



## 32 HYAM PLUTZIK POEMS: DEEP IN THE THROAT – KELLY MARTINEZ-GRANDAL

### I. A perfect stranger.

Before Edward Moran contacted me two months ago to write this review, I knew nothing about Hyam Plutzik. He was, for me, a perfect stranger. His name does not appear in the constellation of national poets and, anyway, one does not know all the poets. Pretending otherwise is an act of frivolity. One is simply glad when a new poet arrives, to put it with Hanni Ossot, like love or fever.

The book, *32 poems / 32 poems*, is a bilingual collection compiled and edited by George Henson and published by Suburbano Editores; fourteen writer-translators residing in the United States who took on the task of bringing several Plutzik poems into Spanish for the first time. It features a foreword by Richard Blanco and an introductory note from the editor. The result is a space of transits and emigrations, because translating is also making a language find ways to adapt to a new territory; that a work finds its place among new readers.

Furthermore, I learned that Plutzik was born in Brooklyn in 1911 and that he was the son of newly arrived Jewish emigrants from what is now Belarus; who did not speak English until he entered primary school and his childhood developed between the musicalities of Hebrew and Yiddish, an apprehension of the world - to the extent that language stands as an organizer of codes and creator of realities - from one place another. I will not expand on his biography. Suffice it to say that he fought in WWII, was a professor in the English Department at the University of Rochester, a Pulitzer finalist, and that he died at the age of fifty. He had no time to follow or arrive. He became a cult poet; one of those names that are pronounced like a spell and that create, among those who know him, a secret brotherhood. From the effort to expand it,

### II. The word closest to silence.

We are used to bilingual books in which the voice of a single translator serves as a sieve for an author's work. With this we stay, we are faithful to it. The poems of Ajmátova translated by María Fernanda

Palacios or Whitman translated by Borges will always be a beacon for me. It is difficult for me to conceive of another Akhmatova or another Whitman, a comfort trap, since every work accepts a more or less wide range of readings and interpretations. What happens, then, when there are several translators and what happens in the book is a choral song? It happens that one approaches the text in many ways, each with a different landscape; that you have a solid sense of how complex a poet's visions can be. Fine editorial strategy, the selection of fourteen voices draw Plutzik's work in Spanish and allow the reader not to stick to a single glance, but to understand the plasticity and plurality of poetry itself. And it also happens that one begins to recognize the particular characteristics of the person who translates: the beautiful liquidity of José A. Villar-Portela does not resemble the earthly forcefulness of Pedro Medina, the certain gloominess of Gastón Virkel or the sober meticulousness of Ximena Gómez and George Franklin, signs also present in the works of each of these writers. At the same time, as if by magic, all translations are Plutzik. The reader who masters both languages will know that images, meanings and rhythms are maintained; an intact balance between the voice of others and your own voice.

I said approach the text. It is true, the work of Plutzik is not reached, not in the first readings. If anything, it surrounds you. The attitude in front of it is one of attention and listening, like someone deciphering the messages of an oracle because it is, in fact, oracular poetry. *Seventy-seven traitors will block the way / And those who love you will be few but stronger*. Close to mysticism and metaphysics, his bet does not escape the Hebrew notion of the word not as a mere sign or content, but as a fact in itself. One that also challenges us; that inaugurates in us a fundamental conscience about the meaning of our existence. I have seen the wound that matter causes in space / *The cavity in the empty page of the white paper*.

Synthetic, precise, pure, his poetry is, above all, a sober and elegant architecture that is also repeated in the construction of the book, in the intelligent selection made by George Henson and in the cleanliness of the design. A poetry that is difficult to read because there are no walking sticks that can be used to climb the mountain. Plutzik's poetics does not appeal to emotion and neither to the sound effect of language. Pure image, power word, what remains here is to go up to full lung and body; or assume that we will be in front of the sphinx, knowing that the monster will ask questions and extend its leg just before devouring us. What remains is joy because, deep down, we almost understand.

In his report for the 1960 Pulitzer Prize, in which Plutzik was a finalist, Alfred Kreymsbourg stated that, although he was not a musical poet like his contemporaries, he made up for the strength and depth of his writing and the power of his visions. and his personality. It is true, it is not Ginsberg howling, but - and with all due respect to Kreymsbourg - I would not say that there is no musicality in Plutzik's work. In the manner of *kaddish*, that beautiful prayer with which the Jews say goodbye to the dead, his poetry has the ability to adapt to the melody of the one who reads and translations prove it, since *every internal or external flame that shines is random*. And, although as Henson points out, his concerns were those of a man of his time — alienation, modernity, war, the need to return to nature — we will not find here a desperate cry but *the word closest to silence*.

Calm lake, in those words we see our immanent reflection. And is it not, perhaps, the ultimate goal of poetry? Beyond forms, rhythms, traditions, is it not his will to face the immeasurable of existence? 32 poems, 32 translations, a “little book” remind us of it. They come from a necessary poet, one we finally meet. They come from the *torment of beauty deep in the throat*.

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