

Lost Territories

By Claudia Guillén

In this space I have mentioned a group of authors who already form a complex and solid cartography of the generation that precedes me: writers born in the seventies who are without a doubt marked by the events they lived in their teens and during the first years of their adult life. They have walked naturally into the new millennium with all its implications. These men and women look unconcerned at technological, social and political developments in our country that occurred less than three decades ago. Even their approach to sexuality—with the appearance of AIDS—already establishes a different perspective to their seniors.

The circumstances that join them are many, and it would be long to list them, but their particular context has served Jesús Ramírez Bermúdez, Daniela Tarazona, Luis Jorge Boone, Guadalupe Nettel, Antonio Ortuño, Socorro Venegas, Tryno Maldonado, Brenda Lozano, Hilario Peña, Rogelio Guedea, Nadia Villafuerte, Jorge Armodio, José Ramón Ruisánchez, Antonio Ramos, Alberto Chimal, Luis Felipe Lomelí and Julián Herbert—to mention a few—, through short stories or novels, to show not only a register of quality, but also a convergence of views where the void and reality establish a perfect symbiosis. There are differences among them, true, some of them approach these aspects directly, while others use a treatment that barely states them as an axis, as if they did not exist, although they become constant in the subtext.

The new voice of the set is Liliana Pedroza (1976), from Chihuahua, with her short-story book *Life elsewhere (Vida en otra parte)*, edited by Ficticia and awarded with the Premio Chihuahua de Literatura. A fiction and essay writer, Pedroza is a doctor by the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, with special studies in the Sorbonne, and along with her literary work, she is a professor and researcher specialized on Elena Garro's work, the origin of her book of essays *Elena, we're fleeing (Andamos huyendo, Elena)*. Among other awards, she has received the Premio Nacional de Cuento Joven Julio Torri 2009 for her book *Cartography of the abyss (Cartografía del abismo)*.

Life elsewhere has seventeen short-stories of different registers in language and treatment. Most of them are brief —not less convincing for that—, they encode their view on situations that refer us at the same time to feelings of oddness and empathy. Their protagonists live in desolate worlds and they are always interesting as a consequence. The book opens with “States of neuralgia”, where a man discovers in his dreams a reality that separates him from physical pain. Here the realist are intertwined with the oneiric elements, until both are mixed up in the mind of the protagonist, who flees in search of a platonic woman.

In the case of “Rooms”, there is also a man who conceives the passage of time, apparently without perceiving its passage, though suddenly time itself seems to fall on him as a heavy wall. The fluid language gives a very hard tone to the dense atmosphere of this text where it seems that nothing happens. In the next, “Paris 7”, a writer meditates about a possible text in front of a cup of coffee, as he is invaded by memories of his time in the French capital. As in the first text of the book, the perspective of the character swings between memory and reality, while around him there is a lonely, empty atmosphere. That is the same tone of “Samalayuca”, a brief story where the author involves the protagonist in a mirage or fantasy, through subtle images related to loneliness and very well worked poetic rhythms, that allows for the vision of an abundance of marine fauna—“two hundred and eleven blue whales”— in a desert town. In these four stories, in addition of the specific setting that has a determinant influence on the characters’ lives as a recurring element, something between an oneiric and fantastic tone is perceived, full of density, portraying a reality that is at the same time desolate and vivid: the reality that fills the worlds of evasion.

It is very clear that Liliana Pedroza is very passionate about painting. It is demonstrated in “Orsay”, where she performs an effective narrative exercise that again refers us to the setting as decisive on the behavior —but now focusing on the aesthetic sphere—: the protagonist is witness and participant of the actions derived from some of the most emblematic paintings found in the Parisian museum that the short-story is named after. On the other hand, in “Sequence” Pedroza continues her homage to plastic arts with her skill in imagery, as she takes our

hand through the journey of some wine drops establishing an analogy between them and another image, that of blood on sand, in a visual trip that introduces us again to the spaces of painting. In “Windows”, a magnificent story where the author recreates her own aesthetic tastes, we observe the world that surrounds the character in the form of little postcards that even in their stasis manage to move the reader through the clear sensations they create; among them longing, yes, but expressed by small details that build a very complex cosmos. In “Essay of a man held to light”, through a story plotted to recreate images, the reader sets himself in front of a colorful painting, the details of which make us forget the act of reading, to make us feel we are only watching a painting.

Other stories are focused both on love and the lack thereof, though the setting seems to dictate the characters’ destiny. In “To bark at the moon” the sea works as a water vehicle that joins the American continent with the Iberian Peninsula, until it becomes a sort of humid accomplice: two friends are related because they are neighbors, and the anxieties they both have seem to fuse into one: the protagonist is obsessed with a man, while the narrator is herself obsessed with her friend’s story, who manages to evade herself through a transitory madness. The storyteller feels trapped in that small cosmos of domestic vicinity barely divided by a wall; that is, both her point of view and the manner she speaks reveal in her certain misbalanced thoughts. Something similar occurs in “The solidary”, where there is a sketch of the complexities inherent to cohabitation when one is in a foreign country: beyond the discomfort caused by the presence of “the other”, there is a codependence sustained on the invasion exercised by the supposedly momentary roommate. In this text she conveys some carelessness when narrating that causes certain anger, but the author manages to mold it so the reader becomes an ally not with the victim, but with the aggressor. In the same tone, “It is not simple” approaches the description of the practical situations suffered by one who moves from his territory, whether it be the country, the house, school, work; they are all spaces identified with a huge and complex numerology that is necessary to write down in a notebook that may disappear forever. *Life elsewhere* presents us with a colorful and somber array that tells truly disturbing

stories. That is the case of “Trinidad”: the setting is now Barcelona, where an old woman is taken, who in addition to having never visited the Mediterranean, asks a question about the sea that cannot be answered by her grandson nor by the narrator, placing before us one of those inquiries that we mumble silently and that regularly have no answer.

The book closes with longer stories, maybe the reason I liked them most. Thus in “Gathering of pigeons”, without abandoning the thread of the stories —the escape, whether through apparent insanity or the oneiric state— the author submerges in the memory of the loss of a loved one, in order to recall it only through dreams, and then insomnia. Here pigeons are the symbol of reunion. “Lorena with nostalgia” tells the experience of a Mexican woman who comes to Madrid with great pretensions, and casually she immerses in the worlds that will provide her a better life: she participates in acts of witchcraft and without losing the Mexican flavor or the link with her country, she has a clear objective. She is a strong woman you may say, who knows what she wants, loyal and solidary, so she gets her neighbors to share her tastes and extravagances. In “Migrations” —the longest story and maybe the one that better synthetizes the book’s thematic obsessions—, with a spare prose the narrator talks about her return to Chihuahua from Madrid, and the journey she starts with her boyfriend to meet her parents, to recognize the spaces of her childhood and to visit the neighboring towns. However, just as her couple’s grandfather, who was exiled in Montevideo because of the Spanish Civil War, she no longer recognizes herself in the geography: she is a migrant that occupies a space that is longer hers, just as the majority of the book’s characters; her present is now in the Iberian Peninsula, in Madrid. “Silvya” also approaches the circumstance of foreignness, but here we see how those who come from a different land may be considered simple items: in this story, the point of view of the two protagonists is joined when they both decide to get rid of somebody they helped without thinking, with no remorse involved. Last, “One and the bathroom” presents us the relation between the protagonist with the bathroom, which becomes a refuge for her thoughts, giving it an important aesthetic value: through seeing several “baths” and their appearance, she knows what kind of

people live in the apartments she visits, so this space works as a sort of emotional compass she uses to make decisions.

Vida en otra parte is a collection of experiences related to foreignness, uprooting and external and internal exile. A brief museum of paper where words and colors, shapes and rhythms make a precise symbiosis to tell stories and draw portraits where we can contemplate ourselves. It is also a collection of stories that talks about a rejection of reality by means of insanity, mirages and evasion, though the reality cannot be avoided. All these topics are considered to the smallest detail by Liliana Pedroza, with the intention of setting us before those lost territories that can only be inhabited by those who have lived more hells than paradises in this world.

Liliana Pedroza, *Vida en otra parte*, Ficticia, México, 2009, 93 pp.