

JAVIER TAFUR GONZALEZ

TWISTED TALES

THE SYLLABLE EDITIONS
GHOSTY COLLECITONS

I
KETTLE DRUMS

THE BLUE PLAID JACKET

He was always afraid of the countryside. He believed he would run into wild creatures. He was already an elegant young man when he was invited on a picnic. Because of his infatuation for Lucía and his enthusiasm on wearing his blue plaid jacket for the first time, he forgot his scruples.

When he arrived, he was astonished by the fields of daisies and he wished to walk alone among them. He did not know nature reserved for herself these treasures that produced such a pleasant feeling. His heart beat joyfully and he pictured Lucía as a queen with a white rolling field of daisies for a background.

With this image in mind, he picked a flower and began to tear off the petals one by one, and when he stripped off the last one, the stem bled. After looking at his hands, he started to run, and in his uncontrolled running he fell down. Quite frightened, he watched a daisy take his arm and tear it off; then he felt another one catching one of his legs... From each of his limbs, grew beautiful daisies swaying in the afternoon breeze.

A TROPICAL WALK

I descended the stairs into the garden listening to the voices of Grisha and Dunia which sounded far away. In front of me were Grigori and Sonia, near a shady tree which perfumed the morning; I waved to them and I went on. They kissed each other and smiled at me.

I raised my right hand and returned their greeting. I liked to see Dunia in that white dress. I remember the first time I saw it on her. At that time, we were meeting in the professor's room at the University of San Petersburgo, and she arrived, joyful because she had just finished lecturing about Pushkin to the pupils of the last year of humanities. I remember her as if I were looking at her right now: she put her books on the table and hung up her coat. The white dress with embroidered tulips appeared. Grisha had just met her and he only had eyes for her. It was the first day of the warmest spring; everybody was happy including Grigori and Sonia who apparently found happiness in arguing. I remember the day when they renewed the argument about Basillides and the paradoxes about perfection and infinity. Sonia became angry because we did not pay serious attention to her and she said there were no forbidden topics for Russians, no matter how byzantine they were. She is a beautiful representative of the dialectic

method, even though she has more authority in regard to dialogism, being a specialist on the work of Mijail Mijailovich Bajtin (1895 - 1975), on which she wrote her doctoral thesis. With all these memories, I left the farm house where we had been invited by some South American colleagues.

What beautiful trees! Wide and tall with thick trunks and great branches which give shade to the pastures. As I am a Russian, the tropics was all bright and sunlit; a beautiful clearness like the smile of a great spirit; while to an atheist like me it looked equally fantastic and marvelous. The house of one floor and built of mud and bamboo in the XVII century, has a large corridor with a floor made of Spanish board.

Its rooms, ample and welcoming, still listen to the whispering of the slow monologue of the fountain, and an irrigation ditch takes away the murmur of the water running through the inside patio. This architecture, matching the landscape, seems very beautiful to me and makes me feel rough when I remember my Siberian friends. I stopped these comparisons and contrasts, seated on the grass, leaning against a "saman" tree. I wanted to leave the farm's borders and passed through a "guadua" gate. I like to learn these

words although my South American colleagues laugh at my accent and, of course, of my syntax.

At the same time I waited for Boris, but since he did not arrive I supposed he had gone with Martha and Carlos, who had decided to organize a barbecue.

South Americans are incomparable at that and they have the best reputation in the world, especially the Argentinians. And, what knives! Certainly more beautiful than those of that unfortunate Venetian baker. Outside the "guadua" door I followed a narrow path. The trees, side by side, twisted their branches over the center; and the sky was a shade of green and a movable burst of light shot through the clouds. Its beauty I cannot describe. There are unexpressible emotions in all languages. I stopped to watch a pair of butterflies dancing in the sunny splendor of the road and further ahead, hiding away, I began to imitate the jumping of a cricket. I was embarrassed when a countryman surprised me in such a ridiculous position and I waved foolishly with my hand and blushed. I laughed at myself but I was happy. I opened a gate and I found myself in another pasture of the same property. I think, because the farm is immense. Ahh! trees blooming in mid - summer! The lilac - colored 'guayacan' flowers, the African tulip, the alder. I took out my notebook and wrote down these puerile experiences. " You will see how envious they will be when they receive the letters", I told myself. "Somebody else will feel eager to travel. The Albanian, I am sure. I bet he will come with the Moldavian. What a pity I do not have a camera! But Carlos and Martha have promised to invite us again; and if not.....it is enough to go out to the fields and look because this

is not an oasis, but an eternal miracle". I kept myself amused with these joyful feelings.

Until I arrived at a poor, white, clay house with a blue border two hands high. I contemplated its simple lines and its functional design: the door, the railing and the infallible "corredor". The window was open and attracted my curiosity. I approached it. What would there be there? The view against the light made it difficult to see. I opened the little wooden door and I went out into the corridor. Although I knew about these people's cordiality, I also knew about the difficult situation of the country, and I was afraid of a violent reaction if I were surprised. But I went ahead and looked: I saw my face reflected in the dim room. I put out my hand trying to feel the window pane but, as I had expected, there was no glass; they do not use them in this kind of housing. I smiled to myself because I saw myself rehearsing an explanation. "How strange". And so I did. I walked back the same way thinking I was not the one who was there, but Watzlavick, the Polack, who wanted to continue explaining enantidromy to me....Ahh, the leafy trees: the pleasing tropical atmosphere. Grigori was trying to show a fly the way out of a crystal trap. I jumped the fence with agility; I think I went to the corridor and there I was. I heard Sonia say to Grigori, " Landasky is handsome".

I looked at her and I waved, and they both waved back. (- 11 -)

THE SAMAN TREE

The last time I went there the saman tree told me he wanted to come to visit me. Yesterday I waited for him; he arrived on time. It would have been about five o'clock. An Italian painter had told him this hour had the best light. Artists' ideas! It seems so to me, too. He came through the door and I was amazed by his plasticity in passing his branches. Once in the living room, he was quite talkative. He was frank when he asked me to leave the window open since he was accustomed to the park and felt a little claustrophobic. What was said is our business but he assured me he would return.

SPRING MEMORIES

He escaped while his parents were working in the field. He got on "Caretá" the mare and rode to the "Chorro" at full speed to join his friends. When he arrived at the ravine, he met Marino. He left the mare tied to an offshoot, and they went into the bushes to kill birds with their rubber sling shots. They knew but they paid no attention to the warnings: "Do not go into the bush because of the snakes and the goblins", the 'Pata Sola', the Bogeyman, the Mountain Souls in Purgatory lived there. The elderly people spoke of the Ghosts and the Dog with Chains, but they went to hunt mulberry birds and to steal honeycombs anyway. They had a good time, ate stolen food, smoked and drank.

Night arrived. The mare was still tied but the boys could not find their way out. That was what Doña Mercedes used to tell them, that the spell begins by making you enjoy the moment and forget everything. That was the cunning of the Goblins who made tasty guavas, star apples and passion fruit appear. When they wanted to return, the shadows were covering the exit, and then the noises began; the croaking of the frogs and the crickets; the flapping of the 'morrocoes' and the owls, the strange laughings, the

steps, the moans, a tall black shadow in the chilly fog. The thick bushes lit up for one instant.

- !The souls in purgatory!

- !Wow! Holy Mother of God, protect us!

They used two sticks to make a cross, Marino felt he was being knocked down and he yelled frightening away a flock of "chamones" and ovenbirds. Their tears were cold when they saw the woman in the long, white dress.

- It's the Pata Sola. Or, the Soul of the Woods.

They turned around and ran, tripping over the plants. They found their way to the end of the woods. They heard some barking and walked faster because they were afraid of the Dog with the Chains. "Careta" was there, motionless; they untied her and rode as riders against the wind. When they arrived at the patio, there were several ghosts among the geese but they were able to reach the kitchen.

THE NEW GARMENT

The teacher instructed the children how to use the harness and the blinders. She told them: "You have to look ahead", and she spoke to them about progress. "With the development of communication systems, we don't even have to speak." She was happy: she did not judge. That day they arrived at school dressed up with clean harnesses and blinders. In language class, they immersed themselves in the labyrinth of words.

Nobody ever asked why this class took place in a basement annex. The teacher went down to the second floor, then to the first one, turning to the right into a dark corridor. There were cells on both sides. The first ones were empty but as she went ahead prisoner children were seen.

"This one was sent by the principal because he is a liar.

"What did he say?" asked one boy.

That his notebook was left at home. That was a lie; I myself opened the school bag and the notebook was there: what really happened was that he did not do his homework. It was cold. The teacher continued speaking; "This one is here because he masturbated one day", and she added,

"young man, put the harness on!" She felt upset when she realized she was talking to herself.

"This is Pepe".

He had been a classmate. They did not remember him at all. He had pissed on their notebooks. His nickname was "The Dog". They had almost forgotten him. Mario was at the back, punished for having a dirty neck, for arriving late and for not cutting his hair, and because he exchanged trading cards, played marbles and made too many friends.

"And is that bad?"

The teacher straightened the harness of the boy who asked the question and adjusted his blinders.

Following the tour, they arrived at an ample room lighted by big lamps. She smoothed out her dress. As they came in, they saw some men in robes.

She bowed and told the children to kneel. A fatherly educator invited them to stand up. The children were impressed and astonished; the teacher, proud. While they were standing, they watched the dazzling setting.

"Words are made here, children ", she whispered.

"Why doesn't Pepe speak?" asked Arturo.

Those gentlemen looked at him, and then they set their eyes on the teacher, who went pale. One of the men, agile and corpulent, approached the boy and tighten his harness recriminatingly.

“Miss So - and - So, what have we invented this garment for? Remember it has to be compulsory and, besides, as we are in an experimental period, you must obey, reporting results promptly, marking suggestions to determine the final model.”

“Or, do you think we have to return to the whip, that savage system?” interrupted another educator. An older one in a different robe, who seemed to be the Principal, slowly walked over and told her in a conciliatory tone.

“Don’t worry..., but remember the rule”.

She was livid, holding her breath. He put his hand on her shoulder, dismissing her affably.

The teacher and the children went out. She wanted to go back, offer her excuses and send that kid to the basement. “This inquisitive boy will repent one and one thousand times!” she thought. And, Arturo was suffering by himself knowing what would happen to him.

The young lady made a great effort to start up the topic again, "Language is made here. The teachers are looking for the authentic national expression".

There were collections of dissected words on the walls, pinned on with pins, others in traps or flattened with stones. The class became more interesting when they passed through the sculpture and pottery workshops: they examined models of citizens with soft hands, delicate feet and no ears; even though others had ears, none of them had a mouth. Arturito fainted when he saw the mummy with its mouth sewn closed. He fell down and struck his mouth. When he woke up, his mouth was sewn and on top of it there was a bloody yellow cloth.

Now, Arturito is accustomed to seeing the teacher walking by his cell every Tuesday. He observes his old classmates and the rest of the pupils, and he determines the progress of the project with precision.

UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE WEEPING WILLOW

Although it was going to be five o'clock, the summer heat was still quite strong out on the street. He was looking out from the office, and typing the last official note on the old typewriter. Henry dried his sweat with a handkerchief.

"I will sign it tomorrow", said the Judge as a farewell.

He continued the last lines quietly and took the sheet out of the typewriter, making a metallic sound. He left at six o'clock, accompanied by the other employees who dispersed with the rest e breeze. He didn't; he walked into the bar and ordered an "aguardiente". Outside, the light grew dimmer until it disappeared; inside, the music, the noise of the customers and the lights made him forget the passing of the hours. The owner added one more drink to the very many he had already had.

"It's on the house", he said.

Henry thanked him with a gesture, drank it and stood up.

When he paid the check, he realized he was drunk; he paid and said goodby. After leaving, he stumbled in the dark, then straighten up and continued down the sidewalk until he arrived at the main street. He went zig-zagging down the street, and when he passed by the river he went up

to the railing tottering in the emptyness. A soft hand took hold of him. It was the woman who was waiting for him in the shadows. He recognized her.

"Thanks".

She rubbed his back placing her hand under his sweat shirt.

"Where were you? he said, with difficulty.

She placed her left arm around his waist and leaned her head on his shoulder, and he felt surrounded by an irresistible breath. They both continued rubbing their bodies, together staggering down the street until they arrived at the railroad tracks, They followed its path until they reached the tunnel and they went in, going down into a dark place full of fireflies where the crickets were quiet. He was lost with her.

"Have we arrived?"

She moved away, leaving him holding onto her ethereal buttocks. Then, she pushed open the heavy door, turning around to avoid his falling down.

"Oh, oh! I feel dizzy".

She loosened her white dress, which had ripped by the branch of a willow tree, uncovering her white breasts. She moved her head back shaking out her hair. This made him anxiously and horny. He kissed her neck and they went down onto the narrow bed. She unbuttoned his shirt and they slept, sweetly tired. Among the leaves the panting wind pushed. (- 20 -)

He woke up at the usual hour, gathered his clothes which were scattered all over the nearest tombs, and he went up into the brightness.

STAR DUST

Life passed us by without being able to possess us ! How fast everything passes. She was just a child in the vortex of time: she and I - two little grains in the twin drops of crystal - we were one in front of the other. Ah! infantile love resolved in the shy glance and the postponed kiss, while the strength of the whirlwind forced us into the narrow tunnel through the passing of the light, and we fell down into the transparent bubble. The dawns, the warm forest, and the rain against the window panes were lost in time. While in the upper bell it was nice to walk by day, forgetting where our steady circular steps lead us. Now, in the Mysterious Region, I have met her again: she was strolling in the night and I approached her. Two embracing fatuous fires illuminated her face and I saw the skin of Sandy Moon, soft, ethereal.

" I would love to accompany you", I told her with a voice which had waited a whole life to speak to her.

"I want to gather seashells", she told me.

We went down to the beach along a weaving path among the palm trees. I placed a seashell in her hand, she put it into her apron pocket but I took her apron off and loosened her skirt; she put her hands up and while I was taking her blouse off, I told her,

"Don't forget that a dead man is speaking to you, my resurrector, a dead man who is waiting for you to rekindle his ashes".

" Cervera" she told me.

Aquiescent, she smiled. Ah! Her breasts were so sweet.

Joyful she lay down for the expected caress while the stars let their star dust drift down on us.

THE DEVIL'S HORNS

At the door of the Theater school they agreed to go to the party wearing disguises. They made a date to meet at Enrique and Carolina's apartments at ten o'clock. Enrique made himself up as a mime. Carolina gave him the last retouchings. Carolina dressed as a butterfly. At ten o'clock, Death arrived promptly, so well disguised that Carolina and Enrique did not know who it was.

The surprises were beginning. Immediately, the Devil arrived and behind him, the Witch. Then the Wizard and the Snake. They were masters at make-up. The last ones to come in were Samson and Dalila. The witch turned off the lights and lit three candles. With the first glow, Death danced while Dalila put on a record of Arabian music.

The Wizard discovered a bottle of aguardiente which he covered with his colorful silk handkerchief. Everybody laughed when they saw the glasses fill up by themselves. The snake crawled up to Samson and put its head on his thigh, and soon knew he was a male. Dalila and Death were dancing together. The Devil set fire to Carolina's wings. Enrique took them off, went out to the balcony and let them fall.

Death laughed with pleasure, and Samson banged him on the head.
Somebody knocked at the door; Enrique opened.

"Please make less noise because there is a sick person next door".

" Excuse us, neighbor", and he went to lower the volume of the music.

The Snake sunk its eyetooth into Samson's thigh until it tasted his blood. They were happy. The Wizard took out two butterfly wings from inside his hat. The group had become uninhibited. When the candles had burned down, death took out its camera and began to take pictures: click, click, click. He preferred Dalila; she was lustful and sensual. He bit her lips and stepped on her foot. The city was reflected in the apartment producing a pleasant darkness. At two o'clock in the morning, the Witch, already drunk, turned on the lights and said,

"There is one too many here".

"Go away", they answered her.

- "It's not me".

" Yes, it's true, we're an uneven number".

" I am me", said Enrique, and all of them recognized him.

" You are Carolina", said the Witch.

" And you, Raquel?" Carolina made a big effort to recognize her.

" Jose Antonio is the Devil".

" Exactly ", he confirmed.

The rest were drinking without paying any attention to them.

" Who are you, Samson? "

" I'm Samson " .

" And you, Dalila? "

" Dalila is my girl", Death said hugging her.

The couple was vulgar with its excesses.

" Samson in a male", the Snake spoke out,

"and I, I'm Fanny".

"I, I am I", said Death.

" I am also I" said Dalila and she fell asleep.

" Dalilia is Chela" remarked Samson.

It was true; they were with Death.

" I missed the room; I was going to the next apartment..."

" It doesn't matter", said the Wizard. "Let's continue
the rumba".

Death forgave the neighbor's life in exchange for Dalila's
disorganized kissed and her crazy emotions.

AT THE AMUSEMENT PARK

Mexican music sounded through the loud speakers of the amusement park; it filled the atmosphere. The people were going round on the Ferris Wheel, plunging down the slopes of the Roller Coaster, enjoying vertigo or fear in the Wax Musseum of Frankenstein's house.

The children were going up and down to the circular jogging of the merry-go-round, and you could bet on the hammer, or target practice with cork shot guns with twisted barrels.

The vendors offered ice-cream and popcorn, corn on the cob and sausages. A group of teen-agers went up to the Woman in the Well. They had come from the Ghost Train and wanted to play with her. They bet on who would make her dive the most. She climbed up on a swing and swung back and forth in resigned bad humor. On hitting a mechanis with a lead disk, she would fall. Carlos Alfonso always made her fall into the well. When the woman sank, she didn't hear the Mexican music any longer.

When she came out, she hung up the swing and sat down again as if she were a tamed anthropoid. He liked to see her shiver. He had gone seven times during the fair and the last night he waited for her at the exit.

He was planning to murder her. As she was taking too much time, he took his pocket knife to her dressing room. As she screamed in the half-light, Carlos saw how a flock of dogs bounded out of her mouth to devour him. When he woke up he was wearing a dog collar and the Woman in the Well was pulling on it.

She put the food on the floor and looked at him expressionlessly.

THE DOLLS

The shining station wagon was driven by a 'doll' with a plastic grin. Her blond companion didn't smile naturally either. I parked my vehicle next to theirs and they rolled up the window, parking a few meters farther away. Ahh! I rested.... their glass eyes made me feel uncomfortable.

THE KETTLE DRUMS

He was cutting through the night as a comet on wheels at more than a hundred kilometers an hour. When he entered the canyon he was already going 120, and he was more Dead than alive. When he saw the thin bamboo trees at the edge of the river, he understood he was about to arrive. Another motorcycle was coming from the opposite direction. A red one and then a black one with a couple on each of them.

They had on their helmets and their sun-visors, their tight pants and their jackets, although Isabel let the long veils of her white skirt billow in the breeze. Other lights were moving behind them. They cut the barbed wire of a fence and entered swiftly, gentlemen of the night on their smoke spouting horses. The kettledrums of their suicide maneuvers rumbled on the ground.

The club guards arrived and saw two groups on the polo field, but they were surprised and puzzled. Only her eyes were to be the witnesses to that match in the mountains.

Isabela's perfume pleased her friend. Each side took its time. Nobody saw the rapid tears that Isabel was weeping and which she forgot immediately. Two motorcycles were left on the lawn. Nobody asked why

no one tried to stop it. They turned around several times and then lined up, one group facing the other.

There was just one group watching from the white bleachers:

They put on white robes and black hats to match the color of the night first. Isabela was in the middle, in her white dress, then she went down to the bleachers near the tree where the guards were and covered their eyes. She went back to her place. The motors were running, the helmets on, the sun-visors down and determination at its peak. The pikes seemed to be made of moon and the little flags were lit with cold. The start was violent accelerated galloping, the attack was lightening swift, and the crash, a humid sensation on Isabela's cheeks.

SCENES FROM NATIONAL LIFE

I

THE SOCKS

" You're nervous, Luis"

"No, I'm not".

"You have made a real fuss just because of the socks".

"You could have had them ready".

An explosion was heard and his car was on fire.

Luis started to sweat thinking what could have happened to him if he had left his home on time.

II

A DRESS TO MATCH HER JOY

She turned off the shower and picked up a towel.

She knew she was beautiful. She looked at herself while naked, quite sure of herself in front of the mirror, studying her whole body. She wrapped herself in the towel and left. She was happy as she opened the closet thinking about which dress she would wear: "The blue one is pretty. But Jaime doesn't like it. The green one? It's a little dirty. The white one? Today isn't a day for this dress, it's cold. The brown one? It's more welcoming, but no, not today...Neither the gray one nor the mallow. The pink one is old-fashioned. This yellow one is cheerful. Besides whenever I wear it everything goes perfectly well; it gives me good luck".

She decided to wear the yellow one. Arrogant and joyful she went out into the street. The morning was like her drees; the dress was like her ilusions; her ilusions were like her soul.

Suddenly, the yellow dress was soaked in red. A man was stretched out on the side-walk across the street.

The next day it was reported that two persons had died tragically in a wealthy section of the city; one of them, a pretty young lady, killed by a stray bullet during a settling of accounts.

III**MAXIMUM PENALTY**

The city was located downtown because he lived in the suburbs. He ran toward his youth with his rubber shoes quite well tied. Herminsul was a fast runner; the fastest on the block and also one of the poorest. He was accustomed to dodging the police.

He knew how to kick the ball well without having had the possibility of entering the stadium. He used to watch the games on the showroom TV sets. About loving, he only knew he got a hard on when he watched Tola, his neighbor because the pimps told him they had screwed her and paid her nothing. When he drank aguardiente, he would to wash his mouth with it and then spit out his first drink. The second one would irritate his throat because he was only thirteen years old, nevertheless he had already gotten drunk many times and he knew other ways to put his senses to sleep. He saw Tola in the morning when she was changing the faded red blouse had put on wrong side out. He saw her little teets and he felt he was king of the world. He was looking at her through the trim. He thought the show was not

over yet when she went in, but she did not return. So much luck was not his.
If he had money, he would go with Carlos to La Celestina.

There they would find teets like those and all that rumba that the skin has.

He didn't have time.

At twelve thirty, he was running as a soul chased by the Devil; he had an eardrop in his hand and there was a dribble of blood on it. Carlos was running down the sidewalk across the street; Herminsul stepped on the pavement firmly and quickly. This time he also dodged the police. But he was full of fear when he saw a man running behind him in an unusual insistent way. Carlos sneaked away among the people. It was his turn. He turned around at the corner and he hid in a front-yard. He relaxed; he had got it. The owners of the house looked out.

- What can I do for you?

The pursuer discovered him, and Herminsul started to run. He felt his body reacting - he didn't care about the hot noon sunshine at all; he only relied on his muscles in his shoes.

Five blocks ahead he was unexpectedly knocked down hit on his face with a drumstick. He bled.

- !Rascal! !Son of a bitch!

He received another blow on his shoulder and he saw, patiently, how the man arrived, lifting his right leg as if shooting a penalty at the soceer world cup, and kicked him in his stomach. The light faded off.

ASK FOR MATEO

During the war he didn't have enough money to buy either his cigarretes or his booze. It is true the bullets from the machine guns did not get to his trench nor the bombs either; but he did have to pay for room and board, light, and water. In spite of that, the time when they came from the court to evict him, he had the feeling he was losing ground and the enemy was advancing. He did not feel proud of this (he had a toothache, and the union was not going to condecorate him for his kidney stones either). He turned over to the keys house and started his withdrawal, his exodus, with his family. Watching his children carry their belongings, he thought, "Enrique, at 16, would soon be a prisoner of was". He already imagined him playing 'tejo', drinking beer on Sundays, going to work on Mondays. They put their things in a small truck and Esneda, his 13 year old daughter, entered the cabin. She was exactly like her mother. She didn't even need a uniform to identify herself. The truck started off and the judge stayed in front of the house as if he were a field marshall after a victory. A few blocks ahead a motorized patrol of M.P.S. passed them by. Eusebio wasn't frightened: that rough and unexpected noise didn't dash his hopes. He had decided to achieve his objeotive at any price. He had time to put his coat

on. Years ago, he had already convinced himself that there was no money for pleasure.

He used to jog to work every morning. His wife had, using all her prudence to avoid a quarrel, suggested he buy a bicycle, but Eusebio preferred his relation with the infantry. He was clear and precise in the information he gave his superiors.

" Yes, Sir, Manager, today we delivered 25 boxes of shot-guns to the supermarket with proper care".

" And, what about the toys for the other store?"

"As usual".

When he passed by the North Police Station, he saw they were hoisting the flag and he thought they were going to leave it at half mast. He did not know why but he felt like a soldier. The truck arrived at its target after a long tiring ride.

The driver told them; "It's three thousand pesos. " And added " It's behind that low hill. Good luck".

"Thank you, " he said". Here's your money".

"Venezuela", "the man in the truck reminded him with a certain affectation, in the store, I tell you, ask for "Mateo"; his name is Alberto, but that's the password".

The last two swift, unreal Mirages of the Mother Country crossed overhead in the sky.

AN OLIVE TREE FOR CHRISTMAS

The window could be seen from the thickets. An old lady with long hair, a nice face and dilligent hands, held a "chamiza". She lighted the candle and put the dry branch in a cracker can full of sand. A little nine year old girl, wrapped the can with gift-wrapping-paper.

A shot was heard. The old lady put her hand on the girl's shoulder and they stood in silence. The crickets and the fireflies flew away into the thickets; parrots and ovenbirds flew away, too, and in a nearby pasture the 'pellares' were flying about. The girl hung a little colored ball on the "chamiza". The mother silently hung another larger one. There was a cage with blackbird in it next to the window. The girl twisted a coiled confetti and the two of them decorated the branch little by little. Machine guns were heard and a dry shot broke the window pane. The mother and her daughter threw themselves down on the floor. The girl, her face to the floor, felt some blood on her cheek, and the light feathers of the bird made her sad. She blinked. Her mother softly caressed her, and she, without wanting, had to drink the blackbird's blood. A few minutes later they stood up and they hung the last festoon on their little Christmas tree.

THE COMMEMORATION

Two guests with their two crippled hands arrived first. I tell you quite clearly, they had no hands. The doorman didn't see that because he was blind, He was holding a box of white carnations. A group of three, two men and one woman came in just afterwards, all of them on crutches. The paraplegics came in quickly throwing strands confetties into the air. The doorman smiled when he recognized their voices. Somebody played a "salsa" record and the paraplegics started to dance on wheels as if they were amusement park cars. The one-handed moved their feet to keep time. An hour later, the last guests arrived a young blind girl and a man who had several fingers missing from each hand.. Each of them wore a carnation.

" Do you remember, Carlos, the siren we heard before the explosion?" .

" Now you're going to..."

" Excuse me!"

" I only heard the boy's cry" .

The blind girl began to sing; her voice was beautiful. She sang the same songs at every commemoration.

The next day the carnations were all found trampled under foot among the confetti and fallen silverware.

The dishes had not been cleared from the tables; the glass still had remains of whiskey. Alone, in the great room, the young woman and her companion seemed to be on the deck of a ship; her pink dress was completely withered and his shirt was coming out of his pants.

She took him by his arm and said quite gently,

“ You hurt me last night...”

Carlos did not answer.

They left leaving the door wide open;

They crossed the garden. It was raining although the sun was shining.

A TREATISE FOR VISCOUS WORDS

Going over his last day's work, he understood he had to continue. He didn't leave his studio. Writing was his life. He used to write every minute. The words were sticky; his sweat was gelatinous. The words shot out with the force of larva; they moved around the room and they went out under the door while his wife exterminated them without commiseration. Many of them were difficult to kill. She stamped on them and swept them out under the door. His wife didn't know that while she was crushing them, new words came out of their gray matter. They reproduced by division. The studio was practically full, but only when it was overflowing would he literary shelter where the sun wouldn't harm him.

Still, as a result of the scarce light that filtered in, he had a rash on his skin. He wrote and wrote. A viscous saliva began to emanate from his right hand: his interminable discourse. When he died, the studio began to solidify and to summarize itself into a book in top of his desk, the title of which didn't cause any surprise.

Don Francisco signed; the deal was made.

The large old tumbled-down house in the San Nicolas section looked shabby lately, and it was uncomfortable. When he made the decision to enlarge his services by buying new, modern machinery, he decided to move to other quarters. I walked in with the familiarity of a person who had had his books published at that print shop on an old Mergenthaler from the end of the last century, one which Don Francisco had just sold to a businessman who was greedy for it.

" Good morning ", I greeted him.

" Same to you ", they answered me.

I stepped aside while they were finishing their conversation. The new owner left, satisfied, and so was Don Francisco who was hoping to move to the new headquarters where he would receive the new photocomposition equipment. He would use films and developing liquids,,, something innovating, the latest in science and technology. He had even noticed the conveniences of adapting to, felt more the reasons of a collector. I went near, took a lead and, letter by letter, put this phrase together, "I like this machine".

" I sold it" , answered Don Francisco.

" I know".

- Don Francisco, since the man decided to take it away

In two weeks, we could print Mr. Mot's book, "remarked the linotypist.

" It's true. Dardanel ", he answered. "And what do you think?" Don Francisco asked me.

I became transformed. I liked the idea.

"It would be the last one", said Dardanel, his eyes sparkling.

I felt glad; the fact that my book would be the last made me feel glad.

Don Francisco invited me to see the new place. The foreground, where the reception and his office would be, was clear and ample, quite well painted; after that were the sections for the illustrator, the photomechanic, the spaces for exposure and development, for the scanner and the printing machines. The largest of the sections was for pasting and binding, where the paper cutter would also be. A wooden shelving surrounded it, to be used to organize and classify the works. In the background, was the bath room and the warehouse where the inks and papers would be stored.

I congratulated him and said good bye. I left, quite pleased at Dardanel's witty suggestion.

" Don't worry, Don Francisco", I told him. "I'll talk to the buyer and we will print the book on the Mergenthaler".

And so I did. He accepted and he even stayed to watch, joyful, his machine working; but the one who enjoyed it the most was Dardanel.

"There is something wonderful in foundry" he repeated.

"Today machines don't have that spell, they lack fire".

Dardanel showed such skill that it occurred to me to think he could not have done anything else in his life or could he do anything different. This last book represented his last farewell to his machine, the painful separation of a captain whose ship has been taken away. My book was his salvation. He soon finished it. I named the poetic book "Izaka"; the paper was medieval style of an excellent whiteness and weight; the ink was wine-red and the cover was black, with the title and my name up-side-down.

Full of enthusiasm, I left with the first copy in my hands. I went to visit my friends at the Chamber of the Book, who offered to organize a cocktail, which would be used to unite self-editors, an idea which had been motivating the Director, considering we are expressions of a disperse valuable cultural strength which is necessary to identify in order to support in a pragmatic way.

The following week, I gave them several copies and we decided on the date, leaving prudent time.

For the invitations and promotion in our little artistic world, and of course, to be able to assure the presence of the Publishing Houses and of all the eminent people in town.

When the day arrived, the book was exhibited at the entrance where an employee of the Chamber of Commerce sold it at a special discount price. The Director spoke about the convenience of meeting to exchange ideas and create interesting projects since we represented the power of a great creativity, blessed to obtain successful activities. He mentioned me as an example. I knew this was one of the conditions and I could not stop blushing. I read some poems and talked to my friends.

" I liked the last poem", Dardanel told me.

"Thank you".

" It has oriental influences", he said.

" It's true", I admitted.

"Japanese; Chinese".

" Are they so evident?"

" It says so on the back cover. Don't forget it was I who printed it..."

Dardanel reminded me how much the thirty three years he had been next to that bewitched machine to which he had given in his life meant to him. He was satisfied my book had been the last one. I gave him a copy with a long dedication.

He drank an aguardiente and said good-bye. I saw him leaving a little drunk.

A third of the edition was sold that very same day. With "Izaka", I had growing success; I just sold and sold this edition. The people, and afterward the booksellers, asked for other titles. I opened a special checking account, and I believed I could make a living out of my writing. The edition sold out, and the following five months, I sold almost all the stock of books written before. By the sixth month I only had two collections I had kept quite zealously, but an Editorial House, decided to print a complete edition of my writings, offered me to pay me such a good price I didn't hesitate. I was surprised. I had a collection and I decided the task of rereading my writings; I changed my apartment furniture and I ask the owner to authorize me to make some alterations to the studio in which I spent hours and hours with my favorite authours and rereading my own books.

One day I was called by the Chamber of Commerce to tell me I had been awarded first prize for books printed in linotype, because mine was something special. They said they would send me the vellum and the check. It was just a question of seconds because almost immediately there was a knock on the door; it was the messenger with a tabular carboard

package and a letter. I opened them; it was the vellum and six million pesos.

That very same day, or the next, I don't remember, I went to tell the news to Don Francisco at his new quarters. Several days after that, I ran into Dardanel.

" One must know how to wait ", he told me.

I asked him about the collector but he had not seen him again. Dardanel had retired and I noticed he was despective when he said, "One has to know how to wait". There was a lot of resentment in that statement; not in the phrase itself, but in the way he said it.

I wanted to buy the machine and ask him to make it work again; but I postponed this project.

I traveled through South America lecturing, invited by the Chamber to cities where our association had overseas branches, and I lived like that for a year and then for four years more. By the sixth year Don Francisco visited me to ask me for a copy of "Izaka"; I told him I only had one, that the edition had sold out and all the rest of them, too. At the last minute, he convinced me to sell him all the last stocks, except "Izaka".

"When are you going to print it again", he asked me.

I didn't know how to answer him; I had become interested in other things.

- 46 -

"We'll see", I told him, just to get rid of him.

This year has not been as the ones before, I suffered from peritonitis and, I was just about to die and my body was infected. I feel depressed and I have had to fight against dark ideas thinking I have wasted the best of me, I have cheated myself because of my success and I have not been able to love; and what it's worst, I have not written again. A few days ago the collector came and offered to buy the book. I told him I only had that one copy and I could not sell it to him. He raised the price, and made a tempting offer. As I didn't have any money, I accepted, with the only condition that I would keep the last part of the poetic section. He accepted and left quite glad. Immediately, somebody knocked on the door; it was Dardanel.

His visit depressed me deeply.

I complained of his contemptuousness. I recriminated him because he had let the opportunity of our lives go by.

I had let him speak; I didn't know why he had come.

"You are nervous", he told me.

He didn't make any other comment. I thought it over; I offered him a cup of coffee and asked him,

"May I help you?"

He told me he had some buyers interested in my writings. I told him Y didn't even have a copy for myself.

"Excuse me", he said leaving.

"No, wait", I told him. And, I dared to tell him I had some pages left.

"They're good for me, Mister Mots. They only need some samples".

"In that case..."

"I want to buy them. How much are they?"

I started to sweat; I felt courageous and I gave him a very high amount. He took out his wallet and paid cash.

"One condition", I told him.

"What?"

" I will keep the last page..."

He tore it off carelessly; I smiled at him and he smiled back. When he closed the door I felt stupid. I threw the money down and I kicked at it several times. That money didn't last long; I spent it paying old bills that had not been sent to me out of special consideration. I denied them roughly and soon found myself in court in the midst of lawyers, those birds of prey. I was frightened; they made me feel like carrion.

To survive that month I sold the original paintings my painter friends had given me during my writing period; the next month, I had to sell books from my library and, foreseeing worse days, I went to visit Don Francisco to ask him to give me a few pesos in exchange for helping him as a proofreader. As always, he welcomed me and he turned over some texts to me.

"And by the way, don't you have a copy, some sample of "that book" he asked me.

I felt like crying. He read it in my face.

"Forget it" he told me.

"Don't worry, if you knew..."

"What?"

"I still have the last page..."

"How good! he said - I am interested in it".

At noon, I went to my apartment and found an eviction notice, a final order to move ifo I didn't pay the last three months plus costs and fees immediately. When I went back, he asked what was wrong with me, and I gave him the document with all the signatures and stamps and that particular smell of death official papers have.

"But don't you realize the money I can give you for this page is enough to pay this?"

" Really?"

- 49 -

"Did you find it?"

"Yes, but could you only buy half of it. The other part..."

I want to keep it...

"It's all right.."

"As a keepsake, you know?"

I don't know what I felt when I saw the page torn off.

I put my part in the wallet. I paid the total amount of the debt and turned in the apartment. With the small balance I received after the lawyer corrected a mistake in his favor, I went to a bar near the university. I got drunk and thought I saw the collector but it was only Dardanel.

I wanted to call to him but I didn't have the strength; a pain in my heart made me stay quiet, suffering because I thought he would go. He was at the entrance looking out, waiting for somebody. I lowered my head on the table feeling my pain increasing. I took out my wallet and I looked for the piece. I made a last effort and I asked the waitress to take it to him.

"To that man?"

"Yes."

"Is there anything wrong with you?"

"Take it to him."

"Would you like a glass of water?"

I thought the Good Samaritan wouldn't go, I didn't accept her help, so I said O.K. She brought me the glass of water, and after I gave her the last piece of the last page, I fainted.

"I was waiting for you", said Dardanel, and we began to descend.

- 51 -

II

GHOST HOUSE

GHOST HOUSE

Iván, a literature student, fell asleep one day next to a book of ghost stories. When he woke up, the book was open, and the illustrations, had disappeared... He could never get them out; they were living in the him.

M A S K S

The bus left her at the entrance to the town.

She watched it go far down the dusty road and then started walking. Two masks were moving on ahead, they were about thirteen meters away and she heard them in dialogue. From time to time they turned around to look at her and she was not surprised. She was also a mask and she would soon meet them at the same place.

THE VISIT

Somebody knocks on the door. Surely it is the same person who came yesterday, who came the day before yesterday, who has come all these days, who chases me and bothers me. I will open the door. Surely, he will sit on my chair, will take my books, and smoke my pipe. Before opening. I will look out the window. Yes, I see him; there he is. Certainly he is the same one. I can delay him on purpose for a moment but he will knock again. He will end up stepping in. What surprises me is that when he comes in, it is I who make his movements.

LITTLE MEN

He was resting on the sand. He put his hand to his ear to scratch it. Carefully, he took out a little man who was shouting in his ear. He put him on the palm of his left hand and with his right index finger shooed him away and threw him to the ground. He watched him fall and roll seven feet away; he saw him get up and start to run, threatening to take future revenge with his tiny hand.

MAIL

He was just about to wake up when an envelope was delivered to him.

He opened it; there was nothing written on it. The sender had written in unknown letters. He went to a paleographer because he thought it could belong to the Greek of Pericles' century; the result was negative and finally a team of professors came to the conclusion that it did not belong to a known language. He did not dare to burn it nor to tear it up.

"They are on his night table. "I say, they are" because two more envelopes have been delivered to him just before he wakes up.

AT THE EXHIBIT

Absorbed in his thoughts, he put himself in the path of the picture he was admiring and when he turned around he was stopped by the glass. He was watching the visitors from that spot without hearing them and with the certainty of not being able to return the same way he got in. He preferred to look for the exit in the transparent tones of the river.

THE BEAST

She used to cultivate dahlias, hortensias, carnations and marigold in the garden. One night she felt footsteps and deep breathing. She got up and heard to somebody jumping the fence and riding into the shadows.

At the crack of dawn she discovered the marks of hoofs and some plants were bent down. The next night, she left guavas in the canoe. Before going to bed, a purple stain appeared on her forehead. At twelve o'clock his slow steps arrived, his expansive breath; he was grazing. She spied him through a slit in the door: he was of a silver gray color. By that hour, she already had a hint of a horn and moon light flooded the garden.

STARVING ROOTS

The shoot was planted with care in good soil. Soon they saw it grow. It had promise. The watchdog died and was laid to rest under its shadow and the treetop became green. It was already a big tree. The kitten also died and was also buried beside the dog and likewise a duck the animal had killed. The tree received them trunkfully. They did not know if it was because the tree was tall and leafy that the perspective make it seem nearer but at night the roots searched through in the house looking for food.

G U A V A S

The boy fell down while picking guavas and his soul left. When he was taken home he remained unconscious. His soul is hiding behind the tree, afraid that a bird would eat it or it would rain and it would fade away.

BOY

The older people prevented the children from saying dirty words because they would be punished by having animals coming out of their bodies. But the boy did not obey and his parents had to help him take toads, snakes and varmints out of his mouth. He must feed them with vulgarities; otherwise, they will devour him.

THE SEED

He was a little bit upset because his mother had given him an orange advising him that if he swallowed a seed a tree might grow in his stomach. He was neglectful, he swallowed one and leaves and roots began to sprout inside of him.

THE BOGEYMAN

His father told him. " Go to sleep my son otherwise the bogeyman will eat you". At midnight, he went to take a look at him and found his bed empty.

COCOON

Mama, Jose Luis has overslept.

Wake him up because he is going to be late to school.

" Yeah", said his mother, going to wake him up.

A cocoon was curled up in the blankets.

OLD INES

She knocked.

"Who is it?"

" Old Ines" , she said, laughing.

They opened slightly and she saw how their eyes grew bigger and bigger.

They would never think she used those tricks to take away their children !

IMPRESSIONS

The objects were familiar to him. Nevertheless something made him feel strange. He reviewed each of the things one by one and the mirror showed his worry. He observed the room once more. The rocking chair rocked, heavily.

ARTIST'S SPIRIT

She said he took her soul in each performance.

Because he felt unspeakably attracted, he decided to go to the concert.

And, he did. " During her act she was superb and he left taking her soul with him. Everybody thought she had just fainted.

THE NEIGHBOR

Smiling makes life more bearable; but I do not like my neighbor's smile showing me his two canine teeth at night on the other side of my window.

THE CAT

The China Cat jumped away and escaped through the window.

SPENT TIME

" !Mama! "

" Yes, my son."

" The clock is ticking too fast and my hair is turning grey.

Mamaaa!!!".

THE MERRY-GO-ROUND OF THE HOURS

The clock had stopped; he checked it and he found the hands were rusty. He oiled them and made them spin round and round until they were working with the little of the spring it was left.

He went to the bathroom to wash his hands and when he saw how old he was he realized he had wound his own time.

DEAD LOVE

With the open frankness that you know her for, she told me she did not love me anymore; that her love for me was dead. Damned instant; I began to feel an increasing pressure. How could I know the strange truth of her words; how could know I had her corpse inside me...

RETIREMENT

He was 18 years old when he accepted the job.

Since he was a child he had dreamed of the leisure of his old age. He had been an excellent worker all his life. That Friday he left early to receive his retirement pay; he stood in a long line of elderly people and he remembered episodes of his youth. Two turns were left to reach the window, and he was talking joyfully.

" Next ", they called.

One turn was ahead of him. He dried his sweaty forehead with his handkerchief. He listened to an exclamation of surprise but he did not know where it was coming from. Don Robert stepped one step ahead when the window was free. The young lady examined his documents.

"I am sorry. You have another destination; you must start again" she said.

" Oh, my God !" he exclaimed as he became a boy again.

While the young lady said,

" !Next! "

THE OLD MAN AND THE SNAIL

He memories are still; only the tired look follows the snail.

RETRACING HIS STEPS

In bed he reviewed his memories and went back to a moment in his childhood, to the beloved place where he met the girl he tried to kiss that day when they did not go to school. Exactly as he was, she was dying. They met, face to face, and they kissed each other on the threshold of mystery.

FRIENDS

He grew old with the sadness of accompanying all his relatives to the tomb. The road was always the same from his front porch; the grief was always new. The loss of his friend made him silent. He was surprised when he saw him arrive and he thought he was going crazy. He sat down. The Patriach did not want to talk to him.

When he visited him for the second time he smiled, and at the third time he told him,

“ Come with me this afternoon at six o'clock because my happiness is to share my food with somebody.”

The friend arrived promptly.

From that day on, you can see them on the front porch at the same time.

THE DAY OF RETURNING

The morning of the eclipse arrived with a cold, gray wind; trumpets were heard and the wood turned green; chairs, closets, corridors, balconies, doors turned green and aromatic. The parents, the grandparents, the great grandparents returned, and there was such confusion that day...

TIME TRACK

He was going slowly. He was afraid hurrying would make him grow old a snail pushed on by its long, white hair.

I N D E X

	Page
I KATTLEMDRUMS	
THE BLUE PLAID JACKET	3
A TROPICAL WALK	5
THE SAMAN TREE	11
SPRING MEMORIES	12
THE NEW GARMENT	15
UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE WEEPING WILLOW	19
STAR DUST	23
THE DEVIL'S HORNS	26
AT THE AMUSEMENT PARK	31
THE DOLLS	33
THE KETTLE DRUMS	34
SCENES OF NATIONAL LIFE	
I. THE SOCKS	37
II. A DRESS TO MATCH HER JOY	38
III. MAXIMUM PENALTY	40
ASK FOR MATEO	43
AN OLIVE TREE FOR CHRISTMAS	47
THE COMMEMORATION	48
A TREATISE FOR VISCOUS WORDS	50
THE LAST BOOK	51

II GHOST HOUSE

	Page
GHOST HOUSE	68
MASKS	69
THE VISIT	70
LITTLE MEN	71
MAIL	72
AT THE EXHIBIT	73
THE BEAST	74
STARVING ROOTS	75
GUAVAS	76
BOY	77
THE SEED	78
THE BOGEYMAN	79
COCOON	80
OLD INES	81
IMPRESSIONS	82
ARTIST'S SPIRIT	83
THE NEIGHBOR	84
THE CAT	85
SPENT TIME	86
THE MERRY-GO-ROUND OF THE HOURS	87
DEAD LOVE	88
RETIREMENT	89
THE OLD MAN AND THE SNAIL	90
RETRACING HIS STEPS	91
FRIENDS	92
THE DAY OF RETURNING	93
TIME TRACK	94