The Thinking-About-Gladys Machine

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Translated by
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THE BOOK AND THE TEXTS

(NOTE ON THE 1995 EDITION)

For almost twenty-five years now, *The Thinking-About-Gladys Machine* has been practically non-existent. It was published in December 1970, just a few days after *La Ciudad* (*The City*), a novel that earned a mention in the weekly newspaper *Marcha*, and which, perhaps as a result, fared a bit better. *Gladys*, meanwhile, hardly made it into bookshops; according to some booksellers, the distributor's reps said they hadn't even heard of it. I never found out if a decision had been made not to promote it, or if it was just a general lack of interest from both the publishers and the reading public. It was a time of 'topical issues', and the books that were attracting attention tended to have very definite sources of inspiration. The really surprising thing, then, is that I managed to publish these books at all. The credit, or the blame, is due to one Marcial Souto, who worked hard to set up, within an 'ideologically committed' publishing house, a series called Literatura Diferente, which gave a home to works by José Pedro Díaz, Carlos Casacuberta, Dean Koontz and Robert Sheckley, among others.

Some of the pieces that make up this book were previously published in magazines and supplements (*Señal*, the *El Popular* newspaper's *Revista de los Viernes*, *Maldoror*, *El lagrimal trifurca*), and the novella *Jelly* appeared in a chapbook insert of the magazine *Los Huevos del Plata*. After the book came out, and then vanished, the stories went on to be published elsewhere, some of them many times, in magazines, newspapers and anthologies from various countries.

Meanwhile, the publishing house Tierra Nueva had moved from Uruguay to Argentina, and for some reason thought to take along the copies of *Gladys* they had in storage. Several friends spotted the book on the sale tables of the bookshops on Calle Corrientes in Buenos Aires, and that's how more Argentines than Uruguayans come to have a copy in their possession. Later on, it's said, the remaining copies – that is, almost the entire print run – were turned back into pulp, and that very paper pulp might just be supporting a worthy book today.

Allow me, then, to dedicate this second edition of *The Thinking-About-Gladys Machine* to everyone who looked for the first one, whether or not they found it in the end. For all those years, it meant a lot to know that people were out there looking for it.

ML, February 1995
Translated by Kit Schluter

THE THINKING-ABOUT-GLADYS MACHINE

Before going to bed I made my daily rounds of the house, to check everything was in order; the window was open in the small bathroom at the back, so the polyester shirt I was going to wear the next day could dry overnight; I shut the door (to prevent draughts); in the kitchen, the tap was dripping and I tightened it; the window was open and I left it that way – though I did close the blind – and the rubbish had been taken out; the three knobs on the stove were all at zero; the dial on the fridge was at three (light refrigeration) and the half-drunk bottle of mineral water was sealed with its plastic cap; in the dining room, the big clock wouldn't need winding for several more days and the table had been cleared; in the library I had to turn off the amp, which someone had left on, but the turntable had switched itself off automatically; the ashtray on the armchair had been emptied, the thinking-about-Gladys machine was plugged in and purring away softly as usual, and the high little window that looks onto the air shaft was open, with the smoke from

the day's cigarettes slowly drifting through it; I shut the door; in the living room I found a cigarette butt on the floor and placed it in the standing ashtray, which it's the maid's job to empty every morning; in my bedroom I wound the alarm clock, making sure it was showing the same time as my wristwatch, and set it to go off half an hour later the next morning (because I'd decided to skip my shower; I could feel a cold coming on); I lay down and turned out the light.

In the early hours I woke up feeling anxious; an unusual noise had made me jump; I curled up in bed with all the pillows on top of me and clutched the back of my neck and waited tensely for the end: the house was falling down.

Translated by Annie McDermott