

La rosa de Paracelso

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En su taller, que abarcaba las dos habitaciones del sótano, Paracelso pidió a su Dios, a su indeterminado Dios, a cualquier Dios, que le enviara un discípulo. Atardecía. El escaso fuego de la chimenea arrojaba sombras irregulares. Levantarse para encender la lámpara de hierro era demasiado trabajo. Paracelso, distraído por la fatiga, olvidó su plegaria. La noche había borrado los polvorientos alambiques y el atamor cuando golpearon la puerta. El hombre, soñoliento, se levantó, ascendió la breve escalera de caracol, y abrió una de las hojas. Entró un desconocido. También estaba muy cansado. Paracelso le indicó un banco; el otro se sentó y esperó. Durante un tiempo no cambiaron una palabra.

El maestro fue el primero que habló.

—Recuerdo caras del Occidente y caras del Oriente —dijo no sin cierta pompa—. No recuerdo la tuya. Quién eres y qué deseas de mí?

—Mi nombre es lo de menos —replicó el otro—. Tres días y tres noches he caminado para entrar en su casa. Quiero ser tu discípulo. Te traigo todos mis haberes.

Sacó un talego y lo volcó sobre la mesa. Las monedas eran muchas y de oro. Lo hizo con la mano derecha. Paracelso le había dado espaldas para encender la lámpara. Cuando se dio vuelta advirtió

The rose of Paracelsus

In his laboratory, which took up the two rooms of his cellar, Paracelsus asked of his God, of his indefinite God, of any god ever, that he send him a disciple. It grew dark. The scant fire in the grate cast irregular shadows; but to lift the iron lamp up for light was too much work. Distracted by fatigue, Paracelsus forgot his prayer. Night had obscured the dusty alembics, and the brazier, when a knock came at the door. He stood himself up, drowsily climbed the brief spiral of stair, and opened one of the shutters. A stranger entered. He as well was very tired. Paracelsus pointed to a bench; the other sat, and waited. For a time not a word passed between them.

The master was the first who spoke.

—I remember the faces of the West and the faces of the East— he said, not without a certain pomp. —Who are you, and what do you desire of me?

—My name is of little worth— said the other. —I have journeyed three days and three nights to enter your house. I wish to be your disciple. I have brought you all I have.

He drew out a pouch and emptied it on the table. The coins were many, and of gold. He offered them with his right hand. Paracelsus had turned away to light the lamp. When he turned again he noticed that the other

que la mano izquierda sostenía una rosa. La rosa lo inquietó.

Se recostó, juntó la punta de los dedos, y dijo:

—Me crees capaz de elaborar la piedra que trueca todos los elementos en oro y me ofreces oro. No es oro lo que busco, y si el oro te importa, no serás nunca mi discípulo.

El oro no me importa —respondió el otro. —Estas monedas no son más que una parte de mi voluntad de trabajo. Quiero que me enseñes el Arte. Quiero recorrer a tu lado el camino que conduce a la Piedra.

Paracelso dijo con lentitud:

El camino es la Peidra. El punto de partida es la Piedra. Si no entiendes estas palabras, no has empezado aún a entender. Cada paso que darás es la meta.

El otro lo miró con recelo. Dijo con voz distinta:

—Pero, hay una meta?

Paracelso se rió.

—Mis detractores, que no menos numerosos que estúpidos, dicen que no y me llaman un impostor. No les doy la razón, pero no es imposible que sea un iluso. Sé que *hay* un Camino.

Hubo un silencio, y dijo el otro:

—Estoy listo a recorrerlo contigo, aunque debamos caminar muchos años. Déjame cruzar el desierto. Déjame divisar siquiera de lejos la tierra prometida, aunque los astros no me dejen pisarlo. Quiero una prueba antes de emprender el camino.

bore in his left hand a rose. The rose disquieted him.

He sat back, joining the tips of his fingers, and said:

—You believe me capable of producing that stone, which will trick into gold all the elements; and you offer me gold. Gold is not what I seek; and if gold matters to you, you will never become my disciple.

The gold does not matter to me— the other replied. —These coins are no more than a token of my willingness to work. I wish that you will teach me the Art. I wish to follow by your side the way that leads to the Stone.

Paracelsus said very slowly:

The way is the Stone. The point of setting out is the Stone. If you do not understand my words you have not even begun to understand. Every step you take is your goal.

The other looked with misgiving at him. In a different voice he asked:

—But, there is a goal?

Paracelsus laughed.

—My detractors, who are no less numerous than stupid, say there is none, and call me an impostor. I could not tell you why, though it is not impossible that I am deluded. But I know *there is* a Way.

There was silence. Then the other said:

—I am ready to follow there beside you, even though we shall be many years journeying. Let me cross the desert. Let me, if only from afar, behold the promised land: even if the stars do not let me tread there. But I wish for a proof before we set out upon the way.

—Cuándo? —dijo con inquietud Paracelso.

—Ahora mismo —dijo con brusca decisión el discípulo.

Habían empezado hablando en latín; ahora, en alemán.

El muchacho elevó en aire la rosa.

—Es fama —dijo, que puedes quemar una rosa y hacerla resurgir de la ceniza, por obra tu arte. Dejame ser testigo de ese prodigio. Eso te pido, y te daré después mi vida entera.

—Eres muy crédulo —dijo el maestro. —No he menester de la credulidad; exijo la fe.

El otro insistió.

—Precisamente no soy crédulo quiero ver con mis ojos la aniquilación y la resurrección de la rosa.

Paracelso la había tomado, y al hablar jugaba con ella.

—Eres crédulo —dijo. —Dices que soy capaz destruirla?

—Nadie es incapaz de destruirla —dijo el discípulo.

—Estás equivocado. Crees, por ventura, que algo puede ser devuelto a la nada? Crees que el primer Adán en el Paraíso pudo haber destruido una sola flor o una brizna de hierba?

—No estamos in Paraíso —dijo tercamente el muchacho; —acqui, bajo la luna, todo es mortal.

Paracelso se había puesto en pie.

—En qué otro sitio estamos? Crees que la divinidad puede crear un sitio que no sea el Paraíso? Crees que

—When?— said Paracelsus, disquieted again.

—Even now— said the disciple, with brusque decision.

They had begun conversing in Latin; now they spoke in German.

The youth raised into the air his rose.

—It is known— he said, that you can burn up a rose and make it bloom from the ashes, through the workings of your art. Let me bear witness to this wonder. I ask this of you: and my life will be yours entirely thereafter.

—You are very credulous— said the master. —I have no need of credulity; I demand faith.

The other was insistent.

—Precisely because I am not credulous I wish to see with my own eyes the annihilation and the resurrection of the rose.

Paracelsus had taken the rose, and he toyed with it as he spoke.

—You are credulous— he said. —You say that I am capable of destroying this?

—No one— said the disciple —is incapable of destroying it.

—You are mistaken. Do you suppose, by any chance, that a thing can be returned to nothing? Do you suppose that Adam in Paradise could have destroyed a single flower, or a blade of grass?

—We are not in Paradise— said the boy, obstinately. —Here, under the moon, everything is mortal.

Paracelsus had got upon his feet.

—And where else are we? Do you suppose the godhead able to create a world that would not be Paradise? Is

la Caída es otra cosa que ignorar que estamos en el Paraíso?

—Una rosa puede quemarse —dijo con desafío el discípulo.

—Aún queda fuego en la chimenea —dijo Paracelso. —Si arrojaras esta rosa a las brasas, creerías que ha sido consumida y que la ceniza es verdadera. Te digo que la rosa es eterna y que sólo su apariencia puede cambiar. Me bastaría una palabra para que la vieras de nuevo.

—Una palabra? —dijo con extrañeza el discípulo. —El atamor está apagado y están llenos de polvo los alambiques. Qué harías para que resurgiera?

Paracelso le miró con tristeza.

—El atamor está apagado —repitió —y están llenos de polvo los alambiques. En este tramo de mi larga jornada uso de otros instrumentos.

—No me atrevo a preguntar cuáles son —dijo el otro con astucia o con humildad.

—Hablo del que usó la divinidad para crear los cielos y la tierra y el invisible Paraíso en que estamos, y que el pecado original nos oculta. Hablo de la Palabra que nos enseña la ciencia de la Cábala.

El discípulo dijo con frialdad: Te pido la merced de mostrarme la desaparición y aparición de la rosa. No me importa que operes con alquitaras o con el Verbo.

Paracelso reflexionó. Al cabo, dijo:

—Si yo lo hiciera, dirías que se trata de una apariencia impuesta por la magia de tus ojos. El prodigio no

the Fall another thing than our not knowing this, that we are in Paradise?

—You can burn up a rose —said the disciple, defiant.

—The wood still burns in the grate. If you cast the rose on those embers, you will believe that it has been consumed, and that the ash is all. I tell you the rose is eternal: and only its appearance can change. A word will suffice me to return that to your sight.

—A word? —said the surprised disciple. —Your brazier is cold and your alembics are covered in dust. What is there to resurrect the rose?

Paracelso looked sadly at him.

—The brazier is cold— he repeated — and the alembics are covered in dust. At this juncture of my long journey I have the use of other instruments.

—I dare not ask what those are— said the other, with cunning or with humility.

—I speak of that which the godhead used to create the skies and the earth, and the invisible Paradise where we are, which our original sin conceals from us: I speak of the Word which the science of the Kabala reveals.

The disciple said frigidly:

—I ask of you the favour of demonstrating the disappearance and reappearance of the rose. It does not matter to me whether you operate upon your apparatus, or with the Word.

Paracelsus reflected. At length he said:

—Were I to do so, you could say that I have by magic brought before your eyes an apparition. The marvel will not

te daría la fe que buscas: Deja, pues, la rosa.

El joven le miró, siempre receloso. El maestro alzó la voz y le dijo:

—Además, quién eres tú para entrar en la casa de un maestro y exigirle un prodigio? Qué has hecho para merecer semejante don?

—Ya sé que no he hecho nada. Te pido en nombre de los muchos años que estudiaré a tu sombra que me dejes ver la ceniza y después la rosa. No te pediré nada más. Crearé en el testimonio de mis ojos.

Tomó con brusquedad la rosa encarnada, que Paracelso había dejado sobre el pupitre, y la arrojó a las llamas. El color se perdió y sólo quedó un poco de ceniza. Durante un instante infinito esperó las palabras y el milagro.

Paracelso no se había inmutado. Dijo con curiosa llaneza:

—Todos los médicos y todos los boticarios de Basilea afirman que soy un embaucador. Quizá están en lo cierto. Ahí está la ceniza que fue la rosa y que no lo será.

El muchacho sintió vergüenza. Paracelso era un charlatán o un mero visionario y él, un intruso, había franqueado su puerta y lo obligaba ahora a confesar que sus famosas artes mágicas eran vanas.

—He obrado imperdonablemente. Me ha faltado la fe, que el Señor exigía de los creyentes. Deja que

bring you the faith you seek: put away, then, your rose.

The youth looked at him, again as apprehensive as ever. The master raised his voice and said:

—Who are you, besides, to enter the house of a Master and demand wonders? What have you done to deserve such favour?

—I know very well that I have accomplished nothing. But I ask, in the name of the many years that I shall study in your shadow, that you allow me to see its ash and, after, the rose again. I shall ask nothing more; and I shall believe the testimony of my eyes.

He took up roughly the spreading rose, which Paracelsus had laid upon his desk, and threw it on the flaming embers. The carnal colour went; and only a little ash remained. Through an infinite instant he awaited the words and the miracle.

Paracelsus had stood calmly by. In a curiously simple way he now said:

—The physicians and the apothecaries of Basel all affirm that I am a trickster. Perhaps they are in the right. There is the ash that was the rose: and will no more be rose.

The boy felt ashamed. Paracelsus was a talker, or a mere dreamer; and he, an intruder, had forced his door, and was now obliging him to confess that his arts, famed for their magic, were useless.

—I have behaved unpardonably. I have lacked faith, which the Lord demands of believers. Grant that

siga viendo la ceniza. Volveré cuando sea más fuerte y seré tu discípulo, y al cabo del Camino veré la rosa.

Hablaba con genuina pasión, pero esa pasión era la piedad que inspiraba el viejo maestro, tan venerado, tan agredido, tan insigne y por ende tan hueco. Quien era él, Johannes Grisebach, para descubrir con mano sacrílega que detrás de la máscara no había nadie?

Dejarle las monedas de oro sería una limosna. Las retomó al salir. Paracelso lo acompañó hasta el pie de la escalera y le dijo que en esa casa siempre bienvenido. Ambos sabían que no volverían a verse.

Paracelso se quedó solo. Antes de apagar la lámpara y sentarse en el fatigado sillón, volcó el tenue puñado de ceniza en la mano cóncava y dijo una palabra en voz baja. La rosa resurgió.

I may see again, and over again, the ash. I shall return when I am stronger, and become your disciple; and at the end of the Way I shall see the rose.

He spoke with unfeigned passion. But that passion was charity, and it revived the ancient master, so venerated, so vilified, so famed, and in the end so hollow. Who was he, Johannes Grisebach, to reveal with a sacrilegious hand that behind the mask there was no one?

The coins could not be left there now, as if for alms, and the youth took his gold as he went. The master accompanied him to the foot of the stair, and said that he would be always welcome in that house. Both knew that neither would turn to look.

Paracelsus was left to himself. Before lighting the lamp and seating himself in his worn armchair, he sifted the negligible handful of its ash into a cupped palm, and in a low voice said one word: the rose returned.

ghivarghese kuzhikandam

Notes

Many thanks to Terence Honess for trying to save me from my own punctuation — purists will still find colons to frown at — and for marking usage that was too adventurous.

I have taken no liberties with the text: except “spreading rose” for “rosa encarnada” — with “carnal” laid on “color” capturing something, I hope, of the original’s suggestion — and “returned” for “resurgio” at the end. The suggestion of daily event intended thus seems warranted by the conspicuous fatigue — the weary prayer to *any god ever* — of the

beginning; but discovering that *behind the mask there is no one* after all — even after the disciple’s *caritas* has revived the master — should make the quotidian flatness of “returned” some finally opaque quality.

To probe at all the workings of so perfect a parable, however, seems an impertinence; and I have tried to sound its dark intent by saying over and over — as if the words made a spell: wilfully deaf to assurances following — the decree of the Evangelist: *in the beginning was the Word*.