

Pacheco, José Emilio. *Como la lluvia: Poemas 2001-2008*. México DF: Ediciones Era, 2009. ISBN: 978-607-445-019-4. 205 pp.

Pacheco, José Emilio. *La edad de las tinieblas: Cincuenta poemas en prosa*. México DF: Ediciones Era, 2009. ISBN: 978-607-445-020-0. 74pp.

2009 was a big year for Mexico's most influential living poet. In June, José Emilio Pacheco turned seventy years old and published two long-awaited poetry collections. *La edad de las tinieblas* is a slim volume of prose poems while *Como la lluvia* combines five eclectic books into one two hundred page compilation. In the years surrounding his seventieth birthday, Pacheco has been the subject of various *homenajes* in Mexico and abroad and the recipient of some of the most important literary prizes in both Latin America and Spain, including *El Premio Cervantes*, often referred to as "el Nobel de las letras en español."

La edad de las tinieblas Cincuenta poemas en prosa brings together fifty-one short texts that mine themes familiar to readers of Pacheco's twelve previous books: time and aging, history and teleology, authorship, anonymity, and the lessons of a world teetering on the brink of apocalypse. Despite a nine year publishing hiatus between *Siglo pasado (desenlace)* (2000) and the present collections, Pacheco was actively contributing poems and essays to journals and newspapers and much of his frame of reference for his latest books was supplied by the social, political and environmental plight of Mexico's capital city.

The poems of Pacheco's mature years are sardonic and gloomy, weary from the burden of his intensely critical eye. In "A la extranjera," for example, he tells an Austrian friend "No entiendo sus razones para amar un sitio [DF] desesperante y sin esperanza" (31). Poems such as "Algas," "Mexican Curious: Jumping Beans," and "El corredor" create familiar, cyclical allegories of a world in decline, as do other poems composed in some of Pacheco's many favored forms: fables about insects and animals, introspective odes, ecological warnings, and texts written from the point of view of historical figures. Just as the themes of *La edad de las tinieblas* do not constitute a clean stylistic break for Pacheco, his treatment of the prose poem genre is not especially novel either. While some texts are more narrative, allegorical or riddle-like than metered verse might traditionally allow, sometimes the reader

wonders if the main reason for exploring the prose poem was to enter dialogue with earlier practitioners of this hybrid form such as Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Borges, Neruda, Paz or Vallejo.

One final advantage to the prose poem is its natural tendency to lay bare and explain its metaphors, a technique Pacheco has been practicing for decades and continues to cultivate in many different poetic forms in *Como la lluvia*. Poems such as "Mercado de San Juan" reveal the poet's urgency to tell, rather than show, by explicitly providing inferred levels of meaning. *Como la lluvia* contains more than two hundred poems that conjugate the possible outcomes where opposites attract ("La estatua viva"), ponder the meaning of mental illness ("Tierra incógnita") and, overwhelmingly, brood on death (see the entire section "Como si nada. . .," for example). The book is fleshed out by more of Pacheco's signature subjects and styles: poems about nature, history and tyranny, epigrams, texts composed in the voice of other poets or attributed to the heteronym Julián Hernández.

Reading an entire book like this one (does anyone still read entire books of poetry?) lulls the reader into a rhythm of familiar themes and tones and styles, but in poems like "Tierra incógnita" or "Océanos" José Emilio Pacheco is still able to break this cadence by demanding attention, capturing his readers' attention with razor sharp insight, strong imagery and wisdom about the depth and sweep of life. In the end, *Como la lluvia* and *La edad de las tinieblas* should be viewed as an organic extension of a long and evolving body of work from a poet well aware of his talents and station in the writing life. While Pacheco's latest books treat different themes in many innovative ways, almost all of the well-crafted poems within resonate with this lament from "Desorden los factores": "La vida se me acaba sin entender de qué se trata. El mundo insiste en ser como es, no como yo quisiera" (20).

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