

LUIS BORRERO

Boda, 2011
Oil on linen, 32 x 40 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST, PRIVATE COLLECTION

MÓNICA LAVÍN

A Handbook for Falling in Love

1

I didn't do it to make money. It didn't start that way, at least; although I didn't discount the possibility of proving that it was where the money is. If to write and live off it formed an equation, it would be possible with the product I would create. I began the project to amuse myself, as a kind of scientific affront, to mock aesthetic ideals or literary heights, and also—why not?—to find out if I could clear my mind of my erudition, dismiss my skepticism and unadorned realism, and find a way to lie about happiness. I knew there were no formulas to achieve happiness and in any case wanted to explore the problem independently, invent my own method, without consulting any of those bestsellers. I wanted to see if I could become a trickster of certain ploys, techniques, practices, and attitudes that would transport one to sustained happiness. The difficult or amusing thing, to tell the truth, was that I had to make myself naïve again, disguise myself as a man who firmly believed what he preached; I had to be a believer while I pressed my fingers to the keyboard and created schemes. I made fun of myself, but couldn't reveal the jest, no; the guide must acquire followers and for that my voice had to possess the ring of truth that compels others to look in the same direction as oneself. I would be a shepherd; a guide. Nothing further from my work as historian, where I seek sources, question their origins, and develop a documented thesis. In my new enterprise I wouldn't appeal to philosophers and even less to writers, who had all been less than happy. The words would emerge from what I believed others wanted. A single man, I had lived with various women, then finally settled into that delicious liberty of owning space, time, Saturdays, and Sundays; my life was that of a monk with sporadic adventures, most of the time with students or women I'd met at some gathering.

I had to begin by thinking of the overall approach, or the central thesis: the daily routine, not extraordinary but ordinary life, and how, within it, poor heroes of our lives, we could find an epic dimension. Thus it was that I closed myself during the afternoons of a month, including weekends. When my colleagues or my sister invited me to dinner, worried about my isolation, regressing at fifty-five years of age, I alluded to the revelatory biography of notable historians I was writing for high school students.