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# Translating ‘Historia del hombre que quiso parar el mundo’ from the collection *Tanta pasión para nada* by Julio Llamazares

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As yet, *Tanta pasión para nada* has never been published as a translation in English. In fact, despite being a recognized author in the Spanish-speaking world, with numerous works published by the major publisher Alfaguara,<sup>1</sup> only one book by the Spanish journalist and author Julio Llamazares has been translated into English. What could the reasons for this be? Charlotte Barslund highlights the fact that some authors’ books may not ‘travel’ well to another language even though it is technically possible to translate them, as they ‘may be deeply rooted in their own culture, and have little appeal to foreign readers, despite being highly regarded in their country of origin’ (2011: 151).

Is this story (and this collection) untranslatable for an English-speaking audience? The concept at its centre is a particularly Spanish one, and one which is unavoidably alien to an Anglo-cultural and linguistic audience. Quite apart from the fact that we simply do not have a vocabulary for the very specific terminology of bullfighting in English (linguistic untranslatability), it is not part of our cultural understanding (cultural untranslatability; Bassnett 2011: 97) and in many cases stirs emotions of outrage and disgust about cruelty to animals. I believe, however, that Llamazares’s story is not only translatable but that there is an inherent value in translating it. The story transcends the confines of its cultural context and has a literary value and a universal significance which can be absorbed and enjoyed by an English-speaking reader. In other words, within the Spanish cultural and linguistic frame there is a meaning which is much wider; the story is not about bullfighting, it is merely the vessel used to express an idea. As Llamazares says of this collection: ‘los protagonistas de estos relatos son muy distintos, pero todos comparten la misma extraña condena: descubrir que la vida es una pasión inútil. Una pasión [...] que nos permite seguir viviendo pese a que conozcamos su inutilidad’ (Llamazares 2011: back cover; ‘the protagonists of these stories are very different, but they all share the same strange fate: discovering that life is a futile passion, a passion [...] that enables us to go on living even though we know it is useless’). This is an idea which applies to all humanity from all cultures and all languages, and is beautifully crystallized in the image of Neme: ‘not knowing that life, unlike the bulls, doesn’t stop for anyone, but charges right on over those who dare to stand before it’ (ll. 259-61).

Nonetheless, translating the story does pose a number of difficulties. I spent quite some time searching for an Anglo-cultural equivalent that would produce an ‘equivalent effect’ (Nida 1964a: 159; qtd. in Munday 2008: 71) for the image of Don Tancredo standing before the bull, but

1. See <http://www.alfaguara.com/es/autor/julio-llamazares/>

I simply could not find one. In any case, I decided that this would violate Tytler's first principle: 'that the translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work' (Tytler 1791: 209); replacing the bullfighting image, which in any case is very powerful, would render an incomplete translation, and give rise to the question: why translate this story at all?

However, while the audience may be tolerant of, and even relish, a foreign cultural context, they are far less tolerant of 'foreignness of syntax, grammar and usage' (Grieve 2005: 101). As James Grieve argues, literalism when used as a technique for foreignizing a text 'used to be called bad translation' (2005: 101) and quotes *Guardian* reviewer Paul Davis's comment that 'literalism would force general readers to stop reading', as 'one of the most persuasive arguments against foreignization' (Grieve 2005: 103). I therefore sought some middle ground. Any real equivalence of effect is impossible as the culture of bullfighting is so far removed from Anglo-society that we can never be as familiar with it as a Spaniard. However, there is no reason why an English-speaking writer could not have written this same story in English, setting it in a Spanish cultural context. With this in mind, I decided to maintain what I could of the Spanish elements, both linguistic and cultural, from the Source Text (ST) in the translation, while making the Target Text (TT) language (syntax, grammar and usage) as 'natural' and 'accessible' as possible. I have followed something along the lines of what Rita Wilson describes as 'give and take between these two approaches [domestication and foreignization] – a "negotiation" between author, translator and reader' (2005: 122). This flies in the face of Schleiermacher's warning in his famous essay, that 'no mixture of the two is to be trusted' (1813: 229) as it rejects the polarity of foreignization and domestication, and instead attempts to bring the author and the reader towards each other to meet somewhere in the middle.

I have maintained or used words like '*matador*' and '*fiesta*' in italics. They are words which have entered the English popular vocabulary, and pose little or no difficulty for modern English readers. In fact, '*matador*' does not appear at all in the ST, where the word used to refer to bullfighter is '*torero*'. In Spanish the two words have different implications, but in English we make no distinction between a bullfighter who simply taunts the bull, and one who kills it. The concept of '*fiesta*' is another which I have kept. Most Spanish towns have their own *fiesta* as well as national festivities. As the definition '[i]n Spain or Spanish America, a religious festival; also, any festivity or holiday' (OED) implies, it is a very particular cultural phenomenon, but one with which English speakers are nonetheless comfortable enough. I have opted to maintain '*Plaza de Toros*', (l. 92), as the 'bull-ring' forms as central a part of any Spanish town as its town hall or central plaza, and most English-speaking readers will be able to make the leap from '*Plaza de Toros*' to 'bull-ring' without the need for an explanation. In the same way '*becerrada*' as a particularly Spanish term has been kept with a gloss in brackets (l. 173), where we have no English term for a bullfight with a young bull. While this is perhaps pushing the limits of the readers' patience, with the explanation it presents no great challenge to the reader, yet maintains some of the Spanish flavour of the text

For the same reason, I have opted not to anglicize proper names such as 'Neme', 'Cayo' 'Ozaribeño'; street and place names such as 'Gran Vía Metro station', 'Fuencarral Street'; and other nouns such as '*pesetas*' (l. 236) and '*Metro*' (adding station to the end; l. 218). Translating

them as dollars/euro/pounds etc. and subway/underground respectively would transport the original text out of its Spanish context into a specific American/British context, which would add little value to the translation. In fact I have gone so far as to literally place the reader in Spain: 'a Valencian who emigrated to America and introduced it to *our* beloved Spain in 1889' (ll. 176-178).

However, as I stated above, I have also tried to make the English prose as natural as possible, in line with Tytler's second principle 'that the style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original' (1791: 209) – a particularly difficult task given the long rambling sentences which the author tends to utilize. I have done this by using English punctuation (colons, semi-colons, dashes, brackets etc.), breaking some sentences and changing word-order where necessary. As Grieve notes, 'different syntax requires different punctuation' (2005: 101). For example, in the second paragraph of the ST there are three sentences. The first two are very long and punctuated almost exclusively by commas. This works relatively well in Spanish, but in English we tend to get lost. Thus, although I have not shortened the sentences, I have used dashes to clarify digressions from the main idea of the sentence. On other occasions, I have used full stops to shorten sentences where an English reader simply needs a rest, for example in the paragraph on p. 58 of the ST beginning with '*La publicación...*' (l. 153), which contains a single full stop in its 27 lines (though there is a colon and an ellipsis which function as pauses). I have also italicized some words in translation for emphasis, where I deemed this necessary to clarify the rhythm and stress in long sentences (for example: 'Right under my nose I had (I should say I *had* had, as I had known Neme for several months by then' (ll. 96-98)); 'Not only had he done it: he was the last person *ever* to have dared to perform the dangerous 'Don Tancredo'' (ll. 101-103).

Furthermore, I have tried to use English idioms and rhythms in place of their Spanish counterparts in an attempt to match the informal tone of the original, which reads like someone recounting a story from memory. For example, '*los popes de la izquierda provincial*' (l. 15) become the 'movers and shakers of the provincial political left' (ll. 15-16); '*Ante mis ojos*' (l. 96) becomes 'Right under my nose' (l. 96); '*se enfrentó a pecho descubierto*' (ll. 258) becomes 'confronted it head-on' (ll. 258-59); and even '*La suerte de don Tancredo*' (ll. 70; 78-79; 103-104; 175) becomes simply the 'Don Tancredo' (ll. 70; 78; 103; 175), in the same way a tantrum on a tennis court would be a 'John McEnroe' or an eccentric goalkeeping error, a 'Barthez'.

'Historia del hombre que quiso parar el mundo' has never been translated into English. Indeed, despite relative success in the Spanish-speaking world, Llamazares has only had one of his books translated into English to date, which raises obvious questions about his 'translatability'. Although this text presents a number of difficulties – from bullfighting jargon and imagery, to long complex sentences and being deeply rooted in Spanish culture – this story (and indeed the collection as a whole) has a literary value and universal significance which transcend linguistic and cultural roots, and are not beyond translation. With a sophisticated, although by no means specialist, audience in mind, I have opted for a translation method which seeks the 'middle ground' in the foreignization/domestication debate by respecting the Spanish 'flavour' of the text, while simultaneously privileging the accessibility of its syntax, grammar and usage. As Barslund

puts it, ‘a good book is a good book, whatever language it is written in’ (2011: 145). I believe that, despite the difficulties, not only is this a good book in Spanish, but also one which can be enjoyed in its English translation.

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## 1 **Historia del hombre que quiso parar el mundo**

La noticia apareció un verano en el diario provincial perdida entre los sucesos. Era breve. Decía simplemente que un hombre había sido hallado muerto cerca de la vía del tren en las proximidades de un pueblo de la provincia, pero en seguida supe que se trataba de él.

10 Lo había conocido años atrás (bastantes años atrás) en la redacción del periódico para el que yo trabajaba entonces: un semanario de corta vida impulsado y clausurado (cuando se cansaron de él) por los popes de la izquierda provincial. Hablo, claro, de la provincia en la que Neme y yo vivíamos en aquel tiempo.

Apareció una mañana en la redacción acompañado a otro personaje,  
20 un sujeto de gran porte y aires de ejecutivo que, al parecer, venía a ocuparse de la publicidad del periódico, uno de sus puntos débiles debido, entre otros muchos motivos, a la línea editorial de éste, que se compadecía mal con los intereses de quienes, por razones obvias, podían insertar en él anuncios de sus negocios: los empresarios y comerciantes de la provincia. Cayo y Neme se encargaron,  
30 en efecto, de la publicidad del periódico, uno como responsable y el otro como su ayudante, y desde entonces los traté muy a menudo, bien en la sede de la redacción (un piso en el extrarradio de la ciudad), bien en la cafetería del centro en la que tenían establecida su oficina general, en una mesa junto al teléfono, que utilizaban para sus gestiones como si fuera el suyo particular. Por los tiempos de que hablo, todavía no  
40 existía la telefonía móvil.

En seguida me di cuenta de que

## **The Man Who Wanted to Stop the World**

The news appeared one summer in the provincial newspaper, lost amongst other stories. It was short, saying simply that a man had been found dead near the railway tracks on the outskirts of one of the province’s small towns, but I knew at once that it was him.

I had met him years before (a good few years before) in the office of the newspaper where I was working then: a short-lived weekly publication, brought into being and subsequently closed down (when they grew tired of it) by the movers and shakers of the provincial political left. I mean, of course, from the province in which Neme and I were living at that time.

He arrived at the newspaper one morning accompanied by another character, a large man with an executive-type look, who had seemingly come to take care of the advertising side of the newspaper – one of its weak points due, amongst many other things, to the paper’s editorial line, which was at odds with the interests of those who, for obvious reasons, might otherwise place ads in it: the businessmen and salesmen of the province. Cayo and Neme did, in effect, take over the advertising in the newspaper – one in charge and the other as his assistant – and from that point onwards I dealt with them often, whether at the newspaper’s headquarters (an apartment on the outskirts of the city), or in the café in the centre where they had set up their make-shift office at a table next to a telephone, which they used for their operations as if it were for their use alone. At this time, mobile phones were still a thing of the future.

Right away I realised that Neme

Neme era un pobre hombre. Siempre a la sombra de Cayo, que le eclipsaba con su humanidad. Neme era un desdichado que había llegado a su edad (los cuarenta, más o menos, por los años de que hablo) gracias a las ayudas de su familia, que, al parecer, tenía dinero. De hecho, Neme vivía en un hotel, no muy lujoso, es verdad, pero  
50 tampoco de mala muerte como cabría intuir de su situación.

Un día, al cabo de algunos meses, la casualidad hizo que me enterara de su verdadera historia. Siempre en un segundo plano, siempre a la sombra de Cayo, quien, con su frondosa labia y sus trajes impolutos, como de gobernador civil, le eclipsaba por completo, apenas me había fijado en Neme salvo para compadecer su aspecto: su calva casi completa,  
60 sus ojos blandos e inexpressivos y su andar bamboleante, como de pato herido de muerte. Fue Cayo, precisamente, el que me reveló su historia: <<Aquí donde lo ves – me confesó, señalando a Neme, un día en la redacción –, estás hablando con la última persona que se ha atrevido a hacer en el mundo la heroica suerte de don Tancredo>>.

Yo no sabía a lo que se refería Cayo. Había escuchado, eso sí, nombrar la suerte de don Tancredo, pero referida al fútbol (cuando un portero se quedaba quieto, sin hacer nada por impedir que el balón entrara en su portería), o a los políticos, cuando también hacían la estatua ante un problema concreto, pero desconocía su significado auténtico. Cayo me lo explicó, pedagógico, orgulloso de sus conocimientos: la suerte de don Tancredo – me desveló mirando a su amigo  
80 – era un engaño taurino desaparecido ya de las plazas de toros por su extremada peligrosidad, ya que consistía en hacer la estatua en el centro del ruedo y esperar de ese modo, subido en un pedestal, la embestida del toro bravo. Al parecer, el bicho, si la suerte se hacía bien, caía en el engaño y se detenía en el último momento, eso sí, bufando y dando derrotes, como corresponde a su condición de fiera, pero  
90 sin embestir a la falsa estatua. Eso, ni más ni menos, era lo que, según Cayo, había hecho su ayudante en la plaza de toros

was an unfortunate fellow. Always in the shadow of Cayo, who eclipsed him as a human being, Neme was a luckless man who had got to his age (about 40 at the time) thanks to the assistance of his family who, it seemed, did have money. In fact, Neme lived in a hotel; as one could gather from his situation, not an overly lavish one, but by no means a complete dive either.

One day, several months later, chance led me to find out his true story. Always in the background, in the shadow of Cayo – who with his able tongue and spotless suits, like a local mayor, eclipsed him entirely – I had never given Neme a second thought except as an object of pity: his almost completely bald scalp, his soft inexpressive eyes and his shaky gait, like a terminally wounded duck. It was Cayo himself who told me his story: “over there where you see him” pointing at Neme, he confessed one day in the office, “you’re looking at the last person in the world to have dared perform the heroic feat of ‘Don Tancredo’”.

I had no idea what Cayo was talking about. I had certainly heard talk of the so-called ‘Don Tancredo’, but referring to football (when the goalkeeper remains still, making no attempt to stop the ball entering his net), or to politicians when they turn to stone when faced with an unavoidable problem, but I was ignorant of its real meaning. Cayo explained it to me, like a teacher proud of his knowledge: the ‘Don Tancredo’ – he revealed looking at his friend – was a bullfighting trick, nowadays almost completely vanished from the bull-rings due to the extreme danger it involved, in which the *matador*, pretending to be a statue, stands in the middle of the ring on a pedestal to await the angry bull’s charge. The idea is that the bull, if everything goes according to plan, falls for the trick and stops at the last moment, snorting and bucking its head as bulls do, but without toppling the fake statue of the *matador*. According to Cayo, that was exactly what his assistant had done in the *Plaza de Toros* of his home

de su pueblo un año el día de la fiesta y todavía vivía para contarlo.

Me quedé impresionado por la revelación. Ante mis ojos tenía (mejor dicho, había tenido, puesto que conocía a Neme desde hacía meses) una gran exclusiva periodística, no sólo de carácter provincial, sino de alcance internacional incluso, y ni siquiera la había intuido. Ahí es nada: la última persona que se había atrevido a hacer en el mundo la peligrosa suerte de don Tancredo. ¿Qué mejor tema para la última página del semanario, que también tenía a mi cargo, como la mitad de éste, puesto que sólo éramos dos periodistas, aparte del director, en la redacción?

Quedé con Neme para entrevistarlo. Me citó en su hotel, como los toreros, aunque a una hora nada taurina: las once y media de la noche. Estaba muy ocupado todo ese día, se justificó.

Llegué al hotel a la hora en punto. El recepcionista no disimuló una sonrisa cuando le pregunté por el <<señor Neme>> (desconocía su nombre completo), pero me indicó su habitación, que era la última de la tercera planta, la destinada, según me dijo, a la servidumbre y a los clientes fijos.

Fue la entrevista más pintoresca que he hecho en toda mi carrera periodística. Allí, en aquella habitación llena de humedades, con la moqueta raída y el papel pintado roto, en la que Neme vivía desde hacía años y que constituía, por ello mismo, toda una exaltación de la soltería (ropa tirada por todas partes, una maleta abierta en el suelo, una lata de foie-gras en un zapato...), el último don Tancredo me contó su heroica hazaña recostado en la cama, en la que ya estaba cuando llegué, embutido en un pijama de color indefinible y fumando todo el rato, mientras yo tomaba notas sentado en la única silla que había en la habitación. Confieso que, por un momento, llegué a dudar de sus intenciones.

Pero todo fue muy honesto. Neme me contó su historia añadiendo algunos datos a los que me había ya dicho su jefe y, luego, a petición mía, me dio dos

town one year on the day of the *fiesta*, and had lived to tell the tale.

I was impressed by the revelation. Right under my nose I had (I should say I *had* had, as I had known Neme for several months by then) a great exclusive, not only at the provincial level, but also of international interest, and I had been oblivious. Not only had he done it: he was the last person *ever* to have dared to perform the dangerous ‘Don Tancredo’. What better topic for the last page of the paper, of which I was in charge (along with half of the paper, there only being two journalists other than the director in the office)?

I organised a meeting with Neme for an interview. He received me in his hotel room, in true bullfighter fashion, but at a very unusual time for a bullfighter: 11:30 at night. He was very busy all that day, he explained.

I arrived at his hotel on the chime of 11:30. The receptionist made no attempt to conceal a smile as I asked for ‘Señor Neme’ (I didn’t know his full name), but he pointed me towards his room: the last one on the third floor, which housed the staff and long-term residents.

It was the most bizarre interview I have done in my whole career as a journalist. There, in that heavily damp room with its threadbare carpet and torn wallpaper, where Neme had lived for years and which, for this very reason, constituted a true celebration of bachelorhood itself (clothes strewn everywhere, an open suitcase on the floor, a can of *foie gras* in a shoe...), the last Don Tancredo told me the story of his heroic feat. When I arrived he had already made himself comfortable, reclining on the bed stuffed into indeterminately-coloured pyjamas and smoking constantly. As I took notes sitting on the only chair in the room, I admit that I did, for a moment, come to doubt his intentions.

But everything was very sincere. Neme recounted his story to me, adding some details to those I already knew, and at my request, he gave me two photos which

fotografías que buscó durante un rato por toda la habitación. Eran bastante borrosas, pero eran lo que tenía. Una recogía el instante en el que la vaquilla aparece por la puerta del toril y comienza su carrera hacia el falso don Tancredo y la otra un  
 150 retrato de éste con la cara enharinada por completo y subido en la peana desde la que consumó su hazaña.

La publicación de aquel reportaje tuvo gran repercusión. Mucha gente lo leyó, sobre todo los amigos y conocidos del pobre Neme, la mayoría de los cuales desconocían su gran secreto, y éste se hizo famoso por unos días para satisfacción de todos, salvo de Cayo, que encajó con cierta  
 160 envidia, pese a haber sido su promotor, la repentina fama de su ayudante: El último don Tancredo, según decía el artículo, del que entresaco ahora unos pocos párrafos: <<Cuando Nemesio X.X., más conocido por Neme entre sus amigos, se despojaba de su máscara de harina en la plaza de toros de su pueblo el 15 de agosto de 1977, desaparecía quizá para siempre una de las más peligrosas suertes taurinas, que  
 170 tuvo numerosos practicantes hasta que, terminada la guerra civil española, fue prohibida por las autoridades ante la gran cantidad de muertos que originaba, salvo en las becerradas y en las fiestas de los pueblos [...] La suerte de don Tancredo, que recibe el nombre de su inventor, un valenciano emigrado a América que la introdujo en nuestro país en 1889 (al parecer, se la vio hacer en La Habana a un  
 180 mexicano apodado El Ozaribeño), consiste, según Cossío, en esperar al toro en medio del ruedo, a pie firme en un pedestal, vestido completamente de blanco, con la cara y las manos cubiertas de harina o de otro producto blanco y remedando en la pose y en la apostura la pasividad de una estatua, ya que se basa esta suerte en la experiencia de que los toros no rematan, si es que acometen, sobre figuras  
 190 inanimadas...>>.

Neme, que, al parecer, la hizo a la perfección (según relataba él mismo, sufrió sólo un revolcón sin mayores consecuencias y ya al final de su actuación y, además,

he found upon a brief search through his room. They were fairly blurred, but they were all that he had. One captured the moment as the bull appeared in the door of the pen to begin its charge towards the fake Don Tancredo, and the other was of him, his face completely whitened with flour, standing on the platform on which he would earn his place in history.

The publication of the article caused quite a reaction. It was read by many people, not least by friends and acquaintances of poor Neme himself (most of whom had been unaware of his great secret), and made him famous for a few days to the great delight of everyone except Cayo, who despite having been his promoter, harboured a certain envy of his assistant's sudden rise to fame as The Last Don Tancredo, as the article, from which I will now quote a few paragraphs, was titled: "When Nemesio X.X., better known as Neme to his friends, stripped off his mask of flour in the Plaza de Toros in his home town on the 15th of August 1977, one of the most dangerous practices in the sphere of bullfighting disappeared, perhaps forever. It was widely practised until the end of the Spanish Civil War, when it was prohibited due to the high number of deaths which it produced, except in the *becerradas* (bullfights with calves), and in the *fiestas* of each town [...]. The 'Don Tancredo' was named after its inventor, a Valencian who had emigrated to the Americas and introduced it to our beloved Spain in 1889 (apparently he saw it performed in Havana, by a Mexican nicknamed Ozaribeño). It involves, according to the bullfighting Bible, the Cossío, waiting stoically on a pedestal in the centre of the bull-ring, dressed entirely in white with the hands and face covered in flour, or some other whitening product, and mimicking in terms of pose and grace, the passivity of a statue - given that this technique is based on the experience that bulls do not gore or trample inanimate objects, even if they do charge them..."

Neme, who it seemed had done it to perfection (as he told it, he suffered only a slight tumble with no further ado, and at that, it was brought on by himself towards



provocado por él mismo para divertir al público), vivió a partir de entonces de aquella hazaña, que, si bien no le produjo dinero, sí le sirvió por lo menos para ganarse el respeto de todos sus conocidos, incluido, supongo, el recepcionista del hotel en el que vivía. Incluso, tiempo después de aquello, cuando lo encontré en Madrid, me volvió a hablar del artículo, que guardaba doblado en la cartera como si fuera un recordatorio.

Fue al cabo de varios años, quizá diez, o tal vez más; los mismos, en cualquier caso, que yo llevaba en Madrid después de abandonar mi ciudad de origen tras el cierre del periódico en el que apareció su artículo (un cierre al que, por cierto, contribuyó decisivamente su jefe, el famoso Cayo, al fugarse con el dinero de la publicidad de dos o tres meses y dejar el periódico – y al propio Neme, de paso – más en la bancarrota de lo que ya vivían). Un día, yo salía de la estación del metro de la Gran Vía y me lo encontré de frente. Era Neme con algunos años más, pero con el mismo aspecto: la misma calva redonda, los mismos ojos saltones y quizá hasta el mismo abrigo. Me contó su vida en pocos minutos. Al parecer, en efecto, el desfalco de su jefe, al que nunca volvió a ver (al parecer, huyó de la ciudad sin dejar rastro), le había dejado en la calle (donde ya estaba realmente, sólo que ahora sin ocupación) y, durante algunos años, había sobrevivido gracias a los amigos y a la familia hasta que, desaparecida ésta, se había venido a Madrid a buscarse la vida como tantos, sólo que él ya con cincuenta años. Vendía máquinas de escribir, me dijo, aunque no le iba muy bien por culpa de los ordenadores, que comenzaban ya entonces a sustituir a aquéllas. Le di quinientas pesetas, pero no la dirección (alegué para no dársela una inminente mudanza que no era cierta), y me perdí por la calle de Fuencarral mientras él seguía parado junto a la boca del metro de la Gran Vía estorbando a los que entraban y salían a aquella hora de la mañana. ¿A quién estaría esperando?

A nadie, seguramente. Seguramente llevaba allí varias horas

the end of his performance, more to amuse the audience than anything else), lived off that accomplishment from that point onwards, if not in terms of financial gain, at least in terms of gaining the respect of his friends and acquaintances (including, I suppose, the receptionist at the hotel where he lived). What's more, when I met him in Madrid some time afterwards, he spoke again of the article, which he kept folded in his wallet, as one does with a reminder.

It was many years later, perhaps ten or maybe more; at any rate, the same number of years that I had spent in Madrid, after leaving my home town when the newspaper in which the article was published closed down (a closure in which, by the way, his boss the famous Cayo had played a decisive role when he took off from the newspaper with two or three months of the advertising money, leaving it – and coincidentally Neme as well – in even more dire bankruptcy than before). One day I found myself face to face with him, as I was coming out of the Gran Vía *metro* station. He had a few more years under his belt, but in every other way, it was the same Neme: the same round bald-spot, the same bulging eyes, and perhaps even the same coat. He updated me on his life in a matter of minutes: it would seem that the embezzlement of the advertising funds by his boss, whom he never again set eyes upon (apparently he had left the city without a trace), had left Neme in the street, where he essentially had been anyway, only now he had no job. For several years he had survived thanks to friends and family until, once they were gone, he had come like so many others to Madrid to make a life for himself, only he was already in his fifties. He said he made a living selling typewriters, but struggled to compete with computers, which were already beginning to take their place. I gave him 500 *pesetas*, but withheld my address (giving the excuse that I was soon to be moving house, so as to avoid giving it to him), and bid him farewell, disappearing down Fuencarral Street as he remained standing at the entrance to the metro station, blocking the passage of the patrons who came and went at that time of the morning. I wondered who he was waiting for.

Most likely no one. No doubt, he had been there for several hours watching

viendo pasar a la gente, como, por otra parte, venía haciendo toda su vida.

La siguiente noticia que tuve de él fue ya la de su fallecimiento. Apareció un verano, ya dije, en el periódico provincial y, aunque los datos eran escasos, en seguida intuí que se trataba de él. E imaginé lo que, mientras tanto, habría sido su vida: un continuo deslizarse hacia la nada, hacia la pasividad total, hacia la estatua que siempre fue, no sólo ante las vaquillas que lidiaban en las fiestas en la plaza de toros de su pueblo, sino en la vida, a la que siempre se enfrentó a pecho descubierto, tan grande fue su valor, sin saber que la vida no se detiene como los toros y pasa por encima de quien se atreve a enfrentarse a ella.

the world go by, as in some respects, he had done his whole life.

The next news I had of him was that of his passing. It appeared one summer, as I said, in the provincial newspaper, and although there were few details, I knew at once that it was him. And I imagined what had become of him in the meantime: his continuous slide towards nothingness, towards complete passivity, towards becoming the statue that he had always been, not only when facing the bulls that raged in the Plaza de Toros in his home town, but in his life in general. He always confronted it head-on, such was his bravery, not knowing that life, unlike the bulls, doesn't stop for anyone, but charges right on over those who dare to stand before it.

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