

Fall 1973

Peace Through Silence Translated by Murray Baumgarten and Gabriel Berns

Miguel Delibes

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Delibes, Miguel (1973) "Peace Through Silence Translated by Murray Baumgarten and Gabriel Berns," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 2 , Article 21.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss2/21>

This Prose is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in CutBank by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

PEACE THROUGH SILENCE*

by Miguel Delibes

Translated by Murray Baumgarten and Gabriel Berns

Once in bed, he (Jacinto) begins to shake. He puts on a sweater, spreads his bathrobe on top of the blankets, huddles up and pulls the edge of the bedclothes over his shoulders. He is beginning to respond. There in bed he feels much better: tranquil and silent. Ever since the day he said good-bye to Dario Esteban he has not missed the lack of companionship nor has he even felt the need to turn on the radio. "For me, words are superfluous," he (Jacinto) says to himself.

At the beginning, when Genaro had suggested that he join the Group, Jacinto thought that the world in fact did need universal unappropriated words and that therefore Esperanto might offer a solution. He enrolled with great expectations but after a short time he gave it up because he realized that if you talk, you argue; if you argue, you hate; and if you hate, you kill. It was then that he (Jacinto) thought: "Better, fewer and newer words." Genaro would often find him in a trance (he often saw him seated in a chair, rubbing his head, or meditating alone on top of one of the hills surrounding the city) and a few weeks later Jacinto first announced the objectives of the MOVEMENT FOR PEACE THROUGH SILENCE. It was still in the embryonic stages and not yet fully articulated, but it had a suggestive appearance and an undeniable interior strength. Jacinto said: "We did not take advantage of the Tower of Babel, but although it is late, it is not *too* late." Actually, very few people paid any attention to him (to Jacinto) and the majority of that minority only made fun of him. Dario Esteban himself heard him speak one morning in the Refectory and said: "Don't talk nonsense, Jacinto San Jose; it would be better for you to discuss the 3-3-4. Do you think the 3-3-4 is a suitable offensive tactic or, on the contrary, do you believe it is merely a discreet defensive strategy?" and Jacinto wrinkled his nose in an effort to smile as he said "I'm sorry, I never use it," to which Dario Esteban replied, his fleshy neck cocked to one side like a frightened chicken, "do you doubt, Jacinto San Jose, that speaking about sports is even healthier than to practice them?"

After this reticent observation, Jacinto decided to speak only essential words. The conversations in the Refectory, the voiced encount-

*From *The Drowning Man: A Parable (Parabola del naufrago, 1969)*.

ers upon entering and leaving the office, all seemed to him to be a senseless waste, and only when speaking to the mirror did he (Jacinto) permit himself any verbal license for, after all, Jacinto could destroy his image (the mirror) if he wanted to, and such aggression would not be serious or have any harmful consequences for anyone else. Convinced of the systematic congruence of his ideas, Jacinto spent some days looking for disciples. The first epigone was Cesar Fuentes (also known as Caesarean) who immediately formulated his own radical, uncompromising plan as soon as Jacinto had finished speaking: it was necessary to cut out the tongues of all rational beings (in his flute-like voice, Cesar Fuentes had actually said their mouths should be castrated) so as to nip verbal aggressions in the bud, so to speak. Jacinto attempted to appeal to Cesar's better nature by saying: "Be careful, Cesar Fuentes, an ideology born of resentment will have a hard time catching on, and if it did have any success, it would only generate more resentment. If the attempt at mutual understanding is a utopian scheme, there is only one possibility for understanding: not to make the attempt at all."

Besides Cesar Fuentes, there were two men who attracted Jacinto's attention from the beginning, for obvious reasons: Baudelio Villamayor, the gardener, because of his general terseness of speech, and the first-class scribe, Eutilio Crespo, who had an instinctive desire to keep himself hidden from others. Since his first day of employment with the Company, Baudelio Villamayor had made himself understood through half finished words and sentences so that when he said "morning," it was understood that he meant "good morning," and if he said "good," everyone knew he meant "good afternoon." As for Eutilio Crespo, Jacinto noticed he was so jealous of his scribal status, that he would hide whatever he was working on behind a palm leaf fan to evade plagiarism. Both Baudelio Villamayor and Eutilio Crespo accepted the bylaws of the MOVEMENT FOR PEACE THROUGH SILENCE but for them, Jacinto's words fell on deaf ears. That did not stop Jacinto from maturing and elaborating his ideology, trying to articulate the premises of his doctrine, and on the afternoon he formulated his motto "neither rhetoric nor dialectics; the short sentence, the short word, the long thought," Baudelio Villamayor objected that *he* already had the short words and sentences, but how the hell could he find a long thought. This criticism gave Jacinto something to think about and he finally summarized his thesis with the following conclusions:

- a) It is not reasonable that all of man's energies be dissipated through his mouth.
- b) The word, to date, has only served as an instrument of aggression or as an exponent of stupidity.
- c) Words have been used to construct Gardens of Eden which cannot be reached on foot and

- d) the fewer words we utter and the shorter they are, the less aggression and floating stupidity there will be in the world.

So, the question of long thoughts was left unresolved for the time being, and the new language of Contract was born even though Jacinto had not planned for it to appear so soon.

Shortened words, particularly those which were originally proparoxytonic, became more euphonic and were perfectly intelligible within the context of the sentence; they saved time not only for the person speaking and writing, but also for the listener or reader; by redesigning the dictionary, the renovated words recovered their original strength and purity which use and abuse (erosion was the term Jacinto employed) had made them lose; there would no longer be any risk of verbal automatism, the direct cause of all floating stupidity and, finally, the possibility of discord would be weakened since if he who talks a lot errs a lot, he who hardly speaks hardly errs.

Cesar Fuentes, Baudelio Villamayor and Eutilio Crespo smiled as they gave the single acquiescent clap (the traditional ovation was reduced in Contract to a single clap since it expressed agreement and pleasure just as well without wasting time or expending energy uselessly). Jacinto performed the first demonstration with his now famous slogan: "Neither rhetoric nor dialectics; any attempt at comprehension through words is utopian," which in Contract came out reduced to, "Neither rhetor nor dialect; any attempt at comprehension through words is utope." Cesar Fuentes, Baudelio Villamayor and Eutilio Crespo gave another clap and Cesar Fuentes said "wonder!" and Eutilio Crespo said "stupen!" and Baudo Villamo, the garden, looked from one side to the other conscious that he was participating in the beginning of something important but without fully grasping its transcendence. (In time, Jacinto came to recognize that his innate aversion to proparoxytonic words had had a great influence on the genesis of Contract. His timidity made it impossible for him to pronounce a proparoxytonic word without a slight stammer that could easily turn into a full-fledged stutter and would constitute a clear indication of his discomfort. Contract transformed all the proparoxytones into paroxytones, thus making them less overwhelming and more digestible).

Jacinto dedicated many hours to perfecting and polishing the new language. He often said to himself with secret satisfaction: "I am Contract," and this dictum both satisfied his diminutive vanity and imbued him with a sense of restless responsibility. He had faith in Contract's universal acceptance; fewer and shorter words could be the ordering principle Humanity had been searching for. Persuaded, Jacinto (perhaps a bit too precipitously) convened the First Inaugural Contract Conventa on the eve of Saint Joseph's Day.

The meeting took place in Baudelio Villamayor's hothouse among flowerpots, shovels and rakes, with the members in attendance seated around a charcoal burning brazier and drinking glasses of red wine. Jacinto's speech, a model of verbal economy, was transcribed integrally by Eutilio Crespo in the Official Record of Proceedings, the minutes of this first session being the only ones ever taken. It read as follows:

(Integ text inaug speech Move Peace Through Silence delivd Jacint San Jose, Jr.)

"Disting Compans: a few words of saluta to tell you we are heading in the right directa. Human has the obligata to economize sounds. It is danger to speak more than we think. In addita, superfl words lead to confuse. It is incorr to believe that a univ language would facil peaceful co-exist. Rhetor and eloq language interfere with huma unders. Let us be lacon and let us try to have one indiv speak as little as possib to anoth indiv since if an indiv speaks in moder with anoth indiv, discrep is imposs and conseq we will be embarking on a new perio of defin peace. Be cogniz of the transcend of this histor mome. Nothi more. Let us now nominate a Direct, a Vice-Direct, a Secret, a Vice-Secret and a Treasure for the govern of our assoce."

A dry clap was heard, like the uncorking of a bottle, but when it came time to nominate members of the Executive Committee, it was necessary to delete the position of Vice-Secret due to the lack of available candidates. After his election as Direct, Jacinto had to split himself into little pieces in order to be able to offer advice, avoid conflicts, and resolve difficult problems, but in spite of his zeal, a conflict did arise during the *Questa* and *Answer* period. "The endings *tion* and *zon* contract to *ta* for euphonic reasons," said Jacinto. "For examp, precaution becomes *precauta* and horizon becomes *horita*. Verbal tenses, with the excepta of the past partic do not contract. Examps, delivd for delivered, invent for invented. Words of two syllabs gener do not contract. Exceptas: proper names and those words ending in consons. Examps, *Cesa Fuenta* and *erro* for error."

Eutilio Crespo, with his proverbial distrust for everyone, interrupted Jacinto constantly, demanding further explanations, as if he (Jacinto) were trying to put something over on them all, and toward the end of the session, he (Eutilio) began to accuse Jacinto of being overbearing, speaking to him in such a way that the friendly dialogue eventually degenerated into a bitter discussion. Firstly, Eutilio Crespo said: "If verbal tenses do not contract with the excepta of the past partic, we are head in the wrong directa, Jacint." Secondly, Jacinto replied: "Bear in mind, Eutil, that it is a *questa* of inventing a new language, but one that is *compre*." Thirdly, seeing the way things were going and trying to avoid a crisis in leadership, Cesar

Fuentes spoke up: "Your attenta, please, I am going to read you the first translata into Contract of an Anto Macho poem, but Eutilio Crespo (fourthly) considered Cesar Fuentes' interventa as a provocata and he angrily shouted: "This is no time for your stupids! This is a serious questa," and since Jacinto, waving his bluish hands in an attempt to calm things down still wouldn't give in (fifthly), Eutilio Crespo lost his head (sixthly) and shouted at him: "You're a dictate and a son-of!", he said to him, and even though Jacinto weakly indicated that his position as Direct of the recently constituted association demanded certain respect, Eutilio Crespo, beside himself (seventhly), dragged his stool away from the brazier, stood up, and at the top of his voice he ended all possibility of agreement: "The Direct can kiss my testics!" he shouted and then things got out of hand. While Jacinto kept saying, "Your attenta, please," Cesar Fuentes insisted on reading Anto Macho's sonnet, and at the same time Baudelio Villamayor, the gardener, grabbed Eutilio Crespo by the lapels of his jacket, shaking him and calling him a queer and a revisionist. Eutilio Crespo, after freeing himself from Baudelio's grasp (eighthly and lastly) went to the door saying: "Go fuck a duck, you garden of shit," as he left the room, slamming the door behind him.