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Felicidad's challenge, a challenge to us

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Who is Felicidad Mosquera?

From the beginning of her tale, Albalucía Angel faces us with one of the main issues for Philosophy and Psychology, as in Spanish language, *Felicidad* means *happiness*.

Felicidad is someone who reminds us - all the time – of the inherent ambiguity of human life, as already pointed out, for instance, by Carolina Rocha (2004), in her nice literary study about this and other Hispanic tales.

Indeed, while talking to herself, *Felicidad Mosquera* opens to us the ambiguities of her life. On the one hand, her *impotence* facing the sin of her destiny; on the other hand, her *internal rebellion* against that sin. This latter, by its turn, is actualized through a *perseverant remembering and a pervasive revival* of her *intensely happy past moments* lived with her lover. However, it is now this same experience the cause and reason of her *present anguish and unhappiness*. In the intense flux of emotions unveiled by her internal dialogue, *the more she feels near a dead-end situation, the more she dives in her best memories*. At the last moment, she takes the quite few control of the situation by a deal with herself:

“Throw your fear overboard. Don't curse anymore(...) You won't say a word. (...) take courage, Felicidad Mosquera, don't cry or moan any more. Open the door yourself. Stand upright in the doorway. Hold their eyes” (p. 121).

It is, in reality, a deal with the transcendence ² of the *projected time to come*, settled in the celebration of the *past* victories, may be as a

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² Davey (2006) points to the fact that, according to the Gadamerian hermenutics, “Transcendence does not betoken surpassing the range or grasp of human experience. It does not concern what lies beyond experience but what lies within it

revengeful consolation, bringing the happiness of *past* times back to her, giving some dignity in the *present* back to her: only God and she are witnesses of her joy with her lover and her victory in taking care of him and letting him go safe and sound.

The hidden other

Contrary to the expectation brought by the title of the tale, *The Guerrillero* comes to us like a *strong figure in pastel*. He suddenly comes, allowing intense inner transformations in *Felicidad*, bringing her *happiness*; perhaps the only sublime and evanescent moment of coincidence between herself and the beautiful meaning of her name:

“That night, when Sebastian Martinez’s dogs began to howl as if they’d smelled the devil, and you saw him there, suddenly, standing ever so still(...)” (p.119).

“(...) who else will swear if only you felt the delight, the sex entering in your body, searching your smoothness, changing you into streams, twilight, sea; who else will know the movements of your tights, burning, your hands searching; touching the groin forcing sweetly your way into life” (p. 120).

Then *The Guerrillero* disappears – at least for us, in the tale - carrying *Felicidad's* joy with him. As also pointed out by Rocha (2004), *Felicidad* should now pay for a double transgression: having actively experienced the pleasure of love with a forbidden and dangerous lover.

However, like the *angel* in Pasolini’s *Teorema*, the *Guerrillero*, in his dazzling strangeness, allowed *Felicidad Mosquera* to feel other feelings, think other thoughts, act other acts; being other.

Astonished, a little bit angry, a little bit scared, but may be also proud, she realizes that there is another unexpected *Felicidad Mosquera* dwelling in herself, since then unknown for her:

“Whatever got into your head, Felicidad Mosquera?(...) Because you were blind, blind. (...) You never let yourself be trapped into these things. (...) I can’t understand. Felicidad Mosquera, I don’t recognize you any longer. I never thought you’d change this fast, go from black to white, as you did, from one day to the other. Because the trembling you felt when he looked at

or, much rather, it has to do with experiencing those fundamental shifts within passages of experience that can quite transform how such passages are understood. Hermeneutic transcendence involves the transforming experience of coming knowingly to see, to think, and to feel differently” (p. 8).

you with his dark eyes, or the stammering, like a little girl, when he asked for the salt and barely touched you with his fingers as you put it in his hand, everything in you turned upside-down, the current changed, your cables crossed, so how in God's name didn't you notice it? (p. 120)

Even though her *Guerrillero* went away, *Felicidad* was not alone any more. She has now the companion of *other voices* inside herself. She can listen and talk to *YOUs* who are, *simultaneously, the Is and YOUs in herself*. The *quiet and unison I-myself dialogue* (that implicitly exists prior to the beginning of our arrival, i.e. prior to the beginning of the tale), *now* shifts into a more complex dialogue. From her *monological inner monologue*, *Felicidad* so passed through a *polyphonic inner monologue* (Bakhtin, 1981,1986; Rommetveit, 2003; Todorov, 1981), putting in question her *recently past* attitudes and inquiring herself about the *future*.

Felicidad's experience of negativity

Dwelling *The Guerrillero* in his otherness, *Felicidad* could have what, in terms of Gadamerian hermeneutics, is called *an authentic experience of negativity* (Davey, 2006; Gadamer, 1966/1976, 1959/1985). This kind of experience happens in the *present*, is addressed to the *past* and is essential for preparing the person for the *future*.

Both the *Guerrillero's* arrival as a *foreign other*, and his dwelling by *Felicidad* as a *fascinating other*, gave her the opportunity for constructively change the dynamics relating her internal and external worlds. In this process of reconfiguration of her I-world relationships, she could prepare herself for an uncertain and hostile future (Boesch, 1991, 1992; Valsiner, 1998, 2006).

This happened all the time, through a polyphonic internal dialogue with her new fellows, the *YOUs* who are, *simultaneously, Is and YOUs in herself*. They sometimes approve and encourage her, sometimes criticize her, getting her scared and warned:

"Now you will see, Felicidad Mosquera" (p. 119)

"Whatever happened to you, tell me" (p. 119).

"What happened, damn you. I can't understand" (p. 120).

"Putting salt into another person's is stupid, brings bad luck. Bad tidings" (p. 120).

"A deep, deep moan" (p. 120).

"They are coming, Felicidad Mosquera. They'll come shouting that they know (...)" (p. 120).

"And what about the day when instead of letting him go off on his own to get some air, you flushed, all red in the face (...)" (p. 120).

"Don't look like that. Throw your fear overboard. Don't curse anymore: he's far away and all that counts is that he lives and carries on fighting. You won't say a word. Not even if they set fire on your shack, ram themselves into you, or bottles, or do what they did to others to drive you crazy; take courage, Felicidad Mosquera, don't cry or moan any more. Open the door yourself. Stand upright in the doorway. Hold their eyes" (p. 121).

One of the most important changes in terms of personal development, carried out by the *polyphonia* of Is and YOUs in *Felicidad Mosquera* was to put her in the challenge for understanding her actions as an organized and coherent whole (Diriwächter, 2008), if compared with her supposedly less diverse and ambiguous prior actions and self orientations.

Therefore, *Felicidad's* skills for reorienting herself, specially at the emotional-affective level, was put at proof in face of the new requirements of her internal dialogue. Instead of *a comprehensible past and a good or regular expectation for the future, viewed from her present*, she is now in a situation *of striving for self-understanding and self-planning in the present, facing an expected challenging and scaring future, at the light of an unexpected intensely happy past. This latter view (self-interpretation) of the past was allowed by the The Guerrillero as alterity, as well as by the YOUs who now also inhabits her.*

In short, through a richer inner dialogue, past experiences came as remembrances and reviviscences. It does not concern to the replication of lived experiences, what is strictly impossible and psychologically not desirable for preparing for the future. The value of the dialogue is exactly to be another experience: a present experience, addressed to the past, in view of the future life. This is its productive value of a new and authentic experience. What counts in *Felicidad's* internal dialogue is exactly the reinterpretation of her remembrances and reviviscences, the reinterpretation of her former anticipated meanings (Gadamer), preventing her from confirming former expectations and opening space for the emergence of new comprehensions and constructions about herself in her I-world relationships (Simão, 2007, 2008).

In this path, her companions, both dwelled by her and dwelling her, made her the accomplice of her own secrets:

“But only God and you are witnesses. (...) And who’s judge you, Felicidad Mosquera, if only God and you can swear that this is true. No one will dare. They can search you very innards, cut you in two with their machetes, drill into your senses, pierce your heart, they will find nothing” (p. 120)

In such an extent, from her position in the *present* situation, *Felicidad* rectifies her expectation about herself, in face of the requirements for understanding herself in the *past* situation (*how she could do what she did, could feel what she felt*). Her thought flows, then, in a new direction about the expectation and meaning of her future (*do not cry, rise her spirit and meet their eyes*).

This was allowed when Felicidad let herself to be touched by her alterity, letting her Is and YOUs talk, in ways sometimes divergent from her past unison voice. She can, then, step by step, as shown by her inner dialogue, selectively reconstruct herself in the continuous dialogical confrontation with those Is and YOUs that now are part and parcel of herself.

This new subjective configuration, by its turn, unfolds a different (new) understanding of herself in her relationship with her inner and outer world, bringing new decisions: honoring a compromise born in the interplay of the Is and YOUs dialogue in her. A compromise implying autonomy, what does not mean isolation but, on the contrary, the assumption of the *onus on the I-Other relationship*.

In sum, *Felicidad's* processes of meaning construction was formerly oriented by expectations and ways of feeling, thinking and acting, derived from her life experience prior to her encounter with *The Guerrillero*. Following, her expectations of meaning pass through a rectification and readjusting, in the direction of fitting and flowing together, allowing the emergence of a unity of self-acknowledgement. This latter means an enlargement of her horizons, giving rise to other expectations of meaning, brought by the otherness relationship (Davey, 2006; Gadamer, 1966/1976, 1959/1985).

However, all these are possible only if the person could attend to the call of the otherness' voice. One of the ways by which one can be touched by that call seems to let oneself be *illusioned* by the other as alterity.

I am using the term '*to be illusioned*' as a free translation of the Spanish notion of '*estar ilusionado*' or '*ilusionarse*'. It is a term extensively discussed by Julián Marías (1984 /2006), which seems to be very important and appropriated for finishing this exercise on Albalucía Angel's *The Guerrillero*.

According to Marías (1984 /2006), in the Spanish culture, the subtleties of the meaning of the term *illusion* was more preserved along the times, if compared with its process of being narrowed in other languages. In few words, the Spanish meaning of *being illusioned* embraces not only the illusory character of an event, as if it was false or misunderstood, and sooner or later the person who believes in it will suffer a *disillusion*, but also keeps its former Romance meaning, tightly *linked to the imaginary anticipation of pleasure, joy and delight*³. This additional meaning is specially addressed to other people (e.g., *Felicidad is illusioned by The Guerrillero*).

According to Marías (1984 /2006), the feeling of being *illusioned* is anchored in the future, as one of the important dimensions of the human life. However, being *illusioned* happens, at the same, in the present time, lived as the present reality. Its addressing to the future occurs in the form of anticipation and projection of some event (cf. p. 40). In such an extent, "Illusion is inseparable from desire, but cannot be reduced to it" (p. 60, my free translation from Spanish).

It is worth to note that this notion of illusion introduces the duality between reality and unreality as an inherent part of the human life, that is, as part and parcel of its desired possibilities.

Additionally, Marías (1984 /2006) points to the fact that *illusion* is a phenomenon nourished by the past memories, in which the *illusioned* person relies on the image of something that comes back from the past, now in a new way (p. 49). In other words, Marías wants to highlight the fact

³ See, for instance, the sense 3, according to the *Diccionario Clave* (<http://clave.librosvivos.net>), embracing a feeling of joy and satisfaction.

that expectation is possible only if referred to something that was formerly belonged by the person. What was already belonged in *past times* is the frame inside which the expected newness is now lodged. In other words, it is new precisely because the person does not starts from the zero (Marías, 1984 /2006, p. 49).

More important, illusion also refers to oneself, to what a person wants to be, respect to her life project; who she wants to be and what she feels she needs to be, even she has heavy doubts in accomplishing that project. In sum, it touches to the issue of authenticity of one's life projects (cf. Marías, 1984 / 2006, p. 93).

From this perspective, we can ask about *Felicidad's* action potential (Boesch, 1991) for meeting *The Guerrillero* in his alterity. We can also ask about *Felicidad's* life projects for herself, certainly not completely neat or clear even for her.

Both, in the case of referring to oneself and to the other, being illusioned is a process in which, as much as we live it, through the labyrinths of mistakes, misunderstandings, transformations, we make discovers in ourselves and in the others.

Taking advantage of Marías' work once more, I will paraphrase him for finishing this exercise: this process of discovering, in which *The Guerrillero* was *Felicidad's* object of illusion, was also concerned to *Felicidad* herself, as she was discovering herself in the extent she unfolds her interiority to be explored along the process. According to Marías, this is a trifold process of personal discovering: the discovery of *The Guerrillero* by *Felicidad*; the discovery of *Felicidad* by herself in her relationship with him; and, finally, the discovery of *The Guerrillero* at his own eyes, illuminated by the light of the illusion he had awaken in *Felicidad* (cf. p. 105).

However, strictly speaking, as in all what concerns to one's biography, *only God and they can be witnesses.....*

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