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ARE THERE WORDS ENOUGH?

Beatrice Esteve

“Are there words enough in all of song to praise the pen?”

First line from the second verse of “The Battle between the Scissors and the Pen” by Shem Tov Arduziel 1345 a.d. or Santob de Carrión as he was also known.

Andalusian Hebrew poet.

I land in Madrid with Pepe on June 25 coming from Barcelona where we had been visiting Pepe’s family. We are coming for a few days. It will be the fourth gathering of the International Council of the Teatro Real and we are really looking forwards to the festivities, opera recitals, visits, dinners and more, with which we are so richly regaled by what has become our extraordinarily caring “Madrileño” family. Every year has been more wonderful than the last and we know that this will be the case once again.

It is Summer in Madrid and there is nothing more delightful than languid, long lasting daylight hours, melting into evenings which stretch on forever as you enjoy gardens, terraces, fountains, cicadas, friends and the world lies bewitched, cast under a deep, deep spell. This I know for certain.

I am also coming to Madrid because I have been invited to publish a book!

Not just simply “a book” but the launching of what, when I am given it to see, appears a gem.

I have nothing to do with the “making of” and thus may freely use any descriptive adjectives I choose. Invited I have been by Professor Julio Ortega (Latin American Literature at Brown University). Dear friend who these past years has become Chief Editor for Claudio Miguéz and Raul Giron . Two Argentines in Madrid. Their very own little publishing house (Book Museum) the Centro de Arte Moderno. Passionate book lovers, these two “create” books. Hand crafted. Painstakingly and lovingly. Page by page, twine inter twined, cover to cover.

ALL is hand produced. Every page cut, every illustration glued, every cover bound.

Very small editions. Fifty copies.

My friends from all over arrive one day earlier to share this birthing.

I know not what to expect but know it will be singular.

Surreal rather. I am in Don Quixote land where what is: is not and what is not: is.

Thus A book I shall publish.

The airport is quite empty and we make our way to the luggage belt. I sit Pepe down and we begin to wait. Nothing. Twenty minutes and it is still: nothing. When I notice a very nice looking young man/student standing patiently, like myself by the belt.

He has a back pack slung on his shoulders and I read: Harvard Rowing. I hesitate not and address him. My son too was on the Harvard Rowing team thirty years ago I tell him and even had the wonderful experience of going to Hong Kong and partaking in the Dragon Boat rowing Festival. Andrew Habert is his name and hails from Houston. Just finished his Freshman year and comes to Madrid to study Spanish for a few weeks the Summer. I tell him about Pedro and Isabel my graduates, twin grandchildren and he says: Tell them to look me up when they come and I will be very happy to help them with anything they might want or need when they start at Harvard this Fall.

Here comes the luggage!

Andrew gives me a hand but the two smaller items do not appear. I tell him to leave and we part company.

Belt stops. That's it. Off we trot to an Iberia counter behind some partition, strategically indicated. No need to worry, they will be coming out at another belt outside, an attendant assures me blithely. You must walk through Bulgari (!) Bulgari???? I then see an advertisement and a shop and we march duly through as doors close behind us and find the indicated belt. Quite a crowd of stragglers, standing and sitting

around. Luggage strewn all about....This bodes not well. Belt finally begins to move. One pouch appears but where is the second.

Belt stops.

I trot to another Iberia counter I find and am very seriously told: No, your second pouch will NOT be coming out here. You must go to the "Guardia Civil" (at the extreme end of the hall) and ask him to please let you back in from whence you came (normally not possible) as your second pouch will appear on Belt 14.....the original belt where all had begun.

Off we go.... One hour has gone bye....as Madrid awaits us beyond the door. ...

Belt 14 is dead. Moves not. Neither is there luggage of any sort.

Back to the counter we trot. Oh no, No, NO. You must through Bulgari go (again) and your pouch will arrive (eventually) where we first told you. Strangely enough Pepe is not even grumbling...perhaps because he is in Spain. People are still milling expectantly around the "miracle" belt which sure enough begins to roll AND miracle of miracles there appears Pouch#2 and our Madrid visit is off to a great start.

We sink relieved into a taxi and head for the Santo Mauro. This is the first time we will be staying at this neighborhood hotel. The beautiful eighteenth century stately Madrid home of the Counts of Santo Mauro turned into a gracious boutique hotel. The Ritz is closed, undergoing massive renovations and I fear will emerge un-recognizable.....

I love what I see upon arrival. The friendliest of Staffs. We are squished into the tiniest quaint cubicle of a crooked wedge shaped elevator and are led through a windy hall to a lovely room overlooking a fresh, welcoming tree bordered garden. How nice. A fountain tinkles below. Ten minutes to freshen up and down we go to meet Julio Ortega for a relaxed dinner, in the garden. The first of a series of such delectable, slumberous, delightful Madrid evenings.

Next day is an "off day". Time to relax, unwind before activities really begin. Early birds we nonetheless are and soon find ourselves strolling leisurely in the shade, under the trees along "la Castellana". Heading towards the Thyssen- Bornemisza Museum to view the Monet/Boudin exhibit. It is still cool this early in the morning. Lighthearted and free are we.

Lunch at a nice (unknown to us) neighborhood fish restaurant El Pescador and the rest of the afternoon goes quietly bye until early evening we find our way to Calle Galileo to meet Claudio and Raul. The funniest of unobtrusive doorways. Naturally I ring the wrong

doorway first, only to hear a bored voice say: "Al lado"....as #52 stands above the "voice's" doorway. A smiling Claudio and Raul welcome us to their "schatz kammer". A tiny space, lined with cabinet after cabinet of mementos and memorabilia which they, over the years have collected, pertaining to major writers of the Spanish language of the XXth century! What a trove. What to say of their innumerable editions of hand made books and writings of said writers. Unpublished work that Julio digs up and has them publish. Jorge Luis Borges: early poems. Carlos Fuentes: unpublished first stories. Júlío Cortázar.... On and on. Beautiful.

They bring forth my book. I am stunned. No words. I hold it reverently. Fifty copies.

Any lingering doubts I may have had as to friends arriving one day earlier in Madrid for this... vanish. I am more than happy.

Next day we gather once again, early evening. I am thrilled about the visible delight our "Madrileño" friends express when they "discover" Claudio and Raul.

We never knew they existed!!!! Enchanted. How could they! Precious secrets have to be unveiled....lovingly. One needs a "Julio Ortega" to lead you by the hand.

The mood is wonderful. Claudio speaks. Julio speaks. Beautifully. I speak a little. It is over.

What is: is not and what is not: is.

A writer in Madrid I have become.

Next afternoon, spruced and dolled up we are ready for the Teatro Real. First stop the Norman Foster Foundation. This is a relatively new (two years perhaps) research institution created by Norman Foster himself which houses ALL his archives, designs, models. Open only to scholars and researchers and students of architecture, so a very special treat indeed as people such as we simply are not granted access. We meet in the courtyard as "our troops" gather. Welcomed once again by smiling Staff and Directors. Equally nice is to see that the "Madrileños" have brought along their children and grandchildren to benefit from this remarkable visit. One more aspect of what makes this Madrid gathering of the Teatro Real so homey and special. We are definitely not just "guests". We too are included in these diverse, embracing families, spanning several generations.

We split into groups and begin our visit in what Foster called his "Inspiration Center". First object we see, the marvelous Boccioni sculpture of what I call his "winged figure". Futurism, the "avant garde" of eighty years ago and still so contemporary and full of promise. We fly, as does Foster who a pilot is and hanging there in

space are oodles of models of planes all of which he flew at one time or other to inspire and motivate him and propel him ever forwards. Next come innovative pieces of furniture. Collections of photographs. The St Moritz marathon on snow of which he partakes whenever he can, even now in his eighties. On and on, different objects, "whatevers" that catch his fancy and his fantasy.

We come into the building proper. Room after room of mock ups, drawings, "maquettes" for buildings on the moon, railway stations through which you see and grasp infinity. Towering needles. Neighborhoods brought to "new" forms of life. There is no limit to Foster's imagination and we are urged and encouraged to explore, invent, move onwards.

I am happy to sink into the bus and set off to the Teatro Real where we will re-enter the familiar. The comfortable. The known. Lucia di Lammermoor. An extraordinary cast. Lisette Oropesa.

How achingly vulnerable this young soprano is. All the pain, the suffering brought to us through her voice alone. Tragic and sublime. Until horror strikes and we are caught off guard reeling....when her brother Enrico deflowers her in the most violent shocking scene I have yet to see in opera. You may ask and are there not other equally horrid scenes in opera from which one recoils?....even Lucia herself as she, transformed by grief and anguish murders her newly married husband and in her delirium believes she is wedding her beloved Edgardo? Cheated and betrayed by said brother? Perhaps. Perhaps not.

Xavier Camarena equally strong as Edgardo and Artur Rucinski a vile, perfect Enrico Ashton.

Staging and scenography are just as effective. All so powerful I cannot swallow a bite as we walk up for a gorgeous dinner of delicious and tantalizing tid-bits, laid out for us, coaxing, doing their part to help us erase horror and remember beauty. It is after all "only" opera but here come to life as we seldom get to see and experience.

We need relief and get it in perfect measure next day as we assemble for lunch at Palacio Liria, guests of Carlos, Duke of Alba. Ever since our first meeting of the International Council lunch at Palacio Liria has become a tradition and what can be more wonderful than to be able to gaze with awe and admiration at the incredible artistic legacy it houses.

I never forget the first time I had the opportunity to visit Palacio Liria. We had come to Madrid on a visit organized by Save Venice in 2006 or thereabouts. Frederick Ilchman one of Save Venice Directors (today Chairman) and student of Prof David Rosand (one of the world's top

authorities on Venetian artists, in particular Titian) had been invited to co-curate a Tintoretto exhibit at the Prado. It had been several decades since last seen there and Frederick despite his young years was already being recognized as a world authority on Tintoretto and Venetian art. Following in the footsteps of Prof. Rosand. We are a group of perhaps twenty guests.

We are welcomed to the palace by a retainer and there are several others who accompany us as we climb the stairs to the reception rooms above. We walk into the first room. Frederick stops dead in his tracks. Stock still. WOW! He says, and proceeds to name every single painting, one by one, topic and artist following in sequence. Going from one room into the next as more "WOW"s are heard by all of us. Pepe who had been talking in Spanish to one of the retainers has to laugh to hear him say: "Pero QUIEN es esto chico?" Astounded by Frederick's encyclopedic knowledge. I miss Frederick today (now become Dr. Ilchman) but still enjoy roaming freely having though to resort to my reading glasses to help "fill all the gaps".

Lunch is delicious and delightful under splendid Eckhout tapestries in the dining room.

Soon we are on the move as the day lies full, ahead. To Toledo we now drive and soon we are visiting the Convento Santa Clara la Real. Wonderful amalgam of history dating from the end of the XIVth century when it became a convent for cloistered nuns. Typically it holds everything. Remains of older Moorish occupiers, horse shoe arches, Talavera tiles, a romantic patio redolent of laurel.

I am impatient though as the afternoon advances, the light softens and I am dying to get to the Cigarral de Menores. Extraordinary weekend retreat of Pili and Gregorio Marañon where we are being received for dinner and a recital of Zarzuela arias. Idyllic spot on a hillside just outside Toledo, the Cigarral was first owned by a cardinal Quiroga. In 1539 a clergy man, Jeronimo Miranda from the Toledo cathedral buys a segment of the property. Throughout the next centuries it changes hands several times. Abandoned during the war for independence in 1835 the Marañon family acquire the property in 1921 and lovingly restore and live it. Ordinary adjectives become clichés when one tries to describe it. Suffice it to say that El Greco stood (or sat) right there whilst painting his well known views of Toledo.

We too stand and gaze amid the lavender, the olive trees and above all the incessant throbbing of the cicadas from which it gets its name. A pristine, heavenly spot. Several generations of Marañons which adds that lovely family touch.

The singers take their turn as we sit, in full view of Toledo, glowing in

the distance. We too become history while fun and naughtiness now take over. Zarzuelas are just that: lighthearted entertainment. Under the most magnificent of skies as sun has set while daylight lingers. Dinner is served in another outside patio looking towards olive groves behind. Candles flicker all around. Darkness falls and we fall silent as conversation ebbs and we, content. Back to Madrid. Ours, the first bus. Silently. The second bus, Cigarral inspired....sings all the way to Madrid.



Monica Marianno

Saturday begins for us at 7p.m. How nice as impressions need their time to become memory.

Hop on our bus and off we go, back to the Teatro Real. A temperamental Diva we shall hear.

Angela Gheorghiu, "diva-esque" and in full command as she is there to dazzle. Which she does. With her companion, tenor Teodor Ilincai. The house adores. The pianist Ciprian Teodorascu also stems from Roumania. There is other body language here at work as well as musical too. From "gitana" to "romany" in twenty four hours! What fun.

Dinner will be at the home of Helena Revoredo. One more magical Madrid evening. In the garden. Under a patio pergola/tent. Cool the evening. Light the mood. All of us have gently and comfortably jelled together these days. Moments shared and conversation becomes effortless. Once again we are spoiled by the quality of the food, the flavor of the wines.

One can become addicted....

Helena's family too is present; sons, daughters, in-laws and it is sheer delight when Ciprian, pianist, brings his darling eight or ten year old daughter too. Sleepy she is and so the main course served, he does excuse himself and begs his leave to take her home to bed.

We come to Sunday and it is our last. A visit to the Real Academia de Bellas Arte de San Fernando. A place of learning and Museum. We are met by a Doña Mercedes, a Director of over twenty years. A beautiful elderly lady, absolutely enamored of her institution. She will guide us and with what passion. Every little detail is not too little for her.

She lingers on the golden sheen of the fabric on a Goya dress: La Tirana. She points out the silver gleam on the Marques de Villanueva's bodice. A friend of Goya's, startled, he looks up, as Goya captures him forever. At his desk, writing. An intimate moment revealed.

The Arcimboldo "Allegory of Spring" in all its excess. Two Zubaran "hijo" magnificent still lives: "Plate with Lemons" and "Agnus Dei." Her very favorite, the Louis-Michel Van Loo. "Venus, Mercury and Love". Never has skin appeared like this. Such pinks and whites. One wants to touch. Venus like no other.

Followed by a last, happy, boisterous almost, farewell luncheon.

First a lovely little violin concerto by teenage prodigy Ellinor D'Melon Moraguez. Born in Jamaica a mere eighteen years old.

I notice she had studied at Zakhar Bron Institute in Switzerland and played at the Tonhalle in Zürich! We HEARD her two years ago at that very concert I tell her since we had the good luck to sit with her

and her mother at table. I have never seen such display of talent as heard that day. A Recital by the students. Some were mere wisps of children. Eight, nine years old. Some even younger. I remember her as having likewise studied in Spain and being a bit older than most of the others. The eyes shine brightly, the skill and talent are outstanding and yet I am saddened to see this lovely young girl become so shockingly overweight. Oh dear, sweet Ellinor think of your heart, your knees, your joints, your multiple organs that must function well and reliably to enable you to show your brilliance, your skill for many, many, many years to come I silently beg. A grandmother I am and yet I dared not even hint...a word of caution...to the mother.

Joan Matabosch takes over, on fire. Relieved, one could sense, that once again the Teatro Real had come through with flying colors.

Entertain us he did feeding us insider, gossipy tales about Divas and their Tenors beginning from his Liceo days in Barcelona and soon had us all in stitches. My favorite about Montserrat Caballé who while rehearsing a Verdi opera at the Liceo was taken to task by the Maestro. He had been insisting on tempi of which she decidedly did NOT approve and so did NOT follow.

Madame Montserrat: I am the Maestro here and the tempi are these which I set. Joan tells us Montserrat has a rather high pitched voice with a little edge to it and out pipes, ever so sweetly: Chi le a detto questo, Maestro? VERDI???? with emphasis on the "di".

There comes the moment when at the end of all our gatherings Pepe, being our most senior member delivers final words of thanks and appreciation.

Where to begin?

I can say: Thank you Gregorio. I can say: Thank you Pili. I can say: Thank you: Helena.

Marisa, Ignacio, Joan.

I can add words and adjectives....Nothing is enough.

I say only:

DES-PAM-PA- NAN-TE !

What flair !

Opens wide his arms, rolls his eyes, shakes his head.

Savors the sound.

The Spanish section of the room erupts in laughter.

A word gone out of fashion.
Brought back to life.

Beatrice Esteve
Zürich, July 16, 2018

ADDENDUM

“Are there words enough in all of song to praise the pen?
Who else could bear the burden of bringing back the past
and preserving it thus as though with myrrh?
It has no ears with which to hear nor mouth to offer answers
and yet the pen at a single stroke at once does both:
observes and remembers.”

Translated by Peter Cole in “The Dream of the Poem”.

Despampanante. A word which is no longer in general use. Outdated.
Meaning glamorous, dazzling, beyond all words.
When Pepe was a young gallant, seventy five years ago it
was mainly used to describe exceptionally beautiful
young women.
At 93 he re-instates it.



Monica Marianno