

The two hundred things I told you

By Mariano Blatt

Hullo...? Hullo, can you hear me? I have to tell you this dream I had, before it slips away. All right, here goes: I was reading a text, a photocopy, that said something like... ah, it's slipping away, it was "the work of the proofreader is countercultural rather than cultural," and well, it's a shame I've forgotten it so quickly because it said that but in a much nicer way, much better, like those well-written academic texts, flowing all pretty. Then it went on, and I'm forgetting more and more by the minute so, obviously, my memory of it isn't going to be so nice: "The proofreader should show not that they have a perfect mastery of the language, but rather that they can recognize the face of the voice of the text." And then, I don't know why and I don't know how, but it talked about a certain Cristina, who was running late for a train in London in the nineteenth century, but she was relaxed because she knew English trains didn't run on time. "But what Cristina doesn't know is that in the new England," the text said, and that line in the dream was exactly as I just said it, although the one that follows isn't: "the trains aren't what they used to be." Obviously that last part of the line was much nicer than that coarse "aren't what they used to be." Who would ever write "aren't what they used to be" in an academic text on the history of proofreading, right? Only me, because I'm forgetting the dream. So, going back to the text, as I was reading this the train was leaving the station, which was a river station, I think, because straight away the railway went round the city, above the river. Do you know what the proofreader's job was? To dispatch the train. I don't know why the word *mandolin* comes up now, as if the proofreader was the train's mandolin and closed the last door and said when it had to leave. And Cristina wasn't going to make it and the train was going round London and the photocopied text was actually a moving image. Well, I don't know, what a pity you're not here, I'm going to look up the word *mandolin* in the dictionary and see if it has anything to do with trains. Call me when you get this, I'll be here all day,

with the dictionaries. What a nice dream, really, what a pity you're not here. Anyway, bye bye, kisses, call me, won't you? Ciao.

Hullo, so, sorry to call you again so soon, but I wanted to tell you before I forget that in the end I couldn't find the dictionary (any idea where it might have got to?) but I did find the English history books in English that we read at high school, remember? The ones about the industrial revolution, the invincible armada, the first world war, with those drawings of the giant looms in dark, damp warehouses with hundreds of women and children working in shocking conditions. Remember the story that Miss Sheridan told us about how they employed very small children because they could squeeze through the gaps in the looms and fix them? And do you remember how she used to correct our pronunciation. It was all worth it in the end, wasn't it? I mean, you're there in London, speaking perfect English and running that institution for the... the... ah, I can never remember, what is it you do in London, exactly? Anyway, call me if you hear this and you know where those dictionaries might be. Big kiss, bye.

You know, I was thinking about what I told you the other day, do you remember? That dream about Cristina and the proofreader, and I think at some stage I said something like how the train left a river station. So inaccurate, right? How could a train leave a river station? Aren't river stations for boats? Or are those ports? Oh, I always forget everything, more and more each day. I'm telling you, I don't even remember exactly what trains were. Anyway, I did at least find the dictionaries, they were under the bed. Well, your bed, the one you slept in when you lived here. I don't know who could have left them there. It doesn't seem like a good place to leave a dictionary, does it? Ah, I had a thought, now that I've found them, I can go and look up what *river station* means and while I'm there I'll see what it says about trains. Because, you're not going to believe this, but I've forgotten what they were. What were trains? Oh, I hate forgetting so much. It's normal for you to forget your dreams, isn't it? But words, everyday things, whatchagonnado. All right, that's all, I'll see what I'll do about this. What did I say I was going to do? Hullo? Hullo, can you hear me? Anyway, when you get this, call

me back, even if it's reverse charges, I'll pay, it's no trouble and I have the money.
Kisses, miss you.

Guess what happened today! Hullo first, right? I bought two books, beautiful they are, one nicer than the other. The one that's less nice than the other one is about the history of language spoken all over the world and all the civilizations that have ever existed or ever will. A monumental work of over two thousand pages. The other, nicer than the other one, is about invented linguistics, that is, the science of language but without any foundation. A book of poetry, you might say, or exclaim, I know you, I imagine you, I vi-su-al-ize you, looking at me with those written language researcher eyes, but no, it isn't about poetry. It's about how to invent your own theory of language, without having to have read anything or know the academic rules. No, wait, it's not about that exactly, I mean, I'm not explaining this properly. The thing is, what it is, you know what? I left them behind! On the counter in the bookshop. I realized when I got home. And the worst thing is that I don't remember which bookshop I bought them in. So I've been sitting by the phone until just now, waiting to see whether the bookshop called me to tell me I'd left them there, but so far no luck. Yes, I know, I should hang up, in case they're calling me now and it's engaged. It's just that I found it so funny that I remembered you and, well, I wanted to call you and tell you. Anyway, if you hear this, call me. How's London? Is it cold or hot? What day is it there? The same one as here? I never got that.

Hullo, this is just to leave you this short and sweet message because I've got to dash because I'm late for the meeting but I wanted to tell you that yesterday as soon as I hung up the doorbell rang and it was the delivery boy from the bookshop bringing me the books I'd bought and left on the counter, do you remember? Well I didn't, so I asked the lad who was sending me books, whether it was a gift and whether he knew who this secret admirer was who was sending me books instead of flowers, who could possibly know me so well, and for a moment I even thought it might have been you, so I asked the lad whether he knew who was sending them and he said I'd left them on the counter but—honestly?—I don't remember buying these books. I say *these* because I've got

them here now and I'm looking at them and I wonder, when did I buy this? One is a spy novel from the bargain bin that I've never heard of and whose Spanish translation is awful, I mean awful-awful, like no way, don't do it, buggery bollocks, or was it bollocks to buggery? Do you remember that saying, who used to say it? Oh, how funny, we always used to say it, didn't we? Buggery bollocks, ha ha, how funny. Anyway, I don't know what the other book is about because it's in another language and I can't make it out. Besides, I don't know why I buy these things if I don't read them, right? "Because I can!" you'll say. Oh, you have no idea how much I miss you, how much I miss talking to you. Do you remember when we used to play at doing terribly long dialogues all with commonplaces and well-known sayings? What a pity I don't have anyone to play that with now. Do you know who called me the other day? Cristina, remember her? The one who was missing her train in London in the nineteenth century. She's so funny, she has beautiful pronunciation. I imagine you must speak like that by now, no? Like a fully-fledged little Englishman. Why don't you call me? Are you very busy? Oh well, that's all from me, I'm going to be late for... for... where did I have to be? Anyway, call me when you get this, it's urgent.

Hullo, sorry I didn't call you earlier, some things have happened. I'm fine, all the same. I'll call you later, if you hear this first don't call me because I'm not going to be at home and I don't think the answer machine's working properly, because I never have any messages from anyone and I don't think the messages are being recorded. Bye, don't call me, OK? Bye. You're not going to call me, are you?... Do you get it? I'm playing reverse psychology, a technique I read about in the dictionary of applied psychology. Anyway, bye, I'm not going to sit around waiting for you to call because my answer machine doesn't work and because I don't have time to sit round waiting for you to call, besides, I've kind of forgotten you, you went away so long ago to live I don't know where to do I don't know what because you think you're such a big shot with your degree in I don't know what specialization in I don't know what. You know what? I don't care, because I'm applying psychological reverseness for all the stupid sheep and well deserved it is too. No more books, I'm dedicated to gestalt situationism now and

everything to do with applied neuroscience applied to distributive language. The factors of the product don't alter the order, honey. Bye, call me.

"Hullo, this is Cristina, the one who missed the train. I wanted to know if there were any tickets available for tomorrow because I have to go to Leeds and then Liverpool to buy machinery for my industrial revolution workshop. Call me when you get this, please, it's urgent that I buy the tickets. I missed my train because I got to the river station later. My watch hasn't told the time ever since you left." Do you like it? It's a poem I'm writing. Anyway, call me and tell me what you think, whether I should carry on with it or whether you think it'd be better if it went somewhere else. If you encourage me, I'll carry on. I think I've already found a publisher. Kisses, call me and tell me nice things. It's been a long time since I heard your voice. How about you? Can you hear my voice?

"Memories, what are memories? Forgetting, what is forgetting? Is time always punctual?" Another part of the poem. The publishing thing is coming along nicely. Kisses, I'll keep on writing, bye, call me.

All right, I'm angry. It's been a long time since I heard anything from you or me. All I know is that I'm sitting here staring at a wall and I don't understand what it is. My house is full of books but I've forgotten how to use them or what's the point of them. I found some papers in another language under your bed, and on mine I found some handwritten pages in my own handwriting, loads, over a hundred, with this really long epic poem, about some woman called Cristina and a train. The poem is beautiful, and judging by the handwriting I'd have to say I wrote it myself at some stage, but I don't remember when or why. That's all the news we have time for, Argentina, buggery bollocks, and we have told you it. No barbecue is complete without Cativelli extra chorizos. I don't know why I said that, but I had to say it. With a glass of white wine, in a pasta sauce or in a sandwich, extra chorizos have to be tasted. Did I say that? Hullo? Are you listening to this? Call me, please, I need someone to call me.

All right, I don't remember when the last time I called you was, but some things have happened. To begin with, my epic poem about trains was published and it was a hit. Oh, if only you could have seen all the people who came to the launch. No one. It looks like I'm going to win a prize and I might even win a scholarship for a school abroad. Yes, you heard that right, a-broad. Do you know what that means? Because I don't, and I haven't been able to find the dictionary for days. Anyway, my publisher is chuffed, it looks like the book is really selling well. None. I haven't seen any money yet, but hey, you and I know how these things are. Here if you don't run you fly and god gave bread to those with no teeth. But I don't want to air my dirty laundry, don't comb a gift horse's mane. I'm going to need you to give me your address, so I can send you a copy of the book. Yes, I know what you're thinking, if you give me your address I'm going to go and visit you personally and we all know that neither you nor I want to see each other. Because what you did to me is unforgivable. Don't worry, I'm not going to see you anymore. I'm not interested. I was talking to Cristina, things will sort themselves out. The railway service in London has improved greatly and apparently, it's likely but not certain yet, so don't get excited, but there may be, apparently, given the possibility, a situation occurring shortly in which if everything works out and the stars are aligned it's highly feasible that next month you'll have me no more no less in situ, in personae, de facto, habeas corpus and habeas data, ergo, op cit, running an important, one might say an extremely important, one might say mega super prestigious English school dedicated specifically to the subject of the connection between language and ferrobaires announces the departure of its 25 o'clock service to Chivilcoy, from platform twuuulve. Anyway, call me and I'll tell you more. Kisses, I love you, I miss you, I hear you, I dream of you, I listen to you, I softly caress your ears until you fall asleep in my lap coming home in a taxi late at night while the neon lights reflect off the window and I make a nostalgic face for what's ending and I don't remember, and for what is to come, we still don't know: love? salvation? a poem? friends? the orange light of morning seeping through the cracks in the blind? So many things, so many ideas, and all age-old ones. Call me, call me if you want me to make you feel good.