



Ars Poetica: Poems 2006-2013

Ivan Arguelles

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“she is walking the other world?” from *Ars Poetica* *Ars Poetica* is not a sonnet sequence—despite the resemblances—but a sequence of “soundings.” Each poem is carefully dated: it was precisely at this moment that these words occurred to me; it was at this moment that I breathed these words in (“inspiration”). Remembering Wordsworth, we might call these poems spots of time. Ivan Argüelles has produced a body of work rooted in his Mexican-American heritage, but it is unlike anything anyone in any ethnic group has produced. Initially grounded in the Spanish variety of Surrealism, his poetry swiftly began to transform itself into an instrument that communicates before it is fully—or sometimes even partially—understood. It is simultaneously “difficult”—restless, full of “references”—but also immediate, visceral. It cannot be “explicated.” Moving beyond Catholic Mexico/Catholic Spain into the even darker roots of Catholicism, Argüelles’ imagination explores the deeply pagan, deeply anarchic ground of an “other” tradition. Urban, sophisticated, learned in many languages (“tongues”), the poet creates a profane, stunningly transcendent, enormously erotic body of work that would probably have had him burned at the stake in the Middle Ages. Poet John M. Bennett insists that Argüelles’ work “is not really ‘literature’ as the term is commonly understood”: we must read it “with a new mind-set”; “one has to allow oneself to be ‘drowned’ in the ocean of this stunning and protean work and be receptive to all the ambiguities and contradictions it contains.” Argüelles’ own word for his work is “Enigma”; another way to describe it is to insist that it is a mystical consciousness which has removed itself from any known religion: San Juan de la Nada, poetry as that old black magic. Our critical categories fall by the wayside as we attempt to tell people what it is about this work that so moves us, that so “charms” us with its impossible, totally “inconsiderate” power and darkness: “my” inspiration, year 1624 where is verdant luster, where is emerald bay, not carbonized, distance is the symbol, smoking “that” famous cigarette, where sidewalk turns into heaven’s gate, a remark in passing, lowering head in gesture of shy naiad, are there waters so crystalline? distance is the signal, remote the utter language of the Soul, do the two recognize the Other? ++++++ I don’t remember what it is (“my inspiration”) We can call such passages “chaotic”—which they both are and are not. In its incredible swirl of sexuality, erudition, and massive longing, Argüelles’ poetry asks the reader again and again, “You think you have an ego? Try this.” But if we haven’t an ego, what do we “have”? What the entity Argüelles calls his “Muse” has given him: an amazing language that simultaneously attracts and betrays us at every possible moment: “a music emerges a riot.” From Introduction, by Jack Foley.

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