

‘Primavera en Eaton Hastings’: an English translation

A short introduction

Anyone who has read Martin Murphy’s article ‘The exiles of Eaton Hastings’ on this web-site will have been introduced to the story of the exile poet Pedro Garfías and his long poem ‘Primavera en Eaton Hastings’. The poem was written in the period April to May 1939 while Garfías was living as a guest of Gavin Henderson, second Lord Faringdon, in what was known as the Basque House in Buscot Park, where the Basque children evacuees had been living shortly before. After its first publication in Mexico in 1941, the poem was hailed by the distinguished critic Dámaso Alonso as ‘the finest work of poetry to emerge from the republican diaspora’. It can conveniently be found in a short anthology of Garfías’s poetry published by UNAM, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, in 2010. This anthology, which also includes some background on Garfías and a ‘poetic portrait’ of him by his fellow poet and exile Juan Regano, is available at the web address

<http://www.materialdelectura.unam.mx/images/stories/pdf5/pedro-garfias-88.pdf>

The anthology also includes the poem ‘Between Spain and Mexico’ written by Garfías on the steamer Sinaia carrying him and many other Republicans into more permanent exile in Mexico.

Martin Murphy, in his article, gives some extracts from the poem translated into English, but I’ve been unable to find a complete English translation and so decided to try it myself. Martin has very kindly read my translation through and made many helpful corrections and suggestions, but I am of course responsible for any remaining errors.

Garfías subtitles the work ‘A bucolic poem with interludes of weeping’. It consists of twenty linked but independent poems, which I’ll refer to as the *stanzas* and follow the author’s Roman numbering, I to XX, and two *Interludes*. The order of the poem is: stanzas I to VII, First Interlude, stanzas VIII to XIV, Second Interlude, stanzas XV to XX. The Interludes have separate titles: the first is ‘Lamentation on an Island’ and, while there is an island in the lake at Buscot Park which would have been familiar to Garfías, the island of the poem is also Britain, where the poet is exiled; the second is ‘Night with Stars’ – the poet reflects on the different night sky in Britain as compared to Spain. The poet’s voice is strikingly different between the stanzas and the Interludes. In the stanzas, written in a bucolic or pastoral mode with an emphasis on green landscape and woodland, the voice is more controlled, regretting the loss of a beloved other, a ‘you’ whose identify varies. In the interludes of weeping, the poet is more distraught and mourns the painful loss, very specifically, of Spain. The two voices converge in stanza XX, where the controlled pastoral voice merges with the desperate voice in a final cry for Spain. There is a critical essay on the poem by Alejandra (Sandra) Barriales-Bouche in the *Hispanic Review*, which one can find on line at the web address

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27668836?seq=1>

or by googling ‘La dimension etica de la poesia en el exilio: Primavera en Eaton Hastings de Pedro Garfias’, which makes more of these ‘two voices’.

The poem is firmly rooted in space – the English parkland contrasted with the wilder landscape of Spain – and in time – the beginning of the exile from the fallen Republic. It is a remarkable composition, and I hope this translation will make it more widely available.

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Oxford
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SPRING IN EATON HASTINGS
(A bucolic poem with interludes of weeping)

I

Because I feel you far away
and your absence inhabits my deserted solitudes,
how deep this afternoon has spilled over
the green immortal fields.

Already winter has cast its old skin
on the fresh branches of the trees
and slender-waisted Spring is advancing
in short steps across the meadow.

Over the quiet of the gentle slope
the breeze rolls in silent waves
and the violet points its murmur
at the foot of the oak and the grave holm oak.

In the still waters of the lake
clouds and evening lights drop anchor
and the forest spreads its loose nets
to the prodigious flight of your image.

The blue sun with careful hands
weaves its mist and rays, in noble art,
until it leaves your colour, beloved,
on the pure skin of the evening.

I look at you lying on the grass,
the water green and bright green your flesh,
your tumbling hair rustling
and the wood shaking with your laughter.

Around your narrow wrists
tiny bracelets catch the light
and green stems and branches
embrace your powerful arms.

Your voice and the chattering birds
pluck the fine strings of silence;
the sky in its fullness opens its veins
of warm, red blood
and my heart's sorrow rises

like a giant from a nest of shadows!

II

Deep in my breast
clear solitude is growing
slowly and surely... There is light deep within me
and I can see my blood come and go
and I can see my heart... Outside
the nights throng,
desolate and sleep-walking.
An outburst of disturbed silences
creeps and ripples...
Lord who made the poem and the poppy
make the walls of my breast strong,
hard as the glass in this window.

III

To walk with you in perfect solitude,
with blue hills beyond, between
benevolent watchful trees,
in step, slow and gentle.

To walk with you in quiet solitude
through a transparent silence
brow raised to the sun that rises
proud of the vigour of its flight.

To walk with you
on the soft round surface of the earth
with persevering and noble slowness...
with you and your memory and your hope.

IV

My eyelids were heavy with sweet sorrow.
A tumult of images with shreds of dreams
surfaced in my consciousness... Perhaps it was a clear day:
but a final down of shadows enveloped me.

The heart of the world was beating in my ear.
In the little night of my closed eyes
were pale stars and a round moon;
shadows of slow blue veils ran through it.

A murmur of waters and a murmur of pines
intertwined as docile as two new branches;
a thin breeze passed between the two
and soaked their lips in twin tenderness.

I saw you close, drawn in the air,
the colour of night, like her without relief.
My arms looked for you like rushing rivers
Behind the windows the day was bubbling.

V

I can people you, my solitude,
just as I can make rocks and trees
of these dark people who surround me.
How else can I carry on my shoulders
absence? The agile wind knows me
and helps me in my work: every day
I draw from the mountains our clear sky,
I plant in the lake our golden threshing floor
and I slowly empty
the wide river of swift current...
There where the pines and the poplars,
the holm oak and the solid oak were
is the olive tree of silvery green.
And over the cultivated lawn
The corn triumphs.
The sun high above, tiring
the air with its wings,
at the zenith its flight stopped.

How her grace and purity
burn my eyes with her light ... it will not dream it,
the clumsy hand that took away my white Andalusia.

VI

Today when I carry my fields in my eyes
and I only need to look at them to see them grow,
I feel your call, meadows of green age,
I hear your word, trees of a hundred years,
and I look for you uselessly through the afternoon.
Neither the flight of the trills nor the song of the branches
shall break the hard silence of my mouth.
If I were to stand still, like this good oak,
your birds would come to nest in my brow,
your waters would come to lap my roots,
and I would still see, in its intact whiteness,
asleep perhaps, the Spain that I have lost.

VII

You who made it all
- the steps and the path - have left me

free to walk at my will.
But I give my defenceless sails to the wind...
I only want to look, to look at the water
of blue intimacy, to look at the sky,
grey and covered, and at the bank,
the forest of unfading freshness.
My eyes are my life.
That which my eyes reflected
returns its native green.
As I look, I create pure nature,
exact light, the world that You made.

INTERLUDE

Lamentation on an island

Now,
now I am going to weep sitting on this big rock
my head in the mist and my feet in the water
and the cigarette extinguished between my fingers.
Now,
now yes I am going to empty my eyes for you my heart,
open your slow taps and empty you without danger of flooding.
Now I am going to weep for you, you dry ones
who squeeze your sorrows like a virgin her breasts,
and for you, the extinct ones
who already exhale the vapour of ice.
Now I am going to weep for those who have died without knowing why,
Whose questions still echo
in the impassive vault...

And also for you, pale, empty-breasted mothers,
loud bellies that scrape along the roads.
A desperate cry for the little towns
that yesterday bathed in a candid and jovial sun
and today moan in the shade behind the palisades.

And for the crowds
who spend their vigils scratching the earth ...
A widowed cry for he who passes,
so serious in the coffin of his frock coat.

Now,
now I can lament my forgotten cries,
my cries held back in their source
like birds limed in their nest.
The subterranean cries
that sap the world and undermine it,
those who seek the flower of the tree
and the river of light, the faint cries
and the loud cries, come to my eyes
and flow in calm currents

and become part of the universal cry.

On this green rock
water and water all around me
now, yes, I will cry at ease.

SPRING AT EATON HASTINGS
(Continuation)

VIII

Once again I am standing in front of my world
the world I created for my dreams
with its tall trees in bloom
and its green-weary fields
and the transparent sky over the countryside
with sunshine everywhere: in the water
that quickens its boisterous pace
in the passing breeze of pine trees
on the fast mountain top.
The touch of my fingers becomes finer,
my step becomes elastic and flexible,
I can float, jump from one bar to the other in my cage,
singing, swinging in the wind,
smoothing the mountain with my hands
and stopping the flow of rivers.
I go upstream,
skirt the familiar reefs
and anchor at midnight:
I take the white moon
and bring it to my highest noon
that paints it faded blue.
I throw the sleepy lake into space
to the alarm of the quiet clouds
and the astonishment of the fugitive reeds.

I hang up threads of colour at the hours
so as to follow with a glance
time's hasty march through the air...
The earth, the sea and the sky, my friends,
smile at my childish games.

IX

Around every flowering bush
the amorous wind circles:
it kisses temples
and makes birds tremble,
telling beautiful stories
of imaginary flights
until the bush grows

to the height of its cry...

The wind has words
that the tree does not understand.

X

With my brow at the height of the oaks
with my empty hands and my light heart
I come from walking the forest in spring.
The greenery of the fields blooms in my pupils
and the trill of the birds crosses my temples.
I bring the scent of pines and fresh poplar leaves
on my shoulders.
My old sorrow has melted into the water
and sings downstream between the two shores...
The violet from yesterday
has come out on the road to see me pass.

I come from walking the forest in spring.

XI

The sun, the sun of fire that burns the entrails
has come down liquid into incandescent veins.
The deep forest burns and the quiet lake burns
and my heart burns gloriously.

I feel how it devours my miserable flesh -
there are two blue flames in my empty sockets,
the song of dead leaves crackles -
and it licks my sides like a living tongue.

My bones are cleaned and stripped.
I am already only matter, lime and phosphorus...
Like the immobile stone, I enjoy the sun
that melts me without knowing that I enjoy it.

XII

If I stood, in all my pain,
on top of these cool spring hills
that run through streams and pine trees
I could talk to you, Fate that stalks me.
I feel you in the depths of this long road
that joins its banks where my eyes
cannot reach its flight: I guess you are patient
like the ground I tread. This flower
with the tiny voice does not fool me,
nor does this echoing bird entangle me in its whirling.

Through the afternoon I go to you
straight as day to night.

XIII

The Earth spins away
with the rope of Time around its waist.
Outside of time and space
my life is linked with its poles.

The nights are prolonged
in dark rooms without rest
while the days graze golden grass
in the blond sun of the meadow.

I walk through my life like a dog
winding and unwinding my path.
I am happy to smell the new air
where the old air still breathes;

to right and left
to stretch out my eyes
and then to rest, on the summit,
saying: this was all.

XIV

They come from the sky to my eyes,
they go from my eyes to the sky
blue, white, golden...
the colour of my memories.
They meet on the road
and make their round of games;
they chase each other and hide...
where Sirius? where Venus?
The night turns smoothly
as a weather vane in the wind.
The silence has a name:

Your silence.

INTERLUDE
Night with stars

Even if you break, fragile vault, into a thousand pieces
this starry night
I have to cry out in this English forest
of thoughtful oaks and tall sonorous pines.
I must uproot the trees in convulsive handfuls
I must beat the sky with my closed hands
and cry out this biting pain

that gushes from my deepest root.

Alone in the midst of a people that forges its destiny
and rolls its fates with calculated mettle;
that works and plays and on Sunday rests
and all week watches over its confines
with the alert look of a cattle dog;
that traces its paths as if it were combing a child;
that devours the black entrails of its soil
with a green tongue of parks and gardens;
that takes care of its flowers with Franciscan tenderness,
its birds and its fish, while it enslaves India;
alone in the midst of a people who sleep in this night
I shall cry out my cry.

Although the silence cracks and the swan -
which is the property of the King -
wakes up and fluttering disturbs the impassive waters;
although the waters run to beat the shore with their tender knuckles
and the rumour spreads through the curious forest
and even wakes the breeze that slept behind the curved hill;
although the breeze shakes the meadows again
and presses the windows,
although the sound spreads to the stars
and disturbs for a moment their quiet formation
while England sleeps, I must still cry my cry
of a calf that has lost its mother.

SPRING AT EATON HASTINGS (Continuation)

XV

Walking is the tidy thing to do.
To follow our path
pressing to the sides the complacent grass
and the high pine, too high.
Thus our word goes well
with our solitary step.

Go your way.
I want to lie down by the tree
and watch the evening go by... So long
that my motionless eyes
forget their task
they must not deny their condition as mirrors:
let the river run

let the cloud fly
by my open and calm eyes.

XVI

To have a great voice to tell you
- wherever you are – my dream of this hour...
If I tell the tree,
who will carry the message across the waters?
If I tell the wind,
who will guide his young horses through space?

I will tell it to your ear, shadow that accompanies me.

XVII

Today I want to make a verse that takes a curved flight,
That walks with me and goes around the lake
so I will see your perennial roof of greenery,
spring forest, and my brow will dream
a possible escape through a sky of leaves:
thus I will see my image rocked by your waters
that mimic the cradle that years have made blue.
I will entangle my eyes in your brief violets,
I will greet in passing the tender oak
that yesterday crossed its branch with my friendly look
and the toad that runs away from me with childish clumsiness;
the air that carries me with youthful wings
will bring me slowly like a slow aroma:
and I will sit again on this same stone
and like the motionless water
I will continue talking to myself,
to myself and to the sky.

XVIII

O fire, brother fire:
to look, just to look at your pure flame
fierce and perpetually renewed
gives vigour to my wings and my voices.
The docile wood that I give you
now knows more of resigned pride
than the small heart of men.
Yesterday the fiery sun burnished it
and the amorous wind rocked it:
yesterday the green leaves sprouted from it
like a sweat of naive dew
and the innocent rain
licked it like a quiet cow;
its pomp was the pride of the meadows
and the pole-star of the reeds, its stature:

its pedestal was sought by the streams
like the shy flowers, its shadow:
today it is the same flower
and sun and rain.
Looking at you, sun, tenacious, patient and stubborn,
with your pink tireless tongue
devouring the trunks and hours
until, peacock of the wind,
you achieve the fullness of your glorious zenith
the pulse flows serenely
and the daily labour takes a conscious rest
from the path and the goal.

What does your light tell me, which is not only light,
but cordial heat, the light of dawn?
My solitude melts in your lap
and around my waist I feel
a thousand arms blooming.
Outside the harsh hail
is pounding the fields.
At home your flame like
a heart, beats and sings.

XIX

Today the punctual sun missed her appointment.

My eyes have searched for her in slow flight
all over the horizon.

And the reduced sky pales in wait.

Over the green fields

the rain unravels lazily.

Her nakedness is as chaste as a marble.

XX

Human verse is heavy.
I hold it in my hands
and feel it bending my wrists.
My blunders play badly with the road
and my pain with you, O white spring.

Sometimes from the depths of the silence
Bordered by the flowers and the breeze
the long cry comes to my throat.
The swift spring swerves,
the fast crystal air breaks

into a thousand pieces
and the sun covers its naked limbs
like a shy virgin.
I remain on a mountain of darkness
howling at the horizon of my life.
In this luminous spring,
why should I not remember you,
you who shared with me
the rain and the terror.
This water knows of your simplicity,
this tree knows of your dignity.
Perhaps your faces, wet from the storm, will clash badly
with this cultured lawn:
but its grass too has been cultivated by many hands.
Men of dead Spain, dead men of Spain,
come and join the chorus of these birds!