

Memories of Coyoacán

(Fragment)

by Adolfo Castañón



I was someone else and I am the same
I don't know if I was happy:
I walked by night
through the city of memory
The city sleeping
among its names
Early in the morning
I would go off to high school
Not the legendary patios
of San Ildefonso
It was called "Prepa 6"
(We had no idea
who Antonio Caso was)
The place: Coyoacán
The year: nineteen 68
The professors? There really
weren't any: just bureaucrats
and candidates (some political,
some for the mob or guerilla war)

journalists on the take
orthodox and heterodox
curcúbitas and hyperbolas
of the Church of the Tie
I don't know if I was happy:
I only know I stayed up late
I was neither myself nor anyone else
I was what was already passing
Outside the generation
paid its quota of blood
The bestial tide of youth
seeking democracy
with a ragged crutch
on the walls of time
flags of flesh and bone
slogans on the walls
songs on their lips
and flowers in their hair
all power to the imagination

Olympics and rock & roll
(In the distance the pyramids,
I mean the volcanoes
sent up smoke-signals
In the afternoons
the dazzled avenues
made indecisive
castles of sun)

Some read Marx and Marcuse
others Octavio Paz and Julio Cortázar
Some read *The Golden Bough*
I don't know if I was happy
between *The Marble Cliffs*
between *Orlando* and *Vision of Anáhuac*
Ladera este and *Les fleurs du mal*
while in the street they were shouting
Free All Political Prisoners
Times of confusion and hope.
High Times/Amour fou
(Invisible ivy
the music of the organ-grinder
bumpity-bumpity down the street)

The Apostle commanded us to try everything:
Acid peyote and karma
mushrooms and Enlightenment
the answer
blowing in the wind
Tuesday brother of flesh and blood
Wednesday calcinations
which way is the wind blowing?
Ask the watchman
Weatherman, Weatherman
Peyotaris: accelerated children
of time and synesthesia
old-fashioned and pedantic
supposedly, modern
daring and cosmopolitan
Plenty of movies for sure:
Bergman Buñuel Pasolini
Besides Zen Buddhism and Meditation
Yoga
Tarot & Tantra
Free love Kodak and spirituality
Putting down alcohol

praising sobriety
Voluntary labor
in the armies of pleasure
I don't remember the friends I made
—neither faces nor names —
sometimes
ghosts visit me
their voices and nicknames:
Che, Duckface, Dogbreath
Fátima, Magpie and Cronopio
Cavegirl, Goofy and the Ayrab
dancing the sarabande
spinning the merry-go-round Ayari, Polanco and Calac
Some became guerrillas and landed in prison
— why not death
for the adventurous heart?
Others fasted in monasteries
communal tofu, vegan cuisine
the rest fell victim
to family and employment
got married:
contra-dance:
got divorced
while bumpity-bumpity down the
streets
invisible ivy



organ-grinder music
 Some consulted
 Dr. Faust and others Falstaff
 I don't know if I was
 if I was already somebody else
 if I was still the same
 Free Love (of free verse) would baptize me
 I began to trip
 — eating up the atlases!
 how to cross the seas on a map?
 And the little voice asking and asking:
 are you happy are you the same
 who else spends sleepless nights
 to end up at dawn like some hairy
 Pantagruel
 seeking for battles feasts in the market?
 — Day and night I didn't sleep
 practicing absence
 bumpity-bumpity organ-grinder
 grafting the circus on a player piano
 invisible ivy
 (maybe I wasn't happy only blocked
 maybe I had to go on and on)
 Outside the generation paid
 its quota of blood
 taxes to disillusion
 We spoke of the moment
 and our present was already past: an illusion
 Our fathers and older brothers
 sought other musical scores
 in separations and flings
 they flew to Vienna but returned to Paris
 seeking Bangalore
 Tibet
 they didn't want to be puppets
 so they invented Punch and Judy
 watching TV
 I meanwhile
 Dreaming of another City
 I went walking
 stumbling
 over broken roots and half-buried legends
 To find my way I had to forget about
 the swamps
 volcanoes
 the plague and firing squad forgotten



Where was
 Moctezuma buried?
 I only remembered
 the ruins in dreams:
 the moon
 (The day:
 Burning stone
 Dark rainbow of memory:
 the night)
 A palimpsest
 of rocks superimposed: the city
 On the wall of time
 the adventurous heart
 Discovering rubble behind the glitter
 I have awakened I was saying
 I don't know if I know
 but sometimes my eyes
 are open in dream
 stumbling
 I went fugitive
 resembling the shadow
 of a dog along the wall
 I didn't know how to save so many roots
 much less how to get out of the pyramid:
 Secret fire
 Incandescent flower
 serpent in the light
 The serpent
 at rest



with open
eyes
In the crypt
the stone of light
the secret fire
eyes downcast
before the flames of the brazier
the corpse of Moctezuma
unburied drifting in a boat
through canals which today you cross as streets

"Zapata still has his boots on"
The echo of a cavalcade
gunshots far away
in the center of the Plaza
a student fell another centaur
— what dead horseman?
what sleeping knight?
bells toll far away
they have poisoned Benito Juárez
While I walked blindly
 stumbling
 in dreams
spelling out with my feet
looking with my footsteps
my eyes touching light
without a guide:
 the serpent made its nest
under the Cathedral
 the viper

was a spiral stair
and another
going down
 vault of luminous quarries
in the liquid night
 under the chiaroscuro
 rainbow of memory

Who am I? When did I forget my name?
When did my face shipwreck in the mirror?
If I was another if not the same
if like you...
The voice is a question:
word of light
firmament of the letter?

Joyful Trivium
Happy Cuadrivio
With rage and tasty science
Troubadour clown

I only remembered in dreams
I went among ruins and broken roots
while outside
the brothers of the fathers of the sons
were patiently chewing
the dry seeds of the newspaper
looking for the flavor of freedom

Translation John O. Simon

Photos by Dante Barrera.