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**Translating the Bestiary:
Roque Larraquy and Diego Ontivero's *Informe sobre ectoplasma animal***

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Informe sobre ectoplasma animal (*Report on Animal Ectoplasm*) written by Roque Larraquy and illustrated by Diego Ontivero, is an unorthodox bestiary, with entries that enclose the ectoplasm of animals that perished in the cities of Buenos Aires and Montevideo. Published by Eterna Cadencia in 2014, *Informe* is part of the larger phenomenon of bestiary resurgence in contemporary Hispanic literature. Briefly, the bestiary was a medieval literary genre which employed animal plasticity in short entries to indoctrinate readers with Christian values. This resurgence in contemporary Hispanic literature is supported by the eighty bestiaries published in the past twenty or so years, media coverage of said works, and a growing academic interest on the subject. Despite this fascinating appropriation of a medieval genre by contemporary Hispanic authors, not many of the bestiaries have been translated. While more established bestiaries, including Jorge Luis Borges' *Manual de zoología fantástica* and *Libro de seres imaginarios*, Juan José Arreola's *Punta de plata* and Augusto Monterroso's *La oveja negra y demás fábulas* have been translated, in part due to the renown of their authors, contemporary experimenters with the form have received little acclaim beyond the Spanish-speaking world.

There are several reasons as to why no full, purchasable translation exists of *Informe* despite the media attention both book and author have garnered. The first is the uncertain space bestiaries occupy in contemporary Hispanic literature. The genre has only recently begun to attract media and scholarly attraction. While foreign readers anticipate experimentation and idiosyncratic interpretations of old forms from Latin American Avant-garde authors like Nicolás Guillén and Jorge Luis Borges, as well as from the Boom movement as with Julio Cortázar, translation from Spanish is largely reserved for "safer genres"—novels and poetry, vessels for more established exports such as magical realism. Another likely reason for the translation lacuna is that *Informe* is, a priori, an unconventional text. The premise of the bestiary evades classification even for those already familiar with the genre: the "beasts" in this work are not live animals that function as vessels for Christian dogma, rather, they are leftover ectoplasm from dead creatures spread through mid-century Buenos Aires and Montevideo. As foreshadowed by its title, elements of *Informe* read much like a pseudoscientific report, abounding in impersonal sentences, jargon, and staccato prose, elements which mark the text as peculiar even in the source language.

Achieving effect equivalency (Nida 159) with this translation posed a challenge, as the text narrates supernatural, mystical events with a style and detail most often found in scientific reports. This balance between the absurd and the sterile, the abnormal and the scientific is pivotal to the ruse interweaving *Informe*. To reproduce the jarring and comical effect of such a mixture I translated as closely to the original as possible, conveying the supernatural with clinical rigor. The humour in the source depends on this play between form and content, and so, was as difficult to convey as humour depending on idioms, wordplay, puns, or colloquialisms. I avoided literalism as it is often and commercially perceived as "bad translation" (Grieve 103), so, while respecting the style, I maintained syntax, grammar, and usage most natural to English readers. Working to adhere to Tytler's second principle ("the style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original" 209), I have tried to preserve the unique characteristic of the prose, peppered with objective-sounding constructions such as those the impersonal "se" produces. To render this same distance obvious

in the translation, I opted for passive constructions: “Se cubre la zona con carne vacuna a medio cocer”, for instance, became “The zone is covered in semi-raw bovine meat”. “Semi-raw bovine meat” maintains the effect produced by an equally rare term, “carne vacuna” in the original text, as opposed to more common words such as “beef” or “meat”. Along these same lines, phrases like “habitantes de la casa” are better rendered as “house inhabitants” and not “family members”, preserving the surgical edge of the prose. Admittedly, this “scientific style” of writing was not the most challenging aspect of the translation. As Venuti stated, current translations favour a “plain style” of prose (5) and Bernstein described as “the historical movement toward uniform spelling and grammar, with an ideology that emphasizes non idiosyncratic, smooth transition, elimination of awkwardness, &c.— anything that might concentrate attention on the language itself” (27). I thus found that Larraquy’s short, unadorned sentences lended themselves remarkably well to translation.

Another challenge was choosing between a foreignizing or domesticating approach to the translation. Venuti’s identification of scientific style of prose and translation as the most pervasive correctly predict that the syntax itself would not be the main difficulty, not posing many turns of phrase that could be identified as characteristic of Spanish. Where the content is concerned, however, there were a number of variables for which to account. I opted to maintain cultural elements and most names, aiming to mediate a compromise between Schleiermacher’s author and reader. The contrast between *Informe*’s hyper-specific context and its impersonal, scientific prose made way for several possibilities. *Informe* conspicuously anchors itself in mid-century Buenos Aires and Montevideo, referencing landmarks, cultural elements like titles and customs, and the 1930 overthrowing of Hipólito Yrigoyen’s government by those loyal to General José Félix Uriburu. Because the early to mid-twentieth century, Latin American context is intrinsic to the work, I did not adapt or anglicize any aspect of the content. In the entry “Fairy”, two aspects of the entry’s namesake pose difficulty. The first is that the English word “Fairy”, is presumably an eccentric nickname for an eccentric man. To side-step the offensive connotation that the term might have when applied to a man in specific contexts, especially when the fact that the events described in the entry unfold in 1930, long before English was as ubiquitous in Latin America as it is today, I changed the name to “Hada”. This change preserves the eccentric effect of someone choosing a foreign nickname in a largely monolingual culture, and also hints at the character’s predilection for showmanship and “magic” tricks. Fairy is also referred to as “Licenciado”, a commonly used term to distinguish someone with a university degree. Since there is no real English equivalent, I changed the title to “Doctor”. This title conveys the effect of someone who is presumably learned and cultured performing a rather vulgar trick and sending his ex-wife spectral tadpoles in the mail.

Closely linked to my choice to forego adaptation, there were instances of linguistic untranslatability which exercised my creativity. The term “confitería” in Argentina, is not, as the name suggests, an establishment which exclusively sells confections and sweets. Because one can dine and enjoy other foodstuffs at confiterías, including, as the entry reveals, duck, I chose to translate it as “Richmond Café”, which also communicates casual, albeit tasty, dining. Confitería Richmond is a known Buenos Aires landmark, frequented by authors like Jorge Luis Borges and Leopoldo Macheral, and it is sometimes translated as the “Richmond Tea Rooms”, which necessarily brings up a British connotation, by changing it to café the sense of the place is maintained, while also referencing the cultural and intellectual heritage of the now gone institution. Related to the bistro, I translated the word “baño” as “lavatory”, instead of bathroom or washroom, thus keeping the fact that the entry took place in 1952 and avoiding siding with any particular English dialect. The word “asado”, for instance, is specific to Argentine and Uruguayan culture, distinct from, say, North American barbecue, so I chose to keep the word as a calque, italicized.

Following Jakobson's axiom that languages vary not in what they can convey, but rather in what they must convey (Jakobson), I found some challenges at the code-unit level. In Federico, for instance, the source text mentions a family member ("Un familiar se ofrece para ahuyentarlo" 9) without specifying the gender, and the sentence following this introduction contains a tacit subject: "Reza frente a él, le grita" (9). I thus defaulted to a male family member as the entry is most concerned about the science of capturing an ectoplasm and delivering objective facts, and a female pronoun might have proven distracting. English also does not inflect for gender, so I translated all animal pronouns to "it". The phrase "El cocinero lo reconoce" (13), for instance, yields "The cook recognizes it". This rather obvious observation is important when the larger goal of keeping the prose objective and sharp, at times allowing me greater word economy due to not having to clarify between subjects.

A few words which encode more than one meaning posed challenges as well. In the phrase "para estimular la aparición" (9) could be translated with "apparition" or "appearance". The scientific treatment of supernatural events makes the translation of this word rather tricky, as the tone of the text would demand "appearance", but the subject matter suggests that the reader is before an "apparition". Given that the most striking feature of the entries is the treatment of the supernatural and mystical as ordinary, I chose to keep the objective, distant tone and translate "aparición" as "appearance". The word "amaestrado" in the entry "Mono albino" could be translated as a "trained monkey" or a "performing monkey". No decisive conclusion could be made from the text, however, so to not coerce the original meaning, and not start the reader with the possibilities behind a "performing monkey", I chose "trained", the more general of the two meanings.

It is worth mentioning that short sections of *Informe* were used as part of a translation exercise by Fundación TyPA's Contemporary Argentinian Literature Translation Workshop. TyPA's translation is a collaborative effort, rendering the Spanish source text into German, English, French, Portuguese, and Italian. The bestiary lends itself to these "vignettes" of translation, as the genre—and consequently the book—is comprised of short entries, each no more than 250 or so words. To my knowledge, this is the only attempt made at translating the book. Said translation is not complete, the translators have picked entries that do not follow the order of the source text. TyPA's translator, Mara Faye Lethem and I have both translated "Federico", "Mono albino" and "Confitería Richmond", but I chose to follow the order of the source text and translated "Fairy", "Palacio del pollo al minuto" and "Viñedo" as well, which were not translated by the workshop and thus, I can assume, since there are no full existing translations of the source text, by anyone else.

Despite having received significant media attention and being considered a text representative of contemporary Argentine literature, *Informe sobre ectoplasma animal* has not been translated into English. The bestiary merits a wider reputation for both its aesthetic contribution and value, and for its role as a text representative of how contemporary Hispanic authors interpret a medieval genre, merits a wider circulation. While there are certainly difficulties to rendering the text into English, the prose style lends itself well to translations and its humour, so often impossible to translate properly, relies on mechanisms not beyond the scope of what can be gracefully rendered in a target text and enjoyed by an audience far removed from that of the source text. Translating the full text of *Informe sobre ectoplasma animal*, as well as other bestiaries belonging to this resurgence would also invite further study on the curious phenomenon of resurgence, and what about the genre resounds so strongly today.

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**Informe sobre ectoplasma animal
Roque Larraquy & Diego Ontivero**

**Report on Animal Ectoplasm
Roque Larraquy & Diego Ontivero**

Translated by Ailén Cruz

**Federico
Buenos Aires, 1949**

Los habitantes de la casa dicen que algo invisible les interrumpe el paso en la puerta de entrada. Creen que es Federico, perro querido de la familia, que murió en el umbral en 1948.

Para estimular la aparición se cubre la zona con carne vacuna a medio cocer, su alimento preferido. El ectoplasma de Federico se presenta ovillado en el piso, en fulgor de 2 a 5 watts, con los ojos cerrados. Un familiar se ofrece para ahuyentarlo. Reza frente a él, le grita. Lo atraviesa con un fósforo encendido. No hay reacción. Con las horas el perro se disipa, pero sigue siendo un obstáculo para entrar a la casa.

Se contrata al ectografista Julio Heiss para documentar el hecho y tentar una solución. Heiss, promotor de la ectografía materialista, concluye que la única perduración de Federico es la de su gusto por la carne. La imagen, los ojos cerrados, la respiración en su vientre, son materia tenue residual, sin sobrevida: no es posible pedirle que se vaya. Sobre él se construye un peldaño que resuelve el problema de la entrada.

**Mono albino
Montevideo 1940**

El 31 de diciembre de 1939 un mono albino escapa de un barco amarrado en el puerto de Montevideo. Por las marcas en sus manos, y por su habilidad para romper la cerradura de una puerta de la iglesia y subir al campanario, donde se refugia, los vecinos deducen que es un animal amaestrado.

A la hora del nuevo año el párroco acciona la campana con su peso, ignorando que el mono cuelga del carillón. 1940 comienza con el sonido de un cráneo roto. Desde entonces el espectro del mono reaparece periódicamente como una mancha nocturna.

**Federico
Buenos Aires, 1949**

The house inhabitants state that something invisible obstructs their front entrance. They believe it is Federico, beloved family dog that died on the threshold in 1948.

To stimulate its appearance, the area is covered in half-raw bovine meat, his favourite sustenance. Federico's ectoplasm presents itself curled up on the floor, glowing between 2 and 5 watts, its eyes closed. A family member offers to chase him away. He prays before Federico; he yells at him. He pierces it with a lit match. There is no reaction. With the hours the dog dissipates but continues to obstruct the entrance.

Ectographist Julio Heiss is hired to document the event and find a solution. Heiss, advocate of the materialist ectography, concludes that the only remaining aspect of Federico is his preference for meat. The image, the closed eyes, the breathing in his belly, are residual matter, with no excess of life: it is not possible to ask him to leave. Overtop of him a step is constructed, resolving the matter of entrance.

**Albino monkey
Montevideo, 1940**

On December 31, 1939, an albino monkey escapes from a boat docked at the Montevideo port. By the marks on its hands, and its ability to break the lock on a church door and climb to the bell tower, where it takes refuge, neighbours deduce it is a trained monkey.

On New Year's Eve, at the stroke of midnight, the priest uses his weight to ring the bell, ignoring that the monkey hangs from the chain. 1940 begins with the sound of a broken skull. Since that day, the spectrum of a monkey periodically reappears like a blot in the night.

Para conseguir su imagen se sigue el procedimiento habitual: series de veintidós ectografías por segundo disparadas en automático, con el ectografista en puntas de pie sobre una placa de cesio en frío. Se obtienen seis segundos de giroscopio en los que el mono camina erguido como un ser humano.

Confitería Richmond Buenos Aires, 1952

En agosto de 1952 cuatro clientes de la confitería Richmond dicen sentirse observados al usar el baño. En septiembre, un cocinero del local abandona el baño a causa de un horrible graznido que brota de los orinales. Luego, contrae glaucoma.

El ectografista Martín Rubens registra la imagen de un pato espectral con el cuello quebrado asomando entre dos mingitorios. El cocinero lo reconoce. Dice haberlo horneado tras una larga persecución. Rubens ironiza sobre la memoria del cocinero: “Conserva en ella a todos los muertos de su cocina”. Le explican que la confitería raramente sirve pato. La escena de su preparación es inusual y fácil de recordar.

El glaucoma empeora. Se habla de una venganza del pato. Rubens, promotor de la ectografía animista, comenta que se trata de un espectro con sentido del tiempo: “Para macerarse en rencor necesita una memoria, y para vindicarla requiere de un futuro, o una idea de futuro”. Julio Heiss señala que tales percepciones no se corresponden en grado alguno con las de un pato, vivo o muerto.

Fairy Buenos Aires, 1938

El licenciado Fairy tiene la habilidad de tragarse una rana vivía y hacer que las patas delanteras le asomen por los agujeros de la nariz. La gracia no supera el minuto; durante ese lapso la rana se refriega con deleite contra la campanilla del licenciado, liberando una sustancia que humecta el conducto. Conforme el numerito se repite en cenas, asados y un vernissage inolvidable, la

To obtain its image the usual procedure is followed: a series of twenty-two ectographs per second, shot automatically, with the ectographist on tiptoe overtop a cold cesium plaque. Six seconds of gyroscope images are obtained, in which the monkey walks, upright, like a human being.

Richmond Café Buenos Aires, 1952

In August of 1952 four clients of the Richmond Café claim they feel observed while using the lavatory. In September, one of the café’s cooks abandons the lavatory because of a horrible squawk emanating from the urinals. He later develops glaucoma.

The ectographist Martín Rubens records the image of a spectral duck with a broken neck peeping from the urinals. The cook recognizes it. He claims to have roasted him following a long persecution. Rubens ironically says of the cook’s memory: “He retains in it all the deaths transpired in his kitchen”. They explain to him that the café rarely serves duck. The scene of its preparation is unusual and easy to remember.

The glaucoma worsens. There is talk of the duck’s vengeance. Rubens, an advocate of animist ectography, comments that they are dealing with a spectrum with a good sense of timing: “One needs memory to stew in such resentment, and to vindicate said memory one requires a future, or the idea of a future”. Julio Heiss points out that such perceptions do not correspond to those of a duck, dead or alive.

Hada Buenos Aires, 1938

Doctor Hada can swallow a live frog and make its front legs poke out of his nostrils. The trick does not last more than a minute; during that time the frog enjoys rubbing itself against the doctor’s uvula, releasing a substance that lubricates his trachea. Satisfied with the show, he repeats it at dinners, *asados*, and an unforgettable vernissage. Hada’s throat, exposed to the

garganta de Fairy, expuesta a las emisiones químicas del anfibio, alcanza un alto nivel de lubricación.

Su esposa lo abandona. Esto conduce al licenciado a un pico de exposición social. Repite su acto con el guante de un amigo. Se mete la mano en la boca y saluda con los dedos desde su nariz, pero el público pide una rana. La saca de una, lata deja que sola le salte a los labios, se los cierra en la cabeza y la absorbe. Por error, el viaje concluye con el estómago. La concurrencia se entrega a comentarios en torno al tracto digestivo de Fairy. Algunos sugieren purgantes, otros una visita a un médico de guardia. Otro compadece a la rana. Con la rana desovándole en las tripas, Fairy asiste a la destrucción de su vida social.

Esa misma noche vomita los huevos y se toma el trabajo de enviarlos en una probeta a su ex esposa por correo. Las manos de la mujer ser vuelven viscosas apenas abre la probeta. A causa de esta afección, que resulta ser crónica, ya no puede tocar a nadie. En las ectografías de la Colección Solpe se las ve cubiertas por un banco de renacuajos en fulgís de 3 a 4 watts.

Palacio del pollo al minuto Buenos Aires, 1955

Un reloj cucú con pajarito minuterero preside el salón del Palacio del Pollo al Minuto, sobre la calle Corrientes. La noche del 16 de septiembre el pajarito se traba en su riel y el mecanismo de giro queda inutilizado. Una cuchara comienza a flotar sobre un omelette. La señora Celia Daumes, clienta ocasional, llama al encargado del restaurante y señala con el dedo la magia que ocurre frente a ella. El encargado intenta bajar la cuchara de un tirón, pero está elevada en el aire. A la par, Celia Daumes siente que algo le sujeta la cabeza desde el ojo. Dice que es una fuerza de tal magnitud que podría balancearse en el aire colgando del todo el peso de su cuerpo. El encargado intenta moverle la cabeza, pero también está clavada.

La cena queda interrumpida en su última posición. En lo que demanda

chemical secretions of the amphibian, reaches new levels of lubrication.

His wife leaves him. This leads to a peak in the doctor's social exposure. He repeats the act with the glove of a friend. He puts the hand in his mouth and waves with his fingers, through his nose, but the public demands a frog. He pulls the frog out of a tin, leaves it to jump up to his lips, which he closes over its head, absorbing it. By mistake, the voyage concludes in his stomach. The concurrence lends itself to commentary on Hada's digestive track. Some suggest purgatives, others a visit to an on-shift medic. Others sympathize with the frog. With the frog spawning in his guts, Hada partakes in his own social demise.

That same night he vomits the eggs and takes it upon himself to send them in a test tube to his wife in the mail. His wife's hands become viscous as soon as she opens the test tube. Because of this affliction, which turns out to be chronic, she can no longer touch anyone. In the ectographs belonging to the Solpe collection her hands can be seen covered in tadpoles glowing between 3 and 4 watts.

Minute Chicken Palace Buenos Aires 1955

A cuckoo clock featuring a little bird presides the main hall in the Minute Chicken Palace, on Corrientes Street. The night of September 16 the bird becomes stuck in its track, rendering its spinning mechanism useless. A spoon starts to float above an omelette. Señora Celia Daumes, occasional client, calls the restaurant owner and points with her finger at the magic occurring before her. The owner attempts to yank down the spoon, but it remains elevated in the air. Simultaneously, Celia Daumes feels that something is gripping her head by her eye. She says it is a force of such magnitude that she could be balanced in the air, hanging from all the weight of her body. The owner attempts to move her head, but it is also fixed in place.

conseguir un ectografista, el omelette comienza a pudrirse y deja al descubierto el pico cartilaginoso de un pollo neonato.

Martín Rubens se encarga de obtener las imágenes. Muestran el ojo de Celia Daumes envuelto por el ectoplasma calcáreo de un huevo, y en su interior el espectro de un pollo en gestación. Rubens teme que al nacer destruya el ojo y asome por la cuenca. “Y cante la hora”, bromean los mozos del Palacio.

El ectoplasma que rodea la cuchara es más sutil. Rubens lo describe como un “Girón informe de vapor etérico”. (Julio Heiss deploró esta metáfora en la Sociedad Ectográfica Argentina. La primera edición del Nomenclador fue aprobada pocos meses después).

Dando el ojo por perdido, Rubens propone esperar los veinte días que corresponden al tiempo de incubación del huevo y documentar la ruptura del cascarón. En giroscopio se ve al pollo etérico naciendo del ojo de Celia Daumes, y la cuchara que cae.

Viñedo

General Alvear, Mendoza, 1947

El ectografista Martín Rubens recorre un viñedo de noche, sin linterna; sabe que los lugares abiertos suelen ser ricos en espectros animales. Un perro etérico, pequeño, asoma a sus pies. Rubens casi tropieza con él; trata de no pisarlo, pero no es posible porque el perro literalmente le brota de la pierna.

Sentir algo ajeno en su cuerpo produce en Rubens la necesidad de huir. La obedece. De todos modos realiza más de cien tomas en automático a lo largo del recorrido. En giroscopio se obtienen cinco segundos en los que el perro dirige la huida de ambos como siempre el miedo le fuera propio y siempre hubiera sido un pie.

The dinner is interrupted in this last position. In the time that securing an ectographist demands, the omelette begins to rot and leave behind the cartilaginous beak of a newborn chick.

Martin Reubens works to obtain the images. They show Celia Daumes' eye enveloped in the calcareous ectoplasm of an egg, and inside the spectrum of a chick in its gestation stage. Rubens is afraid that when the chick is born, it will destroy the eye and poke out of the socket. “And sing the time,” the Palace waiters joke.

The ectoplasm surrounding the spoon is more subtle. Rubens describes it as an “uneven fabric of etheric vapor”. (Julio Heiss deplored this metaphor at the Argentine Ectographic Society. The first edition of the Nomenclator was approved months later).

Assuming the eye lost, Rubens proposes that everyone wait the twenty days that correspond to the egg's incubation time and document the breaking of the shell. The gyroscope shows the etheric chick being born out of Celia Daumes' eye and, and the fall of the spoon.

Vineyard

General Alvear, Mendoza, 1947

The ectographist Martín Rubens walks through a vineyard at night, without a flashlight; he knows that open spaces tend to be rich in animal spectrums. A small, etheric dog gets near his feet. Rubens almost trips over it; he tries not to step on it, but it is impossible as the dog literally sprouts from Rubens' foot.

The feeling of something foreign in his body produces in Rubens the need to escape. He obliges it. Regardless he manages to get more than a hundred automatic takes during his trek. The gyroscope obtains five seconds in which the dog leads both their escapes, as if the fear were its own, as if it had always been a foot.