

The “Illness”

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Introduction

Deborah K. Symons Roldán is a teacher of Spanish language, a writer and translator. What follows is an English translation of her Spanish short story "La enfermedad".¹ The story developed in the author's imagination during a particularly tedious meeting, giving birth to the character of Armando, who wonders whether he belongs at all or whether there is something "wrong" with him. It is very rare to have an author translate their own work, and this presents a unique opportunity for students of translation to see how an author would translate their own story into a different language.

¹ The original story in Spanish can be found in the University of Arkansas' Literary Magazine "Azahares": https://issuu.com/ua_fort_smith/docs/azahares_2020_final.



Figure 1. The author. © Deborah K. Symons Roldán

"The Illness"

Spain, 1950.

Armando was just a regular chap. He had a regular house, and a regular job. He tried to be happy in his very normal life which gave him everything he needed. And yet, he wasn't at all happy.

And this was because Armando had been ill for many years. Nobody really knew what it was, nor what it was called. Every once in a while, it would attack him and it was, well, quite difficult to live with. Sometimes these attacks would come on while he was in the office, sometimes at the beach on a holiday. They were terrible. The poor chap didn't know how to contain them.

They usually came on all of a sudden. Armando would be at a beach with family and friends and, while everyone else was talking about the most mundane things, like the children, work, the house, paying the bills, or the latest programme on the telly, Armando would start daydreaming. It was as if some dark, senseless desire had infiltrated his blood. He would begin to doodle in the sand with his foot, or grab some sea shells brought in by the tide and start building little houses of different shapes, and making all kinds of drawings in the sand...

He first realized that what he had was some strange illness the day that his friends, and his beloved wife, stared at him in astonishment at

the beach, and said: What's wrong with Armando? What the devil is he doing with his foot?

The following week, he had one of his attacks while he was at the office. Armando had a great job. His office was in a beautiful building. Pristine, really. Beige walls, plexiglass furniture. And very organized.

One afternoon, when he had almost finished everything for the day, one of the unexpected attacks arrived: he was ready to leave when all of a sudden, like a sleep-walker who moves unaware, his hand opened the drawer. Without hesitating, he grabbed a pen and a piece of paper, almost as though he were not in control of his own hand and started scribbling what seemed like totally incongruous words, one after the other, creating something like a story, a fairy tale, who knows!

Trembling, almost breathless with anxiety, he finished it and shoved it into the drawer, sweating as if he was hiding a murder weapon of some sort. Quickly, he locked the drawer with his key with the horrifying feeling that he had just committed some kind of sacrilege, a terrible sin.

These terrible attacks, which he had never heard of before in his life, came more and more often, until one day his drawer was filled to bursting with papers. Hundreds of sheets. Drawings, doodles, and a never-ending stream of stories...

Even so, when Armando would return home every day to find his wife waiting for him in the kitchen, apron on and smiling, with the usual home-made meal on the table, his children sitting neatly at the dinner table waiting to start: "Hello, daddy. How was work today?" Armando would take a deep breath and calm down. And thus, everything would go back to normal and he would completely forget about his illness... for a while.

Nevertheless, after a few days, it would always come back. It attacked his peace, mercilessly again. Breathless, sweating, he would write and write and draw and draw. He could not stop his hand; it felt as if it had a life of its own. He buckled under the strain of his own imagination, which tore him apart with its evil strength. It would simply dismantle his existence, his tranquility, his sanity, it would eat him inside like a snake that was inside of him and wouldn't let him think straight. His hand, totally out of control, created stories and drawings one after the other, filling blank pages with ideas of all kinds that came out of

nowhere, from his guts, perhaps from his soul. Until Armando, out of breath and with tears in his eyes, would shove it all into the drawer again, and, trembling, would lock it with his key... Nobody could know about this. Nobody could find out about his illness. God knows what they would think of him.

Many years went by like this. Until, one day, Armando disappeared.

For weeks, everyone cried. Anguished, they asked themselves: where could Armando be? What could have happened? The neighborhood all dressed in black. They thought he was dead, perhaps fallen from a cliff, perhaps kidnapped. But, why? And by whom? Who would want to harm poor Armando? Everyone loved him. He was just a good man who worked very hard and took good care of his family... Where was Armando?

Unfortunately, after a few days of mourning, and still with no answers to any of these questions, Armando's wife, exhausted, walked sadly down to the basement of the house one afternoon and found the answer to what had happened. Or, what was perhaps worse: she found more questions without answers. That day, she found her husband in the basement, and the story of Armando is still an enigma, a story that everyone still talks about in that village in Spain.

In the basement of their house, Armando's wife found her husband dead. Not kidnapped, not murdered, not fallen from a cliff, but collapsed and buried under a mass of boxes, all around him.

Hundreds and hundreds of boxes, full of sweat and tears, filled with drawings, stories, tales, ideas... Boxes full of his heart and soul, bursting with his untamable imagination.