

I
WILL TAKE IT
TO
THE GRAVE

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*Laura Alcoba, Mario Bellatin, John M. Coetzee,
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MALBA

I WILL TAKE IT TO THE GRAVE

Since 2001, through the Department of Literature, the Malba organizes activities aimed at the study and promotion of contemporary literature, as well as at recovering books and writers from the past by means of different actions, and in collaboration with publishers, independent agents, libraries and universities.

This collection of stories arises from an invitation to writers from different generations made within the framework of the exhibition entitled *Unerasable Memories: a Historical view on the Videobrasil Collection*, which opened on June 25, 2015. The watchword was a simple one: to evoke a historical fact (either a minor or a relevant one) of which they had been main actors.

Regarding length and form, the watchword implied that texts should be longer than a sentence and shorter than a page, and should be published in the language they have been written, together with their translation into Spanish, if applicable. The unavoidable reference has been the American artist and writer Joe Brainard, who published in 1970 *I remember*, a book where he listed memories of his childhood and adulthood. Some years later, the French writer Georges Perec, who was also keen on inventories, established this literary way of remembrance in his book *Je me souviens*, 1978. After him, there were many authors who resorted to this type of autobiography.

The stories in *I will Take it to the Grave* are private memories but also political and social ones. Divided in three volumes, they cover a wide temporal and geographical range, and deal with various subjects, from the Soviet missiles crisis to Evo Morales' rise to the presidency. They are circumscribed neither to one country or one culture nor to a specific period of time; on the contrary, they are varied in relevance and pertinence, as it happens with our own memories.

This is the first of three volumes.

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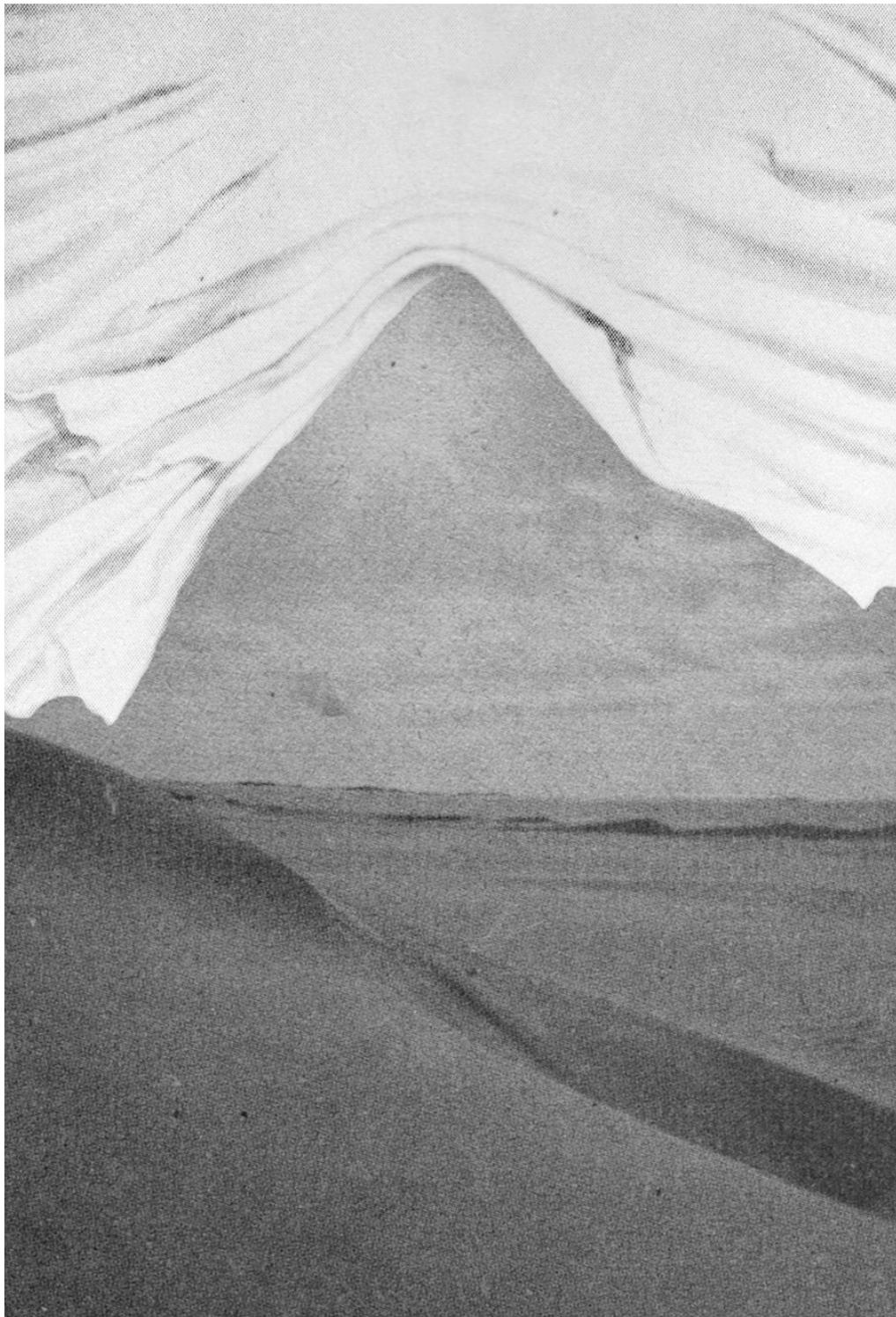
Was born in Tokyo in 1951.

At the age of 12 she moved with her family to New York and studied French literature at Yale University.

When she finished her studies, she settled down again in Japan and devoted herself to writing fiction.

Una novela real is her first novel published in Spanish.

Originally published in Japan in 2002, it was awarded with the Yomiuri Prize, a major Japanese literary award, formerly granted to Kenzaburo Oé and Yukio Mishima.



Japan

To Die in a Country that Barely Knows Itself

For a little Japanese girl born just as the American occupation was ending, nothing was simpler than understanding her country's history. Forget the details. All she had to know was that her country's past was divided into two periods, the bad and the good, or *before* the War and *after* the War. She was told that things had been terrible in her country before the War. Naturally, the War itself had been terrible. And her people too had been terrible—so terrible in fact that they deserved all they got, including the Little Boy in Hiroshima and the Fat Man in Nagasaki which had thankfully put an end to their folly. She was grateful to be born after the War, knowing that the dark days—the unenlightened days—were finally over and that from now on everything could only be more and more wonderful. “Feudal” was the word learned adults used to disparage each and every vestige from their past, and the whole country happily bade farewell to “feudal” this and “feudal” that. A bowl of rice was feudal; it must be substituted by slices of bright white bread which everyone knew made you smarter. Bean cakes were feudal; they must be taken over by fluffy and creamy cakes which everyone knew made you stronger. Tofu-sellers must disappear because you should be eating steaks instead. Futon should be replaced by beds. Kimono should be replaced by dresses and pants. Chinese characters should be replaced by phonetic signs. Maybe in a decade or two, the Japanese people will be just as smart and strong as the Americans.

This August marks the seventieth year after Japan entered this blissful historical stage. Seventy years is a long time. The little girl born after the War is now a woman approaching the winter years of life. Not surprisingly, she, along with some others in her country, is finally beginning to realize that something went terribly amiss as they happily got rid of their past. Yet, alas, all is too late. They are now left with a country that barely knows itself, a country that barely has any history. How sad that this should be the realization and the knowledge she must take to her grave.

SÉRGIO SANT 'ANNA

Was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1941.

He has published more than 18 books and several of his works have been translated in more than 15 countries.

Among the books published in Argentina are *Un crimen delicado* and *El monstruo*. He writes fiction but has also worked

for the theatre and published some poetry.

Five of his books have been adapted to film scripts. *El gorilla*, the last one, directed by José Eduardo Belmonte, was released in Rio de Janeiro and San Pablo theatres in June 2015.

He was granted a scholarship by the Political Sciences Institute, Paris University and took part in the International Writing Program, Iowa University, U.S.A

Um tiro no coração

Mesmo vivendo no Rio de Janeiro, em 1954, meus pais me mantinham interno no Colégio São José, dos irmãos maristas, no bairro de Tijuca, na mesma cidade. O Brasil vivia uma crise quase sem precedentes, depois que um major da aeronáutica foi morto num atentado contra o político Carlos Lacerda, maior inimigo do presidente Getúlio Vargas.

As investigações, coordenadas pela Aeronáutica, chegaram a Gregório Fortunato, guarda-costas de Getúlio. A oposição conspirava para derrubar o presidente e corria pela cidade a notícia de que Getúlio seria levado a depor numa base da Força Aérea, suprema humilhação.

Na madrugada de 24 de agosto, após uma reunião com seus principais colaboradores, em que Getúlio mais ouviu do que falou, ele se recolheu a seu quarto. Lá redigiu uma carta-testamento e, logo depois, ouviu-se um tiro que ecoou por todo o palácio de Catete. Correram ao seu quarto e lá estava Getúlio morto, com um revólver junto ao coração.

Em toda a cidade corriam rumores de que haveria um enfrentamento entre os partidários de Vargas e seus inimigos, todos militares. No colégio marista a excitação era grande, pois os irmãos não puderam esconder dos alunos, por muito tempo, o suicídio do presidente. Também não queriam ficar com os alunos, no caso de uma revolta sangrenta. Então mandaram que cada um telefonasse a seus pais, para virem buscá-lo e levá-lo para casa.

O único telefone era na portaria do colégio. Quando chegou a minha vez, no meio da manhã do dia 24, simplesmente fingi que telefonava e disse ao porteiro que meus pais me autorizaram a sair sozinho. Ele acreditou.

Cruzei as portas do internato, desci sua longa escada e falei ao encarregado do portão de ferro para a rua que estava autorizado a ir embora sozinho. Ele também acreditou.

Saí para a rua e peguei um ônibus para Botafogo, bairro onde morava, bem distante da Tijuca. Durante todo o trajeto vi tanques na rua e soldados entrincheirados. Não senti qualquer medo mas somente uma grande excitação, euforia mesmo, por estar presenciando aqueles acontecimentos. Mas nenhum tiro foi disparado.

Ao chegar em casa, levei uma grande descompostura de meus pais, mas sem que eu escondesse a minha alegria, sabendo que teríamos alguns dias de férias, até as coisas se acalmarem. Minha mãe era lacerdista e fanaticamente anti-getulista, meu pai se mantinha numa atitude de cautela. E eu? Eu não era nada, apenas um garoto que acabara de viver uma aventura.

A Shot to the Heart

Although my parents lived in Rio de Janeiro, in 1954 I attended the Marist Brothers' San José School as a boarder, in Tijuca, a neighborhood in that same city. Brazil was undergoing an unprecedented crisis, after an Air Force major was killed during an assault on the politician Carlos Lacerda, President Getulio Vargas' worst enemy.

The inquiries, coordinated by the Air Force, aimed at Gregorio Fortunato, Getulio's bodyguard. The opposition was plotting to overthrow the President and throughout the city news spread that Getulio would be brought to testify in a military base, a supreme humiliation.

At dawn on August 24th, after a meeting with his closest co-workers where Getulio had to listen rather than speak, he retired into his bedroom. There he wrote down his last will—in a letter—and, soon after that a shot echoed all over the Palacio de Catete. They ran into his room and found Getulio dead, with a gun to his heart.

All over the city rumor had it that there would be a confrontation between Vargas' followers and his enemies, the military as a whole. At the Marist School everybody was excited because the Brothers had not been able to conceal the President's suicide from the pupils for too long. Neither did they want to be with their students if a bloody revolt broke out. Consequently we were ordered to phone our parents and ask them to come and fetch us.

The school's only telephone was at the front desk. When my turn came, midmorning on the 24th, I just pretended to phone and told the superintendent that my parents had allowed me to come home on my own. He believed me.

I passed through the school gates, went down the long stairs and told the porter that my parents had given me permission to leave on my own. He also believed my words.

I went out and took a bus to Botafogo, the neighborhood where I lived, a long way off Tijuca. Along the way, I saw tanks in the streets and entrenched soldiers. I was not scared at all but highly excited, euphoric actually, for having witnessed such events. But not a single shot was fired.

When I got home, my parents gave me a harsh scolding, but I couldn't hide my joy because I knew we would be on holiday until things calmed down. My mother was a Lacerdist and a bigoted anti-Getulist; my father kept a cautious attitude. What about me? I was nothing but a boy who had just had an adventure.

JOHN M. COETZEE

Was born in Cape Town, in 1940 and lives in Adelaide, Australia.
He has published more than 20 volumes, including novels such
as *Elizabeth Costello*, *Childhood*, *Youth*, *Summer* and
Diary of a Bad Year, and books where his linguistic and literary essays
are assembled. In 2003 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for
Literature and in two occasions the Booker Prize, the most
renowned literary award in English language.



I left South Africa in 1962 and moved to London. I wanted nothing more to do with the land of my birth. I wanted to live in a great world city, to be a poet, to experience the agony and the ecstasy that were reputed to be part of a poet's life.

London was cold and unwelcoming. The newspapers wrote of the threat of war. The Americans had sited ballistic missiles in Turkey, pointing at Moscow. Now the Russians were siting their own missiles in Cuba, pointing at Washington. The air was full of charges and countercharges, threats and denunciations.

Britain had its own squadrons of nuclear bombers ready to strike Russia. Therefore if hostilities commenced, the Russians would at once strike Britain. The island would be wiped off the map. I, a youth from the far South who had no part in this Northern bellicosity, would be annihilated along with all the poems I had not yet written.

Led by the ageing philosopher Bertrand Russell, tens of thousands of British people marched in the cause of peace and disarmament. They were mocked in the media. I went to a rally in Trafalgar Square in the heart of London. It was the first rally I had been to in my life: in South Africa all political demonstrations were banned.

The skies over London were grey, the crowd was sombre. We could die tomorrow, we could die today. We would not even hear our death coming. There would be a great flash of light and that would be the end.

SANTIAGO LOZA

Was born in Córdoba in 1971.

He is a playwright, and a movie and theater director.

As a playwright, he has been awarded the Teatro XXI and Trinidad

Guevara prizes, and has been nominated on several occasions

to the Florencio Sánchez, María Guerrero,

and Teatro del Mundo awards. As a movie director, he took part

in several local and international festivals: Cannes,

Locarno, Berlin, San Sebastián, London, among others.

He created the series *Doce casas. Historia de mujeres devotas*,

broadcasted by TV Pública.



Argentina

My first memory is the day when Perón died.

I was at home in the backyard, and was just three years old. I was playing with a cuddly dog-shaped toy, dark brown, a sort of poodle. I had that pet for years... (till I was seven or older, when they took it away or hid it from me, but that's another story). We were inseparable. He is with me in that memory, my first one.

We were sitting in the backyard, it was winter, and I think it was sunny. Probably, it was naptime. The grass was thin and yellow.

My eldest sister, Carolina, was with her best friend, Mariela (who, long years later, married a criminal, got very fat and, in the end, suffered from a devastating cancer).

They were playing French skipping. Curiously enough, they were not at school.

My memory is vague.

There we were the three of us (indeed, the four of us counting my dog) in that winter backyard, in a dry and hopeless province. And my sister tells me Perón is dead. I think it was then that I discovered amazement. I didn't quite understand what death was about (and I doubt whether I understand it now); but Perón's death sounded impossible.

Perón does not die. I told my sister she was a liar, but she and her friend swore blind they were telling the truth. Perón had died that day.

I do not think I was capable of understanding Perón's historical importance then, as I was only three. I doubt I knew who he was. But my first memory is a Peronist one.

It is a mystery why that news had such a first impact. Perón was not loved in my family. He was cursed by my parents and grandparents.

At three, I had the intuition that there were people who would never die. I knew it with Perón, even when I did not know who he was. Perón's death entered my unconscious. My remotest memory. The first amazement. Death's first notice.

LINA MERUANE

Was born in Santiago de Chile in 1970.

She is a narrator and an essayist. Her fiction includes the short-stories collection *Las infantas*, and the novels *Fruta podrida* and *Sangre en el ojo*.

She has written the essay *Viajes virales*, the chronicles *Volverse Palestina*, and the harangue *Contra los hijos*. She has been awarded the Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Prize (Mexico, 2012) and the Anna Seghers Prize (Berlin, 2011), among other awards.



Chile

Mornings

I remember getting into my mother's bed, on a Saturday or maybe Sunday. I remember the flower-patterned sheets under thick blankets made to last. I remember my mother wearing her woolen shawl, the tangle of holes through which the cold that damped the house would come in. (The kerosene stove was turned on only for a couple of hours in the evening, but nobody complained; in those frozen dawns we used to scribble in the hot air words which came out, gauzy, from our lungs). We were made for that fierce cold: for my mother, that woven shawl over her thin arms, which she raised to read an enormous newspaper full of lies, of omissions, was enough. It must have been 1977 or 1978 (the month is another gap in my memory of those days). I remember the shine of the tin tray, the two cups already empty of their tea with milk, bread crumbs on a plate. I remember my father entering the room dressed in military green from head to toe and wearing black combat boots size 45, which I now wonder where he got from in that Chile of starving men. I remember asking why he was wearing that uniform, but not where he had got it from. I remember that the sharp answer by my mother (shielded behind the newspaper) was that he had a training session. My mother swallowed the lacking word but I had already understood. If the war broke out, he would be sent to the front to do the military service he had never done before. Instead, my father had studied medicine. My father was now working at one or two hospitals, doing night shifts twice or three times a week, seeing patients for some hours at a private office, and almost didn't talk to us because such an extra effort would have been too much for him. My father was now getting ready to take care of those wounded in combat. The war, so near. I remember imagining that the front was just two hours from home, on top of the snow-covered mountain chain we shared with Argentina. I don't know why, for years, I believed that the possibility of that dispute was burning in the high peaks, not in the southern islets. Maybe in the mental map of my seven or eight years, summits and islands were one and the same thing called war, called death. I know my father kept on dressing up in military green clothes for long months, and that I never asked again about that confrontation between dictators which never broke out but remained stuck forever in my head.

NICHOLAS JOSE

Although his parents were Australian, he was born in London in 1952 and raised in Adelaide, South Australia. He is a novelist, an essayist and a playwright.

He published the novels *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, *The Custodians* and *Original Face*, the latter published in Buenos Aires in 2014. He is a lecturer at Western Sydney, Bath Spa and Adelaide Universities.



Australia

I will never forget Beijing in June 1989. I had visited Tiananmen Square most days over the previous weeks and months, as the protests grew and the atmosphere changed from uncertain to festive and defiant. At its height, a million citizens gathered there. When martial law was eventually declared and the prospect of violent force became real, to be used against the people, the mood changed from pride to despair. Walking away down the old street by the walls of the Forbidden City, where China's rulers have always lived, I heard a group of girls cry out, 'Our movement is defeated! Our movement is defeated!' Then a ninety-five year old woman, who had lived through China's regime changes, from the Empress Dowager on, commented sharply that in a crisis the government always made the wrong decision.

A few days later, after the army had stained the Square with innocent blood, I was driving a friend of mine through the city at night. He was a thinker who had articulated and inspired the ideals of this democracy movement and now, for his role in trying to stop the tanks from crushing the demonstrators, he was on a black list. We drove to the Australian embassy where he could seek refuge. But at the gate he shook my hand and said his choice was to stay in China. He ran across the road in the darkness to join some Chinese friends. Not long after, a call came from his terrified girlfriend to say that he had been caught. He would be imprisoned and beaten up, and not released for many months. He has continued to act with courage. He is in jail again, still, in China today, even after winning the Nobel Peace Prize for 2010. I will never forget that moment of his choice and decision. I was thirty-six then and not long after noticed my first grey hair.

MARIO BELLATIN

Was born in Mexico in 1960.

He has published several novels and books, among which there are *Salón de belleza* (Beauty Salon), *La escuela del dolor humano de Sechuán*, *Perros heroes*, *La condición de las flores*, and *La biografía ilustrada de Mishima* (*Shiki Nagaoka: A Nose of Fiction, Illustrated Biography of Mishima*). He has also carried forward several projects that seem as powerful as his writing: films such as *Salón de belleza*, and *Bola negra*, and utopian publishing projects, such as *Los cien mil libros de Mario Bellatin* and the Dynamic School for Writers.



México

Payment for Being

As I had never made a film before, the day I had the opportunity of directing a feature I wanted to take things to the limit. The film was on something related to the Dead Women of Juárez and, while we were shooting, we realized that, from the other side of the border wall, American guards were the only witnesses to the atrocities, and were doing nothing to stop them. Willing to check the level of their operational capacity, I suggested that the cameraman jump over the wall and run across foreign land to see what happened. Around a kilometer ahead, I had seen a Border Patrol pickup truck: we would have enough time to jump back over the wall in case they reacted. On the other side, there was the desert. We followed our plan, supposedly recording our daring, and as we were on the run we could hear some gunshots, and the shouts by the rest of the group who had stayed on the Mexican side urging us to come back. Out of the blue, there had appeared another Border Patrol who was not only firing at us but also about to catch us. I wonder how we managed to jump back over the wall, leaving behind the trucks that got together a few seconds later at the very place where we had been. I remember we began making, from the Mexican side, obscene gestures at the vehicles' polarized windshields. When we tried to watch the shots, we realized that, due to our fear, nothing had been recorded. Afterward, I heard of the tortures inflicted on those who are caught doing such thing, apart from the fact that they are added to a list of international terrorists. What had I been looking for when I had such a crazy idea? Was I attempting to legitimate through danger an art that was not my own? A payment which, as we often see, those who do not belong are ready to make? They do not only tolerate the humiliations we are used to witnessing, but also relinquish their future or their life to pass off what is fake as genuine. Even today, every time I go through immigration at any American airport, I am scared that the video with the absurd and grotesque faces I made at an armored pickup truck may appear on the supervisor's screen. Straightaway, I imagine myself inside a dungeon, paying for being guilty of pretending to be what I am not.

LAURA ALCOBA

Was born in La Plata, Argentina, in 1968.

When she was ten she moved with her family to Paris, France.

She became a Bachelor of Arts in Literature at the École Normale Supérieure. At present she works in France as an editor and translator. She has written the following novels: *La casa de los conejos*, *Jardín blanco*, *Los pasajeros del Anna C* and *El azul de las abejas*, all four originally published in French.

Her work has been translated into German, English, Serbian, Italian and Catalan.

Je me souviens

J'étais chez moi, à Paris, en compagnie d'un vieux professeur de littérature. Nous parlions de *La Dorotea* de Lope de Vega – de la place que tient la musique dans le roman, du langage amoureux du corps. Du regard et de tout ce qui se dit souvent entre les lignes, dans les bulles de silence, quand les objets et les gestes prennent le relais des mots. En fait, c'était surtout lui qui parlait – moi, je prenais des notes, consciencieusement, redevenue étudiante face à lui, impressionnée par l'érudition de l'homme qui était devant moi.

Soudain, un ressort a lâché sous le fauteuil où il était assis. Puis un autre, produisant un bruit métallique et sourd à la fois, comme la corde d'une contrebasse qui se serait brisée d'un coup. Je n'ai pas osé l'interrompre – mais tandis qu'il continuait à parler, je voyais des ressorts et des fils de crin végétal tomber en masse sur le sol. Un bout de toile sale et usé s'est alors détaché, emportant avec lui quelques clous rouillés, et le vieux fauteuil a fini par vomir tout son rembourrage. Je me souviens d'avoir vu le célèbre professeur s'enfoncer, comme si sous lui tout se dégonflait. Cette fois, j'ai vraiment failli lui dire quelque chose – mais je suis restée muette, le regard rivé sur le fauteuil qui se vidait. Une fois notre entretien terminé, il s'est levé et je l'ai reconduit jusqu'à l'entrée. Il ne s'est pas rendu compte qu'après son passage le siège était totalement éventré. Je me souviens d'avoir pensé à un vieux dessin animé, *Mister Magoo*, tandis que je refermais la porte derrière le professeur.

Lorsqu'il est parti, j'ai allumé la radio dans la cuisine – j'ai mis France Inter. J'avais beaucoup de mal à comprendre de quoi on parlait. J'ai cru à un moment à une fiction radiophonique. Mais j'ai fini par réaliser que non, que les mots de la radio n'étaient pas ceux d'une fiction – alors j'ai allumé la télé et suis restée immobile, de longues minutes, devant l'écran, près du fauteuil éventré. C'était le 11 septembre 2001.

I remember

I was at home, in Paris, together with an old literature professor. We were discussing Lope de Vega's *La Dorotea*—the importance of music in the novel, the erotic body language. Glances, and all that is often said between the lines, in bubbles of silence, when objects and gestures take the turn of words. He was the one actually talking—I wrote down my notes thoroughly, I became a student once again, deeply impressed by the knowledge of the man sitting in front of me.

All of a sudden, a spring bolted at the bottom of the armchair in which he sat. Then another, making a sound, both metallic and dull, as if the string of a double bass had suddenly broken. I dared not interrupt him—but while he kept on talking, I saw springs and threads of the upholstery filling fall massively onto the floor. A piece of dirty and worn out fabric then peeled off, carrying with it a few rusty nails, and the old armchair finally threw up all its filling. I remember seeing the famous professor sinking down, as if everything went flat under him. This time, I was on the verge of saying something, but I remained silent, staring at the armchair while it emptied itself. Once we had finished our interview, he stood up and I saw him to the door. He had never realized that after his passage, the seat had been gutted. As I closed the door behind the professor, I remember an old cartoon came to my mind: *Mister Magoo*.

After he left, I turned on the kitchen radio, France Inter. It had trouble understanding what they were saying. For a moment I thought it was a radio fiction. But I finally realized it wasn't: the words on the radio were no fiction at all. I then turned on the TV and froze long minutes in front of the screen, next to the gutted armchair. It was September 11, 2001.

GIOVANNA RIVERO

Was born in Santa Cruz de la Sierra.

She is a writer and is now finishing her Ph.D.

in Latin American Literature at the University of Florida, USA.

She writes a fortnight column in the Bolivian newspaper *El Deber*.

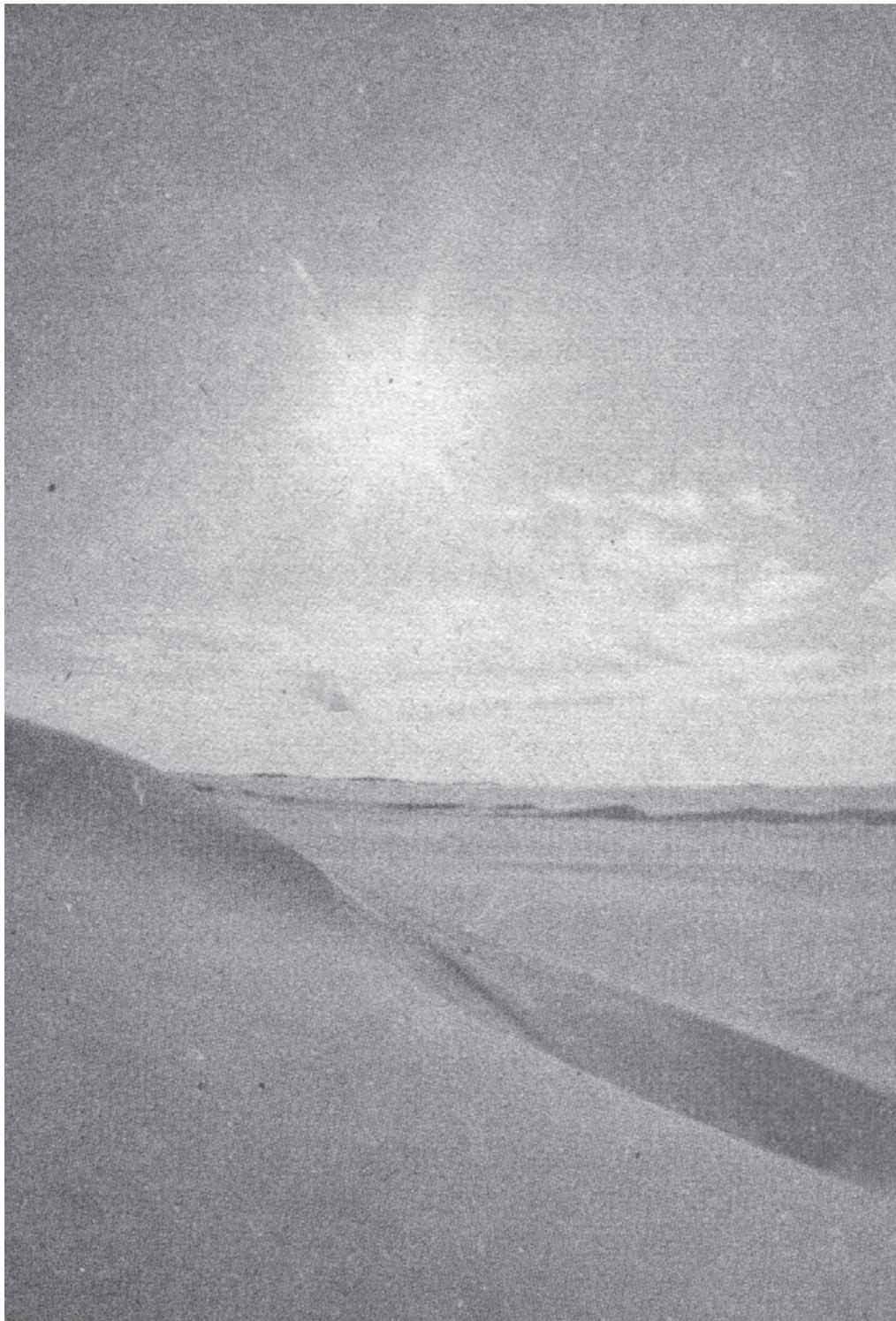
She has written the following books: *Contraluna*, *Sangre Dulce*,

Las camaleonas, *Tukzon*, *historias colaterales* and *Helena 2022:*

La vera crónica de un naufragio en el tiempo.

She took part in the International Writing Program,

Iowa University, U.S.A.



Bolivia

That evening the sky was clear, so clear that if one had insisted on finding mystical pretexts, in that starry landscape one would have found countless signals of what was happening and prefiguring a new advent. It was the evening of December 18, 2005, and at my parents' house we were still recovering from the defeat suffered by my father—suffered by all of us— a year before, at the municipal elections, where dad had run as an independent candidate. I am sure he would have been a great mayor. But History has its own tides and its own karmas. At that moment, the moment of the defeat, we failed to see the mystical or historical or provincial signal: the forms of political hope had changed, they were emerging from ancestral depths and requiring a different materialization, an almost futuristic one.

I remember we had not decorated the Christmas tree because we were not in the mood for celebrating anything. However, I remember I thought that being together there in the backyard, exposed to the elements under such a premonitory sky, waiting for the final results of the democratic election that were being announced on TV by spots that were growing in astonishment, was enough. Happiness was that old and sentimental formula: “Being together through thick and thin”.

I had just divorced and was a daughter again.

Mom brought lemonade as they announced on TV that Evo Morales was the new president with 54% of the votes. I remember the ice cubes clanking against the aluminum pitcher. I do not know if dad was glad—we had not voted for that movement which was growing as an unrestrainable mutation; anyhow, he said: “Gosh, let's see if they learn now”. I looked at my children, who were still very young, and knew they were not the ones who had to learn. History teaches the other way round.

Firecrackers banged in a faraway street. And maybe it was that, or the fact of being so intensely alive while things were changing, what made us happy. I remember the camera was focused on Evo's profile, and I had the idea mom could sell, in her boutique, black T-shirts with his indigenous face printed in stunning colors, like Veronica's bedsheet. I repudiated my pop fantasy and paid attention again to dad's talk; he was awakening from a long pain. “How funny that you are leaving just when this is turning more interesting”, he said, pressing my hand. And, in spite of that incomprehensible happiness, I remember I had a fear of dying, a fear of my father's death, though ironically I also thought that I could die precisely there, and that everything would be alright.

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