

One need not be a chamber to be haunted,
One need not be a house;
The brain has corridors surpassing
Material place.
Emily Dickinson

It is not strange that remembrance was the name given in ancient times to everything that makes a comeback voyage to the heart, because, truly so, that seems to be the movement in question: memories—as oblivions—cannot be chosen, neither are they kept within reach or archived in some mind drawer just as we would please; it is them that journey back to us—as of their own will—and it does not matter how long, sometimes extremely long, the corridor they have to walk through before they find us is. Memory is, if not haunted, quite crowded indeed—more and more every day. It is there where the privileged situations lay—those, in the end, unforgettable—not disturbed by anyone. Memories are part of us (as much as we are part of them, Gaston Bachelard would say) but this does not mean that they are at our disposal, not even that they belong entirely to us: this hostel sometimes takes in fake memories put together from what others tell us about ourselves, particularly regarding to those we were in our childhood. Looking at it from this standpoint, it may seem that our own personal history or, more precisely, our own biography (which is but the way that history is remembered) did not belong to us fully. The memory assuredly says: “Things were exactly like this”, and we believe it. We do not hesitate, not for an instant: *that* afternoon we were dressed that way, the dog was barking and rain was pouring down heavily. We are incapable, however, to find anywhere the name of that friend who drove us to the hospital. The impossibility of remembering *something*, and the chance to remember *something else*—even with crystal clear detail— is our limitation, which to some extent defines ourselves. In this sense, we could say that we are our own memory; and in this I am not forgetting that memories are always—yes, it is obvious—of something memorable. *That* rainy afternoon is never just any afternoon: it is the afternoon of revelation, of encounter, of fall. And the other afternoons, the ordinary ones, where do they go? Aren't they also part of our lives?

The I who saw the ghost is not the I who had the attack of indigestion.

T. S. Eliot

In the epilogue of the novel *Mañana en la batalla piensa en mí*, Javier Marías talks about our tendency to see ourselves “in our different life stages as the result and the sum of what has happened to us and what we have achieved and what we have done, as if these were the only things making up our existence”. We rarely think that people consist of “both what they are and what they have not been, both what can be proved and quantified and remembered and what is most uncertain, doubtful and blurred; maybe we are made, in a balanced proportion, of what was and what could not be”. Maybe it is so, but at the time of having to evaluate our life, of looking back in retrospection, life insists on presenting itself as a fluent and consistent succession of events where there is no space for minuscule scenes; even if these are the ones that proliferate. We will never hear anyone say, for example, “I graduated in this school, I got married and two days after I solved a crossword”; it is as if the exceptional and the ordinary, the crucial and the anecdotic, never crossed their ways; as if it truly were –Eliot *dixit*– that the I who sees the ghost is different from the I who suffers the indigestion. Not to mention the inner’s life I: the one who thinks, imagines, gets bored: could it be that it only exists as long as we are able to remember it? And how would we manage to do it, if memory does not like the blurred, that which produces not clear images? We just need, for instance, to sleep a couple of hours to see how easily an idea that a moment ago seemed brilliant abandons us for good. Eliot is exact when he says:

*Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow*

It may be because of this that people feel the urge to keep a diary, to leave proof of their most fragile selves, and to say, at least: “Tuesday. Nothing. I have existed”, as we read in one of the pages of the fictional diary of Antoine Roquentin¹.

III

With the heavy past of my true existence,
subdued to the fatalities of matter, I made blossom
in a breath a past according to my interior destinies.

Henri Bosco

However, if it is impossible anyway to tell everything about the past, and if the permanent reality of the personality, as Beckett observed, “only can be apprehended in a retrospective hypothesis”, why pretend differently? Could we not rather *relive* life at pleasure, and simply link to the past that was, the past that could have been? It is true: between the potency and the existence falls the shadow, but sometimes is a light what falls instead; a light coming from a daydream. It is not about restoring the past out of regret, but out of pleasure. We are talking, then, not so much about the daydreaming that makes us doze off, or calm us down, but about the kind of daydreaming that Bachelard called active: “the dreaming which prepares works.”

IV

Then the vague mental images were so much condensed
that we thought they could be touched with the finger.

Henri Bosco

Aren't the photographs presented here by Iñaki Bonillas exactly this?: a dreaming that gains form, incarnated in images? What we see is not a simple *mise en scène*, a parody of the daily life of a cowboy (who would bother so much?). We are rather confronted by a fine exercise of reconstruction of the past, or that is how the artist presents it: a man portrays himself obsessively, living the life he would have liked to live. Pure condensed imagination. Interestingly, this man, J. R. Plaza, the artist's grandfather, was a real cowboy for a few months; but he did not take his inspiration from that situation. In reality, his passing through the "West" –we know this from reading his diary– was rather stumbling. But it would be wrong to think that Plaza carried on his "reconstructive" perseverances in spite of his trippings; it was precisely because of them. The photographs are meant not to replace memories but to console them: it is the voice, in any case, of the original dream of a young man, maybe a boy, who wanted to become a cowboy. In this sense, *A sombra e o brilho* is a defense of our imaginative self. Both in life and art, everything is dreamt of first. This is what Bonillas suggests when opposing the dream to the memories—that is, the pictures to the text. The biography –inasmuch as it is a *memorable* tale– has to be filled with images that are decidedly ours; because forms taken from reality, as Bachelard thought, also need to be "blown up with oneiric matter" to work.

1. In Jean Paul Sartre's *Nausea*.