The Family, Huatabampo, 2003

It was a bad year. Everyone was comparing
my old, childhood hero to a new
Kobie. Our blood we believed
flowed red, blue and—wow—white
and everywhere the symbol of empire
was on the windows of people who loved
their children. I wake in México having loved
in my sleep whom I cannot remember. A new
sunshine in opaque glass. In the living room, an empire
of small rod-iron angels; the mothers compare
each baby-breath halo, the clothing they make for white
harmless solders. For a son’s confirmation. For Dios believed
in the duty of the hands. Be. Lived.
Children scurrying in the kitchen; the parents’ hands rest on the love
shaped thighs; the grandparents presiding; and the elder, white
and tired, tottering between chair and bathroom, comparing
each of his steps. The space stained with TV green from the new
flashing lights and scatter. My people are flexing their empire.

The kids ask me if they’ll bomb my house; empirically it makes sense, but it’s impossible. I believe
in words I have heard and forget. A new
aroma calms this world: Carne Asada. I’ll love
the dances, they say, pointing to a room and I compare
the paint peeling at the entrance, bright green versus white.

Next day the music is pounding, the family unchanged. Figures in white
sweats dance. A room through the window: wooden floored, mirrored, an empire
of shifts, bends, turns, and leglifs. Each girl comparing
the others’ rhythm. Paloma, who makes angels, believes
in the endurance of thighs. She yells for pace. “Troops, make love
in the air!” Her father tells me to go see them, a new
beginning in the spandex of the newly twenty. This dance could make someone, could white-wash any news, could paint a love for crumbling buildings. Later, an empire of eyelashes surrounds us, reaching; I believe I can't talk, Spanish broken when nervous. I compare their walk with a more desperate fleeing: odd new empire white in my mind, superimposed, glistening. I do not want to believe. Through the windows of the town, love peeks out and compares.

Aaron Zaritzky

Crítica

Zaritzky masterfully uses a traditional sestina form to construct various images re-using the same language to narrate and create contrasting images both of the United States and Northern Mexico. In many occasions, the expression reminds us of baroque poetry with intense use of hyperbole, hyperbaton and enjambment.

The two key points to understand this narration are given in the title- the place and time. The year 2003 indicates a period where US troops are being mobilized into the Middle East and yet our poetic subject, realizing that social condition at home, finds himself in a completely different juxtaposed space- the small Mexican town. The poem will then narrated from the perspective of US foreigners and their visionary, exotic and postmodern encounters in this small town of Huatabampo, Sonora.

Zaritzky will rely on six key words which will convey both images and emotions: compare, new, believe, white, empire and love. These will be reconfigured into noun, verb, adjective and adverbial counterparts to demonstrate the delight with language that has been attributed the production of postmodernism. This contemporary style is also evident in the clashing imagery of the provincial elements describing the lifestyle in Huatabampo and the co-existence of television, white spandex, pounding music and aerobics which indicate the cultural influence from the “empire” (read United States).

Although some critics have considered the sestina a mere poetic exercise, Zaritzky’s poem has challenged that conception by conveying images of the Other and contextualizing it to create a social discourse where two worlds, so near, co-exist and yet are so different.

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