

# CIRCE'S ISLAND

PAUL GREGOR

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## INTRODUCTION

Paul Gregor (aka Paul Sebescen, 1914-1988) became famous in french occult world when he published, in 1964, his famous 'Journal d'un Sorcier' (A Wizard Diary). He was relating in this book his astonishing adventures in Brazil, just after World War II, when he plunged into the world of the 'Quimbanda', the darker side of Macumba. Contrary to the pious kardecism of most Macumba branches, the Quimbanda looks like some kind of sexmagick hard-flavoured enough to scare a lot of 'sane' occultists (that is emasculated practitioners of so-called 'white magic').

Paul published the same year the 'Lettre d'un Sorcier au Pape' (A Wizard's Letter to the Pope)... some other books had been printed by the famous french publisher Julliard : 'Le Saut dans le Soleil' (1960), 'Le Cloître Vert' (1959), 'Le Pistoleiro' (1962), 'Brésil Embrassé' (1963)... He was a great writer, with an unique style, and even his thrillers are full of magickal significance.

Three works at least are somewhat famous amongst the english-speaking audience : 'Amazon Fortune Hunter' (Souvenir Press, London, 1962), 'The Jump into the Sun' (Berkley's, N.Y.), and 'Sex + Magic = Religion ?' (P. Sebescen, London, 1980).

I began a correspondence with him in 1985, which lasted until his death - I also met him at London in 1986, a nice memory. In the course of this correspondence, he sent me a copy of an unfinished 'novel' : 'Circe's Island'. I suppose Lady Death didn't allow him to achieve this work. That copy remained in my Archives for some 15 years. I think it's time now for english-speaking people to (re)discover what a strong-minded and original adventurer Paul was : that's the very reason of the electronic edition of such a witty jewel - totally unpublished. Of course, for sure, we'll never know what would have been the final missing facets...

I wonder sometimes which way he now experiences extasy, on another plane, embracing his loved one, or ones, the grin of Exù - like some kind of mystical sado-masochistic Cheshire Cat - floating over them!

Philippe Pissier, january 2003 e.v.

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Legend : first page of typescript (Philippe Pissier's Archives : section 666 Network : subsection Paul Gregor : item # 74) : the handwriting says : "First thing : read this. Pissier : there is in this 1/3 of a future novel more MAGICAL REALITY than in all the 'occult' literature. Absolutely historic : two of three little stylizations : for example, Gregor never fought in the french maquis".

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## CIRCE'S ISLAND

by Paul Gregor

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French writer, born in Yugoslavia, 1914. Eight books published in Paris, four of them at : R. Julliard, Editeur. Two plays performed in Paris theatres. Wrote and directed two French feature-films. Shot seven documentaries in Brazil. Since 1969 : seventeen plays for Radio France (former O.R.T.F.). Enclosed : three reviews out of about fifty, published in Paris newspapers. Translated into English : 'Amazon Fortune Hunter', Souvenir Press, London and 'The Jump into the Sun',

Berkley 's, N.Y. Sporadically wrote in Yugoslav and Portuguese. His acquaintance with the English language dates from his childhood.

## ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL 'CIRCE'S ISLAND'.

PRINCIPAL THEMES, knotted into a picaresque, satirically high-lighted action.

1/ Brazilian Black Magic. Particularly its most hermetic Satanic sect : the Quimbanda.

2/ The connection of Quimbanda's eroticism and its sadistic ritual with other mystical currents - the atmosphere of blood-sacrifices being (more or less overtly) the very source of all religions, of all striving towards non-Euclidian Universes of the spirit.

3/ Quimbanda's weird erotic 'technique', 'the love of the Orixas', which focuses sexual energies into burning points of fulfillment, rejuvenescence and the unfolding of creative energies.

## THE SETTING OF THIS METAPHYSICAL (TRAGI) COMEDY OF (BURLESQUE) ERRORS.

Brazil, 1947. A wholly surrealistic country that has vanished, unnoticed by History, just like other less ephemeral Atlantises did. Socially : a blend of feudal, Victorian and modern elements. Emotionally : determined by the aphrodisiac of a hot and moist climate, characterized by a maniacal sexuality and boundless imagination - impregnated by the omnipresent spells of Black Magic - Iberian courtesy cohabiting with murderous instincts - calling to mind the Marquis de Sade's elucubrations rewritten by Swift - this unique world of schizophrenic poetry was swallowed years ago by the blessings of industrial progress. But not before having attained, in the 31 days of July 1947, the dramatic climax of our dubious hero's comically intertwined, basely financial and loftily esoteric pursuits.

## THE PROTAGONIST'S TWISTED (IF NOT CROOKED) CHARACTER

Paul Gordan, 34, a Frenchman born in a Balkan country, with a 'solid' Byzantine (or Odyssean?) atavism in his veins has lived in Brazil since the end of the war. Ex-lawyer, ex-Davis Cup man, ex-playwright of a stage-hit in Paris before the war, ex-captain in both partisan and regular armies, polyglot, publisher, culture official in the French Embassy, he conceals behind this glittering facade the personality of an unscrupulous adventurer close to gangsterism. So he quickly becomes popular, not only with Rio's male and female snobs, but also with underworld figures and sorcerers. Being a naturally gifted hypnotist, he turns into an influential member of a particularly disquieting occult cell of the Quimbanda sect. His inborn peasant distrust and a coarse humorousness prevent this rather Rabelaisian nature from playing the part of a pompous prophet. Nevertheless his central passion is 'psychical research'. He seeks palpable proof of life beyond the grave. Quimbanda's Dionysian mysticism seems to him a path leading towards the solution of that ancient enigma. As

always, his theoretical and practical interests coincide. He wants his publishing firm to become, through a considerable increase of its investment capital, a research-instrument. Teams of explorers will comb Brazil's immense territory for the countless mediumistic phenomena, disseminated in the savage 'interior' - analysing them, writing about them and eventually finding the 'true prophet', the link between material and non-material life, in whose existence, 'somewhere in the jungle' Gordan firmly believes.

The hunch that he might himself be this extraordinary thaumaturge, brings him - through intoxication and collective hallucinations - to the verge of certifiable madness. His robustness eventually rescues him.

But from the novel's (necessarily gradual, and slow) introduction onward, he assumes the mental attitude of many a historical high-priest. He is half-seduced by his own teaching but at the same time cornered by the necessity of being an outright charlatan.

For Rio's elegant establishment is incredibly stingy. The increase of Gordan's assets requires the weaving of an intricate cobweb of spiritualist intrigue amongst the superstitious and often unbalanced members of this elite. It is this mawkish endeavour that brings about the kaleidoscopally flashing action and the hilarious counterpoint of nightmarish scenes developed in the second and third part of the narrative, as well as in the short epilogue.

(N.B. There will be 90,000 words of what could be called: 'the flight', after the first 60,000 words which assemble the plane's complex engine and describe its exploratory taxi-ing around the airport terrains. Total : about 150,000 words, of which about 50,000 are enclosed. The author is a 'fast breeder' and hopes to finish 'Circe ...' by the end of this year.)

Some allusions to the 'flight', after the take-off at the end of the 1st Part, mentioning a few of 'Dramatis Personae et Peripeteiae'.

1/ A convent of Benedictine nuns possessed by the inordinately mischievous and lascivious Chief Devil of the Quimbanda : Exu-of-the-Seven-Crossroads. A rather unorthodox exorcism, with the participation of Monsieur Anatole, a superb Alsatian dog with an abnormally high I.Q. who is a student of applied sociology.

2/ Two overwrought and frustrated lesbian ladies, desirous of changing - by the virtue of Quimbanda sacrifices - their personalities and partners: with unpleasant results which, however, lead eventually to the restoration of their friendship and 'lasting happiness', after the reversal of the all-important, 'mistress-slave' relationship between them.

3/ 'et ad infinitum'. The Swiss prophetess of the 'Two Cemetery Island' and her two guests : a monocled ex-colonel of the Habsburg-Dragoons and his equally eccentric chum, a Bavarian Baron, who fled Munich University just before the war because of a scandal in the Amphitheatre of Anatomy. Both are practitioners of an astounding genre of necrophilic homosexuality which is that much more disturbing on an Island where the 'resuscitation' of zombie-slaves from their sepulchres is a part of every day routine.

Furthermore we shall observe bi-sexual triangles (nay hexagons), compelled to alter their shapes.

There is also a motor - and racing - crazy Abbot, a scholastic philosopher who demonstrates the inspiration of the Holy Ghost by blowing into the spray nozzle of a carburetor and who commands the Benedictines' considerable fortunes.

Last but not least : Padre Walden Pereira, a midgetópriest in a greasy cassock, whose charismatic authority menaces governments, but who is nevertheless humorous and unprejudiced - ('looking over the fiery fence into the competitor's yard, trying to steal his tricks') and who helps the atheist Gordan to thwart the machinations of the 'Nunciatura' and the 'Banco dello Spirito Santo di Roma' which aim at placing the gadget-loving Abbot under a trusteeship quite contrary to the interests of these two odd cronies.

And there are so many other persons and so many quests through remote jungle hide-outs for miraculous mandragora-roots and their hanged producers - such a diversity of descents into the caves of ghosts from Atlantis, such weird creations of 'homunculi' condensed from the ectoplasm of ecstatic virgins, such an accumulation of psychical tension up to its final dissolution in a cosmic guffaw (which however leaves all the hypotheses wide open) - that the author feels as if a minute 'blueprint' of the whole novel would represent a task equal to the composition of a small epic in its own right.

Gordan's mystico-Chaplinesque failure seems to imply banal conclusions in the style of Voltaire's 'cultiver son jardin'. Much can be divined but little can be known about parallel Universes. And anyway : humanity's demeanour would be modified by such knowledge to a much lesser degree than our exotic fellow-traveller's romantic idealism (genuine, in spite of his cunning Byzantinism) had hoped for.

However, facing the sea - so similar to the 'wine-dark' one, that carried the Argonauts - philosophizing with Monsieur Anatole and holding hands with an (at last!) unsophisticated Brazilian country-girl - he still has the feeling that he will - maybe in a distant future - embark yet again on a raid after his own, personal, unperishing Golden Fleece.

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Paul Gregor

CIRCE'S ISLAND

Epigraph :

Bibet miscet

Ill cum illa

Miscet servus

Cum ancilla

Miscet coqua

Cum factore

Miscet Abbas

Cum Priore

Et pro Rege

Et pro Papa

Bibent vinum

Sine aqua

Et pro Papa

Et pro Rege

Miscent omnes

Sine lege

Bibent miscent

Sic in - fundo

Donec nihil

Sit in mundo

(Unfortunately, the author has forgotten this mediaeval poet's name. Jacopo di Something??).

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For my numerous realistically-minded Brazilian friends.

For the benefit of their (much) less objective compatriots I'm busy writing (simultaneously with other incorruptible experts) a scientific monograph proving beyond any reasonable doubt :

1/ That since Brazil occupies the peak of economic, financial and social achievement - envied by the rest of our Planet - it would be redundant and even misleading if that country's foreign propaganda emphasized, or even mentioned, the natural artistic genius of its people.

2/ That Brazil's climate is moderate, almost Nordic, unfavourable to snakes, crocodiles and coloured people - no specimens of which have ever been sighted on the territories ruled by the green and yellow banner.

3/ That internal administration in the 'Realm of the Southern Cross' has attained such a degree of salutary perfection that no devil in his right mind would dare set foot on those partly Manhattanized but still breathtakingly beautiful shores.

The author.

N.B. Possible resemblances to (still!) living characters can be explained (but not excused!) by the pernicious influence of my learned friend, Exù-Of-The-Seven-Crossroads, whose identity will be forthwith disclosed.

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## PART ONE

### CHAPTER I

Gordan mused, facing the dawn, above the masses of greyish water. His terrace stood three hundred metres behind the fort. (Precisely on the extension of a four-kilometre-long imaginary line that connected two granitic rocks. The jaws of some giant Cerberus. They looked threateningly ready to bite, to close this strait which linked the South Atlantic to the dark gullet, landward.)

A few tiny fires were now reddening, here and there, at the edges of the liquid steppe. (Reflections from the summits. For the Wagnerian mountains in the background flared up.) Not enough, though, to brighten the landscape. The opposite shore could scarcely be made out through the slowly dissolving mist. The far end of the bay was nowhere. The whole thing suggested the presence of a big dangerous-looking river's mouth. Styx. Styx. Styx.

"One sticks here", mumbled Gordan in his bad English. But how could this reality grip a man and hold him so tightly? Was it some fascination, radiated by the more or less Black Masses held in honour of the god-devil, of Exù the King? What night was it he had attended the Dark Lord's latest gala? (Scattered about on the ground: smooth dark torsos, stripped to the waist, gleaming with ecstatic sweat. Girls lying on their faces, at the feet of the sorcerer-in-chief).

(The nervous dance of the torches amidst the bush. Ghosts and reptiles swarmed there. Not too far from here. Under that plateau called the Emperor's Table. That Emperor must have been three times the size of the Eiffel Tower.)

Those torches. Whirling sparks above and around creeping bodies. When was it? Last night? The night before? (Even time got mixed up, under this lunatic sky.) Crazy fingers: furtive shadows plucking red strings. Long, narrow lines, drawn with razor-blades on necks, breasts and hips as delicate as quivering silk. A dark dew seeped surreptitiously lightward. Just as surreptitiously as the sadistic emotion rose in the nerves of the witness. Or of the peeper? So what? Rather a peeper than blind.



That murky sensation had nothing to do with magic spells. What held him there was his own burning curiosity. He suspected this land of hiding (behind its clouds of butterflies and bacteria-breeding swamps) a thing as important as the philosopher's stone. The clear, easily-understandable answer to ancient riddles.

Did the various gods of history exist? Which ones and where? Is there a life beyond the grave? In what form? Mineral? Vegetable? Animal? Astral? Nature, here, seemed inhabited by a strength (or wisdom? or wealth?) far above anything imagined anywhere else in past centuries. The gods of this land did not demand servile credulity from their faithful. They offered them tangible proofs. They allowed them to lift a corner of the veil that conceals other universes.

The telluric currents? They existed. They regenerated. And the splitting of body and soul? Under certain conditions the astral life was able to leave the inertly slumbering material body. One could see the latter, from outside, from above. One could float away from it. Far away.

Such were the facts, shown to the believers by the virgin land. Unfortunately, it was also mischievous, just like its children the wistful-monkeys. The elusive fairy of the sombre forest loved to play tricks on intruders. She juggled with realities and optical illusions so vertiginously that you had to look sharply into things and learn, before anything else, how to discern.

## 2

The vice-admiral had never managed to learn that. He, too, had had before him the scene Gordan now gazed on. His caravel's masts must have been about the height of this roof. It surrounded the penthouse, recently built on the top of a two-storey shanty, dated 1900 or so.

But the caravels had arrived here early in the morning of January 20th (St. Sebastian's day) 1520. The sharp eyes of the gallant naval officer scanned the bay. Then and there he decided it was nothing of the sort. Having allowed a life-boat to dabble for an hour in the depressing lukewarm water, all the experts agreed. This was the estuary of a huge river. They had previously found similar ones on this coast. The ocean's salt water penetrated a long way up-stream, into the sleeping countryside. Right and left : dark green walls. The tropical forest. As the sun rose, a thousand birds and apes woke up and rejoiced noisily in being discovered. The depth being right, a procession of barges was formed and, rocked by the morning breeze (which carried a thousand scents) drew into one of the white beaches. The vice-admiral disembarked, amidst other glistening suits of armour, defying the first fury of the sun. He was a fine-looking man with a blond full-beard, inherited from remote gothic ancestors. They called him Mem de Sa. The Portuguese names were almost as melodious as the Indian designations of places, plants and animals. Those have survived up to now. The bay too has kept its ancient Indian name. Guanabara.

Of course the Franciscan monk, indispensable for correct navigation, arrived in a hurry and had no sooner set foot on shore than he ordered a huge cross to be planted at the entry of Copacabana Beach. The curious Indians who gathered around in the meantime were not quite sure what to think about it. However, the Mass, celebrated on the spot by the man of God, reassured them entirely.

These strange strangers were human after all, in spite of their silly clothes and the cadaverous pallor of their faces. All the Guarani and Tupi tribes knew, liked and practiced comical pantomimes, accompanied by songs. The sense of this one, as well as the gestures of the pious Father and his playmates, were somewhat obscure, but after all, no man would ever think of more than three subjects. Eating, drinking and making love. The satisfaction felt by the good savages was deep. It was the feeling of human identification. Their joy exploded. Showing their teeth, they began gambolling, rolling themselves in the sand, jumping merrily around and slapping their own thighs, not unlike certain figures in Tyrolian dances. The Padre Vicente De Something or Other did not fail to underline in his diary the fact that these heathen were by no means insensible to sacred things.

Naturally he noted also the name of the town that would be built in the future, around the implanted cross. Taking date and topography into account, he could not have baptised it anything but : St. Sebastian of the January-River. After a few centuries St. Sebastian got lost in the National Archives, but Rio de Janeiro is still there, reminding us of an exclusively Portuguese glory. And this would never have come about without a very glorious miracle.

### 3

For as it happened, and contrary to appearances, the brave Vice-Admiral and his gang hadn't discovered anything at all. Further, up the bay there was already a French colony, founded a few years earlier, and named (with touching optimism) 'Antarctic France'. It was peopled with two shiploads of noblemen, very proud of their blue blood. Most of them were descendants of the Albigeois, inspired by an uncompromising, hereditary puritanism. Their chief, the Admiral de Villeaignon maintained iron discipline among his peers, as well as among the subdued Indians. He strictly prohibited swearing, drinking and making love outside of the narrow limits meticulously circumscribed in the Bible. The French represented the elite of the white race. They were exemplary colonisers.

And their Portuguese competitors? An unbelievable jumble of races. Nobody knows who lived in their country before the Celts overran it. And after the Celts came the Romans. And the Goths. And the Arabs. And last of all came crowds of black African slaves. Besides they had long years of voyages, full of hardships and growing anarchy behind them. Hapless gypsies, broken bastards, they did not stand a chance in a thousand against the French. However, it was the odd logic of those antipodes that dealt the cards. Therefore the Portuguese triumphed and the Empire-builders were eaten.

Here is why. As soon as the light of their first morning began (just as here and now) pouring glistening cataracts into the dead sea, filling it with trillions of blazing aquamarines, emeralds, topazes and rubies, those bold sea-tramps had two illuminations. The first one was about hammocks and their usefulness. Woven of lianas, these swung lazily under exotic trees: flying carpets of long-repressed dreams. The Portuguese expressed them immediately. For here came the second illumination. These lovely, delightfully smiling brownish girls had not yet read the Bible. They were entranced by the little mirrors and coloured glass-pearls. The male autochtones were happy and proud about the success of their girlfriends. Nor were the monks over-scandalised. During these voyages their flock had accustomed them to astonishing shows, under the light of queerly glittering oceanic colours. The priests did not object to the private lives of their black sheep from the Tejo and the Alentejo, as long as the flock did not forget to confess its sins now and then. Then the repentant could swiftly regain the state of grace and their hammocks, to produce (among other things) the most spectacular girls of that hemisphere. The 'entente' could not have been more 'cordiale'.

Within days the vassals of the French deserted to the last man. The Portuguese were really chummy, easy-going fellows. The Indians felt they were something like cousins-in-law. The French had never treated them as equals. And the natives saw nothing wrong with participating in the pantomimes of their ultramarine in-laws. The ecclesiastical authorities were gratified. They did not hurry things, but evangelised these new converts slowly, gradually.

There was no point in attacking cannibalism frontally. They just analysed it from the point of view of its usefulness and pleasantness.

The Indian brethren, newly born to spiritual life, quickly assimilated the wise teachings lavished on them. It was quite obvious that the flesh of the gypsyish Portuguese, stunted by deprivations, would have been found lamentably lacking in flavour and nutritive values. On the other hand it was equally self-evident that the temperate, clean living of the aristocratic (and so white!) neighbours designated them an exquisite culinary substance,

The children of nature are often open to sound argument. Thus disappeared the defenders of virtue, and only ephemeral traces of them were left behind Brazilian bushes.

#### 4

A sky-blue half-sheet of some fairy newspaper flapped clumsily in the air, over the terrace. A displaced elephant amongst butterflies. It must have come from the undergrowth, behind the cragged slopes of the first hills. These followed from afar the graceful lines of the beaches, like some green fortification.

Gordan stretched himself, twisting his muscles. The first warm rays caressed his heavy bulk.

He entered the half-dark of his dwelling. Unlike the shutters, all the doors of the three rooms were wide-open. Absent-mindedly he felt his way among the ancient colonial-style curios, mostly picked up in the attics of Brazilian friends.

Still naked, except for the espadrilles he had just put on, he came back to the terrace, carrying a rope for jumping, two dumb-bells, two dossiers, pencils and yesterday's newspaper.

His office - a kitchen table and two crude chairs - still stood at the shadow-side. Disregarding the rules, once more, he lit his first cigarette. Feeling a pleasant, almost imperceptible dizziness, he noticed the world around him had changed.

The Styx was nowhere to be seen. The sea was sky-blue. The sky: indigo. Before him: the fort's promontory, at the intersection of two wide-flung, graceful curves. One of them, to his left, embraced a six-kilometre breadth of azur space. At his right, the other, somewhat larger one, opened to the blazing Atlantic. The beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema.

Behind them, landward, spreading toward the hillsides, rows of merry gardens, enclosing secluded villas. One look at them would have scared any impenitent boozier. There was something of everything. Mosques. Chinese pavilions. Indian temples. Serails. Medieval castles with miniature drawbridges. Scaled-down gothic cathedrals. Down here, a few paces to the left: an unprecedented marvel. Seeing it, Gordan grinned again.

From above, the house looked very much like a huge cylinder lying on the ground. But down in the street, looking at the entrance, you understood that the whole house exactly reproduced the form of the facade, which was a monumental, awe-inspiring keyhole. These people enjoyed any kind of fun, anytime, anywhere.

In the gardens: red and yellow flowers, big as babies' heads. Dozens of euphoric monkeys and beautifully coloured but cantankerous parrots, all in unrestricted liberty. It was too dreamily playful. A cocktail of the nineteenth century, the crazy twenties and Walt Disney. It couldn't last. Neither this, here, nor anything of the kind. Real estate speculation was stirring. The price of these square metres was soaring. Concrete-nightmares were soon to overgrow everything.

In the city's centre, twenty-five kilometres from here, one could already see a couple of real, inhabited sky-scrapers. And there were others which had been hurriedly evacuated because they threatened to collapse. The Brazilians, always fond of a joke, would say: "Have you noticed the superiority of our architects? The foreign ones, the 'Gringos', are only able to figure out how long it will take to finish their buildings. Ours are much more far-sighted. They'll tell you the day and the precise hour that their masterpiece will come down on your skull." (So many things were to come down, so soon, on so many skulls.)

In a couple of years a new-born vulgarity would crush all these castles from Alice's Wonderland. Unless he, Gordan, in his imagined capacity as an ambassador of a foreign planet - having attained a much higher degree of evolution than poor little Earth - could deflect the course of events toward some more pleasant cosmic alternative. (Which seemed to him a very plausible idea!)

Leaving the panorama, his green, almost Mongolian eyes shifted to the table and the newspaper. So yesterday was July 3rd, 1947. His thirty-fourth birthday. He kept it from everyone. That was one of his little superstitions. Or rather, a prejudice, taken over from his late father. (Danubian landowner, old giant, brisk to the end.) He would heap his vast catalogue of Yugoslav curses on his only son whenever Gordan dared to congratulate him on such occasions. "The imbecility of people! They make a song and dance about getting older!"

So "Vasco de Cama" has thrashed "Flamingo" three to one. In the Maracana-Stadium, the largest in the world. Planned and built with amazing bravado by Brazilian architects. It stood firm as a rock. ("There are just two things we take seriously. Football, and the Carnaval.") Three hundred thousand spectators could follow the game there without any difficulty. Anti-tank ditches protected the referees, as much as possible, from lynching.

The stock exchange seemed quiet. Shares in papermills were slowly climbing. Would that influence the price of paper? He had bought some, open. One of the two dossiers had CORCOVADO printed on it. The name of that ex-volcano, up there to the left, above the hills of Copacabana. He had used it as the trade-name of his publishing firm. Well, the bank had accepted these two bills. They were due quite soon. But this was unlikely to cause any kind of Brazilian tragedy. He wouldn't even have to go to town about them. Two days before they were due, he would just ring up the bank manager at home, in the morning. "Hi, Ramos (or Silveira or something like that). How do? Nice dreams? It's about those two bills of mine. What? Nothing special. I'm not going to pay. No, nor will my customer. Not this month, anyway. No, I'm telling you in good Portuguese: the Academic Bookshops won't pay either." Then, the sleepy voice: "Would you mind my asking a modest question? When in the devil's name are you going to fork out, you and the other one? In thirty days, I imagine?" "Have you seen the Merchant of Venice in the Municipal? That's you! Couldn't you give me a breather? What about ninety days?" "Ah ... that would be a little more complicated." Which meant, in terms of Brazilian courtesy: "Don't dream of such a thing!"

But they protested only exceptionally. Nobody turned the screw on anyone, and almost everyone paid up in the end. The number of bankruptcies was trifling. They were rather decent chaps. (Yes? Oh yes. Up to a certain point.)

He closed the dossier, and then sighted a brown speck, very far away, but standing out clearly on the still-deserted sand, close to the water line,

Here came what he had been waiting for all this time with a feeling of unavowed anxiety.

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## CHAPTER II

Suppressing a slight shiver he bent over the balustrade and glanced landward. He had guessed right. There were still other remarkable things around. Right down there. Quite an exhibition. The demon's device must have been set, where it had to be, during the night. At the side of the pavement, in the grass, lay a white cock. Its throat was cut. Around it: crossed cigar-butts, candle-ends, bottles half-filled with cachaça: with cane brandy. The banquet of the spirits. Only - of the bad ones. The good souls had been cordially invited to stay away.

They had absolutely nothing to do there at the corner of the alley which led to the "palacete", to the little palace (worse than baroque) of his friend Pedro. (Charming, old, millionaire, post-impressionist painter, refined, degenerate.)

He was the party chiefly concerned by the "trabalho", the work that should be initiated with the shortest delay, by the incubi and succubi who busied themselves day and night.

To be precise: a spell was to be directed against two women, each of them being - in her own way - fatal to the unfortunate post-impressionist's aspirations. They were not only lesbians but also over-excited characters, often agitated by inexplicable, disconcerting rages.

From this point on, Gordan's intricate business life took on a highly surrealistic aspect. In other words, it depended mostly on the good-will and understanding shown by cohorts of werewolves and headless mules, all of them spitting fire and cantering through the forests of the night. ("I should begin to draw a genealogical tree of my cabals, just to keep in mind how they are interrelated, lest I get mixed up in them myself.") But his Byzantine nature felt quite at home in the labyrinth of his mercantile machinations and his fanatical, haunted searching.

Had the distant brownish speck stirred? He knew it was the kernel of a cloud. Soon it would spread in all directions, becoming a black thunder cloud, dimming, abolishing the present reality. ("Easy. Easy. Wait. Wait.") It looked like some half-dead insect coming wearily back to life. At this pace more than thirty minutes would pass before the climax was reached - before the divine serpent soared up into the air, far above the receding beach. A phosphorescent tunnel would dig itself through the darkness. That would be the highway of the nightmarish being: there it would advance, twisting its rings, swimming, up there, towards the palacete of the petrified lovers.

He guessed that there would not be just the two of them waiting for the apparition. Their thighs were locked (did Gordan see it or imagine it?) around a lethargic, asexual adolescent. One of those living-dead zombies, abducted from his grave? The reincarnated soul of a slave, martyred after the great uprising? Or just a poor idiot, picked up one day in the street because he lent himself so innocently to aberrant games?

Too early for the spirits, he told himself, leaving the world of pre-fabricated dreams. An energetic contraction of the diaphragm brought him back to earth.

The rope lashed the cement -under his espadrilles. One, two, forward, backward. A flying circle surrounded him like a lasso thrown by himself to catch his own body. Double leaps made the cord whistle around him. Magic was something like this. This and nothing else. A disciplined dance. (Of the thoughts? Of states of mind? Of sexual pulsations?)

He let the rope go and took the dumbbells. (His first love had been boxing. A little later: tennis. Sixteen, fifteen, fourteen years before he had been Davis Cup man for his first country, the smaller one. He still played now and then, just for the fun of it.)

Of course, spirit and body were accomplices. Sorcery was (among other things) close to acrobatics. Quite: the acrobatics of one's beliefs. One had to learn how to believe firmly, manifestly contradictory ideas. It was all very well to accept, in a corner of his brain, all the flying serpents of this chimerical sky. But a quite different Gordan had to stay in the background, observing, shrugging his shoulders. For on that condition he could venture further, dive deeper into the obsessions which were inseparable from his plan. If he kept his head there was no danger for him. There would be no fall into the snake-pit. He would not howl day and night, wallowing in the horror that everybody carried around with him, inside him, under the smooth skin. (The entrails, knots of coloured sticky reptiles creeping out of torn bellies, animated by their own horrifying life.) Nor would there be whitish worms before his eyes. Nothing of the nauseating, secret world unveiled by flying steel fragments. (Ah, those incandescent pink roses of hell!) No army had ever decorated such an absolute coward. (That accursed force of imagination! Luckily it could be disconnected. Or perhaps, from a certain point on, it disconnected itself. Then: an imperturbable robot took over.)

In other words he promised himself not to go crazy. Which was more than could be said about the surrounding multitudes. Of course, that was the point. One had to be practical and use the present, extravagant reality. Anything capable of producing tangible effects was in some way real. It would be stupid not to make it serve one's own aims. Many tools had been given. The elixirs. The witches' sabbaths. The lucid drunkenness. The power of sex increased tenfold, transfigured. This sort of sexual urge he was even now feeling, as it radiated around him, hotter than the tropical air. The one that (sweet anxiety and slumbering wildness) now throbbed in his throat. The rapture which had begun to reveal to him an astral life, probably imperishable.

And why should one throw away a useful camera, just because it sometimes gave blurred pictures? Moreover, there was a way to clarify them. Statistics. Even for science, several concordant probabilities gave a result close to certitude.

And then that most convincing weapon of the mind: induction. Finding small proofs from which vast laws could be built. Trigonometry could be used to measure a chicken-yard. Astronomers applied it to measure the Universe. From quite banal events, far-reaching conclusions could be drawn. As for instance .....

Inside a bus. The nape of a woman's neck. An insistent gaze resting on it. The patient begins chasing non-existent flies around her neck and eventually flashes a furious look backward,

An invisible bond of little account, but just as inexplicable as the Newtonian gravity that reaches out to the stars, whirling them, screwing them into terrifying bottomless abysses.

(Terror? It could be converted into rage. The rage into cruelty. Then into frenzy. Into passion. Emotions were transmutable. The alchemy of emotions: that is the spring from which flow the powers of midnight.)

Now, back to that bus (arriving on a direct line from Plato's dialogues). Was the reaction, the nervousness of the lady at the receiving end, not in direct proportion to the weight, to the passionate charge that launched the emitter's look?

So those "impenetrable" barriers of the other world had all the same a few weaker points where probes could sink in. Especially the hypnotic experiences.

He glanced toward the beach. The situation was almost unchanged. But it was in vain that he tried to remove from his mind the thing that was approaching. Memory showed him that phenomenon's origin as well as the way it had come to life. It had happened two nights before. A couple of hours after the baptism of the newborn devils. As soon as the ritual orgies were done with.

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Obscurity. A few tentative beams amidst it. Scarcely discernible : a large trunk metamorphosed into a phallic totem. Idols such as: over-sized octopuses, crucified bats, flayed goats - Madame Tussaud's museum re-styled by the Quimbanda sect.

Alone with his ally. They were the only beings alive there. The two prostrated women were not wholly alive.

Drugs? Trance? Hard to decide which predominates. Arrows of living flesh vibrate and brush: half-open, thirsty membrane-mouths. They penetrate, they retire, they come again slowly to caress mucous lips, to recede, but so little that the heat of their lives keep mingling. Their electricity keeps connecting currents alive with unceasing spasms, foretokens of a lightning that will never strike.

The "little murder" of the Quimbanda demanded an odd sort of nerves. But it crushed the medium's opposition as infallibly as the terror did. Neither did the terror miss this coming-together. The flickering light came from three holes. Very narrow, very deep. Just under the wide-open eyes of the Saint's slaves. There, under the trembling light of candles, lived, gazed, creatures more blood-freezing than the dreams of all the forest's damned put together.

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That was the recipe. Paralyzing frustration, terror, drugs, cachaça, hypnotism. It opened the subconscious, making it as docile as a fainting body. Then the hypnotic orders transfixed them with the icy sweetness of rape. These girls were programmed like computers. For weeks in advance, if necessary. But especially for this morning's prospective events. The experience was promising. But who knew exactly the secret working of this mechanism? And who was manipulated? who was programmed, after all?



He decided not to watch the beach any more for fifteen minutes. That would dam up and condense fluxes of energy: it would favour the blossoming of ... the blossoming of what the hell? Of the "supernatural"? An eloquent noise without any meaning! He admired science. Without it, Earth would still be the kingdom of melancholy orangutans. And then, science did not spring from sermons, phoned from burning bushes. (Not to speak of what came out of whales' tummies!) And if some people chose to call this "poetry", well then, it must be said that humanity has known fairy tales of a less dubious quality.

Science calculated, experimented, verified. But did it not also deduce? And as to life and its mystery: had science as yet worked through every riddle? Could there not be unknown elements, energies rays?

What was really known about the states of split consciousness? (Split into two quite dissimilar lives.) For it was feasible to pass from one level of being to another one. To juggle with oneself. As he did. To play with his wishes and his fears. The coins he threw and caught were: hunger, cold, nightmares, everything he loathed. By no means with the purpose of settling in them or getting used to them. Just to dismantle his own engine and examine its working,

(The ardour of this search was like the humming of a very distant music that followed him everywhere.) But always and everywhere he had tried to avoid inspired madmen like the pox. And now he was living in the very midst of an endless lunatic asylum. And most worrying of all, he didn't feel the faintest desire to escape from it.

What was he doing there? Spying on the frontiers of madness and immortality. Yes, but when all was said and done, what essential knowledge had he won, for instance, by learning the art of the god Ogun, the hypnosis that struck as suddenly as lightning? What did all these experiments do to unravel the enigma of that phosphorence which had once shone on him? Had it been a product of the spirit? Of the brain? Of the nerves? Or was it related to the true light that flashes through endless spaces, long after the native star's extinction?

He recalled to mind the "terreiro", his friend's miraculous shed, the night of his taking those unholy orders.

A moon, as big as a football, the roof on poles, amidst the clearing, thundering tom-toms, a suffocating wall of shuddering bodies. On the soil: coppery reflections of dancing lights and two long, thin, black snakes crawling toward his feet.

They push before him a mulatto girl with an adolescent torso. He clenches her tender wrists. He knows he is being put to a test, but he is already too drunk to remember what is expected of him. Suddenly an absurd fury explodes in him. A painful cramp tears his muscles apart. A crazed effort seems to drive his eyes out of their sockets, to throw them toward the target known only to his boiling blood - toward all the voluptuous spasms of life rolled up, packed into a few seconds. From the alternating current of an orgasm that was tamed (provoked, repressed, resuscitated, transfigured) bursts the lightning of the god (a rage to live and to rule) and in front of him the slender figure collapses, struck down.

When he came to, he thought he saw, lying at his feet, the proof of bodyless life. There was blood on her face. (Her nose? Nobody had touched her.) Her eyes seemed swollen, her lips bruised. Her teeth were grinding unearthly seeds. Her chest, her muscles were shaken by unknown tides.

After a minute, standing between her open legs, he realised with awe the transfiguration of everything. A new meaning illuminated all of this. All the panting, the revulsions, the convulsions of this infantile belly.

First she had reincarnated Gordan's willed paroxysm. And now she received, from the distance of a metre - (even had it been from a million metres it would not have added to this evidence of an immaterial fluid streaming from one life into another) - the wave of his passion. He thought he saw (but of course he might have imagined it) a vaporous (or ethereal, you great Brazilian gods!) shaft extending his penis and plunging it into the hot, humid darkness of that reviving, gratified body. (Was it an alcoholic's dream after all? Alas, he'd never know for sure.)

However, in that moment, a well-known face materialised at his side. It belonged to the man he had, in his thoughts, laughingly christened the Great Golden Cat. With a half-smiling grimace around a feline moustache, the Cat spoke to Gordan: "If thou wilt, I can teach thee to do all the things I can do."

He did not become a real disciple. First, because years earlier he had already started to feel his way across "all these things". What was more exciting than to transmit thoughts deliberately, in the course of some everyday, indifferent conversation? To whisper them, voicelessly, into the interlocutor's ear? Or else, to modify instantaneously without altering in the least his own tone and attitude, the climate of some delicate discussion.

On the other hand, there was in Gordan's mind an incessant silent bantering which precluded the Big Cat from a masterly guru's role. The very idea that he might be swindled infuriated the Franco-Slav.

That was why he found the marvels of hypnosis revealing but questionable. A great part of humanity could have practiced it, but nobody knew its real nature.

The people who fell thunderstruck at the enchanter's order, did they not follow, after all, the deepest secret propensity of their natures? He knew all too well that most mediums cheat, particularly at the beginning of their acts. But how far did the theatre go? Sometimes it was impossible to distinguish excellent acting from reality. Especially because the illuminated mingled both. So how could he expect to discover the unquestionable truth he was searching for?

Why did he not, then, interview the dead? In this field he had never witnessed anything but stupid, transparent fakes. Besides, the Quimbanda (and a good thing it was) cared more for the living than for the dead. He would get in touch with the latter (very soon, probably) in his own way. Without transgressing the rules of common sense and of beyond-the-grave-savoir-vivre.

For the time being he would make do with other sorts of signs which gave away the secret of survival. They were modest, not in the least spectacular, but all the more convincing. He knew several of them.

### CHAPTER III

He lifted the dumb-bells. A quite absurd idea came from nowhere. These solid globes would convey to him a message hidden in their bulk. Preposterous. Worse: mad.

(Five kilos each. Not the very best for the muscles. But better than nothing to fight this debilitating climate.) For a moment he left the iron spheres swinging lazily at the end of his arms. Abruptly the feeling of this absent-minded motion extended through his muscles, shoulders, motor nerves, travelling like a flying spark. And the message arrived. He held in his hand the proof of second sight, and thus of another way of existing.

This hand swung precisely as when (not so long ago) it clenched that unpinned grenade. The sun had been rising over the moon-scape of Montenegro's crevices. Unluckily, it had also been rising above the hole, where, between two rocks, he was waiting for a bit more light, cursing it in advance, not being quite sure what he should wish, pressing his belly against quite inhospitable stones.

That past came back to him. Just ahead (he thought at spitting distance, although it was more than that, but still uncomfortably close) frowned the breach of the cave with a heavy machine gun, manned by what was left of a Waffen SS-section. It was rather a narrow vertical slit in a wall of grey mineral. In a couple of minutes it would be dyed beautifully pink. From then on he had only seconds left. Whose eyes would prove quicker? That was the problem.

To reach this spot, he had crawled five or six hundred metres, coming from where the first dead lay. He had spent most of the night on this trip. Now and then he had stayed motionless, - it seemed for hours - hiding his face from the very lights. Then he went on creeping, winning metre by metre.

The previous afternoon's exercise had been called a mopping-up operation. A good third of the cleaners (of his own company) had been mopped up, there behind him. No mortars. These eight or ten Germans had done as they pleased. The bullets of their machine-gun had become shrapnels. They had flooded his chain of sharp-shooters under a deadly

rain of quartz and limestone. At nightfall he had remained lying where he was, because of his panicky fear of the abysses. There were plenty of them behind, where his mountaineers had fled, leaping with the nimbleness of goats. Should he (he had wondered) go in for rock-scaling in the darkness? (Alone, without the assistance of his friendly Montenegrines who, however, secretly jeered at the clumsiness of this accidental commander who had stumbled into their midst, pushed by war's (bad) luck, coming right from his Big Plains, directly under the elephantine feet of the Black Mountains.) That kind of mountaineering would have been suicide.

So where was he? Could he stay there for ever, crouching under overhanging blocks of limestone? (He would have loved that!) But in the morning, the very first harassing shots would, he knew, bury him under the debris of these fossil-bearing-rocks. To avoid being fossilized, there was but one way. In front of him, the plateau leading toward the enemy was almost flat. So here he was, at the end of the road, which led to an idiocy or to a heroic deed (or both), just because he was so awfully scared of ravines and climbing.

Now he was so close he imagined the barrel of the machine-gun (which of course he couldn't yet see properly) to be pointing at the precise geometrical centre of his forehead. The black wall before him was becoming dark-blue. The vertical opening in it remained black. There were no large caves nearby. Just holes. That was good. The bad thing was that his timing had to be so precise. A little too much light and they would see him first. A touch too little and he would miss the mark. In that case he would never have a chance to throw a second grenade. Their plans in there? Short-dated, as everybody's in that phase of the war. They commanded the plateau from the cave. He thought he had never before seen such a narrow nor such a black hole. Something stirred in it. Fearful shadows: blacker than blackness.

Fortunately for him, in that very moment Gordan had been moved elsewhere. Into the centre of a void where thoughts could no longer penetrate. Dazed, unhooked from reality, without computing, without even a conscious will, he let the little iron pineapple fly straight over the machine-gun, disappear in the cave, transform the black split into a thundering volcano.

He would never have managed to do it in his normal state. Fear did it. An emotion strong enough to daze him, so that a stranger, coming from nowhere, could act in his stead. An absence of the spirit. But lucid, infallible. It had nothing to do with absent-mindedness or relaxation. Such a state would never come about without a man's mind having been previously stirred up, strongly shaken. That sort of unconscious but lightning and accurate Montenegrine reaction was not unknown to him. It had occurred even before that. ("Now look", he told himself with a clownish grimace, "you have so far packed into your thirty-four years enough to last a century in a normal man's life. Even so you want still more. You are thirsting after coming centuries, aren't you? But how can you hope to learn about secret life-energies nobody has ever known? Shouldn't you have your head examined?" But he denied the charge of megalomania. "Don't dramatise things", he protested. "I'm more than reasonable about this. I'm going ahead in the jungle of occultism, but I take my bearings principally by matter-of-fact, commonplace landmarks. This is my originality, if you don't mind my saying so. And as to that lucid void which gives birth to unerring actions: it indeed does happen. Just think of sleep-walkers.")

This state could be provoked, directed. Tiberio was a master at it. Gordan recalled the seance of the night before last. (Sure, that's when it was. The night - or at least a great part of it - he had spent with Livia. With the girl he used to call: My misfired St. Catherine!).

That baby swirling through the air! It had described a trajectory of almost ten metres. Certainly not less than the Montenegrine grenade.

There had been a crowd. It was the night of the baptism by Satan the King, by Exu-of-the-Seven-Crossroads in person. Tiberio, wearing a gleaming music-hall general's uniform, had been dancing like the devil incarnate (which he was) brandishing a heavy cavalry sword, showering blows on the soil, inches from the new-born's head. The golden skin of his face glistened. Holding the burning end of a cigar adroitly inside his mouth he blew - through its thinner end - dense clouds upward to the Irreconcilables. His leaping became more and more acrobatic, the flourishes of his sword more and more menacing. He should have been dead drunk. During the ceremony, he had put away a large bottle of cachaça. However, his movements were still controlled. Another sign of the different levels of existence. Once under this kind of tension you could drink with impunity. It was almost impossible to get drunk.

The wizard knew exactly what he was doing. Even when he grabbed the little one's ankles. (A cunning prophet: he would never have taken the slightest risk of losing face before his people.) He was settled inside his own interior void. (By the cachaça? By hypnotic exertions?) It was another, bolder, surer, miraculous Cat who threw the newborn little devil (to which dignity it had just been elevated) making him whirl like a boomerang above the heads of the faithful. But this boomerang did not come back. As if guided by an imperturbable hand it glided down to land in the arms of its quite unconcerned mother.

## 2

When he was bathed in perspiration, he ran under the shower. It was outdoors, beside a wall of the penthouse. Putting on the espadrilles again, he went back to the table. It was delicious to be dried by the breeze, (July: the beginning of winter. Temperature: the French Riviera's in May.)

From what impulse came the almost manic cleanliness of these people? They bathed two to four times a day. They washed only their bodies, rarely the tiles and flagstones of their more or less slovenly interiors. Was that because of the heat? But he had heard also about certain rather filthy tropical peoples. Could it have had something to do with the omnipresent sexual obsession? Be that as it may, forest-prospectors had told him about the impossibility of camping very far from one of the numberless watercourses. Deprived of their baths, their ragged woodsmen would have revolted.

The Corcovado Books weren't doing too badly. Not well enough to allow him to quit his job at the French Embassy. Anyway, for the time being, it would have been pointless. The French didn't overload him and the connection was by no means useless. Quite the contrary. Down there in the garden stood a sign of his relative prosperity. An old Studebaker was relaxing under the trees. He used it only rarely, for commuting to the city. It was almost as dubious a pleasure as driving his jeep too close to barrage-fire. Then, however, he had been able to find ditches to hide in. But here nothing protected the motorist from the natives' frenzy.

Every morning, at both sides of the twenty-five kilometres long, picturesque run into Rio, you could admire at least a dozen new monuments to the dangerous life. All sorts of wrecks were to be seen: telescoped cars, others wrapped around the luxuriant vegetation and still others with their noses settled on the counters of shops and banks, the iron curtain fronts

of which had proved too frail. Trophies telling of flat-spins and loops executed with amazing virtuosity. He preferred the "mini-buses". While riding in them, heroic participation in the struggle against traffic-lights was unnecessary. A little fatalism would do. The driver was always an artist. Fag-end stuck to the corner of his mouth (impassive, sombre face of an astronaut) he would make his vehicle dance like a hysterical rat between the borders of large avenues, overtaking on the wrong side, invading pavements and pedestrian islands, spreading heart ailments in his wake. Sometimes he would brake dramatically, creating zones of weightlessness where marvelling passengers fluttered. ("Go and complain to the goddess Yamandja! By the god Ogun, who is my guide: a word more and I'll ditch all of you! Caramba! Without intending to fail in the courtesy I owe your Lordships - what a bunch of clods and heathen! Did you expect me to run over that poor innocent dog who might well be one of my late relatives reincarnated, or for that matter even one of your own illustrious ancestors! Now kindly shut up, I beseech you, because I am a very sensitive and touchy person!"). In spite of certain hidden but quite bewildering features, it would have taken a frightful prig to dislike them.

3

He felt a kind of sweet anxiety inside his thorax. Like a hesitating bow, brushing lightly over strained strings: the nerves that connected lungs, heart, the abdominal region and its ruler: the diaphragm. He was anticipating the nervous effort. The three-dimensional colour film which auto-hypnosis would soon show him.

Later he would get back to the present less spooky world, although with the joyous feeling of having changed it just a little. And the source of this power was in him, somewhere around the spinal column. The brain emitted perceptible waves only when plugged to the battery of boiling sexual energies.

Often before, he had guessed the omnipresence of that secret. Sometimes he had felt its dark presence. Then again, he might have used it unconsciously. But it was only here, while dissecting the hermetic teaching of the Quimbanda, that he came to understand what it was really about, and to what heights it led. The Quimbanda was a numerically tiny sect, although cursed and feared by the multitude of spiritualist chapels, "Umbanda" clans and other theosophical boy-scouts of Brazil. Its fate was obviously : to overcome shallow wishy-washy rivals or to be diluted, dissolved in them.

Its Satan-King Exù-of-the-Seven-Crossroads was neither more nor less diabolic than the late Prometheus. The fire he brought (not to mankind: just to a few capable, chosen ones) was the idea of diverting the current of sexuality away from the production of gloomy generations destined to a cheerless future. The current had to be used otherwise. To infuse into this life's living blood the elixir of reconquered Paradise.

What gave birth to the ecstasies of the mystics? Why this breathless stammering whenever they tried to describe their visions of divinity? Had the firebrand of their passions been inflamed by the excellence of the principles laid down in the Ten Commandments? Was the Saint's delirium purely spiritual? Why not keep such tales for moderately bright children? When, he wondered, when will we be spared such purely (or dirtily) spiritual fables? The only motor of powerful imaginations - all the glorious visions - is nourished by an overflowing sexual current, be it sublimated or repressed. Therefore: glory to Exù the King, who may be a devil but certainly not a fool.

First and foremost: the Lord of the Lower Regions did not demand any asceticism of his initiate. They were free to eat, drink and waste their energies as they pleased. Now and then there were periods of Ascension. These began whenever the devil's disciples chose, and they could stop them as soon as they wished to do so. However, this source of power, this expansion of the senses, this unity with delightful beings, was so intoxicating that the privileged felt compelled to return to it more and more often. That is: the called and chosen ones reacted thus. As to the others: not even by sticking their noses into it could they have been made to see what it was all about.

It was also an exacting sport which demanded a great deal of self-control. However it had nothing to do with chastity and still less with coitus interruptus. For had the admission fee been as low as that, there would nowadays be more sorcerers than motor cars around, threatening the security of the public.

He thought back to Livia whom he had left just before dawn. She was a lovely girl, with a figure a shade too ripe for her twenty-four years. As a matter of fact she had been married for three years until the somewhat odd death of her lord and master, in the chair of an Argentine dentist they had both befriended.

Anyway, as a widow, she was outside the strict rules of Iberian modesty. Remnants of these still applied to young girls. But the quite numerous "desquitadas" - separated women (for only a sort of half-divorce existed under Brazilian law) - were free to follow all their inclinations. Rich as she was, Livia could scoff at the rules. She trampled merrily over the laws of this world and the next. Her fearless nature and her cutting, rather defiant mind had brought her, in ten years, from the benches of the Notre Dame de Sion's convent-school to the dignity of a "yalorixa", a chief priestess to the black cult. During the ritual she represented Pomba-Gira, the spouse of the six Exùs. (For this demonology was much more complicated than Catholic theology. Instead of a Holy Trinity, there was a ... what should it be called?... an Infernal Sevenness. Six male devils and their lawful wife - represented in the ceremonies by Gordan's woman - coexisted peacefully and democratically: seven persons with equal rights forming a unique Royal Satanity.)

Her skin's whiteness was one of the "terreiro's" sensations. Pure Whites and Blacks are relatively seldom seen in Brazil. A thousand and one shades of coffee-and-milk, of bronze and even brass (or gold?) are the usual colours. The red blobs splashed on her white skin (the blood of holocausts, not hers, oh no!) regrouped into astonishing abstract pictures when she danced. He would have found this disgusting as well as childish, but for his understanding the sense of it. The blood did not serve the purposes of sadistic or pornographic exhibition, but was meant to horrify the performer herself. Untouched depths had to tremble to enable her to soar up to visions which the eyes of an unperturbed spirit would never behold. For Livia was not just a priestess. Whenever the devil's spouse felt like it, she would "descend" on Livia to incarnate herself in that hospitable white body. And that was at least as credible as the Divinity's presence in a bakery product.

The burning and icy showers of lust and horror were the keys which set free the forces of the beyond.

Had he not, with his partner Tiberio, paid visits to specialised hags, known to be capable of causing sickness and even killing at a distance? (In this connection he had observed facts which seemed more or less convincing.) At one of those loathsome practitioners' places, he had discovered a revealing collection. Amongst other things, in a hole under flagstones: a very thick, remarkably ugly baffle-frog. Then a glass jar with purplish-blue leeches. There, swimming in a

brownish liquid, was the mistreated statuette of the distant patient. And of course there were also idols and phallic objects. Seeing them and smelling the traces of ether and aphrodisiac incense, he guessed that all these instruments were rather harmless. Nor did the frog or the leeches, still less the statuette, transmit any kind of hertzian waves through the ether. It was the witch's nervous system that needed a corner of reality to hook her imagination onto, to excite herself, to hurl herself into a swirl of delirium. And that such delirium, such a maddened brain, had something in common with a fatal whirlwind that strikes from afar: that was a quite different kind of idea. That he could believe.

And then Gordan remembered his own experiences. He knew that whenever he dreamt passionately and clearly of a person, his message was received even at great distances.

Many questions remained unanswered. Why did the fusion of sweetness and cruelty release such tremendous energies from the spirit's nuclear reactor? Idle question. It had always been so. He had examples before his eyes. The most venerable ones? In any case, the most venerated ones. These, for instance.

5

He opened the second file, not without some hesitation taking from it one of the loose scraps covered with his most illegible scrawl. It was some sort of personal stenography which said: "I received a head in my hands and at the same moment I felt a joy, a sweetness which the heart could not have conceived nor the lips expressed." "Who is this monster?"

St. Catherine of Sienna wrote it, after the execution of a very young criminal to whose conversion that glorious soul had devoted the days previous. And in order to pre-empt the usual drivel about metaphorical phrases malevolently isolated from a purely ethereal, angelical context, note that she goes on raving:

"My soul relished such a deep peace in the perfume of his blood that I would not allow the least drop of those which had gushed on me from his wound to be removed."

The frenzy of morbid sensuality? Sure. But with the beatific vision at the other end.

And St. Theresa of Avila, in ecstasy under her little angel, belabouring her bosom with a sharp instrument, just as Bernini sculpted her, following the description of the happy victim? And St. John of the Cross, the sublime poet of the "Noche Oscura", is transfigured into a bride, poetically but also realistically raped on a perfumed bed of night-flowers. And the contemplation of imaginary floods of sacred blood (as it was practised around him during the three years of his adolescence, spent in a Jesuit school) depicted with frightful vividness. And the cross (simply a tool of Roman torture), adored for two thousand years. Not to speak of its by-products, such as the Inquisition and a dozen large-scale slaughters of all sorts of heretics. Well then, surveying all these sanguinary lunacies: two conclusions arose.



In the first place, the affirmations of the Holy Ghost's bureaucrats - that their history differs fundamentally from other magic tales, the Christian's having an absolute monopoly on divinity - is addressed to the united feeble-minded of the earth. The preachifying about the guaranteed spiritual purity of Christianity's champions spread such a pestilential smell of bad faith that only a string of well-chosen Yugoslav curses could answer them appropriately.

In the second place it became clear that the wrong-doings of the Quimbanda (or rather of one of its hidden cells) were Kindergarten-games compared to the ghoulish excesses camouflaged behind Glorious Churches.

As to Livia, in spite of her predilection for Black Masses, it must be noted that only goats' blood was being sprinkled over her and that so far, nobody had observed her playing basket-ball with the heads of decapitated friends. Of course she played extravagant games, but these were quite pleasant and never deadly.

6

He glanced at his waterproof wristwatch. It was a useful thing to have. Dampness penetrated everywhere. After a couple of days, stowed-away shoes and portmanteaus were covered with a thin, greenish layer of mould.

It was six. The fifteen minutes he had given to the spirits to be kind enough to state their exact purposes were over. That distant brown speck had grown. (Was it a bit of ectoplasm? The proton of a dead soul's substance? Or just the push-cart of an early-rising lemonade peddler?)

He went for the cachaça bottle which stood waiting behind the door. (The scotch whiskey, also close at hand, was to be ignored. Exù preferred this infamous, burning, devastating poison.)

Sitting back, he took a couple of gulps. This was no pleasure. It had become a necessity. The drugs, the roots, the mushrooms were just for the messengers. The master's only fuel was cachaça. Heroic doses of it, naturally. The drink had little effect. In this the climate helped. Days and nights of perspiration eliminated toxins very quickly. Besides, Danubians were used to heavy drinking. Gordan lifted the bottle again.

Warmth spread through his empty stomach. He felt as if his eyes were widening in some weird way, absorbing much more light than a second before. The pub at the corner, facing the deceased cock, had opened in the meantime. Brownish fishermen with naked legs entered it in groups. They went there in order to "shut off their bodies" from the dangers of the sea. With cachaça, of course. This was really an alcoholic's land. "There's nothing wrong with that" muttered Gordan with a smug expression, as he squeezed and relaxed his diaphragm repeatedly, following a rhythm that would soon stun him. At the same time he began to paint, behind his closed eyelids, the moving picture which he would take with him into the depth of sleep.

But it was still too early, he thought, raising his head, which was becoming heavy. Was he not exaggerating, doing too much? There was no point in these mental acrobatics. Why should he lie to himself about that brown thing at the beach? It was useless to generate artificial curiosity, a feverish expectation of some unknown marvel. Why? One side of his head knew perfectly well what it was. No need to strain his energies. That thing on the beach was just a safety-device, a secondary relay. The big show would not be here and now. But it would take place within two hours, up there at Pedro's. It was minutely prepared and timed. Post-hypnotic orders are carried out with a precision recalling certain sleepers, able to wake up at any hour they choose before going to bed.

The best part of the work had been done the night before last, when, along with Tiberio, after that "baptism", they had magnetised the two dazed women.

One of them was precisely that brown thing down there. Nothing very sensational about that. It was the same medium, approaching, moving in a silly way, crawling, dragging half her body over the sand and the other half in the shallow water. Certainly the girl was even now sleeping with open eyes. She was coming to bring him (even in her present form as an unconscious puppet) that corner of reality which he needed - just like the witch - to embed his imagination in. She would also convey to him the help of those phantoms that arose from the brains of cataleptic dreamers. He searched his memory for her name. Teodora. A "crioula", a quadroon. Not a beauty: nor ugly. Sturdy, muscular, without an ounce of fat. He had seen her before that night at Tiberio's. But where? He could not yet discern her face, she was too far away. At the "terreiro" she had been just one blurred shadow among a lot of others.

7

Yet, she had been at the terreiro where they had prepared her for this. When? This confusion of time levels was irritating. He had to straighten it out. Well, of course, the prologue of today's show had been performed the night before last. ("More precision, please!") O.K. After the baby-satan's christening. (And?) And after a bit of witch-sabbath-recreation. ("Let's bet you don't remember the sequel too clearly.") Ah, but I do. Here.

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She had been lying on her back half-covered by shadows, and the first things he became aware of were the still, naughty, massive breast. The eyes were gazing emptily, as they probably were now. Her long hair was knotted to someone else's, of a lighter shade. It belonged to Pedro's wife Lily. She must be anxiously waiting by now. Up there, behind the pub, under the cupolas and friezes of the stunning "palacete".

So, the two women were lying in the gloom, their heads together, their bodies forming a straight line.

Lily was tall. In tennis shoes she stood a little above Gordan's five feet ten. Very much an athlete she was, too. From her Danish father came the nose of some vikingish bird of prey, a broad face with a formidable jaw which clashed with the only contribution of her Brazilian mother: large black eyes of a suspicious sweetness.

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Gordan's finger-tips waver around Teodora's temple. Sensing a motion in front of him, he peers through the flickering shadows. What he sees in his partner's hand gives him a start. He gets up. (He has always mistrusted the unannounced improvisations of his learned friend.) This looks worse than fishy.

An unusually long and thick hairpin materialises between Tiberio's fingers. Is the wizard stark crazy?

He seems to heat the pin-points at the flame of one of those candles, planted inside the holes of the Unnameable. He has no fear of poisonous bites.

When his hand with the silk handkerchief, holding the safe bit of the pin, reappears, the points are red.

The slender figure of the Hollywood-gigolo monkeys around, playful as ever, simulating a few steps of some grotesque dance. Then he stops and bends over the helpless dreamers at his feet. Gordan's legs are heavy, imprisoned in some non-existent swamp.

Is there an icy gleam of horror in the motionless eyes of the victim? Like a voiceless howl. Just a flash of rebellious life instinct, fading into the blindness of slavery.

The hell-points stab. The frozen eyes, are they pierced? No. It is a feint. Like lightning the pin plunges into the bushy knot of hair.

Is the commander of the underground forces performing the part of a mundane hair-stylist? He would be good at it. With the thick, glistening gold-chain and the heavy Swiss watch at his nimble wrist! He pushes and twists and turns the pin as if it were a hair-iron. He hops around the subdued heads, mumbling inept orders about snakes that have to change their skins.

Then Gordan holds his breath. The sight before him makes his cramped solar plexus sink. His cortex stops vibrating. The overly charming mulatto goes on with his conjuration by himself while his white partner is awe-struck.

To hell with his own sarcastic grimacing when confronted with preposterous rituals. If they are able to achieve this ... then they have ceased to be ridiculous. Gordan is eyewitness to an exchange of personalities. To the passage of two sensibilities - yes, of two spirits, from one body into another.

Tiberio pricks Teodora's thigh. She does not react. It is Lily who winces and whose untouched thigh contracts. The sorcerer belabours the soles of Lily's feet: it is Teodora who moans trying to free her ankle from nobody's grip.

There is more to come. Tiberio extends his palm over Lily like a saint blessing the waters. The Viking girl should dance like a puppet, attached to the wizard's magnetic strings. This time she doesn't react. But Teodora's belly dances, her hips twist in a frenzy.

Exù's ambassador shifts his hands over Teodora. Immediately she falls quietly asleep. Now it's the turn of Lily's belly and hips to jerk savagely, uncontrollably.

If nervous reactions, tactile sensation, motive energies, can be transfused into another living receptacle, then almost anything else must be possible as well. Lily can be freed of her aggressively mannish, maybe murderous nature. (Although the latter point was more likely than not, just a hysterical yarn, and she had probably never run a blade through the body of a peasant arsonist.) Anyhow, her wish could be fulfilled, she could be drained of her frustrated, unhappy character loaded with universal hate (as she complained herself) by injecting into her Teodora's docile femininity. If this could be done, it would be the unquestionable proof of the soul's independence from the body where it quite accidentally dwells. It would also mean a couple of bright years for Pedro.

Thus, nursing these two gratifying ideas, one of a possibly cosmic impact, the other less vertiginous, but still pleasant, Gordan gives himself up to the contemplation of nature's beauties. Shadows are becoming dark blue. Glow-worms glide through them like nut-sized burning emeralds. The scent of night-flowers (recalling a sort of super-jasmine) float over the clearing. Only Tiberio, whistling a gay samba under his breath, crouching beside his pupil like a black question mark, seems somehow to hinder the descent of absolute harmony.

It was possibly this presence which awakened dissonant thoughts in our exotic fellow-traveller's mulish head. Were these women really unable to see Tiberio's manipulations? How deep was their sleep? How far could hysterical mimicry go? Did the witches of the past sincerely believe they were flying through the air, riding on brooms?

Why should such people cheat - even themselves ? Because performing supernatural roles, high up in the kingdom of the spirits, must seem enormously attractive to conceited and oppressed people. Of course, states of genuine, complete catalepsy were also known. But there the investigation clashed with still more impervious problems.

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He pulled himself together, trying to regain a more impartial view. Surely, exaggerated distrust must be as fruitless as ready credulity. He had to keep his too rigid controls under control. Otherwise he would never be able to oust monsters or crush dragons. (For even if these should prove entirely psychological dragons, they were nevertheless very nasty.)

Nor could he hope, if weakened by too much scepticism, to exorcise an entire convent of Benedictine nuns, in whose midst Exù-of-the-Seven-Crossroads (always the same!) has had the shocking idea of setting up his quarters.

Above all he had also to think of his urgent mystically financial (or financially mystical?) program. So he concentrated again on nature, glow-worms and flowers. He particularly admired the latter because they were invisible but still so manifestly present in the perfumed air.

## CHAPTER IV

Six and a quarter hours. Still a lot of time left. Enough to think over his latest ups and downs. Too many incoherent lines crossed each other. Most came from vaudeville, but others recalled lugubrious Greek tragedies. ("Well, perhaps not Greek ones, but still ...").

One of his impersonators, who might have been a success in a musical comedy, came from the alley-way and turned respectfully around the deceased white cock and its trimmings. Pedro de Azevedo Lima e Albuquerque was taking an early walk along the empty beach. Luckily he was heading away from Teodora who was wallowing still at a distance of five or six hundred metres.

Presumably, the post-impressionist was too impressed with the impending magic operation to protract his not entirely innocent dreams. How on earth had this marriage with the Danish girl come about at all? A still deeper mystery: how had it lasted almost seven years?

Lily had been just thirty, Pedro more than twice that age. This was not a disaster in itself. But then Pedro, when seen from afar at his wife's side, looked very much like a ten year old underdeveloped schoolboy. Still worse was the incompatibility of their characters.

The tiny painter, with his white goatee (which somehow recalled Don Quixote), with his sparkling, mischievous black eyes, had kept about him, along with its irremovable accessories (béret basque, pipe, espadrilles, slangy accentless French twang) something of the carelessness of the Montparnasse Bohemians in whose midst he had spent twenty of his best years.

("Modigliani? Yes. I knew him well. An Italian Jew, plastered most of the time. Nothing to write home about ... Except that ... well, he was a genius ... whereas me ... alas, a lamentable dauber ... yes, you understand: someone who smears

daubs all over perfectly guiltless canvases ... right ... but then, I am still alive, which is something, just the same... Yet, if you knew... Gr-gr-great master of demons and tennis-cannon-balls ... my dear Paul Gordan, friend and protector of lonely Learns ...if you ... or anybody could understand what my life is like!").

And this fine old boy with his warm heart had daily to face the frosty contempt of the Monumental Danish Cow. (Gordan had invented this secret nickname following not only his inborn arrogance but also a highly logical deduction. Lily's father's profession makes it wholly clear. This respectable exile from northern pastures manufactured widely-known cheeses, appreciated all over Brazil. And his trade-mark as well as his ubiquitous labels, showed the features of a self-conscious, cultured European cow.) The too Nordic love-object answered Pedro's radiant cordiality with the stupid disdain of a particularly unsociable iceberg.

What was in her mind while listening to the wedding bells, seven years ago? Maybe she had begun, even then, to feel herself a spinster, isolated as she was by her secret loathing of men. Snobbery might have been another explanation. To leave the sphere of dairy production for the palace of one of the exceedingly rare (even if outdated and miniaturised) specimens of authentic Brazilian aristocracy must have flattered her. Nor was it unthinkable that her assessment of this sexagenarian's boiling vitality should have been altogether faulty. She would look forward to an easy-going conjugal life, followed (at not too long notice) by a distinguished widowhood. It would have been even more prosperous than her youth, spent under the sign of the cheese.

Few, if any, expectations had ever been more cruelly disappointed. Pedro's love of Lily could have been symbolically depicted as a volcano's fiery eruptions. Undoubtedly, there was also some kind of a Freudian fixation. For this noble but frustrated husband (who was of course thirsting for human sympathy) resumed, as often as circumstances would possibly permit, the same melancholy tale. His powerful virility, once enviable (here followed details worthy of an epic poet's harp) betrayed him everywhere outside the matrimonial chamber. Alas, he met, precisely at this privileged place, with a more than evasive reception.

("One evening, more than two years ago, she threw my clothes out into the corridor, thundering 'Get out of here, you dirty old depraved ape, and don't dare show your sickening, lewd face here again, if you don't want to swallow this! I'm keeping it specially for you!' Yes, believe it or not, she still always has within her reach one of those disgusting, long, thin butcher's knives which, in the country, they call 'mata porco' - swine-killer! Ever since I've been so scared that I live in the housekeeper's pavilion: little better than a kennel! In my own house! Oh well, in our house. Yes, because I have been such an idiot that I married her under the law of co-ownership! I assure you that up there, at my place, everybody has a much greater regard for Monsieur Anatole than for me!!").

At this very moment (much as if he had somehow, perhaps telepathically, read Gordan's thoughts) Monsieur Anatole in person emerged from the alley-way. With an unconcerned and sceptical look he examined the departed cock. The odour of the fag-ends, and particularly of the cachaça (for he was one of Brazil's few teetotallers) must have shocked him, for he proceeded to make one of his characteristic gestures, demonstrating a total disregard for public opinion. After short reflection, he began to piss attentively all over the magical display. Then, leaving the scene of his misdeed without haste he joined Pedro, who had stopped close at hand, brooding over something, puffing away nervously on his pipe. Having inspected the pockets of the painter's faded blue linen trousers, and having noticed the non-availability of peanuts (of

which he could never get enough) Monsieur Anatole seated himself at the edge of the beach (concealing his disappointment, but marking his principled disapproval of all sorts of tobacco with an irritated sneeze), at Pedro's side, turning towards him his pointed ear, eager for gossip. This attitude was by no means a manifestation of friendship (his character being as stand-offish as an English peer's) but rather of the pleasure he felt whenever he had the opportunity of receiving confidential communications and listening to discourses about basic human problems. He did so with a lofty mien, although betraying glimmers of genuine scientific interest.

Judging by the motions of the pipe and of the mouth where it stuck, the temptation of harping on his favourite topics (in front of a sympathetic audience) had once more proved irresistible to the playmate of Van Dongen and Kiki de Montparnasse.

He must have rambled on something like this: (all in beautiful French, because the newcomer seemed to have taken a fancy to this language) - "My compliments Monsieur Anatole! How nice to meet you so early in the morning. Ah, mais! Nom d'un nom d'un nom! What a pity.. ...I am telling you ... you know that I am free of racial prejudices... ...and say so with all the respect due to your national identity... However ... what a pity you are a dog!"

At this point in the lecture, Monsieur Anatole must (as he often did) have given the orator a haughty and slightly ironical looking-over. He obviously preferred his own standing as a superb wolf-hound (entirely black, however, by some moral slip of his forefathers), his young, sturdy two-and-a-half year old manhood, as well as the general respect he enjoyed, to the existence of a talkative oldster, who was visibly mediocre in his art and, all told, a little grotesque.

Moreover, Monsieur Anatole was a genius amongst dogs. It is from this angle that we should observe his ulterior interventions in the field of parapsychology. They are fated to turn out even more spectacular than his above-depicted demonstration. Therefore, a short analysis of this far from banal personality appears useful and promises enlightenment.

Although bottle-fed, during his early childhood, by Pedro, Monsieur Anatole was nobody's dog. For instance: he refused doggedly to answer to his name when it was not preceded by the accustomed honorary title. He used to take his meals at the 'palacete', accepting the eager attentions of the servants with good grace, reserving himself, however, a total independence in organising his daily routine. His absences were sometimes a little enigmatic. It was assumed, however, that he dedicated most of his time to researches about the life-style of neighbours, beachcombers and even far-away city dwellers.

The essential point was that Monsieur Anatole knew how to speak. That is: he loved to participate in conversations, in the various neighbouring drawing-rooms he was accustomed to visit. His attitude there was invariably the same. Half-standing, his elbows on the back of a chair, he scanned everybody around him. As soon as one of the other guests opened his mouth he would meet the concentrated, sparkling gaze, longing for knowledge, of this dignified black intruder. His "gr-gr-gr" and his "hum-bum-nrum", articulated as polysyllabic words, were now and then bored (he sometimes yawned noisily), then again, they were approving or manifested doubts or a discreet hilarity. But as a rule these remarks were placed quite pertinently and fitted into the context of the discussion.

He seemed to be aware, undoubtedly due to his own deductions, of the advisability of ontological speculations. (Pedro: "A genuine philosopher, he!").

Thus he awaited, sitting in the centre of the courtyard (and having a manifest knowledge of the time-tables), the passing of the planes (in those times still infrequent) to and from Sao Paulo. His nose, aimed at the sky, slowly followed their flight. Afterwards he stayed there for a long time, his head hanging, lost in thought, obviously trying to define the essentials of these strange beings so distinct from lower-flying and less noisy birds.

Therefore Gordan was not particularly surprised to observe their departure from the stage, with Pedro wildly gesticulating and exposing the situation to Monsieur Anatole. He would scarcely have been astonished had he seen them walking, arm in arm, along the street.

3

Exeunt Pedro & Co. from left to right behind the house. What was it the old fellow so eagerly wanted to impress on his four-legged counsellor? Undoubtedly something out of the same limited repertoire (maybe with variations) which he used to recite for the benefit of his two-legged confidential agent.

("Can you believe it Paulo!? She settled that loathsome old kitchenmaid in the midst of my art collections! What? Yes ... right ...but what I'm talking about is her cultural level ... I don't mean her family background which is ... well ... tolerable ... To think that she's capable of worshipping such a repugnant monster!! Wanda! the boss of the Merry Crocodile! I'm sure she cast an evil spell ... do you agree? Well, of course, such things are less frequent in France than here ... but they are commonplace in our family histories ... look ... my own grand-uncle the Viscount of Djurudjuba had his member knotted ... yes, by the maleficence of a fiendish sorcerer ... and it has been rumoured that the same misfortune befell his Imperial Majesty ... whence, naturally, the decline of the dynasty ... Of course I'm sure ... These things are with us ... since a number of noteworthy, yes, even distinguished persons, vouch for them, how could there be any serious doubt whatsoever ... ah, but ... how stupid of me ... he-he-he! I am explaining this ... to you ... he-he-he ... to you! I'm convinced: you must have been a Brazilian in a former life ... Everybody talks about your gifts... everybody knows everything about you ... à propos ....tell me, if you may ... how did you manage to cure the old lady Sampaio - don't try to bluff me, my dear boy ... you know her as well as I do ... The old girl who owns the Sampaio Café Ltd. ... how did you cure her of that persistent public incontinency ... such an awkward thing at solemn ceremonies... so? so? Tiberio did it alone? ... yes, but you with him ... you two form a single astral person ... a famous clairvoyante has told me so ... well then: what about my business? I do understand ... how well I understand ... that it is an intricate case ... by all means ... we must proceed by easy stages ... gradually ... sure, that makes sense... but could you not, after all ... since you are capable of charming even horses ... what? what? only Tiberio does that? Tiberio again... I don't believe you, you are too unassuming ... I'm asking you: who would ever touch Tiberio with a barge pole, were it not for your sponsorship... Who the hell is he anyway? Probably a retired "capanga", a professional killer, from Alagoas ... that's their principal trade, up there ... Bah, Alagoas is more than two thousand kilometres from here, so who cares ... but without you he would never be a regular visitor to the Jockey Club advising the sportsmen ... ha-ha-ha! How cynical you are mon cher gr-gr-grand maître ... I know he's some kind of father-confessor to the jockeys ... to the real ones I mean ... ha-ha-ha ... good, good ... so he has more inside information than the horses themselves ... ha-ha ... but you should not poke fun at such serious things... you should know that better than anybody ... but you two ... as you are Siamese twins in the Realm of the Spirits ... joining your powers ... why don't you do still another job, but a quick one, for me? Oh, if only you could change that execrable Wanda into a real crocodile... no! no! wait!... into something else ... into a cockroach! ... so I could crush her under my espadrilles... like this! like this! What do you think??").



Never, never would Gordan have done such a thing! He recalled Wanda Correa da Costa, a fortyish widow, petite and slender like Pedro, still attractive, with her Roman nose, her pale, somehow threatening face which resembled a certain portrait of Cesare Borgia (without the beard of course, but as to that there were some painful problems which will be elucidated, however, in the course of this report).

Remembering her, he felt a slight shudder, this time without metaphysical causes. It was just that this ... it was just that that... well, it was just that Wanda Correa de Costa also happened to be a customer of Gordan's. As well as Lily. This was one of the supernatural vaudeville's plots. ("One of these days I shall be caught in my own cobweb. Look out, Gordan! She needs to be microscopically analysed, she does, that worthy Wanda!").

She was planting sugar cane ("Comme tout le monde qui se respecte") and owned numerous stills. In them she manufactured a celebrated rotgut - the bottles of which were adorned with the portrait of the above-mentioned amphibious creature - while partaking of the joys of alcoholism.

However the "mother of the crocodile" (as Pedro used to call her in his endless indictments) by no means usurped or ever exercised the rights of a despotic pater familias over Lily. Nor was she the vile seductress, entirely fabricated by post-impressionist imagination. Wanda had some absolutely censurable propensities. In this case though, she was, for once, nothing but an innocent victim.

It was Lily who launched (after a couple of weary years at Pedro's side) the social attack that had turned their first meeting into a close friendship and quite soon into a fiery idyll, evoking that of Tristan and Isolde. (Although suggesting a somewhat less sublime version of it.)

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There was a small and very dirty notebook in one of his dossiers that could have been - but fortunately was not - inscribed with a proud title like: Gordan's Aphorisms.

Somehow he felt he had wonderfully succeeded in clarifying Wanda's and Lily's case, capturing it in a few penetrating words, which were not devoid of his usual literary virtues. He was unaware of a heading, written with invisible ink, by a ghost coming from a future extension of the time-space continuum. Together with other mysteries, this one will also be unveiled in an appropriate paragraph of the present disclosures, The heading said:

## THUS SPAKE ZARATHUSTRA'S ASS

But luckily Gordan could not see this denigration of his thoughts and of their elegant expression. So he went on revelling in his creations and in the light they shed on those complex customers:

"Alas, humans are unable to avoid the trap of contradictory longings. Their denials and self-delusions are vanity. The silent dilemma: Master? slave? - never stops flickering, like some diffuse, venomous phosphorenee, through the gloomy caverns where passions are born."

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After two years filled with the most tumultuous effusions, Lily got tired of being relentlessly idolised. However, it was the natural bent of their relationship which had led to this state of things. Were the roots of their passion merely corporeal? Did they just come from the contrasts of Lily's majestic shape, towering over her partner's fragile figure which called to mind Tanagra statuettes? There were certainly more and deeper causes. (Wanda: "Oh, your magnificent hands! My beautiful mistress! You lovely girl with a man's hands! Oh!").

As often happens, Lily's titanic facade hid unexpected, discordant counterpoints. Within her dwelt, among other things, a meek, childish soul and its fervent wish for self-sacrifice, devotion, submission to an overpowering master.

Of course, the mind boggles trying to guess what such an overwhelming master would look like. Undoubtedly like some sort of youthful Jack Dempsey, but much bigger. Let us say he would measure - as it is easier to imagine them together along horizontal lines - at least two metres in length and not much less in breadth. Or else, maybe, Lily would put up with a merely spiritual superiority. In that case the Swiss sovereign of the Two Cemeteries Island would be a perfect solution. Homicidal mania was their common point of understanding. The only trouble with Ingrid Ehrhard (which was the name of the island-prophetess) was that this hobby could hardly be just the raving of a sick imagination. It really seemed to be more than that. Rumour had it that la Ehrhard had already - at least once - realised her heart's desire. But then she would certainly not harm a docile disciple. Therefore she could safely take her place as a link in the chain of Lily's transformations, at the end of which, Pedro's long wait might be rewarded.

In the meantime, Lily - surrounded by a sempiternal cloud of incense, burnt by a perpetually adoring Wanda - felt growing frustrations. She had senseless fits of anger. They worried her, and she was unable to grasp their real causes.

(The plasticity of these people had never ceased to stupefy "Paulo". Tastes and characters changed uncannily, like in some wild, raving version of the Midsummer Night's Dream. Contrary to indignant denials, bisexuality flourished. A glance at the carnival processions and at their many scabrous travesties banished any doubt about that.)

So, Wanda, all things considered, was by no means Tristan and still less Isolde. It was an altogether different play. Wanda did not lack energy, even aggressive drive. Yet not enough to stand up against the unleashed storms of a Viking temperament. Lily's jealousy was so ferocious that the inventress of enlivening drinks had begun to tremble secretly for her life. Her tastes were manifold. But she dared not follow them any more. To fulfill the multiplicity of her dreams, the only way still open to her was the contemplation of Pedro's lavish as well as spicy art collections, which surrounded her implacably, like the walls of some Amazon prison tower. Torn between an adoring devotion to Lily and the desire to get the hell out of her reach, one part of Wanda's aspirations was closer to Pedro's deepest wishes than either of them could have guessed. Here was a good point for Gordan.

And there was still another one. Lily herself had reached a stage in her "sado-maso" evolution where she was not so sure any more what she actually wanted.

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(Is there a more confusing cruelty than the joke about the sadist and the masochist? The maso: "Oh please, torture me!" The sadist: "What an idea! I couldn't think of it!").

Be that as it may, the threads of the plot became tangled. All the actors would gladly have deserted the theatre. They were paralysed by the inertia of habits, by the fear of some shocking crisis and by an incapacity to grasp the meaning of what was happening to them. To end this deadlock, it seemed imperative to recommend to the spirits thorough and expeditious action.

6

But they are really taking their time, he said to himself, squinting at the beach. Teodora, their special envoy, had made little progress. As far as could be seen from this observatory, she propelled herself with both hands, beating the shallow dying waves with her feet. Like some slightly idiotic child, teaching herself, with stubborn zeal, how to swim.

(A good thing it was July. For the autochtons this was winter at its severest. The quicksilver would hardly climb above twenty-five centigrade. Even later, few people would venture to the beach.)

Her twisting was liturgically correct. That is, she obeyed the post-hypnotic orders. But something was wrong with Gordan himself. Why couldn't he get her into focus? What twinkled there, around her head? Was it a mirage? Quite possible. Blinding reflections came from everywhere.

(In front of him: a flock of white islets, emitting a silvery glow. At his right, on a small hill: three imperial palm trees - huge exclamation marks. They seemed to quiver. Masses of hot air streamed upwards. Also the bulky cones of the Twins, higher even than the Emperor's Table, swayed behind blueish vapours.)

Where did this muffled rumbling come from? Was it far off or inside his skull? Could it be, all of a sudden, the much-feared short-circuit of nerves, the clash of irreconcilable wishes and wills? Did he "Want to see and do what he did not want to see and do"? (if however he had grasped the correct meaning of that Jungian psychiatrist's foggy sentence.)

He recalled a face which reminded him of a horse. There was also a voice to it. Pompous, irresistibly grotesque. Both belonged to Silbermann, the psychiatrist. Well, it was just one of that man's aspects. An eloquent, dignified, preaching horse. Gordan's silent laughter chased away the clouds of new-born phantasms which were forming all around him. Let them wait for their turn. Just half an hour. Other, more disturbing thoughts, came to him.

7

Of course, our contemplative acquaintance began, thereupon, to think about the "coming of thoughts". He remembered having put down, for posterity's sake, some astonishingly deep idea related to the subject. So he opened the aforementioned slovenly notebook, finding immediately his aphorism but still unaware of its omnipresent, unearthly title. Consequently, from now on, whenever we detect traces of the above-deplored disrespectful remark, smuggled from outer space into this chronicle, we will disguise it, together with our deep indignation, under a practically unbreakable code, sealed to all save a few exceptionally shrewd decipherers. Like this:

THS SPK ZRTHSTR'S SS!

"Could we but measure the thought's speed! Swifter than the light, it flashes through worlds, within fractions of a second."

8

Why was the trade in fire-arms and daggers so widespread in this land? Not a security problem, though murders seemed no more frequent here than elsewhere. Gordan had seen less idyllic places. He dealt in arms himself, now and again. By means of the Chevrolet truck, co-owned with Tiberio (one of their various associations), they did some business with "fazendeiros" - planters - scattered over the endless surface of the "interior". Under the cover of harmless transports they swapped automatic guns, whisky and French perfume for jaguar - and ocelot - skins. (Of course, the driver-salesman skimmed the profits, but you couldn't do everything yourself.)

It was not this trade, nor the omnipresent guns which intrigued him. Was it perhaps the weird, almost amorous relationship of the Brazilians to their fire-crackers?

(Here: across the front page. The picture of the President getting into an aeroplane, waving graciously to his admirers. His jacket of Irish linen is unbuttoned, showing what he wears at his belt. It looks like (and obviously is) a Smith and Wesson, .38 long barrel, certainly loaded with "carga tripla" bullets - the popular name for the magnum. Nobody would have second thoughts about that. As little as about his tie or his wedding ring.)

Gordan grinned and whistled. It was really a miracle they didn't march around killing each other even more diligently. A murderer just had to take one of those motor-barges which crossed the bay every thirty minutes. On the other shore he stepped into a different Federal State. There he could enjoy absolute liberty up to the end of the often endless, convoluted extradition proceedings, demanded by the constitution. For this was a free country, inhabited and governed by punctilious lawyers.

All of this was rather comical, with slightly macabre undertones. The same could be said about their infatuation with guns. But there was something more intricate behind it. There was an old, confidential correlation between these people and killing which astonished the Franco-Slav. This attitude differed from the atmosphere of his war memories. Nor did it have anything in common with the natural aggressiveness of his native land.

It was something else. In spite of their radiant amiability and refined courtesy, cruel obsessions throbbed in the brains of these people. The ceremonies of the common magic cult, called "Macumba", literally swam in blood. Of course it came, as a rule, from harmless sacrifices. Now, as for the Quimbanda cell he manipulated (or did it manipulate him?) some of its aspects would have delighted the "divine marquis". Moreover, that hidden popular sadism had deep roots.

The verb "degolar" - that is, to slaughter - (to cut throats - with knives, with razors, with swords - with anything whatsoever, as long as they were sure to spurt: those lovely red fountains!) flickered through all the legends of the country. During the war with Paraguay this treatment had been successfully applied to thousands of prisoners. About the beginning of this century, diverse bands of rebellious mystics performed the same surgical intervention on crowds of adversaries and government soldiers. More recently, gangs of highway robbers followed the tradition actively, and some of them even passively. The latter is illustrated by the example of the celebrated "cangaceiro" Lampiao, Mrs. Lampiao and a dozen of the gang's male and female lieutenants. Their salted and stuffed heads can be admired during opening hours (9 - 12, 3 - 6 pm - Thursday clos. Entr. fee: Cruz. 0.70, Childr.: Cruz. 0.35) in the Salvador da Bahia Municipal Museum of Modern Art and Handicrafts.

The topic of the greatest modern Brazilian novel: "The Rock of the Kingdom" by Ariano Suassuna is a bewildering texture of blood-trickling archetypes. How much of it stems from authentic nineteenth-century accounts and how deep the author's macabre and irresistibly funny synthesis of folk traditions goes is irrelevant. The sado-comical story of the "King Dom Joao II the Execrable" springs, like every genuine work of art, from such a truthful atmosphere, from such psychological plausibility that it opens the Brazilian folk-psyche like a key.

The hero is (of course) the mad prophet of a mystical sect. He gathers a few hundred of his wretched, hungry believers around two phallic rocks hidden in a deserted grassland. Mounting these natural pulpits he imparts, with beautiful eloquence, the good news to everybody with ears to listen. He opens to them a new, royal road to total redemption. It is easy. They just have to "degolar" each other, thus curing their brethren and themselves from all spiritual and corporeal ailments.

The Execrable Sovereign (crowned by himself) demands priority treatment for women, children and dogs. This injunction appears kindly and thoughtful, once the advantages to be gained by this surgery are clearly understood. Within a few weeks, all the victims are to resurrect, rubbing their eyes. And rightly so, because they will find themselves young, immortal, beautiful and scandalously rich, since in the meantime the transformation of the rocks into pure gold and precious stones will have been accomplished. Nor will there be the least shortage of "Lebensraum", as the dogs, resuscitated and converted into dragons, will promptly exterminate all the rich land-owners. The prophet king must have been a champion of mass hypnosis for his success was sweeping. Thousands of new brethren in the true faith came running from near and far to profit from the sanctifying medication. There were other praiseworthy prescriptions, like for instance a new version of Catholicism, revised by the Monarch himself, instituting compulsive and universal polygamy as the first moral duty of the North-Brazilian Catholic Church. Being a remarkably pious man, the Ruler conformed his private life strictly to the new precepts, marrying, among others, his two young cousins.

Unfortunately he could only periodically profit by this pleasant arrangement, since he was unable to perform his conjugal duties without having satisfactory quantities of human blood before his eyes. So we can readily understand his bitter complaints, when in one of his last sermons he accused his flock, calling them "people of little faith that omit to irrigate the Sacred Rocks as abundantly as the Law stipulates".

So they obeyed and a general slaughter ended these mystical raptures, even before the unhurried arrival of the local militia. But beforehand this godly flock had enabled their good shepherd to participate fully in all the benefits of his curative methods.

Suassuna's literary glory is amply deserved. Now, as to his sweeping popular success (before a public that never stops repeating "We are the most humane race on earth ... observe, ah but observe the delicacy of our feelings ... our sensitivity ... our songs ... our love-romances ...our easy compassion!" - which was also partly true), it reminded Gordan of what he called: "this double bottomed national character". And thinking it over, his expression became dreamy.

There were other royal dramas which deserved pondering over. So, for instance, he called to mind a legend of the XVIIIth century still very much alive in the people's imagination. It was about the realm of the rebellious Negro slaves and their king Zumbi.

(This name had nothing to do with the zombies. Some of these were going to participate in Gordan's impending experiment. How many of them? The Quimbanda's quick metamorphoses hardly permitted precise enumeration. Teodora, there at the beach, was of course a zombie, for a few days. As well as Lily behind the balcony of Pedro's funny house. She was at least temporarily "zombized". Not so her too clear-headed playmate, Wanda. And in what shape was Chico, the third participant of that weird gathering in the "palacete". Was he just a feeble-minded boy, or the reincarnation of a young warrior from Palmares, the capital of the revolutionary Negro monarchy? Be that as it may, since we are talking about the "living dead", let's repeat that there is a great difference between a zombie whose "corpse" has been stolen from his grave, then resurrected and converted into cheap manpower or by some other method deprived of his free will - and King Zumbi who had kept his own to such an extent that all the white masters trembled at his approach.

Everything was equivocal hereabouts. Including relations with African slaves. During this rational exploitation, which all the Christian Churches approved, the Portuguese didn't at all behave like little angels. (Their methods were not inferior to those of more enlightened nations.) They even succeeded (owing to their own contrivance) in improving greatly upon the already known devices of torture and mutilation.

In most houses, engravings could be seen representing "capitães do mato" ("forest-captains"). The pictures (kept because of a likeable sentimental attachment to the past) portrayed the said officers going about their business - dragging after their horses at rope-end, amidst blood-hounds - strings of half dead niggers.

There was only one difference between the Portuguese and peoples with a greater racial consciousness. The Portuguese didn't have any. Traditional promiscuity and the begetting of brownish generations went on busily. Whence the comparative rarity of immaculately white or black Brazilians. According to Gilberto Freyre - whose work is the lone summit of Brazil's modern sociological history - there is no Afro-Brazilian - be he black as blacking - without a few drops of Caucasian blood in his veins, and vice-versa.

In this matter, however, the celebrated Brazilian sentimentalism eventually showed up. Liberation of illegitimate children became almost the rule. They were often sent to school and university. Following the quoted authority, the rural clergy's contribution to this manner of cultural progress was astounding. Which was one good point for the rural clergy's activity.

But the other side of the coin was less idyllic. There's no denying it. Too many accounts have survived. (Abolition of slavery came only by the end of the nineteenth century.)

Girlfriends of planters escaped mysteriously, now and again, in spite of their enviable standard of living. Even the most competent "capitães do mato" pursued them in vain. Then the distressed master's legitimate spouse began serving him new little dishes, lovingly concocted, with the obvious purpose of consoling him and changing his ideas. The sauces - maybe a little too spicy, even for Iberian palates - disguised perfectly the provenance of the fat chunks of meat in the diverse ragouts and pot-au-feu. These were the most unexpected anatomical parts of the absent beauty. (Or would it be more appropriate to say: present but incognita?).

Redoubts hidden in inaccessible mountains, like the one in Palmares, which protected King Zumbi's realm, appeared several times in Brazil's four hundred year history. The African citizens indulged to their hearts' content in their favourite sport, which was hunting down and catching Whites so that they might contribute usefully to agriculture's progress. Unluckily, these experiments in applied sociology could not be carried through. They were eventually crushed under the artillery fire of armies mobilised against them. Afterwards there were whole alleys displaying the refinements of Chinese torture as well as hundreds of impaled Negros, of whose bodies everything which lent itself to such processing was hacked off.

Gardens of vertical corpses? Drives? Forests? Had he already seen such things? Where? What a dumb question! At a couple of places. Behind the wheel of his jeep, flanked by motorised scouts, he had sometimes passed such exhibitions. Very straight, very grey corpses. At attention. As if he was looking at them through some filthy water, submerged in it himself. They were slowly swaying. People with sensitive stomachs would have thrown up. Nothing helped except the well-tryed remedy. Clear everything out of the mind. Not a single thought. No gazing. Just a glance, without taking in much of the picture. Slacken every muscle, particularly those of the face and neck. (This must have given him an idiot's expression. Half-open mouth, half-closed eyes. The jaw hanging. Like somebody falling asleep. Looking almost like the hanged ones.)

No, he would be hanged himself if that war-time sightseeing had caused him the slightest equivocal shuddering. He certainly had not felt any mystical or non-mystical titillation. Just the healthy wish to wipe out in the shortest time the greatest number of Germans luck would permit.

Quimbanda's sadism did not appeal to him at all. But he had observed weird outbursts of vital energies when these were exacerbated by cruelty and sex. How priggish it would be to recoil from experiments, just because they were a little shocking. Could he therefore deliver himself a certificate of a cool, absolutely non-committal inquirer? Could he? Yes? No?

It wasn't so simple. Some venomous contradictions existed. Time and memory secreted them.

He had talked it all over with at least half a dozen veterans. Everybody hated the hell of rolling artillery fire under which many a genuine hero had soiled his breeches. However, after a time almost every man remembered that icy agony with some sort of absurd, unaccountable nostalgia.

Could it be a yearning for those slices of the past in which life had been unbelievably intense, because it was compressed, galvanised by deadly dread? Whatever it was, it worked like a delayed-action device.



In this case, was it not conceivable that his memory should be busy even now, reinterpreting, heating, widening the significance of those Goya-pictures, which at first sight had awakened in him nothing but disgust?

Time, memory, did they not distil just now from those grim images an inkling of the morbid spasm which Exù's, the Holy Ghost's, Dionysus', Baal's visionaries derived from the contemplation of bloody sacrifices?

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Why was this same obsession present in every one of the persons upon whom he counted for his "kolossal" project? Birds of a feather? Was he well on the way toward possession, sadism, homicidal mania? Preposterous! Certainly not! Not consciously, anyway.

Yes, but no certainty could be found in the kingdom of the shadows where he was settling now. (For only those half-dark zones of the mind concealed treasures!).

Had he created a morbid atmosphere around himself? And what did these words mean, anyway? What was it he had heard about that, a couple of weeks ago? How did the screamingly unbelievable Doctor Silbermann explain morbidity? He should know about such things a little more than average mortals. Had he not been in the early thirties some kind of assistant to Jung, in Switzerland? By all the Orixas, thought the Franco-Slav, there are just two spirits in the world - Brazil's and mine - capable of gathering together, in so short a time, such a collection of queer birds.

Doctor Silbermann was a Jew, converted to a most fanatical degree of Catholicism, in spite of his more or less notorious passive homosexuality. He radiated human warmth but deplored bitterly the absence from our world of heretics roasting on medieval stakes. He seemed to have forgotten all about their contemporary and absolutely concrete variants from which fortunately he had been able to escape, plunging into Brazil's beatific abstraction.

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CHAPTER V

"Normal? Abnormal?" - Silbermann muttered that late afternoon, "of course neither of these mean anything at all." "And there are still other expressions in dictionaries for retarded children, such as: "raving madman" or "dangerous lunatic", that are a little more precise. By certain symptoms these conditions can be recognised. Symptoms are the great thing! Some of them are outright proofs. Ad literam. Sapiens nihil affirmat quod non probet. Here comes an example and immediate diagnosis will follow. Listen to this proposition. Every European who touches this shore and is not panic-stricken before six months are over and does not run away: is a very suspect case. This striking example is furnished by my own biography."

They were sitting in a sombre Spartan study. Some forty volumes of astrological Ephemerides occupied the place of honour on the bookshelves. It was reported that Jung consulted them about every patient. On a white wall: a crucifix, almost as big as the one implanted by the Franciscan chaplain of the Portuguese discoverers. The ritual black leather couch - consequently shirked by Gordan - along with two faded armchairs: the only worldly comfort. (How was that? The Jungians did not use couches.) But here it lay, jeering contemptuously at its reluctant victim. The only window remained hermetically shut in spite of the caller's third cigarette and the host's discreet coughing.

("Let her open that blasted window if she is so delicate! I'm not going to stop smoking. I'm nervous. No, just curious. But she babbles and babbles like a genuine old queen nearing her second childhood.")

These impatient thoughts were unfair. Silbermann's academic volubility was by no means senile, nor did he look anything like an old fairy. If his longish face evoked that of a horse, it was a rather noble courser with beautiful melancholic eyes. Middle height, svelte, his wavy chestnut-brown hair without a shade of grey. Nothing betrayed his fifty-odd years. He could have been any age between thirty-five and forty-three or four. Did he prefer this penumbra for cosmetic reasons? His gestures were slow, ample, measured, theatrical - but not irritatingly so. Nor was his nasal psalmodising voice in any way disagreeable. ("All the same", thought Gordan, "I could readily picture him gazing into a crystal ball.")

"But Doctor, your lucidity seems to have resisted a stay of twelve years very well. Therefore as I have been here just twenty-four months, it appears that my risks are six times less than those to which you are exposed. And the..."

"Ha-ha-ha! You and your arithmetic! And what if you were six times as crazy as me?"

"That's up to you. It's your problem, isn't it? Especially after all these tests you inflicted on me, beginning with the Rorschach. A dozen at least. Still: here I've been all this time waiting patiently for your detailed conclusions."

"That's out of the question. You are too full of yourself as it is. I will say, however, that you made all the tests crack at the seams. Unfortunately the other side of the coin is not so promising. But there cannot be any certainty about you, without a complete analysis."

"To tell the truth, it's not these things I'm going to trouble you about. I've come to spy on you discreetly."

"Another of your former trades! It must have fitted you like a glove."

"Not at all. It's too hard on the nerves. What I'm looking for, after all, is my soul's serenity."

"Ha-ha-ha! He-he-he!"

"I'm happy to amuse you. It might melt your icy aloofness. I was hoping to extort some information from you about a suspect. I am talking about the Empress - or should I say the She-Pope - of the Two-Cemetery Island."

"Oh, you mean that Swiss girl? Ingrid Ehrhard? But she is not a suspect! As the English say: she is as mad as the March Hare and the Hatter rolled into one. In fact ... sub sigillo ... she should have been certified years ago."

(They spoke in German. It is a language that, contrary to general belief, permits plain and direct speech. That's what Gordan tried. Not so Silbermann. He was too much a product of Heidelberg University and too fervent an admirer of the Minnesaenger and 19th century romantics. How could he have resisted the temptations of Teutonic syntax? How could he have refrained from meandering, now and then, along its elegant circum-volutions, leaving, here and there, beautifully coloured puffs of mist, around otherwise clear thoughts.)

"Is she dangerous?"

"Now how should I know that? I'm just a poor little psychiatrist. Not a budding prophet like you ... Wait ... now, wait a moment ... I can guess what's at the back of your mind, even without any help from black magic! Coming back to her ... no, I don't think she's capable of ... no, it is not likely that she has done much harm to any of her barmy subjects ... After all, I withdraw everything: it would be useless to lock her up, since she long ago organised her own personal ... oh ... insular loony-bin. In any other country the authorities would have put their foot down! Not here! Pater Omnipotens! ... In Brazil you can do anything ... A community of 'scientific and healing' spiritualism! And to top it all off: 'directed by the astral body' of the late lamented Gurdieff!! But all the same: no, no! I am quite certain of this: not a single one of her disciples has become a greater nut than he was before, because that would have been entirely impossible. And as to your devious opening ... just a moment ... let me close my eyes ... I shall divine your vile intentions ... Eureka! I've got it! ... 'Das also war des Pudels Kern!' ... You are going to entrust a certain person to her 'care' ... a very tall, blond ... Nordic type ... who is bi ... I almost said: multi-sexual ... which is, according to my standards - well known to you - so much the better for her ... I never held back my views about one hundred per cent males or females. Let her go to the Island - to a whole archipelago if she wishes ... She will be none the worse for it ... it will be better for her than staying in Copacabana ... or is it Ipanema? ... well anywhere ... under the influence of two charlatans! Whom I am charitable enough not to name..."

"Please yourself. I've got an elephant's skin. And, by the way, about nineteen-ten Freud was still a notorious charlatan. For some academics the great Jung is a quack, even now. But you didn't catch my meaning. I'm not worried about Dona Lily d'Albuquerque's mental well-being. Incidentally, she wishes nothing more fervently than to become, for a while, Ingrid's Man Friday. But what about her bodily health? Is there no danger of St. Ingrid of the Isle's past surfacing?"

"God knows! But I do not think it probable. During the past ten or twelve years she has not been reported to have been instrumental in any strangulation ... or was it throat-cutting? ... Yes, I know ... History is not precise about that ... maybe both combined in some clever way? ... No, that is final ... nothing like that happened in Brazil ... neither in a motor car, nor while strolling and taking the fresh air ... that I promise you: nobody has ever observed her throwing corpses into Brazilian mountain-fissures ... neither for political reasons ... nor for other, more praiseworthy purposes ..."

"I've always thought those tales about the murder of some important political figure far-fetched. Ludicrous. The only divinity she adores is herself, or rather her future image as humanity's lighthouse, or redeeming beam ... which is to come about very soon ... as soon as she's learned how to walk over the waters ... oh, I got it wrong - over air-cushions. Do you know how good the Biblioteca Nacional is? I've been through the Swiss newspapers back to nineteen thirty-four and thirty-five. Absolutely nothing. Nor did I come across anything in the Bern-Canton. "

"Oh no, you had better dig into the French papers. In the Bern-Canton? Certainly not! In those days I was still in Switzerland. If somebody wanted to search the ravines now, he would be better off to look around the Route Napoleon. Closer to Grenoble than to Cannes. Not that he would find much, after all these years ... Now what were you saying a minute ago about her convictions? You are underestimating the chameleon. By which I mean complex characters ... Listen, there is a mirror by the door ... what about taking a good look at yourself?"

"I assure you: I'm not a conceited gigolo."

(Gordan had begun to tramp up and down the room. This call wouldn't bring him new and interesting details. About Ingrid Ehrhard, or about those in her court. Silbermann was obviously closing the drains of his passion for gossip. With his taste for romantic German poetry, the psychiatrist would have described the act as "the closing of a night-flower before the daylight". There was only one way to re-open the flow of his convivial candour, but it was temporarily out of Gordan's reach. A little distant flirtation would have accomplished miracles. Unfortunately he felt the tickle of a nearing, irresistibly bursting, stupid and pointless guffaw.)

(Half lying in his worn out armchair, his legs crossed and outstretched, chin resting on the back of his hand, the healer of ailing souls looked not unlike certain faded photographs of Emilienne d'Alençon, la belle Otero and other celebrated French courtesans of la Belle Epoque, who gazed just as dreamily into the lens. According to spiteful tongues, Silbermann's games were cerebral, rather platonic. Did he find among the rich local fauna, now and then, more tangible relations? Nobody knew for certain. Anyway, Gordan's retreat toward the mirror was a wise move. The nasal voice behind his back waxed alarmingly cordial. To keep his distance Gordan pretended to be lost in contemplation of the light-heavy-weight boxer before him who was for some obscure reason wearing the pontifical colours. As a matter of fact, the sun had lent to his broad face that same complexion of antique gold which Tiberio had received as a gift, in his cradle. The white suit completed the Pope's banner. Of course he was desperately trying - even at the cost of half-witted jokes - to divert an outbreak of hilarity, which would spoil everything. It was no good. One idiotic idea chased the other.) ("Couldn't this display of the papal flag stimulate still more the unmasked-for Silbermann sympathy?").

"But why shouldn't you be just a little conceited, Paulo? That's what everybody calls you, isn't it? Even the French, I noticed. After such a short time, you are already more at home here ... more so than I shall ever be ... Oh why, why do you so stubbornly persist in squandering your better self?! Yes of course ... do look at yourself ... it certainly is not an everyday sight ... Of course you are not Rudolph Valentino ... far from it ... nevertheless you are looking at an interesting specimen ... a male, yes, but somehow different from the others ... I never concealed my low opinion of out-and-out he-men and she-women ... Besides, you are so gifted ... How many languages do you have?"

"Just my three more or less native tongues. Slavic, French and German. There was a strong minority of German peasants living in my neighbourhood, on the Danube. I played and brawled with German peasant kids. But you know all that. Haven't you squeezed my biography dry? To the last drop, I'd say. Is it part of your third-degree inquisition? That's what I've observed. You want to go over and over and still over the culprit's evidence. If it makes you happy, I'm game. I also have a little English and some kitchen-Italian. That's all. Now tell me a little more about the Blessed Ingrid. You really believe she's not a public danger?"

"You have forgotten to mention your Portuguese. I was amazed Thursday, during that calamitous theological discussion of yours with Padre Walden Pereira. I am not speaking of your scandalous arguments - which I know all too well - but about your linguistic brilliance."

"There has been neither calamity nor scandal. Your little inquisitor is much more tolerant than you. Ah, tell me about that character. There is a real sorcerer for you. Hasn't he overthrown the government yet? Don't forget our appointment with him the day after tomorrow. Oh no! Don't make such ironic faces at me! Of course, as you guessed, he fits into my scheme. So do I into his. But plans or no plans, he would fascinate me anyway. That clown-faced midget in his greasy cassock. What a show: all those ministers and senators, Masons or atheists one and all, listening to him as to some oracle! What's he doing? Is my idea of rehabilitating the devil still O.K. with him?"

"What cynicism, what sorry confusion in your head! The Padre is a Saint! You grasped not a single word of what he said. He tried to explain to you that divinity's presence and action is of the same nature, whether It reveals Itself in our souls or outside them, in a way perceptible to our senses. The miracles He performs in our souls prove the reality of those He shows to our bodily eyes. And Catholicism is thereby a unique texture of omnipotent archetypes and symbols which trigger, which awaken our supernatural life."

"Caramba! Stop it! Stop it before they burn you as they would have done four hundred years ago! You're about to invent one of those discreet heresies the contemporary Church tolerates. Tell the little inquisitor to look out for himself. About the archetypes, I agree with you. Let us say that certain symbols are capable of mobilizing our subconscious forces. But as to your psychological Catholicism, I won't buy it ... By the way, whose brainstorm is it? Your's or the Padre's? Of course, you must have concocted it together. Just one thing, Doctor Anglicus. About your religion. Perhaps it was, a very long time ago, a 'unique texture' - or fabric, if you prefer - of energy-creating symbols. It's nothing of the sort any more. The 'texture' is as thoroughly worn out as the Pater Seraphicus' cassock. Within two generations the Vatican's spiritual influence will have become like that of some World-Centre of stamp collectors or animal-protectors. On the other hand, the Quimbanda's archetypes haven't been washed out by time, as yours have. Your superior smile doesn't convince me. Show me the logical necessity of believing in your Catholic God? I was taught when I was under thirteen that I must believe in His existence because He had ordered me to. A vicious circle that satisfied me up to my twelfth birthday. Not after it."

"You are playing with words! These are nothing but sophistries! Did the Jesuits teach you this crooked reasoning? You should have stayed with them longer. Then you would have assimilated the luminous side of their doctrine as well!"

"At thirteen I had assimilated enough luminosity to lay an ultimatum before my old man. He was, on the whole, rather understanding, so I went to another school. You want to send me back to the former one? Twenty-one years too late. The Padre has more humour. The idea of reconverting me would never occur to him."

"The Padre is no psychologist ... so he is not aware how desperately you need Christian faith! He can't imagine how frightening your psychological profile is. But I can guess it, even without analysing you. The tests are sufficient to point out the monstrous repressions which are devastating your subconscious life! What I see down there in your inner self : it is boiling lava without any trace of safety-valves. This is the cause of your schizoid personality ... of your autism, yes autism ... which is simply what we Christians call pride. And on top of everything, such a heterosexual fixation which ... Oh Paulo ... why do you not listen to me ... haven't I made it clear to you that few ... very few women are able to inspire love in all its purity ... listen, listen my boy ... how could a common female infuse into your soul the capacity for giving yourself ... for devoting yourself to somebody else ... plunge you into the live waters of selflessness ... of Love ... which is the only way to the soul's blossoming ... yes! To faith."

(Things couldn't have been worse. Gordan was standing before the closed window, looking at the neglected garden and trying to think quickly of a pretext for a hurried exit. He put an unlit cigarette back into its packet. Now Emilienne d'Alençon's features expressed suffering as well as missionary exultation. Gordan remembered Harnisch's yarn about Silbermann. Harnisch was the smuggling-truck's driver and salesman. Ex-seaman, ex-German, ex-deserter. After having chosen survival, six years ago, his native Brazil had reassimilated him in no time. In the 'interior' they called him the gaucho because of his Rio Grande do Sul-accent. That was of old the gathering place of German immigrants, baptised by popular irony: 'Teuto-Brazilians'. At one time, Silbermann had taken a lively interest in his psychological profile. After many a fruitless interview, Harnisch had jumped to the conclusion that Silbermann would diagnose repressed homosexuality in every single patient, recommending as an absolute panacea the assiduous practice of sodomy. Only, the naval truck-driver - a roguish, red-faced, and always slightly plastered mercenary - had used more direct expressions.)

"Think it over, Paulo ... I know I am right ... look ... for instance ... at your age you still do not have children; That is precisely a result ... well a non-result, of the autism I hinted at ... your lack of affection and warmth ... Mater Dolorosa! Do you not realise what a fiendish egoism inhabits you?"

"Just a moment. Doctor! What is the name of the Frenchman who said: 'Egoist is a bastard who loves himself more than he loves me.' ? And then, as far as I know, you don't have any children, either."

"Sancta simplicitas! You refuse to understand! You are the one who is incapable of dedication, not I! As for me, on principle ... you hear me? I could have children!"

(This was going badly. Gordan jumped to the mirror, feverishly arranging his vogueish black tie with the ridiculous pearl in it. He remembered the panacea allegedly suggested by the Jungian therapist to the merry smuggler and he stiffened his shoulders to conceal his mirth at the scientifically sensational idea of Silbermann's lying-in, through Harnisch's ministrations. But he didn't come to poke fun at the doctor. Nevertheless, listening to the maternal, frustrated voice behind him, it was hard to suppress an outburst of hilarity. He hastily tried to change the topic of conversation.)

"There are contradictions in every character, aren't there doctor? You declared just now that we may consider the Swiss girl more or less harmless. On the other hand, you often fulminated against her in my presence. You said she was the real cause of the regrettable accident which overtook the Abbot Thomas Feller. Have you seen him recently?"

"The Padre Walden uses to call every two days on the Benedictines, at Sao Bento's. He is their confessor. The Abbot is all right ... well ... as far as circumstances allow. If you ... yes, if you were obliged to carry around a silver plate protecting your brain like he does ... yes! a silver plate one can see throbbing under the skin of his forehead ... particularly when he is irritated ... which happens very infrequently ... for he is a saintly person ... well, with such a plate your speech too would be a little less logical, don't you think? At any rate it was the fault not so much of Ingrid Ehrhard's as of Gurdieff's false prophecies! It was the Abbot's righteous indignation over those fallacious ... yes, mendacious superstitions that almost killed him ... but in spite of your quite uncalled-for grimaces ... he is still a great scholar and an upstanding ... "

"I know, he stands almost two metres in his socks. Don't get angry! I'm joking. I'm well aware that he was formerly professor of Thomist philosophy at the Germanicum in Rome. So, after all, you have come to accept my account of that deplorable occurrence? Well, well, the ways of Providence are unfathomable, but even so I am delighted that you agree with my interpretation. I always thought it elegant, even picturesque."

"Please stop fooling with serious matters! Of all your masks it is the Mephistophelian Sneer which I hate most!"

"That's the difference between you and Goethe's fun-loving Almighty.

"...Ich habe Deinesgleichen nie gehasst.

Von allen Geistern, die verneinen

Ist mir der Schalk am wenigsten zu Last."

"You've scolded me enough. Relax. Besides, you're fond of having me repeat the same stories whenever it suits your whim. So be fair for once. Let me relish - aloud - my version of that historical episode which is a perfect philosophical circle. You may refute it here and now, or never again! Listen carefully and stop me if I'm wrong! Ingrid's spiritual director a couple of years ago, was Gurdieff, magus and dealer in mystical-oriental carpets. In the early thirties he empties London and Paris of all their rich visionaries and gathers them at his feet in the forest of Versailles. There he proclaims his own infallibility. As proof, he explains to the faithful that he never learned how to drive but doesn't need a single lesson, and he is well able to dominate that art in a trice, being directed in everything by the unerring inspiration of

the Universal Hydrogen. Proudly he seats himself behind the wheel of the community's newly bought luxury car and sixty seconds later demolishes a tree, the auto and his own nose. Later on, our Ingrid tells your exalted Abbot all about it. And he listens and smiles quite seraphically. Of course, he observes indulgently, such sorry superstitions cannot but harm poor, credulous people. As for himself - Dom Thomas - he has no idea how to drive either, but he is inspired by true Faith, and guided personally by the Holy Ghost. Which is of course a quite different kettle of fish. Whence: a totally wrecked Cadillac and that large dark-red stain throbbing under the skin of his philosophical forehead, over the famous silver plate. Brazilian surgeons are outstanding. When I last spoke to him his answers were more or less intelligible. So much the better."

"I must say, you are ... *horribile dictu* ... quite a trial for somebody who ... like myself ... comprehends your cunning designs ... You would not think of asking about the Father Abbot's health ... were it not for the Benedictines' immense riches ... and for your twisted ... yes, entirely schizoid plan ... it's a maneuver born in a most unscrupulous Balkan ... no, Greek ... no, Levantine mind!"

"There, there! That's an almost racist outburst. But naturally you're right, in that I'm principally worried about Dom Thomas because he's the boss of an important trust. The Sao Bento convent owns, as a matter of fact, skyscrapers, endless plantations, factories. How could I prevent my imagination from being inflamed by such gorgeous perspectives? There's nothing schizoid about that. On the contrary: it only shows my realism. Besides, my plan is not secret at all. I discuss it with everybody who wants to listen. Twisted? Why, you may even call it crooked, if you like. How could it be otherwise, with all those twisted characters I have to get moving. Indeed, doctor! I find you lacking in Christian charity! Don't you see how I'm exerting myself, and that I'm a genuine martyr to my ambitions? What a frozen silence! Still the 'no comment' - look? Well then let's come back to the Imperial Court of the Two Cemeteries. You must admit that your German romantics would look like silly little boys thereabouts. What about the two newest inmates of the Holy Island? I mean the dashing colonel of the Habsburg-Dragoons and the noble Baron von Etsch. The latter must be very happy. Has he decided which one is to be his favourite cemetery? Or is he going to pursue his research-work in the depths of both?"

"Herr Doktor Gordan! I entreat you to stop this nonsense!!!"

(This was getting out of hand. As a matter of fact, he had an almost forgotten French law degree, but Silbermann Germanised and solemnised that title only when bitterly angry. This call had proven completely fruitless - but it was essential to end it in a civilised way. Silbermann was an important thread in his cobweb. And then, in spite of everything, he was somebody.)

"You know perfectly well ... Ah, Paulo ... you know as well as I do ... that Etsch is a 'von' all right, but no more a Baron than I am ... but if you persist in switching our conversation and deflect it to ... bend it backwards ... yes, yes ... with your Byzantine cunning ... there's no offence meant ... you used the same adjective describing yourself ... then I must ... I decline categorically to be involved in stupid discussions about genuine and self-made aristocrats ... and about their being or not being intimate friends of His Imperial Majesty Otto von Habsburg ... I do not even want to think about those two malignant clowns ... What an unexpected match ... well: *asinus asinum fricat!* ... but they are zoologically worse than some harmless asini ... and I could not care less what scandalous behaviour did or did not take place in Munchen University's anatomy theatre! I had a deep wish to talk seriously to you. But it appears that, contrary to the greater part of humanity, you are not interested in yourself!"



"You couldn't be more mistaken! I observe myself with a loving interest. Let us see. What was it you started to explain, about my schizoid tendencies? Do you mean I might effectively go off my rocker?"

"I did not say: schizophrenia. I only stated that your inclinations are a little ... well, anyway ... I cannot give a full diagnosis now ... Why, for that I should at least have begun your analysis ... "

"Oh, no! My curiosity doesn't reach that far. And then, I'm really too busy ... Oh, Hell! Almost five! I'll be on the run."

"No! No! Wait! You are caught in a characteristic contradiction! You pretend to be too busy to learn essential things about yourself ... things which might even save you from ... the worst fate ... yes, possibly so ... But on the other hand you always have enough leisure to pass half your nights reading! And reading what? Mostly things that would have been burned in saner centuries. So you read ... it clashes with the rest ... a man of action, a fighter ... and at the other end: a bookworm! It's a bit odd, isn't it?"

"Well, Cortez managed to conquer Mexico, carrying Horace and Virgil under his arm. And Lermontov? Cervantes? There were others, too. In my case it's a childhood vice. Little time is lost. I swallow a medium-sized book in a couple of hours. Now as to the sort of books ... what good luck you're not a censor of the Holy Office! You know that I'm your friend but I could often strangle you."

"It is precisely this aggressiveness of yours which worries me most. You are a cultured fellow. I am almost inclined to say too cultured ... but then you repress so many appalling reactions ... some day they are likely to explode and do thoroughly nasty things ... yes of course I am quite right there ... Or have the nasty things already happened? Before? ... I am just thinking of your a-ma-zin-gly heroic past. I can positively smell around you ... sometimes ... some kind of evil ... no! no! don't get mad at me ... aren't we objective observers of life? Let me ask you just a single little question ... Of course you will accuse me of re-hashing ... But what is wrong with that? Explain it by my eagerness to fathom what makes you tick ... or ascribe to me a little forgivable mania for harping on familiar subjects ... In short ... you told me that over there, in your Danubian homeland ... exactly as here in the Rio Grande ... there has long been a large German minority. Where are they now?"

"Never again accuse me of crookedness! You yearn for a pathetic and dramatic scene, and look how twisted your allusions are. Ah, but I can deliver the goods. Do you enjoy horror stories so much that you re-read them now and again? All right! I'm game! Well, I've already told you there's not a single Swabian peasant left on the Yugoslav banks of the Danube - and what a hell of a good thing that is. A band of hereditary cretins ... and how they stink! You could smell them from thirty metres or so, because they never, never washed! Then in forty-one, under the German occupation, they discovered that their race too belonged to the higher species, and should have more rights than all the others. Including the right to health-furthering exercise. So they started hunting their Slavic neighbours like rabbits."

"Yes. Yes. I know what they did. I'd like to hear about what your people did. Particularly your voice and way of telling me about it ... Won't you recount once more this ugliest canto of that Inferno? Go ahead, please! The Germans enlisted them into units of the Waffen SS and they fought against the partisans. Let us come to the dropping of that horrifying curtain ... Do relate again what happened to them just before the end of the war."

"If this is a test, it's a very childish one. O.K. ... Yankovitch, a general of the partisans, had the somewhat extravagant idea of having a few thousand of them buried up to their necks, standing in individual holes, in the middle of a huge field. There was no lack of voluntary manpower for the job. Then he let the tanks loose over the implanted Nordic skulls."

"You speak about it precisely in the tone of a radio-reporter covering a football match. A highly characteristic tone and most revealing ... "

"Did you expect me to shed tears? I've seen villages 'pacified' by your protégés. And in those villages butcher-hooks, with halved babies hanging on them, and the poster 'Serbian meat - one Dinar a Kilo!'"

"And you think this justifies those thousands of heads crushed by the tanks?!"

"There's no justification for anything if that's what you're driving at. This story fits in with your probing my psyche as beautifully as mustard after dinner. What do you want of me? When those tank-exercises took place, I was far away. More than two thousand kilometres in space and two years in time. In occupied France. I had 'd'autres chats à fouetter!'"

"Wonderful! Wonderful! Entrancing! But: '... Der Teufel stellt Dir naechstens noch ein Bein!' And so you crossed the burning, destroyed continent like a luxury-class tourist with the most perfect set of false identity papers in your pocket ... probably looking at the horrors with the same air of snobbish aloofness you show me now ... It's thus ... there's no doubt about that ... it's thus you look at those devilish rituals ... It's the same gaze you cast into that ... fiendish ... diabolical future, the seeds of which you are sowing with ... your lunatic projects ... Do not mention ... please do not boast any more about your objectivity! It is with that gaze ... that gaze from a hell made of frozen sulphurous fumes ... that you inspected German corpses ... the bodies of the most beautiful young men ... yes ... and also of the most cultured young men, the world had ever seen!!"

(The psychiatrist had jumped to his feet and pointed towards the ceiling, precisely like St. Genevieve does on that fresco in the Pantheon, where she tries to inject the milk of human kindness into fierce Attila's heart. Then he began gesticulating in his visitor's face. Gordan counted quickly. Ten. When in his thoughts he reached the twenty mark, things clarified a little. When he arrived at thirty, in his exercise of self-control, he understood it all. The director of disoriented spirits was most comfortably settled - and not just since yesterday - in the Kingdom of Schizophrenia. Twelve years of peaceful contemplation, surrounded by Brazil's unreal atmosphere, had somehow distorted the angles of his memory. Having left it behind him, so far away and so long ago - he at certain moments forgot all about the world's recent history, as well as about his place and his role, performed in it of yore. All he wanted was to be left alone amidst the phantasms of his imagination: among beautiful, fair young bodies, the embraces of which he would never feel - a thought that shocked him just as much as the invisible barricade Gordan's stand-offish behaviour erected between them.)

("And this," he thought, "is the sort of thing I must discover in people I have taken seriously, up to now. And it's this sort of half-crazed pervert that wants to explain to me what is and what is not normal, and even has the impudence to judge such a complicated reality as mine!" He tried to count a bit more: but anger was growing in him.)

"Now listen to me, Sil - ber - mann" he said as calmly as he could, "you mix and mingle and mess up a lot of things. While you're at it, why don't you - as you did last week - point out my lack of charity? Do you feel it would be too stupid, even coming from you? Of what crimes have you convicted me? Are you mad at me, because I crossed the 'burning continent' with artistically forged documents in my pocket? Such was my part. It was as natural to me, as hiding in Switzerland and Brazil was for you. As a liaison agent I was just a wave, overwhelmed in a rip-tide. A wheel in a great design that miscarried. But I fought the nightmares, Silbermann. Have I asked you where you were and what you did, then? So let's drop all this. Anyway: I left the nightmares behind me. Here I am now, perhaps facing other nightmares. Maybe I'm serving another great design that might also miscarry. But then and now and all the time: I always know what I want. So try and tell me: what do you want of me? Are you suggesting I should love your beautiful, cultured Germans? Look, I'm crazy about dogs but when they have rabies I shoot them. You accuse me of deliberately cultivating sexual ecstasies? But in my drunkenness, I can still see clearer than you, amidst your maiden-dreams! Take it easy, man! Do you think those dreams dismay me? I'm shocked by few human peculiarities. Yours aren't amongst them. But I ask you the favour ... " (- and then, for a few seconds his fury burst like whistling vapour between his heavy lips and, as Silbermann's romantics would have put it: "a greenish poison seeped through his mongoloid eyes") - "of coming down out of your pulpit and never again transmitting the Almighty 's instructions to me. Except for that: you know how much I appreciate our conversations."

"Wusstest Du doch, mein Freund wie grob Du bist!"

"Im Deutschen luegt man wenn man hoeflich ist."

"You would certainly be the crudest person I ever knew, Paulo ... if you did not control yourself so ... so ... yes, in a word ... that's the word: so monstrously!"

(The defender of German culture was back in his armchair. Bent in two, he rocked his head left and right as if searching the floor for some lost object. During this short interlude his eyes flashed once towards the crucifix and then returned to the threadbare carpet and to the contemplation of dark corners.)

("That did it," reflected the luxury-class war-tourist. "My pointless counter-attack has brought him back to earth. Now he's becoming vaguely aware of the contradictions between his theories and his practice. He's seeking some comfort in his religion, but, like everybody else in his Church, he believes in it only confusedly, half-heartedly. The most fanatical declarations of faith are nothing but the reverse of secret doubts. There: he's all mixed up but he still doesn't dare push his thoughts to the frontier of the Unthinkable, of a care-free, god-free humanity. If only that cosmic rural constable existed! I should ask him not to let me ever become like this one. Shame! Shame on me and my Pharisee's charity! Is this all I can feel for a person who is, after all, a remarkable and tragic figure?! Be that as it may, I would prefer almost any disaster to this one. To get so irreversibly lost between the things I see and the things I wish to see. Between what I know and what I want to imagine. Like him now." Seeming to answer this undelivered speech, the other said in a low, diffident tone:)

"This is the greatest of all the dangers which threaten you ... It's the only unquestionably abnormal trait I could detect in you. Your self-control is inhumanly ... I would say: extrahumanly developed. You know that and it makes you too bold. Thereby you venture into a territory where you are likely to be destroyed. In spite of your robustness ... I can see a symptom of real alienation here in your experiments ... well ... in those sexual practices which are ... entirely morbid ..."

"I have told you too little for such an excommunication. Anyway, you would never understand."

"Let us forget it for a moment. After all ... it's just one of the symptoms which announce the impending disruption of your personality. You control ... with an unhealthy lucidity ... every one of your gestures ... of your thoughts ... and this leads to a scepticism that makes you disbelieve everything ... you are even too sceptical to be a genuine atheist."

"Of course I find the idea of a heavenly chief-accountant irresistibly grotesque. On the other hand Bergson and his Catholic plagiarist: Teilhard de Chardin are probably right. There is in life's evolution an obvious thrust towards perfection. So divinity is some sort of ferment inside the molecules programmed for millions of years. Why should I then cling to such a chemical god who is so absolutely uninterested in my belly-aches and overdrafts? No, no, when it comes to book-keeping I'd rather get the help of an expert recognized by the Chamber of Commerce."

"How can you do all you are doing ... because after all ... you see I am inclined to believe your claims ... that by your foggy financial schemes ... and through those ridiculous Brazilian superstitions ... and even at the cost of those sexual aberrations, which are likely to crush you before long ... yes, yes ... exactly as those skulls were crushed under the tanks ... no, no ... let us not think about that for now ... Well ... I am ready to accept that by all these absurd means you are endeavouring to prove ... to yourself ... the certainty of life beyond the grave. But how ... how can you conceive the soul's survival without the existence of an eternal ... of an Almighty God ... who is infinitely kind-hearted and just? ... Where could an immortal soul come from ... if not from the Father ... who created all and everything?"

"And who the devil created Him? Who invented the paternal creator or the lice, of syphilis, of leprosy and hereditary cretinism? In the line of kindness and justice there are better products on the market. It is much easier to think clearly without that idea of a God invented by half-apes scared of thunderstorms. As to survival, I mean our capacity for it ... you can very well imagine it as an electrical charge in us, a tension, an essential force, a radiation, not unlike hertzian waves, that keep on travelling through space, long after the emitting device has been dismantled. I think it is bloody well time for us to know a little more about these things. I've said 'to know', and not 'to believe'. People are fed up with nursery tales in which they are summoned to believe under pain of damnation. Do I believe in the existence of this table? Hell, no! I see it and I can touch it. No need of any catechism to explain its mysteries."

"How can you be so stupid, so childish, in spite of the brain which was given to you? This table ... preposterous! Where would the merit be then? Where the soul's joy of recognizing truth behind the veil where it was concealed by Infinite Wisdom? And it was infinitely wise to conceal truth because our mortal eyes were not intended to... "

"Here we are! Here's your strategy! It consists in charging everybody else with stupidity! Just like the pursued thief who shouts 'Stop thief!' The merit you speak of, reminds me of Balkan mums trying to intimidate kids who hate their soup. 'So where is the nasty witch?' She's stalking you behind that door! She wants to know whether you are really obedient to your mum or if you drink your soup only because you're afraid she'll transform you into a little pig! Beware of her magic wand! So nine kids out of ten panic and swallow the 'strength-giving' spicy broth. As for me I'm just trying to lure the nasty witch into the open so we can see what she's like."

"You want to know the unknowable by means of basely superstitious practices! ... You are playing with the fire... "

"Of Hell! Puxa, Doctor! Your little inquisitor is less pedantic. He seems to prefer the cult of the devil to the cult of nothing at all. He's also grasped that my sulphurous channels promise more inside information about the mysteries, than all the angelic choirs put together."

"You are distorting everything. The Padre Walden well knows what the word ' psychodrama' means. It's liberation from neuroses by expressing them theatrically. I also explained to him all about narco-analysis. Intoxication which blasts the subconscious wide open. Your Quimbanda is just a mixture of these two tricks. Your magic carries people to a degree of nervous strain which is far beyond human endurance ... and, ah ... God knows I am not joking ... that is why it confronts us with devilish features ... yes ... begotten by a pride ... which has severed all human roots ... that is how pride leads to despair ... to the strait-jacket ... id est ... to Hell!"

"You are pasting labels on bottles, without even a guess about what might be in them. Your psychodramas and so on, serve to expel neuroses. The ritual of my magic is the very opposite: it instils telepathic forces into the mind. It awakens slumbering energies, unknown delights. Ah well. I don't mean to convert you. To have impressed new ideas on your friend, the Padre, will do for me."

"You know, I think I am going to cancel that appointment with him. I cannot allow you to intoxicate him."

"Don't be funny, Doctor. He is too much a Brazilian, and consequently too polite, to tell you he doesn't give a damn for your protection. He gladly let himself be intoxicated, the last time. So he'll get in touch with me. With your blessing or without it. Wait. I didn't mean any offence. I'm sure he will be, just as I am, glad to have the assistance of a psychiatrist in that tricky business. Hell! It won't be a picnic! Quite a job! Exorcising all those girls ... two dozen of your venerated Benedictines! Yes I said 'your' and 'venerated'. Because you never dared threaten them with strait-jackets! Although they're at least as cracked as me!"

"Not a single one of them is chronically unbalanced ... You know that Jung describes certain neuroses as unchained demons that assault the spirit ... and overrun it ... So after all ... At least I think ... if the considered action is ... essentially ... just a psychological experiment ... and if the Padre sees it from this perspective ... then..."

"His perspective is very close to mine. Never before coming to Brazil have I imagined a nation so obsessed by sex and magic. There must be some connection between these two ways of raving. If so, in that communicating vessel we - yes, the Padre as well as myself - might find the answer to the main question. Can we, or can we not, somehow get out of this skin?"

"How deeply I am displeased with all of this! You mingle the most sublime and the most murky elements! And the same happens in your projects. Metaphysics with the backing of banks. Indeed!"

"That's proof of my sanity! Does nature ever produce pure gold? That little Brazilian mystic, the Padre, understands me better. And then, our practical aims are identical. Neither he nor I want the Benedictines' property to be sequestered. Still less do we welcome the idea of putting the motor-racing Abbot under a trustee. We should both be deeply alarmed at any restriction of his freedom of will and his economic leadership. So we shall do everything to sink the vile machinations of Monsignore Pallavicini from the Nunciatura. To be more precise: we both oppose the ignominious plotting of the Banco dello Spirito Santo de Roma represented by the aforesaid Monsignore. He dreams of infiltrating the Banco de Minas Geraes of Rio. Because the majority shareholders of the Banco are precisely the Benedictines. Don't you see that the Holy Ghost is not at all against banking transactions? Nor is your miniature Saint so very ethereal. Besides: he wants to spy on his cloven-hoofed competitor's tricks. That's all right with me. Doctor, don't you ever smile?"

(The other kept silent and passed a hand over his forehead and eyes. Gordan went back to his armchair. He couldn't leave now. Silbermann would bear him a grudge, once left alone to brood in this heavy atmosphere. Even if he missed his appointment, he had to stay, in order to treat the psychiatrist. The Jungian was an indispensable junction of contacts. With the two Benedictine cloisters and with other key-points of the Catholic hierarchy. Also with the Swiss girl and her zombies of the Cemetery Island. Then, there was the personal importance of this relationship. Where, in Rio, could he indulge in this sort of dialogue? Only here could he discuss loudly - in the course of relaxed bickering - his own secret doubts, locating them and clearing them away.)

"Couldn't we open the windows? I'm smoking too much."

"Oh, never mind. I wish that was the worst thing about you! The main disaster is your logic ... your spurious logic ... I see you amidst clouds of smoke, with lights around you ... but they are artificial and pernicious! I am truly ... literally afraid that the devil might fetch you away ... quite soon ... you and your logic! To get you with your amazing but entirely false spirit ... Tell me just one more thing ... the other day, you dropped a remark ... oh, quite incidentally ... about your sexual power ... no! no! Wait a moment and do not jump down my throat! Ah, but now we discover the blushing adolescent in you! How quaint you are! Look here ... you and I ... we are not children anymore, alas! We can talk about anything ... you cannot always avoid ... ah ... slippery subjects ... is it true that you establish sometimes ... such ... records? Ha-ha-ha ... between the evening and the morning star? Or did you exaggerate a little?"

(Was this a new attempt at some veiled flirtation? Maybe reiterating the former offer of a free analysis? Gordan was irresistibly reminded of his confessions during his pious childhood and of the solicitous and unctuous voice coming from the heart of darkness: 'And how many times did you do this my child?' But fortunately, he couldn't detect anything but scientific curiosity in the Doctor's eyes.)

"What's the point of such statistics?"

"They might well be the key to your psyche. If they are true. But maybe you have magnified reality... ah ... a little ... in a poetical ... let us say, epico-mythical way ... Or rather as dramatists do ... of course ... ha-ha-ha: are you not the 'Pirandello Yugoslav' of the French pre-war reviews? That's it! Have you not pirandellised things? Did you not dramatise your story?"

"A single juvenile offence, that should have been booed by the Paris public, doesn't give you the right to call me names. Dramatist and poet and what else? Why not charge me with outright mythomania? But my 'psychological profile' is in your drawer. So: am I a mythomaniac?"

"Well, it is not impossible, but doesn't look exactly like it ... it's not probable, after all ... You are too much of a megalomaniac to accept the compensations that lies could offer ... On the other hand, if you have been speaking the truth, that makes your case that much more serious ... and then you are beyond the usual anthropological measurements ... ha-ha-ha."

"Go ahead. Try and measure me zoologically. I don't mind. You know how much I admire our four-legged brethren."

"Ha-ha-ha ... how right you are. What a relief from the soul's burdens a little merriment can be. But then: there is nothing much to laugh about. If we look for a rational explanation of your prowess ... Let us say that your energies sprout from the fertile black soil of your Danubian homeland. And you dare repress them? Paulo! No nervous system on earth would be capable of resisting them! Not in the long run! Not amidst those satanic aberrations! What do you call them? The 'orixa's love'? What are the orixa's? Witches?"

"No. Jungle divinities. It's just a poetical, sonorous name. Anyway, your ideas about this matter are too vague. You can't judge those things without personal experience of them. In 1830 several scientific Academies declared that railway passengers would go mad at speeds above thirty kilometres per hour. And anyway: I don't repress anything at all."

"All the same, it has to be some repressive act ... ah ... you are speaking about inverted currents ... everything considered, it must be some sort of coitus interruptus ... Horribile dictu ... and you perform such exercises with your lovely mistress?! Small wonder she turned for help to his Underworldly Lordship!! Or else ... if I am mistaken, please enlighten my fumbling spirit."

"Too complicated. I'm not going to draw bawdy sketches for you. No Kama-Sutra for the Sir Doctor Blandish! And as to Livia, let's drop her."

"You are an astonishingly prudish propagandist for: 'Magical Fulfillment through Sexual Obsessions'! That is only one of your psychological inconsistencies. There is no rhyme or reason in it."

"I'm consistent with myself. A man can very well be possessed of sexual demons and at the same time loathe vulgarity. Verbal details stink. It's a moron's delight to sniffle and ruminate ... filth? oh no: filthy tales! Not bodily dirt: there isn't any. No, the infantile idiot craves for rhetorical dirt. Slimy, nauseating descriptions are just the trademark of stupidity, of powerless imaginations ... Yet, the memories of events that overflow everyday banality can be recalled to life only by the language of symbols."

"Ha-ha-ha! Now we arrive at the Gordanian theory of sado-masochism. Priceless! Whenever you stick knives into throbbing tissues ... in the Gavea-Forest - under the Emperor's Table ... or over there in Montenegro ... Or in the French Massif Central skirmishes ... it's just a symbolical expression of true love! Well, I say ... your mad-house philosophy goes too far ... !"

"Herr Doktor, your provocations are to no avail. I'm not going to fly into a rage spitting out the spicy details you're looking forward to. You're not going to hear a word about Livia's imaginary penances ... well, more or less imaginary ... and let me amiably assure you that you are drivelling. I'm not in the habit of sticking knives into anything ... here, or in Europe. We had guns and grenades for those jobs. And by the greatest Orixas: there wasn't a trace of eroticism in the Second World Rumpus. Nor in my modest contribution to it."

"Maybe so ... but given the fact that for you symbols are everything ... that you ascribe omnipotence to them ... I cannot help wondering ... if ... don't you believe symbols are capable of giving a little push to the shaky mental balance of these people? Oh yes, should your pipe-dreams ever come true ... you would not waver for a moment before plunging all of this country ... huge as it is ... four thousand kilometres from the North to the South and as many from East to West ... into a deluge of dementia ... you would drown it in mass-delirium ... worse than the children's crusades ... worse than all the roaming hordes of flagellants ... perfectly capable of that, you are ... you and your sym-bol-ic-al vampirism ... "

"At last! I've always longed for a title! So you elevate me to the rank of a Count Dracula ... But a very reasonable Dracula, I am. One who only goes in for a little relaxed, social blood-drinking. Your caricature of me is malicious. What makes you mad is your suspicion that I'm holding juicy episodes back from you. And also: the very existence of the unknown irritates you. For me it's the opposite: the unknown attracts me very much. Poetry alone can put the secret world of great passions into our reach. Metaphors express more than descriptions. 'Burning desires' and so on. Images do it. We don't go up in flames so it seems wrong. But we feel something very close to it, so the image is alright after all. A worn out, threadbare metaphor, but still truer than reality. For it tells more about our excitement than a close-up photograph of a salivating vagina with hairs, pimples, dribbles and other aesthetic delights. That's why this lecture to you, now, will be quite plausible. Listen well. A desire that is very strong, and also feverishly active ... a desire so powerful that you would call it demented ... is bound to turn into sadism. It materialises in pictures, as these are the only possible outlet for it: it creates images. In those images it pierces ... yes ... it uses daggers and other tools ... it tortures but it does that in order to subdue by this lascivious pantomime - to subdue beyond and across all the barriers of reality ... Of course it enchains and at its utmost: it kills ...to immobilise fleeting love ... to transform it into an object ... eternizing it ... taking possession of it, forever ... as a petrified image - under an unblinking, frozen eye. And this fearful poetry also acts the other way round: in the inexpressible, boundless devotion of the maso. Moreover, one looks in vain for male or female principles. There are no clear landmarks in these dim catacombs. Both sexes perform puppet shows in both styles. Helter Skelter. It's just that you, Hochgelehrter Herr Doktor, must be seriously sick if you imagine me plunging Brazil into bloodbaths and whatnot. Even if there was the remotest possibility of my bringing it about. Do you



fancy me in the part of some idiotic Nero, doing Indian dances around my victims? I agree to be a monster, just to please you, but not such an imbecile. No, no. My aspirations are different. It's obviously possible to domesticate the poetry of excess, just as lightning and steam have been tamed. That's precisely what Christianity did, diluting the very Jungian archetype of blood-drunk sacrifices, transposing them into the symbolic, cerebral cannibalism of the Communion! Here was a poetical image strong enough to stir the depths of the soul. Too bad for you, but nowadays it doesn't stir things up much. Images wear out. Speak too often about 'the light of the Spirit' or even about the 'Pink Fingers of Aurora' and you'll sound very silly. That's why we desperately need a new language, a new poetry! To revive our capacity for ecstasy. To regain our sense of eternity. That's all I'm looking for."

"If only I wouldn't hear so many rumours about your sect of gallows-birds! I'm not jesting: the very thought of them makes my hair stand on end! It literally freezes me ... see ... touch my hands ... why, oh why always those violent excesses ... why not choose the great Calm ... the Confidence ... in Providence ... instead of infernal delirium ..."

"Nothing comes from the great Calm. Without delirious fevers humanity wouldn't have known a single great saint or a single great artist."

"Be careful", sneered the Doctor with unexpected hostility. "Or you'll end up cutting off one of your ears with a razor in order to offer it as a gift to a harlot."

"If it would enable me to paint as Van Gogh did, I'd give serious thought to the matter. But that sort of frantic surgery seldom leads to the 'Wheat-Field with Ravens'. It works only if the human engine - that paints or writes or builds - is equipped with a terrific boiler. And the steam in it must be kept under an uncommon pressure. Otherwise the best ships are portbound. As useless as scrap. The steam is the sexual desire. The hot and moist climate here brings it close to the boiling point. So it instills a drop of madness into the Brazilian's blood. Well, let us complete nature's work. Let us bring to life a dozen autochthonous geniuses. Let us over-feed the boilers."

"They will explode! Yours will be the first to blow up ... I pray to the Lord to spare you but ... but ... it's necessary to be rude ... you are talking twaddle! All your discoveries are pure nonsense! The desire, the fleshly lust you exacerbate in the course of those ceremonies for paranoiac kitchen-maids ... what could ever come of it? Maniacs and more maniacs! A public danger! ... Veritas odium parit! Maybe you'll never forgive me but this is the moment to be utterly frank with you ... The basest quack is less dangerous than you! What presumption! To stick your nose into matters about which you are totally ignorant! Put this in your pipe and smoke it: sexual desire is unable to fertilise the spirit! Lust can only act on a higher level, after it has been sublimated! This can be brought about particularly by Faith, which alas you have lost! This is all. This is a proven fact. Every undergraduate in psychology knows it! But you persist stubbornly ... pigheadedly ... with your unspeakable ... with your dreadful ... oh! No! no! Let all the ships rust in their berths! It is a thousand times more merciful fate than to be dragged by you, towards whirling ... yes, towards yawning gulfs ... towards shipwreck ... towards a material, moral and physical ruin! I am dismayed at the idea of all those unhappy creatures you are manipulating ... Including your ... your ... that Dona Livia! And those two ladies with your friend the painter ... and the wife of that cultural attaché ... oh why, Almighty God, why have I introduced you to the Padre Walden? ... and these poor nuns who are falling to pieces right now ... even without your 'help' ... You ... you want to cure them? Heaven only knows how many other unbalanced persons are menaced by you ... solely because you dare dispute the scientifically established truth ... warranted by me! By all my honest past as an academic and research worker!... "

(What had happened? The host was running up and down, gesticulating, shouting, shaking and kicking the floor like a spoiled child having a fit. He behaved like a passenger on one of those endangered ships which he imagined whirling on the edge of cyclones, typhoons and other unpleasant things. He must have decided that Gordan was disrespectful of all his human and intellectual values and impervious to his admonishments as well as to the warm feelings behind them. The psychiatrist's psychosis was a menace to Gordan's design. It was essential to salvage and reassemble the pieces of the wrecked Silbermann by any means, even the most cynical. The Danubian began his maneuver in an absent, meditative tone.)

"Our planet has seen a great many universally accepted scientific truths. The earth was flat. The sole cause of the arrow's flying was the turbulence of the air around it. The blood did not circulate. Not I, but you, are the dramatist, Doctor. You are trying to crush me under the weight of your academic authorities. Do I have to topple you from your pedestal with the very words of your supreme master, Jung? Didn't he write: 'Our modern psychology is still on a very primitive level, comparable to that of the Thirteenth Century's surgery'? So don't be cross because I wouldn't let you operate on me according to the rules of your dogmas (belonging to the same era). I keep on sniffing, like the good hunting dog I am, sniffing at the track I've found. It leads from sexual obsession to bloody symbols and from them to - let's say - telepathic faculties. I've no mind to give up my sniffing, particularly not here in Brazil. I'm too curious. What am I going to unearth? How should I know. Maybe a disaster. Or the contrary. Anyway, there's no omniscient adviser we can consult. Oh no! Stop pulling your hair out! What's the point in holding your hands over your ears! Listen, listen, for your own good! I haven't yet explained to you the paramount importance of the Orixas love for the peace of your: yes, your spirit! Come, let us sit down and talk quietly. The devil is busy elsewhere ... that's right. There, there. It's not really the Orixas' 'technique' that matters for you. It will always be the privilege of very few, very strange individuals. It stems from a fever and it winds up in a higher, still hotter atmosphere. But it is the point where the analysis of your case begins."

"But ... but you are distorting everything! Brazil is inhabited by entirely normal people! Here is the proof that you are slipping into acute schizophrenia! Brazil is full of the sanest people in the world!"

"Maybe. Anyway you can only observe one sector at a time. Mine is full of nuts. Now if you say I was looking for them, I shall answer that they were easy to find. So their number must be great. Now let us examine this rutting crowd and its bisexuality. Be patient: you'll see what an interesting new light will be thrown on your problems!"

"No! no! no! Excuse me ... you said you had an appointment..."

"Before leaving I must introduce my friend the ecstatic chimpanzee. Experiments were made and it was ascertained that a chimpanzee, when in heat and short of better solutions, tried to rape dogs, cats and - poor he - even a hedgehog! Here we have a striking example of the monkey's Universal love for all God's creatures."

"You are a sadist! I am not listening! What has all this to do with me? We are not apes!"

"Are you so sure of that? Anyway, this is how we grasp the causes of those scabrous disguises we can see during the Carnaval. As we said: one of the reasons is this hot climate, which ..."

"Nonsense! Rubbish! They are childishly gay, ah ... that is ... merry ... those travesties are just for fun... for laughs ..."

"So they say. So they say. However, observing their dances, their gestures, we detect in them such a relief and at the same time such an exuberance ... it gives the impression that they somehow changed their skins ... the men as well as the women ... I repeat: this air is an aphrodisiac ... Why? Perhaps an influence of the stars? You believe in them, don't you? You and Jung. And now we arrive at your personal case: at your homosexuality."

"I forbid you! You soil everything! You are not a blackmailer, as far as I know ... "

"Of course not. Let me see your forehead. Let me! There, don't be afraid of me ... I'm not trying to rape you ... Hey! Your forehead is burning now. Doctor, see a Doctor. Easy ... easy ... everything will be all right ... of course. I understand you. Whatever you confided to me was meant just theoretically. I can see your point. Your conscience is clear. We are sinners: all of us. Why should a homosexual temptation be worse than any other of the devil's artifices? The more so as all of your emotions are domiciled on a 'higher', an incredibly sublime level. No, I'm not jeering at anybody. Listen to me, please. You'll be reassured, once and for all. It's a grave matter (in spite of my jokes). But it's nicer to relax than to fly into fits. From the concupiscent chimpanzee we arrive directly at the principle of all obsessions. At the way they grow into universal love. Which of course includes bisexuality. And so, after all you should think a little better of my 'technique', which you condemn without the faintest idea of what it is. Without guessing its possible benefits."

"Do you ... in fact believe ... that your, ah, method ... is really able to restore youth and conserve it?"

"I'm convinced of it. Of course I can't tell for sure until thirty to forty years are past. Now back to the despairing chimpanzee. Unfortunately for him he hasn't read Stendhal, so he is quite defenceless. But we know the celebrated theory of love, don't we? You throw a dry branch inside a cave full of stalactites and after a couple of months, coming back, you find the same banal object again, but now surrounded with glistening crystals, turned into a unique jewel out of the Arabian Nights. Cheers! I see you're interested. Very well: the cave is your imagination. I'm sure imagination is the very highest human gift. The poor little monkey-baby in his cradle didn't receive it. Nor is fantasy his cup of tea, later, when he has become a grown-up suitor. If he were to be endowed with it, he would - after a couple of painful failures - elevate the unapproachable hedgehog into a sublime being. Simian troubadour, he would sing moving serenades and compose love-lorn madrigals, praising the beauty of the virtuous hedgehog."

"Ha-ha-ha ... you are a complete nut, Paulo! Ha-ha-ha ... it's impossible to take you seriously ... Why, what do we have in common ... the two of us ... ha-ha ... with your zoological psychology? What a hare-brained individual you are! My God, what a pity for you!"

"I'm aware of my outrageous talkativeness but I'm entranced by the originality of this prospect! Here is the Imperial Road which leads from the obsessions - whatever they might be - to the catholicity of love!! Harken to the First Gordanian Law: 'Given a certain intensity of excitement and an easily reachable opportunity: everybody without exception - everybody - is capable of any sexual deviation'. Just look at convicts and sailors. Oyez, oyez! Do you know

that a couple of days ago I myself had the feeling of ... eh ... being something of a Greek philosopher. There was a boy, maybe fourteen years old - at Copacabana. He shined my shoes. Well, he was as beautiful as a Moorish prince ... no, as a Moorish princess ... No shirt, shorts, barefoot ... and the blessed heat ... melted gold flowing around me and through my heart ... In Europe I should never have dreamed such ideas ... but there, looking at his glistening teeth ... while we jested with each other ... not without some coquetry on his side, it seemed to me ... well, I assure you ... for a moment the scale of my emotions was extended over new territories and ... then and there, I fully sympathised with Alcibiades and Co and all his symposia."

(There was a silence, much more relaxed this time. "What a whore you are, dear Gordan", he said to himself. Was that episode true? "Of course, I'm unable to operate with outright lies. Fortunately my truth has so many facets that it's easy to light up the one which suits me best. What did I leave in the dark? The fact that the sensation I experienced was faint, hazy and that I immediately forgot all about it ... up to this minute. But I still need this dear old boy. His embitterment is gone and all of a sudden he considers our relations with favourable eyes. This remains none the less a qualified mental prostitution. But what's the importance of it all, compared to eternity?" he thought, concluding this belated self-examination.)

"And since then: do you have your shoes polished frequently?"

"Ha-ha-ha! Oh no! As it is I'm already crystallising too many things. If I now start to produce an entirely new sort of crystal I'll lose my bearings, I'll be counted out. Maybe later ... as soon as I can see whether I've won or lost. Mine is a ticklish game and you've got it all wrong. You imagine I'm assembling some huge 'machine infernale'. Far from it. I'll just throw a little match into the Brazilian collective mind. It'll make a big bang or it won't make anything at all. Later ... if your diagnosis proves wrong ... I mean if my sanity doesn't go down the drain during my trip ... then I might stop, and have a close look at myself."

("Oh, the beautiful Balkan cat-house!" he thought, continuing his half-amused self-incrimination, while Silbermann got to his feet, dragging himself, hands in pockets, towards the window of his ground floor flat. Outside the last sunbeams flickered among the shadows of the neglected garden's luxuriant vegetation. The metallic chirping of giant cicadas seemed to clink against the window panes. Jung's disciple pronounced the following sentences in a choked voice, brooding before his bushes, without turning around.)

"I am not going to start my sermons anew ... but I want you to explain something. There's still another of your reactions that does not make any sense to me ... What is the reason for your aggressiveness... your vulgar banter ... every time the sphere of Sacred Truths is mentioned in your presence?"

"It's the voice of divine wrath that thunders, through my mouth, anathemas against idolators like you! It's the voice of my chemical and fermenting god, who leads all the Universe, from evolution to evolution, nearer to the divine being that Man is programmed to become. That God - the motor behind evolution - is present in me, too! For here we have at last a really ubiquitous divinity! And he is sickened by your narrow dogma that aims at preventing me - me! from thinking and seeking! And I fume, I'm wild, I go mad when I call to mind the countless generations of poor bastards, who were forbidden to think and seek the truth ... because of your bullshit."

"What you are impudent enough to call bullshit, is rooted in the deepest convictions of precisely those countless generations! ... It was and is the consolation of millions and millions of souls ... Superior spirits ... venerable beings bow down to the ground before those Truths ... and you ... you ... want to be more intelligent than the conjugated brains of a Universe full of believers!"

"There were many Asiatic generations ... at least as enlightened as the European ones ... and amongst them a swarm of venerable and superior spirits ... all of them deeply convinced that the world is carried around on the back of a cosmic elephant. Every one of those hand-picked souls found sweet consolation, a sense of security, in that sacred and so obvious cosmology; and the sacred pachyderms sacred back held out, for thousands of years, against sacrilegious unbelievers. I am myself crazy about the elephant and, whenever I arrive in a new city, I run as soon as possible into the zoo, to present him my respects and some biscuits. But don't ask me to burn incense to Him, to light candlesticks around Him, or to bow to the ground before Him, just because someone from His Family, at one time or another, carried humanity on His back. Besides, he would be the first to find my demeanour suspicious, if not hopelessly idiotic. Now, on the whole I'm rather tolerant. There is no point in such tragic faces. Think of the Padre Walden: he's blithe as a lark. Nothing I do or say frightens him. Do you know that our encounter the other day was a real thunderbolt of mutual love at first sight? Probably because in spite of his dogma, he is able to think. He still has the guts to look for new evidence for his cause. He squints over the fence into the competitor's backyard. Flames or no flames: he isn't yellow. Nothing gives the jitters to that glorious little clown."

"Tell me another thing, Paulo," said the doctor, leering at Gordan over his shoulder, "do you suppose that your lovely mistress ... well, the Senhora Livia da Fonseca: that she is really possessed by the devil? Are you really capable of believing that?"

"Puxa! She believes it!" cried the caller in a triumphant voice, himself coming closer to the window. "It's the only thing that matters. She believes it firmly enough that - sixteen days from now isn't it? - she'll make a community of less talented mediums obey her. The power of imagination is everything. It's the hard core of all other powers. As soon as she imagines him with sufficient intensity: her devil becomes real. Obviously so: because he influences reality. And what I, myself, unrestrictedly believe is this. Imagination can grow so strong that it ... "

(- and in that moment he heard his own voice, which was usually somewhat hoarse, but which resounded now like a gong, struck with Gordan's own, entire, untarnished faith. -)

"...that it can condense into a matter, as palpable as this window pane, I am touching now. And also I believe that I shall stumble on this new sort of reality, somewhere under this endless Brazilian sky. Then I shall know for certain everything about my upward-striving God, who is fermenting, distilling the perfection of future Universes. Not about his existence: that's obvious. What I'm eager to discover are his intentions: particularly with respect to us, here and now. Is he going to keep his lift's door closed, leaving us here to rot at this exitless dim ground floor? Or will he consider giving us a ride, upwards, over thousands of floors, to the top of a never-glimpsed skyscraper? As soon as this question is answered by positive evidence - by evidence, if you please, and not by some ludicrous belief - then the world and life will be so changed, ... all of a sudden they'll be unrecognizable ... Life will be just a joyous rubbing of eyes!"

"You know, my dear Paulo," enounced the physician, this time with a blank, poker face and still staring at his garden, "You ought to hop into the first plane for Paris and never again set foot on these shores."

"Oh! Ah! Doctor, this rich idea beats even this afternoon's fantastic rambling! Nom d'une pipe! Don't you realise that this is my paradise? Every morning I'm drunk on beauty! On these wild colours! And then: these swarms of gorgeous girls! Besides: at the present time I'd be a poor devil under Paris' pastel-coloured sky, under its grey-blue opaque gloom. Not in twenty years there could I hope to earn what I got out of the past twenty-four months. Let me also admit that the people I mix with here in Rio may be an odd crowd, but vulgar or boring they certainly are not! Then, above all I have the distinct feeling of being on the verge of an important discovery. Stop your jokes, dear Doctor! Why don't you even think of going away yourself after all these years?"

(There was a short silence and then he managed to guess the answer in a quite unexpected way. The physician kept gazing at a point of space, in front of him. The expression in his eyes was again - as it had been at the beginning of their discussion, sad, but there was also a quietly but madly entranced gleam in them. Gordan's eyes followed the direction of that gaze. Before the window, stood two banana trees, with their absurdly jagged, two-metre long leaves. A banana-bud, about the height of a man, rose before a shimmering blue background formed by a narrow slice of the ocean. That Martian bud resembled a lance, pointing haughtily skywards. It consisted of a four-inch thick, gnarled stalk, crowned by a sturdy gland: round at its base, sharp at the top, flaming purplish violet in colour. Ah, yes. With a little imagination it could be seen as a stylised enlargement of a coloured illustration. In an anatomy handbook. Ah, yes. In full erection, at that. The psychiatrist seemed lost in contemplation. The melancholy of that moment moved Gordan. He understood that his friend was living exclusively for his dreams and that he was their prisoner, for ever. He was feeling, like a light breath on his face, the gathering of the weary thoughts, that the other began to formulate.)

"Wohl kenne ich dies' Land! Well do I know this land. Better than you do. You can achieve whatever you want here. Everything will be docile, subdued to your wishes. But it's like building sandcastles. The first breeze will wipe them out. To whom do you think you are praising this beauty, my friend?"

(Without any concealed grin, Gordan reflected how very different the various notions of beauty may appear.)

"Yes it is this splendour" Silbermann pursued, "this glory that caresses every instant of my life and pours sweetness into my soul, even at the thought that I shall be dissolved in it, untraceably, as water vanishes in water."

After that they talked for a couple of minutes about other matters and parted on quite cordial terms. Back in the Studebaker, Gordan rubbed his temples pensively. His black alligator shoe hesitated a minute above the starter which was, in those times, in the left front corner of the car's floor.

And now, sitting this morning on his terrace, the cachaça bottle between his knees, he was under the impression that he remembered every moment of that conversation, quite literally, with amazing clarity. People, rescued from deathly perils describe that clarity. It illuminates the panoramic vision of life's every single minute, which materialises before them, when death seems imminent. But Gordan might have been mistaken and was probably only able to recall the topics of that conversation, its accents, the essential rhythms and tonalities, which then, in their turn, recreated all the details of that dialogue.

He felt sure that the ideas advocated by him were on the whole, absolutely correct. However, he admitted the possibility that the iron circle of his logic might have been, all the same, crossed, infiltrated, by one or two illusions.

But in spite of the sincerest will to be frank with himself, he was unable to see by which ones.

## CHAPTER VI

Elbow reposing on the parapet of the terrace, profile to the sea, propped up in his chair, Gordan suddenly realized that his heart had stopped beating. This lasted two or three seconds. With a silent curse he pulled himself together. Why this jumpiness? Why this mixture of joy and fright? Wasn't it his own will which had been transformed just a moment ago, into a living form, here before him, below him, less than fifty metres away. The long-premeditated scenario was about to unfold. Now. In a couple of minutes. It would be easy. Just like diving into an icy underground river. He drank again, as if he wanted to store warmth, for later. The light dizziness which ensued was rather pleasant.

Teodora had arrived. Motionless, washed over by little waves, eyes closed.

He breathed deeply while scanning the landscape from the corner of his eye. From here until the first rocks of Leblon, the Ipanema beach offered a six-kilometre long perspective, without the slightest animation, absolutely forsaken. Behind Gordan, at his right the glittering arc of Copacabana was also empty. So much the better. He remembered, with slight irritation, Tiberio's gibberish. According to him, a bewitchment had to be prepared "with strategical precision". Just like the "squaring of political accounts" in Gordan's far-away homeland. In this line, the sorcerer's experience was impressive, although it was restricted to family wars and municipal elections in the north, in Brazil's most disreputable Federal State, Alagoas. "Perfect familiarity with the site". "A chronometric punctuality" (which was the weakest point of all these telepathic games.) The man had talents, but sounded like a pretentious crook. Well, of course. He was a part-time crook and a part-time demon. Were there other equally puzzling characters mixed up in this? Hmm. Probably so.

A single truck, loaded with scrap-iron, broke the silence, emerging from behind the house, heading towards Ipanema with a startling jangle. The aged vehicle scuttled away in the direction of Leblon, along the narrow, black concrete ribbon that followed the coastline. This road separated the row of villas - licked by the reddish flames of blossoming bougainvillea - from the pavement which bordered the beach. The only house built on the two hundred metres wide strip of white sand, was occupied by Gordan (and a judge's numerous family, who lived on the lower floors). An open-air staircase - which he preferred to the inner one - led him directly to the door of his secluded garden, twenty steps from the nightly tide-mark. Under his scanning eyes oases of playful coconut trees, planted at regular intervals, enlivened this miniature seaside Sahara.

As everywhere in Brazil, the pub across the street had no front wall. The white marble tops of the tables called to mind Toulouse-Lautrec's Montmartre. The cafe was empty. The fishermen had vanished and the usual patrons, the troubadours, had not yet shown up. (For this pub, sporting the proud title of "The Cafe of the Fine Arts", was the headquarters of the beach district's composers. Barefoot mulattos and creoles composed their often remarkably rhythmical folk-songs tapping on the tables with empty matchboxes. They were watching for the publishers from the city's centre, who used to drop in and buy up copyrights. That was a wise move, in this country of jobless lawyers.) A

yawning postman, clothed in khaki, was pushing letters under uninviting doors. Still further along a black maid swept the gangway.

Should some curious person come too close, he would take the dripping medium for an eccentric swimmer, unafraid of the harshness of the Brazilian winter. But the absence of an audience was preferable. The aspect Teodora presented was amazing in more ways than one. She was still wriggling, just as she had before, all along the beach. For her, this was now the normal thing to do. Hadn't she temporarily been turned into a Jararaca snake by hypnotic orders?

Only, why had she kept this smart bath-robe on? It needed wringing and drying. It was of brown terry-cloth with large green fishbone designs. Eyes still closed, lying on her back with a suffering look, she stiffened and then shook her head slowly from left to right. Something the matter with her neck? Under the half-open bath-robe shone a gaudy yellow bikini. Congratulations to Tiberio! He couldn't have chosen a better fitting spare body for Pedro's wife.

The same athletic shape. Tanned, muscular, broad-shouldered. Just a little overweight, but long-legged. Almost as tall as the Danish woman. Not a blonde, of course. Her loose ebony locks curled freely around her strong breasts. She confessed to thirty-eight years, but looked younger than that. Her eyes were planted well apart. (Again the same question: why was this face so familiar to him?) Her short, straight nose had nothing in common with Lily's haughty profile. However Tiberio had declared that physical resemblance of the mediums was less important than the affinity of their horoscopes. He established these following the rules of some African astrology, which he had probably invented himself. For the sorcerer jealously guarded the secret of this unfathomable science.

The strategical position looked fine. The magic triangle was very narrow and its tip reached into the distance. Its base was marked by two almost neighbouring heads. The unconscious half-caste's and the would-be sorcerer's. The latter felt a slight aching in his limbs. They were getting numb. The top of the triangle darted over the pub, well into the room behind the Palacete's balcony, five hundred metres from here.

He lowered his eyelids. The bay's splendour reached him now just through a tiny slit.

At the same moment he heard the gong of the first round. The slow hammering of a drum neither close nor very far away. Like a sound muffled by invisible vegetation. Was it the expected signal? Exù's radio? Or just the droning of his own blood? He opened his eyes and the drum stopped immediately. This didn't prove the sound had been a delusion. It was possible to transmit, by telepathy, relatively feeble noises over a distance of thirty or forty kilometres. He had made experiments with a chronometer, pencils and a telephone within reach. The information given by the chronometer was dubious. Rumbles, cracks, bangs often arrived five minutes or more behind schedule. As if the telepathic waves had to claw their way through reluctant layers of ... of what? Was our material world a bad conductor of that sort of electricity? But on the other hand it was possible to confirm by the telephone that the sound he heard was the same that had been caused miles away. Nobody on the other end of the line could have guessed Gordan's auditive sensations. Cheating, in this case, seemed impossible. But if he wanted unquestionable truth he had to mistrust everybody, everywhere.

There was a very strange common point to all these "transmissions". Perhaps it could help to clarify them. It was indispensable that the emitter - of a distant hammering, for example - should in fact drum, while he concentrated on a



real saucepan or some other suitable instrument. It was as if imagination - this powerful master-builder - needed a spot, a corner of the already existing universe. In order to lean on it, to embed into it the pillars of a bridge leading to new worlds Gordan coveted.

But not with the idea of leaving the old world for good! Nothing was further from his mind than to become a permanent immigrant in dreamland. His proposal was to live by turns in both realms. Why did all other illuminati want to burn the gangways behind them? Why should higher knowledge imply blindness to the beauties of the material universe?

Here was a reality fit to hook the bridge of his robust imagination onto. Teodora. Visible. Suffering under her artificial slumber. But was all this true? Where did the truth end and the hysterical stage-play begin? No way of knowing that. What a deadlock. He hadn't seen enough miracles to believe but he had seen too many to give a cold shoulder to their playground.

Was it at all possible to know the truth about the universe of the spirits?

But of course it was! In one single case. His own. Hadn't nature tailored him to measure - with his boiling imagination and his cool eye - exactly for that purpose? Wasn't he designed to penetrate mysteries? Or could it be that he was designed to be the clown of the spirits? So what? Since when was he so afraid of being ridiculous?

2

He knew that jealous spirits at the French Embassy called him "the General's Clown" behind his back. The Ambassador was a Flying General. During the blitz he was - in spite of his age - spitting fire above London. According to malevolent rumours the Viscount d'Arcy de Rocquencourt had been named ambassador to Brazil with the sole purpose of allowing him to re-gild his family's coat of arms. If this was true, it was Marcadet's job anyway. This faithful family lawyer to these particular d'Arcy had been created Commercial Attaché at the Rio embassy. As to the General - a jolly fellow full of the sparkling vitality of middle-aged (and even much older) Frenchmen - he was bored stiff in the office. He haunted the departments and the corridors doing imitation acts. The most successful was of a cavalry Sergeant in the Riding School. Often he bellowed from a distance: "Captain! Gordan!" (The French Army had recognized Gordan's rank.) "Come and do me the obsequies!" (This was the literal translation of a Portuguese formula of courtesy) "Let's go to my place and have a press conference!" That was their favourite game: making literal translations of newspaper articles and massacring the headlines. That brought forth things like this:

## INTESTINAL INCOMMODITIES

### AT THE PRESIDENCY OF THE REPUBLIC.

No, he was certainly not a clown there. The General was laughing with him. But here?

Wasn't he, even now, the king of idiots for watching Teodora so intently? A couple of years ago, and in a less crazy country, he would certainly have had an irrepressible fit of laughter at the very idea of ethereal umbilical cords.

Teodora, with her arms resting along her body, reminded him of a dark brown exclamation mark (with a spot of yellow sunshine round its middle) between the wheat-flour-beach and the aquamarine sea. Who but a half-wit could have admitted the existence of an invisible umbilical cord, sprouting from among the idyllic colours of this landscape and connecting the medium with the tall Danish girl, up there behind the balcony window? (Yes, but who would have believed in radio waves around 1847?).

Was there really (wireless!) communication between these two personalities? Was it a fact that they mingled? Were they about to swap bodies? Of course, this was just the thought suggested to them, during thorough brainwashing sessions. Of course, such a metamorphosis couldn't be accomplished in a week, by the stroke of a magic wand. A gradual subtle impregnation was necessary. Moreover the recipe comprised paralyzing ingredients. First of all: terror, the irreplaceable international language. It galvanized slumbering forces.

And then: the relay stations. Like this one. In order to enhance their efficiency, the cerebral vibrations had to emanate from several skulls. Like in the case of mass psychoses. The crowd's psychosis sharpened its senses and allowed it to see quite remarkable things. Today: flying saucers. Yesterday: levitating saints, who (whenever they felt like it) fluttered up to the ceilings of their chapels.

The relay station: the imagination of the masses was omnipotent. Perhaps it could even catch the fairy "bluebird" Gordan was after. Translated into prose to turn dreams into throbbing palpable flesh and blood. This happened rarely. But everything pointed to the conclusion that it had happened. Lourdes wasn't just a den of crooks. Nor was the Quimbanda.

He lowered his head, not being keen just now on social contacts. Pedro and Monsieur Anatole had re-entered the stage, at his right, coming from the same direction as the noisy lorry that had invaded peaceful Ipanema. They advanced slowly, brooding, probably recapitulating the main points of their former conversation.

("What an over-excited fellow, this Pedro! I've told him more than once not to show the tip of his nose before nine o'clock. There's going to be a small crisis at his place, at about half past eight. Small? Or not so small? How should I know. Anyway this plebeian offspring of the noble Viscount of Djurudjuba must by no means be allowed to mix things up still more. Quite so. He's a commoner, because the Empire distributed only life peerages. However, not so good an omen, this! Too many slightly cracked viscounts around me! Wherever I look: a nutty viscount! How hard I've tried to

make clear to him that no miracles are to be expected today. We'll need several climaxes and several weeks to impregnate those nervous systems. But try and explain that to a vis-count!").

Oh, but this topped everything! These two peripatetics had crossed the tarred road and stood now at the edge of the sidewalk - prettified every hundred metres or so by cement banks -, precisely in front of Teodora.

Their viewpoint commanded the beach from a height of two metres. Stairs of concrete led downward, unless one preferred to jump.

Facing Africa, as the two explorers did now, there was nothing much to be seen. Just the sand, the South Atlantic and the skyline. The three of them absolutely empty. The only intriguing sight, at a distance of about a hundred and fifty metres: that motionless darkish exclamation mark - that is, the forest divinities' messenger-girl. And then, of course: the universal greed for sensations stirred. The picture taken in by those four scrutinizing eyes suggested some sort of accident.

Was Monsieur Anatole able to see that far? It seemed so, judging by his excited tapping and wriggling. His well-known eagerness for scientific discoveries would compel him, in a moment, to jump down and rush toward the sea to analyse the situation. Pedro would follow at his heels, his pipe sticking out provocatively like some kind of extraterrestrial antenna, contrived to spy on the human condition.

Gordan was infuriated. It didn't help to repeat to himself that this chapter of the procedure was after all secondary. For anybody to cut into this state of concentration was almost as unpleasant as the interruption of coitus. It was certain he would feel the frustrating effects later. And it was essential for him to feel fit at half past eight. Otherwise how could he hope to neutralize the stupid violence that would be unleashed in the Palacete.

How the devil did Tiberio dare prophesy that no bothersome outsider would show up. Or else - he had said - an intruder who appeared on the scene would, for some reason or other, turn and walk away without noticing what was happening.

Had Gordan, after all, been taken in by a mythomaniac swindler? Suddenly one of his rare fits of blind fury swept over him and he gnashed his teeth.

At this very moment, down below, Teodora lifted both her arms as if doing breathing exercises. Had she felt her partner's irritation? If he wanted to believe that, he could. It wasn't unthinkable. (But how could he ever be sure?) Well, a great number of coinciding facts pointed toward a convincing probability. But in that case he would be comfortably tucked into statistics, up to his ears. And everybody knew that all the concerned parties cooked their statistics. Consciously or unconsciously. How far could Gordan trust himself? A good point: not a man in ten million was unprejudiced enough to ask himself such questions. He was just the one.

Pedro and his aide-de-camp exchanged disappointed glances. What a pity! This was obviously no sensational corpse washed ashore. However, Monsieur Anatole's demeanour called to mind another remarkable working hypothesis. Still looking in the direction of Angola, he lifted his nose, sniffing the morning breeze, while his whole body expressed - owing to his incomparable mimetic talents - a slightly shocked astonishment. Did he thus acknowledge the ethereal presence of some vile smelling astral body on the beach?

A knowledge of the underlying circumstances was necessary to explain this problem. The relations between the black Monsieur and Madame Pedro had a facade of cool, formal politeness, but concealed spontaneous mutual antipathies. It was hard to tell which of them hated the other more cordially. And now, the Monsieur's prompt and hostile reaction! As if the intimation to leave a room had been pronounced by a strong, vulgar voice which couldn't fail to scandalize a sophisticated spirit. Had the projected exchange of personalities taken place, at this side of the beach, much earlier than was expected? A more credulous Gordan could have believed that.

Anyhow, certain facts seemed to confirm that possibility. Monsieur Anatole began sneezing violently, as if sensing a still fouler smell than the one from the magical cock. He shook himself energetically as if stepping out of his bath, and without any explanation trotted away from the beach toward the alley-way where he was domiciled. Had he concluded that Lily's unasked-for presence at the beach at such an inconveniently early hour was a quite sufficient reason for him to choose an altogether different place for his own activities? Was this his motivation? A questioning of the interested party would have met - in spite of his natural eloquence - with linguistic difficulties. Maybe his brusque departure was inspired by the idea of his impending breakfast? Plausible, because Gordan's own subtle thoughts had begun to descend toward that commonplace problem. Of course he rejected them at once.

The abandoned artist was less inclined to asceticism. His objurgations remaining - as usual - without any effect on the behaviour of the four-legged philosopher, Pedro directed his lonely steps toward the pub of the Composers, its aromatic thick black coffee and its savory shrimp pancakes.

Gordan had nothing to restore himself with, besides the cachaça. In order to regain the state of grace he bestowed some more of the fiery stuff on himself. (What? What? More than half the bottle was gone!) With or without magical immunity, his head began to swim a little. This was quite all right for what he had to do. But it was time to stop.

Cheek reposing on his fist, he looked around. He stared at the flocks of little islands. They were of melted silver. The sea! The sea of Odysseus! (Or of the Argonauts?) And here, closer, under him, the long, strong, hospitable, glistening thighs of the girl. A sensation of well-being spread through his nerves. Why should he worry about the contradictory onslaughts he was confronting? There was at least one certainty. Brainwashing was a fact. It was practiced all over the world, on a large scale. Some people did it to themselves, without knowing it. It wasn't a bad thing in itself, everything depended on its aim.

The aim of the present case? Lily, an aggressive lesbian, is all of a sudden subdued, fascinated by the authoritarian regime which rules over the Ingrid-island. At the same time she is scared. Her violent nature compels her to commit a crime that would spoil her life. Not because of the all too lax law courts. But for much more serious reasons. So the wish to be cured rises in her. Just as in the case of some unlucky kleptomaniac. Or of a repentant drug addict. However one looked at it: the aim of this psychodrama was praiseworthy. For a couple of reasons. Gordan would help to unearth the tendencies of Lily's subconscious life. Left alone she would never have been able to discover the meaning of her

behaviour. She was too stupid for that. The Danish Valkyrie wanted to "change her surroundings" and "her impulses". But to do so it was by no means necessary to go to the devil's kitchen to be re-flavoured and laced with the sweet docility of a meek creole girl. This had already been done. At her birth. Her second nature, the subdued one, was in her, just waiting to be awakened.

The impending shock? The panic? The shrinking back from herself? The escape into a servitude that - she felt it - could only be salutary? Why not, if it was her most fervent dream?

Could such Damascus-like conversions be operated by a serpent: as dangerous as it was imaginary? Not so imaginary as that! And he had witnessed still more surprising metamorphoses provoked by equally preposterous means. People believed themselves to be trees. Or flowers that spoke to each other. What did the surgeons of the thirteenth century know about all this? Silbermann and his equals, indeed! There was at least a thoroughly researched fact at the basis of all these mental acrobatics. Researched by himself. It was the extraordinary receptivity of two sleeping brains to mutual dreams, after only short training. Wanda and Lily were sleeping, up at Pedro's. They could never have resisted that sort of sleepiness! The same was true for Teodora. He too would dive shortly into a tormented but willed dream. It was indispensable for his project. He willed it. The law of his life demanded it. Every life had its secret law but most people didn't know it. He, Gordan, was of the elite familiar with the law of their own life. An emotion (or was it a cosmical thunderbolt?) had dictated it to him, and so he had engraved on his own soul his only stone tablet.

5

It was a recollection from his childhood. It still haunted him. But how could he translate into words this force, terror, softness, rapture, which had kept on wringing his heart right up to this moment? Whenever he wanted to analyse it, to explain it in logical terms - trying to liberate that from the blindness of his senses - he ended up holding just a disappointing skeleton in his hands. He had to open his grasping hands, letting That drop back into obscurity, from where It revived and guided reality - oh how irresistibly!

It had happened during a summer stroll with his parents, when he must have been six or seven years old. All of a sudden he stood paralysed, in front of the sun's huge red disc which touched the silent skyline of his native land. A powerful agonizing craving squeezed his throat. He wanted to run, to hurl himself forward across the fields, toward the setting sun, further, still further, reaching eventually the other side of that monstrous, red, celestial beast. There, behind it, without any doubt, lurked something that was magnificent and frightening and more valuable than anything else in the world.

6

Lazily scanning the glittering islands, he expelled the fear from his spirit. There was no danger at all. He felt himself able to inhabit two separate floors of consciousness. Getting down from the level of hallucinations would be no problem. Gordan wouldn't get trapped up there, a prisoner of the phantoms. Was he all the same running some risk? Yes, but ducking it an unavoidable misfortune would befall him. A long peaceful life in the company of his greatest yearning - irrevocably frustrated. Time for philosophical speculation had run out.

He closed his eyes. Then opened them just a little. Painters examine colours this way. Seen through this slit Teodora shrank into a brownish-yellow, flickering speck. It was the trembling of his own eyelids. His elbow left the balustrade. He clenched his fists and tightened his muscles. Those of his arms, legs, stomach - of his whole body, imprisoning his breath at the same time in his bursting chest. The strain shook him from head to toe like the vibration of a motor designed to throw him upwards.

Like a diver he held his breath for a full minute. As soon as small bells began clinking in his ears - like railway signals to the big locomotive that was his roaring heart - he abruptly relaxed and let himself glide into a restful Nirvana.

He erased all his thoughts. An imaginary windscreen wiper swept them away like raindrops. The brown stain, which had formerly been Teodora, darkened, danced through the luminous slit, towards the innermost screen of his eyes. Had he completely closed them for a moment? He wasn't sure of anything, any more. With a mutineer's blind hate he clenched his fists again.

Five or six times: the same alternation of painfully cramped muscles with gratifying plunges into quiet. Ten minutes later when he stopped this weird warming up for good, his body was covered with sweat and his heart beat like a mad dervish drum.

With all his weight he leaned anew against the parapet. In his thoughts he started to paint - imagining the careless strokes of many nimble brushes - the picture he wanted. Now the brown speck broke into three or four pieces. Among them quivered - like will-o'-the-wisps - a few subsiding sparks of the surrounding world's sunny glory.

He didn't think: "I will". He just felt an ever-swifter circular motion stirring the inner core of his brain, while that locomotive seemed to rush through his skull and its ghost engines thundered - quite independently of Gordan and all his intentions - the overwhelming, smashing, crushing chant: "I will. I will ...".

First slowly, then with increasing pace, he let heat waves stream into the cavity of his chest, and deeper, around his diaphragm. Shades, recollections of the past night. Of Livia's sweetness. And the lightning that had nailed them together.

He didn't think, he sensed. He touched, he felt the knot: the unity of all this at his fingertips. Of the happiness that sprouted in him, deep deep inside him and - he was aware of it - now beamed from all his pores. And then the joy! The joyous knowledge of his power. Of the power to project into space pictures, coloured, moved, animated by his vital force, by the stocked, piled-up, omnipresent life-energy: by his all-pervading desire.

Had he closed his eyes? He didn't know. Teodora had vanished in swirling black smoke. The same thick cloud engulfed Gordan. There was no horizon, no sea, no beach, any more. Nothing but green and red beams, Flashing zig-zag through a rolling black fog.

The dazzling-coloured rays flickered, gathered, and then, all of a sudden: the enemy was there, before him. Suspended in mid-air - the long, black, forked tongue quivering less than a metre from Gordan's face. The Jararaca. The most poisonous and by far the ugliest Brazilian snake.

A fading voice whispered still in his ears: "it's nothing, it's just your imagination!" But at the same time he felt the touch of a slimy body that made his chest and his shoulders shudder, and froze the nape of his neck.

The blazing Jararaca swung, swayed, came spinning toward his eyes, carving up the blackness, as horrifying as the other one he had encountered two months earlier, while stalking deer. He had seen it from just as close quarters as he saw this one now. It was perched at shoulder height at the edge of a shallow ravine through which he wormed his way, the two-barrelled gun hanging loosely in his hands.

Seven or eight feet long. Green squares on its back. A fat, shining, dirty-white belly. The narrow pointed tail, coiled up, ready to strike. Its rings twisting furiously, long after the hellish little round head - full of rows of white pins of teeth - had flown away, torn off by the double charge of buckshot, fired almost point blank.

Here it was again. It burst into him, plunged into his bowels, through his nostrils, through his throat: the thick, heavy, pestilential stench of the reptile. It choked him, it strangled him, here and now while that poor dying voice tried a last time to murmur into his ear that none of this was true.

Then with the rage of a nearly defeated warrior he squeezed his diaphragm, pressing it like a lemon to force out the last drops of courage. In order to attempt the ultimate acrobatics of the mind: the double leap between the two flying trapezes of his - of everybody's - ever-present hostile twins - of man's two opposed wills. In the cases in which this fencing with one's other self succeeded, it worked a lot like the sudden braking that hurls the passenger of a speeding car forward.

He made it. He galvanized the voice of reason for the last time, and with it came the fright. The frightening thought that this was already madness, raving madness: this obstinate will to see something that didn't exist. To purge his mind from this demented vision was a matter of life and death - more important than anything else. He seized the left-overs of his energies in order to prevent himself from: WILLING TO SEE THIS. His teeth chattered while he clung to a second will that had become powerless, unable to prevent him from craving to SEE THIS. It wasn't possible. Not any more.

Vertigo stirred his brain, his head spun, his skull was going to explode. It was the panic of a fall into an unfathomable well. All of a sudden he understood that nobody could be so irresistibly attracted except by a massive and deathly reality, which was here, in front of him.

Then the horror spiralled and rocketed and with wide open eyes he saw - no, he lived in the reflection of his original, of his first, of his deepest will. Here was the loathsome, fat, dirty-white belly of the Jararaca turning slowly toward the dwelling of the fainted women, boring itself into the dark clouds, twisting its rings as it did in the jungle, only to vanish, finally, amidst this smoky, this black foliage.

When he came back to this side of life - shivering and dazzled by the sun and the reborn colours - Teodora was nowhere to be seen. He discovered her, however, a moment later, further away, bent in two, dragging herself towards a cluster of coconut-trees. She collapsed in their shadow and didn't move. He remained seated, absent-mindedly running his fingers through his hair. Hell! After all this, there still wasn't the slightest trace of a secure belief in him. Had somebody offered him a treasure, as a reward for a candid answer, he would have been unable to say whether he had been asleep or not.

After a quarter of an hour he began to breathe freely and the memory of his voluntary hallucination was fading away. A wave of victorious pride caressed his still throbbing heart. The law of that criminal, spell-casting hag applied to him too. This at least, was certain. He knew that such a cyclone, such a whirlwind of delirious imagination as that which he had raised in himself just now - could strike, and was bound to strike unerringly and from afar. Moreover he had ventured, once more, into the Kingdom of Schizophrenia, and here he was back again unharmed, just as sane as before. "As good as new!" He could, with impunity, undertake such excursions again. If it was necessary: he would do it even now, at this very moment.

As can be seen, this optimist took a lot of things for granted.

## CHAPTER VII

### 1

Taking the chair with him he returned, to the table, the two folders and the cachaça-bottle. No, he wasn't drunk. Balkan atavism was no empty word. Within half an hour perspiration and the marvelously rich Brazilian breakfast (comparable only to its British equivalent) would efface this innocent dreamy mirth. Was it more? Yes, a silent exultation. Just like the feeling he had had years before when, in the last set of a very tight match, an inkling of victory had somehow arisen in him. To hold onto this pleasant state of mind, he allowed himself a last long gulp.

Of course, had his clairvoyance been as sharp as he assumed, had he really had a hunch about the impending events, his mental attitude would have been slightly different. Without falling into the opposite extreme of a depressive crisis he would all the same have thought of defensive measures which it would have been reasonable to prepare.



He did nothing of the sort and began (just like the itinerant poets of the "Cafe of the Fine Arts") tapping rhythmically on the table with his palms, humming under his breath the samba that served as a liturgical hymn to the great She-Devil, close relative to Livia:

Salve ta-ta, Peomba-Gira!

Salve Exù-Mulher!

Ela esta na encruzilhada

Ela que faz tudo o que quer.

Which meant more or less:

Hail to thee, oh Whirling Dove!

Hail, oh Woman-Exù!

She is waiting at her crossroads

Doing whatever she wills to do.

2

("The jingoism of these fellows is unbelievable! What an odd idea to reproduce their glorious banner even on such a nondescript folder!") He opened the dark green cardboard file with the triumphant, thick, sunshine-yellow stripe printed across it. The consternating inscription's invisible ink was of such sophisticated contrivance that not even his staggering telepathical feelers could detect it. It was better this way. He would have been upset for no reason.

Even if it had been possible to discuss things with that friendly ghost of a distant future (with the character he would become himself, thirty years later) nothing but a meaningless squabble would have resulted. That jovial futurist phantasm, whose hand would later decorate the patriotic Brazilian folder (somehow rediscovered, retrieved from the rubbish of some attic or other) with the impertinent heading, didn't seriously blame his forerunner and hadn't the slightest intention of hurting his feelings. Quite the contrary. He looked at this collection of loose pages with sympathetic nostalgia and thumbed through them with amicable understanding. He didn't deny the truth of some of the thoughts he encountered, mixed up with passages of an intimate diary, with lyrical effusions, and somewhat pretentious aphorisms. The whole thing pointed toward the plan of some ulterior literary work - the main lines of which were so far disappointingly foggy.

("Isn't it time to begin it at last? Fate has been more or less clement, up to now, but is this reason enough to think so little and so sluggishly about it? Thirty years maturing should be enough, for any book, shouldn't it?").

The only thing that really irritated the future ancestor was the tone of these notes.

("This raving individual, mumbled the not-so-dignified Elder - projecting himself into the neutrality of the third person singular - gives the impression of a dishevelled, plastered poet - of a wriggling young hound. He is at the time of this 'diary' obviously fifteen to twenty years under his real - no, let's say under his statistical - age. Now: even if this abnormal disparity still exists and still resists the downpour of time - yes, even if the slowness of the life-clock is still a fact: it could never produce nowadays such romantic, such poetic fits as it did thirty years ago. So what! To hell with it! Aren't reason and a balanced mind the highest good? No? Are they nothing of the sort? Why should I be cross all of a sudden? Am I envious? Jealous? Of whom, you great Brazilian Gods, who are forgotten or turned into petty Bourgeois by the filthy industrial miracle and even - oh horror - into officers of some local Salvation Army! Cross with whom? Jealous of whom? Probably of time. Of that greedy slut that has pinched and carried away so many beautiful things. Well, some of them are still with me. So that's that.").

Thus it was, after all, with a slightly melancholic toss of his head and a grin more mischievous than nasty, that this old mountebank printed on the top-secret dossier of Gordania the ominous title:

....ZRTHSTR'S SS

Unaware of this future crime of "lèse-majesté" - drunk on cachaça and on last night's (and quite a few other nights') memories - he flipped through the disconnected smudgy scraps of paper covered with his scrawl, on which he could re-read snatchy passages like this.

3

"...and what a never ending crowd of lovely girls ... quite a devaluation of this gorgeous currency ... your cook is Gina Lollobrigida - Sophia Loren your housemaid - both of course in their early twenties ... the teen-aged Raquel Welch and Claudia Cardinale are washing up the dishes over there in the pub ... and the others, wherever you look ... kitchen-maids or aristocrats - the same high distinction in all of them ... and plenty of it ... oh miracle, a crowd of marquesses ... watching their gait unconnected words come to your mind, such as queens, sluts, circus acrobats. Tall and slender like El Greco figures but not skeletons, by no means! And what curves ... just where they ought to be ... the length and the flexibility of these limbs ... no, of these antennae carrying rubies, are beyond measure. The same suppleness somehow otherworldly - somehow a little monstrous - undulates around their arms and legs and hips. These girls don't walk: they flow. They are at the same time aggressive and coy, and the grace of The Arabian Nights smiles around their glittering teeth. They are a blend of a wild-cat mentality with French boarding-school virtues ... I absolutely must put all of this down ... so I can recount it later ... thirty years from now when I'll be no good for anything but story-telling..."

('... and what do you know about that, imbecile!' grumbled a deep hoarse voice from far, far away.)

"... yes, I absolutely must fix it in my memory ... the first night I spent with Livia under the sign of the 'Orixa's' love demon... so let us remember the premiere ... when was it? ... three or four months ago ... I had known two, three other virtuosi ... but never, never that sublime folly before her ... Love? This? What a bad joke! A scream! Love! A grotesque sham! A mushy, hypocritical masquerade, invented by European and obviously anemic, phthisical minstrels! Just a short carnival, during which the poor cretins go around disguised as charming princes and even more spurious princesses ... so much ado about nothing ... and then the choking disappointment and the throwing-up the next morning ... the morning of that Ash Wednesday which for some exceptionally poor bastards lasts up to the end of their lives ... how could such translucent masques resist this merciless pagan sun and the deep black of these shadows? How could that wishy-washy sentimentalism stand up against a bodily passion that is material, all right, but of a material that transforms us into something like the 'glorious body' promised by the Church ... not only during a sugary carnival's love story ... but for that eternity which the same Church used so long as a bait to lure us..."

"Of course I have to write this ... I want to have forever before my eyes pictures of my coming together with Livia ... even if it was just the fulfillment foreshadowed by three or four of her predecessors whom I had met also under the flaming red sign of the 'Orixa's'. Anyway, every minute with her is the first one ... only the devils and the fairy queens know how many such Walpurgis nights I've had so far ... But I can see them clearly. There's no need trying to sculpt and paint on these shabby pages ... a few sketches will do ... Boy! Are you off your rocker!/? Stop, stop this scribbling at once! Are you drunk? Writing about this?! And what about security regulations?! Of course my very best friend, Gordan, is plastered once again! What security? What nonsense! Wake up! The war is over! It ended more than two years ago! And who on earth would fancy coming up here and rummaging among my papers? ... surely not old Dona Conceicao, the cleaning-woman, if she can read which I doubt very much ... and then to be on the safe side: I won't put down a thing about the delirious dialogues ... not a word about Livia's whips and hair-shirts ... nor about the slight, red stripes along her back ... Oh nothing much! Just pale pink arabesques ... Let me forget her library of biographies of Saint Catherine of Sienna and other wonderful saintly sado-masochistic girls ... and first of all don't write a word about the devil visiting her, and about his eccentric demands ... These follies are just a faint musical background to ... to what? And what would old Pedro say? Ha-ha-ha. If ever he came to read this he would say: 'No, nobody ever took you for normal, mon cher grand maître! But this story is the summit of your Brantôme-like talents ... oh no, who is Brantôme compared to you ... tell me one secret: do you get excited while writing? You know what I mean ... Good Heavens! What a pornographer the world has lost in you! But you're too slow! Why not come to the point? Or is it part of your tactics?' ... O.K. Dom Pedro, you're right ... let me get to the story's hard, hard core!"

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"The first night with Livia. Precisely the same as every night I have passed at her side since ... Open window, lukewarm air, scents of her sleeping park flowing around our naked torsos ... there it is: the trademark of all Brazilian nights: always and everywhere the perfume of that little white flower ... just like the jasmine, but five times stronger ... its working hours begin after nightfall ... they call it 'dama da noite' - the Lady of the Night ... and while one's meandering by night, passing before the always wide open doors of the dark gardens - one receives a whiff of this deathly sweetness ... yes, in more than one sense, because they say that one bunch of this in a sleeping-room with closed windows would put you out for good ... fortunately, these windows are open and Livia doesn't belong to this poisonous botanical species ... shall I describe her now? Why should I stick her photograph into this diary ... anyway, I'll never forget her ... but how can I know that? Well, just a swift sketch ... who knows what might happen to my memory later ... She's like the Brazilian girls I've been talking about ... But this is nonsensical ... that was just a summing-up... of course here as anywhere the girls are of all sorts... there are even natural blondes. The only difference: the number of dazzling beauties is much greater here ... Livia is... how old? Twenty-four or twenty-five. And she's ivory white ... one should say a pure Portuguese. A whiteness of which her ridiculously snobbish family is not a little proud ... almost as tall as me ... but ... but where does this face of an adorable but entirely white Japanese come from? Next I'll try to prompt the truth out of one of those gossipy spinsters in the neighbourhood ...of course I don't give a damn one way or another, it's just curiosity ... I was told that in the last fifty years many sons of Nippon have settled here to earn their daily bread ... Oh, sorry, I

mean their rotten fish ... and what would the unbelievably noble Fonseca family think about such a yellow blood transfusion? There's nimbleness about her as well as subjection to my whims ... but now and then a show of ... of a coy resistance which she manifestly and joyously expects to be crushed ... all this makes me think of the Far East, where, by the way, I've never set foot. Mostly because it doesn't attract me at all... 'Thanks, querida, another whisky would be fine, querida' ... Oh this ... this looking at each other ... half-naked, trembling with desire but knowing that eternity is before us, and we want it ... this long vertiginous wait ... inhaling deeply every beauty around us ... and in us... even poetry... only to protract this icy and burning expectation... because we want it this way ... Let me light your cigarette, Cara ... what do you mean? The strophe of Alphonsus de Guinaraes' sonnet about the garden we read together yesterday? Voce e quem manda!

"A fonte dourada chora

"Por entre seixos be luar,

"Quando se fecham, Senhora,

"As janelas do teu lar."

"I was fencing all this afternoon with the French translation. Listen.

"Entre cailloux argentés

"Gît la fontaine dorée qui  
pleure

"Lorsque se ferment, oh ma  
belle dame,

"Les fenêtres de ta demeure."

("The golden fountain is  
weeping

Among moonlit pebbles and  
loam

At midnight when they close,  
Senhora,

The windows of your home.")

"Claro, tem razao. Of course I know it's far less beautiful than the original. Thank you, of course you're right, my drink is too pale, let's freshen it up. Look: every shadow ... all the garden is 'brightening'... easy ... easy ... because it has already started ... with this endless ... senseless night-watch ... it was indispensable to see each other ... to take each other in

from afar ... to feel ourselves severed from each other ... chaste, strangled by anxiety ... without any obstacle between our feverish, greedy arms ... no barriers between us but our will ... to transform nature into a magic garden.

"But it's only later, when I'm firmly anchored in the hot, wet velvet of her body, that time indeed comes to a stop ... everything around us, in us: is natural, 'normal' if you wish. But every moment transfigures nature ... Our motions are slow, floating, calling to mind those of deep-sea divers. The heat of our hearts and the waves of our tenderness rise imperceptibly but steadily to become lumps in our throats.

"All of a sudden, spasms of fever and violent jerks let the waves of passion foam and then ... abruptly: the clash with a ruthless stop-bolt and we are projected into the throbbing immobility of a statue of lovers above a proud barbarian gravestone. Seconds and minutes go by, a slight blessed shudder runs over us and a new floating undulation arises from the depths.

"We are settled in each other for voluptuous hours, we live submerged under the ever-growing tide of lust.

"I whisper into her ear. I am telling her soft and gentle and cruel and terrifying tales.

"We are both living inside our two bodies and also far beyond them. We are part of the exuberant nature which surrounds us, of its soothing quiet and also of its sadistic Black Masses. We are ceaselessly changing. Into night-flowers, birds, trails of blood, rags of skin lacerated by razor-blades - now we are hoarse yells, now the murmur of brooks under the moon. Only in our imagination? Where does imagination begin? Where does it end? Is it morbid? Why should we care?

"The only thing I know for certain: this is eternity. Our sighs are sighed by our innermost life. Our breathing follows the rhythm of permanent orgasm, we are cast in the iron mould of unending lust: ceaselessly ebbing and flowing.

"We are that fabulous being of Plato, with two heads, four arms and four legs.

"Without releasing her, without loosening my embrace by an inch, I manage to get to my feet and - my arms around her shoulders and her legs around my hips I carry her - obeying a dark longing - to the source of the intoxicating perfumes: to the open window. Everything becomes possible now. It wouldn't be at all astonishing, for us, to take off and fly out above those slumbering trees. Was the flight of the witches something like this?

"But all this is just a description of a picture seen from outside. All this might be cramped, forced, artificial. But it's not. This is a new, hitherto unknown state of consciousness. We wouldn't have access to it, my mistress and I, if we didn't have the capacity for gliding, for imperturbably swinging from one layer of the soul to another quite different one, A power we have acquired by mastering corporeal pain, the fear of death and: above all: the drunkenness of our senses.

Thus, and only thus are we able to split ourselves in two parts, looking from a little distance at our bodies that struggle and suffer and exult. But we see them from above for we are floating in the air, above these sweating forms, above those screens made of crude matter that cannot any more conceal from us the serene, the immortal life-essence, vapours of which are ascending toward us, now. One cannot glide over the sucking pits: over grasping passions if one is not half detached, half liberated from their weight. Otherwise one's pure aura is instantly swallowed by childish gluttony, which leads to an awakening in a bleak dawn dipped into the dreariness of exhausted animals.

"The ejaculation which ends these nights is almost the same as anybody else's. The difference? After all these over-heated hours, the emission of the vital substance is surprisingly minute. There is in certain countries a proverb saying that married couples who are in a lasting, frantic love with each other, do not beget children. Has it something to do with my story? Be that as it may everything points toward the probability that the organism absorbs during this endlessly renewed rapture a great part of its own vital secretions which - as well as the origin of life - still harbour some mysteries.

"On the other hand, this final 'dénouement' lasts such an absurdly long time and is so free of the 'little death' (which is the ancient name of the 'normal' coitus) that one literally feels the waves of his own passion - of his own vibrating electricity - running back into his own diaphragm, into his own brain, plunging them into a death-like sleep. Two hours of it do more good than a normal night's sleep."

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('All the same it's funny how poetically this fellow yells about, well, about not so extraordinary facts of life', grumbled the observer from the inverted fourth dimension, laying down his x-ray telescope, closing the folder and clapping the rubber band around it. 'Of course I know he has been in quite a few exciting situations. He could have spoken more clearly, more realistically about them. However I shall not throw the first nor the second stone at this poetaster. Must a man of action be an absolute brute and preferably an illiterate one, in order to be taken seriously by other bipeds?').

4

So he was at the top of his form, at five o'clock in the morning when he reached his shabby pent-house.

"How objectively, how realistically have I succeeded in putting in a few words such a delicate theme!", he congratulated himself pushing away the green and yellow folder and opening its yellow and green twin-brother. This gesture indicated his return to common terrestrial life: to his disorderly but successful business correspondence. Everything was fine. And best of all: the days which followed such nights were, as a rule, full of surprises. Wonders would come of this light-heartedness, this sensation of strength, this impression that he could leap over houses.

Trifling but meaningful events would take place. Sometimes he would throw his cigarette-butt, without aiming, into the middle of a tiny ashtray three metres away. In this mood he used to drive through Rio's erratic traffic with the bold awareness of having a sleepwalker's invulnerability, absent-mindedly speeding, wriggling out of dangerous situations,

nearly brushing other vehicles without ever a scratch. Waiters brought him newspapers which he was just about to request. In the street, gazing at a woman walking before him, she didn't look back. No. She stumbled a little.

Undoubtedly: his batteries had been recharged. He looked up at the distressing cupolas of Pedro's baroque castle of horrors, ("No, no, it's not his fault. A noble uncle of his had this beauty built.")

He asked himself what on earth might be going on behind that balcony. Could this morning's state of grace help the realisation of an old dream? Of a visionary capacity dawning in his spirit?

He closed his eyes and his faith was immediately rewarded. Abruptly he sighted a large, austere room. Darkish, full of smoke, somehow monastic with its niches, saints, stained-glass windows.

Beneath these, the nude bodies of two women and a boy were entangled in an extraordinarily complicated way that would have gratified the most overflowing imagination. A long "mata-porco", a knife for killing pigs relaxed in a corner, and a display of a dozen flesh-wounds evoked a savagery beyond anything Montenegro's rocks and valleys could have offered.

There was also a broken flask of ether with a vaporizer on it, and another one uncorked. Tiny clouds of vitriol seeped from its belly. The smell was unmistakable.

Unfortunately this picturesque vision faded away at his first critical thought. Of course! He was just embroidering with threads provided by his perfect knowledge of that place and of the characters in it.

If he wanted to know the exact score of the game played over there he couldn't (yet?) rely on his visionary powers but had (just as any common mortal!) to trot up to that uncanny Quimbanda-monastery and use his earthly, commonplace eyes.

("Preferably from close quarters and with a magnifying glass", he reflected but then noticed that the curtain behind the balcony was not entirely drawn and might thus give away some of the secrets of St. Pedro's Domes. "No magnifying glass! What I need are my binoculars!").

And thereupon he awarded himself a renewed certificate of lucidity, impartiality and a dozen other intellectual virtues - inseparable from such a scrupulously scientific seeker as Cardinal Gordan of Hell's almost achieved Vatican.

But he had been thinking of his wartime binoculars. They had vanished into thin air, long ago. What he owned now was an antique naval telescope. ("Where in Hell have I left it?") He liked the feel of its long brass tube and the idea that some Portuguese pirate had used it before him, scanning the sky-line for his victims' mast-tops. ("So my romanticism goes back to Treasure Island? What's wrong with that? Childish or not: I still like that book.")

The modern versions of this optical instrument were probably the most coveted devices in Brazilian cities. Telephoto lenses came next. ("What a bunch of lascivious apes! Right. And what about yourself?!").

Lying in ambush behind curtains, lots of Brazilians spent a considerable part of their spare time staring at beauties scattered around swimming-pools or sunbathing behind bushes, dressed in Paradise-style, or at others relaxing in their torrid flats - all windows open yearning for the smallest draught. These peeping Toms were everywhere. Even their unarmed eyes pierced through feminine clothing like x-rays. Voyeurs seemed to be part of the landscape. In the city centre, in the offices and cafes, they stood around gaping at the kaleidoscope of dazzling girls, in ecstasy, with half-open mouths, hands in pockets. (Not those of their jackets.) Sexual craving heaved the chests and filled the lungs all over these eight million square kilometres.

He glanced at his divers' watch. (A useful item in this climate. Moisture penetrated everywhere. After a couple of days, stowed away trunks and shoes were covered with thin greenish layers of mould. "This climate is a killer", Silbermann had once moaned. "Did you know that the average temperature here is precisely at the level maintained by scientists in their cultures of microbes? A kingdom for a rush of dry, cold air!" "Not for me", Gordan had protested, "give me hot humidity any time. I never felt healthier. There must be some affinity between me and our sub-microscopical brethren.")

It was 6:47. The dilapidated chest of black sculpted wood was very beautiful. It stood half-open in the middle of the anarchic bedroom. There was a huge bed with a sumptuous, dusty canopy and some thirty or forty books lying helter-skelter under it. Kitchen-chairs, a broken Venetian mirror, reproductions of El Greco and poor dear Vincent's corn-fields, and then: in a corner, a superb, man-size, cubist statue of Exù (moulded and soldered with rusty spare parts, stolen from wrecker's yards by mechanics in the Sao Cristovao suburb.) In the opposite corner, one of Pedro's chefs-d'oeuvres was leaning against the wall. The master of the lodging had indefinitely postponed its "accrochage".

The chest's inside was as chaotic as the rest of the place but he had no trouble unearthing the telescope from under heaps of dossiers, laundry and fresh linen. On top of the whole jumble lay an open envelope containing his spending money for the current month. He extracted a few small notes from it and threw it back where it had been without counting the cash. Nobody would come here during his absence except for Dona Conceicao, the cleaning-woman, and a very few starving but still resolutely exploring cockroaches. Among them this penthouse must have had a very bad reputation. Like the Sahara or the North Pole in gourmet circles. He didn't keep a crumb of food at home.

Not so the lodgers on the two lower floors. The "Desembargador", the Appellation Court judge and his prolific family walked on rolling carpets of invading cockroach-troops. This exalted magistrate never omitted - during his rare encounters with Gordan - to complain (in a stentorous voice and with gestures worthy of some sensational criminal process) the misdeeds of those orthopterians. As a matter of fact these insects swarmed all over Rio. In those days they seemed just to laugh at the countless anti-cockroach products contrived by contemporary pharmacology. Since then the



economic situation of the cockroaches (even theirs!) had catastrophically deteriorated. ("It's unjust to annoy them and to pursue them", declared Dona Conceicao about this creeping population, "they are Brazilians too after all, aren't they?").

Dona Conceicao would never have touched somebody else's money. The idea of larceny would come sooner to the mind of her crawling protégés than to her's. Definitely: this was not a country of petty thieves.

("Yes, but ... however ... still ... how shall I put it?") Well, in short: as soon as the sums involved in a transaction reached a point where it began to excite the native imagination, their "psychological profiles" changed radically. Time and again European importers received shiploads of rotten oranges or pebbles, modestly veiled by a thin layer of alligator-skins or exquisite tropical fruits. Long before the arrival of the ships in Europe the Brazilian branches of the buyers' banks had unblocked the letters of credit and had paid the price of that astonishing merchandise, to the last "centavo". What else could they have done? All the ship's documents and bordereaus and dispatch-notes had been presented to them officially, in due form. Everything was there. The signatures of the port authorities, of the naval Court's experts, of the Director of Customs, of the Ministry for Foreign Trade with certificates guaranteeing the provenance and quality - together with sanitary approbations, classifications, chemical analyses - every stroke of the pen, every paragraph on every sheet having been authenticated, certified, legalized by legions of notaries.

For in every forlorn jungle-village there were at least two "tabeliaos" (notaries) sitting and legalizing day and dark and night and main. 'Whatever deed the first tabeliao judged even by his standards too perplexing, would be obligingly and promptly legalized by his competitor, the document's authority being strengthened by rows of special decorative stamps and superb renaissance-style wax seals encased in carved wood containers and dangling under the parchment diploma at the end of yellow and green-striped silk-strings. As to the European importers: why should they be pitied? All those Gringos had to do was to drive their own prices up a little, so they would be indemnified by their Gringo customers and everything would be all right. Should those foreign blood-suckers change their minds and begin to pay decent prices for Brazilian goods: such funny cargoes would never again be seen. And even so: even now while their stinginess was flaying the hapless Brazilian farmers, those bewitched shiploads were relatively rare. Maybe periodically a thumb to put the balance of justice right. ("Anyway, the Gringos were obviously on the winning side, otherwise they wouldn't keep on buying up whatever they could in our Wonderland! Therefore it's easy to see where the real thieves are!").

Palm-greasing was more than a national habit. It was a style of life. Gordan had at first sight rediscovered here, the Balkanico-Levantine socio-economic rules of his homeland. From the very first days he felt like a stranded fish thrown back into the sea. (There was but a single moral law. One didn't take in his friends. As to the State, Banks, exaggeratedly rich strangers: the main reason Providence created them was so they could be fleeced.)

Half a year after having disembarked in Rio, less than nine months after his farewell to arms, he was at the head of his first fortune. (Wrong: it was the second one. Both his father and mother had been driven in their coach from a twelve metre high dam straight into the Danube, by a probably very drunk coachman. This happened in 1938. Eighteen months' life in the exuberant atmosphere that characterized Paris between the wars and the purchase of a pavilion in Neuilly - recently resold - didn't make a big dent in his inheritance. It vanished completely however a little later, under the clouds of gunpowder that descended on the Balkans.)

In Rio, in those days money came and went, flowing nimbly both ways. In 1947 (things have got a little bleaker in the meantime), one just had to register a commercial firm, with a minimum of formalities, and the banks began, without second thoughts to advance money on the new "enterprise's" drafts, i.o.u.'s and other proofs of sales on credit. (A bank manager after a couple of quick ones: "You know, the greatest medium in town, that's me! I just have to sniff at a draft and I know whether it's genuine, covering an existing deal or just eye-wash about complicitous sham purchases and sales of poetically imagined goods. Even our greatest firms often enough use such rags, particularly when they are low on cash. Me? I never open my mouth. Like a half-wit, without batting an eyelid I advance the dough. All of them pay up sooner or later. All of them make money. None of them wants to be kicked out of business.")

In less than six weeks he had made more than half a million Cruzeiros. The heavy-weight dollar was worth four (still very respectable) Cruzeiros. In the following thirty years the rest of the world never had a chance to stop admiring the Brazilian economy's vertiginous progress. According to today's papers more than eighteen thousand old time Cruzeiros would nowadays buy a single anemic dollar. Forward, ho! That proud ultramarine currency's value had been multiplied by - 4500, or in other words: it's worth four thousand five hundred times less now than it was thirty years ago. How silly Europe's exotic peoples look with their poor devaluation rate of a mere three hundred and fifty or so! What a proof that the future belongs to the very young nations! Cheers to their progress!

In a sense he had pinched those hundred and thirty thousand and some dollars while serving Marianne (the virgin-emblem of the République) as he had done before in the 'Massif Central' and around Carcassonne. (But maybe not exactly in the same way?) To cut a complicated story short, it was about the famous and colossal Exposition destined to reaffirm, shortly after the war, France's prestige in Latin America. Plans from Paris were grandiose. Eight million cruzeiros had been earmarked for the gloire's renovation at the Antipodes. Three huge buildings had to be redecorated from top to bottom. Gigantic shop-windows, the building of new pavilions and boxes was a must. The French Navy's surviving destroyers were mobilized for the overseas transport.

That outdated Cruzeiro's acquisitive power was tremendous. In the homeland it was relatively mightier than the contemporary dollar's in the U.S.A. Legions of architects, decorators, carpenters, mirror and glass-makers, electricians, inn-keepers, lorry owners, firms of night-watchmen, Union bosses of dockers and porters, speculators in real estate leases - all of them dreaming of fat contracts, crooked one and all - besieged the commission of French technicians who couldn't have been more dumbfounded by the reactions and the indecipherable mentality of this outlandish rabble and above all by the middle and lower class Brazilians' total ignorance of Racine's language.

The Embassy lent them Gordan as chief-interpreter of the popular idiom and mentality. (With French, Latin and some Italian behind him, only a peerless imbecile wouldn't have spoken fluent Portuguese after three months in the country. But perched on the sumptuous ivory tower of their language the French instinctively disdain polyglot achievements.)

In a matter of a week the wayward Roland of this 'chanson de geste' advanced, from an interpreter's role to the unofficial rank of a commercial adviser to the French delegation, and his prestige came close to the authority of a spiritual director in business-matters. Every morning, at the head of the flabbergasted board of experts, he discussed prices with would-be contractors, booting out the most obvious thieves, suggesting in a very cool tone provisions, clauses, deadlines, contractual fines, alternative solutions and then just after the contracts were signed and the first instalment handed over, he exchanged a rapid and grave glance with the overjoyed candidate.

It was a cosmic laser-beam that connected in a trice the secret life of Balkan valleys with the sombre forests of Amazon country. (This mystical communication was made easier by the fact that when thinking of business all Brazilian brains tick exactly the same way.)

Every single one of those honest undertakers had from the very first minute seen through the situation and understood its real meaning. This frail old discreetly coughing unobtrusive functionary of the 'Arts et Métiers' who understood nothing about anything could not for a moment be taken seriously for the genuine big boss of the Exposition. The chief of chiefs could be nobody else but this sturdy, loud-mouthed devil of a Gringo who knew (or guessed?) the rules of Brazilian poker-games so well. He loyally protected his government's interests. Hadn't he thrown out the most impudent offers? But then he didn't seem inhuman or devoid of conciliatory spirit. Quite obviously it was this martially but not always inimically yelling Gringo who would control everything from the beginning to the end of the works and on up to the final settling of accounts. How much might his goodwill be worth? Oh, as usual. Five to ten per cent of the gross. Naturally this already figured in the smart tradesman's preliminary calculations of costs and administrative expenses. He would have been full of mistrust about the whole deal, had he not managed to locate the man in the key position: the central palm to be urgently greased. That was why the business card - ceremoniously dog-eared and presented to Gordan - bore the faintly penciled mention: 'Office-hours from seven a.m.'

Two arduously and zealously active weeks followed. Every morning he made the milkman's round of three or four contractor's places and collected his entire commission, staying for a few minutes' amicable chat about the weather, the latest musical show and the football. Thereafter the delighted companions parted, not without having in lyrical accents proclaimed the superiority of a beautiful friendship above all of the world's other treasures, at the same time exchanging 'abraços'. (A gesture which consists of tapping gently on each other's backs and means nothing at all.) Then he returned to the Exposition's headquarters, and got on with the defence of the interests of 'la Douce France' as well as his own.

Even now he was still so much a Byzantine that he regarded these arrangements as profoundly equitable. According to his flashing arithmetic he had spared Lady Marianne a total loss of one and a half million cruzeiros - a sum that would have been irremediably ghosted away without his intervention. It would be a flagrant injustice not having rewarded himself for his services with a third of that amount, even if the description of his merits, in terms of commercial book-keeping, might have been a somewhat intricate task.

Thus had it happened that Brazil's cultural horizon was widened by the founding of 'CORCOVADO BOOKS'. It made a little money but solely owing to a few unobtrusive subsidies from the 'rue de Lille' - of the 'Oeuvres Françaises à l'Etranger'. So far he had published only two widely circulated school-books: a new French-Portuguese (and vice-versa) pocket dictionary and a bilingual selection of Michelet's historical works. But all this was bound to change. 'Corcovado' would soon become a great power in Brazil. An enterprise with assets of at least five million Cruzeiros, exclusively controlled by the extirpator of anti-Expositional wrongdoings!

Just as everywhere else: a solid financial basis is also, in Brazil, the best material for asphaltting the royal highway that leads to substantial gains. However, this was not the perspective which entranced him most. (He meant it seriously.) He deemed his present way of life quite satisfactory.

But on the other hand, such an important publishing house as the one he had in mind (for he realised once more that a capital investment of five Brazilian millions had a much longer arm than elsewhere) could speed up the ripening of ideas and natural inclinations. No, no: power didn't attract him either. He loathed the recollections of personal power and the way even a nondescript company-commander had to exercise it over conquered villages.

But he wanted at any price to see with his own eyes the reactions of a secluded country (which Brazil still was - almost as much as the dying Chinese Empire) if its inhabitants all of a sudden came to know that life beyond the grave was a fact. How would people react, having to think about eternal life clearly, practically, as about the arrangements for impending holidays? The paramount influence on his thinking was Bergson's philosophy. This half-forgotten Father of a new followerless Church affirmed that all worldly greed would be dampened by the certainty of survival, just like the electric lights of a smoky ballroom seem to fade at dawn when the rising sun's glare breaks in through the open windows. People wouldn't be turned into angels but the pursuit of material goods would become less hectic, less cannibalistic. This would probably lead to a sensible improvement of human nature, ironing out its worst iniquities. For Gordan was perfectly aware that behind the many-coloured sparkling scenery he had chosen (or that had been chosen?) for his activities, unimaginable strangling misery oppressed Brazil's endless spaces and countless crowds. And who would not prefer living among satisfied people to sitting in the middle of an arena for Victorian rat-fights? But he had arrived at the conclusion that it was quite impossible to change the course of history by external action. Only a psychological thunderbolt, an abrupt Bergsonian change of the soul's illumination, the new sun of a new empirical religion would be capable of transforming (gradually, yes, but not at all slowly) this planet's present aspect.

(While brooding over these transcendental problems, his good faith was beyond any doubt, wasn't it? Well, well ... there was the very faint shadow of a doubt, just now arising in his spirit. He remembered a few discussions he had had before which were somehow related to this self-analysis. How ruthless, how aggressive had been his verbal duels with priests! Even at Silbermann's, when he had met Padre Walden, the "little inquisitor" whom he had immediately liked. Of course the "holy midget" had a great sense of humour and wasn't easily offended. And naturally in all those altercations Gordan's outbursts were mitigated by a falsely urbane tone, by ironical understatement, by cool although transparently abusive sarcasm. He bluntly accused God's men of bad faith. Behind their passionate defence of religion, Church, divine revelation and so forth there was a dark point. And it stank. Didn't they, with their unctuous declamations - consciously or unconsciously - protect their personal comfort? Not their spiritual comfort. The bodily one. Their social standing. Or to put it very simply: their jobs.)

("Well spoken, Gordan, but what about a closer look at yourself?" This inner voice that asked this disagreeable question came from his recollections of a secular tradition. Of the pitylessly boring Jesuitical self-examination. Were his own convictions, his seeking his - let's say, metaphysical - experiments entirely free of egocentric motives? Was he not propelled mainly by the will to unfold, to multiply his natural gifts? To exploit them fully. And maybe not with the sole purpose of attaining his spirit's sovereign freedom? Worst of all: had his striving not been tainted by the wish to keep and to strengthen his own venturesome but by no means unpleasant social position? For sure, had some joker asked him such a question he would have protested with the same indignation - the same leonine roars and howls uttered by the Church-dignitaries he had openly indicted for venality and hypocrisy. But now, alone, he could coolly discard that ugly suspicion. Vulgar egoism didn't figure among his motives.)

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The future ancestor had a fit of laughter, cleared his throat, lit the day's thirtieth cigarette and began one of his hoarse, grumbling lectures. Unfortunately the Inter-Time Tel & Tel Inc. having yet to convene its first meeting of stockholders, Gordan couldn't listen. It might have been useful because it was concerned with his meditation.

"You silly ass! You're taking yourself for Schopenhauer! You with your note-book of youthful Gordanian 'Paranaesen und Maximen'! Here's a better aphorism for you to chew on. 'No one is capable of conceiving thoughts that would crush him!!!' - Example: nobody could think he's an incurable cretin and a really hopeless failure. As soon as he dares think such a thought seriously: the man can get out of his predicament. Why? Because it was the feeling of latent reserves of energy in himself (which could manage to ram his prison's walls) that opened his eyes to his incarceration, which he would otherwise - feeling himself weak - desperately deny, christening his dungeon: full liberty! So: insight is conditioned by strength! WISDOM by FORCE!! Above a certain level of banality they begin growing towards each other as if attracted by an obscure identity. Listen: let's make a metaphysical joke between us. (By the way, don't worry about my yelling at you: I condescend to recognize a few common points in us. How come? I dunno.) Let's offer to the 'calotins' as the Jacobins called the priests, a poisoned gift. Venomous, but so beautiful that they will be enraptured swallowing it. Good. Haven't I shown you with my usual brilliance that Wisdom and Force or Power or Might tend to meet. And what about the other attributes of Divinity? Does an extremely wise and powerful man blackmail or steal? Why, the knowledge of his exceptional position brings Justice automatically into the picture. Whom would he be compelled to envy or what would he covet beyond the contemplation of his wonderful achievements? So here we have Beauty or Glory. For the sight of such a wise, mighty, just spirit functioning is harmonious: esthetically uplifting: truly glorious! (Think of Goethe!) And so we draw the converging lines of the rest of the adoring litanies that enumerate all the much-praised qualities which - in these mortal waters where we, poor fishes, are a-paddling - remain isolated. Only in the highest spheres do these shining virtues unite. Where? At the surface where water touches air: eternally vivifying air. At the point where the blindingly white beam of Divinity plunges into our mortal element and is immediately refracted into a rainbow of the finest virtues. Which get less and less fine as they dive further and further away from Eternity. But they can converge again in the shape of very highly developed personalities, coming close to the sacred air (ether? sky?) and return into the virginally white and perfect beam: during the moments of Beatific Vision and Purified Dying. Now isn't this something for the highest Board of Directors of the Heavenly Banco dello Spirito Santo? Shouldn't they jump and dance for joy? Isn't my metaphor - even if we take it only for a metaphor - a more convincing argument in favour of deity's existence than St. ArisThomas' (sic!) hilarious 'proofs' beginning with the 'unmoved mover'? But we'll stop the rejoicing in Israel, you and me my boy, with a single hard look at His so-called Creation. At the bloody garbage produced by that snow-white 'Wunderkind'. What was the 'mortal element' for, if He felt so perfect alone, by Himself? A sadist then? Oh no! Just thin air. So strengthen your will in order to endure more truth about yourself. Don't for a minute see yourself in such a goddam blameless pure and noble light. Or else you'll go and try to butt in walls with your bare skull. Fortunately I happen to know it's pretty thick. However, try to learn modesty. You are not God. Look at me. I succeeded in becoming modest. Humble even. I know that I'm not God. Just a Half-God. That'll be all for today.

And for tomorrow and all the other days. I'm fed up with this still mute Inter-Time-Phone (Progress indeed! My arse!). And your 'Paranaesen und Maximen': back to the attic! Moreover: I know your story too well. Eureka: Eureka! From where I sit I'm omniscient regarding your funny person! In hindsight? Everybody is? Wait! Wait! I know more about you than the best historian could ever scratch together. Why? You bloody idiot! Because your perfection bound fermenting molecules are still in me! And mine were already in you dictating your forethoughts!! So isn't the future Man-God already in both of us - (poor but fighting bastard-animals) - whispering omniscient advice? Oh, no I have to stop! Too early for the sixth whisky and soda! Well I don't dislike your tale but I'm busy recounting more recent adventures. I'll leave the sequel to your bawdy legend for my unobtrusive twin-brother. He's nostalgic, poetically-minded - but underneath the same lusty, slightly perverse pig as all our family. He'll not use the In-Ti-Phone. Too discreet, the hypocrite. He too expends tons of brackets but few exclamation marks. You'll be O.K. with him. A last tip. Couldn't you booze a little less? Couldn't you accept a little restraint? No? Well, I never did. Still going strong. Medical Wunderkinds, aren't we? Tant mieux. Touch wood.

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By which I get my wealth

And very gladly will I drink

Your Honour's noble health.

Farewell and cheerio, Funnyface!

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Alas, due to the technical imperfections of his time, Gordan couldn't follow all these well-meant injunctions. He thought he saw his own 'psychological profile' very clearly. Didn't he know he was driven solely by that (cosmic? mystic? prophetic?) thunderbolt which had struck him in childhood, in front of the gigantic red sun!

What was his craving to know the unknowable if not an inborn refusal to yield to banality settling in life's petty dimensions. He never thought of death. Particularly not when it was close at hand. Only life interested him. This, or another one.

Because there was ... there were ... he couldn't for a second doubt it ... somewhere, about these endless spaces - far behind these Wagnerian mountains ... there lived ... forlorn among the galaxies of superstitions and charlatans ... there existed ... (every sense thundered it in Gordan's ears: he or they was or were bound to exist in this land of madness, poetical trance and the Wisdom of Pure Beauty) ... there was or there were ... one or several true prophets ... living, probably unknown even to themselves ... he or they were the missing link between material and non-material life ... and their presence would reveal the terrifying and magnificent secret of the red sun's other side.

It was a question of life and death for him to find that magical pin in Brazil's gigantic hay-stack. But he would never find it without the radar-system of a strong organisation. It was a must also for the tumultuous events that would follow the great discovery.

How lucky it was that nobody guessed his thoughts! It would have been the joke of the century ! The boiling down of his Grail-seeking to this infamous equation: The Central Secret of the Universe = the pinching of a certain amount of money.

Yet it was a strictly logical deduction. It resulted from the same internal geometry of nature which determined the shape of crystals. The sacrilegious equation which depreciated the value of Beatific Vision - fixing its price at five million vile Cruzeiros - proceeded from a firm reality: as immovable as the axioms of Euclides. Here's why.

### 3

Brazil's lower classes were full of the most generous disposition but were sorrily lacking in the means to manifest it. As to the wealthy citizens, it happened that they threw huge sums away but they did it exclusively by exhibitionism. Showing off was their greatest passion. In all other circumstances Molière's 'L'Avare' was a Prodigal Son compared with them. Nothing could distress this elite more (getting them into a state of panic-stricken dismay) than a request for money be it for the most sublime causes.

Of course they never bluntly refused the loan or contribution or investment they had been asked for. The rules of Brazilian courtesy came first! Unfortunately it just happened that they were (every single one of them) at that very moment facing total bankruptcy. As soon as they succeeded in averting the imminent danger of death by starvation for themselves and their poor families, this dear and excellent friend could count on them: their house and fortune would then be entirely at his disposal. And thereafter, they fled the dear and excellent friend like plague, smallpox and elephantiasis.

Moreover: what a stupid idea! Funds for a publishing firm?! How silly! Had Gordan had other ideas: a dope-smuggling network for instance or a steady little white-slave circuit: serious people would take him seriously and several hands as discreet as they were open would support his clever enterprise. But that line of commercial activity was not to his liking. His law-degree hadn't been of much use so far. It did allow him, however, to locate with the greatest precision the border between civil and penal law, and to perform his haphazard operations exactly there. He had never had the slightest trouble. This was a comforting thought but didn't resolve the impending problem.

There was no real money in books. Everybody thought so. However this wasn't always true. For example the Ultramundain Poems of Humberto Campos (of this great Brazilian poet) turned out to be a gold-mine for one of Gordan's competitors. The deceased bard, ex-member of the Brazilian Academy of Belles Lettres, had had the noble idea of temporarily leaving his dwelling on the Elysian Fields in order to honour the Spiritualist Circle of a derelict and noisome village with a visit. There he dictated, through the mouth of an illiterate medium, an entire volume of his newest lyrical creations to another (literate) seer whose handwriting began, just then, to resemble (oh miracle!) more and more the handwriting of the departed genius. This similarity - as well as the obviously Camposian inspiration of the heaven-sent works - was confirmed not only by the etherified laureate's widow (who of course drew - as was only just - new extraterrestrial royalties from the clairvoyant publisher of those transcendent verses) but also by most of the aristocratic academicians delighted to see (at last!) headlines about a literary subject on the first pages of the Brazilian newspapers together with their own photographs and interviews authenticating the awe-inspiring phenomenon of desincarnate versification.

Very few critics dissented. They hinted timidly at a few discrepancies in the style of the new quickly materializing poems. But these skeptics probably hadn't taken into account the psychological shock, the effects of the euphoria that troubadour must have felt while wandering in the fifth dimension and observing from up there how his sales increased from the usual gloomy thousand (a total to which his stay on this unpoetical planet had accustomed him) and shooting past the mark of six hundred thousand copies sold in less than six months.

4

But Gordan's schemes didn't include such primitive tricks. He was yearning for a sublime truth far above trickery. ("Although", he reflected, "it has never been possible to separate completely these two levels of perception: reality and illusion. Nowhere does nature produce pure gold. She hides it among rocks and sand. The purest mystics have resorted to tricks. Sometimes they deluded their public, thus creating the necessary atmosphere. But more often than not they deceived themselves. Yet these self-delusions cast their nerves towards higher and higher degrees of rapture - until they reached the ultimate limit of the soul's growth: the revelation of its own divinity. But to attain such heights and bring their message back to the crowds bound to the plain, they had to be entranced by the ideas and the symbols of their own mythology. Of the legends and ceremonies that were living energies then and there. The gods that inhabited the saints' souls could never have spoken without the help of those theatrical effects.

He darted a sidelong glance at his own show. The banquet of the bad spirits was set up at the corner of the alley-way leading toward Pedro's, and the two bewitched girls', pseudo-baroque calamity. From the balcony window they could have seen the 'Nature Morte (very morte) au Col Blanc'. A few early risers had started their morning stroll. They stepped respectfully down off the sidewalk moving coyly around the visible meeting place of invisible demons. No doubt there was awed whispering about the Lord of the Seven Crossroads. Manifestly he was everywhere, poking his nose into everybody's business.

Only a few days earlier Gordan had witnessed the self-immolation of a very pale girl who howled and wriggled in her many-coloured blazing dress kneeling on the pavement in front of a rather indifferent crowd.



"She probably couldn't help punishing herself", a middle-aged lady explained unctuously. And, finishing her funeral oration, "She must have betrayed Exù with some misbeliever!"

Her tone conveyed heartfelt indignation about the suspected sacrilege. It was indeed an unforgivable thoughtlessness to multiply in such a blameworthy way the quite satisfactory number of the Sinister King's horns.

5

The mental attitude of these people couldn't be more favourable. What had to be done was to unite the countless but essentially similar sects and to instil a new mysticism into this collectivity's highly receptive heart. He didn't aspire to the role of a prophet nor would he run for the Papacy of the new Church. But he felt a generous humanitarian enthusiasm, seeing himself with his mind's eyes as an Eminence Grise behind the throne of a never foreseen Pontificate.

He was no dreamer. His plan was feasible. Under two conditions.

First: he needed the sacred fire: the inner aid of a never vacillating gapless faith. Without it he was incapable of convincing anybody of anything. However: if he marched resolutely forward he would certainly - on his road to Damascus - encounter his faith. Preaching to others is also a kind of auto-suggestion. Total faith would come to him: 'like a thief in the night'. He heard the babbling of miraculous sources - the presence of still virgin mines in the depths of his subconscious. Even if the price of fanatical belief was foundering into definitive madness he would not recoil. But he trusted his hitherto benevolent Destiny. He had a distinct premonition of his growing power. He would realize the medieval dream of the Homunculus, create artificial beings condensed from the auras of ecstatic virgins. The exploration of remote jungle hide-outs for miraculous mandragora-roots and their hanged producers awaited him. Descents into the caves of ghosts from vanished Atlantis, encounters with omniscient sages flashed through his imagination. No doubt: the mystical lightning of a new Religion would pierce and exalt Gordan at the end of this road.

But there was a second condition to be fulfilled, however prosaic it might seem. No great dream had ever been materialized without a cast iron foundation under it. To shake up the consciousness of even this unimportant corner of the world, a relatively small but efficient clockwork of numerous wheels was necessary. Pencil in hand, using all his tactical talents he had calculated the project and its cost. Dozens of expeditions all over the enormous, partly empty, partly unexplored territory - doing psychical research on an unprecedented scale - filming - probing relentlessly. He anticipated the publication of the first, most sensational accounts of Brazil's unknown mysteries, and then the financial snowball permitting further digging into the hard core of Occultism's no-man's land. His sharp-edged arithmetic had led him to reliable conclusions.

He needed: five thousand shares (nominal or to the bearer) at a thousand Cruzeiros each, duly signed, partly paid and deposited at one of his banks charged with the incorporation. This was all he wanted. A proof of immortality and five millions. Surprisingly enough, these two things were inseparably intertwined. A surrealistic delirium? Not at all. Just his fantastic but hard-boiled reality. ("No panicking at the thought! Easy, easy!").

How could he put his hands on five million? He had at least a dozen prosperous friends. He hadn't even tried to bother them about his idea. It would have been hopeless. Nobody would go along with a publishing project. Not even the modestly lucrative diffusion of spiritualist books would find financial supporters. Profits of forty or fifty per cent in a year didn't interest anybody. Brazil's new-born industry, mightily protected by an unassailable barrier of high customs duties practically didn't have to reckon with foreign competition and drained all the free capital. Only propositions assuring a yearly gain of more than a hundred and fifty per cent were found worthy of a serious Brazilian investor's attention. Thus the normal solutions were out. That left the hare-brained ones.

"Poor people come to see me about their money-problems", his ally the sorcerer Tiberio had explained, going on in his much too polite, soft, Brazilian voice:

"And what do the wealthy customers want? Miraculous cures maybe? Not on your life. The best doctors money can buy are taking care of their precious health. What the rich ladies and gentlemen want to find with our help is: rejuvenescence and beauty (which is quite relative, and depends on taste, ha-ha). Sometimes bloodthirsty revenge ! Listening to their cruel ideas would freeze even thy blood. But mostly they want amorous conquests of quite astounding sorts. That's right! Even now, after thy amazingly rapid progress, thou canst not guess half of what is happening around me - around this servant of thy servants who obeys thy orders ... and whom thou darest call ... yes indeed ... what a funny Gringo art thou! ... why was it thou calledst me last time when we got so very plastered together ... Why am I the Great Golden Cat? ... Well it doesn't matter ... some Gringo joke probably ... what of it ... aren't we chums? I'll presently show thee still other tricks ... even here in this cave ... What cave? Where? Ha-ha-ha ... in front of thine illustrious nose! Hidden by the undergrowth and that thick cedar-tree ... there are three holy daughters of the Spirit ... sleeping in the cave... they've been sleeping there for more than eleven days... awaiting their initiation ... and they have compresses of very special herbs on the shaven tops of their heads and all around their skulls. Ha-ha-ha, thou wilt see what my little sweet and scented herbs can do ... Thou wilt see all sort of things that will please thee ... but: Caramba! Thou wilt learn that I'm not a cat ... golden or not ... I'm a tucan with a big thick gold and yellow beak and I like to dig with it into deep pockets filled with - yellow and gold Spanish doubloons! ... Oh yes ... thou knowest ... if I had to choose between glory glory halleluia in heaven's eternal bliss or a huge heap of the right stuff here in this valley of tears ... well I'm nothing but a poor ignorant caboclo - half-caste ... I'd modestly and humbly choose the dough ... Doesn't thy Gracious Excellency agree with me?"

Gordan's Gracious Excellency did fully agree. But what a Chinese puzzle had come of this agreement !

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