



A Metaphorical Voyage

Housed in a Porfiriato-era building in the stately Roma neighborhood, the Museo Ramón López Velarde (Ramón López Velarde Museum) was conceived by its creators, Guillermo Sheridan and Hugo Hiriart (both poets themselves, of course), as a metaphorical museum to celebrate the world and poetry of Ramón López Velarde, who lived and died in these rooms.

Visiting it can become an act of initiation. Its preamble is meticulous: we enter by a side door, go up the stairs, turn to the right and admire the space dedicated to two other Mexican poets and writers, Salvador Novo and Efraín Huerta, whose personal libraries are housed here. It is inevitable to dissert a little about their differences in personality because it springs to mind: separated by a metaphysical line are their desks, pens, books and bookcases.

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Rubén Vázquez



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After exploring the reading room and consulting the library with its thousands of volumes, we retrace our steps and head again toward the stairway where a closed door awaits.

When it opens, we enter the archetype of what must have been a middle-class household of the city's early twentieth century, with its flat ceilings, furnished with objects like those that must have filled Ramón's rooms.

Here, with just a few objects, we slowly begin our approach to the poet: a trunk containing López Velarde's personal effects also includes clues about his mundane inclinations and his unrestrained eroticism: two women's garters, left there almost by mistake. The desk and the bookcase, indispensable proof of a life dedicated from a very early age to words. On the walls, portraits: of his mother and sister; of friends, also poets; and an image of the Sacred Heart, proof of his religious fervor. The forged iron headboard on the bed whose geometric forms remind you of the runes of power and wisdom. The quilt and bedspread, with the poet's initials embroidered on them, confirm his loving relationship with his mother and sister. The shoes under the bed make us think that he comes back to sleep in it every night. The household remedies and medicine chest on the nightstand, unable to save him from a deadly pneumonia contracted on one of his many walks through the city and probably aggravated by syphilis. On the hat stand, a black hat and coat, his uniform as an adult, reminds the visitor of the mourning López Velarde kept for his father from the age of 20 to his own death. A premature death at the age of 33, like Christ.

The trunk-suitcase above the wardrobe symbolizes the poet's pilgrimages between city and provinces, never seeing the fruition of his desire to have his own house. A desire that only

now, many years after his death, is realized. Since, as its creators say, this is the house that Ramón López Velarde never had because his memory resides here.

We have not been in the place very long and we feel we already know the poet. Only one object remains to be examined: the wardrobe.

The absolute protagonist of all Mexican bedrooms for years until they were replaced by built-in closets, more than just clothing and personal effects were kept in the wardrobe. Parts of our lives were also kept there. Secrets, hopes and dreams included. Whenever possible, you kept it like an old friend. Perhaps for that reason they chose the wardrobe in this room to initiate the metaphoric adventure.

Behind its doors, we will be victims of a surprise assault on reason that will only strip us of our incapacity to draw with words, of our incapacity to discover all the possible worlds that are liberated by a poet's pen.

THE POSSIBLE WORLDS

Novel and unusual are the precise adjectives to describe what happens then, when we face a series of apparently unrelated objects with no reference point in reason. Mirrors fringed in neon light, green, white and red, that return to us a thousand angles of ourselves that we did not know before; a clock without hands that leans in, almost saluting our approach; across from it, a piece of furniture in festive, childish colors that inside has two circles whose meanings oppose and meet each other; a chair that looks giant compared with the train that crosses its seat. The well, the receiver of fantasies and a place of predictions. The confessional, behind which we find the secret for overcoming the temptations of the flesh. Masks that return to us luminous images of a place which can no longer be the same. And, at bottom, the intangible lady of the black gloves...

But there is no cause for concern. We are entering into a stimulating imaginative game with the help of López Velarde's poetry, the identity card of every object displayed. And it all takes on meaning: his passions, his dualities, his losses, the reason he is one of Mexico's most admired poets.



Rubén Vázquez



Elsie Montiel



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*"Suddenly you come out to meet me,
resuscitated and with your black
gloves..." (I Honor you in Fright)
Dedicated to Fuensanta.*

No conventional museum could remit us to the innumerable meanings and imaginative experiences that a poet can with his pen. That is why this homage was conceived this way, like a metaphorical game that eludes the literal meaning of words and the objects that represent them and launch us into the world of a passionate poet who, in the words of Hiriart, "is capable of transfiguring in his interior chemistry the misery of existence into the clean crystal of verse."¹ Here, pleasure arrives together with our freedom to react before the weight of his poetry.

WHAT DO WE DISCOVER ABOUT RAMÓN LÓPEZ VELARDE?

That at 12 he set off on the rocky road of unfulfilled love. That he never married, but loved three women passionately and fervently, without avoiding the demands of his sex. That of the three, Josefa de los Ríos, better known as Fuensanta, eight years his senior and who died before him, is the best known by history. That his imperturbable religious fervor was only comparable with his unstained erotic temperament. That, loving his native Jerez, Zacatecas, he was irremediably drawn to Mexico City, which was only a reflection of a life always immersed in contradictions. That he foresaw that his life would be short.

That his education moved between the seminary and Law School. That he practiced law but from his teens knew that his life was irremediably paired with

words. That he wrote with mastery, lucidity and originality, cultivating poetry with the patience of a goldsmith.

That he labored in the choice of adjectives, to the point of leaving blank spaces in his poems to give himself time to find the exact word, the one that would interest or baffle the reader. That his second book of three, *Zozobra* (Anguish), was received by the critics as "the most intense, the most daring attempt to reveal the hidden soul of a man,"² and his most renowned poem, "Suave Patria" (Sweet Land), was celebrated for its "magnificent manufacture, its novel lyricism," and for exhibiting "a baroque elegance never before foretold in Mexican poetry."³

In summary, we discover enough for curiosity about his life and his poetry to last a very long time after visiting his house.

Let us recapitulate: in a world for which large museums require remarkable architects, spectacular buildings integrated into

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*"Sweet Land: your house is
still so vast that the train
rolling by seems only a
diminutive Christmas toy."
(Sweet Land)*

the landscape and collections of incalculable value—as though art needed luxurious clothing to exist—there is still room for a metaphorical museum, for a museum that bases its fame and fortune only on poetry, that unfinished human good that requires an attentive ear and a new convert every day to perpetuate itself. The trip through this museum will be brief or eternal, depending on the eye that looks at it and the gaze that discovers it. **MM**

Elsie Montiel

Editor

NOTES

¹ Hugo Hiriart, *Casa del Poeta. Museo Ramón López Velarde* (Mexico City: Casa del Poeta, 1991).

² Baltasar Dromundo, *Vida y pasión de Ramón López Velarde* (Mexico City: Editorial Guaranía, 1954), p. 75.

³ *Ibid.*

CASA DEL POETA. MUSEO RAMÓN LÓPEZ VELARDE
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OPEN TUESDAY TO FRIDAY, 10 A.M. TO 6 P.M.
SATURDAY, 11 A.M. TO 3 P.M.
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The museum houses the libraries of Efraín Huerta and Salvador Novo, made up of more than one thousand volumes which can be consulted during museum hours. School visits, book launches, lecture series and other cultural activities are also held. Another interesting space is the Las Hormigas Cafe Bar which hosts events and is open from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. on Saturdays.