

THE ONE BEHIND YOU

(M A T A L L A N A / A N A L L A T A M)

*We would all like the thousand-year-old kingdom,
A kind of Arcady where maybe one would
bBe much more unfortunate than here,
Because it is not about happiness,
Doppelgänger, but rather where there
would be no more of that filthy game of
substitution that we have been busy with,
for fifty or sixty years and where we would
really shake hands instead of repeating
the gesture of fear while wondering if the
other guy is carrying a knife hidden between his fingers.*

Rayuela, Julio Cortázar

A small child looking into a mirror cannot distinguish his/her reflection from the surroundings that it becomes confused with, because this is just a mere extension of the world. After going through different stages, he/she will come to recognise him/herself, not just in a mirror, but in that very world that he used to be a part of. The knowledge of others will develop along side of this knowledge, and differentiation and identification will forever constitute the anchor lines of our identity. Based on these premises, we will have to fight against two sources of information about ourselves throughout our lives: the information that comes from our own perceptions and the information from other people's perception about us. Hence we build that identity that is merely the result of negotiating our need to have bonds with others and to be aware of ourselves. This duality has been in man since his origins and has

taken on mythical tones over time in a desire to recover lost unity and transcend opposites. We are born one, but we are many. The mirror later returned the reflection, not of what we are but of the other. The reflection. A representation of ourselves. The double. A twisted sham of our identity. Borges used to say that *he abhorred mirrors because they multiplied men*. And Matallana adds with his sketches that *mirrors multiply doubts*.

Carlos Matallana navigates the questions of doubles and identity in his little farces. And he does so from the projection of an imposter convincing us of a truth. His previous works and of course this one, have always been characterised by the constantly changing themes and styles in a kind of continuous broadening, in an attempt not to cling to anything that could identify it. And maybe because he, himself was always a double, he can offer us those graphite pantomimes in which he does not only ask himself. It is on paper that he has the chance to manufacture a sort of identity and finally corroborate the fact that all images are a fiction.

The theme of the double has a lot to offer in literature. And one example of this is the sinister figure of *Doppelgänger*, the duplicated figure, the other, the anonymous figure. Like Calvino's *Cloven Viscount*, a character split in two, who travels through cities and forests to end up re-forging himself between good and evil. Or as in Cortazar's *Rayuela* and the vital symmetries of Oliveira and his *Doppelgänger* Traveller. *Frankenstein, Jekyll and Hyde* or Poe's *William Wilson* are merely examples of this dual tradition that started in the northern legends and which has survived to this day. Man is always involved in his eternal struggle between antagonistic principles that determine his future. And the irrational fear of facing his own double.

In these drawings, Matallana becomes a double of himself while he paints a self-portrait: the reflection on the paper is his *Doppelgänger*, the sinister shadow of himself. Or of ourselves. Because these portraits are not merely a narcissist exercise in recognising the author. There are no names or faces, but there is a body and an identity. A mask. In this case, in the representation, the author is an impostor. The Impostor. And he makes it clear with the titles of the works that we are witnessing a farce or a false representation, in which he is the actor and the spectator, impostor and pretender.

The theatrical division of Matallana leads us to an unresolved narrative tension. His images propose scenes and unanswered questions that lead to uncertainty. And beneath the surface, in the heat of the masquerade, ironically, you breathe the possibility of tackling actions of challenging individuality like those that at some moment in time, in a mythical past, were carried out by the beings that left a mark on time. Now only a grotesque pantomime. What seems so familiar to us is no more than the other side of the sinister.

The precision of the drawing, the realist detail and the demand for plausibility accentuate the strangeness of the scenes. These are vaguely familiar, special theatrical effects, laid out to the millimetre, but out of place from the point of view of the narrative. And that is where their sinister appearance lies; because they are shocking and grotesque, but strangely close to us. And the unease and frustration from watching an unfinished play in which we are spared the argument and the outcome for the sake of a discordant knot of hidden quotes. And drawing is the medium to fix them.

If we look at any of these drawings, we believe we are looking at something strangely alien, perhaps without realising that we are glimpsing our double. Copy and original, model and representation.

Ángel Padrón