

The Eclipse

When Brother Bartolome Arrazola felt lost he accepted that nothing could save him anymore. The powerful Guatemalan jungle had trapped him inexorably and definitively. Before his topographical ignorance he sat quietly awaiting death. He wanted to die there, hopelessly and alone, with his thoughts fixed on far-away Spain, particularly on the Los Abrojos convent where Charles the Fifth had once condescended to lessen his prominence and tell him that he trusted the religious zeal of his redemptive work.

Upon awakening he found himself surrounded by a group of indifferent natives who were getting ready to sacrifice him in front of an altar, an altar that to Bartolome seemed to be the place in which he would finally rest from his fears, his destiny, from himself.

Three years in the land had given him a fair knowledge of the native tongues. He tried something. He said a few words which were understood. He then had an idea he considered worthy of his talent, universal culture and steep knowledge of Aristotle. He remembered that a total eclipse of the sun was expected on that day and in his innermost thoughts he decided to use that knowledge to deceive his oppressors and save his life.

"If you kill me"--he told them, "I can darken the sun in its heights."

The natives looked at him fixedly and Bartolome caught the incredulity in their eyes. He saw that a small counsel was set up and waited confidently, not without some disdain.

Two hours later Brother Bartolome Arrazola's heart spilled its fiery blood on the sacrificial stone (brilliant under the opaque light of an eclipsed sun), while one of the natives recited without raising his voice, unhurriedly, one by one, the infinite dates in which there would be solar and lunar eclipses, that the astronomers of the Mayan community had foreseen and written on their codices without Aristotle's valuable help.

Augustus Monterroso