

Hugo Cuevas-Mohr

>> Interview

A poet from Cali launched the book **'The Gamboas: A dynasty of poets'** which accounts for a history that has shades of myth: during five generations, the descendants of Isaias Gamboa and his brothers have been poets.

The case is unique in Latin America.

Let's talk about 'The Gamboas: A dynasty of poets'. How was the book born and what is it about?

It was all born from a compilation of poems and profiles of poets from the Gamboa family. An initial work in 2004 undertaken by Dr. Vicente Perez Silva for the centennial commemoration of poet Isaias Gamboa's death.

Don Vicente is a historian and writer associated with the Institute Caro y Cuervo in Bogota. He has done monographs of known poets, and it seemed very interesting to him that Isaias Gamboa and his brothers (Francisco, Mateo and Ezequiel) and a number of their descendants inherited the love and taste for poetry. That tradition has remained in the family for five generations.

After that initial work, with this book we are now trying to raise awareness of the Gamboa's family origins and the history of some of its family members, which since the XIX century until today have written poetry. There are about 30 of them. This is something that might have a genetic explanation or it is just tradition, I do not know. But there is no question about it, there is something there. This case of poetic tradition in one family, asserts Don Vicente, is unique in Latin America.

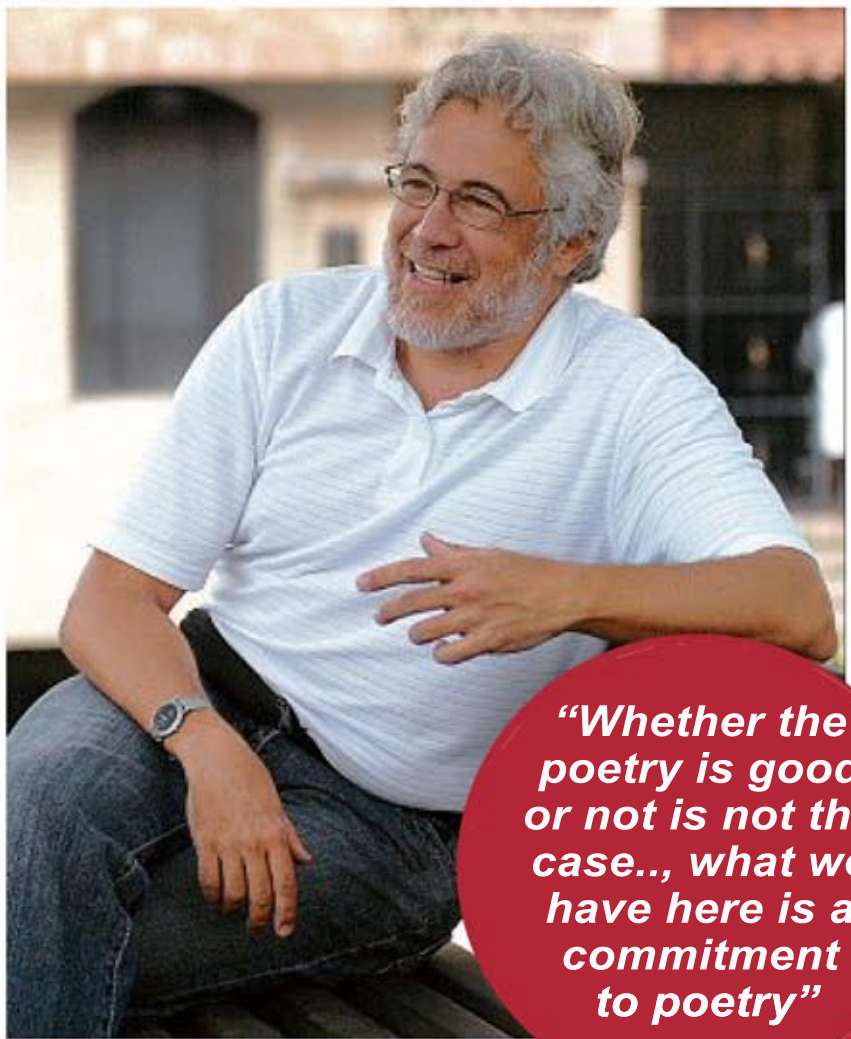
How was the investigation carried out?

For the centennial commemoration of Isaias Gamboa we created a website, www.familiagamboa.com.

There we started gathering the family genealogy, stories, writings. That work has been done from 2004 until now; without the magic of technology, it could not have been done. Thanks to the website, more and more poets that were part of the Gamboa family were appearing, all related to Isaias and his brothers.

A number of interesting cases came up, like that of Claudia Llerena. Claudia is a great-granddaughter of Francisco, a brother of Isaias who arrived to El Salvador in 1880. He was a professor, reformed public education in El Salvador, he was the country's Vice Minister of Education, a bright intellectual and there he started his family branch. From that family branch, there are about five poets that were not aware that in the other branch of the family in Colombia there were also poets. Claudia, as well, was not aware of that.

I was following that path, researching her life, when another branch of the Gamboa family appeared. Thanks to Mauricio Maya Quintana, an engineer, who for over ten years has been compiling his family tree on his own. When we joined his family branch to ours, the poets of the Gamboa-Maya branch appeared: one of them was Fray Teofilo Maria Gamboa a Franciscan friar who lived in the convent in front of the Government Center in Cali and who carried the Holy Oils to senior citizens of San Antonio and El Peñon. Nevertheless, it has been a continuous and passionate discovery



"Whether the poetry is good or not is not the case..., what we have here is a commitment to poetry"

And what was the revelation that impacted you the most?

Actually there were several. Once a Gamboa descendant wrote to me, who lives in the United States, Jaime Hernandez, and tells me: "Hugo, I left Cali when I was only 11 years old. My son was born here in the United States and his name is David Hernandez. He doesn't speak Spanish, we never taught him. He lives in California and has now four books of poetry written in English. It seems to me that according to all your work trying to find more about the family, you have to know about him". And of course I did. Last year David wrote his first novel and now stands as one of the top ten most prominent Latino writers for the next decade. He doesn't know Cali, had no idea who Isaias Gamboa was, and the Gamboa poetry tradition. So what is all this? Repeating what I said, I do not know if it is genetic, if it is tradition for poetry, or something else. But it is amazing....



>> The book was done by Vicente Perez Silva and Hugo Cuevas-Mohr, who writes inspired by his grand-mother Margarita Gamboa, a pioneer in women's erotic poetry in Colombia.

Written originally in Spanish by Santiago Cruz and translated by Jaime Hernandez and Hugo Cuevas-Mohr

one last question...

Then we have the case of Nelson Rodríguez...

>> Yes, Nelson Rodríguez appeared later on; an old man now, he migrated to the United States forty years ago. He didn't take his family with him but provided for them all these years, living by himself and working as a plumber on a cookie factory. And the only thing he has done continuously has been writing poetry. He has more than 1500 poems that he had never shown. I had to stop the printing of the book. I had to wait for Nelson to be in it...