

Letter to Vaclav Havel from Enrique Molina

Two years ago I arrived at Schaumburg Castle in West Germany. A journey that resulted from strange circumstances or at least uncommon motives and, which for me at that point, were dizzying. I was invited by the "Societe Imaginaire" that Batuz presided over and had just founded. In some ways it seemed to me something like an initiation ritual into a secret society. A secret society that did not exist and which nevertheless was inducting me. A society floating in the fantastic and which was at that time, in the most latent sense of the term, imaginary. The still uncertain ritual oscillated between dream and reality. It was establishing a fraternal meeting of people unknown to each other, and I thought about a visionary order of knighthood or a vast conspiracy preparing to embrace the entire planet and whose goal was extraordinary: to bring together in that feudal castle in the sky, on top of a hill jealously guarded by the forest where Sleeping Beauty wandered amongst the trees, a small group of writers and artists who had come from Central Europe and from Latin America. In order to establish a link among the intellectuals of those countries which Batuz describes as "from the periphery," countries which seem almost exotic to those from other places, a confusion of names of cities, rivers, mountains, news fragments or pieces of postcards lost among meandering frontiers.

In that first experience of the "Societe Imaginaire" those of us from Argentina included a visual artist, another writer and myself. Michel Butor would arrive later from France. Two novelists and their wives came from Hungary, and from Czechoslovakia, Vaclav Havel was invited.

We waited for you with great expectations, but you did not arrive. In your place Batuz read us the message that he just received. Havel was forbidden to leave his country. Had he tried they would have detained him at the border; he might have gone to jail or been deprived of his passport.

Now we realize that the "Societe Imaginaire" had fulfilled its charge nonetheless. While we had at that time only vague notices of your literary work, we did know about your struggle for freedom and human rights. But none of your works had been translated to Spanish. Batuz presented us with a moving text, directed to the most vital part of contemporary conscience: your speech entitled "A Word About The Word," written on the occasion of receiving a prize awarded by a group of German editors. In Latin America that text - which I consider to be one of the most important speeches of the year - was completely unknown. The meaning and defense of the word has always been, especially for us, writers and poets, the central focus of our spiritual reality and our fundamental creative material. In your text you project the word into a social arena, a complete development

which in some way, with moving lucidity, predicted the extraordinary changes that have been wrought in the countries of Central Europe. An invocation to the essential truth of man, the truth as an absolute precondition for freedom on all planes and structures of society. The "Societe Imaginaire" in this fashion has put us in communication with the governing idea of your creation. It has allowed us to hold it present in all its vibrant energy and has created a spiritual bond between you and us.

After traversing eight countries Batuz finally succeeded in having "A Word About The Word" rendered into Spanish, thereby making it possible to reach hundreds of millions of persons that speak that language. In Mexico, at the Goethe Institute, they promised to make the translation to give it to Jose Donoso and Jorge Edwards in Chile. Later they indicated the impossibility of doing the translation for lack of time and means. Finally in Buenos Aires, another member of the "Societe Imaginaire" Norberto Silveti Paz, translator of Faust and of Holderlin was able to realize the task.

As I said, in all of Latin America this text was completely unknown. Meanwhile a super abundance of information destroys what is essential in information. Everything ends up on the same level, always the lowest. We become knowledgeable in depth of the quality of football in Czechoslovakia. But we are unaware of many of the most significant names of Czech culture. And vice-versa. The "Societe Imaginaire," to the extent that it can, proposes to fill that void. Through its intervention "A Word On The Word" will be widely distributed in America, beginning with newspapers in Argentina. The Argentines brought together in Shaumburg, from that moment, felt much closer to you. We could say that we came to know you much before your name was known world-wide after your rise to the Presidency of your country, a fact which we all celebrate so much. Paradoxically the "Societe Imaginaire" requires distance as a fundamental element of recognition and affiliation to the organization. Distance will unite us from all of the peripheries. Distance brings us near and confirms our brotherhood.

As a poet it is natural that I would appeal to a magical and transcendent content of the word, to the multiple meaning of each term, its correspondences with all elements of the universe. But this multiplicity of radiation of the poetic word cannot be false nor can it be a mask for any ideology. The authentic poetic word is incandescent, an always desperate search for the essential truth of our condition and of the world in which we live, this durable and terrible planet called Earth.

Only through the existence, now real and fulfilled, of the "Societe Imaginaire" do I have this unusual opportunity to communicate with you in such a personal fashion. However,

I also think that poetry gathers together all the messages of shipwrecks scattered throughout the world, and it is poetry that now allows me to signal to you from so far away, and express my admiration and recognition for your watchword regarding human truth and dignity.

Receive my heartfelt wish of happiness and that of all my companions in the "Societe Imaginaire" which, contrary to all logic, exists without boundaries, amidst all boundaries. And we are all so very happy that Spring now has an eternal home in Prague.

Enrique Molina

translated by  
Timothy J. Keating  
Hartwick College  
Oneonta, New York  
USA