

The Resisting Translator

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If we may be permitted to dispose of Jakobson's (1966: 234) "dogma of untranslatability", we might say that the translator enriches linguistic and cultural experience by interpreting and re-expressing a textual reality. The art of translation, a highly complicated act of communication, links time past and time future to a present of linguistic and theoretical turmoil in which translators are dragged out from that solitary space of their own to face the crossfire from linguistic, cultural and academic communities; to meet their double and come to terms with their otherness in a violent and fully conscious struggle. My reflections on what Goethe called that "most necessary of evils" are based on my experience of translating Julio Cortázar's short story "Pesadillas" into English and on my agreement with the translator Anthea Bell's statement that, "since verbal communication seems to be one of the evolutionary developments that made the race human in the first place, it is well worth our while at least to try to communicate with each other".¹

The literary translator embarks upon a journey of self-discovery during which the mode of thought, sensitivity and desire of the other become apparent. Only through a profound knowledge of the writer and his or her created verbal constructs can the translator hope to produce what Jacques Derrida (1985: 209-248) calls a "true translation": that is,

¹ Cf. Stephen COX, "The Impossible Will Take a Little While", in *The Author*, p. 61. This is an article which summarises "a gesture of goodwill towards translation and translators" on the part of the English Centre of International PEN when they chose to celebrate their seventieth birthday (1991) and International Writers' Day (March 23rd) by "organising a forum at the Olympia Conference Centre under the title of 'Tower of Babel: The Art of Translation' ". It is delightfully critical and shows that translators are treated with equal disdain on both sides of the Atlantic. I attended the event and exploded, as did Cox, when Germaine Greer (of all people) told us that words have meanings and "meanings simply cannot migrate into another language". As Cox writes, "Go tell cartographers the earth's not flat".

“a transparent and adequate interexpression” and a “coherence of construct”. This process involves, among more mundane aspects, what might be described as the “revelation” of the source text to the translator—a revelation which will be the outcome of quite a different operation from that of the writer, as Lilia Ray (1976: 261) explains: “A translator starts at the tips of the branches, works his way back down to the source, and journeys out again, down another limb of man’s experience”.

The translator may travel towards but can hardly aspire to reach the same heart of darkness on account of the previous shaping of the text. Yet, if the essence of the source text is grasped and reproduced in the target text, the act of translation becomes symbolic: it is the miraculous fusion of two totally individual creative experiences.

The moment of fusion is, fortunately, so intimate that it cannot be explained in any sensible fashion. The act of translation, which is a habit of mind, remains largely an enigma: the “revelation” of the text and its subsequent re-creation are hidden in the recesses of the translator’s conscious and unconscious self. This mystery underlies any discourse on translation and it has made me question whether I, as a woman translator from a different culture, am in a position to translate the work of a man who has a different relationship to power, language and meaning from me. This problem, which a translator may naturally disregard when his or her imagination is set ablaze by a literary text or when such mundane things as the rent and bills have to be paid, does have its place in the translation debate and it may even throw light on the nature of writing itself.

Before I start, I should anticipate those who argue that even to pose the question of gender and translation—a vast topic I cannot hope to do justice to in these few pages—is to fall into the phallogocentric trap of discourses of opposition, which, based on heterosexuality, “oppress us in the sense that they prevent us from speaking unless we speak in their terms”.² There appears to be no immediate solution to this convincing argument, other than that proposed by Adrienne Rich (1986: 25): “[...] feminists [whether heterosexual or lesbian] will draw political strength for change from *taking a critical stance* toward the ideology which *demand*s heterosexuality”. In this I would agree with Rich. I sustain that we must first discuss the issues at stake, understand how we may be oppressed by the discourses of dominant groups, and recognise our difference before we can even attempt to find that “new theoretical

² Monique WITTING (1980: 105-106), “The Straight Mind”, *Feminist Issues* 1, September 1980, pp. 105-106.

space” advocated by Julia Kristeva, “where the very notion of identity” may be challenged.³

One key issue is the sex/gender debate, which, although often taken for granted, has been aired and questioned by many a writer, including Virginia Woolf in *Orlando*. This work shows, as Phyllis Rackin (1989: 115-116) says when discussing sex and gender roles in Elizabethan theatre, that:

Gender is, above all, a social construct, arbitrary and varying from one society to another, related to sex but not identical with it; and varying from one society to another just as the words we use to signify our meanings vary from one language community to another. Moreover, the relations between gender and sex are as various and problematic as those between signifying words and signifying meanings or between poetic fictions and the elusive “realities” they imitate.⁴

We do not have to pull this statement apart to realise the complexities contained in it, not only for our understanding of language and literature but also for our understanding of the translation process. As Barbara Johnson argues, “Literature [...] inhabits the very heart of what makes sexuality problematic for us speaking animals”.⁵ Elaine Showalter (1989: 1-13) gives an overview of the different debates around this issue in “The Rise of Gender” and points out that “Marxist-feminist critics” fear that gender may be treated as an isolated category within a psychological framework. “Masculinity and femininity”, writes Cora Kaplan, “do not appear in cultural discourse, anymore than they do in mental life, as pure binary forms at play. They are always, already, ordered and broken up through other social and cultural terms, other categories of difference”, such as homophobia, class divisions and racial hierarchies.⁶ This sensible view offers another perspective on what Hélène Cixous calls “death-dealing binary thought” which is based on the hierarchical opposition Man/Woman. But let us return to our nightmare of the moment, which will reveal many more of the issues at stake.

It is a desire to acknowledge Mecha —the silent protagonist in “Pe-sadillas”— as she has never been acknowledged before, which underlies

³ “Woman’s Time”, in Toril MOI (1986: 209).

⁴ “Androgyny, Mimesis, and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the Elizabethan Stage”, in Elaine SHOWALTER, ed., (1989: 113-131).

⁵ Quoted by Phyllis RACKIN from Elizabeth ABEL, ed. (1982).

⁶ Quoted in Elaine SHOWALTER (1989: 3-4) from Cora KAPLAN (1986: 148).

my discourse. I have been obsessed by this story for years; yet not even my original translation of “Pesadillas” —which gave me the opportunity to experience textual desire and pleasure far more immediately than reading or literary criticism— alerted me to the reasons behind my obsession. Only upon rereading the text —perhaps more as a resisting reader as Judith Fetterley would put it⁷— did I eventually realise that the narrative focus on Mecha also poses the questions of sexual difference, of her relationship to power, language and meaning, and, thus, of the possibilities of an alternate —be it female, feminine or feminist—creativity.⁸

When considering the matter of whether we should refuse to translate texts that are sexist or ideologically incompatible with our own views, Carol Maier (1985: 4) says: “The translator’s quest is not to silence but to give voice, to make available texts that raise difficult questions and open perspectives”.

In one sense, this suggests that my task as a translator is to “give voice” to Mecha’s silence —her unspoken creativity— and to open perspectives on that enigmatic *no-man’s land* she inhabits. Remembering Sappho, Willis Barnstone (1985: 12) proposes as the translation aim: “to find the instant when words disappear as awkward, separate phonemes and the author’s authentic voice is heard”.

⁷ *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1978.

⁸ I do not intend to go into the debate concerning the differences between female, feminine and feminist other than to quote Toril Moi’s distinction which may give food for thought. This article, included in Catherine BELSEY and Jane MOORE, eds., (1989: 117-132) as “Feminist, Female, Feminine”, is an extract from “Feminist Literary Criticism”, in Ann JEFFERSON and David ROBNEY, eds., (1986: 204-21). I quote Belsey and Moore: “In the extract reprinted here it is argued that ‘feminist’ is a political term, ‘female’ a biological one, and ‘feminine’ a cultural definition. The essay calls into question the belief that female experience is the basis of feminism, or in other words that politics is a direct effect of biology”. Moi claims that the “feminist critic” can use whichever methods or theories she likes, so long as they are compatible with her politics and engage a study of “the social, institutional and personal power relations between the sexes; what Kate Millet in her epochal study called *sexual politics*”. Feminist criticism is, in her opinion, “characterised by its *political* commitment to the struggle against all forms of patriarchy and sexism”, but this does not mean that the very fact of being *female* “guarantees a feminist approach”, as any Mills and Boon will show us. Moi wishes to go no further than to define “femininity” as “a set of culturally defined characteristics” or a “cultural construct” precisely because patriarchy has done such an excellent job of this *alrea-dy*: “It is after all patriarchy, not feminism, which has always believed in a true female/feminine nature: the biologism and essentialism which lurk behind the desire to bestow feminine virtues on all female bodies necessarily plays into the hands of the patriarchs”.

Both these literary translators emphasise the desire to articulate and make heard the “authentic voice” in their translations: an essential objective for any translator. However, it is Lynn A. Higgins (1985: 13) —discussing her encounter with French women writers— rather than Maier —discussing her encounter with a Cuban male poet— who finds *écriture féminine* “a translator’s nightmare”. The reasons for this may become clearer later on.

Marguerite Duras (1975: 174) once defined “feminine literature” as an “organic, translated writing [...] translated from blackness, from darkness”. And she goes on to say:

Men don’t translate. They begin with a theoretical platform that is already in place, already elaborated. The writing of women is really translated from the unknown, like a new way of communicating rather than an already formed language [...] There are many women who write as they think they should write —to imitate men and make a place for themselves in literature [eg. Colette].

Might Maier and I not be accused of doing just that —imitating a man? This does express the translation ideal of fidelity to the original work of art, but it also raises the question of whether we, as women writers translating from darkness, can mount a male “theoretical platform”. Let us dwell on this for a moment.

On the one hand, Julia Kristeva (1974: 166) claims there are two extremes in women’s writing experiences: “the first tends to valorize phallic dominance”, while the second flees the phallic “to find refuge in the valorization of a silent underwater body, thus abdicating any entry into history”. From this it appears that women may decide to accept or to undermine symbolic power. If women “reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning in the existing state of society”, they are, in her opinion, “on the side of the explosion of social codes”; they are “with revolutionary moments”. French feminist theory and practice often place the emphasis on the sex of the writing rather than the sex of author, thus regarding the feminine as a playfulness which displaces authority and the rational, which undermines the symbolic order and which decentres and questions fixed meanings (such as may be detected in avant-garde writers).

On the other hand, there are those who believe, as did Virginia Woolf, that the work of art *should* be androgynous —a term currently under debate once more. Carolyn Heilbrun in her study *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* refuses to draw the conclusion that feminists can in fact

desire androgyny, while Toril Moi (1985: 14) would agree with Kristeva that “a theory that demands the deconstruction of sexual identity is indeed authentically feminist”. This idea of androgyny or artistic integrity is, as Hanscombe and Smyers (1987: 6) point out, fine in theory —and even seductive. However,

[...] to argue [...] that ‘art’ somehow has characteristics which are the real opposites of the ‘life’ that gave it birth, or that an artist or writer [or translator for that matter] is somehow beyond the parameters of gender, must be the result of a collusion between men arrogant enough to believe women’s lives to be like their own and women servile enough to accept the authority of such men against the evidence of their own experience.

Even the sentence, as Woolf found out, is at times unsuited to women’s purposes. Furthermore, often underlying feminist criticism is the argument that women not only write about different things from men but that they write about them in a different way. And this is not all. Some have argued that since men and women are constructed differently as individuals through the learning of language, the relationship of men and women to language, as I suggested earlier, is different. Does this imply that “intersexual” translation is the result of Hanscombe and Smyers’ “collusion”?

Julio Cortázar’s treatment of the theme of the *Doppelgänger* arises in part from his own situation as an Argentinian living overseas and in part from his desire to break with the conventions of the traditional narrative mode. By exploring the limits of identity and consciousness, he seeks to annihilate the frontiers of time and space, and to reveal the different manifestations of the self in the imagination. The “other side” of his work is, first and foremost, the non-structured world of creativity. (Curiously, this becomes the translator’s “other side” as well, as he or she delves into the text in search of the non-structured world of creativity which he or she aspires to re-create.) Secondly, it represents the unknown, the uncharted regions of the self, which Cortázar explores in an attempt to reach a deeper understanding of the nature of art and the human condition. Thus, we might argue that Cortázar is really translating, at least in part, from that unknown that Duras claimed for “feminine literature”; moreover, rather than mount the “theoretical platform already elaborated”, he does, at least in “*Pesadillas*”, try to find a new way of communicating. His sentence is, like that Woolf attributed to Dorothy Richardson, “of a more elastic fibre [...] capable of stretching to the

extreme, of suspending the frailest particles, of enveloping the vaguest shapes".⁹

"Pesadillas" relates a story of the oppression of the Botto family —by their domestic nightmare and by a political nightmare under a military regime that immediately evokes the socio-political reality of Argentina. The text plays with these two principal levels of coherence. The domestic crisis revolves around their young daughter Mecha who is in a coma and who, ironically, only awakens to "la hermosa vida" when the soldiers invade her home, perhaps in search of her brother Lauro who has disappeared.¹⁰ Indeed, as in "Casa tomada", invasion is a key word.¹¹ Cortázar shows the impotence of the family as their physical and mental space is invaded, the first by violence, the second by the unknown, paining the passive self whose boundaries are being violated by a phallic master. He appears to be questioning the patriarchal space of domination, hierarchy and conquest. As the Editorial Collective of *Questions féministes* (1985: 215) argue: "The 'principal enemy' is a certain type of hierarchal social relation where men are involved as agents but not as biological beings". Mecha alone has found a space in the enigmatic *no-man's-land* of her comatose state. And she reacts violently to any invasion: her convulsions —breaking the peace of her coma— consistently coincide with the sound of gunfire in the street. Lauro, her brother, cannot seek "refuge in the valorization of the silent underwater body" but is drawn into history making. Mecha's silent space gives her the potential, despite her ostensible impotence, to question the discourses and socio-political circumstances framing this textual expression of nightmarish alienation, oppression and repression.

Mecha's silence is a powerful act of resistance, her defiance of authority. In this sense, we might compare Mecha with the royal princess in "The Blank Page" by Isak Dinesen, whose sheet from her marriage bed

⁹ V. WOOLF (1923) claimed that D. Richardson had invented a woman's sentence, "but only in the sense that it is used to describe a woman's mind by a writer who is [not] afraid of anything that she may discover in the psychology of her sex".

¹⁰ See Appendix 1 for a translation of this text. As I imply, no translation is *the* translation and I offer a version of a short story which poses many problems for the English-speaking translator.

¹¹ Flora BOTTON (1983: 121) describes three aspects of "Casa tomada" which are particularly relevant: "el contraste entre lo definido y lo indefinido, el tratamiento del espacio y la falta de resistencia a la invasión". Though the circumstances are different, both stories are haunted by the "strange presence" that haunts the house.

(or coffin —“dos semanas que está como muerta doctor” [JC: 121])¹² —framed in the convent— remained spotless, costing her life or her honour.¹³ Dinesen’s blank page is as radically subversive as Mecha’s silent body. “The female body”, as Susan Gubar (1981: 294) argues, “has been feared for its power to articulate itself”. For example, in Conrad’s *Victory*, Axel Heyst saves a girl called Lena from “murdering silence” in an all-female orchestra. Converted from artist to accompanist to accomplice, she seems “like a script in an unknown language” and Heyst feels like “a man looking this way and that on a piece of writing which he was unable to decipher, but which may be big with some *revelation*”.¹⁴ When gunfire is heard near the house, Doña Luisa screams. She, the nurse and her husband “vieron cómo el temblor se repetía en todo el cuerpo de Mecha, una rápida serpiente corriendo del cuello hasta los pies, un moverse de los ojos bajo los párpados, la leve crispación que alteraba las facciones, *como una voluntad de hablar, de quejarse* [...]” (JC: 123; my underlining). These final words are a vain attempt on the part of the narrator to explain the mysterious and silent movement of Mecha’s body. Characteristically, the unknown is associated with evil: Mecha is possessed by a snake. It reminds us of what Luce Irigaray once said: “Women do not manage to articulate their madness: they suffer it directly in their body”.

The Botto family is convinced by “the authorities” —the doctor who invades their privacy with his medical friends and “un nuevo aparato con ventosas y electrodos”— that “el estado de coma la aislaba de toda sensibilidad” (JC: 123). However, Lauro is sure she is dreaming and trying to communicate: “Duraba como las sirenas ahí afuera, las manos parecían buscar algo, los dedos tratando de encontrar un asidero en la sábana” (JC: 124). He wants to talk to her about so many things, “como Mecha a lo mejor estaba hablándole desde su lado, desde los ojos cerrados y los dedos que dibujaban letras inútiles en las sábanas” (JC: 128). However, every time he goes to her bedside he feels “la misma sensación de contacto imposible”. Mecha is like that script in an unknown language, which Lauro, like Axel Heyst, is unable to decipher from his position within history. In Lauro’s estimation, Mecha is a prisoner of her silence and of her attempt at translation from darkness: “los vagos sig-

¹² This method is used throughout to identify quotations from Julio CORTÁZAR, “Pesadillas”, in *Deshoras*, México, Nueva Imagen, 1983.

¹³ In *Last Tales*. New York, Random House, 1957.

¹⁴ “The Blank Page” and the Issues of Female Creativity”, *Critical Inquiry*, 8 (Winter).

nos de los dedos y esa mirada desde adentro, buscando salir, [...] un mensaje de prisionero a través de paredes de piel". Since Lauro is, in one respect, a member of the dominant group, he simply cannot interpret an attempt at communication issuing from the "wild zone" of a member of the muted group. This "wild zone", proposed by Showalter (1986: 261-266) as "the address of a genuinely women-centred criticism, theory, and art, whose shared project is to bring into being the symbolic weight of female consciousness, to make the invisible visible, to make the silent speak", may be interpreted, in terms of consciousness, as the "place for the revolutionary women's language [*sic*], the language of everything repressed, and for the revolutionary women's writing in 'white ink'".¹⁵

The old story teller in "The Blank Page" praises the blank sheet—the virgin sheet—because it is the material out of which art is produced. In the case of "Pesadillas", Mecha is both artistic object and artistic subject. As artistic object, she provides the means by which writing may be explored as *the very possibility of change*, as Cixous (1976: 879-882) says: "the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures".¹⁶ This transformation—the transformation of language itself—is evident in every aspect of the text, from the disarticulation of syntax, the elastic sentence, the confusion of narrative voices and punctuation devices to the silence running through the text like a subversive current. Mecha holds the secret to this silence. This must become the translator's secret: the secret to the unknown and uncharted regions of the self which mysteriously pave the way for creation. In this respect, Mecha challenges the English-speaking translator to observe the

¹⁵ Cf. Elaine SHOWALTER (1986: 243-267), "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness", for an explanation of the relationship of the dominant and the muted group, which is represented by intersecting circles. Much of each circle—called men (dominant) and women (muted)—falls within the boundaries of the other, but not all. As Showalter says: "When we think of the wild zone metaphysically, or in terms of consciousness, it has no corresponding male space since all of male consciousness is within the circle of the dominant structure and thus accessible to or structured by language. In this sense, the 'wild' is always imaginary; from the male point of view, it may simply be the projection of the unconscious". What is perhaps most interesting for the translator—and the writer—is that in this model, first proposed by Edwin Ardener in two essays, "Belief and the Problem of Women" (1972) and "The 'Problem' Revisited" (1975), there is, in spatial and experiential terms, a crescent that is alien to the other sex.

¹⁶ "The Laugh of the Medusa", translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, 1, no. 4 (Summer).

markers of the “separate reality” (E. Sapir), represented by each language that is itself “steeped in the context of culture”¹⁷ and in the socio-historical moment of its articulation; to resist the desire of English to disperse the fog of ambiguity and confusion, of fear and alienation, which rubs its muzzle on the window-panes of the Botto household; to recognise her difference in the undermining of authority and the rational; and, finally, to re-create this revolutionary gesture as she challenges the dominant discourses and the terms of textual repression and socio-political oppression, reminding us that no translation, especially one from darkness, is the translation.¹⁸

As artistic subject, Mecha represents, among other things, that attempt to translate from darkness, that attempt to give voice to silence. She symbolises the enigma of translation, the possible meeting of the yin and the yang in that new signifying space which challenges the very notion of identity. She may embody many alternative scripts for women. The writing of her body and the “letras inútiles” drawn on her sheet contain all stories in no story, just as silence contains all potential sound. She represents the many gaps, borders, spaces and holes in the discourse of this text. As Xavière Gauthier (1986: 164) puts it, Mecha emphasises “the aspect of feminine writing which is the most difficult to verbalize because it becomes compromised, rationalized, masculinized as it explains itself”. If the reader or translator should feel disoriented in this new space, “one which is obscure and silent”, as the characters and narrator in “Pesadillas” surely do, “it proves, perhaps, that it is a woman’s space”.¹⁹ And “Pesadillas” shows most clearly that this is the feared space, which must be repressed and silenced: in the final irony, Mecha awakens to “la hermosa vida” as the troops invade her home and that space of her own.

The shift in primacy from the metaphor of the pen to the primacy of the page is, as Gubar (1981) explains, a late-nineteenth century phenomenon. The shift from the primacy of the page to the primacy of the body is a mid-twentieth century phenomenon introduced by the

¹⁷ Susan BASSNETT MCGUIRE (1980: 14) quotes Lotman: “No language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its center, the structure of natural language”.

¹⁸ For a detailed discussion of each aspect mentioned here —and many others— see Charlotte BROAD, “Traduzco en la soledad pero no para la soledad: A Translation of ‘Pesadillas’ ” (unpublished).

¹⁹ In *New French Feminisms*.

French feminists. Cortázar could hardly have been unaware of this. Thus, I would argue, bearing this and all the above in mind, that Cortázar's subject matter and his mode of expression, at least in this story, make him a much more accessible writer for a woman translator. (His translators into French and Polish at least are women: Laure Bataillon and Zofia Chadzynska respectively.) Though I realise I am about to voice an oversimplification, I would sustain that the work of certain men writers—precisely those who are not arrogant and who decentre and question fixed meanings—is *closer* to women's experience and writing practice. We may have to act like chameleons or an Orlando; however, when within the prison house of language and what Mary McCarty (1981: 368) would call the "cramped confines of patriarchal space", our primary obligation as translators is to be very aware of the problems before even attempting to adapt ourselves to the circumstances. And these include what Showalter (1986: 263) calls a "double-voiced discourse" that "always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritage of both the muted and the dominant".

The old "coffee-brown, black veiled" story-teller from "The Blank Page" explains to her audience: "where the story-teller is loyal, eternal and unswervingly loyal to the story, there, in the end, silence will speak. Where the story has been betrayed, silence is but emptiness. But we, the faithful, when we have spoken our last word, will hear the voice of silence". And so will we, if the translation is loyal to the source text and comes to terms with its otherness; if it succeeds in making the "authentic voice" of Mecha and her script heard; if, finally, it communicates the textual desire and pleasure of a reading, writing and translation experience, thus overcoming the pain caused by the phallic master when Mecha awakens.

Besides attempting to come to terms with some of the many issues at stake in translation, this essay has entertained another purpose, rather similar to that of the consciousness raising so popular among feminists of the sixties and seventies. José Ortega y Gasset once said:

No comprendo cómo cada filólogo no se considera obligado a dejar traducida en esta forma alguna obra antigua. En general, todo escritor debería no menospreciar la ocupación de traducir y complementar su obra personal con alguna versión de lo antiguo, medio o contemporáneo. Es preciso renovar el prestigio de esta labor y encarecerla como un trabajo intelectual de primer orden. Si se hiciese así, llegaría a convertirse el traducir en una disciplina *sui generis* que cultivada con

continuidad segregaría una técnica propia que aumentaría fabulosamente nuestra red de vías inteligentes.²⁰

Society can no longer describe translation as a shadowy presence, or, like Larbaud, think of the translator as a beggar at the church door. This art has acquired an undeniable status throughout the world in recent years and has influenced—as it always has—each linguistic community's development in every way. Since we apparently no longer live in a feudal society, we now depend upon translation for our food, clothing and shelter. J. Ortega y Gasset recognised the importance of this act of communication as an intellectual pursuit, and it is now our duty to place translation and its protagonists in their proper place: translation, the bridge between cultures and socio-economic and political communities, is also our means of survival.

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²⁰ From "Misericordia y esplendor de la traducción", in *Obras completas*.

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There is obviously no need to list the dictionaries and other sources of reference as they form part of the bag and baggage of every translator. I personally consider my readers the most valuable source of information, since they possess a knowledge, an understanding and an intuition which reach far beyond the scope of any reference work. I should thus like to express my gratitude to Dra. Flora Botton and the members of her translation seminar for their constructive criticism of my translated text.

*Appendix 1***Nightmares**

Wait, that's what everybody said, you have to wait because one can never tell in cases like this, and so did Dr. Raimondi, you have to wait, sometimes the patient reacts, specially at Mecha's age, you have to wait, Mr. Botto, yes doctor, but it's been two weeks now and she hasn't come round, two weeks like a corpse, doctor, I know, Mrs. Botto, it's a classic state of coma, there's nothing to do but wait. Lauro waited as well, every time he came back from the university he paused outside in the street before opening the door, he thought, today, yes today, I'll find her awake, she'll have opened her eyes and will be talking to Mum, it can't go on for ever, she can't die at twenty, I'm sure she's sitting up in bed and talking to Mum, but he had to go on waiting, just the same, love, the doctor's going to look in again this evening, everybody says there's nothing to be done. Come and have something to eat, Lauro, your mother'll stay with Mecha, you've got to keep your strength up, don't forget about your exams, we can watch the news meanwhile. But everything there was for a while, where the only thing that never changed, that was exactly the same day after day, was Mecha, the weight of Mecha's body in that bed, Mecha, so skinny and light, a rock dancer and a tennis player, crushed there and crushing everyone for weeks now, a complex viral process, a comatose state, Mr. Botto, impossible to make a prognosis, Mrs. Botto, just keep her going and give her a chance, the young have so much strength, so much will to live. But she can't do anything, doctor, she doesn't understand, she's like, oh God forgive me, I don't know what I'm saying anymore.

Lauro could not really believe it either, it was just like one of Mecha's tricks, she had always pulled the dirtiest tricks on him, sitting on the staircase dressed up as a ghost or hiding a feather duster in his bed, the two of them giggling, inventing jokes, playing as if they were still children. A complex viral process, the abrupt blackout one afternoon after the fever and pains, then sudden silence, her skin ashen, her breathing distant and peaceful. The only peaceful thing there with doctors and equipment and analyses and consultation, until little by little Mecha's joke went from bad to worse, dominating everybody hour by hour, Mrs. Botto's despairing cries giving way to silent sobbing, her anguish confined to the kitchen and bathroom, paternal swearing interrupted by the hour of news and a glance at the paper, Lauro's incredulous rage broken by his trips to the university, his classes, his

meetings, the surge of hope each time he returned from the centre, you'll pay for this, Mecha, you've gone too far, I'll get even with you, you wretch, you just wait and see. The only peaceful person apart from the nurse knitting—they'd left the dog with an uncle—Dr. Raimondi did not come with his colleagues anymore, he looked in for a moment in the evening, even he seemed to feel the weight of Mecha's body that was slowly crushing them more each day, getting them used to waiting, all that was left to do.

The business of the nightmare began the same afternoon that Mrs. Botto could not find the thermometer and the nurse, rather surprised, went to get another from the chemist on the corner. They were talking about it because a thermometer doesn't just disappear when it's being used three times a day, they always talked out loud at Mecha's bedside now, there was no point in whispering as they had at the start since Mecha could not hear them, Dr. Raimondi was sure that the coma had isolated her from her senses, they could say whatever they liked but nothing would change Mecha's indifferent expression. They were still talking about the thermometer when they heard shots from the corner, perhaps even farther away, closer to Gaona. They looked at each other, the nurse shrugged, shots were often heard in the district and elsewhere, and Mrs. Botto was on the verge of saying something about the thermometer when they saw the tremor move through Mecha's hands. It only lasted a second, but they both noticed it, Mrs. Botto let out a cry which the nurse stifled with her hand, Mr. Botto came in from the living-room and the three of them watched the tremor ripple through Mecha's body, a snake swiftly rushing from head to toe, a slight movement under the lids, the twitch that altered her expression, as if she wanted to speak, to complain, the quickening pulse, the slow return to stillness. Telephone, Raimondi, nothing new really, perhaps a ray of hope, though Raimondi would not say, Blessed Mary, let it be true, let my daughter come to, let this purgatory end, dear God. But it did not end, it started again an hour later, then more frequently, as if Mecha were dreaming and her dream was distressing and exasperating, the nightmare returning time and again without her being able to drive it away, to be at her side and watch her and talk to her without anything getting through to her, invaded as she was by that other thing that somehow made the nightmare drag on for everyone there without any possible means of communication, save her, dear God, don't leave her like this, and Lauro who came back from a lecture and stayed at her bedside, a hand on his mother's shoulder while she prayed.

In the evening there was another consultation, they brought a new machine with cupping pads and electrodes, which they stuck on her head and legs, two doctor friends of Raimondi argued at length in the living-room, you have to go on waiting, Mr. Botto, her condition hasn't changed, it would be unwise to look on this as a favourable symptom. But she's dreaming, doctor, she has nightmares, you saw for yourself, it's about to begin again, she feels something and she's suffering so much, doctor. Vegetating, Mrs. Botto, no sign of consciousness, I assure you, you have to wait and don't let this upset you, your daughter's not suffering, I know it's distressing, it'd be better if you left her alone with the nurse till there's some change, try to rest, Mrs. Botto, take the pills I gave you.

Lauro sat up with Mecha until midnight, reading his exam notes from time to time. The sound of the sirens made him remember he should've rung the number Lucero had given him, but he shouldn't ring from the house and he couldn't go out straight after the sirens. He watched the fingers of Mecha's left hand moving slowly, again her eyes seemed to roll under her lids. The nurse suggested he leave the room, there was nothing to do, only wait. "But she's dreaming", Lauro said, "look at her, she's dreaming again". It lasted as long as the sirens outside, her hands seemed to be searching for something, her fingers groping for a handhold in the sheet. Now Mrs. Botto was there once more, she couldn't sleep. Why—the nurse getting cross—haven't you taken the pills Dr. Raimondi gave you? "I can't find them", Mrs. Botto said in a daze, "they were on the bedside table, but I can't find them". The nurse went to look for them, Lauro and his mother looked at each other, Mecha moved her fingers very slightly and they could feel the nightmare was still there, dragging on interminably as if refusing to reach the point when some kind of mercy, of ultimate compassion would awaken her and everybody and so release her from this horror. But she went on dreaming, from one moment to the next her fingers would start moving again. "I can't find them anywhere, Mrs. Botto", the nurse said, "we're all so lost, there's no way of telling where it's all going to end in this house".

Lauro arrived late the following evening and Mr. Botto asked him an almost evasive question without taking his eyes off the World Cup broadcast on the television. "I was with some friends", Lauro said, looking for something to make a sandwich with. "That goal was a beauty", Mr. Botto said, "It's a good job they're showing the match again to get a better look at those championship shots". Lauro did not seem

interested in the goal, gazing at the floor as he ate. "I suppose you know what you're doing, son", Mr. Botto said, his eyes glued on the ball, "but do be careful". Lauro looked up at him somewhat taken aback, the first time his father had let slip such a personal remark. "Don't you worry, Dad", Lauro said, standing up to cut the conversation short.

The nurse had dimmed the nightlight and Mecha was only just visible. On the sofa, Mrs. Botto removed her hands from her face and Lauro kissed her on the forehead.

—She's just the same —Mrs. Botto said. —She's like that all the time, dear. Look, look how her mouth's trembling, poor girl, what can she be seeing, dear God, how can it just go on and on, how can it ...

—Mum.

—But it's impossible, Lauro, nobody else seems to realise, nobody understands she's having a nightmare all the time and she doesn't wake up...

—I do, Mum, I realise. If anything could be done, Raimondi would've done it. You can't help her by sitting here, you need to sleep, to take a tranquilliser and sleep.

He helped her up and went with her to the door. "What was that, Lauro?" stopping dead in her tracks. "Nothing, Mum, just a few shots in the distance, you know". But what did Mrs. Botto really know, why go into that. Now it was late, once he had left her in her bedroom, he would have to go to the shop and ring Lucero from there. He could not find the blue windcheater he liked to wear at night, he looked in the wardrobes in the corridor in case his mother had hung it up there, in the end he put on an old jacket because it was chilly out. Before leaving, he went into Mecha's room for a minute, almost before seeing her in the half-light he felt the nightmare, the tremor in her hands, the secret inhabitant slithering under her skin. Outside the sirens again, he shouldn't go out until later, but then the shop would be closed and he wouldn't be able to phone. Mecha's eyes rolled under her lids as if trying to find a way out, to look at him and to come back from her side. He stroked her forehead with a finger, he was scared of touching her, of adding to the nightmare with any outside stimulus. Her eyes went on rolling in their orbits and Lauro moved away, he had no idea why but he got more and more scared, the thought that Mecha might open her eyes and look at him made him back away. If his father had gone to bed, he could phone from the living-room in a low voice, but Mr. Botto was still listening to the football commentary. "Yes, they talk a lot about that", Lauro thought. He would get up early and phone Lucero before going to the university. In the distance he saw

the nurse coming out of her bedroom carrying something shiny, a syringe or a spoon.

Even time got mixed up or lost in that continuous wait, awake all night or asleep all day to compensate, relatives and friends who popped in and took turns to entertain Mrs. Botto or play dominoes with Mr. Botto, a stand-in nurse because the other had had to leave Buenos Aires for a week, coffee cups nobody could find because they were strewn all over the house, Lauro dropping in whenever he could and leaving without warning, Raimondi who came in without bothering to ring the bell anymore to go through the same old routine, there's no change for the worse, Mr. Botto, it's a process in which all you can do is keep her going, I'm feeding her intravenously, you have to wait. But she's dreaming all the time, doctor, look at her, she hardly ever rests anymore. It's not that at all, Mrs. Botto, you think she's dreaming but these are purely physical reactions, it's difficult to explain because one has to take other factors into account in these cases, anyway, please don't think she's aware of that thing that seems like a dream, most likely those reflexes and all that movement are a good sign, believe me, I'm following her closely, you're the one who needs to rest, Mrs. Botto, let me take your blood pressure.

Lauro found it more and more difficult to come home, what with the journey from the centre and everything that was going on at the university; but, more for his mother's sake than for Mecha's, he turned up whenever he could and stayed for a while, he heard about the same old thing, he chatted with his folks, thinking up things to talk about to get them out of their rut a bit. Each time he went near Mecha's bed he had the same sensation of impossible contact, Mecha so close and seeming to call him, the vague finger signs and the look from within, trying to get out, something that went on and on, a prisoner's message from behind the walls of skin, her call unbearably useless. Every now and then hysteria overcame him, the certainty that Mecha recognised him more than his mother or the nurse, that the nightmare hit its worst when he was watching her, that it was better to leave immediately since he couldn't do anything, that it was useless to talk to her, you darling fool, stop bugging us, please, open your eyes once and for all and get this mean trick over with, you twit Mecha, sis, sis, how long do you intend pulling our legs for, you nut, rascal, send this farce to hell and come here, I've got so much to tell you, sis, you don't know anything about what's going on but I'll tell you anyway, Mecha, simply because you don't understand

anything I'll tell you. All this thought as if in a volley of fear, of a longing to cling to Mecha, not a word spoken because either the nurse or Mrs. Botto was with Mecha, and he there needing to talk to her about so many things, as Mecha was perhaps talking to him from her side, from the closed eyes and the fingers that drew useless letters on the sheets.

It was Thursday, not because they knew or cared what day it was anymore, but the nurse had mentioned it while they were drinking coffee in the kitchen, Mr. Botto remembered that there was to be a special newscast, Mrs. Botto that her sister from Rosario had rung to say she would arrive on Thursday or Friday. No doubt Lauro's exams were about to begin, he had gone out at eight without saying goodbye, leaving a note in the living-room, he wasn't sure he'd be back for supper, they shouldn't wait for him in any case. He was not back for supper, for once the nurse succeeded in persuading Mrs. Botto to go to bed early, Mr. Botto had looked out of the living-room window after the T.V. quiz show, volleys of machine-gun fire could be heard coming from Plaza Irlanda, suddenly it was quiet, almost too quiet, not even a police car, better go to bed, that woman who'd answered all the questions on the ten o'clock show was fantastic, what she didn't know about ancient history, almost as if she was living at the time of Julius Caesar, in the end culture was a better deal than being an auctioneer. Nobody found out that the door did not open all night long, that Lauro had not returned to his room, in the morning they thought he was sleeping in after some exam or that he was studying before breakfast, it was ten before they realised he was not there. "Don't worry", Mr. Botto said, "I'm sure he spent the night celebrating something or other with his friends". Now was the time for Mrs. Botto to help the nurse wash and change Mecha, the lukewarm water and the cologne, cotton wool and sheets, midday already and no Lauro, but it's funny, Eduardo, that he hasn't even rung, it's not like him, remember the time of that end-of-term party, he called at nine, he was afraid we might be worried, and he was younger then. "The boy's wound up about his exams", Mr. Botto said, "you'll see, he'll be here any moment now, he always turns up for the one o'clock news". But Lauro was not there at one, he missed the sports news and the newsflash about another subversive attempt thwarted by the prompt intervention of the forces of law and order, nothing new, a gradual drop in temperature, heavy rain in the Andes. It was past seven when the nurse came to look for Mrs. Botto who was still phoning their acquaintances, Mr. Botto was

waiting for a police superintendent friend to phone him to see if he had heard anything, he kept asking Mrs. Botto to leave the line free but she went on leafing through her phone book and ringing friends, perhaps Lauro had stayed the night with Uncle Fernando or had returned to the university for another exam. "Get off the phone, please", Mr. Botto asked once more, "don't you realise that maybe the boy's ringing right now and the line's busy all the time, what do you expect him to do from a public phone, when they're not out of order you have to give others a chance". The nurse kept on insisting and Mrs. Botto went to see Mecha, all of a sudden she had started to move her head, every now and then she turned it slowly from side to side, the hair falling over her face should be combed back. Let Dr. Raimondi know at once, difficult to find him in the early evening but his wife rang at nine to say that he was on his way. "It won't be easy for him to get through", the nurse said, coming in from the chemist with a box of injections, "they've cordoned off the whole area, no-one knows why, listen to the sirens". Hardly moving away from Mecha who went on shaking her head in a slow, obstinate refusal, Mrs. Botto called Mr. Botto, no, no-one knew anything, no doubt the boy couldn't get through either but they'd let Raimondi by because of his doctor's plates.

— It's not that, Eduardo, it's not that, I'm sure something's happened to him, we should've heard something by now, Lauro always ... — Look, Luisa —Mr. Botto said— watch how she's moving her hand and her arm as well, the first time she's moved her arm, Luisa, perhaps ...

— But it's worse than ever, Eduardo, haven't you noticed she's still having hallucinations, as though defending herself against ... Do something, Rosa, you can't leave her like that, I'm going to ring the Romeros who may have some news, their girl studied with Lauro, please give her an injection, Rosa, I'll be back in a minute, or, better still, you ring Eduardo, ask them, go on, hurry up.

In the living-room Mr. Botto started to dial and then stopped; he hung up. What if right now Lauro, what could the Romeros know about Lauro, better wait a while. Raimondi had not arrived, they must have stopped him at the corner, he would be explaining, Rosa could not give Mecha another injection, the tranquilliser was too strong, better wait till the doctor arrives. Bent over Mecha, brushing the hair from her useless eyes, Mrs. Botto began to reel, Rosa just had time to draw up a chair, to help her sit down like a dead weight. The siren, near Gaona, was growing louder when Mecha raised her eyelids, the eyes, coated with a film which had accumulated over the weeks, gazed fixedly at the ceiling, then turned

slowly towards Mrs. Botto who was screaming, clasping her hands to her breast and screaming. Rosa struggled to pull her away, calling desperately to Mr. Botto who now arrived and stood stock still at the foot of the bed looking at Mecha, everything seemed focused on Mecha's eyes, which drifted from Mrs. Botto to Mr. Botto, from the nurse to the ceiling, Mecha's hands rising slowly up past her waist to meet just above, the body convulsed in a spasm, perhaps because her ears were now hearing the multiplication of sirens, the blows on the door which shook the house, the shouted orders and the crackle of splintering wood following the volley of machine-gun fire, the wails of Mrs. Botto, the thrust of the throng of bodies surging in, everything as if in time for Mecha's awakening, everything timed so that the nightmare might end and Mecha might at last come back to reality, to the beauty of life.