



Luis Humberto González

## A Prayer for OCTAVIO PAZ<sup>1</sup>

Aurelio Asiain\*

True conversation is rhythmic. No one knew that better than he did. When he talked, he punctuated his sentences with a gesture of his hand like someone throwing a coin in the air (heads or tails?), and when he listened, he moved his fingers as though counting syllables. Was he following the words of the person he was talking to or the course of his own thinking? Both at the same time, I'm sure. Because the dominant voice in the conversation was always, as is only natural, the voice of the host who had called us in, though one of his main virtues was knowing how to give other people the floor. He did it, not like a master of ceremonies who discretely withdraws and returns only to introduce whoever is next, but as an attentive, interested conversationalist, who participated passionately in discussions, and, in contrast to almost everyone else, listened no less intensely than he spoke.

He was interested in practically everything, but not in just anything, and the pedantry of the specialist bothered him as much as the vulgarity of the popularizer. He spent his life paying close attention to what was going on around him, but in his case that was not limited to what the newspapers propagated. A

television newscaster would barely finish reading a report when he was already hearing the rebuttal—a pertinent one, naturally—from a character out of Molière or Shakespeare. Or the maid, if it was relevant, because although he was an intellectual poet, he did not have his nose stuck in a book. He had little patience, therefore, for writers who lived in warehouses of portentous quotations, and he always insisted that—contrary to the postulates of an overwhelming current of contemporary thinking—poetry is above all oral, and talking about writing to refer to literary works was not only pedantic, but an error in judgment.

He was a prodigious reader, but the printed page was never more important to him than a girl passing in the street, a lizard running along a wall, the grass growing between two bricks. Books were a way to reality; the world, a presence at the center of dialogue; and poetry, a way of listening to the silence to which he always returned. That is why he, who by nine o'clock in the morning had already carefully reviewed a dozen newspapers and magazines, never went to bed without reading a poem. "They are my prayers," he used to say.

After the ritual minute of silence, what other way is there to keep faith with him but continuing the conversation? His words are our home; his voice, our air. ■■■

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