

An analysis of the “Guerillero” by Albalucià Angel, for the Interactive symposium organiser by Livia Mathias Simão, Dialogical self conference 2008, Cambridge.

“...you have wrestled with God and with men. And you have won.”
Genesis 32:28

A fight with an Angel

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The short text is presented as the monologue from Felicidad Mosquera. The plot is very simple: A woman is expecting some soldiers who might molest her for having hosted a guerillero. The text narrates her experience of inner change, from a state of strong panic in the perspective of being searched for by soldiers, to a state of great calm and readiness in front of what is awaiting her.

Status of discourse

The text is fictional, and as it is very short, it is very precisely carved. It is poetic craft, yet if we want to work on it, we have to consider as-if it were a “real” flow of thinking/speaking. I use this term, because the text does not appear as pure thinking: it is thinking mediated by language (even if thinking is enabled by verbal categories, we have no way to prove that people’s inner thinking is purely verbal). It does not seem either like a real externalisation: the text does not seem addressed to anyone, and there is no cues to make us believe that it is actually spoken out. Hence the status of this verbal language is itself fictional. For this exercise, we therefore renounce to decide whether this discourse it meant to be an “inner” discourse or an “external” one, a real or an invented one. As such, let us call it a free flow of thinking/speaking.

To justify this free flow of thinking/speaking, the author has used a literary artefact: the text is represented as a discourse addressed by a narrator to a “you”. The components of a typical dialogical (Marková), ternary dynamic are thus present: a semiotic flow is mediating two parts of an inner dialogue, and the evolution of each of these components is likely to induce transformations in the others.

Hence, I consider the flow of thinking/speaking not only as having a communicative power, but also, as a mediator, as having a transformative power. All its emotional, evocative, social and symbolic strength is likely to participate to the transformations it generates.

Dimensions for an analysis

The text is constructed as a text addressed by the narrator, to a “you”, both being part of the same person, Felicidad Mosquera. These two “voices” are themselves not static, but, as the text progresses, they evolve through different positions. I propose to organise these movements along four dimensions:

- 1) *The (social) position of the narrator*: Positions of the narrator can be seen as representing various I-positions (Hermans), that is, internalised voices of relevant social others *in most of the cases*: the narrator as one member of the neighbourhood who saw many people being arrested or molested; the narrator as witness of Felicidad; the narrator as the warden of the “normative” Felicidad; the narrator as witnessed by God, etc. Additionally, the whole monologue brings the narrator to take in account two forms of radical otherness: the *they* of the soldiers that will come from her, and the *he* of the Guerillero;
- 2) The *time-space* of the scene in which the “you” is located: the verbal form suggest the location of each proposition in time. Thus the texts moves from “you” in the future (what will happen to you when they will come to take you); to “you” in the present (that’s how it is); and “you” in the past (that night, when he arrived in your house);
- 3) The *degree of reality* of the scene depicted: *what did happen* is real, and *what would have happened if* is counterfactual, that is, imaginary; *what will happen* is undecidable (as it is in the future it is not fixed yet);
- 4) The *degree of distancing* from the semiotic means used to mediate experiences from the “you”, which moves from very just above the subconscious (below semiotic elaboration, Valsiner), to the embodied, here-and-now experience, to more descriptive or factual, images, to more diffused, values or emotional tones (hyperconscious in Valsiner). These are marked by the use of different semantic fields, some being at the level of organic event – trembling, blood, membranes, muscles – other at the level visual descriptions; others at the level of good/bad values, suggested by mentions of signs of God/the devil.

A psychological rupture

The reader realises that, through the text, Felicidad changes position and state of mind. I can try to render explicit the linguistic means by which this change is manifested by a close look at the three first lines and the three last ones.

The first proposition, “Now you’ll see, Felicidad Mosquera”, is symmetrical to the last ones, “take courage, Felicidad Mosquera, don’t cry and moan any more”, yet its meaning is quite at the opposite. At the beginning of the text, the tense is the immediate future. The subject of the actions are “they”, who will “arrive”, “threat”, “ask”, “force you”; the “you” I-position is passively observing these things being done to her, without means to resist: “you’ll see”, “you’ll confess”. The impression is that of a person being forced to bend or to fall on her knees. The narrator is exterior to the whole seen, like a disengaged witness. The sentence is long, cut by comas, and leaves the reader breathless. In contrast, at the end of the text, the immediate present is marked by an imperative present form: “Open the door yourself. Stand upright in the doorway. Hold their eyes”. There is no propositional mark: the narrator addresses the I-position directly, without the presence of a “they” or a “you”. The I-position is active and autonomous. She is the one that goes and opens the door; the enemy is almost absent, as if it were non relevant. The physical position marked by the text is verticality and expresses self-honour (“stand upright”, “hold their eyes”). Because of the grammatical construction, the distance between the narrator and the “you” seems to have vanished; the narrator is almost on the shoulder of the “you” and standing by the door, looking in the same direction. The sentences are suddenly short, and the rhythm of the language imposes a slow breath (one would have to check the original version).

This first descriptive analysis highlights the change of position of the character facing the same immediate future – the arrival of the armed forces that will be looking to the guerrillero hidden by her. Felicidad moved from fear, shame and passivity, to pride and self assurance. This is a relational position: it is a sort of psychological/emotional/moral stance in front of some specific other, or specific event. Yet the objective events Felicidad has lived through and is now expecting are exactly the same: she did hide and heal a guerrillero, and she did sleep with him. The soldiers will come and ask her about him and possibly, to account for her actions. So how can we explain this change of *subjective relational position*?

I will consider this change as the semiotic elaboration made by Felicidad of a rupture in her life – a rupture in her course of her conduct and her relationship to the world, which translates into an intrapsychological rupture. It seems that Felicidad used to be a “cool-headed. A watchful heart. Careful” person (p. 119, 4th line from bottom). For some reasons, she did something which does not correspond to who she think she was and what she thought she was able of: she engaged in a relationship with a guerrillero, that is, she took the man him, asked him to stay for a few more days, etc. This creates an intrapsychological rupture which is marked, in the text, by a sort of estrangement between two the two I-positions of the narrator and the “you”: “what got into your head? (p. 119)” and “what happened, damn you” (p. 120, l. 4); “I don’t recognise you any longer. I never thought you would change... from back to white” (p. 120, l. 5-6). Hence, the whole relationship to the guerrillero creates a rupture in Felicidad’s life. This intrapsychological rupture is expressed by the conflict between two I-positions (narrator and “you”). The events of the rupture also change Felicidad’s relationship to the others and the social reality; they have as consequences the threat of the armed forces, and possibly, a long standing bifurcation in Felicidad’s life.

If the relationship to the guerrillero is the rupture, then position of “fear” expressed at the beginning of the text is that immediate reaction when contemplating this rupture, possibly its social meaning, and its possible consequences. The position of “pride” from the end of the text appears in that respect as the result of the semiotic elaboration of the *personal sense* of this rupture. The text is hence the mean and the externalisation of the transition process from this to that position, and the language is the semiotic operator of this transformation.

In that perspective, the goal of my analysis is to understand how this rupture is elaborated. I will try to identify some of the semiotic operators of the change, analysing the discourse along the dimensions identified above. I will identify the main movements of the text, and try to characterise the operators of change. For this I will focus on the two last dimensions of the four dimensions identified above (distancing and degree of reality), using the other ones only when the analysis requires it.

Movements of the text

The main movements of the text are the following ones (I identify them on the basis of a substantial change in the time-space location):

- 1) *They’ll arrive*: Fear and passivity characterise the text from the beginning, till the twice repeated “That’s how it is” (p. 119, l. 9). In this first section, Felicidad considers herself with some distance (as seen above) and she will simply share the fate of all the other women that have been abused and tortured she is one of many. Here, the I-position is lost in the community.
- 2) *If-only* (p. 119, l. 10-13): the narrator engages in a counter-factual reasoning: if she had gone with him – the guerrillero? - (which she did not do) she would not have been exposed to that fate. Given the resistances of the narrator it is quite unlikely that she

could have actually accompanied the guerrillero; the counterfactual reasoning seems rather as an imaginary mean to escape to this imposed fate. In the thinking process, the counterfactual thinking enables to take some distance from the state of panic in which the narrator is, and with it, the presence of “they” (troops and neighbours). She can then imagine, as she speaks, that *she could be not here-and-now*. This enables her to go elsewhere in thinking, that is, in the past, in which is located the next section.

- 3) *Hosting the Guerillero* (p. 119, l. 13-p. 120, l. 20): this is the narrative heart of the text, where we actually have a full narration of what actually happened. The text is alternating between the descriptions of the guerillero through the perceptions of Felicidad, the actual shared events (staying longer, eating, going for a walk), and the shocked comments of the narrators taking distance from her.
- a. The narrator is more and more distancing her from the “you” who seems to progressively loose control of her reality: “you were blind, blind” (p. 119, l. 25); “your cables crossed” (p. 120, l. 11). The active resistance of the narrator is marked by the negative-narrative style. It does not say: you did A and did B, it says, you did not do A, you did not do B. Hence, what is emphasised, is the fact that the character had, at each bifurcation, the choice of engaging a different action that the one she took: “you” could have found an excuse to tell him good night (p. 119, l. 18) and “you” could have told him goodbye once rested, (p. 119, l. 34), “you” could have not accepted to go for a walk with him (p. 120, l. 16). If “you” had taken the alternative, then there would not have been such a strong rupture between “you” and the “narrator”.
 - b. The other effect of this narration is that it emphasises the irrevocable, irresistible nature of the growing trouble possessing Felicidad. It is marked by the progression of her modes of perceiving the guerrillero. First, Felicidad’s perceptions are visual and auditory: she first just sees him with his “trousers in shreds and his white shirt so bloody” (p. 119, l.16); she hears him mumbling and sees him falling. Then, her perception starts to be much more embodied, under the skin and in her muscles: she feels a shiver when she looks at his face and she realises that she likes his black moustache; she feels trembling when he looked at her; she starts stammering; she flushes; she then feels “how the heat boiling on his skin began to seep into [her] like a burning” (p. 120, l. 19).
 - c. How to explain this progressive lost of contact with reality? In that section of the text the symbolic resource (Zittoun) that the narrator uses to confer sense to these facts is the culturally defined system/or social representation of the “evil”. Indeed, the actual underlying semantic field is that of devil possession: the Guerillero arrives “that night, when Sebastian Marquez’ dogs began to howl as if they’d smelled the devil” (p. 119, l. 13); this is “Bad luck, Felicidad” (p. 119, l. 19); then “whatever got into your head (...) what evil star dazzled you then, what evil wind blew through your heart to stir up the fire” (p. 119, l. 24-26); and then, as events evolve, “putting salt into another person’s hand is stupid, it brings bad luck” (p. 120, l. 13). Only such bad omen, or presence of the evil, might explain, for the narrator, that Felicidad follows that path – “how in God’s name?” (p. 120, l. 12).
 - d. In other words, the reader sees a growing mutual desire between Felicidad and the guerillero. In the here and now of the actual events, Felicidad seems to have engaged in these various actions without problems, following the flow of events, and naturally choosing the course of action which would enable to let the relationship develop. It is afterward, in the attempt to confer sense to these events which are alien to her, that the narrator uses semiotic resource attached

to the social representation of the devil (who can possess, burn inside, etc.). Why would she use such a symbolic resource? Two complementary interpretations can be proposed. Suppose that it is the first time the narrator is thinking about these events, and that she is actually paralyzed by fear of the coming troops. Fear, as well as negative feelings, are very contagious in thinking, and can bring the emotional quality to various parts of experience (Janet, Green). Hence, it might be an effect of fear and the imagination of the soldiers to come that, in turn, make the narrator use a vocabulary of the evil to mediate her memory of the experience of her developing relationship with the guerillero. The complementary interpretation is more social: as the narrator is trying to make sense of her action, she uses the perspective of others in her community – the soldiers, the women. It might be through the interiorised I-positions of these social others that she condemns this relationship and judges it as bad, and immoral. Finally, it might be because the whole process is described with such a vocabulary, than the narrator resists to it and finds it alien to herself.

- 4) *They're coming* (p. 120, l.20-26): The narrator precisely follows this position of externality, heterogeneity to the self. The text takes back the motives of the first paragraph, but with a slight change in the intensity. The time is not only future but with the continuous present the catastrophe seems absolutely imminent. Also, their presence is more menacing: this time, it is not only that “they’ll ask”, this time, “they’ll say that they know”.
 - a. So what is it that “they” know? In this sentence, the emotional field developed in the first section of the text (the fear of being aggressed, tortured), recalled here, fuses with the one just developed – that of Felicidad’s growing desire. Consequently, at this point, the discourse creates an ambiguity: does the narrator mean that “they” know that Felicidad helped the guerillero, or that Felicidad was burning for him?
 - b. The last sentence is “they’ll say that they know so that you go for it” (p. 120, l. 26). The narrator creates a “what if” situation, an exploration of an imaginary future in which “they” will use a well-known technique (or semiotic resource) to induce confession. This imaginary scenario forces the narrator to imagine “what she would go for”, that is, what it is that she could actually have to confess. This creates a radical short-circuit (Gillespie): realising what “you” would say to “they”, and how “they” might hear “you”, makes the narrator understand that the problem is really wrongly defined; because there is actually no way at all that what “you” knows could be known by “they”.
- 5) *But only God and you are witnesses*: (p. 120, l. 27-p. 121, l. 4).
 - a. This passage is introduced by a grammatical caesura, the “but”, which indicates or creates a rupture with what precedes. Especially, it objects to the previous imaginary scenario, stating its impossibility; “what if” cannot be the case. “But only God and you are witnesses” enables to change position, take distance, detached from the here-and now contingencies. Hence, the proposition “But only God and you are witnesses” creates a new thinking space (Perret-Clermont), in the present, and in peace: “they”, the others, the screams are gone.
 - b. In this thinking space, memories can actually emerge, as they are witnesses of “the meetings in the field...”. The narrators is then in the present of the narration to describe the actual sexual encounter between Felicidad and the guerillero. The language chosen here is as close as possible to embodied

organic, inner perception: membranes, moistures and blood (which in principle escape to language). This scene is the climax of the sequence (3). Only, this time, the emotional tone and the positions of the narrator are radically different. The “you” and the “he” progressively dissolve in the action, and so we have the impression that the narrator also fuses in the flow of the memory. The deep intimate nature of these experiences belongs only to Felicidad and her lover. The experience moved her at the core of herself, far below language and the visible. It is therefore impossible that anyone but God could have known it – therefore there is no “who else” (p. 320, l. 29; 33-34).

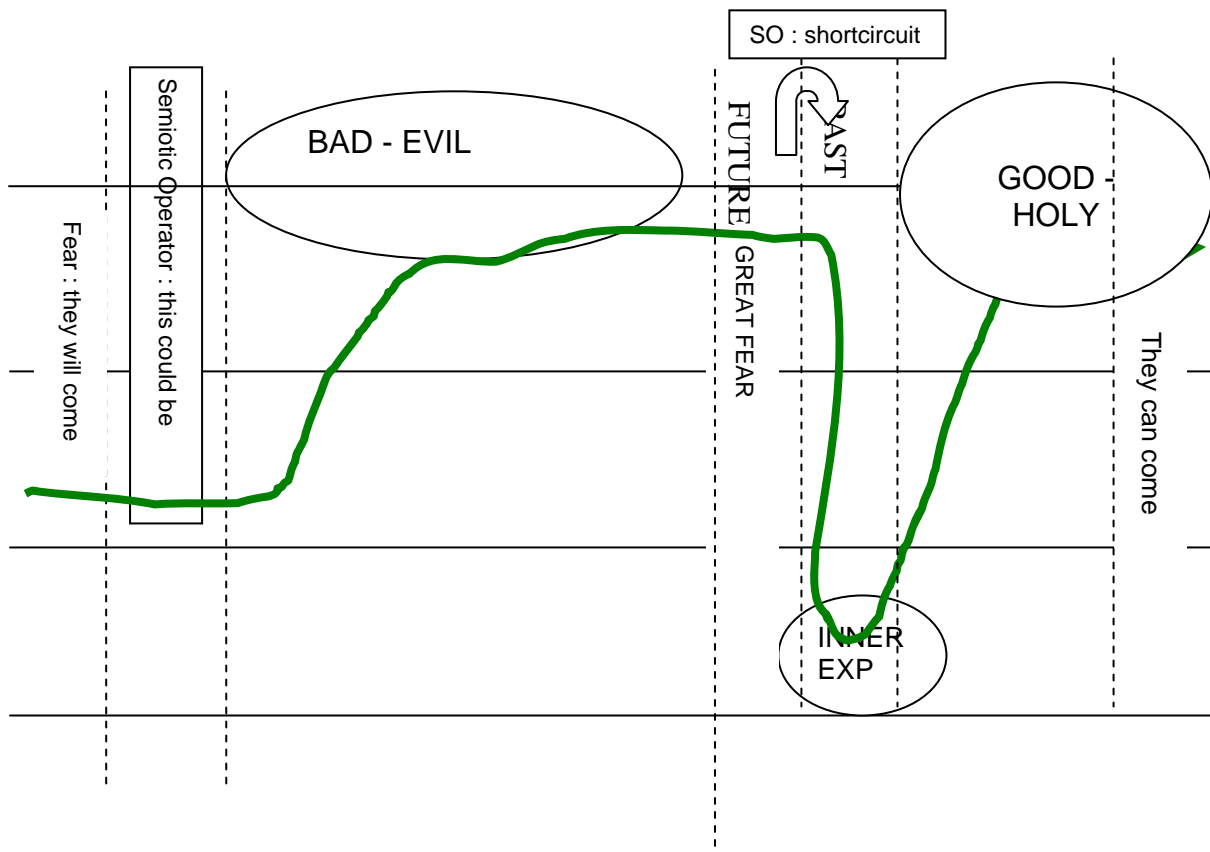
- c. In other words, if the accusing, negative voice of the narrator against “you” could be seen as result of her position of exteriority, close to the neighbours, the others, the community, now the narrator meets the “you” in a place of absolute interiority. From there, no one can judge her.
- 6) *And who’s to judge you.. Not a whisper* (p. 121, l. 4-1.9). This passage is pulling together the two strings of the previous one: the inner ineffable nature of the experience of encounter between the Guerillero and Felicidad; and the connection to God as “you” is under “His” protection. Hence, paradoxically, by this juxtaposition, the encounter, which is impossible to see, and belongs only to her, becomes of divine nature. In other words, after the experience of the fear of total annihilation (4), the narrator could open a space and find the distance given by the idea of God to live again the actual experience around which the whole text is constructed. From this perspective, a new field-like semiotic resource is available; that of the “holy”, which cannot be found even if the “heart is pierced”, and that only God can see. Note that the “inner space” as the place where God can be found is a classical religious theme (see Markovà on Saint-Augustin). In this paragraph, as in the previous one, the narrator is no more refusing her connection to the “you”. One might say that the experience of this inner-transcendent place enables the resolution of the conflict between the two I-positions.
- 7) *Don’t look like that... Hold their eyes* (p. 121 l. 9-15). In these last lines, the narrator is no more accusing “you”, or distancing from her; it is now supporting and advising her. At this point, the sense of the rupture is reduced to a minimum: the experience did occur and is gone; in that sense, nothing can take it away from her. Felicidad is now standing back straight in the here-and-now reality. She is ready to what is to come, not scared of what might be the case; she has explored her past and the future, and knows that the experience she had, located in her interiority, has nothing to fear from external threats. That is how she now can be proud and brave and face the men who might come to her door.

Synthesis

I have proposed to see this text as a thinking/speaking flow by which, in a dialogical dynamic, Felicidad is engaged in the process of conferring sense to a rupture in her life, linked to her relationship with a guerillero. We now the starting point and the ending point of that process, a change in a relational subjective position, from fear and passivity, to readiness and strength confronting the same objective situation. The transition process that brings from one to the other position is a semiotic elaboration. The analysis I have proposed identifies the following key semiotic resources and operators of this transformation:

- 1) The starting point is, under the threat and the eyes of the other, in a present situation of fear and miscomprehension, a situation of alienation. The first scene is that sense pre-symbolic;

- 2) The first semiotic operator enabling a change of perspective is a subjunctive, “you should”, which in contrast to “that’s how it is”, enables distantiation and opens a *first imaginary space*;
- 3) In that space, the whole experience of the relationship with the guerillero is given a first meaning. The *first field-like symbolic resource* that enables to hold together the initial feeling of fear, the alienation, the presence of others, etc., that is, the diverse of that experience, is the imaginary of the *devil* – from the Greek *diabolein*, what separates. In other word, the narrative is given a sense and a direction by a set of a highly distanced, or hyperconscious, value, which its semiotic mediators that diffuse the whole narration and is diffracted at the level of action and physical events;
- 4) This brings to a catastrophic imagination of the immediate future, in which “they” will use a classical torture mean – saying that they know to make you go for it. Yet this opens a *second imaginary space*, in which the narrator can see herself from the perspective of the others, and realise that she has nothing to hide. In that sense, the classical torture trick becomes a *semiotic resource to operate a reflective short-circuit*;
- 5-6) The short-circuit, marked by the “*but*” – a semiotic marker of interruption in a flow of thinking/speaking, enables in turn a vivid re-presenting of the past in the present, in a new thinking space. This time, the semiotic means to express the scene are at the level of organic experience, or just above the sub-conscious (Valsiner) that is, below the presence of fact, values, judgements, presence of the others. It is, paradoxically, through this inner experience of union, that a new semiotic field emerges – that of the divine or the sacred, in an Augustinian manner. Hence, “God” invoked here is the new triangulation point, the semiotic operator, which enables the solution of the conflict between the I-positions. Hence, “God” plays here the role of the symbolon – etymologically, that unifies what is separated. This deploys a *second hyperconscious field like symbolic resource* of the holy or the righteous (or the martyr??), which dictates images (pierce the heart), and has various consequences, at the level of action (not moaning, not swearing) as well at the level of embodiment (stand upright).
- 7) It is through this new semiotic field that the initial situation is resignified; in the present, it is now a situation of the righteous having nothing to fear from what is to come. Indeed: the fight has already taken place.



Indicative references

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