

¡Doppelgänger

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The Chinese Box. Doppelgänger. The dreamer who is dreamt. Tautology. All those would be appropriate titles. When Professor Sugar told me the story, my first reaction was to try to forget it. I failed. Its memory returned to me like the burning heels of blistering, narrow shoes. I confess that in a somewhat sadistic way, I have laughed at it. Laughter is also a sign of madness. The story is, after all, politically incorrect. For all of this, I decided to write it. This way, I would remember it as fiction, and I would have forgotten it is real.

One shiny autumn afternoon, behind the yellow sunlight filtering through the large glass windows of the lab, Professor Sugar told me she had casually met one of our colleagues, Professor Otálora, the librarian. He was laughing. Polychromatic laughter, she specified. His tie was undone, his collar, unbuttoned. He looked demented. He told her this story:

--I was helping a group of students to find secondary sources for a presentation on bullfighting in Spain, studied from the perspective of animal cruelty, so that they could compare it to dog fights, or even

cattle raising in the USA, as similar inhumane treatment of animals, when I thought this was my best chance to tell them this joke: “what is the worst problem with young people today? Is it ignorance? Is it indolence?” and they replied: “we don’t know, and we don’t care.” Then he continued his hearty laughter he had interrupted only to tell the story.

Professor Sugar told me that crisp afternoon, she had found the story clever, and she made the resolution to tell it in her classroom at the first appropriate occasion. When she finally did, nobody laughed. --I felt embarrassed. Even ashamed, she said. I think the story is a bit insulting, so I apologized to the class.

I, same as Professor Sugar, found the story astute, too, but intriguing. I waited and waited for my chance to visit her class with the pretext to conduct teacher observations. Once in her classroom, I asked a group of her students: “Do you know the meaning of the word ‘indolence’? They answered: --“No.” Then I asked: “Did you ask Professor Sugar? --No, what for? they replied in unison.

¹ Cuento del profesor Miguel Zapata. West Virginia State University.