Someone Speaks Your Name, by Luis García Montero

Fidelidad a la voz del poeta en una traducción de su prosa

Katherine M. King

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

University of Washington

2016

Committee:

Anthony Geist

Donald Gilbert-Santamaria

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Spanish and Portuguese

University of Washington

Abstract

*Someone Speaks Your Name,*by Luis García Montero: Fidelidad a la voz del poeta en una traducción de su prosa

Katherine M. King

Chair of Supervisory Committee:

Professor Anthony Geist

Spanish and Portuguese

Luis García Montero destaca como uno de los más importantes y populares poetas de la España contemporánea. Pero a pesar de sus muchos premios literarios, su popularidad y su perfil como un personaje literario famoso tanto en América Latina como en España, muy poca de su obra ha sido traducida para publicación en los importantes mercados de lengua inglesa, que son el Reino Unido, los Estados Unidos, Canadá y la India. El propósito de esta tesina es demostrar la importancia de hacer llegar la obra de García Montero a los lectores y académicos en inglés. La traducción literaria es una forma de leer un texto meticulosamente. Como una estrategia para analizar la fuerza y riqueza de la voz poética de García Montero en su prosa, he traducido al inglés una selección de *Alguien dice tu nombre*, de su tercera y última novela. Muchos

investigadores y críticos han escrito sobre la poesía de García Montero y su enorme influencia en toda una generación de escritores en la lengua española. Pero casi nadie ha analizado sus obras en prosa. Es una falta significante porque García Montero emplea y experimenta con muchos géneros y plataformas en sus constantes esfuerzos por evolucionar su voz poética. Su novela *Alguien dice tu nombre* juega un papel importante en esta evolución. La novela es un homenaje a la rica historia de la literatura española y es una carta de amor a todos los poetas y novelistas de esa larga historia que le han inspirado. Queda patente la atención detallada del poeta al vocabulario, juego de palabras, ritmos, sintaxis, metáforas e imágenes. Pero con todo eso, sigue siendo una novela regida por un argumento dramático con una narrativa de suspenso que arrastra al lector hacia un final sorprendente. Es un ejemplo perfecto de cómo García Montero desarrolla la maestría de su arte, experimentando y evolucionando sus capacidades creativas.

Introducción: Fidelidad a la voz del poeta en una traducción de su prosa

Someone Speaks Your Name, by Luis García Montero

Translated by Katherine King

Luis García Montero es uno de los poetas más populares y reconocidos de la España contemporánea. Es también un novelista, un profesor universitario, un incansable conferenciante, un ensayista, un comentarista de la radio y televisión, un blogger, un artista de rap, un activista político y, brevemente en 2015, un candidato para un puesto político. (Perdió.) A pesar de sus muchos premios literarios, su popularidad y su destacado perfil público en España y América Latina, la traducción de su obra al inglés para publicación en los importantes mercados de lengua inglesa, que son el Reino Unido, los Estados Unidos, Canadá y la India, ha sido escasa.

El propósito de esta tesina es demostrar la importancia de hacer llegar la obra de García Montero a los lectores y académicos en inglés. La traducción literaria es una forma de leer un texto meticulosamente. Como una estrategia para analizar la fuerza y riqueza de la voz poética de García Montero en su prosa, he traducido al inglés una selección de *Alguien dice tu nombre*, de su tercera y última novela. Muchos investigadores y críticos han escrito sobre la poesía de García Montero y su enorme influencia en una toda una generación de escritores en lengua española. Pero casi nadie ha analizado sus obras en prosa. Es una falta significante porque García Montero emplea y experimenta con muchos géneros y plataformas en sus constantes esfuerzos por evolucionar su voz poética. Su novela *Alguien dice tu nombre* juega un papel importante en esta evolución. La novela es un homenaje a la rica historia de la literatura española y es una carta de amor a todos los poetas y novelistas de esa larga historia que le han inspirado. Queda patente la

atención detallada del poeta al vocabulario, juego de palabras, ritmos, sintaxis, metáforas e imágenes. Pero con todo eso, sigue siendo una novela regida por un argumento dramático con una estructura narrativa dramática que arrastra al lector hacia un final sorprendente. Es un ejemplo perfecto de cómo García Montero desarrolla la maestría de su arte, experimentando y evolucionando sus capacidades creativas.

García Montero y la literatura de España del siglo XX

García Montero es uno de los fundadores y líderes del movimiento poético llamado *Poesía de la experiencia* que nació en el alba de la transición democrática en España, unos años después de la muerte del dictador Francisco Franco en 1975. Apareció como una reacción al movimiento literario previo en el que destacaron el culturalismo y la experimentación vanguardista. El objetivo de la poesía de la experiencia ha sido conectar la poesía a la vida real, comunicar verdades a través de una interpretación de mentiras, crear un "yo" familiar pero distante. La poesía de la experiencia explora las emociones a una distancia para poder acercarse a la realidad de las emociones. García Montero denomina esta nueva realidad como "la otra sentimentalidad". Ha llegado a ser el movimiento poético que define la creatividad en España al final de siglo XX y comienzos del siglo XXI.

España comenzó el siglo XX con la Generación de 98 y el Modernismo. En los años 20 entró la denominada Generación del '27, un grupo de poetas, dramaturgos, artistas y novelistas que produjo una cantidad y calidad extraordinaria de creación artística, la época literaria más importante en España desde el Siglo de Oro. El grupo destacó por su diversidad estilística y sus miembros – Rafael Alberti, Federico García Lorca, Luis Cernuda, Vicente Aleixandre entre otros – se convirtieron en la fuente de inspiración para las generaciones que les siguieron,

especialmente para García Montero. Después de la Guerra Civil española y la consolidación de la dictadura de Franco, la generación de poetas que nació durante y justo después de la guerra empezó a desarrollar un nuevo estilo de poesía, que fue lírica y elíptica. Este estilo fue en gran parte una reacción a la censura del gobierno. No fue conveniente escribir de la política ni expresar opiniones abiertas. Luego, empezando en 1970, otro grupo entró en escena llamado los Novísimos. Con Franco ya enfermo y la censura reducida, este nuevo grupo de poetas diseñó un acercamiento a la poesía que fue más experimental y "culturista", influenciada por la cultura "pop" de figuras como Andy Warhol y los nuevos medios electrónicos de comunicación.

Fue en reacción a esta poesía culturista que en los primeros años 80s, García Montero y sus amigos poetas Javier Egea, Álvaro Salvador, y Felipe Benítez Reyes crearon otro movimiento nuevo que nombraron *La Otra Sentimentalidad.* El concepto fue publicado primero por el académico norteamericano Robert Langbaum en su libro de 1957, *Poetry of Experience*. El nuevo movimiento español no fue exactamente como la fórmula original de Langbaum: enfatiza un estilo que es a la vez ficcional y autobiográfico. El "yo" es una voz poética que tiene una complicidad con el lector, pero permanece separado. La relación es muy específica, que el poeta describe mejor en su propio poema "Espejo dime," de la colección *Poesía urbana: Antología, 1980-2010*.

"Espejo dime"

Déjame que responda, lector, a tus preguntas,
mirándote a los ojos, con amistad fingida,
porque esto es la poesía: dos soledades juntas.

Esta técnica literaria entremezcla la experiencia personal con la colectiva, la experiencia histórica con el compromiso social:

"Yo soy el asunto de mis poemas. Pero dentro de mí hay mucho más que una identidad individual. Mi literatura es cívica porque se plantea las relaciones de un individuo con el mundo en el que vive. De forma especial me interesa el amor. Creo que los sentimientos forman parte de la historia, como las constituciones o las batallas. El amor es el descubrimiento del número dos. Creo que la intimidad es también un lugar en el que se juega la experiencia de la emancipación." (García Montero, de una entrevista no publicada con el autor, 2014)

La poesía de García Montero es accesible, pero esconde una complejidad interna. Usa imágenes y temas cotidianos, y ofrece detalles autobiográficos aparentemente íntimos, pero la complicidad depende de la formación de una relación entre el lector y el "yo" ficticio del poeta. Este "yo" es una mentira, una ficción que sirve a la vez para conectar y distanciar al "yo" y del lector. Este concepto de complicidad es profético porque anticipa los medios sociales de nuestra época digital, que también a la vez conecta y distancia a los participantes.

La novela

En, *Alguien dice tu nombre*, García Montero extiende su visión poética a una novela cuidadosamente forjada en la cual las palabras, especialmente los nombres, son protagonistas junto con el narrador. El argumento se centra en la historia de un joven universitario en Granada en 1963, cuando apenas empezaba a despertar el país a una posible transición democrática después de Franco, que aún vivía y regía. El narrador de la historia autobiográfica es León Egea Extremara, un joven que acaba de terminar su primer año en la Universidad de Granada. Su profesor/mentor le ha ayudado a conseguir un trabajo para el verano con una editorial de enciclopedias, para que no tuviera que volver a su pueblo natal en la provincia de Granada donde se ha hecho enemigo del alcalde, un aliado político de los franquistas, y de su hijo. La narrativa

toma la forma de un diario personal. León aspira a ser escritor, y propone usar el diario para practicar su arte y anotar las aventuras del verano viviendo solo en la ciudad y trabajando en su primero empleo oficial. Su mentor le dice que "aprender a escribir es aprender a mirar" y esto es el hilo conector de todos los temas de la historia. Es una metáfora para España después de muchos años de insolación política, económica y cultural bajo la dictadura. Es una nación que necesita volver a aprender a mirar. Lo conseguirá a través de las palabras, a través de la literatura.

La traducción

La voz: Traducir la novela presenta varios desafíos. El primero y más importante es mantener la fidelidad a la visión poética de García Montero. El traductor tiene que recrear el lenguaje de "la otra sentimentalidad" en una manera que replica la experiencia de la complicidad entre el lector y el "yo" poético. García Montero logra este efecto en el original poniendo en boca del protagonista una serie de apartes filosóficos. De repente, interrumpe la narrativa para introducir, o reforzar, un tema. En el siguiente ejemplo, el tema es la indiferencia. Es uno los temas centrales de la novela porque España bajo Franco requería una indiferencia del ciudadano normal para poder sobrevivir a una dictadura que no permitía la independencia de pensamiento ni activismo de ningún tipo. Para vivir una vida tranquila, los ciudadanos se veían obligados a ignorar algunas realidades desagradables, como la falta de libertad. En la escena siguiente, León, de mal humor y con una furia adolescente encima, se ha lanzado a la calle para desahogarse. Pasea por las plazas y callejones de Granada un domingo caloroso por la mañana, criticando todo lo que ve. Cuando observa a los matrimonios felices comprando sus paquetes de pasteles como si no hubiera problemas en el mundo, se enfurece con su indiferencia terca ante los problemas de

España y citando a su profesor/mentor lanza un largo monólogo interior sobre la naturaleza del mal, el poder, la mediocridad y la indiferencia.

"'Madrid is a city of more than a million cadavers, according to the latest statistics.' That's what Dámaso Alonso wrote and that's what Ignacio Rubio read to us in class, and that's what I'm thinking right now, surrounded by flowers, pastries, couples, good things and good people that today seem to me unbearable." (García Montero/2014:41)

"*Madrid es una ciudad de más de un millón de cadáveres, según las últimas estadísticas*. Eso escribió Dámaso Alonso, eso leyó Ignacio Rubio en clase, eso pienso yo ahora, rodeado de flores, de pasteles, de matrimonios, de buenas cosas y buena gente que hoy me parece insoportable."

Esta reflexión, introducida a través del poema de Dámaso Alonso "Insomnio" (1944) es el comienzo de un largo discurso explicando los antecedentes del protagonista, especialmente su pelea con el hijo del alcalde de su pueblo sobre el tratamiento cruel de este contra un pobre pastor del pueblo. Un lector en España entendería con facilidad el contexto y juego de todos estos personajes – el alcalde franquista, el hijo mimado, el pastor pobre y pasivo – y lo que representan en ese lugar y ese momento de la historia de España. Es decir, existía un régimen represivo que obligaba la pasividad de los cuidadanos hasta que la indiferencia se volvía una defensa psicológica para sobrevivir bajo una dictadura. León, en su voz de adolecente frustrado, denuncia la pasividad frente a la injusticia y acaba declarando que prefiere a los malos - (el alcalde) que hacen algo, que toman acción -- a los indiferentes y los pasivos que no hacen nada más que comprar pasteles. En traducción al inglés, lo más importante es transmitir la voz del "yo" ficticio del protagonista adolescente, para ayudar al lector a imaginar una España adolescente gritando "¡El mundo no es justo! ¡Hay que hacer algo!".

La estrategia poética que emplea García Montero en su poesía es también visible aquí. Las escenas e imágenes son cotidianas pero discordes, a veces casi surrealistas. El efecto es desequilibrar sutilmente al lector mientras al mismo tiempo refuerza la distancia entre el lector y

la voz poética. Un ejemplo es la escena entre León y su jefe cuando viajan en tren a un pueblo para vender enciclopedias. El tren de provincias es viejo, lento, ruidoso y va lleno trabajadores chismeando. Por la ventana, León observa el terreno quemado por una sequía prolongada y lanza otro monólogo interior comparando la árida tierra afuera y el exuberante paisaje de lenguaje e imágenes dentro del tren.

"I try to focus on the scenery, concentrate on the squalid river, the bridges, the poplars, the clusters of houses around small station stops. The truth is the conversations offer up more goats, rabbits, hares, sparrows and doves than does the countryside framed by the train window. The arid landscape displays none of the lushness of the gossip inside the train. Suddenly, a wedding makes its escape and dashes down the aisle of the carriage or a bitter property line dispute takes flight between the seats." (27)

"Intento fijarme en el paisaje, concentrarme en el río escuálido, los puentes, las alamedas, las casas que rodean las pequeñas estaciones o los apeaderos. La verdad es que las conversaciones ofrecen más cabras, conejos, liebres, gorriones y palomas que el campo enmarcado por la ventanilla. En la tierra seca falta la hierba verde que le sobra al parloteo. De pronto una boda se escapa y corre por el pasillo del vagón o vuela entre los asientos la disputa más enconada por la linde de una finca."

"Extranjerizante." Esta estrategia de traducción explicada por Venuti (2012, p. 277) explora hasta qué punto el traductor debe ajustar la voz del idioma original en el proceso de traducir al nuevo idioma. Una traducción extranjerizante, según Venuti, resiste la dominación del nuevo idioma (en este caso el inglés) y permite la apariencia de la cultura original en el nuevo idioma. Una traducción domesticada disminuye un texto haciéndolo parecer como si la versión en el idioma nuevo fuera el original. Con *Alguien dice tu nombre,* he tomado la decisión de aplicar el consejo de Venuti en parte, pero no en gran parte. Lo cotidiano de García Montero tiene que resonar como cotidiano para un lector en inglés, pero lo discorde tiene que mantenerse también. Abajo detallo algunos ejemplos de cómo he incorporado oportunamente lo "extranjerizante" en mi traducción de esta novela.

En particular, los nombres son sumamente importantes, como indica el título. Esto incluye los nombres de personas, lugares e instituciones. He mantenido todos los nombres en su original en español, lo cual puede hacer pausar a algunos lectores en inglés hasta que entiendan el significado del nombre por el contexto. Por ejemplo, he retenido el nombre de la Guardia Civil en su original. Bajo Franco, la Guardia Civil era un brazo represivo cuasi militar del régimen. El nombre es bastante conocido en toda Europa, análogo al nombre del Gestapo de Hitler. Gestapo, un acrónimo para las palabras en alemán que significan la Policía Secreta del Estado, es un nombre reconocido en todo el mundo en su idioma original. Otro importante nombre en su original es el título del Caudillo usado como sinónimo para Franco. Es posible que lectores no hagan la conexión inmediatamente entre Caudillo y Franco, pero pronto por el contexto se van enterando. Así el lector en inglés se va convirtiendo lo "extraño" (palabra extranjera) en lo conocido. Lo mismo ocurre con el nombre de un personaje menor pero importante de la narrativa, Pedro el Pastor. Traducir este nombre al inglés - Peter the Shepherd o Pedro the Shepherd – sería una domesticación de término que cambiaría por completo la imagen transmitida en el nuevo idioma. La palabra "pastor" es reconocible para muchos lectores en inglés, inclusive en su doble sentido de un cuidador de ovejas y un cuidador de almas.

Juego de palabras y un homenaje a la literatura: *Alguien dice tu nombre* es una carta amorosa a la literatura. Aquí aparecen todos los grandes de la historia literaria de España y algunos del mundo, incluyendo a Unamuno, Alberti, Galdós, Alonso, Garcilaso, Góngora, Fray Luis, Tolstoi, Neruda y García Lorca. García Montero nombra a su protagonista Egea en honor a su amigo y co-fundador del movimiento *Poesía de la experiencia* Javier Egea. Muchos traductores ya aceptan que la búsqueda por internet es una parte integral de la lectura de libros en el siglo XXI. Pocos se sienten obligados a clarificar iconos culturales en la ficción porque es tan

fácil que el lector lo busque por su cuenta. Sigo esta misma dirección con esta traducción. Los lectores que se preguntan por qué el protagonista se siente tan estimulado por su lectura de *Anna Karenina* y tan furioso con Tolstoi solo tiene que buscar la novela y o información sobre Tolstoi en el internet.

García Montero ha creado un protagonista con manías. León insiste en escribir números en letras, se niega a usar mayúsculas cuando escribe nombres relacionados con de la religión católica. El papel de la enciclopedia y su distribución en la España rural de la época es una metáfora para la falta de educación y erudición no solo en el campo, sino entre la clase dominante bajo la dictadura. La importancia reside en los nombres de las cosas, nombres que son manipulados, nombres que nunca se dicen, nombres que finalmente se hablan francamente. Por lo tanto, la traducción de los nombres es el reto más difícil y más importante de esta obra.

El protagonista como metáfora para una España que despierta

El narrador, León Egea, tiene 19 años y está a punto de empezar su segundo año en la universidad. Su voz y su vocabulario pertenecen a la Andalucía de los años 60. Quiere ser escritor. Le sobra amor propio y al mismo tiempo sufre de una inseguridad profunda. Por falta de experiencia es ingenuo y dogmático y sus opiniones y sus humores cambian a menudo. Es un retrato de un adolescente que refleja la sociedad española acercándose al final de la dictadura. España había vivido una existencia claustral bajo Franco. La información, opinión y educación estaban estrictamente controladas. La iglesia católica, las instituciones militares y el gobierno de Franco jugaban el papel de padre estricto. El ciudadano típico estaba mal informado, resentido del control gubernamental, deseoso de librarse de control, pero temeroso por el posible castigo como resultado de sus acciones. Este despertar social está reflejado en los miedos y enojos del

joven León. En la traducción al inglés, es crucial que las palabras y acciones de León sean leídas como adolescentes y que sean vistas como muy de su lugar y época, la España de 1963.

El nombre

Todo se centra en el nombre en esta novela y los nombres están cambiando.

"Even the loners, we hear our names spoken thousands, millions of times. The first thing we do when we want to hide is conceal our names. The first thing we do when we meet someone is speak our name. That's why you should repeat names over and over. It triggers sympathy or fear, an unconscious relationship of dependency." (33)

"Aunque seamos muy solitarios, oímos nuestros nombres miles, millones de veces. Lo primero que hacemos para escondernos es ocultar nuestro nombre. Lo primero que hacemos para presentarnos es decir nuestro nombre. Por eso conviene pronunciar los nombres muchas veces. Desatan simpatía o miedo, una relación de dependencia en el inconsciente."

Con estas palabras de su jefe, León empieza su entrenamiento como vendedor de enciclopedias. Los nombres son herramientas tácticas para vender, pero también sirven de metáfora para el destino. Como sugiere el título del libro, cuando alguien dice tu nombre, te conviertes en cómplice. Puede ser estrategia de venta, una novela o un movimiento político, si te nombran eres cómplice. Todos los nombres tienen significados múltiples, empezando con el protagonista, León. León explica que su padre maldice el día que nombró a su hijo León porque el nombre influenció su carácter. Los que hablan español verán en seguida que León es lo mismo que la fiera león. Para el lector en inglés, hacer la conexión de León a "lion" es más complicado. Decidí dejar que el texto se explicara por el contexto, en vez de forzar una traducción. Una y otra vez, es el contexto que proporciona la respuesta. La tarea del traductor es no meterse en medio.

"Although to be honest, the biggest impact on my personality is my first name: León. It's funny, but Vicente's name-based sales technique agrees with my father's perspective. He curses the day he named me León. Too much ferociousness for a person to live a quiet life."

"Aunque, está claro, lo que pesa más en mi carácter es el nombre: León. Tiene gracia, la filosofía y las técnicas de ventas de Vicente Fernández Fernández dan la razón a mi padre. Maldice el día en el que me puso León. Demasiada fiereza para que una persona viva tranquila. "

La palabra "ferociousness" situada próxima al nombre "León" permite al lector que no entiende español hacer la conexión entre un nombre que suena más o menos como "lion" y la "ferociousness" de ese animal. Más adelante en el texto, hay una oportunidad para hacer esta conexión aún más explícita, ampliando la técnica de significado por aproximación a otras palabras posiblemente "extranjeras."

"Vicente asked me if I knew the name of the Minister of Education. Yes, I said: Humberto Vaca. Vicente thinks that Humberto's taste for honors and homage, partly inspired by the "H" in his name, is really due to his anguish over his family's surname. My boy, said Vicente, it's just not the same to be named 'Lion' as to be surnamed 'Cow'…." (34)

"¿Sabes cómo se llama el ministro de Educación? Eso me preguntó. Yo le respondí que sí: Humberto Vaca. Vicente piensa que su gusto por los honores y los homenajes, apoyado sin duda en la letra *H,* se debe a una reacción angustiosa frente a la idea de apellidarse Vaca. Hijo mío, dice Vicente, nunca será lo mismo llamarse León que apellidarse Vaca…."

A estas alturas, el lector puede percibir el juego de palabras que une León con "lion." La extensión de este juego a la palabra "vaca" en relación a "cow" es plenamente visible. Son conexiones que se introducen sutilmente, casi inconscientemente, sin interrumpir la narrativa. Esta estrategia de traducción también logra enfatizar la complicidad, la soledad compartida de García Montero, entre el lector y la voz poética porque nos encontramos dentro de la cabeza de León, dentro de sus pensamientos, leyendo mientras él escribe en su diario. Pero al mismo tiempo estamos fuera observando el proceso de sus pensamientos en el momento que ocurren.

García Montero emplea varias técnicas en el desarrollo del tema de "nombre como destino" en la novela. Una que es interesante y difícil de traducir es su uso del soliloquio. Destaca el ejemplo de León, en plena bronca interna, en un largo soliloquio cuando se burla de la

estrategia de ventas de su colega Vicente. La estrategia de Vicente consiste en repetir el nombre del cliente una y otra vez, conectando la letra inicial del nombre con palabras con la misma letra. En su soliloquio, León simula una conversación con León Tolstoi, inspirado por su lectura de *Anna Karenina*, en la cual intenta convencer a Tolstoi a comprar una enciclopedia citando de ella una larga lista de palabras que comienzan con "L", la letra que comienza el nombre de los dos. La lista empieza a ser absurda, y León se cansa.

"What can I say, Leon? That this whole exercise is really for losers? A loser is an idiot written with an *L*. It's a marvelous letter which you can use to think about lice or leprosy or a handful of seminal liquid or the lies that everyone tells about the word *liberty* or the impossibility of healthy living when there is no water…." (40)

"¿Qué le voy a decir a usted, León? Que esto es un ejercicio propio de lerdos. Un lerdo es como un tonto escrito con *L*. Una letra maravillosa para pensar en el huevo del piojo llamado liendre, y en la enfermedad llamada lepra, y en la mano manchada de lefa, y en las mentiras que aquí se cuentan sobre la palabra *libertad*, y en los problemas de limpieza cuando falta el agua…."

Afortunadamente, la mayoría de las palabras "l" tienen una equivalencia fácil en inglés: lerdo, letra, liendre, lepra, libertad. Lefa, un término vulgar sin fácil traducción a otra palabra que empieza con "l" he convertido en "seminal liquid" una solución imperfecta que mantiene el simbolismo y la aliteración. Es un momento importante en la narrativa porque aclara la razón detrás de la bronca dirigida hacia Tolstoi. Antes de lanzar su bronca, León se masturbaba mientras leía *Karenina* después de lo cual se siente solo y frustrado. La escena es una metáfora para una España que se siente estimulada por la cultura extranjera pero frustrada de no poder consumir su propia relación con la literatura. León expresa esta frustración en su argumento de venta a Tolstoi. Esta bronca adolescente y vulgar es parte del despertar de León, de su creciente conciencia de la injusticia y su furia con la indiferencia del pueblo. Todo se expresa a través del lenguaje de los nombres.

Consuelo, el "confort", es la secretaria de la editorial y es el interés amoroso del protagonista. Consuelo le lleva casi veinte años a León y es misteriosa y una poeta secreta. Consuelo se convierte en otro tipo de mentor para León. El despertar sexual de Leon es un enlace a su despertar político, que a su vez es un enlace al paso de tiempo, desde un presente "detenido en el tiempo" como el calendario en el bar que frecuenta hacia un futuro que poco a poco empieza de nuevo a marcar el tiempo. Son las palabras – los nombres, la poesía, la literatura – que impulsan la acción de la novela. En la siguiente escena Consuelo ha invitado a León a tomar una cerveza en su casa, donde le recita poemas de Pablo Neruda. León intenta hacer una buena impresión inventando para contar a Consuelo una descripción de su propio carácter usando frases ridículamente "eruditas".

"Solitude is the underwear of my conscience, my most intimate state of being, my form of existence, I say. I start to feel a little bit ridiculous. I'm talking as if I were trying to write a scholarly paper about my character, as if I had gotten completely carried away writing in my journal. I'm furious at falling into my own infantile trap. The underwear of my conscience!"

"La soledad es la ropa interior de mi consciencia, mi condición más íntima, mi manera de ser, digo. Empiezo a sentir que estoy haciendo el ridículo, que hablo como si quisiera escribir una redacción escolar sobre mi carácter, como si se me hubiera ido la mano en la escritura de mi cuaderno. Me da rabia el infantilismo en el que he caído. ¡La ropa interior de mi consciencia!"

Conclusión

El narrador León Egea es una metáfora para la España de los años 60. Representa un país a punto de entrar en el siglo XX, media siglo tarde, con un despertar sexual, intelectual y político. El complejo juego de palabras que emplea García Montero para conseguir esta representación es complicado de traducir. La solución más eficaz reside en emplear una traducción selectivamente **"**extranjerizante" que permite que el contexto sutilmente dibujado por el autor comunique el sentido de las palabras. García Montero es sobre todo poeta. Su voz poética luce en toda su obra, incluyendo esta novela. Como toda su obra, *Alguien dice tu nombre*

es accesible, divertida y llena de momentos muy peculiares. La amenidad acomodadiza de la narrativa esconde una gran complejidad de signos y significados. Para el traductor – y el lector – es esencial que no se pierda ni la complejidad ni la amenidad en traducción.[1]

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[1]Traduje las primeras 1,850 palabras de *Alguien dice tu nombre* en la clase "Literary Translation" de la Profesora Cynthia Steele en el Departamento de Literatura Comparada de la Universidad de Washington en el cuatrimestre de invierno de 2015. El extracto completo fue publicado por *World Literature Today* en julio de 2015. http://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/blog/someone-speaks-your-name-luis-garcia-montero

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Someone Speaks Your Name[1]

By Luis García Montero

Translated by Katherine King

The bar's calendar is suspended in time and space. Nothing changes. No one can escape from here. It shows the nineteenth of April. It doesn't show the last eleven days of April or May or June. As Vicente Fernández pointed out later, it doesn't show the last two hundred and fifty-six days of nineteen sixty, or nineteen sixty-one or nineteen sixty-two, or the first one hundred and eighty-one days of nineteen sixty-three. I prefer art to science and I prefer to write out numbers with letters…although when I write poetry, I count out the syllables with numbers. "Vivimos en un tiempo detenido," eleven syllables, that's a hendecasyllable. "Ángel con grandes alas por cadenas" is another. Eleven syllables.

Today is the first of July of nineteen sixty-three. That ancient calendar, practically prehistoric, is a good metaphor for our paralyzed nation. I think I'll be here fairly often in the Lepanto café bar over the next three months. It's right next door to Editorial Universo, on Calle Lepanto. My Literature professor told me that learning to write is learning to see, the ability to look and perceive the meaning of things. I'm looking at a calendar whose dates have stopped changing, and I think of a dried up nation, a city that is hot and stunted, futureless. A wooden frame with grooves to slide in the wood squares with numbers for days and the wood slats with names for the months: I'm almost grateful for this clunky old calendar. The photos on the paper calendars that permeate the bars and shops around here are disgusting. At least here there aren't any images of holy week processions, no virgins, no saints, no starlets, no tacky women posing

with bottles of Soberano cognac, which is a man's drink. I enjoy denying the church its capital letters. My Literature professor says that to become a writer you need to choose your obsessions. It gives you personality, worldliness. Artists are obsessives. Juan Ramón Jimenez used to write "j" in words that everyone else spells with a "g": antholojy, jeneration, relijion. It's painful to look at but that's the point, to write and cause pain. I am the master of the premeditated spelling error. Some professors condemn my use of the lower case to write *god*. But that's my obsession, my insolence. In my town, I'm infamous for my insolence. I want my writing to be infamous for insolence too.

A clunky old calendar with an air of dignity. But out of time. The Lepanto café bar fills up with seekers of water and coffee, Vicente Fernández greets them, people come and go– but there, inside, time stands still. We are suffering the heat and the drought of a Paleolithic summer, dense and senseless. My Literature professor likes Valle-Inclán because he produced unforgettable three-word adjective combinations. Madrid was absurd, brilliant and starving. The Marquise de Brandomín was ugly, catholic and sentimental. Summertime in this city is like Brandomín's life: dried up, dense and senseless. Time will not pass, no one will pull the pages off the calendars, we will continue on the same day, the same month, the same year. It doesn't matter that a new school year's starting, that the cold's coming, that the mountains wake up white with snow, that my parents are getting older, that I'm putting up with more Latin and language history courses in the Department of Philosophy and Letters. Time will not march on and we will inhabit a Paleolithic city, dense and senseless, a futureless city, riveted to a calendar that cannot move.

That's a pretty good metaphor to kick off my stories about this summer. Today, Monday, the first of July, nineteen sixty-three, I climbed the stairs to the Universo offices. Gloomy, worn

and asthmatic, that describes the stairs at Number Seven Calle Lepanto. I had a noon appointment with Vicente Fernández. The secretary, a pleasant woman, interrupted her phone call to tell me that Don Vicente had gone down for a coffee. She said I could wait for him there in his office or go look for him in the Lepanto café bar. I decided the bar was the better option. The ceiling fan in the office served only to stir up sadness. The secretary turned to concentrate again on her conversation.

"Yes, you said you're in Motril, right? Your name? Yes, please. Your telephone number? As soon as someone from sales is available he will contact you. Excuse me? No, I don't have that information, but …. In half an hour. Of course. Thank you."

A metal bookshelf, walls with chipped paint, the smell of age and of yellowing wall paper, two closed doors, a secretary talking on the phone and a couple of battered armchairs too rickety to sit in… no further reasons needed to go down and check out the café bar. That and the fact that I didn't have breakfast yet. My Literature professor is partial to the intelligent use of humor when writing about pretty much anything. Go for the smile, even at the saddest moments. To write is to seduce. Humor with tears, humor with hunger and café con leche.

I went down to the café bar to find the calendar waiting for me, suspended on the nineteenth of April, nineteen sixty. What did I do on that day three years ago? My Literature professor insists that to write is to negotiate with memory. I have a good memory, I'm no good at forgetting, I remember the favors and the offenses. My mother thinks that holding a grudge is for spiteful people. I'm not spiteful. I forgive, but I don't forget. I don't like Don Mateo, the professor who saw fit to throw me out of his class on the nineteenth of April, nineteen sixty, because he decided he didn't like me and expelled me five and a half times during the two

classes I had to put up with him. Five and a half times. One day he threw me out, then had a change of heart and followed me out into the hallway to ask me to come back.

"Come on, León, I don't want to throw you out today. It's your onomástica. "

I don't know if it was the nineteenth of April, nineteen fifty-nine, or the nineteenth of April, nineteen sixty. He expelled me from class and then pardoned me, because it was my saint's day, the nineteenth of April, the same day that hangs forever on the wall in the Lepanto café bar. There, every day is my saint's day, or my onomástica, as that pedant Don Mateo would say. I promise I won't write the word *onomástica* again, ever. Farewell, onomástica, farewell. My saint's day! Even those of us who don't believe in miracles have to acknowledge the mysterious presence of luck. Farewell, Don Mateo, may you remain forever entombed in your university lecture hall, you can keep my onomástica and my expulsions, because now I've passed my first year at the University.

The waiter said he became a widower on the nineteenth of April, nineteen sixty, and since then his life has lost all meaning. She died on my saint's day. What are the chances? Still, I don't associate that emptiness with death, but rather with the absence of life. They're not the same thing. The dead are in cemeteries, surrounded by flowers, and forgotten. The absence of life walks out into the streets every day, it goes to work, to school, it has coffee in the bars and it seeps into our bodies when we try to think or dream. I'm not spiteful, but I won't keep quiet. There are certain times when no one can shut me up. I haven't been tamed like a mule, or like my father. I refuse to follow orders. My father curses the day he decided to name me León. He's convinced that my name has shaped my character.

"So, you are León Egea Extremera."

"Yes, Don Vicente."

"You can drop the 'Don.' I'm going to be your colleague, more than anything else. The boss is Don Alfonso but you won't see much of him in the office this summer. Want a coffee?"

Yes, I did want a coffee and some toast. He seems like a good person… too good. One of those guys who never gets involved in other people's problems. He met my Literature professor when Universo published his book. It's a good connection that helped me get this summer job, a great opportunity that I really needed. That's another thing I owe to my professor, his classes and his way of thinking. But I don't think my professor and Vicente are actual friends, because their personalities are so different. Vicente speaks, smiles and holds his tongue with the respectful, somewhat tame, manner of a salesman. He's pleasant, he listens, he's attentive, he tries to be agreeable, but when you start talking about your own life, some story or some event, he withdraws and says he doesn't need to know about that. I think it must make him uncomfortable to share confidences with someone he's just met.

I'm jotting down these memories of that meeting and my first conversation with him to keep a record of my impressions. We sat at a table so I could eat my breakfast comfortably. The widowed waiter served me, on Vicente's tab, a café con leche, toast with butter, and a glass he filled with Lanjarón mineral water. They turned off the tap water at eleven-thirty in the morning today. For a city suspended in time, nothing more appropriate than a drought. But I'm not complaining about my luck. I ate a good breakfast. Vicente is generous, if a bit lacking in spirit. I started talking too much out of sheer gratitude, content with the breakfast and the job. When I shared some details of my life, my friendship with my Literature professor, my run-ins with the

priest who teaches Latin, my father's fears, the advantages of not going back to my hometown this summer and avoiding another argument with the mayor, Vicente just responded:

"I don't need to know about that."

I was a bit offended by his distance. But he gave me a small smile and calmly started to talk about work. Universo had just published a three-volume encyclopedia. The ad campaign they ran in the newspaper promotes the Universo Encyclopedia as a fount of wisdom and an essential research tool for schoolchildren. In this country, I told him, we're all schoolchildren, even the over- fifty's. Nobody knows anything. Ignorance rules. Look, Vicente said, this is a good line of work, but you have to be careful how you explain things. It's no good insulting, complaining, or railing on about how illiterate we all are, or looking down on others, as if the salesman were the wise man in a village of idiots. You get better results with optimism, driving home your vision of helping our nation improve and advance, helping our children progress and our families to all play their part. You have to open the doors, let in the light. Ok, I told him, I get it.

Later we went up to the office as he continued his explanations. He introduced me to Consuelo Astorga, the lady who works as the secretary, and we all went into the office we are going to share. The calendar on Consuelo's desk and the almanac hanging on the wall are up to date. The office is not as lively as the bar, but at least up here no one has locked himself away in a date on a calendar. The month of July welcomes with open arms the new player on the scene, one who aspires to fill the towns and villages of the province with encyclopedias. Consuelo works in the reception area, a smallish room, but big enough for two armchairs, a bookshelf with Universo books on it and a desk where she receives visitors and screens phone calls. The door to

Don Alfonso's office looks like it'll be closed all summer. That's better for me. I don't do well with authority figures. The office I'm going to share with Vicente has a window that opens out onto the interior courtyard. In winter, the aroma of simmering stew for the midday meal will waft up through the windows there, as it does from the courtyard windows in my apartment building. I'll be gone from this office by October, so that aroma won't be whetting my appetite. Today though, all that's wafting up through the office courtyard window is the sound of a radio station. Our office has a meeting table, five chairs, another shelf full of books and three huge filing cabinets that organize this vast, parched, downcast world of Granada into three sections: A to G, H to O, P to Z. There's a door that opens to a bathroom with a mirror, a wash basin and a toilet. Everything is clean but shabby. The mirror shows little interest in reflecting the image of any hand washer who stands before it. The obstinate stink of disinfectant competes with the murky odors drifting in from the building's interior. Observation is another essential quality in a writer and a requirement for anyone who wants to know how to survive the next three months. This will be my kingdom until I start my new term at the university.

The work is easy. It consists of answering the phone when some sap falls for our ads in the newspaper and calls in. We try to sell them encyclopedias. Once we hook them, all we need to do is fill out the forms and thank you very much. If they are unsure or hesitate, you have to offer to personally visit their homes to demonstrate the books. Arrive, observe, convince. There is no doubt that having access to the wisdom of the universe benefits any home, school, library, office or city hall. I think the most interesting part of the job will be the travel. According to my Literature professor, knowledge of the human condition and of Spain's small villages is crucial for anyone who aspires to write. Experience feeds the ability to see. Learning to write is learning to see.

All in order. All happy. I didn't want to go home to my village during summer vacation and now, luckily, I have a job that allows me to spend this summer in the city. My father wanted to avoid problems with the mayor and it was a relief for him to keep the danger away, that is to keep me away. The landlady was fine with charging me half the normal rate for my room during these months when all the students abandon the city and the room rental business collapses. I'll be able to save enough money for books next semester. And I'll take advantage of this experience to develop my skills as a writer. I'm going to learn how to see, strengthen my memory, cultivate my powers of observation, create adjective combinations and practice humor. Between the office dynamics and some sales trips to the countryside, I think it'll be easy to deploy an intelligent sense of humor. I'll find characters and their humble affairs suspended in time, a calendar with no days and faucets with no water. I won't need to be clever to seem clever and fill this diary with good humor. I'll recount the adventures and adversities of a future writer during this hot, dry, Paleolithic and bewildering summer of 1963.

Vicente Fernández Fernández is neither tall nor short, fat nor skinny, intelligent nor stupid, agreeable nor disagreeable, friend nor enemy, young nor old. I've been working with him a week now, but it's hard to form an opinion. But then, is it really necessary to have an opinion about someone? Well, it's never a bad thing to know who you are working with, who's giving you advice, who's inviting you for a cup of coffee. Also, if you want to be a writer you have to delve into the human condition. My Literature professor, Ignacio Rubio, repeated that over and over when he was talking to us about Galdos' *Misericordia.* Capturing the human condition is always your objective; it's the prize for words woven as finely as a spider web.

I've met a lot of people in my life, each with his own peculiar name and character. I know more dark-haired people than light-haired people, more thin people than fat, more short

people than tall. But all that isn't so important. My mother divides people into good and bad, those who have a decent heart and those who have a curdled soul. Reality is subject to a different kind of division. It's not whether you're good egg or a bad egg, what counts is hierarchy, power. In the end, there are those who give commands and those who obey them. Of course, there are always nuances and I like people who don't care whether they are commanding or obeying. It doesn't matter which side of that equation birth has landed them on. I get along with people who reluctantly command as well as those refuse to obey, even though both often have to bite their tongues. Here, I'm practicing introspection. On occasion, I'm also going to practice exercising my conscience.

I know I'll end up liking Vicente because he never tries to humiliate anyone or boss anyone around. Among the people I love, I've learned to respect the ones who were born to obey. I acknowledge this and accept it, it seems logical being from the village I'm from and having the father I have. But affection aside, I confess that I only truly admire those people who refuse to obey. Pedro el Pastor refused to obey and instead broke his sheperd's walking stick over the back of the mayor's son. I can't obey either, it's very hard for me to keep quiet or stay still. I bury myself in my books to avenge injustices without creating any problems. My father knows the score, he feels sorry for what happened to Pedro el Pastor but says nothing to him. He smiles, lowers his eyes, murmurs some polite greeting. My father is afraid to say what he thinks, to unleash a conflict. He'll often say that while he may not know how to read, life is not a novel and the arrests, beatings and deaths are very real.

I suspect Vicente is one of those people who just does his job without causing anyone any problems. I'm not really sure. It's hard for him to carry on a conversation, to comment on stories in the newspaper, to talk about his life. He's pleasant, he tries to be polite but his silences

impose a distance, an absence of spontaneity. When people who don't have any secrets are too quiet, it suggests fear not sincerity. It's self-protection, as if he's afraid of something unexpected. It seems odd for a man of the world, who's travelled, who's been to Paris. Sometimes I think he's never really even left the office. He's nothing more than a good man who's prepared to put up with tedious hours at a desk, glasses of water at the Lepanto café bar and the rumbling engines of the provincial buses.

Just about everything I know about him Consuelo told me. And she doesn't know much. Vicente was born in Moraleda de Zafayona, he just turned 45, he's married, he's always neatly dressed with a dark blue jacket during the winter and a beige jacket during the summer. I've only seen the beige jacket but Consuelo says that he's just as faithful to the blue one. He arrives at the office, says hello, scans the list of calls, wipes the sweat from his brow with a white handkerchief, unfolds his shirt sleeves, arranges his paper and his pen and launches into his work, beginning by listening patiently to all the clients' doubts with submissive, repetitive and claustrophobic friendliness.

"Yes, there is a great deal of information about raising rabbits and hens, yes sir. It's as if you had a veterinarian right in your home. Of course, that's the way it is, that's what encyclopedias are for. These days there are never-before-seen illnesses, plagues that can wipe out your farmyard in just a couple of days. Children? They will be able to learn about santa teresa de jesús or Don Juan of Austria …."

The Universo Encyclopedia, promoted in the papers as an alphabetized collection of human knowledge both ancient and modern, is filled with facts about Juan of Austria, the capital of Norway, diseases affecting beet crops, hunting techniques, the care and feeding of pet

goldfinches, and even about proper sexual practices for married couples. Vicente Fernández mops his brow with the white handkerchief, he continues explaining, he lists all the advantages of erudition, he offers up facts, he points out important names, he urges as far as friendliness allows, he closes deals with delight, absorbs failure with patience, and notes down the address and possible dates for a follow up visit.

"Tuesday or Wednesday next week. That's fine. Of course. I'll leave you a message at the telephone exchange. Thanks very much Don Pablo. All right."

Vicente isn't fat, isn't skinny, isn't tall, isn't short, isn't young, isn't old. When he's in the bar, when he's talking to the widowed bartender or ordering a beer to toast the end of a workday, he seems like a normal person; big-boned, more or less my height, still showing some visible signs of youth. But when he speaks to a client, or when he goes silent after a hostile comment, or when he reacts by murmuring from a cautious distance that stupid phrase "I don't need to know that," Vicente becomes smaller, fatter, older. It's pitiful to see how he says goodbye at the end of the day and heads home, withdrawn into himself, with his clumsy stride, his black briefcase in his hand and the full weight of the city's heat on his shoulders. He's one of those people whose shoes always pinch their feet.

I can't believe he spent five years living in Paris, the city of philosophers, cabarets and liberty. Consuelo says he was there until nineteen-sixty. Then he returned to Spain, married a woman from Madrid, and found a job with Universo. It didn't take me long to figure out that this office isn't Universo's headquarters. Too poor, too lifeless, too insignificant. Ignacio Rubio, my Literature professor, found me a job in a simple provincial office. You have to start somewhere. Maybe one day I'll get to visit the main office in the Puerta del Sol in Madrid. That's where the

writers go to sign contracts and to plot big projects. All we do here is put ads in the local papers, talk on the phone and plan bus trips along torturous mountain highways.

In our office, we don't even get to collect on the installment plan payments. The head office already has deals with an association of retired non-commissioned officers, Guardia Civil and national police. They're the ones who collect the payments in exchange for a modest stipend that helps them top up their measly retirement income. It's sort of funny all that authority just disappearing, all that "I order you," "I command you" all of a sudden turning into friendly visits to collect a payment. I'm even beginning to feel a little sorry for Sargent Palomares, always at the ready for the mayor of my village and always at the ready to give me a thrashing in their little station. Let's just see how many encyclopedia payments he'll be needing to collect in the future. Pedro el Pastor treated his sheep dog better than the mayor treats his sergeant.

My Literature professor says it's a good idea to distance yourself, to use your intelligence to make sure that your writing doesn't turn into emotional venting. To exercise your conscience, you must achieve detachment. We're never any good unless we achieve a profound diagnosis of the human condition. Vicente went to Paris as an immigrant, condemned to feeling distant, to seeing everything with resentment. He didn't take advantage of the city, he withdrew, preferred to go back to Madrid. And he kept on withdrawing into himself, getting fatter, getting older and he ended up in a provincial office, very close to his home village of Moraleda de Zafayona, with the only ambition of knowing as little as possible, only the essentials. And saying as little as possible, only the essentials. Vicente Fernández has the soul of a clerk. He'd be happy if he never had to get up from his desk, if he could limit his work life to patient telephone conversations about the glories of universal wisdom. I suspect he views as tragic our upcoming trip on the regional train to Loja. There is only one mystery in his methodical existence. It's the

mystery of our office. Consuelo doesn't know where Vicente Fernández Fernández lives. Even his surnames are repetitive. When he leaves the office, or the Lepanto café bar, with his shuffling pace and his black briefcase, he heads off into the unknown.

Consuelo Astorga also has an uncertain air about her. It's important to use words precisely. Many people use the word *uncertain* to express something that is false… and they are wrong. I'm not trying to say Consuelo is false, just that it's difficult to read her because her looks are deceiving. She's a nondescript woman. The first day she seemed conventional with the demeanor of a secretary and a hairdo like a woman of almost fifty. Neither cute nor ugly, her air of professionalism dominated her looks, the exemplary secretary with her smile and her glasses, the precision of her caricature. She reminds me of my Aunt Rosario.

She gets better the more you talk to her though and you start to see her in a different way. Yes, each day she gets a bit better. I haven't asked how old she is but now I think she's closer to forty than to fifty. The sadness in her eyes wasn't born there. She picked it up from the plastic flowers, the useless air conditioner, the armchairs, the papers on her desk, the telephones, the filing cabinets, the office. Vicente is a man with the soul of a pencil-pusher. I don't think Consuelo has the soul of an old maid. But she is overwhelmed by her circumstances. She looks a lot like my Aunt Rosario, who didn't have a suitor by the time she was twenty-five so she had to resign herself to life on the shelf. Consuelo isn't on the shelf, but she does organize files, take messages, sharpen pencils, persist with the disinfectant in the bathroom each day, put up with Vincente's silences; she's demure in her remarks, she never jokes, she never goes into the Lepanto café bar, she's always the first one in the office and always locks the door because she's the last to leave in the evening. My Aunt Rosario is dark haired and Consuelo is blond, but they have the same face, they look a lot alike. Consuelo is blond, perfect and overlooked.

When she told me she had never married, right away I thought of my Aunt Rosario. My mother' sister maintains an air of a proper young lady, the daughter of a pharmacist, brought up in a house right on the town's biggest plaza, right next to the church. My father says he's had more church bells than breakfasts in the mornings. My grandparents were not happy that their eldest daughter made such a bad marriage with a farm worker, they had hoped for a different future for their progeny. They saw the union as a millstone around their necks, they bore the scandal of my mother's pregnancy, they felt themselves above the sniping of boorish and the sanctimonious villagers, but they always looked upon my parents with an air of superiority. And then they had the bad luck of their second daughter remaining single. In the end they weren't sure which was worse, the badly married daughter or the unmarried daughter Rosario. The poor thing never lacked for work. First she took care of my grandfather when he had pneumonia, then my grandmother when she had a stroke, and finally, when my mother set up a small grocery store with her inheritance, Rosario once again devoted herself to taking care of family. She wasn't asked to stack cans of tuna or tomatoes. She had never even learned to sell aspirin in her father's pharmacy; selling didn't suit her character. But she took on caring for me, preparing my snacks, helping me with my school homework, clean and caring for my clothes. She became a second mother, with my father working in the fields and my mother in the store. Playing the part of mother because you are unemployed is sadder than an old electric fan in an office.

Discreet, perfect, kind, she's at the core of our lives but somehow always out of place; a boy who has to peddle through the streets on a borrowed bike. Resignation defines her kindness, she carries her spinsterhood inside, her eyes reveal an intimate solitude, the stinging brand of creatures that are not needed in this world. Rosario is not one of the bitter ones. Her bad luck did not move her to hate. Instead she cultivated resignation. Ever since I've known her she's been

incapable of getting worked up by either happiness or misfortune. When I started getting good grades and excelling in school, she didn't show any pride. When I punched the mayor's son in the face, she didn't get angry. That's just life, a combination of good and bad moments that she accepts into her home, but accepts as if she herself didn't belong there, and had no right to speak either the first or the last word. It's enough for her to simply take note of things while continuing with the tasks of her modest routine.

Consuelo does not carry her spinsterhood inside. She's younger than she seems and her eyes frequently widen with interest in life, an appetite to have her say. She even gives me looks of complicity when Vicente says something strange or goes into one of those silences of his. Our eyes find each other and sparks go off. Singleness is a different experience in the city. Here they say everyone knows each other, that Granada is a village. But those of us who were born in a real village know that this is an exaggeration. Nobody recognizes me in the streets here, no one knows who my father is, what I study, where I work. No, Granada is not a village and Rosario spinsterhood is not Consuelo's, even though they both look a lot alike, are both perfect and neither breaks the rules their roles demand.

Of Consuelo, I only know that she is single, she doesn't have any nephews and she studied typing. She hasn't told me how she came to work as a secretary in the Granada office of Universo Publishing. Just the way things happened, she murmured, with a thinly disguised effort to change the subject. I think without meaning to I hit a nerve. The closed office door of the boss Don Alfonso could hide many stories. Perhaps a love story. Imagination is another essential virtue for a future novelist and I have no trouble imagining. I can see Consuelo getting up each morning, selecting her perfect secretary outfit - a print blouse, a knee-length skirt - with calculated neutrality all the while nurturing a secret passion for the boss, who amuses her and

occasionally bestows on her a quick afternoon of lovemaking in the office or a clandestine trip to the vacant hotels and beaches of the wintertime in the Costa del Sol. It could be…why not?

Then summer comes, and Don Alfonso is a married man, so he does his duty by his family and disappears to spend his vacation with them on a crowded seashore, with beach umbrellas and decency, with children, buckets, spades and strolls, greetings, a lot of "yes, yes, my dear", "yes, my darling" "of course my love," "Look how Alfonsito has grown." Consuelo Astorga hides beneath her blouse and skirt a body that is still young, capable of carrying on an adulterous affair with the boss. Good breasts, good hips, good legs. Don Alfonso must have that mustache that married men have. In the summer he disappears, and the secretary stays back at the office because there is no question of bringing her along with the family and because the months of July and August are decisive in balancing the accounts of an encyclopedia publisher. There are a lot of reasons someone might pay attention to a newspaper ad about encyclopedias during the summer: a failing grade at the end of the school year, kids with homework, the irritation of having them around the house or the danger of letting them loose in the streets, teachers taking stock of their needs, and good intentions for the school year ahead are all magnificent incentives. You get a discount if you pay the full price up front or you can pay in low monthly installments with a slight surcharge. Love in installments also has a surcharge: secrecy, waiting, a life filled with sharp curves and potholes, like the buses that bump along poorly paved highways.

That could be Consuelo's story and explain her presence in the office. Or maybe it was a favor for a friend and who was trying to end a bothersome affair and was looking for somewhere to dump a woman fallen into disgrace. It's hard to imagine that's the case with Consuelo but what's certain is that there is no resignation in her eyes, no private loneliness or internalized

spinsterhood. Instead her eyes convey a carefully disguised carnality. Examining each detail of her body adds to the overall impression. If she didn't look so much like Rosario, I would dare to write that Consuelo Astorga is a desirable woman.

The provincial train line passes through the villages of Atarfe, Pinos Puente, Íllora, Tocón, Monte Frío, Villanueva y Huétor Tajár. A fine excursion enjoyed on a slow, bleak, gossipy train. Travelers get on and get off, but they never stop talking, they invade each coach with their chatter shamelessly sharing personal details of their family lives, fits of employment, debts, the son who lives in Germany, the daughter who is getting married in the fall, the daughter-in-law who is due any moment, how good this season's chorizo is, the saintly hands of the doctor, or the healer, or the veterinarian. I try to focus on the scenery, concentrate on the squalid river, the bridges, the poplars, the clusters of houses around small station stops. The truth is the conversations offer up more goats, rabbits, hares, sparrows and doves than does the countryside framed by the train window. The arid landscape displays none of the lushness of the gossip inside the train. Suddenly, a wedding makes its escape and dashes down the aisle of the carriage or a bitter property line dispute takes flight between the seats.

I do appreciate the country breeze. It's still fresh from the nighttime. It hasn't had time to heat up yet and so unfurls its fresh scent of garden greens. The breeze coming in the window seems to have forgotten it's been more than a year since it's rained. It lends a fleeting air of wellbeing. I'm reluctant to open the novel I brought along because I can't pull myself away from the scene inside the train. I'm caught up in the laments of the locomotive, the complaints of the

carriages and the personal lives of the travelers. No one is reading, not even a newspaper, there's no chance of someone taking the bait of our ads about Universo encyclopedias. I comment on this to Vicente, but all I get in return is a murmured corrective, delivered with a smile:

"Don't look down on people."

"I'm not looking down on anyone," I protest. "But if they don't read the newspaper, they'll never know we're selling encyclopedias."

"Maybe they listen to the radio."

"We have radio ads?"

"Of course! 'Universo Encyclopedias: From its pages spring the tree of knowledge.'" Vicente has put on his radio voice. "Anyway, today we've got a sure thing. Two clients."

And then he goes silent again. My traveling companion is the only silent one in the entire carriage of chatterers. His restraint is so extreme it seems inhuman. When the train gets to Loja, a woman in the next carriage suddenly goes into labor. I'm not surprised. This journey is so long and slow, has so many whistle stops, hold ups on the line and delays that anything could happen. Engagements, weddings, births, baptisms, funerals. Childbirth! Now that's a moving human event, the kind that becomes news and fodder for those look-back-at-the-year reports they put out around Christmas time. For sure tomorrow everyone will be talking about this story. No doubt this unexpected delivery – that's how the headlines will describe it in the newspapers and the radio – will attract more attention than any encyclopedia ad.

Travel turns life into a box of surprises. Naturally, pandemonium broke out at the station when we arrived. Somebody called the Guardia Civil, someone else started offering advice, others improvised a stretcher. Everyone jumped into the hubbub. Except for Vicente.

"Let's go, we're going to be late."

"But there's a woman there about to give birth…."

"The Guardia Civil will call the doctor."

"She might need help." I protested. "Maybe we should …."

"Women know more about these things than we do."

When we got to City Hall, the mayor of Loja was waiting for us nervously. He's in a hurry to close the deal because he's just been advised that a woman has given birth at the train station. It seems that all has gone well and the mayor wants to go have his picture taken with the mother and her newborn. It's a big event for this village. The mayor asks if we've just come from there and Vicente tells him that yes, we were in the same carriage as the pregnant woman and that the reaction of the townspeople of Loja was spectacular as was the efficiency of the Guardia Civil, and their swiftness in calling the doctor. Without a doubt it will be the human interest story of the month. This explanation by Vicente leaves me dumbfounded.

"This encyclopedia is a luxury," Vicente says, with a tone of absolute conviction. "It unites the head and the hand, ideas and action, wisdom and experience. Let's see what it tells us about birth." He asks me to hand him the volume I'm carrying in my bag, opens it to *B, Bi, Bir* … and he pursues the word with his finger. "Here it is. Birth: A person's origin or ancestry. No no, that's not it. Let's see: genesis or dawn of something. No, that's not it either. Ok, this is it.

Birth: The act of giving birth. Look at this Don José. It's a miracle come true. Advice for emergency childbirth if a woman is not able to reach the hospital or if there is no doctor present. First: controlled breathing will help delay the impulse to push along with the contractions, buying time for a doctor or midwife to arrive. Second: the Good Samaritan who arrives to help should be sure to wash his hands and then wash the vaginal area with soap and water. Third: place clean towels or clothes on the ground underneath the buttocks to keep them elevated and protected from unclean surfaces. The woman should place her hands under her thighs to keep them elevated – the mayor is listening, slack-jawed, as if before an apparition. This is wisdom that remedies all of life's surprises. How about that, Don José? What do you think? Fourth: when the baby starts to crown, you should never pull on the emerging head. All movements must be gentle. Fifth: nudge the head downward to help the shoulder emerge. The other shoulder will follow naturally. Sixth: wrap the baby in a clean towel. Seventh: do not pull on the umbilical cord or the placenta until medical help arrives. How about that Don José? This is an essential book."

"Yes, of course. I'm feeling a bit dizzy. It's hot in here."

I don't say a word. The official portraits hanging on the mayor's wall inspire me to keep my mouth shut. Acquiescence is the dominant theme. Don José quickly and generously agrees to the purchase. One encyclopedia for the recently opened Girls School of Loja City. It will be a gift from City Hall to Doña Hortensia and Doña Olga, the teachers who saw the ad in the paper. Another encyclopedia will go to the Natalio Rivas National School, a gift of thanks for consistent collaboration in organizing cultural events. And another encyclopedia for the virgin of grace Academy. The director wants it as a gift for the teachers who come from Antequera for testing. Another encyclopedia for City Hall because it will always come in handy to have good

information to hand on any topic, and another encyclopedia for the mayor himself, father of three schoolchildren and husband to a woman who is still of an age to give birth. All in all, a brilliant bit of business.

"We have a little extra money floating around." Don José is an affable man. Despite his hurry, he proudly cites his successes. "This year we have had many illustrious visitors. In February, Don Jorge Vigón, Minister of Public Works was here. The Caudillo himself honored us with a visit in April. In June it was cardinal Larraona. A lot of VIPs. The regional governor helped us a lot with our special budget for official receptions. There's a bit of cash left over. And what better investment than in education. And please, give my best regards to Don Alfonso."

Twice. That's twice that the Caudillo has visited Granada this year. I saw both visits covered in the NO-DO newsreels, which they show just before the movies and are similar to movies with applause, flag waving, shouts of Franco, Franco, Franco, fervor among the throngs, fishing boats tooting their horns, naval destroyers saluting with gunfire the arrival of the *Azor*, his Excellency's yacht, its masts festooned, people crowded onto the dock, in the streets and on the highways. The newsreel announcer proclaims that the presence of the Caudillo is a promise of efficient relief from misfortune, and of reliable and peaceful progress. Franco in civilian dress, Franco visiting in person to sympathize with the pain and suffering of citizens affected by a drought or a flood, Franco on hand to inaugurate a new building, or a futuristic construction project; all signs of our unquestionable advance toward the universal.

"Now that I think of it…." The mayor pauses in the doorway. He has just had an idea. "Can you get the encyclopedias here by Thursday? We've organized a reception for the eighteenth of July."

"I'm so sorry, we need at least a week. I am truly very sorry." Vicente wanted to be more obliging. His face becomes a mask of infinite sadness. "It's just that …."

"No matter, no matter. We could have included them as gifts during the celebration. The twenty-seventh anniversary of the National Uprising! How time flies!" He glances at his watch. Suddenly he's in a hurry again. "But don't worry, it doesn't matter."

I'm going to look up in the encyclopedia the words "visit" and "inauguration." Talking nonsense is another way of appearing to be intelligent like my professor. The courtesy call, an obligation of caudillos, ministers, governors and mayors, is an immense lie, a theatrical event performed in a troubled city in which they've closed the schools and the university so that students can demonstrate their enthusiasm, waves flags and cheer enthusiastically, grateful for the generous kindliness of the authorities, their sole comfort after earthquakes or accidents, droughts and floods, in sickness and in health. Inauguration: to begin or introduce something, to a village for example, to give morals and commandments to a village, to something called a village but is really a flock accustomed to cheering and making merry on command. Any future customers whose names start with *V* or with *I* will be assigned the words *visit* and *inauguration*.

Advice on what to do in an emergency childbirth situation is a variation on Vicente's usual technique. He took advantage of the circumstances with a speed I didn't expect in someone so quiet. His usual strategy is to play with names. In the office he explained to me that buyers feel more committed when they hear their visitor speak their names. It establishes an intimacy that's hard to break. It's important for a salesman not only to understand his clients but to help them understand themselves, their own shortcomings, the things that they truly need.

Vicente thinks that names and surnames seep into our beings. Our character establishes a secret relationship with our names. The subconscious, he says, is a deep well of words. And of course names and surnames occupy a very important place there. We are called by our names every day of our lives, going to school, checking into a hostel or applying for a job. Falling in love in nothing more than drawing a heart around two names. The names are never missing. Even the loners, we hear our names spoken thousands, millions of times. The first thing we do when we want to hide is conceal our names. The first thing we do when we meet someone is speak our name. That's why you should repeat names over and over. It triggers sympathy or fear, an unconscious relationship of dependency.

Names, Vicente explained during my first training session, can be a great sales tool. If you call on someone named Baltasar, flip through the encyclopedia to the letter *B*. "Ok Mr. Baltasar, let's find the meaning, the history of your name." And then you find a country that begins with the letter *B*. "Let's see now, Brazil, what a huge country, so many miles." And then an animal, a buzzard, no better a buffalo because no one likes to be compared to a buzzard. A buffalo will inspire positive images, adventures, Western movies. And then you move on to anatomy, and you talk about the importance of the brain, which starts with a *B*, like Benedict XV or Bécquer or Belmonte, the legendary bullfighter, to cover all the cultural bases. See what I mean? It's the power of the letter. And if you really want to close the deal, find out ahead of time what your dear client's profession is. Because if he's in the military, you'll get a lot of mileage out of the word *battle* and if he's a doctor, right away we look up *blood* pressure and if he's a priest we thrill him with the article on *basilica* or on the starving children of Biafra, depending on his character. See? Everything starts with the name.

Vicente never forgets the importance of surnames. He has an obstinate and insistent character because his own surnames make him favor repetition: Fernández Fernández. The double *F*. I don't escape the tyranny of the letter myself. My two surnames begin with *E*. Egea Extremera. Although to be honest, the biggest impact on my personality is my first name: León. It's funny, but Vicente's name-based sales technique agrees with my father's perspective. He curses the day he named me León. Too much ferocity for a person to live a quiet life. The mayor's son, my classmate in grade school and in high school, was constantly saying how one of these days he was going to declaw a "lion" he knew. I didn't bite him and I didn't scratch him. I did punch his lights out. I told Vicente about it, but he didn't ask me any details. He never asked what happened or what he had done to me. Nothing. His only comment was that the human subconscious is a deep well full of reactionary elements.

Vicente asked me if I knew the name of the Minister of Education. Yes, I said: Humberto Vaca. Vicente thinks that Humberto's taste for honors and homage, partly inspired by the *H* in his name, is really due to his anguish over his family's surname. My boy, said Vicente, it's just not the same to be named Lion as to be surnamed Cow. But, the world is full of ups and downs and it's always possible that some sort of trauma, an attack by a swarm of wasps for example, can suddenly create a fighting spirit in cows and benevolence in lions. That's why it's so important for a good encyclopedia salesman to study psychology and know all his saints, he says.

These are ridiculous ideas. Armchair psychoanalysis. That was my reaction anyway when Vicente explained his sales strategy with a hollow, distressing and tiresome pretentiousness. A university student can't take this kind of low-rent reasoning seriously. But the truth is that in practice this stuff helps, can be a good ice-breaker and can create a bridge to the client during

those first moments of conversation. I understood this when I saw it in action. I'm referring specifically to the second visit we made in Loja. In Don Juan's case, it was easy, he had clear educational reasons to make a purchase, he had the money and I'm pretty sure that Don Alfonso had hit him up before we even got there. But the thing with Pablo Aguayo was a different kind of deal, almost stingy.

"Why does that man need an encyclopedia?" I asked Vicente, uncomfortable, when we got to the station.

"So he can buy one from us. We're encyclopedia salesmen. Isn't that a good enough reason?"

Pablo Aguayo lives in the outskirts of Loja. After making our way through the decrepit neighborhood and up a dirt road into the hills we arrived at the modest home of a farmer. His wife heard us and came in from the corral. She told us Pablo would be back shortly and said we could wait for him in the dining room. She offered us a glass of wine with curt politeness. I couldn't tell if it was the brevity of shyness or the chill of a bad mood. Her husband returned about ten minutes later, greeted us with a frank smile, requested a moment to wash his hands and then took a seat with us. Pablo Aguayo is a man of about forty years, bald, with leathery skin. The years of his body multiply in the reflection of his eyes. He looks good, with a rustic and hospitable innocence that matches the atmosphere of the room. I was impressed by the size and strength of his hand as he shook mine when we arrived. He works the land he inherited from his parents. He's helped by two friends from the village who work with him because he has no sons. The land doesn't produce much, barely enough to live. They make ends meet with the farm animals his wife keeps. In years of drought, they bring in more from the hens than from the crops.

Vicente unfurled his strategy, calling him by his first name Pablo and hailing its importance, alluding to the fall on the road to Damascus and to the voice of truth. Then he moved on to Paris, the city whose name is written with a capital *P*, as big as the Eiffel Tower, the City of Light, followed by an exaltation of pacifism, prudent men, the wisdom of Parmenides and the importance of global fauna with *P* names, such as penguins, pelicans, pheasants, pigeons and parrots. *P* for Pablo and *P* for these amazing birds. You can see, Pablo, that an astute man can distinguish between Pakistan and Pekanbaru, between Pantocrator and Pentecost. You follow me Pablo?

It's a good strategy. What can you talk about when you sell encyclopedias if not words, letters, the world offered up in alphabetical order to pique the curiosity of a man whose name, the one he's carried around for a lifetime, ends up in ink on the Universo receipt, thanks to the clear looping handwriting of the salesman. Vicente asked me to run ahead to the station to buy our return tickets while he finalized the contract with Señor Pablo Aguayo. Back at the station they were still talking about the unexpected birth. Everything turned out fine, the doctor arrived in time to take care of the umbilical cord and the placenta. The mother was now recovering in the home of the mayor, who offered her a room until her husband could come get her. It was a girl. Perfect, a successful visit. But I was feeling a little down, with a bad taste in my mouth after selling an encyclopedia to someone who didn't need one. I said as much to Vicente when we went to buy a sandwich in the cantina but his only response was to remind me again that we're encyclopedia salesmen.

With Vicente Fernández, it's hard to stay mad for long - or irritated or friendly or admiring for that matter. The neutrality of his life douses any spark of goodwill or ill will. On the way back, I embraced my role as an encyclopedia salesman and proposed we get ourselves

included in the picture with the mayor and the new mother. We could talk to the mayor, maybe even the governor, and explain to them that we were right there on the same train with the woman as she was in labor. We could donate an encyclopedia to the city government to give as a gift to the newborn girl. It would be a grand publicity campaign, a lucky break. The baby girl who came into the world with an encyclopedia under her arm.

"Forget about governors," was his response. He left me speechless, not just because of his lack of enthusiasm for a great idea and for taking advantage of a great opportunity which he had earlier done so successfully in Don José's office. The coldness of his response also suggested disdain for authority, a lack of consideration for the office of the governor. And that's my role, my university student's impertinence, my father's concerns about me, my problems with the mayor and his son in my village, my rebelliousness, my vexation with living in a city whose calendar has been frozen on one day, out of time with no future. To put me in my place, Vicente had taken my place.

Irritated, I decided to launch an angry commentary about an article I had seen in the paper. I had grabbed one from the cantina in the station to read between looking out the window and eavesdropping on other conversations. The other passengers were more subdued in the heat of the afternoon and the fatigue of the day's work. As we arrived in Montefrío, I was reading a politics story that had nothing to do with inaugurations or ministerial visits to the province. The jail sentences for the Communist Party leaders who were arrested three years ago had finally been announced. It was positioned as a big police success, an exemplary operation that brought down the entire clandestine leadership.

"This is terrible. One of them is getting 20 years, the other 15 years and four more are getting 10 years. Those are incredibly harsh sentences."

"Yes."

"This is intolerable." I was starting to raise my voice, pleased to see that I was finally getting a reaction from Vicente. He cast a furtive glance around the rest of the carriage. Now I was the one who was scaring him, the one who was the most disdainful of the government. "What a country we live in!"

"That's just the way it is."

"They are arrested, beaten in the police station, subjected to a farcical trial and now they are going to rot in jail. At the University we know about these things. Some of my classmates are in the know. Did you know that they torture people in Spain?"

"I don't need to know about those things."

I shut up. I could see in Vicente's eyes that same fear I saw in my father's. The same fear I saw in the eyes of my high school principal when he brought me to his office for a talk after the mayor had spoken to him. The same fear in Pedro el Pastor's eyes when he ran into the mayor's son the very day after he was released by the Guardia Civil. Pedro had no choice but to suffer his insults and cowardly threats. "I bet you're shitting yourself, aren't you Pastor? Smartasses get their nuts chopped off real fast around here you piece of shit and I am going to beat the shit out of you if you even dare to come near me in a bar or anywhere in this town. Do you understand me?"

I can't stand seeing other people's fear, their impotence, that habit of bowing the head and looking down at the floor. Watching humiliation drives me crazy. But what else could a simple shepherd like Pedro el Pastor do? Or my father? And of course then there's Vicente. We live where we live and here everyone's shoes pinch.

"Madrid is a city of more than a million cadavers, according to the latest statistics." I'm spending this long Sunday morning repeating to myself that line that impressed me so much. My Literature professor read the poem by Dámaso Alonso out loud in class and ever since then whenever I have a bad day it pops into my head. Everyone has bad days, a black hole from which to contemplate oneself as a dead man buried in statistics among hundreds, thousands, millions of cadavers.

The morning started out well. My roommates had gone off to their villages, their parents, their vacations. I hadn't seen the landlady in a fortnight. The discount on my summer rent means I have to take care of the place on my own. But that's fine, this way I have it all to myself. I can sleep peacefully, have breakfast, go back to bed, read *Anna Karenina*, masturbate with thanks to Tolstoy, get up again dreaming of a shower that is not to be because they've turned the water off again, straighten up my room, mend my shirt, inspect the furniture in the apartment, so fragile and so inhospitable, and then … fall into a funk. There are few things as shabby as an apartment rented out to students. And so I spent the rest of the morning feeling depressed, that and succumbing to the temptation to rehearse my salesman script. I don't want to get caught with nothing to say the next time I get the chance to sing the lead during an encyclopedia sale. I'm sure one day next week, before the end of July, Vicente will hand things over to me, ask me to be the one to speak. And he'll do it without warning, without smiling, as if it were just part of the normal process. "Go ahead, you explain to the gentleman the advantages of the encyclopedia."

Greetings to you Lev Nikolayevich, Count Tolstoy, I am Señor León. My name means lion, a carnivorous mammal belonging to the feline family. It's important to know that there are many other animals whose names begin with the letter *L,* leopard for example, which is also a very fierce animal, but without a mane. The *L* is in our bodies through the lungs or in the sky thanks to light, and in our literature thanks to masters such as Luis de Góngora and Fray Luis de León, who enjoys a double *L* in the tranquility of his religious retreat, or like you yourself Leo Tolstoy. The *L* shines in history as well as literature with many popes named Leo and many queens baptized with the name Leonora, and a revolutionary from your very own country surnamed Lenin, not to mention the many interesting legends that any man of letters will know about because in his library can be found books about the African landscapes of Lesotho and the palaces of Latvia and the droughts of Lebanon. If your eyes are bad, use lenses. For nighttime reading use a lamp. And for drought, liters and liters of liquid.

What can I say, Leo? That this whole exercise is really for losers? A loser is an idiot written with an *L*. It's a marvelous letter which you can use to think about lice or leprosy or a handful of seminal liquid or the lies that everyone tells about the word *liberty* or the impossibility of healthy living when there is no water, or about the 18th Century French military officer Santiago de Linier's bad luck when he decided to become a Spaniard only to be executed later by his new countrymen in Río de la Plata. What more can I say, sir? I say that I am going crazy in this abandoned student apartment and that I am getting out of here right now.

I head out of the Realejo district down Pavaneras street. I keep walking until I hit Reyes Católicos. I look up at the blue sky, which is pallid and taut despite the heat. I look in the window at the Bernina pastry shop. I cross the street. I enter the Bibarrambla plaza. I observe the flower kiosks and edge away from the couples heading home with their little packages of

pastries. “Madrid is a city of more than a million cadavers, according to the latest statistics.” That’s what Dámaso Alonso wrote and that’s what Ignacio Rubio read to us in class, and that’s what I’m thinking right now, surrounded by flowers, pastries, couples, good things and good people that today seem to me unbearable. My Literature professor never talks about politics in class. He reads poems, talks about novels, outlines writers’ lives and explains that we must without fail learn to see. I see, I observe, I write. I’ve seen myself today in the mirror, and I have to say I can’t stand myself, Mr. Tolstoy. I hit the streets to work up a fury about whatever I see out there. Good but unbearable people, protagonists of the great indifference, of the look-the-other-way-because-I-don’t-want-to-see, of the I-don’t-need-to-know-about-this-or-that. The great indifference of those who turn their heads away or behave as if they had a stick up their ass, content with their Sunday morning pastries. They don’t exist. They are dead, more than a million of them according to the latest statistics and a bad mood on a bad morning.

I prefer bad guys. It makes sense that people who are leaders are evil. Authority wants to hold on to power, its rules, its threats. Fear is its humble servant. I admire a mayor who doesn’t forget he’s mayor, and a mayor’s son who gets good grades because he is the mayor’s son, who is cruel because he is the mayor’s son and who enjoys his revenge because it’s good to keep the memory of fear and punishment alive. It makes sense that the mayor’s son wants to have a good time, that he doesn’t accept any limits. It’s completely logical that one fine day he decides with his friends to steal a sheep from Pedro el Pastor and kill it. He’s used to shooting at the priest’s doves. A frog, a dove, a sheep – what difference does it make? So, you chase the frightened sheep around, you pretend to bullfight the sheep, you sacrifice the sheep and you make a nice mutton stew with the sheep. And if Pedro el Pastor finds you and humiliates you in front of your friends, what could be more logical than to seek revenge? You call Pedro el Pastor’s dog, you pet

it, you take it to a nearby tree, you put a rope around its neck and you hang it. The hanged dog is a warning that trembles on the olive branch. The dog no longer bites. Its cadaver does.

After the loss of his sheep, Pedro el Pastor presented himself at the mayor's house to demand compensation for the damages cause by the son's vandalism. Pay up and that's that. But the dirty trick with dog, that's a whole different thing. That shattered rules, fear, patience and logic. The response had to be definitive. So, if Pedro el Pastor goes out on his own to find the imbecile son and breaks his staff over the boy's back, knocking the wind out of him – along with his pride and his consciousness - for a few seconds, it's completely logical that the mayor would call the Guardia Civil. Also logical are the two beatings Pedro el Pastor received in police headquarters, in front of the mayor, the fine and the week in jail while everyone waited, including the Guardia Civil, for the mayor to get over his fury and his attack of hubris. Mission accomplished, Sergeant Palomares.

All of this is completely logical. It's his world, his upbringing, his creed, his privilege. Evil in those who command it is understandable. What's harder to understand is the indifference in those who obey. Pedro el Pastor's fear is understandable. So is my Literature professor's prudence in cutting short any controversial discussion by saying the classroom is not for politics, and that the syllabus for his class does not include arrests and police stations. The most famous rebel in the University takes a step back. Literature is about how you look at things, with imagination, with three-word adjective combinations, with intelligent humor, with objective distance…and with the threat of an undercover cop infiltrating the student body, two ears and two eyes ready to collect any and all information. You can understand Ignacio Rubio's reserve. When students criticize his political reserve, the weakness of his social commitment, I defend him. He's got a lot at stake. But the indifference of those who have nothing at stake is a lot

harder to take. I don't need to know about that, murmurs Vicente Fernández. I could run into him any moment in Bibarrambla plaza, on Reyes street, with his mysterious wife and a little package of pastries. If only those statistical million or so cadavers would dare to breathe, to say no, they would bring an end to Pedro el Pastor's fear and to the mayor's hubris. I'm starting to admire the mayor and hate the indifferent. Evil is better than a little package of pastries.

I completely lost my cool, which in a way is an attack of evilness. When the mayor's son went into a bar and saw Pedro el Pastor sitting at a table, he went after him with a cockiness that was as inherited as any piece of prime farm land. "Have you learned your lesson motherfucker? Around here, assholes get their balls chopped of quick." I suddenly remembered how many times this same imbecile had threatened to "clip my claws." I couldn't bear the humiliation in Pedro el Pastor's eyes. I couldn't bear a police file filled with lies and rewards for the mayor's imbecile son. I went for him and delivered the punch that Pedro el Pastor couldn't.

That's my big heroic moment, Mr. Trotsky. Occasionally I win the battle against my own indolence and I find the time and energy to sit myself down and write. This is a victory, a way to learn and to make sense of this summer. But the big heroic moment of my life is this punch, a scandal in a village where kids are constantly fighting each other with sticks and stones. I've fought a thousand times with friends who've gotten good grades, so so grades and bad grades. Play comes to a halt, a fight breaks out, then just as suddenly that's it, it's all over and back to play. But some punches can be dangerous, a blow by an older man to the face of the mayor's son, for example. A dirty business. A dog's life. Dog, a carnivorous mammal that belongs to canine family. Man's best friend. Great strategic tool to sell encyclopedias to clients named David, Diego, Daniel, Dylan, Darío, Demetrio, names written with a *D* for dog, as in lap dog, police dog, hunting dog and sheep dog, which works to take care of and guide the livestock. It's

a dog eat dog world and all because of the indifferent. And here I am in the city, partly just because I want to, and partly in exile for my own good because dead dogs – or exiled dogs – don't bite. I'm an encyclopedia salesman. Blessed be those who feel hate, rancor, fear, the impulse for vengeance, arrogance, cruelty and rage. The indifferent be damned.

Anyone can have a bad day. I'm having a bad Sunday, a bad twenty-first of July, nineteen hundred and sixty-three. I can't stand myself, I can't stand my apartment, I can't stand this street, I can't stand these people. The married couples pass by with their little packages of pastries, very dignified but very dirty. Unless they got up before nine in the morning they won't have had a shower. Rain falls on Paris and on heavy hearts. Here the drought lives inside us as well as out. Earth, dust, smoke, shade, nothing. An epidemic of dry farmland, dry taps, dry showers, dry calendars. People are passing by, very dignified, coming from mass, they buy flowers, they go in and out of the Bernina pastry shop and they hide behind their indifference to avoid contagion. Where is the doctor who can cure indifference? Medicine, science that deals with human illness. Doctor, someone who is legally authorized to practice medicine. Pills for indifference. Injections for indifference. Medicinal syrups for indifference. Pharmacists willing to fill prescriptions for indifference. I'll say it again: the mediocre are more dangerous than the evil. I'm going to write a thousand times in my journal that I must flee from mediocrity, flee from mediocrity, flee from mediocrity. In this country, you emerge from adolescence through the portal of the indifferent. Adolescence, the age following childhood. A period of profound physical and psychological changes that for women occurs between the ages of twelve and eighteen years and for men between fourteen and twenty.

I go back to my apartment. I make something to eat. With the advance from Universo and my share of the commission from the first sale, I've got the pantry full. Some canned food,

yesterday's bread and a beer. There are ten days left in July. Two months left before school starts. Six months left before I leave adolescence behind. One hundred and forty pages left before a train runs over Anna Karenina.

I'm going to tell the whole story in chronological order for the fun of surprising myself again with events as they unfold. Tuesday, the twenty-third of July…

I arrive at the office at five minutes after nine. Consuelo Astorga is already at her desk. She reads the newspaper and waits for the phone to start ringing. She's exchanged her brown glasses for some more modern ones with white rims. A little bit later, Vicente arrives looking like he hasn't slept well. He complains about the heat even before saying good morning. Some nights the cold wafts down from the mountains and infiltrates the asphalt and the bricks to cool things down. You can sleep well with the window open on those nights, and you might even be thankful for the sheet tangled around your dreaming body. But other nights, the darkness is immobile, the heat becomes an oppressive mass that keeps you from breathing so that you don't need another nightmare, more forced labor, more condemnation to suffocate. Insomnia will do that to you. Vicente Fernández arrives at the office with a face full of defeat. He must have had a rough night.

At nine-thirty we divvy up the calls. Vicente gets *A* to *O*. I get *P* to *Z*. Give them the basic information, explain the conditions of purchase, close the deal or, if the circumstances warrant, rope the client into a personal visit. The individualized approach gives a more human face to the cultural and financial discussions. I go slowly, taking it easy, I pause before dialing

each new number, I'm slow to finish up my list of calls. Vicente is faster. He runs one call into the next, he doesn't slow down to discuss flora and fauna and world geography. He takes out his handkerchief, wipes the sweat from his face, tips his nose up toward the ceiling, stretches his neck muscles as he listens to the client, takes notes, and then closes the contract. In-person visits are only a good idea when there's a bigger deal in sight, such as the one the mayor facilitated for us in Loja. It's also good if the client is able to influence others around him to buy. He who plucks a grape may get a cluster. Every now and then when he finishes a call, Vicente will look over at me. He decides to indoctrinate me.

"What's up? You aren't doing anything."

"I'm listening to you. I'm learning."

"Well, if you really want to learn, convince yourself that it is just as dangerous to be too timid as too aggressive. A lame effort is just as bad as being caught with your pants down. You have to choose a path, have a clear vision for where you're going, that's the main thing. You're an encyclopedia salesman. Tomorrow you'll be something else, you'll have another goal. You have to live each day according to your goal. For now, an encyclopedia salesman. The mission is to do your job. Strategy is based on discipline. Not on reserve and not on recklessness. Go ahead. Call someone now. Don't think about it. Dial. I want to hear you."

Two-bit philosophy for a mediocre existence. Prudent men don't get ahead in life. They are office fodder, the lowly pencil pushers of obedience. They snuff out any spark they encounter. There is much more to living life than dousing flames. Personally, I want to change many things, burn many things, erase, delete, scream. I'm not reserved, I just don't buy into what I'm doing here.

At eleven, Consuelo approaches Vicente's desk with a message from Don Alfonso. Call him as soon as you get off the phone with your client. Universo Publishing is about to close a deal with the Department of Education and Recreation. They're going to buy and distribute encyclopedias to all the hotels, cinema clubs, business offices and even to the Spanish Association of Spelunking. The smell of a hot business deal wafts through the office like a warm birthday cake coming out of the neighbor's oven. We may have picked the winning lottery ticket. Don Alfonso's contact list is worth its weight in gold, Consuelo says, and I perceive a trembling tone of pride in her voice. She's the one who's had a good night. She looks gorgeous with a white dress, white shoes and a big white smile. All of which matches her new white-rimmed glasses and the big white handbag dangling from the back of her chair. She doesn't look like a little girl dressed for first communion, nor does she look like a bride, but she is radiant. I sense, or I imagine, the reason why. It could be that this deal between Don Alfonso and Education and Recreation has led to a pause in the boss's family vacation, an unexpected bit of work that might include the secretary. I'm mortified when Consuelo looks up from her paperwork and catches me watching her. The same thing happened yesterday. And the day before. And this is already the third time today.

What's changed is that now when I look at Consuelo, I spy on her, I'm checking out her hair, her lips, her gestures, and I'm looking for that Bohemian from Paris. It's all Vicente's fault because yesterday afternoon he went mad with unexpected joy when he heard on the radio that Manzaneque had won the Val d'Isère stage of the Tour de France and that Bahamontes was wearing the yellow jersey of the race leader, and that fuck the French anyway and Long Live Spain, and that miracles are still possible. Consuelo got mad and said it wasn't any fault of the French and that's when I learned that she had also lived in Paris.

"It's obvious that you've never worked in a factory." Vicente's tone thickened into a kind of pride that I didn't understand. "Of course, that's because you were living with artists, enjoying the Bohemian life."

I find it impossible not to watch Consuelo, to resist imagining what her glasses have seen, what her hands have touched, the people she's met, that world that's even better than a Tour de France victory. My eyes cannot keep still.

At eleven-thirty, after talking to the National Department of Education and Recreation and to whoever it was from the Spanish Trade Union Organization , Vicente invites me for a coffee. Before heading down to the Lepanto café bar, he stops at Consuelo's desk to gossip about the day's big surprise and the mystery of Don Alfonso. How is it possible that such a succulent piece of business from a national organization lands in a small provincial office? Only god and Don Alfonso know the answer.

"Ok, we're off to do our thing," he says to Consuelo with an expression of delight rarely seen on his placid salesman's face. "I don't think they're going to note this sale on our win list. What an amazing commission we would have gotten, don't you think? León and I are going to head down for a cup of coffee. Can you call this number in Motril please? We need to set up a meeting."

At a quarter to twelve, the Lepanto café bar serves its last coffees and its first rounds of beer. The coffee isn't sitting well on my stomach this morning. The nineteenth of April of nineteen sixty is more painful than ever after a baking hot night that was as hard on me as it was on Vicente. A hot night is like a paralyzed calendar. The widowed waiter was arguing about soccer with a group of medical assistants from the Health Clinic. He's a pessimist, nothing ever

goes right, everything's a mess. Last year they reinvented the team, they booted out the president, they turned the club over to a management committee, they fired twelve players, they signed up a bunch of new ones, and then? Well, nothing but nothing, Granada hasn't come close to getting into the playoffs. The best they could do was sixth place in the Second Division. I'm not sure why I bought a season ticket, he complains. I've jinxed the team.

One of the medical assistants thinks that signing on Millán as the new coach will change the course of the team's history. The widowed waiter acknowledges Millán's skill as a former player, and declares him a fine example of loyalty to the team. These days no one is loyal to his team, he says, no one sacrifices himself for the team colors. As we are about to leave, I get up the courage to ask him about Millán.

"You are so young." He looks at me with an affecting smile of superiority. If Granada's team were to make it to the playoffs this year, the widowed waiter might even be capable of unfreezing his calendar. "So very young. Millán's one of our stars: Candi, Vicente, Millán, Gonzalez."

"Hey Vicente! Have you played on the Granada team?" I feel I can joke with him because we are both so elated by the Education and Recreation deal he just told me about.

"There are many Vicentes in the world, my dear León. I have never in my life kicked a soccer ball."

At two o'clock on the dot we shut down the office. Everyone has lunch at home. At five o'clock we're all back in the office to continue answering the phone now with the whir of the electric fan in the background. At five-thirty, a delivery man from the La Estrella warehouse arrives with two long wooden poles. Consuelo wants to install new curtain rods in her apartment.

The one in the living room broke, and she decided to install a new one in the bedroom too while she was at it. At seven Vicente says goodnight. I watch him leave with his pinched feet, a handkerchief in one hand and the black briefcase in the other. At five minutes after seven, Consuelo says that it's closing time. We go. She couldn't take the tram because of the poles. It would have been impossible to get on, get off, find a seat, avoid hitting other passengers on the head, avoid breaking any windows. Since I don't have anything to do, I offer to help her home. It's a nice walk. I want to be a gentleman.

The curtain rods are heavy. The main difference between a student residence and a proper home is the weight of the objects you find inside. The furniture in my apartment isn't built to last. It seems it could disintegrate at any moment. In the old fashioned guest houses the furniture was as weighty as the history of its residents, with memories of families fallen on hard times who make ends meet by renting out rooms. But the student flats that have been opening across the city are filled with junk rather than memories. They all feel provisional. It's a dynamic of quick investment. Wardrobes built just to get by, beds to use and throw away, tables and chairs no one expects to last more than a year or two. Maybe that's the crack where time sneaks in and the calendar starts to drop its pages. Consuelo's curtain rods are weighty as a lifetime.

At seven-twenty we pass by the Batallas fountain. No water. At a little after seven-thirty, we get to the Salon fountain. No water there either. A rumor of beer and roast potatoes wafted out from Las Titas restaurant, but I'm afraid to suggest we stop. I don't want Consuelo to think that the poles are too heavy for me to carry. I do risk shifting the poles to my other shoulder so I don't wear out just one side of my body.

"Are they heavy?"

"No, not at all"

At eight o'clock we arrive at number four Transversal de la Bomba street and climb up up to the fourth floor. A home tastefully decorated with furniture for real. Shadows, order, memories. Most of the furniture is from my parents' house, she says thanking me for the compliments. She's hung the white handbag on the coat rack in the entry way and kicked off her shoes by the bedroom door. For my gallantry she offers me a beer. Walking around the house barefoot, she goes to the kitchen and returns with a tray. Two glasses, a large bottle of Alhambra beer, two thirds full, a pack of cigarettes and some matches. She asks if I smoke and when I say no she asks if I mind if she smokes. I've never seen her smoke in the office. There are things, Consuelo says, that I only do at home. It's eight-fifteen.

She wants to know about me, asks about my family and my studies in Granada. I tell her about my mother's grocery store, my father's farm work, life in the village. Then I tell her the adventures of the itinerant student who has just finished his first year of Latin studies with very good grades. I offer her some details about my friendship with Ignacio Rubio, my Literature professor, openly declaring my admiration for him and my intention to become a writer. Ignacio helped me endure a school with too many dried up leaves in the fall and too much cold in the winter. I'm not that interested in Latin, Greek or Spanish grammar. I confess that I'm in Latin studies only because I want to write. I figure it's the right bet for a solitary soul like myself. I confess to her, in a display of my profound self-awareness, that my solitary nature has nothing to do with the fact that I'm alone in Granada during the summer, with the university shut down and none of my family or roommates around. Solitude, I say, is my form of existence, my most intimate state of being; it is the very underwear of my conscience. I start to feel a little bit ridiculous. I'm talking as if I were trying to write a scholarly paper about my character, as if I

had gotten completely carried away writing in my journal. I'm furious at falling into my own infantile trap. The underwear of my conscience! But Consuelo interrupts both my confession and my raging shame by launching into a recitation of Pablo Neruda. It's a quarter to nine. "I like you when you're still because it's as if you were absent, and you hear me from afar and my voice doesn't touch you." Pablo Neruda, I say stupidly, as if I were answering a riddle. She continues. "It seems as though your eyes have flown away, and it seems as though a kiss has closed your mouth." That's right, she said, *Twenty Poems of Love.* Consuelo confesses that when she was young she wanted to be a poet, she read and she wrote many kisses, oops, I mean many verses. But then you never know where life will lead you, always toward the unexpected. Instead of a publisher for her own writing, destiny offered her a position as a secretary working for a publisher of manuals, guidebooks, dictionaries and encyclopedias. She's not going to complain, doesn't want to complain, but behind her modest appearance and her retreat from literature, occasionally she can still light a flame for poetry and she remembers Pablo Neruda and Federico García Lorca and the great timeless love poems. As for me, I'm not timeless at all, she says. I know I'm starting to get old.

At nine o'clock I tell her that's not true at all, that since I've met her she's gotten a lot younger. I can't exactly interpret the odd expression on her face when I say this. As I try to explain that I was fooled by my first impression of her at the office and that I learned to look at her in a different way, the sound of rumbling water pipes takes over the apartment. It's an unmistakable announcement, one that we've become accustomed to over the last months. Water, says Consuelo happily. Time to shower. She rises, enters the bathroom and leaves the door partway open.

At ten minutes after nine, I hear the tap running. At twelve minutes after nine I hear the shower running, water beating on the bottom of the bathtub. It's twelve minutes after nine, the door is ajar, I'm a gentleman, I don't dare get up, I have a sip of what's left of my beer, I look at the broken curtain rod lying in the living room, the two new ones propped up against the wall, I think I should just go ahead and put them up, Consuelo would be grateful. From behind the tempting, half-open door emerges the impatient rumor of falling water. I imagine Consuelo's naked body, her damp blond hair, the rain drops trickling down her body, a summer storm falling across her shoulders, her breasts, her belly, her sex, her thighs, finally arriving at her painted toes, those same toes that walked barefoot from the dining room to the kitchen, from the kitchen to the sofa, and from the sofa to the bathroom. Beneath her disguise as a demure secretary, there is a living world, a world that needs water, land, fire and air. A long shower, almost a quarter of an hour, as if the water and Consuelo's body were waiting for something.

"You don't want to take a shower?" she asks me at nine-thirty, completely natural.

I get up, I walk to the bathroom door. I see her naked for just a moment, the time it takes her to cover herself awkwardly with a towel. I saw my mother naked once when I was ten years old. That's about it for my experience. I'm unsettled by her damp hair, the blue towel draped around her wet body like a flag on a windless day. Her shoulders exposed, her hands across her chest, her hips and thighs barely covered.

"Sorry. No, no thanks. I'll shower when I get home."

I'm like some timid little fellow desperate not to bother anyone. One must cleanse oneself in one's own home. I go back to the sofa and watch Consuelo walk from the bathroom to her bedroom wrapped in her towel. She leaves little steamy footprints, as if she were walking

along the shore of a movie or a novel. Did I do the right thing not taking a shower? I ask myself over and over. What would a worldly, modern, open-minded man do? Swoop down onto the naked body before him, or wait until the situation became clearer? A woman has a right to a shower when water appears in the middle of a drought. She can take a shower in her own house without this implying some sort of shameless proposition. And what would a boy do, a dumb shit adolescent frightened of the age difference, of his own ignorance and of his paralyzing anguish at the thought of making a fool of himself?

Consuelo emerges from the bedroom wearing pajama bottoms and a plaid shirt. I struggle to make conversation. We tip-toed around neutral topics, work issues, the itinerary Consuelo had worked out for us. Tomorrow I'm going to Motril with Vicente. We've arranged a visit to the Guardia Civil headquarters there. We also have appointments with two doctors, a pharmacist and a lottery ticket vendor who lives in the port.

"The two of you are spending the night in Motril. I reserved a hotel room. You'll share a double. We save money that way. But be careful."

"Why?"

"I've heard rumors that Vicente is homosexual."

"But he's married."

"I've never seen his wife. Anyway, you never know. You can't trust anybody. It doesn't matter if he's married."

At ten-fifteen I leave Consuelo's apartment. I head toward the river that is running dry. As I walk along the balustrade I pass young lovers seeking refuge from another hot night in the

cool gardens along the Genil. At eleven o'clock I open the door to my apartment. Along the way home, I passed by the virgin of anguish and by city hall. Everything's clear to me now. As I passed by the virgin of anguish I decided that Vicente wasn't a homosexual. I would have noticed by now after working and traveling with him for the better part of July. By the time I reached the mayor's office I convinced myself that Consuelo was actually suggesting that I was a fag. You never know, but the homosexual turns out to be me. I made a fool of myself. Solitude is the underwear of my conscience, my most intimate state of being. What a child…what a missed opportunity.

You have to resist. This is Vicente's advice when he sees my face paling as we round the third curve. Anyone can make it through one tight curve, maybe two. The biggest problem is my awareness of time. When you are on a torturous road trip, the question of are-we-there-yet gets brutal. Our destination becomes blurry. The threat of a bleak future makes the present even bleaker and I'm oppressed by the fear of how unwell I'm starting to feel. I'm hopeless. Seeing me so pallid, Vicente tries to encourage me.

"Here's the trick. Only think about the next curve. Don't think about anything but the next one, and when you get past that, the next one. Forget about the three hours we still have left to travel. That'll perk you up and you'll be able to resist until you finally get used to it.

Only the next curve. The next bump. That's the up side of forcing yourself into a routine. But there's another side to that coin. The same forces you deploy to avoid an embarrassing bout of motion sickness can also be used to quash the imagination and become an indifferent soul. Routine is a rut, burying yourself in curve, and then another, and another and another without

thinking about the long journey, the hot bus, the uncomfortable seats and Vicente's body which the inertia of each turn keeps pushing toward me, invading the little space I have in seat number twenty-two. A couple of seats back, a boy is vomiting in between wails, a mother offers a sick bag, a man points to the land scorched by the sun and complains about the drought, the bus driver shifts gears, spins the immense steering wheel, leaves a pungent smell of gasoline every time he goes up or down a hill. I'm only thinking about the next curve. Vicente's right. At some point distress, fatigue and suffering become routine.