

A Hotel with My Name Collected Poems Vol. 1 by Cecilia Pavón trans. Jacob Steinberg
(Scrambler Books, 2015)

El pasado vuelve como cuadro de costumbres donde se valoran los detalles, las originalidades, la excepción a la norma, las curiosidades que ya no se encuentran en el presente.

The past becomes a tableau of habits where details, originality, exceptions to the norm, curiosities are valued that are currently not found in the present.[i]

—Beatriz Sarlo

This new translation of Cecilia Pavón's work by Jacob Steinberg operates through the clever weaving of the intimacy of the everyday with the bleakness of our contemporary situation. Pavón's faith in the certainty of her discovery and confession is what drives this collection. Steinberg's translation is in constant dialogue with Pavón's revelations, while also letting the translator's own fascination and creativity arise.

The poem "Mother" illustrates this play between the mundane and the profound that the poet and translator are engaged in, "I am eating dinner at the House of Pancakes, / where the walls are bland like pillows, / and I can kill the kid without even leaving my seat" (p. 39). There are these spaces where radical honesty becomes critique.

In addition, it is important to note that this interaction with the everyday comes from a deep intimacy, both in the work of Pavón and reflected in Steinberg's translation. These poems and translations start from a deep space of openness. This idea of intimacy found in Pavón's work is interesting to me not only on the page and in Steinberg's touching preface to the collection, but in terms of its distribution and its effect on the culture of Buenos Aires.

Pavón, alongside Fernanda Laguna, is a founder of the artist collective *Belleza y Felicidad* (which celebrated a mini-retrospective at SculptureCenter in Queens this past spring) that worked collaboratively with various artists and writers in Buenos Aires to print small texts, including Pavón, Laguna, Fabián Casas, Roberto Jacoby, César Aira among others. In this way Pavón's sense of revelation and honesty departs from the page and extends into print culture, early internet culture and collectivism all amidst the crisis of 2001, one of the most economically tumultuous periods in the history of Argentina.

Steinberg's translation works to extend this sentiment. My favorite poem in the collection is "Ira" ("Anger") from Pavón's book *Virgin (2001)*. I am especially interested in how Pavón and Steinberg's work with intimacy relate to the idea of the index and categorization (March 22: the plantain trees leaves / spin with grace [85]). The poem works well in its specificity. The poem is a list, a yearning for one's own list in the face of chaos and perhaps an overabundance of information. ("12:30: I needed the wind to caress me, / so I fled home" [85]) It makes sense that

the title for the collection *A Hotel with My Name* comes from such a need for control and self-maintenance and identity in the face of this sort of distraction.

Pavón describes this idea of distraction on a visual level "why are there so many people exiting that theatre? / They're going to distract me from my emotions, / and I won't be able to stay focused on my witchcraft. (87)" but there is also a fear of memory loss as well "I felt anger as the afternoon fell and I can't remember the / effects (87)." One might say this poem describes a sense of "information overload," the over-accessibility of information and its effect on the psyche and ideas of identity. And yet the poem is not overly reductive or pressing in its tone. There is a natural intimacy and nuance to her tone.

Pavón's work perhaps speaks to a greater issue of internet culture and production while remaining remarkably personal and specific, and Steinberg captures it brilliantly (The power is out, / but only in my house. / It would have been better if it had gone out / for the next ten blocks.). These lines might also speak to Pavón's collective goals at the heart of Belleza y Felicidad. There is an impactful story of personal strength and perseverance but also one that seeks a collective voice. As she references a conversation with Fernanda Laguna in the poem "Annihilation" "They must think we're crazy, / they don't invite us to their houses, / even though they appreciate us. (89)."

A Hotel with My Name: Selected Poems—Book 1 is available from Scrambler Books, 2015.