

Dark Swallows in Helsinki: Fredrik Pacius Score for Bécquer's Rhyme LIII¹

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To Adriano Duque, who brought Pacius to me.

On April 8th 1942, Agustín de Foxá published in *ABC* a chronicle about an anecdote between poet Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer and a music score composed by Fredrik Pacius entitled *Dark Swallows in Helsinki*. The anecdote is so extraordinary that it appears as a fantastic story, a fiction created to move lovers of poetry and sublime coincidences.

The well known Spanish writer and diplomat was in Helsinki himself when he wrote this chronicle, mainly born out of his own admiration for the author of the rhymes. Agustín de Foxá y Torroba (1903–1959) had started his diplomatic career in 1930 and after posts in Bucarest and Rome came to the Helsinki snows in 1941, where he stayed until 1943. The landscape reminded him of the sad destiny of the Granadian Ángel Ganivet—whose stay in those lands, also as a diplomat, he followed in “Ganivet’s tracks”—and lead him to evoke the mists of Bécquer’s poetry, that he thought of Nordic or German inspiration, in coincidence with the poet’s name and surname, so common in those latitudes. Once in the Finnish capital city, Foxá would have the chance to talk with his new friends about his own country and people. He would tell them about this German named poet from Sevilla, and that could have lead to be referred to the life of another Finnish Becker, not a poet, but one who lived as a romantic and legendary hero, and whose task as a mediator between a queen, María Cristina of Austria, mother of Alfonse XIII, and a musician, Fredrik Pacius, favoured the fact that now we have access to such a unique score for rhyme LIII.

Foxá’s chronicle was included in the book *Un mundo sin melodía: notas de un viajero sentimental* (A world without melodies: Notes by a sentimental traveller, 1949) and later also in the second part of his own *Obras completas* (Complete works).² This writing testifies of the author’s prose, full of lyric tone because he adopted a sentimental and intuitive point of view that can be seen in the images and metaphors characteristic to his style. In the Foxá’s own words: “A literary article can be a jewel. The article writer, differing from a novelist, has

¹ Artikkelin alkukielellään “Las Golondrinas en Helsinki: una partitura de Fredrik Pacius para la rima LIII”. Englanninkielisen käännöksen on tehnyt Rafael L. Junchaya. Käytännön toimituksellisista syistä artikkeli julkaistaan alkuperäisessä formaatissaan ja englannin kielellä.

² Madrid, Prensa Española, 1972, 2nd. ed., pp. 245–248. In *Un mundo sin melodía* (Madrid, Prensa Española) it appears in pp. 33–38.

to write imprisoned by the clock and the calendar. He has to be born and die every day and make eternal what is ephemeral; he has to convert a telegraphic report into something that can survive as a wonderful achievement. If something have I done in literature, it is to bring poetry to journalism...".³

The coldness and ice of Helsinki also left tracks in his poetic work, as happened to the already cited Ganivet. In the section "Varia poética" (Poetry variety) from volume I of his *Obras completas* there are texts that were written in the Finnish capital in 1941; among these are found "Poema de Sur y Norte. Recuerdo de Ganivet" (Poem from North and South. Remembering Ganivet), "Temblor primero" (First trembling), "Aino" and "Estatua finlandesa" (Finnish statue).⁴

When I first read Foxá's chronicle, many years ago already—which I include at the end of this article— I did not trust on the veracity of the story. After I met the music score, I wonder if it could be a fiction to explain why it was composed by a German-Finnish musician who never travelled into Spain. After following Foxá's own tracks in the mists and snow country, I can now document those names pointed out in the chronicle, and can also recall that reality is sometimes more wonderful than literature itself.

Characters: Gustaf Becker and Fredrik Pacius.

Gustaf Becker

The Finnish Becker in this story was Evert Gustaf Waldemar Becker (Helsinki, 1840–Rome, 1907), although he used to undersign only with his third name Waldemar, and was known by the nickname "Becker-Bei". His career as a soldier and mercenary, as Foxá recounts, brought him to a diversity of destinations. He serves in Poland as a lieutenant of the Finnish Guard and, in search for action and glory, comes to Spain to the end of the 1850s to fight in the war with Morocco, where he takes part in the actions of the Spanish army against the Moroccan revolutionaries, the last episode of which was the battle of Wad-Ras (February of 1860) that leads to the final peace signature. Due to his boldness in the battle field, Becker is awarded the Cross of San Fernando.⁵ In the same decade he also collaborates in the Mexican Civil War in favour of emperor Maximiliano, where he managed to be saved from the death sentence dictated by the revolutionary forces against him, and after that he also collaborates in the Greek campaign against Turkey. In Egypt he fights in favour of Pasha Ismael, who names him Bey (since that his nickname of "Becker-Bei"), and in Serbia,

³ Cited by Joaquín de Entrambasaguas in *Las mejores novelas contemporáneas* (Best contemporary novels), vol. IX, Madrid, Planeta, 1968, p. 905. Foxá was awarded Mariano de Cavia Prize for his article "Los cráneos deformados" (Deformed skulls).

⁴ Madrid, Prensa Española, 1963, pp. 171–178.

again fighting against the Turks, he reaches the rank of Colonel of the General Staff of his army. He also takes part of the Pope's Swiss Army in Rome and, among other failed projects, was the idea of fighting at Garibaldi's side in Italy. Foxá offers more data, in a much attractive way, seasoned with his rich prose and probably also by the admiration aura of his informers (Beaurin sisters, Pacius' descendants). On the other hand, Becker's love adventures help to build his unavoidable romantic profile: an escape with his regiment's chief's wife (he was chased and sentenced to death), a marriage with a Mexican girl, for which he converted to Catholicism in 1868, a commitment with a Spanish aristocrat in 1881, and, after that, a marriage with the rich Angela Komnenos, family of the ancient Byzantine emperors, who lived with him in Naples until his death. His corpse was brought to Finland after the country's independence.

The causes he defends and the sides he prefers introduce him as a convinced monarchist, an ambitious and dedicated soldier, for whom war has a special aura of adventure and idealism.⁶ But Waldemar Becker was not only an action man but one with ideas. He lives in Paris since 1880; his life still nomadic, but he seems to begin a new stage marked by reflexions on his experiences in so many fronts. He does not forget his own country and claims for liberty, this time with a quill: he publishes an article "La Finlande indépendante et neutre" (1880)⁷ in the newspaper *Le Contemporain*, an important and forerunner statement towards Finnish independence that aroused severe criticisms among his country's rulers, and later he continues as a prominent politics analyst in *La Russie, son passé, son présent* (Naples, 1906).

Short after his stay in Paris, Becker returns to Spain and we are now in the years of his "encounter" with poet Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer.⁸ The return is in 1881, in the last years of King Alfonso XII, who died in November 1885 when his widow, María Cristina who was expecting the future king (born in 1886), starts her regency. Foxá, perhaps aimed by certain romantic affection and guided by the nostalgia that always leads his memories of times gone by, distorts the facts and makes coincide the new King Alfonso XIII's infancy with Waldemar Becker's visit to the Royal Palace against true history. The Finnish Becker is in Spain during Alfonso XII's life when, obviously, his son is still not born. The image of a mourning Queen, passionate for violets—as it appears in the chronicle—coin-

⁵ There is no document in the military archives that I have researched that tells about Becker's actions (Military General Archives of Madrid, Military General Archives of Segovia, Military Historic Service and Army's Museum of Madrid), nor of the San Fernando's award. Erik Becker (*Becker-Bei suomalainen sotilas ja poliitikko*, Hämeenlinna, Karisto, 1968, p.56) documents the veracity of this award on the letters that Waldemar Becker sent to his mother during his stay in Spain, interesting letters that let know the young soldier's aspirations, where he laments that during the short campaign he could have obtained better personal achievements.

⁶ In this point, he is just as his contemporary Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, volunteer soldier and war reporter from Africa in the same years, whose impressions are collected in *Páginas de un testigo de la guerra en África* (War in Africa witness's pages).

cides with monarchist Foxá's poem "Dead King's Romance", this time referring to the death of Alfonse XIII in Rome. The final verses of it:

"Su madre, en El Escorial,
entre violetas le aguarda,
y al otro lado del mar
Madrid enluta sus casas".⁹

("His mother, in El Escorial,
waits for him among the violets,
and in the other side of the sea
Madrid mourns in its houses")

In those years Waldemar is director of the newspaper *La Europa*, where his signature appears on June 8th 1881 under the section of foreign news commenting the legality of the expansion of Spanish influence in Morocco. It seems that it was the King Alfonso XII himself who, after reading some of his articles published in the French press and admiring his knowledge of the European politics, offered him this post.¹⁰ In the edition of May 28th of this newspaper, a trip to Aranjuez for Spanish and foreigner press representatives as part of the celebra-

⁷ Finland was part of the kingdom of Sweden since 12th century, although, from a political point of view, kept its own identity. In 1809 it became part of Russia with the status of Great Duchy under the dominion of the Russian Emperor, but keeping its autonomy, laws and traditions. Towards the middle of the century a national Finnish feeling started to develop, which is exemplified in the national epic *Kalevala* by Elias Lönnrot, and a struggle for an independent Finnish state is promoted, which would lead to the creation, in 1878, of a Finnish Army. The following events killed these expectations: the Soviet government does not grant the independence until December 1917 (Cf. Matti Klinge, *A Short History of Finland*, Helsinki, Otava, 1997).

What has been said to this point about Waldemar Becker comes from *Otavan iso tietosanakirja. Encyclopaedia Fennica* (Keuruu, 1963, 5th ed., p. 1103), which I acceded thanks to Minna Helander, from the Library of Helsinki University and to Erik Becker, *cit.*, which I found after I closed the present article, but those data have confirmed, and partly widened, the character's biography. From cited Erik Becker there are several texts from his personal archives, sources for the former book, in the National Library of Helsinki (Sign. HYK Coll. 19 and Coll. 19.5), among them are found some articles in French and English by Waldemar himself. Also here it is found the article "Dark Swallows in Helsinki", without reference data, wrongly attributed to Becker-Bey. More information about this character's biography and, over specially about his value to the shaping of a Finnish identity, can be obtained from: Werner Söderhjelm, *Profiler ur finkst kulturliv Werner Söderhjelm*, Helsingfors, Lilius & Hertzberg, 1913; and Juhani Paasivirta, *Becker bey och hans idé om ett självständigt Finland 1880*, Ekenäs, Ekenäs tryckeri, 1961.

⁸ According to Erik Becker, Waldemar would have come back to Spain also before, towards 1868, and here continues his military career before moving to the United States Army in 1871.

⁹ The poem is dated in Rome, March 1841. In *Complete Works*, I, *cit.*, p. 169.

tions for Calderón de la Barca's death centennial is reviewed. Here the name of "Colonel Waldemar Becker of LA EUROPA" is found. His prose style says vastly of his knowledge of languages that Foxá also reports in his chronicle, and in general of his culture knowledge. The Finn was in Spain for five years and also adventured other commercial businesses with wood and marble.¹¹

Becker shows his very good knowledge of Spain and Spanish politics in his short thirty two pages booklet *De la reorganización militar de España* (On Spanish military reorganization, 1882), dedicated to the president of the Ministry Council Práxedes Mateo Sagasta,¹² where he offers a strategic plan to reinforce the Spanish influence in Africa and America, based on the redistribution of the military resources. I will not extend on his argumentations that today, after the conflicts with Cuba and the Philippines and the continuation of the problems in Africa, seem quite right and almost prophetic. I am interested in noting that Becker does not speak as a profane but as a deep connoisseur of the Spanish army, and refers to his own experience when he deals with the soldiers character and their reactions in the battle field, because to the end of his text he mentions that he made his first military attempts under the Spanish flag.

As Foxá's Finnish friends, Beaurain sisters—grand granddaughters of Pacius—told him, Waldemar Becker is a habitué in Madrid cafés and salons invited by his aristocrat friends, and contacts politicians and journalists as a colonel and cultured man, with ample experience and knowledge. His prestige would lead him to the Queen of Spain's private salon and it is here where the relationship with Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer starts. Again, the common surname—maybe not the first Christian name, as the Finnish character uses the other one—would be the link and the memory: the Queen, according to Foxá, has talked to Waldemar about the poet from Sevilla and recites some verses from one of the

¹⁰ So is assured by Erik Becker, pp. 134–135. According to this author, due to Waldemar Becker's prestige, the king did not mind that in former times he had claim his sympathy for the Charlist causes and, also, had collaborated actively with its defendants. Only three numbers of this newspaper are preserved in the Madrid Municipal Newspapers Library, corresponding to May 25th (n. 116), May 28th (n. 119) and May 30th 1881 (n. 121, dedicated to Calderón de la Barca's centennial). Only in n. 119 Becker's signature is found. The administration offices of the newspaper were in San Gregorio 8, Madrid. Juan Eugenio Hartzenbusch mentions in his catalog some other papers of the same name but they are unrelated to this one (*Apuntes para un catálogo de periódicos madrileños desde el año 1661 al 1870*, facsimile ed., Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional / Ollero & Ramos, 1993, pp. 136, 172 and 231).

¹¹ Cf. Erik Becker, p. 140.

¹² Madrid, Typography of "La Correspondencia Ilustrada", 1882. The signature reads: Waldemar de Becker, Colonel of the Serbian General Army Staff. The particle "de" (of) could be due to Alfonso Ordax, responsible for the Spanish version of the book. There are some examples of this booklet in the National Library of Madrid and the Royal Academy of History. On the other hand, in the archives of the National Library of Madrid is found the booklet *Polka espagnole*, by G. Becker (Madrid, G. Becker & Cie. s. d.), that I think is not by our character.

most known poems (“The Dark Swallows”) and complains on the lack of a good melody to sing those words with the piano, as none composed to date had captured the poem sense. “Maybe a musician from the North might know how to better understand its melancholy” says Queen María Cristina, as the chronicle reads. Waldemar, attentive and polite, makes his the Royal wish and carries it to Pacius.

Without any doubt, only the actors would tell with detail and truth what really happened in that salon and the exact words word first exchanged between the soldier and the Queen, and later, between the soldier and the musician. And fortune and determination have helped for one of them to do it: Eduard Pacius, the composer’s great grandson, keeps the manuscripts of the five letters that Waldemar Becker sent to his ancestor between July 7th 1881 and April 7th 1882, which are mentioned by Foxá himself in his chronicle. His kindness of sending me copies of the originals and their transcriptions offered me a satisfaction that I could hardly correspond.¹³ These letters tell directly about the Queen’s wishes and how the project continued until the score came to his hands. Before that, however, it is necessary to introduce Fredrik Pacius.

Fredrik Pacius

Finnish music of 19th century is represented in Spain mainly by Jean Sibelius, the most well known composer outside the borders of Finland and the most recorded to date. A different fate is that of Fredrik Pacius (Hamburg, 1809–Helsinki, 1891, nationalized Finnish), hardly known in Europe when in his country the situation is the opposite, as he is the author of the National Anthem and the first Finnish opera, based on a historical motive: *Kung Karls jakt* (King Charles hunt, 1852), with libretto by Zacharias Topelius.

Young Pacius’s exceptional gifts as singer and violin player lead him, together with his teacher Louis Spohr, to a brilliant career as concert performer. He got a job offer in Sweden in 1827, where he would stay until 1834. He comes to Finland in 1835 with a contract as music teacher at the University of Helsinki. His work as teacher and as leader of the Academic Kapell was fundamental for the musical life in this capital city. Even more: his stay in Finland was so decisive for the consolidation of a Finnish music that it can be assured that he incarnates himself its musical life in the 19th century. Influenced by German Romantic music by Mendelssohn and Spohr, Pacius studied and used popular music resources and was appreciated by the contemporary high society that, by then, was looking for national references to feed the desire of independence from the Russian environment, that would end in the adaptation in 1843 of the Swedish poem *Vårt Land* (Our Land), by the romantic Johan Ludvig Runeberg, that would become Finland’s National Anthem. Besides, Pacius composed the

¹³ Eduard Pacius owns these letters by heritage. Thanks to Anni Heino, directress of the classical music section of the Finnish Music Information Center, I obtained the necessary data to contact Eduard Pacius in the far Espoo. In his cited essay, Erik Becker also uses partially this letter, which he cites translated into Finnish.

opera *Die Loreley* (1887), music for a *singspiel* entitled *Princessan af Cypem* (1860), several cantatas, a violin concerto, other orchestral pieces and a number of songs for chorus and solo voice. During his long life, the composer was admired as father of the Finnish national music and was called “Genius” and “Master”.¹⁴

Pacius work, then, is framed into the Romantic period and can be linked to the nationalistic assurance environment that, like in the rest of Europe, recovered the ancient history and culture, those which represented the roots of its identity. Since 1827, the University of Helsinki became the centre of the romantic patriotic concern that would be symbolized by Elias Lönnrot, keen researcher of popular poetry, who—inspired by this Medieval tradition—composed the Finnish national poem, *Kalevala*.

It is not difficult to suppose that Waldemar Becker, part of the high society of the capital city, would have grown up aware of Pacius’s name and musical activities. Becker was educated in times of romantic effervescence and his own life seems to be the affirmation of his creed. Foxá points out that they were friends, but the letters tell the opposite. What seems to be clear is that Becker had no doubt on who to choose among the Finnish composers. The musician was then seventy-two and, known and admired in the whole Finland, lives half retired on his property at Backas.¹⁵

Becker’s letters to Pacius.

Waldemar writes to Pacius in Swedish, the Finnish social and intellectual elite’s language during 19th century, that without contradiction and considering the country’s history and its status of part of Sweden until the beginnings of the same century, was used by many romantic poets in their revolutionary claims (for example, by the already mentioned Topelius and Runeberg). This explains why the latter’s poem, the basis for the Finnish National Anthem (*Vårt Land*), was written in Swedish, although was translated into Finnish in 1848 (*Maamme*). In the headings of the first four letters it is written the date and probable Becker’s address: Cuesta de Santo Domingo no. 18 duplicado; the last one is sent from Paris, with the Hotel du Palais stamp, 28 Cours-la-Reine, 28, at the Champs Élysées.

Becker requests Pacius a score to the rhyme LIII (“The Dark Swallows”) in July 1881. For him the Queen’s request becomes a means to demonstrate, being so far from his country, his Finnish sensibility, capable of transmitting in a new musical structure the rhyme’s feeling. The linkage that the Austrian born

¹⁴ There is a vast bibliography on Pacius’ musical career and his representation into Finnish music, most of it in Swedish and Finnish. I take this information from A. V., *Finnish Music* (Helsinki, Otava, 1996, pp. 27–30).

¹⁵ Some photographs of Pacius and his family on this farm are found in the archives of the National Library of Finland.

Queen had done between the becquerian rhymes and the Nordic mists has been the argument topically repeated during many years. Here is the transcription of the letter:¹⁶

Madrid, July 6th 1881

My much appreciated Maestro:

Some days ago Queen María Cristina said with insistence that she wanted to sing "The Swallows" by the very popular poet Bécquer, but the Spanish composer who has made the music has not understood absolutely the poetry that the poem entails, which, she added, claims for a Nordic composer.

My mind travelled to Finland in a flaming desire to take the chance to show the South, without the need to fall into disputes, that the North is also able to accomplish these lyric tasks.

I expect that this introduction can be forgiven as you do not know me, and that I have taken the liberty of asking Mister Maestro if he would be so kind to compose some music for "The Swallows", the text of which I here attach in a bad but reliable translation into Swedish. If the Maestro agrees with the purpose of these lines, I ask him to dedicate the song to Her Majesty the Queen María Cristina of Spain and that one copy would be sent to me, that I will be honoured to bring it to her in the Maestro's name and I am sure that Her Majesty will correspond with a merited distinction. Anyway, I am sorry for the stolen time.

With a profound acknowledge, the humble server of Mister Maestro,
Waldemar Becker, Chief of the General Staff.

This letter is attached with a MS copy of the rhyme LIII in Spanish (Holland size, headed with *La Europa* and different handwriting); the Swedish version was not among the papers accessed.

Pacius hurried to accomplish the Queen's request and in September the music score was already in Becker's hands, who passed it to another musician for an opinion and to have another copy for the Queen, that was by then absent from Madrid. Its premiere at the Royal Palace at the beginnings of October aroused warm praises from the court members and the Queen María Cristina herself, who expressed to the Finn her wish to thank the musician for the beautiful present in a personal way, which she accomplished by naming him as Commander of the Order of Elizabeth the Catholic. After its success in the Palace, the Pacius's music for "The Swallows" became so popular among the ladies that, according to Becker, he was repeatedly asked for copies of the score to be sung with the piano. The last letter, sent from Paris next year, has as attachment the diploma of the naming as Commander of the Order of Elizabeth the Catholic, dated on March 29th 1882.¹⁷ Before that, Becker had sent a preformatted letter where the Marquis de la Vega de Armijo, Ministry of the General Staff and president of the Congress, let Pacius know of the concession (March 13th in the same year).¹⁸ Here I transcribe the whole text of the letters:

¹⁶ The letter was literally translated into Spanish by Yvonne Schneider. I have adapted the text to the Spanish syntax in an effort to make the sense clearer, but I have kept the politeness formulas.

Madrid, September 11th 1881

Much esteemed Maestro,

I want to thank you sincerely for the score for "The Swallows" that I received yesterday with your honoured letter.

I have shown your composition to a great musician and he found it extremely warm, dramatic and really artistic, and due to my patriotic feelings, I am already convinced before listening to it. I have taken care immediately for your song to be properly copied. Her Majesty the Queen is still in Baden, but will return to Madrid on the 20th of this month.

When I have the honour to give her "The Swallows" I will tell you how Her Majesty liked it. Meanwhile I can let you know that she has a good ear for music and will appreciate your work's value.

While waiting to bring the score to Her Majesty, I thank your nobility and send you again my gratitude with my greetings.

Humble server of Mister Maestro,
Waldemar Becker.

Madrid, October 22nd 1881

Much esteemed Maestro,

Her Majesty the Queen María Cristina has given me the honour to let me send you Her effusive gratitude for your kindness and politeness of putting into music one of Her Majesty's favourite poems: "The Swallows".

Her Majesty has also expressed Her admiration for your beautiful music composition, its richness and sonorous melody and has wondered if you already knew

¹⁷ It reads on the face of the diploma: "DON ALFONSE XII CONSTITUTIONAL KING OF SPAIN. / Because, in an effort to prove My Royal appreciation to you Don Federico Pacius; I have decided to name you by My Decree of the thirteenth of the actual month, Ordinary Commander of the Royal Order of Elizabeth the Catholic, free of any expenses for your condition of foreigner. / So I concede you all the corresponding honours, distinctions and usage of the ensigns according to the Statutes, trusting that for the qualities that make you distinguished, you will make every effort to contribute to the glory of the Order. And of this titled signed by the Secretary of the Order and by the Great Chancellor will be noted in its accounts. / Given in the Palace on March twenty-ninth of year one thousand eight hundred eighty-two. / I, the King".

In the reverse it is read: "I, Don Evaristo Pérez de Castro, Ministry Secretary of this Royal Order, have it written on His command", and then follow the signatures of José Patriarca de las Indias, José Pizarro and Eduardo Díaz del Moral. Below: "Title of Ordinary Commander of the Spanish Order of Elizabeth the Catholic in favour of Don Federico Pacius". Both the originals of the letters and of the diploma are kept also by Eduard Pacius. [The use of the italics is to differentiate the handwriting in the official press.]

¹⁸ Heading of the Staff Minister; date: Madrid, March 13th 1882. Text: "My dear Sir: I have the honour to let you know that H. M. the King, my High Sovereign, has decided to name you by Decree in this day ordinary Commander of the Royal Order of Elizabeth the Catholic, the title of which I will be pleased to send you in the right time". / I take advantage of the occasion to express the security of my much distinguished consideration. The signature of Marqués de la Vega de Armijo and the name of the addressee follow. To Don Federico Pacius.

the Spanish language, because you have managed to create a complete harmony between the words and the music.

Although my personal gratitude is not as worth as Her Majesty's, I let myself thank you. Since yesterday you have been honoured in the Royal Palace of Madrid, and with you to the whole Finland. Besides, Her Majesty expressed Her wish to send you Her personal gratitude, so I expect that She will have a chance to congratulate you in a short time, although in Spain nothing goes so fast.

My gratitude, Mister Professor, I send you my most docile admiration,
Becker.

Madrid, March 22nd 1882

Much esteemed Maestro,

I have the special honour of being able to send you the attached communication from the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Marquis de la Vega de Armijo, where you are informed that the King has decided to name you as Commander of the Order of Elizabeth the Catholic as a reward for the beautiful song that you have dedicated to the Queen María Cristina.

Mister Maestro, let me be the first to congratulate you for so merited distinction and at the same time renew my gratitude for the kindness you have demonstrated personally.

When the diploma is ready I will have the honour to send it to you myself, and although it is not ready yet I want to tell you, as you already know, that you have been acknowledged by this country.

My most sincere gratitude,
Waldemar Becker.

Paris, April 27th 1882

Much esteemed Maestro

It is a pleasure for me to attach the diploma of the Cross of Elizabeth the Catholic that the Ministry President sent me yesterday.

At the same time I want to thank your polite letter from the 5th of the current month, but I also want to decidedly protest for the modest judgement the Maestro makes of such a valuable composition and that you, politely, have thanked Her Majesty the Queen.

If Mister Maestro, as I expect, has made copies of the composition or has another copy available, I would like him to send me another copy because Her Majesty has both the original and the copy that you sent me and I do not think it is appropriate to ask Her for them, and many ladies I know have asked me for a copy.

If Mister Maestro can satisfy my wish I beg him to send it to Madrid, where I will be back soon.

My most sincere acknowledgement, you have my gratitude Mister Professor,
Waldemar Becker.

Neither in the Palace General Archives nor in the Royal Library is there a record of either Pacius's letter or the score for rhyme LIII. Foxá tells that the Beaurain sisters gave him the original.

Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer's rhymes and melodies "de salon"

At the same time as we find a "poetry de salon" for bourgeois enjoyment, there is a salon music genre to the last third of the 19th century, the repertory of which—as Celsa Alonso González has explained—¹⁹ was fairly mediocre. This salon music was aimed to entertain, but it was also "essential embellishment for a social meeting", followed the current vogue and used several genres. Among these genres, the most important were vocal works in French, Italian and Spanish, usually with piano accompaniment, being this instrument an "unavoidable ornament in the 19th century's aristocratic and bourgeois salons". The musical magazines tell of the demand for new music scores for this purpose. Together with Andalusian and populist songs and melodies with French and Italian poets' texts, the songs with becquerian style poems are many: Ventura Ruiz Aguilera, Antonio Arnao, José Selgas, Eusebio Blasco, José Antonio de Viedma and Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, among others, saw their compositions widening the musical albums and collections published those years. As Celsa Alonso reminds, these poets' interest on music is due to the success of their texts among the composers; poets and musicians worked together in the creation of a new lyric song inspired on the German *Lied*.²⁰

Bécquer's rhymes were put into the pentagrams in several occasions, to the point of becoming one of the musicians' and the public's favourite authors. Isidoro Hernández, Isaac Albéniz, José Casares, Tomás Bretón, Gabriel Rodríguez, Antonio Reparaz, José María Benaigues and Ruperto Chapí made musical adaptations of the rhymes.

Similarly to the bourgeoisie and aristocracy's salons but with higher pomp and quality, there were literary-musical evenings in the Royal Palace, which gathered musicians and poets together with politicians and military men. In those evenings there were songs and recitations with piano accompaniment, tradition that lead to the genre called "sinfomela" or "a sort of poetic meditations brought to the piano, with romantic virtuoso figurations, over which a poem is recited".²¹ Countess of Llorente composed *Álbum de melodías con letra*

¹⁹ *La Canción Lírica española en el siglo XIX* (Lyric Spanish Song in 19th Century), Madrid, Publicaciones del Instituto Complutense de Ciencias Musicales, 1998, especially pp. 455–480.

²⁰ *Ibid.* in pp. 409–417; about becquerian poetry and Bécquer himself, pp. 444–453. Concerning Bécquer's musical education: Gerardo Diego, "Bécquer y la música", *Estudios románticos*, Valladolid, Casa Museo Zorrilla, 1975, pp. 41–61; Enrique Sánchez Pedrote, "Bécquer y la música. La música en la época de Bécquer", *Archivo Hispalense*, n. 165 (Jan-Apr 1971), pp. 1–54; T. Ibarz Ferré, "Bécquer y la música: la música poética o la poesía musical", *Revista de la Sociedad de Musicología*, XIV, 1–2 (1991), pp. 429–434; and Pedro Ángel Soriano, "Gustavo A. Bécquer y la música", in J. Rubio Jiménez, ed., *Actas del Congreso "Los Bécquer y el Moncayo"*, Zaragoza, Centro de Estudios Turiasonenses / Institución Fernando el Católico, 1992, pp. 291–298.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 388.

(*para recitar al piano*) (Album of melodies with text—to be recited with piano), dedicated to queen Elizabeth II, formed by seven declamations with piano with texts from different authors, among them “The Swallows” by Bécquer.²² Songs made on other rhymes, “The Swallows” included, would be carried to her successor Queen María Cristina’s salon. Here also travelled Pacius’s score.

Music for rhyme LIII

In the CD edited by the National Library of the *Libro de los gorriones* (Book of the Sparrows) it is noted of the music scores on Bécquer’s rhymes that are kept in that library. From the one known as “Las golondrinas” (The Swallows) there are four, due to José María Casares: “Así no te querrán” (They will not love you like this, Madrid, 1872), José Rebollar: “Las golondrinas” (Madrid, 1881), Arturo Cuyás: “Como yo te he querido” (The way I have loved you, New York, 1883), and Tomás Bretón: “Las golondrinas” (Bilbao, 1890).²³ We have to add also one by Fermín María Álvarez, from 1873, noted by Rafael Montesinos and Celsa Alonso,²⁴ and Francisco García Villamala.²⁵ And finally, the one not noted until now, according to my data, work by Fredrik Pacius.

²² Ibid. p. 466 and n. 8.

²³ Cf. *Libro de los gorriones*, Madrid, Ministerio de Educación y Cultura / Biblioteca Nacional (col. Tesoros de la Biblioteca Nacional), 1999. Concerning the last title, Celsa Alonso gives the date 1888 (p. 448), and comments that this version was very successful. After being sold for 75 pesetas, Bretón wrote in his diary: “The famous Schumann was not often given that much”. Alonso also says that in the third contest organized by the philharmonic magazine *Notas musicales y literarias* in September 1883 a prize is offered for the best three melodies on the rhymes *Olas gigantes que os rompéis bru(a)mando* (Gigantic waves that bump in mist), *Volverán las oscuras golondrinas* (Dark swallows will return) and *Yo sé cuál es el objeto* (I know what the purpose is). Some others by the same author had been chosen in former contests (p. 445).

²⁴ Cf. *Bécquer, biografía e imagen*, Barcelona, Ed. RM, 1977, document number 145. Montesinos reproduces the first page of the score with the following footnote: “To the beginnings of our century there were still common the family evenings with piano, romances and poetry recitals. They were indeed the same reunions to which Gustavo had attended forty years earlier in Julia Espín’s house. But in 1900 [...], Bécquer –even though absent– was not an anonymous guest”. Also cited in Celsa Alonso, pp. 425 and 430.

²⁵ Celsa Alonso, p. 449.

The German *Lied* was part of the usual repertoire in the Finnish music environments, which can also be seen in its salons. In a parallel path with what happens in Spain, the native musicians tried to create a Finnish lyric song according to that model and made arrangements of compositions in Swedish and Finnish that would fit with the nationalistic and romantic expectations referred paragraphs above. Fredrik Pacius put into music poems by German and English authors, but also by Finnish poets as Runeberg or Topelius.

Concerning the text of the rhyme, Waldemar Becker sent a copy of the rhyme taken from one of the editions of *Obras de Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer* (Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer's Works) published to date,²⁶ that Pacius arranges for his song: on one hand, breaks the verse unity and repeats some sections to adapt them to the musical phrasing; on the other hand, does not use the central part (verses 9 to 16). The result is dramatic: Pacius underlines the verse "¡así... no te querrán!" (thus... you will not be loved!). The lyrics and the score are included in the appendix.

As we know, the romantic *Lied*, a genre derived from the German folk song, is transformed into an artistic shape where musical ideas suggested by the words are articulated in its adaptation for voice and piano, to produce formal unity and to highlight details of the text. Thus the music—deriving from the words—serves as a rhetoric feature to paint metaphoric or literally the poetic writing. These descriptive features are evident in "The Swallows". The song is divided into three parts that are unequally correspondent to the poem's strophes. The omission of third and fourth strophes, where Bécquer writes about honeysuckles, is undoubtedly due to the composer's wish to describe in music only the verses related to the swallows, theme that gives the title and serves to the thematic unity of its musical shape.

The first part up to measure thirty-four begins with a pianistic introduction that sets the rhythm, the atmosphere and the main tonality of the whole piece, A-flat major. The repetition of groups of quavers evokes the agile and quite flight of the swallows. The second part starts in measure thirty-five that breaks with a sadder tonality, f minor, although the rhythm in the piano is identical to that of the former strophe. This section is rich in minor tonalities, which produces an effect of melancholy, especially in the measures that express the phrase "No volverán" (Will not return), repeated four times by the voice. It seems obvious that Pacius wants to emphasize this idea of loss, remoteness, solitude, lack of

²⁶ Besides the *princeps* (Madrid, Imprenta Fortanet, 1871), a second one had been edited (Madrid, Fernando Fe, 1877) and a third (id., 1881). In Waldemar Becker's copy, the last verse of the rhyme is "así... ino te querrán!" (thus... you will not be loved!), that in *Libro de los gorriones* Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer strikes out this verse and changes for "nadie así te amará" (nobody will thus love you). It is known that Bécquer's friends did not always follow his indications and corrections, and rhyme LIII is one of those cases. On this subject, see the noted edition of the *Rimas* cared by Robert Pageard (Madrid, CSIC, 1972, pp. 291–296).

love; that is why he inserts two measures where the solo voice is left, literally, alone (mm. 49–50), like the poem says. The fifth strophe is described in the last section and for the same melody of the beginning of the song is used for that purpose, but now Pacius transforms the dynamic melody into a slow praying, almost static, with religious shades, underlining the words “Dios” (God, m. 73), “altar” (m. 75), or the verb “adora” (to adore, mm. 71–72 and 76). This sentence is written with an ascending melodic movement to the words “adora” and “altar”, and slowly descends among them. The song seems to establish a relationship between God adoration in the first part of the strophe and the adoration of the poet for her beloved, hence the repetition of “como yo te he querido, nadie te querrá” (as I have loved you, you will not be loved).²⁷

As a whole, and to conclude, it can be said that Pacius knew how to create a musical structure that underlines the fundamental elements of the rhyme and fits to the proper verse rhythm, which is quite merited due to the fact that, even though he had a copy of the rhyme in Spanish, he constructed the music from a translation.

I only know of one recording of this score made in 1980 by Finlandia Records, reedited in 1991 (Fazer Music Inc.). Fourteen songs for voice and piano are collected under the title “Fredrik Pacius: Songs”, with words by Topelius, F. Berndtson, Runeberg and E. von Quanten. A complete stranger to the collection, “Las golondrinas”, de G. A. D. [sic] Bécquer appears as track six sung by Margareta Haverinen.

Concerning the music score, in lack of the original, here I reproduce a copy dated in 1943 that was offered also by Eduard Pacius.²⁸

Some reflections on the popularity of the rhymes in the salons, on the intense and varied environment of the Royal Palace music environment in Madrid²⁹ can be continued from the information in the letters by Waldemar Becker to Pacius, or on the relationship that the readers find between the spirit of the rhymes and the German poetry and music. My aim was mainly to tell a story and introduce the characters, stopping in the circumstances and motivations of a particular event. Foxá reached Bécquer though the Nordic frozen lands; now, the same trip is reconstructed in these pages, but from his sunny birth city.

²⁷ I want to thank José Luis López Aranda and Rafael Vélez invaluable help. I owe them this short harmonic comment on the score.

²⁸ An identical copy is in the Musicology Department of Åbo Akademi University (Sibelius Museum) in Turku.

²⁹ Concerning this point, José Subirá, *El Teatro del Real Palacio (1849–1851)*, Madrid, CSIC / Instituto de Musicología, 1950.

“Dark Swallows in Helsinki” by Agustín de Foxá³⁰

Even though Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer was a real Spaniard (from Andalucía and Soria, like Antonio Machado) there is something Nordic or German in his poetry. It seems that Heinrich Heine sings to his ear and his rhymes, lost in very sweet mists, wander a bit apart from our strong and realistic Spanish poetry. His surname seems of German origin and his name, Gustavo Adolfo, is Lutheran and Nordic.

There was another Gustaf Becker contemporary to ours born in 1840 in Helsinki's surroundings; but this one was not a poet but a warrior.

Here I have been told his story by people who knew him. What a story! The Finnish Becker lived one of those passionate and brilliant lives that were so common in the 19th century. A student of the Military School he soon became part of the Finnish Guard. But he loved war and the North was then too quiet. Becker was tempted by the South's warmth, sun and colours, so he travelled into Spain, where he appeared in that war from a heroic lithograph, from a historic depiction, of our campaign in Morocco. He saw the Queen Elisabeth II, pompous, as described by Valle Inclán, with her blue skirts with ribbons, green satins and opulent neckline, placing a scapular on O'Donnell's chest, arched with medals, who secretly sighed for the Queen.

The newspapers, linking that war with the reconquest of Spain, talked about the Cid, of Saint Fernando and the unfaithful.

In one of those first trains with a high chimney (resembling a contemporary top hat) our blonde Finn departed to Morocco. He fought in Wad-Ras, met Prim de los Castillejos and was awarded a medal for his boldness, no less than the Ensign of San Fernando.

Back in Finland, Becker enters the Russian Army and in 1871 he is appointed Empire Guard in Grodno. He gets bored very soon. Now he is dazzled by Mexico. Empress Carlota plays the piano among the palm trees and emperor Maximiliano drinks refreshments, dismayed, in Cuernavaca. Becker fights for his side against Juárez, the Zapotecan native that pretends to revenge Cortés's conquest in that blonde descendant of Charles V; and Becker, wounded under the sun, among aloes and lizards, is made prisoner by that tanned tropical Robespierre. He escapes of being executed by miracle, and in year 78 this son of a Protestant country goes to Rome to serve in the Pope's army. Among the Swiss, dressed with coloured ribbons and high pointed helmets, drawn by Michelangelo, he stays in the castle of Sant' Angelo. And when the Pontifical State starts to drain through the Porta Pia, Gustaf Becker sails to Egypt to offer (like the ancient Scandinavians did in Byzantine times) his sword to the Khedive, who honours him with the title of bey.

In 1876, Becker is in Belgrade, fighting as a Serbian officer against the Turks. Soon after, he travels among the dusted vineyards, the Acropolis marbles and Plato olives, studying Athens and Piraeus defences.

³⁰ In one of his collaborations for the newspaper *La Nueva España* (December 27th 1963), Dionisio Gamallo Fierros refers to this article without adding any new information (see Jesús Rubio Jiménez, “Dionisio Gamallo Fierros y Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer”, *El Gnomo. Revista de estudios becquerianos*, 9, 2000, p. 242). I got it thanks to Professor Rubio Jiménez.

Becker is a blonde, tall man, who speaks in eleven languages. Mundane and charming, wherever he goes he leaves not only enemies in the battle fields but also women's broken hearts. In the year 80 he writes in Paris about the independent Finland. Then he returns to Spain when the King Alfonso XII is dying, watching the blurred holm oaks in El Pardo and the cold blues of the Guadarrama River.

Becker is often found in Madrid's salons when the sad Queen Cristina rules with Sagasta. The Regent is mourning and loves the violets. Every Saturday evening she goes to pray to the church of Virgen de Atocha, together with the Infant King, blonde, pallid as Velázquez's infants.

One afternoon, among her closest friends, in her salon of yellow silks and music clocks, the Queen, undoubtedly due to the similar name, addresses the Finnish Becker and tells him about the death Sevillian. Her Majesty also recites the first strophe of "The Dark Swallows".

"It is such a pity—she says—that none of the melodies already composed to sing this rhyme with piano manages to interpret the meaning of our poet—and adds: Maybe a musician from the North might be able to better understand its melancholy".

The Finnish officer remembers then his friend Pacius, who lives there, distant, on his property in Backas in Helsinki surroundings. And he promises to write him, pointing out the Queen's wishes.

Fredrik Pacius is by then a happy old man. He is well known and appreciated in his country, being the author of the anthem *Maamme laulu* and of *Suomen laulu* or Finnish song. He lives on his ranch with his cows (kept inside in wintertime and fed with grass conserved in salt), his horses, geese and old furniture. He spends the long winter evenings dedicated to his grandchildren and his piano. When he is bored, wearing his long boots and walking in the snow for several kilometres, in spite of being seventy eight years old, he comes to Helsinki to drink some *snaps* with his old friends at the Societetshuset.

Becker's letter from Madrid inspires him.

"The Queen of Spain—he comments to his friends—wants me to compose a melody".

Pacius has received the famous rhyme from his friend, with a translation into Swedish. And with youthful passion he starts to compose. From the snows in Backas, under the ice hanging from his roof, he dedicates his romanza to the Queen of Spain, the Queen of the South and the birds.

The finished composition arrives in Spain during the summer. And Becker writes back that he has been unable to give it to Her Majesty because she is in her summer holiday. When the Queen returns to San Sebastián, *The Dark Swallows*, with the music by Pacius, is sung in the Royal Palace in Madrid. This audition becomes a great success. And the Queen ensures that, finally, she has found a music that interprets the rhyme. Thankful, she concedes to Pacius the Cross of Elisabeth the Catholic, and some days later, our State Minister, Marquis de la Vega de Armijo (an interference of the lyric in the bureaucracy) sends the diploma and ensigns to Helsinki.

I saw yesterday that old cross with its tired silks in Norra Kajen streets where Misses Beaurain, granddaughters of Pacius, live.

Together with the cross, the colourless letters of the Finnish Becker dated in Madrid, in Cuesta de Santo Domingo, with the rhyme carefully copied and its translation into Swedish.

At the evening, when the sun was turning red over the ice in the sea, these beautiful Finnish ladies, Anna and Elisabeth, have performed for me with the piano and in Spanish the sad rhyme by Gustavo Adolfo, moving me. I left towards the cold

street and the snow has fallen over the score, that I was carrying home as a present. At the harbour, the cars were parking in front of the Swedish Embassy where there is a big dinner tonight.

The ships, still, unmoving, seemed like houses or walls over the hard sea. A boat's siren sounded sadly. The snow piles whitened the Helsinki streets, dark because of the bombs.

And I, watching this score spilled with snow, have thought of the civilized Spain of our parents, not yet savaged by the Marxism and where (in an account proper to Rostand) it was possible this beautiful story where a Queen (impassioned with a poet) and a hero talk with a Finnish musician about some swallows' light poem.

ABC, Madrid, April 8th 1942³¹

Text and score of "Las golondrinas" by Fredrik Pacius

Text:

Volverán las oscuras golondrinas
en tu balcón sus nidos a colgar,
y otra vez con el ala a sus cristales
jugando llamarán.
(bis)

Pero aquellas que el vuelo
que el vuelo refrenaban
tu hermosura y mi dicha
tu hermosura a contemplar,
aquellas que aprendieron nuestros nombres...
ésas no volverán
ésas no volverán
ino volverán!
ino volverán!
Volverán del amor en tus oídos
las palabras ardientes a sonar;
tu corazón de su profundo sueño
tal vez despertará
tal vez despertará.
Pero mudo y absorto y de rodillas
como se adora a Dios ante su altar
se adora a Dios ante su altar,
como yo te he querido; desengáñate,
iasí no te querrán!
como yo te he querido
ino te querrán!,
ino te querrán!

Translation:

The dark swallows will return again
to hang their nests from your balcony,

³¹ See reference in footnote 2.

again will their wings beat softly on your windowpane,
calling playfully.

But those that paused for a moment in their flight
to see your beauty and my happiness,
those that learned to sing our names...
they... will not return!

Love, again, will return
to sound with burning whispers in your ears;
again, perhaps, will your heart
be roused from languid sleep.

But silent and engrossed and fondly kneeling,
as God before his altar is adored,
as I have loved you... be not deluded,
thus... you will not be loved!

—Translated by Robert Lincoln Snavely, revised by Rafael L. Junchaya

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