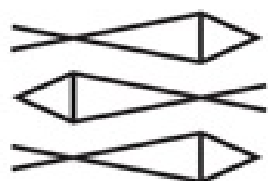


TERRA NOSTRA

CARLOS FUENTES

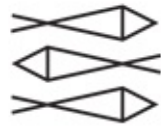
TRANSLATED
FROM THE SPANISH BY
MARGARET SAYERS PEDEN
AFTERWORD BY
MILAN KUNDERA



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AFTERWORD: Esch Is Luther

by Milan Kundera

Books by Carlos Fuentes

Copyright

FOR SYLVIA

What does that old spook want...?

Goya, *Los caprichos*

Fervid in her fetid rags. It is she, the first
False mother of many, like you, aggrieved
By her, and for her, grieving.

Cernuda, *Ser de Sansueña*

Transformed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born ...

Yeats, *Easter, 1916*

CHARACTERS

THE LORDS

FELIPE, *the Fair, married to*

JOANNA REGINA, *the Mad Lady*

FELIPE, *El Señor, son and heir to the former, married to*

ISABEL, *La Señora (Elizabeth Tudor), his English cousin*

THE COURT

THE JESTER *at the court of Felipe the Fair*
GUZMAN, *secretary and chief huntsman to Felipe El Señor*
FRAY JULIAN, *painter and miniaturist*
FRAY TORIBIO, *astrologer*
THE CHRONICLER, *poet and court scribe*
PEDRO DEL AGUA }
JOSE LUIS CUEVAS } *doctors*
ANTONIO SAURA }
FRAY SANTIAGO DE BAENA
THE BISHOP
THE INQUISITOR OF TERUEL
GONZALODE ULLOA, *Comendador of Calatrava*
INES, *his daughter, novitiate*
MILAGROS, *Mother Superior*
ANGUSTIAS }
CLEMENCIA } *nuns*
DOLORES }
REMEDIOS }
AZUCENA } *maids to Isabel, La Señora*
LOLILLA }
THE DWARF BARBARICA, *companion to the Mad Lady*

THE BASTARDS

THE PILGRIM, *son of Felipe the Fair out of Celestina*

DON JUAN, *son of Felipe the Fair out of Isabel, La Señora*

THE IDIOT PRINCE, *son of Felipe the Fair out of a she-wolf*

THE DREAMERS

LUDOVICO, *student of theology*

PEDRO, *peasant and sailor*

SIMON, *monk*

CELESTINA, *peasant girl, witch, and procuress*

MIHAIL-BEN-SAMA, *wanderer*

DON QUIXOTE DE LA MANCHA, *knight-errant*

SANCHO PANZA, *his squire*

THE WORKERS

JERONIMO, *blacksmith and husband to Celestina*

MARTIN, *son of serfs from Navarre*

NUÑO, *son of a foot soldier of the Moorish frontier*

CATILINON, *rogue from the streets of Valladolid*

THE MEDITERRANEANS

TIBERIUS CAESAR, *second Roman Emperor of the Augustan line*
THEODORUS OF GANDARA, *his secretary and counselor*
FABIANUS
GAIUS
PERSIUS
CYNTHIA
LESBIA
PONTIUS PILATE, *Roman Procurator of Judea*
THE NAZARITE, *minor Hebrew prophet*
CLEMENS, *slave*
THE GHOST OF AGRIPPA POSTUMUS
THE JEWISH DOCTOR *at the Synagogue of Toledo*
THE SCRIBE OF ALEXANDRIA
THE MAGUS OF SPALATO
THE GYPSY GIRL OF SPALATO
DONNO VALERIO CAMILLO, *Venetian humanist and bibliophile*

THE FLEMISH

THE MISTRESS *of the Beguine Monastery, Bruges*

SCHWESTER KATREI, *possessed Beghard*

HIERONYMUS BOSCH, *painter and adherent to the Adamite sect*

THE DUKE OF BRABANT

THE INDIANS

THE LORD OF MEMORY

THE LADY OF THE BUTTERFLIES

THE FAT PRINCE

THE WHITE LORDS OF HELL

THE LORD OF THE GREAT VOICE

THE PARISIANS

POLLO PHOIBEE, *sandwich man*

CELESTINA, *sidewalk painter*

LUDOVICO, *flagellant*

SIMON, *monk, leader of the penitents*

MME ZAHARIA, *concierge*

RAPHAEL DE VALENTIN, *man-about-town*

VIOLETTA GAUTIER, *consumptive courtesan*

JAVERT, *police inspector*

JEAN VALJEAN, *former convict*

OLIVEIRA, *Argentine exile*

BUENDIA, *Colombian colonel*

SANTIAGO ZAVALITA, *Peruvian journalist*

ESTEBAN *and* SOFIA, *Cuban cousins*

HUMBERTO, ~~*deaf and dumb Chilean*~~

CUBA VENEGAS, *Cuban torch singer*

THE VALKYRIE, *Lithuanian benefactress*

THE OLD WORLD

FLESH, SPHERES, GRAY EYES BESIDE THE SEINE

Incredible the first animal that dreamed of another animal. Monstrous the first vertebrate that succeeded in standing on two feet and thus spread terror among the beasts still normally and happily crawling close to the ground through the slime of creation. Astounding the first telephone call, the first boiling water, the first song, the first loincloth.

About four o'clock in the morning one fourteenth of July, Pollo Phoibee, asleep in his high garrison room, door and windows flung wide, dreamed these things, and prepared to answer them himself. But then he was visited in his dream by the somber, faceless figure of a monk who spoke for Pollo, continuing in words what had been an imagistic dream: "But reason—neither slow nor indolent—tell us that merely with repetition the extraordinary becomes ordinary, and only briefly abandoned, what had once passed for a common and ordinary occurrence becomes a portent: crawling, sending carriers, pigeons, eating raw deer meat, abandoning one's dead on the summits of temples so that vultures and their feed might perform their cleansing functions and fulfill the natural cycle."

Only thirty-three and a half days earlier the fact that the waters of the Seine were boiling could have been considered a calamitous miracle; now, a month later, no one even turned to look at the phenomenon. The proprietors of the black barges, surprised at first by the sudden ebullition, slammed against the walls of the channel, had abandoned their struggle against the inevitable. These men of the river pulled on their stocking caps, extinguished their black tobaccos, and climbed like lizards on the quays; the skeletons of the barges had piled up beneath the ironic gaze of Henri de Navarre and there they remained, splendid ruins of charcoal, iron, and splintered wood.

But the gargoyles of Notre-Dame, knowing events only in the abstract, embraced with black stone eyes a much vaster panorama, and twelve million Parisians understood finally why these demons yesteryear stick out their tongues at the city in such ferociously mocking grimaces. It was as if the motive for which they were originally sculptured was now revealed in scandalous actuality. It was clear the patient gargoyles had waited eight centuries to open their eyes and blast twaa! twaa! with their cleft tongues. At dawn they had seen that overnight the distant cupolas, the entire façade, and Sacré-Coeur appeared to be painted black. And that closer at hand, far below, the doll-sized Louvre had become transparent.

After a superficial investigation, the authorities, far off the scent, reached the conclusion that the painted façade was actually marble and the transparent Louvre had been turned to crystal. Inside the Basilica the paintings, too, were transformed; as the building had changed color, its paintings had changed race. And who was going to cross himself before the lustrous ebony of a Congolese Virgin and who would expect pardon from the thick lips of a Negroid Christ? On the other hand, the paintings and sculptures in the Museum had taken on an opacity that many decided to attribute to the contrast with the crystalline walls and floors and ceiling. No one seemed in the least uncomfortable because

the Victory of Samothrace hovered in mid-air without any visible means of support: those wings were finally justifying themselves. But they were apprehensive when they observed, particularly considering the recently acquired density in contrast to the general lightness, that the mask of Pharaoh was superimposed—in a newly liberated perspective—upon the features of the Gioconda, and the lady's upon David's Napoleon. Furthermore: when the traditional frames dissolved into transparency, the resulting freeing of purely conventional space allowed them to appreciate that the Mona Lisa, still sitting with arms crossed, was not alone. And she was smiling.

Thirty-three and one half days had passed during which, apparently, the Arc de Triomphe turned into sand and the Eiffel Tower was converted into a zoo. We are confining ourselves to appearance for once the first flurry of excitement had passed, no one even troubled to touch the sand, which still looked like stone. Sand or stone, it stood in its usual location, and after all, that's all anyone asked. Not a new arrangement, but recognizable form and the reassurance of location. What confusion there would have been, for example, had the Arc, still of stone, appeared on the site traditionally occupied by a pharmacy at the corner of the rue de Bellechasse and the rue de Babylone.

As for the tower of M. Eiffel, its transformation was criticized only by potential suicides, whose remarks revealed their unhealthy intentions and who in the end chose to play it cool in the hope that other, similar jumping places would be constructed. "But it isn't just the height; perhaps even more important is the prestige of the place from which one jumps to his death," a habitué of the Café de Bouquet, a man who when he was fourteen had decided to kill himself at the age of forty, told Pollo Phoibee. He said this one afternoon as our young and handsome friend was pursuing his normal occupations, convinced that any other course would be like yelling "Fire!" in a movie theater packed with a Sunday-evening crowd.

The public was amused by the fact that the rusted structure from the Exposition Universelle was now serving as a tree for monkeys, a ramp for lions, a cage for bears, and as a very heavily populated aviary. Almost a century of reproductions and emblems and references had reduced the tower to the sad, but really affectionate, status of a commonplace. Now the continual flight—dispersion of doves, formations of ducks, solitudes of owls, and clusters of bats, farcical and indecisive in the midst of so many metamorphoses—was entertaining and pleasing. The uneasiness began only when a child pointed to a passing vulture that spread its wings at the very top of the tower, sailed in a circle above Passy, then flew in a straight line right to the towers of Saint-Sulpice, where it settled in a corner of the perpetual scaffolding of the eternal restoration of that temple to watch with avarice the deserted streets of the Quarter.

First, Pollo Phoibee brushed a strand of blond hair from his eyes, then ran the fingers of one hand (for he didn't have two) through his shoulder-length mane; and finally he leaned out of his sixth-floor rooming-house window to salute a summer sun that like every summer-morning Paris sun was supposed to appear borne on a chariot of warm haze, attended by a court of street perfumes—the odor the sun king disperses in July different, of course, from those distilled by the moon queen in December. Today, nevertheless, Pollo looked toward the towers of Saint-Sulpice, reviewing in his

mind the catalogue of accustomed odors. But as the vulture settled onto the scaffolding, Pollo sniffed in vain. No freshly baked bread, no scent of flowers, no boiling chicory, not even damp city sidewalk. He liked to close his eyes and breathe in the summer-morning air, concentrating until he could distinguish the scent of the tightly closed buds in the distant flower market of the Quai de la Corse. But today not even cabbage or beets in the nearby market of Saint-Germain, no pungent Gauloise Gitanes, no wine spilled on straw or wood. Not a single odor in the whole of the rue du Four—and not even the sun appeared on its customary vehicle of haze. The motionless vulture faded from sight amid billowing black smoke issuing like a blast from a bellows from the towers of the church. The enormous vacuum of odors was suddenly filled with foul and offensive effluvium, as if Hell were discharging all the congestion from its lungs. Pollo smelled flesh ... burned fingernails and hair and flesh.

For the first time in his twenty-two summers, Pollo closed the window and hesitated, not knowing what to do. But he would scarcely realize that in that instant began his longing for the visible symbol of liberty provided by that always open window—night and day, winter and summer, rain and thunder. He would scarcely identify his unaccustomed indecision with the feeling that he and the world about him were irremediably growing older. He would not likely overcome that feeling with a swift question: What's happening? What is it that forces me to close my free and open window for the first time...? They must be burning refuse; no, it smelled of flesh, they must be burning animals. A plague epidemic? Some sacrifice? Immediately Pollo Phoibee, who slept in the nude (another conscious symbol of freedom), entered the stall with the portable shower head, listened to the noisy drumming of water against the white-enameled tin, soaped himself carefully, sudsing with extra attention to his golden pubic hair, raised his only arm to direct the stream of water onto his face, letting water dribble through his open lips, turned off the tap, dried himself, and left the small and impeccable confession booth that had washed him of every sin except one, that of innocent suspicion; forgetting to prepare a breakfast, he slipped on leather sandals, drew on khaki-colored Levi's and a strawberry-colored shirt, glanced swiftly around the room where he had been so happy, bumped his head against the low ceiling, and ran down the stairs, ignoring the empty, abandoned garbage pails on each landing of the stairway.

At the entresol, Pollo stopped and with his knuckles rapped at the concierge's door. There was no answer, and he decided to go in to see if there was any mail, a most unlikely possibility. Like the doors of all concierges, this was half wood and half glass, and Pollo knew that if the self-absorbed face of Madame Zaharia did not peer from between the curtains, it was because Madame Zaharia was out, but since she had nothing to hide from the world (this was her favorite saying: she lived in a glass house), she had no objections to her tenants' coming in to pick up the infrequent letters she sorted and left tucked in the mirror frame. Consequently, Pollo decided he could go into that cave of bygone gentility where the fumes of an eternal cabbage stew misted over photographic mementos of soldiers twice dead and buried, once beneath the soil of Verdun, now beneath a film of vapor. And if his earlier indecision had controlled Pollo Phoibee's spirits when, like a warning of disillusion and old age, he

had noticed the absence of summer smells, now to enter the concierge's room in search of a more improbable letter seemed to him an act of primordial innocence. Absorbed in this sensation, he entered. But the physical reality was more novel than his new mood. For the first time he could remember, nothing was bubbling in the kitchen, and the photos of the dead soldiers were limp mirrors of useless sacrifice and tender resignation. Even the odor had evaporated from Madame Zaharia's room. But not sound. Lying on her sagging bed, upon an eiderdown covered with the bloom of ancient winters, the concierge—less preoccupied than usual—was choking back a gurgling moan.

Many suns will pass before Pollo Phoibee condescends to analyze the impression provoked by Madame Zaharia's condition and posture: which cause and which effect? Perhaps it would be possible to propose, without the authorization of the protagonist, that the terms of his matutinal equation had been inverted: the world, irremediably, was growing younger—and decisions had to be made. Without stopping to think, he ran and filled a pail of water, he lighted the flame of the burner and set the water to boil on the stove, and with a blend of atavistic wisdom and simple stupefaction he gathered towels and tore strips of sheets. The same thing had happened too many times during the past thirty-three and one half days. With his teeth Pollo rolled up the sleeve of his one good arm (the other sleeve was pinned over his stump), and knelt between the open, febrile thighs of Madame Zaharia, ready to receive the tiny head that must soon appear. The concierge uttered a sputtering howl. Pollo heard the water boiling; he lifted the pail from the flame, threw the pieces of sheet into it, and returned to the foot of the bed to receive, not the expected head, but two tiny blue feet. Madame Zaharia moaned, her belly was gripped by oceanic contractions, and Pollo's stump throbbled like a piece of marble longing for the companionship of its mate.

After the breech birth had been effected, and once Pollo had spanked the babe, cut the cord, tied the umbilical cord, disposed of the placenta in the pail, and mopped up the blood, he did certain things in addition: inspected the infant's male genitals, counted six toes on each foot, and observed with amazement the birthmark on its back: a wine-red cross between the shoulder blades. He didn't know whether to hand the baby into the arms of the ninety-year old woman who had just delivered it or take charge of it himself, care for it, and carry it far from possible contamination and death by asphyxia. He chose the second; in truth, he feared the ancient Madame Zaharia might drown or devour her so untimely son, and he walked to the antique gold-framed mirror where the concierge customarily inserted, between the glass and the frame, the few improbable letters addressed to her tenants.

Yes. There was a letter for him. It must be one of the official notices that arrived from time to time, always inordinately late, for the almost total collapse of the postal services was a normal fact of an epoch when everything that a hundred years earlier signified progress had ceased to function with either efficiency or promptness. No chlorine purified the water, the mail did not arrive on time, and microbes had imposed their triumphal reign over vaccines: defenseless humans, immune worms.

Pollo leaned closer to look at the envelope and noticed that the letter bore no recognizable stamp. Gripping the newly born infant against his chest, he slipped the letter from the frame. It was sealed with ancient, grimy sealing wax; the envelope itself was old and yellow, as the writing of the sender

seemed old, and curiously antiquated. And as he took the letter in his hand a few quivering drops of quicksilver rolled across it and dropped onto the floor. Still clasping the child, Pollo broke the ancient red wax seal with his teeth and extracted a fine, wrinkled sheet of parchment, as transparent as silk. He read the following message:

“In the *Dialogus Miraculorum*, the chronicler Caesarius von Heiterbach warns that in the city of Paris, the fountain of all knowledge and the source of the Divine Scriptures, the persuasive Devil had inculcated a perverse intelligence in certain few wise men. You must be on the alert. The two forces struggle between themselves not only in Paris but throughout the world, although here the combat will seem to you more acute. Chance has determined that it was here you would be born, spend your youth, and live your years. Your life and this time could have coincided in a different space. It does not matter. Many will be born, but only one will have six toes upon each foot and a wine-red cross upon his back. This child must be baptized Iohannes Agrippa. He has been awaited through long centuries; this is the continuity of the original kingdoms. Further, although in another time, he is your son. You must not fail this duty. We are expecting you; we shall find you, make no effort to look for us.”

This extraordinary missive was signed *Ludovico* and *Celestina*. Astounded by this reversion from the death he had smelled in the smoke of Saint-Sulpice and divined in the zealous vultures to the life he held in his single arm and believed to have extracted but not introduced, as the letter mysteriously indicated, Pollo had no time to reread it. Twice he shook his head in negation: he knew no one named Ludovico or Celestina, and he had never slept with the ancient woman. He dipped his fingers in the bloody water, sprinkled a few drops on the head of this infant as exceptional as recently born, and in accordance with what the letter had requested, he murmured: “Ego baptiso te: Iohannes Agrippa.”

As he did so, he winked an eye in the direction of the robust poilu killed in some forgotten war in the trenches, tanks, and mustard gases who was the ephemeral, the certified, the only husband of the aged Madame Zaharia; he placed the child in the arms of the startled old woman, rinsed his hand, and without a backward look left the room with the satisfaction of a duty well done.

Truly? He opened the heavy street door onto the rue des Ciseaux, that imperturbable narrow little street that for centuries has stretched between the rue du Four and the Boulevard Saint-Germain, and he had to struggle against a new alarm that threatened anew his wish to enjoy this glorious July morning. Was the world growing younger? growing older? Pollo, like the street itself, was partly bathed by the sun but partly in deserted shadows.

The open doors and sidewalk tables and chairs of the Café Le Bouquet, usually filled with the faithful, looked inviting, but the mirrored wall behind the bar reflected only orderly rows of green and amber bottles, and the long copper stripping showed only light traces of hastily smeared fingerprints. The television had been disconnected and bees buzzed above the cigarette showcase. Pollo reached for his hand and directly from the bottle drank a gulp of anise. Then he searched behind the bar and found the two large posters advertising the bar-café-tobacco shop. He thrust his head between the panels and adjusted the leather straps that joined across the shoulders. Thus outfitted as a sandwich man, he

returned to the rue du Four and without concern walked by the open and abandoned shops.

Buried in Pollo's young body, perhaps, was an ancient optimism. Sandwiched between his poster he was not only doing the job for which he received his modest stipend. He was also adhering to code according to which, when the subway has been stalled for more than ten minutes and all the tunnel lights go out, the proper thing to do is continue reading the newspaper as if nothing had happened. Pollo Ostrich. But as long as none of the things that had happened to Madame Zahar had happened to him (and considering the times, who was going to stick his only hand into the fire?), he saw no reason to interrupt the normal rhythm of his existence. No. Just the opposite: "I still believe that the sun rises every day, and that each new sun announces a new day, a day that yesterday lay in the future; I still believe that, as one page of time closes, today will promise a tomorrow invisible before and irrepeatable afterward." Immersed in these reflections, Pollo did not notice he was walking through thicker and thicker smoke. With the innocence of habit (which inevitably is solidified by the malice of the law), he had walked toward the Place Saint-Sulpice and was now prepared to parade before the faithful, the usual café customers, the posters that fore and aft covered him to the knees. His first thought when he saw he was surrounded by smoke was that no one would be able to read the words recommending the choice of the Café Le Bouquet. He looked skyward and realized that not even the four statues on the Place were visible; nevertheless, they were the only witnesses to the publicity posters trussed upon Pollo, and entrusted to Pollo. He told himself, idiotically, that the smoke must be coming from the mouths of the sacred orators. But not even Bossuet's teeth, Fénelon's lips, Massillon's tongue, or Fléchier's palate—aseptic stone cavities all—could be the source of the nauseating odor, the same stench that had been so noticeable at the window of his garret room. What accentuated it now, more than proximity, was the beat of unseen marching feet his ear first located on the rue Bonaparte. Soon he realized what it was: the sound of universal movement.

Smoke enveloped him, but someone besieged by smoke always believes there is clean air about his own body; no one trapped in haze feels he is devoured by it. "I am not become haze," Pollo said to himself. "The haze simply swirls around me as it surrounds the statues of the four sacred orators." From smoke, but also toward smoke, Pollo extended his only hand, then immediately drew it back, frightened, and thrust it behind the panel that covered his chest; in that brief instant his outstretched fingertips, invisible in the smoke, had touched other flesh, fleeting, naked ... other flesh. He hid the fingers that remembered and still bore the traces of a film of thick oil almost like butter: other bodies invisible but nevertheless present bodies ... swift, grease-covered bodies. His only hand never lied. No one had seen him, but Pollo felt ashamed for having been afraid. The true motive of his fear had not been the casual discovery of a quickly moving line of bodies marching toward the church in the obscuring smoke, but the simple image of his only hand, his outstretched hand, devoured by the smoke. Invisible. Vanished. Mutilated by the air. I have only one. I have only one left. With the recovered hand he touched his testicles to assure himself of the continuance of his physical being. Higher, far from his hand and his genitals, his head whirled in a different orbit, and reason, again triumphant, warned him that causes provoke effects, effects propose problems, and problems demand

solutions, which are in turn, by their success or failure, converted into the causes of new effect problems, and solutions. This is what reason taught him, but Pollo didn't understand the relation between such logic and the sensations he had just experienced. And he continued to stand there in the midst of the smoke, exhibiting his posters for no one to see.

"Don't be too persistent, it's annoying, counterproductive," the *patron* had admonished him when he contracted for his services. "A turn or two in front of each competitor's, and away ... alleyoop ... off to a new spot." Pollo began to run, far from the Place Saint-Sulpice, far from the smoke and the stench and that contact; but there was no escape; the smell from Saint-Sulpice was stronger than any other; the odor of grease, of burned flesh and fingernails and hair stifled the remembered perfumes of flowers and tobacco, of straw and wet sidewalks. He ran.

No one will deny that in spite of an occasional slip our hero basically is a dignified man. The awareness of that dignity caused him to slow his pace as soon as he saw he was approaching the Boulevard, where, unless everything had changed overnight, the usual (for the last thirty-three and one-half days) spectacle awaited him.

He tried to think by which street he could with least difficulty reach the church, but they were all the same; down the deserted rue Bonaparte and rue de Rennes and rue du Dragon, he could see the compact mass of heads and shoulders on the Boulevard Saint-Germain, the crowd lined up six-deep, some perched in trees or sitting in the temporary stands they had occupied since the previous night, not before. He walked along the rue du Dragon, which was, at least, the farthest from the spectacle itself, and in two long strides had overtaken the owner of the Café Le Bouquet walking toward the Boulevard with his wife, who was carrying a basket filled with bread and cheese and artichokes.

"You're late," Pollo said to them.

"No. This is the third time this morning we've gone back for more provisions," the *patron* answered condescendingly.

"You two can go right up to the front. What luck!"

The *patronne* smiled, looking at the sandwich boards and approving Pollo's fidelity to his employer. "More than a right. An obligation. Without us, they'd die of hunger."

"What's happened?" Pollo would have liked to ask. "Why are two miserable tightwads like the two of you (that's the truth, I'm not complaining) going around giving away food? Why are you doing it? What are you afraid of?" But, discreetly, he limited himself to a "May I go with you?"

The owners of the café shrugged their shoulders and indicated with a gesture that he could accompany them through the ancient narrow street as far as the corner. There, Madame placed the basket on her head and began to call out: "Let the supplies through, make way for the supplies," and the *patron* and Pollo forced a path through the festive multitude jammed between the house fronts and the police barricades set up along the edge of the sidewalks.

A hand reached out to steal one of the cheeses and the *patron* clipped the scoundrel on the head. "This is for the penitents, *canaille!*"

The *patronne*, too, rapped the joker on the head. "You! You have to pay. If you want a free meal

join the pilgrims!”

“That really tears it!” Pollo muttered. “Did we come here to laugh or cry? Are we dying or being born? Is it the beginning or the end, cause or effect, problem or solution? What are we living through?” Again reason proposed the questions, but the film of memory, swifter than reason, rolled back in time to a cinema in the Latin Quarter ... Pollo walking with his employers, carrying the supplies along the rue du Dragon ... Pollo remembering an old film he’d seen as a child, terrified and paralyzed by the meaningless profusion of death, a film called *Nuit et brouillard* (fog, the smoke from the Place Saint-Sulpice, the haze pouring from the vulture-guarded towers), night and fog, the final solution ... cause, effect, problem, solution.

But now the spectacle burst before his eyes, interrupting his pensive, nostalgic, fearful mood. Circus or tragedy, baptismal ceremony or funeral vigil, the event had revived ancestral memories. Along the avenue, people were decked out in peaked Liberty caps that protected their heads from the sun; there were tricolor ribbons for sale and assortments of miniature flags. The first row of seats had been reserved for a few old ladies, who, quite naturally and in respect to certain well-known precedents, knitted ceaselessly, commenting on the groups passing before them, men, boys, and young children carrying banners and lighted candles in broad daylight. Each contingent was led by a man wearing a hairshirt and carrying a scythe across his shoulder; all of them, barefoot and exhausted, had arrived on foot from the diverse places identified by their gold- and silver-embroidered scarlet banners: Mantes, Pontoise, Bonnemarie, Nemours, Saint-Saëns, Senlis, Boissy-Sans-Avoir-Peu. Bands of fifty, a hundred, two hundred men, dirty and unshaven, boys who could scarcely drag their aching bodies, young children with filthy hands, runny noses, and infected eyes, all of them intoning the obsessive chant:

The place is here,
The time is now,
Now and here,
Here and now.

Each contingent joined the others in front of the Church of Saint-Germain, amid the hurrahs, the toasts and jokes of some, the sepulchral fear and fascination of others, and the occasional scattered, drifting choruses repeatedly singing the stirring *La Carmagnole* and *Ça Ira*. Antithetically and simultaneously their voices demanded the gibbet for the poet Villon and the firing squad for the usurper Bonaparte; they advocated marching against the Bastille and the government of Thiers at Versailles; they recited chaotically the poems of both Gringore and Prévert; they denounced the assassins of the Duc de Guise and the excesses of Queen Margot; paradoxically, they announced the death of the “Friend of the People” in his tepid tub and the birth of the future Sun King in the icy bed of Anne of Austria. One cried, “I want a chicken in every peasant’s pot on Sundays!”; another, “A marshal’s baton in every knapsack”; over here, “get rich”; over there, “all power to imagination!”; and one, a sharp, ululating anonymous voice drowning out all the others, shouting obsessively, “O crime, what liberties are committed in thy name!” From the rue du Four to the Carrefour de l’Odéon, thousands of persons

were struggling for a favored spot, singing, laughing, eating, wailing, embracing, pushing, exhausting themselves, joking among themselves, crying, and drinking, while Time flowed into Paris as if toward a roaring drain, and barefoot pilgrims took each other's hands to form a double circle before the church, an enormous circle whose extremes touched, to the north, the Gallimard bookstore and the Café Le Bonaparte; to the west, the Deux-Magots; to the south, Le Drugstore, the Vidal record shop, and the Boutique Ted Lapidus; and to the east, the church itself, towering and severe. An escaped prisoner and an Inspector of Police timidly raised a heavy metal manhole cover, could not believe what was happening before their eyes, and disappeared again, lost in the black honeycomb of the sewers of Paris. A tubercular courtesan watched with languor and disillusion from behind the closed windows of her high-ceilinged apartment, closed her curtains, lay back upon her Empire couch, and the shadowy room sang an aria of farewell. A young, slim, febrile man, dressed in a frock coat, top hat, and nankeen trousers, strolled along, indifferent to the throng, his attention fixed on a piece of skin of wild ass shrinking upon the palm of his hand.

Pollo and his employers reached the corner of the Deux-Magots and there, according to agreement, Madame handed the basket to her husband.

"You go on, now," he said to his wife. "You know they won't accept anything from a woman."

Madame faded into the crowd, not without first musing: "Something new every day. Life wonderful these days."

Pollo and the *patron* walked toward the double circle of silent pilgrims, who were beginning to disrobe, and as the two men approached with the basket, those nearest looked at each other without speaking; they suppressed an exclamation, probably joy, and fell to their knees; with humility, heads bowed before their two providers, each took a piece of bread, a piece of cheese, and an artichoke, and still kneeling, heads still bowed, and with sacramental piety, broke the bread, savored the cheese, and peeled the artichoke, as if these were primary and at the same time ultimate acts, as if they were both remembering and foreseeing the basic act of eating, as if they wished never to forget it, wished to inscribe it upon the instincts of future generations (Pollo Anthropologist). They ate with increasing haste, for now, whip in hand, a Monk advanced toward them from the center of the circle. Again bowing their heads before Pollo and the *patron*, the pilgrims finished removing their clothes, until like all the other men, boys, and children who formed the double circle, they were clad only in tiger-jute skirts falling from waist to ankles.

In the center of the double circle the Monk cracked his whip and the pilgrims in the first circle, the internal one, fell, one after another in slow succession, arms spread, face down upon the ground. The impatient, distracted, and excited murmurs of the crowd diminished. Now every man and boy and child standing behind those who had prostrated themselves stepped over one of the prone bodies, dragging their whips across them. But not everyone in the enormous circle lay flat, with arms outstretched. Some had adopted grotesque postures, and Pollo Catechist, as he glanced around the circle, could repeat, almost ritually (for haven't we been educated to know that every sin contains its own punishment?), the cardinal expiations demanded by fists clutched in rage, an avaricious

grasping hand, those bodies sprawled in green isolation, the unrestrainedly plunging buttocks, the stuffed bellies bared to the sun, lolling heads propped upon lifeless hands, the prideful poses disdain and self-esteem, the gross mouths, the greedy eyes.

As the Monk walked toward the penitents, a blanket of silence descended over the crowd: the whip cracked first in the air and then against those fists and hands and buttocks and bellies and heads and eyes and mouths. Almost all choked back their cries. One sobbed. And with every whiplash the Monk repeated the formula: "Rise, for the honor of sainted martyrdom. Whoever say or believe that the body will arise in the form of a sphere, with no resemblance to the human body, be he anathematized..."

And he repeated the formula as he stopped only a step away from Pollo before an old man clenched and unclenched his fists, an old man whose stooped shoulders were covered with gray hair. With every blow on the penitent's livid hands, our young and beautiful friend shivered and bit his lips. He felt that everyone in the dense crowd was shivering and biting his lips, and that, like him, they had eyes for nothing but the Monk's whip and the old man's flailed hands. Yet a force stronger than Pollo made him look up. And as he looked, he met the Monk's eyes. Dark. Lost in the depths of his hood. An expressionless gaze in a colorless face.

For the last time the Monk lashed the clenched hands of the old man so visibly containing his fury and repeated the formula, staring directly at Pollo. Pollo no longer heard the words; he heard only a breathless, timbreless voice, as if the Monk were forever doomed to that breathless panting. The Monk turned his back to Pollo and returned to the center of the circle.

The first act had ended; a noisy roar surged from the throats of the crowd: old women clicked their needles, men shouted, children agitated the branches of the plane trees where they perched. The same Police Inspector, lantern held high, continued his pursuit of the fugitive through the rat-infested labyrinths of black water. In her shadowy room, the courtesan coughed. The thin and febrile young man clenched his fist in desperation: the wild-ass skin had disappeared completely from the palm of his hand, as life flowed from his liquid gaze. A new whiplash, a new silence. The penitents rose on their feet. In his hand each held a whip, a cruel instrument ending in six iron-tipped thongs. The Monk intoned a hymn: Pollo could scarcely hear the first words: "Nec in aerea vel qualibet alia carne quidam delirant surrecturos nos credimus, sed in ista, qua vivimus, consistimus et movemur."

The initial words of the celebrant were expected; whether thirty-three days and twelve hours old, new, never heard or ancient, they were received with the same amazement, bathed in the same aura, as when this hooded man had first sung them, standing in the center of the double circle of penitents lined up before the Church of Saint-Germain. It seems that on that extremely distant occasion the spectators had stood in silence until the end of the hymn and then had run to buy all the Latin textbooks in the Quarter's bookstores, for the most informed among them barely knew that *Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres*. But now, as if they all knew somehow that the opportunities for the pure oral excitement of every performance would necessarily become fewer, or at least less exalting, the crowd immediately erupted into shouting and weeping as the Monk chanted the first words.

This echoing wail, this long loud lament was passed from voice to voice, it died out on one corner

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