



The AALITRA Review

A JOURNAL OF LITERARY TRANSLATION

No. 1, March 2010

Website: <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~aalitra/>

This is not a short story (“esto no es un cuento”) by Carme Riera and It Wasn’t the Wisteria (“no eran las glicinas”) by Neus Aguado
Lilit Thwaites

To cite this Article:

Lilit Thwaites, “This is not a short story (“esto no es un cuento”) by Carme Riera and It Wasn’t the Wisteria (“no eran las glicinas”) by Neus Aguado”, *The AALITRA Review: A Journal of Literary Translation*, No.1 (Melbourne: Monash University, 2010), pp.5-15.

Published by
MONASH UNIVERSITY

© Monash University 2010

This is Not a Short Story (“Esto no es un cuento”) by Carme Riera¹ and It Wasn’t the Wisteria (“No eran las glicinas”) by Neus Aguado²

TRANSLATED BY LILIT THWAITES

Carme Riera (born in Palma de Mallorca, 1948), one of Spain’s and Catalonia’s outstanding contemporary writers and essayists, is also a recognised scholar and literary critic, and Professor of Spanish Literature at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. She has been awarded several important prizes both for her creative (fictional) writing (e.g. Premi Josep Pla 1994 and Premio Nacional de Literatura 1995 for *Dins el darrer blau* and for her own Spanish translation of this same work, *El último azul* respectively) and for her scholarly work (e.g. Premio Anagrama de Ensayo 1988 for *La Escuela de Barcelona*, her critical study of three key Barcelona writers). Her literary debut in 1975 was a dazzling collection of short stories (*Te deix, amor, la mar com a penyora/ Te dejo, amor, en prenda el mar*) that shone the spotlight on Spanish society from a feminine – and frequently feminist – perspective. With each successive work, no matter the genre, no matter the focus, Riera continues to challenge her readers to examine and explore the worlds she creates, the societies that have inspired them, and those who people them.

Perhaps it is because Riera, for historical reasons, grew up with a “triple” personality (Majorcan, Catalan and Spanish) and two languages – Catalan (for fiction) and Spanish (for academic studies) – that identity and the double have always fascinated her, and she has always paid particular attention to words and their many possible meanings and interpretations. Early in her career as a writer, she decided not to have others translate her literary works from Catalan into Spanish, but to undertake the translations – some would say interpretations – herself. She thus poses an additional challenge to those who translate her works into another language.

“This is Not a Short Story” is an excellent example of the multiple games Riera engages in with the text, the reader and the translator. She mixes real people (including her friend Neus Aguado, the author of “It Wasn’t the Wisteria”) with invented ones, gives the occasional nod to literary friends and competitors, confounds her real self with narrative creations, and couches her critical comments and social concerns in humour and irony as she confronts and demonstrates the potential fear of every writer: the potential (mis)use of electronic machines and gadgets.

Neus Aguado was born in Córdoba, Argentina in 1955, to Catalan parents, and “returned” to her Catalan roots and the city of Barcelona when she was

¹ In *Contra el amor en compañía y otros relatos* (Barcelona: Destino, 1991), pp. 145–51.

² In *Juego cautivo* (Barcelona: Laia, 1986), pp. 23–25 (written in May 1979).

ten years old. She studied dramatic art at the Instituto del Teatro, and media studies at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Her first published work (1981) was a collaborative venture in Catalan with Carme Riera: a “reportage” of Barcelona’s cemeteries, *Els cementeris de Barcelona (una aproximació)*. But her initial passion was poetry, and her first two literary works were in fact collections of her poetry, written in Spanish and published in the 1980s. She was, however, simultaneously experimenting with short stories, and the first collection of these, *Juego cautivo*, appeared in 1985. Further anthologies of poetry and prose have since been published, together with an impressive number of journalistic articles and critical studies and reviews of the (literary) works of other writers.

Aguado has been described as an entomologist of humans, an apt description of her ability to dissect and portray the inner and outer workings of her human literary creations and the worlds they inhabit, often with a startling brevity of words which nevertheless capture the images she wishes to convey to her reader. Like Riera, she is not averse to humour, irony, and the occasional note of sarcasm or cruelty; but by the same token, her prose can stun with its poetic and evocative imagery.

“It Wasn’t the Wisteria” is a perfect example of her ability in this regard. Sights, sounds and smells are lyrically captured in a few sentences. Despite the occasional seemingly jarring note, the reader is drawn into what appears to be a garden of earthly delights which, like the Bosch triptych that inspired the story, ultimately shocks the reader into the realisation that what seems paradisiacal can also be(come) infernal. The story poses a similar dichotomy for the translator: in its brevity lies its appeal, but capturing that brevity in another language could prove to be the translator’s nightmare.

La Trobe University, Melbourne

This is Not a Short Story

For José María Merino

Towards the end of the summer of 1987, I coincided at a writers' festival with Andrea Hurtado, who was to die a short while later in tragic circumstances which have yet to be satisfactorily accounted for. During those few November days in Oviedo, I had the occasional conversation with the aforementioned writer from Menorca whom I had met quite by chance at another gathering of intellectuals in Valencia a year earlier. The pages which follow were read by Andrea Hurtado during her last public appearance. Perhaps anticipating what was to come, she gave them to me, asking me to take on the task of finding a publisher if I believed that it was the appropriate thing to do. I am fulfilling that task with pleasure, as a posthumous tribute. May you rest in peace.

I'm afraid that, as a starting point, I have no other option but to apologise to the Director of this Festival, as my contribution today will have absolutely nothing to do with the designated topic. What I'm about to read is not a short story, nor does it have anything to do with fiction, though at times it might seem that way. Those of us who are dedicated to literature know perfectly well that reality doesn't beat about the bush, and that it can defeat the most frenetic imagination with a knockout blow, a fact which, on occasion, is nothing short of a tragedy. Accordingly, I insist that what I'm about to read is not a short story but a denunciation. The denunciation of a situation which already affects some of the writers here today, but which will shortly affect the majority of this country's short story writers, including those of us who are already classified under the Autonomous Regions and write in one of the Spanish State's three minority languages.

The situation strikes me as so serious that I prefer to use up my allotted time to disseminate everything I know, rather than lumbering you with the short story I had prepared, even though this might well be one of the last opportunities I have for disseminating a genuine story, by which I mean a story that is totally mine. What I'm about to put before you has everything to do with the recent upsurge in popularity of our genre, a popularity which has already been commented upon here. There can be no doubt that this has been the summer of the short story. All the newspapers, without exception, many magazines, even Church newsletters, corporate bulletins, never mind photocopied pamphlets, all of them have included short stories. "The revival of the short story", "The return of the short story", "A short story for the swimming pool", "At sea with a short story", "Thursday's story", "The same old story", "Long live the short story", "The never-ending story", etc., are some of the headlines that have emblazoned the literary sections of countless publications.

Since some newspapers had also commissioned stories from me, in mid-June I buried myself away with my computer to try to finish two previously started, long overdue stories. I began with the one that attracted me more, a story about doubles, a worn and overused topic which I was attempting to modify somewhat by centring my version on a *triplication* rather than a duplication: a woman who triplicated herself sideways, upwards and downwards into three

distinct beings who eventually, after a trinity of adventures, reunited again to form a true goddess. I worked on the story for almost two weeks and when I felt I couldn't improve it any further, I polished the style, checked the number of times the word *including* had been used, hit the "replace" command (the time honoured *in addition* and *as well* appeared), watched with pleasure as the letters bunched up like sanctimonious women at the Masses of old in order to accommodate the late arrivals, and considered the story finished. But I didn't send it. I preferred to leave it for a few days before printing it, and in the meantime, turned my attention to the second story, a tale about literary creation and its technical limitations: ball-point pens that dry up, fountain pens that blot, insubordinate typewriters, computers that go on strike, a topic not chosen, however, because these things happen to me; far from it.

At this advanced stage of my life, whether by good luck or misfortune, my situation is the exact opposite. It's perfectly clear that I was born with a great affinity for all types of machinery, and with certain powers of seduction, if not over men, certainly over machines. Perhaps that's why becoming aware of what I'm about to put before you is a talent only bestowed upon – or reserved for – someone like me who, in my long life as an unattached homeowner, have never needed the services of a repairman for any type of domestic appliance, sound system or similar piece of equipment. For I have overcome unassisted the weariness or unwillingness of dishwashers, irons and fridges, at times solely through the use of a few persuasive words of encouragement for a job as self-sacrificing as it is meritorious, and have alleviated the pains or maladies of televisions, record players or washing machines through the soothing remedy of an opportune caress. It's true that on other occasions I've resorted to a more forceful remedy which has even entailed tools and replacement parts, but in either case, my abilities have always been evident, and my neighbours, friends, and even the odd colleague such as Neus Aguado have been able to benefit from this particular gift.

Naturally it goes without saying that the computer – and I bought myself the most sophisticated IBM model – was child's play for me. Practically from the day I acquired it, almost five years ago, our relationship has been one of such harmonious coexistence, such kinship, that it quickly became painful for me to abandon the machine, even if only for a couple of days. If I linger over this point, it is to make it perfectly clear that, despite my air of awkwardness and indifference, I'm not clumsy, and if, as far as fingers go, I'm in the forefront of technological civilisation, when it comes to the acquisition of knowledge about microelectronics, my head is every bit as good as my deft extremities. That explains why my computer is permanently connected to the information nerve centre of IBM for whom, of course, I work, and why that connection led me to my discovery.

It all started one afternoon towards the end of June, just over two months ago when, tired because I couldn't find the desired tone, I decided to set aside the second story for a more opportune moment, and returned once more to the first one, with the idea of looking it over one last time. I entered the appropriate command, ready to start reading: "Countess Serpeiri's motive for selecting the hotel in Lluc Alari was the same as that given by most prospective clients for not staying there – the lack of air conditioning". But what I saw on the screen

was not just this somewhat excruciating opening sentence – I should clarify that I do my own translating into Spanish – but in addition, competing with my text, and inserted between the lines, a series of coded references which, after considerable effort, I managed to decipher, and which referred to works by José María Merino, Torrente Ballester, Borges, and Pere Calders, among others. But there was more. A completely new text followed this series of insertions, a compilation of various texts, a truly magnificent text, but one which under no circumstances could I recognise as my own.

I assume that at this stage you can all imagine the degree of stupefaction with which I launched the timely investigation of my computer's unruly innards, which had clearly been interfered with from within IBM's head office without my knowledge. That was when, thanks to my technical abilities, I successfully uncovered the fact that my story had served as a guinea pig for the experiments of a group of critics and professors, as well as a famous short story writer whom I'd rather not name, with the aim of designing a story machine, a monstrous story machine programmed with as many stories as possible from as many authors and countries as possible. It would suffice for the owner of such a machine to turn it on for it to organise a brand new, totally different story, an original story based on the judicious manipulation of inter- and intratextuality, the best possible story of all those stories already told or yet to be told.

I would imagine, dear colleagues, that you share my concern. If this invention prospers, not only will it shortly ruin our careers as short story writers, but it will also force us to admit that we will never be deemed worthy of competing with the great story machine, and that it will always beat us, no matter how much effort and dedication we put into the telling of our stories. Our contributions, no matter how inspired they might be, will merely serve as ingredients for the cake, a piece of the story puzzle, for every story can undoubtedly be improved, and everything has already been written many times before, in other languages, by many authors.

So, for all these reasons, I ask myself whether we ought to sacrifice our individual interests on the altar of the story machine and send our written contributions down the pipeline solely to see how miniscule a contribution we are deemed worthy of offering, how many lines we are allowed, which of our characters or plots are accepted, or if, on the contrary, we must react in the strongest and most intransigent manner possible, by refusing to allow the great story machine to thrive.

I am of the opinion that this matter is sufficiently serious to warrant profound reflection. If you agree, we could deal with it during discussion time. For my part, I'm absolutely clear as to where I stand. To the barricades! Down with the story machine!

Sitges, September 1987.

Esto no es un cuento

Para José María Merino

A finales de verano de 1987 coincidí en un encuentro de escritores con Andrea Hurtado que habría de morir poco después de manera trágica y en circunstancias no suficientemente aclaradas. Durante aquellos días de noviembre en Oviedo traté un poco más a la escritora menorquina, a quien casualmente había conocido en otra reunión de intelectuales celebrada en Valencia el año anterior. Las páginas que siguen a continuación fueron leídas por Andrea Hurtado en su última intervención pública. Tal vez presintiendo su final me las regaló, pidiéndome que, si lo creía conveniente, me ocupara de su publicación. Cumplo gustosa el encargo, como homenaje póstumo. Descanse en paz.

Me temo que no me queda otro remedio, de entrada, que comenzar por pedir disculpas al Director de estos encuentros porque mi intervención no va a ceñirse en absoluto a la propuesta de su convocatoria. Lo que voy a leer no es un cuento, ni tiene nada que ver con la ficción, aunque a ratos pueda parecerlo. Quienes nos dedicamos a la literatura sabemos de coro que la realidad no se anda con chiquitas y puede vencer por K.O. a la imaginación más frenética, lo que, en ocasiones, no deja de ser una tragedia. Insisto, por tanto: lo que voy a leer no es un cuento, sino una denuncia. La denuncia de una situación que afecta ya a algunos de los escritores aquí presentes, pero que muy pronto repercutirá en la mayoría de cuentistas de este país, incluso en los que estamos ya transferidos a las Comunidades Autónomas y escribimos en las tres lenguas minoritarias del Estado.

El hecho me parece tan grave que prefiero consumir mi turno informándoos de cuanto sé que en endosaros el cuento que tenía previsto, aunque tal vez ésta sea una de las últimas oportunidades que me quedan para difundir un relato auténtico, es decir, totalmente mío. Lo que a continuación voy a poner en vuestro conocimiento no tiene que ver precisamente con el reciente auge alcanzado por el género, como ya se ha comentado aquí. No cabe duda de que éste ha sido el verano de los cuentos. Todos los periódicos sin excepción, muchas revistas hasta hojas parroquiales, boletines corporativos e incluso panfletos ciclostilados los han incluido entre sus páginas. “Resucita el cuento”, “Con el cuento que vuelve”, “Para la piscina un cuento”, “En el mar, un cuento”, “El jueves, cuento”, “El mismo cuento de siempre”, “Viva el cuento”, “El cuento de nunca acabar”, etc., son algunos de los títulos con que diversas publicaciones han encabezado sus selecciones literarias.

Como a mí también algunos periódicos me habían encargado relatos, a mitad de junio me enfrasqué en el ordenador para tratar de terminar dos viejas historias pendientes. Comencé por la que más me interesaba, una narración sobre el tema del doble, un tópico tan viejo como manido que yo pretendía variar un punto ya que mi relato no se centraba en un desdoblamiento, sino en un *destriplamiento*: una mujer se triplicaba a lo largo, a lo ancho y a lo alto en tres seres distintos que volvían, al fin, a reunirse, tras una trinidad de aventuras, en una diosa verdadera. Trabajé en él casi dos semanas y cuando ya me sentí incapaz de mejorarlo más, pulí el estilo, contabilicé el número de repeticiones de la palabra *incluso*, palpé el comando de sustitución

(aparecieron las consabidas *además y también*), vi con sumo agrado cómo las letras se arracimaban cual beatas en las misas de antes para dejar sitio a las recién llegadas, y di por concluido el relato. Pero no lo envié. Preferí que reposara unos días antes de publicarlo mientras me dedicaba al segundo, una fábula sobre la creación literaria y sus limitaciones materiales: bolígrafos que se secan, plumas que emborronan, máquinas de escribir que se insubordinan, ordenadores que se declaran en huelga y no porque el asunto fuera conmigo sino al contrario.

A mí a estas bajuras de la edad, ya no sé si por suerte o por desgracia, me ocurre absolutamente al revés. Está claro que nací con una gran disposición afectiva hacia todo tipo de máquinas, y con ciertos poderes de seducción, ya que no sobre los hombres, sobre los aparatos. Tal vez por esto sólo a alguien como yo le estaba dado –o guardado– percatarse de lo que en seguida explicaré, puesto que en mi larga vida de solitaria ama de casa no he tenido que requerir jamás los servicios de mantenimiento de ninguna fábrica de electrodomésticos, aparatos de alta fidelidad o semejantes pues yo misma, a veces hasta con la simple persuasión de unas palabras de aliento a una labor tan abnegada como meritoria, he paliado el cansancio o la desgana de lavaplatos, planchas y neveras, mitigado los dolores o achaques de televisores, tocadiscos o lavadoras con el lenitivo de una caricia oportuna. Bien es verdad que en otras ocasiones he utilizado una terapia más contundente en la que han entrado incluso herramientas y piezas de recambio, pero tanto en un caso como otro mis habilidades han quedado siempre de manifiesto y mis vecinas, amigas y hasta alguna colega como Neus Aguado han podido beneficiar de ese don.

Ni que decir tiene que manejar el ordenador –y eso que me compré el modelo más sofisticado de IBM– fue para mí un juego de niños. Prácticamente desde el día en que lo instalé, va para cinco años, nuestras relaciones han sido de una convivencia tan intensa, de un trato tan fraternal que pronto me resultó penoso abandonarlo, aunque fuera por dos o tres días. Si abundo en este punto es para que quede bien claro que, pese a mi aspecto desgarbado y a mis gestos patosos, no soy ninguna manaza, y si en cuanto a dedos estoy en la avanzadilla de la civilización técnica, en cuanto a la adquisición de conocimientos sobre microelectrónica mi cabeza no va a la zaga a mis extremidades superiores. Esto explica que mi ordenador esté conectado a perpetuidad con la central de informática de IBM, para la que precisamente trabajo, y que esa conexión me pusiera en el camino del descubrimiento.

Todo empezó una tarde de finales de junio, hace poco más de dos meses, cuando decidí abandonar para mejor ocasión mi segundo relato, cansada de no encontrar el tono apetecido, y retomé de nuevo el primero con la intención de echarle el último vistazo. Pulsé el comando correspondiente, dispuesta a comenzar a leer: “El motivo por el cual la Condesa Serpieri escogió el hotel de Lluç Alcari era el mismo por el que solían rehusarlo casi todos los posibles clientes, la falta de aire acondicionado”. Pero lo que vi en pantalla no fue sólo este comienzo, algo chirriante –olvidaba aclarar que yo misma había realizado la traducción al castellano– sino que también, contrapunteando el texto, insertándose entre líneas, aparecían, una serie de referencias en clave que tras múltiples esfuerzos logré descifrar y que remitían a obras de José María Merino, Torrente Ballester, Borges, Pere Calders, entre otros. Pero aún

había más. Tras toda esa serie de ingerencias aparecía un texto nuevo, una suma de textos diversos, un texto realmente magnífico pero que en absoluto podía reconocer como mío.

Supongo que a estas alturas podéis imaginaros con qué grado de estupefacción inicié las pesquisas oportunas en el río revuelto de mi ordenador que, sin duda, había sido interferido desde las oficinas centrales de IBM sin que yo lo supiera. Fue entonces cuando, gracias a mis habilidades técnicas, pude descubrir que mi relato había servido de conejo de Indias para los experimentos de un grupo de críticos y profesores además de un gran cuentista que prefiero no nombrar, para diseñar un aparato contador, una gran máquina cuentera, programada con todos los cuentos posibles, procedentes de los autores y los países más diversos. Batará que quien la posea le dé pie para que ella organice un cuento nuevo y distinto, un cuento original a base del sabio manejo de la intertextualidad y del intratexto, el mejor cuento posible entre los cuentos ya contados o por contar.

Imagino que compartís, queridos colegas, mi preocupación. Si el invento prospera, no sólo pronto arruinará nuestras carreras de cuentistas, sino que además nos llevará a tener que admitir que jamás seremos dignos de competir con la gran máquina contadora y que, por mucho esfuerzo y dedicación que pongamos en contar cuentos, ella nos vencerá siempre. Nuestras aportaciones, por geniales que puedan ser, servirán sólo de ingredientes del pastel, de pieza del *puzzle* contador, porque todo relato es, sin duda, mejorable y todo ha sido escrito ya muchas veces por muchos autores, en otras lenguas.

Por eso, por todo eso me pregunto si debemos sacrificar nuestros intereses individuales ante la máquina y pasar por el tubo escribiendo únicamente para ver qué minúscula aportación ofrecemos de provecho, cuántas líneas se nos admiten, qué personajes o situaciones se nos aceptan, o si, por el contrario, tenemos que reaccionar del modo más duro e intransigente oponiéndonos a que la gran contadora prospere.

Creo que la situación es suficientemente grave y requiere una reflexión profunda. Si os parece, podemos tratar de ella en el debate. Por mi parte lo tengo claro: ¡A las barricadas! ¡Muera la máquina contadora!

Sitges, septiembre de 1987

It Wasn't the Wisteria

The woman was walking slowly. When she reached the shadiest part of the copse, she stopped for a moment and took a deep breath. She headed off again into the sun, took the path leading off to the left, and found herself facing the large country house. It was unmistakable, especially in the spring. Wisteria in all its glory adorned the facade. Clusters of flowers covered the branches. The aroma, and the buzz of insects sipping their nectar brought back the memory of other springs when she had cut splendid branches with which to adorn the salons. While arranging them in various cut crystal bowls, she would peck greedily at the flowers. She relished the flavour they released. And yet it wasn't the wisteria that had seduced her.

She circled the house and pushed open the gate to the back garden. There she was. The little girl was unperturbed. The woman came into the garden at the same time every afternoon. Sometimes she stroked the child's hair. The child would feel the gentle progress of her nails across the top of her head. On other occasions, she would caress the little girl's cheek, or place her stiletto-thin fingers on top of the child's chubby hand. They had never spoken.

The visits had begun towards the end of April. Now, in early May, they continued with mathematical precision. Day after day, the same scene unfolded, the kneeling child picking wild strawberries and arranging them with extreme care in a wicker basket.

Occasionally she would stand up and offer the woman strawberries, or an elegant posy of white flowers that she had prepared beforehand, flowers with the scent of strawberries.

Sometimes the child didn't notice the woman's presence, absorbed as she was in finding the little red berries hidden in the grass. On those rare occasions when the woman found the little girl in that totally absorbed state, her mind would begin to wander. She would recall Bosch's "The Garden of Earthly Delights". She could picture the central panel in all its detail: a naked man offering a ripe strawberry of enormous dimensions to a young naked woman. She could still hear the murmur in her ear, "the strawberry is the fruit of Venus": the fruit of Venus, the fruit of love and of perdition, of amorous delirium.

Today, the little girl was looking at her, smiling, wearing a small straw hat which couldn't quite contain her abundant chestnut curls. For the first time, the woman spoke to her. The child willingly offered her some strawberries. The woman stood motionless for a moment, then bent over, took a handful and stored them in her pocket. In the next instant, she picked up the child. Swiftly, instinctively, she impaled her on a sharp spike on the wall which had once served for hanging up tools.

The child didn't emit even the tiniest cry. Only one brief little spurt of blood stained her chin, and another more brilliant one, the little dress covered with bows. There she stayed, eyes open, still clutching the little basket tightly.

With her hand, the woman cleaned the blood from the surprised face. She untied the ribbon which, when done up in her hair, made her so beautiful, and wound it round the child's waist, binding her to the spike. She couldn't resist the temptation of taking another handful of strawberries from the basket and eating them then and there, savouring them slowly, her face very close to

the child's. Suddenly, startled, she stepped back. She had the impression that the child was trying to approach her.

The fragrance of the wisteria bothered her. The smell of blood was already becoming noticeable. She passed through the garden gate without a single backward glance.

When she arrived at her hotel, she asked for the bill. Once in her room, she opened her suitcase and put it on top of the bed. She folded each garment with care, the pyjamas decorated with deep turquoise flowers, which she liked so much; the rose coloured nightgown and matching peignoir, the dress with little birds all over it, the striped jacket which made her look younger ... She went into the bathroom, brushed her teeth, washed her hands, hurriedly gathered her toiletries. Finally, with a convulsive, almost robotic gesture, she seized a locket which always accompanied her on her travels. She looked at it for a moment as if she had never seen it before, then smiled, opened it and carefully deposited a lock of chestnut hair in it. The lock blended with others, blonde, black, red ... The bas-relief on the lid featured a reproduction of a nineteenth century automaton: The Fairy of the Strawberries.

No eran las glicinas

La mujer caminaba despacio. Cuando llegó a la parte más umbría del bosquecillo, se paró un momento a respirar profundamente. Salió nuevamente al sol, tomó el camino de la izquierda, y se encontró frente al caserón. Éste era inconfundible, sobre todo en primavera. Hermosas glicinas adornaban la fachada. Los racimos de flores llenaban las ramas. El aroma y el zumbido de los insectos que libaban el néctar le traían el recuerdo de otras primaveras, en el transcurso de las cuales ella cortaba espléndidas ramas y adornaba los salones. Mientras las colocaba en diversas fuentes de cristal tallado, solía picotear golosa las flores. Le gustaba el sabor que desprendían. Sin embargo, no eran las glicinas quienes la habían seducido.

Rodeó la casa y empujó la puerta del jardín de atrás. Allí estaba. La pequeña no se inmutó. Cada tarde a la misma hora aquella mujer entraba en el jardín. A veces le acariciaba los cabellos. La niña sentía el paso de las uñas, muy suavemente, por la cabeza. En otras ocasiones, le acariciaba la mejilla o ponía su afilada mano encima de la más gordezuela de la niña. Nunca habían hablado.

Las visitas habían empezado a finales de abril. Ahora, entrado mayo, continuaban con una precisión matemática. Día tras día se representaba la misma escena, la niña arrodillada recogía fresas silvestres y las amontonaba con sumo cuidado en una canasta de mimbre. De vez en cuando se ponía en pie y ofrecía fresas a la mujer, o ya le tenía preparado un gracioso ramo de flores blancas, flores con perfume de fresas.

Algunas veces la niña no advertía su presencia, abstraída como estaba en buscar entre la hierba los pequeños frutos rojos. En las contadas oportunidades en que la mujer encontraba a la niña en esa reconcentrada actitud comenzaba a divagar. Recordaba el *Jardín de las delicias* del Bosco. Veía con exactitud el panel central: un hombre desnudo le ofrece a una joven desnuda un fresón maduro de enorme tamaño. Todavía percibía el murmullo en su oído, “la fresa es el fruto de Venus”: el fruto de Venus, el fruto del amor y de la perdición, del

desvarío amoroso.

Hoy la niña la miraba sonriente, llevaba una pequeña pamelita de paja que no conseguía recoger los abundantes rizos castaños. Por primera vez la mujer le dirigió la palabra. La niña, con docilidad, le ofreció fresas. La mujer permaneció un momento estática, después se inclinó, tomó un puñado y se las guardó en el bolsillo del vestido. Acto seguido incorporó a la niña del suelo y de manera rápida, impensada, la clavó en un hierro punzante de la pared que en su día había servido para colgar aperos.

La niña no emitió el menor grito, sólo un breve chorrito de sangre manchó su barbilla y otro más luminoso el vestidito lleno de lazos. Quedó con los ojos abiertos, sujetando con fuerza la cestita.

La mujer limpió con la mano la sangre del sorprendido rostro. Se soltó la cinta que anudada a su cabello la hacía tan bella, la pasó por la cintura de la niña atándola al hierro. No pudo resistir la tentación de tomar de la cesta otro puñado de fresas; las comió allí mismo saboreándolas con lentitud, muy próxima su cara a la de la niña. De repente se apartó sobresaltada. Tuvo la impresión de que la niña intentaba aproximarse.

La fragancia de las glicinas le molestó. El olor a sangre ya empezaba a hacerse patente. Atravesó el portal del jardín sin mirar ni una vez hacia atrás.

Al llegar al hotel pidió la cuenta, ya en la habitación abrió la maleta y la colocó encima de la cama. Dobló con esmero cada prenda, aquel pijama de flores turquesas, ultramar, que tanto le gustaba; el camisón y el salto de cama rosa, el vestido estampado de pequeños pájaros, la chaqueta a rayas que la rejuvenecía... Entró en el cuarto de baño, se lavó los dientes y las manos, recogió apresuradamente los objetos de tocador. Por último, con un gesto convulso, estereotipado casi, agarró un medallón que siempre la acompañaba en sus viajes. Lo miró un momento como si nunca lo hubiese visto y sonrió, lo abrió y depositó con destreza un mechón de cabellos castaños. Un mechón que se mezcló con otros rubios, negros, pelirrojos... El bajo relieve reproducía un autómatas del siglo diecinueve: *El Hada de las Fresas*.