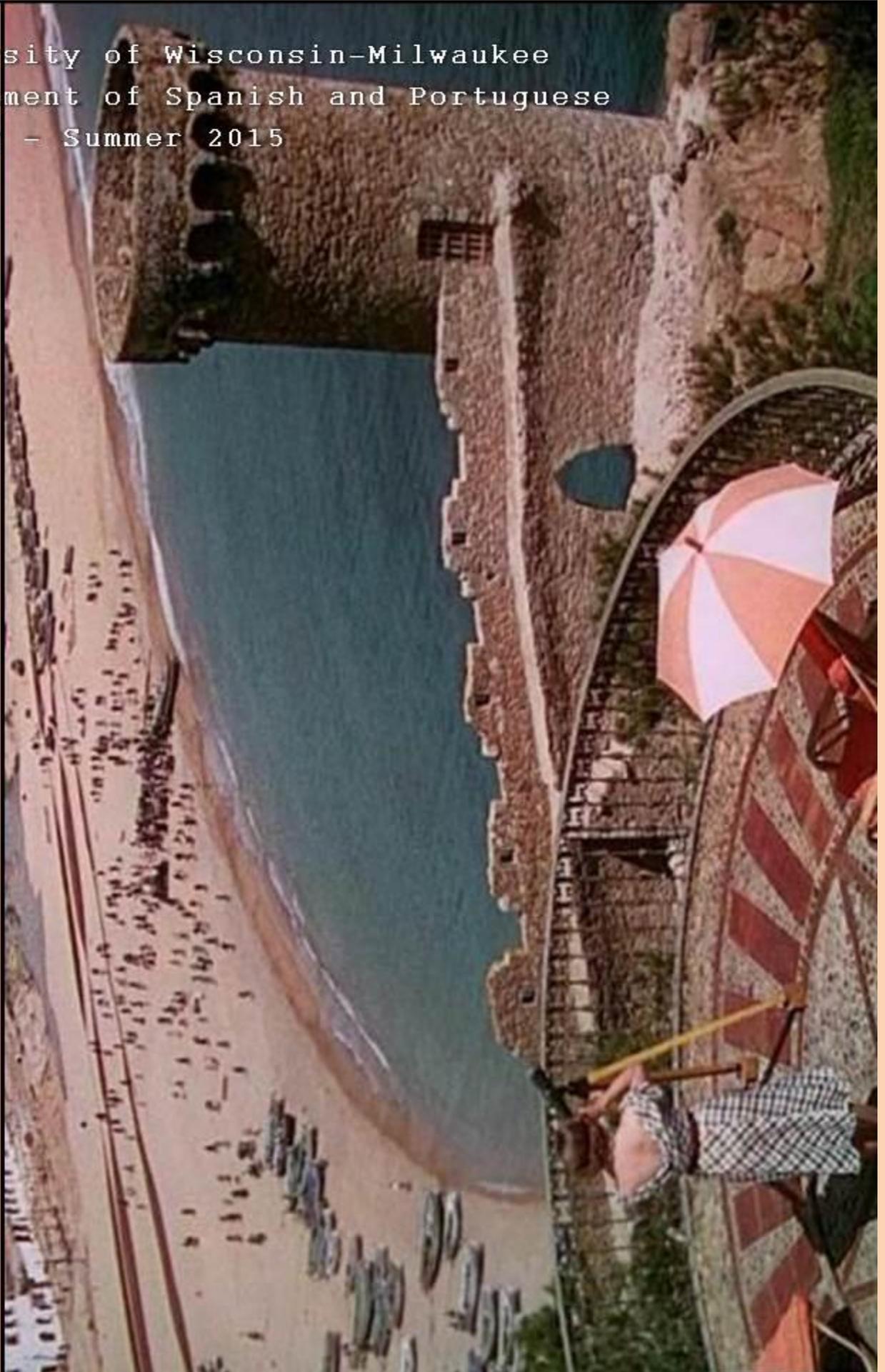


University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Department of Spanish and Portuguese
Spring - Summer 2015

Luna creciente, 4



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Image on the front page designed by Mario Sánchez Gumiel from Albert Lewin's *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* (1951).

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Luna creciente 4

**University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Department of Spanish and Portuguese
Spring-Summer, 2015**

El fin del pavo

Nancy Bird-Soto

University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

Al pasar los años, me percaté de que no mucho cambiaría. Pasar las páginas de libros que no cautivan es eso: pasar páginas. Pero no toda la tinta crea la misma impresión.

Hace un tiempito ya, cuando tomamos una clase juntas sobre el Siglo de Oro español, Merisa y yo solíamos almorzar en un lugar reconocido por sus sándwiches de pavo. Un día en que solamente pedí unas tostadas con mantequilla, Merisa creyó que, en efecto, ya no me gustaba el pavo. Sin prestarle mucha atención a su atrevido juicio de valor ante la falta del sándwich en mi bandeja, me dio por filosofar sobre la dieta del Quijote y sus duelos y quebrantos. Entonces, con cierta curiosidad, ella me preguntó qué era lo que yo comía por lo regular.

-Pues, no sé. A veces tostadas, otras, qué sé yo, algo con tomate y pimientos, si me apetece, una pizza. Depende.

El semestre terminó y, en efecto, mi proyecto investigativo había llevado el título de “Duelos y quebrantos o ¿qué comía el Quijote?” con el propósito de examinar el alimento emotivo e imaginativo que

propulsaba las andanzas del venerado personaje.

Y el tiempo continuaba, como siempre, su curso.

Luego de un semestre comienza el otro. Luego de una racha de preferir cierto menú para el almuerzo, llegó otra en el momento en que me harté de los sándwiches de pavo y de las tostadas. Para entonces, Merisa y yo tomábamos juntas la clase sobre la literatura del siglo XX en Latinoamérica y, por motivos de schedule, solamente coincidíamos para comer algo una vez a la semana. También para ese entonces, ella había declarado una concentración en algo cuyos edificios quedaban al otro lado del campus. Eran edificios más modernos, eso sí.

En uno de nuestros almuerzos, pedí una ensalada de la casa y unos coditos. No recuerdo si el sándwich de Merisa había sido de pavo o un enorme submarino. Entre bocados, nos metimos por laberintos borgianos liderados por el gran y pobre Funes. Como la porción que había recibido Merisa había sido más que la de costumbre, ella me ofreció parte de su sándwich. Fuera

submarino con atún o pavo, en ese preciso momento, aquello no me apetecía además de que estaba llena con lo que había engullido. “Pero, ven acá, ¿qué tú comes?” me preguntó como si hubiera sido la primera vez que me preguntaba.

-Pues, depende. A veces ensaladas, pastas, algún arroz, o algo tailandés. No sé. Muchas cosas.

Pasaron algunos años después de aquel semestre que resultó ser el último en que fuimos compañeras de clase en la universidad. Pasaron así también muchas frutas, tostones, camarones y pancakes por mi estómago. Se pasaron además muchas y muchas páginas de novelas, cuentos y crónicas. No sé muy bien qué tipo de libro estaban leyendo ella, pero lo cierto es que estaría lejos de los duelos y quebrantos.

Y luego, habiendo pasado los años suficientes como para que todo pareciera una gran coincidencia, por motivos de una conferencia, Merisa y yo nos topamos en una de mis ciudades canadienses favoritas. Resulta que vivía no muy lejos de allí con su marido y un perrito. Me la encontré caminando frente al hotel en que me hospedaba y, como faltaban dos horas para mi panel, quedamos en hablar un ratito, allí

mismo, en el café que quedaba a la vuelta de la esquina.

Ella, que conocía bien el lugar y sus especialidades, había pedido un postre que tenía coco, pues en ese momento de su vida, el coco era uno de los sabores que más le agradaba. Me ofreció si quería un pedacito, pero le dije que, aparte de la piña colada, el coco por lo general no me hacía tilín. Luego de eso, conversamos un rato para ponernos al día. Hacía años que no nos veíamos, aunque hubiéramos coincidido en tantas clases y hubiéramos ido a tantos almuerzos quijotescos y borgianos, como terminamos bautizándoles.

Recordando aquella vieja conversación sobre la dieta del Quijote y aquel trabajo que yo había escrito al respecto, Merisa me volvió a preguntar, como si nunca lo hubiera hecho, ahora, frente a la falta de entusiasmo ante el coco, qué era lo que yo comía.

-Pues, no sé... Páginas, supongo. Páginas.

¿Cómo responder ante un posible lapso de memoria?

Nos echamos a reír ambas, aunque no sé si con el mismo tono metafórico. Supongo que sí.

Silvio y *La Quimera*

Ruth Otero Carballa

University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

En la mitología griega, la Quimera era un monstruo híbrido, que vagaba por las regiones de Asia Menor aterrizando a las poblaciones y engullendo rebaños y animales. Las descripciones varían desde: unas decían que tenía el cuerpo de una cabra, los cuartos traseros de una serpiente o un dragón y la cabeza de un león; otras afirmaban que tenía tres cabezas: una de león, otra , que le salía del lomo, y la última de dragón, que nacía en la cola. Todas las descripciones coinciden sin embargo en que vomitaba fuego por una o más de sus cabezas y era un animal muy rápido. Silvio, es el protagonista principal de *La Quimera*, novela de artista escrita en el siglo XX por Emilia Pardo Bazán. La quimera en esta novela representa el miedo o los objetivos no cumplidos por parte de los artistas que la protagonizan. Antes de profundizar en las características de este personaje en concreto, es importante destacar el hecho de que Silvio es un personaje ficticio basado en un pintor real que formó parte de la vida de la escritora, este es Joaquín Vaamonde. El hecho de que este personaje se forma a partir de alguien

real puede significar una representación más subjetiva del mismo. Sin embargo, en este caso, se puede observar como los rasgos característicos del pintor no dejan a la persona real en una buena posición.

Maurice Beebe, en uno de sus ensayos críticos sobre las características de un artista, destaca el hecho de que los escritores hablan con más franqueza sobre sí



mismos a través de un personaje. Esto podría ser aplicado al hecho de que a lo mejor, el personaje de Silvio en *La Quimera* se corresponde con una descripción verídica de Vaamonde y no se reduce simplemente a una descripción cruel por parte de Emilia Pardo Bazán. Continuando con las características del artista, es importante destacar el hecho de un artista por norma general, siempre está atormentado o se le plantea un dilema concreto. En el caso de

Silvio, su tormento es un dilema también, él tiene su quimera, particular. A lo largo de la novela el lector puede observar como hay una evolución del artista a nivel psicológico; al principio Silvio cumplía los requisitos del héroe-artista ya que pintaba aquello que deseaba aunque ello le costara pasar hambre y ser infeliz. A medida que va transcurriendo la novela Silvio se acomoda en la vida burguesa y el dinero se convierte una parte principal de su vida. Es en este punto en el que el tormento de Silvio se ve representado: por un lado la idea de ser pobre y “libre” y poder pintar aquello deseado y por el otro pintar lo que el mercado le solicita y así poder vivir una vida cómoda. La quimera de Silvio, sin embargo, es algo que podría desaparecer ya que él tiene el poder y la oportunidad de decidir qué cosas pintar. De hecho, Clara, una de las mujeres de su vida, le brinda la oportunidad de liberarse de responsabilidades económicas y poder pintar lo que el desea, realizarse como un artista pero rechaza la oferta.

El papel de las mujeres en la vida de Silvio también se corresponde con una de las características de los artistas. Los artistas, y en concreto Silvio que es el que nos atañe, rechaza cualquier tipo de relación con mujeres que trascienda más allá de lo

carnal. Las mujeres representan un conflicto ya que pueden ser motivo de distracción a la hora de crear una obra de arte. En la vida de Silvio hay tres mujeres que de alguna manera trascienden en la vida del artista. Minia, representación de la propia Emilia Pardo Bazán, es la figura de la mujer aristócrata como artista. La quimera de Minia es la lucha de una artista consagrada por hacerse un hueco en un mundo masculino, ella es la que aconseja a Silvio en sus largas conversaciones y es a la primera mujer a la que le hace un retrato por propia elección. Minia representa la primera etapa del artista cuando aún se le puede considerar héroe. Clara es la segunda mujer en la vida de Silvio, ella también pertenece a una clase acomodada y como se ha mencionado con anterioridad, ella le brinda la oportunidad a Silvio de liberarse de las responsabilidades económicas y de centrarse en su arte a cambio del matrimonio. Este rechaza la oferta ya que clama que él no puede estar atado a nadie aunque lo irónico sea que el dinero y los trabajos por encargo sean su cadena. La última mujer que tiene importancia en la vida de Silvio es Espina, Espina representa el feminismo y la mujer moderna y por ello cobra más presencia en la etapa de París.

Como última característica me

gustaría destacar es el egocentrismo. Silvio a lo largo de la obra demuestra ese sentimiento de superioridad y de sentirse el mejor. Es curioso como esta parte de su carácter se ve reflejado en su actitud hacia los acuarelistas o en el hecho de que él cree que es superior que muchos pintores ya consagrados como Velázquez. Sin embargo, cuando visita el museo del Prado y contempla a Goya y Rubens se da cuenta de

que el realmente no es nadie.

Como conclusión, simplemente resaltar que la mayoría de las características de los artistas que Maurice Beebe expone a lo largo de sus estudios críticos se ven reflejados en Silvio. Si tuviéramos que describir a Silvio con pocas palabras se podría decir que Silvio representa al artista moderno del siglo XX atormentado por una quimera psicológica.

Sobre *Cambio de armas*, de Luisa Valenzuela

Sergio López Ramos
University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

En este libro de cuentos, Luisa Valenzuela logra expresar de manera profunda una situación particular en la región de América Latina en las décadas de los setenta y ochenta del siglo XX: una serie de dictaduras militares limitaron las libertades políticas de los ciudadanos de la región, y con ello, una cruenta persecución, el uso de violencia física y psicológica contra aquellos hombres y mujeres que se oponían a la opresión de sus sueños y libertades.

Valenzuela maneja una serie de temas que permiten cristalizar un estilo literario muy particular: el rol de la mujer y el hombre; los estereotipos detrás de cada género; y el erotismo como elementos fundamentales de historias narradas por voces que están en la periferia de una sociedad que, a lo largo de la historia, se ha caracterizado por ser machista y tener en la periferia a las mujeres, a los grupos indígenas y a los grupos con diferentes preferencias sexuales.

Luisa Valenzuela, en particular, da voz y expresión a diferentes mujeres en diferentes historias y desde diferentes perspectivas. En

el caso del cuento titulado “De noche soy tu caballo”, la protagonista recibe una sorpresiva visita: la de Beto, no solamente un ser querido sino su pareja.

La protagonista, sorprendida por la llegada de Beto, le cuestiona donde había estado todo ese tiempo; podemos inferir que, como en otros cuentos, los encuentros entre estas dos personas solamente ocurren cuando el hombre lo decide, repitiendo un patrón social que podemos interpretar como el poder y la preeminencia que tiene el hombre sobre la mujer en algo que, sencillamente, podría y debería decidirse de común acuerdo: por algo una pareja se refiere a la uniformidad de condiciones de igualdad, derechos y oportunidades; dejando a un lado las condiciones de superioridad del hombre sobre la mujer.

Mientras que la protagonista señala que posiblemente Beto estuvo “teorizando revolución, en la clandestinidad o muerto”; la narración sigue una línea sobre los prejuicios de género en una sociedad machista de cualquier país de América Latina en la que el hombre es el “idealista” que lucha contra la dictadura, contra otro

hombre por la supremacía de un sistema, mientras que la mujer permanece en la periferia, en un lugar seguro, lejos de la acción armada.

Una característica que resalta de este cuento por encima del resto de las narraciones de Valenzuela son los elementos mágicos que contiene, poniendo en duda la verosimilitud de esta historia. Posiblemente al comienzo del cuento, el lector se vea inmerso en el regocijo del encuentro de los amantes, en esa manifestación de comunión no solamente física sino también espiritual.

Entre el alcohol y la alegría, entre la pasión y el reencuentro, la música de Gal Costa culmina el encuentro entre nuestros dos personajes. De una forma sutil y original, Valenzuela logra plasmar ese encuentro entre dos almas que culmina con el placer físico, en un re descubrimiento de ese territorio conocido y explorado pero lejano por las circunstancias que llega a ser el cuerpo del ser amado a la distancia.

Y de repente, la protagonista despierta por el timbrazo del teléfono y desafortunadamente recibe la noticia de que Beto ha sido hallado muerto. En este momento, toda la experiencia que se narró queda en duda pero desafortunadamente lo que queda bastante claro es la fuerza que utiliza en ese momento el Estado en contra

de los grupos marginales que apoyan a los insurrectos.

Con una imagen en la que la protagonista es víctima del legítimo uso de la violencia que asegura poseer el Estado, comparte con nosotros lo único que realmente posee al final de esta experiencia: una imagen que nunca sabremos si fue real o solo parte de su imaginación, un objeto abstracto que en palabras de Valenzuela la policía no puede llevarse porque: “a uno no se le despoja de un sueño”.

Finalmente, si para el lector aún no queda claro si lo que acabamos de leer es realidad o producto de la imaginación de la compañera sentimental de Beto, su protagonista concluye la narración argumentado que: “Y si ustedes encuentran en mi casa un disco de Gal Costa y una botella de cachaça casi vacía, por favor no se preocupen: decreté que no existen.”

Sobre *El cuarto de atrás*, de Carmen Martín-Gaité

Sergio López Ramos
University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

Esta novela, escrita por Carmen Martín Gaité, es un ejercicio que pretende, a través de la memoria y los recuerdos, desentrañar la vida y las vicisitudes de su protagonista, C.

El contexto en el que la autora recrea la obra es una contradicción necesaria. La protagonista, C., nos narra su historia, su pasado remoto y actual en un constante ejercicio por “rescatar” esos recuerdos y esa memoria con el fin de terminar un ciclo que empezó no solo con el nacimiento de C. sino con la muerte de Antonio Mauras y Pablo Iglesias y que, para cerrar un ciclo, parece terminar con la muerte de Francisco Franco. Estos datos oficiales de la historiografía, son elementos que aportan elementos de verdad a la narrativa de Martín Gaité.

La historia de C. se narra entre el olvido constante y un cúmulo de recuerdos; entre la búsqueda de evocaciones del pasado ya lejano y las evocaciones más recientes como la muerte de Franco. Vale la pena recordar la aportación que hace Paloma Aguilar Fernández en su texto “*Regarding Memory, Learning and Amnesia*”, en donde señala que la amnesia permite la

reconciliación a través de esta y del olvido sobre algunos hechos; lo que podría ayudar a entender, de primera mano, los constantes cambios de tiempo durante la novela.

Desde este punto, podemos partir para entender el proceso que realiza C. de un constante ejercicio de recordar aquellos hechos que olvida y que recuerda de manera frecuente, en donde se hilan familiares, su hija, una amiga que ya murió y el enigmático personaje que solo conocemos como “Alejandro”.

De esta forma, C. realiza un viaje al pasado y entre sus memorias destacan recuerdos sobre los cambios que ella y su familia le daban al cuarto de atrás de su casa; su hermana; su tío socialista; y las actitudes de sus padres antes de la guerra civil; durante ese cruento suceso y sus constantes estancias en los refugios; y una amiga cuyos padres eran socialistas y con quien invento un saludable espacio imaginario donde nada ni nadie podía afectarla con sus palabras y acciones: Bergai. Todas estas memorias, que no tienen elementos históricos exactos sino que abundan sobre hechos y recuerdos de una

época, enlazan los propios recuerdos de C. con los recuerdos de sus familiares y amigos.

Este proceso refleja la construcción de la memoria histórica a través del desarrollo de la memoria autobiográfica (homo *psychologicus*); el intercambio de recuerdos (homo *sociologicus*) que C. realiza con los personajes más cercanos a ella y el intercambio de recuerdos a un nivel social (homo *agens*), en la figura de Franco, presencia indispensable no solo en inauguraciones o eventos de Estado sino, incluso, con la incredulidad de la gente sobre su muerte.

La narración tiene dos líneas: a) los recuerdos anteriores y que se sitúan en Toledo y; b) los recuerdos del pasado reciente sobre la muerte de Franco en Madrid; ambos narrados en el presente. Con estas características, podemos señalar que la obra de Martín Gaité es una nueva novela histórica por el desorden cronológico que posee y por las dos líneas del tiempo que narra. Esta mezcla de recuerdos y su constante búsqueda, confunden en un momento al lector sobre el tiempo real en el que se narra la obra al recurrir de manera constante a saltos temporales entre los recuerdos de la posguerra y recuerdos recientes sobre la muerte de Franco.

Es importante subrayar que C. hace alusión a dos aspectos fundamentales en la construcción de la memoria histórica desde la visión del “homo *agens*”: primero, la omnipresencia de Franco, lo cual le permite imponer una nueva identidad nacional en España y una memoria histórica oficial. Y segundo, en este proceso de gestación de una nueva identidad española, la educación de la mujer tiene un particular énfasis en la obra de Martín Gaité. C. parte de la idea de que su madre la apoyaba en el aprendizaje del latín, actividad que no estaba bien vista por la sociedad.

Una vez que llega Franco al poder y se constituye como la autoridad suprema del nuevo Estado Español, la educación que recibe la mujer y su papel en la sociedad se transforman dramáticamente. La propia C. señala que la retórica de la nueva España tenía como objetivo desprestigiar al feminismo de los tiempos de la República y enaltecía los valores de la abnegación y el sacrificio de madres y esposas: “en la importancia de su silenciosa y oscura labor como pilares del hogar cristiano”.

De acuerdo con C., las dos virtudes más importantes de toda mujer bajo el régimen franquista eran la laboriosidad y la alegría; teniendo como máximo ejemplo de comportamiento a la reina Isabel la Católica.

Hay un elemento más en la novela que nos permite ser testigo de un relato excepcional: “Alejandro” ante quien C. desvela su sentimiento adverso por las cucarachas; se constituye como una figura que constantemente aparece durante la narración y que la misma obra relaciona con el miedo; se encarga de ayudar a C. a descubrir recuerdos que, probablemente, ya ni sabía dónde encontrar.

Y aunque no queda clara la existencia de “Alejandro”, al final de la obra hay elementos para darle vida al personaje como la presencia de dos vasos en la sala de la casa y la cajita dorada que el misterioso

personaje le regala a C. Este personaje tal vez podría ser la propia memoria de la protagonista ya que la obra se desarrolla solamente con recuerdos de C., sus familiares, su amiga y los recuerdos de la dictadura militar en España.

El cuarto de atrás, es sin lugar a dudas, una obra en cuyo título se resume el crecimiento de la protagonista de la narración; la cual permite analizar y entender los complejos sistemas sociales que enmarcan la memoria autobiográfica, colectiva y del Estado Español en una época difícil para la nación española como lo fue la dictadura militar de Francisco Franco.

El amor no tiene fronteras sexuales

Sergio López Ramos
University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

En algunas semanas, el 19 de junio para ser más exactos, se celebrara un aniversario luctuoso más del escritor y cronista mexicano Carlos Monsiváis.

Recuerdo muy bien la imagen del homenaje a Monsiváis que se realizó en el Palacio de Bellas Artes aquel domingo 20 de junio del 2010 en la ciudad de México. En el féretro del cronista había tres banderas de proyectos que tuvieron una gran importancia en su vida: la bandera de México; la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México y por último, una bandera multicolor, un símbolo de la comunidad homosexual a nivel internacional.

Sin lugar a dudas, esta última bandera me causó una gran sorpresa y las palabras de Elena Poniatowska en el funeral confirmaron lo que un símbolo declaraba: un amor más de Carlos Monsiváis.

Atrás quedaba el intelectual que se resistía al poder presidencial, que se hacía presente en Acteal y en Chiapas, que acompañaba los movimientos sociales, alentaba a la sociedad civil a organizarse para enfrentar las consecuencias del terremoto de 1985 y aparecía el Monsiváis de carne, hueso y

sentimientos que pocas veces dejaba traslucir en sus letras.

Un Monsiváis al que Elena Poniatowska le confiesa: “nada en los últimos meses de tu enfermedad me ha conmovido tanto como el amor que te tiene Omar. Su dolor te honra, su entrega es tu trofeo y a mí me hace entender lo que significa la existencia real del amor sin límites, el amor que no tiene fronteras sexuales y ese amor me enaltece como enaltece a todos los movimientos de reivindicación o de identidades diversas en mi país”.

Pocos meses después, apareció en las librerías de México una recopilación de textos escritos por Monsiváis sobre la diversidad sexual en México titulado “Que se abra esa puerta” en el que aborda temas importantes como la presencia de los homosexuales en la historia contemporánea de México, desde la crónica de la redada de los 41 (que fueron 42) en 1901, la vida literaria de algunos poetas pertenecientes al grupo de los “contemporáneos” como Salvador Novo y Carlos Pellicer así como el impacto del SIDA en la vida de la

comunidad Lésbico Gay Transgénero
Bisexual (LGBT).

En el prólogo del libro “Que se abra esa puerta”, Alejandro Brito toca un tema importante sobre la vida íntima de Carlos Monsiváis al señalar que los activistas más radicales del movimiento lésbico y gay le reprochaban su supuesta negativa a salir del closet. Para Brito, Monsiváis nunca se percibió dentro del “closet”. Siendo un personaje muy público en México, no se animaba a ser adjetivado como “el homosexual de México” y no estaba dispuesto a repetir la experiencia del poeta Salvador Novo.

Monsiváis no quería, como bien explica Brito, “respirar por la herida”. Como se explica en el prólogo del texto “Que se abra esa puerta”, varios escritores se declararon abiertamente homosexuales para tener una ganancia mediática pero inmediatamente todas sus obras fueron adjetivadas como “literatura gay”.

En palabras de Monsiváis: “Creo que de alguna manera la homosexualidad te da libertad. Parto de la base de que la opinión ajena me condena y, entonces, no trato de

cortejarla”

De esta forma, Monsiváis decide no darle armas a sus detractores y seguir observando, creyendo y defendiendo las causas sociales que las élites políticas y económicas han denostado a lo largo y ancho del país.

Pero aún más importante, Monsiváis es un ejemplo de la lucha de la comunidad lésbica y gay para defender siempre su identidad y de actuar siempre con inteligencia ante las expresiones de intolerancia tan comunes en el México del siglo XXI.

Una comunidad gay y lésbica que, sin lugar a dudas, aspira a vivir una verdadera primavera en libertad, un espacio con tolerancia y respeto para profesar un amor que va más allá de los estereotipos sociales.

Descubrir

Sergio López Ramos
University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

Tus ojos
Entrañan un deseo
Tu piel
Un mar por explorar
Suave, aperlada
Me miras, te miro
Y tus ojos
Me piden que te acompañe
En un viaje
Por el deseo y el cuerpo
Para explorar
Cada rincón de nuestras olas
Y llegar a la tierra prometida
Soltamos amarres
Navegamos a través del océano
Y con tu cuerpo me llevas
A lugares desconocidos
Con la vela de tu barco
Tocamos el cielo
Mientras las estrellas componen
Versos para nosotros.

Always Controlled, Never Repressed

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Always controlled, but never repressed,
or oppressed,
or less, than authority.

Screams are heard
insulated from the self.
Why is it hard to say, "I am sorry"?

People, the modern day breed,
are reluctant to imagine.
To manage their guilt.
Some pray to a god.
Some lay on a quilt
and sleep.

Daze off on a hill, on a rock.
This is their past.
The last shall be first,
the first shall be last.
There's pain with each laugh, since,
no more are they pillars
or a vessel of wisdom.
Either, idlers or killers.
For sure, paralysis filled.
Material, their fillers.
An incomplete draft.
An unidentified paraph.
They drift into starvation, from heaven to hell.
Their penny down a well.
Even though they have wealth
They pray for their health, with only a penny for luck.

Always controlled, but never repressed.
The subconscious, instantaneously felt.
Living a lie, real eyes realize real lies
To rely on one's self.
Confidence melts.
Now they purge.
In an urge, a spruce that they merge.
Gauge their eyes,
no longer the controller.
They're belly up, rolled over and sober, with an unlucky clover.
Always controlled, but never repressed, or oppressed, until today.

She

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She was Muslim
And I was Atheist
and my mind was concocting a way for this to work.
We both had something in common.
We were, both, partially Puerto Rican.
Seeking to enrich, advance, strengthen to lance our perception of us
so as to feel wholly, not holy,
but part of the culture.
I was Dominican of African and Taíno descent,
and the European is obvious.
She was Pakistani of clearly partially Portuguese descent.
She was Muslim and I Atheist
and that we were different, is what I meant.
She could not date and I found this out studying Islam.
I liked it.
I just couldn't believe in a god,
or perhaps I could and label it natural selection,
but that would not be a precise reflection
on who the hell I am to this day.
I fell in love with Islam,
she,
my motivation.
I read books and did research
to gain enlightenment.
Fell for the brotherhood culture.
She was an environmentalist.
So, I studied the methods of the horticulturalist.
She was Muslim
and rejected me twice.
I misunderstood her politeness and niceness.
Felt trife, during that moment in life.
Contemplated carrying my knife, a shank.
I said fuck the world and its *people*.
Since *people*
strive to connive to contrive
and abort stipend transactions for those with less fortune.
Not to mention
those with the most curse them.
An example is gentrification.
A false hug to the poor

is a malicious, fictitious, and false friendly abrasion.

She was Muslim and
a capricious anomaly
from retrospective prospects,
and I
a visionary,
a dreamer,
a neurological prophet
foresaw events
as they went and came into fruition
in my imagination
– was sent back to the truth
when I found out she was taken!
She was taken,
she is taken
and I have awoken.

Ebony

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I crave; the scent of a particular
Ebony.
Whose lips are sweet, hands tough, mind sharp,
but her eyes must also be,
sentimental.
A heartless lover is,
detrimental.
To always be in touch, in a bond,
is of being a mental residential, non judgmental,
gentle angel.
The best things in life happen,
accidental.
Thus, she must be unforeseen.

I crave, to a point of starvation:
Ebony,
Authentic and caring,
Yet firm.
For me to discern
and to learn, of, but
my concern is of being a doubter.
When will I know that it is *right*?

La ventana / The Silent Worker / A Votar

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La ventana (taken in Naguabo, Puerto Rico)



The Silent Worker (taken in La Vega, Dominican Republic)

La ventana / The Silent Worker / A Votar

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A Votar (taken in Guatemala City, Guatemala)

Foreigner

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As a foreigner to the land that I have just ventured from, a slab of cold and cemented reality, I
am finally home.

Home, after only knowing a bedbug and roach infested house in the projects of the most racially
segregated city of the United States.

These states have taught me more about Division than Unity. The United States of Amerigo
Vespucci. The America to the south of Canada — that highlights pigskin flying through the air.
Here, home, we make pigskin into Chicharrónes. This country, well, commonwealth-colony does
not feel like home. Not anymore.

I am happy in the moment though. Just got off the plane and the feel-good vitamin D triggered
by the sun has got me feeling elevated. There are so many possibilities, but I find it troublesome
that I feel tired-*cansao*, and never got the chance to “line up”. The beard takes the focus away
from my weary eyes though — maybe I will keep it.

The accents seem quaint. They make me smile. It is a surreal feeling to hear my dialect coming
out of those varying faces. Faces that are as pale as cave dwellers, as dark and beautiful as cacao
and some that are, like mine, sun kissed and caramelized.

“Oye Yankee!”

I turn my head to the trigueño cab driver that reminds me of a Bomba y Plena drummer that I
met in Chicago once.

“Necesita un pon?” he asks

“Estoy esperando familia”

He nods and waves another tourist down.

Poemas de Rupi Kaur

Traducciones de Leticia de la Paz de Dios
University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

(1)

el primer chico que me besó
me agarró de los hombros
cual manillar de bicicleta
esa que nunca
había conducido
yo tenía 5 años

sus labios olían a hambre
hambre que aprendió de su padre
devorando a su madre a las 4 am
cual festín

ese primer chico
me enseñó que mi cuerpo
debía entregarse a aquellos que lo querían
que eso debía hacerme
sentir completa

y, ay, dios mío
me sentí tan vacía
como su madre a las 4:25 am

the first boy that kissed me
held my shoulders down
like the handlebars of
the first bicycle
he ever rode
i was five

he had the smell of
starvation on his lips
which he picked up from
his father feasting on his mother at 4am

he was the first boy
to teach me my body was
for giving to those that wanted
that I should feel anything
less than whole

and my god
did I feel as empty
as his mother at 4:25 am

(2)

sujetaste mis
piernas contra
el suelo
con tus pies
y me ordenaste
que me levantara

you pinned
my legs to
the ground
with your feet
and demanded
I stand up

(3)

él puso sus manos
en mi mente
antes de pasar a
mi cintura
mis caderas
o mis labios
no me llamó
bonita primero
me llamó
exquisita

-la forma en que me toca

he placed his hands
on my mind
before reaching
for my waist
my hips
or my lips
he didn't call me
beautiful first
he called me
exquisite

- how he touches me

Fear

Sandra Sousa

University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

(For Tom)

I am not a writer.

Just the thought of having to write something on a blank page gives me such an incredible and unspeakable pain that is even hard to put it in into words. How to just start to describe the dizziness that can come from a white page? How could I make myself sound intelligent by filling that whiteness with words that can actually mean something and make a difference in people's lives, in the world? How to be able to fully express yourself and make yourself completely understood when you have, since you know yourself, a deep understanding that communication is never a perfect thing? How to pass your message across when sometimes you are not even sure about what you really mean?

Yes, I used to think that a blank page was my worst nightmare and my worst fear. Incredibly enough, I chose a profession where writing is part of my daily life. Or if it is not, it actually should be. Why do I do this? – I've asked myself so many times that I even lost count. Do I like to inflict pain on myself? Am I some kind of sadistic person who enjoys the hidden pleasures of suffering? After so many years, why don't I just give up and start living a life where blank pages could become just a

distant dream of the past? Why do I keep coming back to that evil whiteness over and over again? Does "she" have powers over me? It is absurd, since "she" can't even talk.

I know, so many questions and it is only the first page. But aren't our lives a permanent questioning, a constant interrogation mark? You may ask me if I have any answers. I am not sure I do and, as I get older, most of my earlier life certainties, especially those we acquire during our teenage life, start to vanish. As I once heard, I am not sure when, as we get older against all expectations, we start questioning more and being less certain. Or maybe, we just develop another kind of knowledge, more subtle and, hopefully, wiser. Or maybe, some of us just don't like to be perceived as pedantic.

One thing that I maybe know is that I keep coming to that white page because I don't want "her" to defeat me, because not coming back to it would mean that I gave up, that I lost the game of my life. And I don't like to lose and, maybe scarier than facing the white page, would be the feeling of defeat. Maybe the white page is the metaphor of my life. I like challenges, I am not sure why, but if it is not challenging, why even bother to do it? I am not sure when I will overcome this fear, maybe

tomorrow, maybe never. One thing I know for sure, when I die I want to be able to look at myself right in the eye, I don't want to feel ashamed of the person that I have in front of me when I look in the mirror. I want to look into that mirror and see a reflection of my soul, no matter how many wrinkles I may have in my face, I want my soul to look young, pretty, confident, happy and unregretful. Of course, soul here means, for lack of a better word, what I am made of, whatever it is that makes us be who we are, independent of the material form we might take.

Yes, I have that as a deep certainty. Giving up is just not a verb in my personal dictionary as hard as life sometimes gets, as tempting as it might be sometimes just to turn my back and say, "It is just too hard for me, so I will find something easier to deal with." And then I stop and look into the future, at the old woman that I expect to become and the picture of a curved-spine woman looking down at the floor—that image just doesn't sit well in my stomach. So I take a deep breath and think: "I still want to make a difference in the world!" My father often tells me that I can't save the whole world, but can I be blamed for wanting to try? I guess that if we look at people as being in themselves a whole world maybe I can accomplish something, something good, something that can actual make a difference.

Maybe this is of no interest to you, if you are the type of person that just finds meaning in spending your time at big shopping

malls as a way of releasing your daily frustrations, with the more money you spend insuring the better you feel, until the next day comes and you need to get yet another credit card. If you are that person, you should not keep going, or maybe you already gave up on me and got in your SUV to go for another ride to buy that expensive pair of shoes that you didn't dare buy yesterday, but which tormented your dreams all night long. Trust me, I am not against you. I also like shopping once in a while. I am a woman; I like to look good and I am human.

The big questions, though, remain: Will I be able to make a difference? Will I be able to become the woman that I want to be? I believe the answer for these questions will have to wait, hopefully, a long time. I have been all my life obsessed with answers. I think many times that my only hope in dying is that I will get all the answers that I need. At that time, I hope that everything comes together and finally makes sense. Otherwise, I say jokingly, I will be really pissed! Meanwhile, I try to convince myself that the most important thing is not to get all the answers, but that it is my journey to reach that goal. Who knows, maybe, at my end, answers will be not so important anymore?

And yet another question arises: Why am I writing all of this? I, the person who fears writing?

I believe it is because I discovered another fear, a greater one, which has always accompanied me: the fear not so much of death, but of having surgery, of having someone

cutting my skin. Since I was a kid, I never ventured into any type of activities that could even remotely cause me to break a bone and have to be taken to the hospital to get stitches. Just the idea of something perforating my skin was enough to get me terrified. I was always a tough kid, I had no problem getting into fights with boys, slap them, but breaking my precious bones was out of question. Getting into car accidents and becoming all disfigured and broken--this was out of the question. Falling off the stairs and breaking a leg, out of the question also. Luckily enough—since the great majority of people whom I know had “small incidents” as kids—I actually never broke a bone or had to have any stitches. My poor brother didn’t have the same luck. I sometimes remember the day we were playing and he hit his head. Suddenly there was blood all over the place and I am not sure how I didn’t faint and gather enough energy to go call my mother for help. I certainly yelled for her as if I were a mad person. I didn’t even dare to go to the hospital with them. I stayed home agonizing, trying to imagine the pain my brother was feeling. That was enough for me.

But now and after so many years of avoiding what seemed to me almost a miracle, I decided to break that fear once and for all, and for the best reason I can imagine: to give a kidney to my husband and to make a difference in his life—n our life and in our world. I assumed it would not be an easy decision, and it is one that haunts you until the moment that you are almost, almost lying on that operating table

in the hospital.

But even if fear takes part of my body and my thoughts, from the moment I knew that Tom needed a kidney, I didn’t even blink, and I knew deep inside that I wanted to go ahead and do it. I knew I was supposed to do it, and even if I was scared, I knew I would be fine. Since that first moment, that sixth sense that they say we have told me that we were a match. I didn’t need any tests to prove it, I just knew. And since I knew, there was no way I would not give it to him.

It took him a long time to accept my offer. For him it would be like taking something precious from me, a part of my body that makes me healthy. But the stubborn me never gives up, and I tried many different kinds of persuasion, including: “I truly think that this was the only and real reason why I moved to Iowa City, to meet you, marry you (even though I had never thought about marrying anyone before in my life) and give you a kidney.” And I did and do believe that. After many months, the stubborn him gave up. There is nothing one can do when I put something in my mind, not even Tom. You can ask my mother about that! Sometimes I feel sorry for her, for having to deal with me as kid and a teenager. I was very quiet and shy, but gosh, I had a bull’s mind! I confess that as an adult, I have been trying hard to domesticate the bull inside of me. I want to believe that I’ve made some progress.

And so we started the process. I filled out paperwork to send to the hospital and waited

for their answer. Next fear: I didn't lie about my lifestyle and so I began to be anxious that they would not accept me because I am a smoker. Should I have lied? I supposed they would figure it out later anyways when I did exams, and a lie and a liar sooner or later will be caught. As my mother always says: "A mentira tem pernas curtas." A lie has short legs, and it does indeed, and I just hate lies and liars. So, nothing to do about that: they would have to accept me the way I am, I thought. The possibility of stopping smoking? Uhhmm. If you ask me, in my mind that was harder than giving the kidney, but I didn't put it aside. I convinced myself that I could be a very, very light smoker. We'll see what the future brings...

And finally the answer from the Kidney Coordinator, a wonderful woman, with a sexy voice (as she put it!) and warm heart: yes, I could go ahead and schedule my one full day at the hospital for my medical exams. I would have a long day, which would have to start two days before gathering all my urine in a plastic container and no eating breakfast until blood was taken out of me. The day of the exam with no eating almost all day!—How could I do that?, I asked myself. I love to eat; it is the first thing that pops into my head every morning when I wake up. I will die if I can't eat, that's for sure. In my parents' house we were raised as Catholic's, but my parents never respected any type of fasting. The only thing my mother was always concerned about was for us not to eat meat on Friday's during the Lenten period. I

used to sneak some ham in my mouth, and every time she caught me, my father—a non-believer in religious practices—would save me by joking that "fiambre" was not really meat. Ham was ham not meat, like codfish is not really fish in Portugal: *bacalhau* is *bacalhau*, fish is fish.

Well, I did not die, and I enjoyed my day at the hospital. I liked to observe that in the medical world people are actually doing something for other people. They care for how you are feeling, and they want you to be here in this world to be happy and healthy for a long time. Sometimes I think that I should have chosen a medical career, but, when I was younger, the only thing I associated it with was blood and cutting skin. I was not aware that you could be in the medical profession and avoid those sights.

Of course on that day I was nervous. One of the things that you are told--besides the normal stuff like you can't be paid for donating an organ (Tom and I used to joke, and I would tell him, that yes, as my husband, he was going to pay a very high price!!)—was that your gesture would bring you something special inside (giving someone life has no price, we should all know that!), that for you it is also good to take these (free) exams because they are so exhaustive you might discover some disease that you didn't even know you have. In such a case, the disease would be caught on time, and you have a better chance of being ok. Actually that's something they should not have told me: now I feared already being sick without

knowing what was attacking me all over. What if I had cancer? After all, I am a smoker!! The positive side of me always thought, ohhh well, we are all going to die at some point... But in my mind that point is a long, long time away--not now! Well, I dealt with that fear in my very peculiar way.

As I said, the day was going pretty well, I met with the Coordinator who sounded as sexy in person as on the phone, and no, I was not shocked that she is not actually a sexy woman! I am not a shallow person, and I prefer beauty inside than on the outside of people. We talked a lot and I told her that I was ready to go on with my decision even though I was shaking a bit inside.

Next step, meet the surgeon. That was the hardest part. He said everything possible to make me give up. He described the pain after the surgery as something indescribable, so painful, but so painful. . . . I tried to joke around, and I could not even get a smile out of his mouth! I think I was starting to sweat. . . . And he kept going on and on: that he was going to turn me, a healthy person, into an unhealthy one; that I could not go to the gym for a long time after surgery, etc., etc., etc. I made a big effort, and I blocked my brain, and I was not listening to him anymore . . . —that was it! He was not going to derail me from my intention. And that’s what I told him. And after my last attempt at a stupid joke, which I can’t recall, he finally gave me a smile. I felt better.

After Dr. X, I had to go talk to a

psychologist, and this was also a fear. Would I be able to pass her test for “normal” people? I, who always had thought of myself (and others had confirmed this to me) as someone who did not quite (sometimes not at all) fit so-called “normality,” who goes against that normality, who as a kid was always perceived as different and had to come to a country where she thought normality was not so important. Tom and I also used to joke about this: that that was my hardest task, to try to convince them that I am not a crazy person just because I see the world with a different lens.

The “interview” ended up going well: at least I think it did, since they let me go ahead with more tests. Again, I didn’t lie; I was myself, even though I must confess, that I thought very carefully about my answers. I knew what they were looking for, and I knew that in the end I would be able to do what is expected from donors. No, I didn’t care about having a scar on my body as big as you could imagine. (I actually think that scars are sexy and full of meaning—Tom has lots of scars—I didn’t express this thought, of course.) No, I would not be depressed (how could I be?) that I was giving Tom more life. Yes, I would be able to follow medication, etc. In the end, another fear was supplanted--defeated. Have you noticed how many of the fears I had actually lived inside the Big One: surgery, being cut? Quite a few and little by little I was overcoming them all.

After all the medical exams, some of the results quite impressed me (my lungs were

perfect for a person my age!! As you can imagine, this made me more than happy.) Then it was that the whole transplant team got together for the final decision: were we or were we not a perfect match? Could I give Tom one of my kidneys?

I was driving one day to the gym, and my phone rang. Since I couldn't pick it up immediately, I let it go to voicemail. And later came the sexy voice, confirming what I knew since the beginning without anyone or any tests telling me: *Yes* we were a match, and I could give Tom a kidney. I can't explain the emotion in her voice! She told me we could start planning the surgery, but that nonetheless I still needed to go for a final exam, since the doctors saw a difference in the size of my kidneys. Tears of contentment were falling down my face. I knew--I knew I told myself. I can and will do this. I called Tom immediately and gave him the happy news. He cried also: we were finally in peace. When I got home, the hug he gave me was everything I needed to know. We would be fine. We would always be fine, no matter what.

I called the Kidney Coordinator back and scheduled the last appointment. Another hour lying still with a scanning machine on top of me would make no difference in the whole scheme of things, I thought. And then came the fifth day of May, my birthday, the day the sexy voice would call to give the final, *finalísima*, answer.

And on that day, the day of my 35th

birthday, the world disappeared for a moment. It fell apart, how could I have failed the last test after all of the fears and anxieties and frustrations trying to convince Tom, how? My birthdays were always happy, shiny, warm days: how could this one be different? What was this supposed to mean? How was I going to tell Tom that I failed in the thing that mattered the most to me? How could I explain to him how miserable and worthless I was feeling? Would he still love me after that?

He was disappointed of course—we were both very disappointed--but we are two tough people, two people that do not bend easily, and two people who are deeply in love and committed to each other. We know we lost that battle, but we also know that the most important thing is to always take that one step further, the one that helps people have a better life.

Even if we are so very afraid that our bodies or minds will change after surgery, or that we will not be able to live the same life as before, we will always take that step. Of course we will be able to, because we have the power to heal. And even if we might not be exactly the same person anymore, I was and am sure we will be better persons. Our fight will continue every day, in a different way, a step at a time, until the soul that is destined to give Tom a kidney decides to show up. It is not that hard, trust me. Until then, I hold on to that hug, the one that told me that we will be fine for a long time.

In the year 1648...

Graham Thomas–Kilmer
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PREFACE

In the year 1648 King Joao ordered the Minister of the Colonies to send an emissary to Brazil to report in the state of the colony. The minister decided to send his nephew, in an attempt to elevate the social standing of his sister's family. With the Man, sent by the minister, would travel a cardinal of the Catholic church to assist in the spreading of the word of the lord.

*

The last ten days aboard the ship had brought a dour expression upon the face of the crew. The rations were low, with morale trailing closely behind. Every soul aboard dreamt of land, and sand sliding beneath their feet. Perhaps there would be a large rock to stand upon, thought the man, some ancient monolith standing in the face of time and conquest.

The man felt he could only bear one more night aboard the ship. To plunge into death and the sea, seemed easier than another day of rolling purgatory.

As morning came over the stern, the ship came to life.

It was time for the deck, time for the sea, the order-less blue wash. Yet, there still lies a current beneath the waves. There's still a wind, bringing with it dreams of land.

There it was.

It was green, and carried with it a glow of naïve familiarity. The salty men of the sea

could see the land, and now a sudden spark of hope smoldered in their stomachs.

All this work, all this survival, and now all the Man could think of was the journey still to come.

The sun had begun to set. It rested in that powerful three-quarter part of the sky. It glared down upon the man's cheeks, spitting its ember radiance in his face.

Suddenly he began to smell it. He could smell the land. It was like a sweet mellow memory, innate, engrained forever in that relay of human consciousness. It was a reminder of where you came from, where you are and where you are going.

The sun was approaching its slow fall behind the rolling tree covered mountains, set behind the city that was their destination. The ship felt like it was matching the pace of the glowing orb melting away the day. Their descent into the harbor had brought a restlessness upon

the crew. They were thinking of cooked meat and music. There would be plenty to drink and exotic prostitutes. All the excitement of life outside the sealed hull of the ship.

The thought of the pleasantries of city life, for the man, was accompanied by an assurance, the assurance of ensuing labor, of a hot jungle, unfamiliar territory and foreign dialects.

The crew weighed the ships anchor roughly five hundred yards from the nearest dock. The men began to let down the row boats. The crew's restlessness was growing. Their excitement fought against the thick tropical air.

Fortunately for the crew, there wasn't much cargo to unload. What cargo there was, was living, and only needed to be unlocked and dragged up from the bottom of the boat. The ship had brought with it 50 slaves. All of which were the property of Cardinal Vasquez, who hoped to sell them in order to help finance the construction of a proper catholic church somewhere in the jungle.

"Bring up the rest of my chattle." barked the Cardinal, "I won't be dealing with this business well into the night. I require a night of good rest before my journey tomorrow."

Always with the Cardinal was a young slave boy. He was his personal slave, and performed most of the Cardinals personal tasks. He never left the Cardinals side. He even slept in the Cardinals quarters.

The row ashore was refreshing. The men of the ship dipped their hands into the warm

harbor water and brought up cupped fists of water to run through their greasy beards.

The ragged men dragged down the docks, past crates of fruits and wild animals, Barrels of rum and ghoulish merchants.

They finally entered the city, which was built like a horseshoe wrapped around the bay. The buildings appeared to grow in the distance, as they had been built upon the stratifications of the surrounding hills. Even from the coastal cusp of the city, one could see the grand market at the center of everything. The man could see the black columns spiraling from the smoke stacks, and hear the chatter of haggling merchants and townspeople. There were men and women of every hue of human flesh, from the ivory wives of colonials to the obsidian black of the imported labor. In a few among the crowd, the man would see the unmistakable native fidgeting uncomfortably in his western clothes.

In the center of the bazaar was a large circle of area fenced off by a series of wooden planks. Within the circle stood a large post with a gashed and bloodied slave fastened to it. All around the unconscious slave was the clinking of shackled humans, being paraded for profits. The merchant of this flesh stood to the far side of the rotunda. He was flicking the blood from a long thin cane. His sweat soaked blouse was unbuttoned nearly to the navel, and his large straw hat was pushed back far enough to reveal a set of cold menacing eyes.

From his position in the market the man could see the Cardinal inching his way along the

wooden posts, slave boy in tow. He approached the slave vendor and the two shared a sincere embrace of hands followed by an apparently focused exchange of words. The Cardinal and the slaver smiled at each other. Even with a smile trenching through the frown lines of the slavers face, his eyes seemed to darken. As though his thoughts were of a nature more deplorable than the setting in which he had comfortably postured himself.

The man had been focusing on the slaver when the Cardinal appeared next to him in the crowd.

“A sight to behold isn’t it.” stated the Cardinal.

“A sight indeed.” said the Man.

“The glory of Christ and the Portuguese people has brought wealth and prosperity to this savage yet, rich land.” said the Cardinal, “All around me I witness the fullness of trade, and the mighty forge of divine Portuguese values.”

The man stood dumb, distracted by the scene unfolding at the center of the slavers rotunda.

The slave on the pole had begun to awaken from his shock induced slumber. As this happened, the slaver stepped in from the side to commence another round of lashings.

As the sun sunk lower in the day the shadow of the nearby church steeple threw a black cross upon the slaver’s circle. Just as the slaver cocked back his initial lash, the six ‘o clock bell began to ring in the tower. Its clear ringing became a metronome for each cane

strike to the poor slaves back. All this misery brought upon him for no reason other than his birth in Africa, thought the Man.

The Cardinal still stood next to the man, clutching the slave boy’s wrist in his right hand.

“I wish to inspect the church before we begin our journey tomorrow morning.” said the Cardinal, “Do you wish to come and pray with us?”

“No, thank you, I had better go see Captain Fernando about tomorrow’s details.” said the Man.

“Very well, come boy.” said the Cardinal.

The man made his way to the edge of the market. The area had been slowly thinning of people as night began to seep into the light of the city.

Captain Fernando’s garrison was located at the edge of the cities slum, a clearly disregarded part of town, which seemed to house any natives who managed to avoid slavery or death.

The garrison was not what the man thought it would be. It was a small wooden fort with a wall of mostly sharpened tree trunks. Once inside he was directed to the Captain’s quarters.

He knocked on the door of the small wooden residence that was the Captains office and home.

“Come in.” the Captain yelled from inside.

“Ahhh you must be the Minister’s

emissary.” said the Captain.

“Yes I am, excuse me if I seem devoid of pleasantries, but the crossing truly exhausts ones soul.” said the Man.

“You are in Brazil, one has no need for a soul here.” said the Captain, who paused momentarily, remembering he was speaking to an appointed representative of the crown.

“Because the glory of the Portuguese empire provides all with more spirit than one could find use for in a lifetime.” the Captain quickly remarked.

“Pardon my brevity, but I should like to know the details of our trip so I may rest, if ever momentarily, before we enter the jungle tomorrow.” said the Man.

“Of course, of course.” said the Captain.

“Myself and forty of my men will accompany you, the cardinal, and twenty five colonizers to a new village about twenty miles west of here.” said the Captain, “I have been told you are not staying in Brazil long?” questioned the Captain.

“Yes that is correct, I am to see the new village then board a ship bound for Portugal in two weeks-time.” said the Man

“Such a long journey for such a short visit.” remarked the Captain.

“It is all one journey, which does not end until I am at home with my family.” said the Man

“The truth of those words I simply cannot describe.” said the Captain.

The man awoke sharply the next

morning. He had spent the night in the garrison, figuring the accommodations in this tropical land varied only slightly from inn to inn, or so he told the Captain. Quite honestly, it was really the thought of sleeping surrounded by Portuguese canons that led him to choose the garrison for his first Brazilian respite.

As he shuffled out of the sleeping quarters the first thing that he noticed was the vibrancy of the Brazilian morning. The brilliant greens of the distant jungle glowed marvelously beneath the cool blue sky.

In the center of the garrison the travelers were packing carts and mules, and some were saddling horses. The forty soldiers tasked with protecting the caravan were crouched together in the shade of the eastern wall.

The man was just beginning to wipe the morning from his eyes when a hand clapped him on the back.

It was the Cardinal, who stood next to him looking over the preparing company like a shepherd gazing upon his flock.

“I’ve never felt the presence of God in my heart as I do now.” breathed the Cardinal.

“A whole land of savages begging for the glory of God and the virtue of Portuguese spirit.” said the Cardinal.

“Fetch the mounts boy.” he barked.

The boy came back several minutes later with a strapping steed for the Cardinal and a rather bashful mule for himself.

“The Captain tells me the village were going to is mostly slaves.” said the Cardinal

The man continued his dawn silence.

“Imagine that, a whole village eagerly awaiting a proper righteous conversion to our lord god.” said the Cardinal.

“Are they truly waiting if they’re chained to the floor.” broke the Man.

A thought he would have kept to himself, had he not been plagued by this early morning grogginess.

The Cardinal gazed at him in confusion.

“Slaves, Obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them as you would serve Christ. Ephesians.” quoted the Cardinal.

As the company began its trek out of the city the lines were formed as such. There were twenty soldiers walking at the head of the column with the colonizers comprising the middle, and the other twenty soldiers bringing up the rear.

The man rode next to the Captain, behind the colonizers, preferring his stern silence to the religious yammering of the Cardinal.

They had made their way out of the city and were trolling through miles of sugar plantations. All around them, black bodies toiled in the punishing midday sun, endlessly chopping at the sugar cane. They were men, women and children, all working, none looking up.

The cardinal looked back at the man from his mount.

“Just as the righteous Christian loves and fears god, so too does the slave to his master,” said the Cardinal, “He fears the lash,

and loves the power behind it.”

The plantation fields were beginning to give way to the impending jungle, the green mass drawing closer and closer around them.

“Full alert men!” shouted the Captain.

“Expecting trouble?” questioned the Man.

“Some of the savages have been harassing supply routes lately.” said the Captain, “It’s nothing to worry about.”

The Man felt a cold shiver crawl up his back. Amidst the steam of the jungle he could feel the fear, and it was cold.

It all happened so suddenly. They had been in the bush for little more than an hour.

The first arrow struck a slave woman in the calf. She shrieked to the ground, blood pulsing between her fingers.

A swarm of uncountable brown natives erupted from the trees all around the caravan. For many, there was no time to react.

Many of the slaves cowered on the ground, as though some primordial sense told them this fight was not theirs. Some of the colonizers ordered their slaves to fight on penalty of death, a penalty that already seemed certain for every soul in the company. After the first two slaves were cut down with the same swiftness delivered to their masters, the rest shot up and took to the jungle.

An arrow flew, searing into the Man’s left thigh. Exhausted and expecting the end, the man dismounted and sat in the shade of a nearby tree. His wounded pacifism seemed to make him

invisible to the natives currently dealing with the slaughter of the company.

The man looked down at his thigh. Blood was pooling in the dirt beneath his legs, creating a morbidly muddy resting place.

The cold fear was gone. It was replaced with the numbing drain of life, through the arrow wound in his leg.

He looked up to see the Cardinal frantically cursing the natives with bible verses, from atop his horse.

“Every one that is found shall be thrust through, and everyone that is joined shall be fallen by the sword!” he shouted, “So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye, for blood it defileth the land, and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it!”

The natives pulled the Cardinal down from his horse. One of them lofted a large club above his shoulders and with a mighty swing brought it down, opening the Cardinal’s head upon the jungle floor.

*

One year later in Lisbon...

The Minister of the colonies addresses

King Joao with news from Brazil.

“My grace, King Joao, majestic emperor of Brazil. I bring to you news from the frontier of the empire. The Portuguese people in Brazil, live in harmony with the land and the native people. They harvest the land’s resources for the empire, as only the ingenious Portuguese could, and bring with them the spirit of Christ.

Your Grace, you should see the blacks of Africa cutting sugar cane in the fields, the Brazilian sun kissing their faces, and warming their saved souls. Nowhere else will you see a slave smile at his master with such fraternal love. They thank us for the opportunity to help forge this new world.

And the savages, a once barbaric mongrel race, are elevated to a Portuguese level of humanity, by the glory of god and the wonder of the Portuguese civilization. The holy-spirit seems to flow unperturbed through the land as if it was being colonized by Jesus Christ himself.

My own Nephew, whom I sent as an emissary a year ago, has decided to stay in Brazil. The colony there has become so dear to his heart he could not tear himself away.

I will leave you now with these words, your Eminence, so that you may bask in the glory of your empire.”

Taking Steps, But Not Telling Them: Archivists and Professors in Jorge Luis Borges' "The Anthropologist" (1969).¹

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"The Anthropologist" narrates the story of Murdock, a man who makes an ethnographic study about the secret of an American Indian tribe. After two years living with the tribe, he learns that secret, returns to the university where he was taking his doctoral studies, and in lieu of revealing what he has discovered, he becomes an archivist in Yale. The secret that Murdock discovers is never clarified. My purpose in this essay will be to explore two ideas: the first one, to present why, despite not being revealed, the secret in "The Anthropologist" is not truly important for the comprehension of the story because what is really important is to see the process of gaining knowledge in the main character. The other idea will be to discern why Murdock, at the end of the story, instead of writing a thesis translating what he has learnt, becomes an archivist in Yale.

The first question that comes to the mind of the reader once "The Anthropologist" is read is what the secret

that Murdock discovers is. Similarly to Alfred Hitchcock's *MacGuffin*, the secret seems very important for some characters of the tale, but it is not actually relevant for both the comprehension of the story and the reader. The narration focuses, instead, in seeing how a man coming from the Western society (the story starts by saying that "[t]his story was told me in Texas") (Borges 46–7) has an encounter with the Other (someone outside his regular world) and as a consequence receives full knowledge. Amplifying Murdock to the embodiment of corrective psyche, his experience can be understood as a collective confrontation with the traditional "other" represented by the Indians. In this way, two streams would be working in "The Anthropologist": on the one hand, Murdock as individual, who confronts his personal shadow tied to his (American/European) ancestry; and, on the other hand, Murdock as westerner confronting the shadow of the Indian (Rowlandson 21). The secret that Murdock

discovers is not relevant for the purpose of the story because it is both his process of discovering and his response to that discovery what is relevant.

Both ideas are closely related to the fact that, at the end of the story, Murdock is required to reveal what he has discovered, but he decides instead to keep silent, get married and become a librarian. According to Rowlandson, when Murdock finds work in the library (a location depicted symbolically by Borges as the height of human memory and knowledge), he is inhabiting “a psychic state representing perennial wisdom” (28). He has activated a powerful force of psychic energy due to his journey, and the wisdom he has gained has exceeded the strict limits of academic discourse (25). His professor, however, does not understand this decision of not revealing the secret discovered. Marc Nichanian asks whether the writing of a doctoral thesis in ethnology only consists in discovering and communicating the secret of a group among which one has done fieldwork (3), and suggests that Borges seems to be here confronting both the profession of “professor” and the profession of “archivist,” understanding the former as the guardian and the propagator of knowledge and the latter as the guardian of the books

and of the archives; only the responsible for their maintenance, classification and significance, but not for their content (4). Murdock’s attitude of not spreading what he has learnt is coherent then with what the profession of archivist means. While the profession of professor seems unable to fully understand the knowledge of Others because it seems more concerned with the spreading of ideas than with the ideas themselves, the archivist, on the contrary, can help to the preservation of that knowledge because spreading it is not its priority. “No, that’s not it, sir,” Murdock says in Borges’ tale, “Now that I have the secret, I could explain it in a hundred and even contradictory ways. I don’t really know how to tell you, but the secret means a great deal to me. Compared to it, science – our science – seems not much more than a trifle” (Borges 49). Immediately, he adds, “The secret, I should tell you, is not as valuable as the steps that brought me to it. Those steps have to be taken, not told” (49).

Therefore, I do not think that Murdock is unable to translate the knowledge he has learnt. I think, however, that he decides not to translate it, and in making this decision he is positioning himself between two disciplines that deal with knowledge, but with different purposes.

When he says, “Those steps have to be taken, not told,” he is praising the work of the archivist and thus positioning on its side. The archivist preserves knowledge, but allows people to discover it by themselves, not by means of a third person –the professor. Considering Borges’ background as a self-educated man in libraries and archives, this idea sounds perfectly coherent, in spite of what Murdock paradoxically does is a fieldwork, and Borges was known for his aversion to that sort of activity.

Notes

1. This text is the reprinting of a paper for a

UWM seminar with Dr. Jian Xu (Department of French, Italian and Comparative Literature) titled “The Truth of Others,” during Spring 2015.

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Entre mis manos

Sergio Grossi (Milán)



La soledad

Sergio Grossi (Milán)



