

The Collected Short Stories of Ultimo Reducto

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Stories Published in the Book “Stories From the Dark Side”

Original Spanish title: "Historias Desde El Lado Oscuro".

The One Who Came From the Land of the Cold¹

Her name is AL DADREV, “The One who came from the Land of the Cold.” No one remembers when She emerged for the first time; the fact is that She is here now, has always been, and always will be.

According to Her, the Land of the Cold extends far beyond the Walls, and it is so large that it has no limits. Still, no one has been there; no one has even seen it, because the Walls have no doors or windows.

It turns out to be terrible that something like this could exist, something beyond our control, something that exists by itself, something that does not require us to give its existence meaning. Something that simply is, with or without us. Just thinking about it, fear catches up with me and a chill goes right through my body.

This is why no one likes “The One who came from the Land of the Cold.” Her words, her attitude, her mere presence seem to be hard and cold as ice to us. Her way of speaking is outrageous, never expresses doubts, She is as direct and sharp as the wind sweeping away crystals of frost.

That is why, whenever “The One who came from the Cold” reappears among us, we pursue her, we despise her, we cage her, we torture her, we murder her... But She always comes back, and stays there, in the squares, in the streets, in full view of everyone, reminding us that The Cold exists, that She knows It, that The Cold is She: AL DADREV.

The Cold! What nonsense! Surely we all know that The Cold does not exist, that there are only varying degrees of heat, which depend on many things: the situation, the persons, the place, the mood, the weather, the moment...

But, what if The Cold really does exist?... No, that cannot be, it would be the end of all that we are, of all that we have created over many millennia, of our entire great civilization.

¹ Translation of a version of the original story published in *Historias desde el Lado Oscuro* (E=m.c², 2004). Copyright © 2004, E=m.c².

Some may think that AL DADREV, “The One who came from the Land of the Cold,” is a revolutionary who is trying to change the established system. But even the most dissatisfied elements and groups among us repudiate and repress Her for the same reason as the others, the icy hardness of her gestures, the white and marble coldness on her expressions, the frozen darkness that her gaze gives off, her words, sharp as icicles, and the strength and fortitude of her mood, hard and cold as metal.

No, it is not at all comfortable for us to be reminded that The Cold exists. This forces us to bear It in mind, to put on warmer clothes in order to live with It, to respect It... What nonsense! We all know that The Cold is a myth, a lie that results from the insanity of “The One who came from The Cold.”

But, if it is a lie, why does her presence bother us so much? Why don’t we stop taking AL DADREV seriously?

There is something about “The One who came from The Land of the Cold” that keeps us from forgetting her completely. Something in her, or in us, that lures us and fascinates us, that frightens and repels us; something that we all know but that we prefer to forget for convenience. What can it be?

Is it that The Cold, and not the heat, is what really exists, and that the idea of its nonexistence on which we base our lives, our cultures, our ideologies... is false? It would be terrible; an entire civilization, a whole History, all the struggles, revolutions, and wars carried out for and by the advancement of society, and even this very same society, based on an enormous lie. All an enormous lie, unmitigated, without adornments to smooth it out. All a lie!

Or, perhaps, is it that The Cold exists, but the heat does as well, and The Cold is always present, though we try to soften it by warming it up? It would not matter, even so it would mean that over millennia, we would have been deaf and blind to the existence of The Cold, and, therefore, we would have based on lies everything we have done, thought, and been. What a big error!

Perhaps this is why we do not like “The One who came from the Cold.” Because it reminds us that the heat and comfort that we seem to feel are false, that they are based on excuses and lies. Because in the back of our minds we know that what the foreigner AL DADREV says, does, is, and represents is THE TRUTH² without costumes, without clothes to conceal Her to our eyes, to make Her less cold, less hard, less uncomfortable.

Yes, what “The One who came from the Cold” brings is THE TRUTH: a huge block of ice against which collide the foundations on which we have built our society, our culture, our beliefs and ideas, our Walls, which we take as right based on the comfortable and pleasant answers they produce when trying to explain everything. But that warm calmness shatters whenever AL DADREV appears and reminds us of

² “LA VERDAD” (“THE TRUTH”) in the original text in Spanish. “AL DADREV” is an anagram for “LA VERDAD”. *Note added for the English version.*

the falsehood and weakness on which it is all based, showing us the cold face of a reality that we never wanted to accept.

“The One who came from the Cold” poses no danger to people. Her hard ways and words are by no means insulting or offensive, although many people think so, again for convenience. “The One who came from the Cold” does not imply violence and intolerance toward people. Her cold presence is not fed by hatred or vengeance. However, the Foreigner and The Cold She represents offer a threat without limits to our way of being and living, to our conscience and ideas. With the white solidity of ice She shatters, pulverizes our ideas and cultures based on the lie. Although She has never touched or despised one of us, Her mere presence embarrasses us. In fact, it is we who insult, despise, and beat Her, because we know in the depths of our minds that The Cold exists, that AL DADREV is right. This does not allow us to continue being happy. The Cold is not comfortable.

Yesterday we again killed AL DADREV, “The One who came from the Land of the Cold,” with the hope that She would no longer return. Today I feel unhappy, uncomfortable, restless. The happiness and tranquility that I felt a few days ago has disappeared, and The Cold, the intense cold, runs through my bones.

Admittedly, The Cold — THE TRUTH — isn’t anything convenient, although It is fascinating and necessary, and now I am sure that It exists, It is here. AL DADREV, “The One who came from the Land of the Cold,” has returned.

The Extinction³

He was the last wild specimen of his kind, or at least he had not seen any other, for a long time. Everyone else had been disappearing or had been progressively domesticated.

He was born quite a few years ago. When he arrived in the world he found himself immersed in an increasingly artificial medium, very different from the one for which he was biologically prepared. He often remembered his childhood and youth, when many things around him had not yet been subjected, destroyed or replaced, although by then the degree of domination to which the Earth and its inhabitants were subjected was already very big. And since then domestication and destruction had grown uninterruptedly.

Even so, as their natural habitat was reduced, he had been resisting the growing pressure and had adapted to the new times trying, at the same time, to maintain unbroken his original nature.

However, the tension was tremendous and trying to go on living freely in that unnatural environment was increasingly difficult.

He was too strong to let himself die or be exterminated as had happened to many of his conspecifics. Something inside forced him to continue living, not to leave. But,

³ Tale extracted from *Historias desde el lado oscuro* (E=m.c², 2004); © 2004, E=m.c².

on the other hand, that same inner strength prevented him from accepting conditions that were artificially imposed on him, yielding and submitting to them; it prevented him from betraying his true character as an autonomous non-domestic individual.

And, as if it still were not difficult enough, a part of his untamed nature was also the social tendency which led him to need to be with other beings of the same species. But it was impossible to relate properly to those domesticated individuals, sad shadows of what once was the species, and there were no more wild members left with whom to live. Therefore, since the disappearance of the other individual with whom he shared the dubious privilege of being the last free specimens of his species, loneliness had become another factor that further aggravated his situation. And although, when there were two of them, the conditions had not been better either, and though the hopes of being free again in a wild environment had disappeared a long time ago, along with most of their peers and other species and elements of their original autonomous environment, at least then he had the feeling of that not everything had been dominated, destroyed or replaced by artificially designed and maintained substitutes; that, at least, there was another individual apart from himself who was reluctant to stop being what he really was, with whom to share the last remnants of their freedom and satisfy, at least in part, his innate social character.

But his partner had long since disappeared. And yet he still sometimes thought that he noticed him from afar, among the domesticated individuals of his kind, but no, it wasn't he; it couldn't be. Those beings were nothing more than ridiculous caricatures of what was his companion.

Now he felt that the moment he had feared so much was approaching. The wild life was becoming unsustainable. Some animals of other species, due to their more flexible specific tendencies, were better able to adapt to the new conditions without their autonomy seemingly suffering too much, although they always had to pay a price. However, he could never live another way, sooner or later he would die and with him the memory of what the real freedom, the autonomy, the independence, the primitive self-regulation of ecosystems, of organisms, of Earth meant...

This animal could have been any member of any wild species endangered by extinction, but no, in reality the protagonist of this story was a true human being, one of those that almost no longer remain but, in the background, everyone knows they live inside us, although in most cases we exterminate, repress or modify them to survive as domestic "human" beings in an, in turn, domesticated world.

The Cow, the Mind⁴

Although today cows are domestic animals, controlled by humans through livestock, there was a time, increasingly remote, when they were free, independent of the domain

⁴ This tale was published in *Historias desde el Lado Oscuro* (E=m.c², 2004); Copyright © 2004, E=m.c².

to which they are currently subjected. At that time, in conditions of total freedom, they developed the characteristics of their species in close relationship with the non-artificial environment, their needs, trends and basic skills, which they still retain more or less inhibited or distorted.

Let's review some of them:

Every cow needs to feed. When the cow is a free cow, it moves along large open spaces, eating the different types of herbs, shoots and leaves offered by the plains, riverbanks, forests, mountain meadows... In all these places and in many more can a cow travel to feed itself, when its movements are not impeded by chains, fences, doors, walls or ties.

Every cow must learn, know, observe in order to cope with what happens throughout its life, identifying its limitations and anticipating the risks based on the accumulated experience. Thus, if it is a free cow, while it grows it learns the places where the most tender grass grows; the springs where the clearest water flows; the trees that provide the coolest shade in summer; the lands through where it is dangerous to walk; where there are the chasms in which it can fall; which animals pose a danger and which not; where to shelter during storms; how to get to the grass hidden under the snow... All this and much more can a cow come to learn, when it is free, when its life and its movements are not limited to a larger or smaller area surrounded by barbed wire or stone walls.

Every cow needs to relax. When the cow is a free cow, it lies on the grass; has a nap during the hottest hours; quietly chews the cud, the previously grazed food to assimilate its nutrients well; walks along the paths that cross the mountains and valleys; observes with curiosity everything that surrounds it... All this and more is what a cow can do, when it can rest freely, without cowherds that impose schedules on it, when it has enough tranquillity to choose a place and a resting time, comfortable, without stress, without haste.

Every cow needs to interact with others of the same species. If it is a free cow, it can meet others like it; choose which ones to interact with and which not to; learn from them; communicate; fight and defend with them; develop together ... All this and more can make a cow do when it is free and can freely relate to others of its species.

These and many more are the natural abilities of a cow. But at present free cows practically do not exist. All of them, to a greater or lesser extent, collide with a fence or a wall when they decide to go too far, if they can even decide that.

At present, some cows can eat in some places, but not in all places and not when they want but when their cowherds decide.

Nowadays, many cows do not get to know much more than a trampled and muddy meadow in which the grass no longer grows, and their vision of their surroundings is reduced to what comes to them through the barbed wire.

Today, many other cows only know the four walls that surround them, from which they never leave. They do not know the sun, the moon, the wind or the rain, they

do not eat fresh grass but scientifically designed feed. And the luckiest ones can chew, from time to time, dry hay that has largely lost its flavor and nutritional properties.

These days, many cows live fast, locked together with other cows that have their instincts, abilities and relationships altered and repressed.

Now many cows think they are free without being so, and they prefer not to ask themselves if they are because everything is more comfortable this way.

There are no more free cows, wild aurochs, only deformed creatures, aberrations of what they once were. We are all responsible for it and it is up to all of us whether or not human minds will follow that same process of extinction-domestication.

The Beatitudes⁵

He arose from the Great Darkness and rising above the Ruin shouted to the World his Silence:

— Fortunate are the already dead because their eyes no longer have to see the harsh Reality of a subjugated world.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they are not forced to go on living as slaves who enslave in turn.

— Fortunate are the already dead because nothing and no one can force them any more to build with their hands the Great Prison in which we all live.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they are no longer forced to care for and love the Monster that keeps us alive but imprisoned.

— Fortunate are the already dead here because they are no longer here trying to break old links to feed the Machine that manufactures the chains.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they are no longer forced to contemplate the sick Home, covered with sores and bandages.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they no longer suffer to see how everything that made beings worthy of existence is violated and subdued.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they are no longer obliged to talk to the walls or to listen to the crying of the Earth.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they no longer see the Asepsis of the Great Operating Room grow.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they are no longer spectators of the substitution of The Wild for The Domestic, of The Living for the Inert Movement, of The Real for the Virtual.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they never had to be spectators of the total perversion of The Sacred and of the sacralization of The Perverse.

⁵ Translation of the original story published in *Historias desde el Lado Oscuro* (E=m.c², 2004); Copyright © 2004, E=m.c².

— Fortunate are the already dead because with their death they avoided continuing to see how, constantly, many get up and walk just to go the wrong way without ever recognizing it.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they no longer need to work constantly to unmask the Deception that is transformed and maintained at the expense of their efforts.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they no longer worry about being the only ones to recognize the Truth in a world of lies.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they are no longer victims of reveries or hopes about a Wellbeing, a Happiness and a Security which, either will never come or, if they arrive, they will be the final Slavery.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they failed to see how the thick Reality they knew is replaced by the swirling fluid of Progress.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they no longer suffer the grief and anguish of being the last to remember in the New World without memory.

— Fortunate are those already dead because they died before knowing the consequences of the What-Is-To-Come that they themselves built and those who remain maintain.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they are no longer forced to witness their own decline and the victory of the Comfort.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they have already gotten rid of having to live consciously in the constant Failure.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they are no longer condemned to rebel heroically against a Fate made of their own cowardice.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they no longer have to be brave to sustain with their fear the Hell they abhor.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they left the Existence before The Worst arrived.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they no longer need to run behind The Unreachable or to feel the anguish of those who decide to always fall behind.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they no longer witness the advance of the Future that is increasingly present.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they do not feel the painful imperative of living a life that is no longer worth living.

— Fortunate are the already dead because they no longer need to die again. Ended for them is the Agony that for others extends forever.

— Fortunate are those already dead, simply, because they managed to end their life in a world where not even Death seems firm anymore.

But almost no one heard him in the middle of the Immense Noise made of millions of silent tragedies. And among those who heard him, very few listened to him. And of those who listened to him, even fewer understood him. And of those who understood him, only one joined in his Silence. That one was himself.

No one got anything. Evil continued to advance.
But he kept shouting to the World his Silence.

The Cow, the Goat and the Flock⁶

Once upon a time there was a goat; not a wild and untamed goat, but a domestic goat that lived in a flock of sheep.

For a while now, every day a cow approached the flock. The cow invariably looked for the goat and threw long and imposing moos at her. The goat, frightened, took refuge among her group mates. The fear that large being made her feel, with its long horns and its hoarse voice, was visceral and uncontrollable. The cow does not need to belong to a flock in whose mass to blur her own silhouette; she lived independently; she was much stronger and braver than her. And her moos were much more thunderous; much deeper and much sharper than her bleat, drowned in the noise of the flock.

Therefore, the goat was afraid of the cow; it was a fear that day by day turned into distrust; into rage; into a subtle, permanent hatred.

So, one day, when the cow was about to approach the goat to give her the usual serenade, the goat, armed with the courage that the presence of the group instilled in her, responded with a wide repertoire of baas. She told the cow that the forcefulness of her moos seemed authoritarian to her, that she believed that the hoarse tone of her voice was offensive, and that she thought that her independence was a danger to the flock, since she blocked with her presence and her way of acting its calm transit, causing tensions and shocks. And as if this were not enough, she let the cow know that she didn't like her at all because cows' customs and gestures were not pleasant, but rather uncomfortable.

Hearing all this, the cow turned around and went away quietly, thinking: "How many goats there are who, thinking they are autonomous and different, fear the cows for not looking like sheep but do not see the wolves disguised as lambs with whom they share the flock!"

The Black Sheep and the Wolf⁷

Libertia was a young sheep but, unlike the other sheep of the herd, she was born black. And color was just one of her peculiarities.

Her character was also different from that of the white sheep. She was not as docile as her companions. She did not lower her head and squeeze herself against the others

⁶ Translation of the original story published in *Historias desde el Lado Oscuro* (E=m.c², 2004); Copyright © 2004, E=m.c²

⁷ English translation made by Agria Chora of "La oveja negra y el lobo", a tale extracted from *Historias desde el lado oscuro* (E=m.c², 2004); © 2004, E=m.c².

at nap time, but preferred to take walks in the vicinity instead of staying drowsy. And when it came time to move with the herd, she used to move further ahead or stay behind, or leave the path, irritating the shepherd and the dogs, who always had to be running behind her to return her to the path. And when she returned to the pen, at dusk, she was always the last one and acted so lazily, that the shepherd used to have to threaten her with shouts while he brandished his stick, and even sometimes he had to shove and kick her to make her go in. Sometimes, she would turn to the shepherd or the dogs and threaten to headbutt them; and at some point she had even done it. Other times, if the shepherd was distracted, she would shit and pee on his blanket and bag. And, often, when she was with the rest of the flock and became bored, she thought about things and tried to explain to the other sheep that it was an injustice that the shepherd did not treat them as well as he treated his other animals; that he did not caress them as he did with dogs; that he did not give them anything to eat other than the grass they found in the field, contrary to what the shepherd's family did with the cattle, to which they gave hay and barley; that he did not take them for a walk to the village as he did with the donkey... And when they heard it, the others stopped grazing for a moment, lifted their heads, looked at her blankly and returned to grazing, just as they did when, during a storm, the monotonous sound of rain was interrupted by a distant thunder.

Because of all of these special features, so atypical in a sheep, Libertia saw herself as a rebel and felt lucky, because she thought that she had freed herself from the prejudices that prevented the other sheep from seeing. She thought she was really free.

This was so until one day, when the flock was in the summer pastures of the highlands of the mountains, and while the sheep, the shepherd and the dogs were taking a nap under the late June sun, Libertia, who was wandering around as usual, ran into a strange animal that was lying in the shade of a large oak tree. At first sight she took it for a dog, because its appearance was such, and quietly exchanged greetings:

— Hello!

— Greetings!

— Are you watching some flock of sheep in the surroundings? — asked Libertia. — Not for the moment. By the way, sheep, don't you think you're a bit far from your flock? You could lose yourself.

— Don't believe so — said the proud sheep — I'm not a conventional sheep, I'm a black sheep, I ride free.

Upon hearing this, the stranger laughed, revealing jaws full of sharp teeth and two pairs of large fangs. When she saw them, Libertia became frightened and suddenly realized that the animal resembling a dog was what the oldest sheep and the shepherd's dogs called "a wolf". She was about to run away when the wolf said with a smile:

-Don't run, I'm not going to hurt you. I have just eaten one like you a while ago on the other side of the mountains. I'm not hungry yet. I really like you, and that is why I am going to teach you some things about yourself that you do not know.

Libertia, seeing that the wolf did not move and that it really seemed to have no intention of attacking her, calmed down a little and looked interested.

— What can you show me that I do not know? — she answered.

— I'm an old wolf, don't forget this, and if I know anything, it is about sheep, because I killed and devoured many in my lifetime.

— Okay, but I'm not a normal sheep, I'm a black sheep.

— Black or white, it's all the same; anyway, you are a sheep. You presume to be independent, free... but you are not able to get away from the flock very much, to actually abandon it, am I wrong? Have you spent any time away from the flock by yourself? Have you tried it? What, no? It has not even crossed your mind.

He looked at Libertia with his wolf-slanted eyes and a stern look, and she was silent and looked down in a more than eloquent silence.

— It is enough for you to take a walk during nap time, but yes, without losing sight of the other sheep or the shepherd and his dogs; to go to the side of the road when the herd moves, but, in the end, never stop going where all the other sheep go; and, in general, to be a little more of a nuisance and to give a little more work for the dogs and for your master. With this, you think you're free and rebellious, but in reality, you're still a slave, you're still part of that flock that you can not and do not want to escape from, you're still a sheep, rare and black, but a sheep after all.

You are neither a mouflon, nor a roe deer, nor a deer, nor a boar, nor an ibex, nor a fox, nor a bear, nor any of us wild animals that inhabit these mountains and are really free.

We despise the care and affection of the masters and the comfort of a life of slaves and captives, and what we really appreciate is the free and wild life we live here. You, however, do not and can not know, what freedom is, and you envy the fodder your master gives to his cattle and the caresses and the appreciation he gives to his dogs, because you are as slavish as they are, and you will always be so, because you are only a sheep that does not want to stop being a sheep and believes that it is enough to be black.

You must know that if the shepherd has not yet disposed of you and keeps on bearing your extravagances, it is because you are useful to him. Herds with black and white sheep are more resistant to diseases than herds with white sheep only. The latter, over time, tend to degenerate and become extinct. In fact, on the other side of the mountains, where stockbreeding is much more advanced than here, the herds are composed mostly of black and gray sheep, because the mixture of sheep of different colors to darken the fur of their descendants ensures the future health, resistance and productivity of the herd, even if it is less easy to manage.

And now, go back to your fellows before I get hungry again and I regret not having bitten your throat.

And Libertia returned to the flock with her head down. And she remained black, of course; and she did not stop acting eccentrically from time to time (after all she was a black sheep and could not help but be a little odd), but she never forgot the truth

in the words of the wolf: the black sheep are still no more than sheep, members of the flock.

The Sage and the Tiger⁸

One day, many centuries ago, a wise man walked through the vast forests of the region of Arutan, on which the majestic Airudibas river draws its sinuous course, with no more company, luggage, clothing, or equipment other than his own thoughts. Nozar, which was his name, was totally lost in his thought, walking by the narrow path surrounded on both sides by a thick and impenetrable green mantle.

Either as a result of the abstraction from reality due to his deliberations, or because of the intricate character of the terrain, Nozar did not notice any sign of danger until he bent a very sharp curve of the path. In doing so, he was suddenly petrified in front of the impressive figure that just moments ago advanced in the opposite direction and had too been immobilized by the fortuitous encounter.

It was a huge tiger who, crouched in the middle of the path a few steps away, was staring into his eyes.

The sage's reaction, although calm, wasn't long in coming. He moved serenely to one side of the narrow path, inviting the beast to continue its march, with a subtle gesture; all without losing sight of the cat's eyes for a moment.

The huge cat kept his tense posture for a moment but, seeing the strange behavior of that elongated figure in front of him, was dumbfounded and seized by doubt. He had stopped feeling as powerful as he thought he was until then. He was facing a being who, far from showing signs of fear or nervousness trying to flee, surrendering to his will or defending himself aggressively as others used to do, simply moved out to the side of the way and left space for it to continue on its way, without forfeiting his calmness or composure.

Then, getting up, it advanced towards Nozar and passed by his side, so closely, that the tips of its whiskers brushed the leg of the sage, who remained impassive. Immediately, the tiger turned the curve through which the man had arrived such a short time ago, and disappeared.

Nozar returned to the center of the path and continued, without haste or anxiety, his placid wandering along the banks of the Airudibas, in the Arutan region.

⁸ Translation of the original story published in *Historias desde el Lado Oscuro* (E=m.c², 2004); Copyright © 2004, E=m.c²

The Myth of Erk⁹

The story goes that in the beginning, when the Great Force that gave form to the world caused the first animals to arise, one of them, called Erk, after observing the things that were happening around him, turned in anguish to the Great Force and put these questions to her: Why does everything have to be so hard, so difficult, so painful...? Why must some suffer and die so that others may live? Why must we struggle against one another? Why is it necessary to expend so much effort in order to get what we need to stay alive? Why didn't you make a simpler, an easier world in which everything would be more accessible, comfortable, and agreeable? What is the sense of so much suffering, so much discomfort, so much death?"

The Great Force knew the answer, but she also knew that Erk would understand it only through direct experience. Therefore, after listening to Erk's complaints and even though the Great Force knew that she had made no mistake in designing the world, she changed it so that Erk and his companions should discover the sense of things for themselves. At first the Great Force thought that a few little changes would be enough to make them recognize the truth. So she softened the conditions of life for living things: She moderated the climate so that it would be more kindly to life, made access to food easier for the animals, prevented the deaths of the youngest individuals, and reduced the number of accidents, diseases, and catastrophes as well as the suffering the victims had to endure. But Erk and his companions, after a brief period of euphoria, began again to complain that in this new version of the world there was still pain, that death still existed, that it was still a hostile world, a place that was too hard and too difficult for life.

Upon seeing this, the Great Force decided to take drastic action in order to open the eyes of Erk and his companions. From that moment, everything was easy, comfortable, simple, and agreeable. No one suffered or died, or had to make any effort to procure the necessities of life. What was needed was obtained instantly and without effort. Nor was it necessary to be alert, since there were no dangers from which to protect oneself and no harm to fear. There were no conflicts, no aggression, and no confrontations of any kind among the animals or between them and their surroundings. The world was at peace. It seemed marvellous.

But after the initial rejoicing, a new and very disagreeable sensation began to arise, a symptom of a great problem where there were no problems, a profound malaise in the midst of that well-being: Boredom. Due to the lack of motivation, of initiative, of goals, of incentives, of challenges, of activities... because of the prevailing indolence in those idyllic conditions the animals were bored. Since they didn't need to make an effort for anything, worry about anything... they had nothing to do, nothing that was worth the trouble, nothing to motivate them, nothing that would push them to get up

⁹ English translation of "El Mito de Erk," (Copyright © 2004 by E=m.c². Copyright for English translation © 2005 by Theodore John Kaczynski).

out of their lethargy and act. All the same, they were still animals and therefore felt within themselves an imperious need to act. And for this reason it happened that after a little while the animals grew so bored and so nauseated with this state of inactivity that, just in order to be able to do something and find an outlet for their instinctive need of action, they began to develop absurd behaviors that had nothing to do with those they had developed in the beginning before Erk had spoken to the Great Force.

Because they had everything they needed, they began to desire other things that they did not need, just in order to be able to act and to exert themselves in getting those things. Thus they began to build, to destroy, to dig, to eat, to copulate, to run, to attack one another... compulsively and frenetically, and as a result many found their capacity for action seriously impaired, they suffered grave injuries, and they profoundly altered their habitat; but they did not stop acting that way, because they simply preferred to suffer all those consequences rather than endure the boredom of having nothing to do; at least these negative effects provided them with stimulation and sensations that kept their bodies and minds in working order and served in turn as a spur to act again under the pretext of palliating the same effects.

Upon seeing all of that, Erk finally understood. He turned to the Great Force again and said to her: "I have come to understand what was the sense of the world just as you created it in the beginning. I have come to understand that it should be that way and not the way that seemed to me more pleasant, because that is really the best way it can be. I have come to understand that when I saw no sense in the world it was because of my own weakness and ignorance, and because I didn't look at it in the right way or thinking properly. I allowed myself to be carried away by a mirage, and I disowned by real nature and the world to which I really belong. Now I know it, now I am stronger and I will never again fall into that error. Thank you, I have learned the lesson, but now please return the world to what it was originally."

Seeing that she had now achieved her objective, the Great Force made everything return to what it had been in the beginning.

So it was that Erk came to understand what was his place in the world and in life, as well as the sense of the world and of life. Since then we wild animals, generation after generation, have kept the memory of those events alive so that, like Erk, we will remember what is our place and what is our function, and so that we will not fall into the same error.

And even so, in spite of everything, many human beings have completely forgotten the story of Erk and live blinded by the same error, trying to create Paradise and immersing themselves and the world ever deeper in Hell.

The Termites¹⁰

I am a termite.

Long before I was born, termites already lived in the Old Tree. As they say, at first there were a few insects in an oak several meters in perimeter and many more in height.

Today we are billions of termites. We are distributed throughout almost all of the trunk and branches. Our society grows exponentially, each generation faster and faster. And all thanks to the rich wood of the Old Tree.

This constant progress means that, in general, an atmosphere of optimism and cheerfulness is maintained in the termite nest, which in turn favors the proper functioning, organization and growth of the colony even more. And yet, deep down, no termite is really satisfied.

Some have been saying for generations that the Old Tree belongs to the workers, and that it is they who must administer it, or even enjoy it exclusively. They say the problem is that the queen, the court and the soldiers are parasites who live at the expense of the workers and who accumulate sawdust while the workers go hungry.

But I, who know these whiners well, know that in reality they are only moved by envy and hatred due to the frustration of not being able to do so much.

I also think that the queen, the court and the soldiers are unnecessary parasites, but I also know that they are only a small part of the real problem, or rather, a mere consequence of it.

I know that, although the workers cannot eat the best quality of wood, nor accumulate as much sawdust as the upper classes, practically all of them aspire to be able to do so; they dream of achieving it, and most live relatively “happy” and “content” as long as they are allowed to work to try to.

I know that, deep down, the vast majority of the thousands of thousands of insects that constitute the colony have the same idea, the same goal: to eat and accumulate more and better wood (much more than is necessary). Although that means that, as there is not enough for all to accumulate, many will remain without seeing their dream satisfied, and that, among these, many will protest and blame those who manage to accumulate more (which, by the way, will never be enough for any of them).

But the real problem is precisely that unstoppable desire to grow and reduce the trunk and branches of the Old Tree to chips usable by the colony. They are all so blinded by the desire to prosper in their accumulation that they are not able to see what is happening: the Old Tree is dying. Its last vital parts are being affected by the constant and expanding activity of the termite nest.

¹⁰ Translation of the tale, “Las termitas”, from *Historias desde el Lado Oscuro* (E=m.c², 2004); © 2004, E=m.c². Translation by Agria Chora.

When we arrived at the Oak, so the chronicles recount, many other beings lived in it. Its trunk and branches housed all kinds of living beings, we were just one more species.

But at some point the situation began to change. Some termite groups began to grow very large and to establish a network of colonies along the trunk. They needed space and food and began to expel and exterminate the other species that lived in the Tree.

Some were enslaved and taken advantage of, in order to prosper and accumulate more. Some small termite colonies that lived apart from the network of termite nests, in the areas furthest from the trunk, were not better off.

In order to prevent the network of colonies from collapsing, not only a constant growth and expansion of it to other parts of the Tree not yet colonized become necessary, but at the same time it was necessary to gradually structure and regulate the life of the insects that formed part of it. Thus, the current form of social organization was reached, consisting of classes and subclasses (queen, court, soldiers and workers), and with it came the ideological programming based on prosperity as the unquestionable goal, that is, believing that the natural meaning of the existence of Termites is and should be work to be able to eat and accumulate more than necessary.

So, little by little, the network of termite nests became more compact, until it became what it is today: a monstrous single colony that encompasses almost all of the Old Tree.

But all this growth, this progress, has been built at the cost, not only of extermination, slavery and the imposition of a certain form of thought, action and social organization, but also at the cost of the colonization and reduction of the Old Tree to sawdust and manure.

Some termites seem to have realized this problem, but this impression is usually nothing but a mere mirage.

Some, following the line of their grandparents, blame exclusively the queen, the court and the soldiers for the depletion of the Old Tree, forgetting that the colony, and the destruction that this entails, is being maintained and developed by the work and the consumption of the workers themselves, and that virtually none of the workers in the growing center of the colony work only to eat and stay alive, but almost all of them (including these “discontented” ones) share with the nobles and soldiers the unstoppable desire to eat more than is necessary and accumulate as much as possible.

Others do not blame anyone; they only ask the termite ruling classes to take measures to prevent the destruction. And, of course, between request and request, they continue working to be able to eat and accumulate more and more sawdust and chips.

And, also, almost all of them, both those who want more but cannot have, as well as those that request measures (sometimes being one and the same), do not consider for a moment that the colony should stop growing, that the real problem, of which all the rest are derived, is that we have created a society of insects too large and demanding for our true way of being and for the health and limited size of the Old Tree.

Halfway between the nobles and the workers, there is the caste of the engineers, who constantly propose technical solutions to the problems in order to perpetuate the development of the colony.

Among these there are more and more who believe it is possible to strike a balance between the growth of the colony, the maintenance of the habitability conditions in the termite nest and the conservation of the Old Tree. They call the whole of their theories “maintainable growth,” and say that they are putting them into practice now. They talk about recovering the colony’s waste and maintaining (and even increasing) the production of sawdust and shavings by artificially controlling and directing the growth of the Oak, always replacing the original wood, branches, leaves... with new, renewable materials, of course. And to achieve this, they engineer the most diverse methods, but they never propose to reduce wood consumption to a minimum or to stop and reverse the growth of the colony.

In reality, their methods of renewal and sustainability do not serve to save what remains of the Old Tree (nor do they really intend to), but only to hide its destruction and perpetuate the development of the colony.

And even many engineers raise and study the possibility of extending the colony to other trees, some of them so far away that we can barely see them from here, or even creating artificial “trees”, termite nests in the middle of nowhere, to whom to send the surplus population. And all of this, while talking about redesigning our species (and others) to adapt it to the conditions of these new environments there, or to the degraded environment of what remains of the Old Tree here.

The engineers are an incredible class; they are able to present, study and work seriously, coldly and methodically the most implausible, absurd, abominable and mind-blowing ideas in such a way that it seems, not only that they are sensible and that they have foundation, but that they are the ideal, the most desirable, the best that we can and that we must try to achieve. And so far they have managed to keep the termite colony growing. Therefore, the rest of the termites, from the nobles to the workers, and from the “happiest” with their situation to the most discontented, hold the engineers in high esteem and trust them, taking their theories and projects as a reference and role model, and as a source from which to obtain the necessary hope to continue striving, with energy and joviality, to develop the termite nest and accumulate more sawdust.

But almost no termite stops to seriously reflect on the price of all that progress. In fact, the vast majority believe that it is something priceless, which only brings advantages when it comes to accumulating chips. But some of us know that this is not the case, and that the price that has been paid, is being paid and will be paid, is actually much higher than the alleged advantages that it is supposed to give us.

The colony is the only thing, the only world left for us, the termites that survive today. The Tree, of which one day we were a tiny part, is today a mere appendix of the colony; soon maybe not even that.

And yet, the termites of today remain basically like those first termites that lived at the beginning in the Old Tree, when there was not yet a single termite nest (not even a

network of large colonies) that occupied it in its entirety, but a few small termite nests distributed throughout the Tree, which they shared with many other beings. And this is why we feel that something is missing: that is why we are never really satisfied; and that is why we feel that we need to grow, to eat, to accumulate... because acting like this grabs our attention, and prevents us from having to face what we really are, what we really need, what we have become and to what we have transformed the Tree, of which we have always been and will be a part.

I know all these things, as all the other termites know in the back of their minds, yet I am one of the few who (I still don't know why) have stopped to think seriously about them. Nowadays nobody wants to hear what those few have to say. No one wants to remember. No one wants to face the dogma of growth. They are all busy with more important things, they say. They do not have time. And when they do have it, they don't want to be overwhelmed with such "ridiculous" concerns; they prefer even more ridiculous ones, such as trying to grow and accumulate, maintain growth at all costs or protest because they cannot grow and accumulate as much as the others. And all this, in order to avoid having to stop and think about what I just told you.

Anyway, do not worry, you are human beings and these are only insect problems.

The Well-Meaning¹¹

Alfredo Alfonso Alfalfa was such a merciful being that every morning, upon waking up, he thought of all the beings that would be dying at that moment and of all the suffering that other animals, human or not, would be enduring at that precise moment. Every morning, he remembered that he was one of those beings, that he suffered and that, although it was difficult to get used to the idea, he would die like everyone else. Alfredo Alfonso Alfalfa was not only convinced that feeling empathy for the rest of the beings was the right thing, but he firmly believed that feeling what one thinks that others feel was an unequivocal and unquestionable trait of superiority over the rest of the unscrupulous and uncivilized beings.

Alfredo Alfonso Alfalfa spent his days overwhelmed by these thoughts, they were his obsession.

One morning, when the sun was shining, the birds sang and the insects flew over the meadow, Alfredo Alfonso Alfalfa went for a walk. He walked a long way through the countryside while suffering because of the cruelty of the world: he was stepping unwittingly on the grass, the sun dried the plants, the birds ate the insects and insects devoured each other and plants. It was a real carnage. He could not stand it. Tired, he sat in the shade of a fig tree while watching uneasily the transit of a caterpillar through the stem of a bramble. Would that evil insect want to eat the plant? And, how much the caterpillar would suffer if it was punctured with the cruel thorns of the

¹¹ Translation of a version of the original story published in *Historias desde el Lado Oscuro* (E=m.c², 2004); Copyright © 2004, E=m.c².

bush! The world was crazy, everything was contrary to how it should be. Nature was death and suffering. How he wished he could prevent it!

At that moment, God (who, as all atheist readers know, is an old man, tall, hairy and bearded, gray-haired, and dressed in white sheets, who lives in the clouds and spends his life creating worlds and taking care of them) appeared in front of him. He had pitied the immense compassion of compassionate Alfredo, who, meanwhile, thought to himself: "This stupid and brutal god is stepping on the poor and defenseless ants". God, who also thought to himself: "What bad luck! I have fallen onto an anthill. ¡These damned things bite as hell! ", sent an angel that gently grabbed Alfredo and raised him to heaven.

Now in heaven, God approached Alfredo Alfonso Alfalfa, who watched pensively from above a world full of evil beings, in which all bore terrible sufferings and agonies, and in turn they inflicted them on others; in which murder and sadism were the norm...

-Alfredo, my son -said God, who deep down was a sentimental-. Your great mercy has pleased me. I have been pleasantly surprised by your concern and dedication to the lives and welfare of the rest of beings. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that if all beings were like you, the world would be very different. Alfredo, my son, you are my idol, and to prove it to you I will allow you to be God in my absence because I have to go do some shopping. Into your hands I commend the world. Your wishes are commands and you can use these instruments that you see here to carry them out.

And, having said that, He vanished, leaving Alfredo in the seventh heaven.

Alfredo was overjoyed. His worth was finally recognized, finally someone (even if this was only God) realized who he really was and for what he had been born. God had had a divine revelation. The knowledge of the true superhuman character of Alfredo Alfonso Alfalfa had been implanted in the mind of God by the paranormal psychic power of the divine Alfredo. He was the Savior, the Original, Authentic, Unique, Special and Unmatched Being that the world had been waiting for millions of years.

Evolution had come to an end. Everything had happened with an obvious intention: he, Alfredo Alfonso Alfalfa, the purest, most loving, most perfect and most humble spirit that ever existed. He was excellent, unsurpassable, the most good, the most intelligent, the bestest... He had finally achieved it, he was God himself.

Alfredo Alfonso Alfalfa resolved to hold his new position as supreme, omniscient, omnipotent and ubiquitous being. He could finally realize his desire to end suffering and death and to repair what millions and millions of years of chaos, ongoing crimes and fierce struggles had engendered: a hateful and bloody world, a nightmarish and atrocious spectacle of constant oppression of the strong beings over the weak, of violence of the weak over the weakest and of aggressions of strong groups of weak beings on weak strong beings.

He decided therefore that he would raise again, through the superpowers that the divine high technology provided him, all beings that had died to date, and that from now on he would prevent any being from harming another, and no living being would ever die.

No sooner had he said than it was done. He put the angels to work and, in a few minutes, the maneuver of resurrection and immunization against pain and death was over.

How happy he was! Evil was over, there was only Good: eternal life and happiness without limits. He was so happy that he didn't even bother to look down and see his great work. After all, the theoretical principles on which it was based were impeccable, everything logically fit perfectly; he had designed it, so why did he have to check the result?

In that exact moment, God entered with his hair and beard stood on end and throwing thunder from his mouth and rays from his eyes.

-Who the hell is the swine who has caused such a mess? — He shouted at the angel who was performing the function of God's boatswain — he is going to get himself in a lot of trouble!¹² I'm going to turn him into a crib figurine!

-What happened, buddy? — asked Alfredo, worried about the uneasiness of him who was now his colleague — What irritates you so much? Tell me and I'm sure I can do something for you.

-Take a look at the world from the edge of the cloud and you will see it -said God.

Alfredo Alfonso Alfalfa approached the safety railing surrounding the cloud deck and, amazed and full of pride, observed his great work.

Down there were piled up, layer upon layer, millions, billions, trillions... of beings of the most diverse shapes, sizes and textures (furry, feathered, scaly, soft, hard...) forming a shapeless and palpitating mass of moving bodies mixed with trunks, branches and leaves and a viscous substance of indefinable colour composed of microorganisms, manure, urine and decomposing organic matter. They stepped on and crushed each other because of the lack of space, but no matter what happened, no one died and they immediately recovered their original form only to lose it again in the same breath in another accident. And most amazingly, the size of that huge ball of life grew by the minute because, although they were immortal, living beings continued to reproduce.

-It has come out impressive, right? -Alfredo said.

-So it's been you. You have ruined my creation. Thousands of millions of years maintaining the balance and then you came, and in ten minutes you have wrecked it.

-What are you saying? What balance? What is the problem? -Alfredo could not conceal his astonishment; that idiot god was not able to recognize Good when he saw it.

-Don't you see they have no place? They are crushing one another! -God shouted angrily.

-Ah! That's all... Well, we send them to other planets and that's it.

¹² "¡Se le van a caer las plumas!" in the original. The idiomatic pun of the sentence in Spanish has been lost in the translation. *Note added for the English translation.*

God couldn't quite handle the situation, that well-meaning little man was worse than a pest, and apart from that, he was a smart aleck. God had the impression that control was slipping through his fingers.

-At the rate they grow there would not be enough planets in the Universe, and also, if they were in this planet and not in others it was for some reason. That's all we needed, to extend this big mess¹³ throughout the rest of the Universe. You have to stop them, now!

-You got it- said Alfredo Alfonso Alfalfa, as if he had everything planned for a long time-. We sterilize them and that is the end of it. In addition, in order so that they stay still and don't fight or attack each other, we lock each one up separately, and, if necessary, we immobilize them and that's finished. It is a good idea, isn't it? Surely it had never occurred to you.

God was perplexed, that arrogant little creature made in his image and likeness (or was it just the other way around? God had always suspected that it was he who had been designed and made in the image and likeness of some humans like that one) had a "remedy" for everything. And what remedies! Worse than the disease. And on top of that, that scoundrel bragged about it...

-What are you saying, you fool! Who do you think you are to dispose of the freedom of other beings and to decide which ones should be born and procreate and which ones not? God, perhaps?

-Now that you mention it, well yes. You have nominated me as your substitute.

-Well, I remove you from office.

God was about to have a fit any minute now. That little human was annoying Him. It was something totally unbearable, even for God. What the hell (oops! Sorry, I wanted to say "heck") could He have seen in that puny and vain being? Thank goodness He knew that God is infallible, because if not, He would think He was wrong.

-Well, I don't feel like giving it up. You are a jerk, a doddering, decrepit, weak and pseudo-pacifist old man who tolerates evil. You are so incompetent that you have not been able to eradicate pain and death from the world and I have had to come to teach you how to do Good and put order. Go now and leave the post to someone really capable, like me.

-Look, sonny, the only imbecile here is you and those who, like you, think that the world is theirs.

Now He had no doubt, despite being God, He was wrong. So many holy texts, so many centuries exalting Life, Love, Happiness... all they had achieved was to create monsters like that individual in front of Him.

-Out of my cloud!

Instantly, an angel grabbed Alfredo Alfonso Alfalfa by the ears and took him down to the ground. During the time the descent lasted, God and the angels who were on

¹³ "Sindiós" in the original story. again the idiomatic pun of the sentence in Spanish has been lost in the translation. *Note added for the English translation.*

duty at that time undid the mess, leaving the world as it was before Alfredo “fixed it”. Alfredo Alfonso Alfalfa woke up at noon when he felt the bite of a perfidious horsefly that meanly and viciously had tried to suck his blood. He was horrified, the world was still a great torture room; everything had been a dream, an illusion. He was a human again and although he obviously deserved to be God because of his kindness towards the innocent and defenseless victims of the perpetual mistreatment and abuse that occurred in Nature, he was not. It had all been just a beautiful dream. The reality was cruel and this was just another proof of it.

Suddenly, Alfredo Alfonso Alfalfa felt panic, he realized the danger he had run by falling asleep in a completely hostile Nature. Any predatory, bloodthirsty animal could have attacked him in an outburst of animal fury and, with relish, have devoured him alive by tearing his limbs with its fangs and claws as it swallowed his carcass and drank his blood. Oh! What a terrible possibility! He was terrified. Luckily he always carried his mobile phone around for these emergency cases. When he remembered it, he regained his calm, and getting up, he began to come back home, which by the way was less than three hundred meters from the urban green space where Alfredo was.

While, in glory, God faced a deep existential crisis and doubted Himself, that is to say, He was agnostic. After entering mystical ecstasy He decided to leave his post and become an atheist. Anyone can commit an error,¹⁴ but when a god makes such a mistake it is best that he resigns.

The strangest thing is that from that moment on, His absence was not noticed at all. Everything followed its natural course. Death continued to be the end of individual life and one more step in the evolution of life at large, free animals continued to use pain to maintain contact with reality and to avoid further damage, and unfortunately, some dwarfs with delusions of grandeur, lack of humility and strong mental imbalances kept on trying to bring order to the pre-existing order which was more than they could handle, playing gods and stating that God wanted it that way.

From the well-meaning deliver us, Lord!

¹⁴ “Un error lo tiene todo dios” in the original tale. Once again the idiomatic pun of the sentence in Spanish has been lost in the translation. *Note added for the English translation.*

Other stories

In Too Many Places and Not Only in La Mancha¹

Just then, they discovered thirty or forty wind turbines in that mountain. And as soon as Don Silvestre saw them, he said to his tour guide: “Misfortune is guiding our affairs worse than we could ever have feared. Look over there, Vicente, my friend, where there are thirty or more fierce robot-demons with whom I plan to do battle and to take them all their batteries out, and with their spoils we’ll start to get free; for this is righteous warfare, and it’s a great service to Nature to rid the earth of such a wicked seed.”

“What robots?” said Vicente Masa.

“Those that you see over there,” responded Don Silvestre, “with arms of a sustainable green color, so clean that they seem white, that usually can be seen from almost two leagues away.”

“Look, your worship,” responded Vicente, “what you see over there aren’t mechanical demons —they’re wind turbines; and what seems to be arms are the blades that rotate the electrical generator of the mill when they’re turned by the wind.”

“It seems to me,” responded Don Silvestre, “that you aren’t well-versed in the antitechnological struggle — they are robots; and if you’re afraid, get away from here and start surfing through cyberspace while I go into fierce and unequal battle with them.”

And saying this, he pedalled his bicycle without heeding what his tour guide Vicente was shouting to him, warning him that without a doubt those he was going to attack were not evil robots, but wind generators that promised to solve all our problems, facilitating with their immaculate and inexhaustible electricity production the development, the progress and the unlimited production and consumption of goods and services and, therefore, the universal comfort and happiness. But he was so certain they were robots that threatened to turn us all into slaves of their lord Don Sistema, that he paid no attention to his tour guide Vicente’s shouts nor, even though he had also been well indoctrinated in the progressive faith, environmental education and values, and it was well into the 21st century, did he fail to see what they were. Rather, he went on shouting: “Do not flee, cowards and vile creatures, for it’s just one knight attacking you!”

¹ Translation by Agria Chora of the story “En demasiados lugares y no sólo de La Mancha”, which is an adaptation by E=m.c², of a fragment of *El Quijote*, by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra.

At this point, the wind increased a bit and what seemed like only large blades began to move, which Don Silvestre observed and said: “Even though you wave your arms as if they were blades and try to cajole me with your murmur to make me believe that you are only neutral and harmless mills, you will not be able to deceive me like the rest.”

When he said this — and commending himself with all his heart to his lady the Virgin Nature, asking her to aid him in that trance, well-covered by his shield, lance in hand — he attacked at full speed of his rickety bicycle and assailed the first of what looked like simple ecological mills; and giving it a strike at the blade, there appeared a lot of angry well-meaning technophiles, eco-solidaries and progressives to see how he attacked their panacea without any respect for the taboos and politically correct dogmas dictated by the media, educational programs and social movements, who took him for an evil authoritarian right-wing ultra-conservative and attacked unitarily and democratically against him with such fury that they broke the lance to bits, taking the bicycle and rider with them, and tossed him rolling onto the ground, very battered.

Luckily, the multimedia telecommunication microchip that, like the rest of his fellow beings, Vicente had had implanted in his brain, automatically contacted the police, the firemen and the ambulance service. Having done this, Vicente Masa went to help him himself, at full speed on his quad bike, and when he got there, he saw that he couldn’t stir; such were the blows that he was given by the tolerant social eco-justice warriors in self-defense.

“Internet help us,” said Vicente. “Didn’t I tell you to watch what you were doing; that they were nothing but wind generators of sustainable, clean and good electricity, and that only a person who did not have a microchip of telecommunication, integration and social contact implanted in his head could fail to realize it?”

“Keep still, Vicente, my friend,” responded Don Silvestre. “Things associated with Modern Technology, more than others, are subject to continual change. Moreover, I believe — and it’s true — that Don Sistema — he who robbed us of our freedom — has changed these evil robots into sustainable-looking mills, trying to dazzle everyone so that you can dance to his song with good will, believing that you do Good by defending them; such is his degree of twisting and complication; But in the long run, his evil cunning and the good intention of his faithful will have little power over the indifference and firmness of my skull and back.”

The Raft and the Optimist²

Feliciano was optimistic. She always saw the glass not only half full, but usually full to overflowing, and there was no harm to which she didn’t see a much greater good than its evil. For Feliciano, life was a joyful uninterrupted progress in which each event

² A Tale by E=m.c². Copyright © 2017, Em.c².

improved and far exceeded the previous ones in quality and value, the present was always incomparably better than the past, and she did not doubt even for a moment that the future would be even better than the present. Feliciano was a regular follower of psychotherapy and self-help books, publications and courses in which the optimistic attitude was exalted and in which it was affirmed that the bad thing was not knowing how to accept things the way they are and the way they come, not being able to adapt to changes, fearing innovation... Even she had got the motto "Don't worry, be happy" tattooed on her shoulder.

It is not that the optimistic Feliciano never saw any problem, any evil; No, from time to time she saw some flaw here or there, but they were minor petty things that were more than compensated by certain great and unquestionable advantages that were paired with them (a small price that had to be paid to move forward and improve).

And, of course, she also saw a very bad evil: the deplorable attitude of those who, unlike her, did not see that things were always so great and struggled to find defects in them and who did not recognize the undeniable fact that everything was going well and getting better. Those pessimists exasperated her. They were the only really bad thing she saw in the world.

And unfortunately, there was always someone near her who was spoiling her day by pointing out this or that alleged problem or failure. She, who usually appeared to be happy as a lark and to live joyful and content, without worries, in a perfect (or almost perfect) world, felt that those spoilers were trying to steal her positive energy. That is why, whenever she could, she avoided all contact with this toxic type of people and their negative attitudes, ideas and vibrations. They were embittered and she wouldn't allow them to embitter her too.

However, there was something in the whole of Feliciano's beautiful picture of life and conception of the world that didn't quite fit. Because, deep down, between laughter and laughter, from time to time, Feliciano shyly felt that the optimistic happiness she advocated, and of which she intended to be a living model, was not true, that it was in fact a dishonest attempt to avoid looking straight at things as they are, a self-deception.

When this happened to her, Feliciano made use of her ideological resources and, armed with her arsenal of books, theories and slogans in favor of optimism, life-affirming attitude and positive thinking, quickly extinguished the threat of concern, lest it grew and ended up destroying her invaluable spiritual well-being or, at the very least, causing her wrinkles. In such situations, in her head and on her lips began to resonate, again and again, the echoes of the following litany: "Reality is subjective and the value of things depends on how one takes them. Things have to be taken as they come and accepted as they are, as good. If you don't conform, unhappiness and bitterness come. And therefore, those that are not happy, aren't so because they do not want to be. The only problem is to believe that there are problems. Everything is going well and I am happy, I am happy, I am happy..."

Thanks to her firm optimistic convictions, Feliciana had achieved what the manuals promised her: happiness and success in life. She had many friends and a good standard of living. Life smiles to those who smile at it.

One day, while Feliciana was sailing across the ocean in a small sailboat, in the company of some friends, a water leak appeared. That did not particularly affect Feliciana, who, just as she saw the glass half full, now, she saw the hull, simply, half empty. However, among her friends, who turned out not to be as optimistic and hyperpositive as she thought, concern spread. They stopped smiling and said something about the ship sinking and that they had to inflate the life raft to get to safety. It seems that she had not been careful enough to choose her friends, and some damned pessimists had sneaked in among them. But hey, she would deal with breaking the relationship with them later, for now they were not going to spoil the trip for her. And she continued to force herself to enjoy the breeze and the sun and to smile, until the water completely covered the deck.

At the last moment, just before the ship sank, her depressing, bitter and energetically negative friends grabbed her and shoved her into the life raft along with them. Exaggerated alarmists!

Already on the raft, Feliciana continued to enjoy the breeze and the sun for another week, while drinking water and food were running out and some of her ex-friends received the just punishment for their pessimism and their bad attitude by dying of dehydration or falling overboard and getting lost among the waves on a day of swell.

When there was no more food or drinking water left, Feliciana decided, spontaneously, that it would be very healthy to fast. And so she would have happily enjoyed the next three days, if it weren't for her jinx ex-friends displaying a severely limited joy of life by dying one after the other, with annoying and unpleasant groans, throughout that time interval. What an indelicacy to complain and die in front of her!

All but one died; this one was not really her friend but only a friend of one of her ex-friends, who had invited him to embark with them on that trip. This other survivor, who, by the way, was the one who complained the least, was called Sereno.

Feliciana was throwing the bodies overboard as they died. To hell with them and with their bad vibes and their negativity! Now she would enjoy her pleasure cruise much more.

But the next day the raft was punctured. It was Sereno who saw the puncture and told Feliciana that the raft was losing air and that a solution should be found. She responded by saying:

— What a problem! Put a patch on it and that's all.

-There are no patches. We lost them the other day in the storm -Sereno replied.

-Well, we cut a piece of tarpaulin from the raft and use it to cover the hole -Feliciana replied, applying what she had learned in her manuals and workshops in a display of positive and emotionally intelligent reaction to life.

— But if we do that, then, we will make another hole to cover the previous one!

-Are you also starting to raise objections? -Feliciana replied dryly and sharply-. Leave me alone. What happens to you is that you are an envious killjoy, full of bad vibes who can not stand to see me happy. You are an energetic vampire who tries to steal my happiness and cheerfulness and to make my existence miserable.

After another five days a merchant ship spotted the raft and picked up Sereno. They found him alone and in good physical and mental condition. He was well fed, calm and lucid.

When they picked up the raft they saw that it had a strange patch attached to it with an inscription: "Don't worry, be happy."

Someone's Sermon to Some Others Somewhere³

Someone, at Somewhere, leaving the thicket, climbed on a rock and spoke thusly to those who were listening to him:

"To Hell with my followers! Damn those who now or in the future try to use my name to justify their ideas and actions! If you consider that an idea is correct, it must be able to be explained and defended by itself through reason and facts; further authorities are unnecessary. If, on the contrary, you consider that it is not, you should be able to prove it without resorting to the abominable scheme: 'This is false because Dr. So-and-so said it is'. So-and-so will never be more than a simple hominid, like all of us; and even the smartest ape has his limitations and is mistaken from time to time.

"A curse on those who now or in the future worship my image and honour my memory! A curse on them all once and a thousand times! "

And having said that, he spat on those present as a sign of disdain, and turning around, he disappeared again in the thicket.

However, for better or for worse, there was no one to listen to him there, except for a deaf goatherd who, after observing with surprise the peculiar behaviour of that moody being who had emerged from the undergrowth, and after dodging his spit, concluded that, whatever it was that that character had said to the void, he took it very seriously of course, and that he seemed to honestly feel what he was saying. But, since he had not heard a single word of the speech, he did not give greater importance to the incident and to its protagonist either.

Over the years, Someone's fame grew, first through the region and then beyond, because of his exceptional actions and words. For some he was a madman or an idiot, for others he was a saint or a sage. The former did not understand at all what he did

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and said. Neither did the latter, despite worshiping him and honouring his memory. It was these latter who should have been there that day at Somewhere when Someone climbed the rock and sodded them.

Interestingly, the only one who understood Someone really was the deaf goatherd who could not listen to him. For him, Someone was always just that, someone. Someone who one day, while he was herding his goats, climbed on a rock, and really pissed off, shouted something to infinity.

The River Fish and the Fish Tank⁴

Our protagonist lived in a river, more specifically in its middle section. He had always enjoyed complete freedom to swim the length and breadth of the channel until one fateful day, without knowing how, he ended up in a container.

After a few hours of hustle and bustle inside that can, the lid opened and the water dragged him out. Suddenly he found himself in a larger place where there were also other fish. Happy to be out of the can, his first impulse was to swim away at full speed. But, after having covered only a short distance, he collided with an invisible barrier. Surprised, he followed that strange transparent wall until he came to a corner where that piece of glass joined another one at right angles. He followed this other wall until he came upon another corner and then another, until he got back to the first. So that was it! That was not a river or a lake, but another, larger container, and in this case, with transparent walls.

The days passed, and he got to know the other inhabitants of the aquarium. They were almost all of his own species, but they were not like him. None of them had ever, through their own experience, known a river or a lake, much less the sea, that vast expanse of water too salty for their species but not for others, such as eels or salmon, which some old fish claimed stretched to infinity, down there, at the end of the river in which he had once lived. He tried to explain it to them, but they neither understood him nor paid him much attention and often branded him a liar or a lunatic. All of them had been born and had lived at that aquarium, or in others similar to that one, and for them, the world and life boiled down to a few liters of water enclosed within those glass walls. They could not even conceive that there was anything else outside aquariums or other ways of life than swimming around back and forth along the glass and eating the flakes of fish food which, from time to time, fell at more or less regular intervals from the surface. Yes, they did indeed glimpse through the glass at strange beings who wandered here and there, but instead of thinking that this was something real, they assumed that they were mere optical effects of the glass wall itself, distorted reflections of their own image and of that of their world. Some of them, perhaps more curious or restless, had sometimes tried to jump out across the surface to see if there was anything beyond that. And all they had managed to do was collide with the lid

⁴ A tale by E=m.c². © 2017, E=m.c².

of the aquarium and fall back bruised into the fish tank, which was interpreted by all of them as proof that there was nothing out there except a small layer of air on the surface. And what interest could there be in that little layer of air for a fish that was unable to breathe out of the water? Although there was a whole world outside the aquariums and the images they saw on the walls were real, it was clear that this was not an aquatic world, and therefore it was of no interest to them.

The river fish, hearing these arguments, tried to make them understand that, apart from a terrestrial and aerial world in which the fish certainly had little to do, there was a whole vast aquatic world beyond the walls of the aquariums, inhabited by river fish like him.

The responses of the other inhabitants of the aquarium belonging to the same species were diverse, but none were positive. They ranged from laughter and mockery at “such far-fetched occurrences” to anger, or even outrage, in the face of what some considered dangerous and harmful ideas for the welfare and the order of the life in the aquarium, to those of some fish, whose erudition and prestige were recognized by all others, who reminded him pompously that legends and myths had always been heard about a primitive silver aquatic world and imaginary wild and good fish that lived idyllically in such a paradise, but that these were only tales. He endeavored to make them understand that he was not speaking of ridiculous non-existent worlds or fantastic idealized fish, but of a real river and real fish, like himself and, to a certain extent, like them, and to tell them in detail how real life was like in the River. But then they answered that this supposed river and that wild life of which he spoke to them did not seem to them to be anything appealing, but rather something terrible and miserable, with so many dangers and unpredictability, and so much precariousness and difficulties in surviving. The only ones who seemed to give some credence to him were some of the most fainthearted and foolish fish, precisely those who believed in the myth of the Silver Aquatic Age, who obtusely considered him one of their own, because, among all the things he was really saying about wild life in the river, they listened to only what they liked hearing and, therefore, understood as little as the rest of them. Be that as it may, over and over again, he collided with the stupidity, the misunderstanding and the rejection of his other congeners of the aquarium.

In one of these instances, when he was dejected and sad in a corner, a fish of another species, who always swam alone and apart from the rest, approached him — he was the only one of that species that was in the aquarium — and said:

-Don't keep wasting time trying to convince them of what they don't even want to hear about. They are ignorant. And besides, most of them are also cowards. They know that if they really paid attention, they would no longer bear this aquarium and its comfortable way of life, and they would begin to feel them as intolerably bad. If you were taken seriously, even for a moment, even to ask whether what you say is true or not, they would in turn question their narrow conception of the world and of life, the aquarium would begin to feel too small, the life they lead now would turn out boring and empty, even despicable, and they would begin to feel uncomfortable, unhappy...

and this is something too hard to bear for fish like them, accustomed to an easy life, without problems, worries, conflicts, risks... Many of them feel that they are missing something (that's why some, from time to time, jump out and hit the lid) but they do not recognize it, much less will they ever accept that what they lack is the River and the free but hard way of life you tell them about. Normally, they attribute their discomfort to other causes such as the poor quality or the low quantity of food; to the delay in receiving it; to the lack of cleaning of the water filters; to the scarcity of ornaments, stones and plants in the aquarium among which to be able to swim and play; to the competitiveness and oppression exerted by the largest fish over the smallest... They do not conceive that, having a totally clean and safe fish tank, with good and abundant food every day, plants and rocks with which to entertain themselves, and the exclusive friendly company of other fish of the same size, they might need anything else; and of course they will never assume that what they lack is precisely freedom, and with it, a certain degree of effort, discomfort, precariousness, risk, difficulty... in life. They would never exchange their narrow but safe aquarium for your River, which for them represents nothing but hardships and threats. Therefore, they neither can nor want to listen to you. It is easier and less painful to settle for and convince themselves that there is no other possible world other than this aquarium.

-Yes, but I know that this is not true -said the river fish-. I know that the River exists, because I come from it; and that this fish tank is a miserable caricature of what our natural habitat and way of life are, and I am outraged that they do not want to take what I say seriously.

-And you're absolutely right -answered the strange fish-, but that doesn't help if they don't want to listen to you. The fish of my species are different from yours. We do remember and maintain the knowledge of what we really are and where we come from, and we transmit it from generation to generation. We force ourselves to be realistic and to acknowledge truth. That's why we don't usually get along with your kind, although there are obviously exceptions. I'm the only one of my kind left in this aquarium. The rest of my companions died in fights with those of your species, precisely because they did not want to adapt to that petty way of seeing the world and life. They tolerate me because I stand aside and do not enter into discussions or conflicts with them. Being strong, brave, honest and realistic and being right is of no use if you aren't cautious about your actions and make that bunch of bastards and fools furious. Especially when you are in a clear minority.

-I miss the River. Here I feel like I'm suffocating.

-I understand, I was born in an aquarium like this and I have always lived in fish tanks- said the rare fish -and even so I also miss the River you are talking about. But, as much as you miss it, don't even think about telling fish like that. You will only get them to make fun of you and take you for a crackpot. Limit contact with them to what is essential and go unnoticed if you do not want to end up like my companions. You will never get rid of that longing, but at least you will keep yourself alive and unscathed.

-And is life still worth living in these conditions?

-Maybe yes -replied the rare fish-. You should know that, in other aquariums like this one, there are more fish of your own species that are like you, that admit that the River exists, that it is how you describe it and that it is what we lack. I have met several of them. And from time to time, they either take one of the fish from here to another aquarium or they bring one of the fish from another aquarium here. Always be alert, and learn to distinguish those who are like you from the others, that is, from those who deny that the River exists, from those who belittle it, and also from those who ridiculously idealize it. To remember that you are not alone, and if you can and have the opportunity, to contact others like you, will help you stay strong and in high spirits in order to survive with dignity in this fish tank.

-Will I ever get to see the River again? -asked the river fish.

-That's something I can not answer with certainty -answered the rare fish-. Who knows? But, anyway, never forget that the River exists, how it really is and that you are coming from it. Because the day you "forget" and deny what you are and where you come from, you will stop being yourself, a true river fish, and you will become another one of those miserable aquarium fishes, and then, you will surely never be able to return to the River.

What the Story Did Not Tell⁵

The famous folk tale about a "Naked King"⁶ ends with the comment of a child who says what everyone saw but no one dared to recognize. However, the only unlikely part of this story is precisely the end that is traditionally assigned to it. That is, after listening to the child saying that the king was naked, everyone openly acknowledged the deception and the scamming tailors were punished. What a fairy tale! That people, as a whole, in an extraordinary outburst of honesty and courage, recognize their own mistakes and defects, and even more, as in this case, their meanness and herd mentality. This does not fit even in a story!

What was then the true end of the story? What really happened after that poor and unsuspecting child recklessly opened his sincere mouth is something that nobody tells, because, as is well known, these kinds of stories are first and foremost popular, and there are certain things that people do not like to remember (nor to be reminded of), especially if these things reveal people's true character: that they are a stupid and vile mass.

Let's see what the true end of the story really was, now that the mass doesn't hear us:

⁵ A Tale by E=m.c². Copyright © 2017, E=m.c²

⁶ There are several versions of this old tale (it dates, at least, to the fourteenth century), but the most popular today is that by Hans Christian Andersen (nineteenth century), entitled "The Emperor's New Clothes".

“When people listened to what that kid was openly saying, and knowing all that it meant, that is, that all of them, from the king himself to the last of his vassals (except the bigmouth child, obviously), were nothing but hypocrites, brown-noses, fakers, sheeple and cowards, they reacted quickly and expeditiously, as was necessary. And covering the kid’s mouth so that he wouldn’t say what nobody wanted to hear, they started beating him and calling him a fool.

“The next morning, at the gates of the city, the agonizing body of the undemocratic child drew its last breath impaled on a pole. The king was still naked and people praised in public the beauty and showiness of the monarch’s attire fabrics. The wealthiest ordered “clothes” like those of the emperor from the false tailors, and the rest, full of envy, dreamed that someday they or their children could “wear clothes” like those of the king. And they all laughed and mocked remembering how that idiotic and unsociable kid was unable to see what they didn’t see either, but which they would never admit to not be seeing.”

Genesis⁷

In the beginning was the world, and it was neither bad nor good. And out of the world came forth Man. And Man created a spirit in his own image and likeness and called it Satan, and saw that it was evil. The evil spirit, seeing that men were suspicious and avoided it because of its evident evilness, created a scarecrow on the sly and entered into it. Thereupon it appeared before men saying, “I am God, I am Good,” and then men came to it and listened to it and followed its orders and served it, and they did so willingly because they saw that God was good. And this is how the devil, disguised as God, deceived men into obeying and serving him, believing that they were doing Good. And in this way Satan finally succeeded in subjugating the world.

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Ultimo was a long time correspondent of Ted Kaczynski and Ted did the translation of the story “The Myth of Erk” below. Published under the pen name $E=mc^2$.

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