

OUT OF THE BLUE

The commemorative poetry about September 11th



Family members visited the Sept. 11 memorial, where the names of the dead have been inscribed on the walls. [Go to 2011 slide show](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/09/02/resources-teaching-and-learning-about-911-with-the-new-york-times/?r=0) »Credit Todd Heisler/ The New York Times- [http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/09/02/resources-teaching-and-learning-about-911-with-the-new-york-times/? r=0](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/09/02/resources-teaching-and-learning-about-911-with-the-new-york-times/?r=0)

Subject: Poesía inglesa de los siglos XX y XXI / **Group:** A / **Lecturer:** Miguel Teruel Pozas. **Student:** Carmen Cócera Hernández

1. INTRODUCTION:

September 11, 2001 began like any other day of clear skies and a sun reflecting on the windows of the “Twin Towers”, who could imagine that the day would become night, a night of nightmare for the United States. Those who received the news across the screen of their TV in the safety of their homes could not believe it. United States, which was considered untouchable and protected by God, was suffering an apocalyptic terrorist attack that would show all its vulnerability. That morning, The Twin Towers, part of the complex of buildings of the World Trade Center in Manhattan, New York City, were completely destroyed. Nineteen members from the Al-Qaeda’s Jihadis network, a Sunni Islamist global organization founded by Osama bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam, hijacked four passenger airliners to be crashed into buildings. People who worked in the towers ended up dying after the impact or the collapse, many were forced to jump out of windows to avoid being burned, some lucky people got to escape but there were wounded and some with post-traumatic stress. Numerous rescue teams of fire-fighters and police officer also died when they responded to the first attack and the buildings collapsed. The largest city in the United States and all citizens were left in shock. However, the devil had still kept an ace up his sleeve and a third plane crashed into the Pentagon. The forces of security of the state put the country on maximum alert on risk of new attacks. The public transport remained inoperative. Then, the last flight: United Flight 93 fell in an open field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Apparently, there would have been a struggle crew and passengers with the hijackers to take control of the device. Fear, immediately, gave way to solidarity worldwide. Many countries offered pro-American support.

After the attacks did not take long to find responsible. Someone had to pay for that. A total of 2996 people had been perished. President Bush spoke to the American people at 8:30 p.m. This were his words: "These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat, but they have failed." The authorities undertook a rapid and effective investigation which led them to find the culprits. Very soon, it was unveiled to the public that those responsible for the attacks were Muslim fanatics led by Mr. bin Laden. This news created an Islamophobic wave among citizens, so many innocent Muslims paid with their lives. As it could be observed, the most shocking of these attacks were not the victims, it was the consequences that they brought. Not only human and economic losses but the feeling of insecurity and interracial hatred. Over the

years there have been conspiracy theories that say it was not an external attack, but organized by the United States itself. Then, they had the perfect excuse to invade Afghanistan and take its oil. Famous journalists and writers have published about it. Even some survivors have written their traumatic experiences as a therapy and even, they have given their opinion on who they think were the real perpetrators. But few have put voice to those who died that day. Simon Armitage did it.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE POEM 12 BY SIMON ARMITAGE

Out of the Blue - 12poem

You have picked me out.

Through a distant shot of a building burning
you have noticed now
that a white cotton shirt is twirling, turning.

In fact I am waving, waving.

Small in the clouds, but waving, waving.

Does anyone see
a soul worth saving?

So when will you come?

Do you think you are watching, watching
a man shaking crumbs
or pegging out washing?

I am trying and trying.

The heat behind me is bullying, driving,
but the white of surrender is not yet flying.

I am not at the point of leaving, diving.

A bird goes by.

The depth is appalling. Appalling
that others like me

should be wind-milling, wheeling, spiralling, falling.

Are your eyes believing,
believing
that here in the gills
I am still breathing.

But tiring, tiring.
Sirens below are wailing, firing.
My arm is numb and my nerves are sagging.
Do you see me, my love. I am failing, flagging.

TRANSLATION INTO SPANISH – POEMA 12

Me has escogido.
A través de una toma lejana de un edificio en llamas
lo has notado ahora
que una camisa de algodón blanco está girando, girando.

De hecho estoy agitándome, saludando
Pequeño en las nubes, pero saludando, saludando
¿Alguien ve
un alma que valga la pena salvar?

Así que ¿cuándo vas a venir?
¿Crees que estás viendo u observando
un hombre quitarse las migas
o tendiendo la ropa?

Lo estoy intentando e intentando.
El calor detrás de mí es intimidante, me empuja

pero la bandera blanca de la rendición aún no está volando.

No estoy en el punto de abandonar, de zambullirme.

Un ave que pasa.

La profundidad es atroz. Es espantoso

que otros como yo

deban estar girando con el viento, dando vueltas, cayendo en espiral.

Pueden tus ojos creérselo,

creérselo

que aquí, con branquias

Todavía estoy respirando.

Pero cansado y agotado.

Abajo las sirenas están aullando, disparadas.

Mi brazo está adormecido y mis nervios están decaídos.

¿Me ves, mi amor? Estoy cayendo, exhausto.

Simon Armitage is a British poet and novelist that in 2006 decided to work on the poem-film *Out of the Blue*. He always has demonstrated a strong concern for social issues, so he wrote a volume of poems to commemorate the 5th anniversary of '9/11'. In fact, *Out of the blue* is a long one poem which is divided in 13 fragments. This poem, which is divided in seven stanzas of four-lines each, tells a story about a man who is working in one of the “Twin Towers” the day of the attacks; this man discovers that what he considered other ordinary morning is not, when it changes suddenly to become a catastrophic and violent hell. After the two planes crash into the buildings, our speaker and other people are trapped inside without any possibility to scape, they cannot use the lifts or the stairs; the smoke and heat are very sweltering. The unique exit are the windows but jumping from there is committing suicide.

The reader is facing a dramatic monologue. The protagonist in this tragedy is alone because no one can help him. The first line of the first stanza begins with a hard "You";

the victim appeals to a reader who can only watch helplessly as the story progresses. The feeling is almost suffocating. No exit. We can even imagine the warmth of the blazing flame. The reader is focused on this man who seems to be hanging from the window, because his white shirt is “twirling, turning” probably due to the wind outside. The narrator feels observed so he begins to talk to one who has chosen him. Thus, a close relationship between the reader and the narrator is created. The poet has two great ideas: the first one, he designs a climate of anguish and panic, and the second one that he moves from the general aspects to the details. In the second stanza, the word “waving” is repeated four times. The protagonist is waving his arms to call the attention to be saved or just to say farewell to the world. We can notice the desperation at the end of the stanza when he asks “Does anyone see a soul worth saving?” it sounds almost like a prayer, a plea because if he is not going to be saved, Could his soul be saved at least?

At the beginning of the third stanza, we have to face a hard question: “So when will you come?” despite the tension of the moment, the narrator does not lose hope. In the fourth stanza, the speaker knows that his end is coming but he is not prepared for surrendering even when he has the heat of the flames behind him.

In the next stanza, the unexpected image of a “bird” assails us, if one were a bird could get away without problems. However, it is impossible and others like him have already begun to fall over. The “depth appalling” provokes us a sense of vertigo. The bodies look like rag dolls that are spiralling out of control until they impact the floor. Both the narrator and the reader are in a state of shock, everything seems to happen so fast that it is not enough time to assimilate what is going on. The speaker wakes us of our absorption with a new question in the sixth stanza: “Are your eyes believing, believing?” and finishes it in a drastic way: “I am still breathing”. This information tells us that he is not going to be alive much more. It sounds so terrible.

At the end, the narrator has to confront his tragic fate. The situation looks like a bad joke. Ironically, he can listen from on high how the help is coming: “Sirens are wailing below, firing.” A help that is waiting downstairs, in the street, where he no longer needs it. What is more, the sound of the ambulances is almost like a torment. The decision is taken, it is time to jump. He tells us how he feels before falling: “My arm is numb and my nerves are sagging.” We observe in silence holding the breath. While he is falling he is addressing to someone: “Do you see me, my love [...]”. Then the reader realizes that

the man was talking to an important person to him and not to us. We can suppose that this person is his wife. Although, he falls flat alone, he has the need to stay accompanied, even in a spiritual way, by the person he loves most in such a dramatic moment. But, the end is most gruesome than it seems because the last word used is "flagging" so we assume that while he is falling, he desperately tries holding on to something to avoid dying.

It is also remarkable in the poem, the repetitive use of the "-ing" suffix. It is really useful because gives us a sense of progression in the story. We can follow every single moment like something that is happening just right now. Time is suspended in the present. Furthermore, the repetition of a few words shows the seriousness of what we are facing, it emphasises the desperation and gives cohesion to the poem; even sometimes, it works as a union from one line to next (enjambment).

Finally, I would like to comment that the poem is based on the picture taken by the photographer Richard Drew of a falling man from the north tower of the World Trade Centre. The identity of this man was unknown until friends and relatives recognised him by the clothes in the picture. It seems that this was Jonathan Briley. He was an audio technician of Windows on the World Company. He was 43 year-old. In this poem, Armitage uses the image of this man to give voice and face to the victims who were forced to jump through the windows due to the unbearable heat and choking smoke. At last, victims can be heard, they can express their fear and despair. It is not just survivors who put voice to the history, it is not just a bunch of names on a wall. They are who died without choice. Now that they have been heard, they can rest in peace. Probably, Armitage could have been more involved in the poem, what to give a political opinion is concerned, as some have criticized the poet prefers to stay out instead of taking part by giving his opinion. I believe that it is not fair to blame the poet if he is more or less critic with what happened that day because in the poem, he is talking by those who were astonished and overwhelmed by the situation, he reflects very well the suffering of those who lived the worst or the last day of their lives and I think that the victims thought, at that time, how to survive or call their loved ones and not if it was their own government who organized everything. So, I do not see why the poet must be more involved in political issues when the poem goes beyond. It is not about the perpetrators, but their victims. We are facing a commemorative poem rather than to a philosophical dissertation on terrorism. When I read this poem, I could see that Armitage is a very

particular poet who has his own style. For that reason, he cannot be confused with any other poet. He writes passionately on social issues and almost effortlessly reaches the reader with an overwhelming simplicity. Naturalness in describing the everyday events and simple language facilitates their relationship with the reader who is reflected in his poems.

3. CONCLUSION:

After the attacks of September 11 the world already has not returned to be the same. Americans have a constant feeling of panic, fear that at any time they can be attacked again. The government took advantage of the fear of citizens to take a series of security measures, as we can see in the documentary film: *911 experts speak out*; “the civil liberties were removed by the Patriot Act, Military Commissions Act, Department of Homeland Security,” and so on. Currently, the citizens can be arrested without a warrant and without evidence if they are associated with terrorism. The same questions are asked constantly by many people: How could something like this happen? How two planes ended up knocking down three buildings? Why the area was not investigated thoroughly? The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) published a document years later to explain the collapses and answer some of these questions. But the explanations were unclear. According to experts who do not work for the government, the collapse of the buildings was a controlled demolition and they know it by the way that the third building, the World Trade Centre 7 fell, because it collapsed with zero resistance and buildings do not have zero resistance; it could be seen clearly in the video. Furthermore, many witnesses who survived the catastrophe claim that suddenly they listened to a succession of explosions and immediately the buildings collapsed. Everything very suspicious. For that reason, it is believed that the US government was involved in the attacks. Furthermore, it was not the first time that the World Trade Centre had suffered terrorist attack, the underground of the North Tower was bombed in 1993. Knowing this, why they were not forewarned? In my opinion, many people lost their lives for the interests of a few. Over the years, life continued but relatives of the victims still have no answers. The attack seemed to be randomly and the collapse of the buildings unexpected at the view of the citizens; and this is basically what “*Out of the blue*” means. Simon Armitage decided this title for his book because it turned out to be an abrupt and unforeseen event. The title reflects the chaos in a perfect way.

To conclude, I would like to say that the poem reflects a heinous suffering that is hard to read. In fact, analysing it has not been easy because as I said, the poem is fraught with very negative emotions and images of a moment of terror and stupefaction for the whole world. However, despite the difficulties, I liked that victims take an active part in what happened through the poet and in this way, those who died can share their drama. It is true that, we will never know exactly how they lived every moment, but we can walk in their shoes for a while and imagine it. So, we are on the verge of a nervous breakdown and we see ourselves making a last call before falling. Luckily, when we finish reading the poem, we realize that we can breathe, we can see a new day and our name is not in the National September 11 Memorial & Museum.

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