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BRAZILIAN LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION

LITERATURA BRASILEÑA EN TRADUCCIÓN

#10

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EDITORIAL

A boa tradução esforça-se por exprimir o caráter e o estilo de outro escritor com simplicidade e naturalidade. Para tal, o domínio e a composição da língua alvo ganham mais peso do que a decodificação da língua fonte. O tradutor é um intérprete e, assim como um bom ator, só é capaz de simular bem quem domina a arte de bem escrever.

Nesta última revista, que abrange o melhor da produção do Programa de Apoio à Tradução de Livros Brasileiros no Exterior da Fundação Biblioteca Nacional dos anos de 2017 a 2021, apresentamos esse prolífico diálogo-síntese entre o nacional e o estrangeiro – arte e meio, como diria Leopardi, para a renovação e o fortalecimento das literaturas nacionais.

Boa leitura!

O curador.

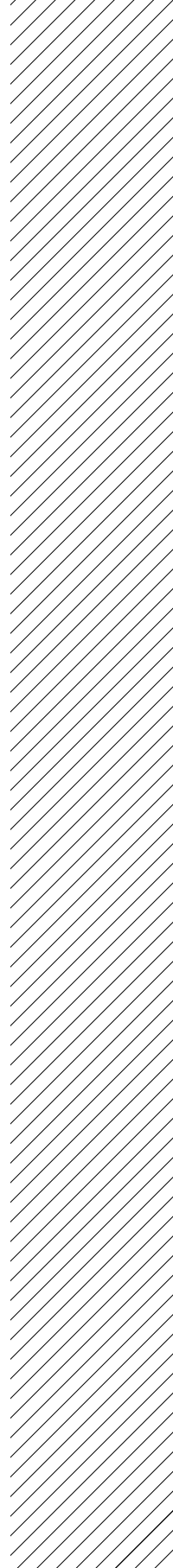
EDITORIAL

A good translation strives to express the character and style of another writer simply and naturally. For this, the domain and composition of the target language gain more weight than the decoding of the source language. The translator is an interpreter, and, like a good actor, the only ones able to simulate well are those who have mastered the art of writing.

In this latest issue, which covers the best of the production of the National Library Foundation Support Program for the Translation of Brazilian Books Abroad from 2017 to 2021, we are proud to present this prolific synthesis-dialogue between the national and the foreign – art and medium, as Leopardi would say, for the renewal and strengthening of national literatures.

Good reading!

The curator.



EDITORIAL

Un buen traductor se esfuerza por expresar el carácter y el estilo de otro de forma sencilla y natural. Para ello, el dominio y la composición de la lengua de llegada ganan más peso que la decodificación de la lengua de origen. El traductor es un intérprete y, como buen actor, solo es capaz de simular bien a quien domina el arte de escribir.

En esta última revista, que cubre lo mejor de la producción del Programa de Apoyo a la Traducción del Libro Brasileño en el Exterior de la Fundación Biblioteca Nacional de 2017 a 2021, presentamos esta prolífica síntesis-diálogo entre lo nacional y lo extranjero – arte y medio –, como diría Leopardi, por la renovación y fortalecimiento de las literaturas nacionales.

¡Buena lectura!

El curador.

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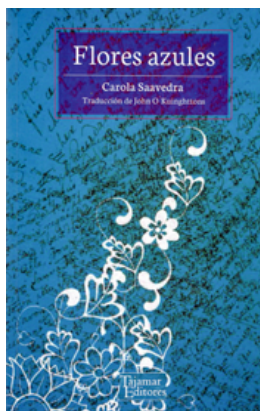
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ESPAÑOL



1.

El libro: Flores Azules

Título original: Flores Azuis

El autor: Carola Saavedra

El traductor: John O'Kuinghttons

ISBN: 978-95-69043-49-9

Año de publicación del original: 2008

Año de publicación: 2018

Editora del original: Companhia das Letras

Editora de la traducción: Tajamar Editores

Número de páginas: 167

Síntesis: Poco tiempo después de instalarse en un nuevo departamento, un hombre recién divorciado abre una carta aparentemente destinada al antiguo habitante, que él no conoce. Es una carta de amor escrita por una mujer que solo firma con su inicial: A. Cada día llega una nueva carta de la misma mujer, y el hombre no resiste el deseo de leerlas, y comienza a esperar con ansias al cartero. A lo largo de nueve días, toda su

vida – su relación con su hija de tres años, con su ex mujer, con su actual novia y su situación en el trabajo – es puesta en examen en sus diversas facetas.

¿Qué hay de tan perturbador en estas cartas? Es el inventario de una separación, el fin de un amor, la revisión obsesiva de las últimas horas de una relación sentimental que adquiere, con las distintas versiones, detalles más perversos y violentos.

Reseñas: “Carola Saavedra ya tiene un camino con sello distintivo propio. Dos constantes atraviesan su obra: la referencia, generalmente indirecta, a los lazos con Chile, su país de nacimiento, y el uso de estrategias narrativas que buscan romper con una escritura tradicional” – Beatriz Resende, *Folha*.

“Carola Saavedra despliega el talento propio de una autora que ha sido justamente situada como una de las principales exponentes de la actual literatura brasileña” – *Outra Página*.

El autor: Pese a haber nacido en Chile en 1973, Carola Saavedra es considerada una de las nuevas voces más relevantes de la actual literatura brasileña, aseveración que fue también confirmada por la revista británica *Granta* al incluirla dentro de los veinte autores más promisorios de Brasil. A la edad de tres años se radicó con su familia en este país, donde tras hacer la enseñanza escolar en el Colegio Alemán curso la carrera de periodismo. Vivió por una década entre España, Francia y Alemania, donde obtuvo una maestría en comunicación. Ha publicado el libro de cuentos *Do Lado de Fora* (2003) y las novelas *Toda Terça* (2007), *Flores Azuis* (2008), *Paisagem com Dromedário* (2010) y *O Inventário das Coisas Ausentes* (2014). Su obra ha sido traducida al alemán, francés e inglés, y ha obtenido numerosos premios y reconocimientos.

El traductor: John O’Kuinghtons Rodríguez (Santiago de Chile, 1966) es escritor, traductor y profesor de lingüística y literatura española en colegios de enseñanza media en Chile y, también, en universidades brasileñas. Él ha traducido los libros de varios autores como Rubem Fonseca, Lygia Fagundes Telles y Malba Tahan.

.....

CAPÍTULO II

(p. 35-41)

Al espejo, la imagen de un hombre todavía joven, sin duda, a pesar de las primeras arrugas y del pelo y la barba que se iban encaneciendo a velocidad inesperada, un hombre todavía joven y una niña de tres años sentada en un banco. La hija, pensó, como solían ser sus pensamientos de fin de semana, desde la separación. Frente al espejo él trataba de peinar sin mucha práctica el largo y ensortijado pelo rojizo de la niña. De vez en cuando ella reclamaba, pero en general se dejaba peinar, la mirada seria, compenetrada, como si tuviera pena del padre, como si comprendiera aquel esfuerzo extremo que era peinar el pelo de una niña de tres años, sin que eso significara algún tipo de indulgencia, de perdón, o demostrase que estaba dispuesta a facilitarle la tarea. Al contrario, se mantenía ahí, inmóvil, en pose de princesa frente a un súbdito. Él se sentía incapaz, algo en ella lo intimidaba, desde el principio, cuando sólo se trataba de un bebé desarticulado que le pusieron en los brazos en la maternidad. Un día después del parto, a la ex mujer gustaba recordar, el único hombre que se ha demorado veinticuatro horas en ir al hospital que estaba a diez minutos de casa. Él nunca supo explicar lo que ocurrió. La verdad es que no se acordaba, no se acordaba, le dijo a la mujer, ella no lo dijo, pero era evidente que nunca lo perdonaría. Y nunca lo perdonó. Las mujeres pueden ser terriblemente rencorosas, concluyó él. Y ordenó los crespos lo mejor que pudo sobre los hombros de la niña.

Listo, Manuela, ahora a esperar a la mami.

¡Papá!

La niña levanta un prendedor rosado hacia el reflejo del padre en el espejo.

Se te olvidó.

Se le había olvidado. Tomó el prendedor, examinó su mecanismo. Estiró un mechón de pelo y lo arregló de modo que no se le viniera a la cara.

Sí, es verdad, quedó mucho mejor, ahora te ves más bonita todavía – dijo, forzando una sonrisa, tratando de iniciar un diálogo.

La niña no esbozó ninguna reacción, saltó del banco y se fue a jugar a la pieza. Una princesa, pensó. Altiva y arrogante. Hablaría con la ex mujer apenas llegara, estaba echando a perder a la niña.

Poco después llegó la ex mujer, dos toques del timbre anunciando que era ella, cosas que no cambiaban. Se levantó del sofá y fue a abrir la puerta. Ella entró como si en vez de ella entrara un ejército entero, una multitud, el perfume esparcido por la casa, ocupando inmediatamente todos los espacios. Le dio un beso en cada mejilla.

Hola, Marcos, ¿qué tal?

Hola, Marcos, nunca se acostumbraría a oír a la ex mujer llamarlo así, alguien que por tanto tiempo lo llamó de cariño, mi amor, menos todavía de esa forma distraída,

desinteresada, hola, Marcos, vivió años con la mujer, tuvieron hijos, una casa, una vida, y un día todo eso dejaba de existir y ella se convertía sólo en una persona perfumada que entraba por la puerta y decía como diría cualquiera, hola, Marcos.

Bien.

La ex mujer no atendió a la respuesta, examinaba con aire severo el desorden del departamento, cajas de mudanza esparcidas por la sala, los pocos muebles que él compró, una planta reseca que se había olvidado de regar.

¿Por qué no ordenas este despelote? Ya va a hacer más de un mes de que te cambiaste.

El respondió distraído, como si el consejo fuera para otra persona.

En cuanto tenga tiempo ordeno.

Uno siempre tiene tiempo, basta con querer.

Fingió que no oía. Ella sonrió y cambió de tema:

Y la Manú, ¿dónde está?

A la ex mujer le encantaba llamar a la niña de Manú. Habían discutido un montón de veces sobre eso, si le pusieron Manuela para qué llamarla de Manú, Lulú, Bilú, lo que fuera. Un nombre tan bonito para que la madre lo eche a perder llamando a la niña con un apodo.

La Manuela está en la pieza.

Manú, mi amor.

La niña salía corriendo hacia la madre, parecía que estaban separadas desde hacía siglos, separadas contra la voluntad. Y ahora, frente a sus ojos, el momento tan ansiado.

¿Cómo está, mi amor?, cuénteles a la mamá.

Y él se quedó ahí, en la puerta, viendo aquel reencuentro. Las dos abrazándose, la niña con un cariño, una pasión que nunca le había dedicado. Y él ahí, imaginándose un ogro o algo por el estilo.

¿Quieres tomar algo?

No, gracias, no tengo tiempo. Todavía tenemos que pasar a la casa de mi mamá.

Ah, claro, tu mamá. ¿Cómo está?

Bien, pero siempre con los problemas de artritis, tú sabes.

Sí, claro.

¿Y ustedes? ¿Qué tal el fin de semana? ¿Comió bien?

La niña en brazos de la madre, rodeándole el cuello, parecía cansada, como si hubiera pasado por una larga espera, una prueba.

Muy bien, Manuela dibujó al Felipe en varias versiones, después fuimos a comer una pizza. Hoy en la mañana jugamos en el computador.

La ex mujer puso a la niña en el suelo.

Anda, cariño, anda a buscar tu osito, vamos a la casa de la abuela.

La niña obedeció inmediatamente, observó él. En dos minutos estaba de vuelta con el osito rosado. La niña ahora de la mano de la madre, la mujer que conoció aún muy joven. Ambos se habían recibido en arquitectura. Ahora ella era decoradora, una decoradora famosa que cuidaba las mejores casas de la ciudad. Una mujer dinámica, siempre lo había sido, de buenas relaciones, siempre lo había sido. En cuanto a él, ni

dinámico ni de buenas relaciones. Nunca trabajó con arquitectura. La vida tomaba sus propios rumbos. Pero tenía una buena situación, no podía reclamar. Le pasó la mochila con las cosas de la niña.

Gracias. Bueno, nos vamos, tú entiendes, mi mamá está esperando.

Claro.

Manú, cariño, dele un beso a su papá.

La niña vaciló, pero ante la mirada insistente de la madre se acercó a ese hombre que se había agachado para que ella pudiera tocarle rápidamente la cara con su boca.

Deberías afeitarte – comentó la ex mujer al despedirse. Sí – dijo él automáticamente.

Y ahí se quedó, la puerta abierta, mientras ellas esperaban el ascensor. La madre y la hija, después se encontrarían con la abuela. Una especie de clan femenino, de linaje matriarcal, un vínculo que las unía y las hacía enigmáticas, inaccesibles, y él ahí, excluido para siempre de ese pacto. Recordó una foto que la ex mujer le había puesto en la mesa de la sala, las tres, abuela, madre e hija: la abuela, una señora muy elegante sentada en un sillón, la nieta en brazos y la hija agachada para quedar de la misma altura de las dos. Muchas veces se sentaba en la sala y miraba esa foto. La suegra, con quien tenía una relación cordial pero seca, la mujer, cada vez más una desconocida, y la hija, esa niña tan distante. Miró a la dos en el pasillo, ambas en silencio, tal vez esa espera de pocos minutos las incomodara. Él también se sentía incómodo. Y cuando llegó el ascensor, finalmente la despedida.

Chao, Marcos.

Chao – apenas oyó su propia voz.

Al cerrar la puerta, su sensación era de alivio y tristeza al mismo tiempo. Y era casi como si ellas dejaran de existir. La mujer, la hija y todo ese linaje de mujeres. Y entendió que había deseado todo el día ese instante, cuando la puerta se cerrara y se quedara finalmente solo en casa. Al fin el tiempo, el espacio necesario. La carta. El pensamiento que no se manifestaba, soterrado por la presencia de la hija y por todo lo que esa presencia significaba, pero que de alguna forma lo acompañaba, discreto, adormecido, pero insistente, todo el tiempo, desde temprano ese día.

Fue a la cocina, se sirvió una taza de café. Volvió a la sala, puso la taza en la mesa, tomó el sobre azul que dejó ahí esa mañana, un poco escondido bajo cuentas de luz y gas. El pensamiento que insistía. Esta vez abrió el sobre de inmediato, sin la vacilación del día anterior, aún en el ascensor. Algo lo impulsaba, impaciencia, curiosidad. Lo observó con atención, la misma letra, el mismo nombre, su dirección. En el remitente una inicial. Una lapicera. La letra arredondeada. El sobre abierto sin mucho cuidado, abierto con una especie de ansia. Esta vez notó que no había timbre de correos, detalle que no percibió por la mañana, aguantó la respiración unos instantes, la idea de que ella estuviera ahí, tan cerca. Fue hasta la ventana, como si esperara verla. Los pasos rápidos, cuidadosos. Tal vez una sombra que entraba al edificio, el pelo negro y largo, el vestido rojo, la espalda desnuda, el sobre entre los dedos. La dirección que imaginaba ser del amante pero que ahora era suya, el departamento donde estaba, las cajas de la mudanza todavía esparcidas por la sala, la vista de la ventana. ¿Será que en algún momento ella se apoyó allí, donde estaba él ahora, teniendo frente a sus ojos lo mismo que él veía, el mismo paisaje? ¿Habrá sido así?, pensó.



2.

El libro: Labranza Arcaica

Título original: Lavoura Arcaica

El autor: Raduan Nassar

El traductor: Juan Pablo Villalobos

ISBN: 978-84-16677-61-0

Año de publicación del original: 1989

Año de publicación: 2018

Editora del original: Companhia das Letras

Editora de la traducción: Editorial Sexto Piso, España

Número de páginas: 135

Síntesis: La primera novela de Nassar, sitúa la acción en una granja brasileña, en un universo rural y primigenio con marcados ecos del Antiguo Testamento (un vergel mancillado por el pecado), para narrarnos la huida y el regreso de André, suerte de hijo pródigo sediento de libertad que, harto de la austeridad, las penurias y las obligaciones, cansado de los trabajos y los días, y temeroso de la imponente y autoritaria figura del padre, decide abandonar la casa y las tierras de la familia, cargando con un oscuro e inconfesable secreto, y andar su propio camino a la intemperie. La prosa de Labranza arcaica es lírica y sensual, transida de una intensidad bíblica, y se regordea en las dolorosas disyuntivas entre cuerpo y alma, ley y transgresión, placer y obligación, familia e individuo para urdir un texto fascinante, profundo y poético.

Reseñas: “La intensidad de la escritura de Nassar y su fusión de lo erótico, lo místico y lo natural le han valido comparaciones con D.H. Lawrence, mientras que su prosa indómita y desenfrenada recuerda a su compatriota, Clarice Lispector” – *The Independent*.

“Seamos sinceros, ¿cuántas veces la revelación, traducción mediante, de un ‘genio olvidado’ está a la altura de las expectativas suscitadas? Bien, aquí tenemos a uno que lo consigue: el brasileño Raduan Nassar” – *The Times Literary Review*.

El autor: Raduan Nassar (Pindorama, 1935) es un escritor brasileño, hijo de inmigrantes libaneses. Estudió Derecho y Filosofía en la Universidad de São Paulo. Debutó en la literatura en 1975 con esta novela, *Labranza Arcaica*. En 1978 se publicó *Un Vaso de Cólera* y en 1997, *La Chica del Camino*. Nassar se hizo más conocido entre el público en general con las versiones cinematográficas de *Un Vaso de Cólera* (1999) y *Labranza Arcaica* (2001). En 2016 fue merecedor del Premio Camões, el mayor galardón de la lengua portuguesa.

El traductor: Juan Pablo Villalobos (Guadalajara, México, 1973) es escritor y colaborador de diversos medios. Ha publicado cinco novelas, la última de ellas, *No voy a pedirle a nadie que me crea*, resultó ganadora del Premio Herralde 2016.

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CAPÍTULO IX

(p. 39-45)

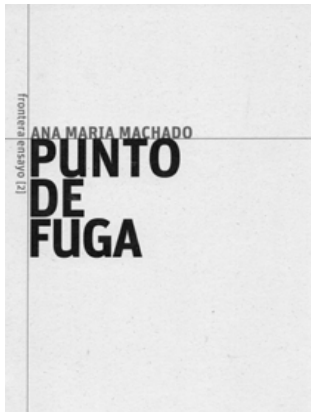
Qué rostros más saciados, nuestros rostros adolescentes alrededor de aquella mesa, nuestro padre en la cabecera la pared a sus espaldas, cada palabra suya ponderada, péndulo, y nada en aquellos tiempos nos distraía tanto como las campanadas graves que marcaban las horas, «El tiempo es el mayor tesoro del que un hombre puede disponer, aunque no se puede consumir, el tiempo es nuestro mejor alimento, a pesar de que no tiene medida, el tiempo es nuestro bien de mayor grandeza: no tiene comienzo, no tiene fin; es un fruto exótico que no puede ser repartido, aunque puede proveer igualmente a todo el mundo, omnipresente, el tiempo está en todo, existe tiempo, por ejemplo, en esta mesa antigua: existió primero una tierra propicia, existió después un árbol secular hecho de años sosegados, y existió finalmente una plancha nudosa y dura trabajada por las manos de un artesano día tras día; existe tiempo en las sillas donde nos sentamos, en el resto de los muebles de la familia, en las paredes de nuestra

casa, en el agua que bebemos, en la tierra que fecunda, en la semilla que germina, en los frutos que cosechamos, en el pan sobre la mesa, en la masa fértil de nuestros cuerpos, en la luz que nos ilumina, en las cosas que nos pasan por la cabeza, en el polvo que se disemina, así como en todo lo que nos rodea, rico no es el hombre que acumula y se pesa en el montón de monedas, ni tampoco aquel disoluto que se extiende, con manos y brazos, sobre vastas tierras, rico sólo es el hombre que aprendió, piadoso y humilde, a convivir con el tiempo, aproximándose a él con ternura, sin contrariar sus disposiciones, sin rebelarse contra su curso, sin molestar su corriente, atento a su flujo, brindándole antes con sabiduría para recibir sus favores y no su ira; el equilibrio de la vida depende esencialmente de este bien supremo, y quien sepa con acierto la cantidad de descanso o de espera que se debe poner en las cosas, no corre nunca el riesgo, al buscarlas, de toparse con lo que no es; por eso, nadie en nuestra casa ha de dar nunca un paso más largo que la pierna: dar un paso más largo que la pierna es lo mismo que suprimir el tiempo necesario de nuestras iniciativas; y nadie en nuestra casa ha de poner nunca el arado delante de los bueyes: poner el arado delante de los bueyes es lo mismo que retirar la cantidad de tiempo que un emprendimiento exige; y además, nadie en nuestra casa ha de empezar nunca la casa por el tejado: empezar la casa por el tejado es lo mismo que eliminar el tiempo que tomaría levantar los cimientes y las paredes de una casa; aquel que se extralimita en el uso del tiempo, precipitándose de manera osada, lleno de prisa y ansiedad, no será jamás recompensado, puesto que sólo la justa medida de tiempo da la justa naturaleza de las cosas, no bebiendo del vino quien vacía de un solo trago la copa llena; pero está a salvo de malograrse y libre de decepción quien alcanza este equilibrio, es en el manejo mágico de una balanza donde están guardadas todas las matemáticas de los sabios; en uno de los platillos de masa tosca, modelable; en el otro, la cantidad de tiempo, y hay que exigirse la perfección del cálculo, la mirada pronta, la intervención ágil al más sutil desnivel; son sabias las manos toscas del pescador que pesa su pesca de olor fuerte; firmes, controladas, arrancan de los dos platillos colgantes, a través del cálculo conciso, el reposo absoluto, la inmovilidad y su perfección; sólo llega a este raro resultado aquel que no deja que un temblor maligno se apodere de su mano, y tampoco que ese temblor suba corrompiendo la santa fuerza de los brazos, y que tampoco circule y se extienda por las áreas limpias del cuerpo, y que tampoco entumezca de pestilencias la cabeza, cubriendo los ojos de alboroto y muchas tinieblas; no es en la bigornia donde calzamos los estribos, ni es inflamable la fibra con la que tejemos las trenzas de nuestras riendas, ¿podéis decirme adónde va quien monta, porque es célere, un potro salvaje?, el mundo de las pasiones es el mundo del desequilibrio, contra él debemos extender el alambre de nuestras cercas, y con las púas muy afiladas tejer una red estrecha, y sobre esta malla enmarañar un seto vivo, cerrado y robusto que divida y proteja la luz calma y clara de nuestra casa, que cubra y esconda de nuestros ojos las tinieblas que arden del otro lado; y ninguno de nosotros ha de transgredir esta frontera, ninguno de nosotros ha de extender sobre ella ni siquiera la vista, ninguno de nosotros ha de caer jamás en el hervidero de esa caldera insana, donde una química frívola intenta disolver y recrear el tiempo; no se profana

impunemente al tiempo la sustancia que sólo él puede emplear en las transformaciones, no lanza contra él el desafío quien no reciba de vuelta el golpe implacable de su castigo; ay de aquel que juegue con fuego: tendrá las manos llenas de ceniza; ay de aquel que se deja arrastrar por el calor de tanta llama: tendrá el insomnio como estigma; ay de aquel que recuesta su espalda en las brasas de esta leña inservible: ha de purgar todos los días; ay de aquel que caiga y se abandone en la caída: ha de arder en carne viva; ay de aquel que quema su garganta con tanto grito: será escuchado por sus gemidos; ay de aquel que se anticipa al proceso de los cambios: tendrá las manos llenas de sangre; ay de aquel, más lascivo, que todo lo quiere ver y sentir de un modo intenso: tendrá las manos llenas de yeso, o de polvo de hueso, de un blanco frío, o quizá sepulcral, pero siempre la negación de tanta intensidad y tantos colores; acaba por no ver nada, de tanto que quiere ver; acaba por no sentir nada, de tanto que quiere sentir; acaba sólo por expiar, de tanto que quiere vivir; cuidense los apasionados, apartando de los ojos la polvareda rubia que les turba la vista, arrancando de sus oídos los escarabajos que provocan torbellinos confusos, expurgando del humor de las glándulas el muérdago venenoso y maldito; levantar una cerca o guarnecer simplemente el cuerpo, son éstos los artificios que debemos usar para impedir que las tinieblas de un lado invadan y contaminen la luz del otro, al final, ¿qué fuerza tiene el remolino que barre el suelo y gira locamente y ronda la casa como un fantasma, si no exponemos nuestros ojos a su polvo?, escapamos del peligro de las pasiones a través del recogimiento, pero nadie en su juicio ha de creer que debamos quedarnos de brazos cruzados, pues en tierras ociosas crece la hierba dañina, nadie en nuestra casa ha de cruzar los brazos mientras exista una pared que levantar, tampoco nadie en nuestra casa ha de cruzar los brazos mientras exista un hermano que socorrer; caprichoso como un niño, no debemos con todo retraernos en el trato con el tiempo, bastando que seamos humildes y dóciles ante su voluntad, absteniéndonos de actuar cuando exija de nosotros contemplación, y actuar sólo cuando exija de nosotros acción que el tiempo sabe ser bueno, el tiempo es largo, el tiempo es grande, el tiempo es generoso, el tiempo es hartó, es siempre abundante en sus entregas: amaina nuestras aflicciones, diluye la tensión de los preocupados, suspende el dolor a los torturados, trae la luz a los que viven en las tinieblas, el ánimo a los indiferentes, el aliento a los que se lamentan, la alegría a los hombres tristes, el consuelo a los desamparados, el alivio a los que se retuercen, la serenidad a los inquietos, el reposo a los que no tienen sosiego, la paz a los intranquilos, la humedad a las almas secas; satisface los apetitos moderados, sacia la sed de los sedientos, el hambre de los hambrientos, da la savia a quienes la necesitan, es capaz incluso de distraer a todos con sus juguetes; en todo él nos atiende, pero los dolores de nuestro apetito sólo llegarán al santo alivio siguiendo esta ley inexorable: la obediencia absoluta a la soberanía incontestable del tiempo, no oponiéndole jamás un gesto en este culto raro: es a través de la paciencia que nos purificamos, en aguas mansas es que debemos bañarnos, empapar nuestros cuerpos de instantes apaciguados, disfrutando religiosamente la embriaguez de la espera en el consumo sin descanso de ese fruto universal, inagotable, sorbiendo hasta el agotamiento el zumo contenido en cada baya, pues únicamente en ese ejercicio maduramos,

construyendo con disciplina nuestra propia inmortalidad, forjando, si somos sabios, un paraíso de suaves fantasías donde habría existido un reino penoso de expectativas y sus dolores, en la dulzura de la vejez está la sabiduría y, en esta mesa, en la silla vacía de la otra cabecera, está el ejemplo: nuestras raíces duermen en la memoria del abuelo, en el anciano que se alimentaba de agua y sal para proveernos de un verbo limpio, en el anciano cuyo aseo mineral del pensamiento no se perturbaba nunca con las convulsiones de la naturaleza; ninguno de nosotros ha de borrar de la memoria la hermosa senilidad de sus rasgos; ninguno de nosotros ha de borrar de la memoria su descarnada discreción al rumiar el tiempo en sus andanzas por la casa; ninguno de nosotros ha de borrar de la memoria sus delicados botines de cabritilla, el rechinar de los tablones en los pasillos, y menos aún sus pasos acompasados, serenos, que sólo se detenían cuando el abuelo, con dos dedos en el bolsillo del chaleco, sacaba suavemente el reloj hasta la palma de su mano, recostando, como quien eleva una plegaria, la mirada tranquila sobre las horas; cultivada con celo por nuestros ancestros, la paciencia ha de ser la primera ley de esta casa, la viga austera que sirve de soporte a nuestras adversidades y nuestras esperas, por eso digo que no hay lugar para la blasfemia en nuestra casa, ni por el día feliz que se niega a llegar, ni por el día funesto que de súbito se precipita, ni por las lluvias que tardan pero siempre llegan, ni por las sequías bravas que incendian nuestras cosechas; no habrá blasfemias por causa de otros reveses, si las crías no se logran, si la res se consume, si los huevos engorran, si los frutos se marchitan, si la tierra se retarda, si la semilla no germina, si las espigas no embuchan, si el racimo cae, si el maíz no grana, si los granos se llenan de gorgojos, si la labranza plaguea, si se hacen mustias las plantaciones, si se abaten sobre los campos las nubes voraces de langostas, si arrecia la tempestad devastadora sobre el trabajo de la familia; y cuando suceda que un soplo pestilente, traspasando nuestros límites tan bien vedados, llegue hasta las cercanías de la morada, insinuándose furtivamente por las rendijas de nuestras puertas y ventanas, alcanzando a un miembro desprevenido de la familia, ninguna mano en nuestra casa ha de cerrarse en puño contra el hermano acometido: y las miradas de cada uno, más dulces de lo que nunca fueron, serán para el hermano exasperado, y la mano benigna de cada uno será para este hermano que la necesita, y el olfato de cada uno será para respirar, de este hermano, su olor virulento, y la blandura del corazón de cada uno, para ungir su herida, y los labios para besar tiernamente su pelo trastornado, que el amor en la familia es la suprema forma de la paciencia; el padre y la madre, los padres y los hijos, el hermano y la hermana: en la unión de la familia está el perfeccionamiento de nuestros principios; y, circunstancialmente, entre posturas más urgentes, cada uno debe sentarse en un banco, plantar bien uno de los pies en el suelo, curvar la espina, hincar el codo del brazo en la rodilla, y, luego, a la altura del mentón, apoyar la cabeza en el dorso de la mano, y con ojos amenos observar el movimiento del sol y de las lluvias y de los vientos, y con los mismos ojos amenos observar la manipulación misteriosa de otras herramientas que el tiempo emplea hábilmente en sus transformaciones, sin cuestionar jamás sus designios insondables, sinuosos, como no se cuestionan en los puros llanos de las planicies los senderos tortuosos, bajo las pezuñas, trazados

en los pastizales por los rebaños: que el ganado siempre va al abrevadero, el ganado siempre va al pozo; han de ser éstos, en su fundamento, los modos de la familia: pilares bien trabados, paredes bien amarradas, un techo bien soportado; la paciencia es la virtud de las virtudes, no es sabio quien se desespera, es insensato quien no se somete». Y nuestro padre, en la cabecera, hizo la pausa de costumbre, corta, densa, para que midiéramos en silencio la majestad rústica de su porte: el pecho de madera bajo el algodón grueso y limpio, el cuello sólido que sostenía la cabeza grave y las manos de dorso largo que agarraban con firmeza la esquina de la mesa como si sujetaran la barra de un púlpito; y acercando después la bombilla que dejaba caer un lastre de cobre más intenso en su frente, y abriendo con los dedos macizos el viejo libro, donde él, con una caligrafía grande, angulosa, dura, tenía textos compilados, nuestro padre, al leer, no perdía nunca la solemnidad: «Érase una vez un hambriento».



3.

El libro: Punto de Fuga

Título original: Ponto de Fuga

El autor: Ana Maria Machado

Las traductoradoras: Beatriz Peña Trujillo y Silvia Castrillón

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Síntesis: Sugestivos ensayos de la autora en diferentes eventos. Los textos debaten cuestiones relevantes del mundo de las letras, particularmente de la literatura infantil. La autora nos conduce hacia una amplia discusión acerca del papel político de la cultura y discute la importancia de la cultura por las preguntas que plantea.

El autor: Ana Maria Machado escritora brasileña. Estudió pintura en el Museo de Arte Moderno de Río y en el MOMA de Nueva York. Después se formó en lenguas románicas, estudió con Roland Barthes en la École Pratiques des Hautes Études en París en donde recibió su doctorado. Ha sido invitada como profesora a numerosas universidades de Europa y Estados Unidos. Comenzó a escribir en 1969 y ha publicado más de 100 títulos para niños y adultos. Fue presidente de la Academia Brasileña de Letras. Tanto su obra para niños como de los adultos ha sido distinguida con numerosos premios:

Casa de las Américas, Fundación Nacional del Libro Infantil y Juvenil, FNLIJ, de Brasil, Machado de Assis, Hans Christian Andersen, Jabuti, Príncipe Claus, Barco de Vapor, SM, entre otros. El libro *Punto de Fuga* fue declarado “fuera de concurso” en la premiación de 2017 de la FNLIJ.

LIBROS INFANTILES COMO PUENTES ENTRE GENERACIONES

(p. 195-218)

En el principio es el verbo. En forma de poesía. Al son de una música. Canturreado en voz baja, por la madre o el padre, para el bebé que amorosamente acuna en los brazos, esa criatura a quien se pretende calmar y ayudar a sumergirse en el sueño. En ese momento, por lo general, el adulto repite los sonidos que oyó en su infancia y guardó en algún lugar recóndito de la memoria, en la época en que, a su tiempo, fue bebé y era puesto a dormir por sus padres y abuelos. Con el mismo gesto, planta la semilla de lo que ese cachorro arropado les cantará algún día a niños que aún no han nacido. Arrullos, nanas, melodías en tono menor las más universales formas de poesía popular infantil, primer contacto con la literatura oral que liga una generación a otra.

A continuación, a medida que el bebé se desarrolla y el niño va creciendo, los mayores le ofrecen nuevas formas de creación verbal: juegos, chistes, rimas, adivinanzas, trovas. E historias, muchas historias, en situaciones narrativas ritualizadas, desde el “érase una vez” hasta el “y vivieron felices para siempre”, desde el “hace mucho tiempo, en un reino muy lejano” hasta el “colorín colorado, este cuento se ha acabado”.

Historias que posibilitan la acción de mecanismos de identificación y proyección por parte del pequeño oyente, historias en las que pasan cosas, surgen conflictos, el personaje los enfrenta, los supera y, al final de un aumento de la tensión, llega al remanso de una solución satisfactoria, que calma y cumple un papel de construcción de sentido.

Tales poemas e historias sencillas acompañarán al individuo para siempre, guardados en la memoria. No sólo como un vasto legado cultural subyacente a lo que él construirá a lo largo de su vida, sino también como recuerdo específico del adulto que se los contó. De mi parte, puedo atestiguar que recuerdo perfectamente

quién me introdujo a diferentes zonas de ese territorio de los clásicos universales infantiles. Incluso porque fui la mayor entre muchos hermanos y oí ese repertorio repetidas veces. Distingo los arrullos cantados por mi padre o por mi madre. Cantar ciertas rondas es evocar directamente a algunas tías. Determinados chistes e historias folclóricas me traen de modo vivido y nítido la evocación de mi abuela. Es un repertorio tan claro que puedo identificar que mi madre me contaba cuentos de Grimm y de la *carochinha*¹ mientras que mi padre me presentó a Don Quijote, Gulliver, Robin Hood y Robinson Crusoe – ahí ya con el libro en las manos, mostrándome las ilustraciones y resumiendo las aventuras. Los puentes que construyeron entre las generaciones de ellos y la mía fueron tan sólidos y útiles, que después pude utilizarlos para cruzar nuevamente el río del tiempo, en dirección a las márgenes donde estaban mis hijos o mis nietos.

No obstante, no hay que pensar que, por hacer parte de la tradición folclórica, creación anónima y colectiva, o por estar constituido por elementos literarios aparentemente simples, ese primer contacto con la poesía y las historias tradicionales es limitado, no deja marcas o se contenta con permanecer sólo en la superficie, en medio de una colección de recuerdos afectivos y ordinarios. Por el contrario, como podemos atestiguar en todas las culturas, en las obras de tantos grandes autores, esas raíces se adentran en lo hondo, penetran con fuerza en la tradición nacional, buscan savia y alimento para futuros árboles frondosos, capaces de esparcir ampliamente su sombra y alimentar con sus frutos a muchas generaciones venideras.

Los elementos básicos de la forma poética – rima, aliteración, paralelismo – ya surgen en esas primeras manifestaciones y se solidifican, modélicos, muchas veces finos y sofisticados. En el mismo proceso, el contacto con los elementos fundamentales de la lógica narrativa también se consolida en esa práctica de contar y oír historias, como brújula y norte de las grandes navegaciones literarias que ofrecerá el futuro. La fuerza metafórica de muchas de esas imágenes establece ya desde el inicio de la vida cultural un universo onírico densamente poblado de imágenes que no signen la lógica directa y objetiva de lo cotidiano, pero que presentan, desde temprano, la posibilidad paralela de una dimensión más amplia para el espíritu humano. Un territorio no susceptible de reducirse tan sólo a su materialidad, sino que, por el contrario, exige vuelos más abstractos por espacios ilimitados, que más adelante serán habitados por la invención, por el arte, por la filosofía.

Como atestiguando la fuerza y la permanencia de esas formas orales de transmisión literaria entre generaciones, algunos de los más grandes nombres de la literatura contemporánea, en las más diversas culturas, insisten en retomar esa línea por medio de citas, parodias y homenajes, o dándoles la atención de su capacidad consciente de análisis y su espíritu crítico. Los ejemplos son incontables, pero nos quedaremos solamente con unos pocos. En las culturas de lengua hispánica, por ejemplo, el ensayo de Federico García Lorca sobre nanas infantiles es magistral, y nos ayuda a entender la profundidad de la contribución que la tradición oral le dio a su obra y el patrimonio cultural que adquirió en su infancia. También en la latinidad,

¹ *Carochinha* es la voz femenina tradicional portuguesa de los cuentos populares o de hadas anónimos (N. del E.).

un autor como Italo Calvino no sólo se dedicó a recoger y recontar las Fábulas italianas, sino que además exhibe de forma transparente en su obra la influencia de esos relatos populares escuchados en la infancia como base para la transfiguración luminosa que sufrieron en sus textos en contacto con la modernidad, mezclándose con elementos del inconsciente, con técnicas disruptivas y con la gran erudición del autor. Del inglés, basta con citar el párrafo inicial de una novela de uno de los más grandes nombres de la lengua en el siglo XX, radical innovador y fundador de la literatura moderna:

Allá en otros tiempos (y bien buenos tiempos que eran), había una vaquita (imu!) que iba por un caminito. Y esta vaquita que iba por un caminito se encontró con un niñín muy guapín, al cual le llamaban el nene de la casa...

Éste era el cuento que le contaba su padre. Su padre le miraba a través de un cristal: tenía la cara peluda.

Él era el nene de la casa. La vaquita venía por el caminito donde vivía Betty Byrne: Betty Byrne vendía renzas de azúcar al limón.²

Y James Joyce prosigue con su Retrato del artista adolescente con ecos de poemas infantiles.

En portugués, podemos recordar ejemplos sobre – salientes e influyentes, como la prosa de Mário de Andrade o la poesía de Manuel Bandeira, entre tantos otros, para confirmar cómo la creación brasileña del último siglo está atravesada por la influencia oralizante de esas primeras voces literarias oídas en la infancia.

Con ese acervo de prosa y poesía que constituye el primer contacto del niño con el arte de la palabra, un acervo venido oralmente desde la noche de los tiempos y pasado de una generación a otra por sucesivos puentes, poco a poco se va construyendo un legado. Una vez sedimentado, ese patrimonio pasa a exigir rupturas y reinenciones que a la vez lo contesten y lo reconfirmen – en nuevas voces y nuevos tonos, para que pueda ser retransmitido también de forma renovada, con el agregado de experiencias originales.

En las generaciones más recientes, que son más alfabetizadas que las anteriores y han vivido tiempos de escolarización más democratizada y universal, el vehículo para esas nuevas creaciones ya pasa a ser la palabra escrita – sobre todo a partir de una mayor diferenciación del mercado editorial, que incorporó nuevos recursos gráficos y avances tecnológicos con el fin de valorizar los atractivos visuales de ilustración y diagramación y crear libros para niños que también funcionen como juguetes seductores.

Es en ese marco, por lo tanto, que actualmente se puede hablar de un género específico, el de la literatura infantojuvenil, surgido a partir de las primeras obras que, en el siglo XIX, principalmente en Inglaterra, se propusieron conscientemente el proyecto de tender puentes literarios entre generaciones. Muchas veces de forma sencilla, pretendiendo apenas tender puentes entre seres humanos que se amaban,

2 Joyce, James. *Retrato del Artista Adolescente*. Madrid: Alianza, 2001. p. 7.

pero que eran de edades diferentes. Un proceso que combinó talento individual, intimidad con la tradición literaria y afecto personal.

Es el caso de Lewis Carroll cuando escribió las aventuras de Alicia para las niñas que lo acompañaron en un paseo en barca un día de verano. O de Beatrix Potter cuando les mandaba a los hijos de su gobernanta, en sucesivas cartas ilustradas con dibujos encantadores, las historias irónicas y divertidas que su imaginación presentaba como posibles de haber sido vividas por los pequeños animales que había a su alrededor. O de James Barrie cuando buscaba alcanzar directamente un público de todas las edades, conformado por familias que asistían a su pantomima sobre Peter Pan, sentadas en la oscuridad de una sala de espectáculos londinense. O de Robert Louis Stevenson, que al ver a su hijo entretenido dibujando un mapa, decidió crear para él una maravillosa historia de un tesoro escondido que un mapa podría revelar. O de Kenneth Grahame, cuando inventó para su hijo las peripecias de algunos pequeños animales silvestres que vivían a la orilla de un río, mientras soplaba el viento entre los sauces. O de A.A. Milne, que le contaba al pequeño Christopher Robin las cosas que pasaban con él mismo y sus juguetes cuando el Osito Puff, el Lechón y el conejito de peluche salían con los otros a pasear en el bosque. O de J.R.R. Tolkien, cuando ofreció a su hijo todo un mundo paralelo, perfectamente autocontenido y bien estructurado, a partir de lo que soñaba e iba poniendo en el papel, con El Hobbit. O de Gianni Rodari, quien, angustiado por el régimen fascista en su país, trataba de formular para los italianitos del interior las más diferentes historias que les aseguraran la soberanía de la imaginación humana ilimitada sobre la tentativa de dominación política que sufrían y que les quería imponer una sola forma de ver el mundo. O del brasileño Monteiro Lobato, que, desencantado con la violencia del mundo o demostrada en la salvajería de las guerras europeas del siglo XX, creó en sus libros un mundo imaginario donde los niños pudieran vivir, preservando la cultura clásica, en contacto con la naturaleza, respetando todas las formas de imaginación creadora y criticando el absurdo de la política adulta.

Los ejemplos son innumerables. No constituyen la única forma de escribir libros para niños. Pero, sin duda, son una de las más frecuentes entre las experiencias exitosas en ese campo, que muestran cómo la conjugación del talento literario y del dominio del arte de escribir con el deseo de levantar puentes entre individuos de generaciones diferentes puede tener excelentes resultados y generar obras maestras.

He hablado siempre de individuos, de afecto, de amor. Nunca estará de más enfatizar esos aspectos. E insisto en eso, porque no creo que las cosas pasen con la misma fuerza si se piensan y planean en términos de mercado, en una distorsión que parece ser muy corriente hoy en día. Al menos esa es la impresión que muchas veces tengo, cuando percibo la reacción de los medios y del público en general en el contacto con los escritores. Por eso, los invito a todos ahora a ir conmigo a examinar más de cerca ese equívoco en sus manifestaciones más comunes.

Un primer ejemplo. En un congreso de escritores en Estados Unidos, en los años 80, descubrí aterrada que existen cursos de escritura creativa que pretenden enseñar a construir esos puentes según técnicas claramente formuladas, que no parten de la necesidad íntima e inaplazable de que un adulto se dirija a un niño,

sino de recetas para apuntar a determinada franja de edad del mercado. Además de proponer temas, aconsejar sobre el lenguaje adecuado, sugerir situaciones recomendables y esquematizar el tipo de personajes deseable, las instrucciones se rebajaban a minucias como aconsejar cuántas palabras debe tener en promedio cada capítulo de un libro para niños de determinada edad.

Me acuerdo perfectamente de una participante del encuentro que acudió a mí con un asunto que le estaba dando dificultades: estaba en la mitad de una situación que todavía no había llegado a su punto de resolución, se le había ocurrido una nueva idea que le parecía interesante, pero si la incluyera en la historia, el libro pasaría a tener más páginas que las recomendadas para aquella franja de edad. Así, no le funcionaría. No sabía si cambiar de franja y extender el libro, o si abandonar la idea (tal vez la única verdaderamente original e interesante de su historia) y seguir con el mismo público objetivo. Cuando le dije que se olvidara de todo aquello y simplemente siguiera sus ideas, sin preocuparse por nada de eso, porque no tenía la menor importancia, me explicó que, si hacía eso, jamás podría publicar la obra, que en ese nuevo formato difícilmente encajaría en una colección. Dos editoras presentes confirmaron que eso realmente disminuiría mucho las oportunidades de publicación, porque el mercado no aceptaría que se rompieran las reglas de juego confiables a las que estaba acostumbrado. A medida que avanzaba la discusión, noté que me trataban con cierta condescendencia, pobrecita yo, esa escritora que ni siquiera sabe cómo funcionan estas cosas, nunca estudió escritura creativa, viene de un país que ni ha soñado con esta forma más moderna y racional de conquistar al público. No me llamaron ignorante, fueron delicados. Pero me dejaron de lado, como si yo no estuviera allí, porque aquellas cosas que yo decía no eran pertinentes para el debate. Pasaron simplemente a discutir entre sí cuestiones transcendentales como número de páginas, extensión de los capítulos y factores semejantes, que podrían garantizar mayor comunicabilidad con el público según un modelo hipotético formulado por no sé quién, pero seguramente no por escritores verdaderamente creativos.

Entendí entonces que entre esas dos visiones había un abismo profundo: la distancia que existe, de un lado, entre aquel a quien le parece que escribir para niños es comunicarse con un público objetivo y, del otro lado, aquel que escribe porque no tiene elección, necesita expresarse y quiere poder alcanzar lectores de edades diferentes – inclusive niños. Porque ama a algunos niños y quiere compartir con ellos lo que imagina. Y aquí vale la pena recordar la opinión de C.S. Lewis, cuando afirmaba que un buen libro infantil es aquel que, después de dar placer al ser leído a los diez años, podrá propiciar nuevos descubrimientos al ser releído a los cincuenta años.

Puedo dar otro ejemplo, de otro sector, el de los llagados lectores especializados en la prensa y en la academia. Otro síntoma frecuente de ese equívoco al que refiero está en ciertas preguntas que a veces me hacen los periodistas y los profesores. No sé si todos los escritores para niños tienen esa experiencia, pero para mí es frecuente, tal vez por circunstancias particulares de mi biografía: porque antes de volverme conocida como autora infantil fui editora de periódico y profesora universitaria, porque también escribo para adultos, porque hice mi tesis de posgrado en París bajo la orientación de Roland Barthes, tengo novelas y libros de ensayos publicados,

algunos de ellos premiados, y porque también he recibido premios por mis libros para adultos. Entonces, surge una cierta extrañeza: ¿Cómo es que una persona tan integrada al establishment adulto y tan sofisticada literariamente puede tener tanto éxito con los niños, al punto de vender millones de ejemplares? ¿Cuál es el secreto del éxito con el público infantil? ¿Cuál es la diferencia entre escribir para adultos y para niños? ¿Cuál es su fórmula? ¿Cuál es el mapa del tesoro? ¿Cómo logra reducir su lenguaje para que esté al alcance de los niños? ¿Será por la parte de niña que guarda dentro de sí? Como si yo no tuviera la edad que tengo y la madurez conseguida por todo lo que he vivido y todo lo que recuerdo, sino que fuera una especie de aparato con canales diferentes, que se cambian apretando un botón según la necesidad de una programación diversa.

El equívoco subyacente a esas preguntas es la idea de que son programaciones diversas. Y que quien se especializa en una no podría dominar bien la otra.

En otras palabras, la duda metida a la fuerza en esas preguntas es más o menos la siguiente: ¿cómo puede construir un puente frágil, ideal para que lo atravesara un niño, pero que no soporte a un adulto? ¿Es realmente posible hacer eso? Claro que es posible, pero creo que se caerá pronto, porque pronto cruzarán por él dos o tres niños al mismo tiempo, o un niño y un perro, y no va a aguantar el peso. No tiene la menor utilidad, es una pérdida de tiempo y esfuerzo y la negación de la ingeniería, en su inmediatismo irresponsable. Mejor dicho, creo que un puente que no aguante el peso de adultos no sirve para niños y no se les debería ofrecer a ellos, puede hasta ser peligroso. Un ingeniero que hace eso sería condenado. Pero parece que, en general, la sociedad muchas veces cree que un autor que hace eso debería ser un modelo de éxito. Y tal vez lo sea realmente, considerando lo que muchas veces se entiende por éxito. Pronto sería abandonado, pasaría de moda y le daría su lugar a nuevos hits, que alimentarían la industria de novedades.

En el intento de aclarar ese malentendido y explicar cómo pasan las cosas, procuro recurrir al lenguaje. Lo que me hace escribir para niños no está ligado a un objetivo mercadológico que transforme el acto de creación con palabras en una carrera en dirección hacia determinado objetivo. Claro que existe una consciencia de que hay un niño del otro lado, en el momento de llegada, pero para mí es siempre un niño específico o un grupo de niños que yo conozco y en los que pienso con amor, no una entidad abstracta caracterizada como “franja etaria” o “segmento de mercado”. Para esos niños que amo, quiero contar y expresar cosas serias y profundas, parte de mi búsqueda de sentido en la vida. Pero trato de hacer eso en un lenguaje que también sea capaz de incorporarlos – de traerlos al cuerpo. Cerca, con ternura. Al regazo, al abrazo, al abrigo. Para mí, el puente con un niño lector está hecho de afecto y lenguaje.

El afecto es obvio. El lenguaje exige una mirada más de cerca. Y tiene que ver con traducción.

En las situaciones cotidianas concretas, nadie se preocupa por el lenguaje cuando va a hablar con niños. Fluye naturalmente. Se parte del presupuesto de que el niño es capaz de entender y el adulto es capaz de expresarse. Si es necesario, unos apelan a recursos obvios de lenguaje afectivo (como el uso de diminutivos, que personalmente

procuro evitar), o del lenguaje coloquial (que es muy rico e interesante), o repiten lo que hizo la especie humana en su infancia e instintivamente procuran emplear términos concretos, imágenes visuales directas, percepciones poéticas sensoriales, repeticiones, refranes y estribillos que faciliten la memorización. Pero a nadie le pasa por la cabeza que un adulto no sea capaz de hablar con un niño. Porque es natural que pueda. Siempre ha podido, a lo largo de toda la historia humana. No hay nada sorprendente ni extraño en eso. Es un uso natural del lenguaje.

Lo que no es natural es el lenguaje que los adultos usan entre sí cuando quieren impresionarse mutuamente en discursos políticos, sermones religiosos, conquistas amorosas, etc. y construyen edificios enteros de palabras – muchas veces huecas, otras veces falsas, otras veces bellas – para convencer y dominar al otro. Como, sin embargo, los adultos oyentes o lectores lo saben, han aceptado esos artificios como un juego, y artifice, artesano y artista de las palabras se mueven en ese terreno de construcción consciente y elaborada. Cualquier adulto acostumbrado a la convivencia social ha aprendido a situarse en ese mar de lenguaje, a filtrarlo de acuerdo con la situación y a tomar con beneficio de inventario lo que dicen la publicidad, la oratoria, la retórica de los discursos, la poesía épica o amorosa y todo lo demás. Distingue con facilidad lo que es comunicación directa de lo que es artificio verbal, sea como recurso artesanal en titulares de prensa o mensajes publicitarios, sea como recurso artístico en la literatura.

Los niños no saben eso y rechazan ese lenguaje adulto artificial, no sienten ganas de pasar por ese puente que no les atrae. Muchas veces hasta los asusta y se presenta como un obstáculo que superar, no como un camino abierto o un puente invitador. Así, para ellos, el juego de construcción artificial inherente a todo arte de la escritura, como construcción cultural, tiene que enfrentar otra dificultad, porque no puede parecer artificial. El puente tiene que ser sólido, pero no puede ser amenazador. Cada escritor para niños resuelve ese asunto según su propia sensibilidad y capacidad, según su talento y sus lecturas, su historia y su tradición. Pero hasta que no lo resuelve, no llega muy lejos, porque pierde la sustentación.

Hablé de traducción porque creo que los procesos tienen semejanzas. Como señala George Steiner, sólo es viable hacer traducción cuando se parte de la premisa de que eso es posible, de que existe una traductibilidad entre las dos lenguas. En ese sentido, como en el caso de los traductores, los mejores escritores para niños deberían ser bilingües, conocer muy bien la lengua de la cual se traduce y la lengua a la cual se vierte. Así, serán capaces de construir puentes firmes, sólidamente sujetos a las dos orillas.

Más incluso que los escritores que sólo escriben para adultos, los que escriben para niños están condenados a sufrir la enfermedad básica del escritor, de la que habló Roland Barthes: tienen que ser capaces de ver el lenguaje con un tipo especial de sensibilidad hacia el uso del idioma. Pero no sólo el lenguaje en sentido reducido. Hay que saber verlo de una forma más amplia y abarcadora, que englobe su universo cultural. Wittgenstein decía que cada lengua en particular está habitada por una mitología particular, un complejo no circunscrito de valores semánticos y culturales y de reconocimiento internalizados. Lo mismo ocurre con la lengua adulta

y-la lengua infantil. Traducir la una a la otra sólo funciona cuando esos universos se reconocen y se respetan.

Una buena traducción es un medio de transporte, lleva de una cultura a otra, transfiere una energía vital del original y la restaura con la fuerza integral de su presencia en la otra orilla. Existen riesgos de pérdida y de disminución, hay amenazas de traición y distorsión en ese proceso, eso es claro. Pero, cuando es exitoso, se constituye en un puente real entre seres humanos.

Lo mismo puede ocurrir en los escritos para las nuevas generaciones cuando no se limitan a ser sólo libros para niños y son literatura infantil. En ese caso, como literatura, lo que más importa es el sustantivo, no el adjetivo. Es el lenguaje, no el público objetivo. Es el arte de las palabras. Un arte hecho de sutileza y precisión. Un arte exacto – para emplear la expresión que usa el crítico George Steiner para referirse a la traducción. A propósito, algunas observaciones de Steiner sobre traducción son especialmente iluminadoras para reflexionar sobre la literatura para niños como puente entre generaciones. Él afirma que

... la traducción ofrece nuevas vidas o vidas adicionales al original, aflojando las ligaduras que, por definición, atan a las más insignes creaciones poéticas al lugar y al momento en que fueron compuestas. La traducción es la donación del ser a través del espacio y del tiempo, el contraenunciado de Babel sin el cual la cultura, los monumentos intelectuales” y el arte de la oratoria subsistirían, si esto fuera posible, dentro de un asilamiento monádico.³

No obstante, hay una aparente paradoja en ese proceso, en el transporte por medio de ese puente. La buena traducción, para ser fiel, no puede ser literal, pero tiene que hacer que la respuesta al texto sea responsable, tanto técnica como éticamente, según una economía moral, como señala Steiner.

Y es sobre esa observación que me gustaría concluir esta reflexión, incluso para dejar más claro por qué busqué hacer esa comparación entre traducir y escribir para niños. Creo que ese paralelo, de alguna forma, restaura el afecto en esas cuestiones que he tratado más a la luz del lenguaje. Es que, en ese campo, para ser bueno, no se puede ser impositivo. No vale escribir pensando en un niño si todo lo que el adulto desea es mostrarle que él es más sabio, más experimentado y que puede darle consejos y lecciones como tantos ejemplos de libros infantiles insistieron en hacer, ya sea con moralejas, ya sea con preocupaciones sobre lo políticamente correcto, didácticas o de proselitismo.

Para un autor, expresarse de tal forma que logre llegarle a un niño implica dejar abierto y libre un espacio para que éste también se pueda manifestar y responder, expresándose libremente al recibir ese texto y creando también, a su turno, un nuevo texto, por medio de su lectura y su imaginación. El objetivo no puede ser un público de determinada edad, pero sí la garantía del proceso, la creación de condiciones para un intercambio significativo, dice Steiner:

³ Steiner, George. *Pasión Intacta*. Madrid: Siruela/Norma, 1997. p. 232.

Las flechas del significado, del beneficio cultural y psicológico deben moverse en ambas direcciones y de forma recíproca. Idealmente, debe producirse un intercambio de energía sin pérdida de energía. [...] El orden, la coherencia y la energía potencial se encuentran a resguardo en ambos extremos del ciclo: la fuente y el receptor.

Ese proceso de reciprocidad – como lo denomina Steiner – va a lo profundo. Cuando el niño lee literatura, “le otorga al original lo que ya estaba allá”, como afirma Steiner de una traducción excelente. Un texto que permita una lectura tal sólo logra hacerlo porque almacena en sí mismo una buena cantidad de elementos de connotación, de ambigüedad, de subtonos, alusiones, insinuaciones, latencias de significación, afinidades o contrastes con otros textos y culturas – en resumen, una riqueza literaria densa y espesa, que no era visible y ostensiva, pero que ya estaba “allí”, presente desde el principio.

“Recrear lo que fue creado antes” – dice Goethe – “de modo que la creación no se vista con la armadura de la rigidez: ese es el propósito de la acción eterna de vivir”.

“Y recrearla de modo que su presencia se torne real, que llene lo que ya está completo”, agrega Steiner sobre el propósito de la traducción responsable. Y, agregamos, también el de la literatura para niños.

Los libros infantiles pueden ser, sí, un puente entre generaciones. Pero no hay razón para construir puentes que sólo puedan cruzarse en un sentido. Y si queremos que los libros sean realmente puentes y no rodaderos o toboganes, si pretendemos tener reciprocidad y aceptamos que la lectura de los niños también pueda interferir creativamente en textos escritos por adultos, tenemos que insistir para que esos textos hagan parte de la literatura como un todo. Deberán, en ese caso, pertenecer a un universo donde el arte de las palabras no sea gobernado por preocupaciones psicológicas, pedagógicas o mercadológicas, pero que esté sujeto a las mismas exigencias y criterios rígidos de juicio y análisis crítico de cualquier otra gran creación del espíritu humano que escoja usar las palabras como su medio de expresión. Es arriesgado y difícil, pero es honesto. El joven lector tiene derecho a hacer también su travesía de vuelta, teniendo la certeza de estar apropiándose de una parte del mundo de la literatura que le toca, de un legado cultural. No es ético, en vez de eso, entregarle un artículo comercial, desechable, sólo para el mercado, algo que ningún lector maduro consideraría digno de una relectura.

Únicamente así los libros para niños pueden ser puentes ser ricos y significativos entre las generaciones. No sólo entre generaciones contemporáneas. Sino que pueden también lograr dar vida a antepasados de todos los rincones del mundo y ayudar a plantar las semillas de personas que un día vendrán, pero que aún no han nacido.



4.

El libro: El Tablado – Antología de Teatro Infantil

El autor: María Clara Machado

Las traductoras: María Julieta Drummond de Andrade y Marcia Cabrera

Ilustrador: John Varón

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Síntesis: El teatro de María Clara Machado tiene la virtud de su universalidad, aunque a primera vista se asimilen como representaciones de historias sencillas, arquetípicas de la oralidad e imaginarios comunes, es justamente el arquetipo el medio que le permite alcanzar su eficacia para llegar al disfrute de todo público y poner en escena situaciones de innegable contenido político y crítico del mundo moderno, con el humor y el juego propio de la infancia. Su mayor encanto es lograr el punto práctico de color y humor que es propio del imaginario infantil y llevarlo a la representación escénica.

El autor: María Clara Machado (1921-2001) Reconocida creadora brasileña de teatro infantil, con una amplia producción como dramaturga y directora de sus propias piezas, en el grupo y espacio teatral que fundó y que a la fecha aún se mantiene vigente en la ciudad de Rio de Janeiro.

Las traductoras: María Julieta Drummond de Andrade (1928-1987), distinguida escritora brasileña que escribió novelas, crónicas, cuentos y libros infantiles. Vivió muchos años

en Argentina, en los cuales trabajó como profesora de literatura en la Universidad de Buenos Aires y traduciendo del portugués al español obras de autores como Cecilia Meireles, Mário de Andrade, Augusto dos Anjos y las obras de teatro infantil de Maria Clara Machado. Enseñó portugués y difundió la cultura brasileña en Buenos Aires, durante más de 30 años, en el Centro de Estudos Brasileiros de Buenos Aires, institución que también dirigió.

Marcia Cabrera (1980) es cantante, performer, actriz, compositora, traductora, directora escénica y poeta. Recientemente tradujo, junto con Cecilia Palmeiro y Damain Kraus, el último libro de la psicoanalista y crítica de arte Suely Rolnik.

ESCENARIO ÚNICO

(p. 202-211)

Un bosque
ESCENA I

Se ven cinco brujitas en fila y la Bruja-Instructora, de espaldas. Todas están montadas en escobas. La que está de espaldas, que es la Bruja-Jefe o Bruja-Instructora, toca un pito y las brujitas dan vuelta a la derecha.

La Bruja-Instructora toca el pito otra vez. Las brujitas empiezan a cabalgar alrededor del escenario, siempre montadas en sus escobas. La Bruja-Instructora vuelve a tocar el pito: se detienen. La última brujita de la fila es diferente de las otras. Bajo la ropa negra de bruja, enmarcada por un pelo extrañamente rubio (las otras lo tienen negro y violeta, desgredado) surge una carita angelical: es la brujita Angelita. Vuela con gran placer en su escoba y monta con elegancia, mientras sus hermanas lo hacen como verdaderas brujas, a carcajadas y con movimientos torpes.

BRUJA-JEFE: ¡Muy bien! ¡Muy bien! Casi todas... Brujita Angelita, eres un fracaso. Tu risa no es una risa de bruja y mucho menos de hechicera. Así no pasarás de grado. Ahora vamos a practicar el segundo tema: carcajada de bruja.

La instructora toca el pito nuevamente. Todas se echan a reír a carcajadas con exageración. Brujita Angelita apenas sonríe.

BRUJA-JEFE: Una de cada vez. (Toca el pito. Tuerta, Asquerosa y sus hermanas, todas queriendo demostrar gran maestría, dan carcajadas hasta que llega el turno de Brujita Angelita, que se ríe... sin ninguna maldad.)

BRUJA-JEFE: Brujita Angelita, eres la única que no estuvo bien. Aprende a dar carcajadas como tus hermanas. Brujita Tuerta, riete de nuevo. (Brujita Tuerta se ríe de manera horriblemente fea.)

BRUJA-JEFE: Muy bien. Muy bien. Brujita Tuerta sigue siendo la primera de la clase. Pasemos al tercer tema: hechizos antiguos y modernos. Tomen sus ollas y el libro de recetas y vamos a ver si ya aprendieron las principales brujerías.

(Las cinco brujitas salen y regresan con palos y enormes ollas donde mezclan grandes hojas en un mismo ritmo agitado. Solo Brujita Angelita pica su verdura despacito, completamente fuera de ritmo. Al advertirlo, la Brujo-Jefe toca el pito con nerviosidad. El ritmo cesa. Todas miran a Brujita Angelita que continúa picando calmamente.)

BRUJA-JEFE: Brujita Angelita, realmente vas muy mal. Si continúas así, tendremos que mandarte presa a la Torre de Alquitrán. ¿Quieres ir allá...?

BRUJITA ANGELITA: ¡No!

BRUJA-JEFE: Entonces trata de aprender bien las brujerías para ser una bruja mala de verdad.

(Se oye una corneta. Todas escuchan un momento. Otra corneta más cerca.)

TODAS: ¡El brujo!

BRUJA-JEFE: (Emocionada.) ¡Brujitas, atención! Nuestro Brujo llega para el examen. Les pido a todas que no me avergüencen. Es necesario mostrar a Su Soberana Maldad que ustedes están preparadas. Y ya saben que la que salga primera ganará como premio una escobita a chorro.

TODAS: ¡Oh!

(Empiezan a charlar y a comentar la novedad, mientras repasan los temas de examen. Algunas arreglan los sombreros, lustran las escobitas, limpian el lugar. Sólo Brujita Angelita, en un rincón, ajena a todo, suspira.)

BRUJA-JEFE: (Advirtiendo que el brujo se aproxima.) ¡Silencio!

(Las brujitas se ponen en fila. El Brujo entró solemnemente con el Vice-Brujo, que le tiene la cola del traje y en silencio la acomoda en medio del escenario. El Brujo espera y el Vice-Brujo sale de escena volviendo en seguida con una silla-trono que coloca también en medio del escenario. El Brujo se instala en ella con aires de sacerdote supremo. Después estornuda violentamente, lo que es aplaudido por las brujitas.)

BRUJA-JEFE: ¿Podemos comenzar, Vuestra Maldad?

(El Brujo hace señas al Vice-Brujo, que se acerca a él. El Brujo le dice algo al oído. El Vice le da a la Bruja-Jefe un signo de asentimiento.)

BRUJA-JEFE: Señor Brujo Belzebú Tercero, único señor de este bosque, rey de todas las hechiceras, emperador de las maldades... emperador de las maldades... emperador de las maldades... (Parece que la bruja-jefe se ha olvidado el resto.)

(Todos quedan medio preocupados con el olvido de la Bruja-Jefe. El vice le habla rápidamente al oído.)

BRUJA-JEFE: (Con mayor énfasis.) Dictador de los brujos, guardián de los maleficios, Tarzán de las selvas oscuras: las chicas están listas para el examen final y esperan la aprobación suprema de Vuestra Maldad para merecer la escoba a chorro y el diploma de brujas hechiceras de primera clase, y desean también...

BRUJO: Basta, Bruja-Instructora. (Se levanta.) ¡Queridas brujitas reclutas! Tomo este examen con gran alegría. El bosque anda lleno de hadas, lleno de risas, lleno de chicos, y es necesario terminar con todo esto. Hacen falta hechicerías en este mundo. Por todas partes sólo se ven brujas falsificadas. Gente que se finge mala y que no lo es. Esto no puede seguir así. Es preciso acabar urgentemente con los paseos alegres por el bosque. Ustedes van a encargarse de limpiar el pasto y el bosque, de expulsar los leñadores, de raptar niños, de hacer callar a los pajaritos, de arrancar los árboles recién plantados, de ensuciar el agua de las fuentes, de adormecer a los muchachos, de engañar a las hadas – sobre todo de engañar a las hadas –, de envenenar los ríos, de quemar los pastos, de maltratar las plantas, de provocar inundaciones, de atraer rayos y truenos, de destruir las brisas, de formar vendavales... El bosque tiene que ser nuestro otra vez, y yo cuento con ustedes... (El Brujo dice todo con tanto énfasis que se cae cansado en el trono. Las brujitas aplauden, menos Brujita Angelita.)

BRUJO: Vamos a empezar el examen. Ven tú. (El Brujo señala a Tuerta.)

BRUJO: Saca una bolilla.

(Tuerta mete la mano en una olla que el Vice-Brujo recibe de la Bruja-Instructora; saca una bolilla, la entrega a la Bruja-Jefe, quien la pasa al vice, y éste al Brujo. El Brujo la observa y se la pasa al Vice, que vuelve a dársela a la Bruja-Jefe.)

BRUJA-JEFE: Tema quinto: hacer dormir a la gente.

(Bruja Tuerta ejecuta con mucha desenvoltura una especie de danza, diciendo palabras en brujés, que es la lengua de las brujas. El ruido se acompaña con un ritmo.)

BRUJO: Muy bien. Ahora algunas preguntas. ¿Quién descubrió la receta del remedio para hacer dormir?

BRUJITA TUERTA: Usted, señor.

BRUJO: Muy bien. ¿Quién fue el primer brujo del mundo en cruzar el bosque con una escoba a chorro?

BRUJITA TUERTA: Usted, señor.

BRUJO: ¡Muy bien! Esta brujita es vivísima.

BRUJA-JEFE: Es la primera del grado, Vuestra Maldad.

BRUJO: Ya se ve. Ahora la última pregunta: ¿quién fue el primer brujo que comió alelas de hada crudas, con jugo de palmera verde?

BRUJITA TUERTA: Usted, señor.

BRUJO: ¿Quién es el único protector y amigo de todas las maldades?

BRUJITA TUERTA: Usted, señor.

BRUJO: ¡Muy bien! ¡Muy, muy bien! Y una pregunta todavía para ver si eres realmente lista. ¿Cuáles son las dos mejores cosas del mundo?

BRUJITA TUERTA: Hacer maldades y obedecer a Vuestra Maldad.

BRUJO: ¡Espléndido! ¡Colosal! ¡Qué inteligente! Con brujitas como tú la maldad está salvada en el mundo... Vamos a otra. Tú. (El brujo apunta a Brujita Angelita, que se acerca muy avergonzada.)

BRUJO: ¡Por qué es tan distinto el pelo de esta bruja!

BRUJA-JEFE: Nació así, Vuestra Maldad.

BRUJO: Esto es muy raro. Es necesario teñirlo con jugo de alas de cuervo cansado.

BRUJA-JEFE: (Anotando.) Sí, Vuestra Maldad.

BRUJO: Saca una bolilla.

(Para extraer la bolilla, la Bruja Tuerta ejecuta el mismo procedimiento que utilizó anteriormente.)

BRUJA-JEFE: Tema segundo: Cabalgata en escoba.

BRUJITA ANGELITA: ¡Qué suerte! ¡Qué suerte! ¡Qué suerte!

y

BRUJO: ¿Por qué tan alegre?

BRUJA-JEFE: Porque lo único que le gusta hacer es cabalgar en escoba.

(Brujita Angelita, montada en su escoba, corre por el escenario dando grititos de placer.)

BRUJO: (Levantándose.) ¿Qué manera es esta de cabalgar una escoba? Muéstrale cómo se hace, bruja instructora.

(Lo Bruja-Jefe hace una demostración con gritos muy feos.)

BRUJO: Muy bien, Bruja Instructora. Todavía estás en forma, ¿eh, vieja? (El brujo le da unos golpecitos en la espalda a la Bruja-Instructora.)

BRUJO: (A Brujita Angelita.) Ven aquí, brujita. Déjame examinarte de cerca.

(El Brujo baja del trono acompañado por el Vice, que le tiene la cola del traje, y da vuelta alrededor de la brujita, que se mantiene inmóvil.)

BRUJO: ¡Qué raro! ¡Qué caso tan raro!... esta brujita es rarísima... Haz como yo: ¡vamos!

(El Brujo hace algunos movimientos. Brujita Angelita trata de imitarlo, pero sin el menor éxito.)

BRUJO: ¡Horrible! Vamos a ver con las preguntas. Tal vez ella se pueda salvar con las preguntas. ¿Quién descubrió América?

BRUJITA ANGELITA: Cristóbal Colón.

TODAS: ¡Oh!

BRUJO: (Muy ofendido.) ¿Entonces no sabes que antes que ese genovés desembarcara acá, YO, el brujo Belzebú, el Malo, ya vivía en estos bosques?

BRUJITA ANGELITA: ¡Ay... es verdad!... Pero yo pensaba que

BRUJO: (Interrumpiéndola.) ¿Cuál es la mejor cosa del mundo?

BRUJITA ANGELITA: ¡Debe ser andar en escoba a chorro, allá arriba, en el cielo, cerca de los árboles más altos...!

(Las otras brujitas, afligidos, hacen seña de que saben con los dedos.)

TODAS: ¡Oh!

BRUJO: ¿Sabes cuál es el premio para quien no apruebe los exámenes?

BRUJITA ANGELITA: Sí, señor...

BRUJO: ¿Cuál es?

BRUJITA ANGELITA: Quedar encerrada en la Torre de Alquitrán y no poder jamás volar en la escoba a chorro.

BRUJO: Por lo menos has dado con una respuesta acertada. Y ahora la última pregunta: ¿Cómo se preparan brujerías para hacer dormir a cazadores y leñadores?

BRUJITA ANGELITA: (Trotando de recordar.) Se ponen en una olla tres hojas de cactus, dos litros de agua de rosas...

TODAS: ¿Agua de rosas?

BRUJITA ANGELITA: De rosas no. De limón podrido. Después, una pizca de pimienta molida, media docena de espinillos y un poco jugo de violetas.

BRUJO: ¡Jugo de violetas! Eres la peor alumna que he tenido. Hoy en la noche tendrás tu última oportunidad. Si no haces nada, serás encerrada en la Torre de Alquitrán. Y nunca más saldrás. Todas las brujas tendrán que hacer sus primeras maldades esta noche.

(Todos aplauden, menos Brujita Angelita.)

BRUJA-JEFE: Permiso, Vuestra Maldad, pero faltan algunas para dar examen.

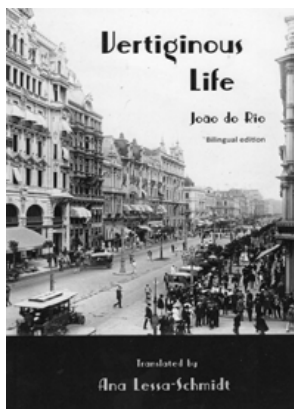
BRUJO: A las otras las examinaré mañana. Me quedé de mal humor. Ahora tengo que ir a comer a la casa de un ogro amigo mío... Traten de ser bastante malas si quieren recibir la escoba a chorro. Y tú, Brujita Angelita, si hasta media noche no haces una maldad, serás encerrada para siempre en la Torre de Alquitrán... Y no es jugo de violetas, ¿sabes? Es jugo de higuera infernal...

(El Brujo monta en su escoba, que el Vice ha ido a buscar, y sale acompañado por las brujitas y por la Bruja-Instructora. Todas dan vueltas cantando. El Vice va enancado con el Brujo, siempre sujetándole la cola.)

CANTO DE LAS BRUJITAS: Zum, zum, zum, Somos bien malditas... Zum, zum, zum, Somos las brujitas... Zum, zum, zum, En las escobitas...

(Se oscurece la escena mientras se retira la silla. No es necesario que caiga el telón.)

ENGLISH



5.

The book: Vertiginous Life

Author: João do Rio

Translator: Ana Lessa-Schmidt

Original title: Vida Vertiginosa

ISBN: 978-09-98273-08-2

Year of publication: 2017

Publisher: New London Librarium

Number of pages: 465

Synopsis: *Vertiginous Life* is a collection of articles and chronicles of urban transformation originally published between 1905 and 1911, presented here for the first time in the English Language. João do Rio aimed his critical eye at a great city and society in transformation, forward-looking.

The author: João do Rio (1881-1921) was a chronicler, translator, and literary journalist before the term existed, before anyone saw that journalism could be raised to the level of art by infusing it with intellectual insight and sociological analysis.

The translator: Ana Lessa-Schmidt, Ph.D. is a linguist and translator. She researches and lectures on Brazilian Cultural studies in the areas of post-conflict, visual culture (cinema and photography), literature, music, the arts in general, and the Portuguese language. Her translation of Machado de Assis's short story "Trio in A Minor" appears in *Ex-Cathedra: Stories by Machado de Assis* – bilingual edition.

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THE LAST MULE

(p. 435-445)

It was the last mule-drawn tram, a suddenly aged little streetcar. The laggard coachman rested the reins; the receiver had an air of the end of a theater play, and the inspector, with intimacy, chatted.

"So, do we stop?"

"It's the last trip."

We were on a sad and empty street. We had come from the mind-bending motion of hundreds of workers who, on another street, under huge lights, planted the gutters of the electric rail, and we could see, at the end of the quiet street, hundreds of workers striking the tracks with satanic fury.

I alighted a bit saddened. I looked at the mule with obvious melancholy and it seemed to me that this mule, which finished the last cycle mule traction, was also sad and melancholic.

Amongst domesticated animals, the mule is the one which suffers the most ingratitude from man. One could well say that we made it outcast amongst animals. As it had the pleasure of being humble and serving, the poets never sang about it, the fabulists refer to it with clear contempt, and each person decided to find in it the comparison to a bad quality.

"He's stubborn as a mule" people say of a stupid fellow: "What an ass!". Each animal is a symbol, and the mule became the symbol of a lack of intelligence. But nobody wanted to see that in the mule that which seems to be insufficient of thought is candor of the soul, and no one has the courage to notice the innocence of its dedication.

I have certain sympathy for this strange sufferer. There are men infinitely more stupid than the mule who nevertheless are even rich and have a box at Teatro

Lyrico¹. There are animals far less endowed with intelligence and nevertheless gained fame. The fox is very sly, whilst in truth it's an unthinking fury; the ox is philosophical; the horse only lacks speech, when in fact it falls in with the mule, and the infinite number of home inutilities, from cats and lap-dogs to caged birds, get men's goofy admiration, when this admiration should lean toward the simple and painful case of the mule.

The mule is good, so good that legend puts it in the stables where people assume was born a great dreamer they call Jesus. The mule is resigned. It comes through history providing services without resting and getting whipped as if it's an obligation. It isn't one, it's all. I know the wagon mules, with bloody skin, sweating, pulling violent weights, and I know the mule trains in the boondocks; and the streetcar mules skinny and famished. They are fatally faithful and resigned. They don't ask them if they've eaten, slept, if they are well. They work until they burst, and even their death is a reason for disdain. To demonstrate that nothing was going on during a conflict, raging fellows would say to curious people:

"What are you looking at? A mule has died."

The mule is affectionate and familial. Go see them in their limited hours of rest. They lie down and roll around in the dust or grass, and they kiss each other, they kiss chastely, for no other reason. Sometimes they even play.

The mule is sad. Its braying is the most distressing cry of pain of all living beings; its neighing is gurgling of sobs. The mule is intelligent. I've examined the mules of public cleaning carts in the dead of night in deserted streets. The sweeper goes with shovel and broom. He's a mule of resignation. Then comes the mule pulling cart. It's the sweeper for its intelligence. They are two good friends. They know each other. They talk, and when the first says to the second:

"Whoa, stop!"

Soon the mule stops. In solidarity in their humble work, the two poor things eat together.

This is a daily example. History cites the mule of the wise Ammonius² in Alexandria, which attending his lessons preferred to hear a poem than eat a bunch of grass.

The mule is peaceful. If there were only mules there would have never been wars. And to show the limit of this sweet animal's patience, it must be emphasized that almost all of them like to listen to music. An anonymous abbot of the 7th Century, writing about humans and animals in a book that proved that animals have a soul, says that it was the animals that taught mankind all that they developed later. The mule taught continuous and resigned work, the work of the poor, the wretched. All animals can work, but they work proud and fiery, like the horses, or with the abbatial

1 *Theatro Lyrico* or *Teatro Lírico* (1871-1934), the main opera house in Rio de Janeiro at the time, was the name given to Teatro Dom Pedro II, after independence.

2 *Ammonius Grammaticus* (c.319-396 AD), was a Greek grammar professor in Alexandria at the close of the 4th Century, who allegedly rode his donkey to his lectures where it would sit attentively listening to its master's teachings. Socrates (c.380-439) was one of his pupils.

glory of the bulls. The mule is in the dust, way below, enduring and suffering. Hence, when one wants to show the immense extent of the efforts of a wretch, he says:

“He works like a mule!”

Poor painful quadruped! He has no loves, no outraged instincts, no one who loves him! When he falls exhausted, to get him up, they beat him; when he cannot pull, it's punches on the chin that convince him. In fact, man domesticated a number of animals to be their servant. These animals are mostly refined parasites, with the ambiguous soul of all parasites, with skin, fur, or feathers. The highly useful make a lot of trouble. Only the mule doesn't. And no one thinks of him!

Here, among us, since colonial Brazil, the mule has been the incomparable helper of the city's formation and later its animator. The mule reminds us of Rio before the Paraguay River, Rio of the second empire, Rio of the beginning of the Republic. Historically, he brought urban points together, leading the first public vehicles. They harnessed him to the gondola³, tied him to the streetcar. And he was the soul of the streetcar for over fifty years, strangely multiplying on all lines, forming families, because the mules were known – the ones of the Botanical Garden, the sluggish mules of São Cristovão, the lean and hungry mules of the Carris.⁴

Progress came and took them out of the first. But it was a prudent progress, at a time when we were prudent. The Germans came, the American robbers came, and in the cloud of dust of so many open and cut off streets, electric cars zoomed around killing people in piles, killing the fundamental influence of the mule. I was seeing the last mule that pulled the last streetcar in the old layout of the urban road system. And it was for me much more full of ideas, memories, images than to be in the Council listening to the puffy rhetoric of the deputies.

Then I approached the animal friend.

Sure, the mule is one of those destined for immediate oblivion. Between the electricity and the strength of four legs there is no choice. No one will miss the legs, with a desire of arriving quickly. The mule of the streetcar won't have a seventh day mass after a long exhaustive life of incomparable sacrifices. What's he going to do? I felt like asking it at the end of that trip, which was the last:

“What will you do?”

All that was left for it was the shafts of wagons. The streetcar mule, besides being specialized in a profession, formed the highest caste of mules. Leaving the streetcar for the shafts is a decline. Also, the coaches are replaced by fast cars which carry much more weight. And no one speaks of monoplanes. Within a few years monoplane and car will make the mule trains legendary with the poetry of the patronesses... As species disappear when their means fail then and men don't take care of them, perhaps the mule will disappear from the world under the conditions of the huge saurian. Soon there won't be even a single sample in the cities.

3 An old type of carriage or small bus, with capacity for nine people, drawn by donkeys in the streets of Rio de Janeiro.

4 Companhia de Carris de Ferro da Cidade à Boavista na Tijuca was inaugurated in 1859, its donkey power was replaced by steam in 1862, but the company, failing to overcome financial difficulties, went bankrupt in 1866.

Children will know it from pictures. In three or four centuries it will be more difficult to see a living mule than to go to Mars.

Oh! The tremendous, the colossal ingratitude of human selfishness! We only realize the importance of what boasts the service it provides and of parasites. The mule within civilization is like one of those old, gnawed slaves who didn't stop for a second, working without whining. The new device comes along. They push it.

“Get out, you dunce!”

And no one remembers the past service anymore.

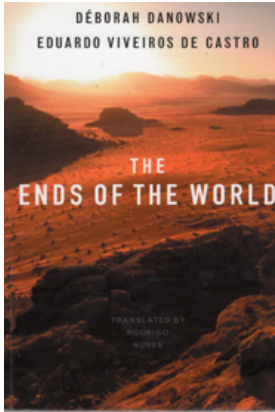
I, myself would be unable to think of a mule when having electricity, although considering the sweet and resigned animal the greatest symbol of a patient agglomeration existing everywhere to which they call people - the beaten people of coachmen, exploited by stables of young men, driving scoundrels and idiots, loaded with cargo and taxes. At that time, I wanted to know what the mule thought. But, of course, he may not have known that he was the last mule which for the last time was pulling the last streetcar in Rio, ending the mule's general activity in the urban streets and civilization. All that I thought was indeed morbid literature, because even the mules wouldn't be interested in it, nor would men have the gratitude of thinking about their animal friends, at least having a monument made for them. Man didn't even know because the case had not been announced. That representative mule might be thinking only about the stall - which is the ideal in the life to the mules and all other living species.

So, feeling for him the agonizing, torturing, shattering sense of the great utility which becomes irrevocably useless, I could see it floating at the high tide of velocity, like the debris that will take to the beach, like the deputies who fail to please the oligarchs, like the friends of falling governments, like the unemployed fellows. How much that mule expressed!

Then I grabbed his jaw. I wanted to remember his face since he insisted on not letting me see it well. But as, in another street, the announcement of a cable car echoed, I hurried my steps, I dropped the mule without nostalgia - I, too! - not even asking where they would take this animal charge with conclusive act of the prerogatives of its kind, without even remembering that I had seen the last mule of the last streetcar on his last urban trip...

And thus is everything in the hurried life.

Original publication: O Último Burro. Rio de Janeiro: A Notícia. 04/05/1909, n. 205, p. 3.



6.

The book: The Ends of the World

Author: Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro

Translator: Rodrigo Nunes

Original title: Há Mundo por Vir?

ISBN: 978-15-09503-97-1

Year of publication: 2017

Publisher: Polity Press

Number of pages: 186

Synopsis: The end of the world is a seemingly interminable topic. Environmental catastrophe and planetary apocalypse are subjects of enduring fascination and human cultures have approached them in very different ways. Indeed, in the face of the growing perception of the dire effects of global warming, some of these visions have been given a new lease of life. Information and analyses concerning the human causes and the catastrophic consequences of the planetary “crisis” have been accumulating at an even-increasing rate, mobilizing popular opinion as well as academic reflection. In this book, philosopher Déborah Danowski and anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro offer a bold overview and interpretation of these current discourses on “the end of the world” reading them as thought experiments on the decline of West’s anthropological adventure – that is, as attempts, though not necessarily intentional ones, at inventing a mythology that is adequate to the present.

Press reviews: “In their powerful essay on the climate crisis that humans face today, Danowski and Viveiros de Castro propose nothing short of a radically new and pluralist anthropology that is bound to reinvigorate humanist and post-humanist debates on anthropogenic global warming. A brilliant tour de force” – Dipesh Chakrabarty, The University of Chicago.

“This is a passionate, profoundly intelligent book. The ends of time are not the Anthropocene; that is a boundary, not a destiny. What comes next cannot be allowed to the barbarism of the techno moderns. In this book, recomposition tracks along the Möbius strip of still imaginable, still liveable thought, mythology, and world-making practices indigenous to terrans. Actual indigenous peoples, who have refused to end in end time after end time, can perhaps teach the ‘needed subsistence of the future’” – Donna Haraway, University of California.

The authors: Déborah Danowski is a professor of Philosophy at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro is Professor of Anthropology at the national Museum of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

The translator: Rodrigo Guimarães Nunes is a professor of modern and contemporary Philosophy at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro. He is the author of *Organisation of the Organisationless* (Mute, 2014) and of *Neither Vertical Nor Horizontal: A Theory of Political Organisation* (Verso, 2021).

WHAT ROUGH BEAST...

(p. 1-7)

The end of the world is a seemingly interminable topic – at least, of course, until it happens. The ethnographic record documents a variety of ways in which human cultures have imagined the disarticulation of the spatial-temporal frameworks of history. Some of these imaginings have had a new lease of life since the 1990s, when scientific consensus became established regarding the ongoing changes in the planet’s thermodynamic regime. Information on the (anthropic) causes and (catastrophic) consequences of the planetary “crisis” have accumulated at a speedy rate, mobilizing popular perception as well as academic reflection.

As the gravity and irreversibility of the present environmental and civilizational crisis become more and more evident,¹ there has been a growing proliferation of new and old variations on a theme that we shall call, for the sake of a simplicity that this essay intends to complicate somewhat, “the end of the world”. There have been blockbusters of the fantasy genre,² History Channel docufictions, scientific popularization books of varying complexity, videogames, art and music pieces, blogs of all shades across the ideological spectrum, academic journals and specialized networks, reports and pronouncements issued by world organizations of all kinds, unerringly frustrating global climate conferences (like the COPs), theology symposia and papal pronouncements, philosophical tracts, New Age and neo-pagan ceremonies, an exponentially rising number of political manifestos – shorts, texts, contexts, vehicles, speakers, and audiences of all kinds. The presence of this theme in contemporary culture has increased as much and as rapidly as what it refers to – namely, the intensifying changes in the terrestrial macro-environment.

This veritable dysphoric efflorescence goes against the last three or four centuries of Western history. It is a harbinger, if not already a reflection, of something that seemed excluded from the horizon of history as the saga of Spirit: the ruin of our global civilization as a consequence of its very hegemony. A fall that may drag with it a sizeable portion of human population, obviously beginning with the destitute masses that inhabit the ghettos and garbage dumps of the world system; but the nature of the oncoming catastrophe is such that it will hit us all in one way or another. Therefore, it is not only the dominant, Western, Christian, capitalist civilizational matrix, but the human species as a whole, and the very idea of a human species, that is being interpellated by this crisis. Above all (and for good reason), those peoples, cultures, and societies who are not responsible for said crisis, not to mention several thousand other lineages of living beings who are under threat of extinction or who have already disappeared from the face of the earth thanks to the environmental modifications brought about by “human” actions.³

Such a demographic and civilizational disaster is sometimes imagined as the result of a “global” event, a sudden extinction of all human or terrestrial life resulting from either an “act of God” (a lethal supervirus, a massive volcanic explosion, a collision with a celestial body, a giant solar storm), the cumulative effect of anthropic

1 See, for instance, the latest reports produced by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which came to light in 2013-14 and can be found at <http://www.ipcc.ch>. As is well known, the IPCC’s projections tend to figure among the most moderate among those circulating in the scientific community with regard to the speed and intensity of climate change.

2 On apocalyptic cinematography, the reader could do no better than consult Peter Szendy’s (2015) *Apocalypse Cinema*, which comments on thirteen end-of-the-world films and includes instructive references to dozens of others. For an analysis of the proliferation of apocalyptic discourse in the curious cases of dystopian fantasies directed at a female adolescent public, see Craig (2012).

3 The question regarding the pertinence of the concepts of human species (“humankind”) and/or “humanity” as a way to frame the reflection and action of currently existing political collectivities in the face of environmental crisis (states, peoples, parties, social movements) will be taken up again in the conclusion of this essay.

interventions on the Earth System⁴ (as in Roland Emmerich's 2004 film *The Day After Tomorrow*), or finally a good old-style nuclear war. On other occasions, the disaster tends to be more realistically depicted, in line with the successive scenarios proposed by the so-called climate sciences, as a process. A relentless, an extremely intense, already ongoing, increasingly accelerating and in many respects irreversible process, a deterioration of the environmental conditions that presided over human life during the Holocene,⁵ in which droughts follow hurricanes and floods, human and animal pandemics follow colossal crop losses, and genocidal wars take place against the background of extinctions that affect whole genera, families, and even phyla. All of which would act back on each other in perverse feedback loops that would slowly but inexorably push our species, in a process of "slow violence" (Nixon 2011) that appears to become less and less slow, toward a materially and politically sordid existence – what Isabelle Stengers (2015) has dubbed "the coming barbarism", and which will be all the more barbaric if the dominant techno-economic system (which we could call, with a nod to Félix Guattari, Integrated World Capitalism) is allowed to continue its headlong flight forward from itself unchecked.

It is not only the natural sciences, and the mass culture feeding off them, which have been registering the world's drift. Even metaphysics, notoriously the most ethereal of philosophical fields, has begun to echo the generalized disquiet. The last years have seen, for example, the elaboration of new and sophisticated conceptual arguments that propose to "end the world" in their own way:⁶ be it to end the world conceived as being inescapably a world-for-man, so as to justify full epistemic access to a "world-without-us" which would articulate itself absolutely prior to the legislative intervention of the Understanding; be it to end the world- as-meaning, so as to determine Being as pure indifferent exteriority – as if the "real" world, in its radical contingency and purposelessness, had to be "realized" against Reason and Meaning.

It is true that many of these metaphysical ends-of-the-world have only an indirect motivational relationship to the physical event of planetary catastrophe; but that does not make them any less expressive of it, offering as they do an outlet for the vertiginous sensation of incompatibility – perhaps even impossibility – between the human and the world. Few areas of contemporary imagination have failed to be affected by the violent re-entry of the Western noosphere into the Earth's atmosphere, in a veritable and unique process of "transcendence." We once believed ourselves to a vast sidereal ocean, now we find ourselves thrown back at the harbor whence we started...

4 The "Earth System" is a technical concept currently used by climatologists and other Earth scientists to refer to the geophysical cum macro-ecological parameters that characterize our planet.

5 Geological epoch of the Quaternary period that followed the Pleistocene at approximately 11,700 years before the year AD 2000 and continues into the present (until, that is, the "golden spike") marking the start of the Anthropocene has been agreed on – assuming it will be agreed on – by the geological community).

6 To the end of the world "in their own way", that is, by demolishing the concepts of a world elaborated by modern philosophy, from Kant to Derrida and beyond (see Gaston 2013).

Dystonias, then, proliferate; and a certain perplexed panic (pejoratively indicted as “catastrophism”), if not a sort of grim satisfaction (recently popularized under the name of “accelerationism”), seems to hover over the spirit of the times. The predictive value of punks’ famous cry of “no future” is revitalized – if that is the right word – at the same time as previous anxieties return, comparable in scope and intensity to our present ones, such as those elicited by the nuclear arms race of the not-so-distant years of the Cold War. It is impossible not to remember Gunther Anders’ (2007: 112-13) dry, somber conclusion in a capital text on humankind’s “metaphysical metamorphosis” after Hiroshima and Nagasaki: “The absence of future has already begun”.

This future-that-is-over is thus come once again, suggesting that it maybe never stopped having already begun. (In the Neolithic? In the Industrial Revolution? In the atomic era?) If the prospect of the climate crisis is less spectacular than that of the nuclear threat (which has never gone away, lest we forget), its ontology is more complex, both in what regards its connections to human agency and in its paradoxical chronotopics.⁷ Its advent bears the name of the species: “Anthropocene,” the designator proposed by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer for what they see as the new geological epoch that came after the Holocene, which would have started with the Industrial Revolution and become intensified after World War II.

§ On the somewhat paradoxical relationship between the emergence of a “biospheric” consciousness, the perspective from outer space, the consolidation of climate change theory and the Cold War’s arms race (Reagan’s Star Wars program included), the reader will find the works of Joseph Masco (2010, 2012) and Peter Szendy (2011) of interest. In a recent TED talk, James Hansen (2012), speaking of the temporary energetic disequilibrium of the Earth System caused by the build-up of greenhouse gases (the difference between the amount of energy or heat that enters the system and the amount reflected back into space), suggested an eloquent equivalence between the heat of 0.58 W/m² daily accumulated in the planet’s “reservoirs” (the oceans, ice caps and soil) and the heat liberated by the explosion of four hundred thousand atomic bombs. On that topic, see also John Cook’s excellent Skeptical Science blog, according to which our climate has accumulated an amount of heat equivalent to the explosion of four Hiroshima bombs per second, totaling 2,115,122,880 bombs from 1998 until the time of writing (to be precise, July 2, 2014, 2.45 p.m. Brazilian time, when we last consulted the <http://4hiroshimas.com> widget).⁸ (For an illustration of the strongly symbolic relation – the “prolonged hesitation between sound and sense,” as Valéry would say – between the names “Hiroshima” and “Katrina,” see AAP 2013.) In short, the old human project of continuously increasing the amount of per capita energy (Lévi-Strauss 1952: 32) at our disposal

7 “A nuclear war would have been a conscious decision on the part of the powers that be. Climate change is an unintended consequence of human actions and shows, only through scientific analysis, the effects of our actions as a species” (Chakrabarty, 2009: 221).

8 See Cook (2013a, 2013b). A comment on one of these posts points out that John Lyman (University of Hawaii) had already employed the comparison to the Hiroshima bomb in relation to ocean temperature in interviews about a study published in *Nature* (see Lyman *et al.* 2010; Israel 2010).

finally seems, since the acceleration of the processes through which this energy is obtained after the Industrial Revolution, to be coming up against a wall into which the species runs the risk of colliding in a most spectacular way.

Although others had apparently already proposed terms like “Anthroposphere”, “Anthrocene”, or “Anthropocene” in the last century (and even earlier), it is said that it was during a discussion at a meeting of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP) in Mexico City in 2000 that the atmospheric chemist and Nobel Prize laureate Paul Crutzen first proposed the concept, publishing an article on the subject shortly afterwards (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000), formalizing it two years later (Crutzen 2002). The proposal is still under consideration by the scientific community and should be discussed at the next International Congress of Geology in August 2016. Crutzen has recently stated that he is inclined to suggest the twentieth century’s nuclear tests as marking the diagnostic beginning (“golden spike”) of the Anthropocene.

The Anthropocene, or whatever else one might want to call it,⁹ is an “epoch” in the geological sense of the word, but it points toward the end of epochality as such, insofar as our species is concerned. For it is certain that, although it began with us, it will end without us: the Anthropocene will only give way to a new geological epoch long after we have disappeared from the face of the Earth. Our present is the Anthropocene; this is our time. But this present time progressively reveals itself a present “without a view”, a passive present, the inert bearer of a geophysical karma which it is entirely beyond our reach to cancel, which makes the duty of its mitigation all the more urgent and demanding: “the revolution has already occurred... the events we have to cope with do not lie in the future, but largely in the past... [W]hatever we do now, the threat will remain with us for centuries, for millennia” (Latour 2013a: 109).

METAPHYSICS AND MYTHOPHYSICS

This essay is an attempt to take present discourses on the end of the world seriously, grasping them as thought experiments about the downward turn of the Western anthropological adventure, that is, as efforts, though not necessarily intentional ones, to invent a mythology that is adequate to our times. The “end of the world” is one of those famous types of problems of which Kant used to say human reason cannot solve but cannot help posing at the same time either; and it does so necessarily in the form of mythical tabulation or, as it is

⁹ In the conclusion we shall see some of the reasons for the dissensus surrounding this concept as a way of naming the time in which we live and the event that befalls us.

fashionable to say nowadays, of narratives that orient and motivate us. The semiotic regime of myth, perfectly indifferent to the empirical truth or falsity of its contents, comes into play whenever the relation between humans as such and their most general conditions of existence imposes itself as a problem for reason. And if it is true that all mythology could be described as a schematization of certain transcendental conditions in empirical terms – a validating retroprojection of certain sufficient reasons in terms of certain efficient causes – then the present impasse becomes all the more tragic, or ironic, given that such a problem of Reason has now been given the stamp of the Understanding: here is an essentially metaphysical problem, the end of the world, formulated in the rigorous terms of such supremely empirical sciences as climatology, geophysics, and biochemistry. Maybe, as Lévi-Strauss often remarked, science, which started out by separating itself from myth around three thousand years ago, will eventually encounter it once again at the end of one of those “double twists” which tie analytic to dialectical reason, the anagrammatic combinatory of the signifier to the historical vicissitudes of the signified.¹⁰

One word more on the notion of “myth”. An important, if contingent, stimulus to the present essay comes from a book of philosophy, Quentin Meillassoux’s *After Finitude* (2009), originally published in French in 2006. Alongside the writings of other contemporary thinkers associated with so called “speculative realism”, Meillassoux’s project seemed to us to renew, nolens volens, the ties between metaphysical speculation and the mythological (Kant would say “dogmatic”) matrix of all thought. After reading *After Finitude* (and later on Ray Brassier’s 2007 *Nihil Unbound*, another influential work in the speculative realist movement), our impression was that the book inscribed itself in a series stretching, say, from Saint Anselm to Badiou, but also in a vast discursive universe that goes from the treasure trove of ideas accrued over millennia in the cosmological speculation of the world’s indigenous peoples up until Lars Von Trier’s (2011) *Melancholia* and Cormac McCarthy’s (2006) *The Road*, by way of the long Western mythical-literary tradition on the theme of the *pays gaste* or “wasteland” (Weston 1920), and the persistent vitality of this “minor” genre which is science fiction.¹¹ Jorge Luis Borges’ (2007) well-known quip on metaphysics being a branch of fantastic literature not only requires that the converse be true – fantastic literature and science fiction are the pop metaphysics (or the “mythophysics”) of our time – but it effectively anticipated the cross-pollination currently taking place between some experiments in the creative fringe of contemporary philosophy and the work of “popular” writers like H. P. Lovecraft, Philip K. Dick, Ursula Le Guin, William Gibson, David Brin, or China Miéville.

Our goal is then to draw a preliminary balance sheet of some of the main variants of the “end of the world” theme, such as it presents itself today in the imaginary of world culture. But let us begin by briefly evoking the problem’s so-called objective terms.

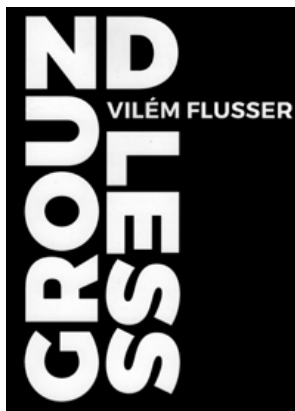
¹⁰ On the “double twist” as the formula of structuralist transformation par excellence, see Maranda (2001); Almeida (2008); Viveiros de Castro (2014).

¹¹ Eduardo Sterzi has done some important research on the theme of the wasteland, from its European origins to contemporary Brazilian literature. See, for instance, Sterzi (2009).

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7.

The book: Groundless

Author: Vilém Flusser

Translator: Rodrigo Maltez Novaes

Original title: Bodenloss: Uma Autobiografia Filosófica

ISBN: 978-09-93327-26-1

Year of original publication: 1973

Year of translated version publication: 2017

Publisher: Metaflux Publishing, UK

Number of pages: 278

Synopsis: Groundless is at the same time, Vilém Flusser's autobiography and a singular title in the author's literary production as a thinker. Written in 1973, one year after his return to Europe, this work addresses a variety of themes, beyond the experiences of the one who reports them. Through an experimental structure, Vilém Flusser presents to the readers a series of philosophical dialogues that he maintained with the people who marked him during his life in Brazil.

The author: Vilém Flusser (1920-1991) was a Brazilian Czech-born philosopher, writer and journalist. He lived in São Paulo (where he became a Brazilian citizen) and later in France. A polyglot, his works were written in many different languages. He came to prominence in the field of Media Philosophy.

The translator: Rodrigo Maltez Novaes is a Brazilian artist, translator, editor, and the founder of Metaflux Publishing. He was a research fellow at the Vilém Flusser Archive

at the Universität der Künste, Berlin, from 2010-14. With a BA from the University of Gloucestershire and an MA from the University of the Arts London, his main areas of activity are painting, philosophy, media, and communication. Currently he lives and works in São Paulo where he now leads the long-term project for the translation and publication of Vilém Flusser's work from Brazilian-Portuguese into English.

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THE BRAZILIAN LANGUAGE

During the last years of the 1940s one began to establish the first authentic contact with Brazilian culture. And it must be said, from the start of this adventure, which would decisively mark the course of one's life, one's attitude in approaching such a culture was an attitude seeking engagement. In other words, one sought to learn and understand the culture as profoundly as possible, not only to absorb and assimilate it to one's own culture, but to act within it as well, thereby marking the lived experience that Brazilian culture causes in us. In general, cultures provide three types of lived experience:

(A) The culture to which one belongs at birth, which informs us from the "start" ("start" could mean both the awakening of consciousness and earlier unconscious layers) also informs the environment in which one lives and is experienced as "given." This culture is both a determining aspect of the environment into which one is thrust at birth, and an aspect of the freedom one has in order to rebel against the environment's limiting aspect. Thus, the vast majority of people experiences this culture as culture tout court, and the discovery that it is only one among several existing cultures (among all the available cultures) is attained by only a few people. Effectively, this discovery contains the germ of the groundlessness-malady, because it allows an external view of the culture to which we belong. The ones who truly belong to their cultures do so because they never grasped such a discovery. This was the situation in which one found oneself in Prague. The important thing, in order to understand such a situation, is that it did not exclude information about other cultures. However, these other cultures were not seen as alternatives to our own, but as problems to be dealt with, within the parameters of one's own culture, which structured one's universe – and in this sense, encompassed every other culture. One would not have "discovered" Brazilian culture if one had studied it in Prague.

On the contrary, one would have concealed it within Prager culture (doing what could be termed as "Brazilian culturology" with Prager cultural methods and categories). But if Brazilian culture had emerged as an alternative to Prager culture, one would have "existentially" discovered it, in the sense of removing the Prager cover (perhaps the difference between "discovery" and "knowledge"

explains a fundamental problem within anthropology: one may attain a far deeper and more detailed knowledge of Eskimo culture than any Eskimo ever could, but, one would still not have “discovered” such a culture). In this context, the following question emerges: can one “discover” one’s own culture, in the sense of “discovering” oneself? Or does one “discover” one’s own culture only after abandoning it, that is, after abandoning oneself? This is the problem of “transcendence,” and one could not escape Kant now or then.

(B) Once one has transcended one’s own culture (or reached a situation of groundlessness), one starts to float above a complex set of cultures – and picture oneself floating. This implies a series of problems, on many levels. For example: one starts to see cultural interpenetrations, hierarchies, and abysses between cultures, as well as the various dynamics that allow them to interpenetrate, become distant, and devour each other. This invites comparison between cultures but excludes any valorisation and therefore, any engagement with a particular culture. Another example: one is constantly called upon to give an account of how much the apparently transcended culture remains active within oneself, which means that one is constantly called upon to transcend oneself. By seeing oneself as a “cultural factor” though (one is a “Self” in relation to a particular culture – the one apparently transcended), this constant state of transcendence is equivalent to a constant emptying of ones “Self.” Groundlessness thus becomes a constant process of self-alienation, of abandoning ones “Self.” This is an aspect of the “suicide game” discussed earlier. Third example: seen from this situation, every culture emerges as a field for engagement – but a field from which one may only take something for one’s own profit. One thus becomes a sponge, absorbing elements from any culture (perhaps this is the true meaning of the term cosmopolitan: the universal, passive, and irresponsible ability to profit). This explains one’s experience in relation to Eastern culture and may also explain the nausea it provoked. In this situation, every culture is thus experienced as a more or less structured set of models (a game); an experience to which Nietzsche came close in his Zarathustra. This is possibly a type of “supra-human” experience, but certainly inhuman and dehumanising.

(C) One may find oneself on the border between two clashing cultures, which is the situation of the classic immigrant type (this was not the case in Prague, because the three fundamental cultures, Czech, German, and Jewish, formed a synthesis and therefore a new culture). Emigration takes one all the way to the border of one’s culture (it allows one to experience the limits of the culture), and immigration takes one all the way to the border of another culture (it allows one to experience the other culture from the inside out). The immigrant’s task is defined by the situation in which he finds himself: he must seek to synthesise both cultures within himself, and then seek to progressively encourage the “new” culture to replace the “old” culture in his “form” of being-in-the-world. The dialectic process through which the immigrant absorbs the new culture, and is absorbed by it, does not pose a problem of engagement. To put it simply, one “reality” gradually replaces the other and the abyss of groundlessness is never revealed (of course, the dialectic process varies according to culture: this variation will be discussed later). This process of replacement

of one culture by another is slow; it happens mainly in unconscious layers, and it generally covets a larger span of time than the immigrant's own life. The immigrant transfers the assimilation process to his children, and even his grandchildren, and it is impossible to fully verify a clear passage from one culture to another at any given point. The problem of engaging with the "new culture" does not emerge because one imperceptibly slides towards it. The "new culture" is experienced as the progressive penetration into a new reality. One had never gone through such an experience, and that set one apart from the other immigrants with whom one had contact. During the first ten years of life in Brazil, that country's culture was one amongst many observed from the distance of one's own groundlessness. However, suddenly one decided (*Entschluss*) to become engaged, which meant, that one's experience of this culture was not framed within any of the types of experience previously sketched out here. This partly explains the curious fact that, from then on, one felt a lot more connected to "native Brazilians" than to other immigrants.

Since how one experiences a language is a fundamental aspect of how one experiences a culture, attempting a phenomenological description of how one experienced Brazilian culture, after deciding to engage with it, is made easier by the fact that this culture emerged more clearly in the form of the Brazilian language. In the type of experience (A), one's language is experienced as

"language tout court" and every other language is seen as an object-language and one's language becomes a meta-language. In other words, the native language serves as a tool for the study and domination of other languages. In the type of experience (B), every language is observed from an extra-linguistic position (for example, from structural analysis), which is the Wittgensteinian position (this is why one always felt a similarity between the Wittgensteinian and Nietzschean positions). In the type of experience (C), the "new" language is experienced as a communication medium with the new environment and imperceptibly starts to displace one's native language, gradually becoming "one's language." The classic immigrant in Brazil gradually learns Portuguese to be able to communicate with Brazilians and, imperceptibly becomes dominated by Portuguese, which starts to structure one's thoughts, consequently, one's grasp of the world. However, one's experience of the Portuguese language was entirely different from theirs.

The decision to engage with Brazilian culture was fundamentally a decision in favor of engaging with the Brazilian language. This meant one did not absorb the language in order to use it for daily contact with Brazilians, but as a tool for expression. In other words, Brazilian Portuguese was not experienced as the language spoken in Brazil, but as the raw material with which one was going to work to realise one's life. One experienced the language as a challenge and as a life project. Thus, the characteristic dialectic between the subject that seeks to inform matter and the matter to be worked upon was established from the start. The epistemological aspect of this dialectic was that one sought to penetrate the essence of the Portuguese language in order to modify it from within, and simultaneously be penetrated by that essence in order to be modified by it. The emotional aspect of this dialectic was that one became enamoured with the Portuguese language, imbued by its beauty,

but at the same time, one began to passionately hate the language as it gradually resisted one's efforts to modify it. The existential aspect of this dialectic was that one began to live according to the Portuguese language, which became the field of one's engagement. But at the same time, one started to use the language as a tool, or as a medium for engaging with a supra-linguistic reality (Brazilian society). To sum up this dialectic: one sought to be dominated by Portuguese in order to dominate it, and to engage with Brazilian society. The synthesis of this dialectic, the aim of this engagement, was to become a Brazilian writer.

By deciding to engage, the situation in which one found oneself was the following: one had a relatively complex bilingual education; during infancy one spoke Czech, although German was never a foreign language. One's primary schooling was in German, but the majority of one's contact with the surroundings continued to be in Czech.

One's secondary schooling was in German, and during that period German was the dominant language. Maturity was reached through German, but then quickly repeated in Czech. The few academic semesters one enjoyed were in the Czech university. When we abandoned Prague, one was impregnated with the German language on every level except the most concrete one, which was dominated by Czech. However, the dominance exerted by the German language was problematised by two factors: the constant infiltration of Czech structures, and the aesthetic rejection one felt towards German as used by the Nazis. One was passionately in love with the German language as it was formulated deep within us (for example, through Schiller, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Kafka), but one simultaneously loved the Czech language as the founding structure of one's concrete thought. Therefore, one's engagement with writing in Prague had very clear coordinates: write in German in order to enrich it with Czech structures, and therefore resist its vulgarisation by the Nazis; write in order to save German with Prager injections. One must note that the German language, in its written form today, seems upon one's return to Europe, as the most sorrowful victim of Nazism.

The Prague schools had given us a relatively solid "classical" education, which meant solid knowledge of Latin structure, and some familiarity with Greek structure. Latin never became a language in the fullest sense of the term, but its syntax

(the delightful play with rigid forms in order to reach exact and simultaneously "open" meanings) invaded one's German. Latin became one's stylistic model for writing in German. Greek worked in the opposite way: its agglutinating capacity, the way it forms *porte-manteaux*, reinforced and ennobled a similar tendency in German, as well as encouraged us to create neologisms. This agglutinative similarity between Greek and German explains the "Hellenism" of so many German philosophers and poets and why they manage to penetrate Greek thought. "Das Land der Griechen mit der Seele suchend" (One searches for the land of the Greeks through the soul), could be translated as "one searches for the thought of the Greeks through similar German grammatical forms". This meant that one's engagement with writing implied not only introducing Czech structures into German, but also Latin ones and a hint of Greek forms.

One's engagement with Zionism during the last years in Prague provided a minor knowledge of Hebrew, which turned out to be a violent revelation. It was curious to observe that, during the Hebrew lessons, one was the only person to undergo such a shock. Hebrew revealed itself to be an entirely different thought structure (meaning created through a game with verb roots and a virtually nonexistent present tense) and a radically different, new way of relating to the world (*Sachverhalte*), due to the absence of the verb "to be" and the existence of the term "yesh", which is generally translated – badly – as "there is". Hebrew emanated an aura of archaism and sacredness, despite its deliberate modernisation by the Zionists. This created a challenge, which, unfortunately, one never fully adopted, due to a lack of time. However, Hebrew's inherent, transcendent form of signification lingers to this day.

During the last years in Prague, one read Ortega y Gasset. His style was far more fascinating than his message: a simple, economic, and penetrating type of writing. One had always considered the aphorism the appropriate style for being-in-the-world, which is why Heine (a noble, and unfortunately rare brand of journalism) and Nietzsche (not so much a violation of language but a violation of thought through language) emerged as ideals to be followed. Curiously, Marx, with his violent dialectic game of opposing terms, had been aesthetically repellent – but intellectually attractive. With Ortega y Gasset, however, one found a master: irony without cynicism and stylistic economy without double-entendre. For this reason, one studied Spanish (not in order to emigrate, as others did). Spanish was not the language of Buenos Aires or Bogotá (or of Rio de Janeiro as was commonly thought in Prague) but the language of Ortega y Gasset. Once again, however, Hitler arrived too early, curtailing any concrete results that could have come from studying Spanish. What one wrote in Prague was a kind of blind search for Ortega y Gasset.

The escape to England cut short one's existential ties with the German language, but it opened the wide horizons of the English language. Perhaps due to one's groundlessness, this incredible language penetrated with surprising ease. On a colloquial level, English is unequalled in its syntactic poverty and simplicity. On the technical and scientific levels, however, it is unparalleled in its rigour and economy. On the philosophical and literary levels, English is unparalleled in its complexity and profundity. On the level of poetic beauty, it is almost unbearable. English is the language of all languages. But this all lies buried to "continental" ears behind its strange repulsive, sounding melody. Although theoretically Germanic, like the German language, English is, in a sense, the opposite of German. English tends to be monosyllabic, whereas German leans towards agglutination. Syllables like "put," which are meaningful only within context, distance English entirely from Greek but move it close towards Chinese. Of course, in such a situation, one was obliged to stop writing entirely and wait until English was better absorbed. This absorption continued in Brazil, where one read books almost exclusively in English. Two stylistic models began to emerge: that of B. Russell and E. Pound and that of J. Dewey and H. Melville. And the following problem emerged: should one write in German, but absorbing English, or in English absorbing German, along with all the implications clinging to it since Prague? The search for Brazilian nature was essentially a search

for grounding in order to resolve this problem. In sum: one was in the “B” situation in relation to these languages; one hovered above them.

It is curious, in retrospect, that the Portuguese language did not emerge as a challenge during the first years in Brazil. One had learned this language with great ease (thanks to Latin, a more or less superficial knowledge of French, Italian, and Spanish – and especially, due to one’s groundlessness). But one used it only for daily communication. One spoke it reasonably well but had not delved into its structure or into the fascinating essence hidden within it. Later, this blind attitude towards Portuguese would complicate one’s engagement with it. One eventually had to relearn the language – an arduous task since it meant having to forget what one had already learned. A characteristic feature of one’s engagement was that one never fully managed to eliminate one’s “first” Portuguese. One’s love for the Portuguese language thus persisted as an unhappy love, even though it produced some texts that are not bad. In other words: German, and even English, were always – and even today – the languages in which one wrote with greatest ease. The consequence of this is that Portuguese is still one’s true task, precisely because it is the most difficult.

In sum, the situation in which one gradually opened up to Portuguese was this: it became the language to be absorbed, manipulated by ones Czech, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew-infected-German, as well as by one’s English – having Ortega y Gasset as a stylistic model. The task of a lifetime. Life began anew.

Viewed as raw material, the Portuguese language demands very different techniques of manipulation from the ones demanded by German and English. This discovery, which emerged right at the beginning of one’s engagement with Portuguese, influenced much later the long discussions one had with J. Guimarães Rosa on the phenomenology of spoken and written Portuguese, through critiques aimed at the Concrete poets – especially Haroldo de Campos – and through one’s own review of Dora Ferreira da Silva’s translations of R. M. Rilke. The situation might be illustrated in the following manner: German and English are like vertebrates in which rules function like a skeleton supporting a growing organism, whereas Portuguese rules function like a shell growing in layers to protect the organism. This image allows several conclusions that are valid, to a certain point.

(1) The English skeleton is far simpler and more deliberate than the German one. Consequently, the syntactic challenge offered by the English language is more restricted: its syntax is almost perfect. German syntax, conversely, allows richer manipulations with surprising effects – but without breaking the skeleton. In other words: in German one can perform a kind of gymnastics that contorts its limbs into bizarre positions without breaking its bones. In Portuguese, however, the situation is entirely different because its syntax is far more consistent than German and far more complex than English. This presents a challenge for anyone who manipulates Portuguese syntax, because it breaks easily. Lying hidden within the Portuguese lexicon’s soft matter are hard, shiny, opaque pearls (“sayings” as Mário Chamie calls them) that shine through the cracks and appear in layers of the shell. What this means is that, when E. E. Cummings does “concrete poetry” and J. Joyce plays with basic elements of language, English syntax remains intact, and when C. Morgenstern does

“concrete poetry” and T. Mann plays with basic elements of German, the syntax is violated but its rules are preserved. But when Pedro Xisto does “concrete poetry” and J. Guimarães Rosa plays with basic elements of Portuguese, the shell of its syntax cracks; its rules are broken, and its hidden essence emerges. One could say that the Brazilian Concretists’ interest in Russian “Modernists,” especially Mayakovski and Yesenin, is perfectly justified: the Russian language probably has more meaningful similarities with Portuguese than several other languages.

(2) The English organism grows almost freely, supported by its skeleton, although the skeleton remains untouched. Consequently, almost every foreign component can be easily anglicised; every neologism is quickly absorbed – or not even experienced as a neologism. The German organism grows with more difficulty, since the skeleton that supports it must adapt to growth. Consequently, the Germanisation of foreign components is a creative challenge because several neologisms created in this manner have demanded a manipulation of the German syntax. Also, since German has a great capacity for creating “internal” neologisms (thanks to its agglutinating tendency), the introduction of foreign elements is a dangerous task. However, the Portuguese organism cannot grow without breaking the rules enveloping it. Consequently, the introduction of foreign elements means the liberation of that language and engagement against Portuguese syntax. Neologisms constantly infiltrate the Portuguese language, and they come from somewhat exotic contexts, for example, Bantu, Guarani, Japanese, and Yiddish: which means the emergence of a dangerous dialectic between the enrichment of language and the loss of its identity. This dialectic is powerful and may be described thus: the Portuguese language, all of it, is put into question every time that it is manipulated.

(3) The near perfection of English syntax tends to make it invisible, just as the perfect apparatus becomes invisible, which creates the illusion of freedom. In other words: apparently everything is allowed in English, precisely because in reality everything is almost perfectly organised. To subvert the English language means, therefore, to reveal its hidden rules. The syntactic studies of English, while subversive, are highly creative. This partially explains the success of the Prague School and the Vienna Circle in England and the U.S.A. The complexity, the inconsistency, and flexibility of German syntax, which are responsible for the “depth”, obscurity, and lack of logic in German thought open up a wide field for discoveries. To reveal German syntax could mean to real “deep” layers; Heidegger’s analyses of a few sentences by Hölderlin and Nietzsche prove it. However, in Portuguese, syntax is on the language’s surface. Consequently, analyses of Portuguese syntax, which abound, are academic, formal, and lacking in interest. The real engagement Portuguese demands is to drive against its syntax in favour of hidden semantic treasures. One could elaborate on this even further. But to sum it all up: to write in English and German means to manipulate the semantic layer in order to reveal the syntax. To write in Portuguese means to break the syntax in order to reveal the hidden semantic secrets. This could be further generalised: to become engaged with Brazilian culture means to break the formalist shells (Positivism, Marxism, etc.) in order to reveal

hidden semantic secrets (for example, its mysticism and messianism). In this sense, Euclides da Cunha remains to this day an unachievable model.

Additionally, a fundamental consideration must be made in relation to written language. English and German orthography are more etymological than phonetic, which means that to read in these languages is to discover their past. However, Portuguese orthography superbly rejects etymology and seeks perfect phonetic spellings. To read in Portuguese is an exercise in ahistoricity. For example, the shock of having to write “ciência” [science], without the “s” and with the “ã”, was an unforgettable experience. These spelling “mistakes” languages since orthography can only be modified with great difficulty. In Portuguese, these “mistakes” are not so meaningful. Portuguese orthography changes constantly through academic convention (almost diplomatic) and adapts to the flow of pronunciation in different contexts. Therefore, the challenge for whoever writes in Portuguese is not orthography but pagination. And the visual aspect of Portuguese is not manipulable through letters within words but by the modification of words within sentences. From this standpoint, a curious parallel could be drawn between Portuguese and Russian.

Obviously, in every Western language, to write does not mean merely to arrange letters on a surface but also to transcribe spoken language, no matter whether its orthography is phonetic or not. This means, in other words, not only to create drawings but also to compose musically. Neither English nor German are terribly melodic, and this is their greatest challenge. Harmony dominates German and rhythm English. This partially explains why great English writers favour melody, as in Pound’s, *The Cantos*, Elliot’s great melodies, and Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*. This also explains partially the Romantic German songs and *Duino Elegies*. However, Portuguese is a melodic language par excellence; when speaking it one is almost singing. Hence, melody is not a challenge, and the Portuguese and Brazilian Romantics are sweet to the point of being indigestible. The real challenge in Portuguese is harmony (Cassiano Ricardo is an example), but especially rhythm. Unbelievably, this challenge was not detected until the emergence of *Bossa Nova*. In a country where African rhythm dominates every field – which in a certain way permeates the culture as a whole – literary and poetic production was limited to a mechanical calculation of syllables that was entirely alienated from reality. This is why *Bossa Nova* represents an aesthetic revolution of the first order, far more than the famous week of 1922 – not so much as music, but as literature. *Bossa Nova* is the first conscious manipulation of Portuguese rhythm.

At this point, one must clear a few misunderstandings, all of which are related to the transposition of foreign literature to Brazilian soil. The new American, English, German, and French novels are not as productive in Brazil as they are in their original countries because they do not grasp the essence of the Portuguese language. The great writers, such as Clarice Lispector, are fully aware of this and pursue different paths. Guimarães Rosa is not a Brazilian J. Joyce. There is no sense in transposing Norman Mailer when he is engaged in the discovery of English syntax. On the other pole lies the problem of translating Saint-John Perse and R. M. Rilke. Their positions, in their respective contexts, are ambivalent. They are engaged with melody and in

this sense, they are revolutionary and subversive. However, they do not battle the discourse of their languages, and in this sense they are decadent. They represent the apex of a moment in transition. But in the Portuguese language context, their ambivalence disappears – except for Dora Ferreira da Silva’s translations, which add a harmonic dimension that is missing from the original texts. This raises the issue, however, of the “freedom of translation,” which will be dealt with later in this book. Even more importantly, linguistic experiments in contemporary American, English, German, and French poetry (specially “Dada”), which disrupts semantics, lose most of their impact within the context of the Portuguese language. And of course: Brazilian literature is an integral part of Western literature but can only function so automatically when it does not abandon the specific problems posed by the language.

Much of one’s effort was located in this arena; unfortunately, these efforts were largely ignored.

From the beginning, long before one had a clearer, phenomenological view of the problem, the question of rhythm dominated. This demands a more detailed explanation. The Czech language formed the substratum of one’s thought. In Czech, the first syllable is invariably accentuated, which means that hexameter feels appropriate to the language is therefore uninteresting, since it is redundant. This is why one found Czech classics written in hexameter virtually unreadable. In this regard Czech is the opposite of French, which accentuates the last syllable, and for which the anapaest is appropriate and redundant. However, Portuguese and Brazilian literature do not rely on the “quality” but rather the “quantity” of syllables, which happens inauthentically – or rather, by ignoring the reality of what is being spoken – except, one must repeat emphatically, in Bossa Nova. Therefore, one’s challenge was to turn the Portuguese language into hexametric. This was a challenge because, despite being innate to us, hexameter’s rhythm is absolutely opposite to the Portuguese language’s “spirit,” and because hexameter creates, both directly and ironically, an epic and dramatic mood suitable for communicating one’s message (which was always about groundless existence). However, it was equally clear that one’s use of hexameter excluded writing poetry, as this would have been a form of inauthentic archaism and sheer affectation. Much later, Theo Spanudis’ poetry provided hard proof of how hexameter defeats itself in poetry through an internal contradiction. Therefore, if one were challenged by the Portuguese language to write hexameter, one had to write prose – preferably essays. But the hexameter issue remained hidden in the text so that the reader would feel it but not be consciously aware of it. The reader would feel some strangeness in the text, but not be able to pinpoint it, and this could only be done if the hexameter was imperfect, which would also eliminate monotony. Sentences would end on an accentuated syllable, emphatically breaking up the epic flux of the discourse. The result was satisfactory, but disappointing: satisfactory in that several young people unconsciously copied one’s style – proof that the rhythm did reach a noticeable level – but disappointing in that several critics assumed the text’s strangeness resulted from one’s imperfect grasp of the language rather than a self-imposed structure.

One must confess another problem with rhythm. Hexameter is a Gestalt made up of dactyls, although it is not the only form traditionally available.

Pentameter and the combination of both hexameter and pentameter, the elegiac couplet, emanate an ever fascinating, magic hammering. A perfect rhythm would be to use hexameter to reach a climax and then pentameter to reach an anti-climax, according to Schiller's recipe: "Im Hexameter steigt des Springquells silberne Säule, Im Pentameter drauf fällt sie melodisch herab".

However, one soon discovered the rupture that characterises pentameter is intolerable as prose because it does not interrupt the flow of linear thought but rolls over it. Consequently, the elegiac couplet, despite remaining as two lines of poetry, loses the elegiac character of the prose. Later, when one learned about semantic rhythm in the Old Testament (for example: the mountains leapt like goats and the hills like sheep; or you are like the sweet rose and the lily of the valley), one grasped the possibility of an almost pentametric rupture through meaning. One imagined what it would have been like if Homer had met the author of the Song of Songs, and vice-versa. One tried to introduce into one's texts semantic rhythm as a counterpoint to syllabic rhythm, which progressively became second nature. The danger of using semantic rhythm lies, however, in the imagistic seduction caused by metaphors. In other words: the sheep and the lily of the valley become more important than the hills and the beloved; the signifier more important than the signified. The solution to this problem emerged spontaneously and became one's writing method: the text must be rhythmic not on two, but three levels. On the syllabic level, imperfect hexameter was the obvious choice for creating a sonorous rhythm – except in violent diatribes (such as answering offensive criticism in the newspapers), when a flood of iambs seemed more appropriate. On the word level, semantic rhythm must be used sparingly, which is very difficult because images tend to multiply spontaneously, and early on one learned to mistrust "intuition" and spontaneity. The defenders of "intuition" are likely not familiar with it on a practical level. And on the level of message, the rhythm must be geometric: structured rhythmically like a flat figure that is imposed by the message itself. If the message is dialectic, the figure must be triangular; if the message is linear and uninterrupted, it must be circular. This would be one's "style": three rhythmic levels with a virtually unlimited play of sympathies and antipathies between the levels. The Portuguese language thus became an instrument of engagement, to be used in an infinite game that changed during the course of play – which meant one changed with it. In other words: in a disciplined and enthusiastic way, one gradually became a Brazilian essayist.

The hybrid form of the essay, which lies between poetry and prose, philosophy and journalism, aphorism and speech, academic treatise and vulgarisation, criticism and the critiqued, is a universe in itself and an appropriate habitat for whoever is "exposed upon the mountains of the heart" (Rilke). Whoever practices this form, whoever lives essayistically (in other words, those for whom life itself is a preparation for essay writing), knows that the problem of the essays subject is never clear. Or to

1 "In the hexameter rises the fountain's silvery column. In the pentameter aye falling in melody back". Translation by S.T. Coleridge.

be precise: it is negatively clear. In the essay's universe everything is a subject and the problem lies in having to choose from such a rich array of subjects. However, to be honest, this statement is also incorrect. The choice of subject is imposed by the choice of rhythm. The essays' rhythm calls for its subject. Therefore, it is not so much a case of the medium being the message, but of the medium demanding its message. This is why this chapter seeks to communicate the motives behind one's choice of rhythm but will not waste any time presenting the motives for one's choice of subject. To recapitulate: one's choice of rhythm was imposed by the dialectic between the Portuguese language and the language structure that shaped us; hence, the subjects of the resulting essays were imposed by their rhythms. However, despite their rhythms the subjects have been and shall always be variations on a single subject: the problem of engagement within a groundless situation. This is because one's own life (one's essay-life²) has been a variation on that subject, which could be aphoristically described as the "search for faith, in disgrace".

However, the essays ambivalence lies in its character, which is both monologic and dialogic. In other words: the essay is a monologue that seeks a reply. For the essayist, culture is a linguistic fabric woven on a loom on which the writer plays with the threads. If the essayist wants a partner, he must engage with the loom and not the fabric. Dialogue is only possible on the level of the loom and not the fabric. This was the functional aspect of one's loneliness and isolation. During the early 1950s, one's problem was the following: how to penetrate the fabric of the Portuguese language in order to reach the loom on which it was woven?

Theoretically, the answer was obvious: by reading much as one could of the literature from every field, not so much to grasp its messages, but to encounter the authors at work. In any case, the messages were interesting because one had already learned to doubt any "explanation" or "teaching". A practical solution for the problem emerges, however, in the Literary Supplement of *O Estado de São Paulo*. This was a periodical that existed, on curious enclave within the local cultural context. The newspaper published news and commentaries within a global context, comparable to newspapers in the other large urban centres and inspired by the cosmopolitan character of the decadent, pseudo-aristocracy from the State of São Paulo – as well as the 19th – century liberalism characteristic of this sector of the pseudo-aristocracy. Perhaps this is why, together with its reactionary ideology, the newspaper did not accurately depict the Brazilian situation – although it had a powerful influence on it. An examination of the Estado's role during the period of liberal democracy and the period directly following it would undoubtedly provide a revealing account of the Brazilian cultural context.

However, its Literary Supplement had a certain autonomy within the newspaper. It was "apolitical" (meaning, it was "open to several trends, except the most extreme

2 In Portuguese Flusser does a word play. *Vida-ensaio* but the word *ensaio* can be translated as both *essay* and *rehearsal* or even *sketch*. So essay-life could also be read as life-rehearsal or sketched life. The idea of the essay as a rehearsal points to the very notion of groundlessness that Flusser explores. The idea of life as a constant sketch that is continuously changed and never pinned down or finished and varnished never fixed.

ones” –which obviously meant it was liberal in the 19th-century sense, as much as the newspaper that produced it), and less of a channel for literary critique. But it provided a somewhat unstructured arena for essayists from all over Brazil. The Supplement could be read in at least two ways: as a more or less random clearinghouse for information about the Brazilian cultural scene, and as a laboratory for developing the future culture of Brazil. In a radical sense, one followed the latter route: one read the Supplement not for what its contributors wrote but to see how they wrote and to contribute to it later. This had an immediate formal effect: the majority of essays published in the Supplement were two columns long – four typed pages. Hence, this determined the size of one’s essays. This was a para-poetic limitation that forced us to struggle not only against and within the rules of the language, but also against and within the rules of the Supplement. This limitation proved fruitful (as every limitation is, gives the dialectic between “limitation/freedom”). When one left the Supplement several years later, one’s lack of limits, one’s “freedom”, became painfully obvious.

In sum: the moment one decided to engage with Brazilian culture, one became a potential contributor to the Literary Supplement of *O Estado de São Paulo*. The immediate problem was how to transform this potential into action. Or: how to break through the perfidy of human matter named the “*O Estado de São Paulo* newsroom.” This took us directly to the core of engaging with Brazilian culture. The initial surprise was that despite being an enclave of privilege within Brazilian culture, the Supplement was easy to enter – and therefore unfulfilling as a challenge. The second surprise was that, from the moment of acceptance, one was part of an enclave with which one barely agreed. The third surprise was that the published essays’ effect (their feedback) was fast, relatively wide, and very superficial, hardly corresponding with the intensity of one’s engagement. And the last (and most painful) surprise was the realization that one’s contribution to the Supplement did not confer any influence upon it: one’s contribution was “irresponsible,” or only an individual concern, which intensified one’s sense of isolation. These surprises (which multiplied in every field) contributed to one’s eventual disengagement – including from the Supplement. In short: the taste of defeat emerged in one’s early and easy victories. This was the spirit in which one’s engagement as a whole began.

In describing the dialogues of the 1950s and 60s – which are, in a way, ongoing today (although one’s gradual move to Europe has changed the channels) – one has to guard against the perfidy of memory. In the course of this book, the strongest resistance encountered has been a reluctance to acknowledge the social decadence (although secondary) caused by the Nazi catastrophe. One was born into a traditional elite against which one rebelled – but one was a part of it. During the 1940s there was social degradation, but also a reformulation of the social hierarchy: in Prague one saw the division of society organised by cultural levels; one occupied an exalted level within this hierarchy. In São Paulo, one was forced to accept a socio-economic hierarchy in which one occupied a relatively low level. This was not a conscious preoccupation at the time because social (and economic) vanity was not so developed in us and because there were more important ethical,

epistemological, and ontological problems to worry about. In writing this book, however, the social degradation of that period reveals itself as a barrier imposed by memory, which proves it was repressed.

During this period, one's engagement with culture resulted in one's social reorientation, via criteria resembling those in Prague, and one's reinsertion into the corresponding level one occupied in Prague. Thanks to this engagement, one gradually began to occupy the social role reserved for one at birth. Although honesty begs the question of whether this return to one's original social position was a motive for engagement, the answer seems clear that: it was not. One never sought, at least on a conscious level, to become socially prominent. From this point onwards – at least as a method for writing this book – it is necessary to point out that one no longer represses problems relating to one's social position. However, a new type of resistance is emerging, demanding a new strategy: the fact that one tends to reduce the importance of one's role in Brazilian culture, either because of a new type of modesty or in order to reduce one's own responsibility. The danger this attitude poses is dialectic: by resisting, one falsifies testimony by understating it; by fighting resistance, one risks exaggerating the importance of the events reported here. The second danger is reinforced by a tendency towards self-praise and ego worship – a tendency one finds difficult to relinquish. The following testimony will seek to navigate between Scylla and Charybdis. One must state immediately that the following dialogues are important for both the present and future of Brazilian Culture.



8.

The book: My Sweet Orange Tree

Author: José Mauro de Vasconcelos

Translator: Alison Entrekin

Original title: O Meu Pé de Laranja Lima

ISBN: 978-17-82691-53-2

Year of original publication: 1968

Year of translated version publication: 2018

Publisher: Pushkin Press

Number of pages: 182

Synopsis: Meet Zezé – Brazil's naughtiest and most lovable boy, his talent for mischief matched only by his great kindness. When he grows up, he wants to be a “poet with a bowtie” but for now he entertains himself playing pranks on the residents of his family’s poor Rio de Janeiro neighborhood and inventing friends to play with. That is, until he meets a real friend, and his life begins to change.

My Sweet Orange Tree is a worldwide classic of Children’s literature – never out of print in Brazil since it was first published in 1968, it has also been translated into an astonishing number of languages and won the hearts of millions of young readers from Korea to Turkey, Poland, and Thailand and in many other countries too.

Press reviews: “You will cry and laugh in secret, just like Zezé, who looks for love and troubles on every page of this wonderful book” – Andrey Kurkov, Ukraine.

"Readers will be warmed and deeply touched by the innocence of Zezé. A superb read!" – Gerbrand Bakker, The Netherlands.

The author: José Mauro de Vasconcelos (1920-1984) was a Brazilian writer who worked as a sparring partner for boxers, a laborer on a banana farm, and a fisherman before he started writing at the age of 22. He is most famous for his autobiographical novel *My Sweet Orange Tree*, which tells his own childhood in Rio de Janeiro.

The translator: Alison Entrekin is an acclaimed translator from Portuguese, whose translations include *Budapest* by Chico Buarque, which was shortlisted for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize.



A CERTAIN SWEET-ORANGE TREE

(p. 14-21)

In our family, each older sibling brought up a younger one. Jandira had taken care of Glória and another sister who'd been given away to have a proper upbringing in the north. Totoca was Jandira's little darling. Then Lalá had taken care of me until not long ago. For as long as she liked me. Then I think she got sick of me or fell madly in love with her boyfriend, who was a dandy with baggy trousers and a short jacket just like the one in the song. When they used to take me for a 'promenade' (that's what her boyfriend called a stroll) on Sundays, he'd buy me some really yummy sweets so I wouldn't tell anyone. I couldn't even ask Uncle Edmundo what 'promenade' meant or the whole family would find out.

My other two siblings had died young, and I had only heard about them. They say they were two little Apinajé Indians, very dark, with straight black hair. That's why they were given Indian names. The girl was called Arney and the boy, Jurandyr.

Then came my little brother Luís. Glória was the one who looked after him the most, then me. He didn't even need looking after, because there wasn't a cuter, quieter, better-behaved boy in the world.

That's why when he spoke in that little voice of his without a single mistake, as I was heading out into the street, I changed my mind.

"Zezé, are you going to take me to the zoo? It doesn't look like it's going to rain today, does it?"

How adorable. He spoke so well. That boy was going to be someone; he was going to go far.

I looked at the beautiful day with the sky all blue and didn't have the courage to lie. Because sometimes, if I wasn't in the mood, I'd say, "You're out of your mind, Luis. Just look at the storm coming!"

This time I took his little hand, and we went out for our adventure in the backyard.

The backyard was divided into three games. One was the zoo. Another was Europe, which was over by Julio's neat little fence. Why Europe? Not even my little bird knew. We played Sugarloaf Mountain cable cars there. We'd take the box of buttons and put them all on a string. (Uncle Edmundo called it twine. I thought twine were pigs, but he explained that pigs were swine.) Then we'd tie one end to the fence and the other to Luis's fingertips. We'd push all the buttons up to the top and let them go slowly, one by one. Each cable car was full of people we knew. There was a really black one, which was Biriquinho's. It wasn't unusual to hear a voice coming from over the fence, "Are you damaging my fence, Zezé?"

"No, Dona Dimerinda. See for yourself, ma'am."

"Now, that's what I like to see. Playing nicely with your brother. Isn't it better like that?"

It might have been nice, but when my "godfather" the devil gave me a nudge, there was nothing better than getting up to mischief...

"Are you going to give me a calendar for Christmas, like last year?"

"What did you do with the one I gave you?"

"You can go inside and see, Dona Dimerinda. It's above the bag of bread."

She laughed and promised she would. Her husband worked at Chico Franco's general store.

The other game was Luciano. At first Luis was really scared of him and would tug on my trousers, asking to leave. But Luciano was my friend. Whenever he saw me, he'd screech loudly. Glória wasn't happy about it either, and said that bats were vampires that sucked children's blood.

"It's not true, Gló. Luciano isn't like that. He's my friend. He knows me."

"You and your critter mania, talking to things..."

It was hard work convincing Luis that Luciano wasn't a critter. To us, Luciano was a plane flying at the Campo dos Afonsos air base.

"Look, Luis."

And Luciano would fly happily around us as if he understood what we were saying. And he did.

"He's an aeroplane. He's doing ..."

I'd stop. I had to get Uncle Edmundo to tell me that word again. I didn't know if it was "acrobatics", "acro-batics" or "arco-hatics". One of those. But I couldn't teach my little brother the wrong word.

But now he wanted the zoo.

We got quite close to the old chicken coop. Inside it, the two fair-feathered hens were pecking at the ground, and the old black one was so tame that we could even scratch her head.

"First let's buy our tickets. Hold my hand, 'cause it's easy for children to get lost in this crowd. See how busy it gets on Sundays?"

Luís would look around, see people everywhere, and hold my hand tightly.

At the ticket office I stuck my belly out and cleared my throat to sound important. I put my hand in my pocket and asked the woman, "Until what age is entry free?"

"Five."

"So just one adult then, please."

I took two orange-tree leaves as tickets and we went in.

First, son, you're going to see how beautiful the birds are.

Look, parrots, parakeets, and macaws of every color. Those ones over there with the colorful feathers are scarlet macaws.

His eyes bulged with delight.

We strolled about, looking at everything. We saw so many things that I even noticed Glória and Lalá behind everything else, sitting on the bench peeling oranges. Lalá was eyeing me...

Could they have found out? If they had, that zoo visit was going to end with a big paddling on someone's rear. And that someone could only be me.

"What's next, Zezé, what are we going to see now?"

I cleared my throat again and resumed my posture.

"Let's go and see the monkeys. Uncle Edmundo calls them simians."

We bought a few bananas and threw them to the monkeys. We knew it wasn't allowed, but the guards had their hands too full with such a big crowd.

"Don't get too close or they'll throw banana peel at you, pipsqueak."

"I really want to see the lions."

"We can go in a minute."

I shot another look over to where the two other "simians" were eating oranges. I'd be able to hear what they were talking about from the lions' cage.

"Here we are."

I pointed at the two yellow, very African lionesses. Luís said he wanted to pat the black panther's head.

"Are you out of your mind, pipsqueak? The black panther is the most terrible animal in the zoo. She was brought here because she'd bitten off and eaten eighteen tamers' arms."

Luís looked scared and pulled back his arm in fright.

"Did she come from a circus?"

"Yes."

"Which circus, Zezé? You never told me that before."

I thought and thought. Who did I know who had a name for a circus?

"Ah! She came from the Rozemberg Circus."

"Isn't that a bakery?"

It was getting harder and harder to trick him. He was growing smart.

"That too. We should sit down and have our lunch. We've walked a lot."

We sat down and pretended to be eating. But my ears were pricked, listening to what my sisters were saying

"We should learn from him, Lalá. Look how patient he is with Luís."

"Yes, but Luís doesn't do what he does. It's evil, not mischief."

“So, he’s got the devil in his blood, but he’s so funny. No one on the street can stay angry at him, no matter what he gets up to...”

“He’s not passing me without getting a paddling. One day he’ll learn.”

I shot an arrow of pity into Glória’s eyes. She always came to my rescue, and I always promised her I wouldn’t do it again.

“Later. Not now. They’re playing so quietly.”

She already knew everything. She knew that I’d gone through the ditch into Dona Celina’s backyard. I’d been fascinated by the clothesline swinging a bunch of arms and legs in the wind. Then the devil told me that I could make all those arms and legs come tumbling down at the same time. I agreed that it would be really funny. I found a piece of sharp glass in the ditch, climbed up the orange tree and patiently cut the line.

I almost fell down with it. There was a cry and people came running.

“Help, the line snapped.”

But a voice coming from I don’t know where yelled even louder.

“It was Seu Paulo’s kid, the little pest. I saw him climbing the orange tree with a piece of glass.”

“Zezé?”

“What, Luís?”

“How do you know so much about zoos?”

“I’ve been to a lot of them.”

It was a lie. Everything I knew, Uncle Edmundo had told me. He’d even promised to take me to the zoo one day. But he walked so slowly that by the time we arrived, it wouldn’t even be there anymore. Totoca had been once with Father.

“My favorite is the one on Rua Barão de Drummond, in Vila Isabel. Do you know who the Baron of Drummond was? Of course you don’t. You’re too young to know these things. The Baron must have been really chummy with God. Because he was the one who helped God invent the lottery game that they sell tickets for in the Misery and Hunger bar, and the zoo. When you’re older...”

My sisters were still there.

“When I’m older what?”

“Boy, do you ask a lot of questions. When you’re old enough, I’ll teach you the lottery animals and their numbers. Up to twenty. From twenty to twenty-five, I know there’s a cow, a bull, a bear, a deer and a tiger. I don’t know what order they’re in, but I’m going to learn so I don’t teach you the wrong thing.”

He was growing tired of the game.

“Zezé, sing “The Little House” for me.”

“Here at the zoo? There’s too many people.”

“No. We’ve left already.”

“It’s really long. I’ll just sing the bit you like.”

I knew it was the part about the cicadas. I filled my lungs.

I live in n house

atop a hill

down which

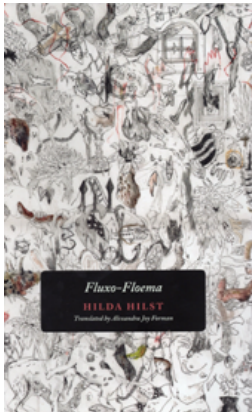
an orchard spills.
4 little houses
where one can see
far far off the sea.
I skipped a few verses.
Among strange palms
cicadas sing psalms.
The sun sets
with golden sails.
In the garden,
a nightingale.

I stopped. My sisters were still sitting there waiting for me. I had an idea: I'd sing until nightfall. I'd outlast them.

No such luck. I sang the whole song, repeated it, then I sang 'For Your Fleeting Love' and even 'Ramona'. The two different versions of 'Ramona' that I knew... but they didn't budge. Then I got desperate. Better to get it over and done with. I went over to Lalá.

"Go ahead, give it to me."

I turned around and offered her my bum, clenching my teeth because Lalá was heavy-handed with the slipper.



9.

The book: Fluxo-Floema

Author: Hilda Hilst

Translator: Alexandra Joy Forman

Original title: Fluxo-Floema

ISBN: 978-1-9-37658-84-7

Year of publication: 2018

Publisher: Nightboat Books, New York

Number of pages: 170

Synopsis: From one of Brazil's most prolific and influential authors, Hilda Hilst's first novel Fluxo-Floema reads like the ravings of contemporary mystic, cataloguing the daily difficulties of retaining human form whilst accessing the divine – absurd, pornographic, scatological, spiritual – and ultimately referencing the failure and success of writing. In these ontological tales, Hilda Hilst breaks glass before we know there is a glass between us and the teeming of reality – the glass now broken, Hilst's circling proses resonate not just from page to page, but through the pages, as if bound paper or screen pixels were themselves porosities subject to the flux-oh of flowed language. Alexandra Joy Forman takes up the challenge brilliantly in her rerouting of the flow, unexhausting this marvel of a work in an English that travels fluctuating, infatuating, multifoliate – it graces and awakens us all at once.

Press reviews: “Hilst’s writing is characterized by an exuberant, masterful impropriety and winding sentences that put it, by her own lights, squarely in the tradition of literature that includes Joyce and Beckett” – Eugenia Williamson, *The Boston Globe*.

The author: Hilda Hilst (1930-2004) was born in Jaú, a small town in the state of São Paulo in 1930. A graduate of law from University of São Paulo, she dedicated herself to literary creation from 1954 to her death. She is recognized as one of the most important and controversial names in Brazilian contemporary literature and received some of Brazil's most prestigious literary prizes

The translator: The author of *Tall, Slim & Erect: Portraits of American Presidents* and translator of *Saga of Brutes* by Ana Paula Maia. She lives in Rio de Janeiro.

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THE UNICORN

(p. 93-97)

for Dante Casarini, with love

I'm inside what sees. I'm inside something that performs the action of seeing. I'm seeing that this thing sees what brings its suffering. I walk over the thing. The thing hunches up. Was he a Jesuit? Who? The one who mistreated Teresa of Ávila? Yes, he was a Jesuit. An urge to speak about the siblings all the time. Does it give you pleasure? No pleasure at all. They were evil. She loved women. But that's unimportant and it doesn't make anyone evil. They say all sexual perverts have bad character. I know they say it. Do you believe it? I do. In the physical sense she was still a pimple-less kid. And he? Wait, I'd like to speak more about her. Very well, pimples then. That's not all. When she'd tell me about sex, under the fig tree, I couldn't help but giggle. What could that clean-faced adolescent know of sex? And then, check this out and tell me if it would be possible to take her seriously: she wore panties with pussycats painted on them. What? I swear. You saw her panties? Her panties hanging on a nail in the bathroom once: tell me I'm seeing a pussy painted on your panties? She smiled. But the kitty must have meant something. What meaning can pussycat print on panties have? Hey girl, I don't know, these things are complicated while they can be sweet and funny to you they might be pragmatic, erotically, to the next person. Sure, that's true. And the brother? Wait I have more to say about her. The cat, then. Very clever. But there's more. More than one? No, no, there was something else, a dark look about her especially when she was near him. Near the brother, Yes. Was she afraid of the brother? Did this darkness come from fear? The darkness may have come from the fear of fear itself. Their mother was a possessive fatty. Hold on, now you're going to talk about the mother? No, I want to say more

about her. When I first laid eyes on her, she had a humble posture. The word posture I'm borrowing from one of my old lady friends who wished to be a saint and wise woman. For now, let's call her "the wise woman". She was a writer. She cried when she wrote. Are you going to talk about this wise woman? No, I still have something to say about the other one. So where did we stop... oh, yes, a humble posture. Was that what I said? Exactly that. But it was humility and fear. Later we'll see. That afternoon I recited some poems at the city library in memory of a poet friend. She said: your poetry is pretty. I found this touching, I find everything touching. Yes, that's plain, plain. We made a date for her to come by my house. She came. The brother too. I noticed he loved men.

The sister was a lesbian and the brother a pederast? Is it important? No, no it's not, but it seems like a lot to put into a story, a single story. But that's how it is. She showed me verses. Her brother's verses? No, the verses were hers. They were bad but improved considerably later. Did she have talent? With some effort, tenacity, she could make it. But do such things make a poet? Sometimes, yes. It would be difficult to support her mother, that possessive fatty, and despite such a mother, still be a decent poet. Are you listening with interest shall I stop? No, I mean, yes, let's write this story. Are you tired? It's just poetry is different, there's an atmosphere, a containment to it. After that tea we became good friends. They seemed so clean. Clean, with a certain edge. I don't really know how to explain it: a secret anxiety. Were they nice? Very, very, and they thought I was great. It's nice when they think we're great, right? I felt like giving them everything I had, I would say my companion... Your companion? You haven't mentioned him. I'll never have a face like his. It's clean. He likes the earth, animals. Look, I feel I already know the whole story: let's couple all the characters and finish with a dramatic coda. What coda? Your death, killing the companion would be evil's victory. No, no, no, don't kill off my companion's clean face. My death is fine. MY DEATH. You know, a story should have a thousand facets, as if you'd put a coyote through a prism, for example. A coyote? Yeah, a wolf. They're so intelligent, I'd tell my companions. Who, the coyotes? No, the siblings. So humble. The father's schizophrenic, the mother's a possessive fatty, the father is crazy, the father is crazy. Did you know that my father was also crazy? Is that so? They pretended they didn't know their father was crazy, they were the perfect family and it was so sad to see those four people in the same house posing all the time as if they were about to have their portraits taken. When I told the siblings their father was crazy, their little eyes welled up, first with anger, then with tears, and I apologized many times, I told them about my father, forgive me friends, my father, can you believe it, he was much more crazy, much more, of course, of course. We read a lot, we had big plans, we wanted to make a community, pry open the hearts of others, tell the truth always, we even made some statutes for this community but the most important thing was to have God in our hearts. My tears flowed, I was extremely touched to be living with, to be living like this with people who were so... You know the Maritain also wanted to build a community, to live with friends who had similar spiritual interests, understand? Yes, it seems like a nice idea. But it's not because it's simply a nice idea, it's, it's love, it's love, you laugh? It's just that you seem so naive. I felt clean. And now you don't

anymore? It's strange, but it all seemed soul cleansing then, seems filthy to me now. It was all vanity. At base we thought we were exceptional, I know I'm different from many, all who write are different from many, but now it's necessary to be part of the mainstream, or there'll be no salvation. We thought most of humanity was manure, trash, merde. They're all shitty. It's not good to feel that way. I want to say more about her. Some girls would go to bed with her. But what a beautiful community. But the community had nothing to do with it, so she loved women, so what? Deep spiritual pursuits and the joys of the body. The BODY BODY BODY. Pederast brother said he was chaste. I believed him for quite a while, he seemed honest when he said he was chaste, he confessed he'd had a passionate affair with a man once, of course, but afterwards felt fear and modesty. After what? After a lot of thought. Uh-huh. You know, I would say to him, it's nice when two friends love each other, we'd discuss Death in Venice, which is so beautiful, do you know it? Of course, but not everything ends like Death in Venice, get that out of your head, it ends with them pulling down their pants and then comes the worst bit. Ah, isn't that the truth. It's not worth it my friend, you'll become very sad in the end, don't don't don't do it. How I believed in him, Holy God, when he was a boy he wanted to be a priest, but his father threatened to burn down the monastery and everyone was so frightened. He made small sacrifices, he stopped eating sweets despite practically dying of cravings, you can imagine how it made me feel. How did it make you feel? Well, girl, touched, of course. Once, my companion and I decided to spend some days in the city, you know, and we loaned him our apartment so he could study in peace for a while, he had said it was impossible to study at his own house, the schizophrenic father, ants-in-her-pants mother always talking about food about her belly, her enormous belly. We opened the door and there he was with a pretty adolescent pederast. But you really do have something against pederasts? If the boys wanted to butt-fuck what did that have to do with you? Nothing, but hold on, he made a fool of me, he never talked about butt sex with me. But nobody talks much about butt sex, do they? Ah, but hold on, my whole life I told him my whole life story, the mortal and major sins while he was giving ass and having clean thoughts? No ma'am. The two were eating empadinhas and drinking wine, tousled hair and tacky satisfied faces. I also can't conform to the empadinhas. He told me the adolescent was his student, he gave classes, you see, Parmenides, Pythagoras. And that's the point, the boy had logicity, the Greeks and the butt, don't you see how very logical it is? What a story. He faked it for me. A saint. He was afraid of you, he thought you'd get into it with him, would get on your soapbox, don't give ass, don't do it. Saintly, ah. But why can't a saint be a pederast? Look at Genet, you're a Thomist. He liked nice clothes, he was strange. Why? Can't a philosopher like nice clothes? No, no, he can't, I can't take them seriously, these blazer-with-golden-anchors-wearing philosophers. Trashy. But suddenly he'd begin to speak. It was Saint Bernard himself speaking, I'd forget everything, his obsession with clothing, the hours he took in the bathroom, primping. Was this during the holidays? They'd stay with me over the holidays days. Pederasts primp exhaustively. It's a danger for everyone. Why? Because there's no time, you know, we think time is generous but there's never enough time for one with a task.



10.

The book: We All Loved Cowboys

Author: Carol Bensimon

Translator: Beth Fowler

Original title: Todos Nós Adorávamos Cowboys

ISBN: 978-19-45492-16-7

Year of Publication: 2018

Publisher: Transit Books, California

Number of pages: 195

Synopsis: After a falling out, Cora and Julia reunite for a long-planned road trip through Brazil. As they drive from town to town, the complications of their friendship resurface. By the end of the trip, they must decide what the future holds, in a queer, coming-of-age debut novel by one of Granta's Best Young Novelists.

Press reviews: "Award-winning novelist Carol Bensimon writes of 21st century characters embarking on open ended journeys" – BBC.

The author: Carol Bensimon was born in the southern Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in 1982. She is the author of a story collection and three novels. In 2012 she was selected by Granta as one of the Best Young Brazilian Novelists.

The translator: Beth Fowler has been a freelancer translator since 2009, working from Portuguese and Spanish to English, and has a degree in Hispanic Studies from the University of Glasgow. Her published translations include *Open Door* and *Paradises* by Iosi Havilio and *Ten Women* by Marcela Serrano. She lives near Glasgow, Scotland.

CHAPTER 6

(p. 99-110)

I had glimpsed a dark stain right in the middle of the asphalt, but I didn't say a word. It wasn't far from the cars in smithereens and the ambulance with its back doors open. The light revolved over the scene like a mute family member. I kept wondering whether they bothered to clean the dark stains afterwards and, if they did, who would be nominated stain remover, would they be thinking about someone in particular as they doused the road with water, and would they have been informed of the owner of the pool of blood when there was no longer a pool there? Since we had passed the accident, I had thought about my mother several times.

Julia was now playing with the seeds from a slice of tomato. The earthenware bowl of bean stew had formed a viscous surface, which gave the impression of a mangrove swamp. I swatted away a fly, then another one. We were in a large dining room with fluorescent strip lights. Apart from our table, only two others were occupied: one, at the back, with four uniformed men and the other, near the door, with a woman and child. I crossed my cutlery on my plate, although it had been a while since I finished eating. On the television, a Palmeiras player committed the worst miss of the round.

"I'm going to call my mom, okay?", I announced to Julia.

She raised her eyes and nodded her head. I went out to the street, passing on the other side of the diner's large windows. For a moment, as I moved away, I watched Julia and the table and all the reflections as if they were all part of an Edward Hopper canvas.

The public telephone was set slightly away from the rest of the facilities at the gas station. I dialed the number and started looking down the straight line of the almost empty street. How long had it been since I had heard the voice for collect calls? Then that long beep.

"Cora, is that you?"

"Hi, mom."

"Why didn't you take my cell phone, honey? Where are you?"

She seemed breathless, as if she had hurried to answer the phone.

"I think it's a place called Pantano Grande."

"Pantano Grande?"

"Is that how you say it?"

"What are you doing in Pantano Grande?"

"It's a long story, mom."

"Cora, listen. There's nothing there, honey."

"In Pantano Grande? It's fine, we just stopped for lunch."

"It's not safe, none of this is safe. Is the main purpose of this trip to leave us here thinking the worst twenty-four hours a day?"

"Oh my God, no, mom. Why do parents always think that everything their children do is specifically to piss them off?"

"I don't know. But your dad has every right to be pissed at you."

It had been a while since my mother had ceased to measure her words. You could say it had been ever since the separation. When my father left our house all sense of subtlety seemed to abandon her, and so my adolescence was bombarded with the sincerity of a pessimist. It was as if I needed to have someone analyzing the world around me all the time and issuing regular bulletins about its (mal-)functioning. Beneath the surface, the message always seemed to be the same: you don't have to see with your own eyes, I'm telling you how it is. And so my mom would accompany me to the garage or to the front door with her last minute recommendations, the themes of which varied from urban violence to the bad influence of certain friends. Come on, I knew perfectly well how extreme it was to live in a big Brazilian city. A guy had fired a gun in front of my college. He didn't show up in a radio class because he was busy shoot- in on the other side of the street, and hundreds of students in dozens of classrooms were able to recognize the sound. Now tell me what a tragedy it is for a nation that its entire youth knows what a goddam firearm sounds like.

And of course I would make friends that weren't worth two cents, the friendly face just waiting for me to turn my back to then comment on my ripped jeans halfway down my ass, that little touch of exhibitionism. I would swallow all ten pills from a pack and throw up in the house of some guy whose name I didn't remember, and all just to grasp at some lousy rays of light. I would spend the entire night waiting for something that wouldn't happen even if I went a week without sleeping. I would fall in love with people who changed their minds too quickly. The wrongs just formed part of the rights, and I wasn't about to cry for the choices I had made, because, however hard the falls, I was left with the feeling that even they had their beauty. But my mom was always more afraid of life than devoted to it.

"I know he's right", I said.

A truck prepared to enter the gas station. Its brakes were issuing an increasingly shrill squeal. I covered my ears and had the impression that the driver was finding the scene funny.

"What? I can't hear you at all!"

"I said that your dad was really angry!"

There was a pause. In that time, the truck moved away going to park behind the gas pumps, where two men in riding boots were chatting and sharing a single cigarette. I tried to see Julia behind the window of the diner, but the reflection of the sky left everything blue and shining.

"I think he'd like to know why he paid for a plane ticket for you when you're not here with the family waiting for his son to be born. Cora, listen to me. Two girls alone on the road, that's not a good idea."

"Is she still having a caesarian? On the 24th?"

"Oh, I don't know, Cora. Why don't you call your dad?"

"Maybe I will."

"This isn't France, understand? It's no good to be driving around down there, people don't do that. Was this trip Julia's idea?"

"No, mom."

"It's convenient when she doesn't have a car."

"I said it wasn't her suggestion."

"Sorry, hon, but I honestly just can't believe that."

I hung up as soon as I could, promising my mother that I'd call again in a few days. When I returned to the diner, Julia was no longer there. No one was there, not even the girl serving tables. Our plates had been cleared. The freshly baked cakes made the window perspire. I walked out again. There was a street vendor on the terrace, he must have been there a long time, although I hadn't noticed him before. I wondered why someone would buy a plush heart with the words / love you while traveling down the RS-290. When I moved closer, I began to hear something about violence in the Mexican cartels. Someone had been beheaded, just to make the message clear. Among the caps, fans and sunglasses made in China, a mini television was now showing the exterior of a single-story house surrounded by reddish soil, where the head had been found. The vendor was staring at the screen, sitting in one of those camping stools. There was a girl of about eighteen near him, probably a daughter, but she was filing her nails with her back to her father and the TV, wearing too much eye shadow, a foundation that made her orange face appear separate from the rest of her body, and a top revealing a couple of inches of flaccid belly. The man said: "Take a look at the sunglasses, miss?". I said no and entered the restroom.

The only light was the natural daylight from outside, which entered dimly through a strip of slanting windows. Four cubicles. I began to examine the gap between the floor and the doors. In the third, Julia's sneakers appeared. We had never swapped shoes, I don't think, although it was a regular practice among friends of a certain age and with a certain level of intimacy. Julia turned round, her heels suddenly swiveling into view. She flushed the toilet.

"Did you talk to your mom?"

"Mmhm."

She looked for soap, but there was none, in liquid or bar form. Resigned, she cupped her hands under the stream of water, which dripped into a chipped basin the color of dead skin. She looked for a paper towel, there were none. So she started shaking her hands, and with them shook the Navajo bracelet, the other times with Eric, the shared bed, the fits of homesickness, a road in the wilderness of Arizona. Some droplets hit my face. I closed my eyes and opened them again. The situation made me slightly nervous because it smacked of something that had already happened, me, Julia and a public restroom there was a real labyrinth of public conveniences in my head perhaps more than motel rooms, sometimes I had to ask for the key from the gas station attendant, sometimes it dangled from an empty carton of motor oil so that people didn't accidentally make off with it in their pocket. The walk to the

restroom was always rather ridiculous. Julia would allow herself to be led. Then it was hard to say whether it was me pressing her up against the door, or her positioning herself, delicately, between me and the outside world.

Now Julia was inspecting herself in a tarnished rectangular mirror. A cloud had made everything slightly darker. I began to say:

“I was thinking that you...”

She drew close to me, just two seconds of certainty, she reached up to my mouth and, almost crazily, kissed me. When she withdrew, she was smiling, perhaps because of my astonishment. She bit her lower lip very discreetly in the middle of that smile.

“What were you thinking?”

I dangled the car key from my fingers.

“That you could drive for a bit.”

Another smile formed. She grabbed the key.

“I thought you’d never ask.”

The road to the pampa was green and blue, and vast. Fewer people, more ruins. Nightclubs that had closed down long ago. Towns three digits away, indigenous men selling wicker baskets, a used car lot where tiny flags fluttered for potential customers that weren’t there. Julia drove with the seat closer to the steering wheel than I did, which probably said less about our difference in height (a couple of inches of advantage for me) than about certain personality traits. In the rearview mirror, I watched things get small and then even smaller. Like the names of a couple of lovers written on a single grain of rice.

What was that goddam kiss all about?

At times, something like a shack at the side of the highway fashioned out of garbage sacks inspired us to launch into meaningful conversation; whether it was enough that we were sympathetic, and how much the barefoot indigenous kids knew about having been screwed over. At other moments, we played old songs and sang along, No Doubt, Silverchair, Alanis Morissette before her trip to India. That spiritual journey had killed rock, and all the rebel girls from 1996, who grew their hair long so they could shake it in the solitude of their bedrooms, grasped desperately to the last distorted guitars of an era. The baggy t-shirts would soon be switched for the awful ‘baby’ look. I remember it well.

“I must confess that I heard Jewel and liked her.”

“For God’s sake, Julia!”

Her arms were more relaxed on the steering wheel now.

“Listen, it was kind of because of a neighbor of mine, he gave me the Jewel album as a Secret Sant on my English course. Like a message. It said ‘You Were Meant for Me,’ that’s my favorite.”

“That was everyone’s favorite.”

“Whatever, it was a clear message!”

“Okay, it was.”

“He liked me too.”

“I believe you.”

“Do you have Jewel on your iPod?”

I began to laugh.

“Of course not.”

It was after four when we finally arrived at Pedra do Segredo. From Cambará, we had spent a total of six hours on asphalt and a bit more on a dirt track. We were now in the center of Rio Grande do Sul, gateway to the pampa, something unprecedented for both Julia and me. Our families had never suggested a trip to Uruguay, which would necessarily have introduced us to the southern half of the state. Uruguay had duty free stores at the border, a melancholic capital and above all beaches, beaches with freezing seas, of which the most famous was without doubt Punta del Este. Many of Porto Alegre’s more contemptible residents went to Punta in the summer. Until a few years ago, their cars would return covered in bumper stickers; the colorful emblems of Uruguayan casinos and hotels were one of those silly status symbols, as were the small dice from a certain brewery and the logo of a horse-riding competition.

Julia parked my car in front of a small brick house where we were supposed to meet a man called Lauro. It was the middle of nowhere. We got out. Everything was so quiet that saying something in a loud voice would seem like a heinous environmental crime. We took a moment to stretch our legs. Suspended above what was perhaps the start of a trail was a wooden, hand-carved plaque that read: PEDRA DO SEGREDO CONSERVATION UNIT. This path went on to disappear in the tangle of undergrowth after an abrupt bend. Even further away, at a distance that was hard to pinpoint, sat the secret stone itself, recalling the head of a furious monkey. In a cartoon this would definitely be the mountain where the exhausted hero would arrive after a thousand adventures and the stone would open into a magical passage to reveal a world that was full of advantages over the real world, beautiful women, muscular men, walls studded with diamonds, cooperation, peace.

The door of the brick house creaked.

“Afternoon”, someone said.

I looked. There was a man standing there. He took a step outside, as if to allow himself to be examined. He was one of those bald guys who prefer to shave their head than to seem in any way incomplete, around forty, skin quite sunburned. The print on his t-shirt was of a beach in California, where he had probably never been.

“Hi”, I replied. “You must be Lauro.”

Of course it was Lauro. Beto had told us he lived here alone, in the rural belt around the town of Caçapava do Sul, taking care of those protected acres day and night. Before that, Lauro had lived for two and a half years in Pantanal, where he had led treks for eco-tourists, been bitten on the fingers by baby caiman, as well as being dumped by the love of his life, a very short Nicaraguan lady who was only in love with Brazil. Julia approached him and made the introductions. For a moment, I wondered whether it wasn’t dangerous for the two of us to be alone with a stranger; shouting wouldn’t help in this place, there was no one to hear us. Ah, but what idiocy, I thought immediately, apparently I’m acting just like my mother, because of that telephone conversation earlier and the confirmation that my dad

was furious with me certainly didn't help much either, even though it was impossible for him not to be furious under the circumstances and, well, even if he turned to cheap psychologies in search of an explanation, for example that I was jealous of Jaqueline and the baby, that I felt I'd been replaced, rejected, abandoned, he would no doubt conclude that accepting a plane ticket only to disappear into the interior of Rio Grande do Sul was what you might call rather a disloyal attitude.

"Rent it for about a week", Julia was saying when I started paying attention again. Lauro was leaning against the doorframe.

"The house at the mines?", he asked.

"That's right."

"Of course, let's go see it. It sleeps four. There are two double beds."

He took a discreet look towards the car.

"It's just the two of us", I said.

"Ah, good. Don't you want to come in?"

I said okay.

Inside, the place seemed even smaller, a single room, most of which was taken up by a brightly colored motorcycle. There was, as well as the motorbike, a closet with double doors, a single bed, a corner to make food, and a table with a computer. I stared at the screen in sleep mode. Family of sea lions. Aerial view with pine trees. Large block of blue ice.

"Huh. It's been a long time since I've seen Beto. Is he still in Cambara?"

"Mmhm."

"And you two came from there in one go?"

"Ye", I replied.

"Courageous, eh."

Lauro turned his back to us and filled three glasses with water from the faucet.

"I was born in Minas do Camaquã."

"Really?"

"Seventy-one, I was raised there, my dad was a miner, but it's a ghost town now. I mean, there are still some people living there, a few. If that's what you're looking for..."

"Precisely that", I said promptly.

He sat down at the computer. Julia and I stayed standing, politely sipping our water. What was Lauro going to show us? Photos of the house? I didn't need to see it, I just wanted to get away with the key and some directions, as long as it had a bed (and it did, two of them), it was all good. The map of Brazil appeared on the screen, in satellite mode. Lauro typed in a geographic coordinate. It took a moment for the country to disappear, eventually replaced by smudges that gradually sharpened. There was Minas do Camaquã. It seemed like a miniature town made by scale model fanatics. Everything fitted into one glance. The soccer field. The rows of houses. "In my day, it even had a movie theater, Cine Rodeio, you'll see the building", said Lauro. Then he pointed to a blue smudge, which looked like a lake, but which wasn't actually a lake but a deactivated open mine that had been accumulating rainwater since 1996. The blur that had caught my eye, however, was a different

one, further to the right, sand colored, four or five times bigger than what you might class as the urban perimeter. I asked what it was. Lauro replied, askance: "That's the reject". I didn't have the slightest idea what that meant, so I asked again. I had the impression I was touching on a secret. Everything that came out of the mines that wasn't copper he explained, was thrown onto that piece of ground. Piles and piles of stone ground down for a hundred and fifty years. Ninety-eight percent of what comes out of a mine is useless, so do the math, nothing is ever going to grow there. A manmade desert. I think Lauro's father had been one of those men. Perhaps that was why he was here now, watching over a bit of native wood. Sometimes children must inherit the sins of their parents.



11.

The book: Bellini and the Sphinx

Author: Tony Belloto

Translator: Clifford E. Landers

Original title: Bellini e a Esfinge

ISBN: 978-16-17756-62-7

Year of publication: 2019

Publisher: Akashic, NY and Ireland

Number of pages: 270

Synopsis: Who is the missing dancer Ana Cíntia Lopes? Why did her coworkers, Camila and Dinéia, disappear? What does the voluptuous prostitute Fatima want? Who killed renowned surgeon Dr. Samuel Rafidjian? And what is the role of the hulking live-sex performer known as the Indian? To confront the puzzle of several sphinxes, most of them female, private detective Remo Bellini plunges into the underworld of São Paulo. Little by little, the mysteries unravel in a surprising fashion, until the solving of the final enigma leaves Bellini perplexed, with a bitter taste in his mouth.

Press reviews: “Bellotto is one hell of a writer. With an elegant and quick narrative voice, he reaches a pinnacle of excellence and originality that’s hard to find around here” – Reinaldo Moraes, author of Pornopopeia.

“If Marlowe and Harry Bosch are Los Angeles, Matt Scudder is New York and Maigret, Paris, the detective Remo Bellini is São Paulo’s most complete translation” – O Globo.

The author: Tony Bellotto is the author of the best-selling mystery novels, which have been released as major feature films and translated widely, establishing him as the preeminent writer of Brazilian detective fiction. He is also a guitarist and songwriter for the famed Brazilian rock band Titãs, which has released twenty albums and sold over six million copies. Bellotto writes for the newspaper O Globo and hosts a television show. He is the editor of the books Rio Noir and São Paulo Noir.

The translator: Clifford E. Landers. Translator of books by Rubem Fonseca, Jorge Amado, João Ubaldo Ribeiro, Nélica Piñon, José de Alencar and other Brazilian authors. Ph.D. in Political Science; Retired university professor. Awarded Mario Ferreira Prize and fellowships from Fulbright Commission and Fundação Biblioteca Nacional. Author of Literary Translation: A Practical Guide, published by Multilingual Matters.

MAY 20

SUNDAY

1

There's one indispensable quality for a detective: patience. On Sunday I spent approximately seventeen hours on my feet, from seven thirty in the morning till half past midnight, staring at that small house. During that period, I went to the Nau de Goa Bakery two or three times. It stayed open all day, till eight at night. My nourishment that day consisted of two cheese-and-salami sandwiches and a few cups of coffee. I planted the rumor that I worked for a research institute and was observing the habits of the street for a publicity agency. While I ate or talked, I kept one eye glued to the door of #63.

Early in the morning, around eight thirty, a man who appeared to be past seventy, wearing a beret and wool sweater despite the heat, came out of the house and walked to the bakery. He bought milk and some rolls. Later, at 2:38 p.m. to be exact, the same man, still wearing the beret but without the sweater, went to the pharmacy and returned with a small package in his hands. He limped slightly. He had the relaxed look of the retired, was unshaven, and wore wrinkled clothes. Later, thanks to a talkative saleslady, I learned he had purchased two over-the-counter items - Plasil (antinausea medication) and Voltaren (an analgesic for rheumatic

pains). She also said he was a retired widower who lived alone. On rare occasions he would receive a visit from one of his children. She didn't know whether at the moment anyone else was there. He often bought Voltaren, but as far as she knew, it was the first time for Plasil. She didn't know the widower's name. She called him "sir".

The only time that Sunday when I took my eyes off the house were the minutes spent in the bathroom at the Nau de Goa. I couldn't risk pissing in the street and calling the attention of the entire neighborhood.

2

Around seven that evening I was beset by a bout of paranoia: was Camila even inside the house? Was I wasting precious time on a false lead? That gal Beatriz had Dineia's address and photos, and I still had nothing tangible, just an address. Was I chasing a ghost? Who was Ana Cíntia-Dinéia-Camila? And who was Beatriz?

I thought about Fatima, the only real woman I'd met in the last three days. And what about the kiss we had shared? What nonsense was that?

Before I started hearing my father saying how stupid I was and my ex-wife complaining about my adolescent fantasies I decided to take action. I hid the camera inside my jacket (besides patience, detectives need pockets) and strode resolutely toward #63. I rang the bell. The elderly man with the beret opened the shutter and said in an ill-humored Spanish accent: "What do you want?"

I took a deep breath. "Good afternoon, sir. I'm here on behalf of Caruso Focca with a message for Camila Garcia."

"What is it?"

"He would like to know, whether she's going to return to work. She's missed a lot of days and he needs to know what her plans are."

"Just a moment."

He returned a few minutes later. "She says not to worry, next weekend she'll be back." And he closed the shutter.

I resumed my position across the street and waited there until the light from the TV went out at around twelve thirty a.m. I walked for several blocks before finding a taxi. I had dispensed with Duilio because I didn't want to snort any more coke and because I no longer needed to be driven around the city. Besides which, it was wise to save money, which Dora would appreciate.

Dora. The previous night, when I called and gave my report on my adventure in the casino, she said, referring to the death of the dog Rocco: "Well done. I can't stand mastiffs or Pekingese." About my discovery of Camila's address, she commented: "The fish took the bait, now we just have to wait for the right time to haul in the catch".

When I returned to the hotel the following night, I barely had the strength to relate the facts of that frustrating Sunday. At the end of the call I said, "The fish took the bait but doesn't want to show its face".

"Don't worry", she replied. "It's just a matter of time. A short time. By Wednesday this case will be solved, mark my words."

I remembered Dinéia (had I ever really forgotten her?) and asked Dora about Beatriz's photos.

"They're excellent. Dinéia fits Don Quixote's description of Ana Cíntia perfectly. Now we're going to wait for the mysterious Camila. Wednesday night, I guarantee it, you, Beatriz, and I will have dinner at a restaurant and celebrate with French champagne, on Rafidjian's dime."

Without knowing where she got such confidence from, I blacked out from exhaustion as I hung up the phone.

MAY 21

MONDAY

1

At eight a.m. I was on Rua Tratado de Tordesilhas, armed with my camera, my eyes glued to the door of #63. It was Monday and the street was busier than the day before. To amuse myself during the endless hours of waiting, I took my Walkman this time and listened to some classics by Big Bill Broonzy. "When I Been Drinking" has always been my favorite.

At eight thirty the man in the beret and sweater walked with his slight limp toward the bakery and returned with the same container of milk and package of bread as the day before. I hid behind a tree, which was ridiculous: according to Dashiell Hammett, only fictitious detectives hide behind trees.

In the following hours nothing happened except I traded Big Bill Broonzy for Blind Willie McTell. At three o'clock, as I mentally reviewed my memoirs, the door to #63 slowly opened.

There she was: Camila leaving her hole. I had landed the fish at last.

She was fragile and ethereal (her white skin contracted with the violence of the afternoon sun). Her eyes were deep-set, and her body was simultaneously harmonious and aggressive. She was wearing a sleeveless black T-shirt that emphasized the voluptuous swell of her breasts and a short skirt, black with white polka dots. On her feet, a pair of brown leather sandals with laces up to midcalf. I grabbed my camera and took almost an entire roll without pausing between shots.

Camila seemed distant, divorced from what was happening around her, and didn't even notice me, the lunatic who was photographing her from the opposite sidewalk.

She went into the pharmacy. While she was inside, I changed rolls of film.

As she headed back to the house, Camila struck me as being inebriated, in a torpor I couldn't read. I took some more photos. She entered #63, closed the door, and I ran to the bakery.

I ordered a beer and drank almost the whole bottle in a single gulp. I celebrated my success quietly by eating a sandwich and drinking another beer.

Then I caught a taxi and returned to the hotel.

When I arrived, Sintra told me: "There's an urgent message for you".

"What is it?"

"To call Dora Lobo. Right away."

I went up to my room still brimming with satisfaction. I wavered between writing the report or phoning Lobo, but since she had called, which wasn't typical, I decided to get back to her before doing anything else.

Rita answered the phone with her shrill voice and told me to hold for a moment. Right away I heard Dora's deep and stern voice: "Bellini, come back immediately".

"Why?", I asked.

"Dr. Rafidjian has been murdered."

"What?"

"Dr. Rafidjian was murdered."

2

Immediately after hanging up, I got in a taxi and made it to the office in São Paulo around six that evening.

I found Dora sitting at her desk. An empty glass with traces of port wine and an ashtray overflowing with Tiparillo butts revealed her mood. In front of the desk, sitting in the armchair I usually occupied, was a slim young woman with short dark hair and round glasses, also sipping wine. I noticed that her lips were moistened with port. Both women looked at me, surprised. Dora rose and came toward me with her arms spread.

"Bellini, dear." Pulling me by the hands. "This is Beatriz."

Beatriz stood up and smiled with her large mouth in an angular face. But what caught my attention were her long legs and her small, firm breasts.

I greeted her. She said: "I'm finally meeting the famous Bellini".

We laughed nervously, betraying a suspicious excitement. Dora suggested we sit down, then went to the liquor cabinet and poured another glass of port and offered me a Scotch.

"You're going to need it, the story is kind of rough..."

Beatriz watched me out of the corner of her eye, and when our gazes crossed, she seemed to be wrestling with some enigma created by my presence. I took a healthy swallow and became all ears. Dora lit another Tiparillo and assumed the expression she displayed only when narrating a crime (and what pleasure she took in narrating a crime).

"Dr. Rafidjian was murdered today, in his office on the eleventh floor of a building for medical and dental practices, sometime between noon and one p.m.

when his secretary, Dona Gláucia, went to lunch, as she does religiously every day. She's done that for years, and doubtlessly the criminal was aware of it. When she came back from her meal promptly at one o'clock, Dona Gláucia found the door open that separates the waiting room from the consultation rooms. That was totally abnormal. Upon entering the consultation area, she discovered Rafidjian's body lying in the middle of the room. He was belly-up and his face was completely disfigured; he had bled to death. She started screaming, drawing the attention of nearby offices on the same floor. The doctors who worked there confirmed that Rafidjian was dead and called the police."

Dora paused for a moment, then continued: "The initial impressions by the police are that it wasn't a burglary, as nothing was missing; and amazingly... the murder weapon was an umbrella, Rafidjian's own umbrella!"

"How so?", I asked, intrigued.

"Rafidjian's face was lacerated by blows struck with the point of his own umbrella, an umbrella he always carried. He even had it with him when he was here. I remember that detail very clearly, because it caught my attention: a man carrying an umbrella on a night when there wasn't the slightest threat of rain..."

"And the murderer, after killing the doctor, apparently poked out his eyes in a display of extreme sadism", said Beatriz with a strange, morbid (and sensual) smile.

Dora: "The police quickly interrogated all the porters, elevator operators, employees in the labs and medical offices, janitors, garage attendants, doctors, dentists, and patients about the possibility of having seen anyone suspicious entering or leaving the building during that time. They found nothing – it's a large building with numerous doctors' offices and labs with constant coming and going".

"How do you know all this?", I asked. "The crime was committed just six hours ago."

"Very simple", Dora replied. "The one heading the investigation is Boris."

Detective Boris Ferreira in the homicide division was an old acquaintance of Dora's. Although younger (around forty-five), both identified with the concept of the "ideal investigator". And Boris, despite being quite eccentric, had no peer when it came to solving complicated crimes.

"Yes", I said, "but how did he find out you were involved with Rafidjian?"

"Look, Boris's first thought when he entered the office was to go through the drawers of Rafidjian's desk. He found our contract stuck in an appointment book or something like that. He called me immediately. That was around three this afternoon."

"Beatriz and I were here, checking some details in the reports. I asked her to go to the crime scene and follow the investigation. Boris wants to talk to you tomorrow morning, nine sharp, at homicide. After that, at eleven thirty, I want you and Beatriz at Don Quixote's funeral."

"Anything else?", I asked.

"Boris is intrigued. In his eighteen years as a cop, he's never seen anyone killed with an umbrella."

3

Beatriz had come back from Rafidjian's office shortly before I arrived. Dora asked her to bring me up to date. She cleared her throat and said: "All the doctor's family members were there, crying and screaming. It was horrible". She took a swallow of wine. "Detective Boris let me go right away at six in the afternoon. The crime scene squad had just gotten there, and the specialists were combing for evidence. Fingerprints, hair, forensics. He said the body would be sent to the morgue for autopsy. Tomorrow or day after tomorrow at the latest he should have the results... and the detective repeated several times: 'An umbrella, who would've thought it, an umbrella?'".

I felt like grabbing Beatriz, kissing her wine damp lips, tearing off her clothes, and biting the nipples of her firm breasts. Dora called me back to reality, as if guessing my secret desires.

"From the looks of things, we're removing ourselves from the case." She gave me a severe stare, taking on that school principal air. "Let's turn to our final obligations: Bellini, hand over the film so Rita can still get someone to develop it today. I'm curious to see Camila's face. At nine tomorrow you'll meet Boris and take him the reports and the photos of Camila and Dinéia. Afterward, you'll go with Beatriz to the doctor's funeral. I want a final report on all of it."

"Why?", I asked. "The case is over. Our client was murdered."

"Because I like to keep documents on file in unfinished cases, it's a habit", she replied.

Despite her efforts to appear pragmatic, Dora couldn't hide her frustration. Rafidjian, Ana Cíntia, Dinéia, and Camila continued to be an enigma, and Dora was always drawn to enigmas.

Deciphering them was a question of honor.

4

The mention of those names made me curious. Ana Cíntia, Camila and Dinéia. Ana Cíntia was quite probably a pseudonym of one of the other two. Camila I already knew. I asked Beatriz and Dora to show me the photos of Dinéia. Dora took an envelope from a desk drawer and spread the photographs on its surface.

Dineia Isidoro was young, with an earnest smile and something Indian in her features. I saw photos of Dinéia and her mother, an elderly woman with an enigmatic gaze and ravaged skin, also with Indian features. They were in a small living room with Formica furniture and, in the background, two pictures hanging on the wall. One was an image of Jesus with his heart in flames, pierced by thorns, bleeding. The other, older, showed a man and woman, newlyweds. The faces of the bride and groom were retouched, making them appear unreal and frightening despite the fact that they were smiling. Another photo showed children of various ages, all of them seemingly half-Indian, smiling. Dinéia and her mother, with serious expressions, beside the TV. Two little sisters with their hands on Dinéia's belly.

The voice of Beatriz seemed to emerge from one of the photographs: "Does Dinéia look like Camila?"

"No. It's funny how the two fit the description of Ana Cíntia but are completely different from each other."

"It's a shame to have to abandon the case just when it's starting to get interesting!" Dora's voice was like a hammer pounding on an anvil.

As if thinking aloud, Beatriz stated: "I won't lie, I'm relieved to be off the case". She examined the photos, still on the desk. "I said I was a social worker, and those people opened their house to me with total hospitality and trust. They even offered me coffee, cake, those things. I'm not cut out to be a detective, not at all."

"My dear", replied Dora, gruffly, "in the majority of cases a lawyer is obliged to lie as much as or more than a detective".

I intervened: "I think we're all rattled by the situation. How about some pizza and beer - aren't you two hungry?". Silently, I congratulated myself for my presence of mind.

The atmosphere in the office had become unbearable. The corpse of Rafidjian with his eyes gouged out by an umbrella, the melancholy poverty of Dinéia and her family in that tiny house on the outskirts of Cornélio Procópio, Camila's chemically induced torpor and the limping steps of her widowed father in Santos, and most of all our frustration at not being able to do anything further with a case that became more complicated (and interesting) by the minute - had all left our nerves rubbed raw.

One feeling, however, overshadowed my frustration. It was the strange excitement that Beatriz's presence aroused in me. There was something intriguing in her apparent normality.

I couldn't explain what was going on with me, so I let the unexplainable manifest itself.

Dora, Beatriz and I ended the night at the Pizzeria Camelo, on Rua Pamplona.

We ate garlic pizza and drank beer, lots of beer. During the meal, someone bumped Beatriz's chair and her purse, which was hanging from it, fell to the floor. She bent down to pick it up and I caught a glimpse of both her breasts. The sight impressed and rattled me.

After eating, we drank some more, and by the end of the evening we were more or less resigned to the abrupt conclusion of the case. On the way back I drove Dora's car and we dropped Beatriz at her home. She lived with her mother (her parents were separated) in a two-story house in Jardins. When we said good night, I muttered something like, "It was very nice to meet you", and she said, "None of that, Bellini", and then, smiling with her strange morbidity, "Tomorrow we've got a funeral to go to". That was when I felt something happening.

"Magic" was how Dora referred to the phenomenon she had just witnessed, and, vain about her capacity for observing human behavior, she didn't refrain from commenting.

She dropped me off at Baronesa de Arary.

When I was almost at the door, she called out from the car: "Get whatever information you can out of Boris. I want to know what the police think about all this".

Before going to sleep, as I lay in bed listening to Robert Johnson, the scene I kept coming back to wasn't Dinéia's Indian mother, or Camila's leather sandals or Dora talking about Rafidjian's empty eye sockets.

It was the sight of Beatriz's breasts.

FRANÇAIS



12.

Le livre : Ni Partir Ni Rester

L'auteur : Julián Fuks

La traductrice : Marine Duval

Titre : A Resistência

ISBN : 978-24-6813-42-2

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Synopsis : Suite au coup d'État de 1976, un couple dissident quitte l'Argentine pour le Brésil accompagné du bébé que leur avait confié une sage-femme. C'est ensuite en exil qu'ils donnent naissance à Sebastián et à sa sœur. Aujourd'hui écrivain, Sebastián s'interroge sur les origines de son grand frère adopté dont on ne sait presque rien de la famille biologique. L'auteur se rend à Buenos Aires à la rencontre des Grands-Mères de la place de Mai, une organisation rassemblant des femmes dont les petits-enfants ont été volés à leurs parents par le régime militaire. À travers cette quête historique mais aussi personnelle, Sebastián essaie de comprendre les silences gênés de sa

famille et la distance qu'entretient ce frère. Il cherche dans le langage et la littérature des réponses à ses questions, ainsi qu'aux énigmes qui hantent aujourd'hui encore tant de familles argentines.

L'auteur : Julián Fuks est né en 1981 à São Paulo de parents argentins, Julián Fuks est journaliste et écrivain. Après plusieurs romans et recueils de nouvelles acclamés par la critique, il reçoit, pour *Ni partir ni rester*, le prestigieux prix Jabuti au Brésil et le prix José Saramago au Portugal.

La traductrice : Marine Duval est une éditrice et traductrice franco-brésilienne. Elle a notamment traduit le livre de Fernanda Torres, *Fin*.

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CHAPITRE 1

Mon frère est adopté, mais je ne peux ni ne veux dire que mon frère est adopté. Si je le formule ainsi, si je prononce cette phrase que depuis très longtemps j'ai pris soin de passer sous silence, je réduis mon frère à une condition catégorique, à une attribution essentielle : mon frère est quelque chose et ce quelque chose réside dans ce que tant essaient de discerner chez lui, ce quelque chose réside dans les signes que nous persistons à chercher malgré nous dans ses traits, ses gestes, ses actes. Mon frère est adopté, mais je refuse de souligner le stigmate que le mot évoque, le stigmate que représente le mot lui-même converti en caractères. Je ne veux pas approfondir sa cicatrice. Or si je ne veux pas l'approfondir, je ne dois pas l'évoquer.

Je pourrais employer le verbe au passé et dire que mon frère a été adopté, le libérant ainsi du présent immuable, de la perpétuité. Mais je n'arrive pas à dépasser l'étrangeté que la formulation induit. Mon frère n'était pas autre chose avant d'être adopté. Mon frère est devenu mon frère à l'instant où il a été adopté, ou mieux, à l'instant où je suis né, quelques années plus tard. Si je dis que mon frère a été adopté, c'est comme si je déclarais sereinement l'avoir perdu, qu'il avait été enlevé, que j'avais un frère jusqu'à ce que quelqu'un soit arrivé et l'ait emmené loin.

Reste l'option la plus prononçable. Parmi toutes, celle qui engendre le moins d'inquiétude, ou qui la masque le mieux. Mon frère est un enfant adopté. L'expression enfant adopté implique une technicité qui contribue à son acceptation sociale. Une nouveauté qui l'absout un instant des séquelles du passé, semble le blanchir de toute acception indésirable. Quand je dis que mon frère est un enfant adopté, les gens ont tendance à acquiescer d'un air grave. Dissimulant leur peine, ils baissent les yeux comme s'ils ne voulaient plus rien savoir. Peut-être qu'ils partagent mon inquiétude, peut-être qu'ils passent à autre chose le temps d'une gorgée ou d'une

bouchée. Si l'inquiétude continue de se réverbérer en moi, c'est parce que j'entends aussi la phrase partiellement – mon frère est un enfant – et il m'est difficile d'accepter qu'elle ne se termine pas par la tautologie courante : mon frère est un enfant de mes parents. Je prétends que mon frère est un enfant et une interrogation me brûle alors les lèvres : l'enfant de qui ?

CHAPITRE 2

Je refuse d'imaginer un hangar vaste, glacial et sombre, le silence souligné par le mutisme d'un enfant frêle. Je refuse d'imaginer une main robuste le saisissant par les mollets, les coups rudes qu'il reçoit jusqu'à ce que résonnent ses pleurs accablés. Je refuse d'imaginer le bruit strident de ses pleurs, le désespoir du petit garçon contenu dans son premier souffle, son besoin d'être serré dans des bras dont on le prive. Je refuse d'imaginer les mains tendues d'une mère à l'agonie, un autre sanglot étouffé dans le fracas des bottes contre le sol, des bottes qui s'éloignent et l'emmènent. L'enfant disparaît, reste l'abîme du hangar, reste le vide. Je refuse d'imaginer qu'un enfant puisse provoquer la ruine d'une femme. Je préfère laisser ces images se dissiper dans l'inaudible des cauchemars, cauchemars qui habitent ou habitaient un lit voisin du mien.

Je ne saurais décrire un accouchement heureux. Une chambre blanche, des draps blancs, les gants que reçoit le petit, blancs, plastique, impersonnels, scientifiques. Aucun bonheur, à l'évidence, dans l'asepsie totale. Un obstétricien l'accueille dans ses mains neutres et l'examine : l'enfant est entier, l'enfant respire, il a la peau rose, la flexion de ses membres est bonne, sa fréquence cardiaque est régulière. Il ne faut pas que sa mère le voie. Ou plutôt, il ne faut pas que la mère qui lui a donné naissance le voie. À quoi bon risquer une confusion des sentiments. Surtout dans un moment si sensible, quand la douleur de l'accouchement s'estompe, après la délivrance, peut-être un léger vide. Une telle incertitude n'en vaut pas la peine. Des bras provisoires ne lui seraient d'aucun bénéfice. Il vaut mieux qu'il rencontre au plus vite ses véritables parents, des bras ouverts et prêts à le recevoir, avides et déterminés à une pleine étreinte.

Si je suis sincère avec moi-même, je préfère ne pas me laisser absorber par les images de cette naissance. Parler d'un enfant qui naît, c'est parler d'une existence subite, d'un être qui se crée. Ce moment n'importe à personne autant qu'à cet être, il ne concerne personne d'autre que l'enfant qui surgit à la vie. Pour accorder à cette naissance le ton joyeux qui lui est dû, dont j'aimerais qu'il lui soit dû, que mon frère mérité comme toute vie le mérite, je devrais convoquer le sourire de ceux qui se sont bientôt trouvés devant lui, qui se sont précipités pour l'appeler enfin leur fils. Ce devaient être de larges sourires, de ceux qui naissent du relâchement des nerfs quand une attente est enfin assouvie. Mais un enfant ne naît pas pour soulager. Il naît et en naissant exige d'être lui-même soulagé. Un enfant ne pleure pas pour

créer chez les autres la possibilité d'un sourire. Il pleure pour qu'on le prenne dans ses bras, qu'on le protège et qu'on taise par ses caresses la vulnérabilité implacable qui le tourmente si tôt déjà. Si je refuse d'imaginer qu'un enfant puisse provoquer la ruine d'une femme, je ne peux pas non plus l'imaginer comme le salut d'une autre famille, de la famille qui serait la mienne, salut déraisonnable qu'on ne devrait jamais exiger de lui.

CHAPITRE 3

Il est adopté, c'est ce que j'ai dit un jour à une cousine qui s'obstinait à souligner à quel point nous étions différents lui et moi, ses cheveux plus foncés et bouclés, ses yeux beaucoup plus clairs. Je crois qu'il n'y avait pas de méchanceté ni de mépris dans ma déclaration. Je devais avoir cinq ans à peine. Mais si je ressens maintenant le besoin de me justifier, c'est peut-être parce que j'ai été animé d'une cruauté innocente que j'essaie encore aujourd'hui d'occulter. Mon père conduisait et ma mère devait être absente car mon frère occupait le siège avant. Je ne sais plus s'il participait à la conversation ou s'il était perdu dans des pensées insondables. Le silence s'est fait immédiatement. J'ai peut-être reçu un coup de coude discret de ma sœur, que j'imagine assise à côté de moi. À moins que l'élanement ne soit venu du malaise ressenti, en m'apercevant de mon erreur, malaise si souvent ressenti sans qu'on ait besoin de me donner un coup de coude. C'était un silence tellement écrasant que je m'en souviens encore aujourd'hui, parmi tant de silences peu mémorables.

Je n'espère pas m'absoudre de l'équivoque en disant qu'à cette époque les orientations que nous recevions étaient vagues et ambiguës. Mon frère a toujours su qu'il avait été adopté. C'est ce que disaient mes parents et cela m'a toujours troublé, à moins que cela ne me trouble aujourd'hui : comment annoncer une telle chose à un enfant qui ne maîtrise pas les mots les plus simples ? Avec quelle froideur ou distance prononcer maman, papa, bébé, adoption ? Comment transmettre l'importance d'une telle donnée, avec toute la gravité qu'exige le sujet, sans lui conférer un poids inutile, sans le transformer en un fardeau que l'enfant ne pourrait jamais porter ? Winnicott dictait nos pas. Nous suivions la plupart des préceptes que la théorie winnicottienne préconisait, c'est ce que j'entendrai des années plus tard. Sans comprendre tout à fait le terme, je remarquais néanmoins le ton plaintif, la voix désolée. Il fallait qu'il le sache, que nous le sachions, que tous les habitants de la maison le sachent, il était fondamental de le savoir. Et cependant, le processus s'est en quelque sorte inversé. À un moment donné, ces mots sont devenus indicibles, on a tu la vérité comme pour ainsi la gommer. Je crois pouvoir dire que mon frère nous a lui-même imposé ce silence. Il lui était plus confortable et nous l'avons simplement accepté, par gentillesse, par lâcheté.

Dans mon souvenir, mon frère avait les larmes aux yeux. Mais il s'agit sans doute d'un détail de mon invention, imaginé les premières fois où je me suis remémoré

l'épisode, déjà tourmenté par un certain remords. Il était assis à l'avant. S'il pleurait, il retenait sûrement le moindre hoquet et cachait ses larmes derrière ses mains ou tournait son visage vers la fenêtre, le regard perdu vers d'éventuels passants. Le fait est qu'il ne m'a pas regardé, ni ne s'est retourné. Peut-être était-ce moi qui avais les larmes aux yeux.

CHAPITRE 4

Quelle force a le silence quand il s'étend bien au-delà du malaise immédiat, bien au-delà de la douleur. Depuis des années, j'observe, impressionné, la capacité qu'a mon frère d'expédier les pensées qui le dérangent, de couper court aux conversations sans brutalité, de changer de sujet sans qu'on s'en aperçoive, de glisser d'une idée à l'autre presque instantanément, sans effort. Je vois son visage se crispier une seconde avant la moindre menace, avant même qu'on ait eu le temps de prononcer la moindre phrase malheureuse, une infime suggestion ou insinuation à son trouble, pour bientôt revenir à ses traits habituels, à son indifférence, son insensible neutralité. Il a su en fait oublier, de nombreux indices l'attestent. Bien qu'oublier ne soit pas le mot exact, occulter est le mot que mes parents suggéreront ici, je le prédis. De nombreuses preuves témoignent de ces longues périodes passées sans qu'il ne se confronte ne serait-ce qu'à lui-même, sans accepter ni reconnaître – des jours ou des mois, peut-être des années, enfermé dans sa chambre sans que rien de tout cela ne l'atteigne, sans que ne lui revienne à l'esprit tout ce que je ne veux pas et ne peux pas dire, tout ce que j'ai besoin de dire. Et lui, n'a-t-il pas besoin de se le dire ?

Quelle force a le silence quand il s'étend bien au-delà, je me le demande, bien au-delà du malaise immédiat et de la douleur, mais aussi bien au-delà de la culpabilité ? Et là je peux répondre. J'ai été moi aussi longtemps capable d'oublier. Nous sommes de nouveau dans la voiture, cette fois le voyage est long et la fatigue nous pèse presque autant que la torpeur, la chaleur, l'exaspération, et ici encore il semble que j'essaie de justifier mon insensibilité, mon insanité. Je ne sais plus pourquoi je suis énervé contre ma sœur, je ne veux plus être à côté d'elle, partager le voyage ni l'espace avec elle, mais j'y suis obligé et cette perspective me désespère : je ne suis pas son frère. J'annonce que je ne suis pas son frère et elle s'indigne. Tu ne peux pas dite ça, tu es et tu seras mon frère pour toujours. J'insiste. Je ne veux pas, tu n'es pas ma sœur un point c'est tout, c'est décidé, j'ai décidé. Elle fait appel à mon père, qui lui donne bien sûr raison tout en masquant son rire. Ma mère acquiesce et rit aussi devant l'absurdité comique de la scène, à hauteur de mon entêtement. Aucun verdict n'a de valeur dans ces moments : Ce n'est pas la peine, allez au diable, je ne suis pas son frère un point c'est tout.

L'anecdote est devenue un classique familial que l'on raconte lors des dîners, même si tous les convives la connaissent déjà, comme exemple typique de sottise

enfantine ou comme preuve de mon extrême obstination. Elle est toujours relatée sur le ton amusé que ceux qui étaient à l'avant, mes parents, lui attribuent. Nous deux qui étions à l'arrière assumons aussi ce ton. Nous nous souvenons nous aussi de l'épisode comme d'un événement comique, jusqu'à même le concevoir comme un rite fondateur de notre complicité.

Mais nous étions cinq dans la voiture. Mon frère ne s'est jamais prononcé à ce sujet, préférant encore aujourd'hui rester silencieux, au bout de la table, avalant le reste de son assiette avant de se retirer chaque fois un peu plus tôt. J'étais assis au milieu, entre elle et lui, je devais lui tourner le dos tout en parlant, déterminé à défendre ma position impossible. Je ne sais pas comment mon entêtement résonnait à ses oreilles, s'il a apprécié le peu de valeur que j'accordais aux liens du sang ou s'il a souffert de connaître la précarité que je conférais aux attaches fraternelles. Je ne remettais pas en question le fait qu'il était mon frère, je ne voulais pas rompre notre relation. Mais je me demande pourtant s'il n'a pas une seconde froncé les sourcils, baissé les yeux et crispé ses traits d'enfant.



13.

Le livre : Les Miniatures

L'auteur : Andrea Del Fuego

La traductrice : Cécile Lombard

Titre : As Miniaturas

ISBN : 978-28-15914-96-3

Éditeur : Éditions de l'Aube

Année de publication : 2018

Nombre de pages : 194

Synopsis : Dans un institut qui se dresse au centre de São Paulo, des drôles de thérapeutes reçoivent des patients endormis auxquels ils suggèrent des rêves à l'aide de miniatures très diverses, allant du tigre... à un ovaire ?! Las ?! la machine s'enraye lorsqu'un des onirocrites se retrouve en charge de deux membres d'une même famille, ce qui est rigoureusement interdit. Commence alors un stupéfiant récit à trois voix ? Celle de la mère qui se bat pour garder le goût de l'existence, celle de son fils adolescent bien décidé à tracer son chemin et celle de l'onirocrite, complètement obsédé par leur destin. Une ambiance digne d'un Kafka à la sauce brésilienne ? : détonnant et savoureux !

L'auteur : Andréa Del Fuego est née à São Paulo (Brésil) en 1975. Autrice de romans et des contes déjà traduits en plusieurs langues, elle est lauréate du prestigieux prix José Saramago (Attribué à l'unanimité !).

La traductrice : Cécile Lombard, Traductrice d'édition ATLF (portugais/anglais-français).

L'ONIROCRITE

L'institut Midoro Filho est situé au centre-ville. Ma fonction est simple et je traite directement avec le public.

Durant mon stage, je devais passer les miniatures à mon instructeur au cours des séances. J'avais le choix entre les dix qu'on rangeait dans le tiroir : dinosaure, livre, échelle, serpent, calculatrice, voiture, verrou, chaussure, trompette, et une abeille. Des figurines sombres, à l'éclat de plastique neuf.

L'onirocrite a tendu la main pour tester ma pertinence ; je lui ai remis ma figurine qu'il a brandie devant le visage d'un rêvant assis sur une chaise, bouche et yeux fermés, globes oculaires dansants. J'ai risqué d'abord le verrou, puis, dans l'ordre, l'abeille et le serpent. Les globes se sont apaisés, le rêvant s'est levé de lui-même et a quitté la pièce.

C'était l'examen. Après m'avoir fait signer un papier, mon instructeur m'a conduit dans une salle proche : j'avais obtenu ma promotion.

Aujourd'hui, je suis moi-même onirocrite ; je travaille seul, sans appui. Pièce carrée, plafond blanc, murs gris, carrelage froid. Plus le travail est rapide, plus nous recevons de patients en augmentant la diversité des figurines, c'est-à-dire le nombre de lettres de l'alphabet à notre disposition. C'est mieux, on peut pousser plus loin, bien que cela fonctionne déjà avec une lettre unique : pâtissier, paille, pain, prison, parachute, paon, poisson, pont, plage, porte, poignard, procession, pigeon. J'ai déjà beaucoup insisté sur le m : mer, melon, montagne, monstre, mur, moine, mallette et monnaie.

L'Institut suscite le rêve à partir du rêve lui-même, tout comme la grammaire agence des mots pour former des phrases. Ma salle comprend une table étroite, une chaise pour moi et une seconde en face, où s'installe le rêvant. Tous les sujets sans exception ouvrent la porte sans piper mot. Un jour, j'ai demandé au gérant pourquoi nous ne les faisons pas s'allonger, vu que cette position serait plus confortable. Il m'a répondu de m'occuper de mon rayon.

Dans mon tiroir, j'ai des dizaines de miniatures, inefficaces en elles-mêmes : on doit les commander à la voix, prononcer une expression clé. On ne choisit pas son patient, c'est l'Institut qui opère le tri initial. Mais il s'est trouvé que j'ai dû traiter une mère et son fils – séparément, bien sûr. La mère une fois par semaine, le fils tous les jours.

La première expression que j'ai soumise à la mère, c'était « maison avec trois fenêtres ».

« La maison de ma grand-mère ? a-t-elle répondu, les jambes tendues au maximum, les yeux enfoncés dans les orbites.

– Positif.

– J'entre par la fenêtre ?

– Positif.

– À l'intérieur, elle est plus grande qu'elle ne paraît.

— Positif. »

À chaque confirmation, j'avance d'un degré. Avec elle, le travail est facile. Avec le fils, je dois parler davantage, je suis obligé d'indiquer tout le parcours :

« Un verre, je suggère.

— Et ?

— Regarde ce qu'il contient.

— Rien.

— Mets-y un zeste de citron.

— Un quoi ? »

S'il ignore le sens du mot, ça devient difficile. On sait, dans nos couloirs, que les maladies déterminent des traits familiaux identiques : l'un hérite du ton de l'autre, une sorte d'embryon de feuille de fougère planté dans la terrine du crâne. Il est donc possible que le fils rattrape sa mère en agilité. À vérifier.

Je me souviens de tous ceux qui séjournent dans cette salle, je m'autoconsulte en tant que table des matières mentales. Il me suffit d'un substantif et l'information arrive comme sur un tapis roulant. Je relie l'expression à la personne, je peux décrire les corps qui se sont assis en face de moi. Bien qu'immobile, personne n'est inactif, et la concentration est si intense qu'elle est presque palpable.

Nous n'avons pas accès à l'historique du rêvant. Quoique, avec un peu d'observation en salle, je pourrais établir un profil assez conséquent, mais nous ne saisissons que des craquelures ; une donnée n'est jamais complète.

Nous avons une bibliothèque qui abrite les listes des miniatures déjà produites pour chaque patient. Tout y est : on y archive les renseignements extraits des rapports que nous transmettons aux bibliothécaires. Des données obtenues par les réactions des rêvants aux expressions clés lancées au cours des séances et à partir desquelles sont générées de nouvelles figurines. Nous ne notons pas tout aussitôt le patient sorti, car notre mémoire est phénoménale. Moi, par exemple, je le fais de quinze en quinze jours. Hormis cet inventaire, la bibliothèque ne possède pas d'ouvrages explicatifs.

Tout de suite après la mort de Napoléon Bonaparte, on nous a permis de proposer en miniature sa représentation, c'est-à-dire son chapeau. S'agissant d'un personnage public, ses données ne sont plus secrètes, on a le droit d'accéder à sa liste : une souris, une théière, un obélisque égyptien. Déjà au Moyen Âge, des renseignements décrivaient une mendiante : la moitié d'un pain, un bout de parchemin aux mots effacés, une couverture fine et une note, SE RÉFÉRER AUX RÊVES DE SA MÈRE.

En face de l'institut Midoro Filho, il y a un couple qui dort, je vois d'ici leurs jambes emmêlées ; à peine la nuit tombée, ils prennent un bain dans l'eau croupie de la fontaine débranchée sur la place. De temps en temps, ils lèvent la tête vers moi et j'ai l'impression qu'ils vont me parler ; mais l'édifice étant tapissé de miroirs, la seule chose qu'ils devinent dans le reflet des nuages, c'est s'il va pleuvoir ou non. J'aime regarder par la fenêtre, observer les passants en bas, ceux qui traversent la place, entrent à la cathédrale ...Ceux qui pissent sur la pelouse ou vendent des jeans dénichés dans les poubelles, et des concierges qui mangent du maïs bouilli.

Jamais je ne me suis attaché à un patient, jusqu'à cette mère et son fils. Le truc, c'est leur lien de parenté : ce cordon qui les relie m'a intrigué. En premier lieu, j'ai eu envie de le couper, mais le fait de rompre leur lien n'aurait pas effacé leur ressemblance physique. Un sexe et un âge distincts, sur deux visages dont l'un est la conséquence de l'autre. Comme l'Institut interdit qu'un thérapeute traite deux membres d'une même famille, cette faille du système dont j'avais été témoin et à laquelle je participais m'a énervé. À ma dernière séance avec la mère, j'ai eu du mal à me concentrer.

« Une montre, ai-je proposé.

— De quelle taille ?

— Qui fait le tour de deux poignets.

— Pour une obèse ?

— C'est ça », ai-je confirmé.

LA MÈRE

Cette nuit, j'ai rêvé d'une montre dont les chiffres étaient remplacés par des animaux. Il paraît qu'on rêve de ce qui nous est nécessaire. Pour un chauffeur de taxi, c'est la montre qui commande, on est payé au temps, un café tout de suite en sortant. Je n'attends pas les clients à des points fixes, je tourne en ville. C'est super de choisir un quartier, les gens aiment reprendre le même taxi, ils finissent par avoir confiance. En voyant une femme qui paraît cinquante ans – même si je suis beaucoup plus jeune –, ils en concluent que je suis prudente au volant, c'est tout à mon avantage. Je roule doucement. S'ils me demandent de me dépêcher, je fonce, à condition qu'il n'y ait personne devant. Je me réveille tous les jours avant mon fils : à l'heure où il se lève, j'ai déjà fait deux courses.

Si je ne l'avais pas à charge, je m'en irais d'ici. Ce n'est pas de la tarte d'être la mère d'un gamin de seize ans qui ne fait rien. Tant qu'Ademar ne revient pas, on est comme en suspension, ça mine le courage. Pour être franche, ce serait aussi bien qu'il n'existe pas celui-là.

Quand Gilsinho est né, Ademar s'est fait embaucher comme technicien en électronique et je restais à la maison pour m'occuper du petit. Il n'y a pas si longtemps que mon fils a arrêté de manger des pâtes dans son bol en plastique de bébé. Il aurait pu remplacer mon mari, à savoir être une compagnie docile pour moi. Mais ce n'est pas le cas : et j'ai faim, et je veux acheter des baskets, et je veux sortir avec ma bande. Il a un copain qui habite si loin qu'il reste quelquefois chez nous pour la nuit. Je ne l'aime pas celui-là, ou plutôt je n'aime pas sa mère, qui ne connaît pas l'enfant de quinze ans qu'elle a mis au monde et qu'elle laisse dormir loin du nid. Celui-ci aussi pourrait être mon mari, dans le sens d'une chambre à la lumière éteinte et de trucs qui se passent dans le noir.

Ah, Ademar ! Et si je racontais à Gilsinho que tu n'es plus à l'hôpital avec interdiction de recevoir des visites ? Si je lui disais que tu es guéri et que tu t'es tiré ? Même ta mère n'a pas le courage d'avouer la vérité à son petit-fils. Tu as de la chance que ton fils soit obéissant et qu'il n'ait pas reçu ma part d'héritage génétique, qui fait que les mèches de cheveux volent quand on me contredit. Tiens, aujourd'hui, c'est la dernière fois que je prononce ton nom, je vais le répéter maintenant, et après, jamais plus : « A-de-mar ».

J'ai inscrit Gilsinho au collège technique dans la section publicité, c'est ce qu'il lui faut : il travaillera pour des journaux, des magazines, il créera des affiches. Seize ans, c'est le bon âge pour un garçon quand sa mère en a quarante-deux. J'ai vécu vingt-six ans sans lui.

Quand je me lève, à cinq heures, il dort ; je ne le réveille pas, je pose un café et des vêtements propres à côté du lit. Hier matin, j'ai chargé une dame au centre-ville, qui allait dans l'avenue Paulista.

« C'est à peu près au milieu, j'ai oublié le numéro.

— Pas grave, c'est facile à trouver.

— Ça fait longtemps que vous êtes chauffeur de taxi ?

— Depuis que mon fils a commencé à parler.

— Je vais porter à manger au mien. J'ai enterré mon chat au Trianon il y a deux ans, j'ai payé un gosse pour qu'il le fasse parce que j'ai le dos fichu. Je l'avais baptisé d'un nom de garçon. C'est comme un enfant, en plus économique, et on sait à l'avance qu'il mourra le premier, ce qui minimise le drame ; parce que les enfants meurent, madame, il y a combien de gens qui ne meurent pas jeunes ? Faites le compte. Et votre fils à vous, il est mort ? Vous pouvez tourner ici, on y arrive, quelle circulation ! Je porte des croquettes à mon fils. Je les laisse sous l'arbre où on a mis son corps. À mon avis, tout le monde devrait avoir quelqu'un à enterrer et à qui rendre visite après. J'ai tué mon enfant le 3 janvier, il pleuvait à seaux. Je l'ai empoisonné, il a eu des convulsions, je lui ai jeté une valise très lourde dessus pour accélérer le processus. Souffrir, non, mais mourir, c'est normal. De nos jours, c'est presque incorrect de mourir : comme une défaite, un échec.

— Ici, ça vous va ?

— Faites le tour. Déposez-moi devant le portail, je ne veux pas traverser. »

Après celle-là, j'ai chargé un monsieur en veste étriquée qui m'a demandé de le laisser à la poste de Vila Mariana. J'ai regardé dans le rétroviseur, il pleurait doucement. Un grand type, comprimé dans son vêtement trop étroit.

« Vous voulez un mouchoir ?

— S'il vous plaît. »

J'en ai sorti un de la boîte à gants et je le lui ai tendu. Au moment où il allait l'attraper, le feu est passé au rouge. Ma voiture est une quatre portes, il a ouvert et il est descendu, sans payer, sans moufter, sans remercier. Ça m'arrive de temps en temps. Je m'en fiche : le soir, Gilsinho a son repas tout prêt, que j'apporte du supermarché. Il y a des jours où en rentrant, je le trouve déjà couché, comme un vieux. Je vais à la salle de bains, je laisse l'eau chaude me laver de ma journée. J'envisage de vendre des boissons fraîches et de la bière dans mon taxi. Je mets

des glaçons dans un sac isotherme et quelques canettes, qui va refuser ? À manger, c'est compliqué : la bouffe risque de se gâter et le client peut être malade ; il y en a qui notent le numéro du taxi. Une fois, un type m'a prévenue en montant : « Je vous avertis, si vous faites une ânerie, je peux me plaindre ».

Je n'ai pas réagi, mais, en entendant ce genre de propos, un chauffeur de taxi mal luné le tuerait pour qu'il ne le dénonce pas. Le problème, ce serait de savoir où déposer le corps. Moi, je le poignarderais de côté. Il aurait l'air évanoui, je m'arrêteraï dans le parking d'un centre commercial et j'étendrais le cadavre sur la banquette arrière. On est tenu de garder une toile cirée dans le coffre. Puis je le laisserais au Trianon, près du fils-chat de la vieille. Parfait. Il vaudrait mieux le découper, mais là je n'aurais pas le courage, il faudrait que je demande à quelqu'un de terminer le boulot. Il y a un boucher pas loin qui porte un collier de protection d'umbanda¹ et écoute de la musique classique ; il a une Sainte-Vierge posée au-dessus de son frigo, sa boucherie est plus propre qu'un hôpital. Voilà un type à qui je pourrais demander de l'aide.

Je n'ai jamais eu de contravention, je respecte le code de la route, je suis disciplinée. J'ai une licence pour le taxi, tous mes documents sont en règle. Dessus, je suis second conducteur, le premier étant le père de Gilsinho. En principe, ce papier est accordé par la préfecture, mais lui, il l'avait acheté une fortune à un de ses cousins qui avait renoncé au métier après avoir écrasé une gamine. J'ai le droit de travailler à une station au meilleur endroit de la ville, dans le centre. Mais je n'y reste pas, j'ai horreur d'attendre dans une file ; chaque fois que c'est mon tour de charger, le client veut juste que je l'emmène jusqu'au métro le plus proche. Alors qu'au suivant, on demande de partir pour une longue course vers des banlieues lointaines. Si je stationne, je n'ai aucune chance, donc je tourne jusqu'à la tombée de la nuit.

Je connais pas mal d'épouses de cinquante ans qui relaient leurs maris pour le taxi, y font le ménage le matin, installent un vase de fleurs, passent le chiffon sur la banquette et de l'alcool sur le téléphone, lissent la couverture du plan des rues... Il ne manque plus à leur mec qu'elles lui coupent les ongles. Mon affaire à moi est circulaire. J'ai le chic pour prendre des clients pressés, qui oublient des trucs dans mon taxi. J'ai une grosse boîte remplie des pièces de monnaie que je retrouve sur le tapis de sol. Des paquets de cigarettes, des trombones. Les dossiers qui contiennent des documents, les portefeuilles, je les rends ; mais avant, je fouille pour savoir qui est le propriétaire. Un jour, j'ai rapporté des papiers au patron d'une pizzeria, et je suis rentrée à la maison avec une calabraise et un oignon. Gilsinho devrait trouver un job dans ce genre, en contact avec le public, où on côtoie des gens – mais pas toujours les mêmes, pas longtemps, juste le temps d'une course. Le cours de publicité, c'est cher, et il n'est pas près de commencer à travailler. Il faudrait que je le prenne avec moi dans le taxi pour qu'il rencontre un client intéresse. Mais si on était deux, les gens refuseraient de monter, ils penseraient qu'on est de la police.

« Bonjour madame, vous êtes dans le secteur de la publicité ? Voici mon fils, donnez-lui un emploi ou je vous laisse à la limite de la ville. »

¹ Religion afro-brésilienne.

Je vais trouver un petit boulot pour mon fils. Il aime la mécanique, il comprend ce qui se passe dans le ventre des voitures. C'est certainement pour ça que j'ai rêvé d'une montre, je vais vendre son temps, qu'il convertira lui-même en argent pour ses études.

« Gilsinho, tu connais la station Caïman, au Brigadeiro ? Ils cherchent un pompiste. »



14.

Le livre : La Brave Bête du Coin

L'auteur : João Gilberto Noll

Le traducteur : Dominique Nédellec

Titre : O Quietos Animal da Esquina

ISBN : 979-10-95434-09-2

Éditeur : Éditions DO

Année de publication : 2018

Nombre de pages : 92

Synopsis : Un jeune poète désœuvré traîne dans un quartier mal famé de Porto Alegre. Arrêté par la police pour le crime qu'il vient de commettre, il est mystérieusement relâché et interné dans une clinique avant d'être recueilli dans une vaste propriété par un couple d'Allemands. Incapable de peser sur le cours de son existence, il s'abandonne alors au confort de cette vie nouvelle, tout en s'interrogeant sur les motivations réelles de son énigmatique protecteur. Lui sera-t-il donné d'être autre chose que son obligé, son garde-malade, son animal de compagnie ?

L'auteur : João Gilberto Noll (1946-2017) était un écrivain brésilien, lauréat de six prix Jabuti. Admiré pour la radicalité. L'intransigeance et l'intranquillité beauté de son œuvre, João Gilberto Noll est une figure légendaire des lettres brésiliennes.

Le traducteur : Dominique Nédellec est l'un des traducteurs les plus renommés de la littérature portugaise vers le français, étant, par exemple, responsable de la traduction de l'œuvre d'António Lobo Antunes, publiée en France aux éditions Christian Bourgois.

C'est précisément pour la traduction de « Que Cavalos São Aqueles que Fazem Sombra no Mar ? » (Quels sont ces chevaux qui jettent leur ombre sur la mer ?), de Lobo Antunes, que Dominique a remporté le prestigieux prix Gulbenkian-Books en 2015.

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CHAPITRE 1

Un jus noir me dégoulinait des mains sous le robinet, je venais de perdre mon boulot, je disais adieu à ce cambouis pas facile à enlever.

Un jus noir qui dégoulinait, trois mois ont passé depuis, et j'ai pris l'habitude de tuer le temps en traînant en ville, léger abattement en me voyant dans le miroir d'une pissotière, mais rien qu'un garçon de dix-neuf ans ne puisse dissiper en marchant encore un peu.

Quelquefois, il m'arrivait même de faire la queue avec d'autres candidats pour un emploi, je sortais alors de ma poche n'importe quel bout de papier, un stylo, si quelqu'un me regardait je prenais un air grave, comme si je notais non pas des vers me venant à l'esprit, mais un truc urgent qu'il ne fallait pas que j'oublie.

Dans le centre de Porto Alegre, mon trajet ne variait pas beaucoup, je marchais un peu rua da Praia, je prenais un petit café dans le passage de la Galeria Chaves, j'allais jusque chez le marchand de journaux de la praça da Alfândega, je feuilletais encore et encore, je montais jusqu'à la rua Riachuelo, j'entrais chez un bouquiniste, restais un moment à feuilleter là aussi, de la poésie, trop fauché pour acheter des bouquins même d'occasion, les réserves quasi à sec, bien souvent comme ce jour-là, j'allais me poser à la bibliothèque municipale à deux pas du bouquiniste en question, je lisais des vies de poètes, tous plus déjantés les uns que les autres, il y en avait un qui n'avait jamais cherché à tirer son coup, jamais baisé avec personne, il est mort comme ça, chaste, un autre avait une passion secrète pour ses rognures d'ongles, il les gardait dans un petit flacon et leur vouait une sorte de culte, poussé par un sentiment qu'il était incapable de déchiffrer.

Cet après-midi-là cette bonne vieille faim n'a pas tardé à se manifester, je me suis levé, dirigé vers la sortie en regardant les gens qui lisaient, penchés sur des tables sombres et calleuses, pour la plupart les usagers habituels, je me demandais s'ils étaient au chômage comme moi ou s'ils touchaient une pension d'invalidité à cause d'une maladie cachée, parce que je ne distinguais rien d'anormal chez eux, ils étaient là, assis, à lire, tranquilles, ils n'avaient l'air ni estropiés ni amputés à première vue.

Je m'apprêtais à m'en aller quand j'ai vu qu'il tombait de la suie, on ne savait d'où, par endroits, en telle quantité qu'on ne voyait même plus le trottoir d'en face. Des gens passaient et recevaient ces flots de suie sur la figure, d'autres couraient, d'autres encore entraient se mettre à l'abri dans le hall de la bibliothèque, j'ai sorti

mon portefeuille de ma poche, il me restait quelques pièces, je suis parti, l'averse de suie touchait à sa fin, j'ai descendu l'Avenida Borges, pris la rua da Praia, la rua Vigário José Inácio, je suis entré dans le cinéma Carlos Gomes, je me suis installé pour regarder un porno, la femme a garé son cabriolet capote abaissée et a commencé à se caresser la chatte, un attroupement d'hommes s'est formé autour d'elle, un touriste japonais filmait la scène, et la femme comme si de rien n'était, les yeux clos, jouissant plusieurs fois de suite, la chatte trempée, rose.

Je suis sorti du cinéma quasiment en fin d'après-midi, j'ai marché doucement, si doucement que je me suis carrément retrouvé à l'arrêt dans la travessa Acelino de Carvalho, une venelle froide qui ne voit jamais le soleil tellement elle est étroite, accessible seulement aux piétons, avec son éternelle odeur de pisse, quelques coiffeurs d'un côté et de l'autre trois, quatre portes de sortie latérale du cinéma Vitória, je me suis retrouvé figé devant une de ces portes et j'ai entendu des voix à l'intérieur qui parlaient anglais. Puis je me suis rappelé, je rentre chez moi là, et je suis reparti d'un pas plus décidé jusqu'au terminus.

C'est un lundi après-midi que j'ai débarqué dans le squat du quartier de Glória, où j'habitais désormais avec ma mère. J'y suis arrivé seul, avec juste une caisse à outils, une caisse que j'avais l'habitude d'emporter, je ne sais pas pourquoi, dans des situations délicates comme celle-là. C'était un immeuble resté inachevé : une porte par-ci par-là, quelques fenêtres, des salles de bains presque prêtes, les cuisines pas vraiment. Chaque jour de nouveaux squatteurs se pointaient en douce, ma mère et moi par instants on s'interrogeait du regard, puis on décidait de faire comme si on était vraiment chez nous en accrochant quelque chose au mur, en poussant le vaisselier cassé plus près de la fenêtre, c'était depuis notre expulsion de notre ancienne maison à moitié penchée sur le bord du trottoir dans ce même quartier de Glória, c'était depuis ce moment-là qu'on se surprenait l'un l'autre à se regarder comme ça d'un air ahuri.

Le bus qui me ramenait chez moi passait maintenant sur la crête au milieu des cimetières, j'étais cerné par les cimetières, sur la colline mélancolique comme ils disaient à la radio, depuis le sommet j'ai aperçu comme tous les jours le vallon de l'autre côté, le quartier de Glória - plein de maisons basses, et l'église atroce avec ses tours que l'heure avait légèrement rosies.

J'ai pensé à la tête de ma mère en train de m'attendre dans le petit appartement, avec une seule chambre, les parpaings à nu, l'ampoule sans abat-jour, et cette femme qui semblait juste m'attendre, depuis que mon père était parti, elle restait là sans rien d'autre à faire que m'attendre, à regarder la télé en m'attendant, une télé en noir et blanc qui ne captait pas toutes les chaînes.

En bas de l'immeuble il y avait une grande galerie avec des colonnes en enfilade, il faisait déjà sombre quand je suis arrivé, et comme tous les jours en fin d'après-midi ils étaient là adossés aux colonnes, toute une bande, des gars et des filles, presque tous sans boulot comme moi, un peu pâles, sous l'éclairage faiblard, j'avais l'habitude de m'arrêter une minute, pour écouter, y aller de mon avis à l'occasion, une rumeur comme quoi il était possible que la police, des unités de flics viennent nous virer des apparts, ils pouvaient débarquer à tout moment, grosse rigolade de

ceux qui n'y croyaient pas une minute, à mon tour maintenant de tirer sur le joint baveux, deux ou trois types planquant une seringue et s'éloignant vers l'arrière de l'immeuble, où se trouvaient les bouts informes d'une construction laissée en plan dès son démarrage, qu'on appelait des ruines.

J'ai ouvert la porte déglinguée de l'appartement et ma mère était là comme toujours à m'attendre, sauf que cette fois elle pleurait, elle m'a dit qu'elle allait partir le lendemain, qu'elle n'en pouvait plus, que moi j'étais jeune mais qu'elle irait habiter chez sa sœur, là-bas du côté de São Borja.

On s'est assis, les coudes sur la table. Ma mère a dit que ce lait lui restait sur l'estomac. De fait, sur la surface du verre il y avait des plaques de matière grasse.

On a frappé à la porte, je suis allé ouvrir en sachant d'avance qui ce serait : le fils aîné de la voisine d'à côté, un gamin complètement taré qui avait la manie de venir me demander un clou, pour la centième fois je lui ai dit que je n'en avais plus, comme toujours il avait besoin de clouer quelque chose, cette fois, c'était pour clouer un éclair, oui, clouer un éclair au plafond au-dessus de son matelas, il vociférait presque : taper, taper, taper jusqu'à ce que ça saigne. J'ai levé les yeux puisque c'était vers là-haut qu'il pointait le doigt furieusement, je voyais le plafond fissuré du couloir, prête-moi juste un clou répétait le gamin, juste un clou c'est tout, de sa voix à moitié étranglée, et puis d'habitude, il redevenait brutalement silencieux, et s'en retournait dans l'appart où il habitait comme anéanti par une défaite dont aucun autre gamin n'aurait idée.

Ma mère regardait la telenovela assise sur le canapé plus qu'élimé, j'ai descendu l'escalier pour aller voir s'il y avait du nouveau au pied de l'immeuble, en descendant je pensais à elle, je me disais que c'était vraiment bien qu'elle parte à São Borja, parce qu'ici à Porto Alegre tout portait à croire que ça allait mal tourner et je ne voyais pas ce que j'aurais pu faire d'elle.

Autour de l'immeuble, partout ou presque des broussailles, de l'humidité, des étendues continuellement submergées, des grenouilles qui n'arrêtaient pas de coasser. Personne en vue dans les parages. Je me suis appuyé contre une colonne avec le bras, j'ai baissé les yeux, mes tennnis déchirées, je pouvais profiter de ce silence pour écrire un poème, sortir un bout de papier de ma poche, un stylo, des images de choses qui ondulaient m'obsédaient depuis un moment, une fine tige peut-être, très fine sous la brise, c'est alors que j'ai entendu quelqu'un chanter, une voix aiguë, j'ai regardé autour de moi, les choses qui ondulaient, la fine tige, très fine sous la brise ce serait pour une autre fois, j'allais chercher qui chantait comme ça, c'était tout près, ça ne venait pas des appartements là-haut, mes pas lents, regarder dans tous les coins, la voix très aiguë, je me suis dirigé vers l'arrière de l'immeuble d'où la voix semblait venir à présent, ah, c'était la fille qui vivait au dernier étage, Mariana sauf erreur, assise sur les ruines, plus jeune que moi, elle fredonnait une ballade romantique à souhait, d'un chanteur plutôt moche mais qui faisait hurler les filles comme des hystériques sur les plateaux télé, salut, j'ai dit, tu es toute seule ?

La fille a continué de chanter encore un moment, soudain elle s'est arrêtée et m'a dit qu'avec un ciel comme aujourd'hui, plein d'étoiles comme ça, par-dessus le

marché avec une lune pareille, il fallait s'attendre à qu'il y ait un paquet de druidesses à descendre. C'était ce genre de fille, tout le temps à parler de druidesses et de créatures étranges, elle disait qu'elle n'allait jamais à l'école, en revanche elle allait tous les jours dans son refuge au sommet d'une colline, où elle passait la matinée à chanter.

Quand elle est partie dans ses délires de druidesses j'ai commencé par me dire que j'avais sommeil, que j'allais rentrer me coucher, ou pourquoi pas réattaquer mon poème.

Mais dans un deuxième temps, quand elle s'est remise à chanter, j'ai pensé qu'après tout non, ce serait pas mal de rester un peu, il ne faisait pas froid, j'ai déambulé au milieu des ruines, elle chantait un truc plutôt bien d'ailleurs, la nuit était claire, et maintenant je voyais ces ruines prendre une teinte jaune sous la lune.

Tout à coup, je me suis rendu compte que je me trouvais si près de la fille en train de chanter que je pouvais presque sentir son haleine, je ne disais rien, elle a arrêté de chanter, j'ai remarqué qu'un grand mur hérissé de piques nous cachait de l'immeuble, je lui ai balancé un baiser, on a roulé tous les deux sur la terre humide, ma langue pénétrait dans la bouche de la fille à travers une rumeur sourde, un cri certainement si j'avais enlevé ma bouche – maintenant il était trop tard, il fallait que j'étouffe ce cri, dès que ma queue est entrée j'ai joui, et la rumeur sourde, le cri que j'étouffais en écrasant ma bouche contre la sienne a cessé, et je me suis relevé.

Je suis rentré, ma mère dormait sur le canapé élimé, elle avait laissé la lumière, je suis allé dans la chambre, je me suis effondré sur le lit, me suis endormi.

J'ai été réveillé pendant la nuit, des voix dehors, je me suis levé, j'ai jeté un œil par la fenêtre, j'ai vu des flics en train de parler avec des types sortant d'une Escort rouge, le fourgon de police avec le gyrophare qui tournait, ils étaient sur chemin de terre tout défoncé à droite de l'immeuble, ils avaient stoppé le fourgon en biais devant l'Escort, l'un des flics a commencé à menotter les types, l'autre les tenait en joue.

C'était la routine d'être réveillé à cause d'embrouilles de ce genre dans le quartier, police, voleurs de voitures, dealers, cette nuit-là était même plutôt calme, il n'était pas rare que des coups de feu éclatent, et moi comme bien d'autres nuits les épiait par la fenêtre en faisant attention de ne pas me faire repérer, s'ils m'apercevaient en train de les épier sûr que je serais aussitôt considéré comme suspect.

Je me suis assis sur le lit, j'ai entendu la sirène des flics. Puis le silence est revenu. Dans le salon ma mère ronflait, le lendemain elle partirait pour São Borja.

J'ai vu un éclair taillader le ciel, tout est devenu bleu, le tonnerre a retenti, je suis revenu à la fenêtre, nouvel éclair illuminant l'espèce de clairière où ils avaient construit l'immeuble, l'Escort était toujours là, j'ai senti que je n'allais pas arriver à me rendormir, une forte averse a commencé à s'abattre contre les carreaux, l'eau m'empêchait de voir au-dehors, je me suis dit que j'avais du mal à mettre ma vie sur les rails, ma mère ronflait comme si rien ne la concernait, et moi regardant les gouttes qui ne me laissaient pas voir au-dehors, n'arrivant pas à me rendormir et pas moyen de sortir avec cette pluie, je suis allé dans le salon, la lumière était toujours allumée, j'aurais pu voler l'alliance que ma mère avait à

son doigt, m'enfuir tranquillement puisqu'elle n'allait pas se réveiller, mais à tous les coups cette alliance ne valait rien et, surtout, j'étais lâche, j'ai appelé ma mère, je lui ai demandé de me faire une tisane parce que j'avais la tête qui tournait, j'étais à deux doigts de vomir.



15.

Le livre : Angola Janga

L'auteur : Marcelo D'Salete

Le traducteur : Dominique Nédellec

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Synopsis : Angola Janga est un roman graphique écrit et conçu par Marcelo D'Salete qui raconte l'histoire de Quilombo de Palmares, connu parmi ses habitants sous le nom d'Angola Janga, ou « Pequena Angola ».

L'auteur : Marcelo D'Salete (São Paulo, 1979) est auteur de bande dessinée, illustrateur et enseignant brésilien. Il est titulaire d'une maîtrise en histoire de l'art de l'Université de São Paulo.

Le traducteur : Dominique Nédellec est l'un des traducteurs les plus renommés de la littérature portugaise vers le français. Dominique a remporté le prestigieux prix Gulbenkian-Books en 2015.

DES SENTIERS ET DES RÊVES

J'ai entendu parler de l'histoire du quiombo do Palmarès (on disait autrefois mocambo) au cours de mes premières années de scolarité. Un jour, une camarade m'a lancé, catégorique : « aujourd'hui, on est le 20 novembre, c'est le jour de Zumbi dos Palmares ! ». Je l'ai regardée, intrigué. J'ignorais presque tout de l'histoire de Zumbi, comme de celle des Noirs du Brésil. C'est un univers que je n'ai commencé à entrevoir que des années plus tard, à travers le rap, la littérature et le cinéma.

Longtemps après, alors que j'étais à l'université, j'ai eu l'occasion de lire des textes sur ce conflit qui s'est déroulé à Palmarès, dans la Serra da Barriga. C'est alors que j'ai pris la mesure de l'importance de cet événement. L'un des conflits majeurs du XVII^e siècle et de l'histoire du Brésil colonial. Plus que cela : il s'agissait du plus grand soulèvement d'esclaves noirs dans toute l'Amérique, comparable à la révolution haïtienne.

Encore plein d'incertitudes, j'ai entamé l'élaboration d'un premier scénario sur Palmarès, j'ai décidé des principaux épisodes et de la ligne centrale du récit. J'ai ébauché quelques dessins mais, à ce stade, je ne disposais pas encore des informations nécessaires pour mener mon projet à son terme. J'ai passé les années suivantes à étudier les textes et l'iconographie de cette période. Entre-temps, j'ai publié plusieurs livres : *Noite Luz* (2008) et *Encruzilhada* (2011). En 2014, a paru *Cumbe* (éditions ça et là, 2016), une œuvre directement inspirée de mes recherches sur la résistance des Noirs au temps du Brésil colonial.

Je me suis rendu à Maceió, dans l'État d'Alagoas, pour découvrir les lieux, me faire une idée du paysage et visiter le mémorial de Palmares, dans la Serra da Barriga, où se trouvait autrefois Angola Janga (la « Petite Angola », expression kimbundu qu'utilisaient les Palmaristas). Le mémorial se trouve sur le site de l'ancienne capitale, Macaco. Le projet a été lancé par l'IPHAN (Institut du Patrimoine Historique et Artistique National) au début des années 1980. Cependant, il n'a été achevé qu'une vingtaine d'années plus tard, avec la reconstitution de maisons, de lieux de travail, de palissades et de tours de guet. Au XVIII^e siècle, cet endroit dépendait de la capitainerie générale du Pernambouc.

Cette bande dessinée n'est pas la première sur le sujet. Clóvis Moura et Álvaro de Moya (*Zumbi dos Palmares*, 1955), Antônio Krisnas et Allan Alex (*Zumbi - A Saga de Palmares*, 2003), Carlos Ferreira et Moacir Martins (*A Guerra de Palmares*) ont déjà proposé des récits sous forme de bande dessinée sur ce fait historique. En littérature et au cinéma, Palmares a également donné lieu aux travaux de João Felício (*Ganga-Zumba*, 1961), Jorge Landmann (*Tróia Negra : a guerra de Palmares*, 1998) et Cacá Diegues (*Ganga-Zumba*, 1963 ; et *Quilombo*, 1984). Un événement de cette ampleur méritait certainement de nouvelles interprétations.

Ce livre ne raconte pas l'histoire, mais une histoire de Palmarès. Il renvoie à la possibilité d'interpréter et de réimaginer des faits. On peut aborder ce conflit

de différentes façons. Les données historiques fournissent des pistes, des indices, qui peuvent nous aider à progresser sur un sentier à travers la forêt profonde. Les documents dont on dispose concernent principalement les dernières décennies de cette bataille. Ils émanent de soldats, d'officiers, de maîtres de moulins, de gouverneurs, de prêtres, etc. Autrement dit, de personnes qui étaient parties prenante dans la destruction de Palmarès. Le présent ouvrage entend, au contraire, proposer un récit tenant compte du point de vue des Palmaristas. À cet effet, la fiction joue un rôle important. C'est grâce à elle que nous pouvons franchir les obstacles et rejoindre, par l'art et la poésie, ces hommes et ces femmes.

Une grande partie des personnes qui se sont rebellées pour aller vivre à Palmares étaient originaires des royaumes Ndongo, Matamba, Kongo et de leurs environs (principalement aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles). Ces Africains parlaient kimbundu, ovimbundu, umbundu, etc. Une minorité d'entre eux avaient d'autres origines. La culture des mocambos était donc nourrie d'un ensemble de traditions essentiellement bantoues. D'après les estimations officielles, environ douze millions d'Africains ont été déportés aux Amériques, dont plus de cinq millions au Brésil. Mais on sait que le trafic a été plus important que cela et il faudrait donc revoir ces chiffres à la hausse pour s'approcher de la réalité.

Au XVI^e siècle, les Portugais avaient accès aux côtes angolaises. Leur association avec les Imbangala (ou Jaga) a accru le trafic dans l'intérieur des terres. Il est probable que des informations sur les royaumes de Ndongo soient parvenues jusqu'à Palmarès. Au XVII^e siècle, la trajectoire de Nzinga, par exemple, a été contemporaine de l'épopée des Palmaristas. Nombre de guerriers de Nzinga, reine de Ndongo et Matamba, vaincus à la guerre, furent envoyés au Brésil et réduits en esclavage. Pour des raisons évidentes, les Luso-brésiliens redoutaient que des chefs africains n'arrivent dans les montagnes du Pernambouc.

Le territoire des colonies portugaises doit être pensé à partir de leurs nombreux points de contact dans l'Atlantique sud. Le Brésil et l'Angola étaient reliés par un même jeu d'intérêts productifs, commerciaux et politiques. Dans une perspective coloniale, ils dépendaient l'un de l'autre. Pour l'historien Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, la croissance du Brésil des premiers siècles est le résultat direct du pillage et de la destruction des royaumes angolais.

Les premières références aux mocambos de la Serra da Barriga dans le Pernambouc datent de 1597. Une quarantaine d'hommes et de femmes, après avoir détruit un moulin à sucre, s'enfuirent dans l'épaisse forêt de la côte. D'autres Noirs arrivèrent également de régions proches (celle de Bahia, par exemple). Les premières expéditions contre les mocambos de Palmarès eurent lieu en 1602, sans grand résultat. Les mocambos d'Angola Janga résistèrent et s'agrandirent, principalement pendant la période d'occupation hollandaise (entre 1630 et 1654).

Dans les montagnes du Pernambouc, Angola Janga était formée d'une dizaine de dou mocambos. On y produisait essentiellement du maïs, du manioc, des haricots, des patates douces et des bananes. À son apogée, Palmares compta plus de vingt mille habitants. Les plus grands mocambos, comme la capitale Macaco, pouvaient rassembler jusqu'à six mille personnes. Celui de Subupira était connu comme centre

d'entraînement militaire. Parmi les autres mocambos, citons Zumbi, Andalaquituche, Alto Magno, Aqaltune, Acotirene, Amaro, Tabocas, Osenga, Dambraganga, Curiva, Una, etc. En raison des attaques continues de la part des Luso-brésiliens, les mocambos les plus proches de villes, dont l'existence était connue, pouvaient avoir une durée de vie limitée. Dans la montagne, les esclaves marron se montraient d'un extrême prépondérant pour l'existence de Palmares. La survie de ces mocambos dépendait de leur capacité à se rendre invisibles et inaccessibles aux attaques des soldats. Les mocambos de Palmares n'étaient pas isolés dans la Serra da Barriga. Palmaristas et colons communiquaient et commerçaient. Ces contacts étaient loin d'être négligeables. Ils permettaient aux Noirs insurgés de se fournir en poudre et en armes, mais aussi d'être informés de futures attaques des Luso-brésiliens. Ainsi, vers 1690, le Paulista Domingos Jorge Velho menaçait les colons ayant des sympathies pour les Palmaristas, car il craignait que ces derniers ne fussent prévenus de ses projets d'offensives.

La tactique des Palmaristas consistait à éviter les affrontements directs avec l'ennemi. La forêt, impénétrable, menaçante et harassante pour les soldats, était un terrain idéal pour les rebelles. Ils pouvaient y déployer leurs défenses, dresser des embuscades. Les mocambos étaient loin de tout, difficiles d'accès ; après des semaines de marche, les soldats qui n'avaient pas déserté étaient épuisés, malades, affamés et apeurés : des proies faciles pour les attaques des calhambolas.

L'accord de Cucaú, conclu en 1678 entre Ganga-Zumba et le gouverneur, déboucha sur la concession de terres à un petit groupe de Palmaristas dissidents. Malgré les éloges du gouverneur, ce groupe, sous la double menace des maîtres de moulins et des partisans de Zumbi, n'eut qu'une brève existence. On peut voir cet épisode comme une tentative pour décourager et diviser les Palmaristas, comparable à ce qui se produisit dans d'autres mocambos d'Amérique latine. De nouvelles négociations de paix furent entreprises au cours des années suivantes ; dans le même temps, le camp des partisans de la guerre totale se renforça.

Le régime de captivité existait également à Palmarès. Avec cependant des différences notables par rapport à l'esclavage colonial, un système dans lequel les Noirs étaient la principale force de production de marchandises, le moteur principal de l'économie locale. Dans les mocambos de Palmarès, les captifs n'étaient pas les seuls agents de production ; ils n'étaient pas esclaves à vie, ni de génération en génération. Étant donné l'état de guerre permanent, la présence de soldats, d'espions et de traîtres, la captivité temporaire peut avoir été retenue comme un moyen stratégique visant à surveiller les nouveaux arrivants capturés dans les villages coloniaux.

Dans les premiers écrits d'historiens, Palmarès est présentée comme une entreprise exotique et redoutée, un repaire de rebelles et de corsaires. Les Palmaristas sont parfois tenus pour de valeureux ennemis, obligeant le pouvoir colonial à multiplier les prouesses pour en venir à bout. Pour l'élite coloniale, cet exemple servait à justifier une oppression généralisée visant à empêcher toute tentative de récréation de mocambos et de poches de résistance.

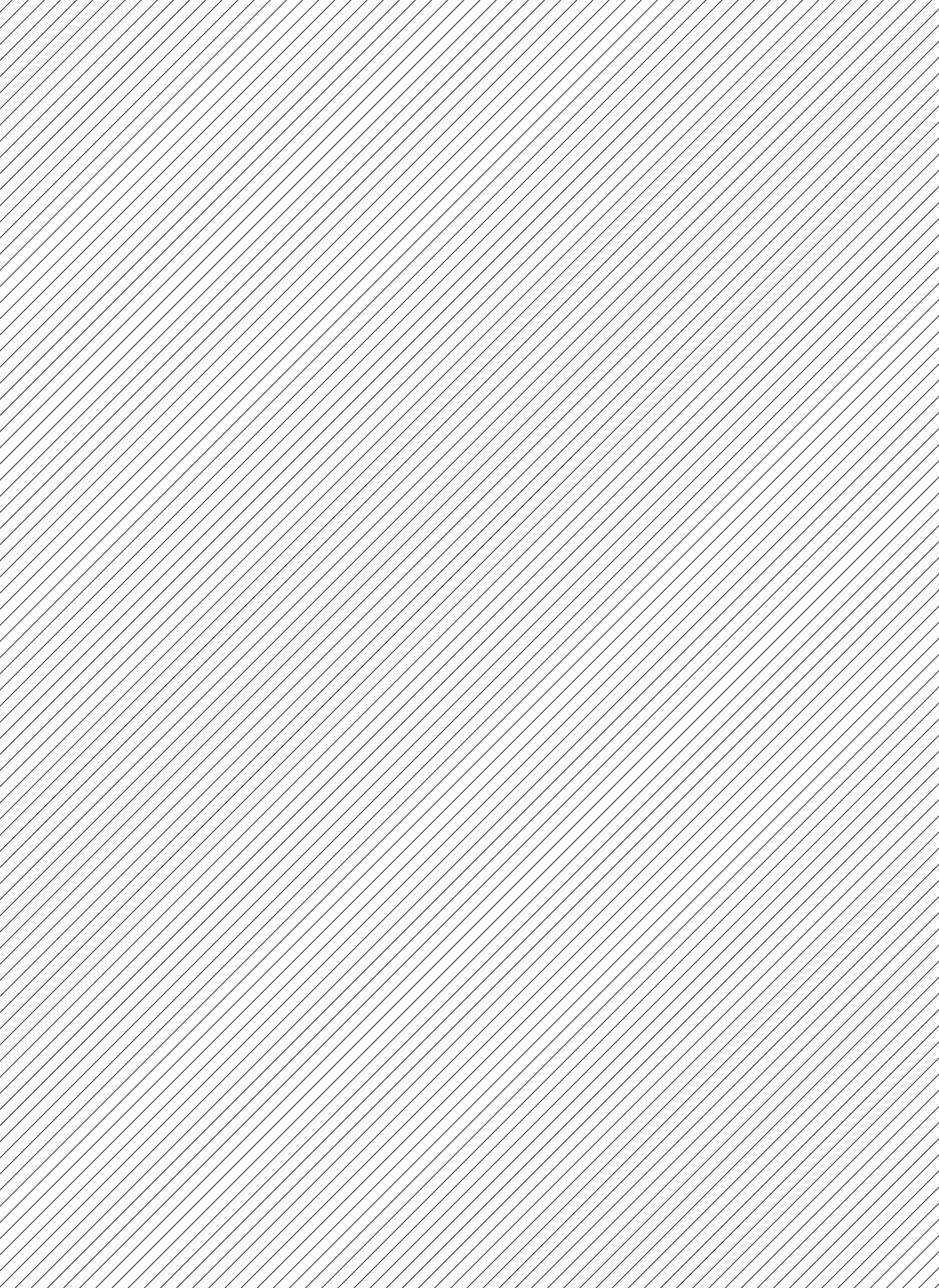
Concernant Zumbi, on sait qu'il fut l'un des principaux chefs de Palmarès et qu'il joua un rôle central du milieu des années 1670 jusqu'à la disparition de Macaco, la capitale. Néanmoins, des incertitudes demeurent sur ses origines. Selon l'historien Décio Freitas, il serait né à Palmarès, mais aurait été capturé et éduqué à Porto Calvo. Cette hypothèse est encore contestée. Selon d'autres chercheurs, les documents manquent pour l'attester. Il convient également de souligner que l'histoire de Palmarès dépasse celle de son chef le plus célèbre. Nombreux sont les protagonistes à l'avoir façonnée, par leurs actions, leurs désirs, leurs angoisses, leur engagement dans les conflits qui faisaient rage dans les montagnes de la capitainerie du Pernambouc.

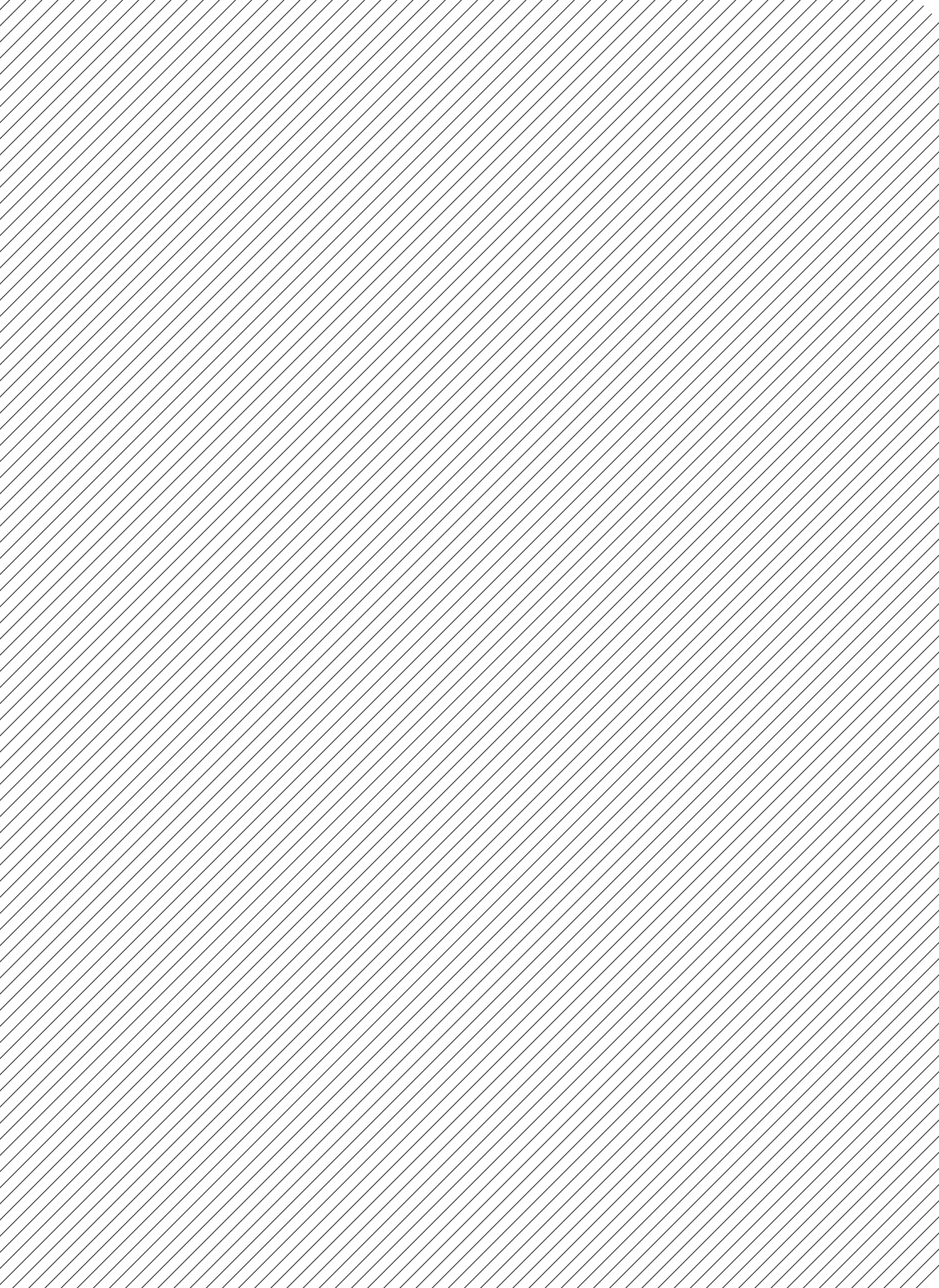
Pour la réalisation de cette bande dessinée, il m'a aussi fallu faire des choix afin de proposer un récit qui soit à la fois concis et intéressant. Au cours des quarante dernières d'existence de Palmarès, par exemple, le Pernambouc a connu plusieurs gouverneurs. J'ai choisi de les présenter par l'entremise d'un seul personnage. André Furtado est un acteur important des dernières batailles contre Palmarès. Dans mon récit je lui attribue des réalisations qui furent en réalité l'œuvre de Fernão Carrilho, figure marquante des affrontements des années 1670 qui débouchèrent sur l'accord de Cucaú. Ces choix ont été dictés par la dynamique, le rythme et les possibilités de compréhension du récit.

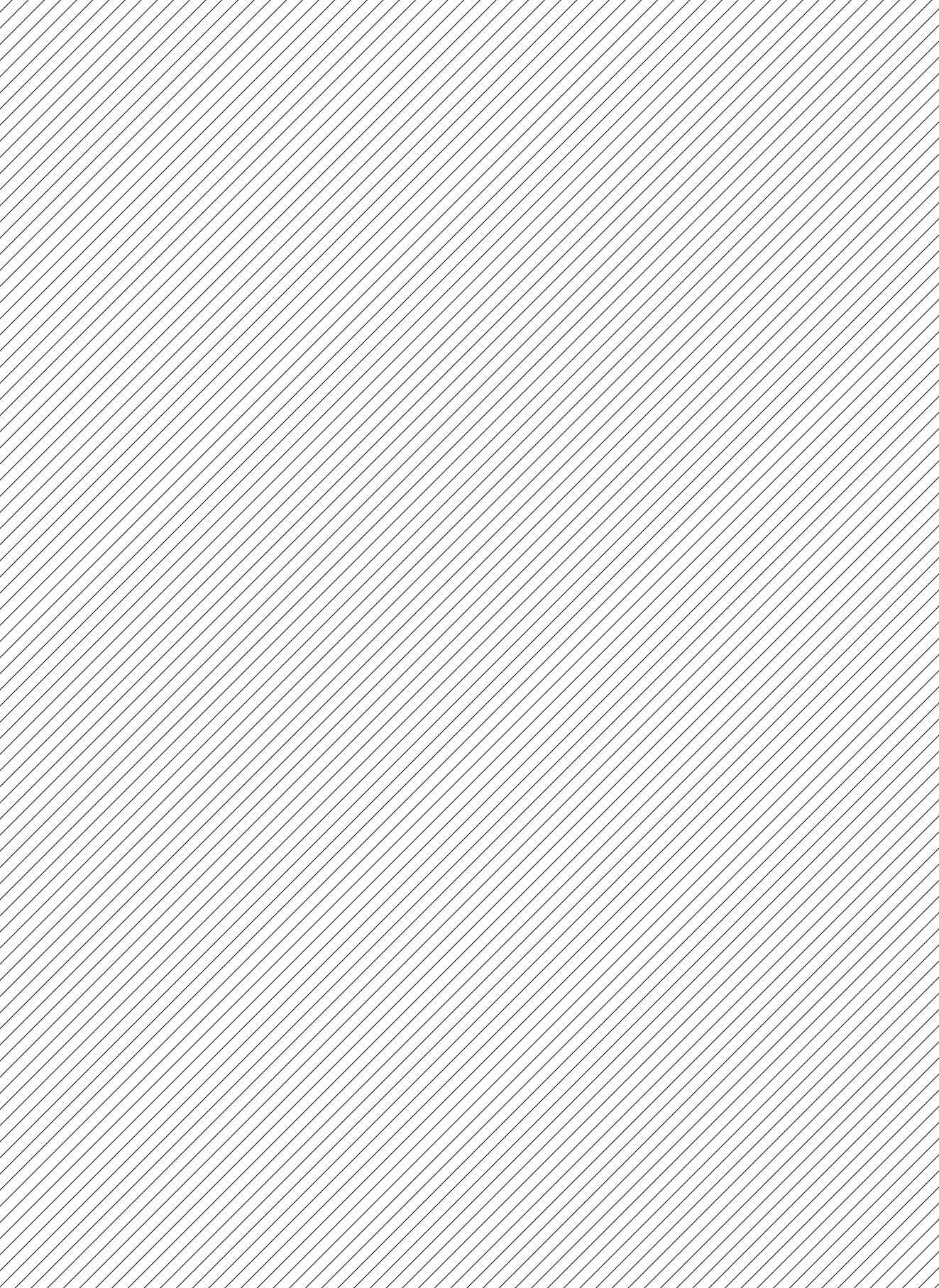
Macaco, la capitale de Palmarès, fut attaquée et détruite en janvier 1694. La palissade assurant sa défense eut beau être renforcée, elle ne put résister à la nouvelle arme apportée par les Luso-brésiliens : le canon. Ajoutons à cela le fait que le territoire était désormais connu et l'accès à Macaco facilité suite à la construction d'une route. Zumbi fut tué le 20 novembre 1695 par André Furtado. Les affrontements se prolongèrent dans la Serra da Barriga pendant encore une trentaine d'années. Après quoi les Palmaristas ayant survécu renouèrent avec la stratégie de la guerre en forêt. D'autres encore se dispersèrent dans la région.

Aucun autre *mocambo* n'atteignit la taille de Palmarès, où vivaient plusieurs milliers de personnes. Mais la résistance de *mocambos* plus petite fut une réalité pendant et après la période coloniale. Pour les Noirs insurgés, il s'agissait d'échapper à la captivité et de reprendre le contrôle de leur existence. Aujourd'hui encore, les descendants des communautés ayant vécu dans les nombreux *quilombos* du Brésil se battent pour être reconnus comme les légitimes propriétaires de leurs terres. Ils sont menacés, mais ils résistent.

Ce livre est le résultat de onze années de recherches, de conversations, d'échanges et d'apprentissage. Et je suis convaincu que je ne serai pas le dernier à m'émerveiller des histoires que l'on raconte au sujet de Palmarès.







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Machado de Assis – Literatura Brasileira em Tradução es una iniciativa de la Fundación Biblioteca Nacional. El objetivo de la revista es divulgar en el mercado editorial internacional textos traducidos de autores brasileños. Cada edición presenta nuevas traducciones para acceso del público especializado, con el objetivo de colaborar con la visibilidad de comercialización internacional de derechos de publicación de escritores brasileños. De esta forma, la revista se suma a otras iniciativas de la Fundación Biblioteca Nacional de apoyo a la difusión de la literatura brasileña, como el programa de becas de traducción, el programa de residencia en Brasil para traductores y el apoyo a las publicaciones hechas en los países de habla portuguesa.



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