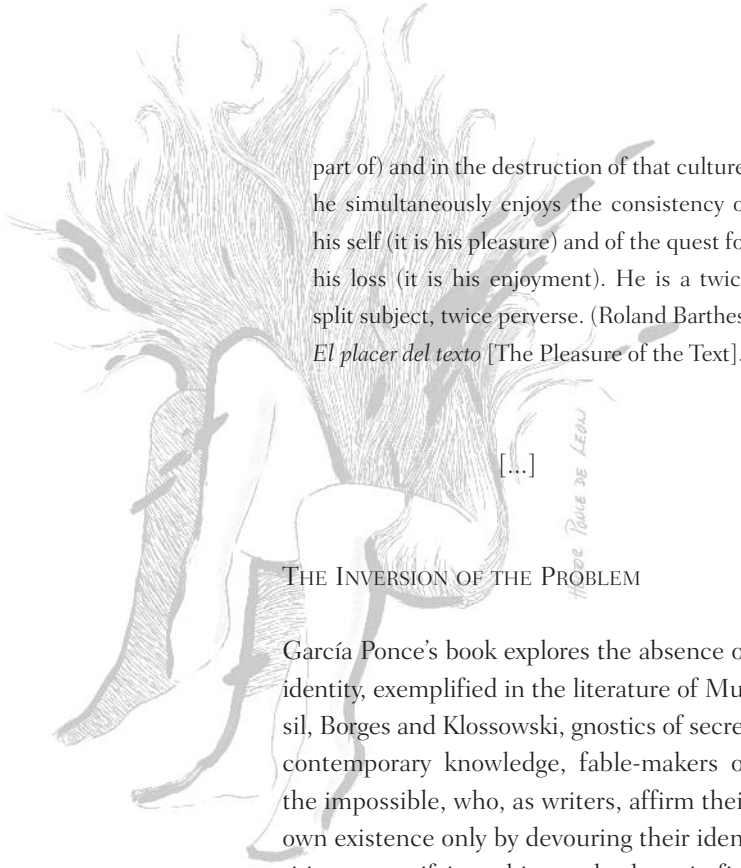
#### LOVE AS A ROAD TO KNOWLEDGE

García Ponce has seen his authors revolve around and around a crucial point for metaphysics: the principle of identity, which in all three “gives rise to facing love as a road to a specific form of knowledge.” And what else could be more precisely voyeur-able than love, even if it is the unrealized kind? It would be nothing but traditional to say that it is a pleasure to read García Ponce’s *The Unending Errantry* about the works that have occupied him for many years of his life and may continue to

occupy him, since the same essay is always written. It would also be commonplace to say, like his interpreter in studies that have turned into books (*El reino milenarío* [The Millenarian Kingdom], *Teología y pornografía* [Theology and Pornography]), that García Ponce has added a great deal of value to the universal interpretation. We should know how to say that this book—so justly a prize winner—imposes its intelligent manufacture to the point of making the consistency of the chronicler waver in his cultural bases.

He who maintains the two texts in his field and in his hand the reins of pleasure and enjoyment is an anachronism, since he participates contradictorily and at the same time in the profound hedonism of all cultures (which penetrates in him pleasantly in the form of an art of living that ancient books are a





part of) and in the destruction of that culture: he simultaneously enjoys the consistency of his self (it is his pleasure) and of the quest for his loss (it is his enjoyment). He is a twice split subject, twice perverse. (Roland Barthes, *El placer del texto* [The Pleasure of the Text].)

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#### THE INVERSION OF THE PROBLEM

García Ponce's book explores the absence of identity, exemplified in the literature of Musil, Borges and Klossowski, gnostics of secret contemporary knowledge, fable-makers of the impossible, who, as writers, affirm their own existence only by devouring their identities, personifying arbitrary absolutes in figures of fiction: Roberte, who is multiplicity itself, in Klossowski's work; Beatriz Elena Viterbo locked in Borges' *Aleph*; Ulrich and Agathe in *The Man Without Qualities* by Musil.

In Borges, the opposition of opposites is annulled and all identity disappears interminably; the Other is always the Same; the traitor is the hero; he who is alive is dead; and "Our nothings differ little; the circumstance that you are the reader of these exercises and I the writer is trivial and fortuitous." Ulrich contemplates himself in his sister Agathe, and she contemplates herself in her brother, in the un-realized incest, in that which their creator, Musil, leaving it undetermined as Ulrich and Agathe want, dissolves in the "pure image of their love." Roberte accepts being possessed by the Spirit to receive as pure grace the identity of the "other" Roberte that she always contains, since souls eternally return to other bodies when they, through seduction, remain out-of-themselves to thus create Octave, the seeker of the pure spirit, in divulging or co-participating the body of his

wife (Octave is Klossowski). As García Ponce says,

The problem of identity cannot be resolved in a work that does not grant it "from outside" as "pure grace," but in the loss of oneself, in that memory of forgetfulness that allows us to know that momentarily we are in the time that is always "that tiger that devours rivers" and whose refutation is impossible because before we were in another time placed outside the time that, through the Eternal Return to the Same that only is such in its apparent Otherness, gives us eternity. But if this is only the "fatigued hope" that is the only one within our reach, its recognition always leads to the manufacture of fables in which it becomes visible.

#### THE THREADS OF A COMMON PLOT

For Musil, Identity is the permanent non-entry into the Millenarian Kingdom. For Borges, literature makes the man who believes he makes it. "Our identity is a mere grammatical courtesy," as Klossowski says. In lucid skepticism, in pursuing the obsession that leads to madness (to losing oneself), in the book perpetually open in which brothers are "neither separate nor united," Juan García Ponce seeks the threads of the common plot of their creators: the vertigo of the seekers of the absolute, where myth and reflection nourish each other, thanks to a literature that has become self-aware. The essay is convincing; nothing is forced since "the myths communicate among themselves" (Levi-Strauss) and the ideological and the imaginary overflow, liberated, twisting consciousness.

Philosophers do not ask themselves about the poetic; poets do ask themselves about philosophy and eternally precede it, Heidegger used to say. And Juan de Mairena writes, "With words, you think, feel and desire." The

poetic is what is left once the wrapping is removed; the problem is knowing how to differentiate with a conscious, wise, creative work, whose supreme moment is that of great fiction. García Ponce proceeds by progressive turns of the screw, asking himself the questions that matter in this serious game of literature, whose function is always the same: "Turning into spirit, into pneuma, into a breath, into words." The great writers let themselves be pure literature so their creatures can live, and the identity of their persons is devoured by the signs of their literature, which in the end, perhaps, as Borges supposes, "draws the features of its own face," made of words, since, they are only wind, breath, the inevitable destiny of all death when bodies exhale their souls (Klossowski).

For Musil, writing is "expressing subjectivity"; but Ulrich, the man without qualities or the qualities without a man, takes it upon himself to discover reality's absence of reality and the non-existence of a presumed subjectivity, the nothing of the world's false appearances. Borges ends up knowing that he is not Borges because he has become "a vast, expanded literature." Klossowski closes the circle with his Roberte, transformed and changed by everyone, perversely hypostatized to allow the entry of the spirit into the world, her person suspended in a "living picture" that situates her in the intemporality and the fixedness of art, a pure contradiction, a loss of being.

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#### THE ABSENCE OF IDENTITY

But "all names are nothing more than a momentary designation behind which the absence of identity is hidden, the triumph of forgetfulness in the repetition of the Same." All

identity is illusory. Klossowski knows that the secret knowledge that seeks all gnosis is impossible, and that is why, says García Ponce, "it makes inevitable the continual repetition of the fable in which he thinks he offers us that knowledge and, like all identity, beyond what the fable itself creates." The same with Borges, who will preserve himself losing the arbitrary absolute personified in the figure of Beatriz Elena Viterbo in *Aleph*,

where that figure lives forever beyond its death in the object that embodies the infinite. The absolute cannot preserve itself or destroys he who contemplates it. Musil renounces the identity that would give "closure" to *The Man Without Qualities*, that is, realizing Ulrich's and Agathe's love, the incestuous pair without completion. Poetry, thus (*quo erat demonstrandum*), lives at the cost of the poet, and his identity is not found in the work that he himself has made possible, but rather, to the contrary, is devoured by it

as always happens in all categories. There is no origin or end, but only continuity, just as the fables show, "bases of a reality without basis": creation is the work of a minor demiurge who proposes absolutes that are not really absolute, but that affirm the impossibility of the absolute making it possible in its very negation. And in the end, we return to the beginning to start over: "The only thing that exists is the grammar that allows us to feign the absence of an ending." **MM**

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This is an abridged version of the essay, "La errancia sin fin. Musil, Borges, Klossowski." *Crítica bajo presión. Prosa mexicana 1964-1985* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2003). It was originally written to commemorate Juan García Ponce's winning the Anagrama literature prize in 1981.