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Author

Leni-Olivares, Roberto

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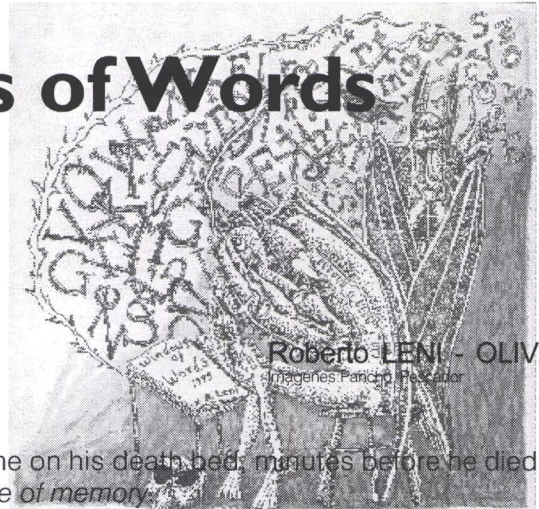
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Windows of Words

SHORT STORY



Roberto LENI - OLIVARES
Imágenes: Pancho Becator

A poet I spent a lot of time with as a child once told me on his death bed, minutes before he died, *to die is to open the last window and chew on the last bone of memory.*

He used to say lots of things because he loved to talk, write and communicate. There were many things he said I could not understand at all. He once told me, *I never give money to beggars, every time I look at one on the streets my eyes just die a little.* And it was not only death he talked about.

He lived with Amanda, the woman of his dreams, poems, and shared nightmares. They had a small piece of land where they planted most of the food they ate. And the corn grew, because he knew the codes that seeds use to communicate with the elements—the language of the earth, or *Mapu*, as he used to call it, the language of water, the language of the wind, and the language of fire and flames. Also, because in nights of a full moon he would bring a chair out to the yard for Amanda, and would serenade her and the plants to be for hours at a time. Under the metallic light of the moon, the poet sung songs of love, seeds, and births. He had an old hand-made guitar, and the romantic evening would only come to an end, when either Amanda fell sleep, or Washington Carrasco their dog, became so inspired by the melodies of the poorly tuned instrument that he decided to join in the chorus of other dogs in the neighborhood.

My window is as big as the ocean, he once said, with a clear horizon dividing the blue of the world. The trouble for me was that as I looked out the open window of their shack, all I could see was Funes sticking her head in to listen to what the poet had to say. Funes was their cow, long time friend, source of milk and inspiration. Funes accompanied the poet in his work. While he wrote she patiently chewed on grass, herbs and wild flowers, like chewing on moments.

Amanda and the poet agreed to name her Funes, because *cows know it all, have no regrets about it, do not care about reducing their amber colored memories to a manageable number, and don't fool themselves with having to create artifacts to measure time and space. They know rhythm is the conjugation of both—and certainly, cows don't have to consult a watch to know what time it is. You can see it in her eyes said the poet, she has windows to eternity.* The color of two tea cups Amanda added, and with a Mona Lisa of a smile, she took a long sip from her steaming cup.

Outside the world lived an enraged spring. The explosion of germinating life distorted monotony to the point where ants lost their way. The state of excitement became so powerful that even bees died of exhaustion, seagulls flew in-land on bright sunny days, and flies begun to feed on pollen.

But the poet also had days when memory paused and lingered, suspended in space about to fall, yet never bursting. These were days and nights when nothing worked. Days when words, his most sacred of seeds, became but dissonant shadows of bad births. Words turned into monkeys jumping on the shoulders, wind-mills, dragons, monsters, and bad memories of disjointed melodies.

Days of coma, the poet call them. And he would grab a page or two from the tender pile of old newspapers in the corner of the room, and walked to the out-house at the end of their piece of land, for a visit to The Rockefeller, as they called “the throne” or toilet. They baptized the out-house with the honorable name because, after the last long earthquake which hit the region, the North American billionaire donated a million toilets to rebuild the country.

In *days of coma* the poet sat at the Rockefeller and read the paper, which would then be used as toilet paper out of principle and necessity. Every chance he had, the poet insisted on reminding me that *if you go to the bathroom once a day it's alright, but if you go twice or three times, you have found happiness.*

Eleven days had passed since his first collection, *Poems to Cry Yourself to Sleep & Laugh Yourself to Death*, had been completed. But the collection of seventy three poems was never published because Washington Carrasco, touched by the unsettling germ of spring, snatched the manuscript off of the table, playfully chewed on it for a while, like the puppy he no longer was, and hid it in the chicken-coup where the poems with each passing day got buried deeper into miniature mountains of chicken shit.

Suddenly, the poet found himself observing a moth which flew into the room through the open window, as Funes stuck her head in, chewing like a teenager on a piece of gum, a mouth full of fresh spring grass. The moth sat in a corner of the small wooden frame mirror hanging, where the poet's vision landed. *The moth is making love to its own reflection*, thought the poet, *leaving a sandy gray-shiny mess on the smooth, double sided universe of the mirror.*

After much thought, eleven brief moments of despair, and an unusual lapse of irritation over the lost poems, the poet came to his final conclusion and poetically stated, *I feel like shit*, to which Amanda quickly replied, *welcome to the revolution.* They both laughed while Funes with her quick and hard hitting tail whipped the flies off of her back-side, and through the window savored her lips with her thick, wet, pink tongue.

After finishing the week's laundry, the poet sat down to start on his other work. It was clear that he was not going to try and recreate the lost poems. He remembered that which Krishnamurti had once said, *We humans are nothing but a bag of memories*, and the words of Plato, *all knowledge is but remembrance.*

He understood that he had not only thought the poems as he wrote them, but that he had also felt them physically on his chest, arms, legs and in every part from within his body. *The experience was the same, yet different*, he thought. Like that time when he heard for the first time Amanda's breathing and his own searching to become one before sleep reached them. That night he heard his heart beating and hers synchronized to the same drum, and he could imagine the blood circulating calmly in the stream of their veins. The next day Mr. Guerrero, one of his neighbors, had explained to him that the tendency of the hearts to beat together was called *euritmia*, and the poet has since loved the word.

He knew the poem he would miss the most was the one titled, *Suicidal CEOs*, because it was the one poem where he had been able to realize how copying is an act of love, and how there are people in the world who lead lives, rather than live them, which do not present a model to be followed. Still, he remembered a line from that poem which read, *To love is to copy, but not the shadow.*

Funes' eyes became red from staring and seldom blinked, while observing the poet at work. The poet's eyes became green with inspiration, as he looked at Washington Carrasco. *All that is considered natural or the nature of a being is ultimately altered by culture*, he thought and then went on writing for hours, until Amanda returned home, tired from the poorly paid job at the maquiladora, where she spent ten hours, of her six-day-work-week, sewing T-shirts for the country of the North's youth to wear.

The poet prepared the meal, which they shared under the shade of the elevated grape-vines, and later went back to writing and digging, from the memory bag and always from the world around him, in search for *the bone of bones.*

He interrupted his work calmly, as Amanda later told me, and asked her to get in touch with me and everyone of their friends, because at age seventy three he was going to lay down and wait. He was ready, he had said, *to open his last window and choose the day to get out of life.*

When I arrived nineteen hours later, there were a thousand people there. The entire town, and two hundred close friends and their families, whom had traveled from all corners of the globe, including myself and my family—the nieces and the nephews, and even the newly arrived grand-niece—and of course there were eleven or thirteen parachooters which dropped from the sky into any gathering whenever and wherever there is food, wine and laughter. Everyone was eating, huge tables had been set-up which poured out into the streets, like life-boats in an ocean of people commemorating the poet before his death.

I respectfully walked into the shack, kissed the poet on his balding forehead and remained quiet, leaning over his body. The poet grabbed my head gently and pulled my left ear next to his murmuring lips, *Amanda spent the last three days preparing Funes for the grill*, he whispered, *eat some of that cow, if there is still any left. The opium which Dr. Mateluna gave me is good shit. Remember Roberto always remember. To die is to open the last window, and chew on the last bone of memory.*