

Translating Code-Switching Prose in *Killer Crónicas*
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January 2020

ABSTRACT

In *Killer Crónicas*, Mexican-American author Susana Chávez-Silverman explores the relationship between languages and how they shape our identities. She does so by straightforwardly writing about her autobiographical experiences as a multicultural woman who has been raised speaking two languages, and who has lived in several countries—as well as by the remarkable mixing of Spanish and English in her writing. Ensuing a background that considers *Killer Crónicas*'s most important themes, this paper establishes how a translation of the work in Dutch can be constructed.

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INTRODUCTION

Killer Crónicas (2004) is an epistolary work, written by Susana Chávez-Silverman, a Mexican-American author who grew up bilingually in California, Spain and Mexico (Stavans). The novel takes the form of non-fictional e-mails to friends and family members, which include an extensive, ongoing use of code-switching from Spanish into English. In an interview, Chávez-Silverman herself calls this writing style “code-switching prose poetry” (Spyra 200). According to Ania Spyra, Chávez-Silverman chose this form because “she needs to feel that she is talking to a particular person while writing” (200). Spyra tells how this creates a personal writing dimension, one that enables Chávez-Silverman to express herself liberally (200-201). In a podcast, the author tells how, when she started writing in this code-switching style, people told her she would have to choose between English and Spanish, which she refused, because “this is my language” (Stavans et al. 22:53-23:12), and “the language that is most homely to me” (21:40-44), her “authentic voice” that she will not translate (30:28-33).

In this thesis, I discuss the various aspects that come into translating *Killer Crónicas* into Dutch.¹ In order to do so, it is necessary to identify the major challenges encountered. Firstly, it is important to understand the text and what it attempts to convey to the reader. It is important to determine the possible audiences, as the reader’s identity may affect the way in

¹ In 2018, Safa Gün wrote a Master’s Thesis about the translation problems encountered in *Killer Crónicas*. Gün’s focus lies explicitly on the phenomenon of Spanglish. The present thesis, however, looks at the novel’s translation problems from a more general angle. Furthermore, for the translation part, the sections Gün studied will be disregarded, in order to create a fresh viewpoint.

which he/she will interpret it. Furthermore, this thesis analyses the work's primary themes of language and identity. Based upon this theoretical background, a translation-oriented text analysis, according to Christiane Nord's model, will be constructed. This will be the foundation for a translated section of *Killer Crónicas*.

Chapter 1

AUTHOR, FORM AND AUDIENCE

1.1 *Killer Crónicas*: Author and Form

Killer Crónicas is Susana Chávez-Silverman's debut, and stays true to its subtitle *Bilingual Memories*. It is best described as a collection of memories in prose form, coming together as a disjointed jumble of thoughts, resulting in an even more tangled whole due to the persistent manner in which the author combines English and Spanish. In each letter, Chávez-Silverman takes a recollection of a person, time, or place, and describes it while considering the impact it has had on the choices she has made, how it has shaped her worldview, and most importantly, on the person she has become. These extensive trains of thought come together into a series of personal, candid, and rather philosophical letters—or *crónicas* [chronicles].

Because of her multicultural background—not only as a daughter of Mexican immigrant parents raised in the U.S., but also because of the variety of places she has inhabited throughout her life—language and culture play a large part in the work. This manifests itself most evidently through the ongoing use of code-switching. *Killer Crónicas* cannot simply be deemed English, Spanish, English with a hint of Spanish, or vice versa; it is a close-knit combination of the two languages. The author will write a phrase in English, one in Spanish, switch halfway through a sentence, or add a single word. She writes, for example: “Anyway, ¿qué remedio? Here I was, pero it’s not like you can look a gift cabasho en la boca, right?” (8). Additionally, this section demonstrates another way in which Chávez-Silverman displays her multiculturalism: the word *caballo*, ‘horse’, is written phonetically according to the Argentinian pronunciation, where the “ll” usually is pronounced as “sh”: *cabasho*. Other instances include the references to certain culture-specific elements,

such as social norms, dishes, and landscapes, and direct references to places, such as South Africa or Madrid.

It is difficult to categorise *Killer Crónicas* as a specific genre. The work combines the epistolary and the autobiographical mode, while inevitably stressing the function of language and culture—both directly through the author’s use of code-switching, as well as in its contents. However, the narrative itself, being a series of memories and thoughts, gives reason to consider it a memoir. It could also be considered a work of poetry, in which code-switching is used as a poetic device.

1.2 Audience

According to Lourdes Torres’s categories of code-switching, Chávez-Silverman adopts “radical bilingualism” in *Killer Crónicas*. This means that Spanish is incorporated in a text in such a way that it is only accessible for readers who speak both Spanish and English (Torres). Additionally, Roshawnda A. Derrick claims that *Killer Crónicas* maintains neither English nor Spanish as a base language (366). She illustrates this by comparing the work to Cisneros’s *Caramelo* (2000) and Díaz’ *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), two other well-known American English-Spanish code-switching novels. Both authors use English as their base language, where Spanish words and phrases are inserted into the English text. Upon studying two of *Killer Crónicas*’ chapters, however, Derrick found that over half of its utterances are typical hybrid sentences that are unintelligible to both English and Spanish monolinguals (366). Therefore, she suggests the term “language fusion”, which she deems more suitable as it distinguishes Chávez-Silverman’s code-switching from the code-switching of authors such as Cisneros and Díaz (367).

From the letters in *Killer Crónicas*, it becomes clear that Chávez-Silverman has travelled a great deal. Interestingly, she illustrates this, besides simply stating she has lived in a certain place, by incorporating the language varieties. For example, in a letter written from Buenos Aires, she writes “ehtuve” and “arihta” instead of “estuve” and “arista”, she spells “ya” as “sha” (28), and she maintains this textual characteristic throughout the entire work. In the preface, “Glossaria Crónica” [“Glossary Cronicle”], where she explains her language choice and use, Chávez-Silverman says she does so in order to “[transmit the phonetic reality of the] northern suburbs [of] Buenos Aires” (xix). Additionally, she writes, “[In] Buenos Aires I often wrote [with the] ‘th’ for the final Castilian ‘d’”, as she spent part of her youth in Madrid (xix), where she picked up this feature, which is part of the Iberian Spanish variety.

More fundamentally, however, in order to understand the references Chávez-Silverman makes, a reader should have a similar cultural background. Therefore, it can be said that a Mexican-American reader will understand the work to the largest extent. This, however, does not automatically mean Mexican-American readers are the work’s intended audience: after all, it is an epistolary work that rotates around the author’s personal experiences and perceptions. Moreover, it could be the case that, in fact, through this work, the author is trying to raise awareness of the experiences of a Mexican-American among readers with a non-bilingual identity. Moreover, Torres mentions that “[n]ot surprisingly, academic presses, rather than mainstream ones, have published these texts” (86). “Not surprisingly”, because Chávez-Silverman’s language choice drastically limits the number of readers, and therefore diminishes the demand of the work. In an interview, Chávez-Silverman even states that she rejected several publishers ready to publish her work on the condition she translate it into either Spanish or English (Spyra 204). Clearly, there were no commercial reasons for Chavéz-Silverman to publish her work.

Lastly, Torres also suggests that authors such as Chávez-Silverman “have created a space for the publication of books that challenge linguistic norms for texts published in the US” (87). In other words, Chávez-Silverman has contributed to the process of overthrowing the norm of monolingual texts.

Chapter 2

LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

2.1 Language Is Identity

2.1.1 What is Spanglish?

A more common term for code-switching between English and Spanish is Spanglish. However, Spanglish is a term heavily charged, for several reasons. Derrick notes that the *Dictionary of the Real Academia Española* uses the word “deformándolos” to define it: Spanglish “deforms” both Spanish and English (40). Often, Spanglish is deemed a language for speakers too ignorant or lazy to distinguish between English or Spanish, and is seen as a threat to monolingual Spanish, and therefore to the collective Hispanic identity (Rothman and Rell 516). A study by Morales has found that Spanish is used in Latino communities as “a form of resistance against the dominant culture” (Derrick 20). On the other hand, Spanglish is used to bond emotionally, as found by Mahootian (Derrick 18), and more fundamentally, a device that displays a bicultural identity, which is generally perceived as positive (Otheguy and Stern 86).

Spanish is generally considered a spoken language. This does not, however, mean it is restricted to speech: sung and written code-switching has become rather popular over the past few decades (Davies and Bentahila, Gardner-Chloros and Weston). This has resulted into an ongoing discussion on literary code-switching.

2.1.2 Functions of Literary Code-Switching Spanglish

Many theories exist about the reasons behind literary code-switching. Sometimes, it is used simply as a literary device, to emphasise or add humor, Jonsson explains (Derrick 5). The

most evident reasons, however, are to express a hybrid identity to challenge power relations. Arteaga describes these functions as “an identity search through the two cultures and [...] some type of resistance towards monolingual Anglo culture” (Derrick 25). In other words, through their specific language use, authors attempt to define their identity. Furthermore, by not restricting themselves to one language, they reject the norm: the monolingual text. Interestingly, Lipski notes that within the bilingual authors’ communities, the norm is, in fact, code-switching (192). Holly Martin explains this rejection of the monolingual norm as follows: “[B]y including their ethnic languages, writers lay claim to the languages of their communities and resist the dominance of English by proposing that these languages can accompany English in the creation of works of US literature” (404). Literary code-switching is, according to John Lipski, not an unconscious effect (191). By joining two languages, the author creates a specific literary effect that expresses something (s)he cannot express by means of a single language (191-92). In this way, the author’s language choice becomes an independent function of the text: this function is never stated literally or figuratively.

2.1.3 A Hybrid Identity

Code-switching as a way to express a hybrid identity has been studied by many scholars, such as Derrick, Rothman and Rell, Torribio, and Myers-Scotton. Language is widely seen as directly linked to identity, because in order to be part of a certain ethnic group, speaking its language is deemed a heavy-weighting determinant. Even the term Spanglish reflects this: its name is a mix between two language names, and therefore (at least) two cultures (Rothman and Rell 526).

Gumperz claims it is the tension between the two language dimensions that establishes a speaker’s identity, too (Woolard 76-77). He argues that the bilingual speaker splits up his

languages into two social groups; a we-group for the minority language and a they-group for the larger community (76-77). This language division automatically results in a cultural division, which is considerably enhanced by the common division between the domestic setting in which Spanish is used and the professional setting for English.

Expressing a hybrid identity is also frequently described as a way to navigate two languages and cultures, and is said to function “as a way to navigate bilingual and bicultural realities” by Arteaga (Derrick 25). Derrick describes it as “reaffirming a bilingual identity and defending a bilingual code” (25). For example, a study by Myers-Scotton has found code-switching in a bilingual setting gives bilingual speakers the opportunity to display their hybrid identities (Derrick 19). According to Martin, it is also a way to enhance the validity of their heritage language (404).

Nieves Pascual Soler goes as far as calling this phenomenon an “an expression of identity conflict” (as qtd. in Rothman and Rell 527). She argues that Mexican-Americans “are searching for a linguistic model that accurately represents and expresses their experiences” (Rothman and Rell 527). Code-switching functions accurately, because it includes the sameness of the speaker community, because of the mixing, but also because of the, as she describes it herself, “sense of rootlessness under which transnationals and their kin must survive” (as qtd. in Rothman and Rell 528). Derrick agrees with this, saying that code-switching is what unites immigrants who have moved to the US (42).

2.2. Language in *Killer Crónicas*

2.2.1 Chávez-Silverman’s Identity in *Killer Crónicas*

For Derrick, the fact that Chávez-Silverman in *Killer Crónicas* adopts a *permanent* switching makes it the expression of a hybrid identity (39). The fact that the text has no base language

serves for her as a proof that Chávez-Silverman's code-switching is not anchored in or pulled slightly more in the direction of one language, but is wholly independent.

Ania Spyra claims that Chávez-Silverman's identity consists of many languages and many language varieties, explaining how the author has adopted these during her youth, through trips and via friends speaking varieties other than hers. She says that Chávez-Silverman "proves that one speaker can use all accents at the same time, thus rejecting the one nation, one language (or even language variety) prescription, while simultaneously esteeming the particularity of each cultural tradition" (Spyra 203). Therefore, in a certain way, Chávez-Silverman's identity is broader than the prevailing explanation of the coexistence of two languages in one atmosphere. In fact, the hybridity of her identity might not even be rooted within language, but in language variety, or perhaps even in cultural backgrounds. *Killer Crónicas*, might be the "linguistic model that accurately represents and expresses [her] experiences", to come back to Soler's description (Rothman and Rell 527).

2.2.2 Spanglish: An Oral Language Only?

Keller claims that there are significant differences between written and spoken code-switching (Dumitrescu 357). He points out that literary code-switching aims to be aesthetically pleasing, while oral code-switching tries to "mirror society" (as qtd. in Dumitrescu 357). Furthermore, Davies and Bentahila remark that whereas spoken code-switching occurs spontaneously, literary code-switching is developed consciously and will normally be edited (3). John Lipski agrees with this (162), adding that writing is a conscious process, and therefore "does not represent the uncontaminated output of the internal linguistic mechanisms of the speaker" (162).

However, in “Glossaria Crónica”, Chávez-Silverman describes her code-switching as an “oral [...] orthography” (xix). From this can be concluded that the code-switching in *Killer Crónicas* represents the author’s *speech*, and accordingly, is not a carefully constructed poetic device. On top of that, Gardner-Chloros and Weston argue that the use of code-switching in fact “heightens the orality of a text” (186). Additionally, an oral version of the work is available on the website of University of Wisconsin Press, where the author herself is recorded reading her work. Furthermore, as an epistolary novel consisting of original e-mails, it can be assumed *Killer Crónicas* will not have been as heavily edited as a fictional novel. Therefore, while the content and style of the work can be considered literary, oral and written code-switching have merged into one in *Killer Crónicas*.

2.2.3 Home, Location and Globalisation

An important theme and motif in *Killer Crónicas* is living in different places, and consequently, about making different places home. Chávez-Silverman exhibits this by adopting the linguistic habits of these places. Instead of actively trying to ban local accents from her vocabulary, she embraces them. “[S]he refuses to translate her multilingual life into just one language and one accent” (199), states Ania Spyra, who for this reason has coined *Killer Crónicas* “cosmopoetics”: “Spanish becomes a borderless yet localised language: a cosmopolitan vernacular” (202). She notes that it is difficult to map the work’s location, and that therefore Chávez-Silverman’s national identification cannot be pinpointed (199). According to Spyra’s vision, *Killer Crónicas* is a ground-breaking work of world literature: she argues that it might represent “the reality of a globalised planet” (199).

Furthermore, Spyra argues that the use of e-mail is a feature that should not be disregarded. It enables Chávez-Silverman to connect and unite the places she has inhabited.

Spyra notes that even though each letter is anchored to a time and place the author states at the top of each letter, this does not restrict her to stay in this specified area (200). In fact, most letters are memories or ponderings of the past, taking place in different countries than where the letter in question was written from, often jumping back and forth in time and space. An e-mail that is sent and received within a matter of seconds, Spyra explains, is an excellent example of how communities can stay connected across large physical distances (200). She links this back to the author's use of language, through globalisation, by stating that Chávez-Silverman is introducing a more actual view of literature; a globalised type of literature where "purity of language" only does not simply equal community anymore (203).

Chávez-Silverman confirms this. In an interview with Daniel Olivas, she states that her novels are

"strongly about emotional connection: using a language that is in (at least) two places at once. I use Spanish and English together—as well as their in-between!—to connect with memories, with a sense of wonder and yearning, and with a bunch of important people in my life. Also, to connect with other spaces, in a geographical and temporal sense." (Olivas)

However, she also says she intends to establish a connection with the reader through her use of language. As Spyra argues, many people are used to living in-between languages these days, and she even claims that this will make people have a receiving attitude towards a "global audience" (205). Gardner-Chloros and Westos even claim that in fact, monolingualism actually is a "global exception" these days (184). This makes code-switching and Chávez-Silverman's use of language even more actual and relevant. This language, Chávez-Silverman describes in Stavans's podcast, is "the language that is most homely to [her]" (Stavans et al. 21:40-44).

Chapter 3

TRANSLATION-ORIENTED TEXT ANALYSIS

3.1 Christiane Nord's Model

It is widely acknowledged that, in order to gain an optimal translation of a text, it is crucial to understand the source text (Nord 145). The most effective way to guarantee an optimal comprehension is by means of text analysis (145). Nord's model for text analysis is built upon the Lasswell formula, which considers the following question: "Who says what in which channel to whom with what effect?" (145). Her own model is, therefore, a more extensive version of this question: "Who writes with what purpose to whom in which channel where why a text with what effect? About what does he (not) say what, in what order, using what nonverbal elements, with what kind of words, in what kind of sentences, using what tone with what effect?"² Because the questions that appear in this formula have been extensively analysed and discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, they will not be looked into once again. If necessary, there will be referred to one of the previous chapters.

An author Chávez-Silverman has often been compared to is Sandra Cisneros, specifically with reference to her novel *Caramelo*. Though *Caramelo* has not been translated in Dutch, Cisneros's novel *The House on Mango Street* (1991) has been published by De Geus as *Het huis in de Mangostraat* (2007). De Geus has published a significant amount of novels that concern foreign cultures and contain non-Dutch words, such as Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* (2010), translated as *Ochtend in Jenin* (2012), and In Koli Jean Bofane's *Mathématiques congolaises* (2008), or in Dutch: *Congolese wiskunde* (2013). Additionally, De Geus's collection contains several original Dutch novels that include foreign words, such

² All translations from Dutch are mine, unless indicated otherwise.

as Kader Abdolah's *Het huis van de moskee* (2007) and Alfred Birney's *De tolk van Java* (2016). On its website, De Geus is described as "representing literature that matters," and "distinguishes itself by profoundness and social engagement" (Singel Uitgevers B.V.). The website specifically stresses the importance of diversity, "giving voices to those who aren't heard elsewhere," and mentions that "literary quality" is essential. Based on its published novels and this emphasised open-minded identity, De Geus will be a suitable publisher for a Dutch translation of *Killer Crónicas*.

Considering De Geus's target audience, a reader of the Dutch version of *Killer Crónicas* will be interested in qualitative literary works, preferably ones that reflect on social matters from a refreshing, intriguing angle, while stressing their important social value. (S)he will likely be intelligent and interested in foreign culture. Based on their personal choice to read *Killer Crónicas*, the reader likely will have a specific interest in and an affinity for languages. There is a large chance (s)he has—a least—little previous knowledge of Spanish. A large group of readers, therefore, might feel challenged by the text, wanting to test their ability to understand a text partly written in a language that they only speak limitedly. Lastly, there will likely be a—considerably smaller—group of readers who have been raised bilingually and are looking for a familiar aspect in the use of code-switching: those who have been raised in a Dutch-Spanish setting, and those who have been raised in a setting of Dutch and any other foreign language than Spanish.

Nord recognises four different types of translation problems: pragmatic, cultural, linguistic, and text-specific (147). They can be solved by means of the so called top-down analysis, that tackles each of these elements. From this analysis, a translation strategy is formulated. These four types of translation problems will each be discussed separately in the next section.

3.2 Translation Problems

3.2.1 Pragmatic Problems

Pragmatic problems arise from differences between communicative situations of the source text and the target text (Nord 147). An audience that speaks both Spanish and Dutch will be smaller than an audience that speaks Spanish and English, globally speaking. This is not only because there are fewer speakers of Dutch than speakers of English, but also because English speakers are more likely to speak Spanish as a second language than Dutch speakers. This is partly due to the large group of Latin-American immigrants who live in the U.S., but also because Spanish is the most popular foreign language to learn in the U.S., whereas in the Netherlands, its popularity is preceded by English, German, and French. In order to make *Killer Crónicas* attractive for a Dutch reader with limited to no knowledge of Spanish, it is necessary to make it more accessible.

3.2.2 Cultural Problems

Cultural problems arise from differences in norms and conventions between the source culture and the target culture (147). Although *Killer Crónicas* includes numerous quite specific cultural references, it is impossible to talk about one source culture or one communicative source situation. References to many more cultures than the American, Mexican, and Mexican-American culture are made, such as on page 10: “[...] even having to wash clothes en esa [in this] tiny, casi [almost] breaking down lavadora and dry them en ese [in this] bizarre gas closet en la cocina [in the kitchen], que yo pensé [that I think] all Argentines must have [...].” It is likely that the majority of the audience will not be able to fully grasp these references.

3.2.3 Linguistic Problems

Linguistic problems are specific for a language pair and arise from differences in structures between source language and the target language (Nord 147). A difference between Dutch and English is that the use of the English progressive tense, specifically in subclauses, is less common for Dutch. In the case of *Killer Crónicas*, not only differences between structures of English and Dutch have to be considered, but also structures of Spanish, as Dutch and Spanish sentences will fuse in a translation. A linguistic problem arising from this will be further considered in Chapter 3.2.4, as it is essentially a consequence of a text-specific problem.

Lastly, differences between Dutch and English punctuation conventions have to be taken in consideration. Examples of these differences are the Dutch use of commas between verbs, and the less common use of the dash in Dutch. This is, as well, a problem that becomes apparent in Chávez-Silverman's writing style, and therefore will be regarded in a text-specific light in the following chapter.

3.2.4 Text-Specific Problems

Text-specific problems apply to individual texts, and their solution cannot be used for other translation exercises (Nord 147). This is the most evident type of problem for *Killer Crónicas*, predominantly because of the author's use of code-switching. As mentioned in the previous section, a fundamental difficulty is rooted in the structure of sentences, predominantly applying to English sentences that start or end in a Spanish phrase. This might make it impossible to change the word order of the English part, which drastically limits the translator's options. In this way, a translation of a phrase might reflect the English content

perfectly, but does not connect to the Spanish part seamlessly, and therefore cannot be used. This largely has to do with the English and Spanish structure of a verb followed by a noun in a subclause, whereas in Dutch, a verb is preceded by a noun in a subclause.

Another text-specific problem arises from the author's writing style, which takes the form of an unstructured train of thought, at times giving the entirety of the work the feel of an interior monologue. This is enhanced by the noticeably informal register, though this is often interrupted by complex words such as academic terms, or by formal and poetic phrases. For example, the author frequently uses interjections, including ones that are generally spoken exclamations, such as "ay", "ey" and "oye", but also ones that consist of more than one word, such as "Te juro" ["I swear"] and "I mean". Sentences at times are short, lacking direct information: "Sí, eso" (12), "As if!" (24), and "Whatever" (65), and sentences are often started with "And" and "Y" ["And"]. Furthermore, Chávez-Silverman uses brackets and dashes, which are often used to add relevant information and afterthoughts. Sometimes she capitalises a word to emphasise it, and uses more than one question or exclamation mark. However, she also creates sentences and fragments that have a poetic feel to them, such as vivid and abstract descriptions of places and objects. Lastly, some of her sentences are exceptionally long, running to over fifty words. The following example illustrates the writing style, register, and sentence length the author often adopts in *Killer Crónicas*.

"I felt no center, suddenly, like on that Boardwalk ride cuando el [when the] centrifugal force smashes and holds you flat against the metal walls y de repente [and suddenly] the floor falls out, cual si flotara nomás [as though it's just floating] among those dim market stalls, aware only of the overpowering, lyrical, death-pronóstico scent: spikenard, le dicen en la Biblia [it's called in the Bible]." (Chávez-Silverman 47)

In conclusion, although it is important to maintain these aspects in a Dutch translation, this should not diminish the readability of the target text.

3.3 Translation Strategy

In order to structure the translation strategy that will be adopted upon translating *Killer Crónicas* in Dutch, this section has been split up in two major goals that are recognised: expanding the accessibility of the target text, and optimising the readability of the target text.

3.3.1 Accessibility

One of the largest problems arising is the limited accessibility of the text for a Dutch audience. The increase of this accessibility will be achieved by means of four solutions.

In the first place, footnotes will be added to clarify certain Spanish words or word groups. This is a strategy that publishing house De Geus often applies to other novels that include foreign words, such as the novels mentioned in Chapter 3.1. In the case of *Killer Crónicas*, this is a subjective strategy: not every single Spanish word can be translated, due to lack of space and due to the fact that the use of two languages is what makes the work exceptional. Because of this, four guiding questions will have to be answered in order to establish whether a footnote is necessary:

1. Is the word key to a specific sentence, fragment or to the entire novel?
2. Will the reader be able to correctly guess the word's meaning from its context?
3. Does the word resemble a Dutch word that is a correct translation, or a Dutch word that has a similar meaning?
4. Does the word resemble an English word that will be common enough for a Dutch reader to recognise?

A footnote will be considered by means of the answers to these questions. For instance, the words “echarle la culpa” (Chávez-Silverman 43) will be accompanied by a footnote containing a Dutch translation: “de schuld geven.”

Secondly, the phonetic writing of certain Spanish varieties, such as the Argentinian “sh” for an “ll”, will be italicised in order to prevent confusion among the audience. In spite of the “Glossaria Crónica” in which the author explains her language and these linguistic details, a reader with a limited knowledge of Spanish might not recognise these instances and will therefore struggle with them. “La cashe” (Chávez-Silverman 3) will in this way become “La *cashe*”.

A problem that arises from the use of code-switching are ‘false friends’: words that are spelt equally in two languages, but have a different meaning. Some of these words will not result in confusion as they are not common enough to appear frequently, such as “pan” (Dutch: “pan”; Spanish: “bread”). Others, however, are in fact words that are very common and might give certain phrases double meanings. The most important instances are “en” (Dutch: “and”; Spanish: “in” or “on”) and “de” (Dutch: “the”; Spanish: “of” or “from”). These words have to be considered separately in order to establish whether or not they will problemise the target text. In most instances, these words are embedded either in a Spanish or in a Dutch clause, and therefore can easily be identified as a Dutch or Spanish word. A solution for the exceptional cases is to translate the words into either Dutch or Spanish. For instance, an ambiguous “de” might become an “el” or a “van.” Likewise, an ambiguous “en” might become an “y” or an “uit.”

Lastly, *Killer Crónicas* is preceded by a foreword by Paul Allatson, a scholar specialised in Latino culture and literature, in which he and praises Chávez-Silverman’s work, while explaining its importance, specifically within Latino society (ix-xiii). This

foreword shall be followed by a note from the translator, who will briefly explain the use of italicisation and footnotes.

3.3.2 Readability

Other problems that have been highlighted in Chapter 3.2 interfere with the readability of the target text. Often, these problems are a consequence of differences between Dutch and English conventions, and can be solved by means of a naturalising translation strategy, meaning that the foreign culture will be adapted to the target culture (Grit 190). This applies to punctuation, such as the Dutch use of commas between verbs, which is not used in either English or Spanish, and the source text's use of the dash, which is a symbol less commonly used in Dutch. Furthermore, sentences that lose their readability once translated in Dutch due to their length will be split up, following the naturalising approach. Likewise, the use of formal and informal words, which is important to Chávez-Silverman's writing style in the work, will be naturalised.

The grammatical elements that affect the readability of the source text stem from differences in sentence structures between English and Dutch, such as the use of the English progressive tense, specifically in subclauses, which is less common for Dutch. Additionally, at times, problems arise from the differences in sentence structures between Dutch and Spanish. This means that sentences may have to be restructured in order to achieve an optimal Dutch translation, following the naturalising approach as well. If there is any reason not follow this strategy, this will be clarified in a footnote.

Although most of the problems with regard to the readability of the target text can be solved by means of this naturalising strategy, this is not the case for the variety of cultural references. A consequence of these references is that there will be a recognisable aspect to the

work for individual readers. Furthermore, as stated in Chapter 2.1.2 and more specifically in Chapter 2.2.3, the adoption of the variety of different cultures is in fact an aspect that increases *Killer Crónicas*'s value: the alienation the reader might feel as a result of the cultural references it is as much part of the work as the use of code-switching is. Hence, naturalising this element would detract from the work's essence. Because of this, cultural problems will always be translated in an exoticising manner: adapting the target culture to the foreign elements (Grit 190). Exceptions to this strategy will be explained by means of a footnote.

Chapter 4

TRANSLATION

Instances of the word “en” that were considered ambiguous or confusing, as explained in Chapter 3.3.1, have been translated and highlighted in yellow. Instances of “de” have been translated and highlighted in pink. Words or phrases that needed clarification by means of a Dutch translation have been highlighted green. The translation is followed by a glossary that contains the original phrases and words and their translation in Dutch.

I

Mini playera-terugkeer crónica

18 agosto 2001

Los Angeles, Califaztlán

Voor Nancy “Paquita” Rankin

’s Avonds laat, in een schemerige straat in Venice Beach,³ después de ver una slechte, artistieke, MTV-achtige, Britse film, *Sexy Beast* (hint: dat was ’ie niet), con Ben Kingsley, in Santa Monica. La *cashe* propvol met kleine gerenoveerde bungalows in Spaanse stijl,

³ Mijn andere optie, ‘Een wandeling door een schemerige straat’, zonder werkwoord, verandert de aard van de zin: ‘wandeling’ suggereert ontspanning en een activiteit, terwijl het waarschijnlijk gaat over het praktisch overbruggen van een bioscoop naar huis.

ienieminië, echt, pero tan y TAN duur. Eigenaars zijn filmcrewleden,⁴ surfers, acteurs met kleine rolletjes, docenten, professionals. De repente, un **olor que no había sentido** en más de un año stijgt op en la zeebries en slaat me, nee, AAIT me, vol **in** la cara: salie. Ach, o, het is het (Noord-) Amerikaanse zuidwesten – ah, salvia – tan groen en subtiel en schitterend!

Met mijn ogen schrijnend van de tranen huiver ik. Zucht. Ik zou voorbereid moeten zijn para estas overweldigende vlagen van emotie. Siempre he sido así. Je bent te gevoelig, me decían de niña, zo beïnvloedbaar, me dicen siempre. **In** Buenos Aires supe que aunque tengo mi zonneteken **in** Aries, está en la Casa 4, bestuurd door de Kreeft, dat softe, timide, schaaldier.⁵ Y tengo, por si eso fuera poco, a Mercurio **in** piscis en la Casa tres, y eso me (lo) explica, in principe. Het betekent dat je een zesde zintuig hebt, schatje, me dijo esa vidente **in** New Orleans. Y Beatriz, la astróloga que me hizo la primera carta natal me dijo: tus **sueños** tienen **el poder de pronosticar**. Ik had de twee astrólogos echt niet nodig: Beatriz en Belgrano (precies naast de plek van de watertank, zoals in *Altered States*, te lo juro!) y Victor Richini (antaño amigo de Alejandra Pizarnik!) **in** la Recoleta, die mijn tweede geboortehoroscoop

⁴ Filmcrewleden: er bestaat geen Nederlands woord voor een ‘movie grip’, en ik was zelf niet bekend met de term. Als ik dit als uitgangspunt neem, kan ik dus niet het brontekstwoord cursief maken en behouden. Een zoektocht leverde op dat er vrijwel geen Nederlandse vertalingen bestaan voor soortgelijke termen. Daarom heb ik voor het algemenere woord ‘filmcrewleden’ gekozen.

⁵ Een kreeft is niet ‘sidewinding’, in tegenstelling tot een Cancer/krab. Ik kon geen fysieke eigenschap van een kreeft bedenken die de lading dekte, aangezien ‘sidewinding’ hier de connotatie van ‘iets op een eigenzinnige manier uitvoeren’ bevat. ‘Crustacean’ is ‘schaaldier’ in het Nederlands, en dat woord heb ik al gebruikt, en ‘kreeftachtige’ is geen optie omdat het woord ‘kreeft’ hierin herhaald wordt.

(handgetekend, zo mooi) heeft gemaakt **in** la Argentina. Pero ze bevestigden cosas que he venido intuendo mijn hele leven. **El olfato** me *sheva* y me trae por la vida *dehde* siempre – de plankgasimpact ervan, onmiddellijk en nostalgisch a la vez.

Un poquito después del salie llega otro olor **dulzón**, casi empalagoso: Chileense 's nachts bloeiende jasmijn. Oh, esos broze, onschuldige bleekroze bloemen que de día no huelen a nada ahora overweldigen me, casi jaqueca-sterk.

Y luego, nog later, esa *woesj... woesj*. Son las **olas**. De ellas no podré – nunca – vivir **lejos** mucho tiempo.

Me vuelvo loca, op een bepaalde manier, **in** el 'INTERIOR'! Zelfs als ik bij een rivier ben, die enorme, khakikleurige⁶ Río de la Plata, of mijn geliefde Mississippi, of de ijzige Charles. Y válgame Dios als het een heel hoge en droge plek is, sin río siquiera. Tipo *Madrith*. Of Pretoria. El interior. Me vuelvo un poco knettergek. Pero zelfs een rivier is gewoon niet hetzelfde als dit *woesj... woesj* van mijn Stille Oceaan en die marine vochtigheid y mis **cabeshos rizados** y mijn kontspieren die pulseren en steken tijdens deze snelle, langbenige Venice-nachtwandeling del auto a la casa de mi entrañable amiga Paquita, naar het (niet-slapende) tienerslaapfeestje en daarna, een van Paqs detective-pocketboeken, gewoon om mezelf in een versufte, eenzame slaap te sussen. Ik ben terug. Hier. Thuis. Zonder jullie allemaal. Poetas. Amigas. Poetas/amigas. Wat is het verschil?

Ay, waar ben ik?

⁶ Letterlijk vertaald wordt 'camel-coloured' 'kameelkleurig', maar waar 'camel-colored' een gangbaar Engels woord is, is 'kameelkleurig' dat in het Nederlands niet. 'Khakikleurig' is de kleur die het meest overeenkomt met 'camel-colored'.

VI

Ouwe koeien uit de sloot-crónica

22 agosto 2001

Los Angeles

Para JHS, in memoriam

Papa, was je echt zó gemeen?

Mi **hermanita** Laura – y mi abuela Eunice Chávez también overigens, op wie jij gek was, die van jou hielden – herinneren jou zich *bien* gemeen. Bien sarcastisch. Con todo el mundo. Tegen mam. Laura se acuerda de un ruzie die papa en mam hadden over politiek (misschien de doodstraf? No, era over het legaliseren van **la mota**! Ja, dat was het), donde no se hablaron por días. Of, mama ging twee dagen lang naar een motel. Pero quizás este es el mismo broodjeapverhaal de **cuando ella nos llevó** a un hotel **aan** la playa en Santa Mónica en alles wat we een tijd lang aten was hotdogs? (Les dicen “panchos” en Buenos Aires, ongelooft, toch?)

Pero nee. Ik weet zeker dat die ruzie over **celos** ging, y que se estaban elkaar achterna aan het zitten om het bed in ons oude huis, in the Valley, op Rubio Ave. Of misschien was het dat ene daarvoor, **in** Van Nuys? Pero hoe dan ook, ze zwaaiden sneu ijzeren hangers naar elkaar, y mami nam mij en mijn andere zus, Sarita, a un hotel vlakbij Pacific Ocean Park. Laura **ni siquiera había nacido**. Ja, dat was het. Zeker weten.

Alhoewel?

Papa, wat ik ook probeer, no te puedo **conjurar** gemeen. O, ik weet dat je meedogenloos was con tus enemigos. En je had er een héle hoop. Que anti-semitas er tevoorschijn komen. Que mensen die niet gestemd hadden hoe jij **in** los comités **van de** UCLA wilde. Esa vez que **no te quisieron dar**, al principio, un ascenso naar Super Professor Trede 8 *overscale* of hoe ze dat ook doen in het UC-systeem, en jij kreeg een woedeaanval. Een gigantische.

Enemigos ideológicos. Intelectuales. Académicos. In je wetenschappelijke artikelen, in cryptische voetnootvendetta's, en in Brieven aan de Redacteur-columns streed jij je strijd, esas épicas batallas letradas que **te carcomieron**, finalmente, por dentro. **Esa rabia** que te tragabas por lo general, liet je slechts zo nu en dan als donkere wolken boven jouw lucht van Robert Goulet, Harry Belafonte, en Lucho Gatica samepakken, vlam vatten en exploderen, **in** un perfect getimede en toegeslingerde sarcastische kleinering. Tegen mami. En tegen ons? Así dicen. Zelfs tegen mij?

Yo te recuerdo como un enorme **huraño**. **Ya sé**, papa. Dat is een oxymoron. En dat was jij ook. Een koud-warme Weegschaal. Un dulce melancólico **in** tu studeerkamer en casa, je hoofd heen-en-weer schuddend **in** ese gesto milenario, casi rabínico, over een of andere historische ongerechtigheid, alguna tragedia die je zo fervent op je eigen huid voelde **cual si te la hubieran perpetrado** – tatuado – **a ti**.

Papa, te reconozco en los versos **van** 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction' **van** Wallace Stevens, que recité met volle en lage stem en droge ogen, **in** tu Yahrzeit. Maar een paar dagen na mijn verjaardag. El 25 de marzo, 1990 fue. Eén jaar en twee dagen erna.

Hij moest kiezen. Maar het was geen keuze

Tussen dingen uitsluiten. Het was geen keuze

Tussen, maar uit. Hij koos om de dingen in te sluiten

**Die in elkaar zijn ingesloten, het volledige,
Het gecompliceerde, de vergaarde harmonie**

Ese día te sentí – riep ik je op – en esos reconfortantes, sencillos, casi parcos versos. Y dije, entonces, ‘Zodoende was mijn vader in staat om op evenwichtige wijze⁷ een jongen uit de Bronx en een gerenommeerde wetenschapper uit het gouden tijdperk te zijn, iemand die zeer geboeid⁸ was door Sefardische liederen, Cervantes en Lope de Vega, maar ook door The Beatles.’ Concluí citando – y diciendo **querer emular** – otra de tus frases favoritas: **‘[La vida] es el arte de no renunciar a nada.’**

Weet nou niet meer wie dat gezegd heeft. Lope? Cervantes? Denk het. Pero iets in mijn heeft nooit een slok willen nemen uit de beker que te nutrió a ti. Ik wilde niet – maar voelde me fataal aangetrokken tot – los clásicos. Mijn God, si no hubiera sido por Pizarnik, **habría hecho, casi seguro**, una tesis sobre Cortázar. O Quevedito. Weet je nog, papa? Ik herinner het

⁷ Ik vond ‘evenwichtig’ de meest treffende vertaling, en omdat het woordgebruik van de zin relatief formeel is, misstond ‘op evenwichtige wijze’ niet.

⁸ ‘Gepassioneerd’ wordt eigenlijk alleen als bijwoord of bijvoeglijk naamwoord gebruikt; ‘gepassioneerd door’ is onidiomatisch. Een ander probleem is dat ‘impassioned by’ een voltooid deelwoord is, een werkwoordsvorm die in deze zin slecht te behouden is in het Nederlands. Ik heb gekozen voor ‘geboeid’, maar omdat het tekort schoot in ‘passion’, heb er ‘zeer geboeid’ van gemaakt.

me⁹ nu weer, duidelijk, jij en ik, escribiendo tot diep in de nacht,¹⁰ juntos, **in** tu casa en Santa Cruz, inspirados encendidos, uren en uren aan het denken over die ene regel: **‘polvo será, mas polvo enamorado.’**

Wat een onzin, pap. Hoe kan ik hebben geschreven, hoe kan ik die dag hebben gezegd, tan zelfvoldaan, tan literair, que jij allebei kon zijn – allemaal – in harmonie? Cuando OB-vio (pronunciación porteñísima) het proberen, los keuzes al die tijd aan je ingewanden knaagden? Desde tus 26 años, desde **la úlcera que te pegaste** cuando tu mamá, La Monte (alias Oma Edna Maslow) quiso prevenir que **te casaras** con mami y **te mudaras** a Califas vanuit New York en een of andere dokter of zielenknijper, qué sé *sho*, **te aconsejó**, nou jochie, het wordt je moeder of je vrouw: kies maar. En gekozen heb je zeker.¹¹ Maar tegen welke prijs?

⁹ In de brontekst is er sprake van herhaling van het woord ‘remember’. ‘Remember, Daddy?’ zou vertaald moeten worden als ‘Herinner je het je nog, papa?’ om de herhaling te behouden. Dit is omdat er niet voor ‘Ik weet het nog’ bij de tweede ‘remember’ kan worden gekozen, aangezien die luidt: ‘I remember, now, clearly’. De ‘Herinner je’-vertaling neemt de leesbaarheid van de zin weg, en klinkt bovendien erg houterig, terwijl het origineel juist kort maar krachtig is, en een simpele kindertaal suggereert. Daarom heb ik gekozen voor ‘Weet je nog, papa?’

¹⁰ ‘tot diep in de nacht’ geeft de nadruk die ‘late late into the night’ ook geeft, maar klinkt als natuurlijker Nederlands dan ‘laat laat in de nacht’.

¹¹ ‘You did, you did’ legt nadruk op ‘pick’. Alternatieve opties zonder herhaling van het woord ‘kiezen’ waren: tweemaal ‘dat heb je gedaan’ of tweemaal ‘dat deed je’, die allebei te veel klinken als een letterlijke vertaling van ‘you did’. Omdat ‘En gekozen heb je’ langer is dan de brontekst, heb ik die zin niet herhaald, maar het woord ‘zeker’ toegevoegd als een alternatief voor de extra nadruk.

Papa. Net als el Caballero de la Triste Figura, **el** studie naar degene die jou beroemd heeft gemaakt, eras solitario zelfs **in** toda tu solidaridad humana. En realidad, un fantasioso. Incluso algo mesiánico. Hoe hard ik het ook probeer, no puedo recordarte gemeen. Ik probeer je me voor de geest te halen als streng, en in plaats daarvan hoor ik je snuiven van het lachen sobre los ridículos, amateuristische ‘professionele’ muzikanten – esos Bremer Stadsmuzikanten: todos vals, mal vestidos y hasta verwickeld in slecht verborgen, onsmakelijke op-het-randje-van-incestueze relatie, la madre-hijo-team achter de piano, te acuerdas? – **op** ese onvergetelijke Sofia Noel-concert en Madrid en 1979. Ja, fuimos con Selma. **In** el Centro Cultural de la Villa, en Colón. O te veo **casi llorando**, terwijl je zachtjes met James Taylors eerste album meezong: ‘*Suzanne, the plans you made, put an end to you...*’ **Intento** recordar tu legendario humor, en in plaats daarvan te veo hoe je me, op 12-jarige leeftijd, in de drive-in mee liet glippen para ver een herhaling van *Midnight Cowboy*¹⁰.

Wat is het toch met geheugen? ¿**Qué es lo que hace que** Laura **te recuerde** tan (auto) exigente, tan distante? Y que yo, en cambio, vea una wirwar **van** imágenes solapadas en el tiempo y el espacio, pero en casi todas – zelfs als dat spiertje op de zijkant van je kaak trilt – casi siempre eindig je bezwijkend van het lachen? Qué es lo que me permite (me obliga) **creer** fervientemente que esa crueldad tuya een zelfverdedigingsmechanisme was?

El modo de **resguardarse**, de escudarse de un hombre, un Joodse arbeidersjongen uit de Bronx die opgroeide tot een beroemde en knappe en charmante en bereisde en elegante (en die me zelfs heeft leren walsen) pero die nooit heen groeide over la inseguridad de haber sido klein, miope, arm, hijo de una inmigrante rusa judía y de un inmigrante rumano judío met weinig (en later zonder) werk, y encima divorciados. Ese Yossie, de kleinste jongen **in** la

Bronx ganga, degene die ze als mensajero gebruikten omdat hij de nietigste¹² was, el que **corría** más rápido omdat 'ie¹² de bangste was. Ese jongen zat altijd in jou, pap. Yossie. Je bent nooit over hem heen gegroeid. Je hebt hem nooit ingehaald del todo.

El hizo que praktisch op je sterfbed me insistieras, me recordaras: 'Sukie, je weet het, onthoud: tengo meer dan 300 punten op mijn cv.' Dat weet ik, papa. Y ese kennis heeft me doorboord, verwond, naar de klote geholpen, jarenlang, kromgetrokken¹³ zelfs, diría. Heeft me vervloekt con la misma jodida inseguridad **y** de behoefte aan bevestiging van anderen die jij had meegenomen in je graf. Yo he aprendido a **echarle la culpa** al Saturnus in het twaalfde huis, **el** Zon in Ram, **in** la cuarta. Pero jij bent het, papa. Ik kijk altijd over mijn schouder pa' ver dónde estás. Kijk je naar me? Bevalt het je wat je ziet? Nou? O, waarom wilde ik ooit schrijver worden? Pero zoveel van jou in mij, qué más podría haber hecho? Wat zou ik ooit anders kunnen doen?

Is het iets Joods, esta nooit-tevredenheid? Een oudste kind-ding? ¿Sólo un **modo de ser** melancólico, compartido entrañablemente?

Nunca sabré, en ik kan het je niet vragen. Pero ik vraag het je toch, bijna elke dag. Ay papa, por qué esta mi urgencia de ti? Quién me definiría como ziek, a veces (me) pregunto, por hablarte, buscarte todos los días zonder uitzondering? Wanneer laat je me alleen? ¿Por qué **me dejaste**?

¹² Om herhaling van het woord 'kleinste' te voorkomen, heb ik voor 'nietigste' gekozen.

¹³ Het alternatief voor 'kromgetrokken' was 'vervormd', wat niet gehéél een negatieve betekenis heeft, omdat het ook kan duiden op 'het aannemen van een andere vorm', wat ook neutraal of positief kan zijn, terwijl 'kromgetrokken' de connotatie heeft van iets dat in een significant verslechterde staat verkeert.

Glossary/Verklarende woordenlijst

un olor que no había sentido = geur die ik niet had gevoeld

sueños = dromen

el poder de pronosticar = de macht om te voorspellen

el olfato = de reuk

un poquito después = even later

dulzón = zoet

olas = golven

lejos = ver weg

cabellos rizados = krullende haren

hermanita = zusje

abuela = oma

la mota = de cannabis

cuando ella nos llevó = toen ze ons meenam

celos = jaloezie

ni siquiera había nacido = was nog niet geboren

conjurar = oproepen

no te quisieron dar = ze wilden je niet geven

te carcomieron = aan je knaagden

esa rabia = die woede

te tragabas = slokte jou op

huraño = timide persoon

ya sé = ik weet het al

cual si te la hubieran perpetrado a ti = alsof het jóú was begaan

querer emular = willen evenaren

‘[la vida] es el arte de no renunciar a nada’ = ‘het leven is de kunst van het nooit opgeven’

habría hecho = ik zou hebben gedaan

casi seguro = hoogstwaarschijnlijk

‘polvo será, mas polvo enamorado’ = ‘tot stof zal hij zijn, stof dat verliefd is’

la úlcera que te pegaste = het gat dat in je is geslagen

te casaras = je trouwde

te mudaras = je verhuisde

te aconsejó = adviseerde je

casi llorando = bijna huilend

intento = ik probeer

¿Qué es lo que hace que...? = Wat is het toch dat...?

te recuerde = herinnert jou zich

creer = geloven

resguardarse = schuilen

corría = rende

echarle la culpa = de schuld geven

modo de ser = manier van leven

nunca sabré = ik zal het nooit weten

me dejaste = me achterlaten

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Though the translation of any novel proves to be a work of analysing, considering, and compromising, *Killer Crónicas* has proven itself to be a challenging case. This is caused by a number of facts that are interconnected, and therefore, deeply rooted within the work.

First of all, there are several ambiguities that make it difficult to compose a reliable translation-oriented text analysis. The work's genre is unclear, as well as its audience, as well as its purpose, resulting into an unfocused overview of the source text. Furthermore, the themes of language and identity that are dealt with in the work are relatively delicate, as they are related to an ethnic minority and to the struggle of searching for one's place in society. In addition to this, the work is autobiographical, which is even enhanced by the personal and often emotional stories and thoughts the author shares. Lastly, the use of code-switching results into several translation problems, which are mostly rooted in the grammatical differences in structures of English, Spanish, and Dutch. These become most evident upon producing a Dutch translation of the English part.

Despite these difficulties faced, a suitable translation strategy will help at producing an accurate translation of *Killer Crónicas*. Upon establishing a commission by publishing house De Geus, it is possible to construct a reasonable target audience, which leads to certain adjustments necessary to enhance the accessibility and readability of the target text. Such are the addition of a glossary that accompanies the target text; changes to rule out false friends that will lead to confusion; the italicisation of phonetically spelt words; and the addition of an explanatory foreword. Due to the high quantity of references to a large variety of different cultures, it is impossible to speak of one single source culture. In order to maintain this valuable aspect of the work, this cultural problem is to be translated in an exoticising manner.

The linguistic translation problem of differences between Dutch and English structures, that leads to a decrease in readability, can be avoided by means of adopting a naturalising translation approach. A more complex problem is the text-specific problem that arises from the author's use of code-switching, where Spanish and English phrases are merged. In this case, as for the aforementioned linguistic problem, the readability of the target text should be considered more important than the grammatical structure of the source text. Therefore, a naturalising translation strategy will be adopted in order to nullify this problem, as well. Likewise, Dutch sentences that lack readability due to their length will be naturalised, as well as English punctuation conventions that differ from Dutch ones.

Using this translation strategy, many major translation problems for a Dutch translation of *Killer Crónicas* can be avoided. Additionally, upon being asked whether her writing could be translated, Chávez-Silverman answered, "I mean—nothing is impossible" (Stavans et al. 39:38-39:47).

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SOURCE TEXT

I

Mini Playera Re-Entry Crónica

18 agosto 2001

Los Angeles, Califaztlán

For Nancy “Paquita” Rankin

Walking down a dimly lit Venice Beach street late at night, después de ver una bad, artsy, MTV-like, Brit movie, “Sexy Beast” (hint—it wasn’t), con Ben Kingsley, en Santa Monica. La cashe crowded con little Spanish-style refurbished bungalows, teeny tiny, really, pero tan y TAN expensive. Owned by movie grips, bit part actors, surfers, teachers, professionals. De repente, un olor que no había sentido en más de un año rises en la coastal breeze and hits me, no, it STROKES me, full en la cara: sage. Ah, oh, it’s the (North) American Southwest—ah, salvia— tan green and subtle and gorgeous!

Eyes smart with tears and I wince. Sigh. I should be prepared para estas overpowering waves of emotion. Siempre he sido así. You’re too sensitive, me decían de niña, so impresionable, me dicen siempre. En Buenos Aires supe que aunque tengo mi sun sign en Aries, está en la Casa 4, ruled by Cancer, that mushyhearted, timid, sidewinding crustacean. Y tengo, por si eso fuera poco, a Mercurio en piscis en la Casa tres, y eso me (lo) explica, basically. It means you have E.S.P. baby, me dijo esa vidente en New Orleans. Y Beatriz, la astróloga que me hizo la primera carta natal me dijo: tus sueños tienen el poder de pronosticar. I really didn’t need the two astrólogos—Beatriz en Belgrano (right next to the

flotation tank place, como en “Altered States,” te lo juro!) y Victor Richini (antaño amigo de Alejandra Pizarnik!) en la Recoleta, who made my *second* natal chart (hand-drawn, so beautiful) en la Argentina. Pero they confirmed cosas que he venido intuyendo all my life. El olfato me sheva y me trae por la vida dehde siempre— the full-throttle charge of it, immediate and nostalgic a la vez.

Un poquito después del sage llega otro olor dulzón, casi empalagoso: Chilean night-blooming jasmine. Oh, esos delicate, innocuous pale-pink blooms que de día no huelen a nada ahora overpower me, casi jaqueca-strong.

Y luego, still later, esa *shoosh . . . shoosh* . Son las olas. De ellas no podré—nunca—vivir lejos mucho tiempo.

Me vuelvo loca, in a way, en el “INTERIOR”! Even if I’m by a river, that huge, camel-colored Río de la Plata, or my beloved Mississippi, or the icy Charles. Y válgame Dios if it’s a really high and dry place, sin río siquiera. Tipo Madrith. Or Pretoria. El interior. Me vuelvo un poco stir crazy. Pero even a big river is just not the same as this *shoosh . . . shoosh* of my Pacific and that marine damp y mis cabeshos rizados and my butt muscles pulsing, stinging on this fast, long-legged Venice night walk del auto a la casa de mi entrañable amiga Paquita, to the (non-sleeping) teen slumber party and later, one of Paq’s paperback murder mystery novels, just to lull myself into a dulled, lonely sleep. I’m back. Here. Home. Without you all. Poetas. Amigas. Poetas/amigas. What’s the difference?

Ay, where am I?

VI

Memory/Lame Crónica

22 agosto 2001

Los Angeles

Para JHS, in memoriam

Daddy, were you really *that* mean?

Mi hermanita Laura—y mi abuela Eunice Chávez también for that matter, whom you adored, who loved you—te recuerdan *bien* mean. Bien sarcastic. Con todo el mundo. To mom. Laura se acuerda de un fight daddy and mom got into over politics (maybe the death penalty? No, era over legalizing la mota! Yeah, that was it), donde no se hablaron por días. Or, Mom went to a motel for two days. Pero quizás este es el mismo (sub)urban myth de cuando ella nos llevó a un hotel en la playa en Santa Mónica and all we ate for a while was hot dogs? (Les dicen “panchos” en Buenos Aires, can you believe that?)

Pero no. I’m sure that fight was about celos, y que se estaban chasing around the bed in our old house, in the Valley, on Rubio Ave. Or maybe it was the one before that, en Van Nuys? Pero anyway, they were swinging wire hangers pathetically at each other, y mami took me and my other sister, Sarita, a un hotel near Pacific Ocean Park. Laura ni siquiera había nacido. Yeah, that’s it. I’m sure.

Or am I?

Daddy, try as I might, no te puedo conjurar mean. Oh, I know you were ruthless con tus enemigos. And you had tons of them. Que anti-semitas coming out of the woodwork. Que people who didn’t vote your way en los comités en UCLA. Esa vez que no te quisieron dar, al

principio, un ascenso to Super Professor Step 8 overscale or whatever they do in the UC system, and you got into a rage. Bigtime.

Enemigos ideológicos. Intelectuales. Académicos. In your journal articles, in obscure footnote vendettas, and in Letters to the Editor columns you waged your battles, esas épicas batallas letradas que te carcomieron, finalmente, por dentro. Esa rabia que te tragabas por lo general, only every so often letting just a flicker of it cloud your Robert Goulet, Harry Belafonte, Lucho Gatica surface, ignite and explode, en un perfectly timed and hurled sarcastic put down. To mami. And to us? Así dicen. Even to me?

Yo te recuerdo como un expansive hurraño. Ya sé, Daddy. That's an oxymoron. And so you were. Un cool-warm Libra. Un dulce melancólico en tu study en casa, shaking your head back and forth en ese gesto milenario, casi rabínico, about some historical injustice, alguna tragedia you felt as keenly on your own skin cual si te la hubieran perpetrado—tatuado—a ti.

Daddy, te reconozco en los versos de “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction,” de Wallace Stevens, que recité full- and low-voiced, dry-eyed, en tu *yahrzeit*. Just days after my birthday. El 25 de marzo, 1990 fue. One year and two days after.

He had to choose. But it was not a choice
Between excluding things. It was not a choice
Between, but of. He chose to include the things
That in each other are included, the whole,
The complicate, the amassing harmony.

Ese día te sentí—I conjured you—en esos reconfortantes, sencillos, casi parcos versos. Y dije, entonces, “Thus, my father was able to be, harmoniously, a boy from the Bronx and a

renowned Golden Age scholar, someone impassioned by Sephardic ballads, Cervantes and Lope de Vega, but also by Peter Sellers or The Beatles.” Concluí citando—y diciendo querer emular—otra de tus frases favoritas: “[La vida] es el arte de no renunciar a nada.”

Don’t remember now who said that. Lope? Cervantes? Think so. Pero part of me never wanted to sip from the same cup que te nutrió a ti. I didn’t want—yet I was fatally drawn to— los clásicos. Hell, si no hubiera sido por Pizarnik, habría hecho, casi seguro, una tesis sobre Cortázar. O Quevedo. Remember, Daddy? I remember, now, clearly, you and I, escribiendo late late into the night, juntos, en tu casa en Santa Cruz, inspirados encendidos, hours and hours thinking about that one line: “polvo será, mas polvo enamorado.”

What bullshit, Dad. How could I have written, how could I have said that day, tan smugly, tan literarily, que you were able to be both—all—harmoniously? Cuando OB-vio (pronunciación porteñísima) the trying, los choices gnawed at your insides all along? Desde tus 26 años, desde la úlcera que te pegaste cuando tu mamá, La Monte (aka Grandma Edna Maslow) quiso prevenir que te casaras con mami y te mudaras a Califas from New York and some doctor or shrink, qué sé sho, te aconsejó, well sonny boy, it’s your mother or your wife: you pick. And you did, you did. But at what price?

Daddy. Just like el Caballero de la Triste Figura, the study of whom made you famous, eras solitario even en toda tu solidaridad humana. En realidad, un fantasioso. Incluso algo mesiánico. Try as I might, no puedo recordarte mean. I try to conjure you stern, and instead I hear you snort with laughter sobre los ridículos, amateurish “professional” musicians—esos Musicians of Bremetown: todos off-key, mal vestidos y hasta inhabiting an ill-concealed, unsavory bordering-on-incestuous relationship, la madre-hijo team on the piano, te acuerdas?—en ese unforgettable Sofía Noel concert en Madrid en 1979. Yeah, fuimos con Selma. En el Centro Cultural de la Villa, en Colón. O te veo casi llorando, crooning along

with James Taylor's first album: "Suzanne, the plans you made, put an end to you. . . ."

Intento recordar tu legendario temper, and instead te veo sneaking me, at age 12, into the drive-in para ver "Midnight Cowboy" on a re-run.

What is it about memory? ¿Qué es lo que hace que Laura te recuerde tan (auto) exigente, tan distante? Y que yo, en cambio, vea una jumble de imágenes solapadas en el tiempo y el espacio, pero en casi todas—even when that little muscle at the side of your jaw is twitching—casi siempre you end up collapsing into a snort of laughter? Qué es lo que me permite (me obliga) creer fervientemente que esa crueldad tuya was a self-defense mechanism?

El modo de resguardarse, de escudarse de un hombre, de un working-class, Bronx Jew-boy who grew up to be famous and handsome and suave and world-traveled and elegant (and who even taught me to waltz) pero who never outgrew la inseguridad de haber sido short, miope, poor, hijo de una inmigrante rusa judía y de un inmigrante rumano judío under(and later directamente) *unemployed*, y encima divorciados. Ese Yossie, the smallest boy en la Bronx ganga, the one they used as mensajero because he was the littlest, el que corría más rápido cuz he was the scarest. Ese boy was always inside you, Dad. Yossie. You never outgrew him. You never outran him del todo.

El hizo que practically on your deathbed me insistieras, me recordaras, "Sukie, you know, remember: tengo over 300 items on my C.V." I know you did, Daddy. Y ese knowledge pierced me, wounded me, fucked me up for years, even warped me, diría. Cursed me con la misma jodida inseguridad and need for approval from others you took with you to your grave. Yo he aprendido a echarle la culpa al Saturn in the twelfth House, Sun in Aries, en la cuarta. Pero it's you , Daddy. I'm always looking over my shoulder pa' ver dónde estás. Are you watching me? Do you like what you see? Do you? Ah, why did I ever have to

become a writer? Pero so much of you in me, qué más podría haber hecho? What else could I ever do?

Is it a Jewish thing, esta never-satisfaction? An oldest child thing? ¿Sólo un modo de ser melancólico, compartido entrañablemente?

Nunca sabré, and I can't ask you. Pero I do ask you, almost every day. Ay Daddy, por qué esta mi urgencia de ti? Quién me definiría como sick, a veces (me) pregunto, por hablarte, buscarte todos los días without fail? When will you leave me alone? ¿Por qué me dejaste?