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## Observations on the Nature of Translation: El murmullo de las abejas

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Observations on the Nature of Translation:  
*El murmullo de las abejas*

Senior Project submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by

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Annandale-On-Hudson, New York  
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This work could not have been completed without the unconditional support of my parents, professors and friends, whom have all encouraged and enticed me to further my interests in the study of Literature and Language. All are co-collaborators of this work in one way or another.

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## INTRODUCTION

My project begins with a translation of a book, if not all of it a selected good portion of it, by a contemporary author Sofia Segovia. This particular book of hers has never before been translated. The novel is titled *El murmullo de las abejas*. The story is essentially about a boy in Northeastern Mexico and it takes place around the time of the Mexican Revolution (1910). It was written in Spanish and I was in charge of translating it to English. The translation in itself will be only part of my senior project, for there will be another section in which I scrutinously analyze my deliberate selection of words and specific manner of translation and have founded arguments as to why it is I preferred or found it more applicable to choose a word over another in translation. Or perhaps validate why it is that a sentence in the original is completely changed in the translation. These arguments are all pointing towards making the text communicable to an English speaking audience.

This paper consists of three major portions. The first involves studying four different authors and their commentaries on translation and literature. The second portion is comprised of the translated first ten chapters of *El murmullo de las abejas*. The third involves a case study of certain moments during the translation that are relevant or important to discuss. It is important to note that the order of the presentation of contents does not adhere to the chronology in which they were produced. The translation was, in its majority, done before more deeply plunging into investing myself into the authorial approaches and descriptions of translation. This enabled me to

do two things, firstly it allowed me to approach the translation unbiased in regards to the lateral more sophisticated and erudite approach through the lens of translation writers; secondly, it helped perfect and come to terms with the incongruencies that I had found along my work in the translation and selected to explore. These explorations are the connections that comprise the third portion of this paper, the application of thought theory and practice intertwined.

Sofia Segovia writes shortly after the time when the 72 years reign of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional or PRI, has lost their power and the Partido Accion Nacional broke their streak with Vicente Fox. She is also writing under a time when the PRI has won the national elections and Mexico is under command of a president from said party: Enrique Pena Nieto. What is more, she is writing in a time that is roughly exactly a century after the revolution of 1910, which essentially gave way to the one party rule of the PRI, despite having removed Porfirio Diaz from power. Due to this the context is more than relevant to the development of the story and the repercussions of what the author has to say and the specific words she utilizes to express her developing themes and topics, but because this paper is not a profound or critical analysis of the work itself, it will only be alluded to when needed, the surface of which in its majority will only be scraped. These ranging from the scale of the land and the relevant events that shape the politics of a nation state, down through to the region, state and city, and even further down to explore the deep and complex intrafamilial dynamic of a wealthy, upper class family in northeastern Mexico. As such, the task that Sofia Segovia embarks upon is not an easy one, for she has the ability and the need to access the characters at the psychological and

uttermost personal level while leaving herself room to explore the psyche of a general society and a complete nationhood and movement.

So it is as well that the translation heeds very specific attention to the use of words, in both their semantic and syntactical nature, utilized by the author surrounding the very same wrapture and vein of thought. My translation takes into consideration the enveloping context of the work, from the deeply personal to the relational and family dynamic, societal norms and customs, expressions that are used, explored through the different classes of workers to *patrones*, soldier to washerwoman, to mother and country. This underscores the importance undertaken by Segovia, through these precise iterations into the persons of different class during said period in Mexican history. She is required to empathize with her characters, give them life, flesh and backdrops –in order to translate them unto her writing. This is perhaps a crux of the argument that is being explored in this paper, that Sofia Segovia being a writer makes her de facto a translator followed by the notion that every translation is a mistranslation, so because she is translating thought and her characters unto paper she must undergo the change of medium to express the ‘original’, and as such something gets obstructed by that as filter. What goes on to happen is that if we proceed to mix the two ideas together, it goes to show that the translation of her work is already a translation in itself that pertains to a previous original thought, so my translation is facing something that has already encountered the process of translation, and as such facilitates the moral justification of doing so, without having to think that what one is doing is fully sacrilegious, but only partly, because it is already tainted.

What is also of grand importance is the fact that it is a woman author, which comes into direct conflict with Roland Barthes' idea of the death of the author, for if the author were to be

removed then so would her gender. Of this direct conflict I would like to later focus, but let us assume that the author is still alive (which she is), and that there exists a communication between the author and the reader through the text itself. Only do I single out that she is a woman so as to emphasize how important it is to draw certain parallels, perhaps of course without oversimplifying them or extending them. The roles that women play in the story and the general undertone is that of a feministic power and recognition of worth and contribution to society. It is important because she is a contemporary female voice wearing the body of a voice in Mexico speaking of turbulent times, being the Mexican revolution of 1910, to the violence that is being upheld in Mexico in the past few years, or ever since Calderon declared his war on drugs. The analysis of the work focuses on how we cope with the idea that every translation is a mistranslation, in the sense that because it is a translation, it is removed from the original in some way transmuted and rearranged. From here I would like to proceed to the part of the senior project that deals with the concept of a mistranslation in general language. Mistranslation treated as a speech impediment that does not fall in accordance with what we are trying to express. To further explain, the inherent connotations in language which rule our semantics and syntactic expressions, and the general expressions of us humans is language, are biased in such a way that they betray us by mere fact of us speaking them. So it is that launching off from the translation of the text, to the analysis of the translation in itself and the irreconcilability between them, along with the things that were actually able to translate more fully, and the idea of speech as translation, of thought as a translation of something intangible in cadence with something physical.



## CASE STUDIES ON THEORIES OF TRANSLATION

### The Dialogic Imagination, Mikhail Bakhtin

What Mikhail Bakhtin is analyzing and bringing forth in this particular essay of the Dialogic Imagination is that of the differences and commonalities between writing prose, the novel in particular, and poetry. Bakhtin argues that the novel functions at a very different plane from that of poetry. It is a plane that is able to sustain multitude of dialogues and dialects, that is he narrows them down as almost subspecies of a certain language. The languages of everyday life, or informal tones, is rotundly different from those that say, a dispassionate lawyer employs. “The novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice.”

(Bakhtin 261) Through this he goes to say that critics or literary scholars will classify a novel as having a certain style, while Bakhtin argues that this simple-founding catalogization of the novel is absurd and utmostly wrong. “The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour –this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre.” (262)

Bakhtin begins his essay by arguing that novelistic discourse had been relieved to the side in terms of stylistic analysis, for “[a]fter failure to find in novelistic discourse a purely poetic formulation (“poetic” in the narrow sense) as was expected, prose discourse is denied any artistic value at all... an artistically neutral means of communication.”(260) Bakhtin terms the multitude of layers upon which the novel operates as *heteroglossia*. This word, as an etymological compound, suggests that there’s more than just one, homogenous and over imperative tongue or speech taking place in the work of the novel. *Hetero* as other and *glossia* as related to the tongue or the condition of having a tongue<sup>1</sup>, explicitly suggest a transiency that takes place in the form and style of the novel.

Ultimately what I consider Bakhtin to be doing is placing the novel in a realm of itself, outside that of poetry and enables it to be self standing. Bakhtin describes that the poet must detach himself and his work, his words and letters, from all the other subjective attachments that the word implies and must make ‘it his own’. The poet speaks in language particular to itself and in reference to itself<sup>2</sup>, it is a language that therefore is able to transcend even the same language it was written in, as such it becomes participant in a sort of ‘unitary language’, “the dynamics of the image-as-word –is exhausted completely by the play between the word (with all its aspects) and the object (in all its aspects).” (278)<sup>3</sup> So, “for the writer of artistic prose, on the contrary, the object reveals first of all precisely the social heteroglot multiplicity of its names, definitions and

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<sup>1</sup> Note having different tongues, as translation within the socioeconomic boundaries, and the different disciplines, as was aforementioned lawyer language, economic language, proper, informal , scholarly, to name but a few. Between these there are translations from one to the other, micro languages translated within a macro language, that can also be translated to another macro language that is composed of just as innumerable micro languages.

<sup>2</sup> With this I believe that this self referral is that communication that takes place within the whole that was previously evinced, but applied to the poetic realm.

<sup>3</sup> Note signifier and signified.

value judgments. Instead of the virginal fullness and inexhaustibility of the object itself, the prose writer confronts a multitude of routes, roads and paths that have been laid down in the object by social consciousness.” (278) These multiplicity of routes and roads are carved by the same society, throughout people different offices and disciplines, routines and times of day, seasons and years. World affairs. Whether or not they had payed the electric bill. Interactions that build up for years throughout a person’s life, and have been for hundreds and thousands. Getting back to the center of things, the poetic is an attempt, more so I’d say an experience that is unitary and complete, and as such there is something that is individual and particular, as if the poet created a language within a language. The prose writer on the other hand, ‘confronts’ the different languages and incorporates them. The languages seem like something that is already there and present to be held or reaped. It reminds me of Leonardo and the gang, drawing people out in the markets streets in the renaissance, the nasty old men. There is something that speaks more about society’s contemporary currents, or previous ones, or whenever the text is said to be situated for prose, but that both their structures are assimilated to each other in so far as poetry creates a dimension of its own, that functions under a concrete set of easily verifiable different rules, while the prose writer mimics the different languages that people speak on their daily life. The idea too then becomes that poetry and prose in these unicum languages *heteroglossic* or *homoglossic*<sup>4</sup>, or the different access point through which they can access language, have a meeting point in the means that is writing, text and literature. This harkens immediately to Mallarme, and the silver lining, l’azur, that is the eternal division point of things, which is why, when these two forces, who are independent to each other because they have constructed their

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<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note that spell check suggested to change it for monoglossic.

own universes with their own set of un/specified rules, collide they become a thing of their own, with its own set of parameters.<sup>5</sup>

I think that because of the heteroglossic nature of writing, in particular a novel, which is the medium i am evaluating in translation, forces, in a way, what Walter Benjamin asserts as an inconsideration of the reader because it does not consider the single reader at the individual level. Because of the multifaceted nature of the heteroglossic composure, that is to say that it breaks into everything spanning from class to gender and racial spectrums, the work of the novel cannot acknowledge the reader at the individual level: because it encompasses everyone it cannot allude to a single individual. At certain instances it might perhaps completely resonate with a particular reader that identifies him or herself with the scene and vocabulary that are taking place in the novel, but as soon as they are removed from that, and in the novel this may happen within the frame of sentence to sentence, the individual reader is forced to reckon with the whole centrifugal force of society.

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<sup>5</sup> Note the change from plural 'their' to the singular 'a thing' 'its'.

## The Death of the Author, Roland Barthes

Roland Barthes argument in the Death of the Author is attempting to fully detach the writer from the work that he or she produces, as Mallarme, “no doubt the first, saw and foresaw in all its scope the necessity to substitute language itself for the subject hitherto supposed to be its owner” (Barthes 50) Barthes says that the removal of the author ‘utterly transforms the modern text’ and the Author who was once preconceived as the past of his book, but instead the modern writer is “born at the same time as his text” and is completely “submerged in the here and now.” As such the writer becomes unable to operate in terms of recording, of observing a representation that functions in retrospect. According to Barthes, the author follows a performative mode of approach in which “speech-act has no other content than the act by which it is uttered” (52) like tracing “a field without origin—or at least with no origin but language itself, i.e. the very thing that ceaselessly calls any origin into question... His sole power is to mingle writing, to counter some by others, so as never to rely on just one; if he seeks to *express himself*, at least he knows that the interior ‘thing’ he claims to ‘translate’ is itself no more than a ready-made lexicon, whose words can be explained only through other words, and this ad infinitum... To assign an Author to a text is to impose a break on it, to furnish it with a final signified, to close writing.”

## The Task of the Translator, Walter Benjamin

Walter Benjamin seems to be removing the reader, and the audience from its role or relevance in the vacuum of the art piece or text. It seems to me that it is an inversion, or perhaps extension of the death of the author, but in this case it would be the death of the reader. “No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the audience.” (Benjamin 253) Here it is important to consider the word intended, for it deals with intention and teleological purposefulness. It is redirecting the object of the work, assuming that the author is holding a gun, he would change his aim from the reader to something else. As such, the reader becomes a spectator, though still a participant, of the event of the shooting. It is simply that the author was not shooting at the reader or ‘perceived receiver.’

Walter Benjamin asserts that there are two basic bad translations, the first deals with attempting to communicate something alleging that the literary work does not ‘impart information’ but that its only medium of doing so is ‘communication,’ and because communication is inessential it follows suit thus, and hence a bad translation that has a misdirected focus. This in his mind leads to the question of unfathomability in writing, if a literary text says ‘little’ to the reader, proceeding then to focus on what lies beyond communication and from this the substance of the poetic matter is brought into play. This falls

then again as a fault for Benjamin, for he deems that therefore the translator must become a poet himself. But upon doing so he automatically becomes subservient to the reader, at such point Benjamin seems to be drawing away from any extremists point of view, that seems to me to be perceived as absolutist stances, where one cannot become subservient to the reader by considering and directing the work towards they, nor the translator can focus on what the original is trying to communicate, because it falls yet again under the scrutiny of the original itself being detached from the original, which does not put the reader into question, but the author. Does the author then not fall as medium between the original-thought text and the original-physical text and the translator falls between the original-physical text and the translated-original-physical text?

From this he goes on to talk about translation as form, because as the word explains it is not a place of rest, translation is not a the object but the medium through which the original goes through a change of tongue. As such translation falls in the in between, it is the connecting bridge between to substances that are being attempted to be transmitted. What he then puts into question os the translatability of a work, on which it pivots around two questions that arise: Whether or not there will ever be found a suitable translator or the work; and whether or not the work itself is translatable and in that form calls for a translation. It seems to me that Walter Benjamin is acknowledging that upon translation the work itself has nothing to do with the original, in a way it becomes self standing, but it still the closest it can to the original through its translatability and not directly to the wo itself. This connection to the original he calls a vital or natural one. He then draws the analogy of the manifestation of life and life itself as the original, but in this case the translation is made manifest as the afterlife of the original. This reminds me

heavily of a clip by Jean Luc Godard, in which *Nana fait de la philosophie sans le savoir*. In this scene she is talking to a philosopher about all matters surrounding life, and in one of their exchanges he says that : ““Il faut qu'on pense, et pour penser il faut parler, pour communiquer il faut parler c'est la vie humaine.. Je crois qu'on arrive à bien parler que quand on a renoncé à la vie pendant un certain temp, c'est presque le prix, parler c'est presque une résurrection par a rapport à la vie en ce sens que quand on parle c'est un autre vie que quand on ne parles pas, et bon pour en parlant il faut passer par la mort de la vie sans parler.” This acknowledges the fact that the original text is a translation from the original thought and as such shares a connection to it through the translatability of the original thought, so what we deem as the original also shares a natural and vital connection with its ‘precursor’. Yet again, the original thought is not something that is physically present and as such one has no direct access to it, therefore the reader becomes, in a way, nullified because one has no access to the original it must take into account essentially all of the author's life in order to say something that is substantial or fully conditional to the life of the author or between her and the work. But even if that were to be the case supposing that one is able to account for all of the author's life, the scenes and other characters with which she interacts with must be held accountable as well. To claim to be able to hold all things accountable is to claim to be god. Which is why I believe that Walter Benjamin struck me from nowhere when speaking about god, for it is this precise reason that it resembles facing god. God’s remembrance as true memory.

I am interested in Walter Benjamin’s usage of the words contingent and apodictically to describe the the way in which the two different questions surrounding translatability were to be treated. It calls my attention if whether his use of contingent and apodictically refers back to



Leibniz' *verites necessaire et verites contingents*, to which there must be a nod of the head or acknowledgement of sorts, and yet a build on top of it.

*Malanga Chasing Vallejo: Selected Poems: César Vallejo: New Translations and Notes: Gerard Malanga*

What strikes me first and foremost about the translation journey that Gerard Malanga embarks upon is that it stems from a deep connection with the author, with Vallejo himself, he felt, as if 'he were speaking to me [him]'" and held in direct conversation with him through his experiences. He says that he does not have full mastery of spanish and that a dictionary was by his side throughout the translations, and that he intends to 'transubstantiate' Vallejo's work. This I take to mean that he will not adhere to the form of the poem but rather to the substance of poetry itself, to the core of Vallejo. The question that then arises is what happens if a piece of literary text has a collaboration between substance and form that are so intertwined with one another that they feed each other, and in a way what is being said is made manifest or furthered by the way that it is presented and vice-versa, that the way the piece is structured is amplified by the semantic content of the work. So it is that I appreciate his effort to transubstantiate the piece, but I find it hard to believe that this is the most suiting way to translate the text. It feels to me that Gerard Malanga was undergoing some sort of emotional or difficult stretch in his life that made him emotionally attached to Vallejo. As such I feel that he is perhaps putting a bit too much aside the body of the work, the layout and framework, in favor of the substance that the author is expressing and communicating, to which no one has access to. It is as if he were so

deeply in love that he was blinded by a mist, as if he were speaking with fog in his eyes. This I severely criticize him for because he is not translating prose, where the idea of what is being communicated functions under a more fixed structure: in prose the writer has sentences that build paragraphs that build chapters that compose a book, and the way of delivery is, in its traditional perspective rather steady. This does not go to say that prose writers do not care about structure and form, but that their concerns regarding it are different and work at a different level than does poetry. In poetry the syntactic changes have a more immediate effect, an effect that carries more significance than in a novel. This happens for multiple reasons, but in part it has to do with the volume of the work. Prose novels tend to have more words and are longer, spanning hundreds of pages, that dilute the gravity of each word or literary pictographic expression through repetition, whereas in poetry the works tend to be much shorter in length and as such repetition is not as common, so when it happens, or doesn't it's 'a bigger deal'. It's like dropping a drop of paint into a bucket filled with water as opposed to a pool. The effects that drop of paint will have on the water are stronger than they will have in the pool, but not by inherent nature fact of the paint, but by the size of the body of water. As such, the paint does not diminish in importance itself, this means that detail to form in both novel and prose is as important, but that the prose writer needs to add more paint into the pool if he wants a specific attribute to make itself more evident or present in the general pool of the book. It is clear that Gerard Malanga is neither a translator himself nor an avid fluent speaker of spanish. Though I am not out to attack him, for he is not taking full scholarly pride in his translation, for he does not write about his translation substantially except for the introduction which is a mere 4 pages long and does not extensively

back up his claims on the nooks and crannies of his translation to english. Take for example the first verse of the first poem that he translated from Heraldos Negros:

“Hay golpes en la vida, tan Fuertes Yo  
No sé!” (Malanga 296)

“Life has such blows and such harsh  
ones... I don't know!” (295)

The way Vallejo plays with the structure of the sentence completely alters its meaning in a way that is not made manifest in Malanga's translation. Vallejo's starts off in mode of assertion saying that life indeed deals blows, “hay golpes en la vida”/ “there are blows in life”, but then he adds a comma which creates a feeling of suspense, of awaital, of expectation on part of the reader who's about to read a clause that will further what was firstly communicated, that is that life deals blows. As opposed to the translation, where the ‘and’ conjunction serves more as an addendum. But what is interesting is that the word which follows the comma, ‘tan’, serves two functions in spanish: for one it becomes an amplifier of ‘the golpes en la vida’ by quantifying how ‘fuertes’ they are; secondly, it serves to connect the first clause of the verse with the second, for it also serves a sort of conditional phrase, a phrase that begins to question what was said before regarding the blows that life deals. So it is that in the original verse of Vallejo the word ‘tan’ seems to serve two disparate meanings that acts as an axis for the whole sentence for it emphasizes how strong the blows of life are at the same time that it puts them into question, depending on where one's reading from. In this way Vallejo is both affirming that there blows at the same time that he is questioning whether or not there are blows that life deals. What Malanga

is doing here is choosing to express ‘tan’ as ‘such’ as opposed to ‘so’, and because in Spanish ‘tan’ functions as both ‘such’ and ‘so’ at the same time, Vallejo works with both sides of the sentence. In so doing, Malanga begins affirming that ‘life has such blows’ and then reaffirms that there are ‘such harsh ones’. This is a bad translation because the way Malanga is operating and utilizing the word ‘such’ amplifies twice the blows dealt by life and it is not only until the end of the sentence that the questioning of the blows dealt by life is brought up. In Vallejo’s the reader finds himself hit with assertion and doubt right in the middle, whereas the translation is doubly assertive and then doubtful.

So, Malanga goes:           Affirmation - Affirmation - Doubt;

while Vallejo’s goes: Affirmation - Affirmation/Doubt - Doubt.

Again my intention is not to debunk and attack Gerard Malanga’s translation but to point out how our approaches differ. Gerard Malanga seems to be fully tilted towards preserving exactly what Vallejo was saying, and seems more willing to sacrifice, or quicker to turn a blind eye to the form of the poem in exchange for the semantic logic of the phrase. In contrast, the way I approach translation is to try and save the best of both worlds and push them as asymptotically close to the original as I can. At times I acknowledge that there is a trade-off and there are decisions that must be taken where one has to choose between adhering more closely to form or function in the original, but whenever that is the case I argue for the reasons as to why I chose to sacrifice one and not the other for the better of the translation. What I’m trying to explain in the ways our approach towards translation vary is that Malanga approaches it already biased, already attempting to re evoke the spirit of Vallejo, the *ghost* of Vallejo, going straight for ‘transubstantiation’ without giving him a body made of flesh and bone. On the other hand my

idea is to approach translation unbiased from wanting to adhere to either substance or form, acknowledging that they are both as equally important, but using more of one than the other depending on the need. If there are any doubts regarding my criticism of Malanga's translation, we can quickly proceed to look at the verse that follows the first: "Blows like the hatred of God"; (295) and Vallejo's: "Golpes como del odio de Dios;" (296) The differences between what Vallejo is saying and what is being said in the translation are so radical, but they derive from such a minute misinterpret or misread of the original Spanish. This for me as a translator is a complete aberration, almost to the point of being sacrilegious not only to either language but also to Vallejo himself. If I seem a bit over-reactive allow me to explain the motives as to why I am reacting in such a way. I am over reactive because petty things like these, and attention to detail, are of the most crucial importance because they make up the whole, most especially in poetry. Vallejo in the original is saying that the 'golpes' are like coming from god's hatred not that they *are* the hatred of god, whereas Malanga is saying that the blows *are* like the hatred of God. What Malanga translated from the Spanish is: "Golpes como el odio de Dios." If the difference has not been cleared out, what Vallejo is saying is that the blows are as if coming from the hatred of god, and not that the blows are in effect god's hatred. This is a huge implication I cannot forgive, and most definitely not overlook in terms of analyzing how good a translation is, because it puts into question the directionality of the simile, and in this directionality the true substance of the predicate is being shown. In Vallejo's the blows are a sort of collateral damage, an after-wave to the power and hatred of God, whereas in Malanga's the blows become God's hatred. This key difference is that if the blows are god's hatred and they are being dealt against the reader, than god's hatred is directed precisely at the reader. In the original the blows are *as if* coming from

god but that does not mean that they actually *are* directed from god, so in the translation by mere fact that the ‘blows are like god’s hatred’ and that they are indeed being dealt, indicates that they must be coming from god himself. Vallejo’s verse puts the origin of the blows into question, whereas Malanga’s translation puts into question the nature of the blows themselves, not their directionality. As such, Malanga’s translation is a bad one because it verifiably missed the point of what Vallejo is actually examining: intention.

‘ ’

# THE MURMUR OF BEES

By Sofia Segovia

Translated by GFE

I dedicate this novel to my husband, Jose; to our children, Sofia, David and Cristina. To my parents, Enrique and Susana. It especially goes to my Soledad Betancourt, who touched my life with her stories.

In these pages I would like to honor Francisco and Lydia, Arturo and Maria Luisa, Chelo, Maria Teresa and another Francisco, another Lydia and Angelica, *la China*, Enrique and Maria Elena.

This is not the story they told me, it is just the one they inspired.



1

## Blue child, white child

That October morning the wailing of the baby mixed with the noise of the cool breeze circulating between the trees, the singing of birds and the insects' farewell to the night. The wails floated out from the thickness of the mountain, but it quieted a few meters from its origin, as if withheld by some sorcery from going out in search of any human ear.<sup>6</sup>

For years they would say how don Teodosio, heading to work in a neighboring *hacienda*, must have surely passed by the poor abandoned baby without hearing a peep, and how Lupita, the Morales' washerwoman, crossed the bridge that would take her to *La Petaca* in search of a love potion without having noticed something strange: and if I had heard it, I would have at least picked it up, because no matter how horrible, I do not know who could have abandoned a newborn baby just like that, to die alone, at evening I would tell that to whomever cared to listen.<sup>7</sup>

That was the mystery. Who from around had shown an indiscreet swelling recently?<sup>8</sup> To whom did this unfortunate baby belong? In town the news of indiscretions of this kind spread faster than smallpox, so in anyone knowing, everyone would know.

Regardless, in this case no one knew anything.

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<sup>6</sup> Explanatory notes 1.

<sup>7</sup> Explanatory notes 2.

<sup>8</sup> Explanatory notes 3.

There were theories of all types, but the one that seduced the collective imagination the most was that the baby belonged to one of the witches in *La Petaca*, who as everyone knew were free in their carnal favors and that, in birthing such a deformed strange creature —punishment of the Highest or the devil, who knows?—had gone to throw it under the bridge and abandon it to God’s good grace.

No one knew how many hours the baby was like that, abandoned under the bridge, naked and hungry. No one could explain how it survived the weather without bleeding to death through the untied<sup>9</sup> umbilical cord or without getting devoured by the rats, bird of prey, bears or pumas that abound in those hills.

And everyone wondered how the old nana Reja found it covered in a mantle of live bees. Reja had chosen to pass her eternal time in the same place, outside one of the sheds that were used as storehouse for the hacienda *La Amistad*, which was of a simple construction without windows, identical to various other service sheds erected at the back of the house and facing the main house so as not to be seen by the guests.<sup>10</sup> The only thing that distinguished that shed from the others was its overhanging roof, that allowed *la vieja* to remain outside<sup>11</sup> whether it be winter or summer. That it had one was no more than a lucky coincidence. Reja had not chosen that spot to protect herself from the elements but for the view that from there she appreciated and for the wind that, blowing through the labyrinth of mountains, descended to her, for her.

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<sup>9</sup> The narrator here uses “sin anudar” or without it being tied up.

<sup>10</sup> Explanatory notes 4.

<sup>11</sup> Explanatory notes 5.

Many years had passed since *la vieja*<sup>12</sup> chose that spot, for besides Reja there weren't any left amongst the living that had witnessed the day her rocking chair appeared there, or that would remember the moment the nanny<sup>13</sup> had taken possession of it forever. Now, almost everyone believed that she never moved from that place and supposed that it was because of her age, which no one was able to determine, her bones would no longer hold her and her muscles would no longer respond. Because upon the break of dawn they would see her, rocking with ease, impelled more by the wind than by her feet. After, by night, no one noticed her disappearance, because everyone was already occupied with their rest.

So many years in the rocking chair instigated the townspeople to forget about her history and her humanity: she had become a part of the landscape and grown roots in the earth upon which she rocked. Her flesh had transformed into wood and her skin into a hard, dark and ragged bark.

When passing by her no one offered their regards, as no one would acknowledge an old and dying tree. Some kids looked at her from afar when they trekked the small journey from town in search of the legend, but every now and then one of them had the guts to get close enough to make sure that she was in fact a living woman and one not carved out of wood. Soon they noticed that within that bark was life when, without needing to open her eyes, she hit the intrepid adventurer with her stick.

Reja would not consent to being anyone's curiosity; she preferred pretending she was made out of wood. She would rather be ignored. She felt that with her years, with the things her

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<sup>12</sup> Explanatory notes 6.

<sup>13</sup> Explanatory notes 7.

eyes had seen, that her ears had heard, her lips had spoken, that her skin had felt and her heart had suffered; she'd had more than enough to overwhelm anyone. She couldn't explain to herself why she was still alive or what she was waiting for to leave, if she was of no use to anyone, if her body had been dried up, and she therefore preferred to see or be seen, to listen, to speak or to feel the least amount possible. Even though she didn't dominate altogether that aspect of her senses.

There existed a few people that Reja tolerated around her; amongst them the nanny, Pola, who in any case had seen her best days fly away a long time ago. She also tolerated the kid Francisco because one day, when she still allowed herself to feel, she loved him with intensity, though she could barely stand his wife Beatriz or his daughters. The first because she didn't feel like letting someone new into her life, and the second ones because they were unbearable.

There was nothing that they needed from her and she had nothing to offer them, because old age had exempted her from her duties as a servant. It had been years since she last participated in the daily maintenance of the house, and that is how she slowly became a part of her rocking chair. So much so that one could barely distinguish where the wood of one ended and the other one began.

Before dawn she walked from her room to the shed, where her mobile chair awaited under the overhanging roof, and she closed her eyes and ears to neither hear nor see. Pola brought her breakfast, lunch and dinner, that she barely tasted because her body no longer needed much food. She got up much later, only when behind her closed eyelids the lights of the fireflies reminded her of nighttime, and when her hip began to feel picks and prods of her wooden rocking chair, which was tired long before her from such constant proximity.

Sometimes she opened her eyes on the way back to bed. She didn't need to open them to see. Then she sunk down upon the sheets<sup>14</sup>, without feeling cold, because her skin did not even let that penetrate. But she did not sleep. The necessity of sleep was something her body had left behind. If it was because she had slept what a human must sleep throughout a lifetime or because she refused to sleep to not fall in the big sleep, she did not know. It had been a while since she stopped thinking about it. After a few hours in the softness of the bed, she began to feel the pricks and prods that the bed gave her to remind her that it was time to go visit her loyal friend, the rocking chair.

Nana Reja did not know exactly for how many years she'd been living like that. She didn't know how she had been born or her full name —if anyone had ever bothered giving her one. Although it was supposed that she had an infancy, she did not remember it nor her parents -if she ever had any-, and if someone would have told her that she was born out of the earth like a walnut, she would have believed it. She would neither remember the face of the man that gave her that child, but she did remember seeing his back as he walked away to leave her in a shed of sticks and mud, abandoned to her own luck in an unknown world.

Regardless, she wouldn't forget the strong movements in her belly, the stinging in the breasts and the yellow and sweet liquid that emanated from them even before she gave birth to the only son she would have. She didn't know if she remembered the face of that kid, because maybe her imagination played her some joke upon reassembling the features of every baby, white or black, she breastfed in her youth.

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<sup>14</sup> Explanatory notes 8.

She remembered with clarity the day she entered for the first time into Linares, half dead from hunger and cold, and she still felt her baby in her arms, curled up against her breast to protect it from that January's freezing winds. She had never descended the hill, hence it was natural that she had never seen so many houses together, or walked down a street or through a square, and this was the only thing she did when weakness loosened her knees.

She knew she had to ask for help even though she didn't know how to, or that even she herself could not. She would ask for help for the baby she held in her arms because it had gone two days without wanting to eat or cry.

Only that forced her to descend from her shed on the hill into this town that she sometimes contemplated at a distance,.

She had never felt so cold, of that she was sure. And perhaps even the inhabitants of the town also perceived it, because she didn't see anyone walking around, facing the freezing air as she did. All the house seemed inaccessible. The windows and the doors were barred and locked. So she sat in that bench in the square, indecisive, freezing and every time more fearful for her baby. She ignored how much time she'd remained like that, and she'd perhaps still be there, converted into the plaza's statue, had it not been for the medic of the town, a good man, who was alarmed at seeing a woman so ravaged.<sup>15</sup> Doctor Doria left his house under those conditions because the Señora Morales would die soon. It had been two days since the woman had given birth to her first baby, tended for by a midwife. Now the husband had sent for him in the morning, alarmed by his wife's fear. She had to be convinced to say where she felt her ailment: the breasts. The infection manifested as a heavy pain while breastfeeding.

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<sup>15</sup> Explanatory notes 9.

Mastitis.

—Why did you not tell me before, Señora?

—Because I felt embarrassed, doctor.

Now her condition was very advanced. The baby would not stop crying for more than twelve hours had passed with him not having had food, for her mother could not bear to breastfeed him. He'd never seen nor heard of a woman that had ever died of mastitis and it was clear that la señora Morales was dying. Her ashen skin and that sickly glow in the eyes indicated to the doctor that the new mother would soon give up the ghost. Concerned, he took señor Morales out to the hall.

—You need to let me examine your wife.

—No doctor. Just give her some medicine.

—What medicine? La señora is dying, señor Morales, and you have to let me figure out why.

—Maybe from the milk.

—Maybe from something else.<sup>16</sup>

It was necessary to convince him: promise him to touch, but not see; or see, but not touch. In the end the husband acceded and convinced the moribund woman to let her breasts get palpated, and worse: to let him see or touch her lower underbelly and crotch area. There was no need to touch anything: the intense pain in the pelvis and the purulent lochia that sprouted from the body of the sick augured its passing.

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<sup>16</sup>Explanatory notes **10**.

Some day the causes of death during childbirth would be discovered and a way to prevent it, although for la señora Morales that day would arrive too late.

There was nothing else to be done: just to maintain the sick woman as comfortably as possible until God said stop.

To save the baby, the medic sent the Morales servant in search of a milk goat. In the meantime Doctor Doria tried to feed him with an improvised nipple filled with a serum of water and sugar. The newborn did not tolerate the goat's milk. Of which it would surely die, in a slow and terrible agony. Doria was still worried during the road back home. He had said goodbye to the husband and father after telling him there was nothing more he could do.

—Be strong señor Morales. God works in strange and mysterious ways.<sup>17</sup>

—Thanks, Doctor.

Then he saw the woman of black ice while walking back home, which in itself seemed to doctor Doria a little miracle, because he was exhausted and because the cold made him walk hunched over. He saw her in the plaza, sitting just there in the bronze plaque that announced that the bench had been donated to the townspeople by the Morales family. Compassion pierced through his tiredness enough to motivate him to walk up and ask her what are you doing here? Do you need help?

The man talked much too quickly for Reja to understand, but she understood the look in those eyes and trusted enough to follow him home. Now in the heat of the interior, Reja decided to uncover the baby's face a little. It was blue and inert. It did not suppress a moan. The man, as the town doctor, did what he could to revive it. Had she been able to speak despite how numb

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<sup>17</sup> "Dios sabe porqué hace las cosas" see Explanatory notes 11.



she was because of the cold, Reja would have told him *pa' qué le hace*.<sup>18</sup> But she was only capable of moaning and moaning more, aggravated by the image of her blue son. She never knew when it was that the doctor undressed her and didn't even stop to think that that was the first time a man did such a thing without throwing himself over her. Like a ragdoll she let herself be touched and checked on; she only reacted when the medic grazed her warm breasts, huge, stiff and painful from the accumulated milk. Then she let herself be dressed with thicker and cleaner clothes without even wondering to whom they belonged to.

When the doctor put her back out on the street, she thought to herself that at least she would no longer feel so much cold as soon as he'd dropped her off on the same bench, and was surprised when they walked right by the plaza down a road that led them to the door of the most imposing house of all.

Inside the property was dark. Just like she was feeling. Reja had never seen people so white as the ones that received her, although there was something in her gaze that made her appear somber: a sadness. They sat her down in the kitchen, where she kept her head low. She didn't want to see faces or looks. She wanted to be alone, again in her hut of sticks and mud, despite her dying of cold, alone with her sadness, because she couldn't stand that of others.

She heard the wailing of a newborn, first with her new mother's nipples and then with her ears. Her body reacted that way every time her baby cried of hunger, even though she wasn't there to listen to him. Regardless, her baby was already blue, right? Or had the medic indeed saved him?

Her breasts burnt more every time. She needed relief. She needed the baby.

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<sup>18</sup> Explanatory notes 11.

—I'm missing my child, she softly said and none of those around her in the kitchen seemed to have heard her, so she dared to repeat it louder: —I'm missing my child. <sup>19</sup>

—What is she saying?

—That she's missing her boy.

—What is that she's missing him?

—That she needs her boy, —the doctor arrived with a bundle in his arms and gave it to her, —He is very weak. He might not be able to eat well.

—Is that my child?<sup>20</sup>

—No, but he still needs you.

They needed each other.

She opened her blouse, offered her breast and the boy stopped crying. In the relief she felt of emptying out her breasts little by little, Reja observed the baby: it was not her boy. She knew it immediately, because the sounds he produced when crying, suckling or sighing were different. He also smelled different. To Reja, the effect was equally attractive: she wanted to lower her face to smell him in the crevice of the neck, though she thought they might not let her, because above all else, the biggest indicator that she was holding a baby other than her own was the color. If hers had gone from a dark tone to a deep blue, this one turned gradually from a live red all the way to white.

Everyone watched in silence. The only sound coming from the kitchen was of the baby sucking and swallowing.

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<sup>19</sup> Explanatory notes **12**.

<sup>20</sup> Explanatory notes **13**.

Alberto Morales had fallen asleep, watching over his agonizing wife. After a couple of days of his wife's moaning and the incessant crying of the newborn, he had gotten the idea that while they made noise, it showed they were still alive. That is why the deafening silence awoke him: not even his wife moaned nor his baby cried. Distressed and without daring to touch his wife, he ran in search of his son.

In the kitchen he found the staff and doctor Doria around what he supposed was the dead body of his son. Upon noticing his presence, everyone moved aside to let him through.

He looked at his baby suckling from the darkest breast he'd ever seen.

—We found a nurse for your son.

—She's very black.

—But the milk is white, as it should be.

—Yes. Will my boy be alright?

—The baby will be fine. He was just hungry. Look at him now.

—Doctor, my wife didn't make a sound when I awoke.

That had been the end of Ms. Morales.

Reja maintained her distance from the mourning process, the wake, the burial and the wailing. To her it was as if the Ms. had never existed, and sometimes, in the moments the boy gave her time to spare, when she allowed herself to listen to the silent calling of the hills, she came to believe that that baby that had not come from her body but had sprouted from the earth. Like herself, who did not possess more memories than those of the hills.

Something stronger than maternal instinct overcame her, and throughout the following years the only thing that existed in Reja's world was the baby. She imagined she kept him alive

for the earth, crippled mother, so it never occurred to her to stop offering her breasts after the baby's first teeth or with a full set of teeth. She would simply say: don't bite boy. Her milk was nourishment, consoling and humming. If the boy cried: to the breast for feeding; if the boy was mad, loud, needy, sad, irritable, congested or insomniac: to the breast.

Six years from nana Reja's breasts did the boy Guillermo Morales enjoyed. No one had gotten it out of their heads that the poor boy had been close to dying of starvation, for which no one denied him anything. But one day, the aunts Benitez came to visit the poor widower, who, scandalized after watching a boy almost in his schooling years pinned to the black breast of the servant, they demanded to señor Morales that the child be weaned.

—It's not like he is going to die from hunger, man. —said one.

—It's scandalous, an obscenity, Alberto. —said the other.

By the end of their visit, as a favor to the confused parent, the pair of spinsters took Guillermo to Monterrey one season, for they realized that there was no other way the boy would be reasonable or manage to sleep, for he had never been far from the breast of his nana Reja.

They left Reja empty handed, and so overflowing that she spilt milk wherever she went.

—What are we going to do Reja? —the other servants asked her, tired of cleaning the dripping she left whenever she walked.

She didn't know what to respond. She only knew she missed her boy.

—Oh Reja: if you are going to be like that, you better not waste it.

That is how they brought malnourished baby and orphans to her for breastfeeding and glass bottles to fill, because the more she breastfed the more milk she had to give away. Then the

widower Morales married for a second time to Maria, the younger sister of his dead wife, and together they gave nana Reja twenty-two children to feed.

In the coming years Reja would never be seen without a child pinned to her breast, though she remembered with special care Guillermo Morales: the first boy she nursed, who saved her from absolute solitude, who put her back on track to a purpose that would keep her content for years.

Of course, Guillermo came back still a child. He became a man and formed his own family. Upon inheriting the estate after the death of his father- victim of nothing, but the passing of years-, he also inherited his nanny Reja, whom was still in charge of nursing his children when they came to the world.

Strange case of the father that had been nursed by the same breasts as his own children. Nonetheless, upon considering an alternative —looking for another nurse and give Reja some rest—, his wife had firmly denied: what better milk than that of the nanny? None. So Guillermo desisted, though he avoided thinking too much about it, though he pretended he did not remember his prolonged turn at breast.

Tired of living in the noisy center of Linares, Guillermo had made the extravagant decision of abandoning the big old house in the plaza to go live in the *hacienda* la Amistad, which was situated one kilometer from the main plaza and the built-up zone of the town. There Reja had grown old, and also he, whose nanny watched him die of a contagion. And as before, upon inheriting the estate to Francisco, the only surviving son of dysentery epidemic and another of yellow fever, he also inherited nana Reja, along with her rocking chair.

She did not breast feed Francisco's nor his wife Beatriz' daughters. Time had gotten in charge of drying Reja up, whom no longer remembered how many children from around had lived thanks to her abundance. She no longer even remembered the last white drop that had sprouted upon squeezing her breasts nor the sensation of these at compressing even before listening to the crying of a hungry baby.

That morning of October 1910 the inhabitants of the estate awoke, as every other day of the year, disposed to their routines.

Pola opened her eyes without even turning to the bed of her roommate. After decades of sleeping by her side she knew that nana Reja came and went in silence without letting anyone know. That was her routine. The noises of the estate began to rise: the peasants arrived for the working tools and to go to the fields of cane sugar and the house servants disposed to get rid of their tiredness.<sup>21</sup> She bathed and dressed. She had to go to the kitchen to get coffee before going out to town to buy fresh bread in the town bakery. After finishing her coffee and milk she took the money that ms Beatriz always left in a tin box by the kitchen.

It promised to be a sunny day, though she needed her frac because at that time, and at that time of year, the cold winds of the night lingered. She walked through the shortest path, as she did every morning to leave the estate and get into town.

—You're leaving dona Pola?

—Yes, Martin. I won't take long.

Pola enjoyed her routine. She liked getting every day's morning bread. This way she found out about all the novelties of Linares and looked from afar at that boy, now turned

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<sup>21</sup> Explanatory notes **14**.

grandfather, that she so like when she was young. She walked to the constant rhythms of Reja's rocking chair. She enjoyed walking by the road flanked by enormous trees that connected the *hacienda* to the town center.

When she still spoke, nana Reja told her how the widower Alberto Morales had planted them when they were just bare twigs.

Upon returning, she would bring breakfast to Reja, as per custom.

Nana Pola suddenly halted, making memory. And Reja? As every other day, Pola had passed in front the black rocking chair. Many years ago she had desisted from conversing with the old woman, but it consoled her to think, like those ancient trees, nana Reja remained, and that she might perhaps forever will.

How about today? Did I see her when I walked by? She turned around.

—What did you forget dona Pola?

—Have you seen nana Reja, Martin?

—O'course, in her rocking chair.

—Are you sure?

—Where else could she be? —said Martin, following the rushed steps of nana Pola.

On arriving to the rocking chair they saw that nana Reja was not there, despite the rocking of the chair. Alarmed, they went back to the room the nannies shared.

They did not find her there either.

—Martin: run to to ask the workers if they have seen nana Reja. Look for her on the road.

I'll let Ms. Beatriz know.

Beatriz's routine consisted in not waking up too early. She began with the certainty that everything needed to commence the day was set: the bread and coffee on the table, the gardens getting hosed and clean clothes ironed. She liked to begin her days listening to her husband rattle, between dreams and from far away, and the shudder, still under her bedsheets, praying a rosary in peace.

But that day, in the house of the Morales Cortes there were no ablutions, rosary, nor peace.



2

## Echoes of honey

I was born in between that bulk of bricks and mortar and paint a long time ago, it does not matter how long ago. What does matter is that my first contact outside my mother's womb was with clean sheets and her bed, because I had the fortune of being born on a Tuesday night and not a Monday, and since times immemorial the women in his family have changed the bedsheets Tuesdays, as decent people do. That Tuesday the sheets smelled of lavender and sun. That if I remember? No, but I imagine it. In all the years I lived with my mother I never knew her routine to change, her customs, the manner in which things were made as God commanded: Tuesdays the linen bedsheets, washed one day prior, would be changed, sprayed with lavender water and then put out to the sun for drying and finally ironed.

Every Tuesday of her life, with a single and painful exception that was still to come. Must have been the day of my birth, but mine fell on a Tuesday like any other, so I know of what the sheets smelled of that night and how they felt upon contact with the skin.

Even though I don't remember, the day I was born the house already smelled as it always would. Its porous brick had absorbed like sponges the good aromas of generations of working

men and scrutinous women for cleaning with their oils and soaps; they'd impregnated into the family recipes and the boiling clothes with the white soap. They always located in the air, the perfumes of burnt milk candy and nuts that my grandmother made, those of her jams and marmalades, those of thyme and epazote that grew in pots in the garden, and most recently of oranges, orange blossoms and honey.

As part of its essence, the house too preserved the infantile laughs and games, the chastisements and the door slams of the present and the past. The same mosaic of loose clay that my barefoot grandfather at his twenty years of age and his twenty two brothers stepped on, and then my father in his infancy, I stepped on too. It was a telling mosaic of nightly mischiefs, for with its inevitable *clunk* it alerted the mother at the time of the plan schemed vastagos.<sup>22</sup> The beams of the house creaked for no apparent reason, the doors screeched, the shutters rhythmically beat against the wall even without wind. Outside, bees buzzed and the cicadas would surround us with its incessant song of madness every summer afternoon, just before nightfall, while i lived my last adventures of the day. At sunset, one started and the rest followed, until all of them decided to fall silent, scared by the imminent darkness, I suspect.

It was a living house that witnessed be come into this world. If at times it released a perfume of orange blossoms in the winter or one would hear some giggles without owner in the middle of the night, no one would frighten: they formed part of its personality, of its essence. In this house there are no ghosts, my dad would tell me: what you hear are the echos it has preserved so that we remember how many have walked through here. I understood. I imagined

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<sup>22</sup> Explanatory notes 15.

my grandfather's twenty two brothers and the raucous they must have caused, and it seemed logical to me that still, years later, evocations of their laughters reverberated in some corners.

And as I suppose my years in that house left some echoes of my own, for not for no reason my mother would say shut up boy, you resemble a cicada, the house left in me its own echos. I still have them in me. I am sure that in my cells I carry my mother and my father, but I also carry the lavender, the orange blossoms, the maternal bedsheets, the calculated steps of my grandmother, the toasted nuts, the *clunk* of the betraying mosaic, the sugar about to turn into caramel, burnt milk, the crazy cicadas, the scents of old wood and waxed clay floors. I am also made out of unripe oranges, sweet or rotten; of orange blossom honey and royal jam. I am made of however much touched my sense and the part of my brain where I store my memories at that time.

If today I could get there by myself and see the house and feel it again, I would.

But I'm old. The children I have left —now even my grandsons —make decisions for me. It's been years that they do not let me drive a car or fill out a check. They talk to me as if I couldn't understand them or listen to them. Truth is, and I confess it here, is that I hear, but don't listen. Might be I don't want to. It's true -I admit it- my eyes don't work that as well as before, that my hands tremble, my legs tire and my patience is lost when I get visits from my grandsons and great-grandsons, but despite being old I am not incompetent. I know the day in which I live in and the outrageous price of things: I don't like it but I don't ignore it.

I perfectly know how much this trip will cost me.

Neither out of old age do I talk to myself<sup>23</sup> nor see things that are not there. Not yet. I distinguish between a memory and reality, even if I feel attracted more and more to memories than reality. I review in the privacy of my mind who said what, who married who, what happened before and after. I revive the sweet sensation of being hidden between the tall branches of a walnut tree. Stretch my hand, take a nut and split with the best nuttackers I've ever had: my own teeth. I hear, I smell and I feel things that are as much of me today as yesterday, and that sprout<sup>24</sup> from the inside. Someone could split an orange by my side, and the aroma, upon arriving to mind transports to the kitchen of my mom or my father's orchard. The commercial canisters of burnt milk remind me of the untiring hands of my grandmother who spent hours stirring the milk with sugar over the fire so that it would burn without scorching.

The sound of the cicadas and the bees, that is now barely audible in the city, forces me to travel to my childhood, despite me not being able to run. I still search with sense of smell some sign of lavender and catch it even when I know it's not real. Upon closing my eyes at night I hear the *clunk* of the mosaic, the wooden beams that thunder and the shutters that beat, despite my city house having no loose mosaics or beams or shutters. I feel at home, the one I left in childhood. The one I left too soon. I feel accompanied, and I like it.

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<sup>23</sup> This moment in the rough translation used to read as "Neither out of old age do I speak alone or see things that are not there." While the final version modifies speak alone: "Neither out of old age do I talk to myself nor see things that are not there."

<sup>24</sup> Here yet again the author employs a term that is associated with plants, for the original utilizes *brotar*, in the translation I decide to use sprout because it preserves these same associations.

3

The empty rocking chair

Beatriz Cortes of Morales would remember this October morning of 1910 for the rest of her life.

They had knocked on her door with insistency, and thinking they were coming to say that one of the cane fields had caught fire, she left the warmth of her bed to go open. It was Pola crying: nana Reja was nowhere to be found. Would she not be in her bed? No. In her rocking chair? No. Where else could the old lady be at?

Dead, surely lying around somewhere, between some bushes.

Beatriz knew nana Reja all her life, because being neighbors, the Cortes and the Morales came and went in visits between properties. Even though she knew him since forever, she had fallen in love with the man who would be her husband at seventeen, when Francisco

Morales came back from studying civil engineer at the university of Notre Dame and took her out to dance a romantic piece during the festivities of the Saturday of Glory.

Since the death of her father-in-law, and upon Francisco inheriting his properties, Beatriz had shared the responsibility of everything, including the now missing old woman.

The Morales mobilized the employees in the estate: some to ask around town, others to search between the bushes.

—And if a bear took her?

—We would have found paw prints.

—Where could she have gone, if she has more than thirty years of not leaving her spot?

There was no answer to that question. Dead or alive, they had to find her. While Francisco coordinated the search by horse, Beatriz went to sit in the nanny's vacant chair, that creaked upon feeling her weight. It seemed to her that it would be the right place to await for news, though soon she asked Lupita, the laundress, to bring out another chair. For as much as she tried, she could not tame the foreign rocking chair to her body's contours.

She spent interminable hours sitting in her own chair, next to nana Reja's, that rocked on its own, perhaps helped by the air that blowed from the mountain or perhaps out of pure habit. Mati, the cook, brought her breakfast, but Beatriz had no appetite. She couldn't do much else apart from looking out into the distance. To try and distinguish any movement in the distance. Any interruption of the monotony of the plantations or in the improvised and intact beauty of the hills.

Pretty the view of the mountains and the fields of cane sugar that were enjoyed from there. She had never appreciated it from that perspective and now understood the intial charm

that place infused in nana Reja. But why eternally look towards those interminable and immutable hills? Why look always towards that dirt road that curved before them? And, why look constantly over there, if she did so with her eyes closed? What was she waiting for?

While she awaited for news, Beatriz, woman of a practical mind, arrived to the conclusion that they would hardly find the nanny alive. Meanwhile, her pragmatism had also allowed her to make concrete plans for the wake of dear nana Reja: they would wrap her in a white linen sheet and bury her in a coffin of fine wood that she had already called to bring. The mass would be officiated by father Pedro, and the whole town would be invited to assist tot the burial of the longest-lived woman in the region.

Of course there couldn't be a wake without a body. But could there be a mass without the dead?

In terms of the rocking chair, she couldn't make up her mind on what would be the right thing to do. They could burn it, make it sawdust and spread it around the garden of the house or put it, as it was, turned to sawdust, with the dead in the coffin. Or they could leave it where it was, as a memory to the body that it occupied for so long.

It would have been sacrilege to let it move from being an extension of nana Reja to turning it back into a practical use for someone else. That was clear.

She looked at the old rocking chair with scrutiny, because she'd never seen it vacant. She'd never done anything to fix it or keep it in good condition, but it preserved itself. It creaked a little when rocking, though it seemed immune to time and weather, like its owner. The symbiosis between the chair and its owner existed, and she imagined that as long as one lived, the other would live too.

Alarmed, before her she saw someone running back on the road that crossed the hill streams.

—What happened, Martin? Did you find her?

—Yes, ma'am. Mr. Francisco sent me for the cart. Beatriz observed him leave hurriedly in search of the transport. They found the body she thought, and despite having the mind of a practical woman, she felt a strong sorrow. Nana Reja was incalculably old and it was expected she'd die soon, even if she wished she'd leave in some other way: peacefully, in her bed or rocking to the wind in her rocking chair. Not like this, maybe after the attack of some animal, alone and surely frightened, exposed to the elements on that road that disappeared between the hills.

So much life to end that way.

She shook her sorrow: there were plenty of things to do before the body arrived.

When the men came back with the loaded cart, it seemed evident that the preparations and plans had been in vain: against all odds, the nanny came back alive.



4

Under the shadow of the anacahuita

Francisco would later recount to her how some peasants found her, a league and a half away from home. They'd gone to get him, unrequited, for when they finally found the old woman she denied to answer or move from where she was. Francisco then sent for the cart and he himself went to the place where nana Reja was, resting her closed eyes and sitting on a rock, rocking under the shadow of an anacahuita. In her arms she had two wrapped bundles: one with her apron and the other with her shawl. He approached her softly so as to not alarm her.

—Nana Reja, it's me Francisco— he said, encouraged when she opened her eyes—. What are you doing so far away from home, nana? —he asked, despite not expecting an answer from the old woman, who had grown mute years past.

—I went looking for him —she responded calmly, with her voice raucous from age and disuse.

—Whom?

—The baby that cried.

—Nana, there are no babies here —he responded—. Not anymore.

In response, Reja extended the two bundles towards Francisco.

—What are they? —Francisco held the first bundle wrapped in the apron. Frightened, he quickly dropped it after opening it. It was a beehive—. Nana, why do you have this? Did they sting you?

With the impact against the ground, the few bees that still inhabited the interior came out angry, in search of the culprit. Some laborers ran from the danger, chased by the insects, but only for a few meters for these halted their aggressive flights at unison and came back, like called home. The bundle that nana Reja kept between her arms moved within its shawl. Francisco and a few other workers who had resisted the temptation of running after the first attack of the infuriated bees were left in shock, even more so when the old woman held the package against her again to keep rocking it like one would a child.

—Nana, what else do you have there?

Then the bundle exploded wailing and frantically moving.

—You're hungry, boy —said nana Reja as she swayed to and fro.

—May I see?

Upon unrolling the shawl Francisco and his men finally saw what the nanny held in her arms: a baby.

The horror made them step back. Some crossed themselves.

5

Between ribbons and lice

There never were too many infantile illusions allowed in terms of the origin of the babies. Since always I've known that that stork story from Paris was precisely that, pure story for nosy children. My mother never pretended with me, as did many other ladies of the time. If I threw a tantrum, she would say, how long an hour it took me to give birth to you; if I disobeyed, she would complain about the pain of giving me birth. Sometimes I feel that, being able to, after any mischief she would have charged me for every contraction.

My mother was a good woman. Seriously. She just couldn't explain herself where I came from. I'm not talking about the physical: she was very intelligent, and despite living in an era of elegance she knew that the consequence of conjugal intimacy were children. The problem was that by the time she found out she was pregnant, her period of fecundity was over: my two sisters had already gotten married and made her grandmother. My belated apparition in her life came as a surprise.

With that background it's easy to understand the fit my mom threw upon discovering she was pregnant, at the virulent age of thirty-nine. I imagine the suffering she went through to admit her state before my older sisters. Worse before her friends in the casino of Linares. And I understand her desperation when, after having two ladies of ribbons and laces, she'd have a little male of muds, blonde lice and tan toads.

So I was born to my mom when she already had a grandmother's vocation. I loved her very much, and she loved me very much, but we had our problems. I remember that when she couldn't cover me up in frills and bows, she insisted on dressing me as a spanish *senorito*, with suits that she herself confectioned, and I of a fine *señorito* never had anything. Of Spaniard either, even though she insisted in trying me out little embroidered suits that she copied from the latest magazines from Madrid.

To her consternation, I was always smeared with food, dirt or a dog's, cow's or horses poop. I always had scraped knees and blonde stiff dark hair from the mud. Never did the boogers hanging from my nose bother me. The handkerchief embroidered with my initials, that my mom ordered to be put in my pocket daily, served me for everything but to wipe them off. If I remember correctly, because I must have gotten over it early in life, I'm told I preferred eating scarabs before the chicken or beef liver that the nannies prepared for me— by order of my mom— so that my cheeks would blush.

Now that I'm a father, grandfather and great-grandfather I admit that I was not an easy child to deal with. Even less so to manipulate.

My mother complained all her life that ever since I finally learned to talk my favorite words were no, I alone and it's not fair; that from my first steps I ran; that upon mastering

velocity I climbed every tree that crossed my way. In a few words, she could never do with me. She felt too old and thought that she had done her job as a mother with her two older daughters, who were almost perfect.

She said she had a girl of her eyes, for my older sister Carmen, it must be said, was gorgeous. When we were little my mom curled her blond hair and was pleased when people told her she was an angel, a doll, a beauty. When older she'd broken half the town's hearts, after her departure to Monterrey as a student, and then as a married woman. Even though she never said it, even when married and living out of the house, I know that my sister was ashamed that in the streets of the town the legend of her beauty was kept alive. My mother kept for years the innumerable letters of eternal love and corny verses of however unrequited lovers Carmen had, before and after marriage. Anyone could say that they wrote them to her, because she kept that bunch of papers as trophies she'd show off at every chance she got.

She also said she had a daughter of her ears, because the second of my sisters, though pretty, distinguished herself more for her voice. My mom made Consuelo sing in front of anyone who came visit, and her melodious voice always received praise.

—She has the voice of an angel! —everyone opined.

I've never heard angels sing, though I suppose it was true: my sister possessed the voice of an angel. What few knew is that behind that voice was hidden a demonic genius. Of course, not even in her worst moments would she lose her melodious tone, and any of her phrases sounded of pure poetry. She could say: don't get near me, boogery licy,<sup>25</sup> you disgust me, and still sound like an angel to my mother's ears.

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<sup>25</sup> Explanatory notes 16.

—I'm telling him fairy tales she responded every time my mother would ask her what she was telling the boy.

It would not affect me a big deal whatever she said, for she was a stranger whom in reality did not belong to my world. For years she was like a witch to me as those in the fairy tales I knew, and that how I understood her to use her voice to enchant everyone and make them believe in her kindness and sweetness of an angel, specially my mom.

I belonged to the few that remained immune to her charms. My mother did not understand why when my sister would visit us I would not fall to her feet. She did not understand that I preferred passing the day far away or that, when sent for a visit to Monterrey, I opted for staying in Carmen's house, the oldest. So good is your sister towards you, so nice, so sweet, my mom would frequently tell me to soften or mend the relationship.

And so there were two angels in my family, besides the boy, who was me. When my mom talked about me, she would say as if apologizing: this is the boy. Or, he is the plus one.<sup>26</sup> She never said she had in me the boy of her sighs. She would never have dared or it might have never occurred to her, but that was me. Oh god, she would say all the time. I don't remember running into my mom around the halls of my house, in the patio, the dining room or kitchen, without her releasing a sonorous sigh. Oh, god, she said, blowing out a little air, look at what hair, what snot,<sup>27</sup> what clothes, how dirty, how rough, how sunburnt, I'm too old for this, oh God! Soon she began to cut back on her sighs. She would later only keep the oh God!, then only the oh!, and then not even that: it was only sighing.

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<sup>26</sup> Explanatory notes **17**.

<sup>27</sup> Explanatory notes **18**.

All the time I was of a loud and strident voice. My body was refuge to however many ticks, fleas or louse found itself in need of a home and sustenance, for which it served my mom nothing to try and let my blonde locks grow. Like someone shaven in a hospice.

Oh, God! Sigh.

Had I stayed under the full care of my mom, I might have ended up wearing more bows than my sisters. The circumstances spared me from that destiny, because my dad, whom by the time I was born was already a grandfather and had resigned from working the land to inherit them to his grandchildren, would never allow that his only son, though a latecomer, to become timorous. And though he never opined over the raising of his older daughters, ever since he knew that he'd had a son he began confronting my mom over mine. He knew very well that in our lands and time there was no place for the delicate, with war in the surroundings and sometimes visiting us.

To my mother, whom I never saw feel intimidated before anything, those confrontations must have perturbed her more than she was able to withstand. She adored my dad, something strange in a woman -a grandmother- of such advanced age, of almost forty, which is why she preferred to remove herself a little from my direct upbringing to preserve the peace. In his own turn, my dad did not have the time nor the disposition to take charge of me, firstly because he would not have known what to do with a baby or childling, and then because he spent his time from one place to the other supervising and defending the livestock ranches of Tamaulipas and the orchards of Nuevo Leon.

Regardless, he had many arms just for me. My nana Pola would leave me with Mati the cook, who'd leave me with Lupita, the laundress, who forgot me with Martin, the gardener,

whom after a little would leave me accompanied, under the care and entertained by Simonopio.

He would not hand me down to anyone until it got dark and someone came out of the house

asking where the boy was.

6

Wings that cover

The Arriola of Simonopio top the Camila was an event that mareada Us in an reparable manera.

A family divider. Later on it became the difference between life and death, even if we did not

understand it but in a distant retrospective. My dad would recriminate for the rest of his life his

first reaction upon seeing him.

I suppose that it was because he was more traveled, learned, and illuminated that he felt, he hadn't gotten altogether rid of as much superstition existed in a neighboring town to a community of witches. And perhaps that day's event had enervated him: the empty rocking chair, the lost nanny. The certainty of her death, the search in the circumventing bushes and every time further away from the house; then the finding, the talking nanny, the warrior swarm of the hive transported in an apron; a newborn baby with a disfigured face, snuggled by the nanny's bosom and by a blanket of live bees.



In terms of first impressions, that are always so important, Simonopio, as he was to be baptized after insistency of the nanny and despite the objection of my parents and the priest, he had not caused the best. The workers had asked their boss to leave that monstrosity there, under the anacahuita on the side of the road,

—So that it is God who wants him, sir, because that child is the devil –insisted Anselmo Espiricueta.

By the my dad had overcome the reaction to his first impression. Employing as much use of strength that he derived from knowing himself a man of the world, traveled, studied and illuminated he'd shaken off the superstition to concentrate on the mystery.

-Those are absurd ideas. Here we don't believe in those things, Espiricueta, -he said, to proceed with his soft interrogation of the nanny.

With the few words the *viejita* had pronounced, Francisco understood where she had found him and under what circumstances. How and why the old woman had walked all the way up the mountain to the bridge, under which she found the baby, no one would ever know. I heard him, was the only thing she used to say; I heard him. Whether they were superstitious or enlightened everyone knew that it was impossible to hear the weak cry of an abandoned child under a bridge when one is leagues away,

That was the great mystery, which became even greater and would last forever after don Teodosio and Lupita, the young washerwoman, denied having seen him on their way to the same place a little earlier. How was it possible that the old woman heard it? There was no possible answer. Believable answer.

—I can't listen even when my woman calls me nearby to eat— said Leocadio, the *hacienda's* pawn, to whomever wanted to listen to him.

But there existed a fact that no one could deny: the old immobile lady, of would, had abandoned her little world to go in rescue of the unfortunate child, and had done good in transporting it all with a hive and its winged companions. When my dad disposed of shaking the bees that covered completely the body of the newborn, Reja stopped him.

—Leave them boy, she said, clothing the baby back.

—But Nana, they will sting him.

—They would have already.

Irritated, he ordered his men to load nana Reja to the wheelbarrow, but she held on with strength to her load, fearful that they'd tear him away and fulfill their threats of abandoning the baby once more.

—It's mine,

—It's yours, nana —my dad assured her—, and he's coming with us.

—The hive too.

He himself, reticent but with great care, covered her with the apron once more to load her on to the wheelbarrow. Only then did they get back underway towards the house and the empty rocking chair.

7

From white tear to blessed tear

Francisco Morales was far from feeling the certainty with which his nanny had answered him. It's coming with us, she told him. Yes but for what? What are we going to do with a creature that is already marked upon entering the world? Abandon the child was not an option that would have crossed his mind, but he heard that the laborers had been saying on the low and especially Anselmo Espiricueta, the newest employee, after they refused to get on the wagon with the newborn. That if the devil had kissed him, that he had made a deal with the devil, that if it was the demon himself or divine punishment. Superstitious ignorants. Regardless, he couldn't see how a baby that instead of a mouth had a hole<sup>28</sup> would only survive a day, without speaking of the ignorant prejudices of the people that would surround for however long his life were.

Near the town hed ordered espiricueta to deviate. Partly because someone had to ask doctor Cantu to go to his house and check the old nana and the unfortunate baby, for another to

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<sup>28</sup> Here the author uses boquete, "Entrada estrecha de un lugar." (RAE)

get him away from the child and his already nervous committee. He did not need the influenced by apocalyptic prophecies of the southerner.

—And don't start with the gossip of the devil's kiss, eh? We are not going to be playing around with stories of witchcraft.<sup>29</sup> The nana found a baby that needed her help and that is all. Have you understood, Anselmo?

—Yes, patron —answered Anselmo Espiricueta as he ran away.

Upon reaching the town and seeing Juan, the knife sharpener, Anselmo did not resist the temptation of explaining to him, within the boundary of each others trust, that I come<sup>30</sup> with lots of fright, that the nana, that the bees, that the baby of a witch, to then continue his peroration with all kinds of fastly omens that came to his mind at the moment.<sup>31</sup>

—And then you'll see how evil falls upon us.

And so it did, as it usually happens with those things, that before Anselmo could find the medic, the whole of Linares knew about the misfortune of Simonopio and the possible disgrace to the Morales family and all their descendants.

Doctor Cantu, as serious and professional as he was, had immediately attend the call of the Morales without first stopping to the questions of the stubborn and superstitious. He was surprised to com into the hacienda behind a cartwheel that was transporting a casket. It was a shame: he'd understood that there were no deaths in this matter of the vieja and the baby.

Upon arriving home he found the nana in the same place as always:<sup>32</sup> patronaged in her rocking chair, surrounded by the family and the closest serfs. That the *anciana* had moved from

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<sup>29</sup> Note the author again uses *brujeria* which I translate as witchcraft.

<sup>30</sup> Explanatory notes 19.

<sup>31</sup> 'Presagios funestos'

<sup>32</sup> Here, Sofia uses *apatronada*

her seizure<sup>33</sup> was enough for him to surprise himself. He found it impossible to believe that someone of such an advanced age would suddenly throw herself down the adventure of some rugged road, and even more, that she would come back with no apparent damage. ?And come back from the mountains with a live baby in her arms?

If Francisco Morales had said it, there was nothing but to believe it.

—Who died?

—No one —replied Francisco.

—So, for who's the casket?

When they turned, there they were Martin and Leocadio carrying the heavy box, in wait of instructions. The doctor was left intrigued, Francisco confuse and Beatriz alarme: the casket! She had completely forgotten the preparatives shed made during the disappearance of the nana, when she ordered Leocadio to go into town for a box. Now Francisco looked at her surprised.

—Umm... It's in case of emergency.

Beatriz moved away to indicate to Martin that they cover well the casket with a thick tarp and store it in the shed's bodega, away from everyone's sight. When she came back doctor Cantu demanded to see the child.

They did not let him near the bundle that the old lady was carrying without first putting on some gloves of thick leather, propert of some labourer, because the bees, doctor, are everywhere. Upon undoing that molote of a bundle<sup>34</sup> he realized what they meant: hundreds of bees buzzed around the baby's little body. He doubted how to make the insects go away without

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<sup>33</sup> Sofia uses agarrotamiento, which apart from having used it before, it might also mean a moral or material imposition.

<sup>34</sup> "Aquel molote de rebozo", the molote is like a mexican empanada.

alarming them but nana Reja took care of that. Cantu did not know if, helped by her rough skin, the woman felt immune to the bee stings or if it was simply that they dared not to sting her.

Whatever the reason, with great calm she proceeded to shake them off without making the angry.

The baby stayed observant and calm. The doctor was surprised to see him follow with his eyes the last bees that buzzed around him to later introduce himself into a beehive that someone had hung with an metal wire in the corner of the overhang.<sup>35</sup> He noticed that the unknit bellybutton had begun to bleed, so he tied it with stitching string.

—This baby was abandoned so it'd die, Morales. They did not even try leaving it to luck: it could have died from severe bleeding. Even more, it should have died from severe bleeding.

Regardless, it hadn't, even when it would have been expected, with the bellybutton like an open hose. Against all logic, it did not show a single bee sting. It was obvious that it had not been devoured nor it had died from exposure to the elements. That conjunction<sup>36</sup> of factors increased the mystery which would almost remain surrounding Simonopio.

—The boy is surprisingly healthy.

—But, doctor, and the mouth? -- asked Beatriz, worried.

The lower jaw was formed to perfection, but the upper part opened from the middle of the lip to the nose, He didn't have a lip, frontal superior gum nor sky.

—He was kissed by the devil-- someone from the crowd said: Espiricueta.

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<sup>35</sup> Again techo volado

<sup>36</sup> conjunto

—No devil kissing here —responded the doctor, energetic—: it's a malformation. It sometimes happens, like when someone is born without fingers or they are born with extra fingers. It's sad but its natural. I'd never had a case like this one, though I've seen it in books.

—Can it be fixed?

—No.

That is the way the child is going to live for however long his life lasted.

—Kids like these don't live long: they starve to death because they can't suckle, and if by some miracle they make it through, they drown with the liquid, which flows down their breathing tracks. I doubt he'll survive for more than three days.

Before sending to bring in a milking goat or to go search for some willing mother to share her milk. Francisco ordered for father Pedro, because if this child was to die, it needed to be baptised as god mandates it. The goat got there before the priest and la nana asked to have had a mug filled with some lukewarm milk and a little honey that already began to drip from the hive. She wet an edge of her shawl in that mix, and squeezing the textile drop by drop for more than hour, she fed the baby to sleep.

By the time the priest arrived, with much hurry, carrying holy oils and holy water, to baptise the child and anoint him, he found him awake again with his mouth open, awaiting each white droplet that fell and rolled down its tongue. They had already cleaned him and dressed him in fine diapers and the white garments <sup>37</sup> that the Morales girls had used in their baptisms and that Beatriz had sent out to bring from a trunk. Seeing they were in a hurry, the ceremony began

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<sup>37</sup> Sofia uses ropon

without interrupting the nourishing, and so, from white droplet to holy droplet, with la nana by one side and Francisco and Beatriz on the other, Simonopio would save the body and the soul.

8

The harvest of the war

That day he had lost all the corn harvest. It hadn't been the most abundant but he got it through despite the plague. To save it, he'd not slept as if it were another daughter of his. It almost seemed to him as if he'd stroked every piece of corn.

But they'd snatched it away from him. They came for it after the plague came, after it had been watered with what it needed, after it fully ripened, after it had been, tender and juicy, picked from under the candid april's sun that sometimes, like that one, could be worse than July's. They came in for her when even the last of the corns was in the boxes and ready to be shipped to the nearby and distant markets.

—It's for the army —they said before turning round.

Francisco Morales had no remedy but to see them disappear in wagons loaded with boxes, and in silence, say goodbye to the complete effort of a seasons work.



But it's for the army, he consoled himself, with sarcasm, as he poured himself a whiskey. And to him, not even a single corn for dinner did they leave him. Not a single peso for new seeds. It's for the army, yes, but which one of them all?

In that war armies were onem he decided, only that pieces sprung out of it without an end like a wooden russian doll in the form of a bowling pin that a russian partner had shown him in college.

—It's a *matryoshka*. Open it —said the russian.

He noticed that the *matryoshka* had an imperceptible cut into the center of the body. He pulled and opened. Within it, surprised, noticed there was an identical one. And then another and another and every time smaller and smaller till counting ten.

So the army seemed to him —the armies— of that revolution: from one surged another and then another and then another; lal identical; all with the same conviction that they were the official army of the nation, and therefore had the right to run over anyone. To kill anyone. To declare anyone a traitor to country. And every time they passed by his land, it seemed to Francisco that, like the russian doll, they became smaller, if not in numbers, in credibility and sense of justice. In humaneness.

That harvest was the least the war had robbed them off. They'd lost Beatriz' father when one of those armies had surprised him on his way to Monterrey and had accused him of traitor for offering a dinner to the general Felipe Angeles, his friend from young and new -but brief- governor of the region, but enemy of the deposed president Carranza.

The war had stole them then the peace, the tranquility the certainty and the family, for through Linares came highwaymen that robbed and killed. They took any skirt they found along their way. Ugly or pretty, old or young, rich or poor: no distinctions made.

It seemed extraordinary to Francisco that such a thing would happen in modern times. He then supposed that, with the war even modern times would vanish.

His daughter had now began to leave childhood behind: they were young, pretty and rich. From fear that one day they would come and take them away, Francisco and his wife had made the decision to send them away to the cloister with the nuns. They were kept in Monterrey, but her parents felt them lost.

With the levy some men also went missing if they did not manage to hide from the path of any of the armies, for without any questions or explanation, they took them to fight. Francisco lost two of his laborers that way, which was not easy to forget because he knew them both since they were young.

To him -men like him- the levy overlooked. Having renown and richness still counted for something by 1917. The war did not require of his meat as yet another shield, but it would nonetheless surround him, send him winks and threats more than his corn, for the corn of that day would last too little and it would never satisfy that voracity that demanded everything.

The armies of the war wanted the lands as much as him. Land and freedom, they demanded, Everyone fought for the same as him, the men like him, they didn't have where to shelter themselves from crossfire: the only possible outcome for them with the Agrarian Reform, that all the sides said to defend as their own, meant losing their land; meant giving it up by decree for the use of someone who desired it, but that had never sworn a drop for it, that would

never get to understand it. It was giving it with docility the day they came to his door knocking, just as it had happened with his harvest: in silence. It was that or dying.

That is why he did not dare oppose when they came for his corn. Not even his renown would shield him against a bullet between the eyes. For a harvest of corn it was not worth dying. He loved the land that he had inherited from his ancestors but there was something he appreciated even more: his lie and that of his family. Would he allow them to snatch away his lands with the ease with which they took his harvest?, he demanded himself, frightened.

For now the only thing that he had managed to do for his lands was through partitioning them: putting some under name of friends of his trust. Those measures were not enough. There was no legal way to register the remaining lands under Beatriz name or his daughters, which for great extensions were susceptible to being expropriated. That's why he now sat in his office, having the only glass of whiskey the day allowed him, but earlier than usual.

—Francisco?

Beatriz would not like that excuse that I am getting drunk because I lost and because I am going to lose it all and I can't find a way out. Because, how can one defend oneself from a legal robbery?

—... so Anselmo wants to throw them some soap.

He would have his whisk. One. As per usual. He would enjoy it, even though he knew he would not find answers, He would then get up and walk through the reedbeds. He would force himself every step. He would caress every reed if necessary: it was the only resource left to not fall in red numbers; to not make use of...

—Simonopio.

—What?

—One says ‘excuse me’. What do you mean what? Is this how your mom raised you?

Well what are you thinking of?

Tired of so much responsibility and so much incertitude, sunk in a defeat that barely let him attend the things at hand and impeded him from proceeding with the sketched out plans with anticipation for the future, like extending the cultivations, hiring more workers, edifying the bodegas for equipment and harvests or construct and expand the houses for the employees –and to buy the so much wanted tractor–, he also wondered what he was thinking about, what he was doing there losing his time, why did he not have the motivation that afternoon for nothing more than his whisky.

He knew that even though every harvest would give, even if he sold them at the best price, complete, and without having the stolen by the robbers or the government por its armies, maybe noone of this would work for him. Maybe he would end up working for someone else to harvest them, for someone else to occupy his property. Why invest time money and effort in those lands if he knew did not know to whom they would belong to in a month or a year?

Wouldn't it be better to go to Monterrey and keep buying properties there? To enjoy whatever it is that he had left of the youth of his daughters The war had also stolen time from him, besides everything else. He wished he had more for his wife, for his daughters; more time for the child that had arrived in their lives to stay.

That day there was time, he understood, surprised. That day the war, with the corn delivered as tax of one hundred percent-- had robbed him of his planned things to do. Regardless,

it had left him time. It had left him a rare day with empty hands; without corn to protect without merchandise to deliver or send. He would stop lamenting himself then. That day he would not dedicate anytime to war nor reform. Nor the lost corn.

The whisky could wait for the habitual hour. The reed could wait for his visit. He would take advantage of time in a different way.

—Francisco: I am talking to you!

—Excuse me, excuse me, excuse me. That's how my mother raised me, he said at the same time he left the glass of whiskey half had on the table to go hug his wife and smile at her, as he would only do when they were alone.

—Oh, Francisco...

—So, excuse me?

—No! Cut it.<sup>38</sup> I came to tell you that Anselmo wants to throw soap on the bees to kill them. He says they are the messengers of the devil, or I don't know what stupid things. He won't stop talking. I can't even understand what he's saying now.

—Tell him no.

—I've told him! Do you that man will listen to me? No. You go. I left poor nana Reja alone, sitting in the rocking chair, but swinging her cane. She's furious. She even opened her eyes!

—And Simonopio?

—Simonopio is never around when Anselmo arrives. I don't know where that boy hides.

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<sup>38</sup> Sofia uses *dejate de cosas*, which is slang for cut the bullshit, or stop it with this nonsense.

Not the years, not even the long talks manages to get Anselmo Espiricueta to leave his superstitions behind, thought Francisco, frustrated. He looked at his whisky. Looked at his wife, somberly<sup>39</sup> for having to abandon the game they'd already begun. So little time did the war and land leave for Simonopio, but today he'd give it to him. He would defend his bees for him, because they were his, because they had arrived with him, because if Simonopio had always had hands that looked after him and guardians that looked after his well being<sup>40</sup>, for Francisco --in his monotone horse rides from ranch to ranch--, the notion that they were his main tutors assaulted him. Killing would be like killing him in part too. It'd be like orphaning him,

Besides, despite that little by little they had been covering the roof of nana shed, and that meanwhile no one dared enter to store the usuals, they had never hurt anyone. The majority had already habituated to their presence around the kid. They seemed only interested in Simonopio and he in them. Life would be pretty harsh for him with them by his side. What would he be without them?

They had come with the child. There must be a reason. They'd leave them alone.

—Let's go.

That day was Simonopio's; it was the day of his bees. Some other day he would find a way to defend his lands.

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<sup>39</sup> pesaroso

<sup>40</sup> Padrinos que velaran por el

9

### The child of the bees

At nana Reja's feet, and under the hive of bees that had clad<sup>41</sup> him, Simonopio learned to focus his sight and followed them with his eyes. Even when they flew in a swarm, the baby learned to distinguish them individually, to seeing them abandon the hive early and wait for their punctual return in the afternoon. He learned to live his life around the bees schedule and soon he learned to stay away from the mattress where they would lie him down during the day to try and get near his tireless companions and follow them up through the garden.

The day would arrive when he would follow them beyond the limits of the garden and beyond the mountains he saw.

Reja, whom had soon turned back to her wooden immobility, looked after him in a silent but constant manner, She would no longer feed him personally, but since the first day she'd had given to understand that the child of the bees had to be fed with goats milk and honey, first with

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<sup>41</sup> arropado

a piece of cloth, then with a spoon, and then with a cup, In the first few days she would not let anyone near the child out of fear that someone with bad intentions would hurt him, or that someone with good intentions would drown him while trying to feed him like any other child. The only ones allowed to get near the baby were Beatriz nana Pola and Lupita, the washerwoman. The first Reja would not let her feed him. Beatriz was always in a hurry to be somewhere else: if she wasn't supervising the house or her daughters, she was at her casinos social events. Besides, Reja knew that, if she allowed it, Beatriz would make Simonopio a boy of the inside, of books. Simonopio was not up for that.: Simonopio was up for outside, for the mountain. He was out to read life, not books. When Beatriz wanted to carry the child she had to go all the way up to Reja's rocking chair to do so.

Pola was old and patient, and in Lupita, though young, Reja warned of a kindness that would permit her to see beyond the hole in Simonopio's face. Them both would feed the child until the last spoonful, without hurrying. Nana Pola and Lupita would never kill Simonopio with either good or bad intentions.

And well, if no one else felt ever welcome to get near, ever since he acquired mobility just like any other normal kid, proper to Simonopio, he would get near everyone else, always with his version of a smile. Those closest to the house of the Morales left frightened upon seeing the kids deformed face, but with the passing of time they began to express familiarity and care, even to the point of forgetting the defect that marked him. They felt him get near and they received with pleasure, for with his complacent personality he was the best company while the daily chores were being done.



With the years it was made clear that despite having survived and conquered nourishing, Simonopio would never fully master communication. Consonants at the tip of the tongue, which are the majority, would flee in the cavern that was his mouth. And even though he could pronounce however many sounds originated from the bottom of his mouth, like the n, the k, the g, the j and the q, besides the h for being mute and all the vowels, the patience of most of his interlocutors had too short a limit. They could talk of everything and found the small noises and blabbering very uncomfortable that baby Simonopio attempted to imitate, and a little more with the words that he tried to pronounce without success. Upon not understanding a thin, some got to think that for the huge disgrace of the kid, not only did he have a facial defect, but that he was also mentally weak and therefore, he didn't understand them either. Some well intentioned people started calling him Poor Simonopio. Poor Simonopio entertains himself and lulls himself with the bees, he laughs alone, doesn't know how to talk, he pretends to sing, doesn't understand a thing.

How wrong they were.

Simonopio would have loved to sing the song that Lupita persistently tried to teach him to pronounce, if well *the r with the r in cigarette, r with r in barrel, rapidly roll the cars ridden with sugar from the railroads*<sup>42</sup> was beyond his capabilities. He would have liked to converse with some about the songs of snobby women, abandoned women, women who worked on the railroads, women who were carabinieri. He would have liked to talk about his bees and ask anyone why they did not listen to them to when they speak to you, like they speak to me. On

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<sup>42</sup> Here I attempted to keep the use of the r that she is employing to teach Simonopio how to pronounce the different r's in the song.

being able to, he would have talked about the music the bees sung to his ear disposed over the flowers in the mountains, distant encounters and friends that would not have completed the long journey back; about the sun shining strong one day, but that the next it'd be covered by storm clouds. Then he would have liked to have asked, Lupita, why do you hang the clothes you just washed if you are going to have to run back and get them when it rains? Why do you water the plants if it rains tomorrow? He would have liked to have asked his godfather why he hadn't done anything to avoid the harvest from dying overnight during last winter's frost: did he not feel the cold coming? How to talk about the constant impossible images that passed before his closed eyes, or regarding events that without even living he would witness beforehand, before and after? What do other people see when they close their eyes? Why do they close their ears nose and eyes when there is so much to hear, smell and see? Is it just me who listens and hears, but no one else does?

How to approach those theme if his own mouth would not obey the signals reason would send it and if from it would not come out more than snarls and whale squawkins? And because he couldn't he wouldn't. Simonopio learned that the great effort that required him to say the simplest things was not worth it if no one understood him, if no one cared.

So, at his nana Reja's immobile feet, whom always sitting in her rocking chair facing the road that had united them, Simonopio conquered the silence.

10

## Unfulfilled promises

Beatriz Cortes was sitted where it corresponded as president of the organizing committee for the annual dance of Holy Saturday at the casino of Linares. For months she insisted on resuming the tradition that she had so enjoyed in her teen and younger years. The annual dance had been, in a past without war, a magnet for the families' lineage of Saltillo, Monterrey, Montemorelos and Hualahuises whom without fail would make the trip each year. Surrounding the great event were also organized various day activities in the different *haciendas* and ranches of the hosts of Linares. Everyone had fun: the older. Already married, visiting friends from youth, and the young getting to know each other and maybe –if they were lucky– finding and courting the love of their lives.

Many ladies from the society of Linares had denied at first to participate in the organization of the event, but Beatriz convinced them of the importance of returning to old customs. They are not coming, they said. What's the case? They might have been right, but Beatriz had to try. How much time did it take for a tradition to irreparably die? Perhaps less than the eight years that it's been in suspense. Perhaps, hopefully, there was still some life left in what seemed dead. She would make the tradition of Holy Saturday resurrect. She must try for her younger daughters sake. How can one generation confront the other, see it straight to the eyes and tell them: I let one of the few things that I took for granted I would inherit you?

Beatriz was not a vacuous woman. It was not the dance pieces that she wanted to save nor the pretty dresses, but the sense of belonging to the next generation, her daughters', whom in recent years<sup>43</sup> had found themselves obligated to send to Monterrey and continue their studies at the Sacred Heart. She wanted to save the memories Carmen and Consuelo had the right to create, the links they still had to form living their life in that house of their ancestors.

She had to pretend that she organized the dance, despite the fact that she knew first and foremost that it'd be almost impossible to have it take place: in the region food was scarce, and so was money. Sometimes a woman had to save herself, and for Beatriz Cortes de Morales organizing this dance, unite to the new social activity and charity there were in the town, represented just that: salvation. She could not cure the scarcity. She could not stop the war and the killings. What she could do was try and keep herself sane, and the only way she knew how to was keeping herself busy with family matters, townspeople in need, sowing constant and yes, planning the annual dance.

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<sup>43</sup> Sofia uses time, but I use years

Usually concentrated in her business<sup>44</sup>, she would now think engrossed on herself about the irony of the name: it'd be called the annual dance despite it not having been held since 1911, months after the war broke out. Besides, it'd be organized by the casino of Linares, despite the fact that this social club lacked a venue. There were great plans, of course, of constructing the building in the style of the Paris Opera, in front of the municipal plaza of the city. The lot had been acquired 1897 by the recreative society of Linares, near the cathedral of San Felipe de Linares, and the original intention had been to overcome, or at least match, the elegance of the casino that already existed in the city of Monterrey. Grand ambition, marvelous plans, precious plans, but since the first inversion the terrain the funds of the recreative society, whom since then would call themselves the casino of Linares, had vanished. In origin it had been contemplated to begin the construction of the social building in two or three years, but not: two or three more years would be needed, and even so. Now with less conviction, she'd insisted that perhaps it'd happen in the next two or three. After the war broke out, and with the uncertainty and insufficiency of all types of materials, products and even food resources, the partners of the casino of Linares had found themselves obligated to put their social and economic priorities in order. At the end of a long list of personal expenditures the donation for the new recreational building would appear.

Twenty one years after its conception, that october of 1918, the first society of Linares kept awaiting a venue. It was inevitable that every that its members went to mass or to the town center, shopping, would pass along the way there or back by the empty lot, and Beatriz was sure that more than one felt sorry the vacant space. In its majority it endured, she knew this, the

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<sup>44</sup> En lo que le atañía

sensation of incomprehension and incorporate that in the neighboring and other insignificant city of Monterrey the society of their casino would dedicate to constructing now a second building, better and bigger than the former, which they had lost in a fire in 1914. Twice had the first society of Monterrey built a casino, while the one of Linares had not even begun its first. A hard blow for some. At moments like this Beatriz would be invaded by the question regarding if whether any of the founding partners of Linares, secret pyromaniac, had had the tentative initiative to set fire to the so envied social building of the neighboring town<sup>45</sup>, a suspicion that she would never dare talk<sup>46</sup> about it with anyone, because, what was the point?<sup>47</sup>

Beatriz did not care if Monterrey had had the casino, before or during, but the empty center lot and the big stagnant pretensions at the sight of everyone weighed on her like lead. In a certain way it seemed to her that to the casino fo Lineares was happening the same thing in her life: a lot of potential, few accomplishments and unfulfilled promises.

For life had promised great things to Beatriz Cortes.

Since her cradle she had understood that she belonged to a privileged and appreciated family that held the fruit of their work in their lands. She had understood that her place in it was solid, like a peculiarly attentive and loving father, and a mother, if not loving, very intelligent and firm. She knew that, unless some mortal dysentery contagion , she would lead a long and plentiful life. It was a fact that Beatriz Corres would meet and make friends with the people of worth of Linares and the region. That the daughters of the best families would be their desk classmates and then during maternity. That they'd be their spinsters and that together they'd

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<sup>45</sup> Sofia uses 'cercana', which means nearby, but neighboring felt smoother and more familiar.

<sup>46</sup> Sofia uses 'ventilar con nadie', which would mean to release air, breathe out, as an expression

<sup>47</sup> She uses 'cual era el caso?'; which she used earlier

grow old in front of everyone to enjoy an old age filled with grandchildren. Of course, before grandchildren, lots of kids. And before having kids, marriage with the ideal man. Even before that, a youth with lots of courtiers, whom seek to attend the parties shed be at to be courted.

Early in life she knew with what type of men she would marry: from the locality and son of the town lineage. That before he was of age to put a name and a face to her chosen one. They would have lots of sons and daughters and most would survive, that was for sure. And next to her husband there'd be plenty of successes and some failures, salvageable of course. There'd also be winters, droughts and floods, as there were in cyclical form.

She counted with the certainty that all the promises life had made her were or would be fulfilled in relation to the work and effort invested. Only the potential was free in life. The final product, the accomplishment, the finish line, had a high price that she was willing to pay, for what Beatriz Cortes would never spare her efforts to be a good daughter, friend, student, wife, mother, charitable and christian lady.

How can a simple woman convince a whole foolish nation to lay down their arms, to go back to production and work? How does a women pretend that the events surrounding her do not affect her? What can she do to change the trajectory of a single bullet, of ten, of a thousand?

At that moment she was sitted at a table, surrounded by women who faked their interest in preserving the old traditions with a dance that would possibly take place in six months, when none of them had the guarantee of living up until then. They talked about flowers, advertisements, invitations, visits and locations, when in reality each one of them was thinking of failed and rotten things from the lack of transport or buyers. They would think about the spontaneous undesired and violent visits of the opposing armies and in the obituaries that

followed. They would think that their sons would grow and, if the conflict persisted, perhaps they'd be dragged into the interminable war. They'd think of the daughters that would never meet the man of their lives, for at this moment or the next he'd be receiving a bullet to the heart, or the head, or what's worse, the gut. A young man that they'd been destined to meet at some dance in the next five to ten years, but that perhaps it was no more than dust or sterile and vermin food to nourish the *nopalera*, instead of nurturing of life a woman through her womb, who'd been a woman had it not been shot on a good day by the first bullet fired and if this one was not followed up by a next, and after with an interminable blow.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> She uses 'rafaga', which is closer to *aventilarse*, because they are both words that connote to the wind



## CASE STUDIES IN THE TRANSLATION

There seems to appear some correlation between the ideas explored in the Bakhtin and Barthes essay, this means to say that there are examples, or instances in the reading of the text, and more so in the translation of those instances to english where the relevance of the essays seems to be of a particular importance. There are moments in which the dialogue in *Murmur of Bees* becomes a clear heteroglossic display of social and economic implications in the characters and what this shows of their identities. One of the examples I like to explore in depth is when Nana Reja says that ‘le manca su nino.’ Firstly, the difficulty confronted when translating this at face value is precisely that the word manca is not in spanish, as such we are led to believe that it is borrowed from the french, and there are clear indications that during the times of the revolutions, particularly in the northeastern region of Monterrey, Linares, Saltillo and Torreon there were families that were into the soap business and were of french descendance, whom struggled during this particular period. When I spoke about the historicity of the phrases, and intention of implementing analytical methods in such a way so as to evaluate the facts that are presented so as to generate hypotheses. In this case, the influence that perhaps came to nana Reja

indicated that she had interacted, or perhaps was a descendant of sorts, perhaps worked for a family of french heritage that lived and had moved to the region. Another main reason that makes it more difficult to translate is that the relationship between spanish and french is closer, for they are both romance languages, inherited from Latin. This does not go to disacknowledge the enormous french influence, where vowels and sounds were softened, performing as a certain distanciation from its original anglo-saxonic. Furthermore, in spanish we find what is called a *manco*, a *manco* is someone who is missing a hand, which harkens to the french, ‘*quelqu'un me manque*’, in which the effect is directed at the speaker or whomever pronounces the sentence. It goes to translate roughly as ‘someone is missing from me, or someone is cut from me’, as a sort of indirect reflexive instance. Bakhtin recognizes that in the novel there is a multilayered range of different languages within a language throughout different age groups and classes and offices, and this case is an exemplary one, because this does not mean that Nana reja does not speak spanish but that she has learned a different type of spanish. What is even more interesting is that there has to be a multiple sequence of translations, for the characters within the text do not fully understand what she is saying, and where there to be any spanish speaking reader that has no education in french or perhaps does not connect the noun *manco*, to the verb *mancar*, will not understand what she meant either. As such there is a translator within the novel at this particular instance who translates between Mr. Morales and her, confirming “*Que le manca su nino. Qué es eso de que le manca. Que le hace falta su nino.*” There then is a further layer that involves translating this into english, while attempting to preserve the core idea at play in the dialogue, whether it be an attempt to keep the original because it is already a mistranslation in spanish, and as such it should be made clear that it is also a mistranslation in english. This raises the question

of whether to apply directly *mancar* into the translated sentence: “That she *manques* her child.” But this would be a further removal because it would implicate a direct borrowing and anglicization of the french, without attaining to the already adapted way in which it plays in the original, as a spanishized french. To this I firmly oppose because it would mean that the reader is decontextualized from the setting, a setting which must not be forgotten because it is crucial to the development of the story, of the narration because it revolves -pardon the redundancy- around the mexican revolution. To this added the debate of whether it should be translated as her child was cut from her, or her child is missing from her, which would keep the indirect discourse of the speaker, and the meaning of the sentence but shedding on the formal structure that would come with using an adapted *manquer*. But how then, to translate this instance of mistranslation into english without incorporating a foreign word? This would radically change what the instance is showing for the misunderstanding will no longer be derived from the word being strange or foreign, but that perhaps Mr. Morales could not listen what she was saying as opposed to not knowing the word that caused this misunderstanding in the first place. This sheds light on what both sides lose during the process of translation and this forces the translator to measure out the damage done so as to choose what path aligns more with the authors and the translator’s standing on the matter.

Another key moment that is completely relatable to the incident that takes place with the use of the word *mancar*, but this time, the conversation takes place with Beatriz, and the dynamics of the translation are very different. It is also true that this case is a mistranslation, but as I have just said the inner workings and the origins of said mistranslations have acute differences that are important to point out in order to further the study of translation. At this

instance in page 47 of the translation, Beatriz is talking with Francisco, who asks him a question about Simonopio, demanding that he does not procur him any harm. To this Francisco replies abruptly: “What?” or “Que?” One of the important key factors that I mentioned earlier is that this seemingly superfluous everyday interactions are actually cues, that whether or not the reader notices are there and present to indicate a variety of general undertones that further our knowledge of the characters without having the author explicitly say anything about them. As was observed with nana Reja and her possible connections with a family of french descendance through her using the word *mancar*. So it happens with Francisco and Beatriz, but instead of the cues demonstrating a background based on culture or ethnography, this one is based on societal norms and class, education as part of the strata that compose the heteroglossia of which Bakhtin speaks. This exposes a particular lineage of education that highly contrasts what takes place with nana Reja when she is taken in, not only as was aforementioned but that the transgression of mistranslation in the second is of aggression, as opposed to the first which is of doubt; the first arises then from not understanding the word that was used, as opposed to the second scenario, where the word that was used was understood all too well, or understood so as to know that it was out of place.

## CONCLUSION

This work has helped a lot in terms of fathoming something that had been afflicting me since times immemorial, but particularly when I arrived here at Bard. Last year I found myself under the profound influence of a theme that is utmost present in this my evaluation of translation. I felt as if the words that I spoke were betraying me by mere fact of me speaking them. I recognized that there was a fault in language and that every time I expressed myself through words they would come back like daffers to hurt me precisely because it is a system that is inherently flawed. I wanted to find something that justified me speaking or writing in general. I wanted a justification that would allow me overlook all of the contingencies that come with language. From this sprung the idea that language is in fact a tool, and it is a tool that we have control over and one we can manipulate and adapt to our will and conception of what we deem to be better. In essence the discord I found myself in consisted in my acknowledgement of the huge disparity between the way we perceive ourselves and humanity and the rudimentaries of language. Our perception of humanity has surpassed the fixations of language, in other words this means that language has lagged in terms of technological advancement. It seems to me that

all the research and development that has been invested into Landauf shall now be reaped and its fruits enjoyed by all. My personal approach into perfecting language is directed at Spanish and as such the relationships between what I learned from translating can be applied in almost the same way to this idea. Just as in translation there must be a perfect or a balance between form and function, that neither of them are absolutes or fixed, that in order to satisfy a good translation the translator must take into account both sides of the equation and move them, rearrange them according to what the text demands from it. As such there is a freedom of choice that is not present in Spanish and the generalizing dead end streets in language, for example that the general in Spanish or the general plural is most always definitely masculine, that there is no room to express oneself according to the way in which we perceive the world. The fixation of gender for nouns is something with which I profoundly disagree with because who is to say that I see a chair and it must be necessarily feminine? What if the way in which I see *la silla*, or the way I perceive it to be is actually masculine: *el silló*. Or what if I look at that same chair and actually see it in feminine but then I turn and look again but feel that it is no longer feminine to me at that moment but perhaps genderless. The implications of such a thing are monumental because what the freedom of choice exposes in people is intention. If I express the chair to be masculine or feminine or gender neutral indicates and says a lot about the way in which I perceive the chair to be, or perhaps most importantly want the chair to be. It shows that it is me who has chosen to portray it as a feminine noun or a masculine one, as such it reflects back on the subject that pronounced said choice. The formatting of the work falls in relation to the same dynamics that are explored in the theories of translation and, goes without saying, translation itself. Corollaries

like the arrangement between the ‘chapters’ and the ‘whole’ of the paper behave like the micro languages do to the general macro languages.

As time progressed in my work on the translation I feared that I would not notice the differences because I would get habituated to the ways and writings of the text. This means that I learned the author’s vocabulary and that I got better by automatic means the more and longer I translated it. I fear this because the flow of the translation became so natural to me that I might miss something to evaluate or point out. Yet, the fact that it became a natural mean does not make the translation any worse, for it indicates that I am in full submersion mode. That I started doing without thinking what took me longer to translate at first, or during the first chapters. Do not think that doing it without thinking speaks in absolute terms. I was thinking about the translation, but the questions and incongruencies that were in the beginning utmost puzzling to me became easier for me to answer, precisely because I was more equipped with the tools and growing in familiarity with the the Murmur of Bees and unbound by the weight of tarnished language.

## EXPLANATORY FOOTNOTES

**1** I immediately found a difficulty in the last clause in the first paragraph of the novel, which I was more than expectful for. The original reads “como impedido por una brujería a salir en busca de cualquier oído humano.” The subject in this case is the mixture of the baby’s crying and the fresh wind, the singing of birds and the insects, but is then limited by something supernatural. The translation reads as follows: “as if impeded by sorcery out in search of any human ear.” I decided to employ impeded this time to keep parallel with the author not only of the phonetics of the word but also the etymology, as such it is not as distantiated from the original. For the word “brujeria” I decided to use ‘sorcery’ over witchcraft, even though the word brujeria implies bruja, for witch, because the ambient is more of an overcoat intangible aura of a spell more than it does with the classical imagery of a cauldron or of potion making. A craft is something that is physical and even visible, though the word ‘kraft’ in German means ‘force’, the semantic meaning has been separated from its German counterpart that it instantly connotes an object as opposed to the spell like sensation. I have modified the sentence for it to read “as if



by some sorcery withheld from going out in search of any human ear” for the previous translation made the subject of whom was ‘out in search of any human ear’ ambiguous. Whether it be the sorcery that was in search of the human ear or the wails it was unclear, but now, the sentence more clearly identifies who it is that is withheld from going out to search any human ear.

2 The narrator here changes the addressee of her words, and seems to turn and talk to the reader himself. Like on film, when an actor looks at the camera and speaks leveled straight with it. The original reads as follows: “diria por la tarde a quien la quisiera escuchar.” It is important to note that it is a one sentence paragraph, and that even within that there is mention of three characters: don Teodosio, the baby and Lupita. But there is also a third, the narrator, and so with that last sentence she is affirming that in fact she would say all of those things to whomever wanted to listen to her.

3 The second sentence of the third paragraph of chapter 1 in Spanish uses the word “embarazo” to describe a pregnancy, but the author cleverly uses the word because of its double meaning: it is both an embarrassment, or shameful, as much as it is a pregnancy. *Que te suceda algo embarazoso*, is to say that something embarrassing happened from which one must feel a little ashamed for. In Spanish, *cuando alguien está embarazada*, means that a woman is pregnant. When the narrator, a third person semi-omniscient voice, says “Quién de los alrededores había mostrado un embarazo indiscreto recientemente?” (9) it is playing with the double entendre previously explicated. I translated it as follows: “Who from around had shown an indiscreet

**swelling** recently?” I use the word ‘swelling’ because it is remindful of a physiognomical attribute, like someone wearing sunglasses for being ashamed or trying to hide a swollen eye. I used to have, “an indiscreet carrying”, but it did not imply any of the connotations above mentioned either semantically or in the syntax of the word, as well as making the fact that she was undergoing a pregnancy more ambiguous, unfamiliar and confusing to the reader.

4 In the first and second sentences of the third paragraph of page 10, I encountered more technical difficulties in translating the specific terms used for “visitante social” and a “techo volado”. I translated them both as “homeowners guests” and “overhang”, respectively. Of the former I am not entirely sure because it is separate from either the social or visitor aspects, both words having an equivalent in English, but the feeling and immediate thought that comes from saying a social visitor is not as pleasant or as neighbouring a feeling, which is the case I feel the author is trying to set, as much as does homeowner’s guests. I would like to perhaps look at a translation of some of Tolstoy’s and Dostoevsky’s works to see how they translate the word social visitor or guest, because the dynamic of the situation harkens plenty to the way it is used or was used in the Mexico of the time. It’d be a very formal process, especially if one is entering the casa de los Morales, as would have been in the 1800’s of Russia. There’d be a porter at the door and there would be house movement, with service, as is the case with the novel and the Russian *soirees*. I do not intend to say that Mexico in the early 1900’s is as Russia was in the early 1800’s, but that the formalisms and idiosyncrasies of receiving and having people over to one’s home were made of a big deal. “Overhang” is a word that does not translate literally as

‘blown roof’ (*techo volado*) but it adheres to referring to the physical image and actual architectural structure just as much.

I’ve now completely changed the previous sentence to better describe the location and positioning of the service shed, and made it more colloquial to not mention that the guests were the homeowner’s guests because it is something implied by the word itself, and the context. As such, I decided to remove it and avoid myself from the redundancy.

**5** The original reads “que le permitía a la vieja permanecer a la intemperie”, previously my translation read “to stay outside in the elements”, but to remain is more attune with ‘permanecer’, indicative of persisting. ‘La intemperie’ is a singular noun used to describe the weather and nature’s, exposure to the elements, but since the elements are already mentioned two sentences down, to avoid any unnecessary repetition, to say that “she remains outside” suffices to fully picture the image.

**6** Another critical issue I encountered takes place in the same page the second to last paragraph, first sentence in which I decide to keep the word *la vieja*, because it is a voice that resonates deeply in spanish and connotes more than simply saying ‘the old lady’, and the sporadic, or not so sporadic but chosen and deliberate decision of keeping certain words in Spanish reminds the reader of the context. For in the translation one is not trying to remove the reader from the original surroundings, but only making the sharing of feelings, emotions and intentions of the other manifest and to be evocated in the reader. Thus. it is utmost necessary to not mislead the reader into thinking that the setting is no other that northeastern mexico. It must

feel as if it were Mexico, as if the reader was presently there and he were listening to the narrator and dialogues in Spanish but comprehending all of it without having to speak Spanish. I most definitely do not intend to fall into the trap of making it sound overly Spanish and lose some familiarity and colloquiality with the reader. In page 12 (6), the author uses again “techo volado” and I continue to use “overhang” to keep with the flow and recurrence of the word as referential.

7 The argument behind keeping *la vieja* in Spanish and not *la nana* but instead ‘the nanny’ (in English) allows the reader to get a first taste and immersion into the original setting and ambience of the novel, but then switches back to the nanny, keeping it more familiar and colloquial therefore not estranging the reader, or forcing the work with too much foreignity.

8 Comment on the author's use of ‘en fondo’, the oxymoronic nature of the sentence and the irreconcilability of translation, untranslatability. The narrator here uses "luego se acostaba 'en fondo' sobre las cobijas". Add something about the awkwardness of the original (12).

9 The next difficulty that arose was the word “desgarrada” because though it is indicative of a rupture it is also associated to claw, or garra, so desgarrar is to maul or claw through and as such is most resemblant to cats through clothes or knives, something pointy; while torn is more a motion of being dragged in two opposite directions. I decided to stick to torn because it expresses what semantically the word is trying to say, though it perhaps alludes to the physical aspects of having torn clothes, due to her condition when the doctor found her. “Torn apart” has

now been changed to “ravaged” because it runs in tandem with the brutality and physicality of the word ‘desgarrar’ which the author uses in the original.

**10** The familiarity in expressions is difficult to translate because it employs very specific language that perhaps needs more than one word to translate. Dialogue is then one of the most difficult things to translate because it moves in a present state and it is as if it were alive. So the lines in page 14, in the dialogue between Mr. Morales and the doctor on the former’s wife that read “Sera de leche. ] Sera de otra cosa.” I had to translate as: “Maybe from the milk] Maybe from something else.]” Because the word *sera* is attempting to put blame on something, an attempt to figure the cause of a thing upon seeing the effect. Like trying to pinpoint with one's finger on the cause of it, and using the word ‘maybe’ implies a yearning or reach, or hypothesis, for example like saying ‘Maybe it was because of this or that.’

**11** The preserval of this in the spanish is justified by the aforementioned glitch and changing what was being *said* in “God works in strange and mysterious ways”, where the original reads as “Dios sabe porque hace las cosas” which would literally translate as “God knows why he does things.” It is so drastic a change from the original phrase, for which I almost felt a complete aberration during the translation because it adds two words that aren’t in the original strange and mysterious. Though these descriptive adjectives iterate and reiterate what is implicit in the original. As such they do not deviate from what is being said in regards to the machinations and dynamics in which god operates. Another major deformity that I feel impelled to disignore, like a little rock in my shoe or a huge Trump billboard in times square, is that of the change in

directionality and therefore intention on the part of subject. The key things responds to the fact of what the questions the original and the transmuted ask: they answer two distinct ponderations. In the original spanish what is put to question is our lack of understanding as to why god does things. In affirming that God knows why he does things, we are simultaneously negating our knowledge of his plans. The translation concerns itself with the question of *how* it is that we interact with god, as opposed to the why. Furthermore, there is a directionality that changes, for which I call out Gerard Malanga on and criticize on doing in his translation of Vallejo what I am doing in mine. But Vallejo is translating poetry, and he does not justify the balance by preserving some of the spanish except when translating names and terms, like yaravi in page 565 of the ebook. What keeping something like *pa que le hace* in the english text in translation creates a counterweight to the familiarity that is said with god works in strange and mysterious ways, because it is most commonly used, it's a 'thing', an expression.

**12** One of the most interesting moments I encountered during the translation takes place in page 16, when Reja is at the Morales' and says: "Me manca mi nino." The verb *mancar* is not applicable in spanish the way in which she used it, and through context, by the ways the characters react, expresses such inapplicability: "Que esta diciendo?"/"What is she saying?" and "Que es eso de que le manca?"(16)/"What is that she's missing him?" Because it is technically not a word in spanish the translation to me was flabbergasting and this was yet another evidence of the impossibilities in translation. In french, one can say "Tu me manques" which means "I miss you." But this translation is not syntactically accurate either, first of all the directionality of the sentence in french is possessive, it is directed at the recipient, at the one who states what is

being said; Tu, means you, the *me* part is indicative of the other (you) having an effect on the *me* and *manques* is the verb. In spanish, the noun *manco* describes someone without a hand, like Cervantes. The reason this is so difficult to translate is that the structure and word of the sentence that Reja uses is borrowed from a different language, one close enough to be used in spanish without having to change the syntax of the sentence. Following the structure in french, Reja says: “Me manca mi nino.” Which would syntactically translate as “Me manque mon fils.” But it would still not mean the same thing, “Me manque mon fils” means “I miss my child.” But perhaps that is also partly implied by what nana Reja is feeling, for she might not only miss her child, but that her child is missing from her, that she does not have her child. The fact that Reja utilizes it in spanish though, evokes a completely new imagery and perhaps meaning to the word, for if a *manco* is someone who is missing a hand, it is as if Reja was missing a limb or an extremity of her body. For all these reasons I had much trouble translating it into english. When Reja, again, says “Me manca mi nino.” she could be saying “My child is missing from me.”, “I miss my child.”, “My child has been cut off from me.” This plurality in implied meaning makes it very difficult to translate because first of all one cannot in any way keep the grammatical structure of the sentence intact, and as such the general feeling of the expression changes as well as the meanings that are perhaps not explicitly mentioned. After serious ponderation and deliberation the final translation decides to stick to the main idea being conveyed, that is, that Reja is in fact missing her child. This satisfies both sides of the argument, whether to keep a foreign word or adapt the sentence to convey the meaning, because it falls corollary to the original meaning of the phrase *quelqu’un me manque*, which is to miss someone, or that one is

missing someone. This also enabled me to keep the flow of the work and the train of thought without disorienting the reader with an over-translation.

**13** In that same page the author employs a word in Spanish that has no equivalent in the English language, but refers to a child or a being that is still not enough to take care of itself, a living being that is still under the protection of a guardian or parent. She uses the word ‘crio’ to mean child, or baby, but the word in itself connotes many more things and is particularly associated to animals. In Spanish one can say that a bird’s hatchlings are “crias de ave” for example. This noun, ‘cria’ is also associated to the verb ‘criar’ which means to raise, as in raising children. I decided to translate it as: “Is that my child?” in order to keep the coherent development of the narrative, and I explain myself to demonstrate that I am fully aware of what I have had to shed and lose upon me choosing to translate it this way. Throughout the translation there are plenty of these words that carry more meaning through association in the original that is lost in the translation by default of language.

**14** In page 20, the author writes “la servidumbre de la casa se disponía a desterrar el sueño.” The verb used in this case is ‘desterrar’ which would literally translate as ‘to exile’ but it is used in such a way so as to explain that the house servants have committed ‘to ridding themselves of their tiredness.’ But another impossibility that cannot be evoked in the translation is that which the word *des-tierro* connotes. The prefix *des* indicates a removal of or from, and the word *tierro* comes from *tierra*, meaning land or dirt. As such, what I believe the author is trying to bring forth in the reader’s mind is a feeling of the dirt and field, the hard working laborer plowing not



only at the land but also at their dreams, for the word *sueno* which the author uses is also used in Spanish to refer to dreams. So, the author here seems to be very subtly and in the flip a one sentence, hinged on the scrupulous pairing of words a perhaps underlying argument and suggestion regarding the status and condition of the servitude around the days of the revolution of 1910. In context, there is no surprise then that the paragraph before that one begins as follows: “That October morning of 1910, the inhabitants of the hacienda...(15)/Esa mañana de octubre de 1910 los habitantes de la hacienda amanecieron...(20)” This might be a light wave or undulation in the underlying narrative, to which Sofia Segovia is alluding to and beginning to wrap the reader around the true context in which the work is situated.

**15** The word the author employs for this particular sentence is *vastagos*, and as I have noted throughout the translation of the work there is a big connection with the words Sofia Segovia utilizes to describe the characters in the novel and their actions in terms of life matter, particularly surrounding the idea of a plant. Like with the description of Nana Reja being part of the wood of the rocking chair, as if she herself had also grown moss and bark for skin. This seems to be a deliberate intention on the part of the author in order to create a subtle or not that subtle if detected, indicates a strong affinity to nature and land, with further connotations of family heritage and lineage: the importance of family trees and the symbology of grounding oneself, of taking to root in place proudly.

**16** In this instance the author uses *mocosos pulgosos*, which translates literally as someone who has snot and boogers and covered in lice. Though it sounds awkward in the translation, it is

a very common thing to hear get said. (I remember that in middle school there was a rhyme that went: ‘oso mocososo con cara de pulgoso’

**17** Sofia Segovia uses here the word *pilon*, which has many meanings, and one of them by the Real Academia de la Lengua Espanola writes that *pilon* in Mex. means: “añadidura, especialmente la que se da como propina o regalo.” But there are further meanings to the use of this word, when one is talking to a friend and they tell you that all their siblings are 10 or 20 years older than them you are probably bound to say that: “tu saliste de *pilon*” or “you came as a plus one”. This carries also the idea of being an unexpected child, a child that was not planned to happen but managed to sneak in, or out.

**18** The original here reads as “que mocos” and it is interesting that here the translation sets ahold as a singular plural as opposed simply to the Spanish plural, because it relates to the idea of maintaining two distinctly apparent separate forces at once.

**19** Here Anselmo begins to speak but the author decides to not use hyphens or any punctuation marks to indicate it, the reader is only able to know that the words on the page were pronounced through context. That is when the voice of the narrator omnisciently impersonates the character. It is also very much important to note that she uses this method throughout the work, one that I think of particular importance since it suggests a great ability on part of the author and the reading to fully immerse oneself and it is as if also dealing with stream of consciousness.

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