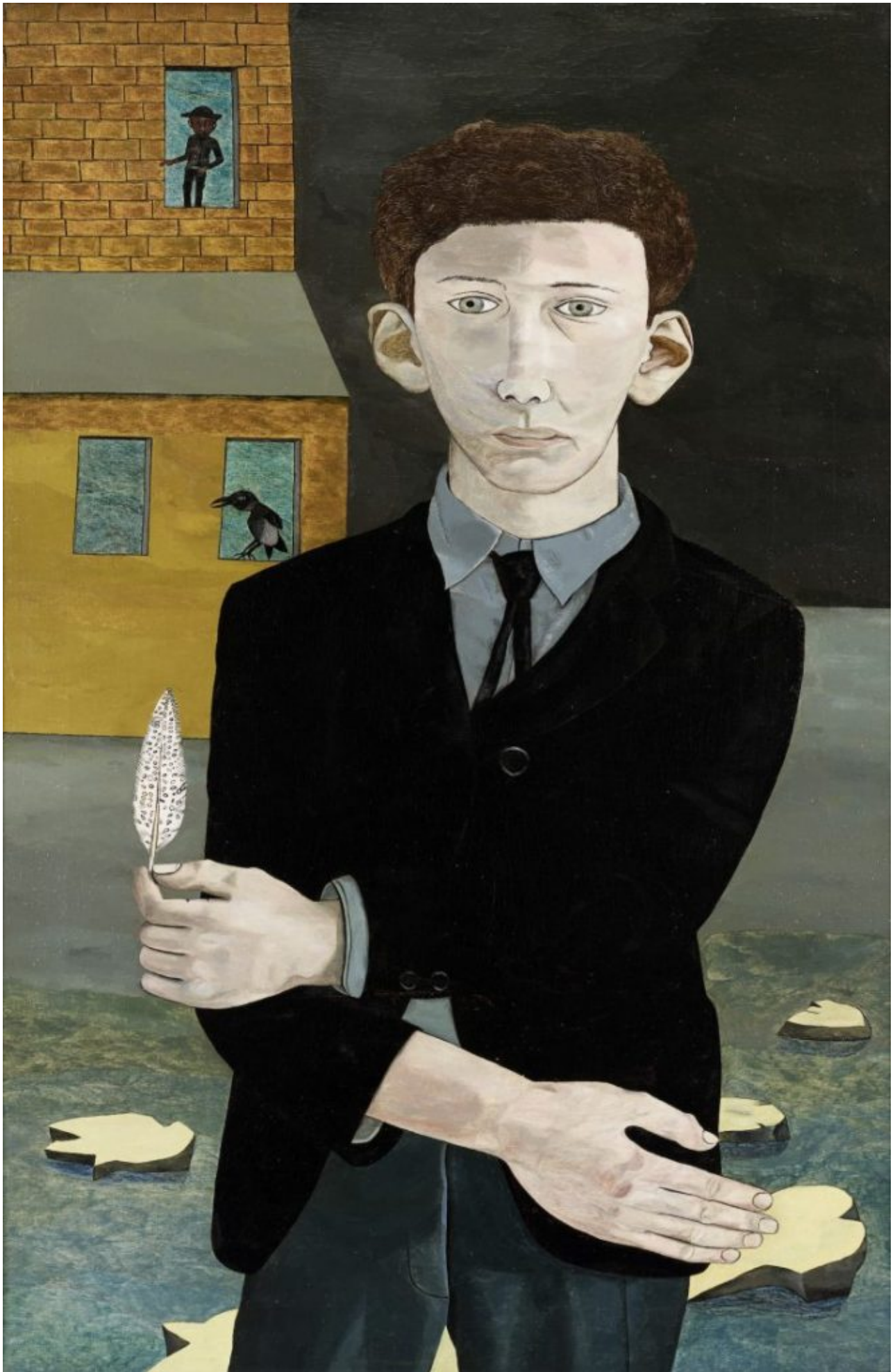


# The Botanist

by [Pedro Blas González](#) (December 2024)



Man with a Feather (Lucian Freud, 1943)

1

Mr. and Ms. Bloom own the largest lawn and garden that I attend to. Their mansion is surrounded by many acres of exotic trees, flowers and plants. The place is a gardener's dream.

Unfortunately, they are really nasty people. They are shallow beyond redemption. They are also wicked and sinister. But I need the work, as I am a botany graduate student.

Whenever I go to work at their mansion, I always hope they are out. Strangely, I always feel physically ill after I leave their place. Frankly, their estate scares me, for even though I cannot pinpoint what it is, I am convinced that the people who live there are evil. I want to have as little interaction with them as possible.

Mr. and Mrs. Bloom keep some of the most sinister and vile people that one can ever imagine as acquaintances. Their parties always involve black magic and strange rituals. One evening, right before the sun went down, I saw a young man with his arms and light-colored shirt streaked with blood run out of the house. He scrambled into his car, leaving red handprints on the door and roof, and fled.

The interesting aspect of their estate is the layout of the garden.

One day Mrs. Bloom called me into the house and asked me if I could climb on her roof and adjust their satellite dish. I found this request awkward. I know nothing about those things.

I propped up a long ladder on a second story balcony and climbed onto the roof. From up there, I could make out the complexity of their garden. I was delighted, struck by its symmetrical beauty.

The perimeter of the house was lined with Yarrow trees. In the

middle section of the yard, I could plainly make out a circle of Nightshade trees.

This caught my attention. Nightshade is a poisonous tree that produces pretty berries. This tree is associated with one of the Fates in classical mythology—the one who cuts the thread of life.

In the middle of the circle, I could make out a five-point star design that consisted of Henbane. This tree is a close relative of Nightshade. It gives off a horrific smell, while lacking the colorful berries.

More bizarre still was Mrs. Bloom's incessant request that I bring six Blackthorn and Hawthorn plants into the house. The plants are placed on some kind of altar that she keeps in a windowless room that is painted red and black.

The rooftop view of the garden made me curious.

I wanted to know if there was any significance to the design of their garden. I began to sift through books on plant and flower folklore. Sure enough, the strange set up of the garden began to make sense to me.

Yarrow is a tree that is dedicated to the devil. Nightshade and Henbane are also considered to be evil, especially when used by people who want to communicate with malignant spirits. The circle with the five-point star inside it—well—I already knew about that.

I tried to figure out Mrs. Bloom's ritual of bringing the Blackthorn and Hawthorn plants into the house. I discovered that these plants are bearers of bad fortune whenever they are brought into a house. I noticed that Mrs. Bloom only brought the plants in whenever they had influential guest in their house.

I had just finished showering. I sat down to my nightly reading. I was excited to finish a book on bonsai that I had begun the previous week.

I noticed a dark spot; a kind of shadow gently descend and settle down next to me on the couch. Its movement was slow and deliberate. The couch was a dark color, thus making it difficult to discern movement through my peripheral vision.

The spot first appeared on my left.

I had two lamps on at the time. One was my desk light, which emits a white fluorescent light. The other was the soft yellowish light coming from a lamp to my right.

That night, in bed, I began to replay the entire episode in my head. It was about two hours later that I finally fell asleep.

The next evening, I sat outside in my backyard to enjoy the long summer hours. Next to me, on one of the other lawn chairs, I could make out the shadow of a figure sitting down. This was very obvious to me given that I was sitting in the sunlight.

I froze and stared. The dark shadow sat next to me, but didn't move. I stared in fear. I decided to go inside the house.

I was scared.

As I started to get up from the chair, the shadow also moved, as if to say, "I can go anywhere you go."

I sat back down. I figured it was safer to remain outside.

I found myself sitting under a beautiful blue sky, emotionally mute. I could make out the shadow swaying back and forth.

I looked around the yard. I tried to take into account all of the objects that could cast a shadow, the time of day and the

relative position of the sun.

I also made a mental picture of the object's size—its height, width and girth. My purpose was not to have to doubt in the future if what I saw was truly something supernatural or merely a shadow.

The most shocking thing was when I saw the shadow, which up to then had been amorphous, begin to take human form.

It dawned on me that I was in the presence of some supernatural being, when the now person-like shadow began to walk around my lawn chair in a very slow and calculating manner. The being seemed to be studying me. It was as interested in me as I was fearful of it.

The entity then walked into the house. I told myself that I needed to control my fear. I followed it inside. It walked into my living room and sat on the couch. It seemed to stretch its arms and legs. It then dissipated into the couch. The being vanished literally right before my eyes.

My immediate reaction was to get out of the house. I went for a walk. I tried to convince myself that I was merely imagining things.

When I returned home, I called my friend Marty. Marty and his wife, Barbara, are convinced spiritualists. I have never paid much attention to such things, but under the circumstances, they were the best people to consult.

Marty advised me that my experience was an illuminating one, and that I should not be concerned.

I didn't feel anything close to illumination, only fear.

"Beings that come to harm us do so immediately," he said. "This, visitor," he reiterated, "was some kind of benevolent spirit."

I questioned why this being should care to visit me.

After an hour-long telephone conversation, Marty convinced me to go to sleep and pretend that nothing happened.

At 8:00 p.m. I had dinner and later took a shower. While combing my hair, I began to feel the strange sensation of a presence near me.

While brushing my teeth, I detected some faint movement. It resembled a bright shadow. Several seconds later, a figure began to materialize next to me.

I dropped my toothbrush.

I don't remember what I felt at the time. I can't say if it was fear or shock.

The figure grew darker and more pronounced, human-like. I stared in amazement. I felt cold all over.

Next to my reflection in the mirror, I saw another image of myself looking back at me. It was an exact copy, a replica of myself. The apparition stood next to me and watched me.

As I looked closer at the image in the mirror, I thought this was an optical illusion. However, the secondary image of me, the being—as I will now refer to it—was not dressed as I was. The being was draped in some undecipherable white tunic. I was now certain this was not an illusion.

I turned around to look at the being. It turned sideways to face me. I could no longer tell the difference between the being and myself.

Looking at the manifestation of the other being was like stepping out of myself. I tried touching its shoulder, when to my surprise, he moved hastily backwards. There was no expression on his face, just a perpetual stare. I tried again. But once more, it moved back. I refrained from further

attempts to make physical contact with it. Instead, I just remained facing it. After some time of this intrigue, the being began to walk away. I followed it into the living room, where it vanished without a trace.

The following day I took the afternoon off from work.

I planned to spend the remainder of the day in the public library going over books about the paranormal. After a short while, I concluded that was a waste of time. Instead, I went to see a priest who has been a friend of my family for many years.

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Father John O'Brien had just finished offering mid-afternoon confession and was busy changing some candles. He baptized me when I was a youngster. The priest was 74 years old, his hair snowy white, his face marked by creases.

"Father O'Brien," I said, greeting him with fully extended arms.

"Steven. It's been months. How are you?" he responded, with his usual charm. "I'm delighted to see you. How's the family?"

"Everyone's doing great." I answered. "How about you, father?"

"I'm fine. I've got the usual aches. You know, those things that affect the body," he responded.

"Father, do you have a few minutes that you can spare me?"

"Why, of course. Come. Let's go up to my apartment. Sparing time for others is the greatest sacrifice we can make."

We went up to his tiny one-bedroom apartment on the second floor of the church, which he kept meagerly furnished. He had books stacked everywhere.



"How many are you up to now?" I asked, pointing to the books.

"Ah, who knows? I just wish I had more time to read them all. Sit down. Let me make coffee. Your father and I are the world's greatest coffee drinkers," he said, as he began to prepare the coffee.

"Tell me. What is ailing you?" he asked as he poured the coffee, some minutes later.

"I don't know where to start. Recently, I had something happen to me that is beyond words."

I then went on to tell him my strange experiences, not knowing how he would react. "I'm really embarrassed to tell you all this."

"I know your character well," he said.

I told him about my encounter with the being.

"I've often heard accounts of ghosts. Just last week I talked with a woman who told me that her husband appears to her at home. I even hear accounts of poltergeists. What you are telling me is different, though. The Germans have a word for a personal double. Doppelgänger, they call it. This is a personal double that is said to live somewhere in the physical world."

"I don't know what to make of it, father. I know I'm not crazy."

"Don't worry about that. Human reality is replete with things we can't explain. Remember, there is often a profound psychological and sociological aspect to any religious experience. Our desire and ability to know and our will to believe are sometimes so strong that we do eventually see."

"Father, what I saw was real. I know that much."

"The compelling aspect of your experience is that you saw yourself and not some other being, as is most often the case. Tell me, did it look exactly like you? Did it talk to you?"

"It was I. It was identical to me. I felt myself very disoriented in its presence. It never spoke, didn't even make a sound."

"You said that it moved away from you when you tried to touch it?"

"Twice, in fact. Both times it moved backwards."

"Often, people who experience such beings talk about an uplifting sensation that they feel. They feel weightless, contentment. They describe the experience as spiritual clarity and rejuvenation. Such experiences leave people with a clear vision of the meaning of their lives."

"Could it be a guardian angel?"

"I don't know. Guardian angels offer moral/spiritual guidance."

"I am pretty confused about the whole thing."

"There's no reason to apologize. Think of what Horatio means when he tells Hamlet that there are more things in Heaven and Earth than we can dream of in our philosophy. We live in a time when intuition is negated in favor of sterile physicalism."

"You don't think that I have gone out of my mind?" I joked.

"What you are telling me doesn't sound like a guardian angel. At least, not in the Christian sense. Guardian angels are spiritual beings. What you are describing is something completely different."

I didn't know what to make of this.

"In the Zoroastrian faith there is a being that resembles best what you are telling me. Zoroastrian priests refer to what you have described as a *Fravashi*, a spirit double."

"Fravashi?"

"It's a kind of soul double. They think of it as the other part of one's soul. I will give you the name and address of a good friend of mine that can help you," he said, writing down the information.

"His name is Dagmer Yazusha. He is a Parsee priest—a member of a tiny sect of modern-day Zoroastrians that run a very modest temple not far from here. I know he will be happy to talk to you. I will call him and arrange for you to go see him."

That afternoon it began to rain.

The dark skies opened up with a vengeance. I managed to spend the greater part of the time sitting in a downtown restaurant enjoying a warm vegetable soup and reflecting on some of the things that father O'Brien said.

By 4:00 p.m. the rain had subsided to just an annoying drizzle.

Mr. Yazusha told me on the telephone that he was very interested in our meeting. So was I. My anticipation was coupled with nervousness.

The fire-temple, as it is called, looked like an inconspicuous two-story office building. I was greeted at the door by a tall, slender man who must have been in his early eighties. He wore a long white shirt, which I was later told the Zoroastrians call a *Sudreh*, and a kind of cord, called a *Kusti*, that must be worn for life.

"How do you do? Welcome," he said, in accented English. He extended his hand to greet me.

“Father O’Brien has spoken very highly of you and your family. He said that you are of sound mind, body and soul. Do come in, please. He also said that you are interested in plants. This is very noble.”

I had very little time to speak before he took my umbrella and asked if I wanted something to drink.

“A little water is fine,” I said.

He then showed me around the inside of the small building. The first floor served as the temple. There was an austere altar with candles. He told me this is called a fire-table. The fire-table is just a flat slab of stone which has a fire urn in the center known as an *Afringanyu*. Next to the fire-table were two stone blocks where frankincense and sandalwood are placed as offerings. Mr. Yazusha told me that he was a *Zot*, a chief officiating priest. He then excused himself for several minutes.

I was told that Zoroastrian priests must be descendants of other priests. When he returned, he did so in the company of a younger man named Abraham Lameer. Mr. Lameer, Mr. Yazusha informed me, was a *Raspi*, an assistant priest.

After a general introductory session, when both men acquainted me with their faith, Mr. Lameer left. A couple of minutes later Mr. Yazusha asked if I wanted to sit outside in a covered terrace.

I immediately found a liking to Mr. Yazusha. I asked him to forgive my naiveté and ignorance about Zoroastrianism.

“Your experience is beautiful and sacred. Allow me to be personal, Steven. Ahura Mazda is the Supreme Being who created the spiritual realm, what is called *Menog*, and also the material realm—*Getig*. Ahura Mazda’s power and blessings are dispersed throughout the universe by way of the *Amesha Spenta*, which are somewhat like Christian Archangels. There are six of

these *Amesha Spenta*. Each serves a function. Zoroastrianism is a dualistic religion. You see, there are two opposing forces in the world, which struggle to win over man. These are Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, an evil doer, like the devil...”

“What about the double of our soul that father O’Brien mentioned? What role does it play?” I asked, anxiously.

“Yes. I was about to come to that. You see, Mr. Taylor, the universe is filled with evil. Ahriman never takes a rest. The good spirits are known as *Spenta Mainyu* and the evil ones are *Angra Mainyu*. Anyone who possesses *Kratu*, wisdom, can touch Ahura Mazda.”

“Is there a specific way of life that can deliver us to wisdom in your faith?”

“Precisely. One of the six holy immortal *Amesha Spenta*, one called Vohu Manah, is in charge of enlightening the mind. Wisdom comes about in two ways. First, there is *Asna Kratu*. This is innate wisdom. Then there is *Gaoshosruta Kratu*, which is acquired. We refer to the enlightened and righteous as *Ashavans*. The *Ashavans* are people who are noble and of moral character. *Asha* means the highest value in our faith. It is the way in which a Zoroastrian must live according to our love of Ahura Mazda.”

“What about the *Fravashi*?” I asked, rather tentatively.

“Father O’Brien did very well in bringing us together. I am very interested to hear about your experience. The *Fravashi* is unique to Zoroastrianism. We believe that all of mankind is given a soul at birth. However, our soul is not complete...”

“Not complete? How do you mean?”

“Our soul is not completely within us. Our soul has a double—a part of itself—that we call a *Fravashi*. Mr. Taylor, the *Fravashi* guides and protects us. Our soul does not become

complete until the time of death. That is why you could not touch the being you saw. You are lucky to see your *Fravashi*. Most people never even suspect this exists."

"So, I have come into contact with my own soul?" I asked, not truly understanding what I was asking.

"I believe so."

"Why is there a split in the soul to begin with?"

"The soul has been split since birth in order to look after itself, to protect it from the corruption of the world, so that it won't lose itself in the material realm. At birth, the spirit is shocked to enter the material realm."

"But why me?"

"Mr. Taylor that is like asking why some people die young and others live long and evil lives. Why are some people visionaries and others harm themselves?"

"What else can I expect?" I asked, naively.

"Father O'Brien told me that you have always possessed a special clarity. *Fravashis*, you must understand, are perfect copies of imperfect beings found in the material world. Everything in the universe has a double. Only evil Ahriman and his demons do not have a *Fravashi*. You ask me what the purpose of this experience is. It serves to protect and warn you of impending evil. It could mean that your *Fravashi* is trying to warn you that you are in mortal danger."

"What do you suggest I do?"

"Oh, that's entirely up to you. Perhaps this is a warning that there is some danger coming to you."

I took the train home that evening still doubting whether what I was experiencing was even real.

I made dinner and poured me a glass of red wine. I was tired. The sound of the telephone ringing startled me.

It was Mrs. Bloom. She told me she had some people she wanted me to meet. She invited me for drinks at her house the following night.

I found her invitation odd. Actually, it scared me. I thought about some of the dark things that I had witnessed in that house.

On several occasions, when asked to take the plants out of the dark room with the altar, I had seen blood on the floor. Each time, when I looked at Mrs. Bloom, she just smiled and nodded.

As I ate in my dining room, I could feel a presence standing behind me. I turned around. I saw the being staring at me, only now, I was no longer frightened. The being was now old. Its hair was thin and white. I saw myself as an old man.

The being then stretched out his arms and offered me a plant. I realized that it was actually a Pearlwort plant, one of several the being held in the crook of his arm. I refused to take the plants for fear of touching him and what that could mean.

The being did not move. It stood with outstretched arms waiting for me to take the plants. He then walked into the living room, still holding the plants. I followed him. He never looked back. He sat on my couch and gave me an expressionless look, before he slowly vanished.

I poured more wine. As I sat in bed, I began to go through my plant folklore books. I searched for Pearlwort, also known as Molus or Mothan in other parts of the world; *Sagina procumbens*. Pearlwort, it turns out, was the first plant that Jesus of Nazareth stepped on when he rose from the dead.

“Was my double offering me new life?” I wondered. If so, what

would it mean that I had refused his gift?

I poured more wine. Sometime later, I went to sleep.

I tossed and turned in bed for what felt like most of the night. I had no shortage of strange dreams. When I awoke the next morning, I remained in bed for several minutes. Bright light was streaming in through the edges of the window shade.

Turning around and placing my feet on the floor, I could feel something soft under my feet. When I looked down, I saw that my feet were resting on the Pearlwort plants, spread across the carpet beside the bed.

“New life,” I said to myself. “Or a chance to continue this one?”

I never returned to the Bloom mansion.

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**Pedro Blas González** is Professor of Philosophy in Florida. He earned his doctoral degree in Philosophy at DePaul University in 1995. Dr. González has published extensively on leading Spanish philosophers, such as Ortega y Gasset and Unamuno. His books have included [\*Unamuno: A Lyrical Essay\*](#), [\*Ortega's 'Revolt of the Masses' and the Triumph of the New Man\*](#), [\*Fragments: Essays in Subjectivity, Individuality and Autonomy\*](#) and [\*Human Existence as Radical Reality: Ortega's Philosophy of Subjectivity\*](#). He also published a translation and introduction of José Ortega y Gasset's last work to appear in English, “Medio siglo de Filosofía” (1951) in [\*Philosophy Today\*](#) Vol. 42 Issue 2 (Summer 1998). His most recent book is [\*Philosophical Perspective on Cinema\*](#).



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