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FLARR Pages #43: The Welder of the Tropics by Vicente Cabrera Funes

James Wojtaszek

University of Minnesota - Morris

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FLARR PAGES #43

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The Journal of the Foreign Language
Association of the Red River

-Continued from
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-Vicente Cabrera
Funes

-Writers from
Ecuador

The Welder of the Tropics by Vicente Cabrera Funes, translated by James Wojtaszek, UMM

I've just received...and he's not quite sure what to say, he already feels the shame of their criticism, for being negligent, for disregarding his fraternal and familial responsibilities.

He'd left them years ago with a wife he found for himself at a convention of the faithful devotees of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Holy Eucharist. Said council was taking place in a five-star hotel on the outskirts of a tropical city. (The name is left out for the sake of decency.) Everybody knows it's a place full of whores, known for its casinos, its orgies and orgasms at night...and during the day.

The city doesn't sleep even for a second.

And if such an event took place, it was precisely to combat the unpleasant air of the city of Gomorrah, or so said the spiritual leaders, of which he was one. They had to do something for that rat-hole, it was a blemish on the whole country, and on all humanity. The group leaders tended to overdo it with their goals and ambitions, in addition to seeing the devil everywhere; they knew how to sway their members with smooth talk and lots of spin.

He married her, because in his heart he knew there wasn't another woman like her, who would understand him and keep him on the path of professional prestige and, above all, she was the prettiest he'd seen and from a very good family, from another locality, different from his, different from the sort of poor and unimpressive town he came from, which by the way was called...and he doesn't even want to think of the name of his town, but he has to tell her where he's from, and, making a superhuman effort, he declares that he is from Guano.

He's often thought about the better luck that others have had with names: from the land where they were born to the name they carried to the grave. He, on the other hand, has found himself feeling depressed, weighed down, by a word that embarrasses him and makes him as uncomfortable as an inordinately tight shoe. He remembers vividly that the day he had to confess his name and the name of his town he was sweating between his legs and blushing on his forehead and behind his ears. Because life certainly does bring coincidences that can leave even the most philosophical of men feeling small and foolish.

The spiritual meeting took place in the tropics, where the sun blazed until midnight, twenty-four hours a day, the damn thing. His hand was sweating profusely when he picked up the white glove, which she had most likely dropped on purpose just so the handsome catch would pick it up and say *miss, you dropped this, vea nomás*, just look at the good fortune of this glove, of the lady it belongs to and of the coy, upstanding gentleman, who knows how to reap the rewards of a friendship, a discreet compliment, a matrimonial promise. And now you see we are in front of the Lord to receive his blessings and grace, to form a sacred union devoted to the mission and the fight against the evil of the world, against the awful habits such as those of the city of Gomorrah where we met. And how very strange destiny is (who would have predicted it?), now we are binding ourselves together with the glove and the blessing of Father Hortensio Benavides Sicuta, full-time coadjutor and former parish priest of Santo Domingo of Gomorrah.

He was going to become a priest, but one wild night, with a few women from the wrong side of the world (where he'd been brought by his own nephew, a university student, who apparently had more force of spirit than his uncle), he burned his cassock. With a gallon of gasoline they made a bonfire of San Juan, and he was left wearing black trousers and a linen shirt, like a civilian going out into the world for the first time. To let the world see what was behind that outfit that looked like a circling buzzard, those were *la Victoria's* words, the one who took him by the hand to her bed, once he'd accepted the bet that he could

finish off the bottle of rum, with no cinnamon or passion fruit; halfway there, with only his lips and the bottle, no glasses or any other form of aid, he passed out, not because he was drunk but because he lost his breath, as the liquid went down the wrong pipe. And when they noticed his eyes were glassy like a corpse's, they said to her: take care of him, *carajo*, and that's how he found his way to her, the incomparable *Victorita*, who was drawn to him from the first moment when they told her – and she was convinced – that he was a virgin, that he had never tasted the forbidden fruit. “*Ven, mi amor*, I'll take care of you, I'll bring you back to life,” and recovering his breath and his balance he followed her to that joyous room of the first time, that's according to her, the expert, the all-knowing and ultimate source of knowledge on these things.

There *Victorita* undressed him and he found himself exactly as his mother had brought him into this world. In less than three minutes, the illustrious seminarian threw away an eight-year career of meditation and prayer in the arms of the Lord, and crossed over immediately into enemy camps, without his father finding out until one day a neighborhood gossip came to tell him that she'd seen *Leyvita* – with his nephew – leaving that house of sin, better known as – she pointed out – “the House of Mirrors.”

“The House of Mirrors!” repeated the old man, incredulous.

“What a beautiful name!” the nephew had said to his uncle. “You'll love the place, come on.” Of course he knew this for sure, he himself had found out about it from a military man, *Remigio Beltrán Padilla*, the brother of another seminarian who was, in the *Seminario Mayor*, the most reliable source on the sins of this world, and he himself also ended up leaving the place, not through the main door but the window, and that cost him his life, of course. This flying seminarian had his room – with a view of the pool – on Side A of that large Diocesan complex.

Cabrera Funes, Vicente. “El soldador de los trópicos.” Excerpt from El hortelano de Ulba. Quito: Libresa, 2003. pp. 59-63