

**Subj:** el poema es una chispa en el correo aleatónico  
**Date:** 4/29/99 10:55:09 AM Eastern Daylight Time  
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10<sup>11</sup>

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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Date: Thu, 29 Apr 1999 07:56:05 PDT  
Mime-Version: 1.0  
Content-type: text/plain