









# Contrapuntos I



A Live Edition

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Marcos Pico, ed.





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*A Wifredo de Ràfols,  
en busca de una edición viva.*





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## PRÓLOGO

A solamente tres cortos años desde la aparición de la tableta *iPad* y casi quince de la pantalla *Eink* se daría paso a la actual tecnología de lectores digitales como *Kindle*. Estos últimos han influenciado considerablemente a la creación, distribución y lectura de los textos (digitales) de hoy.

El texto digital, ya con varios años de desarrollo, ha generado una constante permutabilidad, dando espacio a este primer acercamiento de una edición viva como lo es *Contrapuntos*. La presente publicación ofrece un encuentro de diferentes estilos, idiomas, formatos que al unirse van definiendo La antología viva, (*A Live Anthology*). En otras palabras, un corpus que crece y se reinventa en el transcurso del tiempo.

Los autores de *Contrapuntos* resaltan en su multiplicidad de estilos, tonos, temáticas, e incluso idiomas. En el centro se encuentran dos voces que forjan un paralelo en el bilingüismo de este espacio digital. Cristina Rivera Garza contribuye con “Sumergirse, también” logrando un movimiento orgánico y majestuoso que rezuma a “Submerging Oneself, Too” bajo el mando de Solymar Torres García.

Con la misma fluidez se presenta “El Truckee” que nos lleva a la mirada cinematográfica de la guionista Teresita Giacaman ofreciendo una muestra de una postal viva. Bajo la pluma de Elena Atanasiu se presenta “Blancanieves” mostrando el lado oscuro del cuento infantil mutando a los personajes clásicos de esa historia en títeres literarios.

En “El espía” los personajes de corte lynchescos juegan con el lector de principio a fin logrado por la astucia de Juan Miranda. En ese estilo único de atrapar al lector se encuentra JC Prasník. “Return” propone un ejercicio lúdico cuyo propósito sólo le será develado al lector al final del relato.

Marvin González contribuye a esta colección con uno

de los trabajos más extensos “Barge”. Aunque último en la antología, el escrito podría presentarse como una digital *novelle*. En ella, los personajes se definen a medida del viaje luctuoso, lleno de esperanzas ligadas a su querido ‘Papi’.

“El rector” marca el inicio de *Contrapuntos* llevándonos al ambiente escolar donde la autoridad es plasmada con gran agilidad y agudeza por los trazos de José Prats Sariol en cuatro escolásticos episodios.

Las voces que aquí se presentan son la primera promoción de autores que se aventuran a formar parte de esta nueva propuesta del texto digital *Contrapuntos: A Live Anthology*.

Marcos Pico, febrero 2013

## INTRODUCTION

This experimental collection of autonomous resistant voices are united to produce an eccentric yet harmonious melody as a whole. These stories are the seeds planted in the rich fertile terrain of cyberspace. This dynamic dimension is the site of cultivated ideas flourishing under the incessant scrutiny of the digital literary world.

This inconsequent compilation of poetic expression refuses to conform to traditional conventions of genre classification. Instead, it looks towards a constant textual evolution via collaboration of the live digital text. It offers a literary and critical space that does not recognize geographical, cultural or linguistic limits but rather promotes a universal heterogeneous community unified under their pure affinity for literary poësis.

Contrapuntos is the collision of diverse discourses and authorities. We learn from “El Rector” a valuable lesson while indulging in the voyeuristic gaze of “El espía”. Within the meditative mind of “El Truckee” we recall the eternal beauty of “Blancanieves”. In “Sumergirse, también” we float from one space and time to another. “Submerging oneself, too” we are inundated by the primordial desire to “Return” home to the “Barge”.

And now, for your reading pleasure, *Contrapuntos...*

Erika Bondi

# EL RECTOR

*José Prats Sariol*

## 1

SÍ, ANTÓN, AHÍ ESTÁ BIEN. Oiga, reflexione lentamente. Después apurará la decisión. Sabrá la sabandija que los hechos son demoledores. Sentirá mis palabras como un fuetazo en su lomo de mariposa. Masticará la evidencia, ahora tal vez bajo otro nombre.

Aquí lo tengo: un mago cuando enseña el conejo. ¿Lo reconoce, verdad? En forma de acordeón, cuidadosamente doblado hasta que cupiera entre el cinto y el pantalón, cerca del bolsillo, con las fórmulas claves. Como un monje benedictino dedicado a transcribir luminosos tratados de alquimia; un miniaturista flamenco, capaz de pintar en la cabeza de un alfiler casas de chimeneas humeantes buscando el cielo. Podría exhibirse en el sitio nuestro de Internet, en el mural del comedor...

¿Para qué tantos pinchazos? Sólo arrinconarlo, leer el informe. Antón, se halla en unas condiciones... La declaración jurada de su querido profesor no puede ser más rotunda. Hasta un murciélago vería que subestimó la vigilancia. Me da risa. Le refrescaré que el examen se desarrollaba bajo concentrado silencio en las respuestas. Y de buenas a primeras, de malas, los pasos rápidos desde la tarima hasta el pupitre, el profesor reclamándole el acordeón como el ulular de una ambulancia. La flecha en el centro del blanco, del gay. *In fraganti*:

Reconstruiré con algún detalle para el sabor. ¿Tomará un color cetrino, apergaminado, de cartucho grasiento? Apresuraré los hechos. Nuestro colega logró arrancarle el

acordeón. Buen instrumento de lengüeta, con sus fuelles y botones de circo, notas para payasos, pariente del bandoneón argentino. Tango o milonga tocada por el concertista. Un murmullo arrabalero surgiría entre los condiscípulos. Y a salir del aula, esperar la reunión conmigo. Temblar aquí, después de que en la Facultad le condenaran a la expulsión definitiva, de que fracasaran las mediaciones de la asociación de estudiantes y le rogara al decano.

Sudará. ¿Hace tanto calor? ¿Se sabrá sin frenos en la caída? Me resulta engorroso porque he revisado su expediente, indagado: Pedí al director el criterio de sus otros profesores para que se sientan partícipes de las decisiones, respeten más mi cargo, la salud académica. Ha sido una experiencia llena de vericuetos insospechados, sobre todo cuando he transferido la responsabilidad de juzgar, cuando me he diluido en la masa... Apariencias, preocupaciones. ¿Traerá pañuelo? Séquese el sudor, Antón, por Dios, me da pena verlo ahí como una estaca, empapado y rosáceo; es más, siéntese, sí, por favor, más tranquilo.

Existe una posibilidad de que no sea expulsado deshonorosamente. Pues sí, hay un chance. Por supuesto que se le pondrá una nota en el expediente y tendrá la asignatura en examen extraordinario, que sólo obtendrá el aprobado. Pero la expulsión... Ahí le hablaré bajito: Depende de su voluntad de reivindicarse. Las señas suponen un sí: Lo mismo copia en un examen que se va sin pagar de la cafetería, que se pierde un libro en el aula y termina en su maletín. Hasta me enteré de que estuvo enamorándole el novio a una condiscípula.

Debe comprender que el rectorado exige zanjas más sutiles que las informaciones de claustros o asambleas de alumnos... También necesito rumores, bromas, chismes. Confidencias, a veces anónimas, entrevistas que conduzco hacia la novedad que deseo. Desentrañadas, aportan iluminaciones. Quizás Antón intuya que también pasillos y

recepciones, librerías y bares, lenguas sueltas y mordidas, me conectan a conspiraciones, malestares que me caerían como relámpagos. No tiene que morder la historia, sólo saber que necesito ojos y oídos indiscretos, regados por el *campus*.

El alumno que cumple la misión en su escuela egresa, ya escribe la tesis. Elogiaré su perspicacia, necesito que Antón se sienta tan hábil como el antecesor. No se apure, por el momento no diga nada, tranquilo. A un confidente, sea profesor, empleado, alumno, se le garantiza que nunca será descubierto, bajo ninguna situación. Protegerlo contra cualquier riesgo es mi responsabilidad. Al que menos le conviene destapar la olla es a mí. Debe entender que volvería recelosos a los grupitos que mejor andan hablantines.

Ni siquiera archivo los informes: ¿Ve aquella maquina de la esquina, sobre la mesa? Observe cómo destruye esta hoja. ¡Venga, acérquese! La introducimos por aquí, apretamos este botón azulito, esperamos unos segundos, y ya está: confeti para carrozas. Cuando un asociado entrega una información procedo al carnaval, las previsiones llevan los confetis para la casa, los quemo en un cubo del pasillo lateral del garaje. Ni una lista de informantes, Antón, ni una libreta de teléfonos que aparente lo que no es. Todo aquí, en mi memoria de filósofo.

Así también evito traiciones, cargos de conciencia. Nada peligra, mucho menos el decoro del rectorado. En paz y en silencio. Silencio e informes verídicos. Los pormenores no pueden tener ni un polvillo de novelorías. Mi tiempo es demasiado escaso para malbaratarlo en sandeces. Exijo los hechos, ¿bien simple? Los juicios, si valen la pena, los ensalivo con mi almohada.

¿Cuáles hechos? Sólo los extremos son interesantes. Nada original, hace milenios que los servicios secretos lo saben. Las informaciones del medio llegan en la documentación oficial, casi nunca merecen diferentes ángulos, su rutina les impide influir sorpresivamente en



algún acontecimiento. No merecen un cuerpo de confidentes. Mi curiosidad está en las puntas de la sogá. Resuma los comentarios que entreguen un estado de opinión, ecos, las reverberaciones a cualquier situación o medida. Bien apretaditas, al grano. En particular los juicios de sus condiscípulos. Lo que no quiere decir que si en el elevador o en el vestíbulo oyera explayarse a algún profesor, director, empleado...

La semana próxima se anunciará el nuevo sistema que aplicaremos para la matrícula. Ahí tendrá la primera labor. Acostúmbrase a echarle maíz al patico para que picotee, para que crezca y engorde y nos lo podamos comer a la naranja con ciruelas pasas. No dejaré que me interrumpa. Urbanidad. Paciencia y neuronas. Reflexione, Antón, reflexione lo que va a hacer...

Busque la provocación. Desayúnela. ¡Terrorismo y anarquía! Al oír gris se pasa al negro o al blanco, si objetan levemente usted va a la crítica demoledora, pero verosímil. El arte del soplón conduce a la pregunta implícita y prepara la respuesta, destruye la protección. El delator transita por ahí, poco a poco. Picardía y astucia le sobran. Por eso decidí darle una oportunidad, la última, Antón, para que se ponga en función de su universidad, de mantenerla como la más prestigiosa del país, y más allá: una de las mejores del mundo. Pero no se le ocurra hacerse el difícil... No está en condiciones.

Le hablaré entonces del otro cordel aparentemente nimio, baladí. Siempre hay tontos que subestiman el valor de un chiste, de un rumor. Cualquier cuchicheo que oiga, cualquier frase ambigua, cualquier doble sentido... Tendrá que ejercitar la memoria para anotar tal cual oyó, sin alterar ni la respiración de un asmático. Hasta un mutismo o una sonrisita significan. Sin pudor hacia mis años, aunque se caguen en mi difunta madre. Y también los apodos, las nuevas expresiones, el habla de los jóvenes. Necesito refrescar el vocabulario, engrasarme.

A veces las obligaciones me llevan la benevolencia,

imponen una severidad insoportable... Pero así son las responsabilidades que uno asume, tienes que actuar y duele. El deber mastica los bocados zapatudos como faisán. Y ahí le preguntaré con energía: ¿Cree usted, Antón, que me agrada mantener una red de confidencias? ¿A quién le puede gustar la delación? ¿A ver? ¿En cuántos juegos de ajedrez podría emplear las horas que me roba?

El fraude académico es peor. Obtener un mérito sin esfuerzo resulta más feo que un trabajo sucio. Y quizás a esa altura caiga que es maricón. Lo postergaré para que no suponga prejuicios. La homofobia se remonta a la edad media, pertenece a la nación, no al gobierno. Edulcorarla no es serio, las jerarquías siguen siendo machistas, aceptarlos ya significa un perdón, reaccionar a los prejuicios que perviven. Ustedes transgreden por la puerta trasera, sus festivales son otro circo de enanos y elefantes... No. ¿Para que la cizaña? Pura teoría: multiculturalismo mediático, inventos oficiales, caramelitos para ingenuos. Se insulta con maricón de mierda. De golpe y porrazo no pueden borrarse milenios de discriminación, las hogueras malolientes, las burlas solapadas...

¿Le diré que su resentimiento favorece nuestro plan? ¿Comprenderá? ¿Entenderá sus facilidades para escarbar entre los condiscípulos? La hostilidad le es tan propia como la mirada perdida por una bragueta. ¡Que busque malestares, que se meta en ellos como en una laguna, que se zambulla sin temores y me escriba! ¿Cumplirá mejor que el anterior? ¿Deseará convertirse en un profesional?

A partir del lunes espero su aporte a la prosperidad universitaria. Sin firma y a mano, en el buzón que está a la izquierda, en el recibidor del Rectorado, donde me caen tantas cartas de halagos e insultos, de solicitudes y delaciones. Y que memorice la clave de peligro, el teléfono privado, el correo electrónico de conexión segura... O no sé, más adelante... Sólo para una emergencia. Entonces retornaré a las benevolencias. Hasta que me ponga de pie y le diga Antón, ayuda a este anciano que mantiene el orden,

que evita las perturbaciones para que puedan graduarse en paz, con excelencia.

## 2

Esperará una media hora en el sofá verde del vestíbulo, hasta que interiorice la distancia, pero cuando lo mande a pasar enseguida le ofreceré asiento, cordialidad en celofán. He leído su currículum con la detención que se ha ganado, doctor Cairo, reciba, recibirá mi cortesía como una distinción que comentará pausadamente con la familia, a la mesa. ¿Para qué confesarle del detective frustrado, de mi pasión por las sutilezas: la estructura de la información, los matices del que calla, el tenue olor de un suspiro?

Quizás sea como el ajedrez. Al doctor Cairo no debe gustarle. Mejor. Su aspiración a la cátedra ha cubierto satisfactoriamente la fase decisiva. Entonces, en tono de confidencia, agregaré que puedo concederme algunos placeres y la edad mejora los de esta naturaleza, porque los factores que decidieron mi aprobación albergan un suave brillo, otra zona del gusto, del capricho. Aquí verifico si la arteriosclerosis avanza o aún la mantengo en la esquina, contra las cuerdas.

No se preocupe, doctor Cairo, cuido los minutos ajenos como si fuesen míos. ¿Y no sé si darle a conocer mi manera de analizar, de evaluar? Algo, algo para que calibre y no se equivoque. Si entra al claustro le será inexcusable. Tampoco tendrá opción, salvo la de levantarse y sacarme la lengua, perder la apuesta. Pero jamás hubiese escrito un currículum de esa manera. Le contaré por qué está aprobado, cuáles aspectos decidieron la calificación. Sé que obrará en consecuencia, de lo contrario ni siquiera lo sentaría frente a mí, hubiese delegado en el vicerrector académico la responsabilidad de comunicarle que rehusamos sus servicios. ¿Le brindaré café? ¿Por qué no? ¿Una pausa antes de pasar a las observaciones? ¿Recordará el doctor Cairo su servicio militar, se imaginará frente a un

sargento?

Poco a poco, de menor a mayor: adoro los pormenores, la simiente. Lo primero que me alegró de su currículum fue la tercera persona: un *se* delicioso, alejado, que indica la ingenuidad de evitar el *yo*, que busca ser objetivo. ¿No decía Pascal que el yo es odioso? Aprecio las intenciones, la secreta ridiculez que entraña la humildad. Tal extrañamiento posee una dote de máscara griega. ¿Debe saber que en griego no se distinguía entre persona y máscara? El *se* tiene una pátina que recuerda cómo el hombre no ha cambiado en milenios, oscila entre el sujeto indeterminado y la voz pasiva.

Y a otro detalle. Participa de una cualidad bastante corriente: no cierne, piensa que toda la harina es buena. La falta de tamices decide la desmesura del currículum. Abultar, típico... Disculpe la franqueza, no se altere: Digamos que son manías premodernas o posmodernas, da igual. La relación de eventos científicos, conferencias impartidas, países visitados, postgrados, cursos monográficos..., es signo de un valor que aprecio. Conmover. Me encanta imaginar el momento en que fue redactado, cómo se fue sintiendo un infatigable trabajador de la cultura con algunas pizcas de resentimiento hacia las estructuras académicas. ¿Verdad? Logró escribirlo — como se dice— con lujo de detalles. Detalles, así me gusta. Lo contrario indicaría un ligero desprecio hacia el oficio docente, considerar que la academia permite ganarse los frijoles para emprender planes más ambiciosos, como algunos que aún padezco.

Su opuesto no lo quiero, el envés de la hoja tiene demasiado filo, podría tasajear mi paciencia, malgastarme horas. ¿Qué ganaría nuestra universidad con más tipos así? Cólicos nefríticos. Les fascina criticar, buscan el conflicto en ayunas o con la barriga rebosante, casi siempre con aliento etílico. Pero no le diré nada, indicaría una tribulación, una debilidad de quien logró sentarse en esta silla. Y no fue fácil. ¿A qué cantidad de hiel tuve que

mezclarle azúcar? Sonrisa y punzón, aplausos y confabulaciones, reverencias y zancadillas hasta poner las manos sobre esta mesa de caoba, acariciarla como a una novia.

Ni una palabra: sonrisa para que no piense que repudio en otros lo que puedo permitirme. Parece un poco tarde para reprimir instintos. Almaceno el aguijón y lo saco en la primera oportunidad. ¿Para qué navegar en esa lava si puedo evitarlo, casi siempre, en las admisiones? A él sólo un elogio por la minuciosidad, y dos o tres detallitos adicionales: la mención de sus diversos tutores. Sublime. A mí qué me importa si fueron brillantes o mediocres, no determinan. Es el acto de nombrarlos. Indica una transferencia de prestigio, una inseguridad útil a la ambientación que tanto me ha costado crear. Un rector también se nutre de tutorías, de aparentes agradecimientos que velan las distinciones. Felicitaré su gratitud hacia quienes lo firmaron. Le diré que lo prestigia, algo así.

Y al detalle de la presentación: carpeta plastificada, imitación de cuero, respeto de normas tipográficas, márgenes y subrayados, ni una sola enmienda o errata, fichas de la bibliografía perfectas, ortografía actual... Elogiaré lo impoluto. Demasiado evidente. Mejor a formalidades que los chapuceros desprecian por incapacidad. Respeto a las apariencias, sin ellas el castillo se desmoronaría. El acatamiento en forma de ademanes y vestuario, de urbanidad e higiene.

Pasaré a lo inadvertido. Ni el mismo doctor Cairo estuvo consciente, pero a mi vista casi no se le va una mosca. Vanidades... Confío en mi lupa. Tomaré un tono solemne: En verdad, en verdad que esta sutileza es un termómetro. Me encantan las frases anticuadas, las disfruto como a un tinto riojano. En verdad, distinguido colega, que decidiera incluir las calificaciones que obtuvo en cada asignatura durante sus estudios universitarios, que todavía sienta una brisa de orgullo y sobre todo que sean parejamente inmejorables, indican algo decisivo: su línea

no presenta curvas de apogeo y perigeo.

Demasiado explícito, sólo satisfacción ante el ritmo sostenido. Estimulante, al menos para mí, un anciano que recuerda cuando suspendió un semestre de latín por andar detrás de udunas nalgas legendarias, cuando por muy poco pierdo un concurso de oposición por leer a Nietzsche... La invariabilidad de sus calificaciones resulta sobrecogedora. Le diré que hombres como él son precisamente los que contribuyen a la estabilidad del claustro, los que nunca participarán en sediciones vacuas ni alentarán la rebeldía, los que mostrarán abnegación, sacrificio.

¡Cuidado, doctor Cairo, con despilfarrar concesiones, falacias anarquistas para las buenas conciencias! Y no le dejaré responder. Me pondré de pie, extenderé la mano, si acaso añadir la satisfacción de tenerle junto a nosotros.

### 3

Tributo: Distinguidos vicerrectores, decanos, directores, jefes de Departamentos Docentes, de Secciones Técnico-Científicas y de Servicios Universitarios, funcionarios administrativos, integrantes de nuestras familia de educadores, compañeras y compañeros... Y añadir que la palabra conclusiones huele a funeraria, que cumpliré la clausura sin un instante más allá de lo imprescindible.

Repaso: el orden del día, los apuntes que he tomado en las cuatro horas larguísimas que acabo de pasar. ¿A ver? Rápido, mientras meriendan y se reanuda la sesión... Enseguida al punto que dejo para el final. Las turbulencias o turbonadas pertenecen a la astronomía, no a las aulas, no a los privados de los docentes, menos que menos a un grupúsculo de profesorcitos hipercríticos y autosuficientes. Cualquier manifestación contra el cumplimiento de los acuerdos del claustro anterior, por velada que resulte, es un acto repudiable. Si el centralismo democrático no fuese nuestro método, el caos, el individualismo, la desidia, se

adueñarían de la universidad. Negarlo es un suicidio, no lo permitiremos porque amamos demasiado nuestro trabajo para tolerar que sea minado impunemente por los eternos contestatarios y disidentes, por los que sentados en la cerca bebiéndose un trago pretenden burlarse del maestro, del estudiante, de los que no somos fiscales prepotentes sino obreros del saber.

Adelanto: nada más, los implicados sabrán por dónde voy. El espíritu de franco y abierto debate fortalece la democracia en nuestra universidad, al menos en los años que me he honrado en conducirla con la ayuda de colegas honestos y disciplinados. Nada más saludable que haya primado la polémica franca, por mucho que pueda dolerle a ciertas lenguas viperinas, fabricadoras de calumnias y falacias.

Bajaré la voz para decir que ya hablaremos de ellas... Y ni una cucharada extra. Me iré por una digresión contra los floripondios que estiran sus intervenciones para sopesar sus metales de voz. Pasaré al perfil amplio. Hay consentimiento en la necesidad de tener listos para el fin del semestre los proyectos de cada perfil. La hiperespecialización, que en un determinado estadio de desarrollo nos pareció una consecuencia lógica del progreso alcanzado por las diversas disciplinas, es un freno laboral porque el egresado sabe mucho de poco, más de menos, y encontrar empleo se le torna cada día más problemático. Nos fuimos por encima de la realidad económica, social y científica del país y graduamos profesionales que se mueven por un sendero angosto. Garantizar un marco de posibilidades acorde con las estructuras reales del país es una tarea prioritaria. Por los informes acabados de verificar estamos a un paso de lograr un abanico de opciones laborales para cada graduado. Ello incidirá positivamente en la pirámide que forman obreros, técnicos medios y profesionales.

Tenemos un macrocefálico, de endeble piernas. Así se representa la estructura laboral. Exhortaré a lograr una

proporción equilibrada. Las candidaturas y los doctorados son en el nuevo milenio las verdaderas especializaciones. La formación autodidacta determina los conocimientos funcionales de cada disciplina, los nuevos planes de estudio tienen como razón de ser las opciones laborales.

Y a la obligatoriedad del currículum. Bastante flexibilidad, demasiada, tienen. Es doloroso que un alumno haya errado al elegir, peor sería que la golondrina hiciera verano. Miraré al principal oponente, al decano de Biología, antes de añadir que la decisión se toma al matricular, lamentablemente al salir de la adolescencia, pero no hay otra fórmula, aunque el perfil amplio divisa una mejoría. Las exigencias de la Federación de Estudiantes de algunas Escuelas son inaceptables, darían paso al caos. Ni habrá convalidaciones de asignaturas cuyos programas no se correspondan estrictamente, ni admitiremos que después de un año académico se acepte abonar determinada materia. Cada profesor tendrá que involucrar a sus alumnos, repetirles el razonamiento de la pérdida de conocimiento por desuso, decirles que negarse a la evidencia científica es buscar el título en la pared. El currículum no es la carta de un restaurante de lujo. Las asignaturas básicas de cada profesión no son negociables. Poco importa que algunos, fuera o dentro del claustro, usen esta exigencia para sus demagogias, estamos acostumbrados a los populistas, a los que andan a la caza de campañas para su feroz oportunismo.

Sabandijas y gusanos deben sentir que cuando menos se lo imaginen recibirán el puntapié. Y al reciclaje docente. Relacionaré los logros en el nuevo siglo, los retos científicos y tecnológicos. Martillaré otro clavo: pues mientras la escoria dedica su tiempo a pedir menos horas frente al alumno, menos planeamiento de las clases, menos controles técnico-docentes, menos y menos y menos... Mientras la escoria sólo tiene intereses espurios, la mayoría mantiene un amor a la profesión fiel a la memoria de los grandes educadores. Porque el sabático no es sinecura. Los



titulares y decanos tienen que controlar si los proyectos de investigación se quedan en el disco de la computadora. Tratamos de incrementar las posibilidades de superación y de investigación, favorecemos las iniciativas porque estamos orgullosos de la participación exitosa en eventos internacionales, de las resonancias que nuestros profesores eméritos alcanzan. Sería un crimen no garantizar el reciclaje bajo el principio de la educación permanente, del cuerpo teórico que la sustenta a nivel mundial, en la UNESCO y en la más reciente bibliografía pedagógica.

Que sepan que uno está al día y crean que dejen sueltas las piltrafas. Focalizaré el disparo: Si algunos artistas de la calumnia vierten por ahí sus ladridos, sus imposturas verdiamarillas, ¡allá ellos! Y al otro punto: Fortalecer la exigencia y la disciplina es tan permanente como la superación, la autoridad profesoral no es consigna. Sin la firme unidad entre nosotros cualquier nueva resolución se nos escapará bajo el puente, correrá por la cañada que bordea la escuela de Química. Evitar disidencias no es autoritarismo sino prevenir desastres, que nos quiten la autonomía universitaria y seamos un vulgar apéndice del gobierno.

La discordia trae revoltura, caos. ¿A quiénes ayudan meter cizaña? Azuzar litigios, echar leñas a cismas pertenece a las artistas que salpican el claustro de malas migas, de dimes y diretes. Aquí muchos se darán cuenta de contra quien apunto. Pero seguiré en el carrusel, en que la controversia sana no es ponzoña. Las fuerzas divisionistas están activas, medran con los tibios, con los pusilánimes. Padecen de un pesimismo raigal y pretenden transmitirlo con impunidad, como si los leucocitos no produjéramos distintos fermentos y secretáramos sustancias capaces de destruir microbios, neutralizar sus toxinas.

Pasaré al último punto, pero les añadiré un regalito, así, con diminutivo, para desbordar su bilis. ¿Cuál cara pondrá ella? ¿Cómo se sentirán los que están a su lado? Los Juegos Universitarios: Llevábamos doce años, tres ocasiones, en

que hacíamos la solicitud y la votación nos era adversa. La ciudad celebró el otorgamiento, tenemos algunas instalaciones. Nuestros deportistas se han comprometido a obtener un cantidad de medallas muy superior a la de los juegos anteriores. Explicaré el plan para cada deporte. El pronóstico de los especialistas es alentador, superaremos ampliamente las actuaciones anteriores, tenemos el aliento del público a sus atletas.

Se han elaborado cuidadosamente los aseguramientos y han sido refrendados por el Comité Olímpico. Acabamos de despedir a sus dirigentes y en la reunión central, en las visitas y hasta en el aeropuerto, me ratificaron la certeza de que nuestro evento superará los anteriores, será un ejemplo. Este honor trae aparejado algún sacrificio presupuestario. ¿Les recordaré la frase de Juvenal: “Mente sana en cuerpo sano”? ¿En latín? En español, no creo que ningún contestatario sepa que el mismo Juvenal de los deportistas dijo que al pueblo pan y circo...

Frente a vicios y sedentarismos, el deporte se erige como antídoto; los alumnos y los de la veteranía deportiva recibimos una inyección de frescura; los aficionados discuten y apuestan, preparan coros de embullo, abarrotan las instalaciones. Ya el Director de Deportes les habló del nuevo estadio, del velódromo, del combinado de piscinas... Reconozco la excelente labor de la Escuela de Arquitectura, de la Facultad de Ingeniería. Ayer pasamos por las canchas de tenis y por la futura villa, cada tarea cuenta con sus cronogramas, con una organización impecable.

Invitaré a ver las construcciones para que comprueben cómo los alumnos brindan su trabajo voluntario, borran cualquier duda del éxito. Falta contratar algunos equipos electrónicos para competencias, las pizarras gigantes; están pendientes las esteras y creo que el tartán de campo y pista; pero a fines de mes se habrá completado. Involucrarlos, que se sientan partícipes. Al entusiasmo lo afean las lenguas purulentas de algunas resentidas. Alzaré la voz:

Mientras evitamos alcohol y tabaco, calenturas políticas, subversiones que hipotecan el futuro de la nación, mientras favorecemos la formación integral, otros se dedican a patrañas. Quisiéramos disfrutar de entrantes, carnes blancas y rojas, escanciar vinos selectos, acompañar las crepés con champán... No siempre el bolsillo alcanza.

Aquí sí la miraré a derretirla. Hemos contraído un compromiso histórico y sabremos cumplirlo con la dignidad que nos caracteriza. Matizaré: Es verdad que el museo aguarda desde hace una década, pero no podemos tomar champán por ahora. Si para garantizar los Juegos hemos sacrificado reparaciones que se evaluaron como impostergables, no vamos a llorar por una obra que puede irse remediando con el local que ocupa.

¿Para que relacionarles lo que interrumpimos? No conviene. Indignación. Lo intolerable es utilizar una decisión involuntaria como si no quisiéramos favorecer la cultura. Mencionaré la palabra calumnia, sílaba a sílaba. No insistiré en los daños, en el deterioro de los ánimos que infructuosamente tratan de conseguir. A los trabajadores honestos las campañitas nos resbalan. Dan asco porque sabemos identificar su trasfondo oportunista. Los Juegos serán un éxito que contrastará con el ridículo de las difamaciones. Haré una pausa, larga. El silencio la envolverá. Le ruego a la directora del Departamento de Arte que mañana a las nueve esté en mi despacho. Y con voz dulce, que no habiendo otro punto se da por concluida la reunión con una noticia de última hora: nuestro equipo femenino de voleibol obtuvo medalla de oro en Tokio.

#### 4

El globito rojo... Quince días de espera por la entrevista le será saludable. Risa y lástima. Jugo de paciencia. Que Prieto se la sienta, pero sin excesos, ya no son necesarios ¿Qué le diré? ¿Cómo se lo diré? Que el tenue olor del rectorado le envuelva sutilmente, como si estuviera en la

Casa Dior. *Poison. Eau de Cologne. Vaporisateur.* Creo saber con alguna precisión lo que usted ha hecho en los dos años que lleva aquí. Tal vez se me han escapado ciertos detalles, pero no los frívolos...

Me da gracia que piense lo contrario. Un resumen, cronológico y aleatorio, a la coherencia de mi improvisación. O pongámosle una señal: ¿qué le parece la palabra marxismo? Pase a la boutique. *Duty free.* Gratis y sin plusvalía. Recordaré su arribo al campo universitario y cómo husmeó enseguida el ambiente. Nuestra primera entrevista, lo de siempre, algo cursi. Quizás le confiese mi creencia en los fenotipos, algo de la teoría de Lombroso y del intuicionismo a lo Bergson se mezclan por aquí dentro como dos sustancias que forman una masa tal vez lúcida. Algo de su cara, quizás los ojos, me dieron la señal. Parece que no estuve errado.

Le pediré excusas por el tono profesoral y regresaré al tema: Muchas veces un hilo de agua ilumina el paisaje, un arabesco define el estilo, un gesto entrega la sensualidad de una mujer... ¿Habrá sucedido así con usted? En fin, a su primer curso de filosofía: Todas las noches cerraba la biblioteca, miles de tarjetas, ¡qué manejo de fuentes y exégesis, derroche de eficiencia pedagógica, de elocuencia participativa, voz y dicción y silencios y preguntas y motivaciones! Boquiabiertos los dejaba. Salían embelesados, a comentar en la plaza o en la cafetería un giro coloquial de los que usted intercala para quitar sobriedad, un chiste de cuando el viejo Carlos Marx no se bañaba en Londres. Y las evaluaciones, como un torrencial aguacero. Y cuando repartía los exámenes, llenos de comentarios en los márgenes, se intercambiaban las hojas, surgía un nuevo diálogo colmado de aparentes divagaciones pero que daban en el blanco. Siempre con una frase de aliento.... Se puso de moda en la Facultad: la envidia rodando por los privados del claustro, un eco entusiasta cuando aparentemente distraído pasaba por al lado de los alumnos, como si un estupefaciente fuera

quedando a su paso, en el murmullo sobre la última ocurrencia. Las adolescentes excusando la barriga incipiente, la calvicie no tan incipiente, valorando al cuarentón que ocupaba el uno. Y ni hablar de lecturas, no había interpretación que careciera de seis o siete en turno, hasta releían a Gramsci. Prieto, distinguido colega, usted rutilaba.

Sin excusas por la ironía. En junio el prestigio de la adquisición universitaria alcanzaba la cima, y sin embargo algunas visitas al Bar Sevilla indicaban un curioso ruido. Le llevo un puñado de tiempo, más de veinte años de adelanto o de atraso, también pasé por ahí, transformando a la gente, soñándome en tal o más cual posición, saltando de tres en tres los peldaños. Excuse el paternalismo, no hay ofensa, Prieto, tómelo como signo del declive que algunos de los aspirantes a mi cargo comienzan a atribuirme.

¿Café? ¿Por qué no? No ponga esa cara, verá que tendremos un final feliz. Son las obligaciones, engorrosas pero inevitables. Imagínese, con la diversidad de personas que atiendo... Me veo como un jugador de ajedrez. Continuaré con las vacaciones: mes de playa y sol, agua de coco helada con ron, azúcar, limón, servida en el propio coco, y novelas policíacas; desconectar de ontologías y epistemologías y todos los *íus*, tropicalizar el marxismo, a que don Carlos y *herr* Federico se tostaran un poco, oyeran el toque de tambores, bailaran rumba con una mulata de oro. ¿Aunque imagino que reflexionara sobre el curso siguiente? ¿Verdad, Prieto? Unos goterones de acción humedecerían las futuras clases. Praxis. Adiós a los argumentos que quizás le recordaran las palabrejas de la ideología liberal: humanidad, justicia, libertad. Usted, un intelectual orgánico, ¿cómo no iba a darse cuenta de las contradicciones que existen entre aquellas ideas mutiladas y la destartalada realidad? Por supuesto, con esa fuerza de cognición...

La ironía me es tan inevitable como la valoración de los

hombres, de mí mismo, dicen por ahí que nunca me he recuperado de mi tesis sobre Nietzsche. Conmigo soy más despiadado. ¡Al tema! Su tiempo también es el mío. Regresó a las aulas imbuido de la teoría que lo espera todo de los hombres y de su acción, que no juega con relaciones políticas de fuerza, sino que termina con el juego de fuerzas, con la burguesía, con el idealismo, etcétera, adelante, uníos. A mancharse las manos. Al menos con el deseo de embarrar de tierra los espesos volúmenes.

En el segundo curso las expectativas no pudieron ser más favorables. Perfecto, de líder docente a líder político, y decente. Tan decente que cuando los muchachos comenzaron el alboroto y los bomberos le rociaron un poco de agua y los policías le regalaron un poco de leña, ahí mismo regresaron las meditaciones. Trataré de no sonreír. No se me vaya a molestar...Usted? ¿Yo?

Debo ser yo, a Prieto le queda —como se dice— un mundo por delante; el mío está en un puñado de recuerdos, en el ajedrez... Le confesaré los indicios. Sabía de una escena con un chofer de espaldas anchas, de los insultos, de que le pidió perdón cuando lo sacó a la fuerza del auto; sabía de cómo no aguantaba que le alzarán la voz y devolvía los decibeles con un ligero temblor de impotencia en los labios; sabía de su esposa —aquí le pediré perdón.

Los muchachos tenían gasolina, crearon una nueva Asociación de Estudiantes, repudiaron a los pusilánimes, lograron una frágil unidad de centroizquierda, y a la lucha, a pedirle al guía político docente qué hacer. ¿Qué hacer? Estuvo genial: Imposible, los exámenes semestrales eran inminentes, entre más supieran, más útiles a los cambios revolucionarios que se avecinaban. La orientación era luchar con las notas de clase, combatir la bibliografía, vencer la asignatura. Salir del apuro.

El segundo semestre comenzó entre evasivas a reuniones y mítines. Ahí se consagró. Prieto capeó el temporal con apenas dos o tres magulladuras, porque

algunos discípulos no eran tontos, claro. Algunos lograban ver que el político docente se iba a pique. Un atrevido se lo gritó en el pasillo: ¡Se pinchó el globo rojo! ¿Tendré que narrarle las semanas finales, no están demasiado cercanas, penosas? Lo sabía, sin excluir variantes, desde que la popularidad inicial despertó mi atención, desde los primeros informes. Es como una partida de ajedrez, gana el que ve más jugadas. Le insistiré en que nadie aprende por cabeza ajena. Me ha dado por los refranes, latería del idioma. Ahora usted se conoce mejor, no importa que me tenga por zorro. Estupidez no, ahí, desde luego, no perdono. Nada contra la inteligencia parece tolerable.

En fin, contrato por tres años. ¿Qué le parece? Tendrá una semana para la respuesta. Aceptará, casi estoy seguro. En todo caso le daré las gracias por haberme entretenido dos cursos a los estudiantes. Mucho ha evitado su gestión pedagógica. ¿Sonreirá? Por favor, Prieto, no se haga ilusiones. Gracias de nuevo.

## EL ESPÍA

*Juan Miranda*

MI ESPOSA JADEABA Y GEMÍA pero no era por culpa mía. Al principio era distante, como si buscara algún tipo de represalia al abandono de nuestro matrimonio. Yo había sentido lo mismo al principio y también había buscado asilo en los brazos ajenos de alguna extraña.

El cinco de agosto, me acuerdo, fue la tercera vez que la llamé para saber dónde estaba y me decía que estaba en casa. Ella no estaba en casa. Las primeras veces llegaba con rosas u orquídeas, en busca de algún tipo de reconciliación egoísta que nos uniera y sellara ese amor costumbrista y extraño que nos conectaba. Ese cinco de agosto, me acuerdo, fue la primera vez que la había llamado desde la esquina de la calle Urrutia, mientras ella caminaba, con teléfono en mano, buscando reparo en el umbral recóndito de la casa azul de dicha calle. Con el teléfono adquiría una belleza distinta, un gustito prohibido que convertía su historia en algo mucho más interesante que la mía. Me decía que la encontraba en el jardín y por eso el viento, y que quizás iría a visitar alguna amiga no mucho después de entonces, porque se había divorciado de su marido. Mi mujer se mostraba displicente, entonces la saludé con apatía y le dejé saber que llegaría un poco más tarde a casa.

Al terminar la llamada, puso el móvil en el bolso y entró a la casa azul. Yo entré minutos después que ella, intentado mantener mi anonimato. El conserje me preguntó qué número de habitación iba a alquilar el día de hoy y le respondí que tenía una cita con una mujer y otro hombre, pero no habíamos acordado el número. Le describí a mi



mujer y me señaló la habitación 101. Le pedí discreción y asintió. Subí al primer piso y posé el oído en la puerta. Del otro lado se escuchaban gemidos desgarrantes, apasionados. Husmeé por la cerradura y efectivamente era mi mujer. Estaba arriba de un tipo buen mozo, cubriéndole las piernas con la misma falda anaranjada que flameaba unos diez minutos antes a causa del viento. Se meneaba sudorosa. El tipo la miraba, la movía con ímpetu de la cintura y exhalaba fuerte. Mi mujer callaba.

Me fui al baño y comencé a llorar. Pensé en patear la puerta y asesinarlos a los dos, pero no tenía arma. Entonces, fui a casa, intentando que el conserje no me viese así no sospecharía nada. En casa esperé. Esperé a que llegara para ver el nivel de cinismo que tenía. Llegó dos horas después. Yo no me podía sacar la imagen de mi mujer desnuda de torso, de esas escaleras taciturnas de la casa azul, del hombre fornido y célibe que la cogía con furia mientras yo espiaba por la cerradura.

Le pregunté cómo se encontraba su amiga y me respondió que no se sentía muy bien y que intentaría mantener el contacto porque había estado hablando de cometer alguna locura. Yo intentaba, con fuerza voraz, no sonar sarcástico o irónico para no despertar ningún tipo de dudas. Tampoco procuré indagar más de lo debido para no sonar más interesado de lo que normalmente era de sus asuntos. Sin embargo, a la noche intenté intimar con mi mujer e imitar la pasión con que había congeniado con ese extraño. Penetrarla por última vez, transgredirla con venganza, asesinarlos a ambos y desaparecer. Ella no quiso hacer el amor conmigo. Hacer el amor con extraños le proporcionaba dolor de cabeza por la noche concluí. Me hice el desentendido, aunque le ofrecí una aspirina y ella me respondió durmiéndose.

A la semana, ya había conseguido un arma y había sacado todo el dinero del banco. Llamé a mi mujer desde el teléfono del trabajo y le dije que me esperara en casa porque necesitaba que me firmara unos papeles del

abogado con respecto a una propiedad que habíamos vendido y que íbamos a cobrar ese mismo día. Me esperó con el almuerzo, firmó, me dejó saber que llegaría tarde porque pasaría por la casa de su amiga y volví al trabajo. A los del trabajo les dije que me sentía mal y me fui rápidamente al banco a cobrar la hipoteca del inmueble. Después me apresuré a ir a casa y esperé a que mi esposa saliera. Hice tiempo en el coche, en la esquina opuesta del camino que tomaría ella para ir a la casa azul de la calle Urrutia.

Vi que salía y encendí el automóvil apresurado para llegar antes que ella a la casa azul. Llegué rápidamente. Saqué el revolver del compartimento, me fijé que no estuviese cargado y me puse dos balas en el bolsillo. Entré y le dije al conserje que me abriera la habitación de siempre, pero que no les dijera a los otros que estaba allí porque quería que fuera una sorpresa de cumpleaños; una vez más le pedí discreción. Él asintió. Me abrió la habitación y se largó. Me escondí en el armario, dejé la puerta corrediza brevemente abierta para poder ver a mi mujer y al otro, tomar coraje y dispararles a ambos.

Parecieron ser dos eternidades hasta que al fin llegaron. Rápidos y jocosos se tiraron en la cama y empezaron a sacarse la ropa. Mi mujer estaba hermosa, ahora tenía bucles, pero la falda era la misma que la última vez. Intenté tomar valor, abrir la puerta y dispararles, pero no pude. Empecé a excitarme y comencé a masturbarme. No entendía cómo era que mi cobardía y ver a mi mujer hacer el amor con ese otro tipo me producía placer. No era de mí interrumpirlos, quería ver todo lo que hacían. El tipo le besaba los pezones y eso me excitaba más. Por fin me vine y tuve que esperar unos minutos para que el extraño hiciera lo suyo. Se abrazaron por un momento y mi mujer le dijo que se tenía que ir rápidamente porque tenía que visitar a una amiga en problemas. Se vistieron y salieron.

Salí del cuarto consternado. Bajé las escaleras taciturnas, saludé al conserje con un guiño y conseguí dar con la calle.

El cielo y mi cabeza estaban nublados. Encendí un cigarro para poder recapitular lo que acaba de acontecer. Tomé el coche, guardé el arma en su funda dentro de la gaveta y me fui a caminar por ahí. Dejé que me pegara la lluvia tan fuerte como cayera y me quedé parado un rato mirando al cielo.

Volví al coche y conduje a casa. Ella me esperaba con una cena especial, pero le extrañaba que estuviera todo mojado. Le dije que había mucha cola en el banco y que me había tenido que mojar. Me preguntó si había cobrado el dinero y afirmé. No sentía odio por ella. Nos sentamos y comimos. Se veía hermosa, sus bucles caían dispersos sobre su torso. Terminamos de comer y nos acostamos. Me bajó los pantalones, empezó... Me la imaginaba sobre el hombre extraño y me calentaba mucho más. Después me montó en un vaivén suave. Besaba sus pechos como lo había hecho ese tipo, me imaginé verme en el closet.

Cerré los ojos por un momento contemplándome en la casa azul de la calle Urrutia. De repente, me vine y mi mujer conmigo. El hombre extraño salió del closet con un arma. El disparo me ensordeció..., me sentí vivo justo después dándome cuenta que no había sido yo la víctima. Abrí los ojos viendo al hombre apuntándome, entonces, los volví a cerrar. El hombre me besó en la frente y se largó.

Me desesperé y pensé haberme vuelto loco. Pestañeé rápidamente... Mi mujer me llamaba por el nombre. La dí vuelta, la penetré contra su voluntad y me puse muy violento. Empecé a violarla, golpearla. Se asustó mucho, pero la culpa la enmudecía. Entonces, acabé una vez más, le dije que la amaba. Me largué de su vida.

## EL TRUCKEE

*Teresita Giacaman*

EL OPTIMISMO LE VOLVIÓ A INUNDAR EL PECHO cuando llegó al puente y miró el río, rodeado de piedras ovaladas y pasto. Bajó y se sentó con todas sus cosas agarradas sobre el vientre: el iPod, el pasaporte y la billetera que aún contenía unas lucas chilenas. Los ojos le ardían por el bloqueador y el cuero cabelludo le quemaba justo donde se hizo la raya al lado derecho. Había gente alrededor, a pesar de que era un sábado por la mañana. Algunos corrían, otros paseaban a los perros, los bares abrían sus puertas y ella abajo, sobre una piedra, se animaba a tocar el agua con la punta de sus dedos. Le pareció sublime, el agua clara y fresca en su pie, media azul oscura, verdosa en los contornos del empeine, corriendo hacia abajo, ondulada, como queriendo llevársela. Cerró los ojos y trató de encajar sus pensamientos. Ella bajó para bañarse. El agua la hace feliz. Se sacó los pantalones y la inundó la vergüenza. Súbitamente se volvió el centro del universo. Siente punzantes miradas en el hombro derecho, la nuca, la mejilla, la tienen rodeada desde las calles y las ventanas de los edificios. Ella mira de vuelta y se cerciora que no haya ningún testigo cerca, entonces rápidamente se saca la polera y mete entre dos rocas un paquete que hizo con su pareo y el banano. Se acomoda el bikini y yergue el pecho. Ya está ahí. Baja al agua ayudándose de sus manos y sus pies, como una araña, casi sin levantar el trasero del suelo.

Parece hubiera sido más fácil, pero le cuesta andar derecha. Finalmente se deja deslizar en el agua, como si fueran las sábanas de una cama y no puede evitar lanzar una risita acompañada de un grito ¡Está helada el agua!, mira alrededor rápidamente, pero no hay cómplices. Se relaja. Huele a vegetación descompuesta, barro y pasto recién cortado. Hunde la cabeza y el pelo se le paraliza debajo, agarrando otro movimiento, como dejando entrar el frescor al cerebro. Abre los ojos, escucha la corriente, las piedras sueltas golpeando las rocas y unas pequeñitas haciendo remolinos más agudos. Desde adentro se ven los altos edificios y la gran mancha blanca del sol. Vuelve a salir. Nunca había estado en una ciudad donde la belleza pase por el centro mismo y se pueda utilizar. Su Santiago tiene el río Mapocho, pero sus aguas son contaminadas y nunca fue pensado para ser utilizado por personas, como casi todo lo que hay allá. Está abrazada a una roca, tomando el sol, el pelo largo y negro le gotea, los ojos semiabiertos, puede sentir el olor de su piel morena en contacto con los rayos, es el mismo olor de su mamá. La recuerda durmiendo siesta con ella, el ventilador prendido y los perros corriendo alrededor del arroyo que pasaba por su propiedad. También el de la piedra recién mojada, calentita, como cuando salía congelada del pozón y se quedaba acostada al borde por largos minutos hasta que la piel se le llenaba de hoyitos rojos producto del relieve del granito. Cruza los pies detrás y logra dormitar un poco hasta que un chico la pasa saltando, como un mono. Levanta la cabeza y se da cuenta que una familia de Chicanos se ha instalado justo detrás de ella, ¡Tan cerca! Tres niños más llevan un bote inflable al agua, todos

gordos, unos con bigote pelusiento adolescente. Tuerce el cuello y logra ver una parrilla y bastante comida. Se queda estática, lamentándose, no se quiere mover y otra vez las punzadas. Siente que todas las miradas van hacia su culo, que por cosas del destino, quedó elevado hacia ellos, como desplegado al público. Los chicanos hablan en español y ella lo entiende; cosa que ellos no sospechan. Uno le dice al otro algo, ella cree que hablan de ella, se tensa completa, agarra el pareo y lo aprieta como si fuera una piedra frente a un perro que amenaza al fondo de la calle. No puede determinar qué es lo que dicen, pero se ríen, ¿dirán que está buena? Que¿ ,es gorda? Que¿ ,...no tiene mucho? Se incorpora al mismo tiempo que se cubre. En menos de un segundo está sentada, envuelta en el pareo y sintiendo la injusticia del momento. Ella quería estar tranquila, pero detrás de ella la descueran. Resignada, vuelve sentir ese pánico que la atrapó en San Francisco, una mezcla de novedad, miedo y apatía de estar en ese planeta nuevo. Entonces se levanta, indignada y mira a su alrededor: no tiene más salida que cruzar por donde está la familia para llegar al puente y a la calle otra vez. Finalmente avanza. No quiere hacer contacto visual, pero vuelve a sentir las risas y decide enfrentar a ese par de indiscretos, pero nunca hubo conexión ya que ellos miraban una película en su iPod, mientras los niños se metían al río en el bote inflable y las mujeres preparaban algo para comer en la parrilla. Nadie reparó en ella, ni antes ni ahora. Entonces cruza por entremedio de ellos, como un fantasma y llega al pasto. Se pone la polera y las chalas. ¿Se siente aliviada? Sí, pero también un poco desilusionada, le hubiera gustado que la miraran, que la admiraran. Pero no pasó nada.

# BLANCANIEVES

*Elena Atanasiu*

TRABAJABA CON MUJERES DE TODAS LAS EDADES, las arreglaba de la cabeza a los pies. Altas, bajas, flacas y gorditas; cuando salían, se convertían en reinas de concurso de belleza. Las pintaba, engalanaba el pelo y también elegía la ropa que se iban a poner para esta ocasión tan especial. Un día la trajeron sus padres; morena, con ojos claros, tendría más o menos quince años. Era diferente a las otras, y, aunque tenía una cicatriz fresca que le partía la mejilla en dos, se enamoró de ella a primera vista. Amor ad conspectum primum, una de las tantas cosas que recordaba de su antigua carrera que dejó por razones económicas y estéticas. Empezó por arreglarle el pelo; no le puso mucho maquillaje porque no quería estropear esa belleza tan natural de su piel, más blanca que la nieve. Eligió un vestido rosa y al fin la convirtió en una princesa de cuentos de hadas. La niña no paraba de mirarlo. Aunque no decía nada, él sentía que esos ojos lo deseaban, lo observaban inmóviles. Le acarició una mejilla y la besó. Ella no resistió el primer beso ni los muchos otros que le siguieron. La tranquilidad con la que le entregaba su cuerpo hacía que él se excitará como con ninguna otra. La penetró muy suavemente una y otra vez, porque no quiso que su primera experiencia fuera dolorosa. Cuando se vino, le besó los labiecitos rosa, le bajó el vestido y la metió dentro de la nevera junto a los otros cadáveres que esperaban entierro al día siguiente.

## SUMERGIRSE, TAMBIÉN

*Cristina Rivera Garza*

SI NO HUBIERAN ENCALLADO, yo no habría salido de su interior. Nunca es una palabra muy larga pero, en este caso, adecuada. Yo no habría salido nunca de ahí. Otra manera de decir lo mismo diciendo otra cosa sería anotar que “yo me habría quedado ahí siempre”. Sin sentido del tiempo o de su paso, la importancia del nunca o del siempre disminuye drásticamente. Pero las ballenas encallaron y yo, aprovechando los huecos que el destrozo había producido entre las formaciones queratinosas que responden al nombre de barbas, salí. Tuve que hacerlo. De no haber tenido que hacerlo, todavía estaría allá, en el interior. Viviendo.

Solía mirarlas de lejos. Me apostaba en el piso más alto de la torre y avistaba. A veces caminaba hasta los arrecifes y me detenía sobre la piedra más alta. El musgo bajo mis pies: Un verde así. Era mi particular fascinación: observar atentamente hasta que aparecía, un poco antes de la línea del horizonte, el chorro de agua o el lomo que apenas se distinguía de la superficie marina. Emergían de las entrañas del océano pero a mí me daba la impresión de que descendían también de un cielo magnífico o irreal. Todo azul. O todo gris. O todo verde. Una única unidad. En realidad, se trataba casi siempre del gris. Algo mercurial y nervioso. Algo a punto de partir. Una franca exageración.



Vivía para esos inviernos en que pasaban lo suficientemente cerca de la costa como para hacerme soñar. Imaginaba que me iba con ellas, mi cuerpo de humano perdido entre sus excesivas osamentas de mamífero. Imaginaba que me iba sobre ellas, como si galopar fuera del todo posible. Como si el mar fuera un llano.

*Flotar es un movimiento en diversas direcciones indecisas. Sumergirse también.*

Siempre me gustaron los días nublados y húmedos, supongo que eso explica algo. La lluvia solía ponerme feliz. El mundo cuando el mundo entero se protege en una especie de sutil contraluz, eso me gustaba a rabiarse o a morir. La manera indirecta. El plano oblicuo. Mientras los otros se quejaban de la nubosidad o de la falta de calor solar, yo solía caminar con entusiasmo cuando lo hacía, literalmente, entre nubes. La melancolía de la nube que, en ciertos días, se transformaba en bruma. Creo que busqué toda la vida un sitio así: oscuro, húmedo, dúctil. Una cueva o un susurro o algo que fuera lo mismo. Siempre preferí, en todo caso, pensar a solas y, a solas, seguir la evolución de mis reflexiones o de mis delirios. Ahora que lo escribo así, con tinta y sobre la hoja seca de un papel traído, con toda seguridad, del oriente, estoy convencido de que toda la vida quise estar dentro del cuerpo de una ballena.

Había leído, como todos, *Storia de un burattino*. Sería más preciso decir, sin embargo, que, como todos, la había escuchado más bien de labios maternos o paternos justo en el inicio de noches muy inquietas. No fue sino hasta muchos años después que supe, con algo de desazón, que se trataba de un libro real: una compilación de textos

publicados entre 1882 y 1883 en un periódico italiano. Carlo Lorenzo Filippo Giovanni Lorenzini, mejor conocido como Carlo Collodi, inventó a Gepetto y a ese otro títere que siempre fui yo. Algo de madera o de acero. Algo sin expresión en el rostro. Esta persona que buscaba, como en el cuento infantil, una especie de reconciliación o de fuga dentro de los cálidos órganos de un cuerpo majestuoso.

Con el paso de los días fui estudiando su estructura interna. Tenía tiempo de sobra. También interés. Tenía ojos aunque, sobre todo, tenía manos y nariz y voz. Para la flotación, la capa de grasa en la piel. Para respirar, los pulmones y los espiráculos. La aleta dorsal. La aleta caudal. La reminiscencias de los ancestros terrestres en los elementos óseos con apariencia de dedos. Un período de gestación de entre nueve y dieciséis meses, eso lo aprendí ahí. La curvatura de las muchas costillas. El corazón. El hígado. La vejiga. Y, en las inmersiones profundas, el aguantar de la respiración. Veinte o cuarenta o hasta cincuenta minutos. El oxígeno, renovado en un 80 o 90 por ciento en cada inspiración. Llegué a ubicar casi con exactitud mi posición dentro de su cuerpo: muy cerca del espiráculo, justo en la depresión donde el vapor y el agua se confunden antes de brotar a chorros —violentos, verticales, veloces— hacia la atmósfera. Esto.

Más que variar, mis costumbres en realidad se acendrarón. Adapté mi sistema respiratorio al suyo, inhalando y exhalando de acuerdo a los ritmos atroces de su espiráculo. Me alimentaba, como ella, del plancton que se atoraba entre sus barbas. Llevaba mis pocas pertenencias conmigo, junto a mi cuerpo. Las pastillas contra las reumas, por ejemplo. O la pequeña lámpara con

la cual podía leer durante las largas inmersiones profundas. Había prescindido de todos los libros para quedarme con uno solo. El libro. Eso leía una y otra vez. Y eso me bastaba. Un pequeño libro empastado con plástico. A veces, por puro gusto, alzaba la voz. Gritar. Aullar. Berrear. Gruñir. El eco me respondía con una puntualidad a la que pronto me acostumbré a llamar gracia. Cantaba con ellas. Ponía atención a sus innumerables latidos. No miento al escribir aquí que fui, durante ese tiempo, un hombre feliz.

Muchos han tratado de explicar la causa de sus encallamientos. Algunos culpan a la estructura social de las manadas: basta con que una ballena dominante se desoriente para que otras la sigan, ingenuas y despavoridas. Otros responsabilizan a los cazadores, de los que las ballenas huyen sólo para quedar atrapadas en las mareas bajas y, eventualmente, en las playas. Los ecologistas creen que los verdaderos enemigos son los ejercicios navales y los sonares. Lo cierto es que hay pocas cosas más tristes a la vista que los cuerpos encallados de las ballenas. Su lento morir. Esa manera de deshidratarse bajo los rayos del sol. Su desistir.

*Flotar es un movimiento en diversas direcciones indecisas. Caminar también.*

Además de los rayos solares, lo más molesto ahora es el ruido. El silencio marino en realidad no existe pero los sonidos bajo el agua y, aún más, en el interior de su cuerpo, tenían una consistencia distinta. El sonido se propaga a mucho mayor velocidad en el agua que en el aire. Los líquidos, que son más densos y, además, incompresibles (no varían apenas en densidad con la

presión), hacen que el sonido se atenúe menos intensamente. Todo parece continuar allá abajo, quiero decir. Pocas cosas parecen tener fin.

Pero existe, eso. El fin. Existe la expulsión. Existe salir a gatas de entre los labios de un muerto. Existe, si esto es algo que en realidad pueda existir, el sosiego.

En las ilustraciones originales de Enrico Mazzanti, el títere es más monstruoso que infantil. Su sonrisa provoca miedo o suspicacia. Los ojos parecen abrirse hacia un mundo ominoso, lleno de peligros o de musgo o de objetos partidos a la mitad. Supongo que ésas son características que bien pueden describirme cuando estoy sobre la superficie terrestre. Supongo que así me veo segundos antes de sumergirme otra vez.

## SUBMERGING ONESELF, TOO

*Cristina Rivera Garza*

IF THEY HADN'T RUN AGROUND, I wouldn't have come out. Never is a long word, but it's appropriate in this case. I'd never have gotten out of there. Another way of saying the same thing with other words would be to say that "I would have stayed there forever." Without the sense of time or awareness of its passing, the importance of the never or the always diminishes drastically. But the whales ran aground and I didn't, taking advantage of the holes the disaster created between the keratinous formations, I left. I had to do it. If I hadn't been forced to, I'd still be there, inside. Living.

I used to look at them from afar. I'd position myself on the highest level of the tower, and I'd spot them. Sometimes I'd walk to the coral reefs and stand upon the tallest rock. The moss beneath my feet: This type of green. It was my private fascination: to observe attentively until, right before the horizon, a spout of water or a hump that could barely be distinguished from the water's surface would appear. They emerged from the depths of the ocean, but they gave me the impression of having also descended from a magnificent and surreal sky. All blue. Or all gray. Or all green. One lone unity. Actually, it was almost always gray. Somewhat temperamental and tense. Something about to break. A frank exaggeration. I lived for those winters in which they passed close enough to the coast to make me dream. I'd imagine going away with them, my human body lost among their excessive mammal skeletons. I'd imagine moving over them, as if galloping

outside of the all-possible. As if the sea were a plain.

*Floating is a movement in diverse, undecided directions.*  
Submerging oneself, too.

I have always been fond of cloudy and humid days, I suppose that this helps explain something. Rain used to make me happy. When the entire world protects itself in a kind of subtle backlight, I used to love that to the point of madness or even death. The indirect way. The oblique manner. When others complained about the lack of visibility or the absence of the sun's warmth, I used to walk enthusiastically and—literally—amid the clouds. The longing of the cloud that, on certain days, transforms itself into mist. I think I searched all my life for a place like that: dark, humid, ductile. A cave or a whisper or something similar. I always preferred, in any case, to think in solitude and, in solitude, continue the evolution of my reflections or my deliriums. Now that I write it down with ink and upon a dry sheet of paper brought, most likely, from Asia, I am convinced that all my life I have wanted to be inside the body of a whale.

I had read, like everyone else, *Storia de un burattino*. It would be more precise to say, however, that I had heard it like everyone else, from the lips of my mother or father right before especially restless nights. It was not until many years later that I learned, with some unease, that it came from a real book: a compilation of texts published between 1882 and 1883 in an Italian newspaper. Carlo Lorenzo Filippo Giovanni Lorenzini, better known as Carlo Collodi, invented Gepetto and that other puppet that was always me. Something made of wood or steel. Something without an expression on its face. A person who searched, like in the children's story, for a sort of reconciliation or an escape inside the warm organs of a majestic body.

For days I studied its internal structure. I had time to spare. As well as interest. I had eyes, although, above all, I had hands and a nose and a voice. For floating, blubber. To breathe, lungs and a blowhole. The dorsal fin. The

flukes. Reminiscences of terrestrial ancestors in its finger-like bones. A gestation period of between nine and sixteen months, this I learned there. The curvature of many ribs. A heart. A liver. A bladder. And, in its profound depths, the ability to hold its breath. Twenty or forty or even fifty minutes at a time. Oxygen that renews itself 80 to 90 percent with each inhalation. I came to locate, almost exactly, my position inside its body: very close to the blowhole, right in the hollow where the vapor and the water become indistinguishable before the spout of water comes up—violently, vertically, vehemently—towards the atmosphere. This.

Instead of branching out, my habits became more fine-tuned. I adapted my respiratory system to its pattern, inhaling and exhaling according to the atrocious rhythms of its blowhole. I nourished myself, like it, from the plankton that became entangled in its baleen. I carried my meager possessions with me, close to my body. My anti-rheumatoid medication for example. Or a small lamp with which I could read during long profound submersions. I parted with most of my books. I kept only one. The book. That is what I read over and over again. And that was enough. A small book bound in hard plastic. Sometimes, I'd raise my voice for the sheer pleasure of it. I howled. I bellowed. I grunted. The echo responded with a timeliness that I soon got accustomed to calling grace. I sang with them. I paid attention to their countless palpitations and premonitions. I'm not lying when I write that I was a happy man during that time.

Many have tried to explain the cause of their stranding. Some blame the social structure of the herd: all it takes is for one dominant whale to become disoriented for the others to follow it naïve and terrified. Others say poachers are responsible, since the whales flee from them only to end up trapped in the low tides and, eventually, on the beach. Ecologists believe that naval and sonar exercises are the real enemies. The truth is that few things are sadder

than the sight of the beached bodies of whales. Their slow death. The way they dry up under the rays of the sun. Their surrendering.

*Floating is a movement in diverse, undecided directions.*  
Walking, too.

Besides the sun's rays, what most annoys me now is the noise. Marine silence doesn't really exist, but sounds under water and, more so, inside of the whale's body, had a different consistency. Sound travels faster through water than it does through air. Liquids, that are dense, and also, incomprehensible (considering that they barely vary in density when pressure is applied to them), make sound weaken less intensely. I mean to say that everything seems to continue down there. Few things seem to end.

But *that* does exist. The end. There *is* expulsion. There is the crawling out from between the lips of a cadaver. There is, if this is in reality something that can exist, calm.

In the original illustrations of Enrico Mazzanti, the puppet is more monstrous than childish. Its smile provokes fear or suspicion. Its eyes seem to open up towards a gloomy world, full of danger or moss or objects broken in half. I suppose that those are the same characteristics that can describe me when I am on solid ground. I suppose that is what I look like seconds before I submerge myself once again.

Translated by Solymar Torres García



## RETURN

*JC Prasznik*

JULIA WANTED TO KNOW HOW TO LOVE. She had spent most of her life, numb to all physical and emotional human contact. She believed that this was due to never having known her mother. For over thirty years she repeats the same cycle with reluctance. Always skeptical of her feelings, she over analyzed her emotions, and dissected every level of signification until it became nothing. It pleased her to know that there was at least nothing because this meant that there was something. She wondered if this something always existed. Latent, at any moment it could be realized, or was it a becoming from the nothing with which she was all too familiar? Was it inside of her or was it an autonomous being that she would encounter at random?

It was already spring when Julia encountered a woman that she believed had something that she wanted for herself. Her name was Jeanne. She was immediately drawn to her from the very first time she became aware of her existence. They met at a café under a very unusual circumstance. Jeanne, sitting alone, appeared to be waiting for somebody. Julia was instantly struck by her presence. She sat a few tables away to watch her exist in her space and time, untainted by interaction, by dialogue. Jeanne, a woman in her late forties, had subtle wrinkles under her eyes that Julia was able to perceive from a distance without a trace of makeup on her face or any other artificial products. She seemed at ease and in perfect harmony with her body as her hair like Arachne's silver threads

weightlessly fell just past her shoulders. Her eyes were as dark and distant as her presence. Yet at the same time, there was something extremely warm and welcoming about her, like a hearth burning steady through the winter. Then— she looked straight at Julia. Provoked by curiosity, Jeanne approached her.

“You like looking at me?” she asked in a low voice with a French accent.

Julia’s body was engulfed by flames and trembled with nerves. The heat rushed through her body and fragmented her voice. She could not manage a response.

“You are nervous to talk to me?” She asked sitting down across from her.

“I don’t know what this is,” she says concerned for her wellbeing and overwhelmed with physical discomfort.

She takes Julia’s shaking hand into hers as a stream of electricity disperses through Julia. She loses control of her muscles as if her mind were disconnected from her body. “It’s OK,” Jeanne says without a trace of presumption. “If you cannot tell me, show me...”

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Julia wakes wrapped in Jeanne’s embrace. No longer numb, she feels Jeanne’s warmth tranquilize her. Their naked bodies overlapped so naturally that it was difficult to tell where one began and the other ended. Two bodies organically intertwined almost as one. Jeanne’s skin was so malleable that Julia felt that she could lose herself and sink into her deep caresses. Julia’s body took control of her mind and she had nothing to understand and everything to feel.

Jeanne slowly gets out of bed as to not wake her. Julia rolls onto her back and watches Jeanne slip into her robe. She sees that Julia is awake and sits next to her. “This is a good morning no?” she asks kissing her lightly on the forehead and gently removing her hair away from her eyes.

Julia smiles and says, “I feel like I’m home.”

“My beautiful girl” she says shaking her head, “What a thing to say.” Jeanne gets up and leaves the room. “Come, I will make you breakfast.”

Julia, inundated with passion, made her way to the breakfast table. Half asleep, she observes the paintings and photographs on the walls. They were unconventional and complex in the sense that reality was evoked yet was absent. They brought about a slight headache. Somehow, she knew that Jeanne was a very talented artist. One piece called her attention. It was a black and white abstracted image of two elements folding into one another like a mobius strip. She approached it for the perfect angle and distance. Jeanne noticed her interest and asked, “You like my painting?”

“Very much,” Julia replies captivated. There was something that triggered her subconscious; something primordial about the thick monochromatic stokes concealing the surface of the canvas.

“It is my daughter and I,” she answers. Julia stands a few feet away almost in a trance and remains perfectly still, fixed on the image. “It is very curious no?” Jeanne begins to remember the unusual situation from the day before. “Yesterday, at the café when we met, I was to meet her for the first time.”

Without moving a muscle Julia participates in the dialogue, “Who?”

“My daughter. Somehow, she contacted me.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know.” She said realizing that she had no answers. There was an uneasy silence that swept across the room. “It has been a very long time. I was very young.”

“Do you ever think about her?”

“Yes, of course. She did not meet me.” Jeanne walks to Julia and envelops her body with her familiar warmth. “I would have loved to hold her again.” Their hands find one another as they stand looking at the painting in a disquieting repose causing both women to cry.

## BARGE

*Marvin González*

NO, I DON'T THINK HE WOKE US UP THAT MORNING. But, I do remember Walter peeking out the curtain during breakfast, like an actor backstage trying to get a head count, while I yelled at him that his Folgers was getting cold. 'I mean it, Walter,' I said, 'if you don't eat now you'll be cranky later.' I was saying it as much for him as for me. But, he just sort of shushed me away, and dismissed it all with one of those clumsy backward waves of the hand. After I'd eaten and put the china by the sink, I poured myself another cup of Folgers and went back to the dining room where Walter was still attentively posted at the window looking out of a chink in the curtain. 'Delores, the man's gone bat shit,' he said. He had the cold cup of Folgers in his hand now; he was holding it backwards without looking at me and said, 'Delores get me two cubes, would you?' 'Dear me, Walter,' I said, 'you're hopeless.' I dropped two cubes of granulated sugar in for him and sort of swirled them around half-heartedly, then I said, 'Well, what in the blazes is going on, Walter dear?' 'Bat shit, Delores!' 'Walter!' 'For God's sake, Delores, let a grown man talk like a grown man, could you for once?' 'Oh, just shush and tell me what you see.' 'The man's bonkers, just plain insane. He's been out there since 4:30 without his shirt on working on that old boat he's had sitting in the shed for twelve years now, I told him to chuck years ago!' He said waving his right hand with his thumb pointed out like he was hailing a taxi. 'Well, Walter it is summer after all.' 'Delores, forget about the shirt!' 'You said he wasn't

wearing one.’ ‘That’s what I mean; once again you’ve managed to brilliantly miss the point.’ ‘Well, if it were winter that would be one thing.’ Then he turned around and looked at me for the first time, took a deliberately long sip of Folgers, disgustingly slurping on purpose just to be a smart aleck, and said softly, ‘What is an old geezer like that fixing up a boat for, he can’t hardly walk, let alone go fishing?’ ‘He’s only three years older than you, Walter.’ ‘You don’t see me taking my shirt off to work on a boat, do you?’ He snorted as he turned back to the chink in the curtain. He was trying to hide the fact that his face had gone red, again. ‘Don’t let yourself get all worked up, Walter. Dr. Matheson has warned you about getting irate, what with your cholesterol and your blood pressure the way they are.’ Then he waved his left hand downward three times, Walter’s eloquent way of telling me to pipe down, and said, ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah...’

Well, as you know a woman’s duties they never end, so I got on with my Saturday morning. I washed the dishes, tidied up the kitchen. I had some clothes I needed to wash, and of course the linens in the bedroom needed to be replaced with fresh ones. I called my daughter, Sami, but it was a terse conversation because she was in the kitchen with the kids. Around 11:30 I sat down to sort of veg-out in front of the TV. Mainly, to get off my feet and sew a button on the knit sweater Norma May gave me for Mother’s Day last year that I just love so much, but Walter didn’t move. He sat there all morning staring out at Milt Martinez working on his boat, occasionally scratching his back where I know it’s been bothering him lately, giving me updates like: ‘He’s gutted the inside of the boat, Delores, see?’ Or: ‘Now, he’s put a mattress in the damn thing.’ Then I would say, ‘Walter pipe down, I can’t hardly hear the TV lady.’ But, mostly he just grumbled in that famously Walter-way, and said, ‘Bat shit, Delores, bat shit.’

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I remember Tio Milton from when we were kids. The Eighties. We grew up in Bishop as kids so it was easy to take a trip up to Reno, and Dad and Tio Milton would take us up to the lake and sit on a cooler of Tecate and talk shit all day, while their hairy chests gleamed over and went from being slightly olive to penny-loafer brown. As far as I can recall, it was good times at Tio Milton's place, plus Tía Martita's cooking was, I think we all agreed, the best in the family, which meant something back then. At night we would rent horror movies on VHS and eat and drink, like shit loads of Cool Ranch Doritos and Shasta straight out of the two-liter bottles, while Dad and Tio Milton cooked up bistec encebollado and drank red wine and told old stories on into the night. But then we moved back east and our family gatherings became infrequent. Tio Milton became, like, this guy that I just saw from time to time, and as I got older I didn't really have anything to say to him. When he came to visit, I was trying to get out of the house to go do bong loads with my buddies, or get down some girl's pants. I wasn't trying to hang out at the house and talk to my dad and his brother who were both, like, bald and old as shit. I had more exciting things to do. More pressing matters. However, as I got older and my own mortality became an evermore looming reality, I often found myself thinking about the old house down in Bishop, and our trips over to Tio Milton's. So, when I went to UC Davis for grad school, I fully planned on taking a trip up to Reno and seeing about going to the lake with Tio Milton, where we could work on a cooler of Tecate and maybe he could tell me some stories about Dad that I hadn't heard before. But, before I can even get settled, my mom calls me out of the blue and tells me that Tio Milton has died. This in July, I had barely moved into my place, but I was obligated to go to the funeral since I was so damn close. Anyway, this wasn't exactly the way I wanted it to go down, but a part of me appreciated that I

was finally taking this trip to go visit Tio Milton and sort of, like, make amends, or at least finally let him know that I appreciated all those good times. You know, that I still thought about them, and they were important to me, even though it seemed like or I acted like they weren't when I was a teenager. So, I went.

The funeral was a spectacle, but this story is more about what happened afterwards, so I'm not even going to gloss over it. I was still kind of in a daze after the funeral, and was weirded-out by how the reception afterwards had turned into this kind of outdoor pagan love-in on the lake. So, I went to the bar and got a gin, then took it somewhere quiet where I could, you know, chill out on the natural beauty of the lake and mountains and the enormous granite boulders that looked like they'd been strategically placed there by some giant, and to just sort of ease back and take it down a couple of notches. So, that's what I did. It was peaceful out there and the juniper in the gin complemented that woodsy outdoor scent that caught the breeze as it came off the swaying Jeffery pine. But then all of a sudden this old dude shows up and totally ruins my peaceful private moment, just as I am staring out over the lake at the remnants of Tio Milton's barge and I am just starting to, like, get all of these things off my chest and I feel that I actually have the attention of his spirit out there. Here comes this old dude out of left field with his long white hair and his black suit and white button-up without a tie. 'So, what's your relation to Milt?' He asks me. And, I sort of sigh and matter of factly say, 'He was my uncle. He was my Uncle Milton.' 'My condolences,' he says mechanically. Then I take a sip and chew on some ice and say, 'yup.' 'I'm sorry, did I interrupt something?' And, then before I have a chance to answer he says, 'It's just I get a little wierded-out at these things, especially lately, you know?' And then he kind of starts tugging on his long white hair. 'No, not really, man. I mean, I guess sort of.' Then I add, 'I guess I sort of understand what you're

saying,' before I take a loud sip of my gin. He turns his attention toward the lake then says, 'When I was in my late twenties, early thirties, all my friends were getting married and having kids, and I was still drinking 'til four in the morning, going home with different, strange women. That made me feel inadequate or unfulfilled or like there was something wrong with me, because I couldn't commit to life; grown-up life. Now, they're all dropping like flies, and I still feel like I ain't doing something right because here I am, still kicking. You know, like I can't commit to death now, or something,' then he pensively stares out at the lake. I have no idea how to respond to this, because he seems, like, legitimately sad, so I say, 'Hey, man, you must be doing something right if you're still here, and you look like you're holding up alright.' 'Yeah, I suppose you're right.' Then he smiles, like he just thought of something clever, and he reaches into his inside coat pocket and produces a flask, 'This,' he says, 'is a superb single malt Scotch, Longmorn, which I procured on a recent visit to the old country. You can't get this shit just anywhere. Would you care for a splash?' 'Why the hell not,' I say. I throw back what's left of the gin, ditch the ice, and then hold my glass out. I take a sip, and he wasn't joking, this is an orgasmic sip of Scotch. 'So...,' I ask, 'how did you know Uncle Milton?' He's taking a sip, and he sort of laughs, and says, 'Ummm,' and for the sake of preserving such a fine Scotch he holds his hand up to his mouth to keep it all in. Then he says, 'He was my roommate in college, freshman year. He was my friend.' Maybe it was the Scotch, or the fact that my private moment with tio Milton was effectively ruined, but suddenly I felt like listening to this old bastard croon on, so I goad him, 'Oh yeah, man, I bet you guys used to have a time, huh?' 'I guess you could say that,' he replies. 'What was Uncle Milton like in those days? When he still had a full head of hair? I've seen pictures of him sitting on the hood of a pretty, how should I say it, testosteroneic Trans Am.' 'How



was your uncle Milt in those days?’ He asks rhetorically scratching his head. ‘I’d say probably like he was his whole life: depressed. Maybe depressive is a better way of putting it,’ and then he splashes my glass with more Scotch and takes a swig before he caps the flask and puts it back in his jacket. ‘He always seemed like, you know, happy go lucky to me,’ I say. ‘Yeah, he was, don’t get me wrong, he just had this strange preoccupation with death. I remember when we were around twenty-five or so, we were out playing pool, throwing some brews back, talking to some skirt, you know, basically out having a good time this one night, and we’re sitting at the bar and suddenly he tells me he’s dying. I tell him to shut the fuck up, because I think he’s just trying to mess with me, but then I’m speechless because he has this dead-serious-look to his face. Then he tells me that he has been having these heart palpitations lately, that he just feels it inside, like, he feels degeneration. And, this is a young guy we’re talking about. But so, Milt looks me in the eyes and it’s intense, like he’s possessed by some dark force, or like a dark cloud had descended on him, and he says simply, “I’m dying”...and I have no choice but to believe him because he believes it so much that it must be true.’ The old dude says this turning toward the lake, then he puts his hand to his mouth and he directs a kiss toward the remnants of Tio Milton’s barge, ‘Son of a bitch was right, too. Fifty years late, but right nonetheless.’ Then he grabs me by the arm and says, ‘C’mon let me get you a drink at the bar.’ So, we go.

It starts to get hazy here, because me and the old dude are tying one on, like we’re doing it in Tio Milton’s honor, or something. The vibe is festive that night, and we are the life of the party, which is sad, I know, you shouldn’t be all happy at a funeral, but it was how Tio Milton wanted it, after all. Eventually, I start talking to one of the girls who is working for the catering company. She is blond, and has her hair pinned back, but she is wearing this white headband that makes her look so adorable in her

traditional European servant garb. We sit around talking, and I am cracking jokes, and smiling a lot, and generally just trying to be pleasant, right? But, I can't help but every once in a while look over at the old dude who is now sitting at one of the tables all by himself, and he is sort of blankly staring out while the breeze comes off the lake and plays with his long white hair. But, I know he is deep in thought, because I can, you know, just feel it. Anyway, I can't help but look at him, even though I am trying to remain pleasant and charming and witty for this adorable catering girl. Then the catering girl says she needs a smoke, so we walk off away from the reception and pretty much end up where I went before to get away from everyone. Apparently, this is the spot to go. But, she doesn't start smoking, she pulls me close and starts kissing me, and it is, obviously, awkward as hell because I can see the embers from the barge still flickering ever so dimly over her shoulder. And, it is hard for me to get into it, because all I can think about is the old guy sitting alone at the table, and Tio Milton's spirit free-floating in space around me. And, soon we are down in the dirt and pine needles are poking into my back as she is riding me, and they are like these little pins of guilt, which are not overwhelming or anything, just like these constant uncomfortable reminders that I am dishonoring my uncle's memory. But, she is getting more and more into it, meanwhile. And, I am thinking, 'Goddamn it, the whole point of coming was to tell Tio Milton that I was guilty for blowing him off all the time to get high and chase skirt, and here I am getting drunk and getting laid and not making amends at all like I wanted.' But, as soon as I start to think these things, I get distracted because the catering girl grabs onto my hair, and sort of bangs my head into the sand and pine needles below. Then I look over toward the diminishing embers of the barge, and I say, 'Sorry, Tio Milton.' And, I swear to God I feel my heart skip a beat, I feel this, like, palpitation. And, as I look up at the catering girl, who is moaning

ecstatically, this coldness descends.

So, I come.

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Papi always related everything to scent. Even his dreams. It got to the point I couldn't even cook him rosemary potatoes anymore without him tearing up, because the scent enveloped the house, and even found its way out to the driveway where Papi was shaving wood and hammering away. He said they were Mamá's favorite, but I can't remember her ever cooking them, let alone eating them. But, the way he let the tears flow, shit, you'd think there was a Meryl Streep movie on. It's hard for a girl to see their dad cry, especially when you've gone thirty-five years without seeing it before. It destroys certain ideas that you've constructed in your brain, it challenges the blueprints you've superimposed onto the known universe and makes you realize that there's no such thing as absolute certitude. Fuck it, the sooner you realize these things the better. Papi once told me that the visible world was merely a weak projection of reality, and that the nose was the actual conduit of truth. He said something can look very beautiful, but if its scent is rank you can never grow to love it. This is why he freaked out so much when I suggested that we get rid of Mamá's clothes; maybe donate them to Goodwill. I made the mistake of telling him once that he was holding on. He told me he could give two shits about the clothes themselves, but that the scent contained within was [tú] mamá speaking to him from the other side. I often caught him smelling one of Mamá's silk scarves before he went to bed, whispering clandestinely, kissing the air between giggles.

He told me once that sometimes his dreams consisted of simply existing within a cloud of scent, that he had figured out some way to allow himself to dissolve, to fragment into millions of indistinguishable little pieces, and

then to diffuse through nothingness in an invisible cloud. He told me that reaching this state was absolute freedom, because not even the third dimension bound you. He got a little kooky there, those last days. He always used the same white towel to wipe the sweat off of his bare chest and underneath his arms, as he worked on the barge shirtless. I said, 'Papi a man your age really shouldn't hang out in front of his house all day long with his shirt off, people begin to talk.' He told me he could give two shits about people and their talk, he said that language was the single biggest folly of mankind, that as soon as we developed language we retarded all of our other senses and closed ourselves off from truth. 'The further away we got from that truth,' he said, 'the more we needed language to qualify and quantify observable phenomena. It's a fucking vicious cycle!' He yelled even though I was standing right in front of him. I think he was losing his hearing towards the end, too. In his dreams, he told me, he would slip into people's noses, that he would travel through the capillaries that lead to the brain and he would filter into an electric haze of conscious/sub-conscious activity. Then he would implant context, subtext and pretext. He would implant ideas and trigger remembrances. He would whisper falsehoods and inject projected illusions of minstrels at dance and play. Ultimately his goal was to achieve that in the physical world. He couldn't stop talking about conduits and vessels. People thought he was losing his mind. Daddy said that he was simply moving into the next dimension one breath, one atom at a time, and that the closer he got to it, of course, the less sense he would make to these cretins who were still trying to hold onto an illusion. 'Yes, Papi, of course they're cretins.' He couldn't stop talking about String Theory and unseen universes, he was consumed. I was at the house almost daily listening to Papi's far-fetched theories as I cooked him dinner. He mentioned something about the weak interaction once. He said that radioactive decay was a metaphor for life, but that

we shouldn't place too much importance on it. 'If the energy in a star eventually fizzles out and its life comes to an end, then why should we be any different?' He said that his core had simply reached the point where helium had given way to denser elements like nickel. 'Sometimes there are stars whose masses are so astronomical that their destruction causes space and time to compact.' 'I know what a black hole is, Papi,' I would tell him. But, then he'd go on about how his life-force had reached the event horizon, and there was nothing he could do to stop it now. 'Okay, Papi.' It became rare for him to even put his shirt on during dinner. He would just sit there sweating profusely, wiping his underarms with that white towel, which by now was crusty and tan like an old treasure map.

This art student started coming over to help Papi sculpt the wooden dragon heads that he wanted affixed on both ends of the barge. I didn't talk to her much, but she seemed nice, and anyway, I was relieved just having someone else lend Papi an ear for a minute, so that I could at least get some work done around the house. A couple weeks after Papi passed she dropped by my house, I couldn't remember the last time I'd seen her. She was sobbing outside holding Daddy's nasty sweat rag. 'I took this from the house,' she said, 'I'm sorry.' Then she put it in my hand and ran back to her Subaru kind of dramatically. I resisted the urge for a long time, but eventually I had to take a whiff. I put the hardened towel up to my nose and sucked in deep. It was putrid, just absolutely rank. But, I couldn't stop sniffing it. I sat on the couch for what seemed like hours just sniffing and inhaling, and I was just inundated with remembrances long-hidden, as well as those that were all too familiar. Then I stopped thinking almost entirely. I became calm and my mind cleared. Suddenly it felt like someone else were directing my course of thought for me, and I was hit with these strange impressions of Papi, like, I could see Papi sitting at the kitchen table being expressively silent,

and I could almost feel the moment, or like understand what he was wordlessly trying to communicate; to convey. But, then my thoughts had nothing to do with Papi at all. I was lying back on the couch sniffing through the towel fiendishly and I just let the serenity envelope me like a mist. Until the mist bonded with me, and seeped into my epidermis through microscopic holes and, like, sort of injected itself into me. And, then I was like a self-sustained ecological cycle: sniffing the crusty rag, which allowed clouds to form in my mind that showered me with memory, which in turn would heat and rise as a vaporous scent that I would soon breathe in only to allow new memories to reorganize into cerebral clouds. When my husband, Jeffrey, came home he said it took him ten minutes to knock me out of my wide-eyed reverie.

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The night Milt died I couldn't sleep. My peepers just wouldn't shut. Something was keeping me up besides Delores's constant wheezing and moaning, of which I've grown accustomed all these years together. Maybe, it was my back was just killing me. Anyway, around 4:30 I'd had enough lying around with cracked-mirror-eyes, so I went to the kitchen to brew some Folgers, and pulled out a bottle of whiskey. When the Folgers was done brewing, I poured myself a cup and threw in a couple shots worth of whiskey. I figured I'd just get shitty and maybe sleep through the afternoon, so at least I wouldn't have to hear Delores's constant complaining. I sat down in the living room and popped the TV on so that I wouldn't be sitting there by my lonesome, and I sat there and sipped my Folgers and whiskey as the TV screen lit up the room like one of those wall-mounted fireplaces with the fake logs. It was an old episode of The Dick Van Dyke Show, but I had the volume on so low I really wasn't paying attention to the storyline. More or less, I was just following the

constituent players as they swung their arms and reconfigured their facial expressions, and I mused silently as my eyes bounced back and forth between sips the way a cat might stare out the window passively alert. Laura was bitchin' to Rob about something in the kitchen, when suddenly I heard a kind of, oh I don't know, I guess a sort of happening outside. I stood up and wanted to stare out the window, because I clearly heard the front door of Milt Martinez's house open and shut, and also the unmistakable sound of a woman crying, and lately, I'm not gonna lie to you, that house was turning into a goddamned circus freak show, but something kept me back. I don't know, something told me not to look, and I knew I didn't want to, but I just had this feeling like I had to see what was going on, so I took down the rest of the coffee and whiskey, and then I peeked out the curtain. Holy fuck! I am so surprised by what I see that I drop my cup, and thank God it's empty because Delores would have had a fucking conniption. But so there is Milt butt-ass-naked standing by the barge with a hard-on big and throbbing, curling up toward the sky just like one of those weird Basque pelota mitts. He has this desperate look and it seems he is shaking uncontrollably, and this young girl in a silk robe is standing next to him trying to calm him down, when suddenly he lies down in the barge and stops moving. The young girl puts her head to his chest, and she is screaming his name, but he just lies there still as night, with his hard-on like Excalibur threatening the early morning sky. I don't even want to know what the hell's going on, so I step back and pretend I haven't seen shit, and I pick up my cup and fill it to the brim with whiskey. Around 5:25 I hear the sirens, and the red and blue lights shine in through the curtains. Delores gets up and asks me what the blazes is going on while she ties up her robe, but I'm too shocked to say anything. And, then there's Delores staring out the curtain, yelling at me to come look see, but I just sit there watching those dumb-ass Golden Girls

chirp at each other, sipping on my whiskey with this alcoholic urgency, thinking that I need to just get shit-housed and forget this sordid early morning ever happened. But, I can't. All I can do is watch the red and blue lights re-render Delores's image, and it pulls her in close, like 3-D, separating her from the moment in this bizarre way I don't have the proper vocabulary to rightly articulate. And, I can almost see my own face change emotionally with the flashes of the TV and the red and blue lights, and as I let the whiskey sting my palate, the moment becomes tangible in this weirdly ominous way.

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First of all, Dad gave me that watch. By all moral standards, the watch was mine, okay. I'm fully aware that Dad's will called for his burial to abide by very specific standards. But, Christ. The will stipulated that he be attired in the navy blue silk pin-striped suit that he had worn first twenty-five years or so ago for his induction as Rotary Club of Reno, club 567, district 5190, chapter president with a solid red silk tie, and again eleven years later at Mela's college graduation from Scripps, on that occasion with a pink silk tie decorated with embroidered paisleys. It also stipulated that he have on his aquamarine (his birthstone) cufflinks, his father's bola tie adorned with an onyx-black stone of undetermined origin that was affixed with a 18k Italian gold "reverse 4", which was his father's cattle brand, and, of course, his grandfather's pocket watch: that contentious pocket watch it was rumored once belonged to the revolutionary general Pancho Villa. I have confirmed with Dad's lawyer, Martin Blumenthal, of Norquist, Blumenthal, Higgenbottom & Associates, that the last draft of Dad's will was amended on August 14th, 2010. It's video-documented fact that Dad gave me that watch, along with a Stetson and a Roosevelt-era pearl-handled nickel-plated six-shooter in seemingly workable



condition, for Christmas of 2010, four months, roughly, after the last draft of the will. This confirms for me that the watch's presence in the will was simply a mistake; that at some point Dad decided that he didn't want this watch to go up in a ball of fire, but that he wanted it to remain in the family. Incidentally, it has never been confirmed that the watch was actually owned by Pancho Villa. Mela wouldn't have it, though. She was determined to follow through with the funeral exactly to Dad's specifications. Accusations were lobbed, by both parties it should be noted, like Molotov cocktails. I was accused, amongst other vile, wicked things, of being materialistic, soulless, and voluntarily disrespectful of our father's last testament. I simply called her what I felt was all-encompassing of her behavior: bitch. Tempers flared, tears dropped like little sperm-shaped bombs, and eventually I acquiesced and forfeited the watch for the greater good of the family, though admittedly I couldn't let the issue of the watch pass, and I constantly reminded Mela of my sacrifice. As is my self-destructive nature, I overplayed my hand and, because of my admittedly juvenile and puerile behavior, I missed an opportunity to garner sympathy and support from the rest of the family. In retrospect, I believe I could have gotten enough of them on my side of the issue, and I honestly think the family would have agreed to let me keep the watch if I'd played it right, however, I was habitually acting thusly that I made Mela appear to be the proverbial adult in the room, and goddamn it, this only made me, I'll fully admit, act more immaturely and seemingly, to everyone else, petty and selfish. But, here's the thing about the watch, what nobody knows, is that Dad had been promising me that watch since I was a kid sitting on his lap watching Spanish telenovelas taking sips of his Tecate as he injected my mind with stories of near mythological stature about the pocket watch. When he finally gave it to me last Christmas it was like we were fulfilling some necessary father/son pact. It's difficult to articulate, but it

was a very emotional and intimate exchange. We go our whole lives having people we trust, be they parents, teachers, husbands, wives, rescinding on their promises, so when this very personal, very meaningful, promise physically began to manifest it was impossible to deny its complete fruition. Standing outside the corner market by my house one evening, feeling the pulse of the street, smelling her rank pheromones as they oozed out the sewage grate, I knew, as sure as the frigid, twilight air contracted the area of my skin and shocked my hair follicles, that I would, one way or another, possess that watch.

Here's the pocket watch's back story, according to my father, more or less cohesively spliced together from myriad Tecate-induced stories spanning many years, and corrupted by time and memory: one could say that the watch's story begins in the silver deposits of the Sierra Madre Occidental, where the metal that comprised the watch lay dormant, silently waiting for infinite stretches of geologic time. It is said to have been purchased at a small watch shop, La Madrugada, in what is now el centro histórico of the mountainous city of Zacatecas, whose circular logo, now illegible, is imprinted on the inside of the watch. My great-grandfather Euliano Martínez Villalobos was a young man from Tepechitlan, a small ranching community, who fled to Zacatecas, presumably out of boredom, to join Pancho Villa's ranks during the Mexican Revolution. Who knows if this is true, I asked my grandmother once, and she said that he was a mason and as far as she knew Papa Euliano never so much as fired a gun let alone fought in a revolutionary militia. Dad told me, however, that Papa Euliano was a masterful marksman, a skill second only to and eclipsed by his cunning at poker. Apparently, my great-grandfather had a stone face, a characteristic, my father always used to tell me laughing in that sort of way unfunny people do when they tell jokes that are more amusing to themselves than

their audience, of any mason worth his salt. This was the only part of the story I actually later came to believe, as I remembered looking up at my father freely dispense these inventions of the mind with such natural ease, a trait he must have inherited from Papa Euliano, who did appear to have a stern granite-like countenance in any photo I ever saw of him. In any case, my great-grandfather's stone face abetted his ability to bluff, and, so it is told, he was able to win a small fortune from the risk-taking Villa, well known for his sobriety, who sought other avenues to imbibe the mind with intoxication and thrill. The watch, therefore, was a collateral winning, which because it was comprised of .999 pure silver was worth quite a bit in those days. My great-grandfather was said to have worn the watch during the fall of Zacatecas, and it diverted a stray bullet. A fact my father constantly reminded me was the reason I was here at all to listen to these tales in the first place, and the reason I literally owed my life to the watch. The watch was adorned with a picture of a Palomino on one side, and a deserty landscape on the other. There was a small nick on the Palomino side. The watch no longer worked. I never got a clear story of where the pearl-handled six-shooter came from.

I couldn't get the watch off my mind, and when the day of the wake finally came I was so consumed by it, I was having these ridiculous fantasies about going up to Dad's barge and taking the watch out of his pocket. I could see the chain poking out of his coat pocket, and once or twice I came up to the barge and I ran my fingers along the chain, but every time that I did, one of my aunt's or female cousins would start reciting the Hail Mary in Spanish, and then everyone would come up from wherever they were to pray. By the time I was reading the eulogy at the funeral, however, I had peacefully resigned to the fact that the watch was going with Dad on his voyage to wherever it is we go when we die, and the idea of, in a way, giving the watch to Dad to take with him on his journey into the

unknown was beginning to give me a great joy. The barge was attached to a large rope, we were instructed via Dad's will to let the barge float out until the reception was over, which is when we were to pull it back to shore and ready for burial. While I was giving the eulogy, according to the testimony of the many in attendance whom I later asked, which I didn't see because my back was toward the lake, someone swam out to the barge, but no one said anything because they were all, and this seemed to be a universal sentiment, afraid to interrupt the eulogy because they didn't want to appear socially unconscionable. Eventually though, I began to notice a change in the guests' expressions, going from that morose slightly distant expression that reasonably normal people possess during a funeral to wide-eyed bemusement, and it began to distract me so much I started to kind of falter my prepared remarks, which I was resolved to get through the more I seemed to be bombing at the podium. But, when a woman stood up with her hand over her mouth and the other pointed out toward the lake, and then screamed something I can't clearly remember now, I had no choice but to stop what I was saying and turn around to look. I could see someone swimming back to shore out in the distance, and fire shooting out of the mouths of the dragonheads. I'm not going to lie, it was actually one of the most marvelous things that I have ever seen, and at that moment I couldn't have been more proud to have descended from this insanely genius man. But, another part of me wondered if perhaps fire shooting out of a wooden barge wasn't the safest, or most legal, thing in this pristine wilderness. But, then the barge lit on fire, and I suddenly didn't care, because sparks began to shoot out from the barge, which were followed by rockets shooting up in the sky and exploding in dazzling polychromatic spheres. The rockets began to shoot out furiously, one after another, and we all stood there in silent amazement, with our eyes suspended in mid-air and our mouths agape, and though the rockets

were exploding violently, there was a sort of peaceful calm that came over all of us, and though I couldn't see any of them, I knew we were all smiling. But, then suddenly the barge lit up noticeably more than before, and then there was this like big explosion, which made us all flinch back collectively. We were all so shocked we didn't know how to react, but I knew I had to do something, so I ran over to the rope to try to pull it back in, because now the barge was kind of just burning gently, but as I tugged on the rope I could feel that there was nothing on the other side. Feeling as if though words would only cheaply try to represent what my father's surprise firework show had more truly communicated about him, the funeral was cut short. And, we did as any reasonable people would do in such a circumstance: we rolled out the kegs and popped the lids off the chafers.

The reception turned into quite a festive affair, and it seemed that any of the stress and drama appendages that had materialized over the "watch conflict" had now fallen by the wayside. We were all quite jubilant celebrating Dad the way that I knew he wanted us to, except for Mela, who was forced to explain the whole bizarre situation to the authorities. But, even so the watch kept finding its way into my thoughts. So, rather than cause a spectacle at my own father's funeral I went out to my car to smoke a joint and try to let my frantic thoughts settle. I popped the joint into my mouth, but I couldn't find the lighter I was sure was in my coat pocket, so I opened the glove box and out pops the pearl-handled six-shooter. I can't remember having put it in there, but nonetheless, there it is, shining in this sort of glamorous soft-focus glow. The joint falls out of my mouth, and I reach over toward the gun with this excitement that's like this is the first time that I've ever seen it. I cup it in my hands with care in this almost supple, sexual way. Then I pick the joint off my lap, stick in my mouth and I walk out into the forest. The day is in its final stages, making it sort of dark and frightening out

there, but enchanting almost the way the acutely-angled light creeps in through the trees alighting the drifting debris, and I move on with this persistence that is uncharacteristically me. I reach this ledge and I look out over the lake, and I feel like a soldier, my eyes having taken on an almost cat-like supernaturalism, almost like I have night-vision goggles on, only instead of a green hue everything takes on this distinct azure monochrome. I see the embers of the barge, and I point the six-shooter out toward the lake, and the trigger is itching my skin like how those cinnamon toothpicks used to tickle your tongue back in grade school. And, I am pointing out toward the lake, straight at the barge, and then I say, 'Pow!' And, the motherfucker pops off in my hand, completely catching me by surprise, so much so, in fact, I nearly throw the damn thing off the ledge, because it is suddenly like a hot potato, or something, that I am sort of clumsily juggling around. But, I can't hold on and the thing slinks out of my grasp and kind of slides across the ground settling dangerously close to the ledge. There is like this rustic fence at the ledge, and the gun is underneath the most-bottom rung on the mossy ground. So, I get down on my stomach to retrieve it before the wind sends it tumbling down the ledge, and I crawl over on my forearms, getting pine needles and dirt all over my black suit. Just as I am grabbing the gun, I notice this sort of shiny object hanging on a branch of a pine tree down below reflecting the waning rays of the late summer grapefruit sun. All I can see is the canopy of the forest below, which kind of fades into darkness, but the top part is lit up well enough that the pine trees glow like fluffy green ziggurats; like these celestial spires, and I can now distinctly and definitively see that it is the damn pocket watch hanging on one of the swaying treetops. I grab the gun, stand up and look out over the ledge as I lean on the rustic fence. I still have the gun in my right hand, and I suddenly feel like a secret agent in my black suit as I stare at the watch swaying

delicately. While I try to figure my way through this happenstantial predicament, I am having, like, this out of body experience where I can see myself standing there with this very masculine and thoughtful mien, as my tie flips around like a cat tail in the wind. And then I start to smile because this very illogical, yet sexy, notion pops into my mind, and I am one hundred per cent sure that I am going to fulfill this fancy. So, I tuck the gun into the back of my pants, climb up onto the rustic fence, and I for some reason I think about Rambo as I plunge out toward the watch wavering over the profundity below.

It all happened because I was broke. I had stupidly quit my part-time job at a café on campus to focus on my artwork, but it turned out to be a complete disaster. At the time I figured that I could produce some work peripheral to my class load, and I could sell that to get by, but half-way through April I had hit a wall financially, creatively and spiritually. Then I saw the flyer. Some old guy was looking for a sculptor to design dragonheads for some barge he was working on. If I would have seen that flyer earlier that semester I would have arrogantly dismissed it, but lately I was so broke that I was willing to forfeit any artist credibility for a hot meal. So, I called the number and scheduled an appointment. We met at a restaurant downtown; I don't remember its name. He arrived before I did and he was eating an appetizer and seemed a little buzzed, like he had had a few drinks before I got there. He introduced himself as Milt Martinez, which I remember thinking sounded made up. He seemed like he was a nice guy from the beginning, which was good because all day I had been nervous that he was going to be a creepy old weirdo trying to hit on me. He was actually really funny and crazy in that sort of charming way that makes old people seem cute and entertaining, as opposed to senile or demented. He seemed very lucid and self-aware, and his topics of conversation were obviously nothing like the inane, banal banter that most guys my age were apt to fall

victim. I could just see some of the jerks from class ridiculing this old man for his topics of discussion, but I thought it was adorable the way that he seemed so at ease in his own slightly insane and unseasonably, even for a Mexican, tan skin. His self-confidence was exuberant, but not overbearing. He told me I could order anything on the menu, and half-way through dinner he suddenly asks me if I know anything about Norse Mythology. I tell him that my brother used to obsessively read Thor comics, which he left in the bathroom, and on occasion when I was doing the old number-two I would pop one open out of boredom. 'Other than that,' I said, 'I am pretty much a newbie.' He takes a bite of his steak, and with his right cheek bulging from the meat he asks me if I am familiar with burial by boat. I respond that I was familiar with the concept, but that any actual funeral I had attended had been more traditional, in the Western-sense I was quick to clarify. Then he asks me how I felt about carving two dragon heads out of wood, and I said that I felt great about it. So, he pulls these big old leather-bound books from his briefcase and throws them down on the table, causing my silverware to jump off the table and the beer in my glass to ripple in that Jurassic-Park-sort-of-way. He tells me to be at his house by 7 AM on Saturday if I was still serious about it. After dinner we shook hands and I told him that he could most certainly expect to see me on Saturday, and then he nodded and smiled without saying anything, and walked off toward his car while the downtown traffic provided this sort of screeching, mechanical, despairing soundtrack.

I didn't have time to read the books completely, I mean with my installation and critiques looming and all, but I did devote an hour or so before I went to bed to sort of peruse them, and a couple of nights I stayed up so late I fell asleep with them resting baby-like on my bosom. By the time Saturday rolled around I felt that I at least had an idea of what Milt wanted from me, so I woke up that



morning feeling very good about myself, because for the first time in a while things seemed to be looking up, financially and creatively speaking. It was mid-April and the weather wasn't exactly horrible, but it wasn't exactly nice either. So, I was taken aback when I showed up and Milt was hard at work, shirtless, cussing up a storm and wiping himself with a stinky old rag. He was actually quite built for such an old guy, and it made me uneasy staring at him as his muscles popped underneath a leathery sheet of old loose skin. Mainly because there is something kind of sexual about it that made me uncomfortable to ruminate on. Finally, he noticed me standing there with the leather-bound books hanging in my arms like I was some sort of old-time school girl, and he tells me to put my things down and join him for some coffee. As we sip a medium roast out of our over-sized mugs he lays out what he expects from me. He's got some sketches already, which he hands me, then tells me to re-imagine the designs however I see fit. So while Milt goes out to the driveway and starts cutting and shaving wood, I work on sketches from the kitchen where I can see him toil away as sawdust collects over his oily skin, which gives his skin this strange texture that's façade-seeming. He is out there with his shirt off, wearing these ridiculous Daisy Duke Wrangler cutoffs, and I can't help but stare out at him working while I sketch Norse dragonheads and I smile widely whenever it occurs to me that he looks like a bald Latino Iggy Pop.

Around five o'clock he comes in wiping himself off with that crusty rag, and finally puts a shirt on as he asks me if I want to stick around for a steak dinner. Of course I stay, I haven't eaten a thing all day, and the idea of going home to cook dinner for myself seems horribly unappealing. He opens up a bottle of chilled pinot grigio and pours me a glass before he goes out to grill up some carne asada. We eat dinner, and he tells me about his kids as we listen to Pedro Infante on vinyl. After dinner we open up another bottle and sit on the couch and Milt starts

telling me about his theory on scent. He is describing, of course, what he hopes to achieve with the barge, how he wanted to transform into an amorphous cloud and how the barge was the vessel that would facilitate that transformation. So, while he's telling me all this, I kind of pop my shoes off and lean back, and his words begin to peacefully lull me into this catatonic sleep, and the next thing I know everything is dark and I am wrapped in a blanket on the couch. I get up and walk to the kitchen, where I chug down like two glasses of water, and then I wander around until I find Milt's room. He is sound asleep, but I wake him up as I curl into bed with him. At first things start off innocently, we are just spooning and our breathing synchronizes. I'm not sure who started it or how it started, but eventually we are taking off our clothes and Milt is putting a silk scarf around my head to trap my pheromones. For a guy who's constructing his own funeral barge, he was still quite virile and full of life in the sack. He was attentive to me in this way that goes beyond just mere experience, like, there is a reason why women prefer older men, but this is different. I can literally feel the lucidity with which he is approaching this moment, you know, like he is truly aware that these moments are precious few, and the way that his eyes take me in, and how I can just tell that he is aware that our bodies are moving congruently like waves on a cellular level, is electrifying. Most guys I sleep with wear this glazed, anesthetized-look, like they are hiding in some uncomfortable self-conscious corner of their mind. You can tell they are somewhere else, and it translates to the way they make love to you. I'm guilty of it too, we are simply at this age where we are still uncomfortable to be ourselves because we have no idea who we are yet. But, Milt has resigned to the fact that he is dying, and this gives him that ultimate freedom to finally imbibe the true thrust of life. It never would have occurred to me, but knowing that you are going to die must be the ultimate aphrodisiac, and of course, I am intoxicated

enough just soaking up Milt's run-off.

Those months before Milt died were some of my best. It didn't take me long to finish the dragonheads, and soon I am just hanging out in his garage working on my other projects while he rigs the barge chalk full of explosives. He reminds me like four times a day where I can expect to find the hidden lighter, and he is constantly quizzing me on where exactly I am to ignite the barge. Then after his daughter leaves, we take a roll in the hay some more. Life begins to follow this nice routine, but then the semester ends and I am forced to get a serving job because I am once again broke. I see less of Milt, but I still come by to help around the house and by now the barge is pretty much done, and just sits in the driveway on display, or something. The closer it gets to his final days, the stranger he begins to act. Sometimes I would come over and find him sitting in the living room with the lights off, and I would walk in mid-sentence of a conversation he was having with some unseen person in the room. The conversations we would have got stranger, and more intricately layered. But, most of the time he was still sweet old Milt. We spent the whole day together the night that he passed. I woke up to an empty bed. I threw on one of his t-shirts, and then I walked out to look for him. As I'm coming down the hallway I can hear him talking, though I can't distinctly make out what he is saying, so I take caution to approach as silently as I can. I reach the end of the hallway where it opens up into the living room, and I sort of peek around the corner where I see Milt staring out the rather large fenestration in his living room, which points out toward the street in front of the house. The blinds are open and it is a particularly bright morning, or maybe my eyes are yet unadjusted, so all I can make out is his silhouette, which because he is standing there in the buff, strikes me as reminiscent of the male bathroom sign, only as though viewed from behind. The only thing distinguishable about Milt's silhouette that morning is

where his ass is white from the Daisy Duke cutoffs that he is always wearing. He is standing there static, verbalizing something mutedly, almost like how people half-whisper prayers, and though I am trying really hard to listen I can only make out a few words or phrases. It suddenly occurs to me that he is narrating, not praying, not so much because I can hear what he is talking about, but because the pace and cadence of his speech resembles that of a story. Quite suddenly I become lucid to the fact that he is narrating the actions of his street before they occur as though he were conducting an orchestra or calling plays from the sidelines. Cars pass by, as do birds who settle on tree branches or telephone wires. Trees shutter and spur, leaves of grass engage in a collective dance that is subtle and simple, and truly beautiful because it lacks complexity. Children ride in circles on their bikes in concert with sprinklers that eject drops of water that prismatically bend the passing light so that each drop reflects the colors of the visible spectrum. Everything moves on its own and as part of this one collective moment or experience, and I can feel that it is all happening at Milt's direction. But, soon everything becomes mutable and muddled and it becomes harder to distinguish each constituent player in this theatre of life, and as the actions just outside Milt's window become less distinct, the sun's light seems to be growing with intensity. Soon there is so much light shining through Milt's window that I can see the light bend around Milt's silhouette, and what was once a crisp image of the man, becomes fuzzy and blurred. My eyes proportionately lose their ability to stay open, and as Milt's image begins to disappear I can finally hear what he is saying, even though I am sure that he is speaking in a whisper: 'We are expanding like the sun.' He is saying this phrase over and over in a manner that turns off some switch in my head, and I hold on to the wall as long as I can before I finally tumble to the ground.

The day only gets weirder from there. Milt refuses to

put any clothes on the whole day, and every time I offer him something to eat he bats it away. His eyes remain glazed and far away, and only periodically do I feel he is aware of his true surroundings. He keeps talking to me about things that never happened between us, memories of years that far preceded my conception, but he keeps insisting that I was there. I want to get the Hell out of there, but I'm stuck. He told me the night before that his daughter was taking to the kids to see their grandmother who lives in Auburn for the weekend, and I don't even know the son's phone number, but Milt is acting so fucking bizarre that I know something big is eminent. There's nothing I can do, as the situation stews over in my mind, it becomes clear that I have to stick it out. He still refuses to eat, but after I eat dinner he seems to be acting normal again, and fixes himself a cocktail even. My fears allay toward evening's end as he returns to his normal self, though he grows fatigued far earlier than normal, and by nine-thirty we are off to bed. The stress of the day has wiped me out as well, and I pass out it seems as soon as we settle into the bed. My sleep transpires dark and uneventful, until around four in the morning when I become aware that Milt has resurrected me with sexual arousal. Things go by in the usual wonderful way, until at some point I am on top of him and he is reaching up at me, touching the sides of my cheeks with his hands, which I kiss gently as they explore my cheeks and neck. It's then I notice that they are ice cold, and the coldness of his hands shocks me and brings me out of my sexual reverie, so, I look down at him, and I see that the veins in his arms have become mottled and these depressed pigmentations have formed below his stony eyes. His face is jaundiced and he seems to no longer wear an expression, but a face that appears to have been painted on at a particularly unemotional moment. Then he suddenly gets up muttering, throwing me to the ground, as if he is consumed by a brilliant notion, and as I pull myself off the

hardwood floor I see Milt running around the room as he points his finger in the air the way I think Jesus or Socrates might have. He runs outside and slams the door as I search for a robe to cover myself with, and when I get outside he is next to his barge running in place, and he is shivering even though it's warm out. I am trying to calm him down, but he continues to shake and eventually he gets into the barge and lies down. As soon as he does he is calm, and the gravity of the moment is immediately felt. It's overwhelming and heavy, and it brings me down to my knees so that I am resting my head on Milt's chest. But, after a minute, I draw the tears back, because I know that the next phase of Milt's plan has begun, and I'm fully aware that I cannot continue on and bring it to fruition if I am overcome by hysterics. So, I take a deep breath, suck in the sadness, and carry it like a heavy bullet in my chest as I walk to the kitchen to phone 911.

The day of the funeral I readied myself as if though I were going into battle. Milt told me once everything is a mind game, if the mind is convinced something is so, so it will be. And, so I imagined myself lighting the barge, a scenario that repeats itself over and over like a home video rattling in my head. I had been swimming laps in the swimming pool at Lombardi for a couple of months now, and I was feeling very confident of my abilities. I was overcome with a certain excitement as I waited on a hidden shore of Tahoe, watching the proceedings of the funeral transpire. As soon as I saw his son take the podium, I dove into the lake and swam out determinately toward the barge. I achieve an inward focus so great the swim out to the barge eludes my memory, but I do remember getting to the barge, gasping for air, and involuntarily opening the secret compartment that houses the lighter, which I quickly use to ignite the barge. But, I don't stick around to watch the show, because Milt warned me that I only had a certain amount of time before the barge went up in smoke, and eventually blew up. So, I

simply fill my lungs with air, before I return to the water and begin my journey back to the shore. As I race back I can hear sparks popping and flames whipping hotly at the crisp mountain air. This scene has unraveled so many times in my mind that I don't have to see it to know what is happening. I reach the shore, and as I catch my breath I look out at the barge, which is now like a fireball dancing over the rippling skin of Lake Tahoe. I know I have little time to get out of there, so I throw my backpack on, and start running up the hill into the forest, and before I get fifteen yards from the shore I hear the barge explode. I stop in mid-trail, and I feel like Lot or Orpheus, because I'm overcome with this sudden urge to look back, but I know that I cannot until the journey is over, so I run off the trail, and trudge up the mountain following an indiscriminant path.

I reached the top of the ridge and when I found a clearing that looked suitable to set up camp, I unloaded my backpack and looked down at the lake for the first time. The day was at that point before dusk where the sun's rays dramatically enter the atmosphere acutely, and I could see smoke coming from Milt's barge billowing up into the air. After I set up camp, I pulled out a bottle of Breggo Pinot Gris from the Anderson Valley that I stole from Milt's house along with his crusty old rag. The night falls and I put on my fleece jacket, and I sit there and sip the bottle of Breggo and occasionally I take deep breaths through the crusty rag, and I smell Milt, the true essence of Milt, and I know that he was right. Eventually I finish the bottle and the moon comes out and I notice that the clouds have undergone inversion, and the pleasant warm mountain air suddenly makes so much sense. I keep sucking through the crusty rag as I stare down at the waves of condensed water vapor as they play with the nighttime air and reflect the subtle beams of moonlight. My mind begins to float, and I realize that I am light-headed from all that intense respiration at such a high altitude, and it strikes me as

bizarre that I am literally, like, feeling high on Milt. And, with my eye lids attracting to one another like steel to magnet, and my eyes glazing over from the oniony scent of Milt's crusty old sweat rag, the brilliance of the plan finally becomes clear to me. I understand now that the smoke from the barge has been consumed by these clouds, that Milt has dissipated strand by strand, molecule by molecule, atom by atom, into this opaque sea. I see now that the sea and the barge have become indistinguishable, that man and vessel are one and the same. Tomorrow the sun will come out and warm the basin air, and eventually the clouds will float on. Perhaps, one day, I think, it will rain and little traces of Milt will soak into my clothes. I smile at this, still sucking in air through the rag, still watching the clouds tumble and crash, still watching them swirl and mix, even as the clouds in my mind attenuate and disappear, only to reemerge as a barge floating on this opaque sea pushed on by an unseen gale toward a destination I wish not to understand nor care to see. But, I know I am already lost. I am already there.



## AUTORES · AUTHORS

**Cristina Rivera Garza** (Matamoros, Tamaulipas, 1964) Narradora y poeta. Estudió sociología en la ENEP-Acatlán de la UNAM, la maestría y el doctorado en historia latinoamericana en la Universidad de Houston. Ha sido profesora en la UNAM, la UAEM, la San Diego State University; la Universidad de Pauw, Indiana y el ITESM, campus Toluca, donde también es codirectora de la Cátedra de Humanidades. Colaboradora de *El Cuento*, *El Sol de Toluca*, *Excelsior*, *La Guillotina*, *La Palabra* y *El Hombre*, *Macrópolis*, *Nacional*, *Punto de Partida*, *Revista de la UAEM*, y *San Quintín*. Becaria del CME, en narrativa, 1984; del FONCA, en novela, 1994, y en poesía, 1999; del Centro de Estudios México-Estados Unidos, 1998. Premio Nacional Juan Vicente Melo 2001 por *Ningún reloj cuenta esto*. Premio Anna Seghersz 2005. Premio Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz 2009 por *La muerte me da*.

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**Marvin González** (Elko, Nevada, 1982) was the playwright in residence for Good Luck, Macbeth Theatre Co.'s 2013-14 season, where he developed the play *The Fifth Wind*. His play *Prostheses Bound* was a 2016 national finalist at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival and was published through Samuel French in 2016. He was commissioned to write *Lights Out* in June of 2016 at Reno Little Theatre as part of La Gente Theatre Festival. His play *Haboob* is set for production in April of 2017 at Arizona State University in partnership with Teatro Bravo in Phoenix, AZ. He is currently an MFA in Dramatic Writing at Arizona State University and will graduate in 2017.

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**EDITORES INDEPENDIENTES**

*Contrapuntos II: A Live Anthology* (2014)

Autores: Gabriela Alemán, Judith Castañeda Suarí, Daniel Herrera, Pedro Ángel Palou, Regina Rheda, Rick J. Santos, Tino Villanueva.

*Contrapuntos III: A Live Anthology* (2015)

Autores: Guillermo Corral, Saúl Cuevas, Sarah Rafael García, Chely Lima, Marcos Pico Rentería.



This first issue of *Contrapuntos* (Counterpoints) is the celebration of the foundational voices to this collection that have found a place where to interact with one another. The stories in this issue have resisted the paradigm of traditional grouping, instead, our editors have selected narratives with different background, styles, or even languages. Each story they see as a *counterpoint* put together to create a desired literary polyphony.

La primera edición de *Contrapuntos* es la celebración de las voces fundacionales de la colección que se han encontrado para la interacción entre las mismas. Los cuentos que aparecen en esta edición han resistido el paradigma del grupaje tradicional, para esto, nuestros editores han seleccionado relatos sin importar antecedente, estilo, o idioma. Cada cuento se entiende como un *contrapunto*, que, en conjunto forma la deseada polifonía literaria.