

THE SLOW BIRD

CURATORIAL FICTION

CLAUDIA FONTES

33bienal/sp

Avis Patiens



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Once upon a time there was a bird, my God.

Clarice Lispector

Once upon a space there was a time, my God.

Once above space there was no time, your Dog.

Once or twice I heard a space go fly, not God.

There was a time when there was a bird when, there was no God.

Once upon a twice upon a thrice upon a time, another God.

Once upon a sound there was a bird, my Song.

Time upon a once there bird a God, my was.

Did I say that a bird was my God? That birds can be gods?

That birds are gods if they are mine?

Carlos Ceci Petril

Translation by Daniella Gitlin

THE LOCKED-ROOM MYSTERY

Pablo Martín Ruiz

CONFIGURATIONS

If you look at them carefully, letting your gaze wander in different directions, forgetting the way we're used to looking at them, you feel the presence of forms which want to be seen in all their details, their designs, their arrangement; in their short, controlled, precise lines, curved or straight, which leave open spaces or close in on themselves. They group themselves in ways that can seem random, but at regular distances from one another, making them easy to look at while also leaving blank spaces between them, meaningless little nothings through which some other sense unexpectedly flows. Some consist of just one line, others need two, none requires more than three. What I'm looking at are letters of the alphabet, printed, laid out on a page. Together they form words, which form sentences, which form texts. Because of my job, I've grown accustomed to paying attention to them, to looking at them closely, to seeing them pass intact from one tongue to another.

I've always enjoyed imagining them in different configurations, repositioning them, inverting them, abstracting them from the page, turning them around, adjusting their scale, subjecting them to permutation and combination, treating them like parts of a whole which has to be rebuilt, as though they were the key to an unknown problem. It's not hard to see that they lend themselves to a variety of perceptions. Their two visual dimensions can easily be transposed to music: each letter is an instruction to produce sound, every text is a score. You can imagine them growing in volume and turning into a three-dimensional alphabet, like those toys in the shape of letters that Jerome suggested building to teach children to read back in the 4th Century. And that once we let them grow into space, they in turn will create their own spatial arrangements, like sculptural constellations, statues which forget and detach themselves from what they once represented. Drawings, images, sounds, volumes, which are no longer text yet continue to be text. Let's stop and look at any one of them. It could be the C or the I or the S, complete in their cut, their polished form, their distinction from the others. Let's choose P: a straight vertical line and a semicircle on the upper right part. Let's observe the open space it creates around itself, the closed space it leaves inside. I think about words that have the letter P in them, about words and names that start with the letter P. Now let's look at it on its own, undone, before it belonged to anything, before its own design, still open to its own potential: it could be the P of a word in Spanish, or a word in another language, or a word in a language that doesn't have a P in its writing system. It could be the P of a non-language, representing something

purely visual or something we can't imagine or something which is always shifting, which simultaneously signifies and doesn't signify and exhausts itself in its own contemplation. If we had to come up with a riddle whose solution were the letter P, what riddle would we come up with?

UNSETTLING FACTS

News of Sara Litvín's disappearance first came to me by chance, while I was reading a dictionary at a cafe downtown. I heard it from Arturo Guasch, who was alarmed and telling it to two other translators at the next table over during a break from the annual Latin American conference. He told them what would later be repeated many times: that she had gone to a library to work and hadn't been seen since. We'd spent the whole morning listening to presentations and I was tired and feeling sleepy, but those words heard involuntarily jumped out at me.

It wasn't just any name—we knew Litvín. She was even listed among those registered for the conference and was supposed to give her presentation the following day. We knew her well for how productive she was and because, in addition to translating multiple languages, she wrote lucidly about the process of translation. She was also an active member of the translators association and had been a candidate from the opposition political group within the association, but she was unpredictable in the alliances she formed and her positions were sometimes hard to anticipate. She had a few known enemies who felt betrayed or threatened by her, but

in general she was respected and admired by her colleagues. I remember reading several of her research papers and essays. One of those essays, a reflection on the concept of “original,” ends with a series of questions that I often cite in my class and are examples of her acumen:

When I read a poem in English which was written originally in English, am I, a Spanish speaker, reading the original? When I read a poem in Spanish which was written five hundred years ago, am I, as someone living in this historical moment, reading the original? When I read a novel by a contemporary author who writes in Spanish, am I, who am not that writer, reading the original? And what about when I read something I myself have written?

Her disappearance hit hard. Alarming if not altogether brutal news was not uncommon at the time. A council member had been shot point-blank by unknown assassins while she was being driven around the city in her car. A young woman had been raped and her body torn to pieces in the neighborhoods of the south. A group of young people walking on the street had been violently attacked by another group with metal rods, for reasons that were never given. It didn't take much time for a disappeared translator to arouse all kinds of conjectures and fears.

The disappearance took place at the Roses Foundation, right in the center of the city, where Litvín had been going almost every day for just over a month thanks to a grant she'd

received to work on one of her translations. Her study area was in a room on the first floor which they called “the library,” where there are shelves filled with books lining the walls, a large wooden desk, and a pair of glass cases to display items from the Foundation’s collection. The windows of the room look out onto a park: to the green of the trees, a small lake, the passing birds. It’s an ideal place to work. The eyewitness of the disappearance, if it’s even possible to have an eyewitness of something which has occurred by omission, was Guasch himself. The room on the first floor is used regularly as a work space and is given in turns to researchers or grantees who request it. Guasch’s time slot was directly following Litvín’s. Considering the history of confrontation between the two of them, which we all knew about, this coincidence did not go unnoticed.

I didn’t know Guasch well, but I knew he had a certain tendency towards conflict, that he liked being an instigator. I once heard him say: “I translate all kinds of texts, except literary ones. Writers care about words, and anything can be translated except words.” Naturally he was an excellent literary translator of both fiction and poetry, and a well-known authority on translation studies. But he wasn’t free from controversy: he’d once been accused of altering texts that he had translated, of changing entire paragraphs into a single short sentence or eliminating them entirely. The point is that Litvín had entered the room and hadn’t left, or at least no one had seen her leave. She didn’t go home and no one had heard from her. Days went by without any news. She had, as they say, vanished.

Like many of my colleagues, in addition to translating,

I teach. I also pitch pieces whenever the translation jobs aren't rolling in, which is to say often. The case was all over the news and I started writing a piece for a newspaper. The news was upsetting, but as I found out more details, I started to find it funny. I suddenly imagined myself writing a locked-room mystery, those detective stories where someone is killed in a hermetically sealed room and the murder seems impossible, a sub-genre of detective fiction which at one time I was an avid reader of. I thought about the reams I'd read, starting with the foundational one, Poe's story about the Parisian orangutan. Those written by Zangwill, Leroux, Dickson Carr, or those by the writing duos Ellery Queen and Boileau-Narcejac. I thought mainly about oblique examples, stories written by authors for whom mystery writing wasn't common yet seemed to lie secretly at the heart of their work. Like Roberto Arlt's nearly perfect crime: the murder of an old lady who is alone in a locked apartment, solved with an ice cube; or the story "The Case of the Locked Room" by Fernando Pessoa who, in addition to so many heteronyms, came up with the detective and infallible reasoner Quaresma and left behind hundreds of draft pages of detective fiction. How remarkable the image of these two writers, so extraordinary and so different, the great novelist of social conflict and the great poet of fragmented identity, inventing those airtight riddles at nearly the same time, using a fixed formula, riddles made up of locks, sealed windows, and dead bodies. And I thought about one that wasn't even written by a writer but a musician: the American George Antheil, composer of the explosive *Ballet mécanique* which the Dadaists admired, who wrote a detective novel un-

der the pseudonym Stacey Bishop in which not one but three impossible murders take place and the detective is an expert in dodecaphonic music and avant-garde art. I now found myself in a situation where I was writing a newspaper story about the incredible disappearance of a person who was in a perfectly locked room. And on top of that, as if it were all some kind of joke, the protagonists of the story were translators.

Reading Machines

Together, all the components of these devices, built specifically to integrate the latest technological developments, constitute a complex but fully intact and user-friendly machine. One of the simplest machines on the market is the Hyper-Oculus. Suspended above its solid metal base is a device not unlike a camera with a retractable mirror. To read a text all one has to do is place it beneath the camera and the machine will automatically activate its synthetic retina. The models in this series are based on prototypes built by Bob Carlton Brown, who predicted in 1930 that the printed book was destined for obsolescence and designed a machine which allowed for high-speed reading by compressing texts and sending them via wireless networks. His designs were based, in turn, on the technological advances of Admiral Bradley Fiske, who in 1926 invented a machine which one had to bring close to the eye to read through a complex system of magnifying glasses;

the typewritten text was processed photographically, its size so microscopic that it was invisible to the eye. (Brown disqualified this machine on the grounds that, ultimately, it was nothing more than “the old-fashioned book hiding behind a magnifying glass.”) The devices based on Juan Esteban Fassio’s model are very different, and it is to them which we will now turn.

DEBATE AND RIVALRY BETWEEN LITVÍN AND GUASCH

– An excerpt from a presentation by Sara Litvín:
“It’s that translators don’t work with languages, they work with texts. The translator doesn’t reflect on one language in order to arrive at another language, but rather on one text to arrive at another text. A translator intervenes in a language, makes innovations in the vocabulary or syntax of a language, solely with respect to the text she is working with and the text she wants to arrive at or has an intuition for. Working with language is subordinate to working with texts. The ideal or absolute goal of the translator, if we even want to imagine it, isn’t a particular or universal language, with whatever characteristics, but rather a text, or, to say it another way, a text of texts, THE text of texts, always unattainable, always eluding us. That was the mistake that certain mystical-idealist theorists made—believing that the translator was some kind of idolater of language, when really the translator’s only deities are the texts. No one translates Baudelaire or Flaubert, say, for the love of French, but

because of an attraction to particular texts by those authors. That the initial text is in one language and the end result in another is a condition, even a necessity, of the task, but only a secondary one. It's time we had a materialist understanding of translation. My critique of what we might call theoretical idealism within the field of translation is equivalent to Marx's critique of Hegel."

– An excerpt from a presentation by Arturo Guasch:
"The power of this idea lies not in making the translator an epic hero charged with saving the world through language, but rather in the translator's ability to dissolve and disappear in the language, making himself one with it in its desire for totality. The translator does not consider his goal to be the materiality of the texts, or even the materiality of a text which he could imagine as absolute or ideal; on the contrary, the translator must think of himself as a being who is evolving, and whose final state will be a language, or to put it more concretely, will be his identification and complete assimilation with that language, which is certainly not a concrete language, neither present nor past, neither living nor dead, but rather a language in a state of constant becoming, towards fullest consummation. The translator does not limit himself to syntax or word choice decisions to produce the texts that he produces, but rather intervenes directly in the constant transformation of language. The translator, or the ideal to which the translator aspires, is an angel with outstretched wings who looks towards the distant origin of language, who sees the numerous transformations of all languages over the

course of millennia, the syntactical and grammatical ruins that accumulate like broken pieces which he wants to lovingly put back together, and who is carried forward by the wind of Pure Language which fills his wings and pushes him inevitably towards the future, a future where he will disappear and be turned to nothing and where everything will be made of absolute word and heaven.

– Facts:

In a competition for the post of History and Theory of Translation Department Chair, Litvín and Guasch were the finalists and she was the one who, after a long and conflict-ridden trial of contestations, rebuttals from both sides, and bitter confrontation, was finally given the job.

ARTURO GUASCH'S TESTIMONY

I arrived at the Foundation a few minutes before my appointed time. I waited a while. When I saw that no one was leaving the room, I knocked on the door. No response. I heard some noises that sounded like footsteps, but they could have been coming from outside. I tried to open the door but it was locked. From the moment I arrived until the moment I knocked on the door, I didn't see anyone enter or leave the room. I went to speak with the secretary at the reception desk on the ground floor. She told me that the translator who had the slot prior to mine was in the room, that she herself had given her the key a few hours earlier. She hadn't seen her leave and hadn't been

given back the key, so she should still be there, she said. She reviewed the reservation schedule and confirmed that it was another translator, Sara Litvín's, time slot. I was surprised to hear her name because I'd known her for many years. The secretary opened the door with a spare key. The room was empty, the windows were closed and locked from the inside, everything was perfectly in order.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN TRANSLATORS

"Did you hear what happened with Litvín?"

"Everyone was talking about it at the conference."

"How was the conference?"

"Just like all the others. A few interesting presentations, a lot of irrelevant ones."

"I hope it's nothing serious."

"I'm used to it already."

"I meant Litvín."

"I'm writing a story bout her case."

"Isn't it remarkable that she disappeared while translating? It seems like a metaphor for our trade."

NEWS ABOUT THE MISSING TRANSLATOR

Attention first turned to Litvín's political enemies, since there were no major conflicts among her acquaintances. But it didn't go beyond rather brief interrogations in any instance since

there wasn't a shred of incriminating evidence on anyone. The presentation excerpts, taken from conference proceedings, were published together with a detailed account of the confrontation with Guasch by a sensationalist newspaper trying to elicit scandalous theories. An imaginative or shrewd journalist took the content of Guasch's presentation literally and proposed the idea that Litvín had dematerialized as a result and ultimate culmination of her work as a translator and (the journalist added with questionable irony) as the involuntary confirmation of her rival's theory. A rumor began to spread that among the translator community there was a belief that a language existed which was the ultimate possible state of the world, and which translators could reach before everyone else. Soon even theological speculations were made, and when the fantastical theory began to catch on that the translator hadn't actually disappeared but rather her body had become a spirit because she had reached the absolute language of God, the episode became an obligatory story on the news channels and a matter of heated debate on social media. Suddenly translation was a topic of conversation in bars and cafes, and nearly everyone was speculating as to the nature of language and its possibilities.

That was when, less than two weeks after her disappearance, a message started making the rounds that suggested some possible leads. This message, taken seriously by investigators because of the details it included about Litvín, listed the next steps for finding her. The problem was that these alleged instructions, listed at the end of the message, were embedded in a few paragraphs written in an incomprehensible language, and in letters from a seemingly distorted or new alphabet.

Encounters between Death and Reason

Death has always been the ultimate limit experience. Not only because it's the end of life and the end of what is known, but above all because it's the limit or the edge of our capacity to make or lend sense to things. Death is the real event which reason has always come up against. In this essay we propose, using the paradoxical concept of *sylogistic agony* (elaborated upon in the following pages) as a core idea, a comparative study of some of philosophy's reactions to death, focusing on two basically contemporaneous central figures who came from cultures between which there was never much exchange: the Greek Socrates and the Chinese Chuang Tzu. This allows us in turn to consider two of the most important philosophical systems of antiquity: platonism and taoism. Let us begin by noting that neither of these two thinkers wrote, and what we know about them comes to us from what their disciples wrote. That is, let us begin by noting that their words are, from the very beginning, the words of the dead.

THE PLOT THICKENS

The Roses Foundation performed an internal investigation which revealed that one of the display cases in the room was missing a manuscript and a poor-quality copy had been placed there in its stead. It was the unpublished work of a visual poet who had died, a notebook whose every page was covered in

shapes, sketches, and wordless diagrams, and whose sense and general organizing principle, if it had one, left the experts dumbfounded. The display case was completely shut and intact, it didn't seem to have been forced open, and there was in fact no sign of someone having tried to open it. Had Sara Litvín stolen the manuscript? And if so, how? Had it simply disappeared into thin air? Or was it that someone had kidnapped Litvín and also stolen the manuscript? Or was there no connection between the two facts? A new enigmatic absence compounded the first. Now we were dealing with a locked-room mystery within a locked-room mystery. I couldn't help but think that the manuscript whose content was incomprehensible was yet a third locked room in this triple concentric set of perplexities.

EXEGETICAL MATTERS

At some point something happened, some kind of misunderstanding, because what were at first more or less serious attempts to decipher the incomprehensible paragraphs that might shed some light on a possible murder, suddenly became proposals that seemed intended for some kind of creative competition with changing or contradictory rules. The most unexpected submissions started to come in from different places around the world. The Voynich Association offered their help, based on five centuries of (unsuccessful) experience; an experimental translation group proposed performing an ultra-proto-neo-multi-translation of the text; Charles Bernstein disciples sent in a hundred different possible English translations

of the text; a theory came in from Montevideo that the text was based on Felisberto Hernández's writing in code; a translator from Armenia sent a translation into a completely incomprehensible language, claiming that the two incomprehensibilities canceled each other out and that universal semantic equilibrium thus restored would reveal the meanings of both texts. Chaos seemed to have permeated the news reports and reality itself.

The first half of the solution came from Campinas, Brazil. A university professor, a specialist in ancient Middle Eastern history, said she had recognized words and parts of sentences in Aramaic, or in something very similar to Aramaic, if one transcribed the language into the Roman alphabet using simple "mimetic-analog assimilation" (namely, if a letter looked like an A, it was transcribed as A). The translations she proposed were verified in nearly every instance by Aramaic experts. The mere mention of this language set off countless more or less biblical theories which ranged from the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Gnostic texts of Nag Hammadi. Someone ought to publish a volume dedicated to the alternative translations that were submitted, so remarkable was their richness and variety.

The second half of the solution came from Toronto, Canada. An authority on Buddhist texts was certain that part of the manuscript (which happened to be the part that wasn't in Aramaic) significantly corresponded to words and phrases in Pali, the ancient language of the first sutras. The combination of these rough translations from Aramaic and Pali made for a

*Things are weighed
in kilos and grams,
but what makes them
immovable are pacts
and the past. The
movements would
have to change: instead
of pushing with one's
waist, lifting up one leg
and then another, as
when crossing a barbed-
wire fence.
That place on the other
side is hard to imagine,
barely a shadow. But we
know it exists, we look
for it.*

here relatively coherent text which seemed to be the description of
she dances a place, albeit impossible to identify with any kind
up the staircase of precision. Interpretations immediately began to
of the inner ear spring forth, not so much about the described place's
collects characteristics and location, but about its possible
fragments meaning. The predictable consensus was that it could be
to hoard against fire a description of the place where the kidnapped
 translator—or her body—would be found.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN TRANSLATORS II

“First an article about reading machines, then one about the relationship between death and reason. All they have to ask me now is to translate a text about the theme of the double and I’ve got a study on detective fiction ready to go. Sometimes I have the feeling that the random texts I translate are not random at all, but rather chosen by someone to form a coherent whole, a sort of novel governed by the ghosts of the Tower of Babel, which also seems like an ironic commentary on what’s happening in my life. Speaking of novels, I was thinking about the case of our translator. I think it’s all a setup. The story of her dissolution into absolute language, her alleged dematerialization into a mystical union with God’s grammar—that harebrained hypothesis based on Guasch’s esoteric theories was spread around to draw attention, not to be believed. It’s a story that was invented to cover up another story. What I think is that it was the very same Guasch who made up the story and spread it, using his esoteric theories to conceal the true and possibly horrific facts: that he killed her, tore her apart,

and buried the pieces somewhere. He probably just wanted to mess with her but things got out of hand and he had to kill her. Because he couldn't stand that she was

better than him, because of their

A whale swims in a ditch.

tumultuous

A person drags himself along a sandbank.

history,

A sentence looks for a place in a text written in another language.

because he

A feeling, born from the encounter between two strangers, coils in

lost that job

the roots of a carob tree.

to her,

Someone enters a family gathering with his siblings, his parents,

or because of all of it

cousins and aunts and uncles, with whom he has a close

overall these years, who knows.

relationship, and he doesn't recognize anyone.

He always had a sensitive ego and was always a little aggressive.

“...”

“Tell me what you think. You’ve been quiet for a while.”

“I agree with you that it’s all made up, but there’s something in your explanation that doesn’t make sense to me. It seems too obvious for a man like Guasch who, though he can be eccentric and provocative, leaves no doubt about his intelligence. I think the opposite—that the one who orchestrated it all was Litvín. She saw on the schedule that he had the time slot directly after hers and decided to set a trap for him. She knew he would be the primary suspect, that the history of conflict between the two of them would quickly be remembered, and simply because she resented him, or to confirm her superiority over him, or for something that might have happened between them that we don’t know about, she decided to stage her own disappearance so that he would be the one accused.”

“It’s not a bad explanation, but we’re still left with the problem of what she plans to do with her life from now on. And I’d like to add that it’s pretty funny to see two translators playing

detectives. We should both be right.”

“It might be funny, but it’s not that surprising. Think of it this way: whenever a translator goes about her work, she is reasoning, trying to find the solution to a problem, like a mathematician. And she progresses towards that solution with a natural intuition for words, like a poet. Remember Poe’s ideal detective, who had to unite the virtues of mathematics and of poetry? That ideal is nowhere better embodied than in the work of the translator.

Ra felma tameca

A black bird jets into the middle of a library to repeat to a lover—in mourning, submerged in his reading—the truth about what he doesn’t want to confront. The scene appears to fulfill Michelet’s wish in a celebrated essay “to reveal the bird as soul, to show that it is a person.” But what is it to reveal a soul if not to expose a language? That is, to show the foreignness that exists in everything that wishes to present itself as though it were an essence, to make evident the fragmentary quality of that which could be considered a homogeneous whole (if only grammatically), but which in reality does nothing more than turn around its own void, its blind spot, its lost or forgotten origin. And above all to show, almost as though putting it on display, the expressive power of that which is absent, the capacity to produce sense afforded to a materiality which cre-

ates its own intangible double beside its own tangible self, its cavity, its shadow space, like an iteration that is both its negative and its complement. Like that vision the penitent saint had in the desert of a creature which not even memory was capable of changing, a creature both monstrous and divine which he was only able to describe as an unbearable being who was half bird and half bird. There could be a song whose lyrics are mathematics and whose melody is nonsense. *Ra fel-ma tameca zabial mi, deno i gandres*. A sentence with transparent syntax which nonetheless is composed of incongruent parts, and which forces a possible exegete to ask himself not so much about its provenance or origin as about its future and its destiny, as though it were a sentence which wasn't the result of past linguistic transformations but rather was marking the creation of a language which, in its constant transformation, was nothing more than a continuous translation, a semantic fact made of pure promises and meanings to come, a language whose future form was, to put it one way, that of an infinite bird, such that the vastness of the space through which it flew, even as it was constantly expanding, was always within itself.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN TRANSLATORS III

“So? Did you get sent a text about doubles to translate?”

“No, but I got some kind of treatise or anthology of shaman-

istic and poetic texts. I don't know what the connection to
detective fiction is but I'm sure
the black of these letters on a white page I'll discover one. I started to
is as much an absence as a presence translate them and I keep thinking
punctuated by a final point they're about some other thing I can't
a window through to other window manage to translate, as though they're
asking to be translated and resisting at the same time. We
should translate them together."

PARTIAL RECONSTRUCTION

In what follows, a series of what are normally quite implausible events are transcribed, coincidences and narrative infelicities that rely on the extenuating circumstance that this is indeed how things came to pass. Litvín and Guasch, who knew each other since they were both students and had been enemies for years, had met a few months earlier at the fine arts museum in the small town of Vic-sur-Seille, France. They both—neither knew that the other was going—had been invited to the European Association of Translators Conference. Although they would have wanted to avoid it, suddenly they saw each other face to face and, maybe because the totally unexpected nature of the situation made a showdown seem ridiculous, they started to talk, surprising even themselves. That conversation was followed by a long night and that night was followed by a few days of traveling around the south of France. The years of discord had happened not to them, but to two avatars whom they had just declared defunct, and whom they didn't wish

to hear from. Among the many stories they shared, he told her one about an incomprehensible manuscript written by his maternal grandfather, León Dordino, a descendant of Sephardic Jews who had settled in Andorra (the original family name was D'Ordino) before the Inquisition.

This grandfather of Guasch's had earned his living as a sporadic businessman, but he was also a serious reader and had spent years studying the holy languages

of antiquity, which he came to know imperfectly. The manuscript was actually a page handwritten on light yellow unlined paper. According to family legend, the text included instructions for finding a valuable painting which, out of animosity towards the family, resentment, or who knows what secret reason, the grandfather had decided to hide. Guasch had only found the text because, just days before her death, his grandmother had insisted that he ask him about the painting. "So that he tells you before he dies." His grandfather had actually already died, but his grandmother's insistence in the midst of her delirious agony compelled Guasch to start looking through old papers. At the top of the page was the perfectly clear heading: "Here is Jerome." The rest was completely incomprehensible, written painstakingly by hand in an indeterminate language and in letters that hardly recalled the Roman alphabet.

Just after Guasch told the story,

*is it a song or a code
you must decipher?
(is there a difference?)*

*is it a memory you forgot you had
or a lost dream
whose poignancy returns
with a sharp pain in your heels?*

*in air exposing
now invisible distance
has me cradled yet*

*hung here do I stretch to hear
ants marching, lines receding*

purely out of greed (since there was the possibility, even if remote, of getting rich from this unlikely treasure), or maybe because both were feeling a renewed sense of adventure, or for both reasons, they thought about how they would go about it. They agreed on having her disappear just before the conference and creating the greatest possible commotion in the translator world, so that many translators would become interested in the case and the chance of someone deciphering the manuscript would increase, if indeed the text was written in something that could be deciphered. They took advantage of the Roses Foundation having little by way of security measures. She simply waited behind a door for him to signal to her when the secretary had stepped away from her desk. She walked out of the building from the main door, without even having entered the room from which she had allegedly disappeared. The grandfather's incomprehensible manuscript was of course the text in the message that circulated after her disappearance. All that was needed then was to suggest that these incomprehensible notes might disclose the whereabouts of the missing translator and wait. In the meantime, she was at a small hotel in the countryside, registered under a different name. They also realized they could have some fun sending wild hypotheses into the ether. Of course they were the ones who had sent those loose paragraphs, intentionally edited, to the newspapers, and made

<i>I wrote a letter</i>	sure they would be circulated. In any
<i>to myself</i>	event, the best theories that surfaced
<i>I needed to figure</i>	had nothing to do with them but rather
<i>why I</i>	with what others came up with from
<i>how I</i>	the few pieces of reality that they had
<i>it turned out that</i>	
<i>in the hurricane</i>	

partially crafted. The plan turned out so well that, just from following the vague, tentatively translated, almost stammered instructions, and after a few failed attempts, they found the painting. It was buried, carefully wrapped and protected, at the far end of a humble family field where Arturo had spent some summers as a child. It was one of those famous portraits of Saint Jerome made by the French painter Georges de La Tour in the 17th Century. They sold it for a small fortune and disappeared.

*To experience "pure editing" in real time.
Angles replace edits. A dish of soup, white
rounds, straight-stretched shadows. A young
girl in a coffin, not-white on white on white.
A woman stretched out on a divan, natural
curve against man-made curve. Is it the
same without someone staring back? Can
one read these differences on one's own face?*

NOTES IN A COMPOSITION NOTEBOOK

Good material to one day write my own locked-room mystery. I like the symmetry of coming up with one disappearance (of the translator) in order to solve another (of the painting). And of coming up with one mystery (of the locked room) in order to solve another (of the manuscript).

How will I know the proper placement of things?

But I'd have to get rid of the fumbling parts, or use them some other way. Like the manuscript being stolen from the Foundation, which has no concrete function and gets confused with the other manuscript, as though it were just an arbitrary

How can I distinguish what

duplication. Get rid of it? Or create an entire story around it and make the whole thing a double mystery, with converging and diverging riddles. Who grabbed it? The best option would

What is the melody of replacement? be to suggest (but not confirm) that it was Litvín herself. That once the

desire to have a valuable original had instilled itself in her, she felt the desire to have another, especially one within arm's reach. She simply tried to open the display case and was able to do it with a certain ease. She looked at the manuscript with care, made a rough copy of several pages, and replaced it one day. The

*what
can you learn from her?* contradiction between the desire to possess originals and the systematic

*her ability to pivot upon pain
to transfer it into motion, speed, pleasure* practice of translation is especially

*so simple, if we can play the same melody:
ruins will be the foundations
plain walk - forensic proof of existence* elegant (remember the translator who said he wanted to do translations that

achieved what, by definition, a translation can't achieve: to radiate the power of the unique; look for quote).

Consider the name Georges de La Tour as a possible pseudonym: it combines the name of Perec with a purely Babelic last name.

Detective story and translation: the connection is in the origin

of the genre itself. Remember that the first detective solves the first mystery, the one about the murders in the Rue Morgue, using the skills of a translator: there is a cacophonous message in an indiscernible language, which seems to be all languages and no language at all, which needs to be made sense of.

Include thoughts or quotations about translation. Incorporate translated texts. Translation as an act of violence: “Every translation assaults the language into which it enters.

Something from the outside invades the inside of a different space. It’s as though suddenly someone were to drag a fallen tree through your living room.” Don Mee Choi: “Translate me and I’ll kill you.”

*Your keys are ready to strike the ribbon
you wish for it to bear your fingerprints
but could you really mark it?
The bird that will hatch
from this egg
resembles a cicada
counting seconds with its vibrating ribs
The bird that will hatch from this egg
sings a song of bells and ink
You may wish to have done this
but in the doing you will be impatient
You may wish to have seen this
but in the seeing you will think of other things
(that woman’s hair, your phone bill,
an itch on your ankle, the government)*

Marpa Lotsawa: “I try to translate into a language that seems to come not from the birds’ song but from their fury.”

Make a section (or a chapter) which considers two kinds of
 detectives and the efficiency of their differ-
maternal tree ent methods: the socratic detective, who
& paternal water proceeds methodically using dialectic
within me immaculate questioning, and the taoist detective,
step after step who proceeds paradoxically using
I welcome the strongest passive action, the unintentional
of your thoughts action of the intuitive and spontaneous act.

Michelet: “Both things have been accomplished—one difficult
 and the other, on the face of it, impossible— by the bird.”

Focus on the sacred language enthusiast and occasional cryp-
 tographer León Dordino. Why didn’t Dordino, who wasn’t a

errant mind / inverted flower / heaving heart rich man, sell the
slim flicker / wide open spectrum / time stands still painting himself?
 Maybe he couldn’t

sell it for some reason but planned to do it later. In that case,
 Dordino wrote those notes for himself, not for others. Turn
 everything into a novel? The first chapter could be the story of
 Dordino, which includes the tale of how he got the painting or
 how it came to him and of how, beginning with his interest in
 the Torah, he ended up wanting to learn the dead languages
 which were used to write the sacred texts of the great religions.
 Dordino is interested in one translation problem in particular:
 the *hapax legomena*.

Possible titles: “The Mystery of the Roses”; “Imperfect Trans-
 lators”; “The Guilt of the Innocent”; “Towards the Bird”; “Bar-

barian Translations”; “Involuntary Criminals”; “The Detectives of Babel.”

Take up the reflection again about contemplating the letters and rewrite it. Use it, maybe as a beginning. Change the core of the riddle, so it’s not necessarily a letter. Or the riddle is about the letter P but the solution ultimately ends up being the letter B, of which P is an incomplete version. Or even better: the riddle is about the letter B but the solution ends up being the letter P, because the best solutions are those that leave an empty space.

Think about the ending. Some possible options: the painting is authentic and expensive, they sell it and keep the money; the painting is authentic and expensive, but they like it so much that they don’t sell it so that they can look at it; the painting is authentic and expensive, but when they try to sell it they find out it’s stolen and they need to return it; the painting is a fake, they’re arrested for trying to sell it; the painting is a fake, León Dordino didn’t know; the painting is a fake, León Dordino knew. Or maybe keep all of these endings and make them all happen. It would be a story not with an open ending but a branching, arborescent one.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN TRANSLATORS IV

“It turns out his siblings found out and are looking for him.”

“They ought to look for him in translator heaven.”

“This case is almost grotesque in its literalness, but it’s a good reminder that family is the best source for mysteries.”

“Every family is a locked room full of people where inexplicable things happen,” she said with a smile.

“And it also
seems like
there’s no
such thing
as innocent
translation.”

*Melting the day into the night or the night into the day
Melting the outside into the inside or the inside into the outside
Melting the black into the white or the white into the black
Melting the sound into the eye or the eye into the sound
Melting a circle into a circle a circle into a circle into
The melting point: where?*

“As someone
once said, you never know who you’re translating for.”

*the task
is to breathe
from inside your center
until you forget the idea
until you forget you forgot the idea
until you forget you forgot
and the outside enters into you
without breaking anything*

TRANSCREATIONS

Claudia Fontes commissioned Pablo M. Ruiz to write *The Locked-Room Mystery* on the occasion of her exhibit *The Slow Bird*, which she curated for the 33rd São Paulo Art Biennial. The task was to write a detective story whose plot has a transversal relationship to the exhibited artwork. These works respond in different ways to the possibility that two seemingly incompatible modes of understanding, like the analytical and the poetic, can coexist and enhance each other.

Detective fiction, invented by Edgar Allan Poe in 1841, sought to reunite these two modes of understanding which were considered to be distinct beginning with the rise of rationalism in the 18th century. It therefore seemed appropriate to commission a detective story which would tap into key curatorial concepts while also engaging with *transcreations*, playful and poetic texts inspired by the works in the exhibit.

The concept “transcreation” was proposed by the Brazilian concretist poet Haroldo de Campos to explain his conception of literary translation. It’s a concept which seeks to highlight the creative and intellectual aspect of the work of the translator. The final product of the work is not secondary in importance to the original but rather of equal ranking, as a new object of creation. We aim to pay homage to Haroldo de Campos by liberally adapting his concept of transcreation and applying it to a possible relationship between a work of art and language, between image and word. They aren’t explanatory texts; rather, they enter into a dialogue with the work, broadening the potential of its meaning. They have no predetermined format and they can result from a variety of procedures and creative solutions.

The transcreations included in this book were written by members of Outranspo, a group of writers, translators, and researchers dedicated to creative and experimental translation. Ruiz is a founding member of Outranspo.

Listed below are references to the transcreations together with the name of the authors and the works they are responding to:

- P. 21. Magdalena Cámpora
on *La respuesta de las cosas*, by Paola Sferco.
- P. 22. Rachel Galvin
on *P. for Possible*, by Daniel Bozhkov.
- P. 23. Pablo M. Ruiz
on *The Living Room*, by Roderick Hietbrink.
- P. 26. Chris Clarke
on *Hidden Sun*, by Žilvinas Landzbergas.
- P. 27 (1). Rachel Galvin
on *Ex Situ*, by Sebastián Castagna.
- P. 27 (2). Jean-Jacques Poucel
on *You Can't Imagine Nothing*, by Ben Rivers.
- P. 28. Camille Bloomfield
on *Content*, by Katrín Sigurdadóttir.
- P. 29. Chris Clarke
on the untitled work by Elba Bairon.
- P. 29-30. Rachel Galvin
on *La respuesta de las cosas*, by Paola Sferco.
- P. 30. Rachel Galvin
on *P. for Possible*, by Daniel Bozhkov.
- P. 31. Rachel Galvin
on the untitled work by Elba Bairon.

- P. 32 (1). Camille Bloomfield
on *Content*, by Katrín Sigurdadóttir.
- P. 32 (2). Jean-Jacques Poucel
on *You Can't Imagine Nothing*, by Ben Rivers.
- P. 34. Irène Gayraud
on *Ex Situ*, by Sebastián Castagna.
- P. 35. Rachel Galvin
on *Hidden Sun*, by Žilvinas Landzbergas.

Transcreations on p. 21 and p. 23 were originally written in Spanish. The first one was translated by Daniella Gitlin. The second one by Rachel Galvin.

The sequence from the epigraph by Clarice Lispector was written by Pablo M. Ruiz.

Cover image:

Fragment from *Footnote**.

Work by Claudia Fontes created for *The Slow Bird*.

Detective story and porcelain ornaments shattered by birds into 5500 pieces, covered in cotton cloth sewn by hand. 2018.

**Footnote* can be thought of as both a transcreation of *The Locked-Room Mystery* and also as *The Slow Bird* curatorial text.

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