

Reflections on fascination in relation to bravery

-A transgenerational story-

The actions that require bravery are plentiful. Each decision has consequences - often irreversible and life changing. The only remedy to confront the accompanying inner fear is an overdose of bravery. Some require more doses than others but, ultimately, everyone is in need of it. In the same way each act requires differing levels of bravery, they also result in varying levels of fascination upon their spectators. The word *fascination* is used here not only with connotations of surprise, but of admiration. The perception of this feeling is not a simple task; one can perceive diverse controversial feelings which frequently provide a wave of the Sublime but is unable to recognize the fascination as such. On the other hand, not everyone has the same capability and ability to be fascinated. Generally, in order to do so, one has to be open to fascination. This is not always the case, given that many things exert such power of fascination that regardless of the efforts one may make to restrain from such feelings, this effort is in vain when it is exceeded by the colossal force of the fascination.

Throughout my life, I have found myself affected by this overdose of fascination several times. In some occasions, this fascination has been *manifested* in me - causing feelings which cannot be terminologically defined - yet in other occasions this fascination has *taken over me*, clouding over my feelings and repressing the will to search for definitions. Therefore, I have taken the liberty of classifying them as secondary – those *manifested* – and primary – those *overtaking*. As it is to be expected, the power of the latter is inversely proportional to the frequency with which they occur.

If we may recall, fascination is a consequence - a collateral effect of an action accomplished often with bravery. Each passive fascination relies on the existence of a previous active act of bravery. Hence, I wish to share – but not to define, because of the previously mentioned reason – a personal fascination of mine of the type of the *overtaking*, caused by an act of bravery.

A *name*, a *date*, a *place*. Their concealment has no other purpose but to generalize, in an aim to help the reader establish his own scenario and individualize his character. In this *date*, this same *name* decided to change his *place*. One often has to travel, change one's location for a certain period of time. If these periods are brief, little needs to be reflected on, yet if the trips are lengthy, more deliberation is required. Especially if this involves leaving one's family behind.

1960. Making the decision of emigrating to a foreign land, leaving a family behind, but putting them before anything else. In that year, to emigrate was to seek a better future for your beloved ones. To emigrate was total uncertainty. To emigrate was 'booking a one-way ticket', as we know it in the twenty first century. To emigrate was sacrifice. To emigrate was, above all, bravery. This bravery surely plays an extremely important role in this fascination that has *taken over* of me.

A *place*. I do not reveal it to avoid acclaiming a particular nation. In the end, the migratory movements that have been carried out for decades were never about the *where to*, but the

why. Regardless of the place, there have always been uncountable barriers. The language barrier. The culture barrier. The distance barrier. The fear barrier. The uncertainty barrier. I do not intend for the reader to misinterpret me, since I also believe these barriers to be, once overcome, a great source of satisfaction for the experiencer, in the sense of self fulfilment and personal growth.

When this *name* left, he did not go alone. He left with a group of people who found themselves under similar circumstances and with whom he shared these feelings. The refuge of finding oneself in collectivity. In total, almost two millions of Spanish people emigrated as a result of economic reasons. By virtue of assisted emigration, the Spanish government fixed the problem of unemployment and at the same time encouraged industrial development. Meanwhile, northern countries required support for their workforce. Two millions. Even if this *name* did not personally meet each person who made up the two millions, he indeed met a considerable amount of them. However, he did not find his place amongst them. While many emigrants spent the daily wages in the tavern, this *name* never crossed the doorstep. His only purpose was to work - rewards would come at a later stage. Besides, for him there was no better way to finish the working day than listening to two voices coming out of the other side of the telephone. A wife and a daughter. His sole reason to emigrate.

This child's voice from the other side of the phone has always been proud of her father's determination to undertake such an adventure - and she was never surprised by it. Why would it be surprising when her father had been working since he was her age simply in order to be able to afford nocturnal school? Undoubtedly, this *name* had a curiosity for knowledge. In the same way he memorized all Spanish rivers by just singing a song as a kid, when he emigrated, he managed to learn the corresponding language as easily and as effectively. He never knew how to write a single word, but he could speak it as a native.

That is indeed one of the factors which has exerted an influence in this fascination of mine. Learning something so complex without a guiding tutor teaching you, without physical material on which to rely and definitely, lacking any kind of metalinguistic awareness. As we would say today: building the house from the roof. From my perspective, languages are progressively learned with phonetics, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Even if it is often hard to stick to this chronological line, the foundation of language learning settles in this sequence. However, this *name* moved from the semantic and pragmatic knowledge towards the other three – regardless of his unawareness of that differentiation.

Personally, I find unconceivable the fact that someone could learn a language without that grammatical knowledge as a starting point. And this *name* successfully achieved it. I anticipate that not every reader will find the slightest fascination in these facts – and yet, I am not bothered by it. Fascination, I must add, is a highly subjective experience.

This *name*, whose story I am narrating returned to his native homeland after some years. In his return, he proved those initial barriers to be tools with the power to change oneself. When he returned, he did so as grateful as ever – the same way he remained for the rest of his living days. When he returned, he did it with a will to transmit everything that he had learned. When he returned, he did it with his heart broadened as ever. When he

returned, he felt fortunate - hence his will to share that luck he possessed with everyone who did not have it.

A *name*.

I must admit that even if I have been interested in this story during my whole life, I only became more fascinated when I grew up and this hero did not live anymore. It is a story with which you grow, but only with the ability to fascinate when it conforms something from the past. Few people are able to seize the present time, since they are stuck in the past or anxious about the future – something innately human. Virgil and Horace did warn us: '*Tempus Fugit*' and '*Carpe Diem*', respectively. However, many people distort these sayings – equipping them with connotations of irresponsibility and banality- justifying narcissist behaviors. Even if it is indeed true that their meanings have changed along the different literary periods, from my perspective, the most adequate one is the insistence on the celerity of the passing of time and therefore, the importance of not wasting it. Personally, I do not think that looking back in time or forward to the future necessarily means wasting time. On the one hand, by looking back in time, one can be enriched by abundant personal lessons. On the other, planning the future can provide knowledge about what it is that one must do in order not to have feel fulfilled. I cannot help but thinking of the last verses of Shakespeare's sonnet number 3: 'But if thou live, remembered not to be / Die single and thine image dies with thee'.

Procreation involves being remembered by one's descendants – for the only reason of kinship and closeness in the disposition of a family tree. When a relative undertakes an act of bravery – and this one is preserved within the passing of time – it can cause a much bigger fascination upon the spectator, if compared to another act of bravery – of the same degree – but which does not come straight from your own blood. If the reader has not noticed so far, the fascination I am experimenting is of that type.

The story of this *name* prolongs for several years and it is not my intention to expand on it here. However, I must admit that *his* story of bravery has caused this fascination in me. A fascination which I do not want to define with words, but with which I trust the reader sympathizes. Action - reaction. Stimulus – response.

In this particular case, that initial stimulus has developed in a response. 59 years later. The luck that this *name* had when he returned, I possessed ever since the beginning of my trip. Even before my departure. In these 59 years, the technological developments have drastically reduced the aforementioned barriers. What before were mountains, now are simple hills -and with the option of a cable car. What before was a need, now is just finding oneself, reconnaissance and adventure. And I must admit myself that these have been my source of motivation 59 years later.

Looking retrospectively in time does not necessarily mean this story is not alive anymore. Historical processes repeat themselves in circles. In the same way slavery in the colonies is now repeated in more countries we are willing to admit. In the same way medieval crusades have turned into religious extremism or the racism from the Holocaust into racism against the black community - If one decides to look back to these processes with a rather optimistic mindset, one might as well compare the role of the women who fought for women's suffrage with the current fight to reach total equality in more informal social

positions. In the end, it is undeniable that the processes, whether of benevolent nature or not, repeat themselves over and over again.

That story dating back to 1960 *takes over* me daily. The past in connection to the present, as in any historical process. Action – reaction – action. Stimulus – response – stimulus. *History* will always shape current events, in the same way my present is influenced by that particular *story*. In short, past bravery results in present fascination and present fascination results in subsequent decisions. Thus they form a continuous loop.

A date. A place. A name.

1960. Duisburg, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. Francisco Bravo.

Julia Méndez Bravo