

Arts, Linguistics, Literature and Language Research Journal

Acceptance date: 18/10/2024
Submission date: 12/09/2024

“EVERYTHING IS IN EVERYTHING BUT YOU”: RAMÓN XIRAU¹

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1. Adapted from the chapter “Todo está en todo, menos Tú”: Ramón Xirau from the book “Cantares De Poetas Mexicanos Actuales: Didáctica De La Poesía”.

Abstract: The intention of this work is didactic, the promotion of reading and writing, especially poetry, since poetry is always a salvation in the midst of sorrows. An opportunity for students and teachers to have support material for the hard work during classes (face-to-face or virtual). In the face of a pandemic that has modified life in the Postmodern Age, a time when Nature has been considered as an object susceptible to infinite exploitation by humanity, in which the proposal of hope and consolation that comes from education with art arises, to relate now with the Earth in another way, a compassionate one.

Keywords: poetry, literary work, Ramón Xirau, writing, art.

INTRODUCTION

Here we present an initiative aimed at putting students in direct contact with literary works and that, on this happy path that brings together pedagogy and incredible adventures, the teacher is a guide in the manner of Virgil to accompany the efforts with discipline, perseverance and awareness, until the young disciples are their own teachers. A model that proposes theoretical reflection accompanied by intuition. Knowledge and taste.

How many times we talk about the need to put into practice what we have learned: to savor the joy of poetry. We agree, as much as we can, because we understand art as a space in which one experiences the freedom of infinite possibilities to live in a splendid way. Yes, one must acquire sufficient knowledge of Literature because Literature is an objective knowledge; but then one must let it rest at the bottom of the pond to establish a direct link between the work and the reader, one must read each poem (either aloud or standing up) with enthusiasm, while the words arouse evocation about the meaning of life and death, and sow a deep seed in the spirit that later becomes wisdom.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

We open this dialogue with Ramón Xirau (1924-2017): poet, philosopher, teacher, who was born in 1924, in an art nouveau building in Barcelona, Spain; only son of Joaquín Xirau and Pilar Subías. Due to the Spanish Civil War he went into exile with his family in 1939 in Mexico, when he was 15 years old, and since then he fell in love with the vastness of the geography and the beauty of the American landscapes; as an anecdote, it should be noted that he remembered with affection a walk through the mountains of the Huasteca Potosina, in the vicinity of Tamazunchale.

Ramón Xirau, a man linked to the teaching vocation: he had a solid university education at UNAM and at La Sorbonne and Cambridge. He worked teaching philosophy at the Liceo Franco Mexicano, at the Universidad de las Américas, at UNAM; he was also a member of El Colegio Nacional; he excelled in his courses and workshops taught at universities in Oxford, Bologna, Barcelona, Yale and Columbia.

The transcendence of his work for the cultural life of the country stands out: an example of which is the role he played as director of the *Revista Diálogos* (published from 1964 to 1985 by El Colegio de México). His academic efforts as a researcher and writer focused on various topics related to the poetic act and presence; the meeting between philosophy, religion and poetry, as he argued that imaginative and conceptual language seek to bring to light the so-called essential questions for each person. A philosopher who harmonizes art and science.

Ramón Xirau received many distinctions; to name a few, we recall that in 1984 he was named Doctor Honoris Causa by the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. Since 1993 he was the eighth occupant of chair XIII of the Mexican Academy of Language. He received the IX International Prize of Poetry

and Essay “Octavio Paz” and the Doctorate Honoris Causa by the National Autonomous University of Mexico, institution where he was also distinguished as emeritus researcher, in 2010.

As if that were not enough, Ramón Xirau wrote a profound poetry that doubts about love, life, and inhabiting the world. The following is a list of his poetry books published in Catalan and Spanish:

- *10 poemes* (Mexico, 1951).
- *Lèspill soterrat* (*The buried mirror*, Mexico, 1955, prologue by Agustí Bartra).
- *Les platges* (*The Beaches*, Barcelona, 1974).
- *Graons* (Gradas, Barcelona, 1979, with foreword by Octavio Paz).
- *Dit i descrit* (*Said and described*, 1983).
- *Ocells* (Birds, 1986).
- *Natures vives* (*Living Nature*, Barcelona, 1991).
- *Poesía completa 1950-1994* (Barcelona, 1996).
- *Indrets del temps* (*Places of Time*, Barcelona, 1999).
- In 1990 he published *Poemes. Poemas*, bilingual anthology (selection and translation by Andrés Sánchez Robayna).
- *Naturalezas vivas. Natures vives*, in 1997 (translated by Rafael-José Díaz).
- In 1999, *Nuevos poemas* (translated by Sánchez Robayna).
- In 2002, *Lugares del tiempo* (translation and foreword by José María Espinasa).
- His *Poesía completa*, a bilingual edition, appeared in 2007, translated into Spanish by Sánchez Robayana.

THEORETICAL BASIS

Xirau’s poetry shows an arduous writing process, the effort to internalize the transience of existence, the infinite change, the communication of the poetic act in dialogue with philosophy and mysticism. We now present to you an effort of literary approach to the poem “Strawberries”, a text of profound clarity; and that, nevertheless, we propose to you as a literary game:

Red strawberries
are red,
white clouds
are these white clouds,
the yellow green leaf
is green is yellow,
the clear girl
is the clear girl,
the blue waves
are the blue waves,
everything is in everything but You,
red, strawberries
blood? no blood
strawberries, field at dawn.

From a phonological perspective, the poem is composed of 14 lines, whose meter varies between 3 and 9 syllables. In the first ten lines there are balanced consonant rhymes; in the first pair of lines, that is, vv. 1 and 2, it ends with the same word *rojas*, the second pair (vv. 3 and 4) with the word *blancas*, in the third pair (vv. 5 and 6) *amarilla*, the fourth pair (vv. 7 and 8) with the adjective *clara*, and in vv. 9 and 10 with the plural of *azules*. The last four lines have no rhyme. The binary rhythm of the poem is given in the tonic syllables that are usually repeated in syllables 2, 4 and 6 more frequently; although alternated with verses accented in syllables 3 and 5; it is important to observe that the sound that the verses produce is harmonic and agrees of course with the versal distribution and the punctuation signs used.

To illustrate the above, the following three-entry table separating articulable sound emissions (syllables), their measure and rhythm marked with bold letters is presented:

| Verse | Metric and rhythm | Metrics |
|-------|---|---------|
| 1 | The- fre- red -free-as- red | 5 |
| 2 | They are- red, | 3 |
| 3 | the -nu-bes-white-white-white-white-whites | 5 |
| 4 | are-these-white-white-white-white-white-white-white-white-white-white-white-white, | 7 |
| 5 | the ho-ja -see-from-a-ma-ri-lla | 7 |
| 6 | es - ver-de es- a-ma-ri-lla, | 7 |
| 7 | la- mu-cha-cha-cha- cla-ra | 6 |
| 8 | is- the- mu-cha-cha-cha-cha-cha-cha-cha-cha-cha-cha-cha-cha-cha-cha-cha-cha, | 7 |
| 9 | the- o-las a-zu-les | 6 |
| 10 | are - las-las- o-las- a-zu-les, | 7 |
| 11 | all-all-is-in-all-is-in-all-me-us-you, | 9 |
| 12 | red-red,- the- fre- s-as | 5 |
| 13 | San-gre? -no -san-gre | 5 |
| 14 | fre-sas, -cam-po in -el -al-ba. | 7 |

In appearance, the poetic world reflects a simplicity and clarity about the perception of reality; but new paths open up when “You” appears, the loving bond that disrupts the Universe. The poetic I speaks of the “red strawberries”, tries to affirm at first the simplicity of the instant that surrounds us, the world of order reflected in *the white clouds, the yellow green leaf, the clear girl and the blue waves*. In the eleventh verse, the poetic “I” poses a conflict by saying that “everything is in order, except You”. That “You” is the receiver of the message of the poem that in the logic of the first ten lines has no place, because it insinuates that in the presence of the You, as also expressed by the great Eastern and Western mystics, there are no certainties, only uncertainty, impermanence, emptiness; the point of equilibrium is that passionate fruit that the poetic I proposes to savor life; so in the last three verses the lyrical subject

asks himself if the red of the strawberries will be because of the blood, to which he answers “no”, if perhaps they are a field at dawn or dusk, and not blood.

The poem, from the first line, uses excellent epithets in the manner of Garcilaso de la Vega (Beristáin, 1995); both in the “red strawberries” that he will use from line 3 to 10 and also in the *white clouds, yellow green leaf, clear girl and blue waves*.

In the logic of the poem everything has a clear order, each element is represented by a specific quality of color, and they are what they are, there is no doubt; but, when referring to the “You”, the order is disrupted, because the “You” does not enter into that simplicity that tells us little about the essential. The last three lines of the poem imply a *metaphor* (Beristáin, 1995), because it supposes that the “You” is defined by blood, passion, sorrows; but, strawberries are not red because of blood, they do not have it; thanks to the “You”, to whom it is addressed, now strawberries have a new attribute besides the red color, they are a field that dawns or dusks:

We have approached the subject of the study of poetry from the didactic point of view; however, the educational and ludic functions are shared by literature.

Poetry is an attitude, a way of seeing, feeling and appreciating the world, which can be manifested through all expressions of art in a suggestive way. To appreciate poetry one must begin by reading it directly, tasting it patiently and appropriating it; poetry can be enjoyable when, as the Mexican writer Alfonso Reyes (1993) expressed, “it does not address reason, but rather sensation and fantasy” (179). In the case of the writing of

Ramón Xirau, for example, argues that poetry constitutes a privileged form of knowledge of the world. Poetry gives us privileged access to certain aspects of reality, and can sometimes lead us to transcend it and gain knowledge, for example, of

supranatural entities. Both the creation of poetry by the poet and its recreation by the reader would be part of a process of discovery or revelation of the world, of a process of knowledge of reality. And where we speak of knowledge we also speak of truth: without truth there is no knowledge. Through the knowledge that poetry gives us we come into possession of a certain type of truths, says Xirau, which perhaps we could not access in any other way, for example, through science. It is through the combination of conceptual, imaginative and emotive language that occurs in poetry that poetry can unveil those truths (Ortiz, 2017, p.162).

CONCLUSIONS

We recommend training teacher-readers capable of appreciating poetry, the aesthetic contribution, to circulate in their blood and vibrate with every word; to be able to communicate the beauty and truth that poems reveal to children and young people, a taste that is necessary to experience in the flesh. It is necessary to set out to create and discover oneself, that need to find answers for life in poetry.

We could say then that appreciation for poetry has to do with the capacity, ability, and attitude we take towards it; acquiring this competence involves reading poems together in the classroom or online. It is perhaps easier for students to start with current poets. This poetry reading competence sharpens with the passage of time, with the practice and experience that the reader undergoes, so that a seed germinates in the spirit of each reader. It is important for teachers in training to prepare themselves as promoters of poetry among their students. If during the academic training the teacher did not take into account this literary need, a broad information about its genres, trends and representative authors, it is convenient to take measures in this regard and make up for the gaps in knowledge with readings.

In this sense, the selection of poems presented here give a guideline to start with this selection process; it does not mean that they are the only ones or the best, but they do allow us to analyze from different angles and perspectives, from taking advantage of the adventure of living, by breaking down each poem and observing its parts and the meanings that give us back hope. What is sought when we encourage our normalista students not only to read, but to enjoy, discuss and live poetry?

There are different themes, different forms, capable of satisfying the expectations and needs of different children, of different ages, of different temperaments and different socio-cultural contexts. The success of the work of the adult mediator lies precisely in this search, within the multiple possibilities offered by poetry, to find the poem that can dazzle each particular child (Andricain, 2016, p. 12).

Ramón Xirau points out in *Gradas* (1979), within the first lines of his “Nota mínima” and introductory note: “Every poem is visible, not explicable”. In light of this note, the poem “Strawberries” is an apparently clear and simple visual poem. The poem casts a meaning on the things it names, gives them essence, circumstance, color, texture, a new dimension and a specific movement.

And after reading it, what can be done with this poem? Let’s not do anything with it: introducing it, introducing it and giving it a place in the students’ lives will be more than enough. You can create an atmosphere to welcome it among the students, read it aloud, in small groups, in silence, share it or invite introspection and leave it at that, just for the sake of reading it. If the poem has moved students, it is likely to have gotten others excited about reading it or to try to experience that excitement by seeking out and reading other poems.

We also propose a series of activities as an invitation rather than a teaching aid to promote writing in the classroom and to encourage students to create other poems of their own. Preliminary discussion of the poem can revolve around the students' varied approaches, so that they appreciate and contrast opinions about substance and form, so that they are able to enjoy all these treatments in the discovery of poetry, enriching their senses and their possibilities of apprehending reality.

You can take the poem, cut the lines of its verses in such a way that they remain in fragments and then invite the students to reorganize the text as they see fit; thus encouraging the emergence of another different text, a new poetic proposal; or else, give them the incomplete poem in definitive aspects, key words, asking the students to write a beginning, a central part or an ending, as appropriate at their free will.

We also suggest taking verses from different stimuli: a taste, a color, a sound, a graphic image, a smell, a texture, a feeling, among others, Xirau's poem lends itself well to this exercise, in this way we can create rhetorical figures, play with the rhythm of the poem with imagination and playful spirit. Continuing with the stimuli, let us try to find within the poem, those images that allow us

to chain others; the poem is rich in images, it mentions everything: strawberries, clouds, leaves, waves, blood? Blood. "Everything is in everything but You." Let's focus the discussion on this verse, what does this "everything but you" mean to the author? What does it mean to you? The divine, Nature, the other? Gambarte (1999) points out that Xirau's poetry summons to

all the images [that] belong to that world. It is a poetry that summons the senses, that penetrates through the eyes: glances, and that is kneaded by the four fundamental elements of earth: sand, plants, small animals; of water: sea, fish, boats; of air: birds, sun, stars; of fire: light and shadow. Mediterranean are the colors that abound: white, blue, yellow, some gold, red and green; cherry, pomegranate, orange and lemon trees, pines, strawberries, swarms, mountain ranges, sands, beaches, sea, light, lots of light. Always illuminated (205).

Let's close with the last activity: first let's identify which are the images of the poem "Strawberries" that invite to creation and let's locate them in four fundamental elements; then identify your own, which are the images of your own world? A world that has a theme, that has a purpose, a feeling and a desire to communicate something specific, locate that something and write a poem from your own world of words.

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