

Plot of a Long Story

Introductory note and translation
by Todd Mack



Ramón Reventós i Bordoy (Barcelona 1882 - Barcelona 1923) was a Catalan journalist and short story writer. Though he came from one of Barcelona's most important intellectual families, and gained some popularity as a writer in his own time, today he is best known for his long-term friendship with Pablo Picasso. Four years after moving to Barcelona in 1895, Picasso met Ramón (known as Moni) and his brother Jacint (known as Cinto), and they quickly formed a deep friendship. Because the Reventós home was a frequent gathering place for intellectuals and artists of the time, the brothers helped Picasso connect to Barcelonan society. Soon, Moni garnered praise as an art critic, humorist, and satirist; and he published articles and short stories in the journals *Arte Joven*, *Pel & Ploma*, and *L'Esquella de la Torratxa*, in the last of which he published the following short story on February 2, 1916.

In "Plot of a Long Story," Reventós tells of how one day Mrs. Moon gets the idea into her head that she will drink up all of the seas. He then describes how she accomplishes such a feat, and what happens in the aftermath. One might be tempted to find symbolic meaning here about humankind's careless and innocent descent into previously uncharted territories and their subsequent and summary demise, but alternatively, it might be best to read this story as a piece of literary nonsense. This genre began with Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll in the mid nineteenth century, and became popular with the avant-garde in the late 1910s and 1920s. Writers in this genre resist creating *meaning*, employing instead playful language and presenting impossible ideas in order to stimulate emotions and sensations. We see this on display in Reventós' personification of the moon and the seas, and in his artful depiction of the palaces of the mermaids or of Neptune's magic cove or of sea monsters that swallow ocean liners whole. We also see it in the nonsensical description of scientists raising up water like bridges in reverse, muscles raining from the sky, and children catching fish out of the air like bats. A sense of playful, childlike *jouissance* infuses the work from start to finish.

"Plot of a Long Story" was posthumously re-edited and included in a collection of Reventós' prose entitled *Proses*, which also contains some illustrations by Picasso. For this translation, I have used the 1953 edition of *Proses* and have made only a few small changes in syntax and lexicon for the sake of modern English readers. ●

Ramón Reventós o Bordoy

Plot of a Long Story

One day Mrs. Moon had the idea of drinking the seas. We shouldn't need to explain the reasons she had for doing such a thing because plots are all action and they never explain the motives that move the characters. Let us just say, then, that Moon had the idea of drinking all of the seas in the world.

First, she began by sipping, and when she got tired she would pant, and with this procedure she produced tides like the normal ones she produces with her breathing. It was just a light coming and going that was not even worth noticing. Then a day came in which she felt sufficiently strong, and she sucked hard and not only the seas, but also the rivers and the lakes and the modest little springs were like an afternoon snack on Michaelmas.

*For Saint Michael meant
The snack's to heaven sent.*

To heaven went the grandiose Pacific, the Atlantic who makes way for it, the Indian with its marvelous waters, the oceans of north and south, and all of the seas, large and small, even our blue Mediterranean abandoned its beloved Greece, France, Italy, and Spain to go off with the Moon.

And see here that men found that their possessions had increased considerably, enormously, and the walkable ground was six or seven times larger than it had ever been. Frightened, they came down into the deep valleys which used to be the home of those fish who are all head, and for a body they have just a bullfighter's tail. Once there, in the light of the sun, which shone in that place for the first time, they saw the palaces of the mermaids; the magic cove of Neptune; the den of the great sea serpent — that serpent that has a mane like that of a thousand lions or like that of a *viura*¹ and who can swallow an ocean liner and

digest the whole thing, machinery and all, just as there are people who digest cherries or plums with the pit still inside.

They passed by the soft sands that formed unending fields. They traversed forests of completely unknown algae. They found new minerals, new precious stones, in short, everything that the crew of the Nautilus saw, but corrected and with increased beauty and wonder, and without having to don a suit for breathing underwater, which is both uncomfortable and ugly.

The Sun and the Moon illuminated everything; the men — stretched out belly up — contemplated the most beautiful of films. Naturally, food became very expensive, because of the drought; but soon the ingenuity of the wise awoke and they raised up the waters, and like he who builds a bridge in reverse, they made fall to the earth the inexhaustible rays of a thousand fountains, rivers and small springs of water both fresh and free, which restored the abundance to the earth. They fished with a shotgun, throwing a lasso, and those who wanted to fish with a pole looked like children killing bats.

Occasionally there would be a shower of muscles or oysters and all kinds of mollusks, and that was a delight — earthly Paradise.

The bad thing is that one day Mrs. Moon tired of holding her breath, and there was a kind of Flood, but even bigger. The only people to survive were the members of the swimming clubs.

¹ Grape grown in Catalonia. Also known as a Macabeo. Used for making the famous Catalan wine called *cava*.