Unamunian Microcosms: Four Short Stories in a New Translation into English

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UNAMUNIAN MICROCOSMS: FOUR SHORT STORIES
IN A NEW TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH

by

Emily Ann Davis

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

UNAMUNIAN MICROCOSMS: FOUR SHORT STORIES
IN A NEW TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH

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Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno’s short fiction is neglected in both the academic and nonacademic communities, and it is especially underrepresented in English-language translation. This thesis constitutes a comprehensive approach to four short stories: “El que se enterró,” “La manchita de la uña,” “Mecanópolis,” and “Batracófilos y batracófobos.” A detailed exploration of thematic resonances among them, and between these and other works by Unamuno, precedes side-by-side translations of all four texts, of which only “Mecanópolis” has been previously published in English translation.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To every one of my schoolteachers who, over the last twenty years, have helped me to cultivate my talents, especially when I could not see them myself;

To Claire, who makes me believe that I can do anything;

And to Miguel de Unamuno, who taught me how to read when I was nineteen.
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Translation as Creative Interpretation

Why have I chosen translation, over a more traditional form of exegesis, as my preferred mode of approximation to the literature of Miguel de Unamuno? Just call me a hermeneut. The “hermeneutic motion,” a term coined by George Steiner in *After Babel*, refers to an interpretive approach to “the demonstrative statement of understanding which is translation,” involving an initial trust that there is something of value to be found in the text in question, followed by an invasion of the text with the intent of extracting meaning, which is thereafter incorporated into a new text in the target language (312-19). As Douglas Robinson puts it in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, “hermeneuts imagine themselves inside the activity, feel subjectively what it must have been like to be,” in the case of literature, the writer of the original text, “and attempt to describe what they find from within” (97). Such an approach calls to mind the goal of Jorge Luis Borges’s Pierre Menard, who intended to, in a sense, become Miguel de Cervantes so that he could adequately “translate” the *Quijote* (47). Borges’s text is, of course, hyperbolic and satirical, but it does present a valid viewpoint of translation as a veritable re-creation of the original text. Menard perhaps takes the idea a bit too far, but anyone who has ever attempted to translate a piece of literature and has struggled with the ensuing problems cannot very well blame him for trying, in his eccentric way, to attain an ideal translation, faithful in every aspect to the original.

Theorists and scholars classify various types of equivalence in translation, where denotative, connotative, textual, contextual, pragmatic, or formal considerations may influence a translator’s decisions. Ultimately, any number of these variables may be combined under the umbrella of what is known as “functional equivalence,” referring to
the translator’s role in determining which variable or variables are most important in resolving each issue encountered in the translation process (Kenny 77). In the struggle to produce a translation which adequately re-presents the original, in the repeated questioning as to which type of equivalence is appropriate at a given point in the process, the translator, through agonizing moments of indecision while analyzing every conceivable solution before settling on what is determined to be the best one, undertakes an analysis of the most immersive and comprehensive variety of the text in question.

George Steiner elucidates in *Real Presences* the identity between interpretation and translation:

An interpreter is a decipherer and communicator of meanings. He is a translator between languages, between cultures and between performative conventions. He is, in essence, an executant, one who ‘acts out’ the material before him so as to give it intelligible life. Hence the third major sense of ‘interpretation’. An actor interprets Agamemnon or Ophelia. A dancer interprets Balanchine’s choreography. A violinist a Bach partita. In each of these instances, interpretation is understanding in action; it is the immediacy of translation. (7-8)

Reversing the equation, Steiner goes on to affirm that “[t]ranslation is, as we have seen, interpretative in its very etymology. It is also critical in the most creative ways” (15).

Thus the hermeneutic translator who, like Pierre Menard, like the actor, the dancer, the musician, seeks to understand the text in question by acting it out, by reliving the act of its first creation, in effect incarnates his interpretation as a creative work, in a form that no traditional literary analysis can claim. That sort of creative interpretation, a
translation as hermeneutic re-creation, is what is produced when the translator believes, as in Walter Benjamin’s concept of “pure language,” that he “must go after the mode of intention of the original, and by reaching towards this indefinable poetic realm add to the language where the harmony now finds itself expressed” (Bush 195-96). It is the embodiment of Yves Bonnefoy’s theory, as Peter France puts it, “that the task of the poetic translator is to relive the act which produced the original poem and to discover in a new language the ‘original intention and intuition… stripped of that fixed form which is only its footprint’” (5). It is precisely this question of extracting the origin of the text and conveying that originality in a different language which Unamuno addresses in an essay entitled “Traducir el estilo”:

¿Es que la originalidad es intraductible? ¿Es que lo original de una lengua no puede pasar a otra?

‘Original’ deriva de ‘origen’, y ‘origen’ del verbo latino orior, oriri, que significa surgir, nacer. Es el mismo verbo de donde viene nuestra voz ‘oriente’, o sea naciente, con referencia, ¡claro!, al sol. Y original es lo naciente o lo surgiente. Y lo que nace luego se transmite, se le hace vivir, se le convierte en tradición. Pero en tradición viva. Y tradición es algo así como traducción, pues el tradere, entregar o transmitir, es un traducir. Cabiendo originalidad en la traducción. (603)

Through a series of etymological associations, a thought process common in his essays and naturally linked to his training in classical languages, Unamuno tells us that originality and translation are not only not mutually exclusive, but essentially connected.
And he refers to the same sense of originality suggested in both Benjamin’s and Bonnefoy’s theories, mentioned above.

A reaching for the original within the text, seeking to carry it intact through a recreation of the text in a language other than that of its first publication, constitutes the ultimate driving force as well as goal of my translations included here. Before taking a close look at how such a theory is expressed in practice, I wish to comment briefly on my choice of texts for translation.

A Note on the Texts

Several of Unamuno’s works are available in English translation. Most notable among them are The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Peoples, first translated by J. E. Crawford Flitch in 1921, and Princeton University Press’s multi-volume Selected Works of Miguel de Unamuno, featuring a number of essays and works of fiction, including Anthony Kerrigan’s translations Mist and Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr. However, Unamuno’s short stories, meaning those narrative pieces shorter than such “exemplary novels” or “novellas” as, for example, San Manuel Bueno, mártir or Nada menos que todo un hombre, are too often neglected.

It is true that Unamuno resisted defined genres of writing, as he admits in his essay “La sinceridad del fingimiento”: “He sido siempre un espíritu rebelde a la lógica formal, […] a la ordenación, al método, y he ahí por qué afecto este género de conversaciones y ensayos divagatorios, llenos de digresiones y de idas y venidas” (495-96). Hence the difficulty of classifying much of his work, where personal essay is often intertwined with philosophical discourse, and so many of his shorter, freestyle essays have come to be known as autodiálogos. Víctor Goti, a character in Unamuno’s novel
Niebla, claims to be writing in a new genre, nivola (200), itself a sort of hybrid of Unamuno’s own stylistic tendencies, featuring especially the dialogic character of his narrative and his desire that “siempre bajo las líneas de un escritor se sienta la voz cálida de un hombre que nos habla” (“Artículos y discursos” 168). Even the pieces that I have chosen to translate defy a definitive category. Eleanor Krane Paucker published them in a collection called simply Cuentos, while Editorial Sudamericana’s multi-volume collection of lesser-known Unamunian prose, De esto y de aquello, presents them under the heading “Relatos novelescos.”

Despite his intentional ignorance of structured genres, or perhaps because of it, the fact remains that Unamuno’s writing took many different forms, including poetry, drama, narrative fiction ranging from very brief stories to full-length novels, and essays of varying length and subject matter, including, but not limited to, religious-philosophical treatises, socio-political commentaries, self-conscious discussions of the act of writing, and playful notes arising from musings on etymologies. The stories, or “novelesque tales,” or whatever one might choose to call the short fictional prose pieces that I have chosen to translate, comprise an important part of Unamuno’s written work. Largely ignored both within and without the academic community, these short narrative pieces deserve greater attention and wider availability. Encapsulating themes, motifs, and philosophies found in Unamuno’s essays, poetry, and longer novels and novellas, each of these stories possesses both intrinsic value in terms of what of Unamuno’s thought they offer the reader, as well as a greater richness to be discovered when viewed in the context of Unamuno’s entire body of writing. I imagine my translations filling two major functions: first, they will allow English-speaking readers who are already familiar with
Unamuno’s work to forge a more comprehensive understanding of the Unamunian corpus. In addition, they would be ideal introductory texts for the English-speaking reader who has never before heard of Unamuno, pieces that would appropriately be found in an anthology of short stories or in a textbook designed for a survey course, where shorter pieces facilitate exposure to a wide selection of authors.

I have chosen as my subjects four stories which I believe are especially rich in their complementarity to other Unamunian texts: “El que se enterró,” “La manchita de la uña,” “Mecanópolis,” and “Batracófilos y batracófobos.” “El que se enterró” was first published in the Buenos Aires newspaper *La Nación* in 1908. Both “La manchita de la uña” and “Mecanópolis” first appeared in *Los Lunes de El Imparcial*, the literary supplement to the Madrid newspaper *El Imparcial*, in 1923 and 1913, respectively. “Batracófilos y batracófobos,” dated 1917, appears not to have been published in any periodical or bound collection during Unamuno’s lifetime. The Spanish texts which appear in this volume are reprinted from the texts as they appear in *De esto y de aquello*, *Tomo II*, with a few minor changes as indicated in the notes. Of the four stories, “Mecanópolis” is the only one to have been already published in English translation. Patricia Hart’s “Mechanopolis” appears in the 2003 *Cosmos Latinos: An Anthology of Science Fiction from Latin America and Spain*, and Stanley Appelbaum’s “Mechanopolis” was published in 2004 in his own collection of side-by-side translations, *Short Stories by the Generation of 1898/Cuentos de la Generación de 1898*. Now that we have some background on the pieces that I have chosen to translate, I wish to review the evidence supporting my postulate that they are good representatives of the corpus of Unamuno’s writing.
Thematic Resonances

Unamuno says in “Decirse a sí mismo” that “los más grandes escritores se han pasado su vida repitiendo unas cuantas cosas, siempre las mismas, puliéndolas y repuliéndolas, buscándoles la expresión definitiva y más perfecta” (348). We may assume that, observant as he was of this phenomenon in the work of other writers, Unamuno was also conscious of the degree to which he cultivated the practice in his own writing. It should not surprise us that he rearticulates this same idea, in nearly the same words, in at least one other essay (“Aprender haciendo” 502), and anyone who has ever seriously read more than one piece of his writing will have noticed striking similarities between one and another of Unamuno’s texts. Themes, motifs, narrative and discursive style, all unmistakably Unamunian, combine to convey his distinctive ideology, his way of thinking about human experience. Not in vain did Unamuno say:

quisiera que al leer algo mío se dijere: ‘¡se le siente pensar!’ Y he aquí por qué, de entre todos los elogios que a vuelta de muchas censuras […] se le han dirigido a mi estilo, a mi manera de escribir, ninguno he agradecido más que el de Ramón Pérez de Ayala, que vino una vez a decirme eso, que se me sentía pensar al leerme. (“Pensar con la pluma” 526-27)

In agreement with Pérez de Ayala, I see in Unamuno’s works, and particularly in the stories I have chosen to translate, that certain Unamunian something that grants us a glimpse of the man’s thoughts. It is the question of what constitutes that something, what allows Unamuno’s thought to be transmitted—translated, so to speak—through his writing, what connects one Unamunian text to another, which I must now address.
“El que se enterró”

The story of “El que se enterró” opens with a comment on the change in character that the narrator has noticed in his friend. The discovery of the cause of this man’s transformation, according to his own explanation, calls to mind Unamuno’s musings on the question of aging, namely whether we are the same people that we were as children, or that we were last year, or last month, or if our past selves have died and passed on leaving an entirely different person. This idea is expressed most memorably in a poem from “Rimas de dentro,” number VI, of which I replicate just a few verses:

Se me ha muerto el que fui; no, no he vivido.
Allá entre nieblas,
del lejano pasado en tinieblas,
miro como se mira a los extraños
al que fui yo a los veinticinco años. (Antología poética 85)

The case of Emilio is somewhat more drastic, as, according to his story, he has personally witnessed the physical death of his former self and his rebirth in a new body. Still, the idea is the same, only articulated in a different form, an occurrence concordant with Unamuno’s statement, mentioned earlier in slightly different words, that “[e]l escritor fecundo que repite mucho una idea y le da muchas vueltas, acaba por encontrar la forma perfecta, la más ceñida, para esa idea” (“Aprender haciendo” 502).

I have been careful to qualify the character of Emilio’s unusual experience as dependent upon who is telling the story, since it is plain to see that the narrator is not entirely convinced by Emilio’s explanation. This brings up the topic of Emilio’s ideas about hallucinations and their relationship with reality. “Y en cuanto a eso de las
alucinaciones, he de decirte que todo cuanto percibimos no es otra cosa, y que no son sino alucinaciones nuestras impresiones todas,” argues Emilio (451), in response to the narrator’s off-hand remark that what his friend had experienced was only a hallucination (449). “La diferencia es de orden práctico,” Emilio continues:

Si vas por un desierto consumiéndote de sed y de pronto oyes el murmurar del agua de una fuente y ves el agua, todo esto no pasa de alucinación. Pero si arrimas a ella tu boca y bebes y la sed se te apaga, llamas a esta alucinación una impresión verdadera, de realidad. Lo cual quiere decir que el valor de nuestras percepciones se estima por su efecto práctico. Y por su efecto práctico, efecto que has podido observar por ti mismo, es por lo que estimo lo que aquí me sucedió y acabo de contarte. (451-52)

Such a definition of reality is closely related to Unamuno’s claim in the essay “La ideocracia” that the “[i]dea que se realiza es verdadera, y sólo lo es en cuanto se realiza; la realización, que la hace vivir, le da verdad” (252). Both of these instances, in turn, reveal the influence in Unamuno’s thought of the pragmatist view of truth, being that, whether or not a given idea is true is determined by its consequence if put into practice. The founder of the pragmatist school of philosophy, William James, defines the concept as “what definite difference it will make to you and me, at definite instants of our life, if this world-formula or that world-formula be the true one” (20). He goes on to say that “[a]ny idea that helps us to deal, whether practically or intellectually, with either the reality or its belongings, […] that fits, in fact, and adapts our life to the reality’s whole setting, […] will hold true of that reality” (82). It is precisely that quality of helping him to deal with his transformation, that Emilio refers to as he illustrates his reason for
accepting as truth, as reality, what his friend believes is nothing more than a hallucination, an imagined idea. Emilio’s story is, as far as his perception of his own experience goes, not merely an idea that he has imagined, but one that has been realized, and therefore, in accordance with Unamuno’s statement in “La ideocracia” mentioned above, one that is true. A similar concept of truth applies in *Niebla*, where the protagonist Augusto Pérez imagines that he is a character in a book of fiction (201). His friends dismiss the notion as a crazy delusion, but it becomes a practical reality when Augusto meets and talks with his author in person (ch. XXXI).

Along the lines of the question of illusion and reality lies the function of the mirror motif as a trigger of existential reflection. Attempting to explain his strange experience, Emilio says to his friend, “Figúrate que estando delante de un espejo, la imagen que de ti se refleja en el cristal se desprende de éste, toma cuerpo y se te viene encima…” (449). His friend is skeptical and writes it off as mere hallucination, but we already know that, for Emilio, what begins as hallucination often turns out to be reality. The mirror, for Emilio, raises the possibility of his existence in more than one realm, which in turn raises questions about the nature of his existence and his identity, which may no longer be defined by just one being. Mirrors appear frequently in Unamuno’s writing, and they often carry existential significance. Perhaps the most memorable of these instances is in *Niebla*, when Augusto confides in his friend Víctor Goti: “una de las cosas que me da más pavor es quedarme mirándome al espejo, a solas, cuando nadie me ve. Acabo por dudar de mi propia existencia e imaginarme, viéndome como otro, que soy un sueño, un ente de ficción…” (229). The resonance between these two passages is unmistakable. For both protagonists, the effect of beholding their other selves is one of
the utmost existential importance. It leads Emilio to witness his own death, the cause of his subsequent character transformation; for Augusto it is one of a series of experiences that lead to his ultimately discovering the nature of his existence as a character in a book of fiction. Emilio’s story, in a way, makes concrete the idea that occurs to Augusto (that his reflection in the mirror is in fact another self), similar to the way in which, as I noted earlier, Emilio’s second self embodies the poet’s musings on what might have happened to the person he was many years before.

Emilio and Augusto share another characteristic relevant to their experience: they both assume that their dogs possess a human-like cognizance. Reminiscent of Augusto’s frequent philosophical musings addressed to his dog Orfeo is Emilio’s remark to his dog: “no comprendemos nada de lo que pasa, amigo, y en el fondo no es esto más misterioso que cualquier otra cosa…” (451). His subsequent retort to his doubting friend, “¿es que crees que la filosofía humana es más profunda que la perruna?” recalls the “canine philosophy” expressed by Orfeo in the “Oración fúnebre por modo de epílogo” at the close of Niebla (296-300). The quality of assuming a dog’s philosophical sensibility is evident as well in Unamuno’s “Elegía en la muerte de un perro”, wherein the poet addresses his dog with such verses as:

¡tal vez cuando acostabas la cabeza
en mi regazo
vagamente soñabas en ser hombre
después de muerto! (Antología poética 43)

Here the poet contemplates the nature of the dog’s existence, whereas Orfeo ponders the nature of Augusto’s existence. In all of these cases, though, we see Unamuno’s tendency
to include a consideration of the canine condition in his explorations of existential questions.

“La manchita de la uña”

The driving force of “La manchita de la uña” is Procopio’s “superstición de las supersticiones” (539). It is his arduous search for meaning, contrasted with his stubborn disbelief in the existence of any meaning, which together propel Procopio through a series of tormenting thoughts. Launched by the appearance of a little spot on his fingernail, Procopio’s intellectual struggle is summed up as follows: “Ya la cuestión no era lo que aquella pintita significara, sino si significaba o no algo. Y en rigor, si hay algo que signifique cosa alguna” (540). That is to say that Procopio is trying to discover the meaning of the spot on his fingernail, knowing all the while, or at least thinking that he knows, that it does not mean anything. Yet, he cannot help but wonder if it has a meaning after all, and the struggle to figure it out gradually drives him to a philosophical crisis in which not only is his entrenched disbelief in the meaning of anything questioned of its veracity, but we also see that it is impossible either to prove or to disprove it. In form, Procopio’s inner conflict is similar to the vital struggle that Unamuno describes in Del sentimiento trágico de la vida:

¿Por qué quiero saber de dónde vengo y adónde voy, de dónde viene y adónde va lo que me rodea, y qué significa todo esto? Porque no quiero morirme del todo, y quiero saber si he de morirme o no definitivamente. Y si no muero, ¿qué será de mí?; y si muero, ya nada tiene sentido. Y hay tres soluciones: a) o sé que me muero del todo, y entonces la desesperación irremediable, o b) sé que no muero del todo, y entonces la
resignación, o c) no puedo saber ni una ni otra cosa, y entonces la
resignación en la desesperación o ésta en aquélla, una resignación
desesperada, o una desesperación resignada, y la lucha. (52)

Clearly, Procopio’s situation is significantly lighter than questions of human immortality,
but the idea of trying to make sense of a dialectic whose solution we cannot, however,
know for certain through logical reasoning, is the same. The concept appears in “El que
se enterró” as well; in that case, however, each of the two characters assumes one side of
the dialectic. Upon hearing Emilio’s story, his friend asks, “¿Y todo esto qué significa?”
and Emilio, clearly irritated by such a question, replies: “¡Ya salió aquello! Ya estás
buscando la solución o la moraleja. ¡Pobres locos! Se os figura que el mundo es una
charada o un jeroglífico cuya solución hay que hallar. No, hombre, no; esto no tiene
solución alguna, esto no es ningún acertijo ni se trata aquí de simbolismo alguno” (453).

We should not be surprised that the opposing sides of the argument are presented by
participants in a dialogue. In fact, Procopio’s musings, which form the bulk of his entire
tale, are nothing more nor less than a dialogue with himself, an autodiálogo.

A term often employed by Unamuno himself, an autodiálogo is distinct from a
mere monologue in its consciousness of another participant who takes the role of
opposition in the conversation, and it is defined by frequent questioning and challenging
of statements and viewpoints set forth. Let us illustrate with an example of this form of
discourse from “La manchita de la uña”:

“Dicen que a Newton —se decía Procopio— se le ocurrió lo de la
gravitación viendo caer una manzana…

Cuentos, ¡claro!
Pero, ¿no será la aparición de esta manchita en mi uña algo como la caída de una manzana newtoniana? Y ahora, ¿qué descubro yo?” Y se puso a pensar qué es lo que descubriría. Porque necesitaba descubrir algo; el ánimo le pedía un descubrimiento.

Sólo que como nada significa nada… ¿Descubriría esto: que nada significa nada? (541-42)

The passage appears originally in a single paragraph, but I have shown here how it can easily be broken up into lines of a dialogue illustrating the sides of Procopio’s inner conflict.

The autodiálogo is highly visible in much of Unamuno’s work, whether it be the overarching form of a personal essay or the structure of the inner thoughts of a fictional character such as Procopio or Niebla’s Augusto Pérez. Unamuno was conscious of the autodiálogo form and it played an important part in governing not only his writing but also, as far as we can tell, his style and philosophy of thought. “No hay más diálogo verdadero,” he writes in the essay “Soledad,” “que el diálogo que entablas contigo mismo” (55).

At one point in Procopio’s autodiálogo, the dialogue that he rehearses with himself, he wonders if his being named Procopio has any significance: “¿qué quiere decir esto de que yo me llame Procopio? ¿por qué me hizo bautizar con ese nombre mi padre, que, por su parte, se llama Wilibrordo?, y tenía, por cierto, un hermano, tío mío, Burgundóforo…” (541). This musing is particularly reminiscent of discussions of the importance of names in Amor y pedagogía. Early in the novel we witness Avito Carrascal’s extremely careful selection of a name for his son: “Ya tenemos al niño, al
sujeto, y ahora surge el primer problema, el del nombre. El nombre que a uno le pongan y que tenga que llevar puede hacer su felicidad o su desgracia; es una perpetua sugestión” (63). At the close of the book we see again an emphasis on the significance of names; this time the author refers not to personal names but to the names of things, but the idea is the same. In the “Apuntes para un tratado de cocotología,” on the etymology of that term, we read: “no dudemos de la importancia del nombre, importancia tal que precisamente lo más grave de una idea u objeto es el nombre que hayamos de darle. Rechacemos aquel absurdo aforismo de le nom ne fait pas à la chose, «el nombre no hace a la cosa». Sí, el nombre hace a la cosa y hasta la crea” (189). This is a bold statement, perhaps, but it does carry an ironic tone in the context of this pseudo-scientific treatise on origami birds. Also, it should not be too shocking to anyone familiar with Unamuno’s constant attention to etymologies and meanings of words. Moreover, a statement like this one from Unamuno helps to explain why it would occur to Procopio, a character created by Unamuno, to wonder what it might mean to have the name that he has. Ultimately, though, in both cases the idea that a name would be so important is rather ludicrous. In the case of cocotología, the name of a “science” that carries very little intrinsic significance and makes virtually no impact on the rest of the world does not matter much. In the case of Procopio, his musing on his and his relatives’ names, which are extremely odd and even laughable, is both silly and unfruitful: it does not succeed in outweighing Procopio’s fixation on the frivolous issue of the spot on his fingernail.

Besides this rumination on names, another important moment in Procopio’s autodiálogo is a sort of self-conscious meta-thought process where he explains to himself that “[e]n rigor el hombre no piensa más que para hablar, para comunicarse con sus
This articulation of Procopio’s is nearly identical to Unamuno’s in *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida*: “pensamos articulada, o sea reflexivamente, gracias al lenguaje articulado, y este lenguaje brotó de la necesidad de trasmitir nuestro pensamiento a nuestros prójimos” (45). This same theory of language plays a role, albeit a less visible one, in “Mecanópolis” as well.

“Mecanópolis”

Meshing with Unamuno’s philosophy, articulated both by himself and by Procopio, that spoken language was born out of the specifically human need to communicate with other humans, is the phenomenon that in the city of Mecanópolis, spoken language is absent except when uttered by the sole human visitor whose story we read. Since there are no human inhabitants of Mecanópolis, it makes sense that there is no spoken language. We see, however, that written language remains in the city, and it is not only an artifact in the museums (456); written language is continually being produced in the city newspaper, *El Eco de Mecanópolis* (456-57). The question, then, is: for what purpose, and for whom, is this language being generated? This is, in fact, a facet of what the visitor to Mecanópolis attempts to figure out, and it is a part of what makes “Mecanópolis” an especially interesting case for translation.

The problem of translation in “Mecanópolis” first presents itself in the narrator’s stated intent to retell his friend’s story “con sus mismas palabras, a poder ser” (454). In a sense, the narrator acts as translator when he retells his friend’s story, and the qualifier “a poder ser” indicates that he is aware that an absolutely precise word-for-word retelling will be impossible. The translation is more interesting, however, in the case of the traveler’s attempt to project a human interpretation on the dehumanized, mechanized
world of Mecanópolis. He desperately tries to understand it, in a manner similar both to Emilio’s friend’s instinctive search for meaning in Emilio’s story, and to Procopio’s torturous inquiry into the meaning of the spot on his fingernail and into whether or not anything has any meaning. Exasperated by the strangeness and the loneliness of the place, the visitor to Mecanópolis begins to imagine invisible inhabitants, and this hallucinatory attempt to cope turns out to be close to the truth which he eventually realizes, that the city is populated by the mechanical souls of the machines themselves. To the tune of Emilio’s philosophy of hallucination and reality, which we have already discussed and to which we will return shortly, this detail brings us to the issue of dream versus reality.

The narration of the story makes for ambiguity as regards the traveler’s visit to Mecanópolis; that is to say, it is not entirely clear whether or not he really went there. He tells us that he went to sleep shortly after arriving at the oasis: “No sé cuántas horas estaría durmiendo, y si fueron horas, o días, o meses, o años. Lo que sé es que me levanté otro, enteramente otro” (455). Immediately upon waking up, he walks a short distance, finds the train station, and embarks on the journey to Mecanópolis. Then, at his breaking point in the strange city, he recounts: “Salí como loco y fuí a echarme delante del primer tranvía eléctrico que pasó. Cuando desperté del golpe me encontraba de nuevo en el oasis de donde partí” (458). That is to say that, flanked by periods of sleep, it is plausible that the visit to Mecanópolis was merely dreamed and never realized.

The motif of “la vida es sueño” is not uncommon in Unamuno’s work. Again, Niebla comes to mind, whether it be in Augusto Pérez’s casual “¿Sueño o vivo?” on waking up from a vivid dream (128), or in his more serious and philosophically
contemplative: “¿Qué es el mundo real sino el sueño que soñamos todos, el sueño común?” (169). It is interesting that the traveler refers to his vision of an oasis in the distance as most likely “un ensueño de espejismo,” not only a mirage, but also a daydream, a sort of dreamed-up half-reality. Both of these terms are closely related, of course, to hallucination, and it is worth noting that Emilio’s discussion in “El que se enterró” of the relationship between hallucination and reality references specifically the experience of imagining an oasis in the desert (see page 9). As it turns out, the experience of the traveler in Mecanópolis is nearly identical to the one that Emilio describes. He is lost in a desert and dying of thirst, when he thinks that he has spotted an oasis. Only half-believing in the hallucination, he drags himself toward the vision and, as he later tells us, “cuando llegué, encontréme, en efecto, en un oasis. Una fuente restauró mis fuerzas” (455). That is to say that the traveler’s hallucination became a practical reality, exactly according to Emilio’s theory and precisely in the form that Emilio offered as an example.

It is in a similar manner that, as I mentioned before, the traveler’s hallucinated interpretation of the population of Mecanópolis becomes a practical reality, a solution which allows him to make sense, strange though it is, out of his surroundings. The effect that this nearly unbelievable discovery leaves on him, however, is one of illness, even of madness. “Me creí víctima de una terrible enfermedad, de una locura,” he exclaims (457). Shortly thereafter, he identifies the long-term consequence of this experience: “Y desde entonces he concebido un verdadero odio a eso que llamamos progreso” (458). Such an impression has the experience left on him, that he is compelled to stay as far away as possible from anything that could replicate the chilling horror that he felt in Mecanópolis. This traveler’s experience and reaction are extreme; nonetheless, it is known that
Unamuno harbored a certain uneasiness about “progress,” particularly in the field of technology. He suggests in *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida*, for example, that “acaso la enfermedad misma sea la condición esencial de lo que llamamos progreso, y el progreso mismo una enfermedad” (39). Unamuno’s view of *progreso* often places it in sharp contrast with the natural world, which has the power to renovate the soul. This concept is evident in sonnet XXXIV from “Fuerteventura a París (Diario íntimo de confinamiento y destierro vertido en sonetos)”:

La mar ciñe a la noche en su regazo
y la noche a la mar;
[…]
y el alma siente
que noche y mar la enredan en su lazo.
Y se baña en la oscura lejanía
de su germen eterno, de su origen. (*Antología poética* 99-100)

These lines illustrate the capacity of an ocean view at night to resituate the soul within the cosmos from which it originates, in a sense reviving the soul by reminding it of its birth.

In “Mecanópolis,” the desert traveler, dying of thirst, is spiritually revived and driven on by hope arising from a glimpse of “alguna verdura,” then physically revived by a fountain when he arrives at what turns out to be a real oasis (455). Soon, however, we see *progreso* compete with nature. “Era tal la velocidad del tren, que ni podía darme cuenta del paisaje circunstante” (455), recounts the traveler. The traveler’s being detached from the surrounding landscape by the high-speed train is a mild confrontation with technology compared to his strange, lonely, and miserable experience in the city of
Mecanópolis, where a simulated theater spectacle in a deserted hall “[l]e heló el alma” (456). Once out of the city, the traveler finds relief when he meets a group of Bedouins and they pray together, “mirando al cielo estrellado.” The implication of causality is apparent in the sentence immediately following: “No había máquina alguna en derredor nuestro” (458). The view of nature as an antidote to spiritually damaging technological progress is unmistakable in the last line of the story, where the man who visited Mecanópolis expresses his desire to find a place “donde no haya una sola máquina y fluyan los días con la dulce mansedumbre cristalina de un arroyo perdido en el bosque virgen” (458).

In “El perfecto pescador de caña (después de leer a Walton),” Unamuno again evokes the image of flowing water, giving particular attention to its soul-reviving properties: “A la orilla del río van invadiendo el alma dulcemente y gota a gota las profundas aguas, hasta que le bañan las espirituales entrañas” (586). In the same essay, he describes the same setting’s poetic value:

¡Qué sabroso descanso el de sentarse a la orilla del río y a la sombra de un álamo, a dejarse vivir en suave baño de resignada dejadez, mirando correr las aguas! ¡Qué secreta escuela de resignación y de calma! Fluye la líquida masa tan compacta y unida que semeja titilante cristal inmóvil. Contemplándola discurrir así, apréndese la quietud que sustenta al curso de la vida, por agitado que éste sea, y el solemne reposo que del concierto de las carreras de los seres todos surge. (585)

In this passage, praises of the “resignación,” “calma,” “quietud,” and “reposo” created by the flowing water of the river echo the reference at the conclusion of “Mecanópolis” to
the “dulce mansedumbre” of a stream as the ideal representation of a peaceful life. Furthermore, the contrast of those sentiments with the “curso [...] agitado” of life points to the opposition between elements of nature, like water, and those of modern society, such as machines. The belief in the cleansing power of nature, held by both Unamuno and the traveler in “Mecanópolis,” is clearly articulated in the expression above: “las profundas aguas [...] le bañan las espirituales entrañas.” The spiritual value of a natural setting is conveyed not only in these two works, but also, as we shall see next, in the story of “Batracófilos y batracófobos.”

“Batracófilos y batracófobos”

In this story, the poets of Ciamaña are aware of the inspirational value of surrounding themselves with elements of nature: “Para los poetas casineros ciamañenses el mayor regalo era sentarse en las tardes serenas del otoño junto al estanque, a ver en el cristal terso de su sobre haz reflejarse el follaje ya enrojecido de los árboles sobre el reflejo del azul limpidísimo del cielo” (505). The poets of Ciamaña contemplate the standing water of a pond, while in the passage above Unamuno ponders the flowing water of a river. Both bodies of water, however, are praised for their reflective properties, and it is clear that both offer inspiration to the poets who take the time to contemplate them.

One such poet in Ciamaña is Erminio, known as “[e]l más inspirado” (506). Particularly inspired by the sounds of the animals that accompany his thoughts and compositions in the garden, Erminio writes a book called Chirridos diurnos y croídos nocturnos. And, we are told, “[l]o de croído, de croar, como silbido y chirrido de silbar y chirriar, era palabra que él inventó” (506). This is just one instance of the linguistic
creativity and playfulness that permeates the story of “Batracófilos y batracófobos.” The
title itself is interesting, as batracófilos and batracófobos are unfamiliar, unabashedly
Greek-rooted terms that all but demand etymologic sensibilities. The words derive from
the Greek batrachos, frog, philia, love or affinity, and phobia, fear or aversion. Coming
from Unamuno, an accomplished scholar of ancient Greek, such words are not surprising.
Nor, in fact, is an essay like “Jugueteos etimológicos: El Caramillo y el Calamar,” which
concludes with the remark: “Considere, pues, el lector, si es que suponía parentesco
espiritual entre el caramillo, el calamar, el caramelo y el acto de encaramarse, y dígame
luego si hay cosa más divertida y amena que esto de las etimologías” (202). Indeed,
Unamuno is acutely aware of the etymologies of the words that he uses in his writing,
particularly in the sort of capricious essays like the one just mentioned, where etymology
constitutes the subject matter itself. In the case of batracófilos and batracófobos, the fact
that these foreign-sounding, pseudo-scientific terms are found in common use in Ciamaña
is a major contributor to the satirical tone of this story of a highly learned community tied
up in childish arguments. This sort of linguistic consciousness and playfulness is at work
in a number of Unamuno’s texts, and it encompasses several instances of coining new
words which create nuances of meaning.

In Amor y pedagogía, Unamuno coins such words as “ídeotas, ideítas, idezuelas”
(113), each coloring the root word idea with a unique tint. These words are similar in
their creative morphology to Erminio’s croído, which, being a verbal noun derived from
croar, is however slightly different in meaning from the officially accepted, simple
nominalized form, el croar. The precise difference is not explicated, but rather the new
word is published and subsequently interpreted and judged by the reader, just as
Unamuno expects of the term that he publishes in “El trashumanismo,” essay which he concludes with the following: “‘Bueno —me dirá el lector—, ¿y en qué quedamos con eso del trashumanismo? ¿A qué se reduce?’ Pues bien, lector amigo, yo ya creé la palabra, ¿te parece poco?; lo demás corre de tu cuenta. Te la regalo y puedes hacer de ella lo que gustes, porque a mí, después de escrito esto, no me sirve ya para más” (156). Both here and in “Batracófilos y batracófobos,” it appears that the joy of coining new words lies, at least in part, in giving the reader the responsibility of defining them. In both trashumanismo and croído, as in batracófilos and batracófobos, there is to be found an undercurrent of poking fun at intellectual elitism in a way impossible with words already accepted in the lexicon. This function of linguistic creativity plays a vital role in defining the tone of each text.

A final instance of playful linguistic self-consciousness brings us back to the topic of the meaning of names, whose importance both in Amor y pedagogía and in “La manchita de la uña” have already been noted. Here in “Batracófilos y batracófobos,” the idea recurs near the end of the tale, when the reader meets “don Sócrates, el filósofo—acaso se dedicó a la filosofía para honrar su nombre” (509). This commentary is a lighthearted jab at what otherwise might have been considered a cliché name for a philosopher, and Sócrates is an example of one who, like Procopio in “La manchita de la uña,” took the time to consider what greater meaning may lay in his being named as he is, but who went a step further than did Procopio and in effect allowed his name to define his character.

It is Sócrates who, honoring his name indeed, effectually resolves the great dispute between batracófilos and batracófobos, by recognizing and appealing to the
dialectic structure of the debate. It is he who exclaims: “¡O con ranas o nada!, han dicho los unos; ¡o sin ranas o nada!, han replicado los otros. Y estos dos dilemas tienen, señores, un término común. Ese término común es: ¡nada! Estamos todos de acuerdo en la nada dilemática. Es el triunfo de la dialéctica. ¡Suprimamos, pues, el estanque!” (509)

The immediate result is that, everyone being in agreement about the proposed solution, they get rid of the pond. Before long, however, the people are discontent with the new arrangement:

desde entonces andan los casineros ciamañenses tristes y cariacontecidos; la vida parece haber huido del Casino; su jardín es un cementerio de recuerdos; todos suspiran por los tiempos heroicos de las luchas entre batracófilos y batracófobos. Ahora es cuando de veras les molestan los mosquitos y eso que no hay ya estanque. Pero volverán a ponerlo, ¡alabado sea Dios! Y volverán las luchas batrácicas. (510)

It is clear that, for the people of Ciamaña, the struggle between opposing forces is both the essence and the driving force of life. Their way of life is, in a way, an externalization of Procopio’s inner conflict in “La manchita de la uña”. Both forms, the internal and external, are described in Unamuno’s La agonía del cristianismo:

La vida es lucha, y la solidaridad para la vida es lucha y se hace en la lucha. No me cansaré de repetir que lo que más nos une a los hombres unos con otros son nuestras discordias. Y lo que más le une a cada uno consigo mismo, lo que hace la unidad íntima de nuestra vida, son nuestras discordias íntimas, las contradicciones interiores de nuestras discordias.

(29)
In perhaps one of his best known essays, “Mi religión,” Unamuno explains on a more personal level the role of that *lucha* in his own life: “Mi religión es buscar la verdad en la vida y la vida en la verdad, aun a sabiendas de que no he de encontrarla mientras viva; mi religión es luchar incesante e incansablemente con el misterio” (366). This is the same personal philosophy evident in Procopio’s inner dialogue in “La manchita de la uña,” in the narrator’s desire to capture the meaning of his friend Emilio’s story in “El que se enterró,” and in the traveler’s terror-driven efforts to interpret the strange world of “Mecanópolis.” Albeit on a lighter, more humorous note, the same *lucha* which propels Unamuno and each of these of his characters through their lives governs life in Ciamaña, home of the *batracófilos* and *batracófobos*. I would argue that the *lucha* that is for Unamuno the essence of life is active in every piece of writing that he ever composed; however, this is not the place for such an extensive discussion. Instead, I will assume that the point has been sufficiently made as regards the four stories in question. And now that we have seen how these pieces may be considered representative of Unamuno’s writing as a whole, let us proceed to take a close look at the translation process.

**Theory of Translation?**

It would be fitting here to set forth briefly my theory of translation, the overall philosophy that I have chosen to guide me in translating these texts. However, that task turns out to be less simple than it appears. Like Unamuno and his characters, I am torn between two opposing forces. While something tells me that I ought to translate with a systematic theory in mind, I know that no single method can possibly be adequate at every point in the translation process. Put another way, no established theory resonates
enough to dictate all of my choices, and yet I feel compelled to grasp at some philosophy of translation which will guide me.

Unamuno says in “Estilo y pluma”: “Bueno, vamos a crear nuestro estilo. O sea, a definirlo. ¿Pero no será mejor seguir escribiendo, estilando, y definirlo así? ¿No es hacer algo la mejor manera de definirlo?” (546). In a similar way, I would like to let my translations speak on their own, to place on the texts themselves the responsibility of defining the theory behind them. Knowing, however, that both my limited authority and the standards of this discursive setting preclude such a move, I will instead appeal once more to George Steiner, this time in his assertion that “[t]here are, most assuredly, […] no ‘theories of translation’. What we do have are reasoned descriptions of processes. At very best, we find and seek, in turn, to articulate, narrations of felt experience, heuristic or exemplary notations of work in progress” (After Babel xvi). I therefore offer no prescriptive theory behind my translations, no strategy which pre-determined every choice made in the translation process. I do admit a general consciousness of the hermeneutic motion, which to some extent has shaped my translations in the sense that I have sought to reach toward the essence of the text first embodied in the foreign language and to carry it through the translation process into an adequate re-creation of the original. Fearing that such a philosophy may appear inadequate, however, I will attempt to counteract its inherent vagueness by describing at length the process carried out in translating the specific texts in question. I do so with the hope that such a detailed account of the problems that I have encountered and the solutions that I have chosen will provide a sense of the ways in which I have attempted to translate each of these texts into an acceptable form, one which would, ideally, satisfy Don Miguel himself.
“The Man Who Buried Himself”

Most of the issues involved in translating “El que se enterró” dealt with word choice, influenced by contextual, connotative, and formal considerations. Two instances of context-based decisions present themselves in the initial description of Emilio’s changed character: “Sus momentos de abstracción eran frecuentes y durante ellos parecía como si su espíritu viajase por caminos de otro mundo” (447). The first part comes through smoothly and idiomatically in a straightforward, literal translation: “His moments of abstraction were frequent.” The words that are particularly interesting here are “viajase” and “caminos,” because each would admit any one of a number of English words in their place. The verb viajar typically translates as “to travel”; however, “to journey” could be just as fitting, and a range of verbs indicating motion may be appropriate, such as “to walk,” “to go,” “to traverse,” “to trek,” etc. In most cases, “trek” will not work with “spirit” as the subject of the verb, as is the case here. Considering the context of the action carried out by the spirit, namely, in “moments of abstraction,” the sense of being lost, directionless, and absent—as in absent-mindedness—which is evoked by the verb “wandering,” makes this word a good fit. Camino, like viajar, may suggest several English words: “road,” “street,” “path,” “walkway,” and so on. In this case, an option which indicates a place for walking is preferable to one which suggests a place for driving. “Wandering” is something typically done on foot rather than on wheels, and it would be inappropriately absurd to admit a wheeled vehicle to Emilio’s spirit. And, after all, camino shares the same root with caminar, “to walk.” So a context-influenced selection from shades of meaning of camino is supported by a formal, etymological consideration. When it came down to choosing from the options of “paths” or
“walkways,” my decision was ultimately driven by the sound and feel of each word. “Wandering the walkways,” with its clunky alliteration, was an option I immediately rejected, whereas “paths” provides a smoother, more natural-sounding alternative. Thus, both context- and form-driven decisions produced this result: “His moments of abstraction were frequent, and in them it seemed as if his spirit were wandering the paths of another world.”

A word choice initially determined by form was “indescribable” for “indecible” in the following passage: “Lo que entonces pasó por mí fue indecible; no hay para expresarlo palabra alguna en el lenguaje de los hombres que no se mueren sino una sola vez” (449). A more direct translation of “indecible” would be “unspeakable”; however, choosing to favor the formal characteristics of the source word resulted in a term that turned out to be more adequate than “unspeakable,” in the sense that “indescribable” does not limit itself to speech, but covers written language as well. When Emilio goes on to say that there are no words to “expresar” what happened, he does not limit the form of expression to either speech or writing, nor to any other form, for that matter. So, a word choice based on form unexpectedly produced an especially insightful result.

Differences in the grammatical structures of Spanish and English presented some problems and, in turn, guided decisions. Where English, except in the imperative mood, requires an explicitly stated subject for every verb, Spanish nearly always allows for an implicit subject, indicated by the distinguishing conjugated form of the verb. There is room for ambiguity in the Spanish verb system, and Unamuno takes advantage of such a possibility in the following: “tomándome el pulso, quiero decir, tomando el pulso al otro, me convencí de que ya no vivía” (451). Since verb forms in the imperfect are identical
for the first and third person singular, here the verb “vivía” could refer, with equal likelihood, either to yo (I) or to él (he). Under the circumstances of Emilio’s story, this ambiguity is of the essence. Unable to preserve the ambiguity due to the rules of English grammar, I opted instead for maximum strangeness to accentuate Emilio’s strange tale. The result is: “taking my pulse, I mean to say, taking the other’s pulse, I convinced myself that I was no longer living.”

Another instance of ambiguity of subject appears in the conversation about Emilio’s dog. Emilio says: “El pobre perro me miraba con ojos de terror, pero de terror humano; era, pues, su mirada una mirada humana” (451). The possessive adjective “su” could be translated as “his” or “its;” in the context of Emilio’s admitting the dog human qualities, the personalized form seems more appropriate: “The poor dog watched me with eyes of terror, but I mean human terror; the look he gave me was, well, a human look.” I make the opposite decision when translating the response of Emilio’s skeptical friend: “Lo que creo es que no te entendería” (451). The subject of the verb “entendería” could be “he” or “it”; I have chosen the impersonal “it” to emphasize the narrator’s opposition to Emilio’s beliefs: “What I believe is that it would not understand you.”

Another grammatical issue present is that of contractions. Although the contractions del (preposition de + definite article el) and al (preposition a + el) are required, there exists in Spanish no option of a contraction of a subject and a verb, for instance, which in English is frequently used and is just one of many and varied possibilities for contractions. Because contractions are so common in normal English speech, I have opted in this and in the other stories for contractions where they contribute to the fluidity and naturalness of the speech or narration. For instance, “Bueno; tú no vas
a creerme ni palabra de lo que te voy a contar, pero eso no importa” (448), where contractions are impossible, becomes in English: “Alright, you’re not going to believe a word of what I’m going to tell you, but that doesn’t matter.”

“A Little Spot on the Fingernail”

Two major issues needed to be addressed in translating “La manchita de la uña.” The first appears early in the text and is repeated several times throughout. The postulate, “nada quiere decir nada” (539), might be translated simply to “nothing means anything.” However, it is soon clear that this will not do, since the narrator is acutely aware of both verbs used in the expression. He goes on to play with the two verbs and each of their meanings, saying, “No hay cosa que quiera decir nada, aunque diga algo; lo dice sin querer” (539). To combine the two verbs querer, “to want,” and decir, “to say,” into the simplified “to mean” would be very irresponsible here; much, if not all, of the meaning of the sentence would be lost without attention to both verbs. Deviating slightly from a word-for-word translation, a still morphosyntactically faithful approach generates: “There is nothing that means to say anything, even if it says something; it says it without meaning to.” Rather than translate literally querer as “to want,” which would be very strange in English, where it is far from common to use that verb in order to express the verb “to mean,” I instead translate querer as “to mean,” while retaining the literal “to say” for decir. This produces the expression “to mean to say,” which is just abnormal enough to draw attention to itself as a reflection of the alternative structure of the original expression in Spanish, without being entirely implausible as a language construct in English.
The next major problem appears in a common riddle: “¿Quién puso el huevo en la paja?,” which Unamuno has slightly modified into “¿qué hace el huevo en la paja?” (541). The question is essentially the same; the shift in focus is from cause to effect. The original riddle is similar to the familiar “which came first, the chicken or the egg?” Framing the same question in another way, shifting the focus from cause to effect, yields: “Which came second, the egg or the chicken?” The riddle, in Procopio’s imagination, is posed by the spot itself, which follows with the line: “Y yo, ¿qué hago aquí?” Then the narrative commentary resumes: “Y era un huevo, un huevecillo—un ovillo—de pesares trascendentes” (541). *Huevo,* “egg,” and *huevecillo,* “little egg,” are straightforward enough; however, *ovillo* proves significantly more challenging. On a literal level, the term refers to a tangled ball of thread; it may also be used metaphorically to mean any sort of tangled-up mess. Finally, the word is formally related to *huevo.* Although *ovillo* in fact derives from Latin *globellus,* it looks as though it could have descended from the Latin root of *huevo,* *ovum.* At any rate, the two words in their current form, *huevo* and *ovillo,* are similar in appearance, and the fact that Unamuno places *ovillo* in the same series with *huevo* and *huevecillo* cannot be a mere coincidence. My efforts to retain the multivalence of the term *ovillo* resulted in the translation: “a little egg-shaped knot.” The word “knot” carries double meaning: in one sense, it is a tangled-up mess, and in another, it is a visible imperfection, as in wood, or, in this case, on a fingernail. The qualifier, “egg-shaped,” of course, obviates the connection back to “egg” and “little egg,” the preceding items in the series. This short passage consisting of a riddle and subsequent commentary presented probably the greatest challenge in translating “La manchita de la
“Mechanopolis”

My approach to “Mecanópolis” may be considered somewhat freer than that taken to the other stories, since this is not the first time that it has been translated into English. Stanley Appelbaum’s translation in particular is a fairly literal rendition. Its high degree of formal lexical faithfulness produces some strange results: “reconnoiter the oasis” (13) for “reconocer el oasis” (455), for instance. Nevertheless, the text provides a basic sense of the original story and form. Patricia Hart’s translation takes some liberties in lexicon and syntax and results in a somewhat smoother, more natural text. Seeing these two different versions already in place, I jump at the opportunity to make this one unique. My vision in translating this story is precisely that, a vision: to get inside the text, to visualize the narration, and then to convey the image that I see, recodifying it in a new language.

Perhaps this approach is most evident in the first paragraph of the traveler’s story, after the narrator’s introduction. It begins: “I was lost in the middle of the desert; my traveling companions either had turned back, looking to save themselves—as if we knew where salvation was to be found—or they had been claimed by thirst and exhaustion.” I get the sense of an extremely harsh and unforgiving environment, a vast desert which threatens to swallow up a weakened traveler at any moment. To emphasize the travelers’ powerlessness before the merciless conditions of the desert, I chose to substitute the passive construction “they had been claimed by thirst and exhaustion” for the original “habían perecido de sed y de fatiga” (454).
The passage continues: “I was completely alone, and dying of thirst. I had begun sucking the black blood that oozed from my fingers, covered with scrapes and cuts from scratching at the parched earth, in my delirious state half-believing that I might find water below the surface.” That descriptor, “black,” comes from the original “negrísima” (454). This is, of course, an intensified form of negra, so literally “negrísima” means “really black” or “very black.” It is therefore curious that neither of the previously published translations of “Mecanópolis” admits the absolute blackness of the traveler’s blood. The image is certainly a strange one, but in my view it felicitously intensifies the strangeness and otherworldliness of the traveler’s environment. It may be that his memory is imperfect and leads him to recall details with less than total accuracy; still, if he says “negrísima,” I have a hard time believing that he means either “nearly black” (Hart 48) or the still milder “very dark” (Appelbaum 11).

The rest of the paragraph particularly evidences the influence of the translator’s imagination, in precisely the sense of the capacity to create images. It reads as follows:

Just when I was about to collapse on the ground and close my eyes forever to the unrelenting blue sky, even to hasten my death by holding my breath or burying myself in that dreadful dust, I looked up through sun-drunk eyes and I thought I saw something green in the distance. “A mirage, a daydream,” I thought; but I went toward it anyway, dragging myself across the hot sand.

In my word choices I have elected to emphasize certain nuances that seem particularly salient in the image that I see when I read the original, but which would not necessarily come through in a literal, obvious translation of a given word. For instance, rather than
render literally “tierra terrible” as “terrible earth,” I choose to emphasize the contrast between the desert soil, arid to the point of being almost completely incapable of supporting any life, and the type of rich, organic, earthy soil found in a garden, a field, a farm, a riverbank, any place where we are used to seeing something growing out of the ground. The earth which our traveler speaks of, in the hostile, life-swallowing desert, is not like the earth most readers are used to. Translating “tierra” as “dust,” I believe, contributes to the feeling of being completely lost to the world, struggling to survive on this earth that is hardly recognizable as earth. It is so dry that not only does it support no life, it also gets picked up and scattered in the wind as if it were nothing. Translating “terrible” as the slightly heavier, more forlorn “dreadful” intensifies somewhat the atmosphere of impending death in this unforgiving environment. The resulting alliteration in “dreadful dust” is a coincidence, albeit a fortuitous one, echoing the alliteration in the original “tierra terrible.” In another instance of quasi-creative word choice, I translate “desmayados ojos” (454) as “sun-drunk eyes.” The verb desmayar means “to faint,” so “desmayados” in this case might be literally “fainting.” Going a step further, however, I opt to interpolate the cause of this condition. Noting that the traveler has just used the term “implacable” in reference to the sky, I choose the sun as culprit. I imagine, which is all we who are not seasoned desert travelers can do, that countless hours of exposure to intense sunlight, with never a moment of shade from sunrise to sunset, could produce such an effect. The result of this musing is “sun-drunk,” a term which evokes a sense of eyes that are so exhausted from over-exposure to the elements that they have lost the ability to focus on anything. Surely the idea of the sun having an
intoxicating effect on one’s eyes is a strange one, but again, the intense strangeness of the traveler’s environment is an important quality to emphasize.

“Batrachophiles and Batrachophobes”

The first issue to address when translating “Batracófilos y batracófobos” is the question of how to translate the terms batracófilos and batracófobos. In their highly visible Greekness, they are uncommon and foreign-sounding even in the original Spanish. I chose to retain that quality and to translate the words as “batrachophiles” and “batrachophobes,” respectively. The two words are used frequently throughout the narrative, and they are important contributors to the overall tone of the piece. In a story of a community dominated by intellectuals, where a major concern is the closure of the reading room during the summer months, where both political and everyday life are driven by the arguments between poets and scientists, the use of a word like “batrachophiles” is not only appropriate but also necessary. A term like “frog-lovers,” while alright as an explanatory note to the reader, as when, in the original, the first mention of “batracófilos” is followed by the clarification, “amantes de las ranas” (506), would, however, wreak havoc on the elitist undercurrent of the story’s setting if it were used as a simple gloss for every instance of the word “batracófilos.”

The next question that arises is that of how to render the name of the city where the story takes place. The opening line of the story names the city: “Ciamaña—nombre que los eruditos locales interpretaban como contracción de Ciudad magna” (505). A name like that, accompanied by an exposition of its etymology, was just too interesting to leave unchanged. The name in translation, “Cimannis,” is similar in form to Ciamaña, and it is plausible that such a name might have resulted from a natural process of
condensing the grander, more formal “City Magnificent.” This longer name diverges slightly from a literal translation of *Ciudad magna*, which might otherwise become “Great city,” but “magnificent” is not really so far off from “great.” Besides, “magnificent” preserves formal characteristics of the original *magna* (indeed, “magnificent” derives ultimately from *magnus*, -a, -um), allowing, in turn, for formal resonance between “Cimannis” and “Ciamaña.”

The question of whether or not to translate the name of the city was a difficult one, considering Unamuno’s comments in “Sobre una errata,” in which he muses on the problematic of translating place names. He notes that it would be silly to translate the name *Buenos Aires* into another language, since “nada tiene que ver originariamente con los aires ni con la bondad de ellos” (337). He goes on to trace the name’s etymology from Latin through Italian to Spanish, noting the significant changes in meaning throughout its history. If the reason behind not translating a place name is to avoid propagating a false etymology, then it seems reasonable that a place name whose etymology is known may be translated as long as the source is translated as well, so as to conserve an analogous etymology. It is important to note, too, that the tone of the article “Sobre una errata” is rather tongue-in-cheek, and the material itself springs precisely from such an “error” that Unamuno pretends to denounce. When he writes, “¿Se le ocurre a nadie llamarle El Puerto a Oporto, o Río de Enero a Río de Janeiro, o Puentes a Brujas […]?” (336), Unamuno appears to disparage anyone who would do such a thing, while at the same time hinting, by virtue of posing the question, that perhaps someone ought to.

Supported by formal, contextual, and etymological-denotative harmony, by the assumption that translating a fictional place name will cause in the real world neither
confusion nor more serious problems, and by Unamuno’s consoling assertion that “estas frioleras [concerning such issues as whether or not to translate place names] gustan a mucha gente y hasta apasionan” (338), “Ciamaña” stands translated as “Cimannis.”

The biggest challenge in translating “Batracófilos y batracófobos” concerns the word “croído.” The word first appears in the following passage, which introduces and praises the poetic value of the frogs:

El más inspirado de esos poetas aseguraba que nunca componía mejor sus odas y elegías y madrigales que haciéndolo, de día, al pie de un olivo y al arrullo—así le llamaba él, arrullo—de los chirridos de las cigarras, y de noche, junto al estanque del Casino y al arrullo—arrullo también éste—de los croídos de las ranas. Como que compuso un libro titulado: *Chirridos diurnos y croídos nocturnos*. Lo de croído, de croar, como silbido y chirrido de silbar y chirriar, era palabra que él inventó. (506)

There are a number of things to take into account when translating the word “croído.” First, “croído” is not found in any standard Spanish lexicon. The accepted verbal noun form of the verb *croar* is the simple nominalized form, *el croar*. “Croído” is, however, plausible within the bounds of Spanish morphology: it is analogous, as the text mentions, to the countless verbal nouns formed with the suffix –ido. The examples listed, “silbido” and “chirrido,” are just two of many words which, along with the simple nominalized form of the infinitive (in this case *el silbar* and *el chirriar*), are accepted and widely used verbal noun forms. To render literally the last sentence of the passage, substituting the common gerundive (*-ing*) noun form of the verb where the original has an –ido form, yielding “croaking” as “a word that he invented,” would be senseless and ridiculous,
since “croaking,” unlike “croído,” is a common, accepted, long-established verbal noun form. So, morphological differences between Spanish and English constitute one facet of the problem.

Another element to consider, related to its morphology, is the parallelism of “croído” with “chirrido.” The two words first appear in the description of the poet’s ideal poetry-writing setting: on the one hand, “chirridos” of the cicadas during the day, and on the other, “croídos” of the frogs at night. Given the parallel structure of the sentence (the first in the passage cited above) and in the book title which follows, Chirridos diurnos y croídos nocturnos, it is apparent that the harmony of the two words is essential. Therefore, the renditions in English of “croído” and “chirrido” ought to reflect the formal resonance present in the original pair.

The first step, then, is to “invent” a new word which, though not an established form of “croak,” is nonetheless plausible within the morphology of English. Hence “croakance,” which, though it sounds strange because it is not a real word, is however not so outlandish that one cannot easily guess its intended meaning: an act of croaking. The harmony in both sound and appearance found in the original “chirrido” and “croído” is imitated by rendering “chirrido” as “cadence.” The word comes ultimately from the Latin cadentia, by way of the Italian cadenza and thereafter the French cadence; therefore, its ending in –ence is not an indication of a verbal noun formation from an English verb (though, to be sure, cadentia derives from the verb cadere, to fall). Something must always be sacrificed in translation; in the case of “cadence,” its not deriving from an English verb is admitted in exchange for the fact that the word looks and sounds similar
to “croakance,” as it simultaneously alludes to the “song” of the cicada, as it is commonly called in English, and evokes the unique rhythmic quality of the cicada’s call.

Just as the narrator of “Batracófilos y batracófobos” provides examples to illustrate the viability of the formation of “croído” from “croar,” I as translator must offer examples analogous to the formation of “croakance” from “croak.” Thus the phrase, “Lo de croído, de croar, como silbido y chirrido de silbar y chirriar,” becomes: “That word, croakance, from croak, like resonance and utterance from resonate and utter.” Of course, “resonance” and “utterance” are not direct translations of “silbido” (whistling) and “chirrido” (creaking), but these precise terms are not essential. “Resonance” and “utterance” do find themselves in the same family as “silbido” and “chirrido,” in that they all refer to sounds; besides, what is more important, they share with “croakance” the verbal noun formation by addition of the suffix –ance. Since the “croído” is such an important element in the story, being introduced as the poet Erminio’s invention and recurring several times thereafter as it forms an essential part of both the soundtrack and the content of the political debates, much deliberation and experimentation went into the development of the corresponding “croakance.” It is not perfect; however, I believe that I have maximized the characteristics conserved, and minimized those lost, so as to produce, after all, a word which not only fits within the text, but even helps to define it.

Conclusion

By now it is evident that my translations have been influenced by a wide range of considerations, including denotative, connotative, formal, etymological, visual, aural, cultural, contextual, hermeneutic, morphological, and syntactical concerns. That is to say that, rather than adhere to any set, immutable “theory” of translation, I have instead
adopted a sort of holistic approach to decoding and subsequently recoding the original which was locked within the source text. I have intended, through the preceding exposition on some specific problems and solutions encountered during the translation process, to shed some light on the various hues that my translator’s brush has taken on in an attempt to paint a full color picture of what is to be found on the canvas that lies beneath each original text.

In *El Cristo de Velázquez*, Unamuno refers to Velázquez’s paintbrush as a “[v]ara mágica” (I.i.6-8) because of its power to make visible a vital part of the invisible world (in this case, that of Christian faith). In a similar way, I would argue that Unamuno possessed a magic wand of his own, in the pen that allowed him to make visible, albeit in a form different from painting, that which to anyone besides himself would otherwise remain invisible. If we are convinced by Emilio’s argument in “El que se enterró,” then Unamuno’s, like anyone else’s, own perceptions are nothing but hallucinations until their practical effect is demonstrated (451). Perhaps their practicality consists, in part, of their being communicated to other human beings who, upon receiving this communication, may find that their personal world of perceptions is viable as well. To merge this with another Unamunian theory of reality, we might remember Augusto Pérez’s conjecture that “[e]l sueño de uno solo es la ilusión, la apariencia; el sueño de dos es ya la verdad, la realidad” (169). Augusto also argues that “[l]a palabra se hizo para exagerar nuestras sensaciones e impresiones todas…. acaso para creerlas” (205), which is similar to Procopio’s belief that man speaks “para comunicarse con sus semejantes y asegurarse así de que es hombre” (“La manchita de la uña” 539). That is to say that language allows us to believe both in the reality of our own impressions and in our being human. By using
language to communicate to another person the way in which we see the world, we may convince ourselves that what we see is real, and by listening to others as they tell of their perceptions, we gain a wider perspective and the ability to better situate our own worldview within the vast mystery of what it means to be human. It is my hope that, in these translations, I have produced a text that will help more readers to see what Unamuno saw. Whether or not the readers contribute to making the author’s hallucinations into practical realities is up to them; it is enough for me to make visible with the resources of the English language what Unamuno made visible with the Spanish language in his own compositions.
El que se enterró

Era extraordinario el cambio de carácter que sufrió mi amigo. El joven jovial, dicharachero y descuidado, había convertido en un hombre tristón, taciturno y escrupuloso. Sus momentos de abstracción eran frecuentes y durante ellos parecía como si su espíritu viajase por caminos de otro mundo. Uno de nuestros amigos, lector y descifrador asiduo de Browning, recordando la extraña composición en que éste nos habla de la vida de Lázaro después de resucitado, solía decir que el pobre Emilio había visitado la muerte. Y cuantas inquisiciones emprendimos para averiguar la causa de aquel misterioso cambio de carácter fueron inquisiciones infructuosas.

Pero tanto y tanto le apreté y con tal insistencia cada vez, que por fin un día, dejando transparentar el esfuerzo que cuesta una resolución costosa y muy combatida, me dijo de pronto: “Bueno, vas a saber lo que me ha pasado, pero te exijo, por lo que te sea más santo, que no se lo cuentes a nadie mientras yo no vuelva a morirme.” Se lo prometí con toda solemnidad y me llevó a su cuarto de estudio, donde nos encerramos.

Desde antes de su cambio no había yo entrado en aquel su cuarto de estudio. No se había modificado en nada, pero ahora me pareció más en consonancia con su dueño. Pensé por un momento que era su estancia más habitual y favorita la que le había cambiado de modo tan sorprendente. Su antiguo asiento, aquel ancho sillón fraileño, de vaqueta, con sus grandes brazos, me pareció adquirir nuevo sentido. Estaba examinándolo cuando Emilio, luego de haber cerrado cuidadosamente la puerta, me dijo, señalándomelo:

—Ahí sucedió la cosa.

Le miré sin comprenderle.
The Man Who Buried Himself

It was extraordinary, the change that came over my friend. The jovial, witty, and carefree youth had become a melancholic, taciturn, and cautious man. His moments of abstraction were frequent, and in them it seemed as if his spirit were wandering the paths of another world. One of our friends, a diligent reader and decipherer of Browning, remembering the strange composition in which the poet tells us of the life of Lazarus after he was resurrected, would often say that poor Emilio had visited death. And all of the inquiries that we made to discover the cause of that mysterious change in character were fruitless.

But so much did I press him and each time with such insistence, that finally one day, revealing the effort it takes to make a very difficult and draining decision, all of a sudden he said to me: “Okay, I am going to let you know what has happened to me, but I beg you, in the name of whatever you consider most holy, not to tell anyone before I have died once more.” I promised him in all seriousness, and he took me into his study.

I had not been in his study since before his transformation. It had not been modified in any way, but now it seemed to me more in harmony with its owner. I thought for a moment that it was his favorite and most frequented room that had changed him in such a surprising way. His antique chair, that wide, leather friar’s chair with huge arms, seemed to take on a new sentiment. I was examining it when Emilio, after having carefully closed the door, said to me, pointing to it:

“That’s where it happened.”

I looked at him without comprehending.

He had me sit facing him, in a chair that was on the other side of his desk. He
Me hizo sentar frente a él, en una silla que estaba al otro lado de su mesita de trabajo, se arrellanó en su sillón y empezó a temblar. Yo no sabía qué hacer.

Dos o tres veces intentó empezar a hablar y otras tantas tuvo que dejarlo. Estuve a punto de rogarle que dejase su confesión, pero la curiosidad pudo en mí más que la piedad, y es sabido que la curiosidad es una de las cosas que más hacen al hombre cruel. Se quedó un momento con la cabeza entre las manos y la vista baja; se sacudió luego como quien adopta una súbita resolución, me miró fijamente y con unos ojos que no le conocía antes, y empezó:

—Bueno; tú no vas a creerme ni palabra de lo que te voy a contar, pero eso no importa. Contándotelo me libertaré de un grave peso, y me basta.

No recuerdo qué le contesté, y prosiguió:

—Hace cosa de año y medio, meses antes del misterio, caí enfermo de terror. La enfermedad no se me conocía en nada ni tenía manifestación externa alguna, pero me hacía sufrir horriblemente. Todo me infundía miedo, y parecía envolverme una atmósfera de espanto. Presentía peligros vagos. Sentía a todas horas la presencia invisible de la muerte, pero de la verdadera muerte, es decir del anonadamiento. Despierto, ansiaba porque llegase la hora de acostarme a dormir, y una vez en la cama me sobrecogía la congoja de que el sueño se adueñara de mí para siempre. Era una vida insoportable, terriblemente insoportable. Y no me sentía ni siquiera con resolución para suicidarme, lo cual pensaba yo entonces que sería un remedio. Llegué a temer por mi razón…

—¿Y cómo no consultaste con un especialista? —le dije por decirle algo.

—Tenía miedo, como lo tenía de todo. Y este miedo fué creciendo de tal modo, que llegué a pasarme los días enteros en este cuarto y en este sillón mismo en que ahora
settled back in his chair and began to tremble. I didn’t know what to do.

Two or three times he tried to begin speaking, and each time he had to give up. I was about to beg him to make his confession, but curiosity was stronger than pity, and they say that curiosity is one of the things most likely to make a man cruel. He sat still for a moment with his head in his hands and his eyes lowered. Then he shook himself like he had made a sudden resolution, fixed his eyes on me with a look that I had never seen in him before, and began:

“All right, you’re not going to believe a word of what I’m going to tell you, but that doesn’t matter. By telling it to you I will free myself from a grave burden, and that is enough for me.”

I don’t remember what I answered, and he went on:

“Something like a year and a half ago, months before the mysterious happening, I fell ill with terror. The illness showed no symptoms, so nobody knew that I was sick, but it made me suffer horribly. Everything filled me with fear, and I seemed to be enveloped by an atmosphere of panic. I sensed intangible dangers. All the time I felt the invisible presence of death, but I mean real death, annihilation. While I was awake, I anxiously awaited the hour when I would lie down to sleep, and once in bed I was paralyzed by the fear that sleep would claim me forever. It was an insufferable life, terribly insufferable. And I did not even feel resolved to commit suicide, which I was thinking at the time would be a remedy. I began to be afraid for my sanity.”

“How come you didn’t see a doctor?” I said, to say something.

“I was afraid, as I was afraid of everything. And the fear was increasing so much that I came to spend entire days in this room and in this very chair in which I am now
estoy sentado, con la puerta cerrada, y volviendo a cada momento la vista atrás. Estaba seguro de que aquello no podía prolongarse y de que se acercaba la catástrofe o lo que fuese. Y en efecto llegó.

Aquí se detuvo un momento y pareció vacilar.

—No te sorprenda el que vacile —prosiguió—, porque lo que vas a oír no me lo he dicho todavía ni a mí mismo. El miedo era ya una cosa que me oprimía por todas partes, que me ponía un dogal al cuello y amenazaba hacerme estallar el corazón y la cabeza. Llegó un día, el 7 de setiembre, en que me desperté en el paroxismo del terror; sentía acorchados cuerpo y espíritu. Me preparé a morir de miedo. Me encerré como todos los días aquí, me senté donde ahora estoy sentado, y empecé a invocar la muerte. Y es natural, llegó. —Advirtiéndome la mirada, añadió tristemente:

—Sí, ya sé lo que piensas, pero no me importa.

Y prosiguió:

—A la hora de estar aquí sentado, con la cabeza entre las manos y los ojos fijos en un punto vago más allá de la superficie de esta mesa, sentí que se abría la puerta y que entraba cautelosamente un hombre. No quise levantar la mirada. Oía los golpes del corazón y apenas podía respirar. El hombre se detuvo y se quedó ahí, detrás de esa silla que ocupas, de pie, y sin duda mirándome. Cuando pasó un breve rato me decidí a levantar los ojos y mirarlo. Lo que entonces pasó por mí fué indecible; no hay para expresarlo palabra alguna en el lenguaje de los hombres que no se mueren sino una sola vez. El que estaba ahí, de pie, delante mío, era yo, yo mismo, por lo menos en imagen. Figúrate que estando delante de un espejo, la imagen que de ti se refleja en el cristal se desprende de éste, toma cuerpo y se te viene encima…
sitting, with the door closed, and glancing over my shoulder every moment. I was sure that it could not last much longer and that the catastrophe, or whatever it was, was getting nearer. And sure enough, it came.”

Here he paused for a moment and seemed to waver.

“Don’t be surprised that I hesitate,” he went on, “because what you are going to hear I have not yet said even to myself. The fear was already something that afflicted every part of me, that slipped a noose around my neck and threatened to explode my heart and my head. One day, the 7th of September, I woke up in a paroxysm of terror; my body and spirit hung flaccid and limp. I prepared myself to die of fear. I shut myself in here like I did everyday, I sat down where I am sitting now, and I began to call upon death. And, naturally, it came.” Noticing the look on my face, he added mournfully:

“Yes, I know what you’re thinking, but it doesn’t matter.”

And he went on:

“While I was sitting here, with my head in my hands and with my eyes fixed on an indefinite spot beyond the surface of this table, I heard the door opening and a man entering cautiously. I dared not lift my eyes. I heard my heart pounding and I could hardly breathe. The man stopped and stood there, behind that chair that you’re in, and I’m sure he was looking at me. After a little while I decided to lift my eyes and look at him. What happened next was indescribable; there are no words to express it in the language of men who die only once. The man who was standing there, in front of me, was me, myself, at least in appearance. Imagine that you’re standing in front of a mirror, and the image of you that is reflected in the glass, detaches from it, takes on a body and comes over to you…”
—Sí, una alucinación… —murmuré.
—De eso ya hablaremos —dijo, y siguió:
—Pero la imagen del espejo ocupa la postura que ocupas y sigue tus movimientos, mientras que aquel mi yo de fuera estaba de pie, y yo, el yo de dentro de mí, estaba sentado. Por fin el otro se sentó también, se sentó donde tú estás sentado ahora, puso los codos sobre la mesa como tú los tienes, se cogió la cabeza, como tú la tienes, y se quedó mirándome como me estás ahora mirando.

Temblé sin poder remediarlo al oírle esto, y él, tristemente, me dijo:
—No, no tengas también tú miedo; soy pacífico.

Y siguió:
—Así estuvimos un momento, mirándonos a los ojos el otro y yo, es decir, así estuve un rato mirándome a los ojos. El terror se había transformado en otra cosa muy extraña y que no soy capaz de definirte; era el colmo de la desesperación resignada. Al poco rato sentí que el suelo se me iba de debajo de los pies, que el sillón se me desvanecía, que el aire iba enrareciéndose, las cosas todas que tenía a la vista, incluso mi otro yo, se iban esfumando, y al oír al otro murmurar muy bajito y con los labios cerrados: ¡Emilio!, sentí la muerte. Y me morí.

Yo no sabía qué hacer al oírle esto. Me dieron tentaciones de huir, pero la curiosidad venció en mí al miedo. Y él continuó:
—Cuando al poco rato volví en mí, es decir, cuando al poco rato volví al otro, o sea, resucité, me encontré sentado ahí, donde tú te encuentras ahora sentado y donde el otro se había sentado antes, de codos en la mesa y cabeza entre las palmas contemplándome a mí mismo, que estaba donde ahora estoy. Mi conciencia, mi espíritu,
“Sure, a hallucination…” I murmured.

“We’ll talk about that later,” he said, and continued:

“But the mirror-image holds the same posture that you do, and follows your movements, whereas that I outside me was standing, and I, the I inside me, was sitting. At last the other sat down too; he sat where you are sitting now; he put his elbows on the table as you have yours; he held his head in his hands, as you have yours; and he sat there looking at me as you are looking at me now.”

I trembled when I heard this; I couldn’t help it. He said to me, sadly:

“No, don’t you be afraid too; I am calm, see?”

And he continued:

“We stayed like that for a moment, looking each other in the eye, that is to say, I was for a while looking myself in the eye. The terror had been transformed into something else, something very strange and which I am not capable of defining for you; it was the depth of resigned desperation. After a little while I felt the ground going out from under my feet, the armchair vanishing, the air getting thinner, everything that I could see, including my other me, disappearing, and when I heard the other murmur very softly and through closed lips: Emilio!, I felt death. And I died.”

I didn’t know what to do when I heard this. I was tempted to flee, but curiosity overcame fear. And he continued:

“When after a little while I came to my senses, that is to say, when after a little while I came to the other’s senses, or rather, I came back to life, I found myself sitting there, where you find yourself sitting now and where the other had been sitting before, elbows on the table and head in hands, contemplating me, who was sitting where I am...
había pasado del uno al otro, del cuerpo primitivo a su exacta reproducción. Y me vi, o vi
mi anterior cuerpo, lívido y rígido, es decir, muerto. Había asistido a mi propia muerte. Y
se me había limpiado el alma de aquel extraño terror. Me encontraba triste, muy triste,
abismáticamente triste, pero sereno y sin temor a nada. Comprendí que tenía que hacer
algo; no podía quedar así y aquí el cadáver de mi pasado. Con toda tranquilidad
reflexioné lo que me convenía hacer. Me levanté de esa silla, y tomándome el pulso,
quiero decir, tomando el pulso al otro, me convencí de que ya no vivía. Salí del cuarto
dejándolo aquí encerrado, bajé a la huerta, y con un pretexto me puse a abrir una gran
zanja. Ya sabes que siempre me ha gustado hacer ejercicio en la huerta. Despaché a los
criados y esperé la noche. Y cuando la noche llegó cargué a mi cadáver a cuestas y lo
enterré en la zanja. El pobre perro me miraba con ojos de terror, pero de terror humano;
era, pues, su mirada una mirada humana. Le acaricié diciéndole: no comprendemos nada
de lo que pasa, amigo, y en el fondo no es esto más misterioso que cualquier otra cosa…

—Me parece una reflexión demasiado filosófica para ser dirigida a un perro —le
dije.

—¿Y por qué? —replicó—. ¿O es que crees que la filosofía humana es más
profunda que la perruna?

—Lo que creo es que no te entendería.

—Ni tú tampoco, y eso que no eres perro.

—Hombre, sí, yo te entiendo.

—¡Claro, y me crees loco!...

Y como yo callara, añadió:

—Te agradezco ese silencio. Nada odio más que la hipocresía. Y en cuanto a eso
now. My consciousness, my spirit, had passed from one to the other, from the primitive body to its exact replica. And I saw myself, or I saw my previous body, pale and rigid, that is to say, dead. I had witnessed my own death. And my soul had been cleansed of that strange terror. I felt sad, very sad, abysmally sad, but serene and without any fear of anything. I knew that I had to do something; the corpse of my past could not stay here like that. Calmly and carefully I considered what I should do. I got up from that chair, and, taking my pulse, I mean to say, taking the other’s pulse, I convinced myself that I was no longer living. Leaving him locked up in here, I left the room, went down to the vegetable garden, and with some pretext began digging a large ditch. You know that I have always liked to work in the garden. I dismissed the servants and waited for nighttime. And when the night came I carried my corpse over my shoulder and buried it in the ditch. The poor dog watched me with eyes of terror, but I mean human terror; the look he gave me was, well, a human look. I petted him as I said: ‘We don’t understand anything that happens, my friend, and when you come down to it, this is no more mysterious than anything else…’”

“That seems to me a reflection too philosophical to be addressed to a dog,” I said.

“Why?” he replied. “What, do you believe that human philosophy is more profound than canine philosophy?”

“What I believe is that it would not understand you.”

“Neither do you, and you’re not a dog.”

“*Hombre*, of course I understand you.”

“Yeah, sure, and you think I’m crazy…!”

And since I remained quiet, he added:
de las alucinaciones, he de decirte que todo cuanto percibimos no es otra cosa, y que no
son sino alucinaciones nuestras impresiones todas. La diferencia es de orden práctico. Si
vas por un desierto consumiéndote de sed y de pronto oyes el murmurar del agua de una
fuente y ves el agua, todo esto no pasa de alucinación. Pero si arrimas a ella tu boca y
bebes y la sed se te apaga, llamas a esta alucinación una impresión verdadera, de realidad.
Lo cual quiere decir que el valor de nuestras percepciones se estima por su efecto
práctico. Y por su efecto práctico, efecto que has podido observar por ti mismo, es por lo
que estimo lo que aquí me sucedió y acabo de contarte. Porque tú ves bien que yo, siendo
el mismo, soy, sin embargo, otro.

—Esto es evidente…

—Desde entonces las cosas siguen siendo para mí las mismas, pero las veo con
otro sentimiento. Es como si hubiese cambiado el tono, el timbre de todo. Vosotros creéis
que soy yo el que he cambiado y a mí me parece que lo que ha cambiado es todo lo
demás.

—Como caso de psicología… —murmuré.

—¿De psicología? ¡Y de metafísica experimental!

—¿Experimental? —exclamé.


Salimos de su cuarto y me llevó a un rincón de la huerta. Empecé a temblar como
un azogado, y él, que me observó, dijo:

—¿Lo ves? ¿Lo ves? ¡También tú! ¡Ten valor, racionalista!

Me percaté entonces de que llevaba un azadón consigo. Empezó a cavar con él
mientras yo seguía clavado al suelo por un extraño sentimiento, mezcla de terror y de
“I appreciate your silence. There is nothing that I hate more than hypocrisy. And as far as hallucinations go, I must tell you that everything that we perceive is nothing else, and all of our impressions are nothing but hallucinations. The difference is in their practicality. If you are walking in a desert wasting away from thirst and suddenly you hear the murmur of a fountain and you see water, all this is only a hallucination. But if you put your mouth to it and you drink and your thirst is quenched, you call this hallucination reality. Which is to say that the value of our perceptions is measured by their practical effect. And I judge what happened to me here and what I have just told you by its practical effect, an effect that you have been able to observe for yourself. Because you can see that I, being the same, am, however, another.”

“That’s obvious…”

“Ever since then, things continue to be the same for me, but I see them with another sentiment. It’s as if the tone, the timbre of everything had changed. You all believe that it is I who have changed, and to me it seems that what has changed is everything else.”

“Like a psychology case…” I murmured.

“Psychology? And experimental metaphysics!”

“Experimental?” I exclaimed.

“I should say so. But there’s something else. Come with me.”

We left the room and he took me to a corner of the garden. I began to tremble as if from mercury poisoning, and seeing this, he said:

“You see? You see? You too! Be brave, you rationalist!”

I noticed then that he had a pickaxe with him. He began to dig with it while I
curiosidad. Al cabo de un rato se descubrió la cabeza y parte de los hombros de un
cadáver humano, hecho ya casi esqueleto. Me lo señaló con el dedo diciéndome:

—¡Mírame!

Yo no sabía qué hacer ni qué decir. Volví a cubrir el hueco. Yo no me movía.

—¿Pero qué te pasa, hombre? —dijo sacudiéndome el brazo.

Creí despertar de una pesadilla. Lo miré con una mirada que debió de ser el colmo
del espanto.

—Sí —me dijo—, ahora piensas en un crimen; es natural. ¿Pero has oído tú de
alguien que haya desaparecido sin que se sepa su paradero? ¿Crees posible un crimen así
sin que se descubra al cabo? ¿Me crees criminal?

—Yo no creo nada —le contesté.

—Ahora has dicho la verdad; tú no crees en nada y por no creer en nada no te
puedes explicar cosa alguna, empezando por las más sencillas. Vosotros, los que os tenéis
por cuerdos, no disponéis de más instrumentos que la lógica, y así vivís a obscuras…

—Bueno —le interrumpí—, ¿y todo esto qué significa?

—¡Ya salió aquello! Ya estás buscando la solución o la moraleja. ¡Pobres locos!

Se os figura que el mundo es una charada o un jeroglífico cuya solución hay que hallar.
No, hombre, no; esto no tiene solución alguna, esto no es ningún acertijo ni se trata aquí
de simbolismo alguno. Esto sucedió tal cual te lo he contado, y si no me lo quieres creer,
allá tú.

* * *

Después que Emilio me contó esto y hasta su muerte, volví a verle muy pocas
veces, porque rehuía su presencia. Me daba miedo. Continuó con su carácter mudado,
remained glued to the ground by a strange feeling, a combination of terror and curiosity. After a while he had uncovered the head and part of the shoulders of a human corpse, already nearly a skeleton. He pointed to it, saying:

“Look at me!”

I didn’t know what to do or even what to say. He covered the hole again. I did not move.

“Hey, what’s the matter?” he said, shaking my arm.

I felt like I was waking up from a nightmare. I looked at him with a look that must have been the height of panic.

“Ah, yes,” he said, “now you think it is some crime; that’s natural. But have you ever heard of somebody who has disappeared without anyone knowing where he disappeared from? Do you believe a crime like that is possible without it eventually being discovered? Do you believe I’m a criminal?”

“I don’t believe anything,” I answered.

“Now that’s the truth; you don’t believe in anything and because you don’t believe in anything you cannot understand anything, starting with the most simple things. You, all of you who consider yourselves sane, have no instruments at hand besides logic, and that is why you live in the dark…”

“Alright, fine,” I interrupted, “so what does all this mean?”

“Oh, that! There you are looking for the resolution or the moral. Poor, crazy fools! You picture the world as a puzzle or a hieroglyph and you have to find the solution. No, hombre, no; this has no solution, this is no riddle nor does it have anything to do with symbolism. It happened just as I have told you, and if you don’t want to
pero haciendo una vida regular y sin dar el menor motivo a que se le creyese loco. Lo único que hacía era burlarse de la lógica y de la realidad. Se murió tranquilamente, de pulmonía, y con gran valor. Entre sus papeles dejó un relato circunstanciado de cuanto me había contado y un tratado sobre la alucinación. Para nosotros fue siempre un misterio la existencia de aquel cadáver en el rincón de la huerta, existencia que se pudo comprobar.

En el tratado a que hago referencia sostenía, según me dijeron, que a muchas, a muchísimas personas les ocurren durante la vida sucesos trascendentales, misteriosos, inexplicables, pero que no se atreven a revelar por miedo a que se les tenga por locos.

“La lógica —dice— es una institución social y la que se llama locura una cosa completamente privada. Si pudiéramos leer en las almas de los que nos rodean veríamos que vivimos envueltos en un mundo de misterios tenebrosos, pero palpables.”
believe me, so be it.”

* * *

After Emilio told me this and until his death, I saw him only a few times, because I tried to avoid his presence. I was afraid of him. He retained his changed character, but led a regular life without showing the least signs of being crazy. The only thing that he did was scoff at logic and reality. He died peacefully, of pneumonia, and with great bravery. Among his papers he left a detailed account of what he had told me, and a treatise on hallucinations. For us it was always a mystery, the existence of that corpse in the corner of the vegetable garden, an existence that could be verified.

In the treatise that I mentioned, according to what they tell me, he maintained that many, many people at some point in their lives experience transcendental, mysterious, inexplicable occurrences, but that they do not dare to reveal them for fear that they be thought crazy.

“Logic,” it says, “is a social institution, and that which is called madness is a completely private thing. If we could read into the souls of the people who surround us, we would see that we live enshrouded in a world of tenebrous, but palpable, mysteries.”
La manchita de la uña

Procopio abrigaba lo que se podría llamar la superstición de las supersticiones, o sea la de no tenerlas. El mundo le parecía un misterio, aunque de insignificancia. Es decir, que nada quiere decir nada. El sentido de las cosas es una invención del hombre, supersticioso por naturaleza. Toda la filosofía—y para Procopio la religión era filosofía en niñez o en vejez, antes o después de su virilidad mental—se reducía al arte de hacer charadas, en que el todo precede a las partes, a mi primera, mi segunda, mi tercera, etc. El supremo aforismo filosófico de Procopio, el a y el zeda de su sabiduría era éste: “Eso no quiere decir nada.” No hay cosa que quiera decir nada, aunque diga algo; lo dice sin querer. En rigor el hombre no piensa más que para hablar, para comunicarse con sus semejantes y asegurarse así de que es hombre.

Un día Procopio, al ir a cortarse las uñas—operación que llevaba a cabo muy a menudo—, observó que en la base de la uña del dedo gordo de la mano derecha, y hacia la izquierda, se le había aparecido una manchita blanca, como una peca. Cosa orgánica, no pegadiza; cosa del tejido. “¡Bah! —se dijo—, irá subiendo según crece la uña y acabará por desaparecer; un día la cortaré con el borde de la uña misma.” Y se propuso no volver a pensar en ello. Pero como el hombre propone y Dios dispone, dispuso Dios que Procopio no pudiese quitarse del espíritu la manchita blanca de la uña.

Cuando se puso una vez, al poco del descubrimiento, a escribir Procopio, la manchita no le dejaba llevar la pluma por donde él quería. “¡Pero esto es una estupidez! —se decía, irritado contra sí mismo—; ¡si esto no quiere decir nada!, ¡degradantes supersticiones!” Recordaba que cuando niño se le había dicho que esas pintitas blancas en las uñas son mentiras y que les salen a los niños mentirosos; pero él ni era ya niño—ni
Procopio fostered what you might call a superstitious belief in superstitions, or rather a superstitious disbelief in them. The world seemed to him a mystery, though an insignificant one. That is to say, that nothing means to say anything. The meaning of things is an invention of man, superstitious by nature. All philosophy—and for Procopio religion was philosophy in childhood or in old age, before or after its mental virility—came down to the art of making up riddles, in which the whole precedes the parts: my first, my second, my third, etcetera. For Procopio, the ultimate philosophical aphorism, the A to Z of his knowledge, was this: “That doesn’t mean to say anything.” There is nothing that means to say anything, even if it says something; it says it without meaning to. In truth, man thinks for no other reason than to speak, to communicate with his fellow men and so prove to himself that he is human.

One day Procopio, as he was going to trim his fingernails—an operation that he carried out quite frequently—he saw that at the base of the fingernail on the thumb of his right hand, and towards the left, there had appeared a little white spot, like a freckle. Organic, not stuck on, part of the fabric. “Bah!” he said to himself, “It will move up as the nail grows and it will eventually disappear; one day I will trim it with the tip of the nail itself.” And he proposed not to think of it again. But as man proposes, God disposes, and God disposed that Procopio could not lift from his spirit the little white spot on his fingernail.

Once when, a little after the discovery, Procopio tried to write, the little spot would not let him move the pen where he wanted. “Well this is stupid!” he said, irritated with himself; “It doesn’t mean to say anything! Degrading superstitions!” He
viejo todavía—ni recordaba haber dicho, ni haberse dicho, recientemente mentira alguna de consideración. Además, aquello no quería decir nada. Y salió de paseo al campo, a ver si con el aire libre y soleado se le quitaba la pintita aquella del magín.

¡Que si quieres! Más fácil le habría sido quitársela de la uña. “¿Pero qué puede querer decir una cosa así? —se decía, sin querer decírse—. ¿Qué puede querer decir? ¡Claro está que nada! Alguna causa tendrá, ¡claro! porque no hay efecto sin causa, y esto es indudablemente efecto, efecto de algo; por algo me ha salido esta manchita en la uña y precisamente en la del dedo gordo de la mano derecha y no en ninguna otra de las diez. ¿A ver?” Y se puso a examinar las demás uñas. Y luego se dijo: “No hay efecto sin causa, como no hay causa sin efecto; pero, ¿para qué me ha salido esta manchita… ¿Manchita?”

Y se puso a cavilar si era o no mancha. Porque las manchas le parecía que han de tirar a negro. “Sin embargo, sin embargo —se añadió—, blanco sobre negro es tan mancha como negro sobre blanco; en una levita negra mancha la leche como en una pechera de camisa blanca la tinta.” Creía con estas cavilaciones trascendentales poder desechar de su magín la manchita; pero, ¡quiá!, ¡ni por ésas! Ya la cuestión no era lo que aquella pintita significara, sino si significaba o no algo. Y en rigor, si hay algo que signifique cosa alguna.

Procopio creía no creer en “agüeros”, hechicerías y cosas supersticiosas—creencia que, según le habían enseñado en el P. Astete, es pecaminosa—; pero la superstición de Procopio era que nada quiere decir nada, que ninguna cosa tiene significación. “Y si no, vamos a ver—se decía—: ¿quién quiere decir esto de que yo me llame Procopio? ¿por qué me hizo bautizar con ese nombre mi padre, que, por su parte, se llama Wilibrordo?, y tenía, por cierto, un hermano, tío mío, Burgundóforo…” Mas ni aun
remembered that when he was a child they had told him that those little white dots are
lies and they show up on the fingernails of lying children; but he was no longer a child—
nor old yet—nor did he remember having recently told, not even to himself, any lie worth
taking into consideration. And besides, it didn’t mean to say anything. And he went out to
take a walk in the countryside, to see if the sunny open air would sweep that little spot
from his imagination.

Impossible! It would have been easier for him to take the spot off his fingernail.
“What could a thing like this mean to say?” he said to himself, without meaning to say it.
“What could it mean to say? Clearly nothing! It must have some cause, of course!
Because there is no effect without cause, and this is undoubtedly an effect, an effect of
something; because of something this little spot has shown up on my fingernail and
precisely on the thumbnail on my right hand and not on any other one of the ten. Now let
me check…” and he began to examine the other fingernails. And then he said to himself:
“There is no effect without cause, just as there is no cause without effect; but, for what
purpose has this little spot appeared… Is it a spot?” And he began to ponder whether or
not it was a spot. Because spots, it seemed to him, have to be black or at least dark.
“However, however,” he added, “white on black is just as much a spot as black on white;
milk stains a black suit jacket just as ink does the front of a white shirt.” He believed that
with these transcendental ponderings he could rid his imagination of the little spot; but
alas, not even those worked! Now the question was not what that little dot meant, but
rather whether or not it meant anything. And essentially, if there is anything that means
anything.

Procopio believed that he didn’t believe in omens, spells, or superstitious things—
así… No, no lograba con estas digresiones apartar su obsesión de la manchita. La pequita estaba allá, en la uña, sonriéndose, sí, sonriéndose irónicamente y diciéndole: “Adivina, adivinanaza, ¿qué hace el huevo en la paja? Y yo, ¿qué hago aquí?” Y era un huevo, un huevecillo—un ovillo—de pesares trascendentes. Conque no quería decir nada, ¿eh? Pues, por lo menos, decía querer. ¿Y decir querer no es acaso el colmo del querer decir? La pequita decía querer amargarle el poso de las aguas del espíritu, el sedimento de las supersticiones.

Empezó la cosa—ya le llamaba, hablando consigo mismo, “la cosa”—a causarle un íntimo desasosiego, algo como un cosquilleo del cauce del alma. ¡Dolor, no! Dolor no era; no llegaba a dolor. Pero algo que no le dejaba descansar, como cuando no se acuerda uno del nombre de su padre o de su hijo o del propio nombre. Y recordaba cómo, siendo niño, tuvo que salir de la iglesia dejando de oír una misa, a que devotísimamente asistía, porque no podía dominar los cosquilleos a despabilar los mocos de las velas del altar. Y se le reprodujo aquella congoja infantil.

¿Se pintaría la uña? ¿Se la rasparía? ¿Se la cortaría? Mejor era dejarla crecer. Y acaso con su deseo de que desapareciera la misteriosa—sí, ¡misterio, misterio!—manchita fuera creciendo más de prisa la uña. Porque… ¿no influye acaso la voluntad en el crecimiento, más o menos lento, de las uñas?

“Dicen que a Newton —se decía Procopio— se le ocurrió lo de la gravitación viendo caer una manzana… Cuentos, ¡claro! Pero, ¿no será la aparición de esta manchita en mi uña algo como la caída de una manzana newtoniana? Y ahora, ¿qué descubro yo?” Y se puso a pensar qué es lo que descubriría. Porque necesitaba descubrir algo; el ánimo le pedía un descubrimiento. Sólo que como nada significa nada… ¿Descubriría esto: que
a belief in which, according to what they had taught him in the *P. Astete* catechism, is sinful—but Procopio’s superstition was that nothing meant to say anything, that nothing has meaning. “And if not, let’s see,” he said to himself, “what does it mean to say that I am called Procopio? Why did he have me baptized with that name, my father, who, in turn, is called Wilibrordo? And he had, incidentally, a brother, my uncle, Burgundóforo…” But not even that worked… No, he did not manage with these digressions to cast aside his obsession with the little spot. The little freckle was there, on his thumbnail, smiling, yes, smiling ironically and saying to him: “Riddle me this, riddle me that, which came second, the egg or the chicken? And me, what am I doing here?” And it was an egg, a little egg—a little egg-shaped knot—of transcendent vexation. So it didn’t mean to say anything, huh? Well, at least, it said that it meant. And is saying to mean not perhaps the culmination of meaning to say? The little freckle said that it meant to embitter the dregs of the waters of the spirit, the sediment of superstitions.

The thing—already he was calling it, talking to himself, “the thing”—began to cause in him a profound uneasiness, something like a tickle in the riverbed of the soul. Agony, no! Agony it was not; it had not reached agony. But something that would not allow him to rest, like when one cannot remember the name of his father or of his son, or even his own name. And he remembered how, as a child, he had to leave the church in the middle of mass, which he very devoutly attended, because he could not overcome the tickling impulse to blow his nose. And that infantile anguish surfaced in him once more.

Should he paint the fingernail? Should he scrape it? Should he trim it? Best to let it grow. And maybe with his desire that the mysterious—yes, mystery, mystery!—little spot would disappear, more rapidly would the fingernail grow. Because… does not the
nada significa nada? Creía tenerlo descubierto, mas para sí solo; y cuando no logra uno
descubrir a los otros lo que cree tener descubierto, empieza a sospechar que ni a sí mismo
se lo descubrió.

“¿Y si yo pudiese demostrar —se añadió— que la cosa no significa nada?”

Empezó a asustarse. La obsesión de la manchita no le dejaba pensar en otras cosas más
serias. ¿Más serias? ¿Y por qué más serias?

Procopio se volvió a su casa con la mente henchida de intenciones de
pensamientos. La manchita de la uña se le había convertido en una nebulosa cósmica de
la razón. Y no quería dormirse, no fuera que la manchita se le convirtiese en sueño…

Procopio tenía un supersticioso horror a las supersticiones.
will perhaps influence the growth, more or less slow, of fingernails?

“They say of Newton,” Procopio said to himself, “that the idea of gravity occurred to him as he watched an apple fall… Stories, of course! But, couldn’t the appearance of this little spot on my fingernail be something like the fall of a Newtonian apple? And now, what will I discover?” And he began to consider what it was that he would discover. Because he needed to discover something; his spirit was asking him for a discovery. Only, since nothing means anything… Would he discover this: that nothing means anything? He thought he had already discovered it, but for himself only; and when one does not succeed in discovering to others what he believes to have discovered, he begins to suspect that not even to himself did he discover it.

“And if I could demonstrate,” he added, “that the thing does not mean anything?” He became frightened. The obsession with the little spot did not allow him to think about other more serious things. More serious? How so, more serious?

Procopio returned to his house, his mind crowded with intentions of thoughts. The little spot on his fingernail had become a cosmic nebula of reason. And he did not want to go to sleep, for fear that the little spot might become a dream… Procopio had a superstitious horror of superstitions.
Mecanópolis

Leyendo en *Erewhon*, de Samuel Butler, lo que nos dice de aquel erewhoniano que escribió el “Libro de las máquinas”, consiguiendo con él que se desterrasen casi todas de su país, hame venido a la memoria el relato del viaje que hizo un amigo mío a Mecanópolis, la ciudad de las máquinas. Cuando me lo contó temblaba todavía del recuerdo, y tal impresión le produjo, que se retiró luego durante años a un apartado lugarejo en el que hubiese el menor número posible de máquinas.

Voy a tratar de reproducir aquí el relato de mi amigo, y con sus mismas palabras, a poder ser.

Llegó un momento en que me vi perdido en medio del desierto; mis compañeros, o habían retrocedido, buscando salvarse, como si supiéramos hacia dónde estaba la salvación, o habían perecido de sed y de fatiga. Me encontré solo y casi agonizando de sed. Me puse a chupar la sangre negrísima que de los dedos me brotaba, pues los tenía en carne viva por haber estado escarbando con las manos desnudas el árido suelo, con la loca esperanza de alumbrar alguna agua en él. Cuando ya me disponía a acostarme en el suelo y cerrar los ojos al cielo, implacablemente azul, para morir cuanto antes y hasta procurarme la muerte conteniendo la respiración o enterrándome en aquella tierra terrible, levanté los desmayados ojos y me pareció ver alguna verdura a lo lejos: “Será un ensueño de espejismo”, pensé; pero fuí arrastrándome.

Fueron horas de agonía; mas cuando llegué, encontréme, en efecto, en un oasis. Una fuente restauró mis fuerzas, y después de beber comí algunas sabrosas y suculentas frutas que los árboles brindaban liberalmente. Luego me quedé dormido.

No sé cuántas horas estaría durmiendo, y si fueron horas, o días, o meses, o años.
Mechanopolis

While reading Erewhon, by Samuel Butler, I came to the part about the Erewhonian who wrote “The Book of the Machines,” which triggered the expulsion of nearly all of the machines from his country, and I remembered the story of a friend of mine who went to Mechanopolis, the city of machines. When he told me the story he was still shaken by the memory, and it had made such an impression on him, that afterward he had retreated to an isolated spot where there was the least possible number of machines.

I will try to replicate here my friend’s story, and in his own words, as best I can:

I was lost in the middle of the desert; my traveling companions either had turned back, looking to save themselves—as if we knew where salvation was to be found—or they had been claimed by thirst and exhaustion. I was completely alone, and dying of thirst. I had begun sucking the black blood that oozed from my fingers, covered with scrapes and cuts from scratching at the parched earth, in my delirious state half-believing that I might find water below the surface. Just when I was about to collapse on the ground and close my eyes forever to the unrelenting blue sky, even to hasten my death by holding my breath or burying myself in that dreadful dust, I looked up through sun-drunk eyes and I thought I saw something green in the distance. “A mirage, a daydream,” I thought; but I went toward it anyway, dragging myself across the hot sand.

After hours of agony, I found myself in the oasis that I feared I had only imagined. A clear spring revived me, and after I had drunk from it I noticed the trees, bursting with ripe fruit. I plucked a piece of fruit and bit into it; it was juicy and delicious. I savored a few more and then I fell asleep.

I do not know how many hours I was asleep, or even whether they were hours, or
Lo que sé es que me levanté otro, enteramente otro. Los últimos y horribles padecimientos habíanse borrado de la memoria o poco menos. “¡Pobrecillos!”, me dije al recordar a mis compañeros de exploración muertos en la empresa. Me levanté, volví a comer fruta y beber agua, y me dispuse a reconocer el oasis. Y he aquí que a los pocos pasos me encuentro con una estación de ferrocarril, pero enteramente desierta. No se veía un alma en ella. Un tren, también desierto, sin maquinista ni fogonero, estaba humeando. Ocurrióseme subir, por curiosidad, a uno de sus vagones. Me senté en él; cerré, no sé por qué, la portezuela, y el tren se puso en marcha. Experimenté un loco terror y me entraron ganas de arrojarme por la ventanilla. Pero diciéndome: “Veamos en qué para esto”, me contuve.

Era tal la velocidad del tren, que ni podía darme cuenta del paisaje circunstante. Tuve que cerrar las ventanillas. Era un vértigo horrible. Y cuando el tren al cabo se paró, encontréme en una magnífica estación muy superior a cuantas por acá conocemos. Me apeé y salí.

Renuncio a describirte la ciudad. No podemos ni soñar todo lo que de magnificencia, de suntuosidad, de comodidad y de higiene estaba allí acumulado. Por cierto que no me daba cuenta para qué todo aquel aparato de higiene, pues no se veía ser vivo alguno. Ni hombres, ni animales. Ni un perro cruzaba la calle; ni una golondrina, el cielo.

Vi en un soberbio edificio un rótulo que decía: Hotel, escrito así, como lo escribimos nosotros, y allí me metí. Completamente desierto. Llegué al comedor. Había en él dispuesta una muy sólida comida. Una lista sobre la mesa, y cada manjar que en ella figuraba con su número, y luego un vasto tablero con botones numerados. No había sino
days, or months, or years. All I know is that I woke up different, entirely different. The horrendous suffering that I had just experienced had all but been erased from my memory. “How unfortunate!” I thought when I remembered my explorer friends who had died on the journey. I got up, breakfasted on fruit and water, and set out to survey the oasis. I had not walked far when I came upon an abandoned train station. Not a single soul was in sight. A train was there puffing steam; it, too, was empty, without even an engineer or a firestoker. Curiosity impelled me to board one of the cars. I found a seat and, I don’t know why, but I shut the compartment door. Immediately the train took off. A wild terror came over me and I thought of throwing myself out the window. But I sat tight and restrained myself, thinking, “Why not see where this ends up?”

The train’s pace was so frantic that I could not make out the landscape that was rushing past me. I had to close the windows. The view was making me horribly dizzy. When at last the train stopped, I found myself in a marvelous station far superior to any I have seen around here. I got off the train and left the station.

I will not, I cannot, describe the city to you. We can scarcely even dream all the magnificence, grandiosity, comfort, and cleanliness that abounded in that place. Of course, I could not understand the need for all those cleaning apparatuses, since there was no living creature to be seen. No people, no animals. Not even a dog crossed the street; not a swallow crossed the sky.

I saw a grand building with a sign that said Hotel, written just like that, like we write it, and I went inside. Completely deserted. I found the dining room. It offered good solid food. There was a list on the table, and every item had a number, and then there was a huge panel with numbered buttons. All I had to do was push a button and up through
tocar un botón y surgía del fondo de la mesa el plato que se deseara.

Después de haber comido salí a la calle. Cruzábanla tranvías y automóviles, todos vacíos. No había sino acercarse, hacerles una seña y paraban. Tomé un automóvil y me dejé llevar. Fuí a un magnífico parque geológico, en que se mostraba los distintos terrenos, todo con sus explicaciones en cartelitos. La explicación estaba en español, sólo que con ortografía fonética. Salí del parque; ví que pasaba un tranvía con este rótulo: “Al Museo de Pintura”, y lo tomé. Había allí todos los cuadros más famosos y en sus verdaderos originales. Me convencí de que cuantos tenemos por acá, en nuestros museos, no son sino reproducciones muy hábilmente hechas. Al pie de cada cuadro una doctísima explicación de su valor histórico y estético, hecha con la más exquisita sobriedad. En media hora de visita allí aprendí sobre pintura más que en doce años de estudio por aquí. Por una explicación que leí en un cartel de la entrada ví que en Mecanópolis se consideraba al Museo de Pintura como parte del Museo Paleontológico. Era para estudiar los productos de la raza humana que había poblado aquella tierra antes que las máquinas la suplantaran. Parte de la cultura paleontológica de los mecanopolitas—¿quiénes?—eran también la sala de música y las más de las bibliotecas, de que estaba llena la ciudad.

¿A qué he de molestarte más? Visité la gran sala de conciertos, donde los instrumentos tocaban solos. Estuve en el Gran Teatro. Era un cine acompañado de fonógrafo, pero de tal modo, que la ilusión era completa. Pero me heló el alma el que era yo el único espectador. ¿Dónde estaban los mecanopolitas?

Cuando a la mañana siguiente me desperté en el cuarto de mi hotel, me encontré, en la mesilla de noche, *El Eco de Mecanópolis*, con noticias de todo el mundo recibidas en la estación de telegrafía sin hilos. Allá, al final, traía esta noticia: “Ayer tarde arribó a
the table came the food that I wanted.

After I had eaten I went out into the street. It was buzzing with streetcars and automobiles, all empty. All I had to do was get near one and signal it, and it stopped. I got into a car and let it take me wherever it would go. I went to a wonderful geologic park, where you could see all the different terrains, with explanations on little signs. They were in Spanish, only written phonetically. I left the park, saw a passing streetcar emblazoned with the words “To the Museum of Painting,” and I hopped on. There were all the most famous paintings, and in their true originals. I convinced myself that all that we have here, in our museums, are nothing but skillfully crafted replicas. Beneath each painting was a smart description of its historic and aesthetic value, written with the most exquisite temperance. During my half-hour visit I learned more about painting than I could in twelve years of study here. I learned from a sign at the entrance that in Mechanopolis, the Museum of Painting was considered part of the Museum of Paleontology. Its purpose was to study the cultural productions left behind by the humans that had populated that land before the machines replaced them. The cultural paleontology of the Mechanopolites—who were they?—also comprised the music hall and most of the libraries, with which the city was packed.

Why should I go on boring you? I visited the big concert hall, where the instruments played by themselves. I went to the Grand Theater. It was just a film accompanied by a phonograph, but in such a way that the illusion was complete. But my soul froze when I stopped to notice that I was the only spectator. Where were the Mechanopolites?

When I woke up the next morning in my hotel room, I found on the bedside table
nuestra ciudad, no sabemos cómo, un pobre hombre de los que aún quedaban por ahí. Le auguramos malos días.”

Mis días, en efecto, empezaron a hacérseme torturantes. Y es que empecé a poblar mi soledad de fantasmas. Es lo más terrible de la soledad, que se puebla al punto. Di en creer que todas aquellas máquinas, aquellos edificios, aquellas fábricas, aquellos artefactos, eran regidos por almas invisibles, intangibles y silenciosas. Di en creer que aquella gran ciudad estaba poblada de hombres como yo, pero que iban y venían sin que los viese ni los oyese ni tropezara con ellos. Me creí víctima de una terrible enfermedad, de una locura. El mundo invisible con que poblé la soledad humana de Mecanópolis se me convirtió en una martirizadora pesadilla. Empecé a dar voces, a increpar a las máquinas, a suplicarlas. Llegué hasta caer de rodillas delante de un automóvil, implorando de él misericordia. Estuve a punto de arrojarme en una caldera de acero hirviente de una magnífica fundición de hierro.

Una mañana, al despertarme, aterrado, cogí el periódico, a ver lo que pasaba en el mundo de los hombres, y me encontré con esta noticia: “Como preveíamos, el pobre hombre que vino a dar, no sabemos cómo, a esta incomparable ciudad de Mecanópolis, se está volviendo loco. Su espíritu, lleno de preocupaciones ancestrales y de supersticiones respecto al mundo invisible, no puede hacerse al espectáculo del progreso. Le compadecemos.”

No pude ya resistir esto de verme compadecido por aquellos misteriosos seres invisibles, ángeles o demonios—que es lo mismo—, que yo creía habitaban Mecanópolis. Pero de pronto me asaltó una idea terrible, y era la de que las máquinas aquellas tuviesen su alma, un alma mecánica, y que eran las máquinas mismas las que me compadecían.
a copy of *The Mechanopolis Echo*, with news from around the world received at the wireless telegraph station. There, on the last page, was the following notice: “Late yesterday, an unfortunate man, one of the humans that remained out there somewhere, arrived in our city by unknown means. We predict gloomy days ahead for him.”

My days indeed became unbearable. It’s because I began populating my solitude with ghosts. That’s the worst thing about being alone, when your loneliness gets all filled up with imagined companions. I started to believe that all the machines, the buildings, the factories, the artifacts, were looked after by invisible, intangible, silent beings. I became convinced that the whole city was full of men like me, but they came and went without my seeing them or hearing them or bumping into them. I thought that I had developed a terrible sickness, a kind of madness. The invisible world that I projected onto the inhuman desolateness of Mechanopolis developed into a tormenting nightmare. I screamed, I yelled at the machines, I cried to them in despair. I went so far as to fall to my knees in front of an automobile, begging it for mercy. I nearly hurled myself into a vat of boiling steel in a magnificent iron foundry.

One morning, when I woke up terrified, I picked up the newspaper to see what was happening in the world of men, and I found these words: “As we foresaw, the unfortunate man who came by unknown means to this incomparable city, Mechanopolis, is going crazy. His spirit, crowded with ancestral worries and with superstitions about the invisible world, cannot handle the spectacle of progress. We sympathize with him.”

I could not shrug off the idea of being pitied by those mysterious invisible beings, angels or demons—which are essentially the same—that I believed inhabited Mechanopolis. But all of a sudden I was struck with a terrible idea: that those machines
Esta idea me hizo temblar. Creí encontrarme ante la raza que ha de dominar la tierra deshumanizada.

Salí como loco y fui a echarme delante del primer tranvía eléctrico que pasó. Cuando desperté del golpe me encontraba de nuevo en el oasis de donde partí. Eché a andar, llegué a la tienda de unos beduinos, y al encontrarme con uno de ellos, le abracé llorando. ¡Y qué bien nos entendimos aun sin entendernos! Me dieron de comer, me agasajaron, y a la noche salí con ellos, y tendidos en el suelo, mirando al cielo estrellado, oramos juntos. No había máquina alguna en derredor nuestro.

Y desde entonces he concebido un verdadero odio a eso que llamamos progreso, y hasta a la cultura, y ando buscando un rincón donde encuentre un semejante, un hombre como yo, que llore y ría como yo río y lloro, y donde no haya una sola máquina y fluyan los días con la dulce mansedumbre cristalina de un arroyo perdido en el bosque virgen.
had a soul, a mechanical soul, and it was the machines themselves that sympathized with me. The thought made me shiver. I believed that I was facing the race that would dominate the dehumanized world.

Frantically I ran outside and threw myself in front of the first electric streetcar that came. When I regained consciousness, I found myself once more in the oasis that I had departed from. I walked until I came to the tent of a group of Bedouins, and when I met one of them I embraced him, weeping. How well we understood one another even without understanding one another! They fed me; they graciously and attentively took care of me. At nightfall I went outside with them and, lying on the ground, looking up into the starry sky, we prayed together. There were no machines anywhere near us.

Ever since then I have harbored an intense hatred of what we call progress, and even of culture, and I am always searching for a corner of the world where I might find someone like me, who laughs and cries as I laugh and cry, and where there is not a single machine and the days flow by as the clear, sweet, delicate water of an undiscovered stream meandering through an untouched forest.
Batracófilos y batracófobos

Lo más hermoso de la ciudad de Ciamaña—nombre que los eruditos locales interpretaban como contracción de 

*Ciudad magna*—, lo primero que de ella se mostraba al visitante forastero era el Casino; y lo más hermoso del Casino, el jardín; y lo más hermoso del jardín, aquel estanque de su centro, rodeado de árboles tranquilos—no los sacudían ni aun mecían los vientos—, que se miraban en las quietas aguas. Para los poetas casineros ciamañenses el mayor regalo era sentarse en las tardes serenas del otoño junto al estanque, a ver en el cristal terso de su sobre haz reflejarse el follaje ya enrojecido de los árboles sobre el reflejo del azul limpidísimo del cielo. Sólo por gozar de tal delicia valía vivir en Ciamaña.

No había más que una cosa que perturbara tan apacible manera de vivir. Eran los mosquitos, que en el estío y aun en la otoñada molestaban a los socios del Casino de Ciamaña. El gabinete de lectura tenía que mantenerse cerrado durante esa época del año. Los que iban al delicioso jardín tenían que irse provistos de un abanico, y no para darse aire, sino para espantar mosquitos. Hubo quien propuso que en el gabinete de lectura se proveyese a cada pupitre con un mosquitero, y que así los lectores leyesen dentro de una especie de jaula de tul. Hasta que llegó uno con el remedio, y fué que se poblase el estanque de ranas.

—No hay como las ranas —decía— para acabar con los mosquitos. Éstos ponen sus huevecillos en el agua estancada y en ésta nacen, crecen y se crían las larvas de los mosquitos. Y como las ranas se alimentan de esas larvas, acaban con los mosquitos. En otras partes mantienen camaleones a ese efecto. Y desengáñense ustedes, para combatir el paludismo, la malaria, mejor que plantar eucaliptos—¡como si se fuese a coger los
Batrachophiles and Batrachophobes

The most beautiful part of the city of Cimannis—a name which the local scholars interpreted as a shortened form of City Magnificent—the first thing that they showed to foreign visitors was the clubhouse; and the most beautiful part of the clubhouse, the garden; and the most beautiful part of the garden, the pond in the center, surrounded by placid trees—they did not shake or even sway in the wind—that admired themselves in the still waters. To the Cimannian poets of the club, the greatest gift was to sit by the pond on a calm autumn afternoon, to see reflected in the shining mirror of its smooth surface the reddening foliage of the trees on a background of immaculate blue reflected from the sky. For this delight alone it was worth living in Cimannis.

There was just one thing that disrupted such a peaceful way of life. It was the mosquitoes, that in the summer and even in the fall bugged the members of the club of Cimannis. The reading room had to stay closed for that part of the year. Those who went to the delightful garden had to carry a fan, and not to cool themselves, but to shoo the mosquitoes. Somebody proposed that the reading room provide each desk with mosquito netting, so that the readers could read inside a sort of cage made of tulle. Then somebody came up with the solution, and it was to populate the pond with frogs.

“There’s nothing like frogs,” he said, “to get rid of mosquitoes. The mosquitoes lay their eggs in the standing water and there the mosquito larvae hatch and grow. And since frogs feed on those larvae, they get rid of the mosquitoes. In some places they keep chameleons to do the same thing. And don’t fool yourselves: to combat malaria, far better than planting eucalyptus trees—as if you could catch mosquitoes with mistletoe!—is to populate the pools and the ponds and the backwaters of the rivers with frogs that will
mosquitos con liga!—es poblar las charcas y los estanques y los remansos de los ríos con ranas que se coman las larvas del anofele, mosquito portador de la malaria.

Y así es como se criaron ranas en el hermoso estanque del hermoso jardín del hermoso Casino de la hermosa ciudad de Ciamaña. Con gran encanto y regocijo de los poetas y sus similares. Porque los poetas casineros ciamañenses eran batracófilos, amantes de las ranas. No que les gustase comérselas, sino verlas estarse posadas a la orilla del estanque o sobre una boya flotante o saltar y oírlas croar. El más inspirado de esos poetas aseguraba que nunca componía mejor sus odas y elegías y madrigales que haciéndolo, de día, al pie de un olivo y al arrullo—aquí le llamaba él, arrullo—de los chirridos de las cigarras, y de noche, junto al estanque del Casino y al arrullo—arrullo también éste—de los croídos de las ranas. Como que compuso un libro titulado: *Chirridos diurnos y croídos nocturnos*. Lo de croído, de croar, como silbido y chirrido de silbar y chirriar, era palabra que él inventó. Y seguían al poeta todos los espíritus de naturaleza soñadora y romántica. Los soñadores soñaban mejor oyendo croar a las ranas, y por eso eran batracófilos.

Pero frente a los soñadores estaban los dormidores, los que querían dormir y no soñar, los espíritus prácticos, y a éstos les molestaba el croar de las ranas mucho más que el zumbar de los mosquitos y aun las picaduras de éstos. Y como eran espíritus científicos no se dejaban convencer, a falta de suficiente prueba estadística y comparativa, de que las ranas acabasen con los mosquitos. Que si éstos faltaban desde que había ranas podía ser otra causa intercurrente. Así es que los dormidores o espíritus científicos se declararon batracófobos. Había además los ajedrecistas a quienes las ranas molestaban más que los mosquitos, al revés de los lectores, a quienes éstos molestaban más que aquéllas. Los
eat the larvae of the *Anopheles*, the mosquito that carries malaria.”

And that is how they came to have frogs in the beautiful pond in the beautiful garden of the beautiful clubhouse in the beautiful city of Cimannis. It was to the great joy and delight of the poets and their counterparts, because the Cimannian club poets were batrachophiles, frog-lovers. Not that they liked to eat them, but rather to see them poised on the bank of the pond or on a floating buoy, to see them leap and to hear them croak. The most inspired of the poets swore that he never composed his odes and elegies and madrigals so well as when, during the day, he wrote under an olive tree and accompanied by the lullaby—that’s what he called it, a lullaby—of the cadence of the cicadas, and at night, when he wrote by the clubhouse pond and to the lullaby—this a lullaby, too—of the croakance of the frogs. He even wrote a book called: *Diurnal Cadence and Nocturnal Croakance*. That word, croakance, from croak, like resonance and utterance from resonate and utter, was a word that he invented. And the poet’s followers were all the spirits who were dreamers and romantics by nature. The dreamers dreamed better listening to the frogs croak, and so they were batrachophiles.

But opposing the dreamers were the sleepers, the ones who wanted to sleep and not to dream, the practical spirits, and they were annoyed by the croaking of the frogs much more than by the buzzing and even the bites of the mosquitoes. And as they were scientific spirits, they did not allow themselves to be convinced, due to lack of sufficient statistical and comparative proof, that the frogs were doing away with the mosquitoes. If the mosquitoes were missing now that there were frogs, it could be due to some other incidental cause. And so the sleepers or the scientific spirits declared themselves batrachophobes, frog-haters. There were also the chess players who were bothered more
—Además —exclamaba don Restituto, caudillo de los batracófobos—, el croar de la rana es un ruido ordinario, campesino, rústico, impropio y hasta indigno de una ciudad. Y de una ciudad como Ciamaña. ¡Que nos moleste y no nos deje dormir el ruido de los tranvías eléctricos o el del ferrocarril, pase! ¡Pero el de las ranas!... ¡Es un ruido rural, rural!, ¡y no civil! ¡La rana es un animal rústico!

—¡Un animal elegantísimo! —gritaba don Erminio, el poeta de los croídos—. Los dibujantes japoneses, que no son ranas, le han tomado no pocas veces de modelo. Y aquí tiene usted a don Ceferino, que a pesar de ser un hombre de ciencia, tiene un cubo con ranas en el balcón de su alcoba.

—Las tengo como barómetro —dijo don Ceferino para sincerarse—. Como me dedico a la meteorología, las tengo con una escalera que sale del agua y así me pronostican el tiempo.

—¡Si es así… pase! —dijo don Restituto—, pero…

Cada día se tramaban disputas de éstas entre batracófilos y batracófobos. Y las disputas degeneraron en vías de hecho. Los batracófobos perseguían a las ranas y los batracófilos se ponían a defenderlas. Una vez que aquéllos persiguiendo a una rana por el jardín le dieron caza y luego muerte, los otros, los batracófilos, que eran los más, la hicieron embalsamar y la colocaron como trofeo en el salón de sesiones. En cuanto entrada ya la noche empezaban las ranas a croar, gritaban los unos: ¡que se callen!, y los otros: ¡que canten! Y alguna vez vinieron unos y otros a las manos.

Y había los que sin importárseles un comino de la discordia se dedicaban a enzarzarlos. Uno de ellos imitaba a maravilla el croído de la rana y se complacía en
by the frogs than by the mosquitoes, in contrast to the readers, who were bothered more by the mosquitoes than by the frogs. The chess players, then, were batrachophobes, and the readers, batrachophiles.

“And besides,” exclaimed Don Restituto, leader of the batrachophobes, “the croak of the frog is a vulgar noise, backwoodsy, rustic, inappropriate in and unbefitting of a city. And in a city like Cimannis! May the noise of trains or electric streetcars annoy us and keep us from sleeping, fine! But the noise of frogs!... It is a rural sound, rural! Not civil! Frogs are rustic animals!”

“They are extremely dignified animals!” shouted Don Erminio, the poet of the croakance. “The Japanese painters, who, by the way, are not frogs, have used them not a few times as models. And here we have Don Ceferino, who despite being a man of science, has a bucket of frogs on the balcony off his room.”

“I have them as a barometer,” said Don Ceferino in his own defense. “As I am a meteorologist, I keep them with a little ladder that sticks out of the water and they predict the weather for me.”

“Well if that’s the case, fine!” said Don Restituto, “But…”

Every day disputes like this one went on between batrachophiles and batrachophobes. And the verbal disputes degenerated into more active arguments. The batrachophobes went after the frogs and the batrachophiles defended them. Once when the batrachophobes chased a frog through the garden and hunted and killed it, the others, the batrachophiles, of which there were more, had it embalmed and they displayed it as a trophy in the meeting hall. When at nightfall the frogs began croaking, some shouted: “Shut up!” and the others: “Sing out!” And sometimes the two groups came to blows.
lanzarlo en toda ocasión. Los batracófilos se dedicaron a aprender a croar.

Las sesiones de las juntas generales eran frecuentes y tumultuosas, versando siempre sobre el problema batráctico. Algunas veces acabaron a los gritos de: “¡Viva la ciencia! ¡Abajo el arte!”, de un lado, y “¡Viva el arte! ¡Abajo la ciencia!”, del otro. Pues se llegó, ¡oh ironía de la lógica de las pasiones!, a identificar la batracofilia con el sentido artístico y la batracofobia con el científico y a hacerlos incompatibles uno con otro.

En una de las sesiones se levantó, por fin, un ecléctico, un conciliador, y dijo:

—Señores socios; todo puede conciliarse. La rana tiene un valor científico. Sirve para experiencias de fisiología. Traigamos microscopios y otros aparatos técnicos y déjensenos sacrificar un número de ranas a la ciencia a cambio de que las otras croen libremente.

—¡Jamás, jamás, jamás! —exclamó don Erminio el poeta—. ¡Rebajar las ranas a servir de elemento de investigaciones! ¡Como si fuesen cochinos conejillos de Indias!... ¡Jamás! ¿Ranas experimentales? ¡Nunca! Antes consentiríamos en matarlas para comernos sus ancas.

—Es decir —dijo don Restituto con ironía—, ¿que las ranas puede uno comerlas pero no dedicarlas a que colaboren en la ciencia?

—Sí —replicó el otro—, ¡es más noble ser comido que no servir de anima vilis para la investigación científica. Prefiero que me hagan picadillo y me engullen unos caníbales a no caer en manos de antropólogos que me hagan cisco para estudiarme.

¡Abajo la ciencia!

—¡Abajo la ciencia! —gritaron los batracófilos. Y algunos de ellos se pusieron a imitar el croído.
And then there were those who, without caring a bit about the conflict, entertained themselves by goading the others on. One of them did a marvelous imitation of the croakance and he loved to show it off at every opportunity. The batrachophiles spent their time learning to croak.

The meetings of the general assembly were frequent and tumultuous, always dealing with the batrachian problem. Sometimes they ended with shouts of: “Long live science! Down with art!” on one side, and “Long live art! Down with science!” on the other. Because—oh the irony of the logic of passions!—they came to identify batrachophilia with the artistic sense and batrachophobia with the scientific, and to make the two incompatible.

In one of the meetings there at last stood up an eclectic, a mediator, and he said:

“Gentlemen of the club; this can all be resolved. Frogs have scientific value. They can be used in physiological experiments. Let us bring microscopes and other technical apparatus and we shall sacrifice a number of frogs to science in exchange for letting the others croak freely.”

“Never, never, never!” exclaimed Don Erminio the poet. “Debasing the frogs to be research tools! As if they were filthy guinea pigs!...Never! Experimental frogs? Never! We would rather allow them to be killed in order to eat their legs.”

“That is to say,” said Don Restituto with irony, “that frogs may be eaten but not dedicated to scientific collaboration?”

“Yes,” replied the other, “it is more noble to be eaten than to serve as anima vilis in scientific research. I would rather be made into picadillo and devoured by cannibals than fall into the hands of anthropologists who cut me up to study me. Down with
Las elecciones de junta directiva solían ser reñidísimas. Había, como es natural, la candidatura batracófila y la batracófoba y una de conciliación, amén de no pocas combinaciones entre ellas. Unos y otros se dedicaban a buscar socios por toda la ciudad, a reclutarlos. Y acabó toda Ciamaña por dividirse en dos grandes bandos. Y cada uno tuvo sus dos órganos en la prensa, uno serio y otro satírico. Los serios se llamaban El batracio y El antibatracio y los satíricos La rana y El mosquito. Cuando un grupo de batracófilos se encontraba con uno de batracófobos imitaba el croído diciendo: ¡cro, cro, cro! y éstos le contestaban imitando el zumbar del mosquito con un: ¡iii! Y se venían a las manos. Cada batracófilo tenía en el balcón de su casa un cubo con ranas. Los otros, en cambio, más sesudos, no criaban en las suyas mosquitos.

Llegó, por fin, aquella histórica sesión de la junta general en que se resolvió la discordia. Duraba ya tres horas y don Erminio, el poeta de los croídos de una parte, y don Restituto, el científico de las estadísticas de la otra, no cejaban en sus respectivos campos.

—Antes que sin ranas prefiero que desaparezca el estanque —exclamó por fin el poeta—. ¡O con ranas o nada!

Y no hubo quien se escandalizase de esta terrible perspectiva de la desaparición del estanque, orgullo del jardín que era el orgullo del Casino, orgullo de Ciamaña. A tal punto de exasperación habían llegado los ánimos.

—Y yo —afirmó don Restituto resueltamente— prefiero que desaparezca el estanque a no verlo con ranas. ¡O sin ranas o nada!

Y entonces don Sócrates, el filósofo—acaso se dedicó a la filosofía para honrar su nombre—, que hasta entonces se había mantenido neutral, se levantó y dijo así:
“Down with science!” shouted the batrachophiles. And several of them began to imitate the croakance.

The elections for the board of directors were usually very hard-fought. There was, naturally, the batrachophilic candidacy and the batrachophobic, and one of conciliation, as well as not a few combinations among them. Each of the parties worked to find and recruit members throughout the city. And soon all of Cimannis was divided into two great factions. And each one had two newspapers, one serious and the other satirical. The serious were called *The Batrachian* and *The Antibatrachian*, and the satirical, *The Frog* and *The Mosquito*. When a group of batrachophiles met a group of batrachophobes they imitated the croakance, saying *Cro, cro, cro!* and the others answered by imitating the buzzing of the mosquito with an *Eeee!* And then the punches flew. Every batrachophile had on the balcony of his house a bucket of frogs. The others, however, more prudent, did not raise mosquitoes in their homes.

Finally it arrived, that historic meeting of the general assembly in which they resolved the conflict. It had gone on for three hours already and Don Erminio, the poet of the croakance, on one side, and Don Restituto, the scientist of statistics, on the other, would not budge from their respective positions.

“I would rather the pond disappear than to see it without frogs,” exclaimed the poet at last. “Either with frogs or nothing!”

And there was nobody who was shocked by this terrible view of the disappearance of the pond, pride of the garden that was the pride of the clubhouse, pride of Cimannis. Their spirits had reached such a point of exasperation.
—Ha llegado la hora, señores socios, de que intervenga la filosofía, que sintetiza el arte y la ciencia. Estamos ya de acuerdo todos, batracófilos, batracófobos y neutrales. ¡O con ranas o nada!, han dicho los unos; ¡o sin ranas o nada!, han replicado los otros. Y estos dos dilemas tienen, señores, un término común. Ese término común es: ¡nada! Estamos todos de acuerdo en la nada dilemática. Es el triunfo de la dialéctica.

¡Suprimamos, pues, el estanque!— Y se sentó.

—¡A suprimirlo! —gritaron los unos.

—¡A suprimirlo! —contestaron los otros a gritos.

Y así es como se quitó del hermoso jardín del hermoso Casino de la hermosa ciudad de Ciamaña el estanque que lo hermoseaba.

Pero desde entonces andan los casineros ciamañenses tristes y cariacontecidos; la vida parece haber huido del Casino; su jardín es un cementerio de recuerdos; todos suspiran por los tiempos heroicos de las luchas entre batracófilos y batracófobos. Ahora es cuando de veras les molestan los mosquitos y eso que no hay ya estanque. Pero volverán a ponerlo, ¡alabado sea Dios! Y volverán las luchas batráncicas.
“And I,” affirmed Don Restituto resolutely, “would rather the pond disappear than to see it with frogs. Either without frogs or nothing!”

At that point Don Socrates, the philosopher—perhaps he went into philosophy to honor his name—who until then had remained neutral, stood up and said this:

“The time has arrived, gentlemen of the club, for the intervention of philosophy, which synthesizes art and science. We are all in agreement, batrachophiles, batrachophobes, and neutrals. ‘Either with frogs or nothing!’ some have said; ‘either without frogs or nothing!’ the others have replied. And these two dilemmas have, gentlemen, a common term. That common term is: nothing! We all agree on the dilemmatic nothing. It is the triumph of dialectic. So, let us take out the pond!” And he sat down.

“Take it out!” shouted one side.

“Take it out!” yelled the others in reply.

And that is how they rid the beautiful garden of the beautiful clubhouse of the beautiful city of Cimannis, of the pond that made it beautiful.

But ever since then, the Cimannis club members go about sad and despondent; it seems that life itself has fled from the clubhouse; the garden is a cemetery of recollections; everyone sighs for the heroic times of the battles between batrachophiles and batrachophobes. Now is when the mosquitoes really bother them, and there isn’t even a pond. But they will replace it, praise be to God! And the batrachian battles will resume.
Notes

1. See also Unamuno’s discussion in “La tradición eterna” of the degrees of precision suggested by common names, chemical names, and chemical formulas. To cite an example, the qualitative name *piedra infernal* progresses through the more precise intermediate *nitrato de plata* to the quantitative AgNO₃. All three names refer to the same substance, but the unique set of characteristics that each evokes is of the essence (*En torno al casticismo* 43-44).

2. See also “Elegía en la muerte de un perro” for more instances of a dog’s human expression, for example in the lines: “Moriste con tus ojos / en mis ojos clavados, / tal vez buscando en éstos el misterio / que te envolvía” (*Antología poética* 42).

3. Catechism written by the Jesuit Padre Gaspar Astete in the sixteenth century.

4. Appears as más in *De esto y de aquello*. Judging by the context, I assume that is a typographical error and opt for mas.

5. Appears as ciamañeses in *De esto y de aquello*. Assuming a typographical error, I substitute the spelling ciamañenses, which appears at other points in the text and makes morphological sense when compared to existing forms such as nicaragüense, costarricense, etc.
Bibliography


---. “Aprender haciendo.” *De esto y de aquello, Tomo IV*. 497-505.

---. “Artículos y discursos.” *De esto y de aquello, Tomo II*. 164-68.

---. “Batracófilos y batracófobos.” *De esto y de aquello, Tomo II*. 505-10.

---. “Decírse a sí mismo.” *De esto y de aquello, Tomo II*. 348-51.


---. “El que se enterró.” *De esto y de aquello, Tomo II*. 447-53.

---. “El trashumanismo.” *De esto y de aquello, Tomo II*. 150-56.


---. “La manchita de la uña.” *De esto y de aquello, Tomo II*. 539-42.

---. “La sinceridad del fingimiento.” *De esto y de aquello, Tomo IV*. 489-96.

---. “Mecanópolis.” *De esto y de aquello, Tomo II*. 454-58.


---. “Pensar con la pluma.” *De esto y de aquello, Tomo IV*. 525-28.


---. “Sobre una errata.” *De esto y de aquello, Tomo II*. 336-38.


---. “Traducir el estilo.” *De esto y de aquello, Tomo IV*. 601-03.