

Three Date-Stamps for Emma Villazón

Andrés Ajens (trans. Erin Moure)

September, 2015

Fábulas de una caída [*Fables from a Downfall*] (2007), Bolivian poet Emma Villazón's first book, feels at times like a book in process, despite many poems that read as definitive. Quite something else occurs with *Lumbre de ciervos* [*DeerLight*] (2013), perhaps her greatest literary legacy—without considering her unpublished work. As Cé Mendizábal, bright light of Bolivian letters, usually modest in his literary judgements, wrote: "The passage of time...will confirm *Lumbre de ciervos* as one of the most brilliant volumes of poetry from this part of the world in recent times."

Since the "part of the world" to which the great Cé alludes both admits and overruns the borders of counties and nations, I will add simply: *Lumbre de ciervos* is certainly the most remarkable book of cruciate (from Santa Cruz perhaps but not destined to its Sierra alone, rather *cross-linked* and *crucial*) poetry in at least the last fifty years and—I avow—in the next fifty (read fifty, *cinquenta*, here, also as *sin cuenta*, countless). People will say: *Ajens desvaría*—he's slipped. They'll say: he's still touched by the disaster in El Alto.¹ I am—how could I not be. And, also, yes, I slip: like Cé, at times, I slip out of the common or usual order (one meaning of *desvariar* offered us by the dictionary of the Royal Real and Unreal *Irreal* Academia de la Lengua) and, also, I simply differ from it (another meaning offered by the RAE).

The cruciate in poetry, to paraphrase the quintessential Cuban writer Cintio Vitier, has never been fixed or closed, without further ado, but each time is a poetry to come. Poetry re-living! Cruciate poetry—which *Lumbre de ciervos* greets, dislocates, and reinvents—is articulated, as its name indicates, in crossings, cruces, in crucial crossings between "Bolivia" and "Chile," between "Santa Cruz de la Sierra" and "Santiago de Chile." The book was written between the Third Ring Road or Tercer Anillo of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia and our house in Pirque, Chile: it's no wonder that one of its most singular poems is titled "Deslumbre migratorio" or "Migratory Dazzle." This crux-pollination (or cross-, to those who love and learn from flowers) results not only in a poetry that is resolutely innovative (being that there is no "innovation" without "tradition" in movement) but also a poetry fecund in destiny, date-stamped,² a poetry-to-come. And destination.

Pirque, Chile
August 27, 2015

On Saturday August 16, 2015, you had shown me this loop of phrases:

"No literature with this, not with you my love. Sometimes I say to myself that you are my love: so it is but my love, I say to myself, calling myself out in this way. And so you no longer exist, you are dead, [...], and my literature becomes possible [tricky question given the "quasi-transcendental" posthumous nature of all writing]. But I also know—and for me, this morning, this is the definition of knowledge, I should publish it—that you are far beyond what I repeat as "my-love," living, living, living, and this is what I want, but then I must renounce everything, I mean, renounce any return of love to me, even renounce that, turned to me, you let me hear what I say when I say, to you or to myself, my love"³

It's a paragraph in translation from "Envois" (2001), scanned with your underlining, by the amiable and so very "marrano"⁴ Jacques the Ripper alias Derrida—whom you'd begun again to read, fulminating, without mincing, along with Benjamin, Hamacher, Hölderlin, Wiethücher, Medinaceli, Villena, Oyarzún (the list remains in.finite), so as to *touch* perhaps and displace the border at least, or the skin, as extraordinary as it is cast away, of *El Loco* by Bolivian writer Arturo Borda. On April 28, you'd provisionally titled your doctoral thesis: "Dream of an Infinite Writing; The Legacy of Arturo Borda." As the song by the cruciate musician Gustavo Rivero goes, with your lyrics: Don't run after girls! Cronopia, in your re.iterations, my *ammour*, you are more cronopia than fama.⁵

Early in 2009, we went with Emma to Sucre, Potosí, Oruro, La Paz and Tiahuanaco—where, without television or sacred writings, we settled in.

In Yotala, where César Brie, then director of the *Teatro de los Andes*, had generously lent us his house, my first poem-with-Emma occurred, that first poem-ma. It came to be titled simply "From Yotala," and exists now in *Æ*, a book of poems that with its title marks—without marking at all—and speaks, at times mutely, of the ligature and dance of two letters that belong neither to one nor the other. *Æ* was to be launched in Santiago on September 3, 2015, but for a double pause imposed upon us. From 11th Street in Villa Dolores, El Alto [The On-High], Bolivia, a double-acupuncture fate, the incredible—double possessive case—intervened:

con e mm a

INCREÍBLE roza
en lo alto, toca
tu puerta, cielo.

ábrelo, lúcum
nuba, con tus dedos
de nonada pura;

que vibre, increíble,
que aletee, que
no amanezca nomás
enguacado, pero.

w./ e mm a

INCREDIBLE brushes
the on-high, touches
your portal, sky.

open it, lucumous fruition
of cloud, with your fingers
of mere-nothing purely;

incredible, that vibrates,
that flutters, that
won't dawn again ever
venærated, still.

1 Emma Villazón died in the hospital in El Alto, Bolivia, on 19 August 2015, two days after a collapse from a stroke in the La Paz airport (situated in El Alto, its satellite) while returning to Santiago and her home in Pirque, Chile. She was 32 years old.

2 Erín: As well, I would add, as translator, “dative,” which is the case of the indirect object of the act of giving or sending. The date-stamped work both gives and sends, and its destination is indirect, or unobjectifiable.

3 Trans. Alan Bass, from “Envois” in *The Post Card* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987, 29). Translation slightly revised (in accordance with the French original) by Erín Moure.

4 A Sephardic Jew, but also means disgusting, and pig, plus it is so close to *marrant* in French, thus: funny. A marrano, like Derrida, like Spinoza who is another, is at once the butt of vicious anti-semitism, which is to say life-threatening racism, and one obliged to (and obligated to) migration.

5 Refers to Julio Cortázar’s touchstone story “Cronopios and Famas.”