

Lila Paolucci

Mother line



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This translation serves only informative purposes.

Realizado con el apoyo de Ministerio de Cultura de Santa Fe.
Convenio Plan Fomento 2021.

This text was translated thanks to the support of the Ministry
of Culture of Santa Fe. Plan Fomento 2021 Agreement.



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1

The occasional therapist said, Lucrecia tells me, that women who don't know how to cook have more difficulty getting pregnant than those who do. She said it was scientifically proven and we laughed at the nonsense at first, almost angry.

But then, on my own, I thought about what the therapist said and, in a far-fetched and not at all objective way—which would take me a lot of effort to explain without contradiction (because my thoughts are like a water hyacinth drifting, getting hooked and losing parts on the way and also entangling weeds and vermin and, dragged by the current, reaching a point where it is not a water hyacinth anymore, but an animal)—, it appears to have its authenticity. My mother and food are inseparable entities, linked in a direct and elemental way: my mother fed me, she prepared food for me and, before cooking it over the fire with pans and spoons, she had made it in her own body for me.

The relationship we had was rough and not at all easy. Many times, it was painful. And when she died,

I had to figure out on my own what to do with everything. So it was that, in the hustle and bustle of chewing on my novel, I noticed that when we cooked together or ate something we liked or talked about recipes or watched Anthony Bourdain's TV show, my mom and I didn't fight. (Or we would fight less). And although it's true that the last time we yelled at each other and cried and I dented the door on my way out was over a fried egg, it's also true that we generally lived better in the kitchen. It was perhaps the only place where love was docile.

I finished re-reading *Etymology of the Passions*, a clear and poetic essay by Ivonne Bordelois that proposes a journey to "the infancy of language" following the history of words that name passions, such as joy, anger or jealousy. I returned to the book some years after having read it the first time because, when I considered what the therapist had said to Lucretia, I noticed that in my thoughts reverberated something of what the essay says about love. It was a diffuse but powerful memory.

In the text, Ivonne Bordelois points out that, among the consonants used by Indo-European languages to name love, the *m* of Romance languages which ap-

pears, for example, in the Spanish word amor, and the l of Germanic languages which appears, for example, in the English word love, reproduce the gestures of the mouth and tongue in the approach to the nipple and the licking or suckling of breastfeeding. It would seem, then, that “the occurrence of love is centered on the reciprocal relationship between mother and child, and only by translation does it expand into the zones of the embrace of the human couple. In other words, language knows that mothers cannot divorce their children, nor can children divorce their mothers, and therefore prefers to call this truly indissoluble relationship love”. Further down she explains that the root *am, which is present in love, comes from a mirror projection of the root *ma, which has three entries in Indo-European etymological dictionaries: “in one it means ‘the propitious,’ ‘the good’ (a quality that is still currently projected in matutino or maduro, that is, that which is fresh or that which is about to be eaten); in another, ‘the mother’; in another, ‘the moist.’ The good, the edible, the moist, the maternal, the flowing seem to interweave here”. Subject of language, in me these senses are also interwoven, for, although my mother did not always link with the good or the mature, she did link with food and love and also with

food as a form of love.

There are things that are known on a deep and sensitive level long before they become conscious. There was a long time when love came and went in plastic containers, in the form of potato pie, hake rolls with tomato sauce, baked chicken, Swiss chard cake. Then, for a shorter and more fucked up time, in similar containers and contents, it made its way mostly one way, in the same way that, thirty-two years ago, it had mostly come in breastfeeding. Bordelois continues: “Note that nodriza (wet nurse) comes from nutricia. Nurse, in English, from the same root, means both ‘nurse’ (as a noun) and ‘wet nurse’ (as a verb), ‘to nurse a child’ and ‘to care for a sick person’. In a sense, nursing a sick person is like nursing him or her, feeding him or her, returning him or her to the time when he or she was lovingly receiving mother’s care and milk.”

I am hurt by the fried egg scandal, but I think only a crazy person would eat that an hour after chemotherapy. It is also true that love is often expressed in the form of a laying into. I have also learned that from my mother. I miss that crazy woman.

