

The *Eros* of Memory

Rafael Argullol

... Let us situate ourselves vis-à-vis the judge that affects each of our hours and that we call 'memory'. Memory is a law-court in permanent session but it is arbitrary: it hands down gratuitous reward and generous punishment. Whole years of our existence remain buried under the weighty stones of oblivion and, in contrast, dazzling deeply rooted moments rise to the surface. The peculiarity of this inner court is its utter amorality. It does not act in accordance with codes or established moral laws, not is it founded on any ethical values, whether positive or negative. Of course it cannot be said that it is unconnected with consciousness, but it acts, so to speak, according to the *instinct of consciousness*.

Just as this instinct operates in the fabric of time, memory brings to the surface the critical peaks of our lives and weaves them into our present. No matter that those critical peaks seem to be drowned forever in the oceans of routine; they always end up coming out on top, even against our will. When those eyes, that skin, that sound, that perfume come back to us, it is useless to resist by appealing to a so-called living precedence that may promise to shut them out.

As for the *instinct of consciousness*, the memory constructs a secret story of our life that diverges from, or even contradicts, the official story we try to legitimize, not only to the external world but also in our own personal world. And this secret story is always unsettling, subversive and, in the only possible sense of the word, true.

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So how is it composed, this mysterious story that we keep in a secret place deep within ourselves and only gain access to via the oblique sincerity of remembering? Initially we note that it has nothing to do with the normative time imposed by our day-to-day life. This perception contradicts convictions that are deeply rooted in our mind. We are used to accepting that we are part of cumulative, linear time that springs from a beginning and is directed towards an end. The biological reasons that convince us of this combine with others that are cultural and that decide a certain

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evolution of collective and individual destinies. This is how we form our image of time as an irreversible *continuum* where 'everlasting returns', or even dislocations, have no place. We are subject to the clock, the calendar and the law. . . .

However, it is paradoxical that we are simultaneously able to observe that there is within us *another* time that configures us in a radically different way. A time that is alien to any kind of linearity, that is unbridled and chaotic, that sweeps wildly on and seizes our minds in its talons. That other time, in which we recognize the secret story of our life, does not accept the image of a *continuum*, but instead appears in violent discontinuities, abrupt leaps forward and back that attack the commonly assumed notion of becoming. We do not understand its workings, but we grasp its presence in the shape of moments that twine around the tree of our reason, offering us intensely flavoured fruit.

In our consciousness the superior nature of these moments compared with normative time, which we artificially obey, lies in their force and their freedom. They come to us freely and whisper of supreme power. Even when we would like to – as is sometimes the case – we cannot escape them, because they represent, not the best or worst of ourselves, but what has left an indelible imprint on our identity. Through the echo we want to return again and again to the original sound, following the receding ripples, we want to re-create the moment when the stone hit the water's surface. In our secret story each of these moments encloses a self-sufficient world that is constantly changing.

In a way they are about our personal myth, our *golden age*, though, far from being understood in an Arcadian sense, this golden age implies a special depth more than any other characteristic, a wound on the skin of consciousness that does not heal. This *golden age* does not tell us about our happy days, nor does it usher us into harmonious prospects, but via an infinitely more significant vision it plunges us into abysses where the essential moments of our existence gleam, with no obstacles or attachments, the moments that, because of their importance, might be called *golden moments*.

Poetry is largely constructed around their evocation. That is probably one of poetry's most significant features compared with other literary fields that attempt to reconstruct the historicity of time through narrative artifices. This can be clearly seen in the fiction of the traditional novel and the hypothetical reality retrieved in autobiographical writing and 'memoirs'. In all these instances the linear model of time predominates. But true poetics does not lie in form or subject, but in a temporal treatment of human experience which turns its back on that model and focuses on certain areas whose special light throws into darkness vast forgotten regions. Poetry verbalizes segments of experience that are floating in the void and transforms them into living universes.

However, as far as verbal expression is concerned, poetry tries to reproduce only what absolutely cannot be reproduced because it belongs to the mythical existence, the secret story, of every human being. Still this is the best pointer in order to observe what is common and communicable: poetry refers to what comes back again and again, beyond changes in eras and cultures. It is a circuit that goes round and round on itself.

The scenario that poetry attempts to show is presided over by *eros*. I think this

kind of statement is justified only if we accept the hypothesis that the essential feature of the erotic is radical modification of time. *Eros* illuminates our golden moments and symmetrically they weave through our erotic constellation. This requires a sort of double birth through which the force of a moment, indispensable as action, is even greater if it manages to cut through the filter of evocation. The erotic implies desire and power, but they survive only if they can vault the hurdle of memory.

Tensely awaiting a certain event, caressing a body, contemplating something lovely or terrible, these only manage to get absorbed into our mythical space if they remain and grow in our memory.

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There are no golden ideas in a supra-sensory world, but *golden moments* that belong to our sensory world. This belief definitely takes me away from Plato's view but still approximates to a certain Platonic atmosphere where the erotic is the motor driving towards truth, where what we call reality is pure phantasmagoria and where, provocatively, knowing is remembering. As regards this last premise, I would not hesitate to say that knowing is remembering if knowing is understood, not as the progress of scientific logic, but as that other knowledge that essentially agrees to know itself and has been expressed since the beginning of time in phrases such as 'know thyself' or, the one which I prefer: 'know your *daimon*'.

Knowing is remembering what we are. Not, as Plato thought, what we were when our soul was part of the divine world of ideas, but what we are and what Goethe summarized so well in the final line of a poem entitled *Daimon*: 'You must be thus, you cannot escape yourself'. In many ways we may try to escape ourselves and that is a therapeutic task, but there is one fundamental way in which we cannot: we are unable to get away from our memory. Consequently, knowing is re-reading our secret, constantly returning to those *golden moments*, since they are our points of escape towards the enigma and the illuminations that light up our destiny.

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The radical turn of temporal consciousness, the epiphany of the *other* time that involves the erotic, is marked by the feeling of attraction. And we all subscribe to this obvious fact: *eros* is attraction. It is not enough that something attracts us, it must also continue to attract us in our present moment. What has disappeared has become part of the non-existent, although one day we did experience it. Only what constantly returns encourages us to know ourselves.

This is the meaning of erotic attraction. The body we loved, the vision that conquered us, the giddy feeling that transported us or the music that overwhelmed our spirit: in one or other of those situations a special magnetism acted on us. But is it still active? We can only talk about erotic attraction when the magnet carries on exerting its effect over the enormous distances of forgetting. However, what we feel is then no longer only the magnetism of that body, that vision, the giddiness, the music. We feel our contact with the enigma. What we perceive, always with a certain

surprise, is an enigmatic force that overflows the containing walls of our life and draws us towards a different region, producing a divide between what remains anchored in the day-to-day and what draws us into the depths of ourselves.

This is why I think it is correct to say that desire for the other is a search for oneself. But the opposite is true as well: knowing oneself is not a solipsistic exercise but rather a turn towards an investigation that contains the danger and fascination of the unknown. It is, in the etymological sense, the *à-venir* (still to come), an adventure that gives us the chance to conquer a world, while running the risk of failure. And it is precisely in the realization, maybe even the culmination, of that adventure that desire for the other and knowledge of self are juxtaposed in a magical feeling of unity: that exclusive sense which, taking in the illusion that life's divisions have disappeared, makes us part of a higher unity, suggesting that we have penetrated to the heart of the enigma.

Ecstatic, mystical or aesthetic journeys are aspects of that adventure. They are manifestations of the erotic. They are the true spiritual expressions of human beings' highest creative ability. Nevertheless, as in all spiritual expression, the area of incubation and reception is sensory: spirituality is the state we reach when the bow of sensuality is drawn to its greatest degree of tension. The language that allows us to apprehend and communicate the ecstatic is always sensory. We have only to examine the nature of the great mystical or 'sacred'-related descriptions. The body is at their centre. The body is their centre.

In their official story human beings are after security, while in their secret story they are chasing moments – it would be wiser to say that *certain* human beings feel that the greater part of their life is spent expressing the erotic in different ways. In the end we may wonder if the two stories can come together at a certain point. In other words, apart from its evocative function, can chasing moments be a choice, a disposition, an attitude to existence?

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The response in absolute terms must necessarily be 'no', if we take into account the unpredictable, gratuitous way in which *eros* intervenes. Nevertheless, in a certain sense it may be 'yes'. Acknowledging that the secret story is the true story of our life and that the other time is the authentic time implies a process of learning, an initiation – or rather, the initiation. In accordance with that, human beings may opt for the type of existence that puts them in a situation of greater receptivity compared with what they foresaw. One could then speak of a predisposition that implies a certain nature and even a certain conception of the world. However, access to this type of 'erotic stage' would not mean, as for Kierkegaard, an eminently contemplative position, nor of course a springboard for the stage of the leap towards faith, but the inclination to undertake that voyage of desire during which people wish to reconcile the sensual and the spiritual. The moment-hunter is an apprentice of the imagination who aspires to become a master of memory.

And so *Eros* implies attraction, but above all *eros* is the *great transformer* of time. Since the beginnings of culture the most serious game humans have played is asking questions about the nature of the erotic. Here is my answer: it is the transfiguration

of human time. When we live on the margins of its influence, we live in a *bronze age*, firmly attached to the chain of time, since all our actions are condemned to oblivion. But it is only under its influence that our golden moments, our golden age, are woven, the age that nourishes the memory and so gives truth to life.

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