

The dialogical flow of emotions in *El Guerrillero*

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Emotions are complex *engagements* with the world, sometimes highly reflexive ones. They are not, as some psychologists have claimed, merely the outcome of physiological processes (Solomon, 1984), or entities that possess us (like evil spirits in some societies), nor are they simply a part of our animal heritage (to be contrasted with human reason). What these perspectives miss is that emotions are *intentional* (in the technical sense of being ‘about’ something); they *signify* something in-the-world and provide us with a *strategy* in a difficult situation (Sartre, 1939/2002). In other words, emotions are complex judgments and responses to the world involving a Self. By Self I mean the position(s) we take on as a member of a community (or communities), which mediate our relationship to the world and others from a particular social point of view. As such, an emotion cannot be adequately described in the abstract – as one finds in most psychology textbooks – but must be analyzed concretely, *in situ*.

Angle’s *El guerrillero* provides us with excellent material for a concrete social analysis of the emotions. The whole story is a stream of consciousness reflection on the character’s situation; it is an emotionally loaded dialogue with(in) herself. The story’s “dialogue” is composed entirely of a number of “external *I*-positions” speaking to “internal *I*-positions” (Hermans, 2001). Though there is some semblance to a monologue, these *I*-positions (both internal and external) are dynamically re-positioning themselves, *vis-à-vis* each other and the experiences they comment upon, throughout the story. In the process of re-positioning, new emotions arise and are stabilized in reflection; the boundaries of an emotion are linked to particular exchanges among *I*-positions, which transition to a new emotion sometimes subtly, sometimes suddenly.

The protagonist moves through the emotional currents of *fear*, *regret*, *love* and *courage* in her stream of dialogue. They all say something about her situation and offer different strategies to cope with it. Each emotion has its own particular structure, composed of voices and is oriented in time in a characteristic way. My analytic approach will be to treat each emotion in turn, highlighting the transition between emotions as they occur in the story. However, it needs to be said at the outset that analyzing the emotions in separation is somewhat artificial: emotions flow into each other, interpenetrate each other, enrich and complexify one another. As in speech, the meaning of an emotion at any one point in time is influenced by what came before it and is already moving somewhere else. Still, adopting this analytic approach will protect us from getting lost in the buzzing blooming confusion of emotions!

Felicidad's emotions

Fear

The story begins by throwing us into a fearful situation. The speaker predicts a future in which the protagonist, Felicidad, is threatened, tortured and killed by men with machetes, who have already done horrible things to others in the village. This future scenario is connected to her knowledge of what has been done to those suspected of collaborating with the rebel fighters. The speaker's matter-of-fact repetition of "that's how it is" seals the link between collaborating and gruesome consequences.

The fear of this situation is quite different from the fear we experience when a snarling dog crosses our path; the fear here described is a highly reflective fear, arising out of an imagined future. It is a fear stretched out in time, in which the future ("they all arrive... they'll ask... they'll force you...") is projected through the past ("like they did two days ago with your friend Cleta, remember, or they'll put your hands in the fire like Calixta Fefialosa..."). Previously, she was in the position of [I--as passive observer] of others in the position of *victim*. Now, she uses this "cool-headed" observer position, as an external *I*-position, to reflect on herself in the future position of [I--as victim].

Although this emotion utilizes past experiences, it is *future directed*: When it mentions the past it does so *as it was*, without considering other possible sequences of actions, and in order to construct a probable future. The transition to the next emotion is, for this reason, easy to detect: there is a clear shift to the *past directedness* and alternative *presents* to be found there. The voice also changes from matter-of-fact description of what has happened and will happen to a judgmental voice focused on Felicidad's bad decisions.

Regret

“You should have gone with him then you wouldn’t have suffered”. This utterance marks the shift to a new voice/position and a new emotion, regret. Here suffering in the *present* is traced to events in the *past* that could have happened differently (she says at one point, “too bad it didn’t happen that way”) and thus could have led to a more favorable present, one in which she was *not* “dragging herself around, crying and moaning, looking for anything that might do as a weapon...”

Felicidad goes on to regretfully recall each of the little steps that brought her closer to the *guerrillero*, from their first contact (“you should have spoken, said anything, any excuse to make him whisper good-night and creep back to where he’d come”), to inviting him to stay longer in her house, to agreeing to go on long walks together and let him put his arm around her waist. Each one of these steps got her deeper involved in this dangerous relationship, committed her to the path of rebel collaborator.

Throughout she contrasts herself before she met the *guerrillero* to after – in other words, the position as [I--as passive cool-headed observer] to [I--as lover] and [I--as collaborator]. As we saw in the first section (fear), she passively observed the victimization of others in the village at the hands of the military. This early behavior is implicitly commented upon when she makes a self-attribution of being “cool-headed. A watchful heart. Careful” before the *guerrillero* entered her life. She used not to get involved with these issues, and concludes that the “nervous urgency” with which she went to work curing him was not her own. Let us look more closely at this emerging position of [I as lover].

Romantic love

The position [I--as lover], although silent, exerts a stronger and stronger influence over her emotional experience: She begins to give, if not positive recognition to the [I--as lover] in herself, at least less critical recognition. This is a “form of innovation” in the self is what Hermans (2003) calls the foregrounding and backgrounding of existing I-positions. In surveying her past history with the *guerrillero*, unsympathetically judging each action in turn, the voice of regret stumbles upon instances that cannot quite be judged so harshly. This is a case of “runaway discourse,” whereby the voice undermines its own position by reflecting on events too powerful to re-appraise their significance in the present. Consider the last episode she brings up in the judgmental voice of regret:

And what about that day when instead of letting him go off on his own to get some air, you flushed, all red in the face, when he offered to walk together for a while, and crossing the bridge he held your waist, because it shakes so much was his excuse, but you felt how the heat boiling on his skin began to seep into you, burning, hurting, a cry inside you. A deep deep moan.

(Angel, p.120)

This was meant to be a critical comment about her behavior but the judgment is never explicitly made. Instead, we are left feeling her passion for the *guerrillero*. The self-transformation that is utilized to produce regret by juxtaposing with her “cool-headed” self, at this moment begins to stand alone as something beautiful. Or consider a statement made just before, “I never thought you’d change this fast, go from black to white... Because of the trembling you felt when he looked at you with his dark eyes...”

Love is a series of choices we make that further involves us. In Felicidad’s case these choices assume additional existential weight in the context of the civil war that has reached her village. By inviting the *guerrillero* in, caring for his wounds, asking him to stay longer, walking with him, allowing him to put his arm around her waist, etc. she has committed herself to becoming a particular kind of person and taken a stand in a dangerous political situation. She did not have to do any of these things: even though she saw that he was “handsome” and she “trembled” when he looked at her, she could have run from the situation. Instead, she let it transform her.

Kierkegaard (1846/1968) gives the name “subjective truth” to a transformative experience like Felicidad’s. Subjective truth is different from “objective truth” in that it cannot be brought into language and satisfactorily communicated to others. It is a truth that allows us to passionately throw ourselves into life, rather than contemplate it at a cold distance, a truth that we commit to through our actions which in turn defines us as a particular individual. Thus, it is only by recognizing and reconciling herself to his change that she will live up to the meaning of her name, Felicidad Mosquera, or “courageous happiness” which I will explain in more detail in what follows.

Return to fear

“They’re coming.” This matter of fact phrase violently shakes us from her memory of the walk with the *guerrillero*, quoted above, and refocuses us on the anticipated future, which brings with it another wave of fear. For analytic purposes, I have analyzed the emotions in separation; however, I want to stress again at this point that they overlap, carry themselves into one another and change each other. We have already seen an intermixing of regret and love. Here we must note that the fear she experiences at the beginning of the story is not the same fear she experiences after moving through regret and love longing. The feeling tone of this fear has changed: It now calls out for heroism.

Spiritual ecstasy

A major transition happens after her second occurrence of fear which ends, “They’ll say they know so that you go for it”. Her response marks the most significant change in the story, from a desperate to a self-affirming attitude. She says in response, “But only you and God are witnesses”. This is a previously

unheard from voice, a calming spiritual voice that can positively accept her past actions (I use the word “spiritual” here both because of its affinity to Kierkegaard’s “religious” way of life and her explicit reference to “God”). When she describes her sensual relationship with the *guerrillero* the passion and intimacy of the situation takes the fore. This spiritual voice also gives her some hope for the future. The voice of fear, by contrast, stressed an evitable connection between collaboration and ultimate failure when the army arrives. In short, the new spiritual voice is attuned to her “subjective truth” (Kierkegaard, 1846/1968). She comments, “Who’s to judge you, Felicidad Mosquera, if only God and you can swear that this is true”. This seems an odd statement after two pages of judging herself. Kierkegaard can help us here: when we try to objectify and rationalize a “subjective truth” we betray it. Thus, Felicidad silences the judging voices and becomes resolute in her course. Her actions, even the ones that might lead to her death, become highly meaningful. She could not betray the experience she has had and the person she has become by giving the *Guerrillero* away.

Courage

Courage is not the opposite of fear. We need fear to have courage. Rushing off into battle, unaware of the possibility that one might die, is not courage but stupidity. Courage requires that we recognize the future danger and then make a *choice* to face it heroically. We do so because that is the kind of person we are, that is what we stand for, how we define ourselves. Here the position [I-- as resistant] becomes dominant. She says, “All that counts is that he lives and carries on fighting”. Her actions have meaning in relation to this goal. In becoming [I as lover] she also committed herself to the position of [I as resistant] And [I as resistant] is an “emotional position” (Hermans and Dimaggio, 2007) primarily demanding courage.

The voice that positions her here is supportive. It tells her that she will not betray “a whisper” about the *guerrillero* no matter what they do to her. Contrast this with the voice at the beginning of the story which told her matter-of-factly that she would confess, “that’s how it is”. By the end of the story she has been elevated above this with her the earlier discovery of the semiotic mediator “only God and you are witnesses”. She has used this to recognize her “subjective truth” that will give her the strength to follow her heroism through. The story ends, “take courage, Felicidad Mosquera, don’t cry or moan any more. Open the door yourself. Stand upright in the doorway. Hold their eyes.”

It is at this point that Felicidad achieves emotional integrity. She has come to the most appropriate emotion for the situation, the strategy that will serve her best. In developing this stance Felicidad can be “happy” because she recognizes the significance of her actions and Self-transformation that occurred after meeting the *Guerrillero* and she can give meaning to future actions through this new identity. It is interesting that Felicidad’s name in Spanish means “happiness” and

is often used in contexts of congratulations. Her last name ("Mosquera") is likely a reference to Tomas Cipriano de Mosquera, a courageous general who led the successful liberal rebel army during 1860 -1862 Colombian civil war. Thus, her name may symbolize in the present civil war something like "courageous happiness". That is the emotion I leave her with at the end of the story.

Conclusion

All the emotions analyzed above are dialogical in character: they are formed and transformed in reflection using different voices, mediated by signs, emphasizing the past, present and future in various ways. *Fear* utilizes the past in order to construct an unpleasant future scenario. The voice here is rather matter-of-fact, "that is how it is". The voice of regret, on the other hand, is highly judgmental of Felicidad's past actions. It objectifies her Self, as it appears in the past. Thus, we can say, *regret* is a judgment about one's Self in the past from the position of an unsatisfactory present. *Love* requires us to recognize a series of actions and experiences as personally meaningful and the commitment that goes into following them through. Thus, it is a difficult emotion (in the sense of responsibility to Self) encompassing past, present and future, and requires an accepting, supportive and spiritual voice. When we begin to doubt and judge it we begin to undermine it. Lastly, *courage* requires that we recognize a situation as dangerous and simultaneously approach it with a posture congruent with our values. To do this a supportive resolute voice is needed.

I have made the existential claim that the emotions in this story are in part chosen. We choose to become a particular kind of person through our actions and develop particular emotional repertoire in becoming a particular kind of person. In cultivating the emotion most appropriate situation, which includes both our personal history and the cultural context, we achieve emotional integrity. Felicidad Mosquera has found it in "courageous happiness".

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