

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 IV

JAINISM
(Jainismo)

I just woke up. As if I had put on my glasses while I was asleep, I was able to see the hospital room quite clearly. I see a cockroach sitting on the sacred book of the Agmas. A scorpion comes out of the mouth of a jar and looks at me attentively. I see some ants crawling on an orange rind. I see a centipede wandering across the wall. I see a slug in the basement, a worm on the cornice, a spider on the ceiling, a wasp stirring the air, as well as earthworms, locusts, and ticks. I don't understand why, if as they say they are the souls of sinners, we must treat them so lovingly. I don't like to think about it; God forbid that I might reincarnate in a bedbug or, even worse, end up in the seventh Hell. The Jains have made me the guardian of this hospital room in Mount Abu, and I am not allowed to question it. With my fingernail I carefully remove a louse from my hair, and I see it hop like a kangaroo down my thigh. I close my eyes and go back to sleep.

GOD IS JUST
(Dios se justifica)

Negrín and Dorantes had become very close friends there in the camp. They were happy, therefore, when Captain Juan Quiroga asked both of them to accompany him to the town of Atamahua. The three of them set out, mounted on horseback, and crossed over the hills. Night caught up with them as they reached the valley, and they spent that night under the stars, on the banks of the river. The following day they continued their journey and had just trotted into the streets on the edge of town, when Captain Quiroga noticed that the wallet where he kept his money was gone.

“You sons of bitches, stole my money while I was sleeping!”

“Sir, I think it must have fallen out of your pocket while we were traveling.”

Yes, the wallet had been lost during our trip; but Quiroga was convinced that Negrín had stolen it, and he pulled him off his horse and cut off his hand with a knife (“the hand with which you robbed me, you son of a bitch!”). He turned around and was also about to punish Dorantes; the latter was frightened and ran down the street as fast as he could. Captain Quiroga was not able to catch him and told the police what happened, ordering them to arrest Dorantes for stealing.

Dorantes took refuge in one house, and then in several others, but in all of them he was forced to leave because nobody wanted to believe in his innocence; some asked him for part of the money he had stolen as a price for hiding him, and when he said he hadn't stolen money and didn't have any, they threatened to turn him over to Captain Quiroga. He waited until it was dark and, leaving his horse and everything else behind, he walked stealthily toward the forest and then crossed through it until he reached Puchibamba on the other side. As he was passing around a tree he bumped into something that, in the light of the moon, he could see was an angel. He fell to his knees and sobbed:

"Ah, how lucky I am to find you! You believe in my innocence, don't you?" and after explaining what happened, he added, "Men are so unjust!; and though God is also unjust, at least He would be able to ascertain that Negrín and I did not steal money. Please give God the message that we are innocent."

"But why do you say that God is also unjust?" the angel asked. "Have you not read in the Psalms that He is a Just God?"

"Yes, that is what they told me, but how could God permit such horrible things to happen? Poor Negrín! His hand was cut off, and now he may die of gangrene."

"Haven't they told you that the will of God is inscrutable? Still, what a coincidence! You want to give a message to God at the same time that I have come with a message for you. Because God wants you to know that, if Negrín lost his hand, it was because of an old crime he committed: with that same hand he struck his mother and made her fall off a cliff. Negrín never showed remorse, and so now he has paid for what he did. As for Captain Quiroga, you should know that he was planning to use that money in order to buy a pistol with which he was going to kill the father of a young girl he intended to rape. In making him lose his money, God has saved both the girl and her father, since Captain Quiroga has given up his plan and is returning to camp. You should see him as I do now, riding on horseback over a hill, lifting his head as much as he can, in order to keep it away from hell, which is where he is going just the same! The money he lost was found by a poor farmer whose children are hungry; he made an effort to find the owner, but since there was no one in the place where he was looking, he used the money to feed his family and buy an ox to help him farm his land. When those who refused to give you hospitality see you have left town they will think that you were sent to test them, and now you can see how they are planning to give money to the church to support a hospital for pilgrims. As for you, it is true that you have had quite a fright, but aren't you now compensated by the fact that you have received this revelation? God sent me to tell you that He is even more just than men have always believed.

Dorantes smiled, flattered that he was the one to whom God had chosen to explain Himself; but he also was rather disappointed that He felt it was necessary to give so many different explanations.

THE GOLDEN APPLES (Las Manzanas de Oro)

*The mere stumble of a giant
is a heroic dash for a dwarf.*
(A Greek proverb)

The beautiful Atalanta could run faster than anyone, and since the oracle said she would be doomed if she married, she decided to reject her lovers in the following way:

“I will only marry the one who can beat me; whoever cannot beat me will die.”

Many of those who tried to woo her perished because of that.

When Hippomenes decided to take the chance Atalanta, who was touched by his grace, tried to dissuade him. But that was in vain. Hippomenes wanted to race no matter how great the risk was. And he would have lost if it hadn't been that Aphrodite helped him by giving him three golden apples, with the instructions of how to use them. In the stadium Heracles stood beside the two young racers and gave them the signal to start. They both set off like the wind. Atalanta, who by this time had fallen in love with Hippomenes, at first tried to let him get ahead; but after she thought about it, she decided she couldn't do that and took the lead. That was when Hippomenes dropped a golden apple and Atalanta, attracted by this remarkable golden gift, stopped to get it. Three apples, three stops, and Hippomenes took advantage of the final one to advance triumphantly; Atalanta just caught up with him at the finishing line.

Heracles had already reached the finishing line and was waiting for them, looking just as fresh as he was at the starting line, when he said goodbye.

“When I saw during the race how much you appreciate apples,” he said, “I went to the garden of Hesperides and picked this basket full of them from the Golden Tree.

And he handed it to them as a prize.

Atalanta and Hippomenes looked at each other, both ashamed for having lost the race.

THE ROOSTER

(El Gallo)

I am a city man, and I have only heard a rooster crow there in the city. The rooster in the city, and the city with the rooster. The rooster was a citizen, like me. Once they told me that in certain stories the rooster is the devout watchman of the light, and when he breaks into his song it drives away witches and devils. This is not the rooster that I know. Some other witches and devils are the ones that are driven away when my rooster sings. Because for me the rooster is a symbol of dawn in my neighborhood; of tiredness, sidewalks, fear, chimneys, insomnia, patios. But now I am in the country. I came here yesterday to hide until my enemies forget about me. And now a rooster's crowing has woken me up. My first dawn in the country! I look out of the window half asleep, and I see a vast emptiness from which the streets and houses of Buenos Aires I was dreaming about have suddenly vanished. My beloved Buenos Aires is gone and has left me in the middle of a landscape of Pampa and sky. I breathe in the air of the new day; it is pure, because the city has been removed.

RELATIONSHIPS

(Compañías)

I found a map of the city. After studying some strange marks on it, I realized that these were signs of places where I had lost something. (Could it have been my Guardian Angel

who lost this map which I found by accident, a map where, with these strange signs, he had indicated all the things I had lost?). In order to try and find them, with the map in my hand, I walked all over the city. It was a waste of time. All of the valuable objects—an umbrella, a pen, some cufflinks, a wallet, a watch, some gloves, a knife—had already been found by someone else. A few other useless things—a button, a ticket, a bandage, a carnation—were probably swept up by the street sweeper, or washed away by the rain. However, on one corner, as though she were waiting for me, was my girlfriend, still with sadness in her eyes.

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We were discussing it for the first time. It was not a good discussion. When I returned after having to go to the bathroom, I was not able to enter; she had taken advantage of my absence to lock herself in her room and leave me outside.. I knocked, I begged, I threatened, to no avail. She would not open.

Papa heard me.

“Who are you talking to, Joaquin?”

I didn’t answer; I was about to cry.

“Ah, the door is locked. Don’t worry, that’s no problem,” Papa said. He worked at the latch until he got it to open.

I was afraid that he would see my girlfriend, but even though he glanced into the room, he didn’t see her. But I did; through my tears I could see her laughing there in the middle of the room.

I didn’t want to say anything for fear that Papa would take her away from me.

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I entered my room. All of my furniture had disappeared, and in its place was some other furniture which looked antique. I knew it was my room, and not a place in the museum, since there was a familiar stain on the wall. Three men dressed in armor stood up and looked at me with surprise saying something that, thanks to my study of philology, I knew was a dialect of Spanish from the sixteenth century.

“Pardon me,” I told them, “I have made a mistake.”

And I withdrew.

FLUIDITY (Fluidez)

I know that type of men exist, even though we usually don’t see them. But I have seen at least one. It was one night in the Club, exactly a year ago. I was comfortably settled back in my chair, not asleep, but taking advantage of the solitude and the silence to rest my eyes. But I suddenly had to open them because someone came into the room like a storm. It was him; he was shouting at someone else who remained silent and invisible. I was going to tell him to quiet down, but I changed my mind and decided just to watch.

He kept on talking with such ardor that his face almost seemed like it was on fire, and his abundant hair, which was grey, was like the ashes from that fire. The things he talked about were unreal; dreams, fantasies, conjectures. While he spoke, his hands and feet were shaking, and his whole body seemed to grow and shrink like the tide. That man had the volatility of a stream, of a banner, of a llama, and of the wings of a hummingbird. He spread his agitation to everything in the room, and with his insistent glance he seemed to affect the latent movement of things that still hadn't moved. And what a voice! With his voice he imitated everything that makes sounds: the cracking of furniture, the chirping of birds, the wind in the trees, the rumble of a train. And when he imitated those sounds, his voice seemed to flow through the air. Also his eyes—that suggested the movement of some transparent beings—seemed to flutter through the air. There was a moment when he looked at me; his glance was so liquid that I felt wet. After a while, he said goodbye to his invisible and inaudible friend and went out in the street. I followed him. In the moonlight he had a shadow. It was a very long shadow. The man stopped and looked at his shadow. He began to run, as if he wanted to run across it. He stopped, and then he began to run again. Evidently, he was having fun with his shadow. Suddenly he began to dance like a dervish, and his body—like a pot that is spun by a potter—began to change its form. Finally the shadow began to get smaller, and he disappeared along with the shadow. As if the earth swallowed them up. The city must be full of men like that. Normally we don't see them, but on the few occasions when we do see one we are able to discover their rare fluidity. I admit that having surprised one of them at the very moment he disappeared was a unique stroke of luck.

HOMER
(Homero)

Many generations of Greeks eulogized the heroic episodes of a lost civilization. They thought that they were real because the ruins of Troy and of Mycenae they had seen were also real. When Homer also began to eulogize, he repeated what he had heard. Now and then he allowed himself to invent something to bring together fragments of different legends and make the heroes keep on acting in a constant adventure. On one occasion he invented a ship. Of all the Homeric fiction, it was the only object that ever materialized, and one morning a young girl was able to see this ancient ship. When she said what she had seen, no one wanted to believe her and she eventually forgot about it. However, the sea would always remember the wake of that ship; except that with its watery memory it wasn't sure if the ship had really plied the sea, or if it, the sea, had only dreamt it.

EVIL EYE
(Mal de Ojo)

They had entrusted me to go visit him, and when I met him, Eugenio Gaudio was healthy, rich, and happy.

“How have you managed to handle things so that you have such good fortune in your life?” I asked him with some professional curiosity.

He explained to me that he had not always been so fortunate, but for the last ten years he had spent time following a certain Mrs. Jinx, and that had brought him all kinds of good luck.

“Oh yes? And how is that?”

He foolishly went on explaining:

“You must know, dear friend, that the number of misfortunes is limited, and that there are never two that are the same. When a misfortune happens to someone, it is used up and cannot happen again. In other words, each time something bad happens to someone, there is someone else who is automatically liberated from it. Therefore, although we don’t like to admit it, we are happy when a disaster happens to someone else. As I told you, I began to follow that Mrs. Jinx, a fatal shadow that goes about bringing curses on all who meet her. And since I follow from a prudent distance behind her, without being in sight of her evil eye, nothing ever touches me.”

“Aha, so that’s it!” I said, smiling perversely. “But I think you exaggerate the real importance of this Mrs. Jinx. She is nothing more than a modest assistant.”

For a moment, Eugenio Gaudio looked at me without understanding, but then he understood and, so I couldn’t see his face, he turned around and crossed himself.

“From now on,” I told him, “we’ll be seeing each other quite often.”

I don’t know if he heard me or not, because at that moment the roof collapsed on him.

TANTALUS (Tántalo)

For a long time Tantalus suffered cruel torments. He was thirsty and never able to drink; whenever he bent down to drink the ground absorbed the water from the pond. He was hungry, but he was never able to eat; when he reached out his arms to pick the fruit, the wind blew the fruit off the tree. Finally, Tantalus began to understand that all his efforts were useless. He no longer lowered his head, nor stretched out his arms. Then, without the interventions of Tantalus, the pond overflowed and flooded the town, and the trees were corrupted and became sterile.

Now people are saying with anger:

“Tantalus should not have resigned himself to being thirsty and hungry. Why doesn’t he do something? He should bend down and drink, he should extend his arms and eat.”

ASTROLOGY (Astrología)

Two Chinese astrologers, Hi and Ho, complained:

“Don’t you think its unfair” said Hi, “that the Emperor has claimed the most brilliant constellations for himself, and that he wants the predictions that come from them to be

only for himself, while the rest of us have to be content with the horoscopes of other insignificant stars?”

“Yes,” Ho agreed, “and for that reason I think we ought to invent a great constellation for ourselves and keep it a secret.”

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In Babylon (this was something that happened before Noah’s Great Flood occurred) the astrologer Enmendurana was speaking with a disciple while they were walking on a beautiful starry night:

“The signs of the stars are never mistaken; those of the astrologer are. It is especially true if he was born under the astral signs that make him tend to be mistaken. Therefore, one must know the horoscope of whoever provides a horoscope. If I were to give you a horoscope of your life, in order to be sure that it is really valid, someone ought to look at mine; and another astrologer ought to check on this astrologer, and so on. You may feel that this seems very complicated, confused, and contradictory; but remember that I was conceived under the sign of Gemini and, when I was born, Mercury was under the sign of Aries. Whoever was born under all these signs would necessarily have to speak to you in this way. But, where are you going?...”

“Back home. You said it. Your astrology is complicated, confused, and contradictory. I’m going to sleep. When we are talking about the lack of order, I think I prefer that of my dreams; each dream has its own little star, and since it is mine it will tell me more than other stars are able to.”

AFTERLIFE (La Otra Vida)

According to Las Casas the Indians of the Antilles, infuriated by the torments and the labors that were imposed on them by the Spanish, tried to flee from the land they had invaded. It did them no good. The Spanish hunted them down with dogs and tore them to pieces. The Indians decided they preferred to die. The word spread, and entire towns hung themselves from the trees, certain that in the afterlife they would be able to enjoy peace, freedom, and health. The Spaniards were shocked to see that they were soon not going to have any more slaves. One morning the Holder of an encomienda saw a large number of Indians marching toward the forest with ropes to hang themselves. He followed them and when they reached the forest and were looking for the strongest branches, he approached them and said:

“Please, someone give me a rope. I am also going to hang myself. Because if all of you hang yourselves, how could I keep on living without your help? You give me food, you give me gold... No, I want to go to the afterlife with you, so that there I will not lose all that you have to give me.”

To prevent the Spaniard from going with them and having to spend eternity under his control, the Indians agreed not to kill themselves, for the moment.

THE HISTORY OF SCULPTURE (Historia de la Escultura)

“Let’s play statues!”

We sat down on the threshold. Someone gave us their hand and pulled us, one by one, out into the middle of the street. Once we were there, each one thought of his own statue, the statue he wanted to be. We ran a few steps and then we immobilized ourselves in the postures we had just thought of: the angel of marble, the philosopher of the plaza, the general of the avenue.

Alfredito was different. He had traveled a great deal. He had visited museums and had seen many statues. So many that when he was playing, he was not satisfied by thinking of just one; he thought of all of them. The history of sculpture in just a few seconds. So he launched himself into the street, moving his arms and legs. Alfredito, the smartest of all of us, was the one who lost the game. He never was able to achieve a posture that was recognizable.

DOUBT (Duda)

Ricardo was both lazy and perverse. Each defect tended to rule out the other. When he was resting comfortably, he sometimes abstained from evil, and when he was evil, he then put up with discomfort. Not knowing how to persist in being evil, or sometimes actually being perverse, was his greatest sin.

That morning he took the last subway from the Plaza de Mayo. An old man came and sat down by his side.

“Pardon me, sir, but does it take a long time to get to the Rio de Janeiro station?” the old man asked with a weak, provincial accent.

“No, sir,” Ricardo answered in a moment of distraction. “After I get out, you should get out at the next stop.”

He noted with annoyance that he had just done something good. If he were to get out at Medrano, which is where he lives, the old man would know that the next stop is Rio de Janeiro. But if to annoy him, he were to get out at the station before his own, the old man would do the wrong thing and get out at Medrano, far from where he wanted to go. But then Ricardo would also have to walk a long way to get home.

While the train was moving Ricardo kept on thinking, and no matter how hard he tried, he was not able to decide whether to be lazy, or perverse.

DON JUAN AND TIME (Don Juan y el Tiempo)

The fifty year old Don Juan happened to meet a young boy, who greeted him.

“How’s it going, Father?”

“Father? why are you calling me father?”

“Why do you ask? Don’t you recognize me? I am Juanito Tenorio, your son. Mother is waiting for you.”

And he disappeared.

Don Juan talked to a few people who were walking in the street and was able to find out where the mother of the boy lived. He went to the house and entered. In the middle of the patio was a woman who still looked attractive. Don Juan had never seen her.

“I have just met a young boy who told me his name was Juanito. He says he is my son. Are you his mother?”

“Yes,”

“But if we have never met before...”

“That’s true.”

“Then we will have to sleep together, so that Juanito will have been born according to God’s will.”

“I have nothing against that, but then we will have to get married.”

“So let’s get married.”

“First, you have to make me love you.”

“Agreed. Let’s get started.” Don Juan hums part of a love song.

“Wait a minute. What are you thinking? Just like that? No, no. Falling in love takes time. Besides, not just anyone can make me fall in love. Then before falling in love we need to get to know each other, and before we get to know each other, we need to have met somewhere...”

“And if fate doesn’t bring us together?”

“Ah, that’s the point. You don’t know what you would have lost; I am older now, and you would have to have known me when I was young. So long.”

Don Juan goes back in time to find the woman when she was young. His grey hairs blow away in the wind. He searches for the woman with whom he ought to fall in love, to whom he ought to get married, with whom he ought to have a son. He searches and searches. At this stage of his life Don Juan is a hot-blooded young man. Since he needs to prepare himself for the big conquest, he seduces many women. With each seduction the years pass faster. Aminta, Tisbea, Isabela. To escape justice he makes up the story about how it was the statue of the Comendador that has driven him to hell. Taking advantage of the superstition of people, and having shaved off his beard, he slips away from Seville. He gets involved in more love affairs; when he is finished with these gallant episodes—Julia, Teodora, Constanza, Ines—he is still only an adolescent. Then, one day, so that they won’t punish him after they found him molesting a little girl, he backs off and starts crying bitterly. Like a baby, a child, a fetus. Very soon after that Juan finds himself in an ovum.

THE INCAS (Los Incas)

The messenger was leaving Cuzco—the “the navel of the earth”—and over hills and deserted plateaus he was carrying the words of the Inca to the distant parts of the empire. From time to time a cactus would appear in the middle of the road, with its ears sticking

out, without the need of a head to make them grow, but the messenger kept on going without speaking to them, heading for other ears like those of the prince or a judge, where he was supposed to deliver the secret message. If he was thirsty, he looked for a crack in the ground; there he he leaned over and sang a plaintive Indian song. He was tired by the long journey but still content, and soon the fresh water rose up like a serpent of light.

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The Incas tore out the eyes of the rebels and left them in the jungle. The blind rebels formed a group and helped each other, feeling their way while speaking to each other. One of them lost contact with the others, but when he tried to find them once more he no longer knew where they were. He was all by himself. The trees began to take care of him and one day, like fungus on the bark of an old tree, two new eyes began to grow.

THE DEATH OF AHASVER (La Muerte de Ahasvero)

After wandering incognito over the planet during many centuries, the Wandering Jew finally began to confess to people who he was. He told them without dissimulation:

“I am the Wandering Jew.”

The times had changed and people began to feel sorry for Ahasver when they saw him so wearied. Many felt the punishment was excessive. There were those who grumbled that it was an excessive divine vengeance. God was belittling them.

It was then when up above it was decided that it was time for the Wandering Jew to disappear from earth. He was allowed to die of fatigue, lying at the foot of a silent and motionless oak tree.

PRETERMISSION (Pretermisión)

I do not want to be so impolite as to characterize Eduardo as annoying, but neither do I feel obligated to imply that he has originality. On the contrary, I will admit that he is like me. But I have to say that today he bored me with a vexing story he must have read in *The Magical Spell Book*, and if I remember correctly it was something like this:

Charles Perrault was speaking with his friend Lhéritier, and with some hesitation told him about a story he had thought about writing. “A poor boy was living in a shack lost in a forest. When he happened to hear that the daughter of the King was really beautiful, he swore solemnly that he was going to kiss her, or he would kill himself. So he went to the city, but all that was moving through the streets was a putrid, rotten stench. Once he entered the palace he passed through salons and climbed stairs, always making his way through the bodies of soldiers, servants, and courtiers. Finally, he found the princess lying in her bed, also dead. The youth didn’t complain because he knew that, if it wasn’t for the plague, the soldiers, servants and courtiers would have stopped him from getting

to her. Then he kissed the decomposed body of the princess in order to fulfill his oath and not have to kill himself.” Lhéritier told him that it would not be worth the effort to write such a crude story, and that he still prefers that of *The Sleeping Beauty*. Perrault deferred to the opinion of his friend and did not write it.

This story that was never written is what Eduardo told me today, I don’t know why, because it really is crude and is certainly not worth the effort.

VIGILANCE (Vigilancia)

The task they entrusted to Emilio was not very difficult; he had to go out of the village and ride toward the south until he came to an ombú tree, where he should take the road to the right, and when he arrived at the first house, he should enter it and take possession of the letters hidden in a tin box.

“However,” they told him, “you should know that there is a black man on guard at the door. The trouble is that he is crazy. Those who must be crazier than he is believe he is a wizard, because he walks around with a fish hanging on his neck; they see the eyes of the fish that are always open and they think of the Devil, whose eyes are also always open. But don’t be deceived. The black man has his eyes open like the fish, but he does not see you. And that is not because he is blind. On the contrary. In front of a mirror when he was trying to see what he looked like with his eyes closed, he learned how to see through his eyelids. So now you know; when you see him with his eyes closed, he is watching you, and when you see him with his eyes open, he is sleeping.

THE FINGER (El Dedo)

While I’m standing on my feet and leaning against the wall, my shoes make me shine. I am speaking from above to the shoeshine boy. At that moment, out of the corner of my eye, I see a shadow moving toward me sliding along the wall. It is a dirty, ragged man, but what eyes! Blue eyes, that are wide open. In our world they are lost, but if they have stopped looking at us, it is because they have turned inward, and in the dark interior of the head they are looking at the little blue flames of poetry, or madness. Since I am still leaning against the wall, when the poor fellow approaches me he has to wait. But for what? He doesn’t say anything to me, or even look at me; he only waits.

“Sir,” the shoeshine boy says to me, “lean forward a little, please.”

I lean forward and the man slips between my back and the wall, continues skirting the house and then disappears.

“What about him?” I ask. “What did he want?”

“Nothing. He is a little crazy. When he has to leave his house, he sticks to the walls. The important thing is that he has to touch something. Didn’t you see his finger?”

Yes, when I look I see his finger. With his finger he has made a mark on the interior wall of a closed world, on a barrier that protects him.

So the madman passes through the streets of Buenos Aires, with his finger drawing the profile of his agoraphobia.

ZEUS

From his elevated location, Zeus looked down at the earth and thought about the little gods who, since there was not room for them on Olympus, had to stay down below, wandering around through villages and valleys. From so far above Zeus couldn't see them very well. Because of that he protected certain men and women, thinking they were gods and goddesses.

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A conversation regarding Io.

Tiresias: Seeing Io walking along the banks of a river Zeus followed her, and when she entered a little forest he seduced her. Afterward, so that no one would know about his love affair, he transformed her into a beautiful white cow.

Pentheus: No. Io continued being a beautiful girl. Because of envy, people mistreated her and, in order to insult her they made up the legend about her being a cow.

Erichthonius: On the contrary. Io was always a cow. Zeus didn't chase after little girls. But out of respect for Zeus, people thought that when he had her it was because she had the form of a girl.

Euhemerus: I don't know about Io, but I know that Zeus was a man.

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While he was looking at his father, Zeus, seated on the highest hilltop in the sky and dressed in all his glory, Hermes remembered having seen him in the form of a bull, a swan, a virgin, an eagle, a zephyr, a sudden blaze, a shepherd, a serpent, a ram, a dolphin, a horse, a rain of gold... And he asked himself:

“What is he? What is Zeus really like? Because this aspect of the Father of Gods that he now has is also nothing more than a myth, and he deceives as much here in heaven, as he does down on earth.”

A PACT WITH THE DEVIL (Pacto con el Diablo)

I conjured him several times, and finally he appeared, somewhat reluctantly.

“I would like to make a pact with you,” I said.

“Frankly, I did not expect that from a novelist like you. So you also believe in Pacts with the Devil? I understand that a lot of people want to ask that of me; since in folklore

I usually end up losing, these people think that in some way they will benefit from what I give them, and then in the end they can mock me...

"I assure you that will not be the case with me."

"Yes, I know that. You would fulfill your word. I can tell you are sincere. But for that same reason this won't work, because you have not been condemned."

"Yes, but I will be condemned, if we make this pact. All I ask you is that, in exchange for my soul, you make me a prediction of what literature will be like in the future, or to say it more specifically, what the great novel of tomorrow will be like. I have enough talent to create many different types of novels. I only need to know what type, out of all the different possibilities, would be the one that best represents our time. That way my soul remains in the eternity of Hell, on condition that my novel remains in the universal history of literature."

"I already told you. You aren't suited for this. You have not been condemned. And whether you are condemned is not up to me, but the Other. Some men are condemned, and others are not. To those who are already condemned, I give them whatever they ask, not in exchange for their souls, since it has already been decided that it belongs to me, but only as something to console them. So no pact; I am hospitable that's all, and I limit myself to extending to them the courtesy of Hell. I'm sorry. You are not for me. You haven't been condemned, and because you are free of that you will never write a novel that has been determined by the past, or already lodged in the future, at the disposition of one of my servants."

INSIDES (Adentros)

The architect finished constructing the house; he furnished it piece by piece, he sealed the windows and doors hermetically, he tossed the key in a stream, and vanished forever. Since then, the insides of this abandoned house have experienced a strange life. An inner life like that of a head, and although all those in the town know it is nothing more than an uninhabited house, or even more than a head, like a sombrero placed on the ground. Some villagers keep an eye on the house, worrying that some day someone will come and enter it, or even worse, come out of it. It would have to be someone with a deformed figure that would coincide with the deformed lines of that house. The children that come home from school cross over to the other side of the street, in order to keep from brushing against its doors. No bird ever lands on its roof. A crazy house, probably with several deformed mirrors hanging on its walls.

THE GREAT CRANIUM (El Gran Cráneo)

We were flying. The pilot, who had been quiet for a long time, looked at me as if he wanted to say something but didn't dare; he turned away, he looked at me again, and then he spoke. He was evidently prepared to give me some bad news.

“The universe, sir, is a creature with a soul. Since it has nothing to see or hear beyond itself, it lacks ears and eyes. Since it carries all the air, it doesn’t breathe. Since it has no enemies that threaten it, it has no hands or feet. But it is a creature that thinks, and for that its form is perfect; that of a sphere. The sphere of the universe is a cranium, and the human cranium, in which there are so many ideas, is also similar to the sphere of the universe. One cranium understands the other...”

“Come on, forget about metaphysics and tell me what you have to say,” I interrupted him. “I am not a child. What is going on?”

“We are going to have to go back and land. We cannot continue flying.”

“Why not?” I asked with alarm.

“Can’t you see what is out there beyond these clouds? It is the interior wall of a cranium. We have to go back and land. Something tells me that this cranium has begun to think of a disaster.”

“You must be mad.”

“Mad? Ha! I am telling you that with my little head, I have realized that that larger head has started to think of a disaster. We have to land.”

The man was really mad.

“Okay,” I told him in order not to disturb him. “Let’s land. The sooner the better.”

OLD AGE

(Vejez)

Why deny it? One grows old. You lose something, you gain something. For example, I used to be amazed by all the things I see, always something new. Only I reacted so intensely to the things that stimulated me that my reaction resisted the stimulus so that nothing could reach me. Now that I am older, the things that stimulate me affect me very deeply, and when I see them fall into the abyss of my consciousness I am amazed in a different way; I am amazed at myself, not the same as being amazed by the world, but still amazed. With the extroversion of youth, the air is out there in the sky; with the introversion of old age, the air is here in my respiration. Getting more and more weary, I travel through my inner labyrinths. Some day when I am exhausted by old age, I will be amazed for the last time; I will arrive at some dark place where, splitting apart, I will be waiting for myself, one self greeting the other, like an unborn twin who sees the arrival, outside of time, of a brother who has just died.

CONDITIONAL AND SUBJUNCTIVE MODES

(Modos Potencial y Subjuntivo)

The two twins, one male and one female, must have been born defective. They grew up by themselves, because no one else wanted their company. They knew that they were scorned for their stupidity, their ugliness, their vileness, and the fact they were born. And when they reached the age of love, during a spring siesta on the banks of the river, they

coupled lustfully. When they were discovered during their incestuous relationship, the superior beings that live in this paradisiacal civilization of Intelligence, Beauty, Kindness, and Health, feared for their own future and decided to free themselves from this atrocious pair. They put them in a space ship and sent them to another planet. There, the twins gave birth to children who, in turn gave birth to more children, until the Earth was filled with these monstrous creatures.

BOXING CHAMPION (Campeón de Box)

Kazantzakis was physically weak, but with an imagination so strong that he disfigured the world each time he covered it with a metaphor. The stories that he published were fantasies. With the regular incidents of daily life, he also combined events and myths, facts and dreams. He escaped from reality, but not completely; a reality like when a cat permits a rat to escape, only to grab it with its claws. Kazantzakis bore the mark of those failures. The last was when Ñato Mustafá stole his girlfriend.

Kazantzakis knew very well that literature began using hexameters, like a kidnapping starts a war. Now literature helped him gather all the strength of his spirits in order to get revenge. Using literature he envisioned the classic triangle: Him, Her, and the Other. The triangle, without ceasing to be a triangle, of a vast geography of oceans and peninsulas, fitting within the outline of a neighborhood and bringing together historical memories: epics, heroic romances, novels of chivalry, romantic dishonor, a call to arms, realistic accounts of challenges. And without ceasing to be a triangle, the triangle could be drawn with different shades of color. Kazantzakis chose a his shade a color that was false and true at the same time; he would not fight a duel, he would trade blows with Ñato Mustafá.

With Ñato Mustafá, the boxing champion. But he, Kazantzakis would prove he was as good a man as anyone. And who knows, perhaps when his girlfriend saw how brave he was... Because he was not going to flinch. She would see that. So Ñato Mustafá was a light weight champion? Wait and see. And was he going to be frightened by that? No, not he. Never! Who cares if he is a light weight champion; even if Ñato Mustafá were a heavy weight champion, he would still challenge him! Him, Ñato Mustafá the lucky, the conqueror... Ah, he could even write a story with all that he knew about him! First in the wastelands of New Pompey, and then in the Club of the community. He became a professional boxer, and his triumphs began. He knocked out the Mexican Jicontecal and, in New York, he grabbed the title of the negro Rocky Jones. The public adored him for his courage. He was seeing him at that moment as though he were right before his eyes!; as soon as the bell rang, Ñato Mustafá lunged toward his rival, and without hesitating, he began to punch him fast and furiously during the first three minutes. No one could stop that whirlwind. He puffed out his cheeks, and with his face already bloody, he continued punching, up and down, until he landed a right, and threatened another.

That night Kazantzakis went to wait for Ñato Mustafá in the store on the corner. It was deserted.

The old Ypsilanti, who waited on him, was a Greek who could no longer read the *Iliad*, except by using a translation of Segalá. He was reading it at the time when Kazantzakis entered the store. He was ignoring the “Homeric question,” and was confusing different periods, cultures, races and songs. Happily anachronistic, he believed that the Aqueos were Greeks like him, that the Tuecros were Turks, and that in the Trojan War—the first between East and West—Homer had told how the Aqueos had punished the Teucros for abducting a woman. It was a national poem, a poem of his nation. But he was rather disappointed by Homer’s impartiality. Even though he was a patriot, Homer invented Teucro heroes with unnecessary fervor. In order to describe a combat between two equal rivals, Homer had made the figure of Hector grow at the same rate that Achilles’ anger was growing.

The old man set aside the *Iliad* and served Kazantzakis a glass of gin, then another, and another.

That was when Ñato Mustafá entered the store.

Kazantzakis confronted him and, saying he was going to give him a punch in the face, he did just that.

Ñato Mustafá did not respond.

“Now he is going to say,” Kazantzakis thought, “that he hardly felt that.”

He punched him again, and then the battle began.

It was an epic battle. The old Ypsilanti made a move to try and separate them, but then stopped and decided he preferred not to watch; however he listened to the panting, the punches, the feet scraping on the floor, and always the same grunts of pain. When he heard a body fall to the floor, he raised his head and saw that Kazantzakis was leaving the store. Ñato Mustafá was weeping on the floor, trying to hide his face.

“Coward,” the old man muttered to himself, “you have to be a coward to...!”

He stopped so as not to offend the man who was beaten, but he continued thinking, “you have to be a coward to strike this poor fellow who in his entire life has never fought with anyone. It wasn’t as though this scrawny fellow was a boxing champion, and you have to go ahead and punch him like that!”

Then it occurred to him, that was exactly what must have happened. Kazantzakis had invented things like Homer. Just like Homer invented an heroic Hector, Kazantzakis had invented a Ñato Mustafá who was a boxing champion!

As he was helping Ñato Mustafá get up off the floor, for the first time Ypsilanti felt more sympathy for the enemy, Hector, than for his fellow Greek, Achilles.

CASSIUS (Casio)

Othello thought of Desdemona enjoying herself in the arms of Cassius and, while he was mad with jealousy, the image of Desdemona slid out of the head of Othello like a ghost and slipped into Cassius’ room, throwing herself into his arms.

Cassius was surprised, until he realized that the woman was not real. The way she was acting, wasn’t this just like she acted in the stories that Othello used to tell? The phrases

she used, weren't they also like those in the stories Othello used to tell, even with some words that were typical of a Moor? And such sensuality that definitely was not representative of the chaste Desdemona, wasn't this something that could only exist in the mind of a jealous husband?

Then Cassius left the false Desdemona in his bed and made his way to the bedroom of the real Desdemona to explain everything and prevent a tragedy; but he was too late.

THE INVISIBLE DORA (Dora la Invisible)

Students of both sexes were passing through the corridors of the Administration Building. Hiding in an isolated corner, Dora was watching them. "More than a witness of future lives," she thought, "I am spying on creatures of a different species." She was watching from behind her glasses, as if from inside an aquarium. She was spying out of timidity and glancing here and there. The position of her head, wasn't that one of a person who is timid? That's what they had always told her. Her Mother insisted: "Raise your head!" Her teacher insisted: "Raise your head!" Everyone told her to keep her head up. And there she was bending over as though she were leaning on the glass wall of an aquarium, peering into another world through the lenses of her eyeglasses. Timidity; or rather, the constant astonishment of seeing people that she would never really know; and the fear that the spying might be reversed and that one of those she was watching would begin examining her. But this time her confinement on this side of her glasses became final. She became dizzy and felt that her life was emptying. Her blood, which should have been as salty as the sea, began to flow out of her, leaving Dora pale and cold. With gills instead of lungs, she breathed in air that was more rarefied. She was becoming a reptile, an amphibian, a fish, and was now leaving the phylum of vertebrates. Her bones were softened, and it was miraculous that, being so huge, she could still stand on two feet. Something also must have happened to her eyes—perhaps they lost their color—since the afternoon became cloudy and things began to look faded. She became motionless as if she were stuck in the mud. She didn't even have the strength to take her mirror out of her purse and look at herself. Besides, what for? She was becoming blurred. She looked at her hands and saw how they had become thinner. They were almost translucent, like the tentacles of a jellyfish. "When they look in this direction," she thought, "they won't be able to see me." At that moment a rapidly moving rosy face—with a speed which meant it was coming from far away—came and kissed her on her mouth.

Dora had trouble believing that this perfect targeting of her mouth proved that she was not invisible. Couldn't it be that as she became transparent, her mouth was the only thing that was still visible, like a little bubble? Or could it be that that rapidly moving rosy face hadn't really kissed her but that, without seeing her in this immense liquid void, it had stumbled against her by accident? A stumble, not a kiss. Before vanishing completely, the invisible Dora felt shame when she imagined the surprise, or perhaps the disgust, that the rapidly moving person with a rosy face must have felt after this accidental contact with her mouth.

THE VISITOR (Visita)

1554. Midnight in the City of Angels, in Mexico. The man walks stealthily through the darkened convent. Moving very quietly, he climbs up the stairs. Suddenly, he stops to listen to some voices that are coming from the street. "Here! Come here! There is a body of a dead man under the window of Leonor de Osmal!" Now the shadow continues rising; it advances through the cloister, coming through the door of the cell where the frightened Hernando de Nava has taken refuge.

"Don't be afraid," the weak voice of Gutierre de Cetina tells him. "I am not coming to get revenge. I am only coming out of curiosity. Now that you are my assassin, I find you interesting. I want to get to know you better."

WAITING ROOM (Sala de Espera)

Costa and Wright have robbed a house. Then, Costa kills Wright and remains in sole possession of the valise full of jewels and money. He goes to the station so he can escape on the first train. In the waiting room a woman sits down on his left and starts to talk to him. Annoyed, Costa yawns to pretend he is sleepy and then goes to sleep, but he hears the woman talking as if she hadn't noticed. Then, he opens his eyes and, sitting on his right, he sees the ghost of Wright. The woman looks right past Costa and directs her words at the ghost of Wright, who responds with expressions of sympathy. When the train arrives, Costa wants to get up but is not able. He is paralyzed and speechless, and he sees with astonishment that the ghost calmly takes the valise and goes off with the woman to get on the train as they are talking and laughing. They get on, and the train departs. Costa follows it with his eyes. An attendant comes and begins to clean up the waiting room which is now completely deserted. He runs the vacuum over the seat where Costa is sitting, invisible.

FACES (Caras)

With both hands Grau lifted the portrait of his dearly beloved off the piano and looked at it fondly.

"Oh Silvia, Silvia, beautiful Silvia, oh dear Silvia, my absent Silvia, always sleeping in this portrait; Silvia who is dead on nights that are important, and Silvia who is resurrected during morning encounters in the Park; oh unique and enigmatic Silvia, if I could only know how you are and be with you for a while, if I could only know your thoughts and see you smile, if this could only be, oh Silvia, beautiful Silvia!"

The glass that covers the portrait like a mirror reflects his own face. And then a slight movement of his wrists makes his face merge with that of his beloved. One pair of eyes

within another pair of eyes, two lips over other lips; but these two faces, the one in the portrait and the one in the reflection, neither looked at each other nor kissed each other. Superimposed with the same posture, looking at the space that opened in front of them, their common lines were reinforced, creating a new blurred, generic, expressionless face.

Grau felt cold and discouraged. He thought that hundreds or thousands of photos of different people could be projected simultaneously on a screen. The faces, placed one on top of the other, would result in an image that was clear, objective, typical and lasting, where one was able to see the true meaning of Life. Because, he thought, during their evolution, these faces have inevitably kept eyes, ears, noses, and mouths, as close as possible to the nerves in the head, and as far away as possible from the ground.

Grau put the portrait on the piano again and contemplated the face of his beloved: "Oh, Silvia, Silvia, beautiful Silvia, unique and alluring Silvia!"

THE DWARF (El Enano)

As on other mornings, I thought the inlet would be deserted, but I had scarcely started to run across the beach when I heard someone shout, "Watch out!" I stopped cold, and in front of me I saw a dwarf who was frowning. Irritated, I felt like smacking him.

"Pardon me," I told him, "I didn't see you."

"That was obvious," he said, and stopped frowning.

His figure was grotesque, with an enlarged head over a shrunken waist.

He came to my side, and both of us entered the sea. The dwarf was so dense that I was afraid he would sink to the bottom like a chunk of platinum. With a glance, however, I saw that he knew how to swim so with a calm conscience I left him and began to swim rapidly out toward the little island which waited for me every morning. Since I wasn't paying attention, I hadn't noticed that the dwarf didn't stay behind, but was swimming along beside me. It seemed to me that the arms of the dwarf which he raised out of the water as he was swimming became longer and thicker with each stroke, and that each time they reached farther away from his head. But I didn't pay much attention to that either. Both of us reached the little island. I slowed down so as not to crash into the rocks, and when I could walk the rest of the way, I went to sit down on a rock. And then as he rose out of the waves I saw that the dwarf had grown into a giant.

"Don't be astonished," he told me. "I am Pulgarcito, the dwarf from the Barnum and Bailey Circus. It is a difficult life that demands much contraction. You can't imagine how hard it is when I am working. But here I can stretch out. It's my day of rest."

FIFTY YEARS IN THE FUTURE (Cincuenta Años por venir)

The face of Soldier John had grown from the tree of life like a flawed fruit: it was face of a dog instead of a normal human face that one would expect on such a nice-looking body. He was marching along a deserted road when dog came up to his side. He realized that it

was a devil in disguise, and acting like he was going to pet it, he grabbed it by the scruff of the neck and stuffed it into his knapsack.

“I won’t let you out until you grant me what I am asking.”

“Ask me whatever you want, but it won’t be much because I am just a poor devil.”

“Will you permit me to know the precise details of what will happen during fifty years of my future life?”

The devil said yes, that would be no problem. Soldier John, happy to have assured himself of fifty more years of life, acted like it was not really important and let him go.

A minute later a stream of images rushed through the consciousness of Soldier John; he was able to witness fifty years of his future life. But the moment when the spectacle ended, he heard the devil say to him:

“And now it’s time to die. That’s all I can do. Once you have seen your future life, you have already lived it.”

End of Part IV