



RINCÓN DE
TRADUCTORES

TRANSLATORS'
CORNER

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Volume 2
Compilation 2020-2021

Edited by
Marta Mateo and Juan Manuel Arias

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Presentation

We are happy to present the second compilation volume of translations published in the *Rincón de Traductores/Translators' Corner*, a section which the *Observatory of the Spanish Language and Hispanic Cultures in the United States* launched on its website exactly two years ago, with the aim of fostering the English translation of brief works originally produced and published in Spanish, from no matter which author, genre, country or period, thus contributing to one of the purposes of this research center of the Instituto Cervantes at Harvard University: the dissemination, in the US, of literary and intellectual creation in Spanish. As I mentioned in the Presentation of the first compilation volume of the Observatory's Translators' Corner (2020, p. 5), "turning this production into the main language used in the US will help it reach a wider audience since, in translated form, it will not only be accessible to hispanists or English-speaking readers with a good command of Spanish –i.e. those who can read the original creations from the Spanish-speaking world, but also to those who have very little or no knowledge of this language but might nevertheless be interested in the literature and cultures associated with it." Translation may also hopefully help to open the door of English-speaking contexts to works which have never been known beyond the Hispanic world for reasons which are often hardly connected with their literary value or appreciation by original readers.

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To quote the words about the invaluable contribution of translation to cultural and human development in the excellent and widely acclaimed essay *El infinito en un junco*, by Spanish writer Irene Vallejo –who features in the present volume with another work, “[w]ithout translations, we would have been very different. [...] [O]ur old habit of translating has built bridges, has amalgamated ideas, has started an endless polyphonic conversation, and has protected us from the worst perils of our provincial chauvinism, showing us that our language is just one among many—in reality, many in one.”¹

¹ [My translation]. Original text: “Sin traducciones, habríamos sido otros [...] [N]uestro antiguo hábito de traducir ha tendido puentes, ha amalgamado ideas, ha originado una conversación polifónica infinita, y nos ha protegido de los peores peligros de nuestro chovinismo aldeano, enseñándonos que nuestra lengua es una más –y, en realidad, más de una–.” In Vallejo, I. (2020 [2019]). *El infinito en un junco. La invención de los libros en el mundo antiguo*. Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, p. 247.

We should therefore pay tribute to translators —who break the barriers that separate linguistically diverse cultures through their work— for their crucial role in the construction and enrichment of societies. Together with the translated texts, they occupy a central position in the Rincón de Traductores/Translators’ Corner, as its name reveals, also acknowledging the fact that the target texts presented in it are the translators’ own proposals. Indeed, it is the translators themselves who decide which texts from the Hispanic-speaking world are worth presenting in English, and submit them for our consideration; their proposals are the result of their own decision-making also in terms of translation strategies, which inevitably always reflect the translator’s expertise, creativity, previous readings and experiences, even ideology, as well as knowledge of and attitude towards both the original and the receiving languages and cultures.

Throughout its first two years, this section has received and published proposals by translators from either the country of origin of the source text in question or from the target context, mainly the United States and sometimes other English-speaking countries —as can be seen in the bionotes included in the introductions to the translations with which translators help readers contextualize the original work and author.

This second compilation volume —which will have both a digital and a printed edition, like the first one— collects the translations published online in the Translators’ Corner throughout the academic year 2020-2021, with texts coming from a variety of countries —Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Guatemala and Spain— by nine different authors: Santiago Alba Rico, Ivanna Chapeta, Gustavo Gac-Artigas, José Luis García Martín, Carmen Laforet, Robert Lima, Montserrat Ordóñez, Emilia Pardo Bazán and Irene Vallejo. In 2020-2021, the Translators’ Corner has allowed us to explore genres which had not featured in it before, such as poetry, chronicles and memoirs. The authors themselves show an interesting diversity, with prominent writers like Emilia Pardo Bazán and young promising ones such as Ivanna Chapeta featuring side by side. The translators also come from various backgrounds, some of them being experienced professionals, others initiating their careers; we are pleased to note that two of them have contributed to the Translators’ Corner for a second time, namely Erin Goodman and Francisca González Arias, translations by whom also appear in the 2020 volume.

A very special issue this year was in fact Erin Goodman’s translation of some extracts from Irene Vallejo’s *Manifiesto por la lectura*, with which the Observatorio commemorated this year’s World Book Day. We are very grateful to the author, to the translator and indeed to Editorial Siruela — which generously granted its permission— for allowing us to celebrate this special day through the Translators’ Corner. The section has also served to celebrate the centennials of two acclaimed Spanish female novelists: Emilia Pardo Bazán and Carmen Laforet. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to their translators —Francisca González Arias and Roberta Johnson, respectively— as well as to Carmen Laforet’s children —who gave their permission— for making it possible.

Finally, it is indeed very rewarding to notice that contributions to other sections of the Observatory —e.g. our research publication *Estudios del Observatorio/Observatorio Studies*— have encouraged their authors to send us their translation projects: this was the case, for instance, with Clara Eugenia Ronderos, who, after collaborating on an issue of that series published in the fall of 2020, translated a short story by Montserrat Ordoñez for the Translators’ Corner which features in the present volume. The reverse situation is also true: Francisca González Arias is now preparing a study on the English translations and US reception of Emilia Pardo Bazán’s work for the ‘Literary Shifts’ subsection of our research publication. This is good proof of the conversation already initiated between the various sections of the Observatory.

The Observatorio would like to warmly thank the translators in this volume for their generous and excellent contributions and for their professional work in the revision process. We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to the original authors, or their estates, and publishers for giving us permission to publish their works in English translation.

I want to acknowledge the diligent and conscientious work done by Juan Arias, graduate student from Harvard University and Research Assistant at the Observatorio, who collaborated with me on the revision and publication of all the issues throughout the year and on the edition of this volume. Warm thanks also go to Arabella Adams, undergraduate student from Wellesley College, who helped in the initial stages of the volume during her internship with the Observatory.

I would like to conclude this Presentation by inviting new translators —experienced or not— to send their proposals to this Translators’ Corner, joining in our effort to make more and more Hispanic literary and intellectual creations travel and live on across linguistic and cultural borders. “Without books, the best things in our world would have faded into oblivion,” to borrow once more from Irene Vallejo². Many of those books, we must remember, have been translations.

Prof. Marta Mateo

Executive Director

Observatory of the Spanish Language and Hispanic Cultures in the United States

Instituto Cervantes at Harvard University

² [My translation]. Original text: “Sin los libros, las mejores cosas de nuestro mundo se habrían esfumado en el olvido.” (p. 397; see note 1 for reference).

Waiting for the Revolution: Cuba, the Unfinished Journey (excerpts)

by **Gustavo Gac-Artigas**

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translated by **Andrea G. Labinger**

INTRODUCTION

Gustavo Gac-Artigas is a Chilean writer, poet, playwright, actor, and theatre director. A corresponding member of the Academia Norteamericana de la Lengua Española (ANLE), his poetry has been published in the *RANLE* (ANLE's Literary Review), *Enclave* (CUNY), *Multicultural Echoes* (CSU-Chico) *ViceVersa*, and other literary magazines. In 1989 he received a Poetry Park Award (Rotterdam) for his short story *Dr. Zamenhofstraat*, and in 2018, his novel *And All of Us Were Actors, A Century of Light and Shadow* (2017), translated by Andrea G. Labinger, was first runner-up for the 2018 International Latino Book Award. As a fiction writer he has published: *Tiempo de soñar* (1992) *¡E il orbo era rondo!* (1993), *El solar de Ado* (2003), and *Y todos éramos actores, un siglo de luz y sombra* (2016). Forthcoming, *Cómo quisiera* a trilingual Spanish, English, French poetry collection. He is the author of

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Fragmentos, a series of short videos in Spanish, conversations with the audience about the pathways to literary creation. Gustavo has been a guest writer/speaker at multiple professional conferences, and is a regular contributor of opinion articles to *Agencia EFE*, *Le Monde Diplomatique* Chile Edition, and Impacto Latino, NY.

The text included is an excerpt from *Esperando la revolución. Cuba: el viaje inconcluso* [Waiting for the Revolution: Cuba, the Unfinished Journey] (Ediciones Nuevo Espacio, 2019), a chronicle of ten days in Cuba, where dreams and reality face off sixty years after the triumph of the Revolution. A chronicle that offers us a critical, revealing, fresh, and bold look at Cuba today, interspersed with humor, lyricism, surprising images, and stinging reality. An encounter between the dreams of a young idealist who, at the end of the sixties in southern Chile, set off on a road trip whose final destination was Havana, the beacon of the Revolution, and the reality of the children and grandchildren of a place that was called the first free territory in Latin America. Through various manifestations of a Latin America constantly at the boiling point, the author's journey turned into a lengthy tour of world theaters, exile on French soil, and another period of wandering, this time along the roads of his beloved cordillera, finally arriving at his destination 51 years later, on June 20, 2019, to confront dreams and reality in ten days that shook his mind.

The excerpt includes a selection of loose and discontinuous fragments of the original work to give the reader a taste of the varied aspects of life in Cuba, as experienced by the author in the ten days he spent on the island.

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ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Andrea G. Labinger is a professor emerita of Spanish at the University of La Verne. She holds a PhD from Harvard, and specializes in translating Latin American authors, among them Sabina Berman, Carlos Cerda, Gustavo Gac-Artigas, Mempo Giardinelli, Ana María Shua, Alicia Steimberg, and Luisa Valenzuela. Three of her novel translations were finalists in the PEN Literary Competition and her translation of *And All of Us Were Actors, A Century of Light and Shadow* by Gustavo Gac-Artigas was runner-up in the 2018 International Latino Book Award. In 2013, *World Literature Today* listed her translation of Liliana Heker’s “The End of the Story” among the “75 notable translations of the year.”

Gesell Dome, Labinger’s translation of Guillermo Saccomanno’s *Cámara Gesell*, was awarded a 2014 PEN/Heim Translation Fund grant. Published by Open Letter Books in 2016, the novel was a finalist for the Firecracker Award, sponsored by the Community of Literary Magazines and Presses.

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WAITING FOR THE REVOLUTION: CUBA, THE UNFINISHED JOURNEY (excerpts)

Fidel: *Let's go.*

Che: *We can't.*

Fidel: *Why not?*

Che: *We're waiting for Godot.*¹

When you receive this telegram, I will be on my way to Cuba. Notify my parents.

Chilean Postal Service, Valdivia, September 1968

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I didn't have enough money to add a signature. I was thumbing my way, like dreams.

Journey's End

I closed my eyes and drifted off, drifted off only to awaken

I traveled in dreams, without a horizon, lost in the clouds, trying to make my mind go blank in order to write.

Cuba, 60 years after the dream, Cuba the imaginary, Cuba the lighthouse, Cuba the complement to May of '68 in my beloved Paris, to the Prague Spring on my beautiful Street of the Alchemists, Cuba the first free territory of Latin America, Cuba the cry that arose at student demonstrations in Chile, demanding that the doors to the university be opened to the world, or in support of a squatter district, or adding a cry of *Hasta la victoria siempre* to a *Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh, we will fight until the end.*

¹ Translator's note: Both this opening dialogue and the title of the work itself, *Waiting for the Revolution*, are the author's nod to Samuel Beckett's iconic play, *Waiting for Godot*.

Arrival

It took me fifty years to arrive, with certain detours along the way, of course, from the time I left Valdivia, in southern Chile, in the year 1968.

And it wasn't revolutionary tourism, the obligatory visit of a left-wing intellectual of the era; everybody went, one after another; everybody had a photo taken with Fidel, a photo with Che, a photo to memorialize the occasion, even if later they would erase it from their memory, all of them, all but one, Gabo². But of course, Gabo had lived through one hundred years of solitude, and I, I never managed to grow the student revolutionary beard of the times, and I traveled by foot; I wasn't Wendy and I wasn't going to Castroland.

I had witnessed the invasion and death of the Prague Spring.

But let's get back to the present: what are fifty years in the life of a writer, what are sixty years in the life of a combatant, what are fifty years in the life of a dreamer?

I had trouble lifting my hand luggage into the overhead bin on the plane.

I've never traveled through life in a straight line, not even when I first learned to walk, but that's a different story, and I had already begun following the wrong curve in the road, the good one.

The first sensation – not thought – was of the burning air embracing my body, my pores opening to release many years of accumulated sweat, like an act of purification before entering Cuba.

I called on Marx, Lenin, Fidel, Che, Allende, the Orishás, Saint Barbara, and today, writing these lines, I realize that I had forgotten to call on the Party.

Maybe that was why I had never gotten there before, for that reason, and also because I had been in Prague in August of 1968.

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² Translator's note: Gabriel García Márquez, renowned Colombian author of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, who supported the Cuban Revolution until his death.

Landing

The airport was a disappointment – insignificant, the same as any provincial airport, with no personality. It didn't sway to the rhythm of the tropical breezes, it didn't whisper the songs of Compay Segundo, its bureaucrats didn't flash warm smiles – in fact they didn't smile at all, or else they smiled police officers' official smiles.

The immigration officer took me back to memories of the RDA: dry, cold, steely gray eyes, defending access to the kingdom like a wall of immovable principles, arrogant, possibly because of the provenance of my passport, suspicious of what she saw.

“*Bienvenido*³,” she said, handing me back my passport and visa. I missed the customary *compañero*⁴. I never thought that one day I would miss being called *compañero*, and yet I did. You can't always write a first page by forgetting the past, and my past pursues me.

14 A brightly lit corridor, bureaucrats chatting excitedly among themselves, ignoring us: Good? Bad? No, simply indifferent. How I would have loved to have been ignored in other times!

At the end of the corridor, before the space opened up, two tables and five white coats blocked the exit: health inspection! They changed the film on me, or rather (and this was hardly the same thing), a Resnais film suddenly flooded my memory, *Night and Fog*, cloudy and gray; this one, bright and shiny; that one, the barrier between life and death; this one, a protective barrier. Resnais' barrier led to life or death; the Cuban one led to my past or to my future.

The white coats blocking my way made me cough convulsively; five heads turned around, staring at me inquisitorially.

I went through.

I was in Havana.

³ Translator's note: Welcome.

⁴ Translator's note: *Compañero*: greeting among leftist militants, used to demonstrate a shared ideology.

Sensations

The second sensation was a leap into the past: haggling, haggling over prices, not because people were trying to cheat you, as you could read in the expressions of mistrustful tourists, but rather bargaining for the pleasure of making contact, of measuring yourself in the arena, knowing from the start that both parties would emerge triumphant, that defeat doesn't exist.

In Cuba no one pays the first asking price; what's more, to do so is considered offensive.

It all brought me back to Greece, where I haggled over everything, from a dish of octopus to a Comedy mask, Comedy always being cheaper and less respected than Tragedy. It brought me back to Tunis, where I haggled with the Hammamet Theater for one extra minute in which I, in turn, might bargain for love with *La Bella entre las Bellas*⁵, in an eternal game that would change our lives minute by minute.

Cuba is a land of elections, not the kind you might be thinking of – in that type the result is known from the start and makes no sense – I'm referring to life's important choices: a modern taxi or a shiny, old one for a postcard photo that doesn't reflect the driver's tragedy or dreams.

In order to make those important life choices eminently clear, we chose to stay at the small apartment of a young *cuentapropista*, or private entrepreneur, on Calle Peña Pobre in Old Havana, rejecting the luxury hotel that the conference offered us in Varadero, with its unlimited drinks and food, but where the sweet-and-sour odor of cheap liquor and the drunks stumbling from bar to bar on shaky legs, and the tables of endless, tasteless food where undistinguished dishes, pretentious plates of rice, chicken, and pork alternating with pork and chicken, tasted more sour than sweet, when the "all you can eat" was challenged by the humble, but proud "we eat whatever there is," and, just as when I was a child, and my mother said there was enough for everyone, we knew that to ask for more was to ask for less for my parents' plates, so too did we understand that the all-you-can-eat-and-drink policy in the luxury hotel meant less to eat for some Cuban family.

⁵ Translator's note: Affectionate name term used by the author, in his autobiographical novel *And All of Us Were Actors: A Century of Light and Shadow*, upon first seeing the woman who would later become his wife: "the most beautiful of all beauties."

For its hidden, endless pleasure, I will always prefer the humble, delicious, curled-up shrimp to the haughty lobster, dry and stuffy, but smiling so as to charge more, that strumpet of the seas.

Through the taxi window we saw the scars left on the city by the destructive march of capitalism. What we didn't see was the construction of socialism. Years ago, I visited East Germany, where I observed the ruins of capitalism and the building of socialism: they were the show window of the new society, but something was missing: it was gray; it was sad; Berlin was monochromatic. Of course, it sat in the shadow of a wall, and walls, even defensive ones, are dangerous.

You never know where the enemy lurks.

In Cuba there was no gray: it was a painter's palette exploding under the sun; there were smiles; worn-out sandals beat a tired, but musical rhythm on the stones of the *Malecón*; palms and people swayed in the wind. It was a picture-postcard image, but for me, something was missing: I still hadn't found the soul of her people.

I lay down in bed to rest, closed my eyes, and marched into the past, afraid to awaken in the present.

16 At midnight I awoke from a dream in which Vargas Llosa was propositioning my wife, and she was flirting with him with a conspiratorial smile, like characters in a novel. I woke her: "It wasn't Vargas Llosa," she said to me sleepily, "it was García Márquez."

I spent the rest of the night awake, even though I had downed a couple of mojitos at La Bodeguita del Medio: you've got to make memories.

Dawn was breaking in Old Havana.

Day Two

Between our arrival and the next day, the pharmacy awaited me. Since everything in Cuba is recycled and nothing is wasted, Dr. José Martín Soro's pharmacy was now a bar, one that retained the doctor's sign and his name.

From the ancient shelf they took down a small, dark brown bottle, inside of which a thick, amber liquid kept ideas from evaporating.

They gave me three drops in a glass of mineral water, as there was no other kind, and the kind they did have evaporated before hitting the glass.

As the third drop fell, a black cloud crossed my path: the blockade.

The blockade is a crime.

We traveled on June 20; on the fifth of that month, the last authorized cruise ship had entered San Francisco pier in Havana, due to the tightening of external policies by the President of the United States. In the distance, the canticle of Brother Sun sank gradually below the horizon as tourists ran about aimlessly, abandoning the shoulders of the cruise ship, while the Cubans waited on the pier.

“Taxi? A Lulú-Marilú doll for the little girl? I’ve got the best in Havana, the real thing, not for tourists, mister.”

The phrases and smiles remained silent, waiting, waiting for something to change.

“Change? Better than the official rate; the official rate never changes.”

To blockade a people, to blockade nascent private enterprise, aspiring entrepreneurs, is a crime. Those who suffer are from the ranks of the people; they *are* the people. To block contact between human beings is inhumane, and everything that is inhumane is stupid; to isolate the isolated is to condemn them to live behind bars, stop them from dreaming, deny them sustenance for developing their thoughts, force them to think of a world of enemies and unyielding borders instead of an open, fraternal world where we all have rights, those same rights that are so often trampled by the powerful. To deny contact between two hands is to surrender that contact to weapons, be they ideological or those of the vultures who feed on confrontation.

What they couldn’t blockade is the tongue of the Cuban people. No one can stop them; they loosen their tongues and it’s like unleashing the storms from the very bottom of the Caribbean, to one side and another or to no side at all, with or without direction. They need to speak. I’m talking about those that have a tongue. They make you dizzy. I’m not kidding, I don’t know why people offer you rum all the time when a simple conversation is sufficient, and just like with alcohol, when tongues are loosened, they rise up, toss you from one reality to another, ultimately making you realize that reality doesn’t exist, and then, laughingly, abandon you to your fate.

I broke the blockade, what I couldn’t break is the internal blockage; that is more difficult and more dangerous. To blockade the blockage is a double crime.

I didn’t break the blockade,

it’s just that there are walls and there are walls.

And between both walls? I wondered.

Crossing the threshold of the first *paladar*⁶ I encountered, I replied to the “Hello, mister” in my beautiful language, *Hola, hermano*.

I ordered a dish of “whatever you have,” but not a very big one; I had to leave room for my thoughts.

Cars

Old, gleaming, brightly painted colors where, ironically, red predominates, without catching the unwary tourist’s attention. Laughing women, their blonde manes floating in the wind, allowed themselves to be driven up and down the *Malecón*, not realizing that more often than not, the ancient convertible has undergone as many plastic surgeries as they themselves have, and that its original ragtop has been hammered off by a clever auto body artist, transforming it into an object of desire for the tourists to ride back to the past, to their lost youth.

The films I watched at the Normandia Cinema in Chile, where the scratched celluloid transmitted its scars to the curtain when the house lights went off, returned today from the past on the streets of Old Havana.

I recognized the clothing, not the actresses: Marilyn, Jane, Joan, Bette, Zsa Zsa, Mae, and Marlene, adding her boozy voice. From the streets they were observed by the shadows of Anna, Gina, Simone, Katy, and – descending the staircase and closing the twilight of the myths – Gloria Swanson.

I grabbed a taxi.

I can’t resist the call of celluloid love.

.....

⁶ Translator’s note: Literally “palate”. Noun used in Cuba to refer to mostly family-run private businesses introduced in the 1990 as a counterpart to state-run restaurants for tourists seeking a more vivid interaction with Cuban reality and looking for homemade Cuban food. Before 1993 they were illegal.

On the Third Day He Rose from the Dead

It was at the intersection of Cuarteles and Monserrate. He crossed the street: “Good morning, I want to warn you that you can’t change money outside of authorized locations.”

He might be from Washington

He might be from Havana.

¡Ay, mamá!

Involuntarily I moved my feet, and La Bella, her hips.

“When you buy water,” he went on, “make sure they open the bottle in front of you. Any other water isn’t potable, but some bad citizens refill empty bottles.”

He didn’t say anything about the ice in the mojitos or daiquiris or ice pops.

“You can’t buy cigars outside of authorized locations. Havana is the safest place in the world; I can guarantee that nothing will happen to you. I’m not a policeman, I’m from the Party.”

As the song of the sea still resounded in my ears, I’m not sure if he said “I’m *from* the Party” or “I *am* the Party,” or if there’s a difference.

“Responsible for the security of this section of Old Havana” echoed in my ears. “We’re deployed because many American agents have come here to spread lies about the revolution. They go around asking questions and talking.”

I had just left one of my staircases, the building that justifies them, and the souls that inhabit them; all three had spoken to me. I felt like I was being observed. My staircases, my spirals, always have two directions, and I never know which way I’m going and where Beatrice⁷ is.

The marble exploded into a thousand pieces inside my head. Those who had opened their rooms and their hearts to me, regarded me sadly; the other guy, the Party member, with an expression that came from my past. On his chest he proudly displayed a little badge, that served as a sort of decoration. It read: “My name is Fidel.” I was tempted to ask him, didn’t he die?

I spoke, translating his language into modern times and adapting mine to ancient times, and hurled myself into the void and into my memories. The deeper I plunged into the past, the more I distanced myself from reality, the happier my *compañero* became: he even embraced me – my body, not my ideas.

⁷ Translator’s note: Allusion to Italian poet Dante Alighieri’s Beatrice.

Otherwise, I'd really have been screwed.

I returned, I returned to the time of hope, to the triumph of the revolution, to Fidel's entrance into our lives, the living Fidel, that is, not the little badge. In my journey to the past, I found him and could speak with him – not with Fidel, but with him, the Party.

He took my picture in front of the headquarters of the Vilma Espín Federation of Cuban Women – a sign of progress. He told me that there were very few Party officials, that the admission process was very selective, that one had to prepare, that they had certain privileges. To prove this, he gave me half of the Havana cigars that the Party had given him, 25 of them, so that the smoke of its principles would surround me.

It was a land of *santería*⁸ and principles.

“See you around, *compañero*,” he said as he walked away.

I removed one step from my staircases. “Later, *compañero*,” I replied, as I hid the step where he couldn't find it.

And it was from Carrara, I said to myself with a hint of nostalgia.

.....

Shoot the Piano Player⁹

The conference began: I was to read on the first day about my own writing. I trembled: in my paper I spoke of censorship, and I knew censorship all too well. I had no idea how my audience would react.

I had stopped by the market; the tomatoes were prohibitively expensive. Then I calmed down and was glad that I had defiantly worn a white shirt. White shirt, red shoes, just in case.

⁸ Translator's note: A system of religious beliefs characterized by the worship of gods derived from the syncretism of African religions and Roman Catholicism, *santería* arose during the Spanish colonial period. It is widely practiced in Latin America, especially by people of African descent.

⁹ Translator's note: Allusion to the Truffaut film starring Charles Aznavour.

I talked, I talked about creativity, I talked about the sources of creativity, I quoted Ai Weiwei, a Chinese dissident; in a country where one pays for being a dissident, one pays with silence, a thundering silence that smothers one's voice.

I talked about Evstuchenko, who was condemned to the editorial wastelands; doors were closed to him; his readers' minds were opened. Twenty-six years later, his voice emerged again from the depths, every bit as vibrant as when it emerged in '68 in the amphitheater of the southernmost university on the planet, in Valdivia, Chile.

There are moments when what lies beneath is what shines brightest, when darkness illuminates, when artificial light is blinding, when certainty doesn't exist, when doubt is the polestar.

I talked about all of that as the shadows enfolded me, and yet I was happy, the veil of the temple was torn in two; a girl in the front row smiled at me; sitting beside her, my wife warned me: "Be careful, remember Vargas Llosa."

Wasn't that García Márquez? I was struck by doubt, and to hell with the literary allusions – this time I want certainty.

Afterward, everyone embraced me; I saved my skin. Once more they hadn't understood, or else they understood me all too well. In magical Cuba, behind every saint hides an *orishá*.

As night falls, an image, face down. Oscar Alberto Martínez, age 45. Around his neck, a tiny arm clings to the security of her father, face down, a little body half hidden in her father's undershirt, half naked in her father's undershirt, subject to life, to death,

Giddyup, Papá,
Giddyup, Daddy,
we're almost there,
it was Angie Valeria
23 months old
the ladies ride at the walk
the gentlemen ride at the trot
and the horsemen at the gallop
gallop, gallop

the poor
swimming toward death
at the gallop,
gallop,
gallop,
the current sweeps them away
they were crossing the Río Grande.

The bodies appeared, face down, inches from the dream of a better life. They had waited two months for their papers, requesting asylum at the border between Mexico and the United States. They managed to arrive from El Salvador; they grew desperate, they wanted to celebrate the baby's second birthday in the Land of Opportunity.

They tried to swim across the Río Grande.

Angie Valeria slipped her little arm around her father's neck to hug her savior. The other Savior, El Salvador, the land where she was born, was awash with violence.

At the bottom of the water, in the depths of the river, two little girls came together, the headless Cuban child who appeared floating in the Caribbean, and Elvira, the Salvadoran, her face stuck to her father's back, both children headless, both of them with severed dreams.

23 months, 23, nearly the same age as my granddaughter.

One of them escaped violence, the other, non-violence; one dreamed, the other dreamed; both might have played with my granddaughter one day, all three of them saying *It's my turn, I'm next*, it's my turn to dream.

My granddaughter gliding down the slide in the playground; Elvira clutching the security offered by her father; the headless Cuban girl, her body in Havana, her head and her dreams sailing somewhere, waiting for Charon to join them back together.

It's my turn to dream.

I cried.

"It's your turn to cry, Grampa,

Cry.

Feel better now?"

Night was falling in Varadero; night reigned in the United States; hope drowned along the border.

¡Ay mamá!
Where do the bodies come from
For I find them . . .

.....

The Last Night I Spent with You¹⁰

On the last night, a storm, lightning, and sparks lit up Old Havana. Havana doesn't let anyone leave: it rips itself apart, it tears you apart, sets you aglow, makes you shiver, screams at you from its heart: Don't forget me, remember: fifty years ago, I was your first love.

Sixty years later the dream was fulfilled; they destroyed it and returned us to our starting point.

We entered times of sadness.

23

Day Ten: Spirals

I traveled back, took the plane; it was a round-trip dream; I closed my eyes, and parodying Neruda, exclaimed: Cuba in my heart!

When I opened them, a beggar was walking between the rows of cars, holding up a sign:

I am homeless

I am hungry

any help is good

God bless you

I was in America.

Havana, June 2019
New York, July 2019

¹⁰ Translator's note: "La última noche que pasé contigo," famous Cuban song, interpreted by Eydie Gormé and the Trío Los Panchos.

“A Bad Girl”

by **Montserrat Ordóñez**

translated by **Clara Eugenia Ronderos**

25

INTRODUCTION

Montserrat Ordóñez, a Colombian and Spanish author, was born in Barcelona in 1941 and died in Bogotá in 2001. With a Colombian father and a Catalan mother, she grew up with a double identity. She lived in Bogotá, where she was a writer and professor of literature at Universidad de los Andes. She obtained a PhD. in Comparative Literature at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She specialized in literature written by women and her articles appeared in numerous journals in the Americas and Europe. Her critical work includes an edited volume of articles on *La vorágine* (Bogotá, Alianza Editorial, 1987), a critical edition of this Colombian novel (Madrid, Cátedra, 1990) and a critical edition of the work by Colombian writer Soledad Acosta de Samper (Bogotá, Fondo Cultural Cafetero, 1988). Her poetry appeared in *Ekdysis* (Roldanillo, Ediciones Embalaje del Museo Rayo, 1987). She described herself as “someone who always played and lived with words as a reader, a student and teacher of languages and literature, editor, translator, public speaker, journalist, literary

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critic, researcher, traveler and writer [..., someone who] has discovered unexpected worlds.” In 2002, after her death, she received the *Premio Internacional de Literatura Latinoamericana y del Caribe “Gabriela Mistral”*, and in 2014, the book *De piel en piel*, a compilation of her poetry, was published by Universidad de los Andes.

Prof. Ordóñez read the story translated here, “Una niña mala”, to a group of fascinated students in her “den,” the place where she worked and lived, and where forbidden books came off shelves and feathers turned into pens as if by magic. In this story, we recognize her voice as an independent intellectual, who chose not to be a “good girl” but a dedicated scholar, translator, poet and teacher. Clara Ronderos, the translator, was part of that group of students. Many years later, she ran into this story in the anthology *17 narradoras latinoamericanas* (Bogotá: Coedición Latinoamericana, 1996), and saw the importance of translating it into English, to include it in her course on Contemporary Latin American Women Writers at Lesley University. This has allowed generations of students to enjoy this wonderful story, which she is now sharing for a wider public.

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ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Clara Eugenia Ronderos is a Colombian born poet, critic and translator. She is a retired Professor of Spanish from Lesley University. Ronderos holds a Ph.D. in Hispanic Literature from University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her recent publications include: *The Poetry of Clara Eugenia Ronderos: Seasons of Exile* (Lewiston NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2015) –Mary. G. Berg’s translation of her prize-winning collection *Estaciones en Exilio* (2010); *Ábrete Sésamo* (short stories) (Madrid: Torremozas, 2016); *De Reyes y Fuegos* (poetry) (Madrid: Torremozas, 2018); *Después de la Fábula* (poetry) (Madrid: Verbum, 2018); as well as *Agua que no has de beber* (short stories) (Córdoba, Argentina: Alción, 2019).

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A BAD GIRL

Her power is her own. She will not give it away.

Sandra Cisneros. *The House on Mango Street*

I want to be a bad girl. I don't ever want to do the dishes and I want to run away from home. I won't help anyone with their homework or make my bed. I don't want to stand on the balcony anymore, sighing and holding back my tears while I wait for my Dad; not even with Mom or anybody else. When I turn into a bad girl, I will scream and cry, yelling until the house falls down. When I turn into a bad girl, I will no longer feel nauseous and throw up. Because I will not get in any car that I don't want to, nor go on any rides and outings that I don't want to go on, nor eat what I don't like, nor have to fear anyone telling me: "if you throw up you'll have to swallow it"; but Dad never has to swallow it. I will be a bad girl who throws up whenever I feel like it and not when they force me to eat.

I will come home with traces of red lipstick on my shirt, I will smell of sweat and alcohol and I will go to bed wearing my dirty clothes. Then I will snore until I wake up the whole family. They will all be awake, each of them in their own corner, exhaling fear. I want to be the ogre who eats all the children, especially those who don't sleep when I snore and choke. Cowardly children are irritating to me. I want bad children and a bad girl who is never afraid of anything. She doesn't mind paint or blood, she prefers stones to bread to mark the way back home, and she howls to the stars and dances with her cat by the fire. That is the kind of girl I will become; a brave girl who can open and close the door; open and close her mouth. A brave girl who can say yes or no whenever she pleases; a girl who knows when she is pleased. A girl, drenched; her feet wet, in a puddle of tears, her eyes on fire.

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The bad girl won't have to visit or greet anyone, bending in a curtsy; nor sit with her skirt spread out, her hands still, her legs not crossed. She will cross them, her ankle over her knee, and she will open them at an angle wider than ninety degrees, her head held high and her back wide and straight and she will touch herself wherever she feels like. She will never again do her homework, nor carry her book bag, nor let anyone braid her hair, pulling it, every morning at dawn, over eggs and coffee. No one will put ribbons on the crown of her head or take terrifying pictures of her. Her hair will be like a wolf's¹ and she will shake herself from her ears to her tail before she faces the woods. Don't mind me –the bad girl who wants to be alone will scream. Do not look at me. Do not touch me. All alone, all alone the girl will climb over the chairs and cupboards with her cat. She will open boxes and reach for books from forbidden shelves. When she has her own house and she closes the door, hunger will never get inside her soul, nor will trained monkeys, nor priests or nuns get inside. The afternoon air will envelop her in a translucent sun. Doves and blackbirds will jump on the roof and the terraces, and their feathers will wait for her in the most secret corners and they will be confused with pens and pillows. Cats and burglars will sneak in and maybe sometimes, by mistake, or just because, a rat; for they go after their own desires and don't know anything about little girls, good or bad. She will make herself a den in which to howl and laugh. To play and dance and curl up. To lick her chops.

Now the balcony is closed. The cat still runs and checks out for breathings. It's late and the good girl, without a tear, clutches her knees to her chest and falls asleep.

¹ Translator's note: In the Spanish original the word used is "lobo." I am translating it to "wolf" because the term "she-wolf" in English has connotations the Spanish word does not have.

“Claudia and the Cats”

by **Ivanna Chapeta**

translated by **Lindsay Romanoff Bartlett**

29

INTRODUCTION

Born in 1988 in Guatemala City, Ivanna Chapeta has her undergraduate degree in Language and Literature Education from the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala. Some of her stories have won university and interuniversity competitions, and in 2016 she was the winner of the Editorial Zopilotes II Short Story Competition El Palabrerista. To date, Chapeta has published four books: two collections of short stories, *Historias Incompletas* [Incomplete Stories] (Extracto, 2017) and *Casa de silencios* [House of Silences] (Los Zopilotes, 2018); and two novels, *El año en que Lucía dejó de soñar* [The Year Lucía Stopped Dreaming] (Santillana, 2017) and *¿Volverás a soñar, Lucía?* [Will You Dream Again, Lucía?] (Santillana, 2019). Her short stories have appeared in print in the *Revista USAC* and *Saliva-Zine* and have also been published digitally in several Latin American digital publications. She maintained a blog, *Mierdiario* (Shitdiary), from 2012 to 2018, and since 2016 has been part of the multidisciplinary artists collective La Retaguardia, organized by the author Eduardo Juárez.

Claudia and the Cats is a concise portrait of femicide, of a specific strain of violence which seeks to corral and control women, while simultaneously, blindly, denying these habits. In recent years, across the globe, femicide (the murder of women and girls because of their gender) has been given more light in the press and in certain activist circles. However, the narratives of femicide in the popular press in Guatemala, and in many Latin American nations, are often obscenely superficial, pornographic, and victimizing.

The author deftly attempts to palpate the logic of the violator, even as she demonstrates its relentless senselessness. The stark prose and almost blasé narration emphasize the gory, horrific, and ludicrous -yet mundane- dynamics of power and control which allow for immense impunity, both socially and legally. Capturing the cold, repetitive, egotistical narrative of the original text, which at once is straightforward and elusive, foreshadows and requires negation, was essential to draw attention to the ways in which gendered violence permeates tangible and imagined realms.

It is almost needless to say that Central American women's voices, like that of this young Guatemalan author, historically have been, and continue to be, sorely underrepresented in literature, and even more so in translation. In addition, *Claudia and the Cats* was originally published in its distinctive Guatemalan Spanish by a small, independent publishing house, the Proyecto Editorial Los Zopilotes. This distinguishes the story as part of a growing movement in Latin America that actively seeks autonomy in the face of globalization and increased demands within colonial and imperialist spheres. Thus, the value of the *Claudia and the Cats* is not merely literary, but highly political as well.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

A translator and editor with an MA in Latin American Studies from Tulane University, Lindsay Romanoff Bartlett (Boston, 1987) lives in Mexico City and New Orleans. Working in Spanish, Portuguese, and English, her most recent collaborations include translations of the Ecuadorian poet Pedro Gil and of the Mexican author Francesca Gargallo Celentani. She is currently translating Ivanna Chapeta's book of short stories, *Casa de silencios* (House of Silences, Editorial Zopilotes, 2018) and is compiling a polylingual anthology of contemporary short stories from the Americas.

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CLAUDIA AND THE CATS

Today Claudia is finally leaving. With her cats, like she wanted. I touch her hand, which still feels frozen, and try in vain to entwine her fingers with mine. I approach the window. The afternoon is threatening to turn to night. The cats climb up the rooftops, thirsty for the last drops of warmth. There are hardly any rays of sun left.

With her hand in mine, I go out on the balcony that was so hers. I remember how, one Sunday afternoon just like today, a couple months after we started dating, she slept over at my small apartment (that I hardly fit in), and she didn't ever go back to her house again, except to get her things the following week.

As soon as we could, we looked for a bigger place to live together. We were hoping to find a house where she could watch how the roofs swallowed up the afternoons and that had a garden where I could spend time by myself watching the plants grow. Nothing that we found had both, so I decided not to have the garden, and in exchange, she filled our home with my flowers and her laughter.

The first days were phenomenal. Love found us everywhere and we even made it when we brushed our teeth. Then we would go to work and I would spend the day wanting to see her at night. The problem is that our afternoons were soon blurred by routine. I used to go out to the parks to walk, to see the flowers, or to sit for a while and read. I also liked to go to the supermarkets to pass the time, walking up and down the aisles without buying anything in the end. I tried to do the same with her, but she found it all very tedious. So much so that she decided to stay at home while I went to do the shopping on the weekends.

One day when I got home from work, I found her sitting on the balcony, trying to reach for something I couldn't see. I asked her what she was trying to do, and bringing her finger to her lips so I would lower my voice, she responded, "There are cats." I moved closer to see them and saw a pair of yellow cats lying down, stealing the sun from my neighbor's roof. Claudia was happy in a way that I hadn't seen her in a long time. The sight was repugnant to me so I quickly got out of there, telling her I would put away the things I had bought that afternoon.

After a while, she closed the door to the balcony and excitedly came to tell me what she had seen her feline friends do. She even suggested that we adopt one for ourselves. I didn't let her finish, reminding her that I didn't like pets. When I was a kid, my mama tried to have some little birds. When she changed their water and food in the afternoons, she would sing to them, and I would wait for her, full of a tickling envy in my chest. One day when she left me alone, I decided to open the door to their cage, and in a few minutes, two of them left our lives. The other one didn't go, so I had to take it out myself. When I did, it pecked me. I had no choice but to tear it apart with my fingers and throw it up on our roof. Mama was really sad. I tried to make her happy by singing to her like she would sing to her birds and I suppose it worked because never again did we have pets at home. After my cutting no, Claudia didn't insist on the issue and we went back to our routine of eating dinner in front of the television. Nevertheless, the scene with the cats became frequent. Instead of waiting for me at the table or in the dining room like she did before, now she waited on the balcony. She often wanted me to join her, but I was more and more uncomfortable with the animals being so close to us. Moreover, I was jealous. I stopped going to the park so that Claudia wouldn't spend more time than she already did with the cats, and sometimes I even dragged her to the supermarket with me to do our shopping.

I felt uneasy all the time. I started to dream about cats. Cats that slept in our bedroom and whose weight would fall on my feet before they would come up to my pillow, purring, to take my place in bed. I would wake up annoyed and would fight with Claudia for no reason; each time she was farther from me and closer to them. I felt like I was losing her. That they were taking her away from me.

One day when I sat down in one of the armchairs, the one closest to the balcony, I thought it smelled different. I asked her if she was letting cats come into the house and she blushed, responding that she wasn't. I didn't want to insist, but I was sneezing until we went to bed. Claudia said that one of these days she would dust.

When I went to work the next day, I was more uncomfortable than ever. I asked to leave early (a little later than when Claudia gets out) and I hurried home as soon as they let me go.

I thought about cats the whole way there. Cats in my living room. On my furniture. On my bed. On Claudia. I was disgusted to think that she might have touched one of those animals. Upon opening the door, I found Claudia and a yellow cat sitting in my favorite armchair. They both looked at me surprised, and the cat quickly fled. I insulted Claudia (which I really regret) calling her a traitorous bitch. She acted like it was funny and asked me to calm down, trying to get close to hug me. She said that there wasn't anything wrong with cats and that there was something wrong with me. She was defending the damn animals. I yelled many things at her. So many that she got fed up

and called me many names too, telling me that I was a jerk and that she preferred to leave than put up with my insecurities. She started to cry but I was furious. She was calling me a jerk in my own home because of some stupid animals. She tried to go to my bedroom, but I grabbed her by the arm. She asked me to let her go, telling me not to be an “ANIMAL.” So, I hit her. I hit her to get the idea out of her head that I might be one of her vile cats. I wasn’t an animal. I was a man who had given up his damn garden so that she could watch the sunset, and she had paid me back by spending her afternoons with cats. I beat her until I got tired, repeating (yelling) that I wasn’t an animal. Our floor filled with blood from her pretty mouth. From her nose. From her head.

When I calmed down, she had stopped moving. I tried to revive her, but all that happened was that blood kept flowing from her lips that weren’t so pretty anymore. The damn cats had taken her from me, just as I had feared, and now I didn’t know what to do.

Trying to wake her up, I touched her body again, but everything in the house felt like it was going. I started to cry, begging her not to abandon me, to not let the cats in again and for us to be okay again. I hugged her, dampening my clothes and body with her blood and leaving her face wet with my kisses. I said goodbye to her, but her body refused to go. I started to think that I didn’t have a garden where I could hide her. I stayed with her, touching her hair, her hands, her mouth, until I fell asleep. I woke up hugging her cold and rigid body. Her hair had become glued to my shirt and the dried blood had formed horrible scabs on my skin. I kissed her mouth for the last time and hugged her, trying not to hurt her. We didn’t have a car yet, so I couldn’t simply put her in it and leave her just anywhere. All I had was this house and her. Distracted, I went out on the balcony and saw the cats eating something on my neighbor’s rooftop. I decided that they would take her. I went to the kitchen to get something to cut her up with, but I didn’t find anything. I had to take a bath and go out to get an axe. I’d never even bought a knife before and didn’t know how to ask for it. Luckily, the people at the store helped me, and I went back to the house with an enormous axe and trash bags. I called into work to say that I was sick and unhooked the phone so that they wouldn’t interrupt me.

I began to break off parts of her body, putting them in small bags in the freezer. In the afternoon, wanting to see if my experiment worked, I threw a small piece of Claudia onto the roof. The cats immediately closed in and devoured her within minutes. At daybreak, I was still trying to cut up Claudia, my Claudia. In total, I think it took a week of feeding the cats and other animals in the area with parts of her body. On my way to work, I take small pieces of Claudia with me and distribute them throughout the city. The animals must smell the blood because they quickly eat her up. When I get home, I take more bags out of the refrigerator and continue the task. I had to break

up her stomach and intestines in the food processor. Having to handle that and throw it to the cats disgusted me. The thorax was also difficult because she was very thin, and I had to throw it all in clandestine trash bins that I found. The skull wasn't hard, but it hurt me to have to break apart my Claudia's face and burn her hair, because nothing would eat that. Each time I dispose of a part of her, I say goodbye and remind her that I love her.

The cats have started to come closer to the balcony to get the food that I give them. These days, one (maybe the one I found with Claudia) has kept very close. It wants to come up on the balcony, but it doesn't dare. I saw its clear eyes looking at me expectantly, and I felt a twinge of tenderness. Maybe Claudia was right, maybe I should have considered getting one.

When I went to the fridge today, there were only a few bags left. One held part of her leg, and the other, her whole right hand. I cut the leg into pieces and gave it to the cats. They ate quickly. I kept her hand, which, before going out on the balcony I tried, unsuccessfully, to entwine with mine. I suppose she's ready to go.

Her palm is rigid and purple. The fingers, stiff, have curved, making her hand into a strange claw. I try to make it caress my face, but take it away when I feel the cold of her skin. I think that, at some point, someone will come looking for me, asking for her. I'll tell them that she abandoned me and will wait to see what happens. I look at her fingers, her nails. I caress them and give her a quick kiss before letting her go. The cats are already waiting. I go back to my living room, leaving the door to the balcony open. Maybe the cat wants to come in and keep me company, even though it makes me sneeze a little. Maybe it won't leave, like she did.

Song of Being and Nonbeing

by **Santiago Alba Rico**

35

translated by **Carolina Finley**

INTRODUCTION

Santiago Alba Rico [1960] is a Spanish author and essayist. He has a degree in philosophy from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. In the 1980s he worked as a screenwriter for the innovative Spanish TV program *La bola de cristal*. He has published more than twenty books on politics, philosophy and literature, as well as three children's books and a play, among which are: *Las reglas del caos* (1995 finalist for the Premio Anagrama), *La ciudad intangible* (2000), *El islam jacobino* (2001), *Vendrá la realidad y nos encontrará dormidos* (2006), *Leer con niños* (2007), *Capitalismo y nihilismo* (2007), *El naufragio del hombre* (2009), *Noticias* (2010) and *Penúltimos días* (2016). Since 1988 he has lived in the Arab world and he has translated the Egyptian poet Naguib Surur and the Iraqi novelist Mohammed Jydair into

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Spanish. For many years he has taught literature courses at the Cervantes Institute. His most recent works are *Ser o no ser* (2017), and *Nadie está seguro con un libro en las manos* (2018). In 2019 his radio collaborations with the program *Carne Cruda* were published as *Última hora*. He is a regular contributor to broadcast and print media in Spain.

Romance del ser y no ser (presented here as “Song of Being and Nonbeing”) was written for the *European Philosophical Song Contest* (a theater work by Massimo Furlan and Claire de Ribaupierre). The underlying concept of the “contest” was to take philosophy and intellectual thought out of the university and bring it to people in a popular form. The theater work premiered September 2019 at La Comédie de Genève in Switzerland and went on to tour twelve European cities. Further performances are scheduled for 2021.

Alba Rico’s piece is a metaphysical poem in which the poet uses a Spanish form par excellence, the *romance*, traditionally used for narrating tales of love and war. (During the baroque era Lope de Vega wrote some of the most beautiful and well-known examples, and in the twentieth century García Lorca wrote his *Romancero Gitano* [Gypsy Ballads].)

36 Santiago Alba Rico has intentionally made use of the incongruity between this poetic form and the metaphysical content, with the purpose, one might say, of philosophizing with the body. The title references a long poem written in 1973 by the Spanish philosopher Agustín García Calvo “Sermón de ser o no ser”, but the poem itself is different in both rhythm and substance. The first stanza of Alba Rico’s poem does call to mind the beginning of Luis de Góngora’s best-known work, *Soledades*.

The first half of “Romance del ser y no ser” describes the immanence of Being, which is both Being itself and its opposite, as Being cannot do away with itself without prolonging its Substance. In stanza thirteen, all of a sudden, the possibility of transcendence materializes in the form of Love –a conflict which Hegel and Kierkegaard both addressed. In Santiago Alba Rico’s poem, pain creates an opportunity through which the possibility of truth as earthly transcendence can enter. Being cracks while the possibility of a liberated eventuality arises in Nonbeing: kisses, birds, verses themselves.

The translation presented here focuses on conveying the immediacy of the language and the intense feeling the original poem evokes from the struggle of Being.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Carolina Finley is an author and a Spanish to English translator. She has an undergraduate degree from Northwestern University where she studied History of Art and Philosophy and a postgraduate degree in Literary Translation from the Universidad Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona. Her published works include: *Art of the Far North*, *Aboriginal Art of Australia*, and *Art of Japan*. She lives outside of Madrid in the city of Toledo and specializes in translating Castilian Spanish literature.

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SONG OF BEING AND NONBEING

38

It was the season flowering
with love and lilies
and solitary Being, in the abundance
melted with grief

Being walked in May
on the banks of the Tietar¹
and on his path he only found
what remained of his work

Being was all beings
he was so many things so much
the dog the sun the olive tree
even the mud and the bees

¹ A river that flows westward from the surroundings of Madrid through the provinces of Toledo, Ávila and Cáceres.

Being wept and wept
without finding new essences
in fact his own tears
increased his own essence

Oh! Being, who continued to be
having come forth to be, remains to be
on the banks of the Tiétar
melting with grief

He does not want to be this being
he wants to have been born farther yet
and every time he becomes angry
he sheds squirrels and planets

Being goes weeping and weeping
along the rough ground of the Tiétar
and while emitting falcons
he strikes himself and despairs

The blows are seashells
the gashes great swans
he cuts his four arteries
while a forest grows on him

As much as Being bleeds
his wounds are his veins
if he were to lose all his blood
all his blood would remain

He found a flower on the hillside
his hip's open sore
and taking hold of the green stem
he counts the petals there

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He saw a flower on the hillside
and says my beautiful flower
give me the petal missing
between One and its Love

I have not what you want
the crimson flower answered
odd and even I have
which are sorrows and pleasures

Being continued on his way
pulling out mares
bleeding profusely from sorrow
amid the Tíetar's lavender

Being continued on his way
expelling deer and liana
and at the bottom of the last hill
he met Almudena²

Who are you, crying bulls?
the maid spoke
who are you, sweating tender doves
and bleeding oaks?

Who are you, who are so much?
the maid continued
and Being, astonished, asked her
who are you, who are so beautiful?

I had been to Talavera³
a tryst with my gypsy beau
on the way back I drowned
three days ago

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² The Virgin of Almudena is one of the patron saints of Madrid and the city's cathedral is named for her.

³ A city west of Madrid between Ávila and Toledo.

My face is now ashen
the dead woman's pallor
yet my lips are red
because my blood still remembers

Being, entranced, beseeches
give me death, Almudena,
for I am not eclipsing, nor waning
rather a moon, forever beaming

42

Give me death, sweet girl, please
for this plenitude terrifies me
and I want a last crack
to open in the faraway wind

Being strikes his chest
and a thousand dragonflies burst out
the girl, watching him,
replies thus:

If you give me the beingness I yearn
I will give you what you crave
a bouquet of nonexistence
if you return color to my face

Being and nonbeing embrace
on the banks of the Tiétar
fishes, snakes and winged creatures
tangle together and linger

Would nonbeing return to being
beneath Being holding her so tight?
red warm wild
Almudena brought back to life?

Or the other way, Being not being
would find the crack
through which to slip
the dead woman's breath?

Fishes snakes and winged creatures
half lit intermesh
while the river softly rocks
their glistening cold flesh

Until the break of dawn
the struggle goes on
the being, having been, we are
the nonbeing, not being, might be

Have you killed me yet, sweet girl?
Have you killed me, Almudena?
For I feel a sweet abyss
climbing up my hillside

One doesn't cease to be being
water does not dry seas
the girl answered
while her mouth kissed his

44

Have you killed me yet, my child?
have you killed me yet, gazelle?
For a gallop of silences
is falling down my fell

One is not less being more
flame does not put out fires
the girl sighed
biting his poplar grove

Red warm wild
Almudena returns to life
but the kiss that bestirs her
that kiss condemns her

So suddenly I have been,
so much you have been to me, she said
that I have gone beyond being
and come back from life to be dead

So much without limits I have been,
the maiden's voice fades,
so much without limits you have been
that I have crossed the riverbank

From the river one sometimes returns
but one cannot return to being
death kills not beings
in truth happiness does

The slayer Being watches
the twice dead girl
collapse in his arms
without fulfilling the promise

Oh! Being, who continued to be
having come forth to be, remains to be
on the banks of the Tíetar
lost in grief

As much as being bleeds
his wounds are his veins
if he were to lose all his blood
all his blood would remain

But being has an emptiness
that is neither death nor a planet
it is desire without a mouth
for the kisses of Almudena

46 being has a futility
an empty capacity
and from his seed of dawn
shoots up a foreign thorn

being goes on his way
along the banks of the Tíetar
now called Manuel
he cries for Almudena

Fishes snakes winged creatures
through the opening the kisses plied
emerged into the open air
from Being to the other side

“Christmas Eve in the Hills of Jaruco”

by **Robert F. Lima Rovira** and **Robert Lima**

translated by **Robert Lima**

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INTRODUCTION

“Nochebuena en las lomas de Jaruco” is the true story of Colonel Alfredo Lima Tardiff and one of his major exploits during Cuba’s War of Independence, better known in the United States as the Spanish-American War (1895-1898). The future officer tried to enlist before the start of the conflict in 1895 and, when accepted, rose rapidly in the ranks, receiving a field-of-battle commission as Colonel for bravery while leading his cavalry unit. When the United States Joined the Cubans in the war against Spain after the explosion of the cruiser “Maine” in the harbor of Havana, Cuba, American troops often fought alongside the rebels, as in the famous Battle of San Juan Hill in Santiago de Cuba, in which Col. Lima’s cavalry was involved along with Teddy Roosevelt’s “Rough Riders.”

This account was narrated verbally by the Colonel to his son, Robert F. Lima Rovira, who then told it to his own son, Robert Lima Millares, who gave it written form and presents it here translated into English as “Christmas Eve in the Hills of Jaruco”. The story has been published in its original Spanish form in *Linden Lane Magazine* (Ft. Worth, TX; Winter 2020, 39:4, pp. 30-35).

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Robert Lima is a Cuban born (1935) prize-winning American poet, internationally known literary critic, bibliographer, playwright and translator. He was twice knighted in Spain. His poems have appeared throughout the U.S. and abroad in periodicals, anthologies, broadsides, the Internet, and in his poetry collections *Fathoms* (1981), *The Olde Ground* (1985), *Mayaland* (1992), *Sardinia / Sardegna* (2000), *Tracking the Minotaur* (2003), *The Pointing Bone* (2008), *The Rites of Stone* (2010), *Self* (2012), *Por caminos errantes* (2014), *CELESTIALS* (2015), *Cancionería Cubana* (2017), *Ikons of the Past. Poetry of the Hispanic Americas* (2018), *Writers on My Watch* (2020), and *ODYSSEY* (2021). His critical studies include works on Lorca, Valle-Inclán, Borges, Surrealism, esoterica, folklore, and comparative drama. He recorded his poetry in English and Spanish for Hispanic Division Archives of The Library of Congress.

CHRISTMAS EVE IN THE HILLS OF JARUCO

Prelude

This is a true account of the deeds of a hero of the Cuban War of Independence, Colonel Alfredo Lima Tardiff. During the struggle for freedom from Spain that lasted from 1895 into 1898, his name was enough to put the Spanish Army into a state of fear wherever he confronted it. His area of operation was in the heart of the Province of Havana, where never a day passed without an encounter with the enemy. Greatly outnumbered, he and his men survived only through his military acumen. Jaruco, the place of this account, was one of the most fortified places the Spaniards had in Cuba. The only man who fought his way into the fortress was General Antonio Maceo, and he had with him the entire force he commanded. ... The Cubans lay siege to the fortified town and set it aflame. But, previously, three men had entered by stealth...

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The Cuban rebels, the *insurrectos*, as the Spaniards called them, were scattered about the terraced hills, commonly called the *Escaleras* or steps, overlooking the valley and the Spanish-garrisoned town of Jaruco.



©Robert Lima

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It was high noon on Christmas Eve. The sun was ablaze in the blue and cloudless sky. The *insurrectos* were depressed. The feast of *Nochebuena*, Christmas Eve, would pass and they would not be able to celebrate it in the traditional way. Except for a few *boniatos*, the sweet potatoes picked from a nearby field, there was nothing else in their camp to eat or with which to toast the birth of the Christ Child.

Late that same morning, perched high above the valley, the rebels spotted a twenty-five-mule pack-train heading towards the fortress of Jaruco. They imagined that the barrels strapped to the mules contained fine wines and that the caravan was also loaded with cases of delicacies, nuts, and *turrónes*, the special nougat confection of the season. Their spirits lifted as they saw the possibility of hijacking the convoy of mules but soon realized that it was so heavily guarded that they could not attack it successfully. In near despair, the Cubans saw the mules ride quietly through the valley and enter the gate of the fort.

Since the arrival of the caravan at Jaruco, the boisterous singing of the soldiers at the fort could be heard from the camp of the *insurrectos*. The rebels could only dream of better days when they had feasted on *lechón asado*, the ubiquitous roast piglet, with their families at *Nochebuena*.

Sitting around a roughly-made table, in a broken-down hut, a typical countryside *bohío*, was the general staff of the *insurrectos*. The General, his eyes partly closed, his straw hat bearing the Cuban flag hanging from the back of his neck, was talking to his officers. “There must be a way,” he was saying. “There has to be a way to get some of those supplies from the Spaniards!”

One of the high-ranking officers offered to take Jaruco by storm if he could have a thousand men. Another wanted only five hundred and some good cannons. They all had big plans but they had only two hundred men in their unit, not enough to confront the large force at the fortress.

The only officer who had not spoken so far was a small young man, who looked more like a boy than a member of the general staff; it was Colonel Alfredo Lima Tardiff. He was so small that his fellow officers never paid much attention to him outside of the battlefield, where the small officer always turned out to be a big warrior. Three years earlier, he had tried unsuccessfully to join the *insurrectos*, but was refused on account of his age and size. Finally, he succeeded in being admitted into their unit, but only to take care of the horses. He knew that he had to earn the respect of the rebel band.

His opportunity came soon thereafter. During the height of a protracted battle, the young man joined the fight, machete in hand, and did so well that he was accepted as a regular soldier among the *insurrectos*. A few more battles and there were chevrons on his sleeves; eventually, he became an officer and, three years later, a full Colonel for his bravery in the field of battle as a cavalryman.

He knew the grounds so well that, at the height of a battle, he could disappear with his men through the hidden paths of the mountains and the Spaniards were unable to follow him. This created an almost magical aura about him and his men. His mounted regiment was feared and avoided, but his attacks always came unexpectedly, when the Spaniards least expected him to be around. His charges at the point of the machetes became legendary in Cuba.

When all the officers had stated their plans and had been rejected one by one, the Colonel rose from the stool, his *taburete*, and walked meekly to the General's table. "General," he said softly, "if you let me pick a couple of men, I'll bring some mules from Jaruco."

Everybody, including the General himself, burst out laughing, making fun of his bravado. Despite being belittled by the scorn, the Colonel did not lose poise. He waited until they calmed down and then addressed the General again, but this time his voice was strong and firm: "The trouble with all of you is that you want to use force instead of brains to enter Jaruco. That would cost the lives of most of our men, and success is doubtful. I want permission to try a plan I have, and I'm certain it will work. I'll enter the fort on horseback with my men; we'll be dressed in the Spanish uniforms we've confiscated. We'll work out how to get out and when we do it will be with some mules, wine and *turrón*."

A movement of the General's hand stopped the laughter of his staff. He looked thoughtfully at his Colonel and said: "I believe you are right in that, Colonel. You have done so many things during the time you have been under my command that I'd be disappointed if you did not succeed in what you are proposing. Pick your two men and... God be with you."

Nestor, one of the General's adjutants, was playing cards on the table with the only pack that there was at the camp, and it was so worn and bent that it was miraculous how he could play with them. When the Colonel was about to excuse himself, Nestor said in a mocking voice: "Chico, don't forget to bring me a new pack of cards."

The Colonel turned to face him, responding: "I'll try to do so, Nestor."

A moment later, he was gone. He went to his men and picked Pancho and Cesareo; took them a little way from the *bobío* and explained his plan to them. The men, who worshiped him, cheered loudly, and running to the corral, donned the Spanish uniforms stored there, saddled three horses and started on their way down the slopes, making a big circle around Jaruco to approach the fort by the side gate. It was getting dark by then, as the setting sun was hiding in the mountains, leaving only shadows in the valley where Jaruco lay. When they were a short way from the gate, the three started singing to the tune of Pancho's guitar and acting as if they were drunk. The sentinel was

looking straight at them but hearing such drunken singing waited until they were closer to stop them and ask them for the password. Almost at the gate, the sentinel shouted his warning: “*Alto! Quién vive?* Stop right there and say the password! Stop or I’ll shoot all of you!”

The trio sang still louder and kept on coming until they were in front of the gate. Then a hoarse, alcoholic voice answered: “Come and open the gate! How dare you keep Colonel Navarro and his adjutants waiting!”

The sentinel, caught by surprise at the mention of the notorious Spanish officer’s name, replied: “You must be completely drunk to talk about the Devil himself on a holy night like this.”

Instead of answering, the trio started their singing again, but this time they sang and played an obscene song that the Spaniards had made up about their Colonel Navarro. The sentinel, tired of it all, finally threw the gate open and, cursing every one of them, let them pass.

They kept on the main street for a short time until they were out of sight of the sentinel and then turned sharply into a deserted alley. The drunkards composed themselves, drew their machetes and setting their horses at a trot, traveled quickly around the populated section to the rear of the stables where the mules were kept. Dismounting from their horses, they saw with delight that the Spaniards had been in such a hurry to taste the wines that they had not unloaded twenty of the mules.

Seeing a light in the front room, they calmly approached the window and, looking inside, saw four soldiers playing cards. It was the night watch, supposedly on duty while the rest of the troops enjoyed the drinks and delicacies of *Nochebuena*. The Colonel came to the door, opened it gently and walking in, his two men right behind him, surprised the guards. A moment later the four men lay on the floor, dead. The Colonel took the cards from the table without even wiping the blood off them and put them in his pocket. Now they went to the corrals and tied all the mules head-to-tail and led them out into the deserted alley.

Pancho took up his guitar again and, while the other two waited in the darkness, made his way to the same gate where they had entered the fort, singing aloud. When he was near the sentinel, he distracted him with drunken babbling. The sentinel, cursing again, started to open the gate to get rid of the drunkard, when a machete stroke felled him. The Colonel and Cesareo rushed the mules out and made a clear getaway.

Their timing was perfect; shortly after their exit, somebody discovered the four dead guards and sounded the alarm to close all gates. A few shots sounded dangerously close to the raiders, but by the time the Spaniards realized fully what had happened, the trio and their caravan had melted into the pitch darkness of the Jaruco hills.

The Colonel could get around the trails, the *Escaleras*, with his eyes blindfolded, so he did not have much trouble in finding his way back to the camp of the *insurrectos*. As soon as they dismounted and tied the mules, he approached the General's hut, went quietly inside and sat in his *taburete*. They all stared unbelieving, yet reaching for their weapons, at the Spanish officer who had intruded so silently. Their concerns eased when Nestor addressed the Colonel in his usual mocking voice: "Well, *Chico*, did you bring my cards?"

The Colonel put his hand in his pocket and, drawing out the cards, threw the bloodied deck on the table. The officers jumped to their feet, but Nestor laughed out: "Don't kid me, I know you, you had this pack with you all this time."

Smiling, the Colonel answered: "*Amigo* Nestor, perhaps anybody can hide a pack of cards, but it will be a very good magician who can hide twenty loaded mules."

Hearing this, the General jumped to his feet, grabbed the Colonel by the lapels and asked: "Is it true?" At that moment, Pancho and Cesareo, who were waiting at the door, came in and explained modestly what had happened since they had left four hours earlier. There had been a lightning strike, they all marveled. All the officers rushed out and upon seeing the mules loaded with the items, started cheering and hugging the three heroes.

That Holy Night, the *insurrectos* had a big *Nochebuena*... thanks to the brave little Colonel and two daring soldiers who trusted and followed him on a dangerous mission into enemy territory.

Aftermath

Colonel Alfredo Lima Tardiff went on to fight in many other battles, leading his cavalry to numerous victories, including the famed battle of San Juan Hill, where he and his men fought alongside the Rough Riders of Theodore Roosevelt.

Upon the insurrectos' victory over Spain in 1898, the retired hero was honored by the new government with a series of appointments, including Consul of Cuba in Los Angeles. The famed actor Charlie Chaplin, center, dedicated the photograph below to him, who is standing slightly behind the actor's right.



Three Poems

by **José Luis García Martín**

translated by **Claudia Quevedo-Webb**

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INTRODUCTION

José Luis García Martín (Cáceres, Spain, 1950 -) is a writer, a former professor of Literature at the Universidad de Oviedo (Spain) and the director of *Revista Clarín. Revista de nueva literatura*. His literary work encompasses a multiplicity of books and genres, including critical editions, short stories, theater, and poetry. His first poetry collection *Marineros perdidos en los puertos* [Sailors Lost in the Harbors] was published in 1972 and he has written ten other poetry books since then.

The first two poems that are offered here in English translation, “Mi patria” [My homeland] and “Amigos” [Friends], are part of a larger collection called *Presente continuo* [Present Continuous], published in 2015. The third one, “Despedida” [Farewell], is part of the early poetry book *Treinta monedas* [Thirty Coins] (1989). These collections bring the reader to different parts of the world by using a variety of poetic styles and poetic voices in the never-ending journey of the written word. The poems at hand, although from different creative periods, reflect a recurrent topic in García Martín’s poetry: the presentation of abstract concepts in a poetic, yet quotidian, manner.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Claudia Quevedo-Webb holds a Ph.D. in Spanish Linguistics from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. From 2017-2019, she worked as a Spanish Teaching Assistant in the department of Romance Languages and Literatures at Harvard University. Since the Fall of 2020, she has been an Assistant Instructional Professor of Spanish at the University of Chicago. As a higher education instructor, she focuses her efforts on the pedagogy of teaching Spanish Language and Culture. She has a great passion for Spanish Literature, and she authored the prologue for the book *Casa sin puertas*, by Carlos Alcorta (2017).

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MY HOMELAND

If they told me, you can choose your homeland,
a place to live,
a place to die for,
a great history full of falseness
that you have to believe without hesitation,
an undulating cloth
that should fill you with emotion
when sighted from afar,
what homeland would I choose?
The world is too large,
my village too small.
Will there not be a wandering asteroid
without a name,
without history, without a flag,
without blood on its hands,
without victims to avenge?

A rough stone ignored of everyone,
which will not be splashed
by the stupidity of men,
that I would want to be my homeland.

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FRIENDS

*Max Jacob*¹

What better paradise than a few friends
in this clear never-ending night,
while the river flows behind the closed garden,
and, curious, between the branches, out comes the moon?

If lips tangle with melancholy,
if the forehead of the youngest is clouded,
With another drop of wine, smiles soon return.

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Not even death do I fear when I am with you all
who are half my soul, indeed my whole soul,
friends who will leave, who have already left
in the river of time to a deserted place.
Like before, you are all here with me again,
on this lighted, paused, silenced night,
when all is said though we say nothing.

¹ Max Jacob (1876-1944) was a French artist known for his poetry, paintings, and work as a critic. One of his famous quotes that might connect him to this poem reads as follows: “L’amitié a été le clou où est pendue ma vie” [Friendship has been the nail where my life hangs], extracted from Scheler, L. (1982). *La grande espérance des poètes, 1940-1945* (p. 269). Temps Actuels.

FAREWELL

M. Altolaguirre², Poesía, III, 1930

You have not loved me, and you flee through your years
to a country where I do not exist,
but how much you leave with me by leaving me...
Others will see your life dissolve;
I will preserve the memory
of a fragile, adolescent beauty.
Soon you shall not be you, even if you do not die;
Even if you do not live, you will live in me.
In my memory, you will always be young:
So see how much I win by losing you.

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² Manuel Altolaguirre (1905-1959) was a Spanish poet of the Generation of '27. Some of his poetry books include *Ejemplo* [Example] (1927), *La lenta libertad* [Slow Freedom] (1936) or *Poemas en América* [Poems in America] (1955).

A Manifesto for Reading (excerpts)

by **Irene Vallejo**

translated by **Erin Goodman**

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INTRODUCTION

Spanish writer, classicist, and philologist Irene Vallejo Moreu (b. 1979, Zaragoza) has become an unlikely superhero—a defender of books and reading, catapulted to fame by her award-winning 452-page essay on the history of books in antiquity, *El infinito en un junco* (Ediciones Siruela, 2019), which became a best-selling book in Spain during the Covid-19 pandemic. Much has been written about the power of books as portals, and over 150 years have passed since Emily Dickinson famously wrote “There is no Frigate like a Book / To take us Lands away.” If “books about books” is a genre in and of itself, then Irene Vallejo is currently at its forefront. She earned a PhD in classical philosophy from the universities of Zaragoza and Florence, and writes a weekly column for *El País* and *Heraldo de Aragón*.

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In contrast to her dense 2019 masterpiece, the more recent *Manifiesto por la lectura* [A Manifesto for Reading] (Ediciones Siruela, 2020) is hardly larger than a cellular phone (screens are paper’s “light-sisters,” writes Vallejo). The diminutive 61-page *Manifiesto*, an airy delight to read, was commissioned in February 2020 by the Federación de Gremios de Editores de España (Spanish Association of Publishers Guilds) to accompany a petition proposing a “government pact” in favor of reading and books.

The “Manifesto” was envisioned and written to encourage reading on a national level. In times of fierce competition from digital forms of entertainment, Vallejo argues that reading is an active pursuit, one that engages all of our senses through imagination, and compels us to better understand the lives, feelings, and thought processes of both our contemporaries and people from distant lands and times. Citing Martha Nussbaum, she argues that reading literature is even fundamental to the success of democracy. Through reading, we can imagine a future that will unite us. The simple, elegant prose reflects the universality of reading, and its accessibility in times of great material disparities. It was an honor to translate this selection from the *Manifiesto por la lectura*, about a topic near and dear to literary translators: the capacity of literature to shape our worldviews and to put ourselves, as readers, in others’ shoes.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Erin Goodman’s translations have been published in *New England Review*, *Los Angeles Review*, *The Lifted Brow*, and *Poetry International Rotterdam*, among others. She is a frequent translator for the *New York Times* Opinion Section, and the translator or co-editor of several non-fiction books and a forthcoming selection of poetry by Juana Rosa Pita (b. 1939, Havana), titled *The Miracle Unfolds* (Song Bridge Press, 2021). Erin holds a Certificate in English-Spanish Translation from the University of Massachusetts Boston, an Ed.M. from Harvard University, and a B.A. in International Relations from Wellesley College.

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A MANIFESTO FOR READING¹

II

Wings and Foundations

Humans are able to narrate, read, and write because we have developed the wonderful tool of language. Through words, we can share inner worlds and fanciful ideas. When animals daydream—if such a thing is possible—they lack the tools to tell other animals about it. Some species are endowed with means of communication—some of which are astonishingly complex—but none can compare with ours in terms of flexibility, freedom, and richness of nuance. This linguistic marvel allows us to coexist in two geographies: in the tangible space we inhabit together with thousands of other species, and in a parallel universe that is exclusively ours: the worlds of fantasy, possibilities, and symbols, which no other creature can access.

Driven by language and creativity, our brains branched off from mere biological evolution with its relentlessly slow pace and took flight on the swift wings of cultural evolution. Thousands of years ago, the development of a sophisticated new technology—writing systems—opened the doors to the preservation of knowledge, ideas, and dreams, so we can expand them and revive them with each glance that falls on the words of a page. Philosopher Richard Rorty believes that reading transformed our minds irreversibly. Thanks to reading, we have developed an anomaly called ‘inner eyes.’ Discovering the characters in a story is like meeting new people and becoming acquainted with their personalities and their reasoning. The more different these characters are from us, the more they broaden our horizons and enrich our worlds. Through books, we inhabit the skin of others, caress their bodies, and drift into their gaze. And, in a narcissistic and self-centered world, the best thing that can happen to any one individual is to become everyone.

¹ The Observatorio would like to sincerely thank Ediciones Siruela for granting permission to publish this translation of extracts from Irene Vallejo’s *Manifiesto por la lectura*, which has allowed us to commemorate World Book Day 2021 in this very special way [Editors’ note].

Reading has never been a solitary activity, even when we practice it alone in the privacy of our homes. It is a collective act that brings us closer to other minds and ceaselessly affirms the possibility of a rebellious understanding, impervious to barriers of centuries and borders. Along the path to pleasure, reading offers suspension bridges of words across abysses of difference. Psychologist Raymond Mar and his team at the University of Toronto proved in 2006 that people who read, especially those who read literature, are more empathetic than non-readers. In one experiment, a group of students had to choose between two envelopes: inside one was Chekhov's tale "The Lady with the Dog"; the other contained a text that described exactly the same sequence of events, but in a neutral, semi-documentary language, lacking the inflections of the age-old craft of storytelling. Those who read Chekhov's words, especially those who were most moved by the story, scored higher on the empathy spectrum. The ability to immerse oneself in another's world and dive into distant waters not only enhances our levels of intimacy, but also our personal lives, daily conviviality, and social skills. Its benefits can even extend to international relations and corporate achievements.

The habit of reading does not necessarily make us better people, but it does teach us to observe with our mind's eye the vastness of the world and the enormous variety of circumstances and beings that inhabit it. Our ideas become more agile and our imaginations more enlightening. By peering into a tale, we can escape and cast ourselves onto the characters of an invented landscape. Mario Vargas Llosa has expressed it as

this unjust life, a life that forces us always to be the same person when we wish to be many different people, so as to satisfy the many desires that possess us. [...] Good literature, genuine literature, is always subversive, unsubmitive, rebellious: a challenge to what exists.²

We long to see through different eyes, think with other ideas, and feel new passions. Donning the magical lenses of fiction, we observe through them and slip into the pleasures, terrors, and ambitions of others. Without leaving the comfort of our beds, the vast universe can belong to us with its immensity at arms-length.

² The English translation is from: Vargas Llosa, Mario. (May 4, 2001). "Why Literature? The premature obituary of the book." *The New Republic*.

<https://newrepublic.com/article/78238/mario-vargas-llosa-literature> [Translator's note].

In invented worlds we meet and understand each other and learn to collaborate. American philosopher Martha Nussbaum, who won the Princess of Asturias Award for Social Sciences, argues that reading is part of the fundamental preparation for living in a democracy. Ever since its emergence in Greece thousands of years ago, democracy has remained the most challenging and amazing system humans have attempted. Rather than by force, democracy fosters coexistence by upholding a delicate tapestry of agreements and ongoing dialogue. Antonio Basanta reminds us that the word in Spanish for ‘reader,’ *lector*, derives from the term ‘elector.’ In the daily cadence of the democratic experience, each and every one of our votes leads to decisions that will impact the lives of others. In a text entitled *The Silent Crisis*, Nussbaum reflects:

The ability to imagine the experience of another [...] needs to be greatly enhanced and refined if we are to have any hope of sustaining decent institutions across the many divisions that any modern society contains.³

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The better we are at acrobatics, cartwheeling into the gaze of others, the more solid our democracy will be. Paradoxically, taking flight strengthens our foundations.

³ The English translation is from: Nussbaum, Martha C. (2010). *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Part I: The Silent Crisis). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. [Translator’s note].

IV

Ghost Voices

No one knows when or where the first story was told. It was probably in a cave, by the dancing light of a bonfire. The first to create their own genealogy of stories were tribes, then villages, then cities and empires. Eastern cultures were the earliest to put them in writing, and thus narratives began their journey through geography and centuries. These anonymous and universal tales have been great voyagers. Anyone who knows a good story wants someone else to hear it, feels the immediate need to share it: “Have you heard the story of the child without a shadow? Do you know the tale of the lovers and the ghost? Once upon a time...” Intrigued, everyone listens attentively.

66 Stories tell us how other people, who may have died before we were born, felt and dreamed. We can even hear them alive within us, an incantation that would be impossible for any other species. Starting with the *Iliad*, the birth of European literature, we mentally reconstruct past times, listening to voices from other millennia. Printed words may be but the ghosts of voices or the shadows of minds, but they matter to us. They extend our transitory existences, adding to readers’ lives the lives of all the ages, merging thousands of years of knowledge with their own. Each reader’s life is extended by the confluence of a tangible reality and a reconstructed past. Time machines do exist: they are books.

VIII

A Tool for Rebuilding

We are living through times of crisis, change, and uncertainty. It is precisely at these crossroads that we must return to books, to lines from the past that will remind us that nothing we encounter is happening for the first time. In the memory of writing, we discover traces of human experience, which time and again has survived droughts, famines, plagues, traumas, and wars. Anthropologist Michèle Petit has studied the value of reading in times of collective challenge. After September 11th, 2001, when visual imagery was already ubiquitous, there was an influx of visitors to bookstores in New York City. Reading has been a valuable tool for rebuilding in regions afflicted by violence, economic crises, migratory exoduses, and natural disasters. Petit analyzed countless literacy initiatives in prisons, troubled neighborhoods, and programs for the rehabilitation of former guerrilla children and homeless adolescents. The result is always revealing: participants in these reading experiences “discovered in books the possibility of striking up a relationship with the world that was not based solely on predation, dominance, or utility.”⁴ In troubled times, the written word acts as a reliable repository for the ideas that anchor and rescue us.

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As products of this frenetic millennium, our imaginations are colonized by speed, immediacy, and reproducibility. We are in love with acceleration and dazzled by instant connections, dizzying processors, the miracle of pressing a button and quickly communicating across immense distances. But all of that fast and fabulous technology is the product of a slow-working machine: the human brain. And its slowness is precisely the secret of its refined operation. The ideas that sustain our rationality need time, calm, and care to develop. As the Roman historian Tacitus wrote: “Truth is confirmed by inspection and delay; falsehood by haste and uncertainty.”

Prisoners of haste, we have brushed aside the teaching and learnings of patience. We can call this lack of cognitive serenity a distraction crisis. Guy Debord affirmed that the time we live in pushes us to be spectators rather than readers; that is, to dilute the act of reading into the docility of viewing. Reading is not passive like hearing or seeing: it is a form of recreation and mental effervescence. We read at our own pace, we modulate our speed, and we internalize what we choose to assimilate, not what is thrown at us so quickly, and in such quantities, that we become

⁴ The English translation of this quotation is mine [Translator’s note].

overwhelmed. In these fast-paced times, books emerge as allies to help us recover the pleasure of concentration, intimacy, and calm. Thus, reading can become an act of resistance in an era of anxiety invaded by unbridled information.

Carmen Martín Gaité mused in *El cuento de nunca acabar* [The Never-ending Story] that reading and writing

is like standing firm against all the hustle and bustle, standing tall through thick and thin, as if millenary roots sprouted from our feet [...], as if we were in a quiet, padded enclosure, or on a desert island, or watching a cheery, peaceful landscape from our tower battlements, safe from death, flux, and hurriedness.⁵

Books respect our attention. They keep us disconnected from emergencies, notifications, and advertising. They don't need batteries to recharge, they're sturdy and they can also be beautiful. They're not subject to planned obsolescence, and their useful lives last for centuries. We can hear them, smell them, stroke them. Paper may coexist harmoniously and peacefully with its light-sisters, screens, but it has an aura that we literature enthusiasts love and value.

⁵ The English translation of this quotation is mine [Translator's note].

Parallel 35 (excerpts)
and
“The Dead Woman”

by **Carmen Laforet**

translated by **Roberta Johnson**

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INTRODUCTION

Carmen Laforet (1921-2004) burst on the Spanish literary scene in 1945 at age twenty-four when her first novel, *Nada*, which had won the first Nadal Prize, was published. She married the journalist Manuel Cerezales in the following year and thereafter had five children. Family life slowed her novel writing, but, in 1952, she did go on to publish *La isla y los demonios* [The island and the devils] and *La niña* [The girl], a collection of short stories, one of which I include here. These books were followed by *La mujer nueva* [The new woman] in 1955, and *La insolación* [The sunstroke] in 1963. Her fame was so significantly established by 1965 that she was invited by the United States State Department to tour the country as a key person to present a view of the United States during the cold war era, an honor reserved for influential foreigners. After a month-long tour that took her up and down the east coast, to the south, the mid- and far west, upon returning to Spain she wrote *Paralelo 35* [Parallel

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35] (1967) with her observations about American life and institutions. The author was shepherded around by guide-translators as she spoke no English. Her trip took her to a variety of locations, including private homes, museums, a Sara Lee baked goods factory, a farm, several college and university campuses, NASA installations, and historical places such as San Agustín in Florida, the first Spanish settlement in the US.

I have selected to translate three passages from *Paralelo 35* here: one about Carmen Laforet's visit to Harvard University because it is the site of the present publication, and two passages in which she observes racial tensions in the US, where we see that her novelist's keen eye discerned the most troubling problem in American life, even today. As she preferred to think of herself as a fiction writer, I have also included the translation of one of her best short stories, "La muerta" [The dead woman] from her collection *La niña y otros relatos* [The girl and other short stories] (1973, 2nd ed.).

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

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Roberta Johnson is Professor Emerita at the University of Kansas, and Adjunct Professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at UCLA. She has published some 100 articles on a variety of subjects related to twentieth- and twenty-first century Spanish literature and thought, authored numerous books in this field, such as *Carmen Laforet* (1981); *Gender and Nation in the Spanish Modernist Novel* (2003), and *Major Concepts in Spanish Feminist Theory* (2018), and co-edited volumes on Spanish feminisms. Professor Johnson has won numerous awards and grants recognizing the significance of her scholarly and other academic work, including a Fulbright lectureship in Spain; a year-long NEH Fellowship-in-Residence at Duke University; a Guggenheim Fellowship; the Order of Don Quijote from the Spanish honor society Sigma Delta Pi; and the Order of Isabel la Católica from His Majesty King Juan Carlos of Spain.

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PARALLEL 35

University Vignettes - Harvard

My first visit in Boston was to the student village of Cambridge, next to Harvard University campus.

Harvard is one of the richest, oldest, and most prestigious universities in the United States. Its buildings, grounds, and streets form a veritable city.

At Harvard I had lunch with our poet Jorge Guillén and other Spanish and Latin American writers and professors. I traversed the streets of the University and went into some buildings, both in the old nucleus and in the more modern area, where there are buildings by the best contemporary architects. The only building by Le Corbusier in the United States is found at Harvard.

I visited the great central library, and in its museum I found something absolutely unique in the world—the collection of glass plants and insects made by the Blaschka family. The collection, which was begun in the nineteenth century and completed in the twentieth, was donated to Harvard by Mrs. Elizabeth G. Ward and Professor Soodale, who discovered the Blaschkas, naturalists and artists unique in their genre, for America.

Cambridge is also the home of my enchanting friend Joan Alonso, widow of Amado Alonso, who drove me in her car to the lake Emerson sung about.

The lake was a solitary retreat for the writer, and it was quite solitary the morning I saw it; but Mrs. Alonso explained to me that at present it was a place for tourism and swimming. We were accompanied by Josefina Yangua, a Spanish woman who has taken up residence in Cambridge; she is a businesswoman, owner of two prosperous locales—a Spanish restaurant, El Iruña, and Café Pamplona. Before Josefina opened these places, the students had nowhere outside the university to get together and talk in the European style.

Cambridge is a town with special characteristics where many Harvard students live, especially married students, professors, and intellectuals.

The Harvard students, who give an intense life to the town, are usually rich, and you can find anything you might desire in Cambridge stores from antiques, fashion, textbooks—all of them expensive, as are the restaurants. One sees young couples dressed in a bohemian style on which they have spent a great deal of money. It is kind of an imitation of European student bohemianism, but an imitation constructed on a solid economic base.

A Tourist in Washington

I remember many things about Washington. My nocturnal visit to the city with its grand, silent, illuminated streets; the enormous obelisk, the monument to Abraham Lincoln, with its great white colonnade. The Congress. The impression of that smiling policeman who told us everything we wanted to know, and who, upon learning I was from Spain, spoke to me in Spanish because he was also a university student. The river reflecting the lights, the solitude and the silence of the city at night. At a distance, General Lee's house, lit up above Arlington Cemetery.

I also recall the classic tourist sights. The visit to George Washington's estate, Mount Vernon. Splendid estate, splendid house where one can easily imagine the hubbub of the black slaves at parties and day labor; where one can sit among the tourists who visit the house on the back porch and contemplate a superb landscape—the immense fields, the grand river, the private wharf of the Washington family, the autumnal trees...

The house is preserved by a league of women from prominent southern families. They have recovered as many authentic objects as possible, and the house is now furnished as it was in Washington's time. The mania for extreme, realistic exactness is shocking as it has led them to place mannequins with approximately the same features as the people who lived in the house—women doing handwork, playing cards...—All too much. Just as in the cloister of the Encarnación convent in Ávila, where under a staircase there is a wax statue representing the baby Jesus appearing to Saint Teresa. It turns out that the things that shocked me in America, also occasionally shocked me in Spain.

I also visited Kennedy's simple tomb —with its grave marker between two small stones for his two children and the perpetual flame above it within the immense garden with hills and meadows that is the military cemetery of Arlington. It does not reflect the drama of death, although there are thousands of small white stones with a name and a date. The Arlington cemetery, with General Lee's museum house on a hill, and people strolling through there on their Sunday walk.

I visited the Library of Congress, this impressive mind of the world with its sixteen large reading rooms, its perfect archives, where one can find all the books on every subject written in every imaginable language, all available to everyone who lives in Washington. I saw part of the interior of the immense, marvelous Library of Congress: kilometers and kilometers of rows of books, with librarians placed strategically to receive requests through tubes that are then sent by special freight elevators and mobile carts. Everything is so perfectly organized that it renders one mute with astonishment. It does not take more than forty-five minutes for a book shelved in the most remote corner of the Library of Congress, to reach its reader, despite having to cover several kilometers.

This library is also a cultural center where there the most renowned people in the world do theatre performances and give lectures.

Stradivarius violins that are played by the best violinists in the best concerts are kept in a crypt closed off with golden bars.

The Spanish section of the Library of Congress is under the direction of the Chilean Manuel Aguilera. The Library has authorized him to acquire everything published in our language. He explained this to me and showed me a section of tapes and records by Hispanic authors, and I also listened to poems recited extraordinarily by their author Nicolás Guillén, among them his anti-Yankee poems.

The Hispanic section, like many other sections of this fabulous library, and like all, or almost all the cultural and artistic institutions of the United States, is endowed by different private foundations. The criteria are absolute liberty within the artistic category. There is never a prohibition of any literary acquisition because of its ideas. Absolutely everything is found there.

This library was my first contact with the achievement of interest and perfection that American culture has attained, and it had a very strong impact on me.

One morning I visited the Art Gallery, which has a collection of French Impressionists that I had not even seen in Paris. And this was nothing, only the beginning of what I would see in my travels to other cities. And it was a great deal.

The second day of my stay in Washington, the Spanish Department of the University of Maryland offered me a friendly, intimate meal with people who live not only the language of Spain, but also its cultural interests. This is also the case in the departments of French and German. North American universities seemed to me tremendously serious in their specializations.

Learn About our Problems

One of my American friends, who after a tour of Washington, was enchanted with my admiration for the city, stopped the car in front of a children's hospital. She made a serious gesture.

"I think there is no racial discrimination in hospitals today," she told me, "but when I came to Washington a few years ago, I got a terrible impression of this hospital. It was great in the section for white children, but when you went into the Black ward, it was a completely different world. Everything that was old and lacked paint in the first ward was taken to the second wing. This was a criminal practice, because our country is too rich to allow things like that to happen. Carmen, you have to be aware of our huge problems. You can't just have only a rose-colored view of our affairs."

I did not have a rose-colored view of USA matters. The press and literature had informed me of all kinds of violence, injustice, lynchings, fires. It had not been long since the incidents of Los Angeles, which had the characteristics of a civil war. On the contrary, I was surprised by the peaceful streets, surprised to always find colored people in offices, laboratories, in the State Department, in a larger proportion than the nineteen million human beings of that race, among two hundred million inhabitants of this enormous country, than one would think.

"That's nothing. It's like the beginning of a road toward total justice. So long as people keep talking of race and considering that all individuals with mixed blood belong to the so-called colored race..."

My friend and her husband, a couple who look completely Nordic, with blond, blue-eyed children, were a symbol of what I like best about the American people: this total efficiency that does not pay attention to sacrifices when an American person is convinced of an idea.

Another person informed me that this couple, friends of theirs, had moved so that their children could attend a school where there were black children.

"I don't understand. What is going on in the schools?"

The North American school—grammar and high school—covers what we call the *bachillerato*. These are excellent institutions, with freedom in pedagogical methods, and like all things in the United States, maintained by private initiative over and above help from the state, giving an advantage, of course, to the most affluent neighborhoods. There are schools located in areas where there is not a single household with people of color. For this reason, they instituted a system (which encountered tremendous resistance) by which children from different neighborhoods changed schools by means of bussing.

“This was a desperate and crazy measure” some people explained to me. Children and their parents have the right to attend school close to their homes. Many parents have sacrificed themselves to move to a neighborhood, which has meant economic inconveniences and efforts, with the sole purpose of enabling their children to attend a school they think is better. They cannot be deprived of this liberty.

The American people have the idea of freedom in their blood. They cannot be imposed upon. And within that liberty are the traditions of the communities, the privileges of some groups, the passions, the created interests... And this is not just the case with white people, but also with the blacks. There is a tenacious fight on the part of black intellectuals against mixing the races, against admiration for the white race, against concessions. Eighty percent of blacks are an indifferent mass in the racial struggle. Fifteen percent want equality with their white compatriots and are willing to obtain it by peaceful means or otherwise. Lastly, five percent who call themselves “the five percenters” are fanatics who want the extermination of the white race. They don’t want dialogue or concessions.

I gathered all this information in Washington. The person who told me that said I wouldn’t learn anything about the United States without talking with people. I did not have the luck or misfortune of seeing any incident in the streets that revealed the tension between whites and blacks. I did not witness any demonstration, any hateful behavior, or any kind of violence. There were black families in my elegant hotel that were as nicely dressed and as well served at breakfast in the dining room as the white clients. The hotel servers were predominantly white. I had the right to believe, given what my eyes saw, that the racial problem had been completely solved. And, none-the-less, we all know that that is not true.

THE DEAD WOMAN

Mr. Paco was not sentimental. He was a good man who liked to have a few glasses of wine with friends after work, and who only got drunk on the major holidays when there was a reason for it. He was a happy man with an ugly, congenial face. A few white hairs peeped out from under his cap and, above his scarf, a round, red nose.

When he entered his house, this nose remained suspended for a moment, as if sniffing, while Mr. Paco, who had just taken off his scarf, opened his mouth with a touch of surprise. Then he reacted. He took off his old coat on which his daughters had stitched a strip of black mourning cloth on one of the sleeves, and hung it on the coat rack that had adorned the hallway for thirty years. Mr. Paco rubbed his hands together and then did something totally outside his customs. He sighed deeply.

He had felt his dead woman. He had felt her there, in the quiet hallway of the house, in the ray of sun that filtered in through the little window to the little red bricks that lined the hallway. He had felt the presence of his wife, as though she were alive. As if she were waiting for him in the warm, recently limed kitchen, just as in the early days of their marriage... Then, things changed. Mr. Paco had been very unfortunate, and no one could reproach him a few little glasses of wine and a few little amorous adventures, which had cost him, it is true, a good sum of money... Nobody could reproach him with a constantly sick wife and two unruly and foul-mouthed, demonic daughters. No one had ever reproached him. Not even poor María, his dead wife, not even his own conscience. When his daughters' tongues occasionally loosened more than they should have, María herself had intervened from her bed or her easy chair to shut them up, gently but firmly. In the solitude of the bedroom, when he had been out of sorts, restless, tossing and turning in bed, María herself took pity on him.

“Poor Paco!”

She could certainly pity him. She had always been very happy... She had always had food and medicines. Paco always worked hard, like a pack mule. Sometimes, it must be said, he had fantasized about his wife's death. And now he regretted it. But... she had been declared terminally ill so many times! ... He was ashamed to contemplate it, but he couldn't help thinking about plans, for example, with a shapely widow who lived in the neighborhood and who left him breathless when she laughed at his flattering comments... María was paralyzed at the time... "It's progressive—the doctors had said—the day will come when the paralysis reaches the heart, and then... you have to be prepared."

Mr. Paco was prepared. He already was when she had hydropsy, when she had the breast tumor, when... María's life in the last 20 years had gone from one bad disease to another worse one... And she was perfectly happy. As long as she had her medicines! Even without them because sometimes she gave the money for the medicines to the married daughter, often to buy things for the children... But what was certain was that suffering, what the doctors said she was suffering... no, María didn't notice those pains. She never complained. And when one suffers, one complains. Everyone knows that... Between one illness and another, she clumsily helped her daughters put the unkempt house in order. There were continuous shouts and arguments between the sisters who despised each other... This did mortify the poor woman. Those arguments that were a scandal in the neighborhood and never, not even on her death bed, could she enjoy peace.

During the three years of his wife's paralysis, Mr. Paco had had those secret projects about the widowed neighbor. He thought about throwing the daughters out of the house however he could and keep the flat for himself... After all,... And then to live... Destiny had to offer him some compensation.

Every day he spied on María's pale, smiling face. She would be slumped down in her easy chair, in a corner of the kitchen with the youngest grandchild on her paralytic knees, or sewing with her still agile hands, not worrying about what put Mr. Paco in such a foul mood: to see the kitchen so filthy, the walls black from not having been washed in years and the air full of smoke and the odor of rancid oil.

María would raise her soft eyes up to him, that pale mouth where a mysterious and irritating smile always floated, and Mr. Paco would advert his eyes. He could see that she pitied him, as if she guessed his thoughts, and he looked away. She could pity him all she wanted, but the fact was that she was never going to die, although given the life she was leading, he would say to his friends when the wine loosened his tongue, as for the life she was living, she may as well be resting in peace...

One day Mr. Paco felt all his projects come tumbling down. He got home from work and, when he opened the door to the kitchen, he found his wife standing up washing the dishes as though she had no paralysis. The smile that greeted him was not at all shy.

“Guess what!... This morning I found that I could wash myself without help, and I could walk... I was happy for the girls... The poor girls have so much work.”

It seems like she has got over it once more.

Mr. Paco didn't say anything... He couldn't register any kind of joy or surprise. On the other hand, it wasn't necessary. The daughters, the son-in-law, even the grandchildren took the cure as the most natural thing. They argued just the same when their mother was standing and helping out as best she could as when she was seated in an oilskin chair.

Mr. Paco's love for the merry widow faded when the possibility of the new marriage he dreamed of was dashed, and, in truth, when María finally was on her death bed, he no longer had any desire to be free of her. Up to the last minute, he could not believe it. The same was true of the daughters who were used to having a dying mother after so many years. The night before she died, when she could no longer sit up in bed, María clumsily knitted a little suit for a grandson... And, as always, she couldn't do anything to prevent the habitual family arguments in her last day on Earth.

Mr. Paco acted properly at the burial with a pained expression on his face. But on returning from the cemetery, he had already forgotten her. That tiny, silent woman was such a small thing there!

More than three weeks had passed since she was buried. And now, with no good reason for it, Mr. Paco felt her presence. He had been sensing her presence upon entering the house for several days now, and he couldn't explain why. He remembered her when she was young, and he had been proud of her; she was clean and organized like nobody else, with her black, always shiny hair twisted into a bun and those exceptionally white teeth. And the smell of cleanliness, of good cooking in her kitchen, which she herself whitewashed every Saturday, and that tranquility, that silence that she seemed to introduce wherever she went.

That day Mr. Paco realized that that was the reason... That silence... The daughters had not argued for three weeks.

They too, perhaps, sensed the dead woman.

“No...” Mr. Paco noisily blew his nose, “no... these are old men's things. It's just because I'm so old now”.

Nevertheless, it could not be denied that the daughters no longer argued. Nor could it be denied that instead of leaving things for later, each one making the excuse that the urgent chore was in fact the other's, they now shared the tasks, and the house ran much more smoothly. Mr. Paco,

perhaps for that reason, or perhaps because he was getting old, as he thought, was at home more and he had taken a shine to one of his grandsons.

He took a few steps in the hallway, feeling the warmth of a spot of sun on his nose and neck, as he went through it; he pushed open the kitchen door, remaining dazzled in the doorway for a few moments.

The kitchen was white and gleaming just as in the first years of their marriage. The plates were on the table. The son-in-law was eating, and, something never seen before, the unmarried daughter was serving him, while her sister was busy with the two snotty-nosed children... That was so strange that it made him cough.

“This is pretty different. Have you noticed, Mr. Paco?”

The son-in-law was happy with those walls that smelled of whitewash.

Mr. Paco looked at his daughters. It seemed to him as though he had not looked at them for years. Without knowing why, he said that they were beginning to look like their mother.

“Don’t they wish! Mrs. María was a saint.”

That idea got into Mr. Paco’s head, while he was eating his soup, slowly, silently. The idea launched by the son-in-law that the dead woman had been a saint.

“The truth, father,” one of the daughters said suddenly, “is that we cannot know how some people manage to stay alive. Poor mother didn’t ever do anything besides suffering and putting up with everything... I would like to know what good it did her to live like that and die without ever enjoying any of the pleasures of life...”

Nothing was said after that. Mr. Paco did not feel like answering, nor did anyone else... But it seemed like in that luminous kitchen there was something like an answer, like a smile, something...

Mr. Paco sighed again with feeling, after wiping his mouth with the napkin.

While he put on his coat to go out again, his daughters whispered about him in the kitchen.

“Did you notice father?... He is getting old. Did you notice the way he looked, like he was stunned, after eating? He didn’t even notice when Pepe left...”

Mr. Paco could hear them. Yes, he didn’t know what was happening to him either. But he couldn’t ignore the evidence...He was feeling the dead woman close to him again. It wasn’t terrible. It was warm, infinitely consoling. Something inexpressible. Right now, as he wound the scarf around his neck, it was as though her hands were tying it lovingly... Just like in old times... Perhaps that was why she had lived and died, as she did, suffering and smiling, insignificant and magnificent. Saint... in order to return to everything and to everyone and console them after her death.

“Torn Lace” and “Native Plant”

by **Emilia Pardo Bazán**

translated by **Francisca González Arias**

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INTRODUCTION

Emilia Pardo Bazán was born in 1851 in A Coruña, Spain, and died in Madrid in 1921. She was one of the foremost writers of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Spain. In this year that marks the centennial of her death, we continue to reflect on, and marvel at the intensity of her curiosity, the breadth of her interests, the extraordinary range of her talents, and the relevance that her writing has for the present day. Pardo Bazán was also a committed feminist and defended women’s rights and access to education, the professions, and cultural institutions.

‘Doña Emilia’ —as she is often referred to in Spain— wrote nineteen novels, countless essays, seven plays, and she collaborated widely in the Spanish and Latin American press. Author of some six hundred short stories, she is a creator of the short fiction genre in Spanish. Ever attuned to literary currents beyond Spanish borders, Pardo Bazán introduced French Naturalism into Spain

through her essays in *La Época* collected in *La cuestión palpitante* (1883) (*The Burning Question*). She produced her own brand of Naturalism in novels of the 1880's, such as *Un viaje de novios* (1881) (*A Wedding Trip*), *Los pazos de Ulloa* (1886) (*The House of Ulloa*), and *La madre naturaleza* (1887) (*Mother Nature*). *La Tribuna* (1883) (*The Tribune of the People*) is the only novel by a major novelist of the time to portray a proletarian protagonist, a woman labor activist who leads a strike at the cigar factory where she works. In the 1890's Pardo Bazán continued to explore social issues: *La piedra angular* (1891) (*The Angular Stone*), an examination of the death penalty, and the two linked novels *Doña Milagros* (1894) and *Memorias de un solterón* [Memoirs of an Old Bachelor] (1896) which trace the coming-of-age of the feminist protagonist. Doña Emilia's novels of the early twentieth century such as *La Quimera* [The Chimera] (1903), a portrait of a painter based on her protégé Joaquín Vaamonde, whom she nursed during his battle with tuberculosis, and who died at her Meirás home in Galicia, reflect her alertness to Symbolism and fin-de-siècle tendencies.

Early in her writing career, Pardo Bazán corresponded with Antonio Machado y Álvarez, founder of anthropological studies in Spain, and at his behest she launched The Galician Folklore Society and encouraged studies on the customs, rituals, beliefs and culture of her native region. Her novels and collections of short stories of Galician ambiance —*Cuentos de Marineda* [Stories of Marineda] (1892), *Historias y cuentos de Galicia* [Tales and Stories of Galicia] (1900), *Cuentos del terruño* [Stories of the Native Soil] (1907), and *Cuentos de la tierra* [Stories of the Land] (1923)— together constitute a kind of ethnographic document that portrays the Galician people in all their diversity and with deep insight and empathy.

The two stories published here represent different facets of her narrative work. “El encaje roto (1897) —translated into English as “Torn Lace”¹— is set within the upper-class society that the author herself frequented and that appears in such novels as *Insolación* [Sunstroke] (1889). Its themes highlight female agency and the double standard which prevented women like the protagonist Micaelita from enjoying the same freedoms as her fiancé. This short story also alludes to the issue of domestic violence, which Pardo Bazán portrayed throughout her narrative work as pervasive and transcending social class.

“Planta montés” (1890) —which also appeared in the collection *Historias y cuentos de Galicia* and is presented here for the first time in English translation, as “Native Plant”— takes place in Marineda, doña Emilia's fictional name for A Coruña, and as such it belongs to the author's cycle of

¹ An English translation of “Torn Lace” was published in *“Torn Lace” and Other Stories*, The Modern Language Association, 1996, translated by María Cristina Urruela.

Galician stories. The narrator, an educated woman, an urban dweller who traces her family's origins back to the land, is a study in contrasts. While she readily displays her familiarity with contemporary pedagogical theories (Friedrich Fröbel was a founder of modern early education and created the concept of the “kindergarten”), she also defends “the lost tradition” of service originating in the medieval *foro*, the contract between landowners and the peasants who rent and labor on their land. Pardo Bazán enriches the story with descriptions of traditional Galician garb derived from her research as President of the Galician Folklore Society and her visit to the Ethnographic Museum in Paris, which she documented in *La Revista de Galicia*.

One of the challenges of translating the story is to render in English the expressions in *gallego*, a strategy that doña Emilia adopted to lend more authenticity to her Galician stories, and to highlight the link between language and culture. (She included a glossary of Galician terms in *Historias y cuentos de Galicia*). Words are crucial to the development of character as the narrator adopts the young mountain boy's own language when dialoguing with him:

“Señora mi ama, no me *afago* aquí.”

“Y pasado algún tiempo, ¿no te *afarás* tampoco?”

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It is a scene that endows the young man with his own voice and presages the epiphany experienced by the narrator —that of the bond that all Galicians share, regardless of social status.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Francisca González Arias completed her doctorate at Harvard University with a dissertation on the nineteenth century novelist and short story writer Emilia Pardo Bazán, and she has taught in various universities in the New England area. Her research interests are focused on women writers of the Spanish-speaking world. She has numerous translation projects underway of works by Soledad Puértolas and the Mexican author Cristina Rivera Garza. Her translation of Soledad Puértolas's second novel *Bordeaux* appeared in the European Women Writers Series of the University of Nebraska Press (1998), and her translations into Spanish of Emily Dickinson were published by the University of Valencia Press: Fascicles 7 & 8 (2016) and Fascicles 9 & 10 (2018).

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Instituto Cervantes at FAS - Harvard University

TORN LACE

I had been invited to the wedding of Micaelita Aránguiz and Bernardo de Meneses but I was unable to attend, so I was astonished to find out the next day —the ceremony was to have taken place at 10 p.m. at the bride’s home— that at the very foot of the altar, when the bishop of San Juan de Acre asked her if she took Bernardo for her husband, Micaelita let out a clear and energetic “No.” And when the clergyman repeated the question in a puzzled tone, the denial was pronounced once more, while the bridegroom, after enduring for a quarter of an hour the most ridiculous situation in the world, had no choice but to leave, dissolving the celebration and the ceremony simultaneously.

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Such cases are not unheard of, and we often read about them in the newspapers, but they tend to happen among people of humble origins, of more modest means, in circles where social conventions do not hinder the frank and spontaneous expression of feeling and choice.

The singularity of the scene instigated by Micaelita was the environment in which it occurred. I conjured up the tableau, inconsolable at not having been able to see it with my own eyes. I imagined the packed reception room, the select assembly, the women dressed in silk and velvet, bedecked with jewels, their white mantillas over their arms, ready to cover their heads as soon as the ceremony began. The men with gleaming dress shirts and medals of various military orders pinned to their tuxedo jackets. The bride’s mother, richly attired, busy, solicitous, going from group to group, accepting congratulations. The bride’s pretty little sisters overcome with emotion: the older one dressed in pink, the younger in blue, showing off turquoise bracelets, gifts from their future brother-in-law. The bishop who was to bless the ceremony, alternately serious or affable and smiling, exchanging witty banter or bestowing discreet compliments as he saw fit. Meanwhile, one could glimpse the aura of mystery of the chapel sheathed in flowers, a flood of white roses rising from the floor to the little cupola crowned by wreaths of roses and snow-white lilies artistically crafted on green branches. And on the altar the statue of the Virgin, guardian of the aristocratic mansion, was half hidden by a curtain of orange blossoms, a train-carload of which was sent from Valencia by the

wealthy landowner Aránguiz, the bride's uncle and godfather, who had not come because of old age and bad health. These details spread from mouth to mouth while calculating the magnificent inheritance that was to be Micaelita's, another sign of good fortune for the couple, who were to travel to Valencia on their honeymoon. I imagined the bridegroom in a small group of men, somewhat nervous, slightly pale, inadvertently biting on his mustache, bowing his head to respond to the amiable jokes and the flattering words addressed to him...

And finally, I see emerge in the doorway a kind of apparition —the bride, whose features can barely be seen under the cloud of tulle, the silk of her dress rustling as she passes, while in her hair, as if sown with dew, sparkle the gemstones of the nuptial heirloom... And now the ceremony comes to life. The best man and the matron of honor lead the couple forward, and the innocent figure kneels next to the bridegroom's slim and graceful shape... The family crams into the front, while the curious and friends search for a good spot, and amid the silence and respectful attention of the guests..., the bishop formulates a question, to which the bride responds with a "No" as sharp as the click of a trigger, as fatal as a bullet. And —once again in my imagination— I note the bridegroom's gesture, as he turns, wounded. The mother's energy as she springs forward to protect and shield her daughter. The bishop's insistence, and the look of his astonishment. The tremor of the crowd; the anxious questions relayed in an instant: "What happened? What's going on? Is the bride indisposed? She said 'No'? That's impossible... But is it true? What a scene!"

In society, all of this constitutes a terrible drama. And in Micaelita's case, a riddle as well. The reason for the unexpected "no" was never known for sure.

Micaelita would only say that she had changed her mind, and that she was completely free and had the right to turn back, even at the foot of the altar, as long as a "yes" had not issued from her lips. The family's closest friends wracked their brains, offering unlikely suppositions. What was beyond a doubt was that, until that fateful moment, everyone had seen two people who were very much in love and happy with each other. The bride's girlfriends reported that, when they entered to see her in all her finery minutes before the scandal, she was mad with joy, and so hopeful and content that she would not have traded places with anybody. These were facts that clouded even more the strange enigma that for a long time would give rise to gossip, irritated by the mystery and determined to decipher it unfavorably.

Three years later, when almost nobody remembered what had happened at her wedding, I came across Micaelita at a fashionable spa where her mother was taking the waters. There's nothing like the routine of a spa to encourage friendships, and the young woman and I became so close that one afternoon as we strolled toward the church, she revealed her secret to me, declaring that she gave me leave to divulge it, secure in the knowledge that such a simple explanation would not be believed.

“It was the silliest thing, so silly in fact that I didn’t want to say it. People always attribute events to profound and transcendental reasons, unaware that sometimes our fate is determined by trivial matters, the littlest things... But they’re little things that have meaning, and for some people, they mean too much. I will tell you what happened; and I can’t believe that nobody noticed, because it occurred right there, in front of everybody. If they didn’t notice, it’s because it was over in a flash.”

“As you know, my marriage to Bernardo de Meneses seemed to meet all the conditions and the guarantees of happiness. In addition, I admit that I was considerably attracted to my fiancé, more than to any other man that I ever knew or know. I believe that I was in love with him. The only thing that I lamented was not being able to study his character: some people judged him to be violent, but I always saw him to be courteous, deferential, and soft as a glove. Yet I was suspicious that he was adopting appearances aimed to deceive me and to hide a fierce and disagreeable personality. A thousand times I cursed the subjection of single women, for whom it is impossible to follow their fiancé closely, to delve into his reality, and obtain reports that are true and brutally sincere —the only ones that would have satisfied me. I tried to submit Bernardo to several tests, which he passed with success. His behavior was so correct that I came to believe that I could entrust my future and my happiness to him without any fear whatsoever.”

“The day of the wedding arrived. Despite my understandable emotion, when I put on my white dress, I noticed once more the superb flounce of lace that adorned it, a gift from my fiancé. That ancient piece of authentic Alençon had belonged to his family; it was a foot wide —a marvel—, and of an exquisite design, perfectly preserved, worthy of a museum showcase. Bernardo had praised its value to the skies, which had begun to annoy me because, however much the lace was worth, my future husband should have realized that I was worth even more.”

“At that solemn moment, as I observed the lace highlighted by the dress’s dense satin, it seemed to me that the very delicate piece of handiwork symbolized the promise of good fortune, and that its texture, so fragile and yet so resistant, subtly meshed two hearts together. I was entranced by this daydream while I walked toward the chapel at the entrance of which my fiancé awaited me. As I hurried to greet him, full of joy for the last time before I became his in body and soul, the lace snagged onto an iron nail of the door, with such bad luck that, as I tried to free myself, I heard an unmistakable ripping sound and noticed a strip of the magnificent lace hanging on the dress. But I saw something else: Bernardo’s face, contorted and disfigured by the most vivid rage; his eyes ablaze, his mouth half-open ready to berate or insult me... He didn’t, however, because there were people all around him; yet in that fleeting moment a curtain rose and a naked soul appeared behind it.”

“I must have turned pale, but fortunately the tulle of the veil covered my face. Something shattered and broke into pieces inside me —the joy with which I had entered the room turning into profound revulsion. I could not let go of the image of Bernardo with that angry, hard, and contemptuous expression I had just glimpsed on his face. This certainty took hold of me, and with it the realization that I could not, that I would not give myself to such a man, not then, not ever... And yet I continued to go toward the altar; I knelt down, I listened to the bishop’s admonitions... But when I heard the question, the terrible and impetuous truth sprang to my lips... That ‘no’ burst forth, unplanned. I was saying it to myself... so that everyone could hear!”

“But why didn’t you reveal the true motive, when so many different commentaries were made afterwards?”

“I repeat, because of its very simplicity... No one would ever have believed it. What is natural and ordinary is never acknowledged. I preferred to let people think that there were reasons of the so-called serious kind.”

NATIVE PLANT

There was long deliberation, and a kind of family meeting took place to decide if it was convenient to bring that native of Galicia's most rugged mountains to enter service in the regional capital. The truth is that we were undertaking the taming of a young colt. We would have to begin by teaching the novice the name of the most common household objects, imparting 'lessons of things' that would make Froebel's educational theories pale in comparison. But we were so fed up with the servants recruited from Marineda's restaurants and cafés, given to roguish habits and untrained in the niceties of social intercourse, experts at pilfering wine and sacking the house for gifts for their lady-friends, that we opted to give acclimatization a chance. At the bottom of our hearts we harbored the sweet hope that after finding in the bosom of the mountain an innocent and half feral young man, a descendant of the people who had tilled our lands since time immemorial, we would exercise over the servant a kind of lordly dominion, renewing the lost tradition of old fashioned service, affectionate and patriarchal, in sum. Those were the days when servants died at home of old age!

It was a calm and clear morning. Marineda's sky justified the lyrics that declare it 'azure-colored', when the native of Cenmozas arrived at our home. He was accompanied by his father, the caretaker of our land. Father and son were like two peas in a pod and shared the same features — high cheekbones and a dark complexion, the color of rye bread, with small, deep-set eyes, restless like those of a captive bird; and with thin, almost invisible lips, and an oblong pear-shaped cranium. They differed in their expression: the old man's, astute and humble; sullen and mistrustful, the youth's. They were also set apart by their hair. The father's was closely cropped, while the son's was long in the fashion of peasants bound to the land, and hung from both sides of his dark wool cap. The two wore the authentic costume of the mountain district, akin to the garb of Brittany or the Vende, except that instead of wide pantaloons they used tight linen breeches under brownish cloth ones. Despite the radiant beauty of the day, the mountain men were leaning on enormous red umbrellas.

The old man exuded satisfaction and contentment like one who is sure of having found his offspring a position that would thrill even the king, and a provocative smile danced about on his sly features. But the young man, silent and faded despite his suntanned skin, seemed indifferent to exterior things. When they were offered a seat, they let themselves fall into it heavily and timidly, imbued with respect towards the chair. Before stipulating our conditions, the father duly launched into a panegyric of his Ciprián or Cibrao, for that was what he called him. The laudatory comparisons were taken from the animal life of the countryside. Cibrao, as gentle as a sheep; Cibrao, as loyal as a dog; Cibrao, as hardworking as a wolf (so he said, though I was unaware that the wolf was known for its industriousness); Cibrao, as affectionate as a dove; Cibrao, thrifty like the ant; Cibrao, sturdier than a hinney mule. You didn't need much to provide for him because —praise the Lord! — he was used to everything, and his body was none the worse for wear. If he disobeyed in the slightest, hit him without regret (and the father mimed the movement of someone beating a hide with a stick). And if not, just call *him*, Uncle Julian! He would come down from Cenmozas to give his son a thrashing such as he wouldn't be able to move about in five weeks! Wages, whatever we wished —we had too fine a reputation as good Christians to play anyone a dirty trick! And not a nickel in the young man's hand: for it was common knowledge that whatever lads had they'd spend on rascally girls and at the tavern... He, Uncle Julian, would take it upon himself to collect, let's say, two or three months at a time... If he was in fact paying such an amount today, and his boy earned so much, then that sum could be subtracted when the rent became due. And speaking of the rent, in these difficult years, couldn't we just lower it a bit? Also, the house was falling apart. A strong wind would simply... whoosh! knock it down and... good-bye to their dear little house! And with so many cracks... they were *quivering* with cold! We understood that Uncle Julian had come equipped with the firm resolve of selling us his "lad" in exchange for rent, reconstruction of the house, and money to buy a couple of oxen, which he reckoned would get him out of trouble. In token of this tacit agreement he presented us with two cheeses hard as stone, four ounces of rancid lard, and about half a bushel of plump chestnuts.

When the old peasant said good-bye, after he was well fed and regaled, the son stayed immobile and mute. He didn't even seem to want to accompany his father to the door, or to show any sign of affection and send regards to those left behind in the mountains to which the old man was returning. At night we saw the new servant curled up in a corner of the kitchen, unwilling to come to the table for his supper. Neither our words, nor the jokes of the merry young lady's maid, not even the compassionate remarks of the cook, an older woman who had a son "in the service of the king," managed to cheer him up. He refused to taste a thing.

We understood well enough this initial homesickness or *morriña* and hoped it would not last. Marineda is so festive on Sundays! It offers innumerable distractions to a young peasant boy raised among brambles and gorse. There's so much marching music and military parades and, at Mardi Gras, all those groups in fancy dress. And so many processions during Holy Week! Cibrao would come to relish it all.

The first thing was to make him decent, so that he could appear in front of people and his mates wouldn't make fun of him. A barber cut his hair and showed him how to use a comb; a tailor readied some cast-off clothing, and he was supplied with shirts and socks and suspenders. White neckties were ironed for him and his calloused hands were stuffed into cotton gloves. The metamorphosis suddenly had a favorable effect. One would have thought that the mountain man was going to shake off his apathy. Perhaps because his long locks had made his face seem emaciated, or for some other unknown reason, when his hair was cropped his appearance improved, as well as his appetite and his spirits, and we were all of the opinion that the transplant was taking place most favorably.

But, oh! our satisfaction vanished in a flash! The young man's initiation in service was disastrous. A young mare from Arzúa let loose in the house would not have caused greater damage. Accustomed to the scythe and pitchfork, Cibrao's rough hands were unable to grasp a bauble or a glass without reducing it to dust. He'd pick it up with infinite precautions, and then —crash! It hit the floor in a thousand pieces. He'd blame the gloves with which, he affirmed, he “had no touch.” Crystal exerted a strange fascination over his rough peasant senses. He could not distinguish it from the transparency of the air. If he had a wineglass or a bottle in front of him, he positively “did not see it,” or at least he did not distinguish its shape. “It makes me dizzy,” he'd say when he picked up any translucent object.

He'd mix up the silverware: forks for the soup, and spoons for the meat course. He'd bring out the vinegar cruet at dessert time. He'd flail the paintings with the duster handle and pull out the curtains when dusting them. He'd clean the inkwell with the tea towels, and there was no oil lamp that he did not break. One night, thanks to him, the house was immersed in darkness.

With all this our household furnishings gained little, and their destroyer, even less. The tumult of our constant warnings and scolding, the vertiginous rhythm of the city, or perhaps more intimate causes closer to the transplanted being's soul, were wasting away his face and dimming his eyes in what came to seem to us an alarming manner. Some compassion and a lot of weariness and impatience prompted us to call the young man to account and advise him paternally to return to his mountain refuge. “Let's speak clearly and without fear, young man. Nobody wants you to be in this

house against your will. You've been here two, three weeks. You know by now how things are going for you. You're not happy." A luminous spark lit up his concave pupils, and his tight lips articulated energetically:

"Madam, my Lady, I can't *'custom* myself here."

"And, after some more time, would you still not *'custom* yourself?"

"Not even then. No, ma'am".

In view of this categorical response, we wrote without delay to Uncle Julian to come fetch his puppy. And that he fetch him as soon as possible, or else nothing in the house, not even the lad himself, would be left standing. Our administrator transmitted the old man's response. If he came to Marineda he would break every rib in his son's body for "spitting on his luck." And if he brought him back to the mountains it would be to "ill-use him with beatings." This way of understanding parental authority alarmed us a bit. We gave up on our determination and communicated the "Old Man's" orders to Cibrao.

No response. He resigned himself and fell into a kind of apathy. He did whatever we asked him to, but as soon as our backs were turned, he'd curl up in a corner, letting his arms fall, his jawbone piercing his chest. It was the sad calm of an animal, silent and soporific, without protest or complaint, the enigmatic and stubborn affirmation of will in the zoological world. One day, when asked if he was ill and if the doctor should be sent for, he answered:

"Doctor *ain't* no use. The land is calling me inside."

It was November, that lugubrious month in which one can make out the rattling of the bones of the dead and muffled otherworldly lamentations beyond the ground drenched in rain and the whistling of the south wind. Marineda was putting on her winter dress. Window glass shook with hurricane force, and the roar of the city's two seas —the drydock's and the bay's— played the bass in a terrifying concert, while the wind's strident voice seemed to laugh mockingly. In our solitary street, one didn't hear the nocturnal hours but rather the rhythmic and forceful step of the night watchman, the water's plaintive flow, the bewitched mewing of a cat rabid for love, and a knock that echoed as if from the hollow of a tomb. After the stormiest and saddest night of the entire month, we learned that Cibrao didn't want to get out of bed. The doctor came and we guffawed with laughter when he told us what the young man was suffering from.

"That loafer! Nothing's wrong with him. No fever, no pain. I'll say it again: nothing! He says he doesn't feel like getting up. Why, do you think? I wager you can't guess. Well, because last night he heard a dog bark, that is, howl, and he swears that dog was *foresaying* his death."

Once our laughter had died down, a fit of humanitarian feeling came over us.

“Doctor, soup and wine? Doctor, how about a mustard plaster? Doctor, sometimes a foot bath...?”

The doctor shrugged his shoulders and arched his eyebrows:

“I don’t see a remedy because I don’t see a sickness. If there’s one, it’s in the ‘gray matter’ and I don’t know how to place leeches or apply emetics there. For a superstitious malady, try incantations. Call the parish priest. Have him bring a little cauldron and a hyssop to remove the enemy from his body.”

And Doctor Moragas left, half smiling, half furious.

We’ve often deplored not following the doctor’s ironic advice immediately. Who knows if the sight of the blessed cauldron would have cured the mountain boy’s passion of spirit?

The next night I too heard, mixed with the whistling of the wind and the Cantabrian Sea’s deep turbulent roar, the voice of the dog that howled with a sad and prolonged sound. I lay awake, and an odd uneasiness pressed down upon me until dawn, the time in which sleep usually recompenses the weariness of insomnia.

Will the outcome of this authentic case be believed? It’s not as surprising to us who were born in the misty lands of the prophesying Celts as it is to those who were raised in sunnier climes.

The fear of incredulity paralyzes my hand. I can hardly bring myself to inscribe here that at dawn Cibrao was found dead in his sleep.

We gave him a good burial and even had Masses said for his gentle and primitive soul.

Rincón de Traductores/Translators' Corner

Disponibles en/available at: <http://cervantesobservatorio.fas.harvard.edu/en/translation-corner>

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1. RT/TC 001 (2019). “A Letter of Federico García Lorca to his Parents, 1935”. Author: Federico García Lorca (Spain); Translator: Christopher Maurer; Genre: Letter.
2. RT/TC 002 (2019). “Like a Night with Legs Wide Open”. Author: José Alcántara Almánzar (Dominican Republic); Translator: Luis Guzmán Valerio; Genre: Short Story.
3. RT/TC 003 (2019). “In the Parks, at Dusk” and “I Only Think of You”. Author: Marina Mayoral (Spain); Translator: María Socorro Suárez Lafuente; Genre: Short Story.
4. RT/TC 004 (2020). “The Guide through Death” and “The Fat Lady”. Author: Guadalupe Dueñas (Mexico); Translator: Josie Hough; Genre: Short Story.
5. RT/TC 005 (2020). “The Case of the Unfaithful Translator”. Author: José María Merino (Spain); Translator: Erin Goodman; Genre: Short Story.
6. RT/TC 006 (2020). “The Guerrilla Fighter” and “May as Well Call it Quits”. Author: Albalucía Ángel Marulanda (Colombia); Translator: Daniel Steele Rodríguez; Genre: Short Story.
7. RT/TC 007 (2020). “Miguel Hernández’ Speech to His Companions in the Ocaña Jail”. Author: Miguel Hernández (Spain); Translator: Constance Marina; Genre: Speech.
8. RT/TC 008 (2020). “On the Road to Houmt Souk”. Author: Soledad Puértolas (Spain); Translator: Francisca González Arias; Genre: Short Story.
9. RT/TC 009 (2020). *Rincón de Traductores / Translators’ Corner – Volume 1: Compilation 2019-2020*. Various Authors; Various Translators.
10. RT/TC 010 (2020). *Waiting for the Revolution: Cuba, the Unfinished Journey* (excerpt). Author: Gustavo Gac-Artigas (Chile); Translator: Andrea G. Labinger; Genre: Chronicle.

11. RT/TC 011 (2020). “A Bad Girl”. Author: Montserrat Ordóñez (Colombia); Translator: Clara Eugenia Ronderos; Genre: Short Story.
12. RT/TC 012 (2020). “Claudia and the Cats”. Author: Ivanna Chapeta (Guatemala); Translator: Lindsay Romanoff Bartlett; Genre: Short Story.
13. RT/TC 013 (2021). *Song of Being and Nonbeing*. Author: Santiago Alba Rico (Spain); Translator: Carolina Finley Hampson; Genre: Poetry.
14. RT/TC 014 (2021). “Christmas Eve in the Hills of Jaruco”. Author: Robert F. Lima Rovira and Robert Lima (Cuba/USA); Translator: Robert lima; Genre: Chronicle.
15. RT/TC 015 (2021). *Three Poems*. Author: José Luis García Martín (Spain); Translator: Claudia Quevedo-Webb; Genre: Poetry.
16. RT/TC 016 (2021). *A Manifesto for reading* (excerpt). Author: Irene Vallejo (Spain); Translator: Erin Goodman; Genre: Essay.
17. RT/TC 017 (2021). *Parallel 35* (three excerpts) and “The Dead Woman”. Author: Carmen Laforet (Spain); Translator: Roberta Johnson; Genre: Chronicle/Short Story.
18. RT/TC 018 (2021). “Torn Lace” and “Native Plant”. Author: Emilia Pardo Bazán (Spain); Translator: Francisca González Arias; Genre: Short Story.

