



**Memories  
about Authorship**  
Adèle du Lac



Ediciones del caracol

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There was a time when stories belonged to everyone: everyone made them, everyone owned them. The voice of all stories was common. No story sought a price: nothing would have been considered more absurd. They were as free as the mother tongue was. My father taught me as a child that the strange hoard of men became humanity, thanks to these anonymous and polyphonic stories that belonged to everyone without ever being owned.

There was an age in which each time you lacked a word to express something, you could find a story to supply it.

“Every story was like a new word, a new step on the road to knowledge. Who could pretend to be the owner of a word, of a step on everyone’s path?” My dad told me one day after reading me an old, anonymous legend.

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“Each story, a word. Each word, a story.” My dad repeated to me one day while walking to the town’s library.

Upon arriving, he stopped before its doors and, with a ceremonial movement, he brought his hand to his heart and breathed deeply, like one smelling a delicious mystery.

Once inside, he told me:

“A library is a dictionary. Each book it contains is a word in the story of who we are.”

Later he looked for a dictionary on the shelves. He opened it in front of me, showing me the double rows of words with their definitions.

“A dictionary is an infinite library. No one owns the incalculable combinations of their words. They are all here for everyone.”

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*(To this day I have saved this copy of an engraving called "The Fallen Angel" that my father had hanging in his office)*

My parents never hung paintings on their walls if the painting had the artist's signature on it. Every time I went with them to a home where there were pictures with artist's signatures, my father winked at me as he pointed to the signature and said in a dark, whispering tone:

—The stain...

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There was the first time he put me in front of the camera. Village children represented, for each short of the medium-length film, different love scenes that we had seen in the movies shown in the village. During the gatherings, each child told the others about the love scene that they remembered best.

One of the scenes they decided to film was one that I had told. I was asked to act it out in front of the camera with another child. The scene was the final scene of *City Lights* --- the moment when, upon touching the hands of the vagabond played by Chaplin, the florist recognizes the man who had saved her from blindness.

I remember that I chose it because it was the first love scene that made me cry in front of the screen. Upon seeing it, I experienced an intense feeling of reality, as in dreams, that I was the florist and at the

same time, I was also the vagabond. My life had completely melted with the image of the light on the screen, and I wept with joy and ecstasy while watching those hands clasped, feeling as if it were the beating of my own heart that gave them life.



I also remember how easy it was for me to portray that scene in front of the camera. I had been the florist, so I simply made myself into the representation of the memory of something I had lived before.

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—What is humanity without a story?

I was still an adolescent when I heard it from Walter, an old friend of my father's, whom we went to visit once. We had crossed all of France to go and see the tuberculosis sanitarium in which he had been living for several years, never able to be fully cured or to die. It was the first time I had made such a long trip and it was also the first time I had seen that old friend of my father's of whom he had spoken so often. It would also be the last since, shortly after our visit, Walter's wasted lungs finally stopped breathing.

"We, the story!" exclaimed Walter, responding with enthusiasm to the question he had just asked us.

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*I save this picture that my father had saved, and in which appears Walter's body exactly how it was found the day he died, during one of his walks on the grounds of the tuberculosis sanitarium where we had visited him.*

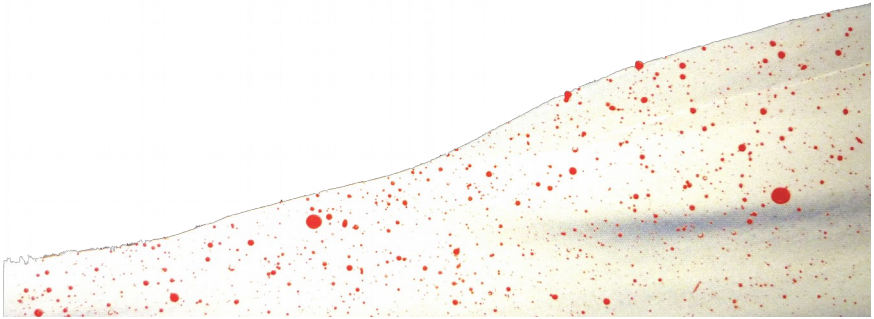


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Coinciding with what my dad had told about him, Walter didn't stop telling stories on the walk that we took on our visit. I remember that everything was white after a big snow announced the imminence of winter, which evoked in Walter legends of the Arctic and stories about Eskimo peoples.

I realized that Walter had learned to accommodate in the rhythm of the story the coughs that every few minutes he could not suppress. Without an apparent effort he made sure that almost every cough created a climax of suspense in the story he was telling. I remember that between two especially strong fits of coughing, he told us, melancholically:

"The Eskimos were decimated at the beginning of the century by tuberculosis that was brought to their communities with the invasion of the white man. The snow was stained with red spots everywhere, and when the sound of coughing stopped, entire communities had disappeared forever in places where generations had previously survived for thousands of years."



On another part of our walk, after putting away a reddened handkerchief with which he had covered his mouth during a coughing spasm, Walter brushed away the snow on the edge of the road to pick up a stone. While he contemplated it, turning it around slowly in his hand, he told us that the Eskimos were great storytellers, but even better sculptors.

“Before they begin to sculpt” Walter told us, “an Eskimo spends a lot of time contemplating the stone.

“Who are you?” He asked it.

After a long silence, again interrupted by another fit of coughing, Walter continued:

“After calmly listening to the reply, the sculpture emerged when the Eskimo helped” -Walter emphasized this word---“to bring out the image within the rock. When

sculpting or telling a story, Eskimos regarded themselves as helpers, instead of creators. Everything was there, just waiting for the help of a gentle push so that it was revealed. They do not consider themselves artists, creators, nor did they even have such words: for them the exterior reality was already something that we call art.”

“I have read that this same attitude of helping to birth, like midwives” added my father, “also governed the relationships of Eskimos with their community: no one imposed, they helped to free.”

Walter nodded his head and was thoughtful for a long time. When my father and I intuited that a new coughing fit was imminent, Walter, instead of coughing, brought the rock to his face and, after breathing deeply the cold air that surrounded us, said with a clean, deep voice:

“Imagine, my dears, to say ‘poetry’ the Eskimos used the word ‘breathe.’ The verses of a song were for them as natural as breath!”

“A happy people....” said my father looking dreamily at me.



When I was still a girl, my mother sometimes called me “Maria Pseudonym,” due to my love of giving silly nicknames to the whole world. This hobby endured for the rest of my life, and would end up applying especially to myself.

Following the example of Walter, my great teacher of one day, I invented many names to vaguely imply “us” each time it was inevitable that the name of an author appeared on some of the stories I have helped to tell throughout my life.

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Not by chance, said Walter, the Eskimos told their best stories from behind a mask that formed part of the story. Once the story was told, the mask became useless, was discarded and another mask was made for the next story. They never told two stories in the same way.

“Can two of the same story exist?” my father told me what Walter said. “Are we always the same, every time we tell a story?”

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Here ends the selection of fragments of the book *Memories about Authorship*. You can close this window and continue your journey.