

Enrique Anderson Imbert

THE CHESHIRE CAT  
(El Gato de Cheshire)

(If you are looking for a particular story in this book, you can find it by using Control f,  
and then filling in the title of the story.)

Part III

FOOT STEPS  
(Talonazo)

“Walking correctly, walking wrong...!” Ariel interrupted impatiently, “What you call walking correctly—slow, steady, heavy steps—seems to me like someone refusing to fly. On the other hand, think how near to flying is to the movement of someone who is drunk, who is palsied, or who suffers from Saint Vitus’ Dance. Just look at that cripple who is now coming this way, looking like a disguised ballerina.”

In fact, a man was limping down the street with footsteps sounding like a tambourine: clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop. The clip of a booted foot, the clop made by a goat’s hoof. Different movement makes unequal sounds. Suddenly, the ground became unstable, and he drew back like a ballet dancer withdraws her legs. The air trembled, as if wings were beating. His eyes were so blue they seemed to have come from the sky, making you imagine that somewhere inside his torso, like the inflated crop of a dove, he was carrying some large, pneumatic organ. Clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop. Ariel was right. The cripple’s foot steps moved faster, and—zoom!—he soon started flying through the air, swift and free.

THE STREET  
(La Calle)

After being exiled for thirty years, he returned to his country and looked for the narrow street where, if he was not mistaken, he had once embraced a young girl. He walked around and around, adrift in his own city. Finally, by pure accident, he found the street. When he saw that it was deserted, with no sign of the girl, he was saddened. When he was about to leave, he began to wonder if perhaps the girl had never really existed; could it be that, while he had been away for so long and then thought about returning to this street, he had exaggerated the pleasure by imagining the memory of a girl? Once he realized his nostalgia must have created a false image, the girl vanished. His past was impoverished, but his present was enriched. The little street he had cherished in his memory was now before him, like a new adventure. So he walked briskly along it, feeling swift and young, with wings on his feet.

## CROSS-EYED (El Bizco)

Every time the judge, Andres Cortes de Mesa, walked out of the Royal Court, he ran into an old beggar who looked at him with a repugnant face; he had one heavenly eye that looked up beatifically to God, and another eye that seemed to stare fearfully at the Devil.

Disgusted by this distorted vision, Dr. Mesa could no longer tolerate the presence of the old man. He called his servant, Escobedo, and gave the order to decapitate him.

As it happened, this was exact time when the beggar left Bogota. When he no longer saw him, Dr. Mesa assumed that the servant had carried out his order, and forgot about it. Escobedo, for his part, said nothing, but he was looking, and waiting...

After a year, the beggar returned. That same night Escobedo found him, and dragging him into the alley behind the Convent of San Francisco, he beheaded him. He dumped the body into a well, and put the head into a sack, to take it and show his master.

Dr. Mesa looked at the head without recognizing it; with the eyes closed, the head was beautiful.

“Now what have you done?” he shouted at Escobedo.

## THE DELUGE (El Diluvio)

In order to make a change in the human race, Zeus instructed Aeolus and Poseidon to create a deluge that would flood the earth.

It was flooded. Oceans and rivers were combined, and large cities were immersed.

Men tried to defend themselves by constructing rafts and boats. Looking down in the water they saw the roofs of their houses, and they hoped that sometime they would be able to enter them again. Meanwhile, they rowed over their orchards and dove down to pick apples; they also caught fish that swam through the branches of the tall trees like birds. Only one couple managed to escape the flood by living on a tiny island; actually, it was the top of a mountain.

Then, before Zeus could come back and restore things like they had been, a group of sirens came and took advantage of the chance to swim around and gaze with astonished eyes, at the submerged streets where famous men had walked.

## THE ANTICHRIST (El Anticristo)

The holy scriptures had predicted it: before the Second Coming of Christ, there would be a Final Judgment, as well as the Final Judgment for an Antichrist. Then, when the year one thousand was approaching, many Christians in Asia Minor were certain that the end of the world was coming, and they began to look for signs. When they looked, they found one. The first was the appearance of an Antichrist in Jerusalem; he was an old man

who refused to believe in God the Father, and in his Crucified Son. Thinking this would bring the Second Coming the Christians welcomed him with jubilation and gave him alms: since the end was coming, they might as well give away the things that would soon be of no use to them. The Antichrist accumulated a fortune and then wasted it. Other Antichrists appeared in Jerusalem, and different places, and all were able to benefit from the charity of the Christians. There were Antichrists who were fat and skinny, tall and short, long-haired and bald, young and old. There were many changes of shape and form; and then, at the same time, in some places there were those who believed that they were imposters. With some justification, those who believed that insisted these imposters did nothing more than commit a sin, and this proved that the Great Sinner was now present among men. Then, the year one thousand arrived when the Final Judgment was supposed to occur, followed by the Second Coming of Christ. But the year passed without pain or glory. The skeptics smiled, and some of the faithful became discouraged. Most people thought that heaven had decided to punish the imposters, and it was said that in order to discredit the Antichrists, God had decided to postpone the Final Judgment for another thousand years. A monk who said it was good that the Final Judgment was postponed, since prophecies cannot be wrong, was also convinced that everyone had died in the year one thousand. What happened, he felt, was that with a flick of His eye God had killed, and then revived, the entire human race; now people did not realize that the world had actually ended, and that they were now in another cycle of their existence.

## MYTHOLOGIES (Mitologías)

While the head of Hermes, who had been decapitated by Argos, was falling off a precipice, a strange trembling shook the feathers of a peacock that was sleeping in the gardens of Hera. The peacock woke up and still was a peacock, but with all of the eyes of Argos embedded in its feathers.

\*

The fifty daughters of Danaus suffered in the beginning because they were condemned to carry water in broken jugs. While some left the river with their jugs leaking, others returned to the river with their jugs empty. So the road to the river was always traversed by a double row of sisters. They suffered, but only in the beginning because, when they were driven crazy, the Danaids were happy; in their madness they believed that they were the river.

\*

The red-haired Galantis enlivened the countryside with her laughter and her lies. She was all mouth. And with her mouth she condemned an offended goddess to give birth. Since then, her children were born like characters in oral tales are born. If the Muses never thought about having contact with this cheerful, talkative Galantis, it was because they still hadn't heard of the Novel.

\*

It was foolish for Achelous, the god of the river Achelous, to challenge Heracles to battle. It was even more foolish that, in order to fight, he took the form of a man, a serpent, and a bull. Heracles always won. Only when Achelous reassumed the fluidity of a river, did Heracles begin to look for him by swimming through the waves of water and, when he couldn't find him, admitted he was beaten.

\*

Someone feels sorry for Sisyphus when he sees him using his hands to roll an immense boulder to the top of a mountain, and when it falls, he roll it up again, until it rolls down once more.

“Poor fellow!” this compassionate person says.

“But I am just playing with it!” Sisyphus responds, with the smile of a great athlete.

\*

With the tips of his fingers a devil from Egypt took a bit of ashes that the Phoenix had left on his funeral pyre and tossed them into the wind. When the Phoenix rose up out of the ashes the next time, one eye was missing.

\*

There was one vulture who refused to peck the entrails of Prometheus. Unfortunately, we know nothing more about it, because the scorn others felt condemned it to oblivion.

\*

The labyrinth is a building, but it is also an idea. Refuting the idea of a building that most people have, Daedalus constructed his labyrinth which turned out to be an idea in reverse. He put a Minotaur in it, but the Minotaur wandered through the corridors of the building, not through the corridors of an idea. The gigantic-headed bull was never aware that it was in a labyrinth.

\*

Orpheus went to Hades to visit the dead. It was a large place, with a sky full of stars, with oceans, mountains, forests, plains, cities, gardens, and cemeteries. He spoke with those who were dead. They thought he was a visitor. They didn't know they were dead.

\*

I don't know how it could be that Caron's boat was able to leave the River Styx and climb up so high, but there it was: floating above a mountain, in a vast twilight sky.

\*

The Sphinx punished those who gave the wrong answer to its questions. Those who answered, "I don't know," were able to go on, safe and sound.

\*

Demeter punished King Erichthonius, by giving him an insatiable appetite so that he sold everything he had in order to be able to eat, and eat, and eat. Finally, all he had was his daughter, and he decided to sell her also. Because Poseidon had given the young girl the gift of being able to change her shape and transform herself into a cow, a mare, a rabbit, or a chicken, Erichthonius thought of selling her to Proteus.

\*

It stopped raining, but a raindrop was still trembling on a leaf. Euterpe cut off the leaf and pointing at it, she gave it to Polyhymnia:

"Do you see what I see? The siren Aglaophenia sings, Poseidon moves his trident, and Aphrodite emerges..."

\*

Atlas stopped with his legs spread apart, still carrying the world over his shoulders. Hyperion asked him:

"I suppose it weighs even more every time a meteorite comes and hits the earth."

"Exactly," Atlas answered. "But on the other hand, I also feel a bit lighter when a bird rises up and flies away."

\*

The nine Muses punished the nine women, who were the daughters of Pierus, who had brazenly challenged them to a competition. They punished them by converting them into cawing crows. However, the Muses could not avoid the fact that there were many artists who were inspired by these daughters of Pierus. But you have to understand these artists. After all, though the Muses were very distinguished, the daughters of Pierus, who were mere shadows of the Muses, were closely related to the earth and their language seemed very real to these artists.

### THE SLEEPER (El Dormido)

A famous writer said to a woman who admired him, "Sometime I would like to write a story about a sleeping man who..."

"Yes indeed" the woman interrupted, "but what would you write? Would it be a story about a man who sleeps for fifty years who, when he wakes up, does not recognize

anyone, and no one recognizes him? Or would it be a story about a madman who is only rational when he is dreaming? Or a story about a sleeper who is immortal, but that doesn't help him since he never wakes up? Or maybe a story about a man who dreams he is a woman, and when he wakes up he wonders if maybe he is a woman who dreams she is a man? Or perhaps a story in which everyone is sleeping and, when the protagonist wakes up the others do too, so that none of them realize they have been asleep for years? No, don't tell me, don't tell me! Now I know. You will write a story about a man who is sleeping and dreams that he is awake, and when he actually wakes up, thinks he is only dreaming he is awake, and that it is part of this dream when people tell him he has been asleep for a long time. Or could it be this one?... While a man is sleeping like a log, his soul leaves his body and enters the body of someone who has just died to resuscitate him; until this borrowed body dies for a second time, and then the soul goes back to the man who was sleeping and dreams he is split in two: one self who is sleeping but dreams he is awake says to his other self, who is having a nightmare, 'don't worry, this is only a nightmare,' and the other answers, 'then you are awake?' and the first one thinks for a moment, and then says: 'no, we are both sleeping.' Or maybe...?"

Here the famous writer interrupts, with a voice that sounds sad:

"You have made me feel inadequate. Before I wanted to write, but now I don't feel like it ..."

### THE FROG (La Rana)

You have seen a bombacious tree (where I live they call it a "drunk stick," perhaps because its trunk has a shape like a bottle). You have seen a rat, a frog. You have seen a man who is bleeding. You have seen all these things, as well as millions and millions of other things. And you have never seen them all together, but one here, and one there, spread out over time. This tree, this rat, this frog, this blood, are tiny parts of the known world. Now then: just imagine that someone were to tell you that precisely these things that seemed such insignificant parts of the world were actually somewhere outside of it. But, not only are they outside the world, they also support it. What do you think? I was in the Chaco region and a Mataco Indian told me that the entire world—the planet, with its continents and its oceans, with its sky and its stars—is resting on a "drunk stick" covered with blood. That vegetal bottle is where the blood of those who are born comes from, and once they die, their blood returns to it. At night a rat comes and starts to gnaw on the trunk of the "drunk stick" in order to bring it down and destroy everything it holds. During the day a frog comes to lick the gnawed places and heal them. Do you see? It is not the gods or other grandiose forces, but the little things. Aren't you also amazed by the tremendous cosmic importance this myth gives to an insignificant tree, to a rodent, and an amphibian? And now, tell me: when you come near a pond and you hear a frog croak and see it jump up out of the water in a bright green parabola, wouldn't you be filled with a feeling of gratitude?

## POINTS OF VIEW (Perspectivas)

Of all the gods who attended the festivals of Odin in Walhalla, Thor was the strongest. The blows of his hammer were famous, like the time he struck the dove's egg; he hit the shell but then stopped, so the impulse did not break it. Other than that, we know very little about Thor's size, or his figure, and the accounts are contradictory.

One time when he happened to be in the forest at nightfall, he took refuge in an abandoned palace that was completely open on one side, with large interior rooms. The next morning he was awakened by a stentorian voice: "where in the devil did I leave my glove?" Then, Thor realized he had spent the night in the thumb of the glove of Skrymir. On another occasion, when he was thirsty, he went to drink from a large drinking horn. No matter how much he drank, the horn always continued to be full of water; only some time later did he realize that he had been drinking the rivers until they were dry.

Thor was also unable to tell the difference between giants and dwarves.

Men became fond of him because when they saw him so quickly become smaller, and so quickly become larger, they felt he was somehow human: doesn't the whole world get smaller so it can enter the head of a man and, in reverse, doesn't it leave a man's head as a small image that then expands until it includes the entire world? By speaking to each other about all the different adventures of Thor, men took part in their own intellectual adventures: looking at the opposite directions of infinity, they imagined that the stars in the sky, and grains of sand on the beach, may be just like each other.

## DIARY (Diario)

I anchored the boat in the Delta, and after that we went to sleep. Around midnight a loud buzzing woke me up; I saw that the cabin had been filled with a sea-green color. The boat was submerged, and my wife was dead and was covered with algae. I looked at my hands, and they were green. The water was also green!

There was a firefly flying through the cabin, making everything green.

\*

The wind was whining through the door which was slightly open, and it sounded like the voice of a beggar.

I went and pushed the door all the way shut. And on the other side I heard a curse.

\*

My father was dying in the hospital. He was now a querulous cancer. I was listening to him when he died. In his final moments, he opened his eyes and shouted, "Son," and he began to cry, thinking that I was the one who had died. So as not to make him think otherwise, I stretched out in the bed at his side and closed my eyes, next to his delirium.

\*

I continued following the road, confident that it would take me where I wanted to go. I only began to have some doubts when the road entered a forest and it began to take turns. I still trusted that the road knew what it was doing. But eventually, the road got lost and there we were, both of us lost in the trees, and night was falling.

\*

Last night I saw the waning moon that stealthily, on tiptoes and curved forward, was going to hide behind a tree. It looked like a thief who goes around stealing gold watches.

\*

The squirrel could be a bird. It speaks like a bird. It has its nest in the branches like a bird. Its tail is more like a wing than the wing of a bird. It climbs and it jumps, but still hasn't learned to fly.

\*

Leave? Never. One leaves the house, but enters the street. One leaves the city, but enters the country. It is like going from one room to another, although sometimes the room may have a ceiling with birds, or stars. No matter where I go, I always find a mirror hanging on some of the walls of this mansion from which I can never escape.

\*

Twilight. Looking out of the window of the train I saw with astonishment that the world had become pale and faded: everything, except a red flame that was burning like an eyeball in the oven of a distant house. That flame-eye looked too depraved to be real.

\*

It had been raining since dawn. By afternoon, when the sun came out, a huge window opened in the sky; in it was a rainbow in which different colors were flowing! Only after the rainbow finally disappeared did the colors begin to settle on the earth, on the back of some insects.

\*

I come out of the garden. Everything is hardened: ceramic soil, trees of stone, flowers of wax, air of crystal, a sky of porcelain. Hard. Everything is hard. But then a butterfly is enough to soften the state of the universe. It is a butterfly that has landed on the path with its wings folded. The ground is now fluid, like the sea; and the butterfly, a little boat with large sails.

\*

In the bed of a river a lascivious flood surfaced. It laughed like crazy, it stuck out its breasts, and it opened its legs. How eager it was to possess the trembling flesh of the water, to search for its moist mouth, to penetrate its foamy ripples! And then walk away, whistling.

\*

The wind tore through the branches with a roar like a waterfall. Four thrushes flew out of a tree. They passed over me, flying into the wind. If I were a thrush, I would be like that other one, a weak one that folded its wings and stayed there praying.

\*

The clouds carry themselves in pockets so that I am not able to deform them with my imagination.

\*

The sky, as blue as a clear spring that reflects the sky, now turns red in the sunset; the blood of a wounded deer shades the light, and the trees, and the stone, and maybe even my forehead.

\*

I would like to see the whole world and love all it holds; but I cannot. Even if I don't look at the sky (the great blue emptiness of morning, the great black emptiness of night), just looking at the cities, with their throngs of people makes me think that all this is only a big black hole, a hole that I fell into when my mother gave birth to me.

\*

A snake slithered across the path in front of me. The rapidness of its undulations made it hard to see. Now it was only the outline of something that was invisible. It was what was invisible, not the snake, that startled me.

\*

It was the noise of chickens and geese that made me wake up. In order to see what was happening in the corral, I opened the window. It was empty. A little later, a big groan entered the house and then went away, like a beggar who is cursing harmlessly. I ran out into the back yard. An earthquake! The earth had become like a soft sea, the sky had become like a precipice, and my arms had become the wings of a flying fish.

\*

The last light of day was trembling through the wires of the fence. If it wanted to fly the fence could do that, but it didn't want to; it had placed its delicate form on the earth, and through those transparent butterfly wings a calf was looking with amazement.

## MEANDERING (Meandros)

With his investigations, Dr. Stein has helped to create the image of the universe that we have today. I don't know what happened to him; one day he had locked himself up in his house, and only a few friends were able to see him. They said he had gone mad. But according to what I have been able to find out it wasn't madness; it was rather that, with eyes that were suddenly telescopic, and then suddenly microscopic, he had been able to see the world just as he pictured it. In other words, the world over which we think we are walking on solid ground, to him seemed illusory. He was even doubtful about the particles that things were composed of. What we call reality was, for him, only a cloud of electrons. Between matter and anti-matter, there was only a collection of images that changed so quickly there was no way of knowing what was what. The intervals of stellar space between one galaxy and another, and the intervals of molecular space between one atom and another, were always the same. The chair on which we are sitting is actually hollow. Dr. Stein didn't sit down; or if he did it was with great caution, making sure with his hands that there was actually something there which would support his body. He felt dizzy when he looked at the ground, as if he were standing on top of a skyscraper under construction, and he felt like he was walking on narrow steel girders passing over a void, or hanging on the edge of an abyss. Then, afraid that he would fall through one of the open spaces in matter, he put on his skis to pass through a room. And so that he could be sure his body would not disintegrate, he wrapped it in several layers of heavy clothing. Eventually, he was no longer even able to recognize his nurse; when he raised his eyes and saw her sitting by his side, that nurse was split into images that were different one from another, like when an astronomer looks at the constellation of Cassiopeia, with stars that are separated by immense spaces.

## LEGS (Patás)

Rodolfo went to take a walk outside of the city. While he was walking through a field, he saw a man sitting on a fence, with a cow on the other side that was looking at him peacefully. Rodolfo couldn't help saying something as he passed by:

"Doesn't this cow give a gentle calmness to the afternoon, and to the entire Pampa? The cow is like a holy temple."

"Well, at least a Theology," the man answered as turned around and smiled, and then started to walk next to him. "I am always impressed by the great seriousness of these quadrupeds; the architecture of the world seems to rest on their four legs. Like a circle that is divided into four parts by a cross."

“In fact, I prefer other numbers. I wouldn’t want to have four legs. That would be too normal. But I’ll tell you something,” Rodolfo added, laughing, “I would like to add one artificial leg in order to confuse people. What a surprise it would give them to see me walking around with three legs!”

“Oh yes,” the man responded, “I understand perfectly. To add or remove legs, like one adds or removes a hypostasis for God, no? The same thing happens to me. As a biped, you would like to be a tripod. That must be because you believe in the Trinity. But I am a soliped and, in order to deceive my friends who believe in a dual God, I gave myself another leg. You see?”

And without further ado, he discarded one leg, and started hopping along on the other.

### SYNESTHESIA (Sinestesia)

There are misionists, misogynists, misogynists, and misanthropes. Francisco became a misophoto. Because of his photophobia he set aside his canvases and his paintbrushes. After that, in even his most casual phrases it was possible to note a feeling of resistance to light. When, on one winter morning, he heard someone exclaim, “What a beautiful blue sky!” he answered, “Bah!, it’s the same as the darkness we saw last night, only a little more visible.” There are those who like the colorful flowers that appear in gardens during the spring. “But I,” Francisco insisted, feigning disapproval, “see only black and white. The whites are the foliage and the grass, and blacks are the sky and the sea.” If a girl with dazzling skin, hair, lips, and blouse went by his side, he would comment, “My eyes perceive waves of infrared; like serpents, in this body I see only the temperature.”

All lies. Nobody believed him. Then, in his abhorrence of the light he researched a treatise on ophthalmology in order to pretend that he was color-blind and myopic; once he even disguised himself as a blind man and walked through the streets with dark glasses and a white cane. But the more he rejected the light, the more he perceived it: just like the blasphemers who become obsessed with their own blasphemies. Even his dreams were filled with reds, oranges, yellows, greens, blue indigos, and violets. All of his sensations began to be colorful. Colorful hearing, and colorful smell, touch, and taste. This was his punishment. The fervent gnawing of a squirrel, the scent of a colorful jasmine, the taste of an apple, or leafing through a book with the tips of his fingers, all mixed with his visual sensations and dazzled him. These rampant attacks of synesthesia made him cry, with pain in his eyes. He was finally forced to shut himself off, to immobilize himself, and live only at night. Everything else did not help. Nor did it help when all the lights in his house were turned off by his wife, who was black.

### A ONE-SIDED CAGE (Jaula de un Solo Lado)

Sweetheart, as you know, this is my first visit to the Pampa. To me it seemed sunken under the weight of a God seated on the grass. I arrived at the ranch of my elderly aunts in a cabriolet, and after lunch I went out into the country. I found an abandoned tool: a

rake, a scraper, a pitchfork? I had no idea what it was. Maybe a comb for a head much bigger than mine. I lifted up the tool and sank its teeth into the ground. A bird flew over and sat down next to the prongs. It did not move when I approached it. I pulled it out and, putting it over my shoulder, I sank it into another place that was farther away. Can you believe it?, the bird came flying over and sat next to it, like a girl who looks out into the street through a gate. I repeated the action several times. The bird always came to sit down beside the row of teeth. It had the entire open countryside at its disposal, but it always preferred to perch there, and look through the bars. Evidently, it liked to feel like a prisoner and invented a cage for itself.

## PARADISE (Paraíso)

In a monastery on the banks of the Gihón River there were three monks who were great friends of God: Teófilo, Sergio, and Higinio. One day they were bathing in the water of the river, and they saw a beautiful, flowered branch floating by in the current. They decided to go upstream and try to find the sacred place where this branch must have come from. They arrived at Paradise, and an angel opened the door. They felt so enthralled by what they saw that they asked permission to visit that marvelous place, for at least one week.

The angel seemed to be astonished and answered with a smile:

“Well now! You would like to stay here for seven days? You have already been here for seven hundred years! When you return to earth, all will have changed; there will be new cities, new laws, new rulers, new languages. If you want to explain who you are to those who ask you, what you will have to do is to tell them you are the same monks that Godofredo de Viterbo is writing about at this very moment, as something that happened seven centuries ago.

## THE INVISIBLE SPIRITUAL ADVISOR (El Starets invisible)

There were conspiracies, riots, wars. Czar Nicholas II, influenced by the religious minded Czarina Alexandra, called for some wizards to direct him.

Soon, appearing in the palace in Saint Petersburg there were bearded fortune-tellers, necromancers, hypnotizers, astrologists, mystics, quack doctors, spiritualists, and miracle workers. Czar Nicolas questioned them, one after another. He was determined to find the correct one. Like a plague of locusts—1900, 1901, 1902, 1903, 1904, 1905—they continued appearing. None of them inspired confidence.

One of the wizards, a ragged peasant, was asked by the Czar to visit him in his private study. Nicolas was in the process of interrogating him—they were talking about several old Russian icons—when one of his official guards entered. He saluted the Czar very ceremoniously but forgot, evidently on purpose, to acknowledge his eccentric visitor.

When he had finished giving the Czar his message, the official left. Nicolas quickly apologized to his visitor.

“I am very displeased by the lack of courtesy my official guard showed you. I will reprimand him when I see him again. In the meantime, I must ask you to forgive him.”

“That is not necessary, Sire. The poor fellow is not to blame. He did not acknowledge me since he could not see me, because I made myself invisible to him,” Grigori Rasputin answered.

## ACHILLES AND THE TORTOISE

(Aquiles y la Tortuga)

Melissa warned Zeno of Elea that the Pythagorean, Philolaus, was angry because of the bad results of his second argument against movement. Zeno laughed uproariously, and said:

“Then it must be because Achilles, in one of these reincarnations that the Pythagoreans talk about, has reincarnated as Philolaus. After all, it is Achilles, not Philolaus, who has reason to be angry. Homer told us how Hector ran away when he saw that Achilles was coming after him, how he circled three times around the walls of Troy, with Achilles still pursuing him. What Homer did not say is that Achilles, who was afraid that he could never catch up with him, thought: “If Hector were only a tortoise!” Well, in my second argument against movement, I gave him that opportunity. Only it would not have helped Achilles if Hector had been a tortoise, because every time he got to the place where the tortoise was, the latter would have always gone ahead, and so to infinity...”

“Let us say just between us,” Melissa whispered discretely, “that your argument is only valid if we strip it of its disguises. You disguised Time using a few points of space. You used a past—Achilles’ reputation for swiftness, and the slow movement of the tortoise—a present—the desire they both have to run—and a future—the goal that awaits them at the end of the race. Achilles and the tortoise both proceed, psychologically. They do not cover mathematically the infinity of points in their line of travel. In order to be logical, your argument would have to get rid of the temporal images you used to disguise them. Without Achilles and without the tortoise, but with the units and points of a spatial dimension, your argument would be completely logical. Only then it would not endure. I mean that your argument would be so obvious that no one would ever think about it.

## THE FRIGHTENED PRIEST

(El Sacerdote asustado)

No one respected that priest. He had not committed any sins of the flesh, or of the spirit, but the entire congregation thought he was gullible, pliable, ignorant, inefficient, and petty. Those who were devout prayed for him. Then one day an angel appeared and came to instill in him the real meaning of his religious calling. It reminded him that, no matter how humble he was as a man, he was still a minister of God in the world.

“When you celebrate the holy Mass” it told him, “you can do more than any other man. The Virgin Mary gave life to Jesus Christ only once, but you conceive it every time on the altar you say: ‘This is my body.’ God has populated the world, but you populate heaven every time, in the confession, you say, ‘I absolve you.’ The liturgy unites you with the Absolute, and since the Absolute does not allow variances, there is no priest that is worth more than any other priest, just like there is no soul that is worth more than any other soul.

“You...”

The angel stopped speaking with surprise, when it saw that all it had instilled in the priest was a great fear.

### THE LOGIC OF MANIACS (Logica de Maniáticos)

Ramiro looked out at the garden. As though his eyes saw in a minute a film that was projected for many years, he saw how plants grew up, and spread out, threatening to take over the entire sanatorium. The doctors and nurses were erased by a rapid flash of light. After a bird flew over it, he saw only that the air was disturbed.

\*

I have done everything I can to hide the tremendous power of my left hand. I use it to play the piano, to type on a typewriter, to make little paper birds, to direct puppets, or to act as a magician. I put one hand next to the other to see if they can relate to each other, and the left hand imitates the discretion of the right. A democratic education of hands. My efforts have no effect. My left hand does not change. It is different, not in the way it looks, but in the way it acts, as if it had a mind of its own. This mind must be like that of an animal that belongs to a different species and has somehow inserted itself into mine. However, so far I haven't noticed anything monstrous. Unless the monstrosity is actually the inability to communicate with a monster that is hidden inside me.

\*

The entire universe is inside of a huge egg, and all human beings are trapped inside it; we live and die without ever being able to leave its shell. We walk over its concave wall. Our heads, like our houses and towers, like our trees and mountains, converge toward something further inside. In the center the yolk of the sun is revolving—half light, and half darkness—and as it revolves, it separates the nights and the days. Things gravitate, not because the ground we walk on attracts them, but because the sun pushes them away. The stars spread out slowly, suspended in a transparent albumin. This huge egg was put there by Lilith (a goddess according to the Syrians, or a she-devil according to the Hebrews); she left it there, and after that she disappeared. But when the egg breaks, another Lilith will emerge, and in her maternal womb another egg will form, from which another Lilith will emerge, and so to infinity.

\*

Often during an urgent visit to a urinal, he had read phrases written on the partitions by someone else; and that had made him think of the pictographs of prehistoric caves, of the inscriptions on the watchtowers of castles, or the writing on the walls of prisons or sentry boxes. Was that how his graphomania started? What we know for certain is that when he became ill and was confined to his room, the freshly painted white walls made him think of using charcoal to record his thoughts; he had an urge to write. He wrote every day on all four walls, at the level of his eyes. His head was also encircled with words that sometimes shifted and moved. As his illness became worse, he could no longer get out of bed, and these words began to think on their own. Lying there on his back, he would see them crawl around the walls like spiders of intelligence, weaving their own maxims and syllogisms. In the end, he finally realized that the room itself was his head, and that inside it, he was less than a vague idea, barely a tiny bubble, without the strength to even form a word.

### A STRING OF PRETENSES (Fábrica de Fingimientos)

I was with Rodriguez (I think his name was Rodriguez) on the corner of Florida and Viamonte. A moment ago, on the opposite sidewalk I saw the ugliest woman I have ever seen. Her body wrapped in a green dress, her hair tinted with several different colors, her entire face covered with cosmetics, she displayed her figure with the rapidity of someone who is trying to create an impression of youthfulness and then disappeared in the crowd.

“Did you see that?” I exclaimed, laughing, “did you see that ugly woman?”

“Yes. It was my wife.”

Confusion, and during an embarrassing moment of silence as we watched more women walking down Florida Street, I thought to myself:

“Rodriguez pretended that monstrosity was his wife in order to punish me for my lack of gentlemanliness. If that woman were really his wife, he would have sounded more offended. But no. He said, “that is my wife” with a lack of feeling that proves she was not; and at the same time that he was teaching me a moral lesson, he was protecting his vanity as a handsome man who, under no circumstances, would have married such an ugly woman. Only, Rodriguez must have foreseen that I would think this way and, in order not to let me escape this embarrassing situation and let me erase my shame for having said the wrong thing, he exaggerated his lack of feelings; he intentionally exaggerated it so that his calmness would be unbelievable and I would know that he was pretending to pretend so that, when I discovered his game, he would not let me be deceived and realize that this ugly woman in fact was his wife, and I would still be embarrassed for having stuck my foot in it. Or maybe the disingenuous Rodriguez pretended that he was pretending so that his pretense would make me feel ashamed for my shame. I suspect that Rodriguez calculated that I would get caught up in this elaborate string of pretenses so that I would be forced to doubt whether that ugly woman

was, or was not, his wife. Or else the same mental labyrinth that I thought Rodriguez experienced, he thought I experienced, and when he heard me exclaim, “Did you see that ugly woman?” he thought I was trying to make him fall into a trap, because that monstrosity was really my own wife.

TIGER  
(Tigre)

I call him “Tiger,” not because he seems ferocious, savage, or aggressive but, on the contrary, since the many years he has spent in jail have made him quite gentle; no, it is because, when I see him behind the bars in his cell, the shadows of the bars make me think of the stripes on the skin of a tiger. Now we are the best of friends. And to think that it was I who arrested him! That was a long time ago. I was then a policeman, and he was an anarchist.

I remember that on a beautiful morning in October I handcuffed him and handed him over to the Commissar who took him and locked him in a cell. Through the window of the cell, you could see a nice garden; they had planted it there purposely, so that it would calm the prisoners. But they were never able to make him even glance at it. Seated on a rickety old bed, he stared fixedly at the wall. If they spoke to him, he didn’t answer.

When they told me about that, I realized that, in his imagination, he had opened a gap in the wall where he was able to escape. Where did he go? I don’t know. Perhaps he wandered around through the streets of the city. Perhaps, as he sank deeper and deeper into misfortune, he escaped through a labyrinth of cells, like in the *Carceri d’Invenzione* by Giovanni Battista Piranesi. But I am sure he escaped; he escaped through a hole that his imagination made in the wall. But then, in order to block off his imagination, the Commissar decided to take away his wall; that was when he took the Tiger out of his cell and put him on display, in a cage in the garden.

CHIRON  
(Quirón)

Since he was very young Chiron had admired the beauty of horses. When he saw them galloping over the plains his soul leaped out of his eyes, as though he were also galloping far away from the city. If he touched the croup or the neck of a gentle horse, he told it sweet nothings with his hand; and if he offered it sugar, his hand trembled with pleasure when it touched the soft lower lip of the horse. He would have liked to talk with horses, and he tried to understand their language: the stamping of the ground, the whinnying, the shivering of the skin, the wallowing in the dirt, the movement of the ears, the eyes, the tail, and the method of eating and drinking. But he was never able to communicate with a horse; whenever he looked into the dark eyes of a horse, he could tell that he was rejected. One morning his parents found him asleep on the straw in the stable, lying next to a blind chestnut horse; he had spent the whole night next to it. On another day his

parents helped him mount barebacked on a horse without falling off. And that's the way things were until, when he was fully grown, he tried to break in a colt. On the blue and green horizon there was an series of hills and valleys under a blue sky. The rider began to merge with the horse. The man and a horse, a man on a horse, a man-horse, a man with a horse inside. And soon, without dismounting he found he was walking on the ground, only now he was walking on four feet. The centaur Chiron tried to say something and he whinnied.

## HYPNOS AND IRIS (Hipnos e Iris)

Hera gave Iris a message for Hypnos.

Wrapped in her many-colored tunic, Iris flew toward the labyrinth where the most gentle of all gods lived. She entered through a dark cave and was lost in the darkness. At first she couldn't see anything, but little by little the reds, yellows, blues, and greens of her tunic began to give some weak light to her surroundings. In this way, she could get a dim view of the different galleries, all of which were empty. Where could Hypnos be? There were only stones. Could he have moved away? Then, Iris began to feel like she was falling asleep. She seemed to hear the subterranean sound of the River Lethe. She seemed to smell poppies. While she was walking, she seemed to feel the edge of passing dreams.

Suddenly, like someone who had opened her eyes and was able to see again, Iris came out of that, and all her colors were bright again. She now understood that the god and his labyrinth were one and the same, and she understood that she, Iris, had passed through the eyes of the god. What she could not remember, was whether she had ever transmitted the message that Hera had given her.

(Now Hypnos, with his eyes closed once again, was sleeping like a log, and he smiled while he dreamt of a rainbow.)

## DEVILS (Diablos)

Lucifer became bored while he was walking with a Cherub. (It was the monotonous monologue of the Cherub that bored him.) Abruptly, he stopped and turned around, and said to the Cherub:

“Ssh!... What was that?”

“What do you mean? I didn't hear anything,” the Cherub told him. “Now, as I was saying...”

“Wait!... I thought I heard a man start to say something.”

“Like I told you, I didn't hear anything.”

“Wait a minute,” Lucifer interrupted her. “I just want to go over there and see who that man is.”

Since it was Sunday, they had sent the Devil out of Hades. Since morning, he had been walking through the streets of the city doing good things; he helped a blind man cross the street, he gave alms to an elderly paralyzed woman...

“How good you are,” said someone, who had recognized him. “But then what else can you do? God wanted to punish you, and today he has forced you to be good. Isn’t that right?”

The Devil looked up and down at the ironic speaker, and responded:

“Well, what did you expect? Did you think I was going to give them a kick? Even if I had stomped on them, I would have still been more kind-hearted than God who, after all, was the one who let them become blind and paralytic. And you think that I am being kind-hearted? Never; not as long as I can avoid it! I showed pity for what God had done to them only to make God look bad, and be even more wicked.”

And speaking loudly so he was sure that the Other would hear him, he recited a triplet from one of the most popular books that are read in hell:

*Qui vive la pietá quando è ben morta.  
Chi è piú scellerato che colui  
Che al guidicio divin passion comporta?*

\*

I paid a visit to the deserted Church of Santa Catalina, which was located on the shore of a lake. The image of the church that was reflected in the lake showed one tower, but that was the only one it still had, and no one could bring back the one that was missing. Like a soldier who surrenders with his hands up and, while standing in this position a grenade blows off one arm and one hand, the church had lost one of the wings with its tower. A bomb during a revolution? An earthquake? In the village they explained to me it was neither a revolution nor an earthquake. A devil had entered the church out of curiosity, disguised as an old man, and when he saw the priest was about to begin the consecration of bread and wine, he did not want to remain a second longer but was blocked by the people around him; so he hurled himself against the vaulted ceiling of the nave, knocking down the tower, and escaping through one of the holes.

\*

When he was visiting Collin de Plancy sometime after the French Revolution, Lucifer complained about men’s bad taste:

“At the beginning of my exile, I had a figure as beautiful as that of any angel. God had let me go with my body intact. It seemed to me that, in spite of everything, He still loved me. It was only much later when I finally realized what His real intention was: God had not deformed me, so other beings might do that, since only they were capable of making things ugly. He left me so that whenever anyone attributed some monstrosity to me, this attribute was imprinted on my body forever. Now I have been covered with deformities. I hope the one who imagined me with a tail like this one is damned. When someone who enjoyed childish tricks tried to frighten a child, saying I had horns? Zap! I grew horns.

These batwings you see were invented by some archpriest; and these paws, by a nun... To hell with their gifts! They have disfigured me so much that when I look at myself in a mirror, I don't recognize myself; but I do recognize the negative opinion people have of animals with a tail, with horns, with wings, or with paws; and I console myself by thinking that, after all, when they mock me, they are also mocking God.

## THE CITY OF LIGHT (La Ciudad de Luz)

In a rabbinical commentary from the Book of Lamentations there is a description of the City of Light.

Those who were born inside its walls remained there and lived eternally. The Angel of Death had no power over them (but he did have the power to eliminate the strangers who, in the beginning, tried to invade it). The doors of the City of Light were always open for any immortals who wanted to leave; of course, the moment they left they lost their immortality and, exposed to the laws of nature, some crumbled to dust right there; others managed to take a few steps before they fell, and the youngest went to die with people in distant cities. The people of the City of Light did not falter; being immortal did not always make them happy, and then when some of them left, it gave room for those who were newborn. Those who left were called *Memitin et atzman la-da'at*, that is, "those who are suicidal."

## A STUDY OF PROFESSIONAL AWARENESS (Examen de Conciencia profesional)

Whenever I dream, I feel like I am a prisoner in some absurd reality. When I wake up, I recover my freedom; and one of the ways I exercise my freedom is to write something rational about these absurd dreams. That's what I have always done: from the butterflies that fall dead, I choose the wings that best suit me for telling my tales. But the problem is that for several months I have forgotten most of what I dreamed. Is it because my poetic skills are weakening? Forgetting something as useless as a dream could show that my interest in life is turning to something more practical and is, therefore, anti-poetic. Perhaps, if I continue forgetting what I dreamed the night before, I ought to sleep for less time, and do it more often. And in this borderline state, I could convert my dreaming into something literary. But probably not. Those replicated stories would be less meaningful and less creative. And also if, in one of these short snoozes, I were to psychoanalyze myself without realizing it, I might cure my neurosis and then lose my desire to write. When all is said and done, I think the wisest thing for me to do would be to buy someone else's dreams: they say that the fishwife around the corner sells them more cheaply, and with a greater number of varieties. We could even come to some kind of arrangement. We could go to bed together. She could sleep in my arms. I could then go inside her, without waking her up; she, in turn, could put her head inside mine, and I would see what she was dreaming, with all its sounds and colors.

AUGUST 21, 1622  
(21 de Agosto de 1622)

*Gossip from Madrid,  
tell us: who killed the Count?*  
(Lope de Vega)

A young man from the nobility, whose name is no longer remembered, once asked the Count of Villamediana what would make his name become part of history.

“Assassinate some famous person, and your name will always be remembered” he answered.

So the young man assassinated the Count of Villamediana.

## PHOTOGRAPHY (Fotografía)

With photographs taken from different times—even including a daguerreotype—Ernesto created a portrait of his family. It was strange photographic genealogy. His grandfather, for example, was smiling like a young man in his prime, next to his dour ninety-year old granddaughter. Ernesto framed the photo, and placed it on a table in the living room. The living room then began to be disturbed by all the different faces that were brought together from different periods of time, and the air was filled with moving shadows. The hands of the clock spun like a roulette wheel, until they broke apart.

## FLIGHTS (Vuelos)

A wandering swallow that came from far away in order to escape the cold perched like a musical note on the pentagram of telephone wires and, while it rested there, it watched a girl who was leaning against a tree. Then later, still looking like a musical note, it went to sit down next to an ugly black bird. After a while it became annoyed and started to fly away, but the ugly bird stopped it saying:

“Don’t go away. Why does everyone avoid me? I am a victim of old stories. People attribute to me all sorts of evils. Do you see that blind girl over there? They say it was I who pecked out her eyes. Lies. A few years ago (then she was just a child) I was flying innocently, and the gaze of that girl became so enthralled by its own flight, which was following mine, that it flew right out of her head. The gaze carried her eyes with it, and now it must be flying around in some other part of the world, with two eyes flapping like little blue wings.

\*

In one of its most absurd experiments life created something imponderable: the consciousness of mankind. In a similar way, but through other organs, life managed to

create other beings that were anti-gravitational. They didn't even fall when they died. So when cosmonauts and astronauts began to leave the earth around 1960, they saw them through the windows of their spaceships. They were translucent, free, and swift; some were curious and perched on the windows so they could look into the ships, until they happily returned to their orbits. No one doubted they were the true guardians of space.

\*

Gazing at the stars, we began to climb up the hill arm in arm; with my arm, which was wrapped around Raquel's waist, I felt a little wiggle as if she were sending me a message. We reached the top of the hill and remained there without saying anything. Suddenly, Raquel impatiently stomped her foot on the ground.

"Hasn't it occurred to you," she said, "that the earth seems large to us only because it cuts off our vision when we look down? What we would like is to keep on seeing the sky beneath our feet. Not being able to see is what really annoys me. Just imagine what we could see, if this piece of ground were transparent!"

With my arm still around her waist, Raquel kept on dreaming.

"If the globe were diaphanous," I told her, "the rays of the sun would pass right through it, like melted ice. Then, goodbye to the nights! We would never again be able to see the stars. We would be bathed in light all the time."

"How lovely. A total transparency: houses, trees, animals, and us too, all transparent. You know something? I wouldn't mind not being able to see stars. What I don't want is to be stuck here always, like a nail. I would just like to yank myself out, and whoosh!"

"Raquel, what you want is to fly."

I wrapped my arm more tightly around her, to keep her there.

\*

The foolish child was dreaming of being an acrobat, a trapeze artist, a tightrope walker. He had still not learned how to walk on a tightrope—that would come in time—but in the meantime he prepared by putting ropes all over the house. His father tripped on the ropes, without realizing his son's aerial vocation. One night he punished him. After that, the child began to chase the prickly thistles that were floating through the patio, like the brilliant stars that dotted the pathways of the sky. He carefully caught thistles, he pulled out their seeds, and ate them. He nourished himself with this flying bread. Then one day he was able to fly with the rest of the thistles and become one of them.

\*

Stone and sky. Manuel was scaling the north slope of the Aconcagua, climbing very carefully. Every time he placed his foot on an outcrop, his hand reached up and found another; he climbed and climbed, a master of the abysses beneath him, as well as the ascent above. It was easy, simple, enjoyable, free, and regular, like a river that was flowing in reverse toward the top. The time passed so rapidly through his thoughts, with his arms and legs supported by the rocks, that he seemed to be flying, his legs guiding him like a bird's tail, and his arms extended like wings.

\*

In its first attempt to fly the little bird had just flown out of the nest and was astonished when it saw so many other things that were immobile.

“And you, why aren’t you flying?” it asked a tree, and then a mountain.

The tree and the mountain looked at each other and covered their smiles; through the roots and the rocks below them they could feel their constant movement. The entire earth was flying, and the little bird, working so hard with its wings, never realized it.

### IOLAUS AND THE CHILDREN OF CALLIRHOE (Iolas y los Hijos de Calirro)

When they saw Iolaus rejuvenated, fresh and active, with all of his abilities for making love intact, many goddesses wanted their husbands, old men with white beards and diminished vigor, to also be rejuvenated in the same way.

What foolishness!” Aphrodite told them. “What would be really good is if, in the blink of an eye, babies could become men.”

It was thus that the children of Callirrhoe stepped down from the cradle one morning, and that same night they climbed into their beds to make love.

### NOT EVEN A SHADOW (Ni una Sombra)

That corner of the city could never rest in the darkness. If only they left it in peace for at least a couple of hours, so it could stretch out in the shadows! But no. Naturally, during the day the light of the sun shined on it brightly. And at dusk, when it should be able to enjoy the twilight, they turned on the public lighting. All night long it was illuminated. A new day came, and when dawn brought its own light, the street lights were turned off. This nuisance kept on repeating endlessly.

In this urban corner, insomnia created a feeling of madness. It was especially evident when the light became double as the streetlights were still on and the sun started shining; or in reverse, when the natural light was covered by another that was artificial. And so, since some lights were like the shadows of other lights, this corner never encountered a shadow that was really a shadow.

### THE WANDERING JEW (El Judío Errante)

The Angel came to tell Ahasver that, since he refused to believe in Jesus Christ, he had been punished. His punishment would be that he would never have more than five coins. He could spend them on whatever he liked—and whenever he did that, another five coins

would always appear—but he would be prohibited from ever having more than five, either by saving, or by working, or by stealing, or with someone else’s help. And he would never be able to bargain; he would always have to give them all of his five coins for whatever he bought. Neither would he be able to get two handfuls of coins in the same place. And he should not ever think, the Angel added, that he would be able to get rid of the coins just like that; nor would he be able to take out his wallet and just throw it away. And if he tried to resort to a trick in order to take advantage of the greed that is typical of others? No, he would have no time to influence anyone. He must always travel, from neighborhood to neighborhood, from city to city, without being able to explain to anyone about his punishment. Commit suicide, or let himself die? That would also be impossible; his days will be as inexhaustible as his coins.

No sooner had he heard the terms of his punishment after the Angel was flying away, when Ahasver began to see all of the twists and turns of the labyrinth to which he had been condemned. He felt an urge to laugh. This was a counterfeit labyrinth that was unnecessarily complicated with trivialities. Besides, the punishment was not terrible. Hell would have been much worse. It would have been worse if he constantly had to experience a sharp pain that was always different, and always there. It would have been worse to be forced to stay in Jerusalem and feel the scorn of those who witnessed his fate. It seemed to him that the Trinity who had thought of the punishment of these five coins did not really understand the divine will. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost had not been able to come to an agreement, and they ended up counteracting each other.

Ahasver decided not to let them think they had punished him, and to return the favor. Since it would not help him to work—he would not be able to do it the in same place, or receive a salary, or have food or lodging—he would take advantage of the circumstances, and he would beg for food, thus converting himself into a burden on society; and he would respond to the scorn of other people with all the stubbornness of his skeptical philosophy.

As for those five coins, he would never use them on himself. When he saw churches he would buy candles and light them next to an image of Jesus Christ. Then, people would be puzzled why a man who seemed so pious and always lit candles next to the altars, would laugh so insanely when he left the church.

## THE OTHER WOMAN (La Otra)

A man struggles to decide between two women; he then marries one of them. Twenty years later he is unhappy; he goes to see a fortune teller and asks: “what would my life have been like if I had married the other woman?” The fortune teller looks into a crystal ball and sees that the result would have been just the same.

After that, in the crystal ball of his head, the man proceeds to consider several different possibilities:

a) the two women were not any different and, therefore, it would not have mattered which one he married.

b) our destiny is predetermined, and since that is so it would not have mattered if he married one woman or the other, even though they were different.

c) man is the architect of his own existence; and if he is a poor architect, with the fragile makeup of either of these women he would end up building a bad marriage.

d) if he had married the other woman he would have been happy, and this magician is a fraud.

## THE FINAL JUDGMENT (El Juicio Final)

“The idea that there will be a Final Judgment is based on the idea of a God who is not very perceptive; is that not so? It is hard to believe that God would have to wait so long before He makes a judgment! A God who is perceptive would make His judgment immediately, and it would be an Initial Judgment.”

\*

As the world turns people continually wake up to a new sun, and in some places there are always those who celebrate mass, or are praying. These are the guardians who preserve the good relations of Humanity with God. In some periods there are many guardians; in others, the number decreases. The day when there is not even one human being left who communicates with the Divinity, will be the day on which the Final Judgment occurs.

\*

In the antechamber of the Final Judgment.

The Angel puts his hand on his shoulder and says to him:

“Now, it is your turn. You are the last man. Go ahead.”

“Really, the last?”

“The last.”

“Then, in view of the fact that I am the last, would it be possible for them to grant me a small favor?”

“What favor?”

“To give me time to write a short poem, about the experience of being the last man.”

“Impossible,” the Angel insisted. “Right now, in this grand finale, you want to try and do something original?”

## ACTAEON (Acteón)

Actaeon had searched in the valley for a place where he could rest from the task of being a hunter. Hearing water splashing and women laughing, he looked into a cave to see a group of naked women bathing themselves. One of them—small, dark-skinned with two small breasts—aroused his passion. The other girls called her Ranis. Actaeon, who was smitten, could not take his eyes off her. One of the girls saw him, and there

were shouts. There was a rapid movement of bodies as the women hurried to gather around the one who was tallest and tried to hide her body with their nakedness; they were trying to cover the nakedness of a goddess. She was Artemis, but because he was captivated by her Actaeon had never noticed. Artemis, with her head lifted above the others and looking at Actaeon with red-faced anger, immediately cursed him. Actaeon was transformed into a stag, and he fled into the forest where his own hounds devoured him. The beautiful Ranis, who was persecuted by the jealousy of the humiliated Artemis, was finally forced to leave the country.

## THE REDEEMERS (Los Redentores)

For centuries the Church had tried to resist the advances of science. But now there was no other choice, and it at least conceded that the earth was moving around the sun, and that life was evolving. Being cautious after their defeat the ecclesiastics reluctantly decided they must accept most of the scientific theories if they wanted to avoid any more embarrassments. Then, around 1960, when cosmonauts began to mention the idea of different inhabited worlds, some theologians, expecting to be criticized for it, began to talk about the "New Age of Space." They felt it important to keep pace with modernity.

Then some curious theological theories appeared.

The Archbishop Pinto, for example, said that a God who only felt love for our world would not be very strong. And if, with the infinite love that God feels for the billions of people who live in countless numbers of galaxies we are only aware of the love He feels for us, that is because this is where we live.

Father Lazaro insisted that, if one of our spaceships eventually finds another planet that is inhabited, we must avoid a repetition of the shameful moments in history when some missionaries went, with a Bible in one hand and a sword in the other, to destroy different human civilizations. "We must learn," he went on to say, "that being different from us is not a sin; and moreover, it is possible that ours may be the only planet in the universe where there actually was an original sin, and that the creatures we discover on these other worlds, no matter how different from us they look, may not need to be saved since they have never been condemned."

Even more attention was given to the theory of Doctor Genta, from the Theological Seminary of Cordoba. According to this theory the words that were exchanged by Jesus and the Wandering Jew, when the former was bearing the cross on his shoulder on the way to Calvary, have been misunderstood. The Wandering Jew said, "Keep going," and Jesus responded, "I will keep going, and you will continue to wander until I call you." It was thought that Jesus was angry at the Wandering Jew, but that is not true. According to Doctor Genta, there was an agreement. The Wandering Jew would stay on earth for many centuries as a miniature symbol of another Wandering Jew, Jesus, who after the Resurrection, was sent to other planets to redeem the people living there. During his wanderings, Jesus adopted the form of the races that inhabited each of the planets he visited, sometimes with three eyes and two antennas.

One seminarian, with a picturesque Cordovan dialect, disagreed with Doctor Genta, saying that Jesus could not be represented by someone in miniature. That would be wrong; surely God did not lack other agents. And besides, it was not right to imagine Jesus having those other inappropriate forms. In the universe—the seminarian added—there must be many redeemers. And he proposed this possibility:

“Imagine you die, Doctor Genta; you go to Paradise and become lost in a labyrinth of different spheres, and by mistake you enter the wrong door. The Angel who is guarding the door does not recognize you. Nor does the Angel recognize the world from which you come. The Angel asks you to identify yourself. To verify who you are, you say that you come from the world that was saved by Jesus Christ. Now just imagine, Doctor, that the Angel might say that there are as many redeemers as there are doors into Paradise. I have never heard of this Jesus you mention. The redeemer of those who may enter here was called something else. Look for yours through some other door.”

### THE TELESCOPE (Telescopio)

Every day he walked down the same street. From the house to the office, from the office to the house. He spent hours, both in the house and in the office, and whenever he came out he passed through a double row of trees without deviating from this very long street. His passage was as regular as the movement of the stars; when they saw him through their windows, the neighbors could set their watches by the time of his passage. And they wondered, “why does he always look so unsure, as if he were walking toward some unknown destination?” They did not understand the kind of surprises this routine could offer the one who follows it. Like that time when, on arriving at the building in which his office was located, he turned around and looked back toward his house at the other end of the street. The street then stretched out like a telescope and he was split into two persons: one looking from his office, and another from his house. The building that was at his side was the one that he saw clearly from his house. He was in two places at once. From close up he saw the building which, from his house, was in the distance. He saw it through the telescope with the strange sensation of not having left his house, (although his fatigue reminded him that he had just walked all the way to his office).

### THE KISS (El Beso)

The Queen of a distant country in the north, who was angry after having been rejected by Alexander the Great, decided to take revenge. She conceived a daughter with one of her slaves, and she nourished her with poison. The girl grew up, and was both beautiful and lethal. Her lips were deadly for the one who kissed her. The Queen offered her as a bride to Alexander and, from the moment he saw her, he was filled with desire. But Aristotle, who was his Master of Philosophy, suspected the girl’s lips were poisonous,

and to be certain, he ordered a criminal, who had been condemned to death, to kiss her. After he kissed her, the criminal began to writhe in pain until he died.

Alexander never wanted to kiss the girl, not because she was filled with poison, but because she had been kissed by another man.

## DREAMS (Sueños)

I woke up and, when I stretched out my foot touched the wall. A cold chill suddenly passed through my body. I felt like a bronze statue standing on my toes, like the Mercury of Giambologna. Since I was lying down, my body was not weighing on my foot; even though it was standing, the Mercury wouldn't have felt its weight, because it was bronze. Like that of the statue, my position was that of a person who was running: one foot was resting on the wall, and the other stretched out, ready to take another step. I never felt as motionless as when I imagined myself in the posture of one of the most rapidly moving gods, running in one place, like me in the dream I just had. I was running and running. Running like the light in some galaxies whose velocity is counteracted by the speed with which it is moving away from us, so that the light is always in the same place. I dream so often about running without going anywhere, that I wonder if there isn't a second nature in me which is that of a reptile: a bronze Serpent, a serpent of light, whose movement is always motionless.

\*

“Why don't all those people who are out there suffering so horribly commit suicide? It is because they are sleeping. When they sleep, their consciousness shuts down, and their freedom to act is closed off. Then a dream takes over, irresistibly, with no possibility of escape. When I sleep, I can never keep from dreaming; when I am awake I can choose either life or death. I have chosen to live because I am happy, but those who are unhappy also keep on living because they know that life is a dream, and since they are dreaming, things are not as bad as they seem. Perhaps those who commit suicide are happier than they think, but since their consciousness is completely awake, they are less able to stand the pain.

\*

Guillermo is now in mortal danger; they have tied his hands and feet to a tree, and a rattlesnake is about to sink his fangs into him. Suddenly Benito appears and is ready to rescue him, but in order to do so, he would have to die.

Guillermo nobly tells him:

“No, I cannot permit such a sacrifice.”

“Whatever you want,” Benito answers, stepping away. “It's all the same to me. After all it's you who is dreaming, not me.”

\*

When I am awake things are always wonderful; but now I am awake, and there is no wonder. Everything is so clear there is nothing to wonder about.

I run like the wind over clouds blown by the wind. I lift my cloudy feet from the cloud and I put them back again, a cloud with a cloud, and a wind with more wind. I run. When the cloud breaks apart I jump over the opening and, as I jump, I look down and far below me I see an albatross flying over a tiny boat floating in the sea, or perhaps in another sky. I raise my head and, above me I see a lake with a floating island. Since I am looking at the island from below, all I can see through the air and through the water, is the wet ground with roots dangling down. I imagine that, on the other side, those roots are growing and flourishing in some garden.

\*

It was the night of their wedding. He went to sleep in her arms with his mouth open, and suddenly she saw a little green lizard come out of his mouth; it jumped out of the bed and ran rapidly across the room, until it disappeared down the stairs into the basement. Then, he woke up and said:

“What a strange dream I had! I dreamt that a green lizard ran out of my mouth.”

\*

“In the dream I just had, I discovered the secret of ubiquity. Everyone has had dreams that travel from one spectacle to another. But my dream was different: I was able to open my eyes simultaneously in more than one neighborhood and more than one house; I was God, and I could see everything. How did I do that? Ah, that is the secret, and I found it with no effort. This secret has always been there within reach of everyone, and I solved it easily. I don’t remember if I was surprised that no one, not even I, had ever done that. What a pleasure it was, though, to see from so many places at once! I can still sense the aftertaste of that ability, although I don’t remember very well exactly what it was I saw. In fact, I remember very little, and the more I think about it, the less I remember. Now I am also having difficulty remembering how I was able to solve that secret, or even what the secret itself consisted of. I am going to have to do something so that I don’t forget it entirely before I wake up completely. If not, a more intelligent early riser could take me by the hand and, before I know it, he might publish our discovery.”

Gabriel lies down on his bed, and before long he falls soundly asleep.

He dreams that he dies. He thinks he dreams that he wakes up and gets out of bed; he approaches someone he doesn’t know, and he says to him:

“What a scare! I dreamed that I had died!

“Don’t worry about that,” the stranger said to him. “The important thing is that now you are here speaking with me.”

“No, I’m not worried. After all, in the dream I had died; but now that I’m awake I’m relieved to see that I am alive.”

“Well, I’m afraid not. The fact is, you actually did die. Look over there at yourself.” Gabriel looks back at the bed and sees himself lying there, rigid.

Evidently the dream was real.

## THE DESCENDANTS OF PYGMALION (La Descendencia de Pigmalión)

The sculptor Pygmalion who did not think much of the women of Cyprus sculpted a marble figure of the ideal woman: Galatea.

She was the daughter of his imagination, but he loved her as a wife. Then one night he laid his daughter-wife next to him in bed and, thanks to the good offices of Aphrodite, the marble he was caressing became a real person. Nine months later, his daughter-wife gave birth to a beautiful boy: Paphos.

After he had grown up, Paphos came to Pygmalion and said:

“Why don’t you sculpt a special woman for me? Wait, I’ll tell you what I would like.”

And he described how he wanted her to look.

Pygmalion agreed to do it; soon after that Paphos was married to the statue of a woman whose marble—thanks to Aphrodite—was changed into flesh. The child of his marriage was Cinyras, who becomes a sculptor like his grandfather; sometime later he is married and fathers a daughter, who is Myrrha. With marble in her blood, Myrrha sleeps with her father Cinyras, and from this incestuous relationship, Adonis is born. He eventually ends up in the arms of Aphrodite, the one who was responsible for so much sculptured flesh.

## THE ARROYO (El Arroyo)

Sunlight and solitude. The road and the arroyo form a cross; the road travels between wire fencing, from south to north; the arroyo flows through gullies, from east to west.

I am walking down the road with measured steps. The arroyo that is flowing from my right passes underneath the road and then continues flowing on my left, with willows on its banks.

Sun and shadows. Wind in the branches. Aquatic laughter. I look under a little bridge and see a girl who is bathing in the stream, with the current flowing around her waist; she folds her arms over her breasts and plunges her entire body under the water.

Water splashes. A submerged island. A shipwreck. The girl’s tresses continue to float down the arroyo (the arroyo is like another tress over the shoulder of the landscape of Cordoba).

## THE CAVE OF MONTESINOS (La Cueva de Montesinos)

Don Quijote dreamed that he arrived at a translucent Alcazar and Montesinos himself, with his white beard and majestic countenance, opened the doors. But when he went to speak to him, Don Quijote woke up. For three nights he had the same dream, and each time he woke up before being able to say a single word to Montesinos.

Sometime later, when Don Quijote descended into a cave, he had a feeling of joy when he saw the very same Alcazar he had seen in his dream. A venerable old man opened the doors, and he immediately recognized that it was Montesinos.

“May I enter?” Don Quijote asked.

“Certainly, it would be my pleasure”, Montesinos continued somewhat doubtfully, “but you have the habit of vanishing every time I go to greet you.”

### THE NEUROTIC MIRROR (El Espejo Neurótico)

The glass merchant went around the city while making an effort to announce the glass he was trying to sell. “Glass for sale. Glass dealer. Glass for sale. Glass dealer...”

He was heard by a mirror that was hanging next to a bed in one of the rooms in a house of ill-repute. It was a mirror that, because of what it had reflected, had become neurotic and, although it was flat, it felt like a large, round bottle full of incarcerated devils. The mirror pictured the glass dealer replacing windows that had been broken by some of the boys in the neighborhood. It pictured the broken windows, some fallen on the ground, and others still in their frames. From inside the disturbed mirror a stream of provocations emerged. It too wanted to have a crack so that its reflections, like the nightmare of vile scenes in this bedroom, could escape into the world and leave it in peace.

### GOBLINS (Duendes)

The pessimistic goblin said:

“I’m telling you that little by little they are catching up with us. One day they invent one apparatus, and the next day, one even more sensitive. Pretty soon they are going to be able to see everything. They are going to discover traces of the most appalling things in the universe. Remember what I am telling you; one of these days, with these new apparatuses, they will be able to make us come and explain all that has happened.

The optimistic goblin said:

“Don’t worry. Men will never catch up with us. And if they do and they force us to speak, all we have to do is lie to them.”

\*

That night some goblins had gathered in the forest and were discussing what men were like. One, a specialist in folklore, talked about human exploits.

“Bah!” Utl exclaimed. “I don’t want to boast, but with just one finger I could throw all those men to the ground.”

“Not just you: but me too, and any other goblin,” Kipt added.

“The bad thing is” the Head Goblin fretted, “that we would never be able to prove it. For us men exist, and for that reason we would be able to defeat them. But because of their limited intelligence they don’t believe we exist, and for that reason they will never know they are defeated.

**End of Part Three**