

**Joaquín Ortega**

### **Translating from memory**

#### **Adaptation**

Translating is something we do every day. It has nothing to do with language issues. We want to use the right word with the right people at the right time. We are like Paleolithic hunters: we "search" to "use" a set of words that build meaningful sentences and communicate first, even if they are not heard well. Putting them in writing is necessary, but we do not speak to the universe; it is essential to be able to speak to an ideal listener. At least in our mind, we choose subjects, verbs, and predicates as a magician builds his act by pulling utensils out of his hat.

#### **Intuitive storytelling vs. storytelling**

Even when moving from platforms not originally envisioned in its initial conception, storytelling is part of our DNA as chroniclers of the human and the divine. The entire human race shares storytelling, and we all narrate, edit, produce, post-produce, and revisit our daily lives. Before going to sleep, many of us review what we have done during the day, and, either because we talk about it at dinner with someone we love or because we are going to make a new to-do list for the next day, we are directors of our own movie – the movie of our life or our documentary or our video clip.

Ego and self-deception are lifelong friends; we cannot break their close friendship. But we always attempt against the story, whether verbal or written. Not only because we kill it too quickly or overextend it. When the story passes through memory, it inevitably suffers alterations in its components. The materials or ingredients change, and we unconsciously add details that leave us in a better position: we create long emotional tensions or give thoughtful answers after the incident, all to change our status from losers to winners. In short, taking something from one language and taking it to another is a kind of abduction, no matter if the abduction was consensual.

#### **A space for symbols**

If we look for the direct meaning of words, there might be fewer components for discussion because, between the dictionary and the synonyms, there is at least a certain camaraderie. But what is left of symbols in dreams, in the personal meanings of artists, or the cultural perspectives of specific magical, mythical, or imaginary figures? The waking mind cannot fully utilize the language of dreams and symbols. There always remain remnants that are impossible to use or recompose. Let us think of some examples: the dragon has a negative appreciation in Europe, while it is a good omen in Asia. The snake is good in the Hebrew dream world, but in popular culture, any appearance is a deception or premonition of hidden enemies.

When writing, and mainly when translating, we must look for those common elements of a culture or language that, without being too similar to the source, allow us to understand the depth and meaning of that which we intend to convert into material for new eyes. The tension between meaning and signifier tells us that we are prisoners of war of our struggles; it reminds us that we read what we want but also what we can. Most of the time, we see almost always halfway. The best example is the skull and bones.

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Imagine what it can tell us depending on our existential perspective or our intellectual autobiography. It can represent whatever our age, life, readings, or beliefs say.

### **Questions and possibilities**

There are many more questions than answers, but without a doubt, we must think about the context, the historical time, the psycho-bio-social framework, and the sources, being a kind of profiler of the author to understand his motivations, interests, and silent dialogues with literature, images, the world, his culture, and even his work, if the author is building it. So, I dare to make five modest suggestions for translating into images with a certain level of dynamic economy:

1. Respect the original spirit, try to see the soul, and even find out to whom the author wanted to speak. This is an intuitive and subjective act, but if done technically and honestly, its results are impressive, as much for diarist and news as for pop or long-form literature.
2. Make the most significant effort to understand the sense of humor, although that does not mean that the desired crossover can be explained or achieved.
3. Distrust all texts. They want to deceive us, they are like demagogues who tell us what we want to hear, but it turns out that their compulsive lying overcomes them. Therefore, we must ask and cross-examine them as if we were in a TV police episode until they contradict themselves and confess their crimes.
4. Set realistic goals with texts. Not 300 pages a day. However, at least ten paragraphs a day, depending on the length of the text.
5. In conclusion, following an old Freudian idea, we must remember, repeat, and work. Translating a genre we are not passionate about is killing us a little. Working tired is the worst enemy of those who have turned words into a profession.

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