

THE FOUR CYCLES (LOS CUATRO CICLOS)

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There are four stories.

One, the oldest, is of a strong city that is besieged and defended by brave men. The defenders know that the city will be given over to iron and fire and that their battle is in vain; the most famous of the aggressors, Achilles, knows that his destiny is to die before the victory. Over the centuries, elements of magic were added. It was said that Helen of Troy, for whom the armies died, was a beautiful cloud, a shadow; it was said that the great Greek horse in which the Greeks hid was also an illusion. Homer may not have been the first poet to tell the fable; someone, in the fourteenth century, left this line that lingers in my memory: "The borgh brittened and brent to brontes and ashes." Dante or Daniel Rosetti might imagine that Troy's fate was sealed at the moment Paris burned with love for Helen; Yeats would choose the instant when Leda and the swan, who was a god, merge.

Another, linked to the first, is the story of the return. That of Ulysses, who, after ten years of wandering through dangerous seas and delaying on enchanted islands, returns to his Ithaca; that of the northern deities who, once the earth is destroyed, see it rise from the sea, green and clear, and find scattered on the grass the chess pieces they once played with.

The third story is of a quest. We can see in it a variation of the previous form. Jason and the Golden Fleece; the thirty birds of the Persian myth, who cross seas and mountains and see the face of their God, the Simurgh, who is each one of them and all of them. In the past, every quest was fortunate. Someone, in the end, would steal the forbidden golden apples; someone, in the end, would deserve the conquest of the Holy Grail. Now, the quest is doomed to failure. Captain Ahab finds the whale and the whale destroys him; the heroes of James or Kafka can only await defeat. We are so poor in courage and faith that the happy ending is now nothing more than an industrial flattery. We cannot believe in heaven, but we can in hell.

The last story is that of the sacrifice of a god. Attis, in Phrygia, mutilates and kills himself; Odin, sacrificing Odin, Himself to Himself, hangs from the tree for nine whole nights and is wounded by a spear; Christ is crucified by the Romans.

There are four stories. For as long as we have left, we will continue to tell them, transformed.

(Translated from Spanish to English)