

Give it Time

by Estrella de Diego

Every summer

“In poets’ life small events happen one after another, as in any person’s life. The poet goes to the country, travels. But the name of the village where he has spent the summer, noted, next to the date, in the bottom of the last page of a work, shows us that life is shared with the rest of the humankind but also that it is used by him for a very different purpose; and, sometimes, if the name of the village – with which the poet proves, at the end of the volume, the moment and place where the book was written- is precisely the name of the village where the novel took place, we feel the whole novel as some kind of immense extension adapted to reality; and we understand the reality that was, to the poet, something very different to that it means to the others; something that contain the most precious thing, that looked for but not easy to find”

This is the beginning of *In Search of Invisibility*, a very short text that Proust had wrote at about 1900, shortly before his 30 birthday and scarcely two years after Mallarmé died –has he mentioned him. Previously he had asked his daughter, at his deathbed, to burn the handwritten of certain immense work that would be unfinished.

And it is not strange that Proust did this invocation to the dices poet, taking into account that in this text – as in others, as in so much passages of the search par excellence that is *In Search of Lost Time*- the writer is going along something as difficult to catch as time and fate and, of course, equally elusive: the reason of writing, for writing, and the terrible difficulties that starting to write entails- on the sheet or on the space.

In the case of Proust these difficulties seem clear: he wants to write / describe time, and not about time, the same way Mallarmé wanted to write / describe space on that page with white gaps, word amnesias that fostered silence density. And its eloquence. Proust venture is very complex, since time is everytime escaping, as writing: imposible to seize.

That is the reason why Proust ventures shudders, it prevails as goal: to describe the time, to articulate it. It is shocking because he begins his trip being conscious of that he is never getting any harbour, whatever he does. He leaves only for fun of leaving, as real challengers. He knows that time escape from pages, it slips away among theories: it cannot be seized. It says nothing.

Nevertheless, that impossibility does not force, far from it, the resignation to give up: on the contrary. It is necessary to find the ambiguous writing, able to express its slippery, changing, fragmentary, complex essence. This writing would be able to configurate time, time that in Proust case has a lot of involuntary memory. It concerns to decipher a writing key –a writing scenography- loyal to something that is generated in reckless and that, for that reason, can only be plural and heterogeneous. So, the text becomes and experimentation place, and, moreover, it becomes an obstinated search by readers, who pursue and share the writer impossibility. Proust

words trap, and it is not because they provide answer pleasure, but they wrap in search in tranquility. They trap because the weak up each involuntary memory, the involuntary memories that come along with us.

And it is because time moves incessant. It has something of tangent, of residue; a vacuum, an extreme fragility, a fracture. Passing time is going out conscious of that time is an uncomplete work, constant surprise, hieroglyphic without permanent solution. It is arriving too late or too soon; too far or not far enough. It is an intense way, nostalgia of the original loss; to resort to the other and to require him an unconditional yes; to the other, covered by his mask and divided like the ego that will ever say a “yes” that means “maybe”. To appeal to the other, the person we were so much time ago that we are almost unable to recompose in memory: ourselves.

In spite of everything, writing necessity lies in that conflict, in that leaving knowing the impossibility to end the journey, in that recognition of an impossible return to a likely place- at least in memory-, on the sheet or on the space.

And Proust still says: “It is very strange that state of mind in which due to some kind of spell it is very easy finding the beautiful that is hidden in every element. Hence the reasoning, the efforts to make the most of talent, with the help from reading, wine, love, travels, *coming back to knew places*.” (Italics are mine). This is expressed by Tarkovsky, also a remembrance master, in an unexpected way: “time is for men a present, a bitter and sweet present at the same time.”

Returns

Maybe because of that recognized impossibility, Proust describes summer as nobody has done and will never do. His summers are uncertain, warm and involuntary memories, and he catches them among lines, in a superb and dramatic way; and these summers set lectures memory in motion. We can hear again our laughter and our father one: laughter from time ago, in summer. And, from that involuntary memory, we start to reconstruct the women we had been; involuntary memory as Proust’s writings memory that aspires to draw time on paper –or on space.

Can you hear laughter? Can you hear it with those strange echoes that came from the other part of your life? Children laughter, your laughter, the laughter that was yours... Can you hear it bursting into your present, by surprise, encroaching on your engrosses?

And then, that incongruous laughter that echoes in the street assails us. Sometimes it arrives suddenly and firmly. This also occurs when we believe to be engrossed in our work, and it tries to steal our words, to steal world words. And when we fight firmly with that words aiming to tell what is difficult to tell and what has never been totally told, or never as we would like it to be told, then, we feel we want to go back to that time. It is and emergency.

But, no! It is better not to desire return to that summer, those days when, as it occurs nowadays, we were also short of words; or maybe they were only half said, or never said as we hoped they should be. It is better to stay and work: Vania’s uncle said. It is better to want what you have because to have what you want seems to be far off.

Not any more. Time flies and blows everything away. Coming back would be pointless and you know it. What is more, if you came back you would lose your present: your present things that were not in your past. And you also want those things, don't you? Coming back implies losses, dispossession, who had though it... I is a different exile, because not only past is exile. Coming back exiles us from present. It is better to stay at that hanged time. It is better to want what you have, it is not bad.

And you stay at that hanged time because you choose it. You stay at a time that is safe because it is private. Because everybody, everything, lives there: what was there and what will be then; what you did not need then but now... you could not imagine your life without it.

And you are safe at that time, half dream, half memory. Infinite instant when everything is condensed; instant when past, present and future are not fractionated: they are only one interval. It is some kind of dream and some kind of recall. They are ambivalent territories and they establish ambiguous places. In this place, past and present, real past and created-desired past, are impossible to separate, because each occurred thing becomes different to our memory.

We all have a landscape to miss, a face, an object, a house, a picture, a song, a smell, the touch of some fabric, the taste of some fruit... Always there is a detail, and it seems to be trivial and inoffensive, daily, but it sparks the remembering process off, and so, you miss: the mother face, the apples, a tree, the rain, an arm signal, an image, the bottle and the comb, the family pottery. You also remember the reminiscence of a picture which embodies certain role farther than the image beauty.

Nevertheless, the reason why those images are nostalgia icons is not that they talk about past or relive the loss notion; the real reason is that they reflect the uselessness of coming back, moreover than the impossibility, because they visualize a territory where you can see that coming back would be disappointing.

On second thoughts, coming back would be easy; we could come back at any time and relive, if not the time that has gone, at least the lost sensations. But, recovering what? How to recover them?

It is not only a time passed forever, that time could survive in memory at least. The lately tragedy is to understand that things were not like we remember them. The heart-rending tragedy is to be conscious of the uselessness and pain of coming back. Because if we came back not only the impossibility of recovering lost moments would become obvious but also that we have neither lived that moments in the way we remember. The desire to revive nostalgia again is even more visible than the feeling of nostalgia itself, when you come back to the immediate cause or when you reproduce it. And it is even more visible the uselessness of doing this and the incapacity to escape from the temptation of trying it.

And here could be the paradox: salvation –coming back- comes through an inevitable sentence: to understand that things were not as we remember them. If things were not as you remember. If nothing was like you remember and if coming back home (childhood, past) is useless because everything would be different and because every reward requires sacrifice (awareness one), in that case the idea of coming back, of remembering, will shape the place of desire and the place of

flight. Around that paradox: want and not to want coming back, is built and inevitability chain. That is the trap.

Return journey

Because she knows it, she knows return traps and its inevitability, Yolanda Herranz has decided to give fruitless remembrance up in order to come back to past time which is real, tangible so it does not drive to leave present behind. That is the reason why she has decided to occupy the present space of a past place when she is coming back to the beginning in a felt and compulsory way, an helicoids return like that first work where words passed by, being the same and different ones every time. She drew a journey excluding nothing and including everything: what was then, what is nowadays and what will be. It means an evanescent image that flies over things when they occur, and it summarizes –now I can understand it- what Yolanda has ever pursued: herself and time, as Proust had done.

But Yolanda does not regret what has happened. She does not want to do it. She neither can, who knows it? “To have what you want / to want what you have”, she says, (no, she does not say: she engraves with fire). And now I realize that she wants what she has: the prove is that passing that has gave her more than taking away, every time it is so. Without melancholy signs: it should be so. It is the only way for people that, as Yolanda does, have taken the hardest path: writing time.

That has ever been her question: the time, the passage of time, and it is the same as saying oneself; how things come; how we are able to transfer them to our personal experience, to the collective experience in which artist is interested since the beginning. From you towards me, it is like the mirror operation: it returns the complete image. Herranz is hot on that image’s heels, because she knows that a hollow lives inside us. That hollow comes from the other that we were some time ago. And all that things are also “women writings”: a different way of telling stories and recalling the passage of time. Because, deep down, women have no time for melancholy. We have learned to want what we have.

Citoux reflects on this with its usual far-sightedness, looking tireless for different ways of writing, and these ways are also, why not, different ways of remembering: *“All the time I lived in Algeria I dreamed to arrive in Algeria one day. I would have done any thing to arrive there (I had written). I have never found Algeria, and just now it is necessary I give an account of it; I have to give an account of how I desired a door opening, now, and not later (I had noted down in a rush) during the fever of a July night. Because, due to dozens and hundreds of different reasons, now the door is half-opening in my memory Forgot gallery, here is the possibility of coming back to Algeria, and therefore, I am obligated to come back.*

In *Reveries of the Wild Woman*, is the first work in which the writer “comes back” to Algeria. A lot of critics says to be an autobiographical work nevertheless every Cixous works are autobiographical, because in all of them she investigates personal events. In this work she speaks about the visit of something that comes, it is the strength to write; its name is not inspiration or muse, it is something-on-border, something that comes, arrives; gerund, because there is the difference between Cixous language and the language of masculinity, Citoux wants to liberate herself from that male language, letting silent to speak.

This passage is ambiguous even typographically, externally to the proper text. It was written with a smaller size and in italics; Cixous uses roman type with discretion in some inserted sentences, explanatory ones: “I had written”, “I had noted down in a rush”. These sentences seem to sneak in the text in inverted commas and they send us to certain fractures that are essential to contemplate any attempted autobiographic text.

These sentences are written by an outsider writing hand, it is a hand that remembers herself in the past, writing notes about the past itself. At the same time she belongs and does not belong.

These sentences should be part of a global project, more complete. A project that you think you have written, that you dream to have written, but, when you woke up, you cannot find it among papers. This loss is an unequivocal symbol of that coming back is not possible or, more over, it is the irrefutable proof of that telling (one self) as something collected and closed is impossible.

And yet, the strange impression is like that ambiguous and short part that begins the work, it seems to be the only authentic autobiographical text in this work, structurally at least. Or, it is, of course, the split game raised in many autobiographic stories as narrative strategy: writing about your own autobiography means to stand in an inevitable narrative space, split yourself into two. You have to look at yourself in that mirror –that has something of Lacan’s mirror- and it gives us the other image back, like it has been since the beginning: we, women, ourselves.

Because they are two heterogeneous subjects, almost contradictory subjects, that have never lived together, either in the time, or in the space; they are the women we were and the women we are. These subjects can only live together in narrative space, but, there, there is neither space for melancholy.

Writing about time and about the passage of time implies to strip yourself of every guarantee, and it is the same when you write your own autobiographical story. And Yolanda strip herself. She draws this exhibition space as the person who narrates her own existence. She looks at herself in the imaginary mirror and it does not break up or separate, it gathers together and rewrites.

And each return is an encounter with all the women we are and we have been. And it is another passage. Never stay forever. And it is everything you have had, part of what you have now, because without loss there is no profit. And Yolanda Herranz wins and loses. And Yolanda strips herself in this journey that put pressure on we to look at ourselves in the story that she is writing about herself.

We look at ourselves: now it is our mirror. And each story, stories we knew, is now a new one that catapults us to new stories. Because each engraved word, each embroidered, told and imposed word, each body metaphor, each very fragile glass, each reflection, each crossed glance act as that lines in italics of Cixous’ text: they are the true story of the concealed life.

And family stories, those that we had known previously, acquire a surprisingly meaning along the way: they give it time.

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