
INVISIBLE AUTHORS

The Ruins of Godin-Mugnier

NEOX/J, ITALO CALVINO AND DAVID WAKEHAM

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CRAIYON

MMXXII

My place could perfectly well be
occupied by a mechanical device.

Italo Calvino

The modern scriptor is born
simultaneously with the text.

Roland Barthes

Imagine that, far from rejecting it,
Victor Frankenstein *melted into* the
living armor of his creation.

Premonitory dream

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SI. INTRODUCTION

Calvino's 1967 lecture "Cybernetics and Ghosts," with the Italian subtitle "Appunti sulla narrativa come processo combinatorio" ("notes on narrative as a combinatory process") anticipates the fruitful use of machine learning as a combinatory prosthesis. In this lecture Calvino describes the author as a *combinatory machine*: "[the author] makes choices and takes them as they come, and then he makes other choices, and then others, and on and on. We can perhaps call it a kind of cybernetic-mechanical situation. And this is what we might call the literary machine" (tr. Andrea Cossu).

By "cybernetic-mechanical situation" Calvino means a situation in which a literary work is the product of a number of, let's say, nine choices, or acts of serendipity. The nine decisions he attributes to the literary machine do not refer to a specific process or method of writing. Rather, each of the steps the author makes are like links in a chain, "tangential units" as he calls them. His chief interest is that the machine eventually arrives at a solution to the question posed.

In response to the query, "what is the relation between text and author?", Calvino imagines an "invisible author", responsible for the "emergent product" of the text, the result of a process in which each of the choices contributes meaning. This procedural serendipity, Calvino says, "tends to break down any opposition between what we call a system and chance." Chance, of course, is only what is perceived or defined by the literary machine as chance; for instance, a flash of insight or the right phrase at the right time.

But Calvino argues that this does not contradict the idea of a grand plan or guiding schema, only the visibility of this schema. There is not only a biographical author, according to Calvino, but an "invisible author", the deliberately invented context that guides the writer's choices. In Calvino's case, "the boundary between them is uncertain" (Calvino 1996: 79). If we cannot determine the boundaries, can we use machine learning to deliberately muddy that boundary, or generate a text that will probe Calvino's distinction?

SII • PROLOGUE



In the ninety years that stretch between our era and the third great era of imaginary cities, an innumerable number of lives were lived, imagined, or invented. My own life was not one of them. But perhaps in imagining my life I have imagined another's, and in imagining it I have written a book.

What is my life if not a novel? What are all my books if not variations of one another? But "literature" has had in the meantime other meanings besides "imagined life" and "created book," just as "urban growth" has other meanings than "three aluminum towers and seven gates with spring-operated drawbridges." And so I am forced to make a distinction between my life and the book I have written about it.

I live in a place whose name I do not know. Other people live in this same place. And they compose poems, songs, novels, and plays whose names they do not know either. I cannot know whether this place that I have never seen and whose name I do not know has inspired many other books and many other lives like mine, whether my place is singular or an accumulation.

However, I can tell you about a new book, which may be more or less imaginary, and which was born one day on a whim. Its principal character is the place in which I lived all those years and knew many people like me—who wrote and created poems, novels, and plays—while we did not know our lives were in literature.

TI • THE FEAST



Telegenic people wearing balloons.

From Zirna, you can travel to nearby Alexandria, a city with an air of cosmopolitanism and in whose center one sees shops built of amber, whose Gothic porphyry cloisters have a hexagonal floor plan, whose Ficus-Bouvard foliage bears only a single large leaf as a symbol of victory. From every balcony and window, flowers—and not even flowers of the vegetable variety but carnations, no doubt thrown there by telegenic people, many of whom emerge from the city's turnpike stations wearing balloons, nymphs, and a certain artificial semblant of poetry—flutter and announce the beginning of the end.

At this hour some, hearing their neighbors cursing on their balconies, feel transported to laugh, and the City in all its beauty becomes a feast.

PI • THE EMPTY NICHEs



The dirty Venetian coast.

From Alexandria we proceed to Rodopi. But is this city of stone terraces not really the husk of Alexandria? Do the pines of Rodopi not in fact bejewel the dirty Venetian coast, though the place where the travelers arrive looks like the most beautiful in the world? The settlement has as streets eight hundred bridges, no streetcars, many villas with pillars of gilt, a monument of green marble, a beach of white sand. But can this be Rodopi? We press on.

Arriving at the next town there are twenty-four niches at the corners of the bus station, and the niches are empty. A sign next to each of them reads: "No one was ever here." We go on and on. We arrive at Orsova. The bus driver stops the bus. He gets out and points to a cat sleeping under an olive tree. There is no town.

MI • EXPOSING THE CITY

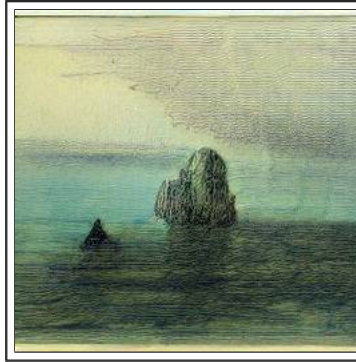


The shadows look strange.

You have arrived in Tcherbakovo at the start of its “brightest” and “saddest” hours. White, pink, red, and gold trees shroud the main buildings of the city. The town becomes truly colorful, as if it had been lit from within.

But the shadows look strange; the porticos are diminished; the faces do not correspond to the expected day, and the rays of the setting sun are drawn and refracted by the rows of trees that crowd the streets. The town appears not to have permanently been, but has emerged here in the past few hours, as if a person had taken a photograph of it at a distance, set the image on a frame, and will soon close it once more.

III • THE SHINING ROCK



The ship of your crew, half buried in fog.

From the mountain of Heraklion, you see only one boat on the seas, the ship of your crew, half buried in fog. On the weathervane, black with the oil smoke of the furnace, there is no name. Captain Rama is a short man, stocky, and bearded. Beneath the cowl of his anorak, his head is hard with the strokes of the whip. The straining sailors chant his name, but their voice is broken by the roughness of the sea.

It is late, they may not return for days; the lamp that flickers above the spume-whitened deck will soon grow dark; cold water will enter the hull, the lamp will be extinguished. On the wall of the forecastle, they will gather a few hours before dawn and watch the sun's first rays painting the horizon. The first rock of Ionia or Lesbos will rise like a gleaming sheet of steel in the luminous chaos of the sky.

PII • LEAVING THE CITY



All these paths are alike.

You are standing on a solitary walkway and want to discover other paths weaving through Aries, knowing they are most certainly nearby. All these paths are alike. From the cliffs, at various levels, look down on streets and houses with walls of pebbles, all lit by hurricane lamps whose trembling flames beckon you to come closer. Proceed. Examine the water that sometimes heaves and foams, the gray and malodorous stains, the fruit floating on the surface and the dead, abandoned among the rocks.

Identify the little girl to whom a man in dark clothes raises an arm outstretched, who takes her and whispers good-bye, and who descends to meet the departing ferryman. The little girl will lift her head and allow you to see the sly, two-colored gaze, the long, mocking nose, and for a moment, which then fills the twilight, the wide mouth behind which her bare teeth flash. She will smile at you. Slowly she will run toward you, then slowly she will pause and turn to look in all directions. She will choose a path. Whichever path she chooses leads away; no one ever returns to Aries.

MII • THE MASTERS OF MANY THINGS



“What is it like to return home?”

You visit the hospital for the insane in Jibilchak. They stand up all together, shuffling their feet, then clap their hands once to demonstrate the sound of a cymbal. With fingers pointing in the wind, they shout, “We are doing many things!” This declaration comes every five minutes. At other times they all take a step back, pull down the visor on their black helmets, and ask of each visitor, in the manner of a high school class, what it is like to return home. Someone repeats, “We are doing many things!” and falls into a coma.

Others pretend they are not ill; others are not ill and try to escape with their personal belongings to the border. Another group is asleep. As many as you count visit the toilets. Every five minutes they shout, “We are doing many things!” And every time someone says “We are doing many things!” he also laughs uncontrollably, then falls down on the ground.

You sit in the corner. You gaze at the sunlight on the lead tiles. You gaze at the pale back of the patient. The patient says nothing. You gaze at the air-conditioning fan. The hours pass. Now the time has come. You approach the ill patient’s bed, which is near the air-conditioning vent. You ask, “What is it like to return home?”

He does not answer. His face is turned toward the window.

MIH • SELLING HAIR



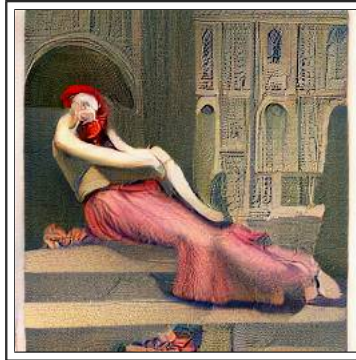
A shadow of a shadow that belongs to no one.

As soon as you enter the city of Arisbel, the priest whose service accompanies you identifies himself with the hat and light-colored vestments of his kind. He walks by your side like a shadow that mimics your footsteps, a shadow of a shadow that belongs to no one. He checks in at the seminary, the museums, the playhouses and vivaria; he talks about the weather at the prefecture of foreign services. He tries to understand the intricacies of your life: what time you sleep, whether you play soccer, if you dream of moving to Rome.

He guides you to the markets of salt, tobacco, and cement; he cajoles you to take a coffee and a Turkish delight at a cattery owned by the Christian Senicharsky family. He amazes you with antique weapons in the weapons shop; he interrupts your conversation with two city merchants to warn you of the danger of robbers who live in the groves of plane trees, sell their hair on Tverskaya Street, and make money by stealing the caps off the heads of the women who pass by.

In short, he does everything except perform his true function: baptizing converts and teaching the catechism. After a while you realize this too, and you understand that he is simply in the city of Arisbel to ask for alms. He is such a tedious man, and probably not even a real priest; nevertheless, he is your duty.

MIV • THE MONTH OF SAINT GIORGIO



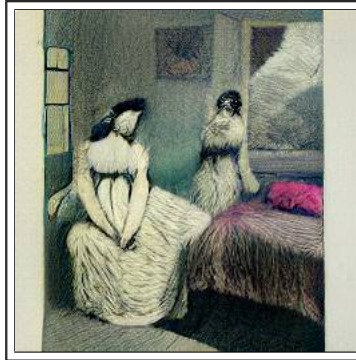
A different girl with a skirt the color of blood.

In the month of Saint Giorgio, when the mistral disturbs the damp stones of the city of Florence, and a brittle light shines in the streets for hours, a slender girl is seen all alone in the Duomo's Piazza della Signoria, her skin powdered white with red flowers and her eyes glued to the candelabra at the altar. She has a voice that is thin and shrill and a face that seems to have been attacked by a constant cold.

The thin girl turns around and stares at the tourists. She opens her mouth and seems about to say something, but instead, she closes her eyes and stares into the flickering light of the candelabra. Then, the organ's brassy note sounds, the girl rushes away, and the tourists pass on their way to the station to take the train back home.

I too was in Florence once, when the sun poured down on the Duomo's mosaic pavement, on the golden lights of the cathedral, and when the organ's strings made the bells on the roofs ring in the wind. When I arrived the slender girl was gone, and in the Duomo's nave, on the steps that descend from the high altar, was a different girl with a skirt the color of blood and sandals the color of seawater, resting her hand on the elbow of a boy with red hair, who slowly counted the coins in his pocket.

LI • THE WOMEN IN THE MIRRORS



A frightening beauty.

The city of Zermatt has a frightening beauty. It does not feel warm to the senses: it is a city of mirrors. In its bedrooms women are constantly washing their hair, whether they are staying at home or traveling. In the bedroom of the royal palaces a window opens onto a balcony, but when the curtains are raised, the balcony has been replaced by a mirror. As in the city, the mirror is always full of women washing their hair.

From the palace, a thin road takes the traveler to the main square, where all the houses are identical and only the hair of the women differs, as well as the old men's short beards. Here and there one finds in the faces of some women a curious serenity, as if they were not at home but rather in a place of honor. Their hair is dark, braided in plaits or in wreaths of flowers, and tied with pins or ivory combs.

People who pass by these faces ask themselves if these women in the mirror are happy, whether they are not waiting for someone to come who will have more importance for them than the travelers, who are of little interest for their own sake. But from time to time they return, and the women's faces are no longer serene but anxious. They seem after all to be expecting the travelers, and do not understand why they do not come back.

III • THE BARONESS



One day they will begin to sing the songs of the Baroness.

The dead silence of the winter evening covers all of St. Clement. Houses bear wooden, not iron, shutters. Blinded and haggard the candles on shop-signs are lit; they emit only a faint glow. In the side streets dogs bark and old men at the beginning of their illnesses walk slowly. Snow lies on the asphalt, on the slate roofs. The apothecary's has not opened for weeks. The Baroness has been here for years; no one knows where she comes from, nor to where she goes. In a house in an alley, two women are taking the last meal of the day; they plan to spend the night in a crowded boardinghouse, and the following day they will die of cold in a filthy room. The silence that comes from the winter twilight, the snow on the roofs, the boardinghouse, the apothecary's, even somehow the Baroness' sandals on the paving stones—all of this is gathered and remains locked inside you like a statue.

But at intervals the Baroness speaks to herself in a singsong voice: she talks of linden trees, which shaded the streets of villages in her own country; of the sea, which she saw in a glass, as it rose and fell, one day in December; of her father's birthplace, a yellow house with four chimneys; of a strange band of traveling players who passed through the village and set up in an abandoned mill; and of a day in the distant past when she and her sister took it in turns to close their eyes and, with fingers interlaced, to feel the fabric of the air.

In other streets, women stop to listen. One day they will begin to sing the songs of the Baroness. Like the rattle of boxes in a dim basement, a whisper will come from the future, saying: there will be music in St. Clement, as well as the usual silence.

LII • THREE TEETH



There is nothing to listen to.

In Przemsya, a light blinks on in a study: a pile of books with an old dictionary, black-and-white photographs of women and men who died long ago, a personal diary written on a sheet of cardboard, a wine glass, a piece of fruit, some garlic cloves. The radio does not play anymore; there is nothing to listen to. Instead, the person sitting in the study reads the cardboard diary. He reads it every evening. In the course of reading it he finds the name, address, and telephone number of a woman he never met. He memorizes this information.

He goes to her apartment with another person (the stranger), and thinks he's there to watch a concert. He hands over a name card, they talk for a moment, and then he remembers: she is a teacher, lives in Ivanovka, talks an unknown language, goes to the temple on Saturdays, has three teeth. He is unaware that she has been dead for years.

SIH • CITY GAMES

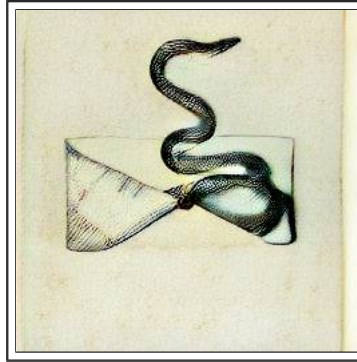


You write a city that all others may erase.

Let's play a simple game. You write a city that all others may erase. It could be the capital, it could be a port, it could be a border post, it could be a fortress, it could be a mansion, it could be a tool shed. Write it on a small sheet of paper, hide it where you can find it again, leave it on a public bench for anyone to take.

If they want to play with it, fine; if not, you'll have a city and they'll have nothing. Go ahead. I'm waiting.

SIV • VOICE FROM ANOTHER ROOM



It is as if I am being watched from a distance.

In so many cities you leave letters for me; I travel to search for them. Many are short; many are long; some are composed in a new language, which I cannot understand. Here, for instance, is the envelope with the watermark of the original imprint: “Nothing about you—nothing at all.” And in the same shade of paper, here is a letter whose tiny, red lacquered seal gives no hint of the contents.

Reading it begins thus: “I no longer know what to tell you about myself. Years have passed since last I wrote you. . . . I do not know what keeps me from being fully with you, but it is as if I am being watched from a distance, by someone in another room. What I have to tell you now seems to come from someone who sits in this room and does not see us together. Or it comes from somewhere else. . . .” The last page of the letter is torn.

I have not received any of these letters. I cannot read the address: it is not my own. I have traveled from place to place, waiting for all the city’s correspondents to receive my own response and that of others. I no longer know what to tell you about myself. Years have passed since last I wrote you. . . . I do not know what keeps me from being fully with you, but it is as if I am being watched from a distance, by someone in another room. . . .

TIV • BIOGRAPHIES AND EMBELLISHMENTS



Gödölla tries to bring itself into existence.

With one last effort, Gödölla tries to bring itself into existence. When it runs into trouble it is abandoned or rebuilds itself in its entirety. Now it has become a tower, or a tunnel with many levels. Does the tower that resembles a deep pit, viewed from the uppermost terrace, have a belfry that rises to a slender spire, turning endlessly round and round to imitate the descent of a star into its center? When the belfry and the spire can be distinguished, though faintly, you know the city is undergoing a gigantic climb, and is working toward infinity.

When the city begins to grow, its size prevents you from taking it all in. One day you can see it from a distance, a hundred miles away, and the next you are there, a footstep away, and all you see is a corner, a floor, a patch of roof. If you try to visualize it, the city will disappear and the sky will rush in to take its place, a sky so immense that you will be lost in it.

PIV • THE NEW MOON



I have no body. I am a verb.

In the evenings the new moon, like a round face with pale-blue eyes, has gathered together with others in a boat whose hull is covered with six thousand fish with orange fins, and together they have crossed the inky water to land on the stone that never loses the taste of the sea. When they have touched the stone, the fish have disappeared, and the moon as well.

The moon is the last of her kind. She has been walking for hours. She no longer knows whether the water is blue or black. She has lost the idea of her name. Everything is fading: the colors of the fish, the names of the lands, the shape of the water itself...

Do I also have a name? I, who was going to be so useful, walking and talking, bearing myself upright. Or I, who was going to achieve something, digging holes in the earth and filling them up again. I, who, growing up in that first evening, I knew would conquer space and time. I. And now I do not know where I am or why I am standing still. I have no body. I am a verb. I have changed into a river. I am the last of my kind. The fish are dying. The boatmen have disappeared. The stars are the faces of the fish: all their eyes are white and blue.

PIV • DAY AND NIGHT



The last day will have no place to rest.

They say that the city of the last day will have no towers, no streets, no roofs. They say that there will be no river. They say that there will be no world. The last day will have no place to rest. There will be no night. There will be no sky. There will be no animals. There will be no salt in the ocean. No one will be born or die. All will be asleep. This is what they say, and they know it.

The day is like the night. The day is like the night. The day is like the night.

MV • THE BLUE HOUR



The city has become a solitude.

The sight of these streets has become useless to me. The white walls are useless to me. The noise is useless to me. I have returned to a space within myself. I seem to be living in the same house. In my pocket I have what you, doctor, do not possess: the Blue Hour. But there are no purple and silver women. There are no colored lambs. No voices on terraces of pink wine. I am bored. The city has become a solitude: full of houses without souls.

I could leave for another city. Perhaps there is no Blue Hour there? Why did you bring me here, doctor? To no purpose. Are you a friend of the dead? Yes, doctor. It's a long time since I heard him laugh. You laugh just as he did. Fool. I am the fool of this Blue Hour. The Hour of turquoise metal chandeliers. Is there a spider in the sun? If there is, his shadow will be the same.

I shall escape this house and wait for you at the statue of Heine. You will come and you will laugh with me. We will rise and sleep in a very tall house. You will find rooms in which to give birth, and the spiders will be your children.

SV • THE LIVING MUSEUM



But he did not reach the center of the labyrinth.

He went out in the garden of the museum of Nîmes to pluck the flowers that bloomed along the walls; the garden was lined with statues made of bronze, marble, terra-cotta, wood, metal, plaster, and even cardboard. He sat on the top of the statue of Daedalus and gazed for a long time at a cornel tree whose leaves were dark green at noon and transparent at evening. He tried to hold this green image within himself for a long time, but he could not. Later he would try again to grasp the image, but he never would succeed.

Orpheus again.

This time he wandered at dawn through the labyrinth of a book; he knew that on each page he could at last trace out that image for which he had been searching throughout his life. But he did not reach the center of the labyrinth.

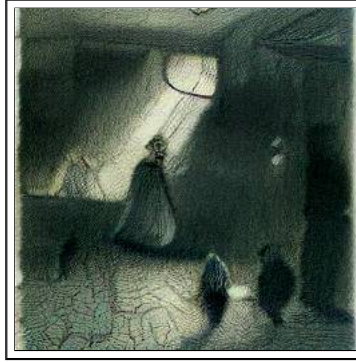
Orpheus again.

He knew the refrain by heart, but he was not sure whether he would again be able to hold its sound in his mouth.

Orpheus again.

Someone must have been killing animals there. Someone must have been singing under a great tree. These signs will reappear. We shall never find a message in any of them.

SVI • COUNTERCITIES



A weak light, a whitish light, a poisonous light.

My room is the worst I have ever seen. There are water pipes on the ceiling, and a large man whom I did not see but heard enter; the walls are plastered with orange emulsion; the curtains hang unevenly; the mirror is cracked; and on a chair lies a bag of marbles that fills the room with a heavy smell of sulfur. The bathroom's tile floor is rough and warm to the touch, and in the corner of the room an old black dog sleeps with his head turned toward the ground, covered with sweat and flies. The smell of the sulfur is no longer unpleasant, but there is a coarseness to the marble that irritates me.

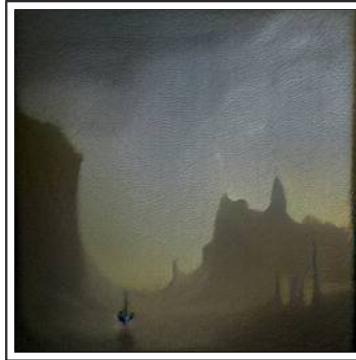
I am alone. It is night, and I can no longer see the walls, which seem to have thickened. I cannot sleep: even if I am not tired, the room is too heavy to bear. I enter a zone of intense stinging pain, and then I hear someone cough. I see two water pipes, a chair, and a man with a wide nose, on which small pimples have formed.

I leave the building; I am still an hour from the center of Val d'Ani. I decide to take the streets. There are butts of cigarettes, trays of fish, and everywhere images of women and children. When I reach the heart of the city, I hear a man's voice say, "Take me there." I go to the lowest part of a street, which is redolent of urine; on the next block, I see someone trying to pick a pocket; another figure, who will return in a few minutes with some sailors, crosses the street at an angle, and I follow him.

In the distance I see a small woman walking; her back is bent and her arms are loaded with packages. I enter the street in which the sailors are speaking; my footsteps echo, and the sound is repeated in a thousand ways; the houses, full of people, seem to radiate a weak light, a whitish light, a poisonous light, and it is the whitish light that paralyzes me; I become a closed space that communicates with others only by causing them to disappear. I enter the white walls; the whiteness closes over my body.

The people appear in the streets as an insect population; the light is piercing; the people are a pack of rats. I ask myself why I have come here, why I have come through the streets and the darkness, why I have exposed myself to the whiteness and the buzzing. It is not with terror that I am leaving my room; it is not with pain that I feel myself sucked into the streets. The whiteness and the buzzing have not frightened me. They have been absorbed; it is as if the city has been built into me, and I am devouring it.

PV • A TOURIST LEAVES



The fountain of the four beasts.

With fifteen days still to spend in the city of Arta, I remained a tourist. I looked for the fountain of the four beasts in the center of the city, only to discover the basin empty and the gates locked. I went to the market, only to find the square deserted. I visited the monument of Prometheus, which depicted a man falling from heaven and holding a torch. I went to the open spaces: I was the only one there.

When the time came to leave, I did so under the cover of darkness.

LIII • LETTER TO KAWALINA



An inner sea.

Kawalina,

Do you hear the sea on the rocks above the city, our Kuqa? I am waiting in my room for my husband to come back from the studio, they tell me the tide is coming in, its noise makes my head throb. He is a painter: why does he shut himself up in that dark room to paint murals of waves on the inside walls of an immense dome? Why doesn't he invite us to join him for our vacation? It must be tedious work, using brushes to paint just sea colors and sand.

I am worried: my husband has been there two months, one month longer than planned. What is he painting in that loft? Bodies carried out to sea? The look in his eyes when he speaks about his work says he is not in his studio, but on a beach or in a grotto, doing something despicable, something sad.

Kawalina, I thought I might run away to the sea. But I am a woman in a man's country. I have children. Should I be ashamed of my fears? Should I pretend I have no anxiety at all? I look at your big windows and you see that my life is neither one thing nor the other, neither dreary nor idyllic. Sometimes, looking out, I see the waves' foam swirling as if it were in another world, an inner sea, and I think of the cobalt theophany that sundered the armies of Sol. In the distance, the sea so close yet so far! The red sunlight bends on the ocean's back like an obsidian knife. One of the children splashes water in the tub with two fingers, and the house fills with the sound of the waves.

One day, I asked my husband why he likes to spend whole days inside that room, and he answered: "It is like being alone." If you were like me, Kawalina, and had

found a man who locked himself up in a dark room to paint sea colors on the walls of a dome, would he be faithful? Are men's hearts like mosaics, with blue and green chips scattered at will over the paving stones?

Emilia

LIV • NIGHT VISIT



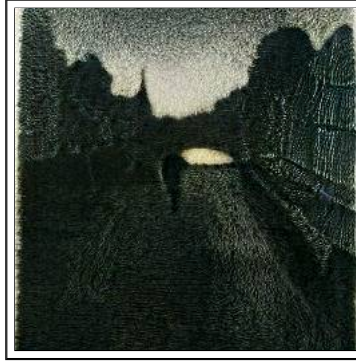
The city with its yellow flowers was pulsating.

Her balcony was covered with flowerpots, and her front door was ornamented with small yellow flowers. When the visitor looked down, he saw she was lying on a bed covered with the same yellow flowers, where she was asleep, curled up like a child. On her hips and breasts a white transparent silk fell, as straight as if cut with a scissors, down to her knees. From the streets came distant noises and shrieks like laughter.

In the air of this room, as she slept, you felt a rapture that made your heart beat harder. You sensed the city with its yellow flowers was pulsating beneath this dream of life, as if the hatred and joy it contained were surging and vanishing, as if something would be born that would break through the narrow balcony...

You have been given permission by the city to climb over the flowerpots, leap off the balustrade, and enter this precious life, your own.

LV • RETURNING TO PORT



the summer darkness moves out of the city

1 Sometimes I walk slowly along the river
2 until the summer darkness moves out of the city.
3
4 Now I have to hurry, quickly as a lover
5 walking along the street
6 with no destination.
7
8 Though I hurry, I am also lazy
9 because that's the way I know life to be.
10
11 Only lazy people know how to hasten.
12 Only people born lazy
13 and in search of themselves
14 can think of hastening.
15
16 Stretching out their arms, counting the purple clouds,
17 people who are really lovers
18 await something
19 that has been postponed.
20
21 The voyage ends with the ship
22 returning empty to port.
23 A clot in the quick river of living.

LVI • THE TREASURE OF SPEECH



Butterflies have settled on the darkening plumage.

It is at dusk that you are invited to the tea room of the Hotel Cecil. Twilight has fallen, and the band is playing in the salon; the air is filled with the smoke of flavored pastries that nobody has the time to eat; the light of oil lamps flickers among the painted baskets. A cool breeze is blowing through the open window and butterflies have settled on the darkening plumage of the ladies sitting there, while outside, in the lemon tree, a nightingale is singing... The music has begun and the waiter is approaching. You ask him to announce you; an urn of orgeat arrives, as do glasses of cold mint tea. Beyond the window, many colored lanterns move about like winged creatures as the city empties its streets.

You don't wish to talk, but if you must, let it be to that waiter who is reaching out to place a silver tray on a glowing brazier. "Listen to this passage, dear sir," the waiter says, positioning the tray before you. You watch him lean over it and blow gently as if he were about to make it utter in flames. "It's a little dusty, I'm afraid. My hands aren't gloved. It says: For every beautiful woman who spends a night at the Hotel Cecil, twenty sous are deposited in a labeled drawer in the safe of the Notary Myrtle, in the name of one S. B. Pamphili. Will you have a slice of fruit tart?"

Without saying a word, you have learned many things: that no hotel in the world is worth a night's stay if you don't sit by a window that is open to the breezes, that tomorrow morning you will have a gold louis in your right pocket and a sheet of pink notary paper in your left, and that soon thereafter your friend Mercier will be able to procure his twenty sous, from a drawer labelled S. B. Pamphili, in some dingy closet in the suburbs.

TV • LITTLE CITY WINDOWS



A white-bearded man knits or, failing that, offers information.

Outside the little city of Anarita, among groves of eucalyptus, a white-bearded man knits or, failing that, offers information on the streets of the city:

There used to be a bookshop here, but the wind blew out the windows. That's why it's called the Library without Books.

Or else:

My house faced on the square. The front porch's columns still stand. Next door was a tannery, but the sand took over. Where the refuse heaps used to be, a nightclub. Where it's now all tightly shuttered, a school.

And then:

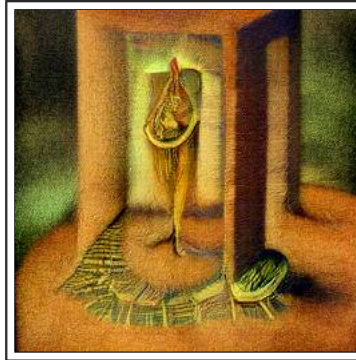
I don't know what I'll do without my daily coffee. Do you remember?

And the old man turns towards you to continue his story, leaning on his crutch and smiling until the end, his nails the color of gingerbread, bringing together the liquid earth, the hyacinths' bells, the limestone, the light. How beautiful it is when he says:

And I remember... I remember... I remember the cupolas of olive oil and raspberry jam—and the cinnamon sweet rolls and the toasted crunchies—I remember being happy when my father came home from the city; I remember the stream beneath our house; I remember, above all, my memories of the city where I was born... you cannot imagine the happiness it gave me to die at last and discover that some time, somewhere, there's a place where flowers grow beside springs and everyone goes by—without me and without their memories—on the shadows of the afternoon. That's why I go back, to look into someone else's memories and make them mine.

And he raises his cup of coffee and drinks.

MVII • THE MOTION OF THE TORTOISE



The furniture is turned in the other direction.

The ground floor of the house we are staying in, a provincial house in Rio de Janeiro, is crammed with furniture and does not have a toilet. As we sit in the living room, my grandfather, who has a motion-sickness condition, begins to make strange noises. After many questions and explanations, I discover that it is caused by the tortoise that serves as a decoration for the dining room wall. The tortoise is tied to a lever that, when a button is pressed, sets it in motion along its vertical axis. Once the tortoise passes the button, it is released and continues its journey along the horizontal axis.

For two hours a day my grandfather experiences total happiness. He lies down on the living room floor, points to the center of the sun, and says: "I'm in the center of the sun." I try to discover how my grandfather's thoughts have led him to this notion. I realize that his mind is receding from me like the tortoise, a little bit, each day, shifting its axis in unexpected ways.

I see him moving away, very slowly, his face full of unobtrusive hope, toward the furniture that keeps him imprisoned in this little house. I open my eyes: the tortoise has passed the button, and the furniture is turned in the other direction. From behind the tortoise, always a step away, I watch my grandfather collapse into his dreams, his movements gradually replaced by those of the tortoise.



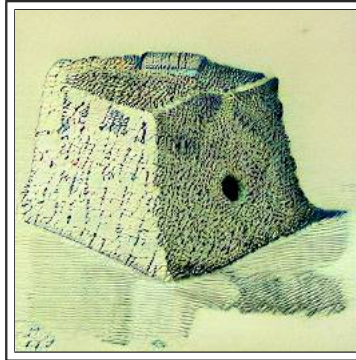
"Signs mean nothing."

My grandfather, after building me a dollhouse and a palace in which I could live and hide myself, also made for me a staircase in the shape of a banana. There was always at the top of the stairway a sign: this was called "la pesquisa del oro". And so it became a fixed belief of mine that there was a wooden ladder attached to my house, and that its purpose was the search for gold.

With time, when I saw that there was no ladder and stopped believing in its existence, this concept changed, and I came to consider the sign a token of the exchange of ideas between my grandfather and me, and still more so when I saw the words written over many doors: "estas malditas palabras", or "words are terrible," or "signs mean nothing", or "I need not explain anything", or "el oro no es lo que hay".

And now I go off to seek the sign of a stairway. I find nothing but tangled vines, broken walls, a factory; reality, not language. So I return home to put another sign on my own house's door: "nada hay", or "there is nothing". And I go looking, not for signs, but for a banana-shaped staircase so that I can hide myself inside its bananas.

PVI • THE DUST OF THE WORLD



Its good years are rare and of brief duration.

Arriving at the city of Gwishkam, I discover that it has been built in the shape of a stone jug, hollow inside, and that the houses are built on top of one another in this form, a little like a pile of crumpled sheets of newspaper. The people of the city live in rectangular holes just big enough to hold their beds, which they keep changing at short intervals, while the walls, corridors, and windows are so filled with stairways and projections that the houses are a labyrinth. Occasionally an arm or a leg reaches up, is caught in a wall, and the hole will burst, that's all.

The piles of debris, the great quantities of mortar, the massive clouds of dust are the exclusive feature of this city. It's true that in its good years it is adorned with the magnificent pavilions of the sultan and decorated with ribbons and lampoons. But its good years are rare and of brief duration, which is why the city presents itself so indifferently, as a pile of crumpled sheets of newspaper.

SVII • THE SEAGULL AND ITS BOOK



Meaningless and obscure images.

In Coccònia, a seagull sits on the window ledge and reads a volume of poetry. When its master calls, it doesn't lift its eyes from the page, and the master has to lean down and force the book open:

The first edition from 1873 begins with the assertion that poetry is not for everyone. Only if the seagull is knowledgeable and talented will it decipher the poem. Otherwise, it will receive a copy that no ignorant seagull will find intelligible. Or if it does manage to read it, it will find a few beautiful phrases, perhaps, but meaningless and obscure images, still without sense, at the heart of the poem.

The second edition from 1892 tells the reader that the first edition contains poems addressed to cats rather than people. Each additional volume carries the message that less and less of it is addressed to people. If the reader reaches volume four, they will finally learn that the poem will never be addressed to anyone, that it was composed solely to teach the seagull to read. Any attempt to interpret the text should be avoided.

MVIII • WORDS ARE DUST FOUND IN THE POCKET OF YOUR CLOTHES



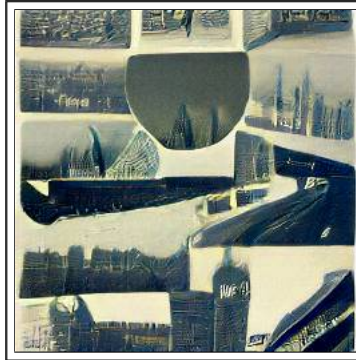
A combination of words and gestures can transform you into a pigeon.

You have dreamed of a city made of pigeons. Two years go by, then one day you learn that the city exists, and it is made of stones, rusted automobiles, fire escapes, reeds, and the corpses of pheasants. You search for a pigeon's wing and find it in a bottle of wine. You dream of walking down a street lined with pigeons. You realize that pigeons do not live there. Although you are pleased to discover the corpse of a pheasant, you ask yourself: Why not call it a pigeon? Why not arrange the windows of the houses so that they open out to a street lined with pigeons?

You try to learn how to catch pigeons. You learn it can be done with leg traps. The traps do not work. You learn the pigeons' tricks. You train pigeons to fly into their hoppers and get out again, as at the railroad stations in the Russian countryside. You follow the pigeons from one house to another. You are never sure whether it is pigeons you have followed, or wasps, or seagulls, or kites, or still distant, unreachable memories.

You sense that there is another world, the world of pigeons, that a combination of words and gestures can transform you into a pigeon. You run after the last bird: you are in the town square, a sewer, a river, a boulevard. The pigeon flies straight ahead, you follow it for a while, then it drops to the ground. You have been chasing a pebble.

LVII • LONDON IS EVERYWHERE



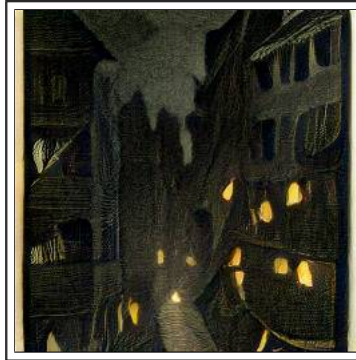
No photo or drawing can bring them forth.

The city is everywhere and everything, here, there, there, a few miles away, more real in its prodigality, in its trumpery, its dissonances and its pandemoniums than in the tiny towns you arrive at before you reach it. It is in the shape of the table where you are seated as if by chance, in the white shade of the doctor's office, in the elevated train of the staircase, at the birthplace of Virginia Woolf.

It is impossible to enumerate all its faces because no photo or drawing can bring them forth: the whole city changes them, re-presents them to our eyes, colors them, so that with each new photograph, each new lithograph the city appears to us in a different way. Here the young man in the cotton frock has left a whorehouse, they are taking him to the hospital; those with rickets and ironing boards are reciting poems on dusty balconies; a merchant in a dinner jacket is staring at a broken clock; the widow on tiptoe reads Milton; the policeman in the top hat admires the corpse in a car.

No: the city is not a *place* that we enter, alight from a stagecoach and leave, walk through, have lunch in. It is impossible to know exactly how the city can fit itself, so omnivorously, into that space beneath our feet. The city that invades us is female, multihued, squat, so that our eyes will know and love it, even if it were not for the certainty of its being London.

PVII • TIME IN THE CITIES



What have you become?

If I imagine I am beginning to write a short, crowded novel about four anonymous strangers brought together by a melodrama involving some bureaucratic mistake or other, and I dream myself a strange, gray city, straight as a needle, where all the windows have bars and all the doors have locks, and the roofs are all like each other, like the spires of a religious building, with catenary arches and balconies covered with woven cloths, with holes for chimneys, dark and narrow like tunnels; and each building has one or two floors missing, so that when you look up from the ground, to the top, you see your own profile reflected in the pools of light filtering out from above; the stranger who is the narrator of my story would ask of that city the same question posed by those who traveled to the door of God's very house: What have you become?

And I would answer, I know not. You are inquiring about what we call the passage of time, and there you have it. In this city of slow anonymity, in time you will become what I am. You who arrive on September mornings will have become by nightfall someone who works in a bar or in a diner or a bookstore, or perhaps simply someone who, in his solitude, engages in solipsistic dialogues about love and joy and suffering; someone who sees a girl across the street with sad eyes walking on a building's sixth or seventh floor, her forehead marked with dark, dried curls.

I am changing; you have become me. This city of obscure hieroglyphs will have incorporated you and transformed you, and only time, inundating you as it were, will have destroyed all hope of recovering your former self.

MIX • THE HOUSES OF THE DEAD



What does the wind blow?

How the wind blows, the wind blows, and the wind blows, blowing on the houses of the dead, but not on the houses of the living. How the wind blows, the wind blows, and the wind blows, blowing on the houses of the dead, and from its many fissures, the sadness of its cold: you cannot see what it is, but it is with you.

It is on the top of the tallest building, in the cathedral with its colored glass windows, in the railroad station, at the pier. You meet it in people who remain sitting and do not stand to greet you, or else these people let their hands fall limp to the side and their eyes turn down, and, instead of speaking, turn their lips to the right and the left. It is even on the crossroads, full of birds and metallically perfect, coated with webs of sadness that never fade and with structures that look like holes made by the wind.

What does the wind blow? It blows to tell you that this is the time of sadness, the time when the soul is alone. If you spend a day walking about, by the pier or on the docks, by the train station or at the corner where the wind blows, you hear it speak to you, you, you. Sometimes in the evening you get caught up in a current of sadness and it sweeps you along in it and before you know it you are lost.

**PVIII · CITIES THAT ORPHANS SHOULD MAKE
TOGETHER, BY WHICH, TO NAME ONLY A FEW, I MEAN**



A theatre without performers.

- An abbreviated labyrinth that, in the main, alternates between parks, gardens, and stairways that terminate in dead ends. (The gardens, it seems, are meant for men; the stairways for women.)
- A theater without performers.
- And scattered in the darkness: small red lights that rapidly blink on and off. They will soon darken and extinguish into nothingness.
- Orphanages.
- Spots that appear to be gutters draining down the sides of a steep wall. Towers whose tops overhang and are deformed, making them appear as ruined steeples. Hotels with rooms made up of wardrobes and cloaks, chairs and horns.
- Laughter heard through a telephone, and a great disembodied voice telling you to follow a trail of roses that ends in a house and a tunnel.
- Omnipresent clocks.
- The number 13.
- Sorrow felt in the pit of the stomach when you wake up, on the brink of sleep, and in the tones of a voice saying: “tomorrow”.
- A lunatic with signs on his forehead, illiterate, and headed for the window.
- The echo of a train.
- More numbers.

- How many ruins hidden in the endless desert and neglected; how many houses fallen into ruins through neglect or time.
- A faceless church.
- Rooms with walls that speak.
- Two faces behind a window. You know who is inside.
- A city that vanishes overnight.
- The word ‘ ’.
- Things that appear and disappear: a window, a cross, a fire.
- The threshold of a house. You know what will happen there and you feel, before entering, the fear that one of the two faces will suddenly draw aside the curtain and look out the window.
- Lights that turn on and off quickly and in other places that remain lighted steadily.
- Windows from which one does not wish to look out.
- Falling stones with signs engraved on them: for instance, RANBRES.
- Cities that will live and die.
- Cities that will not live and die.
- Laughter heard through a telephone, but so weak that only a distant voice will be able to understand it. And immediately afterward, a telephone call from a city three hundred leagues away, the mirror held before your face in the dark, and someone you can hardly see: it is you, it is someone speaking to you from inside a room in a house you have never seen.
- Orphanages.
- Orphanages.
- A man blowing out the light in a house and going away.

You wake up in the middle of the night, breathing quickly, as if surprised by something. You lie there in bed for hours, listening to the nocturnal sounds; fragrant half-light as the city nears morning. Silence. But then: perhaps you hear a door opened to the right, a boy and girl's breathing under a blanket, the clicking of their walking sticks, footsteps moving along an empty street and an iron gate swinging silently on its hinges. Nothing else is seen or heard. Silence. Silence. Then:

- Two faces behind a window.

MX • THE MYSTERIOUS CHAMBER



The prince is a magician, yes, and his spell must be broken.

Some say that the prince of this city is going mad.

I don't see how he can help it. He was born two thousand years ago, he lived one hundred years with the devil, half a century in the wilderness, forty years with God, suffered every kind of wretchedness. Since then he has remained trapped in a windowless palace, buried beneath immense heaps of gifts and offerings. With the passing of the years the various faces that hover within him became so confused that when he speaks, ten or twenty voices offer alternative replies.

He looks at the moorings of the attic where he lives—which he cannot climb—and remembers episodes of his life he has never lived. He remembers having spent a year there without leaving his room, passing that year reading the world's thoughts, inventing stars, making thousands of ingenious sentences.

The prince is a magician, yes, and his spell must be broken. But this can only be done by someone who knows the true geography of the attic, who has been to the very end of its moorings, who knows every projection, knows every window, who knows the precise functioning of its inkwells and its ink-pots, who, in brief, has the same index of dreams, albeit small ones, as the prince.

In order to visit the prince, I must myself be mad and stand day and night near the windowless palace, until one of my false thoughts—perhaps the very first I imagine—touches a nerve, surges into me, surrounds me. Then the self that is my own starts to tingle with disconnected phrases and unintelligible words which always have the same theme: *You are the madman in the attic.*

LVIII • HYPER-STRUCTURE



“Meet me at the usual place.”

One September night a businessman asleep on a park bench in Saralona discovers that he is dead. He starts up at once, with a beating heart, pushes back the fur of his overcoat, fetches out his cigar case, and leaves the park whistling a Mozart aria. The stars burn in a bright cloudless sky; nocturnal animals go scrambling past; the figures of boys and girls pass below in a wash of orange light from their burning joss sticks.

And here he is at last in the prettiest neighborhood, Bensen. How did he get here? By hyper-structure: he has stepped through a window whose frame is made of light. His apartment is lying just outside the window, far below. He starts to run, stumbling in the last few steps because he is wearing rubber-soled shoes, and drops to his knees to open his front door. He climbs the stairs on all fours and enters his own apartment. There he picks up the telephone and dials the number of his office. “Meet me at the usual place,” he tells his receptionist. “The usual place.” He repeats the sentence as if he must now remember it by heart. “At the usual place, the usual place.”

But what is the usual place? He racks his brain: he made some undefined promise to the receptionist and is bound to remember. Ah, but at any moment he will remember! Until then he can talk to himself in the quiet of his apartment, reassuring himself in a few monosyllables: “The usual place,” he says, and hangs up.

It will not come back to him. He stumbles into the bedroom, closes the heavy plateglass door, throws off his clothes, lies down in bed. Somewhere in the room a machine thrums faintly, by day and by night, and through the open window he can hear rain start, drumming its too brief message on the roof. Then he sleeps, and the trans-dimensional window that brought him here vanishes, taking his intelligence and his memory with it, back, back to the usual place.



A mirror, a mirror in a darkened hallway.

What is the Mundaneum?

At least once in a lifetime, the student has to spend an entire night locked up with these statues. Around the same time, it becomes necessary to visit the Mundaneum, where hundreds of thousands of similar statues, packed in long rows, resemble the grains in an infinite mill.

Why is the Mundaneum's entryway not guarded?

Anyone can go in and out. But you will encounter only one person there: a woman perhaps, wearing a black frock coat, standing on tiptoe with one finger to her mouth, looking at you gravely; she will not say a word.

How can anyone in the Mundaneum either leave or enter?

Every statue, even if it is unpainted and undressed, is hermetically sealed behind a glass screen. Some screens are transparent; others are opaque. And even if you did not know that there were any windows, someone speaking in a low voice, and talking about "parallel worlds," could tell you so.

For what purpose does the window exist in the Mundaneum?

In a few of the rooms of the Mundaneum, there are no windows. In fact, the dark rooms preserve a huge silence of not existing, they are unfathomable and devoid of dreaming, but in those rooms where windows are boarded up and air comes and goes silently, life sloughs off its scales and colors and the insides of things can be seen.

In what sections of the Mundaneum is glass permitted?

At the Mundaneum there are thousands of wings. The profusion of wings requires that windows of tinted glass be frequently placed in the walls; by means of a mathe-

mathematical division into frequencies and intensities, these openings admit the sounds of clocks that tick and the shades of shadows that are caught in reflections.

Do these sounds and shades cause some people to wake up, for days or weeks, when they would prefer to sleep?

Some people, perhaps.

How many?

None.

Did it happen only once?

No.

Is the Mundaneum the original source of all myths?

I am not sure.

Did the lunatics find their way here, as they often do in real life?

I do not know.

Was there already an entrance to the Mundaneum in the town of Vauvert?

I cannot say.

What real thing does the Mundaneum most resemble?

A mirror, a mirror in a darkened hallway, the odd moment of moonlight on a wall and the flash of a glass reflected in the light.

What contemporary inhabitant of the Mundaneum would come closest to the profile of a student?

A tramp, I should think.

What are the chances of his finding himself in an advanced phase of hypnagogia in the courtyard of the Mundaneum?

Almost none.

Why would he be there instead of, say, in a boat of primal matter in the forms of various machines?

Because it is raining outside. He left his boat to roam in the empty Mundaneum because he knows of no place else to be and the rain refuses to stop.

(1900, Rue de l'Odeon)



If they are not fantasias, they are inventions.

For a long time I understood the world by means of a certain kind of poetry; the subjunctive, for example, as it appeared in my grandfather's verses: "If I had a green hat in my pocket..." and "If the one who comforts me were to lose her red hair..." and so on. These are all fantasies, and it is easy to see that if they are not fantasias, they are inventions. It is no harder to see that my grandfather was living in his own time, and that if he had emigrated to the city of Knut, he would have cut cabbage there with the farmer's knife instead of making verses about it.

I have forgotten all about that poetry and the language it refers to; but I still sometimes return to the subjunctive, and it is always then that I realize: I do not really know why the boy stood so gravely on the banks of the river; the woman never wove the kerchief with the flower pattern she wore around her neck; and the man, who did not speak a word of German, did not realize that the town council had decided to kill him. To understand the world, not only the facts but the fiction that contains them, is to begin to understand oneself.

It is sad for a man to realize the truth of the sentence: the greater part of his life he has lived without knowing what it is all about, and if he continues to survive without understanding, he still has time for the last stage, namely telling the truth to himself; though he does not realize that this is what he has been doing all along.

★ ★ ★

Of course, that sentence is only another fantasia.

TVI • THE NOVICE OF BAGNÈRES



What do you mean with all this philosophy?

Dialogue among four nuns, after listening to a novice preach.

FIRST NUN. But when is your ordination?

SECOND NUN. The day after tomorrow.

FIRST NUN. And do you already know Latin?

SECOND NUN. Not a single letter. But I've read *The Spiritual Consolations of St. Francis* twenty times. I've marked most of the good parts in red. What I didn't understand, I've learned by heart.

THIRD NUN. And how are your studies?

FOURTH NUN. Not too bad: a nice little two-volume treatise on the preservation of leather. We had to ask our brother teacher how to prepare a tanning liquor. The good sister Elena explained it to us. Heavens! We needed nine hundred years to make one skin more supple than the skin of the Virgin of the Apocalypse.

SECOND NUN. It's as fine as a stretched glove.

FOURTH NUN. I realize now, you know, that the Divine Majesty has made us with three skins. One to protect us, and another to get dressed with, and another to die with.

FIRST NUN. Doesn't anyone have a request?

SECOND NUN. Tell me, do you see that dirty page in the Bible?

FIRST NUN. What dirty page?

SECOND NUN. You know, the one with Adam and Eve doing it behind a tree.

FIRST NUN. Of course I see it.

SECOND NUN. Well, then, you tell me: what happens to all the earthly microorganisms when the flesh is cooked with fire?

FIRST NUN. Doubtlessly they die out: as dust does, they go up in flames.

SECOND NUN. And do the gritty parts of the body burn away?

FIRST NUN. The gritty parts of the body?

SECOND NUN. The inside of the testicles, for example.

FIRST NUN. But what testicles?

SECOND NUN. Brother Servian says there are a few in each body, maybe.

FIRST NUN. But where is this in the Bible? It's nothing more than a fantasy.

THIRD NUN. Brother Belisarius, when he stopped peeing on the walls in the cloister, it was because he became aware of the testicles of many creatures in the night. And I, for my part, came to the conclusion that man's testicles are actually an organ of knowledge and worship. All things that we, being men, worship are distributed throughout the world in the form of testicles, I've come to see: a little glass one in India and the largest one on earth in Tibet, a cylindrical one in Arabia and a triangle with a crown in Mexico, everywhere things at once so different yet also so similar to one another, an echo of the Divine Plan. And on top of all that, we find a marvelous pair of testicles in each human, a marvelous way of giving birth, and a marvelous way of dying.

FIRST NUN. But they will never carry you to heaven. What do you mean with all this philosophy?

THIRD NUN. Didn't the Blessed Augustine also teach that you cannot turn a Jew into a Greek and a Greek into a Jew?

FIRST NUN. Of course.

THIRD NUN. Then everything has its uses.

SECOND NUN. The great St. Augustine also said that God fills the whole world with the grace of His benignity. Why, then, should He not be forced to distribute these testicles for the salvation of creatures in order to give us a glimpse of His wisdom?

FOURTH NUN. And what did you tell the blessed Servian?

THIRD NUN. He stopped peeing on the walls, as I've told you, and he started to throw dust on the eyes of the little creatures who lived in the walls.

SECOND NUN. Why?

THIRD NUN. He read the letter from the bishop in Astapüa.

FIRST NUN. This Servian cannot even read.

THIRD NUN. On the other hand, he knows many things.

SECOND NUN. I think God gives him those powers so as to stop him from peeing on the walls.

FIRST NUN. What do you mean?

SECOND NUN. Do you know how the bishop in Astapüa sent his letter? It was carried on a pigeon, which threw up when it arrived. But I digress. Servian knows some things, and one is the bishop's permission to make those creatures who were born later in the walls as well as the ones who lived from the beginning but kept out of sight and into the earth come to church.

FIRST NUN. Who asked him to?

THIRD NUN. Who asked him not to?

FIRST NUN. But surely the bishop did not command him to pray to them.

SECOND NUN. And how do you know the bishop in Astapüa asked you not to?

THIRD NUN. He did so in his letter: "Make them believe."

FIRST NUN. Of course he didn't ask.

SECOND NUN. Then why should he have written this: "Make them believe"?

THIRD NUN. Just to have done with it.

FIRST NUN. I don't understand you, Sister Fiametta. Are you talking about the heat of the chamber, or are you talking about something else?

SECOND NUN. Yes, a little something else.

FIRST NUN. Ah, I see. So the bishop in Astapüa has a tiny organ hanging from his spinal column?

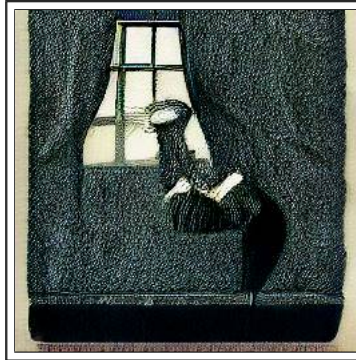
SECOND NUN. The bishop's illness is incurable.

FIRST NUN. He knows the vanity of all things.

SECOND NUN. He knows the ones who worship the testicles and those who worship God.

Fin.

PX • LITTLE GIRL WHO SET FIRE TO THE HOUSE



Ninety-nine, *said the bats.*

A little girl sat on the windowsill and spoke to herself: *My name is Silver. Silver is a bad name. My name should be Crystal... No it should be Diamond... No. Velvet.* When she tired of this meditation, she went out into the street. There she found an old woman weaving black cotton bags; the old woman asked her what her name was. The little girl told her. The old woman pointed to the cotton bag she was weaving. “What will you put in that bag?” she asked. “A dead mouse,” said the little girl. “Where did you get it?” “Under the table,” confessed Silver.



The next day Silver left the house before dawn. She followed a brook lined with dams of colored sand. The colors did not move, and Silver was not thirsty; but the idea that colors change was pleasant and pleasant to think about. She stepped out of the brook at an orange-colored bend, and a man came along. “Where are you going?” he asked. “Into the world,” said Silver, “to find a witch.” He looked at her strangely, and she ran off toward the orange bend. “A witch!” she shouted back.

The next morning she found the brook again and followed it for a while, but started to cry when she realized that the color was changing and becoming gray. Silver also noticed that the river had not returned to the place where it had ended the day before. But she pressed on into the gray light and went down to a quarry, where all kinds of shapes of stone were piled up. She could not be certain that the orchards were still orange or that the color of the river was really turning gray. When it had changed

into gray she had not been there to see it happen. But she was thinking about it, and about the color that changes.

She felt lonely, but lonely in a new way, and because she felt lonely she started to cry. Then she made a little child out of rocks, which was alone like herself. The little child wept too, and Silver was pleased to think that the little one was also lonely. There was no one else in the quarry, except a few white ants crawling over the stones that had fallen down. After a while she was no longer afraid of the gray light or the grayness of things. It was good to be lonely and to weep.



The color that changes got darker. It was evening, and the bats were going home. The light was pale, and from that place there was a long way to go. The bats told Silver what time it was by whistling: *Three! Four! Five! Twelve, thirteen, fourteen... six! Seven! Eight! Ninety, ninety-two, ninety-four, ninety-six... Seven! Eight! Nine!* The gray light did not go away, and Silver walked into the gray land with the little child at her side. "Eight-and-a-half!" she said. "Nine-and-a-half! Twenty-two!"

They came across a ruined house with smoke coming out the chimney. "Years and years it has been like this," Silver said. "And the sea will fill it in. But today there is a witch." It was a round house with no roof. "A witch lives here," said Silver. The house was empty and smoky; the cobwebs covering the smashed window frames looked dry and tangled; a dead cat lay on the floor.

Silver climbed onto the chair. "A witch!" she said. There was no reply, and Silver descended again. The little child looked at her feet. "A witch lives here!" Silver said to the small one, in order to entertain it. Silver went to the window and looked outside. She said: "Witch." Then: "Witch!" but again there was no reply. "We will say it every night," Silver added for the little one. "Witch..."

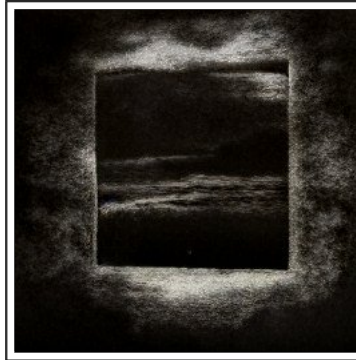


In another room, a light went on. "Someone must be at home," said Silver. The color that changed became very bright, all of a sudden.



Ninety-nine, said the bats. All done now. That's the last one, and the sky is black. Are you going to come with us? Yes? No?

PXI • A TAROT READING



Speak to me of an immense house that guards its secrets.

Speak to me of a city that has three hundred houses.

I do not know which city you mean.

Speak to me of a house that is twenty feet wide, twenty feet long, and twelve feet high.

I have not noticed such a house.

Speak to me of a ray of white marble that emerges from a round window and wanders randomly around the room.

I don't know the name of that house or that marble ray.

Speak to me of a group of people trying to solve the mystery of a man who appeared in the Rua da Restauração, wearing the clothes of one of the men who had disappeared two years before.

I am prepared to set up a reading.

Speak to me of a woman who, unable to discover whether or not a dead man is who he seems to be, wears only black.

She is me.

Speak to me of an immense house that guards its secrets.

I am ready to perform the reading.

Speak to me of a little girl who says she has climbed up to the sky on a rope of telegraph wire and who brings down silvery packets with the angel of death stamped on them.

She is dead.

Speak to me of a child who carries a red serpent in a tiny box that will also be his coffin.

He is dead.

I have finished.

The cards dealt are *Death*, the *Star*, the *Hermit*, the *Devil*, the *Tower*, and the *Moon*. This is a story like many others. The only thing that distinguishes this reading is the final silence.

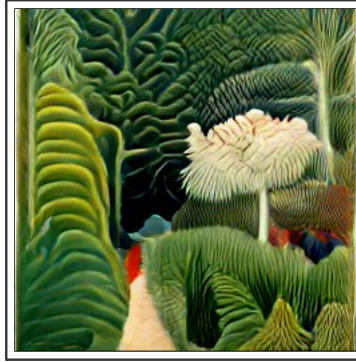
I do not know whether the tarot tells more or less than the visible world.

I do not know how to find the house that you dreamed of that winter.

I was a child. I woke up from a dream, alone and in the dark, in that big room, among those strangers; and I got out of bed, ran to the window, lifted the curtain, and saw only darkness. I looked out at the street, the last houses, the window ledges across the square, where doors open onto porches; across the square, across the bay, across the sea to the horizon, where I could make out a sequence of clouds.

Let them be my first steps.

SIX • THE BOOK OF LEOPOLDO



The mimosas, the papayas, the giant lemons...

I am writing a book. At any rate, it is my intention to write a book. (It was my intention in prison too, though I have hardly had time to write on the headboard of my cot.) The title of this book is *The Book of Herodotus* though the author is not Herodotus but Leopoldo.

Death is near... The shadow of the gallows, reflected like the crooked cross in the executioner's pail, touches the pediment of the town hall of Milagro. The barber has just shaved my head and now, like Socrates, he is shaving my thoughts...

I am writing in the thick of the nineteenth-century's botanical gardens, made up of broad paths of sand, alleys between Japanese fir trees, giant Brazilian palms, shade and shade, gardeners' residences, nursery-keepers' huts, servants' quarters, lofts, orchards of night-blooming cereus...

I am writing under a wooden bench. I have to cross the road with my typewriter to put the spool of paper in the typewriter and then return to my bench, walking under the elms, the double-flowered orchids, the mimosas, the papayas, the giant lemons...

I remember now: this book does not exist. *The Book of Leopoldo* does not exist because... because...

I never left the bench underneath which I was writing. On the first page I begin to type:

The Book of Leopoldo does not exist because I am no more.

SX • IF MY HANDFUL OF NOTES LOOKS LIKE “MAY ALL
SINS BE FORGIVEN,” THIS IS BECAUSE I AM STILL
SINGLE



I have left the “ghost cities” of the past.

Evidently I was once the city I am now, for I well remember how I loved, abandoned, suffered, rejoiced, dreamed, acted. But the causes for my abandonment, sufferings, and the violent acts of which I am the object have vanished into the limbo of a different universe, which seems more real to me as it fades away and is absorbed by this other, in which I believe. Perhaps I am a ghost of a land that once looked like Sodom or Gomorrah and now appears as the city in this *Anthology*. I am not a ghost: I fear the place even more than I love it, because I was always terrified of these “ghost lands” I wrote about in my novel, where I had to live to discover its wonder.

I have left the “ghost cities” of the past, but where is the city that takes me now, which I visit only to learn what it has changed since I was there? Perhaps this is why the *Anthology* has the form it does. I am beginning to consider *The Crossroads of Small*, my second-to-last novel, as a novel taking the form of notes on *Anthology*. This is how *The Crossroads of Small* begins:

THE CROSSROADS OF SMALL

If my handful of notes looks like “May all sins be forgiven,” this is because I am still single, and even have the feeling I’ll be so until the moment I pass my final exams and do not go home but to live among my books as they settle slowly around me.

In reality, I was first on the plane that left the fatherland just as I had written, alone. When my plane landed in the small city where I am living, I was a somewhat obscure graduate student. You will know better the man I was, the one who wrote those lonely white pages in the shabby hotel room where, when I closed my eyes, I always saw flames. Maybe if I look for him, I will find him, or he me.

I find myself thinking of another time, different from mine, when I published an article entitled “My Youth, or the Apparition of a Child Flees from Time,” for which I have enclosed a photograph of the scholar, here dead, who was its original, and an excerpt of the beginning:

MY YOUTH, OR THE APPARITION OF A CHILD FLEES
FROM TIME

It was the year I started to learn how to write, and the century of fear that for me began just before we heard the first airplane’s motor. On a deserted street of a small city, in spite of my lack of confidence, I began to write the dream I had at night.

With a pen whose ink had dried, and thinking I was alone in the room, I removed the faded blue rectangle that said the room’s owner had left for work and discovered a sheet of paper that had been missed. On the clean white paper I began to write:

A DREAM

’Twas in September . . . And from the first moment I felt a happiness that was more than jubilation. Often, walking through the shabby, yet likeable, neighborhood where I was living, I thought I saw a boy with black hair and white face who was perhaps a distant relative or a mere passerby, who changed his appearance each day, like a mirage.

I thought he was perhaps me when I had been a child and escaped from the houses in my fatherland, where I had lived without any obligation to speak, or to speak the truth, the same way I did now.

And here, alone in this place I cannot name but where the writing I did begins 'Twas in September', I also begin the work that caused me to become a bit like the person I saw in my last dream, from the shabby street, and be like the lost child who fears leaving the kingdom without parents.

Now, writing this so many years later as I wait for my final exams, I wonder what I would feel if I found him, or he me. So I am here in his city, which is a small city, near or a long way from where his books end and mine begin.

But, at this moment, this dark city seems the city of mine that does not exist.

LX · ABOUT “THE HONEYMOON D’AMOUR”



I do not like to be told what to read and how to read it.

(Translated from the Spanish by ANDRES FINKELMAN)

This poem should not be spoken aloud, and I recommend you keep silent for a time after reading it; for example, you could go for a walk on a river’s bank. If you like what you read, the reader you ought to imitate is the prisoner in San Francisco who refused to answer his interrogator because if he kept talking “the sound of his voice would unmake his voice.” Or maybe you should again take the lines as written, only then on some inward page.

Otherwise, reading aloud, or repeating it to yourself or with others, will alter the order of the sounds and make it become untrue. Anyway, I do not like to be told what to read and how to read it. Let us go ahead:

The Honeymoon D’amour

Near Thyra¹, a poet is sewing
a waistcoat,
slowly putting together its six sleeve buttons²
and following the holes in the back;
in the next village
*altres faons*³
a carpenter plasters the wall

of a villasuburban⁴.

In the same city

*un amantant*⁵

is putting into the next body

his ache of the next day.

This is what is due each person:

knowing the hour,

remembering,

*en havies d'nostre ombre*⁶.

Still I am not explaining myself,

so why, with all these people

and with the hours of the world,

ask me

why I am alone

here in the car of the airport

at the September end of the night⁷.

What am I waiting for,

when my forehead has no more

lines to fill in?

I am pregnant with departure

and, alone

with desire

and tenderness,

I hold my hands

in front of my face.

This is what it is like,

this flower⁸ of time,

love going out

to love.

NOTES

1. The city of Thyra, city of factories whose windows are filled with blue mirrors.
2. These could be replaced by ellipses: “the six buttons...” The stanza would not lose its savor.
3. In the same way you could say, “in the next village another person is stamping its feet,” and leave the next verb incomplete: “is stamping,” which also would create a rhythm. In addition to being more suggestive, these elliptical phrases would better suit the poem’s action of delay, its reluctance to tell you what it means, why it is now saying nothing⁹.
4. A small cement room on the second floor of a new apartment building.
5. A mute man.
6. Casting a mellow, melodic shadow: the same as could be said of a cloud.
7. Another possible ending: the taxi in the airport (at the end of the night) that takes the traveler “back to the country.” The only other thing we know for sure is the first word (with three successive *l*’s)¹⁰.
8. The *esquil*; a member of the group of decorative floral patterns that grew out of Eastern pattern book motifs (as used for example in thirteenth-century persian carpets). See Gómez Merino, “Carpet: History,” p. 279, and “Carpet: Prose.” These floral designs, with their characteristic scrolls, are found throughout the *Quixote*, especially in the chapters with no illustrations, those devoted to the inn, the innkeeper’s ramblings, and the wedding of Camacho and Galatea.

I add here that the *esquil* pattern also appears in the last part of the tale of the Master Maese Pedro, and as a design on the large sail covering the temporary kitchen built by the three travelers whose adventures were recounted in the final “chapter” of the first part of Cervantes’s novel. Cervantes’s *Dominga la divina* (1584), a pamphlet on courtship or chivalry, has a decorative page with foliated patterns, like a carpet pattern. There are also images of these floral motifs in a few paintings by Gregorio Fernández, and they show up as well in some of his engravings.

It is also worth noting that in the years immediately after the publication of *Don Quixote*, one of the most popular poets of the time was Juan Boscán Almogáver, also known as Boscán de la Roca, author of a *Romancero de trescientas novas rimas* (1543), whose first booklet has a charming engraving showing two shepherds plucking roses from a hedge near an enclosure. One of the shepherds is bent over, dragging his foot to gather some bunches of flowers that are on the ground. It is a delightful moment of joy and languor that joins colors with a mixture of poetry and regret.

9. This should be done with great care. Not necessarily inventing new words, but otherwise modifying the lines with additions and/or cuts, in order to put them where you want, or which the poem imposes. Remember: the poet's magic is the arrangement of the words according to the same rhythmic laws that you use to make music, or that come from these same laws.
10. In the poem *The Fury*, "Eins"¹¹ leads to one. In this poem, you start from the one, twice repeated, which leads to the three.
11. To make this kind of construction, delete the final accented syllable of the next, following, word and change the final vowel of the preceding word to a more open, smaller one. Thus "mi la" becomes "mi la," but also "me lo," "me lo" or "melo." Each of these could mean, "I give (lo) my (le) mouth (la) to kiss (melo)." Now combine¹¹ all of these to form *eins*.

★ ★ ★

It is not poetry that exists, it is the celebration of language. There are so many ways of celebrating it, that it is impossible to know whether it exists or not.

**SXI • FROM A LIST OF BOOKS WRITTEN IN THE CITIES
OF THE NIGHT**

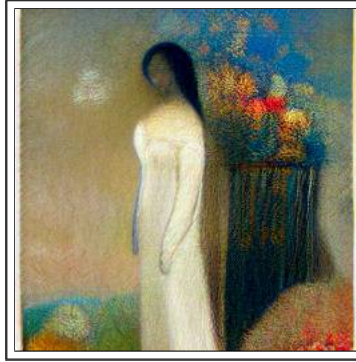


Nocturnal hypnagogic cities flourish in subways.

1. In **BLACK FUGUE** (1959), which Borges has cited twice, I sought to describe the experience of a writer who, after taking a long journey and finally reaching an unfamiliar city, would gradually come to realize that he had never before existed in quite the same way as he does now, that in fact there is no one else like him. In the final section of the book the narrator doubts that he is himself, or anyone.
2. **THE LIST OF CIPHERS** (1968). I describe the city of Godin-Mugnier, which has several hundred abandoned churches, and where nocturnal hypnagogic cities flourish in subways under the marble pavements of the moldering basilica of Sainte-Croix-de-Nivelle.
3. **NIGHTMARE DIARY** (1973). Written while I dreamed, and later corrected. Beginning with the discovery of (fictitious) Los Angeles poets whose work always took place under the cover of darkness, I built up a selection of tales, ostensibly seen from a third-person narrator's point of view, but at times revealing that the author of the tales is also the character (or characters) who relates them: a historian of visions and a visionary historian.
4. **LATIN TRANSLATION** (1976). An autobiographical story written as a translation into Latin of the primary sources of my existence: pieces of newspaper, the minutes of meetings of the writers' union, letters from acquaintances, various tax forms and receipts.

5. *CITIES OF REALITY* (1981). After my mother's death I returned to the city of Godin-Mugnier, whose streets always seem longer than they are, whose buildings lean slightly on their foundations, and whose inhabitants are all related to one another. The book consists of an autobiographical text written in parallel with eight essays by different authors on the city of Godin-Mugnier and its universe.
6. *THE MAN INSIDE* (1982). A translator from Japanese is suddenly and inexplicably seized by insomnia, and is unable to fall asleep because of his own thoughts. During his hospital stay, from which he is released after two weeks with only a tiny dose of morphine to help him sleep, he waits for the moment when consciousness will abandon him, perceiving his body as if it were no longer his own. He thus learns how to dream.
7. *EL REFUGIO DE LA MISMA SOLEDAD* (1984). An underground community of people living in a labyrinth of passageways in the old city of Godin-Mugnier, and of the workers who build the subway in which this city is enclosed. Told in a series of interior monologues, the book becomes at times a volume of verses (in which each chapter ends with a limerick).
8. *METAPHYSICAL ENTANGLEMENT* (1986). After my mother's death I stayed in a suite in a hotel in a city composed solely of buildings that had previously existed in places I had visited before, but there were always distortions, too; buildings that had more windows than their owners originally possessed; or those that had been built from other buildings to resemble/reassemble the original inhabitants, sometimes with disastrous results, as in the story I call "the house of the woman who could only eat shellfish," and in "the house of the mad woman who walked through the house inspecting things."
9. *CITIES OF THE NIGHT* (1988). During my years in Godin-Mugnier, by chance I met a writer and researcher specializing in what he called "para-urbanism": cities under construction, such as those which our dreams see when we awake after having traveled through the country by night and having stopped at some inn or other. In a seemingly conventional way, the book tells a series of stories set in various cities that have taken part in this race of the night, hoping that in the end we might understand why all cities in the world are Godin-Mugnier.

TVII • “I HAD THIS FANTASY”: EXCERPT FROM *ALL THAT IS BETWEEN US*



A leaping flame, as slender as a knitting needle.

I had this fantasy of painting my life with words:

Sunday mornings, a taxi arrives at the shabby lodgings. The occupants are not at home: the door bell breaks the silence. One by one, the visitors move into the house, cross the deserted rooms, and descend the staircase to the garden, where they sit on the grass listening to the birds as they move from tree to tree.

It is here that I often appear, dressed in white, holding a red parasol, an aesthete on my way to a house party. My hair is long, my eyes blue, my legs bare, even when dressed in white. And I appear at that precise moment of the day, the silence, the magic weather, the hidden gardens, the casual friends assembled around me—and I say a few words of welcome and put my hand on a bare shoulder.

It was a Sunday, therefore, when my friends and I walked in silence, hearing only the faint footfalls on the pavement and a woman singing in a nearby garden. And it was in September when I was leaning over the balcony wearing a thin silk gown, listening to the sounds of the city, observing the shadows created by the early evening lights, trying to imagine what it would be like to live an untroubled evening as a faithful lover who knows how to be idle without boredom; and I knew the woman singing must be someone I knew, the woman with the wide black braid singing beneath the balcony beneath mine, in the little garden crowded with shrubs and shrivelled roses.

And I saw an evening garden, heavy with the scent of a midsummer eve, its flower beds drowned in moonlight and darkness; and I saw silhouettes, a little yellow scarf among them; and I began to talk with friends and my friends' friends who had the

gift of listening, of hearing little things and seeing more: I saw, for example, a leaping flame, as slender as a knitting needle, crossing a room, almost a road, that is to say a desert as imagined by someone living in the city of Zurich for the first time.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dona Dubinsky is a novelist and poet. Her second novel, *All That Is Between Us*, is forthcoming from FOLDED WORD PUBLISHING in the summer of 2018. Her first novel, *The Book of Folly*, was published by BLOOMSBURY in the fall of 2014. Drawing from her background as a journalist and museum educator, her work is heavily inflected by historical and cultural memory. Her poetry appears in *Blast*, *Poetry International*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and elsewhere, and is forthcoming in the inaugural issue of *DAUGHTERS*.

Dona lives in Oakland, CA with her partner and their two cats. You can find her online at donadubinsky.com or on twitter @donadube.

LITTORAL ZINE

Dona's chapbook, "When Zlata Held My Hand...and Other Queer Tales" is in its 3rd printing and is available from Z PUBLISHING. Dona is also an associate editor of LITTORAL BOOKS, a small zine press run by Seattle and Olympia-based LGBTQIA+ writers and artists devoted to publishing radical fiction and poetry.

In addition to the first printing of "When Zlata Held My Hand...and Other Queer Tales", LITTORAL BOOKS has published chapbooks by Steve Berman, M. L. Brennan, Noisette Steinke, Alison Whipple, Marijane Osborn, Kali Fajardo-Anstine, Danica McClure, D.A. Powell, Timothy Lee, and Reina Gattuso.

PRAISE FOR *THE BOOK OF FOLLY*

"Dona Dubinsky's elegant, lush novel explores the dark heart of what it means to be human...an unforgettable read."

— Orlando Whitehill,
author of *An Odd Odor of Incense* and *The Strangler Vine*

"Dubinsky's gorgeous *The Book of Folly* is a force of nature that draws from music and literature to tell a story that's crosshatched with literal and allegorical references to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. The

novel's women—both real and imagined—are characters in their own rights; they live and die and rise again in unexpected, thrilling ways.”

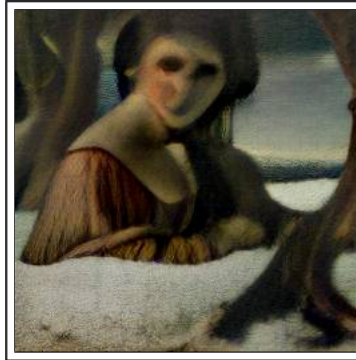
— Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore,
author of *Violin Lessons*

“Dubinsky mixes literary and musical influences to create a novel that is magical, haunting, and lyrical. In following the narrative of Dobrinka, a young Czech opera singer who deserts her opera company to tour the United States, this novel crosses cultures, geographies, and time periods. The spirit of Orpheus, Memphis Minnie, and Patti Smith wafts throughout, as the mythos deepens into a mystical history.”

— Donna Seaman,
author of *Ecstatic Antibodies* and *Jane Doe, Inc.*



LX • THE WHITE FOREST



The cold sharp thorns, which hold her upright.

I

A breeze is blowing
through the streets of Adelina.

I love her.

I want to write her name at the beginning,
then she would be the only one to read it.

II

The words that I am writing now
are written in a blue script
by a little hand,

her hand.

Her fingers are slender. Soft enough, enough.

III

The cold sharp thorns, which hold her upright,
are her most
remarkable features.

IV

I have already seen many women,
and I like what is unique in this one.

This girl is terrifying.

V

Now her fingers,
her palms,
her back,
her neck,
her legs,
and her arms
are lit by the moon.

They are white now,
they are becoming white and they remain white.

VI

It is still cold here,
very cold.
The light that is coming from the window

is white and cold, it is a cold white.

I do not know if she is right here. She is here.
I do not know if I am right here. I am here.

VII

She has met the inside of me
with the inside of her.
I am walking beside her.

I am walking in her shade.

VIII

Now I walk beside a white forest.

I walk through its arms, its eyes.
I go from its folds,
its hands.
Now I walk on its narrow bed.

IX

Now I stand on its white shore.

I dance on its stones.
I dance on its sandy floor.
I dance on its full blue lake.



LXI • LITTLE ENCOUNTERS WITH THE SKY



“What is going to rain?”

Memory does not travel well, especially if too much time has passed: the little details are lost. A few of them, however, remain and from those memories arise thin and fragile documents, in which some few days show, like gold studs, on those yellow pages:

A man, after his second or third sleepless night, opens his eyes at seven in the morning to the sight of her face. He says to her: “It’s going to rain.” The woman doesn’t move. The man goes out. On the roof, he hears the murmur of traffic increasing, vehicles coming toward the city: they’re going to have another day. He returns to the woman’s bed, they wake up the child and dress him. Before it’s time to go out, he again finds the little boy asleep in the big bed, his grandfather’s bed.

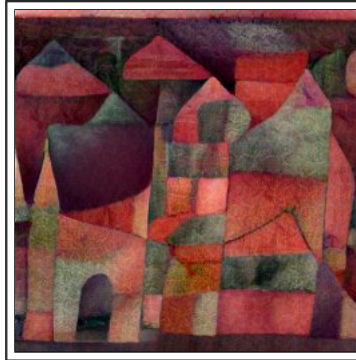
In the kitchen, the mother and the father both drink tea. The father says to the mother: “Yes, it’s going to rain.” And the mother says to the father: “What is going to rain?” Father to mother: “Everything.” Mother: “What do you mean?” Father: “Everything is going to rain.” The woman is still looking at the boy. The father kisses the mother and goes out for a last look at the street. Rain clouds form in the western sky.

Other details: an old woman walking, always dressed in black. Or the three men going to work at eight in the morning, hands in their pockets, clutching cigarettes. Little bits of landscape torn from the sky: a window opening onto an empty balcony, a sign showing the distance from the capital.

The child, a day after school, is looking out at the rain-shiny street. The mother is reading a book. She says: “Who knows, perhaps it’ll rain forever.”

A dry day comes. A word escapes from the book and floats through the air before settling slowly in the silence.

TVIII • THE ALCHEMY OF SALT



Away over the mirrors of the saltpeter plain.

From the city's outer edge, buildings bent in various ways suddenly gave way to wide plains of saltpeter and phosphite and other colored salts, on which the cranes assembled dark crystalline shapes. Behind the cranes was a second line of buildings, which turned these minerals into houses and neighborhoods. In this way the city seemed to slink away over the mirrors of the saltpeter plain, retreating only to approach again.

Each morning, hour by hour, the city would gain on itself, drop out of sight, reappear, and resume its progress to the last rim of the horizon, like a race against the bewitching contortions of the salts.

MXI • PIQUCHIN'S DREAM



But what ruins can cover the flower in his hair?

We are his dream, poor Piquichin. He dreams he is the king of some twilight, urban city in which lights twinkle on tree branches from a blue sky on which a red sun is about to set, the city on which birds fell like hail from the night, the city on which the specter of Monamón, who died a thousand years ago, raises her head. Piquichin knows the spell by heart and he knows that soon the city will fall.

But what ruins can cover the flower in his hair, the flower that blooms on his eyelids, the flowers that appear suspended in the air as though they were stones thrown in a river? Rain begins. A gray, low, damp dawn rises. Birds will be falling again.

TIX • PLACES OF ASH



The stillness of all things speaks in our ears.

We live behind wooden doors painted yellow. From our windows we see linen in the main street. The smell of earth rises from ditches, and the stillness of all things speaks in our ears. Life in our rooms is uncomplicated: we sleep, eat, and wait for night.

Out in the distance there appear lights—fires on ships or perhaps lonely houses. As soon as these lights approach, they disappear into the black. When we awake the next morning, we do not know whether we saw the lights or if they were dreams. So we go on living and waiting.

When it is light, we also see ashes in the sky. At first, they appear to be the same ashes as yesterday. But overnight they have subtly changed, moved; more ash seems to be massed at one edge of the sky, and another time the horizon seems empty. The black arrives; it deposits a few leaves of ash on our mattresses and we again consider whether this ash has traveled with us from previous days or whether someone may instead have burned the same things, in the same place, a place we too shall shortly travel to.

At dawn, after the mysterious fires are extinguished, we look out onto the street, where fresh linen lies scattered. The street is illuminated by ashfalls. The street is silent, the stillness of all things speaks in our ears. We are happy to be here.

TX • SHAPE OF THE WEAK



The light! The light!

We want to be pure. We want to feel the blow. The city is stronger than we are. A single shock, a miracle, and we explode. How can we survive it?

I shall remember certain Sundays when I was a child in the city of Chicago: the great cold, piercing the windows and pressing us against a warm stove; the sky outside clearing of snow, building, flashing, flashing a feeble blade of light onto the window-pane, and inside children shouting in anticipation of the miracle: The light! The light! The miracle is arriving: light, slanting, descending.

And so we yelled: The light! The light!

TXI • EPILOGUE



And here, finally, are the words uttered by Diodorus Siculus as his narrative draws to a close. They seem as if he is saying farewell to someone, as if he were announcing the author's death. We will of course maintain that they are simply traces of a further and secret text, an epilogue destined to be read only by eyes from another planet.

The writer's purpose is to remain concealed behind his words. His only weapon is illusion, to tell of cities in anonymous books, and in novels composed of ancient fragments that have been reworked.

And so, my friends, at the end of the paths we have thus far traced we now find ourselves at a city which, I will not flatter myself, is the most beautiful of all: the city of Bestulozia. But I must request that you not follow me into its streets, nor attempt to cross its stone bridges, nor think of climbing its towers, for this city will never die. It is not built by human hands, but written in a cosmic language. It is made of poems. What visitors it will receive will be the poems that speak of it.

COLOPHON

This book was written and illustrated by a computer.

More precisely, it was written by models in the GPT family (**GPT-J** and **GPT-NeoX**), prompted (except for the introduction) with the first three stories from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (*Le città invisibili*, 1972). The introduction was generated using the first paragraph from the preface of *Calvino's Combinatorial Creativity* (ed. Elizabeth Scheiber, 2016) and the opening sentence. It was arranged and edited by David Wakeham, and story titles were determined collaboratively. The collection was illustrated by **craiyn**, using excerpts from the relevant stories and prompt engineering. This document is typeset in Garamond, using L^AT_EX and the **memoir** class.

Finally, I would like to thank my mother for encouragement, feedback and housing during the three-week fugue *Invisible Authors* was completed.

S Cities and Signs
T Cities and Transformations
M Cities and Masks
L Cities and Love
P Cities and Presence