

**ALAIN
SAINT-SAËNS**

**CHILDHOOD
UNDER
LAPACHO TREES**

English-Spanish
Bilingual Edition

English translation
by

TRACY K. LEWIS

University Press
of the South

2021

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Alain Saint-Saëns.

Childhood Under Lapacho Trees. Poetry.

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

I'm doubtless not the first in pointing out the fortuitous resemblance between the Spanish words *traducción* (translation) and *traición* (betrayal), nor in bringing to light what the second term reveals about the first. Far from fostering a slavish copy of the original, what the translator of literary texts does is to alter them, to subvert them, and finally to "betray" them. Beyond simply re-painting a house, the translator's task is to *re-construct* it with a new floor plan and a new architectural style.

What's more, this reconstruction is involuntary and unavoidable; we are *forced* to betray the original because replacing one language with another necessarily means replacing the very materials of which the text is made. Not even the simplest, most direct substitutions—"tree" for "árbol" for example—can be exact equivalences, since each word differs from the other in spelling, in sound, in rhythm, and in the connotational aura which surrounds it.

For Paraguayans, "árbol" is a subtropical construct, exuberant with fruit and greenery, shadowed perhaps with the Guarani sounds of *ka'i* and *urutau*, whereas North Americans might visualize "tree" in the magnificent garments of autumn, or in the melancholy nakedness of winter. And if this is so for individual words, what can we say of sentences, paragraphs, poems, or entire novels?

When Alain Saint-Saëns invited me to translate his book of poems *Enfances*, therefore, he was actually inviting me to transform it into something else.

Complicating matters was the fact that Alain gave me his text in *two* languages, French and Spanish, and I had to consider both versions in producing mine. For that reason, I am a traitor twice over to the same piece of literature!

The paradox of the translator's craft, however, is that his or her "betrayal" occurs in a context of the most sublime faithfulness: I transform the text while respecting it profoundly, I transform the text precisely because I believe it deserves an analogous presence in my own linguistic universe. Saint-Saëns' poems express a vision eminently worthy of expression in any latitude, a vision which justifies the hard work of seeking its correspondent language, however inexact, in my own small corner of the English-speaking world. I thank Alain for the chance to re-create his text in English and in so doing to complete a triangle that joins three languages, three countries, and one entire world of beauty, anguish, and deeply-felt human emotion.

Tracy K. Lewis

PRÓLOGO DEL TRADUCTOR

No soy, sin duda, el primero en señalar la feliz semejanza entre las palabras “traducción” y “traición,” ni en sacar a luz lo que el segundo término nos revela del primero. Lejos de perpetrar un remedo servil del original, el traductor de un texto literario lo altera, lo subvierte, lo “traiciona.” No se trata únicamente de pintar de nuevo una casa, sino de ir reconstruyéndola con otro plan y otra arquitectura.

Lo que es más, esta reconstrucción no es voluntaria sino inevitable; somos traidores forzados, pues sustituir un idioma por otro es necesariamente reemplazar los *materiales* mismos del original. Ni las sustituciones más directas y sencillas—“tree” por “árbol” por ejemplo— pueden ser equivalencias exactas, pues cada palabra dista de la otra en ortografía, en sonido, en ritmo, y en su aura de connotaciones.

Para el paraguayo, “árbol” es una imagen subtropical, toda exuberancia frutal y verde, posiblemente con sombras guaraníes de *ka’i* y *urutau*, mientras que el norteamericano tal vez visualiza *tree* en su magnífica indumentaria otoñal, o en la melancólica desnudez del invierno. Y si es así con palabras individuales, ¿qué decir de oraciones, párrafos, poemas, novelas enteras?

Cuando Alain Saint-Saëns me invitó a traducir su poemario *Enfances*, pues, me invitó irremediabilmente a transformarlo en otra cosa. Es más, sin embargo, ya que Alain me dio su texto en *dos* lenguas, francés y castellano, y tuve que considerar ambas versiones al hacer la mía. ¡Soy por eso dos veces traidor de un solo