

# GENEALOGY OF THE CHILD BEHIND MY BACK<sup>i</sup>

by Ignacio Apolo

First place in the “Certamen Buenos Aires Teatro 2000”  
Department of Culture of Buenos Aires

## A BIRD

**S.Rz:** Let it be noted that the owl of the bell towers does not tolerate the presence of other animals, even that of its fellows, except for during mating season.

Be aware.

Be also aware that perhaps no one but me comes to the zoo in order to watch an owl. That, in itself, is notable.

## LOCUS AMENUS

**S.Rz:** Let it be understood that we are now at the zoo.

Even though our mind tends to reject the idea of transmigration, I look at the patient zebu and something about transmigration squares with me. Appreciate the fact that the doctrine, in spite of being presented here mainly in its oriental version, has been professed by several communities in different times. Empedocle said: “I was a lad, a maiden, a shrub, a bird, and a mute fish that emerges from the sea.”

But let us go for a walk.

**S.Rz:** Here is a side path, surrounded by pavilions shaped like cages, a mausoleum, or a winter landscape. It is here that the scent of the Ceiba tree and manure amalgamate. Take this as a fact.

Furthermore I quote the unknown Celtic poet:

*I was the leaf of a sword,*

*I was a drop in the river,*

*I was a luminous star,*

*I was a word in a book,*

The list is long. But so is the walk.

*I was a book in the beginning,*

*I was a light in a lantern,*

*I was a bridge that crosses sixty rivers,*

Let us abbreviate it. Now, beside me, there is a ditch full of turbid waters. Geese swim in it and a willow wets its branches. Like this.

*...a captain in the battle,*

*...a sword in the hand,*

*...a shield in the war,*

*...the chord of a harp,*

*For a year I was bewitched*

*In the waves of the sea.*

I return to the zebu and I look into his eyes. He and I look at each other gently. Therefore I adhere to the idea that there isn't a thing in the universe that I have not been. I am not alone in this drama. There are also people, everywhere.

And there is a child behind me.

*Child appears. S.Rz. notices him.*

## FISH

**S.Rz:** We must consent now that the idea of *aquarium* does not harmonize, in our imagination, with the idea of *zoological garden*. We do recall, certainly, the perplexing story of that man who ends up becoming an axolotl, an Aztec fish of philosophical immobility. But not only does this take place in a European zoo, it is also make-believe, and in a work of fiction. Here, however, the aquarium does really exist, and in it are fish, a seagull and a penguin. Among them, the river-fish demand my attention.

I will not discuss each one, since we know them well: the fervent boga, the sweet pompano, the regal surubi, and the unfair catfish. The pacu stands out before my eyes in both its variants: the clock-pacu and the little-pacu. The clock-pacu suggests time, its passing and its measure. The little-pacu, on the other hand, and in spite of its fierceness, suggests childhood.

**Child:** Dad. Does this one eat that one and is that why they separate them?

Dad. I'm bored.

## REPTILES

**S.Rz:** If fish rule over the kingdom of silence, reptiles, moreover, rule over the stillness. When they want to, they suppress all movement. Amazing.

**Child:** Look.

**S.Rz:** Try to remain in complete stillness for a long period of time. You will notice that it is almost impossible, since we mammals naturally adhere to the idea that perfect stillness resembles death.

But not so in reptiles.

**Child:** Did it die with its eyes open, or is it an embalmed snake, or what?

**S.Rz:** Evaluate the observation about the motionless reptile as *the true way* or *the point of entry* to the classical doctrine. And mark now that the Buddha is nothing more than the Mammal Free from Desire, similar to a reptile that remains undisturbed under the Tree of Knowledge looking for Nirvana.

**Child:** That's gross, Dad. And that thing hanging off him, what is that?

**S.Rz:** Alone and motionless under the tree, he is able to see his innumerable previous incarnations and those of all creatures.

**Child:** Yuck.

**S.Rz:** In a glance he covers the whole universe, the chain of all causes and effects. He senses the truth and stays seated there seven days, while a king of serpents coils seven times around his body and makes a roof over his head to protect him from the rain.

**Child:** Are you reading everything you say?

**S.Rz:** Of course. It was a cobra, and it was able to enlarge its head. This one we see over here is also one.

**Child:** Gross.

**S.Rz:** It can be seen from the passage that stillness is virtue and wisdom.

**Child:** I love it.

**S.Rz:** Or as the Tao says so well:

Without action, nothing remains undone.

Staying home, you can know the whole world.

**Child:** And now let's go see the monkeys.

## CATS

**S.Rz:** Just a moment ago, something extraordinary happened. Over there. Two splendid jaguar specimens were licking each other: now the face, now the jaws, maybe the eyes and perhaps the brow. They were fervently licking and licking and licking when, observing the ceremony, a child behind my back discussed the event with his father:

"look how much they love each other," he said.

Oh, childhood. Childhood.

That frightening naive land.

### CHILDREN

**Child:** I'm a child. That other one who talked about the jaguars is too. Yes. I know that because I know him from school; I've beaten him up a few times. He lets me. But then he cries.

**S.Rz:** Here is something else about felines:  
the straw cat or *felis colocolo*, a small native feline.

**Child:** And this is my father.

It's hard for him to express his feelings. But it doesn't matter. We're at the zoo looking at animals. There's everything: big animals, and small ones. There's lots of kids. And parents. Those who have a balloon in one hand and a camera in the other are the parents. The rest of us are the kids.

We kids usually have a lot of fun.

Everything is so pretty, Dad.

### CAMELUS

**S.Rz:** Include in the camelus taxonomy the guanaco, the llama, the alpaca and the vicuna. Include them from afar, cautiously: when I got close to their pen a couple of alpacas spat on me.

**Child:** Dad, what's this?

**S.Rz:** If only it had been just a spit, but it came from the nose. Like a sneeze, a sudden hit from the nasal cavities and believe me: a solitary piece of Inca snot flew out like a baby condor towards my face.

**Child:** Dad, did you see this?

**S.Rz:** Yes. It is well known that they are family. The Oriental camelus, and the Andean ones. Those, an evocation of Arabic sheiks, Wise Men and the Arabian Nights; these, burdened with the solitude and sadness of their huahuas.

**Child:** Let it be understood that "huahua" is how children in the Northeast of our country, the North of Chile, Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador are called. My dad explained it to me. I would be a "huahua" in the vast human family.

**S.Rz:** This is how zoology relates the high Titicaca and the Manco Kapak's footprint in the stone at the edge of the terraces, the corn crops, the inner ocean, the lack of oxygen and the great thorax with two flying carpets and Three Wise Men riding camels, guided by a star to the City of David. Right here, at the zoo, we consider this vast subject before a camel specimen with two humps, rather bald, who lazily watches us, when a child howls impatiently because he seems to be tired. He is behind me. But soon his father comforts him:

"I rented Caspar, the Friendly Ghost, so you can see it".

**Child:** The Friendly Ghost. Yay.

Says the child behind my back. I already told you he is dumb. I, on the other hand, saw it three times.

### MONKEYS

**S.Rz:** The monkeys.

**Child:** Goody! Hooray for the monkeys.

Now we feed them.

Are you enjoying this, Dad?

**S.Rz:** The most important social, familiar and affective behavior in the monkey's life is not sex, is not conversation, nor playtime. No. Monkeys groom each other.

**Child:** Dad...

**S.Rz:** The art of grooming is accomplished in pairs, even though there are always those who argue for the possibility that such behavior occurs as a "chain reaction", by this I mean: this one grooms that one, and that one the other one, and that one the other one, and so on.

**Child:** The baboon has a red ass. I said "ass", Daddy. Doesn't that get your attention either?

**S.Rz:** In my opinion, I disbelieve in an Art, in this time, that is capable of transcending individuality.

**Child:** What if you tickle my back?

No.

My father just can't pay attention to me.

**S.Rz:** One monkey grooms another, I was saying. And there is no metaphor; no; the louse is metonymic: it suggests itch, elementary school and contact between social classes. For a child catches another one's lice, always from *the other*, his Øther. Etc.

Oh, childhood. Etc.

**Child:** It itches. Ass. Back.

**S.Rz:** Let us go back to the monkey. I, monkey, catch your louse and I eat it. Oh pleasure, oh primate condition, oh social relation. Not *my* louse, but *yours*. *Your* hair, *my* mouth; *my* pleasure, *your* proposition and *my* pursuit.

Have we really evolved?

**Child:** Daaaad...

**S.Rz:** You, boy. Look at the monkeys. Look at them and learn.

### TODAY WE LEARNED

**Child:** In this scene we carefully observe the behavior of the apes, and our attention is captured by their moldable humanity, their indifference, and their lack of modesty. For they exhibit their innermost feelings without any shame. You can see it for yourselves, in the words that the chimps inspired in my father:

He talked about my school, and he was right, for there are a lot of lice. And also about contagion and classes. But now he remembers his wife...

It's just that those clear expressions of tenderness among the simians always seem to remind him of her. Let's point out, by the way, that Mom is no longer with him. Let it be known.

And about transmigration...

Come with me, Dad. Thinking about her is not good for you.

Here. Feed them.

### GENEALOGY

**S.Rz.** *fees the audience.*

**S.Rz:** How marvelous. The last monkey is the Rhesus macaque, *macaca mulata*. He is well known because of the RH element, which refers to his name; although this monkey also allows for another reading, a richer, religious, and perhaps epic one.

**Child:** ¡Fucking macaque!

**S.Rz:** The child behind my back is very ill-mannered. I wonder what his parents think.

**Child:** About my mother, Dad told me a beautiful story. He told me she was the prettiest and the best of all mothers and all women.

**S.Rz:** Silence.

**Child:** Then he told me that if she's not with us it's not because she doesn't love us. Later he told me that, in fact, there is a little bit of her in everything. And after that he started with that transmigration stuff. And he hasn't stopped yet.

In a way, we have come to the zoo to look for her.

**S.Rz:** The religious point of view, as we were saying, discusses the *mulata* as a sacred animal among the Hindus, people who are very predisposed to this, one the other hand, as observation reveals that they are not only able to include the vigorous bull but also the insipid cow in such an exciting category...

**Child:** Dad, will you tell me about Mommy? Tell me why when you look at the monkeys you remember her.

**S.Rz:** I am a little disturbed.

The child behind my back seems to have been left alone. And the macaques keep disquietingly silent. But let us not digress.

These Indian monkeys often fight among themselves in gangs, provoking with their howls a rigorously mythological uproar. One should see, or at least, hear. But it is possible to judge the action as *epic* since the moment in which, over the eminent subject of the battle, the heroic chant arises, be it composed by iambic trimeters, dactylic hexameters or mere quadrumanous cries.

**Child:** There are some things you say that I don't understand.

**S.Rz:** Is it not blasphemy to beatify an animal because of its howl?

**Child:** Dad, did Mom exist?

### THE OVERO ALLIGATOR

**Child:** Silence spreads everywhere.

Evening falls. That child who we were talking about leaves with his adults.

And I am confused.

Daddy. Take me to see the crocodile.

**S.Rz:** It must be mentioned that instead of seeing a crocodile we are looking closely at an overo alligator. Outdoors, it remains motionless.

**Child:** Dad...is he dead or is he just staying still?

**S.Rz:** I want to clarify that the child behind my back ended up following me.

**Child:** Or both?

**S.Rz:** I think he wanted to ask me something, or request something.

**Child:** Or are both things the same?

**S.Rz:** Me...I couldn't understand his limited language.

**Child:** And tell me, Dad; is it true that you don't know what to do with me?

### STANZA

**S.Rz:** Let us quickly conclude our tour. We already know that a certain specimen of alligator eats its young as soon as they are born. Swallowing affects their lachrymal glands, and as they eat, they cry. This is not a pleasant sight, to be sure. Let's go on.

**Child:** Let's stop here.  
I'm tired.

**S.Rz:** Well. This is the more "botanical" corner of the park, since it seems to be designed for the contemplation of its flora rather than its restricted fauna. It is also, in a way, the place where we departed, but embellished by circularity: the ditch is now a pond, the geese are swans and the willow is a plum tree.

The child behind my back, who has followed me here, also seems to be embellished and circular.

**Child:** Dad. Love me.

**S.Rz:** It is strange to see him under this light. Maybe he looks like me, or the remembrance of the child I once was.

**Child:** We're alone now.

**S.Rz:** Boy. Do you know how to read?

**Child:** Yes.

**S.Rz:** Very well.

**Child:** By the pond he taught me a stanza. In fact, he forced me to read in a loud and stammering voice what was written on a plaque: the translation of a haiku, a Japanese stanza whose pattern is the omission of some elements, and allusion. I will now recite it for all of you:

*(crossing his hands behind his back)*

*Plum tree on the bank:  
Does the water really carry  
Your reflected flowers?*

GURÍ

**S.Rz:** I look at the renovated pond and it suggests transmigration.

*I was the leaf of a sword,  
...a drop in the river,*

**Child:** Dad often beats me. Especially since Mom left, a period that covers, unfortunately, my whole life.

**S.Rz:** *...a luminous star,  
...a word in a book,*

**Child:** He also talks a lot. But sometimes, he is silent. Even though his silence doesn't last very long, those are the moments when we feel closest.

And that's all I can say about him, except that lately he's been very sad, and that he's wanted to bring me to the zoo so I could see animals.

**S.Rz:** This is the end of the journey. It is also the end of the day, light that extinguishes, the circle that closes. There's no one left in the park. The other animals rest peacefully.

**Child:** I don't wanna be here anymore.

**S.Rz:** At one moment I suggested that the child behind my back was my son, or perhaps myself. It's not true. At dusk, he left with his adults.

**Child:** Will you hold my hand?

**S.Rz:** As for the rest, some animals will remain sleepless. The owl, the bird with which we began our journey, symbolizes wisdom: it can turn its head *completely*, 180 and 180 degrees.

Finally, here, at the end of the day, we remain alone.

**Child:** Dad.

Take me home.

*S.Rz takes his hand.*

*They look sadly into the distance.*

*They sit together.*

*Darkness falls upon them.*

---

<sup>i</sup> Translated by Analola Santana (University of Florida), Karina Vázquez (University of Florida) and Ignacio Apolo