



In Conversation

Martín Veiga

Department of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies, University College Cork

Laura Linares (translator and interviewer)

Department of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies, University College Cork

The pace of creation

We need to create a time capsule where life moves at a slower pace, a refuge from the frantic rhythm of day to day life. A time for reflection and inner thought, that benefits deeper levels of communication.

Q (GAL). Como afecta a idea de ‘contornos de cambio’ o teu traballo (en termos macro ou micro textuais), e que impacto ten vivir en tempos cambiantes na túa produción artística?

Q (EN). How does the idea of ‘environments of change’ affect your work (at either macro or micro levels), and how does living in changing times impact your creative production?

A (GAL). O mundo está en constante mutación, a vida cambia de maneira permanente e en moitos casos os procesos creativos responden a eses cambios de maneira directa, mentres que outras nin sequera é unha escolla consciente que eu faga como creador, senón que veñen dados por certos cambios ou certas transformacións sociais, vitais, etc. Resulta moi difícil resumir unha pregunta coma esta. Un exemplo destes ‘contornos de cambio’ sería o da revolución tecnolóxica, que obriga ao mundo a estar constantemente reinventándose e reformulándose, e aos individuos a seguiren ese paso un pouco incesante e interminábel de continuo cambio. Existe unha tiranía máis ou menos tácita da tecnoloxía segundo a cal parece que para estar no mundo temos que seguir o seu ritmo. Eu rexeito isto, estou frontalmente en contra da obriga de ter que seguir co avance tecnolóxico do mundo, nin sei onde nos ha levar. Isto parece regresivo: non defendo vivir na Idade Media nin nos Séculos Escuros, nin o regreso a un mundo rural escurantista, pero si que me resisto a aceptar esa ditadura constante de termos que darlle a benvinda cos brazos abertos a todos eses cambios. Non sei se como consecuencia disto, pensando nesta conversa sobre o cambio e a

transformación, non sei se por iso, ou por unha evolución da miña carreira creativa, cada vez, falando de poesía agora, cada vez interésame máis a poesía que se deu en chamar 'da meditación', que é unha liña poética moi ampla, con moitas ramificacións moi diferentes, tradicións diferentes..., que presenta a poesía como un proceso de reflexión, de pensamento, estético, e dalgunha forma eses procesos que son sobre todo interiores, para min fórmulanse como aspectos contraditorios ou opostos a esa revolución tecnolóxica da que falo. É unha especie de refuxio, de espazo para a reflexión, onde o tempo discorre con máis vagar. Poño o exemplo da revolución tecnolóxica, pero tamén poderíamos falar da transformación que o impacto brutal do capital, do capitalismo está tendo en todo. É a economía a que lidera, a que nos abre todos os camiños, que é algo ao que eu tamén me resisto; paréceme aberrante. A poesía da meditación, a actitude reflexiva respecto ao mundo axúdame a contrarrestar eses procesos de transformación tan precipitados que se están a producir nos últimos trinta ou corenta anos. Isto lévame preocupando un tempo, pero isto non quere dicir que eu sexa un tipo primitivo que non está en contacto co universo, senón que establezo certos límites e renuncio a estar en certos foros, en certas redes, malia o risco de ficar illado ou nas marxes de certas conversas. Asumo ese risco dende a crenza de que na marxe non se está mal de todo e para poder asumir certa distancia vital do continuo fluxo de novidades —malia gustarme estar informado. Penso moito nisto arredor da poesía porque eu, como comentei moitas veces, escribo en galego pero non vivo en contacto co meu idioma. Esta distancia, que pode ser problemática e que de feito xa o foi para moitos autores, que lles resultou prexudicial non estar en contacto directo co idioma, a min permitíume maior liberdade. E iso gústame.

Esta distancia, que non se produce só con respecto ao tecnolóxico senón tamén en máis facetas, é clave para o meu proceso creativo. Permíteme rescatar un miolo de tempo interior, de tempo mental, que é propio. E é aí onde podo pensar, onde xorde a escrita. É un tempo que se opón á vida real, á vida diaria que transcorre un pouco freneticamente. Hai que crear unha especie de cápsula do tempo, onde a vida ten que transcorrer un pouco máis de vagar porque senón é todo demasiado atropelado. Andamos moi ás présas, e iso non beneficia a comunicación, que atopa obstáculos. Certa comunicación precisa calma, un ritmo máis lento para que se produza. Nós somos profesores e sabemos que a comunicación ten que atopar o seu lugar, o seu ritmo. Non quere dicir isto que teñamos que ir vivir a un mosteiro ou a unha illa deserta, pero é imprescindible atopar eses espazos.

A (EN). The world is in constant mutation, life is forever-changing, and creative processes, in many cases, respond directly and consciously to these modifications. At times, however, my responses are not necessarily conscious decisions that I make as a creator, but

are rather triggered by social and life changes and transformations. It is very difficult to summarise a question such as this one in a few words. An illustrative example of the ‘environments of change’ is the technological revolution, which forces the world to be constantly reinventing and reformulating itself, and individuals to follow this incessant and never ending pace of constant change. There is a somewhat tacit tyranny of technology, according to which it seems that we must follow its pace in order to be in the world. I reject this. I am frontally opposed to the obligation to follow the global technological development and not even sure where it is taking us. This might seem regressive: I am not defending a return to the Middle Ages or the Galician *Séculos Escuros*, nor do I promote a regression to an obscurantist rural world, but I do resist accepting this perennial dictatorship of having to receive these transformations with open arms.

I am unsure of whether it is as a consequence of this personal position or as part of the evolution of my creative career as a poet, but as time goes by, I have become ever more interested in a poetry that has been called ‘of meditation’, a very broad poetic positioning, with many different ramifications which all present poetry as a process of reflection, of thought, that presents poetry as a process of reflection, of mainly inner processes, which for me are formulated as contradictory or opposed to this technological revolution I was mentioning. It is a kind of refuge, a space for reflection in which time moves more slowly. I have focused on the technological revolution, but we could also discuss the transformation that the brutal impact of capital, of capitalism, has on everything. Economic interests lead the change, opening all of our paths and routes, and I also resist that; in fact, it seems abhorrent to me. The poetry of meditation, the reflective attitude towards the world, helps me to counter these hurried processes of transformation of the past thirty or forty years. This has been a concern of mine for some time: again, this does not mean I am a primitive person disconnected from the universe, but I feel the need to establish certain limits and reject being in certain fora and networks that would interfere with my time to do other activities, even if I have to risk missing on conversations or being at the margins of certain exchanges. It is a risk that I take from the belief that life in the margins is not all that bad, as well as in order to get some distance from the constant stream of latest news—as much as I like being informed. I have thought much about this in relation to poetry, as I write in Galician but do not live in contact with my language. This distance, that can be problematic and has in fact been so for many authors, has given me more freedom, which I like.

This distance is key for my creative process: it is not only related to technology but also to other aspects of life. It allows me to rescue a little bit of inner time, of mental time, of a time that is mine. It is there that I can think, where writing begins. It is a time opposed to

‘real life’, to the frantic rhythm of day to day life. We need to create a sort of time capsule where life moves at a slower pace. Our lives are too frantic, and this speed does not benefit communication, it rather hinders it. Certain types of communication need patience, only happen at a slower pace. As teachers, we know that communication needs to find its place, its rhythm. We do not necessarily need to move to a desert island or go to a monastery, but it is essential that we find those spaces.

Q (GAL). Falas da relevancia que para ti ten a poesía da meditación e da necesidade de mudar o ritmo de vida, e no teu teu último traballo creativo, *Diario de Crosses Green*, hai moito de observación. Que importancia ten para ti a observación, sobre todo da contorna, nestes tempos de cambio?

Q (EN). You talk about the relevance of the poetry of meditation, of observing one’s environment and of changing our lives’ pace, and observation seems to be a key part of your latest creative work, *Diary of Crosses Green*. How important is observation (particularly of the environment) for you in these times of change?

A (GAL). A min, igual que sempre me interesou a poesía da meditación como etiqueta ampla, sempre me interesou o que en inglés se chama nature poetry ou landscape poetry, na que a vida natural acada un protagonismo central. Xa de neno interesábame a observación empírica, os paxaros, etc. Antes do *Diario de Crosses Green*, o meu libro *Ollos de Ámbar* (2005) utiliza a ollada como elemento central. O mundo que se expresaba naquel libro expresábase a través dunha ollada, a ollada da poesía. No *Diario de Crosses Green* isto acada unha importancia maior. O diario no sentido estrito da palabra está baseado na observación diaria, minuciosa, detallada dunha contorna moi específica. Unha precisión case topográfica desa observación: nalgúns casos invitación ao poético mais noutros precisión case notarial da realidade circundante que estaba aí.

*A ollada nese sentido... A cuestión do cambio, da transformación en *Diario de Crosses Green*ponse en funcionamento desde o primeiro poema no que se enuncia o que vai pasar, “estou nun balcón mirando o mundo”. Pero logoponse en marcha de maneira case sistemática. O punto de vista é case sempre o mesmo, desde o que se observa, e o mundo cambia, está en constante transformación. Utilizamos o río como metáfora do cambio, unha metáfora moi antiga, pero en realidade tamén é a vida mesma a que flúe, transcorre a diario e non só de xeito metafórico. Esta contradición entre a miña postura de observador e o cambio constante é un pouco o que mencionaba antes desa cápsula do tempo: observar o cambio. Inevitabelmente participo del, porque estou dentro da vida diaria, pero tamén o observo dende a distancia. O punto de vista é un pouco parecido, de observación da transformación da realidade en algo poético, de tradución da realidade. Hai tamén moito*

escrito sobre iso, a poesía como tradución da realidade. Traducir a poesía as sensacións que o mundo che comunica, que che transmite.

A (EN). In the same way that I have always been interested in the poetry of meditation in broad terms, I have also been interested in what is called nature or landscape poetry, in which natural life takes the centre stage. When I was a child, I was already interested in empirical observation: looking at the birds, other animals... Prior to *Diary of Crosses Green*, my book *Ollos de Ámbar* (2005) uses the idea of the gaze as the central element. The world in that book was expressed through a gaze, the gaze of poetry. This acquires even more importance in my latest work *Diary of Crosses Green*. The diary sections, strictly speaking, are based on the daily, rigorous, detailed observation of a very specific environment. There is an almost topographic precision in this observation. The idea of change, of transformation in *Crosses Green* performs itself, it starts on the first poem, which states what's going to happen. I am on my balcony, looking at the world: I observe, and the world changes, it is in constant transformation. We use the river as an old metaphor for change, but in reality life itself also flows, passing by every day, not only metaphorically. This contradiction between my position as an observer and constant change is what I was referring to when I mentioned the time capsule: observing the change. Taking part in it, inevitably, because I am part of life, but also observing it from a distance. That viewpoint, observing reality, transforming it into poetry is an act of translation in a way. Much has been written about it, poetry as a translation of reality. Translating the sensations that the world transmits, communicates, creates in you, into poetry.

Q (GAL). Falando de tradución, o *Diario de Crosses Green*, escrito orixinalmente en galego, acaba de saír en tradución ao inglés. Como experimentaches ese proceso, que non deixa de ser de cambio tamén?

Q (EN). Speaking of translation, the *Diary of Crosses Green*, originally published in Galician, has just been published in English translation. How did you experience that process, which is also a process of transformation?

A (GAL). *Diario de Crosses Green é o primeiro libro meu que se traduciu enteiro. Foi un proceso novo que me abriu os ollos, a través do cal eu aprendín moito da miña propia escrita. Tiven a sorte que Keith Payne é un excelente tradutor, poeta e escritor, e unha persoa cunha gran versatilidade e amplitude de rexistros lingüísticos en inglés. Eu deille toda a liberdade para as traducións, pero había cousas que lle preguntaba e que levaron a debates do proceso e á creación de distintas versións dalgúns versos ou pasaxes mentres afinabamos e buscabamos a solución final. Keith Payne foi quen de ser 'fiel' tanto á letra*

como ao espírito dos meus poemas; mantívose próximo aos poemas sen perder a creatividade e a imaxinación; é un tradutor moi imaxinativo. Mantivo un equilibrio extraordinario entre, digamos, as dúas obrigas. Entre a obriga da fidelidade e a obriga de crear algo que é diferente, que é seu, é propio. Iso é algo que me gustou moito, a transformación, a viaxe da miña voz, que era miña, ás traducións. Eu leo os meus textos, que son meus, e para min son todos meus. Non sei como os entenderá unha lectora allea, como percibirá a miña voz. É como se tivese máis voces na tradución de Keith, máis modulacións, tons diferentes... Eu leo a tradución de Keith e a música cambia moito. O cambio, esa distancia do meu poema á súa tradución foi un proceso realmente fascinante.

A (EN). *Diary of Crosses Green* is the first book of mine that has been translated in its entirety. This new process opened my eyes and led me to learn much about my own writing. I had the great luck of working with Keith Payne, who is an excellent translator, poet, writer and versatile person with a huge capacity to manage different linguistic registers in English. I gave him plenty of freedom for the translations, but I did ask him questions that developed into discussions of the process and the creation of different versions of specific lines or sections while we were tuning in, searching for the final solution. As a poet, he has a great sense of rhythm, and it was a great experience to see my voice travel and be transformed in the translations. It was fascinating to see how different his versions sound. Keith was able to be ‘faithful’ to the word and the spirit of the poems; he was able to stay close to the original while being creative and imaginative, in an extraordinary balancing act between the two core ‘tasks’ of the translator: loyalty to the source and the creation of a work that stands in its own right, that is also his work, his creation, in a way, as the translator. I wonder how the reader will understand the poems, how my voice is perceived in the translation. It feels like I have more voices in Keith’s translations than in my originals, more register modulations, different tones. I read Keith’s translation and the music is very different. That change, that distance from my poem to his translation, was a really fascinating process.