





JUAN LUIS LANDAETA

ROCA TARPEYA

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A
Alliteration

ROCA TARPEYA | JUAN LUIS LANDAETA
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A MAP FOR LOSS

In the lyrics of tango, a music genre that I always enjoy listening to, I have always been impressed by the use of precise geographical markers: names of streets, neighborhoods, houses. Tango outlines in words an imaginary map of Buenos Aires. Its lyrics trace a second shadow city in the air, magnetized by the gravity of melancholy, since the places mentioned are linked to lost loves and a youth so distant that it collides with the legendary. I have given careful thought to this geographic vocation in tango in the context of migration: many of the famous lyricists of this genre were children of emigrants. Perhaps, growing up so close to the acute sensation of having lost a country forever, they could not relate to their new city in a different way, they approached it as if it had always already been lost. To inhabit it, it seems they needed to summon a map made of sound.

Roca Tarpeya immediately brought to mind this characteristic of tango lyrics. Throughout its pages, Juan Luis Landaeta also carries out a kind of mapping, an alternate, discontinuous one, sometimes disjointed, of a city, Caracas, and a country, Venezuela. This book, like tango lyrics, is a map of sound.

Although the poems included in this volume are full of specific geographical references, these tend to be altered until they achieve a rarefied nature that does not allow us to fully cling to them. Throughout the book Landaeta seems to ask himself how

it is possible to narrate a violence that does not correspond to the categories we have historically created to describe it: wars, battles, revolutions. Despite the difficulty that this poses, it becomes necessary to tell it somehow, to integrate it into the symbolic. How can this be done? Landaeta builds a parallel, distorted universe that revolves around a hostile and monumental loss, but without describing it directly — instead he articulates it periphrastically, using a kind of left-handed logic.

His small hybrid texts, which undermine the limits between poetry and fiction, possess the insomniac power of the mythical. They function like short, incomplete fables. Incomplete insofar as they lack a moral lesson, insofar as they resist having any edifying quality. Perhaps because the world they describe lacks sufficient stability to have a determined ethical structure; perhaps because what has happened in that place has called into question what we usually consider ethical.

Roca Tarpeya is a book whose amazing lyrical power manages to fuse personal story and collective history, showcasing them through a distorted mirror. As its name indicates, the book orbits around the image of the Tarpeian Rock, that abrupt promontory by the Capitolium from which it was possible to see the Roman forum. In Caracas, the seventh hill of a mountain range in the southern part of the city was baptized with this name. During the 1950s, this hill was carved to build El Helicoide, an insanely large shopping center that was never finished, and that in subsequent years housed homeless people and became a center for drug trafficking and prostitution. During the 1980s, the building was used to house the Venezuelan intelligence services, and today it has become one of the most feared detention centers in Latin America. In its final expression, the Venezuelan Tarpeian Rock curiously coincided with the true origin of its namesake, which far from being an imprint of civilization (as is often thought with everything Greek and Roman), was an execution site where subjects considered undesirable by those in power were hurled to the ground.

The existence of this site, including its complex and significant history, is the axis of this book. What's more, the semantic instability of that space seems to set the tone for Landaeta's poems. The traditional linearity promised by their narrative structure is only betrayed over and over by the development of the text. The author revels in thwarting the reader's expectations and prefers, instead, to anchor the fragments in a series of disturbing and suggestive images.

These abrasive, ominous, and moving texts outline before our eyes the image of a place that has disappeared, even while it continues to exist. They seem to transcribe into words the symbolic chaos, the narrative disturbance, that a country leaves behind when it breaks.

Elisa Díaz Castelo



JUAN LUIS LANDAETA

ROCA TARPEYA

*Thus the shock of defiance in front of the lumberjack,
and the fright, a thousand times greater,
produced by the chainsaw.
To cut down and kill something that cannot run.*
MARGUERITE YOURCENAR, "Written in a Garden"

*The coach that brought Lenin back – wasn't it the Trojan Horse?
Some time ago, in Kuntsevo, I suddenly crossed myself
in front of an oak. It is obvious: what stirs up prayer
is not fear, but ecstasy.*
MARINA TSVIETÁIEVA, "Journals of the 1917 Revolution"

*You search in Rome for Rome? O traveler!
In Rome itself, there is no room for Rome,
a corpse is all its churches put on show,
the Aventine is its own mound and tomb.*
ROBERT LOWELL, "ROME", versión de "A Roma seppellada
en sus ruinas", de Francisco de Quevedo

*Tell King Mithridatis this:
it's extremely rare to come across anyone like his ancestor's companion,
that noble companion who wrote in the earth with his lance
those timely words that saved him: "Escape, Mithridatis."*
CONSTANTINO CAVAFIS, "Camino a Sinope",
versión de Edmund Keeley y Philip Sherrard

***Toda** verdad vigente está inconclusa.*

Every prevailing truth is still unfinished.

Sorprende constatar que el césped no ha crecido más de unos pocos centímetros. Lo mismo ocurre con las hierbas enanas que se insertaron en el estado Falcón, para la cancha de polo de aquel famoso banquero. Si te agachas, puedes palpar partes de la figura que quedó por completarse. Parece un párrafo enorme sometido a censura, incluyendo tachas y omisiones. Es algo que se debe saber: todo incendio es una narración, el comienzo de una frase dolorosa, pura.

It is surprising to confirm that the grass hasn't grown but a few inches. The same happens with the dwarf weeds that were taken to Falcón State, transplanted into the polo ground of that famous banker. If you bend down, you can still touch parts of the figure that was left incomplete. It looks like an enormous paragraph cut down by censorship, including crossed-out passages and omissions. This is something that must be known: every fire is a narration, the beginning of a painful, pure sentence.