

Margarita Borja

Stages of Life - Life on Stage

1. LIFE AS HER

Stage: A family farm house (ground and first floor) and around it terraces, a garden on the left, pine trees on the right, and a kitchen garden, orchard and chicken barn at the back. The garden starts from the end of the last house of the village whose pavement continues from the church and the army quarters of the Civil Guard. There is a summer cinema on the opposite side of the street.

Inhabitants and visitors: It is appropriate for me to leave open the matter of exact appearances to the process of writing. The reader can have the same freedom to decide who should be profiled as a character and who as an extra.

ROSES AND BREAD AND CHOCOLATE

*Four windows open to the garden on the ground floor
of the house.*

*Upstairs another four windows are also open,
but they do not feature in this episode.*

The music flows into the garden. The garden fragrances pour into the house. Perhaps it was the same sonata by Arpeggione that had just been bought with the Sunday paper at the kiosk on Bolognese Street. The music comes from an old gramophone with an extending arm and a trumpet-shaped loudspeaker that resembles the white perfumed flowers that She observes while munching her snack of bread and chocolate. Maybe the record was ruined, the needle had got stuck and the distorted sound disturbed the tranquillity of the garden with the repetition of a foolish nightly obsession.

Mother (Her mother) enters the living room. She puts a vase of recently picked roses of various colours on the square piano; she lifts the gramophone arm; removes the record, puts it in its cover and takes out a new one. The street door bell sounds in the kitchen at the same time as Irma Vila utters her first trills. *She* - neither You nor Me yet

Mother comes first, and with a capital letter, because father does not yet occupy a place of interest.

She does not yet know either that the capital letter that She will have to grant her father is the kind appropriate to a small dictator, flattered by the centenary costume of fratricidal wars, upheld by patriarchal systems, bosses and captains and other such flocks of people who wear uniform.

- has just come home from a ballet class. Hearing the Mexican song, She sways her hips, gazing at the movement of the pleated Prince of Wales cloth skirt of the hated grey convent school uniform. When She looks towards the house again, Mother is reflected in a windowpane. Magically, she is seen near the piano surrounded by the living room

furniture, at the same time as she seems to be standing in the garden with the municipal water engineer who has just arrived. He is giving her tender looks (just like the petals of the red roses that cover the trellis whose white stalks She will nibble for a change of taste when She has finished her morsel of bread and chocolate).

NOTE 1. She looks, but we do not know if She sees. She is still not able to articulate her discovery: the ambiguity of the reflections and the poetic artifice of insinuation. But anyway from this moment she finds it advantageous to operate as a spy.

THE OLYMPIA CINEMA

*The blue sky of a bright night. On the left
the last window - her window.*

We see her getting up to the rear of the window.

She manages to see a square of the summer cinema's screen. If the caretaker takes a chair out to sit in the fresh air and leaves one of the tin-sheet doors open, She will be able to see another section of the screen from below. She will see shoes, car and bicycle wheels, train rails, puddles, a staircase, grass moved by the wind, whips of sand... In general, She finds that the clues given through this crack are enhanced by the suggestions of the soundtrack. The Olympia is on the other side of the road that starts from the last houses of the village and the garden terrace that looks towards the next town. The cinema is under an open sky; it has jasmine plants and folding wooden chairs. She and her brothers are only allowed to go there when Cowboy and Indian films, or Spanish films with Lola Flores, Manolo Morán or Gracita Morales are being shown.

From her bedroom window, hidden by darkness, She listens to other worlds. Unless a van passes or people go by talking loudly, She can hear all the dialogue, music, sounds, songs and whispers. She can see the forehead, hair, eyebrows, eyes, mouth, and at

times even the elbows of the characters, or the front of a car, the tree-tops, the station clock, the cannon of a tank or the crystal chandelier of a luxury hotel. She does not know whether it is Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo or Ava Gardner, Gregory Peck or Spencer Tracy who speaks, but She is interested in what She hears.

The day that her maths teacher (who is also the cinema caretaker) comes to give her class, She will ask him about the stars whose names are written in such a strange way on the posters still hanging over the box-office. If the voices affect her, She allows herself to lie on her bed. The experience of listening in the dark is exciting. Especially when She remembers that simple sentences like, "Hello, good-morning, how are you?" anticipate quite different things when it is possible to see the eyes of the person who is speaking, or the movement of the eyelids, the frown of the lips, the different conversational expressions. Consequently She will be able to deduce that the exchange of looks between her mother and the engineer, and the gestures hinting a good evening, could continue with scenes beyond the reach of her present potential as a spy. Do they use words the same as those whispered on the screen: "I love you, darling, you are a wild

flower"? The foreheads of the actress and actor get so close on these occasions that She only sees their hair. Another reason,

She believes, to prefer listening in a relaxed horizontal position, lying on the bed.

NOTE 2. She doesn't know that the corner of the summer cinema screen doubly amplifies her role as a spy, towards an inner and an outer space. It steers her imaginary travels towards her passion for the mimesis of the unknown.

ANGLED WINDOWS AND A PROPHETIC EPISODE

*We use letters and numbers
to determine each setting.*

*We call "a" the façade that gives on to the
entrance terrace, "b" the left side.*

We count from right to left.

*The fourth window makes an angle with window 1b
both of which belong to the marital bedroom: a
different orientation that
allows quite a complete simultaneity of
observation. 1b opens to the garden
and is aligned with 4b,
which belongs to her bedroom,
with which we are already familiar.*

Window 4a of Mother and Father's bedroom:

(Mother comes first, and with a capital letter, because father does not yet occupy a place of interest. She does not yet know either that the capital letter that She will have to grant her father is the kind appropriate to a small dictator, flattered by the centenary costume of fratricidal wars, upheld by patriarchal systems, bosses and captains and other such flocks of people who wear uniform. Father is simply not part of anything that happens to Her. He never knows what marks She achieved to pass the term's exams, nor where his socks are, despite Mother's usual answer that for many years they have been in the same drawer in his cupboard in the dressing room. If there are no guests, father eats with a tight mouth, frowning eyebrows and closed ears. His ears sprout hair in the holes and over the top.

Mother is important because she keeps her favourite literature hidden on the tray of the bedside-table. When she drives in the car with a girlfriend, Mother often refers to these books and it seems that what happens to her is similar to what happens in the books. To Her - or to Her sitting in the back seat with her brothers - it seems best to keep quiet or pretend to be asleep. Children are not allowed to read grown-up literature, but no one forbids them to listen to other kinds of indecent conversation; like for example when Mother described how father slept in the double bed with the money that he would give her for the next day's shopping in his pyjama pocket. Mother's girlfriend, who looks like Pier Angeli, has six daughters and is married to a drunkard of the Catalan bourgeoisie whom she despises. She also finds similarities between the books and her husband's habitual way of giving money, only in her case this happens once a week.)

In the prophetic episode at window 4a, the engineer speaks to Mother one evening as they lie in deck chairs on the terrace. Mother tells him that she is finishing *The Magic Mountain* and that she likes it very much. And he says that as soon as she finishes the book he will give her "The..." I don't know what, another strange name, by the same author. It (*Buddenbrooks*) would remind her of incidents from family sagas that she would recognise.

NOTE 3. In this episode, She can neither anticipate, nor even suspect how long it will take her to recognise the hushed system of pacts practised between males within the family, and, in other versions, in all kinds of governments. Carried out at crucial moments of change in age, situation or historical era, these pacts result in the exclusion of women from information, economy and power. She cannot know either that much of the literature that the engineer passes to Mother has been prohibited by Franco's censorship and can only be found in certain bookshops with back-room services, edited by Losada from Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica of Mexico or Ruedo Ibérico. She is not able to calibrate the extent of such a seizure of culture.

It is probable though that what She has heard begins to be transformed into her own longings. It decomposes into images, illuminating shadows of life for the creation of Sadness, the Little Girl Violet or the Soul Comet in a scenario without hiding places like the one Velazquez painted to keep the comedian Pablo de Valladolid standing before the canvas.

BETWEEN THE KITCHEN AND THE YARD

*The back of the house. An iron gate
gives on to the yard
where the laundry pile is, and also
the coal barn, the larder, the servants'
bathroom and the kitchen door.
Some winter morning, for example, or a
morning in summer, when
her bathroom window that
looks out on the yard
from the upstairs floor is open.*

She could be watching how a rabbit is being skinned or a hen being plucked. She could be looking to see how long the red blood that is dripping into the bowl will take to dry up; or how Angeles drowns the mouse that she chased with a broom into the coal-barn, by holding it with two fingers by the tail in a bucket. She looks at these things with her eyes half closed, even though usually, the yard is the place where eyes should be kept most widely open, and ears alert, in order to be ready to take on the tasks one is allowed to do. When the moment for bleaching the sheets arrives, She is permitted to introduce the small bag of washing blue into the basin full of fresh water, stirring the water well with her hand until the washerwoman considers that the blue soap has melted sufficiently. In the afternoon, She helps by cracking almonds open between two big

stones and by separating the shells from the nuts. She nibbles quinces after peeling off the sour skin that She does not want to bite. She divides olives into different sizes. Later the olives will be put in terracotta jars with green glass ceramic bottoms. The jars make a barrel-like sound if you put your head inside and exhale "ahhh..." and then again, a longer "ahhh..."

If Christmas lunch is being prepared, two turkeys await sacrifice. One is black and the other is white. The cook's niece from the village brought them. In their humiliation they shit on the yard floor, their legs tied up with white ribbon. The niece has also brought butter buns boiled in the Arab wood oven, honey biscuits and cakes from Lola's sister. All the goodies are wrapped in a big white cloth. The yard and the kitchen seem the liveliest places to Her.

On the days when Carmen the sewing lady comes, and they have breakfast together, She gets to know incredible things. For example, She hears that a school-friend's mother is so stingy that she puts milk diluted with water into the breakfast bowls of the women in her service, even though Don Alberto, her husband, is the municipal architect and they are rich. But her own Mother is good. That can be seen from the energy

with which she stopped the two guards who came in search of Angeles. Someone had reported Angeles because she was distributing handbills at the tram stop in the street every Monday, before coming to work. Lola has heard the Master shouting at the Mistress asking why she had to get involved in protecting a "red". And Lola shouts at Angeles asking why she gets involved in such brawls, and says that it is all the fault of that Iluminada who has filled her head.

What is a "red"?

Lola is bad tempered today. One of the

neighbours from the poor cottages that lie at the back of the farm gave her a sermon when she went to give him the leftovers for his chickens. Wolf, our German sheep dog, jumped over a small ravine in the wall that separates our kitchen garden from the neighbour's little hen-house and killed three of his laying chickens and squashed the laid eggs.

AT LUNCH TIME

The place for the meals changes, for half the year it is somewhere under the trees, and for the other half it is fixed in the dining room.

NOTE 4. She doesn't yet know that there will be an archaic emotional connection for her between the blood that soaks the yard from the gash over the chickens' jugular and the litres of film blood that the actresses will hurl down the stairs in *Hécuba*. Nor does she know that she will meditate for a long time on María Zambrano's argument that our civilisation has not completed the process of humanisation and that we still live the paradigm of a culture of sacrifice.

For the first time, she gets rid of her disguise as spy and exchanges it for that of witness, which demands even more discretion.



Hécuba, Teatro de las Sorámbulas, 1998.
- Photo: Marta Aizpúrr

Father is sitting at one end of the table, in a bad mood as usual. Mother sits at the other end. When we come to the pudding, Mother brings up the question of the chickens. Mother knows about what has happened and she reinforces her position by affirming that she has seen everything herself. She passed by the gap in the earth and stones and saw the chickens lying on the straw, moist from a sticky yellow oozing liquid, the bitten necks losing drops of blood that nobody had collected in a bowl. Mother adds that she has promised Lola that the wall will be mended and that they will buy three new laying hens for the neighbour. Meanwhile she has promised that Wolf will be muzzled and that Chacha Lola will not have to be ashamed when she goes to the market the next day. Father leaves the table without a word. He goes to the living room and sits in the armchair. Angeles enters with a tray of coffee; she pours the coffee into

cups and asks if the Master would like her to add sugar to his. He doesn't say a word, he is busy taking out the cigar cutter from his pocket - click! And, as the tip does not fall, he tears it off with his teeth and spits. A good cigar! He licks the end, lights the cigar with the long flame of a lighter until he gets a circle of ash. He inhales, blows out the first puff, then the second and finally the third, when Mother says: "The coffee is getting cold and I am not going to ask to have it re-heated while the kitchen is being cleared." He announces that the expense of reconstructing the wall will be shared with the neighbour, and that the neighbour can buy the chickens himself. No, daddy!!

LOLA, THE ILLITERATE COOK, AND ANGELES, THE RED

*The whole house, and the whole map
of the soul looking at the polis.*

NOTE 5. During her adult life She (which is to say me after having been You, as we will see) will not need to read endless and complicated volumes of *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx. But She does need to observe the transparency of negation, to buy the book *NO*, by the Uruguayan poet Idea Vilariño, and to understand the question followed by an exclamation in Federico García Lorca's posthumous play *El Público*. She will include it in *Helénica, Poems for the Audience*: "Once again the same set? It is horrible!" (A key sentence that triggers the fall of the back curtain revealing the naked back stage). She does need to keep the video, recorded from the television, of *The NO in Chile*, for her children, and to cry during the transition to democracy at the presentation of the film *The Official History* (of Argentina). She wept with a girlfriend whose telephone was tapped unjustly because they thought she was a Trotskyite, a fact she reveals as a postscript to the story told by the film.

She loves Chacha Lola and Angeles. Angeles is the youngest of the servants her Mother employs. She thinks that She loves her like a big sister. She also considers Lola to be like a second mother and She says so to her brothers and sister, who agree. Angeles has an aunt in Russia called Iluminada who sends her photographs and letters in good hand-writing on ruled paper. The photo-

graphs show Iluminada holding her son's hand on a road covered with snow (she is a single mother). They show her smoking at her office desk beside a type-writer; drinking vodka on her saint's day with other Spanish people (exiled republicans); in a big room

with a lot of people and another woman dressed in black, called Pasionaria, who speaks into a microphone (defending the workers). Is the neighbour a worker as well? "Shush you, little girl!" Lola orders, exercising the command within her control. "Your aunt Iluminada smokes, why does my father not let my mother smoke?"

Here we can abandon the game of *italics* and capital letters as things start to get complicated and explain instead that the parentheses above mark the moments in which Angeles lowered her voice.

She dictates to Angeles from her schoolbook and corrects her spelling mistakes.

NOTE 6. She writes ILUMINADA with capital letters in a notebook, and observes the effect this causes on Her. She will not write Angeles with capitals because Angeles will not cut her mop of hair, even though it makes her so hot, because of her boyfriend Radesgundes, that dark boy who moved to the village at fifteen and frowns worse than Father.

the slash on the collar and the sleeve have been made with a knife. Perhaps it looks like that. You wash and keep quiet. Something has happened. The Mistress has not stopped lamenting since she woke up and the Master has not come out of the bedroom yet. Master is not home. What do you mean he is not home? Don't ask and keep your mouth shut. Jealousy once again, I suppose. You better learn, learn that that Rades... think how well off a single woman is, with no boyfriend! The bedroom bell rings, Angeles runs. A camomile tea, Lola, the Mistress cannot stop vomiting bile. Woman, you are like a news bulletin. Joking apart, she told me that if it weren't for you getting in between... I put myself so much in between that I showed I meant business, either he disappeared like the wind or I would call the Civil Guard. And the bruise on your arm? I could not calm her, she was rigid, suffocating, foam was coming out of her mouth and she held on to me with such force. And the children? Miss Nuria brought them at bedtime, after supper.

Angeles wants to learn to write as well as her aunt Iluminada. She would do the same for Lola, but Mother tried to do so previously and only managed to get Lola to hold the pencil awkwardly for a bit. "Think how quick you are, and an artist as well, and yet you don't want to learn! And still counting with your fingers!" "You are there for the big accounts, my fingers are enough for me."

ANOTHER OBSERVATORY WINDOW

Her bathroom window from which the pine trees and the kitchen garden can be seen.

What is this? Blood, what else? It seems that

It seems they did not notice anything.

She sees how Mother runs among the pine trees in her night-dress and Lola runs after her calling her softly from time to time, imploring her to stop, for God's sake. Perhaps She was woken by the anguished syllables or by the full moon that shines sideways on her bedroom floor, or by both things. From the bathroom window the view is more mysterious: the white light filters and disintegrates into rays in between the pine branches and trunks. It is difficult for her to distinguish between reality and dream in the scene that is laid out before her.

2. LIFE AS YOU

Stage design for the beginning of the journey towards struggle, without stage directions.

For years the custom of taking a branch of white lilies to Chacha Lola's tomb in the Benejuzar cemetery has been interrupted. In opposition to Father, Mother arranged that

NOTE 7. She doesn't know that the goddesses and half-goddesses of Parnassus did not want to marry and that they fought and ran away from the gods. No and no. Despite their stratagems, they were taken by force, subjugated. And in the end one after the other they were raped.

She doesn't know whether one day She will marry, but She decides that next time She will do the same as her heroine, Chacha Lola. The next time that Father raises his hand to Mother, or to her brother who resembles Mother, or to the asthmatic grandfather, who is bedridden in Galicia, She will help Lola. Between the two of them, they will catch Mother after she reaches and opens the small door that gives onto the street, as she runs down the road towards the barracks in her nightdress. Between the two of them, they will calm her uncontrollable weeping. They will assist her as she collapses after repeatedly sobbing out: "His father sent his mother mad (my sister-in-law Asunción says so), his older brother is sending Enriqueta mad and he wants to send me mad. He won't manage to do it, he won't manage it!" She will intervene when Mother, furious, will run after Lola, hit her, reaching out to pull her hair. She and Lola will embrace and cry disconcertingly for days, sealing an indelible pact with tears.

She doesn't know that she is already writing the beginning of what will be a play. She writes, *Voice: The Garden of the Clock House or the Blind Minstrel's Tale of the Most Priiiiiivate Civil War* interpreted by Arlecchino on stage. She writes, *Characters: White Ophelia* (scene...); *Black Ophelia* (scene...); *Ondina* (who weaves nets on the bottom of the sea while she explains that she bought an encyclopaedia with her savings), ...

She doesn't know that Arlecchino's voice will be heard at the premiere in Madrid, and that they will conclude the performance by reading a manifesto against the ethnic violations in Bosnia Herzegovina. She doesn't know that when Arlecchino's voice sounds on the stage of her town's theatre, a text written by Edward Albee will also be read to celebrate World Theatre Day. And that this text will be followed by another that completes what Albee does not explain, a text that states that three young girls have just been savagely assassinated in the nearby village of Alcasser, and that this act has a name. It is called violence against women.

She doesn't know that She and her colleagues in Sorámbulas will again take up the tradition of Spanish feminism from the years 1927 to 1933 because the popularity that theatre brings them can be used; people recognise Sorámbulas and follow them in the demonstrations.

You could study abroad. You have experienced the phase of studying languages abroad, in Paris and London. You have been through art studies and the life of a recently married wife in Madrid. Now You are back, with your beloved son and daughter who are going to the state high school. Your sister finally gave in and married a rich old man, as Father insisted she should, using Mother's influence. She is busy with her children, first a girl, then a boy. This February Angeles separated from Radesgundes, as You did from your husband. Angeles can accompany you as her son and daughter are grown up

and they are training for jobs. Angeles talks, talks and talks while You drive. Lola fell ill with leukaemia out of grief. Mother was at her side during the illness, holding her hand without moving from her deathbed for days and nights. You had to move to the House, taking your children with you, to check out the work on the central heating installation. While an exhausted Chacha said goodbye to the world, You slept as if among the rubble left by a war, in rooms with holes in the walls, on the floor that connects the hall that has the staircase with the room in

which was the cupboard where the hunting guns were kept. The closet with the cleaning utensils was there, and also the kitchen and the larder that were always packed with excellent broth and the liqueurs that fostered the overwhelming drunkenness of the married couple at the peak of their frustration with their life together.

You tell Angeles that you frequent the Unesco Friends Club, where the cultural change necessary to avoid dictatorship is being forged discreetly. During your second year in Paris, one day at the exit of the Sorbonne University, students were protesting and gathering signatures in favour of the release from prison of some Spanish students, harshly repressed by Franco's police during a demonstration in Madrid. That day You went over the threshold and bought books by García Lorca, León Felipe, Rafael

Alberti and Gerald Brenan in the Ruedo Ibérico book-shop in Paris. You had been looking at those books for a long time in the shop window. Now You know more about the fate of the Spanish Republican exiles. You met some of them at a party in England. Their version of the civil war corresponds to that of your girlfriend, labelled as a Trotskyite. Her story had been passed down by word of mouth from her father.

3. CAPITAL AND SMALL LETTERS IN VARIOUS SCENES

*Me among ourselves,
and something about the artistic trajectory.*

The condition of Her or You has been emphasised by the constraining *italics* and capitals in this compilation of antecedents. Other antecedents have not been mentioned, like the subconscious black sun, the

NOTE 8. Speaking with Angeles You realise that Mother has changed, that You have moved away even if She does not seem to be moving away. You perceive that you and Angeles will not get to know the House with the central heating.

family bog, the gradual removal of investiture inflicted on women, and the plundering of patrimony when the male brothers moved into the front row of the decisions taken by Father. (Here it is advisable to invest him with the capital letter, underlining his negative significance.) In the public sphere, pure discrimination on the grounds of gender was another steep hill to climb during the social passage from adolescence to adulthood in a country that had not yet achieved the democratic respect for freedom and equality that you worked for with other women. I note that the male political and intellectual team's contribution to the women's cause during the transition to democracy, and during the normalising of our Spanish democracy, lagged behind the women's struggle. Their contribution has been short

of voices and belated, if not frankly indolent and troublesome - save for a few welcome exceptions.

To be and remain "I", freed from the baggage of the small pronoun, integrated into an active "us", is a conscious choice which has been forging itself in the "Notes" placed at the foot of each biographical piece. I continue to write from this starting point to explain my political feminist feelings, poured into the struggle for the full rights of women, as part of a generation that needs to follow a path for a better and more humane society in all corners of the world, including the struggle to safeguard the planet.

How does all this get incorporated into the theatre that I propose and that we



Almas y jardines, Teatro de las Sorámbulas and Concertus Novo Orquestra, 1995. Photo: Cayetano Ferrández

produce?

"When truth is important I prefer to write fiction," said Virginia Woolf, and I subscribe to this. Partly because I estimate that one of the tasks of the process to be accomplished is the creation of a universe of symbolic imagery that uses other points of reference and meanings, and that arises from other kinds of relationships among those who create.

I understand theatre as an interdisciplinary meeting place of multiple-authorship, where it is possible to moderate the hyper-infatuation of the I-only-author, as the only descendant of God. The dialectical relationship with space is another of my frequent preoccupations. For example, *Almas y Jardines* (Souls and Gardens, 1995) was

premiered in the Weapons Yard of the Felipe II Barracks of the Castle of Santa Bárbara in Alicante. *Hécuba nómos y música de las ciudadanas* (Hecuba nómos and Music of the Female Citizens, 1998) was premiered on the small Mediterranean island of Tabarca at dawn, on a kilometre long track beside stony, dusty fields, and paths surrounded by cactus. Along the track, beyond the horizon, Algeria revealed a stream of pregnant women, in curious episodes of uncivil war. *Toda la humanidad habla de Troya* (The Whole of Humanity Speaks of Troy), the audio-visual work connected with *Hécuba*, was shown in the historical Governor's House. *Las flores del yodo* (The Flowers of Iodine, 2000) which was presented in a gothic chapel in Barcelona, wove meanings into eras by

re-writing on stage the poems of twenty-five women poets who narrate the 20th century, with their existential avatars and their thoughts about writing. The audience occupied the place of the altar and the actresses the area intended for the parishioners. The next premiere, the multimedia installation *Oratorio del cubo de San Agustín* (Oratory of San Agustín's Bucket) made for the 17th of July 2003 in the Kimmel Center during the 4th Hemispheric Meeting of the Tisch School of Arts, at New York University, is another example. This installation-performance refers to the spillage caused by the sinking of the Prestige oil tanker (77,000 tons of fuel that has continued to inundate the northern coasts of Spain and parts of the French coast in successive black tides since November 2002). The installation was made by Eugenia Funes and composer Immaculada Cárdenas, and it is about the transformation of Catholic rituals into civic protest. In face of the oceanic dimensions of this case, once again we confine the immeasurable event within a television screen.

Working always with the criterion of intertextuality, at times I have included authors' texts to give voice to the male characters in my own plays. I do not want to take upon myself the gendered voice of a man. (An example of this is the character of the Topaze Man, taken from a poem by José María Parreño, which is included in *Hélenica*.) On the other hand, I have presented myself as an author assuming her gender by re-writing text for female characters that has already been provided by male authors beforehand. I did this, for example, in the fusion of the tragedies *Hecuba* and *The Trojans* by Euripides, proposed for Tabarca. I synthesised and added text to the monologues of Hecuba, Polixena, Andromache and Cassandra. I also changed the Chorus into a group of female citizens who call themselves the audience when revealing themselves. I left untouched the highly mean-

ingful Euripidean voice for Ulysses, Polimnestor, Agamnenon and the Messenger.

I have been very concerned to leave written or visual documentation of Sorámbulas' productions because I have always been aware that, however considerable our artistic and public recognition, our productions will never achieve the run that they potentially deserve. At the moment, for example, I only know of one female festival director in the whole of Spain, Magda Puyo, who directs the Sitges Festival, and still there are very few women who manage venues. This is the case, even though there are many professional women in the most active places on the ladder that sustains theatrical and cultural activity in Spain.

Like Jill Greenhalgh, I often underline the need to take the time necessary to search for public or private finance. We need this, not only to make productions, but also to create and make available spaces to meet and hear about what has been done, where we can talk amongst ourselves, getting to know each other through our respective aesthetic options and principles. In order to do this, I started organising the Cadiz Meetings of Ibero-American Women in Scenic Arts.

*The most imminent, to continue living and the
artistic struggle*

My daughter Margarita, also a founder of Sorámbulas, played different Arlecchinos in *Helénica* and in *Almas y Jardines* and was a memorable Polixena in the performance of *Hécuba*. I allow myself this small homage to her merits as an actress because she has stopped working with Sorámbulas. Today she has a doctorate in Sociology and is working in a European University Institute in Italy in social and political research related to gender inequality. She is also taking care of the imminent arrival in the world of what will be her first daughter, my first granddaughter and,

hopefully, another potential feminist descendant in her own context.

The thoughts arising from the difficulty we encountered in conversation one day at the beginning of her pregnancy inspired me to write a poem. We had difficulty in talking about the coming baby in a way that did not exclude the feminine (baby is always masculine in Spanish). In the poem I transpose this personal circumstance to the symbolic imagery of the Renaissance, imagining the creation of a double article, composed of the two personal pronouns - *él* ("the" for male) and *la* ("the" for female). We resolved the problem by changing the usual priority of masculine with the feminine so: *la el*.

This game between my daughter and I, calling what was growing in her tummy *lael* in our conversations, instead of referring to the baby, lasted until the ultrasound scan which revealed the arrival of a girl. Nevertheless the invention was the source for the title of the poetry book that I have just finished, *El río de lael* (Lael's river). In the title I have converted the personal

pronouns in their altered order into a name with small letters.

In conclusion, I add the poem as an indication of the long distance that we still have to travel before we are able to invent new ways of including our experience not only on the stage, but also in the meaningful structure of words, reflecting artistic language.

Translated from Spanish by Julia Varley

<i>Su mirada y la nieve de Febrero en el ventanal de su casa florentina Sus brazos de Gioconda reciben latidos impausados de la el que nacerá Al fondo, la Cúpula de Brunelleschi que su vientre asemejaría si ella o yo misma alumbramos el artículo en función navegable por las aguas discursivas del Arno que nos bana dos veces</i>	The February snow on the window sill of her Florentine home and her Gioconda gaze As her arms embrace the continuous heartbeat of la el waiting to be born In the end her belly might resemble the Brunelleschi Dome if she or I could reveal la el As capable of navigating the watery discourse of the Arno, that will not bathe us twice
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