"Those were the days!" said the Hydra to her gracious visitor. "A month didn't pass without some hero coming to slay me. Proudly he'd arrive to this cliff edge, lean over the waters, and scream challenges at me; I'd emerge slowly (to give the spectacle more dignity) and he, whirling his blade, would clip off a few of my heads. One would fall, and at once, before a single drop of blood spilled out, another replaced it. I allowed that impetuous blade to covet me: I stretched out my twelve whistling and dancing heads to the hero, to put them within his reach. Always there were twelve, no matter how many he lopped off. Finally the exhausted hero no longer had the strength to raise his arm. (Then I freed him from the humiliation of returning in defeat to his land.) Thus I amused myself, month after month, with these harmless executioners. Now they no longer come: my reputation as an immortal has taken the heart out of them. What a shame. Those jousts between blades and heads were an entertainment. Somewhat tensely, I awaited the great two-handed blow which at times was slow in coming, or else came too quickly; and instantly I felt that the new head springing forth was like a sudden change in my life, either that the head continued its predecessor's expression or repeated it exactly. Thanks to this expectation of mine, in which the budding of each head was inevitable and yet surprising, I delighted in myself as if in listening to music. Time. Sheer time. Now I'm bored; and these twelve heads you see no longer sound like the notes of a song, but rather like yawns in a void."

"You have spoken," said the visitor, "of your expectation for change, for continuity, and repetition. You'll see that you needed to learn to await the best part of your song, which is its ending. Would you care to play one last time?"

And rising, Hercules brandished his sword.

*Enrique Anderson Imbert is an Argentine short story writer and novelist.