

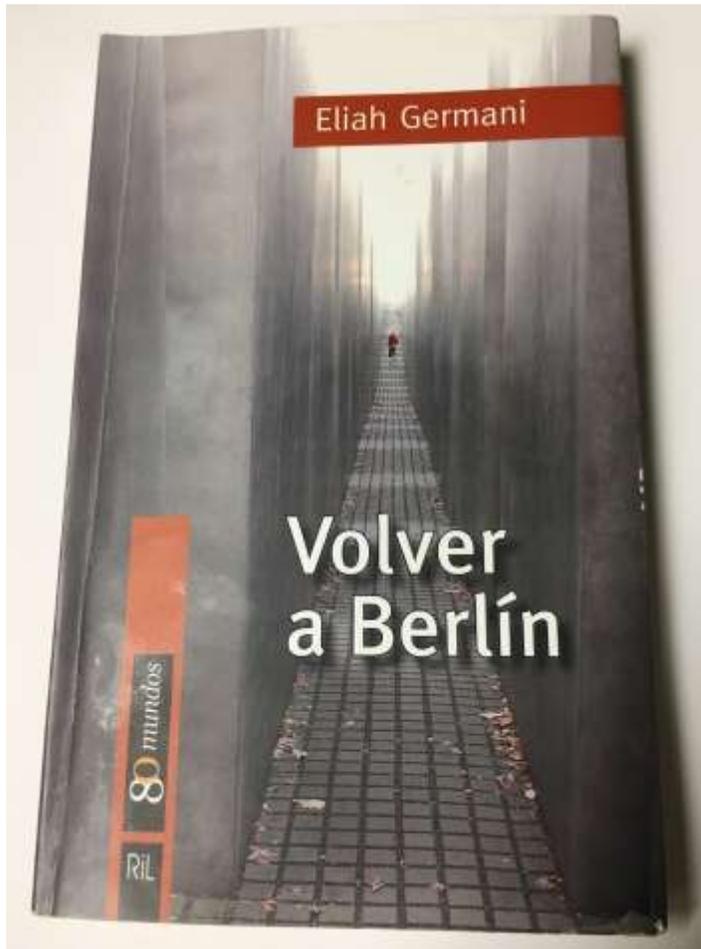
ESPRESSO—Short Story by Eliah Germani (Gonzalo Soto Germani)
Translated from Spanish by Marko Miletich



Today we're happy to share the short story *Espresso* by the award-winning Chilean writer **Eliah Germani (Gonzalo Soto Germani)** in the engaging translation by **Marko Miletich**. We like this story because it depicts an apparent tragic encounter in an urban environment, but with humorous overtones reminiscent of Woody Allen. The language is enjoyably sarcastic and the translation keeps it alert and comic without making it sound pedantic.

We'd love to hear what you think! Find us on Twitter [@TranslateMonth](#), tag us using #NTM2018 and #TranslateMonth2018, join our mailing list, submit a translation month event, or like our [Facebook](#) page. And celebrate your favorite short stories this September and all year long. Share your favorite foreign authors in translation and discover new ones with us.

—*Claudia Serea and Loren Kleinman*

Translator's Note

The story “Espresso” was originally written in Spanish with the title “*Café exprés*”. Is part of a collection of short stories by Eliah Germani (Gonzalo Soto Germani) entitled [*Volver a Berlín \(Returning to Berlin\)*](#). This Chilean writer, who is also a pediatric oncologist at the Regional Hospital in Santiago, Chile, has received several literary awards. Germani’s stories describe everyday situations often with a Jewish backdrop. All the stories in the *Volver a Berlín* collection showcase unexpected events that serve to provide different points of view that offer an invitation to examine life’s dilemmas. “Espresso” depicts an apparent tragic encounter in an urban environment, but with humorous overtones reminiscent of Woody Allen. The Spanish story while comical displays a sarcastic undertone that was kept in the translation. “*Café exprés*” uses a high register as far as many of the lexical choices; something that proved to be challenging in order to maintain the flow of the story without sounding too pedantic. The author uses long sentences, characteristic of Spanish syntax, and these were shortened often to maintain a more usual English syntax and improve readability.

— *Marko Miletich, translator*

ESPRESSO

The girl wore a peculiar pair of round glasses that gave her a sexy look, sort of a glimpse of sensuality that I immediately noticed by the quick look she gave me when she passed by. Nothing more than a casual glance over her glasses, but to me, it seemed exciting and suggestive. She sat down on a stool on a neighboring table and looked over the menu for a moment. She had a nice face and a good figure. She was dressed completely in black, with black pants and a black blouse that revealed her naked waist and the sensual outline of a strand of fine black lace emerging from the edge of her pants when she sat down—an unexpected centimeter of feminine intimacy that was like a private striptease for me. She asked for an espresso, raspberry cake, and a glass of mineral water.

The waitress had not yet served her coffee, when a behemoth approached the young woman, an obese guy gasping for breath, oppressed by the weight of his own wide potbelly. He had a pale face, dark eyes, and very thick eyebrows. He had abundant short, curly hair, short gray sideburns, and thick, hairy ears. He was wearing an elegant blue suit, —probably custom-made— a white shirt, and a yellow tie, and he carried a shiny black leather briefcase that looked miniscule hanging next to his colossal figure. As he passed by, I noticed that his thighs rubbed against each other when walking. I had to make room so he could pass through, a gesture that he acknowledged with a smile while simultaneously loosening his tie.

He greeted the girl with a short kiss on the lips, a kiss that seemed childlike to me, like the slobber smooch of an infant, and took a big white handkerchief out of his pocket—Pavarotti's immaculate handkerchief, I thought—to dry the abundant beads of sweat that were running

down his temples. His arms were disproportionately short relative to his excessive corpulence, which gave him a slightly deformed appearance. He was wearing a visible wedding ring and an unusual sports watch, one of those bulky and complicated watches that divers use. Very carefully, he placed the briefcase next to the table and, as he began the conversation, he rested his hand on her back, a simian hand that he bluntly placed directly over the strip of skin under the blouse, embracing her waist and hips without any hesitation, very casually, as if the girl was his property. She responded with a spontaneous kiss and with a look so filled with tenderness that it made me envious, since they were no doubt a couple, certainly dissimilar, but certainly getting along well. This fact immediately turned me into a sort of jilted and marginal voyeur who then imagined with perverted irony other less fortunate circumstances, such as the complicated erotic tableau of the young woman buried among the white flesh of her disproportionate lover in a grotesque scene that would, no doubt, probably occur on an enormous bed. The waitress finally served the mineral water, the espresso and the raspberry cake, and he took the opportunity to order a big cup of hot chocolate, a bowl of whipped cream and a double portion of cheesecake with the deep voice of Mr. Toad in a Walt Disney film.

Two guys that appeared to be wrestling with the young woman at the cash register took me noisily away from my thoughts at the precise moment the fat guy started to mix a thick layer of whipped cream over the steaming hot chocolate, in a very delicate manner. One of them, an ordinary-looking guy with dirty grey hair, a hooknose, and a face spoiled by a thick pair of antique glasses, leaped to block the door; slamming it shut and pointed his revolver towards us. The poor devil ordered us to be still with a high-pitched voice and vulgar language, while his partner, a fourth-rate Bruce Willis, was already emptying the contents of the cash register into a

grocery bag without wasting a minute. The vulgar pair of assailants contrasted bluntly with the refined mood of the cozy environment of the café, which smelled of mocha, vanilla, and chocolate. They seemed like two clumsy amateurs. Unsurprisingly, this led to fear, as one could expect them to overreact in a number of ways due to their unmistakable lack of experience. In fact, they had started to demand money, cell phones, and jewelry, as well as watches to add to their loot, in a disorderly and overly anxious manner. It was at that precise moment that the guy with the glasses noticed my neighbors and, with a face revealing amusement, leaped toward the giant man, sticking his revolver against his double chin.

“Look where I found them: Beauty and the Beast! And they call me King Kong! So where did you get that chick, buddy?”

He slid the revolver on the fat man’s chin, and my neighbor hit the table with a clumsy blocking move. The fat guy’s block knocked over the cup with a clang and spilled hot chocolate over his chest and belly, soaking his shirt and pants and creating a small puddle on the floor. The bowl of whipped cream fell too and shattering by the feet of the assailant, splashing the robber’s shoes. Suddenly, there was a lot of tension in the air; something terrible was about to happen. A few amusing smiles, however, appeared on the faces of the customers present, exactly when all the danger had been concentrated on the poor fat man, relegating the rest of the people to the background as mere spectators. The harassed giant seemed to be out of breath. He was soaked in sweat and appeared alarmingly pale. He looked all but paralyzed, as if he were willing to tolerate any and all humiliations without resistance. Then his girlfriend thoughtlessly, in a rather reckless manner, and in spite of all known warnings, did exactly what should not be done in cases like

this: she antagonized the assailant. Upset by the ongoing events, she stood up and shoved him away with a sharp push that almost knocked him over. And without taking into consideration the threat of the weapon, she stood in front of him, placing her body between the men so the behemoth was behind her. Clearly, she was taking a great and unnecessary risk, but she seemed in no way vulnerable. On the contrary, she appeared to radiate strength, as if she possessed a dangerous force field.

“If you as much as touch him...! What don’t you try with me?” Her commanding and defying voice left no room for disagreement, and ultimately it was clear that the guy could do nothing but back up, or else... shoot. But she did not give him a chance. Determinedly, defiantly, without giving in an inch, she managed to kick him out quickly towards the door. The assailant made a few gestures, and shouted several nonsensical obscenities. He then threatened us, pointing his revolver in our direction. With horror, we saw ourselves again included in the scene. The stance of the poor guy, however, was now pathetic: the woman had already returned him to his miserable insignificance. His partner immediately realized that things were getting out of hand, that they no longer had the surprise factor, and that the amateur’s stupidity was demolishing his whole precarious strategy.

“You had to start fucking around! We better leave, fast!” the armed robber screamed, grabbing his accomplice by the arm. “Move, move, shit!” They were no longer a threat. They were no longer interested in the loot. They just wanted to escape. Stumbling around the tables, like the true amateurs they were, they could do nothing but flee towards the street.

The fat man, still dripping in chocolate, remained seated, attached to his female companion with a poignant expression of admiration and gratitude. She helped him stand up and showed him to the bathroom. The cashier now was furiously grabbing the telephone, trying to dial an emergency number that, given the predicament, she could not remember. She moved out of the way to let them through. They walked arm-in-arm, completely unaware of us, she, always the protector, with her gaze very high over our heads as if we were a minuscule and pathetic horizon. A waitress pushed aside the table and, squatting, hurried to clean the table at the spot where the fat man had been. Finally, I dared take a sip of my espresso, only to realize that it had gotten cold and lost all its character, turning into an insipid concoction, hopelessly ruined just like the comfortable mood of the premises. The cashier was still glued to the telephone and the customers, not wanting an explanation, started to leave hastily, without paying.

About the author

Elijah Germani (Gonzalo Soto Germani) is a doctor specializing in pediatric intensive medicine and pediatric critical care at the Regional Hospital in Santiago, Chile. He has received several literary awards, among them the 2008 National Book Council Prize. The story “Espresso” was originally written in Spanish with the title “*Café exprés*”. It’s part of a collection of his short stories entitled *Volver a Berlín* (*Returning to Berlin*). All the stories in the *Volver a Berlín* collection showcase unexpected events that serve to provide different points of view that offer an invitation to examine life’s dilemmas. He resides in Concepción, Chile. For more info, visit <http://www.rileditores.com/catlogo-ri102/i31zhj6h42/Volver-a-Berl%C3%ADn>



About the translator



Marko Miletich obtained a Ph.D. in Translation Studies from Binghamton University in 2012. He has a Master's Degree in Liberal Arts with a Concentration in Translation from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, as well as a Master's degree in Hispanic Civilization from New York University and a Bachelor's Degree in Spanish from Hunter College. He has published articles about translation and interpreting. His translations have appeared in *Reunion: The Dallas Review* and *KIN Online Literary Translation Journal*. He is an Assistant Professor of Spanish and Translation in the Humanities Department at Texas A&M Corpus Christi. More information here: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/marko-miletich-7530a516>.