

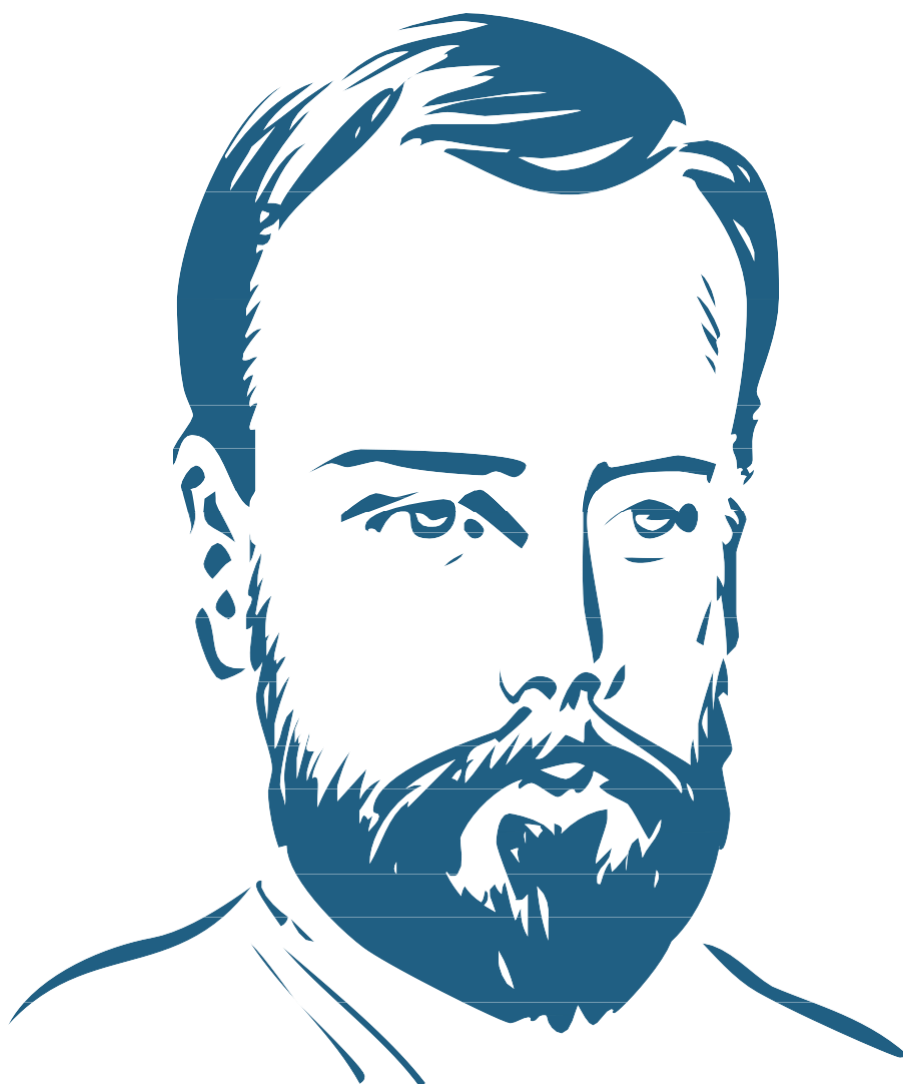
# The Reverend's Pupils

Júlio Dinis



**Biblioteca  
Digital**

Colecção  
CLÁSSICOS  
DA LITERATURA  
PORTUGUESA



 PORTO  
EDITORIA

José das Dornas was a wealthy and healthy farmer, with the kind of flair that made him face everything with a laugh. But that natural, earnest and carefree laughter that does one good, not like that of the Democritus of all-time — skeptical, forced, and gloomy, which is a thousandfold worse than crying.

When it came to farming, as the saying goes, nobody held a candle to him. Even Mr. Morais Soares could learn from him. Though he was sixty years old, he was as robust and dynamic as any boy of twenty. He was familiar with the rooster crowing; the sun always found him up at sunrise, and that's how it left him as it set.

These virtues, alongside a long experience gained at the price of plenty of sun and rain in the open field, made him a consummate farmer which, truth be told, everyone admitted to, without malice or gossip.

People say that — work isn't enough to succeed, and that fortune favors the bold, and who knows what else —; it may be so; but, for once, that wasn't true since José das Dornas was thriving by the minute. By the end of August, carts full of corn wouldn't stop coming into the farmyard! Few people could boast about such luck. There was so much abundance in that home! No one was poor if they knew him, praise God!

As a family man, José das Dornas was also irreproachable. Having lived in perfect and exemplary harmony with his wife for twenty years, and later widowed, he has always been affectionate towards his sons without being demonstrative — which wasn't like him — but, at appropriate times, that affection would be revealed in such sacrifices that would put the most loving parents to shame.

There were two sons — Pedro and Daniel. Pedro, the eldest, was his father's son. He was just like him; — the same honest face, the same robust constitution, the same superiority of musculature, the same type, slightly more elegant, since age hadn't yet exaggerated the curvature of certain outlines and enlarged his transversal dimensions, as was the case with his father. That living specimen of the statuesque Hercules was still in perfect condition.

Pedro was, in fact, the kind of male beauty appreciated in ancient times. The modern taste has changed, apparently. It demands that everyone be frail and delicate, a far cry from the most perfect men of other eras.

His build destined Pedro to be a farmer, and it seemed to require him to follow his father's footsteps when it came to laboring in the fields or managing farm work.

This was understood by José das Dornas, who started grooming his first born, preparing him so that, one day, he could pass on his hoe, his sickle, his rod, and his plow to his son, and to entrust him with the key to the shed, that was so full in times of harvest.

On the other hand, Daniel was built differently, both physically and morally. He was the opposite of his brother, thus incapable of heading on the same life course.

He was built almost like a woman. He was pale and blond, with an effeminate voice, thin hands and fragile health.

The maternal blood pumped more abundantly through his veins than the blood, full of strength and life, to which José das Dornas and Pedro owed their enviable constitutions.

To assign Daniel to life in the country would be to destroy him. It broke his poor father's heart to think that the scorching suns of July or the freezing storms of December would find that feeble child without shelter, that child that looked more like he had been born and raised in cushioned cribs and underneath cambric curtains than in pine beds and coarse peasant pallets.

And, since he first thought of his son's constitution, an idea took hold the mind of that loving father, monopolizing the few hours he wasn't engrossed in labor.

From time to time, his friends would find him quite worried, which, being rather unusual, aroused their curiosities and concerns, and prompted inquiries.

The reverend was one of the most concerned with our man's preoccupied state.

This reverend was an old and affable priest, who had befriended every parishioner. He carried the Gospel in his heart — which is worth far more than to carry it within one's mind.

Leaving the seminary didn't thwart his liberal conviction. There weren't many like him.

— For heaven's sake — said the reverend one day, finally, determined to probe the depths of that mystery — what's the matter with you? What design have you been brooding over for days?

— What else, Father António? A family man has always something on his mind; not only about his own life but that of his sons.

That was the reply.

— Oh, come, now! — insisted the priest. — I've seen you very joyful and in sadder times, and I see plenty who are joyful despite having many reasons to feel otherwise. But you! What more do you want? You have good possessions to bequeath to your sons; but, even if you didn't, we are talking about two lads. You have nothing to worry about, José; a man is nothing like a woman; he can find a place anywhere; all land belongs to him; he can find anything anyplace and any work will do. But, when I think about those poor men I see with many daughters, poor things, who are left in the lurch if anything should happen to their father... I really don't know how they can have a moment of joy; and yet, those fathers don't miss a celebration, bless their hearts.

— Listen, Reverend, I'm aware there are people who are worse off than me, but...

— But then, he who has health and who Christ our Lord gives our daily bread, ought to lift his hands towards heaven to praise Him. Worry about yourself, your sons are no cripples needing to panhandle.

— No they're not, Father, thank God. Pedro, especially, doesn't worry me. The Lord made him robust and sturdy; he's a hardworking man; and he who can work needs no other legacy. It was through work — and the help of God — that I built this house that, truth be told, isn't so bad; he can improve it without so much work if he wishes. But Daniel isn't like that. He's just like his mother — God rest her soul. A day's harvest is enough to kill him. It's his fate that troubles me.

— Oh, is that all? Goodness gracious! It's true: the little one is puny and probably can't handle farm work, but... what do you want your money for, José? Haven't you some money put aside to put the boy through school? You can't make him a farmer? Make him a priest, a scholar, or a doctor, you won't be the poorer for it.

As José das Dornas listened to the reverend's advice, he smiled with the evident satisfaction we always experience when one of our favorite thoughts meets with someone's approval, even before it is unveiled.

— That's what I had in mind. I've thought about putting him through school, but I had some scruples about it.

— Scruples! I don't know what to tell you! Are you that old-fashioned? What scruples can you have about putting your sons through school? You remind me of an uncle of mine who never allowed his daughters to learn how to read; as if more people were led astray by reading than by ignorance.

— That's not it, Father António, that's not what I mean; but I find it hard to provide my sons with an unequal education. Don't you see? They are brothers and, later, the one with a higher education and better career will scorn the one who follows in his father's footsteps, to the point that their own sons will barely know each other: it happens all the time. Isn't Daniel's education an injustice to Pedro?

— For goodness sake, the real inequality is the one between an honorable man, and a criminal and bad one. Now, that's the inequality that, being created by God, will, in the solemn hour, exalt the chosen ones rather than the reprobates. Instruct your sons in any career you steer them to; instruct them according to the values of virtue and integrity, and you won't alienate them, trust me: because, by fulfilling their responsibilities, they will both be

worthy of one other and will shake each other's hands, wherever they may be. And, in the mundane sense, do you think you make Daniel happier by elevating his social status above yours? What a big mistake! The share of pains and ordeals was spread uniformly over all classes, without bias. There are woes and adversities that are responsible for the torment of the great and powerful that the poor and humble don't go through and cannot even begin to imagine. Haven't you heard that with great power comes great responsibility? I tell you what, José — concluded the reverend — have the boy stop by my house and I'll teach him what little I know of Latin, and cut out all that nonsense.

The good priest used these and similar arguments to persuade José das Dornas, who wanted nothing more than to be persuaded — and, after a week, Daniel could be seen, carrying books, on his way to the reverend's house.



— **A**unt Tomásia — said, watching him pass by, an old woman that, sitting in the sun and spinning at her wheel, said the Lord's Prayer drowsily — does José das Dornas's lad go to school now?

— Well, didn't you know his father wants to make a priest out of him? — replied the upstairs neighbor, as she unknotted a thread, making the spinning wheel release the most discordant groans.

— Well, I'll be! Aren't we moving up in the world!

— As they say: a little money goes a long way. You'll see, aunt Custódia, that Pedro, who works himself to death, will always live like a slave, unable to hold his head high; while his scrawny little brother will live like a lord, bossing him around.

— Just imagine! An abbot or a priest in the family! What's the world coming to!

— And what a priest he'd make! He can't fool me; I have his number. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree, no doubt about it, neighbor.

— He takes after his mother's side of the family. Do you remember his uncle — Joaquim do Morgado? What a cunning little lad!

The inflection with which this — what a cunning little lad! — was pronounced was highly significant. It's clear that Joaquim do Morgado, José das Dornas' brother-in-law, left a trail of indelible memories among the women of his time.

— Don't I remember! What a lad! All you had to do was to talk to him and he'd be all over you. That never happened with me since he never had a chance to, of course.

And, having said this, she looked away, bending down to pick up the ball of thread she had dropped, while her neighbor gestured and mumbled unintelligibly in a way that seemed to contradict the old woman's claim and cast doubt on her much vaunted disinterest from the old days.

— He didn't have any luck with me either, aunt Tomásia — said the other neighbor, now raising her voice — he knew very well who he was messing with.

This time the gesture and mumble came from the other interlocutor, with the same meaning.

In the meantime, Daniel had gotten on with his Latin and, before long, could parrot the nouns and adjectives with astounding speed.

José das Dornas had plenty of fun listening to him. The inflections said out loud by his son had gotten in his "good books", as he used to say; and he started to imitate him whenever he was in a good humor, which as we said, happened frequently.

— Go ahead, boy, tell me. So how is it? How is it? *Altrotoro, altrotoro, altrotoro. O track, O track, O trick, oh deuce, deuce, deuce.* Ha! ha! ha! Tell me, boy, tell me.

And Daniel would, once more, start repeating his lessons, accompanied by José das Dornas's laughter that, unknowingly, illustrated a great precept of education that is so often advised: one should overcome the boredom that goes with studying by finding a way to make it enjoyable. In fact, the ease with which Daniel memorized the tedious lessons taught by Father Pereira was partially caused by his father's reaction to them; the harder the names were to pronounce, the more eagerly they would be memorized by Daniel in order to rouse his father's amusement.

Such explosive laughter took place in the night Daniel repeated the inflection of the relative *Qui* and its compounds aloud.

— For Pete's sake! — said José das Dornas — what is all this? *Qua, qua, qua, qua...* Don't tell me that the reverend wants to teach my son to quack like a duck!

And all the family burst out laughing, Daniel most of all.

And, so, little Daniel continued his lessons to the reverend's satisfaction. Many a time the priest would say to his father, confidentially:

— Do you know what, José? The boy is clever and it would be a sin to lead him away from his studies, he has such a flair for them. Can you believe he learnt the languages in a week?

José das Dornas couldn't quite assess the type and degree of difficulty his son had overcome; but he understood that it had been somewhat heroic and, that day, he couldn't help but look at the youngster as if he had something peculiar on his face — the halo of one destined for great things.

— Reverend, — he once asked the instructor — is the little one doing well?

— Beautifully. Learning the Sulpicius was as easy as pie for him. Someday I'll teach him Eutropius, and, before long, Cornelius.

These successive transitions from Sulpicius to Eutropius and from Eutropius to Cornelius made a deep impression on José das Dornas.

That seemed to him a remarkable acrobatic accomplishment.

— Will we make a priest out of him, Reverend?

— Undoubtedly. And a great one, at that!

Now, here's where the good old priest was wrong, as, shortly afterwards, he himself recognized.

About a year after Daniel begun his lessons — he was twelve going on thirteen — the reverend started noticing that the boy arrived later and later for his lesson. At first, five, ten, and fifteen minutes later. Then, those minutes turned into twenty, twenty-five, and thirty, and the reverend tried to figure out what could make him run late.

— Something doesn't seem right. Can he be somewhere playing with other kids? If I catch him! He was going so well! Let him show up, I want to know what's going on. No, I can't have it my own way. Let him show up.

As it happened, the little one arrived, all panting and sweaty, as if he had been running, and the reverend, staring at him with a severe and piercing look, told him, even before giving him the blessings that the boy, with cap in hand, asked for:

— Look here, Daniel; where are you coming from at such an hour?

The lad went as red as a beet and couldn't come up with an answer. He started scratching his head, shrinking, swallowing hard, muttering something and... nothing else.

— Come, I suspect you're turning into a loafer and, if that's so, you'll have to do with me. You *no-good* little brat! Does your father send you to study or to throw rocks with the other kids?

— I haven't been throwing rocks, no sir! — exclaimed Daniel with such eloquent vivacity that confirmed he wasn't lying.

— So what have you been doing until this hour?

The boy yet again became at a loss.

— I'll find out; I'll have someone keep an eye on you and then I'll tell your father about it.

In the two weeks following this scene, Daniel arrived on time for his lessons. The reverend was satisfied with the boy's change and flattered by his own persuasive powers and the transformation he had accomplished with a simple admonishment.

A couple of weeks later, the reverend ran into José das Dornas and had long forgotten to tell on his son, who had since been obedient on his way to duty. José das Dornas, however, seemed preoccupied. The more the priest boasted about Daniel's skill, the more uncomfortable he became, merely releasing unintelligible monosyllables as a sign of approval.

— What's the matter with you, José? You're not yourself! — exclaimed the reverend, impatiently.

— It's just that, Father António, I... to tell you the truth... wanted to say something to you.

— Well, speak, man; go ahead. Why are you suddenly standing on ceremony with me?

— I know you're doing me a great favor by teaching the lad...

— Well, well, go on. Forget about it. If I teach him, it's because I wish to and enjoy it. All I want is for him to take advantage of it as he indeed does; nothing else matters.

— I'm most grateful. But, as I was saying...well, it's hard to explain....

— For Pete's Sake! Speak, man, say your piece.

— It's just that the boy is kind of weak, and...

— And what?

— I'm afraid that, if he studies too much, he'll get sick, and...

— But does he study too much?

— No, sir, but... yes... I was trying to say that it might be best if you let him go home earlier. That's what I think, but if you...

— Yes, yes, but then... let's hear it, does he take long?

— No, not very long. I'm well aware that he has to study; but... I mean... For one so frail as him... To leave home at two and come back at twilight... sometimes even late at night.

The reverend felt as if his heart sank; he was... — let us say the words since we're allowed — he was disappointed. From two o'clock to twilight, and, at times, late at night, when he went to his house at three and left shortly after five o'clock! The priest had to doubly modify his judgement — concerning the boy and himself — doubting the youngster's change and his own power of indoctrination. This sacrifice, in twofold measure, was hard for him and kept him silent for some time. He almost told José the whole story but he kept quiet. After all, he had a generous heart and understood that the revelation would disturb the old man.

— You're right, old man — he simply said. — You're right. The boy will start leaving earlier. I'll make sure of it. But give me a few days, to get where I want to, and then it'll be as you say.

And said the good old priest to himself:

— Don't worry, little Daniel, I'll find out where you go after I send you away. Don't worry, don't worry, you won't fool me again, young man.

And he went home with a firm resolution to get to the bottom of this matter.



**O**n the following day, Daniel took the usual lesson, and, at five o'clock, he was instructed to leave — an instruction whose execution, naturally, didn't take long.

The moment he turned his back, the reverend put on his hat to follow his trail.

The task wasn't easy; we need only remember Daniel's agility, typical of his age, and compare it to the already sluggish movements of the old priest who, in his haste, kicked all the loose rocks in his way.

He followed straight through the roads that led him to José das Dornas's house, asking all the familiar faces he encountered, sitting by the doors or leaning out of the windows, if they had seen the little one pass by. For a long time, everyone answered in the affirmative, which satisfied the reverend because it showed that, so far, the boy hadn't strayed, drifting from his way home.

However, he reached a square from which flowed different roads and lanes, and everything changed.

The reverend, continuing with his investigation system, took the trail that should more promptly lead little Daniel to his father's home.

Outside a one-story house on the corner, sat an old lady threading. Seeing the reverend getting closer, she rose, with the utmost courtesy, from the chair she was sitting in.

— Good afternoon, aunt Bernarda. Tell me, did you see José das Dornas's little boy pass this way?

— God be with you. No, Father, I didn't. The lad used to pass this way every afternoon; but I haven't seen him in two or three weeks.

The reverend began to scratch his ear. Daniel's misdeed was becoming evident to him.

— Of all things! — he grumbled somewhat crossly and, raising his voice, added: — and I forgot to give him a message for his father. Heck!

— If you wish, I can send my granddaughter over there.

— No, no; thank you. There's no rush. May God be with you, aunt Bernarda; thank you very much.

— You're welcome, Father. — And the old woman bowed again.

— There's something going on — the reverend said, frowning and taking another of the lanes connected to the square. — Let's ask here — and he stopped near a rustic porch, under which was sitting a practically paralyzed old man who sought, in the sunbeams, for the warmth that was escaping from his limbs, already frozen by age.

— Good afternoon, uncle Bonifácio — said the reverend, raising his voice and stopping before him.

— Your obedient servant, Father António.

— Can you tell me, uncle Bonifácio, if José das Dornas's little boy came by here recently?

The old man, already half-deaf, had him repeat the question louder and, after a moment's silence, in which he seemed to interrogate his memory, by now stiff and faded:

— Yes, sir, I did — he replied, nodding his head. I did, yes, sir. He came through here with the cattle half an hour ago.

— With the cattle!... Ah, that's Pedro. I'm talking about the younger one, Daniel.

— Ah!... um... that one... oh! yes, yes... the one who goes to school?

— That's the one.

— Why, yes... he just ran past, heading for the weirs.

— Thank you, uncle Bonifácio.

— What can that wicked little boy be doing near the weirs? — wondered the priest, heading in the indicated direction. Along his new path, people would tell him about Daniel, saying that, in the past two weeks or so, he'd show up there every afternoon without fail.

The reverend racked his brain, trying to figure out a reason for such a detour.

— In the name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Spirit! Why does he make such a strange deviation!

After a while, he had no more information to go on, for the place was almost deserted.

The afternoon was not yet over; but some mist started spreading over the fields and the meadows, and the reverend, who had to take care of his rheumatism, was starting to lose some of the fire with which he had started the search.

In the middle of a narrow and flooded trail, that continued deviously between two fields of rye, he stopped and started reflecting:

— The boy vanished. I'm not about to look for him at random this time of day. Let someone else hunt for the shadow person. Who knows where on earth the lad is? Let his father search for him, it's his duty. I better leave while I still have time, before the night air comes in.

He was about to follow the prudent advice he had just given himself, when a sharp and vibrant whistle, whose timbre was as familiar to him as the tune it performed, drew his attention.

— Hello! — said the reverend, stopping, balanced over two stepping stones in the middle of the quagmire. — If I'm not mistaken, love is in the air!

He again listened and, gradually, seemed to confirm his suspicions. He became thoroughly convinced when the whistle was followed by a childish voice that he recognized as that of his disciple, singing, in the same tune, the following verses of a popular song:

Brunette, brunette,  
With your eyes of brown,  
Who, on you, brunette,  
Such charms would crown?

Such charms would crown  
As never did I see.  
Brunette, brunette,  
Take pity on me.

Brunette, brunette,  
With eyes that shine,  
Your eyes, brunette,  
Are sins of mine.

Are sins of mine  
Eyes like that.  
Brunette, brunette,  
Take pity on me.

Brunette, brunette,  
With eyes so gracious.  
Your eyes, brunette,  
Are far too precious.

Are far too precious  
Watching me like that.  
Brunette, brunette,  
Take pity on me.

Brunette, brunette,  
With your eyes of brown,  
From your eyes a gaze  
Grant me, leastways.

Grant me, leastways,  
Don't act coyly.  
Brunette, brunette,  
Take pity on me.

— Here is the man — said the reverend, after listening to the tune; and he headed, resolutely, down the road. But, after a few steps, he stopped as if he had changed his mind.

— No, I must not be seen. I need to spy on him without him noticing it.

After this reflection, he gave the field a once-over and retreated. He once again went around the corner of the lane he had crept in; circled the field on the right side, until he found a rustic gate that didn't offer him the slightest resistance, and, concealed by the rye, he walked, as cautiously as he could, toward where the voice originated from and from then on until he found the game he was hunting for. He didn't take long to carry out his intent.

Here's what the reverend saw, crouching amidst the rye, with the cane stuck in the ground, his hands resting against his cane, and his chin resting against his hands.

## IV

In front of the field where, with the best intentions in the world, the reverend spied, separated only by the already mentioned narrow and moist road, spread a tract of uncultivated land, all covered with furze and broom, and with that alpine vegetation that, in our climate, still embellishes the most arid and wild hills.

Scattered throughout this pasture, wandered the sheep and goats of a vast flock, whose only keepers were an enormous and imposing sheepdog, and a little girl of, at most, twelve.

So far, nothing out of the ordinary for the parish priest.

But what amazed him was the group formed, right then, by the little girl, the dog, and the boy we're already acquainted with, Daniel, for whom the good priest had embarked on such an arduous excursion.

The little girl, sitting by a shapeless and moss-covered stone, intently perused a book, while sneaking, from time to time, half smiles at Daniel who, lying on his stomach, at her feet, with his elbows entrenched on the ground and his chin resting on his hands, seemed, as he adoringly contemplated the eyes of that lovely child, to observe the attributes mentioned in the song we heard him sing.

Lying next to them were a spindle and Daniel's books. The group was completed by the dog curled up near the young student with undisturbed familiarity, exposing that their initial acquaintance, and therefore, that of Daniel and the shepherdess

wasn't a recent one.

This group, despite all its artistic beauty, highlighted by the halftones of the twilight and by the orange background of the sky, from which the lace of the trees in the distance emerged, didn't please the reverend at all who, with a frown, plainly showed his objections to it.

He wanted to emerge from the rye, materializing, to the enthralled characters of this infantile idyll, like the mighty figure of Adamastor, the fearful monster from the stanzas of that great epic, *The Lusíads*.

However, he managed to restrain himself, forcing himself to watch the scene with poorly suppressed discontentment.

The little girl who, for a long while, leaned over the book as if she were struggling to read, a struggle she meant to overcome by herself, finally gave up and, pointing at the unknown word, placed the book before Daniel's eyes, asking:

— What does this mean?

Daniel looked at the book for some time and answered at last:

— *Cataclysm*.

— And what is cataclysm?

Daniel felt embarrassed. In truth, he didn't quite understand the meaning of cataclysm. However, he didn't have the courage to admit it and responded, hesitantly:

— Cataclysm... yes... cataclysm is... I know what it is... it's just hard to put into words... Cataclysm!...

The reverend, despite being in a dangerous spot, couldn't help but feel angry with himself, seeing as a student of his couldn't solve such philological problems.

Margarida, this was the name of the little girl, guessed the reason for Daniel's hesitation and delicately put an end to it. Once again, she looked at the book and carried on with her studying in silence.

Not long after, however, she consulted her young teacher again.

— And this? How do you read it?

— *Metempsychosis* — was Daniel's response.

— And what is that?

This time, Daniel's embarrassment was even greater. He never knew what metempsychosis was and, since he saw himself with his back to the wall for a second time, he lost his patience. He broke free from his tight spot like some teachers do in similar cases.

— Well! That's something that takes a long time to explain. Margarida resigned herself to stay in the dark.

A third question. This time it was originated by the word *pragmatic*.

Daniel was having a streak of bad luck and this question made him lose his temper. After removing the compromising book from his pupil's hands, he said with poorly-hidden spite:

— Let's stop studying, Margarida; I don't feel like doing it right now.

— But then... tomorrow...

— Tomorrow? What about it? Don't worry, I won't punish you. Besides, you still have plenty of time. Don't you realize we meet in the afternoon?

— But...

— But... now I don't want you to study, I want you to sing.

— Sing! What should I sing?

— The *brunette* song.

— I don't like it.

— No?

— No, I don't.

— Then, which one do you like better, Guida? — asked Daniel, attributing to that question, and particularly to that intimate change of name, an air of affectionate gallantry that can never go wrong.

— The one about the *Goatherd* is far more beautiful.

— I don't remember it very well. Well, sing that one, then.

— Not now.

— Yes, now; why can't you sing it now?

— My sister Clara is the one who sings it well, not me.

— Oh, please, she's still a child — said Daniel with a superb gesture, as if he were a grown man. — I want to listen to you sing it.

— I don't think I even know it.

— Yes, yes, you do; let's hear it.

— Listen... I'll sing but...

And Margarida started singing with such a harmonious and pleasantly childlike voice that, if the reverend weren't so preoccupied, and, instead, he were in a more comfortable position where he could judge with an open mind, he'd admit it to be excellent. But, in his present condition, he was a strong critic.

Here's what she sang, in one of those simple and monotonous cadences of almost all our popular ballads:

There was a poor goatherd  
Who tended to her flock,  
From the break of dawn  
To the end of dusk.

In the hills, since she was a little lass  
She knew no other diversion,  
And, as she toiled in her labor  
Her days she saw pass.

— Like you — said Daniel.

Margarida smiled, nodding her head, and continued:

Sitting on the mountaintop,  
The goatherd began to cry.  
Why did the goatherd weep,  
You will now know why:

“Alas! What a cruel fate,  
“Alas! What a cruel anguish,  
“I know no father or mother,  
“Nor a sibling to cherish.

“In the hills, since I was a little lass  
“I knew no other diversion.  
“And, as I toil in my labor  
“My days I see pass.”

But, as she averted her eyes,  
She saw a thing that amazed her.  
Imagine! An all-white goat  
Had lain down next to her.

— Kind of like this — said Daniel, resting his head on his folded arms atop the heathers of the hill.

Margarida went on:

All white, as white as snow,  
Doesn't look anyone in the eyes,  
Covered in the finest cashmere,  
A sight that could mesmerize!

And, maliciously, with a smile of childish mischief, she ran her fingers through Daniel's hair.

She had never seen it before  
Grazing among her herd,  
And she was about to pet it...  
And she was about to stroke it...

And she kept on running her fingers through her young companion's head, who smiled.

Lo and behold! The goat fled  
Straight through the valleys;  
As the goatherd followed her tread,  
But couldn't catch it.

And this went on for three days  
And three nights, on and on!  
Until at the gates of a palace  
They finally came upon.

The king and queen have cried  
Incessantly for ten years,  
Since their daughter was shanghaied  
On a moonlit night.

And ten years have passed  
Without any news of her.  
That's when the goatherd sat,  
Sat near the gate, at last.

“Oh, I see a beautiful goatherd...”

And Margarida couldn't keep a straight face, as she sang this verse, seeing Daniel raise his eyes to her.

“Who downstairs lies!  
“And an all-white goat  
“Who doesn't look anyone in the eyes.

“Servants and squires,  
“Fetch the goatherd.”  
This said the queen,  
This command they heard.

The goatherd was directed,  
With the goat who kept her company  
To the chambers of the palace  
Where, by the king they were expected.

“On my crown of gold  
“I'd wager, for that I'd be bold,  
“That this is my daughter, shanghaied  
“On a moonlit night.”

A miracle! Who would have thought!  
Who could ever guess!  
That the all-white little goat  
Would let words escape her throat.

The following quatrain was sang by Daniel, without affront to the harmony:

“This is the daughter, shanghaied  
“On a moonlit night,  
“Seven years spent on the hills  
“When the throne was her birthright!”

Daniel's intervention made the pair burst out laughing, at risk of leaving the song unfinished.

Entreated by her companion, Margarida continued, after a while:

Such rejoicing in the palaces,  
Such continuous celebration!  
At last, the long lost daughter,  
Is being prepared to rule a nation.

And maids are coming to dress her,  
And maids to choose her shoes with care.  
And the most skilled of all are coming  
To adorn her braided hair.

They look for the little goat...  
Nowhere can she be found:  
But...

Looking at Daniel, little Margarida finished:

But a white-winged angel they saw  
Going to heaven, no longer earthbound.

And so ended the last quatrain of the ballad. For some time, the children were silent, as if they wanted to follow, until the very last vibrations, the harmonious sounds of that voice, that were vanishing into thin air.

Daniel was the first to break the silence.

— See, you could sing all of it. And so well, too!

— Please!

— But it's night, Guida. Look. It's time to round up the herd.

And he added, sighing with melancholy:

— Soon I'm going back to my Latin! And what a colossal lesson I have tomorrow!

— How big is it?

— Well, take a look — said Daniel, opening the Anthology and showing Margarida the pages the reverend told him to study.

— This page... and this one... and this one, up to here.

— And what does it say?

— It's about some generals of times gone by, who provoked wars and deaths, and almost always killed themselves, when they weren't killed instead.

— And why do you have to know about those stories if you want to be a priest?

— Who knows. But what are you saying? A priest! priest! Don't talk to me about becoming a priest, Guida. They really think I want to be a priest. As if.

— What do you mean?

— When the time comes, I'll tell them. The barber has not been born who will give me a tonsure. Uncle João das Bichas told me the other day — laughing, of course — that he already had a sharp razor at home for the occasion. I told him that, then, the razor could be used to shave him after his death, since I had no use for it.

— But your father will kill you!...

— My father? Forget it! My father will not force me to become a priest.

— But the Reverend?

— The Reverend has nothing to do with this. Let him mind his own business. That's a good one!

— Why don't you want to become a priest, Daniel?

— What a question! I don't want to be a priest because I don't want to, because I like you and, after all, I'm going to marry you.

— Please!

— Yes, I will. You'll see.

And, saying this, he familiarly put his arm around little Guida's neck, and kissed her forehead, which didn't even make her blush yet.

The reverend was outraged and flabbergasted by what he had seen and heard.

Had he witnessed, in person, the emergence of the Antichrist, he wouldn't be as stunned.

This harmless scene, this idyll between two children, seemed to him more heinous than the most salacious adventures of the hero, that Byron immortalized as Don Juan, a name that, even before, was already quite controversial.

When the sound of the kiss that ended the dialogue reached his astonished ears, the priest shivered as if he had just listened to the hiss of a rattlesnake, and he couldn't help but release a very loud disapproving interjection, that was perceived by all the characters of the scene we described.

— Did you hear, Guida? What was that? — said Daniel, on his feet, examining his surroundings with a certain unease.

— It's nothing — she replied, showing a bit more composure than Daniel.

But, in the meantime, the dog had already gotten up and was barking furiously towards where the reverend was hiding.

— Here, Gigante, here! — shouted Margarida to no avail.

— What could possibly be in the rye to make the dog bark like that? — asked Daniel, as white as a sheet.

The dog barked more and more, and he seemed ready to lunge at a hidden enemy.

The reverend, as one would anticipate, was starting to feel very uncomfortable.

— Here, Gigante — continued the little girl, by now tired of shouting. But Daniel, frightened, using the dog as a reconnoitering and defense instrument, let out an imprudent word:

— Fetch, Gigante, catch!

That's all it took.

With a single leap, Gigante crossed the narrow road separating him from the field, where the reverend sweated more and more in the face of danger, and, breaking through the rye, landed with his front legs triumphantly on the poor priest's shoulders, who could already imagine himself slain by this monstrous dog.

Like one of those toys that so delight little children, that, as you open a box, are suddenly expelled by a spring, the reverend, feeling the magical touch of the colossal quadruped, suddenly sprang to his feet and, pale and half stifled by the scare, shouted to Daniel:

— Call the dog, you wicked boy! He'll kill me!

But Daniel couldn't help him: he was rendered speechless by the unexpected sighting of the schoolmaster. I'm sure that Lot's wife didn't remain as still, after that fatal moment in which she yielded to her irresistible curiosity.

On the other hand, little Margarida saved the day — as I believe the saying goes. — She armed herself with as much severity as she could muster, and, now with an imperative tone, pronounced a — “Here, Gigante!” — that was promptly obeyed.

The reverend was safe but still didn't have his wits about him. Besides, he felt truly insulted by the ridiculous circumstances that led to his discovery. As is always the case, these circumstances prevented him from taking on a severe, serious, and educational posture, essential to whoever wants to give a scolding, a moral lesson.

With good judgement, the reverend renounced this intention and, without a word, turned his back, walking away from the place of this adventure, feeling as unsatisfied with his disciple as with himself.

After a few more moments of silent astonishment, Daniel burst out laughing, laughing, laughing, with that childish laughter that is honest and infectious, unlike any other. He forgot all the strange and serious aspects about the whole scene, all its repercussions, and could only think of the reverend's grimace, screaming for help, of the priest's scare, and how miserable he looked as he walked away; all this made him laugh hysterically.

Didn't the priest do well to postpone the lecture to a more appropriate occasion?

Margarida, though? She was not laughing. A certain instinct of sensitivity, natural to almost all women, a bad feeling of misfortune that some women acquire from childhood, seemed to tell her that what happened, without her knowing why, could be disastrous.

And while Daniel laughed, she, poor thing, couldn't help herself, and started to cry.

— What's the matter with you, Guida? What's going on? — asked Daniel, now serious and moved by her. — Why are you crying like that?

— Let me be. I'm not sure why... but I feel a deep sorrow ... deep... so deep!... Let's go. It's late, I'll get the herd together.

— And I'll help you.

— No. You go on home, and fast, before the Reverend gets there first.

— Will he?

— Go on... run.

Only then did Daniel realize that Margarida could be right in taking the matter seriously: he shouldn't trivialize the priest's appearance in that place. So, he bid farewell to his companion and ran home.

## V

The following day, on Sunday, the reverend was dressing up in the sacristy, getting ready to say the mass. Amongst the several people who attended mass, the reverend spotted our very own José das Dornas and he recollected what happened the day before, as well as all of its unpleasant circumstances. Throughout the night, alone with his pillow, the priest had made a decision. Bearing it in mind, he said to José das Dornas, when he came closer to the sacristy:

— Later, after mass, wait for me outside, in the yard, we need to talk.

José das Dornas nodded, and entered the chapel.

Nothing out of the ordinary happened during the mass. It was said by the reverend, with all the usual formalities of the ritual, and heeded by the audience, particularly by José das Dornas, with respectful attention.

When it was over, various groups were formed in the yard that, covered with a dense alameda, was, at that time of the year, one of the most desirable places in the region. José das Dornas had a few words with some of his acquaintances. He discussed the weather, the looks of the crops, the changes of the moon, and, little by little, he got more and more by himself, because the villagers started to scatter, lured away by the thought of dinner that awaited them.

Eventually, he was by himself and, with his hands in his pockets, started strolling down the yard. Meanwhile, he tried to guess why the reverend had told him to wait and the nature of his message.

No matter how much he tried, he couldn't find a good enough answer and, reasonably, he ultimately decided to learn it from the talk that would take place soon.

In fact, it didn't take long. The reverend finally left the sacristy, and immediately headed for José das Dornas who, as soon as he saw the priest, removed his hat.

— At ease, José, at ease. Well... we need to talk about your son.

— Do I need to buy some more books? Whatever you find...

— No, no. It's a whole different matter.

— Well?

— It's that... Listen, José. Do you remember me telling you, a while back, that the boy was going to be a priest?

— Do I! Very well. And I said...

— Yes, yes. Well... to tell you the truth... I think it's best... to choose a different path.

José das Dornas stopped and stared gaping at the reverend.

— So... he doesn't have the brains for learning?

— Yes, he does, a little too much. But... look here: to be a clergyman, you need to have an unwavering calling. If you don't, it's wrong to pursue it, and it's a grave sin to force someone to follow it against their will.

— Jesus! Don't I agree? But, then, you don't think the boy has a flair?...

— Erm, erm.... — murmured the reverend. — No, I don't think he has much of a flair.

— Good heavens, but... why don't you think so? And do forgive me, if I'm being impertinent.

— I have my reasons.

— And I thought the lad was cut out for the trade!

— So did I.

— He loved to help with the service.

— Have you looked at him now?

— Even when it came to playing. He used to love pretending he was a little priest, preaching sermons.

— That, now... regarding what he loved doing and his playing... I think there has been a change recently.

— Really?

The reverend was hesitant to reveal the whole truth to José das Dornas; so, when he heard this question, he started faltering, and gave an evasive answer:

— Yes... I don't think he finds it that entertaining to play priest now...

— Ah! Yes... but... now he has other things on his mind... His lessons...

— Ah!... The lessons. That's what I had in mind.

— Listen, Reverend — continued José das Dornas, with some level of incredulity concerning his son's change of heart — I... yes... as they say... I don't know the reasons for you to think that way... but it seems to me you're mistaken.

The reverend had reached the limits of his great patience. José das Dornas's doubt, even if expressed hesitantly, made up his mind to be more explicit.

— What if I told you, José das Dornas — he exclaimed, stopping and turning to his interlocutor — what if I told you your son Daniel, despite being twelve, or thirteen years old, that must be his age, already has a sweetheart in the village?

José das Dornas stopped as if he had been thunderstruck.

The reverend kept walking.

— What are you saying, Reverend?! — exclaimed, at last, José das Dornas, five or six steps behind the priest, and still in the same place the news had left him.

— What I know!... — replied the reverend, with eloquent brevity.

— In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit! What's the world coming to? So the lad... Upon my word, Reverend, had anyone else told me that, I wouldn't have believed them.

— What if I tell you I saw, with my own eyes, your Daniel, sitting on the hill next to the girl, singing together, reading together, and even telling her he would never become a priest because he wanted to marry her?

— Now, now, Reverend, you're overstating. Forgive me, but now...

— What if I tell you he kissed her? — added the priest, confidentially.

— A kiss!

— What if I tell you that, day in, day out, he leaves my lessons at five, and spends every single afternoon with the girl?

— Will you look at that lad!

— You can see we mustn't make him a priest. We, unfortunately, have enough priests to set bad examples. And when, the sample is like that, imagine the whole piece!

— But what are we to do with him now?

— If you follow my advice you already have a plan: don't ordain the boy. Just take him and send him to school as soon as possible, where he won't be allowed to set foot near grass. Then, make him a doctor... a lawyer... whatever you want and doesn't displease him...

— So, are you saying I should send him to Coimbra?

— To Coimbra?... I don't know?... Man, to be honest, a seed like this in Coimbra is bound to bear fruit somewhere. Send him to Porto, where your family members can keep an eye on him; it'll be better. Make him a surgeon. They say they come out as good as the Coimbra students, and it's a good career, too. Our João Semana is old, and, after his death, there won't be anyone else. But we must get right on it. Send the boy away from here, if you want to make something good of him.

— But, Reverend, who was the girl?

— That's none of your business. Just do as I say, and forget about it.

And, in this way, the two of them parted, each one heading home.

José das Dornas remained, for some time, impressed by what the reverend had just told him.

Some news need a slow and laborious digestion, like that of certain food.

While it lasts, the spirit doesn't feel comfortable and it's as if it fidgets under the influence of an uneasy sensation; but, little by little, an intimate assimilating labor takes place, the sort of digestive fever, that accompanies that mental elaboration, soothes, and everything falls into place. The news, that at first had impressed us, at last loses whatever felt strange to us; we feel freer, and in a better mood to face the facts.

This was the case with José das Dornas: what, initially, had felt like a calamity, ultimately turned into a perfectly natural thing, amusing even; what had seemed to be the collapse of a beautiful building under construction, convinced him in no time that it was nothing but a preparatory reform to create a better future, and, though he became sullen and displeased at first, he eventually became pleasant and almost smiling.

— The boy is no angel! So he already had a girl! That was the case! Ha! ha! ha! And the reverend was so embarrassed! Ha! ha! ha! Now I think it's funny! And how he could say he wasn't going to be a priest, because he wanted to marry! What a little lad! Isn't he cunning! Hello! But how on Earth did the reverend learn about it? To be honest... the little one is right. How could I, who was so happy with that saint who's now in heaven, force a son to be deprived of a happiness like mine? Let the boy... He wants to marry?! Good for him. May God grant him a nice girl, a homemaker... But who can she be? That, the reverend won't tell. I'll find out. I'll send the boy to Porto... And what doubts can I have about it? Men are made in big cities... He'll be a surgeon if he wants to. The reverend is right about that. João Semana is finished... There are plenty of priests... and, Daniel is so smart it'd be a pity not to make him something else... That little boy drives me to distraction! Ha! ha! ha! I'll be! He's hot-blooded! He starts early, too!

And, with this monologue and in the most pleasant mood, José das Dornas made it home, and dined with a large appetite. At the table, he stole, furtively, malicious glances at his youngest son, who, feeling he would be lectured soon, didn't raise his eyes. His father could barely keep from laughing, as he watched him.