

The Guided Experiences

by Silo

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Note

This book is divided into two parts. The first, entitled “Tales,” is a collection of twelve stories, and is the densest and most complex part of the book. The second, under the title “Playing with Images,” consists of nine descriptions that are simpler and also livelier than those of the first part.

This material can be considered from various points of view. From the most superficial, it may be seen as a series of brief stories with happy endings. These have the insubstantial quality of drafts produced only for practice, as something of a “divertimento.” From that standpoint they are simple literary exercises.

Another approach, however, reveals this work to be a series of psychological practices based on literary forms. This is perhaps made clearer in the amplifying notes and comments appended at the end of the book.

We are familiar with narrations of all kinds written in the first person, though that “first person” is customarily not the reader but rather the author. In this book, that traditional discourtesy is corrected by making the setting of each story serve as a frame, so that as reader one may fill the scene with oneself and one’s own thoughts and concerns. As an aid to these literary exercises, asterisks (*) appear at intervals in the text to mark pauses at key points that can help the reader—or listener—introduce, mentally, the images that will transform the passive reader into an actor in and coauthor of each description. This novel approach also allows one person to read aloud (observing the aforementioned pauses), while those listening can imagine their own literary “knots.” This approach, while the hallmark of these writings, would in more conventional stories destroy all plot sequence.

It should be noted that in every literary piece, the reader or spectator (in the case of plays, films, or television programs) can identify more or less fully with the characters, while recognizing, either at the time or later on, differences between the actor who plays the role in the piece and the observer, who is “outside” the production and is none other than the spectator himself or herself. In this book, quite the opposite occurs: The main character is at once the observer, agent, and recipient of the actions and emotions.

In any case, whether or not we find these “guided experiences” to our liking, we will at least recognize that we are in the presence of a new and innovative literary initiative, which is not something that happens every day.

J. Valinsky

Part One: Tales

The Child

It is early in the morning as I walk through the countryside, and I feel happy and at peace. Up ahead, I see a stone building that seems to be very old. Its ancient roof is also made of stone, and along the front stand large marble columns.

As I near the building, I can see it has a massive metal door. Suddenly I'm surprised when two ferocious beasts charge toward me from one side of the building. Fortunately they're held back by strong chains that stop them just out of reach.

I can't approach the door without being attacked by the animals, so I throw them a sack of food. The beasts eagerly devour the food, and soon fall fast asleep.

Approaching the door, I inspect it carefully, but can't find a door handle or any other way to open it. Nevertheless I push gently, and the door swings open with an ancient creaking sound.

A long, softly lit room opens before me. I cannot see to the end, but on the left and right are life-size paintings that reach nearly to the floor. Each portrays a different scene. The first, on my left, depicts a magician seated behind a table spread with cards, dice, and other games of chance. My gaze is drawn to this character's curious hat.

I try to run my finger over the hat in the painting, but feel no resistance to my touch—instead my arm enters right into the picture. So I go ahead and put one leg, and then my whole body into the painting.

Raising a hand, the magician exclaims, "Not so fast, you can't come in unless you pay admission!"

Searching through my pockets, I pull out a small crystalline sphere, which I give to this trickster. The colorful character nods, and I enter.

It is night, and I find myself in an amusement park. Everywhere I see mechanical rides, filled with light and movement, but I do not see any people.

Then I discover a child about ten years old who is facing away from me. As I move closer, the youngster turns to look at me, and I realize it is myself when I was that age. (*)

"What are you doing here?" I ask. The child tells me something about an injustice that has happened, and then begins to cry. To console the child, I promise that we'll go on some rides, but the youngster insists on talking about the injustice. In order to understand the child better, I try to recall what happened to me at that age that was so unfair. (*)

Now I remember that injustice. And somehow I realize it's like a situation I'm experiencing in my life right now. I reflect on this, but the child continues to cry. (*)

So I say, "All right then, I'm going to straighten out this injustice that seems to keep happening to me. To begin with, I'll be friendly toward the people who are creating this situation for me." (*)

I notice that the youngster is laughing now. With an affectionate pat I say that we'll be seeing each other again. Saying good-bye, the child goes away very happy.

I leave the amusement park, passing beside the magician, who gives me a quick sidelong glance. As I go by, I brush against his hat, prompting a playful wink from this extraordinary character.

I emerge from the painting, and once again find myself in the long room. Walking slowly, I cross the room and go through the door.

Outside, the animals remain fast asleep, and I pass between them without fear.

The magnificent day greets me. I make my way back across the open fields, whistling and singing, with the sensation that at last I understand a situation that has been a burden to me for a very long time. (*)

An Enemy

I'm downtown at the height of rush hour, walking hurriedly amid the bustling people and traffic. All at once everything stops as if paralyzed, and I realize that I alone can still move. I begin looking at people, staring at a woman and then at a man. Walking around them several times, I examine them very closely.

Climbing up onto the roof of a car, I look all around and notice that everything has fallen silent. Reflecting for a moment, I realize that I can do anything I please with the people, the cars, and everything else. Immediately I set about doing all the things that strike my fancy, and carry on at such a frantic rate that soon I'm left exhausted.

While resting I think of new things to do, and again throw myself into carrying out my every whim, without any inhibition.

But who do I see there? It's none other than the very person with whom I have a number of scores to settle. In fact, I feel this person has done me greater harm than anyone else in my entire life.

Since things won't remain motionless for long, I hurry over to my enemy, who can barely move. Realizing the situation, my adversary looks at me in horror, but is still paralyzed and defenseless. I begin to tell this despicable character everything I've been wanting to say, promising my immediate revenge.

Knowing that my adversary feels every situations in which this person treated me so terribly. (*)

As I reproach my enemy, several people walk past. Hearing my accusations, they stop and begin to harshly criticize the character, who responds between sobs, expressing deep remorse for these past misdeeds. Kneeling on the ground, my adversary begs forgiveness, but more people arrive and continue the interrogation. (*)

After a while the crowd declares that so vile a person cannot be allowed to live, and they condemn my enemy to death.

Just as they're about to lynch the terrified person, who keeps pleading for mercy, I tell them that I forgive my enemy. The crowd unanimously accepts my decision, and the people go on their way. Once again I'm left alone with my adversary, and I take advantage of this to finish getting even. Sensing my enemy's growing desperation, I say and do everything else that I feel is called for. (*)

The sky darkens threateningly, and a driving rain begins to fall. I take refuge behind a storefront window and watch as the city returns to life. Pedestrians run, and cars crawl cautiously through sheets of wind-whipped rain. Continuous flashes of lightning and sharp thunderclaps frame the scene, as I gaze out through the rain-streaked glass.

I feel completely relaxed, as though empty, while I observe almost without thinking.

Suddenly I see my adversary approaching, seeking shelter from the rain. On seeing me, the person exclaims, "How lucky that we're together in this storm!"

As my rain-soaked enemy looks at me sheepishly, I offer a comforting pat on the shoulder, while all the poor soul can do is shrug. (*)

In my mind I begin to consider all the problems that beset this character. I see the difficulties, the failures in life, the person's enormous frustrations and weakness. (*)

I feel the loneliness of this wet and trembling human being who is taking refuge at my side, and see how dirty and pathetically neglected the person is. (*)

Suddenly I'm moved by a strong feeling of solidarity with my companion and declare, "I'm going to help you." The person does not say a word, and growing misty-eyed, can only gaze down at both hands. (*)

The rain has stopped. Going out onto the street, I take a deep breath of the fresh air and leave at once.

My Greatest Mistake

I'm standing before some sort of court. Every seat in the silent courtroom is filled, and I'm surrounded by a sea of stern faces. The court clerk adjusts his glasses and picks up a long document. Breaking the tremendous tension that fills the room, he solemnly pronounces, "It is the sentence of this court that the accused shall be put to death."

Immediately there is an uproar—some people applaud while others boo, and I see a woman faint. Finally an official manages to restore order in the courtroom.

Staring at me darkly, the clerk demands, "Does the accused have anything to say?" When I answer that I do, everyone sits down. I ask for a glass of water, and after a brief commotion they bring me one. Raising the glass, I take a sip, and finishing with a loud and prolonged gargle, I exclaim, "That's it!"

Someone from the jury harshly demands, "What do you mean, 'That's it'?"

"That's it," I repeat. But to satisfy the juror, I say that the water here does taste excellent, much better than I expected, and continue with two or three other pleasantries of this sort.

The court clerk finishes reading the document with these words: "Accordingly, the sentence shall be carried out today: You will be abandoned in the desert without food or water—above all, without water. I have spoken!"

"What do you mean you have spoken?" I demand. Arching his eyebrows, the clerk only reaffirms, "What I have spoken, I have spoken!"

Soon I find myself riding in a fire truck through the middle of the desert, escorted by two firemen. We stop, and one of them says, "Get out!" As soon as I step down from the truck, the vehicle turns around and heads back the way it came. I watch it grow smaller and smaller as it moves off across the dunes.

The sun is setting, but its heat is still intense. I begin to feel very thirsty. Taking off my jacket and putting it over my head, I look around and discover nearby a hollow beside a sand dune. I walk over and sit down in the meager patch of shade cast by the dune.

The wind begins to blow in strong gusts, raising a sandstorm that blots out the sun. Fearing I'll be buried if the wind grows any stronger, I leave the hollow. Staccato bursts of blowing sand sting my skin, and soon the force of the wind pushes me to the ground.

Now the storm has passed and the sun has set. In the twilight I see before me a whitish dome several stories high. Although I think it must be a mirage, I get to my feet and make my way toward it. As I draw closer, I see that the structure is made of a smooth material, a shiny plastic perhaps inflated with air.

A man dressed in Bedouin garb greets me, and we enter the dome through a carpeted passageway. A door slides open, and I feel a refreshing rush of cool air. Once inside, I notice that everything is upside down—the ceiling is like a smooth floor from which things are suspended. I see round tables above us with their legs pointing up toward the ceiling. I see water falling downward in streams that curve and return upward, and high overhead there are human forms seated upside down.

Noticing my astonishment, the Bedouin hands me a pair of glasses saying, "Try these on!" When I put on the glasses, everything is restored to its normal appearance—in front of me I see a large fountain shooting streams of water high into the air. The tables and all the other things are right side up, and everything is exquisitely coordinated in color and form.

I see the court clerk coming toward me, crawling on all fours. He says he feels terribly dizzy, so I explain to him that he's seeing reality upside down and needs to remove his glasses. Taking them off, he stands up and says with a sigh, "Indeed, now everything is fine—except that I'm so nearsighted." He goes on to say he has been searching for me in order to explain that there has been a most deplorable mistake, and I'm not the person who should have been put on trial at all. Immediately he leaves through a side door.

Walking a few steps, I find myself with a group of people seated on a circle of cushions. They are elders of both sexes, with varied racial features and attire. All of them have beautiful faces. Each time one of them begins to speak, I hear the sound of faraway gears, of gigantic machinery, of immense clocks. I hear intermittent thunder, the cracking of rocks, icebergs splitting off, the rhythmic roaring of volcanoes, the light impact of a gentle rain, the muffled beating of hearts—motor, muscle, life—and everything in perfect harmony, a majestic symphony of sounds.

The Bedouin hands me a pair of headphones, saying, "Try these on, they translate." Putting them on, I clearly hear a human voice. I realize it is the same symphony of one of the elders, now translated for my clumsy ear. This time as he opens his mouth I hear, "We are the hours, we are the minutes, we are the seconds. We are the various forms of time. Because a mistake was made with you, we will give you the opportunity to begin your life anew. But from what point do you wish to start again? Perhaps from your birth, or perhaps from just before your first failure. Reflect on this."
(*)

I try to determine exactly when it was that I lost control of my life, and I tell the elder what happened. (*)

"Very well," he says, "and what are you going to do, if you return to that moment, in order to follow a different course this time? Bear in mind that you still won't have any way of knowing what lies in your future.

"There is another alternative," he adds. "You can return to the moment of the greatest mistake in your life, and without changing the events themselves, you can nevertheless change their meanings. In this way you can make a new life for yourself."

As the elder falls silent, I see everything around me reversing in light and color, as if changing into the negative of a film. Then everything returns to normal, except that now I find myself back in time at the moment of the greatest mistake of my life. (*)

Here I am, driven to commit this error. But what is compelling me to do it? (*)

Aren't there other factors influencing this, which I do not wish to see? What things are steering me toward this fundamental mistake? What should I try to do instead? If I don't commit this error, will this change the pattern of my life? And will the change be for better or for worse? (*)

I try to understand that the circumstances surrounding this moment cannot be changed, and I accept everything that happened as if it were a natural disaster, like an earthquake or a flood that destroys peoples' homes and livelihoods. (*)

I strive to accept that in such accidents, no one is to blame. My weaknesses, my excesses, the intentions of others—in this case none of these can be changed. (*)

I know that if I don't make peace now by reconciling with this mistake, my future life will only be filled with more of the same frustration. And so, with all my being, I forgive the others involved, and I forgive myself. I accept everything that happened as something beyond my control, and beyond the control of others. (*)

The scene begins to transform, light and dark again reversing as in the negative of a photograph. At the same time I hear a voice say, "If you can make peace with yourself, reconciling with your greatest mistake, your frustration will die and you will be able to change your destiny."

Now I'm standing in the middle of the desert again, and see a car approaching. "Taxi!" I shout, and soon find myself seated comfortably in the back seat. Looking at the driver, who is dressed as a fireman, I say, "Please drive me home, and take your time, so I can think about everything that has happened." Putting on my jacket again, I say to myself, "Who hasn't experienced some kind of accident? Now I realize I am better than I thought I was, and best of all, I have a future in which to prove it."

Nostalgia

The colored lights pulse to the rhythm of the music as I stand face-to-face with the one who was my greatest love. We dance slowly, and each flash of the lights reveals some detail of my love's face or body. (*)

What went wrong between us? Perhaps it was money. (*)

Perhaps it was those other relationships. (*)

Perhaps it was having different goals. (*)

Perhaps it was destiny, or something impossible to grasp then. (*)

Again I dance slowly, but now with another great love. Each flash of the lights reveals some detail of my love's face or body. (*)

What went wrong between us? Perhaps it was money. (*)

Perhaps it was those other relationships. (*)

Perhaps it was having different goals. (*)

Perhaps it was destiny, or something impossible to grasp then. (*)

I forgive you and I forgive myself, for if we dance and the world dances around us, what can we do with those rock-solid promises that turned out to be butterflies of changing colors?

I rescue what is good and beautiful from my yesterdays with you. (*)

And from my yesterdays with you, also. (*)

And from my yesterdays with all of you who have dazzled my eyes. (*)

Ah—the pain, the suspicion, the parting, and then the wounded pride and endless sadness—these are the excuses. But how small they seem beside those beguiling eyes.

Because the great wrongs I remember are errors made in dancing, and not the dance itself.

I'm thankful to you for your tender smile.

And I'm thankful to you for your softly whispered words.

And to all of you, I'm thankful for the hope of an everlasting love.

At peace with yesterday, my heart is open to the memories of those beautiful moments. (*)

My Ideal

I'm walking through a fairground filled with exhibition halls and displays, and I see many children playing on high-tech mechanical rides.

I come upon a giant figure made of some solid material. It stands upright, and its large head is painted in bright colors. There is a ladder extending up to its mouth, which the little ones climb to reach the enormous opening. Whenever one enters, the mouth gently closes, and soon the child pops out the back of the giant, coming down a slide and landing in the sand below. One by one the children go in and come out as a song flows from the giant:

See Gargantua gobble up the children,
With great care, not harming a hair,
Tra la la, tra la la,
With great care, not harming a hair!

I decide to climb up the short ladder. As I enter the huge mouth, I meet an attendant who tells me, "Children go down the slide, but grownups use the elevator."

The attendant continues the explanation as our elevator descends through a transparent tube. Soon I say that I think we're probably at ground level by now.

"That's right," replies the attendant, "although we're still only passing through the esophagus. The rest of the giant's body is below ground, unlike the children's giant, which is completely on the surface. You see," my guide informs me, "there are actually two Gargantuas in one—one for children, and another one for grownups."

After a while the attendant announces, "Now we're well below ground. We've already passed the diaphragm, and soon we'll stop at a very pleasant place—look, the elevator door is opening and I can show you the stomach. Would you like to get out here? As you can see, this modern restaurant serves delicious foods from all over the world." But I tell the attendant that I'm curious about the rest of the body, so we continue going down.

"Now we've reached the lowest part of the abdomen," announces my guide as the elevator door opens. "The decor here is quite unique, and the walls of changing colors form delicately lined caverns. In the middle of the lounge is the central fire, the generator that provides energy to the whole giant. There are seats for visitors to rest, and the columns scattered here and there are great for playing hide-and-seek—it's easy to hide and then suddenly reappear. And the more visitors who play, the more fun it is. Now I'll leave you here if you wish. To return to the surface, all you need do is approach the elevator and the door will open and take you back up. Everything is automatic—amazing, isn't it?"

The elevator door closes and I'm left alone in the lounge.

At first it seems as though I'm under the ocean. Then a large fish swims right through me, and I realize that the coral, the seaweed, and all the different species of living things are incredibly realistic three-dimensional projections. I sit down to watch this relaxing spectacle at my leisure.

Suddenly I see emerging from the central fire a human figure, its face covered. Approaching me slowly, the figure stops nearby and says, "Hello there, I'm a hologram. Everyone tries to find in me that special someone, their ideal match. I'm programmed to take on any appearance you wish. So tell me, what does your ideal look like?"

“Before I can begin to look like your ideal, it will take just a little effort on your part. If you try this, your brain waves will be deciphered. Then they’ll be amplified, transmitted, and recoded again in the main computer, and as the computer rearranges the hologram, you’ll see my identity take shape.”

“What should I do?” I ask.

“I suggest that you follow these steps,” the figure says. “First, begin to think of the different people you’ve been emotionally involved with, and recall which features they’ve had in common. I don’t mean only their bodies or faces, but also their characters. For example, were they protective, or did they inspire you to be protective of them? (*)

“Were they brave or timid? Were they dreamers? Were they ambitious, deceitful, or perhaps cruel? (*)

“And now, what unpleasant or negative trait did they have in common? (*)

“What were their positive qualities? (*)

“How were the beginnings of all these relationships similar? (*)

“How were the endings similar? (*)

“Try to remember the people you’ve wanted to have relationships with, but things didn’t work out—and why didn’t they work out? (*)

“Now, give me your attention, and I’ll begin to take on the appearance you most desire. Just say the word and I’ll become the person who is, for you, perfect. I’m ready, so go ahead and let yourself imagine. How should I walk? How am I dressed? Just what am I doing? How do I speak? Where are we, and what are we doing?

“Look into my face, just as it is! (*)

“Look deeply into my eyes, for now I’m no longer just a hologram, I’ve become real. Gaze deeply into my eyes, and tell me tenderly what you see in them.” (*)

I stand up to touch the figure, but it eludes me, disappearing behind a column. When I reach the spot, I find that the figure has vanished. But then I feel a hand resting softly on my shoulder as a voice says, “Do not look behind you. It should be enough for you just to know we’ve been so close to one another, and this experience can bring you greater clarity in searching for your ideal.”

As the voice finishes speaking, I turn to see who is behind me, but glimpse only a fleeting shadow. At the same time, the central fire roars and flares brightly, dazzling me.

I know that this setting and the hologram have created a favorable atmosphere for my ideal to appear. But through an impatience I do not understand, my ideal, which is within me and has softly brushed against me, my ideal has slipped through my fingers only to disappear. Still I know that we’ve been near each other and this is enough for me—I realize that the main computer could never have projected a tactile sensation like the touch I felt on my shoulder.

I approach the elevator, and as the door opens, I hear a children’s song:

See Gargantua gobble down the grownups,
With great care, not harming a hair,
Tra la la, tra la la,
With great care, not harming a hair!

Resentment

It is night, and I'm in an old city crisscrossed by canals that pass beneath timeworn bridges. Leaning on a railing, I gaze at the slow movement of the murky liquid mass below. Through the fog I can make out a group of people on another bridge, and I can faintly hear musical instruments that accompany voices sadly out of tune. Faraway bells toll to me in haunting waves of sorrow.

Now the group has gone and the bells have fallen silent. Down a narrow diagonal street, colored neon lights emit their sickly glow.

I move on, once again entering the fog. After wandering aimlessly down side streets and over bridges, I come out into the open space of an old square paved with tiles; the square seems empty, and the tiled surface draws me toward one end that is submerged in still water.

Ahead a boat that looks like a hearse awaits me. But to reach it, I must first pass between two long lines of women dressed in black tunics and holding torches overhead. As I pass they say in chorus:

Oh Death! Whose unlimited domain
Reaches the living wherever they may be,
On you depends the span allotted to our life.
Your endless sleep annihilates the multitudes,
For no one escapes your powerful presence.
You alone have the judgment that absolves,
And no art can prevail upon your fury,
Nor plea revoke your design.

I step into the boat, aided by the boatman, who remains standing behind me. Settling into the spacious seat, I notice that the craft rises slightly until we're just above the water. Then we begin to move, suspended above an open and immobile sea that is like an endless mirror reflecting the moon.

We arrive at the island, and in the dim light I can see a long road bordered by cypress trees. The boat rests on the water, rocking gently, and I step out while the boatman remains behind, impassive.

I walk down the road between the trees, which sigh in the wind. I feel that I'm being observed, and I stop, sensing something or someone hidden up ahead. From behind a tree a shadowy figure beckons me with slow gestures. I begin to approach, and just as I reach it, a grave whisper like the sigh of death brushes against my face.

"Help me!" the shadow moans, "I know you have come to free me from this confusing prison. Only you can do this—help me!"

The shadowy figure tells me it is someone toward whom I bear a deep resentment. (*)

As though reading my thoughts, the voice adds, "It does not matter whether the person to whom you are bound by this most profound resentment is dead or alive, for the domain of dark memory respects no borders.

"Nor does it matter," the shadow continues, "whether the hatred and desire for revenge have been knotted in your heart since childhood, or began only yesterday. Here time is immobile. This is why we are always lurking in the shadows, only to emerge again at any opportunity, transformed into your various fears. And these fears are our revenge for the poison we must continually taste."

Just as I ask what I should do, a ray of moonlight faintly illuminates the figure's cloaked head. Then the specter allows me to see it clearly, and I recognize the features of the person who has wounded me the most deeply. (*)

I tell the specter all about my resentment, expressing things I've never told anyone—I speak as frankly as I can. (*)

The apparition asks me to consider the problem once again, and to communicate everything that is important, even if my words are insulting. The shadow insists that I not fail to express any bitterness I feel, lest it remain imprisoned forever. So I go ahead and follow these instructions. (*)

The specter shows me a strong chain that binds it to a cypress tree. Without hesitating, I break the chain with a single sharp jerk. The cloak collapses and lies spread out on the ground as the shadow vanishes into thin air and the voice recedes toward the heights, repeating these familiar words: "I must be gone, for the firefly's fading glow shows that dawn is near. Farewell, farewell. Remember me!"

Realizing that daybreak will soon arrive, I turn to go back to the boat, but first I pick up the cloak, which is lying at my feet. Draping it over my shoulders, I hurriedly retrace my steps. On my way back to the sea, several furtive shadows ask me if I'll return someday to free other resentments.

Near the shore I see a group of women dressed in white tunics and holding torches overhead. When I reach the boat, I hand the cloak to the boatman. He in turn passes it to the women, and one of them sets it afire. The cloak flares up and is quickly consumed by the flames, without leaving a trace. At this moment I feel a tremendous relief, as though I've sincerely forgiven an enormous wrong. (*)

I step into the boat, which now looks like a modern speedboat. As we push off from the shore, not yet starting the motor, I hear the chorus of women say:

You have the power to awaken us from our stupor,
Uniting heart with head,
Freeing our minds from emptiness,
Removing darkness and forgetfulness from inner sight.
Come, beneficial power: True memory
That straightens life into its rightful meaning.

The motor comes to life just as the sun appears above the ocean horizon. The boat accelerates, and I look at the young driver, his strong clear face smiling toward the sea.

We approach the city swiftly, bouncing lightly on the smooth swells. The sun's golden rays gild the magnificent domes of the city, while bright flocks of doves circle overhead.

The Protector of Life

I'm floating on my back in a lagoon. The water feels very pleasant, and effortlessly looking on either side I discover that I can see the bottom through the crystalline water.

The sky is a brilliant blue. Close by, washed by the waters of the sea, is a beach of soft, almost white sand that forms a quiet inlet without waves.

I feel my body floating gently, becoming more and more relaxed, filling me with an extraordinary sensation of well-being.

I decide to turn over, and begin to swim with smooth strokes until I reach the beach, where I slowly emerge from the water.

The landscape is tropical. I see date and coconut palms, and feel the warmth of the sun and the soft breeze on my skin.

To my surprise, on my right I discover the entrance to a grotto with a stream of clear water flowing nearby. As I approach the grotto, I see a woman standing inside. A crown of flowers adorns her head and I can see her beautiful eyes, but I cannot tell her age. Yet behind her face, which radiates kindness and understanding, I sense there lies a great wisdom. As I gaze at her, all of nature falls silent.

"I am the Protector of Life," she says. Hesitantly I answer that I do not understand what she means. At this moment a fawn approaches and licks her hand.

She invites me to enter the grotto and has me sit on the sand facing a smooth rock wall. I cannot see her now, but I hear her say, "Breathe gently, and tell me what you see." I begin to breathe slowly and deeply, and immediately a clear image of the ocean appears before me on the rock. As I breathe in, the waves roll onto the beach. As I breathe out, the waves recede.

Then she tells me, "Everything in your body is rhythm and beauty. So many times you have despised your body, without comprehending this marvelous instrument you have for expressing yourself in the world." At this moment many scenes from my life begin to appear on the rock wall—I see myself feeling shame, fear, and horror about certain aspects of my body. These images follow one after another. (*)

I feel uncomfortable when I realize that she is watching these scenes, but immediately calm myself. Then she adds, "Even in sickness and old age, your body will be like a faithful dog that accompanies you until the final moment. Do not despise your body when it cannot fulfill all your whims. Meanwhile make it strong and healthy. Take care of your body so that it can serve you well, and be guided in this only by the opinions of the wise. I who have passed through all the ages know well that the idea of beauty is ever-changing. If you do not regard your body as your closest friend, it will become sad and ill—therefore you must accept it completely. It is your instrument for expressing yourself in the world.

"I want you to see now the part of your body that is weakest and least healthy." At once the image of this part of my body appears. (*)

The Protector of Life rests her hand on this area, and I feel a life-giving warmth. I sense waves of energy expanding in this area, and I experience a profound acceptance of my body, just as it is. (*)

"Take care of your body, following only the opinions of those who are wise, and do not harm it with illnesses that exist only in your imagination. Now go, filled with vitality and at peace with yourself."

Upon emerging from the grotto, strengthened and healthy, I drink the crystalline water of the stream and feel completely renewed.

The sun and the wind kiss my body as I cross the white sand toward the lagoon. When I reach the water, for an instant I glimpse in the depths the kind reflection of the Protector of Life.

As I enter the water, I give thanks within myself for my body, this marvelous instrument I have received from nature. (*)

The Rescue

I'm in a car that is speeding down a large highway. In the strange half-light I'm unsure whether it is dawn or dusk. The driver beside me is someone I've never seen before. In the back seat are two women and a man, who are also strangers. The car races onward, surrounded by other cars that are driving recklessly, as if their drivers are drunk or crazy.

I ask my companion what is happening. Looking at me furtively, he answers in a strange language, "Rex voluntas!"

Turning on the radio, which blares noisy static, I can faintly hear a weak metallic voice monotonously repeating, "Rex voluntas . . . rex voluntas . . . rex voluntas."

The traffic slows, and by the roadside I see wrecked and overturned cars with fire spreading among them. We stop, and abandoning the car, join a sea of terrified people rushing toward the fields.

Looking back through the smoke and flames, I see many hapless souls who are trapped and doomed, but I'm forced to keep running by the human stampede that pushes me along. Some of the people stumble to the ground, and amid this delirium I struggle in vain to reach a woman trying to shield her child as the mob tramples over them.

The chaos and violence are spreading everywhere, so I make up my mind to move in a slightly diagonal direction that will let me escape the crowd; I aim toward some higher ground that diverts this mindless stampede. Many of the fallen clutch at my clothes, tearing them to shreds. But I notice that the crush of people around me is growing less.

Finally I manage to break free of the crowd, and almost out of breath continue to climb. Stopping for a moment, I notice that the mob is now going in a direction opposite to mine—they must be thinking that running downhill will carry them more quickly out of this crisis.

I realize with horror that the path they are following ends in a cliff. Shouting with all my might, I try to warn the people of this imminent catastrophe, though I fear that only those nearest me will hear the warning.

One man does break free of the mob and comes running toward me. His clothes are in tatters and his body is covered with wounds, yet I feel a great joy that he's been saved. On reaching me he clutches my arm, and yelling like a madman points frantically down the hill. He's speaking a language I do not understand, but I think he wants me to help rescue someone. I tell him to wait for a while—that right now it's impossible. I know he cannot understand me, and his desperation is tearing me apart. Then he tries to go back down, but just as he's leaving I trip him and he falls headlong. He lies sprawled on the ground, sobbing bitterly. For my part I realize that I've saved both his life and his conscience—his conscience because he did try to rescue someone, and his life by preventing his doomed attempt.

Climbing higher, I reach a freshly plowed field. The earth is loose and furrowed. In the distance I hear gunfire, and think I know what is happening—hurriedly I leave. After a while, everything is silent and I stop once more. Looking back toward the city, I see a sinister glow.

I feel the ground begin to shake beneath my feet, and a rumbling from the depths warns me of an imminent earthquake. Within moments I've lost my balance and find myself lying on the ground. Curled on my side and gazing up at the sky, I'm overcome by waves of dizziness.

The earthquake passes, and I look up to see an enormous, blood-red moon.

The heat is unbearable and the air is filled with an acrid odor. Meanwhile, I'm still uncertain whether the day is just beginning or night is falling.

Sitting down, I hear a growling roar. Soon hundreds of aircraft fill the sky, passing overhead like deadly insects and disappearing toward some unknown destiny.

Nearby I come upon a large dog that is staring up at the moon. It begins to howl, almost like a wolf. I call out to it, and the animal approaches me timidly. When it reaches my side, I gently pet its bristling fur and see shivers running down its body.

The dog pulls away from me and begins to leave. I get to my feet and follow it, and we cross a rocky area until we reach a small stream. The thirsty animal rushes forward and eagerly begins to drink, but all at once draws back and falls over. Approaching the dog I touch it, and realize that it's dead.

I feel a new earthquake, which threatens to knock me over, but it subsides.

Turning around, I behold far off in the sky four enormous clouds advancing toward me with the muffled rumbling of thunder. The first cloud is white, the second is red, the third is black, and the fourth is yellow. And these clouds are like four armed horsemen riding on the storm, traveling across the heavens and laying waste to all life upon the earth.

I begin running to escape the approaching clouds, for I realize that if their rain touches me I'll be contaminated. As I run toward the highway, suddenly my path is blocked by a gigantic figure—towering over me I see a huge robot swinging a sword of fire in a menacing arc. I shout that I must keep going because the radioactive clouds are approaching, but the robot replies that it has been stationed here to prevent destructive people from entering; adding that it's armed with lasers, it warns me not to come any closer. I see that the robot stands on the dividing line between two distinct areas—the one I'm coming from, barren and dying, and the one ahead, filled with vegetation and life.

So I shout to the robot, "You must let me pass because I've done a good deed!"

"What is a good deed?" the robot asks.

"A constructive action, something that builds and contributes to life," I answer.

"Then tell me what you've done that's so good," the robot demands.

"I've saved a human being from certain death, and what's more, I've saved his conscience as well."

At once the giant robot stands aside, and I leap into the protected area just as the first drops of poisoned rain begin to fall.

Ahead of me is a farm, and a soft light glows through the windows of the nearby farmhouse. Only now do I realize that the day is just beginning.

When I reach the farmhouse, a rugged yet kindly looking man invites me to come in. Inside, a large family is preparing for the activities of the day. They seat me at the table, which is set with simple and hearty food. Soon I find myself drinking pure spring water as children play around me.

"This time," says my host, "you have escaped. But when once again you must cross the border between life and death, what coherent behavior will you be able to show in your life?"

I ask him to explain, because his words sound strange to me. He says, "Try to remember the truly unselfish things you've done in your life, which we might call 'good deeds' to give them a name. Of course, I don't mean those so-called 'good deeds' people do when they're expecting something in return. Think only of the things you have done that left a clear sensation in you that the way you treated others was best for *them*—it's just as simple as that.

"Now I'll give you three minutes to review your life and see what inner poverty there is within you, my good friend. And one final suggestion: If you have children or loved ones, do not confuse what you want for them with what is best for them." Having said this, he leaves the house along with all his people. I'm left alone to meditate on the suggestions of this rustic fellow. (*)

Returning a short time later, he says to me, “Now you see how empty you are within, and if you aren’t empty it’s only because you are confused. That is, in either case you are empty. Let me give you some advice, and heed it carefully, for it is the only thing that will help you in what is to come: From now on, do not let a single day pass without filling your life with an unselfish act.”

We say farewell, and in the distance I hear him shout to me, “Tell the people what you have discovered!”

I set off from the farm in the direction of my city.

Today I have learned this: When human beings think only of their own self-interest and their own problems, they carry death in their hearts, and everything they touch dies with them.

False Hopes

I have arrived outside the office of the doctor who was recommended to me, and I see a small plaque that warns: “You who enter here, abandon all hope.”

When I ring the bell, the door opens and a nurse shows me into the waiting room. She points to a chair and I take a seat as she sits down facing me behind her desk. Picking up a form, she inserts it in her typewriter and asks, “Name?” I answer her. “Age? Profession? Marital status? Blood type?”

The nurse continues filling in the form with my family’s medical history.

Then I answer her questions about my own medical history. (*)

I describe for her all the accidents I’ve had since my childhood. (*)

With a piercing stare, the nurse slowly inquires, “What is your criminal record?” I answer her with a certain uneasiness.

Then she asks, “What are your hopes and dreams?” Abruptly I stop my obedient answers to her questions and demand an explanation. Unperturbed, and staring at me coldly as if I were an insect, she replies, “Hopes and dreams are merely hopes and dreams! So you’d better start telling me yours, and be quick about it, because I have to go meet my boyfriend.”

Rising out of my chair, with one swipe I rip the form from her typewriter. Tearing it to pieces, I throw it in the wastebasket. Then I turn and cross the room to the door through which I entered, but now it won’t open. Exasperated, I yell at the nurse to open it, and when she doesn’t answer I turn and see that the room—is empty!

Striding to the other door, which leads to the examination room, I feel sure the doctor will be there and I’ll tell him all of my complaints. “This must be how that wonderful nurse escaped,” I mutter as I open the door—and manage to stop myself just short of a wall. “A door with a wall behind it, what a great idea!” I exclaim. Then I rush back to the first door. This time it opens, but again I run into a wall that blocks my way. I realize that I’m trapped.

Over a loudspeaker I hear the doctor’s voice say, “Tell me about your hopes and dreams.” Regaining my composure, I testily reply that we’re all adults here, and obviously my greatest hope is simply to get out of this ridiculous predicament. But he says, “The plaque on the wall at the entrance warned anyone who entered here to abandon all hope.”

The situation now seems to be some kind of grotesque joke, so I sit down to see how it will turn out.

“Let’s begin again,” says the voice. “Remember how your childhood was filled with hopes and dreams. As time passed, however, you realized that many of them were never going come true. So you abandoned those beautiful projects. Remember? (*)

“Later on,” the voice continues, “other hopes and dreams followed, and again you had to resign yourself to the fact that many of your desires would not come true. Remember? (*)

“Even at this very moment, you have certain hopes and dreams. I don’t mean your hope of escaping this confinement, for the illusion we’ve staged here is already over. I’m speaking of something else. I am speaking about your hopes and dreams for the future. (*)

“Which of your hopes do you secretly know will never come true? Go ahead, think this over honestly. (*)

“Without hopes and dreams, we cannot live. But once we know that certain hopes are false, we can’t hold on to them forever, because sooner or later they’ll end in crisis and failure. If you can

search deep within yourself and find the hopes you realize will never come true, and if you make the effort to abandon these hopes here forever, you will gain a greater sense of reality.

“So let’s return to our task. Seek out among your fondest hopes and dreams those you sense will never come true. But don’t be confused, for there are many things that *do* seem possible! Do not focus on these—choose only those hopes and dreams that will never be realized. Go ahead now, search out your false hopes. Be completely honest with yourself, even if it’s a bit painful. (*)

“Resolve that when you leave this room, you will leave your false hopes behind forever. (*)

“And now, let’s finish this task. Let’s study those other important hopes—the hopes and dreams you *do* consider possible. I’ll give you some help: Guide your life only by what you believe is possible, or what you genuinely feel will come true. And it doesn’t matter if later on some of these things don’t work out, because they have, after all, given direction to your actions. (*)

“And so, we have finished. You can leave now by the way you came in, and be quick about it, because I have to go meet my secretary.”

I get up. Walking the few steps to the door, I open it and leave the doctor’s office. Looking at the plaque near the entrance, I see that it now reads, “You who leave, abandon here all false hopes.”

Repetitions

It is night, and I'm walking down a dark, narrow alley. I don't see anyone, but through the fog I can make out the faint glow of a distant streetlight. My footsteps resound with an ominous echo. I quicken my pace, intent on reaching the streetlight ahead.

As I approach the light, a few steps away I see a human silhouette. It is an old hag, her face half-covered. Abruptly, in a raspy voice she asks me the time. Peering at my watch, I answer, "It's three in the morning."

I walk away quickly, once more entering the fog and darkness, anxious to reach the next streetlight which I see in the distance.

But there, once again, is the old hag. Looking at my watch, I see it now says two-thirty. I begin running toward the next streetlight, looking back over my shoulder and making sure I'm leaving the old woman behind as she stands motionless in the distance. But when I rush up to the next streetlight, again I see her dark shape awaiting me. I look at my watch—it says two o'clock.

I begin running frantically, passing streetlights and old women until, exhausted, I can go no farther and stop midway between two glowing lights. Looking at my watch, I see in its crystal the face of the old woman. I realize that the end has come.

In spite of everything, I try to understand my predicament. I ask myself over and over again, "What am I running away from? What am I running away from?" The raspy voice answers me, "I am behind you and I am ahead of you. What has been, will be. But you are most fortunate, for you have been able to stop yourself and think for a moment. If you find the answer to this riddle, you will be able to escape from your own trap." (*)

I feel dazed and weary. Still I think there must be a way out. Something makes me begin to remember various failures in my life. I recall the first disappointments of my childhood. (*)

Then I remember the failures of my youth. (*)

Now I recall my more recent failures. (*)

I realize that my defeats will keep repeating in the future, failure upon failure. (*)

All of my defeats have had something similar about them—there was no agreement among the things I wanted to do. They were confused desires that wound up at odds with each other. (*)

I discover that even now many of the things I desire to achieve in the future are contradictory. (*)

I don't know what to do with my life, yet in my confusion I still want many things.

But I fear the future and worry that my previous failures will happen again.

Here in the fog of this narrow alley, my life is paralyzed between dying glimmers of light.

Suddenly a light goes on in a window and a voice calls out to me, "Is there something you need?"

"Yes!" I answer, "I need to get out of here!"

"Oh no—by yourself you cannot get out!"

"Then tell me, how *do* I get out of here?"

"I can't tell you. Besides, if we keep on shouting we're going to wake up all the neighbors. And we can't take chances with the neighbors' sleep! So good night."

The light goes out, and then I'm filled with one overwhelming desire—I must get out of this trap. I realize that my life will change only if I find a way out of here. This narrow alley appears to have direction and meaning, but is really only a repetition from birth to death, a false meaning. I

will end up running from streetlight to streetlight until, at some moment, my strength becomes exhausted forever.

To my left I see a signpost with three arrows. The arrow for this alley bears the name, "Repetitions in Life." The second arrow points toward "Denial of Life," and the third marks the direction of "Building Life." For a moment I reflect on this choice. (*)

I choose the direction of the third arrow, "Building Life." As I leave the dark alley and emerge onto a broad and brightly lit avenue, I have the strong sense that I'm about to discover something of decisive importance.

The Voyage

I'm climbing along a mountain path, and stop briefly to look behind me. In the distance I see the thin line of a river and what could be a grove of trees. Farther off, the reddish desert disappears into the haze of the late afternoon.

I walk a few more steps, and the path narrows until it disappears. I know that I still have the last and most difficult stretch ahead of me before I reach the plateau on top. The snow on the ground scarcely hinders my steps, and I continue my ascent.

I come to a rock wall. Studying it carefully, I discover a large crevice that I think I can climb. I begin to climb it, wedging my hiking boots into the footholds. Pressing my back against one side, I lever myself up with one elbow and my other arm. Slowly I inch higher.

Now the crevice has narrowed. I look up and I look down. I've reached an impasse—it's impossible to move in either direction.

I shift my position, flattening myself against the slippery rock face. Planting both feet firmly, I slowly stretch one arm upward. I can feel my moist breath reflecting from the smooth rock. I keep groping with my fingers, not knowing whether I'll find some small handhold. Gingerly I stretch out my other arm. Suddenly I feel myself swaying, and my head falls slowly away from the rock. My whole body follows, until I'm on the verge of falling backwards—but at the last second, I find a tiny crack and grasp it tightly with my fingers. Recovering my balance I continue the ascent, making the final assault on the top without difficulty.

At last I reach the plateau. I stand up, and an endless prairie stretches before me. Taking a few steps forward I turn around. Toward the abyss it is already night. Toward the plain the last rays of the sun escape in varied hues. As I compare these two spaces, suddenly I hear a piercing sound. Looking up, I see a luminous disk hovering high overhead. Circling around, it begins to descend.

The disk lands close by. Moved by some inner call, I approach it without hesitation. As I enter the luminous object, it feels as if I'm passing through a curtain of warm air. I find myself inside a transparent bubble that's flattened on its base, and immediately my body feels lighter.

As though propelled by a giant slingshot, we shoot straight upward into the sky. I think we're heading toward the star Beta Hydri, or perhaps the galaxy NGC 3621.

Fleeting I see the late afternoon light on the prairie below. We climb at great speed as the sky turns black and the Earth slips away.

I can feel our velocity steadily increasing, and the clear white light of the stars changes color until all the stars have disappeared in total darkness.

Directly ahead I see a single point of golden light, which steadily grows larger. As we approach, I see it is a vast ring that continues into a very long transparent tube. We enter the tube, and after a while come to a sudden stop, landing in an open area. Passing through the curtain of warm air, I leave the bubble.

I find myself between transparent walls, which shimmer in musical variations of color as I pass through them.

I walk onward until I come to a flat area. In the center I see a large object, alive with movement, and impossible to capture with my eye as it flows endlessly into itself; regardless of which direction I look on its surface, my gaze always ends up immersed, drawn deep into the object's interior. Feeling dizzy, I look away.

Now I encounter a figure, apparently human, whose face I cannot see. This being extends a hand toward me, in which I see a radiant sphere. I begin to approach, and in an act of complete acceptance, I take the sphere and place it on my forehead. (*)

In total silence I feel something new coming to life within me. A growing force bathes my body in successive waves as a profound joy fills my being. (*)

Somehow I know that even without words this figure is speaking to me, saying, "Return to the world with your forehead and your hands luminous." (*)

And so I accept my destiny, returning to the bubble, and through the vast ring to the stars, and the prairie, and the rock wall below. (*)

Finally I am back on the mountain path, a humble pilgrim returning to my people. (*)

Filled with light, I return to the hours, to the daily routine, to the pain of humanity, and to its simple joys.

I, who give with my hands what I can, who receive both insults and the warmest of greetings, sing to the heart, which from the darkest abyss is reborn in the light of Meaning.

The Festival

Lying in a bed, I gradually become aware that I'm in a hospital room. Faintly I hear the dripping of a faucet. I try to move my arms and legs and then my head, but they don't respond. It's an effort just to keep my eyes open.

I seem to hear someone at my bedside saying that fortunately I'm out of danger, and now it's only a matter of resting. Though confusing, these words bring me great relief. My body feels heavy and drowsy, and grows more and more relaxed.

The ceiling is smooth and white. As each drop of water drips from the faucet, a ray of light flashes across the ceiling. One drop, one ray. Then another. Then many rays, and after this I see waves of light. The ceiling keeps on changing with the rhythm of my heart, perhaps an effect of the arteries in my head as blood pulses through them.

Now the rhythm outlines the face of a young person, who speaks to me saying, "Hey you, why don't you come with me?"

"Sure," I think, "why not?"

Up ahead is a music festival, and the sound of instruments floods with light a vast space carpeted with green grass and flowers.

Lying in the meadow facing the stage, I'm surrounded by an enormous sea of people. Happily there is plenty of space, so that no one is crowded. In the distance I see some childhood friends, and I can tell they are truly enjoying themselves.

I fix my attention on a flower, connected to its stem by a slender stalk that, within transparent skin, gleams a deep green. I reach out my hand, lightly running my finger along the polished fresh stem, barely disturbed by tiny knobs. Moving up through emerald leaves, I come to the petals, which open in a multicolored explosion. Petals like stained glass in a solemn cathedral, petals like rubies, petals like embers awakening into flame—and in this dance of hues, I feel the flower lives as if a part of me. (*)

The flower, disturbed by my touch, releases a sleepy drop of dew, barely clinging to the tip of a leaf. As it falls the drop vibrates, forming an oval, then it lengthens, and now in the emptiness it flattens out, only to become round again . . . falling in endless time, falling, falling through endless space . . . finally landing on a mushroom's cap, the drop rolls like heavy mercury, sliding to the edge. There, in a spasm of freedom, it hurls itself into a tiny pool, raising a tempest of waves that bathe an island of marble. (*)

Looking up, I see a golden bee coming to sip from the flower, and in this intense spiral of life I withdraw my disrespectful hand, removing it from that dazzling perfection.

My hand—I look at it astonished, as if seeing it for the first time. Turning it over, opening and closing its fingers, I see the crossroads on my palm. And I comprehend that in those many lines all the roads of the world converge. I feel that this hand and its deep lines do not belong to me, and I give thanks within myself for this feeling of not possessing my body.

Ahead the festival continues, and I know that this music connects me with that young woman gazing at her clothes, and that young man leaning against a tree petting a blue cat.

I know that I have lived all this before, and I have known the tree's jagged outline, and the sharply defined volume of each thing. Once before I have seen the soft shapes of these ochre clouds, set like cardboard cutouts against the immaculate blue of the sky.

And I have also lived before this timeless feeling in which my eyes seem not to exist, for they see everything so clearly, as if they were not the eyes of everyday seeing, eyes that cloud reality. I

feel that everything is alive and all is well, and that the music and the things have no names, and nothing can ever truly name the. (*)

In the velvet butterflies that flutter around me, I recognize the warmth of lips and the fragility of sweet dreams.

The blue cat comes toward me, and suddenly I become aware of something obvious—the cat moves by itself, without cables, without remote control. The cat does everything by itself, and this amazes me. In its perfect movements, behind its beautiful yellow eyes, I know there is a life, and that everything else is a disguise, like the bark of the tree, the butterflies, the flower, the mercurial dewdrop, the clouds like cutouts, the hand with its converging roads. For a moment I seem to communicate with something universal. (*)

But then a soft voice interrupts me just before I pass into another state of consciousness. “Do you believe this is how things really are?” whispers the stranger. “I tell you that things are not this way, nor the other way either. Soon you will return to your grey world—without depth, without joy, without volume. And you will believe that you have lost your freedom. For now you do not understand me because you lack the capacity to think as you wish. Your apparent state of freedom is only the result of the natural chemical processes in your brain. This happens to thousands of people, who all receive my advice. And now, good-bye.”

With this the kindly stranger disappears, and the whole landscape begins to spin into a light grey spiral, until the wavy ceiling appears once more. I hear the water dripping from the faucet, and realize that I’m lying in the hospital room. I feel the dullness in my senses dissolving and try to move my head, and this time it responds, and so do my arms and legs. I stretch, and realize that I’m completely well. Leaping out of bed, I feel altogether refreshed, as though I have rested for years.

I go to the door of the room, open it, and stepping into the hallway walk quickly to the exit of the building. There I see a large open doorway, with many people passing through in both directions. I go down the steps and out onto the street.

Part Two: Playing with Images

The Creature

It is night, and I find myself in total darkness. Somewhere nearby is the edge of a cliff. Groping ahead with my foot, I can feel uneven ground that is covered with vegetation and rocks. I also sense the presence of the creature that has always provoked in me an unmistakable feeling of terror and disgust. There may be one of them, or there may be many—but I'm certain that something is relentlessly drawing near.

A ringing in my ears, at times mingling with a faraway wind, contrasts with the utter silence. My wide-open eyes cannot see a thing. My heart is pounding, my breathing is shallow, and my dry mouth has a bitter taste.

Something is approaching—what is creeping up behind me, making my scalp bristle and sending cold chills up my spine?

My knees feel weak, and if something grabs me or jumps on me from behind I'll be completely defenseless. I'm paralyzed—all I can do is wait. In my confusion, I think about this creature and those other times when it was near me, especially about that most difficult time. I begin to relive those memories. (*)

What happened then? What was going on during that period of my life? I try to recall the fears and the frustrations I was feeling at that time. (*)

Clearly I was at a crossroads in my life, and this coincided with my encounter with the creature—I feel an urgent need to discover how these things are related. (*)

Now I find I can think more clearly again. While I know there are animals that provoke disgust in nearly everyone, I also recognize that not everyone loses control in their presence. I notice just how the terrifying creature makes me feel, and I try to discover the connection between this feeling and what was happening in my life at other times when I've felt similar fears. (*)

Calmly, I try to feel which part of my body I would protect from this dangerous animal. I realize this part of my body is related to the difficulties I was having when the encounter with the creature occurred, so long ago. (*)

Seeing the animal again has reawakened in me that moment of my life, a moment that is still not resolved. I need to shed light on that dark and painful time, which is sometimes difficult to recall. (*)

Above I see the clear night sky, and ahead on the horizon the rosy glow of a new dawn. Very quickly the day brings with it the stirring of life. Here in this soft meadow, I walk freely on a carpet of dew-covered grass.

A van approaches rapidly and stops beside me. Two people dressed as orderlies get out. Greeting me cordially, they announce that they've captured the creature that frightens me so much. They explain that when they receive a message of fear, they go hunting for the creature that is causing it. When they capture the animal, they display it so that the person who is afraid can study it closely. Now they place the carefully restrained animal right in front of me.

The specimen is indeed helpless. I take advantage of this to examine it thoroughly, very slowly and from all angles, both up close and from a distance. (*)

The orderlies gently pet the docile animal, and it responds in a friendly way. Then they invite me to pet it, too. Feeling great apprehension, I shudder as I try to touch the creature. But I try again and then again, until finally I'm able to pet it. (*)

The animal responds peacefully, with exceedingly lazy movements. Then it begins to shrink, growing smaller and smaller, until finally it disappears.

As the van departs, I try once again to recall the circumstances in my life long ago, when the presence of this animal so terrified me. (*)

On a sudden impulse I begin to run playfully, enjoying the morning and the fresh air. I move rhythmically and tirelessly, breathing deeply. Then I begin to run even faster, my heart and muscles working together like a flawless machine.

As I'm running freely I recall my fear, but feel that I am stronger now, and that soon I'll have conquered it forever.

Bright sunlight streams down from above as I swiftly draw near my city. Filling my lungs with air, I feel my whole body moving in perfect harmony. Those parts of my body that were prey to fear now feel strong and invulnerable. (*)

The Snowmobile

I'm on a broad expanse of snow high on a mountain, and all around me I see people participating in winter sports. Despite the splendid sun, I become aware of the cold on seeing my breath in the air. From time to time icy gusts of wind strike my face, but this only feels invigorating.

Several of my friends approach, pushing a snowmobile. They urge me to get in and drive, explaining that this snowmobile has been so carefully designed that the driver can't lose control. I get in and buckle the seatbelt. Lowering my goggles, I start the turbines, which whine like small jets. As I press lightly on the accelerator with my right foot, the snowmobile moves gently forward. Easing back on the accelerator, I press the brake with my left foot, and the machine obediently stops. Then I turn the snowmobile effortlessly to the left and to the right.

Three of my friends leave ahead of me, gliding along on their skis. "Let's go!" they shout and take off downhill, leaving a zigzagging trail behind them as they descend the magnificent mountainside.

I press on the accelerator, and the snowmobile accelerates smoothly. As I start downhill behind the skiers, I see the beautiful landscape, covered with snow and evergreens. Farther down I see wooden cabins, and in the distance a valley bathed in sunlight.

Fearlessly I accelerate, and my friends greet me with shouts as I pass first one, then another, and finally the third. I head toward the pine trees that appear in my path, dodging between them with impeccable movements. Deciding to go even faster, I press the accelerator to the floor and feel the tremendous power of the turbines. Pine trees flash by like blurred shadows as swirling snow floats behind in a fine white cloud. The freezing wind stretches the skin of my face taut, and I can barely keep my lips together.

Ahead I see a wooden shelter that rapidly grows larger, and on either side of it is a ski-jump covered with snow. Without hesitating I head straight for the ramp on the left. In an instant I'm on it, and as I speed down the ramp I switch off the engines to prevent a fire upon landing.

Taking off, I'm catapulted upward in a fantastic flight, hearing only the roar of the wind as I begin to fall an enormous distance.

Approaching the snow, I can see that my angle of descent exactly matches the slope, and I touch down delicately on the smooth surface. Restarting the engines, I accelerate as I approach the valley floor.

I begin to apply the brakes, and raising my goggles, head slowly toward the hotel complex, from which a number of chairlifts carry skiers back up the mountainside.

Finally I enter a flat expanse of snow near the hotel. Ahead on my right I notice the black mouth of what looks like a train tunnel. Slowly I head toward it, crossing through pools of melted snow. Reaching the mouth of the tunnel, I check for train tracks or tire marks, but do not see any. Even so, I realize that large trucks may use it—perhaps it is a snowplow depot.

Whatever its purpose, I enter the tunnel cautiously. It is dimly lit, so I turn on the headlight. In the powerful beam I can see a straight road extending a great distance ahead of me. I speed up, and the sound of the jets reverberates as their echoes intermingle. Ahead I see that the tunnel curves, but instead of slowing down I go even faster—when I reach the curve, I slide up the wall and then down again without mishap.

Next the road descends, and farther on twists upward, forming a huge spiral like a corkscrew or a coil in some immense spring. I accelerate, heading down at first and then up again—realizing for

an instant I'm speeding along the ceiling—only to descend in a long arc onto a level road once more.

Slowing down, I get ready to go down a drop as steep as on a roller coaster. I begin to plunge down the almost vertical incline. Gradually I apply the brakes, and finally slow down as I reach the bottom.

Now I see I'm coming to a narrow bridge that stretches through an endless void. On either side of the bridge there is utter darkness. Very slowly I follow the road straight onto the bridge, which is no wider than the snowmobile. I feel safe, however, because the bridge is solid. Looking ahead as far as the beam of the headlight extends, the road appears like a taut thread, completely removed from any ceiling, any floor, any wall, separated from everything by unfathomable distances. (*)

I stop the vehicle, intrigued by the effect of this scene. Calmly I begin to imagine different perils—the bridge breaking and myself falling into the void. Then I picture an enormous spider descending its thick silk thread, lowering itself toward me as if I were only a tiny fly. Finally I imagine a colossal cave-in, and long tentacles rising toward me from out of the inky depths. (*)

Though these scenes are frightening, I find that I have the inner strength to conquer my fears. So once again I try to imagine something dangerous or terrifying, and lose myself in these thoughts. (*)

Having faced these challenges, and feeling strengthened by this test I've imposed on myself, I restart the engines and accelerate. I finish crossing the bridge and come to a tunnel like the one I first entered. Traveling swiftly, I ascend a long slope until I reach ground level.

I see a circle of daylight that grows larger, until finally I shoot straight out onto the open expanse of the hotel complex.

Slowing down, I carefully avoid the people walking around me. I drive very slowly until I reach the far side of the area where it connects to the ski slopes.

Lowering my goggles, I begin to accelerate so I'll be going fast enough when I start up the mountain to reach the summit where my journey began—I go faster and faster, and then faster still.

I climb up the slope at the same breathtaking speed I had on my way down. I see the wooden shelter and the ski jumps rushing toward me, but realize that now the vertical wall below the ski jumps blocks my path to the slope above. Veering left, I pass beside the ski jumps and the wall, and continue up the slope.

Pine trees flash by like blurred shadows, as swirling snow floats behind in a fine white cloud.

Up ahead my three friends have stopped, and I see them greeting me with ski poles held high. I circle around them, covering them with a shower of snow, and continue up the mountain. When I reach the summit, I come to a stop and switch off the turbines. Removing my goggles, I unbuckle the seatbelt and climb out of the snowmobile, hardly feeling cold at all. I stretch my legs and then my whole body. On foot once more, I head down the magnificent mountainside. I see the evergreens, and far off in the distance like a tiny irregular dot, I can see the hotel complex.

I enjoy the fresh mountain air and the sun warming the skin on my face, and I feel a strong sense of having gained greater control over my body. (*)

The Chimney Sweep

I'm sitting in a room beside someone I've just met. I feel that he's completely trustworthy, however, for I can sense that he has all the qualities of a good advisor—kindness, wisdom, and strength. Notwithstanding these qualities, many people call him by the picturesque nickname “the Chimney Sweep.”

I have come to consult the Chimney Sweep about some personal problems, and he tells me that I have so much inner tension it would be advisable to do a “cleansing” exercise.

The Chimney Sweep is very discreet, and because he is sitting beside me and not staring at me, I feel comfortable in expressing myself openly. It doesn't take long for us to establish a close rapport.

He asks me to relax completely and loosen any muscular tensions I may have. He helps me by placing his hands on my forehead, and then on the various muscles of my face. (*)

Gently taking my head in his hands, he rocks it left and right, forward and backward, helping me loosen my neck and shoulders. He emphasizes how important it is for me to relax my eyes and jaw. (*)

Next the Chimney Sweep recommends that I relax the muscles in my body—first my chest and stomach muscles, and then the muscles of my back. (*)

He explains that he hasn't been concerned with the tensions in my limbs because, he assures me, my arms and legs will relax by themselves as a result of what I've already done. He suggests that I let my body go limp, like rubber, becoming warm and heavy until I feel a pleasant, floating sensation. (*)

Now the Chimney Sweep says to me, “Let's get right to the point. Tell me about this problem that's been bothering you so much, and tell me everything, right down to the last detail. Remember that I'm not here to judge you, but to help you. I'm your instrument, and not the other way around.” (*)

“Think of something that you would never dream of telling anyone else, no matter what,” he continues. (*)

“Now,” he says, “begin to tell me all about it.” (*)

“If you want to you can go ahead and tell me anything else it would do you good to get off your chest. Don't worry about the way you express yourself, and let your emotions flow freely.” (*)

After a while the Chimney Sweep rises and picks up a very long, slightly curved pair of forceps. Standing in front of me he says, “Open your mouth!” When I do, I feel him insert the long instrument into my mouth, and it seems to reach all the way down into my stomach. To my surprise, however, I find that it's not too uncomfortable.

Suddenly he shouts, “I've caught it!” And little by little he begins pulling out the forceps. At first it feels like something is tearing apart inside of me. But then I feel a pleasant tingling sensation, as if something malignant is being pulled loose from my lungs and internal organs, something that has been stuck there for a long, long time. (*)

As he continues withdrawing the forceps, I'm amazed to feel coming out of my mouth a sweetish, foul-smelling, and slimy creature, writhing in the grasp of the forceps. Finally the Chimney Sweep places this disgusting creature into a clear jar, and I experience enormous relief, like an internal purification of my body.

Standing up, I'm left speechless as I watch this repugnant “thing” begin to melt, turning into a shapeless, gelatinous mass. Within moments all that's left is a dark liquid. Then the liquid turns

clear and evaporates, escaping invisibly into the air. In less than a minute the jar is left perfectly clean.

“Now you can see,” says the Chimney Sweep, “why we call this procedure ‘cleansing.’ All in all, today hasn’t been so bad. A little daily difficulty mixed with a bit of embarrassment, a dose of betrayal, and a dash of guilty conscience. The result—a little monster that prevented you from sleeping well, digesting your food, and from doing other good things. You should see the enormous monsters I sometimes extract. Oh, and don’t worry if you feel an unpleasant sensation for a little while. Now I bid you farewell.”

Descent

We're in a boat at anchor on the sea. We begin to hoist the anchor, only to discover that it's caught fast. Telling my companions I'll go see what's wrong, I climb down a short ladder and enter the calm water.

Diving down, I see a school of small fish, the hull of the boat, and the anchor chain. I swim over to the chain and begin using it to pull myself down.

I notice that I can breathe normally, and continue to follow the chain down until I reach the dimly lit bottom. Here I find the anchor, but it's entangled in some metal wreckage. Grasping the chain, I pull sharply upward and see the bottom give way, raising a hidden cover to reveal a square opening. Entering the opening, I continue going down. (*)

I swim deeper and deeper until I feel a cold underwater current, and I swim in the direction of the current. After a while I come to a wall that is covered with patches of seaweed. Staying close to the smooth surface, I float upward, and notice that everything is becoming lighter. (*)

I emerge in a pool of water within a dimly lit cavern. Climbing out onto a kind of platform, I take a few steps and discover a stone stairway. Cautiously I begin to descend the stairs.

I see burning torches placed at regular intervals along the small passageway, which becomes even narrower as I go down the slippery steps. The stairs are almost vertical, and the air feels humid and suffocating. (*)

Now I come to an iron gate that blocks my way. I push against the rusty bars and the gate creaks open. Here the steps end and now there is only a muddy ramp. As I pick my way down the slick surface, a dank tomb-like odor fills the air. (*)

A sudden gust of wind threatens to extinguish the torches. At the bottom I can hear the roar of an angry sea crashing against the rocks. I begin to have doubts that I'll ever be able to get back.

Whistling loudly, the wind blows out the bottom torch, and I set out to climb back up, resisting my rising fears.

Slowly I ascend the muddy ramp until I reach the rusty gate—but again I find it is closed. Pulling open the gate, I wearily continue climbing the nearly vertical stairs, while behind me the torches keep going out. The stone stairs become increasingly slippery and I must step carefully.

At length I reach the cavern. I step onto the platform and submerge myself in the pool of water, just as the final torch is extinguished.

It is pitch black. Brushing against the smooth, seaweed-covered surface, I descend into the depths once more. (*)

Feeling the cold current, I swim against it with great effort. (*)

I escape the current, and swim upward until I encounter a stone ceiling—then I search in every direction to find the square opening. (*)

At last I find the opening, and swim upward through it. Freeing the anchor from where it is caught, I plant my feet on top of it and pull on the chain to alert my companions.

I ride up on the anchor as they hoist it from above. While I'm rising toward the surface, I observe a fascinating rainbow of ocean life, and all around me the underwater space grows lighter.

Finally I reach the surface. Letting go of the anchor chain and grasping the ladder of the boat, I climb aboard to the cheers and greetings of my friends. (*)

Ascent

It is daytime when I enter the house and slowly begin climbing the stairs. I reach the second floor, and continue going upstairs until I come outside onto the flat rooftop. High overhead is a water tank atop a tower.

I see the metal spiral staircase that I must climb to reach the top of the water tank—but there is no handrail. Calmly I go up the spiral stairs.

Reaching the top of the tank, I stand up. The base of the tower is narrow and the whole structure sways with each gust of wind, but I maintain my footing. (*)

Venturing over to the edge of the tank, I look down and see the roof of the house beneath me. I'm drawn toward the empty space below, but I catch myself and continue looking down. Then I let my gaze wander over the landscape around me. (*)

Suddenly a helicopter appears overhead. As it approaches, I see a rope ladder with wooden rungs being lowered toward me. Grasping the ladder, I place both feet on the lowest rung, and slowly the ladder rises as the helicopter ascends. Below me the water tank grows smaller and smaller. (*)

I climb up the ladder until I reach the door of the helicopter. When I try to open it, I find that it's stuck. Then I look down. (*)

Suddenly the metal door slides open and the young pilot reaches out a hand to me. I climb into the helicopter, and we begin to gain altitude rapidly.

A voice announces that we're experiencing engine failure. I hear the grinding of broken gears and the main rotor stops—we begin falling, faster and faster.

The crew members pass me a parachute, and they leap out into space.

I'm perched in the edge of the doorway as the helicopter plunges earthward at a dizzying speed.

I make up my mind to jump, and fall face downward. I'm falling so fast it's difficult to breathe. I pull the ripcord, and the parachute streams upward in a long sheet overhead. With a strong jolt it opens, I bounce, and my fall slows dramatically.

I must land on top of the water tank, or else I'll fall into the high-tension wires, or the tops of the pine trees that await me like sharpened stakes. I maneuver the parachute by pulling on the canopy lines—fortunately I'm aided by the wind. (*)

The parachute envelops me as I land on top of the water tank and roll to the edge. Freeing myself, I see the parachute fall in a tangle. I get to my feet, and slowly begin to descend the spiral stairs.

When I reach the rooftop, I go down to the second floor, and unhurriedly continue going downstairs until I reach the room I first entered.

Once more on the ground floor of the house, I walk to the door, open it, and leave.

The Costumes

I find myself standing naked in a nudist camp, and I can feel that I'm being closely observed by men and women of various ages.

Someone tells me these people are studying me because it's obvious to them I have certain problems. This person suggests that I cover up my body, so I put on a hat and some shoes. As soon as I do, the nudists lose interest in me.

I'm expected at a party soon, so I finish dressing and leave the nudist camp.

As I enter a large house, in the hallway I meet a fashionably dressed gentleman. He informs me that this is a costume party, and that to enter the ballroom I must be appropriately dressed. He directs my attention to one side, where I see a dressing room that is filled with unusual masks and costumes of every kind. Taking my time, I begin to choose carefully among them.

Before me are several mirrors set at angles, and as I try on different masks and costumes, I can see myself from all sides. First I try on the costume and the mask that look worst on me. (*)

Then I try on the best costume and the best mask, and study myself from all angles. Any imperfection I see is immediately corrected, until my whole costume is perfectly coordinated. (*)

Resplendent, I make my entrance into the grand ballroom where the party is going on. The room is filled with people, and all of them are wearing masks and costumes.

A hush falls over the crowd, and then everyone applauds my perfect costume. Urging me to go up on stage, they call for me to sing and dance—and so I do. (*)

Next the audience demands that I take off my mask and repeat my performance, but just as I'm about to, I realize I'm dressed in that hideous costume I tried on first. To make matters worse, my face is now exposed—I feel ugly and ridiculous. Nevertheless I sing and dance before the crowd, enduring their scornful jeers and whistles. (*)

Leaping onto the stage, a brash musketeer jostles and insults me. To his dismay, I begin to transform into an animal.

I continue changing into different animals, but always keeping my own face. First I am a dog, then a bird, and finally an enormous toad. (*)

At this point a chess piece, a rook, comes over to me and says, "You should be ashamed of yourself, frightening the children this way!" I return to my normal appearance, dressed in my usual clothing.

Now I find that I'm growing smaller—already I've shrunk to the size of a small child.

Stepping down from the stage, I look up at the enormous costumed people peering down at me from above. All the while, I continue growing smaller. (*)

Screaming hysterically, a woman cries out that I'm an insect. But just as she's about to squash me with her foot, I shrink to microscopic size. (*)

Quickly I grow back to the size of a child, and then to my normal size. I continue growing larger and larger while the crowd around me scatters, running in all directions.

My head now reaches the ceiling and I look down on everything from above. (*)

Recognizing the woman who tried to squash me, I pick her up in one hand and set her down on the stage as she screams hysterically.

Returning to my normal size, I decide to leave the party.

When I reach the hallway, I see a mirror that completely distorts my appearance. Then I rub the surface until the mirror reflects back to me that beautiful image I have always longed for. (*)

Giving my regards to the dapper fellow at the entrance, I leave the house at peace with myself.

The Clouds

In total darkness I hear a voice that says, “In the beginning there was neither being nor nonbeing. There was neither air nor sky above, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. There were neither human beings nor animals, not even one bird, fish, or crab, no stones, caves, or cliffs, no prairies or forests. There were neither galaxies nor atoms—nor were there department stores. Then you were born, and sound and light began, and heat and cold, and rough and smooth.”

The voice falls silent, and I become aware that I’m going up the escalator in a huge department store.

I pass by several floors, and then I see the roof of the building opening above me. Slowly and effortlessly the escalator carries me up into the clear sky.

Down below I can see the building, looking very small. The sky is a deep blue. I feel the pleasant rippling of my clothes in the breeze, and with great serenity I take deep breaths of the fresh air.

Passing through a layer of fine mist, I encounter a sea of very white clouds.

The escalator gradually levels out, and I begin to walk on it as if it were a sidewalk. I move forward, and realize I’m walking on a floor of clouds.

I can walk without effort, and gravity is so weak that I can leap long distances. Taking advantage of this, I flip head over heels, landing on my back and rebounding as if bouncing on a huge trampoline. I seem to move in slow motion, with perfect freedom. (*)

I hear the voice of an old friend greeting me, and see my friend running gracefully toward me. Coming together in an embrace, we roll over and over, bouncing and tumbling, laughing and singing. (*)

Finally we sit down, and my friend takes out a retractable fishing rod and extends it. For tackle, instead of a hook we tie on a horseshoe-shaped magnet. Then we let out the line, and the magnet descends through the floor of clouds.

After a while the pole begins to jerk and my friend exclaims, “I think we’ve caught something good!” Immediately we begin to reel in the line, and soon a large tray emerges, stuck to the magnet. The tray is filled with all kinds of food and drink, and everything is exquisitely arranged. Setting down the tray, we prepare for a great feast.

Every dish I taste has a delicious flavor. Even more remarkably, we can eat everything we want without gaining weight, and the food never runs out. All we have to do is wish, and new dishes appear to replace any we have eaten. I begin helping myself to all my favorite kinds of food, savoring every mouthful. (*)

At last, completely satisfied, we lie back on the soft mattress of clouds, enjoying an incredible sensation of well-being. (*)

My body feels warm and soft and completely relaxed, as gentle thoughts wander through my mind. (*)

I notice that I feel no sense of hurry or restlessness or any desire at all. I feel I have all the time in the world for myself. (*)

In this state of complete fulfillment and well-being, I recall the problems I had in everyday life. I feel able to handle these problems without undue tension, and clear objective solutions appear to me. (*)

After a while I hear my friend say, “It’s time for us to return.”

Standing up and taking a few steps, I realize I'm on the escalator again. It begins to slope gently downward, passing through the floor of clouds. I feel a fine mist as I begin going back down to the earth.

Approaching the building, the escalator enters the roof. As I descend past the different floors of the department store, all around me I see people worriedly trying to choose which objects they will buy.

I close my eyes and hear a voice say, "Then there was no fear, no worry, no desire, for time did not exist." (*)

To and Fro

In a large, well-lit room, I walk a few steps to the door, open it, and go slowly down a hallway. Entering a door on my right, I discover a new hallway and begin walking down it. Entering a door on my left, I continue on. Entering a new door on my left, I continue walking. Then I go through still another door on my left and continue on.

Slowly retracing my steps, I return to the room where I began. (*)

On the right side of the room is a large sliding-glass door that opens onto a garden. Opening the door, I step outside. On the ground is a device that supports a steel wire, suspending it a short distance off the ground. The wire follows an erratic, zigzag path. Stepping onto the wire, I balance myself, taking one step, then another; without difficulty I walk along the straight sections, as well as the wire's twists and turns.

Walking backwards, I retrace my steps to the starting point. (*)

Stepping down from the wire, I return to the large room, where I find a full-length mirror. As I walk slowly toward the mirror, I observe that logically my image comes toward me. I keep going until I can touch the mirror. Then, still facing the mirror, I back away from it, observing that my image also moves away.

Again I approach the mirror until I can touch it, but this time discover that my image is moving *away* from me, until it disappears. Then I see my image coming toward me, walking backwards. It stops before reaching the mirror, turns on its heel, and comes the rest of the way toward me.

I go outside onto a courtyard made up of large tiles. In the center of the courtyard is a large armchair positioned precisely on top of a black tile. All the other tiles are white. Somehow I know that this chair has the power to move by itself—always facing the same way—in any of the four directions. Settling into the chair I say, “Three tiles forward.” The chair moves three tiles forward. Then I say, “Four to the right. Two back. Two to the left. One back. Two to the left.” And we end up on the black tile.

Now I say, “Three back. One to the right. One back. Four to the right. Four forward. Five to the left.” We end up on the black tile.

Finally I say, “Three to the left. Two back. One forward. Two to the right. Three back. One to the right. Four forward.” Again we end up where we started.

Getting up from the chair, I leave the house. As I stand in the middle of a large highway without a car in sight, I see someone I like very much coming straight toward me, until we're so close we're almost touching. (*)

The person then moves away, receding into the distance and finally disappearing. (*)

I see someone I dislike intensely coming toward me until we're very close to each other. (*)

This person also moves away, receding into the distance and finally disappearing. (*)

Sitting down, I recall a very unpleasant scene in which I'm in front of other people. I walk away from them. (*)

Finally I recall a situation in which I'm having a lot of fun. I walk away from this situation, too. (*)

The Miner

It is very early in the morning, and a light drizzle is falling from the leaden skies. I'm dressed as a miner, and standing with other miners as we wait for the mine elevator to arrive.

In the distance I see the black silhouette of the factory with its blast furnaces glowing. The chimneys belch fire, and smoke rises in thick columns. Above the slow and distant rhythm of the machinery, I hear a shrill siren that marks the change of shift.

I see the elevator coming up slowly. With a heavy shudder it stops at my feet, and we move forward until we're standing inside on the metal floor. The gate slides shut, and amid the murmur of voices we begin going down.

In the dim light of the elevator I can see the rocky wall passing by very close to me. As we descend, the air grows warmer and turns quite stale.

We stop at a tunnel, and most of the miners get out here. When the gate closes again only four or five of us are left. We continue to descend until we stop at another tunnel, where the rest of the miners get off the elevator. I continue going down alone.

Finally with a crash the elevator comes to a stop. I pull open the gate and step off, entering a dimly lit tunnel. I can hear the noise of the elevator as it goes back up.

Ahead I see a mining car that runs on tracks. I climb in, start the motor, and begin moving slowly through the tunnel.

I stop the car at the end of the tracks. Climbing out, I switch on the light on my helmet and begin to unload the tools.

As I listen to the distant echoes of hydraulic drills and jackhammers, suddenly I hear a faint, stifled human cry—I realize someone is trapped! Quickly I seize a pick and sling a coil of rope over my shoulder. Abandoning the rest of the tools, I advance resolutely through the tunnel. As the tunnel narrows, I leave the electric lights far behind, and now have only the light on my helmet to guide me. From time to time I stop to listen for the direction of the cry.

Nearing the end of the tunnel, I must walk hunched over. Just ahead, in a recent excavation, the tunnel comes to an end—some loose debris tells me there has been a cave-in. Water trickles down around the rocks and broken wooden beams. The floor is a quagmire, and my boots sink into the sticky mud.

Using my pick, I begin to clear away the rocks. Soon I uncover a narrow hole that goes into the wall. While I'm trying to figure out how I can possibly squeeze into it, I distinctly hear the cries—the trapped miner must be very near.

Wedging the handle of the pick between two large rocks, I tie one end of the rope to it. Passing the other end around my waist, I fasten it securely with a buckle.

With great difficulty I manage to wriggle headfirst into the tight opening. Dragging myself forward on my elbows, I crawl slowly down the steep incline. By the light on my helmet I can see that the passage narrows until it closes off. The heat and humidity are so stifling that I can hardly breathe. (*)

Thick mud flows down around my feet, slowly covering my legs and oozing stickily under my chest. I realize that this narrow hole will soon be completely filled with mud.

I press upward, but my back hits solid rock. I try backing up—it's now impossible. Again I hear the plaintive voice very close by. (*)

Suddenly I yell at the top of my lungs as the floor gives way beneath me, dragging me down in its collapse—

I plunge downward until a sharp jerk on the rope at my waist abruptly breaks my fall; I'm left dangling absurdly at the end of the rope like some muddy pendulum.

My fall has been stopped just above a carpeted floor, and I see before me an elegant room flooded with light. I glimpse some sort of laboratory filled with enormous bookshelves, but my predicament is so pressing that I'm completely absorbed in trying to free myself.

With my left hand I grasp the taut rope above; with my right hand I release the buckle fastening the rope around my waist, and tumble softly onto the carpet.

"What manners, my friend, what manners!" says a high-pitched voice behind me. I spin around and stop short.

Standing before me is a little man, scarcely taller than my knee. Except for his slightly pointed ears, he could be described as very well-proportioned. He is dressed in bright colors, yet in the unmistakable style of a miner.

I feel at once ridiculous and dismayed when he offers me a glass of punch. It's quite refreshing, however, so I drink it straight down.

Now the little man cups his hands before his mouth and makes the plaintive cry I recognize so well. On hearing it I'm outraged, and demand to know just what he means by tricking me this way. To my bewilderment, he replies that thanks to this trick, in the future my digestion will be much improved.

This extraordinary little character goes on to explain to me how the rope squeezing my waist and stomach during my fall has done me a world of good, as did the journey I made through the tunnel crawling on my elbows. He concludes his strange remarks by asking me whether the expression, "You are in the bowels of the earth," means anything to me.

I answer that this is just a figure of speech, but the little man assures me that in this case it holds a great truth. Then he adds, "You are in your own bowels. When something goes wrong in their viscera, people can think all kinds of crazy thoughts. In turn, these negative thoughts can harm their internal organs. So from now on you must take good care of yourself in this regard. If you don't, I'll begin walking around, and you'll feel sharp pangs and all kinds of internal discomfort. And I have colleagues who are in charge of other parts of your body like your lungs, your heart, and so on."

Having said this, the little man begins walking around on the walls and ceiling. As he does so, I feel twinges of discomfort near my stomach, liver, and kidneys. (*)

Afterwards the little man sprays me from head to toe with a stream of water from a golden hose, thoroughly cleansing me of all the mud, and in an instant I'm dry. I stretch out on a spacious sofa and begin to relax. Rhythmically the little man passes a soft brush over my waist and abdomen, producing a remarkable sensation of relaxation in these areas. I realize that when discomfort is relieved in my stomach, liver, and kidneys, my ideas and feelings change for the better. (*)

I feel a strong vibration, and find myself back in the elevator, rising toward the surface of the earth.

Notes to the Book

Notes To Part One

I. The Child

The painting through which the reader enters the amusement park is inspired by the first card of the *Tarocchi*. This card bears the image of the Magician, who has always been associated with the inversion of reality, sleight of hand, and trickery. He is related to the prestidigitator, and opens a vein of irrationality that allows the reader to enter that dimension of wonder so helpful in awakening childhood memories.

II. An Enemy

The “paralysis” that dominates a good part of this tale enables the reader to recreate situations in which certain emotions lose their previous intensity as a result of slowing down the movement of the corresponding image. In this way a climate of reconciliation can be generated, and we note that the “forgiver” ends up in a better situation than the “offender,” who previously had the initiative.

III. My Greatest Mistake

The scene with firemen as agents of justice and executioners is inspired by Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*. In the present narrative, this image is used as a contrast to the sentence of dying of thirst in the desert. A similar contrast highlights the absurdity of the trial, when the accused, instead of speaking in self-defense to “discharge” the supposed guilt, takes a drink, “charging” his or her mouth with a swallow of water.

The court clerk’s concluding remark, “What I have spoken, I have spoken!” echoes the words of Pilate, recalling that other surrealistic trial.

The Elders who personify the hours are inspired by D. H. Lawrence’s *Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation*.

The glasses that invert things are well-known in experimental psychology and have been cited by, among others, Merleau-Ponty in *The Structure of Behavior*.

V. My Ideal

The image of the giant is inspired by Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. The children’s song recalls the festivals of the Basque people and the songs that accompany their parades of floats and giant effigies with oversized heads.

The holographic image is reminiscent of the projections in Arthur C. Clarke’s *Childhood’s End*.

The theme of the search for one’s “ideal” and the injunction, “Do not look behind you,” allude to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in Hades.

VI. Resentment

The plot is set in a classical context, although the initial scenes of the city recall Venice or

perhaps Amsterdam.

The recital by the first chorus is an adaptation of the Orphic Hymn to Thanatos or Death, which reads as follows:

TO THANATOS

Hear me you who steer the course of all mortals
and give holy time to all ahead of whom you lie.
Your sleep tears the soul free from the body's hold
when you undo nature's tenacious bonds,
bringing long and eternal slumber to the living.
Common to all, you are unjust to some
when you bring a swift end to youthful life at its peak.
In you alone is the verdict common to all executed,
for to prayers and entreaties you alone are deaf.
But, O blessed one, with sacrifices and pious vows
I beg you to grant long life,
that old age might be a noble prize among men.

The recital by the second chorus is based on the Orphic Hymn to Mnemosyne, which reads:

TO MNEMOSYNE

I call upon queen Mnemosyne, Zeus' consort,
who gave birth to the holy, sacred and clear-voiced Muses.
Evil oblivion that harms the mind is alien to her
who gives coherence to the mind and soul of mortals.
She increases men's ability and power to think,
and, sweet and vigilant, she reminds us of all
the thoughts that we always store in our breasts,
never straying, and ever rousing the mind to action.
But, O blessed goddess, for the initiates stir the memory
of the sacred rite, and ward off oblivion from them.

The specter in this guided experience concludes its dialogue by saying, "I must be gone, for the firefly's fading glow shows that dawn is near. Farewell, farewell. Remember me!" This is inspired by Act I, Scene v of Hamlet, in which the ghost of Hamlet's father reveals to the Prince the identity of the person who murdered him by means of poison.

The boat in this narrative, which is also a hearse, recalls the root of the word carnival, *carrus navalis* (the author believes this etymology to be more accurate than what is generally reported). To this day the black carriages or vehicles used as hearses are often covered with flowers and adorned with large oysters or shells, recalling the final voyage across the water in Greek mythology. The floral displays and the waters of the Roman festival of Lupercalia share this same origin. In the present tale, we find disguises and transformations through which, by the conclusion of the story, the somber Charon has become the young driver of the speedboat returning from the island of the dead.

This narrative embodies a strikingly rich and complex play of images in which each element

deserves individual study: The immobile sea, the boat suspended above the water, the burning cloak, the choruses of women and cypresses (which evoke an atmosphere of Greek islands and cemeteries), and so on.

VII. The Protector of Life

The figure of the Protector of Life is inspired by the twenty-first card of the Tarot. The image in the *Tarocchi* is closer to the figure of this guided experience than are the images of the first compilation of Court de Gebelin, the Tarot of the Bohemians, or the pseudo Egyptian Tarot. Regarding *Anima Mundis*, known as “The World” in the Tarot, there is an illuminating engraving in the work by Robert Fludd, *Utriusque Cosmi Maioris Scilicet et Minoris, Metaphysica, Physica atque Technica Historia*, first published in 1617. Jung also refers to this archetype in his *Psychology of the Unconscious: A Study of the Transformations and Symbolisms of the Libido*.

Nor have these virgins of the grottos been overlooked by the religions. In this sense the Protector of Life is a virgin of the grottos, with elements from Greek paganism, such as her crown of flowers and the fawn that licks her hand, bringing to mind Artemis or her Roman counterpart Diana. One need only exchange her crown of flowers for one of stars, or place her feet atop a half moon to be in the presence of a virgin of the grottos, but now as part of the heritage of the new religions that displaced paganism.

The plot is set in a tropical locale instead of the classical setting one might expect for a virgin of the grottos, accentuating the rather singular circumstances of this story. The qualities of the water that the protagonist drinks recall the life-giving waters of the fountain of youth. All of these elements move toward the same end—encouraging a reconciliation with one’s own body.

VIII. The Rescue

The overall eeriness of the plot is achieved through the ambiguity of time (“I’m unsure whether the day is just beginning or night is falling”); the contrast of place (“I see that the robot stands at the dividing line between two distinct areas—the one I’m coming from, barren and dying, and the one ahead, full of vegetation and life”); the inability to communicate with other people and the Babel-like confusion of tongues (“I ask my companion what is happening. Looking at me furtively, he answers in a strange language, ‘Rex voluntas’”); and finally by leaving the protagonist at the mercy of uncontrollable forces (heat, earthquakes, strange astronomical phenomena, polluted water, a climate of war, an armed giant robot, and so on).

Owing to these devices, a person emerging from this chaotic space-time is able to reflect carefully upon less catastrophic aspects of his or her own life, and thus formulate solid proposals for the future.

The four threatening clouds have as a co-present reference the apocalypse of the Revelation of St. John the Divine 6:2—8:

2 And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

3 And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see.

4 And there went out another horse *that was* red: and *power* was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

5 And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.

6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and *see* thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

7 And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see.

8 And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. . . .

IX. False Hopes

This guided experience opens with elements from Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. Inscribed on the lintel over the famous portal, Dante and Virgil read:

Through me you enter the woeful city,
Through me you enter eternal grief,
Through me you enter among the lost
Justice moved my high maker:
The Divine Power made me,
The Supreme Wisdom, and the Primal Love.
Before me nothing was created
If not eternal, and eternal I endure.
Abandon every hope, you who enter.

XI. The Voyage

The rapid motion of the bubble recalls the journey so splendidly recounted by Olaf Stapledon in *Star Maker*.

We also find a reference to the Doppler effect, in which the color of the stars changes with increasing velocity: "I feel our velocity increasing, and the clear white light of the stars changes color until all the stars have disappeared in total darkness."

Here we encounter a curious consideration: "As if propelled by a giant slingshot, we shoot straight upward into the sky. I think we're heading toward the star Beta Hydris or perhaps the galaxy NGC 3621." We clearly understand in this context that the bubble ascends straight upward. Why, then, are these cosmic directions noted? Since the sun is setting at the moment being described ("Toward the abyss it is already night. Toward the plain the last rays of the sun escape in multiple hues"), this is sufficient to tell us the local time at which the event takes place.

This book was written in mid-1980 (that is, around June 30), at longitude 69° west and latitude 33° south; for this date and location, the local time at sunset was 7:00 P.M. (four hours behind Greenwich Mean Time). At sunset, at elevation 90° (the point directly over the bubble toward which it is heading), we would see a sky between the southern constellations Crux and Corvus and near Antlia in which several celestial bodies could easily be discerned. Among these, the most outstanding would be the star Beta Hydris and the galaxy NGC 3621.

However the author does not specify which of these celestial bodies the bubble is heading toward, although Beta Hydris is at azimuth 125° 28' west, elevation 87° 35', right ascension 11h 52m 0s, and declination -34° 23', while NGC 3621 is at 92° 08' west, elevation 80° 43', 11h 17m 3s, and -32° 52'. To be precise, the direction of the bubble would actually be closer to Beta Hydris (number 103.192 in the Draper catalog, magnitude 4.3, spectral class B9, variable, 326 light years distant), whereas NGC 3621 (a spiral galaxy some 16 million light years away) would be rather more to one side. Perhaps the author's hesitation in deciding on Beta Hydris lay in the fact that the

galaxy NGC 3621 is the more beautiful celestial body, so why not choose it as a destination instead? Among all the oddities that appear in these guided experiences, such astronomical license should not be too ill-received.

Regarding the body in motion, the guided experience reads as follows:

I walk onward until I come to a flat area. In the center I see a large object, alive with movement, and impossible to capture with my eye as it flows endlessly into itself; regardless of which direction I look on its surface my gaze always ends up immersed, drawn deep into the object's interior. Feeling dizzy, I look away.

Clearly this description alludes to those topological constructions of modern geometry that are represented or modeled as “enveloping” objects that flow into themselves. By putting this kind of object into motion, the author produces a disconcerting effect. Remembering Escher's woodcut engraving of a Möbius strip helps us approach the central idea: Escher's work, though static, gives the sensation of paradoxical surface and perception. Hofstadter, in *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*, explains:

Implicit in the concept of Strange Loops is the concept of infinity, since what else is a loop but a way of representing an endless process in a finite way? And infinity plays a large role in many of Escher's drawings. Copies of one single theme often fit into each other, forming visual analogues to the canons of Bach.

According to this, the object that appears in this guided experience is an endless loop “flowing into itself.”

XII. The Festival

In *Heaven and Hell*, Huxley remarked:

For most of us most of the time, the world of everyday experience seems rather dim and drab. But for a few people often, and for a fair number occasionally, some of the brightness of visionary experience spills over, as it were, into common seeing, and the everyday universe is transfigured.

What follows is the point of view of a psychologist who delved deeply into this guided experience, meditating on it while another person read it aloud: “I saw that a state of ‘heightened perception’ could be induced without resorting to drugs or other more or less dissociative procedures like sleep deprivation, fasting or very low-calorie diets, hyperventilation, sensory deprivation in isolation tanks where you're immersed in darkness and immobility, experimentally or religiously induced trances, and so forth. To me this represents a great advance, both because of how innocuous it is and because of the possibilities it offers the researcher investigating special states of consciousness.

“Furthermore, why couldn't we make use of the guided experiences as therapeutic tools in professional practice? Although it has been explained to me that they were not conceived with this intention, I would hope that this possibility is not overlooked. Moreover, in the field of social psychology, perhaps an important number of people who now resort to drugs or alcohol as a panacea could find guidance through making use of the guided experiences.

“These are my professional concerns. As for me personally, perhaps because this guided

experience had such a strong impact on me, this material has opened a new area of study about myself that wouldn't have occurred to me only a few hours ago."

Notes To Part Two

VI. The Costumes

Numerous elements in this guided experience bring to mind Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. We recall the expansions and contractions of this passage:

"Well, I'll eat it," said Alice, "and if it makes me grow larger, I can reach the key; and if it makes me grow smaller, I can creep under the door; so either way I'll get into the garden, and I don't care which happens!"

She ate a little bit, and said anxiously to herself, "Which way? Which way?", holding her hand on top of her head to feel which way it was growing.

And we note the transformations of space in this passage:

"Let's pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze, so that we can get through. Why, it's turning into a sort of mist now, I declare! It'll be easy enough to get through."

Similarly, in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, we encounter images transformed through reflection in a watery form of the magical mirrors that occur so frequently in universal mythology. As for humans transforming into animals, an unbroken line connects the most ancient traditions with Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. These themes, then, are widely known, yet this guided experience still proves to be highly original. It would seem, as Plato reminds us in the *Phaedrus*, that the best writings serve in reality to awaken the memory of that which we already know.

VII. The Clouds

This story bears the name of Aristophanes' comedy, first performed in 423 B.C. Throughout the guided experience, there is a lighthearted, playful background in homage to the spirit of the original Greek work.

The voice heard at the beginning of this story incorporates into a single passage elements inspired by *[from]* the genesis passages of three important works. The opening is inspired by the "Hymn of Creation" of the *Rig Veda*, which reads, "Neither nonbeing nor being was as yet, neither was airy space nor heavens beyond." The next phrase, "and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep," is a direct quotation from the first book of Moses (Genesis 1:2). The following sentence is reminiscent of *[was influenced by]* *[is adapted from]* the Chichicastenango manuscript of the *Popol Vuh*, the sacred Council Book of the Quiché Mayan people, which reads, "There is not yet one person, one animal, bird, fish, crab, tree, rock, hollow, canyon, meadow, forest." With the next phrase, "There were neither galaxies nor atoms," we reach the realm of present-day science journalism with its debates on the Big Bang theory. And finally, "nor were there department stores," derives, according to a note by the author, from an explanation by a four-year-old girl. Here is the anecdote in question:

“So tell me, Nancy, what was everything like before the world began?”

“There was no mommy and daddy,” the little one replied, “and no department stores, either.”

IX. The Miner

The little man of the mine is a gnome, a character from the depths who appears widely throughout European tales and legends. In this guided experience, the little character is an allegory that corresponds to the transformation of physical intrabody sensations (visceral cenesthesia) into visual images in the reader’s mind.