

## Myth Over Matter

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In “The Task of the Translator,” Walter Benjamin writes, “[t]he intention of the poet is spontaneous, primary, graphic; that of the translator is derivative, ultimate, ideational” (76-77). Writing poetry is one thing, but writing with the ekphrastic intention of translating a memory or an image is another. It means entering a hybrid space of artistic transcreation. I often enter this space when I am translating, painting, or writing about home. For *Stirred: Memories and Dreams*, I have included several translations of home, including a painting of my childhood home in Jilava and three accompanying poems in three languages (English, Spanish and Italian). The poems reflect on the experience of leaving and going back to that home and recall Valerio Magrelli’s metaphor, of a translator as a one- person moving company, constantly packing and unpacking meaning (246-247). I consider these poems translations of each other and of the painting, even if they may not be literal: poetic and artistic transcreation moves beyond the literal, surrendering to a more liberal, experimental, and spontaneous form of translation.

When I translate the memory of my childhood home in Jilava, whether through different art media or languages, I realize that memory itself is a mythical process full of mistakes: threads repeatedly unraveling to reveal a desperate, irreconcilable silence. In the process of transcreation, I had to shift, purge, tumble and leap so that each language could activate and embody that silent space of home. Each language has its tricks and verbal textures, its tones, rhythms, scansion, and imagery. To me, each poem is like a little theatre, revealing the most intimate identities of language. The English rendition “Myth over Matter” is specific, concise, and haunting. The Spanish version “Ser descubierta” is organic and elaborate, absurd yet playful. The Italian “Silenzi” is repetitive, layered and lugubrious. The poems also reveal private traces of Romanian, my mother tongue, to emphasize the idea that “I’ve made the mistake of leaving / and I always make the mistake of going back” (He cometido el error de irme / y siempre cometo el error de volver”, “Ser Descubierta”).



Photo credit: Adriana Onita

### **Myth over Matter**

We lived two leaps away  
from Jilava prison;  
heard slow, shifting moans  
from the muffled kitchen.

When we departed,  
Jilava disassembled  
carefully my fingers  
my thumb, my pinkie...

Arrived in Wedgewood  
(winter). My hands trembled  
for hours. I feigned sleep,

to be kind.

At least, at last,  
I ate some tomatoes (in winter?)  
But it was quiet. Too quiet.  
I left my sky singing.

There were tools, too. I sewed  
everything back together,  
the thumb, the middle,  
the small one - pinkie?

Then I could handle it all,  
learned every love language,  
but ignored my own tongue  
for winter tomatoes.

Yet the moans rest inside me,  
a hunger stroking my heavy labour.  
I hear them at times,  
Bite my thumbs in protest.

*M-am întors la Jilava.*

To hear those moans,  
to see how her  
myth-dipped mind  
intertwines with mine.

But the threads unraveled  
as I sat and stared  
into my red palms.  
And Jilava was silent.

## Ser descubierta

Te cuento algo que ocurrió una noche:  
al terminar un día igual a otro  
(el cansancio, el silencio, la rutina  
ciega) en el momento de acostarme y  
dormir, pensé en mi temor a ser  
descubierta.

Recuerdo, o mejor dicho, *n-am să uit*  
aquella noche interminable  
(incompleta) que la tranquilidad de la  
mañana

borró

de una manera que me pareció  
un poco teatral,  
aunque se les ocurre  
a todas las personas,  
en todos los lugares.

No olvido el largo camino,  
los ruidos y los reflejos,  
al atravesar la gran avenida de mi vida,  
desde Jilava hasta Edmonton, *și înapoi*.

He cometido el error de irme  
y siempre cometo el error de volver.

Esa noche, fui muy despacio,  
y cuando llegué  
me puse a esperar en frente de  
una caseta verde de techo metálico.

Allí pasé (creo) un largo rato,  
oliendo esta fragancia típica de  
Jilava,  
(jacintos mezclados con tierra húmeda)  
mirando las ventanas iluminadas,  
traduciendo cada movimiento  
de una sombra reflejada en otra más oscura.

Nadie me vio.  
Nunca me ven.  
Pero esa noche sentí miedo  
de ser descubierta  
como una espectadora  
de mi propia vida.

Me pregunto, si con el viaje,  
¿me vuelvo cada vez más invisible  
o me acostumbro a todo?

La noche parece detenerse.

Me muerde el silencio.  
Un volumen de maletas  
ocupa el espacio  
entre las sombras furtivas.  
Reconozco una valija  
negra, extensión de mi  
cuerpo.  
De repente  
alguien dice *la revedere* -

Es una niña  
de pelo rizado  
con uñas pintadas.  
Sale afuera, casi oculta  
y en la sombra del amanecer  
la vi sorprenderse de mi presencia.

*Dile adiós al aire,  
nina, dile adiós al  
tiempo  
vas a llegar lejos,  
lejos dile adiós al  
tiempo.*

Y allí el sueño se interrumpe –  
la chica desaparece antes que la luna.

El pasado –  
nada más que un postal  
sobre mi estante

una foto tomada con apuro  
desdibujada por la lejanía

un trance reciente  
pero misteriosamente evaporado.

### **Silenzi**

C'è il silenzio di mezzanotte  
che svanisce ogni giorno di più  
C'è il silenzio dell'anima sulla terra  
che svanisce come un sogno ogni notte  
C'è il silenzio del lampo e dell'amore  
che svanisce prima di pronunciarsi

Ma c'è il silenzio di una stanza  
in Jilava  
nella casa verde dove sono cresciuta  
*oliniște sepulcrală*  
che nessun potere del mondo  
può ravvivare

È il silenzio più disperato  
di tutti i silenzi

### **REFERENCES**

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