MIRRORS

STORIES OF ALMOST EVERYONE

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ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY MARK FRIED
No footnotes, no bibliographic sources are included.

I realized in time that they would have taken up more pages than the nearly six hundred stories themselves.

Neither have I listed the many collaborators whose assistance allowed *Mirrors* to become more than just a raving notion. I cannot, however, fail to mention several who had the patience to read the final manuscript and who saved me from more than a few embarrassments: Tim Chapman, Antonio Doñate, Karl Hübener, Carlos Machado, Pilar Royo, and Raquel Villagra. This book is dedicated to them and to the innumerable friends who made this impossible task possible.

*Ypara Helena, muy.*

*Montevideo, the final days of 2007*
Father, paint me the earth on my body.
—Sioux chant from South Dakota

MIRRORS ARE FILLED WITH PEOPLE.
The invisible see us.
The forgotten recall us.
When we see ourselves, we see them.
When we turn away, do they?

BORN OF DESIRE

Life was alone, no name, no memory. It had hands, but no one to touch. It had a tongue, but no one to talk to. Life was one, and one was none.

Then desire drew his bow. The arrow of desire split life down the middle, and life was two.

When they caught sight of each other, they laughed. When they touched each other, they laughed again.

A FEAST ON FOOT

Adam and Eve were black?
The human adventure in the world began in Africa. From there, our ancestors set out to conquer the planet. Many paths led them to many destinies, and the sun took care of handing out colors from the palette.

Now the rainbow of the earth is more colorful than the rainbow of the sky. But we are all emigrants from Africa. Even the whitest of whites comes from Africa.
Maybe we refuse to acknowledge our common origins because racism causes amnesia, or because we find it unbelievable that in those days long past the entire world was our kingdom, an immense map without borders, and our legs were the only passport required.

THE TROUBLEMAKER

Separate were heaven and earth, good and bad, birth and death. Day and night never mixed. Woman was woman and man was man.

But Exù, the errant bandit of Africa, liked to entertain himself by provoking outlawed minglings. And he is still at it.

His devilish tricks erase borders, join what the gods divided. Thanks to his clever deeds the sun turns black and the night burns bright. From the pores of men sprout women and women sweet men. The dying are born, the born are dying. For everything ever created or yet to be created, backward and forward get so confused you can no longer tell boss from bossed or up from down.

Later rather than sooner, divine order reestablishes its hierarchies and geographies, and everything and everyone gets put in its place. But sooner rather than later, madness reappears.

Then the gods lament that the world is such a difficult place.

CAVES

Stalactites hang from the ceiling. Stalagmites grow from the floor. All are fragile crystals, born from the sweat of rocks in the depths of caves etched into the mountains by water and time.

Stalactites and stalagmites spend thousands of years reaching down or reaching up, drop by drop, searching for each other in the darkness. It takes some of them a million years to touch. They are in no hurry.

ORIGIN OF FIRE

In school they taught me that way back in caveman times we discovered fire by rubbing stones or sticks together. I’ve been trying ever since. I never got even a tiny spark. My personal failure has not kept me from appreciating the favors fire did for us. It defended us from the cold and from threatening beasts. It cooked our food, lit up the night, and invited us to sit, together, at its side.

ORIGIN OF BEAUTY

There they are, painted on the walls and ceilings of caves. Bison, elk, bears, horses, eagles, women, men, these figures are ageless. They were born thousands upon thousands of years ago, but they are born anew every time someone looks at them.

How could our ancestor of long ago paint so delicately? How could a brute who fought wild beasts with his bare hands create images so filled with grace? How did he manage to draw those flying lines that break free of the stone and take to the air? How could he? …

Or was it she?

SAHARA’S GREENERY

In Tassili and elsewhere in the Sahara, cave paintings offer stylized images from six thousand years ago of cows, bulls, antelope, giraffes, rhinoceroses, elephants …

Were those animals simply imagined? If not, did the inhabitants of the desert drink sand? And what did they eat? Stones?

Art tells us the desert was no desert. Its lakes resembled seas and its
He lived in the Rio de Janeiro insane asylum. There, seven blue angels delivered an order from the divine: God wants an inventory taken of the world.

The mission was monumental. Arthur worked day and night, every day, every night, until the winter of 1989 when, still immersed in the task, death took him by the hair and carried him off.

The inventory, incomplete, consisted of scrap metal, broken glass, bald brooms, walked-through sneakers, emptied bottles, slept-in sheets, road-weary wheels, sea-worn sails, defeated flags, well-thumbed letters, forgotten words, and fallen rain.

Arthur worked with garbage, because all garbage is life lived and from garbage comes everything the world is or has ever been. Nothing intact deserved a listing. Things intact die without ever being born. Life only pulsates in what bears scars.

THE ROAD GOES ON

When someone dies, when his time is up, what happens to the wanderings, desirings, and speakings that were called by his name?

Among the Indians of the upper Orinoco, he who dies loses his name. His ashes are stirred into plantain soup or corn wine and everybody eats. After the ceremony no one ever names the dead person again; the dead one, now living in other bodies, called by other names, wanders, desires, and speaks.

DANGER IN THE NIGHT

Sleeping, she saw us.

Helena dreamed we were waiting in line at an airport. A long line where every passenger had under the arm the pillow on which he or she had slept the night before.

The pillows were sent through a dream-reading machine. The machine detected any dangerous dreams that threatened to disturb the peace.

LOST AND FOUND

The twentieth century, which was born proclaiming peace and justice, died bathed in blood. It passed on a world much more unjust than the one it inherited.

The twenty-first century, which also arrived heralding peace and justice, is following in its predecessor's footsteps.

In my childhood, I was convinced that everything that went astray on earth ended up on the moon.

But the astronauts found no sign of dangerous dreams or broken promises or hopes betrayed.

If not on the moon, where might they be?

Perhaps they were never misplaced.

Perhaps they are in hiding here on earth. Waiting.