

The method changes disciplines

by Guillermo Samperio

I have the feeling that in addition to being a writer, Liliana Pedroza is also an actress, or she is familiar to the world of theater. I may be wrong, but I get that idea not only because “The spectator”, the second story in her book *What we have left*, talks about a play, the actress and a regular member of the audience:

“The following Friday, moved by I don’t know what desire, I went back to the Sor Juana. Accustomed to the theater, I moved confidently among the seats and picked one different to the other times. The play was familiar: the woman dressed provocatively, the man rapes her violently, the panting, the shouts, the crying. Nothing was new, everything repeated with some accuracy I found satisfactorily surprising”.

This feeling comes also because I notice an application, so to speak, of Stanislavski’s method in her writing. I will try to explain.

Stanislavski used to say he was “not convinced” by or that he did “not believe” a poor, unnatural acting. The acting theorist said that the true actor tells himself: *I know the scenography, the make-up, the costumes and the fact that I have to work in front of the audience is a blatant lie. But it does not matter, what matters is how I would act, if everything around me in the set were true.*

Then, also in literature it does not matter if the writing is a lie from beginning to end, what matters is that it seems true, even if it is Science Fiction. What matters is that the writer manages to define the laws of that fictional world, in such a way they do not contradict themselves, that the fictional gears spin well-oiled, smooth and accurate, and lie after lie unveil the deepest truths.

I continue reading paragraphs from the story:

“In the beginning I thought there were several women that came every three or four nights, with different body markings and variables of death. Asphyxia, above all, or strangling. But it is the same, Irene, it is the same woman. I recognize her face. Sometimes she arrives with her body partially

charred or with deep cuts in her legs. She has been found in some ditch or in a vacant plot of land. I note her markings. I write her body's violent story. In the meanwhile, I see them cut her open and reach to rip off her entrails", the author puts these words in the mouth of Cecilia, physical anthropologist who works in a morgue in Ciudad Juárez.

In theater, said Stanislavski, even the most obvious lie must become truth to be art.

I continue with the text:

"If there was something that attracted me about Juárez and that I learned with Cecilia, who liked to roam around and enter any cantina to have a drink any day of the week, is that it seemed to me like an immodest city that presented itself free of scandal or prudishness. I did not find this shamelessness obscene, on the contrary. Every time I was closer to see the features of the sleepless woman's worn face that I saw on Juárez, of fetid, death-like humours. Degradation levels that I dared not categorize. In the end, we were all trying just to survive".

Thus Liliana Pedroza, in *What we have left*, wears the other's shoes. She may be violent or violated. Man or woman. Be obsessed with the exploration of underground worlds or go to a minimarket in Ciudad Juárez. In the six short stories presented in this book, Liliana Pedroza writes always from the I, first person singular. Although the writer gives herself up in order to wear the other's shoes, each of her characters' shoes, ironically she seems to resort to herself, her I, to understand, dress, give life to the other.

When asked about the correct way of acting, Stanislavski said it was that when the actor on stage thinks and acts correctly, logically, consistently and in accordance with the laws of human nature.

This in literature would be called verisimilitude. Liliana Pedroza's characters do not act as the story needs, they do not seem puppet-characters subject to the author's will, they present themselves as independent beings that do only what the laws of human nature dictate. Example:

“When I was recently recovered, Emilia asked me to leave the house. She wanted to live alone. She said it without looking at me, staring at the furniture as she crossed the living room towards the kitchen. From the main door I saw her shrunk, frail back and could not say a word. We did not speak again. Next day I started looking for a place to live. I had a funny feeling, a bitter taste in the mouth, abandoning Emilia and her flowerless tree, her greenhouse and her muteness. I imagined her behind a fortress made of silence, high ivy-grown walls where there would be no place for deserts or highways, where Marina would spin forever with her 23 years of age. “Poor Emilia, it must be really sad to lose a daughter”, I repeated Julia’s words like an automaton, knowing that even so I would not be able to understand nobody’s pain, only mine.”

In *What we have left* there are no circular plots, surprising characters, spectacular endings. Liliana Pedroza’s short stories just happen and set within the sphere of possibility. The same we can be company to a character as he discovers his paraphilias, his twisted pleasure, than we can listen to a reluctant lesbian, who always ends up being object of another woman’s violence. Both victim and attacker are composed of the same substance, says the author: human nature.

Love, the meaning of existence, death, loss: literary themes have not changed throughout the centuries because man in the end man is always the same, despite space travels, peyote trips, heart transplants, inventions and robotic studies. What makes literature progress and evolve is the way we approach these same themes, or in other words, the way each of our characters act and the plot they unfold.

If actors wear their characters’ shoes and live with them during theater season, the writer has to be a schizophrenic and change shoes as many times as there are characters in their story, but in the end the author is still the author, with all those emotions inherent to each and every one of us. The only difference is the circumstances we had to live. We are all the same, only our environments change.

Going back to Stanislavski, he said that the actor has to possess a developed imagination, a childish ingenuity and trust, and an artistic sensibility for the truth in body and soul.

Are these not also the characteristics that every writer must possess? I believe Liliana Pedroza knew it when she wrote *What we have left*.

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