

Some Clarifications

y otros poemas



JAVIER O. HUERTA

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by

Javier O. Huerta



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*As to myself, I find it absolutely impossible to produce a
work on this subject that shall be any thing like com-
plete.*

*Joseph Priestley, Experiments and Observations on Different Kinds
of Air*

Todo poema é feito de ar.

Ferreira Gullar

a mi amá

Advertisement

The majority (if not all) of the poems in this collection are to be considered as imitations. No, they are more modest than that; they are experiments in the act of imitating. They were written with the chief purpose of ascertaining whether the poet could be removed from the center of the creative act. Readers accustomed to the adventurous language of many contemporary poets may find these poems to be too unoriginal and may even describe them as derivative. “I expected a profound breath,” they may say, “but found only a lazy yawn.” No word could be more insulting for a poet than *derivative*, but the author reminds his readers that the derivative nature of his poems is intentional. He intended to write poems derived from another source other than himself. Many of the poems borrow from more than one source, and many of the poems imitate other imitations. The problem is not that the poems are derivative but that they are *intentionally* derivative. Intention resituates the poet at the center of creation. The author offers this collection as nothing more than a record of his early attempts towards a poetics of modesty.

Readers may also demand an explanation for the bilingual nature of the poetry. (Some monolingual readers may even ask—as several friends of the author who only read in English or in Spanish already have—whether they can acquire a copy of the book at half-price.) Although he finds satisfaction in the linguistic symmetry, the author never intended for half of the poems to be in English and the other half to be in Spanish. The choice of language actually relates to the author’s fear that he would be accused of theft because of excessive imitation. In order to guard himself against such a charge, he attempt-

ed to conceal the sources for poems by writing imitations of English poems in Spanish and vice versa. No other special reason exists for why a poem written in one language could not have been written in the second language. For instance, “Lost Pieces” is the author’s English imitation of one of his Spanish poems. He, for some reason or another, decided to include the English imitation and exclude the Spanish original. Since “Lost Pieces” is the first poem, the collection opens with a self-imitation. The reader would be right to consider such an opening immodest.

The author insists that the poem entitled “Ink all over my Hands” is the only poem in the collection that should not be considered a direct imitation. It arose out of conversation with a close friend who was somewhat irrationally attached to the letters of John Keats.

Some readers may disapprove of what they interpret as inauthentic feelings resulting from the act of imitation. “The laughter in these poems,” they may say, “is but a trick of mirrors.” They may claim that the teardrops are the result not of sadness but of the application of eye drops. Worse: “Nowhere in these poems does the word *horizon* appear nor—what is even more unforgivable—does the word *horizonte*.” The author will not respond to any complaints of this type. Let the reader be satisfied with what is on the page.

Readers of superior judgment may further fault this collection for failing—as many first books do—to provide a satisfactory organizational structure. Feeling discomfort at the idea of a miscellany, readers may blame the author’s wrong-headed obsession with imitation for his apparent disregard for “architecture.” In anticipation to such a complaint, the author provides the following response:

My poetry is based on the mispronunciation of my name: *Javier* as *have air*. (I should say “a mispronunciation” because, although I find *have air* to be the most intriguing, people mispronounce my name in many different ways. My personal favorite is *heavier* because it describes me so well. Other acceptable mispronunciations: *heavy air*, *heave air*, *hey bear*, *he be heir?*, *hobby air*, *j-bear*, *jay beer*, *jay be err*, *ha be a*). In “Es suficiente decirlo,” I write, “hay más música en ese nombre que en todas las operas y sinfonías.” The celebration of my

first name emphasizes the importance of being addressed by one's name. To have a name is to have air. This collection takes air, all of its different types, as its unifying principle. I welcome you, reader, to take notice of kites, hurricanes, hot air balloons, electric fans, hiccups, howls, windshields, candles, eagles, angels, whirlwinds, umbrellas, prophecies, clouds, trench coats, lips, veils, jokes, and tomorrows.

Readers may think that the Spanish poem to which the author refers in his response is an obvious imitation of Whitman's celebration of the self, but the author describes "Es suficiente decirlo" as a *no more modest than immodest* imitation of Tomaz Salamun's imitations of Whitman.

Let readers acknowledge that they enter the pages of this book forewarned. If at any time the reader abandons the journey and turns to the author with the accusation of "you have stolen my enjoyment," the author (in an imitation of his mother) will point his finger in the reader's face and say, "Te lo advertí."