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Karla Suárez's Cuban Novel *Silencios* in English Translation*

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The debut novel of Cuban writer Karla Suárez, *Silencios*, was published in 1999. The Spanish original has since been translated and published in French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Slovak, and several publishers have printed new editions of the original. In France, the work was even converted into a musical. However, consistent with the famously low publication rates of translated literature in English, the novel remains unavailable to the English-speaking reader.

It is a shame that there is no English translation because Suárez's is a significant voice among contemporary Cuban writers – she is one of the most discussed female writers of the so-called “post-novísimo” movement, comprising authors who were born around the 1970s and were producing works in the 1990s (Timmer 159).¹ It is also a shame because *Silencios* is a novel that comes alive in translation, being at once familiar and foreign: familiar, because the main character grapples with many issues to which an English speaker, or indeed any human, can relate – the ups and downs of growing up, the excitement of new experiences, difficult family relationships, and the gradual realization that one's ever-present family members are individuals with their own personal struggles and secrets; yet foreign, because it brings into the picture the less familiar backdrop of post-revolutionary Cuban society under Communist rule. The foreign and the familiar seem at odds, but this apparent disharmony reflects what makes translation so crucial: the way it reaffirms the many things we share as humans while revealing to us new realities and ways of seeing and experiencing the world.

The narrative of *Silencios* spans 20 years. The narrator-protagonist, who remains unnamed throughout the novel, speaks in the first person, describing her life growing up in post-revolutionary Cuba. It is a novel about journeying through adolescence into adulthood, and about how the narrator's responses to the reality and relationships around her shape the person she becomes. Below, I present a translation of the second chapter, in which the narrator is still a young girl.

The “silences” of the title grow stronger as the novel progresses, as the narrator begins to isolate herself from her family and her reality. In the second chapter she is still communicating and engaging with the members of her extended family, with whom she lives in a large Havana apartment, although she is beginning to identify the pain and secrets that were always there, but which she had not understood.

The second chapter focuses in particular on the narrator's interactions with her aunt, as suggested by the chapter's title, “Una tía soltera”, which I have translated as “An Unmarried Aunt”. Titles can be problematic for the translator; they are made up of only a few words, and they sit alone and out of context. When translated, they can lose a double meaning present in the original, or convey one not originally there. In the case of “Una tía soltera”, *soltera* means “single” in the sense of not having a partner or spouse. But in English “A Single Aunt”, while a possible translation, could be confused with meaning “only one aunt”. This explains my use of “unmarried”, which, while more specific than “single”, conveys a similar meaning but without the ambiguity, and avoids creating new meanings such as the negative connotations that would be associated with a translation like “spinster” or “maiden” in place of “unmarried”.

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¹ The 1990s in Cuba was a period of economic and ideological isolation following the Soviet collapse, a period that saw tensions within Cuban society grow and Cuban literary output flourish (Becerril 84).

When translating the chapter, I focused on maintaining the youthfulness and naivety of the narrative style. The novel's narration in general is direct, chronological and minimalist, free of unnecessary flourishes. In the early chapters these characteristics are coupled with a child-like simplicity, as though the narrator, looking back on her past, is armed only with the expressive capacities of a young girl. This is reflected in what Timmer identifies as a sensory focus: the narrator describes what she saw and heard, but not how she felt or how she interpreted the things she witnessed (161).

The narrator describes what she sees and does in a linear, fluid manner, with many long, winding sentences conjoined with *ands*, *thens* and commas, rather as if she were writing in a personal diary. This style reflects the narrator's youth, and many of the long sentences stretch on for a reason, matching or adding meaning to the moments and events being described. In such cases, I translated the sentences intact. Other translators have also emphasized the importance of retaining a particular feature of an author's style where it serves a specific purpose, even when doing so seems unnatural (or grammatically incorrect) in the target language. Gregory Rabassa, for example, preserved the lack of paragraph division and minimal punctuation in his English translation of Gabriel García Márquez's novel *El otoño del patriarca* (translated as *The Autumn of the Patriarch*), stating that these elements were what maintained the drive and momentum of events in the story (101). One sentence that I left unbroken stretches across many lines, punctuated by ten commas and a single semi-colon, wherein the narrator describes what she did and how she felt in the happy, magical moments when she was granted permission to immerse herself in the world of her aunt's bedroom. With so many elements of the memory contained within a single sentence, the reader is encouraged to imagine that moment as an uninterrupted string of sensations flashing by, as though in a single breath.

In *Silencios*, Suárez creates, through the eyes of her narrator, a strong sense of what life is like inside the Havana apartment in which the narrator lives with her extended family. Outside the apartment is the post-revolutionary Cuba of the 1980s, a period in which resources were scarce and many were trying to flee. In the translated chapter, there are various allusions to some of the social and political dynamics of the time, in particular the tension between those who are trying to leave for the United States and those who are not. The image is a little hazy, however, given that it is a view of Cuban society as seen through the youthful eyes of the narrator, when her knowledge and understanding of the world beyond the apartment is limited.

I sought, therefore, to maintain this haziness in my translation. It has been suggested that a translation is always clearer than the original: Blum-Kulka has claimed that an inherent effect of the translation process is the increased explicitness of a text; that is, "explication" is used to clarify information that was implied or less obvious in the original (292). However, Blum-Kulka seems to be referring to clarifications that are necessary and largely unavoidable due to the *structure* of the target language (292).² There may be other, non-linguistic aspects of the text, such as descriptions of its historical setting or socio-political context, that are unclear to the new reader. But clarifying these is not unavoidable – it is a choice. In choosing to explicate, the translator adds information that was not present in the original. I argue that such explication should be avoided unless it serves a purpose for the particular text and it is clear that the original reference would have been widely understood by the original readership.

In the second chapter of *Silencios*, the author alludes to some aspects of Cuban society that, while a daily reality for the author and other Cubans, are likely to be obscure to many outsiders. For example, there are various mentions of people "leaving from Mariel", which refers to the large number of Cubans who left for the United States on boats from a port in the town of Mariel in 1980, a series of events known as "the Mariel Boatlift" or "the Cuban

² These kinds of necessary clarifications come up often in any translation, and *Silencios* was no exception. For example, in a later chapter the narrator talks about *las otras* in the context of her classroom, which, if translated into English as "the others", would no longer clearly indicate other *female* students, as does the original Spanish.

Boatlift" (Card; Copeland). As the reference was initially unfamiliar to me, I imagined that it would also be unfamiliar to other English-speaking readers, and considered adding new elements to the translation to clarify that people were leaving from a port located in the town of Mariel and heading for the United States. However, I also considered the fact that the novel was first published in Spain and would be likely to have a diverse Spanish-speaking readership. Many non-Cuban readers of Spanish are also likely to find the "Mariel" reference and other descriptions of Cuban society obscure. Indeed, a reader in peninsular Spain might have less knowledge of the meanings behind these references than a US reader of the English translation, given the US's proximity to and relationship with Cuba. Since it is not clear that these references would be lost solely on English-speaking readers, to make them explicit in the English translation goes beyond the role of the translator in this instance. I therefore did not make the meaning of these references explicit, choosing to leave the Spanish and English readers on equal footing.

Furthermore, I do not believe that using explication to clarify references to Cuba's social and political situation is particularly important or useful in the case of *Silencios*. Margaret Jull Costa has written about her use of explication in certain translations, and explains that she is guided by the purpose and the essence of the text in question (119). In *Silencios*, the sense of childhood and of growing up is central – the dynamics inside the apartment are more important than those outside it. Indeed, it is possible that the descriptions of Cuba's social and political context were intentionally presented in a hazy manner by the author, reflecting the narrator's necessarily patchy knowledge of the world as a child and allowing the reader's knowledge to grow as hers does. In any case, a sense of Cuba and of some aspects of the social and political context of the time do come through to the reader of the translation without explication. I therefore avoided any clarifying phrases and focused instead on capturing the gradual growth in the narrator's understanding.

Suárez's *Silencios* is a melancholic yet beautiful debut novel. In English translation the world of the central character is brought to life. The reader of the translation follows her as she becomes acquainted with her reality, and is likely to recognize many of the experiences and hardships associated with growing up. At the same time, the reader gains an insight into the more culturally specific aspects of the narrator's family life and the private worlds that exist inside the Havana apartment, while also catching a glimpse of the wider social context outside its walls.

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Una tía soltera
by Karla Suárez

No es que yo detestara la música argentina, pero esa manía de mi madre de escuchar tangos comenzó a molestarme, entonces fue cuando empecé a pintar.

Las noches de mi cuarto eran la lucecita de la lámpara de noche y mi madre junto a ella, tendida, con aquel casi susurro de su tocadiscos viejo, aquella melancolía asqueante, amores perdidos u olvidados, y el mutismo de mi madre. Todo aquello me hacía sentirme incómoda, porque además sabía de sobra que ella no dormiría en toda la noche y yo no podría salir a deambular, ni meterme en el cuarto de la tía; entonces empecé a pintar. Pintaba todo lo que veía en el cuarto, una mujer sombría que de madrugada levantaba la vista para preguntarme qué tanto hacía yo metida en aquel cuaderno.

—Yo pinto, tú escuchas tangos y yo pinto.

—La vida es como un tango, nena, tenés que aprender eso.

Y entonces continuaba hablando de la vida, fijaba la mirada en el techo y hablaba de mi padre, que por aquel entonces andaría metido en otro tango y otras sábanas, porque yo procuraba revisar las suyas todas las mañanas y siempre iguales, sin muestras de uso, sin marcas de presencia, salvo los domingos en la mañana cuando la abuela intentaba barrer debajo del sofá y mi padre se levantaba furioso diciendo que en esa casa ya no había espacio para él, entonces agarraba la camisa y se largaba a sentarse en la escalera del edificio. Yo acostumbraba a seguirlo, me sentaba junto a él, y le contaba de la escuela, decía cualquier cosa hasta que se calmara un poco; entonces comenzaba a hablar. Hubo un tiempo en que de repente todos empezaron a hablar; mi padre sólo decía frases vagas, murmuradas muchas veces en ruso. Yo trataba de ordenar las palabras sin poder comprenderlo, hasta que me pasaba la mano por el pelo agregando que yo era lo único que servía en esa casa y por eso me invitaba al barcito de la esquina, donde podía comer

An Unmarried Aunt
by Karla Suárez
Translated by Katrina Hayes

It's not that I didn't like Argentinian music, but that obsession my mother had with listening to tangos began to annoy me, so that's when I started to paint.

Night time in my bedroom was the glow of the night-light and my mother lying next to it, with that almost whisper of her old record player, that sickening melancholy, loves lost or forgotten, and my mother, so mute. It all made me feel uncomfortable, because I also knew that it meant she wouldn't sleep at all during the night and I wouldn't be able to go out wandering or go into my aunt's room; so I started to paint. I painted everything I saw in the room, a sombre woman who, in the early morning, would look up to ask me what I was doing so engrossed in that notebook.

“I’m painting. You listen to tangos and I paint.”

“Life is like a tango, baby girl, you need to learn that.”

And then she would go on talking about life, she’d fix her gaze on the ceiling and talk about my father who, back then, would have been off entangling himself in another tango and another set of sheets, I knew because I tried to inspect his sheets every morning and they were always the same, no signs of use, not a trace of his presence, except Sunday mornings when my grandmother would try to sweep under the sofa and my father would get up, furious, saying there was no room for him in that house, then he’d grab his shirt and take off to sit in the stairwell of the building. I got into the habit of following him, I used to sit next to him and tell him about school, talk to him about whatever until he calmed down a bit; then he would start to talk. It was a time when, suddenly, everyone started talking; my father said only vague things, often murmured in Russian. I tried to make out the words without being able to understand him, until he would stroke my hair saying that I was the only one of any use in that house and therefore I was invited to

cualquier cosa y él desayunarse un aguardiente, para animar el día. La situación resultaba buena, porque al cuarto trago ya el día se animaba, mi padre comenzaba a cantar en ruso, y el dependiente servía limonada gratis para mí.

Mi madre no sospechaba nada de esto porque sólo escuchaba tangos, entonces yo volvía al cuarto y me sentaba a pintar a mi padre, callada en una esquina, pintaba y pintaba sin cesar. Era bueno. A veces pasaba todo el día allí, pintándolo todo, la casa, la familia, mi abuela peleando, mi tía soltera. Mi tía siempre había sido soltera y eso me llamaba la atención, sobre todo porque después que Mamá y ella tuvieron problemas y Mamá comenzó a hablar, sólo decía que mi tía era una frustrada, solterona y medio gusana. Eran los ochenta, yo ya había aprendido en la escuela que gusano se le decía a los que se iban del país. Cerca de mi escuela habían abierto una oficina adonde acudían todos los que querían irse de Cuba, a nosotros nos paraban en el patio para gritarles «escoria» o «gusanos», o nos incitaban a tirarles huevos a sus casas, y eso era bien divertido, pero mi tía no se fue por el Mariel, ni nada de eso, y salvo por su delgadez no le veía semejanza con esos bichos asquerosos.

Una vez le enseñé uno de los dibujos que había hecho de su cuarto y se puso muy contenta, dijo que yo tenía talento para la pintura y sé que mintió, pero colgó el dibujo en una de sus paredes y ahí permaneció acompañando los cientos de carteles tapizados por el polvo y las telas de araña que crecían día a día dentro de su habitación.

Mi tía siempre resultó un personaje interesante. Estaba flaca y siempre usaba ropa medio rara, con cordones colgando de su cuello y siempre fumando y diciendo alguna cosa interesante. En la época de los conciertos en su cuarto, era divertido, porque ella se tiraba en la cama, cerrando los ojos, y se entregaba a la música mientras yo podía

go with him to the tavern on the corner, where I could eat whatever I wanted and he could have a brandy for breakfast, to liven up the day. In the end it was nice because, by his fourth nip, the day was already brightening up, my father would be starting to sing in Russian, and the waiter would be bringing out a free lemonade for me.

My mother didn't suspect any of this because she was busy listening to tangos, so I would return to the bedroom and sit down to paint my father; quiet in a corner, I would paint and paint without stopping. It was good. Sometimes I spent the whole day there, painting everything, the house, the family, my grandmother arguing, my unmarried aunt. My aunt had always been single and this drew my attention, particularly because after she and Mama had their problems and Mama started talking, all she would say was that my aunt was frustrated, a spinster, and a bit of a worm. It was the eighties, and I had already learnt at school that *worm* was what they called people who were leaving the country. Near my school there was an office that had opened up where people who wanted to leave Cuba would go, they used to get us to stop in the playground and shout at them “scum” or “worms”, or they'd get us to throw eggs at their houses, which was really fun, but my aunt never ended up leaving from Mariel, or anything like that, and, except for being thin, I didn't see any similarity between her and those horrible grubs.

One time I showed her one of the drawings I'd done of her room and she seemed very pleased, she said that I had a talent for painting and I know she was lying but she hung the drawing on one of her walls and there it stayed, accompanying the hundreds of dust-covered posters and cobwebs growing in her bedroom day after day.

My aunt had always been an interesting character. She was skinny and always wore slightly odd-looking clothing, with chains hanging from her neck, and was always smoking and saying something interesting. I enjoyed the days of having concerts in her room because she would lie on the bed with her eyes closed and give herself over to the

jugar con todo. Lo único que no podía tocar era una copa que guardaba encima del librero; decía que era una copa encantada, la copa de la buena suerte, pero sólo su encantador podría tocarla. Lo demás era accesible. Yo jugaba a disfrazarme. Ella tenía una peluca puesta encima de una cabeza de maniquí, yo me ponía la peluca, pintaba mis labios, me colgaba sus collares y luego tomaba cualquiera de los sombreros llenos de polvo que pendían de una de las paredes; entonces danzaba con aquella música celestial salida del viejo tocadiscos, y era bueno, porque podía volar, alcanzaba la ventana y me largaba lejos, regresaba para mirarme en el espejo y cambiarme de sombrero, mientras ella se levantaba, cambiaba el disco, decía cualquier cosa y se daba un trago. La tía siempre tenía algo de beber, guardaba encima del librero, junto a la copa encantada, un montón de botellas de diferentes diseños y etiquetas que iba llenando aleatoriamente con cualquier licor comprado en el barcito de la esquina. Eso me gustaba, eso y su manía de esconder los cigarros en cualquier sitio. A veces terminaba una caja y jugábamos a encontrar el escondite, yo buscaba entre los libros, discos, cajitas, dentro de la botellas vacías. La primera que encontrara uno tenía derecho a escoger la próxima audición. Era divertido. Pero todo eso desapareció cuando Mamá volvió a sus tangos y su lamparita nocturna.

Yo empecé a molestarla. Una noche me puse a pintar y a tararear la novena sinfonía una y otra vez, el mismo pedacito, mientras pintaba y subía el volumen de mi voz, sólo mirando el papel. En una de esas Mamá se levantó y preguntó qué pasaba.

—Pinto y canto —eso respondí.

—Lo hacés para molestarla, sos igual que tu padre.

Entonces me levanté y dije que iba a la sala a pintar. Mamá se puso un almohadón en la cara y dijo que todos la dejaban sola, huían de ella, y yo era igual que todos, igual que esa familia de locos. Cerré la puerta porque en verdad no tenía nada que responder y atravesé el pasillo silenciosa. Al pasar por el

music, while I was allowed to play with everything. The only thing I wasn't allowed to touch was a crystal glass that she kept on top of her bookshelf; she said it was an enchanted glass, her good luck glass, but that only its enchanter could touch it. Everything else was allowed. I used to play dress-ups. She had a wig perched on top of a mannequin's head, I would put the wig on, paint my lips, put on her necklaces and then take one of the dust-filled hats that was hanging from one of the walls; then I would dance to that celestial music coming from the old record player, and it was good, because I could fly away, I'd reach the window and go far away, then return to look at myself in the mirror and change my hat, while she would get up, change the record, say something and take a swig of her drink. My aunt always had something to drink; up on the bookshelf, beside the enchanted glass, she kept a stash of bottles of different designs and labels that she continually filled up at random with whatever liquor she'd bought from the tavern on the corner. I liked that, that and her compulsive habit of hiding cigarettes all over the place. Sometimes she would finish a pack and we'd play find-the-cigarettes, I'd search among the books, the records, the little boxes, inside the empty bottles. The first to find a pack got to choose what we listened to next. It was fun. But all of this ended when Mama returned to her tangos and her little night-light.

I started to get annoyed. One night I began painting and humming the Ninth Symphony over and over again, the same bit, and I kept painting and singing louder, looking only at the paper. On one of those occasions, Mama got up and asked what was going on.

“I’m painting and singing,” I responded.

“You’re doing it to annoy me, you’re just like your father.”

So I got up and said I was going to the living room to paint. Mama covered her face with a cushion and said that everyone leaves her, runs away from her, and that I was the same as everyone else, the same as that family of crazies. I closed the door, in truth because I didn’t have anything to say in

cuarto de la tía escuché un ruido extraño, como un cristal chocando contra algo, y luego unos sollozos agitados. Pensé tocar en su puerta pero sentí miedo y me fui a la sala a pintar. Pinté una botella rota. Luego me aburrí y me tiré en el sofá un rato para jugar a hacer dibujos con las sombras de mis manos en el techo. Al rato sentí unos pasos en el pasillo. Me levanté y caminé hasta el cuarto de la tía; la puerta estaba abierta y entré. Adentro todo estaba regado como siempre, la cama revuelta, llena de libros, la máquina de escribir tirada en una esquina, todo en una semipenumbra como siempre, y en el piso estaban los pedazos de la copa encantada, regados encima de un charco de ron, con algunas manchas de sangre a su alrededor que llegaban hasta la puerta. Me asusté y no pude hacer otra cosa que quedarme allí parada, muy quieta, hasta que sentí la voz de la tía a mis espaldas.

—¿Tú qué haces aquí?

Di la vuelta y ella estaba parada, mirándome muy seria, apretándose con la mano derecha una venda que cubría su muñeca izquierda. No supe qué decir y ella entró empujando la puerta con un pie.

—Puedes quedarte, el encantamiento se rompió y yo me corté, eso es todo.

Mi tía fue hasta el tocadiscos reafirmando que podía quedarme y entonces escucharíamos el *Réquiem* de Mozart, una melodía a tono con los tiempos. Bebió de la botella que tenía a los pies de la cama y me invitó a sentarme mientras se recostaba encendiendo un cigarrillo. Creo que estaba un poco ebria porque me invitó a un trago, pero no acepté. Entonces empezó la música y ella comenzó a hablar. Era el tiempo en que todos me hablaban, no sé por qué. Yo sólo escuchaba sin hacer preguntas, siempre escuchaba las voces de los otros. La tía contó que un día había sido más joven y se había enamorado de un hombre casado, un profesor de la universidad, muy respetado e inteligente; dijo que la inteligencia a veces era imperdonable, sobre todo para los que no tenían inteligencia pero tenían poder. Ella se enamoró del hombre y él de ella y empezaron una relación sin que nadie lo supiera. Las

response, and silently crossed the hallway. As I passed my aunt's room, I heard a strange noise, like a piece of glass smashing against something, and then some distressed sobs. I thought of knocking on her door but I felt scared so I went to the living room to paint. I painted a broken bottle. Then I got bored and lay down on the sofa for a while, making pictures on the ceiling with the shadows of my hands. After a while I heard footsteps in the hallway. I got up and walked to my aunt's room; the door was open and I went in. Inside, everything was scattered as usual, the bed in a mess, full of books, the typewriter dumped in a corner, everything dimly lit as always, and on the floor were the pieces of the enchanted glass, scattered in a pool of rum, and around it some bloodstains that reached as far as the door. I got scared and couldn't do anything but stand there, very still, until I heard my aunt's voice at my back.

“What are you doing here?”

I turned around and she was standing, looking at me very seriously, pressing her right hand onto a bandage covering her left wrist. I didn't know what to say and she came in, pushing the door with one of her feet.

“You can stay, the spell broke and I cut myself, that's all.”

My aunt went over to the record player, saying again that I could stay and then we listened to Mozart's *Requiem*, a fitting melody for those days. She drank from the bottle that she had at the foot of the bed and invited me to sit down while she lay back, lighting a cigarette. I think she was a bit drunk because she offered me a swig, but I didn't accept it. Then the music started and she began to talk. Those were the days when everyone was talking to me, I don't know why. I would just listen without asking questions, I was always listening to the voices of other people. My aunt told me about how she had been younger once and had fallen in love with a married man, a university professor, very respected and intelligent; she said that sometimes intelligence was unforgivable, especially for those who didn't have any intelligence but did have power. She fell in love with that

personas mienten, eso ya yo lo sabía. Pero un día, el hombre tuvo un problema, mi tía dijo que eran tiempos de cacería de brujas y no la entendí; entonces explicó que el hombre tenía amigos, y sus amigos tenían ideas y hablaban mucho, y un día uno de sus amigos se fue del país y el hombre siguió siendo su amigo, pero eso al director de la universidad y a los otros no les gustó, entonces quisieron que él no recibiera cartas ni llamadas telefónicas, ni fuera más su amigo, pero el hombre se negó y ahí empezó a tener problemas, hasta que un día lo llamaron y lo acusaron de estar en contra del país y, además, de adulterio. La palabra no la entendí, pero mi tía dijo que era lo mismo que hacía mi padre y entonces sí entendí. Al final, al hombre lo botaron de la universidad, la mujer lo dejó y se fue con uno de los directores, y los otros que decían ser sus amigos dejaron de visitarlo porque ya nadie quiso tener problemas. Sólo mi tía se quedó con él, pero él estaba muy triste, empezó a beber, y dijo que no haría nada hasta que no reconocieran que había sido injusto. El tiempo pasó y sus amigos se hicieron directores, y los directores ministros y su ex mujer cambió de marido y él se volvió un alcohólico esperando justicia y se encerró en su casa y su inteligencia se la llevó la mierda.

Yo no entendía muchas cosas. Mi tía hablaba entre dientes y bebía muy rápido. Dijo que él se transformó, se fue muriendo lentamente y un día bebió tanto, tanto, tanto, que cuando ella llegó a su casa, lo encontró desnudo en la bañadera con las venas recién abiertas. Mi tía corrió y logró salvarlo. Luego lo internaron en una clínica para alcohólicos, pero no quiso estar más allí y volvió a su casa, a beber y escribir cartas, dice que siempre escribía cartas pero nadie respondía. Sólo ella estuvo siempre para acompañarlo, cosa que ni mi padre ni mi abuela le perdonaron nunca, aunque lo amara. Mi tía encendió otro cigarrillo y se quedó mirando

man and he with her and they started a relationship without anyone knowing. People lie, this I knew already. But one day, the man had a problem; my aunt said those were witch-hunting days and I didn't understand her, then she explained that the man had friends, and his friends had ideas and talked a lot, and one day one of his friends left the country and the man continued to be his friend, but the university director and others didn't like this, so they didn't want him to receive any letters or phone calls, nor continue to be his friend, but the man refused and at that point he began to have problems, until one day they called him and accused him of being against the country, and, moreover, of adultery. That word I didn't understand, but my aunt told me that it was the same as what my father was doing, so then I did understand. In the end, the man was sacked from the university, his wife left him and went off with one of the directors, and the others who had said they were his friends stopped visiting him because by this stage nobody wanted any problems. Only my aunt stayed with him, but he was very sad, he started to drink, and he said that he wouldn't do anything until they stopped thinking that he had done something wrong. Time passed and his friends became directors, the directors became ministers, and his ex-wife found a new husband, while he became an alcoholic waiting for justice who locked himself in his house, and his intelligence was carried away with all the shit.

There was a lot I didn't understand. My aunt was talking under her breath and drinking very fast. She said that he changed, that he was slowly dying and one day he drank so, so much that when she arrived at his house, she found him in the bath, undressed, with his wrists slashed not long before. My aunt ran and managed to save him. Then they admitted him to a clinic for alcoholics, but he didn't want to stay there so he returned to his house to drink and write letters, she says that he was always writing letters but no one responded. She was the only one to stay by him, something which neither my father nor my grandmother ever

fijamente la nada, entonces yo pensé que el amor era en verdad una cosa verdaderamente triste, mi madre escuchaba tangos, mi tía era soltera, mi abuela había sido abandonada, y yo no quería eso. Lo que quería no lo sabía, pero el amor, esa palabra era lo suficientemente triste como para yo necesitarla, y entonces decidí rechazarla.

Mi tía cambió la cara del disco, bebió nuevamente y dijo que no siempre se llega a tiempo a todos los lugares. La noche anterior, el hombre había terminado definitivamente con toda su agonía, porque una historia de mierda, dijo, merece un final de mierda, y entonces se echó a reír como una loca, diciendo que ella había conservado durante años la copa que él le había regalado en su primera salida, que no estaba encantada ni un carajo y no era más que una copa de mierda llenándose de polvo y cargándola de recuerdos inútiles y porquería sentimental, y para qué conservar un cristal viejo si ya los gusanos empezaban a frotarse las manos por el cuerpo aún calentico, lleno de alcohol y mierda, inteligencia putrefacta, sonsa, inútil. Mi tía me miró fijamente y dijo que no éramos más que carne de gusanos, pero había que hacer algo: ella no se iba a cortar las venas nunca, quería ser como Mozart, del que hacía casi dos siglos no quedaban ni los gusanos nietos, pero que estaba allí, en su cuarto, llenando todos los espacios, y entonces se levantó y comenzó a dar vueltas, danzando con el *Réquiem*, dando tumbos, medio borracha y riendo coma una histérica. Yo me levanté asustada, pero ella me alcanzó con sus brazos y empezamos a dar vueltas hasta que cayó al piso, empezó a llorar de rodillas y yo salí del cuarto.

Caminé un tanto desorientada hasta la sala, pero descubrí el cuerpo de mi padre tendido en el sofá; entonces me senté en un rincón, tomé la libreta de mi bolsillo y pinté un gusano grande frotándose las manos. Me sentí más calmada, pero aún tenía miedo de que mi tía saliera a buscarme. Caminé de puntillas hasta mi cuarto, Mamá había apagado la luz pero se escuchaba un tango

forgave her for, even though she loved him. My aunt lit another cigarette and stared into the void, and I thought about how love was really something truly sad, my mother listened to tangos, my aunt was alone, my grandmother had been abandoned, and I didn't want that. What I did want I didn't know, but love, that word was sufficiently sad for me not to need it, so I decided to discard it.

My aunt turned the record over, took another drink and said that you don't always arrive everywhere in time. The night before, the man had put an end to his agony once and for all, because a shitty story, she said, deserves a shitty ending, and then she burst out laughing madly, saying that for years she had kept the glass he gave her the first time they went out, that it wasn't enchanted one damn bit and was nothing more than a shitty glass filling up with dust and heaping useless memories and sentimental bullshit on her, and why keep an old glass if the worms had already started rubbing their hands together in anticipation of his body, still warm, filled with alcohol and shit, and rotten, stupid, useless intelligence. My aunt fixed her gaze on me and said that we were nothing more than worm food, but that she had to do something: she was never going to cut her veins, she wanted to be like Mozart who'd been gone almost two centuries so not even the worms' grandchildren would still be there, but who was here, in her bedroom, filling the spaces, and then she got up and started spinning around, dancing to the *Requiem*, staggering about, half-drunk, and laughing hysterically. I got up, frightened, but she caught me in her arms and we started spinning around until she fell to her knees on the floor, started to cry, and I left the room.

I walked, somewhat disoriented, to the living room, but I discovered my father's body stretched out on the sofa; and so I sat in a corner, took the notebook from my pocket and painted a big worm rubbing its hands together. I felt calmer, but I was still scared that my aunt would come looking for me. I tiptoed to my room, Mama had turned out the light but she was still listening to a tango very

muy bajito. Me acosté a su lado y la abracé, ella me dio un beso en el pelo y preguntó si pasaba algo. Dije que no. Al cabo de un rato la volví a abrazar y murmuré entre dientes que no dejaría nunca que los gusanos le hicieran daño. Mi madre sonrió.

—No, nena, los gusanos se irán todos por el Mariel y a nosotros nadie va a hacernos daño nunca.

low. I got into bed next to her and hugged her, she gave me a kiss on the head and asked if something had happened. I said no. After a little while I hugged her again and murmured under my breath that I would never let the worms hurt her. My mother smiled.

“No, baby girl, the worms will all leave from Mariel and nobody will ever hurt us.”