




TRANSLATORS' RINCÓN de TRADUCTORES CORNER



“The Guerrilla Fighter” *and* “May as Well Call it Quits”
by Albalucía Ángel Marulanda

translated by
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Introduction

Albalucía Ángel Marulanda (1939-) is a celebrated author in Colombia, where her writing is considered vitally important as a historic testimony of one of the nation's most violent periods, La Violencia (1948-1958). Her works embody a feminist perspective and wrestle with topics such as women's rights and Colombian history. Her most recognized novel, *Estaba la pájara pinta sentada en el verde limón*, was awarded the prize *Vivencias de Cali* (1975).

Albalucía Ángel has reached many generations of readers in her country. Her texts are recognized for their capacity to evoke traditional Colombian culture and for emphasizing the perspectives of underrepresented actors in society. They are valuable fonts of polysemy and intertextuality, recoding the idiomatic expressions of her home country and transforming them into literary experiments. The range of voices embedded in her fictionalized accounts is an especially important source of diversity during a challenging time for the country, as Colombia confronts issues of historical memory and demilitarisation. Additionally, Ángel has used her voice to support other Latin American female writers and to advocate for women's rights. She has continually embraced a female form of expression. In 2006, the Third Conference on Colombian Writers was dedicated to her work and historical contributions in challenging gender stereotypes.

The two short stories selected for translation, *El guerrillero* and *Apagá y vámonos*, are found in her collection of short stories, *¡Ob gloria inmarcesible!* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1979), which brings to life sketches of Colombian life in various regions of the country. The pastiche-like stories critique the corruption, drug trade, and violence which underlie Colombian society, even as the country is advertised as an idyllic vacation spot. The themes of these stories are as prominent today as they were forty years ago. *El guerrillero* narrates the experience of a woman who must reclaim her autonomy in the face of reprisals and sexual violence. To this day, guerrilla struggles rage on in rural areas; however, whereas in Ángel's story there is a measure of sympathy for the resistance



fighter—an idealistic and romantic figure—, today the guerrillas are decoupled from their origins in the student-led protest movements of the sixties and are instead linked to the drug trade and human trafficking. *Apagá y vámonos*, on the other hand, is a stream of consciousness narrative of a union leader’s grievances against a deeply flawed society. It is a breathless barrage of recriminations which transports the reader *in situ*, as if she were listening to the narrator speak while sipping on a ‘tinto’ (black coffee). The recent wave of protests across Chile and Colombia (2019) echo these sentiments, as the public took to the streets to denounce political corruption and price hikes.

As with many female Latin American writers from her generation, Ángel’s work has not been disseminated in the way it truly deserves. In presenting these short stories for publication, it is hoped that her prose will reach a wider English-speaking audience and that Colombia’s history, culture and literature be shared with others around the world.

About the translator

Daniel Steele Rodríguez (1991-) is a bilingual speaker of English and Spanish. He was born and raised in Spain, but spent his adolescent and college years in California. He graduated from UC Berkeley with a bachelor’s degree in Spanish Literature, and currently lives in London, where he continues to write and translate short stories. In 2018 he won a local short story contest in Santander, Spain, the *Premio José Hierro*, and in 2019 he obtained first prize in the Spanish category of the *Energheia* awards in Matera, Italy.

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*To the prophet Gonzalo,
wherever he may be.*

THE GUERRILLA FIGHTER

You'll get what's coming to you, Felicidad Mosquera, when they turn up armed with blades, barking out where's he hiding, just to get you to confess. They'll prod you. They'll force you to betray him 'cause if you don't we'll snatch your old folks, like they did to your chum Cleta two days ago, or they'll burn your hands in the fire like they did to Calixto Peñalosa, or they'll slash open your belly after all of 'em have used your body. That's how it'll go down, Felicidad. You can bet on it. Had you fled with him, you wouldn't have to endure this. You wouldn't be scrambling about, crying and wailing, searching for anything that might do as a weapon and barricading the door with a few bits of furniture, had you thought of something to say that night, when Sebastián Martínez's dogs began to howl as if they'd seen the devil and you found him there, standing ever so still, his leather gaiters in shreds and his white shirt seeped in blood. You'd have done better to come up with some pretence, anything that got him to answer goodnight and sent him back to where he'd come from, but curse your luck, it didn't happen that way. Too damned bad. Without trading words you bid him step inside, pulled up a chair, he let himself fall heavy as lead, and then you spotted the other wound on his forehead, I'm tired, is all he muttered, and then he crashed onto the floor like a buckling horse. What got into you, Felicidad Mosquera? What ill-fated star beguiled you like that, what evil wind blew directly into your heart to blaze it up that way, to blind you? 'Cause you were rightly blinded. Those chills you felt, when you gazed at his features and acknowledged that he was beautiful. That you liked his dark moustache. The nervous hurry with which you set the pot to boil and prepared the herb plasters— it wasn't your usual haste. You've always been cool-headed.



A watchful heart. Vigilant. You've never fallen head over heels for anybody. What happened to you, clue me in. What the hell came over you when instead of driving him away, once he felt better and began going on walks at night, collecting wood for you, offering to husk the corn, to fetch water— when instead of saying O.K., farewell, you claimed that it wasn't any bother, of course not, that he should stay a few more days. What the fuck happened. I can't make any sense of it. Felicidad Mosquera, I hardly recognize you. I never thought one could change so quickly, switch from black to white like you did, just so: from one day to the next. Every time he set his blue eyes on yours, you were seized by a tremor, and you stuttered, child-like, when he asked for a pinch of salt and then grazed you with his fingers as you placed it in his hand, for in those moments everything inside you came undone, changed flows, you just lost it, so how's it fucking possible you didn't even catch on? To place salt in someone else's hand is an ominous thing. It brings bad luck. Ill fate. And what about that day, when instead of letting him get a breath of air on his own, you got all flustered when he offered let's take a turn and when you crossed the bridge he took hold of your waist —'cause it's wobbly, was his excuse—, but you very well felt how that warmth emanating from his touch started spilling in, scorching, aching, for it was a cry that voiced what dwelt inside you. A deep moan. They're coming, Felicidad Mosquera. They'll come screaming that they know all about it. Rousing up the house and kicking down doors, like they did to Prospero Montoya's wife, who they ditched in a wash basin with her belly gashed open and the baby still inside. They won't give you the chance to take flight. When they arrive suddenly like that, they're ready to end you. Ready to disappear you without a trace. They'll claim they know all about him to get you to fall for their ruse. But only you and the Lord were witness. The only witnesses to that encounter in the tall grass, on the river banks, between the layers of scent. Who else but you can swear to that ecstasy, his member that sought your insides as it traced your boundaries and turned you into a current, into furtive light, into sea, who else but you could know of the cadence of your feverish hips, of your hands searching for him, reaching for the thighs which pressed softly against your entrance to life. Who but you heard his groan? His tender exploration. His long and unrelenting orgasm while you sunk into the stillness of



luscious flesh, into a rapid throb that hastened the pulse of your muscles and in the end slackened, delivering a body-wide contraction, an inner howl which surfaced towards you like a flood. And who could be the judge of you, Felicidad Mosquera, when only the Lord and you can swear to its truth. No one will dare. Let them search your very innards, hack you to bits with their blades, pierce your senses, penetrate your very soul, seeing as they won't find a thing. Not a single strand. So drop the barricade. Cast away your fears. Don't curse no more 'cause he's far off and all that really matters is that he save himself so that he carry on fighting. You won't breathe a word. Not even if they set your shanty alight, shove in their pricks or bottles, do the same things they did to the others to break you down, stay firm goddammit, Felicidad Mosquera, don't scream or cry. Open the door yourself. Stand upright in the doorway. Hold their stare.



To Nena Pumarejo

MAY AS WELL CALL IT QUITTS

Say brother what's with the new price hikes on beef and 'em scrambled-eggs sky high 'cause you can hardly afford a pound of butter and eggs are soaring gas workers have been on strike since Monday the electric bills cost an arm and a leg as well as schooling for the boys this morning they were hounding me for an extra quarter to ride the bus 'cause nowadays it costs as much as a cab ten years ago even though I keep hearing those *gringos* in New York pay the price of gold for coffee and how that's our bonanza though in our stores all we ever get is the low-grade stuff... have you even had a sip of a decent home-grown roast recently? Dunno what's worse whether these jacked up prices or the idiot box yammering on so that your old lady fancies any goddam thing she gets advertised or those government hardhats or the students protesting or that Fab soap which hardly removes any stains I'd be hard-pressed to recall this much thievery and meanness on the streets why just yesterday they cleaned out three *cantinas* and a bank plus at the church of *San Roque* they even took off with the priest's cassocks and what of the kidnappings well it's small change compared to yesterday's report in *El Tiempo* on parliamentary impunity and today it's hot off the press that a senator cooked up a fine scheme to swindle those priests serves those idiots right and anyway who asked 'em to be such bootlickers... did you read about the bishop? he's in hot water I'll be damned those crooks are first-rate at stirring up trouble and what of the cocaine on board the *Frigate Insignia* just wait and see at election time they'll have us vote for whoever offers a chicken in every pot that's a real con but this time there's no fucking way I'll drop any ballot in the box it don't work like that 'cause I'm right well fed up that's what I said last Thursday I made it pretty damn clear before they set down the Brotherhood minutes... bonanza? Bogus... not for the straw-hatted bumpkin don't fall for that old trick they'll leave us chumps as always hoping for a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow.