

A Displaced Poet Transcends

Book review

Lynne Clive (Marilynn Rashid)

1986

a review of

Los crepusculos de Anthony Wayne Drive/The Twilights of Anthony Wayne Drive, a bilingual edition by Hernan Castellano-Giron, translated by Emil Efthimides. Operation D.O.M.E. Press, Detroit, 1984.

This is a bilingual collection of poems by the exiled Chilean poet Hernan Castellano-Giron. Hernan was born in Chile in 1937 and lived in Santiago where he studied and taught at the University of Santiago. After the military coup in 1973, Hernan was forced to leave the country and found refuge in Italy during 1974 to 1981. He presently lives with his wife and son in Detroit where he is teaching Spanish.

This collection of fourteen poems includes three of Hernan's illustrations (painting-collages) as well as a very thoughtful analysis of Hernan's poetry and poetic philosophy by the Chilean poet (also living in exile in the U.S.) Waldo Rojas. Rojas discusses the anti-poetic climate which has existed in Chile for the last thirty years (much influenced by Nicanor Parra's "anti-poems"), and the profound impact it has had on the character and direction of Hernan's poetry. He enumerates aspects of the anti-poetic which are ever-present in Hernan's work: "The colloquial syntax and the ironic tone, parodic, biting humor, the irreverent posture which confuses at once the sacred and profane, the noble and the plebeian." This is a poetry which disdains the traditions of the "poetic." Rojas notes Hernan's "voiced" rebelliousness, which exposes "with a spirit of cynical impudence, the radical inanity of poetry..."

These poems are not only anti-poetic but heavily influenced by a surrealism at once visionary, yet emotional and nostalgic—perhaps the influence of Santiago street culture and music. Hernan's points of departure are rooted in the real, the personal and significant details of his daily existence—his political exile, his relationship with his son, the memory of his friends and fellow poets. And they focus on incidents—finding a dying bird, listening to the music of Eubie Blake, experiencing a Detroit winter, or observing a snowy owl that perched for hours on a building near his home. But these details are expanded with dynamic language, with jolting images and unlikely metaphor. He begins one poem by describing himself walking on snow "as an endecasyllable would, / As a worm would, over the punch of its destiny, / As the algae, between fable and fable / Would open the arms they don't have to embrace my dead mother..." The solitary experience of walking on snow is exploded within the poem and terrifyingly internalized by the poet: "Snow and ash, it is all a part of me / I am the one who snows, who spreads himself / Dividing his smile at the feet of donkeys / And my silence hesitates, my mouth gives away / Salt which is dissolving the snow..."

Hernan has an eye for the absurd, often tragically comic, aspects of our existence. And so he addresses a statue of the German Romantic poet Friedrich von Schiller found in Detroit's Belle Isle zoo: "The poet arrived here for municipal reasons / to dwell in front of the pond where flamingos bathe." The absurdity of Schiller's presence here in Detroit extends to his own situation: "No one shall ever resolve that historic, / And also linguistic, mystery: / —And Chilean, besides—next to the German Romantic / Now the stone guest at the feast of video-games / And Stroh's beer." He explains his peculiar vision of the world, his singular design, in truth his only option for survival,

in the poem "Mirror Memory": "With the distance of irony / I have lived in misery / Without becoming a miserable man."

There is an ambiguity characteristic of these poems which at once manipulates the metaphors of personal and mass annihilation—"Today as it snows over me and inside me /—Because outside the world, the sun keeps shining—/ The hallucination of the cosmos describes a parabola and crashes 1 Like a ball shot off by a neutron cannon. / Today I'll eat snow and they / Will eat my face alive"—and proves the poet capable of stepping back and laughing at himself, his world, and the "poet's" images. These are the poems of a very unique survivor, a poet who avidly expresses the surrealist's solidarity with birds and reptiles ("Because the flamingo is me, is us,/ Poor birds searching the bottoms of their cages / Not for metaphors any longer but for stubble."), a poet who though displaced is able to transcend the limits of his circumstance and absorb the details of a foreign world, touching, transforming, making them his own.

*Los crepusculos/Twilight*s is available from the Fifth Estate book service for \$6.00; use order form on book page.

fifth Estate

Lynne Clive (Marilynn Rashid)
A Displaced Poet Transcends
Book review
1986

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/322-winter-spring-1986/a-displaced-poet-transcends>
Fifth Estate #322, Winter-Spring, 1986

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net