



A narrativa da tránsfuga.
Escritura translingüe e (auto)tradución
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Inglés: Costa Verde e Pig (1)

Pezas de non ficción ou “creative non-fiction”. Escritas en 2015 (das primeiras pezas breves que escribín en inglés). Inéditas.

Suxestión: Empezar a ler pola segunda, ‘Pig (1)’, na páx., xa que é esta segunda peza a que tivo más percorrido.

Costa Verde

“I baptise this strip of coast as Costa Verde,” my grandfather said last night, in my dream. I saw him standing on a samphire-covered mound, and from there he waved his hand at the coarse-sanded beach behind it while the sea foamed up in the horizon. I don’t think I have ever been to that particular place, but in my dream I knew – because in dreams you know things you don’t in real life - that it was one of the beaches scattered across the forty-mile coastal strip straddling the regions of Galicia, to the west, and Asturias, to the east, in Northern Spain, where I grew up: Costa Verde, the Green Coast. Unlike the beach, the name does exist in real life.

The dream has stuck with me through the day, and it occurs to me that this must be because I happen to have a certain interest in the name Costa Verde. Years ago, I spent some time asking people from the area about the name - whether they knew who came up with it and why. They didn’t. The consensus was that it must have been first printed in tourism brochures and travel guides some time in the 1960s. Like the Costa da Morte (Coast of Death) to the west and the Costa do Marisco (Coast of Seafood) to the south-west, Costa Verde sounds too deliberate, almost writerly. Artificial – a Roman legionary, a medieval monk wouldn’t have given a place a moniker like that. So it could well have been my grandfather who did, and maybe the dream was sent to me in order to bring me the answer I couldn’t find by asking around.

The theory certainly has a lot going for it. It suits my grandfather better than anyone else I know to do something as sentimental yet commercially savvy as baptising a strip of coast with that name. Green – a lazy choice, because our coast is certainly covered in green, but so are other coastal strips in Northern Spain and even in the less exuberant South. Green – but it would nevertheless send the imaginations of tourists running

wild, especially those who came from expanses of concrete and asphalt paradises where trees were a rare sight. Green – lazy and commercial, but probably one of the first words to come to a Galician person's mind when asked: *Describe your homeland in one word*. When I am asked, 'green' is certainly the first word I think about.

My grandfather certainly qualifies as sentimental. An example that always comes to mind: when he and my grandmother reached their fiftieth wedding anniversary they remarried each other in the presence of their five children, their children's spouses and twelve grandchildren. He was sentimental, yet he was also blessed with commercial acumen. In the 1960s - about three decades before the re-wedding we all attended - he sensed that mass tourism could be a revolution for Foz, the fishing village where he and my grandmother owned a corner shop; they had moved to Foz from a nearby hamlet. Foz couldn't boast the fine-sanded beaches nor the endless hours of sun the Mediterranean is known for. But it had beaches, and it had sun - on some days. It was also cheaper and less crowded than Peñíscola or Benidorm. A skint *madrileño*, say, could be made to forget about the rain that fell one day out of three and about the chilly air that blew in the evenings on even the sunniest day, if he was shown unspoiled beaches, unspoiled forests, unspoiled locals – the sort of thing that a mere tourist wouldn't appreciate, but a discerning traveller would.

My grandfather sold his corner shop and built a hotel, the Morymar. The name doesn't mean anything; it is a rather cacophonous combination of the initial syllables of his and my grandmother's surnames. The Morymar's walls were thin and the building was a good fifteen minute walk from the sea front. Still, my grandfather promptly changed from his native Galician tongue to the more urbane, prestigious Spanish to address his guests, and on rainy days would take their children to visit the pigs, hens and rabbits who had their home in the hotel's backyard. Tourism was indeed revolutionizing Foz as predicted, but one needed something to do in the winter, between incursions of the revolutionary forces.

I suppose there were other shopkeepers, farmers or clerks at the time in Foz who became hotel managers or restaurant owners. They too may have been equally adept at balancing the commercial and the sentimental, and it may have been one of them who invented the name Costa Verde. Any one of them could have appeared in my dream, but there is a difference: among them, my grandfather is the one I know best. In my dream, I now understand, he stood for all the rest; his name stood for all their names.

As I revived the dream in my head this morning, I remembered that there is another meaning to the name Costa Verde – and this takes me to a different era in the past. Costa Verde was also the name of one of the bars my parents and I regularly stopped in for our Sunday midday bar crawl during my childhood. Now, I realize that the idea of a Sunday midday bar crawl may sound wild, especially if there are children involved, but in 1980s Galicia it was regarded as perfectly good family fun, to be had on weekends. The tradition started off, I suppose, as a post-Sunday mass treat – when people like my grandparents walked out of the church in the 1960s, a retinue of children following after them; they would put their hands in their pockets and realized there was some money in there that didn't need spending on food, clothes or school fees. Leisure – something the advance forces of the tourism revolution had brought with them, together with jeans and mini-skirts, British and American records, the Spanish language.

By the 1980s many people skipped the mass part altogether. We met my parents' friends and their children in front of the local church; then we walked into a bar, then another bar, then another. The adults drank one small glass of wine or beer in each of the stops, free food on display that we all feasted on: potato omelette, pork ear, fried squid, chickpea stew. After four, five, six places like that it came to the Costa Verde, always one of the last stops in our route and also one of the most unremarkable. A gang of pensioners sitting next to the door, playing dominoes on a felt tablecloth – that was the most interesting thing about it. That and its name. At the time, it made me think of a strip of coastal land in Central America, endless forests expanding into emerald water.

It was only after years of going to Costa Verde the bar that I learned that the Costa Verde was also the name of the coast where I grew up. I think my father must have told me. It came as a bit of a surprise. During the 1980s, the name did not appear on tourism brochures or travel guides that much anymore. It was now

the time of London, Italy, Greece, Cancún – the names stared at us from the windows of the two or three travel agencies that had recently opened in Foz, which was now morphing into a cement and asphalt dystopia next to the sea.

In despite of the competition, the Morymar remained in operation until the 1990s. When I knew it, there were no more children to take to the pigsties or the pen: tourists were fewer and older every summer, and their children had long grown up. My grandfather spent his afternoons in the reception hall conversing with his visitors, even on sunny days. Fewer and older every summer: when they didn't send in their customary booking, we wondered whether they had chosen to rest in a more appealing destination that summer – or whether they were indeed resting in a more metaphoric, more funereal way.

By the 1990s, Costa Verde - for me and for most people - was not a coastal destination anymore; it was just a bar. It still is, the same old men - or maybe the men I knew from my childhood have aged and died and been replaced by others - sitting next to the door playing dominoes. Maybe in ten, twenty, thirty years' time, if bars cease to be a profitable business in these parts, as hotels did, it won't be a bar or a coast anymore. It will be a name, just a name.

I remember coming back from a visit to the Morymar by car, when I was about six or seven. I saw a newly built cottage by the road, paint still fresh on its white façade; Villa Maria, it said. At this point, I asked myself why everything needs to have a name. We name our houses, our pets, our children, our districts, our shops, our planets, our mountains, our rivers and streams, our galaxies, our plans, our battles – and of course our coasts. In Galicia we name perhaps more than any other people. There are more than one million place names in the region, over 150 per square kilometre; we name fields, corners of fields, paths, one farm, two farms, two farms put together; we name people one, two, three times: many of us have one or two nicknames in addition to the name recorded on our birth certificates. We Galicians like to name.

The question I first asked myself at seven now comes back to me: why does everything need to have a name? A second question attaches itself: if a name – say, Costa Verde - disappears, do we really have much to lament? Why did my grandfather, in my dream, feel the need to invent a name when there were already too many – for beaches, villages, hamlets, forests, paths – struggling to survive on that coastal strip? And why do I taste disappointment in my mouth when I write down a few words in Google and learn that it was not my grandfather, but rather Franco's Minister for Information and Tourism who invented the name Costa Verde in 1969, or at least made it official it by law, presumably not from a samphire-covered mound, but rather from his ministerial office in Madrid?

I open my diary, look for today's date and write the words: *Costa Verde*.

Today, these two words have helped me remember. Arguably, they have helped me learn to, although I am not sure what. Maybe they will help me again at some point in the future, should I feel the need to remember, to learn - if there are things I still need to learn.

Or maybe I will come back to these words one day – or they will come to me in a dream – and they will have lost all meaning to me. They will be like two empty shells put together at random.

But that's fine too.

There will be other things to name in their stead.

Pig (1)

I know a man who can slaughter a pig with his hands and a kitchen's knife - the only of his generation around these parts who still can. But it would be unfair of me to suggest he is a fossil, because it is only in two or three respects that he clings to the old ways like mussels when they constellate on rocks by the sea.

Otherwise, he goes to great lengths, every day, to move with the times. He smokes real cigarettes and spurns snuff, which his father thrived on, and while he still worked he paid money every month into his pension fund, because he knew it is not wise anymore to leave wellbeing in the hands of chance or charity in your old age.

I never saw him slaughter a pig, but I once was in his house while he did so in the backyard. Females weren't allowed to witness. I didn't mind much, because I dreaded pigs. When visiting the man, I could just barely bear the drone-like growling punctuating the lives of those in the house. Every now and then, I had very brief, but very lucid, realizations that the noise emanated from the mouths and tongues of living beasts, routing in their pigsties when not banqueting lavishly on leftovers and raw vegetables.

Several children hung around the house at any given time, and one of them was particularly unruly. He once told me that, if I put my hand through the hole through which the pigs were fed they would bite my fingers off and chew them like the tenderest of meats.

He was older than me. More streetwise, too. He had taken a liking to scare me, and I knew it.

"That's a lie," I objected.

The boy laughed curtly. I had always found his face strange - his noise too pointy and grown-up, his eyes fresh and always excited about the world.

"I wish it was".

I didn't inquire further. The boy was unruly. When I woke up the day the pig was going up for slaughter I remembered his words. At breakfast, before we set out, I was informed that all the doors would be locked while the deed was being done in the backyard, and I should under no circumstance even graze the locks.

We didn't speak much on our way to the house. It struck me when we arrived to hear the usual droning from the pigsties: their dwellers clearly didn't know what the morning had in store for one of them. But there were some signs that this was a day like no other: the man's three grown-up sons bowed to him, like I had never seen an adult bow up to a parent. They brought their father cups of coffee with a splash of milk, tied up his shoes and wondered (but never questioned) whether the knives they passed from hand to hand for scrutiny were the right size and sufficiently sharp.

After we'd been there for about an hour, the man opened a drawer in the kitchen and swapped one of his knives for another - just an ordinary, to my eyes, kitchen knife; one I might have even used myself.

He walked into the backyard, his sons and other men following, and the women locked the doors after them.

I lowered my head and studied at my nails. Wait: that's all I could do; that was our main duty at that point in the day. A buzz of conversations, steps and blows on inanimate objects came from the backyard: nothing I had never heard before. Suddenly, it stopped.

The pig cried out once, twice, three, four times.

Then not anymore.

It was over - that quickly.

We unhinged the locks and the men dragged the beast's body into the kitchen, then disappeared into the backyard again. The old man turned his head to look at us before he too walked away. He left his knife lying soaked in the sink, but his hands were spotless.

The pig's carcass was no longer the menacing frame of a ghastly beast, but a lump of meat and nerve to be chopped, kneaded, beaten into shape and made useful by the work of us women.

We chopped, sliced, stuffed, kneaded, seasoned, and after a while I started to gain pleasure from it. Then I grabbed a blade on the wrong end and cut myself in palm of the hand.

One of the women ran to my side and held my hand among hers for a few seconds. Then she proclaimed that the blade had only touched the outer layer of the skin.

"Anyway - go to the bathroom upstairs and wash it. You don't want it to get infected," she instructed.

Once upstairs it dawned on me that I didn't know the house well. We visited rather often, but stayed mostly in the kitchen, where all conversations were had, all decisions taken. I opened one door, two, three, found beds, all impeccably made with identical yellowing sheets, a splash of dull green wool on top.

The bathroom was behind the fourth door, and in the middle stood the old man. Naked from the waist up, shaved.

We looked at each other in perplexity. He was embarrassed at being surprised; I, transfixed by the electric shaver he held in his right hand, rattling so shrilly, so insolently. Of a man able to kill a pig with his hands and a kitchen knife I expected an old-fashioned razor, but then I remembered: I knew that electric shaver. One of his sons had given it to him as a birthday present because his pulse was becoming erratic, his eyesight untrustworthy to shave by hand. I had been at his birthday party and listened to the conversation.

I closed the door. My breathing in and out and the rattling of the machine punctuated, for a few seconds, the buzz of the kitchen.

The growling from the pigsties, I noticed, had ceased.

The man smoked in the parlor as we left, the skin on his face terse and wet, like a young animal's. He said goodbye to all of us. As we were about to board our car, he said goodbye again, this time to me in particular.

I had no more opportunities to see him exert his formidable skill. Still, the knowledge that he could do it was enough for me to understand and fear: *watch out, this is a man who can slaughter a pig with his hands and a kitchen knife, even if you never suspected it. He can do it every morning, before his shaving.*

Strange as it might sound, on some occasions over the years I have found the thought comforting. He is strong, but I know he will never use his strength against me. How he singled me out to say goodbye as we left was his way of telling me he won't. He's known me forever.

The thought still comforts me sometimes, now that the old man - grandfather - will soon be no more.

O avó Eliseo coñecino o día que matou un cocho cun coitelo de cociña no patio da súa casa en Foz, que era tamén a casa do cocho antes de que o avó o matase. Non quero dicir con isto que antes non o coñecese algo, porque ver viámolo todos os domingos desde despois de xantar ata antes de cear e o verán antes da matanza mesmo fora pasar eu soa - é dicir, sen papá e sen mamá - unha semana a aquela casa. A casa era tamén un hostal e había sempre algúns cuarto libre e, ademais do avó e os cochos, vivían nela tamén a avoa, o tío Normando, a súa familia e, no verán, os veraneantes. (Os de Foz din así: *vraneantes*).

O apelido do avó e o apelido da avoa empezaban case igual, menos por unha letra, e cando o avó abriu o hostal deu en xuntar os dous *incipits* para argallar o nome. Quedoulle eufónico e moi do seu tempo, que eran os comezos dos setenta. Daquela, os avós, que ser eran de Marzáñ, levaban quince anos vendendo nunha tenda a granel no centro de Foz. Cando abriron o hostal, o avó mercou tamén animais e meteunos no patio que había detrás da mole, subindo cara ao cemiterio. Nos anos en que nós visitabamos, tiñan galiñas comúns - cen ou duascentas, sempre nas gaiolas -, e había tamén pombas (brancas e das outras), faisáns, quicas e galiñas de Guinea. Algunha vez houbo coellos e ovellas e o que sempre había era cochos. Dous ou tres coido que habería: nunca souben de certo cantos, porque nunca quería ir velos; abondábame con ver como o tío e o curmán lles levaban carradas de berzas, arroz e patacas que lles sobraran no comedor do hostal e bolsas de pan duro. Sobresaltábanme ao rosamar mentres estabamos todos sentados na cociña e papá bebia no café que lle facía seu irmán (o seu xemelgo, ao pensar de algúns) e que el sempre dicía que era o máis rico que probara ou que podía imaxinar que puidese facerse. Papá seguía bebendo e pedía outro café, e ninguén máis se decataba sequera do rosamar dos cochos. Os vraneantes, cando estaban, aínda menos. Estes viñan de Madrid case todos, uns cantos de Lugo e algúns de sitios como Burgos e León. Cando falaban conigo, dicíanme cousas como: *Llevamos viniendo aquí veintisiete años*. Ou: *Y con este ya son treinta y dos*. Ou: *Año tras año desde que nos casamos. ¿Sabes?*. Toda esta xente parecía un pouco ríxida, simpáticos e benintencionados si, pero un pouco ríxidos. Tiñan nomes que eu nunca oíra non sendo de lelos en almanaques: Julián, Matilde, Bernardo, Virtudes. A metade dos días que pasaban no hostal dos avós chovíalles e case non podían facer outra cousa ca quedar no bar xogando ás cartas ou vendo algúna película, e non me cabía na cabeza daquela que recuncasen un ano tras outro e non buscasen outro sitio. Tamén era verdade que quedaban entretidos co avó Eliseo, que sempre lles daba palique, sempre en castelán. Cando falaba en castelán, soaba obsequioso, un pouco alambicado (pensaba eu daquela), e facíame grazá aínda de nena. O avó era moi moderno para cousas coma esas, e por iso, cando papá nos dixo no coche que aquel día o avó ía matar un cocho el só cun coitelo de cociña, estrañoume bastante. O avó non era un deses vellos que non se moven cos tempos. Cando aínda traballaba, era teimoso cos aforros e os xuros, porque sabía que, aínda tendo cinco fillos, xa un non podía fiarse deles para que coiden de ti cando vas vello. (Tamén estaba ben ao día cos seguros dos montes que fora mercando preto de Foz cando no hostal as cousas lles empezaran a ir ben. Un ano no verán queimáranselle varios montes e logo o seguro pagara, aínda que non moito, e deses cartos deunos el a todos os fillos e a todos os netos nun xantar que fixemos no comedor do hostal en setembro ou outubro, despois de que os vraneantes marchasen. Chamábate á cabeceira da mesa, dábache os cartos que che tocaban nun sobre e ti tiñas que darrle un bico e unha aperta diante de todos os demás. Isto era moi do avó Eliseo: gustábanlle as ceremonias e o sentimental, como cando el e a avoa fixeron cincuenta anos de casados e decidiron casar de novo con misa e con banquete. Coido que debeu ser o avó e non a avoa o que tivo a idea, porque ela non era tanto dasas cousas).

Cando papá nos dixo que o avó ía matar un cocho cun coitelo de cociña, Diego preguntou se podíamos ir velo, e papá dixo que el si pero eu non, e non me importou nada. Ao chegarmos, atopamos a todos os da casa sentados xa na cociña, e o tío dicíalle ao avó: Beba isto papá, e pasáballe unha cunca de café con leite, e non canse moito papá, que pagar non paga a pena. (Non pagaba, coido que quería dicir o tío, porque o avó e os da súa casa había xa anos que non precisaban facer matanza: era máis ben unha especie de pasatempo). O avó bebeu; marcharon os homes para fóra e a avoa foi detrás deles para asegurar as portas que daban ao patio: unha na cociña, outra no cuarto de planchar e outra máis no comedor. Era importante que a avoa as pechase ben pechadas, explicara mamá, porque o cocho podía revolverse mentres o mataban e dar safado,

e entón bulería para meterse en calquera sitio onde puidese escapar dos verdugos. Quen o vería entrando a galope no comedor dos vraneantes, que a aquelas alturas do ano levaba sempre tres meses pechado (no inverno sempre estaba pechado, a non ser que os avós tivesen no hostal algún viaxante, oficinista ou funcionario acabado de trasladar e áinda sen casa propia; entón, o señor ceaba só no comedor mentres o tío ceaba na cociña e entre prato e prato levantábase para ir servir ao outro). Todo o poñería perdido de sangue. Pero non vai pasar iso mamá verdade, preguntei eu, o cocho non vai escapar. Non claro que non bobiña, dixo ela, e sabes por que pois porque o avó Eliseo vai coller un coitelo da cociña e vai cortarlle o rabo. E entón o cocho vaise desangrar. Non sei se o sabías, pero os cochos desángranse moi rápido.

Logo daquel día dera en pensar que o avó podía facer moitas cousas; que debía ter feito moitas cousas ao longo da vida das que eu nunca tivera sospeita ningunha. Durante moitos anos despois daquel día dei en pensar que fora el quen nomeara a parte do mundo na que viviamos como Costa Verde; dábao imaxinado perfectamente, nos primeiros anos da súa vida de hostaleiro, subido nun montículo na praia de Llas - que está saíndo xa de Foz pola costa -, estendendo o brazo e dicindo: *Bautizo esta costa como Costa Verde*. Estes sentimentalismos eran moi do avó, e andando o tempo dei en preguntarme de onde sacaría aquel xeito de ser. Algunha vez teño notado que en Foz parece abundar a xente así comparado con outros sitios da contorna, pero matino que o avó aprendería de libros, de novelas que lería facendo o servizo militar e logo na guerra cando o mobilizaron os fascistas. Neses libros, coido que seguramente dos primeiros que lera na vida por decisión propia, aprendería, más aló do que vira en Marzán, sobre como deben comportarse os membros dunha familia os uns cos outros, como debe comportarse un home co que el cre que son os seus iguais, os seus superiores e os seus inferiores. Logo, pasara a vida a intentar recrear aquelas ensinanzas, ao seu xeito, xa sen modelos, cando tivera el a súa propia familia, os seus propios iguais, superiores, inferiores.

Que o xeito de ser do meu avó era adquirido e non natural pénsoo porque o seu gusto polo ceremonial sempre me pareceu un pouco esaxerado, como se, intentando reproducir as ceremonias que el cría que había que facer, se excedese sempre un pouco. Cando falaba cos vraneantes, utilizaba ás veces palabras e expresións castelás que se cadra ninguén tiña usado nunca antes en Foz, e que supoño que serían froito dun certo estudo e selección que faría el cando lembraba as lecturas da súa xuventude. Todo estaba coidado: a orde en que nos chamara aos fillos e os netos cando nos repartira os cartos que saíran do incendio dos montes, case de maior a menor pero non. Estas cousas tiñan ao mesmo tempo, porén, un aquel de natural que indicaba que o avó as absorbera nunha etapa temperá da súa formación; era tamén certo que, de vell, o avó non lía moito, más que *El Progreso de Lugo* e algún libro que lle atopei detrás da barra do bar. Lembro verlle *El arca de Schindler* polo tempo en que saíu a película e algún libro de Vizcaíno Casas: todo lle tiña que vir da mocidade. Tamén era tan natural esta pomposidade que o avó conseguiu pasarlle parte dela a papá, ao tío e coido que a algúns dos seus netos.

Todo isto fai do avó un home que non me custa imaxinar a bautizar un anaco de costa como "Costa Verde". É un nome obvio e fácil - sentimental - para bautizar unha parte do mundo coma esa, pero é tamén un nome que ten dentro verdade. Cando me piden no Yukei que describa o sitio de onde veño, "verde" é moitas veces a primeira palabra que me vén á cabeza. *Green*, digo. *It's very green. You wouldn't imagine*. Non é orixinal, pero "verde" é unha palabra que todo o mundo entende e, ademais, non é mentira.

O día da matanza, víñanos do patio ruído de conversas e de golpes contra o chan: igual que todos os domingos que visitabamos non sendo polo rosamar das pocilgas, agora acalado. Daquela a Diego xa o collería papá en brazos, porque áinda era pequeno e cansaba axiña. Dentro esperabamos. Á media hora de empezaren os homes, o cocho berrou unha vez, logo outra, outra, e despois xa non berrou máis. A avoa levounos entón para a despensa, que estaba pegada á cociña e tiña outra porta que daba tamén ao patio. Alí colgaban os da casa os chourizos e alí tiñan tamén, ás veces, cabritos enteiros metidos no conxelador. Un dos curmáns ensináranme unha vez un, todo pelón, e díxome que era un neno que o avó e a avoa tiveran e que morrera ao nacer (un meu tío, logo), e eu, áinda sabendo que meu curmán era un larchán, arrepiárame toda, porque sabía por papá que a historia daquel pícaro (o *stillborn*, como dirían no Yukei: o que nace parado)

non era mentira. Desde o patio entraron papá, o curmán e o tío a arrastrar o cocho polas patas de diante, e a avoa e a tía miraron para el como o que xa era: unha mole de carne que lles tocaba a elas amasar, abatanar, desmembrar e salar. Estabamos sentadas arredor dunha mesa, e nun lado tiñan encanastrada a máquina de facer chourizos, que me poña case tanto medo coma o rosmar os cochos, porque sempre que a vía lembraba unha nena do colexiño, Sandra, que perdera o maimiño dentro dunha máquina daquelas. Sería dous ou tres anos máis vella ca min, e daquela as da miña clase sempre nos andabamos retando a ver quen se atrevía a mirarlle a man mutilada e aguantar contando ata chegar a cinco.

Levoume ben de anos chegar a saber que a Costa Verde non pasa por Foz. A confusión toda veu por un bar, o Costa Verde tamén, que había en Ribadeo, que era sempre o último na ronda que meus pais facían connosco os domingos antes de xantar. (Estes paseos de domingo sempre me custa explicalos no Yukei, porque pensan que meus pais nos levaban a un pub ou o a un *bar*, que ten un aquel más nocturno que os bares nosos. Os *bars* de Escocia son aínda más nocturnos que os de Inglaterra, e por iso estráñanse aínda más). Foi polo bar que pensei que era a nosa costa a que se chamaba Costa Verde. Eis como descubrín a verdade: varios anos despois de imaxinar que fora o avó Eliseo o que lle puxera o nome a aquela costa, tiven curiosidade por saber cal era a historia de verdade e busquei no Google. O buscador levoume a un Boletín Oficial del Estado do trinta e un de xaneiro de 1969, e coido que esta data xa deixa adiviñar quen foi o responsable último do nome; non haberá aquí tampouco, imaxino, moitas sorpresas. Pero si que me sorprendeu descubrir no Boletín que a Costa Verde é a costa de Asturias toda, de Castropol a Ribadedeva. Busquei en Google un pouco máis por ver se atopaba cal é o nome de verdade da nosa costa, a que vai, un poñer, da Veiga ata a Foz e se cadra un pouco máis aló (máis ao oeste de Foz rara vez pasabamos cando íamos á casa dos avós, só algunha vez papá nos levaba conducindo ata Fazouro para que o vísemos. Había alí en Fazouro, e coido que aínda o hai, un bar que se chamaba El Descanso, e na fachada sempre impresionaba a pintura mural: un paisano con boina bebendo dun porrón de viño e a carón del, como aboando nun espazo baleiro, unha nécora e un feixe de percebes raquíticos).

Non atopei nada. Esta costa, seica, non ten nome.

O avó Eliseo aínda tardou en vir para dentro despois de matar. Pechou a porta dun golpe detrás súa e deixou algo, creo que un coitelo, no fregadoiro. As mans traíñas limpas. Quere algo de beber, Eliseo, ofreceulle mamá; nada, non te preocupes, dixo el. As outras non miraran para o avó, porque había moito que facer enriba da mesa: todo o facían a avoa e a tía Elena; mamá non, porque, aínda que quería sempre axudar, ela non nacera nunha casa daquelas (*casa grande*, chamáballe ela) e non sabía como facer aquelas cousas. De cando en vez miraba para min e sorría, como dicindo: *Si, imos marchar axiña*, aínda que agora que o cocho estaba morto e os seus compañeiros non volveran rosmar nas pociñas, tampouco me importaba tanto quedar un anaco máis naquela casa.

Mentres a avoa e a tía Elena amasaban e embutían, entroume gaña de ir ao baño. Non fun ao dos vraneantes, como faciamos sempre, porque para ir ao baño dos vraneantes desde a despensa o que había que facer era saír e cruzar o patio onde acababa de morrer o porco. Mellor era ir ao baño que estaba no piso da familia, e fun á cociña e metinme pola escala arriba, pero alí estivera poucas veces e non sabía ben o que había detrás de cada unha das portas. Abrín dúas que non eran e atopei o baño á terceira. Alí atopei tamén o avó. Estaba afeitándose e levaba unha camiseta de tirantes, como as que levaba o meu outro avó, Ramón, xa amarelecida. A maquiña mercáramoslla nós - ou mercáranlle papá e mamá - polo santo había un ano. Mire papá que boa idea tiveron César e Teodora, dixera daquela meu tío Normando, que así xa non vou ter que estar eu pendente de que lle dea ben á navalla. O avó deu a volta e mirou para min. Tiña a boca aberta e curvada para abaxo e fixera dous ou tres cortes coa maquiña no pescoco e saíalle un pouco de sangue. Ser, pensei ao velo daquela, era un vello.

Cando marchamos, o avó xa rematara de afeitarse e mudarse e andaba a ler *El Progreso* el só no bar. (O bar, que abría directamente á rúa, era tamén a recepción do hostal e no inverno a familia corría as cortinas da fachada e o usaba como se fose a sá de estar). Un por un démoslle dous bicos, como faciamos sempre ao chegar e ao marchar, porque o avó era tamén moi de bicos. Díxome ao saímos pola porta: “Adeus, nena, a ver se volves axiña”. Igual o avó tamén me coñeceu a min un pouco aquel día.

Esta costa, a que bordeabamos cada vez que íamos de Foz para a casa - aquela tarde tamén despois de que o cocho morrera - non ten nome; ningúén llo puxo. Non importa, porque é verde tamén e se cadra podemos coller prestado o nome da costa de Asturias. Pero non importa tampouco porque nesa parte do mundo - pensaba sempre cando íamos ou volviamos de Foz - xa hai nomes abondo: lugares pequeneiros tiñan nome, e algunas casas tamén, e mesmo durante un tempo houbo unha casa de can que tiña o nome pintado no tellado con letras escuálidas: VILL A P OL. Sempre quedaba mirando para ela desde o coche por ben tempo, ata que dabamos a curva da Devesa e se perdía.

Inglés: Pig (2) e Pig (3)

Relatos. Escritos os dous no verán de 2017. Pig (2) vaise publicar na revista americana The Cantabrigian, como parte dun proxecto no que participan varios escritores. Pig (3) publicouse na revista británica Novelty.

Suxerencia: podedes saltar Pig (2), xa que considero que o (3) é más interesante.

Pig (2)

As we fled, we took the road that sloped upwards towards Esto. Sorna had told us once that few people lived there, that their dwellings were scattered sparsely and that they thought the best way to go about in life was to mind their own business. We thought it wise to head for somewhere we could live for some time without attracting much attention to ourselves, in case a rebellion followed her kingdom crumbling and we were signalled as the culprits, which in turn could alert our pursuers to our presence in the region.

Is this still part of her kingdom?

No, her kingdom barely touched Esto.

But Sorna said some parts of Esto were still part of her kingdom.

Yes but we are not in Esto anymore, we are now past Esto can't you see?

Yes but-

No but-

(Conversations along the lines above multiplied in the following months. Most of the time they were great fun to have, and over time we realized this was a sign that we did not have a great deal to do, apart from fleeing and hiding, which always becomes predictable after a while).

We arrived at a place: five houses bundled up together on a mound, another house half a mile away protuberating on the edge of a eucalyptus forest (some in those parts would call this assembly of houses a sizeable town, just a few souls short of a city). Our eyes were on the house by the forest: there we could hide for years if only we could get into the property. We plotted. For a few weeks we lived in the woods, foraging on berries and the odd partridge we were able to kill with our hands. We studied the house from all possible angles as we prepared to garrison it.

We discovered that the house was inhabited by an old man and his pigs. We knew of the existence of the pigs from the growling drone that punctuated our lives in the forest. Most of the time we tried to live as if it was not there; every now and then we had very brief but very lucid realizations that the noise emanated from the mouths and tongues of living beasts routing in their pigsties when not banqueting lavishly on leftovers and raw vegetables (we knew because we had seen the old man laboriously carrying them out of the main door into the pigsties at the back).

We studied the old man too. We had a sense that he might be someone who in some respects clung to the old ways like mussels when they constellate on rocks by the sea. But just in some respects. For example, he smoked cigarettes (several a day). Were he a straight traditionalist, he would have favored snuff, like his father and grandfather might have done. We came to imagine him as part of a line of humans that can only slowly free itself of old habits, one or maybe two per generation.

In the woods we deliberated. Nature was turning hostile. The eucalyptuses closed down on us, their leaves no longer covering the ground for us to sleep on top of. The morning dew dripped incessantly on our cheeks and eyelids all night long. Dwellers of the village sometimes came to the forest in search of resin. To avoid being seen we had to lie on the ground for hours at a time. The harmony that had always reigned

among us was starting to elude us in those days, but on this we were like one: we needed to garrison the house immediately, and the only way to do it was to become the pigs.

The following night we made our way to the pigsties. We opened the door and two shadows came out running and rushed into the forest. We walked into the pigsties and lay down on the hay. We fell asleep.

(We had dreams that night. In fact we had had them every night from the very day we started our flight. In the morning we always spent a few minutes telling each other our dreams. Sometimes they matched in a way that made us hopeful that we could use them to predict the future or guide us in our flight. We filled several notebooks with such annotations and plans. But then other times they did not match and this discouraged us, although we still made a point of finding a moment in the day to tell them to each other. On the day we occupied the pigsties our dreams were beautiful and strange, but as hard as we tried, we could not get them to match).

While we slept, the old man threw our food on us: rice, lentils, leaves of various shades of green. When we woke up, we ate voraciously. At midday we ate again. We adapted quite quickly to being the pigs, perhaps because we were very careful throughout not to adopt any of the most obvious affectations, which would have only distracted us from our effort to *be* the pigs: chewing with an open mouth, wallowing in mud, not showing basic respect to each other and to the man. We knew better than that.

(Some of us oinked now and then, but this was just for theatrical effect. Others among us did not approve, but after some days a truce was agreed).

We discovered that the man enjoyed talking to his pigs—that is, to us—not so much in the pigsties, which over time revealed themselves to be a space suitable for eating and sleeping only, but in the house itself, where we always trod with some reservation. He talked to us as he cooked on the hob (beans and rabbit, always) or smoked in the porch. Sometimes he kissed us in the mouth too, particularly when he was getting sentimental, which was almost always because his conversations consisted mostly of disjointed memories from his life, which had been quite long if not particularly interesting.

In those conversations we learned more about the old man. He talked mostly about his childhood, which sounded like the childhood of any man his age. Loving mothers and aunts, hunger, not much school, but a sense of camaraderie and good old days throughout. There was also vague talk about a war that he fought sometime somewhere when he was young. We confirmed our beliefs that he liked to cling to certain traditions like mussels cling to the rock. But not to others. For example, we learned over time that when he still worked (somewhere else) he put money into his pension pot every month because you cannot trust these days that your children will take care of you in your old age. (Whether he actually had children or was just making some sort of general pronouncement was not entirely clear, but we tended to think that he didn't have children, although in this too there was some disagreement among us).

He shaved with a razor. Once or twice he let us in the bathroom and shaved in front of us. On a shelf lay an electric machine in its box, never opened.

Over time, the idea started to take shape in our consciences that one of the old-age traditions the old man might adhere to was that of killing pigs with his bare hands and a kitchen knife.

We kept learning about the old man, and over time we got the feeling that he needed us more. He needed to talk to us more. He no longer limited himself to doing so while he cooked or smoked or shaved; sometimes he would even bring us into the hall (and living room and dining room) and talk to us. Just talk. The war (the one he had fought in) featured prominently.

What war was he talking about there?

Don't know. Maybe about a war in Esto-

Against Uesto? Poor countries don't fight each other.

Actually they do. All the time.

Would that be a Great War?

Maybe.

He also kissed us more frequently than before, which we didn't like. We learned more (not much) about the years (many) that followed the war. And he mentioned a word that almost made us jump out of our nature of pigs for a second: Loco.

Did he notice?

I think he noticed.

He's too old to notice anything, anything at all.

Loco could be anything.

It's not.

He's not that clever.

He's cleverer than-

And then the Monday arrived when the pigs were going up for slaughter.

To be then chopped, sliced, stuffed, kneaded, seasoned, compressed.

Pig (3)

I

Upon waking up on the morning of his seventieth birthday, a man decided to be a pig.

II

How do you become a pig? The obvious way is to go down the route of affectations, of which there are plenty: walk on all fours, let your buttocks oscillate to the left and to the right. Oink and growl profusely; perfect a language based on such sounds. Develop an appetite for all kinds of food, in large quantities, and refrain from having any if you won't have an opportunity to chew it up voraciously. Roll in mud.

I didn't go round the route of affectations. The pigs, the real pigs deserve better, don't they. Instead, I chose the route of just being a pig.

Okay, I thought, I can allow myself just one little affectation; otherwise it might be too boring. Just one.

I chose one.

III

Another affectation one tends to encounter in pigs, I've come to realize over the years, is that they become restless on the day you walk into their pigsty with the intention of dragging them out for slaughter.

They growl and leap in the hay as soon as you walk in, even though you have been walking in every morning for years - to feed them, or just to check they are still there - and there is no difference this time in the way you carry yourself or look at them.

Some of them have been known to become restless as early as the night before slaughter.

IV

Meeting the wife was the first test.

Every morning, the wife boils milk until the cream raises to the top and crystallizes in long threads of fat. She lets it cool down, hunts down the threads of fat with a spoon and lays them on top of a slice of bread, then sprinkles with sugar. It's her daily offering to her husband.

The man - no, he is a pig now- walks downstairs. At the smell of the cream on the slice of bread, he almost forgets he is a pig.

The wife shrieks.

'Hey hey! What are you doing in my kitchen, you filthy beast! Off you go! Off! OFF!'

And she casts him out of her kitchen with the help of the broom.

From now on, he will live in the pigsties.

Success.

V

No, it's not true I have slaughtered pigs all my life. My first pig I slaughtered at twelve. Dad put the knife in my hand. Only boy in a family of four girls, all older than me. Mum died before I was two. Farmers, peasants, that's what we were.

For some time after that, I slaughtered a pig every year.

On my birthday. Or thereabouts. In the sort of family I grew up in, birthdays were not that important. We held parties on name days instead. With birthdays, you often wouldn't even know when they fell exactly (even your own), although you would have an idea of the month or season. And so when the time came to slaughter a pig - well into the autumn, but not in the winter: don't let the winter start yet -, I'd know it was my birthday. Or, if I forgot, one of the sisters would remember: The pig is going up for slaughter, it's the boy's birthday.

(Dad never said anything about my birthday. He was never good at remembering those things).

VI

It is not a bad life, being a pig.

At least in day one.

I go to sleep alone - for the first time in, I don't know, forty-something years -, but happy.

I marvel that you can start a new life at my old age.

VII

The next morning, the wife and a man walk into the pigsty.

"I have no use for a pig in this house anymore," she says.

The pig is sold to the man and put into the back of a truck.

As the truck leaves the town, the pig looks at the back of the man's head, looks at the back of the man's head, looks at the back of the man's head, and finally recognizes him. When the pig was a man and owned his own pigs, he used to know this other man - because the pig-owning community was no longer very large in that part of the world. Once or twice they bought piglets off one another. More often, they gave each other advice on who might have had a pig for sale or who might be interested in acquiring a pig.

Once they get to the man's house the pig is released into a field. So spacious, so beautiful. Full of acorn trees. The pig thinks this is quite close to his idea of pigs' paradise. He walks leisurely, gobbles up acorns, soaks up the sun, walks again.

He will soon discover he shares the field with five other pigs. They all lead relatively independent lives - because the field is so spacious -, so the question whether he will be really integrated with them, whether he will become part of the drove, is never much of a question.

He notices that the other pigs behave differently toward him. There is a certain retraction, even fear. They keep their interactions to a minimum, they don't herd up with him to give a good shake to a tree and then devour the fallen acorns.

What is it about me that puts them off, he asks himself. How am I different to them.

One day he comes up with a hypothesis: it is because he remembers, he has memories, while the other pigs don't. The other pigs can smell - sense? hear? - his memories, and this makes them mistrust him.

He considers annihilating his memories to be more like them - to be more like a pig. He thinks about it for three nights.

Then he decides against it. He can be a memorious pig.

He *is* a memorious pig.

VIII

From the age of eighteen to the age of twenty-three, I didn't slaughter any pigs, because I was a soldier in a war.

IX

I used to have a granddaughter who didn't believe it was me slaughtering the pigs. Every year I invited everyone in the family to witness the slaughter, and every year it was a great party. The little girl always came with her parents on the day but refused to come to the courtyard to see the deed. She stayed indoors, on her own.

One year, as she followed her parents out of the house after the slaughter, she exclaimed: I cannot believe you did that, grandfather. Oh, it was not that she was sorry to see the pigs die. She was scared of the pigs. I had seen her shudder every time she heard them growl from the pigsties, and not once did she agree to visit them.

I cannot believe you did that, grandfather.

The next year was the first year I didn't slaughter a pig after I came back from the war.

I think it is fair to say this wasn't connected to what my granddaughter said. It just happened.

X

One day he is removed from the field, then thrown into the back of a truck together with the other pigs - all together, memorious and non-memorious pigs alike. Is there some agitation? There is some agitation. Not so much among the pigs but rather among the young men who guide them into the truck. He looks left and right. As the truck departs he sees, through the house windows, the man lying inside a coffin, surrounded by people who cry.

For a moment he feels sorry for the man that he will never reach an age where he can decide to become a pig, like he has.

The pigs are taken away, slowly.

XI

My wife was turned on by me slaughtering pigs. Oh yes she was.

“Come here, come here, come here, come here,” she used to shriek in the darkness of our bedroom the night after the day of the slaughter (and no other night of the year).

In our first year being married we had no pig in the house. It was too early to procure a pig, what with me being just back from the war and everything. Besides, we lived in town and had our own shop. I had never thought I should procure a pig.

One day my father knocked on the door.

“Here’s your birthday present,” he said. He walked away and left behind a beautiful pig, just old enough and just young enough to be slaughtered. My father never said much.

There were no children in the house yet. The next year, there were.

XII

“My grandfather slaughters pigs,” writes the little girl. The title of the essay is: *Describe your family - how they look like and what they do.*

“Slaughtering pigs is not a job,” says the teacher when he and the girl go through the essay together. “Not anymore,” he corrects himself.

The girl looks pensive.

“Is running a shop a job?”

“Yes.”

The girl crosses out the sentence and writes:

“My grandfather runs a shop and slaughters pigs.”

XIII

He is employed as one of the resident pigs at the region’s most prestigious School for Veterinary Medicine.

It’s not a hard job, and the best thing about it is that it finishes at five o’clock, every day. You just have to let the students palpate you, palpate your anatomy so that they can learn, and be patient with the slowest-learning ones.

Two of his former companions have also ended up as resident pigs. He is not sure about the other two.

All in all, he loves his job.

XIV

When I was fifty-five and the children were all grown-up, the wife said: You're too old for this. Sell the pigs. And so I did. I thought, ok, all I got left to do in life is to wait for death to come and get me. Why did I listen to her? I wasn't too old - I could start a new life, and so I did. On the other hand, if she hadn't told me to sell the pigs, I probably would have never thought of becoming one.

XV

One day, several years later, he decides to run away from the School of Veterinary Medicine. It's not that difficult if you know how to do it. Lots of colleagues have done it, over the years, but it's always been smaller animals - rabbits, hens, small dogs, a sheep, once. Still - he tries and is soon out.

He goes to live in the wild. He has heard of wild pigs, but has never met one. Still, it's easy. He soon becomes the first wild pig he's ever known. Truth is, he avoids interacting too much with other living beings, for fear of being uncovered as Not A Real Wild Pig. But this suits him. With age, he becomes more and more solitary.

He never becomes restless.

XVI

One day he gets out of the wild and walks and walks and walks to visit her granddaughter, who now lives in a house with her own family.

He knocks on the door and waits.