

Manuela Sáenz dances with Giuseppe Garibaldi the final rigadoon of existence

*For Carlos Contramaestre
and Salvador Garmendia*

GASTON BAQUERO

I

The sea was well used to dozing off next to Paita port hearing the sweet melody of that female voice well versed, no doubt, in shouting commands and impetuously declaring her passions.

That voice entered the sea with the authority of who is accustomed to dominating bodies and souls of men, women, horses, blunderbusses, swords.

Whole passages of Plutarch recited by that voice fascinated the secrets of the sea and the fish of Paita, familiar with the writings of Tacitus and the letters of Bolivar, came and went across the southern Ocean, just like the leopards of Kenya come and go all haughty with their beauty.

The woman with the contralto voice recited poems, repeated ardent stories and declarations of love that she would send to a weak little man who nevertheless was resistant to disappearing, a phosphorescent little man whose wife, husband, empress and slave she had been.

Astonished the sea would hear her say: "For once Themistocles telling Aristides that a general's greatest gift was to foresee and preempt the intentions of the enemy", Aristides replied: "Most truly this is necessary Oh Themistocles but the essential for a commander is to keep his hands pure!".

And the echos of the sea strolled through the firmament, and from the wheel chair of the Paita woman the words of Alexander resounded: "The sun, suspended in the middle of the sky will applaud such pomp. Oh Sun, Oh Father!". And at times, the sea fell silent, because Manuela, attired with her uniform of Ayacucho Lieutenant for a grand gala, congregated with sweet authority the indian and black and mulato children of Paita, and accompanied by a blind man on the quena flute sang with silver voice a grave hymn, that an old friend of her's had written, a man like her, unfortunate, despised and tossed by fate, who none the less took heart and inflating his chest delivered a speech more resonant than Pindarus, to sing the Arms and the Literature of the halcyon centuries.

II

One evening, almost dark, the incantations over the sea fell silent. A door was gently pushed, the door of that fluttering

seagulls's solitary emptiness of the soul. Lovely flaming eyes, carbuncles with his eyes staring, of the feverish Bolivar that shrouded her, and the fair heads's whirlwind clothed in gold the old woman's insides, hanging up in the salons of her soul curtains sewn with pearls, love scene tapestries, erotic groves. Uttering a love verse in his italian tongue the Stranger entered: "My name is Garibaldi, he said, I've come to kiss your hand, to beg you let me behold you naked, to caress what he adored. Dante has taught us to wed the unattainable, all that is forbidden. Dear lady, I'm going to undress, to lie beside you. I want your body to pass to mine that man's warmth, his boyish love-making fury, his perennial thirst to possess you in body and soul, and bless you with children. I'll lift you up, I'll tear you away from that wheel chair that is the throne of God's own widow, I'll walk you in my arms, I'll take you to the sea, I'll rock you to the tune of a rigadoon.

Her breasts are terse again, like spurs elevating to the sky desire's delirium.

I'm going to possess her like no man ever possessed Thaïs or Ninon. I only beg you Doña Manuela, Doña Manuelita, that you think meanwhile of Bolivar, that you imagine being in his arms, feel him deranged by the fire that burns in you for ever. Here I am naked before you, my name's Giuseppe, Giuseppe Garibaldi, and I only want to be for you that young man who danced like nobody else the rigadoon in the Quito fair.

The young man, that only when clasped by your arms, was able to discover the taste and the aroma of life.

1989.

Epitaph for María Kodama

I like her to be called
María Kodama
Jorge Luis Borges's
posthumous discovery

María Kodama is
the borgesian name of
the wife of the impertinent
Master of Revels
Kiro Kotsuké No Suké
also known as
Oíshí Kuranosúke
who in turn was
the true
Madame Pechogris
favourite girl friend
of my feared friend
Yukio Mishima
that was, as all know,
the oriental pseudonym
of Jorge Luis Borges.

Jorge Luis Borges
the japanese gardener
who desperate, one day
with solitude,
engendered
María Kodama

Gastón Baquero, 1987.