

World Science Fiction Spring 2019

Cosmos Latinos

An Anthology of Science Fiction from Latin America and Spain

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Jose B. Adolph

PERU

Jose Adolph (1933-) was born to a Jewish family in Stuttgart, Germany, but in 1938 his family fled to Peru, where he has lived ever since, becoming a Peruvian citizen in 1974. He has worked chiefly in his country's civil service and as a journalist and writer.

To date Adolph has published eight short story collections, four novels (including a one-volume trilogy), and a play, and has been winning literary prizes regularly since the late 1970s. His work has been translated into numerous languages and has been included in anthologies in the United States, Europe, and Latin America. He enjoys reading SF and lists among his favorite authors Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clarke, Murray Leinster, Philip K. Dick, and Robert A. Heinlein "when he's not being a fascist."¹ Although not all of his literary output can be classified as science fiction, a significant portion of his work is either SF or incorporates elements of the fantastic. He himself prefers the designation "speculative fiction," alleging that "science fiction is a term that frightens people."

"The Falsifier" ("El falsificador"), first published in 1972, showcases Adolph's erudition and the poetic, elliptical quality of his prose. Although characteristically brief, the story is lush and evocative in its treatment of the astronaut-as-Christ-figure theme. The text, which incorporates a long passage from the chronicles of a real sixteenth-century Spanish conquistador, underscores the fictional potential of historical documents. "The Falsifier" is a clever representation of the metanarrative interconnectedness of history and myth, and of the deceptive, artificial nature of both.

The Falsifier

El falsificador, 1972

by Jose B. Adolph

translated by Andrea Bell,
except as noted

Before the Incas reigned in these kingdoms, or had ever been heard of, the Indians relate another thing much more notable than all things else that they say. For they declare that they were a long time without seeing the sun, and that, suffering much evil from its absence, great prayers and vows were offered up to their gods, imploring/or the light they needed. Things being in this state, the sun, shining very brightly, came forth from the island of Titicaca, in the great lake of the Callao, at which everyone rejoiced. Presently afterwards, they say, that there came from a southern direction a white man of great stature who by his aspect and presence, called forth great veneration and obedience. This man who thus appeared had great power, insomuch that he could change plains into mountains, and great hills into valleys, and make water flow out of stones. As soon as such power was beheld, the people called him the Maker of created things, the Prince of all things, Father of the Sun. For they say that he performed other wonders, giving life to men and animals, so that by his hand marvellous great benefits were conferred on the people. And such was the story that the Indians who told it to me say that they heard from their ancestors, who in like manner heard it in the old songs which they received from very ancient times. They say that this man went on towards the north, working these marvels along the way of the mountains; and that he never more returned so as to be seen. In many places he gave orders to men how they should live, and he spoke lovingly to them and with much gentleness, admonishing them that they should do good, and no evil or injury one to another, and that they should be loving and charitable to all. In most parts he is generally called Ticiviracocha, but in the province of the Callao they call him Tuapaca, and in other places Arnauan. In many parts they built temples in which they put blocks of stone in likeness of him, and offered up sacrifices before them. It is held that the great blocks at Tiahuanacu were from that time. Although, from the fame of

what formerly had passed, they relate the things I have stated touching Ticiviracocha, they know nothing more of him, nor whether he would ever return to any part of this kingdom.

Besides this, they say that, a long time having passed, they again saw another man resembling the first, whose name they do not mention; but they received it from their forefathers as very certain that wherever this personage came and there were sick, he healed them, and where there were blind he gave them sight by only uttering words. Through acts so good and useful he was much beloved by all. In this fashion, working great things by his words, he arrived at the province of the Canas, in which, near to a village which has the name of Cacha, and in which the Captain Bartolome de Terrazas holds an encomienda,¹ the people rose against him, threatening to stone him. They saw him upon his knees, with his hands raised to heaven, as if invoking the divine favour to liberate him from the danger that threatened him. The Indians further state that presently there appeared a great fire in the heaven, which they thought to be surrounding them. Full of fear and trembling, they came to him whom they had wanted to kill, and with loud clamour besought him to be pleased to forgive them. For they knew that this punishment threatened them because of the sin they had committed in wishing to stone the stranger. Presently they saw that when he ordered the fire to cease, it was extinguished, so that they were themselves witnesses of what had come to pass; and the stones were consumed and burnt up in such wise as that large blocks could be lifted in the hand, as if they were of cork. On this subject they go on to say that, leaving the place where these things happened, the man arrived on the sea coast, where, holding his mantle, he went in amongst the waves and was never more seen. And as he went, so they gave him the name of Viracocha, which means "the foam of the sea."

Pedro Cieza de Leon
Chronicle of Peru, part II, chapter 5²

A dark alcove, barely illuminated by a tiny flame, gives refuge to an old man-old in spite of not yet having reached the age of forty-bent over a text that flows from his gnarled fingers. Every now and then he stops the elegant quill and, looking upward, withdraws into himself as he tries once more to fix in his mind a landscape about to pass into legend.

Pedro Cieza de Leon, king's soldier, chronicler of Peru, writes the second volume of his book. The myth of Viracocha, the god who gave name to a king, concerns him today. The Inca Viracocha, hero of the battle for which Ayacucho was named, in which the empire was consolidated once

more, is the pale reflection of an immense figure who, centuries before, passed along the mountains and coast of the kingdom when it was but a vague promise between warring tribes.

Someone impels Don Pedro. The Indians have told him a strange story, which the chronicler has set down with Christian piety. Faithful to his charge, he has recorded it just as it was told to him; and yet on parchment the tale changes subtly, unnoticed by the writer.

The story told by the Indians who, in turn, had heard it from their elders, spoke of celestial carriages and of fields turned to flame. And yet, when transferring this incredible story to the manuscript that will remain as irrefutable proof of his ravings, Cieza de Leon mentions neither carriages nor electric fields. The story is too bizarre, too heretical. It could prove very costly to him, may even result in a charge of Judaism or agnosticism.

Don Pedro's hand-a hand that until now has obeyed him faithfully in the wielding of sword and pen-becomes independent. It writes of its own accord. And from its efforts some other thing emerges, some other story: an Indian version of the Nazarene prophet. An American vision of the Palestine story, of the man who came down from the heavens to teach mankind to love one another. Canas evokes Canaan. The crucifixion becomes a stoning, just as the Palestinian Jews, fifteen hundred years ago, used to execute their criminals and victims.

The story of the Indians has slowly transformed itself until it parallels that of Jesus. Don Pedro will reread what he has written and be surprised at himself. He will never manage to finish any other book, any other work, grieved by the transformation that has taken place in what the Indians had told him. He feels himself a failure as a chronicler, betrayed by a weak memory, by the hand of God, or by a strange cowardice that is not simply the physical fear of the Inquisition.

Don Pedro feels he has lied. But he cannot manage to understand why, or even how much, because in his memory reality-which is also legend-and apocrypha already mix. Don Pedro fears that, by changing the Indians' bold and absurd history into a native version of the Gospels, he has said too much. He fears that, in dread of the truth, he may have done something even worse, which also could qualify as heresy. For, after all, might it not be heresy to suggest that the message of the Son of God made man might be known to those outside the fold of the baptized?

He rubs his tired eyes. He rereads the text once more. He sighs. Per-

haps, he thinks, he has done well, stealing from the uncomprehending eyes of the world something that they could not digest, a thing of witchcraft and evil that cannot be given unto the sinners of this century. Perhaps the Lord will bear in mind, at the hour of his death, that he changed the impious into the holy, the unpronounceable into the compassionate, the terrible into the edifying.

But still he is tormented. Who is he, he asks himself, to alter an authentic tale of these simple and honest folk, who have entrusted their faith to this bearded historian? What punishment might await the falsifier, the deformer, the liar, even though he be one out of piety?

They had spoken to him of a concert of roars in the starry Andean night, of the descent of a good and powerful man, armed with indescribable instruments, wise beyond all knowing. They told of a man who spoke with other men who were not there, and who answered him from afar; of buzzing sounds, and of smells; of colorful visions on silver screens; of long tubes of airy green metal, able to settle like a discreet bird upon the blackened fields of grass. They spoke of the visitor's sadness and desolation at the endurance of idolatry, of the strange foods, of the injured woman and her miraculous cure. Later, they had departed again and Cieza had transformed the untellable spectacle into a walk across the sea. The stranger's request to be forever silent-made by placing a finger across his lips-had been granted, at last, by Don Pedro, but

in his own fashion.

In that darkened Spanish chamber an incident was normalized by a doubtful and tortured man. Perhaps out of cowardice, perhaps from insanity, perhaps due to terror, a chronicler embellished the incomprehensible and saved us, once again, from humans gaining knowledge about us.

Which fact I communicate to you, Commander, and in so doing I bring my research to an end and request permission to continue my journey and that of my crewmate, now recovered from her injuries, to the base on Pluto.