

the motorcycle diaries

NOTES ON A LATIN AMERICAN JOURNEY

preface to the first edition

Ernesto Guevara's travel diaries, transcribed by Che's Personal Archive in Havana,* recount the trials, vicissitudes and tremendous adventure of a young man's journey of discovery through Latin America. Ernesto began writing these diaries when, in December 1951, he set off with his friend Alberto Granado on their long-awaited trip from Buenos Aires, down the Atlantic coast of Argentina, across the *pampas*, through the Andes and into Chile, and from Chile northward to Peru and Colombia and finally to Caracas.

These experiences were later rewritten by Ernesto himself in narrative form, offering the reader a deeper insight into Che's life, especially at a little known stage, and revealing details of his personality, his cultural background and his narrative skill — the genesis of a style which develops in his later works. The reader can also witness the extraordinary change which takes place in him as he discovers Latin America, gets right to its very heart and develops a growing sense of a Latin American identity, ultimately making him a precursor of the new history of America.

Aleida March
Che's Personal Archive
Havana, Cuba, 1993

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ALEIDA GUEVARA p r e f a c e

When I read these notes for the first time, they were not yet in book form and I did not know the person who had written them. I was much younger then and I identified immediately with this man who had narrated his adventures in such a spontaneous way. Of course, as I continued reading, I began to see more clearly who this person was and I was very glad to be his daughter.

It is not my aim to tell you anything of what you will discover as you read, but I do not doubt that when you have finished the book you will want to go back to enjoy some passages again, either for the beauty they describe or the intensity of the feelings they convey.

There were moments when I literally took over Granado's place on the motorbike and clung to my dad's back, journeying with him over the mountains and around the lakes. I admit there were some occasions when I left him to himself, especially at those times when he writes so graphically things I would never talk about myself. When he does, however, he reveals yet again just how honest and unconventional he could be.

To tell you the truth, I should say that the more I read, the more in love I was with the boy my father had been. I do not know if you will share these sentiments with me, but while I was reading, I got

to know the young Ernesto better: the Ernesto who left Argentina with his yearning for adventure and his dreams of the great deeds he would perform, and the young man who, as he discovered the reality of our continent, continued to mature as a human being and to develop as a social being.

Slowly we see how his dreams and ambitions changed. He grew increasingly aware of the pain of many others and he allowed it to become a part of himself.

The young man, who makes us smile at the beginning with his absurdities and craziness, becomes before our eyes increasingly sensitive as he tells us about the complex indigenous world of Latin America, the poverty of its people and the exploitation to which they are submitted. In spite of it all, he never loses his sense of humor, which instead becomes finer and more subtle.

My father, "*ése, el que fue*" ("myself, the man I used to be"), shows us a Latin America that few of us know about, describing its landscapes with words that color each image and reach into our senses, so that we too can see the things his eyes took in.

His prose is fresh. His words allow us to hear sounds we have never heard before, infusing us with the surroundings that struck this romantic being with their beauty and their crudity, yet he never loses his tenderness even as he becomes firmer in his revolutionary longing. His awareness grows that what poor people need is not so much his scientific knowledge as a physician, but rather his strength and persistence in trying to bring about the social change that would enable them to live with the dignity that had been taken from them and trampled on for centuries.

This young adventurer with his thirst for knowledge and his great capacity to love shows us how reality, if properly interpreted, can permeate a human being to the point of changing his or her way of thinking.

Read these notes of his that were written with so much love, eloquence and sincerity, these notes that more than anything else make me feel closer to my father. I hope you enjoy them and that you can join him on his journey.

If you ever have the opportunity to follow his footsteps in reality, you will discover with sadness that many things remain unchanged or are even worse, and this is a challenge for those of us who — like this young man who years later would become Che — are sensitive to the reality that so mistreats the most wretched among us, those of us who have a commitment to helping create a world that is much more just.

I shall leave you now with the man I knew, the man I love intensely for the strength and tenderness he demonstrated in the way he lived.

Enjoy your reading! Ever onward!

Aleida Guevara March
July 2003

ERNESTO
CHE GUEVARA
the motorcycle diaries
NOTES ON A LATIN AMERICAN JOURNEY

ENTENDÁMONOS
so we understand each other

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This is not a story of heroic feats, or merely the narrative of a cynic; at least I do not mean it to be. It is a glimpse of two lives running parallel for a time, with similar hopes and convergent dreams.

In nine months of a man's life he can think a lot of things, from the loftiest meditations on philosophy to the most desperate longing for a bowl of soup — in total accord with the state of his stomach. And if, at the same time, he's somewhat of an adventurer, he might live through episodes of interest to other people and his haphazard record might read something like these notes.

And so, the coin was thrown in the air, turning many times, landing sometimes heads and other times tails. Man, the measure of all things, speaks here through my mouth and narrates in my own language that which my eyes have seen. It is likely that out of

10 possible heads I have seen only one true tail, or vice versa. In fact it's probable, and there are no excuses, for these lips can only describe what these eyes actually see. Is it that our whole vision was never quite complete, that it was too transient or not always well-informed? Were we too uncompromising in our judgments? Okay, but this is how the typewriter interpreted those fleeting impulses raising my fingers to the keys, and those impulses have now died. Moreover, no one can be held responsible for them.

The person who wrote these notes passed away the moment his feet touched Argentine soil again. The person who reorganizes and polishes them, me, is no longer, at least I am not the person I once was. All this wandering around "Our America with a capital A" has changed me more than I thought.

In any photographic manual you'll come across the strikingly clear image of a landscape, apparently taken by night, in the light of a full moon. The secret behind this magical vision of "darkness at noon" is usually revealed in the accompanying text. Readers of this book will not be well versed about the sensitivity of my retina — I can hardly sense it myself. So they will not be able to check what is said against a photographic plate to discover at precisely what time each of my "pictures" was taken. What this means is that if I present you with an image and say, for instance, that it was taken at night, you can either believe me, or not; it matters little to me, since if you don't happen to know the scene I've "photographed" in my notes, it will be hard for you to find an alternative to the truth I'm about to tell. But I'll leave you now, with myself, the man I used to be...

PRÓDROMOS
forewarnings

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It was a morning in October. Taking advantage of the holiday on the 17th I had gone to Córdoba.* We were at Alberto Granado's

*At the time a national holiday to commemorate Juan Perón's 1945 release from prison. General Perón was president of Argentina from 1946 to 1955 and from 1973 until his death in 1974.

place under the vine, drinking sweet *mate** and commenting on recent events in this "bitch of a life," tinkering with La Poderosa II.** Alberto was lamenting the fact that he had to quit his job at the leper colony in San Francisco del Chañar and about how poor his pay was now at the Español Hospital. I had also quit my job, but unlike Alberto I was very happy to leave. I was feeling uneasy, more than anything because having the spirit of a dreamer I was particularly jaded with medical school, hospitals and exams.

Along the roads of our daydream we reached remote countries, navigated tropical seas and traveled all through Asia. And suddenly, slipping in as if part of our fantasy, the question arose:

"Why don't we go to North America?"

"North America? But how?"

"On La Poderosa, man."

The trip was decided just like that, and it never erred from the basic principle laid down in that moment: improvisation. Alberto's brothers joined us in a round of *mate* as we sealed our pact never to give up until we had realized our dream. So began the monotonous business of chasing visas, certificates and documents, that is to say, of overcoming the many hurdles modern nations erect in the paths of would-be travelers. To save face, just in case, we decided to say we were going to Chile.

My most important mission before leaving was to take exams in as many subjects as possible; Alberto's to prepare the bike for the long journey, and to study and plan our route. The enormity of our endeavor escaped us in those moments; all we could see was the dust on the road ahead and ourselves on the bike, devouring kilometers in our flight northward.

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*The Argentine national drink, a tea-like beverage made from the herb *mate*.

**Granado's Norton 500 motorcycle, literally "The Mighty One."

EL DESCUBRIMIENTO DEL OCEANO discovery of the ocean

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The full moon is silhouetted against the sea, smothering the waves with silver reflections. Sitting on a dune, we watch the continuous ebb and flow, each with our own thoughts. For me, the sea has

always been a confidant, a friend absorbing all it is told and never revealing those secrets; always giving the best advice — its meaningful noises can be interpreted any way you choose. For Alberto, it is a new, strangely perturbing sight, and the intensity with which his eyes follow every wave building, swelling, then dying on the beach, reflects his amazement. Nearing 30, Alberto is seeing the Atlantic for the first time and is overwhelmed by this discovery that signifies an infinite number of paths to all ends of the earth. The fresh wind fills the senses with the power and mood of the sea; everything is transformed by its touch; even Comeback* gazes, his odd little nose aloft, at the silver ribbons unrolling before him several times a minute.

Comeback is both a symbol and a survivor: a symbol of the union demanding my return; a survivor of his own bad luck — two falls from the bike (in one of which he and his bag flew off the back), his persistent diarrhoea and even getting trampled by a horse.

We're in Villa Gesell, north of Mar del Plata, enjoying my uncle's hospitality in his home and reliving our first 1,200 kilometers — apparently the easiest, though they've already given us a healthy respect for distances. We have no idea whether or not we'll get there, but we do know the going will be hard — at least that's the impression we have at this stage. Alberto laughs at his minutely detailed plans for the trip, according to which we should be nearing the end when in reality we have only just begun.

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We left Gesell stocked up on vegetables and tinned meat "donated" by my uncle. He asked us to send him a telegram from Bariloche — if we get there — so that with the number of the telegram he could buy a corresponding lottery ticket, which seemed a little optimistic to us. On cue, others taunted that the bike would be a good excuse to go jogging, etc., and though we have a firm resolve to prove them wrong, a natural apprehension keeps us from declaring our confidence in the journey's success.

Along the coast road Comeback maintains his aviator's impulses, emerging unscathed from yet another head-on collision. The

*The English nickname Ernesto has given to the little dog he's taking to Chichina, his girlfriend who is holidaying in Miramar.

motorbike is very hard to control, with extra weight on a rack behind the center of gravity tending to lift the front wheel, and the slightest lapse in concentration sends us flying. We stop at a butcher store and buy some meat to grill and milk for the dog, who won't even try it. I begin to worry more about the little animal's health than the money I'd forked out to pay for the milk. The meat turns out to be horse. It's unbearably sweet and we can't eat it. Fed up, I toss a piece away and amazingly, the dog wolfs it down in no time. I throw him another piece and the same thing happens. His regime of milk is lifted. In the middle of the uproar caused by Comeback's admirers I enter, here in Miramar, a...

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...PARÉNTESIS AMOROSO ...lovesick pause

The intention of this diary is not really to recount those days in Miramar where Comeback found a new home, with one resident in particular to whom Comeback's name was directed. Our journey was suspended in that haven of indecision, subordinate to the words that give consent and create bonds.

Alberto saw the danger and was already imagining himself alone on the roads of America, though he never raised his voice. The struggle was between she and I. For a moment as I left, victorious, or so I thought, Otero Silva's lines rang in my ears:

I heard splashing on the boat
her bare feet
And sensed in our faces
the hungry dusk
My heart swaying between her
and the street, the road
I don't know where I found the strength
to free myself from her eyes
to slip from her arms
She stayed, crying through rain and glass
clouded with grief and tears
She stayed, unable to cry
Wait! I will come
walking with you.*

Yet afterwards I doubted whether driftwood has the right to say, "I win," when the tide throws it on to the beach it seeks. But that was later, and is of no interest to the present. The two days I'd planned stretched like elastic into eight and with the bittersweet taste of goodbye mingling with my inveterate bad breath I finally felt myself lifted definitively away on the winds of adventure toward worlds I envisaged would be stranger than they were, into situations I imagined would be much more normal than they turned out to be.

I remember the day my friend the sea came to my defense — taking me from the limbo I was cursed with. The beach was deserted and a cold onshore wind was blowing. My head rested in the lap tying me to this land, lulled by everything around. The entire universe drifted rhythmically by, obeying the impulses of my inner voice. Suddenly, a stronger gust of wind brought a different sea voice and I lifted my head in surprise, yet it seemed to be nothing, a false alarm. I lay back, returning once again in my dreams to the caressing lap. And then, for the last time, I heard the ocean's warning. Its vast and jarring rhythm hammered at the fortress within me and threatened its imposing serenity.

We became cold and left the beach, fleeing the disturbing presence which refused to leave me alone. The sea danced on the small stretch of beach, indifferent to its own eternal law and spawning its own note of caution, its warning. But a man in love (though Alberto used a more outrageous, less refined word) is in no condition to listen to such a call from nature; in the enormous belly of a Buick the bourgeois side of my universe was still under construction.

The first commandment for every good explorer is that an expedition has two points: the point of departure and the point of arrival. If your intention is to make the second theoretical point coincide with the actual point of arrival, don't think about the means — because the journey is a virtual space that finishes when it finishes, and there are as many means as there are different ways of "finishing." That is to say, the means are endless.

*Miguel Otero Silva, left-wing Venezuelan poet and novelist, born in 1908.

I remembered Alberto's suggestion: "The bracelet, or you're not who you think you are."

Chichina's hands disappeared into the hollow made by mine.

"Chichina, that bracelet... Can I take it to guide me and remind me of you?"

The poor girl! I know the gold didn't matter, despite what they say; her fingers as they held the bracelet were merely weighing up the love that made me ask for it. That is, at least, what I honestly think. Alberto says (with a certain mischievousness, it seems to me), that you don't need particularly sensitive fingers to weigh up the full 29 carats of my love.

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From "La Gioconda's Smile" p. 70-71

In the afternoon we went our separate ways: while Alberto followed up the doctors, I went to see an old woman with asthma, a customer at La Gioconda. The poor thing was in a pitiful state, breathing the acrid smell of concentrated sweat and dirty feet that filled her room, mixed with the dust from a couple of armchairs, the only luxury items in her house. On top of her asthma, she had a heart condition. It is at times like this, when a doctor is conscious of his complete powerlessness, that he longs for change: a change to prevent the injustice of a system in which only a month ago this poor woman was still earning her living as a waitress, wheezing and panting but facing life with dignity. In circumstances like this, individuals in poor families who can't pay their way become surrounded by an atmosphere of barely disguised acrimony; they stop being father, mother, sister or brother and become a purely negative factor in the struggle for life and, consequently, a source of bitterness for the healthy members of the community who resent their illness as if it were a personal insult to those who have to support them. It is there, in the final moments, for people whose farthest horizon has always been tomorrow, that one comprehends the profound tragedy circumscribing the life of the proletariat the world over. In those dying eyes there is a submissive appeal for forgiveness and also, often, a desperate plea for

consolation which is lost to the void, just as their body will soon be lost in the magnitude of the mystery surrounding us. How long this present order, based on an absurd idea of caste, will last is not within my means to answer, but it's time that those who govern spent less time publicizing their own virtues and more money; much more money, funding socially useful works.

There isn't much I can do for the sick woman. I simply advise her to improve her diet and prescribe a diuretic and some asthma pills. I have a few Dramamine tablets left and I give them to her. When I leave, I am followed by the fawning words of the old woman and the family's indifferent gaze.

From pp 77-79 "This Time, Disaster"

One of our traveling companions from the *San Antonio* summed up his brilliant life philosophy with one fine phrase: "Stop arsing about you assholes. Why don't you get off your asses and go back to your asshole country." So that's more or less what we did; we picked up our bags and set off for Chuquicamata, the famous copper mine.

But not straight away. There was a pause of one day while we waited for permission from the mine's authorities to visit and meanwhile we received an appropriate send-off from the enthusiastic Bacchanalian sailors.

Lying beneath the meager shade of two lampposts on the arid road leading to the mines, we spent a good part of the day yelling things at each other now and again from one post to another, until on the horizon appeared the asthmatic outline of the little truck which took us halfway, to a town called Baquedano.

There we made friends with a married couple, Chilean workers who were communists.* By the light of the single candle illuminating us, drinking *mate* and eating a piece of bread and cheese, the man's shrunken figure carried a mysterious, tragic air. In his simple, expressive language he recounted his three months in prison, and told us about his starving wife who stood by him with exemplary

*The Chilean Communist Party was banned and many members persecuted under the so-called Law for the Defense of Democracy (1948-58).

loyalty, his children left in the care of a kindly neighbor, his fruitless pilgrimage in search of work and his *compañeros*, mysteriously disappeared and said to be somewhere at the bottom of the sea.

The couple, numb with cold, huddling against each other in the desert night, were a living representation of the proletariat in any part of the world. They had not one single miserable blanket to cover themselves with, so we gave them one of ours and Alberto and I wrapped the other around us as best we could. It was one of the coldest times in my life, but also one which made me feel a little more brotherly toward this strange, for me at least, human species.

At eight the next morning we found a truck to take us to the town of Chuquicamata. We separated from the couple who were heading for the sulphur mines in the mountains where the climate is so bad and the living conditions so hard that you don't need a work permit and nobody asks you what your politics are. The only thing that matters is the enthusiasm with which the workers set to ruining their health in search of a few meager crumbs that barely provide their subsistence.

Although the blurred silhouette of the couple was nearly lost in the distance separating us, we could still see the man's singularly determined face and we remembered his straightforward invitation: "Come, comrades, let's eat together. I, too, am a tramp," showing his underlying disdain for the parasitic nature he saw in our aimless traveling.

It's a great pity that they repress people like this. Apart from whether collectivism, the "communist vermin," is a danger to decent life, the communism gnawing at his entrails was no more than a natural longing for something better, a protest against persistent hunger transformed into a love for this strange doctrine, whose essence he could never grasp but whose translation, "bread for the poor," was something which he understood and, more importantly, filled him with hope.

Once there, the bosses, the blond, efficient and arrogant managers, told us in primitive Spanish: "This isn't a tourist town. I'll find a guide to give you a half-hour tour around the mine's installations and then do us a favor and leave us alone, we have a lot of work to do." A strike was imminent. Yet the guide, faithful dog of

the Yankee bosses, told us: "Imbecilic gringos, losing thousands of pesos every day in a strike so as not to give a poor worker a few more centavos. When my General Ibáñez comes to power that'll all be over."* And a foreman-poet: "These are the famous terraces that enable every inch of copper to be mined. Many people like you ask me technical questions but it is rare they ask how many lives it has cost. I can't answer you, doctors, but thank you for asking."

Cold efficiency and impotent resentment go hand in hand in the big mine, linked in spite of the hatred by the common necessity to live, on the one hand, and to speculate on the other... we will see whether one day, some miner will take up his pick in pleasure and go and poison his lungs with a conscious joy. They say that's what it's like over there, where the red blaze that now lights up the world comes from. So they say. I don't know.

CHUQUICAMATA chuquicamata

Chuquicamata is like a scene from a modern drama. You cannot say that it's lacking in beauty, but it is a beauty without grace, imposing and glacial. As you come close to any part of the mine, the whole landscape seems to concentrate, giving a feeling of suffocation across the plain. There is a moment when, after 200 kilometers, the lightly shaded green of the little town of Calama interrupts the monotonous gray and is greeted with the joy which an authentic oasis in the desert richly deserves. And what a desert! The weather observatory at Moctezuma, near "Chuqui," describes it as the driest in the world. The mountains, where not a single blade of grass can grow in the nitrate soil, are defenseless against attacks of wind and water. They display their gray spine, prematurely aged in the battle with the elements, and their wrinkles that do not cor-

*Carlos Ibáñez del Campo was Chilean President from 1952 to 1958. He was a populist, who promised to legalize the Communist Party if elected.

respond to their true geological age. And how many of those mountains surrounding their famous brother enclose in their heavy entrails similar riches, as they wait for the soulless arms of the mechanical shovels to devour their insides, spiced as they would be with the inevitable human lives — the lives of the poor, unsung heroes of this battle, who die miserably in one of the thousand traps set by nature to defend its treasures, when all they want is to earn their daily bread.

Chuquicamata is essentially a great copper mountain with 20-meter-high terraces cut into its enormous sides, from where the extracted mineral is easily transported by rail. The unique formation of the vein means that extraction is entirely open cut, allowing large-scale exploitation of the ore body, which grades one percent copper per ton of ore. Every morning the mountain is dynamited and huge mechanical shovels load the material on to rail wagons that take it to the grinder to be crushed. This crushing occurs over three consecutive passes, turning the raw material into a medium-fine gravel. It is then put in a sulphuric acid solution which extracts the copper in the form of a sulphate, also forming a copper chloride, which becomes ferrous chloride when it comes into contact with old iron. From there the liquid is taken to the so-called "green house" where the copper sulphate solution is put into huge baths and for a week submitted to a current of 30 volts, bringing about the electrolysis of the salt: the copper sticks to the thin sheets of the same metal, which have previously been formed in other baths with stronger solutions. After five or six days, the sheets are ready for the smelter; the solution has lost eight to 10 grams of sulphate per liter and is enriched with new quantities of the ground material. The sheets are then placed in furnaces that, after 12 hours smelting at 2,000 degrees centigrade, produce 350-pound ingots. Every night 45 wagons in convoy take over 20 tons of copper each down to Antofagasta, the result of the day's work.

This is a crude summary of the manufacturing process, which employs a floating population of 3,000 souls in Chuquicamata; but this process only extracts oxide ore. The Chile Exploration Company is building another plant to exploit the sulphate ore. This plant, the biggest of its kind in the world, has two 96-meter-high chimneys

and will take over almost all future production, while the old plant will be slowly phased out since the oxide ore is about to run out. There is already an enormous stockpile of raw material to feed the new smelter and it will begin to be processed in 1954 when the plant is opened.

Chile produces 20 percent of the world's copper, and in these uncertain times of potential conflict copper has become vitally important because it is an essential component of various types of weapons of destruction. Hence, an economic and political battle is being waged in Chile between a coalition of nationalist and left-wing groupings that advocate nationalizing the mines, and those who, in the cause of free enterprise, prefer a well-run mine (even in foreign hands) to possibly less efficient management by the state. Serious accusations have been made in congress against the companies currently exploiting the concessions; symptomatic of the climate of nationalist aspiration surrounding copper production.

Whatever the outcome of the battle, one would do well not to forget the lesson taught by the graveyards of the mines, containing only a small share of the immense number of people devoured by cave-ins, silica and the hellish climate of the mountain. 31

p 146 LA COLONIA DE SAN PABLO the san pablo leper colony

The following day, Sunday, we were up and ready to visit the colony, but to get there you have to go by river and, as it wasn't a working day, we couldn't go. So we visited the administrator of the colony, a butch-looking nun called Sister Alberto, then played a game of football in which the two of us performed very badly. My asthma began to recede.

On Monday we sent a good proportion of our clothes to be washed, then went to the colony to visit the patients' compound. There are 600 sick people living independently in typical jungle huts, doing whatever they choose, looking after themselves, in an organization which has developed a rhythm and style of its own. There is a local official, a judge, a policeman, etc. The respect Dr. Bresciani commands is considerable and he clearly coordinates the

whole colony, both protecting and sorting out disputes that arise between the different groups.

On Tuesday we visited the colony again, joining Dr. Bresciani as he made his rounds, examining the patients' nervous systems. He is preparing a detailed study of nervous forms of leprosy based on 400 cases. It really is very interesting work because many of the cases of leprosy in this region attack the nervous system. Actually, I didn't see a single patient who wasn't presenting such symptoms. Bresciani told us that Dr. Souza Lima was interested in early signs of nervous disorder among the children living in the colony.

We went to the part of the colony reserved for the healthy, where 70 or so people live. It is lacking basic amenities that are supposedly being installed, like electricity during the day, a refrigerator and even a laboratory. They are in need of a good microscope, a microtome, a technician — at the moment this post is occupied by Mother Margarita, nice but not very knowledgeable — and they need a surgeon to operate on nerves, eyes, etc. An interesting thing is that aside from the widespread nervous problems, there are very few blind people, perhaps leading to the conclusion that [indecipherable word] has something to do with it, seeing that most receive no treatment at all.

We repeated our rounds on Wednesday, passing the day with fishing and swimming in between. I played chess with Dr. Bresciani at night, or we chatted. Dr. Alfaro, the dentist, is a wonderful person — relaxed and very friendly. Thursday is a day of rest for the colony so we changed our routine, not visiting the compound. We tried to fish, without success, in the morning. In the afternoon we played football and my performance in goal was less atrocious. On Friday I returned to the compound, but Alberto stayed to do bacilloscopes in the company of that sweet nun, Mother Margarita. I caught two species of *sumbi* fish, called *mota*, and gave one of them to Dr. Montoya to enjoy.

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EL DÍA DE SAN GUEVARA
saint guevara's day

On Saturday, June 14, 1952, I, just a lad, turned 24, on the cusp of that transcendental quarter century, silver wedding of a life, which,

all things considered, has not treated me so badly. Early in the morning I went to the river, to try my luck again with the fish, but that sport is like gambling: one starts out winning and ends up losing. In the afternoon we played football and I occupied my usual place in goal, with better results than on earlier occasions. In the evening, after passing by Dr. Bresciani's house for a delightful, huge meal, they threw a party for us in the dining room of the colony, with a lot of the Peruvian national drink, *pisco*. Alberto is quite experienced regarding its effects on the central nervous system. With everyone slightly drunk and in high spirits, the colony's director toasted us warmly, and I, "*piscoed*," replied with something elaborate, like the following:

Well, it's my duty to respond to the toast offered by Dr. Bresciani with something more than a conventional gesture. In our presently precarious state as travelers, we only have recourse to words and I would now like to use them to express my thanks, and those of my traveling *compañero*, to all of the staff of the colony who, almost without knowing us, have given us this beautiful demonstration of their affection, celebrating my birthday as if it were an intimate celebration for one of your own. But there is something more. Within a few days we will be leaving Peruvian territory, so these words have the secondary intention of being a farewell, and I would like to stress our gratitude to all the people of this country, who have unfailingly shown us their warmest hospitality since we entered Peru via Tacna.

I would also like to say something else, unrelated to the theme of this toast. Although our insignificance means we can't be spokespeople for such a noble cause, we believe, and after this journey more firmly than ever, that the division of [Latin] America into unstable and illusory nations is completely fictional. We constitute a single mestizo race, which from Mexico to the Magellan Straits bears notable ethnographical similarities. And so, in an attempt to rid myself of the weight of small-minded provincialism, I propose a toast to Peru and to a United Latin America.

My oratory offering was received with great applause. The party, consisting in these parts of drinking as much alcohol as possible, continued until three in the morning, when we finally called it a day.



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ACOTACIÓN AL MARGEN a note in the margin

The stars drew light across the night sky in that little mountain village, and the silence and the cold made the darkness vanish away. It was — I don't know how to explain it — as if everything solid melted away into the ether, eliminating all individuality and absorbing us, rigid, into the immense darkness. Not a single cloud to lend perspective to the space blocked any portion of the starry sky. Less than a few meters away the dim light of a lamp lost its power to fade the darkness.

The man's face was indistinct in the shadows; I could only see what seemed like the spark of his eyes and the gleam of his four front teeth.

I still can't say whether it was the atmosphere or the personality of that individual that prepared me for the revelation, but I know that many times and from many different people I had heard those same arguments and that they had never made an impression on me. Our interlocutor was, in fact, a very interesting character. From a country in Europe, he escaped the knife of dogmatism as a young man, he knew the taste of fear (one of the few experiences which makes you value life), and afterwards he had wandered from country to country, gathering thousands of adventures, until he and his bones finally ended up in this isolated region, patiently waiting for the moment of great reckoning to arrive.

After exchanging a few meaningless words and platitudes, each of us marking territory, the discussion began to falter and we were about to go our separate ways, when he let out his idiosyncratic, childlike laugh, highlighting the asymmetry of his four front incisors:

The future belongs to the people, and gradually, or in one strike, they will take power, here and in every country.

The terrible thing is the people need to be educated, and this they cannot do before taking power, only after. They can only

learn at the cost of their own mistakes, which will be very serious and will cost many innocent lives. Or perhaps not, maybe those lives will not have been innocent because they will have committed the huge sin against nature; meaning, a lack of ability to adapt. All of them, those unable to adapt — you and I, for example — will die cursing the power they helped, through great sacrifice, to create. Revolution is impersonal; it will take their lives, even utilizing their memory as an example or as an instrument for domesticating the youth who follow them. My sin is greater because I, more astute and with greater experience, call it what you like, will die knowing that my sacrifice stems only from an inflexibility symbolizing our rotten civilization, which is crumbling. I also know — and this won't alter the course of history or your personal view of me — that you will die with a clenched fist and a tense jaw, the epitome of hatred and struggle, because you are not a symbol (some inanimate example) but a genuine member of the society to be destroyed; the spirit of the beehive speaks through your mouth and motivates your actions. You are as useful as I am, but you are not aware of how useful your contribution is to the society that sacrifices you.

I saw his teeth and the cheeky grin with which he foretold history, I felt his handshake and, like a distant murmur, his formal goodbye. The night, folding in at contact with his words, overtook me again, enveloping me within it. But despite his words, I now knew... I knew that when the great guiding spirit cleaves humanity into two antagonistic halves, I would be with the people. I know this, I see it printed in the night sky that I, eclectic dissembler of doctrine and psychoanalyst of dogma, howling like one possessed, will assault the barricades or the trenches, will take my bloodstained weapon and, consumed with fury, slaughter any enemy who falls into my hands. And I see, as if a great exhaustion smothers this fresh exaltation, I see myself, immolated in the genuine revolution, the great equalizer of individual will, proclaiming the ultimate *mea culpa*. I feel my nostrils dilate, savoring the acrid smell of gunpowder and blood, the enemy's death; I steel my body, ready to do battle, and prepare myself to be a sacred space within which the bestial howl of the triumphant proletariat can resound with new energy and new hope.

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