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ALBERTO CHIMAL
(translation by Chris N. Brown)

VARIATION ON A THEME BY COLERIDGE

I got a call. It was me, calling from a phone I lost the year before. I asked myself where I had found the phone. I answered myself that it was in such and such cafeteria that I couldn't remember anymore.

"I bet you're in bad shape," I said, calling from who knows where. "What have you done with your life? Still getting fat? Still stuck in your crisis?"

I told myself no, but in reality I was lying and I knew it.

"You're lying," I told myself.

"What do you want?" I asked myself, a little disgusted with myself. For what reason was I looking for myself at precisely this moment?

"You've been wondering why I'm looking for you right now," I said.

"It's not true!" I answered.

"When you begin to yell you've already lost the argument, you know," I said, laughing at me, and I wanted to hang but I stopped myself, saying, "You need someone to put you in your place and straighten you up."

Then there was a knock on the door and it turned out it was me. I'd been standing there the whole time.

"Obviously I know where you live, idiot," I said, without hanging up the cell phone.

“That’s not fair,” I answered. “Hang up already.”

It was really ridiculous to keep talking on the cell phone. But it didn’t really console me to think that, if I saw myself as being ridiculous, I too saw myself as being ridiculous. In fact I wanted to cry from the realization that I really looked younger and skinnier, and only a year had passed. Even worse, I had hair, I still had hair, when in fact I had had one of my crises the day before and I had shaved my head and looked pathetic.

“You look pathetic,” I said to myself. I couldn’t take it any more. I started to really cry, and answered myself, “Yes.” And then I fell to the floor. And then, against all expectations, I pushed myself up on my knees, and hugged myself, hugged myself and consoled myself and told myself that everything was going to be okay, that if I didn’t help myself then who was going to help me ... or so I told myself.

“We’re going to need to hang up,” I added after a moment, and laughed at myself. I laughed too, sucking the tears and thinking of the indignity of our pose. Then it also occurred to me that I had turned neglectful, because my telephone from a year ago was in better condition than the one I have now.