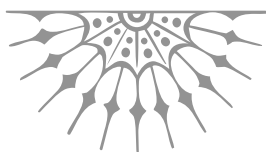


A THOUSAND
DEATHS
PLUS ONE



OTHER BOOKS BY SERGIO RAMÍREZ
IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Hatful of Tigers:
Reflections on Art, Culture and Politics

Margarita, How Beautiful the Sea

To Bury Our Fathers

Stories

A THOUSAND
DEATHS
PLUS ONE

a novel by

SERGIO
RAMÍREZ

Translated from the Spanish by

LELAND H. CHAMBERS



McPherson & Company

KINGSTON, NEW YORK

A THOUSAND DEATHS PLUS ONE

Copyright © 2004 by Sergio Ramírez.
Translation copyright © 2009 by Leland H. Chambers.
All rights reserved.

Original title: *Mil y una muertes*
Published by Alfaguara, 2004

This edition published by McPherson & Company
Box 1126 Kingston, New York 12402,
with assistance from the Literature Program of the
New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency.
Book design by Bruce R. McPherson.
Jacket design by Paul Bacon.
Typeset in Carre Noir.
Printed on pH neutral paper.
Manufactured in the United States of America.

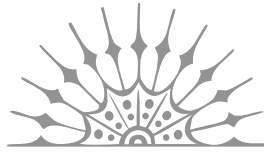
1 3 5 7 9 1 0 8 6 4 2 2009 2010 2011

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Ramírez, Sergio, 1942-
[*Mil y una muertes*. English]
A thousand deaths plus one : a novel / by Sergio Ramírez ; translated from
the Spanish by Leland H. Chambers.
p. cm.
ISBN 978-0-929701-87-5 (alk. paper)
I. Chambers, Leland H., 1928- II. Title.
PQ7519.2.R25M5513 2009
863'.64--dc22

2009002415

The translator expresses particular gratitude to the following individuals for help provided at various points in the process of translating this novel, whose language touches in detail on such a broad selection of historical and cultural themes: Sydney Chambers, Carolynne Myall, Javier Torre, Zulema López, Oriol Casanas, and of course Sergio Ramírez.



FIRST PART

Camera Obscura

- The Nomad Prince* BY RUBÉN DARÍO 13
- 1 *And what is the worst? To be born* 23
- 2 *A country that does not exist* 49
- 3 *A champion hog at the agricultural fair* 80
- 4 *The prisoner in the fortress* 99
- 5 *The knife that cuts both ways* 130

SECOND PART

Camera Lucida

- The Drunken Faun* BY JOSÉ MARÍA VARGAS VILA 147
- 6 *The filibuster and the princess* 161
- 7 *Fleas on the roast chicken* 182
- 8 *The naked nymphs* 202
- 9 *The beloved young man* 217
- 10 *Dorsal decubitus* 242
- 11 *A suckling pig* 262

EPILOGUE

- A glass of the waters of oblivion* 287

..❧ for *Antonia Kerrigan* ❧..

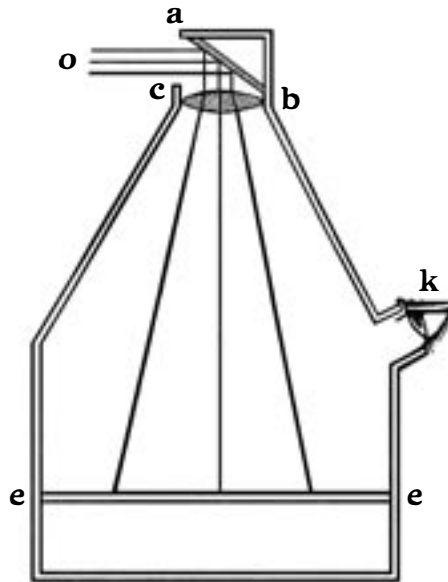
*It is a rule of refinement, when writing about
and making use of the vicissitudes of our life,
never to tell the truth.*

SØREN KIERKEGAARD, *Diary* (1842-1844)

*A man lies here, silent and ignored,
Who, living, lived a thousand deaths plus one;
Do not expect to learn about my days gone by.
To awaken is to die. Rouse me not!*

XAVIER VILLAURRUTIA, *Epitafios*

FIRST PART
Camera Obscura



The Nomad Prince

by *Rubén Darío*



A MORNING OF SUMMER JUBILANCE this July Sunday, when I have come as far as the splendid Mallorcan paradise that for not a few years now has served as a lavish retreat for His Highness the Archduke Luis Salvador. You may be aware that Miramar, this princely estate halfway between Deyá and Valldemosa, was once the residence of Haddarán in times when the Arabs bestowed on these Balearic Islands their miracles of eastern civilization, some quite practical, like the terraces, irrigation canals, and cisterns for the benefit of the seeds, and others rather spiritual, such as the poetic writings inscribed on arches and walls to make the stones to speak.

The magnificent Richard-Brassier automobile which the painter Santiago Rusiñol has made available to me— together with his *chauffeur*, attired in a gray uniform with

The Nomad Prince

high boots like a police official—has made its way with the help of its strident claxon along the narrow, twisting road, blaring its warning alike for the *carretelas* drawn by dilatory Algerian burros, carrying peasants, and for the dray wagons transporting provincial gentlemen and pot-bellied priests on their Sunday excursions.

The fresh light shimmers over the heights and descends as if it were joined with the wind that is shaking the branches of the pines, while the sea with its changing face repeats the burnished solar reflections in the vaped distance where the plume of smoke from a steamer, appearing to the eye as a minuscule something, is dissolving. One can now breathe deeply and full of pleasure the balsamic air that spreads itself everywhere so prodigally, welcoming us, and then it seems as though you can hear the voice of the divine Virgil among the fronds rocked by light Aeolian gusts: *Hic arguta sacra pendebit fistula pinu.*

The royal landlord arrived here years ago while searching for a refuge, fleeing the rigors of court life. Ah, to have the courage to abandon forever the urban masses, those “rectangular abominations”! To understand the merits of solitude and the salubrious mingling of one’s own spirit with that of wordless beings! To withdraw from what in religious terminology is called “the world” and come to a place such as this to finish out the task of earthly life!

From the crest of the escarpment, the landscape starts falling away in steep slopes until turning into the promontory of Na Cova Foradada, a tongue of rock stained with colorings of iron and copper that enters the sea foam like a colossal dragon, with its stone-like eye pierced through by the winds (and on the opposite side you can make out the cove of Sa Estaca, which serves as an anchorage) and where the wandering Archduke ordered to be placed on the heights a small palace cottage for a certain feminine person-

The Nomad Prince

age who is still veiled in mystery. Her name was Catalina.

He carried her from the city to be the housekeeper for these precincts where once the nightingale of Raymond Lull, the Divine Anchorite, was heard to sing, and where now one sees in how flattering a fashion he honored her in his affections. But, persecuted by the Archduke's adverse destiny, she died of leprosy two years ago, having suffered the disfigurement of her elegant face together with the amputation of some fingers. It was an illness that she acquired, according to what I've been told, during a pilgrimage to Palestine.

In a small enclave in the garden stands a cage with iron bars, and behind them a vulture, making a show of its elegant boredom and gazing at us with some disregard and also a bit of asthmatic ferocity. There are small temples rising up from among the graceful pines, and one of those the Archduke has consecrated to Raymond Lull in the same spot where the author of the magic *Libro de Blanquerna* had his rustic chapel.

I have been told that this august personage happened to be absent on one of his frequent escapades around the Mediterranean, but that is not true because from Raymond's chapel, which also serves as a vantage point lookout, I see the *Nixe II*, his mighty three-masted yacht, anchored in the Sa Estaca cove. And now I catch sight of him and am amazed by a singular spectacle. Listen.

Along the road that goes down among the murmuring cypresses comes a strange procession, more resembling a band of acrobats painted by Goya than anything else, absurd figures of the kind so beloved of Valle Inclán, most of them bearing fresh armfuls of camellias, crocuses, peonies: a woman past her prime, thick-wasted and matronly, with a mantilla and back comb, sinking on her twisted heels as she walks; a peasant woman, hair now streaked with gray, one of those that dance the Mallorcan *boleras*; a turbaned

The Nomad Prince

Hindu with the look of a fakir ravaged by the hunger of his fasts, his mouth dyed red from betel nut, and a wicker basket under his arm which might contain a deadly asp; a Turk with his fez, wearing embroidered slippers on his feet, with huge mustachios and his muscled torso naked, the very image of the executioner who would decapitate you painlessly with his gleaming scimitar; a "Miss" wearing a long skirt, with the air of an English governess, and a hat adorned with ragged tendrils, and impertinent eyes with which she seems to want to decipher the mysteries of the world by holding them up in front of her myopic vision; a chubby-cheeked little boy in a sailor suit that squeezes his flesh; a tonsured monk in a coarse-clothed brown habit, faded now, and wearing a pilgrim's sandals; a man in a tight frock coat and a bowler hat, the faithful image of a grave digger of the kind whose sight alone awakens a morbid terror in me.

At the tail of the procession, an elderly man, very fat and bearded, with a grimy blue jacket and visored cap, is carrying a Borneo monkey mounted crosslegged on his shoulders as if it were a little boy, and by his side a dog obviously of no known breed is leaping and running about, trying to get some attention from the monkey, who for his part just bares his teeth. It is the Archduke himself. And right behind him, a photographer painfully carries his tripod, stopping periodically to rest with panting breath; he seems asthmatic. His wide-brimmed hat is thrown forward with a gesture that says, "Of course it's not out of nonchalance," his dark hair falls to his shoulders in Nazarine ringlets, his exhausted amber eyes are set in a face that one would say belonged to a maharajah or an Indian cacique, one of those mysterious faces that the tropic suns have baked in their implacable splendor; and all the while a little girl, whose straw hat is trimmed with colorful ribbons falling down her back, frolics about his feet.

The Nomad Prince

Outrageously nonsensical in their appearance, but anointed with the devotion that you will only find in those hermetic cults which in their esoteric delirium worship Phoebus the golden or the pallid Selene. My presence goes unobserved by them, but I have no idea what they are up to, so it seems impertinent of me to follow after them. When once more in Palma I put the question to Rusiñol concerning this strange vision, he informs me that such creatures comprise the Archduke's entourage, and they always accompany him in his unforeseen peregrinations aboard the *Nixe II*. One might catch sight of them one day in Trieste, another day in Algiers, on yet another day in Palermo, or in Alexandria, or in Piraeus, and on not a few occasions they have been taken for the performers in a circus side show, or else for a *troupe de comédiens*.

At the moment when I met them, they were, he informs me, on their way to throw those flowers into the sea, a ceremony that is held every year in memory of the Archduke's private secretary of old, Wenceslas Vyborny, a handsome boy from Bohemia who died of sunstroke after daring to sail on a clandestine trip from Sa Estaca to Palma to meet with a secret lover. He died there in a hotel, and the Archduke, unhinged by grief, purchased the bed where he had died, together with the rest of the furniture of the room, and brought it all here to be consumed in a kind of funeral pyre. The *Nixe II* carried back to his own country the remains of the young man so beloved of the Archduke, but before weighing anchor he ordered the cloth of each of the yacht's sails painted black.

Then he explained to me why, in a lower room of the Archducal palace, where visitors are permitted to go, and which exudes a monastic feeling because of its silence, the traveler is surprised by a marble monument signed by Tantarardini in which the Angel of Supreme Justice is attempting

The Nomad Prince

to awaken, with the protesting clamor of his horn, a slim-looking Apollonian cadaver. What is that piece of mausoleum sculpture, I ask myself, doing here, looking as though it has been taken out of the Staglieno Cemetery in Genoa, which is considered the most beautiful in Europe, after the Père Lachaise in Paris? For, just like the funeral procession I have described, it commemorates the Archduke's singular relationship with Vyborny.

The wind of gossip, that *ventecello* which the immortal Rossini sets ruffling in *The Barber of Seville*, takes great delight in nibbling away at the opalescent oblation from Carrara that our imperial Pylades dedicated to his secretary Orestes. A simple case of ordinary pandering? Or could it be that the Archduke, exiled from mundane glory by his own will, sees nature as a whole and in consequence demonstrates a grand and extraordinary capacity for love that embraces equally female and male, animal and plant?

Dedicated to scientific research, his books and pamphlets on cartography, navigation, philology and history, on the flora and fauna of these environs, are learned and numerous, and the Royal Academy of Science in Madrid has honored him as a regular member for having discovered a rare specimen of buckthorn, baptized in his name as *Rahmanus ludovicus-salvatoris*.

Tragic, at any rate, is the appropriate appellation for his story and that of his illustrious family of Atreides, having suffered pursuit by the indefatigable Furies throughout the centuries. His fiancée, the Princess Matilde, daughter of his cousin Albert, died in a hydrostatic bed after going through two weeks of agony, the consequence of some serious burns she suffered when her clothing took fire; she had just finished putting on a diaphanous garment of tulle in her apartment in the Weilburg Castle when her father unexpectedly entered her bedroom, and the tragedy occurred

The Nomad Prince

either because in a fright she was trying to hide behind her back a cigarette she was smoking, or else because her progenitor had drawn too close to the sheer fabric while carrying a lit Havana cigar between his fingers.

And his brother Johan Salvator, the rebellious Johann Orth who lit such a fuse for the press when he renounced his heraldic surname to take that of a bourgeois citizen and then married the vaudeville dancer Milli Steubel? The two of them disappeared in the South Atlantic near Cape Horn when their merchant sailing ship the *Santa Margarita* was wrecked. And his cousin Maximilian, the Emperor of Mexico who was set up there by the ambitions of Napoleon III? He was executed on the Cerro de Las Campanas, as recently portrayed so admirably by Nargeot's lithograph, while Carlota, the fugitive Empress, lover of the cantatas and motets of Bach, and in her youth a devout reader of Plutarch's *Moralia: Customs and Mores*, today strolls around, out of her mind, through the rooms of Bouchout Castle in Belgium, the country of her birth.

His cousin Sophia, Duchess of Alençon, died consumed by a fire at La Charité in Paris, an event of which there are some astonishing photographs printed by Count Primoli. Another cousin of his, Rudolph, Crown Prince of Austria, true to a fatal pact with his lover, Baroness María Vetsera, killed her with one shot and afterward put another in his own head, in the solitude of their lodging at a hunting preserve in Mayerling. Still another, Archduke Wilhelm, died in a fall from his horse, after the noble animal suddenly shied and threw him violently from the saddle.

Shall we ever bring this tale to an end? His cousin Ludwig II of Bavaria, the fanciful king who, thoroughly saturated with Wagnerian melodies, spent his life building castles inspired by Teutonic mythologies, was capable of loving with equal passion both Wagner and his stableboy, rival of

The Nomad Prince

Admetus (that *ventecello* once more), and died poetically by drowning in the Sternberger See.

And his cousin Elisabeth, Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary, the mother of the unfortunate suicide Rudolph? Assassinated in Geneva by the dagger of that Luccheni, a fanatic anarchist who attacked her treacherously when she was strolling along the promenade by the lake, accompanied by a single *dame de compagnie*, such was her passion for anonymity. A strange and unsubmissive creature, she preferred the fortunate seclusion of the Gödöllö Palace in Budapest to the weariness of the ceremonial life of the Hofburg in Vienna. On her sumptuous yacht where she paraded her nervous hyperesthesia around the Mediterranean, she always carried two goats, one white and the other black, to be milked every morning so as to be able to give herself a cosmetic bath in milk.

Elisabeth, as nomadic as her cousin the Archduke, sometimes visited him incognito in Miramar, with no other companion than her hunchbacked confidant, the poet Cris-tomanos, who taught the queen to read the dactylic hexameters of Homer in classic Greek. That was when she and the mysterious Catalina met each other. When this poor unfortunate woman succumbed to Hansen's disease, Luis Salvador wrote a heartfelt pamphlet in tribute to her, of which Rusiñol keeps a copy among the rarities of his enviable library, and in which that encounter is described. I quote: "They got along as if they had known each other all their lives, since in both of them throbbed the same human feelings, very brightly. The sun went down on the horizon and the sea shone like gold, enveloping them in a glorious halo. It was like a transfiguration. Who would have dared suspect, at such a moment, that in a few years this earthly transfiguration would be turned into a celestial one for both?"

One must say that, Catalina being only a commoner, the

The Nomad Prince

imperial court in Vienna with bureaucratic speed ordered all the copies of the obituary confiscated; a few copies were saved, and one of them came into Rusiñol's possession, as I said, purchased on the *rive gauche* from Père Bouchon, the most *intrigant* of the *bouquinistes* I know, capable of obtaining for you the original roll of the Torah, if that is what you were to request from him.

Given the incongruousness of his entourage, and the outrageousness of his habits, there are those who think that through the veins of Luis Salvador run the same miasmas of madness that muddied the mind of Ludwig of Bavaria, although he often has been heard to remark sarcastically, "In my family everyone is mad, but the one who is least so is myself." Judge for yourself.

A most pleasing solar glow burnishes the cupolas of the little temples when the eccentric procession becomes lost beyond the branches of the corpulent oaks that hold out the arabesques of their branches above the radiant blue of the sea. The Archduke turns his head for a moment, notices me, and gazes at me with definite curiosity. For my part, I contemplate him as if this were a matter of a photograph before turning over the page in an album. With his filthy jacket and visored cap, his little eyes imprisoned by the fleshy cheeks beneath the blond eyebrows, the bristles of his beard badly trimmed and graying, would he not look to you like the coach driver for a relay of post horses?

The traveler senses from afar his wheezing respiration, and afterwards watches him go off behind his procession with the monkey on his shoulder, stooped and clumsy in his obesity, taking air in with his snout down as if searching for acorns on the ground.

Published originally in *Orbe Latino*, Vol 3, No. 3, Madrid, August, 1907; included in *Páginas desconocidas de Rubén Darío*, ed. Roberto Ibáñez, Biblioteca de Marcha, Montevideo, 1970.

1

And what is the worst? To be born

One body that is vile, the other one pure, virtues and vices all amount to the same thing: they turn into brothers when they are dead. Evidently, death is the best act of human beings. And what is the worst? To be born.

Chopin, *Notebook*, 1831

THE FIRST OF THE EPISODES I wish to tell about has to do with my stay in Warsaw at the beginning of autumn, 1987, when I went for an interview with General Jaruzelski. The Polish government put me up then in a residence for visiting officials on Klonowa Street, very close to the Belvedere Palace where the meeting was to take place.

Klonowa Street is very short, opening out beneath the ash trees and presenting an abundance of Neoclassical mansions with fences of gilded, sharpened rods standing in front of the gardens. The one they assigned to me had belonged to the merchant Karol Kumelski, a dealer in wheat and animal feed, and the double K of his improvised escutcheon could still be seen at the peak of the iron arch above the large portal door. They gave me a luxurious apartment at the back of the garden, while the rest of the

delegation occupied the rooms in the principle section of the residence.

On that street were living now the dignitaries of the party, generals and ministers, as could be seen by the traffic of official cars that moved about noiselessly with their clusters of antennas, and by the guards armed with Kalashnikov rifles that were posted in the sentry boxes beside the front doors. I believe I recall, but this could be a fabrication of my memory, that the guards, squeezed into their gray wool overcoats, wore gaiters and white gloves, and that the sentry boxes were painted in stripes, as in the old comic strips of Tintin drawn by Hergé.

Those were the difficult days at the beginning of the transition that Jaruzelski, amid many tensions and in a rather enigmatic way, pushed through, garbed in his military wear and behind those smoked lenses with their heavy tortoise-shell frames. Because of his dark glasses, in Nicaragua those of us in the government used to refer to him, in the privacy of our jokes, as “José Feliciano,” the name of the blind Puerto Rican singer who was all the rage then. Those glasses and his baldness, which had it not been for his uniform would very likely have caused us to confuse him with an inflexible professor of theology, did nothing for his charisma. But neither did they remove anything from his affability, interested as he was during that interview in listening to my stories of the far-off Nicaragua at war while the Soviet world was beginning to come apart like moth-chewed valances on an old curtain. Then he had me move into a salon surrounded by velvet drapes of Corinthian red, the sort that accumulate age and dust, and in a simple ceremony attended by only by some junior staff functionary, he fastened the Order of the Defenders of Warsaw on me, clumsily poking its none-too-sharp pin through my lapel.

We had arrived late the night before, coming from

And what is the worst? To be born

Prague, but very early in the morning I got up to do my jogging. In those days I stuck firmly to my routine, knowing that the worst thing for keeping to the discipline of my exercises was these journeys, when I would be subject to schedules that usually begin with a working breakfast and end with a formal dinner lasting until well past midnight. That's why, to remove any excuses, I always brought my sweats and my running shoes with me. I thought of waking up Lieutenant Moisés Rivera, who accompanied me on my visits abroad at the head of a small escort of two men, more honorific than anything else, but in the end I decided to play a trick on him and go by myself, as long as the Polish bodyguards in any event were not going to lose the opportunity of following my footsteps. Nonetheless, when I went down to the garden there was only the one guard in gaiters and white gloves encased in his long, gray overcoat beside the sentry-box. He looked at me without saying anything, surely because he didn't recognize me, and then I decided to take off.

Trotting, I crossed the stripes of the pedestrian crossing at Avenue Ujadowskie. At that hour there was nothing moving except a trolleybus, half empty but with its lights on inside, and I passed in front of the Belvedere Palace, illuminated in the darkness of the early morning by discreet spotlights. When the caravan that brought us from the airport the night before had come in sight of the Palace, our official translator explained, with a serious countenance, that during the first half of the nineteenth century the Grand Duke Constantine had resided there. As representative of the Imperial Russian power, he was as hated by the Poles as his brother, Czar Alexander I. Beside me in the seat of the swank Chaika automobile, Josef Krajewska, who as president of the Planning Commission had been charged with receiving me, smiled without understanding

the slightest thing about that spontaneous commentary.

The translator, the grandson of immigrants from Bohemia, was named Dominik Vyborny and was an Assistant Professor in the School of Arts and Letters at the University of Warsaw. Spirited and revealing a bony complexion with broad cheekbones, he must have been around fifty, and his coppery-colored hair was beginning to thin. Slovenly of dress, pompous in his gestures, he spoke Spanish with an appealing accent because he had learned it without ever having left Poland from an exiled republican from Sevilla, don Rafael Escuredo. He pronounced his lengthy sentences without a break, with guttural spasms, the thick veins of his neck standing out, and he would end them with a kind of sob, as if he were lifting his head out of water after a prolonged immersion. He didn't hide his sympathy with Walesa and the Solidarity Movement, and, of course, with the Pope Wojtyła; and as you can already see, neither did he hide his ill will toward the Russians of all epochs. Apart from that, he was a great admirer of Rubén Darío, a respect passed on by his teacher Escuredo, and was the translator of several of Darío's poems into Polish.

Beyond the Belvedere Palace I could make out beneath the motionless mist the woods of the Łazienki Royal Park. Soon I came to an esplanade where there stood several rows of iron chairs, and in front of them some five or six music stands dispersed around the damp grass, recent evidence of some open-air chamber music concert. Behind the music stands was a statue of Chopin in the act of seeking inspiration, a rock for his seat and his hands on his knees beneath a willow tree with a thick trunk, its bronze branches pushed in a motionless tide by the wind.

The night before, during the trip from the airport, I had been unable to get my host Krajewska, who was suffocating from the heat inside the Chaika and surely eager to get

to sleep as soon as possible, to show some interest in the conversation topics I proposed. When I expressed my admiration for Chopin, he had merely smiled as he thanked me. Dominik, paying no attention to the limits of his job as translator, puffed up his mouth in a disdainful way and told me that Chopin, a very precocious genius and all that, had nonetheless accepted favors from the Grand Duke Constantine, even after the insurrection of 1831 against the Russian invaders, and that Czar Alexander himself had given him a ring loaded with diamonds that he not only accepted but kept in Paris among his sentimental treasures.

I began to run first down narrow sandy walkways and then on some paths covered by a jumble of dead leaves. The cold was pressing in, and I zipped up my sweats to the neck. Getting further away, I ran along now without a fixed plan beneath real grottoes of shade. I got onto an unknown path that started behind a thicket that suddenly burst apart, rustling with the sudden flight of a flock of partridges, and I crossed a small log bridge above the rippled current of an irrigation ditch that was sounding below me with a secret murmuring; and soon, as the master of this freedom that was like a gift, I was overcome by the joy of running cross-country through a place as unfamiliar and as beautiful as this one—and moreover, I was alone. I hadn't come across a single soul, no other runner, no passer-by, not even a park guard.

It was just at the break of day when I came out in a clearing and stopped to give myself a rest. In the center stood a summerhouse pavilion surrounded by a gallery of tubular columns topped by capitals without ornament. I mounted the flight of steps eager to get a look through the glass doors, dripping with dew, that calmly reflected the yellow and gold foliage of the trees in a light that remained diffuse. With my nose against the glass, I put my hands

together before my face to form a kind of screen and thus managed to make out a long, double panel mounted at an angle on an easel, covered with photographs. I discovered the door was open because it gave way when the wind pushed it, and so I went in.

The exhibit was titled *Castellón the Photographer in Warsaw*. Paired off on the panels, the photographs with serrated edges, printed on glossy paper, and held up there with tacks, were divided into *Before the Nazi Occupation* and *During the Nazi Occupation*, and the legend beneath each one of them appeared in Polish and in French, carefully typed, all of which gave the whole thing an academic cast. *Before*: the crowded Chlodna Street with the Clock Building trimmed with neo-baroque decorations, the Panoptikum movie theater, the Amphitryon Theater, a huge silken slipper raised up above its slender heel at the door of a women's shoe store, a tailor shop with manikins of different heights showing in the window, for adults and children, wearing double-breasted suits and men's dress hats. At the intersection of Długa and Naveliski streets, Simon's Arcades was a rather modern looking apparition of glass and concrete among the neoclassical edifices.

Then the camera visited interiors. La Fantaisie, a shop for gentlemen's wear. The cashier wearing a bakelite eyeshade proudly raises his glance behind a cash register decorated with ironwork, admiring the merchandise: umbrellas all open and suspended from the ceiling, bundles of canes in wicker displays, fans from Sevilla, ostrich feathers, necklaces of false pearls, brooches and cameos in glass showcases. The Blikle Café, where customers crowded in front of small, marble-topped tables are unfolding newspapers hung on shining rods, the waiters wearing their long aprons are poised with their empty trays, while an imposing porcelain samovar stands in the background.

And what is the worst? To be born

The photos *During* were arranged on the lower part of the panel: the wooden bridge crossing over Chlodna Street at the intersection with Zelatna Street to connect the two sectors of the ghetto, and looking like a railway car suspended in mid air; at the steps leading up to the bridge German soldiers standing guard wearing their gleaming boots and long overcoats, sheathed in those flaring helmets that covered their ears, so familiar from the movies. At the entrance to the ghetto from Siena Street stood a long line of men with days-old beards and women with knotted babushkas on their heads waiting to climb into a military truck carrying their belongings: suitcases tied with rope, a painting with embossed moldings, and a table lamp dangling its plug on the ground, borne in the arms of a boy wearing an adult's hat, all bound for the siding yards at the Central Station on Jeroziolimskie Avenue. Little boys clutched at the grating over the tiny window of a horse-drawn carnival wagon, destined for the same place.

There was also Chopin's birthplace in Zelazowa Wola, *Before* and *During*. *Before*: the gable roof of slate straining under the snow that had accumulated also on the steps of the entryway, *Winter View*, February, 1934. *During*: being consumed by the flames of a fire that has left bare the framework of the roof, the beams smoldering. A swastika, painted with a wide brush, decorates one of the smoke-scorched walls: *A fire that was set on July 4, 1940, by attack forces of Nazi youths who charged Chopin with being decadent*.

The final pair of photos dealt with Szeroki Dunaj Street, very close to the Gate of the Butchers, in the old city. In the one below, *During*, the shuttered businesses have their windows nailed up with boards, and the snow is coming down like sperm over the streetlamps that look in relief like carnivorous flowers entrapped by tiny parasites at the tops of their iron stalks. A boy of some seven years stands in the

foreground, with his back toward the door of a pharmacy, his hands above his head. The pharmacy's sign above the door says *Apteka Capharnaüm* on a ribbon held up by a pair of cupids. The boy is dark, his limp hair open in a pair of waves falling over his forehead, and he wears the Star of David sewn to his coat. A few steps away on the cobblestones lies a pair of bodies wrapped in overcoats, and between them and the boy is a trail of articles of clothing that have fallen out of a packed suitcase of cardboard that also is in the picture. The fallen man is corpulent, the woman quite slight, but their faces cannot be seen. Soldiers stand guard over the scene from alongside a motorcar, pointing their Schmeisser machine guns at the bodies, apparently waiting in expectation of the arrival of a superior officer. *The "chouette" couple from Mallorca comprised of Baltasar Bonnin, a butcher by trade, and his wife Teresa (Catholic Jews having immigrated from the Balearic Islands, Spain), murdered in the middle of the street on Christmas Day, 1940, by soldiers of the Gestapo, one of many criminal incidents occurring after the establishment of the Warsaw ghetto.*

The upper photo, *Before*, shows the same street on a spring morning. There are pots of geraniums on the balconies. In the upper floors the sun warms the glass of the open windows while the sendal curtains are flying. Baltasar Bonnin poses beside his wife in front of the butcher shop door. His temples are clean shaven, but he has a pair of handlebar mustaches, and his rascally eyes shine radiantly. His white apron, spotless, extends from his beltline to his gaiters. Teresa, with her abundant frizzy hair, wears a cameo on her lace blouse, and her flowered skirt covers her to the ankle. Above both their heads, in letters that stand out like a sudden blaze, are the words *Carnicería Balears*, and beside the doorway a hairless pig hangs on a hook, slit open from top to bottom. On the window glass is written in broad, white

strokes, in Polish and German: *Just in: salt meat and sausage from Mallorca*. The whiteness of the pig stands out in the photograph, even whiter than Baltasar Bonnin's apron.

Who was that Castellón? A wandering photographer, an exile, an emigrant from somewhere? I carefully shut the door to the exhibit to make sure the lock was engaged and retraced my steps. Looking at my watch I saw it was getting close to seven. I started running then so as not to lose any more time, but after several turns I found it impossible to recognize any of the places I had passed by earlier. In the distance it was possible to make out the figure of a woman raking leaves on a path, and I went toward her. From behind the bifocal lenses of her frameless glasses she gave me a look of surprise as I was trying to ask her for the way out of the park; she answered me with something in Polish, surely to make me see that she didn't understand, but after I repeated the word "Chopin" several times she laughed, letting me see the rounded gold caps of her teeth, and pointed upward. For the sculpture was right there, on a plane a little higher than where we stood, and I only had to take a path that came out on the esplanade from which I had left.

I caught sight of police cars with their whirling lights flashing and then I saw the Polish bodyguards running toward me behind Lieutenant Rivera, full of concern. Dominik, standing next to the limousine, arms akimbo, watched the scene with a distant, mocking air as the wind blew at the flaps of his overcoat and the thin, coppery lock of hair that crowned his head.

Later that morning a female translator from the Council of Ministers accompanied me to the interview with Jaruzelski, so that Dominik had to wait in the opulent anteroom, persistent in his habit of never shedding his overcoat. When we left the palace he followed behind me in silence, until the members of my escort left me at the foot of the

flight of stairs. Once seated inside the Chaika, he took between his fingers the medal so recently pinned to my lapel to get a better look at it, and without hiding his disdain he released it, as if abandoning it to its own fate. Back in the residence afterward—since we had a free moment before the next meeting, what in the official language is called “a transitional period”—he drew from the pocket of his overcoat a packet wrapped in onionskin paper, tied up with a fine thread, and he handed it to me with a deep bow.

Inside was a paperback volume of Chopin’s letters, edited by Henryk Opienski and translated to English by E. L. Voynich in 1931, plus a thin leaflet that fell to the floor when the packet was being opened. It was an offprint from a magazine published in Madrid, *Orbe Latino*, with an article by Rubén Darío about the Archduke Luis Salvador, “The Nomad Prince,” published in 1907. With a gesture like a prestidigitator, moving his long fingers rapidly as if he wanted to make the whole topic disappear, he forestalled any attempt to thank him.

“The offprint was a gift from my teacher Escuredo, and I have kept it because, as you will see, Darío mentions in passing the story of my ancestor, Wenceslas Vyborny, secretary to the Archduke,” he said.

He became silent as a way of inviting me to question him more about that story, but I pushed it aside because what interested me most were that morning’s photographs, and that Castellón, the one who had taken them. So I mentioned my furtive visit to the summerhouse in the park, and his reddish eyebrows arched in surprise. The Merlini Pavillion, so-called in honor of its builder, the Genoan architect Domenico Merlini, and dating from the year 1867, had been under repair for a long time now, and moreover it was located so deeply in the park that it would be useless to organize an exhibit there because no one would visit it.

And what is the worst? To be born

I thought that probably he was joking, and adapting my tone accordingly, I responded that in such a case the word “chouette” written on the card at the foot of the photograph of the bodies of Baltasar Bonnin the butcher and his wife, a word that was unfamiliar to me up to that time, should not exist. And the photographer, that Castellón? Very seriously, and quite intrigued, he answered that the first *chueta* families who had emigrated to Poland established themselves in East Prussia, in the Danzig region, in 1823, and that hundreds of those Jewish “chouettes,” or rather *chuetas*, had been subjected to trial by the Inquisition in Palma, Mallorca, accused of practicing their beliefs in secret while feigning a devout conversion to Catholicism. Many were sent to the fire after being tortured and stripped of their possessions.

As far as a photographer named Castellón was concerned, this was the first time he had ever heard that name. And immediately he dismissed the matter, as if in revenge for my lack of interest in the story of his relative Wenceslas Vyborny.

“I don’t believe that medal was created in homage to the patriots of the rebellion of 1956 who challenged the Soviet tanks,” he said, glancing meaningfully again at my Order of the Defenders of Warsaw.

Then he stretched his hairy hand toward the gift book he had brought, lying on the table where the waiter had just set down the tray with our coffee, and smacked it on its back a couple of times.

“Read it, when you can. Read what Chopin says about the resistance in 1831 against the troops of Czar Nicholas I,” he added. “It wasn’t only the Nazis that we fought against.”

Chopin had just left for Vienna in November, 1830, when the revolt began, inspired by the uprisings in the

streets of Paris in July of that same year. The rebels believed that when Russia found itself confronted by a war with the Ottoman Empire, it wasn't going to try to cover two fronts at the same time. But contrary to all the forecasts, the Czar sent an army of two hundred thousand men to snuff out the insurrection. The patriots, less numerous and poorly armed, sought refuge in Warsaw to put up a definitive battle behind barricades. The besieged city went into a panic, looting broke out, cholera struck, and the resistance was brutally crushed in September, 1831. In February of the following year, Poland received the punishment of being incorporated into the Russian Empire as simply another province.

"Look at the notes included among the letters," he said, striking the book again, and got to his feet; it was time for the meeting scheduled in the Ministry of Foreign Commerce.

My official duties ended that night with a dinner offered by the minister, Krajewska. I had a free day before going on to my next station on the itinerary, which was Vienna. As dessert was being served, my host announced with a broad smile that he had organized a visit for me to Chopin's birthplace in Zelazowa Wola, and I smiled too while thanking him, taking note of Dominik's hand in that courtesy.

"I have managed to prevent your being taken to the Church of the Holy Cross, where Chopin's heart is kept," he said. "You don't know how much that disgusts me, that cult of the viscera."

When we left for the excursion, I had already started reading Chopin's letters, and, following Dominik's recommendation, I also looked ahead to the section of notes.

News of the fall of Warsaw reached Chopin in Stuttgart, during the tragic first week of September, 1831, and his reaction became desperately anguished: *Oh, God, do you still exist? Are you there, and you do not avenge all this? How*

And what is the worst? To be born

many more Russian crimes do you want? Or are you Russian, too? . . . Oh father, what a consolation for your old age! Mother, poor suffering mother, to have born a daughter so that even her bones should be violated! Mockery! Will my sister Emilia's tomb have been given its due respect? Thousands of other bodies have been piled up above her tomb. What can have happened to my beloved Konstancja? Where can she be? Poor child, probably in the hands of some Russian, a Russian who is choking her, killing her, murdering her! Ah, my life, and I alone here! Come, I will dry your tears and heal your wounds!

"Why has it been doubted that Chopin wrote this, as it says in the prologue?" I asked Dominik, who was seated as always in the Chaika's folding seat, facing me.

"Because of the pathetic tone of the language," he responded. "They couldn't believe that a delicate soul would be capable of writing in that truculent way. For a long time they preferred to believe that his only reaction to the fall of Warsaw had been his *Étude* No. 12 for Piano, the "Revolutionary *Étude*."

"But then," I said, "in neither of the two cases was this a question of his being a bad patriot."

"But you see, he accepted gifts from the invaders," he replied.

"A propos, I found in the book that Chopin was only ten years old when the Czar gave him that diamond ring," I said with a triumphant air. But he was unperturbed.

In May, 1825, Chopin was invited by the Grand Duke Constantine to play the Aelomelodikon for the very first time, and in the presence of Czar Alexander I. This was a machine that looked like an enormous copper samovar, a mixture of piano and organ, recently installed in the Grand Salon of the Warsaw Conservatory, and the boy performed a concerto by Moscheles on the keyboard of the instrument with such

brilliance that he was given that ring as a prize. At that age, he still needed his mother's help when he wanted to use the urinal, and it was she, who always accompanied him to his concerts, who had to open the fly of his velvet trousers.

Chopin's birthplace in Zelazowa Wola is reached by a poplar-lined highway that runs through the broad Mazovia plain, sown with fields of oats and rye. On the edges of the fields stand trees that show the stumps of their shattered branches, and further on in the distance a few old barns under the authority of some huge towers holding up the high tension wires.

The modest building with the slate gable roof looks just like the one I saw in the *Before* photograph, the one taken by Castellón, except for the walls covered in places with ivy, possibly a matter of the season, so it certainly had been reconstructed faithfully. It must be approached on foot through a lovely forest of pines, maples, and birch trees, and then across a wooden bridge beneath which flows the Bzura River's gentle current. In a pool of dark water, the breeze seems to be pushing away a pair of black swans swimming along oblivious of themselves.

"I've already seen this house," I say to Dominik as we are about to climb the stairs.

"Oh, of course you have, at the exhibit at the Merlini summerhouse," he says, striking his forehead in reproach for his forgetfulness. "I found out the repairs have not begun yet; there's no budget, so I wish to offer you my heartfelt apologies. The exhibit you saw there was organized by the officials in charge of the park, but very unsuccessfully, as there wasn't a single review in the press. I spoke with the curator, Professor Henryk Rodaskowski. He is not retired, but for years he was the Director of Photography Archives at the Warsaw Library. I told him about your visit to the exhibit, and, very flattered, he gave me a letter for you, to-

And what is the worst? To be born

gether with some documents. I will have to translate them all before your departure.”

“Did he tell you who this Castellón is?” I asked.

“I forgot to ask about him,” he responded.

“The Nazis burned down this house,” I said then. “That also was in the exhibit.”

“Despite the fact that Chopin was an anti-semite, at least in his own words.”

On going inside the house, where we are the only visitors, I say to him that it is the ideal place for growing up as a musician. The piano notes played by a child practicing in this silence would be heard for many miles, carried by the wind from across the plain that sweeps the fields of oats.

“Chopin never lived in this museum; his parents took him away from here a few months after he was born. All of this is fake; nothing that is shown here ever belonged to the family—” and filled with disdain Dominik points to the furniture, the vases, the lamps placed around the room into which the guide, who is dressed in a uniform rather like that of railway inspectors, has first led us.

I am not going to remind him that it was he who organized this visit, and, if truth be told, everything here gives the impression of being too tidy—the shiny furniture that smells of wax, the recently cut roses in the vases. Not a bit of dust on the curtains. Nothing ages on this artificial stage set. I hear Dominik dismiss the guide, who retires, doffing her kepi. He himself will be my guide.

“This is from the period, at least,” his fingers draw near the keyboard of the piano placed beside a window. “Back then, ‘pantaleones’ is what pianos were called, in musicians’ slang.”

Photographs and music scores are few in these rooms because the curators had wanted to create the atmosphere of a house to which the owners might return at any moment.

A drawing from 1829, by Miroszewski, shows Chopin's parents, Justyna and Nicholas, by now of a mature age, she in a hairnet and a night dress as if preparing to lie down, and he in a formal suit with a high neck. And there are oil portraits of their two grown daughters, Louise and Isabella, done by the same Miroszewski, plus an oval miniature by an unknown artist that shows the profile of little Emilia, dead of tuberculosis at an early age; it was a disease that ran in the family. And they all have the same long, prominent nose as the father.

Chopin always feared the solitude of death. He was afraid of dying among doctors who were really butchers and insensitive servants. When he felt his own end approaching he wrote his sister Louise asking her for help, and she made the trip from Warsaw to Paris in the disagreeable company of her husband Kalasanty Jędrzejewicz, who hated Chopin because he was a constant reminder of his own mediocrity. After the funeral, when it was time to break up the apartment on the Place Vendôme and she wanted to keep his Pleyel piano, Kalasanty ordered her to sell absolutely everything. He would not permit a single scrap of anything from that consumptive to come into his house.

On a table there is also, in a silver frame, a portrait of Konstancja Gładkowska, fuzzy and distant, at the age of forty. This was the one for whom he had showed such fears and such rage at the time of the Russian invasion. She had been buried in the Père-Lachaise cemetery some time before Chopin was. They met in the Conservatory in Warsaw, where she was studying voice, and it is clear that he never loved her. Flattered by the memory of her devotion, he wrote to the friend in Paris who had informed him of her death, "She was too temperamental for me, her head was full of fantasies, not very reliable as a prospect for raising a family." As she gradually took on weight, no longer ap-

pearing on the stage, she used to sing occasionally for her husband's friends during their evenings at home. He was a dealer in fabrics.

A few steps away, in a small glass case, Chopin's left hand with its long fingers, modeled in the hours after his death, seems to pulse in the air as if he were accompanying Konstancja, just as on those tedious afternoons of her singing exercises, when she was practicing for her graduation examination the aria "E amore un ladroncello" from *Così fan tutte*.

And on a bare wall, copies of the portraits of Chopin and George Sand painted by Delacroix. Seen together that way, they appear to be what they really were, an incompatible couple. Chopin's is from the year before his death. Showing the thick bulk of his nose posed in semi-profile, he gives off an air of painful absence, of rebelliousness on the verge of being crushed; while she, at the age of thirty, looks like a vaudeville performer waiting for some lover at the stage door of the theater under the dirty light from a gas lamp.

"That tramp shouldn't be there," Dominik approaches the wall, unusually aggressive. "She was always tormenting that poor swan. Besides, as a writer, she was mediocre, if not just plain bad."

I am about to remind him that George Sand had the misfortune to have hung around Turgenev and Flaubert too much, and therefore she always seems somewhat diminished on being compared with them, but I have learned it is useless to try to convince Dominik, and instead I remind him that that very name, "swan," was given also to Darío, a swan equally unfortunate. On his own Pleyel piano, which was always under the threat of judicial seizure, he often played Chopin's Études.

"I know," he responded, "and he was tortured by another tramp."

“Rosario Murillo,” I say. “But that one hardly knew how to read.”

As we took our leave from each other the following day in the waiting room of the airport he handed me a manila envelope with the material he had promised, put together by Professor Rodaskowski. Unopened, the envelope accompanied me as far as Nicaragua, and it wasn't until days later, when I finished emptying out my suitcase, that I found it again.

On a separate sheet of paper, neatly typed, Dominik had translated the letter Professor Rodaskowski had addressed to me, and in the envelope there was a brochure about the exhibit, again in Polish and French, rather poorly printed, along with some photocopies of press clippings, all of this material translated into Spanish.

The professor lamented the circumstances of my visit to the exhibit, since he would have been honored to accompany me, and he told me that the photos belonged to the Graphics Collection of the Warsaw Library, and there were many more of them, enough to be able to organize a larger show sometime that would illustrate the passage of Castellón the artist through Poland. However (because of what he would get around to explaining to me later), an exhibit of this kind in a setting of true cultural importance might manage only after great difficulty to gain approval by the authorities of the party and the government. The letter continued:

During the years of his youth lived in France, Castellón had a great influence on the development of the art of photography, above all through the medium of his contributions to the invention of the hand-held camera for taking snapshots; and likewise, he took portraits, for posterity, of famous people in literature and the sciences. His nudes, which were published in an album printed

And what is the worst? To be born

in Barcelona, filled me with admiration when it came into my hands, and they convinced me that he was one of the greats of the century. I found out that he was living in Palma de Mallorca, and we established a correspondence. Although he always avoided the topic of his origins, I was under the impression that he was from Mallorca, since his facial features showed certain exotic traits that are sometimes peculiar to the people of the Balearics, given the racial influences from North Africa that those islands have been receiving for centuries.

Castellón had come to Warsaw by way of Barcelona in 1929, through measures taken by Rodaskowski himself, together with his daughter Teresa Segura and his son-in-law, the master butcher Baltasar Bonnin:

I was working then as the social editor for the newspaper *Gazeta Warszawy*, and because of this I was in close communication with the organizers of the contest where for the first time a “Miss Poland” would be elected. They needed a photographer with an international reputation to take pictures of the contestants; I recommended Castellón and they accepted him. I doubted whether he would agree to the assignment when I proposed it to him, given the kinds of compromises that it assumed, but I was surprised to receive a telegram from him sent from Barcelona, advising me that he would be catching the train that same night.

My letter had been forwarded to him in Barcelona. It turned out that his son-in-law had become involved in a serious difficulty in Palma, the nature of which he told me later on. He had been obliged to follow him to Barcelona, where the son-in-law had fled together with Teresa. That situation impelled him not only to take up the offer but to remain in Warsaw as an emigrant. The photographs of the contestants opened the doors of the great world to him; soon he had turned himself into the

Sergio Ramírez

photographer most in vogue, and he set up his studio on the bustling Nalewki Street.

I was in my twenties then, and despite our differences of age we frequented the cabarets and bars together. Castellón had a great love of alcoholic beverages, but his physical constitution was such that after a binge that lasted till dawn, he was always to be found at his establishment early in the morning, attending to the first clients of the day, cool and clean, as if he'd been sleeping like an angel the whole night long.

Once the German occupation had taken place, he ended up in the ghetto along with his grandson, Rubén Bonnin, after the murder of Baltasar and Teresa, an event that he witnessed and photographed, which you must have seen in the exhibit of his work. The boy holding his hands above his head, forced to do so by the soldiers, is Rubén. Inside the ghetto he installed himself on Karmelicka Street, and there he re-opened his studio, specializing now in social photography, pictures of high German officials and their families. In one of these pictures, published in a magazine a copy of which is preserved now in the archive collection next to the original, the *Sturmführer* Nikolaus von Dengler of the Gestapo is seen at the piano accompanying his wife, who, while wearing the costume of Cleopatra, is singing the aria "Da tempeste el legno infranto," from the opera *Julius Caesar* by Händel, according to what it says at the foot of the picture in the magazine.

Under assignment from the Gestapo, Castellón also took numerous pictures designed for the anti-Semite campaign, such as, for example, Jewish couples of the same sex being forced to copulate in front of the camera, or women of any age doing the same thing with mastiffs or greyhounds. But since on the other hand the Gestapo wanted to show images of a pleasant, normal life within the ghetto, he also took pictures of the concerts in the restaurants, of opera performances, like those that took

And what is the worst? To be born

place in the Femina Theater on Leszno Street, pictures that were later distributed both within and outside Germany, and he used his own grandson for the shots of the series "Das Glückskind," which became famous on the covers of the propaganda magazines of the Third Reich.

With makeup on and dressed in corduroy suits and lace collars, or wearing lederhosen and a Tyrolean hat, little Rubén appeared in front of tables loaded with cakes and fruits, gorging himself, or engaged in amusing himself alone while playing with all kinds of mechanical toys, as if that were the ordinary thing in the ghetto.

As you can see, it is for these distressing reasons that it would not be possible even to propose an exhibit of his work to the Polish authorities, something the artist really deserves, but the merit of the case simply clashes with the impropriety of his conduct.

That explains how Castellón would have been able to reach even the burning ruins of Zelazowa Wola with his camera. He traveled with the Nazis, who had murdered his daughter and son-in-law. I was perplexed, but Professor Rodasdowki came to my rescue.

Don't forget that under the moral decay provoked by the Nazis, the people went so far as to give themselves over to the worst sorts of abject behavior, the fruit also of fear and of the lack of possibility to choose. Castellón wasn't the only one. We never chanced to see each other during the course of those awful years, except once when I surprised him leaving the Gestapo headquarters in the Szuch Promenade. I was returning from having gotten some eggs at the home of a dealer in black market goods, and Castellón was coming down the stairs carrying a portfolio of large-sized photographs under his arm. We both pretended not to recognize each other.

In 1933 there had erupted the scandal of a lawsuit for adultery in which his daughter Teresa was involved. The

clippings photocopied from the same *Gazeta Warszawy* which I found in the folder referred to the claim brought by the butcher Baltasar Bonnin against his wife Teresa Segura, accused of an illicit love affair with the Cavalry Lieutenant Jan Kumelski. In one of the clippings was a studio photograph of Lieutenant Kumelski in all his trappings, holding his shako with its shiny visor, and another of Teresa, taken as she was descending the steps of the courthouse in Długa Square between two guards in their gray overcoats, with their long-barreled rifles on their backs, bayonets in place, and a crowd of gawkers surrounding them.

You can clearly see, beneath her coat, that she is quite pregnant, for she is expecting a child. And everyone, the prisoner, the guards, the gawkers are posed in front of the camera as if overwhelmed by a feeling of importance, staring at the camera lens with some kind of avid curiosity as if, instead of being seen, it was they who were doing the seeing. And in Teresa's case, she is a curiosity facing her own drama. An arrow in red ink cuts across the photograph and leads toward a legend in the margin, written in English, in Professor Rodaskowski's hand: "This picture taken by her father." The photograph of Lieutenant Kumelski is also marked by a red arrow: "Dishonorable discharge."

Lieutenant Kumelski, after getting her pregnant, had abandoned her. And it was her intolerable squandering of money spent on gifts for him that had ruined Bonnin without his even knowing it! In despair and faced with the imminent seizure of all the goods of his butcher shop, which had surreptitiously become so compromised, one night he went in search of her lover at the Kumelski family chalet in Klonowa Street, where the Lieutenant had the use of an apartment with an outside entrance to the street. This was where they used to see each other. On Klonowa Street.

I push aside the pages with the translations of the texts,

and I don't stop thinking about all this for a long while. It was the very same apartment of the mansion where I had been lodged while in Warsaw. There is the picture taken from the street, when the newspapers took up the case. The old bed with its walnut headboard, set on a dais one step above the rest of the flooring, like a small stage—all this was surely the same. The lovers' bed.

That night Teresa had put on her black silk dress with arabesques embroidered in the same color, which she only wore to attend mass on Sundays and other solemn days of obligation. She and Bonnin, whether or not sincere, were practicing Catholics the same as they had been in Palma, and they never went near the synagogue. She asked Kumelski to lend her the sum of 3,000 zloty, and he told her "No!" emphatically, while attempting to slip away from her as soon as he could with the plea that his father would soon come into the apartment with some workmen to check on some gutters whose leaks were damaging the plaster on the soffit. Given the time of day, this was an obviously hollow excuse.

From the window Kumelski saw her running through the garden and going out to the street, ever more despairing, her skirt winnowing out behind her like a black flame that was scorching the trunks of the ash trees as it passed by them. Touched by a vague remorse, he saw her getting into the cab that waited for her while the meeting was taking place. After making the driver wander around for awhile with no particular goal, she returned to Szeroki Dunaj Street where her husband, having closed the butcher shop by that time of night, was waiting for her anxiously at the door that opened on the stairway leading to the floor immediately above, where they lived.

Castellón, who occupied a room in the back where he lived with his photography gear, and also concerned about

his daughter's absence, had come to peer out to the street from one of the windows of the sitting room. And while Bonnin's footsteps resounded as he climbed the stairway, he put his face closer to the window glass on which the drizzle was coming down lightly, and he saw the taxicab stopping at a spot barely illuminated by the halo of the half-open corolla of the street lamp rising on its iron stalk. Just as Lieutenant Kumelski had seen her disappear behind the car door closing soundlessly in the distance, he saw his daughter emerge in her mourning dress, watched her standing still for a moment in the middle of the street as if she had become lost, and watched her walk with rapid steps toward the pharmacy followed by the cab driver pestering her for his fare, and then watched her pass through the illuminated door and go into the section where the restricted medicines were kept, which she reached without difficulty because the employees treated her as they always did. The rest Castellón could no longer see. Teresa pounced on the blue earthenware crock where the pharmacist kept tartar emetic and shoveled it into her mouth by the handful, as if she wanted to cure herself of a wild fit of hunger.

That was the story. They saved her life with a stomach pump at the Hospital of the Good Samaritan on Lezsno Street, where she was taken in the car belonging to the pharmacist, a Russian bachelor (and probably gay) named Serge Pestov. Once assured that she would not die, Bonnin determined to accuse her of adultery, despite her advanced pregnancy, and from the hospital she was sent to the women's section of the Pawiak Prison.

But Castellón understood that the only way to keep her out of jail was by saving Bonnin from ruin in his turn. He handed over all his savings and in addition sold his photography equipment, much of it expensive and then unknown in Poland, forcing him to close his studio on Nalewki street.

And what is the worst? To be born

Bonnin then addressed a petition to the court vacating his claim, and just before the birth of the child took her back into his house, where Castellón had remained all this time, despite the litigation that involved his daughter, and where he would have to stay from then on as a dependent relative, for he was now without his own means of subsistence. The child was born, and they named him Rubén; they all lived in harmony until the day of the unhappy events through which both of them lost their lives.

Professor Rodaskowski wrote in conclusion:

Take note of the admirable valor displayed by this old man, who by the date of the misfortune must have been more than 80 years of age, as old then as I am now, who from some hidden vantage point, perhaps from behind the glass window, scarcely moving aside the gauze curtains, was able with professional coldness and in spite of the emotions that undoubtedly were upsetting his nerves, to take a picture of the bodies of his daughter and his son-in-law stretched out on the pavement, meanwhile expecting that the soldiers would be coming upstairs for him, and without knowing how things would turn out for his grandson.

There is no doubt that Castellón was able to moderate his feelings when he brought his eye to the viewfinder of his camera, as he had done before when catching Teresa between her guards in front of the courthouse on Długa Square. And if he hadn't taken her photograph when he saw her getting out of the taxicab to run toward the door of the pharmacy, that was surely because there wasn't enough light.

But on that morning in December, when he heard the menacing voice of the commander of the patrol ordering Bonnín to open up the suitcase, he did come to the window. He must have gone downstairs as well, in keeping with the

Sergio Ramírez

instructions to go to the ghetto with the rest of the family, after the failure of all their petitions to the Nazi authorities during the previous days to avoid being treated as Jews since they were Roman Catholics. He was delayed precisely by his having forgotten his small hand camera, the only thing left to him after liquidating his studio. Bonnin had gotten befuddled, feeling around in the inside pocket of his overcoat for the little key to the suitcase without succeeding in coming up with it; and when he heard the dry sound of the machine guns as they were being brought to bear on him, plus some new threats, he became filled with panic and ran toward the opposite sidewalk, throwing the suitcase down on the cobblestone surface, where it sprang open with the shock. They machine-gunned him, and when Teresa screamed, they machine-gunned her as well. Castellón already had the little Eastman bellows camera in his hand. And he shot.