
As Rulas de Bakunin

Author: Antón Riveiro Coello

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Genre: Fiction

Reader: **Jonathan Dunne**

One of the most talked about and widely translated narratives to have come out of Galicia in the last ten years is Antón Riveiro Coello's *As rulas de Bakunin* or *Bakunin's Turtledoves*. This is a tale of anarchists before, during and after the Spanish Civil War and their attempts to undermine the Fascists. Three narratives are intertwined in alternate chapters following the life of Camilo Sabio Doldán, whose grandfather Estevo had been born at sea in 1851 en route from Galicia to Argentina, where he worked for an anarchist newspaper and married the cleaner, Cristal. In 1905 the couple were expelled for their ideals and returned to the Galician village of Celas, where Estevo advocates discipline and learning and runs into trouble with the local parish priest, who has him thrown into prison under Primo de Rivera, where he dies of pneumonia. The eleven-year-old Camilo sets fire to the village church in revenge.

Camilo is an able student and is sent to Vilaboa near Coruña to pursue his education and stay with his aunt Lola. Here he comes into contact with other anarchists, plays the guitar and stars in the local football team. Lola has been waiting for years for the love of her youth, Ricardo Fandiño, to return rich from America and sweep her off her feet. He sends a Singer sewing machine but himself returns poor and with tuberculosis. They are married, but Ricardo is fatally wounded in an attack on the headquarters of the Civil Guard in Oleiros. Lola is unable to come to terms with her loss and imagines Ricardo is still overseas. One night she sleeps with Camilo, imagining he is Ricardo, and falls pregnant, only to miscarry. This is the sin Camilo will carry unspoken until the end of his life, when he confesses it in a letter to his wife, Rosalía, who has already died.

When the Civil War breaks out in 1936, Camilo takes to the mountains, returning only to defend his wife's honour when she falls pregnant with their daughter. He is sent to Coruña Prison where he shares a cell with the colourful "San Amaro Cuntlicker", Bernardo Figueiras. In revenge for his parents' death and his sister's rape, Bernardo subpoenas prominent Falangists' wives and submits them to cunnilingus. He also steals their goods in a redistribution of wealth. He is shot, but Camilo is released when, on a whim of the prison director, he manages to learn a short novel off by heart from start to finish.

It is this book, in the last of the three narratives, that Camilo is trying to recover. He finally finds a copy belonging to a mysterious A.D.B., who turns out to be a fellow inmate, Andrés the barber. He also was released when he learnt the book off by heart and now uses his recital skills to torment one of the guards, Dalmiro Ferreiro, living anonymously in Santiago de Compostela. Ferreiro is enraged and shoots Andrés at point-blank range, for which he in turn is arrested. Camilo recovers the book with no name or title, which the author informs us in an afterword was written and published anonymously in Argentina by Camilo's grandfather.

This is a spiralling narrative written with distinctly rich language, covering a period, the Spanish Civil War, familiar by now to readers of English through the work of writers such as Manuel Rivas.

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