

Subj: el poema es una chispa en el correo aleatónico
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Dionisio Cañas

THE FIGHT

We shall take the precautions of the ornithologist
One boxer blows apart the face of the other
One is black the other white

Two birds in balance two orchids
against the backdrop of a sticky and humid jungle
Two paintings two artists yet

One is the excess of blood and violence
the other is the beauty of some flowers and two birds
The main theme fixes our gaze

while on the secondary plane appear the jungle
and the fans stirred up by the two men fighting
Blood as sport the jungle as esthetics

The fans are waiting for one of the fighters
to fall soon beaten to the canvas
One is black the other white

A Black and a White Man is the title
George Bellows gave his painting of 1909
later he changed it to Both Members of This Club

The black boxer is winning and the painter
somehow had to amend the title
so as not to betray his inbred racism

Bellows sought an order in the classical figure
to create a contrast with the action and violence
(an America precise and bloody like its buildings)

Classical order and speed Blood and beauty
Two bodies two faces in a rectangle of light
And the spectators expecting only Death

Martin Johnson Heade tried far less
he painted different species of hummingbirds
but also knew how to apportion the violence

between the jungle backdrop and the fighting birds
both of the same species Heade
fixes his eye on the flowers and the birds

it's the same moment Bellows painted

but the result is much more luminous though the sky is dark
The open jungle facing a savage and anonymous crowd

Latin America as a savage and romantic backdrop
The American public before the Crash of 1929
Ghastly faces painted by a Goya journalist

A moment when the struggle is frozen
you and I, like the birds or the boxers
in a small apartment in New York

You and I suspended in a time without beauty
without palm trees or fans to watch us
in a muggy summer day in Manhattan

Our friends waiting for one of us to fall
The victory of a bird facing the jungle
The defeat of the black boxer by the white race

Orchids hummingbirds white boxer black boxer
both members of this club in which you and I one day
found ourselves sketched out by the words of the poem

The open wound is no longer an orchid
The blood on the face of the white boxer
The blood in the feathers of the hummingbirds

You and I paralyzed on this page
whose backdrop is a few years spent together
with the idea that love would never be

a few black strokes suspended in the white space
a fight of words sprinkled around like blood
on the face of the white boxer or the spit of the black

The beaks of birds wounding each other
It all started unexpectedly
in the darkest spot on this island

Time wove the canvas needed
for projecting the scenes so many times
repeated in the minds of those who love each other

But the spectators will see two birds two men fighting
and will not try to understand the cause or the outcome
of this ancient and futile discord

Light too overcomes men like blood
on the white face and the smooth skin
of the black man's legs (a copy of "The Gladiators"

by Borghese which is in the Louvre
maybe a boxer maybe a warrior
according to Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny's

book "Taste and Antiquity")

Actually what does it matter if they are the doings
of the ornithologist artist or the chronicler painter

they both tried to freeze a moment lost
Am I the poet painting our lives?

Ourselves less beautiful than some flowers and birds
less violent than a boxer tearing the other apart
since love hasn't always been behind each kiss

New York rises like a sticky and humid backdrop
before us who are two wings of the same Death
absurd rivals in a fight lost before it started

There are orchids in your small apartment
on 26th just around Lexington
Mine is the language of the black yours of the white

and words fly across the void in the bedroom
like blind birds in a tropical jungle
or the blood and spit of the boxers

Everything seems to have come apart suddenly
as if we'd taken Bellows' painting and Heade's painting
and torn them to pieces and thrown them on the rug

and couldn't tell
which is the boxers' blood
which is the backdrop scenario where the spectators

watch with amazement a battle of images
White leg black fist face stained with blood
a Brazilian jungle some clouds the humidity in New York

the steam above the plants or the steam from the sewers
You and I torn to pieces amid the birds
and the boxers not knowing which are your words

in English mine in Spanish The jungle the deserted city
A splendid confusion to start Spring with
A mirror shatters and its fragments

Reflect portions of your life and mine
Words shatter spattering the boxers' blood
the blood of the birds in the tropical jungle

your blood and my spit your orchids and my skin
your body and my wings your petals and my clouds your Death
and my Death Death: "We must treat the dead

like children, we must love them and respect them,
because they look at us from their dead minds
and in the dead also lives our Death"

The poem is a bird in the Manhattan sunrise
is a boxer lifting a fist stained with blood

a bird destroyed in the tropical air

the poem is the sky where you and I
are fighting pintlessly as words fight
in the void of the page Death turned into paper

Translated by: Orlando José Hernández
From: "El fin de las razas felices", 1987

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