

Chus Pato / in mid-century

translated from the Galician by Erin Moure

Chus Pato answers questions by telephone while finishing off a long interview (“ten pages!”) with the eminent Galician journal *Grial*. She’s running out of time: tomorrow she leaves on holidays for Rodalquilar where she’ll get a few days rest before heading to Argentina where, this very August, she’ll turn 50. There the poet whose audacity has most shaken the Galician lyric of recent decades will enter middle age; in her own words, she feels “fatigue, plenitude and a kind of *déjà vû* that makes me very happy.” Behind her are the years during which her texts found their “definitive form,” when “the romantic and post-avant-garde ‘I’ blew apart with incredible turbulence.” Her explanation of this process is striking: “the ‘I’ emigrated toward the other personal pronouns and at the same time crashed through borders to enter other literary genres. From this turbulent and exploded place, I go on writing, without guarantee.” Part of that revolution, the appearance of her book *m-Talá* (2000) – “I wrote it under tension, with violence. With insomnia.” – was a major event, a title that opened unexplored paths and schools that even today are in ferment. Then came *Charenton* (2004), another book of poems that harrow the breath, and in which Chus Pato locates two tendencies: “One is like a kind of finale to *m-Talá*; the other tries to get away from *m-Talá* as fast as it can. In this second *Charenton*, the poems of starting fresh, is the first appearance of that sensation of *déjà vû* that makes me so happy. I seem to have an ever increasing interest in writing from the non-alphabetic, which is to say: in constructing texts with as little literary mediation as possible, not because I want to engage to what some poetics call real life, which to me is a bore: rather, I want to take a mortal leap without a net, so as to be even more literary.” In this issue of *Revista das Letras*, Chus Pato presents ten texts from her current project, *Thermidor*, in which she extends and amplifies her gamble on that “mortal leap without a net.”

Antón Lopo

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[•]

Let's start: (Hrg) at the bus stop with a bag of paramecia

reason says that there's nothing unusual in this snapshot; the protagonist does what she always does, it's just that now she has to cover a distance of 2000 kilometres, which isn't so infrequent either

(the green tiles of the airport in the country of eternal rains)

and she springs forth as hero, as multitude, as protagonist, any episode that binds us

[•]

Sleep's best with the window open, rocked by wind and the torrential mix of all the waters, or on the high summits, or on the banks of the great fluvial arteries of her continent and with them (with the arteries) and in the sled of one of her woman ancestors she traversed the frozen Rhine and continued on foot along the tracks of the Empire toward the country of great massed trees // always headed in the purple direction of sunset, through the Black Forest and over the pass from the Jura to the Vosges, the wide plain of the Saône, the fertile cultivations of Champagne and Poitou (Jurassic), the region of the Landes or cradle of Aquitaine (Tertiary), the frigid passes of the Pyrenees, the Cretaceous nation of the Basques, the Cantabrian cordillera and the Río Navia

— when will you write of the hero or heroine meeting the Suevi people?*

*Translator's note: The Suevi crossed the Rhine at Mainz in 407, fleeing the Hunnic invasions of their land, today known as Swabia. After 2 years in France, settled by 409 in the wilds of NW Spain, in Galicia, mining and cultivating flax for textiles.

— I decide that the heroine encounters some historical figure, I decide this so as to extend the time of narration, to confound it, to make it real; in this particular case the difficulty lies in the choice of character, who in the end is a collective march, I was interested in the description of this itinerary; there was no vision, no voice to have detailed the ice and waters flowing in the core of the earth, the horizon obliterated by white, the blue of the sky, the pelts, weapons, horses, the cold and this strange woman adventurer who is welcomed as family, the contrast between the Germanic voices and the speech of the protagonist; it's like this: a decision is made, the rest is force, impulse, perception and commotion, gut and logic of language

the heroine thinks of a circular house straw-roofed with a single space for cooking, working and loving and drops off to sleep and her body's almost weightless on the planet

— do all girls play at recovering from ecological disasters?

— some

reader (he) / author (she)

— do they all have toy bathyscaphes?

— not all, no, some

[•]

not even her continual transit, this perpetual state of passage: all sorts of signs, affects, messages, whatever

like the monstrous face of freedom, that slalom of abysses

[•]

A peaceable tendency that shows itself in a slowing of mental processes and relaxation of the body until images of planetary harmony flow, thus forests (and always, always, oak forests of the sort that bring unclassifiable pleasure in the dampness of earth, grey

clarity of the skies or of the rare rays of sun), plus images of oceans and always, always, of the Atlantic, the coastline: sands, dunes, marine birds but also halfway between the surface of the waters and the abysmal deeps, images of submersion that inevitably bring her back to her double placenta which in the months of her own gestation allowed her to develop the organs required for what she identified as “origin”: the love of walking, and language. Sometimes in these navigations she visualized her daughters and through this watery flood she enters in lamination with all the nutritive forces of the species, because of this, enunciation repeats, its rhythm // always, always sanguine

time, that of anyone or no one // a high consumption of words

[•]

It happens right in mid-crosswalk when, after deciding to walk from the bus stop to the hotel, she realizes she has to do it weighted down with baggage; and in the shower, the water gives her lovely curls, and after getting ready for a first date she said to herself that not only was she such and such but just now she’s much more beautiful than in her youth and soon she’s walking down the sidewalk as if she never, never ducks out of anything and realizes how much she’d like it if Antón Lopo were with her now that she is the happiest protagonist of a novel on the face of the earth and she doesn’t even think of nausea

— and then?

— Marta and Publio got there but Marcelo had to go defend the Austro-Hungarian border

[•]

The orange marble floors of the aviation field in the country where it hardly ever rains

[•]

For someone not very susceptible to suggestion the illusion of bodily belonging, even for brief instants, was gratifying

she would have liked to have dedicated a large part of her life to the cultivation of pleasure, which gave her the idea of founding, in keeping with the model of the monks of Ménilmontant, Fourier's phalansteries or the city of New Harmony, utopian-revolutionary harems or bordellos where a community of women and men willingly achieve the ideal of a phratria of bodies

in general the erotic scenes she imagined were born of these weltanschauungs, thus the flings with an English aristocrat (presented in a circus cage glittering with gift ribbons) or with a 15th century gentleman in the Brabant (ergastulum, physiological splendour, ripped clothing, gloom)

some peoples' judgments of Sade she found superfluous and banal, in her opinion the literary works of the Marquis (one of her bedside table stalwarts) could only be understood as a further inventory and the writer's struggle to make bearable *the dark night of the world*

her intelligence was ferocious, slow (due to distraction, inattention and laziness) to accumulate, avid in the face of language. She could anticipate an amorous combat by her response to a text, and detected to perfection with which author it would be possible, and if so who would win her over, by whom she would be conquered and before whom she would give in; in front of a body or in front of a piece of writing her reaction was identical, so much so that you could say that she did not distinguish between body and writing

Cecilia, voice: Empire-cupola

(a whole life at the barricades)

Generally in her youth she had travelled and we can affirm she lived in art galleries for the sole reason that these buildings were good for her spirit, and only there did the food suit her, especially the Gulbenkian Foundation, the Tate or the small Vasarely painting collection; these days the rotations had not stopped in fact had considerably increased in velocity and amplitude but she had no possibility of reaching any museum, exceptionally some accident might retain her in a city, thus the lunulas of the Irish Iron Age or peat-bog mummies in the snowy city of Dublin

she took mobility to be one of the faces of freedom and this had made her a happy protagonist, despite it being true that freedom is polyhedral and its facets and crevices innumerable; the debility that attacked her from time to time, the forgetting of pugnacious conduct, were evidence of her growing need to return or opt to take cover

the space of torment when in Missolonghi she was recovering from a fractured vertebrae, the slowness of her steps onto the balcony and the palm trees and araucarias and the thistle of Lord Byron, dead in the battle against the Turks for Grecian independence, and the sarcophagus

— what you're writing, is it the truth?

(and the author, she answered him, the reader: it's an infinity or two)

— it's a chronicle

— and if it were a poem?

— then it would talk of temporal potential or the acceleration of time

[•]

But nothing can be captured, not the ramification of open arteries,
nor the volcano of incandescent lava, not even the perpetual glacier
nor any new form of basic life or colonization of moss or lichen . . .

hers was not a genuinely revolutionary temperament, more
rebellious and loyal, engrossed in a scar that was healing with
difficulty // this false closure as atmosphere // solitary childhood
where she mixed with those less favoured, from whom she was
separated by the thinnest membrane with which her father
protected her, especially with her schoolmates who as time passed
would swell the lines of misery and emigration to the British Isles
and central Europe

the absence of fascist protection in her family, time spent in the
rural village, a certain type of intelligence oriented toward
distinguishing lies from truth had conditioned Hrg's subsequent
decision, and thus it was utterly impossible for her to give up the
idea that private ownership of the means of production was not only
corrupt and immoral but abominable, this and the belief in the
radical equivalence of all human beings

these were the source of her revolutionary activities, of which it
could not be said that she chose them, but that it was impossible for
her to dislodge them from her path

from there too, from childhood, certain friendships that endured
and her clandestine but repeated presence in underground holes of
questionable renown like *The Red Lighthouse* or *Tabanaco*, or the even
more dubious and recondite retreats of the *Suevia* or the *Paradise*

or her attraction (never fatal) for her now uprooted, jailed or dead
comrades

so it was in the city of stones where she (the author) was born
in which Ophelia was brutally run down when she tried to identify
her brother among the corpses, victims of the latest bombardment

[•]

Back at the bus stop I see she's flustered because she wanted to stub
her cigarette in the proper place by the bus shelter and it ended up
right on the sidewalk, not easy; finally she gets onto the bus and goes
off gazing out at the city but not the neighbourhood where she once
lived, an industrial area abandoned even then, and she wonders if its
magnificent brick chimneys are still standing

"I can't remember when I got there, when I really got there, nor
where I was before "when I got there"; I can see another departure
with a backpack full of canned food and as I had fallen in love with a
complete stranger, the house we'll share in the industrial area,
intermission in the Milan station and desire's explosion; prior to the
rendezvous in the kind of caf  that only a Mediterranean
dictatorship could preserve, I'd come from the north, he from
Florence, Milan, Venice no, even better: Naples"

(Hrg, monologue)