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BIERCE

AMBROSE BIERCE

Meigs County, 1842 - Chihuahua, 1914

American journalist, born in Horse Cave Creek, Ohio. He fought in the Civil War, and after extensive travels in America, moved to San Francisco and became a columnist for numerous magazines and newspapers. He travelled to England in 1872, where he wrote under the pseudonym 'Dod Grile', and published three compilations of his witty sketches: Nuggets and Dust Panned out in California (1873), The Fiend's Delight (1873), and Cobwebs from an Empty Skull (1874). On his return to San Francisco in 1877 he wrote for Hearst's Examiner, becoming the most provocative writing force on the West Coast, his frequent vitriol earning him the nickname 'Bitter Bierce'.

*His Tales of Soldiers and Civilians (1891; retitled In the Midst of Life, 1892), widely acclaimed for such short stories of the American Civil War as 'Chickamauga' and 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge', and his further collection Can Such Things Be? (1893), established him as a writer of sardonic humour, aptly contrasting images of horror and beauty, and a master of the unexpected ending. His subsequent works included the The Monk and the Hangman's Daughter (1892), a medieval romance; Fantastic Fables (1899); Shapes of Clay (1903), satiric verse; and Collected Works (12 volumes; 1909-12). The Cynic's Word Book (1906), later retitled **The Devil's Dictionary** (1911), is a compendium of cynical and witty definitions attacking politicians, materialistic values, and bourgeois life. In 1913 Bierce travelled into revolutionary Mexico, where he mysteriously vanished.*

from The Devil's Dictionary

A

Admiration, n. Our polite recognition of another's resemblance to ourselves.

B

Baptism, n. A sacred rite of such efficacy that he who finds himself in heaven without having undergone it will be unhappy forever.

C

Cynic, n. A blackguard whose faulty vision sees things as they are, not as they ought to be.

D

Discussion, n. A method of confirming others in their errors.

E

Egotist, n. A person of low taste, more interested in himself than in me.

F

Future, n. That period of time in which our affairs prosper, our friends are true and our happiness is assured.

G

Grammar, n. A system of pitfalls thoughtfully prepared for the feet for the self-made man, along the path by which he advances to distinction.

H

History, n. An account mostly false, of events mostly unimportant, which are brought about by rulers mostly knaves, and soldiers mostly fools.

I

Infidel, n. In New York, one who does not believe in the Christian religion; in Constantinople, one who does.

J

Justice, n. A commodity which is a more or less adulterated condition the State sells to the citizen as a reward for his allegiance, taxes and personal service.

K

Kilt, n. A costume sometimes worn by Scotchmen in America and Americans in Scotland.

L

Longevity, n. Uncommon extension of the fear of death.

M

Miracle, n. An act or event out of the order of nature and unaccountable, as beating a normal hand of four kings and an ace with four aces and a king.

N

Nose, n. The extreme outpost of the face. It has been observed that one's nose is never so happy as when thrust into the affairs of others, from which some physiologists have drawn the inference that the nose is devoid of the sense of smell.

O

Optimist, n. A proponent of the doctrine that black is white.

P

Patience, n. A minor form of despair, disguised as a virtue.

Q

Quorum, n. A sufficient number of members of a deliberative body to have their own way and their own way of having it. In the United States Senate a quorum consists of the chairman of the Committee on Finance and a messenger from the White House; in the House of Representatives, of the Speaker and the devil.

R

Reason, v.i. To weight probabilities in the scales of desire.

S

Saint, n. A dead sinner revised and edited.

T

Telephone, n. An invention of the devil which abrogates some of the advantages of making a disagreeable person keep his distance.

U

Ultimatum, n. In diplomacy, a last demand before resorting to concessions.

V

Vanity, n. The tribute of a fool to the worth of the nearest ass.

W

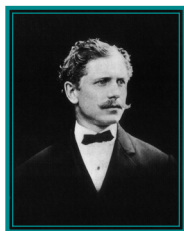
Wall Street, n. A symbol for sin for every devil to rebuke. That Wall Street is a den of thieves is a belief that serves every unsuccessful thief in place of a hope in Heaven.

Y

Yankee, n. In Europe, an American. In the Northern States of our Union, a New Englander. In the Southern States the word is unknown. (See DAMNYANK.)

Z

Zoology, n. The science and history of the animal kingdom, including its king, the House Fly (*Musca maledicta*)



ANOTHER WAY

by Ambrose Bierce

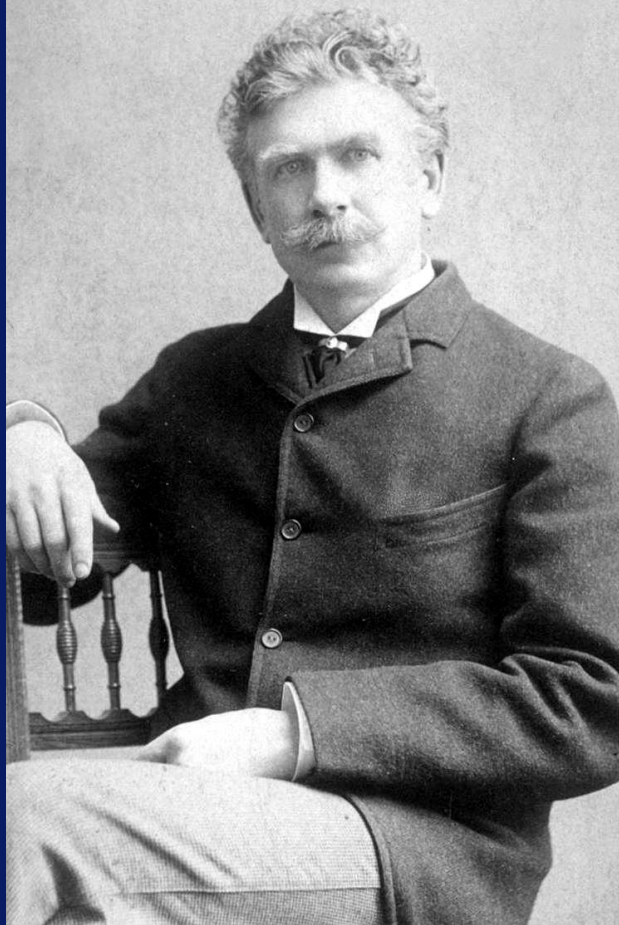
*I lay in silence, dead. A woman came
And laid a rose upon my breast and said,
“May God be merciful.” She spoke my name,
And added, “It is strange to think him dead.*

*“He loved me well enough, but ’twas his way
To speak it lightly.” Then, beneath her breath;
“Besides” – I knew what further she would say,
But then a footfall broke my dream of death.*

*Today the words are mine. I lay the rose
Upon her breast, and speak her name, and deem
It strange indeed that she is dead. God knows
I had more pleasure in the other dream.*



BIERCE



An Imperfect Conflagration

FROM THE PARENTICIDE CLUB (1911)

Early one June morning in 1872 I murdered my father—an act which made a deep impression on me at the time. This was before my marriage, while I was living with my parents in Wisconsin. My father and I were in the library of our home, dividing the proceeds of a burglary which we had committed that night. These consisted of household goods mostly, and the task of equitable division was difficult. We got on very well with the napkins, towels and such things, and the silverware was parted pretty nearly equally, but you can see for yourself that when you try to divide a single music-box by two without a remainder you will have trouble. It was that music-box which brought disaster and disgrace upon our family. If we had left it my poor father might now be alive.

It was a most exquisite and beautiful piece of workmanship—inlaid with costly woods and carven very curiously. It would not only play a great variety of tunes, but would whistle like a quail, bark like a dog, crow

every morning at daylight whether it was wound up or not, and break the Ten Commandments. It was this last mentioned accomplishment that won my father's heart and caused him to commit the only dishonorable act of his life, though possibly he would have committed more if he had been spared: he tried to conceal that music-box from me, and declared upon his honor that he had not taken it, though I know very well that, so far as he was concerned, the burglary had been undertaken chiefly for the purpose of obtaining it.

My father had the music-box hidden under his cloak; we had worn cloaks by way of disguise. He had solemnly assured me that he did not take it. I knew that he did, and knew something of which he was evidently ignorant; namely, that the box would crow at daylight and betray him if I could prolong the division of profits till that time. All occurred as I wished: as the gas-light began to pale in the library and the shape of the windows was seen dimly behind the curtains, a long cock-a-doodle-doo came from beneath the old gentleman's cloak, followed by a few bars of an aria from *Tannhauser*, ending with a loud click. A small hand-axe, which we had used to break into the unlucky house, lay between us on the table; I picked it up. The old man seeing that further concealment was useless took the box from under his cloak and set it on the table. "Cut it in two if you prefer that plan," said he; "I tried to save it from destruction."

He was a passionate lover of music and could himself play the concertina with expression and feeling.

I said: "I do not question the purity of your motive: it would be presumptuous of me to sit in judgment on my father. But business is business, and with this axe I am going to effect a dissolution of our partnership unless you will consent in all future burglaries to wear a bell-punch."

"No," he said, after some reflection, "no, I could not do that; it would look like a confession of dishonesty. People would say that you distrusted me."

I could not help admiring his spirit and sensitiveness; for a moment I was proud of him and disposed to overlook his fault, but a glance at the richly jeweled music-box decided me, and, as I said, I removed the old man from this vale of tears. Having done so, I was a trifle uneasy. Not only was he my father—the author of my being—but the body would be certainly discovered. It was now broad daylight and my mother was likely to enter the library at any moment. Under the circumstances, I thought it expedient to remove her also, which I did. Then I paid off all the servants and discharged them.

That afternoon I went to the chief of police, told him what I had done and asked his advice. It would be very painful to me if the facts became publicly known. My conduct would be generally condemned; the newspapers would bring it up against me if ever I should run for office. The chief saw the force of these considerations; he was himself an assassin of wide experience. After consulting with the presiding judge of the Court of Variable Jurisdiction he advised me to conceal the

bodies in one of the bookcases, get a heavy insurance on the house and burn it down. This I proceeded to do. In the library was a book-case which my father had recently purchased of some cranky inventor and had not filled. It was in shape and size something like the old-fashioned "ward-robcs" which one sees in bed-rooms without closets, but opened all the way down, like a woman's night-dress. It had glass doors. I had recently laid out my parents and they were now rigid enough to stand erect; so I stood them in this book-case, from which I had removed the shelves. I locked them in and tacked some curtains over the glass doors. The inspector from the insurance office passed a half-dozen times before the case without suspicion.

That night, after getting my policy, I set fire to the house and started through the woods to town, two miles away, where I managed to be found about the time the excitement was at its height. With cries of apprehension for the fate of my parents, I joined the rush and arrived at the fire some two hours after I had kindled it. The whole town was there as I dashed up. The house was entirely consumed, but in one end of the level bed of glowing embers, bolt upright and uninjured, was that book-case! The curtains had burned away, exposing the glass-doors, through which the fierce, red light illuminated the interior. There stood my dear father "in his habit as he lived," and at his side the partner of his joys and sorrows. Not a hair of them was singed, their clothing was intact. On their heads and throats the injuries which in the accomplishment of my designs I had

AN IMPERFECT CONFLAGRATION

been compelled to inflict were conspicuous. As in the presence of a miracle, the people were silent; awe and terror had stilled every tongue. I was myself greatly affected.

Some three years later, when the events herein related had nearly faded from my memory, I went to New York to assist in passing some counterfeit United States bonds. Carelessly looking into a furniture store one day, I saw the exact counterpart of that book-case. "I bought it for a trifle from a reformed inventor," the dealer explained. "He said it was fireproof, the pores of the wood being filled with alum under hydraulic pressure and the glass made of asbestos. I don't suppose it is really fireproof—you can have it at the price of an ordinary book-case."

"No," I said, "if you cannot warrant it fireproof I won't take it"—and I bade him good morning.

I would not have had it at any price: it revived memories that were exceedingly disagreeable.





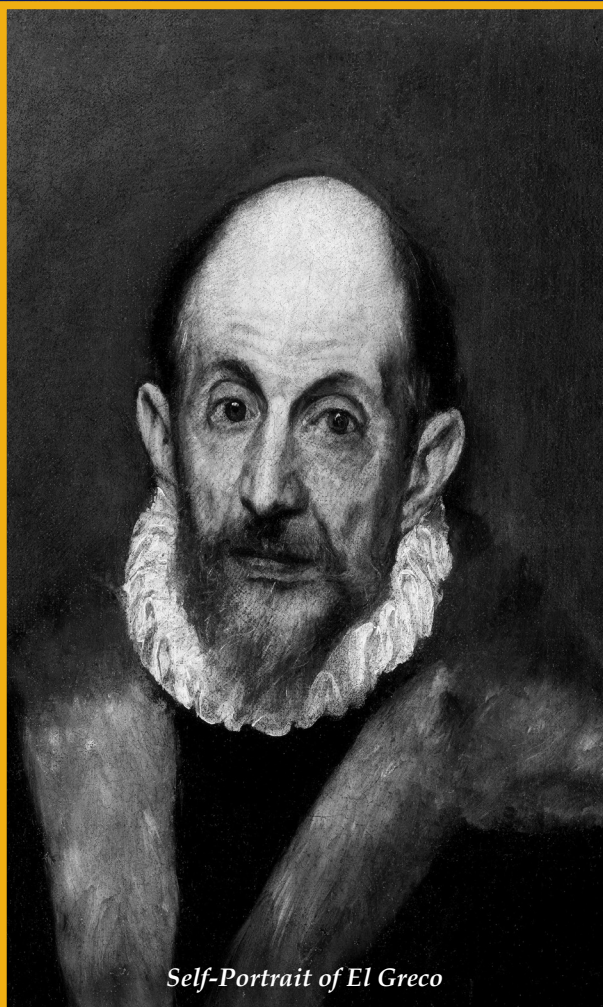
EL GRECO

CANDIA, 1541 - TOLEDO, 1614

El Greco

El Greco, born Doménikos Theotokópoulos, was a painter, sculptor and architect of the Spanish Renaissance. "El Greco" (The Greek) was a nickname, a reference to his national Greek origin. El Greco was born in Crete, which was at that time part of the Republic of Venice, and the center of Post-Byzantine art. He trained and became a master within that tradition before travelling at age 26 to Venice, as other Greek artists had done. In 1570 he moved to Rome, where he opened a workshop and executed a series of works. During his stay in Italy, El Greco enriched his style with elements of Mannerism and of the Venetian Renaissance. In 1577, he moved to Toledo, Spain, where he lived and worked until his death. In Toledo, El Greco received several major commissions and produced his best-known paintings.

El Greco's dramatic and expressionistic style was met with puzzlement by his contemporaries but found appreciation in the 20th century. El Greco is regarded as a precursor of both Expressionism and Cubism, while his personality and works were a source of inspiration for poets and writers such as Rainer Maria Rilke and Nikos Kazantzakis. El Greco has been characterized by modern scholars as an artist so individual that he belongs to no conventional school. He is best known for tortuously elongated figures and often fantastic or phantasmagorical pigmentation, marrying Byzantine traditions with those of Western painting.



Self-Portrait of El Greco



TOLEDO 2014

EL GRECO

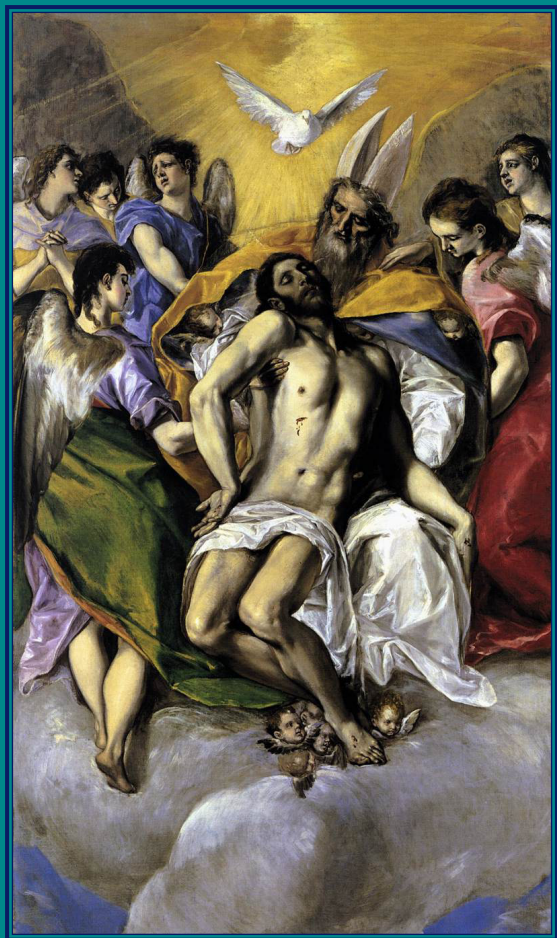
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Christ Healing the Blind Man

(1560 OIL ON CANVAS ~ GEMÄLDEGALERIE ALTE MEISTER, DRESDEN)

El Greco



The Holy Trinity

(1577-79 ~ OIL ON CANVAS, PRADO MUSEUM, MADRID)

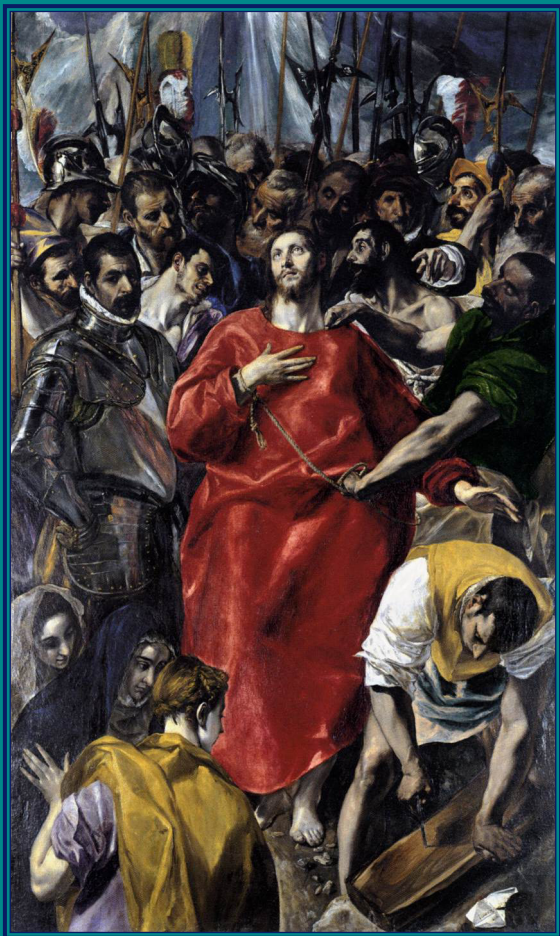
El Greco



Assumption of the Virgin

(1577-79 ~ OIL ON CANVAS, ART INSTITUTE, CHICAGO)

El Greco



The Disrobing of Christ >>

(1579 ~ OIL ON CANVAS, SACRISTY OF THE CATHEDRAL, TOLEDO)

El Greco



St. Peter in Tears >>

(1582 ~ OIL ON CANVAS, EL GRECO MUSEUM, TOLEDO)

El Greco



The Burial of the Count of Orgaz >>

(1588 ~ OIL ON CANVAS, SANTO TOMÉ, TOLEDO)

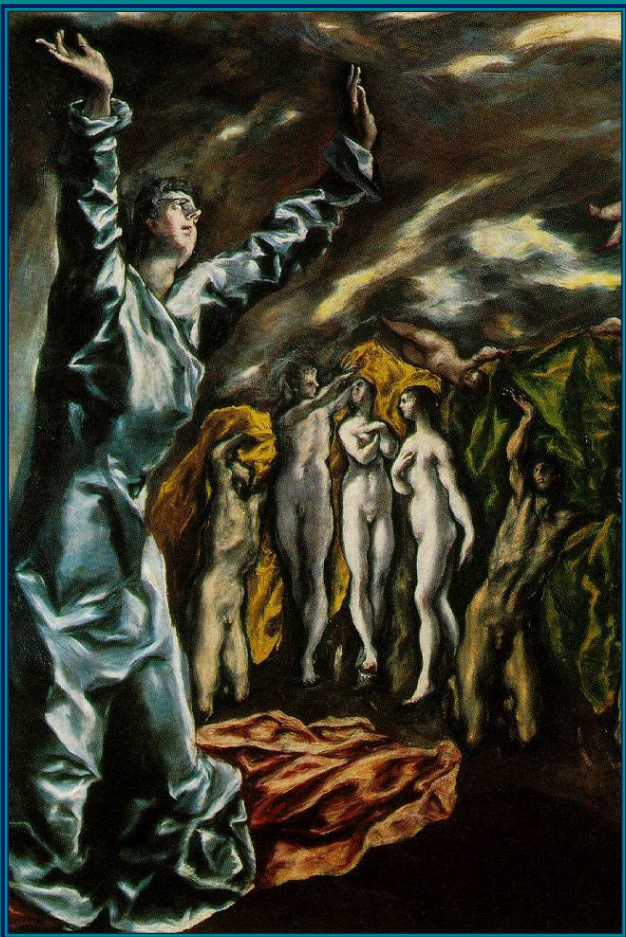
El Greco



View of Toledo >>

(1597 ~ OIL ON CANVAS, METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, NEW YORK)

El Greco



The Opening of the Fifth Seal >>

(1614 ~ OIL ON CANVAS, METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, NEW YORK)

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Salem, 1804 - Plymouth, 1864

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born on July 4, 1804, in Salem, Massachusetts. He added the "w" to his name when he began publishing. Hawthorne graduated from Bowdoin College in 1825. While attending Bowdoin, he became a friend of future U.S. President Franklin Pierce. After college, he settled in Salem and continued writing. Hawthorne worked in the Boston Custom House in 1839 and 1840. He married Sophia Peabody in 1842. They moved to the now-famous "Old Manse" in Concord, Massachusetts, where he continued writing. Hawthorne was surveyor of customs in the port of Salem from 1846 to 1849. In 1853, President Pierce appointed Hawthorne to a four-year term as United States consul in Liverpool, England. After 1857, Hawthorne lived in Italy and again in England before returning to Concord in 1860. He died on May 18 or 19, 1864, while visiting New Hampshire with Pierce.

Hawthorne's works probe into human nature, especially its darker side. He set many stories against the somber background of Puritan New England, the world of his ancestors. Unlike most fiction writers of his time, he was not primarily interested in stirring the reader by sensational or sentimental effects. Hawthorne called his writing "romance," which he defined as a method of showing "the depths of our common nature." To Hawthorne, romance meant confronting reality, rather than evading it. Hawthorne often dealt with the themes of morality, sin, and redemption. Among his early influences were the parables and allegories of John Bunyan and Edmund Spenser.

Dr. Heidegger's Experiment

FROM TWICE-TOLD TALES (1837)

That very singular man old Dr. Heidegger once invited four venerable friends to meet him in his study. There were three white-bearded gentlemen — Mr. Medbourne, Colonel Killigrew and Mr. Gascoigne — and a withered gentlewoman whose name was the widow Wycherly. They were all melancholy old creatures who had been unfortunate in life, and whose greatest misfortune it was that they were not long ago in their graves. Mr. Medbourne, in the vigor of his age, had been a prosperous merchant, but had lost his all by a frantic speculation, and was now little better than a mendicant. Colonel Killigrew had wasted his best years and his health and substance in the pursuit of sinful pleasures which had given birth to a brood of pains, such as the gout and divers other torments of soul and body. Mr. Gascoigne was a ruined politician, a man of evil fame — or, at least, had been so till time had buried him from the knowledge of the present generation and made him obscure instead of infamous. As for the widow Wycherly,

tradition tells us that she was a great beauty in her day, but for a long while past she had lived in deep seclusion on account of certain scandalous stories which had prejudiced the gentry of the town against her. It is a circumstance worth mentioning that each of these three old gentlemen—Mr. Medbourne, Colonel Killigrew and Mr. Gascoigne—were early lovers of the widow Wycherly, and had once been on the point of cutting each other's throats for her sake. And before proceeding farther I will merely hint that Dr. Heidegger and all his four guests were sometimes thought to be a little beside themselves, as is not infrequently the case with old people when worried either by present troubles or woeful recollections.

"My dear old friends," said Dr. Heidegger, motioning them to be seated, "I am desirous of your assistance in one of those little experiments with which I amuse myself here in my study."

If all stories were true, Dr. Heidegger's study must have been a very curious place. It was a dim, old-fashioned chamber festooned with cobwebs and besprinkled with antique dust. Around the walls stood several oaken bookcases, the lower shelves of which were filled with rows of gigantic folios and black-letter quartos, and the upper with little parchment-covered duodecimos. Over the central bookcase was a bronze bust of Hippocrates, with which, according to some authorities, Dr. Heidegger was accustomed to hold consultations in all difficult cases of his practice. In the obscurest corner of the room stood a tall and narrow

oaken closet with its door ajar, within which doubtfully appeared a skeleton. Between two of the bookcases hung a looking-glass, presenting its high and dusty plate within a tarnished gilt frame. Among many wonderful stories related of this mirror, it was fabled that the spirits of all the doctor's deceased patients dwelt within its verge and would stare him in the face whenever he looked thitherward. The opposite side of the chamber was ornamented with the full-length portrait of a young lady arrayed in the faded magnificence of silk, satin and brocade, and with a visage as faded as her dress. Above half a century ago Dr. Heidegger had been on the point of marriage with this young lady, but, being affected with some slight disorder, she had swallowed one of her lover's prescriptions and died on the bridal-evening. The greatest curiosity of the study remains to be mentioned: it was a ponderous folio volume bound in black leather, with massive silver clasps. There were no letters on the back, and nobody could tell the title of the book. But it was well known to be a book of magic, and once, when a chambermaid had lifted it merely to brush away the dust, the skeleton had rattled in its closet, the picture of the young lady had stepped one foot upon the floor and several ghastly faces had peeped forth from the mirror, while the brazen head of Hippocrates frowned and said, "Forbear!"

Such was Dr. Heidegger's study. On the summer afternoon of our tale a small round table as black as ebony stood in the centre of the room, sustaining a cut-glass

vase of beautiful form and elaborate workmanship. The sunshine came through the window between the heavy festoons of two faded damask curtains and fell directly across this vase, so that a mild splendor was reflected from it on the ashen visages of the five old people who sat around. Four champagne-glasses were also on the table.

"My dear old friends," repeated Dr. Heidegger, "may I reckon on your aid in performing an exceedingly curious experiment?"

Now, Dr. Heidegger was a very strange old gentleman whose eccentricity had become the nucleus for a thousand fantastic stories. Some of these fables—to my shame be it spoken—might possibly be traced back to mine own veracious self; and if any passages of the present tale should startle the reader's faith, I must be content to bear the stigma of a fiction-monger.

When the doctor's four guests heard him talk of his proposed experiment, they anticipated nothing more wonderful than the murder of a mouse in an air-pump or the examination of a cobweb by the microscope, or some similar nonsense with which he was constantly in the habit of pestering his intimates. But without waiting for a reply Dr. Heidegger hobbled across the chamber and returned with the same ponderous folio bound in black leather which common report affirmed to be a book of magic. Undoing the silver clasps, he opened the volume and took from among its black-letter pages a rose, or what was once a rose, though now the green leaves and crimson petals had assumed one brownish

hue and the ancient flower seemed ready to crumble to dust in the doctor's hands.

"This rose," said Dr. Heidegger, with a sigh—"this same withered and crumbling flower—blossomed five and fifty years ago. It was given me by Sylvia Ward, whose portrait hangs yonder, and I meant to wear it in my bosom at our wedding. Five and fifty years it has been treasured between the leaves of this old volume. Now, would you deem it possible that this rose of half a century could ever bloom again?"

"Nonsense!" said the widow Wycherly, with a peevish toss of her head. "You might as well ask whether an old woman's wrinkled face could ever bloom again."

"See!" answered Dr. Heidegger. He uncovered the vase and threw the faded rose into the water which it contained. At first it lay lightly on the surface of the fluid, appearing to imbibe none of its moisture. Soon, however, a singular change began to be visible. The crushed and dried petals stirred and assumed a deepening tinge of crimson, as if the flower were reviving from a deathlike slumber, the slender stalk and twigs of foliage became green, and there was the rose of half a century, looking as fresh as when Sylvia Ward had first given it to her lover. It was scarcely full-blown, for some of its delicate red leaves curled modestly around its moist bosom, within which two or three dewdrops were sparkling.

"That is certainly a very pretty deception," said the doctor's friends—carelessly, however, for they had witnessed greater miracles at a conjurer's show. "Pray, how was it effected?"

"Did you never hear of the Fountain of Youth?" asked Dr. Heidegger, "which Ponce de Leon, the Spanish adventurer, went in search of two or three centuries ago?" "But did Ponce de Leon ever find it?" said the widow Wycherly.

"No," answered Dr. Heidegger, "for he never sought it in the right place. The famous Fountain of Youth, if I am rightly informed, is situated in the southern part of the Floridian peninsula, not far from Lake Macaco. Its source is overshadowed by several gigantic magnolias which, though numberless centuries old, have been kept as fresh as violets by the virtues of this wonderful water. An acquaintance of mine, knowing my curiosity in such matters, has sent me what you see in the vase." "Ahem!" said Colonel Killigrew, who believed not a word of the doctor's story; "and what may be the effect of this fluid on the human frame?"

"You shall judge for yourself, my dear colonel," replied Dr. Heidegger. — "And all of you, my respected friends, are welcome to so much of this admirable fluid as may restore to you the bloom of youth. For my own part, having had much trouble in growing old, I am in no hurry to grow young again. With your permission, therefore, I will merely watch the progress of the experiment."

While he spoke Dr. Heidegger had been filling the four champagne-glasses with the water of the Fountain of Youth. It was apparently impregnated with an effervescent gas, for little bubbles were continually ascending from the depths of the glasses and bursting in silvery

spray at the surface. As the liquor diffused a pleasant perfume, the old people doubted not that it possessed cordial and comfortable properties, and, though utter sceptics as to its rejuvenescent power, they were inclined to swallow it at once. But Dr. Heidegger besought them to stay a moment.

"Before you drink, my respectable old friends," said he, "it would be well that, with the experience of a lifetime to direct you, you should draw up a few general rules for your guidance in passing a second time through the perils of youth. Think what a sin and shame it would be if, with your peculiar advantages, you should not become patterns of virtue and wisdom to all the young people of the age!"

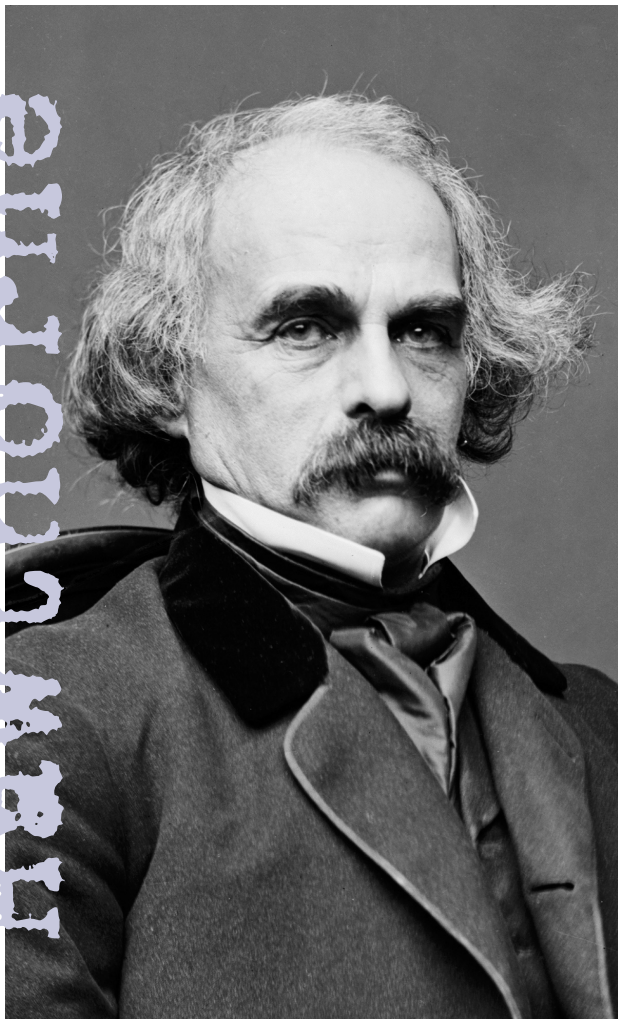
The doctor's four venerable friends made him no answer except by a feeble and tremulous laugh, so very ridiculous was the idea that, knowing how closely Repentance treads behind the steps of Error, they should ever go astray again.

"Drink, then," said the doctor, bowing; "I rejoice that I have so well selected the subjects of my experiment."

With palsied hands they raised the glasses to their lips. The liquor, if it really possessed such virtues as Dr. Heidegger imputed to it, could not have been bestowed on four human beings who needed it more woefully. They looked as if they had never known what youth or pleasure was, but had been the offspring of Nature's dotage, and always the gray, decrepit, sapless, miserable creatures who now sat stooping round the doctor's table without life enough in their souls or bodies

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

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to be animated even by the prospect of growing young again. They drank off the water and replaced their glasses on the table.

Assuredly, there was an almost immediate improvement in the aspect of the party — not unlike what might have been produced by a glass of generous wine — together with a sudden glow of cheerful sunshine, brightening over all their visages at once. There was a healthful suffusion on their cheeks instead of the ashen hue that had made them look so corpse-like. They gazed at one another, and fancied that some magic power had really begun to smooth away the deep and sad inscriptions which Father Time had been so long engraving on their brows. The widow Wycherly adjusted her cap, for she felt almost like a woman again.

"Give us more of this wondrous water," cried they, eagerly. "We are younger, but we are still too old. Quick! give us more!"

"Patience, patience!" quoth Dr. Heidegger, who sat, watching the experiment with philosophic coolness. "You have been a long time growing old; surely you might be content to grow young in half an hour. But the water is at your service." Again he filled their glasses with the liquor of youth, enough of which still remained in the vase to turn half the old people in the city to the age of their own grandchildren.

While the bubbles were yet sparkling on the brim the doctor's four guests snatched their glasses from the table and swallowed the contents at a single gulp. Was it delusion? Even while the draught was passing down

their throats it seemed to have wrought a change on their whole systems. Their eyes grew clear and bright; a dark shade deepened among their silvery locks: they sat around the table three gentlemen of middle age and a woman hardly beyond her buxom prime.

"My dear widow, you are charming!" cried Colonel Killigrew, whose eyes had been fixed upon her face while the shadows of age were flitting from it like darkness from the crimson daybreak.

The fair widow knew of old that Colonel Killigrew's compliments were not always measured by sober truth; so she started up and ran to the mirror, still dreading that the ugly visage of an old woman would meet her gaze.

Meanwhile, the three gentlemen behaved in such a manner as proved that the water of the Fountain of Youth possessed some intoxicating qualities—unless, indeed, their exhilaration of spirits were merely a light-some dizziness caused by the sudden removal of the weight of years. Mr. Gascoigne's mind seemed to run on political topics, but whether relating to the past, present or future could not easily be determined, since the same ideas and phrases have been in vogue these fifty years. Now he rattled forth full-throated sentences about patriotism, national glory and the people's right; now he muttered some perilous stuff or other in a sly and doubtful whisper, so cautiously that even his own conscience could scarcely catch the secret; and now, again, he spoke in measured accents and a deeply-deferential tone, as if a royal ear were listening to his well-

turned periods. Colonel Killigrew all this time had been trolling forth a jolly bottle-song and ringing his glass in symphony with the chorus, while his eyes wandered toward the buxom figure of the widow Wycherly. On the other side of the table, Mr. Medbourne was involved in a calculation of dollars and cents with which was strangely intermingled a project for supplying the East Indies with ice by harnessing a team of whales to the polar icebergs. As for the widow Wycherly, she stood before the mirror courtesying and simpering to her own image and greeting it as the friend whom she loved better than all the world besides. She thrust her face close to the glass to see whether some long-remembered wrinkle or crow's-foot had indeed vanished; she examined whether the snow had so entirely melted from her hair that the venerable cap could be safely thrown aside. At last, turning briskly away, she came with a sort of dancing step to the table.

"My dear old doctor," cried she, "pray favor me with another glass."

"Certainly, my dear madam—certainly," replied the complaisant doctor. "See! I have already filled the glasses."

There, in fact, stood the four glasses brimful of this wonderful water, the delicate spray of which, as it effervesced from the surface, resembled the tremulous glitter of diamonds.

It was now so nearly sunset that the chamber had grown duskier than ever, but a mild and moonlike splendor gleamed from within the vase and rested alike

on the four guests and on the doctor's venerable figure. He sat in a high-backed, elaborately-carved oaken arm-chair with a gray dignity of aspect that might have well befitted that very Father Time whose power had never been disputed save by this fortunate company. Even while quaffing the third draught of the Fountain of Youth, they were almost awed by the expression of his mysterious visage. But the next moment the exhilarating gush of young life shot through their veins. They were now in the happy prime of youth. Age, with its miserable train of cares and sorrows and diseases, was remembered only as the trouble of a dream from which they had joyously awoke. The fresh gloss of the soul, so early lost and without which the world's successive scenes had been but a gallery of faded pictures, again threw its enchantment over all their prospects. They felt like new-created beings in a new-created universe. "We are young! We are young!" they cried, exultingly. Youth, like the extremity of age, had effaced the strongly-marked characteristics of middle life and mutually assimilated them all. They were a group of merry youngsters almost maddened with the exuberant frolicsomeness of their years. The most singular effect of their gayety was an impulse to mock the infirmity and decrepitude of which they had so lately been the victims. They laughed loudly at their old-fashioned attire—the wide-skirted coats and flapped waistcoats of the young men and the ancient cap and gown of the blooming girl. One limped across the floor like a gouty grandfather; one set a pair of spectacles astride of his

nose and pretended to pore over the black-letter pages of the book of magic; a third seated himself in an arm-chair and strove to imitate the venerable dignity of Dr. Heidegger. Then all shouted mirthfully and leaped about the room.

The widow Wycherly — if so fresh a damsel could be called a widow — tripped up to the doctor's chair with a mischievous merriment in her rosy face.

"Doctor, you dear old soul," cried she, "get up and dance with me;" and then the four young people laughed louder than ever to think what a queer figure the poor old doctor would cut.

"Pray excuse me," answered the doctor, quietly. "I am old and rheumatic, and my dancing-days were over long ago. But either of these gay young gentlemen will be glad of so pretty a partner."

"Dance with me, Clara," cried Colonel Killigrew.

"No, no! I will be her partner," shouted Mr. Gascoigne.

"She promised me her hand fifty years ago," exclaimed Mr. Medbourne.

They all gathered round her. One caught both her hands in his passionate grasp, another threw his arm about her waist, the third buried his hand among the glossy curls that clustered beneath the widow's cap. Blushing, panting, struggling, chiding, laughing, her warm breath fanning each of their faces by turns, she strove to disengage herself, yet still remained in their triple embrace. Never was there a livelier picture of youthful rivalry, with bewitching beauty for the prize. Yet, by a strange deception, owing to the duskiness of the

chamber and the antique dresses which they still wore, the tall mirror is said to have reflected the figures of the three old, gray, withered grand-sires ridiculously contending for the skinny ugliness of a shrivelled grandam. But they were young: their burning passions proved them so.

Inflamed to madness by the coquetry of the girl-widow, who neither granted nor quite withheld her favors, the three rivals began to interchange threatening glances. Still keeping hold of the fair prize, they grappled fiercely at one another's throats. As they struggled to and fro the table was overturned and the vase dashed into a thousand fragments. The precious Water of Youth flowed in a bright stream across the floor, moistening the wings of a butterfly which, grown old in the decline of summer, had alighted there to die. The insect fluttered lightly through the chamber and settled on the snowy head of Dr. Heidegger.

"Come, come, gentlemen! Come, Madam Wycherly!" exclaimed the doctor. "I really must protest against this riot."

They stood still and shivered, for it seemed as if gray Time were calling them back from their sunny youth far down into the chill and darksome vale of years. They looked at old Dr. Heidegger, who sat in his carved armchair holding the rose of half a century, which he had rescued from among the fragments of the shattered vase. At the motion of his hand the four rioters resumed their seats—the more readily because their violent exertions had wearied them, youthful though they were.

"My poor Sylvia's rose!" ejaculated Dr. Heidegger, holding it in the light of the sunset clouds. "It appears to be fading again."

And so it was. Even while the party were looking at it the flower continued to shrivel up, till it became as dry and fragile as when the doctor had first thrown it into the vase. He shook off the few drops of moisture which clung to its petals.

"I love it as well thus as in its dewy freshness," observed he, pressing the withered rose to his withered lips.

While he spoke the butterfly fluttered down from the doctor's snowy head and fell upon the floor. His guests shivered again. A strange dullness—whether of the body or spirit they could not tell—was creeping gradually over them all. They gazed at one another, and fancied that each fleeting moment snatched away a charm and left a deepening furrow where none had been before. Was it an illusion? Had the changes of a lifetime been crowded into so brief a space, and were they now four aged people sitting with their old friend Dr. Heidegger?

"Are we grown old again so soon?" cried they, dolefully.

In truth, they had. The Water of Youth possessed merely a virtue more transient than that of wine; the delirium which it created had effervesced away. Yes, they were old again. With a shuddering impulse that showed her a woman still, the widow clasped her skinny hands before her face and wished that the cof-

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

fin-lid were over it, since it could be no longer beautiful.

“Yes, friends, ye are old again,” said Dr. Heidegger, “and, lo! the Water of Youth is all lavished on the ground. Well, I bemoan it not; for if the fountain gushed at my very doorstep, I would not stoop to bathe my lips in it — no, though its delirium were for years instead of moments. Such is the lesson ye have taught me.”

But the doctor’s four friends had taught no such lesson to themselves. They resolved forthwith to make a pilgrimage to Florida and quaff at morning, noon and night from the Fountain of Youth.





125°

CHARLIE CHAPLIN

London, 1889 - Corsier-sur-Vevey, 1977

Sir Charles Spencer “Charlie” Chaplin was an English comic actor, filmmaker, and composer who rose to fame in the silent era. Chaplin became a worldwide icon through his screen persona “the Tramp” and is considered one of the most important figures in the history of the film industry. His career spanned more than 75 years, from childhood in the Victorian era until a year before his death at age 88, and encompassed both adulation and controversy.

*Chaplin’s childhood in London was defined by poverty and hardship. As his father was absent and his mother struggled financially, he was sent to a workhouse twice before the age of nine. Chaplin began performing at an early age, touring music halls and later working as a stage actor and comedian. At 19 he was signed to the prestigious Fred Karno company, which took him to America. Chaplin was scouted for the film industry, and made his first appearance in Keystone Studios’s *Making a Living* (1914). He soon developed the Tramp persona and formed a large fan base.*



CHAPLIN

Chaplin directed his films from an early stage, and continued to hone his craft as he moved to the Essanay, Mutual, and First National corporations. By 1918, he was one of the best known figures in the world. In 1919, Chaplin co-founded the

CHARLIE CHAPLIN



distribution company United Artists, which gave him complete control over his films. His first feature-length was The Kid (1921), followed by A Woman of Paris (1923), The Gold Rush (1925), and The Circus (1928). He refused to move to sound films in the 1930s, instead producing City Lights (1931) and Modern Times (1936) without dialogue. Chaplin became increasingly political and his next film, The Great Dictator (1940), satirised Adolf Hitler. The 1940s were a decade marked with controversy for Chaplin, and his popularity declined rapidly. He was accused of communist sympathies, while his involvement in a paternity suit and marriages to much younger women caused scandal. An FBI investigation was opened, and Chaplin was forced to leave the United States and settle in Switzerland. He abandoned the Tramp in his later films, which include Monsieur Verdoux (1947), Limelight (1952), A King in New York (1957), and A Countess from Hong Kong (1967).

Chaplin wrote, directed, produced, edited, starred in, and composed the music for most of his films. He was a perfectionist, and his financial independence enabled him to spend years on the development and production of a picture. In 1972, as part of a renewed appreciation for his work, Chaplin received an Honorary Academy Award for “the incalculable effect he has had in making motion pictures the art form of this century”. He continues to be held in high regard, with The Gold Rush, City Lights, Modern Times, and The Great Dictator often ranked among industry lists of the greatest films of all time.

HENRI DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC

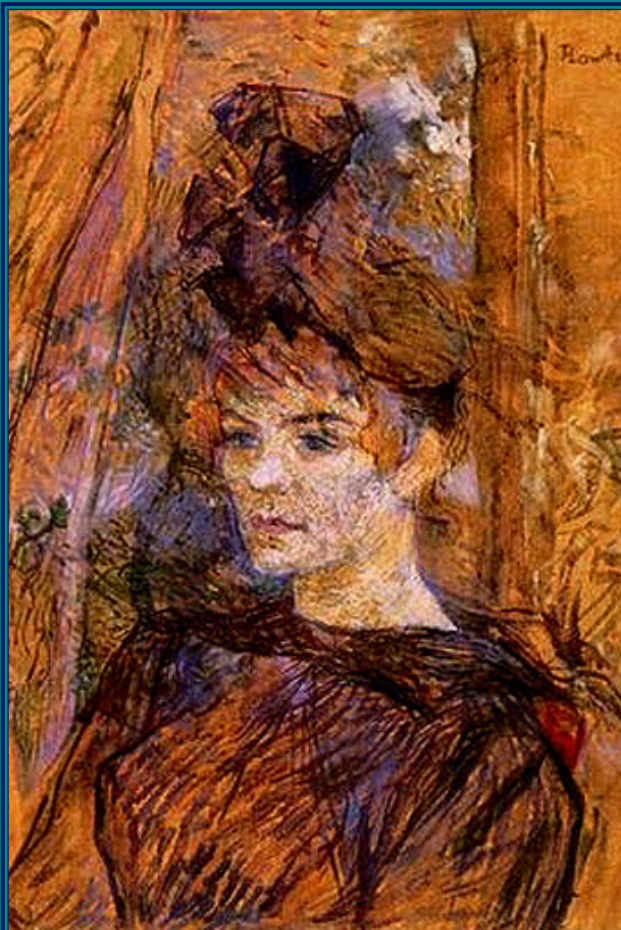
Albi, 1864 - Saint-André-du-Bois, 1901

Toulouse-Lautrec was born in Albi into one of the oldest aristocratic families. Henri was weak and often sick. By the time he was 10 he had begun to draw and paint. At 12 young Toulouse-Lautrec broke his left leg and at 14 his right leg. The bones failed to heal properly, and his legs stopped growing. He reached young adulthood with a body trunk of normal size but with abnormally short legs. During his convalescence, his mother encouraged him to paint. He stayed in the Montmartre section of Paris, the center of the cabaret entertainment and bohemian life that he loved to paint. Circuses, dance halls, nightclubs, racetracks and parisian brothels – all these spectacles were set down on canvas or made into lithographs. Toulouse-Lautrec was very much a part of all this activity. He would sit at a crowded nightclub table, laughing and drinking, and at the same time he would make swift sketches.

Toulouse-Lautrec was a prolific creator. His oeuvre includes great numbers of paintings, drawings, etchings, lithographs, and posters, as well as illustrations for various contemporary newspapers. He incorporated into his own highly individual method elements of the styles of various contemporary artists, especially French painters Edgar Degas and Paul Gauguin. Japanese art, then coming into vogue in Paris, influenced his use of sharp delineation, asymmetric composition, oblique angles, and flat areas of color. His work inspired van Gogh, Georges Seurat, and Georges Rouault. His alcoholic dissipation, however, eventually brought on a paralytic stroke, to which he succumbed at Malromé, one of his family's estates.



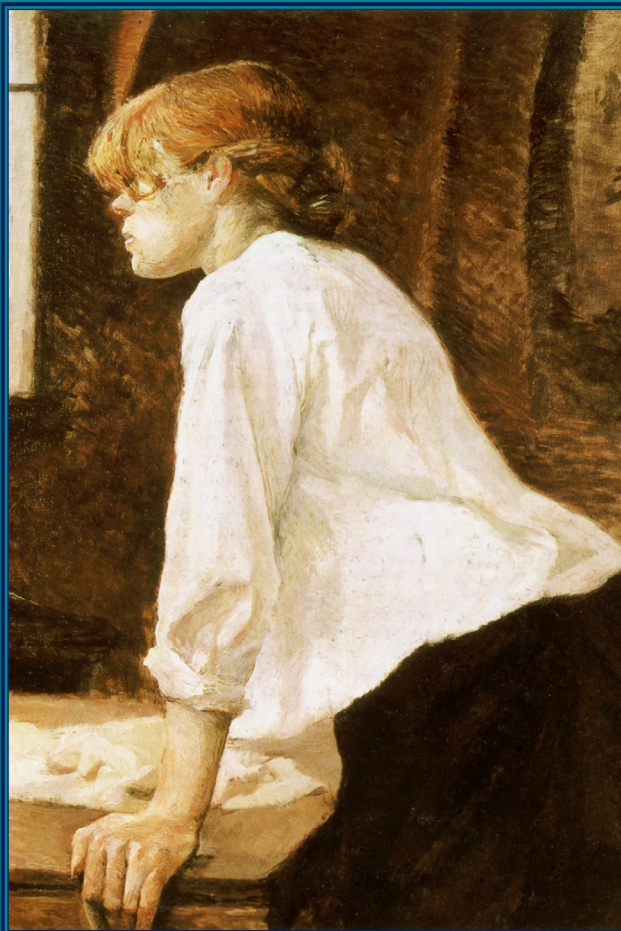
Toulouse-Lautrec



Portrait of Suzanne Valadon >>

(1887 ~ OIL ON CANVAS, CARLSBERG GLYPTOTEK, COPENHAGEN)

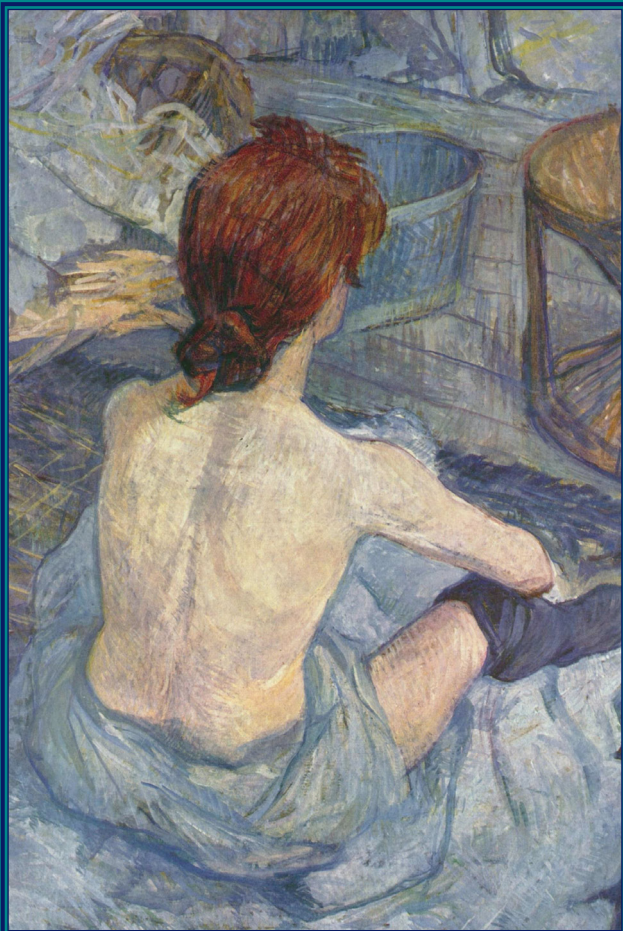
Toulouse-Lautrec



The Laundress

(1888 ~ OIL ON CANVAS, PRIVATE COLLECTION)

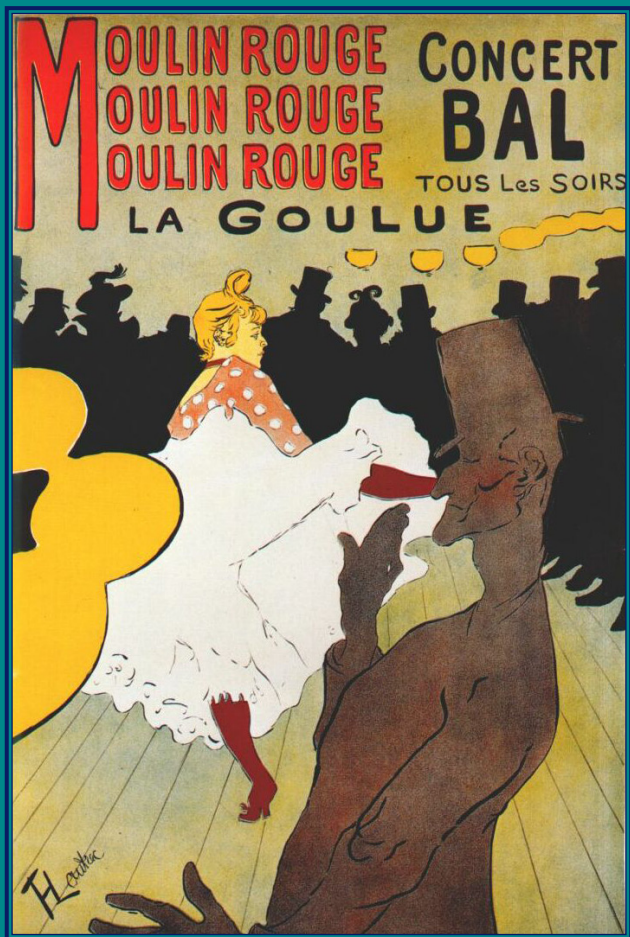
Toulouse-Lautrec



La Toilette

(1889 ~ OIL ON BOARD, MUSÉE D'ORSAY, PARIS)

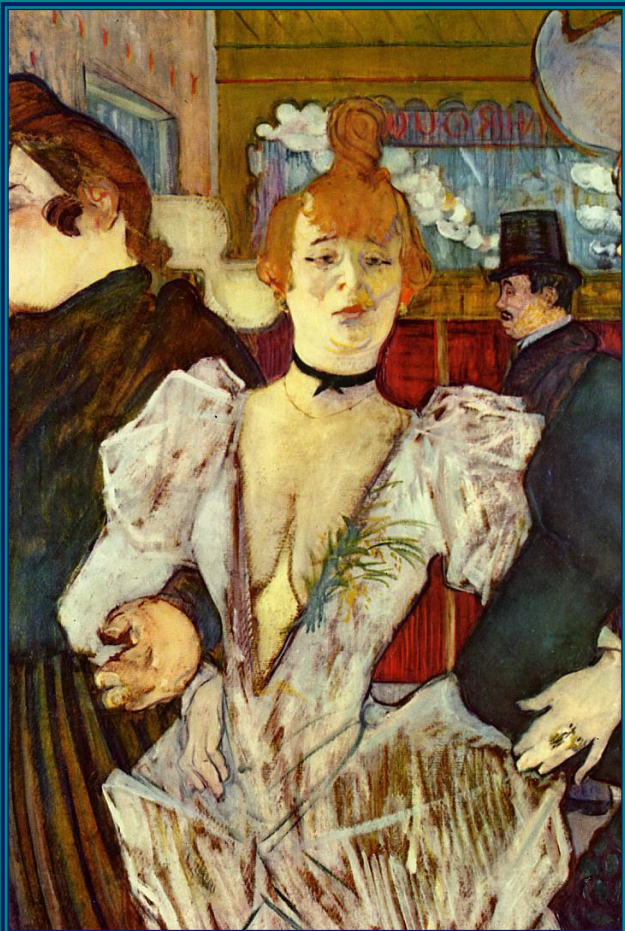
Toulouse-Lautrec



Moulin Rouge: La Goulue >>

(1891 ~ COLOR LITHOGRAPH, THE ART INSTITUTE, CHICAGO)

Toulouse-Lautrec



La Goulue arriving at the Moulin Rouge >>

(1892 ~ OIL ON CANVAS, MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK)

Toulouse-Lautrec



In a Private Room - at the 'Rat Mort'
(1899 ~ OIL ON CANVAS, THE COURTAULD GALLERY, LONDON)



RICHARD STRAUSS

Munich, 1864 - Garmisch-Partenkirchen, 1949

He was born Richard Georg Strauss on June 11, 1864, in Munich. His father, named Franz Strauss, was the principal horn player at the Royal Opera in Munich. Young Strauss was taught music by his father. He wrote his first composition at the age of 6. Strauss studied philosophy and art history at Munich University, then at Berlin University. In 1885 he replaced Hans von Bulow as the principal conductor of the Munich Orchestra. Strauss emerged from under his father's influence when he met Alexander Ritter, a composer, and the husband of one of the nieces of Richard Wagner. In 1894, Strauss married soprano singer Pauline Maria de Ahna.

*The image of Richard Strauss and his music was abused by the Nazi propaganda machine, to a point of damaging the composer's posthumous reputation. Strauss was commissioned to write the **Olympic Hymn** for the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. His cautious apolitical position was the only way to survive and to protect his daughter-in-law Alice, who was Jewish. In 1935 Strauss was fired from his job at the State Music Bureau. He refused to remove from the playbill the name of his friend and opera librettist, the writer Stefan Zweig, who was Jewish. Later Gestapo intercepted a letter from Strauss to Zweig, where Strauss condemned the Nazis.*

STRAUSS





Strauss' daughter-in-law Alice was placed under the house arrest in 1938. In 1942 Strauss managed to move his Jewish relatives to Vienna. There Alice and Strauss's son were later again arrested and imprisoned for two nights. Only Strauss' personal effort saved them. They were returned under house arrest until the end of the Second World War.

Richard Strauss died on September 8, 1949, in Garmish-Partenkirchen, Germany at the age of 85. Strauss' symphonic poem 'Also sprach Zarathustra' (Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 1896) was recorded under the baton of Herbert von Karajan and was used as the music score in '2001: A Space Odyssey' by director Stanley Kubrick, as well as in many other films.



JULIO CORTÁZAR

Brussels, 1914 - Paris, 1984

Julio Cortázar was born in Brussels, Belgium, of Argentine parents abroad on business. When he was four years old, his family returned to Buenos Aires, where he grew up in a suburb. Although he never completed his studies at the University of Buenos Aires where he studied philosophy and languages, he taught in several provincial secondary schools. In 1951, in opposition to Peron's regime, Cortázar traveled to Paris, where he lived until his death. In 1953 he married Aurora Bernárdez. They separated and Cortázar lived with Carol Dunlop in later years. From 1952 he worked for UNESCO as a freelance translator. His translation projects included Spanish renderings of Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, Marguerite Yourcenar's Mémoires d'Hadrien, and the stories of Edgar Allan Poe. Cortázar visited Cuba after the revolution, and in 1973 he traveled in Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, and Chile. Cortázar became in the 1970s a member of the Second Russell Tribunal for investigation of human rights abuses in Latin America. Cortázar died, reportedly of leukemia, in Paris in 1984 and was interred there in the Cimetière de Montparnasse.

Cortázar was an Argentine intellectual and author of highly experimental novels and short stories—the collections Bestiario (1951) and Final de Juego (1956) contain many of his best examples in the genre—who is considered to be one of the most important authors in the history of South American magic realism. Deeply influenced by Jorge Luis Borges, Cortázar created in his fiction worlds where the laws of ordinary reality are almost always subverted by the surreal and the fantastical.

Cortázar

Instructions on How to Understand Three Famous Paintings

FROM CRONOPIOS AND FAMAS (1962)

Sacred Love and Profane Love

by
TITIAN



This hateful painting depicts a wake on the banks of the Jordan. In only a very few instances has the obtuseness of a painter been able to refer more contemptibly to mankind's hope for a Messiah *who is radiant by his absence*; missing from the canvas which is the world, he shines horribly in the obscene yawn of the marble tomb, while the angel commissioned to announce the resurrection of his dreadful executed flesh waits patiently

for the signs to be fulfilled. It will be unnecessary to explain that the angel is the nude figure prostituting herself in her marvelous plumpness, and disguised as Mary Magdalen, mockery of mockeries, at the moment when the true Mary Magdalen is coming along the road (where, on the other hand, swells the venomous blasphemy of two rabbits).

The child putting his hand into the tomb is Luther, or maybe the Devil. Of the clothed figure it has been said that she represents Glory about to announce that all human ambition fits into a washbowl; but she's badly painted and reminds one of artificial flowers or a lightning flash like a soft sponge-rubber baseball bat.

Lady of the Unicorn

by

RAPHAEL

Saint-Simon thought he saw in this portrait a confession of heresy. The unicorn, the narwhal, the obscene pearl in the locket that pretends to be a pear, and the gaze of Maddalena Strozzi fixed dreadfully upon a point where lascivious poses or a flagellation scene might be taking place: here Raphael Sanzio lied his most terrible truth.

The passionate green color in the face of the figure was frequently attributed to gangrene or to the *spring solstice*. The unicorn, a phallic animal, would have infected her: in her body rest all the sins of the world.

INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO UNDERSTAND...

Then they realized that they had only to remove the overlayers painted by three irritated enemies of Raphael: Carlos Hog, Vincent Grosjean (known as “The Marble”), and Rubens the Elder. The first overpainting was green, the second green, and the third white. It is not difficult to observe here the triple symbol of the deadly nightmoth; the wings conjoined to its dead body they confused with the rose leaves. How often Maddalena Strozzi cut a white rose and felt it squeak between her



fingers, twisting and moaning weakly like a tiny mandrake or one of those lizards that sing like lyres when you show them a mirror. But it was already too late and the deadly nightmoth had pricked her. Raphael knew it and sensed she was dying. To paint her truly, then, he added the unicorn, symbol of chastity who will take water from a virgin's hand, sheep and narwhal at once. But he painted the deadly nightmoth in her image, and the unicorn kills his mistress, digs into her superb breast its horn working with lust; it reiterates the process of all principles. What this woman holds in her hands is the mysterious cup from which we have all drunk unknowingly, thirst that we have slaked with other months, that red and foamy wine from which come the stars, the worms, and railroad stations.

Portrait of Henry VIII of England

by

HOLBEIN

In this canvas people have wanted to see an elephant hunt, a map of Russia, the constellation Lyra, a portrait of the Pope disguised as Henry VIII, a storm over the Sargasso Sea, or the golden polyp which thrives in the latitudes south of Java and which, under the influence of lemon, sneezes delicately and succumbs with a tiny whiff.

Each of these interpretations takes exact account of the general configurations of the painting, whether they

INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO UNDERSTAND...

are seen from the position in which it is hung or head downwards or held sideways. The differences can be narrowed to the details; the center remains which is GOLD, the number SEVEN, the OYSTER observable in the hat-and-string-tie sections, with the PEARL-head (center irradiating from the pearls on the jacket or central territory) and the general SHOUT absolutely green which bursts forth from the aggregate whole.

Experience simply going to Rome and laying your hand against the king's heart, and you understand the



JULIO CORTÁZAR

origin of the sea. Even less difficult is to approach it with a lit candle held at the level of the eyes; it will then be seen that *that is not a face* and that the moon, blinded by simultaneity, races across a background of Catherine wheels and tiny transparent ball bearings decapitated in the remembrances in hagiographies. He is not mistaken who sees in this stormy petrification a combat between leopards. But also there are reluctant ivory daggers, pages who languish from boredom in long galleries, and a tortuous dialogue between leprosy and the halberds. The man's kingdom is a page out of the great chronicle, but he does not know this and toys peevishly with gloves and fawns. This man looking at you comes back from hell; step away from the canvas and you will see him smile a bit at a time, because he is empty, he is a windbag, dry hands hold him up from behind; like a playing-card figure, when you begin to pick him up the castle and everything totters. And his maxim is this: "There is no third dimension, the earth is flat and man drags his belly on the earth. Hallelujah!" It might be the Devil who is saying these words, and maybe you believe them because they are spoken to you by a king.



Their Natural Histories

FROM CRONOPIOS AND FAMAS (1962)

LION AND CRONOPIO

A cronopio who was crossing the desert encountered a lion, and the following dialogue took place:

LION. I eat you.

CRONOPIO (*terribly worried but with dignity*). Okay.

LION. Ah, none of that. None of this martyrdom with me. Lie down and cry, or fight, one of the two. I can't eat you like that. Let's go, I'm waiting. Say something.

The cronopio says nothing, and the lion is perplexed; finally an idea comes to him.

LION. Damn the luck, I have in my left paw a thorn that annoys me exceedingly. Take it out for me and I'll let you go.

The cronopio removes the thorn and the lion goes off snarling in a poor temper:

—Thanks, Androcles.

Cortázar

CONDOR AND CRONOPIO

A condor fell like a streak of lightning upon a cronopio who was passing through Tinogasta, corralled him against a concrete wall, and in high dudgeon addressed him, like for instance:

CONDOR. Dare you to say I'm not handsome.

CRONOPIO. You're the handsomest bird I've ever seen.

CONDOR. Again, more.

CRONOPIO. You are more handsome than a bird of paradise.

CONDOR. I dare you to say I don't fly high.

CRONOPIO. You fly to the most dizzying heights and you are completely supersonic and stratospheric.

CONDOR. Dare you to say I stink.

CRONOPIO. You smell better than a whole liter of Jean-Marie Farina cologne.

CONDOR. What a shitheel you are. Not leaving the vaguest possibility of taking even a peck at you.

FLOWER AND CRONOPIO

A cronopio runs across a solitary flower in the middle of the fields. At first he's about to pull it up, but then he thinks, this is a useless cruelty, and he gets down on his knees beside it and plays lightheartedly with the flower, to see he caresses the petals, he puffs at it until it dances, he buzzes at it like a bee, he inhales its perfume, and finally he lies down under the flower and falls asleep, enveloped in a profound peace.

The flower thinks: "He's like a flower."

THEIR NATURAL HISTORIES

FAMA AND EUCALYPTUS

A fama is walking through a forest, and although he needs no wood he gazes greedily at the trees. The trees are terribly afraid because they are acquainted with the customs of the famas and anticipate the worst. Dead center of the wood there stands a handsome eucalyptus and the fama on seeing it gives a cry of happiness and dances respite and dances catalan around the disturbed eucalyptus, talking like this:

— Antiseptic leaves, winter with health, great sanitation! He fetches an axe and whacks the eucalyptus in the stomach. It doesn't bother the fama at all. The eucalyptus screams, wounded to death, and the other trees hear him say between sighs:

— To think that all this imbecile had to do was buy some Valda tablets.

TURTLES AND CRONOPIOS

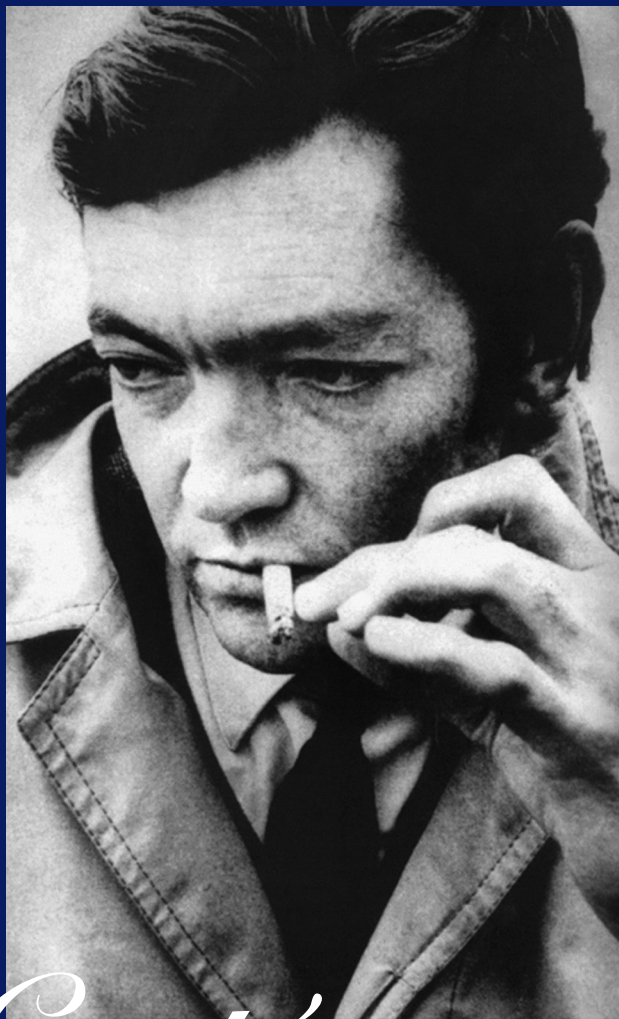
Now it happens that turtles are great speed enthusiasts, which is natural.

The esperanzas know that and don't bother about it.

The famas know it, and make fun of it.

The cronopios know it, and each time they meet a turtle, they haul out the box of colored chalks, and on the rounded blackboard of the turtle's shell they draw a swallow.





Cortázar

House Taken Over

FROM BESTIARIO (1951)

We liked the house because, apart from its being old and spacious (in a day when old houses go down for a profitable auction of their construction materials), it kept the memories of great-grandparents, our paternal grandfather, our parents and the whole of childhood. Irene and I got used to staying in the house by ourselves, which was crazy, eight people could have lived in that place and not have gotten in each other's way. We rose at seven in the morning and got the cleaning done, and about eleven I left Irene to finish off whatever rooms and went to the kitchen. We lunched at noon precisely; then there was nothing left to do but a few dirty plates. It was pleasant to take lunch and commune with the great hollow, silent house, and it was enough for us just to keep it clean. We ended up thinking, at times, that that was what had kept us from marrying. Irene turned down two suitors for no particular reason, and María Esther went and died on me before we could manage to get engaged. We were easing into our forties with the

unvoiced concept that the quiet, simple marriage of sister and brother was the indispensable end to a line established in this house by our grandparents. We would die here someday, obscure and distant cousins would inherit the place, have it torn down, sell the bricks and get rich on the building plot; or more justly and better yet, we would topple it ourselves before it was too late. Irene never bothered anyone. Once the morning housework was finished, she spent the rest of the day on the sofa in her bedroom, knitting. I couldn't tell you why she knitted so much; I think women knit when they discover that it's a fat excuse to do nothing at all. But Irene was not like that, she always knitted necessities, sweaters for winter, socks for me, handy morning robes and bedjackets for herself. Sometimes she would do a jacket, then unravel it the next moment because there was something that didn't please her; it was pleasant to see a pile of tangled wool in her knitting basket fighting a losing battle for a few hours to retain its shape. Saturdays I went downtown to buy wool; Irene had faith in my good taste, was pleased with the colors and never a skein had to be returned. I took advantage of these trips to make the rounds of the bookstores, uselessly asking if they had anything new in French literature. Nothing worthwhile had arrived in Argentina since 1939.

But it's the house I want to talk about, the house and Irene, I'm not very important. I wonder what Irene would have done without her knitting. One can reread a book, but once a pullover is finished you can't do it over again, it's some kind of disgrace. One day I found

HOUSE TAKEN OVER

that the drawer at the bottom of the chiffonier, replete with mothballs, was filled with shawls, white, green, lilac. Stacked amid a great smell of camphor—it was like a shop; I didn't have the nerve to ask her what she planned to do with them. We didn't have to earn our living, there was plenty coming in from the farms each month, even piling up. But Irene was only interested in the knitting and showed a wonderful dexterity, and for me the hours slipped away watching her, her hands like silver seaurchins, needles flashing, and one or two knitting baskets on the floor, the balls of yarn jumping about. It was lovely.

How not to remember the layout of that house. The dining room, a living room with tapestries, the library and three large bedrooms in the section most recessed, the one that faced toward Rodríguez Peña. Only a corridor with its massive oak door separated that part from the front wing, where there was a bath, the kitchen, our bedrooms and the hall. One entered the house through a vestibule with enameled tiles, and a wrought-iron grated door opened onto the living room. You had to come in through the vestibule and open the gate to go into the living room; the doors to our bedrooms were on either side of this, and opposite it was the corridor leading to the back section; going down the passage, one swung open the oak door beyond which was the other part of the house; or just before the door, one could turn to the left and go down a narrower passageway which led to the kitchen and the bath. When

the door was open, you became aware of the size of the house; when it was closed, you had the impression of an apartment, like the ones they build today, with barely enough room to move around in. Irene and I always lived in this part of the house and hardly ever went beyond the oak door except to do the cleaning. Incredible how much dust collected on the furniture. It may be Buenos Aires is a clean city, but she owes it to her population and nothing else. There's too much dust in the air, the slightest breeze and it's back on the marble console tops and in the diamond patterns of the tooled-leather desk set. It's a lot of work to get it off with a feather duster; the motes rise and hang in the air, and settle again a minute later on the pianos and the furniture.

I'll always have a clear memory of it because it happened so simply and without fuss. Irene was knitting in her bedroom, it was eight at night, and I suddenly decided to put the water up for *mate*. I went down the corridor as far as the oak door, which was ajar, then turned into the hall toward the kitchen, when I heard something in the library or the dining room. The sound came through muted and indistinct, a chair being knocked over onto the carpet or the muffled buzzing of a conversation. At the same time or a second later, I heard it at the end of the passage which led from those two rooms toward the door. I hurled myself against the door before it was too late and shut it, leaned on it with the weight of my body; luckily, the key was on our side;

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moreover, I ran the great bolt into place, just to be safe. I went down to the kitchen, heated the kettle, and when I got back with the tray of *mate*, I told Irene:

"I had to shut the door to the passage. They've taken over the back part."

She let her knitting fall and looked at me with her tired, serious eyes.

"You're sure?"

I nodded.

"In that case," she said, picking up her needles again, "we'll have to live on this side."

I sipped at the *mate* very carefully, but she took her time starting her work again. I remember it was a grey vest she was knitting. I liked that vest.

The first few days were painful, since we'd both left so many things in the part that had been taken over. My collection of French literature, for example, was still in the library. Irene had left several folios of stationery and a pair of slippers that she used a lot in the winter. I missed my briar pipe, and Irene, I think, regretted the loss of an ancient bottle of Hesperidin. It happened repeatedly (but only in the first few days) that we would close some drawer or cabinet and look at one another sadly.

"It's not here."

One thing more among the many lost on the other side of the house.

But there were advantages, too. The cleaning was so much simplified that, even when we got up late, nine

thirty for instance, by eleven we were sitting around with our arms folded. Irene got into the habit of coming to the kitchen with me to help get lunch. We thought about it and decided on this: while I prepared the lunch, Irene would cook up dishes that could be eaten cold in the evening. We were happy with the arrangement because it was always such a bother to have to leave our bedrooms in the evening and start to cook. Now we made do with the table in Irene's room and platters of cold supper.

Since it left her more time for knitting, Irene was content. I was a little lost without my books, but so as not to inflict myself on my sister, I set about reordering papa's stamp collection; that killed some time. We amused ourselves sufficiently, each with his own thing, almost always getting together in Irene's bedroom, which was the more comfortable. Every once in a while, Irene might say:

"Look at this pattern I just figured out, doesn't it look like clover?"

After a bit it was I, pushing a small square of paper in front of her so that she could see the excellence of some stamp or another from Eupen-et-Malmédy. We were fine, and little by little we stopped thinking. You can live without thinking.

(Whenever Irene talked in her sleep, I woke up immediately and stayed awake. I never could get used to this voice from a statue or a parrot, a voice that came out of the dreams, not from a throat. Irene said that in my sleep I flailed about enormously and shook the blankets

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off. We had the living room between us, but at night you could hear everything in the house. We heard each other breathing, coughing, could even feel each other reaching for the light switch when, as happened frequently, neither of us could fall asleep.

Aside from our nocturnal rumblings, everything was quiet in the house. During the day there were the household sounds, the metallic click of knitting needles, the rustle of stamp-album pages turning. The oak door was massive, I think I said that. In the kitchen or the bath, which adjoined the part that was taken over, we managed to talk loudly, or Irene sang lullabies. In a kitchen there's always too much noise, the plates and glasses, for there to be interruptions from other sounds. We seldom allowed ourselves silence there, but when we went back to our rooms or to the living room, then the house grew quiet, half-lit, we ended by stepping around more slowly so as not to disturb one another. I think it was because of this that I woke up irremediably and at once when Irene began to talk in her sleep.)

Except for the consequences, it's nearly a matter of repeating the same scene over again. I was thirsty that night, and before we went to sleep, I told Irene that I was going to the kitchen for a glass of water. From the door of the bedroom (she was knitting) I heard the noise in the kitchen; if not the kitchen, then the bath, the passage off at that angle dulled the sound. Irene noticed how brusquely I had paused, and came up beside me without a word. We stood listening to the noises, growing more and more sure that they were on our

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side of the oak door, if not the kitchen then the bath, or in the hall itself at the turn, almost next to us.

We didn't wait to look at one another. I took Irene's arm and forced her to run with me to the wrought-iron door, not waiting to look back. You could hear the noises, still muffled but louder, just behind us. I slammed the grating and we stopped in the vestibule. Now there was nothing to be heard.

"They've taken over our section," Irene said. The knitting had reeled off from her hands and the yarn ran back toward the door and disappeared under it. When she saw that the balls of yarn were on the other side, she dropped the knitting without looking at it.

"Did you have time to bring anything?" I asked hopelessly.

"No, nothing."

We had what we had on. I remembered fifteen thousand pesos in the wardrobe in my bedroom. Too late now. I still had my wrist watch on and saw that it was 11 P.M. I took Irene around the waist (I think she was crying) and that was how we went into the street. Before we left, I felt terrible; I locked the front door up tight and tossed the key down the sewer. It wouldn't do to have some poor devil decide to go in and rob the house, at that hour and with the house taken over.





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