

A justice to come: the politics of reading

There is a passage in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral* in which Levov, the desperate father of Mary, a girl that wanted to produce a revolution, is alone in the room of his daughter who has disappeared. As he is trying to comprehend why their relationship – and their entire family – has fallen apart he starts reading the *Communist Manifesto*, a book that Mary has read with passion.

Levov imagines that he may be able to – if he pays enough attention to those passages highlighted by Mary – get close to the deepest motivations that have transformed his daughter into a completely new person. His assumption is that the pages read by Mary conserve – although ambiguously- something fundamental about the reader. Thus, the text of the *Manifesto* is regarded as a written artifact that can give testimony about the life of the reader.

That is to say that in the marks left by the reader – in the remnants of life that are deposited in the text- a life is expressed. Within the text, in its light and darkness, there is a life, convulsed and distorted, that appears there in that voluptuous body. The book itself is the testimony of a multiplicity of fleshy encounters always exceeding its borders of paper and ink.

So, the desperate Levov reads the *Communist Manifesto* in order to find his daughter; its not the text itself that is being interpreted but a possible Mary. The material relationship between the reader and the artifact (book) becomes an intense site of vitality. Reading is developed as a form of lament and celebration. A lament for the absent or dead, for the disappearing opportunities that are intrinsic to distance and

invisibility. A celebration, even nostalgic, for the echoes or traces of the dead or those who have long been gone that remain within us and for us.

I believe that González, as Levov, is reading the Bible, Genesis 4 specifically, looking for something, for someone, for a justice to come. He is looking in the text for the marks of those absent today, those that have yet to achieve their dreams of land and food. There are certain marks in the Bible that, according to González, can contribute to the understanding of how so many lives in our world are forgotten and ignored. While reading the Bible, González procures to locate lost bodies, damaged flesh and perhaps political impulses. Perhaps he searches for a language to give expression to a world that he sees coming.

González reads and writes looking for the roots to our current situation; in every page of his book one finds an ardent desire to embrace all those who are cursed to be in permanent escape and exile. Through his interventions in the biblical text, González looks for a radical goal: a world for all of us.

Let me turn now to the fragment of poem of César Vallejo – whose poetry informs González's writing and way of reading – which, I believe, is in conversation with our text:

No one lives in the house anymore – you tell me -; all have gone. The living room, the bedroom, the patio are deserted. No one remains any longer, since everyone has departed. And I say to you: When someone lives someone remains. The point through which a man passed, is no longer empty. The only place that is empty, with human solitude, is that there which no man has passed.

This fragment affirms that there is always a remnant of those that are absent, that our house, our bodies, our world are saturated with the lives that preceded us. At the matrix

of our desires and fears there are invisible or microscopic components. González affirms that if we want to achieve our most intense desires of justice and liberation, we should acknowledge the presence of the Bible in our culture and its imaginary foundations. The Bible has passed through us, remarks González; it is within us, even if we have tried to depart from its presence; it is haunting us, framing whatever we imagine possible and impossible. As such the Bible – or must we say its uses? – acts as landscape in which it is possible to create associations, revolts, and maps to act.

González affirms that through a transformation in the way we interact with biblical texts we can also acquire a position to achieve the political desires of the majority. He sees an intimate connection between biblical interpretation and political efficacy. But, in contrast with previous similar exercises from Latin America, Gonzalez's procedures of interpretation are not based upon the assumption that God is actively communicating itself in the texts that are being read. Instead, his standpoint is that it is methodologically necessary to suspend any theistic compromise and treat the multiple biblical Gods as literary characters that belong to the realm of the imaginary. In this regard, what is being discussed when interpreting the Bible are not solely questions belonging to "faith traditions" but the possibility of a justice still to come.

Jonathan Pimentel Chacón

National University, Costa Rica